

Half Dried Fish — Kac'amaasaq

KAC'AMAASANEK AWA'I PILITAAN'ITUT. – THEY DON'T MAKE HALF DRIED FISH ANYMORE.



Photo: Splitting fish in Larsen Bay. Photo by Sven Haakanson.

Fish are a dietary staple in Alutiiq communities, a food that can be harvested in abundance in summer and fall and preserved to eat through the rest of the year. Just as there are many ways to catch fish, there are many ways to preserve or “put up” fish. Alutiiq people dry, smoke, salt, pickle, and freeze quantities of fish.

The Alutiiq language has an abundance of terms related to fish preservation. For example, *kupcuunaq* is the word for smoked fish, while *tamuuq* refers to dried fish. A third term, *kac'amaasaq* is used for any fish that is split along the backbone and partially dried, including salmon or cod.

Not all preservation methods are suitable for all fish. Understanding the qualities of the meat is essential for effective processing. Some oily fish, like fresh King salmon, don't smoke or dry well. They are better preserved by freezing or pickling. Harvesters tend to dry rather than smoke pink and dog salmon filets which are less fatty. Pink salmon are typically caught in freshwater when the color of their skin starts to turn and they develop a hump. This means the flesh has less oil and will dry better. Silvers and reds are favorites from smoking although they can also be dried.