

Split fish (to) — Serluku

KAIWIK IQALLUNEK SER'UQ.—THE OLD WOMAN IS SPLITTING THE FISH.



Photo: Old Harbor man cleans a salmon, 2020,
AM905

Every summer Alutiiq families clean thousands of salmon. Some are eaten fresh, but many are put up for winter. People enjoy dried, smoked, partially smoked, salted, pickled, and canned salmon long after the fresh fish are gone. Fileting, removing the meat from both sides of a fish, is an important step in preparing salmon for preservation.

There are a number of ways to split a salmon, and people have different opinions on the best method. Most people start by gutting the fish. To do this, cut a slit along the fish's belly from the vent to the head. Then, scoop out the guts and discard. Alutiiq ancestors believed the soul of the fish lived in its belly and returned its entrails to the water to ensure rebirth.

Next, work to remove a filet from each side of the fish. Using a sharp filet knife, make a cut behind the head of the salmon, from the backbone to the belly on one side. This cut will be perpendicular to the length of the fish. Then, begin cutting just below the spine. Keep your knife flat against the bones and cut toward the belly using long strokes parallel to the length of the fish to free the meat from the ribs. You can cut the filet off the tail, or leave it attached for hanging a pair of filets to dry or smoke. This fileting method takes a little longer but harvests more meat.