

Shiny (it is) — Rirtuq

UNA YAAMAQ RIRTUQ. – THIS ROCK IS SHINY.



Photo: Piece of molybdenite, a shiny mineral used in paint

Rirtuq is an Alutiiq word that means to be shiny, bright, or gleaming. The word for fish scale, *riq*, comes from the same root. Alutiiq speakers also use *rirtuq* to say something is clear, clean, or smooth—like newly formed ice or an opening in the clouds on the horizon.

Shiny decorations were once a common addition to Alutiiq clothing and objects. People added gleaming quartz crystals and shimmering pieces of mica to their parkas and painted their tools, clothing, and bags with a glittery black pigment. Craftspeople likely made this sparkling paint with a base of wood charcoal and powdered molybdenite, a shiny silver metal. Archaeologists have recovered small pieces of molybdenite in ancestral settlements. Near Karluk Lake, bits of this lustrous grey material were found in the floor of an ancestral *qasgiq*—or men's house with small pigment grinding stones. Although molybdenite is not known to occur in the Kodiak region, it can be found around the Cook Inlet area. As such, this shiny metal ore likely made its way to Kodiak through trade or travel to the mainland.

Why did Alutiiq ancestors value light-catching objects? Light enhances vision. In Kodiak's rainy, foggy environment, vision is essential for hunting success and safety. The ability to see helps people protect themselves from dangerous situations and find the animals essential to daily life. Light and vision are also associated with the spiritual world. Spirits are thought to have great vision.