

Rib — Raatateq

ISUWIM RAATATII MANGIRNARTUK. – SEAL RIBS ARE GOOD TO GNAW ON.



Photo: Digging stick made from a sea mammal rib,
Sitkinak Island, AM997

Animal ribs were once an important source of raw material for Alutiiq craftspeople. People used these long, narrow, naturally curved pieces of bone in manufacturing tasks both large and small. Studies of ancestral villages illustrate that whale ribs were used for construction. In some ancient settlements, you can still see segments of large whale ribs among the remains of sod houses. One historic source indicates builders placed whale ribs alongside wooden timbers to construct household roofs.

Craftspeople also used sections of whale rib to make tools. Wedges for splitting wood were often made of this resilient material, as it can take a pounding from a stone hammer without splitting. People cut lengths of whale rib by carving around the circumference and snapping the segments apart. Smaller sea mammal ribs were used to make digging sticks and tool handles. Collections from the Alaska Peninsula have knives and scraping tools made from caribou ribs.

Alutiiq speakers use the word *raatateq* to mean both rib and chest. In parts of the Alutiiq world, the word for rib is also the same as the word for boat rib. On Kodiak, however, *pertaq*, something that is bent, is the common word for boat rib.