

Arrow Game (verb) — Ruuwarluni

TAMAMTA RUUWARTAALLRIAKUT PAASKAAMI. – WE USED TO ALL PLAY BOW AND ARROW AT EASTER TIME.



Photo: Boys learn to shoot a bow and arrow, Akhiok Petroglyph Camp, Cape Alitak.

In the Alutiiq language, the word for “arrow”—ruuwaq—has a variety of meanings. It can be used as a noun to refer to the wooden-shafted, feather-fletched projectiles fired from hunters’ bows. Alternatively, this word can be used as a verb to mean the action of shooting with a bow. For example, the Alutiiq dancers sing a paddling song that says, “We are coming by kayak, paddling—arrow, arrow, arrow!” This sentence makes little sense if you interpret the word “arrow” as a noun. However, if you think of the word “arrow” as a verb, the singers are urging the hunter to shoot.

Ruuwarluni refers to a target shooting game traditionally played in the spring and fall. To play this game, archers took turns aiming arrows at a kelp bulb suspended from a stick in front of a sod backstop. Each archer had one arrow with his mark. In each round, a player earned two points for hitting the kelp bulb. If no one hit the kelp bulb, the player whose arrow was closest earned one point. The object of the game was to accumulate sixteen points. Scores were kept with the aid of small wooden sticks, or in more recent times, empty evaporated milk cans!