Cross Country Journey

What weighs about 39 pounds and is 14 feet long?! It is the historic, one-man qayaq featured in the Alutiiq Museum’s latest exhibit (p. 1). This rare, 150-year-old artifact was collected in Alaska in 1869 by US Army Officer Edward Fast, and sold to Harvard University’s Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Why is it rare? The boat features both its wooden frame and oiled seal skin cover. It’s hard to preserve skin objects, let alone one of this size and complexity. There aren’t many complete Alutiiq kayaks in museums, and where boats are preserved, the skin cover is often missing.

When the Peabody Museum and the Alutiiq Museum set out to share the rare qayaq in Kodiak, the process required special preparation and planning. First, the Peabody Museum undertook a major project to stabilize the boat. With the help of Alutiiq culture bearers Alfred Naumoff, Susan Malutin, and Sven Haakanson Jr., they studied the qayaq, cleaned it, and repaired tears in its cover. Then, they created a custom storage crate, a box to protect the fragile vessel from light, dust, and pests.

Next, the two museums worked together to develop a ten-year loan agreement and raise money to pay for the boat’s exhibit in Kodiak. A grant to Koniag, Inc. from the Institute for Museum and Library Services and donations from the Peabody Museum, Matson, Marion Owen Photography, and the Alutiiq Heritage Foundation covered the costs.

The final step was to arrange for cross-country travel. A Boston-based art handler constructed a hard-sided, 18-foot shipping case to hold the storage crate housing the boat. Double layers of padding and crating, helped to keep the kayak from moving in the box and to cushion the inevitable bumps of a 5,000 mile, cross continent journey. A moving truck carried the case from Cambridge, Massachusetts to Tacoma, Washington, to a Matson shipyard. Containerized, the crate continued by ship to Kodiak. The final leg of the journey, by water, provided a fitting return for this masterpiece of Alutiiq engineering.

Date Night with Disaster!

What is your survival IQ? If the apocalypse came tomorrow would you be prepared? Join Alutiiq Museum staff members for a fun evening of survival training, and bring your sweet heart. We are hosting a Date Night with Disaster on July 15th. Couples will enjoy a buffet dinner at the museum and learn Alutiiq survival skills. Make a knife from a piece of slate and transform plant materials into natural Neosporin! Stay tuned. Ticket sales will begin in June.

Maritime Story Share

PaRaguutat aiwitaartut kangiyamen, iqallut angilluteng. – The boats always come to the bay when the salmon are returning.