

Iqallugsurluni Kuigmi – RIVER FISHING



Kodiak is home to five varieties of Pacific salmon. Almost every stream has at least a small run of pink salmon, and the region's rivers support spectacular numbers of pink, red, silver, dog, and king salmon. Many waterways are also home to Dolly Varden char, rainbow trout, and steelhead. Because these abundant, widely available, nutritious fish can be harvested in large quantities and stored for winter food, they have fed Alutiiq/Sugpiaq families for thousands of years.

Kodiak's earliest salmon fishers speared fish with long lances ground from slate. Their stream-side camps are filled with pieces of worked slate, lance fragments, and lance sharpening tools. People probably stood in the water to spear individual fish as they swam upstream.

About 4,000 years ago, Alutiiq ancestors began harvesting salmon with nets. Their settlements lie beside deep river channels, and they are filled with thousands of small, notched stones—oval, waterworn beach cobbles with a chip in each end. These stones were net weights, like the lead line on a modern fishing seine. People tied them to the bottom of a net to sink it and keep it open in the water. Why did Alutiiq people begin using nets? Archaeologists think Kodiak's population was rising. There were more people and fewer places to move. Harvesting larger quantities of salmon helped Alutiiq ancestors feed their communities.

About 900 years ago, Alutiiq people intensified their use of salmon again. They built large villages beside productive salmon streams, and stacked stones in nearby waterways to create barriers that captured fish. At the mouths of streams, people built fish pens. Fish entering streams were trapped in these pens when the tide went out. In at least one river, people built weirs—v-shaped walls of stacked stones. Fish swam inside and could not escape. Like their ancestors, Alutiiq fishermen of this time speared salmon, but they used a special fish harpoon. With these technologies, they harvested enormous quantities of fish for food, trade, and winter festivals.



Slate Lance



Notched Stone Net Sinker



Fish Harpoon Valves