

Uksuq – AN ALUTIIQ YEAR



Ugnerkaq – *Spring*

Spring arrives slowly in coastal Alaska, as dangerous, stormy weather gives way to calmer, misty conditions. Spring is the leanest time of year. Stores from the previous harvest are gone, and the abundance of summer resources is not yet available. At this time, Alutiiq/Sugpiaq people turn to the shore. During the lowest tides of the year they collect shellfish, hunt octopus, and pick greens. Gradually, fish and sea mammals move closer to shore to feed. Here, Alutiiq people hook cod and halibut, collect herring eggs, and hunt for seals.

Kiak – *Summer*

The long, warm days of summer are busy in Alutiiq communities. With more daylight and calmer seas, people can travel and harvest on the open ocean. They visit seal and sea lion haul outs, bird rookeries, and ocean fishing spots. In the past, Alutiiq people hunted whales in the summer, pursuing young humpback, minke, and fin whales feeding close to shore. They also traveled to the Alaskan mainland to trade for antler, ivory, caribou pelts, and glassy stone, materials not available on Kodiak.

Uksuaq – *Fall*

As the landscape fades from green to brown, and the days get shorter, Alutiiq people harvest more on land. They pick berries sweetened by the first frosts; harvest large quantities of salmon spawning in local streams; hunt fat bears headed for hibernation; and shoot ducks migrating south for the winter. Fall is also a time of preparation. Summer foods, especially salmon, are carefully preserved for winter food by drying, smoking, storing in oil, or freezing.

Uksuq – *Winter*

In winter, a storm crosses the Gulf of Alaska about once every five days bringing heavy wind, waves, and rain. At this time of year, people move indoors, where they make and repair items, play games, visit, and celebrate. Although patches of clear weather allow people to trap fox, ermine, and river otter, hunt ducks, or fish through lake or river ice, most resources are farther from shore and harder to find at this time of year. In the past, Alutiiq communities held large festivals in winter. People invited their neighbors to celebrate the year's harvest and remember ancestors with feasts and dances.



Beach seining in Afognak Bay, ca. 1960, Chadwick Collection.