

Aiaktalik Island — Angyaartalek

ANGYAARTALEK SUGYATAALLIA CUUMI. – THERE USED TO BE A LOT OF PEOPLE AT AIAKTALIK ISLAND.



Photo: The grassy landscape of Aiaktalik Island, 2021.

Aiaktalik Island, one of the Trinity Islands, lies at the southern end of the Kodiak Archipelago at the tip of the Aliulik Peninsula. Surrounded by the rough waters of Sitkinak Strait, this small, triangular landmass covers just seven square miles. The island is low and rolling, with grass-covered hills no more than two hundred feet high.

Aiaktalik Island was once home to the village of Aiaktalik. One of Kodiak's largest Alutiiq communities, this village had about four hundred residents in the late eighteenth century. The village lay on the shore of Aiaktalik Cove on the island's north side, facing Russian Harbor on adjacent Kodiak Island.

In the Russian and American eras, Aiaktalik was a base for sea otter hunting, and in the American era, it also was a center of fox farming. By the late eighteenth century, the community had an Alaska Commercial Company store where furs were traded for food and supplies. There was also a Russian Orthodox chapel named the Apostle Andrew the First-Called.

With the collapse of the fur trade and a devastating flu epidemic, Aiaktalik families suffered many hardships in the early decades of the twentieth century. Many left the community to move to Akhiok, Kaguyak, and Old Harbor. Scholars Lydia Black and Don Clark report that by 1934, there were just twenty-nine residents of Aiaktalik. The village had no school, so some families moved to allow their children to attend classes. Others left to be close to canneries with seasonal employment. The last families left Aiaktalik during World War II, when the local storekeeper, a Japanese man, was sent to an internment camp and his store closed. In 1957, a group of former residents returned to Aiaktalik, dismantled the chapel, and moved the boards to Kaguyak.