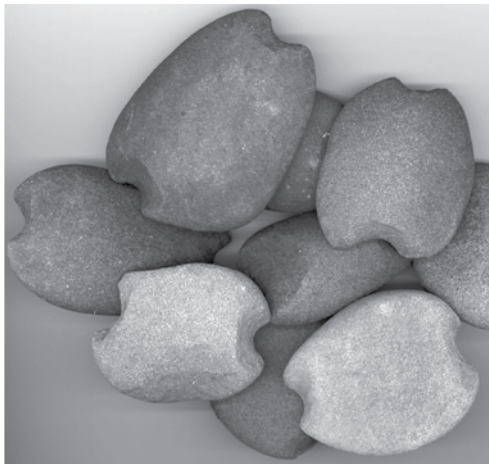




FISHING THROUGH THE AGES



Notched beach pebbles functioned as net weights, sinking the bottom edge of ancient nets.

Seafoods have always been the foundation of Kodiak's human economies. Geological and archaeological data indicate that Kodiak's first settlers arrived in the archipelago by boat, fully equipped to harvest marine resources. Fish are among the most important of these resources.

MARINE FISH: Bone fishhooks and stone sinkers more than 7,000 years old illustrate that Native people have been harvesting marine fish since their arrival on Kodiak. Comparisons with historically used fishing gear suggest that prehistoric tools were used to capture cod, halibut, and rockfishes. Kodiak's ancient residents baited fishhooks suspended from a wooden rig spreader – used to keep the hooks apart. Then they weighted the spreader with a large, grooved, beach cobble and lowered the assembly to the ocean floor from a kayak.

Marine fish play an important role in the annual subsistence cycle, as they are one of the first resources that return to coastal waters each spring. Ancient fishermen probably targeted ocean fish in April and early May. As in the past, Alutiiqs continue to eat marine fish both fresh and dried. Families cut fish into strips and air-dry the meat to eat all year.

SALMON: Salmon are another critical fish resource. The locations of archaeological sites suggest that people harvested these plentiful fish throughout the prehistoric era, but with increasing intensity over time. The earliest salmon fishermen speared individual fish with stone points from small streamside camps. About 4,000 years ago, fishermen began to harvest larger quantities of salmon with nets. They also developed new tools and storage facilities to process their catches more efficiently. These developments reflect an increase in Kodiak's population. As the landscape filled with communities, there were more mouths to feed and fewer places to move. As such, people intensified their harvest of locally available salmon - an easily accessed, nutritious food. Another period of intensified salmon fishing began about 900 years ago. Alutiiqs built large villages along major salmon streams where enormous quantities of fish could be harvested to offset declines in other subsistence resources. They built weirs to trap fish and developed a special salmon harpoon.

FISHING TODAY: Although the technologies used to harvest and process fish have changed with time, Alutiiqs still rely heavily on fish. In the late nineteenth century, employment in American canneries pulled Alutiiqs into the Western cash economy. Today, many Alutiiq people continue to make their living harvesting fish, whether for subsistence purposes, as part of the tourist industry, or in the commercial arena. Fish still feed Alutiiq families.