



WOODEN HUNTING HATS

Wooden hats were an essential piece of gear for Alutiiq hunters pursuing sea mammals in Kodiak's stormy waters. They transformed kayakers into magical beings with killing powers, and shielded their eyes from sun, rain, and sea spray.

Aleut and Yup'ik peoples, along the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea coasts, also wore similar hats. There were three common styles, a cone-shaped, closed crown hat (see below), an open-crown visor, and a rounded helmet. Hats and visors were made by carving a single piece of wood to a thin layer that was carefully bent to shape with steam. Helmets were hollowed from a single piece of wood and were often decorated with the face of a seal.

Each hat was a work of art, reflecting the owner's personality, achievements, and status. Hats were brightly painted with geometric designs, images of sea mammals, and hunting scenes, and elaborately decorated with ivory carvings, beads, woven tassels, feathers, and sea lion whiskers. Each element was rich with symbolism. Some motifs recounted great chases, others referenced helpful bird or animal spirits. Alutiiq Elders recall that hats were embellished over the course of a hunter's life. Elements were added or changed to reflect individual experiences. As such, each hat was highly personalized. Other hats were woven from spruce root, and were similarly adorned.

LEARN MORE:

Glory Remembered: Wooden Headgear of Alaska Sea Hunters, 1991, by Lydia T. Black, Alaska State Museum, Juneau.

Crossroads of Continents, Cultures of Siberian and Alaska, 1988, edited by W. W. Fitzhugh and A. Crowell, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.

