Looking Back on Subsistence

Interviews with Elders of the Chugach Region

A Resource Book for Teachers and Students

Chugachmiut

Looking Back on Subsistence

Interviews with Elders of the Chugach Region

Compiled by Derenty Tabios
Edited by Sandra P. Wassilie & Lana Lofquist-Taylor
Illustrated by Glen Oberg

Chugachmiut
4201 Tudor Centre Drive, Suite 210
Anchorage, AK 99508
(907) 562-4155
chugachmiut@chugachmiut.org

U.S. DOE Grant No. S320A70012

Acknowledgements

My gratitude to the following people for their contributions.

Henry Makarka	Cordova
Jerry O'Brien	Cordova
Alex Moonin	Port Graham/Nanwalek
Margaret Moonin	Port Graham/Nanwalek
Simeon Kvasnikoff, Sr.	Port Graham
Peter Anahonak, Sr.	Port Graham
Herman Moonin, Jr.	Anchorage/Port Graham
Malania Kehl	Anchorage/ Nanwalek
Elias Romanoff	Nanwalek
Roy Romanoff	Nanwalek
Nicky Tanape	Nanwalek
Walter Meganack, Sr.	Port Graham (taped 20 years. ago)
Mary Kompkoff	Chenega Bay
Jack Kompkoff	Tatitlek

Including quite a number of other people that I visited with in all the communities.

Derenty Tabios

Contributors

Thanks to all those who helped in the creation of this publication.

Derenty Tabios was raised by his maternal grandfather in Port Graham, Alaska, where he lived as a subsistence hunter and as a young man he worked as a commercial fisherman. His exposure to the "Alu'utiq" ways, tradition and culture was complete. His first language was Alu'utiq, which he speaks fluently. It was not until he went to school that he learned and became proficient in English as well. Mr. Tabios attended Mt. Edgecumbe High School and Alaska Methodist University where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education. After completing college, Mr. Tabios returned to his village and helped institute bilingual/bicultural programs in the schools and contributed to the development of an orthography for the Alu'utiq language. Mr. Tabios has served in leadership positions in many Chugach Native regional organizations including Chugachmiut, Chugach Alaska Corporation and the North Pacific Rim Housing Authority.

Sandra P. Wassilie is a lifelong Alaskan who enjoys fishing, hunting, trapping and gardening. She is a writer and educator, and has worked at the Alaska Vocational Technical Center in Seward as a teacher, program developer and administrator. She has also worked with Qutekcak Native Tribe on the development of a "place-based" curriculum to teach Native history and heritage. Ms. Wassilie has a Master of Arts in Teaching from Alaska Pacific University.

Glen Oberg is an artist who enjoys creating illustrations that help tell stories such as the wonderful legends of the Chugach people. His illustrations have appeared in other publications including *Chugach Legends* and *Eyak Legends.* He is a Northwest artist who also paints in many mediums but primarily in watercolor.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In discussions with elders during my travels throughout the Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound in the summer of 2000, it has become apparent that the memories of hunting and food gathering by traditional means are rapidly fading as more and more elders pass on. Memories prior to the Western advent, first Russia and then the United States, are almost non-existent except through stories. One can only imagine how much more difficult the task of hunting and fishing must have been with bows and arrows, spears, and crude traps, compared to the modern equipment used today. The earlier hunting tools required greater skill on the hunter's part. However, many of the ways to prepare and preserve fish and game have remained unchanged.

In the early days of the Russian presence, two things that dramatically changed hunting and food preservation were the introduction of firearms and salt respectively. With the gun, game could be taken from greater distances than with the bow and arrow or spear, thus requiring less skill for stalking. The salt allowed for additional methods to preserve fish and game.

Very recently, we have kept our fish and game even fresher by freezing and canning, modern methods advantageous in our region with moderate winter temperatures. However, the freezer may have also reduced the practice of sharing. Yesterday, subsistence foods were shared on a community-wide basis. Today, people feel a need to fill their freezers first, perhaps because of limitations imposed by regulations and reduced fish and game populations.

There was a time when, in Port Graham for example, men would join together and cooperate in fishing or hunting and in bringing their catch back to the village. The entire village would share in the bounty of seals, herring, tomcod, and other foods. Today, easy access to the store has muted the urgency to hunt and gather foods. Jobs and schools with their schedules have eroded the time people have for subsistence. Fewer people go out together to fish, hunt and gather foods.

Much has changed because of diminishing animal populations, regulation by both state and federal governments, and changing life styles. In spite of these changes, people continue to enjoy and value the diet of fish and game. Indeed, at any community gathering or holiday observance, the addition of subsistence foods helps us in celebrating and in remembering who we are.

In the following text I summarize the information I have gathered from interviews with elders at Nuchek, Port Graham, Nanwalek, Tatitlek, and Anchorage. Since I was born and raised in Port Graham, I have started with the Lower Kenai Peninsula. Most of what I have compiled represents subsistence foods and methods of preservation influenced and changed by contact with first Russians and then Americans over the past 200 years. This information on the Lower Kenai Peninsula was reviewed and validated as similar for the Prince William Sound by elders from the Sound with important differences noted in that section.

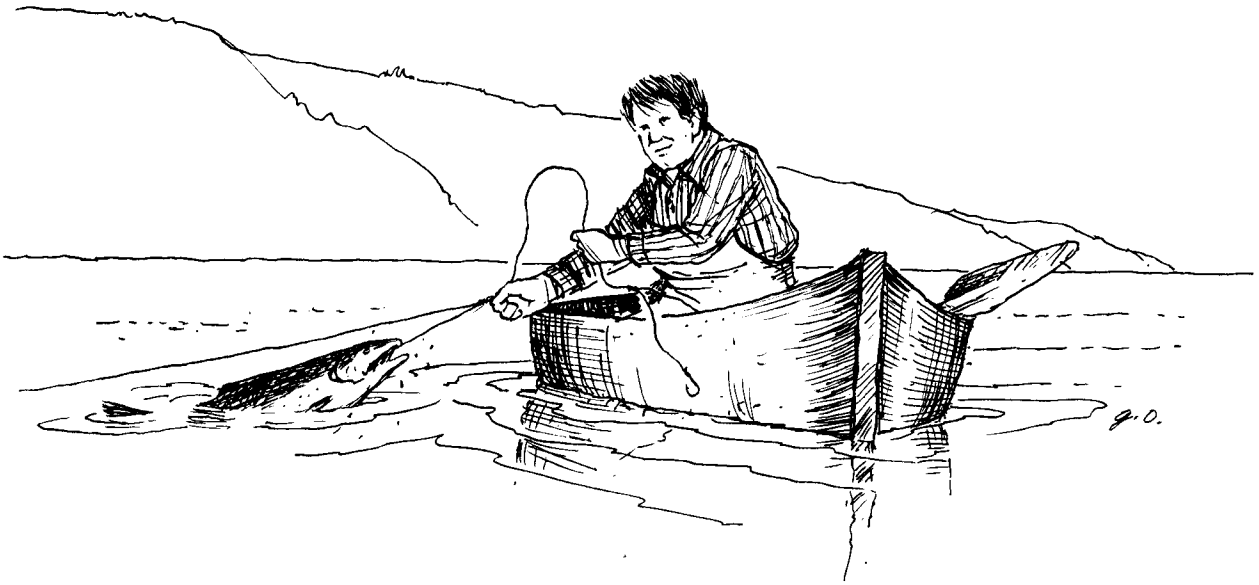
Lower Kenai Peninsula

Fishing

Fish in our region has always been one of our staples. In the past as today, it was available as a protein source year round, fresh during the fishing season and cured for the off-seasons. It was easily preserved by any number of methods. Smoked or dried, it could be kept almost indefinitely. With the exception of salting, freezing and canning, these methods have changed very little over time.

Catching the fish has been improved by more efficient technology over the years. Compared to the hand lines with hooks utilized in the early days, we now have sophisticated rods and reels. Fishing with different types of nets, particularly the gill net, may have been around for sometime, but the materials in the nets are now synthetic. The watercraft getting to the fish have also changed. First, canvas replaced marine mammal hides on kayaks used traditionally.

The rowboat replaced the kayak. When every household had its own skiff with an outboard motor, a very recent occurrence, access increased to a variety of fishing spots and hence the fishing improved.



Salmon Species

Different species of salmon were preserved in different ways depending on the time of the summer season they were taken and whether they were taken in fresh or salt water. Most salmon were available from May until September. However, in recent years, it was discovered in both Port Graham and Nanwalek that *king salmon* (luqakaq) were available almost all year round. They were caught by hook and line or by gill nets. The *king salmon* (luqakaq) was processed in the same manner then as it is today. Freshly caught, it was cooked, or it was "put up" for future use by smoking, drying or salting in brine. When ready for consumption, the salted king was soaked in a pan of water overnight to remove the excess brine. It could then be cooked by a variety of methods, eaten without cooking, or pickled (since it was already salt cured.)

The *red salmon* (nikliq) were available from the months of May and June into early July. The "reds" were preserved by the same methods as the king salmon.

The *pink salmon* (amahtuq), usually more abundant, were available from July through August. The "pinks" taken from the salt water were prepared the same way the kings and reds were. However, when they swam into freshwater streams, people waited a short time until they lost body fat before catching them. It was then easier to dry or smoke them. The reduction in fat content made the fish less likely to become rancid after being dried.

Chum salmon (alimaq) came early in June through early July. These were treated exactly the way pinks were. It was a much larger fish and not as abundant however. Consequently, one did not require as many.

In August when the *silver salmon* (qakiyaq) became available, the weather in the area changed. This required a change in the method for preserving the fish. In Southcentral Alaska, August is the beginning of the rainy season, which makes drying fish difficult. The silvers were mostly smoked or preserved in one hundred percent brine.

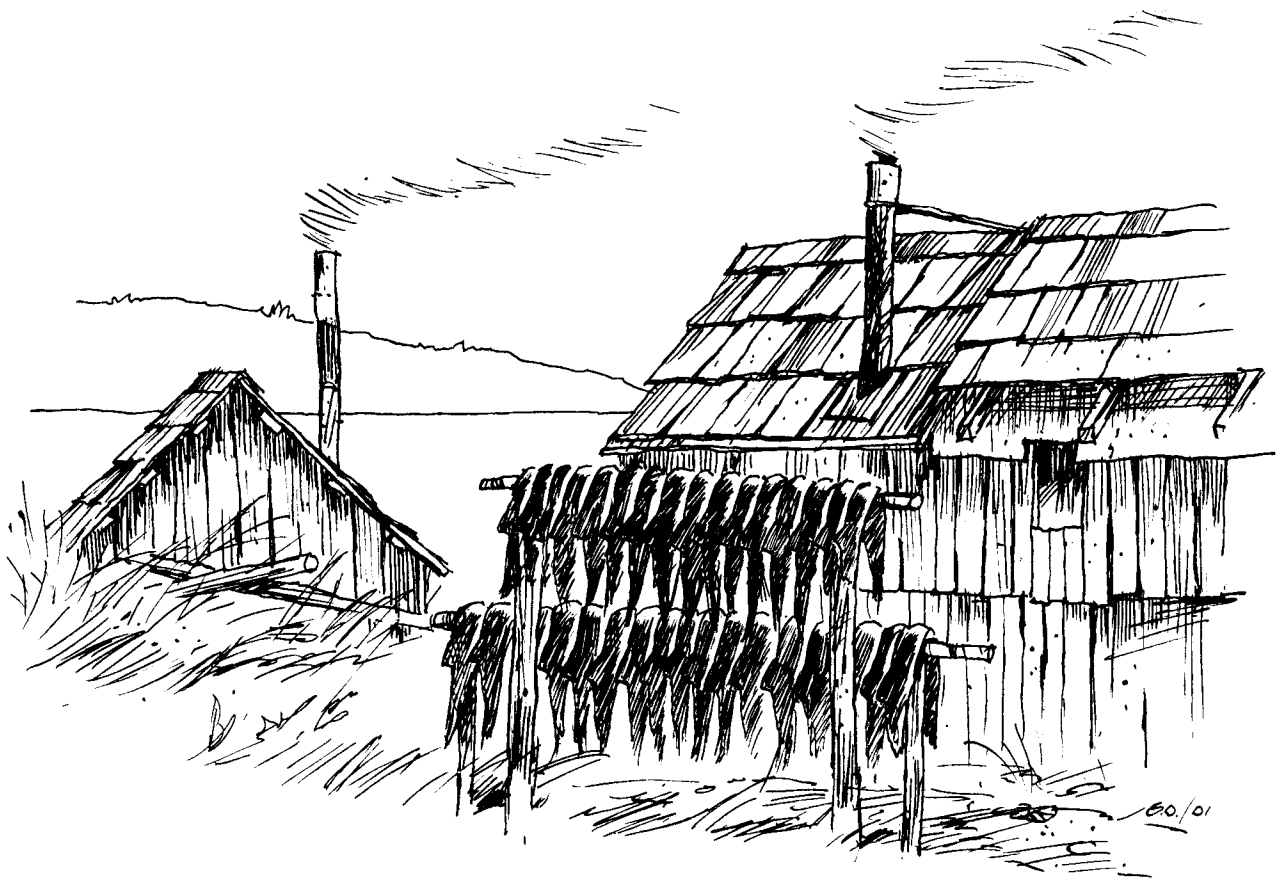
Thus, weather had much to do with whether fish were to be cured by drying or smoking. In the months of June through early August, fish were more easily dried because these were the warmer, usually drier months. By the beginning of the rainy season about mid-August, preservation was mostly by smoking or curing in brine. Of course today, we vacuum seal and freeze when it is too damp to dry fish. As you can see, a variety of salmon were available throughout the year, fresh during the summer season, and cured in one form or another for the rest of the year when the "run" was gone.

Preserving Salmon

Now let's talk about some of the details of preserving salmon. These fish were filleted in two different ways or cut into strips, depending on the size of the fish or its use. For drying or smoking, the fillets were cut thinly to accommodate rapid drying before bacteria could turn the meat sour. Thus, a lot of usable meat remained on the backbones. The backbones were then hung to be dried or smoked. For salt curing in one hundred percent brine, the fish was filleted all the way down to the backbone and the backbones discarded.

For smoking, approximately one-inch strips were cut from the length of the fish fillet. Whole fillets were also smoked; it was a matter of personal taste. Another method for preparing fish was either to half-smoke it or half-dry it. When this fish was used, it would then be boiled or baked and eaten with seal oil.

Two other methods for preserving salmon required fermentation. "Caqali'inaq" was fermented salmon in the ground. A shallow hole was dug in the ground and lined with ferns. The fish was placed on the ferns, covered with more ferns, and finally covered with soil. After it was allowed to ferment over a period of time, it was removed from the ground and eaten. Another method was to place the fish in a grass basket or a wooden vessel and allow it to ferment. This dish was called "cinaq". "Caqali'inaq" and "cinaq" were a developed taste. I have not talked to anyone that prepares fish in this manner anymore.



This covers some of the major ways salmon was preserved as a source of protein. Little has changed in how it is prepared, the exceptions being "caqali'inaq" and "cinaq". Most popular today is cooking fish on a barbeque as they did in the early days over an open fire pit.

Preserving Salmon Roe

An important delicacy from the salmon was the roe. It was kept using a variety of methods. When the eggs were fresh, a favorite with everyone was to simply boil them in water and eat them. Another simple method was to drape the roe, while still massed in a membrane, over a rack to dry and to eat it when dried.

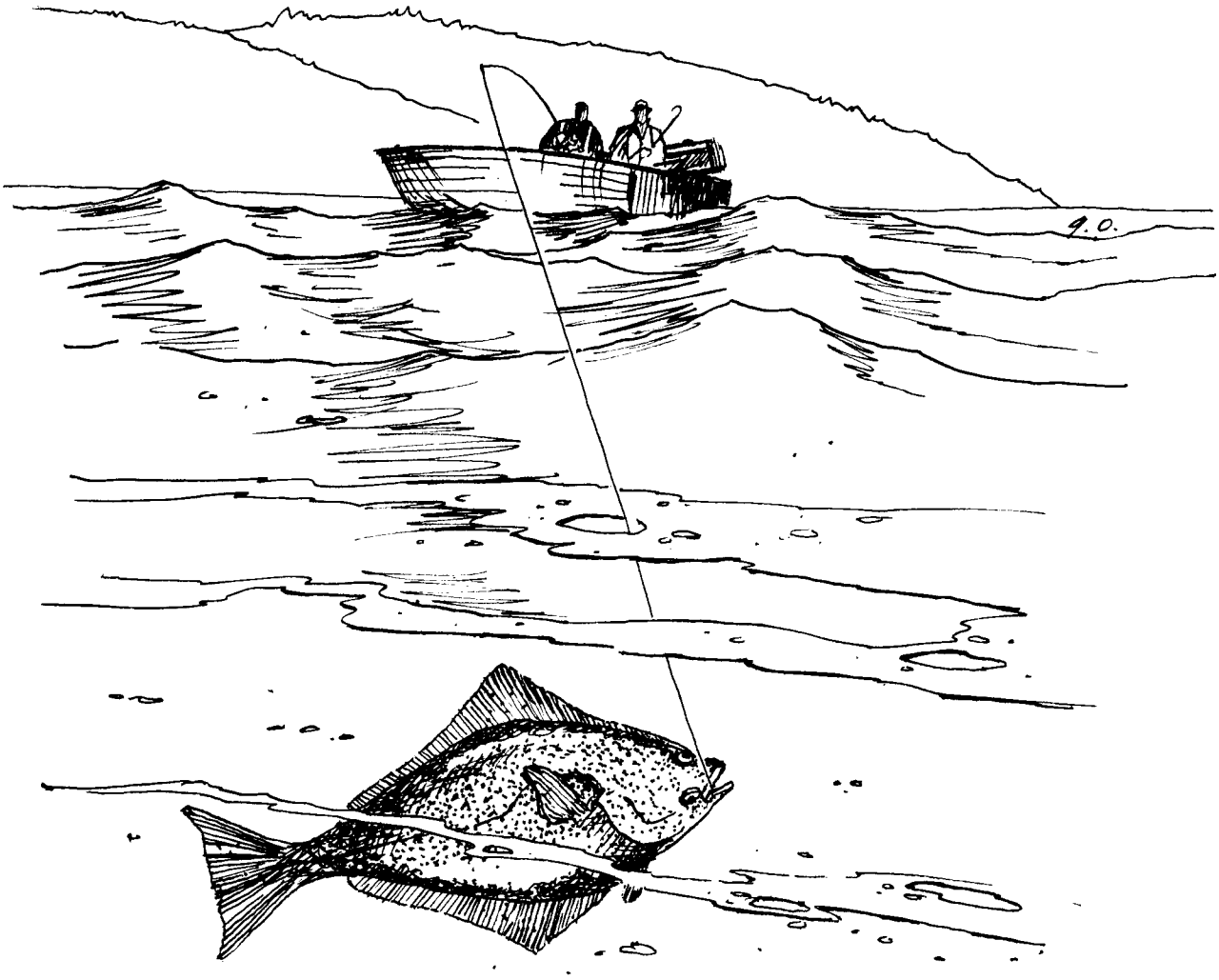
Two elaborate preservation methods allowed eggs to ferment. They were then used as ingredients in or as garnish on other foods. One was placing them in a vessel that allowed ventilation and dry fermentation, decanting off any liquid from time to time. The fermented eggs were stored in the same vessel. They were commonly used in Alu'utiq "ice cream" or eaten with dried fish. However, in later years, the roe was simply placed in a container that allowed drainage while the eggs were left to ferment and cure. Another later variation was to leave the roe in to ferment in its own liquid.

The second major method required crushing the roe in some type of vessel with a little water. Once crushed, the roe was removed from the vessel and shaped into balls, squeezing the excess water from them. Then the balls were allowed to dry and ferment. They became like a cheese. This was widely practiced in the Prince William Sound, as well as the Kenai Peninsula.

The most recent method for preparing roe required that it be taken from fish in freshwater streams. Once in fresh water the roe in the salmon separates and can easily be squeezed out. This roe was salted and rinsed in fresh water, which rendered it firm, a delicacy. Roe that is prepared in this manner could be stored for future use in a cool place, which today is the freezer. In the early days, one of the containers might have been a seal's stomach.

Other Fish

Bottom fish included both the *halibut* (sagiq) and the *gray cod* (amutaq). The halibut were plentiful in the area, but were fished mostly during the summer months when they migrated toward the shallower waters near the shore. They were eaten fresh, or stripped and dried on racks, much like salmon, to preserve them for use later. Some people smoked the halibut for additional flavor and cure. Cod, I was told by my grandfather, was abundant and could be



caught year around. This made it a reliable source of protein. It was eaten fresh, generally boiled and garnished with seal oil. When salt became available, it was preserved in a brine solution as well. Even today the cod is enjoyed, prepared in the same ways.

Another fish available in the early spring was the *herring* (iqaluahpak), generally in the months of March and April. It was mostly consumed fresh, but it could be dried and cured in brine as well.

The *tom cod* (saklaq), *herring* (iqaluahpak), *flounder* (patuquluk), *sculpin* (cilehpak), *dolly varden* (sagwayaq) and a small variety of *sea bass* (kelp greenling) allowed our people to have fresh fish during the winter and early spring when salmon and halibut were not available.

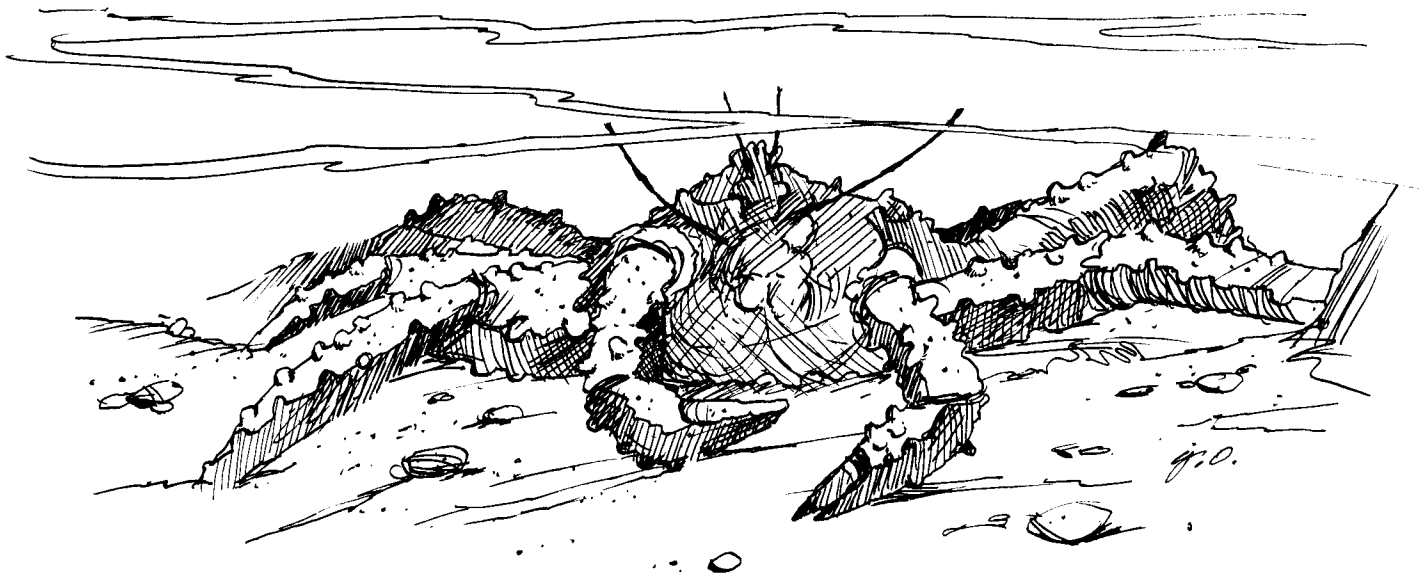
The methods for catching these fish was primarily with hook and line. In later years up to the present day, when fishing by improved nylon netting proved much more efficient, they would feed the entire village.

All of the fish I have mentioned were generally available near the community right in the bay. It was not necessary to travel great distances to put this particular protein on the dinner table. The king salmon was available to Port Graham and Nanwalek as it migrated to the Kenai, Kasilof and other river systems farther up Cook Inlet. The chum, pink, and silver salmon spawned in the Port Graham river systems. In Nanwalek only three miles west of Port Graham, an interconnecting lake distinguishes the river system where red salmon spawned in addition to the chum, pink and silver salmon spawning in the river.

Gathering Intertidal Foods

Other seafood were plentiful at Port Graham and Nanwalek as well. The *Dungeness crab* (yu'alaiyak) was available in spring and fall, but it was not taken in July because of its soft shell. (The crab sheds its old shell and develops a new one to accommodate growth.) The crab was generally taken in the saltwater lagoons or at the head of the bay where the water was shallow, especially at low tide. It was taken mostly with long spears or a type of dip net. Preparation was simple. The crab was boiled for twenty minutes and eaten right out of the shell. Once plentiful up until about ten to fifteen years ago, this species is no longer available, perhaps because of over harvesting or sea otter predation. No one really knows why.

Butter clams (salat) and *cockles* (taugtat) were once abundant at Port Graham, harvested by both people from Port Graham and Nanwalek. They could only be harvested during an extremely low tide or what is known as a minus tide. They could be prepared in any number of ways; they could be boiled in the shell, shucked and fried, or simply eaten raw.



The clams and cockles were only harvested from about October until about April or May in the spring. Summer harvesting was avoided; I suspect it had something to do with the "red tide" or what is referred to in the scientific community as PSP (paralytic shellfish poisoning). This harvest schedule also applied to the other shellfish such as the mussel (amyaq) that is still available in great numbers. However, the clams like the crab disappeared about ten to fifteen years ago. It is suspected that the sea otters did them in.

There is one kind of shellfish that is still available and eaten as in the early days. *Chitons* or *bidarkis* (uhitaq) were harvested at very low tides from rocks or reefs. Preparation was simple. Either they were consumed raw off the shell or placed in a vessel with boiling water poured over them, shelled and eaten. People often preferred eating them dipped in seal oil.

Salt-water snails (iput) were also found at low water on the beaches. Boiled in water for ten minutes, the meat was picked out of the shell and eaten with or without seal oil. They are still prepared the same way today.

The *sea urchin* (utuk) is a small round spiny shellfish that was considered a delicacy, harvested at very low tides (minus tides). It was either boiled in its shell and its contents eaten, or it was simply eaten in its raw state. There are a very few people that consume this creature any more. Those who have eaten it tell me the sea urchin is delicious.

The most challenging sea creature, which was considered a delicacy, was the *octopus* (amikuq). The octopus could be found at low tide, generally burrowed under large boulders. The burrow could easily be identified by large amounts of clamshells just outside of the entrance of the burrow. In the early years simply shoving a long stick or pole into the hole to annoy the octopus would cause it to exit its burrow. Another method was to forcibly pull it out, using a pole with a natural hook.

In recent years this method improved with the use of metal hooks. The most successful way has been to insert a bleach-drenched rag attached to the end of a pole into the burrow; this would generally drive the octopus out of its den.

Once taken home, the octopus was cleaned and placed into a pot of boiling water for twenty minutes. It was then sliced up into small bite-size pieces and eaten. It was somewhat chewy, but considered delicious. In recent years, preparations have become more gourmet. Once cooked in boiling water and tenderized, the octopus can be batter fried or ground up into patties. The taste is not unlike clams, delicious!

Hunting

Now we go on to the wild game. Hunting, of course, required considerably more skill than fishing. Because many of the game animals were terrestrial, hunting on land required much walking and logistics different than hunting marine mammals by water. In the early days, several marine mammals were hunted, including whales and sea lions. Memories about whale hunting are very dim, while sea lions, though hunted recently, are no longer taken because of populations reduced by unknown causes. The harbor seal, which has been a cornerstone of Alu'utiq culture in the past, continues to be hunted. Because its population is also in decline in our region, the harvesting is limited. Let's begin with the seal, so important to many aspects of Alu'utiq culture in the past.

Seal (gaigyaq)

Because the seal was far ranging geographically speaking, hunters had to travel over water, sometimes great-distances, by kayak (paitalek) or in later years by rowboat. Seals were hunted by bow and arrow or spears. Much of the hunting in the early days required the hunters to become familiar with beaches or reefs frequented by seals to rest and sun themselves out of the water. A good hunter could stalk and come within touching distance so they could club or spear the mammal. In more recent years with the advent of the firearm, seals could be taken while they were in the water, and from greater distances. Simeon Kvasnikoff told me the men were able to tell the difference between the males and females by their snout. The females were left alone during the gestation period when they were carrying pups.

As I mentioned the seals were far ranging and required hunters to travel. I recently learned from Alex Moonin that my grandfather Nick Mumchuck and his oldest son, my namesake Derenty (Taḷi), would row from Port Graham to Windy Bay and other places by rowboat without the benefit of a motor. Covering distances that sometimes were greater than fifty miles or more, these were not overnight trips. They were gone sometimes weeks or months, hunting whatever game was available, primarily seal.

The seal provided much in the way of food and clothing. There was very little of the seal that was not used. The meat was cooked over an open fire, boiled, or fried. It was also smoked and dried. The intestines were weaved, sometimes stuffed with meats and fats into a sausage. The heart, liver, and kidneys were either boiled or cooked over open fire. The flippers were singed of the hair and boiled (considered a delicacy). The skull was boiled and the brains eaten. The

blubber was rendered into oil for garnishing other foods such as boiled or dried fish and also as the chief ingredient in "akutaq".

The different bones provided tools or other useful implements. The stomach was blown up and dried, a container used to store many things such as seal oil, salmon eggs, berries, and other foods. The dried stomach could also be used as a float tethered to a harpoon tip when hunting at sea.

The seals, once plentiful, today have become scarce. It was one game animal that provided for the entire community when shared. When the men returned from a hunt they deposited several seal carcasses on the beach and invited everyone to take home what they needed.

Black bear (tanehliq)

The black bear was another game animal that was hunted for food and clothing. It was taken at three different times during the year. 1) In spring, soon after it left its den, before it lost too much body fat and mass. 2) In the fall around September or October shortly before it entered its den. This was the time of the season the bear would be fat from the summer feasting. It would also stay near its den, generally along a mountainside, lining its den with dry grass. It would continue to feed on nearby berries, which helped cleanse the fishy taste from the meat. Bears that were feeding on fish were avoided because of the taste. 3) In the fall, if the bear were not taken, the den would be identified for future reference. During the winter months, a den would be dug up when fresh meat was wanted or needed. At all times, the only bears that were taken were ones without cubs.

The bear was more dangerous to hunt than the seal because of its inherent aggressiveness. Once a cub left its mother it was pretty much of a loner. While it has poor eyesight, it has a keen sense of hearing and smell. Stealth was necessary in order to get close enough to take it.

No one remembers clearly what type of weapons might have been used prior to the introduction of firearms. It is assumed that the bow and arrow and perhaps the spear and

traps were used. I am told that a *deadfall* or a *figure four* trap (nanehyaq) was commonly used to dispatch a bear. This was a fairly simple trap utilizing a log weighted by rocks, set up with a trigger allowing the log to fall on a bear, possibly killing or crippling it. After firearms became available, they no longer were necessary.

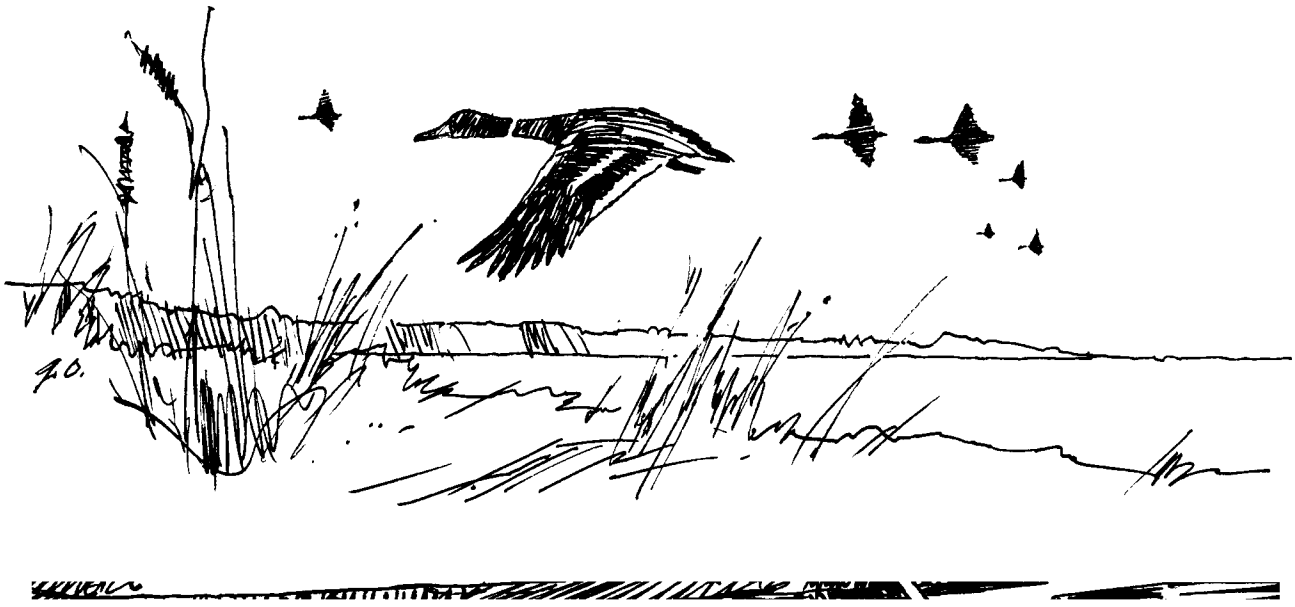
The bear, like the seal, was used almost in its entirety. However, unlike the seal it was also known that the meat had to be fully cooked. How this was known, no one seems to know. Possibly or probably people had died from trichinosis due to consuming undercooked meat. This also resulted in certain taboos not covered here. Suffice it to say the bear was treated differently than other wild game.

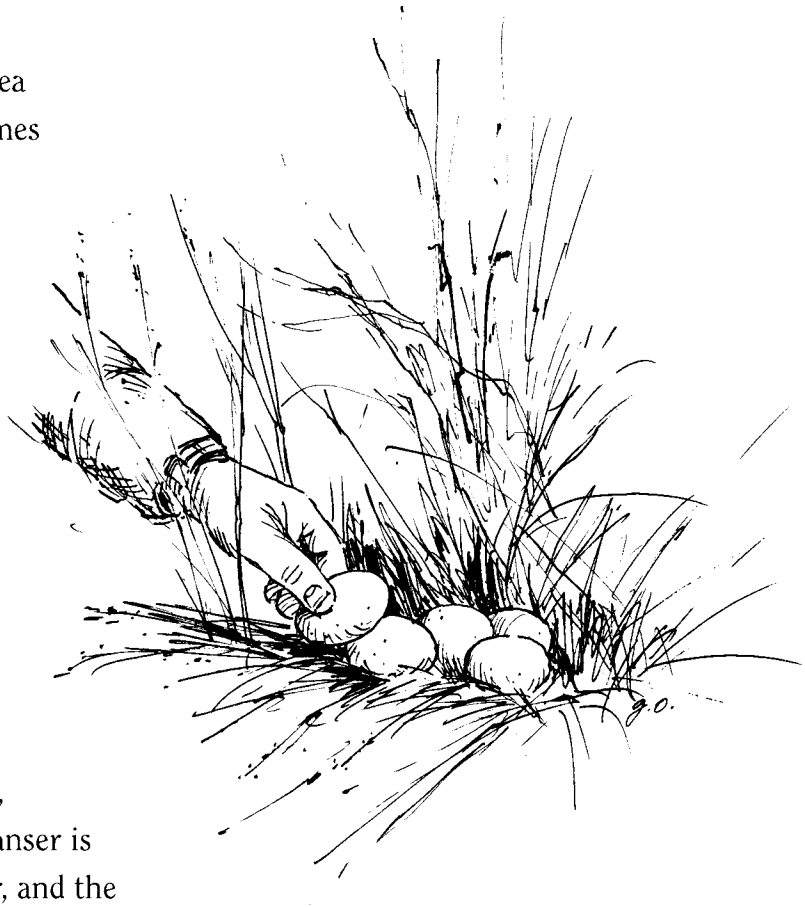
Mountain Goat

A game animal that inhabited the high reaches of mountains was the *mountain goat* (pehnaiq). Because of its agility and relative inaccessibility this particular animal was probably the most difficult to stalk and take. In addition, it had keen eyes and could see great distances. In a herd, one goat would generally occupy a promontory as a lookout for danger. While it was difficult to take in the mountains, occasionally a goat might come down to the beach making it easier to take. The taking of goats was restricted to the seasons without snow, because of the steep and rugged terrain where they lived. Mountain sheep also presented similar challenges to hunters.

Waterfowl, Seabirds and Terrestrial Birds

It is difficult these days to find people who remember how birds were taken for food in the pre-Western days of the Lower Kenai Peninsula. One can only assume from secondhand stories that bows and arrows as well as snares were commonly used. More importantly, as birds were equally available in Port Graham and Nanwalek, traveling great distances was not necessary. The only limits were the migration seasons.





I will list a few of the waterfowl of the area we know from the recent past by the names they are still called:

Mallards, abundantly available in the freshwater lakes, rivers and ponds, were also found during low tide in mud flats of the coastal area. What separates the mallard from the other waterfowl is the fact that it takes off vertically for flight. All the other birds take to the air at a diagonal, much like an airplane. Other birds commonly used for food were the *copperhead* (common goldeneye?), *blue bill* (canvasback), *butterball* (bufflehead), *sawbill* (Two species: the common merganser is larger, found in both fresh and salt water, and the red-breasted merganser is usually found in salt water), *loon*, variety of *black ducks* (black scoters, may also refer to surf scoters and white-winged scoters), *rock ducks* (harlequin), *scaups*, *old squaws*, *pintails* and *whistlers*. The *common eider* was also hunted but we had to travel over to the head of Kachemak Bay to find it.

Waterfowl were preferred over seabirds such as *cormorants* and *sea gulls* that were also available. However, it is said young fledgling sea gulls were occasionally eaten in the spring as well. Eggs from a number of seabirds were collected. The most popular were from the sea gull, collected in spring and salted or preserved in seal oil.

Migratory birds that were hunted were the *goose*, *crane*, and occasionally the *swan*. These birds were available during their migrations north in spring or south in the fall. They were very desirable. Because their availability was limited to a short period, they were considered a real treat.

We were fortunate in the fact that many game birds were always available in our region throughout the entire winter. In the earlier days, birds were taken during the summer months and preserved with salt as many other game animals were. In more recent years, however, birds were generally hunted in the winter beginning in late November and tapering off into February or March. The reason for the late November hunt was the fact that at this point the birds no longer had pin feathers, which are hard and difficult to remove and certainly inedible. The birds were also still meaty and fat at this point. At about January the birds began to lose meat and fat content, so they became less desirable. Hunters were also aware of the fact that as spring neared, it was time to leave the birds alone and allow them time to lay eggs.

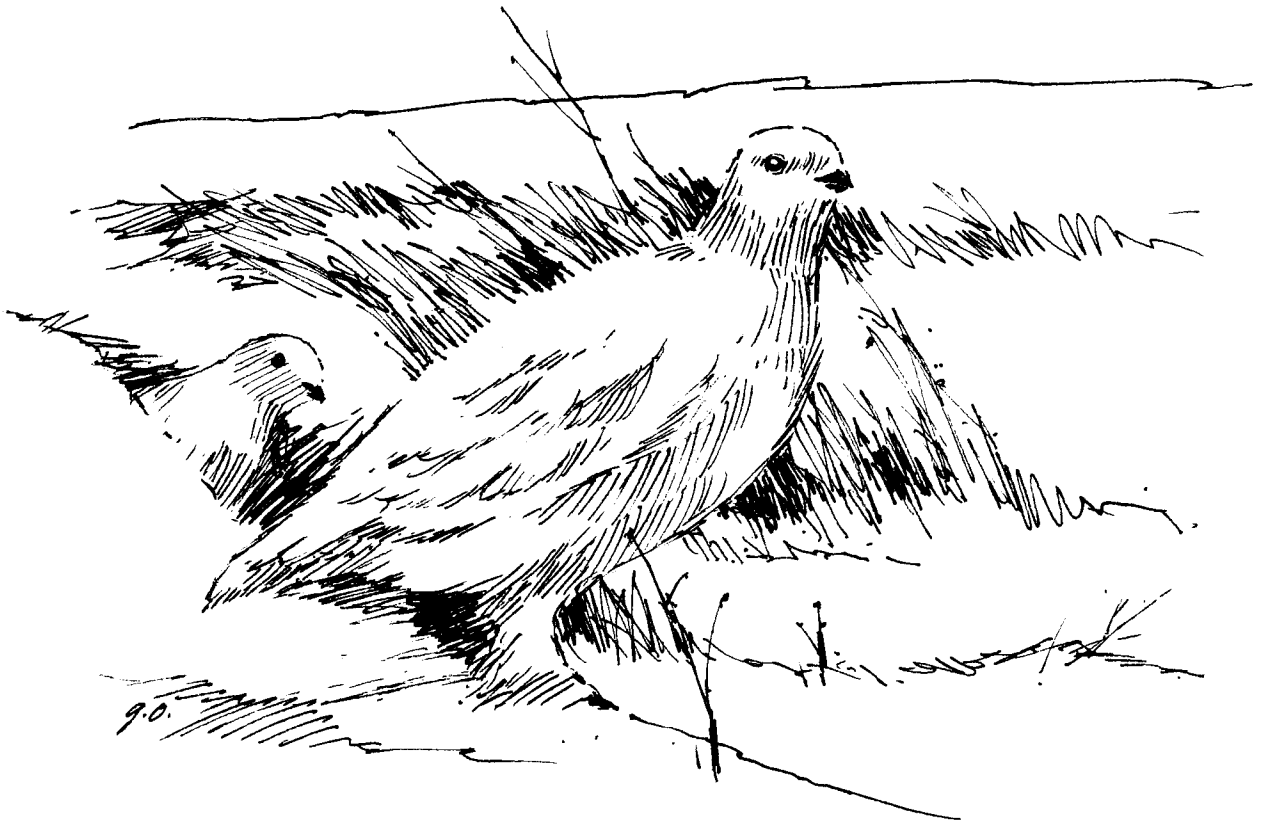
Preparation of the bird for cooking was fairly simple. In most cases the bird was plucked of all its feathers and the remainder of any unwanted fine down was singed off, either over an open campfire or in later times with the benefit of a blowtorch. Singeing provided the desired smoke and burnt flavor. Once this was accomplished the fowl would then be gutted and prepared for cooking. The gizzard, liver, heart, and even its head would also be kept for consumption. The bird would then be ready for cooking over an open campfire or in a pot for soup or stew as the main entrée. The feathers and down were also used for different useful things, both decorative as well as practical. Feathers were most likely used for arrows and for decoration on garments. The down was probably used as insulation.

Although not waterfowl, two other birds, the *spruce chicken* (grouse) and the *ptarmigan* were hunted incidentally for food. These particular birds were taken while we were hunting for other game. The spruce chicken was found in the forests in late fall and winter while the ptarmigan was hunted in the mountains, generally in late fall. Late spring and summer hunts were avoided to allow the birds to lay their eggs and feed their young once hatched.

As far as hunting fowl of any kind, the number taken was limited to only what could be used immediately, since none were preserved for future use. With the introduction of the shotgun, the efficiency for taking birds increased dramatically. However, the one thing that did not change was the fact that hunters continued to take only what they needed.

In more recent years, the taking of fowl has declined, mainly because appetites for wild game have declined, particularly with the younger generation, who seem to prefer a diet of the domestic birds such as chicken and turkey. A few people, especially from the older generation, still maintain game birds as a part of their diet.

In my visits to Port Graham and Nanwalek, there is no marked difference past or present in their local methods of hunting. However, Nanwalek appears to continue to supplement their diet with game more than Port Graham. Due to the conservative practices of the hunters, the bird populations have never been threatened or endangered. Since we are not a culture that hunts for trophies or sport, the take of game birds in our area is minimal. The health of current population of the birds attests to our management practices. The only real change that came about with state and federal management was the fact that now all the hunters are required to have hunting licenses (now we have to pay to hunt) and hunting is confined to early winter months.



Prince William Sound

In my interviews with folks from the Prince William Sound area, I found that hunting and fishing practices in the area were not so very different from those on the Kenai Peninsula area. This should not be surprising since we were essentially the same seafaring people who depended primarily on fish and game available in the coastal areas of the Chugach region. We were all similarly impacted by the advent of the Russians and subsequently the United States, both economically and socially. I had three elders from the Sound review the section I did on the Kenai Peninsula and also held discussions with other folks in the Sound for the sake of comparison.

All of the fish and game resources that were available in the Sound were also available on the Kenai Peninsula with the recent exception of the *deer*. Since deer were not indigenous to the area, they were introduced under a plan developed by the Cordova Chamber of Commerce in 1916 to promote tourism. Between the years of 1917 and 1923 deer were planted on Hawkins and Knight Islands. To allow the deer to multiply in numbers, it was not legal to hunt deer until about 1941. The deer have provided an additional protein source to the Prince William Sound that has not been available on the Kenai Peninsula. However, the uses of the other game common to both areas were either identical or similar both in preparation and preservation.

Another major difference from Kenai Peninsula hunting was the fact that the people in the Sound could range a little farther for their game because of the sheltered waters of the many islands which buffer strong winds. In contrast, the open waters of the Cook Inlet could sometimes be dangerous to people in small watercraft when inclement weather produced rough seas. These sheltered waters allowed greater accessibility to the fish and game on the nearby islands.

The original village of Chenega might be a testament to the stability of communities found in sheltered waters. It was considered to be one of our oldest villages up to the time it was

destroyed in the 1964 earthquake, suggesting that the area continued to provide for their needs for a very long time, as it did for Tatitlek, Kniklik and other communities of the Sound.

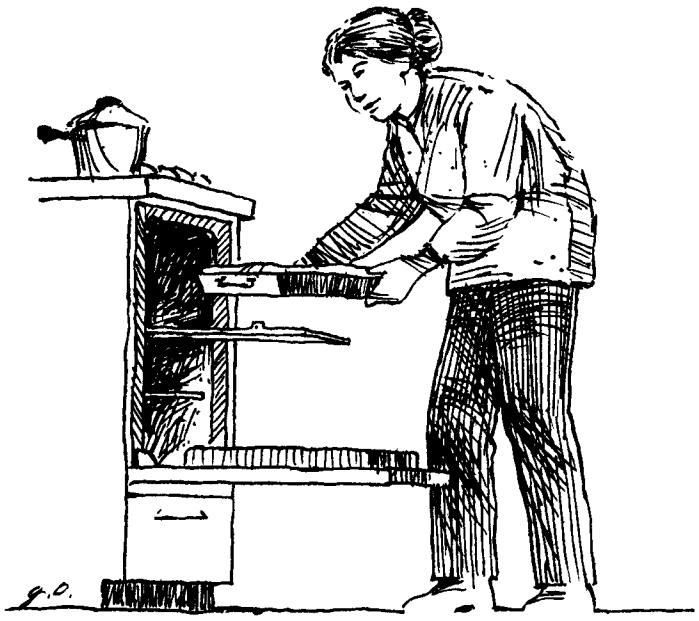
Many customs and practices of the Prince William Sound communities such as sharing food were identical to those of the Kenai Peninsula. Matuska Mary Kompkoff mentioned that in the original village of Chenega when the hunters returned from a successful hunting trip it was not necessary to have anyone alerting the village people that the men had landed on the beach with either fish or game. In Chenega the beach landing was visible from everyone's home. As was customary in our villages, all people would come down to the beach and get a share of whatever fish or game was brought in by the men. The take might have been seals, black bear, herring or salmon. In this way, elders or families without hunters could also eat. Hunters essentially provided for the entire community.

The use and preparation of *salmon* were both found to be identical in both places. It was noted, however, that salmon filleted for drying, smoking, or salting were never cut into strips but used as whole fillets. Cutting the fish into strips is a recent practice that has become more common in the past thirty years as the general public has developed a taste for dried and smoked strips.

It was also important to know how thick to cut the fillets for the different uses. If a fish were to be hung to dry or smoke, the fillet was cut thinly to allow drying before spoilage. The subsequent backbone left with a lot of meat was also hung to dry or smoke. Fish that were to be cooked immediately were cut into steaks or filleted thickly and the backbone discarded. It is important to note that the entire fish was used, including some of the organs as well as the head. Fish that were to be salt-cured were filleted down to the bone, discarding the backbone.

Like on the Peninsula, specific methods of preservation depended on when and where salmon were taken during the different stages of migration. A variety of methods were used to prepare fish for smoking: 1) Salting the fillets of fish, allowing the salt time to permeate it and then rinsing the excess salt off before the smoking process. 2) Soaking the fillets in a brine solution for a short period of time (brown sugar was optional) and then hanging in the smoke house to complete the process. 3) Smoking the fillets without any prior salting.

"Salting" was a more recent process that was used to preserve fish and game. The meat was simply layered with salt generally in a wooden vessel. A weight was placed on the meat so it could cure in its own juices. Whenever any salted meat was later desired, one would soak it overnight in fresh water to remove the excess salt. If it were meat once "soaked" it would then be ready to cook. If it were fish, it could be cooked in any number of ways or just eaten without further processing. In the present day salted fish is also used to make pickled fish or fish pie (pirok).



Salmon eggs or *roe* were also used in a variety of ways. The fresh roe while still attached by membranes could be draped over a drying rack for use later. Once the salmon had been in the fresh water systems for a while and ready to spawn, the roe would separate from the membrane. These eggs could be squeezed into a container, salted and rinsed with fresh water and eaten (the eggs would become firm).

There were two other methods for preserving roe: 1) placed in a vessel and allowed to ferment (qayugyaq). 2) Mashed in a vessel with a little water and removed from the vessel and shaped into balls squeezing as much of the water as possible. It was then allowed to develop a crust and ferment (piinaq). Qayugyaq or piinaq was used to make Alu'utiq "ice cream" (akutaq). Mixing piinaq, seal oil and berries together originally made akutaq. Later when sugar became available this was included. Akutaq was generally eaten, accompanied by dried fish (tamuq). On the Peninsula, mashed potatoes were added to the akutaq as an ingredient.

As on the Peninsula, fermented fish was prepared by burying it; in the Sound it was called "uqsuq." In the Sound, people usually wrapped the fish in skunk cabbage leaves rather than ferns.

Herring provided fresh fish in early spring. It was cooked and eaten immediately or salted for later use. The herring would spawn on nearby kelp beds, and the people would harvest both the *spawn* and the kelp together. It could be eaten raw, seasoned with salt, or boiled. The spawn could also be salted for future use. Whenever spawn was desired, the salt would simply be rinsed out of it. It was then eaten as it was or boiled.

Intertidal foods played an important role in the Sound as well. Clams, cockles, mussels and chitons were just a few of the shellfish that were abundant and available for use. These resources could be eaten raw or cooked and garnished with seal oil. Henry Makarka informed me that cockles were dried for storage for later use, but mostly they were used immediately. Again, not unlike the folks on the Kenai Peninsula, Prince William Sound people harvested shellfish only in late fall or winter, possibly because of the possibility of paralytic shellfish poisoning. Octopus was also available and taken during the very low tides.

Matuska Mary Kompkoff informed me that she remembers *king crab* being caught with a hook and line too. Shellfish were generally available year around, except during their soft shell period, which was in July. Crab were eaten fresh. There is no recollection of crab being preserved.

Waterfowl were treated in the same manner as they were on the Peninsula. Some of the fowl were available when they were migrating, such as the geese, swan, and crane. Black ducks, mallards, mergansers and other waterfowl were available year around. Some remembered in particular of the black duck that was caught during the summer months and salted.

While the people of the Sound could range further on sheltered island waters to reach a variety of wild resources, they used the same ones in the same manner as the Peninsula people. Once the deer was introduced, they had the distinction of having access to a major game animal not present on the Peninsula. Like the people of the Peninsula, the Sound people are handling changes in subsistence brought about the declining populations of many common resources, regulatory restrictions, and time constraints brought about the demands of modern times such as employment, governance issues, and schooling. Yet people persist in seasonal subsistence activities to provide food for the table, to share resources with elders, family and community members, to maintain contact with nature, and to celebrate their culture.

Stories Reflecting Subsistence

The following stories are reproduced from:
Chugach Legends, Stories and Photographs of the Chugach Region, compiled by John F.C. Johnson, Chugach Alaska Corporation, 1984, Anchorage.

The Mountain Goat Hunt in Sheep Bay told by Paul Eliah, pp. 24-25
The Man and the Sea Lions told by Makari, pp. 50-52
Raven, the Bears and the Whales told by Makari, pp. 79-81

Topics for Discussion:

- ❖ Reflect on what each story tells or represents about the subsistence lifestyle:
  - What foods are represented
  - How the animals are caught or gathered
  - How different parts of the animal are used

- ❖ Reflect on the relationships of the animals, birds and fish
  - With other animals, birds, and fish
  - With human beings
  - What types of character are manifest in some of the animals featured
  - How these relationships in Alu'utiq culture differ from those in Euro-American culture.

- ❖ Determine what places in terms of location in the region and in terms of ecosystems are represented.

- ❖ Evaluate what each of the stories explain or teach.

The Mountain Goat Hunt in Sheep Bay

Paul Eliah

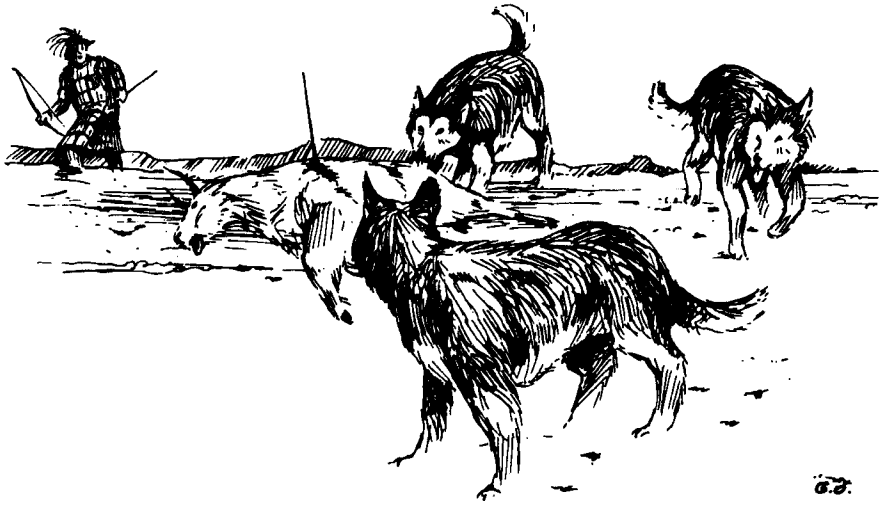
The people from Port Wells and Chenega came to Sheep Bay and had a big meeting in the smoke house. It was winter. They were getting ready to hunt mountain goat next day. The Sheep Bay people said: "We will go with you, but we are not going to hunt very hard." They knew the places and were just going to show the others the way. One Chenega man said: "I am not going to let that Sheep Bay man beat me. He is eating red-salmon soup." The sheep Bay man answered: "All right, you eat spruce-hen soup and I don't, but you will not leave me behind. I will beat you hunting." He was a goat hunter.

They arranged to race up the mountain. They started at daybreak. They had dogs with them when they climbed. All of them had snowshoes. The young men put them on before they turned their dogs loose. Soon they heard the dogs barking. A Chenega man shouted: "Go ahead, the dogs have got a goat." The Sheep Bay people were the last, while the men from Chenega and Kiniklik were ahead. They were passing over a small peak on snowshoes. The hunter from Sheep Bay got to the goats first, even though he had been last. The dogs had the goats surrounded. He looked around, and nobody was in sight. He killed the first goat he saw with an arrow. Then he took off his basketry hat, put it on the goat and left his arrow in it and kept on going. The second one he shot with an arrow he covered with his ground-squirrel coat. He killed a third...he killed all the goats before anyone showed up. On the way back he met the others [only] halfway up.

The old men from Sheep Bay started to sing out when they saw him: "Hi, hi, hi! Even though we eat red-salmon soup, and those people eat spruce-hen soup, they can't beat us." The Chenega and Port Wells people were too ashamed to say anything. Then the hunter

from Sheep Bay said to them: "Here are some goats for you. I got them so you could roast them in the fire." He gave all the goats to the Chenega and Port Wells people and just kept enough for one meal for his own people.

That is why the others are all afraid of the men from Sheep Bay: they are so swift.



The Man and the Sea Lions

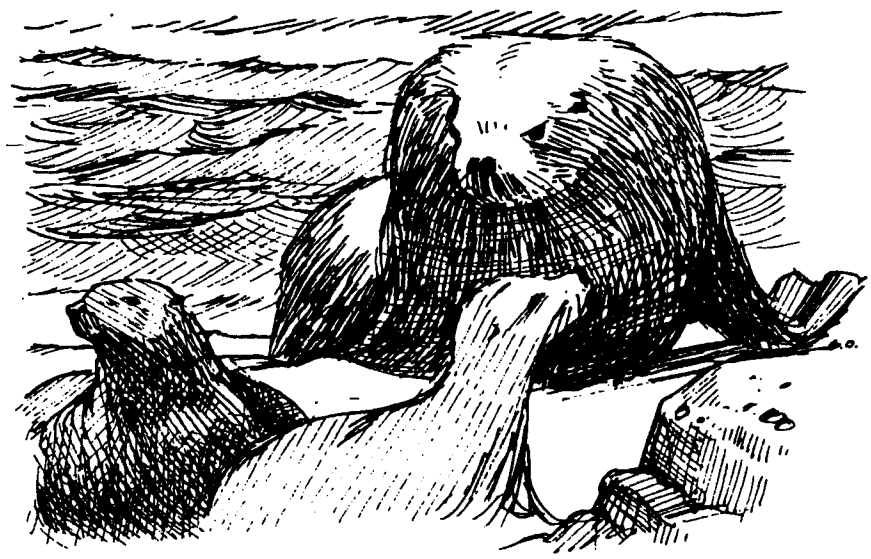
Makari

There was a village near Chenega named Tyaigyulik [*i.e.* Silver Salmon Place] where people went hunting for seal lions. A great many baidarkas went out, and they speared a sea lion, but it escaped with the harpoon head. There was a rock at some distance from the hunting grounds where they left a man while they went looking for the sea lion, because the sea was so rough that they could not get at him. It was so cold that he became sleepy and had been sleeping for a few minutes when somebody cried: "Come on, you!" He woke up, but there was nobody around. While he was sitting there he heard the voice again, saying: "Come on, you are cold." He was peeping under his eyelids to find out who it was and saw a sea lion touching him, crying to him, but diving again. Then the man dived after it under the rock, and the sea lion opened a door to its house, which was full of seal lions. When the man entered he saw a little old woman who came to him and asked: "How did you come here? Are you dead or alive?"

"No," he answered, "I was left on the rock and dived and found this place." The old woman said: "Live men have never come here, only drowned people come to this house."

Then the man saw a great sea lion lying at the fire with his partners' harpoon in its side. It was nearly dead, but the other sea lions did not know what was the matter with him. (The other hunters came to look after the man but did not find him on the rock and thought he was drowned.) The old woman said: "Can you do anything for this man lying at the fire? He is our chief." They did not see the harpoon head. The man said he would bathe the wound with hot water, but he did not tell what was wrong. The old woman asked what the matter was, but he only said that he would cure him. He bathed the wound and removed the

harpoon head and hid it without the others noticing it, and then he said: "I have cured him now." And the old woman said: "I am going to pay you well," showing him a great stomach hanging under the roof — it was the sea lion's baidarka — and told him to ask for that.



The sick sea lion chief got up next day and was very hungry and said: "Anything you ask for you can have." The man pointed at the stomach and asked for it. The sea lion said: "We will give it to you so you can go back to your own people." He took the stomach down, opened it and let the man into it and said: "Now you are going home, but do not try to peep out of the hole until you feel that you are on the beach." The old woman said: "When you have drifted on to the beach, open it from the inside and afterwards tie it again and throw it into the sea. It is going back to us again."

He heard people talking while he drifted away, right to his own village. Some children were trying to bust it throwing stones at it. He got out and told them not to do so, it was the boat they had let him go away with. It was right at their winter village. After he got out he went up to his parents' house. His mother had not a hair left on her head, nor had his father. (In olden days they used to singe their hair when they lost a child.) He said to his mother: "Do not cry anymore. I have come back. But call all the people to a meeting. I want to speak to them. I found a spear they have lost, but I do not know to whom it belongs."

They had a meeting in the village, and the man took the harpoon head saying: "Tell me who owns this harpoon head. I found it in the wounded sea lion, but I do not know to whom it belongs."

Afterwards they lived as before. There was a glacier near the village. It moved back, and they saw the small islands called Kalugat. The chief went to look for a site for a new village there. Next day he returned, and at a meeting he told the people he had found a new place where they could live. It was Ingim-atya [Chenega]. After they had moved there, a two-man baidarka went out hunting sea lions again. One man was left on a rock so he could spear the sea lions; his name was Nayarngaun. His partner, whose name was Tanyurhangtyuk, returned to the village. When he came back they asked him where his partner was, and he answered: "The surf washed him away and drowned him." This happened in the fall. They believed what he said. The man left on the rock was married to a porcupine, and he himself was a black bear. He was full of hair all over his body.

In the fall the following year three baidarkas went out hunting sea lions at the same rock and there they found the man, who had made a house of cormorants' wings. The hunters brought him home without killing any sea lions. They informed him that his wife was now married to the man who had left him, and he told them to wait until dark before they took him ashore. After they had returned and anybody could see them, he asked them to be silent. He used to enter the house where his parents were living feet first. His father said: "Those legs look like our son's legs, he used to go in feet first." Next day he told his parents: "Let us have a feast, and call Tanyurhangtyuk and his wife so that they can see me." When they arrived to the feast he said to them: "That's what you were after! You left me on the rock so you could take my wife. You can keep her now." Then he began to cry like the cormorants: "Rorr-rorr-rorr!" and Tanyurhangtyuk fell dead. After that he took his wife back and they lived as they had done before.

Raven, the Bears and the Whales

Makari

There was a village with many people who were hunting brown bears. They were clever people who used to take a silver salmon and cut it in half, shaking the tail part under a rock while another man was lying behind with his spear. When the bear jumped after the salmon, he stabbed it with his spear and killed it.

There was a place near the village where many bears were living, but by and by they became fewer and at last very few were left. Then the bears looked around for somebody who was more clever than the villagers and were pleased to let Raven into their house, where they gave him food and told him that they were looking for clever people. Raven said: "You are looking for clever people? I know where there is one. He likes to eat dried salmon eggs." Then the bears went to the man, and Raven was in the bears' house when they brought him in. Raven said: "I know why you are getting so few. The humans used to take salmon tails and wave them under the water and kill you with their spears." The clever man said: "If you see a salmon tail wave, do not bite it, but bite higher up, and you will bite off the arm." After that he left.

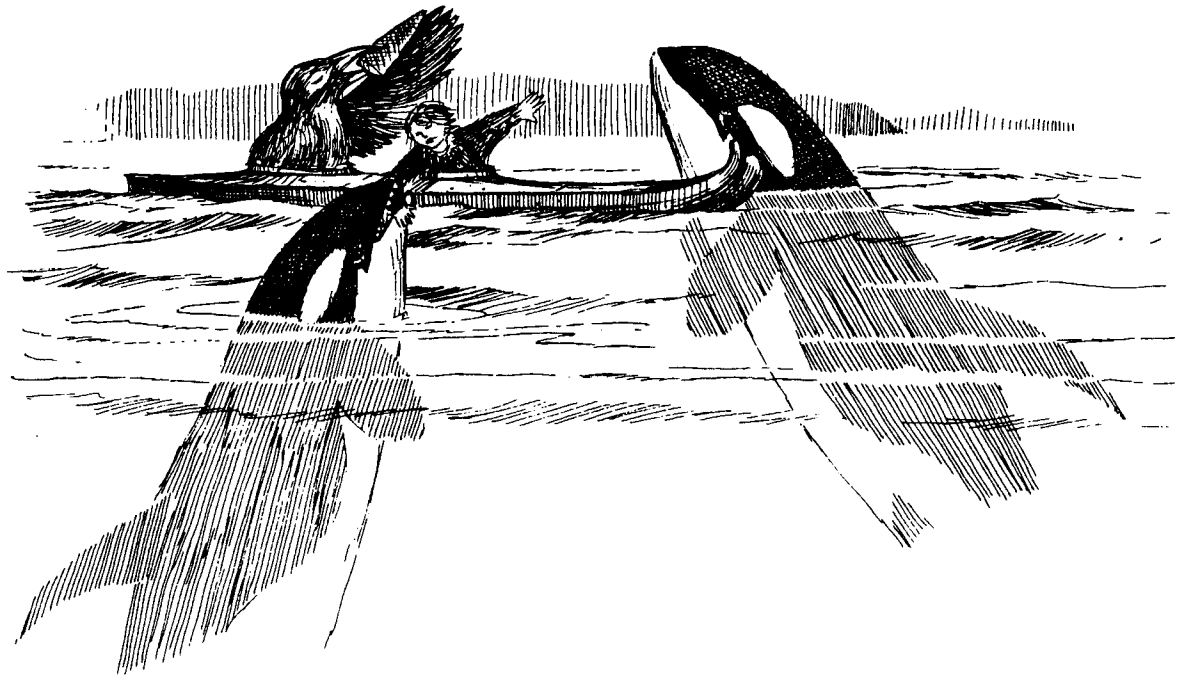
[Some time afterwards] the bears went after Raven again, brought him back and told him that they had bitten a man's arm off and wanted to cause him pain. Raven told them: "Take the arm and hang it up with the hand under the smoke and get some yellow cedar and burn it. Then the man will always feel pain and not recover."

Then the villagers looked for Raven and asked him why the man was feeling pain after the bears had bitten his arm off. "Do you think we could find that arm?" they asked. Raven said: "I know where it is."

"Do you think we could get it?"

Then Raven went to the place of the bears, making deadfalls all the way to their house. Inside the house they had built a great fire of yellow cedar wood, and the arm was hanging over it. When they had tied the arm they had used tree roots, but Raven said: "You ought to use grass roots. The man is very sick and suffering, but the grass roots will cause him more pain." So they changed the string. Raven was going in and out every few minutes and the bears wondered why, but he told them: "When people get old they cannot hold their water as when they were young." The bears were eating, and Raven was watching them while he said: "Slack the line a little."

Then Raven seized the arm and flew away with it. The bears pursued him, but they were all killed in the deadfalls except two very old ones; if they had been killed also there would have been no more bears. Raven brought the arm back to the house and fetched some water, because it was quite dried up. Then he told the young people to go into the woods and get pitch from the trees. After that Raven told them to place the sick man alongside the fire, took



the sore arm and said: "Now I am going to sing a song." He made circles around the fire, and in every corner he put his beak out and called for help. Meanwhile he told the people: "Keep your eyes closed!" And every time he made a circle he put his beak outside so that all the bushes there — salmonberries, wild currents and blueberries — could help him singing. At last Raven said: "Are you sure you have your eyes closed? Now I am going to fix the arm." Then he put pitch on the man's arm and put it in place, but he said: "One of you had one eye open, therefore I have put the arm on crooked." That is the reason why people have crooked [*i.e.* flexible] arms.

After that the chief of the village said: "We will give you anything you ask for, because you have cured the arm of that man." Raven was single, and the man who had the arm bitten off had a young daughter, so Raven said: "I should like to have that girl."

Afterwards, he took his baidarka and went away with her, when he met two blackfish. Every time they came up from the water he said: "You have not got a wife like I have, dressed all in marten skins." Next time the blackfish came up again, one on either side of the baidarka, and said: "We have all kinds of dried fish and want to give you some." Raven asked: "How do you eat dried fish?" They told him: "That is the way we eat it: hold your head back and keep your eyes closed." He did so, but when he opened his eyes and looked where his wife had been sitting he only saw the snip of her marten-skin coat as the whales dived with her.

Then he went home and said that the blackfishes had stolen his wife. He took a walk on the beach where there was a sandspit and found a little smoke house. As he entered he found an old, old woman inside. The old woman was holding the tides. Raven wanted to know how she did so, but the old woman [only] answered that she could do so. She let the tide fall, and Raven went out looking for the blackfish but found nothing but a sea-urchin. After that he again went to the house of the old woman, and a little bird was right in front of him. Raven asked what she was doing. the little bird answered: "I am just walking here, but I can lift the water."

"Can you lift the water, then do so," said Raven. It was high water, and the bird put her feet into it and lay on her back lifting the water and told Raven to enter. Then the bird let the water down again, and Raven went under the water.

Raven arrived where the blackfishes lived who had stolen his wife. There he met a blue crane who was the watchman of the blackfishes. As soon as the crane began to shout Raven gave him a copper spear to keep quiet. Therefore the crane has a long beak. The blackfishes came out and wanted to know what he saw, but Crane said: "I was so sleepy that I saw the dirt falling from my eyes, therefore I shouted." So the blackfish went into the house again. Crane told Raven: "When those two were out hunting they brought back the girl dressed in marten skins." Then Crane took the girl out of the house to Raven who went away with her.