

Kathryn H. Shelton
Director

Division of Libraries, Archives,
& Museums

www.museums.state.ak.us



Bruce Kato
Chief Curator

Alaska State Museums

395 Whittier St.
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1718
907.465.2901

Press Release

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FOR MORE INFORMATION: Rosemary Carlton

Phone (907) 747-8981 Fax (907) 747-3004

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SEPTEMBER ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH **YUP'IK ESKIMO FISH TRAP AND KAYAK MODEL**

A model fish trap with a man in a kayak harvesting the catch is the Sheldon Jackson Museum's September Artifact of the Month.

Missionaries, teachers, gold seekers, traders and whalers during the last half of the 1800s sought the material culture of Alaska's indigenous people. Models of everyday tools and technology often took the place of full-sized objects in the marketplace. This model is 11½ inches in length whereas actual traps ranged in size from two feet to 15 feet in length. Models were also made as toys for children's play and education. There is no record of who collected the piece, but it is noted in the 1930s inventory of artifacts.

Such models, according to researcher Ann Fienup-Riordan in interviews with Yup'ik elders, represent the type of fish trap used in harvesting whitefish, pike, burbot, needlefish and blackfish. Elder Frank Andrews has said "the headwater lakes and rivers that have a lot of grass and caarrluut [debris] inside them have a lot of fish." Andrews remembers going in his kayak as a boy to "clean the rivers." Using short sticks they would "flip over those (grasses) in the water from underneath." The conical shaped traps were then placed along the side of the stream facing toward the bank as this is where the fish would swim. The blackfish reportedly swam into the traps, providing an abundant harvest.

The traps were made from split spruce strips and lashed together with roots, or more recently with twine. Today, chicken wire is often the material of choice in constructing a fish trap.

The model trap and kayak can be seen in the museum gallery September 1 through September 30. Summer hours at the Sheldon Jackson Museum, which run through September 29, are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Summer admission is \$4. Winter hours at the Sheldon Jackson Museum begin September 30 and are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Winter admission is \$3. Visitors 18 and younger, Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum, and those with passes are admitted free of charge. The models can also be viewed online at http://www.museums.state.ak.us/sheldon_jackson/artifact_of_month.html.



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YUP'IK ESKIMO FISH TRAP AND KAYAK MODEL



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