

How to take care Skin (In Alaska)

Arctic boats, Qayaks or Umiaq, used to be covered with the skins of sea mammals (mainly seal skin), (Some Alaskan umiaq are still using sea mammal skin). If do not took hair off from skin, will become a heavy hairy boat, so have to take the hair off somehow.

One time I asked John from Greenland, how to take hair off from seal skin. He said soak seal skin into human urine.

By the way, to remove hair from the deerskin, you can dissolve lime in water to make it alkaline and soak it in the water. Hair will come off quickly. However, deerskin is not waterproof cannot be used for boats.

In Point Hope, Alaska, they were mainly using bearded seal skin umiaq for whaling a few years ago. This time, we will show you how to take hair off from the bearded seal skin.

Please note that, this is the Point Hope's way. This method may vary from town to town or region to region.

Hunting season of bearded seals is May to June. When they catch bearded seal, take skin off carefully. Try to never leave fat on the skin, try to not make holes.



Then, put skin into trash bag or plastic bag and buried in the sand by the beach, or put in outside shed. Let it sit for about two months. In the summer, temperatures can reach to 15 degrees Celsius or more, and the skins ripen in the bag. Bag supposed to be sealed, but flies are laying eggs and full of maggots on the skin. After 2 months, open the bag, strong stinky

smell come into your nose. At this time, almost hair has fallen off and the dark epidermis has peel off too.



Put a string to the skin and throw into the sea,



washing it well with seawater, most of the remaining hair will fall off.

Hanging these skins, the slight

hairs and fat remaining on the inside of the skin can be carefully removed with an ulu (fan-shaped knife).

If you touch this skin with your bare hand, hard to take strong smell off from your hand.



After cleaning the skins, let it dry out and it will keep for years to come.

When they use these dry skins, dipping in seawater for a while will get soft. Then sewing skins together with waterproof stitch. Ready to put skins on the umiaq.

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