

There were three methods of taking the seal, either singly with the harpoon and bladder, or in a company by the clapper hunt, or in the winter on the ice. Till the use of firearms became possible, the customary method was that in which the harpoon and bladder were used. The Eskimo, seated in his kayak with all his accoutrements, no sooner perceives a seal than he approaches to the leeward if possible, with the sun on his back, lest he should be seen and scented by the animal. Concealing himself behind a wave, he paddles swiftly and silently forward till he arrives within a distance of thirty or forty feet, taking care meanwhile that the harpoon, cord and bladder are in proper order. He then takes the paddle in his left hand, and seizing the harpoon in his right, launches it at the seal by the rest or casting board. If the harpoon sinks deeper than the barbs, it immediately disengages itself from the bone joint, and that again from the shaft, and while the cord is being unwound from its coil in the kayak, the Eskimo, the moment he has struck the seal, which dives down with the velocity of an arrow, throws the bladder after him into the water. He then picks up the floating shaft and restores it to its groove in the kayak. The bladder, which displaces a body of water equal to more than a hundred pounds weight, is dragged down by the seal; but the animal is so wearied by this encumbrance that he is obliged to reappear on the surface in about fifteen minutes to breathe. The Eskimo, on perceiving the bladder, paddles up to it, and as soon as the seal makes his appearance, attacks him with the large barbless lance, and this he repeats every time the animal comes to the surface, till it is quite exhausted; he then despatches it with the small lance, and fastens it to the left side of the kayak, after inflating the cavity under the skin that the body may float more lightly and tow more easily.

This method of hunting is extremely dangerous, and exposes the Eskimo to the greatest danger, for if the cord in its rapid revolutions becomes entangled in the kayak, or if it winds itself around the paddle, the hand or even the neck of the paddler, as it sometimes does in stormy weather, or if the seal suddenly darts from one side of the kayak to the other, the inevitable consequence is that the kayak is capsized by the cord and is often dragged under the water. The Eskimo now has occasion for all his skill to extricate himself and recover his balance several times in succession, for the cord continues to whirl him round till he is quite disentangled. Even when he supposes all danger to be over and approaches too near the dying seal, it may bite him on the face or hands, and a seal with young, instead of retreating, often turns on the hunter and tears a hole in the kayak large enough to sink it.

The second method is called by them the clapper hunt, in which a number of hunters surround the seals and kill them in great numbers at certain seasons. In the autumn these animals generally come together in the creeks, where the Eskimos cut off their retreat, driving them under water by shouting, clapping and throwing stones. The seals being unable to remain long without air, soon become exhausted, and at last are compelled to remain so long on the surface that they are easily surrounded and killed by the missile darts. When the seal emerges they all rush on him with deafening cries, and on the animal's diving, which he is soon compelled to do, they all retire to their posts and watch to see at what spot he will arise next. This is generally half a mile from the former place, and if the seal has the range of a sheet of water four or five miles square, he will keep the hunters in play for hours before he is totally exhausted. Should he seek the shore in his distress, he is assailed by the women and children with sticks and stones, while the men strike him