

Otter Facts

Size of adult male: up to 4-5 ft long from nose to tail tip; weight up to 80 lbs. Fully grown at 4 years.

Short white whiskers; round blunt head, short thick neck

Tail: 1 foot or less long.

Fur: unusually fine, soft and dense underfur of about 3/4ths of an inch long, often brown with silvery over hairs; very warm and beautiful

Skin: very loose, so that it can stretch to several feet more than animal's real length.

Largest pelts: as much as 90 inches long and 36 inches wide, usually 6 feet by 30 inches.

Pups: born on bed of kelp at sea; suckle for over a year. Preferred for softer, shorter fur.

Uses for fur

Otter fur became the royal fur of China. Chinese mandarins wore otter-skin robes.

Rich society ladies wore otter capes, belts or sashes of fur

Tails were made into caps, mittens and small trimmings.

When prices rose, furs were used to weigh down and border silk gowns.

By 1790 - one sea otter fur sold in China for \$80-120

1822-1835 - American merchant ships traded with Mexicans living in the mission and the presidio axes, powder, wine, cloth, and rice for otter pelts

Hunting methods

Aleuts hunted on [baidarkas](#) with arrows and darts. They sometimes trapped an otter pup first to compel its parent to come to its defense. The hunters then spear the adult otter.

Russians hunted with Aleuts and from their own ships or on foot. They used small harpoons to prevent damage to the pelt of the kind that a gun would cause. They also feared that gunshots would scare off the rest of the otters after shooting the first one.

Americans hunted with guns, shooting from shore or on boats paddled by Kanakas. If shooting from land, American hunters would have their kanakas swim out to fetch the otters that had been shot.

Larger hunting teams usually consisted of a ship providing food and protection for hunters in canoes.

From the library of Alexi Stroganoff, Fur Trapper-Trader (1776-1839)