

# Aboriginal Stone Artefacts

*lutruwita* is the country of Tasmanian Aboriginal people and everyone has a responsibility to protect our heritage.



Aboriginal stone artefacts (not to scale)

## What are Aboriginal stone artefacts?

Stone artefacts are evidence of stone modified or used by Tasmanian Aboriginal people in the past. Aboriginal people quarried particular stone outcrops or collected stones from river beds and coastal zones to create a sophisticated set of tools. Chert, quartzite, silcrete, spongolite, quartz and other types of rock were used. Aboriginal stone artefacts were made by hitting a piece of modified stone (core), with a cobble held in the hand (hammerstone) to remove a stone fragment (flake). Both cores and flakes could be used as stone tools. Flakes could be further modified into specific tools such as scrapers or blades. Tasmanian Aboriginal people traded stone resources long distances and in the recent past, quickly adopted new materials such as glass to create tools.

## Features of Aboriginal stone artefacts

A flaked stone artefact is usually produced by striking a piece of siliceous rock or mineral (core) with force at an angle using a hammerstone. The flake ventral surface was originally attached to the core, while the flake dorsal surface is the outer surface of the core (see diagram). The ventral surface may show where the hammerstone struck or point of force application (PFA), a bulb of percussion that reflects the force travelling through the stone and fissures or ripple marks radiating out from the impact point. The dorsal surface may show cortex (weathering on the original surface of the core), negative flake scars showing previous flake removal and flake scar ridges. A flake could be immediately used to cut and scrape or may have been modified on the margins (retouched) as part of a process called reduction.

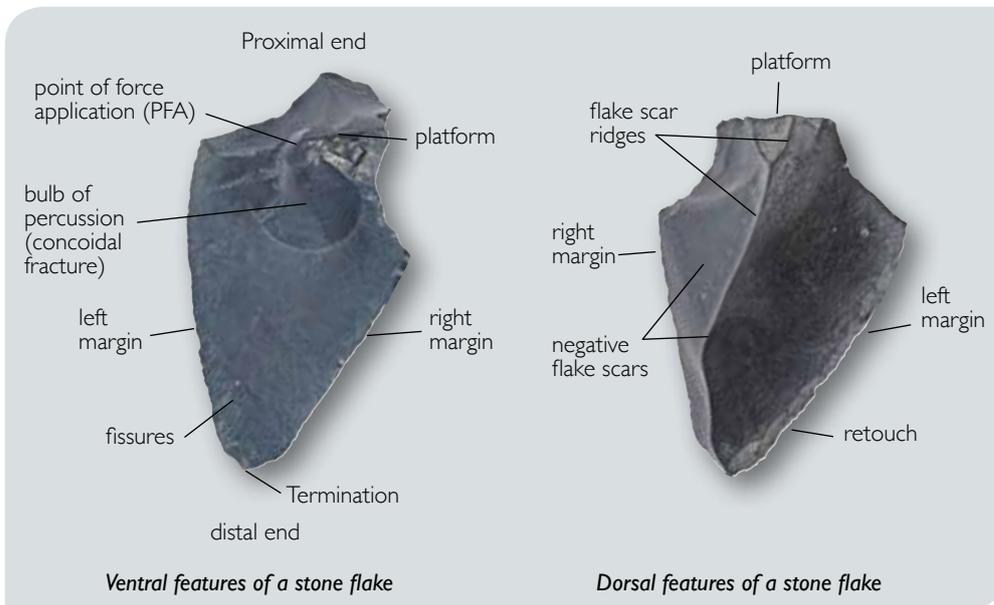
## Summary of stone artefact features

### Core

- Has a platform or multiple platforms from which flakes are struck
- May have one or more *negative flake scars* (flake removal)
- Cortex (weathering) may be present on the core surface

### Flake

- Exhibits any of the attributes in the diagram
- May be used immediately as a tool
- May have retouch along one or both of the edges
- A 'bulb of percussion' is often present below the platform.
- Stone type may be different to the natural stone in the area.



Retouch functioned to resharpen the flake or create a particular scraping or cutting tool. Other artefacts may be hammerstones, grinding stones or anvils showing depressions or pitting and river cobbles with a chopping edge.

### How to identify Aboriginal stone artefacts from natural stone fracture

Natural process or recent land-use activities can fracture stone to resemble an Aboriginal artefact. Extreme temperature change, rock fall, chemical processes, stock trampling, ploughing, river action or modern quarrying can fracture particular rock materials that Tasmanian Aboriginal people also used. The key to distinguish stone deliberately modified by Aboriginal people from stone that has been naturally or accidentally fractured is shown in the diagram. As some features (attributes) of stone artefacts also occur on naturally fractured rock, the context of the 'stone artefact' should be established. Was the quartz 'artefact' found on an upgraded track? Is more than one attribute present to indicate Aboriginal modification of the stone?

### Where are Aboriginal stone artefact sites found?

Stone artefacts occur throughout Tasmania from coastal zones and elevated, dry areas near water sources through to more remote elevations. Stone (lithic) artefacts

are often recorded with other evidence of Aboriginal living areas, such as shell middens, rock shelters and at quarry sites. Within Tasmania there are thousands of artefact sites, which include single artefacts in the landscape or higher density artefact concentrations (scatters) where a number of activities including food and materials preparation, quarrying and tool making were undertaken in the past. Stone artefacts tend to be more visible in areas of lower vegetation cover, erosion or ground disturbance.

### Tasmanian Aboriginal stone artefacts are important

Stone artefacts provide Tasmanian Aboriginal people today with an important link to their culture and demonstrate the diversity of the stone toolkit available in the past. Stone artefacts may represent the only physical evidence of Tasmanian Aboriginal living places in a region. Stone artefacts prove tangible evidence of where Aboriginal people lived, how they manufactured tools, obtained resources and food including

processing plants and animals or use in ceremony. Traces of wood, plants, or animal blood can survive on stone artefact edges. Edge damage can reveal how artefacts were used for different functions, such as cutting, scraping, hammering or grinding.

Comparative analysis of the source quarry and artefact located considerable distance from the source has the potential to tell us about Aboriginal systems of exchange and social relationships. Modifications to a stone artefact can provide insight into past environments, changes to diet or strategies to manage artefact use.

### Aboriginal stone artefacts are protected

Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural material or sites are defined as 'relics' and therefore protected under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1975* (the Act). It is an offence to destroy, damage, deface, conceal, remove or otherwise interfere with a relic. It is also an offence not to report the finding of a relic. So if you suspect that an Aboriginal stone artefact has been discovered during your activity, do not interfere with the site. Report the site to Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania (AHT).

Provide the location of the site and images on the Aboriginal Heritage Site Reporting Form at [www.aboriginalheritage.tas.gov.au/forms](http://www.aboriginalheritage.tas.gov.au/forms) and forward to [aboriginal@heritage.tas.gov.au](mailto:aboriginal@heritage.tas.gov.au). AHT will provide further advice in accordance with the Act.

### Preserve Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural sites by reporting their presence to Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania.

**Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania**  
Natural and Cultural Heritage Division  
Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment  
GPO Box 44 Hobart TAS 7001

Telephone: **1300 487 045** email: [Aboriginal@heritage.tas.gov.au](mailto:Aboriginal@heritage.tas.gov.au)  
[www.aboriginalheritage.tas.gov.au](http://www.aboriginalheritage.tas.gov.au)

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