

# Aboriginal stone artefacts

*lutruwita* is the Country of Tasmanian Aboriginal people and we all have a responsibility to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage.



*Aboriginal stone artefacts (not to scale)*

## What are Aboriginal stone artefacts?

Aboriginal people quarried particular stone outcrops or collected stones from riverbeds and coastal zones to create a sophisticated set of tools from chert, quartzite, silcrete, spongolite and other types of rock. Stone artefacts are evidence of stone modified or used by Tasmanian Aboriginal people in the past. They were made by hitting a piece of modified stone (core) with a cobble held in the hand (hammerstone) to remove a stone fragment (flake). Tasmanian Aboriginal people traded stone resources over 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 (core) with force at an angle using a hammerstone. The flake's ventral surface was originally attached to the core, while its dorsal surface is the outer surface of the core (see illustration on page 2). The ventral surface may show where the hammerstone struck. A point of force application (PFA) is a bulb of percussion that reflects the force travelling through the stone, with 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 show previous flake removal and flake scar ridges. A flake could be used immediately or may have been modified to form a sharper blade by retouching the margins in a process called reduction.

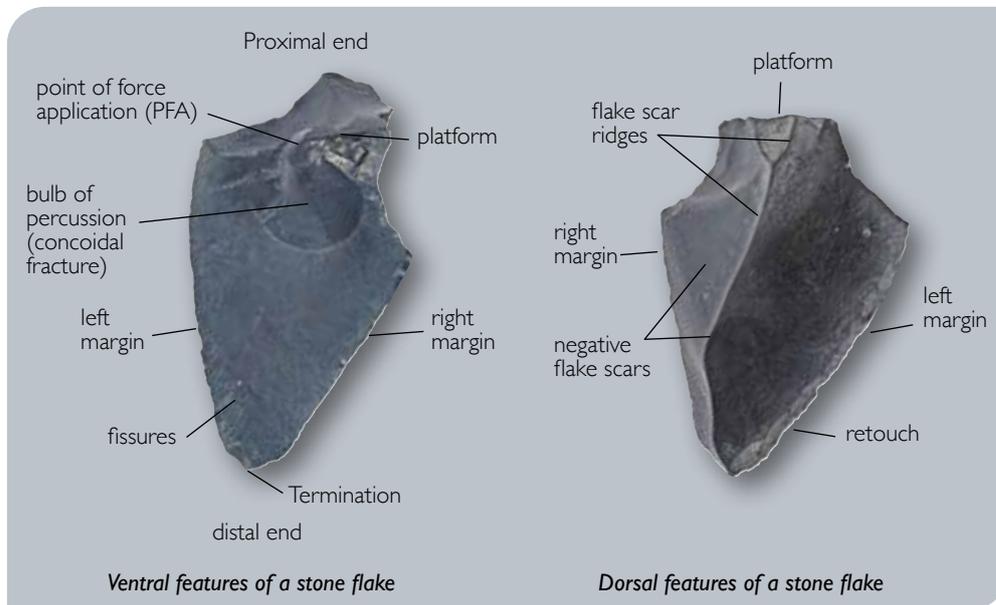
## Summary:

### A core:

- has a platform or multiple platforms from which flakes are struck;
- may have one or more negative flake scars (from flake removal);
- may show cortex (weathering) on the surface.

### A flake:

- exhibits any of the attributes illustrated on page 2;
- may be used immediately as a tool;
- may have retouch along one or both edges;
- often exhibits a bulb of percussion below the platform;
- stone type may be different to the natural stone in the area.



Other artefacts may be hammerstones; grinding stones or anvils (showing depressions or pitting); or river cobbles with a chopping edge.

### How to distinguish Aboriginal stone artefacts from natural stone fractures

Natural processes or recent land-use activities, for example, extreme changes in temperature, a rock fall, chemical processes, stock trampling, ploughing, river action, or modern quarrying can result in fractured stone that resembles Aboriginal artefacts. For this reason, it is important to establish the context of a stone.

- Was it found on an upgraded track?
  - Are there attributes to indicate it has been deliberately modified?
- Features of stone deliberately modified by Aboriginal people can be seen in the diagram above.

### Where are Aboriginal stone artefact sites found?

Thousands of stone artefacts can be found throughout Tasmania, from coastal zones and elevated dry areas near water sources to more remote elevations. Stone (lithic) artefacts are often recorded with other evidence of Aboriginal living areas, such as shell middens, rockshelters and at quarry sites. This includes single artefacts in the landscape or higher density

artefact concentrations (scatters) where several activities were undertaken in the past, for example, food and material preparation, quarrying and tool making. Stone artefacts tend to be more visible in areas of lower vegetation cover, erosion or ground disturbance.

### Why are Tasmanian Aboriginal stone artefacts 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. They may represent the only physical evidence of Tasmanian Aboriginal living places in a region. Stone artefacts also provide tangible evidence of how Aboriginal people manufactured tools, obtained resources, processed plants and animals, or used tools in ceremonies. Traces of wood, plants or animal blood can survive on the edges of stone artefacts. 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 the artefact (often located a 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

Aboriginal stone artefacts are defined as relics under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1975* and are therefore protected. 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 location and provide images of the site by using the Aboriginal Heritage Site Reporting Form at: [www.aboriginalheritage.tas.gov.au](http://www.aboriginalheritage.tas.gov.au)

Forms can be forwarded to: [aboriginal@heritage.tas.gov.au](mailto:aboriginal@heritage.tas.gov.au)

Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania staff will provide further advice in accordance with the legislation.

### Please help to preserve Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural heritage sites by reporting their presence to Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania.

**Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania**  
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