



Stone Tools Virtual Gallery

Stone tools are the most commonly recovered artifacts in most Northwest Coast archaeological contexts. The variety of stone tools reflects the diversity of use and different manufacturing techniques. When you are looking at all the different kinds of tools try to think about who made them and see how we make assumptions about tool making and use.

Grindstone

Used to sharpen bone points. By grinding for a long time, the bone point could get as sharp as a needle that could pierce hide. Bone fish hooks were ground sharp on a stone like this. What do think needles and fish hooks were made of after the Europeans arrived? Can you think why the people would adopt the new technology?

Metal needles and fish hooks were traded for after contact. Metal tools are more durable and more efficient.

Blank (Raw Material)

Look closely at the blank and see the grooves where pieces of stone have been sawn off. What tool do you think was used to saw the pieces of stone? Do you think it takes a long time? Look at the other stone tools in this case. Which ones might have been made in this fashion?

Parallelograms of stone were sawn from a blank using a saw stone made of sandstone, siltstone, slate, greywacke or schist. Saws can also be made from a thong of leather, wood or string. Usually the saw is used with an abrasive sand or a lubricant such as water, but this is not essential with stone saws. In the 1800's, explorers watched Maori tool makers saw stone using these methods. Working every day, a maker could create a 450 mm (15 inch) sword in two and a half months. The adze blades below the blank would have been made in this fashion.

Sandstone Grinder

What do you know about different types of stone? Why do you think sandstone is used for grinding? Is this the type of tool that would be carried from place to place? Sandstone is very gritty and is a good abrasive. Large pieces of sandstone are too heavy to move regularly. Sandstone is reasonably abundant in many parts of B.C., so new grinders could be made. Sometimes people would cache stones like these, using them year after year when they returned to the camp or village site.

Nephrite Adze Blades

Made from large piece of stone called a blank. For strong adzes, the toolmaker would seek out specific types of stone that does not shatter easily. Why would this be an advantage? (Clue- look at the woodworking exhibit)

Adzes were used to cut wood in a chopping fashion. Repeated bashing would shatter or split the adze blades. Broken blades were re-worked into smaller adze blades used for finer work.

Knife Blades

Made from large piece of stone called a blank, usually made of stone that easily fractures in predictable patterns like basalt. Many people think these may have been used as arrow heads, but they are much too large.

Slate Knives

Slate is a very dense, compact, layered stone. The layers let people to make very flat knives that are very strong. These knives could be used for scraping or smoothing. Can you think of one use for these tools?

Slate knives were used to cut fish and meat.

Stone Bowls

Made from various granular stones. An artist may start with a naturally concave bowl, or may make the cavity. The faces and heads carved on the bowls are done by pecking carefully with a small stone. If you try this, be sure to wear proper safety goggles and heavy gloves.

Stone Hand Mauls

Used in wood carving. Large hafted mauls were used for heavy splitting. Smaller hand mauls were used for more detailed work. What other tools would an artist use with a hand maul? What kind of woodworking might an artist do using a hand maul. Like a hafted maul, the hand maul had to be made from a type of stone that could be used as a hammer without breaking easily. Can you see how two of these mauls were broken?

Wedges and chisels may have been used with a hand maul. The two on the left split when they struck a hard surface.

Projectile points

What are projectile points used for? If you guessed hunting, you would be correct. But the point by itself is not the whole weapon. Think about how a spear or arrow is made and what other materials would be used. Why is it that it is the projectile point that is usually found in the archaeological record?

The larger points may have also been used as knives. Spears and arrows are made from wooden shafts, feathers, a plant material that ties the pieces together and sap or gum used as glue. All of these other materials would rot and disappear in most archaeological sites.

Hammer Stones

Hammer stones were used as a percussion tool for making some other kinds of stone tools.

Flake tools

These tools could easily cut animal hide and other materials and so were often used in butchering and hide working. In order to make these very sharp flake tools, special kinds of stone had to be found. Usually basalt, chert and especially obsidian (the black glassy rock) were used because of the ability of the rock to fracture. Sometimes the people had to travel far to find the right kind of stone to make these tools. Do you think it's possible that people would trade for the valuable stones?

Absolutely! Obsidian trade routes have been mapped by archaeologists who match the place where a tool is found to the quarry. Obsidian has small amounts of chemical impurities that can 'fingerprint' it, allowing it to be traced to its point of origin.

Cobble tools

Cobble tools were one of the first types of tools ever made by human beings. They are relatively easy to make and the stones used are found everywhere. You might think that once more complex tool making techniques were developed people stopped making cobble tools, but they continue to be useful especially when there are no other resources available and little time. What do you think people used these tools for?

Cobble tools are used for rough chopping.

Scrapers

Scrapers were used in butchering and to scrape the hides clean so they could be used to make clothing, blankets, drums, etc. When archaeologists are looking for evidence of human activity it is sometimes hard to tell a flaked tool from a broken one. But the way that tools are made leaves very specific marks on the stone.

Microblades and Core

These tools are very small, but the microblades are also very sharp. Can you guess how these small tools would have been used? Remember that usually only stone preserves and is recovered by archaeologists.

Microblades were probably hafted or attached to a handle and used for cutting.