



# Primary and Secondary Sources

Stone Tools have been, and still are, culturally significant resources. By drawing on primary and secondary sources we can reveal the significance of stone tools to Aboriginal people in the past and in the present. The following article contains a collection of these sources.




## CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

-  Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
-  Sustainability

## CONTENT AREAS

- H** History
- E** English
- A** Visual Arts
- G** Geography

## GENERAL CAPABILITIES

-  Critical and Creative Thinking
-  Literacy
-  Intercultural Understanding

## KEY CONCEPT

### Primary Sources

A primary source provides direct or firsthand evidence about an event, object, person, or work of art. Primary sources include historical and legal documents, eyewitness accounts,

results of experiments, statistical data, pieces of creative writing, audio and video recordings, speeches, and art objects.

### Secondary Sources

Secondary sources describe, discuss, interpret, comment upon, analyse, evaluate, summarise, and process primary sources. Secondary source materials can be articles in newspapers or popular magazines, book or movie reviews, or articles found in scholarly journals that discuss or evaluate someone else's original research.

Ithaca College Library

## SUPPORTING CONCEPTS

- › historical inquiry
- › cultural practices
- › cultural knowledge
- › cultural resources
- › cultural revival

## GUIDING QUESTION

What can we learn from primary and secondary sources about the use and value of stone implements in the Tasmanian Aboriginal toolkit in the past and the present?

This printed material is **to be used with Stone Tools – a Living Cultures multimedia curriculum resource** that can be found at [www.theorb.tas.gov.au](http://www.theorb.tas.gov.au)

The Living Cultures Stone Tools resource and this supplementary printed material have been designed to foster culturally responsive practice when learning about Tasmanian Aboriginal Histories and Cultures.

# Introduction

Contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal people talk about a variety of tool types that have many different uses. It is possible to investigate the toolkit, and the uses and value of stone tools over time, through referring to a range of primary and secondary sources. These sources include evidence in the landscape, artefacts, journals, letters, engravings, paintings and drawings.

## The Tasmanian Toolkit

A lot can be learned about the Tasmanian tool kit from sources such as this drawing held by the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.



Terre de Diemen, Armes et Ornemens | TAHO

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › What tools are shown in this artwork?
- › What other information provides clues about this image as either a primary or secondary source of evidence?

Artefacts such as the stone tools pictured below are also primary sources.



Aboriginal Stone Artefacts | Used with permission Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania | \*Stone tools may not be to scale.

Thomas Bock, an artist, engraver and photographer, was born in England and transported to Van Diemen's Land as a convict, arriving in January 1842. He was known for his watercolour portraits. In the primary source below we see a portrait of Fanny wearing a kangaroo skin cloak and a shell necklace with her hair cut very short.

We can then read further discovering more detail.

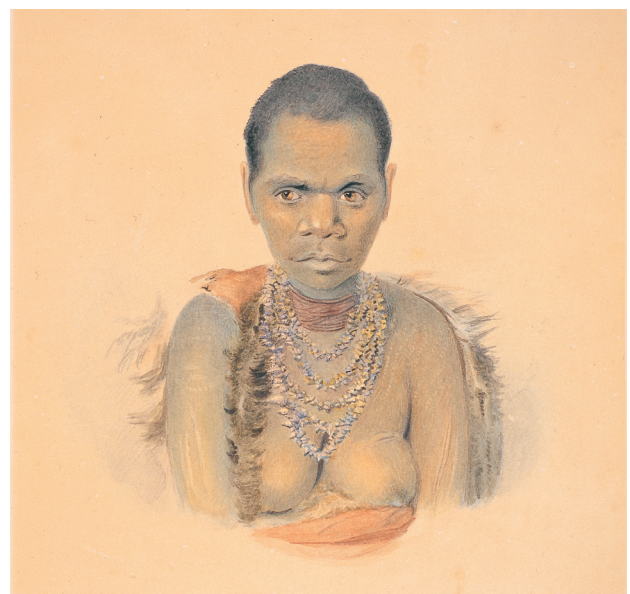
Shell-stringing was (and remains) a painstaking process, requiring knowledge of coastal resources as well as great skill and patience.

Patsy Cameron, has explained how the women pierced each shell with a tool made from a jawbone and sharpened lower incisor of a kangaroo or wallaby.

National Museum Australia, 2017

A few pointed bone tools have been recorded, and these were probably scraped to shape with stone tools.

Mitchell 1955: 131-132



Fanny, Native of Port Dalrymple, V.D. Land  
Collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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- › What tools have been used to groom and dress Fanny?
  - › What do primary and secondary sources tell us about the traditional everyday lives of Tasmanian Aboriginal people?
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## Stone Tools

Through an intimate knowledge of country and its resources, Tasmanian Aboriginal people quarried and worked suitable rocks and minerals – including quartz, silcrete, chert and spongolite – into highly effective tools for cutting, chopping and scraping purposes.

Shaping Tasmania: a Journey in 100 objects,  
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

Stone tools were used by the Tasmanians in tree climbing, in the manufacture of wooden weapons and bone objects, in the preparation of vegetable food, in the skinning and dismembering of animals, and in the making of skin rugs. This wide variety of uses called for chopping, scraping, cutting, and sawing tools.

Mitchell 1955: 131-132

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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- › What do these secondary sources tell us about the use of stone tools in Tasmania?
  - › How might researchers form evidence about the use of stone tools in Tasmania?
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## How Stone Tools Were Used

Letters such as the one written by Jas Rollings and addressed to Dr. Agnew dated 5th May, 1873 tell us more about how the different types of stone tools were used.

In this letter Rollings says that in his youth he was constantly in the habit of seeing the aborigines of Tasmania, ... and that he had many opportunities of seeing how they used their stone knives and tomahawks.

Roth 1968: 148

The knives when used for skinning kangaroos, etc, were held by the fore-finger and thumb, and the arm, being extended, was drawn rapidly towards the body. The carcass was afterwards cut up, and the knife was held in the same way. In cutting their hair, one stone was held under the hair, another stone being used above, and by this means the hair was cut, or rather, by repeated nickings, came off.

Rollings cited in Roth 1968: 148

James Reid Scott an explorer and surveyor provided further details of the manner in which tools were used.

In using the flints, the thumb was placed on the flat surface, and held by the other fingers resting in the palm of the hand, and the sharp edges used to cut the notches in the tree for climbing, cutting spears, and making the handles of the waddies rough, so as not to slip from the hand.

Scott 1873 cited in Roth 1968: 146

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

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- › How does this primary source evidence contribute to an understanding of how stone tools are used?
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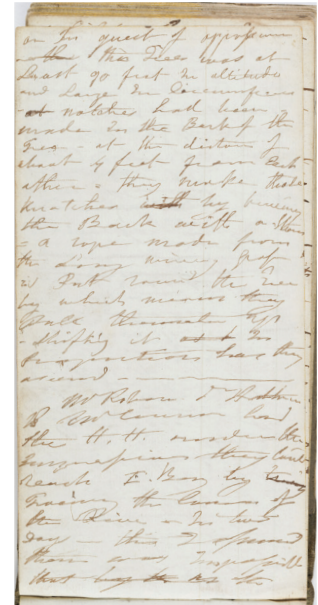
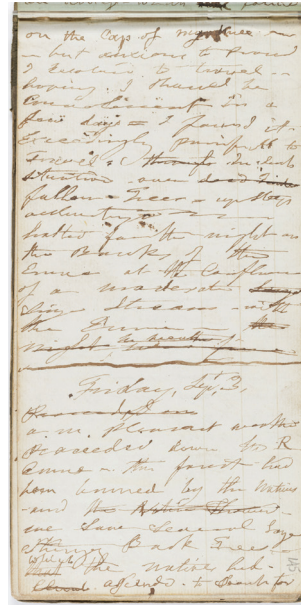
# Tree Climbing and the Cider Tree

George Augustus Robinson, so-called conciliator of Aborigines, while undertaking the Friendly Mission (1829-1834) recorded his own observations of Aboriginal people's lives, culture, customs, and practices in his journals. A number of these entries related to Aboriginal people's use of stone tools.

We saw several large stringy bark trees which the natives had ascended to search for opossums. One tree was at least ninety feet in altitude and large in circumference and notches had been made in the bark at the distance of about four feet from each other. They make these notches by bruising the bark with a stone.

3 September 1830

Robinson cited in Plomley 2008: 242



3 September 1830 Robinson | State Library of New South Wales IR231383

Below is a painting by John Glover in which we can see the notches being made with the stone tool as the tree is climbed. The men at the base of the tree are holding spears and are waiting to catch the possums as they are flushed out of the tree.



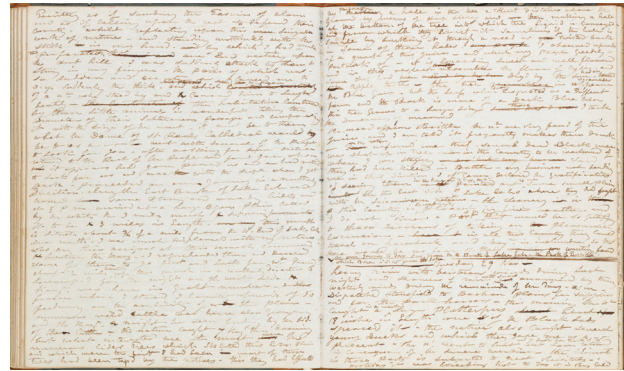
Ben Lomond from Mr Batman's Ground, John Glover © 1884

Here Robinson notes the way in which the cider tree is 'tapped' for its sap.

The natives caught seven kangaroo this evening, but what interested me the most were the numerous cider trees which skirted this extensive plain and which were the first I had seen. Most of those trees had been tapped by the natives. This they had effected by perforating a hole in the tree a short distance above the ground by means of sharp stones and then making a hole at the bottom of the tree into which the liquid is conveyed and from which they extract it, sometimes if the hole is small by sucking it through a reed or twisted bark. In some of those holes I observed upwards of a quart of this juice and which my people greedily partook of.

28 November 1831

Robinson cited in Plomley 2008: 566



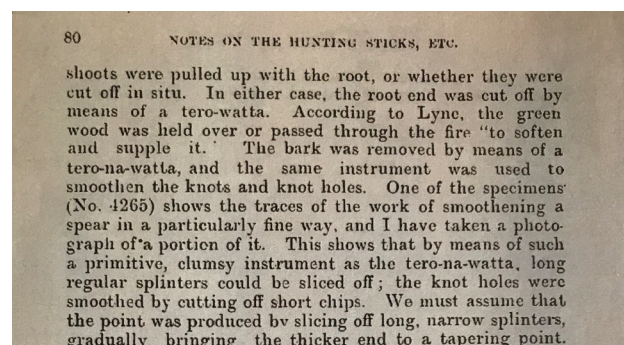
28 November 1831 Robinson  
State Library of New South Wales IR231383

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › Robinson observed Tasmanian Aboriginal people using stone tools. What were some of his observations?
- › Why may these methods have been surprising to Robinson?

Stone tools were used to manufacture spears and waddies, two very effective weapons used for both hunting and fighting.

Fritz Noetling, a German engineer, collected, sold and wrote about Tasmanian Aboriginal artefacts. On the right is an excerpt from a 1911 article on waddies and spears. It describes the use of *tero-na-watta* (stone tools) in the manufacture of a *perenna* (spear).



Noetling F, 1911: 80

Another weapon of choice for the first Tasmanians was the thrown stone, which could be very accurate over long distances. The following two primary sources provide additional information.



They carry with them also sharp stones with which the men make their spears and waddies. The men carry their spears and waddies, their only weapons except stones which they throw with great dexterity.

26 November 1831

Robinson cited in Plomley 2008: 564

The natives are also very expert at throwing stones.

1 May 1829

Robinson cited in Plomley 2008: 60

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- › How were stone tools used in the making of weapons?
- › How effective would these weapons be for hunting and gathering food?

## *ballywinne* Stones and Pounders

In his book *Bruising the Red Earth: Ochre Mining and Ritual in Aboriginal Tasmania*, Sagona discusses the particular cultural and spiritual significance of the *ballywinne* stone, which was used specifically to grind ochre.

It is clear from Robinson's observations and our investigations of [an] ochre mine that the discoid stones used by both men and women to bruise the ochre were a culturally significant component of the Tasmanian's tool kit; the women faceted the stones and the men used them to prepare *pole.ler.win* [ochre].

Sagona 1994: 114

Having said that the faceted *ballywinne* stone had a clear functional use, one cannot escape the feeling that the act of manufacturing the stone and its resultant circular shape also held some deep cultural significance for the Tasmanian Aborigines.

Sagona 1994: 117



Sharnie Everett identifies a *ballywinne* stone on Bruny Island, 2016 | Image: Dcnstrct Pty Ltd

## **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

- › What does Sagona's research tell us about the interconnectedness of the manufacture and use of stone tools with Tasmanian Aboriginal people and culture?

# Scarification

The significance of cicatrices or scarification is mentioned a number of times in Robinson's journals.

Today all the aborigines tattooed themselves, the shoulder of some and back and belly of others was completely scarified. After the operation is performed they rub in the incision powdered charcoal and red ochre mixed with grease.

26 November 1830

Robinson cited in Plomley 2008: 317

Both sexes practised scarification and, whatever its significance, its pattern served to distinguish tribes or groups.

Plomley 2008: 15

At present if they feel any inward affliction or pain they cut themselves with sharp stones or shells, supposing the affliction is caused by *rageawrapper* or evil spirit and by making an incision imagine a speedy cure.

15 April 1829

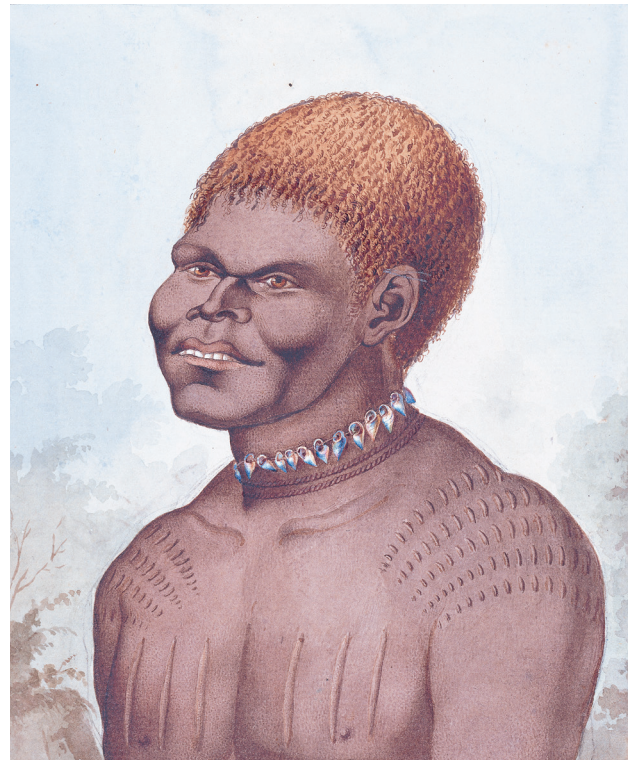
Robinson cited in Plomley 2008: 76

The cicatrice of the sun and moon is intended to remove inflammation, and having the form of these luminous bodies they imagine that it will have their influence on the part affected.

25 October 1830

Robinson cited in Plomley 2008: 291

Below is a Nicolas-Martin Petit portrait of Bara-Orou, a man from Maria Island, wearing shell and fibre necklaces. The scars on his chest and shoulders are clearly visible.



Bara-Orou | Muséum d'histoire naturelle, Le Havre, France

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

- › What do these primary source observations tell us about the process and purpose of scarification?

## Stone Tools Today

The living community of Tasmanian Aboriginal people continues to affirm the significance of stone tools. We have heard from a number of people throughout the Stone Tool resource. The voices of Tasmanian Aboriginal people are a primary source that we can draw on to inform our understanding of the ongoing significance of stone tools.





Relearning the practice of stone tool making | Image: Dcnstrct Pty Ltd

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › Compare what you hear and observe through the Stone Tools multimedia resource with what you have learnt from the sources above.
- › In what ways do stone tools continue to be of use and value to Tasmanian Aboriginal people?

[www.theorb.tas.gov.au/living-cultures/stonetools/teacher-drawer](http://www.theorb.tas.gov.au/living-cultures/stonetools/teacher-drawer)

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