

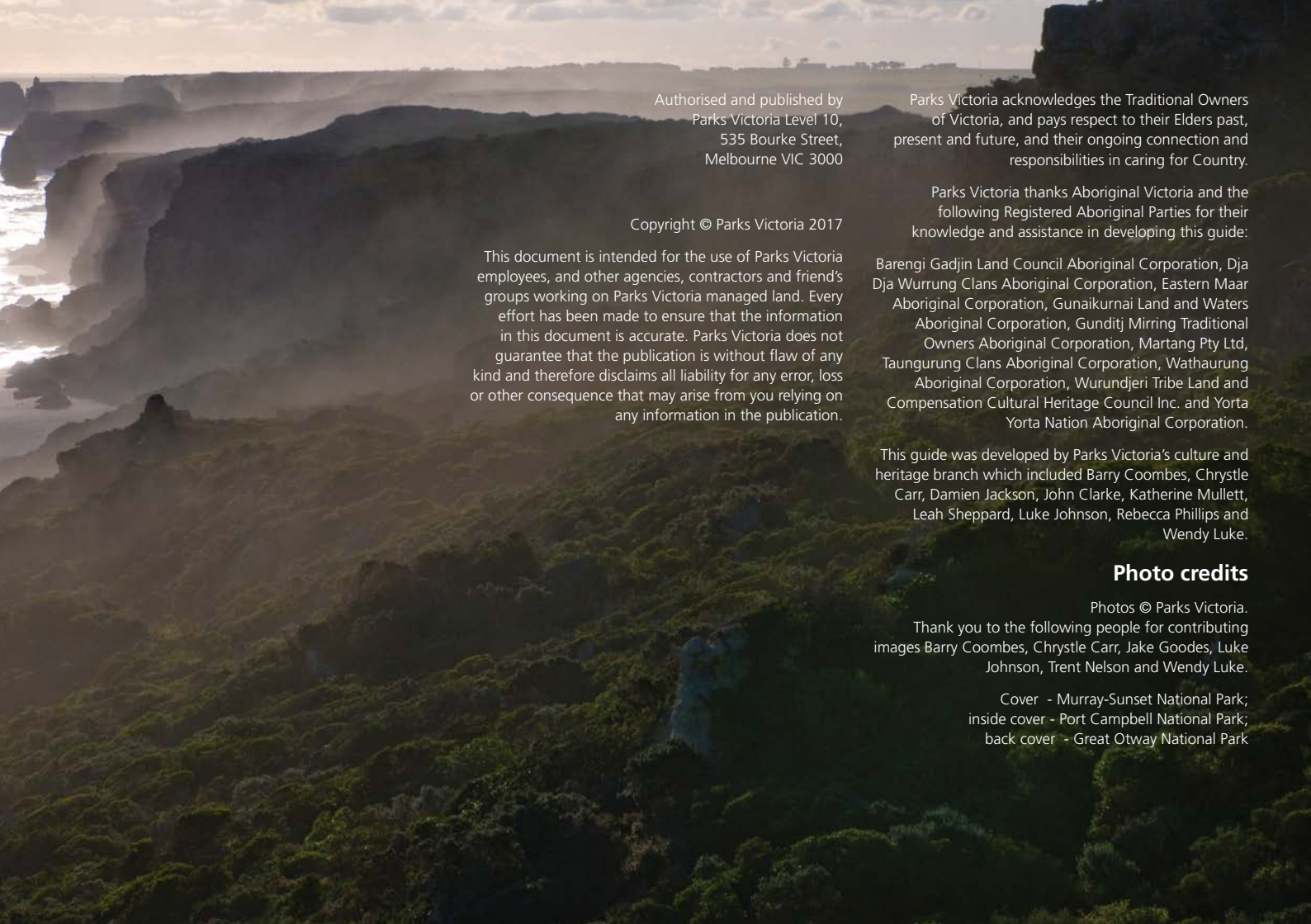


Aboriginal Heritage identification guide

Managing
Country
Together


Parks
VICTORIA
*Healthy Parks
Healthy People*


VICTORIA
State
Government



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Parks Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Victoria, and pays respect to their Elders past, present and future, and their ongoing connection and responsibilities in caring for Country.

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Aboriginal people have lived across Victoria for thousands of generations. Sites where tangible and/or intangible cultural heritage exist are generally referred to as Aboriginal cultural heritage places. These places can have social, spiritual, and ceremonial significance.

Tangible and intangible cultural heritage

Tangible Aboriginal cultural heritage relates to the physical, material evidence of Aboriginal occupation that exists across Australia and Victoria, including over much of the Parks Victoria managed estate.

Examples of tangible Aboriginal cultural heritage can range from small moveable objects (such as stone artefacts), to large built structures (including ancient eel traps and stone houses, or post-contact structures such as mission stations). Aboriginal cultural heritage and places have important and unique heritage values. Contemporary Traditional Owners view Aboriginal heritage places and objects as important links to their Ancestors and their Country.

Intangible cultural heritage relates to spiritual connections to Country and the land, to cultural stories and to past and present activities of cultural and social significance to Aboriginal people. These intangible elements are connected and interrelated to specific places, and in turn to tangible heritage. An Aboriginal place can have intangible heritage values if, for example, there is a particular ceremonial, cultural or spiritual story or events connected to a particular landscape or place on Country.

Parks Victoria has developed strong partnerships with Traditional Owners in Victoria, learning, understanding and acknowledging the long and fundamental relationship they have with their lands and waterways, or Country. Country is a source of pride, kinship and historical connection that enables a cultural and spiritual bond between generations; It is fundamental to identity, and strength as a people. In order to respect and acknowledge the meaning and significance of these lands to Traditional Owners, it is vital our interactions with Country are informed, and aim to enhance this connection. Some places on the parks estate are women's only sites and others men's only sites; it is important to respect these cultural customs.

How to use this guide

The Aboriginal Heritage Identification Guide has been developed to allow for greater awareness and care of Aboriginal cultural heritage inherent to the lands and waterways that we manage. It is intended to give Parks Victoria staff an idea of the different kinds of Aboriginal cultural heritage that they may come across when working in parks and reserves on Country, in order to ensure this heritage is not lost for future generations.

This guide is here to help with the basic identification of Aboriginal cultural heritage, and what to do if you find something. It is alphabetically-structured with different sections that include both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and provides visual and/or verbal descriptions to help you.

What to do if you find something

All Aboriginal cultural heritage is protected under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic.) (the Act). If you come across any Aboriginal cultural heritage, Section 24 of the Act requires that the discovery of Aboriginal cultural heritage places or objects be reported to Aboriginal Victoria as soon as practicable. It is an offence under Section 27 of the Act, to harm Aboriginal cultural heritage and under Section 28 to do an act that harms or is likely to harm Aboriginal cultural heritage.

If you are unsure if your works will harm or may likely harm Aboriginal cultural heritage, contact your Regional Aboriginal Heritage Coordinator.

Detailed information on what to do if you find something and your legal requirements around the Act can be found on Warnawi and the MC2G mobile app.

Aboriginal Burials

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Important:

Never touch or disturb human or suspected Aboriginal Ancestral Remains. If you come across anything you believe to be an Aboriginal burial site, stop all work in the surrounding area immediately and protect the remains from any kind of disturbance.

Report them to the Coroner - Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (1300 309 519). A forensic anthropologist will assess the report and contact the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council (VAHC) if the human remains are believed to be Aboriginal Ancestral Remains. The VAHC will assist in determining the next steps and the relevant Traditional Owners to be notified.

Aboriginal Burials occur in many places and landforms. The most common burial places are:

- Sandy lunettes and alongside water (including prior streams and waterways)
- Sand dunes near beaches
- Aboriginal middens
- In bushland
- Marked by, or found in trees or rock shelters.
- Fragments of bones may also be found exposed from eroding riverbanks, or dry and sandy places.

Protecting Aboriginal Ancestral Remains and Burials on Country is challenging given the effects of climate change, erosion, human interference, and animal disturbance from introduced species, and burrowing pests such as rabbits. Ancient Aboriginal cemeteries may be small, or spread over vast landscapes, containing many thousands of burials.

Aboriginal people were also often buried with important social, spiritual, ceremonial and cultural items, such as stone tools, ochre, shells, or in recent history, with coins and clay pipes. It is important to note that these sacred items are to be treated with the same respect as the Remains themselves.

Ancestral Remains that have been exposed in eroded landforms can appear as a group of bone fragments and possibly teeth. Ancestral Remains may also be bones found intact, or a complete skeleton of an individual person.

Did you know?

Aboriginal Ancestral Remains were often stolen from their burial sites by people who considered themselves to be 'collectors' and researchers of antiquities. Disturbingly, Aboriginal Ancestral Remains were seen as research specimens or 'curiosities'. It is unknown how many Aboriginal Ancestral Remains have been stolen from Victoria or the rest of Australia, and sent to museums, universities or private collections around the world; however, it is not unreasonable to assume that the number of stolen remains is in the many thousands.

Aboriginal people in Victoria and across Australia are working tirelessly with museums, universities and government organisations to ensure that the remains of their Ancestors are returned to Country for burial in a respectful and culturally-appropriate manner. The process of repatriation can be long and has a huge emotional toll for all involved. Parks Victoria works in partnership with Traditional Owners to return Aboriginal Ancestral Remains to Country on Parks Victoria managed land and ensures their ongoing management and protection.



Hearth including burnt clay heat retainers

Aboriginal earth features

Aboriginal earth features

What to look for

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Aboriginal earth features are the result of Aboriginal people living in particular places in the landscape, sometimes for short term seasonal occupations, but also for prolonged periods of time.

Mound features

Mounds were formed through Aboriginal people's use of areas as campsites, foundations of built shelters or cooking pits. Stones or clay balls that were heated for cooking, along with material from other activities built up over time. These deposits, combined with the natural build-up of soil and sand, resulted in the formation of Aboriginal mounds. Some mounds may also be burial mounds. Mounds are often found near swamps or lakes, although they can be found in many other places across Victoria.

Earth rings

Earth rings can be found in open places and grassy slopes. Several earth rings exist in Sunbury, in Melbourne's north-west. They appear as large, slightly built up rings of earth in the landscape. It is not entirely clear why the rings were created or what they were used for, although it is believed that they may have had spiritual and ceremonial purposes.

Hearths

Hearths are generally seen as a cluster of materials including charcoal, ash, burnt rock and/or clay nodules that have been blackened or reddened by fire. These may be associated with other cultural material such as artefacts, shell or bone.

What to look for

- **Mounds:** Appear as rounded formations on the landscape. They can vary in size from small to several meters in diameter, and can often contain shell and bone deposits, charcoal, burnt clay, stone tools and heat retainers, and even Aboriginal Ancestral Burials. Deflated or ploughed mounds can appear in the landscape as oval-shaped patches of dark soil surrounded by lighter shaded soil.
- **Earth rings:** Appear as large, slightly built up soil in rings of earth in the landscape
- **Hearths:** Appear in the landscape as patches of charcoal and heat retainers or clay lumps. They may appear as a burnt, blackened layer or lens in the stratigraphy of an eroded bank.



Hearth including burnt clay heat retainers

Did you know?

Aboriginal people had sophisticated methods for manipulating the landscape for the purposes of land and natural resource management dating back many thousands of years. In some cases, this technology pre-dates similar engineering found in ancient sites like Mesopotamia.

Did you know?

Pit features can sometimes be seen cut into subsurface soil deposits, as can ditches, canals, or trenches dug out of the soil surface to create a long feature (generally to move or direct water). Creation of a ditch will also form a bank or mound of spoil running parallel to the ditch.

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Hearth in eroding bank including burnt rock



Earth rings in Sunbury, north of Melbourne



Midden blowout in dune

Aboriginal middens

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Aboriginal middens

What to look for

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Middens are shell deposits that have built up over time, often as the result of Aboriginal people gathering and eating shellfish and molluscs.

They can be found near water sources throughout Victoria. The shellfish remains (mussels, oysters, pipi, chiton and turban, etc.) may be blackened from cooking fires. There may be other things present, such as:

- Bones from native animals (such as kangaroo, bird and fish bones)
- Stone or bone artefacts
- Grinding stones
- Charcoal from cooking
- Occasionally, burials of Aboriginal Ancestral Remains.

Coastal middens

Coastal middens can be found in sheltered areas, dunes, coastal scrub and woodlands, exposed cliff-tops with good vantage points, and coastal wetlands, inlets, bays and river mouths. In some areas, coastal shell middens are densely layered and may have been formed over many years. They can be quite small, or cover large areas that can spread across many hundreds of meters¹.

Freshwater middens

Freshwater middens can be found on inland waterways including prior streams and water bodies. Freshwater middens are often smaller than coastal middens and will usually appear as thin layers or small patches of shell. The shells present are often freshwater mussel (*Velesunio* sp.) and river mussel (*Alathyria* sp.)².



Artefact found
in midden



Stone axes and artefacts



Animal bone



Turban shell



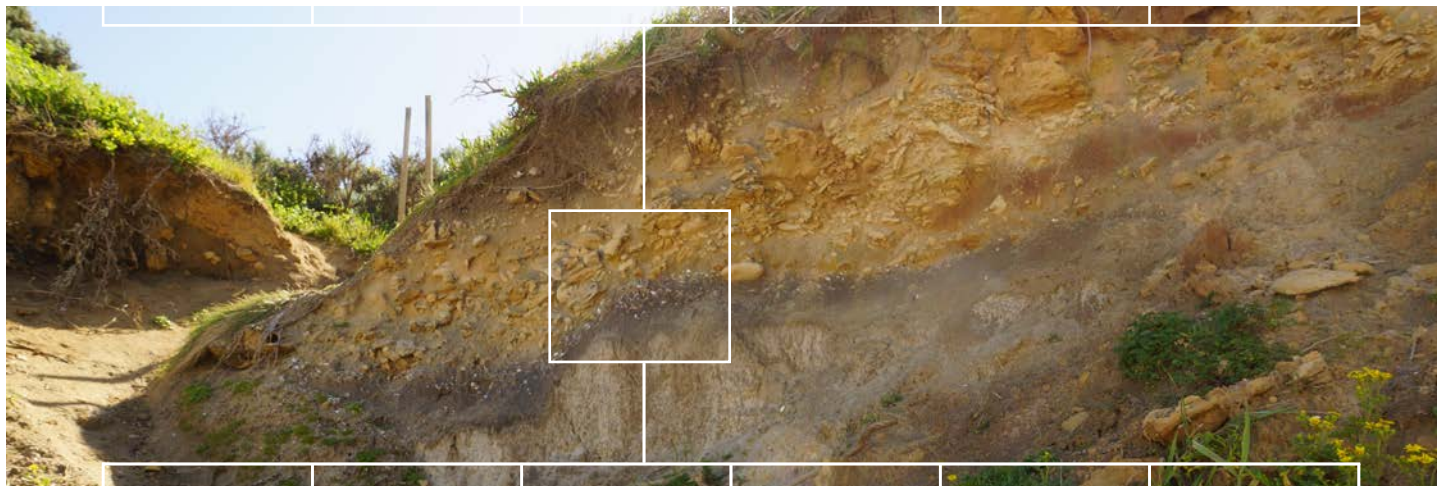
Abalone



Blue mussel



Chiton



Limpet and
Turban shell

Beaked mussel

Turban shell

Limpet, Turban,
Operculum

Blue mussel

Operculum

Operculum, Turban, Beaked
mussel, Limpet, stone artefact



Did you know?

Evidence at Moyjil (Point Ritchie - southwest Victoria) suggests that the area may have been inhabited by Aboriginal people from 60,000 to 80,000 years ago. More research is being carried out to determine if the shell deposits at Moyjil represent ancient Aboriginal middens³.

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Beaked mussel and charcoal



Eroding freshwater mussel midden



Operculum, Limpet, pipi, Turban, stone artefact



Operculum from Turban Shell



Turban Shell



Burnt operculum



Limpet, Turban, Operculum



Axe-grinding grooves

Axe-grinding grooves

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Axe-grinding grooves

What to look for

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Axe-grinding grooves are created when Aboriginal people shape and sharpen stone axes along a cutting edge by grinding them against coarse stone platforms or outcrops (often sandstone).

This is a process which wears away at the stone, creating elongated indentations into the surface of a rock platform or outcrop. Creating and refining the shape of a sharp cutting edge on a roughly shaped piece of stone, called an axe blank, can take many hours of work by skilled stone craftspeople.

Axe grinding grooves can be found in many places across Victoria, especially near water. Water is a vital part of the axe-shaping process, therefore many axe-grinding grooves are located on sandstone or granite outcrops next to, or within water sources, including prior streams and waterways.

What to look for

- Rocky outcrops or platforms of coarse-grained stone, especially near water
- Elongated, almost oval-shaped grooves in the rock which can range in size and length
- There are usually several sets of grooves grouped together on a rock surface, with grooves running in different directions.



Axe-grinding grooves



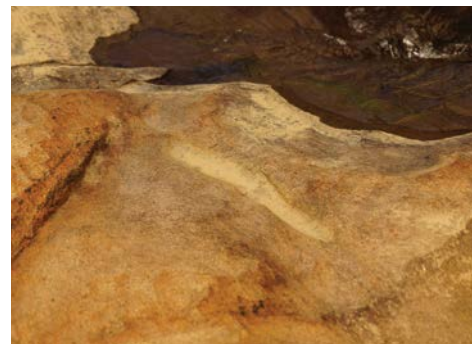
Axe-grinding groove



Axe-grinding grooves



Axe-grinding grooves



Axe-grinding grooves



Barry Coombes removing bark

Culturally modified trees

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Culturally modified trees

What to look for

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Aboriginal people modify trees as part of their cultural traditions for many reasons. These reasons range from bark-removal to construct water transport, temporary shelters or other cultural objects, to ceremonial and territory markings, and branch manipulation.

Culturally modified trees, or scarred trees can be found across all landscapes and across numerous native species. They are identifiable by sections of bark that have been removed, often in the shape of elongated ovals. This bark was then used to create objects such as shields, canoes, small coolamons to carry food and water, and larger coolamons to carry babies. Objects made from bark do not preserve well in the landscape, due to natural deterioration or fire; however there are examples of extremely old bark objects being preserved in swampy environments.

As the bark is removed while the tree is still alive, over time these trees heal themselves with a regeneration of bark growing over the sides of the scar (as seen in the pictures). Sometimes these scars have also been decorated for ceremonial purposes, or to mark territories.

Ring trees are examples of another type of manipulation where the branches of one or multiple trees have become grafted together to form a ring or other shapes.

Natural scars also occur in trees as the result of a number of occurrences, including lightning strikes, termites and other insects, impacts from other fallen trees, cattle, birds, branches falling off and bushfires. Ring trees can also occur naturally.



Culturally modified tree

What to look for

- Scars that have a regular, elongated shape
- Trees that feature a scar on the midsection of the trunk, above the ground and below where the branches begin
- Bark does not usually grow completely back over the sapwood after it has been removed, however the edges will have some overgrowth of bark that often appears 'rounded'
- Small toe holds for climbing that have been carved into the tree
- The exposed sapwood may have axe marks (smaller, straight indentations)⁴
- Branches or trees that have been grafted together
- Culturally modified trees are usually over two hundred years old; however contemporary Aboriginal people continue the practice of bark removal so some scars are younger⁷.

Did you
know?

Contemporary Aboriginal people consider the bark removal and cultural modification process to be very important activities in terms of cultural reconnection that is being taught to, and hopefully continued on by future generations.

Did you know?

There are a few recent examples of this activity being practiced on, or near, Parks Victoria managed land (e.g. Canoe Tree at Plenty Gorge Park (page 19), Shield Trees near Dights Falls, and Carved (marker trees) in Eltham).

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Culturally modified tree



Burnt culturally modified tree



Smoke hole



Flaked stone tools

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Flaked stone tools

What to look for

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Stone tools were made and used by Aboriginal people for everything that tools and knives are used for today, including cutting plants, food and meat, scraping of bark or animal skins, engraving, chopping, carving and chiselling.

Stone tools are flakes of stone that are created by striking a 'hammer' stone on a suitable stone nodule to chip or flake-off a piece. This piece was then usually shaped by finer flaking, known as 'pressure flaking', into tools such as scrapers, blades, or spear points. This manufacturing process is referred to as knapping. These tools are extremely sharp and useful, and some stone tools are incredibly refined and shaped with great care and attention to detail. Others were made quickly of whatever stone material that may have been available at the time to suit a particular purpose. Making stone tools always requires great skill in stone knapping.

Flaked stone tools are found everywhere across Victoria and were made in many forms from many types of stone. Among the types of places these tools are found are surface artefact scatters. Scatters occur commonly across the landscape in Victoria, and can consist of just a few artefacts on the ground, or hundreds of artefacts spread across hundreds of metres. They can also contain other materials such as shell, charcoal, or animal bone. While some stone tools would have been made 'in-situ', they could also have been accidentally dropped or intentionally discarded by Aboriginal people.

What to look for

Flaked stone tools can be recognised by the sharp edges and flat 'scars' on the surface of the stone caused by the removal of other flakes. Many will have a flatter end (striking platform) and a pointy or sharp end (termination). They will also feature a 'bulb of percussion' on one side, towards the striking platform end. This occurs when the flake is struck from a larger core. Well-formed flaked stone tools have a ventral surface (which is smooth and slightly curved) and a dorsal surface (which has a crest or ridge-like line running along the length of the middle). Some stone flakes that are found in artefact scatters are the debris and leftovers from the tool manufacturing process.

Flaked stone tools are largely made from fine-grained stone such as silcrete, quartz and flint, which produced the best and sharpest results.



Core from which flakes have been removed



Glass artefact



Quartz flake



Artefact



Flint point, dorsal surface showing bulb of percussion near proximal end

Did you
know?

Traditional methods of tool production were used by Aboriginal people with newly introduced raw materials after the arrival of Europeans. Flaked and knapped glass was used by Aboriginal people to produce sharp tools.

Did you know?

The thick bases of bottles were flaked and worked into tools, which have been found in many parts of Victoria and across Australia⁶. Metal items such as horseshoes were heated and reworked to form spear points and knives⁷. In many parts of Australia, Aboriginal people still make and use stone tools for use in everyday activities.

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Quartzite microblade core



Angular fragment of a flake from tool production



Microliths (Artefacts)



Fragment from microlith (Artefact)



Chrystal Quartz flake



Geometric microlith (Artefact)



Upper and lower grinding stone

Grinding stones

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Grinding stones

What to look for

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Grinding stones have been used by Aboriginal people for thousands of generations.

They are made from large slabs of stone used for processing plants and food such as, berries, seeds, insects, and many other items including ochre. These items are ground between a large, slab like lower stone and a round, small, hand-held stone. They are used in a manner similar to mortar and pestle, and sometimes water is added to the ground material to create a paste or pigment. Grinding stones are usually made from abrasive rocks such as sandstone or other coarse-grained stone.

What to look for

- Usually large, flat, rounded stones made of sandstone with depressions or grooves worn into the surface
- Upper and lower grinding stones will not necessarily be found together
- Some grinding stones are extremely large and heavy and have been so extensively used over generations that the bottom stone can be worn very thin, or even worn through in the middle.

Did you know?

Due to their large size and enormous weight, grinding stones were often left at places such as camps, where they were used regularly over many generations. Some grinding stones can be quite small; others can be very large or have multiple grinding grooves. Some may even be used on both sides of the grinding stone.



Lower grinding stone - damaged by cattle



Axe

Ground edge axes

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Ground edge axes

What to look for

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Ground-edge axes are stone axe-heads generally oval in shape and made from large flakes (known as a flake blank or axe blank) of fine-grained hard stone such as greenstone⁸. They were also made from cobbles, or cobble fragments⁹.

Cutting edges of the stone axe-heads were shaped and sharpened with great skill through grinding on other abrasive stone, such as sandstone. The axe-heads were hafted onto wooden handles however in many cases the wooden handles have not survived. Axes were used for a variety of purposes including removing bark from trees (see culturally modified trees).

Ground-edge axes were highly valued, widely traded and have great cultural and spiritual significance. The stone quarries from which the stone for axes were mined are places of spiritual significance, adding to the cultural value and importance of the axe.

Generally, stone artefacts decrease in size the further away you get from the source of the stone. This is because stone tools were used and re-sharpened and reshaped as they were carried and traded across the landscape¹⁰. Research has shown that greenstone axes from Mt William in central Victoria were not reworked or reduced in size the further away they were traded. This is due to the axes importance as a social and ceremonial item.

What to look for

- Hard stone such as basalt or greenstone
- Cutting edges that will appear smooth and polished
- There may be a groove around the middle where the handle was attached.



Stone axes and artefacts

Did you know?

The oldest known ground-edge stone axe in the world was recently found in Carpenter's Gap in the Kimberly in Northern Australia, and has been dated to about 49,000 years old¹¹. Stone axes were not used by people in most other countries around the world until farming was introduced about 10,000 years ago¹².

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Axe



Axe



Axe blank



Obelisk at the memorial for Wombesch Puyuun, Camperdown, 1883.

Historic places

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Historic places What to look for

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A 'historic' Aboriginal place refers to a place that is of significance to Aboriginal people post- European contact. A historic place is also often a place with shared history or shared heritage values and significance that is not always visible.

The shared history is often deeply sad, and horrific things done to Aboriginal people during the invasion of Aboriginal land must be acknowledged by all Australians. However, historic places can also be important sites that celebrate the ongoing survival of Aboriginal people and culture in Australia.

Examples of historic places include missions and mission buildings. Missions were established by church groups and government authorities, and their programs sought to "educate" Aboriginal people in Western beliefs and ways of life. Aboriginal people already had their own social, cultural and spiritual beliefs and connection to Country through living in these places for many thousands of years. This connection was suddenly altered by acts of colonisation that denied people access to their traditional lands and resources¹³. Aboriginal people were removed from Country and sent to live in places such as missions, where families stayed for several generations, often through no choice of their own. New connections to place were established as a result of families being born, living, dying and being buried at these places. Connections also involve Aboriginal children being forcibly removed from their parents in such places.

Horrific massacres of thousands of Aboriginal people by foreign peoples occurred during the European settlement of Victoria (and indeed all of Australia). It is estimated that at least 20,000 Aboriginal men, women and children were killed across Australia¹⁴. The places where Ancestors were murdered are sacred places, yet they often show no visible indications of what occurred at these sites.

Aboriginal people's strong resistance should also be acknowledged. Some of these places are on Parks Victoria managed land, and all staff should be mindful of the sensitivity of such places.

The tragic events of colonisation for Aboriginal people, and new social, cultural or spiritual connections and events mean these historic places are significant for Aboriginal people, and for all Australians.

What to look for

It would be hard to identify a historical place based upon the description above. However, having relationships with Traditional Owners and sharing stories can enhance our capacity to understand historic places and their significance.



Scars on a rock shelter where stone has been quarried

Quarry

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Aboriginal quarries are sites where Aboriginal people sourced stone for the manufacture of stone tools, or ochre for ceremonial purposes.

Stone was sourced for artefacts through the gathering of loose stones through to mining from rocky outcrops or rockfaces, where stone was removed by striking with a suitable rock known as a hammer stone. Stone was sometimes quarried by alternating fire and cold water to help in fracturing harder stone. Many different types of stone are good for different types of tools; as a result, Aboriginal people actively sought out areas of specific stone types and systematically mined these places to meet their needs.

Quarry sites can be found in many places, such as the Mt William Quarry site. Mt William was used by Aboriginal people to mine greenstone for axes up until about the 1840s. Greenstone was valuable and exchanged for other items, such as possum skin cloaks by Aboriginal people who would travel large distances to trade or access it.

What to look for

Quarries can be small, consisting of a boulder that has had stone flakes removed from it, leaving behind 'scars' on the rock surface. Other quarries cover large areas filled with rocky outcrops and remnants of unfinished tools and stone flakes that were bi-products of the mining process. Hammer-stones were often left at the quarry due to their weight.



Scars on a rocky outcrop where stone has been quarried



Scars on a rocky outcrop where stone has been quarried

Did you
know?

Mt William, 78km from Melbourne in Wurundjeri Country has been the source of Greenstone Axes traded as far away as Northern Territory. The National Heritage Listed Place has been utilised as a quarry for at least 1,500 years, right up until about the 1840s.

Did you know?

Greenstone was valuable and exchanged for other items such as possum skin cloaks by Aboriginal people, they would often travel large distances to trade or access it.

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Scars on a rock shelter where stone has been quarried



Quarried stone at tool manufacture site



Stone quarried from outcrop



Stone quarried from outcrop



Quarried stone at tool manufacture site



Stone quarried from outcrop



White ochre figures

Rock art

39

Paintings and engravings are created on rock surfaces by Aboriginal people all over Australia.

The style, motifs and technique of rock art varies over location and throughout time. Rock art was produced for ceremonial or teaching purposes, for telling stories and was directly related to the social, cultural and spiritual connection Aboriginal people have to Country.

Dating of rock art is extremely difficult. Rock art is practiced by Aboriginal people today, so sites can range from being brand new, to having been created tens of thousands of years ago. Relative dating can tell us if one style is older than another, but cannot tell us how old the paintings are¹⁵. Some rock art sites in Queensland for example, depict stencilled metal axes, clearly dating these paintings to the post-contact period¹⁶. Artwork in Northeast Victoria depicting a Thylacine (Tasmanian Tiger) is thought to have been created at least 3000 years ago, as this is when Thylacines became extinct on mainland Australia¹⁷.

Aboriginal artists used ochre pigments mined from the landscape and ground them up, adding water or other substances to it for painting. Brushes for applying pigments were made from twigs, feathers, hair or other organic items. Pigments were sprayed from people's mouths on to hands and cultural items to form a stencil on the rock face.

Unfortunately, like many flat and open surfaces, Rock art sites are susceptible to graffiti and vandalism. Some rock art sites like those in the Gariwerd landscape have been caged so that the rock art is protected whilst still visible for the public. While this is not ideal as the caging detracts from the natural beauty and cultural importance of a place, it is an unfortunate necessity.

What to look for

- Rock art paintings in Victoria usually feature motifs such as small figures, animal tracks, hands, or stripes and can range from a single image to hundreds in the one rock shelter.
- Rock art can be seen as a few small strokes of red ochre in small rock shelters or as large paintings depicting figures such as Bunjil, hand stencils or animals.
- Generally, colours were made from white, yellow and red ochre. The colours used were of special significance to individual paintings.



Red ochre hand print



Red ochre figure



White ochre lines



Red ochre hand stencil

Did you
know?

Gariwerd, The Grampians National Park, has the largest number of known rock art sites in southern Australia – more than 80 per cent of Victoria's known rock art sites. Approximately 60 shelters, containing more than 4,000 different motifs have been identified in the national park¹⁸.

Did you know?

Billimina, Gulgurn Manja, Manja, and Ngamadjidj are important rock shelters that depict spirits, figures, bar strokes and stencilled hand motifs that are of great social, spiritual and cultural significance for Traditional Owners.

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Bunjil's shelter



Ngamadjidj Shelter



Graffiti removal



Eel traps, Gunditjmara Country

Stone arrangements and features

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Stone arrangements and features

What to look for

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An Aboriginal stone arrangement is a collection of stones or boulders arranged to construct a place of cultural significance.

Stone arrangements are rare and extremely significant Aboriginal cultural heritage places. They are designed for specific cultural purposes and are usually found in volcanic areas of Victoria.

Stone arrangements or features may be:

- Stone houses (dwellings often referred to as 'huts')
- Fish or eel traps that are part of an aquaculture system
- Ceremonial arrangements
- Rockwells.

Stone arrangements in aquaculture – Fish and eel traps

Aboriginal people constructed complex stone-walled aquaculture systems on lava flows, with the most famous examples found in the Budj Bim landscape on Gunditjmara Country. This aquaculture system is believed to be around seven thousand years old. This date is at least two and a half thousand years older than the great Khufu pyramid in Giza, Egypt and at least two thousand years older than Stone Henge.

Stone houses

Also at Budj Bim, Gunditjmara people built stone houses in permanent settlements, the remnants of which still exist in the landscape today. The aquaculture system, stone houses and the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape has been included on the National Heritage List as a National Heritage Landscape, and is currently seeking inclusion and protection as a UNESCO World Heritage Area.

Rockwells

Rockwells made and used by Aboriginal people are water wells found on rocky outcrops. Rockwells can range in size from small holes in the rock to larger pools, such as those at the You Yangs Regional Park. Some rockwells have stone 'lids' that protect the water from contamination and prevent evaporation. The majority of rockwells that have been recorded in Victoria are on Country in the Parks estate. Rockwells were formed naturally and further modified by Aboriginal people to expand the holes and create channels in the rock in order to better collect water.

What to look for

- Given the varied size of stone arrangements and rocks used to make them, it is good to pay attention to the formation of grouped stones.
- Stones that have been intentionally arranged in linear formations or shapes on the ground, and stones that have been placed on top of one another could be an Aboriginal stone arrangement.
- Rock wells will appear as a water-filled hole on a rock surface, sometimes with a stone lid.
- Houses are usually small u-shaped stone arrangements with a remaining wall standing at about knee-height.



Foundation of stone structure

Did you know?

Wurdi Youang is a stone arrangement on Wathaurung Country. It is a shaped arrangement of about 100 stones. There are three stones at one end of the arrangement that are believed to align with the sunset during the winter and summer solstices' and the Equinox. Its exact function is unclear and the date of construction is not known; however, it is possible that it is many thousands of years old.

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Rockwell with lid



Rockwell in the You Yangs Regional Park



Foundation of stone structure



Foundation of stone structure



Foundation of stone structure, Gunditjmarra Country

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