

Whetstone — Minguitaq

NUUSIQ IPEG CARU MINGUUTAMEK. – SHARPEN THE KNIFE WITH THE WHETSTONE.



Photo: Whetstones from the Outlet site, Buskin River.
U.S. Coast Guard Collection.

For more than six thousand years, Kodiak's Native people fashioned cutting tools from sheets of hard, black slate. Flensing knives for slicing blubber, ulus for splitting fish, and sharp-sided lances for hunting sea mammals were all carefully ground to shape and sharpened with the aid of whetstones—special sharpening stones. Tabular pieces of fine-grained siltstone, commonly found on Kodiak beaches, were used to hone tool edges to razor sharpness, perhaps with the aid of some water or oil. Many of the whetstones found in archaeological sites have been used repeatedly and have very smooth worked surfaces.

Kodiak's prehistoric archaeological sites are also full of other types of grinding tools. In addition to the smooth whetstones used to sharpen slate implements, archaeologists find gritty pieces of pumice, scoria, and sandstone used to shape bone and wood objects, much like sand paper. Some of these have deep grooves from the tools shaped against them. Burnishing stones are also common. Smooth, flat pebbles were used to flatten the grain of wooden objects to create an even, lustrous finish. Masks, paddles, dishes, and many other objects were finished with this technique.