

Whetstone

Period: Iron Age to Medieval (c. 800 BC - 1000 AD)

Material: stone

Complete item

This genuine whetstone is an example of an artefact commonly found in Iron Age and later sites. Whetstones are used to sharpen iron tools and weapons by wetting the stone and rubbing it against the side of the blade. This grinds away a thin layer of the metal to leave a sharp edge.

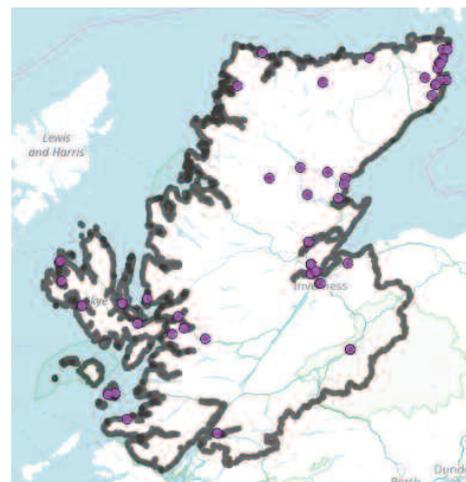
Whetstones were often selected from naturally occurring stones that fit well in the hand and had a slightly abrasive but even surface. This example is a river cobble that has been rounded by the action of water passing over it. One somewhat flattened side is slightly smoother than the rest of the pebble – evidence that it has been used to rub against another surface. It may have been discarded after the pebble broke along a natural flaw.

Artefacts like this demonstrate that people in the past made good use of the natural resources around them, and that sometimes the differences between a natural object and an artefact used by people can be very subtle.

Some whetstones have more obvious evidence of shaping, such as an example from Eigg which has been perforated so that it can be carried from a cord hung from a belt.

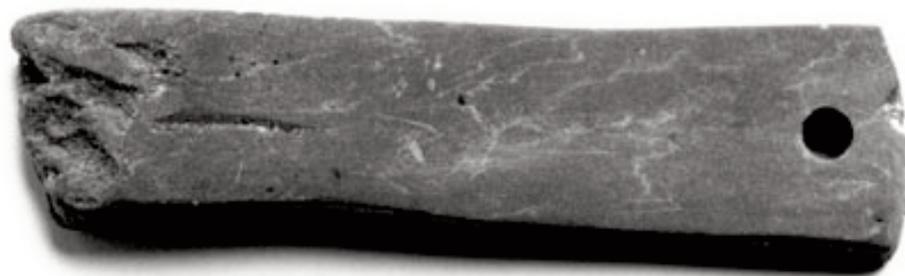
People still use whetstones today to sharpen their tools and knives.

Why might it be difficult to date this artefact?



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Whetstones from Aberdeen



This whetstone from Eigg was buried in a Viking grave. It is now in the NMS, Edinburgh

