

Stone Pecking

Stone pecking is a way of shaping stone by tapping, grinding and chipping away small pieces, usually with another stone. This is a way of creating objects and shapes which requires little technology, relatively little expertise, but lots of time. It is well suited to stone such as steatite (soapstone), granite, basalt, sandstone and tuff. A hammerstone – usually



Pecking a carved stone ball



A well-used hammerstone from High Pasture Cave on Skye, with abrasions all the way round the edge

a roughly spherical or oval river boulder that sits nicely in one hand – is used to tap away fragments of the stone to be shaped until the desired form is achieved. The item may then be ground to a smooth or polished finish by rubbing it against a fine sandstone. This method can be used to create items such as axes, carved stone balls and stone lamps or bowls. It has also been used to create or alter larger monuments such as cup and ring marked stone boulders.

Whilst the skill of the craftsperson will have an impact upon the final product, it is quite possible to produce a good quality item with little practice. This is a craft which was certainly practiced in the Neolithic,

Bronze Age and Iron Age but may also have been used in other periods.

Despite the potential for this technology to be used with easily accessed local stones, frequently more exotic stone was selected, sometimes being imported from a source hundreds of miles away. For example, polished stone axes made of green Cumbrian Tuff have been found in the Highlands. This may suggest that some materials were chosen and indeed sought after for their aesthetic or other properties. There may also have been significance in the fact that something has been sourced from a great distance or a particular location.



Cup and ring marked stone from the Heights of Fodderty, now at the Neil Gunn Monument. The reasons behind the decoration are still debated

See also:

Box 1 object sheets: Carved Stone Ball, Stone Axes

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