



# Mount William Stone Hatchet Quarry

VICTORIA

Mount William in central Victoria was famous throughout south-eastern Australia as the source of the highly valued greenstone hatchet heads.

Mount William or Wil-im-ee Moor-ring (Woiwurrung for tomahawk place) hatchet heads were prestigious items traded over much of the region, creating social links and obligations between neighbouring groups.

Around 1500 years ago the Traditional Owners of Mt William, the Wurundjeri, quarried greenstone at Mt William to make hatchet heads for their own use and to trade.

Stone hatchets were an essential part of the Aboriginal toolkit in south-east Australia with at least one stone hatchet in every camp. Hatchets were often attached to a wooden handle and used to cut off sheets of bark for huts or canoes, shape wood into shields, clubs and spears, cut hollows in trees to catch possums and split trunks open to get honey, grubs or insect eggs.

Wurundjeri dug deep pits to reach the unweathered stone underground, or heated the surface of outcrops (above-ground boulders) to break away pieces of rock. The hard stone was roughly shaped into a hatchet head using a large boulder as an anvil. The traded hatchet heads were then polished and shaped by their new owners by grinding the hatchet against another stone to make a cutting edge.

Mount William is one of the largest and most intensively-worked quarries with hundreds of mining pits and mounds of waste rock surrounding the old work stations where the Wurundjeri made the greenstone hatchets.

In the 1880s William Barak, the prominent Wurundjeri leader explained Mt William's traditional ownership and access conventions:

*'There were places... in which the whole tribe had a special interest. Such a place was the "stone quarry" at Mount William... When neighbouring tribes wanted stone for tomahawks they usually sent a messenger for Billibellary [the main custodian]. When they arrived they camped around about the place. Billibellary's father when he was alive split up the stones and gave it away for presents such as rugs, weapons, ornaments, belts, necklaces.'*



Historic records of traditional ownership and control of access to stone resources are rare in Australia, which contributes greatly to the cultural significance of this place.

During the mid-1800s Mt William was recognised as a special site that had been used by Aboriginal people well before European settlement. Throughout the 1900s people from all walks of life were visiting the area to see the quarry firsthand. In 1917 it was described in the Victorian Parliament as:

*'...the great historic landmark of Australia, furnishing the only indication or proof that we have that this country was inhabited for hundreds of years before the white man came here.'*

– Mr AF Cameron,  
Member of the Victorian Parliament 1917

National Heritage List: 18 February 2008

