

Basic Detail Report



Spearhead

Date

early to mid 20th Century

Medium

Obsidian

Description

This obsidian projectile point was collected on Lou Island in the Manus Province of Papua New Guinea. Obsidian is a naturally-occurring black volcanic glass formed when certain lava varieties are cooled quickly enough that they vitrify rather than crystallize. Prehistoric volcanic eruptions in the Admiralty Islands, particularly on Lou and Manus Islands, created an abundance of the volcanic glass. Islanders sourced the material from mines and traded it as a commodity throughout the region. Obsidian was used in a variety of ways mainly as sharp cutting

tools such as projectile points, blades, scrapers, or drills. In such cases, stone tools were used to shape the obsidian by chipping away flakes and creating a serrated edge—a feature which only served to excel its cutting ability. The obsidian tool featured here is a spear head that was perhaps meant to be hafted to a spear that was capable of being thrown or projected. Decorated obsidian spears were a staple weapon on the Admiralty Islands and quickly diminished around the start of the 20th Century due to the introduction of Western weapons. Obsidian was also utilized for its aesthetic qualities and was important in woodcarving practices on the Admiralty Islands. Large ceremonial feast bowls made of the volcanic glass led the island chain to become a regional center for bowl-making and valuable trade capital.

Dimensions

6 × 2 7/8 × 13/16 in. (15.2 × 7.3 × 2.1 cm)