

Basic Detail Report



Knife

Date

20th Century

Medium

Obsidian and resin

Description

This obsidian-blade knife was collected on the Admiralty Islands 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 edges—a feature which only served to excel its cutting ability. Obsidian was also utilized for its aesthetic qualities and was important in woodcarving practices on the Admiralty Islands. The obsidian tool featured here is a knife with a resin handle that would have protected the user's hand from the sharp volcanic glass. The length of the blade suggests this tool would have been reserved for woodcarving practices.

Dimensions

2 1/4 × 9 1/2 × 1 7/8 in. (5.7 × 24.1 × 4.8 cm)