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A Backed Bladelet with Impact Damage from Sleaford, Hampshire.

Michael Reynier

This piece was found amongst the Wolmer Forest collection of flints made during the late 1940's to 1950's by Major A.G. Wade of Bentley, Hampshire, and now housed at the British Museum. The collection is mainly Early Mesolithic in date. This item, however, is provenanced to Sleaford rather than Wolmer Forest, and has a dull white patina unlike that of the rest of the collection. It is marked as having been found in 1953.

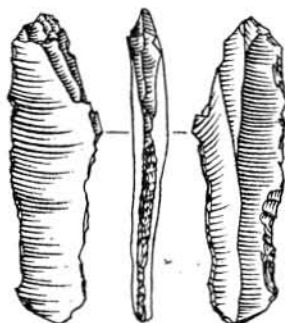
The piece, which is 40.5 mm long, 12.0 mm wide and 4.0 mm thick, has abrupt retouch along the whole of its surviving left margin (see figure). Its proximal end has been truncated by two major oblique spalls running parallel and adjacent to one another. There also appears to be several flexional splinters on the ventral surface at this end. The right margin is damaged along its entire length and terminates in an oblique fracture.

The pattern of damage, in particular the oblique burin-like spalls, suggests impact with a solid object (cf. Fischer *et al.* 1984, Barton and Bergman 1982). The fact that not one but several spalls have been detached, and the quite extensive damage to the left lateral edge would suggest that the impact was extremely powerful.

Dating of the piece has to depend upon typological criteria, and it does not fit comfortably into a Mesolithic context. Instead, it would seem more at home in a Late Glacial context, and similar examples have been found at the Late Upper Palaeolithic site at Hengistbury Head, Dorset (Barton 1992). The discovery of this object adds another location to the rare, but growing, list of open-air findspots of this antiquity.

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scale 1:1

Figure 1: Late Upper Palaeolithic backed bladelet with impact damage from Sleaford, Hampshire.

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Some Australian Bifaces

Alec Rainey

Sweeping across a part of Australia from Western Queensland into the Northern Territory, between latitudes 18° and 21° south, lies a monotonous plain, covered sparsely in a tender grass, called the Barkly Tableland. It has an emptiness and vastness typical of Australia, which almost make you giddy to see and can stimulate a terrible sense of isolation. On the horizon in certain places you will see a low line of trees. This marks the course of a seasonal creek. In December or January, in the wet season, it will be running with water from summer storms or from the subsequent Monsoon.

I was a jackeroo on a 5000 square mile cattle station in the middle of this plain in 1966 and 1967. We spent seven consecutive months camping out, rounding up and branding cattle. Prior to this, living in Argentina, I had been introduced to stone age archaeology through contact with archaeologists, and had some practical experience in the matter in the Pampas, where I had also been working with cattle.

One day - on the cattle station in Australia -, without the least thought of archaeology in my head, I found a 10 cm biface lying on the ground. And rounding up over the following months I found several more of a similar size in the other parts of the station. Two are illustrated here (figs 1 and 2).

The majority of these bifaces are made of fine jasper, two are of chalcedony. All but one are made from nodules with a hard hammer. They are in pristine condition, unrolled, unbattered and lightly patinated. Several appear to be pre-forms or blanks for bifacial points. Such points do exist on the tableland ('pirri points'), but are probably too small (6.5 cm or less) to qualify for this role.

My initial reaction at seeing these artefacts was to believe they were Palaeolithic handaxes. I then realised I was in the privileged position, for an archaeologist, of actually living with the people who, apparently, were responsible for making the objects in question, or who should know something about them first hand. Many of my companions were members of the Warramunga, Wambaya and Karewa peoples, natives of that area.

But turning a biface over in his hands one of these men shook his head and said firmly "No, mate, this isn't made by a man". The others agreed with him, and they proceeded to demonstrate to me what a man-made stone tool looked like and how it was made (an unretouched unifacial 'leilira' blade).