

## The Status of the Horsehoof Core

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**ABSTRACT.** Since it was first identified (Tindale & Macgrath, 1931:281), the role of the horsehoof core in Australian stone tool technology has been the subject of differing interpretations. From examination of both archaeological and experimentally-replicated material, I present some observations and conclusions intended to further illuminate this question.

AKERMAN, K., 1993. The status of the horsehoof core. Records of the Australian Museum, Supplement 17: 125-127.

Noting its often neatly trimmed platform margin, reminiscent of the secondary retouch on flake scrapers, some writers see the horsehoof core simply as a tool (Tindale, 1937; McCarthy, Bramell & Noone, 1946; Mulvaney & Joyce, 1965), more specifically as a heavy planing or chopping tool. Others give an opposing view, seeing the horsehoof core strictly as a core resulting from flake and/or blade production. Among these are Kamminga (1982:85-91) who bases his views on technological characteristics, notably edge damage; and Binford & O'Connell (1986:425), who cite the evidence of exhausted cores remaining from blade knapping they had witnessed by the Alyawarra. In expressing a similar view, Flenniken & White (1985:135) suggest that the numerous step-fractures that invade the platform surfaces of typical horsehoof cores result from platform preparation techniques involving abrasion, rather than from use as a tool.

A third interpretation is that of Lampert (1981) who sees the Kartan industry as a range of core tools, made on both pebbles and blocks which, with resharpening, become progressively smaller in diameter and steeper edged. For block tools the final stage is the horsehoof

core which, in this context, is the worked out remnant of a tool.

Horsehoof cores from Kangaroo Island illustrated by Cooper (1943:351-356) clearly show the extensive stacked or tiered step-flaking that generally affects the major part of the circumference of the striking platform. Multiple platforms occur only rarely. It should be noted here that no one has yet identified the massive unifacially-trimmed pebble tools with similar heavy step-flaking that occur on the island as cores for the production of flakes. On several examples illustrated by Cooper (1943:figs 3,4,7,11,14), the stacked step-fractures are so extensive that a considerable mass of the material overhangs the striking platform. These are too extensive to have been produced, as Flenniken & White suggest (1985:135), '...by rubbing the hammerstone over the edge of the striking platform'. Rather, percussion blows were directed both above the arisses of previous flake scars and between them to deliberately create the stepped effect. When one wants to remove flakes or blades, it could be said that a general rule of thumb is that the striking platform is located immediately behind the ariss. The ariss area acts as one of the controls (because of its greater mass) in