Microblades

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What are they?

The objective of making microblades is to produce a large number of tiny sharp-edged cutting blades from small pieces of very fine stone raw material. These blades had many uses.

The evidence for microblade technology is found in the form of tiny thin blades and the small wedge or conical shaped cores from which they were removed.

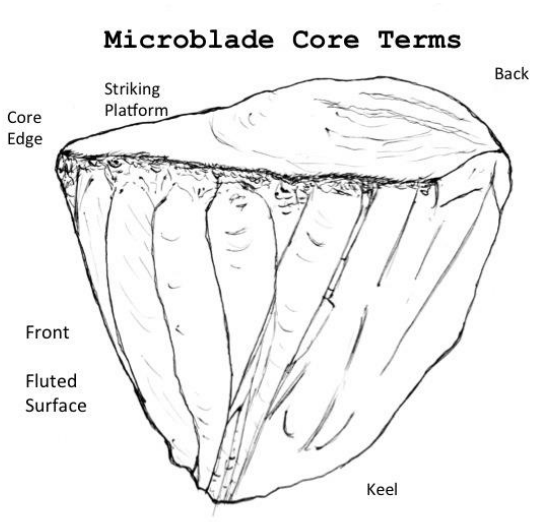
Left: Razor sharp Obsidian microblades. Right: Microblade core of Obsidian. The long flutes show where the sharp blades came from.

Microblade technology is a unique form of stone technology that spread from Siberia to British Columbia by 9000 years ago. First Nations in British Columbia stopped making these tiny blades on the northern coast about 4000 years ago and about 2000 years ago on the southern coast.

How are microblades made?

Microblades are made using a technique called pressure flaking. First a core of fine stone is prepared by hammer or percussion flaking – that is, shaping the bottom by removing flakes and then striking a perpendicular blow from one end to create a flat working or striking platform.

The platform is the flat surface at the top from which blades are pushed off using an antler tool.



The prepared core of fine stone is placed tightly in a wooden vice to hold it in place when flakes are being removed.

The point of an antler pressure flaking tool is then placed on the edge of the platform where it intersects with a slight ridge. A quick steady pressure is applied until a tiny blade snaps off the core.

Removing microblades by pressure flaking.

When a blade is correctly removed down a ridge, two new ridges are created on each side. These ridges become the points from which more blades are removed. This way of making cutting blades provided elongate blades that could easily be put into handles or inset in shafts or arrows or harpoons.

Pressure flaking was an efficient and sustainable use of limited raw materials and because of their small size they were easy to trade over long distances.

Above: Examples of how microblades were put in handles.
Below: Microblade cores of Quartz Crystal (left) and Dacite (right).