

# How to Make a Ground Slate Ulu



Slate ulu with wooden handle, Koniag, Inc. Collection, Karluk One Site.

## MATERIALS:

- Slate
- Sand
- Water
- Whetstone (a stone used for grinding)

Slate is a plentiful material in the Kodiak Archipelago and it can be fashioned into a variety of tools. In addition to the ulus and double-edged knives used for butchering, Alutiig people ground lances, bayonets, and arrows for hunting, and fashioned beads and labrets from slate.



Slate is a fine-grained, layered rock that is widely available in the Kodiak region. The best slate for tool making is hard, black material. Softer, lighter colored slate breaks easily.



Bayonet, Kashevarof Site



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### 1. Select a piece of slate.

Kodiak beaches have many different types—but not all slate is suitable for tool production. The ideal material is hard with few visible layers. A good way to test slate is to break it into pieces and observe how they fall apart. Choose a thin sturdy fragment.

### 2. Chip the slate into the shape on an ulu.

Find a hard beach cobble (a water-rounded rock) to chip your thin leaf of slate into a rough tool form—working along the edges. Another way of creating a rough tool, particularly if you wish to make a lance, is to saw the slate with a hard, sharp rock. A flake knocked off of a beach cobble works well as a saw. With the flake, wear grooves into the slate from both sides then gently snap the pieces apart along the groove.

### 3. Use a flat beach rock to smooth the surfaces of your ulu.

Use a hard, flat beach rock to grind a smooth surface on both sides of your tool. Keep the tool flat as you grind. Water and a small amount of beach sand make a good lubricant and will speed up the grinding process. Keep grinding until you have a smooth flat surface. Try to remove any nicks or indentations in the slate.

### 4. Sharpen the edge

Sharpen the edges of your ulu by grinding at an angle. Turn the tool over to grind both sides of each edge. This will create a bevel (a v-shaped edge) that can be sharpened and resharpened.

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