

Making axes at the end of the Stone Age

People started making polished stone axes around 4000 BCE and used them to chop down trees, impress neighbours, or beat-up enemies. But not all rocks made good axes – you had to find the right ones.

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The polished stone axe

To make a stone axe you start by finding a block of hard rock that will retain an edge.

A rough axe shape is then created, either by knocking flakes off the block, or by pecking away with a hammer stone.

The blade of the axe is sharpened by grinding with sand and water. Sometimes the whole axe is polished like the one shown here.



Graig Lwyd *SH719753*

On the slopes of this mountain is a seam of volcanic rock, perfect for making axes.

Thousands of axes were made here over about 2,000 years, from 4000 BCE.

Many axes were gifted to other communities and examples have been found across England and Wales.

Today Graig Lwyd is legally protected, as are most axe production sites.



Mynydd Rhiw *SH231295*

A seam of volcanic tuff runs through this hill. Around 3750 BCE people began to use it to make their axes.

Most rock was collected by digging out loose blocks from within the soil. Only occasionally did people go to the effort of breaking pieces off of the seam itself.

Hundreds of axes of this rock were made, but they were not traded much beyond the local area.



Great Langdale *NY304065*

This is the giant of Stone Age axe production sites.

High up in England's Lake District, this was the source of thousands of stone axes that were exchanged with communities across Britain.

Many ended up in Wales, with one example being buried in a pit at Llandegai.

This material seems to have been very highly prized by Stone Age axe connoisseurs.



Flint axes

Flint is the classic material for making stone tools. It's easy to flake, takes a sharp edge and looks beautiful when polished.

We find lots of flint axes in Wales, particularly in southeast Wales. But there are no natural outcrops of flint here.

Most of these flint axes must have been made from flint found in the chalk lands of southern and eastern England.