

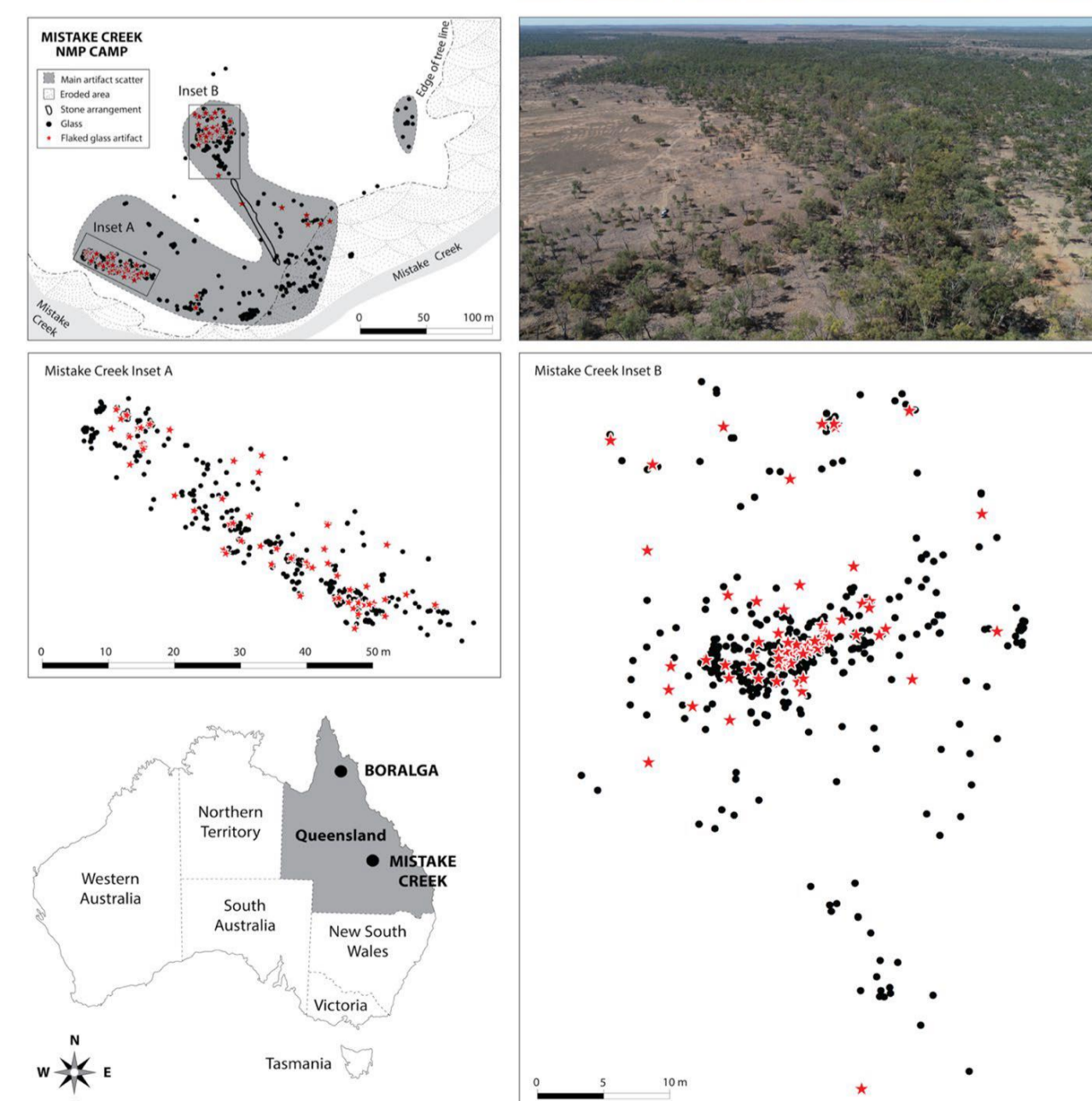
Entangled encounters at Mistake Creek, Qld: Flaked bottle-glass artefacts from a Native Mounted Police camp

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Introduction

From 1849 until the early 1900s the region of Australia that subsequently became known as Queensland experienced the 'frontier wars', a particularly violent and disruptive era of conflict between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous 'settlers' who were staking land claims. Central to many of these encounters was the 'Native Mounted Police' (NMP), staffed primarily by White officers leading Indigenous troopers who were far from their own countries and who had been pressed into service by the colonial Qld Government to enforce colonial laws and 'disperse' (i.e. kill) local Indigenous peoples.

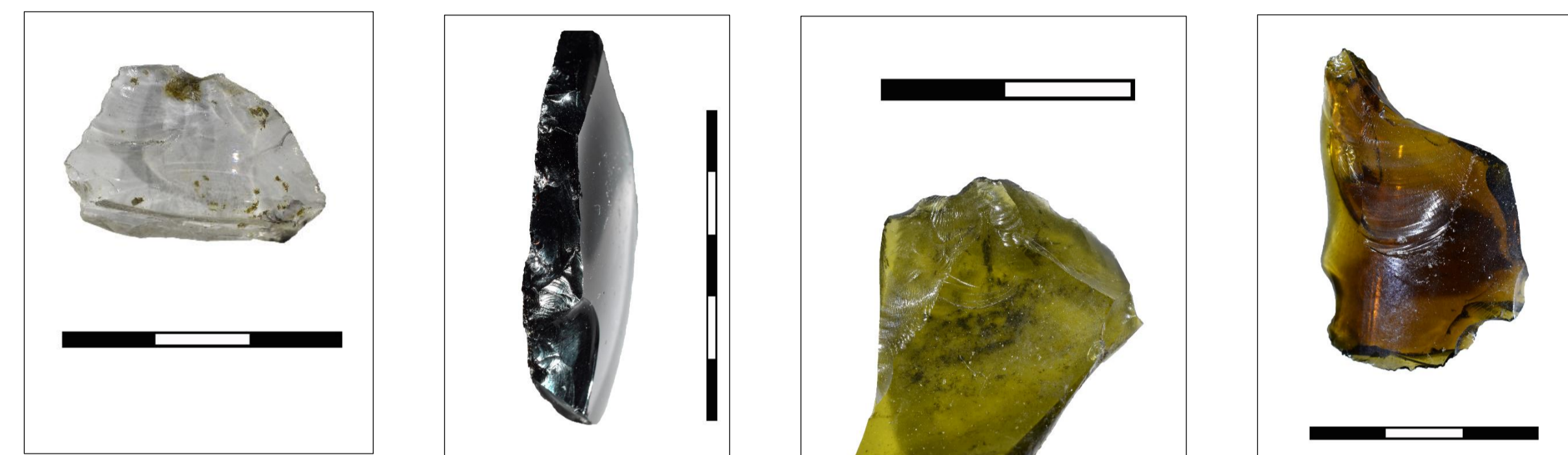
This poster describes flaked glass artefacts recovered from the NMP camp site of Mistake Creek in Central Queensland (also known as the Belyando River NMP camp), which operated between 1863 and 1879. While knapped glass artefacts are notoriously difficult to identify, we argue that the complex and distinctive reduction sequence means these artefacts could only have been deliberately produced. Given the abundance of artefacts at the camps and traumatic associations with these areas to local Indigenous groups, we argue that these glass artefacts were made by troopers of the NMP and/or members of their families. Such a manipulation of an introduced material using traditional methods physically embodies the conference theme of 'entangled encounters'.



Plans of the Mistake Creek Native Mounted Police camp site showing locations of analysed glass assemblages.

How can we definitively identify flaked glass?

Glass requires far less force to initiate a conchoidal fracture path than other stone materials, and consequently it is incredibly easy for incidental forces – tramping, cars, tumbling, spontaneous 'retouch' during breakage, etc. – to resemble or mimic deliberate use-wear, retouch, or flaking.

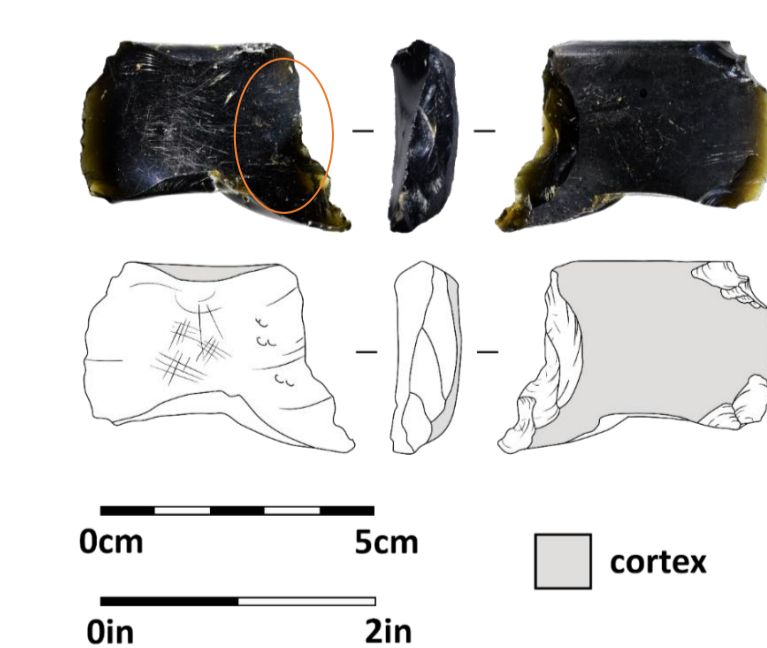


'Pseudo' knapping: The above images show examples of glass that has been 'flaked' incidentally by cars or by trampling, resulting in accidental breaks that resemble deliberate flaking, retouch, and/or usewear.

For this reason, the analysis was approached critically. No single scar was interpreted as deliberate unless:

- the **fracture path** occurred in a neat and controlled fashion;
- flakes initiated from an accessible, reliable, and isolated **platform**; and,
- the reduction sequence represented **complex and reoccurring** permutations.

This parsimonious approach meant that natural breakage could be ruled out with reasonable confidence. It likely also meant that the number of modified glass pieces was also under-represented in the final results.



Deliberate retouch is particularly difficult to identify on glass. In the above instance, however, multiple embedded Hertzian cones (circled) – the result of blows that failed to initiate a fracture – associated with neat and regular retouching scars, support the interpretation that this retouch was deliberate.

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Results

At the Mistake Creek site, 194 knapped glass artefacts could be identified with certainty without further traceological analysis.

We found that six different approaches to removing a flake were applied to these glass bottles, including retouching flakes (see illustration below):

1. **Through the heel.** There were two variations of this (1a and 1b).
2. **Across the heel.**
3. **Through the base.**
4. **Across the base.**
5. **Through the body.**
6. **Across the body.**



Discussion and conclusion

The six approaches to striking a flake from a glass bottle that were adopted at the Mistake Creek NMP site produced an array of sharp flakes, sharp edges on body fragments, and robust 'cores' from the bottle bases. It seems most likely that these knapped artefacts were produced by the Aboriginal men who formed the detachments of the NMP and/or their family members, as these sites tended to be avoided by later local Indigenous people as sites of trauma. Oral testimony suggests glass flakes may have been used for leather working. Given that the wives of the NMP were less likely to be provided adequate resources than the men, these tools might also have represented a resourceful strategy of the Aboriginal women at the camps.

While functional as sharp though brittle tools, these glass artefacts also represent the continuation of a cultural tradition (knapping) despite the immense disruption, disconnect, and an exclusion from local Indigenous connections that the NMP endured – it may even be that this was a deliberate act of subversion. Finally, the glass bottle dump sites may be considered a type of 'quarry site' for raw materials.

Selected references for glass artefacts

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