



*Deep channels in the hard granite bedrock typical of New Kingdom quarrying*



*The area is scattered with small quarries*

The granite quarries, located on the East Bank of the Nile at Aswan, are the most well-known and most visited ancient quarries in Egypt. Forming the 1st cataract at Aswan, exploitation, particularly of the red granite, is known from at least the 3rd millennium BC and continued throughout antiquity. Unsurpassed volumes of red granite were transported 800 km down the Nile to the Giza Plateau, particularly during the Pyramid Age of the Old Kingdom, when its use for monumental purposes linked to the construction of pyramids saw its use as wall linings for burial chambers, sarcophagi, columns and in some instances outer casings of pyramids. The qualities of the stone that made it much desired in antiquity are still sought after today, and so the quarry landscape has been continually transformed by quarrying. Although many ancient quarries are now destroyed, unfinished monumental objects largely dating to the New Kingdom (2nd millennium BC) can still be observed in places. Most famous is the 'unfinished obelisk' (large photo) that lies, still attached to bedrock, in its quarry. Excavations were recently carried out by the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA). A 'must see' on any tourist itinerary to Aswan, this World Heritage site has recently been transformed into an open-air museum where visitors can view the obelisk from a series of specially constructed platforms. The message of the extraordinary feats of ancient quarrying can be clearly given to the many thousands of tourists who visit the site. (Elizabeth Bloxam)



*Dolerite stone hammers*



*Typical "boulder-weathering" in the granite made easily accessible blocks*

*Roman quarrying of the granite is recognised by the use of wedge-lines for splitting the rock*

