



*The oldest quarries: Palaeolithic tool floors*



*Grinding stone blanks for saddle-querns*

The Aswan West Bank, Egypt, comprises a unique quarry landscape of great time depth. The main target for exploitation has been deposits of silicified sandstone ("quartzite") within the Cretaceous Nubian Group, but also non-silicified sandstone has been quarried, particularly for building stone. The earliest quarrying of silicified sandstone was in the Lower to Middle Palaeolithic, when it was used for hand-axes, cleavers and other tools. From the Late Palaeolithic and at least to the Roman Period, the stone was used for hand querns (grinding stone), leaving huge areas transformed by quarrying. Yellow and purple varieties of the silicified sandstone was, furthermore, quarried for sculpture and obelisks in the New Kingdom, and for columns and other ornamental stone products in the Roman Period (large photo). The latter two activities have left a significant ancient road network made for transporting stone blocks. In addition to features directly related to quarrying, the area is also rich in rock art and other features related to human interaction with the landscape for millennia. (Tom Heldal)



*The tip of the Seti 1 obelisk, fully incised, was laying in the quarries until recently*



*An unfinished obelisk base*

*An extensive system of ancient quarry roads is preserved*

