

DEBITAGE

Bits & Pieces ... Remnants Left Behind ... By & For Flint Knappers

Volume I

Number 1



“Soft Hammer” Percussion.

The “Soft Hammer” Percussion Process.

Somewhere along the line an ancient flint knapper picked up a piece of bone or antler to use as a striking tool. Maybe just because it felt better in his hand. Maybe by accident.

However it happened, someone discovered that using a piece of bone, or antler or even a dense, heavy piece of wood, produced a different kind of result when it was struck against the edge of flint or obsidian. It broke off chips and blades which were often wider, flatter and thinner than those thick, curved chips which are so often produced by using a “hammer stone”.

What Makes It A “Soft Hammer”?

These tools are more resilient than hammer stones, and their resulting, comparatively softer impact gives a finer level of control to the knapper. This creates a smoother surface on the tool, and allows a skilled knapper to produce thinner, straighter tools.

A Sequence Illustrates This

Even with the core of this chunk of black Texas flint now getting relatively small, we can still use a “Soft Hammer” to remove additional blades or chips.

You can see the prepared edge of the flint. It has been ground across from side to side with sandstone or carborundum to roughen the edge and help your billet to get a grip at the edge where you want to strike it. This grinding also creates tiny scratches which make it a little easier for a solid strike to initiate the fracture which



Here is the “ground” edge, with a planned striking point ready to be hit.



Though we call it a “Soft Hammer” we do not deliver a “soft” or “tentative” hit. Hit it!





The resulting fracture followed the ridge along the surface, spread out, & made a fine blade.



will remove the blade or chip which you want.

Now, secure the core in your gloved hand, hold it firmly and solidly in place against the protective thick leather pad on your thigh.

Strike your target point near the edge of the stone with the rounded end of the antler billet, following through with the striking motion so that the billet is stopped by the leather pad. You will feel the impact on the top of your thigh, but the energy of the blow is cushioned and dissipated by the leather pad.

In this example I am using an antler billet rather than a copper billet or copper capped bopper. One advantage of using an antler "*soft hammer*": sometimes this allows you to make several hits on a prepared striking platform without crushing the stone.

And, actually, I hit this striking point 6 or 8 times before I got the impact point, force and angle just right. Then the resulting chip removal happened almost instantly, with a very satisfying "*crack!*"

With an antler billet or baton you'll find you need to hit a very short distance in from the edge, rather than right at the edge of the stone (*which does work better with copper tools*).

The resulting 1-1/4" wide by 2-1/2" long flint chip retains the striking platform where the deer antler billet/soft hammer impacted the edge of the flint nodule. The piece is an immediately useful, razor sharp cutting implement or it can be further modified by pressure flaking into a dart or arrow point.

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From the flint knapping workshop of

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