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Topic: Kenniff Cave artefacts

My name's Michael Westaway. I'm the curator of archaeology. Today I want to talk about a site called Kenniff Cave and some of the artefacts from that site. Kenniff Cave was first investigated in 1960 and why it was such an important site, is that it pushed back our understanding of Aboriginal occupation by around 20,000 years.

We now know that Aboriginal people have been in Australia for at least 50,000 years but at the time in the 60s people had very little idea of the great time span involved in Aboriginal occupation. So Kenniff Cave provided a very clear idea of how old Aboriginal occupation actually was.

These artefacts provided a very good idea of the complexity of the stone tools, and the different stone tools that Aboriginal people used and there are a lot of different types we have in the sequence.

In particular, I wanted to talk about the Juan knives which are very finely made triangular-shaped knives with a great deal of working that's gone into them. Now, first of all when such a knife would have been made, a core such as this would have been used. A hammer-stone would have been used to strike off a flake – a flake like this. Then from the flake a great deal of working goes into it. So we have here on this tool, first of all, the point of percussion, which is called the bulb of percussion, and then we have areas of re-touch on the tool where people have applied pressure flaking, perhaps with a bone to remove these tiny flakes to make a nice, sharp knife. And they're called Juan knives.

Here's another example of a larger knife. It's darker in colour because the quartzite has actually been treated by heat to make it harder and more durable for cutting.

So Kenniff Cave is a very important site because it provides not only a clue as to early Aboriginal occupation but also provides a good view and a clear idea of the rich material culture that Aboriginal people had.

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