



Asphaltum

Scientific Name: Bitumen

Biology: Asphalt is a sticky, black, and highly viscous liquid or semi-solid form of petroleum (Islapedia).

Availability: Technically, there's an oil spill every day off the coast of Santa Barbara, as oil seeps naturally from beneath the seafloor and up into the ocean. Asphaltum oil is lighter than seawater, and floats to the surface. Some 20-25 tons of oil float up daily (WHOI).

Applications: The first people to use Asphaltum in the modern day United States were the Indigenous peoples of California. The Chumash, Luiseno, and Tongva collected the substance and treated it to create their own adhesive. This product was used to waterproof baskets, fortify plank canoes, and adhere objects (Islapedia).

Cultural Geography: The use of natural asphaltum for waterproofing and as a general adhesive dates at least to the fifth millennium BC, back to a crop storage basket made by the Indus Valley Civilization (McIntosh).

Citations:

McIntosh, Jane. The Ancient Indus Valley. p. 57

<https://www.islapedia.com/index.php?>

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