✦ IDEA · CHEAT CARD · HISTORY

rai stones

Large stone discs used on Yap as money for big payments, which changed owners by public agreement without being moved.

How it works

1. Yapese crews cut large stone discs on Palau and brought them home by canoe and raft.
2. A rai stone's value came from its size, quality and the danger of bringing it.
3. A rai stone changed owners by public agreement, so even a huge stone could stay put.
4. So the village's shared memory, not the stone's place, recorded who owned each rai stone.

Example

Furness's sunken stone story, Yap, 1903

- A storm forced a crew to cut loose the raft carrying a family's huge rai stone.
- The crew testified that the stone was fine and lost through no fault of the family.

→ For generations Yap counted the family as rich from the stone on the sea floor.

Use it for

- ✓ Seeing that your bank balance is a record that other people must accept
- ✓ Knowing why a frozen account makes its owner poorer without moving any money
- ✓ Remembering that a land register, not the building, proves you own a flat

Watch out

- ✗ Rai stones were kept for big social payments, not for buying everyday food.
- ✗ Famous rai stories come second-hand from foreigners, and retellings changed the details.

Remember Before you count something as yours, ask who keeps the record of it.