

GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS

General Terminology:

Alluvium - soil transported by flowing water.

Archaeology - study of past cultures through the systematic excavation and analysis of material remains.

Artifact - any humanly produced or modified material.

Assemblage - collection of artifacts either from a specific area, related to a specific cultural component, or sharing certain physical attributes.

Datum - fixed zero point used to maintain vertical control in excavation.

Fauna - animal life. Bone and shell are faunal remains often found on archaeological sites.

Feature - non-portable evidence of human activity, such as a hearth, pit, or soil stain.

Floodplain - level or nearly level ground bordering a stream and subject to repeated flooding.

Flora - plant life. Seeds and charcoal are floral remains often found on archaeological sites.

Flotation - method used to separate floral and faunal remains from the soil and other artifacts. A soil sample is immersed in water and the organic remains float to the surface, where they are collected for analysis.

Geoarchaeology - study of archaeological soils and site formation processes.

In situ - position of an artifact or feature as encountered in the soil.

Level - arbitrary depth of soil within a natural stratum.

Loam - soil composed of a mixture of sand, silt, and clay.

Macrobotanical Analysis - study of plant remains for information on past environments and foodways.

Plow zone - layer of soil that has been disturbed by plowing.

Prehistoric - time period before written records; in the Mid-Atlantic region, generally before ca. 1600 AD.

Provenience - vertical and horizontal location in which an artifact or feature was found.

Quarry - locale at which stone, in suitable form for tool manufacture, was extracted.

Radiocarbon Dating - method used to date organic material based on the measured decay of radioactive carbon in an organism (also known as C¹⁴ dating).

Residue Analysis - chemical study of the organic remains adhering to artifacts.

Shovel Test Pit - small test excavation used in archaeological surveys to evaluate artifact density and determine the vertical and horizontal dimensions of sites.

Site - location where archaeological remains are found.

Soil Profile - vertical cut in the soil, revealing the sequence of horizontal layers, or soil stratigraphy.

Sterile Soil - soil that contains no trace of human activity.

Stratigraphy - sequence of geologically or culturally deposited layers, or strata.

Stratum - relatively homogeneous layer visible in the soil profile, distinct from the layers directly above or below.

Test Unit - area of standard size (e.g. 1m x 1m square) in which soils are excavated systematically by natural strata and/or arbitrary levels. A group of contiguous test units is referred to as an excavation block.

Prehistoric Artifact Terminology:

Andesite - fine-grained, often porphyritic, volcanic rock that is similar to rhyolite, but contains less silica.

Anvil - relatively flat stone, often pitted, used to support the core in bipolar stone tool manufacture. The anvil surface alternately may have served in the processing of foods such as nuts.

Argillite - mildly metamorphosed siliceous rock composed of compact clay or silt-sized particles.

Basalt - fine-grained, dark-colored, volcanic rock rich in ferromagnesian minerals.

Biface - flaked stone which has been worked on both faces. A biface may have been used as a cutting, scraping, or chopping tool or may represent a tool that was in the process of being manufactured.

Bipolar Percussion - method of tool production in which the core is rested on an anvil and struck from above, resulting in the splitting or shattering of the core. Bipolar percussion produces blocky, often wedge-shaped debitage with crushed proximal and/or distal ends.

Blade - thin, parallel-sided flake that is at least twice as long as it is wide.

Bulb of Force - small swelling on the ventral surface at the proximal end of a flake, resulting from the conchoidal fracture of the stone core. The bulb is a characteristic of human alteration of stone, and therefore important in the identification of lithic artifacts.

Celt - ungrooved, wedge-shaped, ground and often polished stone tool, used as an ax or adze.

Chalcedony - transparent or translucent, microcrystalline quartz that has a compact fibrous structure and waxy luster.

Chert - compact, opaque to slightly translucent, microcrystalline silica rock. Iron-rich cherts are referred to as jasper.

Chip - form of debitage, sometimes referred to as shatter, that does not possess flake attributes such as a bulb of force or striking platform.

Core - stone which serves as the parent material or nucleus from which flakes are removed by the application of controlled force.

Cortex - outer weathered surface of stone, usually exhibiting a different color and texture from the interior material. The presence of cortex on a lithic artifact is usually an indicator of an early stage of manufacture.

Debitage - residual products of stone tool manufacture, including cores, flakes, and chips.

Distal - portion of the flake farthest from the striking platform; or, the pointed end of a biface.

Dorsal - outer surface of a flake. The dorsal surface exhibits the remnant flake scars of prior flake removals and/or cortex.

- Fire-Cracked Rock** - stone which has been exposed to extreme heat, producing spalling, cracking and/or reddening of its interior and exterior surfaces.
- Flake** - form of lithic debitage resulting from the manufacture of stone tools, or struck from a core for use as an expedient tool. Flakes are formed by either a controlled act of pressure, or a striking action of percussion. They are distinguished from natural spalls by the presence of attributes such as a striking platform and bulb of force.
- Flintknapping** - stone tool manufacture, consisting of a process of reduction in which the knapper removes flakes from a stone in a sequential manner to form a tool.
- Haft** - handle or shaft, usually made of bone or wood. Ethnographic studies and residue analyses indicate that hafting was attached to stone tools with vegetal cordage or sinew, often using glues derived from horn or bone.
- Hafting Element** - proximal end of a projectile point or other stone tool fashioned to receive a haft. The hafting element was often ground to reduce abrasion on cordage.
- Hammerstone** - tough, usually round or ovoid stone exhibiting worn or pitted surface areas from use as a percussor in the production of stone tools.
- Ironstone** - sedimentary rock of iron-cemented sand, sometimes referred to as ferruginous quartzite.
- Jasper** - ferruginous chert, whose usual brownish red color is imparted by quantities of limonite and goethite. Iron Hill Jasper is chlorite rich, often exhibits hydrous chalcedonic banding, and is typically yellow-brown in color, but ranges from yellow to black.
- Lateral** - marginal portion of a flake or tool, on either side of the longitudinal axis.
- Lithic** - relating to or made of stone.
- Medial** - central portion of a flake or tool, between the proximal and distal ends.
- Point** - thin, symmetrical tool form, usually bifacially flaked, having one end pointed and the other modified for hafting. Regularities in morphological design, or style, are recognized, and comparisons with radiocarbon dated materials provide an important tool for chronological analysis. This term includes tools that may have been used as spear points, arrow points, or knives.
- Potlid** - thin, round fragment of stone which has spalled off the main body due to extreme change in temperature.
- Proximal** - portion of a flake retaining the striking platform and bulb of force; or, the basal portion of a biface.
- Quartz** - extremely hard, transparent or translucent mineral of silicon dioxide, having a vitreous luster and occurring in both crystal and massive form.
- Quartzite** - tough rock of welded, metamorphosed sandstone (metaquartzite), or sedimentary sandstone cemented by silica (orthoquartzite).
- Retouched Flake** - flake with a trimmed or sharpened edge.
- Rhyolite** - fine-grained, highly siliceous, usually porphyritic volcanic rock, generally light gray in color and often banded.
- Sandstone** - common sedimentary rock composed of concreted sand grains.
- Schist** - medium-grade, foliated metamorphic rock, usually containing mica.
- Scraper** - bifacially or unifacially worked tool with a steep-angled working edge used for scraping various materials, including fleshy material from hides. Scrapers are described

as end scrapers or side scrapers, depending on whether the working edge is found on the distal or lateral margin of the tool.

Serrated - having a saw-like edge with regular notched indentations.

Sherd - fragment of broken pottery.

Slate - low-grade metamorphosed shale or mudstone that cleaves into thin sheets due to the parallel alignment of minerals.

Steatite - soft, chemically weathered volcanic rock, usually a greenish grey color, composed primarily of talc and serpentine. Steatite is also known as soapstone due to its soapy feel, and was used to carve into bowls and other implements.

Stem - projection at the proximal end of certain lithic points, shaped to attached the tool to a haft.

Striking Platform - stone surface area which receives the force that detaches a flake from a core. The remnant platform is found on the proximal end of the flake, and can be described as bifacial, faceted, simple, or cortical.

Temper - material added to clay in the manufacture of pottery to prevent cracking and shrinking during firing and use. In the Mid-Atlantic region, common tempering materials included crushed steatite, quartz, shell, and sand.

Uniface - flaked stone tool which has been worked on only one surface. A uniface may have been used as a tool, such as a scraper, or represent a tool in the process of manufacture.

Utilized Flake - flake with a dulled or damaged edge, consistent with having been used as a tool.

Ventral - inner surface of a flake. The bulb of force is visible on the ventral surface of a flake.

Historical Artifact Terminology:

American Stoneware - highly fired ceramic with a gray, vitrified body, often salt-glazed and painted with a cobalt blue decoration. Though first produced in the early 18th century, it was popular as a utilitarian ware after the turn of the nineteenth century.

Annular Decoration - concentric bands of colored slip applied by lathe to ceramics before glazing, popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Automatic Machine-Made Glass - mechanical technique of glass manufacture introduced in the early twentieth century.

Ballclay - fine white clay used for making tobacco pipes and marbles.

Blown-in-mold - process of glass container manufacture in which glass was forced by means of air pressure from a blowpipe into a mold. This method was commonly used the advent of machine-molded glass in the early twentieth century.

Clinker - burned or partially burned pieces of coal or coal impurities.

Coarse Earthenware - ceramic with a soft, non-vitreous paste fired at 1000-1900°F. Coarse wares, whether red or buff bodied, usually were used in food preparation and storage.

Creamware - refined earthenware with a buff body and clear lead glaze producing a cream colored surface. Creamware was originally manufactured in England in the mid-eighteenth century, and continued to be made into the nineteenth century.

Cut Nail - nail cut from sheet iron, first produced in the late eighteenth century, that gradually replaced the hand wrought nail.

- Embossed** - having letters, numbers or designs molded in relief.
- Flow Blue** - form of transfer printing in which an excessive amount of ink was employed and allowed to bleed beneath the glaze.
- Ironstone** - hard, refined earthenware with a white body under a clear glaze, introduced in the early nineteenth century and still manufactured today.
- Pearlware** - refined earthenware containing a small amount of cobalt in the glaze, giving the ware a slightly blue-tinted color. Pearlware was made from the 1770s to the 1830s.
- Porcelain** - high-fired, vitreous ceramic that is translucent in strong light. Chinese porcelain is found on colonial sites from the mid-sixteenth century onward, however European porcelain was not produced until the mid-eighteenth century.
- Redware** - red bodied earthenware.
- Refined Earthenware** - ceramic with a soft, non-vitreous body fired between 1400-1900°F. Refined earthenwares are used commonly as tableware.
- Rockingham/Bennington** - refined earthenware with a mottled brown glaze, first made in England during the late eighteenth century and manufactured in North America from the 1840s into the twentieth century.
- Slip** - mixture of fine clay and water used in decoration and luting.
- Solarized** - feature of certain late nineteenth and early twentieth century glass in which manganese was added to enhance clarity; exposure to ultraviolet rays in sunlight tints the glass a distinctive amethyst color.
- Stoneware** - vitreous, opaque ceramic fired at 2100-2400°F.
- Transfer Print** - design from an inked copper engraving which is transferred to a ceramic surface. This technique for mass production was first used in the 1750s and continues today.
- Whiteware** - refined earthenware with a white body and clear glaze, introduced in the 1820s and still produced today.
- Yellow-glazed Earthenware** - white bodied earthenware with a bright yellow lead glaze made in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.
- Yellow Ware** - buff-yellow bodied refined earthenware with a clear glaze, first produced in the late 1820s and manufactured into the twentieth century.