

1969 NSF FLINTKNAPPING SESSION  
SHOSHONE FALLS, IDAHO

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During the month of July and early August, 1969, I participated in a flintworking session with Don Crabtree which was funded by the National Science Foundation. These brief notes are intended to record my activities and impressions of the session.

In general, the session developed with each of the participants learning the fundamentals of lithic technology as well as a variety of lithic techniques. With this base, the participants then specialized in an area of major interest to them. Since I intend to work in the Arctic and sub-Arctic, I was particularly interested in the manufacture of cores and blades as they are widespread phenomena in that area.

Under Crabtree's able direction, I initially learned the basic techniques for the removal of blades from cores. Among these were pressure by hand tools and chest crutch, indirect percussion involving a punch, and direct percussion using a variety of hammers. After familiarizing myself with the various basic techniques and developing a measure of control, I then worked on the replication of various archaeologically attested core types. Among these were Corbiac cores from France, Campus, Tuktuk; Anangula cores from Alaska; Capsian cores from Northern Africa; Shiritaki cores from Japan and cores from the Meso-American area.

In addition to my experimentation and learning of different lithic techniques, I also used different materials to familiarize myself with how they act when made into tools. Among these were varieties of obsidian from Idaho, Oregon, Mexico, and Iceland; chert, rhyolite and siltstone from Idaho and Nevada; flint from Indiana, England, and France, as well as a variety of other types of natural and artificial material. In addition, the participants experimented with the identification, treatment, and use of heat-treated material.

From my point of view, the principal value of the session lies in the fact that it provided an empirical base for the interpretation and reconstruction of archaeological material. Since Crabtree directed our attention to the products of our work as well as the actual process of producing lithic tools, each of us is better equipped to examine an archaeological collection and reconstruct the actions that produced it. In my case, where I emphasized core and blade technology, I now have

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a better sense of what constitutes a core and blade technology, a sense of the variation possible in a particular type, and an understanding of what are the significant attributes on cores. In examining archaeological material, I feel I am better equipped to classify artifacts and waste material, and have some idea of what the makers intended or desired. The latter notion, that of determining what the makers of the artifacts in a particular collection intended or desired, has a particular importance for archaeologists. Many, if not most, of the artifacts in a collection are waste, rejects, preforms, broken or exhausted artifacts. The study of lithic technology enables the identification of these artifacts as well as a reconstruction of the forms desired by the culture that produced an assemblage.

Another point that might be briefly mentioned is that the study of lithic technology allows the separation of production from the function of a particular artifact. Both the production and the use of a tool leaves distinctive marks on it. A knowledge of the production of a particular artifact allows the analyst to recognize functional wear and in this sense, technology is a direct aid to functional studies. During the session some of our activities were directed toward the use of the tools we produced and the evidences of that use.

While my main emphasis in learning during the session was directed toward the study of cores and blades, I also engaged in other aspects of lithic technology, including pressure and percussion work. Again, a number of techniques were learned and the products studied for the identification of a given technique in an archaeological collection.

Another more general, but equally educational, aspect of the session was the opportunity to exchange ideas and views with the other participants. Since we were all interested in different areas, the exchange of information and different viewpoints was particularly valuable. We were also particularly fortunate in having Mr. Gene Titmus, a local flintknapper, spend several days with us. Particularly skilled in his work, Titmus was able to demonstrate different techniques to us and afforded the opportunity to study individual variation in certain lithic techniques.

Finally, I would like to mention that anything the participants learned in the session was directly due to Don Crabtree. As a teacher and a student of lithic technology, he provided a model for all of us to follow in future work.

This brief outline of my activities at the flintknapping session by no means covers all of my work there nor the new information I gained. I am presently engaged in writing up my technical notes in detail and these should provide me with a foundation for further work and experimentation in lithic technology as well as an empirical base in my future activities as an archaeologist.

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