

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY



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Dr. Don Crabtree  
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Dear Don:

One of my students is tackling the complicated problem of trying to distinguish naturefacts from artifacts. He will be using collections from three different sites as a basis for experimentation. At one site, Caribou Island in eastern Alberta, both quartzite artifacts and glacial ice crushed quartzite pebbles are found together in an early post-glacial beach. The second site, Timlin in upstate New York, has yielded a unifacial chert flake industry in the high terrace deposits of a small stream. The New York State archaeologist has hypothesized that the flakes could have been fabricated by the stream or within the glacial ice. François Bordes thought that it was not possible for natural action to make so many good flakes, but nevertheless we need references to descriptions of flakes made by rivers and glaciers. We are returning to Timlin this summer because we got an apparently associated charcoal date of 16,000 BP.

The third site, near Flagstaff, Arizona, is at the base of a talus composed of limestone, chert and basalt. Here the question is whether the chert flakes, at least one of which is very thin, could have been flaked by rolling down the slope.

I wish you could see the collections and give your opinion. Barring that, do you know of any relevant sources on natural flaking that might help us? Also, do you have any suggestions about setting up experiments? So far archaeologists and most geologists simply say that a flake "might have been made by nature" but no one has really tackled the problem systematically. In my opinion it is not the proper scientific approach to simply cast doubt upon a site (like Calico) by saying they all might be naturefacts without suggesting means for testing such an hypothesis.

We had quite a mild winter and now an unusually early spring, so I'm getting the urge to get into the field, but we must wait until late June when Clyde finishes his last high school exams. François sent his regrets that he could not visit you but the plane connections from here and Calgary were much too complicated. He was out of practice knapping and tired easily, but nevertheless gave an interesting talk on his recent work in western Australia.

All our best,

Alan L. Bryan, Professor

ALB/lmo

*Ge. 2.3.34*