

Search

Think

Discover

Ponder

Unearth

Review

Study

Debate

Observe

Question

Learn

Projectile Points



Projectile points are often “diagnostic” for archaeologists, and when found on a site they contribute a lot of information about what happened there, especially when photographed and recorded in the context of the “assemblage,” or the set of all artifacts and cultural and structural remains on a site.

Each projectile point can help identify a time period, and tell us whether the site is about 100, 1000, or 11,000 years old. Some sites were occupied over and over again for hundreds or thousands of years, while other sites were used briefly and then abandoned.

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY EASTERN PREHISTORIC MUSEUM

155 East Main Street - Price, Utah
800-817-9949
museum.ceu.edu

The projectile points on each site help us figure this out. They also tell us the culture that made the point and produced the site, so they help us figure out the overall distribution of Clovis people, Folsom people, Archaic cultures (think about Barrier Canyon-Style rock art) or Formative cultures (Fremont vs. Hitesatsinom, or “Anasazi”).

When found on a site, each projectile point can also be analyzed to help determine where men obtained raw materials for tools during that time period and culture, whether tools were “curated,” or kept for a long time vs. quickly discarded and replaced with new tools, the types of activities and hunting techniques that men were engaged in, and overall patterns of land use, migration and exchange. Sometimes the locations of points within a site can also help us determine the locations of different areas of men’s activities. When these points are taken from a site, much of the information about what men were doing is also removed, and lost forever.

Once these artifacts have been removed from their original location, all the associated information about the site is gone. Did it come from a hunting camp? A prehistoric house? An area where the hunted animal was dressed out and the meat cut into strips to dry before being transported back to a nearby cave, family group or farming village? Was it intentionally discarded in a midden, or communal trash heap near the house? Or was it lost during the hunt when the foreshaft fell out of the animal? We will never know the context in which each of these was used.

The other sad truth about these artifacts is that since

they have been removed from the site where they were deposited by ancient people, much of the information about the site itself is also lost.

Even on private lands, it is inappropriate and unethical to treat artifacts and the remains of people, whether they are from your own culture or Native American, as objects to be harvested for curiosity, pleasure or personal gain. These artifacts are part of the wonderful, sacred legacy of eastern Utah, and part of the cultural heritage of all people. Treat them with respect! Step lightly, and try not to disturb the locations of the artifacts. Don’t walk on ancient walls or touch ancient artwork. Do take photographs, GPS, plot the location on a map, and write down other information you observe about the site. Then contact someone about it, and perhaps you can help record the site. You can contact our archaeologist, or the owner of land where the artifacts were found.

Note: even on private land it is always illegal and wrong to disturb human remains or the objects with them. You must contact law enforcement if you encounter human remains on any land. It is a felony to not do so.

