

Native American Heritage Commission

Archaeological Terms Glossary

A (#A) | B (#B) | C (#C) | D (#D) | E (#E) | F (#F) | G | H (#H) | I (#I) | J
| K | L (#L) | M (#M) | N | O | P (#P) | Q | R | S (#S) | T (#T) | U (#U) | V
| W | X | Y | Z

A

Accession, Accession number

The number assigned to artifacts or data for permanent storage and curation in a collections facility.

Alluvium

Sediment (gravel, sand, silt, etc.) deposited by a stream

Anticipated Effects

Effects that would be created by development of a proposed project to culturally sensitive areas.

Archaeological Site

The location of past focused human activities, defined in close proximity of continuous distribution of artifacts.

Archaeologically

An area where the occurrence of archaeological material is predicted, often on the sensitive basis of settlement/subsistence pattern and environmental data

Area of Direct Impact – AKA:ADI

The area that would be impacted by the proposed development.

Area of Potential Effects

The geographic area or areas within which an undertaking may cause changes in APE the character or use of historic properties, if any such properties exist.

Artifact

An object (tool or ornament) showing human workmanship or modification.

Assemblage

The complete inventory of artifacts from a single, defined archaeological unit (such as a stratum or component)

Associated Funerary

Those objects which, as a part of the death rite or ceremony of a culture, are objects reasonably believed to have been placed with the individual human remains at the time of death or later

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B

Backdirt

The soils excavated from test pits, typically used to refill them once excavations are terminated.

Bedrock Milling Station

An outcrop of bedrock containing one or more mortar cups, milling slicks (bedrock metates"), or other features related to food grinding or crushing.

Bedrock Mortar – AKA:BRM

A mortar cup in a bedrock outcrop

Biface

A tool that has been worked on both sides

Burial

Human remains disposed of by interment burials may be simple (containing the remains of one person) or complex (containing the remains of two or more individual).

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C

Carbon-14 Dating

A method for determining the age of organic material.

Chert

Crypto-Crystalline Silicate. A flint like rock; commonly selected as a raw material for flaked-stone tools.

Chipping, Knapping

Making stone tools by controlled flaking, either by percussion as in using hammerstone, or by exerting pressure on the stone edge with a pointed antler tool.

Complete Survey

To define the extent of a site both surface and subsurface.

Components – AKA:Constituents

The elements of a site, all spatially related features of a site.

Consulting Process

The process where the lead agency provides information regarding development to the various agencies for consultation.

Core

A cobble or small rock from which flakes or blades are removed; the core may be used as a tool as well as a source of flakes.

Cremation

Disposal of the dead by burning; a feature consisting of ash and small pieces of burned human bones and teeth.

Cultural Resources

Relates only to remains and sites associated with human activity or activities or elements or areas of natural landscape which traditional cultural significance.

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D

Data Recovery

The act of excavating with the intent of answering specific research questions.

Datum – AKA:Hub

A stationary control point from which all other features or artifacts are mapped from.

Debitage – AKA:flaked stone

Lithic refuse or debris produced during flaked-stone tool manufacture.

Depression

A large or small circular or rectangular area where cultural activity took place. (i.e. depressed area of a roundhouse or longhouse)

Direct Impacts

Impacts that would directly effect a site. (i.e. a site would have a direct impact if a development proceeds adjacent to a site)

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E

Ethnography

The study of a culture to obtain information on past and present life ways.

Excavation

A systematic process of digging archaeological sites, removing the soil and observing the provenience and context of the finds (both cultural and noncultural) contained within, and recording them in a three-dimensional way.

Extended Phase I Survey

A Phase I survey which the archaeologist excavates a few shovel test pits to determine whether a subsurface deposit is present; however, may be done during the Phase I Survey

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F

Feature

A large, complex artifact or part of a site such as a hearth, cairn, housepit, rock alignment or activity area

Fire-Cracked Rocks

Burned rocks, typically fractured during intense heating in a firehearth or remnants of rocks associated with cooking. Fairly common to prehistoric archaeological sites.

Firehearth

Typically a prehistoric feature containing ash, charcoal, burned rocks and/or other evidence of a fire kindled by people.

Flake

A thin, flattened piece or chip of stone intentionally removed from the core rock by chipping with either a stone or bone hammer.

Flaked Stone

see [Debitage \(#Debitage\)](#)

Flexed burial

A human interment in the fetal position, that is, with the legs and arms bent and drawn towards the ribs.

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H

House

Compacted earth, post molds, hearths, and/or other associated features representing the floor of a structure.

Housepit

A depression of any shape representing the former location of a partly subsurface (semisubterranean) structure.

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I

In situ

In place; applied to archaeological remains found in their original, undisturbed location or position.

Indirect Impacts

Impacts that would not directly effect a site. (i.e. a site would have indirect impacts if a subdivision development would create by the influx of people in the area)

Integrity

Classification of a site regarding the degree of disturbance.

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L

Lithic

Of or pertaining to a stone (obsidian, chert, basalt, etc.), as in lithic artifacts.

Lithic Scatter

see [Debitage \(#Debitage\)](#)

Loctus, Loci (plural)

A concentration of site elements.

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M

Mano

a loaf-shaped handstone used for grinding seeds, pigments, and so forth, metate or millingstone.

Metate

A portable stone slab upon which seeds and other grains are milled with a mano (worked with a push-pull motion).

Midden

Soil that is dark and has a greasy feel. A deposit marking a former habitation site and containing such materials as discarded artifacts, bone and shell, food refuse, charcoal, ash, rock, human remains structural remnants, and other cultural leavings.

Millingstone

A roughly shaped stone slab upon seed and other plants products are ground with the aid of a mano. The milling basin of the slab may be ovoid to round, depending on the rotary motion of the handstone.

Mitigation

Actions taken to preserve or reduce impact to a site.

Mitigation Process

The consulting and review process of direct and indirect impacts to sites to obtain specific results.

Mortar

A stone or wooden bowl-like artifact in which seeds, berries, meat, and other products are ground or pulverized with a pestle. Mortars occur in bedrock outcrops and as portable items.

Multi-Component Site

A site with one or more feature.

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P

Pestle

An elongate, often cylindrical stone used to pulverize food products and other cultural products in a mortar.

Phase I

Generally consists of a records search, a pedestrian field survey, and a written report.

Phase 11

The purpose of this phase is to determine whether a cultural resource is significant" as outlined in Appendix J of CEQA. Usually will include test excavation pits. The goal of this is to determination of the site boundaries; an assessment of the site's integrity; evaluation of the site's importance or significance through a study of it's features and artifacts.

Phase 11I

Total data recovery.

Principal Investigator, AKA:PI

The designated archaeologist who oversees and is responsible for all aspects of archaeological investigation.

Project Proponent

The property owner/developer who is sponsoring the project.

Projectile point

A sharp tip (usually stone) affixed to the business end of a spear, lance, dart, or arrow.

Provenience

The origin or source of an object.

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S

Sacred Objects

Ceremonial objects which are used by traditional Native American religious leaders for the practice of traditional Native American religions.

Site

The location of past cultural activity; a defined space with more or less continuous archaeological evidence.

Spatial

Artifacts and features in close proximity that infer a relationship in time.

Standard Test Unit

A defined unit of measure for the purpose of recovering archaeological material.

Sterile Soil

The layer of soil that contains no presence of cultural material.

Stratum

A layer of material deposited by cultural or geological processes.

Surface Survey

A reconnaissance or on-foot examination of an area to determine its archaeological potential, and usually, to formally locate and record archaeological sites.

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T

Temporal

Groups of items (artifacts, features) that can be traced to a given point in time.

Trait

Any definable element or feature of culture suitable for comparative purposes.

Transect

A survey is often conducted by people walking a study area which has been mentally divided into subareas, in order to systematically locate artifacts exposed on the ground; a series of transects, or passes, are walked by one or more persons in a parallel fashion to inventory an area.

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U

Uniface

A tool that has been worked only on one side.

Unit

A defined area of excavation.

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