

An Unusual Fluted Point from Rockingham County, Virginia

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Among the 1000-plus fluted points recorded in the Virginia Fluted Point Survey initiated by Ben C. McCary in September 1947, there are a few that are of a shape and with fluting unlike the majority. One example of this is Virginia Fluted Point Survey #156 (Figures 1, 2, and 3), which appeared in McCary's third survey report in the September 1949 Archeological Society of Virginia *Quarterly Bulletin* 4(1). This point is different in several ways from the classic Clovis type found in Virginia (Figures 2 and 4).

Survey point #156 is reported to have been found in Rockingham County, Virginia by a Mr. Rexrode in the late 1930s or early 1940s on his farm near the town of Port Republic in the Shenandoah Valley. Mr. Rexrode later gave the point to a local artifact collector, Mr. H. L. Gibson, of Waynesboro, Virginia. Mr. Gibson had searched for artifacts on Mr. Rexrode's farm for several years and had made a collection from the site.

Some years later, Mr. Gibson allowed Mr. W. H. Plumb of Waynesboro to acquire the collection, and Mr. Plumb reported the fluted point to Ben McCary for his survey in 1949. Mr. Plumb then allowed the writer to acquire the point in October 1970, and he provided additional information that he had been given by Mr. Gibson concerning the location of discovery of the point by Mr. Rexrode at his farm on a terrace above South River.

The point is reanalyzed here and with supplemental information 70 years after McCary's initial analysis. This analysis by McAvoy was accomplished using modern measuring instruments and with more recent archaeological and geological information not available to McCary at the time.

In shape, Point #156 (Figure 2) is generally parallel to convex sided but there is an asymmetry to the blade tip apparently from resharpening. The point also shows a slight flare at the base, but one side of the point has some old damage in the basal area, and on this side the flare is not preserved.

This point has a deep, 6-7 mm sub-rounded to somewhat v-shaped basal concavity. This is in contrast to the typical Virginia Clovis point, which has a shallow, rounded basal concavity generally less than 4 mm in depth. However, the most unusual characteristic of Point #156 is the method of fluting resulting in parallel ribbon-like flute scars on both faces.

As shown in Figure 5, the obverse face of the point shows the remnants of at least five parallel flute scars; the reverse face shows two parallel flute scars. All flute scars appear to be relatively narrow as drawn, and all appear to have been produced by use of a punch or some other method of indirect percussion or instrument assisted pressure.

The flutes were likely drawn from multiple, individually isolated platforms at the base. The fluting of point #156 while unlike that of most Virginia Clovis points, which typically have single, wide flute scars on both faces and often small lateral flakes to the edges of the flutes, seems similar to the fluting observed on several points (Figure 6) reported from the far Northwest by

Heather L. Smith of Eastern New Mexico University and Ted Goebel of the CSFA at Texas A&M (Heather L. Smith & Ted Goebel. Origins and spread of fluted-point technology in the Canadian Ice-Free Corridor and eastern Baringia. PNAS, published online April 2, 2018; doi: 10.1073/pnas.1800312115).

Also, unlike many of the fluted points in the Virginia survey that show typical Clovis overshot or “across-face” flaking, point #156 shows flake scars meeting at the center of the blade although the point has a flat (Figure 3) and not a rhombus-shaped, or medial ridged, cross section.

This point is also unusual in that the basal edges are only lightly abraded compared to the heavily abraded edges observed on most Virginia Clovis points. In contrast, the distal blade edges of point #156 are worn with numerous small nicks and damaged areas as if the point was subjected to heavy use-wear as a hafted knife.

The point may have been discarded after a resharpening cycle due to a thick spot or stack at the tip on the obverse face (Figure 3), which was caused by flaws in the stone. The material of the point, Licking Creek black chert (see below), is known from local sources in Rockingham County, Virginia, and has crack-like bedding-plane flaws that often resulted in flakes hinging at the flaws rather than carrying across artifact surfaces.

Measurements and other Information related to VFPS #156 from McCary (1949) and as Reinterpreted and Supplemented by McAvoy (2019):

- 1) Length (McCary): 77 mm; length (McAvoy): 77.7 mm.
- 2) Width (McCary): 28 mm; width (McAvoy): 29.2 mm
- 3) Maximum thickness (McCary): 7 mm; maximum thickness (McAvoy): 9.3 mm at one localized high spot or stack near the tip caused by flaws in the stone.
- 4) Average thickness (McAvoy only): 7.7 mm based upon an average of eight measurements.
- 5) Length of fluting on obverse (McCary): 38 mm; length of fluting on obverse (McAvoy): flute scar 1, 36 mm; flute scar 2, 36 mm; flute scar 3, 30 mm; flute scar 4, 30 mm; flute scar 5, 22 mm. All as measured back to the edge of the basal concavity directly behind the flute scar, not to the extreme basal end of the point.
- 6) Width of flute scars on the obverse (McAvoy only): flute scar 1, 6 mm; flute scar 2, 7 mm; flute scar 3, 7 mm; flute scar 4, 6.5 mm; flute scar 5, 7 mm.
- 7) Length of fluting on the reverse (McCary): 28 mm; length of fluting on the reverse (McAvoy): flute scar 6, 24 mm; flute scar 7, 29 mm. Both as measured back to the edge of the basal concavity directly behind the flute scar, not to the extreme basal end of the point.
- 8) Width of flute scars on the reverse (McAvoy only): flute scar 6, 8 mm; flute scar 7, 9-10 mm.
- 9) Flaking (McCary only): “good.”
- 10) Number of flakes per cm (McCary only): 5.

- 11) Basal concavity (McCary): “medium concave;” basal concavity (McAvoy): estimated at 6 to 7 mm, one of the ears is damaged and this estimate is based upon a projected length and symmetry of the damaged ear equal to that of the undamaged ear.
- 12) Material (McCary): chert; material (McAvoy): Licking Creek Formation black chert, known in Rockingham County, Virginia. Licking Creek formation chert is part of the Devonian-age Helderberg Limestone. The Licking Creek material is composed of closely spaced layers of black chert with sandy-textured impurities often causing fracture along thin bedding planes. This material, in large pieces, is very difficult to knap without producing hinge fractures or stacks. (Virginia Department of Historic Resources web site, Archaeology Section, lithic materials images and descriptions - Augusta and Rockingham County cherts).
- 13) Site type (McCary): “Indian” as compared to a pure Paleoindian site; site type (McAvoy, based upon a visit in 1970 to the site location as provided by Mr. W. H. Plumb): the site was found to be multicomponent with Paleoindian, Archaic, and Woodland period artifacts found across a wide river terrace.
- 14) Location (McCary): Rexrode Farm near Port Republic near the Shenandoah River in Rockingham County, Virginia; location (McAvoy, based upon more detailed information received from Mr. W. H. Plumb in 1970): Rexrode Farm in Rockingham County, Virginia in the Shenandoah Valley near Port Republic on the south bank of the South River near the confluence with North River forming the South Fork of the Shenandoah River.

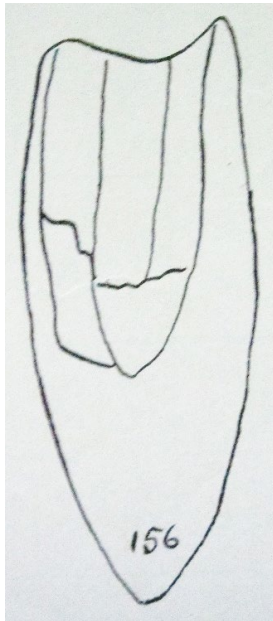


Figure 1. McCary's 1949 sketch of the Rockingham County Fluted point from the Rexrode Farm, VFPS #156, found in the late 1930s or early 1940s in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia.



Figure 2. Left, Photograph of the obverse face of the Rexrode Farm point, #156, from Rockingham County, Virginia; and right, photograph of a classic Clovis point of gray-green fine grain metarhyolite from Buckingham County in the Virginia Piedmont, found on Bear Garden Creek on a terrace about one mile south of the James River near New Canton in 1927, and recorded in the Virginia Fluted Point Survey (VFPS) as #565. Scales are in cm. (Photographs by J. M. McAvoy)



Figure 3. Edge view, tip right, reverse face on top, of the Rockingham County, Virginia Fluted point, VFPS #156, in Figure 2. The high spot or "stack" is visible on the underside near the tip. (Photograph by J. M. McAvoy)



Figure 4. Edge view, tip left, of the Buckingham County, Virginia classic Clovis point, VFPS # 565, in Figure 2. (Photograph by J. M. McAvoy)

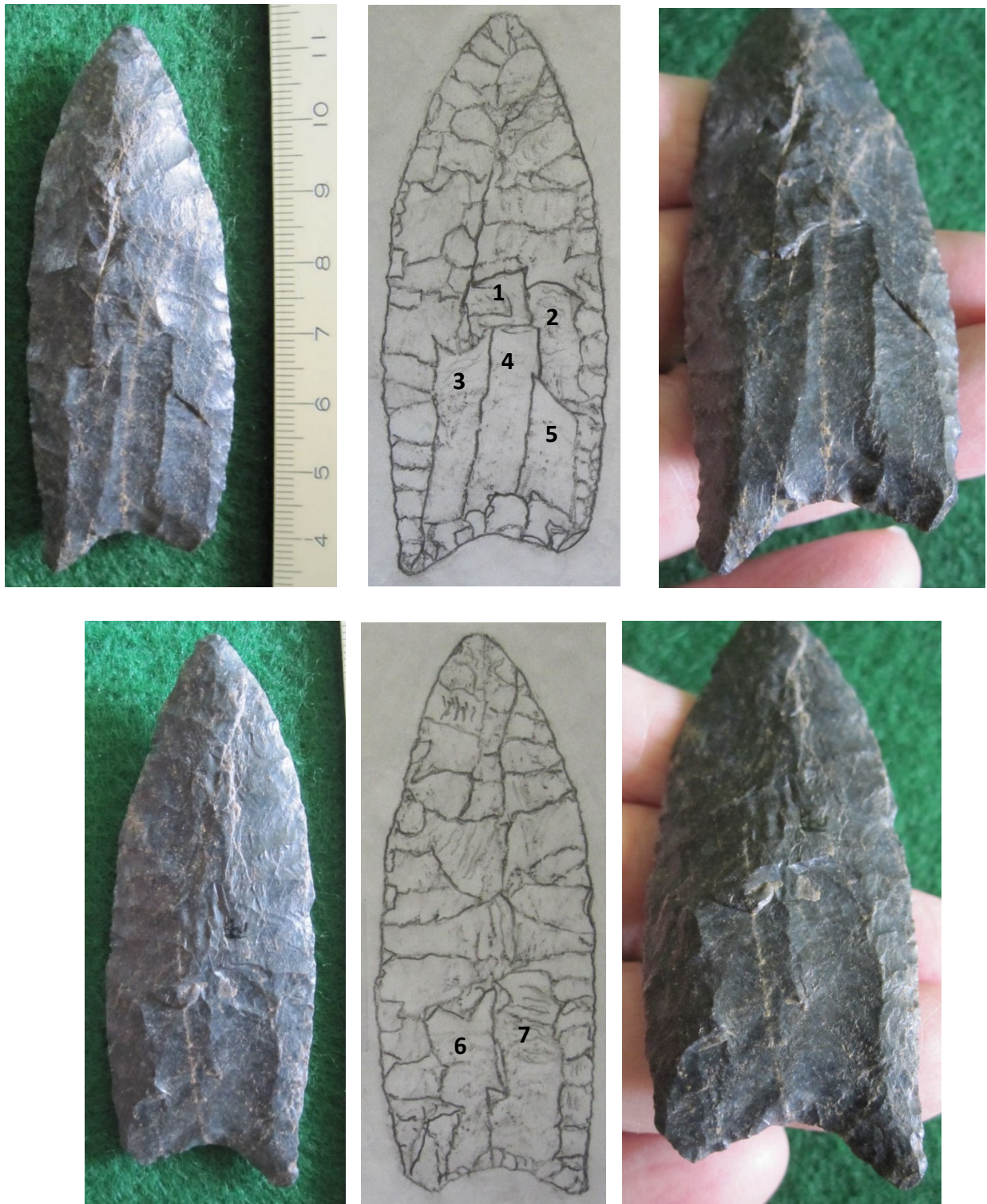


Figure 5. The Rockingham County, Virginia Port Republic fluted point, VFPS #156; top, obverse, bottom, reverse. Shown for both faces are full-face images, sheet paper rubbings (drawings), and angled basal images highlighting flute scars. Numbers on rubbings indicate the apparent order of removal of individual flutes in the manufacturing process, obverse first then reverse. Upper left scale (for all images) is in cm. (Photographs and drawings by J. M. McAvoy)

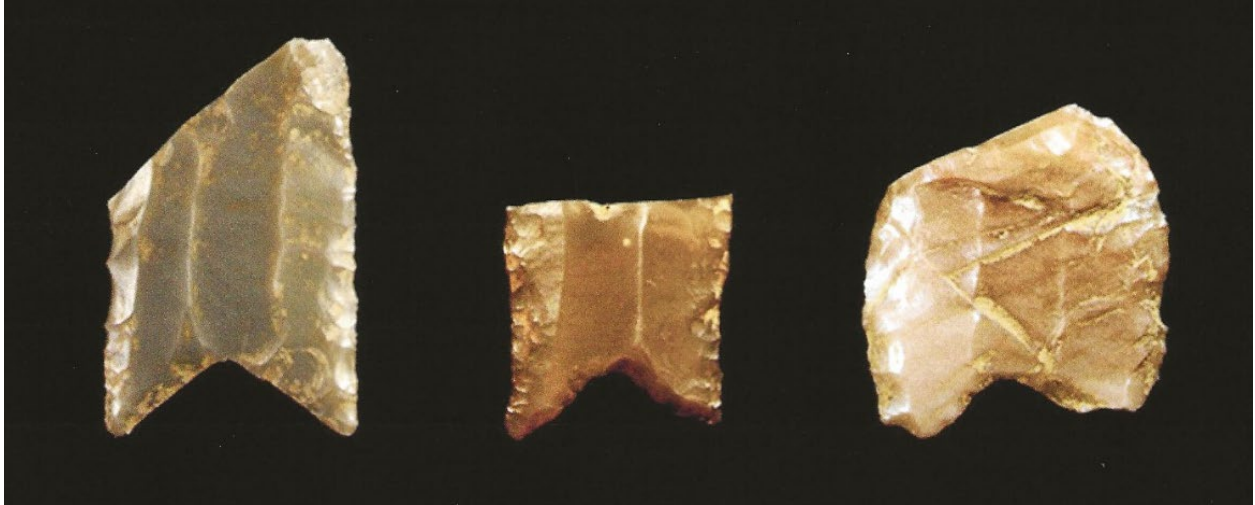


Figure 6. Fluted points from the northern fluted complex as reported by Heather L. Smith & Ted Goebel in *Origins and spread of fluted-point technology in the Canadian Ice-Free Corridor and eastern Beringia*, PNAS. (Photograph by Heather L. Smith)