

# Cultural Resources Vocabulary

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## **Absolute Dating**

Determining the age of an object or feature on a specific time scale.

## **Alluvium**

Sand or clay deposits left by flooding.

## **Anthropology**

The study of humans, past and present. In the United States, the study of Anthropology is divided into four subfields (Sociocultural Anthropology, Biological or Physical Anthropology, Archaeology, and Linguistic Anthropology).

## **Archaeological Site**

A place where human activity occurred and material remains were deposited.

## **Archaeologist**

An Anthropologist (social scientist) who studies the material remains of past human activity.

## **Archaeology**

The scientific study of past human cultures by analyzing the material remains (sites and artifacts) that people left behind.

## **Artifact**

Any object made, modified, or used by people.

## **Atlatl**

A device used to achieve greater leverage and velocity for throwing a spear or dart. Atlatls typically consist of a board with a hook at the end to hold the spear or dart in place until released.

## **Balk**

A column of dirt left unexcavated under stakes in a grid.

## **Bastion**

A projecting part of a fortification built at an angle to the line of a wall. Allows for defensive fire in several directions.

## **Bioturbation**

The process through which living organisms, both plant and animal, move the soil.

## **Chert**

A dense silica rock used to manufacture stone tools such as projectile points.

## **Chiefdoms**

A society in which families are ranked according to how closely they are related to the ruling family.

## **Chronology**

The arrangement of events or artifacts in the order of their occurrence in time.

## **Context**

The relationship of artifacts and other cultural remains to each other and the situation in which they are found.

## **Contour Line**

A line on a map joining points of equal height above or below sea level (see Topographic map).

## **Cultural Heritage**

A tradition of intangible attributes (i.e., language, origin stories, and rites of passage), artifacts, structures, and places of importance associated with a group of people that are preserved and passed from one generation to the next; defines a group's identity.

## **Cultural Resources**

Evidence of past human activity. They include archaeological sites, historic homes, battlefields, burial grounds, shipwrecks, historic and prehistoric artifacts.

## **Culture**

A set of learned beliefs, values and behaviors or way of life shared by the members of a society.

## **Data**

Information collected.

## **Dendrochronology**

A technique used to determine the age of wood based on the variation in a tree's annual growth rings.

## **Excavation**

The systematic digging and recording of an archaeological site.

**Feature**

Material remains that cannot be removed from a site such as roasting pits, fire hearths, house floors or post molds.

**Function**

The way in which something was used; its purpose.

**Field Notes**

Records, forms, notes, maps, and drawings made by archaeologists to record their work.

**Flake (Lithic Flake)**

A stone fragment removed from a core or another flake by percussion or pressure.

**Flintknapping (Knapping)**

The process of applying force to the surface of a stone by percussion or pressure in order to produce a tool.

**Geology**

A scientific field of study that focuses on the earth's history as recorded in rocks.

**Gorget**

A carved piece of shell, stone, or metal worn around the neck.

**Grid**

A network of uniformly spaced squares that divides a site into units.

**Grinding Stone**

Stone on which nuts and seeds were crushed with a pestle; repeated grinding would leave a bowl-like depression in the stone.

**Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR)**

A geophysical method that uses radar pulses to collect and record information about what is below the surface of the ground (only near-surface).

**Hafting**

Stone points were attached or hafted with cord or sinew to a shaft to make a spear.

**Hammer Stone**

Roughly circular smooth stone used with a nutting stone to break open nutshells.

## **Heritage Preserve**

A property protected for its cultural and/or natural features.

## **Heritage Tourism**

Traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past.

## **Historic**

The period of time after written records. Dates vary in different geographical areas.

## **Hypothesis**

A tentative assumption that can be further investigated.

## **In Situ**

In place.

## **Irreplaceable Resource**

A resource containing unique information that can never be replaced once damaged or destroyed, such as an archaeological site.

## **Kinship**

Family relationship through genetics or marriage.

## **Level**

An excavation layer, which may correspond to natural strata. Levels are numbered from the top to bottom of the excavation unit, with the uppermost level being Level 1.

## **LIDAR**

LIDAR (light detection and ranging) is a detection system that works on the principle of radar, but uses light from a laser. It is a remote sensing method used to examine the surface of the Earth.

## **Lithics**

Artifacts made from stone.

## **Looting**

The theft of cultural resources.

## **Material Culture**

Items that people make and use.

## **Metal Detecting**

The use of a metal detector, an electronic handheld instrument containing a sensor probe that sweeps over the surface of the ground, to locate metal objects.

## **Midden**

An area used for trash disposal.

## **Multidisciplinary Approach**

Teamwork between archaeologists and specialists in different fields such as geology, history, and botany.

## **Nomadic**

Wandering. Nomadic people depended on gathering season crops for subsistence.

## **Nutting Stone**

Flat stone with small depressions in which nuts were placed and then opened with a hammer stone.

## **Obsidian**

Black glass-like rock used to make stone tools such as projectile points.

## **Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) Dating**

A type of geochronology that samples and measures the amount of energy trapped within soils over time. Both quartz and quartzite accumulate energy through time. Samples of soil must be collected so that they are not exposed to sunlight. OSL dating can identify soils exposed to sunlight as recently as 5-10 years ago to between 150,000 to 200,000 years ago, with new advances pushing the possible date range up to 5 million years ago.

## **Organic Material**

Bones, wood and leather are examples of organic material. These items typically do not survive in the archaeological record.

## **Paleontology**

A scientific field of study that focuses on the fossil remains of plants and animals such as dinosaurs.

## **Palisade**

A wall built of large wooden posts.

## **Plow Zone**

Top layer of soil that has been plowed due to farming or the planting of timber.

## **Postmolds**

Small, circular, dark stains in the soil that are the remains of wooden posts placed in the ground.

## **Pottery**

Pots, bowls, and other vessels made from clay and hardened by heat (firing).

## **Pottery Decoration**

Patterns found on the surface of a pot (surface treatment). Examples of pottery decoration include: incising (scratching), impressing (with fabric), and stamping (with paddles containing designs such as checked, curved, or angular).

## **Prehistoric**

The period of time before written records. Dates vary in different geographical areas.

## **Preservation**

Protection; keeping from damage or destruction.

## **Projectile Point**

A general term for stone points that were hafted to darts, spears or arrows.

## **Provenience**

The geographic location from which the artifact was found. The three-dimensional location of an artifact or feature within an archaeological site, measured by two horizontal dimensions, and a vertical elevation.

## **Radiocarbon Dating (C-14)**

Dating technique that measures the amount of radioactive carbon ( $C_{14}$ ) in organic material such as wood, bone, or shell. When living organisms die, they lose the radioactive carbon they contain in measureable amounts. The smaller the amount of  $C_{14}$  that is found, the older the object is. The half-life of carbon is 5,730 years. This means that radiocarbon dating is not particularly helpful for very recent objects and objects more than 50,000 years old.

## **Relative Dating**

Determining the age of an object compared to other objects.

## **Remote Sensing**

The science of obtaining information about objects or areas from a distance, typically from aircraft or satellites.

## **Screening**

The act of sifting excavated dirt through screens of 1/4" or 1/8" wire mesh screens to find artifacts and other cultural remains.

## **Shard**

A piece of broken glass.

## **Sherd**

A piece of broken pottery or ceramic.

## **Site Number**

The unique, sequential number assigned to an identified archaeological site. For example, site number 38DA75 is for the Kolb Site on the Great Pee Dee River Heritage Preserve/Wildlife Management Area. The number 38 appears because South Carolina is the 38<sup>th</sup> state in alphabetical order. DA stands for Darlington County, the county in which the site is located. The number 75 is the site number. The Kolb Site was the 75<sup>th</sup> archaeological site identified in Darlington County.

## **Site Report**

A report written by archaeologists that describes an excavation, analyzes the artifacts found, and tells the story of the site and the people who lived there.

## **Soapstone**

A soft rock consisting mostly of talc that was used for bowl manufacture.

## **Stratigraphy**

The layering of deposits in archaeological sites. Cultural remains and natural sediments become buried over time, forming strata. General principle is that more recent artifacts are on the top, and the oldest artifacts are on the bottom.

## **Strata(sing. Stratum)**

A layer of soil.

## **Subsistence**

The ways in which humans feed themselves. Subsistence patterns include hunting, gathering and fishing.

## **Survey**

The systematic examination of the ground surface in search of archaeological sites.

## **Tabby**

A building material made from mixing oyster shells, lime, and water.

## **Temper**

Material that potters mix with clay in order to strengthen the clay. This makes a vessel less likely to crack during drying or firing. Shell, plant fibers, and sand are examples of temper.

## **Test pit**

A small excavation unit dug to get more information about a site. Test pits can be used to determine approximate site boundaries as well as artifact density.

## **Theodolite**

A surveying instrument that measures horizontal and vertical angles.

## **Topographic map**

A map that shows both natural and man-made features, usually by means of contour lines.

## **Topography**

The arrangement of the natural and artificial physical features of an area.

## **Total Station**

A surveying instrument that combines the capabilities of theodolite (measuring horizontal and vertical angles) with the capabilities of an electronic distance meter (EDM).

## **Trowel**

A small hand tool with a handle and flat metal blade; used in excavation.

## **Typology**

Using styles or types of an object to determine a relative age.

## **Unit**

A defined area within an excavation. Dividing a site into units helps archaeologists with spatial relationships between artifacts.

## **Vandalism**

Treasure hunting or nonscientific excavation; destruction or damage of property.