NRCS East Region

Projectile Point Identification Guide

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**Purpose**

This Projectile Point Guide is to serve employees working in the field to help them identify prehistoric archaeology sites. Please understand this guide is not all inclusive for the types of points you may encounter; instead it should be used to give a rough idea of the type and time period of any point you may discover during field visits.

**Introduction**

Many of the points in this guide have different regional or local names. The names used in this guide are taken from *Stone Age Spear and Arrow Points of the Midcontinental and Eastern United States*, by Noel D. Justice, except for the Stubenville Point which was adapted from *Projectile Point Typology for Pennsylvania and the Northeast*, by Gary Fogelman. The attributes and time periods should be the same however, no matter what the point is called. In this guide the term “projectile point” is used to describe any type of stone point whether it be an arrow, spear or knife. All the points in this guide are drawn to scale.

A brief synopsis of the chronology of the different cultural periods used in this guide will be given along with a description of the different attributes that make up a projectile point. The dates used in the chronology are not set in stone; they are based on the central Eastern Woodlands of the Mid-Atlantic region although they do follow the basic prehistory for the entire East Region.

**Paleo Period (16000-8000 B.C.)**

This period covers the time of first human presence in Eastern North America. It is much debated as to when the first peoples came to North America but for the purpose of this guide we will call it about 16,000 B.C. The first people, no matter when they arrived, were undoubtedly hunter-gatherers who relied on now extinct animals (such as mastodon, bison, giant beaver and ground sloth) for the meat portion of their diet. They hunted these animals using large lanceolate-shaped projectile points some of which were fluted such as Clovis and Cumberland.

**Archaic Period (8000-1000 B.C.)**

A climate change to a warmer climate led to a change in the plants and animal used for food. A change in the peoples tool kits and lifestyles was needed to adapt to this new environment. The Archaic Period can be broken down into three sub-periods: Early, Middle and Late.

The **Early Archaic (8000-5000)** saw the rise of the atlatl or “spear-thrower”. This tool allowed a hunter to throw a projectile point much farther and with greater accuracy. This was important as the main animal in the meat diet at this time was the White-tailed deer. Examples of points used during this period were the LeCroy, Kirk, and St. Albans.
The **Middle Archaic (5000-3000)** saw a broader use of the environmental resources at hand. Fish and aquatic life began to become a more important resource during this period. This can be seen by the appearance of fish weirs and shell middens in the archaeological record. Polished stone tools (axes and adzes) and nutting stones (stones used similar as a pestle and mortar for the grinding of nuts and wild grains) were also being utilized during this period. The Raddatz and Morrow Mountain are two point types used during this period.

The **Late Archaic (3000-1000 B.C.)** saw a change to a dryer climate and with it an expansion of habitat for animals such as deer and turkey. This period also saw the beginning of cultivation of crops beginning with such things as squashes and gourds by no later then 3000 B.C. This led to a rise in population and larger more permanent settlements. Grave goods in burial practices also became more common in this period. The Lamoka and Savannah River are two points that are common to this period.

**Woodland Period (1000 B.C.-A.D. 1500)**

This period saw a change to a much more sedentary lifestyle. This sedentary lifestyle led to three important traits of this period. These traits are the making of ceramic pottery, the wider use of cultivated crops and the use of more sophisticated burial rituals.

The first ceramic pottery was a crude, grit tempered, cord marked variety. As time went by the pottery increased in sophistication. The early pottery vessels were probably used for the storage and preparation of foodstuffs.

Pollen analysis has shown that by 1000 B.C. plants other then squashes and gourds were being utilized. These included such plants as; maygrass, sumpweed, sunflower and apricot vines.

Although burial practices with grave goods, even those of mounds, came about during the Archaic period; the widespread use of these burial mounds, some very large and sophisticated, occurred during the Woodland Period.

The Woodland Period, as with the Archaic before it, is divided into three subparts: Early, Middle and Late.

The **Early Woodland (1000 B.C. –A.D. 1)** saw the rise of ceramic pottery and is synonymous with the Adena Culture whose influence can be found in much of the Mid-Atlantic Region of North America. As mentioned above, the rise of larger burial mounds also came to be during this period. The Adena and Robbins are two common points of this period.

The **Middle Woodland (A.D. 1 –500)** saw the rise of the Hopewell culture which influenced much of the Mid-Atlantic. This period also saw the diversification of cord- and net-marked pottery. Chesser and Bakers Creek points were common points of this period.
The **Late Woodland (A.D. 500-1550)** saw the development of the bow and arrow during the beginning of this period. The middle part of this period saw the construction of stockaded villages. The later part of this period saw the rise of the historic tribes that were encountered by the first European settlers. Common points during this period are the Jack’s Reef varieties (probably the first true “arrow head”) and the triangular points such as Levanna and Madison.

**Attributes of Projectile Points**

The following illustrations show numerous projectile points and labels the attributes of each. All Projectile points will have some of these attributes but none will have all of them.
Flute
Clovis-Paleo Period-16000(?)-8000 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Lanceolate in shape with convex sides. The base is fluted and slightly concave. Size ranges from 2 ¼"-6 ½".
Cumberland-Paleo Period-10000-8000 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Fluted base with accentuated basal ears. More narrow in width than the clovis. Size ranges 1 ¾” - 3 ¾”.
Dalton-Paleo Period-8500-7900 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Fluted base with accentuated basal ears. Stem portion straight with narrowing blade towards tip. Size range 1 ¼" - 3 ½".
Big Sandy-Early Archaic Period-8000-6000 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Triangular blade with side notching and a concave base. Size Range 1 ¼”-2 ¼”.
St. Charles-Early Archaic Period-8000-6000 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Lanceolate blade with a convex base and corner notch. Size Range 2¾” - 4”.
Characteristics: Corner notched, often serrated blades with the tip slightly off-center. Normal size between 1 ½"-2 ½". Similar to Kirk points but much smaller.
Characteristics: Smaller point 1 ½”-2” with very deep and narrow corner notches. Rarely have serrated edges.
Decatur-Early Archaic Period-7500-7000 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Triangular blade with corner notch. Size range 1 ½” - 3”.
Kirk Corner Notched (Lg. Variety)-Early Archaic Period-7500-6900 B.C.

**Characteristics:** They come in a small and large variety. They are often serrated. Size range from 1 ½”-4”.
MacCorkle-Early Archaic-7000-6500 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Larger point than LeCroy. Deeply bifurcated with large and rounded basal ears. Size range 1 ½”-2 ½”.
St. Albans-Early Archaic Period-6900-6500 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Slight side notch with a deep basal notch. Size Range ¾”-2”
Kirk Serrated-Early Archaic Period-6900-6000 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Comes in a variety of lengths and different base types. Main feature is its deeply serrated blade. Size Range 1 ¾”-4 ¾”.
LeCroy-Early Archaic-6500-5800 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Triangular blade often serrated. It usually has well developed shoulders with a deeply bifurcated base. Size range $\frac{3}{4}''$-$1\frac{1}{2}''$. 
Kanawha Stemmed-Early Archaic Period-6300-5800 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Triangular blade with bifurcated base. Size range 1”-2”.
Stanly Stemmed-Middle Archaic Period-6000-5000 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Triangular blades with a shallow basal notch. Size Range 1 ½” - 3 ¼”.
Morrow Mountain II-Middle Archaic Period-4900-4200 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Elongated contracting stem with sloping shoulders. Range 1 ¼”-3 ¼”.
Raddatz Side-Notched-Middle Archaic Period-6000-3000 B.C.

Characteristics: Symmetrical U-shaped side notches. Width of base is even with the blade width. Size Range 1 ½”-2 ½”.
Steubenville Stemmed-Middle/Late Archaic Periods-2300-1500 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Slight but noticeable shoulders. Often a slight concave base. Size Range 2”-3”. 
Karnak Stemmed-Late Archaic Period-3700-3000 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Square stemmed with elongated blade and very slight shoulder definition. Size range 2 ¼”-3 ½”
Lamoka-Late Archaic Period-3500-2500 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Triangular thick bladed point with long stem. Size range 1”-2 ½”.
Brewerton Eared-Notched                       Brewerton Side-Notched

Brewerton Series-Late Archaic Period-3000-1700 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Eared-Notched average between 1"-1 ½". Ears extend beyond shoulders. Side-Notched average 1 ¼"-2 ¼". Notches placed low on points.
Savannah River Stemmed-Late Archaic Period-3000-1000 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Large triangular blade with a broad stem. Size Range 2”-3¼”.
Genesee-Terminal Archaic Period-3200-1500 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Triangular blade with rectangular straight base. Size Range 1 ¼”-2 ½”
Eva II-Late Archaic/Early Woodland Periods-4000-2000 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Distinctive basal notched with convex blade sides. Range 2”-3 ¾”. 
Susquehanna Broad-Late Archaic/Early Woodland Periods-1700-700 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Triangular blade. Side notched with an expanding stem. Size Range 1 ½”-2 ½”.
Cypress Stemmed-Late Archaic/Early Woodland Periods-1000-300 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Short convex triangular blade with elongated stem. Size Range 2”-2 3/4”.

Kramer-Early Woodland Period-1000-500 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Triangular blade with convex sides and straight stem. Size range from 1 ½”-2 ¾”.
Adena-Early Woodland Period- 800-200 B.C.

**Characteristics:** Size usually 3”-5” but can be larger or smaller. Shoulder range from very pronounced to slight. Stems are well made.
Robbins-Early/Middle Woodland Periods-200 B.C.-A.D. 200

Characteristics: Broad bladed with straight stem with pronounced shoulders. Size range 2 ¼”-4”.
Bakers Creek-Middle/Late Woodland Periods-A.D. 150-600

**Characteristics:** Triangular blade with a long straight base. Average length is about 2”. 
Chesser Notched-Middle/Late Woodland Periods-A.D. 300-700

**Characteristics:** size ranges from 1 ¼”-2 ½”. Usually a deep side notch with a straight base.
Jacks Reef Corner-Notched-Middle/Late Woodland Periods-A.D. 500-1200

**Characteristics:** Triangular to pentagonal shaped blade with a corner notch and expanding base. Size Range 1”-2”. 
Levanna-Late Woodland Period-A.D. 700-1200

**Characteristics:** Basically equilateral, triangular, with concave base. Size range 7/8”-3”
Madison-Late Woodland/Early Contact Periods-A.D. 800-1700

**Characteristics:** Straight sided isosceles triangular point. Size range 3/4”-1 1/2”.
Acknowledgements & Further Reading

All points in this guide are computer scanned hand drawings by Allison S. Nixdorf NRCS AmeriCorps Member 1995-6.

The following is a list of references used in creating this guide. These sources are also good for general and specific knowledge of the prehistory of the East Region.

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