A Brief Report on a Rediscovered Tool from the Fairfax Sandblows Site (VT-FR-0064), Fairfax, Vermont

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This brief report summarizes presents information about a previously unreported lithic tool from the middle Paleoindian-era Fairfax Sandblows archaeological site. It serves as a small addition to a paper on the site published in this journal in 2008.

A number of years ago, my colleague John Crock and I published in this journal a summary of the information I had gathered on the Fairfax Sandblows Site (VT-FR-0064) and the site's implications for the Paleoindian archaeological record in Vermont (Robinson and Crock 2008). Although poorly documented, Fairfax Sandblows was likely the first New England Paleoindian site reported to professional archaeologists, placing it alongside the groundbreaking discoveries at Folsom during one of the most dynamic periods of American archaeology (Robinson and Crock 2008:22; see Boldurian and Cotter 1999; Howard 1935; Loring 1980).

The Fairfax Sandblows Site was discovered early in the 20th century by L.B. Truax and Benjamin Fisher in Fairfax, Vermont (Howard 1935; Robinson and Crock 2008). Destructive farming and land clearing practices in the area caused the sandy soils to be blown by the winds, forming dunes known locally as "sand blows." In between the dunes, heavier artifacts would be left in place in the deflated surfaces and were easily recognizable by collectors. Nine partial or complete fluted projectile points could be directly attributed to the site at the time our original paper was written, all dating to the Michaud/Neponset "phase" of the Early Paleoindian period, ca. 12,000 to 11,600 cal yr BP (10,300 to10,100 C^{14} yr BP) (Bradley et al. 2008). Early letters written by Fisher to Barnum Brown at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) state that several points were found "…in a chipping bed, with flakes of the same material [Mount Jasper/Jefferson rhyolite] lieing [sic] about… (Fisher to Brown, October 14, 1929, AMNH archives)." In another letter, he also stated that as far as he knew, local farmers had not found any additional fluted points during their casual collecting at the site but had found "other implements" (Fisher to Brown, July 7, 1930, 2008 16 AMNH archives). As such, Fisher's letters provide important but scant documentation that the site minimally contained evidence of the lithic reduction of non-local raw materials, likely including Munsungan chert and Mt. Jasper/Jefferson rhyolite (Pollock et al. 1999, 2008). The reference to "other implements" collected by farmers is also notable because it suggests that activities other than projectile point manufacture and refurbishment were being undertaken at the site.

Several years after our 2008 paper was published, I was assisting the Bixby library in Vergennes, Vermont with the documentation of their archaeological collections. While looking in a cabinet drawer containing artifacts once belonging to William Ross (see Robinson 2008, 2009), I discovered a modified flake in two pieces with "Fairfax Sandblows" printed in pen on the ventral side. The writing style is a good match to Fisher's clean cursive. Although only conjecture on my part, because both Fisher and Ross were very interested in Paleoindian sites in Vermont and were the co-reporters of the Reagen site, Ross may have acquired the tool from Fisher at some point (see Ritchie 1953; Robinson 2008, 2009).

The modified flake measures 8.4 centimeters in maximum length, 5.4 centimeters wide in maximum width, and 0.5 centimeters in maximum thickness. Both lateral edges exhibit intermittent retouch designed to sharpen and potentially straighten them for cutting purposes. Along one edge adjacent to the faceted platform on the ventral side, there is a crushed flake scar with characteristic rings of force emanating from it. These rings suggest the tool was hit with a

force greater than that employed to sharpen the edges. It resulted in the break that separated the distal end of the tool from the rest. The break margins and the ventral and dorsal faces of the tool exhibit equivalent weathering, suggesting that the break occurred in the distant past and was not a result of plowing or other historic processes. It is made from Mt. Jasper/Jefferson rhyolite.

There are several reasons I felt it was worthwhile to report on a single lithic tool from the Fairfax Sandblows archaeological site. First, it lends additional credence to Fisher's characterization of the site in his letters to Brown. Second, the large size of the flake from which the tool was fashioned suggests that significant amounts of non-local raw materials were transported to the site and were being worked into various tool forms, potentially including some or all of the projectile points made from Mt. Jasper/Jefferson rhyolite (Robinson and Crock 2008). The Native American utilization of non-local lithic materials through the Paleoindian period and the routes and processes by which these materials were introduced to sites is a prominent research topic. It is hoped that this report provides a small addition toward understanding these aspects of Paleoindian lifeways. Finally, this report again highlights the importance of well-provenienced avocational collections in understanding archaeological sites discovered in the earlier portions of the 20th century. It also underscores the precariousness of the integrity of these collections as time passes.

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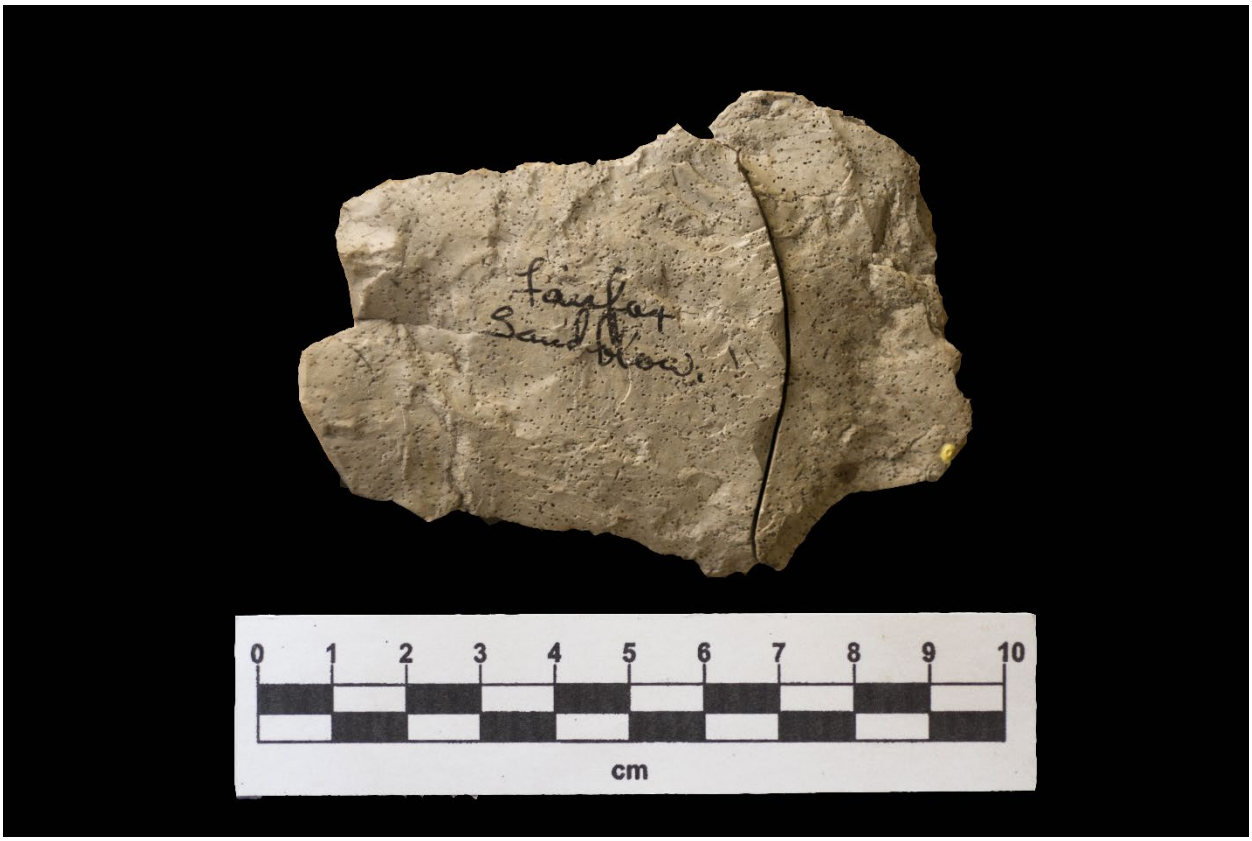

Figure 1. Fairfax Sandblow Scraper