ARTIFACT OR IMPOSTOR?

NATURAL OBJECTS THAT CAN BE MISTAKEN FOR ARTIFACTS

Top: Paleoindian spear points
Middle: Archaic Birdstone
Bottom: Archaic Barbed Axe
(Images from Saginaw Castle Museum)

Artifacts are portable objects made or used by people. Because people have occupied Michigan for roughly 14,000 years, artifacts can be found throughout the state. Finding artifacts on your land can be exciting, because it creates a tangible connection to people in the past. Precontact Native American cultures made and used a variety of stone tools, such as spear and arrow points, knives, axes, adzes, banner/bird stones and pipes *(some examples pictured to the right)*.

Archaeologists are often asked to identify stone artifacts. But there are a variety of naturally occurring objects, created through geological processes, that can be easily mistaken for artifacts. This guide is meant to help you determine whether you have an artifact or a geological impostor.

OMARULLUKS

Omarulluks or omars are a type of glacial erratic that has prominent rounded, often deep, hemispherical voids & pits. The voids result from the weathering of carbonate concretions within the harder greywacke stone. While omars may look drilled or intentionally shaped, these stones are natural.

CHERT NODULES

Chert is one of the raw materials used to make stone points and knives. But not all chert is an artifact. Nodules of chert can be found in glacial outwash and moraines , often naturally weathered into interesting shapes.

WEATHERED LIMESTONE

Limestone is a sedimentary rock that formed in ancient oceans. It is composed from the decayed shells and bones of organisms and is primarily calcium carbonate. This means that limestone easily weathers, especially in water. Limestone may naturally weather in ways that make it look like it was drilled or shaped intentionally, but just like concretions, these are natural formations and not artifacts.

CONCRETIONS

Concretions are natural accumulations of minerals. They tend to form in spherical or disk shapes around a central core of material & can be a variety of sizes. They weather out of limestone and other sedimentary rocks and were transported and redeposited by glaciers. Iron-rich concretions can often look like the have been intentionally shaped or polished, but it is just a natural part of weathering.

For more information visit: www.michigan.gov/archaeology
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