

## "Ageing flint is counterfeiting"

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Make no mistake, if a person ages flint or any other artifact, they are simply a first class counterfeiter. With all the controversy between the archaeologists, investors, collectors, flint knappers etc., as to whether flint knapping is a good thing, one subject stands alone and that is concerning the artificial ageing of Flint replicas or other stone artifacts.

Arguments have been presented by a number of archaeologists who believe that the replication and marketing of Flint items reduces the desire for "looting" while providing an adequate supply of authentic looking items for the marketplace. There are those who also suggest that learning the craft helps one understand how such artifacts were created in ancient times. Then there are the investors and collectors who think that there is too much flint knapping going on and that the temptation for a shady dealer to pawn off a replica at a handsome profit is wrong. It is! Last, the lithic reproductionists as they prefer to be identified say that they are producing works of art and that they serve an important need!

This scenario must be judged on a case by case situation. If the purpose is only to replicate ancient copies and the knapper identifies his work, selling it a such; there is benefit to all. But if the knapper refuses to identify his work by some permanent mark with the excuse that the market for the work is minimal when signed, then the replicator is feeding a market that

is less than honest. If the knapped specimen is fine enough to warrant it being identified as artwork, then the maker should be proud to sign it for all to see! Unfortunately, with the suggestion that some 5,000 persons are engaged in replication to some degree, it should be obvious to most that the art market alone cannot support all the makers!

All kinds of excuses are heard such as " that's the only way I can support my family, or I am not hurting anyone"! How about getting a real job? Selling illegal substances or counterfeiting currency is in the same category. For your information, 99% of the unmarked replicas end up as fakes! That's right, because there is an underground movement of "ageing" the unmarked replicas and for some it is a full time business. Every trick in the book is used from rubbing grease and grime into the thin flakes to burying the items with animal feces to boiling the reproductions in lime and processing with other chemicals, then burnishing the surfaces to make the article appear old and used. This is nothing more than counterfeiting which is illegal in every one of the 50 states. If prosecuted and found guilty, serious time in a penal institution is a real possibility. If I didn't make it clear, selling fakes knowingly is a crime. Do it through the mail and wire and it is federal. Think about it!

## How to recognize unnatural Flint Alteration.

In the beginning, the purveyors of reproduction flint made little effort to change the surface or the characteristics of the material. It wasn't deemed necessary. The majority of reproductions found their way into cabinets and displays of uninformed. Also the majority of reproductions were simply the imagination of the reproductionist and seldom followed patterns of ancient authentic artifacts. That would change quickly with the advent of replica knapping which began in the 1970's.

Experimental knapping courses began to be offered at the college level to assist budding archaeologists learn the basics of flint knapping. A number of scholarly books appeared on the subject and some of the best works were authored during this infancy of the skill. Many took up flint knapping and replication as a hobby, and within a few short years; many enthusiasts made it a full time avocation with a great zeal.

By the mid-eighties, lithic reproduction was in full swing and Knappers began to spring up throughout most parts of the country. This was truly the beginning of an era when more attention was paid to the exactness of ancient projectiles and the materials from which they were manufactured. Prior to this movement, many reproductions were correctly made but from wrong natural materials and made such identification extremely simple as wrong mate-

rial alone caused rejection. Further studies of typology revealed correct substances from which certain projectile points and tools were made. The toolstone of the ancients became the toolstone of the replicators and reproductions with correct size and material became the norm.

Not all toolstone substances available within the marketplace are suitable for quality work and correct knapping. In order to compensate for the lack of available quality cherts and flints, many knappers reinvented the ancient art of heat treatment. This alters the physical structure of the material and causes it to knap with greater success and ease. The 1990's saw the entrance of professional knappers, many whom made this skill their full time vocation. A number of the proficiently skilled authored treatises on the subject, produced books and video cassettes with step by step instruction.

But something was lacking as most examples of skilled knapping have a new look. Those who produce their work for the purpose of education or those who consider it an artistic endeavor don't see the newness as a problem. But those who dispose of their wares to persons who dispense these modern articles as genuine, find the new looking specimens unsatisfactory for resale. This need fostered the advent of serious flint alteration described as follows.

## Acid-etched Flint alteration



**Fig.FA/AE:** We employed photo micrographs with low side lighting to enhance this effect. This an example of chert which has been subjected to an acid bath; probably immersion into the solution at a temperature just below the boiling point. The use of heat hastens the process and allows observation to control the results. The results provide a product that has a weathered look and feel and also helps to break down tiny loose flakes that otherwise would appear to be new. This alteration technique has been used extensively during the past ten years.

## Forced Algae-induced Flint alteration



**Fig.FA/FA:** This is an appearance that should be noted well as it is a simple treatment for ageing. Certain streams and lakes contain a high content of algae which attaches itself to rocks in a very short period of time. After cleaning the flint or chert product of any loose flakes,(generally by wire brush and light buffing) stock flints are merely stashed into the stream or lake bed and within a very brief time, the incredible results shown above (in extreme closeup) is evident. The interesting part is that once attached to the surface, brisk scrubbing will seldom remove much of the build-up. This technique is used extensively by some who claim to find artifacts by scuba diving.

## Chemical induced Flint alteration

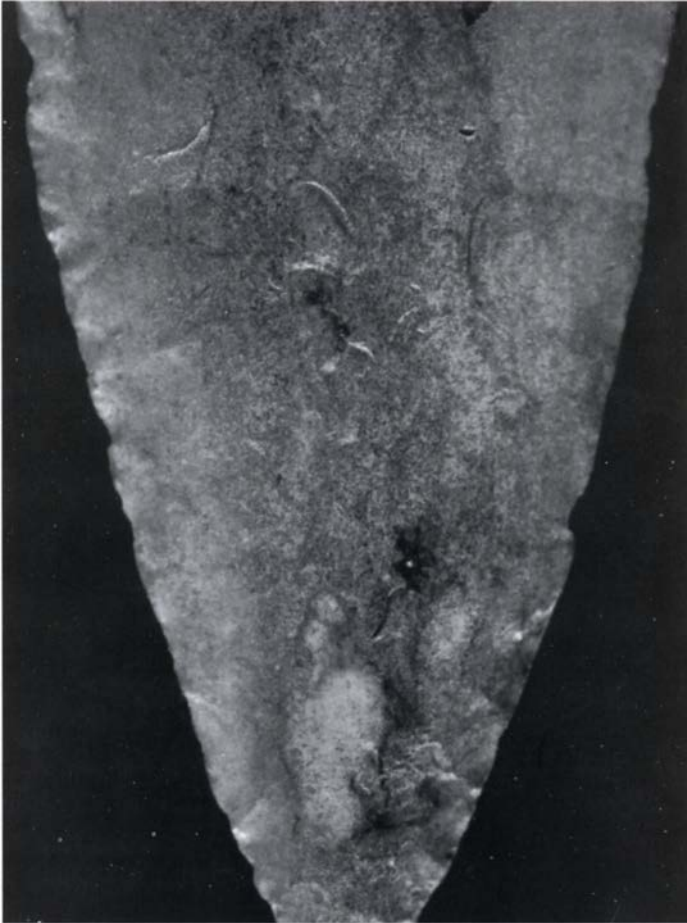


Fig.FA/CI: This closeup shows the effects of chemical immersion or induction. With immersion, the Flint or Chert artifact is subjected to a chemical bath which may or may not be heated or chilled depending upon the required result. If the chemical is merely induced, it may be spotted randomly on certain areas to give a desired effect. In this instance if the entire artifact has been subjected to immersion chemical bath, then unwanted excess surface artificial patination is removed via buffing or scrubbing. The benefit of the chemical treatment is that it is a dependable substitute for other more time consuming methods.

## Sandblasting/machine buffing Flint alteration



Fig.FA/SB: This technique is very effective in producing an ancient looking , feeling artifact with a minimal of effort. The entire surface is lightly sandblasted similar to the treatment used by dentists to clean difficult stained teeth. After a lightly controlled blasting of the desired areas, the high points of the artifact are subjected to a variety of hard wheels which remove a slight bit of the flint surface. This technique highlights the surface area and renders a passable looking condition. This technique is especially effective on flints that have a translucent characteristics such as Knife River and Agates.

## Excessive Heat Treating Flint alteration



Fig.FA/EH: This result is one which often shows up in altered flint reproductions. When the knapper does not control the right amount of heat treatment, sometimes the toolstone can be overcooked to the point where it produces a near glass like quality. This appearance can often be identified by excess coloration, not normally seen in authentic flints. Also with this alteration areas seem as though they were almost to the point of melting. The conchoidal characteristic of good flint is nearly obscured with intensive application of too much treatment. Sometimes, as illustrated in the middle portion of the closeup, the material may experience excessive fracturing.



## **Fresh knapped flint**



Fig.FA/FK: Although this is not necessarily a flint alteration per se, it is an alteration as it is a closeup of freshly knapped flint. This is what you would see if you enlarged the size of a normal point. The tops of the hills are extremely sharp, unlike that of an ancient point. Also the valleys are smoother than normal, resultant of recent flaking. Although these views are closer than one would expect via normal eyesight; it is similar to an examination of an artifact surface as seen through a 10X loupe. Ancient flint artifacts will have a much smoother surface with a decided dulling of the sharp edges and high points. Also keep in mind that the edges of the flint tool will be slightly dulled from usage, new flint work will be razor sharp to the touch.