



## EXCAVATING SURFACES

Revised 2/2001

Structure floors and other types of use surfaces are particularly important in archaeology because associations and spatial arrangements of artifacts and features on surfaces may be used to infer specific activities. In this way, empirical observations can lead to inferences about behavior and to a better understanding of ancient ways of life.

The system used by Crow Canyon to excavate surfaces and recover surface-associated artifacts is outlined below. A surface may be a constructed floor, an unprepared use surface, or bedrock. During excavation, the earlier a surface is detected, the more accurately the surface and its associated artifacts can be documented and the greater the potential for interpretation the resulting record will have. Contexts in which a surface is likely to be found include (1) the bases of walls, (2) between 90 and 110 cm below bench surfaces in kivas, (3) the level at which the opening (mouth) of a pit feature can be discerned, and (4) any location where numerous artifacts or inclusions share a horizontal plane. When excavating in these contexts, the archaeologist should make every effort to define surfaces in order to document them and any associated artifacts or features. Additionally, when excavating in contexts 1 and 2, it is advisable to periodically dig a small test “window” in order to pinpoint the location of a surface in advance rather than discover it unexpectedly. When excavating in any context, the archaeologist should leave all but the smallest artifacts in place until they are completely exposed; this increases the likelihood that he or she will recognize when an artifact is resting on a surface.

Because natural processes following abandonment can result in significant displacement of materials, not all artifacts that were left on a surface at abandonment will still be in direct contact with the surface at the time of excavation. Crow Canyon’s proveniencing system therefore allows the archaeologist to define an arbitrary level from surface contact to any height above the surface (0 to 5 cm is a common choice). This vertical designation implies that one or more of the artifacts not in contact with the surface might in fact be associated with the use of the surface or structure. It gives the archaeologist the option of including or excluding these noncontact artifacts in interpretations about the surface or structure.

All artifacts with a “surface” provenience designation should be mapped individually and recorded as point locations (PLs). Surface contact items may be assigned to one PD and artifacts above the surface to a different PD, or one PD may be assigned for both the surface contact artifacts and those above. In either case, the vertical relationship of *each* point-located artifact to the surface *must* be specified in the “Comments” column of the **Point Location Catalog**. Artifacts from a surface PD that are not discovered in place but are instead recovered during screening of surface-associated sediment should all be bagged together; the bag label will look the same as that on the bag of a point-located artifact except that there will be no PL number on it.

The point location system is a way of recording the three-dimensional location of an object that is identified with a unique field number (PL number). The item is plotted on a map of the study unit or excavation unit; a sequential number is assigned on the Point Location Catalog; and a description of the item and its elevation (defined by the *lowest* point on the object) are recorded on the same log. When the item is collected, the PL number is indicated on the bag label. One PL catalog will be maintained for a continuous surface even if there are multiple PDs for different horizontal subdivisions. For example, if a kiva floor is divided into quadrants, the entire surface will have a single PL sequence even though each quadrant has a different PD.

Please see **Point Location Catalog Instructions** for an example of a PL catalog for a surface.