

Afield in Abydos

PALEOLITHIC
FIELDWORK
TAKES SHAPE

STORY AND
PHOTOGRAPHS
BY MELFORD
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In the winter of 2002, I had the opportunity to journey with Dr. Harold Dibble, Dr. Deborah Olszewski, and Dr. Shannon McPherron to the high desert near historic Abydos, Egypt, on a pioneering field research session to locate and analyze Paleolithic sites.

As the plane approached Cairo, it was clear that I was about to encounter unforgettable scenes that had to be captured on film. It was more than I could dream — the majesty of the monuments, the bustle of the bazaars, and the peaceful scenery of the Nile.

Although I knew that archaeology was not for the faint of heart, this trip exceeded my every expectation. Camping out at



Melford F. Smith in front of the Great Sphinx of Giza

Harold's Camp Comfort with only the barest essentials was not a problem, but the learning curve associated with the identification of Paleolithic artifacts was fairly steep. While on the surveys, I would hear terms such as *flake*, *blade*, *biface*, and *core*. But no matter how intently I looked, I saw only rocks, rocks, and more rocks.

Once my eyes were trained, however, the fieldwork became very exciting. I was thrilled to recognize the thin, flat, asymmetrical flake of flint or other stone that had been intentionally shaped as a tool, or blades that had a knife form. In lithic projectile terms, *blade* describes the distal (above the gripping area) portion of a projectile, knife, ax, or other similar tool. Blade is also used to refer to large, bifaced flaked artifacts. The *core* parent stone is the piece of flint or chert from which flakes or blades have been chipped off in the manufacture of tools or projectiles.

The journey allowed me to see how a field research project is run and to understand more of what one of the Museum's core functions — research — is all about.

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The Abydos Survey for Paleolithic Sites team



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Cairo's Khan El-Khalili bazaar; Dr. Shannon McPherron, Dr. Deborah Olszewski, and Dr. Harold Dibble; Some local children in Sohag, Egypt; Artifact found on the surface at one of the sites; and Harold's Camp Comfort



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