

Flake Tools from the Folsom Type Site: Removing a Case of Mistaken Identity

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► **Keywords:** Folsom Site, Lithics, Great Plains

In the late 1930s, Frank Roberts made passing mention of a “portion of a nondescript flake knife, and one example of a generalized type of scraper” from the Folsom type site in New Mexico (Roberts 1939:534). No more was known of the specimens beyond that vague reference, and the original artifacts were long thought to be lost to history. That was unfortunate, as the Folsom site produced singularly few artifacts beyond projectile points, though given the extent of the butchering of the bison killed there other tools must have been used.

Accordingly, it was with some interest when Meltzer, preparing his *Folsom* volume (Meltzer 2006), received from Fred Wendorf a vintage 35 mm slide labeled “Skinning knives Folsom NM.” In the photograph were three artifacts: the center one was a quartzite knife, found at the Folsom site by Ele Baker in November 1936, which is today in the possession of the Baker family (Meltzer 2006:95, 254). Given the slide label, and that one of the specimens was known to have come from Folsom, Meltzer inferred the other two did as well, and perhaps were even the nondescript specimens mentioned by Roberts (Meltzer 2006:254). The photograph appears as Figure 8.3 in *Folsom* (recreated here as Figure 1) over the caption “Three of the four flake tools known from the Folsom site. The center specimen is the Baker knife [Figure 1b]; the whereabouts of the other two specimens are unknown.”

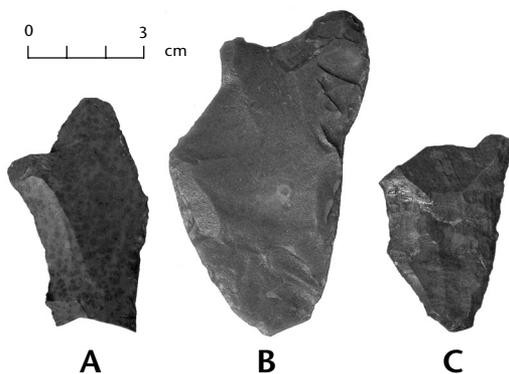


Figure 1. A, flake from Rio Rancho, New Mexico, locus 4146 (Maxwell Museum catalog no. 69.20.13); B, the Baker knife from the Folsom type site, New Mexico; C, flake tool from Rio Rancho, New Mexico, locus 4149 (Maxwell Museum catalog no. 87.1.129).

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The good news is the whereabouts of those two artifacts are no longer unknown; the bad news is they are not from the Folsom site.

Since 1999, Huckell has sought to organize and analyze the artifacts from the Rio Rancho Folsom–age locality in the Albuquerque Basin (Dawson and Judge 1969; Huckell and Kilby 2002). Recently, in closely examining Figure 8.3 in *Folsom*, he realized the utilized flake tool (Figure 1C) to the right of the Baker knife was from Rio Rancho. The flake to the left (Figure 1a) of the Baker knife likewise visually rang a bell.

On checking the collections at the Maxwell Museum at the University of New Mexico, Huckell quickly found the first of the specimens (catalog no. 87.1.129). It was labeled 4149, which matched one of Jerry Dawson’s locus numbers for the Rio Rancho site. Meltzer, in turn, checked Wendorf’s original 35 mm slide and saw there were two numbers—“4146” and “4150”—written alongside “Skinning knives Folsom NM.” A subsequent search by Huckell of the collection from Rio Rancho locus 4146 quickly turned up the other flake from the photograph (catalog no. 69.20.13). Why the slide identified the flake tool as coming from “4150” and not “4149” is unclear; “4150” is a Basketmaker II site, according to Dawson’s notes.

So how did the three specimens from the two different sites end up in the same image? Ele Baker collected extensively in the Albuquerque Basin, worked with Dawson in the mid-late 1960s, and loaned the Baker knife to the Maxwell Museum in 1968. The artifacts from the two sites were likely in close proximity at certain times. Perhaps someone (Dawson?) took the photograph while all three tools were at the Museum, a copy of which ended up with Wendorf.

As for the nondescript specimens from Folsom mentioned by Roberts, they unfortunately remain lost to history.

We thank Tony Baker for (again) loaning us the Baker knife and making it possible for us to reunite these three specimens to make Figure 1, as well as for helpful comments on the discovery of that artifact. Our thanks also to Catherine Baudoin, Maxwell Museum Photoarchivist, for taking the image.

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