

Archaeology: From Map to Museum

LD 5: Archaeological Context and Stratigraphy

Description: The objectives of this exercise are to conduct an analysis of a stratigraphic profile and from said analysis interpret the cultural associations of a rather deep profile. David Hurst Thomas and associates originally prepared the stratigraphic profile in question as the result of excavations conducted at the Gatecliff Shelter located within the Great Basin of North America.

Part 1: First, you should note that the dates added to the right hand of the profile are imaginary or otherwise hypothetical. As such, you are to track the stratigraphic layer from the right to the left, and you are to date the layers at the left margin based on what you believe to represent the continuity of the layer from the right. You will note that I have added some features, mainly a privy pit and excavated trench, into the profile so that you can determine the age of said features as they appear within the profile.

Part 2: Having dated the corresponding layers at the left-hand margin of the stratigraphic profile, you should now locate some very specific historical items contained within the profiles represented. The items in question are noted by the capital letters included within the profile. You are to match those letters indicated with each of the following historical items recovered from within the stratigraphic profiles represented:

1. Hernan Cortez's privy.
2. Davy Crockett's musket and powder horn.
3. A trash deposit containing auto parts from one of the earliest automobiles on record.
4. Deposits containing early Beate's memorabilia.
5. Debris containing evidence of the millennium celebrations.
6. The earliest foundation materials recovered from the construction of Mission San Juan Bautista.
7. Aztec period monuments including the Calendar Stone.
8. Rock art portraying the Supernova explosion of AD 1075.
9. Hopewell funerary art.

Part 3: The last portion of this lab assignment will require that you to walk through the strata labeled on the left hand margin of the chart for the purposes of correlating said strata with what David Hurst Thomas actually recovered by way of his excavations at Gatecliff Shelter. Use the attached chart from Thomas (1989) in order to discuss the significance or meaning of the strata as recovered from this early period rock shelter. Be prepared to respond to the following questions or directions regarding the strata in question:

1. Identify the strata that correspond with what David Hurst Thomas refers to as a "living floor." How does this feature differ from others both above and below it?
2. What does the presence of silt – particularly, fine silt -- suggest about each of those stratigraphic layers within which it was identified?
3. What does the presence of rubble suggest about the creation of the stratigraphic layer in question?
4. Compare the depth or thickness of each of the layers and examine the date (spans) pertaining to each layer. Does the depth or thickness of a stratigraphic layer have a one to one correspondence with the amount of time required for its accumulation? If not, why not?
5. Finally, select five stratigraphic layers at random and compare the dates from the tables provided by David Hurst Thomas, what do these layers indicate about the age, culture, and environmental or climatological features of the Gatecliff Shelter occupation site?