Session 1

The Role of Experiments in Lithic Technology

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Archaeological understanding of stone tools has long relied on knowledge gained from replication and experimentation. A wide range of approaches and goals have been undertaken in this pursuit. Sometimes this research has resulted in generalizable results while other times it has been designed to address highly specific problems. The level of rigor in these experiments has also varied – ranging from informal replications to highly controlled studies of the fracture mechanics underlying variability in lithic technology.

This session brings together an international group of researchers who have been involved in conducting experiments in lithic technology to discuss their work and link it to broader perspectives on what we have learned from more than a century of this methodological endeavor. Assessing the relationship of these experimental cases and approaches to the scientific method and archaeological epistemology is an important aspect of thinking about how to best design and implement experiments in lithic technology. The primary goal of this session seeks to take stock of what we think we have learned from experiments and how that knowledge can be applied. In other words, how have these modern-day experiments in lithic technology assisted our ability to approach and interpret archaeological artifacts and assemblages? Participants are encouraged to take a comprehensive and critical perspective on this research field to assess how and why these attempts may have failed or succeeded. What obstacles and limitations have researchers encountered and how have they been addressed? Where and how should research proceed in the future based on what we currently know?