

"Leaf-shaped" Points

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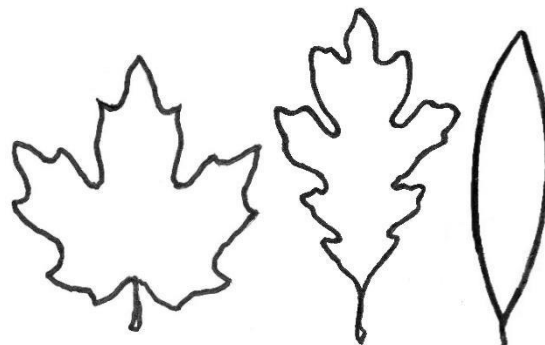
Until the advent of cultural heritage resource management (CHRM), better known in the industry as simply "cultural resource management" (CRM), professional archaeology was a scholarly enterprise. That is, it was ensconced in universities and major museums, and was perceived by its practitioners as a social science. And like all sciences it contained its own vocabulary of specialised terms (aka, jargon).

As long as the archaeologists confined themselves to their classrooms and labs, and communicated only with their learned colleagues, their jargon posed no problems. However, the archaeologists' professional training didn't include instruction on how to communicate in plain English to non-archaeologists (the general public and perhaps even junior-level students at conferences). So when they ventured outside of their classrooms and labs, they typically carried their jargon with them and used it in their presentations to non-specialists, who often didn't understand it.

Many of the "specialised" terms were actually commonplace ones that were familiar to the general public; the difficulties arose when these terms were used in unfamiliar ways in non-academic territory. What we will do here is provide and discuss one example in particular, namely, "leaf-shaped."

Archaeologists frequently use this expression to refer to spear points. By itself, i.e., without a definition, what might "leaf-shaped" mean to a layperson? Well, maple leaves and oak leaves are "leaf-shaped" – they certainly are tree leaves -- so we'd be correct in referring to their outlines as leaf-shaped, would we not?

But are "oak-leaf-shaped" and "maple-leaf-shaped" what archaeologists mean by "leaf-shaped"? Have you ever seen a spear point that is shaped like a maple leaf, or an oak leaf? Probably not; at least not in the case of an artifact found in Manitoba!



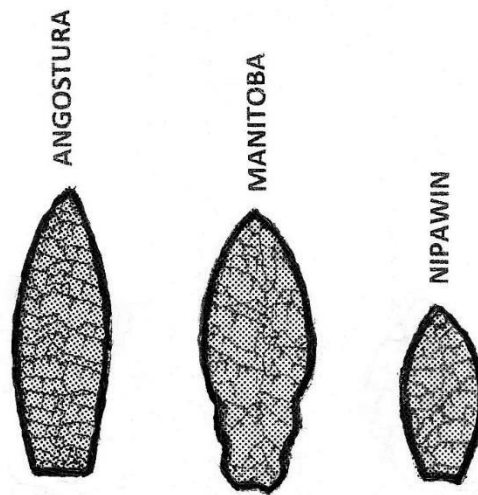
Maple Leaf shape

Oak Leaf shape

Laurel/Willow
Leaf shape

So, when Manitoba archaeologists use the term “leaf-shaped,” what exactly do they have in mind? What they’re talking about is something that is essentially lanceolate-shaped like a leaf from a laurel tree. We can also say that the points in question resemble a willow leaf, with no visible shoulders, nor a stem below the shoulders, nor conspicuous side- or corner-notches. Typically (and correctly), points exhibiting these latter attributes are labelled “stemmed,” “shouldered,” “side-notched,” or “corner-notched” – but not “leaf-shaped.”

Below are illustrations of (1) a complete, conventional “laurel/willow-leaf-shaped point” [left]; (2) an unconventional “laurel/willow-leaf-shaped point” (“unconventional” because of the shallow indentations along the sides) [centre]; and (3) a shortened (reworked) but still “laurel/willow-leaf-shaped point” [right].



So, if you are an archaeologist giving a talk to a lay audience or to a group that includes introductory-level students, make sure that the first thing you do is clarify what you mean by terms like “leaf-shaped.” Then everyone will know for sure what you’re taking about right from the get-go.

Are we all agreed?