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Review of *Distributional Archaeology* by James I. Ebert

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This volume is both fascinating and frustrating. The work challenges one of the fundamental assumptions of most archaeological research—the existence of archaeological sites. In the preface, Ebert states that his goal is to bring a number of lines of evidence to bear on what I believe is the most critical question in archaeology today: whether we can continue to think in terms of sites, or whether this most basic unit of archaeological discussion rests upon so many untenable, unarticulated, in fact unarticulatable assumptions as to be a liability to the advancement and credibility of our field (p. xiii).
The first three chapters present a compelling argument that the concept of "site" is inappropriate for either documenting or interpreting the surface archaeological record. He presents the case that, in most surveys, definitions of sites versus isolated occurrences are often arbitrary, usually capricious, and always accompanied by a set of unwarranted assumptions about human behaviors and the formation of the archaeological record. Ebert proposes that the most rational way to proceed is to record individual artifacts as the basic units of observation rather than recording fieldworker's impressions about what is or is not a relevant component of the archaeological record. This makes sense. Striving to document the archaeological record, rather than our assumptions about its meaning, is always the preferred course of action.

The next two chapters review interpretations about adaptive systems in the Great Basin as portrayed by both archaeologists and ethnographers. Ebert then presents some alternative views and introduces an archaeological survey in southwestern Wyoming designed to implement and evaluate the artifact-based approach of his "distributional archaeology." Examples of analysis using variance-to-mean ratios illustrate the utility of being able to search for distributional patterns at a variety of spatial scales, independent of any arbitrarily assigned site boundaries. The final chapter "Beyond Survey Archaeology" addresses the important topic of working to assure that there is a basic consistency between theory and methods of archaeological research.

Ebert's handling of basic archaeological concepts provides the fascinating, thought-provoking aspects of the volume. It would be unwise for any archaeologist dealing with surface survey data not to read and think about the ideas presented in Distributional Archaeology.

Frustrations with the volume are twofold. The first is the lack of discussion about how to link surface distributions to information from archaeological excavations. While Ebert is correct that many researchers have relegated surface data to a secondary status based on some rather distorted notions about the archaeological record, the problem of how to integrate the types of data from survey with that from excavation still must be addressed. As Ebert's preliminary analyses illustrate, the surface record is primarily composed of stone tools. Excavations can provide a wider range of material classes and allow the application of different scales of analysis than do surface data. While somewhat beyond the scope of the present volume, it would have been interesting to have had Ebert's thoughts on the subject.

This minor disappointment with the volume is secondary to what I feel could be the most frustrating aspect of Distributional Archaeology. The
concepts explored in the book should force anyone doing archaeological survey to reevaluate their methods and goals. I'm afraid, however, that many of those actively involved in surface survey, particularly those in Cultural Resource Management (CRM) will summarily dismiss the distributional approach as unworkable. Even if, as Ebert suggests, field methods can be streamlined through applications of appropriate technology, the concepts of distributional archaeology will be difficult for many managers, even those in general agreement with the approach, to incorporate into their "resource" plans. The concept of sites may be so firmly entrenched in the administration of CRM that overcoming the bureaucratic obstacles could be much more difficult than solving the challenges of efficient field documentation. I certainly hope that is not the case. Distributional Archaeology should receive thoughtful attention and concurrent reevaluation of prevailing practices by everyone either doing or using results from survey archaeology. Lawrence C. Todd, Department of Anthropology, Colorado State University.