

Wupatki Sunset Crater

National Monument
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Pottery

All peoples of the world have had a need for storage or carrying containers. Nomadic cultures usually made lightweight containers of animal hides or basket materials. Settled agricultural people did not have to be as concerned with weight and breakage and could make their household items of materials such as glass, metal, or clay.

Almost everywhere that clay was available, agricultural societies developed the skill of pottery manufacture. In the southwestern United States, pottery making was not restricted to specialized tradesmen but was a household industry. This resulted in the production of large amounts of pottery, much of which still exists today. Completed pottery can be broken into very small pieces but it is difficult to destroy. One of the reasons, then, that archeologists spend so much time studying pottery, is that it exists in larger quantities than highly perishable materials such as baskets. When examining pottery of different cultures, archeologists study the materials used, the manufacturing methods, and the types of decoration.



Over 500 types of pottery have been classified in the Southwest. More than fifty have been found just in the Wupatki and Sunset Crater area. There is a formal naming system for pottery, each type having a geographic designation followed by a description. Examples are Sunset Red and Flagstaff Black-on-White. Since no two pieces of pottery are identical, archeologists have had to be careful in deciding whether a slightly different design is a new type of just individual variation.

The presence of so many pottery types has intrigued archeologists. It was first believed that there had been a massive migration of members of many cultures into the area. Now it is considered more likely that there was extensive trade occurring and that this was a natural boundary where several cultures met.

Archeologists are still working in the area and recording the various kinds of pottery found. Please help them by leaving undisturbed any pottery fragments or other artifacts you find while visiting Wupatki and Sunset Crater National Monuments.



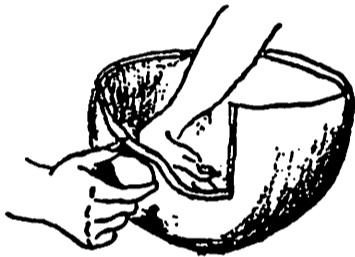
Raw clay was gathered from nearby pits and ground in metates, then mixed with sand, crushed pot sherds or crushed rock. The mixture was moistened and kneaded, much like bread dough, and left to rest for a few days.



The vessel base was molded in a bowl or gourd. This often left finger and hand heel marks on the interior.



Clay coils, about 2 cm. in diameter, were pinched into position along the edge of the base.



The vessel was then hand shaped by patting and scraping with a sherd or gourd fragment using the heel of the hand as interior support. After the shaping was completed, the pot was left to dry completely.



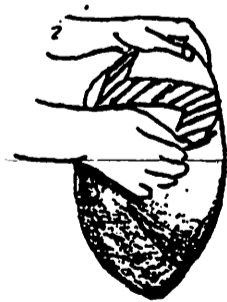
A red or white slip made of clay and water was sometimes added before polishing.



The vessel was sometimes polished with a smooth stone as the slip was drying.

Often, the pots were decorated in fine geometric designs with a narrow-leaf yucca brush.

Hematite, Manganese, Kaolin, as well as a variety of wild plants, were used for slipping and decoration.



Finally the pot was fired. Often, 50% of the pots were broken during firing.

Exact Anasazi firing procedures are unknown. These show the methods of modern Pueblo potters.

