

Archaeological Stewardship

Archaeological sites are fragile, non-renewable resources. A century ago, the United States Congress recognized the damage that was occurring to archaeological sites across the nation and passed the Antiquities Act of 1906 which prohibits collection of artifacts on public land. Later federal and state laws reaffirmed the importance of archaeological resources on public land, instituting criminal penalties for non-permitted artifacts collection and unauthorized excavation of archaeological sites.

Archaeological sites on public land belong to us all, not to any single individual. Unauthorized excavation or removal of artifacts from these sites is like tearing pages from a book. Each discovery is part of a story about the past and once objects are removed, that part of the story is lost. Many sites are also sacred to Native Americans, especially those where rock art is present. Damage to sacred sites is similar to vandalizing a church.

If you encounter an archaeological site, here are some simple guidelines:

Do...

- Put artifacts back where they are found.
- Make a sketch map showing artifact locations and natural topographic features.
- Take a GPS reading of the location of the site or artifact.
- Take a photograph of the site location, interesting artifacts, and rock art.
- Report archaeological finds to the appropriate agency: U.S. Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, State Historic Preservation Office.
- Report suspicious activities or acts of vandalism to the appropriate land management agency immediately. Photograph evidence and record license plate numbers if you can, but for own safety, **do not** approach or personally contact the vandals. The Archaeological Resources Protection Act has stiff penalties for violators and rewards for information that leads to a conviction. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management's hotline is (800)722-3998.

Do not...

- Dig or probe. It damages important archaeological context.
- Collect, remove or mix artifacts. Artifacts, where they lay, tell a story. Once they are moved, a piece of the past is destroyed forever. Placing artifacts in piles distorts what can be learned.
- Disturb human remains, cairns, rock piles or stone circles. Native American graves are protected archaeological resources; please show appropriate respect for these features.
- Touch, chalk or alter rock art. New technology makes it possible to date rock art by analyzing the patina (rock varnish) that has built up over the millennia. Touching it or enhancing it for photography through scratching, pecking, chalking or oiling can alter this patina.
- Carve names or create modern rock art. This is vandalism and is punishable by law.

- Let your pets loose on archaeological sites. Animals damage sites by digging urinating, and defecating in them. They can destroy fragile cultural deposits.
- Camp on archaeological sites. Food attracts rodents who may then nest in the site, smoke damages rock art, and the introduction of modern charcoal from campfires precludes the ability to radiocarbon date a site at a later time.