

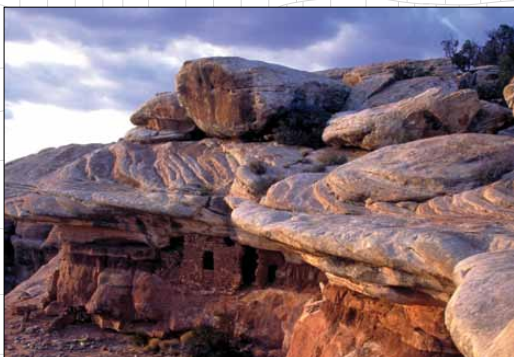
What are archaeological sites and why are they important?

Archaeological sites on the public lands throughout North America provide solid evidence of a story spanning thousands of years. An archaeological site is a vault filled with historical and cultural artifacts with valuable information. Like items in a museum, artifacts are for observation only—not for removal as personal souvenirs.

When artifacts are removed, a piece of America's story—one that we all have a right to share and understand—is gone forever. When trained professionals excavate a site, they make sure no significant information is lost. The artifacts remain available to the public for research, education, and interpretation.

Many archaeological resources are located on public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). These public land resources belong to all Americans. They are our legacy to future generations.

If every visitor takes something, soon there will be nothing left for others to discover. Everyone should have the opportunity to visit an archaeological site that is undisturbed. In fact, collecting artifacts, including arrowheads, from public or tribal lands without a permit is a Federal crime. Violators risk prosecution and prison sentences of up to 1 year or more and/or possible fines in the tens of thousands of dollars.



What is an artifact?

Artifacts are objects made or used by humans. Examples of artifacts include pottery, baskets, bottles, weapons, arrowheads, rock paintings, and carvings.

Artifacts also include graves and skeletal materials that are at least 100 years old. There are laws that protect all Native American human remains.

Anyone who illegally obtains human remains and artifacts is subject to criminal penalties.

What is artifact looting?

Artifact looting is the act of collecting from the surface or digging through archaeological sites looking for historical and cultural objects. People who do this are called looters.

Looters selfishly collect and keep the artifacts for themselves or sell the objects for profit. This robs their communities and the public of the opportunity to discover sites and learn from the artifacts.

What laws apply to looting of archaeological sites and artifacts?

The Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) of 1979 protects artifacts and archaeological sites. ARPA recognizes that artifacts are at risk because of a growing commercial market. ARPA recognizes that these resources cannot be replaced once they are removed.

ARPA sets criminal penalties at a \$10,000 fine and/or a 1-year imprisonment. If the value of the resources involved exceeds \$500, penalties increase to \$20,000 and/or 2 years in prison. For a second or repeat offense, penalties are \$100,000 and/or 5 years in prison. Anyone who damages, digs up, removes, sells, or buys archaeological resources can pay these penalties.

There are other U.S. criminal laws and regulations that also include similar penalties and provisions.



Which activities are legal and which are not?

Only an archaeologist or historian can legally dig for artifacts on BLM public lands. They must have an advanced degree in anthropology or history. They must obtain a valid ARPA permit for the survey and excavation of archaeological sites.

The BLM approves permits for projects that contribute to archaeological research and education. Removal for any other purpose is illegal.

What is so bad about looting and collecting?

Archaeology is a science that depends on the material record in the ground. Qualified archaeologists record the exact location of every item when excavating within the site.

The location of the artifacts in relation to everything else at the site is called context. Context helps archaeologists figure out who used the artifacts, how they used them, and even when they used them. Moving the artifacts out of context destroys the story of the site.

Archaeological sites and artifacts are part of our shared past. Looting deprives all Americans of a clear understanding of our past.

Above all, it deprives living Native Americans of the relics that symbolize their heritage and their ancestors' way of life. These objects help them link past places with important tribal oral histories. Looting leaves literal holes in the story of the site and may destroy its meaning for both scientists and Native Americans.

People who loot or buy artifacts taken from public lands may claim that they have a private "collection" to share with others. Their claims usually contradict their actions because they often hide the artifacts away in an environment that degrades their quality. Wealthy collectors who pay for artifacts spur the continued destruction of archaeological sites.

Often looters are involved in other unlawful activities such as theft, poaching, and illegal trafficking. They frequently use the money obtained from selling the artifacts in the black market to support drug or alcohol addictions.

What can I do to help prevent looting?

BLM law enforcement rangers and special agents and the San Juan County Sheriff's Office in Utah understand the importance of these artifacts. They are working hard to protect them, but they need your help:

- If you observe someone that you suspect is looting, stay away from that person! They may be armed. As soon as it is safe to do so, call the San Juan County Sheriff's Office at 435-587-2237.
- If you find an archaeological site that you suspect was looted, immediately call the BLM resource protection hotline in Utah at 435-587-2237.

How can I get involved in archaeology?

- Join a field project through Passport in Time, a U.S. Forest Service and BLM volunteer archaeology and historic preservation program (www.passportintime.com).
- Participate in Utah Prehistory Week. This event held in May every year includes archaeology programs and activities for the public.
- Become a site steward. These volunteers receive training to help BLM archaeologists protect artifacts in the vast "outdoor museum" on BLM public lands. You will learn about cultural history and archaeology. The training focuses on field techniques, surveying, mapping, compass use, and important safety issues. Site stewards keep an eye on archaeological sites that are in danger of vandalism or natural deterioration. Contact the BLM office in Monticello (435-587-1500) or Moab (435-259-2100) to get started.
- Visit a museum. Public museums preserve, research, and exhibit artifacts and records. Many museums also have volunteer opportunities for you to help discover new stories to share about the sites and artifacts.



If you find an archaeological site or artifact, enjoy it with respect and leave it undisturbed.

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HELP PRESERVE OUR PAST

Stop Looting of Archaeological Resources

