

Archaeology: Building Our Future by Protecting the Past

archaeology



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

www.saa.org

The Public's Quest for Knowledge about the Past

The American public has shown a strong desire to learn about the past through archaeology. According to a recent poll by Harris Interactive, the public feels that “archaeology is important because we improve the future by learning about the past.”

People demonstrate their interest in the past with their wallets. The Travel Industry of America, an association that represents the U.S. tourism and travel industry, reports that cultural heritage travelers spend more money than the average U.S. traveler – visitors to cultural attractions tend to stay longer, thus paying for more food, lodging, and other purchases. This spending helps diversify the local economy and contributes to the preservation of the community's heritage.

Preserving archaeological sites is important for both economic and cultural reasons, and Americans feel strongly that such sites should have legal protection. According to the Harris research:

- ✱ 60% agree that public funds should be used to protect archaeological sites
- ✱ 98% feel that there should be laws to protect prehistoric and historic archaeological sites
- ✱ 85% think a penalty should be imposed for taking artifacts from publicly owned lands

So who is involved in protecting archaeological sites in the U.S.? Most people imagine that all archaeologists are professors who teach and do research at universities or museums. While many archaeologists do, in fact, work in university and museum settings, many others work for government agencies and spend most of their time managing, protecting, and preserving archaeological sites and interpreting the archaeological past to the public. An even greater number of archaeologists work for private sector companies that serve as consultants for government and development industries. These archaeologists carry out the fieldwork and research required for compliance with federal laws that protect archaeological sites and, when that is not possible, preserve the information that these sites can provide.

Archaeology is a way of learning about life in the past by studying the places where people lived and the objects that they left behind.

Tools & Resources

The Society for American Archaeology

www.saa.org

202-789-8200

Government Affairs Contact:

gov_affairs@saa.org

National Park Service

www.cr.nps.gov/archeology.htm

www.cr.nps.gov/aad/public

202-345-2100

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

www.achp.gov

202-606-8503

Society for Historical Archaeology

www.sha.org

856-224-0995

Email hq@sha.org

“Guide to working with Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act”

www.achp.gov/work106.html

“Preserving America's Past”: Cultural Resource Management and Historic Preservation Laws

www.indiana.edu/~arch/saa/matrix/01/SAAcurriculum.pdf



Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act

Most of the archaeological fieldwork carried out in the U.S. today is done in response to the requirements of Section 106 of the NHPA. The law requires federal agencies to “take into account the effects” of projects that they build, fund, or authorize on historic properties, including archaeological sites. The agency must also provide the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation with an opportunity to comment on those effects.

In consultation with State Historic Preservation Officers, Native Americans, and interested parties, an agency must:

- ✦ identify historic properties;
- ✦ evaluate their significance;
- ✦ determine how they will be affected by the project; and
- ✦ decide on measures to mitigate any adverse effects

For archaeological sites, these mitigation measures generally include scientific excavation and analysis, public interpretation, and the long-term care of the resulting collections and records so that these will be available for future research.

Native American tribes, under the 1992 Amendments to the NHPA, are stronger participants in the Section 106 process and are actively involved in protecting historic properties and cultural resources on tribal land.

The federal government manages about 640 million acres of public land in the U.S. and is responsible for preserving and protecting millions of archaeological sites on this land.

Laws that Protect our Archaeological Heritage

Archaeological sites in the U.S. are protected by a variety of federal, state, and local laws. The most broadly applicable of these laws is the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966. The NHPA requires that federal agencies be responsible stewards of the historic and prehistoric resources on lands under their management. The law also requires that agencies consider the impacts of the development projects that they carry out, fund, or authorize on all affected historic and prehistoric resources, not just those under their direct control. Other important laws that protect archaeological sites include the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979, which makes it a felony to loot sites on public or Indian lands, and the Abandoned Shipwrecks Act of 1987, which affords some protection to historic shipwrecks.

Who Pays for Archaeological Preservation and Research?

Each year the U.S. Congress appropriates some \$37 million to the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) to assist state, local, and tribal governments with historic preservation activities. In recent years, additional money has been appropriated to the HPF for matching grants to encourage private and non-federal investment in historic preservation.

All archaeological work carried out for compliance with Section 106 of NHPA is paid for either by the federal agency responsible for the project or by the developer seeking agency approval or funding.

Archaeological fieldwork and research carried out by universities and museums is funded not only by state appropriations but also by the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and other government agencies. Private organizations such as the National Geographic Society and private foundations also fund this work.



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

900 Second Street NE #12, Washington, DC 20002-3557

Tel: 202-789-8200

Email: gov_affairs@saa.org

www.saa.org

