



What If I Find an Artifact?



Visitors, leave artifacts for archeologists to research. (NPS photo)

What Is an Archeological Artifact?

“Artifacts” are the things that past peoples made, changed, and left behind where they lived and worked. Archeology is the scientific study of past human cultures. Archeologists excavate artifacts from archeological sites.

Leave It Be

Artifacts are not souvenirs! Leave the artifact where you found it. Please don't pick it up, move it, throw it, put it in your pocket or your bag, or bury it.

Document the Location

Note where you are. Snap a picture of the artifact where you found it. Step back and photograph the artifact with a landmark. Please don't post them on social media.

Alert a Park Ranger

Show a park ranger your pictures and the location of the artifact. If you cannot find a ranger, use the “Contact Us” form on the park's website to email the information.



Defacing rock images is also illegal. (NPS photo)

Taking Artifacts Is Illegal

Federal law protects archeological sites and artifacts on federal lands. You may not dig, collect artifacts, use metal detectors, or deface rock images in national park units.

Violations may result in jail time or fines, as well as confiscation of equipment. See the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) at 16 USC 470 § aa-mm and the associated regulations at 43 CFR 7.

Besides, collecting artifacts is not the right thing to do. By leaving artifacts in place, you help to preserve the condition of archeological sites. Keeping sites intact enables archeologists to study the past and share its stories with you. The NPS needs your help to preserve and protect archeological resources for everyone to appreciate.

If You See Something Wrong

Please notify a ranger immediately if you observe someone removing artifacts, damaging sites or rock images, or using metal detecting equipment on park land.

Learn More and Get Involved

Visit our websites to learn more about archeology (www.nps.gov/archeology) and ways to volunteer, intern, and work in parks (www.nps.gov/getinvolved/index.htm).