

# Archeology

The area now known as Zion National Park has long been home to a number of native peoples. After Zion became a national park, word started to spread about the interesting Native American dwellings and artifacts that could be seen there. Unfortunately, the sites were vandalized soon after and professional archeologists were sent in to investigate the area.

The first archeological excavations in Zion were conducted in 1934 by Ben Wetherill in Parunuweap Canyon, a part of the park now closed to the public and set aside as a Research Natural Area (RNA). This nationally significant district is rich in archeological sites of the Virgin Branch of the Ancestral Puebloan, including one site now known as 42Ws0122.

Today, archeology in Zion is very different from Wetherill's time. Sites are cared for through surveying, recording, monitoring, and stabilizing—excavation is not common. Park archeologists only excavate if a site is at risk of damage from natural or human causes, such as erosion, flooding, or vandalism. Archeologists prefer to leave sites and artifacts undisturbed in their natural state, which helps preserve the context in which objects are discovered. Zion's archeologists currently care for over 500 sites within the park.



*Recent photograph of a structure in 42Ws0122.  
NPS Photo*



## Case Study: 42Ws0122



*An unidentified individual with prehistoric structure in 42Ws0122, 1934. Museum Catalog No. ZION 10519*

### What's in a name?

The site 42Ws0122 was named using the “Smithsonian trinomial,” a standard used for identifying archeological sites in the United States. The “42” represents the state (Utah), “Ws” represents the county (Washington), and “0122” means that the site was the 122nd to be listed in that county.

42Ws0122 is one of the most architecturally complex sites in Zion. Ben Wetherill’s excavations in the 1930s recorded habitation structures, granaries, and cists and yielded artifacts such as projectile points, ceramic vessels, sandals, and baskets. Prehistoric use of the site dates from approximately 700 to 1200 A.D. Through Wetherill’s investigations, archeologists determined the people that inhabited this area were a unique culture, known as the Virgin Branch of the Ancestral Puebloan people. 42Ws0122 is a “Type Site,” meaning that its structures and artifacts are the models that define this cultural group.



*Puebloan pottery jar fragments found at the site, 1934. Museum Catalog No. ZION 13394*



*This Puebloan pottery jar is on display in the Zion Human History Museum permanent exhibit. Corn kernels inside were found to be about 1200 years old. Museum Catalog No. ZION 13341*