

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What kinds of archaeological sites do we have in Vermont?

Vermont has a remarkably rich and diverse archaeological heritage that spans approximately 13,000 years of human history. Archaeological site types range from Native American campsites used by the earliest Vermonters to Revolutionary War shipwrecks and abandoned 19th-century mining communities.

Native Americans have lived in what is now the State of Vermont for over 500 generations, adapting to the different seasons and leaving behind a tangible record of their activities in the soil. By studying these archaeological sites, we can get a glimpse of the number and variety of Native American places that likely exist in Vermont.

Vermont also has a large number of historic archaeological sites from the last 400 years. These sites preserve stories of exploration and war, relations with the Native occupants, early settlement, industry and commerce, tourism, transportation, and the unwritten tales of minority communities.

Why are Vermont's archaeological sites important?

Vermont's prehistoric and historic archaeological sites are a crucial link with our shared past. Dating back over 13,000 years, these sites provide the only record of Vermont's inhabitants, and their activities, cultures and lifeways. Even during the most recent period of written history, the vast majority of people did not write about their everyday activities, making archaeological sites often the only source of information for the longest part of human history. Archaeological sites are not renewable resources, they are finite and once gone, can never be replaced. Unless they are identified and protected, they are likely to be destroyed. Once identified, they can be projected and share the most precious links we have to Vermont's prehistoric and historic past.

What does "prehistoric" mean?

"Prehistoric" refers to the very long span of human history before written records were kept in any particular area. Some Native Americans and archaeologists prefer the term "Precontact" to describe the 1000s of years of Native American history prior to contact with Europeans. Although the terms "prehistoric" and "Precontact" are interchangeable, Precontact is preferred in most contexts because it recognizes that the absence of the written record does not mean that people did not have a history. Sites that pertain to the "historic period" in Vermont generally refer to those after 1609, the year that Samuel de Champlain first explored the lake that would come to bear his name.

There seems to be more concern with archaeological resources than ever before. Why?

In the last 35 years, we have learned that Native American occupations throughout Vermont were much more widespread and complex than previously believed or documented. We have also begun to appreciate the extent and diversity of sites from the historic period.

As more and more of Vermont's archaeological resources are destroyed, we are increasingly concerned with discovering and preserving our remaining archaeological heritage and improving our knowledge of these threatened resources. Federal and state laws require consideration of archaeological sites when certain kinds of development projects are planned. Many landowners value the archaeological sites on their land and provide critical stewardship to ensure the sites' long-term preservation.

What I should do if I discover artifacts or find an archaeological site?

Documenting a site, you have found and the artifacts you have collected is important! We strongly encourage you to record your discoveries on a map and/or with GPS coordinates, photographs, and other relevant locational information. This can be forwarded to the State Archaeologist, who shall help determine the type of site and its potential importance. We encourage you to leave discoveries in place,

but if artifacts are collected, please keep in mind that they are the property of the landowner. Landowners should be contacted before the removal of any archaeological materials.

Please also keep in mind that it is unlawful to disturb human burials. The police and State Archaeologist should be contacted immediately burials are encountered.

Who owns archaeological sites and artifacts on state or federal lands?

Archaeological sites on state or federal lands belong to the State of Vermont or to the managing federal agency. It is against the law to dig, collect artifacts, or otherwise disturb archaeological sites in these areas.

Examples of state lands in Vermont include state parks, state historic sites, state wildlife management areas, state forests, and under state waters. Examples of federal lands in Vermont include the Green Mountain National Forest and the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge.

Permits issued by the Vermont Division of Historic Preservation (VDHP) are required before any professional archaeological investigations take place on state lands or under state waters. A permit from the applicable federal agency is required before any archaeological work takes place on federal lands.

Who owns artifacts and sites under Lake Champlain and other state waters?

In 1975, the Vermont Legislature recognized the importance of Vermont's underwater historic heritage and made the state custodian of all underwater historic properties under Vermont's waters. The states of Vermont and New York split ownership of Lake Champlain's waters corresponding with the state borders.

VDHP serves as the state's custodian of its underwater historic properties with authority to administer their preservation and protection. State law requires that VDHP issue a permit prior to any type of exploration or recovery operations that may remove, displace, or destroy an underwater historic property. Permits are issued only to qualified professionals.

Can the underwater archaeological sites be explored?

The diving public can visit and enjoy a selection of important historic shipwrecks by diving on Vermont's and New York's Underwater Historic Preserves.

Who owns the archaeological sites and artifacts on my land?

You do! Archaeological sites and the artifacts they contain belong to you as the private landowner. Unless there is a require state or federal regulatory review or a permit for specific undertakings on your property, you have a right to do what you want with the sites on your land. The ONLY major exception is Burial Sites. Otherwise, you can collect artifacts from your sites, give permission for others to collect artifacts, or deny artifact collection and other site disturbances on your land.

How can I help protect archaeological sites in Vermont?

There are many ways you can protect and preserve archaeological sites on your property. If you are planning to subdivide, consider placing archaeological sites or sensitive lands within protected open or green space. If you are farming, consider refraining from deep plowing in archaeological site areas. You can also help protect archaeological sites by prohibiting artifact collecting on your property.

Contact the State Archaeologist, Jess Robinson jess.robinson@vermont.gov to talk about possible ways to protect your sites given your interests, needs, and land conditions.

What is a State Archaeological Landmark?

A State Archaeological Landmark is a designation given to an archaeological site of significance to the scientific study or public representation of Vermont's historical, prehistorical or aboriginal past. Once a

site is designated, archaeological investigations may be conducted only after securing a permit from VDHP.

Where are Vermont's recovered artifacts stored?

Collecting removes artifacts from their original context and alters or even destroys important clues to the past. However, due to development projects and natural events, artifact recovery has occurred. The Vermont Archaeology Heritage Center (VAHC) in Barre serves as the central warehouse for artifacts and archives of Vermont's past. The center is open to the public to explore our 13,000 years of history through exhibits, workshops, and lectures. The collection is currently based on more than 750 known archaeological sites, with reports and artifacts available to qualified researchers.

Is it legal to disturb the ground in a cemetery to find tombstones or human remains?

Burial sites, both marked or unmarked, of any age and the immediately associated artifacts are protected and state law prohibits their disturbance.

Who should I contact to talk about preserving archaeological sites in my town?

Contact the State Archaeologist, Jess Robinson jess.robinson@vermont.gov to discuss your community's interests, needs, and concerns. Acquisition of development rights through conservation easements are important ways to preserve archaeological sites or archaeologically sensitive lands now and in the future. Often, efforts to conserve one resource, such as farmland or forest, can be integrated with the preservation of archaeological sites. A community's purchase of land for conservation or for recreation can also often be combined with protection of archaeological sites.

If I see or know of looting of an archaeological site, whom should I contact?

Any disturbance, vandalism or looting of an archaeological site should be reported immediate to local law enforcement officials or VDHP at 802-272-2509.