

CHECK IT OUT: VERY OLD OBJECTS CHECKLIST

Antiquities and artifacts are one-of-a-kind treasures. It's very exciting to discover and investigate these objects, but you should take the time to observe ethical guidelines and consider long-term scientific consequences. Before you go in pursuit of fossils or buy an ancient artifact, be sure you understand the following points. Then, dig in!

collecting

- Report evidence of site vandalism, looting, or suspicious activity to authorities (e.g., NPS ranger, State Historic Preservation Office, State Archeologist, or a regional natural history museum).
- Do not purchase illegal artifacts. Trade in artifacts encourages looting by professional diggers. If buying objects, demand a provenance.
- Observe a professional standard of ethics. Discuss your finds with experts in a position to recognize exceptional or valuable specimens.
- Never trespass in order to hunt artifacts. Know the land laws in your state, and always ask permission before you go exploring.
- Know the limits of collection. For example, on BLM lands, individuals are limited to invertebrate fossils and 25 pounds of petrified wood a day.
- Assume that it is illegal to collect objects on Federal lands. Illegal items include skeletal material, arrowheads, lithic flakes, pottery or potsherds, rock art, old bottles, and pieces of old equipment or buildings.
- Do not dig! If you have found an important site, vital stratigraphic data will be lost.
- Hunt for artifacts where the ground is already disturbed, such as land that has been bulldozed or deeply plowed, and naturally eroded creek beds.
- Keep quiet about your best discoveries, except for talking with professional archeologists. Casual conversations often lead to site looting.
- Burials and grave goods can come to the surface naturally. If you see Native American artifacts, do not disturb the site. Report the site to authorities.

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Identification

- Make an exact record of archeological finds, noting location, date, and surrounding features. If an item is special, more work can be done on the same site. Label your finds to avoid later confusion.
- Take photographs of artifacts, including overall views and close-ups. Include a familiar object (e.g., a coin) to indicate scale.
- If it's an artifact (as opposed to a natural history specimen), try to determine the nature of the item. For example, is it a bowl? An amulet?
- Study the material substance of the object. If an artifact, what materials were used to make it, and what methods (e.g., carved, cast, woven)?
- What are the dimensions of the item? Make a record of size and weight. Be sure to note the unit of measurement you're using, and the type of dimension (e.g., width, circumference).
- Take note of any unique markings or inscriptions on the object. If you have an historical artifact, it may have a maker's marks or property mark.
- Record any distinguishing features that set it apart from other items in the same class. Are there signs of damage, excess wear, or unusual colorations?
- If necessary, use scientific tests to help identify materials. Research labs can identify composition, internal structure, multiple layers, density, etc.
- Get an expert to help identify objects. Consult local universities, State Historic Preservation Office or archaeological society, museums. You may have an important item that needs investigation.
- Always handle objects with clean, dry, lotion-free hands. Acids, oils, and salts in your skin can damage a variety of materials, e.g., porous ceramics.