

NPS Protocols for Archeological Discoveries

Archeological sites are fragile, non-renewable resources. Well-intentioned visitors to archeological sites sometimes cause lasting damage because they don't know how to behave in these sensitive places. It is important to be aware of the Federal and State laws governing archeological resources.

The Chumash and their predecessors have lived on Santa Rosa Island for over 13,000 years and archeological sites occur throughout the island. Prehistoric and historic items from a diverse array of people who have spent time on the islands provide insight into what life was like in past times.

Especially dense on the Channel Islands are sites archeologists call middens: areas of prehistoric detritus, shells, charcoal and other debris. Other common site types include villages with house depressions, campsites, quarries, ceremonial sites, stone walls, abandoned structures, corrals and ranching tools, fence lines, and military equipment. Care should be taken not to disturb archeological deposits or cause them to be mixed in any way.

In any area where people have lived for thousands of years, multiple cemeteries and burial locations will occur. Santa Rosa Island is no exception. Over the years, erosion has exposed some of these burials. The Chumash community living on the mainland today includes descendants from the original islanders. The living Chumash do not want their ancestors' remains and belongings disturbed. If you encounter human remains please show respect to the deceased and their families. Do not disturb the remains, and do not linger in the area unnecessarily.

It is a violation of Federal law to remove or disturb archeological sites or materials on public lands without a permit. Criminal penalties include fines up to \$20,000, imprisonment, or both. Civil penalties, including restitution and the forfeiture of equipment and vehicles may also be levied. Under California State Law it is also a felony, punishable by imprisonment in the state prison, to remove, obtain, or possess human remains or associated grave goods/artifacts, except as otherwise provided by law.

When an archeological site or artifact is found, do not disturb it. Small artifacts may be picked up and examined if they are lying completely exposed on the ground surface. Do not dig, pry, or cause any ground disturbance. Do not pick up items that look fragile. Do not wash, polish, or otherwise modify any artifacts. Be sure to return artifacts to their original location. If the conditions are muddy, avoid walking over archeological sites.

Make a note of your location. Record your location on a map, or take a GPS reading (be sure to indicate which map projection your GPS unit is using). After completion of the project, all maps containing site locations (or similar lists of GPS coordinates) should be destroyed or surrendered to the Park Archeologist.

Photograph with care. It is okay to photograph sites and artifacts. Often these can be useful to the Park Archeologist in relocating the site/artifact. However, do not take photographs of human remains. Do not publish or share on social media photographs of sites or artifacts. The precise location of sites and artifacts should be treated as confidential information.

Notify the Park Archeologist. If the site or artifact is endangered due to exposure to regular human traffic, erosion, or other natural or human forces, contact the Park Archeologist. If human remains are discovered, contact the Park Archeologist or Chief of Cultural Resources. Avoid discussing human remains over the radio or internet. If evidence of looting or vandalism is encountered (or you witness someone in the act), make a note of the location and leave the area (it is a crime scene and your presence may contaminate critical evidence). Make an immediate notification to the island Law Enforcement Ranger. All other discoveries should be reported to the Park Archeologist on a regular basis.

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