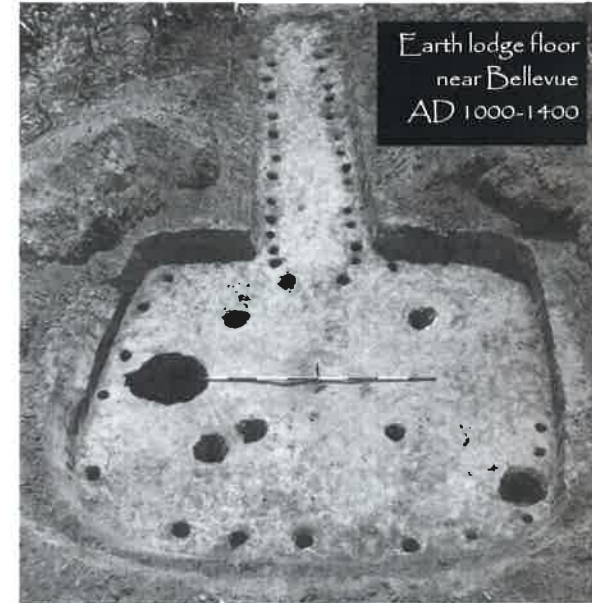


# ARCHEOLOGY in Nebraska

## A Guide for Landowners



Do you think or know you have an archeological site on your property? These important resources from the past can be of great value in understanding more about our heritage. The Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS) encourages you to work with us to preserve these sites.

Site preservation is similar to conservation and stewardship of your land. It is another way to create a legacy for the future.

### Will finding a site change how I use my land?

The decision is up to you. Many sites are buried deeply enough that cultivation causes little or no disturbance. Some sites are not deeply buried and cultivation can disturb them; if the ground has already been cultivated the damage is done and continued cultivation is unlikely to increase it. If the ground is in native pasture, breaking the sod for the first time could damage sites. Activities such as land leveling and terracing can seriously impact sites.

### How do I find out more?

If you know about an archeological site on your property, the NSHS would like to hear from you. It is as simple as contacting us. Our personnel will do the rest. If you want a professional archeologist to look at a site, we can arrange a time.

Preserving Nebraska's archeological heritage is up to all the people of this great state. The NSHS thanks you for your interest and help in this important endeavor!

### Nebraska State Historical Society

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[www.nebraskahistory.org/archeo/index.shtml](http://www.nebraskahistory.org/archeo/index.shtml)

### Archeology or Paleontology?

Archeology = what humans left behind

Paleontology = animal & plant fossils

**Archeology** helps us learn about people through what they left behind. **Paleontology** studies fossilized animals and plants to tell us about past environments and evolution. On some of the earliest human sites, paleontologists and archeologists may work together.

### How can I help preserve Nebraska's archeological heritage?

Since many archeological sites are located on private property, landowners' interest and assistance is essential. Identifying sites is the first step in protecting them and learning what they might tell us about the past. **Without your help, important sites may be missed.**

**Remember:** Reporting sites **does not** jeopardize your ownership, **does not** place any restrictions on your property, and **does not** require you to open the site for archeological investigation or public visitation.

### What are options for protecting sites on my land?

Any of these alternatives or a combination may work for you:

1. Allow professional archeologists to look for sites on your land.
2. Help identify any sites you know about by providing information to the NSHS.
3. Prohibit trespassers who collect artifacts either for personal use or to sell. It is especially important to prevent unauthorized digging for artifacts by non-professional archeologists.
4. Place a conservation easement on your property if it contains a known archeological site. An easement is a way to help preserve sites while still allowing certain farming and ranching practices. Contact the NSHS for more information on easements.
5. Donate the land containing an archeological site to a non-profit organization that has an interest in archeology and/or land stewardship.

**Ownership** of the artifacts and other materials that come from a site resides with the landowner. After archeologists have an opportunity to study the finds and write their reports, landowners may have the artifacts and other remains returned or they can donate them to an appropriate organization.



### What if I think I've found human remains?

Any discovery of human remains must be immediately reported to local law enforcement or your County Attorney. These officials will determine if the location is a potential crime scene. If not, they will implement the provisions of the Nebraska Unmarked Human Burial Sites Act (Stat. §12-1201 thru 12-1212 & 28-1301). The NSHS will dispatch archeologists to examine the remains. They will usually remove the remains with dignity and then try to determine if there are any living descendents or related cultural groups. Final disposition of the remains is decided in consultation with descendents or related cultural groups.



Stone beads & dart point, western NE

## The choice is yours.

Having an archeological site on your property

- **does not** jeopardize your ownership
- **does not** place any restrictions on your property
- **does not** require you to open the site for investigation or public visitation.

The location of an archeological site is strictly confidential.

**How might you want to partner with the NSHS?** Use these frequently asked questions and answers.

### What is an archeological site?

People have lived and traveled through the region we now call Nebraska for at least 12,000 years. Much of our knowledge of how these people lived comes from the archeological study of the remains they left behind. We find artifacts at the locations of former campsites, villages, lodges, homesteads, forts, trading posts, cemeteries and abandoned towns. Remains of the past may consist only of artifacts, like stone spear and arrow points and animal remains such as bone scrap. Physical remains also often include the things that people created for cooking, storing food, and shelter.

Pot from floor  
of earth lodge  
near Omaha  
AD 1000-1400



### Why are archeological sites important?

Much of what we know about the distant past comes from investigating archeological sites. Archeologists are keenly interested in finding and documenting these locations. Each is one-of-a-kind; each has a unique story to tell about how people lived on the land and interacted with their neighbors and the environment.



Excavation at Fort Robinson

By studying the artifacts and features preserved at sites, archeologists try to answer **questions about the past people of Nebraska.**

- **Who** lived here?
- **What** did they eat?
- **Where** did they come from?
- **How** are they related to those that came before and after?
- **Why** did their life change?

Archeologists can discover answers to these and many other questions.

Archeological sites are unique among Nebraska resources in that they are **truly non-renewable**. With time, forests can re-grow and waters can be cleaned of pollution. **Once archeological sites are gone, they can never be restored.**

### How do archeologists find sites?

Walking the ground, often in a systematic fashion, looking at the surface for telltale clues of past human activity, is a tried-and-true method archeologists use to identify sites. Clues include color changes in soil, charcoal flecks, tiny chips from making stone tools, bone fragments, pieces of broken pottery or glass fragments.

Archeological survey usually does not involve digging, but animal burrows or other disturbances can expose artifacts. Occasionally, archeologists use shovels to dig small holes to determine if a buried site might be present. Sediment from such shovel tests is often passed through a screen to look for small artifacts, bone, and charcoal. Archeologists refill each hole after noting any finds.



Searching for sites  
with a magnetometer

Archeologists now sometimes find sites by various high-tech approaches, such as ground penetrating radar, but these mainly supplement survey findings.

### What happens when a site is found?

Archeologists document sites on an official NSHS site form. These forms record basic information such as time period of the site, type of culture represented by the site, artifacts and features that are present. NSHS enters this information into a database that uses the site number for tracking purposes and enters site locations into a geographic information system (GIS) database. NSHS is the central repository for information on all archeological sites recorded in the state. It also produces reports about state archeology.

Recording a site allows future property owners and professional archeologists to know more about the site's significance and to recognize the importance of its preservation. Recording a site contributes to our understanding of Nebraska's past and is a way to preserve the past for the future. Knowing the location of sites means we can avoid inadvertently destroying them through construction or development. **We cannot protect sites if we do not know they exist.**

### Will a site on my property be excavated?

Archeologists rarely excavate sites, and when they do, it is usually because they are threatened by imminent destruction.

### No excavation is done without landowner permission.

Archeologists excavate in a controlled manner and generate a detailed record of how they worked and what they found. They record and map the horizontal and vertical location of artifacts and features and make detailed notes about all physical evidence they recover. After field work, they bring the artifacts and records to a laboratory for study and preservation.