



Preserving America's Heritage

ACHP Policy Statement:

Archaeology, Heritage Tourism, and Education

Introduction

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) aims, among other things, “to insure future generations a genuine opportunity to appreciate and enjoy the rich heritage of our nation” (16 U.S.C. 470(b)(5)). The NHPA goes on to state that “it shall be the policy of the federal government, in cooperation with other nations and in partnership with the states, local governments, Indian tribes, and private organizations and individuals to - (1) use measures, including financial and technical assistance, to foster conditions under which our modern society and our prehistoric and historic resources can exist in productive harmony and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations” (16 U.S.C. 470-1).

Executive Order 13287, “Preserve America,” signed by President George W. Bush on March 3, 2003, builds on this mandate, stating that “it is the policy of the federal government to provide leadership in preserving America’s heritage by actively advancing the protection, enhancement, and contemporary use of the historic properties owned by the federal government, and by promoting intergovernmental cooperation and partnerships for the preservation and use of historic properties.” Executive Order 13287 recognizes the importance of preserving “the unique cultural heritage of communities and of the nation, and to realize the economic benefit that these properties can provide.”

The value of archaeological resources

As used in this policy, the term “archaeological resources” includes archaeological sites (properties or districts), material collections derived from field investigations, related records and data, and results of archaeological investigations. This definition of “archaeological resources” is consistent with the definition used in the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (16 U.S.C. 470aa-mm) and its implementing regulations: “any material remains [including physical evidence] of human life and activities ... which are of archaeological interest” (43 CFR 7.3(a)). “Of archaeological interest” is defined in those regulations as being “capable of providing scientific or humanistic understandings of past human behavior, cultural adaptation, and related topics through the application of scientific or scholarly techniques such as controlled observation, contextual measurement, controlled collection, analysis, interpretation and explanation.”

Many archaeological resources have significant value and benefits as part of our common heritage, and can contribute to public understanding and appreciation of the past through heritage education programs and heritage tourism initiatives at a local, statewide, or regional level. Archaeological resources can have many associated values, including research, cultural, spiritual, aesthetic, and economic values, among

others. Some of these values can support heritage tourism uses, as well as a broader public education component. As demonstrated in a public opinion poll conducted in 2000 by Harris Interactive for the Society for American Archaeology, archaeological resources and the archaeological process hold particular fascination and interest for many members of the public. The Harris Poll found that most Americans “support the goals and practice of archaeology, endorse laws protecting archaeological sites and artifacts, and think archaeology is important to today’s society.” Many of these same individuals are likely to be active heritage tourists.

Heritage tourism, education, and archaeology

Heritage tourism is a component of heritage education, a way to augment the learning experience through onsite visitation and appreciation of archaeological resources and what they tell us. A major goal of visitation and education is to create informed advocates and stewards for such resources and their preservation. Heritage tourism programs and projects also include actively attracting visitors as a form of local or regional economic development. Heritage tourism is defined in Executive Order 13287 as “the business and practice of attracting and accommodating visitors to a place or area based especially on the unique or special aspects of that locale’s history, landscape, and culture.” The National Trust for Historic Preservation further defines cultural heritage tourism as “travel to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present” (*Getting Started: How to Succeed in Cultural Heritage Tourism*, <http://www.culturalheritagetourism.org/howToGetStarted.htm>).

The practice of archaeology, its potential to generate public appreciation of the stories about the past, and public access to interpreted sites and archaeological collections have long been recognized internationally as subjects worthy of educational programs as well as tourism development. Opportunities abound for using archaeological resources in both K-12 and higher education programs, as well as for informal or continuing heritage education activities for the broader public. A number of popular tourism destinations in the United States, such as Mesa Verde or Jamestown, are significant archaeological resources that provide visitors an opportunity to view visible remains in their original context, see collections in museum exhibits, and read, hear, and see interpretations of what has been learned.

At other locations, engaging visitors to actively participate in archaeology under controlled and limited conditions may also be appropriate. Such “participatory archaeology” can offer an excellent opportunity for educating a segment of the public about archaeology and resource stewardship, as well as providing a rewarding leisure activity. While an “admission” or other fee may be charged in order to defray the costs of operating such programs, rarely is this considered a business development activity in its own right capable of returning a profit for commercial investment.

Stewardship of archaeological resources

Legitimate concerns have been raised about tourism development in general, the visitor experience, and the potential impact of visitors and related development on the archaeological record. Such issues may include the adequacy of resource conservation, sustainability, and management; the appropriateness of public access and associated site improvements at a particular location; the cultural sensitivity of some remains as well as their interpretation; and the economic viability of open sites and necessary visitor facilities. Careful consideration of these issues, either informally or more formally through consultation called for under applicable law, may conclude that it is appropriate to use archaeological collections and the results of archaeological research in heritage tourism projects and programs, but not to engage the public at the physical “site.” In such cases, other means of interpreting and presenting the results of archaeological study should be considered, including, but not limited to, electronic “virtual” tours, exhibits, film, and offsite interpretation. Presentations such as these, made available in several languages

where warranted, can foster broad understanding and support heritage tourism initiatives. In other cases, the conclusion may be that a site should not be used for heritage tourism.

Management and economic issues also need to be assessed in reaching decisions about the longer-term viability and sustainability of archaeological heritage tourism. Just because an archaeological site is opened and presented to the public does not mean it will be visited or appreciated, or that visitor use can be supported financially. A sound and realistic business plan is necessary. Issues to consider here include the potential market and audience for this form of tourism; whether site development is an appropriate use of the resources; the impact of a site's location and ownership on public access; immediate and long-term financial and management needs; and the ability and willingness of responsible parties to prepare and implement necessary development, interpretive, and public use plans.

PRINCIPLES

It is the policy of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) to foster public understanding and appreciation of archaeological resources through heritage education programs and, where appropriate, heritage tourism initiatives while encouraging their conservation for future generations in a spirit of stewardship.

The following principles and accompanying guidance have been adopted by the ACHP to assist ACHP staff, federal agency decision-makers, and other parties when, in the effort to foster a greater appreciation and understanding of the American past, they are or will be making decisions about incorporating archaeology and archaeological resources into heritage tourism projects and programs as well as broader education initiatives.

These principles and guidance should also be useful for State and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, local communities with significant archaeological resources that may be of public interest (including, but not limited to, Preserve America and Main Street communities), tourism industry professionals, businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and private individuals involved in heritage development projects.

1. *The public interest in archaeological resources and their interpretation makes them an excellent focus for heritage tourism and related public education efforts.*
2. *While some archaeological resources may be especially appropriate and even desirable for public heritage tourism and education programs, other resources may not.*
3. *Decisions about when, where, how, and even whether to interpret and present archaeological resources to the public should be made in consultation with a broad range of parties. Parties to be consulted include those with particular legal interests or ties to the place or resources that would be interpreted, as well as those with interests in heritage tourism, public education, historical and scientific research, and natural as well as cultural resource conservation*
4. *Responsible public interpretation for heritage tourism initiatives should include current scholarship and findings from archaeological study and other forms of knowledge to bring the past and its investigation to life for the general public.*
5. *Archaeological resources that are made part of public education programs and/or heritage tourism initiatives should be supportable and sustainable through professional, adequately funded, and well-developed and -executed management programs.*

GUIDANCE

1. The public interest in archaeological resources and their interpretation makes them an excellent focus for heritage tourism and related public education efforts.

- a. The Society for American Archaeology's public opinion poll has demonstrated the strong public interest in and appreciation for archaeological knowledge, archaeological resources, and the archaeological discovery process.
- b. There is often great interest in the process of interpreting the lives of people, places, and events of the past, especially those that are reconstructed as a result of archaeological research or are presented in museum contexts.
- c. The discipline of archaeology can foster a greater understanding of and appreciation for peoples and cultures of the past as well as the traditions, events, and places valued by living peoples today.
- d. Through tourism projects, public education programs can assist in mutual understanding and respect between peoples and societies, and between the present and the past.
- e. Tourism can serve to educate the public through both short-term archaeology projects that are open for visitation and long-term archaeology interpretive programs.
- f. Public awareness and appreciation of the value of archaeology and its contribution to our knowledge about both past and living cultures is an important goal consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act and other national heritage policies.

2. While some archaeological resources may be especially appropriate and even desirable for public heritage tourism and education programs, other resources may not.

- a. In making decisions about whether a given archaeological resource's preservation and use is the best and most appropriate way to tell this story to the public, the physical manifestations of the archaeological resources, and how their physical features lend themselves to being viewed and understood, need to be carefully considered.
- b. Many archaeological resources are valued for religious or cultural reasons by Indian tribes (including Alaska Native Villages, Regional and Village Corporations), Native Hawaiian organizations, or other cultural and lineal descendants of the site's creators. Although these uses may be of interest to the public, such ascribed religious or cultural values associated with the archaeological resources may ultimately be in conflict with public access or display. Cultural or lineal descendants should be consulted early about potential public uses of such resources to ensure their views and perspectives are fully considered.
- c. Archaeological resources are fragile and non-renewable, and their conservation and long-term preservation must be considered when weighing plans for increased public access. In addition, some resources may be physically inaccessible to the public, such as those located on a military reservation, on tribal lands, or in difficult terrain. This ability to manage visitation should be considered in reaching decisions about appropriate uses of archaeological resources for tourism.
- d. Where public access is inappropriate or difficult, or cannot be effectively managed, alternative means of presenting archaeological resources and information to the public for both educational and tourism purposes may be desirable. Such alternatives may include offsite videos, Web sites, interactive interpretation and exhibits, and "virtual" tours.
- e. If present, and when properly researched and presented, archaeological resources associated with a standing historic property or location of a past historic event can add considerably to the interpretation and appreciation of that property. An archaeological resource does not have to be listed on or meet the criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places in order to be a candidate for heritage tourism or public education if it has a compelling story to tell and is interpretable.

- f. The issue of human remains is particularly sensitive; decisions should consider the potential for encountering human remains and associated grave goods and have plans in place to deal with the discovery, care, and treatment of any such remains that may be encountered. In all cases, human remains and associated grave goods should be treated with respect and dignity and in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.
- g. In some cases, archaeological heritage tourism or public interpretation of archaeological resources may not be appropriate. This can be a valid decision to make after considering all perspectives.

3. *Decisions about when, where, how, and even whether to interpret and present archaeological resources to the public should be made in consultation with a broad range of parties. Parties to be consulted include those with particular legal interests or ties to the place or resources that would be interpreted, as well as those with interests in heritage tourism, public education, historical and scientific research, and natural as well as cultural resource conservation.*

- a. Decisions should also consider knowledge of the values placed on the resources by living groups, and any associated concerns about privacy, preservation, interpretability, and appropriate uses of the resources.
- b. If a site proposed for tourism is of significance to an Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization, their views and perspective on the proposed project should be sought and considered at the earliest possible time in the planning process.
- c. Any ascribed spiritual or cultural values associated with the archaeological resources should be fully and carefully considered in making decisions about appropriate public visitation. Whether or how such associated values are interpreted and presented to the broader public should be determined in consultation with those who ascribe such significance to the archaeological resources.
- d. Decisions should be based on a broad understanding of historical and cultural context. This should include the rarity, state of preservation, and current state of knowledge about the resources.
- e. There should be an appropriate consideration of protection and access. Such consideration should include a weighing of current or anticipated long-term threats, and adequate provision for the maintenance and sustainability of any archaeological resources that are used for tourism or other educational purposes.

4. *Responsible public interpretation for heritage tourism initiatives should include current scholarship and findings from archaeological study and other forms of knowledge to bring the past and its investigation to life for the general public.*

- a. Scholarship includes sufficient and accurate professional research, including, when appropriate, reference to oral histories and traditional knowledge provided by cultural or lineal descendants, and the results of avocational archaeological studies.
- b. There needs to be reliable and accurate information about the resources in order to present the relevant facts and tell a compelling story.
- c. Archaeological resources as interpreted today are the end results of physical and cultural processes in operation over long periods of time. Heritage tourists and other students of archaeology will benefit from an understanding of the process of formation, discovery, and interpretation.
- d. Public interpretation for heritage tourism should be germane to the particular archaeological resource as well as broader educational goals. Information should illuminate not only the specific archaeological site and its remains but also past lifeways, cultural practices, and development patterns.

- e. Archaeological resources used for heritage tourism should also, as practicable, provide a context that helps visitors appreciate a site's value to any cultural and lineal descendants living today.

5. *Archaeological resources that are made part of public education programs and/or heritage tourism initiatives should be supportable and sustainable through professional, adequately funded, and well-developed and -executed management programs.*

- a. A broad range of governmental and non-governmental organizations can and should participate in decisions about the uses of archaeological resources for heritage tourism or educational purposes, to ensure these projects combine excellent scholarship, responsible stewardship, and sustainable development and management.
- b. Developing partnerships with others who may have a stake in the success of the venture can be very important in the development and the sustainability of heritage tourism or public education that focuses on archaeological resources.
- c. Governmental entities, non-governmental organizations, private non-profit, and business enterprises that control archaeological resources should include archaeological interpretation and public access where appropriate as part of project planning and mitigation programs (such as those negotiated through Section 106 of the NHPA).
- d. In some cases, publicly owned archaeological resources may best be protected and managed through public interpretation and controlled public access. In other cases, threatened archaeological resources should be considered for more formal public interpretive development and/or control of public access in order to help protect them.
- e. Archaeological resources with active non-managed visitation will need to be carefully monitored to ensure that resulting impacts (including looting, vandalism, erosion, or over-use) are controlled and managed.
- f. The appropriateness of archaeological excavation in the first place, and the future care of archaeological resources (including any resulting collections), should be determined prior to a decision about whether and under what circumstances to excavate a site for tourism or public education purposes.
- g. With adequate professional supervision and support, members of the public, including volunteers and cultural and lineal descendants, can all play a role in "participatory archaeology" at certain sites. This participation could involve all phases of archaeological research (as appropriate, background research, oral histories, field investigation, artifact preparation, cataloging, analysis, description, and site monitoring) so that participants gain an understanding of the range of activities that encompass archaeology.

[The members of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation unanimously adopted this policy on August 15, 2008]