

Tips for Visiting an Archaeological Site with Children

Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints!

Archaeological sites are like books, holding information that is waiting to be read. If you take artifacts home, or if you dig into a site and disturb it, it's like tearing a page out of the book, which damages its scientific and historical value forever. The joy that most people experience on archaeological sites is the excitement of discovery, and if artifacts are left in place, that joy and excitement can be experienced over and over again. If you take home some of that site in your pockets, you deprive everyone who comes after you of seeing and enjoying the site the same way. Keep in mind also, for any site on State or Federal Land, damaging an archaeological site is illegal.

- Pick a site where a high point will allow a view of the whole site, and its relation to important landforms (water sources, potential farming sites, sacred areas)
- Learn how to recognize remnants of prehistoric walls, hearths, storage and grinding features. Walk around, not on or through them.
- Bring along a handful of pin flags (available inexpensively from hardware stores). Encourage children to mark objects as they find them, and then go back to each flag, identifying what was found and talking about what it might mean. As you go, pick up the pin flags and leave the artifacts so the site is just as you found it.
- Use your visit as a clear modeling of respect for cultural resources, and the value of contextual information.
- Make sure you have permission to visit. Most national parks and monuments are accessible but have restrictions about walking off developed trails. Often the regional BLM office can direct you to sites that are already known and can be visited. State parks and historic sites are likewise generally accessible, but talk to the manager for permission. Respect private land by avoiding trespass, or ask permission from the owner.