

A Message from Yosemite's Park Archeologist

During 1983, a young boy, who was visiting Yosemite with his family, discovered a rare archeological find. While exploring near his campsite, the boy found a "cache" of seven obsidian "preforms" nestled in a deep crack of a granite boulder. The preforms are large, partially manufactured obsidian blades, made by prehistoric Indians, which could later be shaped into smaller finished tools such as arrowheads, knives, or scrapers. Often these preforms were stored as a cache in the cracks of large rocks or at the base of a tree so that they could be found at a later time to be used for hunting or for trade with other Indians.

The discovery of such a cache is very important to archeologists because it is the remaining evidence of a single cultural event or activity. By studying the preforms, much can be learned about the people who made them -- how long ago they were made, and from where the obsidian originally came. Careful analysis of these artifacts showed that the natural source of the obsidian was a volcanic flow located north of Mammoth Lakes, California, some 80 miles by trail from where they were finally discovered, and that they were manufactured approximately 2,000 years ago.

The important part of this story is that this young visitor to Yosemite, while very excited about his discovery, took the time to deliver to Park Rangers the artifacts so that they could be properly recorded, analyzed, and preserved. It is unfortunate that many visitors find historic and prehistoric artifacts within our National Parks and, without realizing the importance of leaving them undisturbed, remove them. It is more often the case that people take artifacts from Yosemite than those who leave things in their place and report the location to a National Park Service employee.

Artifacts and archeological sites are rare, non-renewable resources. Once they are lost, or removed without proper recording, the information that they hold is lost forever.

Please help us to preserve Yosemite's past.



This brochure produced for the National
Park Service by The Yosemite Association.

YOSEMITE'S PAST BELONGS TO THE FUTURE . . .

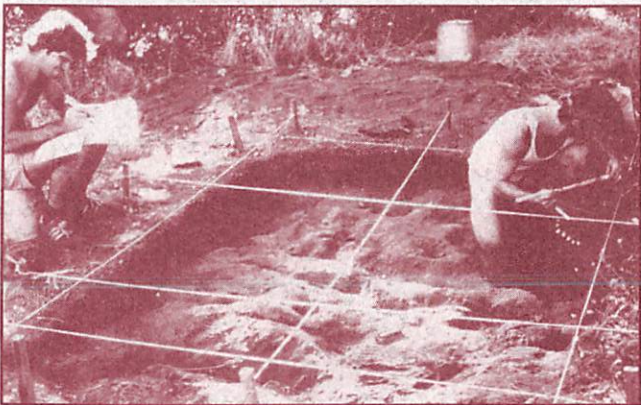


Traditional Miwok Indian cedar-bark house in Yosemite Valley during the late 1800's.

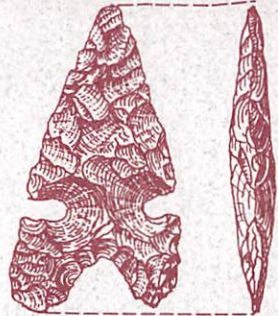
. . . BUT ONLY IF THE PRESENT CAN PRESERVE IT.

YOSEMITE'S HERITAGE

Almost three million people of many different cultures visit Yosemite National Park each year. But long before Yosemite became a national park, native Californians called this area their home. Later, pioneers of the American West lived and travelled through the area. There are thousands of archeological sites in Yosemite where native peoples gathered and hunted food, made stone tools and baskets, and conducted other day-to-day activities. In other areas, pioneers built cabins, mined for gold and silver, blazed trails and built roads. Archeologists are actively studying and preserving these sites today.



Archeologists conducting research in Yosemite National Park.



Obsidian arrow point typical of the Mariposa Phase of prehistory in Yosemite (1200 A.D. to 1850 A.D.).

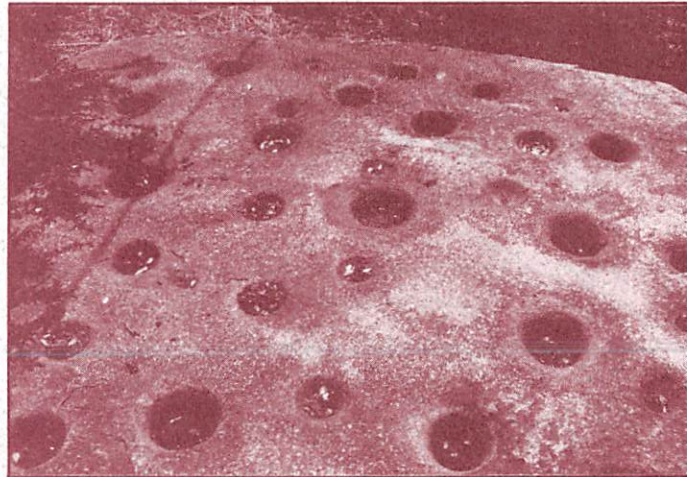
Archeology is a science that studies the remains of past human behavior. Archeologists search for clues to answer such questions as "Who lived here in the past?", "When were they here and from where did they come?" and "How did they live?". The "clues" archeologists use to answer these and many other questions could be anything from flakes of stone chipped

during stone-tool manufacturing or large granite boulders with mortar cups shaped into their surfaces, to trail blazes carved into trees by non-Indian people in the late 19th century.

Conducting an archeological investigation is much like assembling a complex three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle. Pieces of carefully gathered information can form an accurate composite picture of how people lived at a certain time in the past.

If pieces of the puzzle are lost, the view into the past becomes distorted, sometimes impossible to see.

But also like a jigsaw puzzle, ways in which these clues to the past fit together is just as important as the individual clues themselves. The relationship of an artifact, or archeological clue, to other artifacts and to its natural surroundings is essential information in reconstructing the past. An artifact out of context is little more than a curio, with lost meaning.



Large granite bedrock mortar used by prehistoric and historic Indians to grind acorns and other plant materials for food.

People have been in the Yosemite area for at least 3,000 years. More than 1,000 prehistoric and historic sites have been recorded in only five percent of the park. It is estimated that more than 5,000 such sites are scattered throughout the entire park. Through ongoing research, archeologists have been able to determine what types of food prehistoric

Archeological sites represent the last link to our cultural heritage.

If you do discover artifacts or an archeological site within Yosemite, please observe with care, leave everything as you find it, and contact:

Yosemite Archeology Office
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite National Park, CA 95389

peoples ate, with what other local or distant cultures they traded, and what areas were preferred for living sites (often the same areas we choose today).

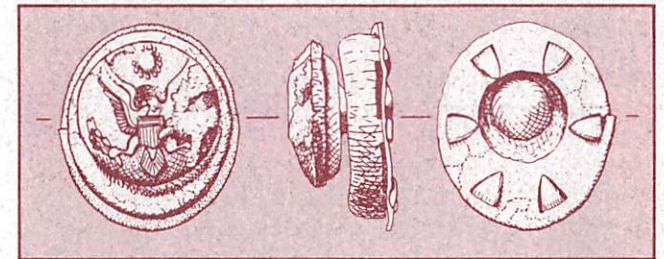
Valuable information from historical, ethnographic, and archeological studies allows us to take a glimpse of the past cultures -- to share in the experiences of the people who lived here before us. A reconstruction of a Miwok Indian village behind the Visitor's Center in Yosemite Valley offers a graphic depiction of the lifestyle and material culture of those native people.

An estimated 1,000 artifacts are taken from Yosemite by visitors each year.

Archeological sites represent the last link with ancient peoples and the early pioneers of the American West. Too often, however, visitors to Yosemite National Park do not realize the importance of artifacts in reconstructing the past. Once these remnants of the past are taken, they are gone forever. Archeological sites and artifacts are non-renewable resources.

Federal laws protect the prehistoric and historic objects and sites. In 1906 Congress passed the Antiquities Act, making it illegal to "appropriate, excavate, injure or destroy any prehistoric ruin or object of antiquity."

That law still exists, but because of flagrant damage and theft since 1906, the Archeological Resources Protection Act was passed in 1979. Specifically, the law states it is "illegal to excavate, remove, damage, alter or deface any archeological resources, on any federal land or reservation." Severe criminal and civil penalties are established under the law.



U.S. Military snap fastener found in Yosemite, used during the period of military administration of the park (1891 - 1916).

You can help preserve Yosemite's extensive and diverse cultural history. Exploring Yosemite's history and prehistory can be an exciting part of your visit. If you find an artifact or archeological site, leave it as you find it and observe with care. Remember that artifacts are most important when archeologists can study them in their original context. With your help we can preserve this important legacy.