



When Visitors Hand You Artifacts



Park employees, here's what to do if visitors bring artifacts to you.
(NPS photo)

Treat It as a Teachable Moment

Explain why artifacts should be left in place: Artifacts are part of archeological sites, which tell us about human life in the past. When artifacts are removed from sites, we lose clues about the activities that took place there. Thank the visitor, but advise that if there's a next time, they should take a picture and leave the artifact behind.

Ask To See the Location and Pictures

Have the visitor lead you to where the artifact was found, or ask them to point to the place on a map. If the visitor took pictures, ask for copies to be emailed to the park.

Learn About the Condition of the Area

Get a sense of why the artifact was found. Ask the visitor: Was the artifact in the open? Was it eroding out of a river bank or hill? Was it on the ground surface? In a hole? Near a trail? Were other artifacts also exposed?



Exhibit of artifacts returned to Wupatki NM. (NPS photo)

Inquire about Social Media

See if there's any chance the pictures were posted to social media. If they were, explain that viewers may use social media to track sites and loot them. Ask the visitor to remove pictures from social media.

Turn in the Artifact

After you have gathered information from the visitor, provide it and the artifact to the Park Archeologist or Resource Manager, or the Superintendent. You may wish to consult with your NPS regional office or archeological center for assistance.

What Happens Next

An archeologist will follow up by locating the site, evaluating any damage, assessing the condition, and conducting necessary reporting. Depending on the case, the artifact may go to a curation facility for processing, or to an educational collection. Some parks create exhibits from the artifacts handed in by visitors to explain federal law, stewardship, and site integrity.

If You Find an Artifact or Site

If you find a looted or disturbed site: Secure the scene. Do not enter the area. Contact your Superintendent or Law Enforcement, Park Archeologist or Cultural Resources Manager, and the Regional Archeologist.