

Archeological documentation is a series of actions applied to properties of archeological interest. Documentation of such properties may occur at any or all levels of planning, identification, evaluation or treatment. The nature and level of documentation is dictated by each specific set of circumstances. Archeological documentation consists of activities such as archival research, observation and recording of above-ground remains, and observation (directly, through excavation, or indirectly, through remote sensing) of below-ground remains. Archeological documentation is employed for the purpose of gathering information on individual historic properties or groups of properties. It is guided by a framework of objectives and methods derived from the planning process, and makes use of previous planning decisions, such as those on evaluation of significance. Archeological documentation may be undertaken as an aid to various treatment activities, including research, interpretation, reconstruction, stabilization and data recovery when mitigating archeological losses resulting from construction. Care should be taken to assure that documentation efforts do not duplicate previous efforts.

### **Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Archeological Documentation**

*Standard I. Archeological Documentation Activities Follow an Explicit Statement of Objectives and Methods That Responds to Needs Identified in the Planning Process*

Archeological research and documentation may be undertaken to fulfill a number of needs, such as overviews and background studies for planning interpretation or data recovery to mitigate adverse effects. The planning needs are articulated in a statement of objectives to be accomplished by the archeological documentation activities. The statement of objectives guides the selection of methods and techniques of study and provides a comparative framework for evaluating and deciding the relative efficiency of alternatives. Satisfactory documentation involves the use of archeological and historical sources, as well as those of other disciplines. The statement of objectives usually takes the form of a formal and explicit research design which has evolved from the interrelation of planning needs, current knowledge, resource value and logistics.

*Standard II. The Methods and Techniques of Archeological Documentation are Selected To Obtain the Information Required by the Statement of Objectives*

The methods and techniques chosen for archeological documentation should be the most effective, least destructive, most efficient and economical means of obtaining the needed information. Methods and techniques should be selected so that the results may be verified if necessary. Non-destructive techniques should be used whenever appropriate. The focus on stated objectives should be maintained throughout the process of study and documentation.

*Standard III. The Results of Archeological Documentation are Assessed Against the Statement of Objectives and Integrated into the Planning Process*

One product of archeological documentation is the recovered data; another is the information gathered about the usefulness of the statement of objectives itself. The recovered data are assessed against the objectives to determine how they meet the specified planning needs. Information related to archeological site types, distribution and density should be integrated in planning at the level of identification and evaluation. Information and data concerning intra-site structure may be needed for developing mitigation strategies and are appropriately integrated at this level of planning. The results of the data analyses are integrated into the body of current knowledge. The utility of the method of approach and the particular techniques which were used in the investigation (i.e., the research design) should be assessed so that the objectives of future documentation efforts may be modified accordingly.

### *Standard IV. The Results of Archeological Documentation are Reported and Made Available to the Public*

Results must be accessible to a broad range of users including appropriate agencies, the professional community and the general public. Results should be communicated in reports that summarize the objectives, methods, techniques and results of the documentation activity, and identify the repository of the materials and information so that additional detailed information can be obtained, if necessary. The public may also benefit from the knowledge obtained from archeological documentation through pamphlets, brochures, leaflets, displays and exhibits, or by slide, film or multimedia productions. The goal of disseminating information must be balanced, however, with the need to protect sensitive information whose disclosure might result in damage to properties. Curation arrangements sufficient to preserve artifacts, specimens and records generated by the investigation must be provided for to assure the availability of these materials for future use.

## **Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Archeological Documentation**

### *Introduction*

These Guidelines link the Standards for Archeological Documentation with more specific guidance and technical information. They describe one approach to meeting the Standards for Documentation. Agencies, organizations or individuals proposing to approach archeological documentation differently may wish to review their approach with the National Park Service.

The Guidelines are organized as follows:

Archeological Documentation Objectives

Documentation Plan

Methods

Reporting Results

Curation

Recommended Sources of Technical Information

1. Collection of base-line data;
2. Problem-oriented research directed toward particular data gaps recognized in the historic

context(s);

3. Preservation or illustration of significance which has been identified for treatment by the planning process; or

4. Testing of new investigative or conservation techniques, such as the effect of different actions such as forms of site burial (aqueous or nonaqueous).

Many properties having archeological components have associative values as well as research values. Examples include Native American sacred areas and historic sites such as battlefields. Archeological documentation may preserve information or data that are linked to the identified values that a particular property possesses. Depending on the property type and the range of values represented by the property, it may be necessary to recover information that relates to an aspect of the property's significance other than the specified research questions. It is possible that conflicts may arise between the optimal realizations of research goals and other issues such as the recognition/protection of other types of associative values. The research design for the archeological documentation should provide for methods and procedures to resolve such conflicts, and for the close coordination of the archeological research with the appropriate ethnographic, social or technological research.

### *Archeological Documentation Objectives*

The term "archeological documentation" is used here to refer specifically to any operation that is performed using archeological techniques as a means to obtain and record evidence about past human activity that is of importance to documenting history and prehistory in the United States. Historic and prehistoric properties may be important for the data they contain, or because of their association with important persons, events, or processes, or because they represent architectural or artistic values, or for other reasons. Archeological documentation may be an appropriate option for application not only to archeological properties, but to aboveground structures as well, and may be used in collaboration with a wide range of other treatment activities.

If a property contains artifacts, features, and other materials that can be studied using archeological techniques, then archeological documentation may be selected to achieve particular goals of the planning process, such as to address a specified information need, or to illustrate significant associative values. Within the overall goals and priorities established by the planning process, particular methods of investigation are chosen that best suit the types of study to be performed.

Relationship of archeological documentation to other types of documentation or other treatments: Archeological documentation is appropriate for achieving any of various goals, including:

### *Documentation Plan*

Research Design: Archeological documentation can be carried out only after defining explicit

goals and a methodology for reaching them. The goals of the documentation effort directly reflect the goals of the preservation plan and the specific needs identified for the relevant historic contexts. In the case of problem oriented archeological research, the plan usually takes the form of a formal research design, and includes, in addition to the items below, explicit statements of the problem to be addressed and the methods or tests to be applied. The purpose of the statement of objectives is to explain the rationale behind the documentation effort; to define the scope of the investigation; to identify the methods, techniques, and procedures to be used; to provide a schedule for the activities; and to permit comparison of the proposed research with the results. The research design for an archeological documentation effort follows the same guidelines as those for identification (see the Guidelines for Identification) but has a more property-specific orientation.

The research design should draw upon the preservation plan to identify:

1. Evaluated significance of the property(ies) to be studied;
2. Research problems or other issues relevant to the significance of the property,
3. Prior research on the topic and property type; and how the proposed documentation objectives are related to previous research and existing knowledge;
4. The amount and kinds of information (data) required to address the documentation objectives and to make reliable statements including at what point information is redundant and documentation efforts have reached a point of diminishing returns;
5. Methods to be used to find the information; and
6. Relationship of the proposed archeological investigation to anticipated historical or structural documentation, or other treatments.

The primary focus of archeological documentation is on the data classes that are required to address the specified documentation objectives. This may mean that other data classes are deliberately neglected. If so, the reasons for such a decision should be carefully justified in terms of the preservation plan.

Archeological investigations seldom are able to collect and record all possible data. It is essential to determine the point at which further data recovery and documentation fail to improve the usefulness of the archeological information being recovered. One purpose of the research design is to estimate those limits in advance and to suggest at what point information becomes duplicative. Investigation strategies should be selected based on these general principles, considering the following factors:

1. Specific data needs;
2. Time and funds available to secure the data; and
3. Relative cost efficiency of various strategies.

Responsiveness to the concerns of local groups (e.g., Native American groups with ties to specific properties) that was built into survey and evaluation phases of the preservation plan, should be maintained in archeological investigation, since such activity usually involve, site disturbance. The research design, in addition to providing for appropriate ethnographic research and consultation, should consider concerns voiced in previous phases. In the absence of

previous efforts to coordinate with local or other interested groups, the research design should anticipate the need to initiate appropriate contracts and provide a mechanism for responding to sensitive issues, such as the possible uncovering of human remains or discovery of sacred areas.

The research design facilitates an orderly, goal directed and economical project. However, the research design must be flexible enough to allow for examination of unanticipated but important research opportunities that arise during the investigation.

### *Documentation Methods*

**Background Review:** Archeological documentation usually is preceded by, or integrated with historical research (i.e. that intensive background information gathering including identification of previous archeological work and inspection of museum collections; gathering relevant data on geology, botany, urban geography and other related disciplines; archival research; informant interviews, or recording of oral tradition, etc.).

Depending on the goals of the archeological documentation, the background historical and archeological research may exceed the level of research accomplished for development of the relevant historic contexts or for identification and evaluation, and focuses on the unique aspects of the property to be treated. This assists in directing the investigation and locates a broader base of information than that contained in the property itself for response to the documentation goals. This activity is particularly important for historic archeological properties where information sources other than the property itself may be critical to preserving the significant aspects of the property. (See the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Historical Documentation for discussion of associated research activities.)

**Field Studies:** The implementation of the research design in the field must be flexible enough to accommodate the discovery of new or unexpected data classes or properties, or changing field conditions. A phased approach may be appropriated when dealing with large complex properties or groups of properties, allowing for changes in emphasis or field strategy, or termination of the program, based on analysis of recovered data at the end of each phase. Such an approach permits the confirmation of assumptions concerning property extent, content or organization which had been made based on data gathered from identification and evaluation efforts, or the adjustment of those expectations and resulting changes in procedure. In some cases a phased approach may be necessary to gather sufficient data to calculate the necessary sample size for a statistically valid sample. A phased documentation program may often be most cost-effective, in allowing for early termination of work if the desired objectives cannot be achieved.

Explicit descriptive statements of and justification for field study techniques are important to provide a means of evaluating results. In some cases, especially those employing a sampling strategy in earlier phases (such as identification or evaluation), it is possible to estimate parameters of certain classes of data in a fairly rigorous statistical manner. It is thus desirable to maintain some consistency in choice of sampling designs throughout multiple phases of work at the same property. Consistency with previously employed area sampling frameworks also

improves potential replication in terms of later locating sampled and unsampled areas. It often is desirable to estimate the nature and frequency of data parameters based on existing information or analogy to other similar cases. These estimates may then be tested in field studies.

An important consideration in choosing methods to be used in the field studies should be assuring full, clear, and accurate descriptions of all field operations and observations, including excavation and recording techniques and stratigraphic or inter-site relationships.

To the extent feasible, chosen methodologies and techniques should take into account the possibility that future researchers will need to use the recovered data to address problems not recognized at the time the data were recovered. The field operation may recover data that may not be fully analyzed; this data, as well as the data analyzed, should be recorded and preserved in a way to facilitate future research.

A variety of methodologies may be used. Choices must be explained, including a measure of cost-effectiveness relative to other potential choices. Actual results can then be measured against expectations, and the information applied later in similar cases.

Destructive methods should not be applied to portions or elements of the property if nondestructive methods are practical. If portions or elements of the property being documented are to be preserved in place, the archeological investigation should employ methods that will leave the property as undisturbed as possible. However, in cases where the property will be destroyed by, for example, construction following the investigation, it may be most practical to gather the needed data in the most direct manner, even though that may involve use of destructive techniques.

Logistics in the field, including the deployment of personnel and materials and the execution of sampling strategies, should consider site significant, anticipated location of most important data, cost effectiveness, potential time limitations and possible adverse environmental conditions.

The choice of methods for recording data gathered in the field should be based on the research design. Based on that statement, it is known in advance of field work what kinds of information are needed for analysis; record-keeping techniques should focus on these data. Field records should be maintained in a manner that permits independent interpretation in so far as possible. Record-keeping should be standardized in format and level of detail.

Archeological documentation should be conducted under the supervision of qualified professionals in the disciplines appropriate to the data that are to be recovered. When the general public is directly involved in archeological documentation activities, provision should be made for training and supervision by qualified professionals. (See the Professional Qualifications Standards.)

Analysis: Archeological documentation is not completed with field work; analysis of the collected information is an integral part of the documentation activity, and should be planned for in the research design. Analytical techniques should be selected that are relevant to the objectives of

the investigation. Forms of analysis that may be appropriate, depending on the type of data recovered and the objectives of the investigation, include but are not limited to: studying artifact types and distribution; radiometric and other means of age determination; studies of soil stratigraphy, studies of organic matter such as human remains, pollen, animal bones, shells and seeds; study of the composition of soils and study of the natural environment in which the property appears.

### *Reporting Results*

Report Contents: Archeological documentation concludes with written report(s) including minimally the following topics:

1. Description of the study area;
2. Relevant historical documentation/background research;
3. The research design;
4. The field studies as actually implemented, including any deviation from the research design and the reason for the changes;
5. All field observations;
6. Analyses and results, illustrated as appropriate with tables, charts, and graphs;
7. Evaluation of the investigation in terms of the goals and objectives of the investigation, including discussion of how well the needs dictated by the planning process were served;
8. Recommendations for updating the relevant historic contexts and planning goals and priorities, and generation of new or revised information needs;
9. Reference to related on-going or proposed treatment activities, such as structural documentation, stabilization, etc.; and
10. Information on the location of original data in the form of field notes, photographs, and other materials.

Some individual property information, such as specific locational data, may be highly sensitive to disclosure, because of the threat of vandalism. If the objectives of the documentation effort are such that a report containing confidential information such as specific site locations or information on religious practices is necessary, it may be appropriate to prepare a separate report for public distribution. The additional report should summarize that information that is not under restricted access in a format most useful to the expected groups of potential users. Peer review of draft reports is recommended to ensure that state-of-the-art technical reports are produced.

Availability: Results must be made available to the full range of potential users. This can be accomplished through a variety of means including publication of results in monographs and professional journals and distribution of the report to libraries or technical clearinghouses such as the National Technical Information Service in Springfield, Virginia.

### *Curation*

Archeological specimens and records are part of the documentary record of an archeological site. They must be curated for future use in research, interpretation, preservation, and resource management activities. Curation of important archeological specimens and records should be provided for in the development of any archeological program or project.

Archeological specimens and records that should be curated are those that embody the information important to history and prehistory. They include artifacts and their associated documents, photographs, maps, and field notes; materials of an environmental nature such as bones, shells, soil and sediment samples, wood, seeds, pollen, and their associated records; and the products and associated records of laboratory procedures such as thin sections, and sediment fractions that result from the analysis of archeological data.

Satisfactory curation occurs when:

1. Curation facilities have adequate space, facilities, professional personnel,
2. Archeological specimens are maintained so that their information values are not lost through deterioration, and records are maintained to a professional archival standard;
3. Curated collections are accessible to qualified researchers within a reasonable time of having been requested; and
4. Collections are available for interpretive purposes, subject to reasonable security precautions.

### Recommended Sources of Technical Information

*Archaeology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. David Hurst Thomas. Harcourt Brace College Publishers, Forth Worth, 1998.

*Archaeology: Theories, Methods, and Practice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn. Thames and Hudson, London, 1996.

*Archeology in the National Historic Landmarks Program*. Robert S. Grumet. Technical Brief 3, Archeology & Ethnography Program, National Park Service, 1988.

*Archaeological Prospecting and Remote Sensing*. I. Scollar, A. Tabbagh, A. Hesse, and I. Herzog. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990.

*Curation of Federally-Owned and Administered Archeological Collections* (36 CFR Part 79)

*Field Methods in Archaeology*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Thomas R. Hester, Harry J. Shafer, and Kenneth L. Feder. Mayfield Publishing Company, Mountain View, CA, 1997.

*Historical Archaeology*. Charles E. Orser, Jr. and Brian M. Fagan. HarperCollins College Publishers, New York, 1995.

*How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register, History and Education, 1977, revised 1986, 1991, 1997, 1999.

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"The Siteless Survey: A Regional Scale Data Collection Strategy." R. Dunnell and W. Dancey. In *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory*, Vol. 5. M. B. Schiffer, editor. Pp. 267-287. Academic Press, New York, 1983.

*Strategies for Protecting Archeological Sites on Private Lands*. Susan L. Henry Renaud.

"Surface Collection, Sampling, and Research Design: A Retrospective." C. L. Redman. *American Antiquity*

52(2):249-265, 1987.