

ORDER UP! ARTIFACTS IN FROM THE FIELD, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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Most folks don't consider what happens to material collected in the field. The artifacts have to go somewhere. Where do they go? What happens to them? Is there a cost?

A quick overview of the answers to these questions:

Where Do They Go?: In a perfect world the artifacts/objects/material and its associated documentation (field notes, maps, photographs, journals, budgets, etc.) are typically stored either in a museum or an institutional/agency storeroom or repository.

What Happens to Them?: Objects and associated documentation are accessioned, assigned catalog numbers, labeled, cataloged, inventoried, rehoused from their field bags/boxes (in acid-free, inert, archival microenvironments), assigned locations within the facility, and stored. Some, usually the unique or "really cool" objects, are kept out to become part of an exhibit. Most often the only time artifacts are accessed is for loan to other museums/institutions, further study, or yearly inventory.

Is There a Cost?: YES – the cost is exceptional: a facility must be acquired and maintained, qualified staff for accessioning, cataloging, housing, and management are required, temperature and humidity must be regularly monitored, pest control measures must be taken, security measures must be implemented and adhered to, protection from light, fire, and natural disasters must be implemented, and proper supplies must be used to ensure the health of the objects and their life in perpetuity. (There is a lot of "must" in this paragraph, isn't there?)

Keep in mind this is just a quick overview and food for thought. Most museums have hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of artifacts in storage with just a few thousand on actual display. Most educational institutions and repositories have hundreds if not thousands of boxes of material in storage/on-site facility with a small amount out for loan, continued research, and use in classrooms. Once an object is taken out of the ground we (humans) have a permanent responsibility for its care and future as well as public education. Museum and Agency Curators are Stewards of the Past and the Future.

Here at Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, objects that are found in the facility or recently received from the field are given a good, clean, safe, and proper home. We make them accessible to agency staff, Native American Tribes, educators, like agencies or institutions, researchers, genealogists, students, and the public (when appropriate). We also make sure the collections are

searchable in a database so as much study/research can be done prior to accessing actual objects, we prefer them to be handled minimally and for as brief a time as possible.

NOTE: Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission does not actively excavate for artifact and data collection meant only for interpretive or research purposes. We work primarily with Cultural Resource Management (CRM) firms and Native American Tribes when a development or utilities upgrade/repair is necessary in one of our parks. We have agency Archaeology staff that manage the archaeology aspect of a project and can and do engage in surveys, shovel probes, test pits, and excavations. We are stewards of state lands and the state's cultural and natural resources, therefore, we prefer to work outside the boundaries of a known site or divert a project if a new site is realized.