

RESPONSIBLE ARTIFACT COLLECTING



Archaeological artifacts are unique and irreplaceable pieces of the puzzle of the past. Our state has laws protecting archaeological and human burial sites. Indiana Code (IC) 14-21-1 provides protection for archaeological sites and historic burial sites regardless of their location on state or private lands. All archaeological sites with artifacts dating before December 31, 1870 are protected under this act. Human burial sites are afforded protection under IC 14-21-1, IC 14-21-2, IC 23-14 (Indiana General Cemetery Act). An “artifact” is non-portable evidence of past human behavior or activity that is found on or in the ground. In Indiana, this includes objects formed, made, modified, or used before December 31, 1870 (IC 14-21-1).

The real value of artifacts lies in the information they provide on where, how, and when people lived in the past. Responsible collecting recovers information, not just artifacts. Therefore, it is very important that if artifacts are collected, they be properly collected and recorded.

1. You must have landowner permission to be on someone’s property. Per state law (IC 14-21-1), artifacts belong to the landowner, unless he or she assigns ownership of the materials to another party.
2. When artifacts are found, record the location of the archaeological site on a map. Standard USGS 7.5 minute topographic quadrangle maps, or GPS coordinates recorded with a cellular phone or other GPS receiver, work well for this purpose. Keep a good record of where each artifact came from.
3. It is not illegal to collect artifacts from the surface of sites (except on Federal and State property) as long as the collector has the landowner’s permission to be on the property to collect artifacts. A permit is required to conduct field investigations on state property (IC 14-21-1-16), and any archaeological scientific investigations must be conducted under the control or supervision of a qualified professional archaeologist.
4. Don’t DIG for artifacts. IC 14-21-1 states that a person who disturbs the ground for the purpose of discovering, uncovering, or moving archaeological sites or features with artifacts dating before Dec. 31, 1870 or human remains buried before January 1, 1940, must do so in accordance with an approved plan from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR).
5. Any discovery of human remains or possible human remains should be left undisturbed and reported to the County Coroner, IDNR Division of Law Enforcement, and the IDNR Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology as soon as possible.
6. Please be aware that a person who knowingly or intentionally receives, retains, or disposes of an artifact, a burial object, or human remains in violation of IC 14-21-1 is breaking the law.
7. If you surface collect for artifacts, share your information with professional archaeologists! You can contact archaeologists at several universities in the state, the Indiana Archaeology Council, or the IDNR Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology. If no record of a site exists, it is obviously much harder to protect. Therefore, keeping accurate and complete records of sites is important, and the individual doing so can help fellow Hoosiers know more about our material culture!

For more information contact:
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