



# A RICH AND ANCIENT HERITAGE



*Prepared by  
Giovanna Peebles, State Archeologist  
Vermont Division for Historic Preservation  
Agency of Development and Community Affairs*

## **Did you know that Vermont's fields, pastures, yards, and woodlands contain a great number and variety of archeological sites?**

From the very beginning of human history, many of our primary pursuits and efforts - such as hunting, cooking, tool making, and construction of shelter - left tangible remains on the landscape. For nearly 12,000 years, since the last glaciers receded, Vermont's people left behind evidence of their activities across our landscape. The extensive and varied evidence of past human activity in Vermont comprises our fragile, complex, and irreplaceable archeological heritage. Most of our knowledge about human behavior during Vermont's long occupation can only be obtained through the archeological record. The archeological record can also give us a great deal of information about past environments, climate, and landscape changes.

## **What kinds of archeological sites do we have in Vermont?**

Consider that thousands of Native Americans lived and died in what is now Vermont for close to 12,000 years; that each one of those years spanned the four seasons of winter, spring, summer, and fall (much as we know them today); that a full range of living activities occurred during each season; and that many of these activities left behind a tangible record in the soil. From this perspective we can begin to get a glimpse of the number and variety of Native American archeological sites that may exist in Vermont. Applying this same point of view to Vermont's three centuries of Euro-American occupation produces yet another glimpse of the potential diversity of archeological sites associated with our Euro-American history.

For thousands of years, Vermont's Native American people mainly focused their activities within our river and lake basins. Upland areas were exploited on a seasonal basis for specific food resources and raw materials. Settling in Vermont soon after glacial recession, Vermont's earliest inhabitants adapted their lifestyle over many millennia of changing environments, climate, and landscapes. To Vermont's native people, river and lake basins constituted key lands: they defined community and hunting territories, provided many varieties of food and other necessary materials, served as transportation arteries throughout and between watersheds, and acted as geographic markers.

Vermont's Native American sites include large and small residential camps, villages, hunting and fishing camps, stone quarries, hunting overlooks and entrapments, seasonal special activity sites (for example, at berry picking or acorn gathering areas, near clay deposits, etc.), tool making and repair sites, and canoe portages. These sites have no obvious structural, visible surface shape as do recent Euro-american sites marked by ruins, foundations, and stone walls,

among other surface evidence. In Vermont, as in most of the northeastern United States, evidence of Native American settlements and activities are typically contained within upper soil layers or may be deeply buried within floodplain deposits.

Lake Champlain, Lake Memphremagog, and river corridors, in particular, provided relatively easy access into and throughout Vermont for 18<sup>th</sup> century Europeans. Although Native American people never abandoned Vermont, the archeological record of the last three hundred years is dominated with the ruins, materials, and other evidence of life - the archeological sites - left behind by explorers, soldiers, and finally, settlers of European descent that came to Vermont. Although many late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> century settlements focused on the hill country, commercial and industrial needs of the 19<sup>th</sup> century resulted in ever increasing development of lands adjacent to rivers and streams to harness the abundant hydropower. Many episodes of life in the historic period - including times of war and times of peace, settlement, and farming, commerce and industry, land and water transportation, and so forth exist today only as archeological sites.

In contrast to Vermont's Native American sites or earliest historic sites, our recent historic archeological sites are usually more readily recognizable on the landscape. The ruins and buried remains of 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings, structures, encampments, landscape features, garbage areas, and all other activity areas comprise Vermont's historic archeological heritage. Thus, the ruins and remains, including all associated materials, features, activity areas, and so forth, of forts, military encampments, homes and farmsteads, taverns, schools, general stores, mills, forges and blast furnaces, charcoal and lime kilns, mines and associated communities, settlements and villages, roads, ferry docks and wharves, shipwrecks, and manufactories of a huge range of goods and materials, constitute examples of Vermont's historic archeological sites. Visible remnants of these sites frequently consist of stone foundations or collapsed ruins; however, most of our historic archeological information is buried within the soil.

Historic archeological sites can provide essential information that both complements and supplements the written record. However, most small events and patterns of history were not written down; most people did not write. In these cases, archeological sites provide information that is not available in the documentary record.

## **Where are Vermont's archeological site located?**

Not all archeological sites in Vermont are located along present-day watercourses. Today's landscape often does not reflect that of 8,000, 3,000, or even 200 years ago. River valleys have been downcut, stream and river channels changed shape and location, floodplains eroded and built up to varying degrees, and wetlands developed and eutrophied. For example, an early Native American camp site along a river bank - 6,000 years ago - may now lie 1000 feet away from the present river channel on an abandoned oxbow. Sometimes, human activities were focused around springs (now dry) or outcroppings of specific rock types or special food resources. Ancient Native American sites have been found on terraces, mountainsides, and valley slopes far removed from present-day watercourses. Entire communities, and thousands of isolated farmsteads, lie abandoned in Vermont's valleys and hilltops.

Most of Vermont's archeological sites have not yet been found. However, based on information from archeological studies, written records (such as diaries, deeds, early surveys, local histories, and maps), oral histories, ethnologies, professional and avocational archeologists, and collectors,

we are refining our ability to predict where both prehistoric and historic archeological sites are expected to be found.

## **Why are Vermont's archeological sites important? Why should they be preserved?**

Our prehistoric and historic archeological sites constitute an essential link to our distant and recent past. These sites are often the only source of information for the longest part of human activity in Vermont. Archeological sites can help us to understand how people coped with changing technological, environmental, and climatic conditions, with population stress, with drought, and scarcity of food resources. Sites can provide invaluable information on micro and macro environments, on environment change, and on changes in landforms and stream dynamics. Archeological sites of the recent historic period supplement written records that are often incomplete or even wholly absent.

Archeological sites are important educational resources within our towns, serving as tangible clues to our past for Vermonters of all ages. Archeological sites can contribute to a community's recreational offerings for local citizens as well for travelers. Examples of possible recreational opportunities include archeological field schools, archeological site hikes, biking or car tours, and diving on historic shipwrecks.

Archeological sites are being destroyed at an alarming rate. Like wetlands and other of Vermont's vital resources, archeological sites are fragile, endangered, and nonrenewable and should be given full consideration as we develop Vermont's lands.

Accordingly, archeological sites in archeologically sensitive lands need to be considered during the early planning stages of land development activities and need to be recognized as important resources in local and regional plans.

## **There seems to be more concern with archeological resources than ever before. Why?**

In the last 20 years we have learned that occupation of Vermont by native people throughout the prehistoric (or pre-contact) period was far more intensive and widespread than previously thought. We have also begun to appreciate the extent and diversity of sites from the historic period, which in Vermont officially began in 1609 when Samuel de Champlain encountered the lake he named after himself. As more and more of Vermont's archeological resources are destroyed, we are increasingly concerned with preserving our remaining archeological heritage and improving our knowledge of those threatened resources. Few of Vermont's archeological sites have been located to date and they are a type of resource that is generally not quickly recognizable on the landscape. There is also a much greater awareness of archeological resources as little known, fragile, and endangered parts of our landscape and environment. For these reasons, impacts to archeological sites are now being fully considered in the Act 250 review process. Construction projects with federal or state involvement have a far longer history of requiring consideration of archeological resources.

## **What protection tools exist for archeological sites?**

Under various state and federal laws (most importantly Vermont's Land Use and Development Law, also known as Act 250; 22 V.S.A. chapter 14, also known as the Vermont Historic Preservation Act; and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act) many private and state development projects and all federally funded, assisted, licensed, or permitted projects must consider and, if warranted, locate archeological sites during project planning. Project impacts to sites must be mitigated. Project redesign is often an effective option whereby the archeological site area is avoided by incorporating it into a "not-to-be-disturbed" buffer zone or green space; then the project can proceed. Recovery of the archeological information contained within a site is sometimes a more costly option but allows a project to proceed after excavation of the site.

Because archeological resources are contained within land - woodlot, cornfield, pasture, yard, etc. - preservation of open spaces and natural areas, farmlands, wetland margins, and other types of land will also assist in the preservation of archeological sites. Purchase of land as well as acquisition of development rights are important methods for preserving archeological sites. Often, conservation efforts for one resource, such as prime agricultural land, can be integrated with preservation of other important resources, such as archeological sites, rare and endangered species, and historic structures. Local governments and commissions, non-profit organizations, and interested citizens can begin to consider the archeological resources within their communities and to actively plan for their identification and protection.

Read about additional ideas for protecting archeological sites in **Archeology In Your Town**. [\[link needed to this\]](#)

## **Do ALL archeological sites need to be preserved?**

Not all sites are worth preserving. For example, some sites have been disturbed by natural forces such as erosion or flood scouring or by human actions such as ditching, logging, or bulldozing. Disturbed sites such as these cannot teach us as much about our history and prehistory as sites that are more intact or wholly undisturbed. Disturbed sites are less important than intact sites. Since archeological sites come in all sizes, characteristics, and environmental locations, we can sometimes learn all we will ever need to learn from some types of sites by simply recording them and recovering their limited information. In these cases, preservation of the sites themselves is not necessary. As we learn more about particular types of archeological sites associated with particular time periods and extract their valuable information on past human behavior and past environments, we will improve our understanding about which sites are the most important and which sites will only provide repetitive information. However, since professional archeological studies in Vermont have been actively pursued only in the last decade, we have a long way to go before we can begin to selectively and deliberately decide which sites, all things being equal, should be preserved and which can go ahead and be destroyed.

## **Have we located all of Vermont's archeological sites yet?**

Not at all - we have barely begun to inventory our sites and still have a very sketchy understanding of our past, especially our prehistoric past. And the more we learn, the more we realize how little we know. In some areas of Vermont, we have considerable information about

archeological sites areas, where sites are located, and their characteristics. These constitute our recorded archeological sites, listed on the State Archeological Inventory. Many of these sites may be eligible for inclusion in the State or National Registers of Historic Places and a few hundred are listed on the State or National Registers.

Since only a few areas of Vermont have been systematically studied to locate and evaluate archeological sites, it is misleading to precisely map known sites. The known, inventoried sites are only a fraction of those sites that potentially exist. Also, archeological sites are easily and too often vandalized. For these reasons, site locations, especially Native American sites of the prehistoric and early historic period, are not specifically pinpointed on a routine basis.

A satisfactory alternative to provide some basic, preliminary information for planning is to develop "archeological sensitivity maps" of a town or smaller area. It must be emphasized that sensitivity maps are useful only for delineating Native American settlement sites. These sensitivity maps highlight landforms having environmental conditions typically associated with known sites.

Archeological sensitivity means that different environmental factors - including present and past topography, sunlight exposure, slope, distance to water (existing and relict sources), and availability of food and other vital materials - exist in various combinations in these lands. These environmental factors cluster essential resources, such as water and food species, on these lands now or in the past - and thus attract human populations. People exploited these resources and have left behind archeological remains of their activities at these locations.

Thus, although most archeological sites have not yet been found, we can, to some extent, predict where certain types of prehistoric Native American sites will be located based on the environmental sensitivity model. Results from archeological investigations in Vermont over the last decade suggest that, in simplest terms, prehistoric sites are typically located within 300 to 500 feet from an existing or relict water source, on gently sloping landforms having moderately/poor to well-drained soil, and often have a southeast-south-southwest exposure.

Some types of Native American sites, for example, 11,000 year-old camps resulting from the Paleo-Indians first pioneering explorations of Vermont, quarry sites where stone material for tool making was obtained, caves and rockshelters, ceremonial areas, and burial sites have differing sets of environmental criteria. Models to accurately predict the location of these types of sites have not yet been developed; their locations are not easily predicted. We deal with these sites as they are found and on a case-by-case basis as they require consideration and, oftentimes, protection.

Different tools and methods are used to locate historic archeological sites. Analysis of various historic town and county maps and atlases, local and regional histories and gazetteers, early town surveys and plats, deeds, probate records and other court actions, contemporary newspapers and periodicals, photographs, and interviews with knowledgeable local people are varying ways of finding historic archeological resources. However, archeological research has shown us repeatedly that written records are neither complete nor always accurate. There is no written record of many historic sites, especially early ones. Some sites will only be found after records research has been completed with archeological field study.

## A Summary

Vermont's rich and varied prehistoric and historic period archeological sites are contained within our natural environment and in a wide range of lands: within cornfields and pastures, within forests, in floodplains and on terraces, on valley slopes, on mountain sides, adjacent to marshes and wetlands, and submerged under our lakes and ponds.

Vermont's archeological sites are important components of our landscape. These sites embody the longest part of our human heritage, most of which was never recorded. Archeological sites are fragile and nonrenewable resources that demand vigorous preservation efforts by individuals, organizations, and local, state and federal governments. Once destroyed, these resources are gone forever.

## TO LEARN MORE ABOUT VERMONT ARCHEOLOGY AND 12,000 YEARS OF VERMONT HISTORY (a very short, selected list):

Calloway, Colin. G. *The Western Abenakis of Vermont, 1600 - 1800*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990.

- details the most recent Native American history of Vermont and outcome of contact with Euro-american culture;
- provides a broad New England context for the Vermont story.

Haviland, William and Marjory Power. *The Original Vermonters: Native Inhabitants, Past and Present*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994 (revised).

- reasonably up-to-date summary of Vermont's Native American occupation and 10,000 year history;
- technical information but fascinating reading

HISTORIC MAPS. Walling and Scott county wall maps for the 1850s, Beers county atlases for the 1860s and 1870s, and Sanborn insurance maps.

- most buildings are identified with name of the owner;
- many maps in the Beers atlases also have a small town directory in map margin;
- beware some errors of fact;
- key sources for cross-referencing with town and county histories and census records.

Rolando, Victor. *200 Years of Soot and Sweat: The History and Archeology of Vermont's Iron, Charcoal, and Lime Industries*. Burlington, Vt.: Vermont Archaeological Society, 1992.

- comprehensive study of Vermont's iron, charcoal and lime industries;
- includes detailed documentation, including archival and field work, of over 100 sites;
- tells previously unknown stories of abandoned communities and fascinating Vermonters.

Vermont Archaeological Society. Vermont Archaeological Society. Burlington, VT.

*The Journal of Vermont Archaeology*. 1994. Vol.1.

*The Journal of Vermont Archaeology*. 1997. Vol.2.

*The Journal of Vermont Archaeology*. 2000. Vol.3.

<http://www.vtarchaeology.org/>

#### *Vermont Heritage Series*

- 8 videocassettes on separate topics about Vermont history, architecture, and archeology;
- available on loan from libraries throughout the state or for purchase

## **LEARN ABOUT VERMONT ARCHEOLOGY ON THE WEB:**

- **Lake Champlain Maritime Museum** - <http://www.lcmm.org>
- **University of Maine Farmington. Archaeology Research Center** - <http://www.umf.maine.edu/~umfarc>
- **University of Vermont, Consulting Archaeology Program** – <http://www.uvm.edu/~uvmcap/content.html>
- **Vermont Archaeological Society** - <http://www.vtarchaeology.org/>
- **Vermont Archaeology Week 2001** - <http://www.vtarchaeology.org/vaw2001.htm>
- **Vermont Agency of Transportation Archeological and Historic Resources** – <http://www.aot.state.vt.us/archaeology/design/default.htm>
- **Vermont Division for Historic Preservation** -
  - **Mount Independence Archeology Field School 2001** – <http://www.castleton.edu/mountindependence/>
  - **Mount Independence State Historic Site** - <http://www.middlebury.edu/~mtindep>
  - **State-owned Historic Sites** - <http://www.historicvermont.org/>
  - **Underwater Preserve System** – <http://lcmm.org/UnderwaterPreserve/indexunderwater.html>
- **Westford, Vermont, History In Our Backyards** –
  - <http://www.vita-learn.org/ws/archeology/arch.htm>

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:**

*Division for Historic Preservation  
Agency of Development and Community Affairs  
National Life, Drawer 20  
Montpelier, Vermont 05620-0501  
(802) 828-3050  
gpeebles@dca.state.vt.us*

October 2001