

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROGRAM OF THE INDIANA STATE HIGHWAY COMMISSION

CURTIS H. TOMAK
Archaeological Consultant

CULTURAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES—MUST PRESERVE

A current major public concern in the United States is the quality of our environment. This concern involves not only the control of pollutants and contaminants but also the protection of resources such as natural areas and archaeological sites. Historic American, historic European, historic Indian, and prehistoric Indian archaeological sites are very much an element of the environment and constitute a very important cultural resource, which for several reasons must be preserved and protected from inadequately mitigated disturbance and destruction.

From a multiplicity of viewpoints and from various problem orientations, the archaeologist is a student of past peoples, cultures, and human behavior. The primary sources and, for most of the past, the only sources of data for such studies are archaeological sites, e.g. settlements, camps, trading posts, forts, work areas, ceremonial and/or religious sites, and burial locations. Even though there are some written records concerning some past peoples, places, events, and times, they are inadequate and incomplete and need to be supplemented by archaeological work. Knowledge of the prehistoric cultural past is, of course, dependent upon archaeology, and most archaeology in the United States involves prehistory.

Original Undisturbed Position of Arch Materials Informative

All archaeological sites have some importance and deserve proper evaluation, treatment, and respect. However, for archaeological purposes the less that a site has been disturbed the better and more informative it is. Even though disturbed locations do yield some very worthwhile information, it is less than can be obtained from unmolested ones. A common misconception is that it is just the archaeological materials and features in and of themselves that are significant. This

is not so. Most importantly and fundamentally it is their original context, precise location, and distribution at sites which reflect or indicate past events, processes, and behavior. Therefore, it is essential that sites be as little disturbed as possible and that they be examined by individuals properly trained in the evaluation, removal, and recording of archaeological data.

IMPORTANCE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The importance and significance of remaining archaeological resources is greatly increased by the fact that prehistoric and early historic sites constitute a nonrenewable resource. Once they are gone, they are gone forever, and there will never be any more of them. Unfortunately, too many have already been lost or seriously disturbed, and at the present time sites are rapidly disappearing, approaching extinction in some areas, due to such land altering activities as mining, urban development, and the construction of reservoirs, power plants, and highway facilities. These factors contribute substantially to the necessity for conservation, preservation, management, and adequate investigation of our archaeological resources.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL LAWS

Over the years the growing concern for our cultural resources has prompted the passage of several federal laws which restrict and prohibit their destruction to varying degrees. These laws include: (1) the Antiquities Act of 1906, (2) the Historic Sites Act of 1935, (3) the Reservoir Salvage Act of 1960, (4) the Historic Preservation Act of 1966, (5) The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, (6) Executive Order 11593 of 1971, (7) the Moss-Bennett Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-291) and (8) Department of Transportation legislation. For a discussion of these laws and related topics see McGimsey (1972).

ISHC ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROGRAM

In response to the threats to cultural resources and in compliance with existing legislation, the Indiana State Highway Commission began a formal archaeological program in 1976 by hiring five archaeological consultants. The general functions of the consultants are to identify and assess the archaeological sites within highway project areas and to recommend and undertake archaeological programs which will satisfactorily mitigate the impact of highway projects on those sites which would or could be adversely affected by the projects.

PROCEDURES IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

The first step in the mitigation of the impact of highway projects on archaeological resources is a records check. The highway commission sends maps and descriptions of their projects to the consultants. The consultants check the archaeological literature and the records at the universities in the state to ascertain if there are known sites in the project area. The results of the search are then reported to the highway commission along with recommendations for an archaeological reconnaissance or survey of the project area.

The initial reconnaissance basically consists of the consultants walking the project area and making inquiries with local people and artifact collectors in an attempt to locate new archaeological sites and to accumulate additional information concerning known ones. In order to adequately surface survey an area the ground has to be exposed (cultivated land is preferred) and to have had sufficient rain to make archaeological materials visible. If enough of the project area or if appropriate specific locations within the area are in poor survey condition, then additional reconnaissance may be needed. It may consist of no more than resurveying the area under satisfactory conditions, or it may involve having some areas plowed and others shovel-probed. Shovel-probing involves digging small holes in areas, such as forests, which are difficult to view prior to disturbance in order to locate sites.

After the reconnaissance has been concluded, a report of all of the work done up to this point is submitted. This report includes, among other things, site discussions and evaluations and recommendations for further work. It may be that the project will not significantly affect archaeological resources and further work will be unnecessary. However, if a significant or potentially meaningful site is involved, additional mitigation will be required. One alternative, when possible, is to avoid and preserve the site. If this can not be done, then it will be necessary to conduct a test and/or a full scale archaeological excavation.

Even after all of the foregoing archaeological work has been accomplished, it is still possible that undetected archaeological resources exist in the project area, and it may be necessary for the archaeologist to watch particular selected locations during construction to see if anything of concern appears. In addition, construction personnel and others involved with the project should be made aware of the possible existence of archaeological materials and features and be on watch for them. If evidence of archaeological resources should become known to

anyone as a result of construction activities or through any other source, the highway commission should be notified immediately, and disturbance should be avoided or discontinued until evaluated by an archaeologist. An assessment of the resources and a mitigation statement concerning them would then be required.

After the archaeological work is completed, a final report is submitted to the highway commission. The content of this report becomes part of the environmental study. This study is in turn submitted to various governmental and other agencies for review and acceptance.