



ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE CONTEXT GUIDE

Use the following site context and cultural period definitions to identify site type on the Archaeological Site Form. Please note that you can further define the site within the narrative portion of the form, but SHPO prefers the use of these site context categories for consistent data within our database.

DEFINITIONS

Artifact Class – Distinct artifact classes are those broad groups of artifacts that denote specific, independent site activities. (E.g., Debitage, Informal Flake Tools, Bifaces, Unifaces, Hammerstones, Cores, Groundstone woodworking, Groundstone personal/ceremonial, Groundstone food processing, Ceramics, Bone/Shell, Bone Tools, FCR, Botanicals)

High density – For shovel test probes (STPs), a high density site has an average of 5 artifacts per positive probe. For pedestrian surveys, a high density site has an average of 5 artifacts per square meter.

Low density – For STPs, a low density site has an average of fewer than 5 artifacts per positive probe. For pedestrian surveys, a low density site has an average of fewer than 5 artifacts per square meter.

Architectural Evidence – Architectural remains could include in situ foundations, chimney falls, stone walls, or concentrations of building materials including, but not limited to, nails, window glass, brick, concrete, shingles, mortar, and tin sheeting.

Pre-Contact sites – Archaeological sites with pre-Contact components (pre-A.D. 1600).

Pre-Contact components – Archaeological components yielding objects of indigenous American Indian origin and manufacture and without post-Contact material culture.

Post-Contact sites – Archaeological sites with post-Contact components.

Post-Contact components – Archaeological components yielding Euroamerican artifacts or artifacts made in Euroamerican styles or of materials of Euroamerican origins. NOTE: The presence of Euroamerica goods does not necessarily indicate that a site is a Euroamerican settlement.

Non-Designated Resources (NDRs) – NDRs are typically things like findspots, modern features or deposits (less than 50 years old), and secondary cultural deposits that are worth noting, but are not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). NDRs will not be assigned trinomials, but should be described and mapped in technical reports.

PRE-CONTACT SITE TYPES

Artifact Scatter – An archaeological site yielding a low density of a single artifact class.

Activity Area – An archaeological site that is not a Habitation site but that yields a low density of multiple artifact classes. Could include sites such as butchering locales, maple sugaring camps, fishing camps, etc.

Lithic Reduction – An archaeological site with a low density of artifacts, including at least two artifact classes associated with the manufacture of stone tools (e.g., debitage, cores, hammerstones, early-stage bifaces, etc.).

Lithic Manufacture – An archaeological site with a high density of artifacts, including at least two artifact classes associated with the manufacture of stone tools (e.g., debitage, cores, hammerstones, early stage bifaces, rejects, and billets).

Find Spot – An archaeological site characterized by a single, pre-contact artifact.
NOTE: Typically only findspots consisting of formal tools, diagnostics, or pottery will be recorded as sites and given trinomials. All efforts should be made to determine whether a single artifact is indeed isolated as established elsewhere in the guidelines (e.g., the digging of radials). In most cases, findspots should be considered **Non-Designated Resources** (NDRs) and described in reports, but not assigned trinomials.

Habitation – An archaeological site with low or high density of artifacts and evidence of multiple differentiated activities, including at least one of the following artifact classes: pottery, groundstone tools, FCR, structural remains, or faunal remains. This term includes all sites previously classified as camps.

Village – A Habitation site of 1 acre or larger marked by a high density and diversity of artifacts and evidence of multiple, spatially segregated contemporaneous activities. Villages should have an identifiable internal spatial organization such as the presence of distinct clusters of artifacts marking individual structures, areas of low artifact density marking plazas, or dramatic shifts in artifact densities indicative of the presence of segregated space like that bounded by palisades.

Procurement Area – Raw material source areas with direct evidence for extraction of those raw materials (e.g., quarried rock/chert, clay mining, indigenous copper mining).

Earthwork – Any earthen construction built above the natural ground surface and any associated borrow pits or ditches.

Mound – Earthen construction, typically conical or oval in shape and lacking borrow pits or ditches. These sites typically include signs of ritual activity and may also include burials.

Mound Group – Grouping of 2 or more mounds in close proximity (no more than 200 yards) to each other.

Enclosure – Sites generally featuring a bank and ditch construction, which can be rectangular or round, and may feature an entrance or gateway through the bank and may contain a mound or earthwork.

Earthwork complex – Groupings of enclosures and/or earthworks in proximity to each other.

Raised Fields – Raised or ridged fields include any earthwork construction built for the purpose of planting crops. Typically these occur in districts together and nearby habitation sites or villages.

Burial – This category includes any burial sites that are not in mounds or earthworks, and is not clearly a cemetery. May include isolated bundle burials, mortuary processing sites, isolated cremation burials, etc.

Cemetery (pre-contact) – Cemeteries are sites with multiple burials occurring in context with each other that lack earthworks, mounding or other features. Cemetery sites may include ossuaries.

Cache pit(s) – These sites are typically clusters (anywhere from 2 – 200) of storage pits occurring together in a single landform, but are often near or adjacent to multiple biomes or environmental zones.

Ceremonial Site – Ceremonial sites are those that lack earthworks or other features, but could include natural boulders, petroglyphs, dance rings, sacred sites, etc.

Other – Sites that cannot be fit into any of the other categories. Provide a description and explanation. *NOTE: Only use this as a last resort.*

POST-CONTACT SITE TYPES

Isolated Find – An archaeological site characterized by a single artifact that could reasonably date to older than 50 years. NOTE: In most cases an isolated historic find will not be given a trinomial and will only be considered in those cases where a qualified professional archaeologist deems that the artifact can provide data meaningful to the archaeological record and is associated with archival records or oral history. All efforts should be made to determine whether a single artifact is indeed isolated as established elsewhere in the guidelines (e.g., the digging of radials).

Artifact Scatter – An archaeological site yielding a low density of artifacts that could reasonably date to older than 50 years and that otherwise have no known historic context. Denote in field methods whether the scatter was defined from materials visible on the surface or by STPs.

Activity Area – An archaeological site with a low or high density of artifacts and evidence of multiple differentiated activities but *no evidence of architectural remains*.

Occupation Area – A non-industrial archaeological site with a low or high density of artifacts, evidence of multiple differentiated activities, and evidence of architectural remains.

Farmstead – An occupation area associated with agricultural activities.

Residence – A domestic occupation area with no evidence of agricultural, industrial, or commercial activities.

Neighborhood – If historical documentation can point to a cluster of residences being constructed at the same time and recognized as a cohesive social community or neighborhood (generally with a widely recognized name), then SHPO recommends using the designation of a “district” to define a neighborhood. The historically recognized name and boundaries of the neighborhood should be documented with archival evidence and/or oral histories.

Industrial – An archaeological site yielding artifacts and/or architecture associated with production or refinement of materials. The exception being lumbering mill sites which should be categorized with lumbering sites.

Commercial – An archaeological site yielding artifacts and/or architecture associated with the sale and distribution of materials and/or services.

Dump – An archaeological site not physically associated with another post-contact site type that contains a high density of artifacts in mixed context.

Religious – An archaeological site yielding artifacts and/or architecture associated with religious communities and/or worship. May also include missions, churches, religious orders and schools.

Transportation – An archaeological site yielding artifacts and/or architecture associated with the movement of people and/or distribution (as opposed to production and consumption) of goods and/or materials. This includes bridges, trails, roads, railroad grades and structures, interurban rails, dams, non-military airfields, etc... Note that maritime transportation should be categorized under shipping. Lumbering railroads and skid roads should be categorized under lumbering.

Military – An archaeological site yielding artifacts and/or architecture associated with military (formal or informal) infrastructure or conflict.

Shipping/Maritime – Archaeological sites related to maritime transportation should be in this category and could include underwater, near shore, and terrestrial components. Sites in this category include ports, piers, and ship refueling stations, light stations (districts), and lighthouses. *NOTE: Underwater sites must be reported using the SHPO Underwater Archaeological Site Form.*

Education – This category should be used for any buildings, sites, or complexes that are part of an education system. This could be a single school-house or university campuses.

Cemetery – Any burial ground, including platted township or municipal cemeteries and community cemeteries, as well as unplotted family plots and expedient graves. Burials do not need to be marked to be considered a cemetery.

Mining – Includes mining adits, pits, camps, offices, and towns or complexes (districts). Refining and processing operations should be categorized as industrial sites.

Lumbering – Includes lumber camps, dams, booms, skid-roads, offices, mills, and towns (districts). Railroads specifically constructed to support lumbering activities can also be classified here, but historic documentation is required to establish this connection.

Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)-related – This could include CCC camps, activity areas, and construction sites. The specific type of CCC site should be specified and described in the site narrative.

Special Site Types

TCP/L – As defined by the National Park Service, a Traditional Cultural Place or Landscape (TCP/L) is a property that is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) based on its associations with the cultural practices, traditions, beliefs, lifeways, arts, crafts, or social institutions of a living community. TCPs are rooted in a traditional community's history and are important in maintaining the continuing cultural identity of the community. *Use the SHPO Traditional Cultural Place/Landscape Form to record these cultural resources.*

Rockshelter/Cave - Any existing or collapsed rock outcrop that creates a sheltered space and that yields evidence of human activity.

Rock Features – Non-structural, non-portable human modification or accumulation of stone.

Quarry – An archaeological site yielding evidence of geologic resource extraction.

Underwater – An archaeological site that is submerged and that would normally require specialized underwater equipment and techniques to manage. *NOTE: Use the SHPO Underwater Archaeological Site Form for submerged sites.*

Culturally Modified Trees – This site type is for ethnographically significant trees, such as trees utilized for birch bark harvesting, pine pitch harvesting, maple sugar harvesting. Ethnographic context and photographic documentation must be included.

Witness Tree – This site type is for trees or vegetation that has oral histories or archival documentation of a connection to significant events or people. Archival documentation and research must accompany site forms when this designation is used.

Undetermined – Only use this category if you truly have no idea what the site function is. Be sure to describe the site, artifacts, and features in detail in the Narrative Description.

Note: If you have a question about any of these definitions or their application to recording archaeological sites, contact SHPO Senior.