



Archaeology 101:

What is archaeology?

Archaeology is the study of human history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and the analysis of artifacts and other physical remains.

Archaeology is important because, by knowing our past, we can understand where we came from. We can use this information to help make decisions about the future. Archaeology also widens our understanding of human culture, technology and lifestyle beyond what is written in the history books.

A single artifact can indicate gender, ethnicity, age, technology, socio-economic status and many other qualities that increase our understanding of the past.

There are more than 34,000 recorded pre-historic and historic archaeological sites recorded in San Diego County. These sites contain evidence of at least 10,000 years of human history. Most of these sites were discovered as a result of laws and regulations enacted to protect natural and cultural resources.

Laws that Protect Cultural Resources

CEQA: California Environmental Quality Act, 1970. This state legislation requires that potential development sites must be evaluated for negative impact on natural or cultural resources. Any negative impact on archaeological sites must be mitigated, either by avoiding the site, covering the site or excavating part or all of the site.

ARPA: Archaeological Resource Protection Act of 1979. ARPA governs the excavation of archaeological sites on federal and Indian lands in the United States, and the removal and disposition of archaeological collections from those sites.

What is an artifact?

An artifact is an object made or used by a human. For example, a stone tool or a bottle.



What is an ecofact?

An ecofact is any object that indicates human activity, such as animal bone or seashells.

What is an archaeological site?

An archaeological site is an area with evidence of human activity, such as artifacts or features. Features include things like hearths or building foundations.

