

San Juan Basin Archaeological Society

Chapter of Colorado Archaeological Society



Proper Etiquette at Archaeological and Historical Sites

Proper etiquette at both archaeological and historical sites is very important for preservation of these resources. These guidelines are not specific to SJBAS members, but apply to anyone visiting these sites. Proper etiquette for site visitation is similar to “leave no trace” ethics for enjoyment of wilderness areas. Please enjoy your visit; after you have departed, the site should be in exactly the same condition as it was before your arrival. There may be variations in proper site etiquette between land management agencies and landowners, so please respect any more-stringent site-specific requirements.

- 1) Avoid walking on or disturbing middens. Middens are prehistoric trash heaps usually located immediately in front of or down slope of an alcove or cliff site. They are often identified by soft, charcoal-stained soil. Middens contain valuable archeological evidence of day-to-day activities that reveal significant preferences in pottery, food, tools, and even treatment of the dead. Since foot traffic causes erosion, please stay off the middens.
- 2) Do not lean, stand, or sit on prehistoric walls, as your activity may weaken the bonding material and eventually destroy them. Stay clear of more precarious sites, since any pressure, vibrations, and soil compaction may result in damage to the site.
- 3) Leave all Ancestral Puebloan artifacts, such as arrowheads, potsherds, or tools, as well as historic artifacts, 50 years old or older, where you found them. In their original context, artifacts contain a wealth of information. Visitors who rearrange their finds are robbing the items of their true value.
- 4) Do not eat or prepare food within 100 feet of an archaeological or historical site. Food remnants attract rodents that can cause significant damage to a site.
- 5) Do not camp or build a campfire within 100 feet of an archaeological or historical site. Fires can ruin walls by causing spalling, the peeling off of rock surfaces. Fires also blacken the walls and roofs of the site. Not only are the smudges unsightly, they also can affect archaeological dating.
- 6) Dogs are not allowed on SJBAS field trips. Dogs damage sites by digging, urinating, and defecating in them. Their actions can destroy fragile cultural deposits.
- 7) Do not touch petroglyphs and pictographs in any way. Even the slightest amount of contact with the oils in human skin can cause erosion of petroglyphs and destroy delicate pigments in pictographs. Taking tracings can cause direct mechanical damage to a petroglyph. Adding chalk or re-pecking petroglyphs destroys the original.
- 8) Preserve historic inscriptions. Often these names and dates inscribed with bullet lead and charcoal are the only means to retrace artifacts in museums to their original sites. Look for names like Wetherill, J.L. Ethridge, C.C. Graham, McLoyd, C.B. Lang, W.J. Billings, Harry French, D.W. Ayres, Emory Knowles, and Orian Buck.
- 9) The SJBAS is not a law enforcement agency and great care should be taken when encountering persons in the act of destroying these resources. Take pertinent notes, time, date, number of persons, their appearance, auto license plates, etc. and report the incident ASAP to the appropriate authorities or land management agency. If encountering misinformed persons, consider opening a dialogue for educational purposes if it can be done in a non-confrontational manner.

I have read and agree to abide by the above SJBAS Site Etiquette standards. This form is to be kept on file with SJBAS membership records.

Name: _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____