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What is The Archaeological Conservancy?

The Archaeological Conservancy, established in 1980, is the only national non-profit organization dedicated to acquiring and preserving the best of our nation's remaining archaeological sites. Based in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the Conservancy also operates regional offices in Georgia, Virginia, Ohio, and California.

Every day, prehistoric and historic archaeological sites in the United States are lost forever-- along with the precious information they contain. Modern-day looters use backhoes and bulldozers to recover artifacts for the international market. Urban development and agricultural methods such as land leveling and topsoil mining destroy ancient sites. The Conservancy protects these sites by acquiring the land on which they rest, preserving them for posterity.

Why save archaeological sites?

The ancient people of North America made no written records of their cultures. For us to gain an understanding of what happened here before Columbus, Coronado, and Raleigh, we rely on clues left behind by these early Americans in the remains of their villages, monuments, and artifacts.

Over the past few decades, the knowledge and methods of modern archaeologists have advanced tremendously. Today researchers use technologies such as tree-ring dating, radiocarbon dating, archaeomagnetic dating, obsidian hydration dating, pollen analysis, and trace-element analysis to glean information from the archaeological record. Few of these technologies existed 50 years ago. For this reason, it's important that we keep a significant portion of raw data in the ground, where future archaeologists with even more advanced knowledge and technologies will have access to it.

Archaeologists still lack the clues that might someday solve the mysteries of the early Americans. By permanently preserving important cultural sites, the Conservancy makes sure they will be available for our children and grandchildren to study and enjoy.

What sites does the Conservancy own?

Since its beginning in 1980, the Conservancy has acquired more than 285 endangered sites in 38 states across America. These preserves range in size from a few acres to more than 1,000 acres. They include the earliest habitation sites in North America, a 19th-century frontier army post, and nearly every major cultural period in between.

Examples of Conservancy preserves include California's Borax Lake site, which encompasses 11,000 years of human occupation; the first mission of Father Kino, as well as several important Sinagua and Hohokam ruins in Arizona; important Caddo Indian sites in Texas and Oklahoma; and in Georgia, key cultural locales of the region's first Indians.

And the list goes on: several ancient Indian villages in Florida; Mississippian sites in Arkansas and Missouri, at least two of which Hernando de Soto visited in 1541; villages of the eastern lakeshore peoples in Michigan; ancestral sites of New Mexico's Pueblo people; in Colorado, Yellowjacket and Mud Springs Pueblos--the two largest ruins of the Mesa Verde culture; and in the Northeast, two Paleo-Indian sites and a Seneca Iroquois village.

Some Conservancy sites have been incorporated into public parks such as Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona, Chaco Culture National Historical Park in New Mexico, Parkin Archeological State Park in Arkansas, and Hopewell Culture National Historical Park in Ohio.

How does the Conservancy raise funds?

Major funding for the Conservancy comes from its more than 23,000 members, as well as special individual contributions, corporations, and foundations. Income from a permanent Endowment Fund supplements regular fundraising. Often we raise money locally to purchase specific ruins in a certain community. In emergency situations, we borrow from our revolving Preservation Fund.