

SHPO Archaeological Services' Definition of Historic Sites

Historic sites can be further defined into two distinct site types: archaeological and non-archaeological. Their archaeological potential (artifacts, features, ecological evidence) is the key element for placement. Historic archaeological sites are defined in the same way as prehistoric sites (i.e., comprised of ten or more artifacts likely to have been generated by a patterned cultural activity within a surface area reasonable to that activity, or a feature).

Historic archaeological sites are the *remains of sites no longer in use or maintained, and must have a clearly defined archaeological potential (i.e., associated artifacts, features, ecological evidence)*. Features associated with linear sites (e.g., roads, railroads, canals, ditches) may be considered historic archaeological sites (e.g., mining feature associated with Chinese mining ditch), related to historic non-archaeological sites (e.g., tidegate, dam, tree blaze along historic road) or both. Archaeological properties are “the place or places where remnants of a past culture survive in a physical context that allows for the interpretation of these remains. It is this physical evidence of the past and its patterning that is the archaeologist’s database. The physical evidence, or archaeological remains, usually takes the form of artifacts (e.g., fragments of tools, ceramic vessels or animal remains), features (e.g., remnants of walls, cooking hearths or trash) or middens and ecological evidence (e.g., pollens representing plants that were in the area when the activities occurred)” (Townsend et al 1993:2).

Historic non-archaeological sites consist of *property types such as buildings, sites, structures, objects, and districts that in general are still used or maintained*. In most cases, linear features (regardless of condition) such as roads, railroads, ditches and canals, will be recorded as historic non-archaeological sites and not as historic archaeological sites. Non-archaeological sites should be recorded on a Section 106 document form, available on the Oregon SHPO web page. However, abandoned linear features that have a high potential of adding to our knowledge of past land use practices (e.g., Chinese mining ditches, early wagon roads) will be recorded as historic archaeological sites and given Smithsonian trinomial numbers. Other linear features (e.g., logging roads, unnamed ditches) that have little historical data or archaeological potential will generally not be assigned Smithsonian numbers but will be plotted on the state’s GIS mapping system along with any temporary number it has been assigned by the recording archaeologist. If additional data becomes available in the future regarding the history and/or use of any of these sites, the allocation of a Smithsonian number can be reviewed.

The historic review and compliance team of Ian Johnson (503-986-0678) and Jason Allen (503-986-0579) maintain the historic site inventory. Historic sites are not given Smithsonian trinomial numbers but are assigned SHPO tracking numbers after they are entered into our computer database. This process occurs after our staff has completed their review of each report.

Townsend, Jan, John H. Sprinkle, Jr., and John Knoerl

1993 Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Historical Archaeological Sites and Districts. *National Register Bulletin* 36, National Park Service, USDI.