

3.0 Archaeological and Cultural Sites

From time to time, exploration crews may become aware of, or suspect that, sites of archaeological or cultural significance are located on lands to be explored, or which are being explored. This is a critical issue that must be addressed during the planning or execution of any exploration program. Failure to do so may create serious legal difficulty and lead to significant conflict with local people. There is no surer way of creating conflict than desecrating, however unintentionally, a grave or a place of worship. Many jurisdictions have laws and regulations pertaining to the protection of archaeological and cultural sites. As professionals, explorationists must have knowledge of these laws and be in compliance with them.



Figure 8 This First Nations cemetery is located within the Manitoba Nickel Belt of northern Canada and is accessible only by water, approximately 60 km. from the nearest community. Such a site must be honoured and respected during any exploration program. © Barry Simmons

For purposes of this discussion, archaeological sites are considered to be sites of prehistoric or historic significance. Significant cultural sites, while including the above, are more difficult to define. They may be much more recent but of importance to the culture and heritage of the

peoples who have occupied or used the lands under exploration. In many cases, this occupation and use may be by indigenous people. Cultural sites might even include prominent landmarks, such as hilltops and other local topographic features. In some areas of the world, these cultural sites may be important evidence to support land claims.

It should be emphasized that explorationists must exercise respect for such sites, since they represent irreplaceable and non-renewable resources. The record is unique, finite, and fragile. It is particularly important to recognize that the heritage of indigenous people will likely constitute the greater part of the archaeological record in many areas that may be explored for mineral potential.

There are both cultural and spiritual links between indigenous people and the archaeological record that must be honoured and respected during mineral exploration programs.

There are a number of practical steps that can be taken by mining companies to ensure compliance with the above requirements and principles.

1. Become aware of any laws and regulations pertaining to the protection of archaeological/cultural sites within the area of planned exploration. Depending on the jurisdiction, contact the local federal, provincial, or territorial government office. All exploration conducted must be in compliance with these laws and regulations.
2. During the planning stage, contact a professional archaeologist or anthropologist at the appropriate government office, university, or museum closest to the project lands if there is any suspicion about, or knowledge of, the existence of sites of archaeological or cultural significance on the property. Follow the recommendations of this professional (and the previously mentioned laws and regulations) to determine if an exploration program is feasible, and how it should be conducted to protect any sites of significance. It

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is often desirable to also contact the local community, especially indigenous groups, to inquire about the possible presence of such sites.

3. If a possible or suspected site is discovered during the exploration program, one should immediately stop work, cordon off a reasonable distance around the site (or such distance as required by law), photograph the site for the record and contact an archaeological or anthropological professional, as well as the representative of the local indigenous community (usually a respected Elder). The site must remain undisturbed until investigated and documented by a recognized archaeological or anthropological professional. Under no circumstances should the exploration crew cause any disturbance or remove any relics from the site. Ensure compliance with any and all laws or regulations pertaining to such a site.
4. Follow the recommendations of the professional archaeologist or anthropologist and the protocols agreed to with the local Elder regarding further protection of the site. For the record, photograph the site again upon completion, or temporary halt, of the exploration program.

These guidelines are very broad in scope and are not meant to represent definitive procedures for identifying or protecting sites of archaeological and cultural significance. Just as a professional outside the area of mining expertise could not recommend the most appropriate tools for exploration, EES cannot fully describe the methods for protecting these sites. It is the responsibility of the exploration company to ensure compliance with the law, that the appropriate professionals are consulted and that the appropriate procedures are taken to protect any and all sites of archaeological and cultural significance. Access to knowledge from the past is an essential part of the heritage of everyone; as professionals, members of the mining industry have a responsibility to protect this knowledge.



Figure 9 This cave in Queensland, Australia has been used for ochre extraction by indigenous people for generations. Such a site must be protected during exploration. © Noranda/Falconbridge