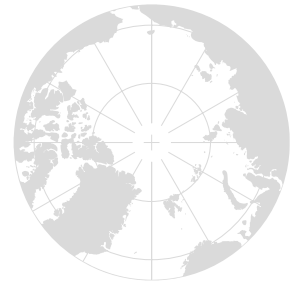


Arctic Cultural Remains Guidelines

Stories from the past



Smeerenburg, Svalbard. Photo: Ole Magnus Rapp

Cultural remains are the traces humans have left behind. They are story-tellers of lived life and past times. Arctic cultural remains often tells stories of challenging life under harsh conditions, where the natural environment and cold temperatures have set the scene. Arctic cultural remains tell many different stories – stories of survival, lost cultures, exploration, science, geopolitics, wars, adventures and much more. While exploring cultural remains, it is important to be careful so that others, including future generations, also have the opportunity to learn from the past.



Photo: Ole Magnus Rapp

Walk around and not between or on the cultural remains. Signehamna, Svalbard.



Photo: Jan Mortne Bjørnbakk

Cultural remains are sometimes not obvious. Crozierpynten, Svalbard.

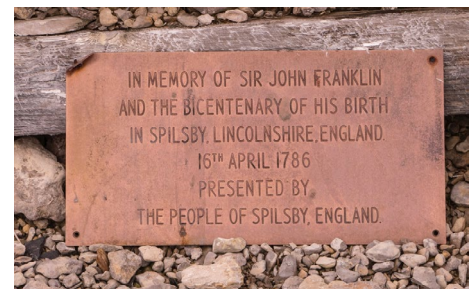


Photo: Kelvin Murray

Commemorative plaque to remember Sir John Franklin's birth, Beechey Island, Nunavut, Canada.

The Arctic coast gradually became ice-free following the last ice age. Alaska and the Siberian coast became ice-free 20 000 years ago. Northern Canada, Greenland and Svalbard also became ice free 10 000 years ago. The earliest traces of Arctic indigenous peoples are from 7 000 years ago in Northern Canada and 4 500 years ago in Greenland.

The first peoples of the Arctic relied on prey that was seasonal and spread over large areas. Hunters had to migrate to be able to take advantage of these resources. They either had a primary community and moved to the different hunting grounds seasonally when the hunt was best there, or they were continuously moving in a yearly circuit depending on the location of their prey.

Indigenous people were not the only ones to harvest the Arctic's natural resources. Opportunistic hunters and fishermen from the surrounding areas also went north. The Vikings established settlements in Greenland in the 10th century and, in the 17th century, West Europeans visited Svalbard for seasonal whaling. Russia sent hunters to live on Novaja Semlja for political reasons.

Russian and Norwegian trappers and hunters later overwintered in Svalbard but did not settle permanently. In recent centuries the mineral resources in the Arctic attracted mining companies, and a few explorers and scientists were drawn north by the unexplored areas.



Photo: Ólafur Rafnar Ólafsson

Vegetation covering remains, may make them difficult to find. Thule homestead, Greenland.



Photo: Hans Harmsen

Different building techniques are characteristic for different historical periods. The Viking age church at Hvalsey, Qaqortoq, Greenland.



Photo: Georg Bangjord

Slaughtering places tells stories of hunting methods from the past. Skulls and bones from walrus at Kapp Lee, Svalbard.



Photo: Ilja Leo Lang, AECO

The industrial explorations in the Arctic have left many cultural remains. Ny-Ålesund, Svalbard.



Photo: Jan Morten Bjørnbakk

Many scientists have been attracted to the Arctic, and many signs of their presence have been left behind. Scientific station, Sorgfjorden, Svalbard.

Cultural remains may be protected by law. The regulations may be different from one country to another, but usually include that it is prohibited to damage, dig up, move, remove, alter, cover up, conceal or disfigure structures and sites or movable historical objects. Sites and objects may have automatic protections depending on age (e.g. everything older than 1946), be protected by decision even if they are younger, and some sites and objects may be protected irrespective of age (e.g. graves, slaughter places, crosses and more). To be on the safe side, leave everything as it is when visiting the Arctic.

Characteristics of Arctic cultural remains

The diverse use of the Arctic over a long period of time is reflected in the cultural remains we find today. Indigenous people with their nomadic lifestyle left modest cultural remains such as rocky home foundations and stone hearths; small cairns to lead reindeer herders; graves with stones and places of religious importance, perhaps adorned with antlers or adjacent unusual natural features such as large stones. To this day, some of these earliest cultural remains have religious importance to indigenous people and should be visited with great respect.

The cultural remains from early hunting and trapping activities are modest in size and form, and often difficult to see. One reason is that vegetation has covered them over time.

Cultural remains from the later periods are easier to see. These may include standing buildings and ruins, graveyards, mine openings, quays, rail tracks, ship wrecks and the remains at sites of industrial exploitation of natural resources. You might also come across military or abandoned scientific or weather installations from the 20th century. The remains from later

periods are generally found along the shores, while the early hunters used other ice-free areas.

Organic materials are well preserved by the Arctic climate. Cultural remains of considerable age can even be found on the ground or semi-buried.

Buildings were generally simple constructions designed for temporary use and vulnerable to disintegration over time. However, it was common practice to repurpose them when possible. Human activities have concentrated close to shore and have taken advantage of existing buildings or constructions. In Svalbard, for example, whaling stations of the 17th century were used by the mining companies of the 20th century. Russian hunting cabins from the 18th century, scientific stations and mining barracks were later used by Norwegian hunters in the 20th century.

In some areas, items dating back even as recently as 1945 are automatically protected as cultural remains. Be aware that more recent remains can also be protected by specific laws.

Many explorers found their last resting place in the Arctic. Four grave headstones from the Franklin expedition 1845, Beechey Island, Nunavut, Canada.



Photo: Sebastian Charge

Beware

- Cultural remains will gradually degrade and change over time. Natural phenomenon such as avalanches, landslides, animals and gradually increasing temperatures in parts of the Arctic can represent risks to cultural remains.
- With this in mind it is important to remember that visits to cultural heritage sites can cause harm and speed up natural decay. Stepping on an artefact can break it, and moving an item can reduce its historic value.
- Anyone visiting cultural heritage sites should do their utmost to ensure minimum impact and remember that cultural remains are signs of the life and death of past inhabitants and should be treated with great respect.
- Cultural remains may be buildings, constructions and crafts. They can also be indicative of human graves including crosses and other grave markings, bones and bone fragments. Remains might also include spring guns and animal traps as well as skeleton of animals and more.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

These guidelines are general. In some areas additional regulations and guidelines apply. This may include special permits and the supervision of archaeologists when visiting sites.

Guidelines

- Educate guests prior to landings to raise awareness of appropriate behaviour for heritage site visits.
- Keep group size within a manageable number and do not leave guests unattended at the site.
- Always leave cultural remains as they were when you arrived.
- Watch from the perimeter and walk around and not between or on the cultural remains.
- On and around cultural remains: do not touch, move, dig, add, or in any way disturb the ground and what is on it.
- What may look like waste at a cultural heritage site are often cultural remains and should be left untouched as where they are.
- Be mindful of the impact to sensitive vegetation, included wet and moist ground. Avoid making new paths.
- If you do walk on old quays, foot paths, rail tracks, stone dumps at mines, and in all kind of mines, be careful not to start soil erosion or cause harm.

Please do not take anything with you,
and leave no lasting signs of your visit.