

Bulletin: Archaeological Sites

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What is an Archaeological Site?

An archaeological site is a location where there is evidence of past human activity. Examples include stone carvings, remains of ancient houses and campsites, culturally modified trees, burial sites, and early trading posts. These sites provide information about Indigenous life during the past 12,000 years and non-Indigenous Life for the past 200 years.

Archaeological sites are fragile, and the context in which artifacts are found is just as important as the artifacts themselves. Once this context is destroyed through construction or landscaping, this history is lost, even if the artifacts are still there.

Why is it important?

The [Heritage Conservation Act](#) is the Provincial legislation that protects archaeological sites in BC. Damaging a site without a provincial heritage permit is unlawful. Any disturbance of a site without a permit is considered a provincial offence and may result in substantial fines (up to \$50,000) and/or imprisonment (up to 2 years).

In many cases, archaeological sites are our only link to our past, providing us with a wealth of knowledge and a fragile link to our origins and early history in BC. For most of the time that people have lived in BC, no written records were made. Archaeological sites and oral tradition are the only vestiges of a rich history.

How do we identify an archaeological site?

Local Governments may access the Provincial database ([Remote Access to Archaeological Data - RAAD](#)) to determine if an identified archaeological site is known or if there is high potential for one within a specific property. Sites near a body of water (lakes, streams, ponds) or near another known site have a high archaeological potential.

The Development Planning Department will conduct a RAAD review on all Development Applications to provide early notification to property owners. Every applicant will receive a [Property Owner Brochure](#) and [Notification Letter](#) from their File Manager advising one of the following:

- Direct overlap with protected archaeological site
- Direct overlap with an area of high archaeological potential; or
- No identified overlap with archaeological sites or areas of high potential.

Development Planning

1435 Water Street
Kelowna, BC V1Y 1J4
TEL 250-469-8626
planninginfo@kelowna.ca

What are Property Owner's Responsibilities?

The property owner shall review the [Property Owner Brochure](#) and [Notification Letter](#) to understand the next steps under the provincial legislation and if provincial approval is required to proceed. If your property has been identified as having direct overlap with a known site or a high potential site, you will be required to complete the [Archaeology Branch Site Data Request Form](#) and share the response with your File Manager.

If you find something in the ground after commencing construction, stop digging! If you think you have uncovered an archaeological site during a project, **please do not disturb the site further and call BC's Archaeology Branch immediately at 250-953-3334.**

What are Local Government's Responsibilities?

The City of Kelowna has set leading responsibly and acting as a team as core values. We have committed to work collaboratively with the provincial government through the [Heritage Conservation Act](#), while also aligning our practices with the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), and the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action](#). **The City of Kelowna's primary responsibility is to notify property owners as early as possible of potential conflict with an archaeological site.**

[The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Article 11:](#)

Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. *This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.*

As such, the [Kelowna 2040 Official Community Plan](#) identifies the following Objectives and Policies:

Policy 9.2.1. Truth and Reconciliation. Where possible, apply an Indigenous lens when undertaking 2040 OCP implementation actions with knowledge of syilx/Okanagan history, and with consideration of documents such as the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Policy 11.3.3 Public Awareness. Raise public awareness about the value of archaeological sites and their protection under the Heritage Conservation Act.

Policy 11.3.4. Heritage Property Owner Responsibilities. Ensure that property owners are aware of their responsibilities under the Heritage Conservation Act when conducting land-altering activities.

Policy 11.3.5. Unauthorized Damage to Archaeological Sites. Avoid or reduce unauthorized damage to protected archaeological sites in accordance with the Heritage Conservation Act.

Resources:

[UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)

[Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action](#)

[Archaeology for Property Owners and Developers](#) (Province of BC)

[Heritage Conservation Act – Transformation Project](#) (Province of BC)