

# Finding the Facts

## How to Effectively Field Archeology Questions from the Public

By Amy Hammons,  
County Historical Commission Outreach Coordinator

County Historical Commissions (CHC) often require help when sorting out local issues involving archeology. Although CHC appointees have a wide variety of preservation knowledge, archeological issues can be sensitive and nuanced, particularly when artifact collection and site damage are involved.

Most CHC appointees typically field two general questions; fortunately, Texas Historical Commission (THC) archeologists have several simple responses to the following inquiries:

- What do I do if I find an archeological artifact (an arrowhead, a piece of pottery, etc.)?
- What do I do if I see an archeological site in which people have been digging?

First, THC archeologists stress the importance of leaving the artifacts in place. Archeologists must know the artifacts' location and circumstances of the find to determine significance, protect an archeological site, and gain information about the past.

Second, they suggest taking a picture and noting the location. Digital cameras may provide location coordinates. At the very least, you must

determine the county and adjacent roads. A dot on a map is helpful.

Finally, archeologists recommend informing the land manager or landowner. Often, THC archeologists can provide expertise to private landowners.



Archeological activity, like this dig at the THC's Levi Jordan Plantation State Historic Site, requires input from professionals to assure proper techniques and documentation.

The THC's website has several publications to help people determine next steps when presented with archeology concerns. Search "looting" on the THC website to find a list of resources that address archeological issues impacting local preservationists. This search provides links to the following brochures:

- Destruction of Archeological Sites in Texas
- A Property Owner's Guide to Archeological Sites
- Artifact Collecting in Texas
- Laws that Protect Archeology Sites

If attempts to locate land managers are unsuccessful, you may call the THC's Archeology Division at 512-463-6096. More importantly, you should call the THC when you see uncontrolled digging that is not conducted by trained archeologists.

You can directly call the THC archeologist assigned to your county. To find your county's archeologist, go to [thc.state.tx.us/contact](http://thc.state.tx.us/contact) and scroll down to the "Contacts by County" section. ★

*The Medallion* is published quarterly by the Texas Historical Commission. Address correspondence to: Managing Editor, *The Medallion*, P.O. Box 12276, Austin, TX 78711-2276. Portions of the newsletter that are not copyrighted or reprinted from other sources may be reprinted with permission. Contributions for the support of this publication are gratefully accepted. For information about alternate formats of this publication, contact the THC at 512-463-6255.

*The Medallion* is financed in part by a grant from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. All of the agency's public programs and activities are operated free from discrimination on

the basis of race, color, national origin, age, gender, or disability. Any person who believes he or she has been discriminated against should write to Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

*The Medallion* is available online at [www.thc.state.tx.us/medallion](http://www.thc.state.tx.us/medallion). If you would prefer to receive *The Medallion* electronically instead of through the mail, please send your name and address to [thc@thc.state.tx.us](mailto:thc@thc.state.tx.us). You will be notified by email when each new issue is available on the THC website and will no longer receive a printed copy.

### Our Mission

To protect and preserve the state's historic and prehistoric resources for the use, education, enjoyment, and economic benefit of present and future generations.