

## Cultural Heritage of Wisconsin's Forests

Cultural resources for a tangible portion of our past. Our knowledge of them enhances our understanding of shared human experience and the accomplishments of our ancestors. The two main categories of cultural resources are archaeological sites and historic structures. An archaeological site is a place with evidence of past human activity. Sites in Wisconsin range in age from 11,500 B.C. to the early 20th century. Types include campsites, villages, garden beds/corn hills, individual burials, cemeteries, mounds, lithic workshops, sugar bushes, tool caches, sacred springs, rock art sites, trading posts, logging camps, homesteads, stone quarries, lead mines, lime kilns, military forts, and shipwrecks. Historic structures, which must be at least 50 years old, include buildings, towers, bridges, tunnels, stone walls, staircases, and stone fireplaces.

The State Historic Society of Wisconsin (SHSW) maintains inventories of cultural resources that have been reported to them over the last hundred years or so by institutions and private individuals. However, since thousands of archaeological sites and historic structures have yet to be reported to the SHSW, these inventories are incomplete. The Archaeological Site Inventory currently lists about 29,500 archaeological sites and cemeteries in the state.

Relatively few of the archaeological sites recorded in this inventory are located in forested areas. This is not because few sites exist. The problem is that sites are more difficult to discover in forested areas than in plowed fields, where artifacts often lie exposed below the surface. Except for submerged sites such as shipwrecks, virtually any type of archaeological site may exist in a forested setting. The types most likely to be listed in SHSW files are: (1) those that are visible without excavation, such as mounds, rock art, marked graves, logging camps, homesteads, quarries/mines, or kilns, and (2) those that are recorded on the basis of historic records and oral traditions such as graves, sugar bushes, trading posts, and nineteenth century Native American campsites.

Some of each type of sites are significant. To be considered archaeologically significant, a site must retain some site integrity and have the potential to offer important information about the past. While forested sites may be difficult to identify, they tend to be much better preserved than sites located elsewhere. In such sites artifacts and cultural features generally retain much of their original context, and it is this context that helps the archaeologist ascertain the history of what has transpired there.

Regardless of archaeological significance, some sites may be significant sacred places. This is particularly true of burial sites (including mounds), rock art sites, certain springs, village names in tribal histories, and landforms tied to oral traditions. While mounds and rock art sites are relatively easy to identify as cultural resources, other sacred sites are less apparent and the locations may be kept secret unless development threatens.

In evaluating properties under consideration for participation in the Forest Legacy Program, the Department of Natural Resources will take into account the presence of potentially significant cultural resources. Measures to identify such resources will include a check of the Archaeological Site Inventory, an interview with the property owner, tribal notification under 36 CFR 800.3, and a walkover by a forester trained in the recognition of cultural features. In addition, consideration will be given to the property's proximity to waterways that were important routes of travel, where unrecorded archaeological sites are likely to exist.