

Archaeological Sites in New Jersey Parks

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Figure 1: Bethel Monument in Thompson Park

New Jersey parks are not only wonderful natural and recreational resources for the community, they can also contain significant archaeological and historical sites (see Figure 1). Archaeological sites can provide us with important evidence about Native Americans who lived in New Jersey for over 12,000 years and about New Jersey's rich Colonial and historic past.

Historic and archaeological sites can become important heritage tourist destinations. Examples include famed architect Louis Kahn's Bathhouse in Ewing Township, the canal including locks and locktenders houses and historic Prallsville Mills within the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park, East Jersey Olde Towne in Piscataway, Jockey Hollow State Park in Morristown, Monmouth Battlefield and

Walnford in Monmouth County, the Black Creek site in Maple Grange Park in Sussex County, prehistoric resources in Farnham Park in Camden, and numerous others.

Recent archaeological investigations in locations like Cadwalader Park in Trenton, Mercer County; Newark Riverfront Park in Newark, Essex County; and Thompson Park in Monroe, Middlesex County has led to the discovery of archaeological resources dating from the 1740s to late nineteenth and twentieth century industrial sites. A significant site is one that is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places because it provides important information about people or events in our past.

Archaeological surveys are usually performed in response to local, state, or federal requirements for permits. Local municipalities, such as Evesham Township in Burlington County, may have requirements for archaeological surveys before construction permits are granted. Federal funding or permits, including funding for highways and other transportation improvements, housing, FCC permits for wireless facilities, wind farms, and other projects require determination if any historic or archaeological resources will be affected.

In New Jersey, state requirements are under the jurisdiction of the Historic Protection Office (HPO), part of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). Surveys to determine the presence of archaeological and historic resources are required for permits within the protected Pinelands and Highlands areas, near wetlands and waterways, and for projects within or near historic districts or site listed on the National and New Jersey Registers of Historic Places. Projects receiving 20% state funding with construction costs of more than one million dollars or involving more than five acres are required to take cultural and historic resources into account and a survey may be required. For example, New Jersey Freshwater Wetlands Permits are required for projects where a waterway is present or within 250 feet and are required to consider the effects of their projects on historic resources. If a building or ruin over 50 years old (pre-1962) is present, a bridge will be replaced or rehabilitated, or members of the public have notified NJDEP that resources are present, archaeological and/or architectural surveys may be required to assess project impacts on historic resources.

A Phase IA historical and archaeological survey includes an assessment of the potential for significant archaeological resources in a project area that includes historical research and a field visit. Phase IB survey involves below-ground testing to identify artifacts and remains of foundations, pits, and other features.

An architectural survey determines if National Register-listed or eligible structures are present and will be affected by a project. This work is generally required if a structure, or structures, over 50 years old are on the property, or if a property is adjacent to an existing, or potential, historic district.

If either type of survey identifies resource(s), further work in the form of a Phase II survey would be necessary to evaluate the resource(s) eligibility for listing on the National Register.

Proposed construction of the Monroe Township high school in Middlesex County's Thompson Park required a Phase I archaeological survey as part of an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under New Jersey Executive Order 215. This was required due to a land exchange between Monroe Township and Middlesex County that required approval by the Green Acres program and funding by the New Jersey Department of Education. It was believed that the proposed school site is on or close to the site of the Bethel Mission Settlement, where David and John Brainerd preached to local Indian groups between 1746 and 1759. Phase I and Phase II archaeological survey included metal detecting, ground penetrating radar, the excavation of 1.5-foot diameter and 5-foot square test units, artifact analysis, and a detailed report. The surveys located over 2,000 historic and prehistoric artifacts (see Figure 2), remains of an 18th century historic site that is possibly related to the Bethel Mission, and remains of a 19th century farmstead.



Figure 2: Fragments of 18th century ceramics

Experienced, professional archaeological and historical consultants can provide you with guidance in dealing with these issues, working with HPO and other agencies, if you are required to conduct archaeological or historical surveys in connection with a project or would like to find out if important historical or archaeological sites are located in your local park.