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# Statement of Position Taken by Committee No.2, Concerning Archaeological Survey

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STATEMENT OF POSITION TAKEN BY COMMITTEE NO. 2,  
CONCERNING ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Report prepared by George H. Odell

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The subject of archaeological survey is very wide in scope and varied in content. It includes both the earthy consideration of on-the-ground technique and the more philosophical issues of why we conduct surveys in the first place and what purposes they should serve. Because of the vast range of potential problems and issues encompassed by the given subject, the committee decided to consider only a limited subset. The division being made was not explicitly stated at the outset, but emerged through long discussion and finally crystallized near the end of the session. The statement that follows is a consensus of the group attending the session and a series of recommendations that the group feels ought to be operationalized in order to resolve some of the major problems faced by researchers conducting archaeological surveys in the northeastern United States.

-THE PROBLEM

Archaeological surveys of all kinds ("pure," contractual and combined)

are currently being conducted in ever increasing numbers throughout the northeastern states. Consequently, there has been a dramatic rise in the sheer volume of information. Some of this information is useful beyond the confines of the immediate problems being addressed, but much is unusable. No consensus exists as to which issues are of utmost concern to the archaeological and lay communities. Without this knowledge, there is certainly no standardization of the information compiled by these surveys.

If this situation continues, we will be left with a great amount of data, a considerable portion of it inappropriate for answering questions posed by others. This is the inevitable result of a lack of full communication among scholars working in the regions. In certain cases, the difficulty is amplified by a lack of explicitly formulated research goals. Increasing communication and interaction would have major advantages which would benefit individual surveys and general research interests in at least four ways. It would 1) provide a general idea of the issues that appear to be most important for current research objectives, 2) make more explicit the need for the survey, thus providing stronger justification and accountability to the public, 3) render the survey more responsive to the needs of other researchers, and 4) provide a certain modicum of standardization which should make it easier to extract desired information from the increasing number of survey reports that are being compiled.

The present situation is particularly frustrating because the potential exists for collecting data of interest for a wide variety of research questions. The basic operational and logistical work of surveying large tracts of land is being performed almost daily. Compared to the effort already being expended in these projects, the additional work necessary to become responsive to the needs of others is very small. On two fronts organization is required: 1) to achieve a basis for communication on current research questions, and 2) to disseminate these research considerations to the people conducting surveys in the region.

#### A PROPOSED SOLUTION

The key to any problem involving a potentially large number of people is organization. It is recommended in the present instance that leadership emanate from the appropriate representative of the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), since this office tends to be a clearing house for survey projects. This stipulation is certainly not absolute; however, and the region could develop an alternative structure for decision making and communication.

It is the archaeologist who must deal with the data provided by reconnaissance activities. For this simple reason, the archaeologist need to be concerned with the questions asked and the hypotheses tested by the surveys throughout the region. Opinions need to be expressed, shared, and discussed. In order for this to occur, some manner of communication among regional archaeologists is required. The archaeologists involved must stipulate not only the questions that most

concern them, but also the kinds of data that will allow them to answer the questions. This must be done in as concrete and practical a way as possible to avoid ambiguity and misinterpretation in the field.

Once these points have been communicated, it is incumbent on the SHPO representative or leader to compose a form that can be employed on surveys to record the information desired. This form should be short, simple, and straightforward. If the form is ambiguous, if gathering the additional data involves too much extra work, the people performing the reconnaissance will probably simply not bother to collect the data of little direct concern to them. On the other hand, if the information can be amassed relatively quickly and easily in the course of the survey, then the additional data and ideas embodied in the form might provide useful supplementary input into the survey being conducted. In this way, one's colleagues can provide ideas and an operational format which may be applied and tested by everyone doing reconnaissance work in the region.

After the surveys have been completed and the forms filled out, they should be returned to the SHPO representative, who retains them in an easily accessible file in the State Historic Preservation Office. The information on the forms should be available to all interested parties without discrimination and should be organized in such a manner that it can be used quickly and easily.

It may appear as though the process outlined above (cynically restated, someone else's data at some extra effort to oneself) is doomed to failure in the practical world. We will admit that human beings, while perhaps not classifiable as inherently lazy, do tend to follow paths of least resistance and maximum efficiency of effort in the short run. The success of the present effort depends on the quality of leadership provided and the interest of the region's archaeologists. The most practical, cost-effective and brilliantly conceived scheme in the world is doomed to failure if the people carrying out the program fail to do their part.

It should be emphasized that there was a strong feeling throughout our committee's discussion that a tremendous amount of effort is currently being wasted by people who are painstakingly accumulating certain kinds of data that could have already been gathered by survey crews-- had those crews been informed of the utility of recording that information while they were in the field. Archaeological research questions and interpretations are changing rapidly; the only way to keep pace with these changes is through active, open and continuing communication. Our recommendations emphasize the necessity for communication, and they go one step farther--toward the outlining of the organization communicational networks. Once these networks have been established, the flow of information will be facilitated, and the long run efficiency of the surveys maximized.