

Frequently Asked Questions (Archaeology)

- What do I do about burials and burial items?

If human remains are inadvertently discovered, STOP all land disturbing activity immediately, protect the burial from harm, and notify the local law enforcement authority. Law enforcement officials, under OCGA 31-21-6, will then notify the coroner, the local government, and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to recommend a permanent protection plan. It is not legal to disturb or dig human burials or collect human skeletal remains or objects associated with burials, regardless of who owns the land. It is not legal to buy, sell, or trade for profit any American Indian burial object, sacred object, or object of cultural patrimony. (OCGA 12-3-621) See: [Cemeteries](#)

- Can I stop a development project if I know there is an archaeological site on the property?

Archaeology rarely, if ever, stops a development project. If a significant archaeological site is discovered by a professional archaeologist during a survey in a development project area, and there is no feasible way to modify the project plans to avoid it, then the site likely will be archaeologically excavated (mitigated). This scientific excavation allows for all the information from the site to be collected, and then the development will proceed as planned. If graves are present, they are protected under state laws from disturbance by development or other activity. If you know or suspect there are human burials in an area slated for development and want to assure their protection, you should contact the local governing authority, such as the county or city development permitting office or zoning board, because it is the local government who has the authority to enforce the applicable laws. Express your concern for protecting the graves, present any documentary evidence you have of the existence of graves, and offer copies of applicable laws if the governing authorities are unfamiliar with these statutes. Click here to read or download these laws: OCGA 36-72-1 through 16, 31-21-6, and 31-21-44

- Where Can I Volunteer on an Archaeology Project?

[Volunteer opportunities](#) in archaeology primarily would be available through an educational institution or non-profit organization. Even though you may see an archaeology project underway in your community and think you'd like to help out or take your school students over to help, most projects are being done under a business contract with legal and insurance liabilities as well as time and money constraints, that prevent allowing untrained volunteers on the site. However, there are opportunities occasionally during the year through organizations.

- Can I Get Someone to Come to My Property and Do Archaeology?

Our office does not provide archaeological investigations on private property. Additionally, it's rare that archaeology is done for "free" by university students or others. Archaeology professors must plan months in advance for field projects with their students and these projects are carefully selected with specific research questions in mind. Full academic schedules and the demands of archaeological fieldwork result in little chance of faculty and students performing complimentary work.

It is routinely necessary to hire a professional archaeologist, much as you would any other specialist or consultant. Small projects are likely to be reasonably priced; it is recommended that you call and discuss your needs with a professional archaeologist. See the [Consultants Directory](#) on our Web site.

One possible source for volunteer labor to investigate a site on your property would be the statewide volunteer archaeology organization, The Society for Georgia Archaeology. SGA has professionals as well as amateur archaeologists among its members. Some SGA chapters around the state do occasionally undertake an archaeological investigation, under the supervision of a professional. Contact SGA at www.thesga.org or by mail at P. O. Box 693, Athens, GA 30603.

- What are Indian Trail Trees?

*Legend has it that Native Americans would mark the location of various resources such as trails, water sources, optimal hunting and fishing locations, etc. by bending young trees to 'point' in the general direction of the resource. These crooked trees have been found in various locations throughout the Southeast with several located in some North Georgia counties. Elaine Jordan has even written a book about these curiosities entitled *Indian Trail Trees*.*

Our office does not record these trees as historic resources because research conducted on several certified trees indicates they are not old enough to be contemporaneous with Native American inhabitation of Georgia.

However, other organizations are still very much interested in these unique phenomena. For more information about these trees and the lore surrounding them, please visit the following links:

[The Trail Tree Project](#)

[Indian Trail Trees](#)

[Appalachian History - Indian Trail Trees](#)