

CAVE ARCHAEOLOGY IN NORTH AMERICA AND MESOAMERICA

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The papers included in this Special Issue were presented at the National Speleological Society Symposium on Cave Archaeology in North America and Mesoamerica, which was held during the 1994 National Speleological Society National Convention in Brackettville, Texas. My intention in chairing this session was to bring several of the principal cave archaeologists together. Much fine work has been done in cave archaeology, and the symposium papers address the state of the discipline today.

These papers concern archaeological investigations of prehistoric cave use in the dark zone, beyond the entrance. All the sites discussed demonstrate that ancient cavers extensively explored and utilized the inner passages of caves. Rockshelter sites, or sites where human remains or artifacts were dropped down pit entrances are not included. The symposium concentrated on the methods and the techniques used by archaeologists for documenting prehistoric use of the dark zones in caves.

Cave sites provide unique glimpses into the cultures of ancient people that are not available through surface site excavations alone. Because of the relative stability of the underground environment and lack of the weathering forces that are always active above ground, the artifacts in a cave are often completely undisturbed since the ancients left them there.

Comprehensive scientific information can be obtained only from intact sites. Much archaeological information is lost when a site is looted for relics and "collectibles." Never disturb an archaeological site should you encounter one underground. Step around the archaeology; do not pick up the artifacts or even touch them; report your discovery to appropriate authorities.

The papers in the symposium and in this Special Issue include papers from sites in the United States, Mexico, Belize, and Guatemala. I believe you will both enjoy them and learn from them.