

Historical Resource Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What is a historical resource?

A historical resource is any resource possessing historical, cultural, archaeological or paleontological significance, including sites, contextual information, structures, districts and objects significantly associated with or representative of earlier peoples, cultures, maritime heritage, and human activities and events. Examples include shipwrecks, historic navigation aids, Native American habitation sites, anchors, and isolated artifacts. Historical resources are also described with the following terms: submerged cultural resources, maritime heritage resources, historic properties, and underwater cultural heritage.

How do I know if something is a historical resource? It may have one or several of the following characteristics.

- Buried, or partially buried
- Encrusted with marine life
- Symmetrically shaped or linear
- Coated in calcium carbonate and shells, known as a concretion
- Includes rocks and other geological materials that are not coral
- Metal or wood composition
- Intact bottles and dishware or broken shards of glass or ceramic
- Concentrations of any material not usually occurring on a coral reef

2. Are artificial reefs considered to be historical resources?

Artificial reefs are intentionally deposited structures permitted by the ONMS for recreational and commercial purposes. Some artificial reefs may be historical resources by virtue of their age or historical significance. Artificial reefs in Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) have been permitted after stringent environmental analysis. Permitted artificial reefs are considered sanctuary resources to be enjoyed, but not damaged or disturbed so that future generations may also experience them.

3. What should I do if I find a historical resource?

- Take a photo or sketch what you see, estimate its size
- Record the geographic coordinates with a GPS or note an accurate description of its location
- Report the above information. Depending upon where you encountered the historical resource this may include:
 - Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary- (305) 434-9383
 - National Park Service- (786) 335-3676
 - Florida's Bureau of Archaeological Research- (305) 245-6444
 - Florida's State Parks Service-report to the park where the historical resource was found
- Do not disturb any part of a historical resource
- Do not take, move, touch, tap, dig, scrape, hand fan, or remove the historical resource

4. Why should I not disturb or take a historical resource?

They are fragile, non-renewable resources, which once disturbed deteriorate more quickly. Researchers gain a better understanding of the past when they are able to study artifacts in their original context. The relationship of one artifact to another and to its surroundings is important. If artifacts are moved, the information value of the site is diminished. It is unlawful to disturb or remove historical resources.

5. Why are historical resources important?

We can learn much about past human events and activities by examining historical resources. Research adds to our knowledge of Keys' maritime history, ship architecture, seafaring people and coastal residents. Proper archaeological research can tell us stories about the past that are often not recorded in history books. Historical resources are a critical aspect of our nation's economy in general and the Florida Keys specifically through heritage tourism. Many people visit this beautiful and historic place to see and learn about the past.

6. Am I allowed to dive on historical resources?

In almost all situations (except for zones that prohibit entry called "Special Use Research-only Areas") divers are encouraged to visit and responsibly enjoy the sanctuary. Nine shipwrecks on the sanctuary's Shipwreck Trail have been documented and have site maps available online. For more exact locations of closed areas or for information about the Shipwreck Trail, visit: floridakeys.noaa.gov/shipwrecktrail/welcome.html or contact the sanctuary.

7. Is everything man-made that I find during a dive considered to be a historical resource?

Divers often encounter marine debris; this trash is not considered a historical resource. Specially trained divers are encouraged to remove marine debris. Marine debris training courses help divers differentiate between trash and historical resources. If you are in doubt, anything that does not look like modern plastic or derelict fishing gear should be considered a historical resource. Report the item to an appropriate resource manager and leave it in place.

8. What are some of NOAA's responsibilities regarding historical resources?

NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries is responsible for protecting and managing historical resources within a National Marine Sanctuary. The National Marine Sanctuaries Act mandates NOAA to abide by laws and regulations of the Federal Archaeological Program. These include developing resource management programs and overseeing federal activities that may affect historical resources. NOAA issues permits for the investigation of historical resources and has a responsibility to inventory and nominate eligible properties to the National Register of Historic Places.

9. How does NOAA protect historical resources within FKNMS?

National Marine Sanctuary regulations prohibit the movement, removal, possession of, or injury to sanctuary historical resources. NOAA conducts research and monitoring, permits historical resource research activities, and where appropriate installs mooring buoys to prevent anchor damage.

10. What role does the State of Florida play in managing historical resources?

NOAA and the Florida Department of State's Division of Historical Resources share responsibility for historical resources within Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. All historical resources are managed in accordance with the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and Protection Act, the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, the Abandoned Shipwreck Act, and Florida state law in accordance with the Federal Archaeological Program. The Florida Division of Historical Resources retains title to abandoned shipwrecks and other archaeological sites on state-owned submerged lands within sanctuary boundaries. NOAA holds historical resources in federal sanctuary waters in trust for the citizens of the United States.

11. Is it ever necessary to disturb a historical resource?

Under certain circumstances, the recovery of artifacts may be warranted. The recovery must take place in a controlled and planned manner in accordance with state and federal laws. Special chemical and physical treatments are necessary for artifacts that are removed from the water. These procedures are best carried out by a professional conservator. Some possible reasons for recovering artifacts include: protecting artifacts, making artifacts more available to the public, and improving scientific understanding.

12. What have historical resources revealed about Florida Keys history?

People have lived in the Florida Keys for thousands of years. More than ten thousand years ago, sea levels were significantly lower exposing much of the land out to today's reef on the Atlantic side of the Keys and for miles on the much shallower Florida Bay side. Native Americans hunted in what was once forested land and fished along the shoreline. Over successive millennia rising sea levels slowly inundated these areas and the people living here adapted their lives to a shrinking island chain.

Interactions between European and Native American cultures likely first occurred when European vessels wrecked on the Keys' reefs. The waterway offshore of the Florida Keys reefs became a heavily traveled route as Europeans exploited and colonized the Western Hemisphere. The sanctuary's fringing coral reefs captured innumerable vessels, some escaped to continue their voyage while others wrecked with great loss of life and property. Each shipwreck provides a glimpse of the past providing information about the everyday activities of those onboard the vessel. Shipwrecks also reveal interactions between communities and cultures on a global scale.

- **Archival research suggests that over 2,000 shipwrecks occurred in FKNMS**
- **14 shipwrecks and 5 lighthouses in the Keys are currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places**
- **FKNMS historical resource inventories record the locations of over 800 sites and artifacts**
- **12 of the 13 known shipwrecks from the 1733 Spanish Plate Fleet are in FKNMS**
- **9 shipwrecks are on the sanctuary's Shipwreck Trail representing distinct period of maritime history**

13. What are some websites that provide more information about historical resources?

floridakeys.noaa.gov/heritage/ Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

dos.myflorida.com/historical/ Florida Department of State Division of Historical Resources

www.flpublicarchaeology.org Florida Public Archaeology Network

www.nps.gov/subjects/historicpreservation/index.htm National Park Service Historic Preservation