

Interior's Museum Collections— Your Heritage

The Department of the Interior's museum collections trace their origins to events before the Department was formed. The Land Ordinance of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 provided for the survey and settlement of the lands that the original 13 colonies ceded to the federal government after the War of Independence. The United States acquired other lands from Spain, France, and other countries and tribes. Congress established the General Land Office in the Department of the Treasury in 1812. As the 19th century progressed, federal land management priorities shifted from disposition and settlement of these federal lands to preservation of resource values. With exploration came discovery of minerals, fossils, and Native American artifacts. With increased focus of resources, biological surveys generated science collections, and the first national parks and wildlife refuges were created. During the 20th century, increases in science activity and in historic and archeological preservation laws triggered unprecedented growth in the resources collected from lands managed by Department of the Interior bureaus.

Thus, managing museum collections in the Department is an awe-inspiring responsibility that traces both the history of the country and the evolution of the Department. Offering abundant opportunity, yet constrained by staff and budget limitations, museum collections also reflect changing attitudes toward resource management over time. Cornerstones of success are based on accountability for, access to, and use of the collections. Accountability establishes protection and monitoring that make access possible. Access to museum collections (in both federal facilities and non-federal partner institutions) provides tools for managers, scientists, interpreters, and the public to further the Department's core mission. This mission is to protect and provide access to our nation's cultural and natural heritage and honor our trust responsibilities to tribes.

Many people are surprised to learn that Interior has museums. The latest count in 1998 places the total size of our collections at 70 million museum objects and 41 million archival holdings.

Why does the Department have so many? The simple answer is that it manages more land than any other federal agency, and that land contains abundant evidence of the nation's history and prehistory. Land management sometimes requires that objects be collected from their original locations to prevent their loss to construction, thieves, erosion, or over-visitation. These objects then become museum collections—fossils, biological specimens, archeological artifacts, and other cultural resources including art, ethnographic, and historic objects made by users of the land during the historic period. The national strategy for federal archeology re-confirms the stewardship of America's archeological heritage as a well-established policy and function of the federal government. Interagency cooperation and partnerships are fundamental to this mission. Museum collection stewardship and partnerships are essential elements of responsible land management.

Within the Department, there are dozens of full-service museums, hundreds of visitor centers with museum exhibits, and a few repositories dedicated to conservation and research of collections. The Department does not have a museum program like the Smithsonian Institution, yet it is responsible for nearly half as many cultural artifacts, historic documents, and natural science specimens. The Smithsonian concentrates its portion of the collected national heritage (reported at 141 million objects and 134 million archival holdings) in nearly 20 major museums on or near the National Mall in Washington, DC. Our approach is different.

The Department's portion of the collected national heritage is available to the public at nearly 400 visitor contact locations on lands managed by Interior bureaus and offices throughout the country. There are also partnerships with non-federal institutions (493 at last count) to

house, research, and exhibit collections near their points of origin on Interior lands. These partner institutions are among our greatest strengths in managing collections.

This approach is based on the belief that the meaning of objects is enhanced by keeping them at or near their points of origin: the der-ringer used to assassinate Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theatre in Washington, DC; Anasazi archeological collections at the Anasazi Heritage Center in Dolores, Colorado, or at Chaco Culture National Historical Park, New Mexico; the cargo of the 19th-century river boat *Bertrand* that sank in the Missouri River at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge in Missouri Valley, Iowa; fossil dinosaurs on Interior lands at Dinosaur National Monument, and other fossils from Interior lands at the Denver Museum of Natural History or the New Mexico Museum of

Natural History; regional Native American arts and crafts at museums operated by the Indian Arts and Crafts Board in Anadarko, Oklahoma, Rapid City, South Dakota, and Browning, Montana. Context is important in understanding history, archeology, ecosystems, and geology. Bureau officers try to keep museum collections in contexts that make them available to inform resource management decisions, enhance research, and interpret sites and concepts to the visiting public.

"Guardians of the past, stewards for the future" has been selected as the slogan for the Department's 150th year. Managing museum collections responsibly brings this slogan to life.

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Department of the Interior Museum Property Distribution Among Disciplines, FY 1998 (Objects PLUS other measures)			
Disciplines	Bureau Facilities	Other Institutions	Discipline Totals
Archeology	36071002 1 cu. ft.	23069251 3959 cu.ft. 391 boxes	59140253 3960 cu.ft. 391 boxes
Art	38461 1 cu. ft.	527	38988 1 cu. ft.
Ethnography	93343	7220	100563
History	3294277	80443 50 cu.ft.	3374369 55 cu.ft.
Documents	39790676 155 boxes	1428837	41219552 155 boxes
Botany	951541	80443	1031984
Zoology	374537	29504 100 cu. ft.	404041 100 cu. ft.
Paleontology	954984	3093173	4048157
Geology	47187 22 lin. ft.	1367	48554 22 lin. ft.
Environmental Samples	10087	1257	11344
Department Totals	81626095 7 cu. ft. 155 boxes 22 lin.ft.	27791671 4120 cu.ft. 391 boxes	109417766 4126 cu. ft. 546 boxes 22 lin.ft