Methodological Approaches to Assessing the Archaeological Significance of Historic Sites

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Introduction

There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.
(Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 2.2.259–261)

The Society for Historical Archaeology marked its 20th year as a scholarly organization in 1987. That milestone, as do all anniversaries, gave cause

for reflecting on where the discipline has been and where it might be headed. It was altogether appropriate, therefore, that the annual meetings should commence with a plenary session on the “questions that count” in historical archaeology (see *Historical Archaeology* 22[1]). Those questions considered by the distinguished panel, however, focused almost exclusively on theoretical issues: what can one hope to learn of the historic past, and in what manner shall one learn it? Little was said in that session about the more mundane matters of the work-a-day existence as practicing archaeologists.

Without doubt such questions as those discussed by the panel are critical if the discipline of historical archaeology is to have a clear sense of identity, as well as a sense of direction. Nevertheless, there are questions of a more practical sort that are equally important. Indeed, since most field research in historical archaeology today is in some way tied to cultural resource management, it can be argued that the practical questions are of much greater importance and demand thoughtful resolution soon. Accordingly, one of the questions posed at this symposium in Savannah was: how does one cope with the cultural resource management process and all it entails? The papers following this introduction, as well as the commentary provided by Doug Scott—one of the discussants of the original symposium, hopefully will provide direction toward some answers and stimulate further thought on the matter.