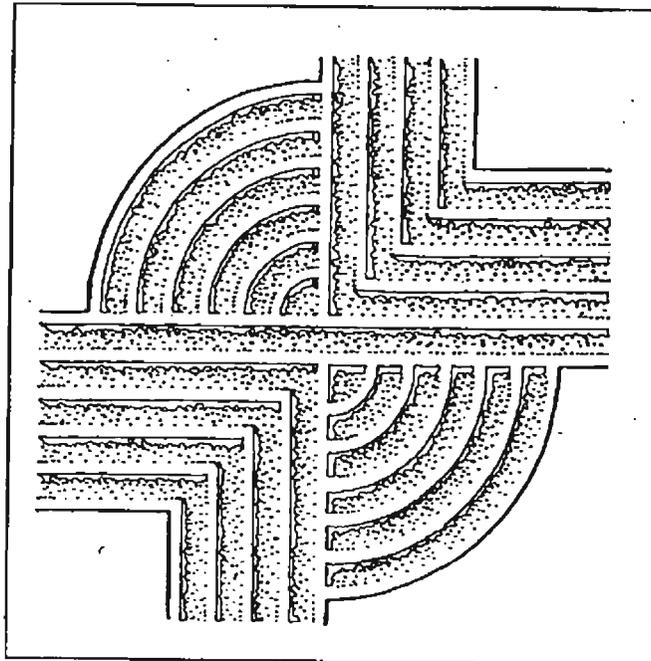


# THE CRISIS OF POTHUNTING — WHAT SOUTH CAROLINIANS CAN DO TO HELP



## RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION 82

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THE CRISIS OF POTHUNTING -- WHAT SOUTH CAROLINIANS  
CAN DO TO HELP

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Thirty years ago environmentalists sounded the alarm that our country's water, soil, and air were being polluted at an alarming rate. The public, while slow to react, now broadly understands concepts such as the depletion of the ozone layer, global warming, and the value of the rain forest. A recent survey by the Golin/Harris Group of Chicago found that 74% of the American public believes that the Federal government should keep environmental protection as a priority, *even if it means slower economic growth.*

The irony, perhaps, is that pollution has also attacked cultural monuments with a vengeance. The Sphinx on Egypt's Giza Plateau is literally disintegrating before our eyes, as experts worldwide struggle to save it, and other cultural monuments, from our own filth.

Clearly, what is seen often is what is first addressed in terms of making policy changes. Yet, we would argue that what often is not seen, or worse, rarely recorded, is having a similarly exponential, horrifying effect on our cultural heritage.

We are talking about pothunting.

For, as in the case of pollution, on a day-to-day basis we may not see changes in the erosion of our cultural heritage. Yet, examined over even a 30-year period the problem becomes appalling.

All of us are familiar with environmental groups who challenge government and corporations in highly confrontational ways. They argue that the "system" has so eroded, is so corrupt, that nothing short of firing warning shots over the bows of whaling ships will get the public's attention.

The reality is that pothunting and the illicit worldwide trade in artifacts from far flung sites -- including South Carolina -- is beginning to mirror the frustration of environmental politics. The result? A trend toward making the wanton destruction of cultural sites a high crime. Farfetched? Hardly.

Currently the World Travel and Tourism Council is spearheading a proposal that would make the damage of selected cultural sites worldwide a *war crime*. Specifically, the Council wants 359 "world cultural and natural heritage sites" to be given protection under the Geneva Convention. The sites, designated by UNESCO, include Petra in Jordan, Buda Castle in Budapest, and the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. The Council is soliciting the support of a broad consortium of international bodies, including the United Nations and the Red Cross. It is encouraging others in the private sector -- especially the travel industry -- to join the efforts to protect the sites.

What this means<sup>5</sup> in our view, is troubling.

Apparently groups such as the World Travel and Tourism Council are not convinced that education and grass roots legislation can have any effect in stemming the tide of such affiliated cultural plagues as looting, vandalism, and the use of cultural sites as pawns in elaborate, target-rich war games.

They have, perhaps unwittingly, raised the stakes in the trade of illicit antiquities. By advocating a "heinous crimes" approach, they may increasingly force looters to use violence to protect their ill-gotten gains. The analog with the illicit drug trade is very real, as some experts rank pothunting as a close second in terms of total illegal revenues worldwide. With Mogollon pots selling at upwards of \$20,000 and some Civil War artifacts selling for several thousand dollars, the question of whether looting is a serious issue is a moot one.

Equally troubling is the formal response of government to trespassing for the purpose of pothunting. For example, the Bureau of Indian Affairs estimates that looting increased by 100% between 1980 and 1987 on protected lands. In the American Southwest alone some 660,000 sites have probably been looted. The number of looted sites in South Carolina, much less the Southeast, seems to be anyone's guess.

Our fear is that like the World Travel and Tourism Council, impacted groups may clamor for unrealistic legal remedies, which, frankly, cloud the very real issue of the long-term protection of cultural resources.

The publishing of archaeological site locations for the purpose of metal detecting and other "treasure-hunting" activities is also a thorny issue, with buyers of such available maps and guides citing "freedom of information" and "First Amendment" rights. How these rights are balanced with society's right to protect its vanishing heritage has yet to be addressed.

Clearly, from our perspective, issues of mitigation and an inventory of known archaeological resources may increasingly override research interests. To some, this is heretical, as archaeology has seemingly become an "end" in itself.

But consider this. No State in the Union has completed an inventory of its archaeological resources. And, as noted by Robert Thorne in the March 1991 *Federal Archaeology Report*, few federal agencies have completed their inventories -- mandated by Executive Order 11593 over 20 years ago. Worse, no one other than Chicora Foundation has developed a multi-disciplinary, systematic approach to setting a benchmark of the current status of looting and looted sites for the United States.

This lack of scientific study has the same ultimate implication as 30 years of discussion, with only recent strong action, on the environmental front: a loss of non-renewable resources. And it portends the worst kind of cultural dislocation -- that of separation of a person or society from their heritage. Such dislocation can lead to escalating demands or the violence so prevalent in the politics of contraband.

So how, then, do we address the crisis of looting, whether here in South Carolina, the Southeast, or globally?

**First, we adopt a survey methodology capable of setting a benchmark of looting which can be monitored and measured over time.** Chicora Foundation, working closely with Craig/Vartorella, Inc., has developed such a shared, copyrighted instrument as part of a program called ILIAD. The creation of benchmark data means we can offer real evidence of the nature of the problem (and the opportunity for change) to all-important opinion leaders.

**Second, we must rejoin our efforts in the schools to educate our children about cultural resources and their cultural heritage.** Not just from an archaeological perspective, but from a broader, multi-disciplinary base that discusses cultural resource and heritage protection. The

exploitative stereotype of the archaeologist as "Indiana Jones" must be destroyed. Further, the host of classroom simulations that focus primarily on "digging" need serious re-evaluation. Charles Blanchard's recent article, "Education and/or Entertainment" in *Archaeology and Public Education*, raises a number of significant issues, not the least of which is his contention that "sandbox digs" may "degenerate into pot-hunting training." Finally, education should more aggressively target the socially disadvantaged and at-risk youths, who have often been forgotten for the advanced and accelerated students.

**Third, we must engage our elected officials on a grass-roots level to help us define the issues of vanishing cultural heritage and seek solutions to them.** "Local laws" is a key concept when it comes to cultural artifacts. Unidroit, an organization of 50 nations dedicated to harmonizing the laws of different countries, has proposed that participating nations would return stolen cultural objects to countries from which the objects had been exported in violation of LOCAL LAWS. The global village, in terms of cultural materials, may well be as large or small as your local city or county council.

**Fourth, consortial projects to curb and measure looting (using the ILIAD model) need to utilize the growing expertise and interest of avocational archaeologists.** The Anasazi Anti-Looting Project, jointly run by the Sierra Club, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management, may provide a useful example. For the past several years the group of professionals and trained volunteers has examined a large number of Anasazi pueblo sites in the Manti-LaSal National Forest of southeastern Utah. Their ultimate goal is to provide data for the development of effective protection strategies for those sites. A similar pilot project could be tried in South Carolina, with the participation of those of you in this room today.

Finally, consider this statistic. An estimated two-thirds of the land in the United States NOT FEDERALLY OWNED is under attack by pothunters. Unless we establish a beachhead somewhere -- and South Carolina is as good a candidate as any with its 13,000+ known archaeological sites -- the battle to save our cultural heritage will be lost.

Environmentalists have been battling for 30 years to get public attention and, finally, some much needed changes.

We are not convinced that we have 30 years LEFT in which to save our vanishing heritage.

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