



## SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

July 2, 2019

Mr. Erik Haegerstrand  
Chief Executive Officer

Ms. Perri Dorset  
Vice President, Public Relations

Bonnier Corporation  
2 Park Avenue  
New York, NY 10016

Dear Mr. Haegerstrand and Ms. Dorset:

I write on behalf of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) concerning the article “Find a 12,000-Year-Old Arrowhead With These 10 Tips” by Tom Keer, which appeared in the June 21 edition of Field and Stream Magazine. The item, as written, promotes behavior that is highly destructive to the cultural heritage of the nation, runs contrary to the ethics of archaeological practice, and is also potentially illegal. We request in the strongest possible terms that Field and Stream correct the terrible misinformation that Mr. Keer’s article conveys.

As President of the SAA, I speak for an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to the research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With more than 7,500 members, SAA represents professional archaeologists in colleges and universities, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. SAA has members in all 50 states as well as many other nations around the world.

Archaeology is a scientific discipline involving the systematic examination and careful study of evidence relevant to human lives and lifestyles in the past. Archaeologists endeavor to stimulate interest in the past, advocate for the conservation of cultural resources, encourage public access to and appreciation of archaeology, and oppose all looting of sites and the purchase and sale of looted archaeological materials. It is crucial that excavations be carried out in a scientific manner, because once a site is dug and artifacts removed, that place can never again reveal the mysteries of the past.

Given this, the SAA has longstanding Principles of Archaeological Ethics. Mr. Keer’s piece, which reduces the search for historical artifacts such as arrowheads to mere treasure-hunting, advocates behavior that would violate three of them: Stewardship, which involves working for the long-term conservation and preservation of the archaeological record; Commercialization, which opposes the buying and selling of archaeological objects and recognizes that such

commodification results in the destruction of archaeological sites; and Public Education and Outreach, which underscores the importance of promoting public support for the protection, preservation, and interpretation of the archaeological record.

Throughout his article, Mr. Keer discusses the potential monetary value of artifacts, and outlines research methods to use in order to maximize the financial potential of finding them. Nowhere, however, does he even mention that archaeological sites on U.S. public lands are protected by the 1906 Antiquities Act and the 1979 Archaeological Resources Protection Act. These laws were enacted precisely because Congress recognized the nonrenewable and vulnerable nature of cultural resources, and sought to protect them from people like Mr. Keer. Particularly troubling is this paragraph:

*“Most arrowheads are found on the surface of the ground, but if you find a few in close proximity to each other, many arrowhead hunters will start digging. You might find more, but here’s where it gets tricky: You might be in a sacred place like an Indian burial ground. Leave that area for the pros to check out. Consult the local resources to report such a historical find; they’re what some archeologists search for their entire lives.”*

The ignorance contained in this statement is astounding. If a site is located on federal, tribal, or most state lands, it is illegal to excavate without a permit. If it is a burial ground on non-federal land, then in most cases state or tribal law prohibits any kind of tampering. If it is a Native American burial site on federal land, then it and whatever objects it contains are protected by the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. Mr. Keer’s readers would never know any of this from his article.

Whatever excavations archaeologists carry out are done according to all applicable laws and regulations, and according to scientific procedures. This is for a good reason—to prevent the destruction of our shared cultural heritage.

We urge Field and Stream to publish a rejoinder or correction to Mr. Keer’s article as soon as possible, to inform its readers of the laws and ethics that should inform excavating and collecting activities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joe Watkins".

Joe Watkins Ph.D., RPA  
President