

# Ice Patch Archaeology



Ice patches are accumulated snow and ice from previous winters that does not melt in the summer. They are found in alpine regions around the world, including the southern Yukon. Unlike glaciers, they do not flow downhill or move over time. Due to the extremely dry and cold conditions, as well as the sedentary state of the ice, artifacts found in ice patches are remarkably well preserved and can include sinew, hide, and feathers on objects up to 9,000 years old!

Archaeological work on ice patches does not require excavation. Instead, it involves walking along the edges of the patch and the surrounding area looking for artifacts with the naked eye — no digging required! This ensures that any artifacts that have melted out of the ice will be spotted and brought to a lab for preservation and analysis.

Some of the more fragile organic artifacts must be kept refrigerated to replicate the environmental conditions of the ice patch (dry and cold). An ice patch survey is an ecologically responsible and effective adaptation of archaeological practice, pioneered in Canada's very own Yukon Territory!

## STEP 1

**Pick some organic and inorganic 'artifacts' to freeze in your ice patch.**

Organic artifacts are living things, like a piece of fruit or vegetable, a stick or leaf, or even some meat and bone from your refrigerator!

Inorganic artifacts are non-living things, including stone, clay pottery, and ceramics.

## STEP 2

**Make observations.**

Examine your artifacts and write down everything you observe.

What does your artifact look, feel, and smell like? What size is it? If it is a food item, how does it taste?

## STEP 3

**Create your ice patch.**

Place your artifacts in a water tight container, such as tupperware, and cover them with water. Place your artifacts in the freezer and leave them until the water turns into ice.

## STEP 4

**Observe changes.**

Now that your artifacts are frozen, remove them from the freezer and observe them again. As the ice melts and the artifacts thaw, write down your observations and compare them to your notes from earlier. How have your artifacts changed from being in an ice patch?