



Abdakeda (ah-bdah-kay-dah), Dakota for “peaceful,” describes the prairie.
NPS / J. ARTHUR ANDERSON



Eagle effigy pipe bowl
NPS

What objects and places do you consider sacred?
For Native Americans, this site has long been a sacred gathering place and the preferred source of pipestone—stone for making pipes. Inseparable from traditions that structure daily routine and honor the spirit world, pipes continue to be prominent in the lives of many Native Americans. Pipestone National Monument preserves and protects this site for ongoing use by Indigenous people and welcomes you to learn more about these timeless stories of the sacred.

When we got the horse we traveled further quickly, our people traded with the Sioux people and other Tribes, but learned of the pipestone quarry from the Sioux people. We traveled there and got the stone; the old ones called it “the blood of the sacred earth” that all (Newe) Indian people could use for pipes for prayer. The stone is sacred to all Natives and whatever is made out of it is also.

—Joe Holley, member of Te-Moak Tribe of Western Shoshone Indians of Nevada (2015)

THE SACRED PIPE

The story of pipestone and the pipes made from it spans more than 2,000 years. Pipes are used for many occasions in daily life and rituals, including for health and in prayer for one’s community. The sacred pipe became known as the peace pipe as a result of non-Native people seeing it smoked at treaty ceremonies.

Creation stories for the pipe vary among Tribes. Often, the blood of the people or of the bison is the source of the stone’s red color, and the Great Spirit creates the pipe, uniting it with the people. These stories are passed down through generations with great reverence, upholding their importance.

Three traditional cultures appear to have quarried here most intensively: Great Oasis, Oneota, and Očhéthi Šakówiŋ (oh-CHEH-tee shaw-KOH-we). Several oral traditions recognize these pipestone quarries as sacred and neutral ground, where differences were set aside so everyone could quarry the stone they needed. Other stories and traditions indicate this stone and the pipes made from it were traded far and wide—like the 2,000-year-old pipestone pipes found in a burial at Mound City in today’s Ohio.

Over the years, pipe variations have ranged from tubes to disks, and later the elbow and Plains T-pipes. Native Americans still use prairie plants like sweetgrass, prairie rose, and leadplant in the tobacco mixture for making prayers with the pipe, as the smoke carries those prayers to the Great Spirit.

Pipestone National Monument protects over 300 native plant species—including 70 grasses—of the tallgrass prairie, a remnant grassland ecosystem that once covered much of the Great Plains of central North America.

BECOMING A NATIONAL MONUMENT

The United States pushed west during the 1800s and forced Tribes onto reservations. Ihanktonwan leader Struck By The Ree refused to move his people until they were guaranteed access to the quarries. The US government agreed, and in 1858 Pipestone Reservation was created—but the Ihanktonwan were forced to live on a separate reservation over 120 miles to the south. As homesteaders, railroads, and the building of the Pipestone Indian Boarding School violated the boundaries of the Pipestone Reservation, the Ihanktonwan filed a lawsuit that went to the US Supreme Court, which ruled the US government’s actions amounted to illegal seizure. The Ihanktonwan were paid a settlement for the land’s value, and Pipestone Reservation’s title came under US government control. In 1937 the quarries became Pipestone National Monument, located on sites of traditional Indigenous lands and resources of many Native American people. The park protects the right of any Native American enrolled in a federally recognized Tribe to quarry the pipestone.

Native Americans continue traditional quarrying.
NPS / J. BORDEN



Ihanktonwan Nakota (Yankton Sioux) Chief Struck By The Ree was influential in saving the quarries.
NATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES / SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION



Native prairie rose
© GENE AND SUSAN HELVIG

Getting Here Reach the park via US 75, MN 23, and MN 30. The park is a 30-minute drive from I-90.

Visitor Center Open daily March–November and five days a week December–February (call for hours). Closed January 1, Thanksgiving, and December 25.

Safety Stay on paved trails. • Trail surfaces may be uneven. • Do not climb into quarry pits or on trailside rocks. • Steps and floor in exhibit quarry are very slippery when wet.

Activities Start at the visitor center for a short film, information, and exhibits on the history and significance of pipes and quarrying.

Discover Junior Ranger programs, petroglyphs, a park store, and daily carving demonstrations by Native American cultural educators April through October.

Be Respectful Native Americans use these grounds for religious and cultural activities. Do not approach or photograph quarriers without first asking their permission. Federal law prohibits removing pipestone except by permit.

Accessibility Contact the park for information.

Circle Trail Hike this paved, ¾-mile loop trail year-round either on your own or by ranger-guided tour when available. Pass tallgrass prairie, quartzite cliffs, pipestone quarries, and Winnewissa Falls.

More Information Pipestone National Monument 36 Reservation Ave. Pipestone, MN 56164 507-825-5464 www.nps.gov/pipe

Use the official NPS App to guide your visit.

Pipestone National Monument is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn more at www.nps.gov.



Carving Pipes From Stone

Since the mid-1800s, the inverted Plains T-pipe has been one of the most recognizable shapes in craftsmanship from the Native Americans of the Plains.

Although today's tools are metal, the process of carving pipestone is similar to traditional methods using stone and wood materials.

These drawings show how the pipes are made without modern technology.

Carving the Bowl Using a sharpened rock, the carver outlines the bowl on a six-inch rectangle of pipestone.

1 Excess stone is cut away using a flint saw to form the rough bowl.

2 The edges are rounded by scraping the bowl against stone, perhaps with quartzite removed during quarrying.

3 Filing refines the shape. Carvers may postpone filing until after drilling because the process of boring can split the stone.

4 The stem hole is drilled through the longer leg of the inverted T.

The drill shown here is wooden with a flint bit and leather thong.

5 Finally, the pipe is polished with a sand rubbing, beeswax, or animal fat, then buffed to a gloss.

A connecting shaft to hold tobacco is bored perpendicular to the stem hole.

Digging the Pipestone It can take months or even years to break through these thick layers of quartzite—which is harder than granite—to reach the soft pipestone.

The pipestone layer slopes about 8 degrees downward to the east. As quarriers continue digging in this direction, the stone becomes harder to reach. It is a constant test of commitment, endurance, and will.

Quarrying is done with respect to the Earth. Quarriers traditionally leave food and tobacco at the Three Maidens rock formation before entering the quarries to extract stone.

Making the Pipe Stem Stems are hewn from branches of ash saplings or other wood that has a soft pith (core). After rough

shaping, the branch is split lengthwise. The pith is scraped from the center of both halves, creating a narrow shaft. The halves are rejoined and secured with a cord and sap glue. Alternatively, a

heated wire is run through the core of a sumac branch to burn out the pith, leaving no need to split the stem. Women traditionally dress the stem by wrapping porcupine quills around part of its length. Paint, carvings, feathers, beads, and animal heads adorn the stem and signify the ceremonial role of the pipe.



Quarrier and carver
Cindy Pederson

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