

## ***Ancestors, Archaeology and the Anishinabek: Bridging the Past into the Future*** ***Cache Pits***

The Michigan Department of Transportation needed to build a road and bridge in Ottawa County, Michigan. Before they could build the road and bridge, they had to dig two archaeological sites. One of the many things they found were Cache Pits.

### ***What are cache pits?***

The word *Cache* means to hide or store something. The Anishinabek used Cache Pits for storing food. Dried meat, smoked fish, wild rice, dried fruits, and other foods were stored in the pits. The Anishinabek ate the stored food in the winter and early spring when fresh food was scarce.



A side view of a partially excavated Cache Pit is shown to the left with its edges highlighted in red. It is four feet wide at the top and three feet deep. The Anishinabek knew that food stored in Cache Pits would not spoil or freeze.

When the first Europeans came to America, they saw how the Native American people stored their food in Cache Pits. Using that idea of storing food under the ground, they built root cellars, like the one pictured on the right, to store their food.



### ***How were cache pits made?***



The Anishinabek dug Cache Pits in areas with sandy soils and where large quantities of storable foods could be safely stored. Before placing food in the cache pits, a fire was built in the bottom and burned until the inside of the pit was completely dry. After burning, the pits were

lined with sheets of dried bark, wood logs, animal hides or thick layers of dried grass. The Cache Pits were carefully lined to protect the stored food from insects and mice. The Cache Pit in the picture above was lined with wood logs.

### ***How was food prepared for storage?***

Nuts, berries and fruits, and seeds were dried and meats and fish were smoked before they were stored. Smoking and drying foods prevents them from spoiling. The food was then placed in bark containers, like the one pictured to the right, leather containers, woven bags, baskets, or ceramic jars. Ready for storage, each of the food containers were carefully placed in the Cache Pits between layers of dried grass.

