Among the places that teach the full range of American history, one of the first chapters must be the Meadowcroft Rockshelter site. Highlighted in the National Park Service theme study, *Earliest Americans in the Eastern United States*, Meadowcroft was selected as the model National Historic Landmark nomination to illustrate this ancient period in our collective American heritage. With its designation on April 5, 2005, as a National Historic Landmark, the Meadowcroft site joins the likes of the Blackwater Draw site, the Folsom site, the Hardaway site, and the Thunderbird Archaeological District as one of the most important archaeological properties in the United States.

Since 1935, the National Park Service has been charged with the mission of identifying places of national significance that retain exceptional value in commemorating or illustrating the history of the United States for the inspiration and benefit of the people. The National Park Service’s approach to history is characterized by a broad consensus about the principal themes, stories, persons, and events that, taken together, preserve the patterns of American history. The 2,694 National Historic Landmarks represent only about three percent of the more than 78,000 listings in the National Register of Historic Places. The National Historic Landmark nomination process is lengthy, deliberative, and requires proponents for individual properties to demonstrate why a particular place is both nationally significant and has a high degree of integrity. The nomination process is also inclusive, with extensive consultation between the National Park Service, property owners, local, state, tribal, and federal officials, and the general public, as well as review by the National Park System Advisory Board and its Landmarks Committee. The Secretary of the Interior designates fewer than 20 properties as National Historic Landmarks each year. The foundation of the Meadowcroft Landmark designation is the *Earliest Americans* theme study. A true collaboration between the National Park Service and the Society for American Archaeology, this theme study provides a historical context for understanding and evaluating the historical significance of paleoindian archaeological sites, sets registration requirements for listing, and establishes a list of potential candidates for National Historic Landmark consideration. Nearly 600 sites and districts containing intact deposits or other substantial evidence of paleoindian occupation were identified in a national survey of historic places. This list did not include thousands of individual finds, a common method of identifying paleoindian occupations. Seventy of the properties identified during this preliminary survey were listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Within the 10 northeastern states, although there are many sites where paleoindian artifacts have been reported, only 14 paleoindian sites are listed in the National Register of Historic Places, including the one previously designated National Historic Landmark. As noted by archaeologist Dina Dincauze, “The Meadowcroft Rockshelter burst into national awareness in 1975, with claims for a tightly dug sequence of cultural deposits dating back to 20,000 years ago.” Dincauze recommended only two properties be considered for National Historic Landmark designation in Pennsylvania: the Meadowcroft and Shoop sites.
University of Alabama Professor Ian Brown, who chaired the Society for American Archaeology's National Historic Landmark Committee for many years and who served on the Landmarks Committee of the National Park System Advisory Board, recently reaffirmed the significance of the Meadowcroft site:

In the history of North American archaeology Meadowcroft is certainly in the Top Ten Sites. There are few sites that have stirred as much debate as Meadowcroft during the past three decades. First and foremost, the meticulous way in which the rockshelter was excavated is a credit to the excavators. Moreover, its thick deposits are rich in artifactual remains, with just about every cultural period of Eastern Woodlands prehistory represented. Although the evidence for pre-Clovis occupation is convincing to many archaeologists, it is doubted by many others. In recent years, as other sites with similar supposed pre-fluted points have started to come to light, I myself believe that Meadowcroft is gaining ground as having a viable pre-Clovis occupation.

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