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Archaeologists have found a 132-year-old rifle propped against a tree in Nevada's Great Basin National Park.

It is unclear exactly how long the Winchester rifle had been left there, but it was long enough to leave the stock cracked and buried in dirt.

"It really is a mystery," said Nichole Andler, a spokeswoman for the park.

The Winchester rifle was common at the turn of the 20th century in the US West during a time when the now parklands were used for mining and ranching.

More than 700,000 rifles were made by the firm between 1873 and 1916.

Records for the gun show it was manufactured and shipped in 1882, but park experts have not yet been able to track its use since then.

"It probably has a very good and interesting story," Ms Andler told the Washington Post.

"But it probably is a story that could have happened to almost anyone living this sort of extraordinary existence out here in the Great Basin Desert".

The park is located in the eastern part of Nevada, and is known for its caves and 5,000-year-old pine trees.

Ms Andler said the gun might have been overlooked in the past because the grey stock of the wood blended in with the tree.

The gun will be preserved in its current state and put on display at the park.

