

Archaeology



What is archaeology?

Archaeology is the study of human life by looking at artifacts (not fossils) left by ancient civilizations. Think about what the difference is between archaeologists, paleontologists and historians.

Where do archaeologists work?

Archaeologists work in the field and in museums. Archaeologists dig at sites where they look for and find artifacts. They will then bring the objects back to the lab, usually at museums and universities for study and to learn from them.

Sites are sometimes found by accident, like the Terracotta Army, but most are the result of a lot of hard work. Once a site is discovered, the archaeologists will need permission from the land owner, and sometimes the government as well.



How do archaeologists dig? What do they use?

Archaeologists must be very careful when they start working on a dig site. They keep track of where artifacts are found, and what it was found by so they can see a relation between objects, piece together things that were broken, and date objects.



Grids

The first thing that is done is to prepare a grid, dividing the ground into small squares using rope and string. The grids are numbered from a single point, called a datum, it's a number for the x and y axis. Each little square is then slowly examined carefully, and each artifact is labeled, assigned a number, and cataloged. They will draw what they found in their grid before removing it to keep good records.



Tools

Some tools of the trade are probes, trowels, sifters, wheelbarrows, brushes, spoons, and picks. For instance, they may use a probe to probe down through the matrix (dirt, and other sediment) to feel for artifacts gently before digging with trowels. They will sift through any removed matrix in case they missed a small object. Once an object is located, the matrix around it will be removed, and brushed away until the object is exposed.

Steps to the Prairie Field School Archaeological Dig

1. By teams, break into smaller groups, grab your "dig kit", and go to a site.
2. Dig sites often are plagued by low budgets and therefore may not have enough tools for everyone. Decide how you will take turns to ensure everything gets done and everyone gets a chance at all roles.
3. Prepare your grid. Prepare where you are going to draw out your site. Finally, prepare your sheets where you will create your catalog.
4. Probe your site square by square, and remove matrix carefully so as to not damage any artifacts. Brush away as much sediment as possible. There are 35 artifacts plus a few blank fragments per group divided evenly among your groups three dig sites.
 - A. Use appropriately sized tools for each job. Large brushes will move large amounts of matrix out of the way, while small brushes will help to clean up individual fragments.
 - B. To make things easy, each piece is at the same layer, representing a single time period.
5. Once your fragment has been found and documented on your grid map, practice writing out your radical on your oracle bone. Be sure to use proper stroke order.
6. Finally, catalog the artifacts by matching the ancient radical to the modern day version.
7. Once your group has filled their oracle bones and catalog, raise your hand to have your catalog checked. Incorrect matches will be removed.
8. **The team who completes the catalog with the best technique wins the Radicals wall.**