



North Carolina Archaeological Society

Newsletter

4619 Mail Service Center, Raleigh NC 27699-4619

<http://www.rla.unc.edu/ncas>

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What Is Archaeology? (AR'CHAE-OL'O-GY)

Archaeology is the scientific study of the material remains of past human life. It is a branch of anthropology and involves the study of people and their activities. **Archaeologists study people and their artifacts, but not dinosaurs! There is no evidence that dinosaurs and people lived at the same time.**

Spear points, pottery, beads, flakes, glass, nails, and coins are all types of artifacts. Many of the items found by archaeologists were discarded as broken fragments or worn-out tools by the people who used them. Archaeologists also study soils, rocks, seeds, pollen, charcoal, and clay to help them understand past environments.

North Carolina is fortunate to have a rich archaeological heritage of Native American, European, and African cultures. Our extensive coastline and river systems hold many prehistoric and historic underwater archaeological sites.

People have lived in North Carolina for at least 12,000 years. Even though those early people left no written records, we can still learn about them through archaeology. By carefully excavating the places where these ancient people lived and worked, archaeologists can reconstruct how their houses looked, what they ate, how they hunted and farmed, and many other details of their daily lives.

Archaeology also provides information about people after written history began in North Carolina. History often records only important or monumental events. People usually did not record the details of daily life, because they took them for granted. When archaeologists excavate a

home site or a sunken ship, they find information that was never written down. For example, they might learn about what people ate, or what kind of cooking utensils and dishes were used.

The value of archaeological sites and artifacts is in the information they can provide about our predecessors. This includes the natural setting of the site, and the arrangement of artifacts within the site. Carefully saved piles of artifacts, whether whole or broken, may be interesting to look at, but they have little or no scientific value by themselves. Without knowing the context or setting of the artifacts, it is impossible to interpret human behavior, which is a major goal of archaeological research.

Archaeological sites are found throughout North Carolina—from the bottoms of rivers to the tops of mountains. In addition to actually walking the ground in search of sites, archaeologists study maps, historic records and deeds, diaries, and nautical charts to find potential site locations. The references used by archaeologists depend upon the time period and type of site one is trying to discover.

Once disturbed or destroyed, fragile archaeological sites cannot be repaired or replaced. Every site can contribute to our understanding of the past, but all sites are not equally important. Some sites are too disturbed to yield significant information. Others may only duplicate information and do not warrant excavation. Careful examination and recording of the information at a site can help determine its significance.

A very small percentage of archaeological sites are actually excavated, and digging is only a small part of an archaeologist's job. Proper excavation is expensive and time consuming. Also, no matter how careful an archaeologist may be, excavation is a kind of controlled destruction. Like any other science, new techniques and procedures are frequently being developed in archaeology. The types of information available from sites today were unheard of only a few decades ago, and this trend is continuing.

The emphasis in archaeology today is on the preservation of the resource base. While this is not always possible due to land development, vandalism, or natural forces, there is a growing concern that without conscious efforts to preserve sites, there will be little left for future generations.

State and federal laws aid in the preservation of archaeological sites. It is illegal to collect artifacts from state or federal property without appropriate qualifications and permits. Collection of artifacts on private property should be done only with landowner permission. Archaeological artifacts legally belong to the owner of the property on

which they are found. Graves and burials are protected even if they are on private property.

Responsible amateur archaeologists can contribute to the knowledge of the prehistory and history of North Carolina. Many amateur archaeologists enjoy collecting artifacts and most do so responsibly. Learn the difference between surface collecting and randomly digging into a site. Digging an archaeological site without the supervision of a professional archaeologist forever destroys much important information.

Everyone can help record archaeological sites. Become knowledgeable about the prehistory and history of our state. If you collect artifacts, it is important to keep good records. You should mark each of your sites on an accurate map, such as a US Geological Survey topographic map or a highway map. Keep artifacts from different sites separated. Label each of the artifacts in a way that will tell you from which site they came. Report locations of sites you find to professional archaeologists or appropriate organizations. Respect archaeological sites and support programs aimed at the proper management of these cultural resources.

Dolores A. Hall



Town Creek Dig a Big Success

This year's fall meeting, held at Town Creek Indian Mound on Saturday, October 7th, provided an opportunity for Society members to participate in archaeological excavations at the site. These investigations were planned for the entire weekend and were sponsored by the North Carolina Archaeological Society, the Friends of Town Creek, and UNC's Research Laboratories of Archaeology. Society members and volunteers also helped dig on Friday, but heavy rains forced a cancellation of excavations on Sunday.

Those who attended the Saturday meeting learned about a unique archaeological technique, the Town Creek Photographic Mosaic, which has allowed archaeologists at Town Creek to obtain a

comprehensive, overall view of the excavated site despite the fact that work there was done piecemeal over a 50-year period. Meeting participants also learned about more modern techniques, collectively known as remote sensing, that can provide new information about Town Creek by examining below-ground deposits for magnetic and electrical anomalies produced by subsurface archaeological features (e.g., pits, hearths, etc.).

The 2006 investigations at Town Creek had three goals. First, we needed to re-establish the excavation grid, following a 20-year hiatus of fieldwork at the site. This was accomplished during the weeks leading up to the fall meeting,

and permitted us to accurately relocate several excavation units that were originally dug more than 50 years ago.

Second, we wished to evaluate the effectiveness of two remote sensing techniques (resistivity and magnetometry) for detecting subsurface archaeological features at Town Creek and then apply those exploratory techniques to a previously unstudied area outside the reconstructed palisade. This investigation was undertaken by Dr. Gerald Schroedl and Steve Yerka of the University of Tennessee. A 20x20-meter block located in a previously excavated area inside the reconstructed palisade was successfully examined, and a similar area outside the palisade (and not previously excavated) also was examined. The results of these investigations, while not yet available, should help us determine if these two remote sensing techniques can provide new insights into Town Creek's past.

Finally, we planned to re-excavate and photograph several 10x10-ft units, first dug in 1950 and 1965, for which mosaic photographs were missing. More than 20 Society members, working alongside professional archaeologists on Friday and Saturday, carefully re-excavated three such units, exposing the tops of pits and postholes. They also helped screen the excavated soil to recover artifacts and troweled the excavated surfaces prior to photography. The resulting photographs of these three units have now been added to the overall Town Creek Photographic Mosaic.

The brief dig at Town Creek was a big success, in that it achieved all its goals and provided an opportunity for Society members to participate in the research. I especially want to thank everyone who participated! Hopefully we can do similar projects in future years.

Steve Davis



Society members and volunteers excavating at Town Creek.



Society members and volunteers screening soil to recover artifacts.



Society members and volunteers preparing an excavation unit for photography.



Steve Yerka (right), Yang Nan (left), and Gerald Schroedl (in background) conducting soil resistivity survey at Town Creek.

NCAS Participates in First-Ever Archaeology Days

Members of the North Carolina Archaeology Society were very excited to participate in the first-ever multi-dimensional Archaeology Days event hosted by the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences located in downtown Raleigh. The two-day event, held November 18 and 19, 2006, was a unique opportunity for folks from all over N.C. to interact with archaeologists from across the State! Funded in part by the Alcoa Foundation, and supported by the NCMNS, the event featured exhibits, workshops, lectures, displays, and hands-on activities for all age groups, some outdoors on the plaza and many indoors on all three floors. A keynote lecture was given by Dr. George Stuart, a Mayan specialist formerly with the National Geographic Society, who received his graduate degree in North Carolina. A special display by UNC and a lecture by Randy Daniel focused on the Hardaway site excavation and collection, which was recently donated to the Research Labs of Archaeology at UNC by the Alcoa Foundation and Alcoa Incorporated. The exhibits ranged from the earliest pre-contact period sites in NC (Hardaway among them) to 14th century sites (Town Creek) to 16th century Spanish occupation (Berry Site) to plantation site excavations (Midway Plantation) to early 20th century naval stores industry in the Sandhills. Activities included hands-on participation with stone tool making and identification, clay pottery making and identification, fire making demonstrations, seed sorting, cordage making, and bone/shell sorting. Archaeologists who participated came from State and Federal governments and agencies, cultural

resource management companies, universities, and other avocational organizations in the State.

The NCAS staffed an outdoor booth at the entrance where we talked to visitors about the mission of the organization, answered artifact identification questions, and sold t-shirts, totes, and hats with the society logo. Brian Overton, who organized the booth along with Dee Nelms, was very pleased with the turnout and thanks everyone who volunteered to talk to the public about our organization and preservation of the state's archaeological resources. The Schiele Museum of Natural History also sponsored a three-part booth outdoors, which featured a dig-box activity, a stratigraphy box you could walk into, and a tent with specialists making stone tools, pottery and bone/antler implements.

The weather was cool but beautiful, so the entire event was a huge success indoors and outdoors, with over 7,900 visitors in attendance! Held in conjunction with the event was the American Indian Heritage Festival at the N.C. Museum of History on Saturday, adding to the public's overall experience. The NCAS did well on the sales of our products and recruited several new members, furthering our goal of public outreach in a meaningful way. We thank the sponsors, the NCMNS, and the event planning committee for their efforts to make this wonderful two-day event for archaeology a success and to share with our citizens and colleagues what great cultural resources we need to protect and continue to study.

Linda Carnes-McNaughton
Brian Overton

NCAS Newsletter Publication Schedule

All NCAS members are encouraged to submit articles and news items to Dee Nelms, Associate Editor, for inclusion in the *Newsletter*. Please use the following cut-off dates as guides for your submissions: Spring Issue - February 28; Fall Issue - August 31; Summer Issue - May 31; Winter Issue - November 30

NCAS Officers

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