

10 Things to Know About Being an Archeologist

1. Two main categories of archaeology: Old World and New World. Archaeologists usually specialize in one or the other, and also in either prehistoric or historic eras. There are also underwater archaeologists and paleobotanists, who analyze plant material from archaeological sites.
2. Archaeology, the study of past people & their cultures, is a sub-field of Anthropology, the study of living people. No fossils or dinosaurs!
3. Education needed: bachelor's degree to get started; master's and Ph.D. degrees are good to have in this field.
4. Jobs range widely. There's teaching or developing museum exhibits, but 99% of archaeology is done by government entities and private cultural resource management firms, because the work must comply with several government regulations. It's a business! I worked with the Georgia State Archaeologist.
5. Three steps to archaeology work: 1) background research on project area; 2) fieldwork; and then 3) the most time-consuming is analyzing recovered artifacts and writing the report describing them and conclusions that can be made.
6. Two basic types of fieldwork: 1) survey, where you plot a grid over the project area and following a line, walk and dig small holes intermittently

to “sample” for artifacts; and 2) excavating on a site that has had significant archaeological resources identified on it from a survey.

7. Archaeology fieldwork is hard! It’s done in all kinds of weather and in all kinds of difficult environments like dense woods with deep underbrush. You’ll get dirty, sweaty or cold, scratched and possibly bitten by critters or insects, but it’s still a thrill to find evidence of people’s past under your feet! Imagine finding a beautifully chiseled spear point that had been dropped and buried, and you’re the first person in 2,000 years to touch it!
8. Equipment used in fieldwork ranges from large, like a Bobcat to move dirt at the beginning of a big excavation, down to small hand tools.
9. Archaeologists are not just focused on artifacts. The focus is on the story told by the artifacts together with all the other clues found in context with the artifacts. The information gained in fieldwork and subsequent analysis gives us a story of what people were doing with those items at that time in prehistory or history. Even though historical documents tell a story, they often tell what the writer wanted people to know –archaeology tells the real truth!
10. My experience in working with archaeologists is that they are hugely intelligent, curious, diverse, talented people with great senses of humor.