

Archaeology in Your Woods

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www.uwlax.edu/mvac

Goals

1. What is archaeology?
2. How can you tell if you have a site on your property?
3. What do you do if you find a site?
4. Where can you find more information?

1. What is archaeology?

- The study of the human past
 - From the recent past to the very ancient
- Historic Archaeology
 - Deals with cultures that had writing systems
 - In the U.S. – after contact with Europeans
- Prehistoric Archaeology
 - Deals with cultures without writing
 - In the U.S. – Native Americans before European contact

Some key concepts....

- Artifact
- Feature
- Archaeological site
- Context
- Provenience

What is an artifact?

- Something made or modified by humans; discrete and portable
- It can be of any age, historic or prehistoric...

Historic artifacts

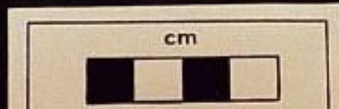




pottery



carved
stone



grinding stones



Prehistoric artifacts



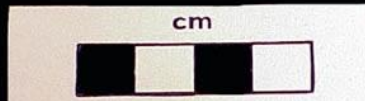
stone axes



projectile points (arrowheads)



bone tools



What is a “feature”?

- Something made or modified by people that is NOT portable
 - Examples: hearth, house foundation, garbage pit



Historic feature (base of silo filled with garbage)



Prehistoric hearth during excavation

What is an archaeological site?

- A **PLACE** where artifacts or features are found
- We'll be looking at different kinds of sites in a minute...

What is context?

- **WHERE** something is found
- **WHAT** else is found with it
- Context helps to interpret artifacts and provides meaning



rattlesnake skeleton...



...found in officers' privy at 1850s military fort

What is provenience?

- **LOCATION**– a record of where something was found
 - Documents the context



Mapping proveniences while excavating



Air photo with site locations

2. How can you tell if you have a site on your property?

- Think about the location
 - Where might people have lived, hunted, quarried stone, or done something else?
 - What factors were important? Water, protection from elements, slope, etc.
- Check the ground in those places
 - Walk over the land looking for artifacts or features on the surface
- Check any exposed areas
 - Stream banks, construction areas, plowed fields, etc.
- Talk to others
 - Other people may have found artifacts
 - Historical societies may have information

Some sites are visible on the surface....

- Historic sites:
 - Building foundations or depressions
 - Scatters of historic material



stone foundation wall and depression

Some prehistoric sites are visible on the surface, too....

earthen mounds



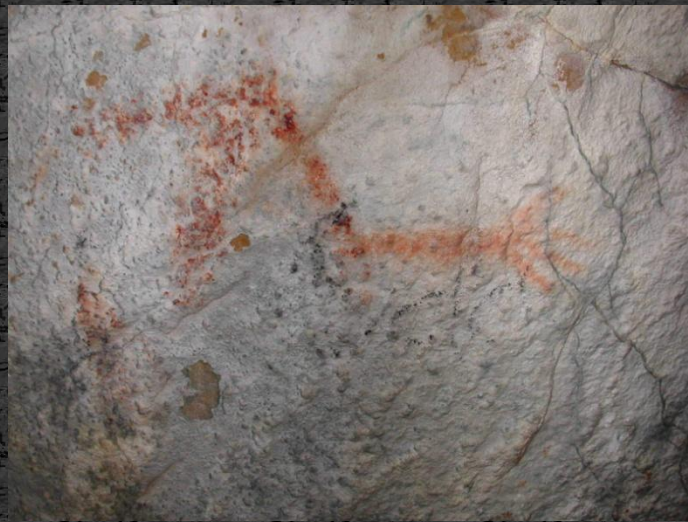
Pueblo building remnants



caves and rockshelters



rock art-
carved or
painted



quarries



prehistoric quarry pit

Other sites might be visible if exposed

Plowing brings artifacts to the surface





Bank erosion can
expose sites



mastodon bone found after
flash flood

soil and stone clinging to
upturned roots



NOV 3 2011

Tree falls can
expose sites



NOV 3 2011

Tree removal can
expose sites



Construction and utility work can expose sites



How do you know if you have found a real artifact?

- Many historic artifacts are easy to recognize.
 - For example, glass, ceramics, metal, bricks.
- Specific kinds of artifacts can be used to date a site.
- Shapes of nails can be used to tell the age of a structure.
 - Square nails are older than machined round nails.
- Many books and websites can help identify materials.
- Colors and designs on ceramics can help identify the date.
- Maker's marks on the bottom of a vessel can be dated.
- Types of glass can be dated.



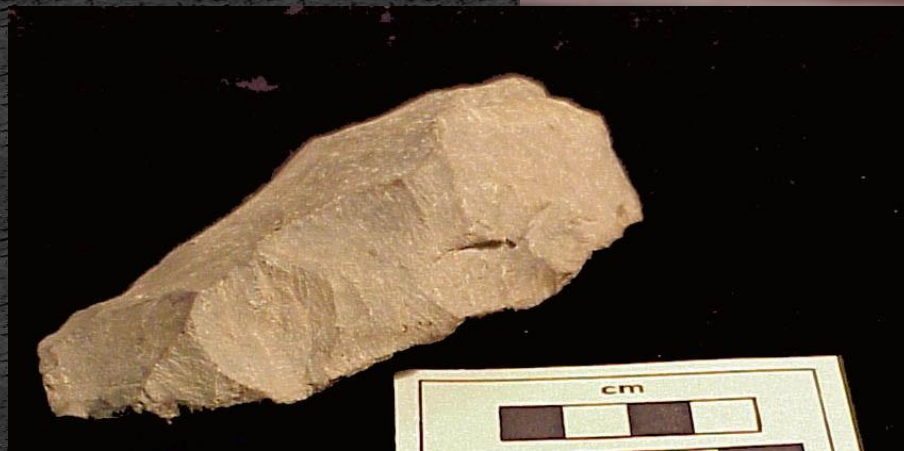
- Some prehistoric pottery is easy to recognize (for example, painted pottery from the Southwest)



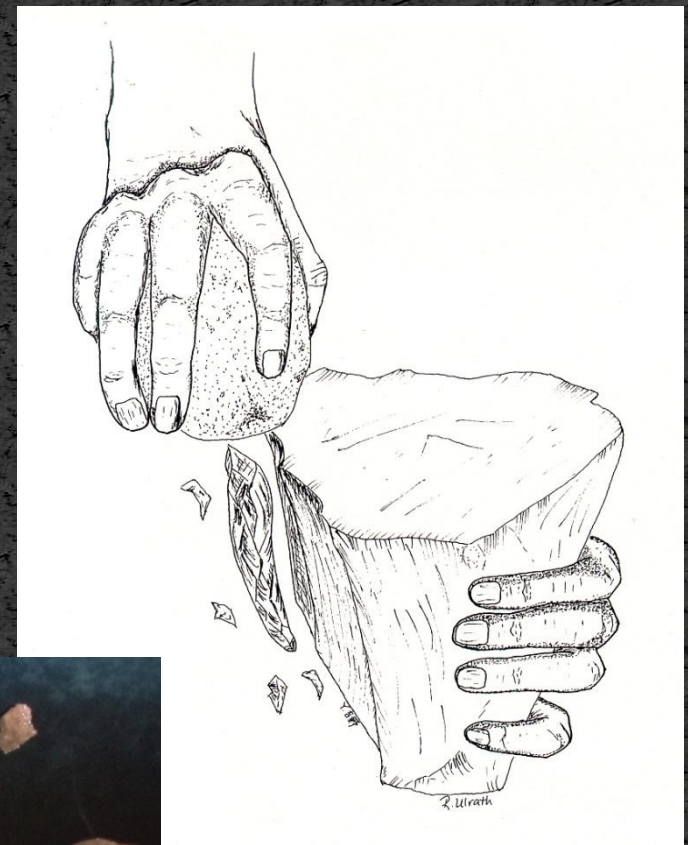
- Some prehistoric pottery is more difficult to recognize....
 - May be in small fragments
 - Open-air firing at lower temperatures
 - Rock grit, sand, or crushed shell usually mixed with the clay
 - May have designs pressed into the wet clay before firing
 - Local museums and web sites might have pottery examples from your area



- Some prehistoric stone tools were made by removing flakes to shape the stone



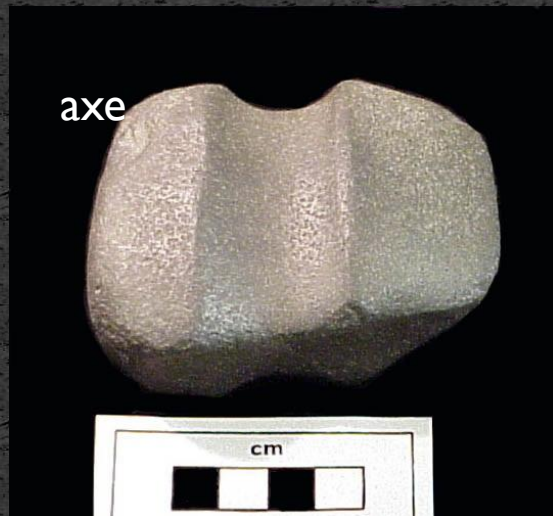
- The waste flakes are thin with sharp edges
- They have a round bulge on one side, like a chip off a glass bottle



- Styles of some stone tools changed through time
- These styles can provide an age for the artifact
- Web sites can help identify and date these tools

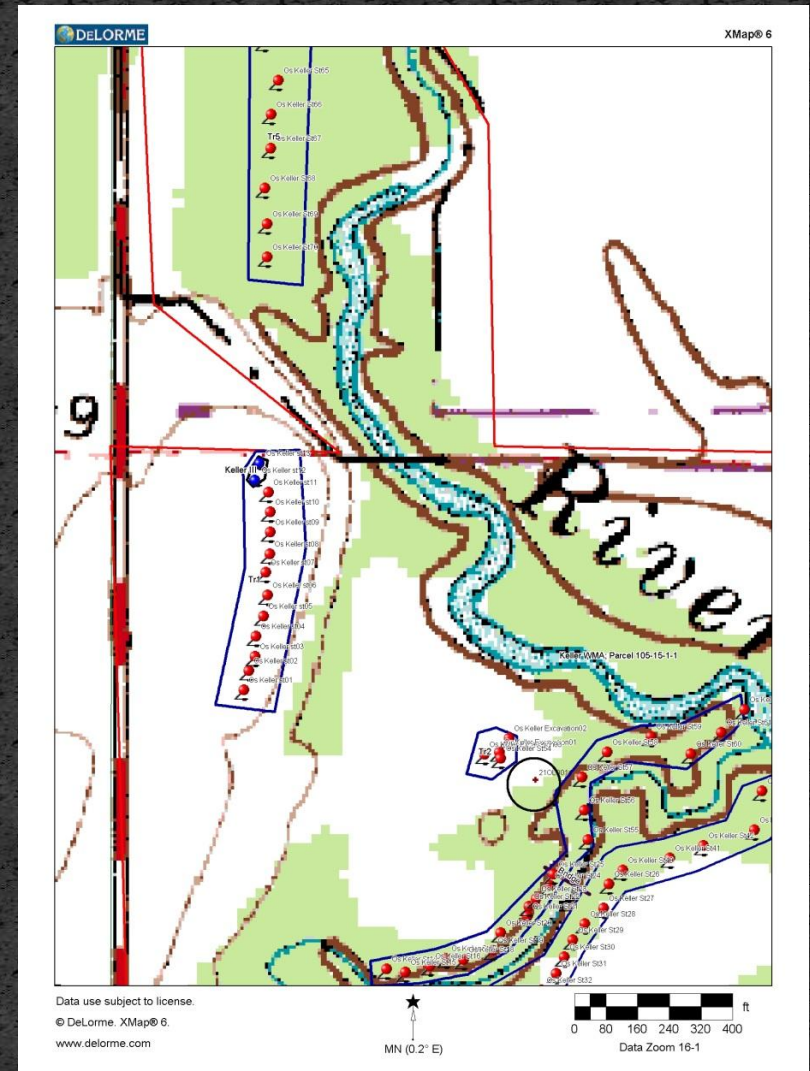
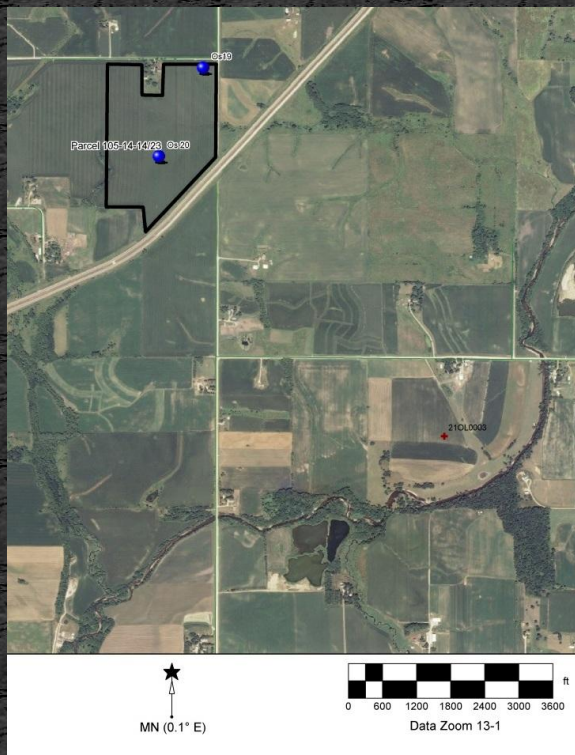


projectile points



3. What do you do if you find a site?

- Document the location:
 - Map
 - Air photo (e.g., Google Earth)



- Document your finds
 - Photos of what you found (include something to show size)
 - Photos of the location and landscape setting
 - Keep the information with the artifacts



Overview and close-up of feature and artifacts in the ground
(tires in the silo provide a scale)

4. Where can you report a site or find more information?

- Your State Archaeologist office
 - <http://www.uiowa.edu/~osa/nasa/>
- Your State Historic Preservation Office
- Local university with an anthropology program
- Local museum or historical society
- Many online resources

See list of web links



What if you find bones?

- Try to determine if they are human or animal
- If they COULD be human
 - Do nothing further with the find spot
 - Immediately report to local law enforcement
 - They will determine if the remains are from a recent event or an archaeological site, and they will usually contact an archaeologist if appropriate
- If the bones are animal, look for signs of human activity- cut marks, butchering marks, etc. Any associated artifacts?
 - If so, they could be part of an archaeological site
 - Keep together with other material from the site, and document what you found, where, and its context

MVAC: Process of Archaeology website

- <http://www.uwlax.edu/mvac/ProcessArch/ProcessArch/index.html>

www.uwlax.edu/mvac/ProcessArch/ProcessArch/index.html

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The Process of Archaeology

PRE-FIELD INVESTIGATIONS FIELDWORK LAB ANALYSIS INTERPRETATION SYNTHESIS

FAQ'S NATIVE TECHNOLOGY GLOSSARY HOME

Archaeology is the science that seeks to learn about past humans and their culture from the material remains that were left behind. Archaeology is not "treasure hunting," and involves much more than just finding and digging up those material remains or artifacts. Archaeologists try to tease out as much information as possible about the past from a small sample of sometimes poorly preserved or fragmentary material objects. Modern archaeologists may spend three or more times longer in the lab than they do in the field-trying to discover the meaning behind the artifacts they have found. This website will explore the whole process of archaeology, from the initial research and logistics to the final analyses and interpretations that bring the past to life.

And archaeologists don't dig dinosaurs. Paleontologists deal with the past and fossils where no humans are involved.

PRE-FIELD INVESTIGATIONS FIELDWORK LAB ANALYSIS INTERPRETATION SYNTHESIS

Site Credits

Pre-field Investigations Fieldwork Lab Analysis Interpretation Synthesis

FAQ's Native Technology Glossary Home

When do you need an archaeologist?

- Sometimes properties need archaeological assessment
 - Required under some Federal or State laws or permits
 - State laws vary from state to state
- Qualified archaeologists can conduct specialized surveys or excavations
 - Requires special training and often permits
 - Not recommended for non-professionals
 - Digging without training destroys a site and loses information