



ISTOCK

Get Your

WHEN I WAS 17, I unearthed my first stone celt—a Native American tool similar to an axe. The archaeologists at the Lost Towns Project found this artifact in a colonial trash pit near Annapolis, Maryland. After photographing it and drawing it *in situ*—in the location that we found it—it was time to remove it so we could take it back to the lab to study it further. The director of the dig announced that the intern, meaning me, should remove the celt. It was quite an honor, and I remember the thrill of delicately removing this piece of history, this tool that a Native American carefully shaped out of stone perhaps a thousand years ago, and which a colonist later found, used, and threw away in his trash heap, where it sat until I removed it 250 years later.

Since then, I have excavated at dozens of sites in Maryland and also in Hungary, and the thrill of discovery hasn't waned. I love archaeology because it allows me to learn about so many different subjects—such as architecture, history, botany, chemistry, biology, geography, culture, and heritage—and how all these subjects relate. I get to work outside most of the year, discover hidden stories about the past, and teach students and adults alike about our heritage. History is all around us, and archaeology helps us understand that, because you can hold the past in your hand.

Today, I am the internship coordinator for the Lost Towns Project, where I had that first high school internship. My experience that summer shaped my future. In college, I studied cultural anthropology, archaeology, and museum studies, and had several hands-on educational opportunities along the way—two archaeological field schools, a museum internship, and a job at my college's natural history museum. When I graduated, I was lucky enough to get a job with Lost Towns.

As the internship coordinator, I am in charge of recruiting, interviewing, scheduling, and educating interns. Our interns range from high school students to graduate students, so there is a range of skills and backgrounds. We do not require any previous experience, but we do require that our interns be interested in archaeology or preservation, be reliable, and try their hardest every day. Some of our best interns have been high school students.

The sooner you get involved in archaeology or history, the better. Here are some thoughts on how to get involved while you're in high school—and how to make the most of the experience.

Get to know your local historical or archaeological organizations.

There are local history organizations and museums everywhere. Look up local resources online or in the phone book, and ask about opportunities for high school students to volunteer or intern. Many historical organizations only have one or two full-time staff and rely heavily on volunteers. This means that you can really contribute to these organizations.

If you have an idea about what you are interested in—such as archaeology, Civil War history, or prehistoric technology—let them know. They may be able to either integrate your interests or recommend another organization that can. If you don't have a specific interest in mind, that's okay, too. That is what hands-on experiences are good for—figuring that out!


Ask lots of questions.

Don't be shy. You are there to learn, and asking questions lets your supervisor know that you are interested and paying attention. It is also good to ask questions of the people you are working with. If you want to be an archaeologist, ask the archaeologists you are working with about how they decided on their career, where they went to college, what they love about their job, and so on. If you think you want to go to school for archaeology, ask questions about different programs. Learn from these professionals.

Hands Dirty!

by Lauren Schiszik

Be reliable.



An internship or volunteer position is basically an unpaid job. Treat it that way. It can be an incredible experience, and sometimes, as in my case, can ultimately lead to a job. Every year, I have one or two students (even college students!) who don't show up on time or at all, don't show interest, and aren't engaged. This reflects poorly on them and is very frustrating to me. When you sign up to volunteer or intern, be clear about your schedule, any limitations you may have (such as reliable transportation), and your expectations for the internship. Communicate with your supervisor if something isn't working out.

While you won't get paid for your time volunteering or interning, the experiences you gain will be valued by colleges and even future employers. An archaeology internship in high school might not seem relevant when you apply for your first retail job or a study-abroad program in college. But it is relevant, because it shows initiative—something that every college recruiter and potential employer likes to see in an applicant.

Keep an open mind.

The archaeology you see in movies or on the History Channel is very different from real archaeology. You don't always find cool artifacts, and more often than not it is slow, painstaking work. You have to enjoy every step of it—even if it's 100 degrees outside and the soil is so hard and dry it is like concrete. Some of our interns realize over the course of an internship that archaeology is not for them. And that's fine. It's great, actually, to figure it out before you invest a lot of time and education in pursuing a field that's not for you. On the other hand, if you figure out early that it *is* something you want to pursue as a career, you can take advantage of even more opportunities. You might even discover in the course of your internship that you're interested in another aspect of archaeology or history, or maybe that you are really good at chemistry. Archaeology needs soil scientists and chemists and teachers and historians—it is so interdisciplinary, drawing on ideas and technologies from many other subjects.

Archaeology is an exciting field with a lot of opportunities for students. There are a lot of archaeological societies, groups, museums, and schools that offer programs. There is always something new to be learned, and nothing beats the thrill of finding a bead from long ago, or bones from someone's stew, or a piece of ceramic with someone's fingerprints still left on it. So if you're curious, I recommend that you come out and play in the dirt! **i**



Lauren Schiszik will earn her master's degree in historic preservation from the University of Maryland in December. She is interested in community-based archaeology and preservation and the preservation of archaeological sites, and is passionate about teaching students and the public about history and heritage. In her spare time, Lauren loves to explore her hometown of Baltimore, work on her culinary skills, go to concerts, do craft projects, and hula hoop.

So, you want to play in the dirt? Here's how!

OPTION 1

Many great organizations have opportunities for the public to get involved in archaeology. Check out these sites in particular:

The Society for Historical Archaeology

www.sha.org

Click the link "Exploring Historical Archaeology" to learn about volunteer opportunities, do interactive activities, and more. Also check out the "Students and Jobs" link to learn about college opportunities and career options.

The Society for American Archaeology

www.saa.org

Click the link "For the Public" to get to a terrific site with tons of information about experiencing archaeology, FAQs for students, how to contact the archaeology group in your state, and links to fun online archaeology games (I played a couple myself, and they are really cool).

OPTION 2

Research your state's Archaeological Society. Sometimes it is spelled "archeology" instead of "archaeology," so try both spellings. Every state also has a State Archaeologist or Archaeology Office, and some counties and cities also have archaeology programs, so look for them, too.

OPTION 3

You can also just try entering "volunteer + archaeology + [your state]" into your internet search engine. I found a lot of opportunities by doing that!

Options 2 and 3 are also relevant for students interested in getting involved in historic preservation or history; you just need to change your search terms. Now go out there and find some history!

—Lauren Schiszik