

Digging Surrey's Past Test Pit Project



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DIGGING SURREY'S PAST TEST PIT PROJECT

What is Archaeology?

Archaeology is the study of humans in the past. Archaeologists dig in the ground to find things that have been left long ago. We call what we find artefacts, and we study these to learn about how people used to live. Archaeologists find things like pottery, animal bones, coins and the remains of buildings.

Fact: Lots of people think that archaeologists dig up dinosaurs but they don't! Palaeontologists dig up dinosaurs, archaeologists dig up things that humans have left behind.

What is a test pit?

A test pit is a small trench, usually only 1 square meter but can be smaller if you don't have space. As a test pit is so small, it doesn't take long to dig and doesn't take up much space. You don't need to dig deeper than about 50cm below the top – most interesting archaeology isn't far down! It is perfect for gardens and small spaces, to learn more about what lies below the ground. Test pits are very simple to do, and you only need everyday garden tools. Make sure you record your test pit as you go along and send your results to us. If you don't we will never know what you have found!

The method we shall be using is based on that developed in the Currently Occupied Rural Settlement (CORS) project run by the University of Cambridge. See <http://www.arch.cam.ac.uk/aca/cors.html> for details.

Before you start

Before starting your test pit, make sure that you have permission from the landowner. It is really important in all archaeological investigations to have permission before you start any work. The landowner (or garden owner!) needs to know exactly what you want to do and where.

What to look out for

Take photos of the pit being dug and after you have finished. When excavating your test pit, keep your eyes peeled for any artefacts. You might find things like pottery, flint, metal, glass or bone. Be very careful when you pick things up out of the ground as they might be sharp, and make sure you wash your hands with warm soapy water at the end. Aside from artefacts, make sure you also look closely at the soil. You might find that it changes colour and texture as you carefully dig down.

What do you do with the finds?

Once you have finished your excavations, make sure you take photos of everything you have found and send them to us! Don't throw anything away. We will have a look at the photos and try to give you some information about them. If there is anything really interesting, we will help you contact the Surrey Finds Liaison Officer.

What if you don't find anything?

Don't worry! Sometimes archaeologists don't find anything during their excavations. Although this can feel disappointing, it is actually really important that you record that you didn't find anything! There are lots of reasons you might not find anything. Perhaps in the past lots of soil has been moved around so the archaeology is very deep, or maybe there is just no archaeology there!

TO DIG YOUR TEST PIT

You will need

1. Gloves (gardening gloves are best)
2. A hand tape (3m or 5m)
3. A large tape (30m upwards is best)
4. 4 metal nails or plastic tent pegs
5. Marker pegs x 40 (These could be seed labels, lolly sticks, tent pegs, cocktail sticks, flags on a stick)
6. 4m of string
7. A spade
8. A garden fork
9. An archaeology trowel (or a garden trowel if you don't have and archaeology one)
10. A hand/coal shovel (or a sturdy dustpan to scoop out soil)
11. Kneelers or something soft to kneel on
12. A garden sieve (1cm mesh)
13. A bucket
14. A tarpaulin or plastic to put the soil on
15. Seed trays or empty fruit trays for your finds
16. Sealable Plastic bags
17. A Permanent pen
18. Camera (a phone camera is fine)
19. Compass and grid reference (both of these can be found using a smart phone)
20. Pen/pencil
21. A4 Plain paper
22. Recording Form (found at the end of this document)



On the left of this photo is a garden trowel. On the right is an archaeology trowel. The archaeology trowel is best as it can be used for scraping back soil, but if you don't have one you can use a garden trowel.

1. Get organised!

Where?

Where is your test pit going to be? Find a spot with grass or soil cover. The best locations are away from large trees, drains, and buildings/walls. You will also need space to put your **spoil**.

Site code

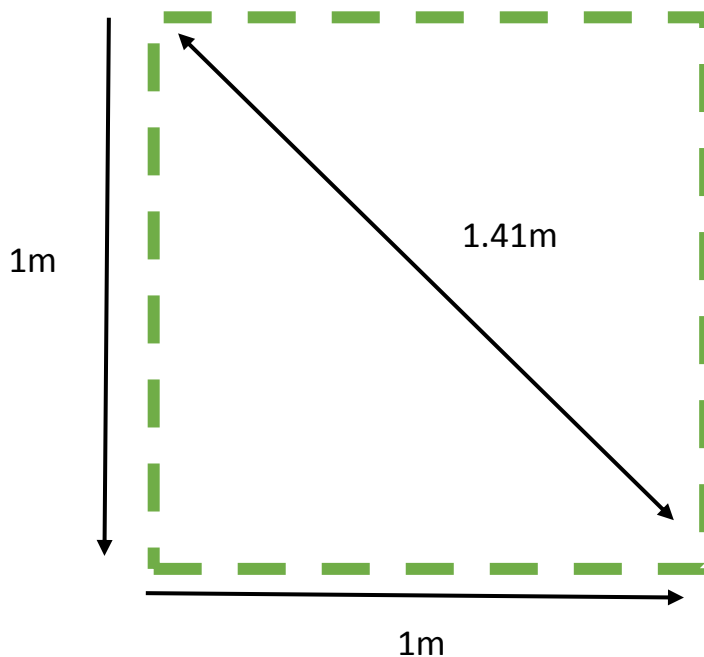
Each archaeological project has its own unique code. The site code for this project is **DSP20**. Make sure that all your recording sheets and labels use this code. It stands Digging Surrey's Past 2020. The site code helps us quickly find all the information about that project, and including the year means we know the date the project was running. You will also need to think of your own individual test pit name. This could be your house number and road name, or your school name.

Test Pit Location

We need to know details of exactly where your test pit is. If your test pit is in a garden, make a note of the address and if it is in the front or back garden. If you are digging a test pit at a school, or community area, make sure you write down the address and a short description of the location on the recording form (e.g. in the playing field). It would be really useful if you could also provide the grid reference for the centre of the test pit. This can be done using an Ordnance Survey Map, or a GPS app on a smartphone.

2. Lay out your trench

Each of your trench sides should be 1m across, and to ensure they are an exact rectangle, the diagonal measurements should be 1.41m. If you don't have much space, you can make your trench half the size, 50cmx50cm with a diagonal of 70.7cm. Use a nail to mark each corner and measure using a tape measure. Tie string around each nail to create a square.





A 1mx1m test pit measured out. Your first photograph should show the very top of the test pit.

3. Record Your Starting Point

Now your trench is ready to go, we need to know exactly where it is. First, use a smartphone to find a grid reference. Next, sketch a location plan for your trench. This should include the location of the trench in relation to any nearby buildings and property boundaries. If you can, include measurements from the corner of buildings and boundaries to the corner of the test pit using the long measuring tape. Make sure you include an arrow pointing north. You can find which way is north using a map or a compass on your smart phone

Next you need to photograph the top level of your test pit. On a piece of A4 plain paper, write in large letters the site code DSP20, your own site code (see Section 1. Site Code) and the number level you are about to start working on (Level 1 in this case). It is also very useful to put an arrow pointing north. Put the level label on the edge of your test pit and photograph it using your phone.

4. Get Digging!

Lay your tarpaulin or plastic sheet at least 2m away from the edge of your test pit. This will become your **spoil heap**. Using a spade, remove the turf from the top of your test pit in small squares, and carefully lie it to the side of your spoil heap so it can be replaced once you have finished.

Level 1

You will be carefully excavating 10cm at a time. As you dig down, scoop out the loose soil and put it in the bucket using your archaeology trowel, garden trowel, fork and spade. Once your bucket is full, pour it out in to the sieve and sieve the soil. Pick out any interested artefacts. If you aren't sure what it is, make sure you keep it and we can help identify any mystery finds. Make sure you sieve the soil

over the top of your plastic sheet. Any finds should be put in a finds tray labelled with the site code DSP20, your own site code, and 'Level 1'



Sieving Soil from the test pit on to the spoil heap

Use your tape measure and measure from the top of the test pit to the flat bottom. Once you have excavated down 10cm and the bottom is level, **stop!** Everything from 0cm down to 10cm is level 1.

Next you need to record the top of level 2. On a piece of A4 plain paper, write in large letters the site code DSP20, your own site code (see Section 1. Site Code) and the number level you are about to start working on. It is also very useful to put an arrow pointing north. You can find which way is north using a map or a compass on your smart phone.



A photo of the test pit recording the top of level 2

Put the level label on the edge of your test pit and photograph it using your phone. Try to take the photograph from an angle so you can see the entire base of the test pit, one side, and the label at the edge of the test pit.

Level 2

Stick a marker peg half way along each edge of your test pit at the bottom. This will mark the end of level 1, and the top of level 2. Next, start digging again! Using your tape measure, carefully dig down the next 10cm, making sure you sieve the soil as you go. Any finds from this layer need to be put in a separate tray and labelled with the site code DSP20, your own site code, and 'Level 2'.

Use the tape measure to measure 10cm down from your marker pegs. You can also measure 20cm from the top of the test pit. Make sure the base of your test pit is nice and level. Once you have completed the digging for level 2, use a new piece of A4 paper and write the same information as before, but label it Level 2. Take a photo of level 2, facing the same direction that you did for level 1.

Level 3 - 10

Keep going down 10cm at a time. Remember to keep finds from each level separate and record each level with a photograph. Keep going down until either you think you have reached the natural soil, or you get down to 1 meter. Remember to take a photo of the bottom of your test pit before you fill it back in!



Excavating levels of the test pit

5. Backfilling

Once you have finished excavating your test pit, you need to backfill it. This means putting all the soil you took out back in! Using a spade or shovel, put all the soil back in. Every so often you will need to get in the test pit and stamp on the soil to compact it down. If you took off any turf, make sure you carefully put it back on the top.

Test Pit – Done!

Finds

You will need

1. Washing up bowl or bucket
2. An old toothbrush x 2
3. Water
4. Seed trays or empty fruit trays for your finds
5. Newspaper

To Process your finds:

You will need to clean your finds so that we can decide what they are. First, take one of the old toothbrushes and brush off any dirt from your finds. This toothbrush will be your 'dry brush'. Not all finds should be washed with water. Metal and delicate finds should **not** be washed, they should be gently dry brushed and then put in a tray.

Other finds, such as pottery, flint and bone can be washed. Try to not immerse your find into the bowl, use your other toothbrush (your 'wet brush') by dipping it into the water and gently brush the dirt of each of the surfaces. You need to get as much of the dirt off as possible, taking care not to damage the finds or scrub them. Make sure you don't mix up finds from different layers.

Once each find is clean, place it in a seed tray or an empty fruit tray lined with newspaper. This will help the finds dry. Make sure you have labelled each tray so you know what layer it came from. Leave them in a warm place to dry. Once they are dry, photograph each tray with the label.



Washing finds from test pits

Where to send your results

Once you have finished your test pit, finds processing and recording, we need to see your results! Please email us with a copy of your recording form, a photo of each layer, and a photo of each finds tray. Make sure each photo is saved with a file names that explains what it is.

You can email all your records to the Surrey County Archaeological Unit Community Archaeologist at: education.scau@surreycc.gov.uk

We will have a look at what you have found and help you identify and mystery finds. All the information you send us will be uploaded to the Historic Environment Record for Surrey, to help us learn more about Surrey's past. Don't forget, even if you haven't found anything please let us know!



One team excavating the soil, another sieving the spoil, and a third team washing the finds as they are found.

Test Pit Recording Form

<i>Test Pit Location</i>			
<i>Site Code</i>	DSP20	<i>Test Pit Name</i>	
<i>Measurements of Test Pit</i> (1mx1m, 50cmx50cm?)			
Address			
Grid Reference			
Description of Location			
Sketch Plan of Trench Location			

Test Pit Layer Recording				
Site Code		DSP20	Test Pit Name	
Layer	Depth (cm)	Description of Soils How does the soil look? Think about what colour it is and what it is made of.	List of Finds What finds were found in this layer and how many?	Photo Taken? Make sure you take a photo of each layer
1	0-10			
2	10-20			
3	20-30			
4	30-40			
5	40-50			
6	50-60			
7	60-70			
8	70-80			
9	80-90			
10	90-100			

Optional Activities

Be a Finds Specialist - Record your Finds

In archaeology, we call all the objects we find 'artefacts'. Each special artefact must be recorded by a **Finds Specialist** so we know what was found during that excavation. Archaeologists try to include as much information as possible such as size, colour, and any interesting information.

You will need:

- Artefact recording sheet
- An artefact to record, this could be any object!
- Pencil
- Colouring pencils
- Ruler

Instructions:

1. Select an artefact you would like to record
2. Answer the questions on the artefact recording sheet
3. Make a sketch of you find, just like a Finds Illustrator might do. Try to add some measurements so we know how big the artefact it. You can also add some colour to your drawing.

Artefact Recording Sheet

Where was the artefact found?	
What colour is the artefact?	
What does the artefact feel like?	
What is this object made from?	
Draw a picture of the artefact in the space below Once you have sketched your object, add measurements and colour	

Be a Museum Curator - Create your own Museum

Once archaeologists have finished studying finds from excavations, they are often passed on to museums. Museum **Curators** are responsible for the collections of **artefacts** in museums. They help pick the most interesting artefacts to be put on display in a museum, so visitors can see what was found and learn about the past. Why not become a museum **curator** and create your own museum display?

You will need:

- The **artefacts** you found during your **excavations**
- Something flat surface to put your display on, such as a table
- Something to write with
- Some paper

Instructions

1. First lay all your objects out on your display area. Think how best to make your **artefacts** stand out. Smaller **artefacts** should be at the front, so they aren't hidden by the larger ones. Make sure they all face the same way.
2. Write a label for each of your objects. The label should include information like where the artefact comes from, and what it is. It could also include why that object is important and why you chose to include it in your museum.
3. Cut out each label and place it next to the correct artefact
4. Invite people to visit your museum!

Key Words

Archaeologist A person who studies how humans lived in the past by studying **artefacts** that have been left behind

Artefacts An artefact is an object made by a humans. Archaeologists find **artefacts** during excavations

Curator The person in charge of looking after the objects in a museum

Excavation An excavations is a dig carried out to uncover the archaeology beneath the ground

Finds Specialist A finds specialist conducts research in to the artefacts that are found during the excavations

Museum Curator A museum curator looks after the artefacts or objects in a museum.

Spoil Spoil is what comes out of an excavation. It is the waste that contains nothing of archaeological importance.

Spoil Heap A spoil heap is a pile of waste that comes out of an excavation. It is usually made up of soil.

Trowel A trowel is a tool often used by archaeologists on excavations to gently scrape away soil

Contact

If you have and feedback on this activity pack, please email our Community Archaeologist at education.scau@surreycc.gov.uk

COVID-19 ADVICE FOR SCHOOLS

It is possible to follow social distancing guidelines whilst conducting a test pitting project. Schools should follow their own Coronavirus guidance.

You can find social distancing guidelines for educational settings here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>

A poster giving general advice about Coronavirus in schools can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/876220/COVID19_Guidance_Education.pdf

The Department for Education Coronavirus helpline can assist with any queries.

DfE coronavirus helpline

Telephone: 0800 046 8687

Email: DfE.CoronavirusHelpline@education.gov.uk