

What Professional Archaeologists Don't Do

(adapted from "Myths and Misconceptions" by the Society for American Archaeology Public Education Committee)

- Archaeologists don't dig up dinosaurs or other fossils. **Paleontologists** study the fossil remains of extinct animals, including dinosaurs, and geologists study rocks. **Archaeologists** study people of the past through their material remains. As dinosaurs died out about 65 million years ago and the first human beings didn't exist until about 100,000 years ago, their paths never crossed.
- Archaeologists don't spend most of their time digging up human graves. The study of human remains from an archaeological site can provide important details about the diet and health of a population. However, such excavations are delicate and time consuming, as is the conservation and disposition of the remains after their recovery. Archaeologists respect cultural sensitivities regarding deceased ancestors. In addition, federal laws protect the graves of Native Americans, and state laws protect cemeteries and unmarked burials on both public and private lands in Kansas.
- Archaeologists don't keep gold, bottles, points, or other things that they find, nor do they buy, sell, or trade artifacts. They believe that objects recovered from a site should be kept together as a collection to be available for future study or display. By law, artifacts recovered from federal or state lands belong to the public and must be maintained on behalf of the public.
- Archaeologists don't spend all of their time digging. Archaeologists actually spend a relatively small amount of their time excavating, compared to the time spent in the laboratory, analyzing and interpreting their finds, and preparing written reports. Some professional archaeologists devote more time to the management and protection of cultural resources, public education, or special analyses than they do excavating and researching sites.



Analyzing artifacts



Surveying and recording archaeological sites.

Professional Archaeologists

Your Guide to Navigating the Project Clearance Highway



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Professional Archaeologists of Kansas

A housing development is planned for the suburbs of a large city, and your firm has been hired to provide design services. As part of the permit process, you are required to send project plans to several agencies, including the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in Topeka (<http://kshs.org/resource/section106home.htm>). You do so, and a few days later you receive a response. It informs you that an archaeological survey will be required and that your firm must hire a professional archaeologist to do the job, write a report, and make recommendations. Now what? Who are these professional archaeologists and what makes them professionals? How do you find one? Why can't you just send an artifact collector or land survey crew from your office to the project area to look around? What do they do out there, and why do they have to write a report and make recommendations?

Now What?

Because both federal and state laws require such investigations, you need to contact a professional archaeologist. He/she will help you navigate the road to archaeological clearance for your project.

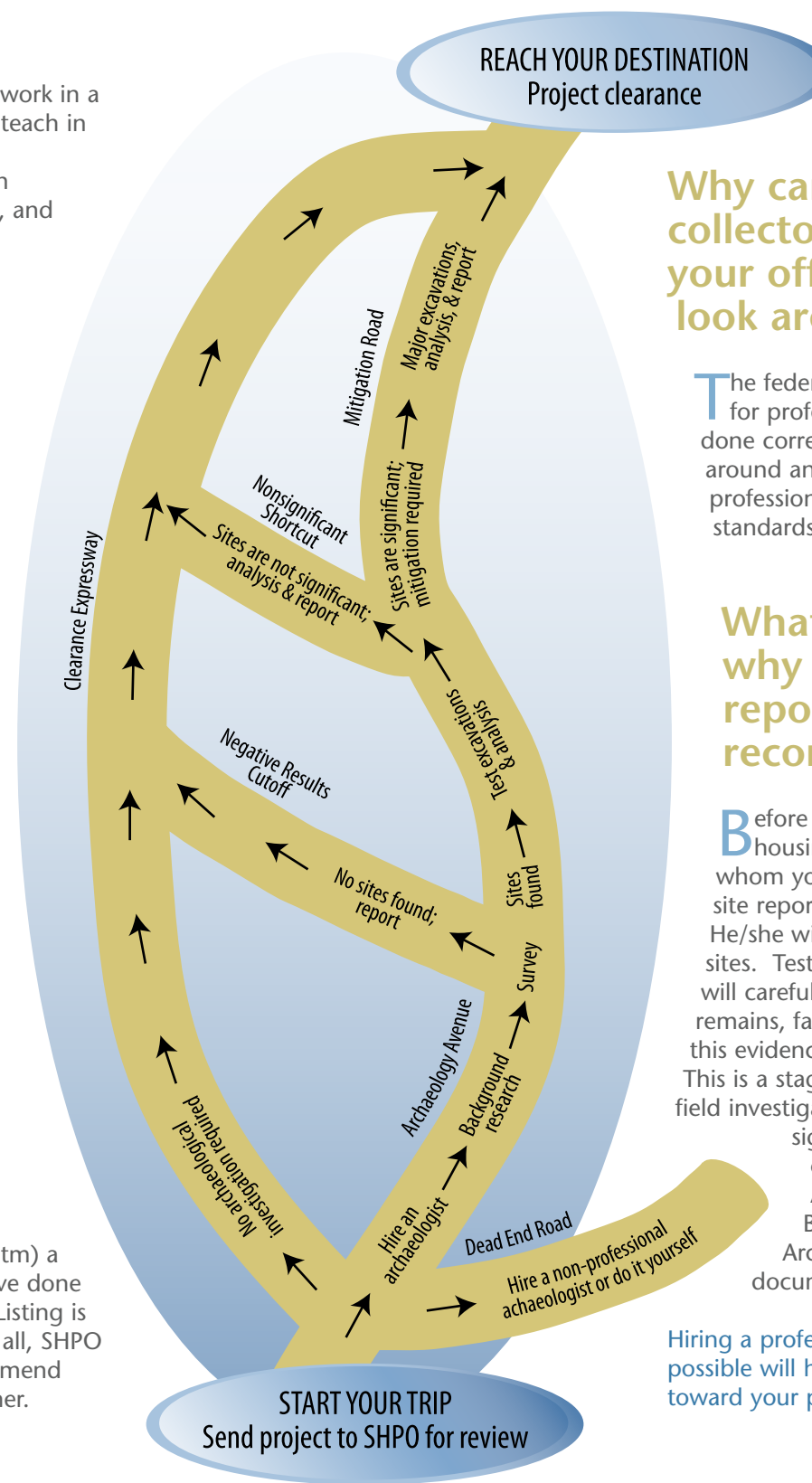
Who are these professional archaeologists and what makes them professionals?

Professional archaeologists make their living learning about past peoples from physical remains left in the ground. All professional archaeologists have college degrees, with at least a Master's degree being required to direct a project. They must have a minimum level of experience and meet standards set by the Secretary of the Interior (http://www.cr.nps.gov/local-law/arch_stnds_0.htm). Professional archaeologists also adhere to codes of ethics (<http://www.saa.org/ABOUTSAA/COMMITTEES/ethics/principles.html>; <http://www.sha.org/about/ethics.htm>).

Professional archaeologists work in a variety of settings. Some teach in universities and community colleges, while others work in museums, historical societies, and federal and state agencies. Many are employed in consulting firms, conducting surveys to identify sites and reporting the results of their investigations. Professional archaeologists have obligations to meet scientific standards, conserve cultural resources, and comply with requirements of federal and state laws, as well as fulfill their client's needs. Nationwide there are relatively few professional archaeologists. For example, the Society for American Archaeology has just over 7,000 members, while the Professional Archaeologists of Kansas (PAK) has about 55 members (<http://www.ksarchaeo.info>).

How do you find one?

The SHPO in Topeka maintains on its web site (<http://www.kshs.org/resource/archeoresearchers.htm>) a list of archaeologists who have done acceptable work in Kansas. Listing is voluntary, and, in fairness to all, SHPO staff members cannot recommend one archaeologist over another.



Why can't you just send an artifact collector or land survey crew from your office to the project area to look around?

The federal guidelines are very specific regarding qualifications for professional archaeologists. This ensures that the work is done correctly. While it might seem that anyone can look around and find artifacts, sending someone other than a professional archaeologist will not meet federal qualifications standards and will only delay your project.

What do they do out there and why do they have to write a report and make recommendations?

Before your firm can proceed with the design of the housing development, the professional archaeologist whom you have hired will study any documents or previous site reports that provide information about the project area. He/she will conduct a field survey to identify archaeological sites. Test excavations may follow if sites are found. He/she will carefully collect and analyze recovered artifacts, structural remains, faunal and floral materials, soils, etc. and compare this evidence with other sites from the same culture or region. This is a staged process that may require multiple phases of field investigations, analyses, reporting, evaluations of site significance, recommendations, and SHPO concurrences, as described in "Getting the Archaeological Green Light for Your Projects: A Basic Guide to Complying with Laws Regarding Archaeological Sites" (http://www.ksarchaeo.info/documents/PAK_TriFold_Large.pdf).

Hiring a professional archaeologist as early in the process as possible will help you avoid dead end roads and steer you toward your project clearance destination.

Archaeological site mapping



Exposing archaeological evidence with heavy machinery



Excavating in a pipeline easement



Systematically excavating cultural features



Examining soil levels

