



Study Tour of Archeological Interpretation

1. Introduction

Welcome

Study Tour of Archeological Interpretation investigates the interdisciplinary issues faced by archeologists and interpreters while working together to provide effective and accurate interpretation of archeological resources to the public. Each section introduces choices and strategies for interpreting archeology in parks and historic sites.



Archeologists working at Hopewell Culture NHP. NPS photo.

Section 2 provides a review of the principles of effective interpretation of archeological resources and the goals of "shared competency" in archeology and interpretation. This section reminds archeologists, interpreters, and related professionals of the importance of working together and of training in each other's discipline in order to interpret archeological resources to the public.

Section 3 asks you to experience an archeological park or museum either in person or in the virtual sense, through websites, from the point of view of an expert, but uninformed visitor. Viewing the interpretation of archeological resources with "fresh eyes" helps put you in the role of the visitor. This, we hope, will help archeologists, interpreters, and other professionals to consider new questions about how a visitor might interpret messages about the past.

Section 4 showcases examples of effective interpretation of archeology and includes interpretive planning documents from sites and parks to download and examine. Review of these documents will help you to understand the inner workings of the process of interpretive decision-making.

Section 5 provides tools to apply lessons from this module into work at your own park or museum.

Section 6 gives information for submitting your *Voice from the Field* experiences as an interpreter of archeology.

Section 7 includes resources to continue learning about interpreting archeology.

In the end, we hope you find in this guide a number of valuable resources for further exploration. Please continue to check in with the module and the [NPS Archeology Program](#) web site for information, examples, case studies, professional modules, and more.

Who is this guide for?

Study Tour is designed for archeologists and interpreters who wish to learn more about interpreting archeological resources for the public. The Center for Heritage Resource Studies and the Archeology Program developed the program for archeologists, interpreters, cultural resource managers, and other staff who investigate, interpret, preserve, and share with the public information regarding archeological resources. We encourage professionals from outside the NPS who are involved in related fields and applications to take advantage of this module. This training was developed to support the National Park Service's shared competency for interpretation and archeology (IDP Module 440) in which: "Archeologists and interpreters work together to provide effective and accurate interpretation of archeological information and resources to the public."

The module is primarily designed for self-motivated learning, so you can make use of the resources at your own pace. Read through the information, visit the links, and answer the assessment questions as quickly or as slowly as your time allows. Our goal is for you to increase your base of knowledge about archeological resource interpretation with every visit to the module.

Format

Each section of the module contains information and guidance for you to consider the issues and questions that archeologists and interpreters face while developing interpretation for archeological resources.

For Your Information subsections include links to additional web resources that enhance the content of this module. Visit the resources for more background and discussion of key points and topics.

For Your Consideration subsections include discussion questions that encourage you to think through the issues and problems of interpreting with archeology, and apply your understanding to your own park or museum.

Review of curriculum

The goal for archeologists and interpreters who undertake the modules of *The Public Meaning of Archeological Heritage* is to gain experience and insight into the rich possibilities of combining their knowledge and approaches for the public. We also hope you will have fun in the process!

Goals for archeologists

- Learn about the purpose, philosophy, and techniques of interpretation
- Understand tools that will provide visitors with the opportunity to make intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings and significance of archeological resources and their stories
- Describe the archeologist's obligation to provide public interpretation and educational opportunities to the public
- Emphasize the archeologist's responsibility to work with interpreters

Goals for interpreters

- Learn about archeological methods
- Understand how archeological interpretations are made
- Describe ways to encourage concern for the preservation and protection of archeological resources

For your information

Review the following interrelated resources for in-depth information:

- [An Inspiring Guide—Effective Interpretation of Archaeological Resources](#) provides an overview of the purposes and goals of the training.
- Read papers from [Module 1: Public Meaning of Archaeological Heritage](#), a session held in October 2004, to find out how archeologists use interpretation to reach communities, explore diversity, and discuss heritage. Some of these and other, additional papers were published in the [March 2005 issue](#) of SAA Archaeological Record.
- [Archeology for Interpreters](#) explores the world of archeology through online activities, illustrated case studies and fun facts. This guide introduces basic archeological methods, techniques and up-to-date interpretations. It also illustrates basic relationships between archeology, preservation, and preservation laws.
- [Interpretation for Archeologists](#) introduces the world of interpretation through online activities, case studies, fun facts, and more. This guide introduces the art and science of interpretation, methods and techniques for engaging the public with archeological resources, and the significant role interpretation can play in encouraging public stewardship.
- Check out [Voices from the Field](#) to learn about the kinds of projects archeologists and interpreters do.

- NPS Module 440: Effective Interpretation of Archeological Resources provides an overview of the purpose, goals and objectives of the shared competency in Archeology and Interpretation.

Note to potential instructors

The *Study Tour* is easily adapted to classroom instruction for credit. Some suggestions follow.

Section 4, in which participants visit a park or museum in-person or a website on-line, is best conducted as an organized field trip to one place or a series of places. Participants can provide each other with feedback about their experiences.

In Section 6, participants are asked to submit a Voice from the Field case study, which can be a final product of the course.

The *For Your Consideration* questions may be answered for assessment purposes. In the current version, these questions are meant to guide participants in thinking about their work. You may wish for participants to write out their answers to demonstrate their review of all the sections and grasp of the material.

We recommend that you ask participants to join in discussions electronically or in-person.

- A listserv, blog, wiki, email, or in-person discussions all offer opportunities for participants to talk about the module, ask each other (and you) for advice, and go over problems as a group. You can also use these discussions to talk about the questions included in each part of this guide, or have the questions be submitted in writing for review.
- If you opt for a listserv or other electronic form of dialogue, provide participants with basic information and how-to tips when they register for the course.

For your consideration

- What motivates you to explore archeology and interpretation together?
- What do you hope to gain from this course?

2. Interpreters and Archeologists Working Together

Shared role in resource stewardship

Goal: To understand the goals of interpreters and archeologists working together.



Archeologists and interpreters at Fort Vancouver. NPS photo

Archeological resources are important and often popular elements of many of our nation's parks and historical sites. Every year, millions of visitors come to national parks seeking to know more about the past. Each visit and each visitor offers an opportunity to create an interpretive experience that is effective and accurate. The shared abilities and knowledge of archeologists and interpreters who work together can significantly affect and enhance how the public approaches new, unfamiliar, or difficult material. Furthermore, the process often shows the public new ways of looking at old problems and provides a unique perspective on the past.

When interpretation succeeds, it allows people to make meaningful emotional and/or intellectual connections with the people and places of the past. The ultimate goal of the interpretation of archeological resources is to help the public develop or strengthen a sense of stewardship and stakeholderhood in the protection of archeological resources. (See [NPS Module 440: Effective Interpretation of Archeological Resources](#).)

Archeologists and interpreters who are successful at effectively interpreting archeology, develop and maintain dialogue with each other about what they do, how, and why. Together they analyze the potential impacts of interpretive programs on the resources, balancing on-site visitor experience with the cumulative and potentially damaging impacts of visitation. They also work together to analyze and understand the messages that interpretive products convey about the archeological past, and seek new and more inclusive ways for visitors to make connections with the past.

Consider the following points from the [Inspiring Guide](#).

Overall goals for shared training in archeology and interpretation

- Convey archeological information to visitors in an understandable and usable manner
- Identify and appropriately present multiple perspectives, or direct visitors to sources for discovering multiple perspectives
- Work together to develop programs about archeological subjects
- Develop suitable presentations and/or media about archeological subjects for a variety of audiences

Objectives of teamwork between archeologists and interpreters

- Create well-balanced, holistic interpretive plans that accurately reflect management concerns, attention to all resources, and address major park themes
- Integrate current archeological information into interpretive services
- Work toward mutual understanding of interpretive themes, techniques, and opportunities
- Actively contribute or solicit input from other experts to produce or present well balanced interpretations
- Frequently interact and discuss the status of archeological projects, programs, actions, and how they might be relevant to interpretive programs
- Create training opportunities (formal or informal) for park interpreters, keeping them appraised of current investigations, new theories, and possible conflicting explanations about the park's archeological record

Why interpret with archeology?

Archeological resources offer a wide variety of interpretive tools and techniques to work with the public. Tours, exhibits, excavations, publications, web sites, and lectures are some of the most frequent types of programs used in parks and museums. They help make the archeological heritage in parks and museums accessible and available to everyone. When interpreters and archeologists work together, these programs have the greatest success of conveying accurate and meaningful information to the visitor, as well as fostering a stewardship ethic towards archeological resources.

Expanding the interpretive and archeological repertoire at a park enables archeologists and interpreters to exercise their creativity and think like a visitor rather than an expert. In the following sections you will have the opportunity to experience and think through the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and impact of different interpretive programs that present archeology. This process, based on the principle of a shared role in resource protection, is designed to expand your understanding of issues in archeological interpretation and broaden your "toolkit" for developing more effective, active, and creative interpretive products.

For your information

Review the resources and tools of archeology and interpretation in these pages

- [What is material culture?](#) Learn about what constitutes an archeological resource. These materials become the medium for interpretation.
- [Tools for Interpreters:](#) Find out about the tools interpreters use to discuss cultural resources and topics of significance with the public.

For a refresher on what archeologists and interpreters do, visit:

- [What is interpretation?](#)
- [What do interpreters do?](#)
- [What is archeology?](#)
- [What do archeologists do?](#)

For your consideration

- Refer to the goals and objectives from the Inspiring Guide reiterated in the *For Your Information* sections.
- Choose a few of the statements above that address your concerns for archeology and interpretation at your site, and explain why. For example, do you see teamwork or problems with cooperation and communication? Have you observed specific gaps in the interpretive program that need to be addressed? How might you and your colleagues meet the challenges you face?

3. Self-Guided Tour

Be a visitor

Goal: To understand the goals of interpreters and archeologists working together.



Visit Chaco Culture NHP's website to see how their collections are interpreted online. NPS photo.

Goal: To experience a park, museum, or a website from the perspective of the public and gather impressions to analyze interpretive programs.

Experts tend to forget that other people do not necessarily share the same knowledge. An important goal of interpretation is helping visitors to look at the world in new ways, put ideas together that they had not before, and think about information and larger themes they have not previously considered. Effective interpretation of archeological resources enables all kinds of visitors to engage with unfamiliar material, to want to know more, and to feel comfortable asking questions.

In this section, you will visit a park or museum either in person or virtually, through a website. Your task is to leave your expert knowledge behind and simply be a visitor. Consider yourself a more-than-typically observant participant, but not an expert. The idea here is to see what grabs your attention, what stimulates your curiosity, and reflect on why.

For this exercise, we strongly advise you to visit an archeological park or museum of your choosing, preferably one you are not familiar with, for the best possible learning experience. If it is not possible to visit a site in person, a list of websites below offers alternatives for "virtual visits" to selected archeological places and museums. For a more thorough experience, you may also consider visiting both a park or museum in person and a website to compare and contrast the interpretive environments.

For onsite visits

Again, for this exercise we heartily encourage you to visit a place in person. Download a [record sheet](#) to take with you. On this sheet is a list of questions to consider before, during, and after your

visit. These questions, however, are just a starting point—please feel free to jot down additional notes and questions as they come up. You are also encouraged to take photographs of the place to share and to refresh your memory later.

During your visit, note down all your questions that arise, even if you think they sound silly or feel like you should already know the information but cannot remember it. This is important for getting inside a visitor's mindset and will remind you of the full range of questions that interpretive products can and should address.

Click [here](#) to download a printable on-site visit record sheet (.doc file).

For virtual visits

Another way to begin thinking about opportunities to incorporate or interpret archeological information at your park or museum is to explore a website.

Download a [record sheet](#) tailored for a virtual visit and enter your comments. Consider its questions before, during, and after your visit. This list, however, is just a starting point. As you visit the websites, note all the questions that come to mind. You should jot down questions even if you think they sound silly or feel like you should already know the information but or cannot remember it. This is important for getting inside a visitor's mindset and will remind you of the full range of questions that interpretive products can and should address.

Remember that all of these websites are themselves interpretive products. Some of the websites reconstruct what visitors see onsite when they tour a particular exhibit or the entire property. Others reconstruct particular exhibits or have always been intended for online exploration. As you tour a website, take the medium into consideration and think about the differences between a virtual and in-person experience.

We recommend that you look through all the websites, but focus only on one for each individual record sheet.

Note that these websites may use Flash and are best experienced on a high-speed connection. You may wish to view the websites at a local library or other venue if your connection speed is slow.

- [The Clearwater Site](#), Center for Desert Archaeology
Explores an archeological site of some of the earliest known examples of pithousing in Arizona.
- [St. Augustine: American's Ancient City](#), Florida Museum of Natural History
Learn about the 18th century Spanish settlement of St. Augustine.
- [Los Ades: Life at an Eighteenth-Century Spanish Outpost](#), Los Ades State Historic Site
Find out about frontier life at the settlement of Los Ades in Louisiana.
- [Chaco Culture National Historical Park](#): Museum Collections of the National Park Service
Presents artifact collections from Chaco Culture NHP and information about different aspects of Chacoan culture.

- [A Mohawk Iroquois Village: An Exhibit at the New York State Museum](#)
This online exhibit recreates a temporary museum exhibit that featured reconstructions of the village
- [Roads to the Past: Fifty Years of Highway Archeology in New Mexico](#), Museum of Indian Arts and Culture
Discusses the history of archeology in New Mexico within the context of highway construction.
- [The African Burial Ground](#), New York Public Library
Describes the controversial excavation of enslaved African and African Americans on Manhattan and what was learned about the interred.

Click [here](#) to download a printable virtual visit record sheet (.doc file).

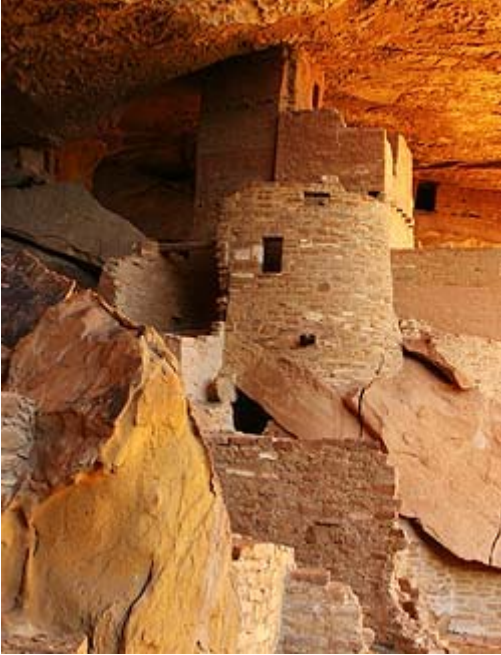
For your consideration

- What important ideas and concepts did you take away from your interpretive experience?
- What do you think is important in an interpretive experience of archeology?
- What unique features does a web environment offer a visitor? What unique features does an in-person visit offer a visitor?

4. Case Studies of Interpreting with Archeology

Case studies

Goal: To use examples from the National Parks as case studies of how archeologists and interpreters use their methods and resources to effectively interpret archeology to the public. To create a framework for evaluating your experience of museums or parks where archeological resources have been interpreted for the public.



Interpretation at Mesa Verde National Park is one case study of this chapter. NPS photo.

The plans included in this section

- Inform your knowledge about the synergy between archeology and interpretation as applied in the National Parks;
- Provide models for creating similar plans and guides at your own museum or park.

The *For Your Consideration* questions will help you to evaluate resources at your own site by examining the choices of others, and other sites that you visit. These questions will help you to think about the breadth of choices available, as well as the resources a park has to use in interpreting archeological resources. Your overall task is to find out how interpretation and archeology work at a site and learn from others' experiences how the public gains an appreciation for the past.

For Your Information

Review the following sections from *Interpretation for Archeologists* to learn about audiences and various approaches to take, and inform your knowledge about the synergy between archeology and interpretation as applied in the National Parks:

- [Interpretive Analysis Model](#)
- [Evaluating Compelling Stories](#)
- [Issues of Sensitivity](#)

Case study documents

The following interpretive plans come from National Park Service sites struggling with the issues inherent to interpreting archeology to the public. They provide a look at how archaeological interpretation, from a planning/management perspective fits into the goals and structure of a park or museum.

[Long Range Plan, Jamestown, Colonial National Historical Park \(June 2000\)](#) (.pdf file)

The Plan provides a 5-10 year vision for the interpretation of Jamestown, considered the first permanent English settlement in the New World. The plan incorporates new information from historical and archeological investigations, and ideas on its application into exhibits and public programs.

[A Plan for the Interpretation of Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado \(May 1993\)](#) (.pdf file)

The plan was written to guide media planners and designers in the development and implementation of media production plans. It also provides guidance for park managers and interpretive program managers by identifying and delineating the various elements into time frames.

For your consideration

The questions and issues below will help you to think through archaeological interpretation by looking at a site holistically - whether a case study or at your own museum or park. The questions should help determine interpretive opportunities and areas that need more attention or support.

Site and Structure questions establish the facts about the park. Consider:

- What is the background history of the place?
- What is its stated mission?
- What are its facilities and personnel?
- How do the institutional budget and other funding sources support interpretation and archeology?
- Are statistics or information kept about visitors? Who are the visitors?

Content of Archeology and Interpretation questions address the process of making interpretive choices in the plans. They also provide issues to consider when planning for your own park or museum. What kind of interpretation takes place (exhibits, public tours, etc.)? Consider:

- What kind of interplay occurs between interpreters and the public?
- What interpretive themes are presented?
- How does archeology fit or expand the mission?
- Can you tell what the relationship is between data collection and interpretation?
- Can you tell what the relationship is between the place and its region?
- What kinds of archeological resources are used in interpretation?
- How are archeological resources integrated with other kinds of resources for interpretation?

- What are some of the issues grappled with (i.e. authenticity, technology, contested history, putting forth different viewpoints)?
- Is stewardship explicitly addressed? What kinds of interpretive products address stewardship? How?
- How does archeological interpretation reach or address different audiences?

5. Putting It Together

Questions and Issues

Goal: To consider the questions, reactions, and experiences that arose in Sections 3 and 4 through developing a series of questions and answers related to the issues.



Archeology is an integral part of the mission and purpose of Tonto National Monument. NPS photo.

Gather your responses from Section 3 and Section 4. This section will make use of your answers to the questions and help you to channel the thinking process you went through into developing interpretations of archeology for your own museum or park. Download a [worksheet](#) of the issues and questions listed below.

Issues of setting archeological research priorities

- Main mission of the park or museum
- How archeological resources fit into or expand the mission
- Park/museum planning
- Funding sources and logistical considerations

Questions about issues of setting archeological research priorities

- Is the administration “sold” on archeology and interpretation? Why or why not?
- How can archeology be more closely integrated into all the events, programs, and products?

Issues of integrating archeological research into museum/park's broader programs

- Non-archeology research, education, and interpretive programs
- Archeology as data collection to fulfill the mission
- Archeology as educational tool for public participation
- Archeology and public interpretation

Questions about issues of integrating archeological research into museum/park's broader programs

- How do visitors use these programs?
- What trends are taking place in the surrounding communities?
- Who are the audiences of the park or museum?

Issues of archeology as a program focus

- Archeology as a focus of educational programs
- Archeology as a source for exhibits and displays
- Focus on archeological methods and techniques

Questions about issues of archeology as a program focus

- Do your archeologists need front-line experience as interpreters? How can they get it?
- What are your resources—people, places, materials?
- What is their current state of curation and care? Do plans need to be made for better care?
- What, if any, concerns are there for the use of these materials?

Issues of interpreting archeology

- Coordination between interpretive staff and archeologists
- Coordination between museum/exhibit planners and archeologists
- Interpreting archeological finds (artifacts, landscape features, soil stains)
- Interpreting the archeological process (methods and techniques)
- Integrating archeological data with historical data
- Site-specific archeology (e.g. excavation of a single building)
- Thematic archeology (e.g. African American heritage)

Questions about issues of interpreting archeology

- Do your interpreters need training and experience in archeology? How can they get it?
- How do the themes of site-specific archeological interpretations relate to universal themes?
- Brainstorm and make a “mind map” of the connections between the archeological resources, the park or museum, and the people and places of the surrounding geographic region.

For your information

- [Archeologists: Personal and professional responsibilities](#)
- [Interpreters: Personal and professional responsibilities](#)

For your consideration

- What have you learned as a result of this guide?
- What will you do next with what you have learned?

6. Use What You Know

Share your voice from the field!



Merle Frommelt interprets archeology at Effigy Mounds National Monument. NPS photo.

Submit a case study so that other archeologists and interpreters can learn from your experiences. What programs have you developed? What has worked or not worked? Please share your own experiences as a case study of approximately 1000 words. You might talk about an experience with interpreting archeology that is particularly important to you, contributes to an overall park story, or you feel illustrates why archeologists should do interpretation or how they might successfully collaborate with interpreters. Feel free to think broadly and discuss exhibits, tours, special programs, influence on policy and planning, etc.

If you have a clear photograph of yourself in action, a pertinent artifact or scene, or group shot, submit it with your case study. Please email high-resolution digital images or, if you have slides or

prints, send them by courier for us to scan and return to you. (Regular U.S. Mail is not a good carrier in this case because it uses an irradiation process that melts plastic and ruins photographs. Use this address for a delivery service: National Park Service, Archeology Program (2275), 1201 Eye Street NW, Washington, DC 20005. Use the telephone number 202-354-2130 on your courier slip.) If there are recognizable people in your photographs, then we will need signed permission to use those photographs on the web.

See examples in the [Case Studies Gallery](#).

7. Additional Resources

Additional resources



Detail of interpretive signage at Hopewell Culture NHP. Barbara Little.

For suggestions on online resources, articles, and books having to do with archeology and interpretation, visit:

- [Enhancing Public Outreach](#)

Download forms and worksheets:

- [On-site visit record sheet \(.doc file\)](#)
- [Virtual visit record sheet \(.doc file\)](#)
- [Photo release form \(.pdf file\)](#)