

Archaeology Field Schools

The Field School Experience

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An archaeology field school is an archaeology dig that is organized to train the next generation of archaeologists. But even if you're not planning on becoming an archaeologist, you can still attend a field school.

If you're not a professional archaeologist, maybe you, too, think about spending part of the summer in the dirt. It doesn't seem terribly fair that we should have all the fun, does it? Well, fortunately, there are lots of university-arranged excavations going on all summer long, called field schools, and some of them take volunteers.

Attending a Field School

A field school is primarily for the training of undergraduate or graduate students. For around six or eight weeks in the summer, a small band of students is taken into the field and shown how to dig, given lectures, sometimes an exam, sometimes a project of some sort. The students get credit and training that way, starting them off in a career in archaeology.

Many field schools also welcome members of the local historical society or archaeology club, or provide opportunities for the public to experience archaeology for themselves. Almost every archaeology department or anthropology department with a concentration in archaeology in the world conducts archaeological field research in schools every summer or every other summer.



To attend such a field school, you'll need stamina, clothes you don't mind destroying, a hat with a brim, and SPF 30 sunblock. You may get college credit. You may have to provide your own travel and housing expenses. You'll need a strong sense of adventure; a stronger sense of humor; and the ability to work hard without complaining (too much!). But you might have the time of your life.

So, if you have a few days or weeks this summer, and you want to experience a little real live archaeology, this is the time to start looking! A field school list has been compiled for this site; you could also go to your nearby university and find out from the archaeology or anthropology department if they are running one this summer. Good luck and good digging!

Finding a Field School

There are several ways to find a field school. Look at the listings of current archaeology digs. You could also contact the archaeologists associated with your local university department. You might consider joining your local archaeology society or club.

How to Choose a Field School

Choosing an archaeological field school may seem a little daunting. There are lots of choices, conducted in many different places in the world, for different fees, from different universities, for different lengths of times. So, how do you choose one?



What makes an ideal field school?

- Exotic venues?
- Exciting archaeology?
- Great group of people to work with?
- Famous archaeologist leading it?
- Important/famous school giving you credit?
- Great food/accommodations?
- Great weather?
- Good tours on the weekends?
- Safety plan?
- RPA-certified?

Well, okay, let's admit it; all of that will help. But to tell you the truth, the best kind of field school is like the best kind of archaeology: an engaged field school. By this I mean, each and every student is an active participant, actively participating in the research itself. Each student has a particular contribution to make, whether it's small finds analysis, faunal identification, soils study, or remote sensing. And each student's contribution is used in the final study.

An Engaged Field School

Sounds pretty exciting, doesn't it? These field schools end up producing the next generation of archaeologists, interested, geared-up, curious students. If you're looking for a field school to find out if you have what it takes to be an archaeologist, you can do no better than to find yourself an engaged field school. The way you do that, is email or phone the director and ask questions about what your role in the excavation might be. Tell them you're interested in actively assisting with the research, and ask about opportunities for your participation.