



# What is Archaeology?

*Understanding Archaeology and Beginning Archaeological Research*

## Archaeology (ar·chae·ol·o·gy)

Archaeology is a form of science which studies human history through physical evidence such as artifacts, features, and eco-facts. Scientists who practice Archaeology are called archaeologists. Archaeologists know how to look for historic sites through a process called surface survey which allows them to determine if there may be more evidence beneath the surface. Archaeologists are highly trained and don't just go around digging holes. The most important thing for archaeology is keeping evidence and objects in context. That's why you should never just start searching or pulling what you think may be a historical object out of the earth or water. Sometimes people find historical objects in their yard or in local parks. If you find something, don't move it or try to get it yourself, call the Washington State Department of Archaeological and Historic Preservation at (360) 586-3065.

## Artifacts, Features, and Eco-Facts

It's important to understand the difference between an artifact, feature, and eco-fact. Look at the meaning of these words in the glossary and then **categorize the following items in the proper column.**

### Glossary

**Artifacts:** objects left behind by human beings such as bottles, arrow heads, pots, and other things.

**Context:** where an object is in the soil and the historical information surrounding it that tell archaeologist its meaning.

**Features:** items that are made or altered by humans that cannot be moved from the space such as fire pits, and house foundations.

**Eco-facts:** remains of natural materials such as plants, rocks, and animal remains which indicate human activity such as fish scales, fire cracked rock, and orange peels.

Boot

Fire Pit

Deer Skull

Fish Scales

Pot Shards

Pieces of Fabric

Painted Bolder

Knife Handle

Artifact	Feature	Eco-Fact

# Surface Survey

During a surface survey many tools and methods can be used but usually archaeologists first walk back and forth across the space and look for artifacts, landscape features, and eco-facts. They then will divide the space into 1-meter square sections to better keep track of context. **Put the following artifacts, features, and eco-facts into the proper squares on the grid below.**



**Boot** – A large men’s boot was found in the top left corner of **Square A1**.

**Fire Pit** – Two fire pits were found, one in **Square C4** and one across the four corners of **Squares C1, D1, C2, and D2**.

**Deer Skull** - A deer skull was found in the right side of **Square C3**.

**Knife Handle** – A knife handle was found in the center of **Square B4**.

	A	B	C	D
1				
2				
3				
4				

## Context

Since everything was found on the surface here and you've already located it on the grid in your surface survey, we know the physical context of the objects in our archaeological site. It seems that most of these items were left or created around the same time. What we don't know is the historical context. In this case archaeologists may work with what they already know about the site or establish context from objects. Here are some facts we learned from the objects:

- 1) The boot we found had a label from a company that only existed from 1889-1920.
- 2) The land that this site was found on was owned by a Seattle businessman and used for hunting from 1871 until 1918.
- 3) The deer skull was shattered in a way that implies a bullet wound.

Look at these three facts and see if you can determine who might have stayed at this temporary camp. Do you have any ideas?

**Write them below.**

In our next *At Home Activities Worksheet* **the Eastside Heritage Center** will discuss excavation on analysis of objects found in archaeological sites so check back with us soon!



