

# Working Safe with Community Projects and Local Groups

## Guide 30



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Community archaeology projects and other public outreach projects are there to engage people and provide both an enjoyable experience and a place to learn, interact and discover. These projects are by definition supposed to be fun, however, there is no reason to ignore the real issues that could arise if simple precautions are not taken.

This short guide attempts to highlight some of the more obvious items to be aware of in terms of staying safe in a public project. The intention is to make participants and leaders to think about what they should be aware of, before they step out into the field. The guide is not comprehensive, but rather a basis for common sense decisions to be made. The checklist is a simplified format to help ensure the basics have been covered, the rest is up to you. Remember though, that this is supposed to be enjoyable!

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## Introduction

The positive benefits we can all obtain from working on a community archaeology project or joining a local group are well known, ranging from sharing our own skills to learning new ones and simply meeting people with the same passion for exploring the past. The number of projects seems to be on the increase, which although a good thing in general, does bring with it some special considerations and responsibilities – most especially in the field.

It is beyond the remit of this short guide to list and collate all the elements that groups or group leaders should be aware of. However, this should be seen as a springboard to further more detailed information and can act as a simple checklist and aide memoir to ensure your project or the one you are involved in, stays safe.



## Think about your own health

The first consideration is the actual physical nature of some of the work, the tools used and the need to ensure a safe working environment. Even though community archaeology should be a fun activity, the same care should be taken to stay safe and be mindful of everyone else's safety. Often you will be in a group with a range of abilities and ages, so it is important to acknowledge this from the start and not push people past their capacity to carry out manual work. Some, may see it as a sign of weakness to stop when they are feeling tired or feel a muscle strain, where all they are doing is hurting themselves and also as tired hands begin to ache they may put other people at risk from losing control of the larger tools that may be used. It is better to work 2 hours a day for a week than 5 hours on the first day and then be unable to carry on for the rest of the project after straining a muscle. You must remember that most people are not used to this level of strenuous activity, and archaeologists who have spent their life in the field will vouch that the stamina and strength need to keep going is hard to maintain. This leads on to the most important lesson to learn when working with the tools of excavation.

## Tool Talk

Shovels, spades, mattocks and picks and even the humble trowel, will all need to be treated with respect and a full knowledge of how to use them. If you are the designated person in charge, then a tool talk is essential, but also constant monitoring of tool use should form part of the day.

Shovels and Spades for example are different tools, and should be treated as such, each one requiring a degree of training to use correctly and safely. Placing the correct part of the foot on the spade is essential, as the heel could slip off and you will have the back of the spade slice up the back of your leg. The middle of your foot is weak, and without the correct footwear, you will find that you could seriously damage your foot. The best foot position is an inch behind where your toes begin. Shovels however, should be treated with extreme care, as it is far too easy to try and shovel and twist to throw the spoil behind you, or to the side, where this will only result in a painful back at best, and serious injury in some cases. Shovel with your knees slightly bent your back straight and remember throw the spoil to the front of you – and never overreach.



Mattocks are not to be swung like pick axes, they have specific functions and it can be argued they are the precision instrument of the heavy tool category and never need to be raised higher than knee height. The head weighs on average 8lbs, so is more than adequate for providing the power you need without the energy wasting swing. Wearing gloves is often a worry when using tools such as picks and mattocks, as loose or inappropriate gloves can lead to the tool slipping from your grip and causing injury to other people in the trench. In most cases you will never use a pick-axe on site, as this is a very dangerous tool that needs some skill to use properly–this should never be handled by a person with little training.

In general these heavy tools need you to be aware of how to use them, when to use them and where others are when you use them. It is too easy to be shovelling up some loose soil and somebody puts their hand in to grab out a piece of pottery – you can imagine the result! When mattocking (if and when you are ready for this tool) think about who is behind you, to the side and even to the front, as 8lbs of steel blade is not something you want to meet on an upswing!

The trowel also has its own characteristics that need to be understood before use. This is once again a precision tool, and should be treated as such. The first thing to remember is that you will get blisters unless you wear gloves; the best being ones with gel padded palms, or leather work gloves. The strain on your wrist will be a lot more than you think and this should make you consider wrist support, rather than be unable to move your hand, when you return home. A person who has excavated before should show you all the ways of troweling (yes, there are more than one) from the blade grip to the broad stroke, the best way to trowel clay and the best for stony layers. In the case of soil with bones and sharp stones or pottery, you should consider a glove that protects your knuckles from scraping along the ground.

It is worth pointing out, that trowelling is often conducted while on your knees, and like your knuckles, these should be protected, which is simply achieved by wearing either kneepads (my own favoured method) or by using a kneeling pad. It is not worth risking your knees and there is nothing macho about not using some form of protection.



## Taking Care

Looking after your equipment is as important as using it; whether it is making sure it is cleaned at the end of the day, or that tools are not strewn around the site or trench where they become a hazard.

The trench itself is a place that you should take special care around, as with any hole in the ground you have the added consideration of preventing people from falling into it (either when you are working or after you have left) by using a mesh fencing roll. Be aware of working within a confined space even when it is only a spade depth – the movement is restricted. So think about how much space people need.

This partly leads to project management, but it is worth considering the number of people who will get involved, the area you have to work with and also the task required. There is no point in going ahead if, say 50 people turn up on the first day and they all want to have a go in a trench – there will be no room at best and accidents may happen at worst; people will go away feeling disappointed at the shambles.

Organisation is key, and having enough trained personnel that can help is essential – if possible there should be a ratio of **1:4**, though **1:7** is possible at a push if you are well enough organised.

Trenches are not the only place that you might work. You might for example carry out field walking where uneven ground is encountered, or survey in woodland where trip hazards and sharp branches should be watched out for. A building survey might have its own hazards; consider the safety of the structure and that of the group recording it (Rotten floors and loose stones are only a few of the hazards to be aware of).



Site Safe

The main concept is to exercise common sense and be aware of the hazards around you in order to minimise the chance of accident or injury. Talking it over and preparing participants won't ruin the fun aspect of the project but will allow people to take personal responsibility. There should be a person who is designated as the responsible site coordinator and have access to a trained first aider as well as contact details of the nearest doctor or accident emergency unit. Below is a simple list of do's and don'ts that will ensure that most eventualities are thought of.

The list is not exhaustive however, it will allow you the opportunity to think about what will make your project safe and maximise the potential to spend more time enjoying archaeology rather than troweling yourself into a corner, hitting others with a stray mattock and fighting over a potsherd in a crowded trench.

## BASIC CHECKLIST

1: Wear appropriate clothing for site work – this will depend on where you are or what you are doing, whether excavation or survey, hot weather or cold.

2: Understand basic site hygiene and have a supply of wet wipes to clean up before eating. It is also useful to think about toilet facilities (both male and female).

3: Always check tools before use to make sure they are safe i.e. no loose handles, broken parts, flat tyres on wheelbarrows. And leave them as you found them, clean and neatly stacked.

4: Before you start work, look around and check whether anyone is in close vicinity and what they might be doing. Will they be affected by your work or vice versa?

5: Ask yourself if you are trained sufficiently to use the tool, as nearly is not good enough – if in doubt, ask. Even before a person steps into a trench there should be a talk (in an evening perhaps) that prepares people for the basics of archaeology, the project and the responsibilities.

6: Never assume that someone else will tidy up after you and keep your area clean, but think about other people's spaces as well. The best way to work is in a trowel line all moving the same way.

7: The site is a dangerous place, but even a forest survey or fieldwalk can have potential hazards, think about your actions and the consequences.

8: A crowded site with too many people will be fun for nobody, keep numbers at a level that can be reasonably managed by the professionals.

9: Always ask before entering the area where another archaeologist is working and never walk over another archaeologist's area without permission, as you are part of a team.

10: Project safety is up to everyone, if you see a mattock lying on the ground for example, politely move it somewhere safe, and suggest whoever left it there should be more careful in future.

*The following pages are a series of templates for groups to use, kindly supplied by Steven Mambery Senior Historic Environment Officer for Somerset County Council and Naomi Payne: Historic Environment Officer and are supplied for free use to be used and altered as seen fit for purpose with no restriction.*

# INFORMATION FOR EXCAVATION VOLUNTEERS

## Location

The dig will take place ..... (map ref ; nearest postcode .....),

ATTACH MAP HERE

## Site directors

The excavation will be directed by.....

## Dates and times

The dig will run from .....until .....(except..... days off).

The day starts at .....am and finishes at .....pm.

There will be a morning, lunch and afternoon break.

## Bookings and cancellations

The number of volunteers that can be accommodated is limited, so please come only on the dates you have booked for.

If you have booked but cannot attend please let ..... know  
telephone....., e-mail..... as early as possible so that the place can be  
reallocated.

## Facilities

We will/will not have access to the facilities, including toilets, water and tea and coffee making facilities.

## Lunches

We advise that you bring a packed lunch with you each day.

for example;

*There are not many food options in apart from a garage and a small café, which are some distance away from the site. There is a fridge in the sports pavilion in which your lunch can be stored.*

## **Other things to bring**

**Clothing** - you will be working outside so make sure you have clothing for all eventualities including waterproofs, sunscreen and a sun hat.

**Footwear** - unless we have suffered a deluge, trainers or walking shoes are OK for digging. Bring wellies too as a precaution.

**Water** - you are advised to bring a refillable container for drinking water, particularly if the weather is hot.

**Medication** - bring any personal medication you might need.

**Equipment** - we will provide all equipment but you may prefer to bring your own digging trowel if you have one.

## **Health and safety**

You will be given a health and safety briefing on your first day. During the excavation you will be using a range of tools and equipment. We will give you instructions about their safe use. Some people prefer to use work-gloves as a precaution against blisters. Likewise you may wish to bring a kneeling pad.

## **Open day**

Everyone is welcome to visit the excavation on the open day on..... Spread the word!

## Volunteer Induction and Training Record

Name		
Organisation (if applicable)		
Date started		
Do you have any medical condition that the office should be aware of?		
Emergency Contact details	Name:	Address:
	Telephone:	
	Email:	
Induction	<i>To be initialled by the volunteer after induction training has been received in these areas</i>	<i>Please initial and date</i>
	Health & Safety guidelines (use of tools, falling and tripping hazards, dehydration, sunburn, cuts and scratches etc.)	
	First Aid facilities	
	Emergency procedures	
	Tour of work area (toilets, kitchen, tool store, what to do with rubbish etc.)	
	Security precautions (locking up pavilion and gate etc.)	
	Register, letting someone know where you are	
	Breaks	
	Photographic permission forms	
	Volunteer Handbook	
	Evaluation forms	

### Disclaimer

*I certify that the information given on this form is correct to the best of my knowledge. If I am accepted as a volunteer I understand information from this form may be computerised for personnel administration purposes in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988. I understand that I may be asked to complete a form and be subject to a Criminal Records Bureau check.*

Signed

Date

# Risk assessment form (H&S) SAMPLE

Name of assessor(s)		Group / Establishment:	
Date			

What is the workplace / activity / equipment / conditions (delete as appropriate) being assessed:	How was the assessment done? e.g. desktop exercise, site visit, in consultation with employees, managers, safety representatives?	Next review date:
		Is the assessment 'generic' or specific to the situation?

Who could be harmed, and how?	What is already being done to control the risks?	Risk Rating * Severity x Likelihood			What further action is recommended to reduce risks further?	Action by whom?	Date action due	Date action done
		S	L	S x L				
Site staff & volunteers. Injury through use of hand tools, misuse of tools; use of defective tools.	Care and maintenance of tools; use of protective gloves, goggles and helmets if/when appropriate. Training for volunteers.	4	1	4	None	N/A	N/A	
Site staff, volunteers & visitors. Injury through trench collapse or objects falling into trench. Low risk in present context due to limited anticipated depth of excavations	Restriction of excavation or provision of adequate shoring; trenches not to be entered with heavy machinery working nearby; tools to be stacked away from trench edges; use of safety helmets where appropriate	5	1	5	None	N/A	N/A	
Site staff, volunteers & visitors Falling and tripping hazards. Unstacked tools; marker pegs; unfenced excavations; falls from scaffold towers.	Proper storage of site tools; capping of grid pegs and high visibility paint; demarcation of deep excavations; trench perimeter surrounded by high visibility fencing; volunteer training.	2	2	4	None	N/A	N/A	

Who could be harmed, and how?	What is already being done to control the risks?	Risk Rating * Severity x Likelihood			What further action is recommended to reduce risks further?	Action by whom?	Date action due	Date action done
		S	L	S x L				
Site staff. Injury by earthmoving and other mechanical plant.	Supervision of working machinery by competent persons; removal of non-essential personnel from area; wearing of helmets and high visibility jackets	5	1	5	Insure that volunteers are not on site when the machine is on site.	RB/TJ	15/8/08	
Site staff & volunteers. Injury through contact with buried live electrical or gas services.	Supervision of working machinery by competent persons; supervision of working machinery by competent persons;	5	1	5	None	N/A	N/A	
Site staff, volunteers & visitors. Vehicles parking; collision with pedestrians crossing the highway between the car park in the village hall and the excavation in the field opposite.	Erect signage to guide people to clearly designated parking areas. Erect roadside signage to alert road traffic to potential hazards ahead; inform all volunteers and visitors of potential dangers; site staff to escort groups across the highway.	5	1	5	None	N/A	N/A	

\* Click [here](#) for guidance in calculating Risk Rating. Rate the **severity** of the potential harm (between 1-5, where 5 is fatal) and the **likelihood** of the harm occurring (again 1-5 where 5 is very likely). Guidance is at [HS 004](#).

Please now pass this assessment to your manager for approval				
<b>Name of assessor's manager:</b>		<b>Date:</b>		<b>Manager's comments</b>
<b>Signature:</b>				

## VOLUNTEER EMERGENCY CONTACT DETAILS

VOLUNTEER DETAILS			
Name		Date of Birth	
Address		Telephone number	
Any health issues we should be aware of			
EMERGENCY CONTACT DETAILS			
Name		Relationship to volunteer	
Daytime telephone no.			

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EMERGENCY CONTACT DETAILS			
Name		Relationship to volunteer	
Daytime telephone no.			

## VOLUNTEER EVALUATION FORM

Had you been on an excavation before this one?
Did you learn something new at the dig? Please give an example.
Would you go on a dig again? If not, why not?
Were you given enough training and supervision?
Do you have any other comments? (Please continue on the back if necessary)
Would you like to remain on the volunteer mailing list?