

DIG Survivor

Preparing for your first project

Guide 31



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Preface

Deciding what to take, what to remember and when to do it can be a struggle for many people about to embark on their first archaeological project, whether it is close to home or across the world.

This guide is designed to give you the basics - with a short checklist at the back to print out and use.

Remember that every project will be slightly different, and have specific requirements depending on the time of year, the type of work and the area you are going to work in.

Always ensure you know what they need, as this guide can't be absolute or comprehensive. However, read it, remember the rules and make sure you prepare in plenty of time. Good luck and enjoy yourself.

This Guide was created with the aid of Past Horizons, Adventures in Archaeology website <http://www.pasthorizons.com> who also provide a range of quality archaeological equipment and can send anywhere in the world the tools you may need.

Cheap tools don't last... always consider quality first.

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Introduction

The number of archaeological projects accepting students and volunteers seem to be on the increase. If it is your first time away on a dig you will need to know what to prepare for. So, take the stress out of your life and read this short guide which includes a checklist at the end.

Most good projects will provide the information you need so it is vital that you read it well in advance. This will give you plenty of time to purchase any required equipment (remember you will not be popular if you have to keep borrowing other peoples equipment), and to organise any special medical requirements that you need to observe such as obtaining a particular type of malaria tablet and getting any necessary jabs.



Travel

Book your travel tickets well in advance. This means you may benefit from any special offers available on flights, trains and buses. Do not leave this to the last minute as you might find there are no seats available on the day that you need to travel or the prices have gone up.

Find out how you will reach your destination and check carefully if the route is feasible. Looking at googlemaps (www.google.maps.com) to scout ahead is a very good idea and print out copies of any maps that you might need so you just can't get lost. Obtain the contact phone number of the project director in case you need help and of course the address of the dig camp location.

Travel insurance is vital if you are going any further than a local dig. Shop around for the best deal but make sure it covers your particular needs.

Remember the essentials, and leave plenty of time to acquire them if you need to:

- 1) Passport
- 2) Visa
- 3) Money
- 4) Insurance

Facilities

Accommodation can vary greatly from tents or cabins to hotels. Often, access to a decent shower is restricted or in a few cases practically non-existent and toilets facilities will be extremely varied depending on your location. So, it is best to be aware of what to expect and check with the project what facilities are available.

Remember, if you don't think that you will be able to cope with basics conditions there is no point in signing up to such a project. You will only make yourself and the others around you miserable and uncomfortable.

Sleeping arrangements can often be basic and communal. Find out if you are required to bring your own tent and what sort of bedding you will need to bring with you.

Most likely you will be asked to bring a sleeping bag or blanket, but never take more than you have to – check first.

Clothing and Packing



The choice of clothing you decide to take will depend on your geographic location and time of year. Without being too proscriptive there are some basic ground rules to follow.

On-site work gear should be comfortable yet robust and remember your clothes will get dirty so do not wear your best outfit. Cargo pants or combat trousers take a lot of punishment and have lots of useful pockets. In addition, a sturdy pair of boots is essential and you may even be asked for ones with steel toe caps. Always remember to break in your boots in advance of the project to avoid the discomfort of blisters.

Whatever country you find yourself in it makes sense to take a hat to protect against the effects of sun or rain. You should also consider protecting the back of your neck from the sun. It is quite possible to get heatstroke or sunburn in Scotland as it is in the Sahara.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should be provided by the organising group however, bring your own kneeling mat or knee pads and don't forget a good pair of gloves which will protect your hands from cuts and blisters.

Don't go overboard on the packing as you will live to regret it. Travel light if possible and give some considerable thought to the items that you want to take. Firstly, lay your clothes on your bed and pick two sets for work wear and two sets to relax in (one of which you can wear on the way there). Pack a week's worth of socks and underwear. Whatever the weather take long sleeved tops as they provide most protection in all conditions.

Evenings and early mornings may be chilly even in hot countries, so take a sweater or fleece. After deciding on the absolute essentials you will know what room there is for some luxuries such as a book, an mp3 player, an old mobile phone and some of your favourite sweets.

Pack any important personal items in your hand luggage, such as medicines, basic toiletries and camera just in case your hold luggage gets lost or delayed. Items such as pocket knives, trowels, and batteries should never be carried in hand luggage – as they may be taken off you if travelling by air.

Toiletries

Do not go overboard on toiletries. You will need a toothbrush and toothpaste, soap, shampoo and roll-on antiperspirant. Feminine sanitary products can be hard to find in some remote areas so take a good supply. Some Norwegian Hand Cream (or similar) is always good to help with sore rough hands after a hard days digging and most importantly take good sun block and after sun lotion.



Dig Equipment

The basic set of equipment to take to a project depends on location and what level of input is expected of you. If you are serious about archaeology even if it is only for a yearly two or three week project, then consider buying your own kit, as it becomes personal to you. The basics found below in the packing for projects equipment section will enable you to dig, draw, record and measure.

Each project will have its own specific requirements, so you should read carefully what you are expected to bring.

Never leave this to the last minute. Most of what you need can be purchased from the Past Horizons online tool store: <http://www.pasthorizonstools.com>

Health

Arrange a visit to your medical centre and get advice about the location you are travelling to. For example, malaria can be a big risk in some places so please take advice and get the right tablets for the right country. Check that your tetanus jab is up to date as it is a mandatory requirement on most sites now.

Be aware of all the potential risks involved in field work. As with most outdoor activities you can find yourselves in weather conditions that may range from blistering hot sun to pouring rain. However, there are other risks to your health whilst working on a site.

These are some of the more common ones to be aware of and with a bit of care you can avoid most of them, but be prepared with your medical kit just in case. This guide cannot recommend any type of medication so it is important you seek professional medical advice as appropriate to treat the ailments below.

- Heat stroke
- Sunburn
- Dehydration
- Insect bites
- Scratches or cuts
- Exhaustion and muscle fatigue
- Blisters on hands or feet
- Chafing
- Sprained wrist
- Back pain
- Food poisoning
- Diarrhoea





Basic Site Safety

Working on a project can make you feel like you are on holiday and yes you are there to enjoy yourself, however, remember that there are issues of health and safety that need to be observed on any archaeological site. It is important to wear appropriate clothing to protect yourself from both the weather and any equipment you may be using. Wearing flip-flops while shovelling for example will eventually end up in an injury.

There should always be a tool talk at the beginning of any excavation where the proper use of equipment is explained. Listen carefully and ask questions if you do not understand. Inappropriate use of tools can hurt both yourself and others. A responsible project will have a risk assessment which is designed to highlight the potential dangers and how they have been mitigated against. The **British Archaeological Jobs Resource** (BAJR) has provided a guide called **Working Safe on Archaeology Projects** and can be downloaded here: tinyurl.com/y9kzcmh

The Basic Rules are:

- 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

Checklist

Travel and Money Preparation:

- Travel tickets
- Visa
- Passport
- Maps and directions and phone numbers
- Travel Insurance
- Money
- Appropriate jabs and malaria tablets
- 3 photocopies of all relevant travel, insurance and passport documents

Packing for Projects - essentials:

- Functional shirt / long sleeved T-shirt and trousers (military or Cargo)
- Well-treaded boots (steel toe-capped optional) – check with the project
- Water-proof jacket (and trousers) – depending on the project
- Hat / Bandana
- Socks (a week's supply)
- Underwear (a week's supply)
- A full set of clothes for evenings and days off (also useful when washing dig clothes!)
- Mug for tea breaks
- Maglite torch or similar
- Spare batteries (re-chargeable if possible and charger)
- Small Penknife with scissors (never carry in hand luggage)
- An international electrical socket adaptor
- Travel plug
- Small sewing kit
- 4 large safety Pins
- 5 metres of string

Medical Kit and Toiletries:

- Sun block and after sun lotion
- Hand-wash (wipes)
- Small First Aid Kit
- Any essential medication you require (notify the project of any medical condition you may have – so this does not come as a surprise to them)
- Insect repellent
- Spare toilet roll
- Re-hydration sachets
- Water purification tablets
- Basics (Soap, Shampoo, Roll-on Deoderant, Toothpaste and brush)

Checklist

Equipment – check with project for any other requirements:

- WHS 4" archaeologists' pointing trowel (or similar)
- Gloves or padded palm fingerless gloves
- 5 metre hand tape
- Kneeling mat or knee pads
- Mechanical Pencil
- Eraser
- Ruler
- 2 x biro pens
- Small notebook
- Foldback clips
- Large ziplock bags
- Water bottle
- Small rucksack or shoulder bag
- Compass
- Camera
- Spare memory card for camera

Always check with the project for a full kit list.

Packing for Projects - Suggestions:

- Mp3 or similar with headphones – for a bit of downtime
- A Book (remember you can swap with other people)
- Old mobile phone. Purchasing a SIM card in destination will usually make your calls cheaper
- Sweets, biscuits or favourite spread like marmite
- A swimming costume/trunks
- Flip flops
- Address book
- For some more exotic locations, having some pens and paper will be welcomed by the local children. If you are going to be meeting adults, then think of a small gift. (ask the Site director if it is appropriate - a small hard to find gift can open many doors)
- Travel chess/backgammon/scrabble or similar (no batteries required!)

Last of all... pack your excitement. This will be something to enjoy, and if you are prepared before you go, then you won't worry you have forgotten something

Archaeology is also about fun and meeting people from around all different places and backgrounds, like the **Rampart Scotland Fieldschool** (below)

Why not investigate all the sites from around the world to in your neighbourhood that you can get involved with.

- <http://www.pasthorizons.com/worldprojects/>
- <http://www.archaeological.org/fieldwork/>
- <http://www.projects-abroad.co.uk/volunteer-projects/archaeology/>
- <http://digs.bib-arch.org/>

