

THE ROMANCE OF ARCHAEOLOGY

Shawn Haley

In 1980, Indiana Jones and *Raiders of the Lost Arc* hit North American Theaters. Other movies soon followed. After the debut of Indiana Jones, archaeology departments at all universities saw enrollment increases of from 10 to 50 percent. Apparently, the movies sparked a renewed interest in all things prehistoric. Newcomers to the field cite all kinds of reasons for their interest. However, a single theme runs through ALL of them - **ROMANCE**. Thanks to Hollywood, a mere mention of the word “archaeology” conjures images of romance ... adventure ... exotic places ... excitement ...handsome men ... beautiful women. You couldn’t help but feel that way; the movies introduced us to far away places filled with untold riches - treasures from a time long ago.

The plots were all different BUT the movies all had at least two things in common:

No one ever went to the bathroom

and

The heroes never took a shower or changed clothes

Of course, movies have had a profound effect on the public’s awareness of archaeology. Equally, however, the adventure movies also created a distorted view of the science - by instilling it with a false romantic air.

I once saw a bumper sticker that I did not understand at the time. It read:

Archaeologists are the Cowboys of Science

Actually, it took a few years before I arrived at a satisfactory interpretation of that statement. I guess I had to

understand cowboys first. A cowboy lives and works outside the main stream of society - spending long hours on his own in the middle of nowhere. He is self-sufficient, actually preferring the solitude and isolation of the range. The archaeologist is similar in type. If he isn't out 'in the field' surveying or excavating sites far from other people, he's tucked away in a tiny laboratory cleaning, cataloguing, and studying his finds. In public, he is shy, retiring...the sort of person who would not be noticed at a party. He prefers it that way. He is far more interested in what is going on inside his head than he is in what is going on around him. He is comfortable with himself and that makes him difficult to live with. I know a lot of archaeologists - few of them are married. Almost all of them live alone. Spouses can't compete with the visions of past cultures that fill the archaeologist's mind.

If he isn't doing archaeology, he's talking about it. Some of my best work has come out of conversations over coffee. Researchers attend conferences not to listen to papers - no - They go to corner cohorts and bounce ideas and theories off them. If you ever get an opportunity, do some eavesdropping in a university cafeteria. You'll be able to identify the archaeologists as soon as you hear them. Most students will be talking about girls, ... Or guys, parties, cars, sports or they'll be complaining about some aspect of the university's administration. Archaeology students, on the other hand, will be deep in debates about seriation, taphonomic filtering, and research designs.

Archaeologists are indeed a breed apart. It takes a very special person to become an archaeologist. He or she must possess several qualities not found in ordinary man.

To be an archaeologist, one must be endowed with enormous patience. Some are born with it. Others have to

learn it. Over the years, archaeology students attend endless dull, boring classes on such subjects as soil formation processes, faunal remains, comparative ceramic analysis, statistics, socioeconomic systems and the like. The boredom factor increases as the student progresses through his education. I once took a class called "Advanced Lithic Analysis." It consisted of 5 hours per week of counting little bits of stone and placing them in piles according to color. The most exciting moment in the class came when a debate broke out concerning a bit of rock no bigger than my thumbnail. The opponents in this debate argued about whether it was grayish-brown or brownish-gray. As far as I know, that debate rages on even as I speak.

After so many classes like that, I have arrived at the conclusion that they are designed solely to teach students patience. If you can survive them, you are then equipped to handle any of the mind-numbing jobs necessary in the field. AND BELIEVE ME, you need patience - as much as you can muster.

An example - I worked with a field school on the central coast of B.C. Because it was a field SCHOOL, we were doing everything according to the book - including leaving a 6-inch wall between excavation units. These walls are photographed and drawn when the pit, or excavation unit, is done. Then and only then, these wall sections are excavated. The cultural deposit at this site was deeply buried and all of our units were being dug to a depth of 6 or 7 feet.

On the third day of the excavation, one of the students discovered a beautifully flaked spearhead at a depth of about 9 inches below surface. Actually, he found HALF of it. It was broken and the broken edge just touched the wall between his unit and his neighbors. (I remind you that this wall could

not be touched until the rest of the unit was excavated). Everyday, that student had to resist steam shoveling through his unit so he could get to his wall - AND the other half of his spearhead. He progressed at the necessarily slow rate - a snail's pace - carefully excavating each level, inch by inch down to a full 7 feet. Every day, for six weeks, he talked about the wall and its treasure. He learned a great deal about patience that summer.

Finally, the big day arrived. Carefully, almost with reverence, he troweled the wall - millimeter by millimeter. Can you imagine his disappointment? The missing half of his spearpoint is still missing. His wall was completely empty of artifacts.

That brings us to the second attribute a budding archaeologist must have - a sense of humor. You must be able to laugh at yourself - long and loud. After all, you have CHOSEN to spend your life digging square holes in the ground using mason's trowels, dental picks and paint brushes.

Fate is always playing cruel tricks on us. A friend, working in southwest Texas once called a news conference to announce the "Find of the Century". He told reporters, as they toured his site, that he and his crew had found an early man (Paleo-Indian) site undisturbed for over 10,000 years. He showed them the spot where the concentration of artifacts had been unearthed. As cameras clicked and whirred, his crew, still excavating in the same area, unearthed the remarkably well preserved roof of a 1956 Volkswagen Beetle. The bug was located roughly 6 inches BELOW his 10,000-year-old site.

Headlines read:

'PREHISTORIC VOLKSWAGEN FOUND'

and

‘BEFORE THE HORSE THERE WAS THE BEETLE’

My friend is still in Texas and is still searching for the elusive early man site. He loves to tell visitors about his mercifully short moment of glory but only AFTER he’s had a few drinks.

Despite setbacks such as these, my friend kept on going. He exhibits a trait typical of archaeologists. He is possessed. The good archaeologists are preoccupied with all things prehistoric - to the point of obsession. They live and breathe prehistory. A former professor of mine is typical. All winter, he taught archaeology, analyzed artifacts, and wrote reports. Every summer, he was in the field collecting more information. He was always busy. His wife got after him to take a vacation - “Take a summer off.” She said. He eventually agreed. After a time, he was even enthusiastic about it. He insisted on planning a three-month camping vacation for him and his family. His wife was pleased until she discovered what he was doing. That summer, they traveled to every single archaeological excavation project in western North America, spending 2 or 3 days at each one. When he arrived at mine, near the end of the summer, they were barely on speaking terms. I don’t think he noticed though. He and I sat together talking about the site from early morning until early morning.

As I understand it, the next year, his wife put her foot down. She forced him into a 2-week vacation to England. She refused to let him have anything to do with the arrangements. I can imagine her dragging him off kicking and screaming to the airport.

As a concession to him, I suppose, she agreed to visit the British Museum early in the trip. Mistake. He struck up a conversation with one of the resident archaeologists there. He spent the remainder of the trip locked in the resident's lab playing with Bronze Age stuff. I think the professor and his wife are now divorced. The story does have a happy ending though. The Prof. now has an exchange program going with the British Museum. He spends his summers in England.

Hand in hand with obsession goes curiosity. Like a little child, an archaeologist finds enormous delight in little things. He has to know all about everything - particularly if it has anything to do with prehistory. That, of course, gives him a lot of leeway as all things in the great outdoors relate somehow. For example, a native friend told me how rabbits, just before they turn, flatten their ears against their heads. Later, I was researching a paper on small game hunting in prehistoric times. My curiosity got the better of me. I grabbed two colleagues, camping gear and a truck. We three headed into the bush for a weekend of rabbit hunting. I had to see if ear flattening preceded turning. For 2 full days, we chased little bunnies. Every time we saw little ears go down, we leaped, throwing ourselves to the ground one way or the other. We figured we had a 50/50 chance of landing on a rabbit. We didn't worry that we also had a 50/50 chance of feeling stupid as we lay face down in the dirt, grass, brush or whatever while the rabbit hopped off in the opposite direction.

That weekend, we proved to ourselves that bunnies do flatten their ears against their heads just before they turn. We felt triumphant. We soon forgot about feeling stupid AND feeling pain when you missed. The pain came in when you threw yourself into the arms of a tree or onto sharp rocks. The worst moment came when one of my cohorts almost drowned. He was intent on one particular rabbit. He, my

friend, almost had 'em too. Would have got him if it weren't for the tree that jumped into his path. It slammed into him. He rolled to the side and over a low cliff into about 4 feet of water. He stayed down for quite a while. Finally, he popped up, sputtering and howling with glee. When he calmed down, he let us in on the joke. He'd seen the tree coming. He said it reminded him of his ex-wife. That image had distracted him long enough to prevent him from avoiding a head-on with the tree.

Yes, we discovered that rabbits do flatten their ears before turning. We also found out that beer at lunch makes afternoon bunny hunting dangerous work.

I have to tell you of another example of archaeological curiosity. A famous Canadian archaeologist tells of a trip to the shores of Hudson Bay. There, he was walking along what is known as a cobble beach. On this kind of beach, there is no sand, only rounded cobbles and pebbles ranging in size from robins' eggs to baseballs. There are a lot of holes on a cobble beach - It is porous. Anyway, as he walks, he pulls a small magnifying glass from his pocket. With it comes a quantity of change, most of which clatters to the ground. An inspection of the surface turns up a single quarter. He gets curious. He knows the coins have slipped down between the stones and he wonders how deep could the coins go.

To satisfy his curiosity, he sets up a grid and starts excavating. (Like any self-respecting archaeologist, he had his gear with him. Mine's in the trunk of my car). He remained at that spot for 2 days patiently digging pebble by pebble. Did you know that dimes could, on that kind of beach, slip between stones and work their way down to a depth of about 5 feet below the surface? He eventually published a paper on the porosity of cobble beaches.

I know that most archaeologists are poor ... And cheap ... But I like to think curiosity prompted the above digging rather than stinginess.

Imagination. You have to have an imagination. We dig prehistoric sites, collecting bits of pottery, fragments of stone tools, tiny pieces of charcoal and bone - plus enormous quantities of written notes and photographs. From that chaotic collection, we first try to decipher what was going on at that site. Then, we expand it - or try to expand it to develop a picture of what was happening in the region throughout prehistory. We want to discover how the people lived in the past. To get there takes a lot of imagination - I suppose you could call it intuition, but that's so ... So unscientific.

About 6 years ago, I had an opportunity to work at an early man site in Banff National Park. It was an incredible site with deposit on top of deposit. It was a deep site but amazingly, there was animal bone preserved near the bottom. We got a date on that bone of about 11,000 years. There was another cultural deposit below the dated one - making it older than 11,000 years. The deposit was weird.

It consisted of several piles of stone flakes arranged in a semi-circle. In 2 or 3 places, the flakes seemed to fill little pockets below the level of most of the flakes. All of us on the project knew there was something significant here - but what?

I played with the site maps for weeks. I ran all kinds of scenarios through my mind. One day, it hit me. We were seeing the outline of a house structure - a circular dwelling. The flakes had been stored along the inside walls. Some had fallen into the holes left when the house posts rotted away.

I announced my theory. It was accepted immediately. Once

pointed out, it was obvious. However, without a vivid imagination, the link between scattered piles of stones and a house would never have been made.

Imagination. Countless times in the field, I've heard archaeologists say: "If I were a prehistoric Indian, I'd camp right here!" In almost every case, there'd be a site right where the speaker stood.

I'm sure you've heard of people sacrificing everything for their art. Archaeologists are willing to suffer incredible hardships to gain that little piece of information - to investigate prehistoric remains in unlikely places. In my time, I've faced blizzards, bears, wild dogs and other hazards.

In 1972, I was working with an Ontario archaeologist. He and I were surveying the shores of a small river near Thunder Bay by canoe. It was early June and the forest was coming alive. As we approached a bend that doubled as the outlet of a small lake, we heard a deep hum. The very air was vibrating. It was like nothing we'd ever heard before. It made my skin crawl but we pressed on. Rounding the bend, we saw something I shall never forget. The lake, which measured roughly a mile by a half-mile, was completely covered by a cloud of black flies. The cloud was over a hundred feet thick and so dense, no light penetrated to the water's surface. We got the hell out of there. Small swarms of black flies have been known to drive animals - and people - crazy in a matter of moments...And this was the granddaddy of all swarms. We calculated that there had to be at least a trillion of the little black monsters (That's a one followed by 12 zeroes). I'd sooner tackle a family of grizzlies.

Archaeologists take deprivation in stride. What other people would live in a primitive tent camp with no amenities

whatever for 12 to 16 weeks at a time? Showers were of the outside wet and cold kind. Food came from cans and the occasional self-caught fish. Picture if you will, a camp so wet that everyone wakes up an hour early to turn on a Coleman lantern in their tents so when the time came to climb out of the sleeping bags your clothes weren't cold and damp - They were warm and DAMP. I've just described a typical field camp on the Pacific coast where rainfall in one day often exceeds the total for a year anywhere else.... And people VOLUNTEER to go there every year, even though they know what to expect.

I can recall setting out on a Friday afternoon survey of an island in the Mackenzie River. We were dropped off by helicopter at noon. We were supposed to be picked up around suppertime. Note I said, "supposed to be"... The chopper pilot, going off shift at 4:00, forgot to brief the incoming crew. The company didn't notice our absence until our pilot returned to work Monday morning. A six-hour survey turned into a 70 hour maroon. We were a bit miffed at the time but we found 2 sites. We probably would have missed one if we'd gone home when we were supposed to.

So far, I've spoken in generalities ... tried to describe what you need to be an archaeologist. Although many archaeologists share the characteristics I've talked about, there is no "typical archaeologist". Each one is different. Each one is human. It seems that many of them are somewhat eccentric - perhaps as a result of what they've been through. Many of those I've met over the years have left impressions on me. I'd like to take a few minutes to tell you about some of them:

Mike. I met him in 1978 when he and I were both doing research in northern Peru. Mike was a curator/researcher for a major U.S. museum. I was a lowly graduate student. During

that summer, there were 10 or 12 archaeologists from North America in Trujillo - working on a variety of projects. Mine was in the mountains. Mike's project was one valley to the south. Every second Saturday, we all met in an apartment in the city to play cards. Mike told everyone to be there. We were all there. He had that much clout.

Before I go on, I have to explain something. When we played poker, we played for kernels of corn. Ten kernels equaled one Peruvian solle. At that time, 200 solles equaled a U.S. dollar - 190 equaled a Canadian dollar. Therefore, it took 19-20 kernels of corn to equal a penny. So, although we were playing for corn, we were playing for peanuts.

As I said earlier, Mike arranged our gaming evening. He was kind of a stuffed shirt...liked to be called 'sir', if you know what I mean. So, I figured he'd gathered us together to worship him or something. I was wrong. At these parties, he was relaxed, friendly - He had a great sense of humor.

As near as I could figure, he only had one serious fault. He HATED losing. He HAD TO WIN any game he played. I can't say he was a sore loser because I never saw him lose. You see - he cheated. He always cheated...every single hand. He wasn't skilled at dealing from the bottom of the deck or keeping cards up his sleeve. Nothing fancy. He simply stole cards from the deck when he thought no one was watching. Or he declared he had the winning hand then wouldn't let anyone see it. Not that anyone ever asked to see it. When he was the dealer, he'd deal everyone seven cards and give himself a dozen.

Throughout each evening, he'd rake in the corn and chuckle to himself. He figured he was pulling one over on us...but we ALL knew he was cheating. No one ever said

anything to him though. It wasn't worth it. First of all, his cheating never cost me more than 20 cents a night - AND I was the big loser. Second, Mike was all-powerful. His position in the archaeological hierarchy allowed him complete control over who did field work in Peru. To confront him with his cheating was to end your career as a South American archaeologist.

Archaeology, the realm of the 'rugged individualist', is markedly tolerant as a whole. Weakness, idiosyncrasies and personal foibles are easily forgiven - AS LONG AS THE WORK YOU DO IS FIRST RATE.

Roberta is a good example. Nobody could match her skill at mapping. And when she wrote about a site, it came alive on the page. Yet, to work with her was a trying experience. The lady was deadly serious ALL THE TIME.

Bert worked with 2 other women on a regular basis. They dressed alike - hiking boots, blue jeans, T-shirts and army jackets. They looked alike too - long hair in braids and sour expressions on their faces. In all the time I knew Bert and her girls, they never once smiled. They would attack a project with incredibly efficiency. They were all business from sunup to sun down, shunning all attempts at social contact. Say hello to Roberta and get an acid glare in return. Try to talk to one of the team and Bert'd bite your head off - ordering you in no uncertain terms to leave "her crew" alone - That order was usually accompanied by invectives and obscenities that'd make a Marine sergeant blush.

Roberta was a nasty person. She drove her crew into the ground. She was a machine, with no interests in 'live' people at all. But as I said, archaeology is tolerant.

Then there was Bill. He was an arctic archaeologist, working in the far north - the land of the polar bear. He, unlike Bert, had a sense of humor and enjoyed life. Unfortunately, he was a temperamental s.o.b. One moment, he'd be joking and laughing with you. The next minute, he'd be angry with you. No matter how hard you tried, you still pissed him off somehow. In the south, it didn't really matter. Wait a few moments and he'd be buddy-buddy again. However, in the arctic, it was imperative you stayed on his good side. You see, his project area coincided with the largest concentration of polar bears in the north. Every year, he took 2 students with him on a survey project that required each member of the team to head off in a different direction, reconvening at the base camp in the evening. He also took 2 high-powered rifles with him as protection from the bears.

Well, Bill always kept one of the rifles with him. That left one rifle and 2 students. If, for some reason, it was your turn in the doghouse, you found yourself out on the tundra without any protection AT ALL. Rather than do archaeology, you spent the whole day looking over your shoulder, expecting to be eaten at any moment.

For some reason, the West Coast has more than its share of eccentric archaeologists. I can think of two that stick out.

Norm acquired the handle "the flying Swede" because of his total lack of coordination. He is the only person alive who can have an accident while standing perfectly still. He is a natural born klutz with a capital K. Lucky for him, he's made of rubber. I've seen him dust himself off and walk away from a fall that would've killed an ordinary mortal.

Norm is a big, bulky man with an infectious smile - a great guy - but a danger to all around him. Give him an idea

or a task and it's full speed ahead - without regard for the consequences. The consequences were usually dire. For example, on a quest for firewood, Norm chainsawed a large tree then stood and watched as it fell on top of him.

One day, he was told to survey a transect - a straight line - through the coastal rainforest. His instructions were to follow the line (a compass direction) for 3 miles. He did it. Unfortunately, the land ran out at 2 1/2 miles. He walked through a grove of trees and off the edge of a cliff - 25 feet straight down into the Pacific Ocean.

When we found him, a considerable time later, he was still floating in the water. Aside from being a bit cold, he was unhurt.

He suffered quite a bit from the damp cold of the rain forest. One night, he resorted to an old Indian trick to keep warm. He dug a pit roughly grave size. In the bottom, he built a fire. When it burned down to coals, he covered the fire with branches and filled the hole with sand. In minutes, the sand was warm. Norm curled up in his sleeping bag on top of the sand. His snores could soon be heard echoing off the mountains. Those snores turned to screams as his sleeping bag burst into flames. He hadn't put quite enough sand on top of the fire.

The flying Swede is MOST famous for some spectacular aerial and aquatic acrobatics. We had a small boat (18') with a 40-horse outboard on her. The motor was old and cranky...so to get it started, it had to be set at full throttle. We tried to keep Norm away from boats of any kind, but this time he got past us. He was going out to our cruiser, moored about 200 yards off shore. Norm climbed into the skiff, released the landline and cranked her up. He neglected to check the gears,

which were set to forward rather than neutral (as it should have been). The engine caught and instantly, the boat shot across the water. Unable to do anything, Norm watched a floating log race towards him. The boat went up - and over the log - throwing first Norm and then the outboard motor into the water.

Somehow, Norm recovered quickly. As if in the wink of an eye, Norm was back in the boat. In his hands was the motor gasping its last gasp. I don't know how he got it and himself back into the boat. How he managed to avoid being cut to ribbons by that prop - who knows?

Norm's aquatic accomplishments pale when compared to Phil's. Phil was known as the "Admiral" or the "Terror of the High Seas" - and not because he was a pirate. He had the papers that said he could skipper the university's 45-foot cabin cruiser. No one else had the permits so he was it - the Admiral of the fleet.

He shared some of the klutzy characteristics with Norm. In addition however, he also held the conviction he was a mechanical genius. On one project, we brought 2 power generators, a water pump and 3 outboard motors that he proudly declared had been serviced by none other than himself. Not one of them ever worked.

He was always setting impossible tasks for himself - convinced that he could carry them out. For example, he decided one day to build a dock for the cruiser near our camp - in the middle of nowhere. All day, he labored over a complex network of logs and chain only to have the incoming tide smash it to bits against the rocks. Remember the log Norm tried to climb with the boat?

Next, he designed a complicated series of anchor and landlines to hold the cruiser steady in the fast waters of Kwatna Inlet. Those lines nearly strangled several people in passing boats before he took them down.

Near the end of our project, Phil got the idea we should move a rock that was in one of our excavation trenches. The rock measured 6 by 4 by 4 feet and probably weighted in at more than 3 tons. The Admiral” said: “Not to worry” and proceeded to set up a somewhat dubious block and tackle arrangement - which he anchored to an enormous tree near the upslope end of our trench. I wanted nothing to do with his scheme so sat off to the side with a cup of coffee. Three others opted to join me. Good thing. Phil wrapped the rock, threaded the pulley and ran the haul lines downslope. The ground surface was wet and slippery so he opted to put the pullers in the trench downhill from the rock and the tree.

The spectacle was hilarious. The admiral stood on the rock and called the cadence. A dozen students pulled on the line. For a long time it was a stalemate...but I'll give the students credit. They got the rock moving. It lifted - 6,7 inches maybe. It hung in the air with the admiral perched on top. Then we heard a load crack and groan. The anchor tree gave way at the roots and fell - right into the trench. It took us coffee drinkers about an hour to dig our compatriots out.

I should tell you something - Norm and Phil are close friends of mine. I like them a lot. However, I had the dubious honor of working with both of them at the same time. For 14 weeks, I shared my life with them on the central coast of B.C. It was an interesting summer. I had to keep one eye on the land (to watch out for Norm) and the other on the sea (to watch for Phil). Danger lurked everywhere. I and the rest of the crew are extremely lucky to have escaped with our lives.

There seems to be some confusion about what an archaeologist does and why. When informing people that I am an archaeologist, I've received responses like: **“That’s great! I’ve always wanted to work in the oil patch.”** OR **“Dinosaurs are SO fascinating.”**

Archaeology is part of a larger social science known as anthropology. Anthropology is, in simplest terms, the study of people - and Archaeology is the study of people IN THE PAST. Archaeologists have a pretty wide time span to study - from when man first appeared on earth (about 4 million years ago) up to the time of recorded history (in his research area). There are prehistoric sites virtually everywhere in the world - from the frozen arctic to the sunny South Pacific islands.

Archaeology is the study of man in the past - anywhere in the world and at any when before the time of recorded history.

The basic aims of archaeology can be summed up as:

We excavate the material remains of past cultures, and through the study of such evidence, attempt to recreate the history of man from his earliest past and to determine the nature of cultural systems at different times and places around the world.

In order to do our job, We have to have some knowledge of the geological and geophysical sciences, the natural sciences, human anatomy, and more, much more ... as each of these areas contributes contribute information to our search for an understanding of man in the past. For example, to understand a hunting/gathering culture from central Alberta of 5,000 years ago, we need to know what plants and animals lived there at that time, what the climate was like at that time, and so on...BEFORE we even start looking at the people.

Some of the things we do in the name of science are great fun. Others are downright gross. Let's try a few examples:

First, let me take you to an excavation. :

As a first step, a grid of stakes and strings is laid out so that the area to be excavated is divided into 2 by 2 meter squares.

Using trowels, dental picks and other implements of destruction, we begin removing the soil slowly and carefully. It has to be done this way. As you dig, you are destroying the site. You **MUST** be able to reconstruct the site on paper when you're done...otherwise, valuable information may be lost. Each artifact, a bit of tool or potshard or bone, is photographed and measured in place. Its exact location in reference to other artifacts, the soils, etc., is crucial.

Some years ago, I dug a site near St. Paul, Alberta. All we got from that site were several hundred pieces of quartz - nothing else. Alone, they told us nothing new. **BUT** adding the observation that some contained pink inclusions while others had yellow inclusions - coupled with the maps we made marking where each little flake of quartz was found and a basic knowledge (learned by experimentation) of how stone tools were made, I was able to describe how **ONE** man sat at this site and made spearpoints (we had 2 broken ones). We could even suggest that he was right handed.

Comparing the spearhead fragments with those from other sites in the area, we dated the site at about 5,000 years. The soils told us the area had been moist - that suggested a marsh or the banks of a small slough. None of the above would have been discovered if we'd simply gathered the artifacts and not kept detailed records of what we found and where.

Back in the lab, all of our finds are processed. Artifacts are cleaned, numbered and examined. Soils samples are tested. Bones (human and animal) are identified. On and on. Charcoal and/or bone is readied for radiocarbon dating. Notes are transcribed. Drawings of unit walls, soil profiles, floor plans are cleaned up and redrawn. The process is virtually endless.

Earlier, I noted that faunal remains, animal bones, were identified in the lab. There is, alas, only one way to do this. The bones must be compared with skeletal material from known animals. A must then is a collection of skeletons from a large number of animals native to your area. How do you get this collection? You can't buy it. You make it. You have to get the animals by hunting, from road kills, from trappers, hunters or whatever. Sometimes you trade with other archaeologists - like baseball cards. I'll trade you 2 skunks and a muskrat for your porcupine.

Once you have the animal, it has to be defleshed - a nice term for a procedure that is nothing but gross. The animal is skinned, gutted, the meat removed as much as possible. It is boiled for several hours and defleshed again. The bones are then placed in a solution containing a powerful enzyme to dissolve any remaining flesh. This stuff is deadly. The smell will turn even a cast-iron stomach. (We never did this step of the process after lunch). Finally, peroxide bleaches the bones and you have your comparative skeleton.

Consider the old saying that "Everyone has at least one skeleton in his closet". Most archaeologists have several - literally.

As you may have guessed, there is too much information for one man to know all. As you progress in archaeology, you tend to focus in more and more on some small part of the field. Your focus may be geographical, chronological or procedural. Let me give you a quick list of some specialties

in archaeology:

Bryan is a ceramic specialist. He works with broken pieces of pottery from Southeast Asia.

Bill is fascinated by big machines -bulldozers, steam shovels, graders, stuff like that and how they can be used in archaeology.

Jim is a botanist. He collects plants everywhere he goes. I have watched him wade chest deep in a swamp to collect a water lily that'd just gone to seed.

Brian spends his days crushing human bones into a fine powder. He's trying to reconstruct prehistoric diets through bone composition. Brian's a big guy and is known to go around singing:

Fe, fi, fo, fum

I smell the blood of an Englishman

Be he live or be he dead

I'll grind his bones to make my bread.

Len is into clamshells.

Chris studies a particular early man culture. He hates to waste time on sites that are too recent. Too recent, too young to him is 8,000 years old.

There are other specialties. Here's a partial list - All items on this list have had at least five years of at least one person's life devoted to it:

frost,

rates of decay of rotting wood,

human teeth,

animal teeth,
hair,
flint quarries,
volcanoes,
prehistoric alcoholic beverages,
native North American jokes.

I hope you are beginning to get a picture of what an archaeologist is. He is a bit out of the ordinary. He is a cowboy of science. It is strangely coincidental that archaeologists and cowboys of the Old West have suffered at the hands of the Hollywood filmmakers. The romantic images created by the film industry distort and hide the true romance of the cowboy and the archaeologist.

It's hard to define romance so I've resorted to the dictionary. Romantic means: visionary, imaginary, and/or having an imaginative or emotional appeal. So then, what is romantic about archaeology?

It certainly isn't the hardships we face - they are simply hard. We live through them because we must. There are never damsels in distress and only rarely are there unscrupulous villains lurking in the shadows. No dramatic background music underscores our research. The majority of our work is routine, mundane, dull, boring - day after day, troweling dirt - day after day of artifact analysis in the lab. No. That can't be it. Only a handful of us ever do archaeology in exotic places - so that doesn't count either.

I will tell you what is romantic about archaeology:

It is sitting on a rock overlooking the Pacific Ocean at

dawn. There is a stillness, a calm interrupted only by the waves lapping the shore and the wind nudging the trees overhead. It is a hot cup of coffee that displaces the morning chill inside you. It is imagining the whaling canoes of thousands of years ago gliding past you on the dawn mists. It is the ghosts of people long dead who bless the forest with peace and solitude. No one can share the Pacific dawn with you but it is a vision carried with you where ever you go - yours to call back whenever you need to recapture the inner calm.

It is watching a big man, a coarse macho-type, ever so gently lift a baby bird, barely the size of the man's thumb, from where it had fallen and return it to its nest.

Romance is dusting the last few grains of sand off an ancient hearth filled with fine white ash and tiny flecks of bone - all that remains of a meal shared by a family long since gone...and for a moment, sharing their life - letting their essence infuse you with a joy of life.

Romance is finding the remains of a young child buried with bright beads and miniature weapons - spearheads in its hand and two knives at its feet. The grief its parents must have felt. The love reflected in the care taken with the tiny grave. Romance is knowing the entire crew feels the same way. There are no jokes, no profanity that day.

Romance is friendship born out of shared tragedy and shared joy. Romance is knowing that a call for help will be answered from all points of the compass. Romance is knowing that the ancient cultures are not dead, as long as you hold them in your heart.

Romance is standing on the shore watching a pod of killer whales slide by the camp. But wait! One breaks from the pod

and swims to your rock. He stops, lifts his head out of the water to look at you. He nods ever so slightly as if to say:

“I know you. You are my brother.

You and I share, learn and grow in this world together. Yes, I know you.”

Silently, he slips back into the sea and is gone.