WHAT DOES AN ARCHEOLOGIST DO?

Are you confused about who can help when you discover an ancient fossil or an arrowpoint? Who can identify that really unusual type of rock you found in the riverbed? Do you think that an archeologist can assist you in each case? Actually, archeologists study traces of the human past, while paleontologists study fossil remains of plants and animals, and geologists examine rocks and landforms for clues to the history of the earth. Still confused about the distinctions? Let's review the following definitions.

Archeologist—a scientist who studies past peoples and cultures by excavating and examining material remains as simple as an arrowpoint or as complex as the ruins of a prehistoric village. Archeologists study ancient cultures as well as recent historic occupations.

Archeologists are interested in animal bones, plant remains, and certain stone materials when these things occur at archeological sites and have a clear relationship to *human* activity. Animal bones that show evidence of hunting or butchering can shed light on what past inhabitants ate and details about the environment they inhabited. So can certain types of plant materials, such as seeds and nutshells. Specific types of stones interest archeologists if they were used for making tools, lining a hearth, or building a structure. Natural features such as rock shelters, caverns, and sinkholes may interest archeologists if they were used or lived in by humans. Since dinosaurs lived long before the first humans, archeologists do not search for or study dinosaur bones.

Paleontologist—a scientist who reconstructs the geologic history of the earth through the study of plant and animal fossils.

Overall, the fossils that are of interest to paleontologists predate human history. Petrified wood, dinosaur bones and tracks, fossil snails and shellfish, and other ancient life forms preserved in stone are objects of interest to paleontologists.

Geologist—a scientist who studies the composition, structure, and history of the earth.

Geologists derive important clues to the history of the earth through the study of rocks, minerals, and geologic features such as volcanoes, underground caverns, escarpments, and other landforms. Fascinating landforms occur in every region of the state and draw the attention of geologists eager to gather more information about Texas' geologic past.

DO YOU WANT TO EXPAND YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF TEXAS ARCHEOLOGY?

Join the Texas Archeological Society (TAS). Members are eligible to participate in the annual summer field school directed by professional archeologists, take part in recording ancient rock art, and attend presentations on the latest archeological research in Texas at the annual meeting each October. TAS members also receive a quarterly newsletter and an annual bulletin.

For membership information, contact the TAS by email, tasinquiries@txarch.org; phone, 210.458.4393; or mail, Texas Archeological Society, c/o Center for Archaeological Research, University of Texas at San Antonio, One UTSA Circle, San Antonio, TX 78249-0658.

Several local and regional archeological societies also offer learning opportunities and a chance to meet with people who share your interests. Contact the Archeology Division for further information, or check out the TAS website, www.txarch.org, for a current list of societies in Texas.

IF YOU NEED ARCHEOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE...

Contact the Archeology Division of the Texas Historical Commission. We have information on a variety of archeological topics and may be able to provide the technical assistance you need. Write, call, or email us at: Archeology Division, Texas Historical Commission, P.O. Box 12276, Austin, TX 78711-2276; 512.463.6096; archeology@thc.state.tx.us.

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