

A DAY IN AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOOL KIT

June 29, 2012 Terry Brock Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2012, Excavation, Expeditions, Historical Archaeology, Surveyarchaeologist, Archaeology, Carabiner, Climbing equipment, education, favorite tools, food, food hot, Michigan, Mountain Hardware Splitter, Science, Technology, then hang equipment, Trowel, Virginia



My day of archaeology is relatively mundane: I spend most of it working on my dissertation, a look into the transition from slavery to freedom on a 19th century plantation in Southern Maryland. While I love my work, I often get the urge to be in the field, particularly with the weather as wonderful as it has been this week. So, I

thought I'd take out my archaeology bag and show you around.

The archaeology bag is more than just a bag with your trowels in it: in many ways it is a reflection of what kind of archaeologist you are. I'm one of those guys who likes to have a tool for everything. I am a gadget man, and I'm always on the lookout for a new tool that could help me be a more effective archaeologist, or to be more helpful in the field.

My bag is a Mountain Hardware Splitter. I particularly like this bag because it is comfortable and rugged, and can hold a great deal of equipment. It was originally designed for mountain climbers to hold their ropes. It has some nifty features on it. My particular favorite is a system of loops at the top of the inside: I use them to attach carabiners to, and then hang equipment from the carabiners. This way, the equipment doesn't bunch up at the bottom of the pack. Instead, it hangs, evenly distributed, throughout the entire pack. Not only does this mean things are easy to get to,

but it also means that the weight is distributed throughout my entire back, making it easier to carry.

Some of my favorite tools include my trowels, which I received during my field school. Some tools I love for their practicality, such as the duct tape or the WD-40 to keep my tools from rusting, or some of the surprises (sham-wows work). Others still tend to be a bit more personal: if you click on the images below, you'll notice that quite a lot of my tool bag is devoted to reducing perspiration (I have a very efficient personal cooling system). Towels, hats, sweat bands, hydration packs...I even carry a bag of salt with my lunch to replenish what I lose.

The tools you carry are also going to reflect where you excavate. I used to dig in Michigan, so foot and hand warmers have become a mainstay in my pack, as have an extra pair of gloves. Now that I'm in Virginia, hydration is the most important part of my kit. In addition to the hydration pack, I typically have two or three water bottles at the ready. A mosquito net has been advantageous in both states.

Safety is also a crucial component of the archaeology bag. Mine includes a tiny first aid kit, sunscreen, a hat, gloves for screening (nails and glass can cut), a reflective vest for roadside or hunting ground survey, and a hard hat (or at least, it did...then my dog chewed it up). Archaeology is a physical activity, and you never know when one of these items might be needed.

Finally, there's lunch. It's important to make sure that you eat an adequate lunch each day, as well as a few snacks throughout. I purchased a lunch bag from Mountainsmith ("The Sixer") that can adequately hold enough food, snacks, and water, to keep me fueled for the day. It easily attaches to my pack via carabiners if necessary, or I can throw it over my shoulder with the strap. I always freeze one of my water bottles to serve as an ice pack. This saves me some room, and I have ice cold water to drink at lunch time. I also love my Mr. Bento: this contraption will keep food hot or cold for up to eight hours. There's nothing like pulling out warm soup at lunch time when you're excavating in frigid temps. The best part about the "Sixer"? It holds exactly six beers for post-excavation relaxing.

Feel free to browse the photos below for a glimpse into my bag of archaeological goodies. You'll probably recognize most of them: we archaeologists are wonderful at the reuse of everyday objects. Click on the link and it will take you to [my Flickr set](#), where I have added notes to the image describing the tools, what they are, and how I use them!