

# ARCHAEOLOGY IS ANTHROPOLOGY

[June 30, 2012](#) [Margie](#) [Community Archaeology](#), [Day of Archaeology](#), [Day of Archaeology 2012](#), [Historical Archaeology](#), [Maritime Archaeology America](#), [anthropologist](#), [Anthropology](#), [Aral Dock](#), [Archaeology](#), [cultural resource management](#), [Dock](#), [Dune](#), [Geography of Michigan](#), [Great Lakes](#), [historian](#), [lake michigan](#), [Leelanau County](#), [Michigan](#), [Northern Michigan](#), [Physical geography](#), [representative](#), [Rumex](#), [Sleeping Bear Dunes](#), [Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore](#), [supervisor](#), [teacher](#), [Traverse City](#), [Underwater archaeology](#), [United States](#)

As a college student, the question of my major and future career ambition is one of those frequently asked questions that I contend with on a daily basis. Very few seemingly understand what it means to study cultural anthropology- that isn't necessarily a value judgement, merely an assessment of my personal experiences. The FAQ takes various forms, but amounts to something like "What are you going to do with that?" or "Oh, so you're going to be a teacher."



*One of the many docks that is part of the inventory of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore*

I must admit that I often ask myself the same question(s), which prompted me to participate in an internship rather than a field school this summer as part of my undergraduate degree requirements. I knew that I had to find something that interested me both as an anthropologist and as a historian.

I ended up working on a project that satisfies both of those requirements. So far

this summer, I have participated in a NAS fieldschool that was held in Traverse City, Michigan and helped other underwater archaeology students with their individual projects. I have attended

various organizational events as a representative of my site supervisor/mentor. But for me, one of the coolest things about this internship is my participation in a complete inventory of the historic docks and piers of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.

Last summer at this time, I was spending the day conducting research on a shipwreck that washed ashore in the same area in late 2010. This summer, I spent the day (once again) doing research. And while the area of historic research is not really in my scope of interest, the information that I found on one of the historic sites is rather fascinating (which for me was rather unexpected). The dock that I am researching is called Aral Dock and is one of many century old docks in the Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore that has all but disintegrated into just pilings. The dock itself was rather homogeneous for the area in both build and use. Cargo such as lumber and agricultural items was loaded and unloaded at the dock and was sent on its way to various ports around the Great Lakes. Aral Dock is not interesting (for me) because of its construction, or materials, or rate of decay; Aral dock is interesting because of the scandal that surrounds it.

Research through local and regional newspapers as well as oral history from residents shows that there was a double homicide on this particular dock, earning it the nickname "Murder Dock". The reason was money related- taxes, specifically- and the murder touched the small agricultural port town in a way that was unexpected for that community. As a student of anthropology and history, this salacious history of an area that is currently considered to be quiet and relaxing for residents and tourists alike is an interesting study in local anthropology.

The area itself was a combination of industrial and agricultural, with the docks acting as a material reminder of how these people once lived and worked. What remains of the historic docks in the area is submerged in varying depths of water, ranging from shoreline depths to fifteen feet. Position fixing has been a chore, especially because of the wave action that is common in this specific bay on Lake Michigan. That is not to say that this experience hasn't been enlightening or enjoyable. I can now say with confidence that I know what it is that I can do with my degree in Anthropology: I want to take what I have learned and apply it the field of historic archaeology, specifically sites that are underwater. Yes, I will likely spend more time in a library, museum, or historical society than I will in the field. I will likely be spending large amounts of time sifting through innumerable amounts of historic photos and oral histories as I did on the Day of Archaeology. But I have come to realize that there is no better way for me to combine my interests in history and human culture than by studying the physical material remains of the people that once occupied the most beautiful place in America.

Plus, my office will have one heck of a view. So, there's that, too.