

PLANES, TRAINS, AND AUTOMOBILES (AND, YES, ARCHAEOLOGY)


July 29, 2013 Andy Dufton Archaeological Media, Day of Archaeology 2013, Digital Archaeology, Excavation, Survey archaeologist, bank account, Istanbul, London, Rome, United States

It's a fitting testament to my current life as an archaeologist and PhD student that I'm writing this post three days late, relying on free wifi from the lounge of a hotel and looking out over the skyline of Istanbul. This is probably the busiest summer of travel of my life. Since mid-May, I've done a circuit from Providence-Canada-Providence-London-Yorkshire-Rome-London-Petra-Rome-Istanbul. I've been involved with survey, with publication, with documentary film-making, and with data-crunching. On Wednesday I'll head down to a site called Labraunda for 4 weeks, before finishing my summer with two weeks at Utica, Tunisia and finally flying back to the US. By the numbers, that's 3.5 months, 7 countries, 3 entrance visas, 11 flights, and I couldn't even guess how many hours spent travelling. My passport is full-up, and by the first week of September I'll be more-than-ready to be home.

When non-archaeologists get excited about our discipline, often the ability to travel to these amazing places is front and centre in the list of 'I'm so jealous...' comments. Rather than talk of the sites themselves – which are incredible – or the experience of these different countries and cultures – which is amazing – I thought I'd use this post to explain why I haven't posted earlier, and to talk a bit about the actual travel itself.



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I think for the most part archaeologists make pretty laissez-faire travellers. Or maybe just I am a laissez-faire traveller. I plan things later than most, including the night before. I probably have more experience dealing with visas, customs and immigration, or travelling with odd materials or equipment. I'm happy to walk around a city with no idea where I'm going, sometimes when I can't speak the local language. I get lost – a lot – and I find my way back again.

This is part of fieldwork for many archaeologists as we criss-cross the globe or our local county looking for the latest dirt on our own research interests. This travel is exhilarating, and exactly the reason I first got excited about a career as an archaeologist. Yet it is also exhausting. It's discomfiting, and it's disorienting. It's lonely, and it's isolating. Living out of a duffel bag for almost four months is hard on my body, it's hard on my bank account, and it's hard on my personal relationships.

This is not a 'woe is me' post, and I don't want to suggest in any way that I'm not always aware of how fortunate I am to have these experiences. Despite all these hardships I love the chance to travel, alone and with my peers, to new places. I love being on site, and I love finding a room in Istanbul with 12hrs notice. However this life isn't suited to everyone. Just because I wouldn't change this for the world, it's worth noting on a Day of Archaeology that the costs of a life of research travel and fieldwork isn't the same as a four month vacation, and I know many friends and family who shudder to think of living with this much uncertainty. I see this as all the more reason to celebrate the diversity of archaeology as a profession, and of archaeologists as people, as demonstrated by the over 300 wonderful posts we've been treated to this year. I'll be thinking of this diversity as I eat dinner on some random terrace in Istanbul, and hope others take the chance to think of this diversity wherever they may be reading this post.