

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES INC. (ONTARIO, CANADA)

July 23, 2013 [ASI Commercial Archaeology](#), [Conservation](#), [Day of Archaeology 2013](#), [Excavation](#), [Finds](#), [Historical Archaeology](#), [Survey Archaeological Services Inc.](#), [CAD](#), [Cultural heritage](#), [Eastern Ontario](#), [GIS](#), [Ontario](#), [Toronto](#), [York](#)

[Archaeological Services Inc.](#) (ASI) is one of the largest archaeological consulting firms in Canada with over thirty years experience in the production and dissemination of knowledge concerning our past. We have over 100 full-time and seasonal [staff members](#) and three offices – two in Toronto and one in Burlington. Our company is divided into separate divisions and here you will find little snapshots about what each field director or division at ASI is doing at the moment. Enjoy!

From Field Director Robb B:

Today I was stripping on site. Now that's not what you think it means. We began stripping/removing the topsoil from our site today in hopes to uncover settlement patterns. We started roughly 20m away from outside the limit of the previously mapped extent of artifacts (as determined by surface artifact scatter or test unit artifact drop-off). As we move northward and closer to the main concentration of artifacts, hopefully we'll find some sort of settlement pattern!



The Gradall machine stripping the topsoil off Robb's site.

From the [Built Heritage and Cultural Heritage Landscape Planning Division](#):

Built Heritage and Cultural Heritage Landscapes is busy this week with projects that are taking place in Downtown Toronto, in the farming communities near Toronto and in a very old and historic area near Niagara Falls. The cultural heritage assessments that we do are a form of archaeology that takes place 'above ground'. Right now, one staff member is working on cultural heritage evaluation of bridges in Eastern Ontario and even managed to find an old bridge in the middle of the bush! Another member of the team is developing a plan for salvaging architectural material from nineteenth-century properties that are slated for removal. Meanwhile, the team near Niagara Falls is exploring ways in which modern infrastructure projects can fit into a landscape that is associated with Canadian heroine Laura Secord and which still contains a number of important historic sites. And, in downtown Toronto a team is looking at how the built heritage of the city can be best preserved; their work will contribute to the establishment of three new heritage conservation districts in the city.



The incredibly talented (and good-looking) Built Heritage team.

From The [Geomatics](#) Team:

Today Blake is overlaying historical maps of Fort York dating back to 1815 and digitizing the buildings and features in Geographic Information System (GIS). This will allow researchers to examine the changes that have occurred at the Fort overtime. It will also aid officials to better protect their hidden archaeological resources should improvements within the fort be planned. Shady is working with CAD files provided by clients in GIS and he is mapping built heritage features and areas that have archaeological potential that could be impacted by different alternates of transit projects. The clients can take Shady's graphics and avoid archaeologically sensitive areas and they can try to ensure that built heritage features are not negatively impacted by future development.

From Field Director Jes:

My crew and I are currently working on a stage three historic site being impacted by a service line associated with a wind turbine. The view is quite nice, with 7 foot corn on one side and a farm with animals on the other. Unfortunately, excavating here is like trying to dig through a rubber tire, but my team is tough and knows how to get things done! Below is a a shot of the crew as well as our monitors from Caldwell, Walpole Island, and Chippewas of the Thames First Nation.



Jes's crew on site beside the cornfields.

From the [Special Projects Division](#):

ASI is also [conducting excavations](#) at Exhibition Place in downtown Toronto at the site of the [East Enlisted Men's Barracks](#) of the New Fort York. Eventually, the exposed foundation of the barracks will be [placed under glass](#) and featured in an entranceway to a new hotel.

In south-western Ontario, ASI is investigating dozens of new sites dating to between six and three thousand years ago in cooperation with Six Nations of the Grand. ASI is also currently documenting the artifact assemblages recovered over the last century from a number of Huron-Wendat ossuaries prior to their return to the earth as part of a large repatriation project planned for later this fall. The [Huron-Wendat Nation](#), the University of Toronto, the Toronto Region Conservation Authority and the Ontario Heritage Trust are jointly participating in the project.

From Field Director Wes:

Our crew (Wes, Nina, Chris, and Kristen) have been excavating the remains of three outbuildings located behind the East Enlisted Mens Barracks at the New Fort Site in Toronto. The foundations of the buildings are partially intact, as are numerous brick and clay drains associated with the buildings. The first photo shows the remains of a brick and limestone structure built overtop of an earlier limestone privy building. It also shows that we are constantly having to battle ground and rain water! The second photo shows the remains of a brick sewer drain later replaced by a clay

drain, both of which are beneath the limestone foundation of what was known as a Cleaning Shed.



The foundations and drain from Wes's site.

From one of the Material Culture Analysts:

I come into our box filled office that I share with two other historic analysts and pull out the collection that I'm currently working on. Each bag full of artifacts is labelled according to its provenience and I work provenience by provenience to lay out each bag's contents and assign a catalogue number to every artifact, and slowly my database grows!



Typical desk of an ASI material culture analyst.

From Field Director Stacey:

We have been working on a stage three pre-contact settlement. So we have been digging a 1x1m unit every 10m in order to determine how large the site is and create a grid of units across the site. When we find a unit with over 100 artifacts we will dig four more units one on each side,

5m away from it. So far we have found lots of pottery, fragments of chert (flint) and animal bone. We have also found evidence of the walls of the houses in the site from post moulds in the ground. Once we finish determining how large the site is, we will begin stage four, block excavation.



Stacey resting in one of her (very deep) 1×1 units!

From the Environmental Assessment Division:

Work continues along the expansion corridor of a major east-west highway north-east of the City of Toronto. Five separate crews are working on everything from test-pitting tree-covered and bug-infested lots to preliminary excavation of pre-contact villages.



One of five crews working on the transportation project east of Toronto.

Environmental Assessment teams are completing work on the sites of future wind turbines. First archaeology, then clean energy!



One of the crews excavating an area for the wind turbine project.

We are also currently excavating a portion of a fourteenth century ancestral Huron-Wendat village north of Toronto. Previously disturbed by road construction, ASI crews will be on site this summer salvaging data resulting from proposed road improvements.

From the TPOK Organizers:

On Thursday, July 25th, ASI hosted its bi-monthly lecture series, Two Pints of Knowledge (TPOK). TPOK started at ASI two years ago and has been a resounding success in drawing large groups of ASI employees out to its bi-monthly lectures. By covering a broad range of topics from lithics and pre-contact ceramics to present-day garbology and historic beer tasting, in an informal, company-sanctioned space, and often lubricated by a beer (or two), TPOK has created a space of learning and socialization within a corporate, CRM environment.



ASI staff and TPOK regulars listening to one of the Thursday evening talks.

The existence of such spaces is paramount to the well-being and sustained ethicacy of the CRM industry at a time when the deadlines placed upon the industry by their clients are making the existence of such events harder and harder to host. As the last line of defense in the daily battle to preserve cultural heritage, it is critical for contract archaeologists to keep up with the

developing methodological and theoretical trends happening within the discipline. While life and bills and a full work schedule get in the way with much of the reading that goes along with the work conducted by our colleagues in university and public sector-based academia, facilitating a lecture series like TPOK allows contract archaeologists to spread much of the research work along them while bringing fellow-minded archaeologists together for open discussion. Thus, not only does TPOK allow for training and education in a socially-friendly format, it creates an open environment so that new conceptions on how best to approach cultural heritage management can emerge. It is our hope that TPOK continues to be a thriving success and that similar venues spring up in other CRM companies to advance the cause of heritage conservation around the world.

From [Laboratory Services](#):

The lab is the entry point for all artifacts that are coming in from the field. We wash, sort, organize and keep track of all the artifacts excavated by ASI crews. Every day is different since we receive such a wide range of artifacts, everything from precontact lithic scatters to nineteenth century urban sites. Being in the lab we have the privilege of seeing the best finds come in from the field as well as discover the secrets of seemingly mundane artifacts. Today we received four bags of artifacts from the New Fort site, more specifically from privies associated with the enlisted men's barracks (see [Wes](#) above).

We also worked on washing, sorting, and cataloguing some artifacts that came from various sites associated with a major east-west highway northeast of the city of Toronto. Two of these sites are villages from the pre-contact era, which include beautiful decorated pottery, pipes and stone tools. We also washed a small 19th century historic surface collection which had some nice decorated ceramics, a pipe stem, some bottle finishes and machine made nails. This surface collection will be analysed and catalogued in the lab, to determine if this site needs to be excavated further.

In order to keep up with all the artifacts that arrive from our 10 field crews we have a partnership with the University of Toronto's Archaeology Centre where we rent a space in their building as well as hire archaeology students to wash artifacts. Right now they're washing a collection from a redware pottery. Because the site includes all the refuse, misfires, and other cast-offs there's a lot to wash!



A collection of pictures taken yesterday in the ASI lab and the U of T lab.

From the Toronto Survey Division:

The Toronto Survey division has recently completed the assessment of a project at the crossroads of two former concession roads in the Region of Peel. The subject property was comprised of a portion of a former landfill site and recently ploughed lands adjacent to a water course along the west perimeter. The former landfill portion of the site was deemed to have no remaining archaeological potential, while the ploughed lands were subject to a pedestrian survey at five metre intervals. Despite careful scrutiny no archaeological finds were discovered.

From Field Director Rob W:

Today our group is focusing on some rolling landscape. We were all thankful for the break in the heat and the rise in the windspeed as we searched for artifacts on the hills and valleys of our long-

standing project. More field crews working on site together meant time for catching up on projects from across Ontario. Nothing improves the work day like running into old friends in a familiar place.



Rob W's crew, Kiara's crew and Jes' crew working together on a slope!

If you would like to learn more about our most famous projects and artifacts, visit our website [here](#).

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Thanks for stopping by!