

DAY OF ARCHAEOLOGY AT SUSTAINABLE ARCHAEOLOGY

July 11, 2014 Rhonda_Bathurst Curation, Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2014, Digital Archaeology, Environmental Archaeology, Museum Archaeology, Public Archaeology Archaeology, Canada, Collections, McMaster University, Research, Sustainability, University of Western Ontario

Hi! I am Dr. Rhonda Bathurst, Facility Manager here at [Sustainable Archaeology: Western](#). Kira Westby is our Administrative Assistant. Together we'll be sharing what a general day is like here at our state-of-the-art research and curation facility!



Left to right: Rhonda, chained to her desk for the day (Halloween 2013), and Kira, celebrating a delivery of packing foam at the facility (winter 2014)

Sustainable Archaeology: Western is an off-campus facility of the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, Canada under the Direction of Dr. Neal Ferris. Together with our partners at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, we consolidate archaeological collections from across Ontario both physically in our two repositories, and (perhaps more importantly) digitally, in our web-based database. To learn more about the particulars of Sustainable Archaeology – our funding bodies, mandate, policies, and more, be sure to [visit our website](#).

As a relatively new facility (we have existed as an actual building for only three years this September), there are still a number of daily challenges to meet, from administering the grant that funds the project, to purchasing and maintaining equipment for our labs. We are also developing policies and protocol for managing over 80,000 boxes of artifacts that our project will physically curate between both facilities. One of our current areas of focus is the development of our informational platform. We have four staff members on site on any given day, three of who spend most of their day on database development – including Kira, who wears several hats around here! We also have four work study students and a broad array of researchers, grad students and others who filter through our doors on a daily basis – we'll introduce you as they drop in!

Administration

As an Archaeologist, my background informs decisions that are made here in regards to equipment, space utilization, and research opportunities. But Administration is my day-to-day. I start each day by going over the daily and weekly calendar with Kira – we discuss what appointments to expect and what our goals are for the week. Today we've got a lot on the agenda! First we'll need to go through our email, and then prepare for a work study orientation session. We'll have to watch for a grad student who will be coming in to do some research on the microCT scanner. Our 3D scanning & printing Lab Technician, Nelson, will be in today as well working on setting up mounting methods for the white-light laser scanners up in our Research Mezzanine. We'll need to keep an eye out for Western Facilities Management and Western ITS, both of whom will be in to install an additional power outlet and network connection in our Collaboration Room in preparation for our new Videoconferencing equipment that will be delivered in a few weeks. I have a Purchase Order I need to submit today for some new computer furnishings and a vendor I need to speak to about setting up a proactive pest monitoring system for the storage area. There are two meetings I have to schedule with other Administrators in the Western Support Services Building to discuss the ongoing administration of our grant funds. Kira will likely squeeze in some temperature and humidity readings, as she does every other week, to monitor the conditions of our storage room. I'll need to remind the cleaning service that we are due for our quarterly window cleaning. And at some point, I will need to finish up some vacuuming around the facility. If we're lucky, we'll spy some deer in the ravine from our Collaboration Room. Those are some of the things we are aware of as we start the day, but each day brings new developments. On the surface, it all seems to have little to do with archaeology, but without these tasks, this facility would cease to be or to function.

Database Development

For over 2 years, the database crew have started their day working on code. As we enter our final stages of beta testing, the focus now is on tweaking the small things such as the layout of the online data entry forms, wording, even colours. We have a number of volunteers working with the database crew to test functionality and work-flow both in-house and externally. Today the focus of attention is on developing a tagging system for boxes in our inventory management, and solving coding bugs that have appeared in our data entry sections. Later in the day, our Facility Director, Dr. Neal Ferris will meet with the database development team to go over issues and questions arising over the last week. On the agenda – user interface, managing loans, and edits to the variables recorded for artifacts.

Work Study Students

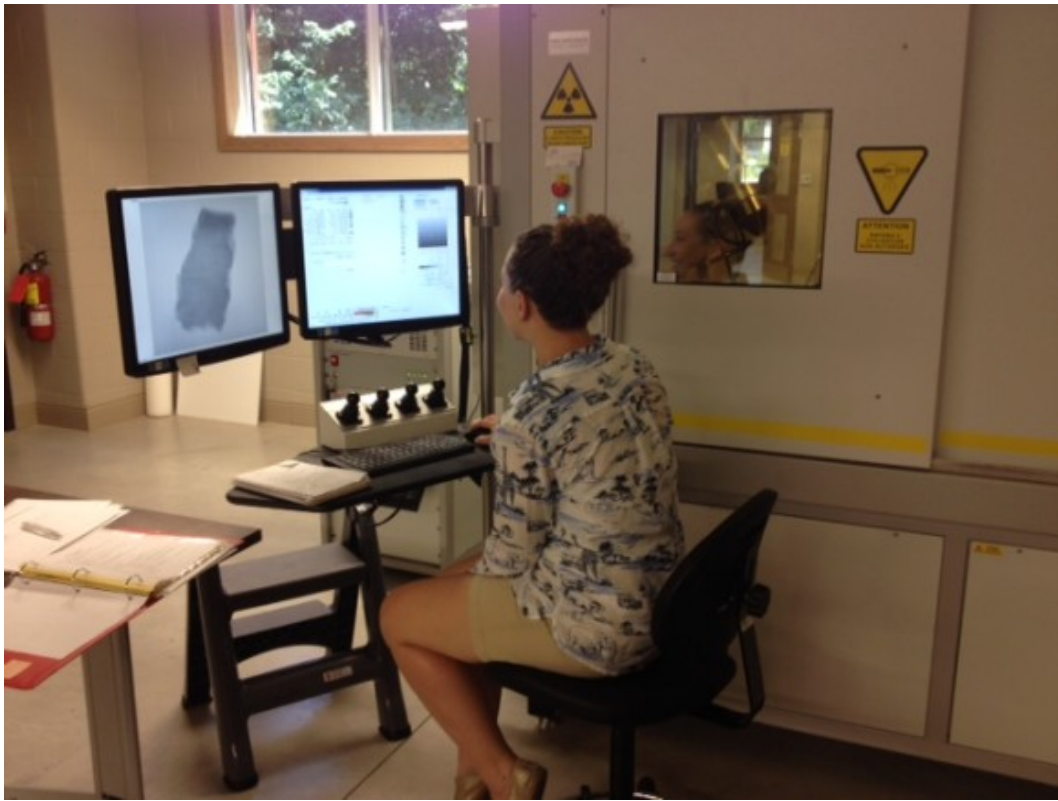
With the end of summer classes, we have an influx of four new Western work-study students joining our ranks for the next couple of months. This morning, Kira and I will be providing an orientation for them that will outline everything from what to do in the event of a fire drill to how to pack boxes, recognize artifacts and enter data into the database. We will explain to them how we plan to inventory and track over 80,000 boxes of artifacts, and we will demonstrate how we're utilizing [2D barcodes to aid with organization, tracking and data entry](#).



Work Study student at SA: Western in the collections repository.

Research at Sustainable Archaeology

Our **micro-CT scanner** and its water-cooling unit are humming mechanically in the background of the Ancient Images Laboratory as Amy St. John, a PhD student in Anthropology at Western, works on scanning pieces of First People's pottery that are several hundred years old. Amy's thesis aims to differentiate different types of pottery temper used in the construction of these vessels. This will inform her about 1) different methods of pottery construction and 2) different styles of construction that may, in turn, allow her to hypothesize about who was making different styles of pottery and how wide spread they were throughout the region.



PhD Student Amy working on the microCT scanner

Meanwhile across the pond, Dr. Andrew Nelson, an affiliate of the SA and primary user of the microCT and digital x-ray, is on holiday in the other London, in England. Today he is visiting the company that built our microCT scanner. For the past few days he's been spending time at the British Museum, working on a collaborative project with the Art Gallery of Ontario to [scan medieval prayer beads](#). You can follow Andrew's progress on our [Twitter feed](#) or on [our blog](#), where we'll be highlighting his adventures!

The Museum of Ontario Archaeology

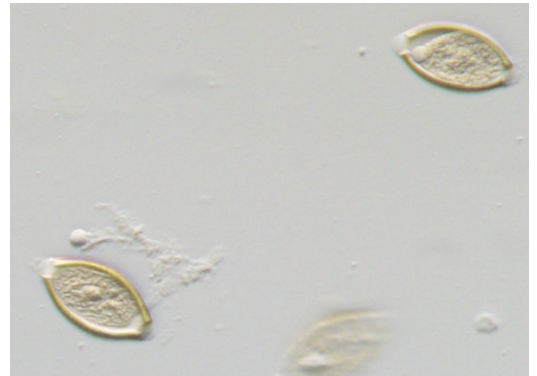
Located adjacent to our new facility is the well-established [Museum of Ontario Archaeology](#), which has been here since the early 1980's. Staff from the Museum pass by with a cart full of boxes formerly housed in their offsite storage, now cleaned and repackaged to our standards and ready to be housed in the SA repository.

Wrap Up

It's been a full day and we're starting to wrap things up here. Our work study students survived their orientation relatively unscathed, and are wiser about how archaeology is done here in the province as well as how we aim to care for those collections over the long term here at Sustainable Archaeology. Dr. Ferris and the database team had a productive meeting this afternoon, and it's exciting to see the database coming into shape – we'll soon be entering data! The mCT scanner was humming all day as Amy worked through some trouble-spots she was experiencing as she learns to scan this particular material, while Nelson was busy calibrating scans and software on the 3D scanners in the mezzanine all afternoon. Dr. Nelson, over in the UK, reports he had a great visit with Andrew Ramsey at [Nikon](#)

Metrology, and will be bringing home some valuable new tips and tricks on how to use our microCT XTH225 XT unit (not a bad way to spend a birthday – enjoy a pint for us – Happy Birthday Andrew!).

I managed to get enough administrative tasks done today that I even managed to squeeze in a bit of training on our new **Nikon SMZ25 digital microscope**, to flex some of my analytical research muscles! Kira and I have gone over our preliminary calendar for next week, so that we are prepared and know what to expect when we return to work first thing on Monday morning. Thanks to all our fellow Archaeologists for sharing their day's activities – there is so much more to archaeology than digging!



Microscopic view of a whipworm egg

If you would like to keep in touch with more of our day-to-day experiences, please follow our blog <http://sustainablearchaeologyuwo.blogspot.ca/>