

WORKING HARD OR HARDLY WORKING? THAT IS THE QUESTION.

July 24, 2015 Riku Kauhanen Explore Posts, Grants and Funding, Location, Military archaeological tourism, Battlefield Archaeology, Beer, Conflict Archaeology, CRM, Employment, Finland, Russia, Unemployment, Veterans

“Fully employed unemployed is a common problem, and it would be good to have a post about your work.”

Reply to my message from Matt Law when I asked about writing about my situation.

A BIT ABOUT ME

First a little about myself. This post is not supposed to be my curriculum vitae, it just shows all kinds of jobs and occupations an archaeologist must be ready to take in order to have some income.

I graduated from University of Turku, Finland in 2012 from archaeology and in 2014 from folkloristics. My MA-thesis in archaeology was about the Swedish-Russo War of 1741-1743 and conflict archaeological theory. After this I did another Master of Arts degree, because the folkloristics in Turku started it's own archive studies line. In my second thesis I studied triangulation between folkloristics and archaeology. I studied as an example regular stones in inhumations, using folk archives to find explanations for the stones.

After two Master of Arts degrees I find myself most of the time unemployed. I graduated from folkloristics in May 2014, and I've had several short employments after that. Luckily I worked during my studies and paid my membership fees to Museum trade union, so after I graduated I was entitled to daily benefits – after two months of bureaucracy.

The work for archaeologists is scattered and most archaeologists in the profession face unemployment sometimes. Many times. During winter the ground is frozen, so that puts a halt to excavations. Last year (2014) I spent a total of 10 weeks as a digger after my graduation in May. I also wrote articles and held lectures at community colleges (Kansalaisopisto). I've tried to get funding to do independent research, but with no success. Year 2015 mostly repeats last year.

Here are a few photos of my fully-employed days in 2014:



Excavations in Harjavalta at the end of Summer 2014. Heavy rain and an improvised tent.



During the excavations in 2014 in Harjavalta the road to construction site and excavations was blocked with gravel and stones during the weekends to prevent thefts. One Friday the construction site workers forgot that the archaeologists were still working.



*Never try to disrupt the movements of archaeologists equipped with shovels.
Archaeologists breaking free in Harjavalta during excavations 2014.*

YEAR 2015 FOR ARCHAEOLOGIST

Like I wrote, year 2015 seems to repeat last year. I worked as a digger in Museovirasto (NBA, National Board of Antiquities) most of April. We circled around Pirkanmaa (Tampere region) and for an archaeologist specialized in conflict archaeology these trips were wonderful, although the excavation sites were “normal digs”. Most sites were located near battlefields of the Finnish Civil War (1918), and I spotted several bullet or shrapnel holes in buildings nearby. I was fascinated with shrapnel tears in the attic of an old house. The master of the house gave me a few pieces of shrapnel as a memento, which were picked from the floor of the attic.



Shrapnel splinters tore the floor of this attic in Messukylä, Tampere during the Civil War of 1918. I was thrilled to see these!



*The shrapnel tears, soon 100 years old,
compared to my hand.*



Shrapnel splinters from the battle of Messukylä, 1918.

It's moments and discoveries like these that make this profession worth the effort.



*Sometimes archaeology is full of sh*t. Especially when you have to dig in a horse pasture. Two horses and one pony were observing keenly, as two brave diggers crossed the fence and started looking for signs of iron age. Sastamala, Finland in April 2015.*

Before this one month job I wrote articles to local news paper Turun Sanomat about the foreign volunteers in Winter War (1939 – 1940). The fee for these writings is small but every little bit helps in my situation. I also had lectures in community colleges. One was about the conflict archaeology of Late Iron Age Finland with title “Lännen pitkä miekka iskee idän sapeliin? Nuoremman rautakauden konfliktiarkeologiaa” (The long sword of west strikes the eastern scimitar? Conflict archaeology of Late Iron Age). I also held five lectures in other college about the history of guerrilla warfare, the radio intelligence in Finland before and during WWII (things I learned during making this lecture made the movie Imitation Game look rather ridiculous, by the way), War of Åland (Crimean war in Finland 1854 – 1855), the Lapland War (1944 – 45, Finns against Germans in Northern Finland) and Foreign volunteers in Finnish wars of 1939 – 1944.

Jobs like these keep me interested in things – with a deadline. It's important to have a set date, before which I have to read all the books necessary and produce a popular representation of the subject. These jobs are also an outstanding alternative to full-time alcoholism.

As a new profession I was a guide in four days trip to Carelian Isthmus (in Russia) in the beginning of May. We visited battlefields of WWII and I provided the speaks and representations. The preparations to visit Russia were thorough. I made very large maps with cardboards, contact paper and glue, which worked fine. Usually the guides just give A4-sized maps full of sings and arrows, which are incomprehensible.



Dragon's teeth, tank obstacles in Siiranmäki, Carelian Isthmus.

This new profession was fulfilling. Sites were amazing and the trip to Russia was mostly without difficulties. Some roads were in horrible condition, but we got by. Timing was good, since the sites were clear of vegetation and we got to witness the Victory Day Celebration in Viborg.

CURRENTLY: WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR IN 24TH OF JULY 2015

The trouble with being a tour guide is the same as with being a professional field archaeologist: you have to move to different sites all the time and employment time is short. I'd like to get employed in Turku, but the chances for that are poor. Second chance is to go to longer excavations to some other part of Finland. Currently the private companies do most of these kind of excavations, and so far I haven't been contacted. Usually one, two, three month excavations are rare and my only chance to get to those is in the beginning of Summer or Fall, when students are back at university. The economical situation doesn't help.

There is a program to employ people under the age of 30. However, the program ran out of money a month ago and since I haven't been on daily benefits for 300 days, I can't get this support.

This week I managed to get one actual job done. During the year 2012 I interviewed war veterans and collected lot's of material, and made a web site for the museum which employed me. Yesterday I finished the student version of these sites after many difficulties. Today I'll do the finishing touches to the site. Designing pages like these is difficult for many reasons: I have little IT-training, the software I'm using is simple – for better or worse – and it's hard to decide the visual design because I'm partly color blind.

Then there are the funds I'm trying to get from different associations or trusts to write books or to do research. The first notice will come next month, after which I hopefully can once again turn into full-time researcher. For a few months.

And there's the free stuff: reviews to professional magazines, articles with which I try to score "academic points" in case I begin doctoral studies, helping other researchers by email and of course helping other small scale field studies for which I get payed in free accommodations, travels, food and beer. I suppose stuff like this keeps archaeology running – the free work and the beer.