

A DAY OF ARCHAEOLOGY, IN THE LIFE OF AN EARLY CAREER ACADEMIC.

July 27, 2015 Dr. Ryan K. McNutt Commercial Archaeology, Day of Archaeology, Digital Archaeology, Education, Explore Posts, Grants and Funding, Historical Archaeology, Landscape Archaeology, Medieval, Post Medieval Battlefield Archaeology, Centre for Battlefield Archaeology, Conflict Archaeology, Early Career, GIS, Glasgow, SERF



There is a method to the madness, and structure in the stratigraphy of notebooks!

Hello! I'm Dr. Ryan McNutt, a University Teacher (adjunct professor to American readers) in Archaeology at the University of Glasgow. Today I'm going to talk a bit about a typical day in my work as an early career archaeologist within academia, and also tell you a bit about how I got here.

ANTHROPOLOGIZING ABROAD— OR, AN AMERICAN IN GLASGOW

Like many archaeologists, and in fact, like many of my colleagues at Glasgow, I've had a varied journey to reach the desk I'm sat in front of today. My undergraduate was a B.Sc in Anthropology from [Middle Tennessee State University](#), where the majority of my interest was in the prehistory and protohistory of the Mississippian civilizations of the American Southeast. Even within that, I was always interested in conflict within and between groups, and the archaeological and anthropological investigations of the effect of conflict on human behavior, and indeed, on the landscape.



Castalian Springs Field School 2006. My last field school prior to graduating.

After a few years doing commercial archaeology in the United States, this interest in conflict, coupled with my desire to return to postgraduate study, saw me pack up and move across the Atlantic to Glasgow to pursue an Mlit, and latterly a PhD, focused on conflict and battlefield archaeology with Glasgow's own (and the only one in the world!) [Centre for Battlefield Archaeology](#). My postgraduate study through the Centre was phenomenal, opening doors and providing some amazing opportunities for fieldwork in France, Poland, and on some of the most historically significant battlefields in Scotland, as well as participating in TV documentaries.



A cemetery termination from working CRM



Some of the Centre's work on the Somme

After completing my PhD, I started my current teaching position at Glasgow, which consists of lecturing and convening a variety of our core

undergraduate courses in Archaeology, from theory to field methods, as well as teaching courses in my own specialty of GIS and its applications to archaeology. So that's a shortened version of how I ended up here.

A-TYPICAL DAY

Part of my role for this summer was teaching topographic and geophysical survey during the department's annual field school in sunny (I'm serious—it was beautiful weather for the whole three weeks!) Perthshire. The [Strathearn Environs and Royal Forteviot \(SERF\)](#) is a 10-year-long research project aimed at investigating in detail the history of the area, from earliest prehistory, through the early Medieval and into the Early Modern. It's an excellent research project, and you can read many of the resulting reports [here](#), but it is also a significant portion of the training and education we give our undergraduates to help them meet Glasgow Archaeology's 55-day fieldwork requirement for Senior Honours. It's also essential to them completing a portfolio of practical work.



Gorgeous Perthshire

Now that I'm back in the office, part of my day today was spent answering student emails relating to their fieldwork portfolios, organizing information and data so they can process them, and making sure any records they need access to are in order and available. However, since I'm also on a 28-hour a week

contract, Fridays are also one of my research days, where I set aside part of my day for my own research. As an early career researcher, I spent several hours sorting through funding calls for postdoc research. I've got several projects, focusing on the application of technology to conflict landscapes that I'd like to get off the ground, and so quite a lot of my research days are spent on applications and project outlines for possible funding.

One of my main interests is the impact conflict would have had on the individuals from the Medieval to the Early Modern who worked, lived and died in fields that became enshrined in history and national identity because of events that often only lasted a few hours. The experience of non-combatants however, and indeed, the very fact the many conflicts took place in *inhabited, built* landscapes is often not discussed. I'd like to focus on this a bit more—to locate, record, and examine the built cultural and social landscape that existed before and after the battles, using tools like LIDAR, satellite remote sensing, and so on. Hence my time spent on funding applications!

I'm also working on several articles today, rewriting and writing several potential pieces of work, hence the stack of books and notebooks in the first obligatory messy desk picture. At the moment, one of the articles taking shape is on the construction and reinforcement of a particular type of southern identity in the American South, through the memorialization and commemoration of the 'Lost Cause' myth of the Confederacy—and specifically how this ties into current debates over the nature of the Southern Cross flag (erroneously presumed to be the flag of the Confederacy).

In addition, I also spent portions of the day managing Archaeology at Glasgow University's twitter (@GUArchaeo) and Facebook, ironically tweeting about Day of Archaeology posts! For the final part of the day, as a web editor for [Love Archaeology](#), a digital celebration of all things archaeology started by several other illustrious former postgrads from Glasgow along with myself, I did some research for one of our upcoming podcasts. This was a followup to a thoroughly enjoyable visit to the enigmatic [Govan Stones](#).



The Govan Stones; or me thoroughly enjoying playing Viking.

So, to sum up my day of archaeology was spent doing quite a lot of a what I love the most about archaeology; researching the past, thinking about the way people interact with each other, how we use objects, and objects use us. How we create the present from the past, and craft national and group identities from these created pasts. And how as archaeologists, we can pick these themes apart. We might not change the world in a revolution, but the more we can get people to think archaeologically, the more we can shift, nudge, and perhaps change the way people perceive the past; and thus the way they see themselves, and the future.

I'm thrilled to be in a position that offers me the best of multiple worlds; the chance to teach archaeology, the chance to do archaeology in the field, and the chance to do my own research. It has been 12 years since my first field school, and my first commercial job. I've been a paid archaeologist for commercial firms, for academia, as an intern for the Federal government, and I've volunteered—and the worst day I've had doing archaeology still beats the best day I had working outside of archaeology.