

WHERE DO ARTIFACTS GO AFTER EXCAVATION?

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The Summer and Fall of 2015 was busy a field season for everyone at ARA, we were very lucky to participate in some large and detailed excavations in Southern Ontario. But what happens next? Once the artifacts are out of the ground they are transported to our lab and our dedicated Laboratory Technicians get busy.

The Winter 2016 lab season was a big adventure for everyone involved and it won't soon be forgotten!

In this photo, Alyssa and Alanna are washing artifacts. This is the first stage in artifact processing. By scrubbing away the dirt and debris we can make important details become clear, such as the pattern on a piece of ceramic or a maker's mark.



Below, Alyssa is using a dry brush to remove dirt from a piece of Native pottery. This is another method used to clean artifacts; it ensures that a delicate piece of pottery is kept intact.





The lab crew was lucky enough to come across pieces of pottery that could be used for carbon dating. Alyssa is placing her sample on a scale in order to get an accurate measurement for processing.



After we thoroughly wash the artifacts, everything is neatly arranged on screens and placed in drying racks. Artifacts are kept on the racks until they are completely dry, usually for 48 hours.





Once the artifacts are dry the lab crew puts them in clear plastic bags. In this photo Alyssa has finished sorting each artifact by type and placed them in the bag.



After all the artifacts are bagged they are brought to another lab technician who adds them to the catalogue. Our catalogue is a detailed record of all the artifacts found during excavation, this is important for so many reasons. Many questions we have about our sites can be answered with the trends discovered from this document. Many decisions about the date and use of the site can be made once the artifact information is explored in the catalogue.

Essentially our job is to: organize, clean, catalogue, study and store all of the artifacts found during excavation. We've done our job right if in fifty years (or more) someone comes across one of our boxes of artifacts and opens it up discovering that all the artifacts are intact and the provenience has been maintained. It requires patience, diligence and a fair amount of team work to get through a day in the lab and we love it.

Thanks for checking out our post for Day of Archaeology! For more information and cool photos check out Archaeological Research Associates on Facebook and Twitter!