

Preserving the past for the present and future

[Science](#), [Archaeology](#)



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Preserving the Past for the Present and Future Many people have little to no knowledge about human's prehistoric past, especially that of humans in the Americas. As you cruise down east bound Interstate 70 and make it through St. Louis, you start to drive by one of North America's largest prehistoric city structures, Cahokia. According to the Cahokia Mounds Historical Site, this city covered six square miles, had 120 mounds, and was home to anywhere between 10, 000 to 20, 000 people from the years 700 to 1400 AD (Keller).

Cahokia use to be a major regional trade center with huge mounds that had large palaces for city rulers, plazas, different neighborhoods, and even gaming fields, but much of this has been lost from natural wear of the land and also human destruction. I-70, although a hugely important interstate nearly connecting coast to coast, cuts right through some of the city, and new housing developments slowly threaten the area (Ritterbush). This human destruction happens all over and continuously erases some of human history from right beneath our feet.

Archaeological sites should be preserved in order to protect unwritten human history, create economical benefits, and teach future generations about the human past and allow for future studies. Much of the reason why many people do not realize there is even a problem with the destruction of archaeological sites is that the sites are prehistoric, meaning they date back to times before written records, and most people have not heard of the sites.

People in charge of a building project, such as project developers, may not realize they are about to build on top of an ancient prehistoric site, which is why there has been a federal law that now requires an archaeologist to come

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out to check land that may be developed. An archaeologist job is to work in the field and scientifically record and recover any artifacts they may find, usually several feet in the ground. The archaeologist then records all their findings and takes the material items back to a lab where they are cleaned, processed, and recorded (Professional Archaeologist).

Needing to hire an archaeologist from the State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPO) inevitably costs money, which makes for a group of people who dislike the law and the idea of preserving sites. Costs vary from the size of the project and whether or not sites are found, and if the law is not followed, federal permits and money can be lost, along with additional fines. All of this can be problematic, and a possible setback in the building plans for the project developers, but it is a very important step (Getting the Archaeological Green Light).

In an interview with Prof. Lauren Ritterbush, she told me about the Blue Earth Village, which she has personally worked at in the Manhattan area that has been nearly lost due to human developments. The Blue Earth Village, just east of Manhattan, Kansas, is an early Kansa Indian village dating back to the 1790s. Modern buildings here, such as houses and a cattle show barn, have covered much of the village that was there prior, but what little is left allows archaeologists a chance to research it and provide the Kansa Indian people with information about their ancestors.

If SHPO had been in place when this area was being developed, archaeologists would have been able to excavate the area and record new information about the area. Many archaeological sites also provide economic benefits, such as tourism, to the areas around the world and here in the

states. Egypt's economy relies heavily on tourism, considering the country is home to one of the Seven Wonders of the World, the pyramids, and other archaeological hot spots. In the year 2008, Egypt profited over 11.8 billion dollars from tourism in the country.

Tourism is also responsible for nearly 12 percent of the labor force in Egypt, making these archaeological sites hugely profitable (Dziadosz). For an example a little closer to home, take the Cahokia site mentioned in the beginning of the paper; the museum society there brings in thousands of new visitors each year. According to an article for the International Journal of Business and Management, tourism is a multi-industrial moneymaker that not only creates jobs, such as people who work in the museum at Cahokia, but also gets people to spend money in the area.

The people that visit these sites need a hotel to stay in, gas to get their and back home, and food to eat; all providing profits that trickle back into the local economy. (Ardahaey 3). Much of the money that these preservation sites receive are through donations (apparent on almost any website pertaining to archaeology by the "donate" page), so any money they make will go directly back into the economy through hiring new employees and allowing more of the sites to be preserved (Ken Keller).

Some people may argue that stores, such as Wal-Mart, will do more economically for an area, but you cannot put a price tag on the knowledge that can be learned from the sites themselves. Getting an education is one of the most important parts of life in the 21st century, and for many generations to come. We all go to school till we are at least 16 years old and many of us go onto higher education, devoting nearly all of our first 25 years

of life to school and gaining an education. Preserving sites give a chance for future generations to learn from the site hands on and lead to possible new discoveries as future technologies are improved.

Many people do not really know what an archaeologist really does, or how their work affects anyone in anyway. One misconception of archaeologists is that their work is unimportant. In one of Shana Leslie's online articles, she states " Modern archaeologists work closely with specialists in a variety of fields - from medical doctors to environmentalists to policy planners" (Leslie). Archaeologists are able to determine what an area's climate was like thousands of years ago by testing different layers of soils or how a whole group of people began to die out from their bones (Ritterbush).

Another important part of the knowledge gained from the work of archaeologist is how humans have evolved over time. Not that human beings have physically changed, but the way we live and the technologies we are able to use and come up with have greatly changed. Archaeologists are able to date their finds and look at how people lived from hundreds of thousands of years ago, to just a couple thousand, which provides insight as to how we went from people using stone tools and living in natural shelters to the iPad using, web surfing, technologically advanced people we are now.

The science and knowledge gained from archaeologist field and lab work can affect people in nearly any type of profession, and help teach the future generations about our human past. While the problem of losing archaeological sites to human development is not a news-breaking event, it is still largely important and creates multiple views. People who work in project management and on building planning teams deal with the necessary

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set backs that may occur from needing SHPO to come in and check their land. SHPO costs money and time, and depending on if a site or sites are found, could increase both of these, making some dislike the archaeological efforts. Many people also have opposing views on the economic values of archaeological sites, believing that the sites could be put to better uses such as farm land or being built up for businesses. Still some people are just unaware of the importance of an archaeologist's job and the sites they work on. For several reasons, archaeological sites should be preserved because they offer knowledge about prehistoric human history, create economical benefits, and teach future generations about the human past and allow for future research.

Nearly all of what we know today about life before written records, from locations like Pompeii to the city of Cahokia just east of St. Louis, comes from the work of archaeologist. While archaeological research may cause troubles for project planners who look to build on undeveloped land, the work that these scientist do can provide new information about life before we knew it. The sites found also offer economical benefits as they attract tourists to visit the location and spend their money.

These benefits to the economy are incentive to continue and preserve archaeological research as it brings in more money and helps educate future generations. The work of archaeologist helps to advance the knowledge of the human past, provide new information in other professions, and ensure future generations the chance to continue to learn from these sites. For those reasons, there should be more support of archaeologists preserving archaeological sites. Work Cited Ardahaey, F.. " Economic Impacts of Tourism

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