

Anth 341 Intro, Part 1:

What's Archaeology?

Fall 2010

Archaeology is the study of “The Past”

- Whose past?
- How far back?
- Where?
- Using what?

Archaeology is Anthropology (in the US)

- We focus our study on human social and cultural factors: politics, economics, kinship, gender, technology, warfare, art, science, etc as cultural features
- We assume cultures change over time, but at any given time, have to make sense to the people living in them
- We assume that culture is a mechanism that helps humans adapt to their environment – including the other people in that environment

Archaeology REALLY is about people, not stuff (no, really...)

- **Artifacts** tell us about people's lives in the past
- **Sites** are the places where a specific group of people did things that left remains. Sites usually have **Features** in them, or spots where a single kind of activity happened.
- **Regions** are areas where we think people sharing roughly the same culture lived
- Archaeological analysis has to take place at **ALL** these scales, simultaneously

Archaeology is all about INFERENCE

- We cannot directly observe the processes we want to know about
- We have to infer them from the observable “remains”: artifacts, documents, sites, etc.
- We have lots and lots and lots of rules about how to make inferences
- We don’t always agree on the inferences. In fact, we don’t even agree about all those rules.
- The more holes we dig in the ground, the more the picture changes, and new inferences and interpretations have to be made.

Some key concepts (that we haven't already covered)

- Dating: how old?
 - Absolute
 - Relative
- Stratigraphy
- Typology
- “Type Site”