



Study Tour of Archeological Interpretation

3. Self-Guided Tour

Be a visitor

Goal: To understand the goals of interpreters and archeologists working together.



Visit Chaco Culture NHP's website to see how their collections are interpreted online. NPS photo.

Goal: To experience a park, museum, or a website from the perspective of the public and gather impressions to analyze interpretive programs.

Experts tend to forget that other people do not necessarily share the same knowledge. An important goal of interpretation is helping visitors to look at the world in new ways, put ideas together that they had not before, and think about information and larger themes they have not previously considered. Effective interpretation of archeological resources enables all kinds of visitors to engage with unfamiliar material, to want to know more, and to feel comfortable asking questions.

In this section, you will visit a park or museum either in person or virtually, through a website. Your task is to leave your expert knowledge behind and simply be a visitor. Consider yourself a more-than-typically observant participant, but not an expert. The idea here is to see what grabs your attention, what stimulates your curiosity, and reflect on why.

For this exercise, we strongly advise you to visit an archeological park or museum of your choosing, preferably one you are not familiar with, for the best possible learning experience. If it is not possible to visit a site in person, a list of websites below offers alternatives for “virtual visits” to selected archeological places and museums. For a more thorough experience, you may also consider visiting both a park or museum in person and a website to compare and contrast the interpretive environments.

For onsite visits

Again, for this exercise we heartily encourage you to visit a place in person. Download a [record sheet](#) to take with you. On this sheet is a list of questions to consider before, during, and after your visit. These questions, however, are just a starting point—please feel free to jot down additional notes and questions as they come up. You are also encouraged to take photographs of the place to share and to refresh your memory later.

During your visit, note down all your questions that arise, even if you think they sound silly or feel like you should already know the information but cannot remember it. This is important for getting inside a visitor's mindset and will remind you of the full range of questions that interpretive products can and should address.

Click [here](#) to download a printable on-site visit record sheet (.doc file).

For virtual visits

Another way to begin thinking about opportunities to incorporate or interpret archeological information at your park or museum is to explore a website.

Download a [record sheet](#) tailored for a virtual visit and enter your comments. Consider its questions before, during, and after your visit. This list, however, is just a starting point. As you visit the websites, note all the questions that come to mind. You should jot down questions even if you think they sound silly or feel like you should already know the information but or cannot remember it. This is important for getting inside a visitor's mindset and will remind you of the full range of questions that interpretive products can and should address.

Remember that all of these websites are themselves interpretive products. Some of the websites reconstruct what visitors see onsite when they tour a particular exhibit or the entire property. Others reconstruct particular exhibits or have always been intended for online exploration. As you tour a website, take the medium into consideration and think about the differences between a virtual and in-person experience.

We recommend that you look through all the websites, but focus only on one for each individual record sheet.

Note that these websites may use Flash and are best experienced on a high-speed connection. You may wish to view the websites at a local library or other venue if your connection speed is slow.

- [The Clearwater Site](#), Center for Desert Archaeology
Explores an archeological site of some of the earliest known examples of pithousing in Arizona.
- [St. Augustine: American's Ancient City](#), Florida Museum of Natural History
Learn about the 18th century Spanish settlement of St. Augustine.
- [Los Ades: Life at an Eighteenth-Century Spanish Outpost](#), Los Ades State Historic Site
Find out about frontier life at the settlement of Los Ades in Louisiana.
- [Chaco Culture National Historical Park](#): Museum Collections of the National Park Service
Presents artifact collections from Chaco Culture NHP and information about different aspects of Chacoan culture.
- [A Mohawk Iroquois Village](#): An Exhibit at the New York State Museum
This online exhibit recreates a temporary museum exhibit that featured reconstructions of the village
- [Roads to the Past: Fifty Years of Highway Archeology in New Mexico](#), Museum of Indian Arts and Culture
Discusses the history of archeology in New Mexico within the context of highway construction.
- [The African Burial Ground](#), New York Public Library
Describes the controversial excavation of enslaved African and African Americans on Manhattan and what was learned about the interred.

Click [here](#) to download a printable virtual visit record sheet (.doc file).

For your consideration

- What important ideas and concepts did you take away from your interpretive experience?
- What do you think is important in an interpretive experience of archeology?
- What unique features does a web environment offer a visitor? What unique features does an in-person visit offer a visitor?