

exploring career options

Archaeologist

Inna Moore, RPA

Senior Archaeologist and GIS Specialist
Brookington Cultural Resources Consulting

Inna Moore had planned to major in marine biology at the College of Charleston (South Carolina), but her plans took a turn when she unexpectedly loved the required geology course she took. After discovering that geology involves every field of science, from biology to chemistry to physics, she switched her major. Today, Moore is an archaeologist who uses her specialized geological knowledge to find and preserve history that is buried underground.



What was your first job in this field?

As a student, I helped some geology professors with research, doing survey data collection of shoreline erosion control. I also did some identification of foraminifera, single-celled protists with shells, to help figure out the age of the geology at the beaches. Those were just summer jobs, but they gave me hands-on experience with surveying equipment.

That experience led to my first job out of college, with a land surveying company. I worked on that crew for

about five months before coming to work at Brookington and Associates as a field technician. I was part of a team that conducted archaeological surveys on properties before they could be developed.

How long did you do that work?

Six or seven years. It was a lot of out-of-town work, a lot of living in hotels during the week and then coming home on the weekends. I eventually got tired of being out of town and wanted to work more in the office. After taking geographic information systems (GIS) classes at night, I shifted into doing graphics.

After we do a survey, we have to create a report to submit to the review agencies. That report might include aerial images showing the location of the tract and the sites, maps showing where we dug holes, historic maps, photographs, plans of the site, profiles of any features we might find. I worked on those graphics.

Interview by Melissa Hartman

What do you do now?

After working my way up through the graphics department, I went back to school for my master's degree, a requirement for becoming a registered professional archaeologist (RPA). I did my master's in environmental science, focusing on GIS and remote sensing, which includes satellite data, ground-penetrating radar, 3D scanning, imagery gathered by drones—any type of data collected remotely. Today I'm in charge of the company's remote sensing program, but I also still do archaeology project management.

Can you give me an idea of what the process is like, from when somebody first calls your firm to conduct a survey?

In South Carolina, when someone, say a developer, applies for a permit from Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, depending on where the land is and what known historic sites are nearby, it may require an archaeological or cultural resources survey. That's when the developer would contact us.

We would go to the site and dig 30-centimeter shovel test holes, every 30 meters, across the entire tract, and screen the dirt for artifacts. If we find artifacts, we'll go back and dig on a 15-meter grid. Once the fieldwork is done, the artifacts come to the lab for analysis. All that information is given to the project manager, who then decides whether the site may be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Our report, with our results and recommendations, goes to the State Historic Preservation Office for review.

If the site is not eligible for listing on the National Register, the developer can move forward with the project. If it has potential to be eligible for listing, the client has to either excavate the site before developing it or leave it alone.

What happens if they decide to excavate?

We go back to the site and do five-meter shovel test intervals and create density maps, showing where certain types of artifacts are located. From there, we'll dig test units, which are usually one-by-one-meter blocks. We may also use a backhoe to scrape off the top black layer of dirt to get down to the sterile subsoil. Any features dug by humans into that sterile



layer will show up as different colors than the surrounding soil. This way, we might identify post holes or even foundations of houses.

Once we've done the archaeology, if the project is moving forward, the client will often have to go through a process called mitigation. This might include sharing the history and artifacts in the form of public outreach. We have a program called the History Workshop, in which we create exhibits to display the artifacts and come in to talk about what we've found. That way, everyone can learn about the history. It's not just developed and destroyed.

Please tell me about a project you worked on that was significant to you.

I managed a project in downtown Charleston, where the city had purchased some property to develop. But when they started to do construction, they found graves. It turned out that the property was part of a cemetery that had fallen out of use.

The city contracted us to relocate the graves. Through extensive research, we found that the property was the original cemetery, from the 1840s to the 1860s, of a German Lutheran church. As the city grew, the church had moved and began using a new cemetery. Eventually the old tombstones disappeared, and then houses were built on part of the property. This actually happens a lot in cities.

We started out with ground-penetrating radar to determine how many individuals we thought were buried there. That estimate was 100, but we ended up with about 430 bodies. There were a lot of yellow fever epidemics in that time period, which explained why, after finding sections in

“

The history gets lost, but we get to bring it back to life.

nice neat rows, we'd come across a big area with mass burials. Or sometimes we'd find two bodies in the same grave shaft. We know now that they were trying to bury the dead as quickly as possible to avoid the spread of disease.

Where did you relocate these remains?

The church purchased property in a nearby cemetery for these graves. They were really happy to have their ancestors in this cemetery, since they had lost track of them.

That's what I find rewarding about this work: I get to give a voice to the people who used to live here. Our work goes back to Native American tribes who were here before the Europeans came, and to those who were here when the Europeans arrived and traded with them. The history gets lost, but we get to bring it back to life. And the work we do with the History Workshop reminds people that they're not the first ones here. It reminds them that they should care about what happens after they're gone.

What do you find most challenging about this work?

Remembering that this is a business. It can be hard to find the balance between your passion and what you think should happen, and what legally and realistically is going to happen. You can't save everything, and you can't get discouraged by the times you can't do as much as you would like.

Do you see any trends in the field that could affect careers for people in another ten years?

Compared to other fields, archaeology is very far behind technologically. But as younger archaeologists enter the field, they're using technology a lot more. The more technology you know and the more science-based background you have, the more opportunities you will find. When we're hiring, if we see somebody that has experience with GIS and imaging technologies and 3D modeling, they go to the top of the list. ■

What archaeologists do

In general, archaeologists study people and cultures of the past through the material remains they left behind. Archaeologists may be responsible for excavating historic or prehistoric sites, managing collections of artifacts, creating exhibits or other public displays, preserving and protecting significant sites, and sharing archaeological findings through publications and presentations.

Where they work

The vast majority of U.S. archaeologists work in cultural resources management, whether for government organizations or private companies, conducting surveys and research required by state and federal historic preservation laws. Others have academic careers at colleges and universities, or work as curators or conservators at museums or historic sites.

Education required

Entry-level jobs, such as field technician or field assistant, require a bachelor's degree (usually in anthropology). At least a master's degree, including specialized training in archaeology, is required for the Registered Professional Archaeologist credential.

Salary range

Salary is influenced by level of education, amount of experience, and where the archaeologist is employed. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median wage for archaeologists in 2012 was \$57,420.

For more information

Archaeological Institute of America
www.archaeological.org

**National Park Service
Archeology Program**
www.nps.gov/archeology/public/career.htm

Society for American Archaeology
www.saa.org