



ARCHAEOLOGY FOR THE PUBLIC: A NEW ADDITION TO SAAWEB

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Archaeologists are well aware that the public has more than a passing interest in archaeological sites, archaeologists, and archaeological methods for studying the past. Moreover, because archaeological research and preservation initiatives ultimately depend on public support, engaging the public has become an important concern for SAA and its members. Actively engaging the public, however, is unfortunately not yet a routine part of most archaeological practice. To help bridge this gap between disciplinary ideals and everyday routine, the SAA, through the work of its Public Education Committee (PEC), is launching a new set of informative web pages on the topic *Archaeology For The Public*. These web pages will be rich with resources to meet the many needs and interests of both the public and the SAA membership. This article reports to the membership about these new web pages that will soon form an important component of SAAweb, SAA's website. The design process is outlined here and the navigation and content areas are presented for preview.

Why Have Specially Designed Public Pages on SAAweb?

The new public web pages will form an important addition, not only because they will provide a significant amount of information about archaeology, but also because they will communicate the commitment of the parent organization and the discipline's practitioners to its publics. These pages will be a major place of contact between the discipline's largest professional organization and both friends—and foes—of archaeology.

This is not to say that SAAweb as currently constructed does not have a role in doing the above. Much of SAAweb, however, is designed to serve its membership and is organized accordingly. The new public archaeology web pages are designed to serve both the membership and the public. These pages will be directly linked from the home page of SAAweb, but their appearance and navigational structure will be more open to the needs of nonprofessional archaeology audiences, while meeting professional audience needs as well.

Who is the Audience for the new SAA Public Web Pages?

Archaeology does not have just one public. There are many publics for archaeological information. Examples of the audiences likely to utilize these SAA public web pages include teachers with education needs, retired couples seeking travel options or volunteer opportunities; people seeking second career options; college students seeking graduate program information; Boy Scouts working toward the Archaeology Merit Badge; major news and entertainment organizations seeking archaeological experts; looters and collectors; members of Native and First Nations groups with heritage education concerns; professional colleagues such as historians, geographers, and museum professionals; avocationalists; legislators writing environmental bills; Smart Growth supporters; Archaeology Conservancy members; CRM clients; site descendants and landowners curious and/or concerned about the archaeological process; and individuals who have discovered a site and are turning to professionals for information about what to do. Also expected to access the site are professional archaeologists worldwide, including the 10,000+ practitioners in the Americas alone, who deal with archaeology's various publics on a regular basis and are looking for advice and resources to assist their efforts.

In planning these public pages, the aim was not to try to meet the content needs of all of these potential audiences, but to create a design that would be flexible enough to address them all in the future. Many of these archaeology publics have been previously identified and targeted for projects by the PEC or other committees. Moreover, there is much valuable public information already on SAAweb. Unfortunately, however, this content is not always readily apparent to website visitors. The design plan we have implemented will not remove or move most existing publicly oriented content from its current location (in, say, the SAA Publications section, or in the Repatriation section). Rather, additional links are being provided to this content. PEC web content previously developed, however, will be imported from the existing PEC web pages to the new public web pages

(e.g., *Teaching Archaeology: A Sampler for Grades 3-12*, and the e-newsletter *Archaeology & Public Education [A&PE]*).

The Development Process: Content Area Design

Content and navigation are the first issues to address for any website—and for an archaeological website, decisions about them should be made by archaeologists, not by website designers with little or no knowledge of our discipline. In this particular instance, decisions made for these web pages will represent both our profession's and our professional society's aims and practices to the public at large. Therefore, it is important to detail for the membership the design process developed for the web project described here.

The design decisions forming the basis for these public web pages began with the efforts of more than 30 SAA members who attended an SAA PEC Retreat in the spring of 2001. The goal was to develop a new strategic plan for meeting the Committee's mandate of "promoting awareness about and concern for the study of past cultures and to engage people in the preservation and protection of heritage resources." Drawing on topics of concern that the PEC regularly considers and responds to, the Retreat attendees generated a large and inclusive set of ideas that were applicable for organizing public web pages. With this foundation in place, the SAA, with financial assistance from the Bureau of Reclamation, funded a working session for a newly formed PEC Internet Work Group, which met in the fall of 2001. Three authors of this paper and one other individual, all of whom are either publicly engaged archaeologists or archaeological educators, attended this session.

Our main task during this intensive working session was to develop a design plan for the new public web pages—not to create content, but to create a link hierarchy that would easily incorporate new content over time. This second stage of the development process involved organizing the previously gathered ideas to which we contributed additional information. Each of us had queried educators and other members of the public to find out what people wanted and/or needed from an archaeological web page. We also had surveyed and sampled many websites to supplement both the archaeological focus of the content and the interview and survey data. These sites included, but were not limited to, those of the National Initiative For a Networked Cultural Heritage (Best Practices in Networking Cultural Heritage), Webby Award/Community Choice and Internet Industry Best of the Web sites, and the public pages of parallel professional societies (such as the American Historical Association and the American Association for the Advancement of Science). Also examined were public archaeology sites with a strong record of use as a public resource (such as the archaeology page at Independence National Historical Park and archae-

ology.about.com) and general community-based resource sites such as the Business Industry Journal's selection for "most successful community-centered web site" (the fan site for the Washington Capitals sports team). While appearing unorthodox at first glance, this latter resource proved a useful model given SAA's aim of building a community of public stewards that will work with archaeologists to safeguard the past.

The link hierarchy that emerged was developed during three long days of lively and frequently heated discussion (to say that the process was intense—even grueling—is not overstating it, as anyone who has experienced this type of collaborative design workshop will know). We presented the results of this effort (McDavid et al. 2002) to the PEC Chair, who apprised the SAA Board of the design plan at the general board meeting in April of 2002.

The Development Process: Design Implementation

After approval by the PEC, work to implement the design plan began. A technical web consultant was hired to construct a working prototype of the design plan, with the aim of achieving a reasonable balance between attractiveness and usability. Given our assumption that these pages will be accessed by members of various non-archaeological publics, they are designed to be more user-friendly, colorful, and graphically interesting than the corporate, managerial style that distinguishes the rest of SAAweb. Because they will also be information-driven, however, our directive to the web design consultant was to avoid burdening the site with flashing animations, loud colors, confusing page layouts, and distracting graphics. The idea throughout was that, while the use of a technical consultant was an essential part of implementing the proposed design, final decisions about how to utilize both technological features and graphics needed to be made by archaeologists.

The Internet Work Group developed a very reciprocal and active relationship with the web design consultant—the site was not simply farmed out. By early 2003, the prototype was ready to be shown to members of the PEC as well as members of various publics. All were asked to review a selection of different layouts for the web page's navigation, and their input led to the final prototype. That prototype is now ready to be fleshed out with content.

This brings us to the present. As this report goes to press, the technological aspects of the public pages are nearing completion. The relevant content already existing on SAAweb is being copied to the new pages when this is appropriate. New content is being written, and PEC members have been solicited to assist in developing this content. We now ask the SAA membership to review the prototype site and join in this content development

effort. As readers will see when they visit the prototype site, there are many pages under construction—more SAA members are needed to develop enough content to create a truly exciting, useful site. As soon as we determine that this has been achieved, we will go live.

Formal Review Procedures

Before going live, all prospective web page content will be reviewed by several people. Members of the PEC Internet Work Group and the SAA Manager of Education and Outreach will review all page content, and, on a case-by-case basis, may send some proposed content to additional reviewers. For example, people who do historical archaeology outreach might be asked to look at content about historical archaeology outreach, and so on. For more sensitive proposed content, the PEC chair and, if appropriate, the PEC Board Liaison, will be asked to review content. The assumption is that sensitive issues could arise within any content area—whether the content is creative, factual, or both.

An important part of this content-gathering and review stage involves getting input from educators on the content elements designed for them and their students. One of our primary assumptions is that educational agendas are different from archaeological ones—not mutually exclusive by any means, but not the same. Therefore, content developed for and with educators must meet educational needs (curricula, pedagogical concepts, age-appropriateness, language, etc.), not just archaeological ones (discouraging looting, encouraging stewardship, etc.). When possible, we will make educator-directed information accessible (and, more importantly, printable with original formatting) as Adobe PDF files.

Launching the New Public Web Pages

The content for the public archaeology web pages will necessarily grow in an organic fashion. Content will be added as new ideas arise, as new controversies grip archaeology, and as new publics are identified—therefore these public web pages will never be completely finished. The pages will, as mentioned above, be launched when there is a sufficient mass of content to begin to serve our publics, but the addition of new information will be ongoing, as would be expected with any good website.

The public web pages will be actively marketed to non-archaeologist groups—particularly educators. This will be accomplished in a number of ways, including emails and announcements to educator gateway sites, email announcements to educator listservs, registration with various search engines and hierarchical directories, and the use of hidden metatags in the html code for our pages.

These public pages will need to be accessible to differently-abled people, and this aspect of the site's design is also being addressed by the technical consultant. Likewise, some content will be optionally made available in Spanish and, perhaps, French, keeping in mind our many colleagues who work in Canada.

Finally, a note about the title of these pages: The link listed on SAAweb to these public pages will be labeled *Archaeology for the Public*. This is an intentional double-entendre, in that it refers to two different types of content, both of which are included in the public pages. One type of content includes information for the public about archaeology. The other is information for archaeologists who wish to communicate with the public.

Previewing these Public Pages

The link map for the new SAA public web pages is archived provisionally for your viewing at the web address that follows below. This online presentation to the membership allows the web content hierarchy to be explored. We ask the membership to forward their comments about these pages to the Internet Work Group in care of Carol McDavid (email: mc david@publicarchaeology.org) or Maureen Malloy (email: maureen_malloy@saa.org). We thank the membership in advance for their assistance with building these SAA public web pages.

To view the new SAA public archaeology web pages, point your browser to: <http://www.txvr.com/SAA/> 

Reference Cited

McDavid, Carol, Mary L. Kwas, Patrice L. Jeppson and Jeanne Fenter
2002 Design Plan for PEC Pages of SAA Web Site. Report prepared for the Public Education Committee, funded by the Bureau of Reclamation. On file: Society for American Archaeology, Washington, D.C.

