



# ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE of AMERICA

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February 29, 2012

John Fahey  
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer  
National Geographic Society  
1145 17th Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20036-4688

Dear Mr. Fahey,

As the president of the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA), I join the Society for American Archaeology, the Society for Historical Archaeology, and numerous other concerned organizations and individuals in voicing the Institute's concern about National Geographic TV's new series entitled "Diggers." The AIA believes that the show promotes looting and the destruction of our shared archaeological heritage; in view of the National Geographic Society's long tradition of supporting serious research and disseminating that research through handsome publications, we are surprised at your connection with this television show.

The AIA was founded in 1879 and incorporated by an act of Congress in 1906, the same year that the American Antiquity Act was endorsed by our lobbying efforts. Thus, from its origins the AIA has been deeply involved with the protection and preservation of the archaeological record and the ethical pursuit of archaeology as a profession and an interest. Currently, the AIA is the largest archaeological organization in the world with over 240,000 members and 108 Local Societies in the US, Canada, and abroad. Our members are united by a passion for cultural heritage and an interest in seeing it properly recovered, studied, and interpreted.

Archaeology promotes an understanding of the human past by study of the artifacts and objects left behind. Artifacts do not occur in isolation, but are part of an associated set of artifacts and features that are in turn a part of a landscape. Removing an object from the ground without understanding or recording its context divorces the object from its meaning. Searching for objects with metal detectors or other remote sensing devices endangers all the other potentially significant objects in the vicinity of the target object. While remote-sensing techniques when used properly can guide scientific research and excavation, they can destroy sites when used irresponsibly.

A show like "Diggers" seems to imply that cultural heritage is only significant if it is profitable or fashionable. Attaching a monetary value to the uncovered object promotes the idea that a society's cultural heritage can be exploited for profit. Linking artifacts to monetary values will encourage people to engage in digging, legal or illegal, in the hopes that they too can strike it rich. The Antiquities Act of 1906, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979, and the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act of 1990 were created to address this issue and ensure that cultural remains would be protected and the knowledge they can provide preserved. Indeed, what "Diggers" is promoting may well be illegal according to local laws.

The AIA believes that archaeologists can work with TV to produce quality entertainment that is ethically responsible. Our members appear on shows frequently as commentators and advisors. With that spirit of cooperation as a model, we request that "Diggers" include a disclaimer that informs viewers of the possible



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illegality of any digging they undertake, even on their own private property, and the need to contact local authorities about any discoveries. We hope to ensure that our cultural heritage is not being destroyed for profit.

Sincerely yours,

Elizabeth Bartman  
President

CC:

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