

Archaeology of a California Mission

LD 3: Archaeology and the Scientific Method

Description: Using the flow chart of the scientific method provided, design a lab and field methodology for undertaking archaeological investigations at a California mission of your choice. Your instructor will serve as your content source and mentor for completing the exercise. While this exercise is largely hypothetical, you should base your proposed methods and procedures on those basic strategies and frameworks identified in class or via assigned readings and or case studies identified by your instructor.

Considerations: The following methodological considerations and procedural guidelines should be taken into account when designing your scientific approach to archaeology and the study of the past.

1. Identify the archaeological site or zone that you intend to investigate and provide some basic cultural and historical information related to what is known of the site or sites. Where San Carlos Borromeo del Río Carmelo is concerned, you should take into account that a pre-existing ancient Esselen community was the focal point of pre-European settlement patterns. In other words, what is known about the site's history and what do you intend to find out as per your investigation?
2. You should first decide as a team what you intend to study in the way of research problems or questions considered of primary importance to the study that you will undertake. In other words, how is your study significant or relevant in terms of its potential contributions to the science of archaeology and culture history? And, what do you hope to achieve in the way of scientific goals?
3. In taking into account the flow chart of the scientific method, you should be prepared to identify the actual methods, procedures, and strategies that you will employ in your efforts to prepare for and anticipate your lab and field study in archaeology. For example, what source of literature or archival information might you rely on and where would you go to get the information that you need for your literature review? In this exercise, you may use the Internet as a preliminary content resource.
4. Having identified the actual methods and procedures that you will undertake, reconstruct the processes and strategies undertaken, and the equipment, personnel, and resources required, in order to see through the project's objectives. Determine the size of your crew and equipment and supply needs required for the project undertaken?
5. What problems, contingencies, and alternative plan might you put in place to assure success in the proposed field endeavor? How might the weather, political instability, group conflicts and agendas, and other unforeseen circumstances affect the outcomes of your research project?
6. Describe the predominant types of artifacts that you anticipate recovering from your field setting, and provide an overview of the methods and procedures that will require immediate attention in order to begin creating a context for artifact and data analysis and interpretation. In other words, if ceramics are the dominant material that you anticipate recovering, what lab procedures might accrue in order to process the materials appropriately?
7. Having interpreted your materials, please provide at least two hypotheses that might develop as per the types of materials and evidence that you have recovered. Describe the significance of your hypotheses, and provide an indication of how you intend to disseminate your findings to the scientific community. Who in your group will be published as the lead or principal investigator, and why?