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# What I Dug Up During My Summer Vacation

By HILLARY CHURA OCT. 9, 2005

MOST of the year, Jim Jansson is a financial consultant outside Denver. On vacation, he is someone else.

"I'm no longer Jim Jansson, investment adviser," he said. "I'm Jim Jansson, archaeologist." Like many other archaeology hobbyists, he spends his vacation time on excavations, digging up ancient objects that usually are seen under lock and key. Hundreds of excavations take place every year around the world, and many are open to students, retirees and others who aren't professional archaeologists. The cost of participation ranges from a couple of hundred dollars to several thousand, and lodging can be in hotel rooms -- sometimes dormitory-style -- or in tents or cabins.

The trips can last anywhere from a day to several months, and are sponsored by museums, universities and other groups.

Mr. Jansson, 61, a history buff from Parker, Colo., has been digging in Calabria, Italy, several weeks a year for 14 years. One site dates from 250 B.C. and was home to about 5,000 people before it was destroyed in 72 B.C., he said, possibly by Spartacus, the Roman slave turned warrior. Mr. Jansson says that he has unearthed Roman spear points, Greek and Roman coins and hand-held oil lamps and that he was part of a group that found a Roman helmet and a Roman sword.

"It's so fun to be in on something like that -- when you uncover something that's not seen the light of day for 2,000 years," Mr. Jansson said. "It almost takes your

breath away. You can find something that literally would only be seen in museums otherwise. Here I get to actually find them and pull them out."

Digs run throughout the year, but most are in summer because they are organized by universities with specific vacation schedules. Application deadlines tend to be in March, so fall and winter are the best times to plan.

Audrey Shaffer of Corona, Calif., has gone on 26 summer excavations, primarily in Israel. This summer, Ms. Shaffer, a retired hospital administrator, was in Jordan for a month at a dig sponsored by the Institute of Archaeology at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Mich., and paid a little less than \$2,000. She speculated that the King Tut exhibition -- now in Los Angeles before moving to Fort Lauderdale, Fla., Chicago and Philadelphia -- could hook more people on archaeology. The last time a King Tut exhibit toured the United States, in the 1970's, people stood in line for hours to see the treasures.

The previous tour "certainly did increase interest, and I'm sure it will this time," she said.

The work at ancient sites is mostly manual labor: moving thousands of years of dirt to reveal treasures like ancient walls, pottery, gold belt buckles and coins. Participants generally clean artifacts once they are found. But hobbyists who want a less strenuous experience can sign up for trips that focus only the cleaning, not the digging.

Alan Spier and his wife, Roz, of Glastonbury, Conn., recently spent two weeks at an excavation in Italy. They cleaned, sorted and examined broken olive oil jugs discarded at Monte Testaccio south of Rome in the first through the third centuries. The Spiers paid about \$2,500 each, plus airfare, and stayed in a local hotel with about 20 other hobbyists.

"I had been looking for something to do in anticipation of retirement," Mr. Spier said. "My wife is not that interested in going on a dig, but she thought this would be tolerable."

Mr. Spier, who is a retired lawyer, and others regularly dig with the Connecticut state archaeologist at an ancient Indian site in South Windsor, and a Colonial glassworks site nearby, in Manchester. The work in Rome was Mr. Spier's first outside the United States.

"It's not only interesting to do but stimulating because you talk about what this is and what that might have been," he said. "You're not just passing the time of day."

Conditions at archaeological excavations can be hot and dusty, and the work much less glamorous than that depicted in an "Indiana Jones" film. Still, the grunt work is not necessarily akin to Marine Corps basic training, either.

Jane Waldbaum, president of the Archaeological Institute of America and a veteran of digs in Israel, Turkey and Cyprus, cautioned that prospective volunteers should recognize their physical limitations.

"It's the blazing sun, and there is dust, and people are pushing wheelbarrows," she said. "Some people show up and say they have dust allergies."

The rigor is a bonus for Ms. Shaffer, 75.

"It's fascinating, a wonderful way to spend a vacation," she said. "Lots of exercise and sun, and I actually come away feeling better after a dig than I do any other time of the year."

While some people go for personal edification, others seek academic advancement.

Kathleen Puglisi, 19, a sophomore at Fordham University, wants to be an archaeology professor. In June, she spent three weeks on a dig at the medieval site of Pintia in northern Spain. She and a crew of about 10 unearthed a burial tomb, bone fragments, pottery and small ceramic balls thought to have been game pieces. She paid \$1,450 for her stint with ArchaeoSpain, a nonprofit group devoted to digs in Spain and elsewhere.

"You get a feel for the culture where you are excavating," she said. "Not only in the past, because of what you are excavating, but also the present because of

everything around you."

Philip C. Hammond, director of the American Expedition to Petra, Jordan, has been leading groups to the Middle East for half a century. He takes groups of 5 to 38 volunteers to Jordan, where he has directed excavations at a site in Petra called the Temple of the Winged Lions for 20 years. His groups have found correspondence seals, door locks, skeletons, statues, bronze coins, figurines and other artifacts that are 1,600 to 2,000 years old.

Workers with the American Expedition to Petra, a private organization that runs excavations, awake at 4:30 a.m. Sundays through Thursdays, are in the field by 6 to beat the searing heat, and are done with digging by noon. For an hour each afternoon, they wash recent finds. Mr. Hammond, like other dig directors, provides archaeological equipment like shovels, trowels, brushes, wheelbarrows, tape measures, pickaxes, survey equipment and buckets, but he suggests that participants bring along hats and water bottles or canteens.

Each volunteer pays \$2,800 plus airfare for the six-week session, including hotel accommodations.

Mr. Jansson said that when he started digging in Italy in the early 1990's, volunteers shared an old police barracks that was infested with rats. Now they stay in a three-star hotel. He pays \$95 a day, which covers lodging, meals and dig fees. His group digs for about seven hours a day, waking at 5:30 a.m. Usually, he attends for three weeks -- just about all his vacation each year.

"We get so tightly involved in our day-to-day lives of going out and earning a living that we never have time to really truly relax," he said.

### QUICK READ

So you want to be an archaeologist, at least for a few weeks. The first step is to decide where you want to go, and how much time and money you can spare. Here are some online sources of information:

American Institute of Archaeology, [www.archaeological.org/webinfo .php? page=10016](http://www.archaeological.org/webinfo.php?page=10016).

American Schools of Oriental Research, for digs in the Middle East.  
[www.asor.org/linksASOR.html](http://www.asor.org/linksASOR.html).

Archaeology Odyssey and Biblical Archaeology Review, in print and online at  
[bib-arch.org/bswbDig.html](http://bib-arch.org/bswbDig.html).

Current Archaeology, [www.archaeology.co.uk/directory/results.asp?cat=1](http://www.archaeology.co.uk/directory/results.asp?cat=1).

Earthwatch Institute, [earthwatch.org/subject/archaeology.html](http://earthwatch.org/subject/archaeology.html).

### QUESTIONS TO ASK

Is the dig run by an academic organization or a professional group, rather than a travel company with no formal proficiency? When is the dig? Do participants sign up for an entire season, or for shorter periods? What kinds of accommodations are offered? What is the age of the average volunteer?

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