

6.1

INTRODUCTION TO ARCHAEOLOGY

0:11–1:05 I'm Nicholas Toth. I'm a Professor of Archaeology at Indiana University and Co-director of the Stone Age Institute.
STUDY OF ANCIENT PEOPLE

Archaeology is the study of ancient people and the world that they lived in. And archaeologists do a lot of work. They're digging, they're looking for new sites, they're exploring, surveying over time. And I got into archaeology at a very early age. I was about six years old. And I had an uncle who had a collection of spear points and very similar to the one I'm holding here. And I was absolutely fascinated by how were these things made, who were the people that made them, et cetera. And I decided at that age I was going to become an archaeologist. And when I was in high school, I actually corresponded with the famous anthropologist-archaeologist Louis Leakey.

Louis and Mary Leakey are famous for digging at Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania, some of the earliest sites in the world. And much to my surprise, he actually wrote back, and that inspired me to go into archaeology as a career. And I studied archaeology in Ohio and then as a graduate student at Oxford University and the University of California.

1:05–1:54

STUDYING THE
STONE AGE

And archaeology tends to be divided into historical archaeology where your...you have written records of the people that were left behind that can really help you flesh out what their world was like. And then prehistoric archaeology, before the written record, and that's the time period I focus on, especially the Stone Age. The Stone Age occupies over 99 percent of the history of human technology, so it's a very important aspect.

And we evolved from a very small-brained animal during that two-and-a-half million years to a very large-brained animal as well, so it's a real challenge. And we interface with a lot of other disciplines. Geology, the geologists who study the geological context and how our sites became buried and what kinds of evidence about climate are left behind. We deal with primate paleontologists who study the animal bones from archaeological sites as well. We deal with climatologists who study climate change over time.

1:54–3:01

MULTIDISCIPLINARY
APPROACH

And so, these are some of the types of disciplines that we work very closely with. The things I like about archaeology, it's an outdoor discipline, you spend a lot of your time outside hiking, looking for new localities, and digging. And digging is not easy either. It's a very strenuous activity you do but we love it. And so there's the field component, and there's also the laboratory component, where you have to analyze the materials that you've dug up and make sense out of.

3:01–4:01

BIG QUESTIONS

And we do a lot of what's called experimental archaeology as well. In our case, learning to make and use stone tools like our ancestors did. And once you do that, you'll learn to make stone tools. In fact, I made this stone tool here. You get a much better appreciation for how our ancestors were doing things and being able to identify patterns that make sense in the prehistoric record as well.

And the big questions we're asking in archaeology, one of them is what is driving human evolution? You get this incredible expansion in the brain, human brain over time, tripling in size in two-and-a-half million years.

Why did that happen? It probably has a lot to do with selection from more intelligent creatures, but how much does technology have to do with it? How much does hunting have to do with it? How much does dealing with larger social groups, if they're group sizes are getting larger over time, have to do with it? These are the types of things that we're trying to tease out.

And the other thing is what accounts for the changes we see in the archaeological record, when people shift from hunters and gatherers to farmers or from farmers to civilizations? Why does that happen? How much of it has to do with climate change? How much... how much of it has to do with new ways of exploiting your resources, et cetera.

So, these are big questions that archaeologists are asking. So, if you're interested in becoming an archaeologist, I would advise you to visit your local museums and archaeological sites in your area. And also to volunteer. Oftentimes, they will take volunteers on archaeological digs and it's a great way of getting firsthand experience. That's how... that's how I started as an undergraduate in college, volunteering to work on archaeological projects.

4:01–4:50

JOIN IN THE ADVENTURE