Cliff Dweller Artifact Kit

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Reminder: Please remember to return the kit by its due date since others are scheduled to receive it immediately following you.

Thank you!
Exploring the Kit

Help your students explore the artifacts, information, and activities packed inside this kit, and together you will discover some very exciting history! This kit is for students of all ages, but it is designed to be of most interest to students from fourth through eighth grades, the years in which Colorado history is most often taught. Younger children may require more help and guidance with some of the components of the kit, but there is something here for everyone.

Kit Components

The Cliff Dweller Kit’s goal is to introduce students to the methods of archaeologists and to acquaint them with one of the prehistoric peoples who inhabited our state, the Ancestral Puebloans of Mesa Verde region. It is also hoped that the students gain an appreciation and an understanding of this past culture and recognize that, in spite of great differences, all people have certain needs that remain the same.

1. **Artifacts and their Significance** – This section contains a description of the items that will be found during excavation. The page numbers reference in the descriptions refers to *The Archaeology of Colorado* by E. Steve Cassells to help provide more detail and illustrations.

2. **Glossary of Terms** – A further resource to understand and explain particular terms.

3. **How to Use this Kit** – Provides suggestions for organizing the students as they use the kit, preparation for the excavation, and approaches to introduce techniques and concerns of archaeology.

4. **Archaeology** – This is the first section of lesson plans. It is a condensation of information on method of archaeology. It is divided into four parts: site, recording information, excavation and stratigraphy. Please read this section to ensure safe handling of the “buried” artifacts.

5. **Mesa Verde** – This is the second section of lesson plans, which contain information on Mesa Verde. This section will enable students to answer questions about the area and the development of the people who lived there.

6. **Additional Resources** – Offers more tools and readings broken into further resources for students as well as teachers.
Artifacts and their Significance

The descriptions that follow are meant to provide you with more information about the objects found in the Cliff Dwellers kit.

There are numbers on some of the artifacts. These are museum identification numbers, indicating that they are part of the Colorado Historical Society’s collection. Some of the objects are contemporary or reproductions. A few items are fashioned after artifacts in the Society’s collection because the originals are too rare and valuable to circulate. For further information and illustrations, page number in Cassells’ book provided.

Stone Artifacts

The Cliff Dwellers had no metal. The stone objects are included to emphasize the use of stone as a material for tools and weapons. The students should be asked to describe the difference between an artifact from the kit and an unworked stone. They should notice that the artifact has been shaped by sharpening, breaking, or rubbing.

Initially deer, buffalo, elk, rabbits, and other wild game were hunted with atlatls (launching sticks) and spears. Later the bow and arrow came into use. Spear points and arrowheads were chipped out of stone (Cassells, p. 127). Although your students will find several arrowheads during their dig, the number of points is not as large as would be the case if the Cliff Dwellers were exclusively hunting people. (See Food Artifacts)

Spear points

Arrowheads

The scraper was a tool with multiple uses. It could remove tissue from the interior surface of hides, smooth wood, and be used for other tasks. It was made by flaking stone (Cassells, p. 89).

Scrapers
The **hatchet head** is heavy rounded rock with the groove entirely around its center. Used to pound, chop and smash objects, it was fashioned from hard rock with its edges smoothed by grinding. A wooden handle was attached with a leather wrapping.

The small, smooth water-worn stream pebble is a **polishing stone**. Pottery was carefully rubbed and smoothed to a slick, glassy surface with this pebble. (See Pottery Artifacts).

The pair of quartz rocks are called **lightning rocks** and were found in **kivas** (ceremonial chambers that were usually circular and subterranean). If these pieces are rubbed together on their flat sides in a completely dark room, a glow will appear. They were probably of religious significance.
Bone Artifacts

In addition to stone, bone was popular material from which tools were made. Bone artifacts are found through all the Mesa Verde cultural periods. The tapered silver of bone, pointed at one end, is an awl. It was used for piercing small holes in skins and for punching or pushing material through holes. When weaving baskets, an awl was used to or splitting yucca fibers, the bone needle was surprisingly efficient. A few seconds with a sandstone block corrected any broken or dull point.

Basket Artifacts

For a hunting and gathering people, such as the early Basketmakers, basketry was an important craft. It provided them with light and easily portable carrying and storage containers. The yucca plant with its long sword-like leaves was readily available and was woven into baskets of various shapes and sizes. Some were woven so tightly they could hold water. Other woven items were sandals, burial wrappers, and mats for floor and door coverings. With the introduction of pottery, the prevalence of basketry declined. Baskets were still used, but they became more utilitarian and were less likely to be elaborately designed or decorated.

Food Artifacts

The introduction of corn was the primary stimulus behind the change from a nomadic life of hunting and gathering to a sedentary life of farming. Corn seeds and cobs have been found with artifacts of all the Mesa Verde periods. Help your students compare these with their present day counterparts. The corn kernels are a variety of colors (red, blue, black and speckled), with red or brownish color predominating. The corn cobs are shorter than those grown today, averaging five to seven inches in length. When the corn was harvested, it could be roasted or boiled on the cob, sun-dried or parched. The dried or parched corn was then pounded and ground on mutates to meal or flour.
Although corn was the staple crop, squash and beans were also cultivated. **Squash** was boiled, roasted or baked in the shell. The shells themselves were sometimes dried, scooped out and used as vessels.

**Beans** were an important addition to the food supply, increasing the protein content of the diet. Beans also indicated a more settled life. Unlike corn that can be planted and then left for long periods of time, beans require almost constant attention.

There three vegetables provided the Ancestral Puebloans with dependable crops which could be stored when harvested. Their food supply was still augmented by hunting and gathering wild plants and fruit. However, planting, tending and harvesting their fields became the chief occupation. Help your students to notice that the relative scarcity of projectile points along with the quantity and variety of food provide further evidence of an economy based on food gathering rather than hunting.
Pottery Artifacts

As life became more sedentary, there was an increase in the accumulation of material goods. Lightweight baskets were appropriate for nomads; pottery—heavier and breakable—was not. When people lived permanently in one place, pottery can quickly became indispensable. Mesa Verde pottery was as distinctive as its architecture. Fine corrugated vessels were made, but the outstanding ware was black-on-white.

**Corrugated pottery** was the general utility ware of the Ancestral Puebloans. Light to dark grey in color and often bearing traces of soot, most vessels show signs of having been placed directly on the fire as cooking pots. These pieces were made by the coil method; there were no potter’s wheels. After the coils had been pinched together, the potter’s fingernail marks were left or a small stick was used to make patterns in the damp clay. The pieces were then fired without scraping, slipping or polishing. This type of ware was made for over four hundred years (Cassells, p. 126).

**Black-on-white pottery**, used as table and ceremonial ware, represented the height of the potter’s art at Mesa Verde. These pieces were also made by the coil method. However, a scraper was used to carefully smooth the surface, inside and out. To give the piece its white base color and a smooth painting surface, a “slip” was then added. When this wash of extremely fine white clay was dry, the piece was then polished using a water-smooth pebble. (See **polishing stone** under Stone Artifacts).

It was now ready for painting. Paint was made first from crushed minerals like manganese and iron oxides, later from plant extracts such as bee plant or tansy mustard. Paint was applied with a brush made from a yucca leaf that was split down to the desired width with the end chewed and frayed. The piece was then fired.
Students should note the distinctive characteristic of black paint on grayish white clay and that the decoration is geometrical, not representational. Black-on-white pottery vessels were the “show pieces.” Mugs, bowls, pitchers, canteens, dippers, pipes and boxes were also fashioned and elaborately decorated (Cassells, p. 128-129).

**Fabric Artifacts**

Many blankets and wraps were made of rabbit fur using a unique construction technique. A long string of yucca fiber was stretched tight. Narrow strips (about ¼” wide) of rabbit fur were wet and wrapped tightly around the cord. The end of one fur strip overlapped the rest, creating a continuous rope. When the fur dried, it would cling to the cord as if it were sewn. These fur covered stings, often 50 feet in length, were then tied together in close parallel rows. This technique of twining was done without a loom and called finger-weaving.

A new material and new techniques in weaving appeared when cotton was introduced. The loom and cotton appeared on the mesa toward the end of the Modified Basketmaker period.
Glossary of Terms

**Archaeology**: the study of past culture through the excavation and analysis of their physical remains.

**Artifact**: a portable object that is the product of human workmanship or use.

**Atlatl**: Aztec word for “spear-thrower.” Throwing sticks with a handle on one end and a spur on the other which fits into a depression drilled in to the basal end of a spear shaft. When the spear is thrown, the atlatl stays in the hand.

**Black-on-White**: white or gray pottery decorated with black, painted designs.

**Coiled Pottery**: vessels made by rolling clay into coils which are then joined and smoothed together into the desired shape.

**Corrugated Pottery**: pottery in which the alternate ridges and depressions resulting from the coiling-and-pinching technique have not been obliterated, but are pinched and tooled into decorative patterns.

**Flesher**: stone, bone, or antler tool used to scrape the flesh off animal hides.

**Hafting Groove**: indentation in the center of an axe head, on which the handle is connected (usually with sinew) to the axe head.

**Incised**: in pottery, grooves cut into soft clay with a sharp tool.

**Kiva**: a ceremonial chamber, usually subterranean and circular.

**Knap**: to shape a stone by breaking off pieces with quick blows from another rock or antler.

**Lithic**: stone.

**Mano**: a hand-held stone, usually roughly oblong, used for grinding grains, seed, etc.

**Metate**: the grinding stone on which the mano is rubbed.

**Olla**: storage jar (usually corrugated).

**Polychrome Pottery**: pottery bearing three or more colors.

**Pot Hunting**: excavating and collecting archaeological artifacts in an unscientific manner, often in order to make a profit by selling the objects.
**Prehistory:** archaeology of periods before literate history.

**Projectile Point:** an arrow, spear, or dart point.

**Sherd:** a fragment of a broken pottery vessel.

**Sipapu:** a hole commonly found in floors of kivas, which is symbolic of the mythological place from which, according to creation myths, the first people emerged from the underworld.

**Slip:** a coating of very fine, wet clay applied to a vessel before firing to give a smooth finish.

**Stratification:** the characteristic of being in layer or strata and the process by which such material is deposited. When undisturbed, the lowest is the earliest, since it was laid down.
How To Use This Kit

The Cliff Dweller Case History can be used effectively either as an introduction to a unit on archaeology, prehistoric man, and the Ancestral Puebloans; or during the unit; or as a concluding activity.

In the first approach, the teacher should introduce students to the concerns and techniques of archaeology. The students then unearth the objects and record the information on the description and location of the artifacts they find. The students will mimic the work of archaeologists as they draw conclusions from the evidence they discover. Their ideas about the Ancestral Puebloans can be compared to the conclusions of professional archaeologists.

If the kit is used during or after a unit on the Ancestral Puebloans, the excavation will reinforce concepts previously taught and introduce students to the methods of archaeologists.

In this kit there are three layers approximately 5 cm (2”) deep. Each layer is divided into two grid squares A and B (marked on the interior side wall of the kit). Teachers have found it effective to divide the class into six groups and have each group excavate and record one layer of a grid square. Each group should have someone to:

a. Use the trowel and brush
b. Sift
c. Record the artifact’s placement in the layer on Form #1
d. Record size, shape, etc. on Form #2
e. Put the artifacts into the appropriately marked bag and note its contents on an orange label card.

To begin, the plastic sheet should be spread out and the kit placed in the center. The tools and the protective layer of foam are removed.

The trowel is used first. The trowel is turned on its side so that the blade is perpendicular to the surface. It is slowly pulled across the surface. The trowel edge should go only ¼” below the surface at a time. The sand is lifted on the trowel and put in the sifter. All the soil should be sifted through the wire mesh screen—otherwise tiny valuable objects might be overlooked.

As soon as an object is touched, a brush is used. Once the object is uncovered by brushing, the placement in the layer is recorded on Form #1 by drawing the object in the position it was found. Out in the field an artifact is measured and photographed in situ, exactly where and how it was found. According to where they are found, artifacts give different clues to their use, age, and history.
The object is given to the student recording information on Form #2. He draws a sketch of it, measures it, and the group discussed what the artifact is made of and its possible use, and then records those ideas. Smaller objects probably will not appear until the sand is sifted and can be recorded then.

When a group has finished its grid of the layer, the artifacts found in that layer should be put in the cloth bag provided and an orange label card filled out. The students can describe the objects on the lower portion of the card.

The setup instructions on the next page help show where to place the items. When students are finished you can also use this diagram to see how effectively your students excavated. On a real dig each artifact would have its own paper sack and a more detailed tag.

After all six groups have finished this process; teachers have found it effective to discuss with the students their conjectures on the function and the material of the objects from Form #2. Information found in the section Artifacts and their Significance will assist you in leading this discussion.
How to Setup Your Excavation

The following diagram shows the relative location and quantities of where to place the artifacts in the container. You can check the excavated items in their cloth bags against this list to determine how thoroughly your students excavated. Please put items back in bags once finished.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrowheads (3)</td>
<td>Polishing stone</td>
<td>Hatchet head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrugated pottery shreds (4)</td>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>Lightning rocks (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corn cob</td>
<td>Squash</td>
<td>Beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corn &amp; squash seeds</td>
<td>Stone scraper</td>
<td>Corn &amp; squash seeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbit fur</td>
<td>Basket fragment</td>
<td>Beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spear point</td>
<td>Bone awl</td>
<td>Beans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Archaeology

Archaeology is the study of past cultures through systematic retrieval and analysis of man-made objects and structures. Portable objects that are made or shaped by human workmanship are called artifacts. The job of archaeologists is to describe, classify and analyze the artifacts they find. The artifacts are often buried and must be dug up or excavated. That is why an archaeological expedition is called a dig.

Archaeology is used to reconstruct human history from the earliest time to the present. The purpose of archaeology is to study how past cultures came into existence, to follow their growth, and to study the factors that led to their demise or success.

Site

A site is a place with some evidence of past human activity. Before archaeologists go on a dig, they must first locate sites with this evidence. The evidence may include artifacts, which are portable items made, used or brought to a site by people (such as tools), or it may include features which are similarly man-made but are not portable (like campfires or house foundations). Therefore, it is important to locate a site that is likely to contain artifacts. Sometimes archaeologists get clues from others who are not involved in the science. A farmer cultivating the land may come across artifacts; burrowing animals may dig up objects of interest; construction men digging foundations for buildings may uncover items; or streams cutting through the soil may dislodge pieces of past civilizations.

Sites will probably be close to water. Caves in a long inhabited area are likely sites. Other clues to the location of sites are unusual mounds or sunken areas. Mesa Verde archaeologists used some of these signs to discover ruins at Mesa Verde. When archaeologists purposefully look for sites, regardless of whether or not they get clues from others, they are doing work called a survey.

Recording Information

When a site is found, test pits are dug to determine its worth. If the site is valuable, the vegetation is removed. Then a grid is set up in the following way. With the use of a compass a north-south line is established on the west end of the site and an east-west line on the south side. Parallel lines to the east of the north-south line are established at one, two, or five meter intervals and to the north on the east-west line. From the southwest corner the north-south lines are labeled alphabetically and the east-west line numerically.

The dig represented in this kit is to be two of many grid squares of a real excavation: 1A and 1B. The interior side wall of the kit is simply marked A and B to represent the two grids.
(It is interesting to note that archaeologists from the United States who work on prehistoric and historic American Indian sites, as well as all archaeologists in other countries use the metric system. Only archaeologists from the United States who work on historic sites of non-American Indian cultures use the English system).

The order of objects found from top to bottom is also recorded. (See the section entitled **Stratigraphy**). Layers are usually 5 to 10 cm deep. A two meter-long pole with alternating colors (the depth of each layer) is set down on the edge of the site so accurate layer records can be made. The layers are numbered L1, L2, L3 from the top to the bottom. (In this kit a similar marker pole is inserted with 5 cm bands of color for the three layers. Form #1 is provided for the students to record layer findings).

It is important to keep accurate records of the placement of each artifact in depth and in relationship to all other objects. The interpretation is often done at a different time and place than the excavation. Therefore, accurate records must be taken during the excavation. (This is the purpose of Form #1). For other scientists, these records make it possible to contrast the findings with those of other sites. Perhaps in the future it will be possible for other people to interpret the findings more completely. (This need for accuracy should be stressed with the students).

**Excavation**

After the vegetation has been removed, any one of several techniques may be used. In hard packed soil the sharp end of a pick is put in several centimeters and used to pry up a clod of dirt. One of the laborers may have this one duty in an area. When he has finished loosening the ground another person will use small tools to break up the soil.

In the Mesa Verde area there are two kinds of soil encountered. The top portion is semi-packed sandy dirt and the bottom is hard, packed clay. The trowel is used to cut through the sand until an object is touched. At this time the archaeologist immediately switches to a stiff brush and sweeps away the earth. This is done to avoid moving, scraping or breaking the artifact. (Stone, bone, fabric, and seeds are in this kit so it is necessary to follow this procedure closely). After the object is uncovered by brushing, its location within the layer must be charted. Once it has been unearthed it is photographed, measured and noted. (In this case the object will be drawn, not photographed. There are forms for this in the kit). Stone objects may be washed—others may not.

**Stratigraphy**

**Stratigraphy** is a method of interpreting layers in archaeological deposits. By studying the position and sequence of layers in which prehistoric remains are found, archaeologists can provide a relative chronology. The layers (or strata) may be comprised of broken tools and pottery, ashes, rubbish, the remains of building, or they may be levels of soil with a few artifacts throughout them. If undisturbed the bottom, or
lowest layer of a deposit, is the oldest. It was the first material to be thrown out or left on the surface and was then covered by more recent materials. That is the reason when a site is excavated, archaeologists are careful to note the location of artifacts within the site and within the layers.
Mesa Verde

Archaeology is the study of past cultures through systematic retrieval and analysis of man-made objects and structures. Portable objects that are made or shaped by human workmanship are called artifacts. The job of archaeologists is to describe, classify and analyze the artifacts they find. The artifacts are often buried and must be dug up or excavated. That is why an archaeological expedition is called a dig.

Archaeology is used to reconstruct human history from the earliest time to the present. The purpose of archaeology is to study how past cultures came into existence, to follow their growth, and to study the factors that led to their demise or success.

1. **Basketmaker**
The basketmaker period began around the time of the birth of Christ, and lasted until about A.D. 450. The Indians of this early stage depended partly on hunting and partly on agriculture for their food supply: the cultivated a primitive variety of corn and some squash, but made much use of wild plants and game. Since hunting was important, the people followed the wild animals and had only semi-permanent types of dwellings, usually light shelters of brush and earth. Light tools and ornaments were fashioned from bone and stone, and skins and furs were used for clothing and other necessary items. The people used plant fibers to weave sandals, carrying cases, and other utilitarian objects. The most notable feature of this early culture was the craft which gave rise to the name **Basketmakers**. Baskets woven from plant fibers were used extensively for carrying and storage. Light-weight and sturdy, the baskets were well-made and highly useful in semi-nomadic way of life.

2. **The Modified Basketmaker**
The Modified Basketmaker period is dated from A.D. 750. During this time, regular communities began to develop as advances in agricultural and housing techniques began to make for a more settled way of life than in the early period. During this stage, the people consistently built simple but sturdy pit houses in which log frameworks were constructed over shallow pits. They grew several varieties of corn and squash, as well as beans. They stored these and other wild plant foods in large granaries. Baskets were still in use, although their importance narrowed as the sedentary way of life gave rise to the development of fired pottery. This early pottery was made by the coil method, and although primarily utilitarian, it was often painted. Heavier than basketry, pottery was better suited to cooking and storage for a people now living a settled existence.

3. **The Developmental Pueblo**
The Developmental Pueblo period, from A.D. 750 to 1100, marked even more extensive transitions in the prehistoric community life. Communities became larger as farming techniques further improved, and with larger communities the
people learned to make further improvements in all areas of daily living. Dwellings underwent major changes: the beginning of this period saw simple houses of wood and adobe mud, but as American Indians learned the techniques of working with stone improvements in strength and design arose. Structures became multi-chambered, with living, storage, and the ceremonial kiva chambers. The people began to grow cotton, and developed weaving techniques, such as loom-work, that led to the production of good cotton cloth. Pottery, improved in both decoration and overall quality, was more extensively used than before, while basketry, no longer vital to daily needs, further declined in quantity produced.

4. The Great Pueblo
The Great Pueblo period, from A.D. 1100 to 1300, was marked by greater concentrations of population, further improvements in the arts, and individual job specialization. Dwellings were large masonry structures of several stories—in the Mesa Verde village alone, there were as many as six or eight hundred cliff dwellings built into the shallow canyon caves. Space on the mesa tops was used more extensively for farming. Excellent cotton cloth and pottery were made by the people, who apparently enjoyed a fairly peaceful community life. Based on archaeological evidence and studies of Pueblo societies since the arrival of Europeans, we believe much time was spent out-of-doors: the men chipping arrowheads and other stone tools, weaving mats and cloth; the women grinding corn, cooking meals and decorating pottery. On special occasions, the people held colorful dances and impressive religious ceremonies. The Cliff Dwellers had no horses, cattle or sheep, no metals, firearms, or wheeled vehicles, yet they had indeed reached a golden age: marked progress had been made since the Basketmaker times, in agriculture and building, and in the arts of cloth weaving and pottery.

Sometime around A.D. 1300, the American Indians of the great cliff dwellings left their homes, bringing to an end of the Great Pueblo period. Archaeologist propose several possible reasons for this withdrawal: the great drought that occurred from A.D. 1276 to 1299, pressure from enemy groups, disease, internal strife, soil erosion lowering productivity, deforestation and overpopulation. Whatever the reasons, the cliff dwellers left and settled elsewhere, probably moving southeast to the Rio Grande country and merging with Pueblo Indian groups.
For Further Reading

Teacher’s List

*Anasazi: Ancient People of the Rock* with photographs by David Muench and text by Donald G. Pike, is a photographic essay that evokes the beauty and mystery of these monumental ruins (Palo Alto, California: American West Publishing Company, 1947).

Frank McNitt uses the biography of one of the first Anglos to view the ruins at Mesa Verde as a means of discussing the Anasazi in *Richard Wetherill: Anasazi* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1966).


A summary of all the prehistoric Indians in the Southwest, including the Anasazi and their contemporaries can be found in Linda S. Cordell’s *Prehistory of the Southwest* (New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1984).

*Among Ancient Ruins* edited by Frederick W. Lange and Diana Leonard (Boulder: Univeristy of Colorado Museum, 1985) is a historical perspective on the life of the prominent Colorado archaeologist, Earl Morris, that includes photographs of archaeologists at work and of Anasazi sites and artifacts.

Duane A. Smith’s *Mesa Verde National Park: Shadows of the Centuries* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988) is an illustrated history of the discovery, creation, and development of the park.
Student’s List

*Cliff Dwellers of Walnut Canyon* by Carroll Fenton and Alice Epstein (New York: John Day Company, 1960) is an easy to read book discussing prehistoric Indians in northern Arizona. Includes discussion of tools, plants, grinding corn, making baskets and pottery.

A good discussion of the Anasazi with color photographs of the park can be found in *Mesa Verde National Park* by Ruth Radlauer (Chicago: Childrens Press, 1984).


*Going on a Dig* by Velma Ford Morrison (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1981) presents an overview of archaeology including the techniques of excavating, how ancient sites become buried and are relocated, and the information that archaeology has revealed about American Indians.

Denise Schmandt-Besserat’s *Archaeology* (Austin, Texas: Steck-Vaugh Company, 1974) introduces the methods used by archaeologists and explains how artifacts fit together like puzzle pieces to reveal clues to life long ago.

*Archaeology* by Dennis B. Fradin (Chicago: Childrens Press, 1983) briefly discusses the techniques and tools archaeologists use to locate and study artifacts from the past. This “New True Book” highlights milestones in the history of archaeology.

Carolyn James provides some fiction with *Digging Up the Past: the Story of an Archaeological Adventure* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1990). Following proper archaeological procedures, two children determine the origins of rocks and bones found in their neighborhood.