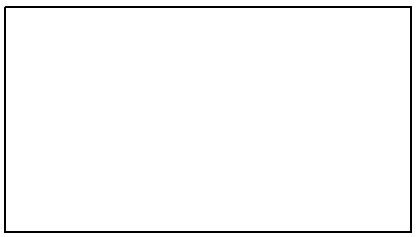
CHAPTER I



WHAT IS

ARCHAEOLOGY?

- PURPOSE

Chapter I introduces the student to archaeology as a part of the Social Science of Anthropology. Archaeologists study the behavior of past societies by systematically recovering and analyzing their material remains. Here in Georgia, for example, the remains of past societies are all around us. One student may have found an ancient arrow point on his family's property, or another an old bottle at an early community garbage dump. These artifacts are the subject matter of the science of Archaeology.

Such artifacts and the sites where they are found are important resources of knowledge. These resources need to be preserved so that they can be scientifically studied. There are many ways citizens can assist archaeologists in their efforts to preserve sites and artifacts in Georgia. Only by studying the past can we understand why human societies have developed in specific ways and where these societies may be headed in the future.

- CONCEPTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The most important concept introduced in Chapter I is that of "culture." Anthropologists recognize that humans, more that any other animal, use learned behavior to adapt to an ever-changing world. Other animals use mostly built-in (biological) mechanisms for adaptation. Human groups organize their learned behavior in ways that allow them to adjust to the environments they occupy. Different groups have unique ways of passing along information from generation to generation, which also affects their adaptive potential. Therefore, if we speak of "Archaic Culture" in Georgia and assign it an age of 8,000 B.C. to 1,000 B.C., we mean that archaeologists have identified a particular way of life, resulting from a particular set of learned behavior, for the period between 8,000 B.C. and 1,000 B.C. We do not mean that there were no changes during those 7,000 years; on the contrary, there were many changes. What we mean is that we can distinguish in certain ways between the styles of life (culture) of those groups before 8,000 B.C., those between 8000 B.C. to 1,000 B.C., and those after 1,000 B.C.

Other important concepts, techniques, and methods of archaeology are introduced in Chapter I. Several of these are explained in the context of an archaeological site that might be created by the students themselves (a picnic site). It is important that students recognize that we, in our modern world, are leaving a material record of our behavior, and that archaeologists of the future might well study this record. It is only when archaeologists recover material remains in undisturbed situations, where it is clear which items belonged to which culture, that usable information can be obtained. For example, if we excavated artifacts from several different layers of a site and then mixed them all together, we would lose valuable information. If, however, we were careful to keep the artifacts from each stratum separate, we could tell the relative ages of each group and could interpret how each culture differed from the other.

The more technical material covered in Chapter I, such as radiocarbon dating and stratigraphy, should be reinforced in the classroom through the use of examples, additional explanations, resource material, or projects. The teacher may wish to utilize some of the projects outlined in Chapter IV at this time rather than wait until the end of the book.

The concluding two pages of Chapter I explain why archaeological sites are a valuable cultural resource that every citizen should work to protect and preserve. The teacher should stress that only professional archaeologists are qualified to excavate a site, because once the site is disturbed, the information can never be replaced in its original context. Therefore, sites should be disturbed only under stringent scientific controls. It should also be stressed,

however, that every student can make a direct contribution to archaeology by helping to protect sites, and by reporting sites to the nearest archaeologist (this direct involvement of the student is further developed in Chapter IV).