

# THE CAER BIG DIG 2020

## HOW TO DIG AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL TEST PIT:

### A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE



## Digging a test pit

Test pits are archaeological ‘mini-digs’ that can be dug entirely by hand and by anyone. You don't need any previous archaeological experience to dig a test pit as long as you follow the instructions in this step-by-step guide. You can also watch our ‘How to dig a test pit’ video on our website at [www.CAERHeritageProject.com](http://www.CAERHeritageProject.com)

Test pits are just 1 m square so create minimal mess and can be fitted in pretty much anywhere. Turf is removed in neat squares and the soil excavated is put onto a tarpaulin so that lawns aren't damaged. When digging is finished, the test pit is backfilled and any turf replaced. The site will be almost invisible within a few weeks.

## What might you find?

People have been living in Caerau and Ely for over 6,000 years so its possible you might find fragments of the stone tools used by our community's earliest inhabitants through to sweet wrappers dropped in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Everything you find is a piece of the jigsaw that will help to tell the story of the place you live over hundreds and thousands of years.

## What equipment is needed?

You'll need some basic equipment to get started. Some of this is included in your ‘CAER Big Dig Pack’ (Caerau and Ely residents only), while other items you might already have. If you need any items, we can supply them and deliver them safely to your door at NO CHARGE (Caerau and Ely residents only, and with social distancing implemented and equipment fully disinfected prior to delivery).

Equipment that is included in your CAER Big Dig Pack:

• Step-by-step guide and Recording form	• Permanent marker pen
• Health & Safety Guide and Declaration	• Garden seed tray (for finds)
• 3 x clear plastic finds bags	• Toothbrush (for washing finds)

Other equipment you will need – tick off what you have and if you need anything delivered please phone us on 02920 003132 or email us [hiddenhillfort@aceplace.org](mailto:hiddenhillfort@aceplace.org)

	I have	I need
1 x hand-tape measure		
1 x spade		
1 x hand shovel		
1 x trowel (4 inch pointing trowel)		
1 x bucket		
1 x Hand sieve (14 inch diameter, ¼ inch mesh)		
1 x tarpaulin (at least 2 m x 2 m)		
String (at least 5 m)		
4 x six inch nails		

## Key things to remember

- Take your time and proceed carefully at all times
- Make sure you follow the step-by-step instructions in this handbook or watch our 'How to dig a test pit video'
- Make sure you read through the Health & Safety Guidance and sign the Consent Form
- Ask for help if you are uncertain what to do — archaeologists from the CAER team are available online (Direct Message us on Facebook at [www.Facebook.com/CAERHeritageProject](https://www.facebook.com/CAERHeritageProject)) or by telephone on **02920 003132**
- If you are working together as part of a family or household, remember to think about how to divide up the various tasks you need to do so that (1) no-one gets too tired, (2) you're all enjoying working as a team

## Step-by-step Instructions

Follow the steps below to dig your test pit. You can also watch our 'How to dig a test pit' film on our website [www.CAERHeritageProject.com](http://www.CAERHeritageProject.com)

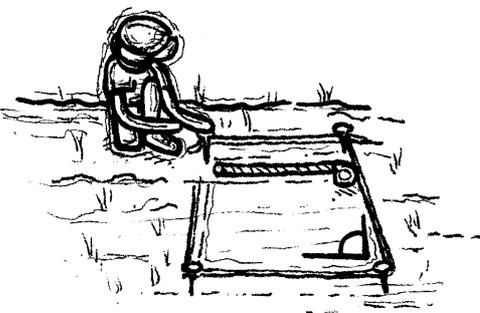
### Step 1: Starting off

The first step in digging your Test Pit is choosing its location which should ideally be fairly flat, with plenty of room to work. The area you put the soil you dig out (the spoil heap) needs to be at least 1 m away from the edge of your test pit. Avoid being under tree branches or too close to bushes and any areas where there may be buried pipes or wires. Keep at least a 1 m distance from any walls.



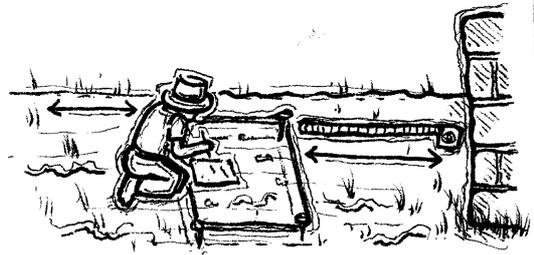
### Step 2: Marking out your test pit

Next thing to do is to measure and mark out your test pit on the ground. To do this you'll need some string, four nails, a sheet of A4 paper and a hand-tape measure. Start by pushing the first nail into the ground and then measure 1 metre along the ground from the nail with the hand-tape measure and push in a second nail in the same way as the first. Connect the two nails with a length of string. Then tie another piece of string to your second nail and use a piece of A4 paper (or this handbook) to make sure that the corner forms a 90-degree angle. Pull the string tight along the edge of the paper, measure 1 metre and insert a third nail. Take up the slack and tie the string to the third nail. Repeat the process to complete your square.



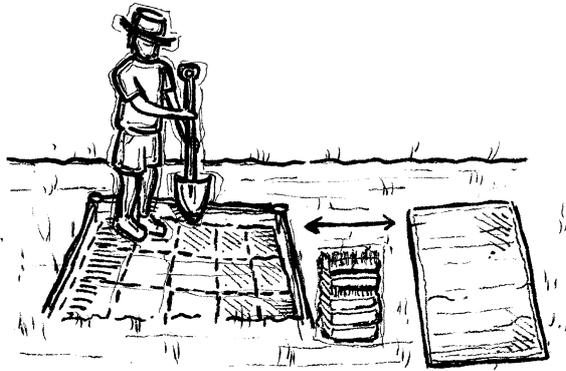
### Step 3: Surveying your test pit

Next, you need to draw a sketch of the Test Pit's location on the Recording sheet (you can find it at the back of this handbook), so that anyone reading it will know exactly where your Test Pit was. To do this, measure the distance from at least two corners of your Test Pit to any permanent feature or structure in your garden (e.g. a fence or wall). These features, and the corners of your Test Pit should be marked on your plan.



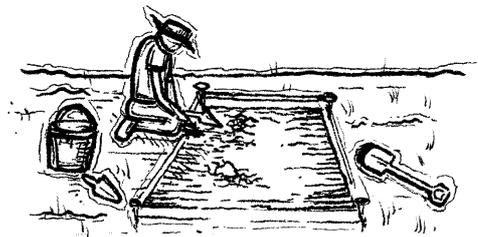
### Step 4: De-turfing

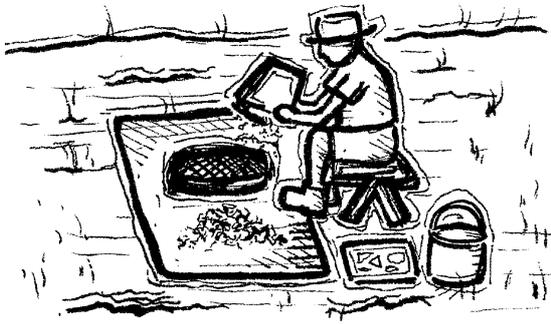
Unfold your tarpaulin and lay it out flat at least 1 m from the edge of your Test Pit. This is where you'll put the soil that you dig out of your Test Pit. First thing to do is to remove the turf (de-turf) with a spade. Put the spade just inside the string and gradually work along each side cutting the turf as you go. When you have cut the turf all the way round begin cutting the middle into a series of squares like a chessboard. Each turf should be about 20 by 20 cm. Stack the turf to the side. The first layer should be grass side down, then the second layer grass side up and so on.



### Step 5: Starting to dig

Once you've removed the turf, make sure you've got your finds tray at the side of the trench, and you're ready to start digging out your Test Pit in a series of 20 cm thick layers or 'spits'. Using the spade and trowel (which one will depend on how hard the soil is) gently loosen the soil. As soon there's enough loosened soil in the bottom of your Test Pit to get in your way, use the hand shovel to get it out of the pit and into a bucket to be sieved. At all times, keep the bottom of the test pit as level and horizontal as possible. You should dig around any large stones, bricks or rocks until you reach their base. Small plant roots can be cut off. NEVER pull a find out of the ground: instead, excavate the soil around it and when it's completely exposed gently lift it up and place it in your finds tray. If you come across any pipes or wires then stop and fill in the pit.



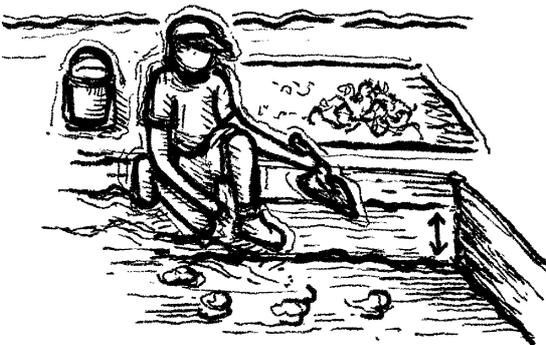
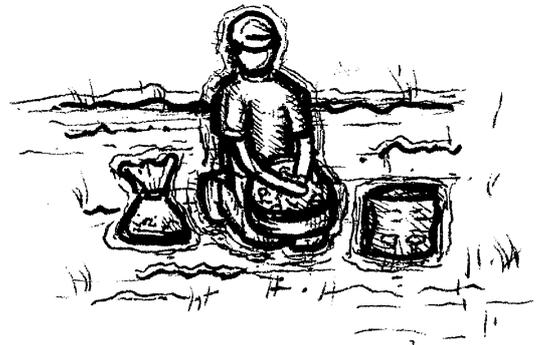


### Step 6: Dealing with the soil

Tip the contents of each bucket of soil into the sieve a bit at a time (holding the sieve over the tarpaulin). It's a lot easier to sieve small amounts, and you'll be able to spot any finds more easily if there's less in the sieve. Take care when lifting buckets of heavy soil. Sieve all of the soil as it is excavated and keep anything and everything that you think might be manmade or interesting for some other reason – **IF IN DOUBT, KEEP IT!!!**. These are your finds and put all of them into your finds tray. Once all the finds have been taken out of the sieve, tip the residue out onto the tarpaulin. Then, put more soil into the sieve and continue!

### Step 7: Finishing your spit and processing your finds

Carry on with steps 5 and 6 until you get down 20 cm (it will usually take about 1 hour), making sure the sides of your pit are vertical and the bottom is flat. All the finds should then be washed. Using the toothbrush and a bowl of water, gently scrub the finds to remove mud and then leave all of the finds from the spit on a newspaper to dry. Once dry they can be placed into a clear plastic finds bag. Using the permanent marker pen you should write on the bag the first line of your address and the spit number (e.g. the first 20 cm spit should be 1, the second 2 and so on). Take care not to mix finds from different spits together.



### Step 8: Starting the next spit

After you have finished a spit, start on the next one by repeating steps 5 to 7. Continue this pattern until you reach 60 cm in depth or hit 'natural' – a term used by archaeologists for layers never disturbed by humans (it will be very hard and compact with no finds in it).

### Step 9: Recording what you find

You should take regular photographs or videos of your Test Pit and the excavation team while it's in progress. Once you have finished digging you should take a final photograph of your completed test pit using your phone or digital camera, and fill in the rest of the Recording form. We'd love to see your photos and films – please email them to [hiddenhillfort@aceplace.org](mailto:hiddenhillfort@aceplace.org) or upload them to our Facebook page [www.Facebook.com/CAERHeritageProject](http://www.Facebook.com/CAERHeritageProject)



### Step 10: Filling in your test pit

Once completed, you should carefully shovel the soil back into the Test Pit, making sure you tread it down. Try to put the soil back in roughly the same order as it came out, so that your topsoil is back at the top. When you have replaced all the soil, replace the turfs that you removed at the beginning so that there are no gaps and that the edges do not overlap. You may find there is a bit of a mound left where your test pit was – this is normal and it will go as the soil settles over the next few weeks.



### Step 11: Identifying and recording your finds

The identification and recording of your finds is probably the most important step. We will be running 'Ask an Archaeologist' online Zoom chats to help you identify what you've found during the week of 6<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> July. Please email us at [hiddenhillfort@aceplace.org](mailto:hiddenhillfort@aceplace.org) to sign up for an 'Ask an Archaeologist' session. If you don't have internet access give us a call on **02920 003132**. We'd also like to record what you've found so let us know when you've finished and we can pop round to pick up your finds bags and Recording Form – we'll return them after a few days with a record of what all the finds are.



### Step 12: Making a 'Virtual Museum'

You should take a photograph of your favourite find (watch our short 'How to take a photograph of your finds' film on our website [www.CAERHeritageProject.com](http://www.CAERHeritageProject.com)). Email the photo to us, or upload to our Facebook page along with a sentence about what you think it is and why it's your favourite find. We'll then add it to an online exhibition on the CAER Heritage website along with the finds and results of all the other test pits. The most interesting find we record will win a fabulous Ely Roman villa T-Shirt.



**Thank you for taking part in the CAER Big Dig! Please let us know about your experience by filling in our short Evaluation Form in your Dig Pack**

# CAER Big Dig – Recording Form

NAME	
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ADDRESS	
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## Test pit location

Draw a measured, labelled plan below showing where your test pit is in relation to features such as houses, boundaries, roads, walls etc. Include lines showing the exact distances from your test pit to permanently identifiable points nearby such as buildings or walls. Show your test pit as a square with the corners numbered 1- 4.

## Dig Recording

What did you find in Spit 1? What was your favourite find? What was the soil like – was it hard, soft compact etc? Were there lots of stones in it?

What did you find in Spit 2? What was your favourite find? What was the soil like – was it hard, soft compact etc? Were there lots of stones in it?

What did you find in Spit 3? What was your favourite find? What was the soil like – was it hard, soft compact etc? Were there lots of stones in it?

**Please put this form with your finds bags to be picked up by the CAER Big Dig team OR email it to [hiddenhillfort@aceplace.org](mailto:hiddenhillfort@aceplace.org)**