WORTHING MUSEUM & WORTHING ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
HIGHDOWN BIG DIG 2025

HOW TO DIG A TEST PIT

Equipment

You will need the following equipment:

A tape measure, string, spade, fork, trowel, bucket, and pen.

A tarpaulin (min 1.5m x 1.5m) would be useful for placing the spoil on.

Finds bags, recording sheet, clipboard and tray will be provided

Method

1. Measure out the 1m square. It does not have to be exact, but an easy way to check that it is square is the measure the diagonals, which should be 1.41m.

2. Select the area where you are going to put the spoil (the earth dug out of the Test Pit). A shaded spot is best if you are lifting turf. If possible, lay a tarpaulin on which to pile the spoil, it will make cleaning up a lot easier. The spoil heap needs to be at least 1m from the Test Pit, and you should be prepared to let it cover an area of 2m x 2m. You may also want to put a tarp around the area you are excavating (especially on a grassed area), again it makes cleaning up a lot easier.

3. If the chosen area is under grass, carefully cut and lift the turf. These should be laid grass side down, preferably in the same order that they were lifted, this makes refitting them after the dig a lot easier.

4. Excavate using a trowel. Trowels will be available. Archaeologists tend to prefer drop-forged 4.5 inch pointing trowels.

5. As you excavate, clods of earth should be broken up to ensure that no artefacts are missed. An artefact is anything which is or could have been man-made. All artefacts should be placed in a finds tray.

6. Try to keep the sides of the Test Pit vertical and the bottom horizontal as you dig. Dig to a depth of 10cm (measured from the top of the Test Pit), at which depth you should stop and record what you have found so far. All artefacts should be placed in a finds bag, which must be marked with the following information:
    - The Test Pit number.
    - The depth (from the ground surface) from which the artefacts were recovered (e.g. 0-10cm, 12-20cm, 20-30cm etc.)

7. Please also ensure that the recording sheet provided is completed with summaries of the soil description (see end of instructions for examples) and the kind of finds at each level.

8. Once you have done that, you can then excavate the next 10cm. Keep repeating this until you have reached a depth of at least 60cm (or have reached the "natural" i.e. layer of unbroken chalk). You can go deeper but we would recommend 1m as the maximum depth for this exercise.

9. It is possible that during your excavation you come across a possible "feature" (these can take several forms, the most common being:
    - A pit.
    - A ditch.
    - Wall foundations.
    - Post hole.

    However, given the limited area open, it is unlikely that an interpretation as to which of the above it is.

    What you are looking for is a change in the soil colour and texture compared to the soil at the same level. If in doubt ask.

10. When the excavation is complete you should backfill the Test Pit. Undoubtably, once filled there will be a mound, as you will have aerated the earth. Do not worry, it will settle over the next few weeks/months.

11. After the excavation, please ensure that the recording sheet is completed and handed to your Supervisor and all finds are correctly bagged and returned to the Finds tent.