

Abstract

When archaeological collections are severed from their provenience, all value is lost. Future collections management troubleshooting can be improved by designing programs to digitize and compile the field archives of collections that have become dissociated from their documentation. The documentation for the Jones Station Collection has been scanned and uploaded onto an Excel database where all information including each catalog number can be searched. Misplaced data and collection processing by different people have resulted in the dissociation of objects and their data. The digitization of field documents is useful in assisting museum staff with the completion of data entry and preventing future loss through the preservation of provenience. The results of the digitization of the Jones Station field data has assisted successfully and efficiently in correcting data migration errors and reuniting dissociated objects with their documentation. This method can be applied to other collections with lost provenience to aid in problem solving and preserving the integrity of archaeological collections.

Introduction

The Jones Station Collection has suffered extensive data loss since its excavation almost 20 years ago. It was processed by many different people which resulted in a significant amount of human error. The collection also experienced data loss through data migration. Much of the original documentation is missing, and the data that can be extracted from the documentation that has survived is often convoluted. The remaining documentation consists of 341 tags which have 2,897 catalog numbers recorded on them.

Objective

This research aims to increase the efficiency of collections management problem solving through the digitization of archaeological documents and the development of a database. The purpose of the digitization of the documents associated with the Jones Station Collection is to solve past collections management errors and reunite dissociated objects with their original documentation, while preserving both the mitigation process and the provenience of the collection.



Two of several stacks of provenience tags.

Methods

341 provenience tags were scanned and assigned a number in a sequential order starting from 1. Each image was then uploaded onto an Excel database.

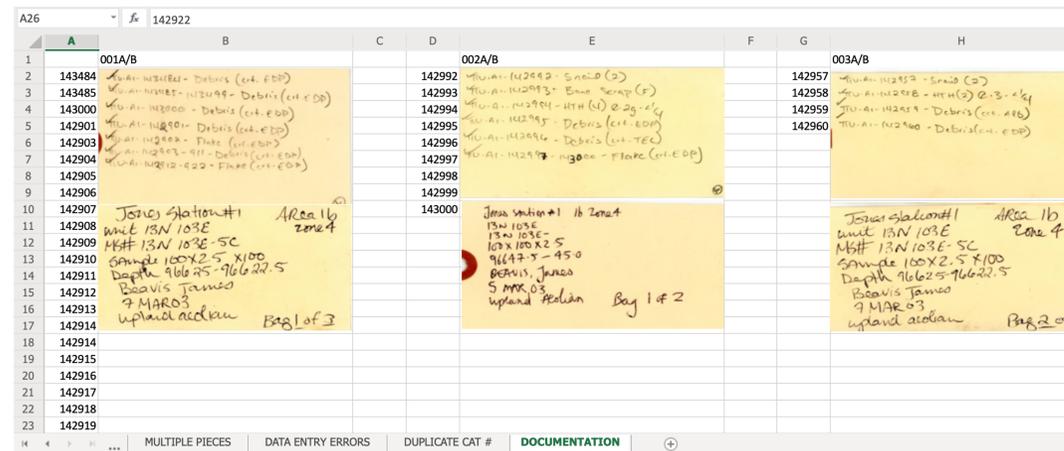
Traditional Method

1. Identify catalog number
2. Look on both obverse and reverse sides of the tag for the catalog number
3. If catalog number is not found, take the next tag in the stack and repeat step 2 (reiterations can range from 0-340)



Digital Method

1. Identify catalog number
2. Use the command + F keyboard short cut
3. Type in catalog number
4. Press enter



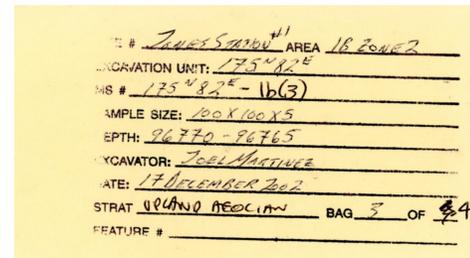
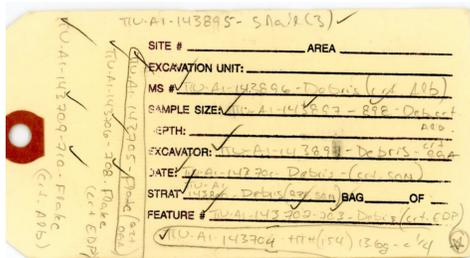
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	001A/B			002A/B			003A/B
2	143484	TU-A1-143895 - Sna (3)	142992	TU-A1-142992 - Sna (2)		142957	TU-A1-142957 - Sna (2)
3	143485	TU-A1-143896 - Debris (1st EOP)	142993	TU-A1-142993 - Bone Scrap (F)		142958	TU-A1-142958 - 1st H (2) 2-3-4/4
4	143000	TU-A1-143000 - Debris (1st EOP)	142994	TU-A1-142994 - 1st H (1) 2-2g-4/4		142959	TU-A1-142959 - Debris (1st EOP)
5	142901	TU-A1-142901 - Debris (1st EOP)	142995	TU-A1-142995 - Debris (1st EOP)		142960	TU-A1-142960 - Debris (1st EOP)
6	142903	TU-A1-142903 - Debris (1st EOP)	142996	TU-A1-142996 - Debris (1st EOP)			
7	142904	TU-A1-142904 - Flare (1st EOP)	142997	TU-A1-142997 - Flare (1st EOP)			
8	142905	TU-A1-142905 - Flare (1st EOP)	142998				
9	142906		142999				
10	142907		143000				
11	142908	Jones Station #1 Area 1b Zone 4		Jones Station #1 Area 1b Zone 4			Jones Station #1 Area 1b Zone 4
12	142909	Unit 13N 103E SC		Unit 13N 103E SC			Unit 13N 103E SC
13	142910	MHF 13N 103E SC		MHF 13N 103E SC			MHF 13N 103E SC
14	142911	Sample 100x2.5 x100		Sample 100x2.5 x100			Sample 100x2.5 x100
15	142912	Depth 966.25 - 966.27.5		Depth 966.25 - 966.27.5			Depth 966.25 - 966.27.5
16	142913	Beavis James		Beavis James			Beavis James
17	142914	9 MAR 03		9 MAR 03			9 MAR 03
18	142915	Upland Acadian Bag 1 of 3		Upland Acadian Bag 1 of 2			Upland Acadian Bag 2 of 2
19	142916						
20	142917						
21	142918						
22	142919						

A screenshot of the 'Documentation' sheet in the database. The corresponding catalog numbers are listed to the left of their respective tags. To the left of the 'Documentation' tab, several other sheets including 'Duplicate Catalog Number' and 'Data Entry Errors' can be observed.

Results

The digitization of the documents associated with the Jones Station Collection drastically increased the efficiency of collections management troubleshooting. The improvements are well summarized by the following:

- Reduced the time searching for the catalog number by approximately **300 fold**; the average time it takes to find a catalog number through the traditional method takes 50 minutes, while searching for a catalog number through the digital method takes less than 10 seconds
- Allowed staff to directly link an object to its documentation, which aided in reuniting dissociated objects and hindering further human error by documenting the mitigation process and preserving provenience



An example of the obverse and reverse sides of a scanned provenience tag. The catalog numbers are written throughout the entirety of the tag.

Conclusions

It is imperative that the preservation of archaeological documents is prioritized. When objects lose their provenience they are no longer valuable. This method of digitization should be utilized in all archaeological collections characterized with dissociation and data loss. The digitization project was successful in several ways:

- Increased the efficiency of collections management activities and assisted museum staff in problem solving
- Saved an extensive amount of staff time
- Preserved both the provenience information and the mitigation process

Acknowledgments

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