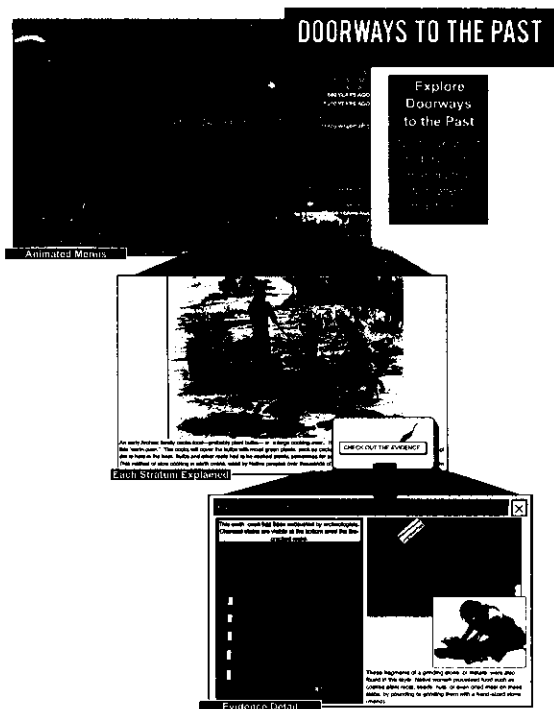


## Texas Beyond History

### Digging into Texas' Archeological History: No Shovel Required



*"I just moved to Austin from Ohio and was unfamiliar with Texas history. This is a fantastic web site that I plan on utilizing during student teaching this fall." Donna Verhey, 4th grade student teacher, Casey Elementary, Austin*

*"I have found Texas Beyond History to be an invaluable tool for expanding my students' research skills and making the history of our state a more vivid and exciting topic to study. It is the only web site I have found that contains information about Texas pre-historic peoples that is suitable for use by elementary school students." Laine Liebick, teacher, Highland Park Elementary School, Austin*

**Publication of this column is made possible, in part, by a grant from the San Antonio Conservation Society.**

Texas Beyond History is a free online educational service of the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory (TARL) at the University of Texas at Austin, dedicated to exploring the state's distinctive and extensive archeological heritage. Since the web site's debut in 2001, TBH has become an important part of many Texas teachers' classroom curriculum (used most heavily in 4th and 7th grade where Texas history is taught). Last year, TBH garnered more than 5 million page requests, with approximately 700,000 directed towards TBH's Kids sections and another 170,000 viewing TBH's Teachers links. Educators and their students, who comprise more than half of the web sites users, have discovered the unique elements that transform TBH from an informative "virtual museum" into a dynamic, interactive learning adventure.

Like an archeological field site, the TBH web site is layered with historical "finds," ranging from primary documents, photographs of rare artifacts, maps, and colorful, realistic renditions of prehistoric life, to a wealth of information about the state's significant historical and archeological sites. TBH's educational blueprint is sophisticated, allowing for wide-ranging study of a particular exhibit, often including detailed accounts of the plants, animals, and

materials important to native cultures. In addition to archeology, the learning material blends many disciplines, such as biology, anthropology, paleobotany, archival research, math, social studies, science, and art. However, users find the site easy to navigate; a simple click of a mouse (like an archeologist's shovel full of dirt) reveals each layer of this extraordinary collection of Texas' historical record.

For students, Carol Schlenk, education editor of TBH, says navigation of the TBH Kids pages was designed to be as interactive as possible, maximizing interest and encouraging further exploration into other exhibits. Dr. Dirt, the armadillo archeologist, leads young scholars on animated adventures, with definitions of scientific terms, descriptions of laboratory techniques, "access" to high-tech equipment (like images from scanning electron microscopes), schematic drawings, and actual field site photos of archeological ruins. In addition, there are educational games, Dr. Dirt's "fantastic facts," a glossary of scientific terms, and a section on how to conduct archeological research. With its interactive animation, exceptional artwork, high-quality graphics and informative text, TBH allows young viewers to "virtually" experience first-hand the excitement and dis-

covery of exploring archeological field sites and Texas cultural history without getting their hands or clothes dirty.

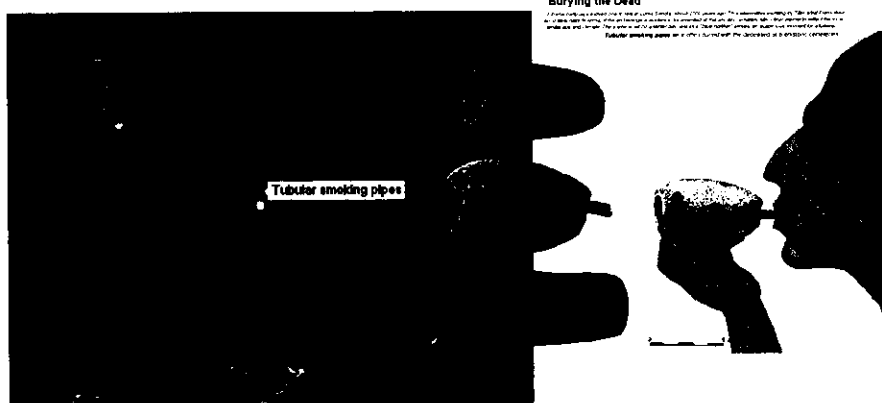
Teachers will find the same attention to detail and richness of resources in their TBH web pages. A teacher's guide provides a listing of and links to more than 50 main exhibits, tools for teaching geography, virtual field trips (which explore the terrain and significant sights in a region), and a "plant, animal, mineral and rocks" gallery. In addition, educators can download more than 60 standards-based lesson plans in four subject areas, as well as more comprehensive unit plans, and find links to other relevant, educational web sites.

Susan Dial, co-editor of the web site, says that the ultimate goal of TBH is to move away from "place-based" exhibits and provide a comprehensive, region-by-region "virtual tour" of the environmental and cultural heritage of Texas. This goal—with the help of 15 organizations and more than 100 contributing content partners—to share as much of TARL's archeological resources and historical knowledge with the public using a virtual museum web site is a

key part of what makes Texas Beyond History a distinctive, premiere educational resource. The TBH staff members and TARL have translated their commitment to archeological and historical preservation into a meticulously crafted, but fully engaging, web-based learning format. As a testimony to these efforts, TBH has been recognized as one of the top humanities education web sites in the country by the National Endowment for the Humanities and EdSitement (a compendium of quality, extensively reviewed and judged Internet resources for teachers that can be found at <http://edsitement.neh.gov/>).

In addition, TBH was presented at the 2007 annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology (this is the correct spelling of the organization's name) as a national model for heritage education—something teachers, students, and others who visit the web site already know! But for those educators and scholars who haven't yet discovered Texas Beyond History, the web site is truly another Texas archeological treasure.—*By Pam Murtha*

To visit Texas Beyond History go to: [www.texasbeyondhistory.net](http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net).



## Dr. Dirt, the Armadillo Archeologist, Gives Kids The Scoop on "Poop"

Human fecal matter hardly seems like an appropriate topic for a lesson in archeology, but Dr. Dirt shows children that there is a lot of history contained in prehistoric "poop," or coprolites. As TBH "detectives into the past," children follow Dr. Dirt into Hind's Cave, a rockshelter frequented by native peoples dating back as far as 9,000 years ago, to learn about the diet of ancient Texans. Once inside, they find out that more than 2,000 coprolites were found in this ancient cave. After "picking up" samples from the cave's floor, Dr. Dirt whisks them off to the laboratory, where the process for reconstituting dried specimens is illustrated. Then, "peering" through a microscope, Dr. Dirt instructs children in how to identify traces of various types of plants and animals eaten by native Texans. Young scholars learn that their ancient counterparts did not dine on hamburgers and fries, but instead feasted on foods like fish, field mice, lizards, birds, wild onions, and crickets. In addition, the pieces of bone, strands of fur, and bits of feather in coprolites tell students that in ancient times, eating their "critters" uncooked was native people's idea of "fast food."

