
Professional Certificate in GIS for Archaeology

Mapping Archaeological Sites and Features

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Archaeological mapping is a vital aspect of archaeological research and is crucial for understanding, preserving, and interpreting archaeological sites and features. Mapping allows archaeologists to document the spatial distribution of artifacts, structures, and landscapes, providing valuable insights into past human activities and environments. In the Professional Certificate in GIS for Archaeology course, students learn how to use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tools and techniques to create accurate and detailed maps of archaeological sites and features. This comprehensive guide will explore key terms and vocabulary related to mapping archaeological sites and features, providing a solid foundation for students to enhance their GIS skills in the field of archaeology.

1. Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are powerful tools that enable archaeologists to capture, store, analyze, and display spatial data. GIS technology allows researchers to integrate various types of data, such as maps, satellite imagery, and archaeological survey data, to create detailed and interactive maps of archaeological sites and features. GIS software provides a wide range of tools for spatial analysis, including overlaying different layers of information, calculating distances and areas, and creating 3D visualizations. By utilizing GIS, archaeologists can gain a deeper understanding of the spatial relationships between artifacts, structures, and landscapes within an archaeological site.

2. Remote Sensing

Remote sensing is a technique used to collect data about the Earth's surface from a distance, typically through satellite imagery or aerial photography. Remote sensing technology provides archaeologists with a valuable tool for mapping archaeological sites and features over large areas. By analyzing remote sensing data, researchers can identify subtle variations in vegetation, topography, and soil composition that may indicate the presence of buried archaeological remains. Remote sensing can also be used to monitor changes in archaeological sites over time, such as the impact of erosion or looting.

3. Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR)

Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) is a non-invasive geophysical survey technique used to detect subsurface features without excavation. GPR works by sending electromagnetic pulses into the ground and measuring the reflections caused by variations in soil density and composition. Archaeologists use GPR to map buried structures, artifacts, and geological layers beneath the surface of an archaeological site. GPR surveys can provide valuable insights into the layout and organization of archaeological features, helping researchers to plan excavation strategies and interpret the site's history.

4. LiDAR

LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) is a remote sensing technology that uses laser pulses to measure distances to the Earth's surface. LiDAR data can generate highly detailed 3D maps of terrain, vegetation, and structures, making it an invaluable tool for mapping archaeological sites and features. Archaeologists use LiDAR to create high-resolution digital elevation models (DEMs) of archaeological landscapes, allowing them to identify subtle topographic features that may be invisible to the naked eye. LiDAR data can reveal hidden archaeological sites, such as ancient roads, terraces, and settlement patterns, that are obscured by vegetation or modern development.

5. Site Survey

Site survey is the process of systematically recording and documenting the physical characteristics of an archaeological site. Archaeologists conduct site surveys to map the distribution of artifacts, features, and structures within a site, as well as to assess the site's overall condition and significance. Site surveys may involve surface collection of artifacts, mapping of surface features, and geophysical surveys to investigate subsurface remains. The data collected during a site survey are used to create detailed site maps, stratigraphic profiles, and other visual representations of the site's layout and context.

6. Excavation Grid

Excavation grid is a system of squares or rectangles used to divide an archaeological site into manageable units for excavation and recording. Excavation grids are essential for maintaining spatial control and documenting the precise locations of artifacts and features within a site. Archaeologists use excavation grids to establish a consistent coordinate system for mapping and recording archaeological data, ensuring that all findings are accurately positioned in relation to each other. Grids can be laid out on the ground using ropes, stakes, or surveying equipment, and are typically referenced to a known coordinate system or datum.

7. Feature Mapping

Feature mapping is the process of recording and mapping archaeological features, such as walls, floors, hearths, and pits, within an excavation area. Archaeologists use feature mapping to document the size, shape, orientation, and stratigraphic relationships of individual features, providing a detailed record of the site's architectural layout and activity areas. Feature mapping may involve using measuring tapes, drawing tools, and photography to create accurate plans and profiles of features in situ. Mapping features allows researchers to reconstruct the spatial organization of a site and interpret the functions and use of different areas within it.

8. Artifact Mapping

Artifact mapping is the practice of recording and mapping the distribution of artifacts within an archaeological site. Archaeologists use artifact mapping to analyze the spatial patterns of artifact deposition, such as clusters, scatterings, or concentrations, which can provide insights into past human activities and behavior. Artifact mapping helps researchers to identify activity areas, storage areas, and refuse pits within a site, as well as to track changes in artifact types and quantities over time. Mapping artifacts allows archaeologists to reconstruct the use and function of different areas within a site and to interpret social and economic relationships among past inhabitants.

9. Stratigraphic Mapping

Stratigraphic mapping is the process of recording and interpreting the layers of soil, sediment, and debris that make up an archaeological site's stratigraphy. Stratigraphic mapping involves creating detailed profiles or sections that illustrate the sequence and relationships of different stratigraphic units, such as layers, fills, and cuts. Archaeologists use stratigraphic mapping to establish the chronological sequence of deposits within a site, as well as to identify changes in land use, construction activities, and natural events over time. Mapping stratigraphy allows researchers to reconstruct the site's occupational history and interpret the formation processes that shaped its archaeological record.

10. Geospatial Analysis

Geospatial analysis is the process of examining and interpreting spatial data to reveal patterns, trends, and relationships within and between archaeological sites and features. Geospatial analysis uses GIS tools and techniques to analyze the distribution, density, and proximity of artifacts, structures, and landscapes, as well as to model past environments and land use patterns. Archaeologists use geospatial analysis to address research questions related to site formation processes, settlement patterns, resource distribution, and social organization. By applying geospatial analysis, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the spatial dynamics of archaeological sites and features and generate new insights into past human behavior and interactions.

11. Spatial Data Management

Spatial data management is the organization, storage, and manipulation of spatial data within a GIS database. Spatial data management involves creating and maintaining databases of geographic information, including maps, satellite imagery, survey data, and geospatial analysis results. Archaeologists use spatial data management to store and retrieve archaeological data, such as site maps, artifact inventories, and excavation records, in a structured and accessible format. Spatial data management ensures that archaeological information is accurately georeferenced, linked to relevant attributes, and preserved for future research and interpretation.

12. Cartographic Design

Cartographic design is the process of creating visually appealing and informative maps that effectively communicate spatial information to a wide audience. Cartographic design involves selecting appropriate symbols, colors, fonts, and scales to represent archaeological sites and features on a map. Archaeologists use cartographic design principles to enhance the readability, clarity, and aesthetics of their maps, making them more engaging and understandable to stakeholders, scholars, and the general public. Cartographic design plays a crucial role in visualizing and disseminating archaeological research findings, interpretations, and narratives through maps and other visual media.

13. Metadata Documentation

Metadata documentation is the creation of standardized descriptions and documentation for spatial data and GIS projects. Metadata includes information about the source, quality, accuracy, and content of

geographic data, as well as details about the methods, tools, and assumptions used in GIS analysis. Archaeologists use metadata documentation to ensure the integrity, transparency, and reproducibility of their spatial data and research findings. Metadata documentation helps researchers to track the provenance of archaeological data, assess its reliability and suitability for specific research questions, and share it with other scholars and stakeholders in a clear and accessible format.

14. Data Visualization

Data visualization is the process of representing and interpreting spatial data through visual means, such as maps, graphs, charts, and diagrams. Data visualization techniques help archaeologists to communicate complex spatial information in a clear, intuitive, and informative way. Archaeologists use data visualization to present the results of geospatial analysis, such as distribution maps, heatmaps, and 3D models, that highlight patterns, trends, and relationships within archaeological sites and features. Data visualization enhances the accessibility, interpretability, and impact of archaeological research by engaging audiences with compelling and interactive visualizations of past landscapes, activities, and cultures.

15. Challenges in Mapping Archaeological Sites and Features

Mapping archaeological sites and features presents several challenges and complexities that require careful planning, methodological rigor, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Some of the key challenges in archaeological mapping include:

- **Preservation and Conservation:** Archaeological sites are fragile and vulnerable to natural and human-induced threats, such as erosion, looting, and development. Mapping archaeological sites requires a balance between documenting and protecting the site's physical integrity and cultural significance.
- **Data Integration and Interpretation:** Archaeological mapping involves integrating diverse sources of spatial data, such as survey data, excavation records, and remote sensing imagery. Researchers must carefully analyze and interpret these data to reconstruct past landscapes, activities, and interactions accurately.
- **Spatial Analysis and Visualization:** Geospatial analysis and visualization techniques can be complex and technical, requiring specialized training and expertise. Archaeologists must develop proficiency in GIS software and tools to effectively analyze and visualize spatial data.
- **Community Engagement and Outreach:** Mapping archaeological sites involves engaging with local communities, stakeholders, and heritage organizations to ensure that research is conducted ethically, inclusively, and transparently. Archaeologists must communicate their findings and interpretations in accessible and culturally sensitive ways.
- **Ethical and Legal Considerations:** Archaeological mapping raises ethical and legal issues related to data ownership, intellectual property rights, and cultural heritage protection. Researchers must adhere to professional standards, ethical guidelines, and regulatory requirements when mapping archaeological sites and features.

In conclusion, mapping archaeological sites and features is a fundamental aspect of archaeological research that relies on Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tools and techniques to document, analyze, and interpret spatial data. By mastering key terms and vocabulary related to archaeological mapping, students in the Professional Certificate in GIS for Archaeology course can enhance their skills in creating accurate and informative maps of archaeological sites and features. Through hands-on training and practical applications, students can develop the expertise and confidence to navigate the complexities and challenges of mapping archaeological sites and contribute to advancing knowledge and understanding of the past.