

In August 2020, **Anne Radigue** had the opportunity to take **part in the archaeological dig at Rozel**, a Neanderthal occupation of the Paleolithic era, in the Manche department, in Normandy. Back to the experience of a member of ArkeoTopia who is not trained as an archaeologist.

Being an amateur scientist on an archaeological excavation



Taking part in archaeological digs is a dream for many people. Nonetheless, access to most of the dig sites is only granted to archaeologists and students. Yet, numerous archaeological dig sites are open, every year, to participants of all ages and professions in the summer period.

There are several ways to take part in it:

1. The official one is to refer to the list of the accessible dig sites, [available on the website of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs](#) (Ministère de la Culture) which is regularly updated, in March/April of each year. For each dig site, the period involved (the Middle Ages, antiquity, prehistory, etc.), the nature of the site, the conditions, as well as the contact are indicated.
2. Word of mouth is also a valuable source of information. If you know places close to your home where archaeological excavations are performed each year, feel free to directly contact the team in charge.

Be careful, for each dig site, tetanus vaccination must be up to date.

Having heard about the site at Rozel, I contacted the director of the dig site, an expert in Middle and Lower Paleolithic era: [Dominique Cliquet](#), Heritage officer at the Regional Archaeology Department of Normandy (Service régional de l'archéologie de Normandie), which is answerable to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs (Ministère de la Culture) and submitted my

application to him. Why did I choose Rozel? For further information about this site, I recommend you read the article by Lionel Tabourier "[On the footsteps of Neanderthals](#)".

The dig activities



One of my fears was my lack of knowledge about the period of the site and dig techniques, although I had done some research on these subjects. I realized that numerous participants felt the same way; taking part in the dig is therefore an opportunity to learn.

As regards equipment, you have to make sure you wear an outfit which doesn't matter if it gets damaged or dirty, as well as closed shoes. The rest of the equipment required, which depends on the dig site, is usually provided on site. At Rozel, the equipment consists of a bucket, a trowel, various brushes (including makeup and artists' brushes), half a plastic bottle and a pocket knife.

Once I was provided with the equipment and assigned a plot to dig, I was shown the techniques and the right manipulations. At this dig site, the aeolian sand must be removed from the ground with a brush, while being careful not to damage the potential footprints or artifacts. Therefore, it is important to strike a balance as regards the actions employed: use enough force to be effective, while remaining attentive and gentle to prevent irreversible damage.



During the dig of summer 2020, I was able to find some footprints

but also bits of charcoal. The footprints discovered, whether they come from Neanderthals or animals, are the subject of a detailed documentation. Their GPS coordinates are identified and their positioning as well as the type of ground are registered in a note card. Then they are photographed. Afterward, some of them are dug up using a hardener. A study of the footprints as well as the documentation created during the dig is carried out later during the rest of the year.

As for charcoal, the GPS coordinates are also identified, before it is dug up for further study. Its study will help identify the plants used by the occupiers. Although charcoal is sometimes used to date a human occupation, this can't apply to excavations of occupations which date back to the lower Paleolithic era (between 3 million years and 100 thousand years BC) which are far too ancient for our current technology. Indeed, [beyond 50 000 years, the technology is not accurate enough](#).

I also had the occasion to use a [total station](#). This device makes it possible to depict the position of the elements found, artifacts or natural features such as schist patches, in relation to their surroundings and get an accurate computerized 3D reconstitution of the site and its configuration. It's this tool that provides geolocation for various discoveries.

Community life on an excavation

Another major aspect of being involved in archaeological digs is community life. Although you may sometimes be excavating alone on your plot, this task is part of a larger project. Each action contributes to achieving a common goal.

Everything is shared and lived through together: meals, coffee breaks and aperitifs, but also the accommodation. Unless you live near the dig site, accommodation is generally shared, in a tent or at a vacation rental, with various levels of comfort.

Taking part in archaeological digs is a very rewarding experience, and central to archaeology. It is accessible to everybody, including beginners. If you are keen, don't hesitate!

To learn more

- Lionel Tabourier, "[On the footsteps of Neanderthals](#)", August 37 2020 to find out more about the occupation of Rozel
- www.neandertalrozel.org, the website of the association to follow the dig campaigns of the team.
- www.culture.gouv.fr/Sites-thematiques/Archeologie, the website of the Ministry of Culture to access the list of the archaeological excavation sites admitting nonprofessional participants each year and to stay up to date with research news

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archeology of today to better help existing organizations to prepare that of tomorrow To find out more about our organization, go to our [YouTube channel to watch our video The 5 pilars](#) (in french only) or go to the page called [Ours actions](#).