

Waiilatpu Press



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Archaeology at Whitman Mission

"I used to live around here as a child. I remember riding my horse up to the memorial on top of the hill."

Every once in a while we still get visitors to Whitman Mission NHS who share these memories. Often they also comment on the appearance of the land at the time, the adobe bricks from some of the mission buildings still visible despite the grasses. That may have been all that was visible to the naked untrained eye, but to the archaeologist, the ground still holds much information about Whitman's Mission and mission life of the 1830's and 1840's.

After the Whitmans were killed in 1847, the buildings were burned by the Indians as much as was possible. The buildings apparently were still usable, as the T-shaped Mission House was reroofed in 1848 by the Oregon Volunteers when for a short time it became known as Fort Waters. After the Oregon Volunteers left, Indians again burned and destroyed the building, more thoroughly this time, so it could not be used again. A log cabin was built by Reverend Cushing Eells on the same site of the Mission House. The cabin burned in



1940's excavation of Mission House

1872, and after that at least two other houses stood in the same place. The last farmhouse was torn down in 1936 when Whitman National Monument was established. The evidence of the Mission House was buried for almost 100 years, covered by the earth and these later structures.

Thomas Garth was the first custodian of the site, called Whitman National Monument at the time (the name was changed in 1963 to Whitman Mission National Historic Site to better reflect the historical significance of the site). He was hired as a historical archaeologist to do

excavations of the mission sites. Work was interrupted by World War II, but resumed in September, 1946 when preliminary work was done on the First House and Mission House. Work continued in 1947 with the goal of locating the major mission buildings, all were found but the Blacksmith Shop, although at the time Garth also believed he had found the foundations of that structure. First House and Mission House were excavated and recovered by soil in 1948 to preserve the sites. The irrigation ditch was also found during these 1940's excavations.

Garth found that the walls of the Mission House were "20 inches wide, made of adobe bricks 20 inches long, 10 inches wide, and 5 inches thick." (Garth, 1949: 297). The excavations of the 1940's uncovered many things, including glassware, broken china, nails, slate, etc. False teeth, individually molded of fine porcelain, were even found along with some other items that told of Marcus Whitman's medical practice. Garth writes of the Mission House in "Excavations at Waiilatpu":

"Fortunately the building

had a heavy dirt roof. This, when the supports burned through, crashed down on the burning wood floors below, in many instances smothering the fire and preserving planks, joists, and even bits of cloth, leather, grains and other foods, in a charred state. The roof also blanketed the area with 4 to 6 inches of earth, protecting it from the tramping and souvenir hunting of soldiers and others who came on the scene afterwards." (Garth, 1949: 297).

In finding the foundations of the Mission House, Garth had the assistance of Narcissa Whitman herself. In letters to home, Narcissa wrote about the plans for the Mission House, including the dimensions and purpose of the various rooms. Garth found that some of the measurements did not adhere to the original plans, so perhaps some modifications to the plans were made. In this way archaeology is useful in verifying these historic documents.

The next major period of excavation didn't take place until the 1960's. At the time of Garth's excavations, the locations of the Blacksmith Shop, the Mission cemetery, and Alice Clarissa Whitman's gravesite were still unknown. The excavations of 1960 - 1961 had the goals of finding the Blacksmith Shop and Alice Clarissa's grave. The approximate location of the Blacksmith Shop was discovered and foundation stones mark that location today. However, Alice Clarissa's gravesite met with more difficulty. The purpose of the archaeological investigations

was so her remains would be safeguarded from construction projects and also to mark her resting place. Instead of finding her grave, these excavations uncovered the location of the Indian cemetery. Despite the fact that her grave was never found, a marker was erected near where it was thought to be.

Excavations of 1961 were also done of Whitman's original irrigation ditch and the Oregon Trail. These two projects assisted in their restoration and a more accurate portrayal of Waiilatpu.

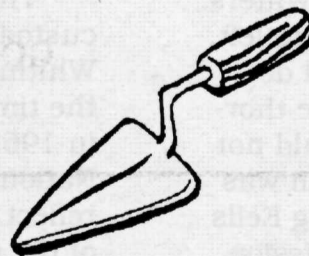
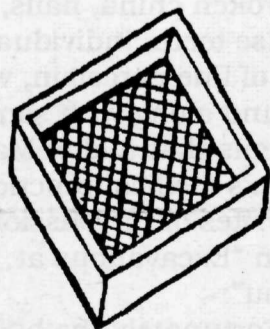
In general, the archaeological investigations done at Whitman Mission have assisted rangers in interpreting the story that took place here 150 years ago. Some of the artifacts found during excavations are on display in the museum, while others are in storage. The value of these items to the science of archaeology would have been diminished had they been dug up by souvenir hunters. Much of the value comes from how items are found in relation to one another and to the site, the provenience of the item. Within the National Park system, collecting natural items, such as flowers and grasses, is prohibited due to their status as protected species. Likewise, artifacts and sites, whether prehistoric or historic, are protected by the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (ARPA). Part of the law states: "No person may excavate, remove, damage, or otherwise alter or deface or attempt to excavate, remove, damage or otherwise alter or deface any archaeological resource located on federal or Indian lands without a permit."

(Via Internet www.arch.dcr.state.nc.us/fedlaws.htm). Metal detectors may not be used within the site, and if a visitor finds an item thought to be an artifact on the grounds, he or she should leave it in place and inform a ranger of the find.

Archaeology is a fascinating science that explores the past, whether it be that of another culture or our own culture. Archaeological research has come a long way with the advent of new technology which does not even require excavation to see what is beneath the ground. Perhaps someday this new technique will be used at Whitman Mission.

Archaeological excavation is not currently being pursued at the site, however, lab work (which constitutes the majority of archaeological research after excavation) continues even 50 years after excavation.

We are taking archaeology in a different direction beginning this year with the development of a classroom and on-site archaeology program. Students will have the opportunity to learn more about the science of archaeology and how it assists in gaining knowledge of the past. Hands-on learning will assist in this goal. We hope area schools will be excited as we are about this new program. We also hope to create a summer Archaeology Day Camp to be held for one week during the summer at Whitman Mission NHS. The more people know about the past, the more likely they are to preserve it for the future.



Heading towards the Future with the World Wide Web

Some of the visitors to Whitman Mission National Historic Site or other segments of the National Park system may have done some research on the web before their visit. They may have found a lot of information available out there, including through "Park Net," the official National Park Service website. The site is located at <http://www.nps.gov/> and includes the categories: Links to the Past - Histories, Cultures, & Places; Park Smart - Education & Interpretation; Info Zone - Servicewide Information; Nature Net - Natural Resources in the Park; a changing link that covers some aspect of the parks such as "Treading Lightly upon the Land," or "Celebrating African American History & Culture," etc.; Park Store; E-Mail; and Visit Your Parks.

Visit Your Parks gives you access to basic information specific to each park in the National Park System. One can jump from Acadia National Park in Maine all the way to Denali National Park in Alaska within a couple of steps. Whitman Mission National Historic Site also has a website which may be accessed through an alphabetic list under W, using the map of Washington, or typing in the address <http://www.nps.gov/whmi/>. Here one can learn some basic information about the park, but also link to our new expanded website which includes our summer schedule of events, map of the park and the region, a "tour" of the park highlighting some of the interesting features to be found here, the "Whitman Mission Classroom" where one

can find some of our previous cover articles from the Waiilatpu Press, and also our Teacher's Guides (which aren't just for teachers!). There's also a section which links to various other websites about the Whitman's, the Cayuse, and the Oregon Trail. We have also placed information regarding our new General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (this may be accessed through either our main web page or our expanded web page).

The staff at Whitman Mission sees our expanded website as a useful tool for students, teachers, and interested laypersons. Students doing reports all over the country will be able to access information that was previously sent through the mail; teachers teaching westward expansion and Pacific Northwest history will be able to print out activities and information to use with their students; and those who find the story of Waiilatpu to be interesting will be able to learn some more about this historic location where two worlds clashed over 150 years ago.

The web, of course, is not a replacement for visiting the actual location in southeastern Washington, but for those unable to follow the wagon route of the Oregon Trail, the web is the next best thing! Please don't hesitate to visit, either in person, or in cyberspace!



BE A JUNIOR RANGER!

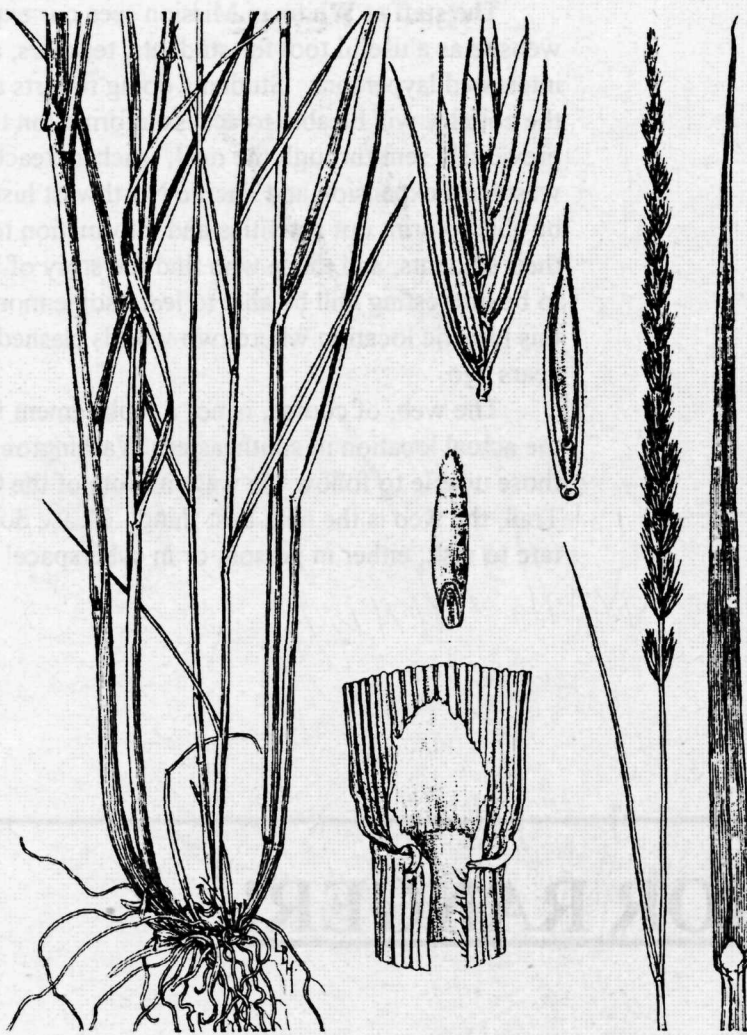
To earn a badge like this one, ask a Park Ranger at the Front Desk for a Junior Ranger form and answer the questions. Ages 4-7 and 8-12. Questions? Ask a Ranger on duty.

GOOD LUCK AND HAVE FUN!!

Common Grasses at

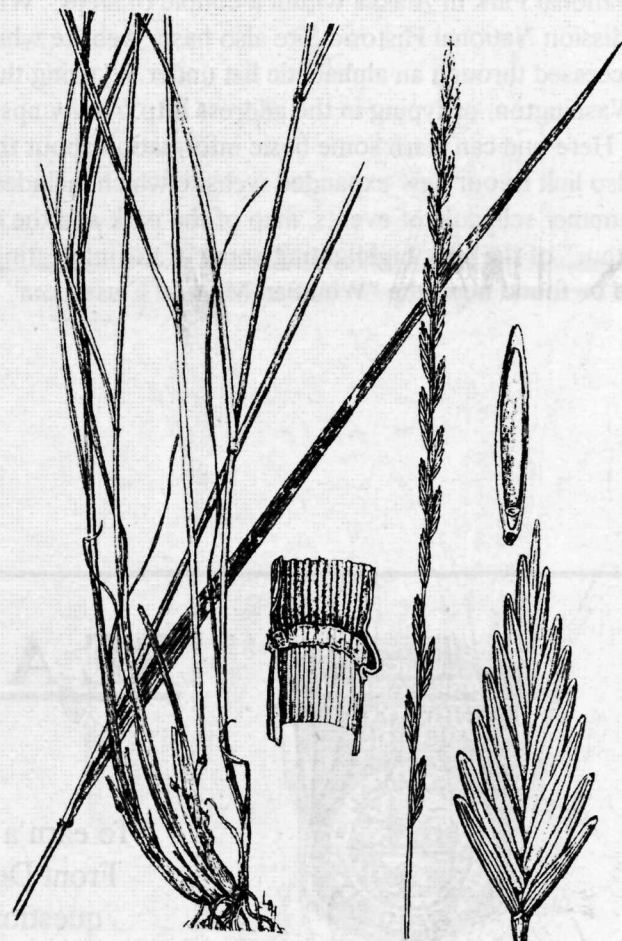
One of the most common questions the rangers get at the park (besides where's the bathroom?) is regarding our many types of native and non-native grasses found on the grounds. The name of our location is even named after a grass -- Waiilatpu, "place of the people of the rye grass." Many people are curious because this is perhaps the first time they are seeing these varieties up close, rather than from a car. On this page you will find a few of the common varieties found at Whitman Mission. Many of these grasses have been replanted over the

Great Basin Wild Rye / Giant Wild Rye



- native
- tall, coarse grass (3 to 6 feet tall)
- grows in bunches
- has single, erect, dense spike of seed heads (5 to 8 inches long)
- will grow in poor soils that are high in alkali
- eaten by wildlife in winter when other forage is covered with snow
- it is palatable to horses and cattle in the spring

Tall Wheatgrass



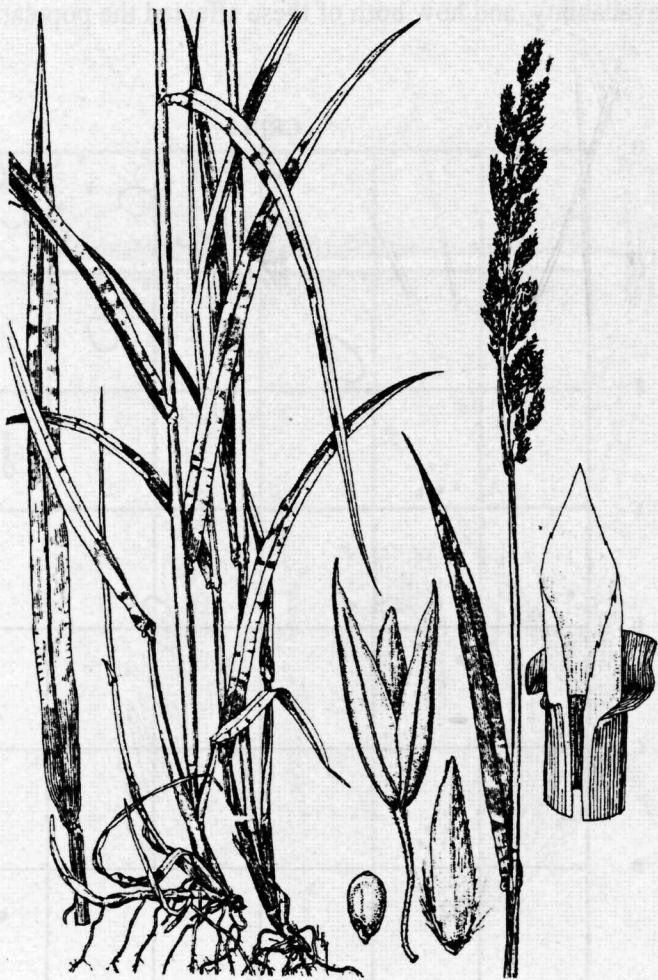
- introduced from Europe (Turkey)
- grows to approximately 4 to 5 feet tall
- a tall, vigorous, stemmy bunch grass
- long, blue-green leaves and large seeds
- good to excellent forage for livestock
- provides excellent cover for wildlife
- seed head is a spike

Whitman Mission

years as part of an ongoing revegetation project to make the mission appear as it had in Whitman's time, before intensive farming changed the type of vegetation.

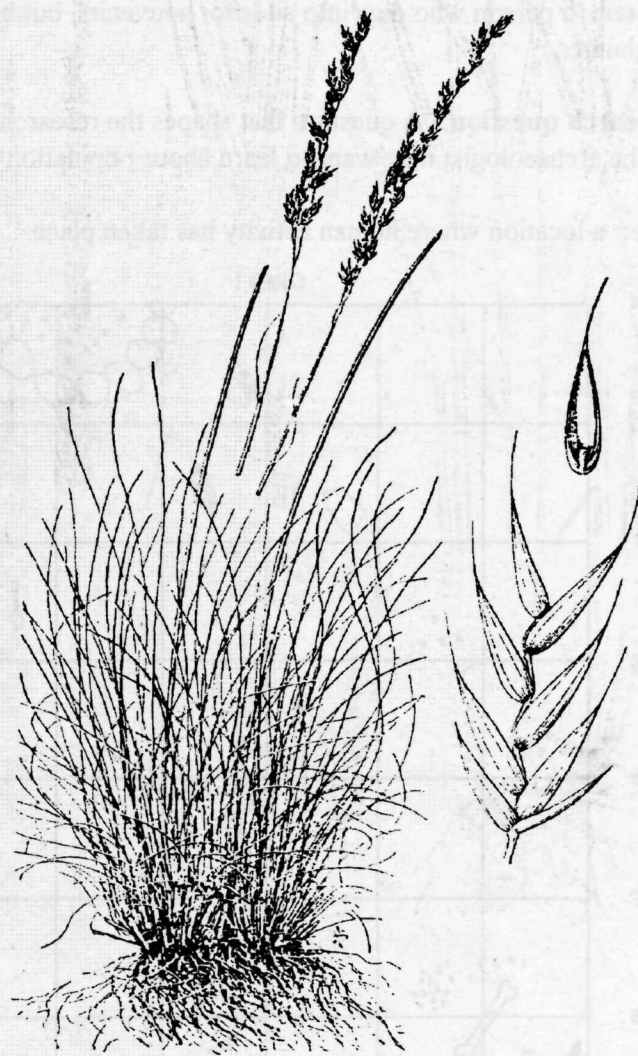
Enjoy exploring and looking for these types of grasses. Please keep in mind that there are many more varieties than that which you see on these two pages. There is a larger grass manual available for those who are interested -- please inquire at the information desk.

Reed Canary Grass



- native
- stems are 2 to 7 feet tall and have a blue-green color
- leaf blades are flat and 1/4 to 3/4 inches wide
- panicle branches out from compact top
- found in moist soil
- can be a problem in irrigation ditches

Sheep Fescue



- native
- grows in bunches up to 4 feet tall
- valuable forage for all classes of livestock (especially sheep!)
- panicle is 2 to 4 inches long
- leaves are 4 to 12 inches long and bluish-green when fresh

Kid's Archaeology Page

The site on this page has been excavated and gridded. *Answer the questions here about this site and try to figure out what story this site is telling.*

An archaeologist requires a permit to **excavate** at a particular location or **site**. He/she has done a lot of research before even getting to that point, and is trying to answer a research question. In the site he/she may find **artifacts** and **features** that may help to answer the research question. If a **looter** has dug into a site just looking for souvenirs before the archaeologist arrived, some valuable information that would have helped the archaeologist piece the puzzle together may have been lost. *Compare the second grid to the first, which items are missing from the second one that may have helped the archaeologist know what took place here?*

archaeology: a method for studying past human cultures and analyzing material evidence (artifacts and sites).

artifact: any object made or used by humans.

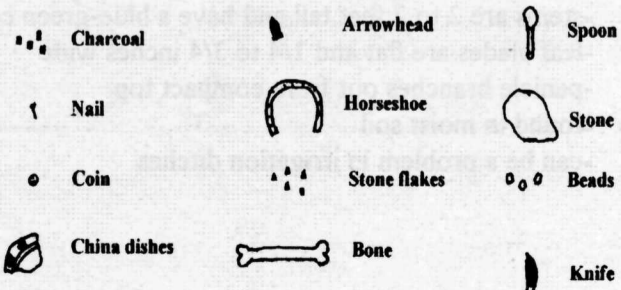
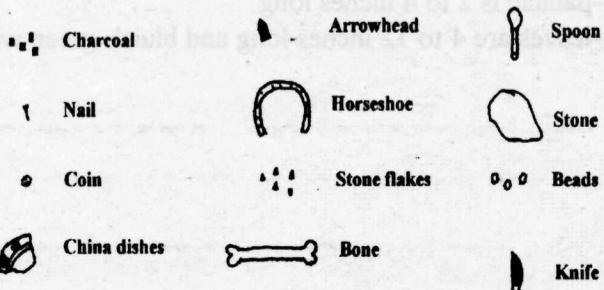
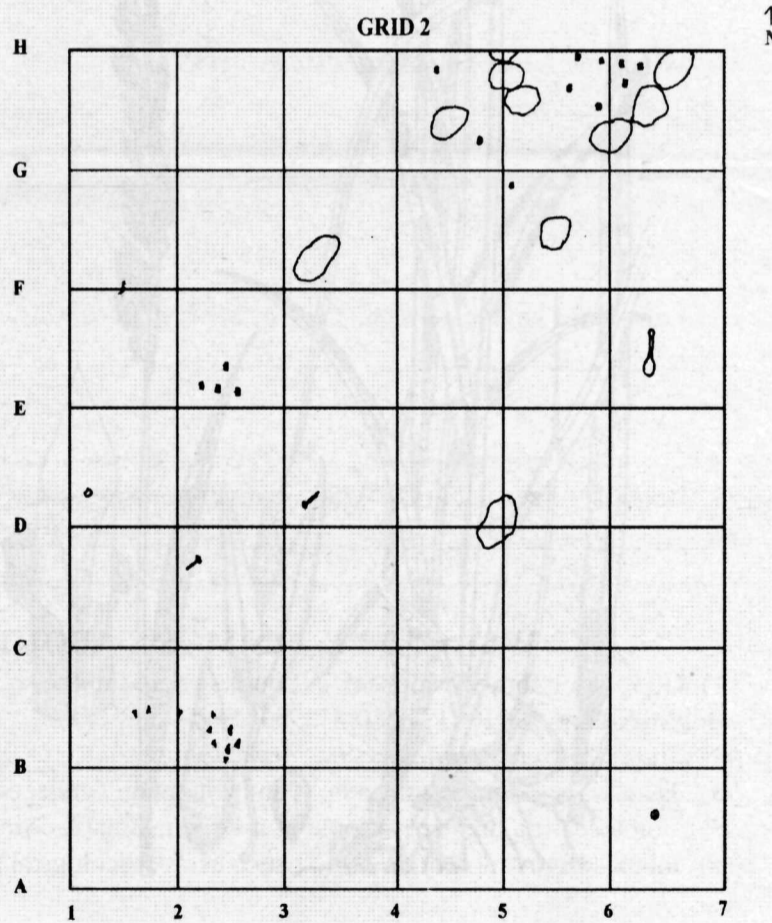
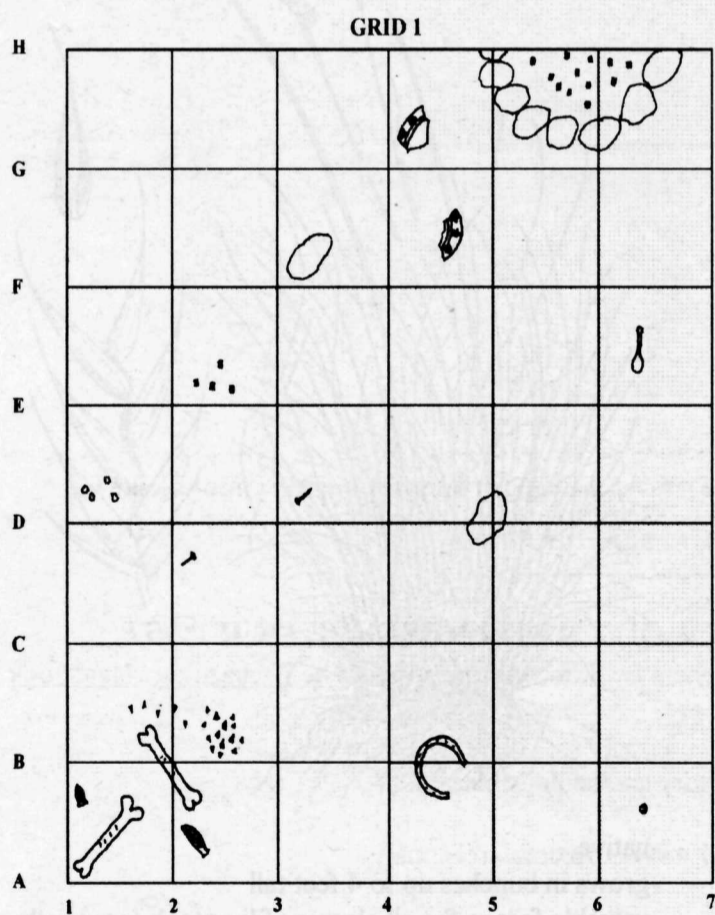
excavation: systematic uncovering and recording of archaeological sites.

feature: nonportable artifacts which indicate human activity at a location. (hearth, postmolds, cache pits, burial mounds).

looter: a person who digs into sites for souvenirs, but has no interest in the scientific value of an archaeological site. May also be called a pothunter.

research question: A question that shapes the research done by the archaeologist at a site. It may be complex and related to other topics -- the archaeologist may want to learn about population distributions, food availability, and how both of these affected the population itself.

site: a location where human activity has taken place.



1. Which square(s) do you find charcoal? (Circle all that apply).

- E,2 B,5 G,1
- G,5 D,2 G,6

2. In which square(s) do you find nails? _____

3. Several different groups have used this same location, which artifacts may belong to the earlier time period?

4. What kind of site might this be, and what kind of activities may have taken place here?

Type of Site: _____

Activities: _____

Type of Site: _____

Activities: _____

5. Notice the cut marks on the bones in squares A,1; A,2; and B,1. What human activity was taking place here?

6. Which items may be used to date the site(s)?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

7. Can we tell anything else about the people that used this site?

8. Look at the second grid. Which items are missing or may be confusing for an archaeologist after a looter dug into the site?

WAYS TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ARCHAEOLOGY AND PRESERVE OUR PAST

- 1) Go to your library and check out books related to the subject. One excellent book for this purpose is The Archaeology Handbook by Bill McMillon, 1991. (ISBN 0-471-53051-4)
- 2) Subscribe to magazines such as *Archaeology*
- 3) Take a class -- many universities and community colleges offer introductory archaeology classes.
- 4) Volunteer at a dig/excavation that may be taking place in your area.
- 5) Join a conservation organization such as Archaeological Conservancy. [www.gorp.com/archcons/]



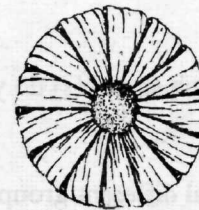
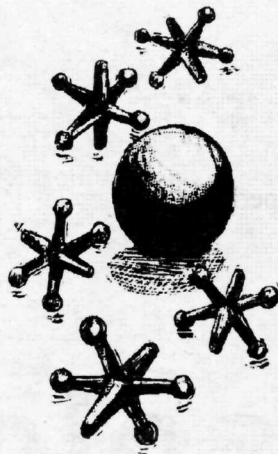
1998 Summer Schedule of Events

JUNE, 1998

June 13 & 14: 19th Century toys, games, and dress-up.

June 20 & 21: Candle dipping

June 27 & 28: Wool dyeing using Northwest plants and other natural dyes.



JULY, 1998

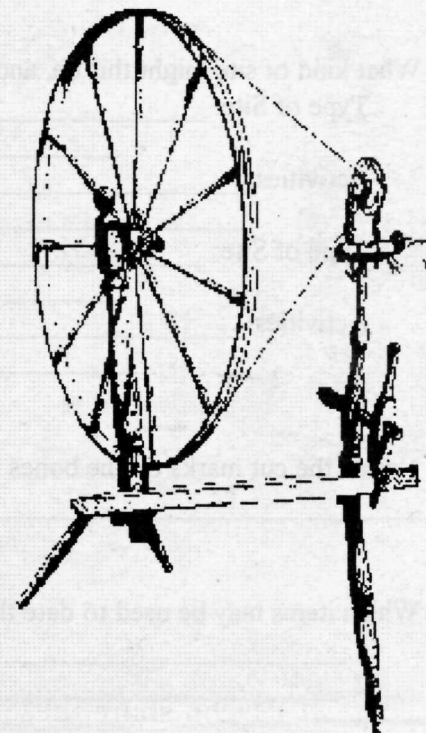
July 4: Pioneer games and contests, including hoop and stick races, marble games, watermelon seed spitting contest, etc.

July 5: Story-telling under the trees.

July 11 & 12: Dutch oven cooking over the campfire and butter churning.

July 18 & 19: Weaving and basket-making.

July 25 & 26: Adobe brick making.



AUGUST, 1998

August 1 & 2: Flint & steel and firemaking the old fashioned way.

August 8 & 9: Flintknapping.

August 15 & 16: Maintenance of a covered wagon.

August 22: Contra dance (evening).

Please note that this schedule is subject to change. Please call the park at (509)522-6357 for current schedule.

Additional demonstrations may be done during the week.



HANDICAPPED ACCESSIBILITY

Whitman Mission is striving to promote full access to park programs by people with physical and mental disabilities. Our goal at Whitman Mission is:

To provide the highest level of accessibility possible and feasible for persons with visual, hearing, mobility, and mental impairments, consistent with the obligation to conserve park resources and preserve the quality of the park experience for everyone.



SERVICES AVAILABLE

Sight: Large type version of park information brochure.

Hearing: Script to 10 minute park orientation program and outdoor audio displays.

Mobility: Wheelchair for loan.

Whitman Mission National Historic Site Visitor Center is open seven days per week from 8:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. May 30, 1998 through Labor Day. The grounds are open until dusk. A slide/sound program, *The Whitman Saga* is shown on the hour and the half-hour 8:00 - 5:30. There is a table with pioneer toys and games and dress-up items in the Visitor Center lobby for the enjoyment of all visitors. Children, ages 4 - 12, may participate in the Junior Ranger program and earn a badge!

Whitman Mission NHS is located 7 miles west of Walla Walla, Washington off Highway 12.