

How Did I Become an Archaeologist?

By Curator of Archaeology Grant Keddie

This is one of the questions most asked of me during my numerous visits to schools over the years. I have always had a curiosity about many things and have a special passion to learn about human beings and other species of animals and our history on this planet.

I spent a lot of time out in the forest and fields when I was young. I made spears, traps and bows and arrows. I observed the behaviour of animals like ground squirrels, badgers and rabbits – and learned to imitate birds. I collected field mice, frogs and tadpoles in the local swamps. When we later had to learn the word metamorphosis in school I already understood what it meant from my many hours watching tadpoles turning into frogs.

I have always been fascinated with matters of time and space. As a child I built castles and bridges with popsicle sticks. I played a lot with magnets and spent time looking at the stars through an old telescope. I collected and learned about many things like rocks, shells and coins.

When I was six my father was splitting cobbles for a rock garden, while I stuck them in place. He split open a rock that looked like it had a fossilized egg inside. The outer rock was a tan colour but the centre was black and in the shape of an egg.

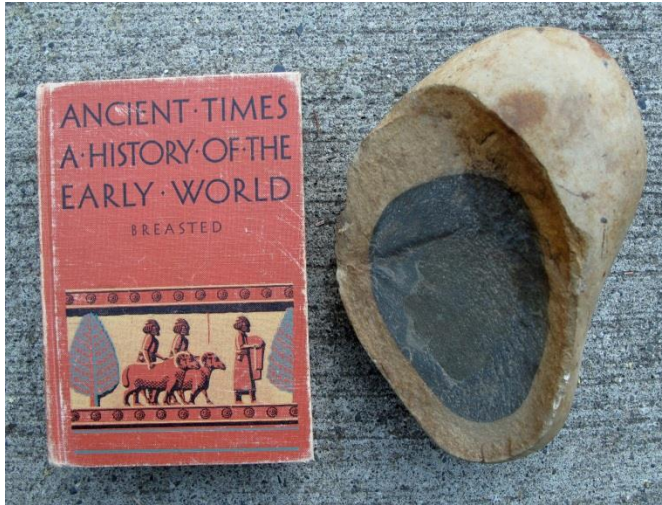
The next day my father drove me across town to the University of Alberta where we went into the office of a paleontologist – a person who studies ancient fossils. His office was overcrowded with boxes of rocks, books and piles of paper. He told me the rock was not a fossil. The dark egg-like shape was caused by what he called “differential chemical alteration”. The rock was originally black and was changing to a tan colour over millions of years.

That rock never made it into the garden; I still have it in my library. I began finding real fossils nearby and the next year went to the Drumheller area of Alberta where I collected dinosaur bones and ancient clamshells.

When I was eight my brother and I would go out at night to raid garbage cans. We saw who threw out the best goodies and when they did it. My mother told us to stop doing this until one night we brought home a perfectly good mink coat and a horse head lamp that someone had thrown out.



Grant Keddie at age six when he wanted to become an Archaeologist.



The special book and rock Grant collected as a child.

During one spring-cleaning, the Norwood's trash can revealed a copy of James Breasted's *Ancient Times – A History of the Early World*. This was the start of my book collecting passion and my increasing interest in archaeology and the study of humans.

I read everything I could find on early humans and fossils and made up my mind I would go to university some day and become either an archaeologist who studies more recent human cultures or a paleontologist who studies much older ancient fossils.

I studied hard in school and eventually went to university to get a degree in archaeology. I taught

myself how to make and use bone and stone tools and did experiments in using them – such as cutting up dead animals with stone knives.

Now I have an office overcrowded with boxes of rocks, books and piles of paper. When I am visited by parents bringing their children, who have found strange rocks they want me to identify, I always have them go away thinking they have found something very special.