TEST PITS

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A test pit is a very small exploratory hole usually one metre or two metres square and it is used to get a snapshot of the archaeology below. They are often dug in gardens to look for evidence of earlier human activity and in fields where research and visual observation may suggest settlement.

LOCATION
It is very important to record the exact location of the test pits so that future generations can identify the site where the artefacts were found - Use GPS

HEALTH AND SAFETY
Pay special attention to health and safety issues e.g. possible electric cables, water pipes etc
Follow YCCCART guide lines

EQUIPMENT
Site diary
String, tent pegs for marking sides of test pits
String to hold a spirit level to see if test pit is on a slope
Measuring tapes and metre stick
Spades and rakes
Ground sheet or plastic sheet for spoil and removed turfs of grass
Buckets for collecting and transferring soil to sieves
Dustbins and sieves for small finds including environmental evidence. Sieves 6 mml
Trays for finds
Trowels - Recommended archaeological
Small and large shovels
Context sheets, pens, pencils and erasers
Kneelers
Wheelbarrow if room
Clipboard
A4 paper
Camera
Metal detector for checking spoil heap
Plastic bags for finds in each context
Plumb line
Kneeling boards to prevent sides of test pit collapsing
Washing up bowl and nail brushes or toothbrushes for cleaning finds-not metal
Site diary
Squared paper for recording side of pit showing context measurements

METHOD
Having decided the location of the test pit, determine its position relative to a fixed point e.g. the corner of the house to two adjacent corners of the test pit, or use GPS and show on plan. Draw plan in your site diary. Starting at the top left of the pit mark the corners 1 to 4 in a clockwise direction. Show walls and fences and features nearby giving location in relation to an OS point Draw an arrow marking north on all plans

Put tent peg with 5 m of string attached, vertically in the ground, preferably a straight metal peg, and attach to a peg 1m away keeping the string taut This forms the first side of the test pit. Use right angle of clipboard or 3, 4, 5 triangle to form the right angle for the next side. Repeat until the pit is outlined. Check all measurements before digging. The diagonals should be 141.5cms.

Start cutting the turf with spades just inside the marker string Cut all round the test pit. Divide into 20 cm squares Remove middle turfs next for easier access..Cut the turf with an equal amount

of attached soil. Observe the soil attached to the turf. Record any finds. Put the turf on the plastic sheet in order, so they can be replaced in the correct position at the end of the dig.
Observe the surface of the pit. Check for artefacts and differences in texture and colour of the soil. Record in site diary.
Trowel the pit carefully using the side of the trowel until you see a difference in the soil.
Name the first dug section context 1. Put the finds in a plastic tray labelled Context 1.
Soil from separate contexts should be kept separately on the sheet of plastic, after sieving, so it can be returned to its original site at the end of the dig. Sieving helps to retrieve small artefacts and environmental evidence e.g. seeds.
The depth of each context should be measured from the top of the pit to the top of the context and from the top of the context to the bottom of the context. Repeat the latter until the natural or the bottom of the pit is reached. Record in site diary.
It is important to keep the sides of the pit vertical and the base horizontal. Observing the sides carefully helps to see changes in the soil,identifying different contexts. If changes in soil are observed at the same level or depth across the pit, each difference should be seen as a different context, so there could be two or more contexts at one level and should be treated and recorded as such.
Repeat this process until 1 metre deep or the natural if occurring first. If large stones or obvious building evidence is found, trowel around the features, leaving them in situ. Photograph each context and draw in site diary. Choose one side of the pit and draw accurately to scale, preferably using squared paper and labelling all contexts on the drawing. Photograph the side section.

RETURNING THE SITE TO ITS ORIGINAL STATE
It is very important to return the site to its original state. Using spades remove soil from spoil heap. Replace and start filling pit. Ideally different soils are best returned to matching soil type. Tread layers down carefully .Repeat process until at the top. Carefully replace the turf in the order they were removed. Tread down carefully until grass is level with the surrounding grass. Remove all equipment from the site.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DIVISION OF TASKS
Six people is possibly the minimum realistic number to work on a test pit. Two to trowel the pit, two to transfer the buckets of soil to be sieved, and to remove soil to the plastic sheet, and two to sieve the soil. If more people and room is available two more could work at the pit and two could wash the finds with gentle use of the toothbrush or nail brush. Do not wash metal. Gently brush. Leave washed artefacts to dry and put in labelled plastic bags.

SITE REPORT
Write up site report with carefully drawn diagrams and photographs clearly labelled and dated.