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SASSA: a soil analysis support system for archaeologists

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Archaeologists in excavating sites need to record and interpret soils to aid overall interpretation. These are core functions of geoarchaeology, but many field archaeologists lack the necessary training to undertake such work. There is thus the need to provide a support system designed to assist archaeologists with field and lab analysis of soils and sediments associated with archaeological sites. As a result SASSA (Soil Analysis Support System for Archaeologists) is currently being developed with the ultimate aim of international applicability. It is a UK NERC funded knowledge-transfer project based at the University of Stirling. This web-based system is being developed to provide information on geoarchaeological recording, sampling, lab analysis and the archaeological questions that benefit from soil/sediment analysis.

When complete by the end of 2007 SASSA will consist of:

1. A background tutorial on the archaeological questions that soil and sediment analysis can be used to address, soil and sediment processes, and field recording and sampling

2. A field tool to help archaeologists produce standard soil descriptions and answer common field-based geoarchaeological questions.

3. A summary of different laboratory analyses, their time and cost implications, the questions they can be used to answer, and sampling and sample storage issues.

4. A database of case studies providing examples of archaeological studies using

soil and sediment analysis.

5. A forum for interaction between archaeologists and geoarchaeologists.
6. A glossary of earth-science terms.
7. News on geoarchaeological related developments, conferences and meetings.

SASSA uses decision making and Wiki tools to produce an interactive, evolving system that can grow and develop along with the field of geoarchaeology. A version suitable for PDA or phone display is also being developed providing a mobile system that can be taken on site. This paper presents an introduction to SASSA and the ways in which it might be used. Comments will be welcome on SASSA when the prototype is available for testing. Please contact the lead author for details.