

Definition: Shovel Test Pits (STP)

This standard archeological technique is used to discover and pinpoint areas worth investigating in the early (Phase I) part of an excavation. Once an area has been identified as a cultural site, small holes are excavated along a grid at equal distances and depths. At the site with the skeleton in the cellar, a series of 18-inch deep holes was dug every 50 - 60 feet. Then, to continue an STP, the soil from each hole is passed through a screen and artifacts are collected from the samples. All the artifacts, known as the assemblage, are mapped onto a site grid, which reveals areas of higher artifact concentrations. STPs can be followed with more subsurface testing in the most promising areas. Using STPs and other surveying methods, archeologists are able to hone in on cultural sites with the least amount of excavation.



This page is part of the [Smithsonian's The Secret in the Cellar Webcomic](#), an educational resource from the *Written in Bone* exhibition, February 2009 - 2014.