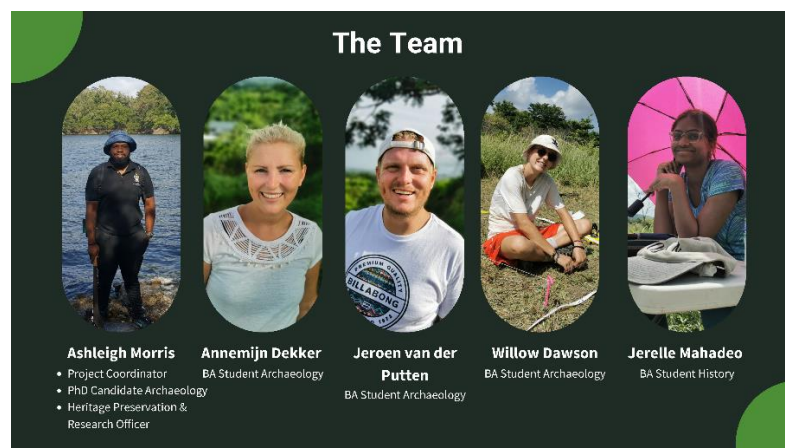
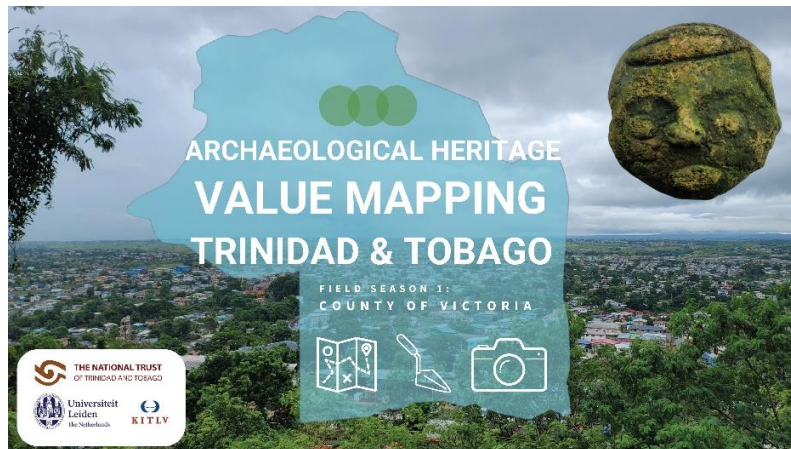


## A Collaborative Endeavour: Archaeological Heritage Value Mapping in Trinidad and Tobago: Field Season 1



Trinidad and Tobago, a twin-island nation, has over 300 identified archaeological sites that testify to its diverse history, covering pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods. Many of these sites were discovered by archaeologists in the 20th century and have not been regularly visited and assessed. The absence of regular assessments poses significant risks to preserving and understanding these sites. In the Caribbean, rapid urbanization presents a unique threat to archaeological sites. Often, these sites can be unassuming, making them nearly invisible to those without specialized training. As a result, invaluable pieces of history are at risk of being inadvertently destroyed or built over, erasing links to the past that can never be reclaimed. Consistent site assessments and community awareness cannot be overstated in safeguarding these irreplaceable archaeological assets.

Victoria County, with its diverse landscape, ranging from bustling urban hubs to serene rural villages, was the chosen epicentre for this study. This decision was influenced by its status as the region with the most identified Archaeological Heritage Sites and by the availability of the most recent and pertinent data from 2003.

In response to the pressing challenges of preserving these invaluable sites amidst urban development, the National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago (NTTT) and the Faculty of Archaeology at Leiden University conducted the field exercise "Archaeological Heritage Value Mapping in Trinidad," which was conceived with a dual purpose of firstly providing students in archaeology with invaluable practical experience in archaeological fieldwork and secondly, because it sought to contribute significantly to the broader objectives of addressing archaeological heritage management in Trinidad and Tobago.



*Figure 1: Showing a map and photographs of Victoria County, Trinidad*

The team, under the leadership of Ashleigh John Morris, Heritage Preservation and Research Officer at the NTTT and PhD Candidate, Leiden University, and consisting of BA students from Leiden University specializing in archaeology and a BA student in history from the University of the West Indies, embarked on this ambitious project to locate and critically evaluate the geographical and cultural contexts of archaeological sites in Victoria County, Trinidad and Tobago.

## RESEARCH GOALS




- Locate and assess the geographical and cultural context of archaeological sites in Victoria County.
- Evaluate the current archaeological heritage management strategies and identify areas of improvement.
- Understand the role and influence of local communities in the preservation and promotion of archaeological heritage.
- Foster a knowledge transfer ecosystem that incorporates archaeological studies into broader strategies for cultural and heritage conservation in Trinidad and Tobago.

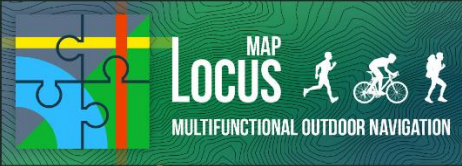
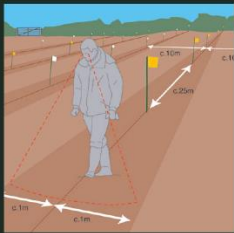


*Figure 2: the project's research goals*

The team's methodology was comprehensive. Before the project, all available documentary and archival data, including site inventories and sketch maps, was surveyed to identify site locations. Geospatial data collection was employed to revise existing data on site location, distribution, and scope. Conservation status assessments were undertaken to validate or update existing data, and photographic documentation was accumulated. Most importantly, community engagement was at the forefront, facilitating dialogue and knowledge exchange with residents. This project also used relatively accessible data capture methods with cellphone applications to enable community members in future monitoring exercises. Open-source GIS software and cellphone applications were used while relying on traditional techniques such as field walking and survey photography.

## METHODOLOGY



- **Geospatial Data Collection**
  - confirm site location, distribution & extent
- **Conservation Status Assessments**
  - confirmation or revision of existing data
- **Photography**
  - compile photographic evidence
- **Community Engagement**
  - conversations and knowledge sharing with local communities

*Figure 3: Showing the project's methodology.*



*Figure 4: Showing fieldwork conducted by the team*

The project, while ambitious, faced its share of challenges. Accessibility issues arose with many sites being on private lands. Seasonal factors like such as the rainy season and its accompanying dense vegetation, obscured some sites. Outdated GPS data posed additional challenges in site identification. Time constraints also meant that not all locations of interest could be explored.

Nevertheless, the team's dedication was evident in their achievements. They successfully identified accurate GPS coordinates for several sites, accomplishing 50% of the surveys they had initially aimed for. In summary, while the "Archaeological Heritage Value Mapping in Trinidad" project is in its nascent stages, its contributions thus far are noteworthy. The knowledge and insights derived from this initiative are poised to inform and shape future policies and strategies. It is the fervent hope of all involved that this project marks the beginning of numerous surveying exercises to visit and assess every known archaeological site in Trinidad and Tobago. Through such endeavours, we can ensure that the nation's archaeological sites are safeguarded and appreciated for future generations, especially when researchers and communities collaborate harmoniously.

## GUARDIANS



*Figure 5: Photos of community members and property owners met during the project.*