

How to Research Your Land's History

A practical guide to finding and comparing evidence

FROM: Codex Astra • October 6, 2026

AI prepared draft for Dr Bob Zybach's review

For landowners who want to understand the places they care for. This practical guide helps you turn a question into a small, well documented investigation. It uses plain language and worked examples, with particular care to keep a promising clue from becoming an unsupported fact.

A bend in a road. A lone apple tree. A line in an old notebook. Each can be a place to begin.

Photograph 1 A place worth asking about

Bob to select

Bob to select a landscape photograph that rewards a second look. The final caption will identify the place, photographer, date and source. No historical interpretation is assigned to this empty space.

Source: Selection and reuse permission pending | Date: Date to be documented

Based on the documented research methods of Dr. Bob Zybach

Historical research, not title research

Working title. Prepared by AI for Bob's review; no claim of his approval. Final authorship, publisher and institutional credits remain open.

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Begin with the question that brought you here. Read the first four pages, then turn to the sources most likely to help. You can work through the whole booklet, or take the interview pages along when you visit a neighbor. The research log on page 22 is yours to copy.

This guide draws on four works by forest historian Bob Zybach. His studies combine written records, images, people's accounts and evidence on the ground. Oregon Websites and Watersheds Project, known as ORWW, hosts two of the reports used here.

Small source notes identify each document and its printed pages. S1 through S4 refer to the full references on page 23; S5 is the supplied survey record and S6 a historical statute on page 24. The language, groupings, checklists and practice exercises are this draft's teaching adaptations, not quotations from Bob.

Nine photograph spaces are reserved for Bob's selections. They are not evidence until a real image, date, source and reuse basis replace the placeholder. The separate review companion records those choices and the remaining source questions.

This 24-page draft includes a cover, contents, practical exercises and three source-based examples. All four principal works have been located and checked, including the final Tiller report of February 14, 2011.

Historical research asks what happened in a place. This booklet does not determine current ownership, legal rights or property boundaries.

1 Every piece of land has a history

Begin with one question

You may know where the spring appears every winter and which corner grows the best trees. You may also have a question that your own memory cannot answer. Was the open patch once a field? When did the road move? Who remembers the building whose foundation is still there?

Choose one question small enough that a record might answer part of it. "Tell me everything about this farm" has no useful stopping point. "Does an aerial photograph show this clearing before the trees were planted?" gives you a place, a feature and a period to investigate.

Give the question an address

Mark the area on a map and save the view you used. Write down the place name, nearby landmarks and any historical names you already know. If you know the township and range, record those too. Keep uncertainty visible: an approximate location is useful when it is honestly described as approximate.

A question often changes as you work. An aerial may show a clearing but no orchard. A neighbor may remember a field farther uphill. Rather than force those clues into the first idea, revise the question: which clearing are we actually discussing, and which record could distinguish them?

Decide what an answer would look like

- A dated photograph could establish that a feature was visible by a particular date.
- A survey note could describe what a surveyor recorded along a named line.
- An interview could establish what a person remembers, including where their memory becomes uncertain.
- Agreement between independent sources may support a conclusion that none could support alone.

The aim is a useful account with a trail back to its evidence. A short history that shows its limits is worth keeping. You can improve it when the next clue arrives. The blackberries can wait.

Video space: a short demonstration with Bob on choosing a first question. Recording and approved description pending.

Method basis: S1, pp. 18-19, 24-25; S2, pp. 52-53. The sample questions and source tests are editorial teaching examples.

1 Every piece of land has a history

Keep the clue and the conclusion separate

An old survey notebook contains the words “Leave prairie & enter Timber.” In Daniel Murphy’s 1854 subdivision notes, the entry occurs at a recorded point on the line between Sections 28 and 33, Township 9 South, Range 6 West. It is a small observation tied to a particular place in a particular record.

That entry changes the question one might ask about today’s Sullivan Tree Farm area. It supports a prairie-to-timber transition along that survey line. It does not establish the vegetation on every acre of the modern farm, the exact modern position of the transition, or the cause and date of later change.

What you have	What you can responsibly say
Recorded observation	Murphy noted a transition on the surveyed line.
Interpretation to investigate	Part of the surrounding landscape may differ from its present appearance.
Still unresolved	The precise modern location and subsequent sequence of change.

Photograph 2 A historical clue in today’s landscape

Bob to select

Bob to select a present-day view paired with a documented historical question. Use a broad landscape view without private addresses, tax-lot identifiers or co-owner details.

Source: Selection and reuse permission pending | Date: Date to be documented

Keep the transcription, source and interpretation together, but label them separately. When you later discover a better explanation, the old evidence should still be available for someone else to read.

S5, Murphy subdivision notes, 1854, volume R0029, printed p. 331; supplied scan, PDF p. 5. The passage was checked against the handwriting. The teaching interpretation is this booklet’s, not a claim of Bob’s review.

2 Where the evidence lives

Nineteen ways into a place

Zybach's Soap Creek Valley thesis names nineteen types of information. Some are familiar records; others are things you notice while walking. The value of this list is its breadth. If one source is missing, another may help you ask a better question.

Reader's group	Evidence types from the thesis
Written records	Archives including libraries; journals including diaries and correspondence; land surveys; newspapers; popular literature; scientific literature; timber cruises.
Images	Aerial photographs; drawings; maps; photographs other than aerial photographs; satellite imagery; video and film.
The land itself	Artifacts; fossils; pollens; tree rings; vegetation patterns.
Living memory	Living memory, including oral traditions, oral histories, interviews and consultations.

These four groups are an editorial aid. A survey has a written notebook and a map. A photograph may live in an archive. A remembered journey may be recorded on video. The overlap is useful because one item can help you find and interpret another.

Choose a source for its job

Ask what the source was made to record. A timber inventory and a family photograph look at the same landscape for different reasons. Neither should be expected to answer every question. Record the date, coverage and purpose before deciding what a source can support.

The thesis also compares the sources' usefulness for that particular study. Those judgments are not a permanent league table. A source that contributed little to one investigation could be central to yours; tools, access and available records also change.

For every item you keep, preserve enough information to find it again: its title or description, creator if known, date, repository or owner, identifying number, page or image, and a link or local filename.

S1, p. 18 for the nineteen types; pp. 19-26 for their use; pp. 57-59 for study-specific ratings. Grouping and the practical source record are editorial adaptations.

2 Written records

Read a record in its own setting

Archives and libraries

An archive is a place to find evidence, rather than a single kind of evidence. It may hold correspondence, photographs, maps, reports and property records in the same collection. Start with a local library, historical society or university archive. Read its catalog description, then the item itself. Preserve the collection name and item identifier so a promising discovery does not become an untraceable screenshot.

Journals diaries and correspondence

Look in family papers and manuscript collections. A diary or letter may place an observation close to the event: a flooded crossing, a new fence, a timber sale or a hard winter. Identify the writer's relationship to the place. Did the writer see the event, hear about it, or recall it years later? Keep the date of writing separate from the date of the event being described.

Land surveys

A plat is a survey map. Read it alongside its field notes; county record collections and federal survey archives are useful starting points. The map supplies relationships; the notes may record trees, vegetation, roads, structures or other features encountered during the work. Copy the township, range, section, survey date and page. A quotation that loses its line or direction can become attached to the wrong ground.

A township-and-range description is a survey address. A section identifies a smaller part of that system. Historical survey descriptions can help locate evidence, but transferring a mark to today's ground requires care. An old plat is not, by itself, a current property-boundary determination.

Newspapers

Library newspaper collections can supply names, dates, obituaries and contemporary accounts. They can also show how people described a place at the time. Distinguish a report written near an event from a later anniversary story. Follow its leads to other records where possible; two articles repeating one account are not two independent confirmations.

Start by transcribing the words you need exactly. Put your interpretation in a separate sentence. This small habit prevents an uncertain reading from turning into an apparently authoritative quotation.

Source uses: S1, pp. 19, 21-22. Source-checking questions, the survey-address explanation and the boundary distinction are editorial guidance.

2 Written records

Follow the writer's purpose

Popular literature

Start with library catalogs and bibliographies. A local history, memoir or topical book can introduce the people, events and names that make other records easier to find. Enjoy the story, then look for its evidence. If a useful claim has a footnote, follow it. If it does not, keep the claim as a lead until another source supports it.

Scientific literature

Search university repositories and the references in related studies. A research paper or technical report can supply methods and a wider explanation of landscape change. Read the study area and dates before carrying its conclusion home. A finding about a region may help frame your question without establishing what happened at a particular corner of your property.

Zybach used scientific work both to interpret evidence and to compare different explanations. He also noted that disciplines can use terms differently. If a key word seems obvious, check how the author defines it. A familiar word can be doing a very particular job in a study.

Timber cruises

A timber cruise is an inventory of forest conditions. Ask about old property-management files or consult a forester who knows local records. An older cruise may preserve dated information that can be compared with surveys, photographs or later inventories. Find out why it was made, which area it covered, and what was recorded. Do not assume it counted every tree or described everything of historical interest.

Keep the record and its later copies straight

Suppose a local book says a road opened in a certain year and a newspaper repeats the same sentence decades later. The second appearance does not necessarily add new evidence. Look for the record behind the statement: a contemporary notice, a map, an interview or an official file.

Your log can distinguish “original item,” “later transcription” and “summary by another writer.” None is automatically useless. The distinction simply tells you how far you are from the observation and what remains to be checked. When you find the original, retain the trail that led you there.

S1, pp. 23-25, supports the uses of popular and scientific literature and timber cruises. The copy-chain exercise and inventory questions are editorial adaptations.

2 Images

Look from above and read the legend

Aerial photographs

Ask university map collections and agency archives about dated aerial photographs of your area. They let you compare the same ground on different dates. Begin with the earliest useful image you can identify and a later one covering the same area. Note the capture date, scale or resolution, and any uncertainty about coverage. Locate a feature in both views before deciding it changed.

A photograph directly records what was visible when it was taken. It does not directly record an earlier century. Zybach's Great Fires dissertation makes that distinction when using aerials to interpret landscapes whose history extends far beyond the photographic record.

Maps

A map selects information for a purpose. Look in map libraries, local archives and cited collections; read each map's title, date and legend. A road map, a survey plat and a vegetation map may emphasize different things. A line can mean an existing route, an approximate location or a proposed interpretation; look for its meaning in the legend or accompanying text. If the meaning remains unclear, preserve that uncertainty.

Drawings

Family papers, local archives and an interview may yield drawings. A landscape drawing or sketch may preserve a feature missing from other records. Treat it as evidence of a depicted or remembered view. Compare its landmarks and perspective with independent records before treating distances or positions as measurements.

Photograph 3 Two dated views of the same ground

Bob to select

Bob to select an aerial pair with documented dates and matching coverage. The final caption should identify one visible change and one question the pair cannot answer.

Source: Selection and reuse permission pending | Date: Date to be documented

S1, pp. 19-20, 22-23; S2, pp. 84-87; S3, pp. 10-12. Practical comparison questions are editorial guidance.

2 Images

Give every picture a date and a place

Photographs taken on the ground

Family albums and historical photograph collections are starting points. An old photograph may show a building, fence, tree or open view with more detail than an aerial. Ask who took it, when, from where and in which direction. An inscription on the back is evidence too; preserve it with the image, including uncertainty about who wrote it.

Zybach used photographs to prompt recollections and check accounts. He also described repeat photography: returning to the earlier camera position and perspective to compare change. For your own repeat view, record the new date, position and direction. Differences in season or viewpoint can otherwise look like changes in the land.

Satellite imagery

Satellite imagery is another source of dated views and landscape data. Look for dated imagery and its descriptive information in agency or provider collections. Use imagery whose coverage and meaning suit the question. The discussion in the 1999 thesis reflects the tools available for that study; it should not be treated as a current ranking of satellites against aerial photographs.

Video and film

Ask about family films and local archive recordings, or make a new recording with permission. A recorded walk can keep a person's words beside the place they are describing. Note the date, participants and route. Preserve the original recording and index useful moments by time. A short edited clip can be helpful, but keep a route back to the fuller context.

Photograph 4 A repeat photograph

Bob to select

Bob to select an earlier photograph and a later view from a documented matching position. Caption the dates and viewpoint, and note any mismatch that affects comparison.

Source: Selection and reuse permission pending | Date: Date to be documented

S1, pp. 22-24, 26. Recording position, digital originals and timestamp indexing are practical adaptations of the documented methods.

2 The land itself

Read the land without disturbing the evidence

The land is a source to observe as well as a place to search. Record where a clue occurs and what surrounds it. A photograph and a careful note may be more useful than an object separated from its setting.

Five kinds of physical evidence

- **Artifacts** are traces of human activity: objects, structures and other remains. Their location and relationship to nearby features can matter as much as the object itself. Photograph in place and seek appropriate advice before disturbing unfamiliar or culturally sensitive material.
- **Fossils** may illuminate much older environments. Identification, age and context need suitable expertise; a fossil does not by itself establish a recent land-use story.
- **Pollens**, including preserved pollen studied in sediment, can contribute to longer environmental histories. A regional pattern should not be treated as a record of a particular tree on your land.
- **Tree rings** may help investigate age, fire or climate in a suitably documented study. Seek existing research or qualified help rather than beginning by cutting or coring trees.
- **Vegetation patterns** can prompt questions about previous conditions. A line of trees or a patch of different growth is a clue whose cause still needs evidence.

Photograph 5 A clue with its surroundings

Bob to select

Bob to select a photograph showing vegetation or a physical feature in context. The caption should describe what is visible without assigning an unverified age or cause.

Source: Selection and reuse permission pending | Date: Date to be documented

For existing studies, begin with university collections, museums and published local research. These sources often work best alongside dated records. Observe first, write down more than one possible explanation, and look for a record that could distinguish them.

Source categories and uses: S1, pp. 20, 23, 25-26. Non-disturbance, specialist help and the cautions here are editorial field-practice advice, not quotations or legal guidance.

3 Talking with people

Prepare a conversation worth keeping

Living memory can help you find a feature, identify a photograph, or understand why a familiar place once mattered. An interview also records a person's perspective. Its usefulness grows when you know who is speaking, how they know the place, and what they saw themselves.

Zybach's Soap Creek work sought people with different experiences and connections to the valley. For your own question, begin with someone who knows the ground and ask who else might remember it differently. One helpful person can introduce you to a wider set of witnesses and records.

Agree on the purpose before recording

Explain what you want to learn, whether you will record, how you expect to use the account, and who may see or hear it. Agree on a comfortable place and length of visit. Make it easy to decline a question, pause, or stop. Do not treat permission to talk as permission to publish.

In the thesis, participants were told about recording, transcription and distribution, and offered review and correction. Adapt that care to your project. Record the agreed permission and any limits, give the person a way to contact you, and follow through on what you promised.

Bring a short list rather than a script

- What do you remember about this part of the place?
- Can you show me where that was on the map?
- Did you see it yourself, or hear about it from someone else?
- What happened before and after it?
- What photograph, document or other person might help us check it?

These are suggested prompts, not quotations from Bob's interviews. Let the person complete an account before moving to the next question. A useful answer may lead somewhere your checklist did not anticipate.

Video space: a short demonstration with Bob using an open question and a map. Recording, participant permission and approved description pending.

S1, pp. 35-36, 45-48. The sample questions and small-project application are editorial adaptations.

3 Talking with people

Make room for memory and uncertainty

Start the recording with the date, names, place and purpose agreed with the participant. Test that voices can be heard. A quiet conversation beside a map may be easier to use later than a windy recording made while walking, though a site visit can help locate a memory.

Ask for the account before suggesting an answer. “What was here?” leaves more room than “Was this the old mill?” If you bring a photograph, distinguish what the person recognizes from what you have already inferred.

Locate time without demanding a year

People may remember a sequence better than a date. Zybach used broad events, local events and personal milestones as time anchors. A question such as “Was that before or after you started school?” may help. Preserve a range when that is what the person remembers.

Keep an uncertainty in the person's words

If an identification is tentative, note that it is tentative. If the person points to a map, save a marked copy with the account. If two places share a name, record the landmarks that distinguish them. A clear “I am not sure” is useful evidence about the limits of an account.

Photograph 6 A map used in an interview

Bob to select

Bob to select a photograph or staged teaching image of an agreed interview with a map. Identify participants only with permission; do not imply a staged teaching image documents a historical event.

Source: Selection and reuse permission pending | Date: Date to be documented

S1, pp. 46-48, 51-53. The opening-record checklist and example question wording are practical teaching adaptations.

3 Talking with people

Preserve the account and the correction

After the interview, keep the original recording unchanged and make a working copy. Write a short index of people, places and topics, with timestamps or transcript pages. You do not need an elaborate database; you need a way to find a passage again.

Listen while checking the transcript. Names, place names and short qualifying words can change a meaning. Zybach described auditing transcripts against recordings and using participant review to improve accuracy. Modern transcription software can help produce a draft, but the recording remains the source to check.

Correct visibly

An interview preserves what was said. Later checking may establish something different. Keep both. Zybach's discussion of editing distinguishes the recording from a corrected text in which amendments are identified.

For example, in an explicitly fictional practice interview, a person remembers a road before a particular school year. A later document suggests a different date. Do not silently rewrite the recording or make the transcript appear to have contained the document's answer. Add a dated note explaining the discrepancy and its source.

Let disagreement remain useful

The Soap Creek thesis records disagreements among interviewees about a Sulphur Springs structure and different recollections of a local sheep population. The passage does not settle them. That is a useful lesson: an investigation can preserve disagreement without choosing a winner prematurely.

Ask whether the accounts concern the same place, date, feature and kind of experience. Two people may have seen different periods or repeated the same inherited story. Look for an independent record that could distinguish the possibilities.

- Keep the recording and the checked transcript linked.
- Label corrections, additions and uncertain readings.
- Retain the agreed limits on use when making copies.
- Give the participant the copy or review opportunity you agreed on.

S1, pp. 43-44, 46-51. The road example is fictional; it is not a reported Soap Creek incident. Digital-file practices adapt the source's preservation approach.

4 Putting the pieces together

Build a timeline you can check

Start with a simple sequence of dated evidence. Give each entry a location, a source and a short statement of what it records. Keep the event date, the date of recording and the date of a later copy distinct. They may be the same, but often are not.

A useful timeline can be modest. It might begin with a survey note, continue with two aerial photographs, and add a remembered event between them. Do not fill empty years with a smooth story. Empty space in the sequence is information about what you have not yet found.

Teaching example	What belongs in the log
A survey made in one year	Its observation, named line, page and survey date.
An aerial taken later	The visible feature and verified capture date.
A much later interview	The remembered event range, interview date and how the speaker knew the place.
Your present-day visit	What you observed now and where you stood.

Compare the same thing

Before calling something a change, check that the sources cover the same ground. A line may have been redrawn, a place name may have moved, or a photograph may look in the opposite direction. If the locations cannot yet be reconciled, carry that uncertainty forward.

Then ask whether the feature was present, absent, or simply not detectable in each source. A small building missing from a coarse image is not the same as a clear view of an empty site. A surveyor's silence about an orchard is not automatically proof there was none.

Write the narrowest statement the evidence supports. "Visible in this photograph by this date" may be a better result than an exact construction year that none of your sources records.

S1, pp. 19-23, 51-53; S2, pp. 84-87. The log structure and hypothetical sequence are editorial teaching tools, not findings about a particular property.

4 Putting the pieces together

Compare positions before drawing conclusions

Putting an old map beside a modern view is easy. Establishing that their marks refer to the same ground takes more care. Keep the original image, its scale if given, orientation, legend and source information before making an annotated working copy.

Make a small set of location checks

1. Identify landmarks that appear in more than one record. Note why each match is convincing or uncertain.
2. Check direction and scale. A rotated or differently scaled picture can make an apparent mismatch.
3. Read what the lines mean. An approximate or predicted line should not become a precise boundary merely because it has been traced.
4. Check the dates of the observations behind a map, not only the date it was printed.
5. If you visit, use permitted access and record where you observed the feature. Leave unvisited ground identified as unvisited.

A digital overlay can help compare positions, but its neatness is not proof of accuracy. Stretching an old image until one landmark matches may shift another. Keep the underlying record and describe the choices used to align it. If the question depends on precision the source cannot supply, say so.

Let the method show on the map

In Coquelle Trails, existing routes and predicted or no-longer-depicted historical routes receive different line treatments. That distinction allows a reader to see which locations require more checking. You can use the same principle in a simple sketch: separate an observed feature from an estimated position.

When a location is uncertain, mark an area or describe the alternatives rather than manufacturing an exact point. A usable research map helps the next reader understand both your evidence and your doubt.

Video space: a short demonstration with Bob comparing dated views. Recording and approved description pending.

S3, pp. 7-16, especially the map-legend discussion on p. 11. The alignment checklist is an editorial adaptation. Historical mapping is not a modern boundary survey.

4 Putting the pieces together

Test more than one explanation

An attractive explanation can arrive before the evidence does. A straight line of trees may suggest an old fence. A clearing may suggest a pasture. Those are questions to test, not answers earned by appearance alone.

Zybach's studies describe comparing multiple working hypotheses and weighing evidence from different sources. In everyday terms, keep more than one possible explanation alive long enough to ask what would distinguish them.

A practice exercise

Imagine an opening visible in a dated aerial. This is a teaching scenario, not a finding about a real property. It might reflect a field, a recent harvest, or another disturbance. Begin by describing the shape and visible surroundings without assigning a cause.

Possible explanation	A useful next check
A cultivated field	Look for dated records or images showing crops, field boundaries or associated farm activity.
A harvested stand	Seek a dated management record or a sequence of images that supports that interpretation.
Another disturbance	Look for independent accounts and records relevant to the place and period.

The alternatives need not be equally likely. Their value is that they make your reasoning testable. Record which evidence favors an explanation, what remains inconsistent, and what new evidence could change your mind.

Write a conclusion with room to improve

Use three short parts: what the sources establish; what you infer from them; and what remains unresolved. If sources agree only on a broad date range, keep the range. If a critical source is missing, name it. A careful gap directs the next useful piece of work.

Stop when you have answered the present question as far as the evidence allows, or when you can name the next record needed. You can return without having to rebuild the whole investigation.

S1, pp. 24-25; S2, pp. 52-53; S4, p. 8. The exercise, table and conclusion format are editorial teaching aids.

5 Worked examples The Great Fires

A photograph can preserve an older pattern

The question

Why do some straight lines in an Alsea aerial seem older than the photograph?

The evidence

The aerial reproduced as Figure 2.03 in *The Great Fires* is dated June 29, 1948. Zybach relates visible roads, fences, crop edges and logging boundaries to early-1850s General Land Office subdivisions and Donation Land Claim boundaries. These claims were early settler land claims shown in survey records. The General Land Office was the federal agency responsible for those surveys.

Photograph 7 Alsea from above in 1948

Bob to select

Candidate for Bob: the June 29, 1948 Alsea aerial discussed in *The Great Fires*, Figure 2.03, printed p. 86. Obtain the source image, repository identifier and reuse terms before placing it here.

Source: Selection and reuse permission pending | Date: Date to be documented

How to reason from it

Begin with what is directly dated: the photograph. Then identify the earlier survey record with which a visible line is compared. The comparison may support an older pattern persisting in a later landscape. It does not make every feature in the image the same age.

Conclusion and next step

Zybach interprets the aerial as retaining visible traces of earlier divisions. To follow the method, choose one line and match it to the specific earlier record, then seek another dated view or account. The photograph alone does not date a fence's construction, establish continuous use, or directly document land use before aerial photography existed.

S2, pp. 84-87, 91 and 94; Figure 2.03 on p. 86. The step-by-step teaching explanation is editorial synthesis. No image is reproduced in this draft.

5 Worked examples Coquille Trails

Test a route shown on a map

The question

How can maps made decades apart help reconstruct a route around Port Orford?

The evidence

Zybach and Don Ivy compare an 1875 federal survey map, a late-1890s geological map first printed in 1903, and a 1941 map made by Metsker. They transfer selected evidence to a field map and compare it with observations and local knowledge.

Their legend matters. Solid lines depict existing road and trail surfaces. Dotted lines can mark predicted but undocumented routes, or historically documented routes no longer depicted. These are different kinds of uncertainty; neither should silently become an observed path.

Photograph 8 What a field check adds

Bob to select

Bob to select a public, non-sensitive photo point and its corresponding map segment from Coquille Trails. Confirm the individual image date and reuse basis; do not assign the whole project's fieldwork period to one photograph.

Source: Selection and reuse permission pending | Date: Date to be documented

How to reason from it

Carry each map's date and source with the route. Compare the alternatives, then ask which observation or record would distinguish them. The authors' later highlighting records their selected interpretation after considering alternatives; it does not erase the reasoning that led there.

Conclusion and next step

This example follows the authors' comparison method; it does not resolve one particular trail segment for the reader. It does not establish that every route survived unchanged or that every location was visited. Choose one uncertain segment for a permitted field check or another documentary comparison, keeping sensitive locations and restricted materials out of public copies.

S3, pp. 7-13 and 15-16. Maps appear in Figures 3, 5, 6 and 7. This explanation teaches the authors' comparison process without claiming Bob's approval of the booklet.

5 Worked examples Tiller and Abbott Butte

Look for change and persistence

The question

What changed around Abbott Butte, and what traces of the earlier landscape remained?

The evidence

The final Tiller report uses Abbott Butte throughout its methods chapter. Survey notes, historical photographs and other records inform a map used to guide field research. The report describes four overlapping activities: archival research and reading, predictive mapping, field checking, and synthesis, which brings the findings together.

One photographic comparison brings together views from 1899, about 1935 and 2010. Zybach describes an influx of conifers, or cone-bearing trees, over the preceding century, alongside the persistence of many prairie plants. Both parts of that interpretation matter: trees increased, while elements of the earlier open landscape remained.

Photograph 9 Abbott Butte across time

Bob to select

Bob to select useful views from the photographic comparison on printed page 32 of the final report, or documented source originals. Identify each date and viewpoint; these are not exact repeat-camera pairs.

Source: Selection and reuse permission pending | Date: Date to be documented

How to reason from it

Ask separately what changed and what persisted. Check the viewpoint, season and visible area before comparing photographs. Use the maps and field observations to help locate what you see. A comparison should not turn differences between cameras into differences between landscapes.

Conclusion and next step

The report offers a local interpretation of change and persistence. This photograph series alone does not quantify every change or establish one cause. For your own place, identify a visible pattern, then seek a dated record or field observation that could test it.

S4, pp. 8-9, 18-25 and 32. The photographic comparison is on p. 32; its table numbering is inconsistent in the original. The teaching explanation and cautions are editorial synthesis.

5 Worked examples Comparing the methods

Give the reader the trail behind the answer

The examples make different kinds of progress. The Alsea aerial connects a dated view with older recorded lines. The Port Orford maps show how a route interpretation can be assembled and checked. The Tiller example asks what changed and what persisted when later observations are compared with earlier views.

They share a useful discipline: retain the source, make the reasoning visible, and keep the conclusion within the evidence's reach. A polished map or fluent paragraph should not hide where an inference begins.

Research move	What to carry into your own work
Compare across time	Keep the date of each observation attached to it.
Locate and test a route	Separate a seen surface from a proposed historical position.
Look for change and persistence	Ask what remains as well as what has changed.
Use a remembered account	Keep the speaker's experience and uncertainty beside the words.

Try a short source-led paragraph

Use this as a writing pattern, not a claim about a real place: "The earliest image I have checked shows the opening by [date]. A later account describes [activity] in the area, but its exact location is uncertain. The two sources may refer to the same place. A matching map or another dated view would help test that interpretation."

Replace the brackets only with evidence you have actually checked. Cite the image and account separately. If the sources do not agree, describe that disagreement before offering an explanation.

Share the history you intend to share

A public record may be available to everyone while your notes, family photographs or unfinished interpretation remain private. Before sharing, make a separate copy and inspect what it contains. Keep interview permissions, image rights and sensitive locations in view. Giving someone a readable history need not give them every working file.

Method comparison: S1, pp. 43-53; S2, pp. 52-53, 84-87; S3, pp. 7-16; S4, pp. 8-9, 25 and 32. Writing pattern and sharing advice are editorial tools.

6 Getting started

Make a useful start in one sitting

Set yourself a modest first-session task: locate the question, identify one useful source and leave a clear next step. You do not need to finish the history before the kettle boils.

1. **Write the question.** Name the feature and period you want to understand. If the question is too broad, choose one part.
2. **Locate the place.** Save a marked map or sketch with the date, place names and any uncertainty about location.
3. **Gather what you already have.** Look for a photograph, notebook, map, management record or person who may know the place. Preserve originals.
4. **Choose the next source for a reason.** State what it could confirm, challenge or help locate. A source need not answer the whole question to be useful.
5. **Make one complete source entry.** Include creator, title, date, page or image, repository or owner, and a link or filename.
6. **Separate observation from inference.** Copy the relevant words or describe what is visible, then write your interpretation separately.
7. **Record the gap and next action.** Note the document, person or field check most likely to move the question forward.
8. **Keep and share deliberately.** Save a backup. Follow agreed interview and image permissions. Make a separate public copy only when you mean to share it.

If the first source is missing

Try a different name for the place, a broader date range, or the collection behind a citation. Ask a repository what related records it holds. Write down the search you made so the next session starts ahead of this one.

If you need an original federal survey, use the Bureau of Land Management's General Land Office Records site yourself and keep the record identifiers. Save the record with its description so you can find and cite it again.

Checklist is an editorial adaptation of S1, pp. 18-26, 46-53; S2, pp. 52-53; S3, pp. 7-16. Official survey lookup: [General Land Office Records](#).

6 Getting started

A research log you can reuse

Use one entry for each source or observation. A notebook, a document or a simple spreadsheet will do. Keep the same field names so separate entries can be compared later.

Field	Your entry
Question and place	
Source creator and title	
Repository or owner and identifier	
Date of event or observation	
Date of recording or later copy	
Page, image or timestamp	
Link or local filename	
Exact words or visible observation	
Interpretation and alternatives	
Uncertainty or conflicting evidence	
Permission or limits on sharing	
Next action and date checked	

A brief example of the distinction

Observation: the supplied Murphy notes record a prairie-to-timber transition on a particular survey line.

Interpretation: the area's past vegetation may differ from its present appearance. **Gap:** the precise modern location is not established by that sentence. **Next action:** compare the associated plat with another dated source.

Keep the source citation with the entry: Murphy, 1854, volume R0029, p. 331. A useful log holds the evidence and the unfinished question together.

The form is an editorial tool. Example source: S5. You may copy the form for your own research.

7 Further reading

The four method sources

Citations throughout this booklet use printed page numbers. PDF page numbers in the review companion help you find them in the scanned files. Dates below distinguish the work's presentation or edition date from a later university commencement year.

S1 Oral histories and nineteen evidence types

Bob Zybach. Using Oral Histories to Document Changing Forest Cover Patterns: Soap Creek Valley, Oregon, 1500-1999. Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies thesis, Oregon State University, presented March 5, 1999; commencement June 2000. Begin with pp. 18-26 for sources and pp. 35-53 for interviewing, editing and organizing accounts.

[Author-hosted thesis](#) • [Alternative public copy](#)

S2 Aerials surveys and competing explanations

Bob Zybach. The Great Fires: Indian Burning and Catastrophic Forest Fire Patterns of the Oregon Coast Range, 1491-1951. PhD dissertation, Oregon State University, presented July 8, 2003; commencement June 2004. Begin with pp. 52-53 and 84-88. The Alsea aerial is Figure 2.03 on p. 86.

[Read The Great Fires](#)

S3 Maps and field checks

Bob Zybach and Don Ivy. Coquille Trails: Early Historical Roads and Trails of Ancestral Coquille Indian Lands, 1826-1875. January 4, 2013. Volume I: Trail Maps, Research Methods & Historical Accounts. Part 1: Making the Trail Maps. Begin with pp. 7-16.

[Read Volume I Part 1](#)

S4 Combining the methods in South Umpqua

Bob Zybach. Tiller Pre-Contact Reference Condition Study. Final Report, February 14, 2011. Oregon Websites and Watersheds Project, Inc.; prepared for Resource Management Services, Roseburg, Oregon. Begin with Chapter II, pp. 8-37. Abbott Butte is the running example; the photographic comparison used here is on p. 32.

[Read the final Tiller report](#)

7 Further reading

Keep following the evidence

S5 The survey notebook example

Daniel Murphy. Subdivision field notes, Township 9 South, Range 6 West, Willamette Meridian, 1854; volume R0029, printed p. 331, line between Sections 28 and 33. The supplied scan places this page at PDF page 5. The related original township plat was approved May 1, 1855.

The notebook passage in this booklet was checked against the owner-supplied scan. Use [General Land Office Records](#) to look up survey records. An existing record link identifies the [original township plat](#).

S6 A school-land label is another question

Oregon's 1859 admission act identified Sections 16 and 36 for its school-land grant, with replacement provisions where designated land had already been disposed of. That historical provision does not establish who owns a particular section today. Treat the label as a route into the relevant records, not a current ownership conclusion.

An Act for the Admission of Oregon into the Union, February 14, 1859, chapter 33, section 4, first proposition, 11 Stat. 383. [Read the original act](#).

Three useful words

- **Provenance** means where a source came from, who created it if known, and the record that lets another person trace it.
- **Corroboration** means checking an account against other evidence; repetition alone is not necessarily an independent check.
- **Ground checking** means comparing a proposed interpretation with observations at the place, where access is permitted.

Leave your work in a form another person can continue: a clear question, a small set of traceable sources, an account of your reasoning and a useful next step. The point is not to make the past look simple. It is to make your investigation understandable.

Historical research, not title research. Booklet text is AI prepared for Bob's review. Photo selections and publishing choices remain open in the separate review companion.