Field Stations
ISAS has four regional field stations responsible for archaeological research and field investigations across the state. These include the Central Illinois Field Office in Champaign covering east-central Illinois; the American Bottom Field Station in Wood River, which performs archaeological research in the Greater St. Louis metropolitan area and most of southern Illinois; the Western Illinois Field Stations in Jacksonville and Macomb, which cover the central and western portions of the state; and the Northern Illinois Field Station, which performs archaeological investigations in the counties just south of the Wisconsin border between the Mississippi Valley and Lake Michigan. The Central Office in Champaign provides administrative and analytical services, physical anthropology, curation, cartography/GIS, photographic and artistic resources, publishing, and computer support for the Survey Field Stations.

Collections
ISAS curates over 18,000 boxes of Illinois archaeological materials containing over 1.5 million artifacts and 1,600 linear feet of documents including a major collection from the World Heritage Cahokia Mounds Historic Site, the largest prehistoric North American settlement that once housed more than 15,000 residents.

Outreach and Education
ISAS disseminates information about Illinois’ rich archaeological heritage to the public and professional communities. This effort includes giving formal public lectures and creating exhibits as well as giving talks to school children. ISAS researchers are also active in presenting the results of their work at professional conferences and publishing articles, reports, and books.
For nearly a century, archaeologists at the University of Illinois have studied the state’s archaeological heritage, while protecting, preserving, and interpreting irreplaceable sites and artifacts. The newest division of the Prairie Research Institute, the Illinois State Archaeological Survey (ISAS), conducts multiple-scale field and laboratory research projects and serves as a major repository and source of scientific archaeological information in the state.

Research and Service: Protecting, Recording, Preserving, and Interpreting the Past

ISAS provides expertise in a wide array of areas. Examples of current research projects include:

Previsiting Burial Sites
With continued suburban and industrial expansion into less developed regions, ISAS staff often encounter unrecorded mound and burial sites as well as pioneer cemeteries when surveying. Working in cooperation with IDOT, ISAS has undertaken a systematic re-inventory of all burial sites within areas affected by IDOT projects. Illinois has more than 58,000 reported archaeological sites, including 9,000+ prehistoric earthen mounds. Many Illinois mound sites have not been revisited since they were reported in the early 1900s. Accurate information on burial locations is critical to their long-term preservation. Updated information on the current conditions of these burial sites is added to the statewide site database maintained by ISAS and the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

Revealing America’s First African American Town
The town of New Brooklyn, Illinois near East St. Louis was the first incorporated African American town in North America, founded by freed and escaped slaves in 1829. Working with local citizens, ISAS archaeologists conducted a comprehensive review of historical documents and discovered portions of the early town. Local groups hope that learning more about the past of this unique town will lead to greater community pride, attract visitors, and encourage businesses to invest in the town.

Preparing for a New $670 Million Bridge
An ISAS archaeological excavation project, the largest of its kind in the country, has revealed the remains of a spectacular late prehistoric ceremonial and residence complex buried under modern East St. Louis. Covered by many feet of historic debris, the site has revealed over 1,400 house foundations, ceremonial areas, and a temple mound remnant. The East St. Louis site was occupied from 900 to 1200 A.D. and was the second largest mound center in North America. The excavations are part of the New Mississippi River Bridge project connecting Missouri and Illinois that will be a critical step in promoting the economic recovery of the St. Louis metropolitan area.

Rediscovering Fort Johnson
Fort Johnson, a War of 1812-era fortification built by Zachary Taylor (who later became a U.S. President), was rediscovered by ISAS and local volunteers on the bluffs of the Mississippi River at Warsaw. Excavations by ISAS staff and volunteers revealed building foundations and recovered hundreds of military buttons, gun parts, animal bones, ceramics, and other relics from this little-known period in Illinois history.

Discovering a Lost Fortified Village in Cook County
ISAS archaeologists, working with IDOT on the expansion of I-80/294 in southern Cook County, discovered the remnants of an expansive native village dating to the 14th century. The village contained hundreds of houses and was surrounded by a protective palisade and three outer ditches, indicating this was a time of extensive warfare in the state.

ISAS and its staff have received multiple national awards and have produced a 28-volume publication series hailed as a major landmark in North American archaeology. An integral part of ISAS’s mission includes the curation of extensive archaeological research and museum-quality collections, including artifacts from over 3,000 sites.

ISAS partners with the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) to mitigate the impact of transportation projects on archaeological resources and works with public interest organizations and private individuals to preserve archaeological sites across the state. ISAS also works with Illinois businesses to help incorporate heritage management and preservation into sustainable economic development.