

Managing Previously Unmanaged Collections

A Survival Guide for Messes Great and Small



Schedule for This Webinar:

- The 3 Golden Rules
- How to Approach the Collection
- Logical Exits
- How to Keep the Process Going
- How to Get Help
- A Few Last Hints
- Your Questions

The 3 Golden Rules:

1. Be forgiving with your past self



2. Take good care of your present self

3. Be kind to your future self*



* Phrase borrowed from colleague Tracey Berg-Fulton

Silent Killers



Arsenic!



Radiation!



Mercury!

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Natural Enemies



Copyright photo 1: Alicia Woods, photo 2: photo 3: NPS CC0, NASA CC0

Yourself



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Your Diary:



May 20, 2016, 8 A.M.: Found door to collections room unlocked.

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How to approach your collection

- To effectively manage your collection hands-on, the first thing is to keep your hands off



Fairfax County VRE Disaster Exercise Nov. 13, 2010: "Victims" Evacuation, via flickr (CC BY-ND 2.0)

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How to approach your collection

- To effectively manage your collection hands-on, the first thing is to keep your hands off
- Take more photos – touch fewer things
- Spot ALL the issues
- Set your priorities, choose your battles
- Make a plan how to tackle and define logical exits



Only a collections manager who takes good care of his or her health, time and resources can effectively manage a previously unmanaged collection.



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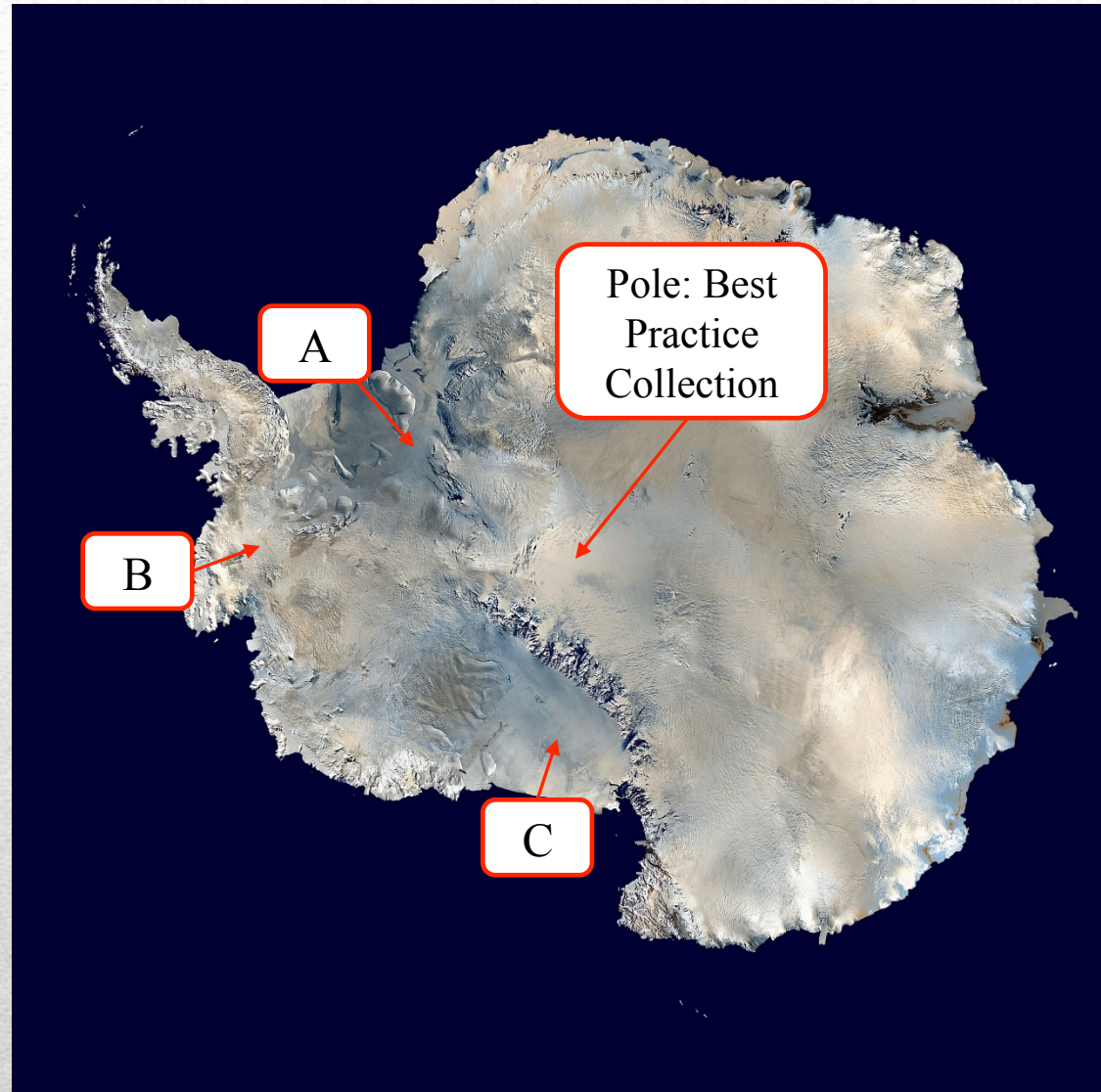
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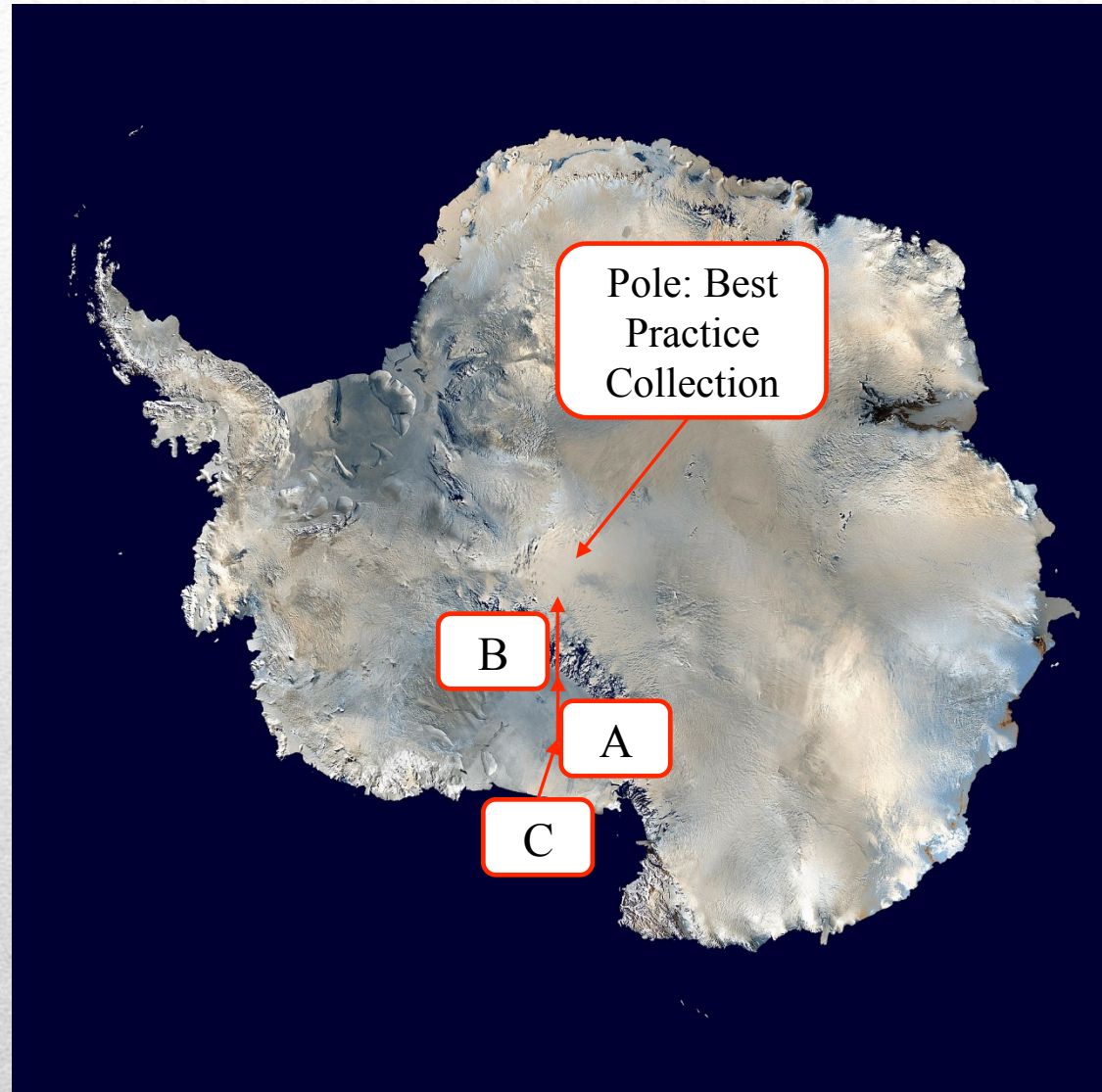


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A: Sorting
B: Cataloging
C: Collections Policy



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B: Cataloging
C: Collections Policy



Example of a "rough-and-ready" Collections Policy

- We collect only farming equipment that was either built or used in our area
- We don't collect archival material
→ Town Archives
- We don't collect textiles
→ Textile Museum

"Okay, how did THIS guy end up in our collection?"

→



Logical Exits



Men and dogs at the 85° South depot, on the way to the pole, 15 November 1911, photo public domain in the U.S.

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The First Logical Exit – Getting Prepared

- Compilation of all basic information
- All relevant information collected
- Your library
- 2 lists of issues to tackle
 - 1) Things you can do on your own
 - 2) Things you need help with
- Material list
- Collection of all available legal documents
- Collections policy
- Diary of decisions and occurrences

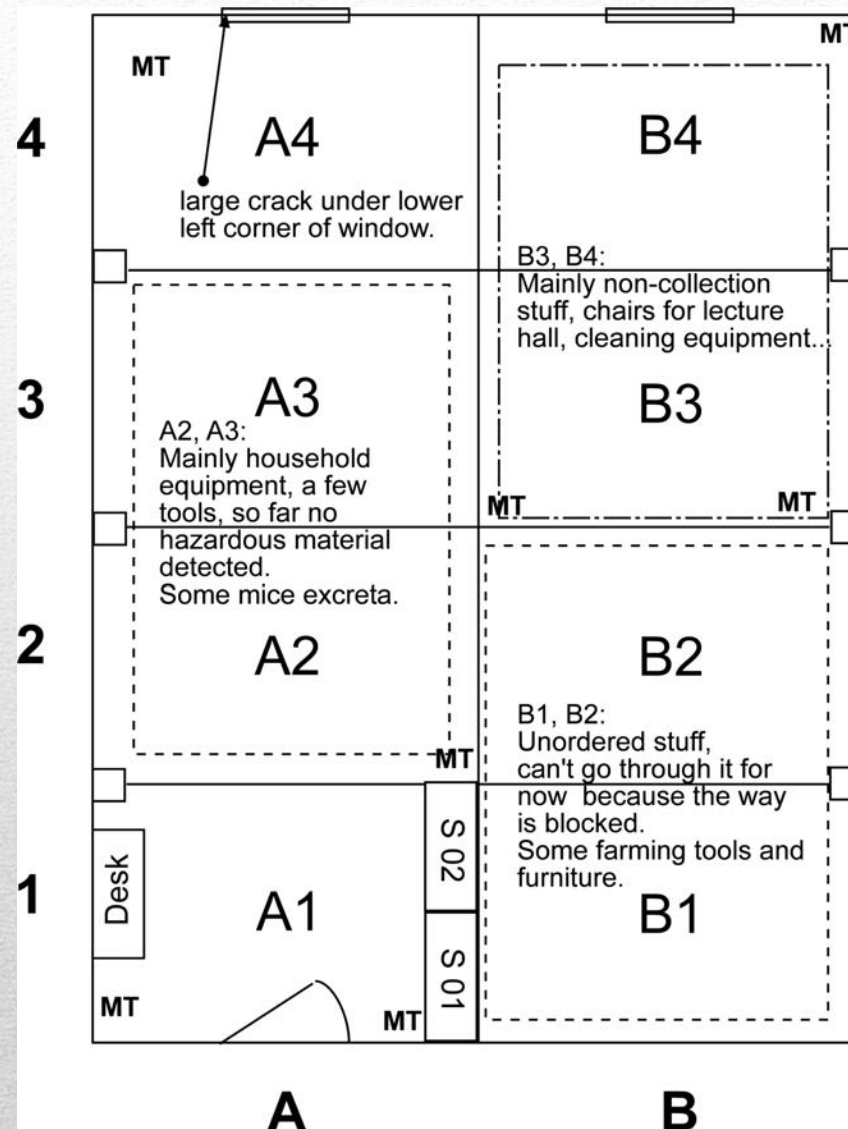


Random Cat Pic
good for blood
pressure

The Second Logical Exit – Getting Organized

- Building has a consistent location numbering
- Collections storage room(s) +
 - 1 place to work,
 - 1 place to store (materials, tools)
 - 1 place to eat
 - 1 place for trash
- Biggest issues with storage are fixed
- Control access
- Explain new organization to staff & upper management





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The Third Logical Exit – Sort Things Out

- Decide on logical categories for sorting
- Sort the collection into those categories
- Document how you sorted – and why



The Forth Logical Exit – A Game of Strategy

- Documentation strategy
- Collections care strategy
- Interlink documentation and collections care strategy
- Eventually design some tasks for interns or specialists

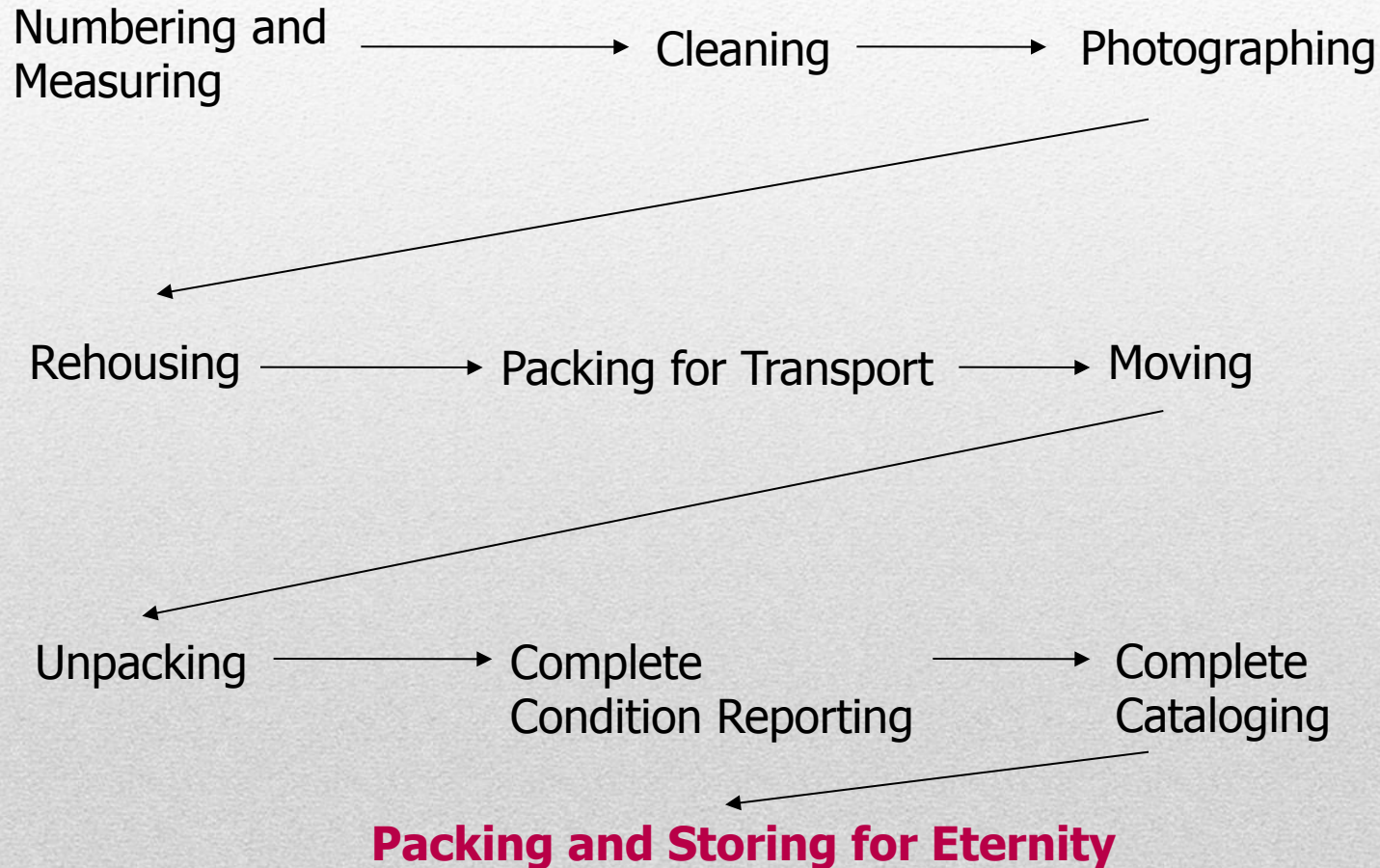




**FIRST
SOCKS
THEN
SHOES**

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The Forth Logical Exit – A Game of Strategy

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Photo: TECHNOSEUM, Foto Bernd Kießling

The Fifth Logical Exit



Your turn!

Logical Exits for a move under time pressure:

- Fifth: Complete photographic overview, collections move strategy, rough storage planning
- Sixth: All objects numbered, named, measured
- Seventh: Detailed collections move plan
- Eighth: Move completed
- Ninth: Every object has proper detailed catalog entry

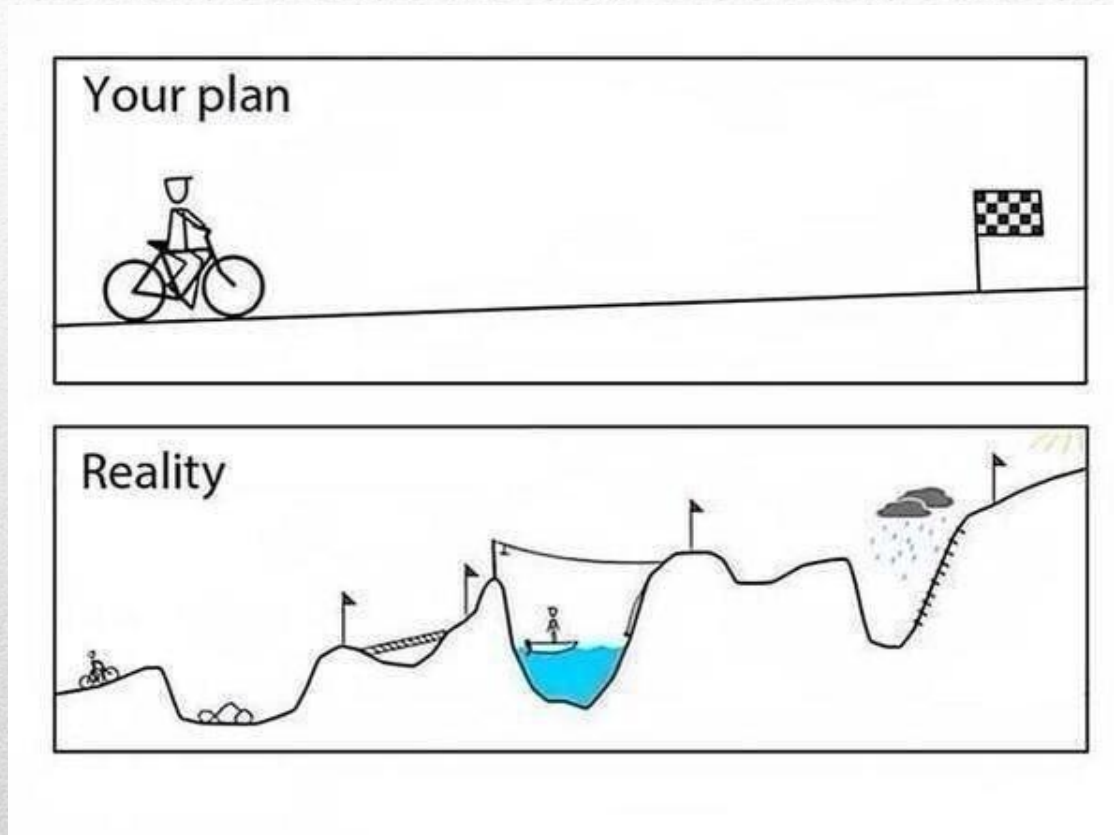


How to keep the process going:



I can fix it!

How to keep the process going:



"Plans are worthless, but planning is everything"

Dwight D. Eisenhower

How to get help

- Ask your peers:
 - Connecting to Collections Care Online Community
 - RC-AAM Listserv (<http://www.rcaam.org/listserv>),
 - Museum Junction of the AAM (<http://community.aam-us.org/home>),
 - museum associations, museums & institutions with the same scope of collections
- Research grants
- Neighborhood help
- Be creative

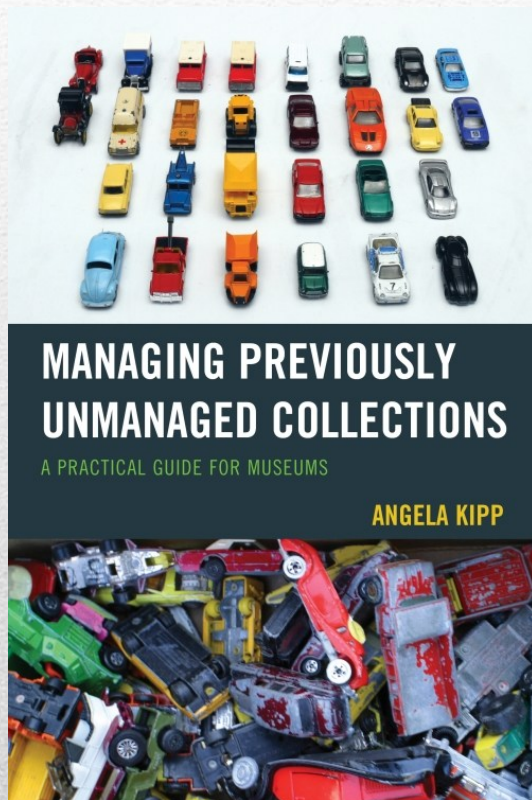


A Few Last Hints:

- Educate yourself. It costs next to nothing and there is no such thing as too much knowledge.
- Ask for help.
- Take care of yourself and everybody you are working with.
- Document everything.
- Provide help for others.



More info about
Unmanaged Collections:



May the road rise to meet you!

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Blog: Registrar Trek <http://world.museumsprojekte.de>

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