

Mammalogy Lab Specimen Prep 'Protocol'

(by J. Rader, 2011)

Overview: In many ways preparing a skull is a simple procedure. You will be repetitiously boiling your skull and scraping/peeling away flesh until the skull is clean. Once your skull is clean you will aim to whiten your skull using a peroxide solution. I encourage you to research this topic on the internet or in the library. Good key words might be “museum preparation of skulls” or “European skull mounts”.

Rules:

- 1) At least one person must be watching or in the immediate vicinity of the stove when in use!!!
- 2) Never more than 2 pots boiling at a time.
- 3) Completely thaw skull prior to boiling. If you put a frozen skull into boiling water the pot will ‘explode’.
- 4) DO NOT boil the pot over.
- 5) DO NOT boil the pot dry.
- 6) Strain all water and put tissue in garbage. DO NOT flush tissue down the drain!
- 7) Return key to file cabinet (just to the left of the prep room door) as soon as you are done! This is very important! If you forget to return the key you will screw up access for everyone!

Feel free to boil skulls at home if you have the required facilities (i.e. a kitchen or outdoor propane boiler).

Instructions:

- 1) Thaw skull completely.
- 2) Remove all hide and as much extraneous flesh as possible prior to boiling.
- 3) Boil at a low simmer. A ‘roaring’ boil will cause your skull to fall apart. Be patient.
- 4) Remove skull and place in cool (tap) water. Your skull will be HOT. Don’t burn your hands.

- 5) Strain pot water. Throw away fleshy parts but make sure to save any teeth that may fall out. Teeth can be glued back into place once the skull is fully cleaned.
- 6) Once cool, remove as much remaining flesh as possible. Make sure to pay attention to nasal and brain cavities.
- 7) Repeat, starting at step #1 until all flesh is removed.
- 8) Once all flesh is removed, soak skull in peroxide solution (pre-mixed) to finalize cleaning and help whiten.

Materials (found in prep room):

- 1) Small pocket knife (provided by you!)
- 2) Pots (S, M, L)
- 3) Peroxide
- 4) Wire brush
- 5) Super glue