

Hopewell Culture

Hopewell Culture National Historical Park
Chillicothe, Ohio

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide



Hopewell cremation ceremony from a painting by Louis S. Glanzman

Mound City: A 2,000-Year-Old Ceremonial Center

When European Americans began to settle in the Ohio Valley in the late 1700s, they found hundreds of mounds and earthworks, long abandoned and obscured by forest growth. The mystery of the mounds was heightened by the fact that the Shawnee and other tribes of the region claimed to know nothing of when they were built or by whom. Arguments raged over the age and significance of these ancient sites. Popular speculation held that the mounds had been built by a "lost race" of mysterious origin which had died out or moved away before the American Indians of historic times came on the scene. Others believed that the mounds and earthworks had been built by ancestors of known native peoples.

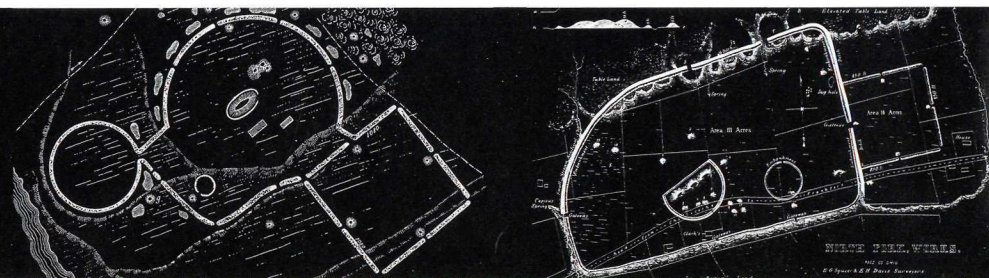
It was not until individuals and institutions began to carefully excavate the mounds and document their findings that the science of archeology took a great leap forward. Ephraim G. Squier, a Chillicothe newspaper editor, and Edwin H. Davis, a Chillicothe physician, were two of the first individuals to systematically investigate these ancient sites. Squier and Davis mapped and excavated dozens of mounds and earthworks in the region, as documented in their 1848 *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*. They named one of these sites Mound City because of its unusual concentration of mounds—at least 23 mounds on 13 acres encircled by a low earthen wall. At Mound City, Squier and Davis discov-

ered that the mounds covered the remains of ancient fires, deposits of finely crafted ceremonial artifacts, and cremated human burials. The "lost race" notion was laid to rest decades later after further studies proved that the mounds were built by prehistoric American Indians. We do not know what name these people gave themselves; early archeologists called them the Hopewellians after Capt. Mordecai Hopewell, who owned the farm on which one of the most extensive sites was excavated in 1891. During World War I, Mound City was covered by part of a training facility, Camp Sherman, and many of the mounds were destroyed. Excavation and restoration work was conducted by the Ohio State

Historical Society in 1920-21; the site was declared a national monument in 1923. Additional excavations were conducted by the National Park Service in the mid-1960s. In 1992, Mound City was included in the newly formed Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, which also includes Hopeton Earthworks, High Bank Works, Seip Earthworks, and the Hopewell Mound Group. (Only Mound City and Seip are currently open to the public.) As you walk the grounds, remember that Mound City primarily represents the burial and ceremonial aspects of the Hopewell era. The people who created these mounds and earthworks did not spend all their time concentrating on death, but led full, active lives.

Other Hopewell Centers Mound City is just one of many Hopewellian earthwork centers in the Scioto Valley. Most have been destroyed, but remnants of some still remain and contain valuable archeological

information. The Seip Earthworks (right) are located 17 miles west of Chillicothe on U.S. 50. The large central mound and portions of the earth wall are still visible. Nearby is a picnic area and an interpretive display.



The Hopewell Mound Group (left) is the site of the 1891 excavation on the land of Mordecai Hopewell, after whom the ancient people who lived here are named. This mound group is not open to the public.

Prehistoric Trails

Long-standing patterns of trade between peoples and regions existed in the Midwest for several thousand years before the Hopewell era, and continued long afterwards.

During the Hopewell era, a large part of the trade apparently moved overland. Many of these Ohio trails were in use during Hopewell times and earlier, connecting with other trails spanning the continent.



Many modern Ohio roads began as Indian trails. This map of Ohio trails is redrawn from Frank N. Wilcox, *Ohio Indian Trails*.

The Hopewellian World

Consider the following modern events: The President of the United States visits a foreign country; he gives and receives gifts of state to establish or renew ties to the country and its leaders. As a result of his visit, new contacts are made between officials, businessmen, and private citizens of each country, and commerce between the two countries flourishes.

Over the centuries, many different American Indian peoples lived in eastern North America. Each group had its own distinctive culture, reflected in different languages, styles of dress, tool manufacture, and pottery decoration, and in different means of subsistence. Yet despite all these differences, there was a brief period between 2,200 and 1,500 years ago when many of these groups had similar burial practices and ceremonial practices which involved certain finely crafted artifacts made of exotic materials. Many of the artifacts you see in the museum at Mound City belong to this special set of artifacts. These may have been used to signify status, to express religious beliefs, or, as in the scenario above, to establish trade and diplomatic ties with distant peoples.

The term Hopewellian is used to describe the shared objects, beliefs, and practices that tied different groups together in a widespread network between 2,200 and 1,500 years ago. Present-day southern Ohio was the center of this network, which extended from the Great Lakes to

the Gulf of Mexico and from the Great Plains to the Atlantic Ocean. The artifacts used to express Hopewellian notions of status and religion were often made of exotic materials obtained in trade: Copper and silver from near the Great Lakes, obsidian (volcanic glass) from a site in what is now Yellowstone National Park, sharks' teeth and seashells from the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico, and mica from the Appalachian Mountains. Artisans fashioned these raw materials into fine objects which were placed in ceremonial mounds and earthworks.

Archeological findings and the observed practices of historic American Indian groups both suggest that Hopewellian earth structures such as those at Mound City were sites for community rituals and ceremonies, and perhaps commemorations of important events or individuals. Some earthworks appear to have been aligned with the sun, moon, and stars, and may have been used to measure time.

Hopewellian people lived along river valleys in small, scattered settlements near the mounds and earthworks they built. They made a living by hunting, fishing, gathering wild edible plants, and by cultivating a variety of crops such as squash and sunflowers (as well as a number of plants which are no longer grown for food such as goosefoot, knotweed, marsh elder, little barley, and maygrass). They fashioned flint knives and spear points, stone axes, and pottery vessels for cooking and storing foods.



From today's perspective, it seems that the Hopewellians enjoyed a long period of relative peace and prosperity, for the evidence demonstrates that warfare, disease, and malnutrition were more common after the Hopewell period ended. By about 1,500 years ago the Hopewellian way of life had come to an end. Whatever the cause may have been—social changes, a breakdown of the trading system, or warfare—within a few hundred years a new society had emerged along the Mississippi River and its tributaries. The Mississippian people differed from their predecessors in that they were fully agricultural and politically more structured. Only the great mounds and earthworks remained as monuments to the once-flourishing Hopewell world.

Exploring Mound City

Location Mound City, a unit of Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, is located on Ohio 104, 2 miles north of the U.S. 35 intersection and 3 miles north of Chillicothe, Ohio.

Hours and facilities The visitor center is open every day except January 1, Thanksgiving Day, and December 25. Hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Labor Day through mid-June, with extended hours in



summer. The grounds remain open during daylight hours. You may arrange group tours in advance of your visit. Mound City has a small picnic area. Food, campgrounds, and lodging are available nearby.

For Your Safety Camping, campfires, and portable stoves are prohibited. Watch for squirrel holes and uneven ground in the mound area.

Your self-guiding tour of Mound City begins

at the audio station labeled 1 (see map below.)

About Hopewell Culture Mound City is just one of many Hopewellian mound and earthwork centers in the Scioto Valley. In

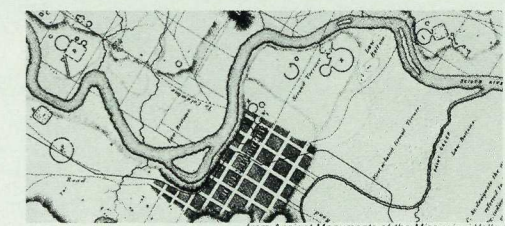
an attempt to preserve some of the last remaining Hopewell centers, the U.S. Congress authorized the creation of Hopewell Culture National Historical Park in 1992. Five sites are currently included within the park: Mound

City, Hopeton Earthworks, High Bank Works, Seip Earthworks and the Hopewell Mound Group. Only Mound City and Seip are currently open to the public. All five sites contain mounds and monumental

earth-walled enclosures. Habitation sites and workshops have been excavated at other nearby sites. Future work may reveal similar activities at Mound City or nearby.

Administration Hopewell Culture National Historical Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Write to Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, 16062

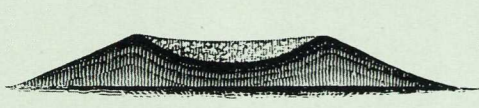
State Route 104, Chillicothe, OH 45601-8694. Phone: 614-774-1125.



From Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley

6 Inside A Mound When Squier and Davis excavated this unusual elliptical mound, it revealed a complex internal structure. At the center was a low, circular, clay platform. In the concave top of the platform were ashes and cremated human remains, many fragments of pottery, stone and copper implements, and a large number of broken spearpoints made of flint, garnet, and obsidian. The platform was covered with a low earth mound which in turn was covered with five alternating layers of sand and earth. The

entire mound was capped with a thick layer of gravel and pebbles. Other mounds show equal care in construction, but vary in detail and number of layers. The mounds vary considerably in the number of burials and the kinds of artifacts they contain. One mound within the complex contained a quantity of fossil mammoth or mastodon bones, and another contained finely crafted pottery vessels decorated with images of birds; others contained various ornaments of copper and shell, stone pipes, and other goods.



Differences in the way people were buried may reflect differences in the status or role of these individuals held during their lifetimes. The variety of images, artifacts and practices evident at Mound City certainly reflects the complexity, richness and sophistication of the Hopewellian peoples who built this place.

Detail of clay platform

5 Charnel House Each mound at Mound City covers the remains of an elaborate wooden building, sometimes called a charnel house. The variety of activities conducted in and around these buildings suggests that these structures served as

repositories for human remains: evidence suggests that these buildings were similar to the "Council Houses" or "Big Houses" used by historic tribes in Ohio for various community functions. The posts at this mound indicate the positions of prehistoric building posts.

For Your Safety Watch for ground squirrel holes in the grassy areas. While on the River Trail, please exercise extreme caution; the Scioto River is deep and rapid.

Please do not climb or walk on the mounds.

7 Towns on the Scioto? The river was a major source of food, including fish, shellfish, waterfowl, and water, as well as an important means of transportation. The Hopewell did not live in the earthwork sites but may

have lived nearby in small settlements along the river's floodplain. Since very few Hopewellian habitation sites have been located, their number, locations, and general sizes are not fully known.

accompanied by falcon effigies made of copper, and fragments of human skull that had been cut and drilled, perhaps to form part of a ceremonial mask. Finally, the second building was dismantled and earth was heaped to form the mound.



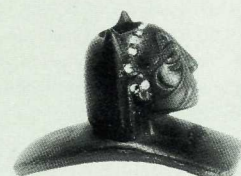
4 Death Mask Mound This is the largest of Mound City's 23 known mounds. When this mound was excavated, it was found to cover the remains of two buildings; the earliest building had been dismantled and a second building erected in its place. Thirteen cremated human burials were deposited in these buildings,

3 Mound of the Pipes Squier and Davis excavated this mound in 1847, reporting that "In the number and value of its relics, this mound far exceeds any hitherto explored...Intermixed with much ashes, were found not far from two hundred pipes, carved in stone...The bowls of the pipes are carved in miniature figures of animals, birds, reptiles, etc. All of them are executed with strict fidelity to nature, and with exquisite skill."

thought by many American Indians to be a form of communication with sacred beings.



From the perspective of the archeologist, one of the most intriguing aspects of the Hopewell era is the great diversity in the way people were buried. There are cremated, flexed, and



extended burials and a variety of types and amounts of grave goods. We do not yet know what the different types of burials meant to the Hopewellians. One feature found at Seip and several other sites, but by no means typical, is a differentiation into three groups of burials within one large mound, which may indicate that the different individuals had different functions within society.

The collection of pipes from this mound was later sold to an English collector and is now in the British Museum. The exhibit in the visitor center has replicas of these, along with original items from other mounds. As you contemplate the pipes in the exhibit, remember that smoke was

2 Mica Grave Mound When this mound was first excavated in 1921, archeologists found evidence of a wooden building that contained a shallow clay basin almost six feet square and lined with sheets of mica. Deposits inside this basin included the cremated remains of at least four individuals, as well as obsidian tools, raven and toad effigy pipes, and a copper headpiece of human shape. Additional deposits elsewhere on the floor of this building included elk and bear teeth, copper ornaments, large obsidian points,

and a cache of 5,000 shell beads. Two copper headdresses were found, one with three



pairs of copper antlers, the other representing a bear, with hinged ears and legs attached with rivets. Sixteen other cremated individuals were also placed on the floor of this building. Eventually, the building that once stood here was dismantled or burned, and the mound of earth you see today was constructed over the site. Hundreds of



years later, long after the Hopewell period, another American Indian group buried one of their own dead in this mound. This later group has come to be known as the Intrusive Mound Culture, because they used mounds built by earlier Hopewellian peoples for their own burials.

Beginning Your Visit Three different self-guiding interpretive trails begin here. The paved path leads you

into the enclosure and among the mounds, with numbered stops keyed to the descriptions in this brochure.

The interpretive trail to your right has signs along the way with information about how the landscape at

1 Visitor Center audio station

Mound City has changed over the years. The trail to your left has numbered stakes corresponding

to information about Mound City plantlife contained in another brochure available at the information desk.

