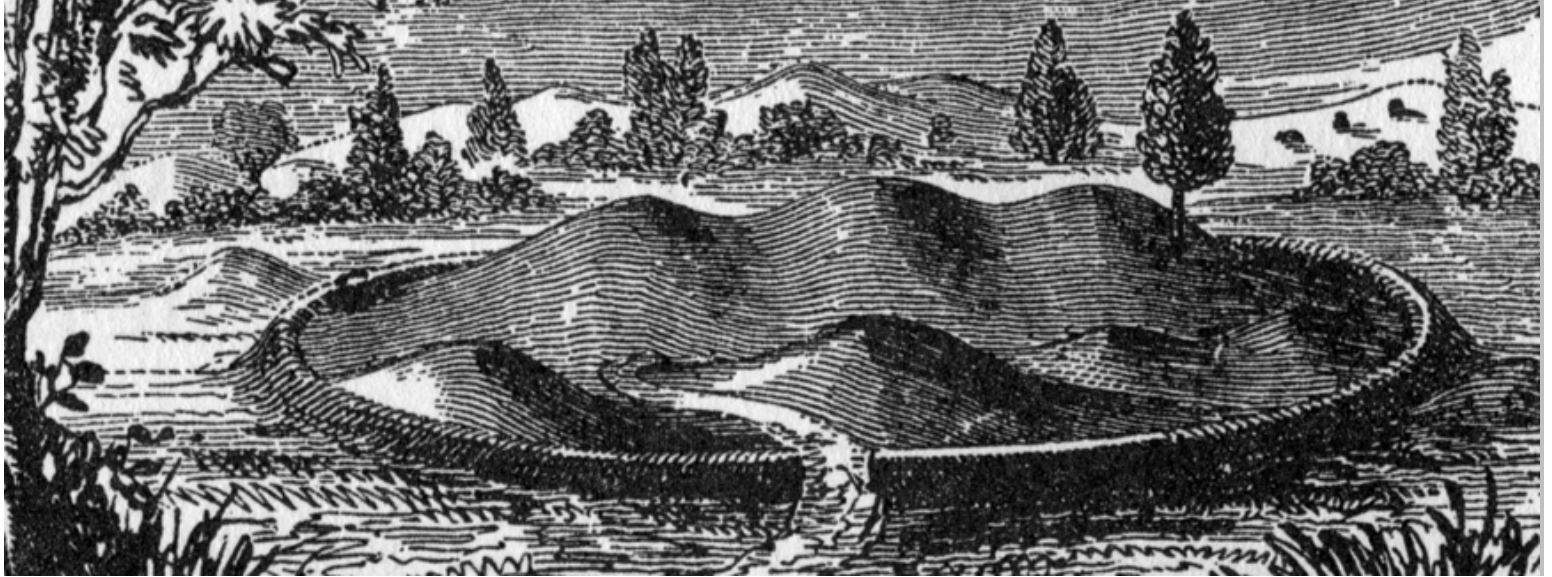




Hopewell Mound Group



Introduction

Two thousand years ago, people of an advanced culture gathered here to conduct religious rituals and ceremonies related to their society. At this site, they built an enormous earthwork complex spanning about 130 acres. An earthen wall extended for over two miles, surrounding an immense sacred space that included 29 burial mounds. Astounding quantities of finely crafted art made of exotic materials were buried here as part of elaborate mortuary ceremonies.

New to Science

The culture discovered at this site was new to the science of archeology in the late 1800's. Newly described cultures are usually named after the place where they are first discovered. Therefore, the culture was named after this farm field, which happened to be owned by a man named Mordecai Hopewell at the time. Consequently, a remarkable American Indian culture, which is believed to have stretched from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, is named after an otherwise obscure Chillicothe land owner.

The true tribal names of these people were lost over the millennia, but the ancient American Indians who built this sprawling structure were part of a cultural golden age that flourished in this region from A.D. 1 to 400. The monumental architecture and artifacts of the Hopewell Culture reflect a pinnacle of achievement in the fields of art, astronomy, mathematics and engineering, the likes of which was seldom seen again in eastern North America.

A Site of Superlatives



Photo courtesy of Ohio Historical Society

Even when compared to all of the other astonishing prehistoric earthworks in the Chillicothe area, Hopewell Mound Group stands out in many regards. This complex included the largest single earthen-walled enclosure constructed by the Hopewell – encompassing over 110 acres. Within its walls was the largest burial mound the Hopewell people ever built: Mound 25 was 500 feet long and 33 feet high. Ephraim Squier's dramatic 1848 engraving above pictures this enormous triple peaked mound surrounded by the low earthen wall that formed a smaller D-shaped enclosure within the great enclosure.

This site provided the greatest set, both in quality and quantity, of artistic Hopewell objects ever discovered. Many of the most famous images of the Hopewell culture are from the objects found at this site: the mica bird claw (pictured at left),

the copper bear paw, and the mica hand with its elongated fingers stretching upward. The artifacts were often made of exotic materials not found in Ohio. A vast trade network appears to have thrived during this period. Huge ceremonial blades made of obsidian from Yellowstone National Park were discovered here. In fact, the total amount of obsidian here was the largest ever found east of the Mississippi River.

While most Hopewell complexes seem to have been used for less than two centuries, evidence suggests that Hopewell Mound Group remained an important ceremonial center throughout the entire era of the Hopewell Culture in Ohio, a period of about four hundred years! All of these extraordinary features support the idea that Hopewell Mound Group was possibly the most important ceremonial center of all the earthworks in southern Ohio.

Visiting the Site

Hopewell Mound Group is one of the five units of Hopewell Culture National Historical Park. The park grounds are open every day during daylight hours. Facilities include restrooms, a picnic shelter and a two mile self-guided interpretive trail. The Tri-County Triangle Trail, a paved bike trail which traverses the site,

runs for over thirty miles between Chillicothe and Washington Courthouse.

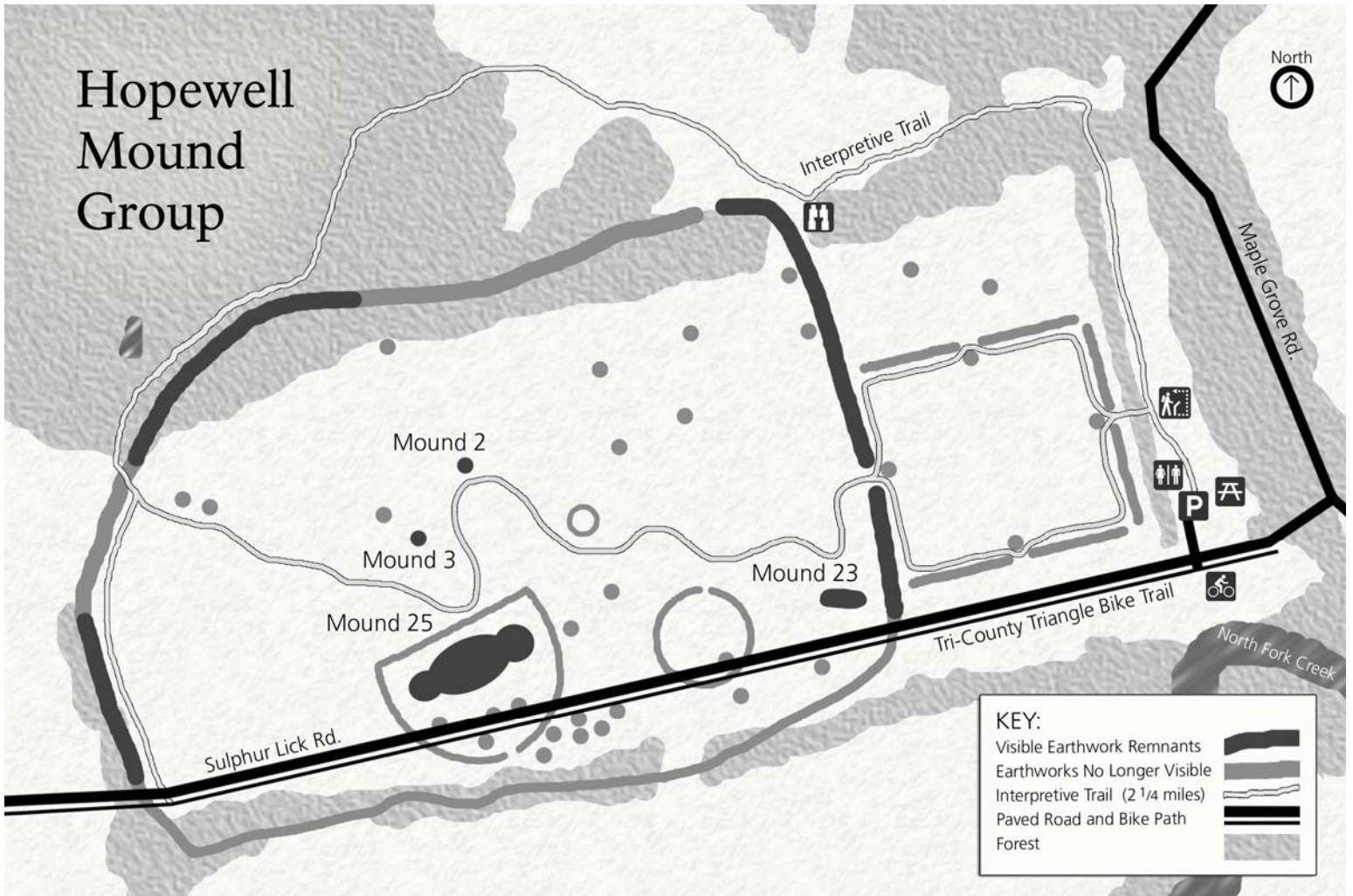
The park office and visitor center are located at the Mound City Group unit. Call the park office at (740) 774-1126, or visit the park website (www.nps.gov/hocu) for more information.

Searching for Remnants

Unfortunately, this fabulous earthwork complex fell victim to the same fate that claimed nearly all of the many renowned earthwork complexes of southern Ohio. Two centuries of plowing gradually leveled the sloping earthen embankment walls until they are barely visible today. The mounds that were too large to plow were excavated to below ground level by archeologists in the early 1900's and never reconstructed. Sadly, the great earthen monuments of this sacred site are now all but

invisible to the casual visitor's eye. However, with some effort, the keen-eyed observer can still find signs of prehistoric grandeur here.

The interpretive trail meanders past some of the site's significant features. Paralleling the trail on the northwest side of the great enclosure, lies an intact, six foot high section of the original 2,000 year old embankment wall. Use the key on the below map to locate the other visible remnants of the Hopewell Mound Group earthworks.



Archeology Expeditions

When Europeans first came to this area in the late 1700's they were amazed to find so many giant earthworks in the Chillicothe area. Eventually, word spread about the intriguing phenomenon and archeologists arrived to study the earthwork and its burials. The current theories about Hopewell Mound Group and its builders are founded on the scientific conclusions of archeologists who have studied this site over nearly two centuries.

1820: Caleb Atwater draws the first map of these earthworks. Atwater assumes the site had been built for defense. He names the earthworks "Clark Fort" after the owners of the farm field.

1848: Ephraim Squier and Edwin Davis draw the most famous map of the site and include it in their groundbreaking work *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*, the first book ever published by the Smithsonian Institution. They name the complex "North Fork Works," due to its proximity to the North Fork Paint Creek.

1891-92: Warren Moorehead excavates to find artifacts for the 1893 "World's Columbian Exposition" in Chicago. By this time, Mordecai Hopewell owns the land. Moorehead partially excavates several of the mounds, including about a quarter of the largest mound, Mound 25. The

abundance and exquisite craftsmanship of the artifacts enralls visitors at the exposition and the concept of the "Hopewell Culture" is born. After the exposition, all the artifacts are stored and displayed in Chicago's newly created "Field Museum."

1922-25: Henry Shetrone and William Mills of the Ohio Historical Society excavate all the mounds of what is now called "Hopewell Mound Group." By this time, many of the mounds and the walls of the square have disappeared under the plow. None of the excavated mounds are reconstructed. Today, the discovered artifacts are stored or displayed at the Ohio Historical Center in Columbus.

1980: Archeologist Mark Seeman of Kent State University accurately relocates most of the mounds through aerial photography and surface survey. By this time, the only part of the earthworks left intact is the wall and adjacent ditch on the north side of the great enclosure.

2001: Using magnetometry, archeologists from the National Park Service and OSU find no evidence of long term settlement within the earthen walls. They also discover a new 90 foot diameter circular earthwork within the great enclosure (the smaller circle on the map between Mounds 2 and 23).