



Mound City Group



A National Treasure

Mound City Group is the only fully restored Hopewell earthwork complex. As such, it is a national treasure. Here, visitors who walk quietly through the enclosure and among the mounds can still experience a sense of what it may have been like to gather at a Hopewell ceremonial site two thousand years ago.

Ceremonial Gatherings



Copper Bird Effigy
from Mound 7

This wonder of the ancient world was constructed by Native Americans over many centuries between A.D. 1- 400. Mound City Group's walls enclose at least two dozen mounds in an area larger than ten football fields. Never the less, compared to the many giant complexes located around the Chillicothe area, Mound City Group is a relatively small Hopewell earthwork.

There is no evidence that people lived within this enclosure full time. In fact, the Hopewell people did not even live in large villages. No more than three Hopewell homes have ever

been discovered in one place. They may have lived in single extended family units scattered along the waterways of the great forest. Yet, even with this relatively simple social organization, the Hopewell people created immense public works that required complicated engineering. These walled complexes were likely the gathering places of people who wanted to form community even though they were not living together in villages. The reasons for their gathering here could have been both religious and social, but many important ceremonies were conducted here.

Careful Construction



Duck Pot from Mound 2

The mounds of Mound City Group are so much more than just heaps of dirt. The process by which these American Indians established a burial mound is long and complicated. Many visitors are surprised to learn that where each burial mound is seen today, there once stood a building. The first step in the mound building process was to construct a large ceremonial building of poles and bark with a plastered clay floor. Inside, fires burned in clay basins and ceremonies were conducted. When the ceremony was a funeral, the Hopewell cremated the body. The ashes were entombed on the

floor of the building beneath a small mound of clay. About one hundred cremated remains were found at Mound City.

At some point, the building would be purposely dismantled. Then the mound construction began. Mound building may have occurred stage by stage over many gatherings, because the mounds consist of many layers of earthen materials, often alternating clay and sand. The borrow pits outside of Mound City's walls may have been the source of some of this material.

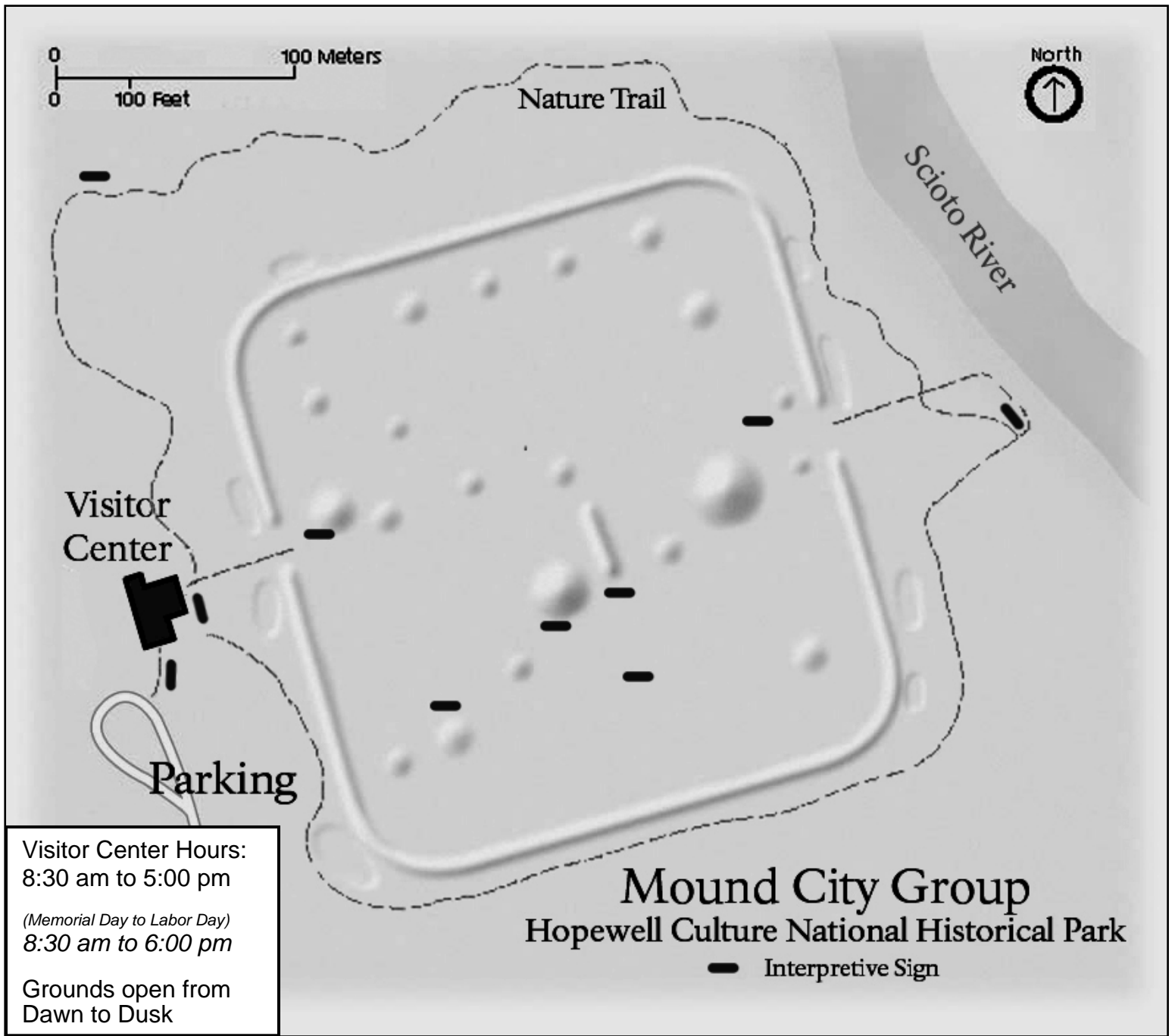
Awesome Craftsmanship



Shaman Effigy Platform Pipe
from Mound 8

Next to each burial, beautiful works of art were placed on the floor of the building. The artistry of these objects is impressive. Be sure to include some time in the visitor center's museum in your visit. Here you will be able to see this two thousand year old American art on display. It is astounding that the Hopewell people were able to create such fine art with the tools they used. Typically, societies that produce art of this quality are structured enough to have an artisan class, which seems unlikely among people who were still hunter-gatherers and gardeners living in scattered hamlets.

What is more, the exotic materials used by the artists indicate an extensive trade and travel network. In fact, the people buried here were laid to rest with such rich collections of artifacts made of exotic materials that it may be that they were not ordinary people, but the most important people in their culture. Therefore, Mound City Group probably functioned as a regionally important cemetery and ceremonial site. The bones of important people may have been brought from far away to be ceremonially cremated and buried at this special place.



Visitor Center Hours:
 8:30 am to 5:00 pm
(Memorial Day to Labor Day)
 8:30 am to 6:00 pm
 Grounds open from
 Dawn to Dusk

Mound City Group
Hopewell Culture National Historical Park
 ■ Interpretive Sign

Please be mindful that Mound City is still considered a sacred place by many people and treat the earthworks with respect. There are no trails within the enclosure. Visitors are welcome to stroll reverently amongst the mounds. Please do not walk on the mounds or earthen walls. Park trails include a nature trail and a beautiful paved river walk along the Scioto River. The nature trail winds through a young forest and passes some old masonry stones from a lock of the Ohio-Erie Canal that ran along the west border of the park in the 1800's.

Slow Demise

It was Ohio pioneers that coined the term Mound City to describe its unique density of burial mounds all in one enclosure. The famous team of nineteenth century historians, Ephraim Squier and Edwin Davis, were the first to map the site. When they surveyed it in 1846, it was still covered in forest, while surrounding land had already been in intensive agriculture for half a century. However, land pressure eventually overcame the hesitancy to farm this site. Like the farmers at all the other Hopewell earthworks sites, the Shriver family plowed right over the walls and mounds of Mound City Group for fifty years, gradually lowering and widening the earthworks until they

had become mere shadows of their former magnificence.

When it was included as part of Camp Sherman, the massive World War One infantry training facility, Mound City Group's utter demise was certain. Military engineers graded most of the earthworks flat. Fortunately, the level of the ceremonial building floors beneath the mounds was below the level of the ground. Therefore, when the war was over, and Camp Sherman dismantled, archeologists from the Ohio Historical Society were able to study the burials below the mounds.

A National Park is Born

The Ohio Historical Society funded the reconstruction of Mound City Group in the 1920's. The reconstruction was based on the maps of Squier and Davis in order to be as accurate as possible. One mound was left unreconstructed so that visitors could appreciate the underlying structure of the ceremonial building.

President Warren G. Harding declared the site Mound City Group National Monument in 1923.

In 1992, four more of Chillicothe's many Hopewell earthwork sites were added to Mound City Group and the name of the park was changed to Hopewell Culture National Historical Park. Mound City Group is now just one unit of a larger national park, however the park administration and its only visitor center are still located here. For more information, call the national park office (740) 774-1126 or visit the park website at www.nps.gov/hocu