

Hopewell Culture

Hopewell Culture
National Historical Park
Ohio

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Illustration by Louis Glanzman

Hopewell Culture National Historical Park includes High Bank Works (below), Hopeton Earthworks, Hopewell Mound Group (right), Mound City Group, and Seip Earthworks.



Hopewell earth structures such as those at Mound City were likely used for community rituals and ceremonies, such as the cremation ceremony (above). Some earthworks ap-

pear to have been built along certain alignments between the earth and sun, moon, and stars, and may have been used to forecast and predict certain celestial events.



The Hopewell world spanned much of the eastern United States. Present-day Ohio (left) had a concentration of sites. At right is one of the mounds preserved at Mound City Group.



David Muench

Finely crafted copper headdresses, a crystal quartz projectile point (above), shell bead necklaces (below), and other objects found during excavations at Mound City provided the basis for the illustration of a Hopewell cremation ceremony (top) that might have occurred

2,000 years ago. Besides shedding light on some of the activity at the earthwork sites themselves, these objects, made of exotic materials, indicate that the Hopewell took part in a widespread trade network. (See reverse side of this brochure.)



Mounds and earthworks along the Scioto River, doubtless the work of many human hands, make us wonder. Who made them? How long have they stood? What role did they play in the lives of their builders?

Beginning in the late 1700s, settlers from the eastern states migrating to the Ohio Valley found hundreds of mounds and earthworks. The Shawnee and other American Indian peoples of the region apparently knew nothing of the builders. Many tried to solve the mystery of the mounds. Some thought that the moundbuilders must be a "lost race" who vanished before the Indians of historic times arrived.

In the 1840s Ephraim G. Squier, a Chillicothe newspaper editor, and Edwin H. Davis, a Chillicothe physician, systematically mapped the mounds and documented what was found inside them. The Smithsonian Institution published Squier and Davis's findings in the 1848 *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*. Through later scientific studies, the "lost race" notion

was laid to rest. The Hopewell peoples—American Indians who lived between 2,200 and 1,500 years ago—were recognized as the architects and builders of the mounds.

The Hopewell were named for Capt. Mordecai Hopewell, who owned the farm where part of an extensive earthwork site was excavated in 1891. The Hopewell settled along riverbanks in present-day Ohio and in other regions between the Great Lakes and the Gulf of Mexico (see map on the reverse side). Excavations of dwelling sites show that they made their living by hunting, gathering, farming, and trading.

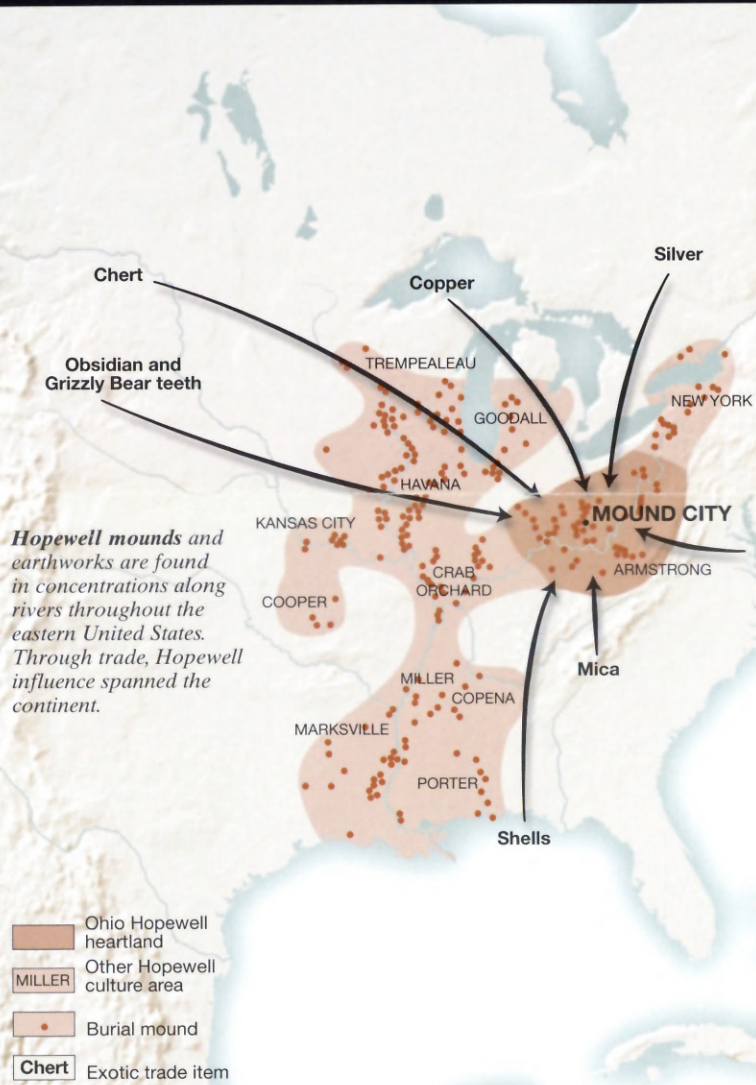
No one lived at the earthworks; artifacts found inside reveal that the mounds were built primarily to cover burials. A mound was typically built in stages: A wooden structure containing a clay platform was probably the scene of funeral ceremonies and other gatherings. The dead were either cremated or buried on-site. Objects of copper, stone, shell, and bone were placed near the remains. After many such ceremonies the structure

was burned or dismantled, and the entire site was covered with a large mound of earth. Wall-like earthworks sometimes surrounded groups of mounds. Squier and Davis named one site Mound City because of its unusual concentration of mounds, at least 23, encircled by a low earthen wall. During World War I, Mound City was covered by part of an Army training facility, Camp Sherman, and many of the mounds were destroyed. The Ohio Historical and Archeological Society conducted excavation and restoration work in 1920-21. In 1923 the Mound City Group was declared a national monument.

The National Park Service conducted additional excavations in the 1960s and '70s. In 1992, Mound City Group became Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, which also includes four other sites in the region: High Bank Works, Hopeton Earthworks, Hopewell Mound Group, and Seip Earthworks. As you walk the grounds of Mound City, remember that although we know of the Hopewell peoples primarily through the way they memorialized their dead, their world was very much alive.

Artifact photographs: National Park Service
Mound diagrams from *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*

The Hopewell World



Imagine Mound City 2,000 years ago: On a midsummer day, young men spear fish, while women and children scoop mussels from the riverbank and pick berries. A toolmaker sharpens new flint bladelets. Nearby a potter mixes grit into clay in order to strengthen it for forming into a bowl. An elderly man secures a deerskin cover over a bent-pole structure that serves as a dwelling. Nettle fibers are drying in the sun; they will be twisted into fiber for fabric. Artisans, using copper and mica newly obtained in trade, fashion ornaments for use in a ceremony at the earthworks under construction on the bluffs overhead.

Archeological excavations at Hopewell habitation sites provide a wealth of information about daily life long ago. Middens and trash sites indicate that Hopewell peoples hunted, fished, and

gathered wild foods, supplementing their diet with cultivated crops. Patterns of small holes outline the sites of dwellings constructed of bent poles and covered with skins, mats, or bark. Food processing areas marked by large, deep storage pits, earth ovens, and shallow basins are often found outside these structures. Many habitation sites were probably occupied year-round for several years before being vacated when firewood and other local resources ran out.

Scattered groups probably gathered at the major earthwork centers seasonally and for important occasions: feasting, trading, presenting gifts, marriages, competitions, mourning ceremonies, and of course, mound construction. Tools and ornaments used in and worn for these occasions were often made

of materials obtained in trade: copper and silver from near the Great Lakes, obsidian (volcanic glass) from a site in present-day Yellowstone National Park, sharks' teeth and seashells from the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico, and mica from the southern Appalachian Mountains. Artisans fashioned these raw materials into fine objects that have been found under the mounds.

By about 1,500 years ago the Hopewell way of life had ended. Within a few hundred years new societies emerged along the Mississippi River and its tributaries. These groups were more fully agricultural and politically more structured. Only the great mounds and earthworks remained as monuments to the once-flourishing Hopewell world.



Left: *Sharks' teeth* (Atlantic Ocean) adorned ceremonial clothing and jewelry.



Below: A *conch shell* (Gulf of Mexico) was gouged out to form a drinking vessel.

Left: *Copper* (Great Lakes) was hammered into thin sheets, then cut into a bird-head design to form a breast plate. Right: A copper *turtle effigy* containing pebbles forms a rattle. Rattles were attached to leather belts.



Below: *Shells* (Gulf of Mexico), fashioned into beads, were abundant in Hopewell burials. Strings of shells and freshwater pearls have been found covering entire human skeletons.

Right: *Mica sheets* (North Carolina) lined burial pits found within some mounds. Like hammered copper, mica sheets were also cut into familiar and abstract shapes.



Artifact photographs: National Park Service

Moundbuilders Timeline



A Walking Tour of Mound City



Right: This *clay pot* was reassembled from shards found at Mound City. Below: A cone-shaped *ornament* made of iron ore mimics a mound.



National Park Service

1 Visitor Center

The self-guiding interpretive trail begins here and takes you through the mound area. Points of interest are keyed to the numbered descriptions in this brochure. Another trail encircles the outer perimeter of the earthworks. During the spring and summer a brochure gives information about native plants along the trail.

2 Earthen Walls and Borrow Pits

The deep borrow pits you see on either side of the trail provided the earth used to build the mounds and earthworks; they were also used to dispose of

trash. The earthen wall forms a rectangular enclosure with openings at the west and east. Its shape follows the form of wooden ceremonial buildings that once stood within the confines of the wall and were burned or dismantled, their sites capped by the mounds.

3 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 6 feet square and lined with sheets of mica. Inside were the cremated remains of at least four individ-



The Field Museum, Chicago

uals, as well as obsidian tools, raven and toad effigy pipes, and a copper headpiece of human shape. Nearby were elk and bear teeth, large obsidian points, a cache of 5,000 shell beads, and two copper headdresses—one with antlers (see illustration on the reverse side), the other possibly representing a bear. Sixteen more burials were placed on the floor of

this building, which was later dismantled or burned. The mound you see now was built over the site. Long after the Hopewell era, another group of American Indians buried one of their own dead in this mound. Because they used earlier Hopewell mounds for their own burials, they are known as the Intrusive Mound Culture.

4 Mound of the Pipes

Squier and Davis excavated this mound in 1847, finding some "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." The exhibit in the visitor center has replicas of these pipes, along with original items from other mounds. This bird-and-fish effigy pipe (above left), dating from 100 B.C. to A.D. 400, was found in a mound at Hopewell Mound Group.

5 The Central Mound

The largest of Mound City's mounds, this covers the remains of two buildings. Thirteen cremated human burials were accompanied by copper falcon effigies and fragments of human skulls that had been cut and drilled, perhaps to form part of a ceremonial mask.

6 Ceremonial Structure

Here you see the outline of the elaborate wooden building erected on this spot prior to construction of the mound. There is evidence that a ceremonial structure once stood at the site of each of the mounds at Mound

City. These buildings were probably similar to the "council houses" or "big houses" used by American Indians of historic times for community functions and religious ceremonies. The posts at this mound site indicate the positions of prehistoric building posts.

7 Inside a Mound

Excavation of this elliptical mound revealed a complex internal structure. At its center was a low, circular, clay platform. In the concave top of the platform were ashes and cremated human remains, pottery fragments, stone and cop-

per implements, and a large number of spear-points made of flint, garnet, and obsidian. The platform was covered with a low earth mound that in turn was covered with five alternating layers of sand and earth. The mound was capped with a thick layer of gravel and pebbles. Mounds vary in many ways: number of layers, number of burials, and the kinds of artifacts they contain. Differences in the way people were buried may reflect differences in the status or role they held during their lifetimes.

8 Hopewell Settlements

Hopewell people did not live inside earthen enclosures, but lived nearby in small settlements along the terraces and floodplains of the Scioto River and its major tributaries. Each settlement likely contained only one to three households and shifted location periodically as nearby soils and game were depleted by farming and hunting. The river was a major source of food and water, as well as an important means of transportation.

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General Information

Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, which consists of five separate earthwork complexes, is part of the National Park System, one of more than 370 areas representing the nation's natural and cultural heritage. For more information write: Superintendent, Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, 16062 State Route 104, Chillicothe, OH 45601-8694; call: 740-774-1126; or visit www.nps.gov/hocu on the Internet.

Hours and Facilities The park visitor center, located at Mound City Group, is on Ohio 104, 2 miles north of U.S. 35 and 3 miles north of Chillicothe. The visitor center is open daily March through November; it is closed Monday and Tuesday during December, January, and February, and on Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. with extended hours in summer. The grounds close at dark. Mound City has a small picnic area. Food, campgrounds, and lodging are available nearby.

Activities Regularly scheduled programs are held during the summer, and special events are held throughout the year. For a calendar of events or to receive the park's newsletter, please write to the park. Please arrange group tours and school tours in advance of your visit.

For a Safe Visit Watch your children. The Scioto River is swift and deep, so please remain behind the railing. • Poison ivy is plentiful along the trails and in wooded areas. • Watch your footing in grassy areas and do not run. Ground squirrels are numerous and their holes difficult to see in the grass. • Be alert to changing weather. Thunderstorms are common in spring and summer.

Exploring Beyond Mound City *Seip Earthworks* is located 17 miles west of Chillicothe on U.S. 50; it is administered by the Ohio Historical Society.

The large central mound and portions of the earth wall are still visible. Nearby is a picnic area and an interpretive display. *Hopewell Mound Group* is the site of the 1891 excavation on the land of Mordecai Hopewell. This site, which later gave its name to this moundbuilding culture, is located along the North Fork of Paint Creek. Portions of the wall and mounds are still visible; however, there are no visitor facilities at the site. The other two units of the park, *High Bank Works* and *Hopeton Earthworks*, are closed to the public.

Other Hopewell Sites in Ohio Mound City is just one of many Hopewell earthwork centers in the Scioto Valley. Many have been destroyed, but remnants of some remain and contain valuable archeological information. The Ohio Historical Society (OHS) maintains a number of these sites. For more information about OHS sites, call 614-297-2300.