

Mounds of North America

Mound Builder is a general term referring to the Native North American peoples who constructed various styles of earthen mounds for burial, residential, and ceremonial purposes. These included Archaic, and Woodland period, and Mississippian period Pre-Columbian cultures.

The term Mound Builder was also applied to an imaginary race believed to have constructed the great earthworks of the United States, this while Euro-American racial ideology of the 16th-19th centuries did not recognize that Native Americans were sophisticated enough to construct such monumental architecture.

The final blow to this myth was dealt by an official appointee of the United States Government, Cyrus Thomas of the Bureau of American Ethnology. His lengthy report (727 pages, published in 1894) concluded finally that it was the opinion of himself and thus the United States Government that the prehistoric earthworks of the eastern United States were the work of Native Americans. Thomas Jefferson was an early proponent of this view after he excavated a mound and ascertained the continuity of burial practices observed in contemporaneous native populations.

Poverty Point in what is now Louisiana is a prominent example of early archaic Mound Builder construction from about 2500 BC. While other and earlier Archaic mound centers existed, Poverty Point remains one of the best-recognized centers. Throughout the United States, the archaic period was followed by the Woodland period, and mound building continued.

Some well understood examples would be the Adena culture of Ohio and nearby states, and the subsequent Hopewell culture known from Illinois to Ohio and renowned for their geometric earthworks. The Adena and Hopewell were not, however, the only mound building peoples during this time period. There were contemporaneous mound building cultures throughout the Eastern United States.

Around 900-1000 AD the Mississippian culture developed and spread through Eastern United States, primarily along the river valleys. The major location where the Mississippian culture is clearly developed is located in Illinois, and is referred to today as Cahokia.

The namesake cultural trait of the Mound Builders was the building of mounds and other earthworks. These burial and ceremonial structures were typically flat-topped pyramids, flat-topped or rounded cones, elongated ridges, and sometimes a variety of other forms.

Some mounds took on unusual shapes, such as the outline of cosmologically significant animals. These are considered to be distinct and are known as effigy mounds.

The best known flat-topped pyramidal earthen structure, which is also the largest pre-Columbian earthwork north of Mexico at over 100 feet tall, is Monk's Mound at Cahokia. The most famous effigy mound, Serpent Mound in southern Ohio, is 5 feet tall, 20 wide, over 1330 feet long, and shaped as a serpent.

The most complete reference for these earthworks is Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley, written by Ephraim G. Squier and Edwin H. Davis and published by the Smithsonian Institution in 1848. Since a large number of the features they documented have since been destroyed or diminished by

farming and development, their surveys, sketches and descriptions are still used by modern archaeologists. A smaller regional study in 1931 by author and archaeologist Fred Dustin charted and examined the mounds and Ogemaw Earthworks near Saginaw, Michigan.

The mound builders included many different tribal groups and chiefdoms, probably involving a bewildering array of beliefs and unique cultures, united only by the shared architectural practice of mound construction. This practice, believed to be associated with a cosmology that had a cross-cultural appeal, may indicate common cultural antecedents. The first mound building is an early marker of incipient political and social complexity among the cultures in the Eastern United States.

As with other continents, the mounds and pyramids of North America vary greatly. It could be that humankind has a primal need to build fake mountains, and that there are absolutely no connections between these sites. Perhaps size and shape are irrelevant, and location is everything, and the guidelines for their placement was once universally known.

It is difficult to determine how many mounds were built in North America, for many have been destroyed by modern civilization - but there were many.

Mississippi Mound

Wonders of geometric procession, the earthworks of the lower Mississippi were centers of life long before the Europeans arrived in America, as was the river itself. The alluvial soil of its banks yielded a bounty of beans, squash, and corn to foster burgeoning communities. Over the Mississippi's waters, from near and far, came prized pearls, copper, and mica.

Along Mississippi's scenic Natchez Trace Parkway sits an immense flat-topped platform 35 feet high, spanning eight acres.

Emerald Mound <http://www.cr.nps.gov/archeology/feature/emerald.htm/>

The second largest ceremonial earthwork in the United States, was built over two centuries before Columbus waded ashore in the Caribbean. The Mississippians erected hundreds - maybe thousands - of earthworks across the southeast while Europe was living through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

As the Mississippians flourished, the mounds evolved into urban centers with the common city problems of overcrowding and waste disposal. Sometimes one large flat-topped mound dominated a village or ceremonial center. More often, as at Emerald, several mounds surrounded a plaza, with the village at its edges. Structures atop the plaza - temples or official residences - sat on large four-sided flat-topped mounds. A palisade of saplings surrounded the entire complex.

Periodically, the Mississippians would raze one of the wood-and-mud structures, bury the remains of a deceased leader in a fresh layer of earth, and erect a new building on top. Commonly, the well-to-do were laid to rest in specially built burial mounds, conical or round.

Crews labored periodically over generations, sometimes a century or more, before an earthwork reached its final dimensions. A mound might begin as a slight rise with an important building on it. After a time, perhaps it might burn accidentally or people would burn it down as part of a cleansing ceremony. The

crews brought basket after basket of dirt to cover the old and lay a new foundation, and another building went up.

Many workers, hauling 60 pounds of soil apiece, labored to complete each stage. Some archeologists say that the culture's survival depended on a steady flow of immigrants to compensate for the high death rates. When the flow ceased, they argue, the cities collapsed.

Today, most of the moundbuilders' legacy is gone. Many of their earthworks have been plowed, pilfered, eroded, and built over. Yet evidence of the culture remains. This website is part of an effort to preserve the legacy that survives along the banks of the lower Mississippi.

The Mississippian Native American Platform Mound http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platform_mound

Monk's Mound at Cahokia

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cahokia>

Poverty Point, Louisiana

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty_Point

Indian Mound - Miamisburg, Ohio

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miamisburg%2C_Ohio

Etowah Mounds - Georgia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etowah_Indian_Mounds

Crooks Mound

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crooks_mound

Spiro Mounds

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiro_Mounds

Montauk, New York

Used to have physical pyramids that align with other pyramids following the sacred geometry. Montauk is at the far eastern tip of Long Island, New York.

The Great Serpent Mound

The Serpent mound is the largest effigy mound in the world. While there are several burial mounds around the Serpent mound site, the Serpent itself does not contain any human remains and wasn't constructed for burial purposes. It is located in Adams County, Ohio.

1,330 feet in length along its coils and averaging three feet in height. One of many sacred places associated with ancient wisdom identified by the serpent symbol. Nearly a quarter of a mile long, Serpent Mound apparently represents an uncoiling serpent.

The head of the serpent is aligned to the summer solstice sunset and the coils also may point to the winter solstice sunrise and the equinox sunrise. Today, visitors may walk along a footpath surrounding the serpent and experience the mystery and power of this monumental effigy. A public park for more

than a century, Serpent Mound attracts visitors from all over the world. The museum contains exhibits on the effigy mound and the geology of the surrounding area.

Serpent Mound lies on a plateau overlooking the valley of Brush Creek. It is located on a plateau with a unique cryptoexplosion structure that contains faulted and folded bedrock, which is usually either produced by a meteorite or volcanic explosion.

This cryptoexplosion structure has caused Serpent Mound to become misshapen over the years. This is one of the only places in North America where such an occurrence is seen. Though the meaning is grounds for debate, the mound's placement on such an area is almost undoubtedly not by coincidence. Glotzhober & Lepper summarize the dispute in their work.

Put it another way. The experts can not agree whether the immediate geological area of Serpent Mound was created from within the earth or from without. Geologists from the Ohio Division of Natural Resources Division of Geological Survey and from the University of Glasgow (Scotland) concluded in 2003 that a meteorite strike was responsible for the formation after studying core samples collected at the site in the 1970s. Further analyses of the rock core samples recovered at the site indicated the meteorite impact occurred during the Permian Period, about 248 to 286 million years ago.

Nearby conical mounds contained burials and implements characteristic of the prehistoric Adena people (800 BC-AD 100). Many questions surround the meaning of Serpent Mound, but there is little doubt it symbolized some religious or mythical principle for its builders. The museum contains exhibits on the mound and the geology of the surrounding area.

The date and creators of the Serpent mound is still debated among archaeologists. Several legitimate attributions have been made concerning both of these questionable factors: The Adena culture and the Fort Ancient culture. Both of these sub-cultures belonged to the broader Hopewell culture, a term used to encompass all of the pre-Columbian Native American groups that resided in Southern Ohio. All of these civilizations had similar characteristics, including burial mounds and effigy mounds, such as the Serpent Mound.

Historically, the mound has been attributed to the Adena Indians (800 BC-AD 100). Many nearby mounds can be assuredly contributed to the Adena culture. The Adena are also renowned for their elaborate earthworks.

However, recent carbon dating studies place the serpent mound outside of the span of the Adenas. There are also no cultural artifacts present within the mound, a trait of most other Adena mounds. This could possibly be because the mound is not of Adena origin, or that it held a special significance above other burial mounds.

A few pieces of wood charcoal were found in the undisturbed portion of the serpent mound. When carbon dating experiments were undertaken on these artifacts, the first two yielded a date of ca. 1070 AD, with the third piece dating to the Late Archaic period.

The first two dates place the Serpent Mound within the realm of the Fort Ancient Indians, a Mississippian culture, but the third back to very early Adena or before. The Fort Ancient Indians could

very well have been the erectors of the Serpent Mound. A significant symbol in the Mississippian culture is the rattlesnake, which would explain the design of the mound.

However, this mound, if built by the Fort Ancient Indians, is uncharacteristic for that group. They also buried many artifacts in their mounds, something of which the Serpent Mound is devoid. Also, the Fort Ancient Indians did not usually bury their dead in the manner which the remains have been found at the effigy.

Astronomy - The head of the serpent is aligned to the summer solstice sunset and the snake's coils align with the winter solstice sunrise and the equinox sunrise. It is thought that perhaps the mound was created as a response to astrological occurrences.

The carbon dating attribution of 1070 coincides with two significant astronomic events - The appearance of Halley's Comet in 1066 and the light from the supernova that created Crab Nebula in 1054. This light was visible for two weeks after it first reached earth, even during the day. There is speculation that the serpent mound was to emulate a comet, slithering across the night sky like a snake.

The Serpent Mound was first discovered by two Chillicothe men, Ephraim G. Squier and Edwin H. Davis. During a routine surveying expedition, Squier and Davis discovered the unusual mound in 1846. They took particularly careful note of the area. When they published their book, *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*, in 1848, they included a detailed description and a map of the serpent mound.

One man who it particularly intrigued was Frederick Ward Putnam of the Peabody Museum of Harvard University. Putnam was fascinated with the mounds, specifically the Serpent Mound. When he visited the mounds in 1885, Putnam found that they were gradually being destroyed by plowing. Putnam raised funds, and in 1886 purchased the land in the name of the university to be used as a public park.

Excavation of the Serpent Mound - After raising sufficient funds, Putnam returned to the site in 1886. He worked for three years excavating the contents and burial sequences of both the Serpent Mound and two nearby conical mounds. After his work was completed and his findings documented, Putnam worked on restoring the mounds to their original state. In 1900, Harvard University turned over the Serpent Mound to the Ohio Historical Society to operate as a public park.

The Serpent Mound is one of those rare loci of the planet's topography where the consummate joining of terrestrial magnetism with astronomical alignments serves to astonish one at the accomplishments of our ancestry's knowledge of Earth and Heaven.

Unless you are an experienced geologist, the unique features of the topography of the lands surrounding the Serpent Mound are not obvious. The land rises and falls, sometime in gentle slopes but often sharply with steep contours, like the outcrop of stone and earth the serpent sits upon.

Through the land, flows many streams, some maintaining their flow throughout the summer. From atop the tower constructed to give tourists an elevated view of the mound, you also see a land covered with mixed hardwoods and the occasional evergreen. The view appears little different from the rest of southern Ohio, but within recent years the land here has been found to be unique. I believe the Adena peoples knew it over two thousand years ago when they sculpted this serpent out of stone, clay, and dirt.

In 1933 W.H. Bucher published an account of this area calling it a cryptovolcanic structure. Bucher was German, and his article was published in a German publication. Perhaps it takes an outsider to see the inner qualities of a place. Bucher saw similarities in the land forms at the Serpent Mound to barely recognizable volcanic upheavals in Germany. But like so many who speculate about the mounds, he saw what he wished to see.

No volcanic materials have been found here; however, he helped people see what is hardest to see: the familiar as strange. In 1947 R.D. Dietz in Science magazine suggested that a better name to describe the land features was "cryptoexplosion" - the folded and faulted beds of landforms from different geologic eras exposed from the impact of meteors.

The central area is characterized by uplifted and faulted Silurian and Ordovician rocks that have been folded sharply into seven radiating anticlines. The forces that produced this structure caused the central area to be uplifted a minimum of 950 feet. Shatter cones - shock-produced structures - are found in moderate amounts in the central area.

This description is from a map showing a nearly circular area representing the disturbed landscape; looking closely you can see the serpent mound sitting on the circumference of the circle. There is a great appeal to Dietz's theory even if the geology does not completely support it; there is no meteoric metal here.

But there are serious suggestions that the serpent is intimately connected with the heavens. Several writers have suggested that the serpent is a model of the constellation we call the Little Dipper, its tail coiled about the north star. It is tempting to believe that the Indians knew of the meteor's explosion into the earth, and they built the mound to honor that event.

Bucher's theory and the variation of it is supported more by the evidence of the rocks and the symbolism of the mound. The explosion came from within the earth from the incredible pressure of accumulated but repressed energies, trapped, blocked, but finally exploding upward as gas forcing its way to be released through the body of the earth toward the sky above.

Old maps of the area show Mounds at these places where the waterways meet, which some people consider gateways - the ways of passage, movement of consciousness between realities. This signifies the inner energies of the earth all embody.

This powerful energy rising from the depths of the earth-body is the energy of transformation, the energy that destroys blockages and barriers to the higher states of consciousness. It is the energy charted by shamans of every primary culture, the energy inherent in every human body.

