

## REPORT ON THE SOUTH MOUND OF A GROUP OF TWO, SOUTH OF AVONDALE, MO.

South of Avondale in Clay County, Missouri, on the hill top west of the junction of Rock Creek and the Missouri River, are the remains of two mounds. The hill approximately 75 feet high, is really the end of a ridge running parallel to the creek and was formerly heavily wooded. A far view can be obtained from this point. From the northwest another small stream flows past the western foot of this hill. In that valley are the remains of several ancient camp sites. In fact, almost every hill and valley in this vicinity show traces of the prehistoric people who once lived here. Two geological items of interest are the loess deposits which form the hill and a ridge of glacial drift 25 feet high, which runs across the mouth of the western valley. In this drift are several grades and colors of granite.

Mounds have been found all along the hilltops and ridges adjacent to the Missouri River. Some contained vaults, others individual cairns for each burial and some a few loose stones to mark the burial. In all of these mounds camp refuse, consisting of lost and discarded tools, broken arrows and pots, chips of flint, charred wood and ashes can be found. These two mounds are of the last type. The south one being a cemetery and the north one in addition to the burials, must have been used for ceremonies. They occupy the very top of the hill and are about 40 feet apart. The first time I saw these mounds the north one had a hole several feet deep in its apex. That was in 1931. I was informed it had been dug at least 25 years before. The south one was 4 feet high with a diameter of 30 feet and was undisturbed. A man from Kansas City dug into the center of the low mound, May 30 1934, but finding only bones, abandoned the digging.

On October 6 1934, I started to excavate, thinking there might be some object of interest remaining. I deepened and slightly enlarged the hole in the center. I found a skull first and since it was unaccompanied by other bones I thought it was part of the burials already removed. Later I realized that it was all of that burial, the other bones having been scattered or lost wherever the body had first been placed. In all, about 50 burials were removed from this mound, and in my opinion they were all reburials. That is that after the flesh had decayed the bones were gathered together and placed like a bundle of sticks, in a shallow grave. One remarkable thing was the absence of any cavities in the hundreds of teeth found. The teeth were however greatly worn down, probably from the grit in their meal and other coarse foods.

On this first day I shaved away at the sides of the excavation and just at dusk I unearthed a water flask and a rough knife. The flask was empty. It lay on its side, the long neck slightly lower than its body. It was down about 20 inches from the surface and was imbedded in very hard dry loess. There is no decoration but on the bottom are black fire marks. The sides are  $3/16$  of an inch thick, the neck  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter, the body  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches and the overall height of the flask is 7 inches.

A great deal more work on other days brought one complete burial to light and one where the skull was missing, but not an artifact of any kind. Occasionally I would find flint chips, bits of charred wood and potsherds, and traces of red and yellow keel. All together the "relics" I found from day to day were rather discouraging, but I went back at every available opportunity. I had read of magnificent spearheads, fine arrow points, pipes and pottery of strange shapes and sizes, found in mounds, but a mound like this soon converts you to real archeology or you quit in disgust. Another thing, some friends think you are doing something worthwhile, others think you are some sort of a



dogged fool. But I sifted and sifted and shovelled and scraped and surely would have quit if it had not been for that water bottle I found the first day.

A friend came to help, also some boys, the boys couldn't take it. They just naturally don't like a shovel. The friend, Ralph Henneman, was an amateur, but he was interested and full of ideas, the last one being that the next yard of earth would probably reveal a find. He liked to try here and there and over there. A straight cut moving through the mound was monotonous, so he started a hole clear outside the east base of the mound and about 20 inches down ran into a group of burials. So it came about that we finally got the excavating going as it should, from the outside edge.

Such a jumble of bones as we ran into surprised us. There were burials a few inches above others and lying at all angles. The bones were laid in like so many sticks, with the skull, if it were there, in just any position. There were no rib, finger, or toe bones and only a trace of back and pelvic bones. The face of the skull was rarely complete and the whole of the interior was completely filled with clay. In this group, there were 7 burials and not an artifact. A few feet away I found a pot. It was only 3 inches from the surface and was upside down in the black topsoil. I have no doubt it had been placed on the mound and had been covered by the leaf mold through the centuries that have passed. This pot was very damp and crumbled easily, but I saved it and after six weeks of drying, was able to restore it. Just below the rim on opposite sides, are two crude drawings, one appearing to be a buffalo. This pot is 5 inches in diameter and 4 inches high. The rim extends out on two sides to form handles. In spite of the fact this pot was inverted when found, it was completely filled with earth. Then another burial was found and near the skull was another pot, sitting upright, and about 20 inches from the surface. This one was 5 1/2 inches in diameter and 4 inches tall. It is quite a really good workmanship. It is not decorated but is very symmetrical and smooth, inside and out. The general shape is the same as the other, with the exception of the handles. On this they are like the handles of a jug but only large enough for a small thong to go through for the purpose of carrying or hanging. One of these handles appeared to have been broken before the pot was placed in the grave.



Five more haphazard burials were found. Near one was a small hematite pipe bowl. The pipe bowl is no larger than a small thimble. Not far away were two small scraps of galena, a small arrow head and a piece of pumice stone, all evidently having been dumped in the mound with camp refuse. But next was an infant's skull, thin and badly decomposed. It was imbedded in that hard mixture of loess, ashes, and charcoal. Slightly above it was another pot, sitting almost upright, one small perforated handle intact and showing plainly where the other should be. The bowl was crushed in. Six inches above this pot was the other handle, hanging to a stone the size of your hat. Apparently when the loose earth had been filled in on the bones, the pot and stone were then placed on top of the grave and in settling, the bowl was crushed, the handle catching on the rough stone.

There were five more burials, the last of which was only charred fragments in a heap of charcoal, a foot deep and 5 feet across. These

were at the usual depth of from 20 to 30 inches. A thin chert knife rather roughly shaped fell from near the surface. Then a piece of red paint stone, soft and smooth, was found; also another with notches on it.

Nine more burials were found, some marked with one stone above the other until three or four were stacked up. In the black topsoil, was another infant's skull as fragile as burned paper. Then there was another cremation, this time in a bed of coals 30 x 10 inches and under 18 inches of soil. Three more burials were without the trace of an artifact. We came to one that showed some care, in that over this bundle of bones was a cluster of small stones, that would have covered the bones like a blanket, but they had been placed diagonally to the grave, so must have been laid there long enough after the burial to have caused the person placing the stones to forget the exact location. About away was a single piece of bone covered with a flat stone. A perforator  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches long was found under the cluster of stones with the bones.

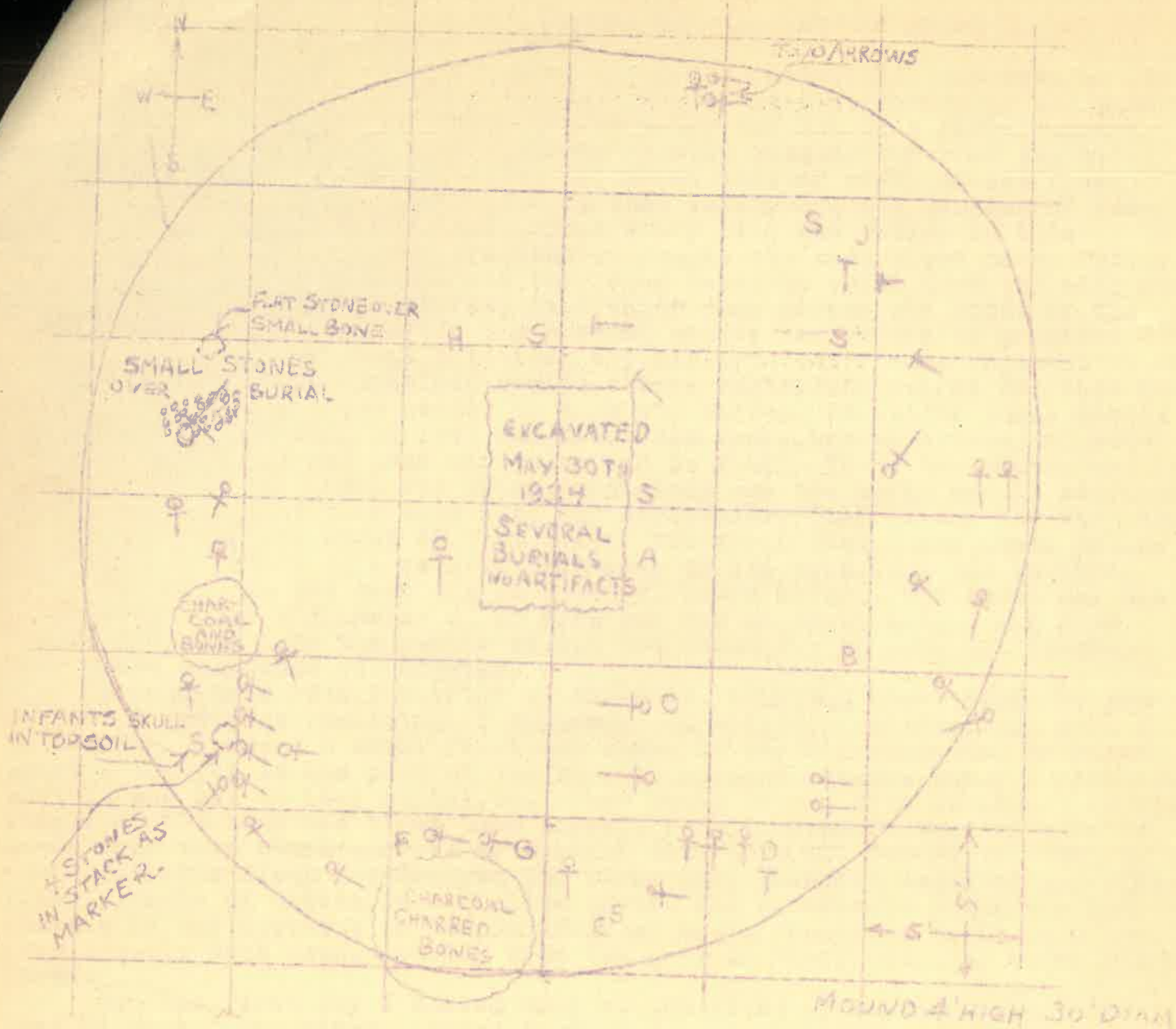
A small reddish bowl  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches by 3" was dug out 6 inches from the surface. It was sitting erect and was in perfect condition. Unlike the other pots which were tempered with shell, it was sandy. Four burials were found without skulls and three skulls without other bones. They were widely separated. Then another pot of the usual type, a piece of polished stone ax, and three complete burials with two large arrow heads.

This completed the excavation of the south mound as far as I can do it, but I feel there will be additional finds made, for as deep as we dug, we continued to find flint chips and never thought we were at the bottom.

These facts are evident from the exploration of this mound. The depth of 20 inches, at which these burials were made, is about the depth the average person would reach in scooping out a hole with a hand tool, while on his knees. These people certainly practised cremation. Their burials were all in bundles and were re-burials, which could account for the lack of valuable artifacts in the graves, in that they could have been lost or stolen from the litters on poles, or in the trees where the body had first been placed. As these litters had decayed and fallen, the bones and equipment became scattered and very few reached the grave intact. This might explain the hundreds of perfect artifacts found on hilltops far from a good camp site. Mr. J.C. Harrington, of the University of Chicago, thinks that the pottery from this mound was made by people of the Mississippi Basic Type. He viewed it in August of 1935.

The north mound of this group was torn open with a team and scraper in January of 1935 and several burials disturbed. A large granite celt was found, also a clay pipe and a pot, both of which were broken and pieces lost. One of the men doing this digging tore out a basin-shaped place that he described as being like a dutch oven. It was fused as though by very hot fires on the inside and I haven't much doubt that it was a cremation basin. I have since done considerable work on this mound, but it is very large and the small portion of the mound left contains hundreds of yards of earth. This mound, like the south one, seems to have been started several feet underground. I have not found a burial so far, nor an artifact of any great value.

James M. Shippae.



- † SKULL WITH BONES IN BUNDLE
- ‡ NO SKULL WITH BONES
- S SKULL, NO BONES
- A WATER FLASK AND KNIFE
- B POT
- C POT
- D PIPE
- E POT BY INFANTS SKULL
- F ROUGH CHERT SPEAR HEAD
- G LEAD AND PUMICE
- H POT, RED, SANDY,
- J POT
- K DRILL