

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

The Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks of Southwest Ohio

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) recently added the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks to its World Heritage List, the 25th such landmark award in the United States. Such a selection recognizes their outstanding value and assures their preservation in the future. There are only about 1000 such sites around the globe.

The Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks are a series of eight earthen complexes built between 2000 and 1600 years ago near tributaries of the Ohio River. They include Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, Fort Ancient Earthworks and Nature Preserve, Mound City Group, Hopewell Mound Group, Seip Earthworks, High Bank Earthworks, Hopeton Earthworks, and Newark Earthworks. They are expressions of the Hopewell culture, constructed by indigenous groups who farmed, fished, and foraged in southern and central Ohio. These people gathered to create, manage, and worship within their massive public works. The complexes are masterpieces of landscape architecture and stretch from Newark to Chillicothe to Oregonia (near Lebanon). Because the earthworks are located primarily in semi-rural or low-density residential areas, they remain mostly intact. The structures and archeological remains therein are proof of the scope and richness of the Hopewell cultural tradition. Three sites are owned and maintained by the Ohio History Connection/the State of Ohio, and five sites are included in the Hopewell Culture National Historical Park and owned and managed by the National Park Service.

The earthworks vary in height from 3 to more than 30 feet in height and are miles long in some locales. Aerial photography has documented the regular geometrically shaped complexes as well as hilltop enclosures. Some are squares, some are circles, and some are octagons. Some contain Hopewell burials, wherein various goods have been discovered – evidence that people from Ohio traded with other North Americans from distant locations. Some earthworks align with the cycles of the Sun and Moon, demonstrating the Hopewell's knowledge of geometry and astronomy. They were not fortresses, rather, they were ceremonial centers.



The moonrise over the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks. (Courtesy of University of Cincinnati Center for the Electronic Reconstruction of Historical and Archaeological Sites)



Mounds at Ft. Ancient

Ft. Ancient is the closest of the Hopewell Earthworks to Indian Hill. Located on the eastern bank of the Little Miami River near Lebanon, it features 3 ½ miles of walls in a 100-acre complex. The embankments reach as tall as 23 feet, and there are more than 67 gateways. Two mounds align with the summer solstice sunrise, and two align with the winter solstice sunrise. Artifacts retrieved from Ft. Ancient include tools, pottery fragments, items fashioned from bones, and pieces of flint and mica. There are miles of trails to wander and a museum with exhibitions as well.

As recently as 2022, there was a golf course atop the Newark Earthworks. Moundbuilders Country Club encompassed parts of the prehistoric Octagon and Great Circle mounds which came into play on 11 of the course's 18 holes. Built in 1911, Moundbuilders was a challenging par 71 course. In 2022 the Ohio Supreme Court ruled that the Ohio History Connection could take the land by eminent domain and transform the club and course into a public park. The OHC's goal was to preserve the site for the larger general public as an example of indigenous people's accomplishments.

The earthworks were constructed one basketful of earth at a time over a period of years by the Hopewell using primitive tools. This occurred about 100 BC- 400 AD. UNESCO determined that the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks had Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), meaning they are "so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity." They were deemed masterpieces of human creative genius. Now a World Heritage site (the only one in Ohio), these eight complexes together bear witness to ancient brilliance.