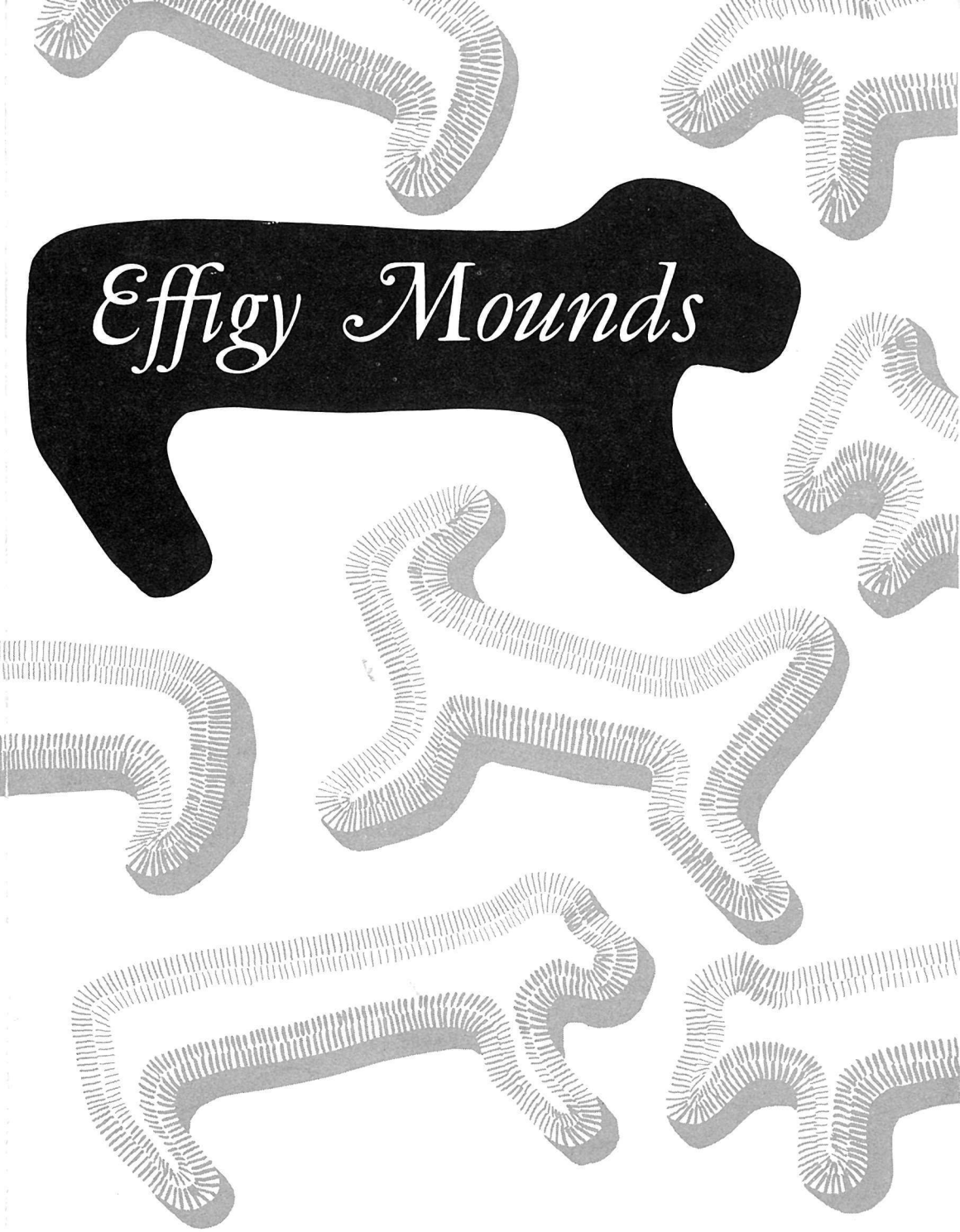
Effigy Mounds



NATIONAL MONUMENT • IOWA

Effigy Mounds

NATIONAL MONUMENT

United States Department of the Interior
Fred A. Seaton, *Secretary*
National Park Service, Conrad L. Wirth, *Director*

Outstanding examples of Indian mounds in shapes of animals and birds

EFFIGY MOUNDS NATIONAL MONUMENT, an area of secluded valleys and weatherworn Mississippi River bluffs, preserves some of the last traces of Indian peoples who thrived here nearly 1,000 years ago while Europe was in the midst of the Crusades. In contrast to feudal Europe's complexity, the culture of the Effigy Mounds people seems simple. Their life is known solely from the burial mounds and village debris they left behind.

The Prehistoric People

THE FIRST SETTLERS in the eastern United States found numerous Indian mounds as silent evidence of people who had lived and died before the white man's coming. Mounds were distributed from the eastern seaboard west to Texas and north into Canada, but were most numerous along the Mississippi River. They ranged in size from hardly perceptible swells in the ground to artificial hillocks as much as 100 feet high and covering several acres. Estimates indicate existence of more than 100,000 mounds before their mass destruction under pressure of an expanding white population.

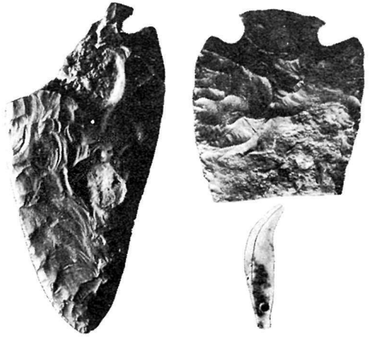
Many early investigators attributed the origin of the mounds to a mysterious race called the "moundbuilders." But it is now known that they were built by ancestors of the modern Indians, and no "lost race" is needed to explain them. Variations in their size, shape, and content suggest that the same tribe did not build them all, that the builders were not at the same stage of cultural advancement, and that the mounds were not all built at the same time.

Effigy mounds are a type distinct from those in surrounding regions. Built in the shapes of animals and birds, they are concentrated in the northern Mississippi Valley, in an area taking in most of Wisconsin, part of eastern Minnesota, the eastern fringe of Iowa, and part of northwest Illinois. The earth effigies, and some of the conical and linear mounds near them, were built for burial of the dead during a period beginning well over 1,000 years ago, and lasting until around A. D. 1300.

Although the shape and size of many mounds imply a fair degree of social organization, the basic economy of the Effigy Mounds people was a simple one. For food, they hunted, fished, and gathered edible plants in the woods. Available food animals included deer, bear, elk, bison, raccoon, rabbit, squirrel, opossum, beaver, turkey, ruffed grouse, and passenger pigeon. Fresh water clams, catfish, bass, and pickerel abounded in the streams, and plant food included wild rice, acorns, maple sugar, hazelnuts, hickory nuts, black walnuts, butternuts, wild cherries, gooseberries, plums, blackberries, raspberries, and grapes. They may have planted a little corn each year. After going on a summer hunt, they returned to harvest the corn, at which time, perhaps, they held a harvest ceremony.

From knowledge of historic Indians under similar conditions, it can be supposed that these moundbuilders wintered in good hunting areas, camping in sheltered valleys or bluff-edge rock shelters. A few families who habitually hunted together comprised the roving bands. As a loose-knit tribal group, the bands would have reunited once or twice a year for planting and harvest, communal hunts, or religious observances.

They hunted with either the "atlatl" (dart thrower) or the bow and arrow, or both, although snares and traps were doubtless used as well. The harpoon was used for fishing but they probably also had nets, hooks, and fish traps. Stone and copper axes were used for chopping or as weapons. Nothing is known of their houses, but some form of temporary shelter similar to a wigwam or tepee was probably constructed.



Broken ceremonial blades and a bear-tooth ornament.

They made pottery for cooking and occasionally placed pots in the mounds with burials. These vessels may have contained food for the dead. They were decorated by stamping the wet clay with various objects, including cord-wrapped paddles, sticks, and single cords wrapped around the neck of the pot. The vessels had elongated bodies and pointed bottoms. Clay pipes imply the cultivation of tobacco.

Bone and copper awls were used for sewing. Possibly they wove cloth, for earlier groups in related areas knew a form of weaving. Judging from clothing of people in nearby areas at this time, the women probably wore skirts of leather or cloth, moccasins, and bone, shell, or copper jewelry. Men wore similar jewelry, and breechclouts and moccasins, and painted their bodies for additional adornment.

Their Mounds

THE MOUNDS wherein the dead were buried vary in external shape and in internal features. In some, the dead were placed in shallow pits dug into the original soil. In others, burials were laid on the ground and earth was heaped over them. Other times, they built up part of the mound, placed the burials on top and then completed erecting the mound. Treatment of the bodies is equally varied. Some were buried with the flesh on the bones. These nearly always occurred singly, with the knees drawn up against the chest. The secondary, or bundle burial, is a common type. Here, the body was exposed until the flesh was gone, whereupon some of the bones were gathered in a bundle and buried. Some bodies were cremated, either on the mound site or in another spot, and the remains were buried. Some mounds have several burial types represented.

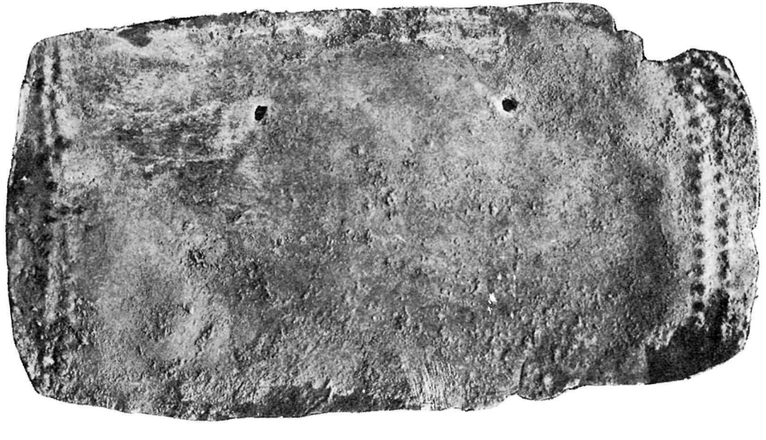
Burials may be found in the head, the "heart," or the hindquarters of effigies. Common effigy shapes are birds and animals suggesting hawks, eagles, bears, and foxes. In some parts of the Effigy Mound region, waterfowl, panthers, dogs, deer, rabbits, turtles, lizards, and even "human" forms also appear.

Conical and linear mounds also show the burial types mentioned above. Some conicals, however, were built by slightly differing tribesmen which are called Hopewell by archeologists. Hopewell mounds often have rectangular burial pits within them and may contain 5 or 6 burials. Grave offerings are richer and include pearl beads, mica sheets, copper beads and breastplates, large spears or knives, and bear-tooth ornaments.

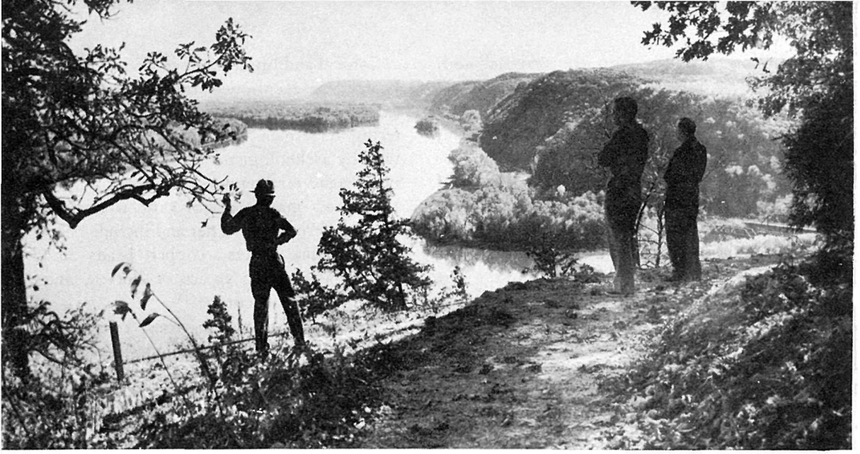
Bundle burials, cremations, or burials made with the flesh on the bones, and with arms at the sides and legs extended, occur in Hopewell mounds in this area. Some bodies may have been wrapped in cloth, for textile fragments have been found preserved by chemical action where the wrapping has come in contact with copper burial goods.

Hopewell culture was widespread in the Middle West from around the beginning of the Christian era until about A. D. 1000. In Effigy Mounds National Monument, a Hopewell-like conical mound, dated by the radiocarbon method, gave a date of 900 years ago, plus or minus a 300-year

Copper breastplate from Hopewell mound.



The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of its people.



The Mississippi River from Fire Point.

margin of error. An animal effigy was dated at 930 years ago, with the same margin of error.

History

BELOW THE MONUMENT, across the Mississippi, is the mouth of the Wisconsin River. Here, in 1673, Marquette and Joliet entered the Mississippi on their voyage of discovery. Through a period of 150 years, a series of French, English, and American trading and military posts were built in the vicinity of Prairie du Chien, Wis., to control this important confluence. Remains of a military road leading from Fort Crawford, Wis., to Fort Atkinson, Iowa, first used in 1840, may still be seen near the Marching Bear Mound Group.

The Monument

EFFIGY MOUNDS NATIONAL MONUMENT was established by Presidential proclamation on October 25, 1949. Establishment of the area was the result of efforts on the part of conservation-minded Iowans for over a quarter of a century. The State of Iowa donated the land to the United States. The monument has an area of about 2 square miles.

The monument area is divided into two parts by the Yellow River. The Fire Point Mound Group north of the Yellow River contains the largest bear effigy remaining in Iowa. This effigy, the Great Bear Mound, is 70 feet across the shoulders and front legs, 137 feet long, and 5 feet high.

South of the Yellow River, the Marching Bear Mound Group contains an alignment of 10 bear effigies, 3 bird effigies, and 2 linear mounds. Almost a mile northeast of the Marching Bear Group are 3 mounds—a bear effigy, a bird effigy, and a long compound mound measuring 450 feet from end to end. Isolated mounds and groups of 2 or 3 conicals and linears are scattered throughout the area. At present, mound groups south of the Yellow River are not easily accessible.

How To Reach the Monument

THE MONUMENT area extends north and south along the bluffs of the Mississippi River and is located 3 miles north of Marquette, Iowa. It is reached by State Route 13.

About Your Visit

YOU MAY VISIT the monument from 8 a. m. to 5 p. m. during which time members of the monument staff are on duty to explain the features to you. Those who expect to visit in a group may receive specially guided trips if advance arrangements are made with the superintendent.

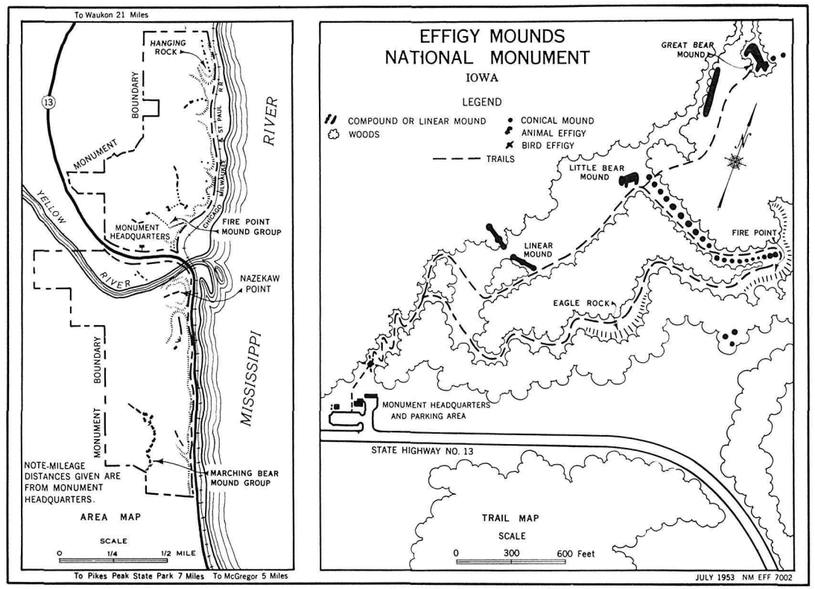
There is an interesting footpath which will lead you from headquarters to the Fire Point Mound Group and to scenic viewpoints overlooking the valleys of the Mississippi and Yellow Rivers. The round trip is 1.9 miles long and takes about 1 hour.

There are no camping or picnicking facilities in the monument, but you may obtain accommodations in nearby towns.

Please do not disturb or harm the mounds, plants, and animals within the monument area. They are protected by law.

Administration

EFFIGY MOUNDS NATIONAL MONUMENT is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is McGregor, Iowa, is in immediate charge of the monument.



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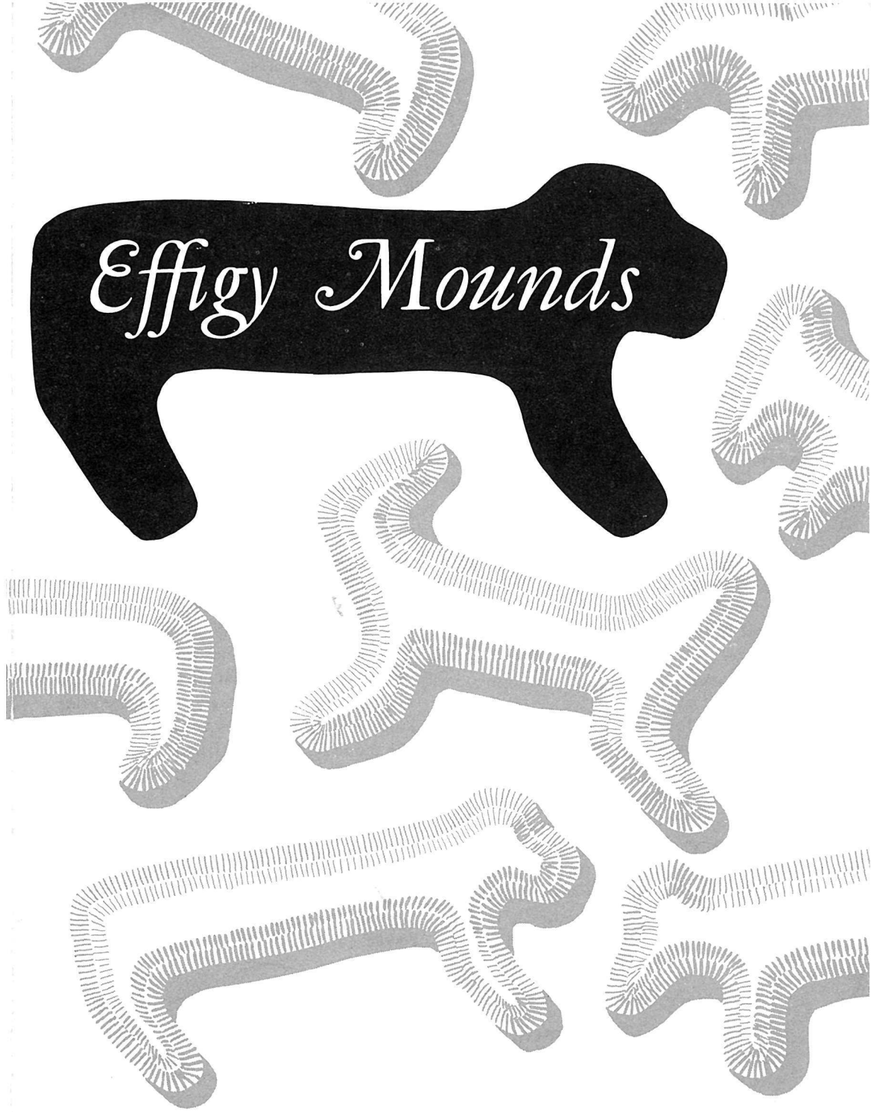

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