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NATIONAL REGISTER

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Bear Creek Mound and Village Site

other names/site number (22-Ts-500)

2. Location

street & number

not for publication

city, town

vicinity

state Mississippi

code 28

county Tishomingo

code 141

zip code 38873

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	buildings
1	sites
	structures
	objects
2	Total
	0

Name of related multiple property listing:

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Edmund C. Bernas

Oct. 25, 1988

Signature of certifying official

Date

Chief Historian, National Park Service

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Chas. B. H. Work

10-17-88

Signature of commenting or other official

State Historic Preservation Officer

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 - See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.

John J. Kowal

12/22/88

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/village
RELIGION/ceremonial site
FUNERARY/burials

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

LANDSCAPE/park

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

NA

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation

walls

roof

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Site Type: The Bear Creek Mound and Village Site (22-TS-500) represents a small Late Mississippian (1400-1600 A.D.) temple mound and village site.

The Bear Creek site consists of a flat-topped temple mound, built up in four stages. Around this mound is an associated Late Mississippian village site, of which two house structures have been excavated. The site is multi-component, in that it has produced Paleo-Indian and Archaic projectile points, and clay and sand tempered Miller (Woodland) phase ceramics.

Environmental Setting: The Bear Creek Mound and Village Site is of northeastern Mississippi (see figure 1), where the Tennessee River is the dominant environmental feature. The Bear Creek site is located at the

The geology of consists of Paleozoic limestone, sandstone, and chert beds, overlain by Cretaceous sands, clays, and gravels of the Tuscaloosa and Eutaw formations. The topography consists of a moderately rugged terrain

The bottom land soils where the Bear Creek site is located are rich, black sandy loams, which are easily worked and fertile. The natural vegetation is made up of Cypress/Tupelo gum, overcup oak, cherrybark oak, swamp chesnut oak, water oak, willow oak, sweetgum, and various elms (Morgan n.d.:58-59; Bohannon 1972:1-2). As described by its excavator, Charles Bohannon:

In sum, the builders of the mound and village found an excellent location for their settlement. The rich soil and an amenable climate would have made agriculture a productive enterprise and the surrounding forests offer many potential food sources, both wild plants and game (1972:2).

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)
Archeology - Prehistory

Period of Significance
Late Mississippian

Significant Dates
1400-1600 AD

Cultural Affiliation
Late Mississippian

Significant Person
NA

Architect/Builder
NA

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Summary Statement of Significance: The Bear Creek Mound and Village Site (22-Ts-500) represents a Late Mississippian (1400-1600 A.D.) occupation of [redacted]. At this time period a number of large Mississippian ceremonial mound centers, known in the archeological literature as the Rogers Island Phase, were constructed in the Tennessee River Valley proper. The data recovered from the Bear Creek Mound and Village Site indicates that it should be considered part of the Rogers Island Phase by commonality of its ceramic complex with those of the Tennessee River Valley ceremonial centers. Rogers Island occupation at the Bear Creek site appears to have been a result of population expansion out of the Tennessee River Valley proper into the small river drainages, to take advantage of plant and animal resources, and fertile soils for agriculture. Systematic exploitation [redacted] for such resources would have been well within the organizational capabilities of a chiefdom, and may well explain the presence of a temple mound at the Bear Creek site, in what would otherwise be considered a remote portion of the Rogers Island culture area during the Late Mississippian period.

Although diagnostic artifacts from earlier Paleo-Indian, Archaic, and Woodland cultures were recovered from the Bear Creek site, none of these groups stayed long enough at the site to leave intact stratigraphic evidence. The significance of these earlier materials that do not have any archeological context are probably linked to the Bear Creek area as an area of rich plant and animal resource exploitation. The main significance of the Bear Creek Mound and Village site is related to the Late Mississippian occupation which left an intact village and temple mound for future investigations.

Further archeological work at the Bear Creek Mound and Village Site could provide information on chronology, settlement patterns, and

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Archeological Investigations: When first recorded by a National Park Service archeological survey in 1950 for the Natchez Trace Parkway, the Bear Creek Mound was noted as being 12 feet high and 100 feet in diameter. Between its initial recording and the 1965 Park Service investigations the mound had been damaged by cultivation, so that in 15 years it was only four feet in height, and its diameter was measured at about 140 to 180 feet in extent (see figure 3). South and east of the mound the excavators in 1965 noted "scattered flint chips, sherds, and bits of burned daub indicative of village remains were strewn over the surface of an area measuring some 350 by 450 feet" (Bohannon 1972:2).

Preliminary testing by Bohannon in 1965, showed that the mound and village had been damaged by cultivation, but they were considered important as a potential interpretive area along the Natchez Trace Parkway for the Late Mississippian period and because the testing produced material dating back to the Paleo-Indian, Archaic and Woodland periods (Bohannon 1972:2-5). For these reasons it was decided to undertake more extensive investigations on the mound in order to gain information required for its reconstruction, to identify the limits of the village site, and to learn if earlier stratified cultural occupations could be found at the site.

Later in the same year (1965), Bohannon conducted extensive excavations in both the mound and village area (see figures 4 and 5). The work showed that during the Late Mississippian period the mound had undergone four stages of enlargement (see figure 6). According to Bohannon:

Stage A, the earliest, was a low, flat-topped earthwork, capped with a layer of red clay. Its platform was square, measuring about 30 feet (on a side), with sides which roughly paralleled the sides of the final stage of the mound (1972:7).

In Stage B, "the mound was increased by adding fill to the eastern and southern sides, thus enlarging the already existing platform. No features were noted on the remnant of Stage B surface uncovered in the excavations" (Bohannon 1972:8). Following Stage C, feature 1, a 12 to 14 feet in diameter pit, of unknown function, was dug 4 feet into the surface of the Stage C, and then refilled. The final construction effort, Stage D, greatly enlarged the size and height of the mound. At this point, burials with Late Mississippian vessels

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were interred in the mound, and from the presence of burned daub it would appear that a house or temple was erected on the mound (Bohannon 1972:9). Unfortunately, the last stage (Stage D) was heavily disturbed by cultivation, which deflated and spread much of this last stage of construction around, obscuring the final form of the mound. In final form, this Late Mississippian construction was a flat topped temple mound with steeply sloping sides, about 85 to 90 feet on a side, and in excess of 12 feet in height, surmounted by a wattle and daub constructed house or temple.

The village area excavations produced two typical rectangular Late Mississippian period houses (see Figure 5), along with several storage pits and postholes, and four burials without grave goods. Excavations recovered bits of charred corncobs indicative of agriculture at the site; and the remains of opossum, beaver, raccoon, black bear, turkey, box turtle, and garfish, that were hunted locally (Bohannon 1972:14). The artifacts recovered from the mound and village excavations consisted primarily of shell-tempered Late Mississippian period (1400-1600 A.D.) ceramics, e.g., Mississippian Plainware, Moundville Incised, Moundville Filmed-Incised, and Barton Incised (Bohannon 1972:15-20). These excavations also produced a small amount of earlier Woodland Period and sand tempered ceramics, e.g., Baytown Plain, Mulberry Creek Cordmarked and Long Branch Fabric Marked (Bohannon 1972:20-22). The Woodland ceramics fall into the locally defined Miller Complex of ceramics that range in dating from 400 B.C.-1000 A.D. (Smith 1982:5).

In addition to the ceramic artifacts a number of diagnostic projectile points, manufactured in the Paleo-Indian or Early Archaic periods were recovered. Among these were Cumberland Fluted (pre-8000 B.C.), Big Sandy I (c. 8000 B.C.), Morrow Mountain (c. 4500 B.C.), Lost Lake (c. 3000 B.C.), and Madison (1500 A.D.) (Bohannon 1972:25-58). The Paleo-Indian, Archaic, and Woodland materials would have represented short term camping on the Bear Creek site, no features or archeological strata were associated with any of these time periods. Bohannon felt these earlier artifacts were deposited at the Bear Creek site because of its favorable location for the collection of many sources of food.



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The Late Mississippian occupation (1400-1600 A.D.) at the Bear Creek site represents a prehistoric people using a complex of intensive agriculture, permanent villages, and the construction of temple mounds, whose origins appear to be connected with the Kogers Island Phase of the Late Mississippian in the Tennessee River Valley. The current interpretation of this occupation of the Bear Creek site is that this site represents one of a series of outlying mound and village sites founded as a result of Late Mississippian population expansion in the Tennessee River Valley, with groups moving into the smaller river drainages and developing secondary mound centers such as Bear Creek (Smith 1982:135-136).

Site Integrity: The Bear Creek Mound and Village Site (see Figures 7 and 8) has in the recent past been effected by mechanized cultivation before being acquired by the National Park Service as an interpreted area of the Natchez Trace Parkway. Most seriously effected was the Late Mississippian temple mound that was reduced in height from some 12 to 4 feet. The difference in the observed diameter of the mound, from 100 feet in 1950; to 140 by 180 feet in 1965, is probably due to the spreading of mound fill by cultivation. Following the excavation of a portion of the mound, which identified the sequence of construction, it was decided to reconstruct the mound as it was the only known Late Mississippian manifestation along the Natchez Trace Parkway that could be interpreted for visitors. As described by Bohannon:

...a series of narrow trenches was dug into the flanks of the mound to determine its original perimeter. It was then a matter of staking the sides and bulldozing the surrounding disturbed soil back on top of the mound. The reconstruction is, of course, conjectural in part. While the perimeter is accurate, the slope of the sides and the height are estimates. The mound, as reconstructed, is 8 to 10 feet high--somewhat less than the original height recorded by the survey (in 1950) (1972:6).

Although the cultivation of the village area did effect the upper soil levels of the site, excavations showed that archeological remains of houses, storage pits, post holes, burials, and other features remain intact.

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ceremonialism in the Late Mississippian period of the Rogers Island phase in northeast Mississippi. These research topics are derived from the Mississippi State Office's Historic Context on the Post-Archaic prehistory of northeast Mississippi (Morgan n.d.).

Chronology

Although Mississippian sites are common within the northeast Mississippi physiographic region, in most instances they cannot be assigned a specific temporal placement. The primary difficulty is that the majority of the ceramic assemblage for Mississippian sites is plain and shell tempered ceramics regardless of phase association. Thus, minimally occurring decorated types and distinctive vessel forms must be relied upon in making phase assignments.

Whether this situation can be alleviated through more intensive ceramic analyses, from sites such as Bear Creek, remains to be determined. However, the Bear Creek site has produced plain and decorated shell tempered Late Mississippian ceramics from intact stratigraphic remains that could assist in identifying diagnostic ceramics of this time period.

Recent work with Mississippian lithic assemblages, particularly triangular points, indicates some promise for employing this artifact class in deriving finer temporal placement for Mississippian components. Examination of thermal alteration of lithic materials has also proven productive. Some archeologists maintain that a change in heat treating strategies accompanies the use of small triangular points during Mississippian times. In addition, the Gainesville Lake area (of the Tennessee River Valley) indicates that the frequency of heat treatment of lithics fluctuates through time. Analysis of Late Mississippian lithic materials from Bear Creek could be used to evaluate this technic for applicability for a larger geographic area (Morgan n.d.:97-98)

Settlement Patterning

Present evidence indicates population expansion of Rogers Island (Late Mississippian) people out of the floodplain of the Tennessee River Valley ceremonial centers in favor of one characterized by more dispersed upland settlements and a renewed emphasis upon a wide range of subsistence resources, and even a reduction in maize agriculture, during the Late Mississippian period of northeastern Mississippi. An adequate comprehension of this development is

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essential for characterizing the Late Mississippian period and also serves as important background data for monitoring the origins and early development of historic Indian groups in the area.

The Bear Creek Mound and Village Site, representing a "frontier" ceremonial site, could be of importance in identifying the factors for the dispersion of Late Mississippian peoples into the upland Tennessee River Valley drainages. In particular, excavations at the Bear Creek site show that faunal remains that would be important in identifying changes in subsistence resources that could be linked to changes in Late Mississippian settlement patterns, are present (Morgan n.d.:100-101).

Ceremonialism

Mississippian ceremonialism within the Tennessee River Valley and its drainages is in need of further explication. While correlations are often made between climax Late Mississippian cultures and the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex (Southern Cult) evidence of the influence of this phenomenon in northeast Mississippi is minimal. Some archeologists note Southern Cult evidence only within the Mississippian period within the Gainesville Lake area and Lubbub Creek and around major ceremonial mound sites such as Moundville. Recent rethinking of Mississippian/Southern Cult relationship between Mississippian society as evidenced in northeast Mississippi and this pan-regional religious/ceremonial phenomenon need to be delineated. Excavation at certain of the northeastern Mississippian mound centers, e.g., Bear Creek where past work on the temple mound has produced high-status burials with grave goods, should shed considerable light on this topic (Morgan n.d.:99-100).

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SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 88002825 **Date Listed:** 12/22/88

Bear Creek Mound and Village Site	Tishomingo	Mississippi
Property Name	County	State

Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

John J. Knodel

Signature of the Keeper

12/22/88

Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Item 8. Period of Significance and Significant Dates

The period of significance is A.D. 1400-1600.
There are no significant dates.

Verified by phone with:
Mark R. Barnes, Ph.d.
Archeologist
National Park Service, SERO

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)