



# Foundation Document Overview

## Hopewell Culture National Historical Park

### Ohio



#### Contact Information

For more information about the *Hopewell Culture National Historical Park Foundation Document*, contact: [hocu\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:hocu_superintendent@nps.gov) or (740) 774-1126 or write to:  
Superintendent, Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, 16062 OH-104, Chillicothe, OH 45601

## Purpose



*The purpose of HOPEWELL CULTURE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK is to preserve, interpret, and research the archeological record of a distinctive and influential American Indian culture known today as Hopewell, including earthworks, artifacts, other archeological resources, the cultural landscape, and ethnographic information.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Hopewell Culture National Historical Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The Scioto River Valley holds the world's greatest concentration of monumental geometric earthworks. The park sites are representative of the variety and complexity of Hopewell earthen architecture. The park preserves the biggest conjoined mound (Hopewell Mound Group), the largest concentration of funerary mounds within an enclosure (Mound City Group), a complex geometric enclosure apparently devoted to nonfunerary ritual (Hopeton Earthworks), one of two known extant octagonal earthworks (High Bank Works), the largest stone walled hilltop enclosure (Spruce Hill), and a large tripartite enclosure representative of a type unique to the Scioto River Valley (Seip Earthworks).
- The artifacts placed in the mounds, including funerary items, made from an unprecedented variety and quality of exotic materials such as copper, obsidian, and mica, reflect a knowledge of and connections to distant places in North America. The finely crafted objects reflect the values, artistry, and technical abilities of their American Indian creators.





## Significance



- Sites that make up the park are closely associated with the development of scientific archeology (from antiquarianism) in North America, including the work of Caleb Atwater in the 1820s, the groundbreaking work of Ephraim Squier and Edwin Davis published by the Smithsonian Institution in 1848, the work of Cyrus Thomas and the Bureau of American Ethnology in the 1890s that concluded that these were American Indian sites, and the description of the characteristics of Hopewell culture by William Mills in 1906. Archeological research in the park continues to lead to new insights into precontact North America.
- The extensive archeological record preserved in the park includes mounds and earthworks as well as nonmound resources related to Hopewell daily life and work. The geographically extensive sites that make up the park have been studied since the 19th century. Because of the wealth and variety of resources, there remains great potential for new discoveries and research to better understand Hopewell peoples.
- The park fosters an understanding of American Indians' relationship with the landscape where these unique earthworks reflected their worldview. These sites are considered sacred among contemporary American Indians and appreciated by many.

## Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Mounds and Earthworks**
- **Archeological Resources Beyond the Mounds**
- **Museum Collection**
- **Value of the Park as a Place Sacred to Americans Indians and Others; a Place That Fosters the Opportunity for Personal Reflection**

Hopewell Culture National Historical Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **The Natural Landscape Within Which the Earthworks Are Situated**
- **Endangered Species, Threatened Species, Candidate Species, and Species of Concern**
- **National Register of Historic Places Listed or Eligible Sites**
- **Other Historic Resources**
- **Tri-County Triangle Trail Section**



# Description

Hopewell Culture National Historical Park includes 1,828.1 acres within its legislated boundary in Ross County, Ohio, at six separate sites: Mound City Group, Hopewell Mound Group, Seip Earthworks, Hopeton Earthworks, High Bank Works, and Spruce Hill Works. Each site preserves the remains of mounds and earthworks in the Scioto River watershed that were constructed between approximately 1,600 and 2,000 years ago by the people of the American Indian culture today known as Hopewell. The park also protects exquisitely crafted artifacts related to the Hopewell culture.

In 1923, President Warren G. Harding declared the Mound City Group site a national monument to preserve prehistoric mounds of “great historic and scientific interest.” Congress renamed the park and expanded it in 1980, 1992, and 2009. The mounds are internationally distinctive world-renowned archeological resources.

The park protects the remains of a dynamic social and ceremonial phenomenon that flourished in the woodlands of eastern North America between AD 1 and AD 400.

The term Hopewell describes a broad network of economic, political, and spiritual beliefs and practices that linked different American Indian groups throughout the Eastern Woodlands. Materials such as mica, shark’s teeth, obsidian, copper, and ocean shells moved through this network to Ohio. The culture is characterized by the construction of monumental enclosures made of earthen walls, often built in precise geometric patterns and aligned to solar and lunar standstill events on the horizon. These enormous sacred places were built and used by societies without hereditary leadership or intensive maize agriculture; rather, these people lived in a social and economic landscape between bands and chiefdoms; between foraging and farming.

Hopewell lives were intimately connected to the natural world, economically, ecologically, and spiritually. At the same time, they transformed the natural landscape through land clearance, cultivation, and earth moving. More than two millennia of natural and human impacts have altered the Hopewell landscapes and degraded the earthen architecture, leaving fragile, scant remnants aboveground and a rich archeological record below.

