



Effigies

What is an effigy?

An effigy is a carving or modeling meant to represent a person or animal, usually made out of rock, clay, or earth mounds. Effigies can vary in size and are not simply 'trinkets,' but often hold a significant meaning.



Bison effigy made by 4th generation quarrier Travis Erickson

How are they used?

Effigies can be used for pipes, pendants, and as ceremonial objects. Fourth generation carver Cindy Pederson says the turtles she creates "represent long life, fertility, and protection. The pattern on their backs can also represent the 13 lunar month calendar."

Common Misconceptions

Many people associate the term 'effigy' with modern political protest. Yet Indigenous people have been using many types of effigies for centuries in a variety of ways. They are sacred items and the skill required to carve them has been passed on for generations.

Effigies in the Midwest

Although effigies made at Pipestone are made from stone, many effigies have also been made using earth mounds for centuries.

Where have effigy mounds been discovered?

Effigy mounds have been found throughout the Midwest. Serpent Mound in Ohio famously resembles a giant snake stretching a quarter mile and facing to the east. Its origins are still a mystery that archeologists debate, placing its creation at ~300 BC or earlier and as late as 1070 AD.



Serpent Mound in Ohio

What do effigy mounds represent?

Effigy mounds have different meanings. Some American Indian Tribes used mounds as burial grounds. Others used them for ceremonial purposes. Many effigy mounds have been built in the shapes of bears, birds, panthers, snakes, and water spirits.

Effigy Mounds National Monument

This unique site in northwest Iowa works with 20 Tribal nations to protect over 200 ancient mounds. There are hiking trails and a visitor center. It is located 5 hours east of Pipestone National Monument at 151 State Highway 76, Harpers Ferry, IA 52146. Call (563) 873-3491 for more information.