

A Walking Tour of Mound City



1 Visitor Center
The self-guiding interpretive trail begins here and takes you through the mound area. Points of interest are keyed to the numbered descriptions in this brochure. Another trail encircles the outer perimeter of the earthworks. During the spring and summer a brochure gives information about native plants along the trail.

2 Earthen Walls and Borrow Pits
The deep borrow pits you see on either side of the trail provided the earth used to build the mounds and earthworks; they were also used to dispose of trash. The earthen wall forms a rectangular enclosure with openings at the west and east. Its shape follows the form of wooden ceremonial buildings that once stood within the confines of the wall and were burned or dismantled, their sites capped by the mounds.

3 Mica Grave Mound
When this mound was first excavated in 1921, archeologists found evidence of a wooden building that contained a shallow clay basin almost 6 feet square and lined with sheets of mica. Inside were the cremated remains of at least four individuals, as well as obsidian tools, raven and toad effigy pipes, and a copper headpiece of human shape. Nearby were elk and bear teeth, large obsidian points, a cache of 5,000 shell beads, and two copper headdresses—one with antlers (*see illustration on the reverse side*), the other possibly representing a bear. Sixteen more burials were placed on the floor of this building, which was later dismantled or burned. The mound you see now was built over the site. Long after the Hopewell era, another group of American Indians buried one of their own dead in this mound. Because they used earlier Hopewell mounds for their own burials, they are known as the Intrusive Mound Culture.

4 Mound of the Pipes
Squier and Davis excavated this mound in 1847, finding some “two hundred pipes, carved in stone....The bowls of the pipes are carved in miniature figures of animals, birds, reptiles, etc. All of them are executed with strict fidelity to nature, and with exquisite skill.” The exhibit in the visitor center has replicas of these pipes, along with original items from other mounds. This bird-and-fish effigy pipe (*above left*), dating from 100 B.C. to A.D. 400, was found in a mound at Hopewell Mound Group.

5 The Central Mound
The largest of Mound City’s mounds, this covers the remains of two buildings. Thirteen cremated human burials were accompanied by copper falcon effigies and fragments of human skulls that had been cut and drilled, perhaps to form part of a ceremonial mask.

6 Ceremonial Structure
Here you see the outline of the elaborate wooden building erected on this spot prior to construction of the mound. There is evidence that a ceremonial structure once stood at the site of each of the mounds at Mound City. These buildings were probably similar to the “council houses” or “big houses” used by American Indians of historic times for community functions and religious ceremonies. The posts at this mound site indicate the positions of prehistoric building posts.

7 Inside a Mound
Excavation of this elliptical mound revealed a complex internal structure. At its center was a low, circular, clay platform. In the concave top of the platform were ashes and cremated human remains, pottery fragments, stone and copper implements, and a large number of spearpoints made of flint, garnet, and obsidian. The platform was covered with a low earth mound that in turn was covered with five alternating layers of sand and earth. The mound was capped with a thick layer of gravel and pebbles. Mounds vary in many ways: number of layers, number of burials, and the kinds of artifacts they contain. Differences in the way people were buried may reflect differences in the status or role they held during their lifetimes.

8 Hopewell Settlements
Hopewell people did not live inside earthen enclosures, but lived nearby in small settlements along the terraces and floodplains of the Scioto River and its major tributaries. Each settlement likely contained only one to three households and shifted location periodically as nearby soils and game were depleted by farming and hunting. The river was a major source of food and water, as well as an important means of transportation.