



The Mitten

A Publication of Michigan History magazine

THE HOPEWELL

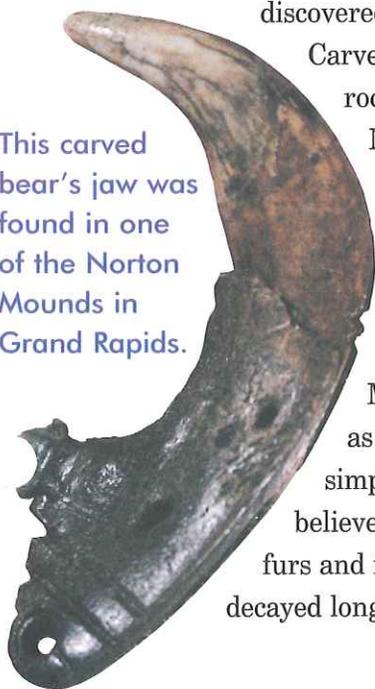
Before European settlers, even before the Odawa, Potawatomi, and Ojibway, prehistoric people called the Hopewell built hundreds of burial mounds in the river valleys and forests of what we now call Michigan. Some Hopewell lived in the western and southern part of the Lower Peninsula. However, the most **sophisticated** Hopewell settlements and the largest burial mounds were in Ohio and Illinois. When they buried honored people in the mounds, the Hopewell included items that tell us about their lives.

The Hopewell were part of a huge trading network that stretched across the central United States. **Elaborate** decorations and jewelry made from Michigan copper, North Carolina mica, and shells and pearls from the Gulf of Mexico were discovered in Hopewell mounds.

Carved obsidian (a volcanic rock) from the Rocky Mountains and shark teeth from Virginia's Chesapeake Bay also have been found. The most **ornate** artifacts were in Ohio mounds.

Michigan artifacts, such as pots and bowls, are simpler. Archaeologists believe the Hopewell traded furs and food, too, but they decayed long ago.

This carved bear's jaw was found in one of the Norton Mounds in Grand Rapids.



In their eating habits, the Hopewell fit between hunter-gatherers and farmers. The Hopewell may have grown some plants, but they were not a full-time farming people. They ate nuts, squash, and the seeds from several plants. Hopewell people also ate wild animals, birds, and fish.

The Hopewell's houses were not permanent, so little evidence remains to tell about them. Scientists believe the houses had wooden pole frames covered with animal skins, grass or herb woven mats, or bark.

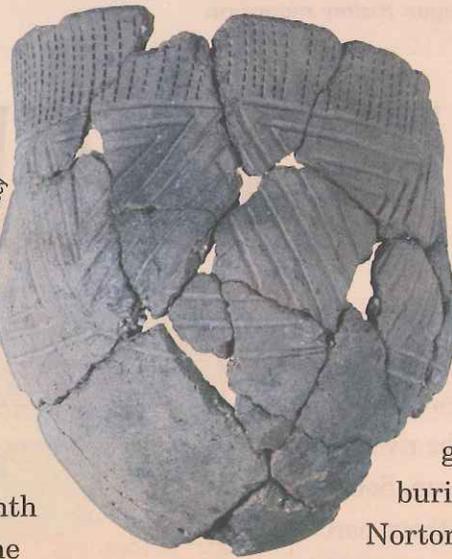
The Hopewell built their mounds in Michigan from 10 B.C. until about A.D. 400. Historians believe the Hopewell are the distant ancestors of the native people who still live in Michigan. Still, no one knows why they stopped building mounds or where they went after A.D. 400.

Mounds in Michigan

The Hopewell people are gone, but 17 of their burial mounds still lie in a forest outside Grand Rapids. This group is called the Norton Mounds. Until the mid-nineteenth century, another group called the Converse Mounds sat where downtown Grand Rapids is today. But in the mid-1850s, farmers, construction workers, and curious people dug into the Converse Mounds. The mounds soon disappeared and the city was built where they had stood.

People who were concerned about the mounds' history collected many artifacts and human bones from the scattered mound dirt. They made maps of the mounds' locations, drew pictures of the artifacts and donated the artifacts to museums.

Artifacts - John R. Halsey

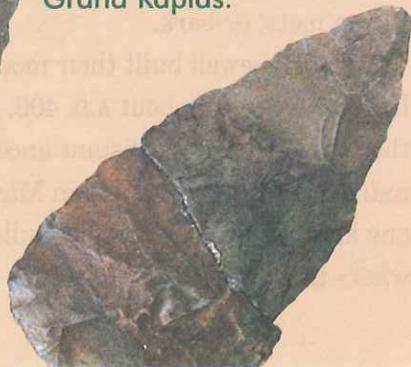


Until the twentieth century, historians did not know what to call the people who had created the mysterious mounds. Then archaeologists recognized that artifacts and burial styles from the Converse and Norton mounds, and other Michigan mound sites, were similar to large mound sites in Ohio and Illinois. They named the mound-building people and their culture "Hopewell," after M. C. Hopewell, an Ohio farmer with mounds on his land.

Archaeologists were glad to have the marvelous Hopewell artifacts, but they wanted to know how the Hopewell chose the items they buried with people. In the middle and late 1960s, excavations took place at Hopewell mounds in the Muskegon River valley and at the Norton Mounds. Scientists studied how the artifacts were placed in graves and what kind of person was buried with each item. Weapon points were found only with men, but objects such as pots, copper beads, and pieces of mica were found with men, women, and children.

Today, Native Americans want their ancestors' burial places to remain untouched, so archaeologists usually do not excavate mounds or burials. However, if a burial site is being destroyed or damaged by erosion or construction, sometimes archaeologists can get a special permit to excavate and save the information and artifacts that are threatened.

These projectile points and the pot shards (above) were found at the Norton Mounds in Grand Rapids.



My First Dig

by JOHN R. HALSEY

How would you like to be a member of a field crew excavating a prehistoric Hopewell burial mound as your first archaeological excavation experience? That's what happened to me as a young anthropology student at the University of Michigan in the summer of 1963. Along with several other undergraduates, I joined Richard Flanders, a graduate student who led the excavations at the Norton Mounds.



John Halsey, at far right, digs the Norton Mounds in 1963.

We were all eager to see the mounds. A few were large, more than 10 feet high and 100 feet in diameter. Those would take a lot of digging! But we soon found out that there was a lot more to archaeology than finding neat artifacts. Only after the grass, weeds, poison ivy, and blackberry brambles had been cleared could we lay out the trenches that we would dig to expose the burial pit.

The summer went by in a flash. In those eight weeks, we learned how to excavate, remove, and carefully pack fragile bones and artifacts. We learned the importance of the differences in soil colors. The soil helped explain how the mound was built. We learned how to explain to the public what we were doing and what we were finding. We also lived in tents and learned how to bathe ourselves in a gravel pit.

After that summer I really wanted to be an archaeologist. My experience also gave me a career-long interest in the prehistoric people who built the mounds.

■ *John R. Halsey is the State Archaeologist of Michigan.*

Where to Take Your Family

The **Public Museum of Grand Rapids** operates the Norton Indian Mounds National Historic Landmark, a 55-acre Hopewell Indian site. Artifacts from the mounds are on display at the Van Andel Museum Center. For information, telephone (616) 456-3977 or visit www.grmuseum.org.

Fort Hill State Memorial in Ohio contains one of the best-preserved Indian hilltop enclosures in North America. The Hopewell Indians constructed the 1.5 mile-long earthworks. For information, telephone (800) 283-8905 or visit www.ohiohistory.org/places/ft Hill.

The **Newark Earthworks State Memorial** in Ohio is the largest system of connected geometric earthworks built anywhere in the world. For information, telephone (800) 600-7174 or visit www.ohiohistory.org/places/newarkearthworks/greatCircle.cfm.

Hopewell Culture National Historical Park in Ohio offers a visitor center featuring hundreds of Hopewellian artifacts. Large earthwork and mound complexes in the park provide insight into the social, ceremonial, political, and economic life of the Hopewell people. For information, telephone (740) 774-1126 or visit www.nps.gov/hocu.

What Did You Learn?

BONUS:

Where are the Norton Mounds?

- a. Grand Rapids
- b. Muskegon
- c. Detroit

Vocabulary

Elaborate: intricate and detailed

Ornate: flashy or showy in style

Sophisticated: complex or complicated

1. Where were the largest Hopewell settlements?

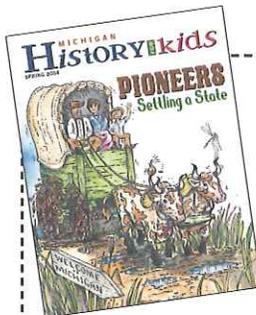
- a. Michigan and Ohio
- b. Kentucky and Louisiana
- c. Ohio and Illinois

2. What are some items archaeologists found in mounds?

- a. food
- b. jewelry
- c. furs

3. When did the Hopewell live in Michigan?

- a. before 10 B.C. until around A.D. 400
- b. from A.D. 200 until A.D. 1200
- c. from 5,000 B.C to A.D. 1500



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