

Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks
United States of America

Brief Synthesis: Outstanding Universal Value of the Series

The Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks is a serial property consisting of seven monumental Native American earthen enclosure complexes used as ceremonial centers in southern Ohio nearly 2000 years ago. These seven sites are unique and exceptional among ancient monuments worldwide in their enormous scale, geometric precision, astronomical alignments and broad geographic distribution. Remarkably these monumental earthwork forms are repeated across a large area, built to a similar scale, using a common unit of measure and incorporating a similar series of astronomical alignments. These seven sites are the largest, most elaborate, and best preserved examples of hundreds of mounds and earthworks built in the Hopewell cultural tradition in eastern North America. Associated ritual deposits contain exceptionally finely crafted objects fashioned from exotic raw materials obtained from distant parts of North America: copper from the Great Lakes, mica from the Appalachians, marine shell from the Gulf of Mexico, even obsidian from the Rocky Mountains. The Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks in Ohio were the focal center of an influential network of interaction that linked together distinct societies scattered across half a continent. The earthworks were settings for ceremonies, sacred rituals and festivals that brought together peoples living in small dispersed settlements, and may have drawn pilgrims bearing exotic gifts from hundreds of miles away. Significantly, 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.

The **Newark Earthworks** is the largest complex of geometric earthworks ever built. Enormous geometric earthen enclosures connected by walled avenues originally sprawled across more than four square miles. The major works include a gigantic circular enclosure 1200 feet in diameter (the Great Circle Earthworks), another slightly smaller circle connected to an octagon (Octagon Earthworks), and a large, nearly perfect square enclosure (Wright Earthworks). Dozens of smaller enclosures and conical and loaf-shaped mounds were scattered across the complex. The Elements of the Octagon Earthworks are intricately aligned to significant events in the cyclical movement of the sun and moon along the horizon.

The **High Bank Works** consists of a conjoined circle and octagon that mirrors the geometry of the Octagon Earthworks at Newark, nearly 60 miles distant. These are the only two circle-and-octagon enclosures ever constructed. The circles at both sites are exactly the same size. The long axes of these two works are oriented precisely at right angles to one another and they share a complex set of alignments to the sun and moon. These exact similarities across vast distances distinguish Hopewell monument-building as a uniquely inter-regional phenomenon.

The **Hopewell Mound Group** consists of an earthen wall nearly six feet tall and two miles long, enclosing an area of more than 100 acres. A geometrically perfect circle 350 feet in diameter and a perfect square 850 feet on a side accompany the main earthwork. At least 40 mounds are located in and around the enclosure, including the largest Hopewell mound in Ohio: Mound 25 was nearly 500 feet long, 180 feet wide and 30 feet tall. Associated ritual deposits contain the largest, richest and most diverse array of exotic raw materials and exquisitely crafted Hopewell objects ever encountered.

The **Hopeton Earthworks** and the **Mound City Group** constitute a complementary pair of ritual spaces located three miles apart on opposite sides of the Scioto River. The Mound City Group played an important role as a mortuary precinct: a simple rectangular enclosure surrounds at least 26 mounds, each built over the remains of a wooden building once used for funerary rites and other ceremonial activities. The Hopeton Earthwork includes two conjoined circle and rectangular enclosures, each encompassing about 20 acres, but no associated mounds or mortuary features. The two sites likely served complementary roles in the ritual life of a single community.

Seip Earthworks is the best example of the complex “tripartite” geometric earthwork. Only five of these were ever built. Each includes three conjoined geometric figures with nearly identical dimensions: a large circle close to 1500 feet in diameter, a smaller circle nearly 750 feet in diameter, and a square earthwork more than 1100 feet across. The total length of the earthwork walls is more than 2.3 miles, and the total area enclosed is almost 110 acres. A huge central loaf-shaped mound 240 feet long, 160 feet wide and 30 feet high towers over the landscape. Rich ritual deposits buried under the mound attest to Hopewell ceremonialism, artistry, and long-distance interactions.

Fort Ancient is the largest and best preserved example of a Hopewell hilltop enclosure. Here, more than three-and-a-half miles of earthen walls ring a vast mesa-like hilltop. Astronomically-aligned mounds, post-circles and other ritual facilities mark this as a sacred ceremonial center.

Criterion (iii):

Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks bear unique and exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition which has disappeared. Built and used during the Hopewell horizon of the Middle Woodland period (AD 1 – 400), the components included in this serial nomination are the finest examples of the Hopewell cultural tradition. Hopewell mounds and earthworks are unique in the history of North America and distinct from other traditions involving earth construction such as those manifested at Poverty Point and Cahokia. Hopewell earthwork-building is unique in the construction of enormous yet intricate and precise earth-walled geometric spaces and immense hilltop enclosures—the scale and complexity of these architectural landscapes is unmatched anywhere in the world. Mounds at Poverty Point and Cahokia were built as platforms to support residential or chiefly buildings. In contrast, Hopewell mounds represent a distinctive and now-

lost tradition in which mounds were built over top of the locations of decommissioned wooden buildings that once hosted ceremonial and mortuary events. These enormous architectural landscapes were replicated and elaborated at a host of locations across the three south-flowing drainages of the middle Ohio Valley. These were sacred non-residential spaces where otherwise dispersed social groups gathered for feasts, funerals and other rites of passage. Hopewell ceremonialism is distinguished by the use of exceptionally finely crafted objects fashioned from exotic raw materials obtained from distant parts of North America: copper from the Great Lakes, mica from the Appalachians, marine shell from the Gulf of Mexico, even obsidian from the Rocky Mountains. The quantity, diversity and aesthetic quality of these quintessentially Hopewell symbols are unmatched in the history of Native American artistry and craftsmanship. The most elaborate material traces of Hopewell ceremonialism are documented in the symbolic forms of the mounds and earthworks and the *in situ* archaeological deposits preserved at the nominated components. The nominated components include the finest examples of each type of Hopewell monumental architecture: mathematically precise geometric earthworks, hilltop enclosures, and mortuary precincts. Architecture on this scale and of this sophistication usually is associated with societies like those that built Cahokia: hierarchically organized, densely settled urban societies reliant upon intensive agriculture for their subsistence. Poverty Point reflects a different cultural tradition: built by hunter-gatherers without agricultural surplus or pottery but nonetheless capable of sustaining a large, permanent, sedentary population. The Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks are distinct from both: these were created in the context of small and dispersed societies without kings or chiefs, experimenting with low-level food production, but not yet fully committed to maize agriculture. The architectural and archaeological records associated with the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks represent a significant transitional stage in human society, economy, and settlement: between band and chiefdom; between forager and farmer; between nomad and villager.

Integrity¹

The seven nominated earthworks form a complete and coherent group that represents all the essential attributes of Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks in an exceptional way, thereby demonstrating Outstanding Universal Value as a series. The seven components are not a mere catalog; instead each component is carefully selected to contribute to the OUV of the serial property as a whole. Collectively, the seven components convey an understanding and

¹ This statement is influenced by review of the following documents. *Serial Nomination of Hill Forts of Rajasthan* (inscribed 2013) <http://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/247rev.pdf>

WHC Report on Serial Nominations and Properties <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2010/whc10-34Com-9Be.pdf>

WHC Report of the International Expert Meeting on Integrity, UAE March 2012
<http://whc.unesco.org/document/121725>

appreciation of the essential attributes of Hopewell ceremonial earthen architecture: enormous scale, geometric precision, astronomical alignments and broad geographic distribution. The components of the series are judiciously chosen to represent the full range of formal and functional variability in Hopewell earthen architecture, including lowland geometric enclosures, mortuary precincts, and hilltop enclosures. The components represent the uniquely broad geographic range across which Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks were constructed: examples are chosen from each of the three principal south-flowing river valleys that hosted earthwork concentrations. The remarkable ritual deposits of artifacts and raw materials associated with the series attest to the artistry, craftsmanship, and continent-wide interaction networks that uniquely characterize Hopewell ceremonialism. The physical fabric of the components is in good condition. Above-ground architectural elements are readily apparent at Newark (Observatory Circle and Octagon Earthworks), Fort Ancient, Seip and Mound City. Where plowing has affected the visibility of mounds and earthworks, archeological geophysics and limited excavations demonstrate that a rich subsurface archeological record is intact at each of the components, with excellent potential for further discoveries and deeper understanding and appreciation of the Outstanding Universal Value of the series.

Authenticity

The individual components and the series as a whole credibly and truthfully express the Outstanding Universal Value of Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks in terms of their monumental scale, geometric complexity, astronomical alignment, broad geographic distribution, and association with a continent-wide interaction sphere. The individual components retain authenticity in terms of location and setting, form and design, and materials and substance. Any reconstructed elements are shown to be based on complete and meticulous archival and archeological documentation to ensure fidelity to the original fabric. The nominated components continue to inspire a sense of sacredness and deep spiritual connection among Native American and other individuals today.