

What is Serpent Mound?

Serpent Mound is the world's largest surviving example of an ancient animal effigy mound. Winding 1,348 feet over the ground, the beautifully preserved ancient earthwork depicts the form of an undulating serpent with an oval shape at the head. Many American Indian cultures called America's eastern woodlands home for thousands of years prior to European contact, producing sophisticated art and large-scale earthworks. Nearly all of these landscape-scale earthworks have been lost in recent centuries to development and agriculture. We are fortunate that early visionaries took the necessary steps to protect the singular Serpent Mound.

Who built Serpent Mound?

Early excavations of Serpent Mound revealed a complete absence of artifacts which would have helped identify which ancient American Indian culture constructed this immense earthwork. It is possible that several different cultures used and even amended the site successively over time, regardless of the identity of the original builders. Three conical burial mounds are found on the same ridgetop as Serpent Mound, offering tantalizing clues, but no certainty. Two of the mounds belong to the Adena Culture (800 BC-100 AD), and one to the Fort Ancient Culture (1000-1650 AD). A nearby village site was occupied by both the Adena and the Fort Ancient Cultures.

Carbon dating of organic material from inside the Serpent Mound has provided conflicting dates for both Fort Ancient and Adena time periods. Investigation and speculation continues in both archaeological and less formal circles in an attempt to explain the Serpent's mysterious origins and use. More recent excavations in 2012 revealed what appears to be the buried foundations of a fourth coil near the head, which at some point in the effigy's history was removed to create the elegant design we see today. Archaeological research at the site is ongoing.

What was the original purpose of Serpent Mound?

Serpent Mound's value to its first builders remains unclear, lost to fragmented oral traditions over the centuries. There are many modern theories regarding what the original intent may have been. Striking astronomical correlations with the serpent's sinuous coils, the most defensible being the perfect alignment of the serpent's head with the direction of the setting solstice sun, demonstrate the builders' earthly acknowledgment of celestial events. The nearby burial mounds, and the serpent's timeless ability to elicit awe and humility to those who witness it, suggest the mound was perhaps a site of sacred ceremony.

The serpent motif has a symbolic connection in many cultures throughout the world to the cycles of birth and death, resurrection, and the higher and lower worlds.

Modern visitors are encouraged to contemplate the mysteries of our land's ancestors, feel a connection to the past, and experience the wonder of early people's physical and artistic accomplishments. Mystery, rather than certainty, remains this site's greatest gift to present generations, and all visitors are welcome to enter the circle of conjecture and speculation.

What is the recent history of the site?

Serpent Mound was known to American Indians and early settlers of Adams County for many years, but was brought to general attention of the country in the 1840's by the famous pair of surveyors, Squier and Davis, who made a broad survey of many of Ohio's greatest earthworks. In the 1880's, Massachusetts archaeologist Frederic Ward Putnam became interested in the site and noticed that it was being degraded by erosion and vandalism. He succeeded in raising the funds to purchase the farmlands in



the name of Harvard University, and the land was soon dedicated as a public park.

In 1900 the site was turned over to the Ohio Historical Society, who supervised the construction of the observation tower overlooking the effigy, and later in the 1930's, most of the park's current facilities. The first interpretive exhibits in the museum were added in the mid-1970's, and the non-profit Arc of Appalachia began managing the park on behalf of the Historical Society, now Ohio History Connection, in 2009.

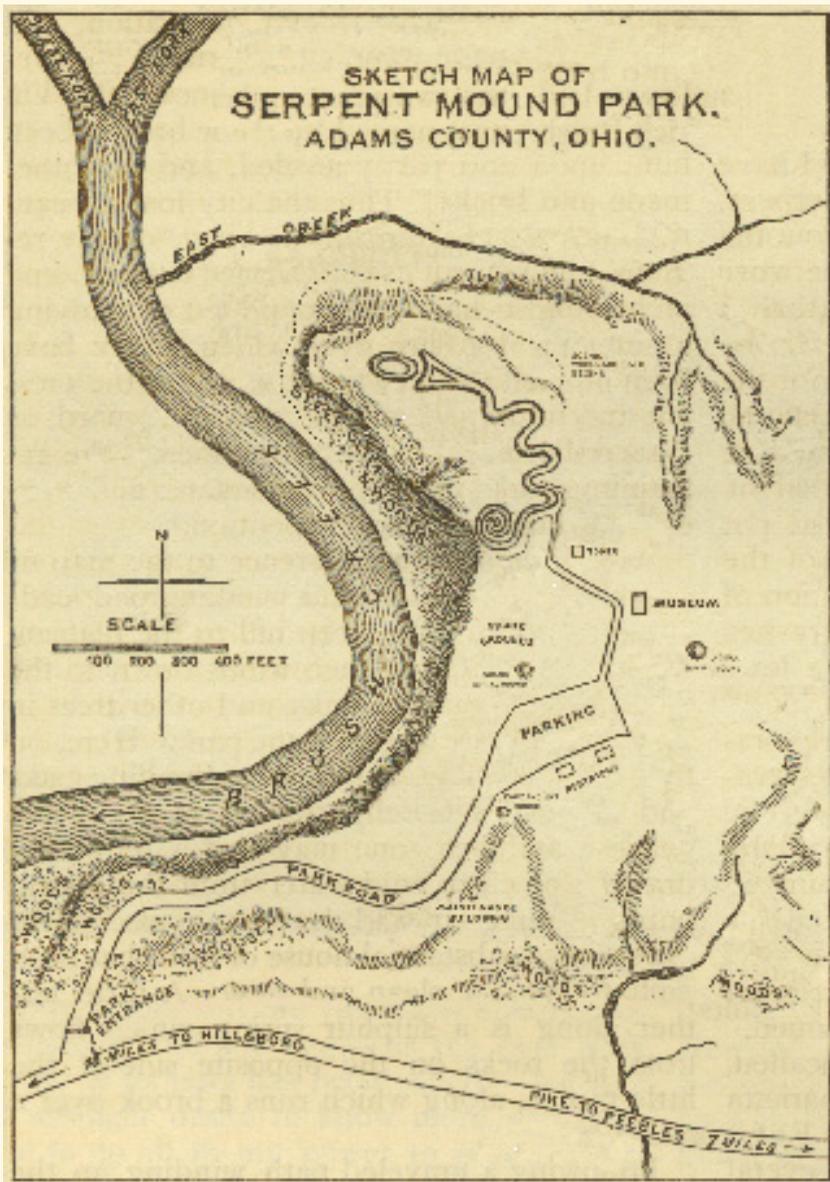
Natural History

A tributary of Ohio Brush Creek runs through the park—a haven for many species of aquatic life, both rare and common. The rock cliffs below Serpent Mound are of a dolomitic limestone, a bedrock that provides the classic karst features of grottos, sinkholes, and springs in the larger region.

The earthwork itself sits atop a narrow flat ridge at the edge of an ancient crater that is at least four miles in diameter. The crater was formed by a meteorite impact that occurred 250 million years ago, long before the land was occupied by human cultures. Today, the crater is greatly eroded and softened by the forces of rainwater, but is still noticeable, especially in the jumbled rock layers characteristic of the area.

At the ancient crater's center, the bedrock has been pushed upward at least a thousand feet from its original position. Throughout the bowl of the structure there are massive cracks, faults, and places where the rock layers are jumbled, or even upsidedown.

It is not known whether any of these special natural features formed a reason for the location of Serpent Mound.



Map amended from *Country Illustrated Magazine*, F.W. Putnam, 1889.

A Landscape in Transition

We are no longer mowing the grass between the bustling museum/picnic shelter hub and Serpent Mound in order to provide an ambience more in keeping with what earlier peoples would have experienced at this ancient ceremonial site long ago. Use this short transition zone to listen to the soft sounds of crickets and birds, allow your mind to quiet, and let yourself drift back in time.

Nature Preservation and Sacred Sites... the Perfect Combination

The Arc of Appalachia manages 15 preserves and 5,000 acres of natural areas and ancient historic sites in southern Ohio. We invite you to visit two of our other preserves.



Nature & Hiking

Highlands Nature Sanctuary

The Highlands Nature Sanctuary is the headquarters of the Arc of Appalachia, protecting 2200 acres along the stunning vertical cliffs of the Rocky Fork Gorge.

At the Sanctuary's Appalachian Forest Museum, eight fine-art murals teach visitors the world significance of Ohio's forest. Three trails lead into the beautiful rock formations of the Rocky Fork Gorge and an old-growth beech forest.

Admission is free. The Museum and its trail complex are open from 9:30 to 5:00 on weekends only, from April through October. The Sanctuary is a 24 mile drive north from Serpent Mound.



Hiking & Earthworks

Fort Hill

Fort Hill protects a 2000 year old earthen-walled ridgetop enclosure which most likely originally served as a gathering ground for ceremonies. The wall has a circumference of over one and a half miles, is interrupted with 36 gateways, and encompasses an interior space of 35 acres.

A total of eleven miles of hiking trails exist at Fort Hill, offering some of the best hiking in the entire state of Ohio. Fort Hill protects the largest, oldest, and most unfragmented block of native forest in southern Ohio.

Admission is free. The park is open every day from dawn to dusk. Dogs permitted on leash. Fort Hill is a 16 mile drive north from Serpent Mound.

Directions: From Serpent Mound, turn left or east on 73 to Locust Grove. Turn north or left on 41. Take 41 through Sinking Springs. For Fort Hill, four miles north of town turn left on Fort Hill Road and follow park signs. Fort Hill is one mile down on the left.

For Highlands Nature Sanctuary, continue north on 41 to the next town, Cynthiana. Turn left in the middle of town on Barrett's Mill Road. 3.25 miles further, turn right on Cave Road. Follow Cave Road approximately two miles. The Appalachian Forest Museum, the Sanctuary's visitor center, will be on the left, with parking on the right.

For more information see www.arcofappalachia.org



Serpent Mound

Serpent Mound is managed by Ohio History Connection and is operated by the Arc of Appalachia.

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Park Information & Regulations

Parking Fee: \$8/vehicle.

Please do not walk on the earthworks or leave the asphalt path to approach the serpent effigy. Serpent Mound and the park's three burial mounds are ancient American Indian sites which were sacred to past cultures, and remain sacred to many people today.

Park Open: The park is open daily from 9:00 am to dusk.

Museum Open: The museum is open daily in from April through October, and on weekends in March, November and most of December. See our website for hours: www.arcofappalachia.org.

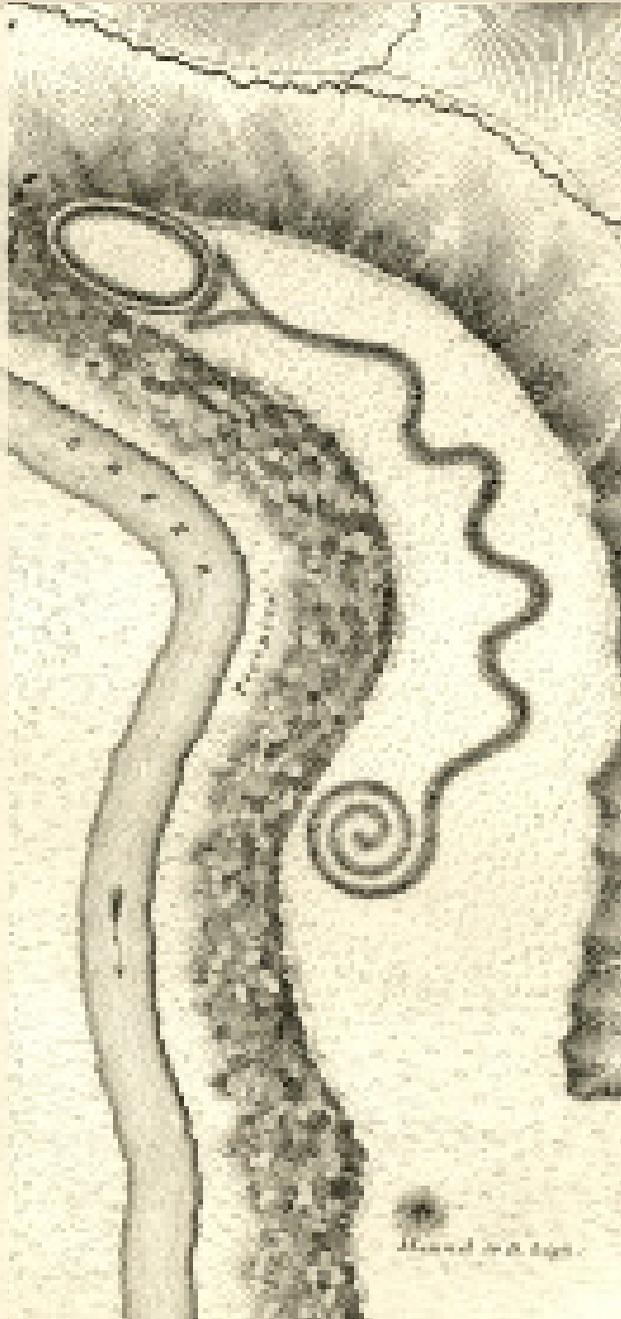
Prohibited: Defacing or disruption of earthworks, stones, or soil, and any type of archaeological searching or collecting of artifacts is strictly prohibited.

Dogs are permitted on leash only.

Groups: To assist our staff, groups are asked to notify us in advance of their visit. School groups are welcome. Contact us for more information.

Please do not pick the flowers! Serpent Mound is rich in wildflowers, particularly in the spring. Please let the flowers bloom freely so that others can enjoy them. No off-trail hiking permitted in the natural areas of the park.

The picnic shelter is available for private events for a small rental fee. Please enquire.



Right: From an illustration of Serpent Mound, Squier & Davis, 1846