



VISITING & HIKING
Spruce Hill, Arc of Appalachia Preserve System
Current Size: 269 acres

The Arc of Appalachia's operations are 100% supported by private donations. If you love what we do, [please support us](#), so that our wildlands preservation work and trail stewardship can continue.



Dogs are permitted at Spruce Hill on a six-foot leash. Please see [Hiking Arc Preserves](#) for more dog-friendly trails.

Hiking Trails: Spruce Hill is not yet developed with a formal Arc of Appalachian trail system but the pre-existing farm lane provides simple and primitive access to the preserve. Because entrance and trail signs have not been installed, be sure to print the directions and carry them with you in order to find the trailhead. The old farm lane is easy to find and begins off the parking lot from where it makes a slow and long ascent to the ridgetop, ending at the edge of a large meadow. You will return to the parking lot by the same route, roughly 1.5 miles roundtrip. The trail is difficult only because of the relatively long length of the farm lane and the gradual but uninterrupted ascent to the top. The lane is uneven and rutted in places. It is easy to get winded on the way up.

You are entering a highly protected nature preserve. PLEASE REMEMBER THAT NO ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIGGING, DISTURBING, OR COLLECTING IS PERMITTED on this important archaeological site. Regulations also exist to protect natural communities from the impact of public visitors. Please follow these regulations so that you leave Spruce Hill as beautiful as you found it. Remain on the trail at all times, walking in single file to protect bulbs of native wildflowers bordering the trail. Do not disturb, pick, or collect flowers, plants, rocks, or wildlife. Hunting, caving, fishing, trail biking, rock climbing, wading, campfires, and swimming are prohibited.

Address: 576 Spruce Hill Road, Chillicothe, OH 45601

Directions: Spruce Hill is approximately 32 miles east of Hillsboro, 12 miles west of Chillicothe off US-50, and 2.8 miles east of Bourneville on US-50. **From US-50** turn south on Blain Highway and proceed for 1.1 miles. Turn right on Black Run Road. After .7 miles Black Run Road turns into Spruce Hill Road. Continue on Spruce Hill Road. After .4 mile Spruce Hill Road makes a sharp left; continue on Spruce Hill Road for another .2 mile. A mowed parking lot will be on your right.

Interpretive Kiosk: An interpretive kiosk is not yet posted at the preserve trailhead.

Spruce Hill hiking trails are open from sunrise to sunset. Please note parking lots are not winter-maintained and the trails are not safe to hike during periods of heavy rain, ice, and snow. Trails are closed during our annual Deer Management Hunt which takes place on the 1) Monday through Sunday following Thanksgiving, and 2) Saturday and Sunday before Christmas.

Archaeological & natural significance: The outer rim of the hill known as Spruce Hill is outlined by a stone wall that was built 2,000 years ago by the Native American Hopewell Culture, demarcating what was surely ancient ceremonial space. It is one of about a dozen hilltop enclosures found in Ohio, the most famous of which are Fort Hill and Fort Ancient. In addition to Spruce Hill, only two other hilltop enclosures were built solely with stone, as opposed to earthen materials. At 140 acres, Spruce is the largest Hopewell-era hilltop enclosure discovered to date, the wall alone stretching over 2.25 miles. This broad vista of Paint Creek's wide floodplain as viewed from the top of the preserve's bluffs and the hill's flat mesa-like ridgetop is probably the reason why the Hopewell people chose this prominent ridge as the setting for one of their ceremonial grounds.

Adding to the mystery of how exactly Spruce Hill was used is evidence that very hot fires burned along the walls, so hot that the sandstone rocks melted and produced slag. About thirty spots along the walls include fused, glazed sandstone, vitrified soils, and/or burnt clay and cinders. No one knows if the walls were burned as an act of violence, or ceremonially, but most archaeologists favor the latter premise because clumps of baked clay have been found retaining the impressions of stacked logs, as if the wall may have been fueled with wood and then intentionally burned. If the fire was deliberately set at once, it certainly would have been a dramatic sight.

Ancient heartland of the Hopewell Culture: The Hopewell Culture is better known for its floodplain earthworks than its high-elevation enclosures. People of this culture built at least thirty-six complex earthworks on the floodplains – typically groups of carefully placed mounds surrounded by high earthen walls in the shape of perfect circles, squares, and other geometric shapes. Perhaps the most famous of these sacred landscapes are the vast earthwork complexes that once covered present-day Newark and Portsmouth. Spruce Hill’s upland enclosure sits high above two of these floodplain earthwork complexes: Baum Works and Seip Works, the latter protected by the National Park Service.

Spruce Hill, Baum, and Seip are part of the Hopewell Heartland, the epicenter of which lies in present-day Chillicothe where the great waterways of the Paint and the Scioto find their confluence. Approximately two dozen ceremonial earthwork complexes once stood on the floodplains of Ross County – fully two-thirds of all the major Hopewell earthworks ever constructed (and virtually all of them in Ohio). Ohio’s remnant earthworks offer a glimpse into the Hopewell Culture’s glorious 2,000-year-old past and inspire awe and wonder in all who behold the grandeur of these ancient monuments.

Natural history: Spruce Hill is completely forested except for the flat ridgetop, which was previously a farm field and now provides meadow habitat. The preserve is renowned for its showy spring wildflowers which include three species of trilliums, celandine wood poppy, dwarf larkspur, and large colonies of wild leeks. It also boasts a high count of native plant species. The extremely steep banks of the hillside overlooking Paint Creek shelter small stands of hemlocks. On the ridgetop is a shallow pond that some speculate was once a deep reservoir for water constructed by people of the Hopewell Culture. If so, it is now mostly filled with organic debris and shaded by buttonbush, pin oak, and swamp white oak. This little wetlands island is an important spring breeding site for spring peepers, spotted salamanders, and wood frogs.

Preserve history: In 2008, the National Park Service staff at Hopewell Culture National Historical Park reached out to the Arc of Appalachia, asking if we could respond to the emergency of Spruce Hill being sold by auction. We said “Yes!” and jumped into action. With the help of Clean Ohio funding and emergency fund-raising from private donors, Spruce Hill was successfully purchased and is now saved as a perpetual natural area and historic site. The site is recognized by Congress as land worthy of national park designation. If fate had led Spruce Hill to become a National Park instead of a nonprofit preserve, Spruce Hill would probably be heading toward World Heritage Site designation today. Unquestionably, as an archaeological site, Spruce Hill has worldwide significance.