Etowah Indian Mounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Etowah Mounds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. National Register of Historic Places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. National Historic Landmark</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mound B, seen from Mound A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nearest city:</th>
<th>Cartersville, GA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coordinates:</td>
<td>34°7'30.47&quot;N 84°48'27.59&quot;W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governing body:</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRHP Reference#:</td>
<td>66000272</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Added to NRHP:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designated NHL:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Etowah Indian Mounds (9BR1)** is a 54-acre (unknown operator: u'strong' m²) archaeological site in Bartow County, Georgia south of Cartersville, in the United States. Built and occupied in three phases, from 1000–1550 CE, the prehistoric site is located on the north shore of the Etowah River. Etowah Indian Mounds Historic Site is a designated National Historic Landmark, managed by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. It is the most intact Mississippian culture site in the Southeastern United States.
History

In the 19th century, European-American settlers mistakenly believed that the mounds had been built by the Cherokee, who then occupied the region; however, the Iroquoian-speaking tribe did not reach this part of Georgia until the late 18th century and could not have built the mounds.

Late 20th-century studies showed the mounds were built and occupied by prehistoric indigenous peoples of the South Appalachian Mississippian culture (a regional variation of the Mississippian culture) of eastern North America. They were ancestors of the historic Muskogean language-speaking Muscogee (Creek) people who later emerged in the area. Etowah is a Muskogee word derived from *italwa* meaning “town”. The federally recognized Muscogee (Creek) Nation and Poarch Band of Creek Indians consider Etalwa to be their most important ancestral town. From 1000–1550 CE, Etowah was occupied by a series of cycling chiefdoms over the course of five and a half centuries.

Site chronology

Archaeologists used changes in ceramic styles across multiple sites in the Etowah River Valley to determine timelines for the region. The ceramics found at Etowah and other regional sites have been reconstructed and allow Etowah to be placed into the following sequences. The town was occupied in three distinct archaeological phases: ca. 1000–1200 CE, ca. 1250–1375 CE, and ca. 1375–1550 CE. It was at its peak roughly from 1325–1375 CE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Regional periods</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Etowah Site Phases</th>
<th>Ceramic markers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Mississippian</td>
<td>Etowah Phase</td>
<td>1000 – 1100 CE</td>
<td>Early Etowah</td>
<td>ladder base diamond predominant motif, shell tempering more common</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1100 – 1200 CE</td>
<td>Late Etowah</td>
<td>2-bar diamond motif more prevalent, grit tempering more common, filofot cross, Etowah Incised and Hiwassee Island red on buff first appear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Mississippian</td>
<td>Savannah Phase</td>
<td>1200 – 1250 CE</td>
<td>Unoccupied</td>
<td>no inhabited sites along Etowah river valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1250 – 1325 CE</td>
<td>Early Wilbanks</td>
<td>coarse grit temper commonest, pottery thicker, bolder and with sloppier, complicated, stamped designs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1325 – 1375 CE</td>
<td>Late Wilbanks</td>
<td>thinner pottery, more finely done stamping, minority vessel forms and designs appear, Rudder Comb Incised, Dallas Incised, Pisgah-like and Lake Jackson decorated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Mississippian</td>
<td>Lamar Phase</td>
<td>1375 – 1425 CE</td>
<td>Stamp Creek</td>
<td>lack of Lamar Incised, rim modifications appear,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1425 – 1475 CE</td>
<td>Mayes(provisional)</td>
<td>wider rims than previous phase, boldly executed 3-line incised designs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1475 – 1550 CE</td>
<td>Brewer</td>
<td>narrower incised lines, stamping sloppy with most motifs no longer distinguishable, rectilinear designs common, Brewster and Barnett are temporally equivalent and are more of a geographic distinction in the valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1500 – 1625 CE</td>
<td>Barnett</td>
<td>higher percentage of shell tempering than Brewster with types such as Dallas Plain, Dallas Incised and Dallas Filleted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[6]
Site description

Etowah has three main platform mounds and three lesser mounds. The Temple Mound, Mound A, is 63 feet (unknown operator: u'strong' m) high, taller than a six-story building, and covers 3 acres (unknown operator: u'strong' m²) at its base. In 2005-2008 ground mapping with magnetometers revealed new information and data, showing that the site was much more complex than had previously been believed. The study team has identified a total of 140 buildings on the site. In addition, Mound A was found to have had four major structures and a courtyard at the height of the community's power. Mound B is 25 feet (unknown operator: u'strong' m) high; Mound C, which rises 10 feet (unknown operator: u'strong' m), is the only one to have been completely excavated. Magnetometers enabled archaeologists to determine the location of temples of log and thatch, which were originally built on top of the mounds. Adjacent to the mounds is a raised ceremonial plaza, which was used for ceremonies, stickball and chunkey games, and as a bazaar for trade goods.

When visiting the Etowah Mounds, guests can view the "borrow pits" (which archaeologists at one time thought were moats) which were dug out to create the three large mounds in the center of the park.

Older pottery found on the site suggest that there was an earlier village (ca. 200 BCE–600 CE) associated with the Swift Creek culture. This earlier Middle Woodland period occupation at Etowah may have been related to the major Swift Creek center of Leake Mounds, approximately two miles downstream (west) of Etowah.

War was commonplace; many archaeologists believe the people of Etowah battled for hegemony over the Alabama river basin with those of Moundville, a Mississippian site in present-day Alabama. The town was protected by a sophisticated semicircular fortification system. An outer band formed by nut tree orchards prevented enemy armies from shooting masses of flaming arrows into the town. A 9 feet (unknown operator: u'strong' m) to 10 feet (unknown operator: u'strong' m) deep moat blocked direct contact by the enemy with the palisaded walls. It also functioned as a drainage system during major floods, common for centuries, from this period and into the 20th century. Workers formed the palisade by setting upright 12 feet (unknown operator: u'strong' m) high logs into a ditch approximately 12 inches (unknown operator: u'strong' mm) on center and then back-filling around the timbers to form a levee. Guard towers for archers were spaced approximately 80 feet (unknown operator: u'strong' m) apart.
Artifacts

The artifacts discovered in burials within the Etowah site indicate that its residents developed an artistically and technically advanced culture. Numerous copper tools, weapons and ornamental copper plates accompanied the burials of members of Etowah’s elite class. Where proximity to copper protected the fibers from degeneration, archaeologists also found brightly colored cloth with ornate patterns. These were the remnants of the clothing of social elites.

Numerous clay figurines and ten Mississippian stone statues have been found through the years in the vicinity of Etowah. Many are paired statues, which portray a man sitting cross-legged and a woman kneeling. The female figures wear wrap-around skirts and males are usually portrayed without visible clothing, although both usually have elaborate hairstyles. The pair are thought to represent lineage ancestors. Individual statues of young women also show them kneeling, but with additional characteristics such as visible sex organs, which are not visible on the paired statues. This female figure is thought to represent a fertility or Earth Mother goddess. The birdman, hand in eye, solar cross, and other symbols associated with the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex appear in many artifacts found at Etowah.

Trade

The Etowah River is a tributary of the Coosa and Alabama rivers, and forms the border between the southern edge of the Ridge and Valley Appalachians and the Piedmont Plateau. Trade and tribute brought whelk shells from the Gulf of Mexico; copper, mica and flint from the Cumberland Plateau; and “galena, graphite, and an array of ochers to provide pigment for painting buildings, bodies, and works of art; greenstone and marble to furnish raw material for tools, weapons and ritual objects” from the Piedmont. The loamy riverbed soil could be easily tilled with digging sticks and stone and shell hoes. Its fertility was annually renewed by the river’s floods. Free of frost most of the year, the land yielded rich harvests of corn, beans, and squash.

Habitat

Chestnut, walnut, hickory, and persimmon trees that grew in upland forests provided nuts and fruit for both the people of Etowah and the white-tailed deer, wild turkey, and smaller game they hunted. Other plants that were gathered include stinging nettle, paper mulberry, and a native holly whose leaves and stems were brewed into the Black drink imbibed in ritual purification ceremonies. River cane grew in dense thickets and was made into arrow shafts, thatching for roofs, splits for baskets, benches, and mats for walls and floors.

River shoals abounded in freshwater mussels and turtles. The Mississippian built v-shaped rock weirs to pen and channel catfish, drum and gar, which they caught in rivercane baskets. Researchers have found remains of more than 100 rock weirs along the Etowah River. One has been restored within the grounds of the historic site.
Post-contact

Archaeological research on the subject is not conclusive, but the Etowah site may be the same as a village of a similar name visited by Spanish conquistador Hernando de Soto in 1540. The chroniclers of the de Soto Expedition made no mention of any large mounds in their record of visiting a town named Itaba. Itaba means "boundary" or trail crossing in the Alabama language. The origin of the English name for the mounds, Etowah, is an archaic Muscogee place name, Etalwa. Etalwa probably referred to the solar cross symbol originally. In Modern Muskogee it means a "mother town."

Until studies of the late 20th century were publicized, most Georgians believed Etowah to have been built by the well-known historic Cherokee. But, the Cherokee did not arrive in this part of Georgia until the late 18th century, two to seven centuries after the mounds' construction. Scholars have evaluated sufficient evidence to determine the mound complex was unquestionably built and occupied by peoples more closely related to the Muskogean-speaking Creeks.

Both the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and Poarch Band of Creek Indians consider Etalwa to be their most important ancestral town. Related to this, the official title of the Creek Nation's Principal Chief is Etalwa Mikko, from this source (the Creek word for chief is miko). A new, large-scale model of Etalwa is on permanent display in the rotunda of the Muskogee (Creek) Capitol in Okmulgee, Oklahoma.

History of excavation and studies

Missionary Elias Cornelius visited the site in 1817 and described it in his journal published by Bela Bates Edwards in 1833. He realized a mound must have been over two hundred years old, due to the size of trees growing on it, but had little idea of its real history. Cyrus Thomas and John P. Rogan tested the site for the Smithsonian Institution in 1883. But, the first well-documented archaeological inquiry at the site did not begin until the winter of 1925, conducted by Warren K. Moorehead. His excavations into Mound C at the site revealed a rich array of Mississippian culture burial goods. These artifacts, along with the collections from Cahokia, Moundville Site, Lake Jackson Mounds, and Spiro Mounds, would comprise the majority of the materials which archaeologists used to define the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex (SECC). The professional excavation of this enormous burial mound contributed major research impetus to the study of Mississippian artifacts and peoples. It greatly increased the understanding of pre-Contact Native American artwork.

In 1947, the government built the Allatoona Dam upstream for flood control. The Etowah site was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1964.

The Etowah Indian Mounds museum displays artifacts found at the site, including Mississippian culture pottery, monolithic stone axes, Mississippian stone statuary, copper jewelry, shell gorgets, and other artifacts.
Gallery

Model of Etowah at its height

Statue of Etowah chief, Georgia State Capitol, based on archaeological findings and the descriptions of early European explorers

Ceremonial flint blades and chunky stones

Rock weir on the Etowah River

Mounds B, and C from the top of Mound A.

Notes


[8] Townsend and Sharp 151


[12] "Etowah Indian Mounds State Park", Informational Guide, Georgia Department of Natural Resources

[13] Townsend and Sharp 154

References


External links

• Etowah Indian Mounds Historic Site (http://www.gastateparks.org/info/etowah/), official site
• Etowah Mounds near Cartersville, Georgia (http://www.ngeorgia.com/ang/Etowah_Indian_Mounds_State_Historic_Site)
• "Mississippian Period" (http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-707&sug=y), New Georgia Encyclopedia
• "Etowah: Remote sensing" (http://www.archaeology.org/0811/abstracts/etowah.html), Archaeology magazine
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