

What are “mounds” and why were they built?

The Hopewell lived in many places across the eastern part of North America. Most of the Hopewell had little in common with one another. In Michigan, Hopewell people lived around the Saginaw and Grand Rivers.

The Hopewell built large *burial mounds* to bury their dead. The one way that *archaeologists* can tell if a community was Hopewell was to discover if the community built mounds to bury dead people. Another way was to see if they buried things that came from far away with the dead people in the mounds.

The mounds and the articles that were buried with each person were important to the Hopewell. Today we can look at the things found in the mounds to learn details about how the Hopewell lived.

Each year in the early summer, the Hopewell gathered to bury their dead. At these times they sang, danced, and prayed for the dead. They also got to see old friends, and talk of recent events.

The Hopewell chose burial places carefully. They put each mound on top of a *gravel deposit*. The gravel deposit needed to be at least five feet higher than the surrounding land so the water would roll off.



burial mound: a man-made hill used to bury dead people

archaeologist: a person who studies prehistoric people and their culture

All mound-building communities were not Hopewell.

Gravel deposit: where many small stones are found all in one spot

When the Hopewell built a burial mound, the workers first dug down two or three feet to the gravel level to form a pit. They covered the floor of the pit with fine dirt. Then they laid down logs on which to put the dead person. Next they dug small drains.

After special songs and prayers, the dead person was placed on the logs and surrounded by ceremonial *grave goods*. Later, the grave was covered over with soil carried in baskets and was then topped with a layer of bark. Finally, two more layers of dirt were added to complete the mound.

In Michigan not all Hopewell were buried in mounds. A mound burial was a sign of importance in a community. Both men and women received mound burials. In Michigan we have examples of children who were buried in mounds.

“Grave Goods” are made for the sole purpose of being buried with the person for whom they were made.