

LIBERTY EARTHWORKS

The Liberty earthworks are located in Liberty Township, Ohio, a bit south of Chillicothe and Hopewell Culture National Historical Park. The earthwork complex is made up of three circles and a square and covers nearly 100 acres. Within and around the earthwork complex are 14 mounds. The largest of these mounds is the Edwin Harness mound.

The Harness Mound was over 150 feet long, 100 ft wide, and 20 feet tall at its highest point. This mound served as the resting place for important members of the Hopewell culture. The people living in the Scioto River Valley shared rich and vibrant religious practices with other groups of people across the eastern half of the United States. These religious practices involved celebrations in ceremonial settings such as the earthworks we see at Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, very similar to churches, temples, and mosques we see today. The people of the Hopewell culture also created religious imagery in the form of abstract designs and animal and human effigies from exotic materials such as copper, silver, mica, pipestone, and obsidian. Many of these items were recovered during archaeological excavations of the Edward Harness Mound.

The earthwork has been excavated multiple times, first by Squier and Davis in 1847; Fredric W. Putnam, an archaeologist from Harvard, excavated in 1885; Warren K. Moorehead the first curator of Ohio archeology in 1897; and William C. Mills in 1907. These excavations all took place before the technological advancement of radiocarbon dating. Dr. N'omi Greber excavated the site again in the years 1975 to 1977 and was able to uncover untouched portions of the earthwork. She was able to recover portions of charcoal and organic materials like charcoal and seeds for carbon dating helping add to the chronology of the Hopewell Period. It is because of Dr. N'omi's work that we know the Edwin Harness Mound at Liberty Earthwork complex was constructed near the end of the Hopewell Cultural Period (AD 330 – 470). During her work at the Edwin Harness Mound, her crew made an important discovery about its construction. Dr. N'omi found that the mound covered a place where a gigantic building once stood. The building has a carefully prepared clay floor and at least four rooms joined together by hallways. Inside these rooms were dozens of tombs where the ancestors of American Indians were laid to rest, along with objects and symbols that expressed ideas about the activities important to their lives. These structures would have served as special locations for ceremonial practices. Dr. N'omi Greber's work at Liberty Earthworks has inspired archaeologists to keep learning about the site and how the Native Americans from (in what is now Ross County) 2,000 years ago lived their lives and practiced their beliefs.

Now it's your turn! Dr. N'omi Greber examined artifacts and site maps to learn more about what life was like 2,000 years ago and asked important questions like where did people live, work, and celebrate? See if you can answer some of these questions.

ARTIFACT IDENTIFICATION

The landowner, Robert Lee Harness, Jr. farmed the land where Liberty Earthworks is located for several years. When he plowed, he found thousands of artifacts on the terrace. Some of these artifacts were materials used to create ceremonial artifacts while others were for everyday tools. It is your job to identify the artifacts found and interpret how they were used. Today you will be our lead archaeologist. Look at the artifacts below. On the lines next to the artifact place the letter of what Item you think it is. Then write the number of the most likely Interpretation of that artifact.

ITEM

- A. Flint Bladelet
- B. Pottery Sherd
- C. Mica Effigy
- D. Bone Awl
- E. Flecks of Mica
- F. Projectile Point

INTERPRETATION

1. A tool that is sharp on several edges used to cut and carve various materials.
2. A shiny thin material used to create ceremonial items.
3. A tool used to punch holes in leather.
4. A tool used to hunt wildlife.
5. A piece of a container used to hold many different items like food and water.
6. A ceremonial item that looks like a projectile point carved from an exotic material



Item 1: _____

Interpretation 1: _____



Item 2: _____

Interpretation 2: _____



Item 3: _____

Interpretation 3: _____



Item 4: _____

Interpretation 4: _____



Item 5: _____

Interpretation 5: _____



Item 6: _____

Interpretation 6: _____

SITE INTERPRETATION

You are helping interpret the archaeological findings at the Liberty Earthworks complex. The site is located on a terrace or a rise that sits above the floodplain of the Scioto River. Floodplains are great for finding natural resources like nuts, berries, animals for meat, and fish from the nearby river which also provided a source of fresh water. People tend to settle along floodplains because of the abundance of resources. You should also consider that the people who participated in the Hopewell culture usually lived relatively close to their ceremonial centers. Ceremonial centers are kept clean of debris and indicate special events and ceremonies. Outside the earthwork are places where craft production or preparation would be carried out.

Based on the types of artifacts you identified in your last activity try to find different activity areas within the site. Activity areas are areas of the landscape where people did specific things like make spear points, eat dinner, or celebrate.

Look at the map below, different boxes indicate different activity areas or components. Review the list of artifacts and features recovered in each component. Can you match each to their location on the map? In the red boxes on the map, write the letter of the component you think the location is associated with.

Component A

Artifacts: 10 bladelets, deer bones, charcoal, pottery

Features: hearths/firepits, several post holes arranged in a rectangular pattern

Component B

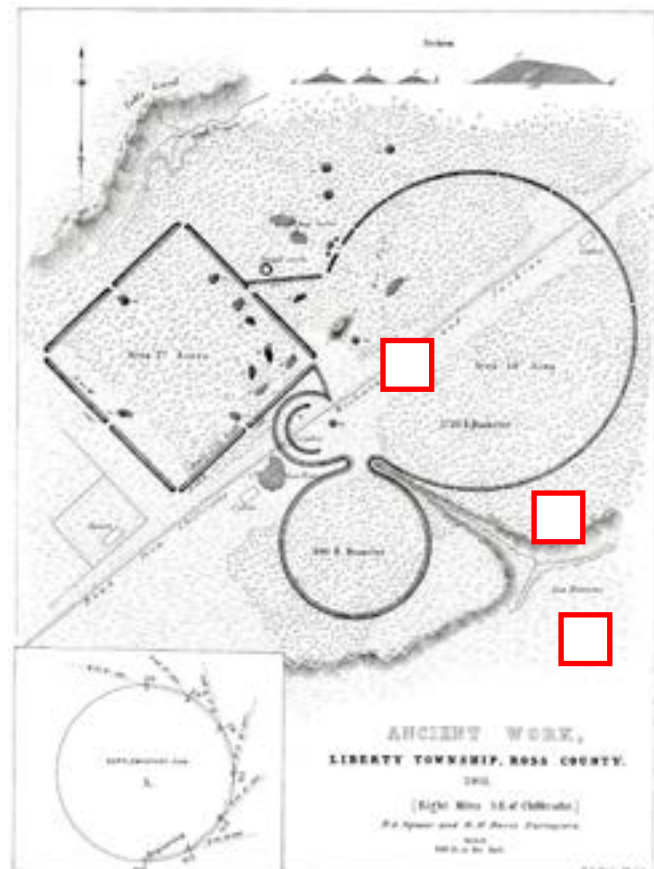
Artifacts: mica effigy of spearpoint, copper breastplate, whelk shells

Features: post holes

Component C

Artifacts: flecks of mica, copper unshaped, flint flakes

Features: fire pits



- 1. Which component of the site do you think is associated with where people were living? Why?**
- 2. Which component of the site do you think people used to create the items placed inside the ceremonial complex?**
- 3. Which component do you think people celebrated and carried out religious ceremonies? Why?**
- 4. What else would you like to know about the site? If you were an archeologist, where would you plan to excavate next?**

SOURCES:

- Greber, N'omi, James B. Griffin, Tristine Lee Smart, Richard I. Ford, Orrin C. Shane III, Raymond S. Baby, Suzanne M. Langlois, Shephanie J. Belovich, David R. Morse, Kent D. Vickery. 1983. Recent Excavations at the Edwin Harness Mound, Liberty Works, Ross County, Ohio. *Kirtlandia* 39.
- Seeman, Mark F. 1998. An Archaeological Overview and Assessment of the Harness Group (33RO22), Ross County, Ohio. Kent: Kent State University.