

Introduction & Hypothesis

Following the UNESCO designation of the Ohio’s Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks, I created this study with the goal of gauging community interest and perceptions. Given how recent the UNESCO designation is, having been put into effect January 1, 2025, there is very little research available that covers public perceptions of the Earthworks.

I originally hypothesized that, among the responses I received, a more negative sentiment towards the Earthworks would be shared primarily among former Moundbuilders Country Club members, but unforeseen circumstances prevented me from interacting with this demographic. Instead I chose to separate my participants more broadly based upon their residence in either Licking County or Wayne County.



Background Information

The Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks were constructed by members of a Middle Woodland Culture known as the Hopewell, who inhabited Ohio from 100-400 AD. The mounds were constructed with such precision that the Newark Earthworks in particular are geometrically aligned with the phases of the sun and moon.

Until July 2024, the Octagon Earthworks, one of the two Newark Earthworks my research focuses on, was under lease by the Moundbuilders Country Club, which had constructed a private golf course on top of the site. The Ohio History Connection managed to end the lease, ending years worth of legal battles between the two companies. In the process, the Moundbuilders Country Club was forced to close and relocate.

Citations

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Addressing Key Opportunities for Future Development and Education Relating to Limited Regional Awareness of the Newark Earthworks

By Finn Malishenko

Data

The data below shows the responses I received to my anonymous survey. One, highlighting participants’ level of knowledge of the Newark Earthworks (Table 1) reveals:

- 69% of the Licking County group agreed or strongly agreed that they felt knowledgeable about the Earthworks compared to only 47% of the Wayne County group
- 12% of the Licking County group disagreed or strongly disagreed that they felt knowledgeable about the Earthworks compared to 37% of the Wayne County group

The second data table (Table 2) shows whether or not the participants have visited either Newark Earthworks site. Results showed that:

- All participants in the Licking County group had visited at least one of the Earthworks sites, with 81% having visited both
- 26% of the Wayne County group had visited at least one of the Earthworks sites

I am knowledgeable about the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks of Newark, Ohio.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Other
Licking County	3	1	2	9	13	4
Wayne County	13	9	8	22	6	0

Table 1

Have you visited any of the following sites in Newark, Ohio:				
	Octagon Earthworks	Great Circle Earthworks	I have visited both sites	I have visited none of these sites
Licking County	3	3	26	0
Wayne County	2	3	11	44

Table 2

Methodology and Analysis

With the data gathered, my work analyzes the perceptions of Licking and Wayne County to:

- Glean public perceptions of the Newark Earthworks
- their level of familiarity with the site,
- And connection, if any, to Moundbuilders Country Club

From my findings I took away that there was an interest in further education of the Newark Earthworks and of Hopewell culture. I was further able to develop methods of educational programming for the Earthworks based on my past experience interning for The Works museum in Newark, Ohio. This included:

- Child-targeted programming (summer camps, weekly crafts and activities, etc.)
- Designated walking/hiking paths
- Charity events



Conclusion

Following my research study, I found that one of the most common themes among survey participants was a lack of prior information about the Newark Earthworks outside of Licking County. If given the opportunity, I would like to broaden my survey demographic to include all 88 of Ohio’s counties or potentially other states to further increase the sphere of influence of the United States’ most recent UNESCO site.

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