

# The Mound Builders

When people think of ancient buildings, they often focus on the pyramids built by the Ancient Egyptians and Mayans, or the Great Wall in China. However, there is a group of prehistoric Native Americans who also built numerous structures, primarily large mounds all around the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. These people are referred to as the Mound Builders; these ancient people are engulfed in mystery, since many of the **mounds** they built have been destroyed.



## How the Mound Builders Lived

First, even though the mound Builders lived hundreds to thousands of years ago, evidence remains that scientists analyze to determine how the mound builders lived. For example, scientists know the land along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers contained an abundance of natural resources, such as squash, corn, nuts, and berries. Since rivers went through much of the Mound Builders' territory, it can be inferred that the Mound Builders utilized the rivers to fish and trade with other tribes. This means the rivers were like highways for them. In fact, evidence suggests they traded with other tribes as far away as the Rocky mountains, which are over 1,000 miles away! Scientists have dug into their Mounds and found grizzly bear teeth that came from the Rocky Mountains inside of them!

## The Mound Builders' Mounds

Of course, the most famous feature of the Mound Builders is their gigantic mounds. These mounds can be found throughout the Mississippi and Ohio River Valleys. Many of these Mounds were built thousands of years



ago, with flat tops so the Mound Builders could construct buildings at the top. However, the Mound Builders also built mounds with large shapes on the ground. One famous shape is a giant snake, which can best be seen from the air and is over 1,000 feet long and over 100 feet high. Another large shape they built resembles a giant alligator. Some archaeologists estimate it took over 1,000 years to construct the giant alligator Mound.

### **Contact with Early European Explorers**

Early European explorers wrote about coming into contact with some of the Mound Builders in the 1500s. Hernando de Soto, a famous Spanish Explorer, wrote about seeing thousands of people living in Towns built on the mounds. Years later, other explorers returned to the Mound **Builder's** area to discover the huge towns were now mostly empty. Scientists assume diseases brought from the **Columbian Exchange** killed many of the Mound Builder's population.

### **Final Questions**

Many mysteries still remain regarding the Mound Builders. We still do not know who they were exactly, or why they built so many Mounds, or why some were in the shapes of animals? Most scientists believe the Mound Builders were early Native Americans, but other people wonder if they were groups of Vikings, Chinese, Africans, or Greeks who somehow immigrated to North America thousands of years before Columbus sailed. Despite these mysteries, the Mound Builders have proven to be a fascinating group of early Americans.

