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Pieces of Iowa's Past, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides monthly, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

Effigy Mounds National Monument **Marks 75th Anniversary**



Entrance to the Monument.
Courtesy of the National Park Service.

Established on October 25, 1949, by President Harry S. Truman, Effigy Mounds National Monument between Harpers Ferry, Iowa, and Marquette, Iowa celebrates its 75th anniversary.

President Truman established the monument because of "great scientific interest" in the mounds and what they might reveal about the "prehistoric American Indians" who built them.

Today, Effigy Mounds National Monument is a place to protect the history and resources of the area and to admire the natural and scenic beauty.

What appears to look like random bumps and grooves, an effigy mound is a raised pile of earth built in the shape of a stylized animal, symbol, religious figure, human, or other figure.



President Harry S. Truman.

October 25, 1949

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Whereas the earth mounds in the northeastern part of the State of Iowa known as the Effigy Mounds are of great scientific interest because of the variety of their forms, which include animal effigy, bird effigy, conical, and linear types, illustrative of a significant phase of the mound-building culture of the prehistoric American Indians; and

Whereas the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments at its meeting held October 28-30, 1941 declared the Effigy Mounds to be of national scientific importance; and

Whereas the State of Iowa has acquired title to 1,204.39 acres of land containing these unusual objects, and has conveyed 1,000 acres thereof to the United States as a donation for national-monument purposes, such conveyance having been accepted on behalf of the United States by the Acting Director of the National Park Service on August 31, 1949; and

Whereas it is contemplated that the State of Iowa will convey the remaining 204.39 acres of such land to the United States for national monument purposes in the near future; and

Whereas it appears that it would be in the public interest to set aside and reserve the said land as a national monument as hereinafter indicated:

Now, Therefore, I, Harry S. Truman, President of the United States of America, under and by virtue of the authority vested in me by section 2 of the act of June 8, 1906, 34 Stat. 225 (16 U.S.C. 431), do proclaim that, subject to all valid existing rights, the lands within the following-described boundaries and shown on the diagram hereto attached and forming a part hereof which belong to the United States are hereby reserved and established as a national monument, to be known as the Effigy Mounds National Monument; and that the lands within such boundaries which do not now belong to the United States shall become a part of such monument upon the acquisition of title thereto by the United States:

The effigy mound builder culture is primarily associated with the years 550–1200 CE during the Late Woodland Period, although radiocarbon dating has placed the origin of certain mounds as far back as 320 BCE.

Effigy mounds were constructed in many Native American cultures. Scholars believe they were primarily for religious purposes, although some also fulfilled a burial mound function. The builders of the effigy mounds are usually referred to as the Mound Builders.



Effigy Mound Region.
Courtesy of the National Park Service.

First discovered in 1880, over 3,200 animal-shaped effigy mounds have been identified in the upper Midwest. According to the National Park Service, the area in which effigy mounds are found "extends from Dubuque, Iowa, north into southeast Minnesota, across southern Wisconsin from the Mississippi to Lake Michigan, and along the Wisconsin–Illinois boundary."

The mounds of the Mississippi River regions in Wisconsin and Iowa most commonly feature imagery of the bear and the bird, while the mounds of the Lake Michigan and Winnebago areas most commonly feature water spirits, turtle and panther mounds.

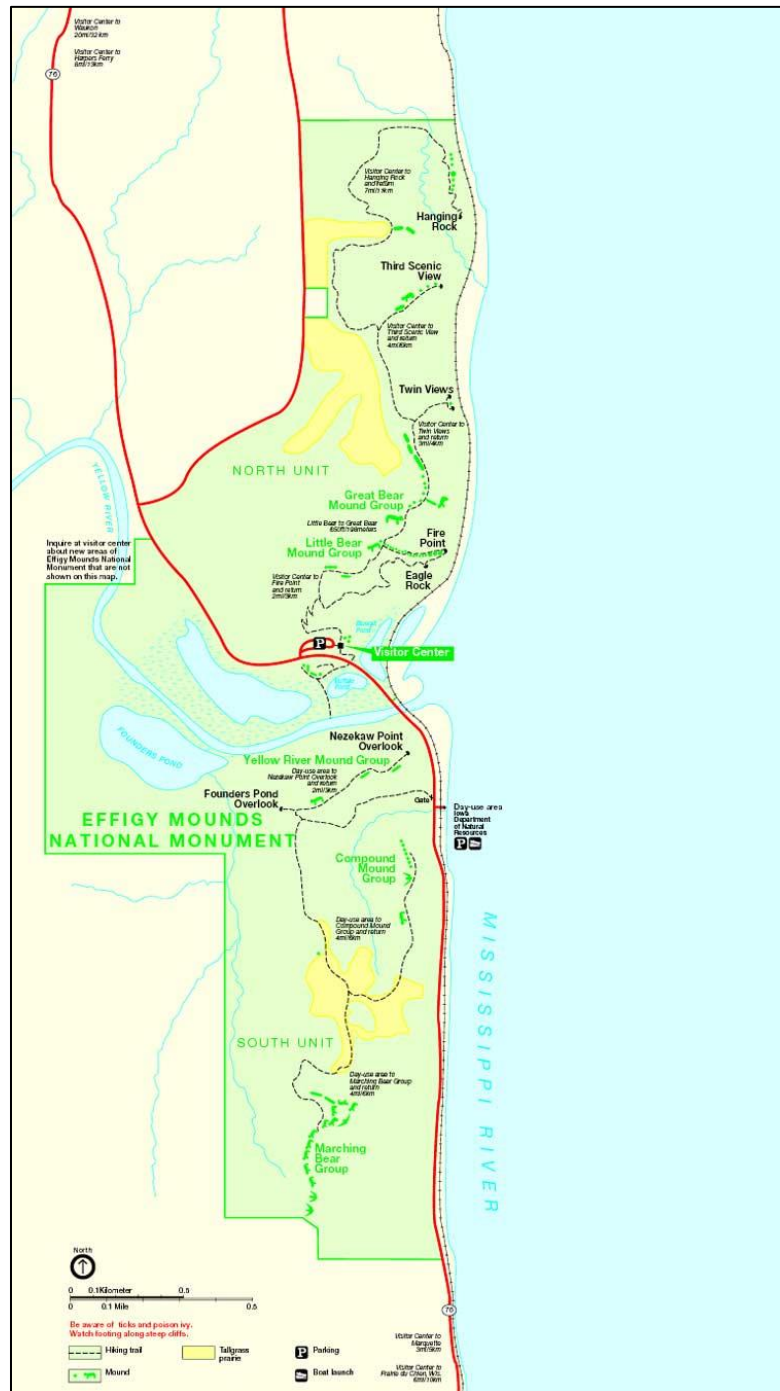


Aerial View of Great Bear Mound Group
Courtesy of the National Park Service.

Effigy Mounds National Monument is located on 2,500 acres of forested land along the Mississippi River, primarily in Allamakee County, Iowa, with a small part in Clayton County, Iowa.

Located on bluffs overlooking the river, the monument has 195 known mounds. Most of the mounds are conical, but about 30 are effigies in the shape of birds and bears.

The oldest mounds in this area have been dated to about 450 BCE. Many of the mounds have yielded copper, bone, and stone tools of Native American origin. The largest of the bear mounds is 137 feet long and 3.5 feet high. Mixed deciduous forests and tallgrass prairies are found in the area. Wildlife species include white-tailed deer and a wide variety of birds, notably bald eagles that nest in the bluffs along the Mississippi River.



Effigy Mounds National Monument Site.
Courtesy of the National Park Service.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the National Park Service excavated the effigy and burial mounds found within the monument, reducing the burial and ceremonial mounds value as scientific objects. In 1959, Effigy Mounds National Monument established a policy prohibiting further destructive investigations of the mounds, and by the 1970s, the emphasis on archeological field investigations had shifted toward preserving and interpreting the story of the peoples who built the mounds.

All effigy mounds are currently protected under state laws that prohibit disturbance to burial sites or, if on federal or tribal land, the [Archaeological Resources Protection Act](#), the [Antiquities Act](#), and the [Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act](#).

Today, the park's more than 2,500 acres attracts thousands of visitors to its visitor center and 12-mile network of trails to view the mounds. It is considered a sacred landscape by members of many modern-day tribes whose ancestors once lived there.



Effigy Mounds quarter minted in 2017 by the National Park Service.