



# The Mound Builders

By **Monroe S. Miller**, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

When anyone mentions earthen mounds in the landscape, of course I think of golf course features - mounds, moguls, chocolate drops and the like. They are intended mostly as hazards to deflect a mis-hit golf ball, but they can also be used to help define a play area, accent a feature or even hide a golfer's look at the intended target.

Most of us even have our favorite shaper, a person who can create mounding with the hand and eye of an artist using a dozer instead of a brush. Rafael Ripp is the best there is anywhere, bar none in my view and experience. He's talented in interpreting an architect's intentions on paper and transforming a piece of ground to reflect the design, while using one of Lee Bruce's John Deere dozers. Ray has left a mark on our course that will endure as long as it does. He is a modern day mound builder.

Wisconsin is also the home to some excellent work by ancient mound builders. In fact, in the basin of the Mississippi River, especially in areas lying east of the river, are tens of thousands of mounds which were built by humans before American history started. Trempealeau county, for example, has over two thousand mounds itself.

Obviously, these mounds in the middle U.S. were built by Indians, although earlier theories held that the earthen works were constructed by a civilization who lived in the great basin before the Indians.

It was heavy work accomplished by a relatively small number of people. At the time of the pilgrims, I've read estimates that the entire Indian population in North America was under a quarter of a million. Of these Wisconsin may have had only 10,000, a small number of people to have built so many mounds. But their work was over generations, maybe 500 years.

Most of the mounds are a few feet high. Exposure to weather and the elements for hundreds of years have worn them down. But there are some with a height of 80 feet or more yet today, giving hint to their original majesty. Some I have seen near the river at St. Louis are nearly that big; it stretches the imagination to understand the amount of work involved in construction at a time of hand labor and crude implements. They didn't have access to any John Deere dozers!

Mounds have many shapes. The conical mounds are sometimes call tumuli. There are linear mounds, squares and circles. These are believed to have been use as fortifications. In many places, especially here in Wisconsin, mounds were shaped to resemble buffaloes, bears, squir-

rels, birds, lizards, turtles, serpents and dozens of other shapes. Some apparently were designed by Indians to represent clubs, bows and spears. Mounds with these particular and peculiar shapes are call effigies.

The conical mounds were frequently built as a burial place for important tribal members. Archeologists have excavated tumuli and found the person was frequently buried in a sitting posture, surrounded with clay pots containing food (presumably to last him until he arrived at the happy hunting ground) and weapons of stone or even copper. Large tumuli were the sites of council houses or the wigwam of a chief.

Indians belonged, through their mother's side of the family, to a clan and each clan had a symbol (or totem) - bear, turtle, buffalo, etc. It follows that the many effigy mounds in Wisconsin and elsewhere represented these clans. Any village could have several clans, explaining why several differently shaped effigy mounds can be found in close proximity.



Three conical mounds at the 14<sup>th</sup> hole at Blackhawk.

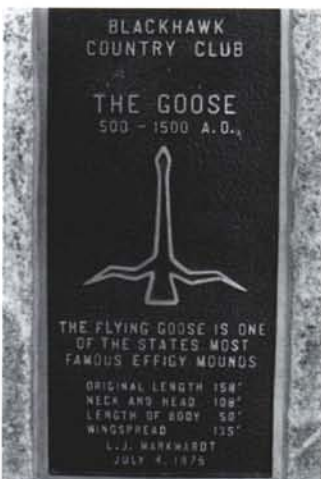


A sign at Baraboo CC asking player to keep golf cars off the Indian mounds. "Piniggi" is an Indian word meaning "thank you."





Al Jansen and his crew at Baraboo CC use white marker paint to note the boundaries of the Indian mounds. This accents the subtle shape of the mounds.



A bronze plaque on a granite boulder marks the large Goose Effigy Mound at Blackhawk CC.



Boulder with bronze plaque identifies site of Three Bears Effigy Mound.

Indian mounds. And all three are on or near water - Koshkonong Mounds CC, Baraboo CC and Blackhawk CC.

The mounds at KMCC were first noted by Dr. Increase A. Lapham in 1855, about the same time he wrote of those around Baraboo CC (1850). Lapham was an early settler in southern Wisconsin and an archeologist. One of his writings dealt with area Indian mounds - *The Antiquities of Wisconsin*. In 1908, archeologists surveyed the mounds around Lake Koshkonong and found over 500 effigy mounds. Thirty-six of those were on the property that became the golf course. The club provides a handout for interested viewers that includes a map of a self-guided tour of their mound collection. Twenty-two of the mounds remain today. I have taken that tour and published photos of the mounds in past *Grass Roots* issues. They are a fascinating collection you may want to visit yourself if you haven't already.

Baraboo CC has eight mounds. Five were documented in the 1800s and three additional were found in 1996 by Al Jansen, golf course superintendent at BCC. Their collection includes a bear effigy (82 feet long), a mink shaped mound 185 feet in length, a linear mound with a head terminating in two parts (230 feet long), a 64 foot long beast lying on a slope and a linear mound bent at the pointed end of its 152 foot length. Jansen found a 200



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The age of Indian mounds is a common question. Two groups built mounds in Wisconsin; the Hopewell Indian Culture (0 to 500 AD) and the Effigy Mound Builders Culture (500 to 1500 AD). Although some of the mounds in Wisconsin may be well over a thousand years old, others are from a time near our history. Skeletons have been found during excavations of Indian mounds wearing silver jewelry and ornaments made in France, some of which are dated as late as 1680! In fact, there is documented evidence that Indians were actually building mounds in our southern states as late as our Revolutionary War of 1776.

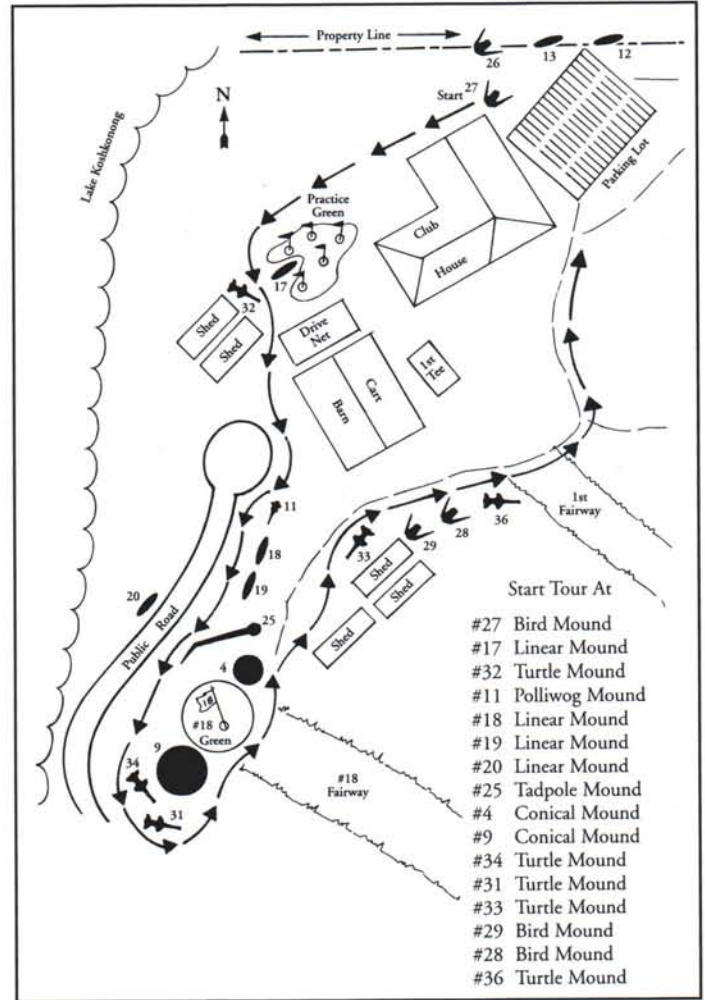
Indian mounds in Wisconsin are frequently found on the banks and areas adjacent to lakes and rivers and often upon the summits of high bluffs overlooking the countryside. That probably illustrates the point of this brief essay on ancient mound builders: at least three golf course I am familiar with in Wisconsin are home to some



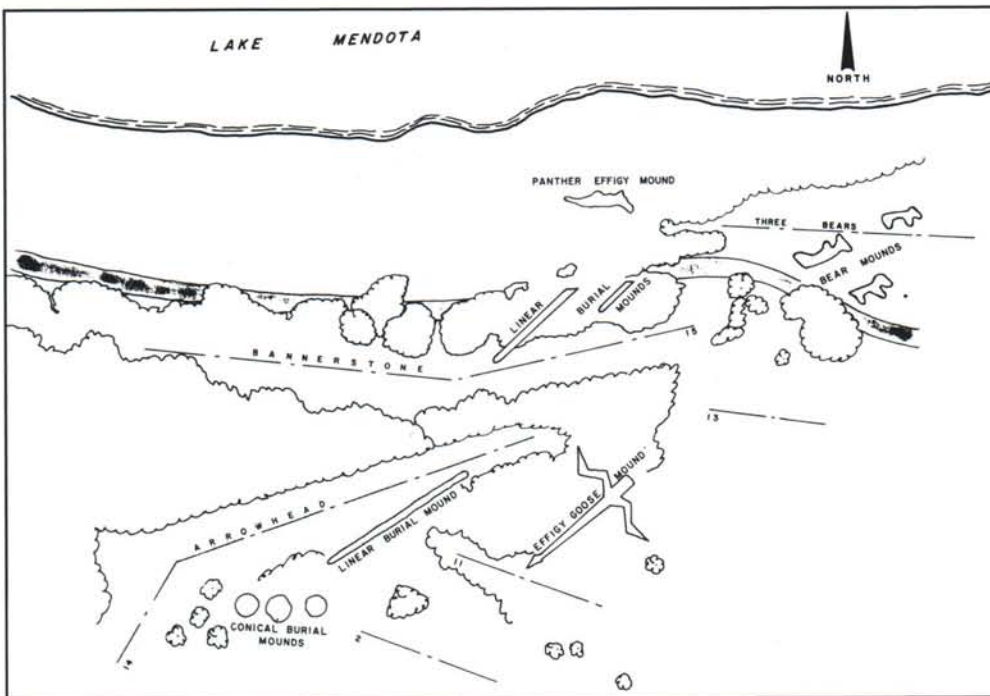
foot linear mound and two smaller effigy mounds.

One of the founders of my course, Blackhawk CC, was still alive in 1976 and decided to go through the exercise of getting our group of Indian mounds on the National Park Service List of Historic Places in America. It was part of our bicentennial celebration. The group includes two linear mounds, three conical mounds, a goose shaped mound, three bear effigy mounds and a panther shaped mound. When the course was built in 1920/1921, a hawk mound was graded out of the 11th fairway, so the project included a 1/2 scale reproduction of it in the clubhouse lawn area. We were assisted by an archeologist from the State Historical Society. The designation by the National Park Service was approved. The mounds are visited occasionally by groups - Boy Scouts, for example - and classes from area schools. Individuals are welcome to visit there, too.

I find them intriguing and can only imagine the work that went into their construction. We build land forms with machinery moving massive amounts of material in as short a time as possible. The predecessors to our properties built their more complicated and detailed land forms by moving small amounts of soil over longer periods of time in baskets and leather bags. Although not as grand as cathedrals and castles of similar times in overseas lands, these mounds are mute and impressive relics in their own way. They are reminders of earlier life on this soil. I know I speak for Al Jansen and Mike Kactro when I say it is a solemn responsibility and yet a pleasure to preserve these mounds intact for the education and enlightenment of generations to come.



Shown above is a map of the self-guided tour of effigy and burial mounds located at Koshkonong Mounds Country Club.



Map showing location of different indian mounds at Blackhawk Country Club national historical site.