

MOUND EXCAVATION IN JERSEY COUNTY THE ISRINGHAUSEN MOUND GROUP, ROSEDALE TOWNSHIP

BY

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In February, 1931, Mr. John Isringhausen found two very fine, white stone grooved plumb bobs on a ridge on his farm one mile east of Nutwood, Illinois. A survey showed the ridge to be "Y" shaped, the branches lying almost due north and south and the stem northeast. Three mounds had been exposed on the south end of the west branch of the ridge. The long axis of mound number one lies east and west. Immediately behind it are numbers two and three, the long axes of which lie northeast to southwest.

On the east branch of the ridge are nine mounds. Number four, whose long axis is northeast-southwest, is considerably larger but lower than the others, due probably to its having been under cultivation for a long time. The long axes of the other eight mounds lie north and south.

Mound number one is 67½ feet long, 30 feet wide, and 4 feet high. Mound number twelve is about the same size, and the others except number four are smaller. They are approximately 35-50 feet long, 20-25 feet wide, and 4-6 feet high.

An old camp site occurs between the branches of the ridge and at the base of the west ridge where there is a fairly large spring. Numerous arrow heads, several axes, a flint pick, and two discoids are known to have come from this area.

The ridges are composed of a clayey and sandy soil which facilitates very good drainage. The mounds are made of the same type of soil and number one shows no lens formations, the base being quite difficult to locate.

Mound number one was chosen as the site of excavation. A total of eight and a half working days has been spent and the mound is now about five-eighths completed.

Twenty-one skeletons have been located, exposed, and photographed. In two small areas disturbed by former excavations, there have been at least twelve skeletons as indicated by the skull count. In the north side of the east end of the mound were three baby skeletons in such a poor state of preservation that only their location could be noted. Only one compound burial, consisting of two skeletons, has been found. Most of the burials have been at or near the base but four have been found a foot or less below the top of the mound.

Of the twenty-one skeletons, fourteen were definitely flexed, four were incomplete but were no doubt of the flexed type, and three were extended. In all but one of the fourteen flexed burials, there was a marked flexion of the legs upon the thighs and in three there was also a marked flexion of the thighs upon the abdomen. The positions of the arms were more varied, the most extreme flexion being with one hand lying over the corresponding shoulder giving the impression that the hand was grasping the clavicle (found in three). Most commonly one arm lay along the side or was partially flexed with the hand over the pelvis or abdomen and the other arm was flexed to such an extent that the hand was on the opposite side of the body or up near the opposite shoulder or in the region of the mandible.

All but two of the burials were on the back; one was on the right side and the other on the abdomen favoring the left side. Two of the extended burials had the arms along the sides with the hands at the sides of the pelvis and the other had the hands over the pelvis.

Two of the burials had apparently been disturbed by later burials. The pelvis and lower limbs of number four were found scattered in the soil immediately above number three. The right ribs and arm of burial number nine, a child of ten or eleven years, had been piled at the right side of the head, the space created being occupied by the lower limbs of number ten, a child of about eighteen months.

Two burials had extra bones interred with them. Burial number seven had several leg bones and an innominate over the flexed lower limbs and several fragmentary arm bones over the chest. The compound burial had an extra skull between and below the two skulls of the burial and several leg bones, a humerus, and a scapula over the flexed lower limbs. There were also two tibiae and a fibula at the top of the skull of number seventeen.

Burial number five showed evidences of bone disease and fractures. There was an extensive periostitis of both tibiae and fibulae with some anterior bowing of the left tibia. The etiology of the condition has not been determined. There was a healed oblique fracture through the deltoid insertion of the left humerus in which the position was exceptionally good, and there was an old transverse fracture through the middle of the left clavicle in which union was complete with some increase in the curve of the bone.

Not many artifacts have been discovered. With burial number three were 250 shell beads (one of the Gulf Coast snails?) in four loops around the neck. Burial number ten had five shell disc beads at the front of the neck and burial number sixteen had six small disc beads under the mandible. The two white plumb bobs were found on the surface at the south-east end of the mound, and just before this area was excavated a large, unfinished, granite plumb bob and a circular shell pendent were also picked up on the surface. During the excavation of the disturbed area in this end of the mound, a finished grooved hematite plumb bob, an unfinished hematite plumb bob, and a broken arrowhead were found but they were not associated with any of the burials. The point of a bone awl was found with burial number twelve.

In the extreme west end of the mound, two badly broken pots of cord-imprinted ware with rather pointed bases were found in the sod. The larger pot is seven and a half inches high, of moderate thickness and grit-tempered. The smaller pot which is five inches high and quite thick, contains a very small amount of grit tempering and several large pieces of rock, one of which shows on both the outer and inner surfaces. These pots were found approximately five feet apart and were not associated with any burial. Between them in the sod were scattered a large number of charred bones. No other pottery, not even a sherd, has been found.

Fifty-two feet east of the west end of the mound and north of and at right angles to the long axis, a soil profile was made. Near the long axis the soil was darker in color and less compact, indicating disturbance. Numerous bones were scattered all through it. Just outside of the disturbed area burial number nineteen was found, and still further out burials numbers twenty and twenty-one.

The work in this group has not progressed sufficiently to warrant the drawing of any conclusions. It is hoped that the excavation of this mound and one on the east ridge can be completed within the next year, when it may be possible to make some comparisons.