



WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

Documenting and Cataloging Extant Mounds

Part 1: The Number of Human Burial Mound Sites That Could Be Cataloged

The estimate of the number of human burial mounds that are extant and that could be cataloged presented here is based upon a review of the records associated with the Archeological Site Inventory (ASI) database and an analysis of current LIDAR images. The information in our database comes from records that were generated over a 200 year period. We have determined that mound sites where post-1975 records and reports are available provide high quality data while those without post 1975 updates or reports have comparatively low quality information.

There are currently 3300 human burial mound site records in the ASI database. Of this total:

- 611 had been reported as extant after 1975;
- 1296 sites were reported as extant prior to 1975, but no records exist after 1975;
- 1393 sites were identified as destroyed or damaged beyond recognition.

In order to estimate the number of human burial mounds that are extant, we compared ASI records for sites in Grant and Jefferson Counties that are not listed as destroyed with LIDAR images that might reveal extant mounds. Our analysis of LIDAR images of sites with post-1975 reports indicates that between 61% and 65% of these human burial mounds are still extant. A lesser percentage (between 9% and 20%) of the human burial mound sites not visited after 1975 but not listed as destroyed, are still extant.

Finally, in order to account for previously unreported human burial mound sites we analyzed the totality of LIDAR imagery for Waterville and Millville Townships in Grant County and Jefferson and Ixonia Townships in Jefferson County in a search for previously unreported sites. We identified 17 new sites in Grant County and 4 new sites in Jefferson County.

Applying our findings above to the statewide information on reported human burial mound sites, we believe that between 533 and 761 previously uncataloged human burial mound sites throughout Wisconsin may be extant and could be cataloged.

Part 2: The Method For Cataloging The Human Burial Mound Sites

Environmental conditions and settings within which human burial mound sites are found must be considered in calculating time requirements for assessment, documentation and then cataloging these sites. The nature and extent of vegetation cover is significant. In instances of light undergrowth in forested areas, or short vegetation in grassy areas, the documentation of even a large group can proceed quickly. The presence of tall grass and or thick undergrowth can slow the work and add considerably to the duration of the fieldwork. The vegetation cover also may impact when the field crews can complete the work. Generally spring and fall provide the best conditions because leaves are absent and the vegetation is down. The exact conditions at each human burial mound group can only be assessed during site visits.

LIDAR technology may provide useful information about the site-access limitations for previously unrecorded sites. LIDAR reveals steep terrain and bluff locations, and indicates how remote these site locations may be from vehicular access.

The following estimate assumes a crew of three archaeologists, working from 1 April to 30 November in the field, and working the winter months drafting maps, drafting cataloging documents and technical reports, and preparing for the next season's field work. As well, we anticipate one permanent staff person spending 10% of their time managing the project, documenting time records, providing technical training to crew and analyzing/approving work products.

Using information from the Native American Mounds Documentation Grant¹ project, and taking into consideration the advantages offered by LIDAR technology and the easier access to landowner information that is now present, recognizing the unknown environmental conditions as described above, we estimate that a crew of three could document for cataloging between 5 and 10 human burial mound sites per week. It could take between 1.7 and 4.8 years to document and catalog the 533 to 761 human burial mound sites that may be extant.

¹ The Native American Mounds Documentation Grant (2002-2004) project was funded through a Surface Transportation Enhancement Grant from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and involved the field investigation of ancient human burial mound sites adjacent to the Great River Road in Grant and Crawford Counties. A total of 103 sites were visited and 74 were found to be extant and were documented. The remaining sites could not be located. Data on crew member numbers, timeframes, activities, etc. were used in our time assessment.