

SHALL IOWA HAVE NATIONAL MONUMENTS?

The answer to this question apparently rests with the people of Iowa. The Federal Government has already made the suggestion. The following paragraphs attempt to sketch the brief outlines of the story.

For many years the people living along the bluffs of the Mississippi River in northeastern Iowa enjoyed what nature had spread about them and said very little about it. "Finest scenery along the whole river!" said the steamboat crews and said their passengers in the days when river packets made regular trips from New Orleans to St. Louis and St. Paul. "We have seen the Hudson, the Rhine, and the Danube", said later world travelers, who began to journey from East to West and from West to East, crossing the Great River on the McGregor-Prairie du Chien ferries when at last the Wisconsin and Iowa highways began to attract some transcontinental travel, "we thought we had seen real river scenery, but nowhere have we found anything quite so majestic and quite so satisfying as this." "We ought to tell the world what we have here", finally said the people of northeastern Iowa, when through the years the testimony accumulated to the effect that the scenery of the Upper Mississippi was not only beautiful but really unsurpassed, "we should have a national park here, right here where the people live and where all may come and see".

There were and there are solid reasons for such a desire and such a conclusion. For in making a river big enough to drain the interior of a whole continent some wonderful forces had to be set to work and some colossal results had to be achieved. During hundreds of thousands of years

vast floods had to cut away and carry to the Gulf of Mexico the bedded sandstones and limestones of many geological ages. When this labor was finally accomplished and the waters no longer rushed and whirled and leaped in the abandonment of youth, but moved silently and steadily along in the serenity of age, there were still the finishing processes that belong to any perfect work, the addition of those graces that proclaim the finished enterprise. The great gorge three miles wide and more than seven hundred feet deep was too severe, too little friendly as the forces of erosion first left it. The tall straight cliffs needed to crumble somewhat into gentle talus slopes; the great stream-bed needed to fill a little with fertile soils for the making of islands and broad terraces; then finally the forests had to grow, hundreds of square miles of them, to cover and soften and beautify. Now men might come and behold and see whether any good thing might still be lacking.

In 1929 the men and women of northeastern Iowa decided to organize their efforts and ask the United States government for an Upper Mississippi River national park. The Northeastern Iowa National Park Association was the result. From the first these men and women looked beyond the borders of Iowa. Their vision of a national park included the flood plain and the bluffs on both sides of the river from about Bellevue in Iowa to Lake Pepin, Minnesota, more than two hundred miles, therefore, of river scenery in Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois. They sought and obtained the support of many people in all this great area. Furthermore, it should be emphasized, they did their work as conservationists, not as promoters of commercial interests. Among their twenty-four officers and members of committees there was not a person who would have benefited financially by the creation of a na-

tional park. If their immediate objective was destined not to secure the approval of the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior, which passes upon all proposals having to do with national parks, their every action, nevertheless, was such as to reveal only a laudable purpose and to reflect only honor and credit.¹

Authorized by act of Congress in 1930, the National Park Service, in 1931, inspected the claims of the Upper Mississippi area to recognition as a national park. Without denying the merit of the proposal, the Director of the National Park Service, Mr. Horace M. Albright, in his report dated February 16, 1932, found what, from the viewpoint of the Service, were insurmountable difficulties, especially the presence of established municipal and commercial interests along the river, which would interfere with unified development and administration. The report also called attention to the fact that Congress had no precedent for the appropriation of public funds for the purchase of lands for national parks and concluded that the problem of the preservation of the Upper Mississippi scenery could be best solved by the several States concerned through their programs for State parks.

But a refusal of the thing asked for is no bar to a bestowal of a different sort, and sometimes the offered pearls or diamonds are quite as desirable as the cloth of gold originally sought. The same report that withheld the national park expressed approval of the establishment of one or more national monuments within the area.

¹ The work of the Northeastern Iowa National Park Association has been so ably conducted, its published literature has been of so high a type, and its continued activities will have so much to do with any recognition accorded Iowa by the National Park Service that the history of the Association should be fully recorded somewhere and preserved. This will undoubtedly be done. Suffice it here to mention only the Association's list of officers: Walter H. Beall, West Union, President; R. G. Miller, Lansing, Vice President; H. S. Rittenhouse, Monona, Secretary; C. J. Orr, Monona, Treasurer.

Now what are national monuments? Not structures of brick and stone, where the National Park Service is concerned, but areas of land set aside and permanently maintained by the Federal Government on account of their outstanding historic or scientific interest and value. And what did Federal inspectors find along the Upper Mississippi that would measure up to any such definition? Indian mounds! Indian mounds of very special types and interest. But it will be best to let Mr. Albright's report speak for itself, quoting only the part that is directly concerned with mound preservation.

"Our national monument system offers opportunities for the establishment and maintenance and development by the Federal Government of areas outstanding for historic and scientific purposes. Along the banks of the Mississippi River, within this area, there are numerous prehistoric mounds, built by Indians and used by them as burial places. Many hundreds of these mounds have already been obliterated by farming operations. It is important that some representative examples be preserved, since they are of great archeological interest to the present and future generations. It has been asserted that no better mounds are found in Iowa than those that are near McGregor. There are three types of mounds — the conical, the lineal, and the effigy. All these are represented there. . . .

"The preservation of such mounds, while there is still time to save them, will be of infinite value to posterity.

"It is believed that within this area can be found Indian mounds of national interest. Any Indian mounds of this type would add to the completeness of the prehistoric remains that are being protected in our existing national monument system. Provided that areas selected may be studied in advance and approved by experts of the National Park Service acting for this department, and that their ac-

quisition and tender for national monument purposes be effected by the States or citizens of the States involved, I should be glad to approve the establishment of one or more such national monuments containing these prehistoric burial mounds under the control of the Interior Department."

Who knew that there existed in Iowa groups of Indian mounds that were worthy of national recognition? Ellison Orr of Waukon knew it, and had known it for about fifty years. Trained as an engineer, Mr. Orr had through many years surveyed and mapped the mounds of Allamakee and Clayton counties. W. H. C. Elwell, pearl merchant of McGregor, knew it, for he had tramped for years the bluffs on both sides of his little city and had noted with surprise and interest the strange antiquities put there by unknown hands in the long ago. Theodore H. Lewis, a young surveyor from Richmond, Virginia, knew it, for in the employ of Alfred J. Hill of St. Paul, a United States topographical engineer of the Civil War, he had quietly surveyed, during the eighties and nineties, many of the mounds of the Upper Mississippi Valley and had furnished the data on which Mr. Hill had drawn a beautiful series of plats.² The writer of this story knew it, for he had learned the facts from the men whose names are here mentioned and had accompanied Mr. Orr and Mr. Elwell on tours of exploration. Some other people, including the owners of the land, knew more or less about the mounds, but on the whole a knowledge of them was confined to local people or to persons with special interests.

² The manuscripts of the Hill-Lewis survey, mostly unpublished up to this time, are owned and preserved in the library of the Minnesota Historical Society at St. Paul. The plats of mound groups used to illustrate this article are reproductions of photostats kindly furnished by the Minnesota Historical Society. For brief accounts of the Hill-Lewis survey, see articles by the writer in *Minnesota History*, June, 1928, pp. 96-108, and *The Palimpsest*, May, 1930, pp. 214-226.

What makes the Indian mounds along the course of the Upper Mississippi River of such special interest and importance? It is because they represent a particular development of the mound-building tradition in America. A brief synopsis of the whole situation may be useful here.

Most of the Indian mounds of America are confined to the eastern half of the continent, from southern Canada to the Gulf and from the western border of the original thirteen States to the eastern border of the Plains. The original number of mounds is unknown, but it was probably well in excess of one hundred thousand.

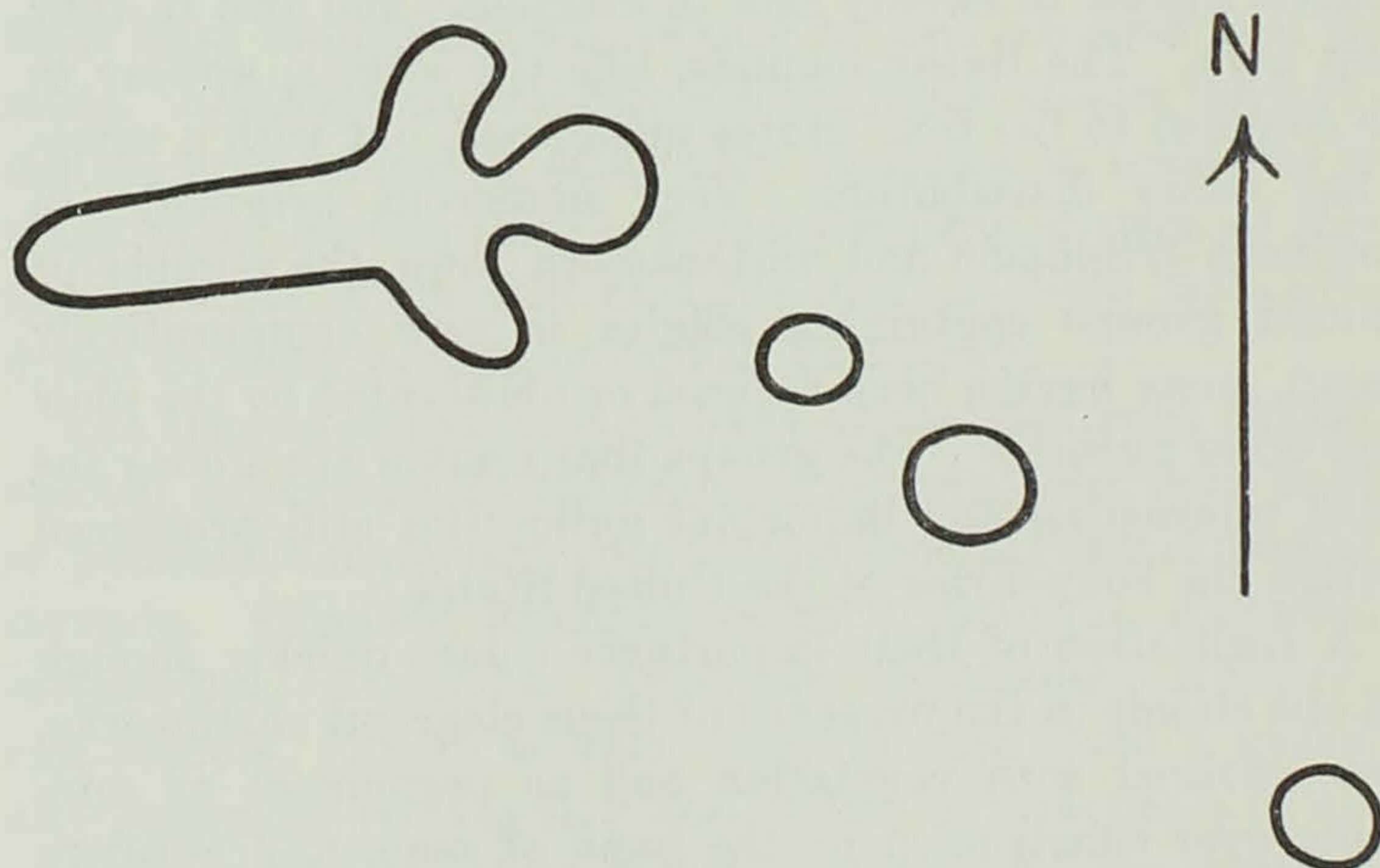
The great majority of mounds are so-called "conicals", which rise in a gentle curve from a round base to a rounded apex. Their height varies from two to seventy feet and their base diameter from twenty to two hundred feet or more. Although conical mounds are found almost throughout the area indicated, being very numerous in Iowa and in many other States, Ohio is best known for mounds of this type because of the fact that the mounds there have produced so many objects of human handicraft.

The truncated-pyramid mounds of the Southern States, erected apparently as the bases of temples that were built of perishable materials, constitute a second class of Indian mounds. Excellent examples occur in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, Missouri, and Illinois. These mounds slope upward from a generally square or rectangular base, which is sometimes in excess of two hundred feet in diameter, to a flat top which is frequently elevated thirty to fifty feet or more above the natural surface. The largest of the pyramidal mounds is Monks Mound of East St. Louis, Illinois, which covers sixteen acres, rises to a height of one hundred feet, and is larger in point of cubic yards of content than the Pyramid of Cheops in Egypt.

The third most notable class of mounds in America is the animal-shaped type of northeastern Iowa, southeastern Minnesota (a few only), southern Wisconsin, and the northern edge of Illinois (a few only). It is to be noted that the area of the animal-shaped, or effigy, mounds is compact and quite limited. These mounds are built up of earth as great cameos from about seventy to three hundred feet or more in length and from two to six feet high, representing a variety of animals, birds, and reptiles. In a few cases even the human figure is attempted. Accompanying the effigies in the same mound group are frequently found conical and linear mounds, these last being straight embankments from sixty to four hundred feet in length, fifteen to twenty feet in diameter, and two to four feet high. The linear mounds, like the effigies, appear to be confined to the four States mentioned, but with a somewhat wider distribution. Very numerous originally in southern Wisconsin and northeastern Iowa, the number of mound groups containing effigies is now comparatively small, many having been defaced or obliterated by the plow and other agencies. The groups that remain are among the most interesting and important antiquities still preserved within the boundaries of the United States.

A realization of their importance comes quickly enough as one stands in the presence of these clear-cut earthworks, now covered with vegetation and as permanent as anything ever constructed by the hand of man, and wonders what the answers may be to the numerous questions that are sure to suggest themselves. Who built these mounds? When did they build them? Why did they build them? Why were they built in all this variety of form? How much human labor was involved and how was the work accomplished? Considering the fact that a single mound group of average size involved the removal and transpor-

tation of approximately six thousand cubic yards of earth, six thousand wagon loads as the white man counts them, without the use of machinery, without any beast of burden larger than the dog, without metal tools, what urge, one asks, what compelling motive underlay the sustained effort needed for all this vast accomplishment? Do the mounds have contents, human burials perhaps? If so, are there any accompanying objects that would help to tell the story of their origin? Some of these queries are in the way of being answered; others will wait long for an adequate solution, for no white man ever witnessed the building of these earthworks and no historic Indian ever had memory or even dependable tradition concerning them.

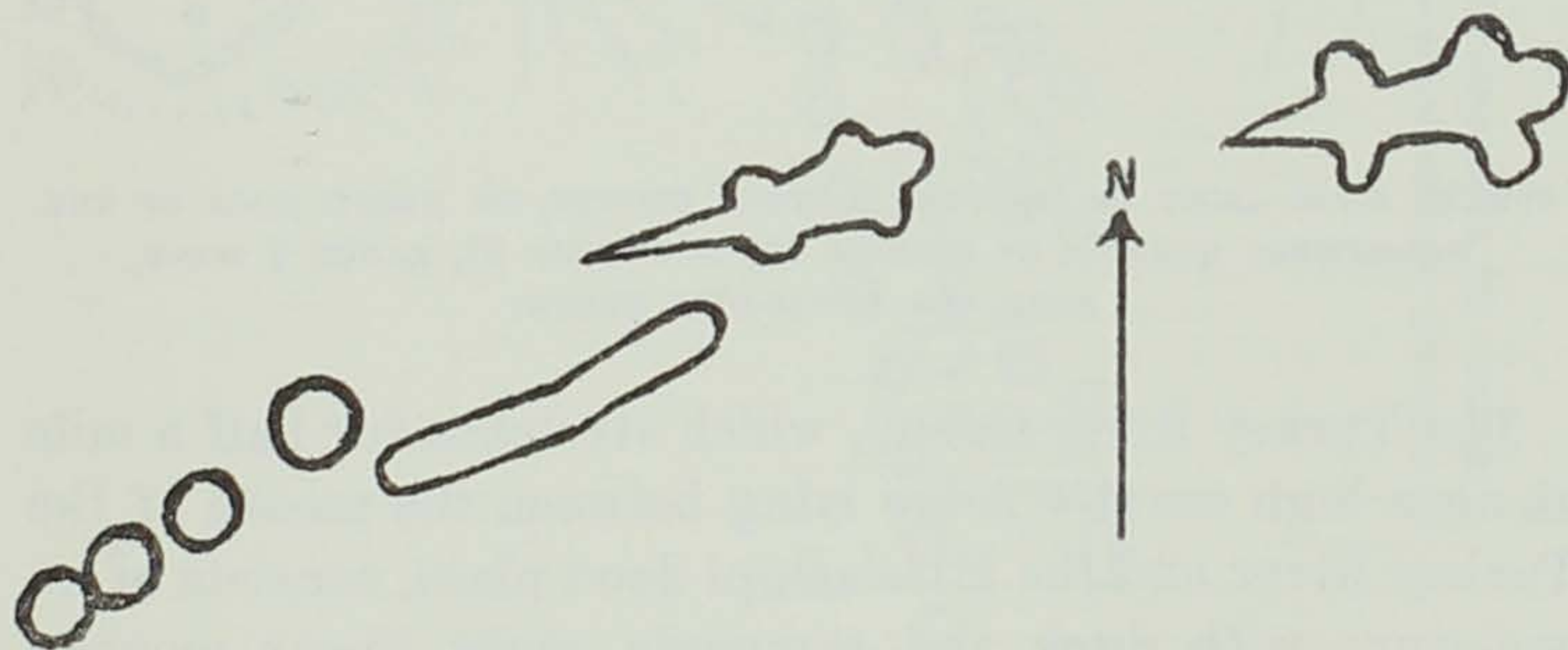


ADAMS GROUP OF MOUNDS ON SOUTHWEST FORTY ACRES OF THE NORTHWEST QUARTER OF SECTION 18, TOWNSHIP 91, RANGE 1 WEST, A MILE AND A QUARTER SOUTH OF THE MOUTH OF TURKEY RIVER, FROM THE LEWIS-HILL SURVEY

Careful excavation of several mound groups in Wisconsin by scientists of the Milwaukee Public Museum has very recently made clear that all the mounds, effigies and linears as well as conicals, contain human burials, that these

burials are usually of secondary types, that is, reburials of a few bones only selected from a primary or first burial elsewhere, made into bundles and redeposited, generally without accompanying artifacts, as the sole contents of the mounds. Thus a known fact tends to create more mysteries than it solves. What a strange custom! Four hundred cubic yards of earth handled and built into an intricate design for the sake of a few bones that might be carried in one's two hands? The fact makes even more insistent our query as to an underlying motive.

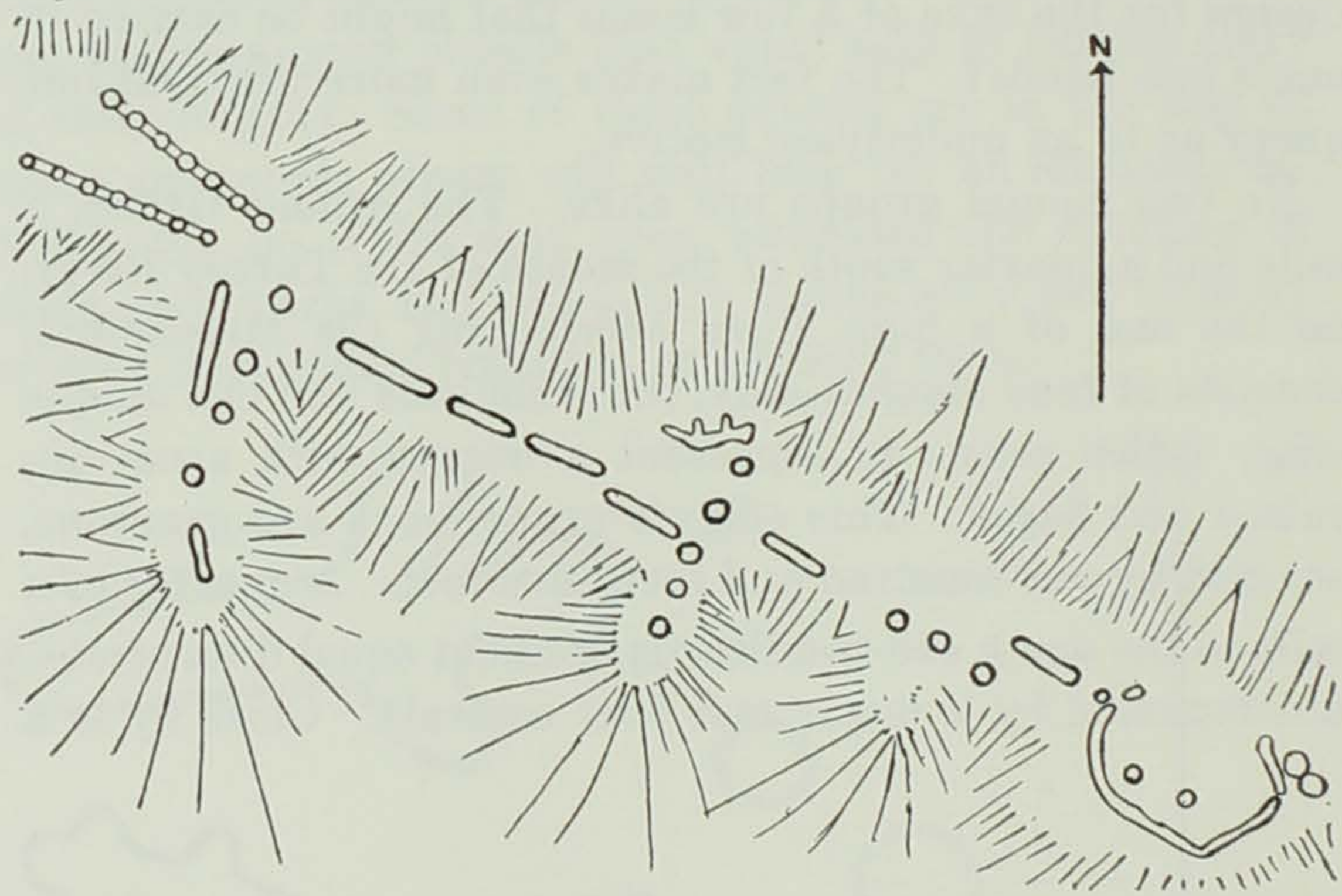
No two mound groups are alike. The Adams Group, a mile and a quarter south of the mouth of the Turkey River, on the end of a high ridge overlooking the Mississippi, consists of four mounds only, three conicals and one unique effigy which seems to represent a woman with arms up-raised and flexed. This effigy's proportions are generous, seventy by one hundred and forty-five feet. A quarter of a mile to the north are two lizards of about equal dimensions, accompanied by a linear and four conicals. Close by is a



MOUNDS ONE MILE SOUTH OF THE MOUTH OF THE TURKEY RIVER, CLAYTON COUNTY, ON NORTHEAST FORTY ACRES OF SECTION 13, TOWNSHIP 91, RANGE 2 WEST, FROM THE LEWIS-HILL SURVEY

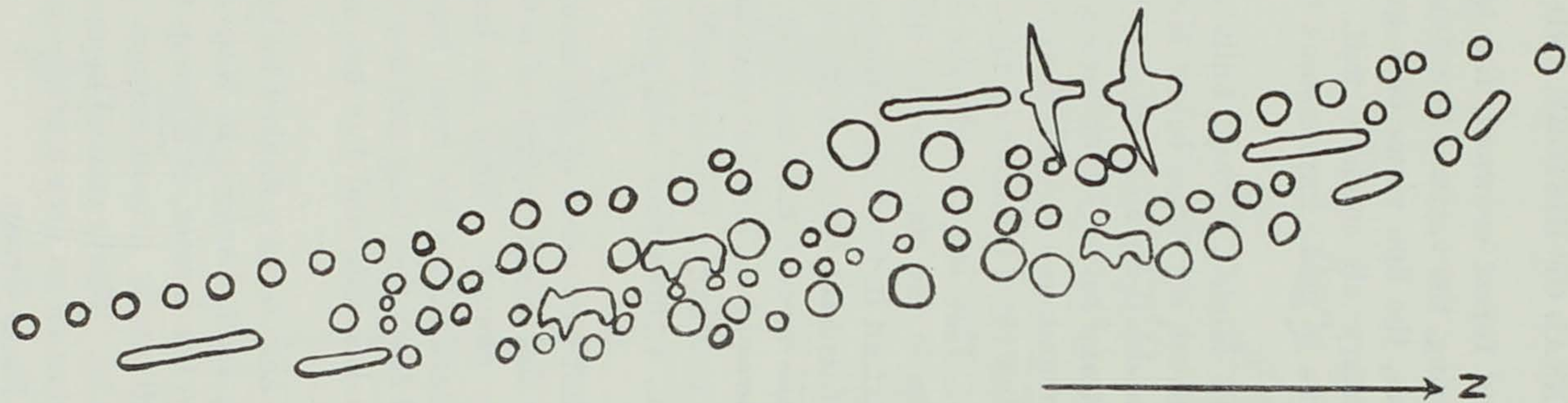
long-tailed animal with both tail and nose in the air in an attitude of keen attention. At his heels follows a stubby-

tailed quadruped. The effigies of mammals, it should be explained, are always seen in profile, lying generally on their right sides and with their noses pointed down stream. Reptiles and birds are as seen from above or below, and their suggested movement is also, as a rule, with or toward the water.



TURKEY RIVER GROUP OF MOUNDS, CLAYTON COUNTY, ON NORTH HALF OF THE NORTHWEST QUARTER OF SECTION 11, TOWNSHIP 91, RANGE 2 WEST, FROM THE LEWIS-HILL SURVEY

The Turkey River Group, which stretches for half a mile along a high narrow ridge lying between the mouth of the Turkey River and the Mississippi flood plain, consists of an enclosure with ditch and ramparts, eight linear mounds following generally the line of the ridge, seventeen conical mounds disposed in rows along the ridge and in cross rows, a single long-tailed effigy, and two modified linears, each three hundred and ten feet in length and with seven conical mounds inclusive. The beautiful ridge, three hundred



SNY-MAGILL MOUND GROUP, CLAYTON COUNTY, ON SOUTHWEST FORTY ACRES OF
SECTION 23, TOWNSHIP 94, RANGE 3 WEST, FROM THE LEWIS-HILL SURVEY

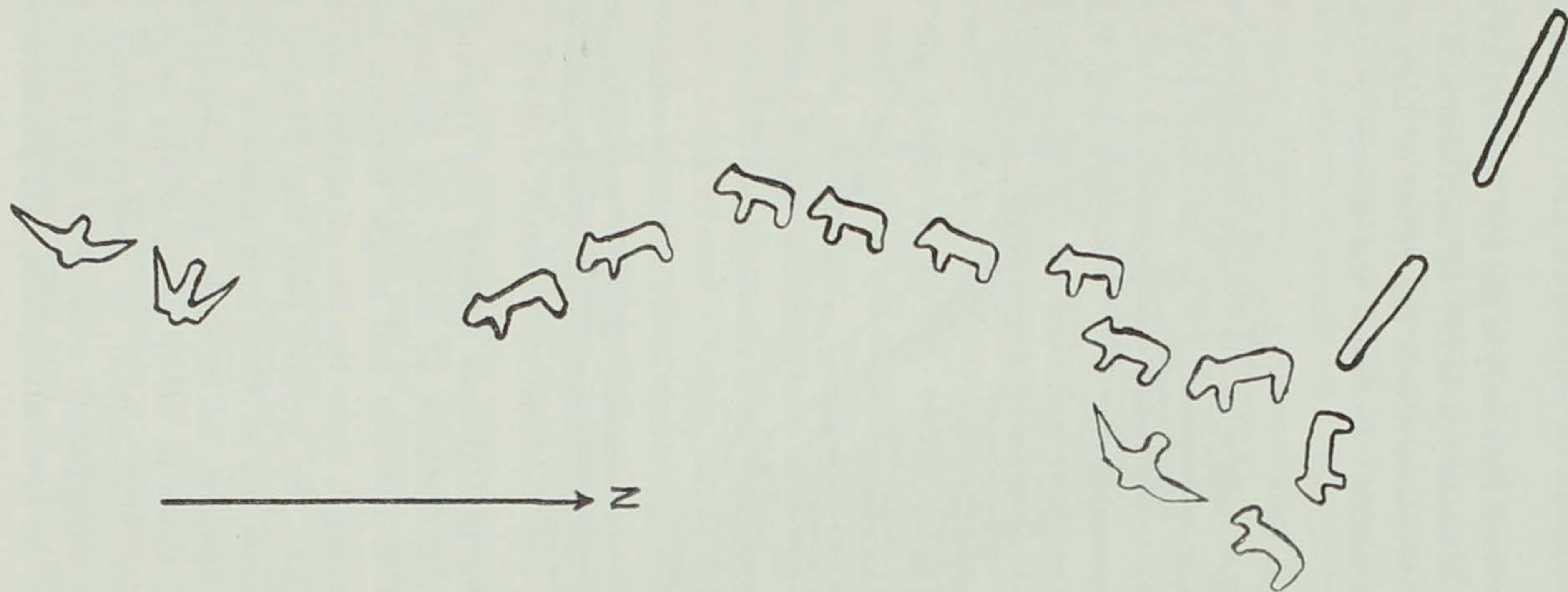
feet in height and forest crowned, the talus slopes with their timber covering, the vertical limestone walls that rise above these slopes, the fine views of a great river and a picturesque tributary all combine with the twenty-nine ancient earthworks to make impressions that the memory will long retain.

The Sny-Magill Mound Group, built on a terrace of the Mississippi River six miles below McGregor, consists of six linear mounds, three bear effigies, two bird effigies, each one hundred and seventy feet across the outstretched wings, one oval mound, and eighty-two conicals, ninety-four mounds in all, lying close together along a secondary channel of the river. This is probably the largest group of mounds remaining in the effigy-mound area and is one of the largest still extant in the United States.

The Jennings-Liephart Group, lying four hundred and fifty feet above the river a mile north of Marquette, with its two linears, three birds, and ten bear effigies, strung out in a great procession half a mile in length, is probably unequalled, location, composition, and perfect preservation all considered.

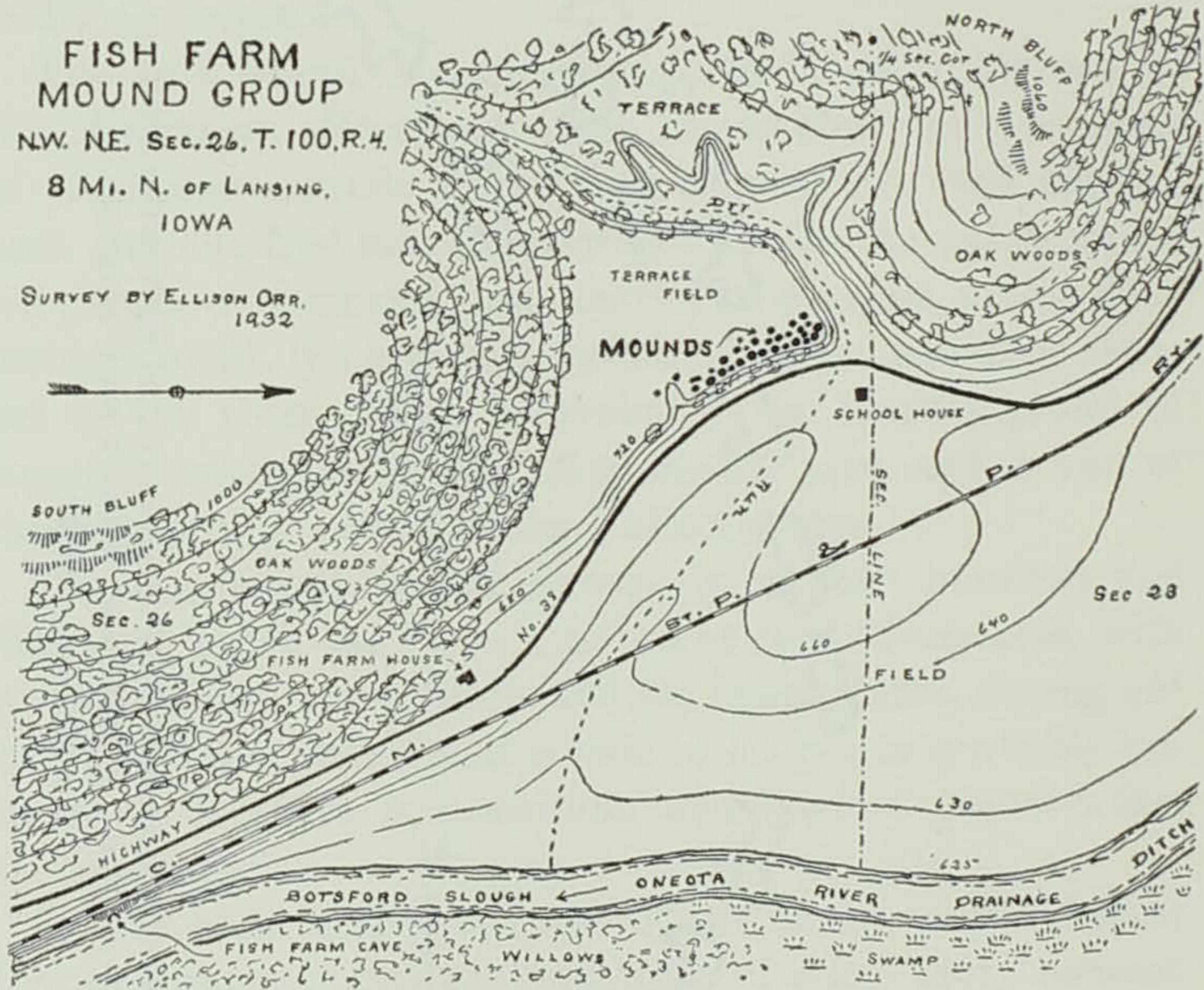
On the high bluff just north of the mouth of the Yellow River is another fine concentration of some forty conical, linear, and effigy mounds. Here the largest bear effigy known, seventy feet across his front legs and shoulders, one hundred and forty feet long and five feet high, lies by exception on his left side and has his nose directed upstream.

On a little five-acre terrace flanked by high bluffs, beside the road leading from Lansing to New Albin and about eight miles above the former, is a group that corresponds completely to all one's preconceptions of what Indian mounds ought to be. Thirty conical mounds, little and big, stand close together on an area scarcely one acre in extent. This is the Fish Farm Group.



JENNINGS-LIEPHART MOUND GROUP, CLAYTON COUNTY, ON SOUTHWEST FORTY
ACRES OF SECTION 3, TOWNSHIP 95, RANGE 3 WEST, FROM THE
LEWIS-HILL SURVEY

The above account lists only a part of the Indian mounds that crown the Mississippi bluffs of northeastern Iowa or cover the river terraces above the reach of high water at the foot of the bluffs. Between the mound groups men-



tioned, beginning in Dubuque County and running to the Minnesota line, a distance of about one hundred miles, smaller groups of mounds and single mounds, many of them of great interest, make the line of ancient earthworks almost continuous. No wonder then that Federal inspectors found material for national monuments in Iowa. Not that the Iowa mounds, as mounds, are necessarily finer specimens than those in other parts of the effigy-mound area. It is the combination of well-preserved mound groups with the unsurpassed scenery of the Upper Mississippi that gives the Iowa antiquities first preference.

How is it that great groups of Indian mounds of forms of rare and peculiar interest could lie on the terraces and bluffs of the Mississippi River since long before the history of the Northwest began and still be accorded so little attention by the millions of people who came to live later within easy traveling distances? Inaccessibility is the word that explains it all. As matters now stand, one must, as a rule, first travel a road that is not the easiest to negotiate, then climb a three or four-hundred-foot hill or force one's way through a long stretch of brush, sometimes both, only to find when one reaches the goal that the mounds themselves are so hidden in forest undergrowth as to be seen and studied only with real difficulty. Those fare the best who attempt the quest in winter, but it happens that most people want to view out-of-doors exhibits during the warmer parts of the year. Those who have once seen an Indian mound in the open, covered with close-cropped verdure, its regular and clear-cut lines testifying clearly to its creation as a work of men's hands, not of nature, can most easily visualize what the effect must be if a whole group of say thirty mounds — conicals, linears, and effigies — should once be uncovered so that they could be clearly seen as units and as a group. There is no doubt about it, people will travel far to see such exhibits when they are once made accessible. And this leaves no doubt either that a few, at least, of the outstanding mound groups should be permanently preserved.

How may such preservation be effected? The last quoted sentence from Mr. Albright's letter above states the two necessary provisions: approval by experts of the National Park Service of the areas selected and tender of these areas by the governments or citizens involved. The first provision has been met. The original inspection of the proposed national park area in 1931, while failing to

find conditions that would make feasible a national park, found reasons for and proposed the creation of national monuments. In July, 1932, Mr. Verne E. Chatelain, Chief Historian of the National Park Service, inspected most of the Iowa mound groups that have here been briefly described and was frankly enthusiastic over the prospect of national monuments in Iowa. This leaves then the second condition, acquisition and offer of the lands on which the mounds lie, to be worked out by the government and people of Iowa. No high-priced land is involved, so that a few thousand dollars only are called for. The monuments will become realities, of course, good times or bad, for Iowa has certainly not forgotten what a good bargain looks like.

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