



**RATCLIFF DRAGON PIPE**

# RATCLIFF DRAGON PIPE

R. Clark Mallam

During the past five years, Dr. Henry Field of Decorah, a charter member of the Iowa Archaeological Society, has periodically donated portions of his library and artifact collection to the Luther College Archaeological Research Center. A recent donation, in April, 1981, consisted of numerous photography, all dealing with his extended avocation of collecting and excavating in northeast Iowa.

One photograph, a gift from Ellison Orr, depicts an extremely unusual artifact. The object portrayed (cover) is a pipe bowl constructed in the form of an unidentifiable animal grasping its tail. Orr (1934:9) referred to it as the "Lizard" pipe but on the back of the photograph he labeled it the "Ratcliffe Dragon" pipe. The latter term may be a consequence of the object possessing, seemingly, a reptilian body and a mammalian head. Although the dimensions are unknown and only two views exist, the photograph and a simplified line drawing, it appears that an opening along the back, located approximately one-third the length of the pipe from the base, served as the stem hole. If this observation is correct, the pipe bowl hole would then begin at the neck-shoulder juncture along the back and extend parallel to the long axis of the bowl until it intersects the stem hole.

Three additional openings occur between the body and the up-turned or recurved tail. Two openings, both circular, are located respectively between the head and forelegs and the hindlegs and tail while the third opening, rectanguloid, is positioned between the forelegs and hindlegs. Conceivable, the function of these openings was

to facilitate grasping whereby the circular openings would have accommodated the forefinger and small finger and the rectanguloid opening providing for insertion of the two middle fingers.

The pipe bowl, manufactured from diorite, was found in 1896 by Dr. J. Ratcliffe, a Waukon, Iowa, physician and collector. According to Orr (1934:9) it was recovered from one of five Oneota graves located along a small terrace at the base of the "Elephant" Bluff in Union Township, Allamakee County, Iowa. While this cultural association is likely, it should be pointed out that Orr's later excavations, along with those of Logan (1976), revealed that the terrace had been occupied since at least the Early Woodland period. Moreover, consistent pothunting combined with extensive rodent activity had resulted in considerable stratigraphic disruption. Or, perhaps, the pipe bowl had been manufactured during an earlier period (Middle Woodland?) and was later found and used by the Oneota. The pipe bowl apparently intrigued Orr. A review of MS79 of the Ellison Orr Collections housed in the archives of the State Historical Society reveals that he studied it for many years. During this time he carried on correspondence with several specialists and appears to have read the available literature on smoking customs and pipes of North American Indians. At one point he even secured an interview with Dr. Ratcliffe through Mr. Fred Hicks of Aitken, Minnesota. The information he provided convinced Orr that the pipe came from an Oneota grave. Following his years of research he concluded (Orr n.d.):

"We have then, the Ratcliffe Lizard Pipe, the effigy of a creature with a lizard's body, legs and tail, and with-making a guess-a monkey's head, acquired in trade by the Oneota not later than 1680-when they left the valley of the Upper Iowa River-a stranger in a strange land, a thousand miles from the country of its nativity, only 72 years after the first permanent settlement by the French at Quebec by Champlain in 1608.

Between 1657 and 1660 the Ottawa (sic) and Huron, driven from their ancestral home north of Lake Ontario by the Iriquois (sic), are believed to have reached the Mississippi River which they "ascended nine leagues and entered a river from the west" which was probably the Upper Iowa.

It is not improbable that it was from these people that the Oneotas acquired the Ratcliffe Dragon Pipe.

The present location of the pipe bowl is unknown. Dr. Field stated that Dr. Ratcliffe took the artifact with him to Aitken, Minnesota, when he left Waukon. Nevertheless, if the artifact were assignable to the Oneota culture it would certainly qualify as one of the more distinctive material items yet recorded for this prehistoric tradition.

Logan, Wilfred D.

1976 Woodland Complexes in Northeastern Iowa. Publications in Archaeology 15. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service.

Orr, Ellison

1934 Report of Surveys of Mounds and Mound Groups, Excavation of

(cont'd. page 3)

# I.A.S. DAY-1982

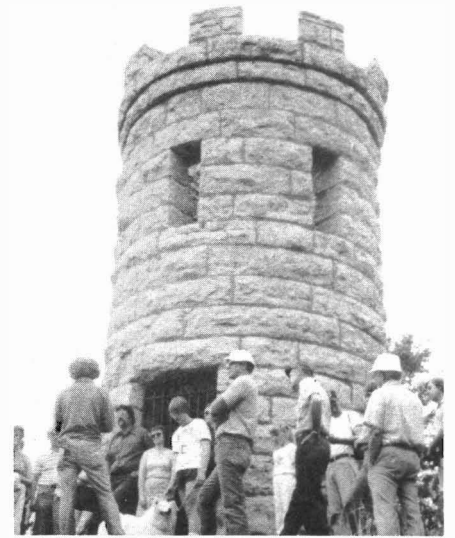
Submitted by Richard Slattery

For the past several years the Iowa Archaeological Society has held an "I.A.S. DAY" in the field and at the site of some on-going archaeological activity in the state. It is an excellent opportunity for members to observe archaeology in action without complete self-involvement in time and the usual rigors attendant with full participation. This I.A.S. Day was held on June 27th at the Mines of Spain Archaeological Project located in Dubuque County just south of Dubuque, Iowa. As a result of the general announcement sent to all members, about 25-30 members and visitors met on the picturesque promontory overlooking the Mississippi River at the Julien Dubuque historical monument at the mouth of Catfish Creek. Larry Abbott, field supervisor of the project, first gave the historical background of the area and a general description of the archaeological activities being conducted within the vast 1230 acres of the Mines of Spain tract. At this point it should be noted that this large area was recently acquired by the State of Iowa to become a preserve for use by the public. The archaeological project is designed to locate and assess the historical and prehistorical resources within the boundaries of the preserve.

Next on the schedule all were invited to take a walking tour of the nearby northern-most end of the tract which contained examples of most of the historic and prehistoric archaeological discoveries made during the previous five weeks of intense survey. First on the tour Larry led the group past a rock shelter high above on a precipitous valley wall of Catfish Creek, then past two very old cabin

foundations now nearly obscured by trees and day lillies, the latter now enjoying the freedom to spread as they wish. The tour continued along a long forgotten roadway up the bluff to higher ground. The road had been laborously stabilized by a retaining wall of large, now moss covered stones. Local inhabitants say many of these old roads were used to haul ice cut from the Mississippi river up the bluffs to the farms on the ridge tops. Before reaching the top of the bluff we paused to view several lead mine pits of varying depths which were of unknown age. On top of the ridge in what is now a rough, abandoned cornfield Larry pointed out the approximate boundaries of an archaic site. Then across the field and back into the timber Larry led the group over a rather extended mound group. From here it was all down hill to a more recently abandoned farmstead. Here the group was shown an archaeological site in the making. Rotting timbers, rusting cans, bottles and other debris were rapidly being covered and/or consumed by the forces of nature. Towards the end of the tour the group walked by a field which was once the site of the now completely obliterated village of Catfish.

The day was hot and some thought the tour a bit strenuous, however, all seemed to enjoy the two hour archaeological experience.



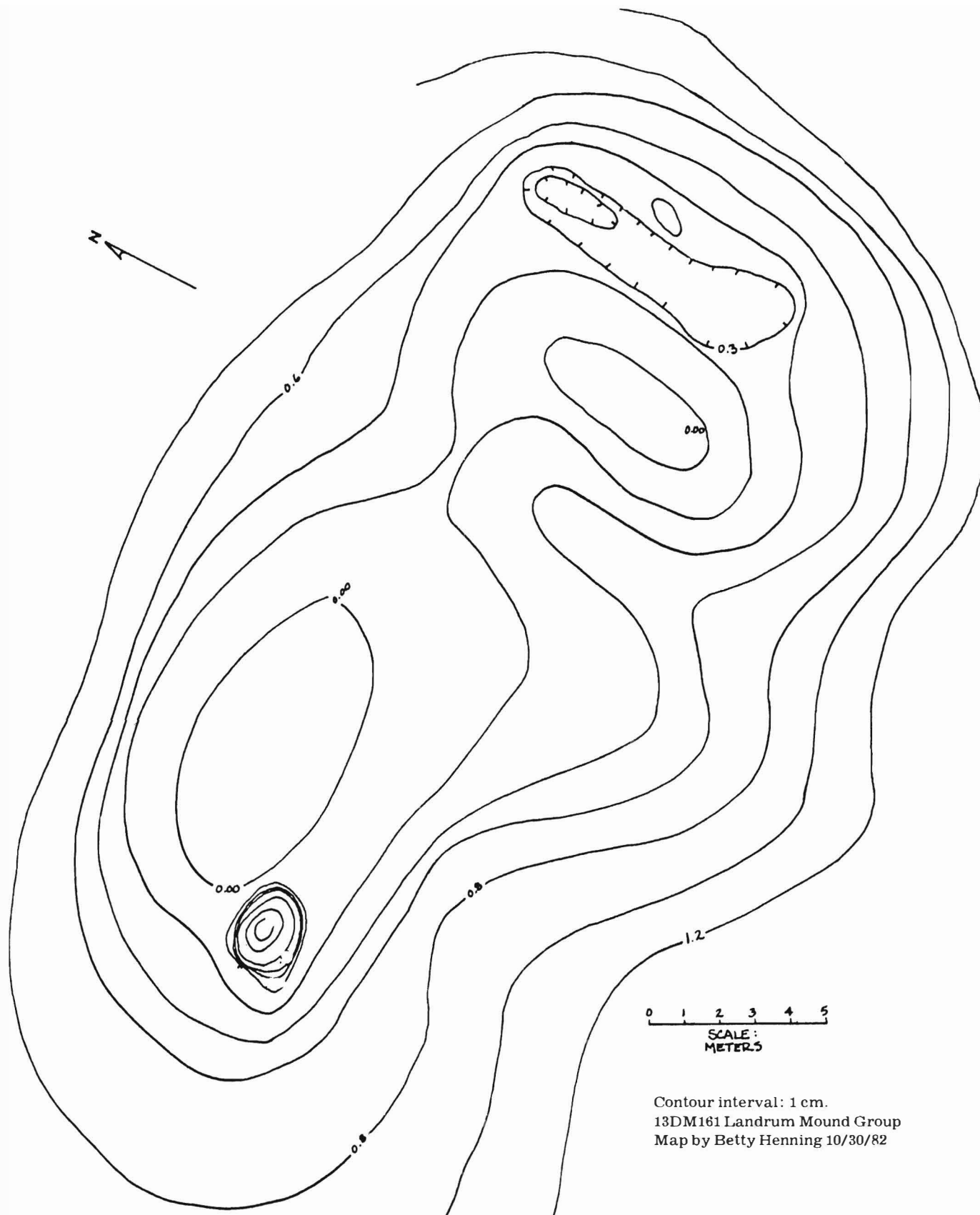
I.A.S. members gather at the Julien Dubuque monument.  
Photo by Richard Slattery.

(cont. from page 2)

Same and of Prehistoric Cemeteries in the Valley of the Upper Iowa River. In, Vol. 1: Iowa Archaeological Reports 1934 to 1939. Evaluation index by Marshall McKusick. In, Archives of Archaeology. Society for American Archaeology, Microcard Series. Edited by David Baerreis. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

n.d. The Ratcliffe Lizard Pipe. MS79, Ellison Orr Collections. Iowa State Historical Society, Iowa City.

A special note of thanks to Mr. George Horton who informed me of the existence of the "Ratcliffe Lizard Pipe" manuscript in the collections of the Iowa State Historical Society.



Note three pot holes in the upper portion of the mound.

The pot hole in lower end of mound is large enough to accommodate several deer hunters who use it as a stand. This excavation was made in about 1975 by a person known to the landowner. At that time this man had several people assist in the devastation of this area of the mound. Periodical digging has been carried on for years. In about 1950 a logging operation cleared nearby land and the crew used logloading fork lift trucks to open most of the nine burial mounds.

# LANDRUM MOUND GROUP

Submitted by D. G. Spears

In 1977, Virgil Landrum reported an unusual mound group to me. At that time he recalled that as a young boy he often visited this site with an uncle who lived nearby.

At this time (mid thirties) the site was in a pristine conditional setting, under a parklike habitat of first growth hardwood trees. The site lies on a ridge approx.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile long and overlooks a sizeable stream.

There is an erratical line of small, low lying oval mounds typical of the late Woodland period. On the east end of this group lies the configuration shown on opposite page. This is also the highest point on the ridge. One quarter mile east and toward the base of the ridge was a circular depression that was usually water filled. This was about 100 ft. in diameter. Land cultivation, soil redeposition and other natural acts have since obliterated this feature which was possibly a barrow pit for the mound fill. Virgil always thought this large mound represented a buffalo. When he viewed it long ago and when it was clear of brush, and had not been disturbed. It might well have looked like a buffalo or could be a buffalo effigy.

Clark Mallam notes that soil samples need to be taken to determine what this mass represents. He suggests that this may be a composite mound(s) comparable to similar other finds (hopewellian).

The mound fill is a light almost spongy loess like soil and a black loam soil mantle has formed on the site.

Domestic cattle have been pastured here. All grazing cattle have a tendency to go to the highest point to stand or mill about. Had there been appendages (small legs) then these



could have been trampled down. Uneven soil buildup or even the backfill from the potting activities could have changed the general appearances of this tumuli.

Two buffalo effigies have been described in reports from NE Iowa long ago. These have since been destroyed.

James Pilgrim has reported one or more effigy mound forms near Dubuque. There are probably more effigys in Iowa that go unrecognized.

Starr, S.B. Evans and et al. in the late 19th century described a "Crescent" shaped burial mound near Ely's Ford, now in the Keo-Lacey State Park in Van Buren County. During the W P A and C C C days a chain of disturbed small conical mounds, associated with this apparent bird effigy were reconstructed. There is some documentation on this group.

Dale and I visited there in October 1981. The conicals had been repotted and we could not find the bird effigy due to a heavy undergrowth, leaves and trees. One report called the effigy an "Alar" form and also

said it was banana shaped.

Members of the Buffalo hunt were I A S members: Dale and Betty Henning, Virgil and daughter Lynn, "Newie" Newell and myself.

Left to right: Betty Henning, Newie Newell, Dale and Virgil.

Photo by Lynn Landram

Editor:

Gary L. Valen

R.R. 2

Lacona, Ia. 50139

Associate Editor:

Don G. Spears

536 South Davis

Ottumwa, Ia. 52501

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# ALLAMAKEE PETROGLYPHS

In the Northeast corner of Iowa, lying hidden in cave fissures and cliff overhangs, are one of the most perplexing oddities of Midwestern prehistoric culture. Petroglyphs (including the logo of the Office of State Archaeologist) occur primarily in Allamakee county where the soft Jordan sandstone outcrops along the Upper Iowa and Mississippi River drainages in heavily forested hills.

As a project for an archeology course at the University of Northern Iowa taught by John Cole, I endeavored to find out more about Iowa's petroglyphs. In travels out West, I was always amazed at the petroglyphs there and the amount of study done on them. I was to find out that no such research base exists concerning Iowa's petroglyphs. Perhaps the most frustrating thing about analysing Iowa's petroglyphs is their poor survival rate. Of the twelve sites I was able to identify thru Ellison Orr's and Theodore Lewis' surveys, at least five have been either vandalized, eroded away, or hidden by natural forces such as vegetation, rock slides, etc.

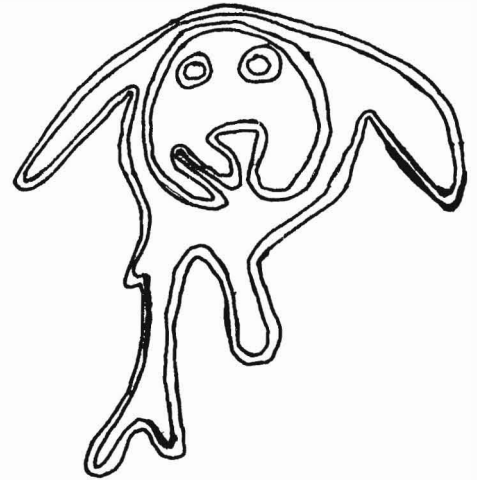
The drawings of petroglyphs made by Orr in 1927 (including Lewis' drawings from 1889) provide us with the most accurate description of Iowa's petroglyphs (see illustrations). Game petroglyphs can perhaps be explained as places of worship before a hunt or as signs of various clans of Oneota society. Likewise, the "Thunderbird" petroglyphs at Conway and Indian Cave probably were an important spiritual symbol of the Oneota. Of interest to me were the heretofore ignored "Turkey track" petroglyphs. Almost all Iowa sites contain numerous "Turkey track" signs as found at the Woolstrom site. Perhaps

they have an important meaning also. The Oneota were an agricultural people, utilizing both prairie and woodland ecosystems. Perhaps the Oneota made symbols for their sacred corn, insuring its fertility and productivity. Surely it was agriculture that helped them to become a successful culture and I find the unexplained carvings a tantalizing clue to bettering our understanding of their lifestyle.

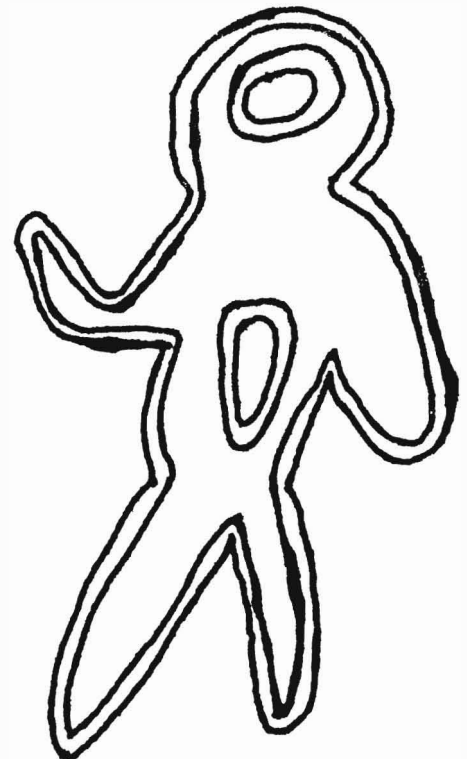
In reviewing my paper, I realize that the studies I did were nothing more than a preliminary show of interest. In order to contribute meaningfully to Iowa petroglyph studies, all of the sites must be found and surveyed again, mapped in every detail, and then considered with all geographical and cultural data. Difficult topography, protective landowners (and I don't blame them a bit!), and fading petroglyphs make the hope of understanding these petroglyphs a dimmer prospect as time goes on. In closing I would like to say "Thank you" to the IAS, Office of State Archaeologist and Effigy Mounds staff. Also, if any readers have information they would like to share with me or opinions on petroglyph interpretation, please let me know.

Matt Hobson  
1142 Magnolia Pkwy.  
Waterloo, Iowa 50701  
1-319-236-0297

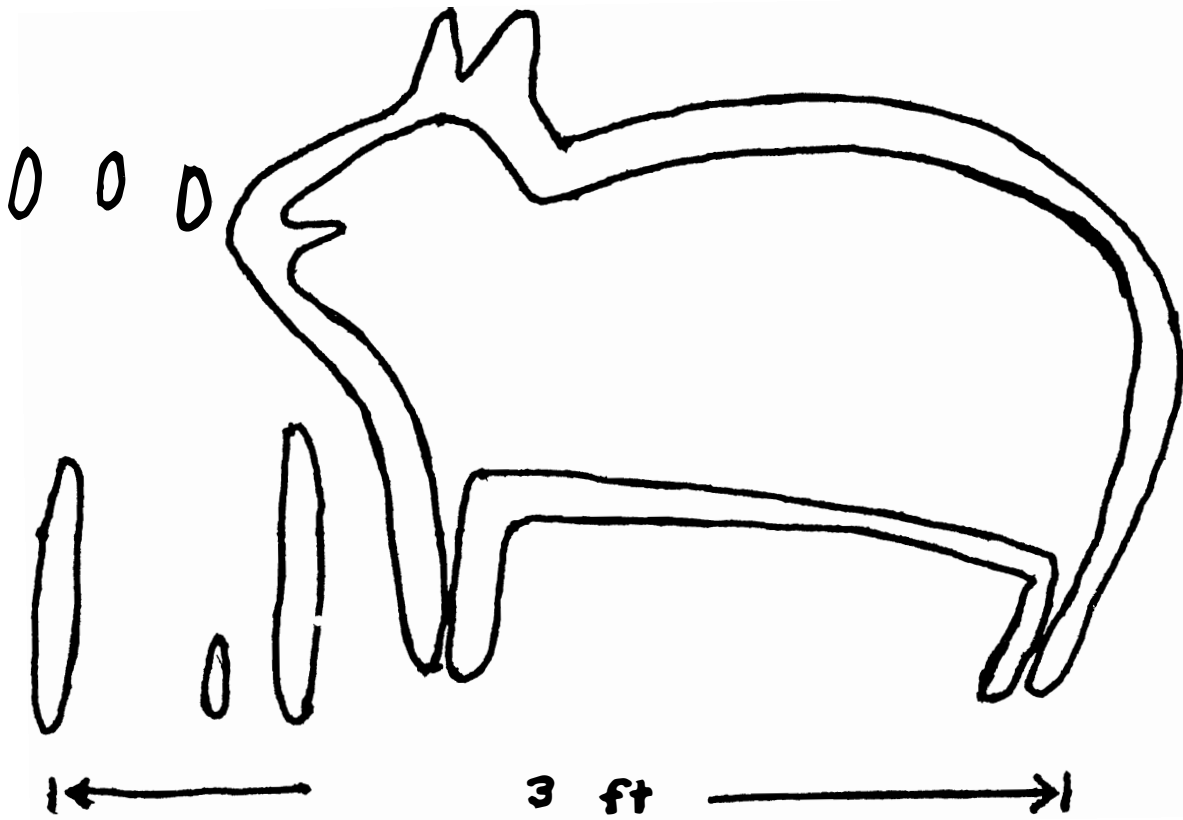
LOVE FARM



LOVE FARM



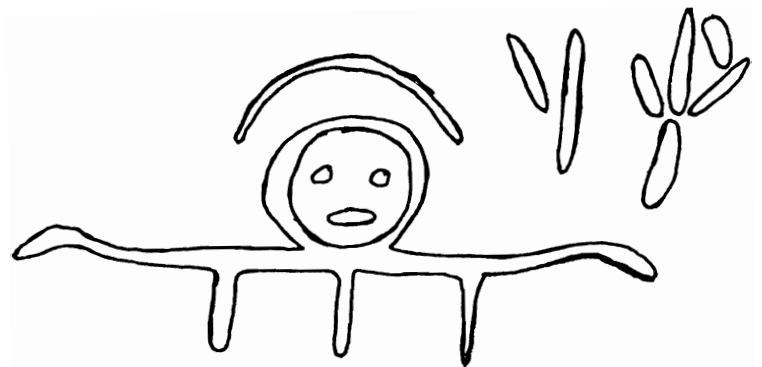
**BEAR CREEK SHELTER**



**WOOLSTROM CLIFF**



**INDIAN CAVE**





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1983 Dues should be paid as soon as possible to eliminate the expense of sending notices. 1983 Dues are:

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This catalog contains some observations based on the authors research on cultivated plants in America. Also available is an exhibit that will be loaned to interested museums. Send now!

## IN MEMORY OF

Orville T. Upp, longtime member of the Iowa Archeological Society.

Born October 9, 1895 - Ottumwa

Entered Into Rest Sept. 20, 1982 - Ottumwa.

Orville was a civil engineer during his lifetime.

He was well known due to his lifetime studies and interest in Chief Blackhawk and the history surrounding the Iowaville area.

He left a wealth of data concerning this local history which will be made available to some one wishing to write up a monologue of sorts to add to some other publication of early Iowa history.

D. Spears

Anyone out there who wants to read the outline of Orville's work with the intent to ready it into a publishable form should contact Valen or myself. This is really important.

D.G.S.

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Iowa Archeological Society  
Office of the Newsletter Editor  
Gary L. Valen  
Eastlawn Building  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa 52242



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