

## Lizard Mound County Park

**HISTORY:** Lizard Mound Park was established in 1950. It is named for its most outstanding Indian mound shaped like a gigantic lizard. Lizard Mound County Park consists of 28 fine examples of effigy mounds. It is an unusually beautiful group of mounds, and one is especially impressed with the prominent height and careful construction of each mound. The majority of the mounds rise three to four feet above the surrounding ground level.

Indians we now know as the Effigy Mound Builders lived in Wisconsin and bordering states between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1000. These Indians built burial mounds shaped like mammals, reptiles, birds and other creatures both real and mythical. They also constructed conical, oval and linear mounds. The custom of building effigy burial mounds died out about 1000 years ago; it was a custom unique to this general area. Unfortunately, very little else is known about the Mound Indians. Even Indians who lived in Wisconsin when the first white men arrived didn't know why, or by whom, the mounds were built. Effigy mounds are found mostly in central and southern Wisconsin. Hundreds of the mounds were destroyed by early settlers who didn't know what they were. Constant cultivation of the land eliminated all traces of most of the mounds. It is estimated that Wisconsin had at least 5,000 effigy mounds when the white settlers first arrived.

The earliest data concerning the mounds in the area of Lizard Mound County Park was in the form of a sketch map resulting from field investigations made by Professor Julius L. Torney of Milwaukee in 1883. In his sketch of the mound group, Professor Torney illustrated a total of 47 Indian mounds. He also indicated that a number of the earth works had been destroyed prior to the time that he drew his map. The original group probably consisted of at least 60 mounds, including many of the well known effigy shapes.

Archeological explorations were conducted in 1960. Exploration of the effigy mounds has revealed that the dead were placed in pits and the effigy mounds were built over the pits. Artifacts such as clay pots, projectile points, pipes, bone harpoons and beads were sometimes placed with the dead. It has been speculated that the shapes of the mounds had a religious or clan significance, but no one really knows for sure.

Excavations of Effigy Mound Builders' village sites indicated they lived in small nomadic groups, hunted, fished, gathered fruits and nuts, fashioned tools of stone, wood, bone and copper, made pottery and may have been the first people in Wisconsin to use the bow and arrow.

No other group of mounds in Wisconsin is so well preserved, so diversified in form, or exhibits such outstanding examples of the prehistoric art of mound construction. This park is an important monument to one of Wisconsin's most interesting prehistoric Indian cultures. The park was acquired from the State of Wisconsin in 1986.

***Lizard Mound Nature Trail***

Lizard Mound County Park provides a self-guided anthropological nature trail that winds around more than 20 well preserved Effigy Mounds. Trail markers reveal the vast history of the extinct culture that built these unique features.

*Information provided by Lisa Lickel*