

A Cry of Outrage

Concerned Friends of the Serpent Mound

A rather remarkable change or even *defacement* of the Great Serpent Mound of Adams County, Ohio has occurred just within a short span of time. The world famous landmark, owned and operated under the aegis of the Ohio Historical Society (OHS), has sustained enough alteration to warrant calling public attention to the problem.

Although it was only 3-4 inches in height at most, the once well defined appendage that jutted quite visibly from the south side of the Serpent's head has mysteriously disappeared, and relatively overnight. Looking back at a few of the maps, one can see how obvious this key low level mound was throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Now it and a few other minor stone features nearby along the margins of the Great Manitou have suddenly vanished. Added to these changes, the small triangular mound at the west end of the effigy has become less distinct. But what could have caused all this in such a relatively short time?

A volunteer who works regularly at the site reported that a prominent OHS official, upon visiting the park recently, did not even seem to be aware of the missing feature, remarking that the appendage to the north represented the puffed-up back of a rattlesnake. Yet the northern appendage has long been considered the twin of the now absent one. So why would a knowledgeable OHS official not acknowledge the missing feature if he subscribed to William F. Romain's rattlesnake interpretation introduced 20 years ago based upon the twin appendages?

There may be a very good reason for this lack of acknowledgement as we learned firsthand from the former manager of the site who yet lives and works nearby. But for this explanation, we have to turn back the clock a full 20 years when he and his wife resided at the site.

After the yearly park closing in 1987, the Ohio Historical Society permitted an expenditure arranging for tons of topsoil to be trucked in and spread atop the sacred structure. This was done to repair what appeared to have been general damage sustained by the thousands of visitors present at the Harmonic Convergence in August that same year.

At the time of the topsoil's distribution, no research was undertaken to study the effects of adding such thick quantities of rich earth brought from an outside source to such a sensitive and important structure. Without consideration for the establishment of a strong and *deep* grass root network, the excess of foreign soil may have been far more than the delicate ecology could sustain. With only an insufficient system binding the earth, perennial rains would gradually dissolve small amounts of the loosely held soil.



This leached soil would then deposit itself by gravity and evaporation mainly where the ground leveled out.

The reason we are so concerned is that such an action, if this theory is considered feasible by the many professional and non-professional friends of the ancient mounds, could be classified among the greatest oversights in modern Ohio archaeological history. It constitutes an apparent obliteration of a key feature of arguably the most important sacred site in all North America.

Should a thorough inquiry and investigation be implemented to determine a course of action needed to restore the missing appendage as well as other minor discrepancies? If so, we would request that it be performed by competent individuals both from within and from outside the OHS, and include at least one native Indian archaeologist also selected independently of the Ohio Historical Society.

Right above: Caretaker Leslie Laboda of Cleveland, Ohio shows the area of the now missing appendage. (July, 2007). Although it was only a few inches in height, it was quite broad. Other interpretations of the twin appendages include flippers or fins with the effigy being a water creature, with the hollow triangular feature seen as a gill slit, and the small triangular mound a lower jaw distended to encompass the oval as serpents have the capacity to do. – F.S.M.