

My First Dig

by JOHN R. HALSEY

How would you like to be a member of a field crew excavating a prehistoric Hopewell burial mound as your first archaeological excavation experience? That's what happened to me as a young anthropology student at the University of Michigan in the summer of 1963. Along with several other undergraduates, I joined Richard Flanders, a graduate student who led the excavations at the Norton Mounds.



We were all eager to see the mounds. **John Halsey, at far right, digs the Norton Mounds in 1963.**

A few were large, more than 10 feet high and 100 feet in diameter. Those would take a lot of digging! But we soon found out that there was a lot more to archaeology than finding neat artifacts. Only after the grass, weeds, poison ivy, and blackberry brambles had been cleared could we lay out the trenches that we would dig to expose the burial pit.

The summer went by in a flash. In those eight weeks, we learned how to excavate, remove, and carefully pack fragile bones and artifacts. We learned the importance of the differences in soil colors. The soil helped explain how the mound was built. We learned how to explain to the public what we were doing and what we were finding. We also lived in tents and learned how to bathe ourselves in a gravel pit.

After that summer I really wanted to be an archaeologist. My experience also gave me a career-long interest in the prehistoric people who built the mounds.

■ *John R. Halsey is the State Archaeologist of Michigan.*

Where to Take Your Family

The **Public Museum of Grand Rapids** operates the Norton Indian Mounds National Historic Landmark, a 55-acre Hopewell Indian site. Artifacts from the mounds are on display at the Van Andel Museum Center. For information, telephone (616) 456-3977 or visit www.grmuseum.org.

Fort Hill State Memorial in Ohio contains one of the best-preserved Indian hilltop enclosures in North America. The Hopewell Indians constructed the 1.5 mile-long earthworks. For information, telephone (800) 283-8905 or visit www.ohiohistory.org/places/fthill.

The **Newark Earthworks State Memorial** in Ohio is the largest system of connected geometric earthworks built anywhere in the world. For information, telephone (800) 600-7174 or visit www.ohiohistory.org/places/newarkearthworks/greatCircle.cfm.

Hopewell Culture National Historical Park in Ohio offers a visitor center featuring hundreds of Hopewellian artifacts. Large earthwork and mound complexes in the park provide insight into the social, ceremonial, political, and economic life of the Hopewell people. For information, telephone (740) 774-1126 or visit www.nps.gov/hocu.