

Our trip to Etowah

By Lee Spotted Pony Billingsley

On our way down to the tribal grounds Anne & I stopped at Georgia Etowah Mounds State Park. The place is near Cartersville GA ,north of Atlanta just off I-75 at exit 288, It's easy to follow the signs to get to it. These are mounds built during the Mississippian culture, roughly 1000-1500BC.

The tour started with a short movie that told us all about how all native Americans walked across a land bridge from Asia, & told how Cherokee country was settled north to south by these people coming down from Alaska. The Cherokees came down from Iroquois country since their language is similar to Iroquois. The movie stressed that the people who lived here were not Cherokee, & were gone before the Cherokee came to this area. (This squashes any discussion, comparison, or contact between Etowah and Cherokee culture)

In the lobby was a diagram on the wall as well as a diorama of how the town would have looked. Notably the town was surrounded on 3 sides by a palisade of stakes about 7ft high, & a moat outside that. It showed square gardens with corn planted in rows.

Some of the staff came over & asked if we had any questions. O yes we did. They may have later regretted asking this.

First of all that movie we saw talked about the Bering land bridge while some scientists are saying people could have arrived in North America much earlier, by boat. Also they may have settled South America first, then moved north, which would mean this country was settled south to north. Why isn't any of this in the movie?

Well that movie is about 20 years old, maybe it should be updated.

The movie says Iroquois & Cherokee languages are similar. How do they know Cherokee people came from Iroquois country based on that? How do we know which language came from the other?

Hmm yes, I see what you mean. It's all in the book we have in the gift shop.

Before I spend \$32 for a 200-page paperback, the diorama over here shows a palisade built around the town.

Yes, that would be for defense, lots of invaders in the area.

Over there it says this was a great trading center...

Yes, it was.

Wouldn't a palisade discourage trade? How do we know the palisade was for defense? And if it was for defense why is there no palisade on the river side, that whole side of town is open, & how do we know all the stakes were 7 feet high, & all the same height?

Well I guess we don't know exactly but there is evidence of a palisade which is why it's in the diorama.

And the moat? Is that defensive too?

O yes.

But it's only like 2 feet deep, doesn't look like that would stop anybody.

It was built for defense.

Over there it shows corn

.... yes, they planted corn, then beans around that , then squash around that, the three sisters, very important to their diet

.... I understand, but that describes planting in a circle, yet it shows corn planted over there in rows, the beans are over there, & the squash someplace else. Why is that?

We found archaeological evidence of corn being planted in rows in various places around the town.

(Wow I thought, these archaeologists must be good indeed if they can find evidence of corn being planted in some spot after 1000 years, give or take)

You know, I'm just trying to establish where the facts end & the speculation begins, so far I'm hearing a lot on the speculative side of things.

O, you don't need to be overly concerned with facts.

(Right about here is where Anne had to walk away to keep from laughing)

Okay, now over here on the wall, this diagram shows these buildings on top of the mound there ...

...yes there is evidence of buildings there

..I'm sure of that, I'm just wondering why the big building is labeled 'Chief's House' & the little one is labeled 'Servant's Quarters.' How do we know anyone lived there much less a chief, how do we know he had servants & how do we know that's where they lived?

Is that what it says? Mmm... sure enough, maybe we should change that... we really can't say who lived there, we just know they had buildings up on the mound.

We spent hours on the grounds, & walking over the mounds, but most of our time was spent sitting by the river where the fish dam is, tho it was covered by water this day. There is a wonderful spirit in this place, a place where you are invited to come on in & set a spell. Etowah does not at all feel like a castle or fort full of frightened people preparing for the next attack. Instead, there is a restful, peaceful feeling in the place. A great place for a picnic.

If you go there, bring tobacco & offer a prayer on the mounds (or anywhere, really) thanking the ancestors who lived there for giving you a chance to visit their home, & for giving a glimpse of how they lived. If you feel rebellious, don't ask permission to do this, Ceremonies are prohibited on the grounds unless you have permission.

Also, the mounds are roughly square, see if you can tell if the sides face the four directions, or the corners.

When we walked by the staff to leave, they seemed surprised, though pleased, that we had spent so much time there.

How did you like the tour?

Wonderful, very nice, we love the place, great place to hang out. You know, (I nodded toward the diorama) it kind of reminds you of a medieval European castle.

Why yes! She brightened, exactly!! She didn't get it!



Lee Spotted Pony