

A Red Ochre Mound in Fulton County

Donald E. Wray

Peoria, Illinois

This mound is located in Fulton County on a bluff overlooking the village of Banner. It is on a point formed by the valleys of the Illinois River and Copperas Creek. The mound is roughly oval in shape, 42 feet long, 32 feet wide and from two to three and one-half feet high at present. It rests on a large natural deposit of soil which may possibly have been artificially shaped, since it is roughly square and flat on top. This forms a rectangular platform 70 feet long and 50 feet wide. It is on this platform that the mound proper is located.

The top of the mound is now flat, but that it was formerly somewhat higher is indicated by some leg bones which lay just below the sod in a position which would place the body above them. We may assume from this that the mound was originally at least a foot higher than at present. The decrease in height is probably due in part to erosion because of the prominence of the mound, but the frequent activities of "pot hunters" have no doubt hastened the process.

The burials in the mound were mainly on the base line, that is about three feet below the surface. Another layer of burials probably existed about 2½ feet above the base line. Only one undisturbed burial was found in this level, but evidence of other burials was present in the heaps of broken bones which former excavators had left.

The peculiar features of the burials as a whole were that they were covered with red ochre and placed in a flexed position with the hands under the head. The skeletons did not seem to be placed with any special relationship to direction or to each other.

Fifteen burials were found, four of which were infants and children. Two skulls from the base level have cephalic indices of 64 and 73, and one skull from the upper level is 66. The figures are only approximately true for all three skulls show signs of distortion from the pressure of the earth, nevertheless they indicate a long-headed type of skull.

The only objects found in the upper level are a six inch knife of dark flint and a small notched arrow point. The base level burials contained a number of interesting artifacts; a necklace of 27 rolled copper beads, 4 cylindrical shell beads, 4 spear heads with turkey tail bases made of dark flint, a sherd of grit tempered pottery with squared rim and cord markings on both surfaces, a pink stone knife 9" long, a shell spoon and a piece of galena.