

Archaeological Examination of Mound Disturbance at Edgewood College
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Summary

Between December 5- 16, 2014, the author conducted an archaeological investigation of a disturbance to an edge of conical Indian mound, designated Mound 4, located on the Edgewood College campus along Edgewood Drive in Madison, Wisconsin, and cataloged as a burial site by the Wisconsin Historical Society in 1990. The disturbance was created in November, 2013 by the excavation an approximate 60 inch x 40 inch. hole to connect fiber optical cable horizontally drilled to a connection under an adjacent sidewalk for an emergency call pole. The archaeological work was conducted to determine how much of the mound had been disturbed and whether or not human burials had been affected.

The hole itself was examined for indications of mound fill, burials, or other ancient cultural activity, and the backdirt was examined for human bone and artifacts. The assessment found that the area had been greatly disturbed by former land use and that only an edge of the extant mound may have been disturbed by the most recent work. No human remains were found and nor was there evidence of burials or other ancient cultural activity. The work also noted a discrepancy in the location the area intended to be cataloged in 1990 and the that appears on a campus 2006 Facilities Condition map. It is recommended that the subsurface extent of the surviving mound itself be determined and that location of the easement be corrected. The current project could feasibly be completed without further damage to the mound, but, alternatively, the fiber optic cable could run to the east of the bordering sidewalk.

Introduction

Between December 5-16, 2014, the author conducted an archaeological investigation of a disturbance to an edge of a conical Indian mound, designated Mound 4, located on the Edgewood College campus along Edgewood Drive in Madison, Wisconsin, and cataloged as a burial site by the Wisconsin Historical Society in 1990 (Figure 1). The disturbance was caused by 60 in. x 40 in. bore trenching hole excavated to a depth of approximately 30 in. to connect a fiber optic cable horizontally drilled for an emergency emergency call pole (Figure 2, 3). The archaeological work was conducted to determine how much of the mound had been disturbed and whether or not human burials had been affected.

Background

The Edgewood mound group (47 Da- 147) was first described by Charles Brown in 1915 based on a 1906 survey by A.B. Stout (Brown 1915:104-107). It consists of effigy mounds, linear mounds, and a line of conical mounds located along the present Edgewood Drive. One conical mound, now referred to as Mound 4, had been disturbed prior by 1906, mainly by adjacent road construction, and its former extent described as unknown. In 1990, the Wisconsin Historical Society mapped and cataloged the mound, along with others, as a burial places under 157.70 Wis. Stats. within a square easement (Figure 1). At that time, Mound 4 was described as 1-2 feet in height and 20 foot in diameter with edges disturbed by a modern sidewalk and Edgewood Drive. In 2006, the mound easements, including that of Mound 4, were incorporated in a Existing Conditions map by JSD Professional Services to be used for planning purposes. Mound 4 itself was not mapped, probably because it is hard to differentiate from the surrounding terrain. An easement was mapped but appears to be larger and offset from that area *intended* to be cataloged in 1990 due to some error, possibly in the original documents (Fig. 2).

In late November 2013 the area of Mound was impacted by the recent work. Current college personnel were unaware of the mound because an easement apparently did not appear on a planning map they were using, and because those facility personal familiar with mound had left college employment. The disturbance was reported to the College and the Wisconsin Historical society by a faculty member.

Fieldwork

The approximate extent of the mound itself was first determined by visual inspection and reference to the 1990 WHS mapping and this was flagged and mapped by JSD (Figure 2). The edges of the

mound were hard to detect due to its very low height, tree growth that raised some areas of ground along the roots, and past disturbances such as the sidewalk and road construction. When it was discovered that 1990 easement was not shown on a campus planning map, JSD retrieved data from their 2006 campus mapping, but this showed the easement about 10 ft. east of the intended location as indicated by overall map of cataloged areas by the WHS in 1990 (Figure 2). JSD could not say now what map data was used, but did indicate to the author that there are difficulties using the survey information from the 1990 WHS legal document.

Soils and Stratigraphy

The sides of the excavated hole were troweled to clarify the soils and stratigraphy and any evidence of burial features, bone, or artifacts. According to the Dane County Soil Survey, the soils of this area are classified as part of the McHenry Series consisting of silty clay loams down to a depth of 33 inches and sandy loam below this (USDA 1978: 43). Examination revealed that most of the area of the hole had been disturbed by modern land use and that probably only an edge of the original mound had been affected. As mentioned, a 1906 survey indicated that the mound had already been mutilated at that time. No human bone, graves, or artifacts were found during the inspection of the hole.

Figure 4 shows the northeast wall of the excavation that covers the asphalt sidewalk. Below this, the ground had been disturbed by previous excavations to a substantial depth as well as the more recent horizontal bore hole. Figures 4 and 5 also show the southwest wall that is topped by 6-8 inches of modern loamy fill that had been placed over, and truncated, a layer of fine gravel originating from the adjacent road and sidewalk before these had been paved. The gravel layer covered and truncated a 2-4 thick dark brown silty clay layer that was disturbed by tree roots. The dark layer appears to be the

bottom remnants of the original A horizon (topsoil) and appears to rise several inches to the north where it gradually transitions into a yellowish brown silt clay E horizon with many tree roots that are characteristic of this zone according to the soil survey. This higher area may well be the edge of the original mound but no clear differentiation between mound fill and natural soil development could be detected. The basal unit or subsoil is a dense silty clay B zone, also characteristic of the natural soil series, and this was disturbed only by the approximate 6 inch in diameter horizontal boring hole.

The northwest and southeast walls show somewhat similar sequences and disturbances (Figure 4, 5). The remnant of the A zone in the southeast wall, near Edgewood Drive, showed it had been disturbed and churned up by use or construction of the road and had many with gravel and small rock inclusions. As well, the northwest wall shows clear recent disturbance by previous excavations beneath the asphalt sidewalk as already noted.

Back dirt

A large pile of back dirt from the excavation and bore holes had been inadvertently piled on the low mound itself and this was removed to the original surface and placed in the excavated hole. The high clay content of the soil prohibited screening but approximately 1/3 was carefully gone through by hand and trowel to recover any human remains or cultural material. Much of this was loose dirt that could be broken up for inspection. However, the rest of clay-laden backdirt froze solid with the abrupt onset of frigid temperatures and snow. Edgewood College maintenance personnel gradually thawed much of this for hand and trowel examination with a flame throwing torch tool used for burning weeds. However, approximately 1/4 of the total back dirt could not be broken up because it remained frozen despite the heating and this had to be placed in the hole in large blocks. However, this soil was clearly from the dense silty clay B zone from the bottom of the excavated hole that showed

no evidence of burial or other cultural activity, so it is my professional opinion that no human remains or ancient artifacts would have been missed.

The only objects recovered during the examination of the backdirt as a piece of a plastic cup, pieces of a modern wooden stake; and several pieces of flagstone that probably came from the adjacent sidewalk before it was paved.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The recent work was in an area greatly disturbed by past activities, but the bore trenching hole excavation may have disturbed a small edge of the original mound. The boring was made below this in sterile soil. There was no evidence that burials or human remains were disturbed. Elsewhere, the extent of Mound 4 was determined on the basis of low rises in the ground and reference to the 1990 map. The center of mound can be determined by a rise between 1 and 2 feet above the surrounding landscape, but the edges of the original mound, or what is left of it, are unclear, partly as a result of disturbance in the past. On the northwest, the area of mound blends with the grassed landscape and some other parts of the detectable rise may be the result of the addition of fill as documented by this study, as well as large tree roots.

There is a discrepancy between the mound easement as shown on College maps in 2006 and the WHS map made in 1990.

On these bases, three recommendations are made. First, a soil scientist with archaeological expertise should determine the modern extent of the mound using soil cores placed along the perimeter of the mound area. Second, a rectilinear easement with at least a 5 ft. buffer around edges of the remaining

mound remnant similar to that in Figure 6 should be reset by professional surveyor and the college should ensure that this information be included in the appropriate facilities and planning maps. Lastly, considering the amount of disturbance that has already taken place, the Wisconsin Historical Society should consider allowing the College to carefully complete the cable connection as originally planned and this should be monitored by an archeologist. If this considered inappropriate, an alternative would be run the cable on the east side of the sidewalk where it would not further impact the mound area.

Sources Cited

Brown, Charles E.
1915 "Lake Wingra" *The Wisconsin Archeologist*, O.S..14 no 3:75-115.

United States Department of Agriculture
1978 *Soil Survey of Dane County, Wisconsin*.

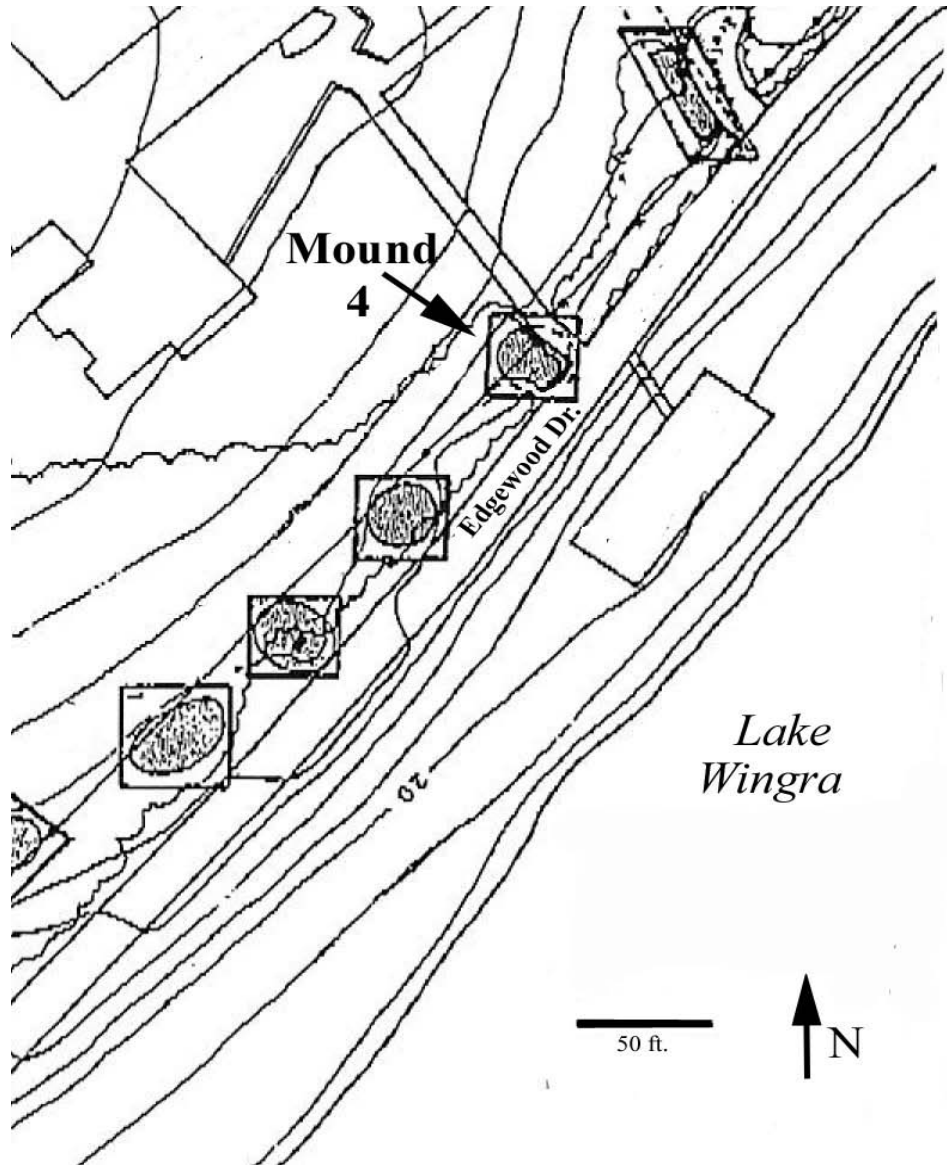


Figure 1: Detail from 1990 Wisconsin Historical Society map showing Mound 4 and easement along with other mounds and easements. For ease of comparison, the map was been re-labeled and re-oriented from the original to show north upwards on the page.

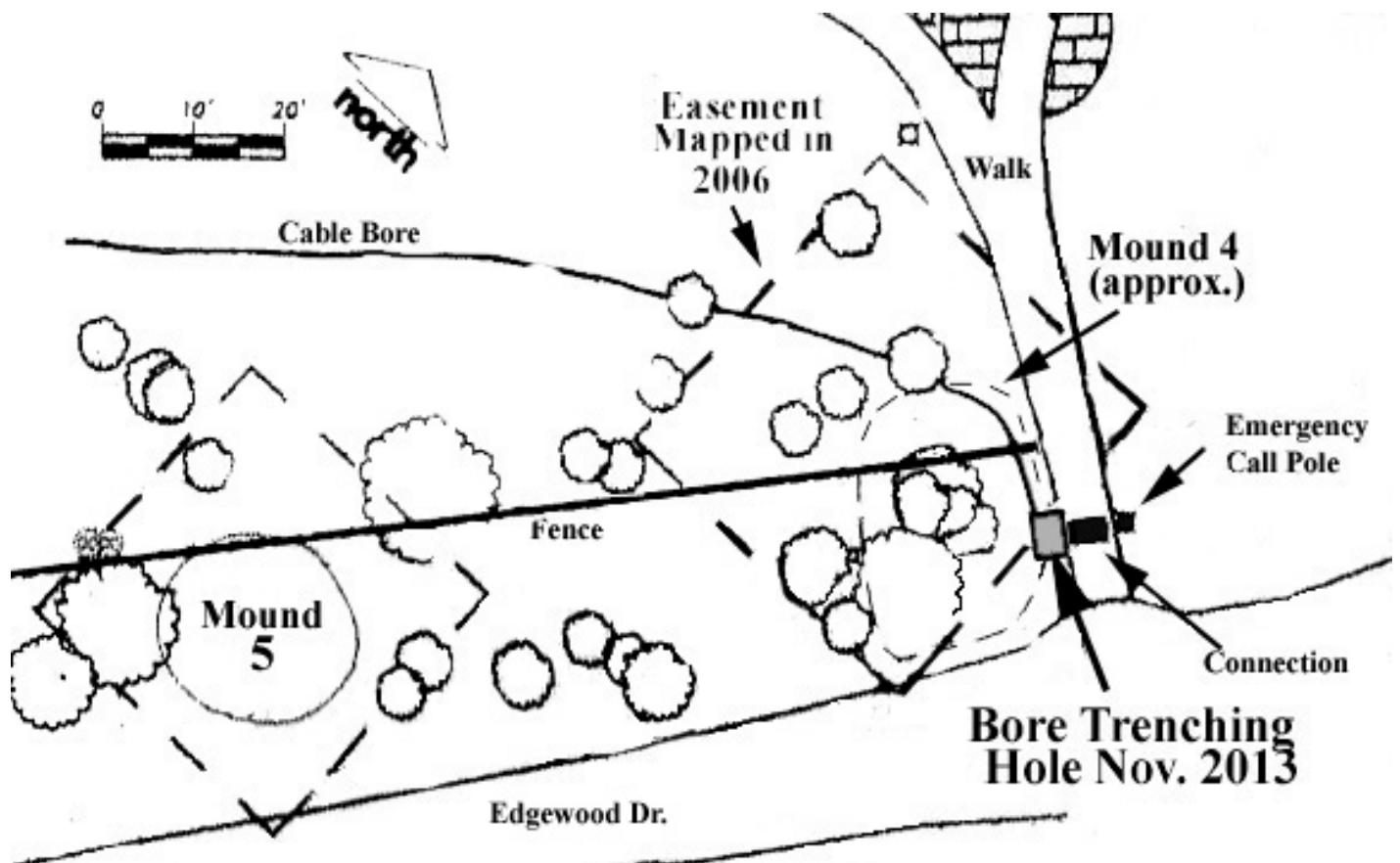


Figure 2: Area of Mound 4 and 2013 disturbance based on a 2006 Existing Facilities map made by JSD Professional Services.

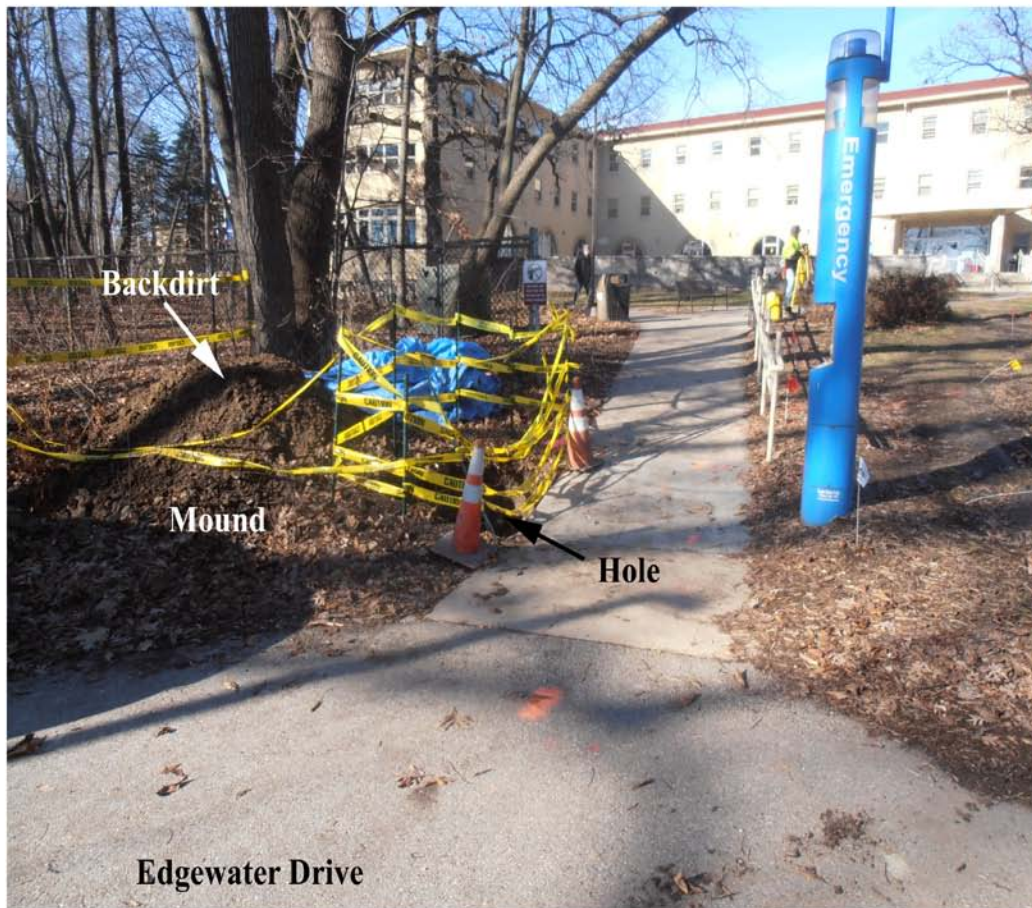


Figure 3: Above, area of disturbance looking northwest; below, bore trenching hole, looking southwest.