

Jones (C.C.) Jr.
ABORIGINAL STRUCTURES

IN

GEORGIA.

BY

CHARLES C. JONES, Jr.



REPRINTED FROM THE SMITHSONIAN REPORT FOR 1877.

WASHINGTON:
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1878.

With the Compliments of

CHARLES C. JONES, JR.,

Augusta, Georgia.

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I.

BIRD-SHAPED STONE TUMULI IN PUTNAM COUNTY, GEORGIA.

The existence of curious effigy-mounds in the southern counties of Wisconsin was noted by Mr. Lapham in 1836. Subsequently, Mr. Taylor, Professor Locke, and Messrs. Squier and Davis furnished additional information in regard to the distinctive characteristics of these unusual structures. It was reserved, however, for the Smithsonian Institution, in the seventh volume of its "Contributions," to furnish, from the pen of Mr. Lapham, the most complete account of these interesting remains. They were quite numerous along the great Indian trail or war-path from Lake Michigan, near Milwaukee, to the Mississippi above the Prairie du Chien. Generally representing men, buffaloes, elks, bears, otters, wolves, raccoons, birds, serpents, lizards, turtles, and frogs, in some instances they were supposed to typify inanimate objects, such as bows and arrows, crosses, and tobacco-pipes. While the outlines of not a few had been seriously impaired, others in a spirited and correct manner declared the objects of their imitation. Constructed of earth, they varied in height from 6 inches to 7 feet. In certain localities the animals were delineated not in relief but in *intaglio*, by excavations and not by elevations.

Two *animal mounds* have been observed in Ohio. On an elevated spur of land near Granville is an earthwork known in the neighborhood as the *Alligator*. Its total length is 250 feet. The head and body, four sprawling legs and a curled tail, were all clearly defined. Across the body it was 40 feet broad, and the length of the legs was 36 feet. Four feet expressed the average height, while at the shoulders the mound attained an elevation of 6 feet. It was manifestly the effort of the primitive workmen to preserve the proportions of the reptile.

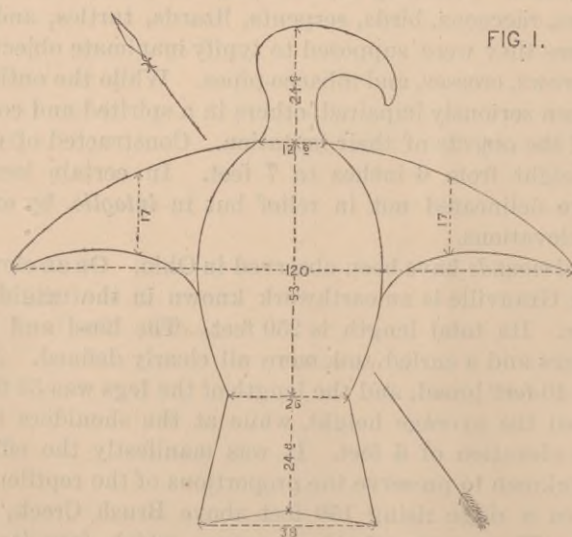
Situated on a ridge rising 150 feet above Brush Creek, in Adams County, is a still more remarkable structure, which, from its configuration, has received the appellation of the *Great Serpent*. "Conforming to the curve of the hill, and occupying its very summit, is the serpent, its head resting near the point and its body winding back for 700 feet in graceful undulations, terminating in a triple coil at the tail." If extended, its entire length would be not less than 1,000 feet. The em-

bankment is upward of 5 feet high, with a base diameter of 30 feet at the center of the body, whence it diminishes somewhat toward the head and tail. "The neck of the serpent is stretched out and slightly curved, and its mouth is opened wide, as if in the act of swallowing or ejecting an oval figure, which rests partially within the distended jaws."

When and by whom these remarkable tumuli were built is not known. The object of their construction is equally a matter of conjecture.

It has been supposed that these animal-shaped mounds existed only in Wisconsin and a few other localities in the West. Our recent observations prove, however, that the primitive dwellers in the South have left similar traces of their constructive skill.

Six miles and a half north of Eatonton, in Putnam County, Georgia, on a plantation owned by the heirs of the late Mr. I. H. Scott, may now be seen a bird-shaped mound of definite configuration. Located in the midst of a beautiful wood, and crowning a high ridge near the headwaters of Little Glady Creek, it is composed entirely of bowlders of white quartz rock, gathered from the adjacent territory. Most of these bowlders are of such size that they could have been transported by a single individual. For the removal of others two or three persons would have been requisite. These bowlders were carefully piled one above another, the interstices being filled with smaller fragments of milky quartz. Into the composition of the structure enters neither earth nor clay.



Scale 40 feet to 1 inch.

Bird shaped stone mound in Putnam County, Georgia.

This stone mound represents an eagle lying upon its back, with extended wings. (See Fig. 1.) The head is turned toward the east. In the construction of this tumulus respect was had to the object imitated;

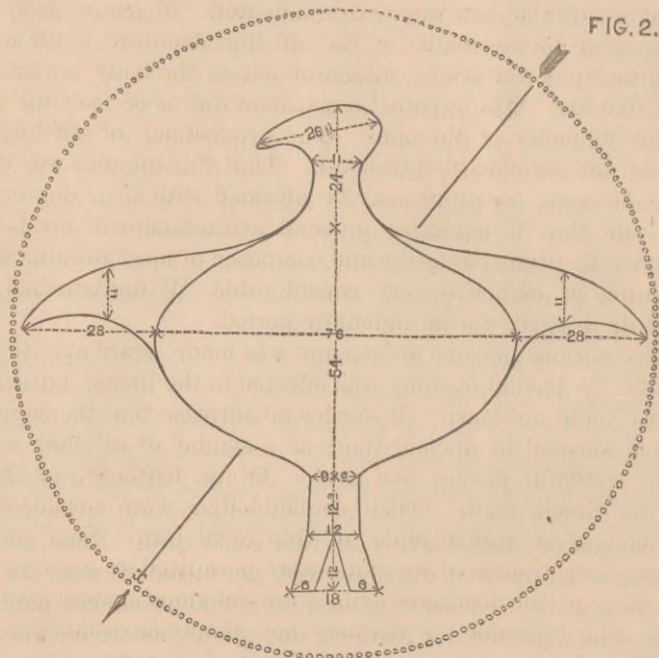
the height of the tumulus at the breast of the bird being between 7 and 8 feet, its altitude thence decreasing toward the head and beak, where it is not more than $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet high, and also toward the extremity of the wings and tail, where it has an elevation of scarcely 2 feet. The beak is decidedly aquiline, and the tail is indented. Measured from the top of the head to the extremity of the tail this structure is 102 feet long. From tip to tip of the wings, measured across the body, we have a distance of 120 feet. The greatest expanse of tail is 38 feet, the same as the lateral diameter of the body. The proportions of the head, neck, wings, and tail are cleverly preserved. That this tumulus was designed to typify an eagle, we think may be affirmed with some degree of confidence, and that it possesses unusual attractions will not be denied. Surrounded by primitive forest and composed of most durable material, its antiquity is evidently very considerable. If undisturbed, it will preserve its integrity for an indefinite period.

By some curious persons an attempt was made, years ago, to pry into its secrets. A partial opening was effected in the breast, but with what results we could not learn. It excites no surprise that the eagle should have been selected in ancient times as a symbol of all that was swift, powerful, watchful, daring, and noble. Of its feathers was the battle-flag of the Creeks made. Their council-lodges were surmounted with carved images or stuffed skins of this regal bird. None among the Cherokees, save approved warriors, were permitted to wear its plumes. To this king of the feathered tribe were religious honors paid by the Natchez, who regarded its feathers not simply as ornaments and trophies, but as marks of dignity and insignia of no common import.

About a mile and a half from Lawrence's Ferry, on the Oconee River, and situated on a stony ridge near the main road, on the plantation of Mr. Kinchen D. Little, in Putnam County, is another of these bird-shaped mounds. Like the former, it is composed wholly of bowlders of white quartz rock, collected from the hill on which it stands. (See Fig. 2.)

Its dimensions do not materially differ from those of the tumulus on the Scott place. The tail, however, is bifurcated. The head of the bird lies to the southeast, and its wings are extended in the direction of northeast and southwest. The entire length of the structure, from the crown of the head to the end of the tail, is 102 feet and 3 inches. For a distance of twelve feet the tail is bifurcated, and just above the point of bifurcation it is 12 feet wide. Across the body, and from tip to tip of the wings, the tape gave us a measurement of 132 feet. The body of this bird, which is evidently lying upon its back, is stouter than that of the eagle, being 76 feet in diameter. Its wings are relatively shorter. The proportions of the head, neck, and tail are tolerably well observed. What particular bird this tumulus is designed to typify, we are at a loss to suggest. The altitude at the breast is about 5 feet, and from that point the structure tapers to the head and tail, which are some

two feet high. At the tips of the wings, which are short and curved, the height is not more than a foot and a half. The ridge upon which this mound rests has never been cleared.



Scale 40 feet to 1 inch.

Bird-shaped stone mound in Putnam County, Georgia.

Surrounding this bird-shaped tumulus is an inclosure of rocks similar to those of which the mound is built. This stone-circle is symmetrical in outline, and at its nearest approach passes within a few feet of the tips of the wings.

Crowning the elevated ridges by which this county is traversed, are occasional rock-mounds of artificial origin. Usually from 4 to 8 feet high, and with base diameters of from 30 to 40 feet, they are circular in form, and are composed of the fragments of milky quartz so common in the region. Some have been opened, and from them have been taken human bones and relics of various sorts. Manifestly such are grave-mounds, it being easier in the rocky neighborhood to heap such stone-piles above than to cover the dead with earth. Of this class of tumuli we instance one on the plantation of Dr. J. T. de Jarnette, 12 miles from Eatonton and about a mile from the Oconee River, and another on the land owned by Capt. A. S. Reid, four miles from Eatonton and near Little River.

It was intimated by some of the early observers that tumuli of this

description were not infrequently temporary in their character, and designed as a protection to the dead who perished away from their homes, until such time as they could be conveniently removed and carried back for interment in the established burial-grounds of the tribe or community of which the deceased were members. While it may be true that some, and perhaps many of the smaller rock-piles so frequent in many portions of Cherokee Georgia, may have originated in this way, we are of opinion that the substantial structures to which we have alluded are permanent in their character, and were erected as enduring memorials of the primitive dead of this region. Surely no more lasting monuments could have been devised at that early period.

The existence of two distinctly marked bird-shaped mounds, of firm construction and excellent proportions, within the territory occupied by the Southern tribes, is deeply interesting, and will attract the attention of the student of American archæology.

II.

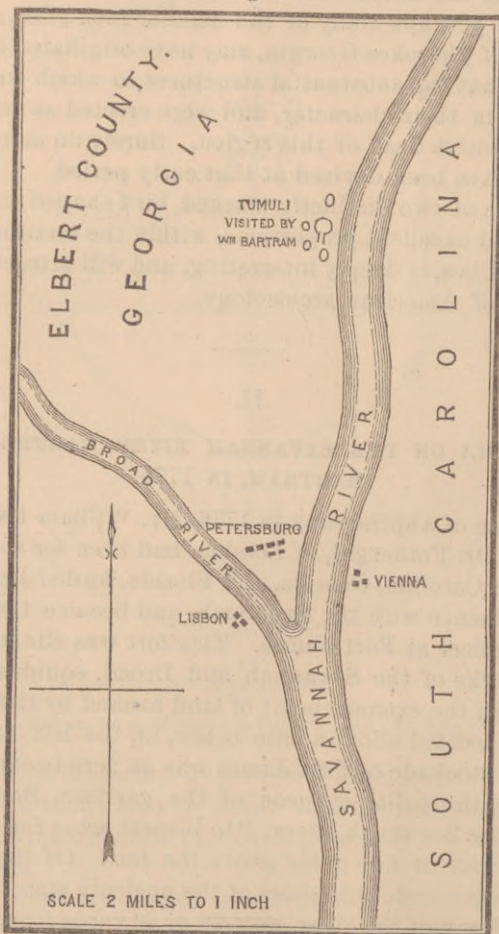
ANCIENT TUMULI ON THE SAVANNAH RIVER, VISITED BY WILLIAM BARTRAM, IN 1776.

Near the close of a spring day in 1776, Mr. William Bartram, who, at the request of Dr. Fothergill, of London, had been for some time studying the flora of Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, forded Broad River just above its confluence with the Savannah, and became the guest of the commanding officer at Fort James. This fort was situated on an eminence in the forks of the Savannah and Broad, equidistant from those rivers, and from the extreme point of land formed by their union. Fort Charlotta was located about a mile below, on the left bank of the Savannah. The stockade of Fort James was an acre in extent.

Attended by the polite surgeon of the garrison, Bartram made an excursion up the Savannah River, "to inspect some remarkable Indian monuments," four or five miles above the fort. Of them he writes as follows: "These wonderful labors of the ancients stand in a level plain very near the bank of the river, now 20 or 30 yards from it. They consist of conical mounts of earth, and four square terraces, &c. The great mount is in the form of a cone, about 40 or 50 feet high, and the circumference of its base two or three hundred yards, entirely composed of the loamy, rich earth of the low grounds; the top or apex is flat; a spiral path or track leading from the ground up to the top is still visible, where now grows a large, beautiful spreading red cedar (*Juniperus Americana*). There appear four niches excavated out of the sides of the hill, at different heights from the base, fronting the four cardinal points; these niches or sentry-boxes are entered from the winding path, and seem to have been meant for resting places or lookouts. The circumjacent grounds are cleared and planted with Indian corn at present,

and I think the proprietor of these lands, who accompanied us to this place, said that the mount itself yielded above one hundred bushels in one season. The land hereabouts is indeed exceeding fertile and productive."

Fig. 1.



Ancient tumuli on the Savannah River.

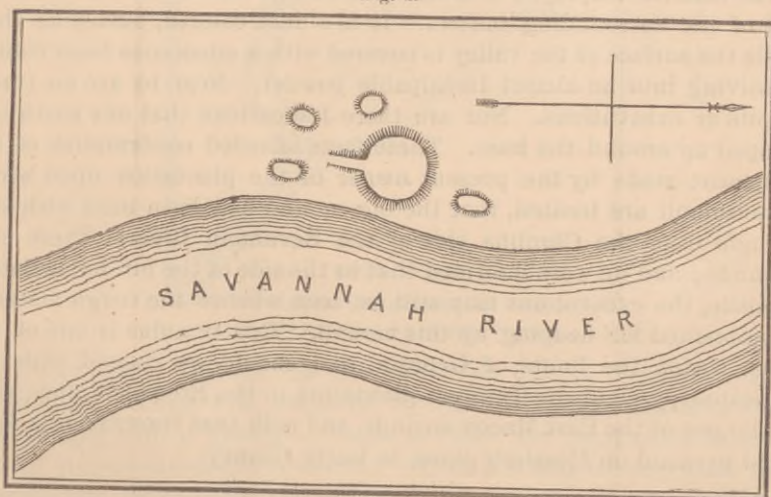
Unable satisfactorily to determine the precise object the aborigines had in contemplation in the erection of this striking monument, he hazards the conjecture that the Indians formerly possessed a town on the river bank, and raised this mound as "a retreat and refuge in case of inundations, which are unforeseen, and surprise them very suddenly, spring and autumn."

What were the uses of the smaller elevations he does not suggest.

Wishing to note the changes which might have occurred during the past hundred years, we visited these tumuli a few weeks since. The attendant mounds, which are mainly grave-mounds, had been materially

wasted by the plowshare and the influences of the varying seasons. The tetragon terraces had lost their distinctive outlines, and were little more than gentle elevations; their surfaces littered with sherds of pottery and flint chips, and occasionally with fragments of human bones. Freshets had sadly marred the level of the adjacent space. Overleaping the river bank, the turbid waters had carved deep pathways in the surface of the valley on both sides of the "great mound." There it remained, however, wholly unaffected by these unusual currents. It had evidently suffered no perceptible diminution in its recorded dimensions. The Savannah River still pursued its long-established channel, but "the four niches or sentry-boxes," if they formerly existed, were entirely gone, and of "the spiral path or track leading from the ground up to the top" we could discover no trace. On the south a roadway, about 15 feet wide and commencing at a point some distance from the base of the mound, leads with a regular grade to the top. This manifestly furnished the customary means of ascent, as the sides are too precipitous for convenient climbing. This feature seems to have escaped Mr. Bartram's observation.

Fig. 2.



Ancient tumuli on the Savannah River.

Not having been cultivated for many years, the apex and sides of this truncated cone are now clothed in a luxuriant growth of trees and swamp cane. Attired in such attractive garb, this tumulus forms a marked object in the profile of the valley from which it springs. Proofs of long-continued occupancy, by the aborigines, of the adjacent territory are abundant. Ancient burial-places, the sites of old villages, traces of open-air work-shops for the manufacture of implements of jasper, quartz, chert, greenstone, and soapstone, refuse piles, and abandoned fishing resorts, are by no means infrequent along both banks of the Savannah River for many miles. Upon the advent of the European the

circumjacent valley was found cleared and in cultivation by the red men, who here had fixed abodes and were associated in considerable numbers. The Southern tribes, in the sixteenth century, subsisted largely upon maize, beans, pumpkins, and melons. These they planted, tended, and harvested regularly. Of their agricultural labors at the dawn of the historic period we have full accounts.

So vast are the proportions of this largest mound that we are persuaded it rises beyond the dignity of an artificial place of retreat, elevation for chieftain-lodge, or mound of observation.

It appears entirely probable that it was a temple-mound, built for sun-worship, and that it forms one of a well-ascertained series of similar structures still extant within the limits of the Southern States. These Florida tribes, as they were called in the days of De Soto, worshiped the sun and were frequently engaged in the labor of mound-building. Over them ruled kings who exercised powers well-nigh despotic. Often were the concentrated labors of the nation directed to the accomplishment of allotted tasks. Hence, within the territory occupied by these people, we find many traces of early constructive skill of unusual magnitude.

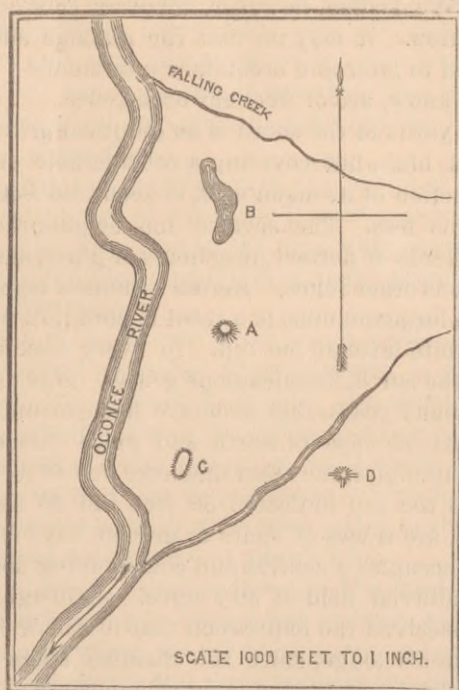
The material employed in erecting this large tumulus differs from the soil of the surrounding bottom. It is a dark-colored, tenacious clay, while the surface of the valley is covered with a micaceous loam readily dissolving into an almost impalpable powder. Near by are no traces of pits or excavations. Nor are there indications that any earth was scraped up around the base. These facts afforded confirmation of the statement made by the present owner of the plantation upon which these tumuli are located, that the big mound had been built with clay brought from the Carolina side of the Savannah River. There clay abounds; and we were informed that in the side of the hill immediately opposite, the excavations may still be seen whence the tough material was obtained for heaping up this mound. This tumulus is one of the finest within the limits of Georgia, and should be classed with the truncated pyramids on Tumlin's plantation in the Etowah Valley, with the largest of the East Macon mounds, and with that frustrum of a four-sided pyramid on Messier's place, in Early County.

III.

ANCIENT TUMULI ON THE OCONEE RIVER.

About a mile and a half north of the Fontenoy Mills, in Greene County, Georgia, and located on the left bank of the Oconee River, are three tumuli surrounded by traces of extensive and long-continued inhumations. The largest (A) is situated rather more than 100 yards east of the river, and rises about 40 feet above the level of the valley. In general outline it may be described as a truncated cone. Its apex

diameters, measured north and south, and east and west, were respectively, 65 and 68 feet. At the base, however, the flanks are extended in the direction of the east and west to such a degree that there is a difference of 35 feet between the base-diameters running north and south, and east and west; the former being 133 feet and the latter 168 feet. At the center of the top may be seen a circular depression, some 20 feet wide



Ancient tumuli on the Oconee River.

and 2 feet deep. Toward the north the face of this tumulus is quite precipitous. When first observed by the European, this monument was covered with a growth of trees as dense and apparently as old as that of the circumjacent lowlands. When the neighboring fields were cleared, this mound was also denuded of its vegetation and cultivated, its rich surface yielding generous harvests both of corn and cotton. Although now overgrown with brambles and small trees, which materially retarded minute inspection, it appeared quite probable from the scars on the surface of the valley in the immediate vicinity, that some severe freshet years ago impinged upon the northern base of this mound and carried away a considerable portion of its northern flank.

Rather more than 100 yards to the north of this tumulus, and trending to the northwest, is an irregularly shaped excavation (B), at present from 10 to 15 feet deep and partially filled with water, from which the earth used in the construction of these tumuli was obtained.

As yet no attempt has been made to open the large mound, but

against its eastern face the overflowing waters of the Oconee at one time dashed, wearing it away for some distance and leaving there a perpendicular front of 10 feet or more. Here were disclosed human bones, the skeletons of dogs, and large beads made of the columns of the *Strombus gigas*. If this partial revelation be accepted as indicative of the general contents of the tumulus, it should be classed as a huge grave-mound. We decline, however, adopting this conclusion without further information. It may be that the remains and relics then unearthed belonged to later and secondary interments. Instances of this sort, as we well know, are of frequent occurrence.

Two hundred yards to the south is an elliptical grave-mound (C), not more than 4 feet high, but covering a considerable area. This structure, in the direction of its major axis, is about 150 feet long. Its minor axis is two-thirds less. The surface and neighborhood abound with human bones, sherds of pottery, fragments of pipes, shell-beads, muscle-shells, and various other relics. Across a shallow lagoon, and 250 yards southeast of the large tumulus, is a third mound (D), well preserved, 10 feet high, and quite level at the top. In every direction, except where it looks toward the north, its sides slope gently. Having been constantly cultivated for many years, this structure has encountered no inconsiderable waste. At the base its north and south diameter was 100 feet. Measured at right angles, the other diameter was 88 feet. Similar measurements across the top indicated 50 feet and 40 feet. To the east, west, and south, are traces of spurs or graded ways for easy ascent.

This mound occupies a central and commanding position in the middle of a fertile alluvial field of fifty acres. Although its contents are unknown, we conceived the impression that it was designed as an elevation for a chieftain's lodge, since the Spanish historians mention the existence of artificial tumuli erected for this purpose. Around the base, and for a considerable distance on every hand, are traces of primitive occupancy, all persuading us of the fact that, in former times, this tumulus was surrounded by the dwellings of people who had here fixed their home.

The space adjacent to the large tumulus (A), to the extent of some four acres, appears to have been largely, if not exclusively, dedicated to the purposes of sepulture. Every freshet which sweeps over this area uncovers human skeletons, disposed in every direction only a few feet below the surface. So thoroughly and frequently has this territory been torn by freshets that it has lost its original level, and now exhibits on every hand heaps of broken pottery, quantities of human bones, and fragments of various articles of use, sport, and ornament. The freshet of 1840 was the first, so far as we can learn, which in a marked manner invaded the precincts of this ancient burial ground. Upon the subsidence of the waters many were attracted to the spot by the multitude of terra-cotta vessels, human bones, shell-beads, pipes, discoidal stones, grooved axes, celts, and other objects of primitive manufacture. One

gentleman collected nearly a quart of pearls which had been perforated and worn as beads. The plantation negroes supplied themselves with clay pipes then unearthed. In the possession of not a few of them were seen strong clay vessels, thence obtained, which they used for boiling soap. Large calumets and other objects of special interest were secured by the curious and carried to their homes, where, for a season, they formed matter for speculation and idle talk, and in the end were either lost or broken. Subsequent inundations have brought to light similar proofs of sepulture and early manufacture, but this treasure-house has been so often visited and so carefully searched that its present yield falls far short of that which was encountered when the Harrison freshet invaded this place of the dead.

It is a sad fact that the denudation of the banks of these southern streams and the destruction of extensive forests in reducing wild lands to a state of cultivation have proved the proximate causes of serious injury to, and often of the total demolition of, many prominent and interesting aboriginal structures.

On the right bank of the Oconee River, about a mile and a half above its confluence with the Appalachian River, situated in the low grounds of the plantation of Mr. Thomas P. Saffold, is a circular earth mound some 20 feet high, covering about the eighth of an acre. The sides are sloping, as in the case of other conical mounds along the line of this river, but the peculiarity which distinguishes it from its companions is that around the apex stout earth walls were raised to the height of several feet, thus causing a depressed or guarded top.

Near the banks of the Appalachian River, in Morgan County, may still be seen occasional artificial pits, some 4 feet in depth and 6 feet or more in diameter. Upon removing the *débris* of leaves and earth with which they are filled, their bottoms and sides indicate the influence of long-continued and intense fires. Fragments of pottery also occur in them. It would seem that they constituted a sort of rude oven in which the Indians baked their clay vessels.

We might multiply instances of tumuli still extant in the valleys of the Oconee and its tributaries, but having already described and figured those in East Macon and its vicinity,* enough has probably been said to convey an intelligent idea of the aboriginal monuments of this section.

*Antiquities of the Southern Indians, &c., p. 158 *et seq.*, New York, 1873.

