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Opinion Article

Ancient Walls that Still will not Talk

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Introduction

Almost daily, announcements are made of spectacular new discoveries using newer technologies or traditional archaeological methods, reexamining sites mistakenly believed to have been fully explored. Not all ruins are willing to release their secrets, however, including some that are only too obvious. They remain both a challenge and a teaching tool.

Aboriginal stone structures in Eastern North America have a history in modern Archaeology that reflects similar phenomena worldwide. At least four of these sites are in state parks, and many are near urban areas. Although many of these constructions remain to be discovered, others have been known and pondered by visitors for centuries. The Georgia structures amazed many early visitors, including writers Charles C. Jones, Jr., Francis Robert Goulding, and George White.

Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, overlooking Chattanooga, for example, has three ancient circular walls. During the American Civil War, Confederate soldiers appropriated them as fortifications. Cartographers in both armies, desperate to note any landmarks, included such ruins on their maps. Over the years, visitors have heard accounts of Madoc, a Welsh priest in a balloon; the Maya; Moon-Eyed People, and Spanish soldiers building these structures.

Philip E. Smith attempted to survey such sites in 1956, and Robert Wauchope did so a decade later. Only the Old Stone Fort site, a state park near Manchester, Tennessee, has received serious modern research, although the Rocky Bottom stone walls site in Pickens County, South Carolina, is under investigation. To the frustration of archaeologists and looters, these Aboriginal builders kept their sites clean.

Located near a major road and an industrial site, Old Stone Fort was well known to white settlers and underwent significant archaeological work in 1876 and 1923. Dr. Charles H. Faulkner conducted extensive excavations there in the 1960s and pioneered radiocarbon dating, demonstrating that the walls were constructed in stages from at least 30 CE to 450 CE.

Other remains could be related. Cairn grave sites are found near the walls. Mounds shaped like buzzards at Rock Eagle in Eatonton, Georgia, are near the Devil's Half-Acre walls. Florence, Alabama, has a massive Indian mound from the era of the Hopewell constructions in the First Century CE. On Rich Mountain in Pickens County, Georgia, more than ninety cairns, each shaped like the letter "L," cover a mountainside in groups of three.

From the 1940s to the 1960s, Margaret Perryman explored petroglyphs (stone carvings) and ancient animal statues, often found near the walls. She discovered that vandals had damaged and stolen many of these artifacts, which they mistakenly believed were treasure maps.

Dozens of these walls likely existed. The stonework commonly found in the Southeastern United States is associated with the Swift Creek Culture subperiod, 100 to 700 ACE. Such sites belong to the Hopewell (ca. 100 BCE to ca. 500 ACE) culture, enigma, presence, religion, and tradition, named for the largest Indian mounds east of the Mississippi, now the Hopewell Culture National Historical Park near Chillicothe, Ohio.

These people of the Woodland Period traded across eastern North America and produced some of the finest ancient American art. The related stone structures across Eastern North America demonstrate that great ideas traveled the continent, as did their trade goods.

These Hopewell sites are found from Canada to Florida, with the most notable examples in Kentucky and West Virginia. Many more of these constructions remain to be found. One theory posits that the walls represent an astronomical event. Why this culture

ended is a mystery. Hopewell could have been a victim of a war or a natural disaster, such as a prolonged drought.

The ruins vary. They were likely not intended as fortifications or walls. The ruin at Fort Mountain State Park near Chatsworth, Georgia, resembles a snake. At Fort Mountain near Blairsville, Georgia, the wall takes the form of a vortex, a symbol also found carved in stone at nearby Track Rock Gap and on Mole Hill near Marble Hill, Georgia, as well as around the world.

Some walls enclose large areas, as at Old Stone Fort State Historical Park. Other such sites include Chatahospee in Chambers County, Alabama, with its bird-shaped mound and a spiral vortex mound. A similar formation is the Kenimer Site at Brasstown Bald in Union County, Georgia.

Ruins have been destroyed or vandalized. Two sites were consequently closed to the public. After 1897, residents dug pits into the wall at today's Fort Mountain State Park, near Chatsworth, Georgia, in search of treasure. An earthquake destroyed much of the wall atop Stone Mountain near Atlanta.

The problem with researching the Hopewell and other such sites, such as the equally impressive walls in California, lies not only in understanding their meaning and origins but also in their identification. Aside from determining whether the sites belong to the same or different cultures and periods, natural rock formations are sometimes mistaken for human-made structures. Dr. Jack Wynn concludes, for example, that the wall at Dug Gap in Whitefield County, Georgia, is a natural outcropping enhanced as a fortification by Confederate soldiers piling up rocks.

Other walls were constructed by farmers in the last 200 years, often for special purposes that merit archaeological study. The controversial Parks-Strickland Sites in Gwinnett County, Georgia, may be stones piled up by farmers clearing fields. Amidst Hopewell sites in Pickens County, Georgia, a massive wall near the Salem Community was likely created by a forgotten farmer to create a field by erosion behind it.

Answers to the questions raised by the Hopewell constructions will remain unanswered, but they remain excellent examples of how to evaluate such sites worldwide and are often convenient to schools of Archaeology [1].

References

1. Robert S Davis (2026) Ancient stone construction and local history: