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An Assessment of Mounds in Southern Manitoba

Introduction

Burial mounds have been reported in southern Manitoba since 1857. They range from small rounded tumuli a few inches high to composite mounds consisting of linear grades up to 765 feet long with circular mounds of 30 to 40 feet diameter on both ends (Capes 1963). Interest had been expressed in having one of these linear composite mounds declared as a National Historic Site. However, prior to making any decisions, an assessment was needed. Among the objectives of this preliminary assessment are:

a) an assessment of previous research and research orientations,

b) tabulation of the number, distribution, nature (burial versus ceremonial, or linear versus circular mounds), and cultural affiliation of the mounds,

c) assessment (involving field visits) of the current state of mounds as a result of excavation, looting, and cultivation,

d) accumulation of available data on previous research including published local data, archival data, and relevant comparative data from areas, and

e) presentation of recommendations for future research and future public development.

Research Program

The program involved field and archival research. The field research was directed to locating mounds, assessing their likelihood of being burial mounds versus natural features, and determining their feasibility of being declared. Since not every "hump" is a mound, a soil auger was tested to determine its usefulness for distinguishing artificial tumuli from natural features.

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The major emphasis of the program involves the archival research. All available data on previous mound searching was accumulated. Practically none of the mounds have been excavated by professionals; most were excavated by zealous pothunters such as Bryce (1885, 1887, 1904), Bell (1885, 1887), Rand (1941, 1945) and Montgomery (1908) and a few were excavated by serious lay archaeologists (Vickers 1947, 1948a, 1948b). Part of the research involved a search of unpublished manuscripts and correspondence to fill information gaps in the rare to non-existant field notes and generalized published reports. Considerable time is being spent on integrating various observations and to correcting errors on data and observations that are filtering into the literature, e.g. P.L. 12 becomes section 12. In addition to recording the history of activities associated with mounds, the history of research "orientation" is being assessed, e.g. from mounds being viewed as features of Toltec Mound Builders (Bryce 1885) to the remains of Assiniboins in a stacked chronology of cultures (MacNeish 1954, 1958) to the remains of numerous co-existing groups over the last 2,000 years (Syms 1976, 1977).

The data on each mound are placed on a standardized 3-page form. Each mound is assigned an arbitrary number to eliminate the confusion of several previous designation systems, but each designation has been placed on the data sheets. The forms include references, dimensions, sketches, provenience, accompanying items, features, burial form, and cultural affiliations. All mounds and possible mounds are plotted on a large map of the southern part of the province and on regional maps; these maps provide geographical distributions and local physiographic preferences.

The data from the mounds are being tabulated and collated in order to present some tentative interpretations on cultural affiliations and on clusters of associated mounds since the artifacts found in the mounds were in limited numbers and were generally found with techniques that provided limited contextual data, many of the mounds cannot be assigned to specific archaeological complexes.

Preliminary Results

The number of mounds was greater than anticipated. There are a total of 124 definite and probable mounds and 75 possible mounds (Table 1). There are 8 more that have been reported recently and must be checked before being incorporated into the report. The greatest concentration occur in southwestern Manitoba near Gainsborough Creek and Antler River (Figure 1). Most of the linear composite mounds also occur in southwestern Manitoba.

The possible mounds range from unlikely candidates that were caused by soil erosion to probable specimens. The soil corer was inadequate on the mounds. Future work in assessing these features will require shovel trenching into the side of the tumuli or excavating them.

Mounds have been made over a long time period. Although the limited number of radiocarbon dates range from A.D. 595 $\pm$ 60 to A.D. 1730 $\pm$ 90, they may date as early as A.D. 1 on the basis of cultural affiliation, e.g. Sonota and Valley complexes (Sym 1976). However, most of the mounds appear to fall in the A.D. 900-1400 range when mounds were being produced by the Siouxan Devils Lake-Sourisford Burial Complex (Syms n.d.), the Algonquian Blackduck Complex (Syms 1977, Dawson 1975, 1977) and other possible archaeological complexes.

Table 1. Tabulation of Mounds in Southern Manitoba

Region	No. of Definite and Probable Mounds	Possible Mounds	
Southwestern Manitoba	73	71	
Pembina-Rock Lake	30	--	
Lower Red River	12	--	
Arden/Westbourne	6	2	
Central Assiniboine River	3	2	
Totals	124	75	
Total			199

The most impressive mounds in terms of designating them and developing methods of creating public awareness, appreciation, and respect for the builders are the linear composite mounds, particularly Mound No. 11 in southwestern Manitoba which is 650 feet long and has been preserved, or a couple of the large accumulative mounds such as the Westbourne Mound which is 10 feet high, 90 feet wide and has a long grade emanating from it or the Calf Mountain Mound which is 15 feet high, 90 feet wide and has a grade attached.

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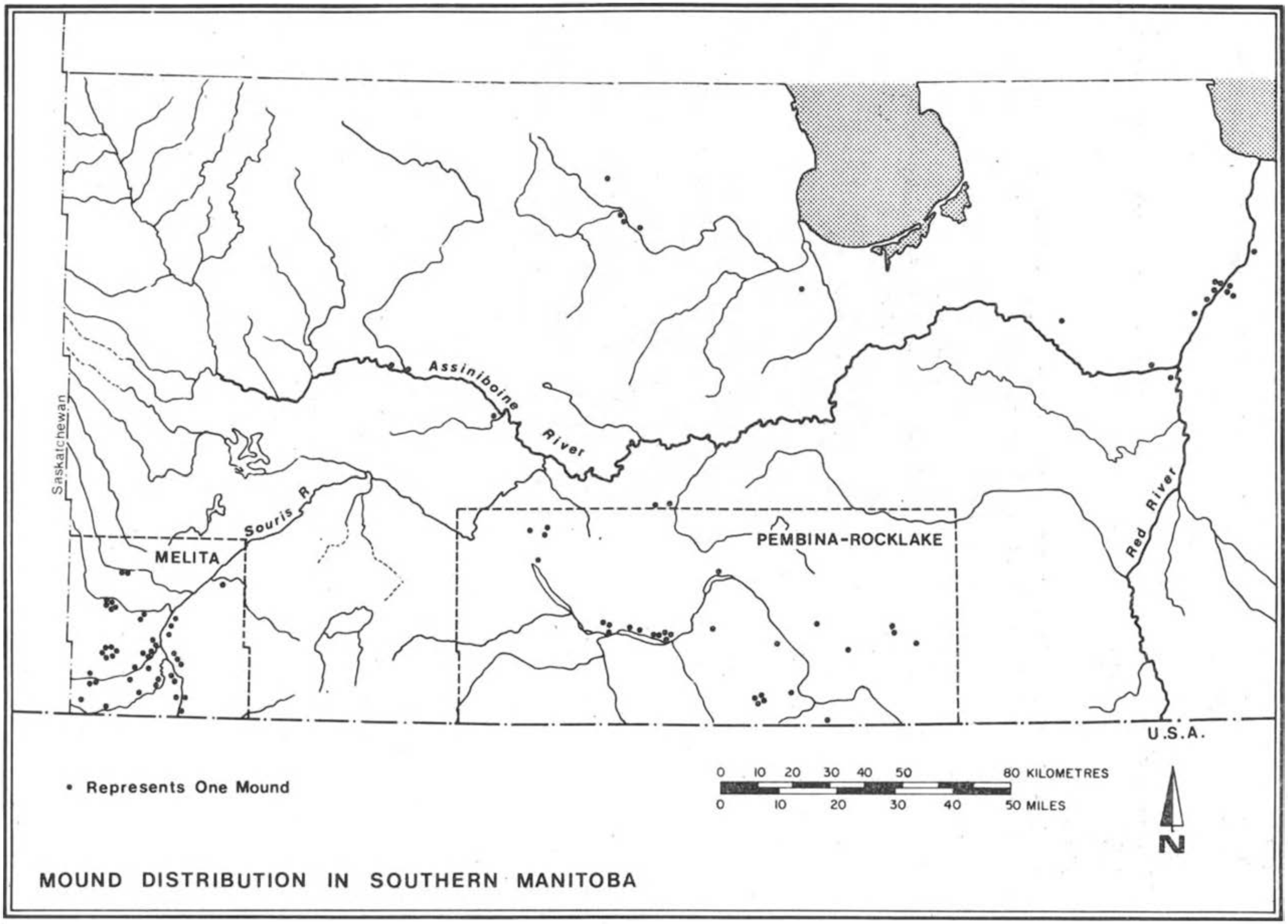

1 Mound distribution in Southern Manitoba. (Drawing by D. Milton.)