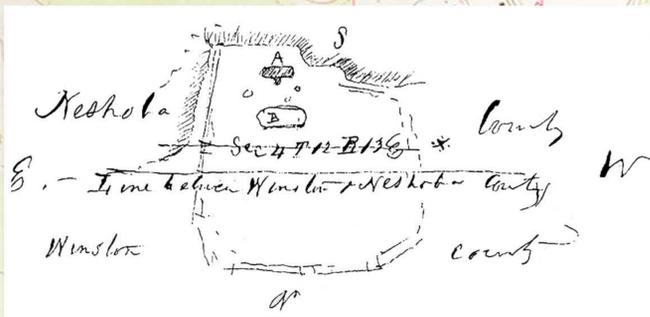




# Archaeology

Chāhtat kanit maya attōk hopo hoyo

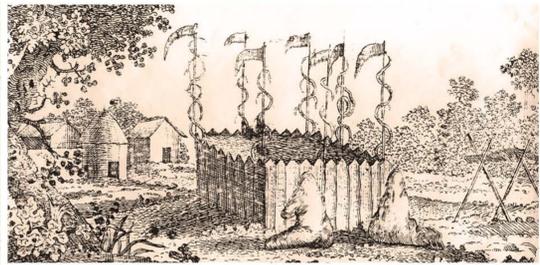


1854 sketch map of Nanih Waiya (adapted from a drawing by Benjamin L.C. Wailes).

“Nanih Waiya has one of the earliest descriptions of any mound site in the Southeast and is one of the best historically-documented prehistoric sites in the region” (Carleton 1999:129).

Evidence suggests that the Nanih Waiya site was originally composed of three main features: a large platform mound, a smaller conical burial mound, and a semi circular segmented earthen rampart and ditch enclosure. At some later date it is believed that additional small burial mounds were added to the site. The first known description of the site was by James Adair in 1775. He described the site as consisting of, “two oblong mounds of earth, which were old garrisons, in an equal direction with each other, and about two arrow-shots apart. A broad deep ditch inclosed those two fortresses, and there were raised an high breast-work, to secure their houses from the invading enemy” (Adair 1986:405-06). A statement from Gideon Lincecum in 1904 based on his visit to the site in 1843 describes that, “many places in the wall were still eight feet in height” and mentions several gaps in the wall (Lincecum 1904:530, 542, notes). B.L.C. Wailes visited the site in 1854 and recorded the burial mound in detail. “Some 200 ft to the north of the high mound is one covering more extent, but either unfinished or obliterated in part, being only ten ft high” (Wailes 1854). Wailes’ description is also the first to mention other small mounds, saying “Some small mounds almost obliterated intervene between the two large ones” (Wailes 1854). Henry S. Halbert further describes the earthen enclosure as “a semi-circular rampart [that] envelopes the mound – the rampart being perhaps nearly a mile and a half in length, each end or extremity of the rampart terminating upon the bank of Nanih Waiyah creek” (Halbert 1891:348-49).

The conical burial mound to the north/northeast of the platform mound may have originally looked similar to this mound (bottom right). “During the Woodland stage, mounds were used for human burial and for the performance of special events, such as feasting. Burial mounds were usually conical or dome-shaped and built to cover subsurface burial pits or tombs...Human remains were sometimes accompanied by ornamental and prestigious grave goods” (Bense 1994:119). The historic Choctaw continued this tradition of elaborate funerary customs by utilizing scaffold burials. Once the flesh of the corpse had decomposed specialized individuals called “Bone Pickers” defleshed the bones and bundled them for storage until a later time when they would be buried. H.B. Cushman wrote regarding burial mounds, “Thus many of the mounds found in Mississippi and Alabama are but the cemeteries of the ancient Choctaws; since, as often as the bone-houses became filled, the boxes of bones were carried out to the same cemetery and deposited on the previously made heap...each deposit being covered up with earth...and thus, by continued accession through a long series of ages, became the broad and high mounds” (Swanton 2001:177).



Tabashi

“Choctaw Burials,” drawing by Bernard Romans, 1775.



Typical Woodland period burial mound.