

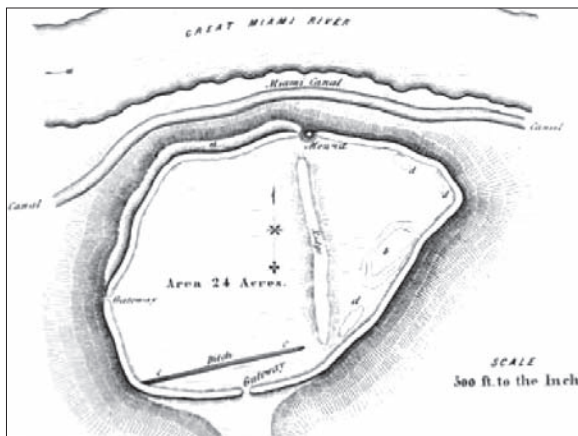
# Dayton

## and the SunWatch Village Archeological Park

Dayton may be best known for aviation (it is the home of the Wright Brothers, and of the National Air Force Museum), but this broad valley of the Great Miami River also has important ancient places. From Miamisburg, enter Dayton via SR 741 and Carillon Park, or cross to the opposite bank of the river to take in SunWatch Village enroute. Dayton is easily reached by Interstate highways from Columbus or Cincinnati, or by state routes from Cedarville, Lebanon, or nearby Yellow Springs.

### CALVARY CEMETERY EARTHWORKS

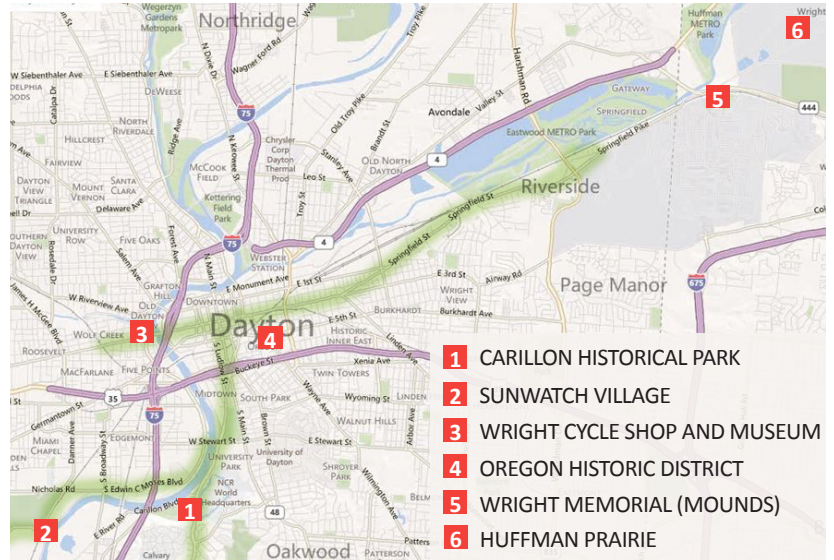
The large Catholic cemetery off of South Patterson Boulevard, about three miles south of downtown Dayton, occupies the site of a hilltop earthwork shown in Squier and Davis (1848). From among the beautiful rolling drives and monuments in the northern section, along St. Joseph Drive, overgrown openings into the woods lead to remnants of the northern walls along the steeply rolling bluff. Intrepid exploration (behind the Nash Obelisk, past a huge Burr Oak) is possible, though not recommended. Instead, inquire about hiking trails being developed by Carillon Historical Park, which owns the hillside.



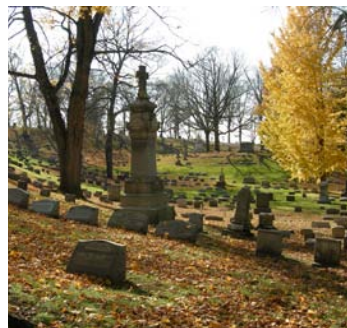
An extensive hilltop enclosure once encircled the steep moraine just above I-75 as it approaches downtown Dayton from the south.

### CARILLON HISTORICAL PARK

Below Calvary Cemetery to the north, and reachable by car, is the Carillon Historical Park (1000 Carillon Boulevard, 937-293-2841). Behind the tall, modern, carillon tower, an outdoor museum of Dayton history has been developed: a large visitors center and museum leads to a fine collection of early settlement structures and exhibits including Newcom's Tavern (Dayton's oldest, from 1796), and a variety of early houses and industrial buildings. A transportation theme is developed in many of the remaining structures: a steam engine from the National Cash Register Company, a canal lock, two bridges, a railway station, and commuter cars. Most significant of course is the amazing, original Wright Flyer III of 1905. Trails are being developed up the steep, wooded hillside to the surviving sections of the Calvary Cemetery Earthwork.



- 1 CARILLON HISTORICAL PARK
- 2 SUNWATCH VILLAGE
- 3 WRIGHT CYCLE SHOP AND MUSEUM
- 4 OREGON HISTORIC DISTRICT
- 5 WRIGHT MEMORIAL (MOUNDS)
- 6 HUFFMAN PRAIRIE



The earthwork apparently encircled much of modern Calvary Cemetery; remnants survive on the wooded bluff to the north.



Carillon Historical Park preserves several of Dayton's oldest buildings, plus other historical displays.

### SUNWATCH VILLAGE

SunWatch Village (2301 West River Road, 937-268-8199) can be reached by leaving Interstate 75 at exit 51. Go west on Edwin C. Moses Boulevard, which becomes Nicholas Road after crossing the Dryden Road / South Broadway Street intersection. Cross South Broadway and turn left onto West River Road and continue one mile south to the site.

The Archaeological Park at SunWatch is a National Historic Landmark, and through reconstructions as well as museum exhibits a visit to the site gives an excellent idea of Indian town life in the last centuries before European contact. Fort Ancient peoples then occupied the central Ohio River Valley (from what is now southeastern Indiana east to modern day West Virginia) and practiced intensive farming. Several houses and poles are re-erected on the 800-year-old remains, based on exact post mold locations discovered



during archaeological investigations. (Post molds are marks in the soil left behind by rotted wood posts.) The quality of the houses, with their wattle and daub walls and thick thatched roofs, suggest a remarkable level of comfort. The modern name "SunWatch" is derived from the relationships among pole locations, certain house doorways, and the positions of shadows cast by the rising sun at different times of the year, apparently the society's way of marking out a calendar for agricultural and ceremonial purposes. Native American events, gatherings, and ceremonies are held regularly at SunWatch.

Eight hundred years ago, about two hundred American Indians lived settled lives here beside the Great Miami River, where the city of Dayton now stands. They built comfortable houses, raised abundant crops, and measured time with shadows cast from a forty-foot pole in the center of their town plaza. In the 1970s, the city of Dayton was planning to expand its neighboring sewage plant at the site, and that's when the Booneshott Museum of Discovery got involved. Site archaeologist Andrew Sawyer:

*So Jay in the museum then got permission from the city to conduct their own excavations, what were considered salvage excavations, beginning in 1971, the idea being that, Salvage what you can, because at any time we're going to come in with our bulldozers and tear the place up and put*



Reconstructed houses at SunWatch prove surprisingly comfortable during cold weather sleep-overs.

*some sewage ponds in there.*

The excavations uncovered the pattern of an elaborate village. So fortunately, the sewage ponds were put somewhere else.

*And beginning in 1982, they started to think about the possibility of presenting this to the public. And so they said: you know, the excavation's great. As archaeologists, we can look at all these holes in the ground, and we can make sense out of them. But the general public, it's not that easy for them to see what we see out here, so: what about rebuilding some of this? What about, in some of these 800-year-old post holes, we put a post back in the ground? And we put all of the posts that supported a house, back in the ground, and we rebuild the house?*

The first house was finished in nineteen eighty-two. The perimeter fence, the central array of sun-poles, and several more houses have been rebuilt, with the greatest possible historic accuracy: each new post is set in an ancient hole. The Dayton Society of Natural History maintains the village, a museum, and a demonstration garden, and offers many special events.



House reconstructions at SunWatch begin with a framework, occupying the original, ancient post holes.

## SHADOWS AND TIME

The central pole at SunWatch is forty feet high, estimated from the size of the post-mold from the original. It casts long shadows, aligning with surrounding houses at key points in the year. Site archaeologist Andrew Sawyer:

*The layout of the village is like a giant sundial, as they watched the morning shadows falling off this center pole, depending on where they fall on the west side of the village, telling the folks what time of year it is, it looked like one of those alignments in particular corresponds with the beginning of the planting, and the beginning of the harvesting seasons.*

On these two dates, in April and August, the center pole shadow falls through the doorway of the Big House, striking a post, and crossing the central hearth. On the winter solstice, December 21, the center pole shadow enters another house:

*We recognize the winter solstice on our calendars, it's the shortest day of the year, in terms of the amount of sunlight we have, and what happens on that day is the sun is rising the farthest south in the eastern sky and so the shadow it creates falls on the northwestern corner of the village, again, through a doorway, hits a post, and across the hearth and the floor of the house.*

Everyone in the village could watch, day by day, as the pole shadow moved toward the most important days of the year.



Sunlight enters the doorways of certain houses to mark the time of the year.

## FARMING AND FOOD

By about 1000 AD, corn had become the most important food for native people in this region. SunWatch archaeologist Andrew Sawyer:

*Corn played a big role in the community here, in fact, it was probably the main reason they decided to settle down, into rather permanent villages, was to take care of the corn crop. And based on the analysis of the remains here at SunWatch in particular, it looks like corn alone took up 50% of their diet. So, this was a very important crop to the people, they wanted to make sure that they got enough in, year in, year out.*

When the village's center pole shadow said it was time to plant, the people set to work, their methods probably much like later ones that have been recorded:

*Historically, the way American Indians in this region grew their crops, was they would make little mounds in their gardens, about a foot or so high, 2 or 3 feet around, and at the top center of the mound they would plant the corn. And, once the corn sprouted, they would plant the beans. And so they would kind of grow up together, and what would happen, as the corn grows, that corn stalk kind of provides a trellis, for the beans.*

Around the base were added squash or pumpkins; their large leaves helped retain moisture and control weeds. Because these plants all worked so well together, they were called "the three sisters." When the center pole shadow announced harvest time, the crops were collected. The corn especially was set aside for winter:

*And, it stores well. The storage pits in front of their houses, they would dig these subterranean pits about three feet or so deep, three feet around, line them with grasses or bark to insulate them, and in the fall at the harvest, they'd bring all their corn and put it in the storage pits, and that'd get them through the next year.*

Dried corn from the storage pits was ground in mortars to make corn bread, or added to soups or stews. The demonstration garden at SunWatch has been developed with help from Native American communities. Some of the corn might even be descended from the original corn grown here:

*A couple of years ago, we were lucky enough to grow some Myaamia corn from the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, which was their corn that they took with them from this area when they were removed, back in the 1840's – 1830's, 1840's? – but this was the corn that they traditionally planted here, they took with them when they went to Oklahoma. We brought some of it back here, to grow in our gardens as well.*



A model in the museum portrays the concentric planning of the village around its central sun-poles.



The interior of the Big House is centered on its hearth; an interior wall may define a zone of ritual preparations.



The Huffman Prairie Flying Field contains a replica of the Wright Brothers' 1904 hangar.

### TOWN AND FAMILY FAMILY

Village life at SunWatch probably went on for about twenty years, a long time compared to the tiny hamlets of earlier Ohio cultures. When local resources, like firewood and fertile soil, were used up, it made sense to go build another village elsewhere. A model in the museum shows the village's concentric rings: the fence, houses, storage pits, burials, and central plaza. The fence might have been meant for defense, but just as likely for keeping children or certain animals in, or other animals out.

Just inside the fence, twenty-five to thirty houses originally stood. A few of them had special uses: the Big House was a kind of community center; another was a men's lodge. The rest were dwellings, and similar artifacts were found in them – except for the pottery, which provides a clue to the village social organization. Andy Sawyer:

*We're finding different ceramic design patterns basically clustered in different quadrants of the site we know at least historically, with the historic American Indian groups in the region, ceramic design and production was what the women would take care of. And a lot of those design elements tended to be – kind of – I wouldn't say property, but they tended to be used by specific families and lineages. What that suggests to us, is that it's likely the women who were designing and producing that pottery, and if we're seeing those designs only in certain parts of the site, then all the women who are related to each other in the village lived in the same part of the site. Which suggests they might have had a matrilineal, even matrilocal, society.*

Matrilineal societies trace ancestry through the mother's side, and in matrilocal societies, young couples settle near the mother of the bride. So life at SunWatch was probably organized in four family-based social divisions or clans.

### THE BIG HOUSE

SunWatch houses were built on a frame of upright poles set in the ground, in a rectangular pattern. The walls were woven twigs, plastered with mud – a method called "wattle and daub." The steep, thatched roofs had big overhangs to keep rain away from the walls. Inside were built-in benches for sitting and sleeping; the central fireplace was vented through the roof.

The Big House, reconstructed here, has other features. The times of planting and harvesting were marked here by the morning shadow of the village's central pole. Archaeologist Andy Sawyer:

*It's one of the biggest houses in the village square footage wise, but also it looks like it has more seating capacity, more benches than any other house in the village, and we think that relates to its use as a communal structure, where folks, village elders, village leaders from this community, maybe even others, would come together at various times throughout the year.*

The Big House also has a special, interior wall.

*And what this interior wall looks like it does is, it might divide off a smaller non-public space from the larger public space. And you think, if this was a non-public space, what it would have been used for is shamans, or perhaps other community or religious leaders, to store religious material, paraphernalia, so that on the mornings of the events such as the planting alignment, it may be their duty to prepare everything in the back, as everyone gathers in the house, and then they step through the doorway, an opening in the wall, to begin any ceremony or activity that goes along with that.*

### THE SITE TODAY

SunWatch Village today is a place of ongoing learning and heritage. Scholars can experiment to find out more about everyday life in ancient Ohio: for example, how did people keep warm here in winter?

*We had an experiment where the temperatures outside were hovering in the mid-20s, and we stayed in the house for about a week. And during the course of that week we found we could raise the interior temperature of the house about 15 degrees or so, up to about 40 degrees, which isn't exactly the barefoot comfort we're used to today, but is significantly warmer than it was outside. But in order to do that, the people staying in the houses were burning between 150 and 200 pounds of firewood every day.*

Many hearths, burning this much wood every winter day, would have depleted nearby woodlands quickly, and would have required long-distance travel to maintain wood supplies, within just a few years.

Today SunWatch affords many chances for first-hand experiences: it's possible to stay overnight in a village house, to learn eight-hundred-year old American Indian crafts, to attend a powwow with day-long drumming, dance, and food. Tribes and native groups play important roles at SunWatch, as advisors and as participants in celebrations that echo the ones held here by the ancestors, hundreds of years ago.

### DAYTON AVIATION HERITAGE

Using the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park (16 South Williams Street, 937-225-7705) as a point of orientation, it is possible to visit five important sites commemorating the legacy of local bicycle makers and flight pioneers Orville and Wilbur Wright. These include the Wright Cycle Company complex and the adjacent museum (at the Williams Street location); the home of Paul Laurence Dunbar, (the Wrights' friend and famous African American poet, in the neighborhood nearby); the Wright Brothers Aviation Center (at Carillon Park, also mentioned above; and the Huffman Prairie Flying Field and Interpretive Center on Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. At the Interpretive Center and Wright Memorial there is a rare cluster of Adena era burial mounds. Finally, don't miss the huge National Museum of the United States Air Force.

For a detailed guide and driving directions to all of this, follow the Dayton, Ohio "Aviation Trail" at <http://www.aviationtrailinc.org/> as well as consulting the National Park Service's materials.



**THE ENON MOUND**

Three miles northeast from the intersection of I 270 with either I 70 or Dayton Springfield Road, is the town of Enon. A small subdivision just a few blocks east of the town center is built around a very large mound (encircled by a roundabout), and aptly named Indian Mound Estates. The mound, almost certainly of the Adena era, is 28 feet high and only partly tree covered; its fine profile is visible from many angles.

**EATING AND SLEEPING**

Dayton's historic Oregon District, just southeast of downtown, offers eclectic shops and restaurants, plus the tropically-themed Inn Port Guest House (137-139 Brown Street, 937-224-7678) and affiliated Inn Port D'Vino (22 Brown Street). Inquire locally about many fine restaurants, including the award-winning Rue Dumaine, on the south edge of the city near Miamisburg, for Provencal cuisine (1061 Miamisburg Centerville Road, 937-610-1061).



Six mounds of various sizes line the edge of a peaceful park adjacent to the Wright Brothers Memorial and Huffman Prairie Interpretive Center.