INTRODUCTION

Brown’s Mount is a special place in the Central Georgia experience. This is true now, and it was true for Native Americans in the past. Some of the things that make it special for us are the same as those of the Indians, and some are quite different. The first and perhaps foremost thing about Brown’s Mount that attracts us is its height and the stunning views to the west from its summit. Magnificent!

The cliffs on the western face are like no other in central Georgia, and seem out of place in the context of the Georgia Coastal Plain. Although this is not the actual highest point in the area, it certainly has the highest drop in a short distance—over 275 feet. The mount is flat on its summit, and drops rapidly on all side, although not as steeply on its eastern side. A narrow ridge extends to the south, forming an elevated tail to the body of the mount. The views from the southern end are equally stunning.

Much of the story for us of Brown’s Mount is the story of the Indians who once lived there. This certainly makes it a special place for us to visit. The mystery of these people, long dead and gone, has been partially uncovered by archaeology during this century, but we will never know the whole story. Sitting quietly on the summit and starring into the distance, however, we seem to sense their former presence here, and share with them in our minds and our hearts the beauty of this place.

EARLY EXPLORATIONS

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a number of authors recognized the special nature of Brown’s Mount and recorded details of it that are critical to our present-day understanding of the archaeological site. This is because much of the above ground remains on the summit were destroyed early in this century when rocks were removed to build a nearby railroad bridge access.

The first reference to the mount is that of Sir Charles Lyell, the eminent geologist, who, on his second visit to the United States from England, visited there on or about January 15, 1846. He states that "Receding from the granitic rocks, six or eight miles still farther to the southeast, I found Brown’s Mountain, a bluff on the Ocmulgee River, and at other places in the neighborhood, a great many siliceous casts of fossil shells and corals, and among others a large nautilus, the whole indicating that these beds of cherty sandstone and impure limestone belong to the Eocene period."

The first extended description of Brown’s Mount, published in the same year as Lyell’s observations, was that of George White in his 1849 publication Statistics of the State of Georgia. His description is as follows.

About nine miles from Macon, on the eastern side of the Ocmulgee River, there is an isolated eminence, known as Lamar’s, usually called Brown’s Mount, its base covering an area of 300 acres; and on its summit there is a level area of perhaps 50 acres. Its size and confirmation distinguish it from the artificial mounds in the vicinity. It is evidently the work of nature, and remarkable for being just on the verge of the flat river bottoms, and presenting all the rugged appearance of mountain precipices on its western front. Upon its summit there is an old fortification, the stone walls of which embrace a space of about 30 acres.
The walls of limestone are yet perfect, to the height of two and a half feet; and the fosse, on the outside, is yet knee-deep around the whole enclosure. The walls were evidently built by a civilized race acquainted with military science, as at intervals of sixty or eighty feet along the wall, there are buttresses and salient angles, not differing materially from those in use at the present day. Near the center of the fortified area is an excavation, floored with limestone, and the remains of and enclosure of the same material around it. Its situation, size, and appearance point it out as a reservoir to contain water for the troops.

White’s estimate of 300 acres for the base of the mount is essentially correct. My estimate is 350 acres assuming a rectangular shape to the base, rather than its true elliptical shape. Further, his estimate of 30 acres for the area enclosed within the rock wall is close to my own estimate, made by estimating the area on the summit from the Macon East United States Geological Survey 1:240000 map. This was just under 27 acres.

In 1854 the same George White published a second volume, Historical Collections of Georgia, in which he again briefly discussed Brown’s Mount. This time White's comments were restricted to geological matters, likely spurred by the publication of Lyell. His second account is as follows.

By far the most important early account of Brown’s Mount is that of Charles C. Jones, published in his famous 1873 volume Antiquities of the Southern Indian. This volume was the most complete book on the Indians of Georgia and their archaeological remains that was published during the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, Jones did not present a map of the now-destroyed rock wall around the summit, nor did he state when he visited the site. I have checked his papers in the collection of the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library in the University of Georgia Library, which holds most of his material, and, unfortunately, found no references to Brown’s Mount. The complete account follows.

"Brown’s Mount," situated on the line between Bibb and Twiggs Counties, from its summit affords a fine view of the city of Macon, while, from its western exposure, which is very precipitous, the eye ranges all over the Ocmulgee Basin and across the country far away to the valley of the Flint River.

Following the natural conformation of the summit boundaries, and at some points retired a distance twenty yards or more from the edge of the hill, are the remains of an old wall---constructed of bowlders of rock, and earth---which encircled and fortified the entire top of the mount. About sixty acres, I am informed, are thus enclosed. Attendant upon the wall are traces of both an outside and an inside ditch, the former being originally about ten feet wide and four feet
deep, and the latter some three feet wide and between two and three feet deep. The earth removed in the construction of these ditches was used, in conjunction with the stone-bowlders, in building this wall. Within the recollections of persons still living, this wall was four feet high, and between four and five feet in thickness. It will be perceived that the height of the wall was practically increased by the depth of the interior ditch; so that the defenders standing in the ditch would be completely protected from the shafts of their assailants.

The defensive abilities of this circumvallation were augmented by elevated platforms and lunettes constructed all along the line at intervals of about thirty yards. The interior dimensions of these lunettes may be expressed by ten feet in front and eight feet in depth. By this arrangement, at close intervals, the defenders were thrown in advance of the line; and, elevated upon platforms, were enabled not only to deliver a powerful direct fire, but also with their arrows and spears to enfilade the main line, thereby securing a double advantage in case of attack, and affording material aid to those who were defending the wall or curtains connecting these advanced works.

In some places the wall has become well-nigh obliterated; at other points it is still quite distinct, and its entire circuit, as well as the outlines of the lunettes, can be traced all along the crest of the hill. Upon the wall, trees are growing more than three feet in diameter. This was, without doubt, the work of the red-men, and in ancient times constituted a fortified retreat. Similar structures exist within the limits of Georgia and in many portions of the United States. It will be remembered that, in the absence of any speedier mode of transmitting intelligence, the Indians signalled by means of fires kindled upon prominent points. Through their intervention the approach of danger was heralded, and the lurid warning quickly repeated until the members of the tribe, through all their abodes, were rapidly put upon the alert. Such is the location of Brown’s Mount, and so abrupt and commanding its exposure on the west, that signal-fires kindled there could be readily seen and interpreted even by the primitive dwellers upon the banks of Flint River. From the side which looks toward Macon kindred warnings---cloudy pillars of smoke by day and bright flames by night---would quickly summon the warriors of the Upper Ocmulgee, and put those, who there inhabited, upon notice. Doubtless, during the forgotten past, this fortified hill answered important military uses in the conduct of the ever-recurring strifes which existed among the red-men.

The impression, entertained by some, that this circumvallation was the work of DeSoto and his followers, is erroneous.

Within the enclosure are the traces of two small earth-mounds, and near the northeastern side is a pond or basin, elliptical in form, covering about a quarter of an acre. Of late years it has been drained, and at the time of my visit it contained no water. The statement was made that this was an artificial basin and that its bottom had been plastered with clay at some remote period, so as the more effectually to retain rain-water which would, from time to time, accumulate in it. I had no means at command for making an examination, and testing the truth of this assertion. The pond was overgrown with trees, and filled with decayed leaves and
loam. To all appearances, it seemed a natural reservoir, although it may be that the natives originally made this excavation with a view to supplying themselves with water in the event of a siege. The natural supply of this fluid, upon ordinary occasions, was probably derived from four springs issuing from the northern, eastern, southern, and western faces of the hill—in each instance, within not more than fifty yards of the wall. Indications still exist tending to establish the fact that the paths leading to at least some of these springs were protected by stone wall or partially-covered ways. The summit of this hill is well adapted to cultivation, and, in one locality, I observed a circular depression, about forty feet in diameter, which suggested the belief that it might be the former site of one of those semi-sunken public granaries in use among the Southern Indians, of which the early historians have given us substantial descriptions.

In 1879, Butler published his *Historical Record of Macon and Central Georgia*, the first local history of this area. He lifted freely from Jones’s published account, but does add a bit of interesting information of his own. His account, minus Jones’s material, is presented here. I should note in advance that his reference to the Silver Bluff area on the Savannah as an important point in Hernando de Soto’s 1539-1543 journey is now rejected by all legitimate scholars.

The most remarkable eminence of which we have any record is Brown’s Mount (not mound) near the Ocmulgee river about seven miles below Macon. It is a very high hill, and upon one side is nearly precipitous. Upon this mount, named for Mr. George A. Brown, who first owned it, are many curiosities, among which are now slight traces of ancient fortifications. Forty to fifty years ago the stone wall, ditches and lines of the ancient works presented sufficient remains to identify the exact plan of the fortifications which had been located there, similar to those DeSoto found in Florida, North Georgia, Alabama and elsewhere. DeSoto never built any fortification. His business was to search for gold. He passed through Georgia without any resistance from the Indians. He stopped on the Ocmulgee only a few days. He was in less than thirty days marching from the present Tallahassee, Florida, to Silver Bluff, below Augusta on the Savannah river, therefore, he had no time to erect forts. [extended quotes from C. C. Jones as above]

Col. Jones describes very accurately the great curiosity on the mount, which will be at once recognized by many of the older citizens of Macon, who in times past had so often spent the day in picnic excursions at this favorite sylvan retreat.

In 1918 the native central-Georgia poet Harry Stillwell Edwards, built his simple home on the extreme northern edge of the summit. In reading some of his writings, one gets the impression that he thought of himself as a latter-day Henry David Thoreau. As he began building his home he contacted the National Geographic Society by letter on January 10 of that year to inform them of the site and his intended plans for it. One important implication of his letter is that at least some of the summit wall was still standing in 1918. His complete letter is reproduced here.
Near this city, overlooking the Ocmulgee river valley, is a noted mount recorded in local deeds as "Brown’s Mount" which tradition says was occupied by DeSoto in his northward march from Tampa in the 16th century. White’s Statistics (Georgia) mentions the remains of a massive wall around the summit, which contains about 50 acres of land. The remains are still visible and strongly resemble the Aztec works of S. A. These remains are of sandstone with shell forms visible. Elsewhere on the mount the rocks are chalcedony. The sandstone is in horizontal layers except where erosion has caused a falling away. If they (the rocks) ever constituted a wall or building, the structure must have antedated, not only DeSoto, but the Ocmulgee Indians, whose home was there and thereabouts. Arrowheads of chalcedony and bits of pottery abound.

I am about to begin a building on this mount, using the most interesting site and rocks, and the object of this letter is to ask you to lay this subject before any archaeologist who may be interested enough to examine and report on the matter. To me the rock looks like a horizontal layer of sandstone crumbling away as the summit narrows by erosion but there is a puzzling regularity of cleavage at one point, and a distinctly artificial appearance.

WPA ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

In the 1930s America was in the midst of the Great Depression. Millions of people were out of work, and the economy of the country was near collapse. Beginning in 1933, the U.S. government began a series of measures designed to put people back to work immediately. Someone had the bright idea to employ people in doing archaeological excavations, and one of the first such projects in the country was in the Macon, Georgia, area. The focus of these excavations was the Macon Plateau site, later the center of Ocmulgee National Monument. Many other sites in the Macon area were also excavated between 1933 and 1940. One of these was Brown’s Mount.

The excavations at Brown’s Mount began on April 8, 1935, and continued until the first week of August of the same year. These excavations were all conducted on the southeastern corner of the summit of the mount, in the vicinity of the small mound located there to this day. The excavations were conducted in four separate units, called Excavations Units A, B, C, and D.

Excavation Unit A consisted of six 300 foot-long trenches, each 4 feet wide, that were placed 20 feet apart. These trenches went from the summit downhill toward the east. It appears that the trenches crossed a portion of the old system of ditches and wall described by Charles C. Jones. This information should be useful in future attempts to relocate this important feature. Very few artifacts were recovered from this excavation, however, and no house foundations or human burials were located. Most of the excavations went only about 1-2 feet deep in these trenches, but in a few places excavations were taken to greater than 6 feet. Apparently all of the artifacts were located near the surface of the ground.

Excavation Unit B consisted of a trench 125 feet long and 4 feet wide that ran North-South in a little field east of the summit. This trench was then expanded in its central section to both the east and the west. Apparently this unit was placed here to excavate an area of dark soil noticed in the plowed field. A large depression was excavated, but it is not clear if this depression was
natural or man-made. A fair number of pottery sherds were recovered from the depression, but no clear evidences of house remains were noticed.

Excavation Unit C consisted of a single 4-foot wide trench, 125 feet long that ran east to west through the small earthen mound on the southern end of the summit. The excavations in this trench barely went into the mound surface, and did not penetrate all the way through it. The trench revealed portions of several burned logs, and other evidence that convinced the excavators that this was the remains of a burned and collapsed circular house. The trench was only open for one week, and was then refilled. In 1935, the excavators thought that Brown’s Mount would become a part of Ocmlulge National Monument, and they decided to wait on the excavations of this small house mound until later. No further work has been conducted on it to date.

Excavation Unit D was the most important one in the WPA research. It was located in the eastern field, south of all the other excavations, and contained the badly eroded remains of a Council House similar to the famous reconstructed one at the Macon Plateau site. The excavations here included a block that was 125 feet square, with the structure in the northeastern portion of the unit. The floor of this circular structure was approximately 39 feet in diameter, and the full diameter of the structure including its earthen buttresses was 58 feet. There was a large central hearth, and a section of eleven peripheral seats was also preserved. The narrow entrance passage was 21 feet long, and faced 19 degrees north of due east. Clearly, this was an important building that served more than a single family. There was very little garbage in and around the structure, supporting the idea that it was of a ceremonial nature.

Almost all of the artifacts that were recovered from the Brown’s Mount excavation consisted of small fragment of pottery vessels. No intact or near complete vessels were recovered. Only a few projectile points were found at the site. The amount of flaked stone debris was also quite low. Not a single human burial was located in the WPA excavations. Most of the artifacts found date to a single time period—about A.D. 950-1150, and are representative of what is called the Macon Plateau archaeological period. Thus Brown's Mount was occupied by the same people who made and used the large mound group at Macon Plateau 7 miles to the northwest.

LATER EXCAVATIONS

In 1959 and 1960 a small-scale archaeological excavation took place on the remains of an Indian house found on the east-central portion of the summit. This work was led by archaeologists from Ocmlulge National Monument and from the Museum of Arts and Sciences. The excavation revealed the presence of one or two rectangular houses that overlapped one another. These houses also contained a few pottery sherds that proved that it also dated to the Macon Plateau period. The houses apparently had narrow entrance ways that were 18 feet in length. Whether these structures should be considered ceremonial or not is uncertain.

In 1989 and 1991, minor excavations were made in the area of the WPA excavations, primarily designed to relocate the 1935 trenches. The trenches in two areas were relocated, and can now be tied to new permanent bench marks. Additionally, small artifact collections were made over most of the summit so that systematic observations could be made about the entire site.
SUMMARY

What we don't know about the Indians who lived at Brown’s Mount is greater than what we do know. Clearly more modern excavations are needed throughout the site. Some observations can be made, however.

Very little can be said about the earliest Indian occupations of Brown's Mount. There is scant evidence that people visited it as early as 8000 B.C., presumably as a hunting location, or perhaps merely to marvel at the view. This early occupation cannot be considered a permanent one, however.

It is not certain when the now-destroyed rock wall around the summit of the mount was built. The most likely time was the Middle Woodland period, about 1800 years ago. This presumably is the same time that the famous Rock Eagle site in Putnam County, 40 miles to the north, was built. Unfortunately, even if we can relocate the course of the wall and ditches as described by Jones, dating them through archaeological excavations will be difficult at best. But we must try.

The major Indian occupation of the mount certainly was in the Macon Plateau period, somewhere in the period of A. D. 950-1150. The occupation here during that period was either very brief or very occasional, for the archaeological remains of this period are only thinly scattered. They are present, however, over almost all the summit. The most intensely occupied area was on the southeastern part of the mount where the 1935 excavations took place. The structures excavated or tested there were all likely ceremonial in nature, and it is not clear that there was any true domestic activity taking place.

In the future, archaeological research must continue on Brown’s Mount for more of its fascinating story to be revealed. In this way its secrets will surely become more and more open to us as we continue to move further away in time from the mysteries of the people who once lived there.