

**Ceremonial Stone Landscapes Day  
Hopkinton, RI  
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**Presentation by Mary Gage & James Gage  
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**Slide 1 – Title**

**Slide 2 - Mound on Ground**

Mound On Top of Boulder

Mound Attached to Boulder

Split Stones with stones inside the splits

We were asked to talk about how we go about our research. Twenty-five years ago when we started exploring ceremonial stone landscape sites Mary noticed site after site contained stone cairns with the same variety of designs.

That lead to her theorizing the designs contained a language. A mound on the ground was in contact with the earth. A mound on top of a boulder was in contact with the boulder not the earth. Split stones were filled with small stones.

**Slide 3 – Basic Parts of a Cairn (*Handbook of Stone structures Fig. 13-5A*)**

To begin to study the designs it was necessary to develop a classification name for each design. Our classification defines stone cairns by their characteristics creating a neutral name. This was important as there are many kinds of stone piles: field clearing piles, property boundary piles, hiking trail cairns, and ceremonial cairns.

Whenever a research project is begun it is necessary to start from a neutral stand point. The researcher needs to approach the project with the idea I do not know what is there, collect the data and then analyze the data to find out what type of stone piles are present. One site we visited in Connecticut had ceremonial stone piles in one field and field clearing piles in the next field.

Steve DiMarzo Jr. uses his own simplified classification when he sends his photos to us. Mary Gage converts it to our more complex names. Example: Steve classifies all stone piles placed on top of boulders as Boulder Top Cairns or BTC. The broad scope of his name does not allow a researcher to look at the numerous designs such as Single Layer on Top of Boulder, Vertical Walled on Top of Boulder, Mound on Top of Boulder, etc. It gives Mary a starting point from which to work.

**Slide 4 – Map with Density Areas**

Now let's look at the Manitou Hassannash Preserve. Steve and Todd Carden documented one thousand and twenty-four cairns, niches, enclosures and effigies. Using our

classification system Mary identified twenty-four cairn designs. I [James Gage] took Steve's GPS readings and structure numbers and compiled a map. This I gave to Mary as she is good at finding patterns. She immediately saw differences in the density of the cairns. To find out what was going on she tracked specific designs and the large cairns. One of her findings was the high density areas with the densest concentrations of stone structures contained small and medium size cairns but no large cairns. In comparison, the low density area on top of the hill contained large cairns and only a few small and medium size cairns. Small and medium size cairns are easily built by a small group of people at a one time event. Large cairns are the work of a whole community of people or large group and are built over a long periods. That is at the annual gathering each year the pile would be added to. These two simple facts show a high density area was likely a different time period from the low density area. The reason being one encouraged individuals to build their own cairns and the other encouraged everyone to contribute to one community cairn. So without knowing what the cairns purpose were we can garner information about the site. It suggests the site contains stone structures from different time periods.

#### **Slide 5 – Serpent Head propped**

After all these years Mary has only been able to decipher small snippets of the language embedded in the stone structures. Effigies are one of the easiest. The problem is anyone can claim a structure looks like a turtle, snake, bird, etc. It is often a highly opinionated process. The key is to find ways to support your theory and thus prove it.

One of the stone walls at the Manitou Hassannash Preserve is a straight length of wall three feet high by two feet wide with one finished end. The opposite end has a short section that appears to broken down with a large triangular stone propped on its end. Is it a snake effigy? There is no serpentine layout to the wall. Part of it is an intact farm wall with a finished end for a gateway. So how do you go about analyzing it? Lets start with the triangular shaped block of stone. Are there any other examples of the intentional use of triangles at this site?

#### **Side 6 – Cairn #260 - 3 triangles**

This cairn has three triangular slabs. A large triangular slab leans against the side with a small triangular slab underneath it. This was intentional.

#### **Slide 7 – Cairn #1158 – Split stone with triangular side**

This split stone cairn has a massive triangular block for one side of the split. The split has stones wedged into the split.

#### **Slide 8 – Cairn #12 – two photos overall shot & close up with triangular stone**

This cairn was built on top of a low base stone and up against a tall glacial boulder has a small tunnel underneath it where the two base stones meet. Above one end of the tunnel is a triangular stone.

These examples prove the triangular shape was incorporated in stone structures and therefore the triangular stone block at the end of the stone wall can be confirmed as being a ceremonial feature. However, it does not prove it is a serpent.

### **Slide 9 – Cairn #1019 – Triangular protrusion on boulder forming snake’s head**

A serpent enclosure is attached to an elongated glacial boulder with a triangular protrusion on top at one end. This structure confirms serpents at this site had triangular shaped heads and thus confirms wall A with its triangular stone block is a serpent effigy.

### **Slide 10 – Wall A – Side view of serpent’s head with quarry marks**

The next step in the analysis is interpretation. The triangular snake head has plug and feather quarry marks showing it was created in the 1800s. That allowed us to search accounts from the historic period.

### **Slide 11 – Pendant with Serpent Effigy**

The Pequot held a ceremony witnessed by early Dutch settlers: “They have a hole in a hill in which they place a kettle full of all sorts of articles. Then a snake comes in,”

A Stockbridge mission Native American said, “Shabash was an honored chief among his people, and bore tattoos in the likeness of a snake on both cheeks.”

These historic accounts confirm serpent images and ceremonies were active in southern New England. It fits with the historic serpent ceremonial enclosure and serpent wall at the site.

### **Slide 12 – Shaghticoke Serpent on top of split stone**

While exploring a site in Kent, CT, Mary uncovered a serpent effigy on top of an extra large split stone cairn with thousands of stone offerings. It looks similar to the Serpent Mound in Ohio in which the serpent is swallowing a round object.

The Shaghticoke continued to hold a rattle snake ceremony in the early 1900s. It was definitely modified as the Indian men went out in advance of the ceremony and collected snakes. They placed them in pillow cases. On ceremonial day they invited the whites to join them. Without the whites knowing it they released the snakes for them to capture.

Serpents live underground in the Underworld. Splits and crevices in rocks were considered portals to the Underworld, a place where powerful spirits resided. Creating a

serpent effigy on top of a split stone cairn makes logical sense. The thousands of stones in this cairn are prayer offerings to this spirit.

The white participation with the rattlesnakes answered a question I have had. I've often wondered how the Native Americans could hold such large gathering on this site during the 1800s without the whites knowing about it. The likely scenario is the whites did know about it and may have even been invited like at Kent.

### **Slide 13 - Photo of Lawton Foster, the Younger**

In conclusion the historic part of the Manitou Hassannash Preserve site is attributed to Lawton Foster, the younger. He was the third and last generation in his family to continue the Great Revival of Native American ceremonies that began around the year 1800 and lasted until 1900. He died in 1907.

Lawton was responsible for the Serpent Ceremony. Earlier in his life he appears to have assisted his father Jonathan whose farm is a quarter mile southwest on the road. His father held spring time rain water ceremony and possibly an Underworld ceremony as evidenced by the two ceremonial stone chambers some of you visited on the tour. Lawton's grandfather also set up a ceremonial site on his land that was located on Route 3. The elder Lawton held a ceremony associated with the sun as his ceremonial stone indicates which is oriented towards the winter solstice sunset.

Their three ceremonial sites are part of a larger group of sites expanding outwards on to neighboring farms. There appears to have been a community of Native Americans in the area of Lawton Foster Road. This is consistent with ceremonial stone sites as they are often clustered together.