

SPIRO MOUNDS SITE  
18154 First Street  
Spiro  
Le Flore  
Oklahoma

HALS OK-37  
OK-37

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

### SPIRO MOUNDS SITE

HALS NO. OK-37

Location: 18154 First Street, Spiro, LeFlore County, Oklahoma.  
Lat: 35.3141446 Long: -94.5741748

Significance: The Spiro Mounds archaeological site is one of the most important prehistoric Native American sites in Oklahoma and the United States. The mounds mark ceremonial areas used for burials, temples, and homes of the Spiro, a sophisticated people, who, based on artifacts found at the site, had extensive trade practices with other Native American groups on both coasts, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Great Lakes region. The Spiro also had an advanced religious center and political system that controlled much of the region. Archaeological excavations at the site have produced a large quantity of art and artifacts that makes it one of the best archaeological sites for the study of the Mississippian culture. The site is classified as an ethnographic landscape and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1969.

History: Located in eastern Oklahoma near the Arkansas River, a tributary of the Mississippi River, the Spiro Mound Site encompasses 150 acres that included 12 mounds (one burial mound, two temple mounds, and nine mounds used either for a base or to bury homes), housing for the elite, and outlying support facilities worked by lower ranking members of the society. They were similar to other Mississippian tribes in their mound building practices, religious ceremonies, had a picture writing system, and spoke a Caddoan language similar to the Wichitas, Kichai, Caddo, Pawnee, and Arikara. The culture peaked from A.D. 900 to 1300 at the mound site, but by 1450 the site declined in importance and was abandoned. During the 1930's, the mounds were discovered and plundered before academic excavations began by the University of Oklahoma. The mounds held a remarkably high quantity of artifacts about the culture and produced one of the largest collections of prehistoric Native American artifacts to be discovered in the United States. In 1969, the site was placed on the National Register of Historic Places as a restricted site, but in 1978, the Spiro Mounds Archaeological Center opened to the public. Owned and operated by the Oklahoma Historical Society, the site has trails, exhibits, and offers tours by an archeologist on staff.

Sources: "Caddo Fundamentals: Spiro and the Arkansas Basin," Texas Beyond History, <http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/tejas/fundamentals/spiro.html> (accessed December 15, 2009).

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"Spiro Mounds: Prehistoric Gateway--Present-day Enigma," Oklahoma Historical Society, <http://www.okhistory.org/outreach/museums/spiromounds.html> (accessed December 15, 2009).

"Spiro Mounds Site," Oklahoma Archaeological Survey, <http://www.ou.edu/cas/archsur/counties/lefllore.htm> (accessed December 15, 2009).

Merriam, Chris, "Spiro Mound," <http://www.spiromound.com/> (accessed December 15, 2009).

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View of mounds (Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture:  
<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/S/images/SP012A.jpg>, accessed  
December 15, 2009).



View of mounds from trail (Explore Southern History:  
<http://www.exploresouthernhistory.com/images/Spiro6.jpg>, accessed December 15, 2009).