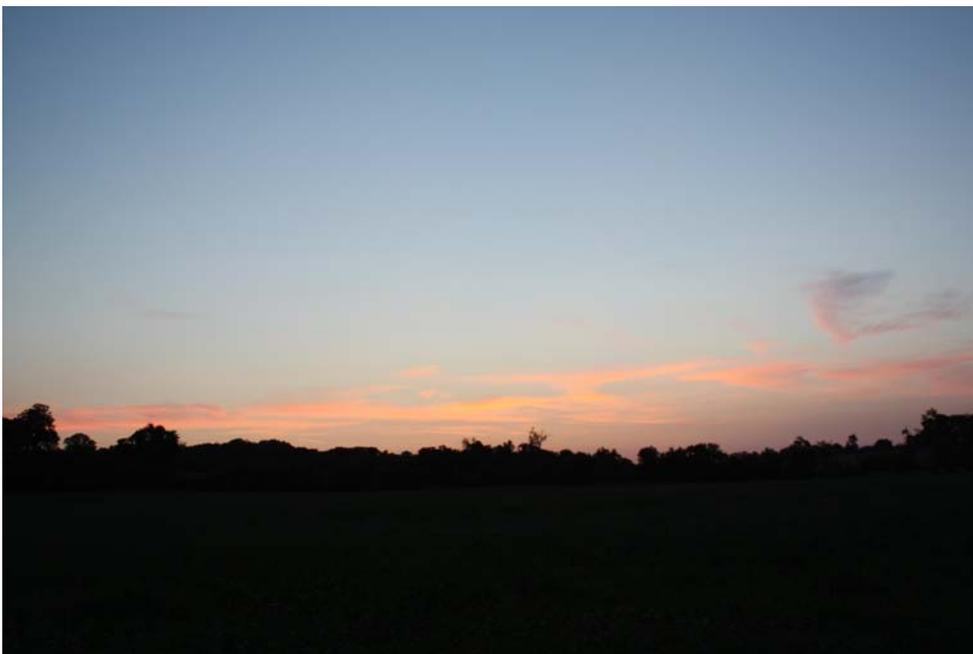


RESULTS FROM JUNE 21, 2011

Today is the summer solstice – the longest day of the year. Solstices and equinoxes are important markers of the seasons and thus were often significant calendrical markers. At some sites, important earthworks (mounds) or other features are aligned with these seasonal events. So, a few of us arose before dawn to make some observations of the summer solstice sunrise at the site. It is indeed darkest just before the dawn....



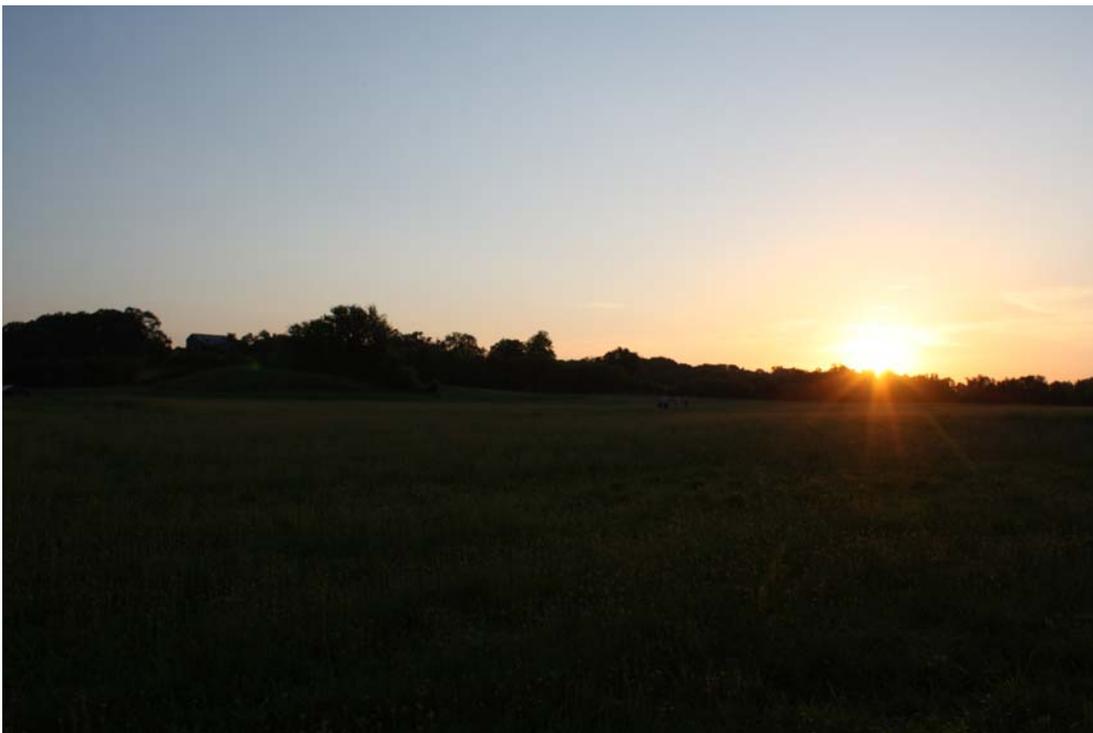
Fortunately, the weather cooperated for our observations this morning – only a few light clouds dotted the eastern horizon as the sun began to rise at 5:30 am. The ridge and treeline to the east hid the sun until 5:45 am.



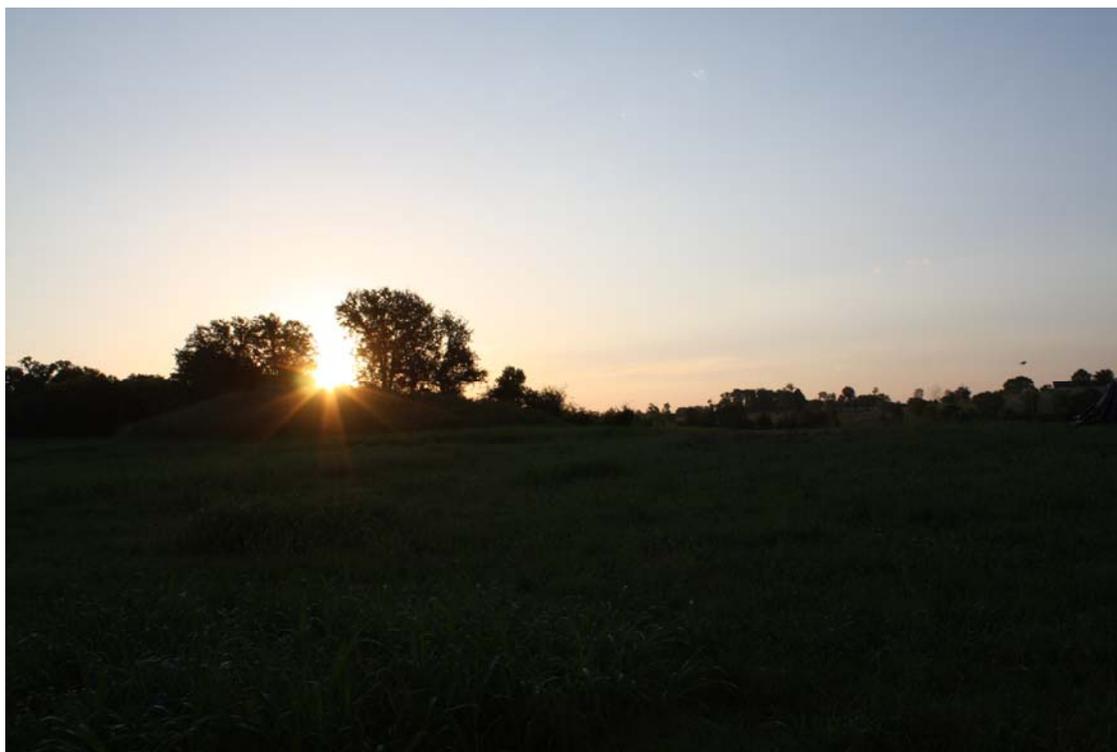
The photo below shows the sun peeking over the trees at 5:46 am – Mound 2, the largest mound at the site is at the left of the photograph.



From what we call Mound 25 – located on the southwestern corner of the town plaza – the sun rose directly across the center of the small mound on the northeastern corner of the plaza. That small mound contains the large circular building we excavated last year.



From atop Mound 3, where we are working this year, the sun appeared to rise across the center of the highest portion of Mound 2. Mound 3 is located at the northwest corner of the plaza.



Whether these alignments are coincidental or intentional is difficult to determine archaeologically. However, it is interesting that the two mounds on the western corners of the plaza both have orientations that might be linked with the rising sun on the summer solstice. As will be noted later, we were not able to make observations of the sunset due to rain. If additional patterns emerge on the other solstice and the equinoxes, we might eventually be able to make a convincing argument. Only time will tell.

Alex, Richard, and Sean finally reached the bottom of Feature 119 in their unit. The irregular outline supports the notion of a borrow pot.



In the easternmost unit over Feature 119, an interesting object emerged later in the morning – the entire carapace or shell of a Carolina Box Turtle. This now rare creature is one of the most common animals in our animal bone assemblage from this site. They seem clearly to have been eaten as food – and the shells were frequently used to make bowls, rattles, and other objects. This one is very fragile and was removed with dirt still inside it for later careful cleaning in the lab.



We were rained out late morning, and then managed to get in another hour in the afternoon before the second wave of rain arrived. In the afternoon, I took a small soil core from the top of Mound 3 – hoping to gain some additional insights into the features and deposits we are encountering. It reveals a thick layer of ash (about 12-15 cm thick) with possible wall plaster at the bottom. This may mean that we have a large burned structure on top of the mound.



We quit early as the second wave of rain arrived – Robert Sharp, Executive Director of Publications at the Art Institute of Chicago, arrived with the rain. In the evening, most of the crew traveled to Cloverbottom Mansion in Nashville for the June meeting of the Middle Cumberland Archaeological Society. Robert was our guest speaker for the evening – regaling the packed room with his recent examinations of human effigy vessels from the Cumberland region. Robert will be staying with us for a few days at the excavation.

