

## Mapping the heavens from Newark

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Late on a cool October evening, I pulled into the parking lot of the Octagon Earthworks to join a handful of excited individuals.

They were there to experience a rare event: a lunar alignment along one of the northwest walls of the Octagon. After an introduction to the Earthworks for those unfamiliar, we took off in the dark across the golf course to our destination just off Parker Drive to view the standstill point of the southern minimum moonset. The event is one of the many highlights in the 18.6 year lunar cycle mapped by the Octagon.

As we waited for the moon to fall into position, the group took a few moments for introductions. We couldn't see each other's faces, but we shared nonetheless.

My history and archeology colleagues spoke to the role of indigenous people thousands of years ago and the tangible remnants of their culture which we were experiencing. When it was my turn, I shared how as a geographer I think of the Newark Earthworks not only as something from the past, but as a living monument rooted in this place. Here, in what would eventually become Newark, Ohio.

We don't know how the original inhabitants observed this same alignment: Were there crowds? Just a few ceremonial leaders? Crying babies? Celebratory feasts?

However, the location is the same: near enduring features of the landscape later renamed by settlers and overshadowed by new construction that would come to surround and overlay the Earthworks themselves — Raccoon Creek, 30th Street, Licking Memorial Hospital, Moundbuilders Country Club — this is where it happened. And this is where the lunar alignments continue to happen.

This year's Geography Awareness Week theme is "Explore! The Power of Maps," and it is entirely appropriate to the nocturnal adventures that await those interested in the Newark Earthworks. Maps are not just for finding directions or data analysis; they also are artistic templates for adventure and opportunities to learn about our surroundings.

As illustrated in the case of the Newark Earthworks, maps can be inscribed on the landscape as well as paper. Two thousand years ago, native people here didn't have GPS units or Rand McNally road atlases, but they left us something eminently more durable — a map of the heavens that would stand the test of time. It is a cosmic scale act of cartography that still speaks to us today if we choose to listen.

The next lunar alignment open for public observation will be the standstill point of the northern minimum moonrise over Thanksgiving weekend. Interested individuals may gather at 6:30 p.m. Friday or 7:30 p.m. Saturday in the parking lot of Moundbuilders Country Club.

After that, alignments won't take place for another nine years. Meanwhile, now you know the answer to question No. 6 on Ohio State Newark's Geography Week Scavenger Hunt at [osu.edu/newarkgeography](http://osu.edu/newarkgeography).

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