Artifacts that could tell history of La. Indians are disappearing

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NEW IBERIA — Artifacts that could fit together pieces of the history of Indians who inhabited Louisiana are becoming more rare, according to Dr. Jon Gibson, department head and associate professor of archaeology at the University of Southwestern Louisiana.

Gibson spoke at the main library here Thursday night as part of Louisiana Archaeology Week. His topic was “Acadiana before the White Man.”

“It has been estimated by a study that was done by the University of Arkansas that by the year 2000 we will have lost 90 percent of our culture resources and Indian mounds,” he said.

Gibson attributed this loss to people who overlook artifacts, such as arrowheads, when they happen to find them.

“If you see an artifact, call us and let us look at it. Maybe we can date it and use it in putting together our puzzle of Indian history,” he said.

According to Gibson, people from various Louisiana universities, including USL, LSU and McNeese, have been uncovering Indian history in New Iberia, as well as throughout Acadiana.

He said Indians first came to North America over a strip of land that connected Siberia to Alaska and is now the Bering Strait.

“If they entered America 14,000 to 15,000 years ago, they were faced with a . . . high sheet of ice, since it was during the Ice Age. They may have had to stay and live in Alaska for awhile,” he said.

Gibson added that at least by 12,000 years ago Indians lived in Louisiana.

“We have found culvis points, which the Indians used to spear animals, around Acadiana,” he said.

“We think the Indians in this area had a trading relationship, by way of water, with the Indians in north Louisiana, which was at a town called Poverty Point.

“Poverty Point was one of the most inhabited places around. About 5,000 Indians lived there,” Gibson said.

By 500 B.C., Gibson said, the Indian culture of Poverty Point disappeared. It is suggested by archaeological authorities that political or religious changes in their culture caused the Indians to move elsewhere.

The Indians scattered throughout Louisiana, eventually evolving a new culture, called the Tchefuncte, which lived in coastal areas and camped on levees and salt domes, according to Gibson.

He said the Tchefuncte people were the first Indians in Louisiana to make large amounts of pottery, which have been found in various areas in the state.

Artifacts like the pottery tell the story of the Indians and are becoming increasingly rare.

Archaeologists want to continue finding artifacts to tell the history of Indians in Louisiana, Gibson said, and are being helped by university students, who participate in archaeological digs to unearth the rare items.

Gibson encouraged persons to contact their nearest archaeological authority if they discover a piece of the Indians’ history.