Bayou Teche searched for Acadian roots

BY RICHARD BURGESS
rburgess@theadvocate.com

LAFAYETTE — Fieldwork could begin as early as June on an archaeology project to find some of the earliest settlements of the Acadian exiles who made their way to Louisiana.

The current focus is along Bayou Teche near Loreauville in Iberia Parish, where Cajun folk hero Joseph "Beausoleil" Broussard helped lead a group in 1765 after unsuccessfully battling British efforts to remove the French Acadians from what is now Nova Scotia. More than 30 of them died within months of their arrival, likely from disease, leaving few clues about where or how they lived or even where they were buried.

"Very little is known about them. We don't know what kind of material culture they brought with them," said Mark Rees, a University of Louisiana at Lafayette archaeologist and anthropologist. A fundraising effort began this year to raise money for the research effort, dubbed The New Acadia Project.

Rees said similar archaeology work has already been done on Acadian settlements in other areas, notably Nova Scotia and states along the eastern seaboard where some Acadians settled.

"A lot of research has been done on Acadians in other areas," he said. "We haven't done much here, but we are hoping to change that."

Perret said the long-term goal, assuming the early settlements can be found, is to capitalize on the historical significance of the sites to boost cultural tourism in an area of the state where Cajun culture is already a big draw.

"This will be an asset to Acadiana," she said.

For more information on the project, visit www.AcadianMuseum.com/New_Acadia_Project.html.