Big Oak Isle Opens Way to Indians of Prehistory

Anthropologists, LSU and Jon Gibson, an assistant professor of anthropology at Louisiana State University and Jon Gibson, an assistant professor of anthropology at LSU, have conducted an archaeological excavation on the site of Big Oak Isle in the southeastern shore of Lake Pontchartrain.

Since June 15, 1972, some 15 students from LSU have been engaged in what is known as the "Louisiana Conservation Review," a project aimed at understanding the life and culture of the Tchefuncte Indians, who inhabited the area from approximately 700 B.C. to A.D. 1.

This summer, two LSU students have been working on the excavation, sifting through the midden debris in search of artifacts and human remains.

They have found a variety of artifacts, including pottery, stone tools, and animal bones. The pottery, which dates back to approximately 700 B.C., is typical of the Tchefuncte period and is decorated with geometric designs.

In their report, the archaeologists note that the site was likely occupied seasonally by small groups of 35-50 people for a short period. They theorize that the Indians who occupied the site were pre-agricultural, relying on hunting, gathering, and fishing.

The excavation has yielded a wealth of information about the Tchefuncte Indians, including their modes of life and social organization.

The findings have raised several questions that archaeologists are currently trying to answer. For example, how did the Indians obtain their food? What was their social structure? How did they interact with their environment?

The excavation has been supported by a private donor, and there are plans to continue the work in the future. The results of the study will be published in a report, which will be released in the near future.

"Our findings have raised several questions, and we are working to answer them," said Dr. Shenkel, assistant professor of anthropology at LSU. "We are studying every aspect of the site, from artifacts to human remains, in an effort to understand the Tchefuncte Indians and their way of life."
STUDENTS CHECK diggings from a test pit for pottery fragments and other artifacts. The archaeological site is about five miles east of Little Woods on the shore of Lake Pontchartrain.

WORKING at the bottom of a test pit, a Louisiana State University in New Orleans student checks for artifacts. Different strata of shells and soil are clearly delineated at the digging site on the shore of Lake Pontchartrain about five miles east of Little Woods.