Canoe may be 1,000 years old

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NEW ORLEANS — A 27-foot long cypress canoe found half-buried in a marsh near New Orleans may be close to 1,000 years old, an archaeologist says.

Two wildlife workers riding in a "marsh buggy" — modern man’s version of the swamp canoe — found the ancient dugout on the edge of Lake Salvadore, in an area that is about 10 miles from New Orleans but can be reached only by boat.

Though it was obviously buried for a long time, it is well-preserved with only a few splits, said Nick Rivet, a state staff archaeologist. It could comfortably seat about 25 people, Rivet said.

“It’s definitely not a pirogue. It’s too different, and it’s not necessarily prehistoric, but it looks like it is,” Rivet said.

Geologists are in the process of dating the wood now and expect to know how old it is next week, a spokesman for the Louisiana Geological Survey said.

Until its exact age is determined, it will be hard to know who rode in the two-foot wide dugout canoe, Rivet said.

But if the boat is prehistoric, it no doubt belonged to one of the many Indian tribes that lived in the swamps and prairies of Louisiana, said Bob Sheldon, spokesman for the state wildlife department.

The boat was discovered in a hunting area accessible only by boat. Rocky Schouest and his brother Floyd, both wildlife specialists, and Irvin Dares Sr., their supervisor, spotted what they thought was a strange looking log.

“They saw what looked like a log sticking out of the mire, and they started to ride over it, but they paused and realized it wasn’t just a log,” Sheldon said.

Wildlife officials, fishermen and trappers have discovered prehistoric Indian burial sites and temples in the St. Charles Parish area, Sheldon said.

But only one other boat like it has been discovered in Louisiana, Rivet said. That one was unearthed in 1983 on the bank of the Red River, north of Shreveport.

Radiocarbon tests dated it back to 1000 A.D., the period in which the Caddo Indians inhabited the hills of north Louisiana, Sheldon said.

Archeologists in Florida are familiar with such finds, Rivet said — they have discovered about 148 prehistoric canoes.