Professor mum on ancient remains find

By GUY COATES
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After fighting heat, mosquito bites and news reporters for eight weeks, a university professor continues to maintain that she's discovered the oldest human remains in Louisiana.

But the latest word that the remains found near Lake Larto in Catahoula Parish date back to 3,300 B.C. came from the Louisiana State University public relations office.

"I don't grant interviews," snapped Ann F. Ramenofsky of the university's Department of Geography and Anthropology. "I don't have the time." Slam went the phone.

"She was harrassed by the media while she was on location," said Nick Kalivoda of the LSU public relations office.

Ramenofsky and a university team dug in the ground for eight weeks to find out more about the site at Cowpen Slough where the remains were found a year earlier.

"They brought back some 40 boxes of artifacts, both human and non-human," said Kalivoda. "Those included clay cooking balls and various stone objects which must be analyzed.

"We do not know how many Indians were there or how long they occupied the site, but research will help answer those questions. Dr. Ramenofsky still stands firm on the date of at least 3,000 B.C."

At the time of the initial announcement last May, she said the discovery meant that primitive Indians existed in Louisiana when picture writing first appeared in ancient Mesopotamia and the calendar and plow were first used in Egypt.

Although artifacts found in the area suggest that people lived there at the time, the LSU archaeologist said they do not represent the "first people in Louisiana."

"Artifacts found suggest that these people lived during the late Archaic cultural period of eastern North America," she said in a May interview with the LSU public relations department.

In that time frame, the Archaic period ranged from about 3,000 B.C. to 1,000 B.C., a period in which human populations were hunting and gathering food off the land.

About 3,000 years ago, Cowpen Slough was the main channel of the Arkansas River, she said. When the river diverted itself, the people abandoned the area. Subsequently, the area was capped with overbank clay deposits of the Mississippi River. Because the clays were so fine-grained, the remains below the clay were sealed and preserved, she said.

Found last year were charred human bones, arrowheads and grinding stones, she said.