Studies Continue at Weeks Island

Numerous Ancient Indian Artifacts Already Found

But Erosion Endangers Future Work

(Baton Rouge, La.—Louisiana's largest Indian shell mound, on Weeks Island south of New Iberia, is being excavated under the direction of a Louisiana State University archaeologist.

Evidence of modern and prehistoric Indian cultures as far back as 1250 B.C. has already been turned up in the excavation, which began in October under a six-month $31,300 National Science Foundation grant.

The findings include artifacts as pottery, bone and stone tools, projectile points, cooking hearths, and the skeletal remains of the people and the animals they ate, including coon, skunk, fish, mollusk, possum, muskrat, squirrel and alligator.

The 12-foot-high mound is some 700 feet in length and 120 feet in width.

Directing the work is anthropology curator Robert W. Neuman of the LSU Geoscience Museum and department of geography and anthropology.

Neuman said it is important that the excavation proceed without delay, because part of the mound is gradually being eroded into Weeks Bayou.

Assistant archaeologist on the project is Robert S. Neitzel of Marksville, who has supervised numerous excavations in the South including the famous Natchez Fatherland Site.

Physical anthropology is being studied by David Meditz, University of Kansas student, who has studied skeletal remains in burial mounds in Kansas and South Dakota. Eight workmen are assisting the scientists.

Neuman said up to now he has found evidence of the modern Natchezan period, the Troyville-Coles Creek culture, 700 to 1100 A.D.; Marksville culture, 1 to 500 A.D.; Tchefuncte back to 250 B.C., and the Poverty Point culture that began about 1250 B.C.

The countless mollusk shells in the mound represent the inhabitants' chief food source. A calculation of their numbers compared in light of the human calorie requirements they filled will give some idea on the Indian populations during the various periods, he said.

Mollusks of the same species, Rangia Cuneata, are still abundant in the wetlands, but have no appeal as a food source for people today.

The large burial site uncovered on the mound contains numerous remains of adults and children with some skeletons fairly intact. Unlike burial mounds in other parts of the continent, practically no artifacts were found buried with the ancient people.

Neuman said artifacts and other important findings will be added to the collection of the LSU Geoscience Museum.

The ages of many of the samples are being pinpointed at the Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory of the LSU Nuclear Science Center on the campus, he said.

Services and equipment for the Weeks Island project are being provided by the Morton Salt Company, the Louisiana Foundation and the McIlhenny Company. The organizations also provided funds for earlier test excavations directed by Neuman.

Although the present project is expected to turn up considerably more knowledge of historic value, it will be continued only until the NSF funds run out later this winter, and will by no means exhaust all the information accessible in the mound, he said.

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