Zigler hosts Indian exhibit until Tuesday

JENNINGS — The Zigler Museum in Jennings is hosting the LSU exhibit “Louisiana Indians Through the Ages” until Tuesday.

Ancestors of the present-day Indians journeyed across the extensive land bridge from Siberia to the North American continent about 10,000 to 23,000 years ago. It was during the late stage of the great Ice Age.

Tours for school groups may be scheduled by calling the museum 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays at (318) 824-0114; or writing to 411 Clara St, Jennings, LA 70506. The exhibit is open to the public 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays; 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Sundays.

At least 12,000 years ago, nomadic hunting and gathering Indian groups had migrated southward and were occupying what is now southeastern United States.

From a broad range of archaeological studies, it is known that some nomadic groups inhabited the region now known as Louisiana. Their stone and bone artifacts are the very first durable record of human thought, invention and resourcefulness in the state of Louisiana.

This traveling exhibit introduces a sample of prehistoric artifacts recovered from archaeological sites in Louisiana. It demonstrates some of what is known about craft technologies such as stone, bone and pottery artifacts.

Stoneworking by the American Indians was accomplished by skillful “reduction” processes. Basically, they reduced a naturally shaped stone to a desired shape and size by proficient chipping, pecking and grinding techniques.

Indians manufactured an enormous variety of useful implements and artistic ornaments. Systematic archaeological studies have discovered stylistic changes over time and between geographical regions, as well as the use of the stone objects.

Bone artifacts were obtained from many of the regional animals and fashioned into a host of implements. Deer bones and antler are particularly common at archaeological sites. In coastal Louisiana where surface stone is not found, tools fashioned from animal bone replaced stone artifacts. Raw material included a wide range of mammals, fishes, birds and reptiles to fashion bone tools and ornaments.

Pottery manufacture was a relatively recent technology among the prehistoric southeastern Indians, emerging about 2000 B.C. Most pottery is found broken into pieces called “sherds,” which are almost as indestructible as stone. They are generally from vessels used in everyday cooking and storage activities. Occasionally more elaborate vessels are found which were used in religious and civic rituals.

These bits of pottery tell archaeologists much about which Indian culture occupied a particular region and at what time period.

Early historical maps of Louisiana document the locations of Indian tribes as first encountered by European explorers and missionaries. Photocopies of several of the 18th and 19th century maps illustrate many of the tribal locations through the years.

A more subtle, yet remarkably indelible impact of the Indians on the state of Louisiana are the place-names of Indian origin such as Atchafalaya and Ouachita. The exhibit map shows the many streams, towns, cities and parishes that have names of Indian origin.