

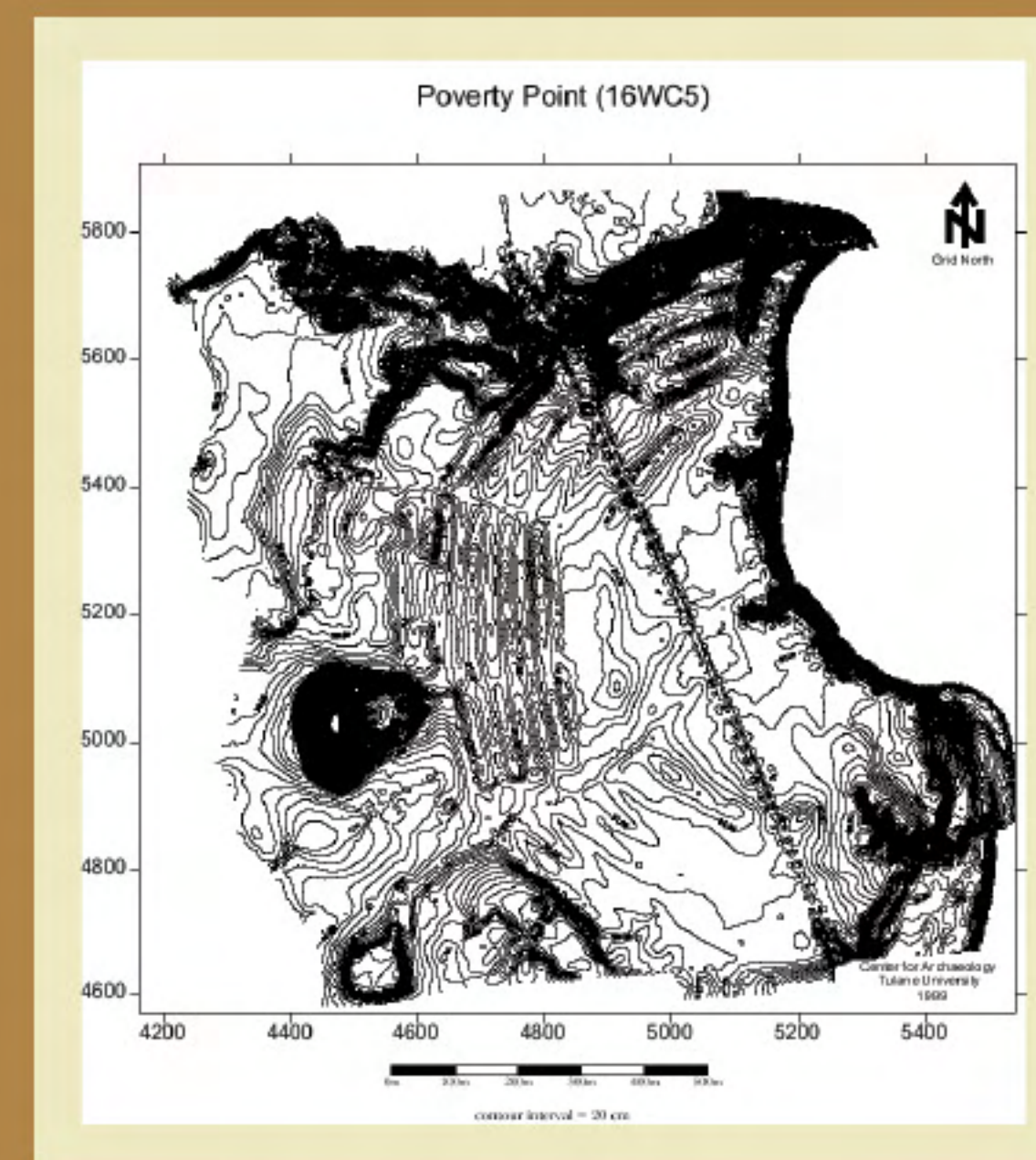
LOUISIANA MOUNDS TO A.D. 500 (CONTINUED)

POVERTY POINT. The Poverty Point site represents the climax of Archaic mound building. Constructed between 1600 and 1300 B.C., the site contains six concentric earthen rings, a 650-yard central plaza, and the third largest mound in the United States. A staggering quantity of dart points, drills, jasper beads, and other objects have been recovered from the site. Many were made of exotic materials. Copper was traded in from as far away as the Great Lakes; stone was imported from Arkansas, Tennessee, and Georgia. Archaeologists still debate what kind of society had so much surplus labor and wealth so early in prehistory.

TCHEFUNCTE. For unknown reasons, the Poverty Point site was abandoned sometime after 1000 B.C. The complex trade network associated with the site collapsed. The Tchefuncte culture that followed did not build mounds until the very end of the culture, when it was influenced by a loosely integrated politico-religious system called "Hopewell," which connected Southeastern societies by 100 B.C.

MARKSVILLE. Hopewell influence resulted in the Marksville culture, the hallmark of which is the burial mound. These conical burial mounds are often surrounded by embankments. The burial mounds contain evidence of the resurgence of long-distance trade. They contain beautifully crafted platform pipes, musical pan pipes, and ear spools (earrings), often made of exotic materials. Burnished pottery, often incised with bird iconography, is also found. The scroll design used throughout this exhibit is another Marksville design, though the meaning of this motif is unclear.

TROYVILLE. The Marksville culture gradually disappeared, and, by A.D. 500, a new culture called Troyville is defined. Changes in pottery and other artifacts indicate influences from eastern cultures, especially from panhandle Florida. Instead of burial mounds, public life was dominated by low flat-topped mounds, which are believed to have functioned as stages for public rituals. These mounds also became more elaborate as sociopolitical roles developed and political positions became inherited.



The Poverty Point site. Image courtesy of Dr. T.R. Kidder, Department of Anthropology, Washington University in St. Louis.



The Marksville site. Image courtesy of Dr. Chip McGimsey, Regional Archaeology Program, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

LOUISIANA MOUNDS A.D. 750-1500

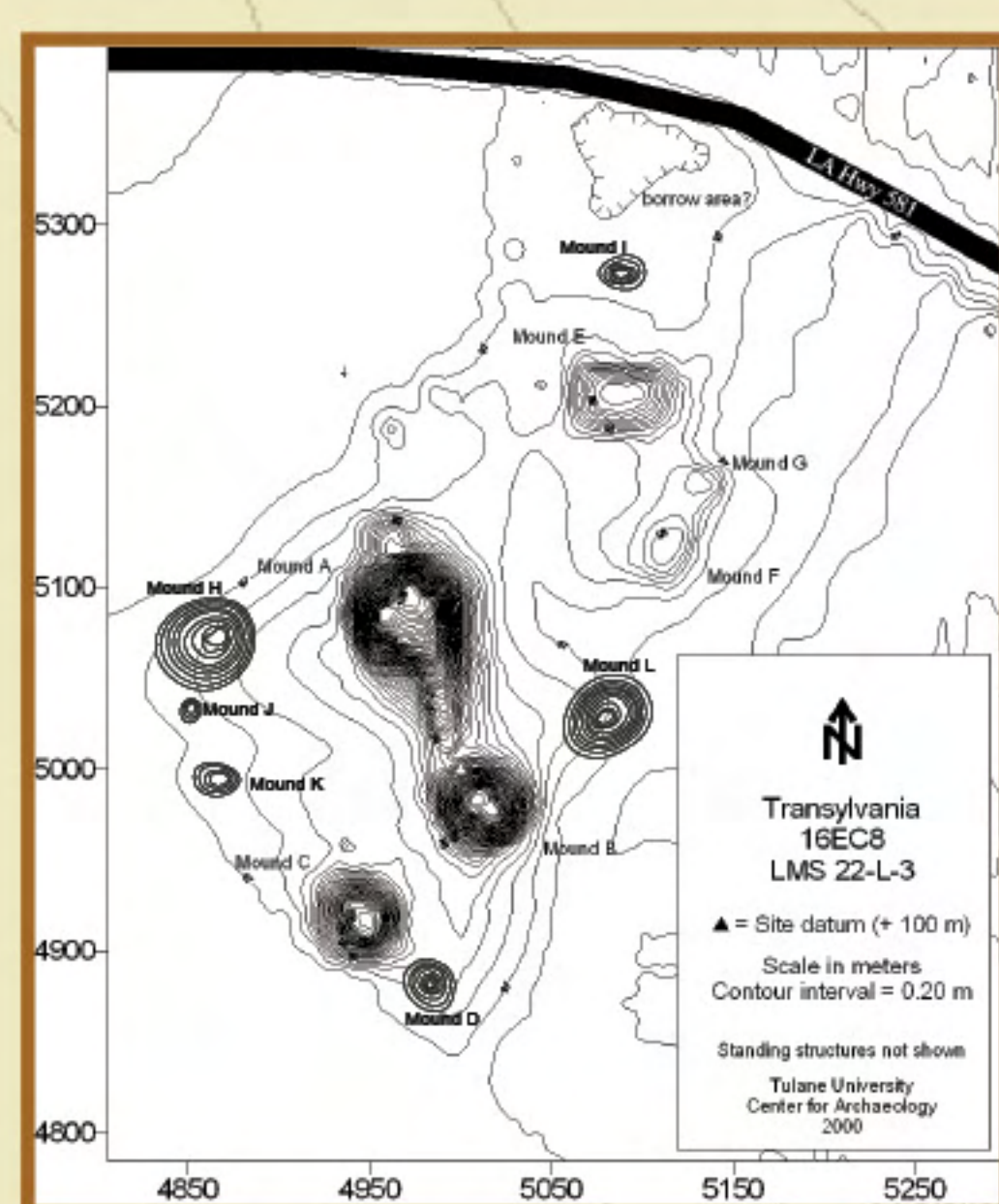
COLES CREEK

By the Coles Creek period (A.D. 750-1200), ceremonial sites often contained three or four tall, pyramidal-based, flat-topped mounds around a central plaza. Some sites, such as the Raffman site, were even larger. Mounds functioned as substructures supporting temples or houses for chiefs or principal men. Unlike in Marksville mounds, only high status individuals were buried in these "temple" mounds.

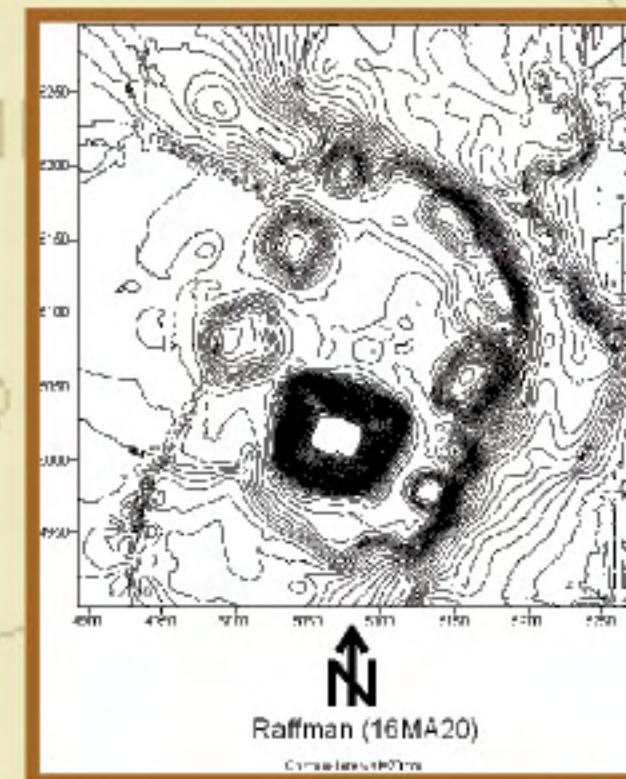
The Bayou Grande Cheniere Mound site, also constructed by Coles Creek peoples, is somewhat different from the norm. That site contains three platform mounds, a 24 foot-tall conical mound, and seven low domed mounds. A twelfth mound was built 75 meters south of the main complex. Excavations in 2001 and 2002 by Museum personnel and students revealed multiple burials in all of the mounds tested. It may be that this was a mortuary site for a number of different lineages, each represented by one or more mounds. Families may have come together at certain times of the year for feasting and mortuary ritual, perhaps analogous to the Mexican "Day of the Dead."

MISSISSIPPIAN

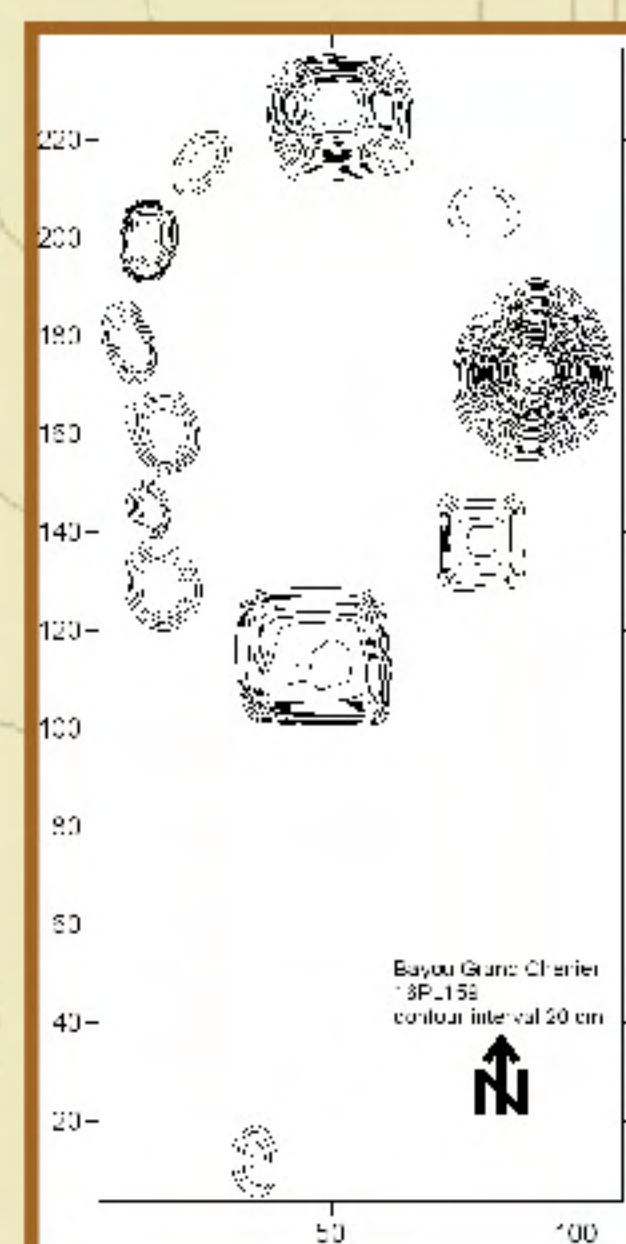
Beginning around A.D. 800, an influential culture called "Mississippian" arose in the area around St. Louis. This new culture is associated with a shift from a hunting and gathering to an agricultural subsistence economy, shell-tempered pottery, and a more rigid and complex political hierarchy. The Mississippian culture spawned a new politico-religious movement that, like the Hopewell and Poverty Point cultures, involved long distance trade in exquisitely-wrought exotic artifacts. In this instance, the motifs emphasized fertility, warfare, and personal status. Mississippian influence was felt in northern Louisiana as early as A.D. 1000 but Mississippian peoples did not settle in Louisiana until quite late, around A.D. 1400, and Mississippian sites are restricted to the extreme northeast and southeast portions of the state. The Transylvania site, with twelve mounds arranged around two plazas, is similar to Mississippian sites outside of Louisiana.



The Transylvania site. Image created from images courtesy of Dr. T.R. Kidder, Department of Anthropology, Washington University in St. Louis and Lower Mississippi Survey, Harvard University.



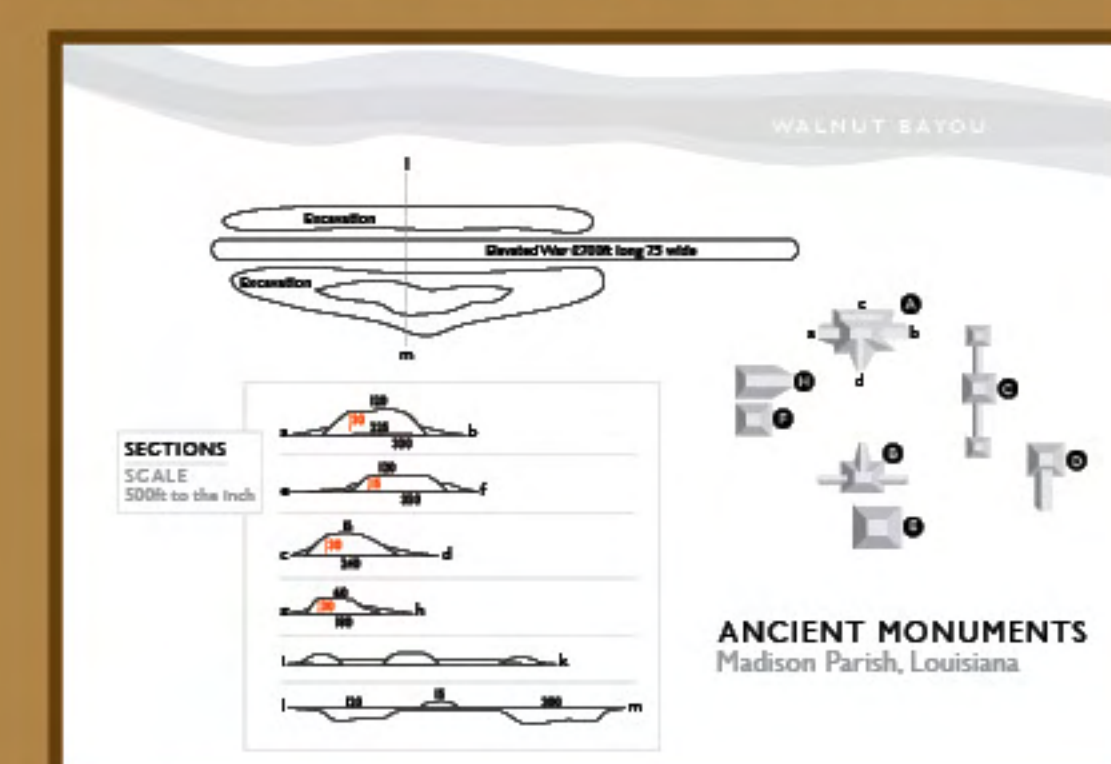
The Raffman Mound site. Image courtesy of Dr. T.R. Kidder, Department of Anthropology, Washington University in St. Louis.



The Bayou Grande Cheniere Mound site. Image based on a sketch map provided by Dr. Chip McGimsey, Regional Archaeology Program, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

PLAQUEMINE

Between A.D. 1000 and 1200, Coles Creek cultures began to be influenced by "Mississippian" cultures to the north and east. By A.D. 1200, a new cultural designation, "Plaquemine" is used to describe local cultures influenced but not taken over by Mississippian ideals. Plaquemine mound sites are generally larger than Coles Creek sites. The Fitzhugh site, for instance, had seven mounds and a 75-foot-wide elevated roadway half a mile in length. In southern Louisiana, where Mississippian ideas were less influential, Plaquemine sites tend to be much smaller. Occasionally artifacts are found that reflect the Mississippian obsessions with warfare and status, but these are rare. Whether Plaquemine culture would become more Mississippian will never be known, as the cultural trajectory was cut off by the arrival of Europeans in 1543.



The Fitzhugh site. Image redrawn from Map in Squier and Davis's "Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley" (1848:114-117), surveyed by James Hough, 1885.

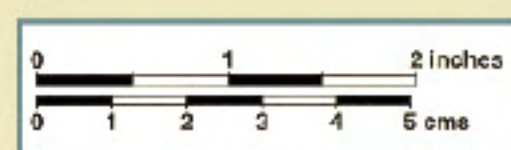
CONTACT

Most mound building ceased across the Southeast after the Contact period, when Europeans inadvertently brought deadly diseases that decimated Native American cultures—especially those along major transportation routes like the Mississippi River. However, Native Americans have regrouped and are actively engaged in conserving mounds and other sites that reflect their durable past.

BONE, STONE, AND SHELL TECHNOLOGY

SUBSISTENCE TECHNOLOGIES

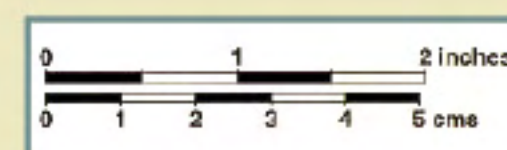
The best evidence of the prehistoric food quest is the hundreds of thousands of projectile points (spear, dart, and arrow points) that occur in Louisiana. Other tools include so-called "bola stones" which could be attached to cords and thrown; they may also be used as net weights. These stone artifacts are what remains of a diverse hunting, gathering, and fishing toolkit that also contained fine-meshed nets for fish and birds, decoys, small and large snares, fish weirs, fish baskets, cane and bamboo arrows, wooden bows and atlatls, and digging sticks for root crops and shellfish.



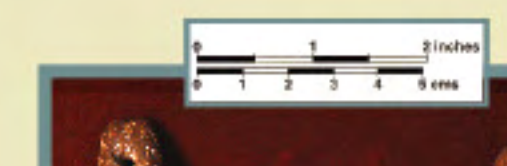
Kent point. Used from the middle of the Archaic through the Marksville periods, these points are often found in plowed fields near water sources.



Man hurling a dart with an atlatl. Image courtesy of Dr. Jon Gibson.



Bone fishing hooks. These hooks were generally crafted from deer long bones. Considering the dependence of most cultures on fishing, fish hooks are uncommon. Bulk capture of fish with nets and weirs was probably more common than line fishing.

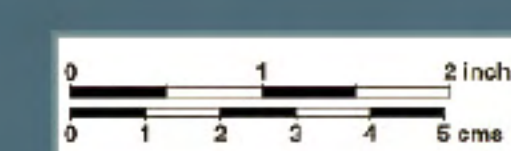


Bola stones or plummetts, used either as weights for a hunting bola or as net weights. These are usually made of exotic, and very heavy stones like hematite or magnetite.

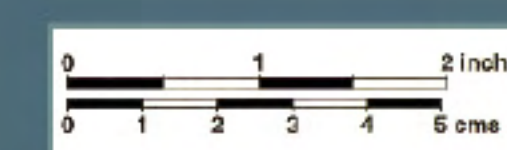
PROJECTILE POINTS

Projectile points changed through time as prey and hunting technologies changed. Paleoindian Clovis points were attached to long spears, and were used to hunt Pleistocene period megafauna like the mastodon. Spear points were often exquisitely crafted from non-native stone and were probably closely conserved. By 10,000 B.C., a more modern climate developed and modern fauna appeared. Long spears and spear points were replaced by smaller darts and dart points. The darts were propelled using

an atlatl or throwing stick, which greatly increased the power of the throw. (For more information on the atlatl, visit www.worldatlatl.org.) Because darts were not easily retrieved, dart points were expendable—they were quickly and roughly made from readily available native stone. This technology lasted over 6,000 years in Louisiana, and was still in use by some Mexican Indians at Contact. However, between A.D. 500 and 700, the bow, arrow, and arrowhead replaced the atlatl, dart, and dart point in Louisiana.



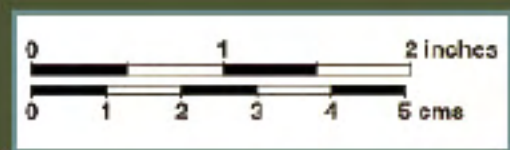
A Clovis point. The 'flute' or channel up the middle of the point was for hafting onto a spear; deep flutes occur only on Paleolithic points.



Scalloped arrow point. This is one of the earlier arrow points. It resembles a dart point in shape but is smaller.

BONE AND SHELL TOOLS

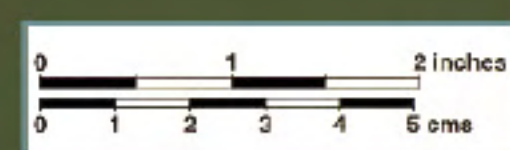
In many areas of Louisiana, particularly in the south where stone is not readily available, bone and shell were important resources for tools. Unlike projectile points, which can be assigned to a general time frame based on shape and size, bone and shell tools are difficult to date because their forms do not change dramatically through time. Bone was used to create points, fish-hooks, "fids" used in net and basket making, and fleshers and punches for leatherworking. On the coast, whelk shells were used as hoes, adzes, gouges, punches, and drinking cups. Gulf coast shells were traded inland as far north as St. Louis.



Turkey metatarsal awl. Awls were used for punching holes in skins or leather, and for sewing garments or other articles of clothing.



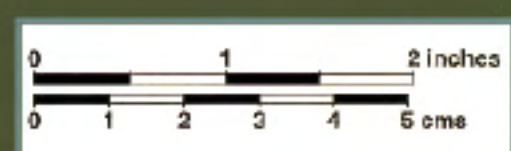
Alligator jaw bone pick. This tool, used for digging, was created by removing the teeth from an alligator jaw, and grinding the ends to useful points.



Bone fid. Fids were crafted from large mammal long-bones that were splintered by cutting or smashing. The resultant pieces were ground to shape and used in net and basket making.



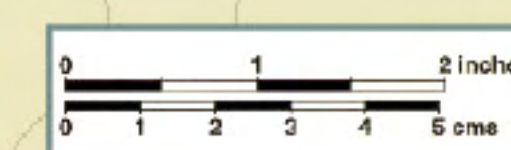
Heavy wear on the end of this whelk indicates that it was used as a gouge or adze.



A bone dart point. Considered to be a groove and snap type tool, it was created by scoring and snapping a large bone to size with further refinement—such as polishing and grinding towards the tapered end—thus creating a point. These were made throughout prehistory, but are more common in areas with little stone.

STONE, BONE, AND SHELL ORNAMENTS

Stone, bone, and shell were also important materials used in jewelry and other items of personal adornment. At least as early as 5000 B.C., these materials were used to make gorgets, pendants, beads, and other items. Such items were traded widely, probably along with other materials such as feathers and furs that have long since disappeared.



Shell beads with pendant. All are made from the central 'columnella' of a whelk shell.

NATIVE AMERICAN COOKING TECHNOLOGY AND BASKETRY

COOKING TECHNOLOGIES

Long before Native Americans invented pottery, they used clay to cook food. At least as early as 6000 B.C., Louisiana natives formed clay into rectangular, spherical, and other geometric shapes called “baked clay objects.” These were heated in a fire and then placed in pits, where they slow-roasted foods—they were early charcoal briquettes!

Baked clay objects (also called “clay cooking balls”) were used by Archaic cultures and as an alternative to pottery by early Tchefuncte peoples. Because it is more malleable than stone, pottery can be used to provide much more refined time markers than other artifact classes. In some cases, prehistoric social groups and social boundaries can be identified by pottery style and surface decoration.



Baked-clay objects from the Poverty Point site. Image courtesy of Louisiana Division of Archaeology.

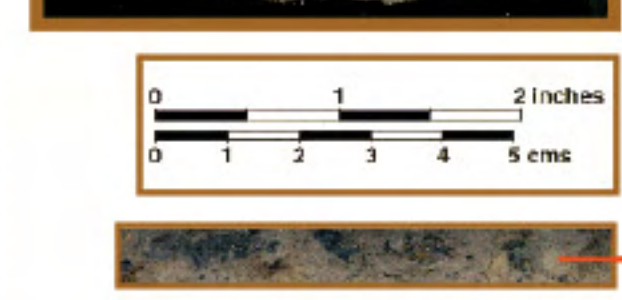
The earliest pottery in the Southeast was created around 3000 B.C. along the Savannah River and adjacent Atlantic coast. It was “tempered” with plant fibers, principally Spanish moss. Temper refers to the addition of plant fiber, sand, shell, or other substances during clay preparation for the construction of a pot. Temper opens up pore spaces and so helps to control shrinkage and cracking when a pot is dried and fired. Between 1000 and 500 B.C., cultures in the Southeast replaced plant fibers with sand or sponge particles. The Tchefuncte culture, though, developed a different temper called “grog,” which consisted of ground-up potsherds. Through time, grog temper became smaller, and other technological improvements produced thinner, harder sherds. Grog tempering worked very well in Lower Mississippi River Valley clays, and it was used until Contact. However, late in prehistory, shell tempering appeared in northeast Louisiana and extreme southeast Louisiana. Shell tempered pottery is an excellent indication of Mississippian cultural influence and of a fairly late occupation.

Surface and cross-section of a fiber tempered sherd.



Burnt Spanish moss

Surface and cross-section of a grog tempered sherd.



Grog

Surface and cross-section of a shell tempered sherd.



Shell Fragment

THE INTANGIBLES

Artifacts of durable materials like pottery and stone represent only a small portion of the material world of prehistoric Native Americans. We know from areas where preservation is unusually good—in dry caves or in wet sites—that there was a heavy reliance on wood, for everything from canoes and housing to atlatls and arrows; on cane and palmetto for basketry and matting; on gourds for containers; and on cordage for bags, baskets, footwear, and nets. Drawings of the 16th and 17th centuries also provide evidence of a rich material culture that eludes archaeologists.



Close-up of the “alligator entrails” basket design.

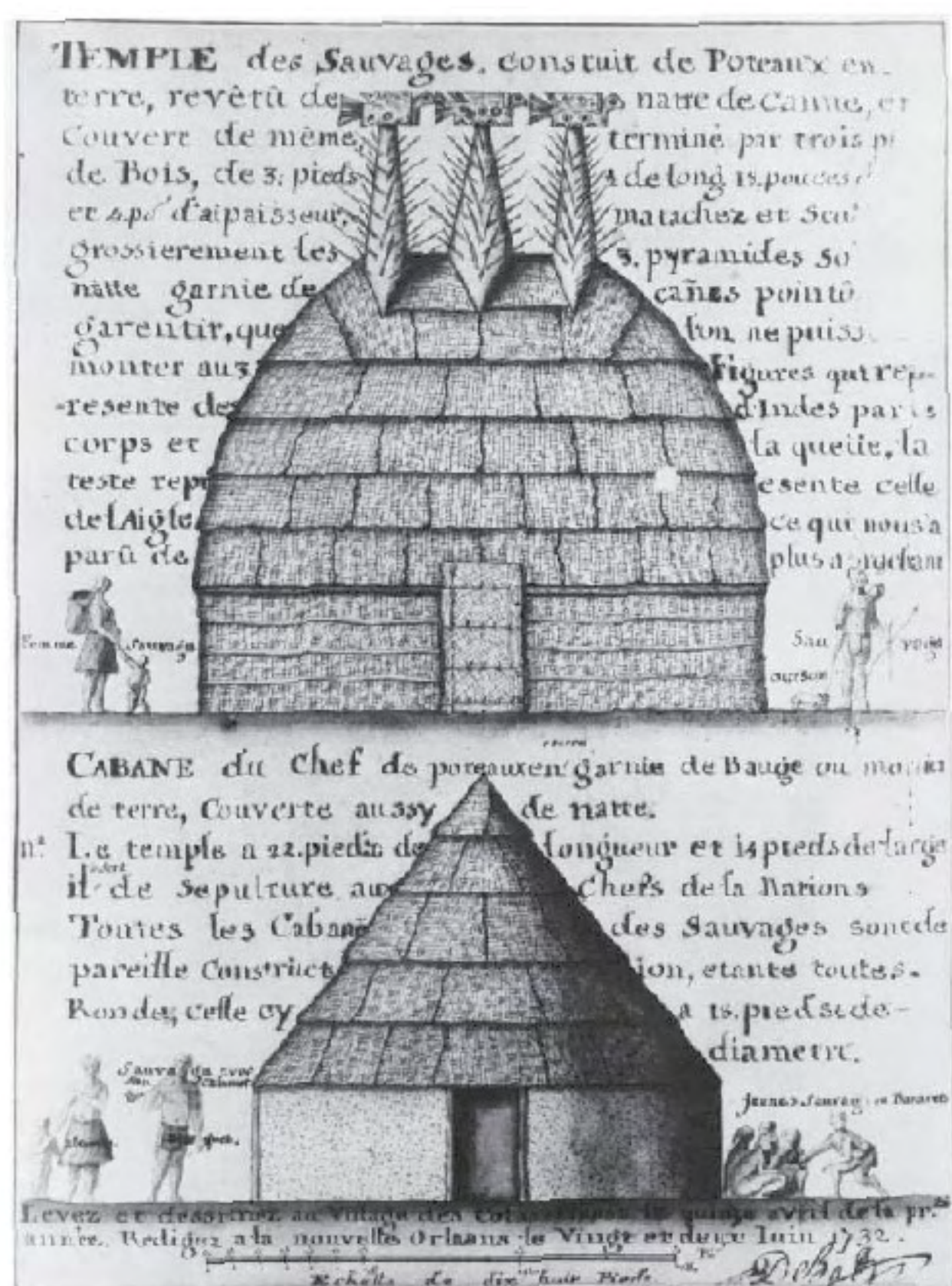
Some organic artifacts have been found in Louisiana. One thousand years ago, Mississippians traveled to Avery Island to gather salt. They used baskets in this process; the salt preserved pieces of those baskets, which were excavated in the 1960s. Basket making continued among many tribes into the present. The Chitimacha basket displayed here was purchased by Stanwood Duval Jastremski in the early 1930s from Chief Paul of the Chitimacha Reservation in Charenton, Louisiana. This double-woven “trunk” basket has a pattern called “alligator entrails.” The double-woven basketry technique and the design are likely rooted in the prehistoric past. This basket and others were donated to the Museum of Natural Science by Florence Jastremski, Stanwood’s daughter.



The Chitimacha basket displayed here was purchased in the early 1930’s by Stanwood D. Jastremski from Chief Paul of the Chitimacha Reservation in Charenton, Louisiana. This double-woven “trunk” basket has a pattern called “alligator entrails.” The double-woven basketry technique likely has its roots in the prehistoric past.

*Created by: Unknown
Donated by: Florence Jastremski (1991)*

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY



DeBatz' drawing of the temple (top) and the wattle and daub Chief's house (bottom) at Natchez, dated A.D. 1732. © 2007 Harvard University, Peabody Museum, 41-72-10/16 T347.3.

TEMPLE, TRANSLATION OF FRENCH TEXT:

"Temple of the Savages, constructed of posts in the ground, covered with mats of cane, and roofed with same, ending in three [stakes] of Wood, 3 ½ feet long, 18 inches [wide] and 4 inches thick, crudely colored and [sculptured]. The 3 pyramids (elements attached to the roof) [are of] reedwork trimmed with pointed canes [to] prevent one climbing to the 3 figures, the body and tail of which represent turkeys and the head that of the eagle, which seemed to us the most like it."

"Surveyed and sketched at the Village of the Acolapissa the fifteenth of April of the present year. Redrawn at New Orleans the twenty-second of June 1732. DeBatz."

CABIN OF THE CHIEF, TRANSLATION OF FRENCH TEXT:

"Cabin of the Chief, of posts in the ground plastered with clay or earth mortar, also covered with mats. The temple is 22 feet long and 14 feet wide; it serves as the sepulcher for the chiefs of the nation. All the Cabins of the savages are of similar construction, all being round, this one is 18 feet in diameter."



Postmolds (small circular areas) defining two walls of a structure at the Mount Nebo site in Madison Parish. The large circular feature in the upper right proved to be a modern disturbance.

PALMETTO HOUSE MODEL

"Palmetto (Sabal sp.), like river cane, was widely used by the Louisiana Indians. Among the Choctaw and Houma it served as a house covering, and palmetto-thatched houses still exist in the Houma country near Golden Meadow, Montague, and Dulac, Louisiana." Kniffen et al. The Historic Tribes of Louisiana: 1542 to the Present, 1987.

"The frames were formed of small saplings; the tops and sides were constructed of palmetto thatch. According to the present inhabitants [in 1908-9], many of the circular houses were large, affording shelter for many persons. Only one door was made, this in most cases facing the south. A fire was kindled on the ground within the lodge, the smoke passing out through an opening made for the purpose at the top near the center." Swanton 1946: 401 quoting Bushnell 1909: 7.



Choctaw of Bayou LaCombe, Palmetto Structure, 1881. This image comes from a series of images of Louisiana's Native-American cultures originally presented as a postcard.

HOUSING, GENERAL INFORMATION-REFERENCING WATTLE AND DAUB (WINTER) HOUSE

WATTLE AND DAUB

Around the posts, the natives "plait pliant withes arranged horizontally at vertical distances of about a foot which they attach with cords from pole to pole. Afterward, kneading well with their feet some clay which they mix with that kind of moss of which I have spoken, commonly called 'Spanish beard,' they make a mud and with it they plaster their cabins, which, when this work is finished, appear as if built entirely of earth." Dumont 1753 (Swanton 1946: 417).



Applying daub (clay with Spanish moss) to wattle to create a wall.

Contemporaneous Spanish (cujes y barro) and French (bousillage) peasantry had similar traditions for constructing walls:

WINTER HOUSE

"This simple but substantial structure had neither windows nor smoke holes; it had only a small entrance facing east, which was the sacred, or 'good luck' direction. During winter, a fire in the middle of the house kept it very warm... Raised platforms around the walls served as benches and beds. They were made of pole frames resting on forked sticks and covered with mats. According to the Choctaw and Caddo, such shelves and beds should be built 'higher than a flea can hop.' Stored under them was a hodgepodge of articles ranging from harvested crops to baskets, pots, spare moccasins, and clothing." (Kniffen et al. 1987:110-111).

ARTIFACTS FOUND ON MOUND SITES OF DIFFERENT AGES

EAR SPOONS

BURIAL MOUND

RAPTOR MOTIF VESSEL

CHARRED MAIZE

SHELL TEMPERED POTTERY

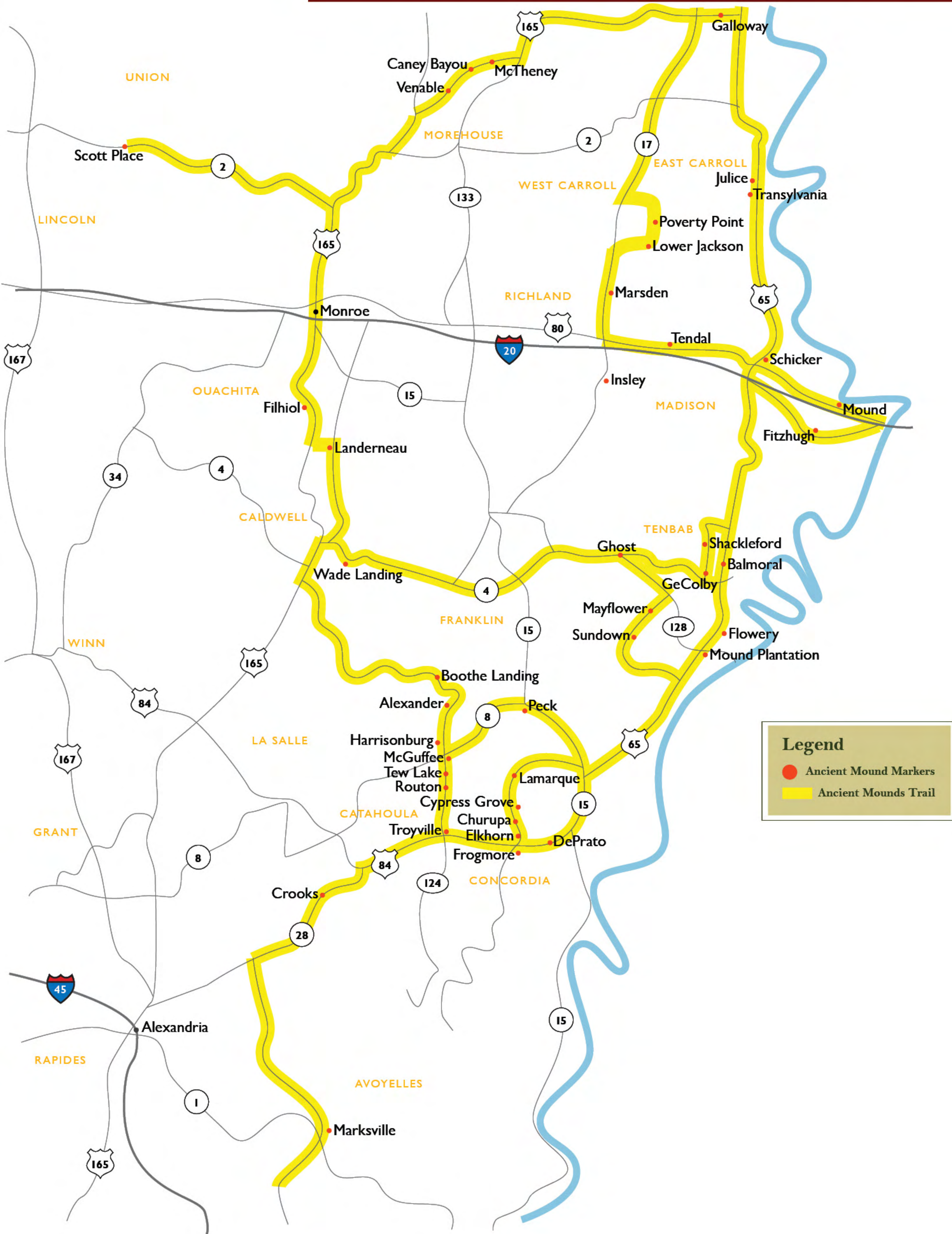
POVERTY POINT MOUND A

JASPER BEADS

BAKED CLAY OBJECTS

ANCIENT MOUNDS AND ARTIFACTS

Durable Reflections of Transitory Societies



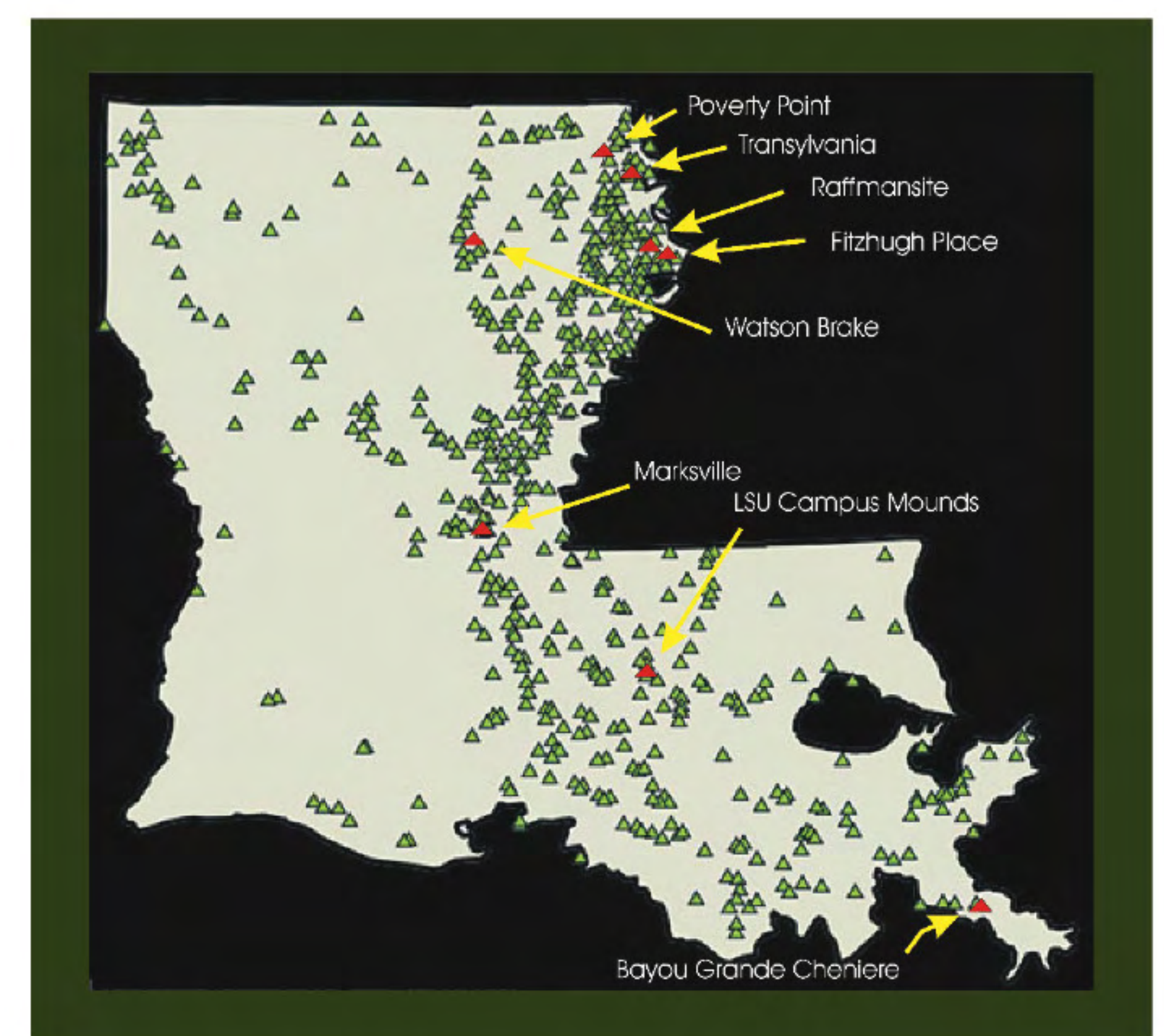
Native Americans have lived in what is now Louisiana for at least 12,000 years. They adapted to major climatic and social changes with modifications to tools and ornaments made of wood and other plant materials, as well as stone, bone, shell, and clay. Aspects of social life and religion were also captured in the form and decoration of both utilitarian and ceremonial artifacts. The organic artifacts have long since disappeared, but the more durable materials remain to reflect the lifestyles—and the artistry—of Louisiana’s first settlers.

Another durable reflection of prehistoric Native American societies is the public architecture that remains—the earthen mounds that provided the focus for social, political, and religious life. Like artifacts, mound shape and size changed through time; mound function and the meanings the mounds had in the social landscape of these peoples changed as well. Archaeologists study the shape, size, and construction history of mounds in an attempt to read the meaning in these monuments.

This exhibit is designed to provide a glimpse of lifeways in the prehistoric past in Louisiana. It is composed of examples of the durable objects used in everyday life, along with some information on the organic items—everything from houses to baskets—that have disappeared. The discussion of mounds highlights the sacred landscapes that gave living its breadth in the past.

LOUISIANA ANCIENT MOUNDS TRAIL

There are over 700 known mound sites in Louisiana, a testimony to the vigor and industry of the societies that lived in Louisiana in the past. In order to enhance public appreciation of the mounds, the Louisiana Ancient Mounds Heritage Area and Trails Commission has created the Louisiana Ancient Mounds Driving Trail. The Trail consists of 39 mound sites in northeast Louisiana that can be seen from roadways. Each mound site is marked by a historic marker that provides information about the site. More information can be found in the Trail Guide, available from the Louisiana Division of Archaeology or on the internet at <http://www.crt.state.la.us/archaeology/homepage/>.



Location of mounds in Louisiana, those highlighted are discussed in the text of this display. Image courtesy of Louisiana Division of Archaeology.

LOUISIANA MOUNDS 6000 B.C. - A.D. 500

RADIOCARBON DATING

Anything organic—anything that breathes in the naturally occurring radioactive carbon in the air or water—can be radiocarbon dated. Dates are reported as (for example) 6570 +/- 80 B.P. The B.P. stands for “Before Present”, the +/- term is the range of error on either side of the date, and the ‘6570’ is the number of years ‘before present,’ which by the standards set when the technique was developed, is 1950. Over the years, scientists have learned that a number of corrections and calibrations are necessary to translate these “raw” counts of remaining radioactive carbon to B.C. and A.D. dates. One of the most important calibrations is with tree rings, which, it turns out, are more accurate than radiocarbon dating! Dates throughout this exhibit are corrected and calibrated.

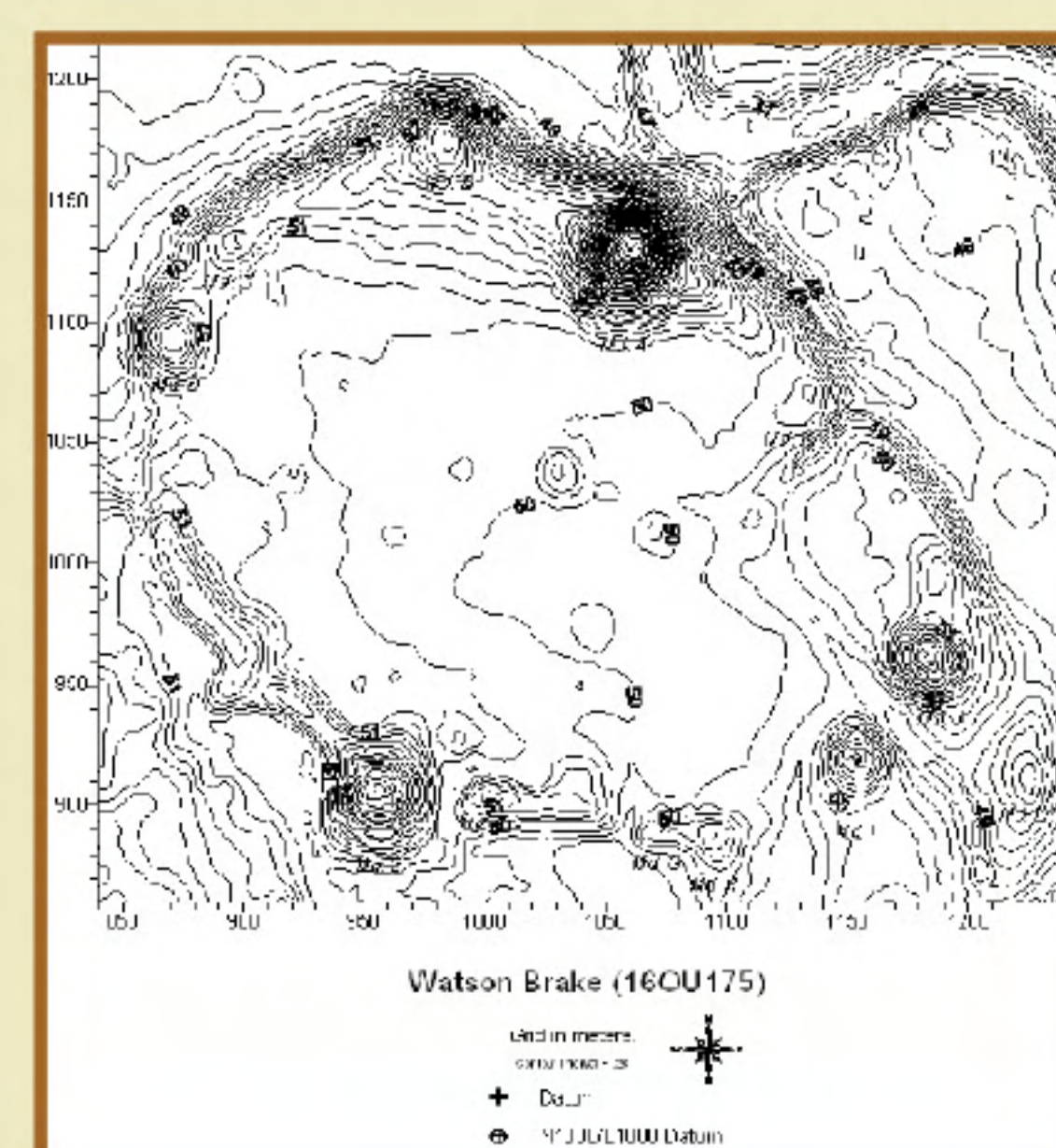
LOUISIANA’S PREHISTORIC CULTURES

The actual names of prehistoric societies in Louisiana are not known. Therefore, we can only refer to prehistoric “cultures” by somewhat arbitrary names that archaeologists apply. These are: Paleoindian, Archaic, Poverty Point, Tchefuncte, Marksville, Troyville, Coles Creek, and Plaquemine/Mississippian. The Plaquemine/Mississippian cultures are the immediate predecessors of historically known tribes.

PALEOINDIAN. Little is known of Louisiana’s Paleoindian (10,000–8,000 B.C.) cultures. Stone tools are generally all that remain. No mounds are known for Paleoindian cultures.

ARCHAIC. The earliest dated mounds in the U.S. are in Louisiana. These were constructed by Archaic cultures sometime around 5000 B.C. The LSU Mounds, though younger (4000 B.C.), closely resemble those earliest mounds.

Archaic mound sites became more elaborate through time. The Watson Brake Site (3400 B.C.) is a set of 11 mounds tied together by an embankment. These encircle a 200-yard plaza, possibly used for ritual performances and social dancing. As at other Archaic mound sites, no burials have been found. Artifacts include beads, and the drills used to make them, as well as dart points and square baked-clay objects.



The Watson Brake site. Image courtesy of Dr. Joe Saunders, Regional Archaeology Program, Department of Geosciences, University of Louisiana at Monroe.

Exhibit funded by:

