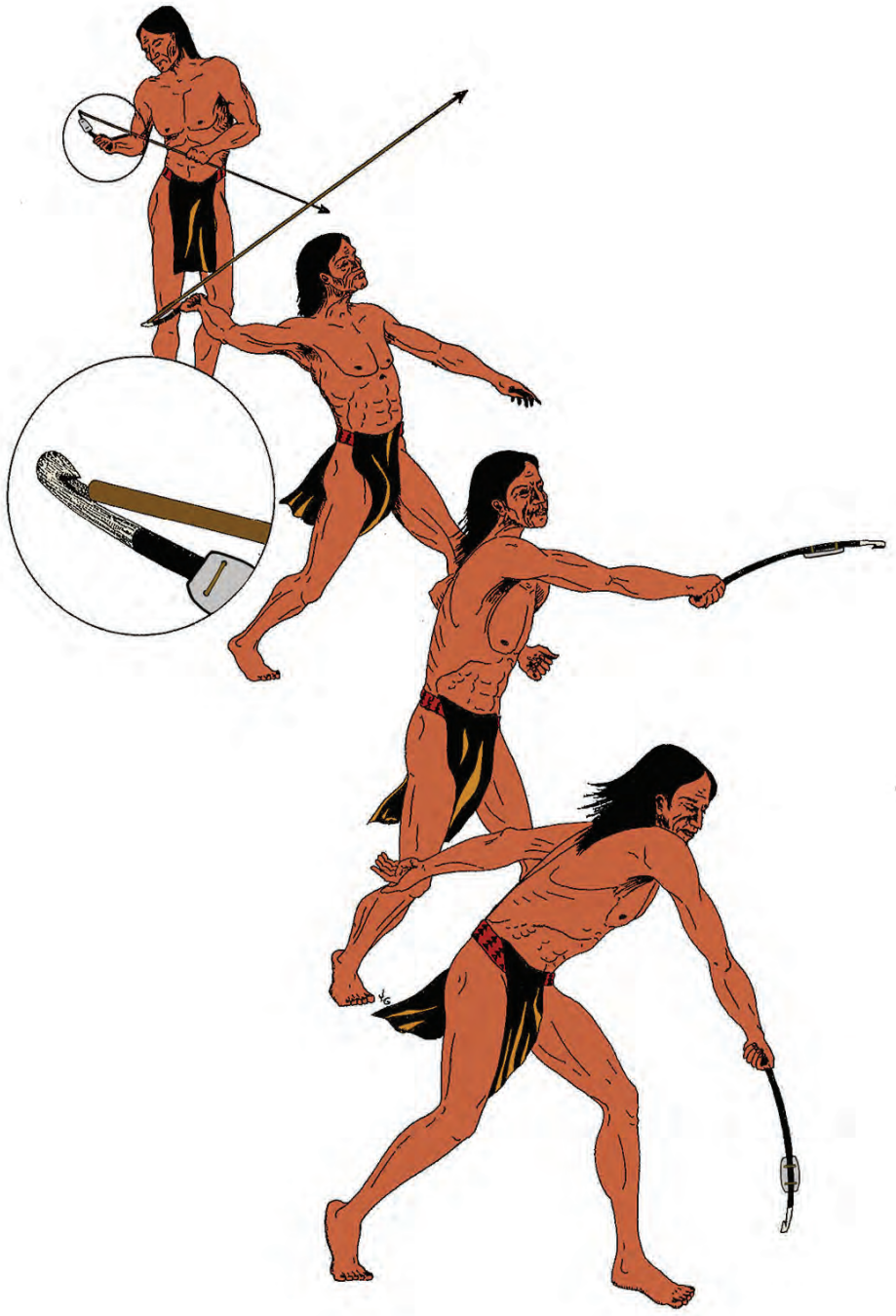
Artifacts

Many people, including archaeologists, tell stories about the past. What makes archaeologists' stories special? They are pieced together with evidence and guided by science. Artifacts, the things people made and left behind, are the best known kinds of evidence that archaeologists find. Archaeologists found a wealth of artifacts at the Bayou Jasmine site. Read on to learn more about the things they found and what they reveal about the people who lived at the site.

Atlatl Hook

Archaeologists found a conch or whelk shell atlatl hook at Bayou Jasmine. Atlatls, or spear throwers, were hunting tools that increased the range of a thrown spear considerably.

Credit: R. Christopher Goodwin and Associates



Atlatl thrower illustration by Jon Gibson.

Awls

Archaeologists found many different kinds of bone tools at the site. These included narrow, pointed tools made of bone and antler. People may have used these pointed tools as awls or pins. Awls are used for poking holes in hides or wood.

Coprolites

Coprolites are preserved feces (poop). Archaeologists get very excited when they find coprolites at sites. Coprolites can offer a close look into the life of a single person. Preserved waste can reveal details about the person's diet and diseases, like if they ate certain foods or had parasites. Sometimes, archaeologists can even get DNA from coprolites. The ones at Bayou Jasmine were from the peat stratum, when the site was a fishing camp. The coprolites had a large number of tiny fish head bones. The coprolites, like all the artifacts from Bayou Jasmine, are preserved and available for future analysis when new techniques may provide more information.

Cooking Balls

Some prehistoric peoples used ceramic cooking balls to heat their food. Archaeologists found 11 cooking balls in the midden strata, and more in the spoil stratum. However, they were not found in cooking pits, so archaeologists cannot be sure about their function.

Cords

Researchers analyzed 31 pieces of cord from the site. Thin cords, woven with plant materials, usually do not survive so long. Cord weaving at Bayou Jasmine stands out in a few ways. First, the cords were braided, not twisted, which is a more common style found at sites in the Southeast. Examination showed that the cords have 4 to 10 strands. Second, cords from Bayou Jasmine are thinner than those archaeologists have found at other sites in the Southeast. They are an average of .06 inch, which is about the diameter of a toothpick. Third, the part of the plant that people at the site used for the cords is unusual. The Bayou Jasmine cords were made from very fine roots of a grass or sedge. At other sites in the Southeast, people used twisted grass, bark, stems or leaves, not roots. No other prehistoric sites in the U.S. have cords made from roots, and no other fiber descriptions resemble those from Bayou Jasmine. Although a biologist researched the plant for three years, she could not determine precisely which plant people used.

The Indians put a lot of effort into making these cords. Roots can be hard to work with because of their tough outer layer. Weavers soaked roots in water to remove the outer layer. This made the roots easier to braid. Some of the roots were whole, while others were split lengthwise into two or four strands. The strands were an average of only .02 inch wide. People began making the cord by tying two strands together, and sometimes by forming a loop. Then, they attached this loop to something stable, so they could use both hands to braid the strands together. Next, they added other strands to make the cords the desired width, strength and length. The final cord could be several feet long.

People likely used cords in many ways at Bayou Jasmine. Their main purpose may have been fishing lines, but they also could have been used as twine to hang things, to make fishing nets and to impress designs on pottery.

Credit: Jenna Tedrick Kuttruff, LSU

Fishhooks

The Indians at Bayou Jasmine caught and ate a lot of fish, based on the large numbers of fish bones in the midden. Archaeologists found evidence for how the Tchefuncte people caught the fish. Archaeologists found 56 examples of bone and antler fishhooks.

Net-Making Tools

People also may have caught fish using nets. Archaeologists found several small rectangles made of turtle shell like the one below. They believe that these rectangular tools were used in weaving fish nets. The size of the rectangles helped determine the size of the openings in the net. Some of the cords found at the site may have been remnants of nets, or possibly of fishing line used with fishhooks.

Flutes

Archaeologists unearthed two very rare bone artifacts at Bayou Jasmine. They discovered two jawbones from either dogs or wolves. People had removed the teeth from these bones and cut open both ends of the jawbones. Archaeologists think the Indians may have used these bones as flutes, placing their fingers ove the tooth sockets and blowing on one end to make music.

Pendants

Archaeologists found pendants at the site, including ones made from bone (top three) and alligator teeth (bottom two). Pendants were probably decorative items that people wore. They were suspended in two ways. One kind of pendant had a hole drilled through it, and the other had a groove carved around it.

Pottery

There were a lot of pieces of broken pots at the Bayou Jasmine site. The Tchefuncte pottery was not as thin, sturdy or well made as later Middle Woodland period pottery. In cross section, the clay in the pots was layered, showing that the makers did not knead it thoroughly before shaping the pots. Archaeologists found over 37,000 pieces of ceramic pots, bowls and jars at the site.

(Top) People decorated the Tchefuncte vessels with a variety of designs. Most of the designs have rectangular geometric patterns but a few had curving lines. Some vessels have lines drawn on the wet clay with a pointed or blunt tool.

(Middle two) For some pots, as the tool was dragged across the surface, it was regularly jabbed into the surface. This technique created a row of dents, or punctates, connected by a line (drag and jab designs).

(Bottom) Other vessels have big areas of punctates. Pushing a pointed tool into the damp clay created a group of shallow holes or punctates.

(Top left) Sometimes the pottery maker pressed a piece of cord into the clay to create a line.

(Top right) At times, the pottery maker pinched the clay between two fingers to make designs.

(Middle left) Rocking a short straight or curved tool across the surface created a distinctive decoration.

(Middle right) On some pots, the top of the vessel lip was also decorated.

(Bottom) Some of the pots had feet on them to hold them up.

Projectile Points

(Right) Archaeologists found many stone projectile points at the site. These were tips for darts thrown with atlatls. The most common kind of stone projectile point was the Pontchartrain type (A, B, C, and F). Archaeologists also found Delhi (D) and Kent types (E) at the site. Most of these points were made of rock that was not from the site. This means people either traveled long distances to get stone or traded or exchanged with outsiders for stone or projectile points. The closest source of rock to the site was Citronelle chert from north of Lake Pontchartrain.

(Below) People also made and used bone projectile points at Bayou Jasmine. These included bone points, made from long bones of deer (A), birds (B), small animals (C) and even alligators (D). These points were hollow at the bottom, so they could slip onto the wooden shaft of a spear or dart.