



University of Michigan graduate student Jim Krakker sorts specimens in a Ruthven Museum laboratory.



JOHN LESKO
He's just begun

SPOTLIGHT

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Nearby sites revealing

They dig Michigan's history

"The story of pre-historic southeastern Michigan is a mess," declared Dr. Christopher Peebles, professor of archaeology at University of Michigan, "but with recent efforts such as John Lesko's, we are unravelling the mystery."

Lesko, 34, physics and anthropology instructor at Schoolcraft College, made significant archaeological discoveries west of Plymouth last summer with the aid of his students.

On a farm in Superior Township near Frain Lake, Lesko found more than 3,000 cultural artifacts, indicating the area had been populated by two pre-historic cultures.

One was the Late Archaic people, who lived there 3,000 years ago. Then Late Woodland people occupied the site 100 years ago, before the time of Columbus.

ARTIFACTS included arrowheads and points, pottery sherds, animal bones and shellfish remains.

Lesko came on the site almost accidentally. "Without my experience on the Raisin River, I never could have found the site," he said.

By the Raisin River project, Lesko meant his work with Peebles in the summers of 1975 and '76 along the river that flows from Adrian to Monroe in Lenawee and Monroe counties.

"Here Lesko learned much about archaeology from Peebles. 'I am still a novice,' Lesko confessed.

"I knew the soil and certain conditions were right" at the Superior Township site, he said. "I also knew that a few years ago, a pre-historic



They make nice necklace pieces, but arrowheads are far more valuable to society if archeologists can study them.

burial ground was found around Joy and Beck roads, but I was surprised to find what I did. I was just lucky."

IN THE RUTHVEN Museum of Anthropology at 1109 Geddes in Ann Arbor, Peebles and his graduate students are listing, labeling and studying the artifacts. It's a tedious process which Peebles said should be completed this summer.

They work in a section of the museum closed to the public, but there are major exhibits that are open and regular planetarium shows, too.

Peebles hopes a more complete picture of pre-historic Michigan will emerge. He sees Lesko's role as a significant one in cleaning up "the mess."

He explained: "We know much about the Hurons and Chippewas and other Indians who came from Canada,

but we don't know much about the Late Woodland or Late Archaic peoples.

The Late Woodland people occupied the site around 1100 AD. This was, of course, before recorded history which begins in or around 1600.

The Hurons and Chippewas were around later, and we feel that the Late Woodland were probably forerunners of the Iroquois. These people were primarily hunters, not fishermen.

The southeast Michigan area at this time was all dense forest. They settled on the land in Superior Township because it was high and near the lake."

STANDARD HISTORY books make no mention of the civilizations Peebles and Lesko are studying. The Late Archaic people arrived on

the site about 3,000 years ago. They were hunters, too. A religious folk, they honored their maker in symbolic rituals. They used copper and slate with great elaboration. They were the forerunners of the Hopewell Indians, who were fishermen who spread their influence to upper Michigan," said Peebles.

History books mention the Hopewell people but assign them to the western part of the state, along the Lake Michigan shore from Berrien County to Muskegon.

"It's still a confusing picture, but with our research we hope to make it clearer," he said.

LESKO HAS learned much from the experience. Although he teaches anthropology, he found he still has much to learn about archaeology.

"I still have trouble telling the difference between a copper hole and a post hole," he said. A post hole is associated with a primitive hut; it is distinguished from the copper's burrow only by the angle of slope.

Exact location of the farm will not be revealed. Lesko wants to avoid having people descend on the site looking for souvenirs. He thinks the land contains still more artifacts.

"People are too-eager, and they are always destroying the land," he said.

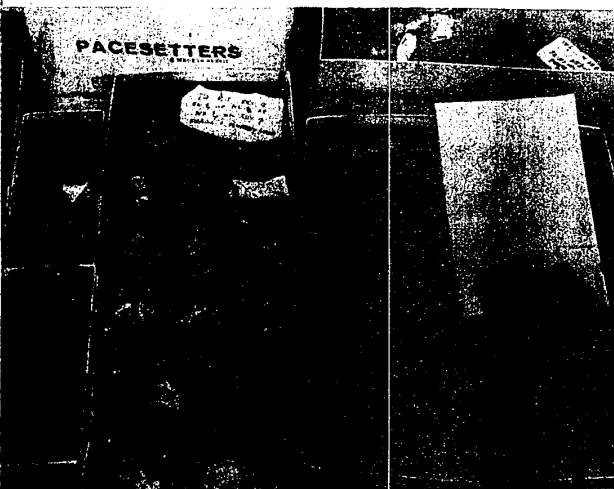
"They like to dig up arrowheads and collect them. Actually, arrowheads are worth quite a bit of money if they are large enough. They are worn around the neck. Just the other day, I saw a display of them in a case in a dentist's office."

"If we ever find anyone messing with the site, we'll take care of 'em," Lesko added with a smile.

Staff photos
by Gary Caskey



Bones tell a story of the diet and living habits of the Late Woodland Indians, forerunners of the Iroquois whom the white man met.



Artifacts are the mute remnants of cultures that populated the area west of Plymouth as far back as 3,000 years ago.



Arrowheads, pottery shards, animal bones and shellfish remains are analyzed in a fourth-floor work room by (from left) Jim Krakker, Karen Bell and Jerry Voss, all archeology students.