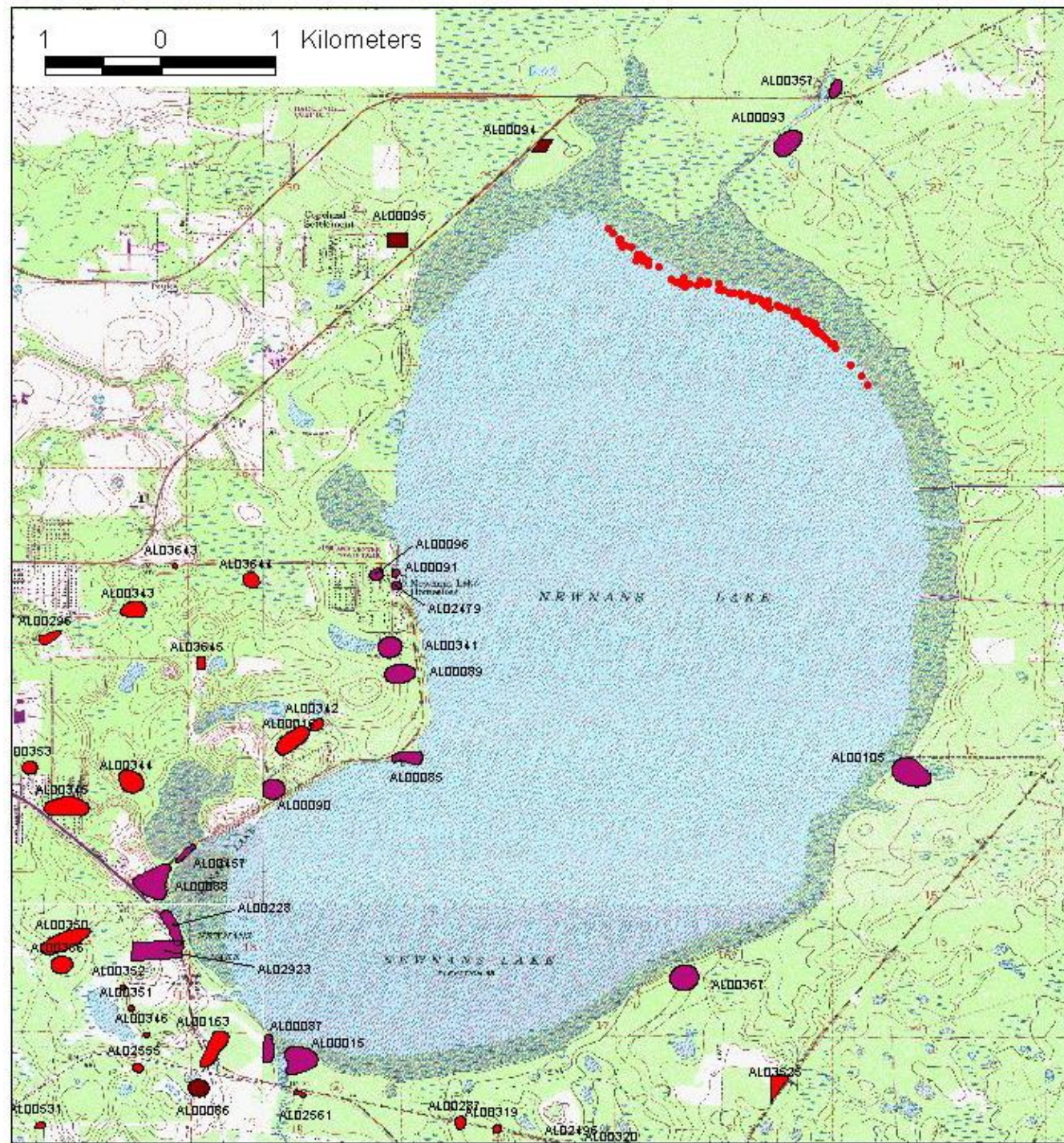




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Canoeing down history

■ Further examination of the canoes could lead to astonishing facts.

By BOB ARNDORFER
Sun staff writer

What it was is open to conjecture. A boat factory. A canoe junkyard. A boggy storage area to protect boats from storms, deterioration or enemies. What it isn't so speculative.

The discovery of scores of ancient Indian dugout canoes buried in the exposed shoreline of drought-receded Newnan's Lake last May is being hailed as one of the most significant finds of its kind in North America. Last Wednesday, the results of radiocarbon testing of samples of 53 of the 87 canoes found last spring were announced and showed they range in age from 500 years to 5,000 years, with the majority between 3,000 and 5,000 years old.

"Nature has revealed its secrets to honor the Indians of today and to show that we have been here a mighty long time," said James E. Billie, chairman of the Hollywood-based Seminole Tribe of Florida.

In announcing results of the carbon dating, Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris said, "The span of Florida's history represented by these canoes should remind us of the sophistication of our state's native inhabitants."

"These new data demonstrate the great importance of water transportation among Florida's native people, and their long history of reliance on the rich resources of the region that we know today as Newnan's Lake."

What might life have been like at the 7,400-acre, kidney-shaped lake just east of Gainesville, which early native people called Pithlachocco, "place of long boats?"

Where they were made

With such a long span of history represented — 4,500 years — it's impossible to describe with any certainty what the Newnan's Lake canoe site might have been. But the discovery has triggered the imagination of scholars and others who theorized about its function.

After visiting the site on the lake's northeastern shore during the summer, Billie talked with some tribal elders

CANOE continued on Page 5A



JOHN MORAN/Sun file photo

Chris Newman, foreground, and Melissa Memory, seated, excavate several canoes in this file photo as Eastside High School ecology teacher Steve Everett photographs the scene.



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