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David Rice, President C. G. Nelson, Editor

IN THIS ISSUE: A COMMENTARY ON EXCAVATIONS IN NORTH CENTRAL OREGON. --Charles Heller pp. 2 - 15

Editor's Comment: The presentation of this paper by Mr. Heller represents an experiment in testing the validity of the thesis that the reporting of an archaeological discovery and/or excavation does add to the inventory of archaeological knowledge as long as the methodology is stated so that the limits of interpretative conclusions can be set and defended. The broader question has to do with the relative merits of reporting the collections of artifacts made under conditions considered as not controlled. Does the absence of the usual elements of methodology make the artifacts worthless to the archaeologist? An artifact without data is sterile. However, knowing the location and the general or relative provenience, there is no doubt but what there is archaeological knowledge to be salvaged. This type of reporting could be considered another kind of 'salvage' archaeology.

The case at hand has some of the typical characteristics encountered in a private collection. The collecting covers a span of time, eleven years in this case. The interval between the collecting and reporting is a span of 14 - 25 years B.P.

The technique of assembling this type of report involved the investigator-informant type of relationship although the investigator role in this case is more nearly an editing function. A tape recorder was used to record all the information and this text was edited in the accepted sense of editing. The statements are actually those of the author.

We feel that a great deal of knowledge can be gleaned from the many private collections extant. We hope that this is but the first in a series of articles describing the more coherent type of collections that we know are available.

A COMMENTARY ON EXCAVATIONS IN NORTH CENTRAL OREGON

By Charles Heller

ABSTRACT: The Deschutes River Valley, significant in the early history of the Oregon Territory as a center of Indian trade and a branch of the Oregon Trail, has also great importance in aboriginal use. The region between the town of Tygh Valley and Sherar's Bridge was an important center for the Tenino. Excavations in the region, and chiefly at Webb's Ranch, indicated a long occupation in more than 14' of cultural deposits.

The ancient Tenino were a native group in North Central Oregon, approximately in the vicinity of Sharer's Bridge and Tygh Valley. In 1940 some fishermen reported finding artifacts along an excavation made on the old right-of-way Meyer completed, during the railway war between James Hill and E. H. Harriman in 1910 up the Deschutes River Valley. The eroding banks and deep cuts revealed artifacts and fossils. A Mr. Pierce, who had done considerable hunting in the area, revealed evidence of archaeological nature to William L. Chrysler, who now resides at Estacada, Oregon, and myself. We went there and made a survey. Our explorations in July, 1941, started at Sherar's Bridge on the Deschutes River, about eight miles northeast of the town of Tygh Valley. We noticed many large house and tipi sites along the upper draw at the confluence of Buck Creek and the Deschutes. There must have been about 300 old habitation sites. Subsequent to the survey, we started excavating a housepit about 30 feet east of the old railroad right-of-way, of considerable size and about 14 feet deep. This site was on a ranch belonging to Mr. Ernest Webb. The ranch stretches on both sides of the Deschutes River below Sherar's Bridge and consisted of approximately 20,000 acres. Mr. Webb was agreeable that we dig as long as we backfilled. Through the years we became good friends. He gave me information on the whole locality and showed us where the last immigrant train in 1846 came across his land, attended by many difficulties, starvation and death. This was the "lost train" from Malheur country. Numerous burials were made on the ranch along the old wagon trail. Wagon parts were left scattered here and there. You can still see where the train lowered their wagons over a 600 foot cliff in the upper part of the ranch.

As we dug we found a variety of artifacts: manos, metates, spear points, knives, bone tools, arrow points and scrapers. In our first season we excavated about four feet in a 16 by 25 foot pit. Cultural material existed in the entire deposit as far as we went. The work was abandoned because the war required we return early on Monday morning to the shipyards in Portland where Mr. Chrysler was the Electrical Superintendent at the Commercial Iron Works and I was the Chief Electrical Inspector for the Navy.

We continued our digs in the years to follow, the last being in 1952. The original pit was deepened to a depth of 14 feet without reaching sterile subsoil. Being in an area where drift sand and debris from seasonal cloudbursts and wind blow were common, the area probably extended from five to 25 feet or more above the underlying basalt. Surface finds revealed artifacts made of obsidian and a type of opal peculiar to Oregon, some basalt and pumice. Deeper artifacts were

cruder, associated with bone tools. These were made of a different type of material than those found on the surface. Below eight feet we found three feet of nothing but clay, sand, and small pieces of broken basalt, completely devoid of artifacts or anything else indicating occupancy. Mr. Chrysler and I decided to continue digging since the cuts made by the railroads showed about 20 feet or more of cultural deposits. Again, we encountered material. Many of the artifacts in this lowest level, and similarly down to 14 feet, were patinated. Layers of mussel shell occurred in the bottom levels. I regret that our accuracy of measurement from 8 to 14 feet was not too good, for we were having great difficulty in excavating and screening dirt from a pit that was very, very large. Some of the artifacts found were not familiar to us at all. Most were cruder, except for the bone which was very fine. These we believed were hair ornaments, awls or pins. I found a fine fish hook which was later declared to be made of human bone. Our dig was interrupted in the later part of July and continued again in August.

As the weather cooled we decided to explore some of the other pits, finding similar surface conditions existing throughout the whole territory. House pits and tipi sites continued for three miles east of Buck's Creek wherever there was a bench or flat space level enough to construct them. On a very high ridge we counted more than 200 pits. After doing a little exploration up the creek for future digging, we returned to our main excavation and continued to work through September. Completing the large pit, we filled it, and commenced work on two others, probably tipi sites. In all our digging over the years, we succeeded only in digging about eight tipi sites finding that the deposits were approximately the same for the whole area. Certainly, this must have been one of the major occupation regions for the Tenino as game and fish were easily available.

The geological formations of the country are typical of Central Oregon. However, we found several features that did not exist in other parts of the state. The main formations along Buck Creek, and practically up to Grass Valley, were basaltic, resulting from many lava flows. Intervening strata between flows show sediments from ancient lakes or the ocean. Geological studies show that there had been great upheavals and volcanic action. The country had once been covered with tropical forests. Later, animals such as the mastodon, small horses and camels roamed the area. There was also a very large species of beaver, for a while disbelieved but now proven correct. We found dikes of granite and a type of green rock which we believe was of volcanic origin that had pushed up through the old lake bottoms. These formations are quite evident along Buck Creek. At one place there was an ancient lava flow that covered at least 200 feet of loam, sand and other soil. Apparently, there had been a rather recent lava deposit, probably at the time of the Mount Mazama blow-up which made Crater Lake. This Columbian lava had the viscosity of heavy molasses and flowed over the earth and surface formations in such a way as to not disturb contours. A lower deposit was of the cinder type, very hot and full of gas, hence explosive. They have dated the basaltic formations near Bend which created the Lava Buttes and the lava forest casts. We do know that this same territory, particularly along the John Day, has produced various types of fish and animal fossils. Along the upper John Day, leaf imprints are found. Similarly, along the Rogue River, shales are not very old because they have not hardened with age and pressure. Leaf fossils are found there, too, some in or near volcanic ash. I would say that the Tygh Valley and Buck Creek are similar to the Lower John Day. Mastodon remains have been taken out of the Tygh Valley where the Seattle, Portland and Spokane and the Great Northern cut through on the west side of the

river. There is a cut there, if you have a ladder, you can still go and recover a lot of animal fossils. Plant fossils seem to stop at the upper John Day and the Rogue.

The original group of Indians, the Tenino, probably existed in the area from Pleistocene times when it was a wetter lake age. Later they were driven out by Indians now known as the Cayuse, Nez Perce, and the Wallowa. In talking with some of the older Indians on the Warm Springs Reservation, I found that they feel that this is a fair picture of the old inhabitants.

We found some petroglyphs at Sherar s Bridge and below Horseshoe Bend.

The Celilo Indians, who once fished above The Dalles, have moved their fishing platforms to Sherar's Bridge since the flooding of their area. They gather there in great numbers during salmon runs.

Returning to the discussion of the Webb Ranch sites, and after consultation with the University of Oregon Geological Society, I believe the Deschutes River was the main artery of travel between South Central Oregon and the Columbia River. It was a natural highway for travel by both canoe and on trails. No better trail exists, unless possibly one that went over the Tygh grade, now crossed by a very fine highway, leading directly to The Dalles. The last Indians who left the Webb Ranch included an old couple and a single man who owned a dugout. They had lived on the west side, about a mile and a half below Sherar's Bridge until 1938. The site along the road where their cabin and dugout stood can still be seen.

We dug a house pit at the upper ranch house where a small packing plant existed in the 1890's. Near the barn and corral we cleared a half acre, digging to a depth of one to four feet until we hit an old basalt layer. In one place there was a deposit of over 60 scrapers of basalt. There was nothing else, showing that the site may have been occupied by skin dressers. Being very amateur pot-hunters and archaeologists, we decided to explore two sites that looked very promising. However, we did not read the signs correctly. When we were down to about two feet in one pit we found the biggest deposit of beef bones left by man! Getting very curious we moved to another spot the next day and found an old circle saw, parts of a sawmill and scraps of iron typical on a ranch. The old saw now hangs upon the ranch barn door along with some other things we found. When Mr. Mays came there to take over in 1910, after the Sherar's had passed away, he established a small slaughtering and packing plant to feed the construction crews of the Great Northern Railroad builders.

The history of the ranch is interesting in many ways. The master of one of the first immigrant trains coming along the Oregon trail thought he knew a shorter route into the Willamette through the Cascades, now called the North Santiam Pass. They broke off from the main train and became lost in the desert until they finally wandered to the west side of the Deschutes. Starving and thirsty, they came to Grass Valley, then turned west over a barren country of sage and grass, finally arriving at the middle of Buck Creek on a bluff from which they could see the Deschutes. They had still to go down over the 600 foot precipice, therefore, they picked a point above the confluence of Buck Creek and another. First they cleared away the big basalt boulders and brush so they could freely let down their wagons. You can still see the deep ruts which are from three to five feet deep. In order to brake the wagons, they removed the wheels from some and filled wagon beds with rocks. The large heavy wagons, with their tongues tied forward to the drags, were lowered down backwards. Many people died on this trip.

Cattle and horses were drowned in crossing the Deschutes at one of the worst places they could have chosen, just below the Gorge. Burials attest to this along the trail. Had they gone down river a mile or more they would have found an easy crossing and a canyon to follow up into the Tygh Valley along the old trail to The Dalles. On the west bank of the Deschutes, they cut a road up a 25% grade and finally came over into the canyon that led them to Tygh Valley.

Several years later, Mr. Sherar, who had come from the East after a try at the California gold fields, settled at Sherar's Bridge. He was an energetic and progressive man. Using local Indians as laborers, he built roads and a bridge across the Deschutes River. The first stages and freight wagons followed some of his roads to Grass Valley. Exacting tolls from them and other passersby, he built a hotel and traveler's rest. A fire, started by sparks from a locomotive, set fire to one of the big barns starting a conflagration. I had the fortune to repair an old Seth Thomas clock which was the only thing saved out of the whole block.

The country is rich in Indian lore and the history of early migrations to the West. The trails were used by the Hudson's Bay and the Northwest Fur Companies. The Aztec American Cattle Company brought cattle there from Texas in the early 1880's and leased the land for years. Some of the land was owned by the Housers, descendants of whom now live in Ellengsburg, Washington. Later, when Mr. Mays bought land, he built a house on the upper ranch and added a number of out buildings. Mr. Webb's father purchased the land developing a large spread which has been added to by the present owner, his son. The ranch is modern, electrified and irrigated.

My archaeological investigations there have been among the most interesting I have done in my life. The site is a sample of the last 5000 years of primitive man's history. Artifacts from the early period (8 to 14') and from the surface (2 to 5') show fine workmanship. The ancient Tenino were a rather peaceful people, wanting to live by themselves undisturbed. Like all people who are peaceful and non-aggressive, others came along to envy and take away their territory. This accounts for variations of artifact types between the levels. It is quite evident from digging the various pits, such as the house pits and tipi sites -- the latter being more oval than round -- that there were long periods of time between occupancy. When a new group came they probably excavated old pits to greater depths, thereby mixing some of their tools and detritus with that of earlier occupants. This may account for one point that was taken out of the railway cut that many thought couldn't have been from there. The point is supposed to be an Eastern type, but later another corrobrated it as having been regional. It looks like it was broken and refashioned. I found a piece of the same material when I was screening one day and tried to chip it. All I got was a mess. It has no grain and whether it has to be seasoned or hardened to work, I cannot say.

A Warm Springs sub-chief of about 80 years, said he had lived in the Buck Creek country as a young man. There were many Indians still living there until the 1890's in agreement with Mr. Sherar and other land owners. He said, that in his younger days, you could walk through the sagebrush in late fall when everything was dry and pick up a large number of artifacts. I verified this when Mr. Webb plowed one place for me on the upper part of the ranch. In one acre, Bill and I found over 80 pieces.

I would like to see a properly supervised dig made, possibly by the Washington

Archaeological Society. It would have to be at least a week end excursion. Mr. Webb, I am sure, would allow it although he might want a few of the artifacts. It would be best to go in the early part of June or the middle of September, for July and August are too hot -- it sometimes boils at 120° F! I would advise anyone wishing to visit the ranch to contact Mr. Webb before trespassing.

LEVEL I - SURFACE TO 2 FEET

GROUND STONE:		
Abrader	(Pl. 1, fig. 1)	1
Perforated pestle	(Pl. 1, fig. 2)	1
Grooved shaft abrader	(Pl. 1, fig. 3)	1
Rectangular abrader	(Pl. 1, fig. 4)	1
Celt	(Pl. 2, fig. 5)	1
CHIPPED STONE		
Chopper, unifacial	(Pl. 2, fig. 4)	1
Scraper, oval	(Pl. 2, figs. 3 & 4)	2
Scraper, oval, pointed	(Pl. 2, fig. 2)	1

LEVEL II - 2 FEET TO 5 FEET

BONE		
Awl, pointed	(Pl. 2, fig. 7)	1
Awl, blunt	(Pl. 2, fig. 6)	1
CHIPPED STONE		
Choppers	(Pl. 3, fig. 1)	1
oval	(Pl. 3, fig. 3)	3
oval pointed	(Pl. 3, fig. 2)	1
pentagonal with concave sides	(Pl. 3, fig. 6)	1
irregular	(Pl. 3, fig. 3 and 10)	2
Knives, irregular	(Pl. 4, fig. 12,13,14)	3
with point triangular, side notched	(Pl. 4, fig. 11)	1
Points		
Triangular, long with straight base	(Pl. 4, fig. 7)	1
Triangular, short with straight base	(Pl. 4, fig. 6)	1
Corner-notched with pointed base	(Pl. 4, fig. 3)	1
Side-notched with wide rounded base	(Pl. 4, fig. 5)	1
Corner-side notched, base rounded, reworked	(Pl. 4, fig. 4)	1
Triangular, basal notched, tanged	(Pl. 4, fig. 1 and 2)	
Long, triangular corner, straight base	(Pl. 3, fig. 8)	1
Awl (?) bi-pointed	(Pl. 4, fig. 8)	

LEVEL II - (continued)

MISCELLANEOUS		
Flat, chipped edge	(Pl. 2, fig. 8)	1
Core	(Pl. 4, fig. 10)	1

LEVEL III - 5 FEET TO 6 FEET

GROUND STONE		
Pestle (?)	(Pl. 5, fig. 1)	1
CHIPPED STONE		
Chopper, oval	(Pl. 5, fig. 2)	1
Scrapers:		
Oval	(Pl. 4, fig. 4)	1
Beaked	(Pl. 5, fig. 3)	1
Oval-pointed	(Pl. 5, fig. 5)	1
Triangular	(Pl. 5, fig. 9 & 10)	2
Knives:		
Triangular, convex base	(Pl. 5, fig. 1)	1
Pentagonal, concave base	(Pl. 5, fig. 7)	1
Long and narrow	(Pl. 5, fig. 6)	1
Points:		
Lanceolate	(Pl. 5, fig. 8)	1
Triangular, side notched, wide base	(Pl. 5, fig. 18)	
Triangular, corner notched, tanged	(Pl. 5, fig. 11)	1
Triangular, convex-notched, wide concave base	(Pl. 5, fig. 17)	
Triangular, corner notched, medium width, convex base	(Pl. 5, fig. 14)	1
Long, corner notched, medium width, concave base	(Pl. 5, fig. 16)	1
Triangular, corner notched, medium width rounded base	(Pl. 4, fig. 12 & 13)	

LEVEL IV - 8.5 FEET TO 14 FEET

BONE		
Awls	(Pl. 6, fig. 5 & 6)	2
Hook	(Pl. 6, fig. 7)	1
Bone haft for fig. 6 (found together)	(Pl. 7, fig. 7)	1
CHIPPED STONE		
Chopper, long	(Pl. 6, fig. 1 & 2)	2
Scrapers, irregular	(Pl. 6, fig. 3 & 4)	(2)
Knives:		
Pentagonal, side notched	(Pl. 7, fig. 1)	1
Long, corner notched	(Pl. 7, fig. 2)	2
Diamond, elongated point	(Pl. 7, fig. 4,5 & 6	3

Points:		
Triangular, convex sides, long pointed base	(Pl. 8, fig. 9)	1
Triangular, concave sides	(Pl. 8, fig. 8)	1
Triangular, corner notched, medium wide, straight base	(Pl. 8, fig. 1)	6
Long and narrow corner notched	(Pl. 8, fig. 2)	2
Diamond	(Pl. 8, fig. 7)	1
Long, side notched, straight wide sides	(Pl. 8, fig. 4)	2
Triangular, side notched, wide base	(Pl. 8, fig. 5)	1
Long and narrow, side notched, pointed base	(Pl. 8, fig. 3)	1
Long (base broken off)	(Pl. 8, fig. 6)	1
Winged eccentric	(Pl. 8, fig. 10)	1

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Tom and Mona Beddall for transcribing the tape, knowing that this is one of the real tests of a true friendship. My gratitude to Del Nordquist for the hours of help in preparing the manuscript and drawing the many plates.

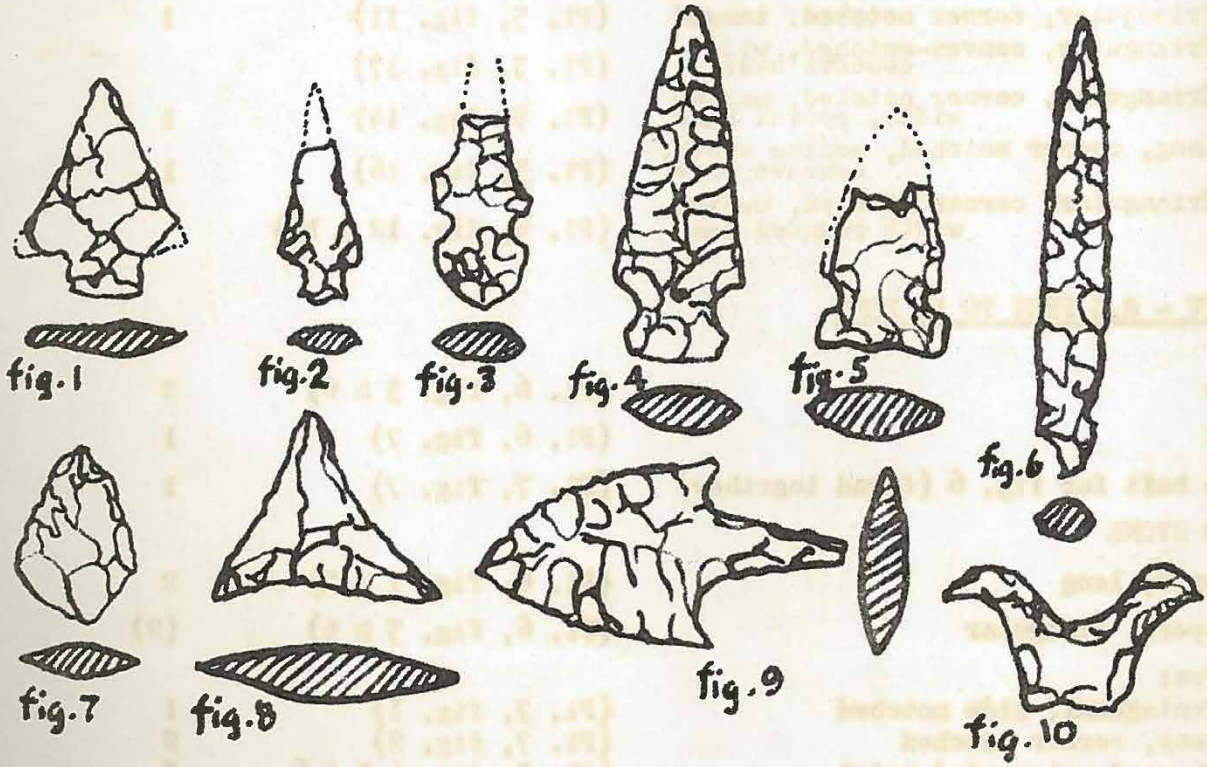

PLATE No.8

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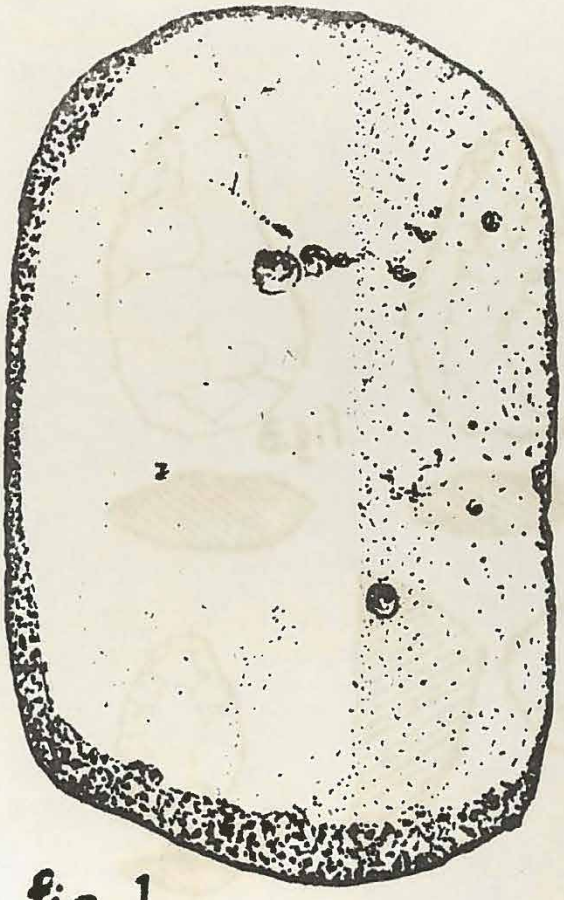


fig. 1

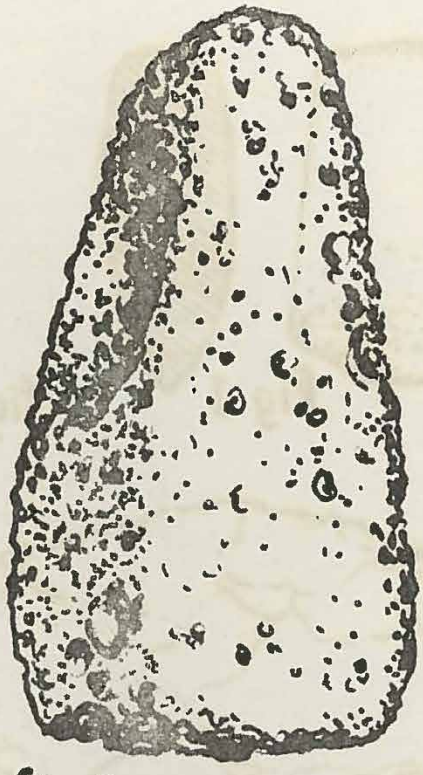
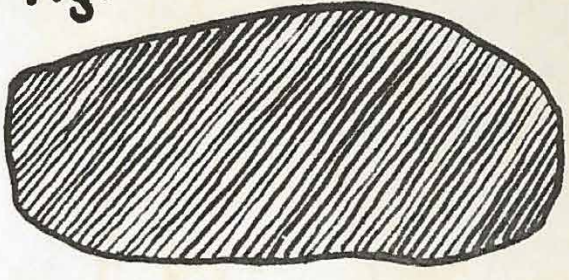
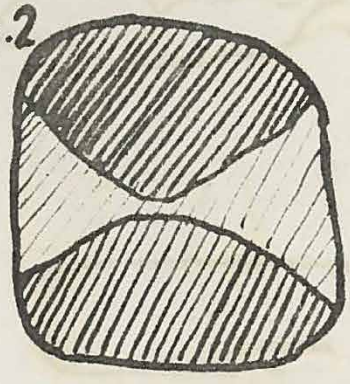


fig. 2





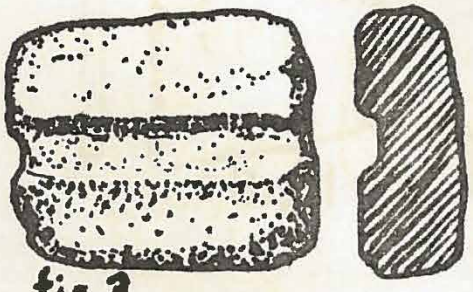


fig. 3

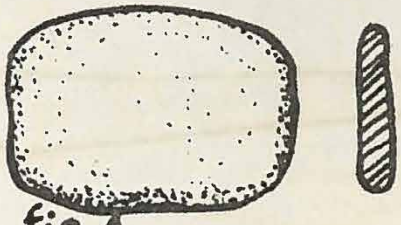


fig. 4.

PLATE NO. 1

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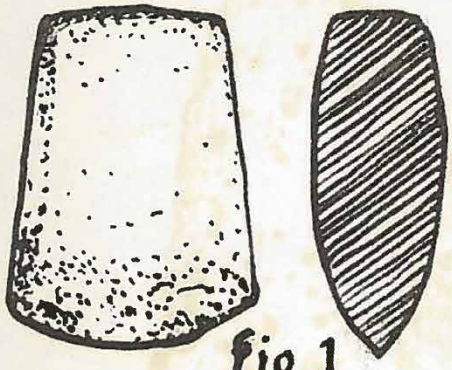

Fig 1

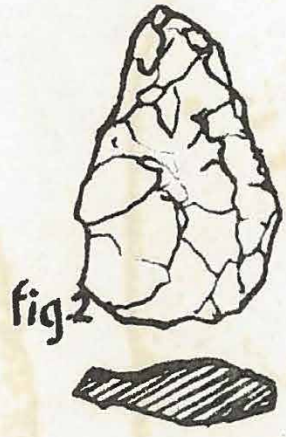

fig.2

fig.3

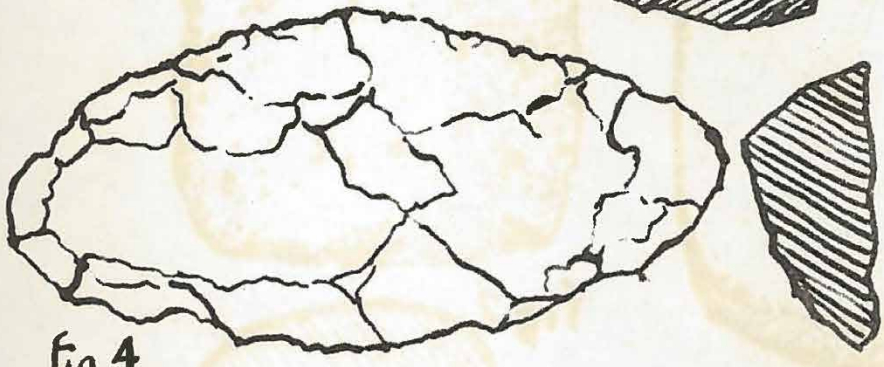

fig.4

fig 5

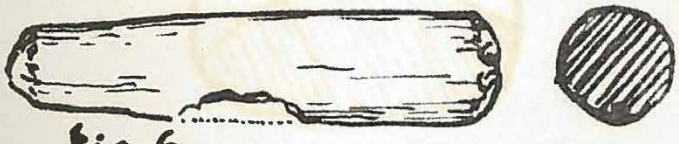

fig.6

fig.7

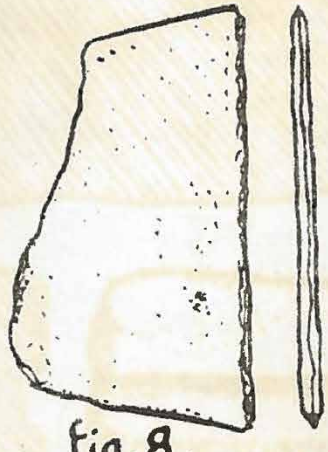

Fig.8

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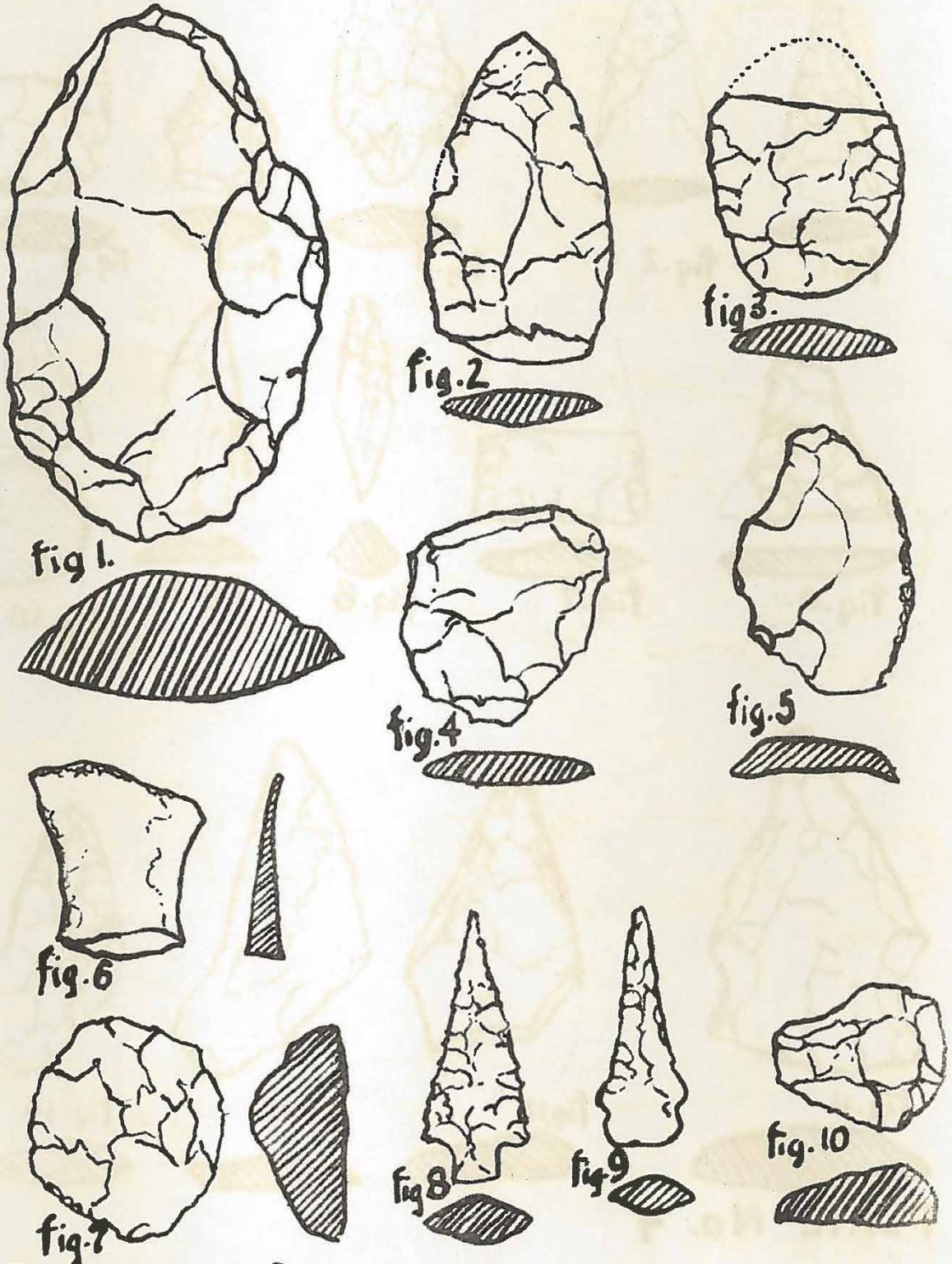

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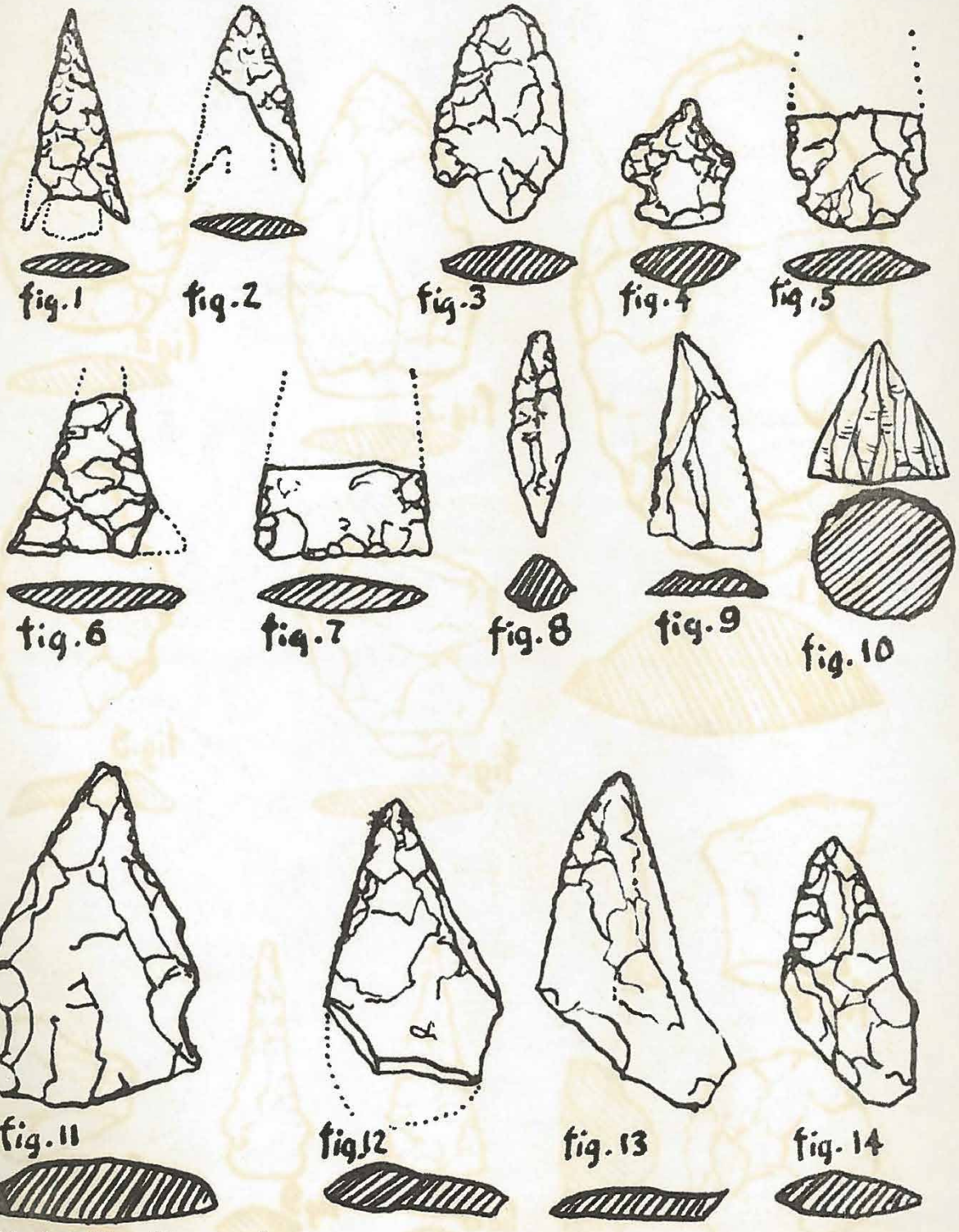

fig.1 fig.2 fig.3 fig.4 fig.5

fig.6 fig.7 fig.8 fig.9 fig.10

fig.11 fig.12 fig.13 fig.14

PLATE No. 4

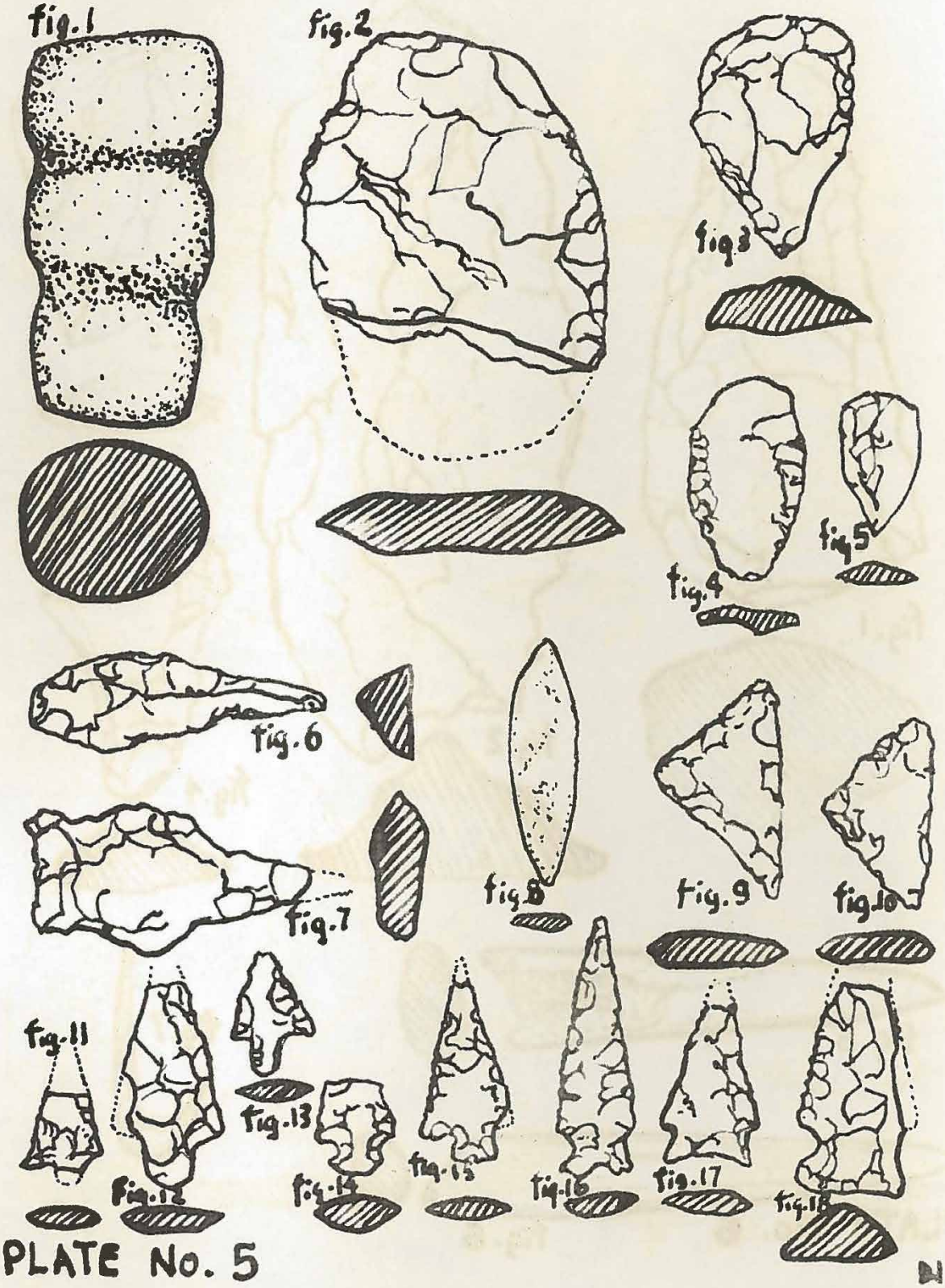
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fig.18

PLATE No. 5

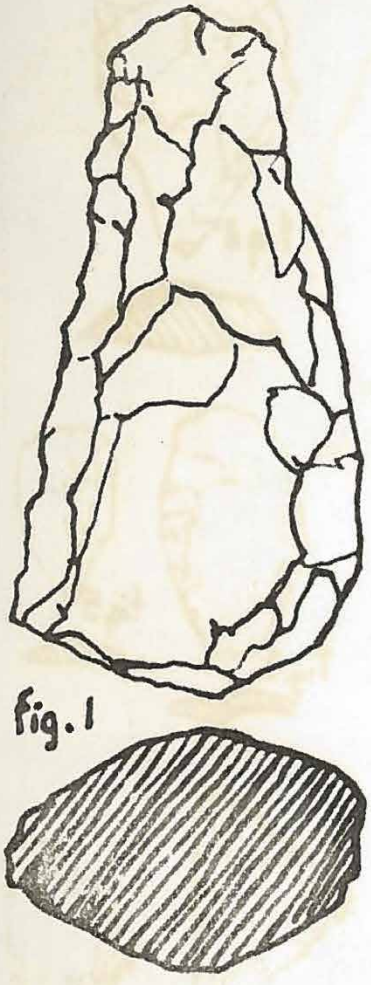

fig. 1

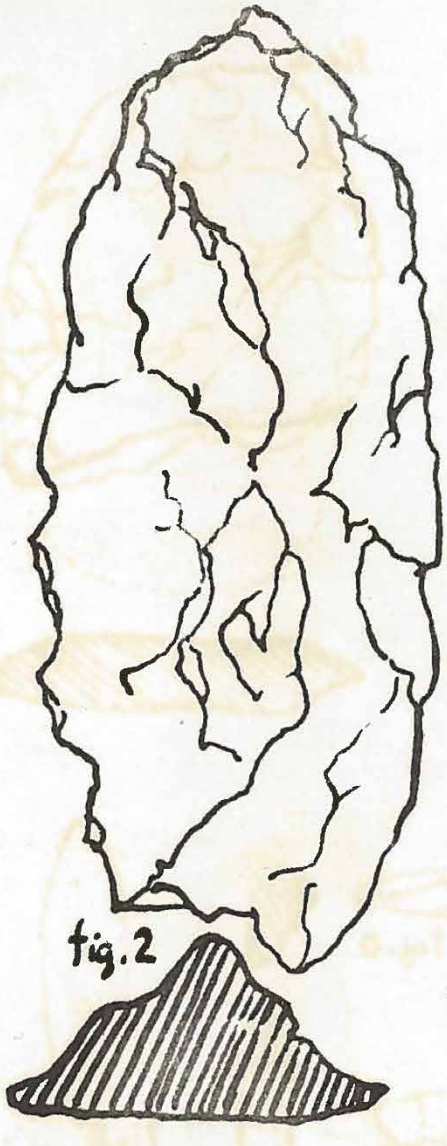

fig. 2

fig. 3

fig. 4

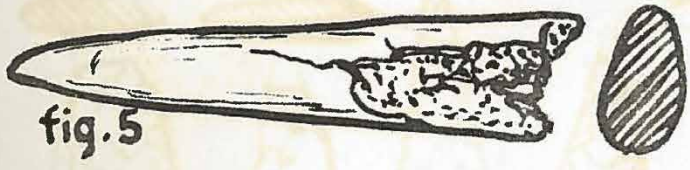

fig. 5

fig. 7

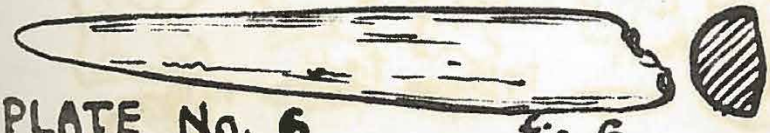

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fig. 6

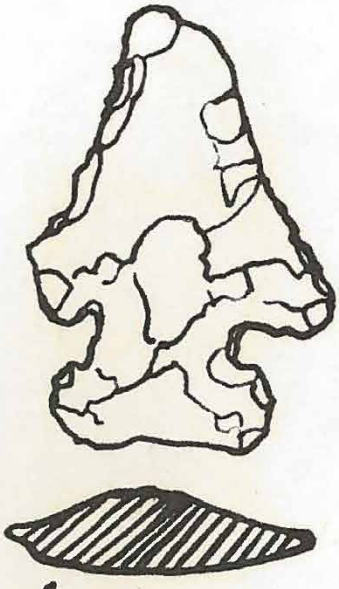


fig. 1

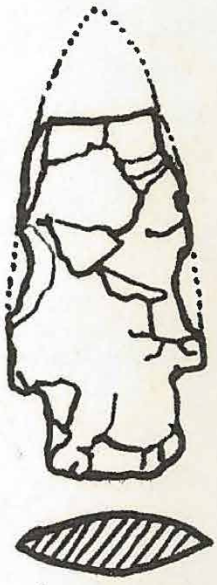


fig. 2

fig. 3

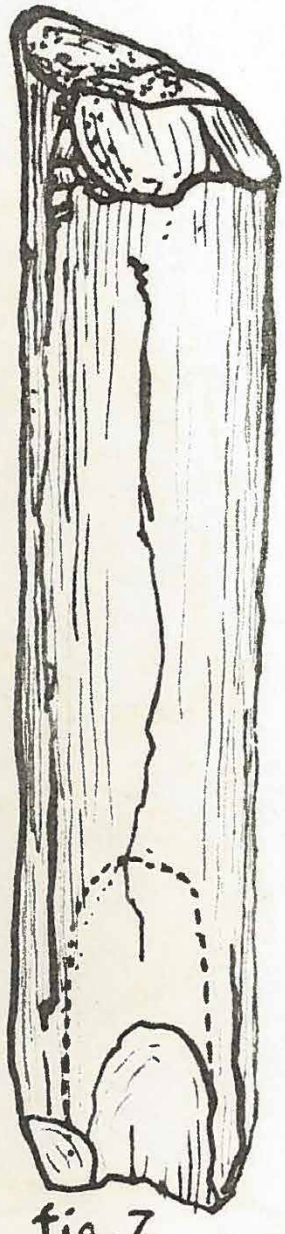
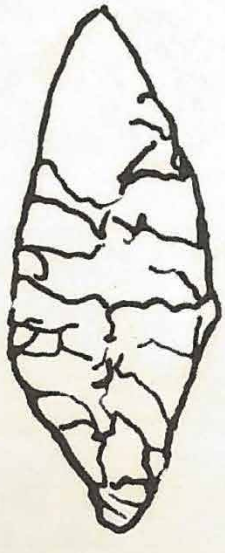


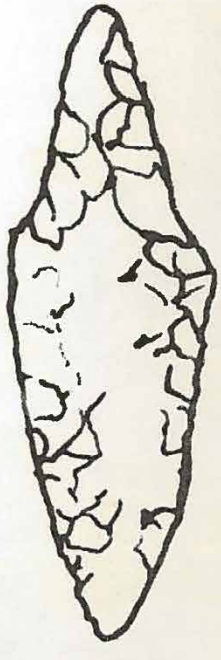
fig. 7

fig. 5

fig. 6

fig. 4





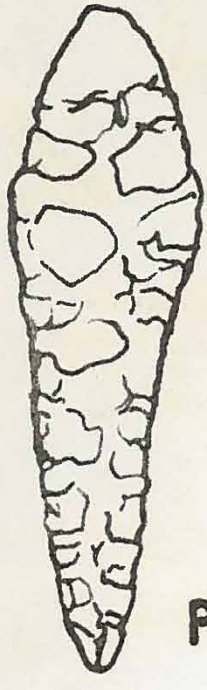


PLATE NO. 7 IV