

EXCAVATIONS AT KWATNA

Roy L. Carlson

INTRODUCTION

Kwatna Inlet, situated about midway between Bella Coola and Namu (see Fig. 1), was a centre of prehistoric settlement, and during the period of European contact contained villages of both Kwakiutl and Bella Coola speaking Indian groups (McIlwraith 1948). The Kwatnagimux, as these people can be referred to collectively, enjoyed an abundant habitat with deer and mountain goat plentiful in the coniferous forests, salmon in the Kwatna River, and halibut, cod, and various sea mammals available in the salt water channels. These facts are attested to by both archaeology and ethnography. Earlier archaeological survey by Philip Hobler (1970:77-94) discovered a considerable number of sites in the Kwatna locality. Several of these sites are on timber leases, and others were undergoing destruction through natural erosion of the shoreline. Excavations this season centered on two sites, FaSu 2 and FaSu 10 on timber leases, and on five sites, FaSu 1, FaSu 18, FaSu 19, FaSu 21, and FbSu 1, which were being washed away by stream and tide. The excavations yielded a total of 1919 artifacts, from three prehistoric cultural phases. These phases in chronological order are the Cathedral phase, the Anutcix phase, and the Kwatna phase. The latter two phases date to after A.D. 400 on the basis of radiocarbon estimates, and exhibit a technology very much like that of the historic inhabitants. The earlier Cathedral phase, which is undated by C-14, exhibits a quite different complex, but likely dates between 1000 and 4000 B.C.

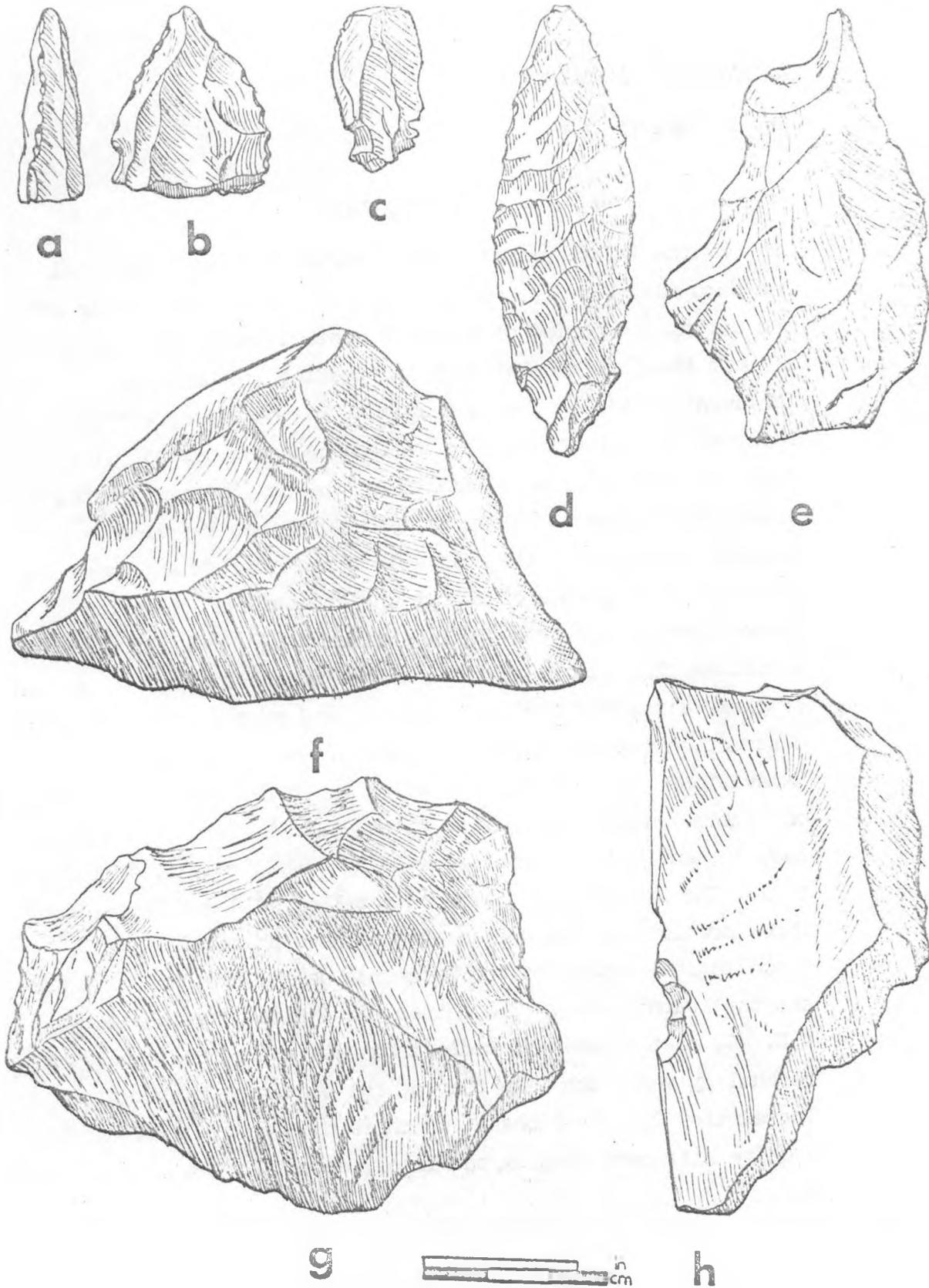


FIG. 18. Artifacts of the Cathedral Phase. a, b, biface fragment with possible burin scar. c, crude obsidian microblade. d, projectile point. e, perforator. f, core. g, denticulate. h, notch

CATHEDRAL PHASE SITES

The Cathedral phase, now known from four sites, is a new phase and contains the material remains of a previously unknown local culture. All four Cathedral phase sites, FbSu 1, FaSu 18, FaSu 19, and FaSu 21, are heavily eroded and we were able to obtain in situ material from none of the sites. A prehistoric midden does exist at the type site, FbSu 1, but contains materials younger than those from the beach. The large beach collections from the other sites are consistent with the artifacts from FbSu 1, and are almost entirely free of artifact types typical of later cultural phases. The geological picture suggests that the sites of this phase belong in a period of time when sea level was lower than it is today, at least in the Kwatna locality.

FbSu 1 is situated on a small bight at Cathedral Point at the juncture of Burke Channel and Kwatna Inlet. FaSu 19 and FaSu 21 are on Kwatna Inlet, and FaSu 18 is on Kwatna Bay. The site locations themselves are strongly indicative of a maritime coastal oriented culture with watercraft and utilisation of sea resources. The artifact complex is very different from that of later protohistoric phases which also occupied the shore line in this same locality. The chief difference lies in the basic tool manufacturing techniques. Tools of the Cathedral phase were made by chipping or flaking stone whereas during the Anutcix and Kwatna phases stone tools were made primarily by grinding, polishing and pecking. The flaking of stone is not only a basic tool manufacturing technique, it is also an horizon indicator separating relatively early cultures in which chipped stone is common from relatively late cultures in which chipped stone is rare. Typical tools from Cathedral phase sites are all made of flaked stone and consist of projectile points, large core scrapers, denticulates, retouched flakes, notches, and perforators.

One definite microblade fragment and several possible ones were also recovered. In addition to these artifacts, quantities of struck flakes and a number of very well made, prepared flake cores were found. Basalt, greenstone, some obsidian, and other similar stones were used as raw material for these tools. Artifact frequencies are shown in Table 2, and a sample of the artifact types is shown in figure 18. Final analysis of the collection may well indicate some sub-divisions of these types.

ANUTCIX AND KWATNA PHASE SITES

Excavations were carried out at three sites which yielded artifact complexes assignable to the late prehistoric Anutcix and Kwatna phases. All three sites are located on Kwatna Bay, and all three are mentioned in Bella Coola tradition. Hobler (1970) has correlated FaSu 2 with the village of Nutlitliquotlank, FaSu 1 with the village of Anutcix. FaSu 1 and FaSu 2 have Kwatna phase components, but we have so far found the slightly earlier Anutcix phase only at FaSu 2. Additional work at FaSu 10 may show its presence there also.

Axeti FaSu 1

This site is on an island at the mouth of the Kwatna River, and consists of both a waterlogged midden exposed only at low tide, and an above water midden. Hobler conducted large scale excavations at this site in 1969. The waterlogged midden is undergoing extensive erosion so we spent one week in additional work there. The artifacts recovered this season are listed in Table 2, and are typical of the Kwatna phase which belongs in the proto-historic period from about A.D. 1400 to 1800.

Table 2. Artifacts of the Cathedral phase

	FaSu 21	FbSu 1	FaSu 18	FaSu 19	Total
Flakes, plain butt	78	84	42	14	218
Flakes, prepared butt	10	14	9	2	35
Cores	14	9	5	5	33
Core fragments	35	47	47	16	145
Denticulates	7	6	4	3	20
"Core" scrapers	20	29	16	10	75
Retouched flakes	16	19	9	2	46
Bifacial projectile points	5	7	-	-	12
Crude bifaces	6	9	2	2	19
Microblades	1?	1	1?	-	3
Blades	-	2	2	-	4
Broken flakes	6	12	7	8	33
Perforators	2	1	1	1	5
Notches	4	10	2	3	19
Total	204	250	147	66	667

Table 3. Artifacts from the waterlogged midden at Axeti

PECKED AND GROUND STONE TOOLS

Hammerstone grinders	44
Adze or chisel blades	8
Adze blade or maul fragments	21
Cylindrical mauls	3
Circular stones	1
Sandstone abraders	3
Pebble hammerstones	2
Ground slate objects	2

BONE TOOLS

Awls	4
Ground porcupine tooth	1
Worked deer scapula	1
Points	1
Unidentified object	1

OBJECTS OF CEDAR BARK

Cordage, 2-ply, z-twist	80
Cordage with knots	2
Braided cordage	9
Selvedge of plaited bag	1
Plaited mat or bag fragments	9
Woven "doughnut"	1

WOODEN OBJECTS

Cedar root eye splice	1
Cedar root knot	1

Table 3 - Continued

Cedar root basketry splints	4
Bound twigs	2
Whittled sticks	7
Barbed curved fish hooks	7
Splitting wedges	9
Stakes, pegs, worked sticks	7
Bipointed fish hook barb	1
Wooden object fragments	3
<u>MISCELLANEOUS</u>	
Chipped stone fragments	3
Quartz flakes	3
Mussel shell knife	1
Ground mussel shell fragments	5
Lead bullet	1
	Total
	249

Nutlitliquotlank FaSu 2

This site is a large surface midden which stretches for about 180 meters along the north shore of Kwatna Bay at the mouth of the Kwatna River. The site was originally tested by Hobler in 1969, and was further excavated by a field crew under my direction in 1970. Excavation this season concentrated on the careful removal of the fill over a large house floor which had been discovered the preceding season. The 6 by 10 meter area of midden covering this floor was removed in 10 centimeter levels down to the floor fill which was at an average depth of 120 centimeters below the surface. The floor was then cleared and exposed. This entire process revealed two phases of intensive occupation in this part of the site: an early phase designated as the Anutcix phase to which the house floor and its associated artifacts belong, and a younger phase designated as the Kwatna phase to which artifacts from about 60 centimeters to the surface belong. Both phases are similar in culture content. The major artifact types are found in both phases with the notable exceptions of hammerstone grinders and circular stones which are found only in the Kwatna phase levels. As such these artifact classes form useful horizon markers for separating the late prehistoric period in this locality into these two sequent phases. Other differences in occurrence of minor types of artifacts will likely appear once the material is fully analysed. Those artifacts discovered this season are listed in Table 4, and a sample of types is shown in figure 19.

Two radiocarbon estimates on samples from the 1970 excavations indicate the approximate age of the Anutcix phase. The earliest date from a charcoal sample well below the level of the house floor gave a reading of A.D. 480 \pm 100

Table 4. Artifacts from FaSu 2

ARTIFACTS OF PECKED AND GROUND STONE

Adze and chisel blades of shale	171
Cylindrical mauls	34
Fragments of mauls or chisels	181
Pebble hammerstones	15
Sandstone abraders and whetstones	66
*Hammerstone grinders	95
*Circular stones, unperforated	20
*Circular stones, perforated	11
Ground slate or shale points	4
Pointed club or object fragment	1
Anthropomorphic figurine	1
Graphite polishing stone	1
Nephrite adze blade	1

ARTIFACTS OF CHIPPED STONE

Side notched basalt knife	1
Quartz flakes, some retouched	36
Obsidian flakes, some retouched	11
Basalt flakes	4

ARTIFACTS MADE OF GROUND AND POLISHED BONE

Bone points	132
Scapula points	17
Bone awls	57
Valves for composite socketed harpoon heads	20
One piece tanged unilaterally barbed harpoon heads	10

Table 4 - Continued

Spindle whorls of whalebone	3
Shuttles(?) of whalebone	4
Ground porcupine tooth incisors	12
Bark beaters of whalebone	3
Carved bone blanket(?) pins	2
Bear tooth pendants	6
Claw pendant	1
Perforated vertebrae	1
Worked bone object fragments	34
<u>MISCELLANEOUS ARTIFACTS</u>	
Red ochre	10
Mica	3
Charred wooden chisel haft fragments	1
Modern intrusives	7
Mussel shell knife fragments	2
	978

* Types of artifacts found in Kwatna phase levels only

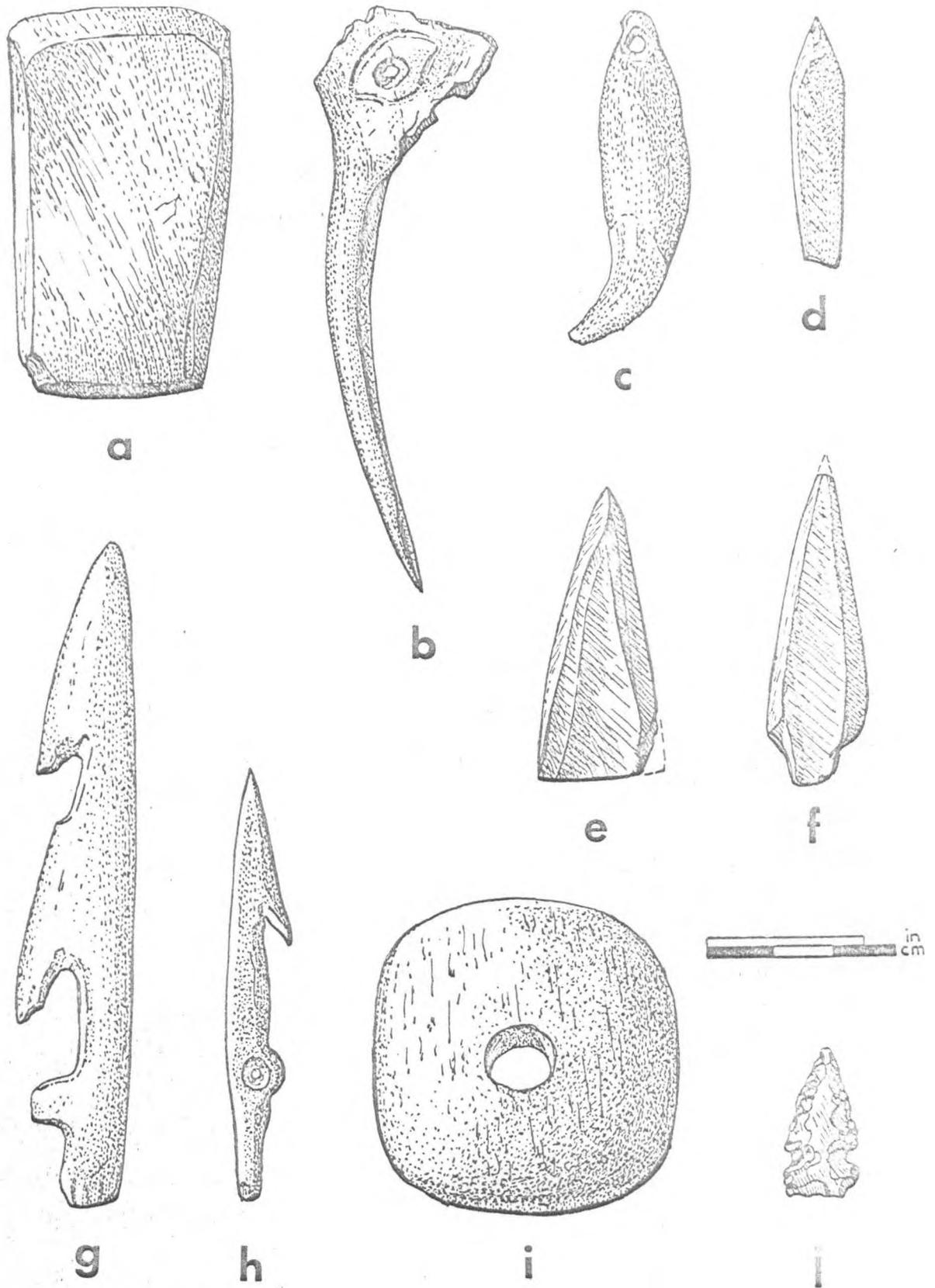


FIG. 19. Artifacts of the Anutcix and Kwatna phases. a, adze blade, polished shale. b, bone blanket pin. c, bear tooth pendant, d, small bone point. e, f, ground stone points. g, h, bone harpoon heads. i, whale bone spindle whorl. j, flaked stone arrow point.

(GAK 3210). The sample of artifacts from this deep level is small, but the types which do occur also are found at the house floor level. A charcoal sample from the house floor itself dated A.D. 1280 \pm 80 (GAK 3211). The Kwatna phase is obviously younger than this date, and possibly began about A.D. 1400.

Anutcix FaSu 10

This site is situated on the northeast side of the Kwatna River about one half mile from its mouth. A considerable amount of time was spent in clearing the heavy deciduous growth from the site, and in mapping. The site itself is quite certainly Anutcix; it fits McIlwraith's (1948:20) location for this village, and is the only Kwatna River site with a house depression in its centre. Bella Coola tradition holds that the "place was abandoned long ago" (McIlwraith 1948:20) before the time of McKenzie's visit to the Bella Coola in 1793.

The site extends about 50 meters back from the shoreline and is about 90 meters in length. The location is dominated by two huge conifers which are growing from the riverward edge of a rectangular depression in the centre of the site. This depression is 9 meters wide, 10 meters long, and 1.16 meters deep. A number of small depressions are visible around its sides and ends and presumably mark the locations of roof support posts. Three logs lie within the pit and roughly parallel its sides. These logs are not fallen trees as there are no stumps from which they could have come. The logs are too long to have been support posts, and if they were part of the house, must have been roof beams. Another possibility is that their position is fortuitous, and they date to the time of World War I when this area was logged. Some rusted logging tools were found on the surface of the site.

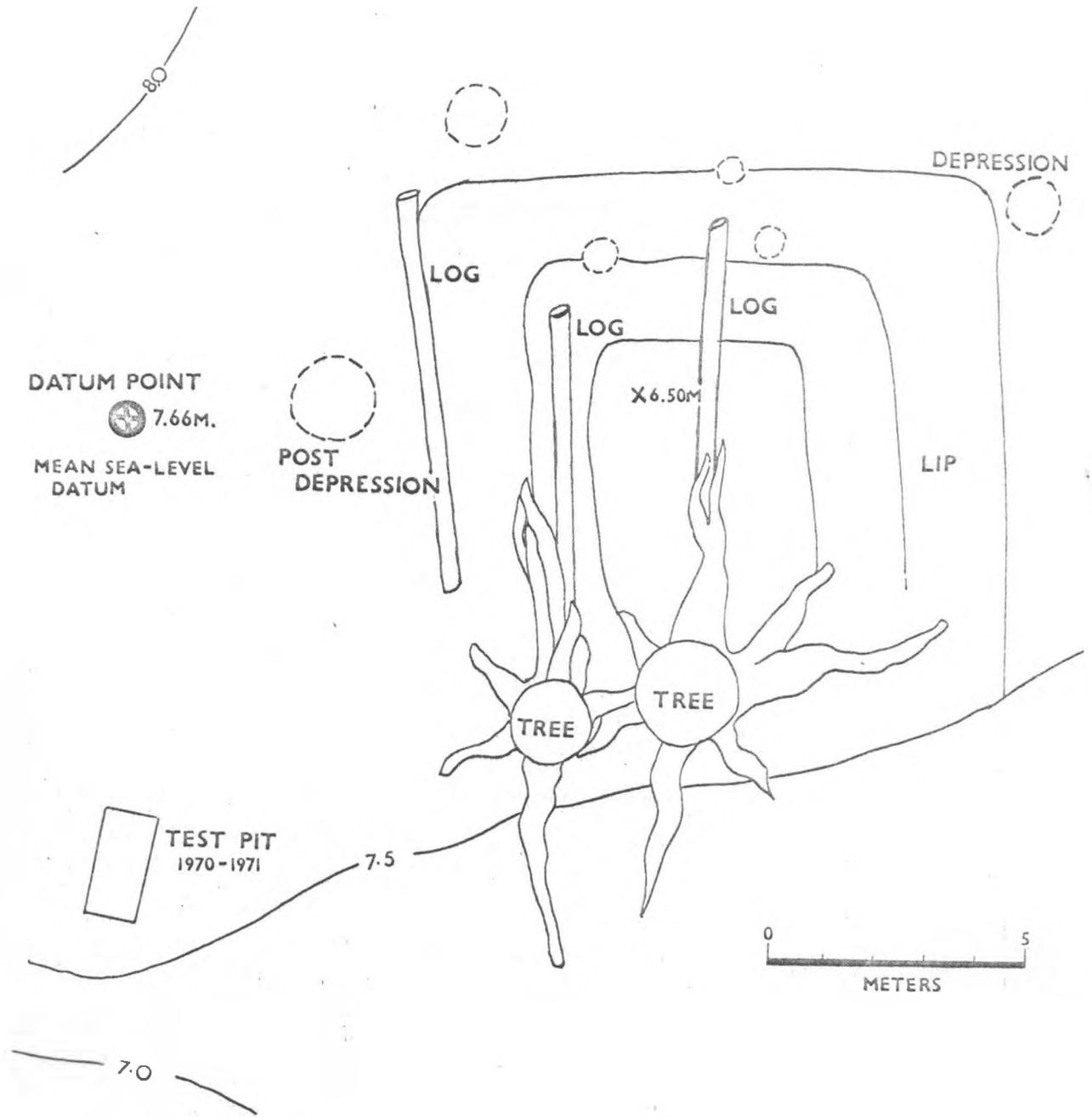


FIG. 20. Plan view of housepit at FaSu 10

Table 5. Artifacts from FaSu 10

GROUND STONE

Adze blade fragments	4
Cylindrical maul fragments	2
Whetstones	2

BONE ARTIFACTS

Harpoon valves	1
Awls	10
Bear tooth pendant	1
Scapula point	1
Small bone points	2
Worked bone fragments	2

Total 25

One test pit was sunk into the midden and produced those artifacts listed in Table 5. The sample is far too small to demonstrate phase placement for the site. However, no hammerstone grinders or circular stones which are diagnostic tools of the Kwatna phase were found, and my speculation is that this site will prove upon further excavation to belong primarily in the preceding Anutcix phase.

CONCLUSIONS

Final conclusions must necessarily await a complete analysis of all the information on houses, features, and faunal remains obtained from these excavations. Our working chronology of three sequent phases may have to be modified, although the observations to date suggest that this scheme is entirely workable.

Acknowledgements

Over and above the support rendered to this project by the Opportunities for Youth programme I wish to especially thank the Allison Logging Company, particularly Mervin Abernethy, Tom Kirkby and Jean Mikelsen whose loan of a float camp permitted our entire student crew to move out of our tent camp in the drenching June rains into relative luxury. Our especial thanks also go to Northland Navigation Co. Ltd., which shipped our equipment, supplies, and river boat north to Bella Coola, and again back to Vancouver at the end of the season. The active assistance of the regional office of the Federal Department of Fisheries at Bella Coola in bringing us our mail and in transporting the students was greatly

appreciated. Ed Armstrong, Henk Veebher, and John Ritland of the Fisheries Department contributed immensely to the success of the project.

The following students participated in the excavations at Kwatna: Brian Apland, Owen Beattie, Judy Burton, Daniel Carlson, Catherine Carlson, Dennis Chalmers, David Crowe-Swords, Diana French, Janice Hocking, Tom Hocking, Jill Sanagan, April Struthers, and Lorne Walters.

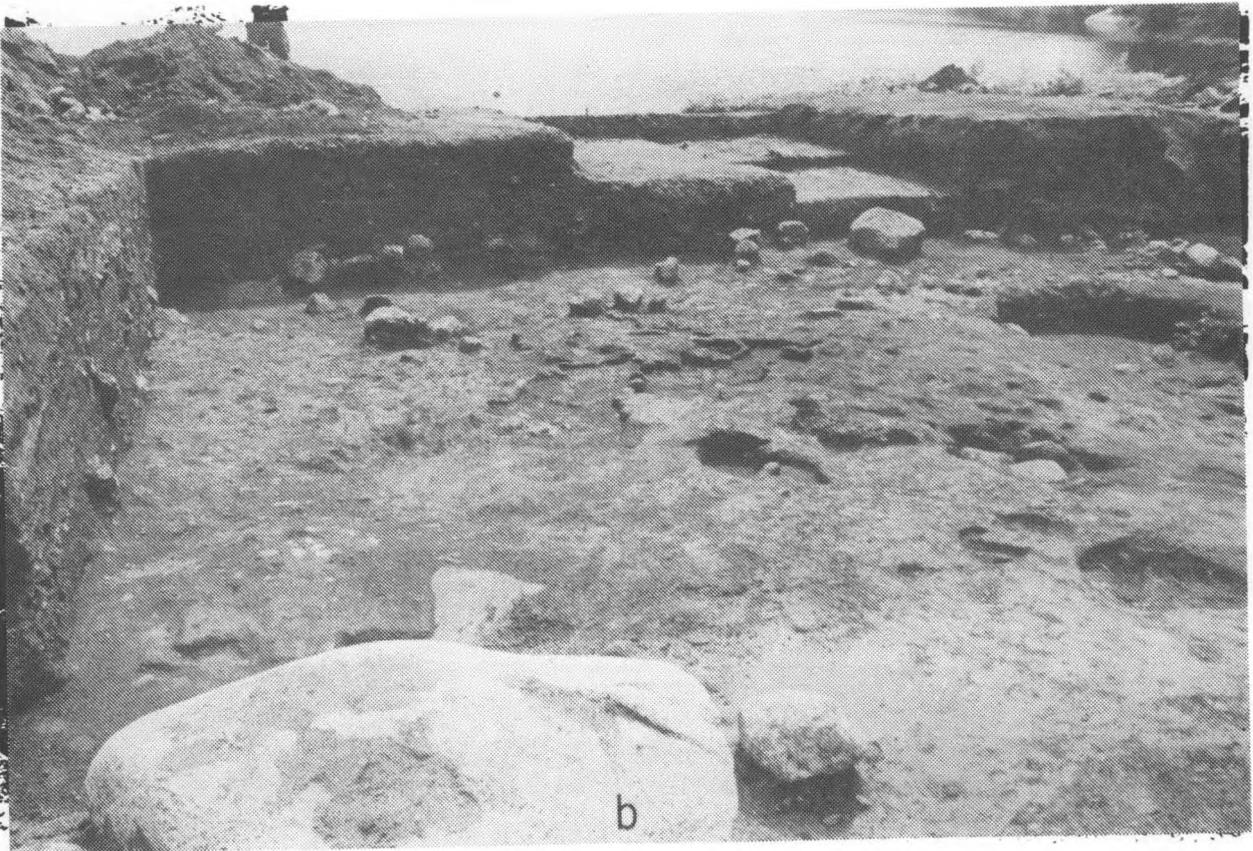
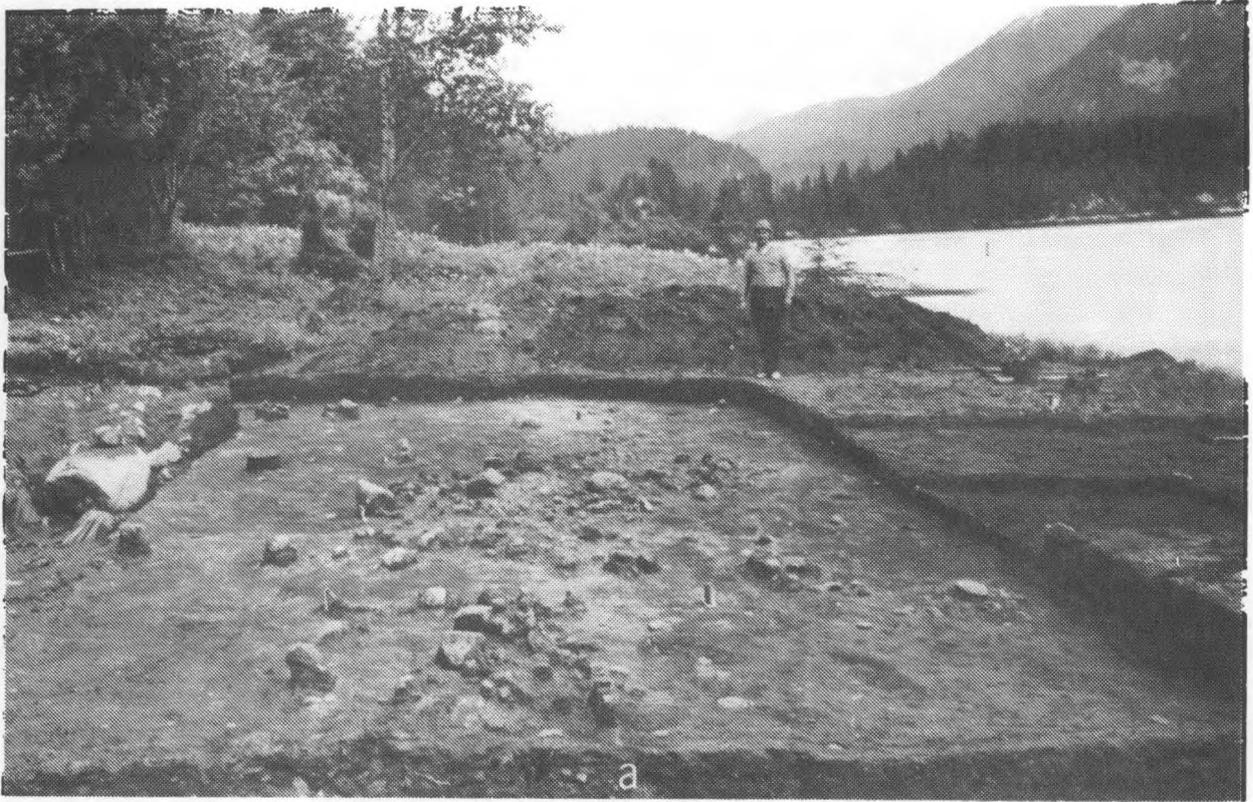


FIG. 21. FaSu 2. a, Kwatna phase deposit at 30 centimeters deep. b, Anutcix phase house floor at 140 centimeters deep underlying Kwatna phase levels.

