

Chapter 7

Excavations At DgRw 204-F6

Feature 6 was overlooked during the initial site reconnaissance of DgRw 204, and was only discovered during the excavation of 204-F1, when human remains were observed in a rubble-filled, chimney-like crevice leading from the southeast corner of F1 to a previously unrecorded upper chamber, which was subsequently designated 204-F6. The possibility of commingling of remains between F6 and F1 led to the selection of F6 for excavation.

Feature Description

204-F6 is situated on the upper bluffs, near the base of a steep slope, beneath a jumble of large sandstone boulders immediately adjacent to and east of 204-F1 (Figures 7.1, 7.2), so that the ceiling slab of F1 forms part of the west wall of F6. It is a complex feature, consisting of a relatively spacious, south-facing entrance passage (0.72 m high and 0.52 m wide), with a chamber opening off either side of the north end (Figure 7.3). The eastern chamber has a low (0.33 m) but relatively wide (0.80 m) entrance; the chamber itself is small (1.36 m north-south by 1.40 m east-west) and triangular in shape, with no skeletal elements visible on the surface. The entrance to the western chamber is larger (0.86 x 0.82 m), as is the chamber itself (2.90 m north-south by 1.20 m east-west). A sparse scattering of human bone (femur, vertebrae) was visible among a jumble of rocks at the south end (Figures 7.2, 7.3) and animal faeces were observed as well.

The ceiling of the west chamber is extremely irregular, ranging in height from 1.13 m just inside the entrance, to a minimum of 0.68 m beneath a downward projecting block, to a maximum of 2.50 m near the west wall (Figure 7.4). The floor exhibits a slight

slope from east to west, and a more definite slope from north to south, with a very pronounced dip at the south end, where the human remains are exposed.

Excavation Results

Due to the narrowness of both chambers, standard sized 1.0 x 1.0 m excavation units were not employed here. Instead, each EU measured 50 x 50 cm, the equivalent of a unit quadrant at the other excavated burial features. In the western chamber, four EUs were laid out along a north-south axis, and numbered sequentially from south to north (Figure 7.3). In addition, a small, irregularly-shaped extension (WX) was excavated to recover remains from a narrow strip against the wall to the west of EU 2 and 3.

In the east chamber a single unit, EU 5, was excavated in two levels to a depth of 10 cm BS, exposing the underlying boulders, but no evidence of human remains was found, and no further work was undertaken in this chamber. The four EUs in the west chamber were dug to variable depths: EU 1 was excavated in three levels to a depth of 15 cm BS; EU 2 in ten levels to 50 cm BS; EU 3, EU 4, and WX in seven levels to 35 cm BS.

In EU 1, excavation of level 3 exposed the top of a large boulder jamming the "chimney" leading down to the east end of F1 below. Human bones were visible in the chimney below the boulder, but were inaccessible from 204-F6, and since the boulder was immovable, excavations in EU 1 were halted. An attempt was made to reach these remains from below, from the southeast corner of 204-F1, and some elements were collected in this manner, but the rubble filling the chimney was very unstable, and after one

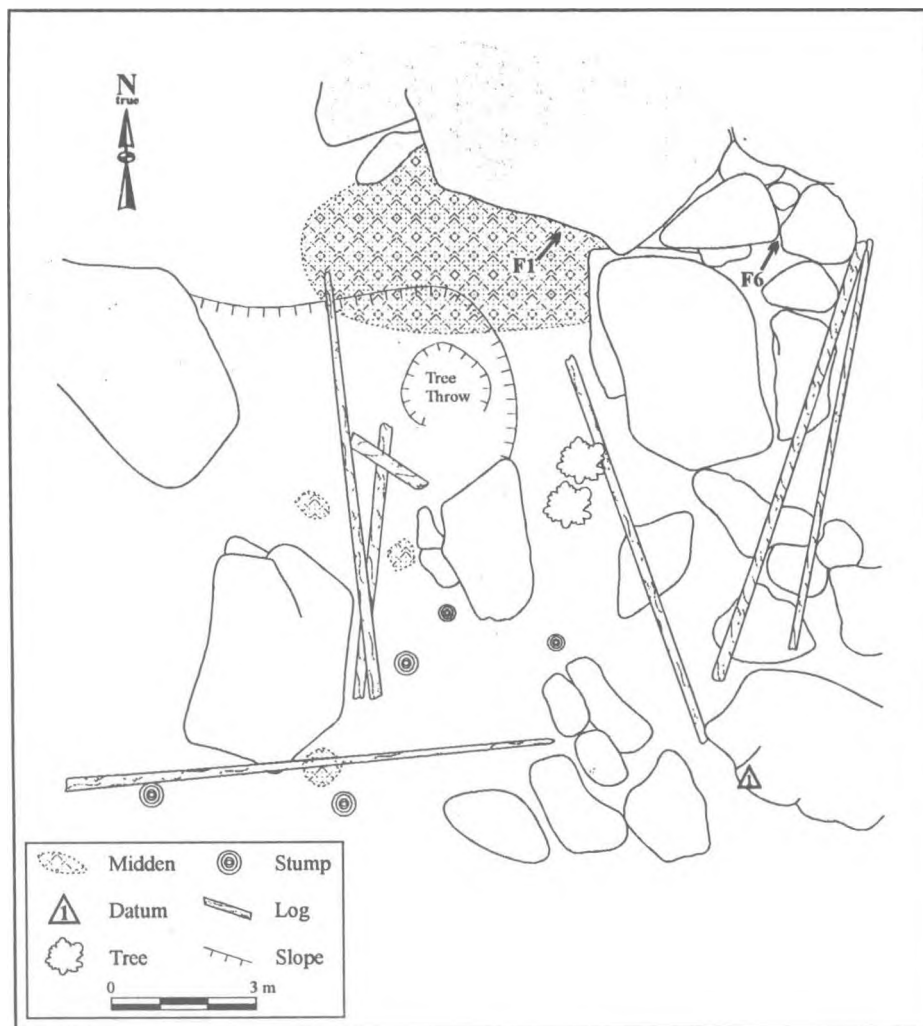


Figure 7.1 DgRw 204-F6 location.

sode of slumpage, it was deemed too dangerous to pursue this course of action, and attention was transferred to the north half of the west chamber.

Bones found in the north half of the chamber were buried to a greater depth below surface, indicating higher sedimentation rates in this portion of the feature. After one heavy rainfall, evidence of a drainage route was seen running from the ground surface above the feature down the face of the west wall near the middle and north end of the chamber. This drainage route is probably responsible for the greater sedimentation in those areas. Most of the recovered bones were oriented obliquely rather than horizontally, probably as a result of the underlying sediments being washed or filtered down between the rocks filling the chimney, creating an uneven surface.

Excavation in EU 2, EU 3, EU 4 and WX continued until the fine sediments which formed the floor

were completely removed, exposing angular sandstone rubble filling a narrow crevice between the large sandstone slab forming the west wall of 204-F6 (also the ceiling slab of 204-F1), and the cluster of boulders forming the floor. This crevice appears to be a northern continuation of the "chimney" between F6 and F1, but does not communicate directly with F1. Some skeletal elements may still be present beneath this rubble; if so, they are inaccessible, since the boulders filling the crevice are too large to remove from above, and too unstable to attempt excavation from below.

Matrix description

The surface of the east chamber was covered by organic litter, mainly decaying leaves with some burnt roots. The underlying non-organic matrix is comprised of yellow sandy silts mixed with angular gravel, cobbles, and sandstone slabs. Removal of level



Figure 7.2 View of DgRw204-F6 from logging road (top); view inside burial chamber looking south (bottom).

2 exposed the tops of the underlying boulders, and no further excavation was possible.

The surface of the west chamber was also covered by organic litter. Once this was removed, the floor of the chamber was found to consist of a veneer of loose, dark yellowish brown (10YR 3/4) sandy silts, overlying sandstone slabs and rubble filling a narrow crevice between large sandstone boulders to the east and west. Small chunks of charcoal were observed in this matrix, particularly along the west wall of the chamber, but whether these are of cultural or natural origin is uncertain. They may have been washed down into the chamber from the surface above, or have resulted from some mortuary ritual associated with the bones.

Faunal Remains

The shells of land snails (Oregon forest snail, *Allogona townsendiana*), which occur naturally in this habitat (Pilsbury 1939), were the most common type of faunal material recovered from 204-F6, and the only type found in the east chamber. In the west chamber, seven skeletal elements were also recovered, with grouse, deer, and canids represented (van Gaalen 1991; Table A.6). Animal faeces were present on the surface of the west chamber, and it is probable that the bird and mammalian fauna represent a natural carnivore accumulation. No shellfish remains of any kind were recovered.

Artifacts

Two bone artifacts were recovered from the west chamber of 204-F6, both from EU 4. One, recovered from level 2, is a thin, rectangular, spatulate piece of mammal bone, which has been ground and polished on all surfaces (Figure B.4c). Both ends are blunt, and the lateral margins are gently tapered and rounded. Two similar artifacts were recovered at the base of the chimney in 204-F1, and it seems likely that they were originally deposited in F6, but washed down into F1. The second artifact, recovered from level 4, is an incomplete worked bone fragment (Figure B.4k). This burnt, rod-like object has been ground and polished on all sides, creating a rectangular cross-section; the extant end is blunt. The function of these artifacts is unknown.

Dating

Analysis of bone collagen extracted from a sample of human rib and vertebra fragments yielded an uncorrected radiocarbon age of 2170 ± 70 years BP, or a C^{13} adjusted age of 2300 ± 70 years BP (Beta-

37846). This date places the burial within the early Marpole phase of the Gulf of Georgia chronology.

Human Remains

A total of 596 human bones and bone fragments were recovered from 204-F6; 383 of these (64.3%) were fragments too small to be identified as to element. One peculiar feature of the human bone assemblage from F6 is the almost total absence of cranial elements, apart from six teeth, a temporal fragment, and a small mandible fragment. It is difficult to determine whether this bias is a product of mortuary behaviour or of post depositional disturbance. Skulls are generally of much greater interest to the general public than are other skeletal elements, and although there was no direct evidence of vandalism or pot-hunting in this feature, its open entrance and ease of access make its contents a likely target for collectors. The frequency of identified skeletal elements in the five excavated features is presented in Appendix C, Table C.1.

Condition

The bones are in extremely poor condition, being incomplete and highly fragmented. In most cases, only long bone diaphyses were recovered, and few metaphyses or articular surfaces have preserved. Crushing of the bones by shifting rocks appears to be responsible for at least some of the severe fracturing observed. Evidence of animal disturbance, in the form of rodent gnaw marks, was observed on one humerus.

Spatial distribution

Of the 596 recovered human bones, 48 were collected from the chimney between 204-F1 and 204-F6, and were not excavated in arbitrary levels. The horizontal and vertical distribution of the remaining 548 elements is summarized in Table 7.1 and illustrated in Figures 7.5 and 7.6. Consistent with the structure of the feature, it appears that natural processes, such as sedimentation, slumpage, and downwash have contributed more to the observed distribution than cultural processes. It is likely that few, if any, of the recovered remains were found in precisely the same context in which they were originally deposited.

Skeletal Reconstruction

Fifty-three bone fragments were found to conjoin with other fragments from 204-F6, producing 16 conjoined "sets" of between two and seven pieces. These sets include 11 long bone fragments, 2 tali, 2 innominates, and a sacrum. Seven of the 16 sets (44%) are comprised of fragments from the same provenience

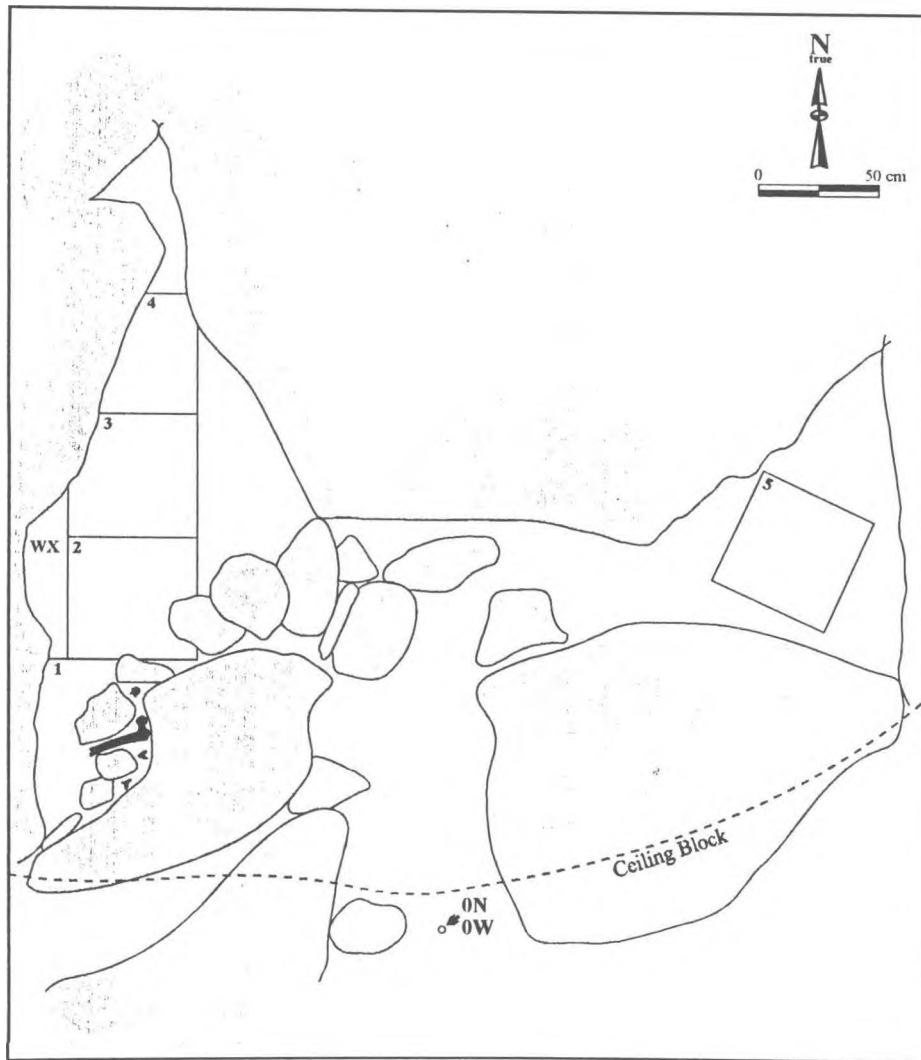


Figure 7.3 DgRw 204-F6: floor plan.

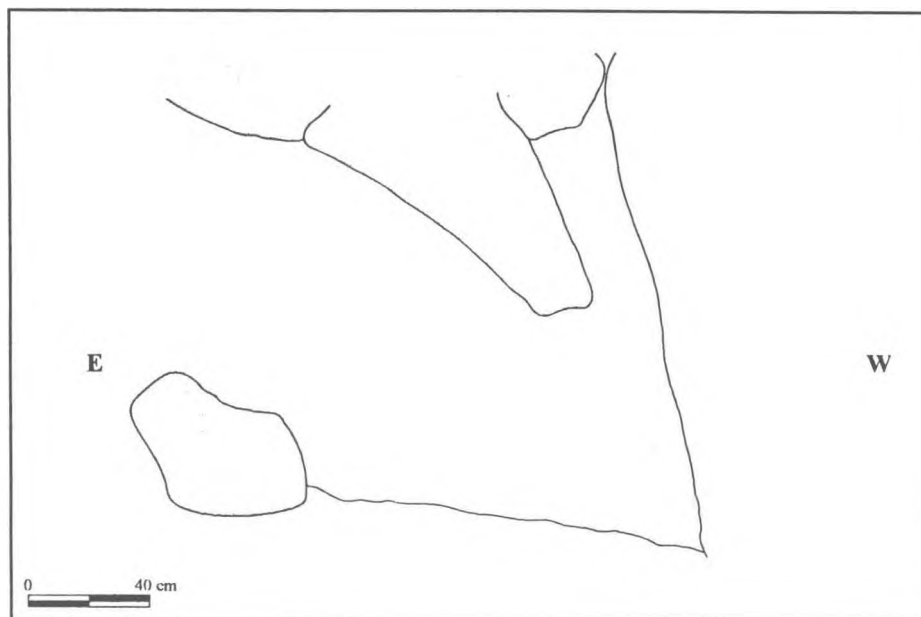


Figure 7.4 DgRw 204-F6: cross-section of burial chamber.

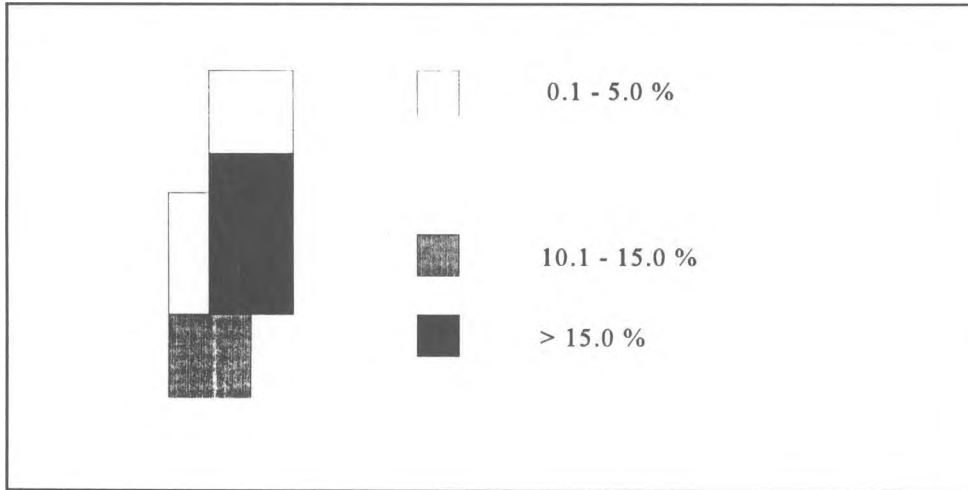


Figure 7.5 Horizontal distribution of human remains, DgRw 204-F6

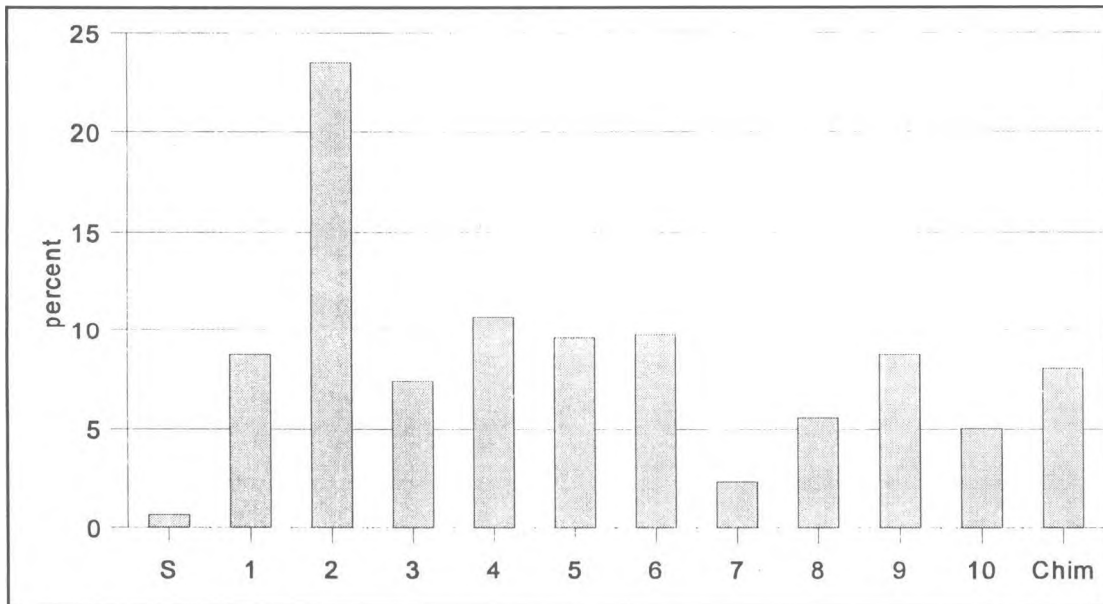


Figure 7.6 Vertical distribution of human remains, DgRw 204-F6.

unit (TS=2); the remainder exhibit significant vertical displacement, with articulating fragments sometimes more than 50 cm apart. Mean vertical displacement score was 4.25. Horizontal displacement of fragments from the same element is generally less pronounced, with an average score of 1.56. The distribution of horizontal, vertical, and total dispersal scores is presented in Figure 7.7, and mean values for these variables are compared with the other four excavated burial features in Appendix C, Table C.2.

The presence of human bone in the chimney between 204-F6 and 204-F1 raised the possibility that some of the bones recovered from F1 may have originally been deposited in F6, and slumped down into the lower chamber. Consequently, the two assemblages were examined for possible cross-linkages, with some success. Nine bone fragments from F1 were found to conjoin with five elements (all long bones) from F6.

Burning

There is no evidence of burning on any of the human remains from 204-F6.

Demography

Although preliminary inspection of this feature suggested an MNI of one adult, excavation revealed at least three individuals represented among the remains. This estimate is based on the presence of three left tibia shafts and three left calcaneus fragments. One of the three individuals is an adolescent male, identified by an incomplete right radius with unfused distal epiphysis, an incompletely developed maxillary second molar, and thoracic vertebra with unfused epiphyses; this developmental stage is indicative of an individual

less than 16-18 years of age (Stewart 1979). The male sex determination is based on an incomplete radial length of 216 mm; considering that the distal epiphysis is missing and the head broken off, the length of the complete element is estimated to have exceeded the range of female radial lengths determined from other Northwest Coast skeletal populations (Curtin 1991a).

The two remaining persons appear to be adult females, as determined by the presence of two right innominate fragments, each with a wide sciatic notch and "groove of pregnancy" type of preauricular sulcus (Houghton 1974). Evidence of moderate degenerative changes on the auricular surfaces of one innominate, and on the articulating sacral auricular surface, suggests that one of the adult females was middle-aged or older at the time of death. For the other female, no narrower age estimate than "adult" was possible. Because of the highly fragmented condition of the skeletal remains and the similarities in demographic characteristics of two of the individuals, it was not possible to separate the recovered remains by individual as was the case with the remains from F2.

Demographic profiles of the five excavated burial features are compared in Appendix C, Tables C.3 and C.4.

Anomalies and Pathologies

No gross pathologies were observed in this collection, except for a few instances of osteoarthritis, affecting an elbow joint (proximal radius), a knee (distal femur), and the sacroiliac joint mentioned above. The poor preservation of most articular surfaces has probably masked other instances of arthritic degeneration in the sample.

Table 7.1 Spatial distribution of human remains, DgRw 204-F6.

Unit	Surf	Lev 1	Lev 2	Lev 3	Lev 4	Lev 5	Lev 6	Lev 7	Lev 8	Lev 9	Lev 10	Chim	Total	%
EU 1	4	16	10	10								48	88	14.8
EU 2		33	53	1	15	8	16	2	33	52	30		243	40.8
EU 3		2	76	28	48	20	38	12					224	37.6
EU 4		1	1	5	1	4							12	2.0
WX						25	4						29	4.9
Total	4	52	140	44	64	57	58	14	33	52	30	48	596	100.1
%	0.7	8.7	23.5	7.4	10.7	9.6	9.7	2.4	5.5	8.7	5.0	8.1	100.0	

Mortuary Practices

The very incomplete and highly fragmented condition of the human remains from 204-F6, the severe post depositional disturbance apparent in the burial chamber, and the commingling of bones with 204-F1 place serious constraints on what can be inferred about mortuary practices at this feature. There is no

evidence for *post mortem* reduction of the bodies for secondary burial (e.g., cutmarks, burning), but the skeletons are so incomplete that such evidence, even if once present, may have been obscured or lost. Unlike the other four burial features, there is no evidence for ritual feeding of the dead interred here; however the presence of two artifacts suggests at least some attendant mortuary ritual.

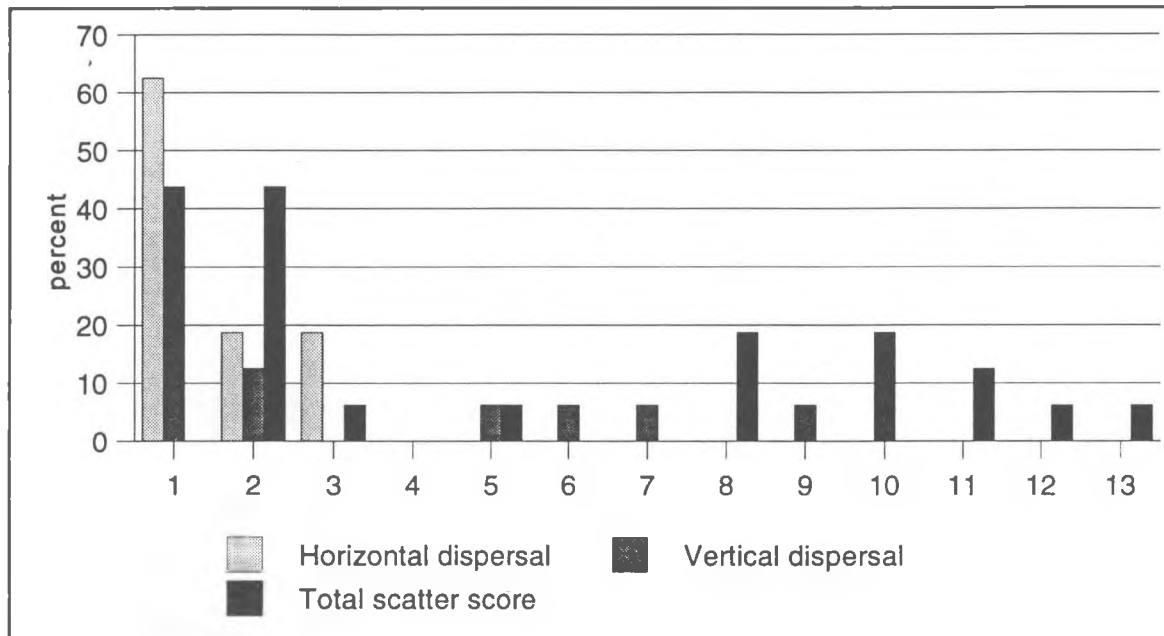


Figure 7.7 Dispersal scores of reconstructed elements, DgRw 204-F6.