

## SALVAGE ARCHAEOLOGY AT BLISS LANDING

Owen Beattie

### INTRODUCTION

In July 1971 the Simon Fraser Archaeological Salvage Project received a report of the disturbance of a prehistoric site at Bliss Landing, British Columbia. This report was investigated by Jack Eisner on July 25 and 26, on behalf of the Salvage Project, who discovered that a pit for a guideline post to support a power pole had disturbed a prehistoric human burial at the site. It was also ascertained that construction of a marina and resort complex beginning in the spring of 1972 would destroy the remainder of the midden. A grant of funds from B.C. Hydro and Power Authority supplemented the Opportunities for Youth grant and permitted us to spend the latter half of August excavating this site.

### THE SITE

EaSe 2 is a small midden situated in Turner Bay, six miles north of Lund, on the west coast of the Malaspina Peninsula (Fig. 13). The bay faces directly out onto Georgia Strait and, except in the northeast quarter, the prevailing winds blow, often forcefully, from the west. It is within this sheltered northeast quarter that the midden is located. To the north and south of the bay the shoreline abruptly rises into rocky bluffs that characterise the coast all along this area. A wharf and resort cabin are situated in the southeast corner of the bay, while in the northern part, bordering the midden deposit, are three old buildings.

The climate of this region is typically West Coast Marine, with noticeable maximum winter precipitation, mild winters, and cool summers. Average annual temperature is



FIG. 13. Map showing location of EaSe 2 at Bliss Landing

around 51° F with 37 inches of precipitation (figures are for Powell River and are from Climate of British Columbia, Report for 1963, Department of Agriculture, Victoria, 1964). The region is also situated in the Coast Forest Biotic area described by McTaggart Cowan and Guiguet (1965).

The cultural deposit at Bliss Landing is roughly semi-circular in outline, measuring 50 meters at its widest along the beach front, by 50 meters from beach front to back. The only beach in the bay directly fronts the midden. It is a beach primarily of large pebbles and rocks littered with oyster shells (leftovers of the old oyster industry that once functioned here earlier this century). An abandoned orchard extends across the back of the site. Behind this is an unused road running approximately north-south, and behind the road the ground slopes down into a sandy-swampy area through which runs a small stream paralleling the road. This stream flows into the bay at a spot mid-way between and the resort cabin. Heavy coniferous forest begins at the back of the midden and continues inland.

Gardening activities in a large area just back from the beach, the power pole construction, and bulldozing of certain areas all have contributed recently to the disturbance of the midden. A 2 meter wide, .50 meter deep, and 12 meter long swath along the south of the midden had been bulldozed onto the beach sometime during 1970. The tides had since washed away this estimated 12 cubic meters of midden soil. Beach collecting in this area, or any other portion of the beach, yielded no prehistoric cultural material.

The Malaspina Peninsula has been known ethnographically to be part of the territory of the Slaiman Indians, a subdivision of the Coast Salish Comoxan dialect (Barnett 1955; Swanton 1968). H. Barnett (1955:50) notes that "There was a

stockaded village on a small bay to the north of Lund...". It is a possibility that this refers to the Bliss Landing site, though, for lack of any further data, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly which of the smaller bays and coves between Lund and EaSe 2 he means.

#### EXCAVATIONS

During our two weeks at Bliss Landing six test pits were excavated in the midden: Test Pit 1 at the rear of the deposit, within the orchard; Test Pits 2 and 3 in the central area; Test Pits 4 and 5 in the southern periphery; and Test Pit 6 near the front (Fig. 14). All except Test Pit 6 were 2 by 2 meters square, and excavated in ten centimeter levels with one exception: from 60 centimeters below surface in Test Pit 4 the levels were expanded to 20 centimeters. Test Pit 6 was a small pit 2 meters by a half meter with 20 centimeter levels.

After completing level two in Test Pit 5 we decided to abandon it and use our limited manpower in the other pits. The strata of this pit had been obliterated by the before-mentioned bulldozing. The high gravel content of the soil may have originated from the construction of the old unused road.

Test Pits 1, 2, 3, and 4 were excavated down to the bedrock. Test Pit 6 was levelled off at 140 centimeters below surface, partly as a safety precaution against wall collapse, and partly because of its restrictive size.

#### ARTIFACTS

A total of 100 classifiable artifacts were found during our work (Table 1). When compared stratigraphically to one another, the distribution of these artifacts show that at least two components, called here early and recent, are represented in the material.

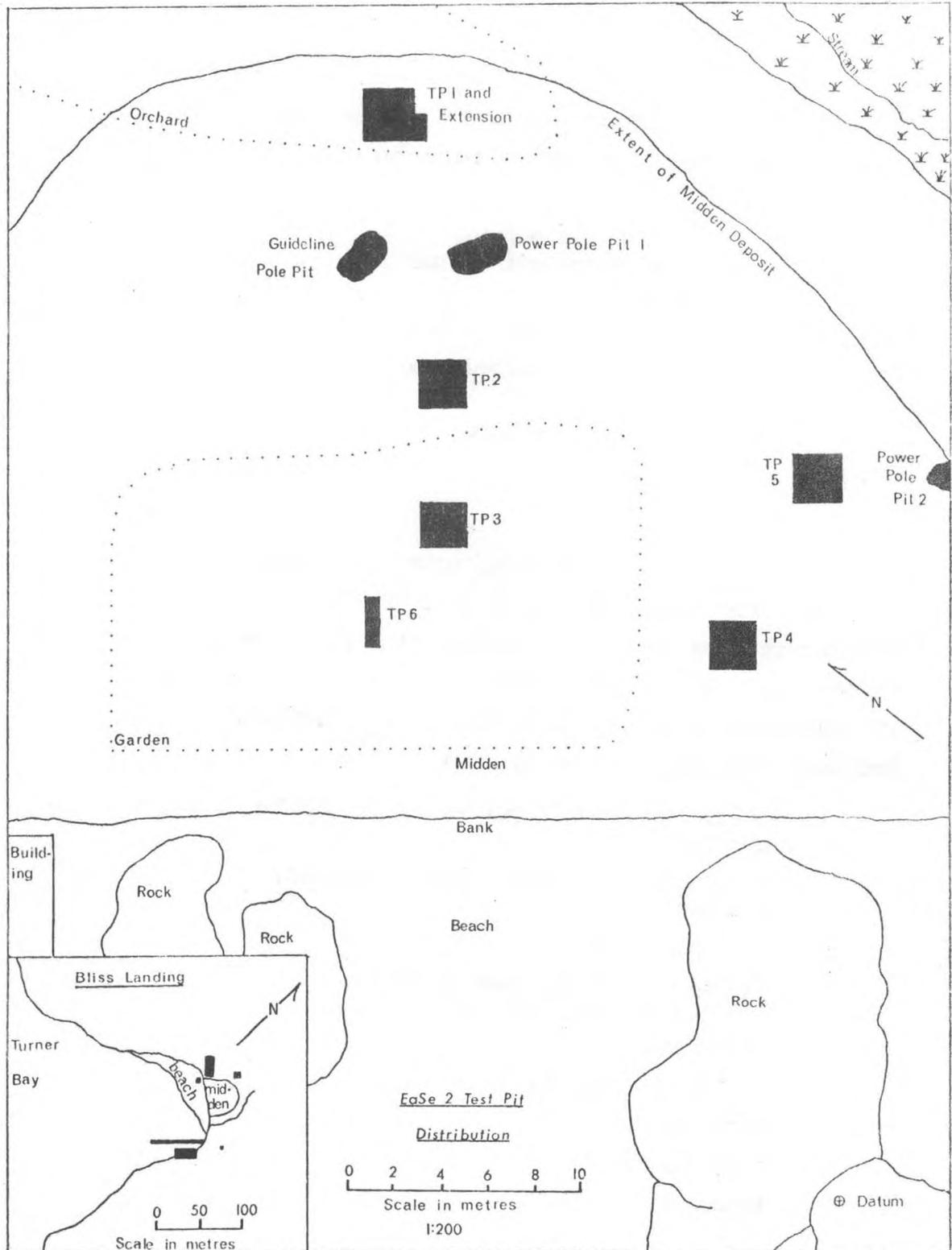


FIG. 14. Location of test pits at Bliss Landing site, EaSe 2

Artifacts of the recent component were found in Test Pit 3 from 0 to 60 centimeters below surface, and in Test Pit 4 in the 0 to 10 centimeters below surface level. They are:

- ground slate points  
(thin unstemmed; thicker stemmed)
- scrapers on thin flakes
- unilaterally barbed bone points
- bone fish hook barbs
- bone awls
- bone points

Some of these artifacts are illustrated in figure 15.

The early component appears in Test Pit 3 from 60 centimeters below surface to bedrock at 160 centimeters; in Test Pit 4 from 10 centimeters below surface to bedrock at 100 centimeters; and in all levels of Test Pits 1 and 2. Artifacts typifying this early component are:

- chipped projectile points (basalt, clear quartz)
- microblades of clear quartz, obsidian, and basalt
- microblade cores
- flakes of various stone materials (including obsidian)
- hammerstones
- cobble chopping tools
- bone points
- bone chisels
- bone awls

Some of these artifacts are shown in figure 16.

Almost 50 percent of the artifacts from the early component are of clear quartz, two thirds of these are from Test Pit 1 at

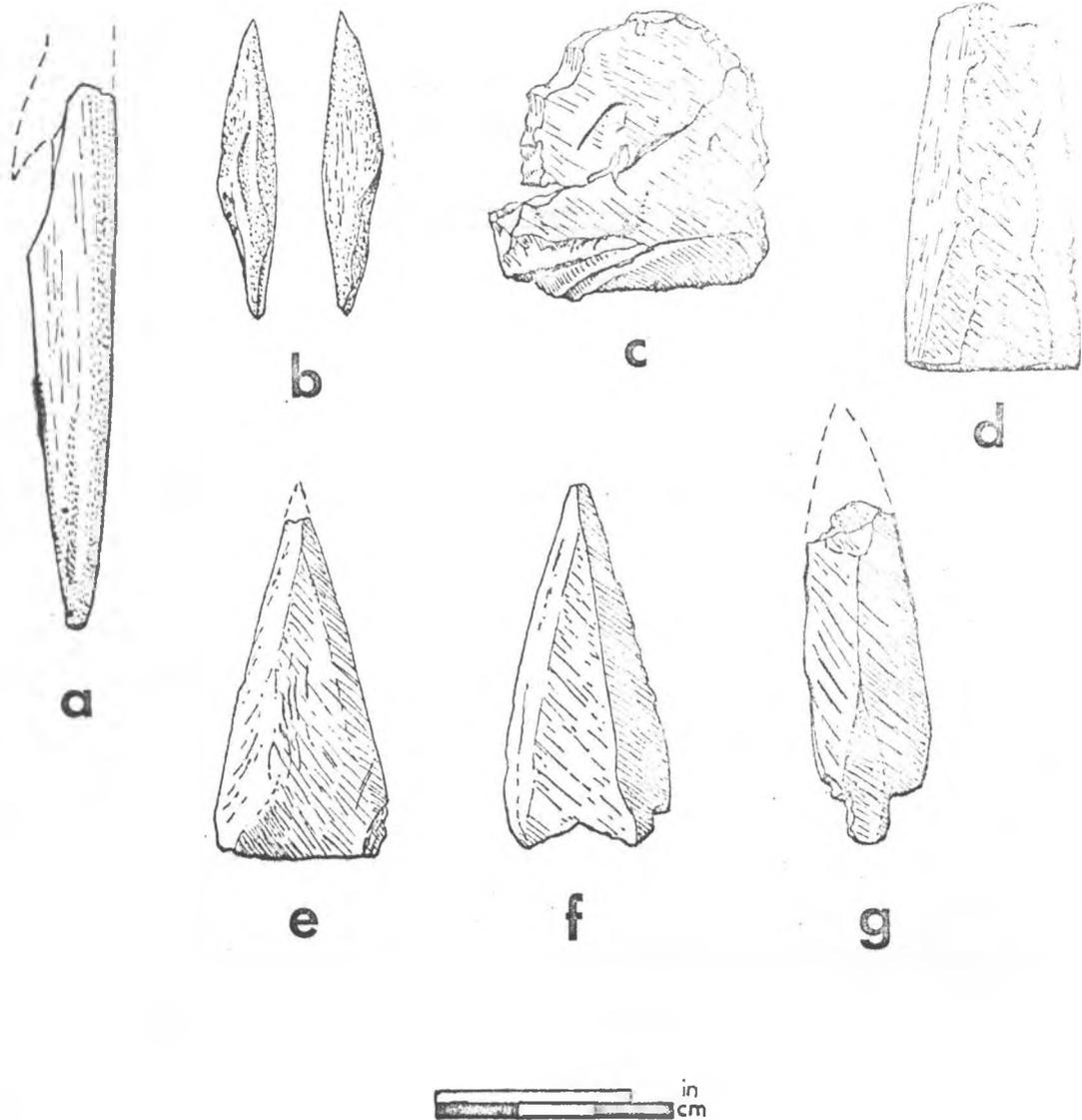


FIG. 15. Artifacts from the recent component at Bliss Landing, EaSe 2.  
a, unilaterally barbed bone point.  
b, fish hook barb. c, basalt scraper.  
d - g, ground slate points

Table 1. Artifacts from early and recent components at EaSe 2

Artifact Type	Component	
	Early	Recent
<u>Worked Bone</u>		
Unilaterally barbed bone points	-	2
Fish hook barbs	-	2
Points	6	7
Awls	3	3
Chisels	1	-
Bear canine pendant	1	-
<u>Worked Stone</u>		
Ground slate points	-	4
Flaked scrapers	-	1
Flaked projectile points	5	-
Microblades: basalt	1	-
obsidian	1	-
quartz	4	-
Microblade cores: quartz	3	-
Flakes: obsidian	2	-
quartz	16	-
other	36	-
Hammerstones	1	-
Cobble chopping tools	1	-
	—	—
TOTALS	81	19

the back of the midden. No quartz was found in the recent component levels. The early component levels of Test Pit 4 were also lacking in quartz (as well as microblades), perhaps hinting at the possibility of another component; but again, lack of a larger material sample necessarily inhibits further breakdowns on the absence of a single, though apparently important, element.

The Bliss Landing material, though small in quantity and in artifact type representation, does contain certain elements reminiscent of two more southerly Georgia Strait cultural phases: the Mayne Phase (type site DfRu 8, on Mayne Island) and the San Juan Phase, also represented at DfRu 8 as well as at various other sites in the Straits (Carlson 1960; 1970).

Carlson (1970:117) suggests that the Mayne Phase "...is part of a widespread coastal culture which extended from the Pacific Coast of Alaska to southern British Columbia between 3,000 and 1,000 B.C.". A comparison of the Mayne Phase cultural traits with those of the early component of EaSe 2 reveals basic similarities, and it is possible that this extensive culture was present at Bliss Landing. All of the 81 EaSe 2 early component artifacts (see Table 1) fit within the framework of Mayne Phase cultural traits listed by Carlson (1970:115). The small number of artifacts recovered, however, fails to demonstrate how close this relationship may be or even if the comparison is totally valid.

Of the 19 EaSe 2 recent component artifacts, certain artifact types (such as the thin triangular ground slate points, the rarity of chipped stone artifacts, the fish hook barbs, and the unilaterally barbed bone points) also are characteristic of the San Juan Phase (dating from A.D. 1200 up to European contact). If the San Juan Phase is represented at EaSe 2 it would appear that, using the very limited material recovered, there was a long period of time, perhaps 2200 years, in which Bliss Landing

was uninhabited or only infrequently used. More extensive excavation would possibly have clarified the apparent absence of cultural remains in the years between the early (Mayne Phase ?) component and the recent (San Juan Phase ?) component.

#### FAUNAL REMAINS

In Test Pits 3 and 4 the components were separated by a pronounced layer of shell. This layer also marked a noticeable transition in the fauna. Primarily, fish remains were very much more abundant in the recent component levels, accounting for almost all bones present. Sea mammal bones, though in small numbers usually in the form of phalanges, seemed to be distributed throughout both components, with an increase in occurrence in the early component. Half the sea mammal bones (14) were from Test Pit 1. Of the four delphinid vertebrae found, all were from Test Pit 1. Bird bones were present in very small numbers, and found in both components. Every level contained a number of ungulate bones.

Here we run into the same problem as with the artifacts: small samples. Only the most obvious fauna and faunal changes show up in the material. Any subtle change in the economy or population of the cultures, as well as the presence or absence of certain species, cannot be accurately derived from such a very small sample.

#### BURIALS

Three burials, and indications of a fourth, were found in our excavations at the rear of the site on the edge of, and within, the orchard. Two of these, burials number 2 and 3, were completely excavated. Only the skull and one incomplete hand were removed from burial number 4 as we were pressed for time and could not do justice to a complete excavation.

Burial 1: Burial 1 refers to the burial disturbed by the power pole excavation. This was the first burial discovered at the site and was investigated by Jack Eisner. His report (Eisner 1971) notes that the skeleton was in an anatomically disjointed position, and that several bones were missing probably as a result of the digging of the guideline pit. Only one leg was present and it was in a flexed position. The burial was that of a young adult, and no artifacts were found in association with the skeleton.

Burial 2: First indication of this burial appeared at the 70 centimeter level of Test Pit 1. The soil of this pit was sterile from this level down to bedrock (90 centimeters below surface). After determining the extent and position of the skeleton it was found that the greater portion of the cranium was embedded in the south-central corner of the east wall. A small half meter by 1 meter extension was then added to this corner to enable a complete excavation to be carried out. At the 50 centimeter level of the extension another burial, number 3, was discovered. This burial will be described later.

The skeleton of burial 2 was lying on its right side and faced southwest towards the beach with its legs tightly flexed against the ribs. The skull was broken in a number of places, but its shape could be clearly determined. It was moderately elongated and possessed an obvious bulging in the occipital region. At the time of excavation it was determined that intentional deformation was the prime cause, though a small rock wedged between an outcrop of bedrock and the bregma of the skull later proved to be responsible for the skull shape. Reconstruction of the skull in the lab showed that it was not deformed.

The vertebral column was in very poor condition though it was evident that the cervicals were not positioned in line with the foramen magnum. They curved forward, with the atlas vertebra positioned between the left and right ascending rami of the

mandible, which was in its proper anatomical position. Evidence for disturbance also appears in the positioning of the foot bones, which were strewn haphazardly along the length of the tibias, and the complete absence of hands. Two bone awls were found directly associated with this burial (see Fig. 161). They were positioned one directly atop the other and were by the right humerus, positioned parallel to the spinal column, in the region of the sternum. Both of the awls had had their tips broken off. These were found positioned along side the main awl shafts, giving the appearance that the awls had been intentionally broken and then placed by the body.

As the pelvic girdle had completely disintegrated and did not survive excavation preliminary ageing and sexing was done exclusively from the skull. Burial number 2 appears to be a male in the 60 years old plus range. All the bones were in poor condition and virtually all were fractured at least once. The skeleton was lying directly on the bedrock at approximately 85 centimeters below the surface.

Burial 3: This skeleton was positioned on its right side facing northeast, away from the beach. Only the bottom half of the torso was uncovered in the extension, the remainder of the bones lying in the south wall and the south half of the east wall. The extent of the burial was estimated and then excavated. The skeleton was somewhat less flexed than burial number 2. The top half of the skeleton had been twisted and was lying on its stomach on a large tabular slab of bed rock. The pelvic girdle was positioned so that the right innominate was exposed. This innominate was situated directly under a large rock and had been badly crushed, undoubtedly the result of the rock being thrown onto the body at the time of burial. The left innominate and the pubic symphysis of the right innominate, however, were well preserved. These show that this

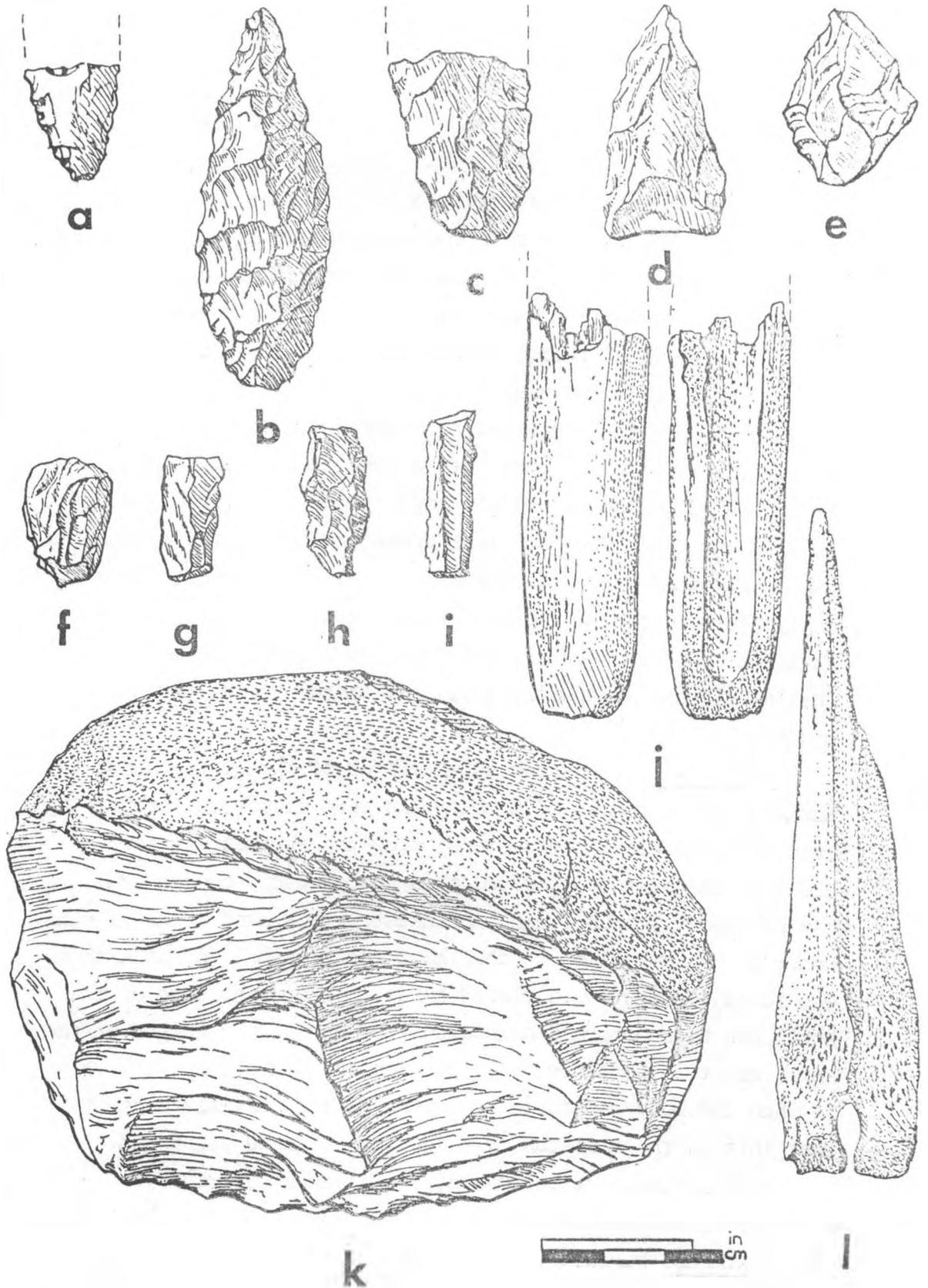


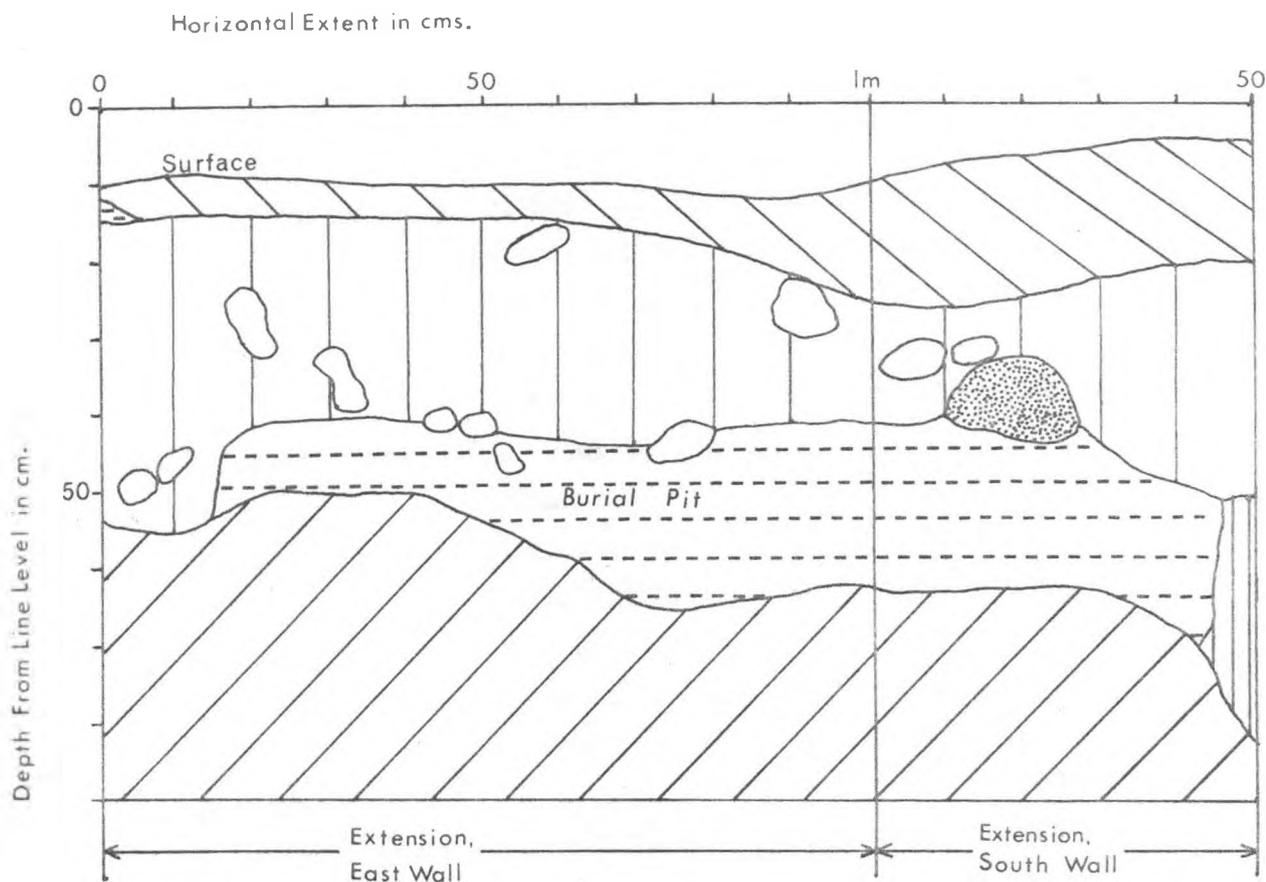
FIG. 16. Artifacts from the early component at Bliss Landing. a - d, basalt projectile points. e, clear quartz projectile point. f, clear quartz microblade core. g, clear quartz microblade. h, obsidian microblade. i, basalt microblade. j, bone chisel (flesher) k, cobble chopping tool. l, awl of an ungulate metapodial

individual was a male, 39 to 44 years of age (T. W. McKern, personal communication, September 1971). No evidence of a cranium was found for this burial, though the complete mandible and perfectly preserved atlas and axis vertebrae were found. Many of the hand bones were missing.

The profile of the extension was very informative as it revealed the presence of an intentionally dug pit into which burial number 3 had been placed (Fig. 17). The soil in the pit was easy to distinguish. It consisted of the typical, high fragmented shell content dark brown midden soil while the soil surrounding the pit was a medium brown, fine soil with no shell. The burial pit began at 35 centimeters below surface and continued down to bedrock, which, in the extension, was at 55 centimeters below surface. It is apparent that 35 centimeters below the present ground surface was the surface at the time of the burial, and that the body was placed in a shallow pit and covered by soil from another part of the midden.

Burial 4: Along the south corner of the east face of the burial 1 pit a number of metacarpals were discovered projecting from the wall at 45 centimeters below the surface. After clearing the dirt from around this spot a badly broken skull was exposed. It was facing northeast with a hand tucked around under the chin. Close to this hand the proximal end of a tibia was found, indicating a flexed burial. The right side of the skull had been compressed inwards, perhaps by the weight of the soil, or it is possible that this was the shape the skull was in when the body was buried. The skull and mandible suggest that this is the skeleton of a female, 25 to 30 years old.

Burial number 3, because of the obvious nature of the burial pit, is from the early component. (Note: Carlson 1970:115, lists extended burials as a characteristic of the Mayne Phase.) Burials number 2 and 3 are more difficult to place. The Sliaman



Topsoil



Bedrock



Rocks



Wood



Medium Brown Soil



Shell

Burial Pit for Burial 3

in Test Pit 1 Extension

FIG. 17. Profile of Test Pit 1 showing location of Burial 3, at EaSe 2

have been known ethnographically to commonly place their burials on close-by islands (Barnett 1955:217); also, the absence of burials in the San Juan Phase (Carlson 1970:114) suggests a similar practice, and it is supposed that the recent component at Bliss Landing may also be lacking in the presence of burials within the midden. If this is the case, all the burials at the site would be expected to be from the early component.

While the east wall of Test Pit 1 was being cleaned for photographing and profiling a human left patella was found in the slump. More extensive excavation in this area would most probably have exposed another burial.

In the 50 to 60 centimeter level of Test Pit 1, most of a set of human primary dentition was found. These consist of two incisors, two canines, and eight molars. Six incisors and two canines were missing, but because of their smaller size they may have fallen through the mesh of our screens. Nothing else found in this level is relatable to the isolated occurrence of the teeth.

#### CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it is evident that at least two components are present in the material recovered from EaSe 2. Whether or not there exists valid relationships between these two components and the Mayne and San Juan Phases cannot be firmly stated. Had the artifact sample been larger, a more conclusive interpretation would have been possible.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Doris Lundy drew the artifacts for the report.

Bliss Landing is owned by Mr. Roy Edmunson, who was very helpful and co-operative toward our whole operation.

The following students participated in the excavation of this site: Lynda Beattie, Daniel Carlson, Doug Elmore, Chris and Ernie Oliver, Gordon and Margaret Pybus, Paul Roof, Jill Sanagan, April Struthers, Walter Tallio, Diana and Robert Vandermey, and Lee Willdey.

