ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK AT KIMSQUIT: 1971

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INTRODUCTION

Kimsquit at the far end of Dean Channel and some 60 miles from the outer coast was once the scene of bustling activity with Indians speaking a dialect of Bella Coola Salish fishing the waters of the Dean and Kimsquit Rivers, and holding potlatches and other ceremonies in villages of large plank houses along Dean Channel and the lower reaches of the rivers. Today, logging is the main activity at Kimsquit and the sites of the aboriginal inhabitants are rapidly disappearing from erosion, natural decay, and logging activities. Our earlier survey of this locality in 1968 (Hobler 1970) disclosed a unique range of both prehistoric and historic archaeological sites, many in need of salvage work. Thirteen sites (Fig. 29) have so far been found with the greatest concentration on the Delta of the Dean River below the canyon, a flat forested area dissected by old river channels. The survey is not yet complete and additional sites are expected on the Kimsquit River as Bella Coola folk tales note at least one settlement there apparently abandoned early in the nineteenth century. Above the narrows on the Dean River other settlements are said once to have existed (McIlwraith 1952:15-16). This preliminary report lists the sites discovered, and gives a short description of the work accomplished in the 1971 season. Table 10 lists the sites surveyed.

THE SITES

FeSr 1

This historic village is located on the Delta of the

FIG. 29. Map of the Kimsquit area. Archaeological sites are indicated by black dots. Two sites are not included in the coverage of this map.

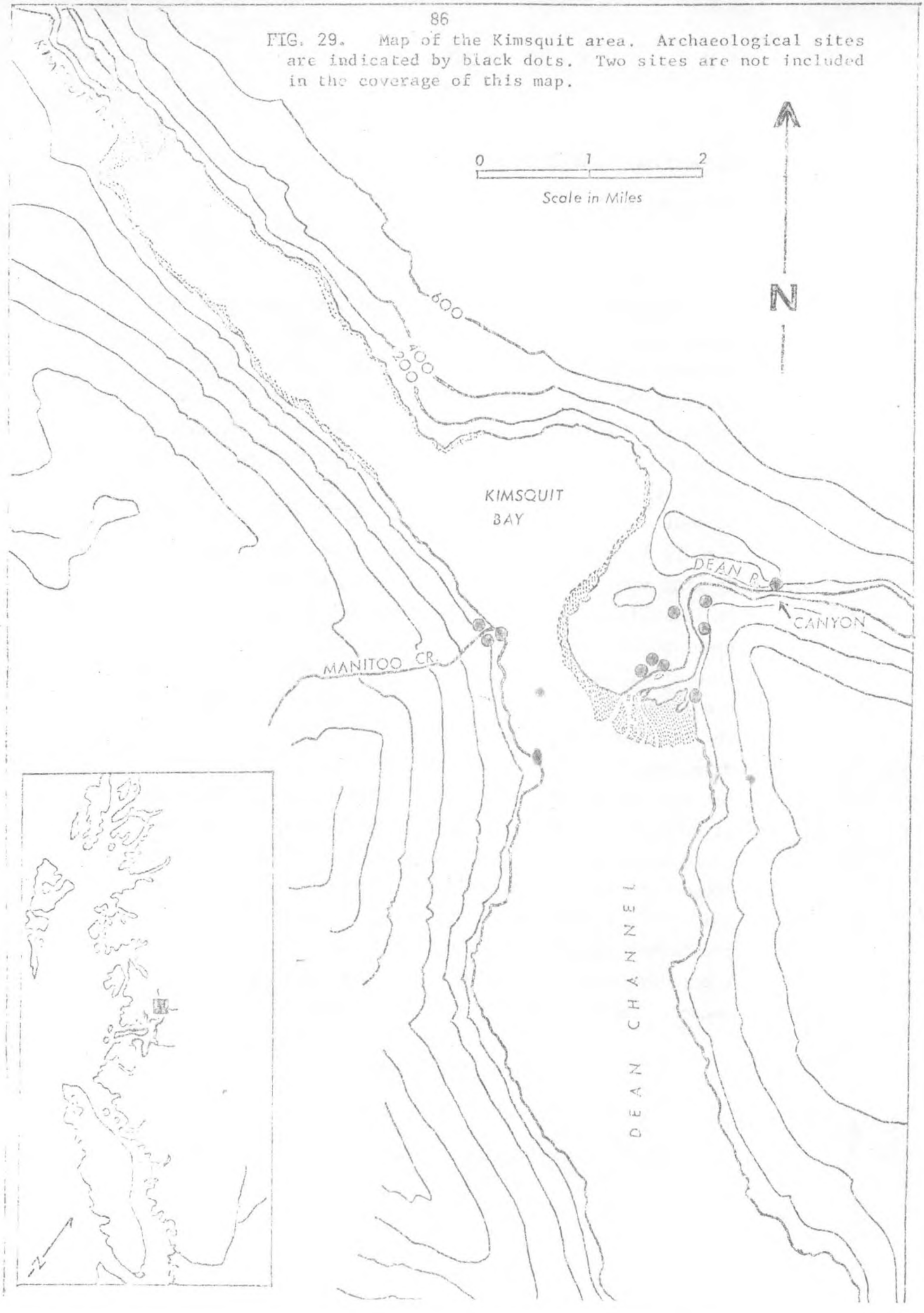

Table 10. Archaeological sites near Kimsquit

*FeSr 1	Abandoned historic village, Dean River
FeSr 2	Cache pits, Manitoo Creek
FeSr 3	Historic cemetery, Dean River
*FeSr 4	House pit village, Dean River
FeSr 5	Small midden, Dean River
FeSr 6	House pit village, Manitoo Creek
*FeSr 7	Early historic midden, Dean River
FeSr 8	House pits, Manitoo Creek
FeSr 9	Beach artifacts, Swallop Creek
FeSr 10	Small rockshelter site, Dean River
*FeSr 11	Petroglyphs, Dean River
FeSr 12	Small house pit site, Dean River
FeSr 13	Indian trail, Dean River

* Sites at which excavation took place

Table 11. Artifacts recovered from test excavations in historic refuse deposits at site FeSr 1, Kimsquit

Nails, cut or "square"	154
Nails, wire or "round"	14
Wood screws	2
Spoons, metal	2
Rifle cartridges	3
Small hinges	3
Buckles	2
Clock parts	2
Kerosene lamp part	1
Lockplate from chest or trunk	1
Axe head	1
Saw blade fragment	1
Conical copper tinklers	2
Conical iron tinklers	2
Unidentified copper fragments	6
Unidentified iron fragments	5
Window glass fragment	1
Door knob, ceramic	1
China ware fragments	37
Glass beads	12
Bottle fragments	18
Glass buttons	13
Metal buttons	2
Wood button	1
Stone flake	1
Sawn slate fragment	1
Ivory gaming piece	1
Total	291

Dean River about one quarter of a mile from the river's mouth. Post and beam cedar plank houses still exist in various states of preservation. In addition, there are houses of frame construction built of milled lumber and numerous roofed storage pits. An 1890 census of Kimsquit recorded a population of 106 and indicated that they were "...all pagan", perhaps implying that at that time aboriginal culture may have been more intact at Kimsquit than in other areas. Quite late in the nineteenth century two canneries were built in the Kimsquit area. One was at Manitoo Creek on the west side of the Inlet and the other in the large bay two miles north of the mouth of the river. From the latter site a wagon road was built south across the delta to the village. The construction of these canneries provided an economic stimulus to the area and undoubtedly reversed or at least postponed the abandonment of the settlement, which began in the last half of the nineteenth century. Even after 1900 the depopulation seems to have been gradual. The 1920's saw the last families leave. Since that time only occasional trappers and a few others have visited the area and used the houses.

During the 1971 field season we prepared a base map of the village, measured and recorded the one well preserved cedar plank house, and dug two small test trenches. The mapping project recorded 108 architectural features. About one quarter of the site could not be mapped because of limitations in personnel and the nearly impenetrable brush. Completion of the map is planned for the next field season. The two test trenches were intended to sample the historic refuse in the vicinity of the cedar plank houses and to determine whether an earlier historic or even prehistoric component might be present. Materials from these excavations

are listed in Table 11. The tabulation is not proportionately representative since some items were field discarded. These are primarily bits of china ware, fragmentary nails, and quantities of thin rusted strips of metal from large tins.

The excavated sample shows that quantities of late nineteenth and early twentieth century refuse are present. A much larger sample would be needed to establish the full range of materials present in the deposits and to indicate their relative frequencies. Of these materials it is probably significant that only about one percent are of aboriginal materials such as stone or ivory. The remainder are manufactured items purchased either from the cannery store at Kimsquit or at Bella Coola. Our refuse tests at FeSr 1 showed no evidence of a prehistoric component or of an early historic component such as is present at FeSr 7.

FeSr 2, FeSr 6 and FeSr 8

These site numbers apply to what may actually be parts of one settlement. Their location is at the mouth of Manitoo Creek across Dean Channel from and somewhat north of the mouth of the Dean River. Numerous rectangular house pits which range up to some 13 meters in length are present at the site. A map was prepared showing the location of these architectural features. As at the other major housepit site in the area, FeSr 4, no artifacts were found on the surface of the Manitoo Creek sites. Small test pits dug into the fill of two of the housepits also failed to produce artifacts. The Manitoo sites are probably largely, if not entirely, prehistoric. The housepits are arranged on several topographic benches which appear to be terraces or possibly raised beaches. Their average floor area is somewhat greater than that of the housepits at FeSr 4. Some

were originally dug back into a gradual slope and are effectively three sided being open on the downhill side of the pit. At least one other appears to have had its outer edge cut away by erosion. 24 housepits and 40 pits too small to have been houses are observeable. Housepits on the main terrace are distinctly the largest. The smallest pits are apparently cache pits and are found throughout the site but tend to cluster on the highest terrace.

FeSr 3

This is the cemetery associated with the historic village at Kimsquit. At this site no excavations were conducted and no surface collections were made. A map recording surface features, grave pits, and wooden surface structures was prepared. The site clearly spans a transitional period in burial customs. A somewhat isolated earlier group of grave pits, some 70 in number, appear as circular depressions, and probably represent simple cedar box burials. These apparently earlier graves have no directly associated surface grave goods. The central part of the cemetery has both these small pits and larger elongate depressions of extended burials. In this area there are quantities of household goods and other possessions strewn about on the surface. There are also the remains of ten small grave houses constructed of milled lumber. There are 210 of the earlier small box burial depressions and 41 pits indicative of extended burials. There are two wooden grave markers and ten tombstones. Dates recorded on the latter range from 1895 to 1917.

FeSr 4

This site was the focus of our main efforts during the 1971 season. Clearing, mapping, and initial excavations were performed. The site shows 45 depressions of which 23 are the remains of domiciliary architecture and 22 are smaller pits probably representing storage structures and other non-habitational features. The site is located along a dry watercourse about one quarter of a mile south of the Dean River and about a mile up from the mouth of the river. At the time the site was occupied the river probably flowed along the edge of the village. Housepits are found on at least three surfaces which appear to be old river terraces. That the river abandoned the site more than a few years ago is attested by the presence of a mature forest on the broad flats between the site and the present river channel. Over most of the site itself a heavy second growth forest flourishes. Vegetation on the site is not noticeably different from that surrounding the site and it is not possible by observing vegetational changes to locate the site from the air.

Although site FeSr 4 was clearly a large village in late prehistoric times, nowhere could we find concentrations of refuse or stratified midden deposits. Surface survey yielded no artifacts, bone or other indication of refuse. At the end of the season's excavation only 79 artifacts had been recovered. Many of these were found along the sloping sides of housepits or immediately adjacent to housepit walls. Only the somewhat atypical housepit 10 produced quantities of artifacts from the central house floor. Artifacts catalogued from FeSr 4 are listed in table 12.

Although this tool assemblage does bear a few resemblances to late prehistoric material from Kwatna it is sufficiently distinct and lacking in enough key artifact types that it

cannot easily be assigned to the Kwatna phase. Village layout and details are also quite unlike Kwatna although it should be noted that at Kwatna one housepit has been observed at FaSu 10 and two at FaSu 1. Once surface clearing of FeSr 4 had been completed the village ground plan could easily be seen. Houses cluster near the edges of terraces but do not form neat lines along terrace edges. At least three housepits have been partly eroded, probably by river action before the river moved north to its present channel. Other houses may have been completely destroyed by the same river action.

Detailed work was carried out at three housepits and at two smaller pits. All of the pits are dug into a fine sterile alluvial sand. This sand makes up the bulk of the upper part of the terrace deposits. Beneath the surface one encounters rocks in the sand. These are at first small and scattered but become larger and more numerous with increasing depth until at depths of from 50 to 100 centimeters large boulders are to be found. The prevalence of these subsurfaces boulders probably affected the depth to which the pits were originally dug. Typically, the housepits are rectangular in plan. Sometimes the builders preferred to throw backdirt along the sides but not on the ends of their excavations, so that some of the pits now have low ridges only along their sides. The finer backdirt was thrown near the edge of the pit and the rocks or larger boulders were carried or thrown further out resulting, in at least one case, in a line of boulders parallel to the sides of the house and out somewhat from the ridge of backdirt (Fig. 30).

In the sandy matrix housepit floors are not clearly defined. Remnants of the original pit side walls can still be seen in some of the housepits (Fig. 31). Trenching within housepit 4 revealed a floor zone some 15 to 20 centimeters in thickness

characterised by sand darkened by charcoal and other cultural material. In places the sand and cultural material are segregated into distinct lamina. These units are visable sporadically in profile but could not be followed individually in plan excavation as they are irregular and tend to blend with one another. Within the houses cultural deposits seem to begin almost immediately beneath the leaf mat and shallow tangle of surface roots. Identification of their upper limit is made more difficult by an ubiquitous ash deposit apparently from a forest fire which burned over the site area a good many years after its abandonment. At housepit 4 cross trenching and the excavation of a quadrant revealed many rocks in the floor zone as well as on the surface of the sterile subfloor deposits (Fig. 32). Floor features in our housepit 4 excavations include a deep basin shaped central hearth excavated well into sterile soil, two shallow cache pits, a large posthole just away from the central hearth, and a deep basin shaped pit full of charcoal against one end wall of the house which may have served as another hearth.

FeSr 7

This small site, in contrast to site FeSr 4 is typified by surface recognisable midden deposits with darkened soil, fire cracked rock, shell and bone. The dense brush covering the site stands in marked contrast to the surrounding forest. There are no housepits. Two trenches tested the site. In one, 11 two meter squares were excavated in 15 centimeter levels to an average depth of 75 centimeters. The other, a smaller trench was 1 by 5 meters and dug to a depth of 45 centimeters. A visual inspection of the stratigraphy and an analysis of type distributions suggest the presence of a single component at FeSr 7. Artifacts include historic items, particularly copper. Aboriginal artifact types made of stone

and bone are also present. These are listed in Table 12.

Fire cracked rock and thin fire spalls resembling man made flakes were found in quantity throughout our FeSr 7 excavations. In places the volume of fire cracked rock exceeded that of the midden matrix making excavation difficult. Such a quantity of fire cracked rock can hardly be explained as castoffs from cooking fires. It may be that canoes or kerfed boxes were made at this part of the site, since their manufacture requires large numbers of heated rocks to boil water and create steam for the necessary bending and shaping.

A number of low mounds dot the surface of FeSr 7 (Fig. 32). Some fire cracked rock was found on and within the tested mound but the mass of the mound is made up of midden deposits. The inhabitants shored up one edge of one of these mounds with what amounts to a crude stone wall. It is possible that one or more mounds may represent raised central hearths of cedar plank houses which are typical of the few aboriginal cedar plank houses whose remains we have seen on this part of the coast. More likely these mounds are simply refuse accumulations outside of houses. Historic photographs taken in this region commonly show these features, particularly just in front of houses.

The surface appearances as well as the artifacts recovered suggest affinities with the historic occupation of the area. The site appears to span the transition between prehistory and history. Trade goods are numerous but of limited variety while artifacts made in the traditional manner of native materials continue to be produced.

FeSr 11

These petroglyphs are located within the canyon of the Dean River. The long abandoned Indian trail along the Dean River

Table 12. Artifacts recovered from site FeSr 7

Conical copper tinklers	3
Copper rings	2
Copper thimbles	2
Rod armour fragment (copper and wood)	1
Copper wire wound wood	1
Unidentified copper fragments	52
Lockplate, brass	1
Key, brass	1
Iron projectile point	1
Thin glass fragments	4
Gun flint	1
Hammerstone grinders	21
Edge trimmed grinders	30
Abrading stone fragment	1
Miscellaneous ground stone	1
Ochre stained cobble	1
Projectile points, stone	3
Retouched flakes	7
Chopper	1
Pointed bone objects	4
Total	138

on its north side passes directly over the petroglyphs. Modern survey markers have actually obliterated some of them. The site was partly recorded by Harlan I. Smith in 1923. By stripping back the moss and soil that had accumulated over the figures we were able to see more of the panel than had been recorded by Smith (Fig. 33). Pictographs have not been found in the area.

CONCLUSIONS

To summarise, the two housepit villages are of a type not previously recorded on the mid-coast of British Columbia. Their rectangularity suggests that cedar plank houses may once have stood within or around the pits but our preliminary excavations have not enabled us to detail the nature of the superstructure. A few general cultural similarities can be seen between the Kimsquit materials and those from Kwatna some 60 miles to the southwest. But, it is clear that the culture histories of the two regions are not identical. The presence of significant proportions of flaked stone, the absence of "doughnut" stones, and the relative scarcity of adze blades distinguish the Kimsquit collections. The predominant edge trimmed grinders at FeSr 7 are absent at Kwatna.

To venture a preliminary interpretation, the three Kimsquit sites FeSr 4, FeSr 7, and FeSr 1, appear to have been occupied sequentially in the order indicated with only slight overlap in time span. FeSr 1 is fully historical with rather complete domination of the collection by commercially manufactured items. Our small sample indicates that the main occupation of the site was after the mid-nineteenth century. We know that occupation continued into this century. FeSr 7 seems to immediately pre-date FeSr 1.

Traded materials represent about half of the FeSr 7 collection and that only if one counts all of the small bits of copper scattered throughout the midden. The absence of nails suggests fully aboriginal buildings while the presence of quantities of stone tools also denotes strong links with pre-contact times. FeSr 4, the large housepit village seems quite prehistoric save for a single deep atypical house in which two pieces of copper were found near the surface. In the absence of carbon-14 age determinations only these two copper objects serve to link the site to the early historic FeSr 7. The site differs both in architecture and in method of waste disposal from the two later Kimsquit sites.

Space in this report does not permit a discussion of the interesting problem of matching the archaeological sites found in the Kimsquit area with the list of old villages recalled by McIlwraith's informants in the 1920's (McIlwraith 1948:1-22).

A number of observations suggest that the downcutting of the Dean River into delta deposits is a relatively recent event continuing possibly into historic times. This downcutting appears to have affected the three main Indian settlements in the area and may have through time necessitated downstream shifts in the locations of these villages. It is hoped that a detailed discussion of this problem will be possible in a later report. Further work will be undertaken in the area.

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FIG. 30. Boulders in back of the margins of housepit 4, FeSr 4

FIG. 31. Housepit 2, FeSr 4. Traces of the original housepit sidewalls can be seen running between the identification board and the standing figure

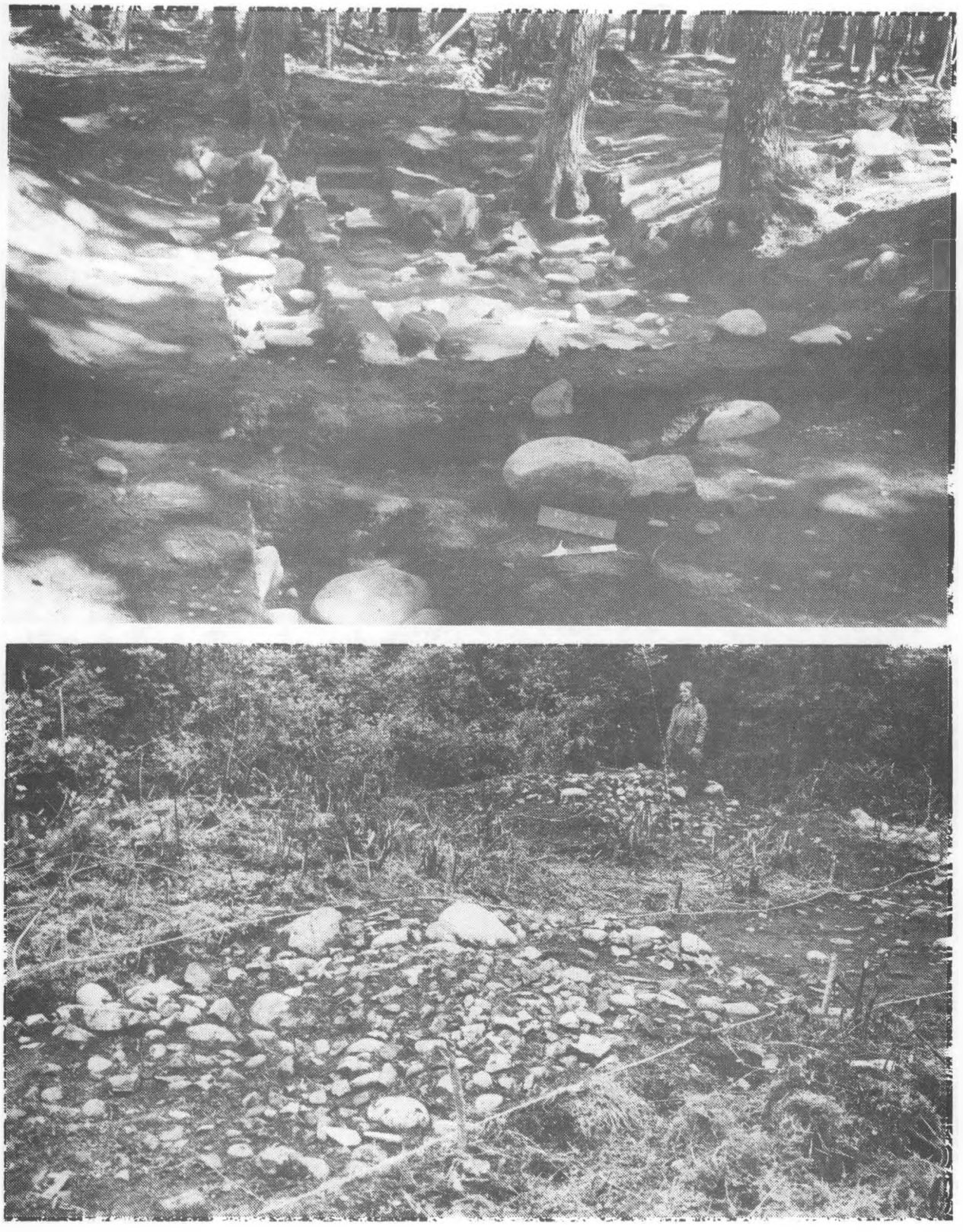

FIG. 32. a, housepit 4, FeSr 4. Cross trenches and excavated quadrant. Note the prevalence of rocks on and within the floor zone. b, mounds of fire cracked rock at FeSr 7. They may once have been just at the outside of a large cedar plank house.

FIG. 33. Petroglyphs in the Dean River Canyon. The old Indian trail along the river on its north bank passes directly over these figures.