

Prehistoric Discoveries in the Foothills of the Himalayas in Nepal 1984

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During geo-archaeological investigations in the Siwaliks (Churias) of Western Nepal, first authentic discoveries of remains of prehistoric man has been made in Nepal. A number of prehistoric sites of early man's settlement as well as a number of smaller localities were found during this survey in the Dang and Deokhuri valleys of Western Nepal. These are the first definite evidences that Nepal was indeed occupied by prehistoric people during the stone age and that early man of a time before the historical period did penetrate into the Nepalese mountains.

It had always been a question of great interest to the archaeologists whether stone age man did in fact live in Nepal. Several attempts have been made in the past to fill this gap of our knowledge about the roots of Nepal's history. R. V. Joshi (1964) investigated the Kathmandu valley for prehistoric remains, but, though his survey yielded no finds he came to the conclusion that it is only a matter of systematic search. N. R. Banerjee and J. L. Sharma of the Dept. of Archaeology of H. M. G. investigated the Narayani River valley in the Nawal Parasi

District (Banerjee 1969). They found a few stone age artefacts near Danda which seem to have been derived from river deposits. Most of these artefacts, however, seem to be naturally worked river cobbles rather than man-made artefacts. The merit of this investigation however is that it did make a first beginning in investigating Nepal's prehistoric past and that it focused the attention for prehistoric research to the Terai and the Himalayan foothills.

It was therefore with great encouragement from the Dept. of Archaeology and particularly Mr. J. L. Sharma, the acting Director General, that this survey was begun a year ago and I want to thank at this place particularly Mr. Sharma for his assistance and interest.

In the year 1969 Banerjee and Sharma (1969) also described some neolithic polished stone axes from Nepal, which had been found at various places by chance, amongst which there was one long axe found by Dr. R. N. Pandey in the Dang valley near Tulsipur on the surface along a stream. This raised the question whether these tools which appeared to be neolithic, were

authentic neolithic artefacts from a people who had lived in Nepal and made these tools in Nepal or whether they had been imported at a much later time from Tibet and brought in by migrants and used as shaligrams, like the ammonites from Muktinath.

Some of these neoliths however, seem to have come from original Nepalese environment. J. L. Sharma describes (1983) all the polished axes and celts which so far had been found in Nepal, and quite a number of them have come from the Charikot area. It would therefore be worthwhile to investigate this area in more detail and see whether such tools could be found there in stratigraphic context.

Some preliminary neolithic survey had been carried out by the late Mme. Laming-Emperaire in the Kathmandu valley but with negative results. After my findings in the Dang-Deokhuri valleys however, I am quite convinced that neolithic man must have occupied also the Kathmandu valley and that sites of neolithic man should be found on the margin of the basin, in similar context as they have been found in the Kashmir valley in India.

One of my aims therefore was, when I began work in Nepal a year ago, to see whether prehistoric man did exist in Nepal or whether the Himalayan valleys in Nepal were only occupied rather recently in historic times.

Another aim of my work was to study the geology and stratigraphy of the Siwalik deposits in Nepal. These had yielded in other parts of the Himalayan foothills, in India and Pakistan a rich fauna with Ramapithecus. First palaeontological collections in the Siwaliks have been made by an American team (West et al. 1978) in Western

Nepal. They also found the first evidence of the presence of Ramapithecus in the Nepal Siwaliks: an upper left molar found along the Tinau Khola exposures north of Butwal (Munthe et al. 1983). It was therefore thought important to build up a stratigraphical base for the Nepal Siwaliks for future detailed palaeontological and palaeoenvironmental research and establish the palaeoenvironmental background of the earliest hominoids in Nepal.

I began fieldwork in Western Nepal last year in Jan./Feb. '84 and November and continued this year from January to April 1985. The work concentrated mainly around the stratigraphy and geology of the Siwaliks south of the Deokhuri valley between Nepalganj and Shivpur. The entire sequence of the Siwalik deposits between Shivpur and the Rangsing Khola, which is extremely well exposed due to the fresh cuttings of the construction of the road to Nepalganj, was examined, measured and searched for plant and vertebrate fossils and a first detailed stratigraphic column with all details was established for this area. It forms the base for the future research in the Siwaliks by the writer. A similar study was carried out in the Tapta-kund area between the Deokhuri valley and Nepalganj and on the road from the Terai to Surkhet, but in less detail. Work still continues. The results of this work is, however, not the subject of this article and will be described elsewhere.

For prehistoric investigations, the Kathmandu valley, the Chitwan area along the Narayani river and the Rapti and Babai rivers in the Dang were chosen.

The Kathmandu valley and the Chitwan area so far proved to be sterile, though it is felt that it is only a matter of continued search in the Nepal Valley to come across sites.

The topmost part of the Kathmandu valley sediments are, however, very disturbed due to the continued tilling and cutting of the rice and wheat terraces and any possible archaeological sites may be heavily disturbed. On the other hand the terraces of the Narayani valley in the Chitwan area along the river course itself are very young Holocene deposits which makes it improbable to find any thing older than Holocene.

My search therefore concentrated on the older terrace sequence at the foot of the Siwaliks at the outer edge of the broad Chitwan valley, with terrace heights of 25 and 45 m. These terraces are remnants of colluvial and alluvial fan deposits along the foot of the Himalayas of post-Siwalik age. They seemed to me of interest and importance for the search of early man's remains. So far they have not yielded anything.

But similar deposits were encountered along the foot of the mountains in the Dang and Deokhuri Duns. They consist of partly heavily dissected yellow silty deposits of colluvial to alluvial character, which interfinger further, riverwards with the purely alluvial, young deposits of the river. These yellow fine sandy and silty sediments seem to have been deposited by many small gullies and lateral tributaries, which have brought the fine colluvial material of the weathered Siwalik sand and mudstones down to the valley. On these fan deposits as well as within these deposits the archaeological material has been found between the river and the hills. Man must have lived here on the margin of the Dun valleys, where they could overlook the valley from a slightly elevated position.

The preliminary survey of an area of about 25 kilometer in a west-east direction yielded 23 localities in the Dang valley and

3 in the Deokhuri valley.

Only sample collections were made, but most of the material was left in the field for further study, so as not to disturb the archaeological evidence in the field. Most of the localities are small and yielded little surface material. But it was the fact, that definitely fashioned stone artefacts were found in geological context, which was new and interesting. A few of the localities, however, are definite sites and two of them, Lamahi and Kurepani, are site complexes. All the sites and localities are connected with the yellow silty deposits along the foothills. But how and in what stratigraphical and chronological order can not be said yet, and only the future work will solve these questions. The archaeological materials from these localities seem to point not only to one cultural affinity but to several.

A number of localities seem to have affinities to a microlithic culture. The first two site complexes found, belong to this cultural affinity: Lamahi in the Deokhuri valley and Chaupatta in the Dang valley. The Lamahi sites show a variety of small flakes of chert, quartz and quartzite, amongst which a well retouched lunate is of particular interest as well as a few other retouched pieces (Fig. 1 a) and some discoidal cores (Fig. 1 b). But there are also some larger quartzite flakes (Fig. 1 c), and a large core of quartzite (Fig. 1 d). The Chaupatta site complex is somehow similar but has more macro-type artefacts and less microlithic type artefacts. A third site, Daingaon in the Dang valley, is very rich in artefacts and shows a great variety of material: various chert varieties, quartz, crystal quartz, quartzite, indurated shale and tuff.

To what period these sites belong and of what age they are can not yet be said, but fur-

ther detailed field studies will clarify these questions. It is however, quite apparent that people, who have fashioned very small tools from a variety of chert, quartz and quartzite occupied the Dang-Deokhuri valleys.

At two other localities, Bhitabang and Basantapur, a small polished stone celt was found (Fig. 2 a). One was found on the silt surface and was associated with a few quartzite flakes, which may have however, nothing to do with the celt. It is a lovely, but broken piece with a sharp, splayed, rounded edge, made on a banded indurated shale (Fig. 2 b). And another celt was found *in situ* in the yellow silt, associated with some very weathered, light red potsherds (Fig. 2 c), which apparently also weathered out from the silt and were found directly in the adjoining small gullies dissecting the silt. Other archaeological material in the form of small chert and quartzite flakes were found in the vicinity on the surface. A lovely unretouched blade on indurated shale was found nearly on the surface, together with a few chert and quartz flakes (Fig. 3 a). They too, seem to have been derived from the silt. But in what connection they are with the celt, and from what level they have come is yet not sure.

These are very exciting finds and they will certainly throw light on the puzzling question of the origin and the archaeological provenance of the polished stone celts which have been found previously in Nepal, disconnected with any other archaeological material.

Another interesting tool type has been found isolatedly on the surface at several places (only two have been taken). These are grinding stones on flat cobbles of quartzite (Fig. 3 b), which show one or two flattened edges by grinding and a polished surface. They are rectangular and one of them shows a very shallow rill on the upper surface (similar to the rills of

the African bead-rounding stones, yet not so deep). The local Taru people, asked whether they still use such grinding-stones had never seen such stories.

The other localities show mainly artefacts of macrolithic nature, made of various kinds of quartzite (Fig. 4 a, b). They consist of flakes with small, often prepared platforms but more often with cortex platforms, and with pronounced step flaking at the edge of the platform on the dorsal face, so as to flatten the flake, it seems.

The most interesting and the most dominant artefact type is a cobble tool which had one unifacial, straight edge which is formed by steep primary, secondary and step flakes, taken off from a flat cortex plane of the cobble. This type of unifacial chopper or corescraper (Fig. 5 a) is found almost at every locality. It is made from well-chosen quartzite cobbles which have several natural flat surfaces. The edge is steeper than is usual with choppers, almost 90°, and the tool resembles more a corescraper (Fig. 5 b).

From the surface evidence this artefact type is associated with the abundant quartzite flakes which are found at all the localities. They certainly belong together: the dorsal face of the flakes show the same technique and workmanship as the corescrapers and have steep step flaking at the edge of the platform and often have cortex platforms (Fig. 4 a). They seem to have been taken off the edge of the corescrapers. The question therefore arises whether the chopper/corescrapers are in fact only cores or whether the flakes constitute resharpening flakes of the corescrapers. The quartzite flakes do not have any retouch and from their appearance seem to have not been used. Only further studies can solve these interesting questions.

At one site, however, at Gidhniya in the Tui Khola valley, it seems quite evident that the

chopper/corescraper is a definite tool type, and not a core. This locality is a well demarcated occupation site on top of a promontory above the valley. The surface is covered by fluvial cobbles and many of them are worked. There are flakes and chopper/corescrapers, and cores and waste pieces, all of quartzite. Here, the unifacial, steep-edged chopper or corescraper (Fig. 5a) is the dominant artefact type and from the preliminary study of the site and the artefact assemblage it seems that this site can certainly be placed into the palaeolithic period. But to what time and to what people is again an open question. Interesting at this site are also a number of very small steep-edged chopper/corescrapers (Fig. 6a) showing the same features of a steep edge against a flat cortex surface as the large tools, but with sizes of only 45-47 mm.

At Daingaon an interesting isolated tool was found which resembles more than the others a Soanian unifacial chopper (Fig. 6b, c). It was found within a subrecent, reworked cobble gravel of the Kholra and is covered with a lime crust. It has a sharp edge of 70° in comparison to the almost 90° angles of the corescrapers, but otherwise is quite similarly fashioned on a quartzite cobble with the edge formed from a flat cortex surface of the cobble.

Another very intriguing tool was found, also isolatedly, but not *in situ*, near Ranigora in a gully, which had cut its bed into alluvial silts. It is a handaxe-like tool, not fresh, but rounded and rolled. The proximal part is broken away and exciting distal part is well worked into a handaxe-like point. A very curious, unexpected tool!

Another interesting feature in this whole area is that a very curious, soft tuffaceous material was used for artefacts, which in fact does not seem to be suitable at all for any work. It is a very soft, very finely

banded tuffaceous white rock, the origin of which could not yet be verified. If it is really a volcanic rock and derives from the Siwaliks, then this would be of extreme interest for the study of the Siwaliks.

Of this material a number of unifacial chopper/corescrapers were made as well as flakes. They are found at all sites with the small artefacts, that means at Kurepani and Lamahi and Arjun Kholra, but also, it seems in connection with the large quartzite flakes. For what purpose did they use this soft material? Especially what was the purpose of the unifacial choppers of this soft unsuitable material?

It is quite apparent from the discovered sites, that prehistoric people who have fashioned a variety of different stone tools have occupied the Dang and Deokhuri valleys and have penetrated into these Himalayan valleys via the heavily forested Siwalik mountains.

It is quiet evident from all these findings that the newly found archaeological material of the Dang and Deokhuri valleys is unexpectedly varied in its artefact types and in the raw material used and seems to belong to several cultural units. Nothing about its origin and the Chronological position within the known cultural sequences elsewhere can be said at the moment. But this makes these findings the more interesting and pose an abundance of challenging questions which to solve will be the purpose of the further research.

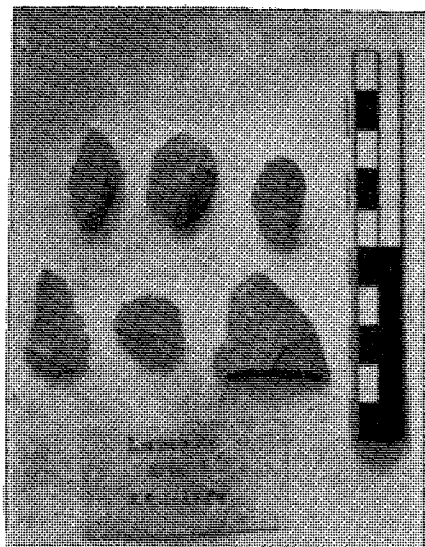
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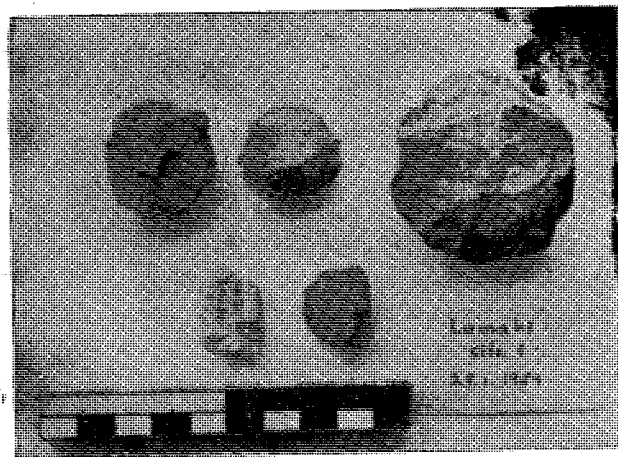
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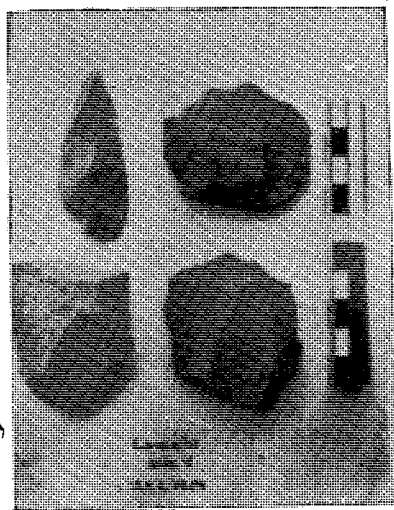
Fig. 1



a) A lunate and some retouched flak from Lamahi.



b) Discoidal core and two small , microlithic cores from Lamahi.



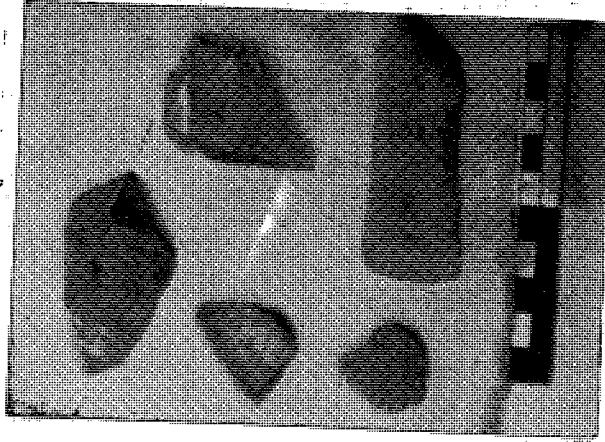
c) Point and flakes made of quartzite from Lamahi.



d) Large core of quartzite from Lamahi.

Fig 2

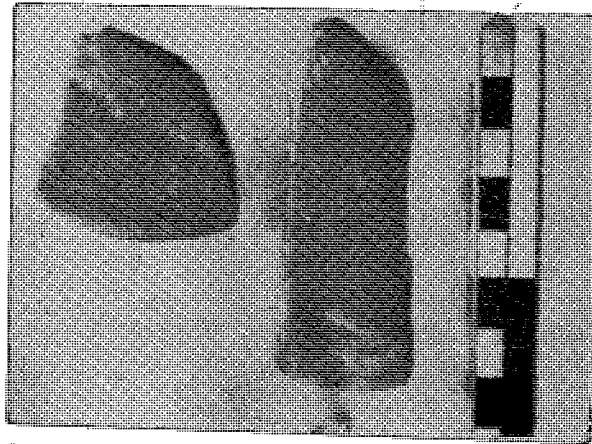
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c) The Basantapur celt, a few pots-herds and a quartzite flake.



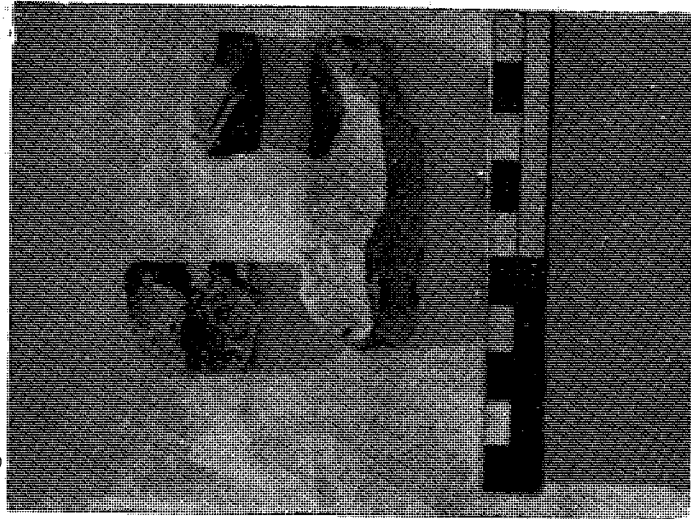
b) The celt from Bhitabang.



a) The two celts from Basantapur and Bhitabang.

Fig. 3

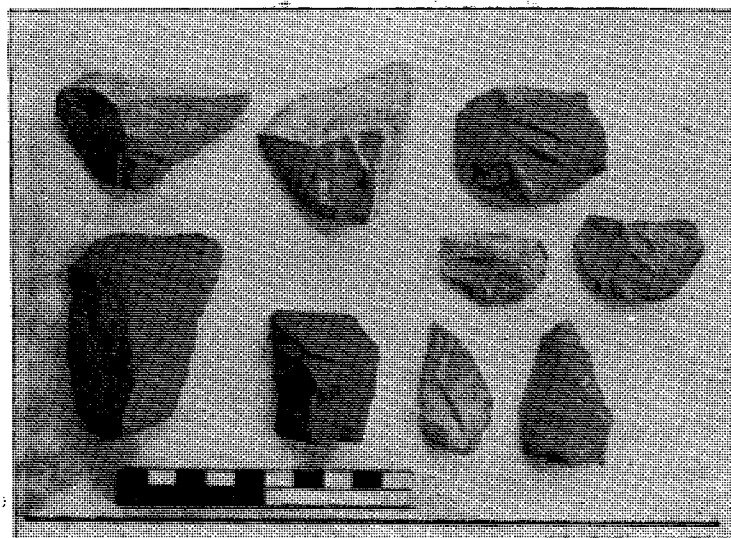
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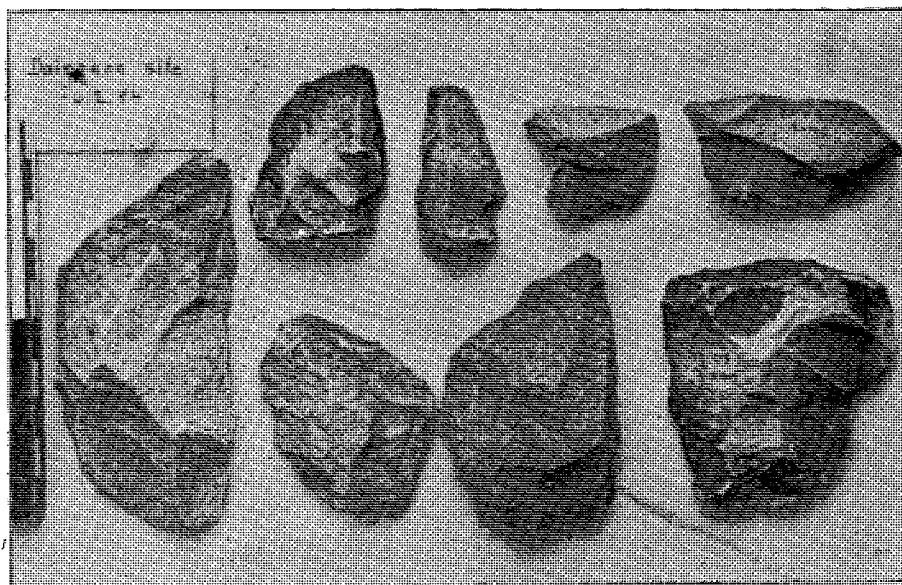
a) A blade and two quartzite flakes from Basantapur.



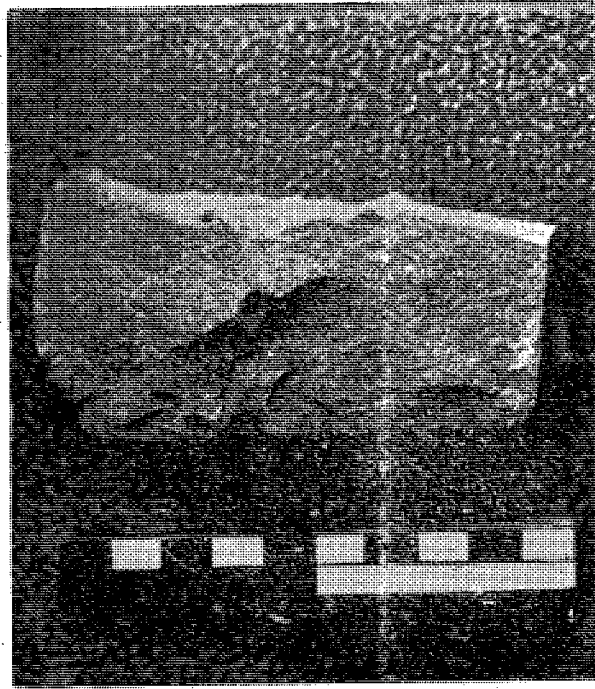
b) A grindingstone on a flat cobble with a quartzite flake.



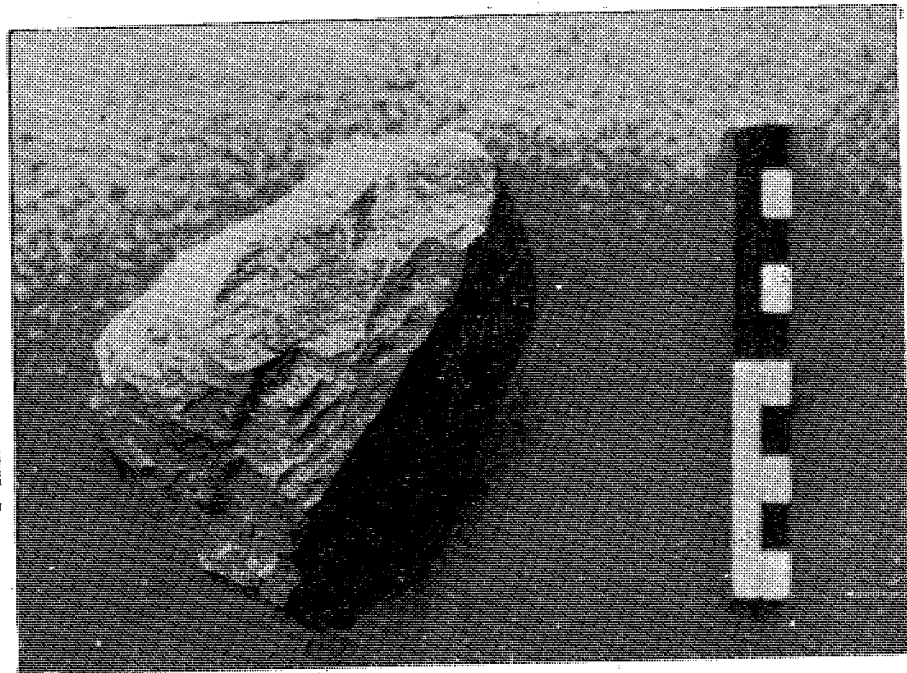
a) Quartzite flakes from various sites.



b) Flakes of quartzite from Dhaingacn.

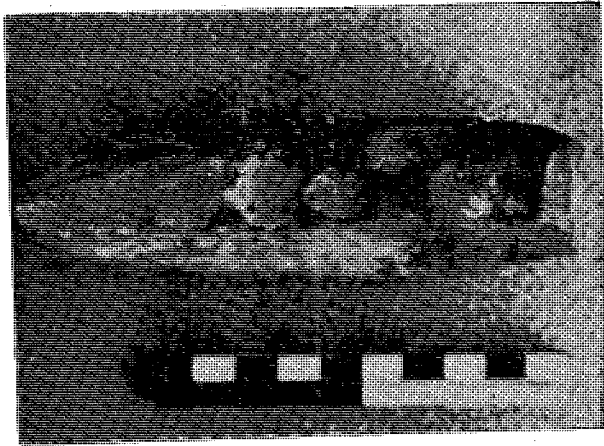


a) An elongate corescraper made on quartzite, from a cobble with a flat surface.

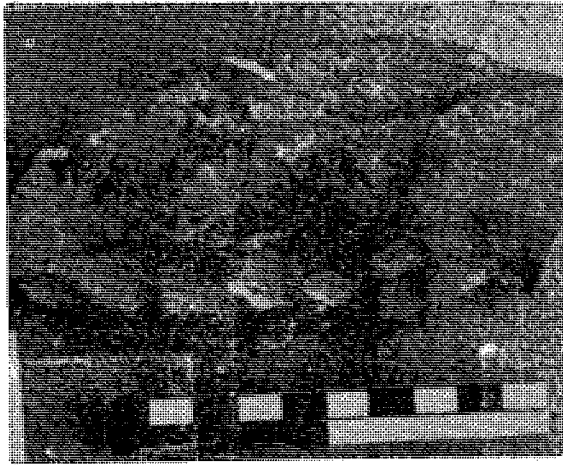


b) A round corescraper made on a round quartzite cobble, with steep stepflaking from a flat surface of the cobble, from Darna.

Fig. 6



c) The unifacial chopper from Dhaingoan.



b) The unifacial chopper from Dhaingoan.



a) A number of very small corescrapers from the Tui valley.