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ADZES OF NELSON ARGILLITE
FROM THE FAR NORTH OF NEW ZEALAND -
THE AUCKLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION

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The most widely distributed rock materials in prehistoric New Zealand were obsidian from the northern part of the North Island, jade from the South Island's West Coast and inland Otago, and metasomatised argillite from the Nelson district. Of these, Nelson metasomatised argillite was the supreme adze-making stone of the early period. Archaeologists have long been aware of the New Zealand-wide distribution of adzes made of Nelson argillite, and this paper describes, and draws some conclusions from, the material in the Auckland Museum provenanced to the far north of the North Island. This is the northernmost limit of the distribution, some 6-800 km from the source area (Fig. 1).

Thirty-six adzes or adze pieces in the Auckland Museum collection have been identified as being made of Nelson metasomatised argillite. Identifications have been made in hand specimen only. Some items are unequivocally of Nelson argillite, and can even be sourced to a particular quarry because of their very distinctive character, but other identifications are more tentative. Some of the smaller adzes have a high degree of overall polish which masks the original character of the rock and makes identification difficult. Provenance, museum catalogue number, and donor information is given in Table 1 (pg 146).

Provenance of the adzes comes from the museum catalogue cards. This is sometimes fairly specific (e.g. "Karikari Bay", or "Parakerake, Doubtless Bay"), but it is usually of a much more general nature. The seven items labelled "North Cape" or "North Cape area" may come from anywhere in the northern peninsula which often goes by that general name. Similarly "Ninety-mile Beach", "Parengarenga", "Houhora" and the other given locations are far from specific. For present purposes, the collection will be treated as one.

Metasomatised argillite in the collection varies from fine-grained black rock, almost certainly from the Mt Ears source on D'Urville Island, and the pale grey, black-veined stone from Ohana on D'Urville Island, to less distinctive dark and light grey and green-grey material (see Walls 1974).

The most striking aspect of the collection is the two very marked typological groups into which the 36 items fall. Eleven are large adzes (or pieces) of characteristically early or

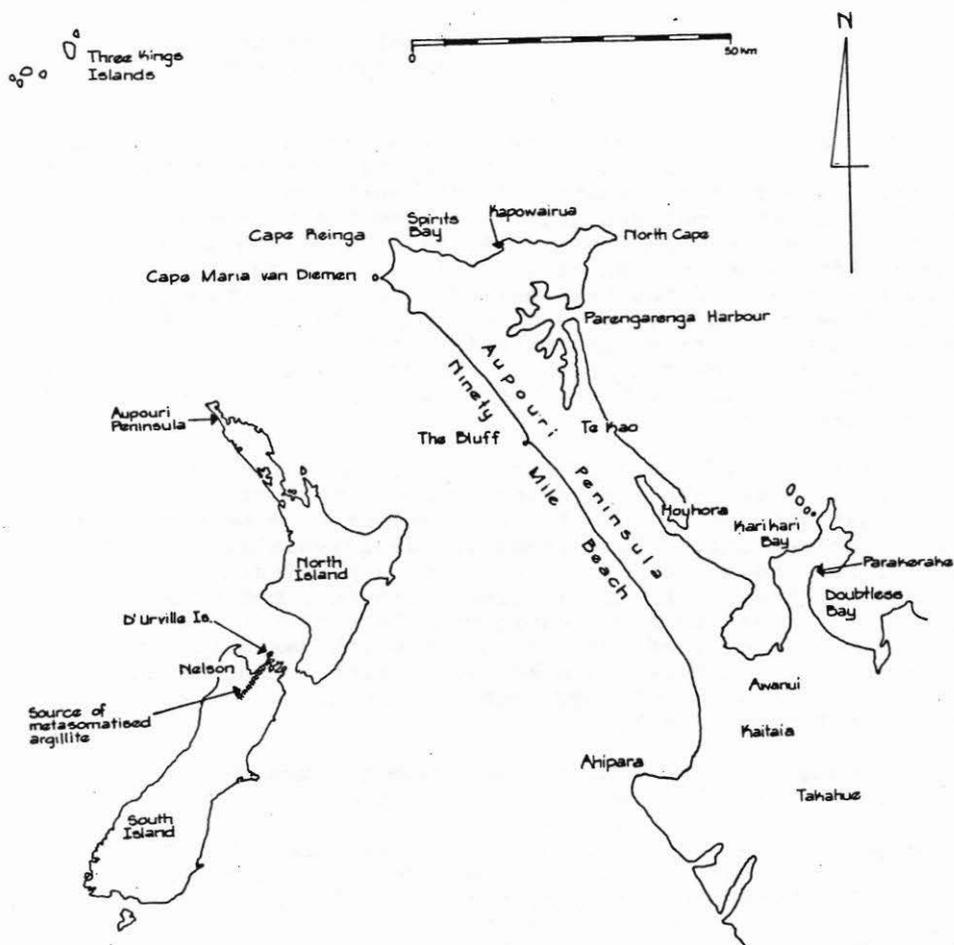


Figure 1. Map of Aupouri Peninsula showing location of adze finds. Inset shows Nelson mineral belt source of metasomatised argillite.

'archaic' forms including Duff (1956:161-176) Types 1A, 2A, and 3. The remainder are small adzes of rounded rectangular cross-section, without grip (Duff Type 2B), typically of late or 'classic Maori' form.

Adzes of early form

Adzes of characteristically early forms are mostly of rectangular cross-section. Two triangular cross-section adzes include a very well-finished example of Duff's (1956:171-2) Type 3B.

Figure 2A depicts what is perhaps the finest adze of the collection, a 335 mm long adze of highly polished black argillite probably from the Mt Ears source (catalogue number 16211.1). Flake scars and hammer-dressing at the angled butt end serve as a grip for lashing. Of similar stone is catalogue number 47230, located to Te Hapua (Fig. 2B). This is a massive adze of deep, subtriangular cross-section. The length is 305 mm.

Figure 2E shows the re-used blade end of a broken adze from Te Kao (17459.3). From its sand-blasted appearance this has clearly been recovered from a beach or dunes. The stone is black argillite, probably from Mt Ears. The original adze might have been 300 mm long; the broken section has been reduced along the sides by flaking and hammer-dressing for re-hafting. Figure 2D shows the butt end of another adze of sharply angled rectangular cross-section (4219.4). Again, the original may have been ca. 300 mm in length. A fragment of yet another rectangular cross-sectioned adze (Type 1A or 2A) in pale grey argillite is not illustrated (60008).

Two more items of rectangular form are both of black-veined grey material from the Ohana quarry at the south end of D'Urville Island. From North Head, Parengarenga Harbour, comes a massive highly polished adze with the butt end rounded on the front corners by hammer-dressing to facilitate hafting (16213, Fig. 3A). The butt part of another adze of Ohana stone is located to Te Kao (26488.5, Fig. 2C). The 60 mm width of the end of this butt fragment indicates that the adze may have been the largest of all the rectangular cross-sectioned adzes from the far north in the Museum's collection.

Figure 3D illustrates the only unequivocal Duff Type 1A adze in the collection (37275). This adze is superbly crafted in black argillite from the Mt Ears source on D'Urville Island. The bevel and front are completely and highly polished and the sides are polished over skilful flaking. On the slightly concave back haft polish is visible over flake scars and hammer-dressing. The reduced butt is finely hammer-dressed all over. Very similar is the adze shown in Fig. 3E (17459.2), except that this adze is without a distinctively reduced butt. It is slightly heavier than the previous adze and is highly polished all over except where flake scars and hammer-dressing are visible at the butt end. The sand blasted surface shows that this adze has been recovered from a beach or dunes,

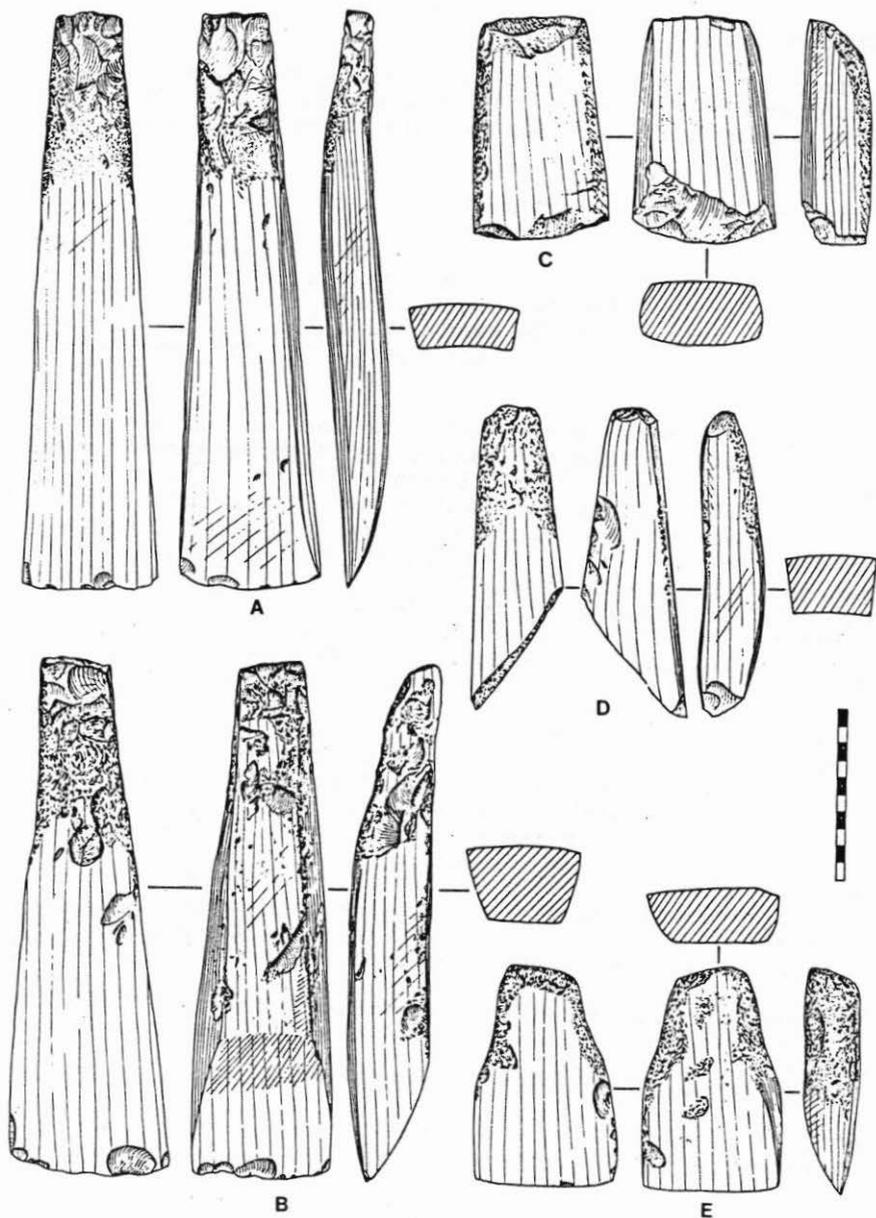


Figure 2. Adzes and adze pieces of early form: A. 16211.1;
 B. 47230; C. 26488.5; D. 4219.4; E. 17459.3.
 Scale in centimetres.

possibly from the same place as 17459.3 (above). The stone is black Mt Ears argillite.

Two adzes in the collection belong to Duff's Type 3. Figure 3B depicts a superbly shaped and finished adze, 195 mm long, rendered in black Mt Ears argillite (16211.2), the only one in the collection with the characteristic white cortex of Mt Ears stone on the butt. The sides of the butt end have been slightly reduced to facilitate hafting. The adze is highly polished front, back, and sides, with flake scars and hammer-dressing visible down the sides. The second Type 3 is a smaller adze (140 mm long) from Parakerake on the northern shore of Doubtless Bay (9820, Fig. 3C), made of grey argillite. Again the butt end has been reduced along the sides for hafting. Unlike the triangular cross-sectioned 16211.2, this adze has a broad back to give a sub-triangular cross-section. It is well-finished, with a high degree of overall polish except where lashing requires the grip of flake scars or hammer-dressing.

Adzes of late form

Twenty-five small adzes of characteristically late form fall into two groups: those of rectangular, and those of round, cross-section. The greater number are of rectangular cross-section, falling into Duff's (1956:163-168) catch-all Type 2B.

Figures 4 and 5 illustrate a variety of small Type 2B adzes. All are highly polished overall and many display haft polish on the butt end as well. Figure 4B shows an adze from Cape Maria van Diemen (33233) at the upper end of the size range for this group of adzes. The length is 110 mm and the maximum width 55 mm. The stone is a very pale grey argillite. At the small end of the size range is a Kapowairua, Spirits Bay, adze (6514, Fig. 4J) of dark grey stone measuring 43 x 35 mm.

Of special interest are two adzes localised to the Three Kings Islands. The adze shown in Figure 4C comes from the tiny islet of West King (31097). This item is unusual in the marked reduction down both sides and the lack of haft polish at the butt end, which together suggest it was hafted in a way different to most other small adzes of the group. The second Three Kings adze is a small highly polished Type 2B without a distinguishing feature (6726, Fig. 4D). Both Three Kings adzes are made of light grey stone.

Figure 5 illustrates variation in Type 2B form. These adzes show a marked reduction in width towards the butt - mostly becoming quite round in cross-section towards that end. Figure 5E depicts a small, well-finished adze (60006) of Mt

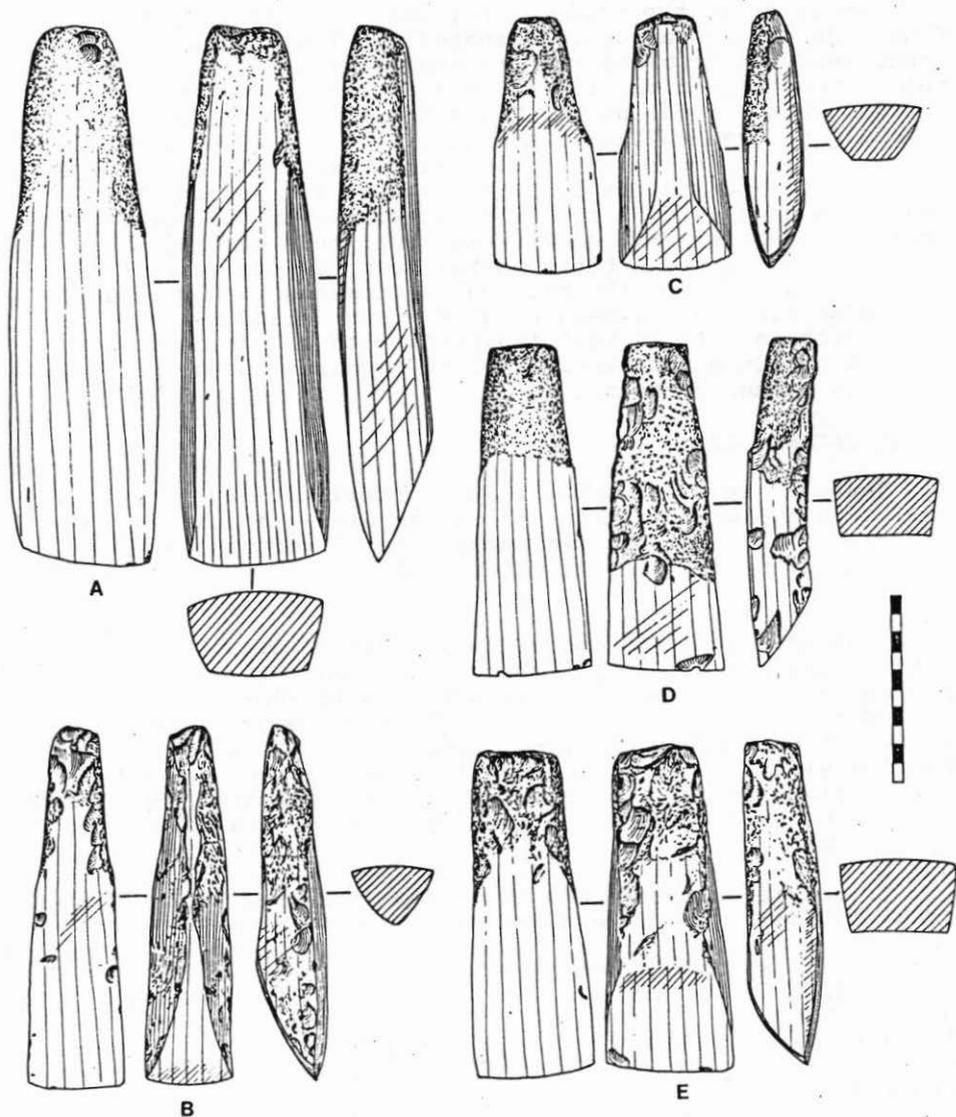


Figure 3. Adzes of early form: A. 16213; B. 16211.2; C. 9820; D. 37275; E. 17459.2. Scale in centimetres.

Ears stone which is quite round for the last 25 mm of its length. A Parengarenga adze of similar form (not shown) is also made of black Mt Ears raw material (17320). A bigger item from Cape Maria van Diemen (16209.2, Fig. 5A) is also rounded and reduced in width towards the butt. It is 113 mm long and made of pale grey-green argillite.

Figures 5B (50984) and 5C (36268) illustrate adzes which are reduced and somewhat rounded towards the butt in contrast to the rectangular shape of the more typical Type 2B. The item in Figure 5D has been reworked from the broken blade of a larger adze (19939.3).

Five of the group of 25 small adzes of late form are of Mt Ears stone; one is of the veined Ohana material.

Discussion

Whatever the actual mechanism - trade, exchange, or social obligation - the 36 adzes of Nelson argillite in the Auckland Museum provenanced to the far north of New Zealand show that there was considerable movement northwards of the adze making stone. Adzes of metasomatised argillite even reached the Three Kings Islands 60 km north-west of Cape Reinga.

The strong presence of archaic types shows that at least some of the movement of material took place in the early period. It can be argued that these early adzes were crafted in the Nelson region as they are very similar to Nelson argillite adzes found elsewhere and the special qualities of the stone probably required particular skills for successful adze manufacture. Also, such long distance movement would best be carried out with finished products rather than large blocks of stone, a high proportion of which would be waste in the adze manufacture process. Nor has such waste been found in the far north or, indeed, outside the northern South island.

Outstanding among the early items are those made of Mt Ears stone. The rectangular cross-sectioned adzes 37275 (Fig. 3D) and 17459.2 (Fig. 3E) and the triangular 16211.2 (Fig. 3B) are certainly of Mt Ears stone, while 16211.1 (Fig. 2A), 47230 (Fig. 2B), 4219.4 (Fig. 2D) and 17459.3 (Fig. 2E) probably originate from that source. The importance of Mt Ears argillite among early adzes in the collection is added confirmation of the outstanding quality of the stone, and its early exploitation.

From the Ohana source come 16212 (Fig. 3A), and 26488.5 (Fig. 2C). The Ohana source is at sea level close to the southern tip of D'Urville island. Ohana material varies somewhat in quality although the best is equal to the finest metasomatised argillite found elsewhere. Limited availability

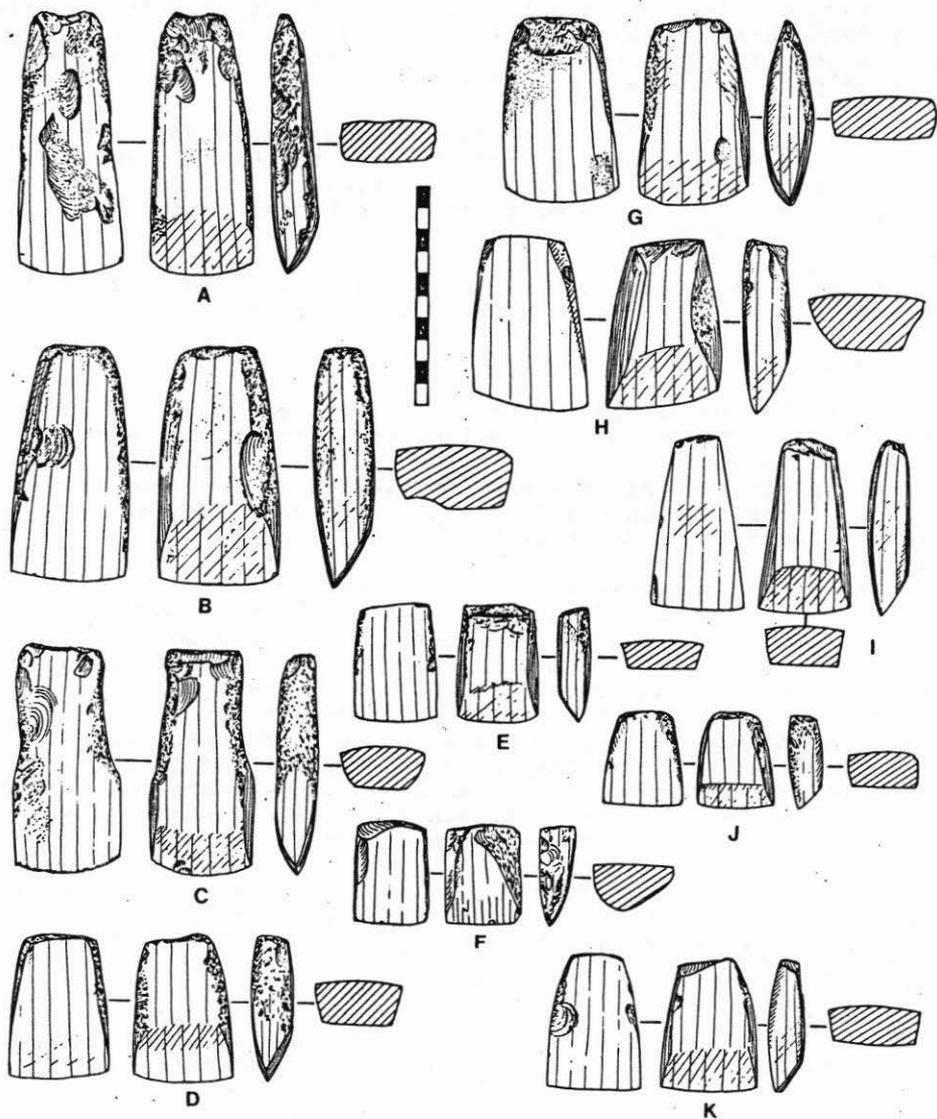


Figure 4. Small adzes of late form: A. 33204; B. 33233; C. 31097; D. 6726; E. 3740; F. 16519.6; G. 43334; H. 16231.5; I. 33798.3; J. 6514; K. 37270. Scale in centimetres.

of Ohana stone at the quarry source has doubtless caused the material to be overshadowed in sheer quantity by adzes of Mt Ears argillite which is available in abundance, outcropping over several hundred acres from the summit of Mt Ears to the sea.

In the group of 25 small and probably late adzes, five are of black Mt Ears stone and only one is of Ohana material. While the sample is small, it does suggest that the two major D'Urville Island sources were exploited early in the history of the region's metasomatised argillite quarries, and that other sources, including those on the mainland, later became more important. This has some confirmation from the Tahunanui (Nelson) adze manufactory site where Don Millar (1971:162-3, 170) notes a strong presence of Ohana (light grey with black veining) stone in the early levels giving way later to more local sources of supply. He concludes that discovery and exploitation of the metasomatised argillite quarries of the region may have commenced at the north-eastern end of the Nelson mineral belt (D'Urville Island) and proceeded south-west to the less easily accessible sources in the mountains east and south-east of Tasman Bay.

A problem in any discussion such as this is the blurred edges of the 'archaic' and 'classic Maori' adze assemblages. Without detailed archaeological information we cannot be certain that the characteristically early or late adzes described here are, in fact, early and late in a particular historical sequence. That they are is, nonetheless, a useful working hypothesis. Despite the caution, therefore, the conclusion may be drawn from material presented here that an important part of early and late adze assemblages in the far north of New Zealand was provided by adzes of Nelson argillite. Thus Davidson's (1984:199) cautious statement on the importance of Nelson argillite adzes in the north may be revised.

A possibility arises that the small adzes of late form result from reworked or broken adzes of early form. The preponderance of D'Urville Island stone among the early material, however, argues against this. If the late adzes were simply reworked older material then the same high proportion of D'Urville Island stone might be expected in the late as in the early group. Instead there is less D'Urville Island material among adzes of late form in the admittedly small collection. Thus it is likely there was a continued movement of metasomatised argillite from the Nelson region to the far north throughout the early and late periods. Despite changing adze styles which were increasingly catered for by other, more local, stone resources Nelson argillite seems to have maintained a strong popularity. Whether this was simply a result of the inherent qualities of the stone, or whether it

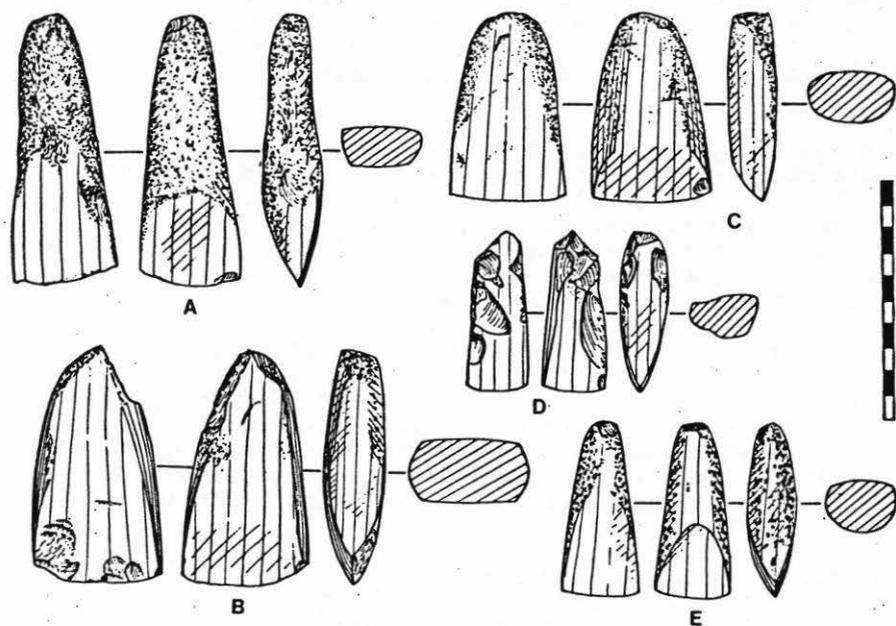


Figure 5. Small adzes of late form: A. 16209.2; B. 50984; C. 36268; D. 19939.3; E. 60006. Scale in centimetres.

was because of the persistence of social and political structures with their attendant channels of communication is just one area for future enquiry.

Acknowledgements

The foremost acknowledgement I owe in putting together this brief account is to Joan Lawrence for her drawings of the adzes. I am also indebted to Anne Walker for the map, and to Kathy Prickett and Dante Bonica for their informed judgement in sorting out the adzes of Nelson argillite in the Auckland Museum collection.

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TABLE 1

Provenance, catalogue number, and donor of Nelson metasomatised argillite adzes from the far north held in the Auckland Museum.

Provenance	Cat.No.	Donor	Figure
Ahipara	50984	Pur. Darien Neil	5B
"	50994	"	
Awanui	4786.2		
Cape Maria van Diemen	16209.2	Vaile Collection	5A
"	33204		4A
"	33233		4B
Houhora	60006	Pur. Darien Neil	5E
"	60008	"	
Kaingawa, Awanui	17329	Lincoln Frost	
Kaitaia	3740	E. Foley	4E
Kapowairua/Takapaukura Bay			
	6514	Vaile Collection	4J
Karetu	4219.4	Hira Henare Keipa	2D
Karikari Bay	33798.3	Gilbert Small	4I
Kauenga, Parengarenga	40857	A.W. Watt	
Ninety-mile Beach	19939.2	H.B. & R.B. Matthews	
"	19939.3	"	5D
North Cape	16211.1	Vaile Collection	2A
"	16211.2	"	3B
"	16231.5	Pur. A.R. Crane	4H
"	16231.6	"	
"	16231.8	"	
"	21453	H. Matthews	
"	37275	Vaile Collection	3D
Parakerake, Doubtless Bay			
	9820	H.W. McCulty	3C
Parengarenga	16519.6	Hallyburton Johnstone	4F
"	17320	Murray	
Parengarenga North Head	16213	Vaile Collection	3A
Takahue	37270	"	4K
Te Hapua	47230	Willis Coll. (pur.)	2B
Te Kao	26488.5	T. Jary	2C
Te Kao/The Bluff	17459.2	Keepa Wiki	3E
"	17459.3	"	2E
Te Kopu	36268	Valerie Bull	5C
Three Kings Islands	6726	W. Tounson	4D
Three Kings (West King)	31097	M. Earle Johnson	4C
Waikuku	43334	Vaile Collection	4G