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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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ORNAMENTS FROM TASMAN BAY

J. Y. Walls

This is a brief description of recently recovered Maori ornaments from sites on D'Urville Island and the Nelson Boulder Bank. All are in the Nelson Provincial Museum. Unlike tools, such as adzes and drill points, which were locally manufactured for trade in their thousands, ornaments were highly personal objects. There is no site in this region where there is evidence of their wholesale crafting. However, at the Glen on the northern end of the Nelson Boulder Bank, serpentine ornaments in various stages of completion form a significant part of the artifacts recovered from this early site. Millar (1971) commented on the lack of ornaments at Tahunanui (S20/2) and a similar gap seems to exist in the material from Rotokura or Cable Bay (S14/1). Otherwise these three sites are culturally closely related. Collectors such as Knapp and Soper accumulated some unusual and unique pieces from the Nelson area which have been widely illustrated, but apart from general locality little else is known about them. A close study of known material may show the development of a distinctive art form in and around Tasman Bay.

A talc figurine, 82 mm high and 12 to 14 mm thick, was found near Patuki, D'Urville Island, in January 1968 by J. R. Eyles. The stone is very pale green talc which would have been found locally in serpentine deposits. The figure is carved in profile with hand under chin. Buttock and leg have incised carving based on a spiral design. Association with an amulet made from human jaw bone suggests a late date for the site (S5, 6/49) which has been virtually obliterated by sea erosion.

Drawing No. 1

Two flat pebble amulets of serpentine from The Glen at the North end of the Nelson Boulder Bank. The right-hand one, which is ground on the back only, is a pale green to buff natural pebble. The other, which is buff to brown, has been ground on both sides and has been generally shaped to match its partner. They are 28 mm high and 3 mm thick. They were found together during a salvage dig by Michael Hurst and myself for the Nelson Provincial Museum during 1973. A full report on this site, S14/20, is in preparation.

The nature of the site material indicates periodic transitory occupation sometime between 1300 and 1500 A.D. and is of the late Archaic cultural period. It is interesting to speculate as to how these two amulets were worn. Perhaps as a pair on the breast or wrist. Or singly as ear pendants.

Drawing No. 2

A serpentine disc ornament unfinished, found during the same excavation at The Glen. The disc is 65 mm high and 5 mm thick at the top and centre, tapering to a fine edge except along the top where no doubt suspension holes were to be bored. It had been left underneath the awl-shaped piece of schist which was probably being used to grind it. The serpentine is black and in its present state is dull although full ground on both sides. Oiled and worn around the neck it would have made a handsome ornament possibly notched around the curve. H. D. Skinner figures a similar one from Motueka in dark argillite (which could be of serpentine on recent petrological knowledge).

Drawing No. 3

A seal-form amulet probably of sperm whale jaw bone. Found by the author at Skull Bay, D'Urville Island, in January 1975, eroding out of a consolidated sand and clay grit. The head (at the bottom), which was the only part exposed, had one half flaked off by weathering so is rounded now on one side only. Details of the "eyes" have gone but they are suggested by small notches at the side of the head. Artifacts from Skull Bay (S5, 6/2) indicate a long period of occupation embracing Archaic and Classic Cultures. Presence of fragments of human skull in the vicinity may indicate a possible burial association. The only other known amulet of this form was found near Blenheim by Mr I. R. Simonson (figured by Skinner). The form appears to be derived from the chevroned amulet with head at the top and is perhaps a forerunner of the rei-puta.

Drawing No. 4

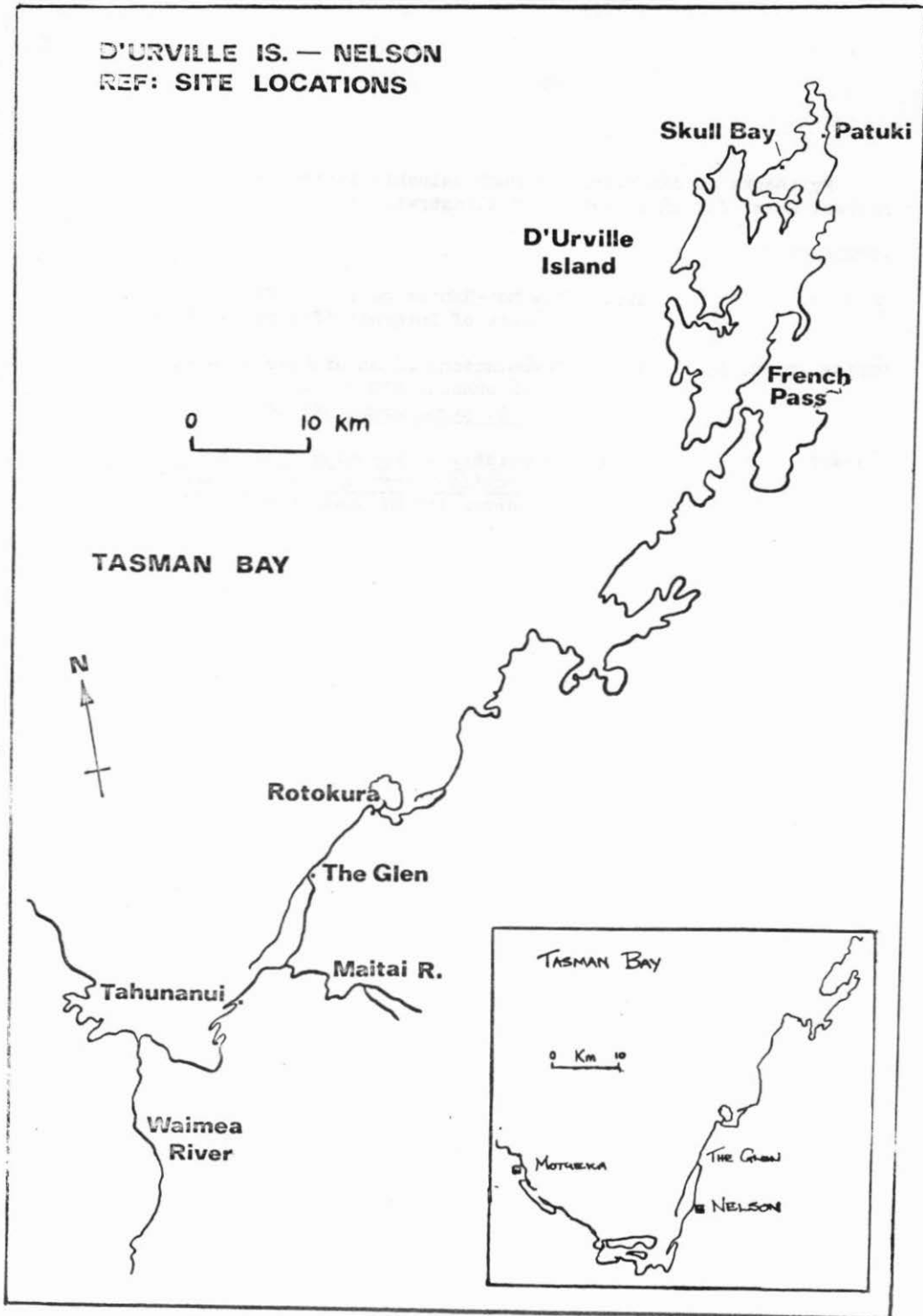
Illustrates two heavy serpentine ornaments in early stages of manufacture before the final form became apparent. The curvature of the right-hand piece suggests either an imitation sperm whale tooth or an aberrant pendant form, both figured by Duff. It is 90 mm long and 27 mm thick. Some grinding on the outer curve has been commenced. The left-hand piece is 110 mm long and 20 mm thick. It is fully ground back and front and tends to curve towards the lateral edges. Whatever its final form, this would indeed be a massive ornament. Both are part of the artifactual material from The Glen.

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D'URVILLE IS. — NELSON
REF: SITE LOCATIONS



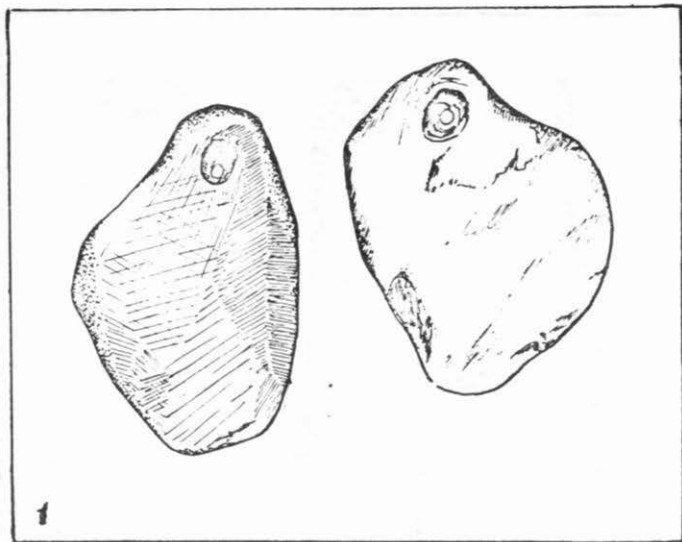


Fig. 1. 28 mm high and 3 mm thick

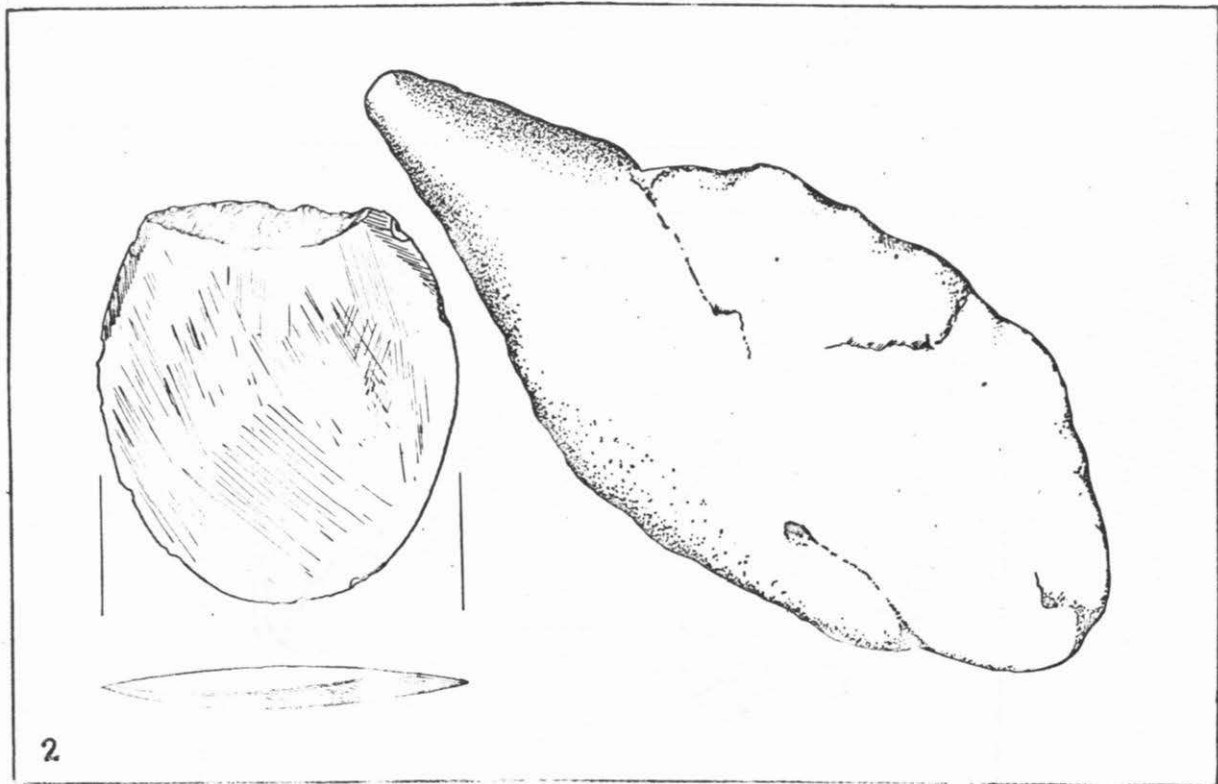


Fig. 2. 66 mm high and 5 mm thick

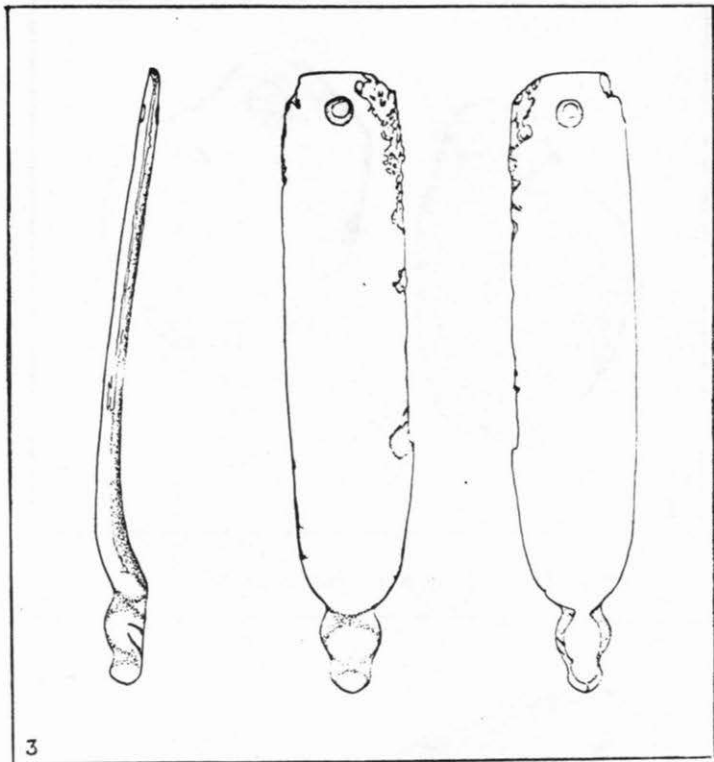


Fig. 3. 140 mm long, 25 mm wide and 5 mm thick

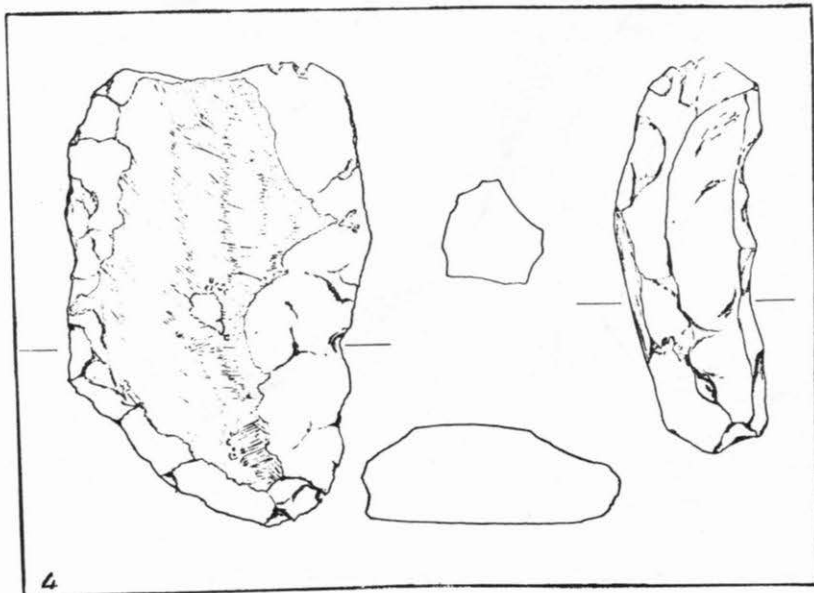


Fig. 4. Left: 110 mm long and 20 mm thick
Right: 90 mm long and 27 mm thick