



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



This document is made available by The New Zealand Archaeological Association under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

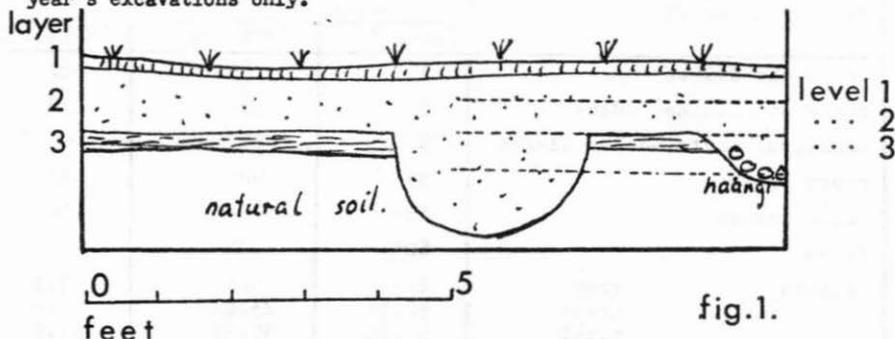
PRELIMINARY REPORT OF EXCAVATIONS ON PONUI ISLAND

by M. Nicholls

In 1956, Mr V. Fisher of the Auckland Museum, and Dr R. Bell, of the University of Oklahoma commenced excavations on Ponui Island, and these excavations were continued in 1957 and 1959 by Mr Fisher, with the assistance of a group of students from the Auckland Teachers' Training College.

The setting: Ponui is an island in the Hauraki Gulf, just to the south of Waiheke Island. It covers an area of about 9 square miles and is, in the main, fairly hilly. The valley in which the excavations were carried out is one of the few areas of flat land on the island. The site, a working floor and possible kaainga, is situated at the mouth of an estuary formed by a stream which flows out on the western side of a bay on the southern coast of the island. A number of haangi have from time to time appeared in the eroding banks of the stream. The bay is tidal, and at low tide extensive mudflats are uncovered.

The excavations: The site was dug in a series of 5 foot squares, with no baulks, and the excavations eventually covered an area of about 50 by 25 feet. In 1956 the material recovered was bagged according to a series of six inch levels (See Fig. I.) rather than by layer, and in the succeeding years, was bagged by square only. Therefore, references to material other than artefacts, in this article refer to material from the first year's excavations only.



Directly under the turf (Layer I) lay a deposit of a gravel soil (Layer II) in which was mixed charcoal, sand, shell, and cultural material. This soil gives the impression that it has been well "churned up", not only by the European farmers, but also by the original Maori population; and the presence of large amounts of charcoal and sand in the soil suggests that it is a soil made by the Maori settlers for agricultural purposes. (Buck, 1949 p.89) Records of land purchases in 1853 suggest that this cultivation was in evidence then, as chiefs of Ngaati Hua and Ngaati Paoa in that year sold their interests in the land, and agreed to give up cultivation, dispose of the potato crop, and remove their pigs. The presence of clay pipes, copper nails, and broken china up to a depth of 9 inches tends to confirm that some of this land was being cultivated at the time of European contact, as

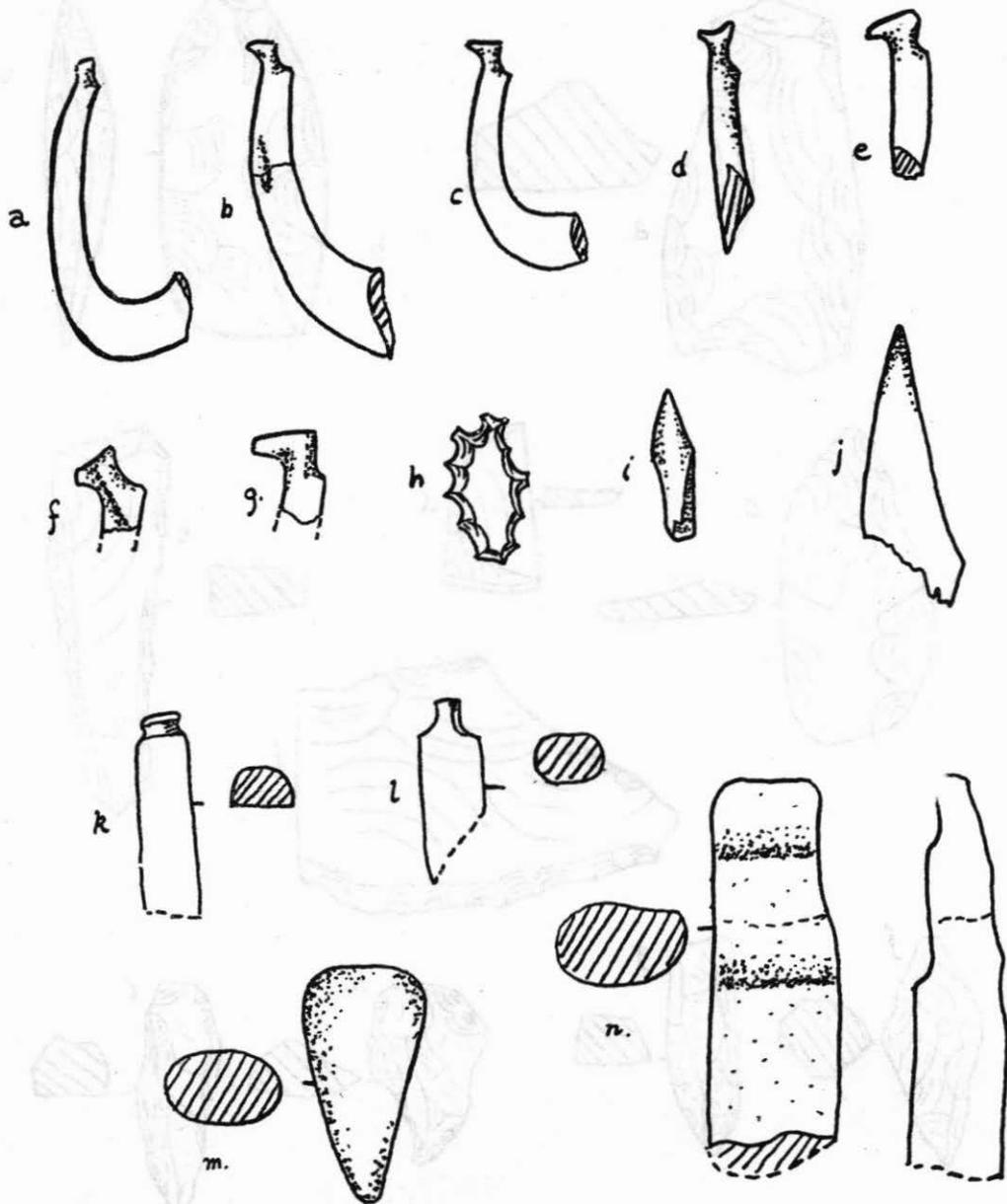
the Chamberlin family, who have owned the island since 1854, have had this area in grass only, and have not cultivated it to any depth, or put any buildings on it. Layer III, which was not present over all of the site, was a much blacker greasy layer, with a high content of charcoal.

At least one pit, about 5 ft. by 3 ft., was cut from the top of Layer III, and a number of haangi were also found that belonged to this layer. (See Fig. I) The records do not indicate from what level the postholes originated, but the presence of timber in two of them suggest that some at least may be of fairly recent date.

While not certain, it seems that Layer III belongs to a predominantly fishing and hunting occupation. Almost all the bird bone, fish bone, and whale (or seal) bone belongs to this layer. Also, most of the worked bone and fish hooks were found in this layer. The fish bone includes snapper, and Mr R. Scarlett states that the bird life is represented by the North Island Weka, a small shag, a small duck (possibly New Zealand teal), tui. Small fragments of Dinornis have been found which are thought to have been green bone when originally broken, although other fragments are probably subfossil. Dinornis occurs also in Level II, as does weka, shag, and the New Zealand pigeon, but the amount of identified bird bone is less than in Level III. A human tooth, and fragments of albatross and pig bone come from Level I, and dog bone occurs in all levels. While the bone is concentrated in level III, the highest percentage of stone flakes and worked stone comes from the top level, and the least from level III. The exact figures are shown in table I.

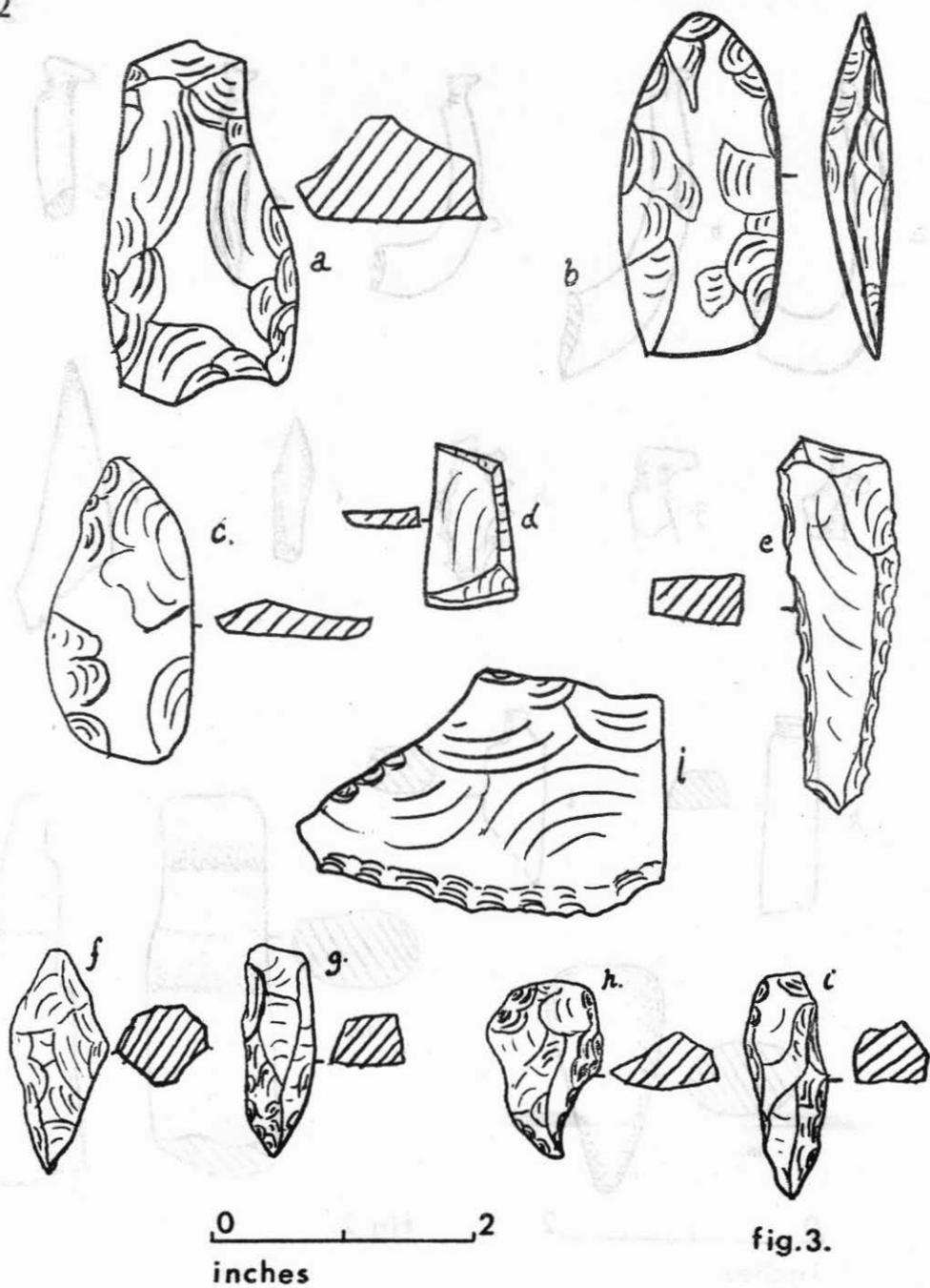
Type of material	percentage		
	Level I	Level II	Level III
graywacke flakes	51%	38%	11%
chips of polished adzes	52%	35%	13%
adzes, roughouts, worked flakes	67%	16.5%	16.5%
chert flakes	35%	40%	25%
drill points	52%	27%	21%
files	60%	30%	10%
obsidian	grey	24%	9.7%
	green	30.3%	23.8%
	total	54.5%	35.5%
fish bone (snapper jaws)	0%	3%	97%
whale or seal bone	14%	14%	72%
all other bone, including dog, bird and unidentified bone	21%	33%	46%

table I.



0 2
inches

fig. 2.



This site was particularly rich in artefacts, and only a brief description can be given here. The fish hooks mentioned above are represented by a number of one piece shanks, although no points or complete hooks were recovered. (Fig. II, a,b,c,d,e,f,g.) The point of either a composite hook or a lure was also found (Fig. II, i.) as were blanks and cores (Fig. II, h.). Some broken pieces of bone appear to have been fashioned into some sort of points (Fig. II, j.). Two broken stone lures are also illustrated (k,l.).

The adzes from this excavation are not well finished or extensively polished, nor are they very large. Apart from one broken roughout from level III, none of the adzes are more than three inches long, and three of them are approximately one inch long. These latter appear to be pieces of flakes that have been snapped and broken, and then used for some cutting purpose, which has given them a polished edge (Fig. 3, d.). Of the five larger adzes one at least is in the process of being reshaped from a larger polished adze (Fig. 3, a). Two adzes appear to be very similar to the smaller ones, in that they have been fashioned from thin flakes (Fig. 3, c). Fig. 3, b shows the most highly polished of the adzes. Some of the greywacke flakes show signs of use also, and a number have very distinct steep flaking along one edge (Fig. 3, i,j).

Both green and grey obsidian was recovered, much of which shows signs of use. It is noticeable that the proportion of green to grey obsidian increases from top to bottom, although both occur in all three levels.

Over 40 drill points were recovered from the site, made both of a chert type of material (Fig. 3, f,g,h,i) and, a few, from greywacke (Fig. 3, e.). They range from about half an inch to three inches in length, although the majority are from 1 - $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. It is difficult to account for such a large number of drill points in the area excavated, particularly as proportionately they occur on the upper levels, while the fish hooks, which need some sort of drilling, occur in level III.

It could well be, however, that these points may have been used in wood-working. It is not possible to say whether this wood-working population is identical or not with the clay pipe and china population which finally lived on the site.

To summarise, the first people used this site as a base for fishing and hunting activities. Later the area was used presumably for working with some sort of organic material, probably wood, which has not survived, and either concurrently or later than this European artefacts appear. However, this is confused as the area was probably used extensively for agriculture.

Reference:

Buck, Sir Peter. The Coming of the Maori. 1949, second edition.