

## FOUR MESOLITHIC ASSEMBLAGES FROM WEST SOMERSET

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The purpose of this article is to compare the flint and chert assemblages from four Mesolithic sites in West Somerset, three of which are being published in detail for the first time. The diagnostic features of the assemblages will be described and an assessment made of their probable cultural affinities.

The sites in question lie within an area of country dominated by the Quantock Hills and bounded on the north by the Bristol Channel, on the east by the Parrett valley and on the south and south-west by the Vale of Taunton (Fig. 1). They are located at Greenway Farm, North Petherton, Westleigh Farm, Broomfield, Doniford Cliff and Fideoak Park, Taunton. These sites are by no means the only ones recorded from this area,<sup>1</sup> but have been selected on account of their apparently similar industries and their relative freedom from admixture with material diagnostic of other periods.

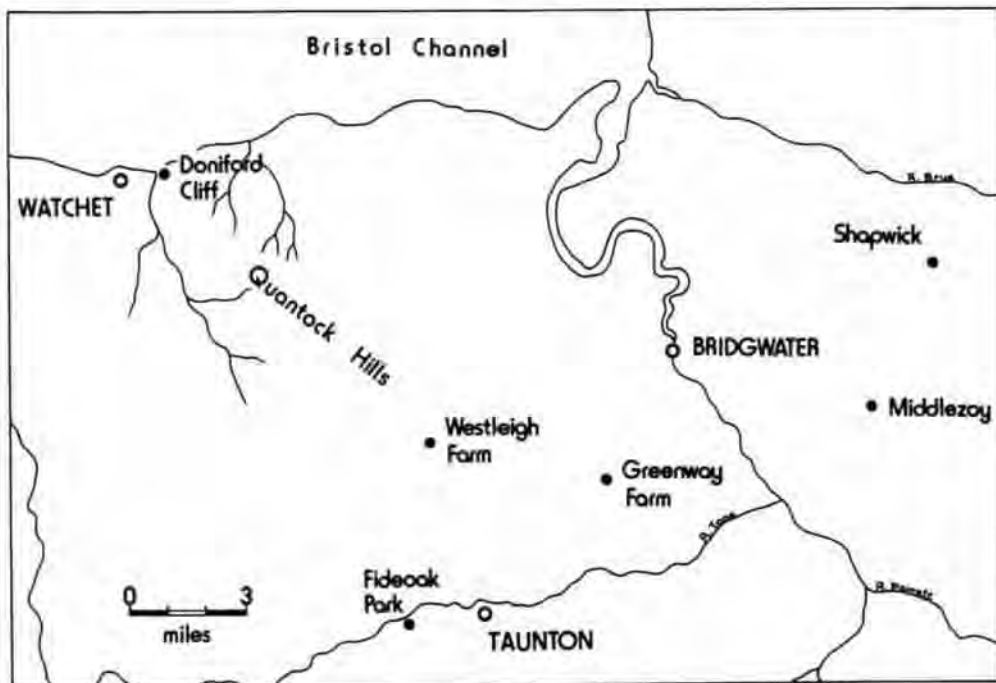


Fig. 1. Map to show locations of the Mesolithic sites.

### GREENWAY FARM (ST 290304)

Greenway Farm lies within the parish of North Petherton and is just over four miles south of Bridgwater. The site is situated at 160 ft O.D., on the gently sloping edge of a spur which runs eastwards from the main Quantock ridge towards the fringes of the Somerset Levels. It is within three hundred metres of a small brook which flows to meet the Levels a mile or so downstream.

The geology of the area consists of Keuper sandstones. These have formed a deep sandy soil which extends from the eastern end of the Quantocks to the recent alluvial deposits of the Levels.

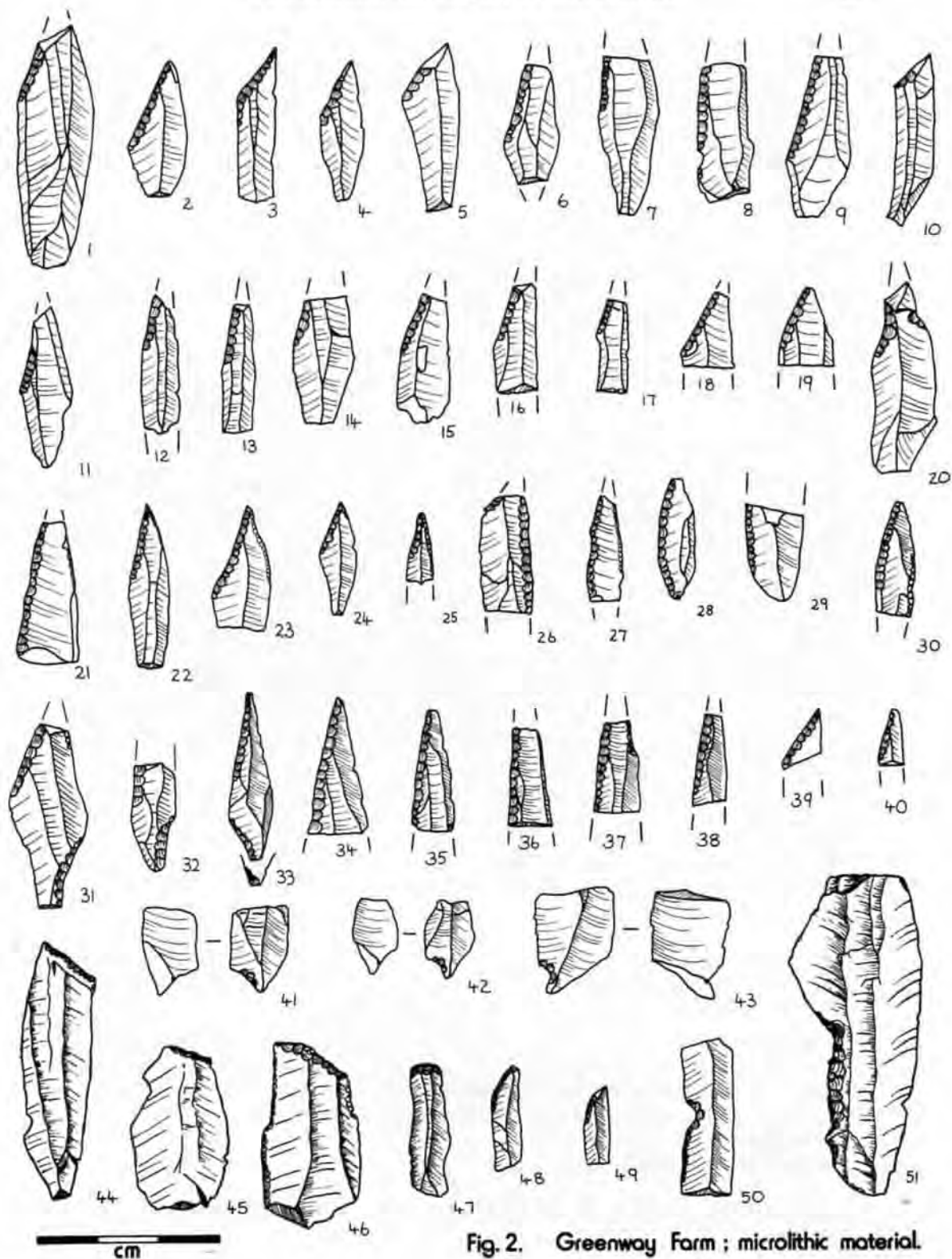


Fig. 2. Greenway Farm ; microlithic material.

The archaeological evidence is in the form of a surface scatter of flint and chert which, before the construction of the M5 motorway, covered an area of about two acres. Many artifacts were collected during the summer of 1973, when construction work removed the topsoil from the western part of the site. However, much still remains in a small arable field adjacent to the motorway, and it is from here that a fair percentage of the material has been obtained.

#### THE ASSEMBLAGE

This will be dealt with in some detail as it provides a fuller range of implement types than the other assemblages under discussion. To date over 2,500 pieces have been examined, a very high proportion of which undoubtedly belong to a Mesolithic industry. However, a small number of unpatinated flakes and cores appear to be related to the very few Neolithic or Bronze Age implements found on the site.

*Raw Materials.* 85% of the total weight of worked material consists of Greensand Chert and the remaining 15% of flint. This chert varies widely in colour from a chocolate brown to shades of red and yellow. Although originally derived from the Blackdown Hills, sizeable nodules of this material occur in Pleistocene deposits in the Vale of Taunton, mainly to the south of the River Tone. Much of the chert from Greenway Farm shows stained and abraded cortex, suggesting that these nodules may have been grubbed out of valley gravel deposits. The flint from the site consists largely of grey and black varieties. Many pieces show patches of fresh, unabraded cortex, indicating that the original nodules were brought from chalk areas. Of the remainder, only a very few fragments show the bleached and battered cortex characteristic of beach pebble flint.

*Cores.* A total of 54 cores have been examined, the majority being of Greensand Chert. In general the chert cores are the larger, weighing an average of 33 g. compared with 24 g. for those made of flint. Some of the larger examples show clear evidence for the production of blade-like flakes of between 5 cm and 7 cm in length. Of those cores which are readily classifiable, twenty are of single platform type (Fig. 4, no. 14). A further eighteen show two parallel platforms (Fig. 4, nos. 15, 16) and one large example shows three platforms at right angles to each other. In addition to these cores, a large number of characteristic rejuvenation flakes were found.

*Microoliths* (Fig. 2, nos. 1-40). Forty of these have been identified, but only a few are complete. Eight are made of flint and the remainder are of Greensand Chert. Despite the fragmentary condition of most of the pieces, it is clear that the dominant type is the obliquely blunted point, with or without retouch on the leading edge. Most of the unidentifiable fragments (nos. 34-40) may also belong to this class. A classification table is set out below.<sup>2</sup>

Type	Total
Obliquely Blunted Points.	19 (Fig. 2, nos. 1-19)
Ditto, with light retouch on leading edge.	6 (nos. 20-25)
Points blunted along whole of one side with light retouch on leading edge.	2 (nos. 26, 27)
Points with convex blunting down one side.	2 (nos. 28, 29)
Points obliquely truncated at each end on opposite sides.	3 (nos. 30-32)
Point obliquely truncated at each end on the same side, with inverse retouch at the base.	1 (no. 33)
Tips and fragments blunted along one edge.	7 (nos. 34-40)

*Microburins* (Fig. 2, nos. 41-43). Sixteen of these have been identified, varying in length from 10mm. to 29mm. Also present are two micro-intermediates (nos. 50, 51).

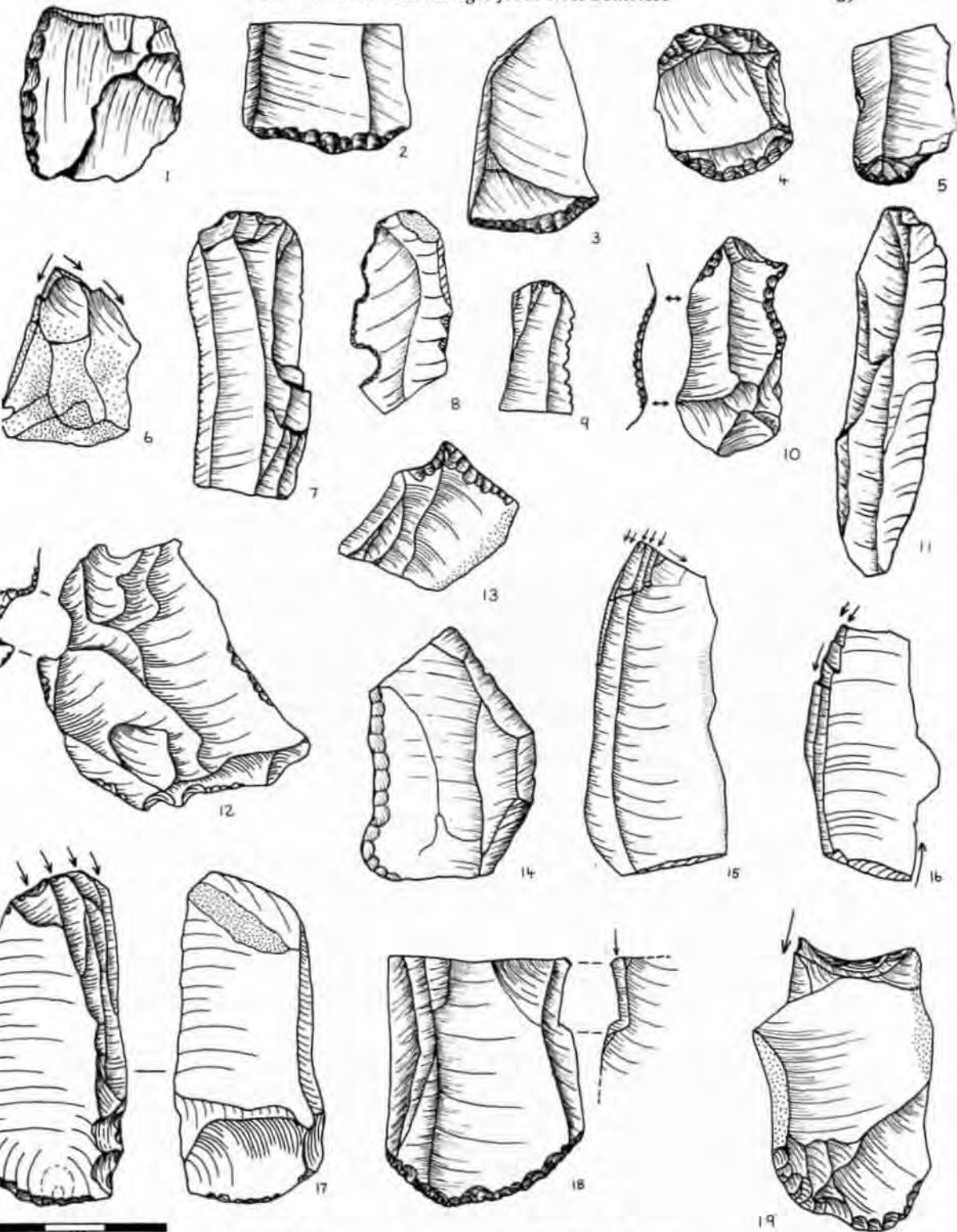


Fig. 3. Greenway Farm; non-microlithic forms.

*Truncated blades* (Fig. 2, nos. 44-49). A number of small blades truncated at one end by abrupt retouch were found. The small convex blunted forms (nos. 48, 49) may have served a similar purpose to the true obliquely blunted points.

*Scrapers* (Fig. 3, nos. 1-5, 18). In contrast to the elegant microlithic component, these tend to be rather small and rough in appearance. Sixteen scrapers have been examined, the majority of which are worked on the distal ends of rough flakes and blades (nos. 2, 3, 5, 18). Also present is a side scraper (no. 1) and a double ended form (no. 4). One unusual piece has been worked on a thick triangular sectioned flake (Fig. 4, no. 17).

*Knives* (Fig. 3, no. 11). Included in this category are a few medium sized blades which show signs of wear along one or both edges.

*Saws* (Fig. 3, nos. 7, 9). Four pieces with serrations along one edge were found, including two finely serrated but broken blades (no. 7).

*Burins* (Fig. 3, nos. 6, 15-19). These are well represented in the assemblage, and eight convincing examples have been identified. These include two angle burins (no. 19), one dihedral and one polyhedral burin (nos. 6, 15). Rather less well characterised are two specimens on broken blades (nos. 16, 18) and a burin on a natural truncation (no. 17). The relatively large number of these tools is one of the more interesting features of the industry.

*Axes*. No axes or convincing sharpening flakes have been found. However, one axe thinning flake, subsequently notched and utilized, may belong to the Mesolithic assemblage (Fig. 3, no. 12).

*Miscellaneous* (Fig. 3, nos. 8, 10, 13, 14). A number of carefully notched blades and flakes, presumably intended as hollow scrapers, were found (no. 8). Also present are two thick nosed awls (no. 13) and a few retouched flakes (nos. 10, 14).

Taken as a whole, the Mesolithic industry from Greenway Farm appears to be the product of one cultural tradition. Its essential components are blade-like flakes, small end scrapers on flakes and blades, burins and a range of non-geometric microliths. However, the evidence for the use of tranchet axes is not very convincing. The importance of this industry lies in its simple microlithic assemblage, which is the largest of its kind as yet recorded from Somerset.

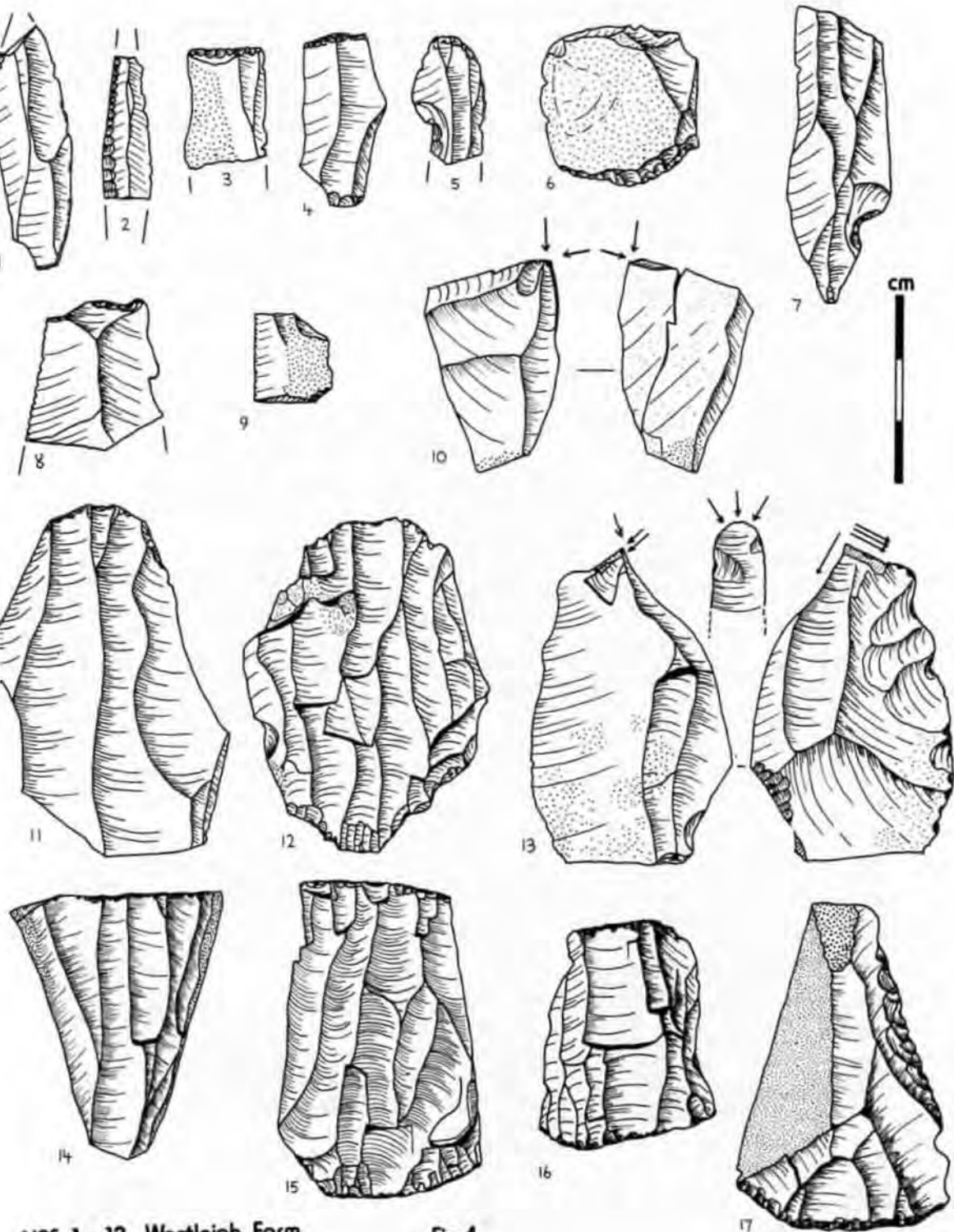
#### WESTLEIGH FARM, BROOMFIELD (ST 217322)

Westleigh Farm is situated on the southern flank of Broomfield Hill, at the head of a long deep valley which runs eastwards for five miles to meet the Somerset Levels at North Petherton. The Mesolithic site lies at 700 ft O.D., on a north facing valley slope near the present stream and within a few metres of an old spring.

The solid geology of the immediate area consists of Devonian slates and shales, which have given rise to a deep, well drained soil. Although located in an arable field, there is good reason to suspect that part of the site may be sealed under an accumulation of down wash material.

The flints from this site were collected from a very small area of the field and consist mainly of flakes and cores of undoubtedly Mesolithic character. However, unpatinated Neolithic or Bronze Age flintwork is present as a diffuse scatter over most of the field. As at Greenway Farm, it is usually possible to distinguish this from the Mesolithic material.

Approximately 75% of the patinated Mesolithic assemblage consists of Greensand Chert, the remainder being of flint. The cores agree well with those from Greenway Farm, the chert examples weighing an average of 45 g. and those in flint an average of 21 g. Two of the flint cores have been worked from beach pebbles. The larger chert cores mainly have two striking platforms (Fig. 4, no. 12). The waste material shows clear evidence



Nos. 1 - 13, Westleigh Farm.  
Nos. 14-17, Greenway Farm.

Fig 4.

for the production of blade-like flakes of between 5 cm and 7 cm in length, some of these being well controlled. The industry also contains some quite large core rejuvenation flakes.

Only two microliths have as yet been found. The larger example is an obliquely blunted point with a fractured tip (no. 1) and the smaller a point blunted down the whole of one edge (no. 2). In addition to these, two truncated blades have been noted (nos. 3, 4). Scrapers are present and are rather rough in appearance (no. 6). Other small pieces include two broken saws (nos. 8, 9) and a few carefully notched flakes and blades (no. 7). Of special interest are the two burins (nos. 10, 13). Although rather crude, these serve as an interesting link with the Greenway Farm industry.

Although the assemblage from this site is very restricted in range, it is striking in its close overall similarity to that from Greenway Farm, some four and a half miles away. The valley head position of this site suggests the possibility of Mesolithic movement along the valley between the Somerset Levels at North Petherton and the hilly areas of the South Quantocks.

#### DONIFORD CLIFF (ST 092433)

This site lies on the edge of the Doniford valley at a height of about 40 ft O.D., and it is approximately 200 metres east of the present stream course. The Mesolithic industry occurs in the upper loam which overlies a thick valley gravel deposit. All the material discussed here was collected over a number of years by Mr. A.L. Wedlake of Watchet, most of it having been exposed through erosion of the low gravel cliff by the sea. Unfortunately the site is no longer accessible.

It would seem most unlikely that the site was actually on the coastline during its period of occupation. The lower sea levels during the Early Postglacial period (8,300 BC to 6,000 BC) suggest that the present Bristol Channel was probably little more than a very broad river valley. Opinions differ widely as to the actual sea levels involved, but conservative estimates would seem to indicate that Doniford was some distance inland even as late as 5,000 BC.<sup>3</sup> Thus it may be wise to consider Doniford as a chance exposure of a stream valley site rather than a true coastal site.

Over 80% of the material collected by Mr. Wedlake consists of Greensand Chert, the remainder being flint. A little beach pebble flint is present. The core types are identical to those from Greenway Farm, those in chert weighing an average of 35 g. and those in flint an average of 23 g. The debris of the industry shows clear evidence for the production of blade-like flakes of between 5 cm and 7 cm in length.

The site has yielded a small series of non-geometric microliths, the predominant type being the obliquely blunted point (Fig. 5, nos. 1, 3-6). Of unusual form is the point with oblique basal retouch and slight trimming on the right hand side (no. 2). This resembles Fig. 2, no. 33 from Greenway Farm, although in the latter case the right hand side of the base has been trimmed by inverse retouch. The points with opposed retouch at the tip (nos. 8, 11) and the point with a convex blunted back (no. 7) can also be compared with forms which are present in the Greenway Farm assemblage.

End scrapers on blades and flakes occur, a couple of these being carefully worked. Other small pieces which are present include a core rejuvenation flake with a finely serrated edge, an obliquely truncated blade (no. 12) and a few odd retouched flakes. Of particular interest is a series of four burins, two of which are distinctly elegant (nos. 15, 16). These two are clearly heavy duty tools, no. 16 being of dihedral form and no. 15 an angle burin with slight dihedral modification.

Also of interest is a naturally shaped bar of chert which weighs 630 g. and is 16 cm in length. The shape of this piece has been slightly modified by the removal of a few small flakes, and the lower end has obtained a sharp cutting edge through the removal of a large flake. Mr. Wedlake considers that this could be a very crude 'pick' or axe, although it cannot be regarded with the same degree of certainty as a true tranchet axe.

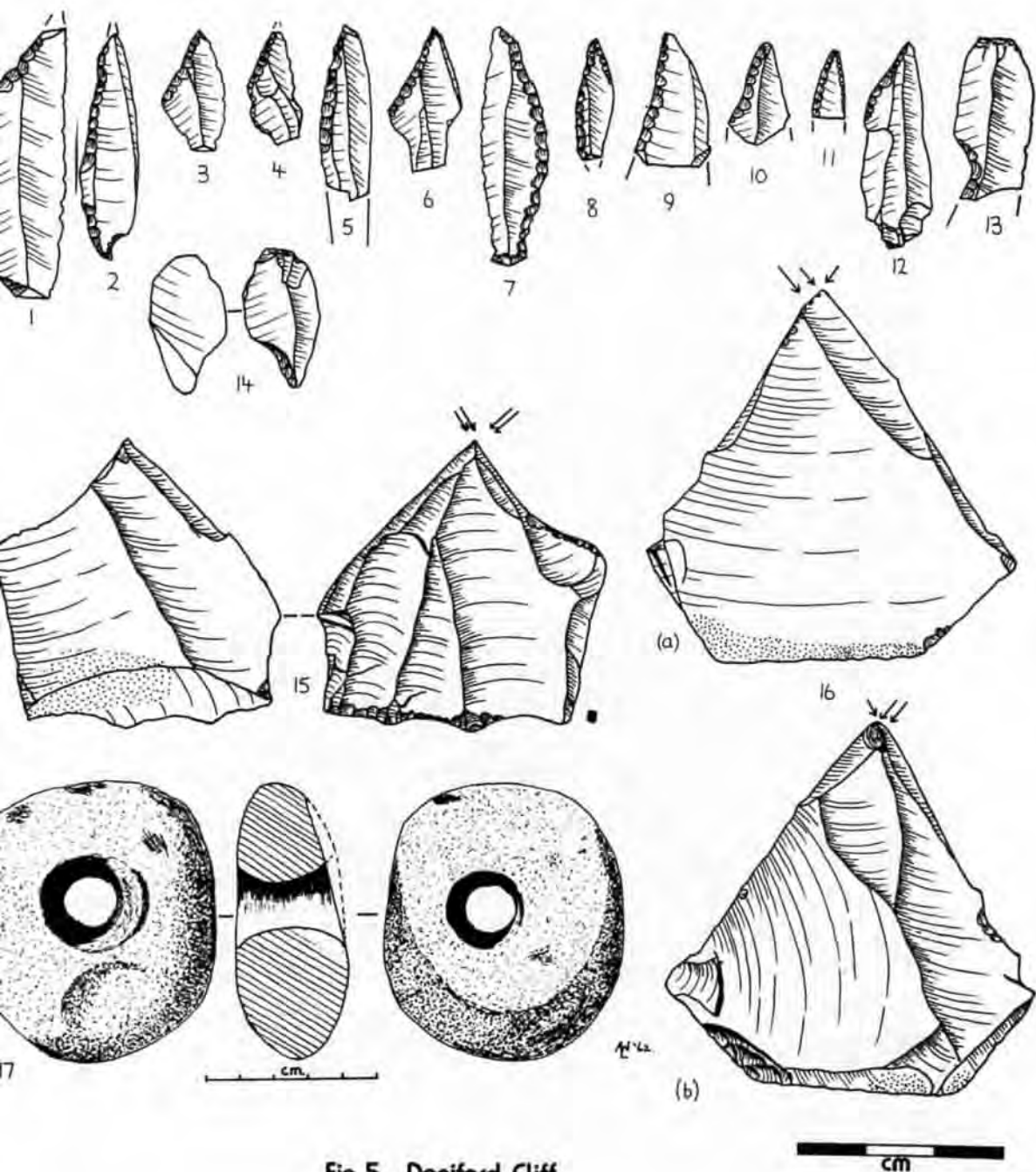


Fig. 5. Doniford Cliff.



In addition to these flints, Mr. Wedlake has found an interesting pebble 'macehead' on the beach adjacent to the Mesolithic site (no. 17). Although unstratified, it would seem very likely that this forms part of the Mesolithic assemblage. It weighs 285 g. and may have been made from a local pebble obtained from the Doniford Stream gravels.

#### FIDEOAK PARK, BISHOP'S HULL, TAUNTON (ST 192249)

This site was discovered in 1950 during the construction of an electricity transformer station and was the subject of a short article by its investigator, Mr. W.A. Seaby.<sup>4</sup> However, most of the material has been re-examined by the present writer in order that a comparison can be made with the other assemblages outlined in this article.

The site lies at 85 ft O.D. on the flood plain of the River Tone, and it is approximately 300 metres from the present course of the river. At this point, Keuper Marl is overlain by a valley gravel deposit, which in turn is sealed by alluvium. The Mesolithic material appears to have been derived from the lower layers of this alluvial deposit, although no stratification was recorded at the time of discovery. The valley gravels in this area contain a good supply of abraded chert nodules, similar to those used as raw materials in all the industries under examination.

Over 85% of the worked material consists of Greensand Chert, the remainder being flint. The range of flint and chert types closely resembles that from Greenway Farm and Doniford, but the material is largely unpatinated.

Cores are abundant and there are many neat examples with two parallel striking platforms. Although those in flint tend to be small, some of the chert cores are very large and weigh up to 140 g. (Fig. 6, no. 7). There is clear evidence for the production of blade-like flakes of between 5 cm and 8 cm in length.

Microliths appear to be scarce and are represented by a calcined fragment blunted along the right hand edge (no. 2), a poor obliquely blunted point (no. 1) and possibly by a fragment with retouch along one edge on the bulbar surface (no. 3). There is a corresponding lack of true microburins, only a couple of broken notched microblades probably belonging in this category. However, truncated blades and flakes are well represented (no. 4).

Typical end scrapers on flakes and blades appear to be scarce, but a few less well characterised pieces do occur (nos. 8, 14). A similar situation seems to occur with the burins, only a few of the pieces showing blow facets being at all convincing (nos. 9, 12). Also worthy of note are a small, carefully worked awl (no. 5), a coarsely serrated and utilized blade (no. 11), and a small fabricator.

Of some interest is the relatively large number of carefully notched and retouched pieces which occur in the industry. Although these vary widely in form and execution, most have a concave working edge suitable for the scraping of wood or bone (nos. 6, 10).

Probably the most diagnostic piece in the assemblage is the middle section of a carefully flaked tranchet axe (no. 13). This tool may have been rejected after an attempt to remove an oblique sharpening flake caused the lower portion of the axe to shear away. This represents the best evidence at present available for the use of tranchet axes in the industries under examination.

The apparent rarity of microlithic points and carefully worked scrapers may be of some significance, as these tool forms are associated with hunting and the subsequent preparation of animal skins. The corresponding abundance of retouched pieces suitable for the working of wood and bone might suggest that some specialised activity, possibly the preparation of fishing equipment, was important at this site. It is worthwhile noting here that the low proportion of microliths in relation to other retouched forms can be paralleled in the early Mesolithic assemblage from Greylake, near Middlezoy.<sup>5</sup>

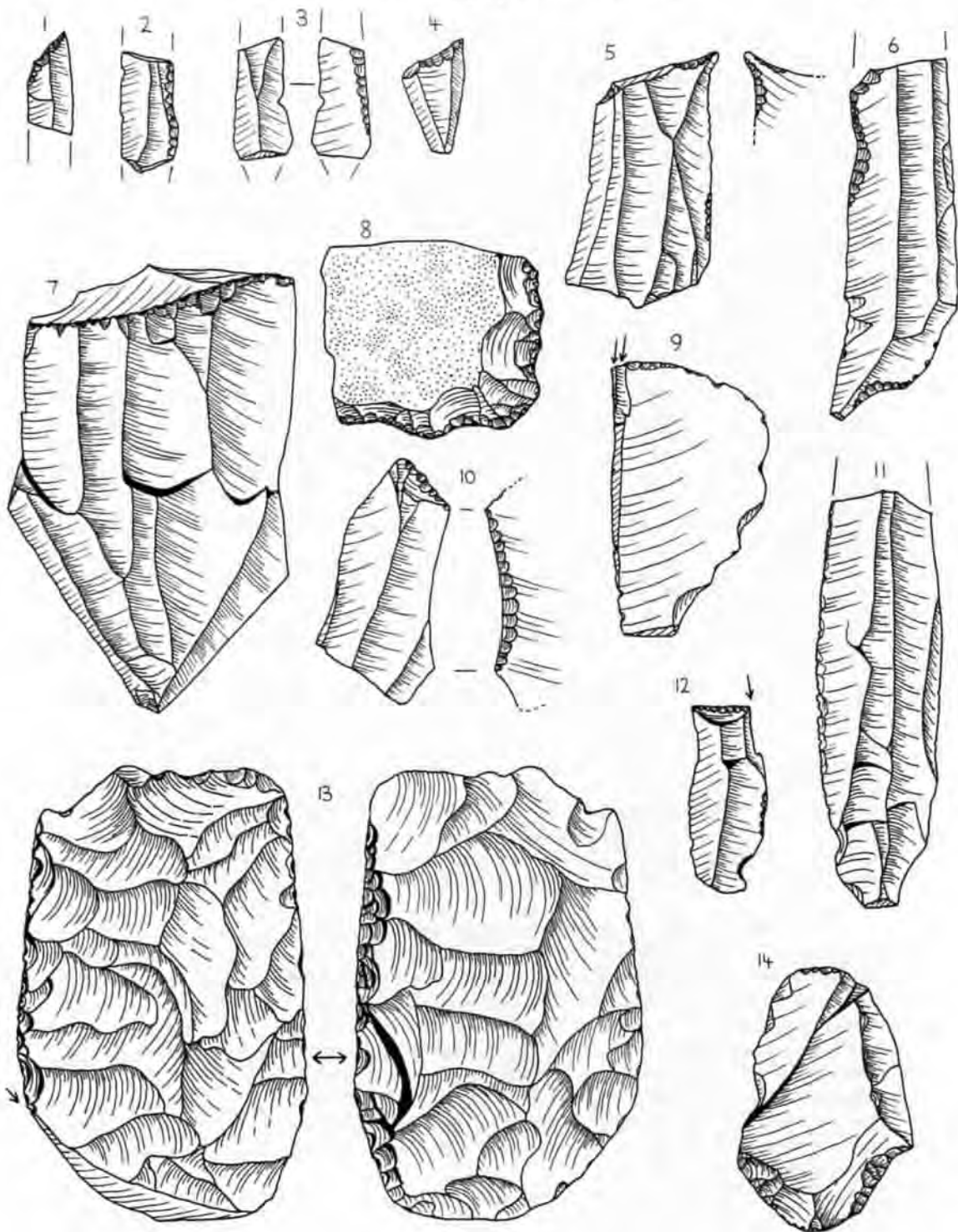


Fig. 6. Fide oak Park.

## DISCUSSION

Of all the similarities which exist between the four assemblages outlined above, probably the most consistent are the proportions of flint and chert types used. Greensand Chert is by far the most important and nearly all the larger blades and well developed blade cores are of this material. The flint element consists mainly of grey and black varieties and most appears to have been brought direct from chalk areas. Evidence for the use of beach pebbles as a source of flint is very limited. The flint and chert debris from the sites is indicative of a well developed blade industry and the abundance of two-platformed blade cores may be significant.

Unfortunately, the range of diagnostic implement types within each assemblage varies widely. This applies particularly to the microliths, and only those from Greenway Farm are sufficient in number to be of any real value. However, they agree closely in form with those from Doniford and the other sites. Of greater significance is the total absence of small 'geometric' forms, such as narrow rods and scalene triangles. A similar situation exists with the scrapers and, with the exception of the Doniford specimens, these are rather poorly characterised. However, burins are present at all four sites and are very well represented at Doniford and Greenway Farm. Other common features include truncated blades, variable proportions of notched flakes and saws. A tranchet axe element is present at Fideok Park, but the evidence for its use at Greenway Farm and Doniford is less convincing. However, the assemblages are too small for the importance of tranchet axes at these sites to be assessed.

In general, the assemblages from the four sites would seem to belong to the same basic industrial tradition. Although they appear to be related, it would be unwise, on the evidence available, to suggest that they are all of the same date. The range of microliths from Doniford, Fideok and Westleigh Farm is far too small to permit any such conclusions to be drawn.

What is certain, however, is that the four assemblages have little in common with those 'geometric' industries at present known in West Somerset. The most prolific local 'geometric' site is located at Hawkcombe Head, near Porlock and Mr. A.L. Wedlake has built up a large collection of flints from here. The industry, as yet not fully published,<sup>6</sup> consists almost entirely of flint, beach pebbles having provided much of this material. The microlithic element is composed mainly of rods and scalene triangles, some of these being minute in size. Burins and large blades are absent and the industry appears to have been geared to the production of small narrow flakes and microblades. On present radiocarbon evidence, industries of this type appear to belong to the later phases of the British Mesolithic.

Taken as a group, the four assemblages which have been examined show features suggestive of an Early Mesolithic or 'Maglemosian' flint industry. Three such industries are already known from South Western England, these being located at Shapwick and Middlezoy in Somerset and at Dozmare Pool in Cornwall. These sites were shown to have Maglemosian affinities in a paper by G.J. Wainwright which was published in 1960.<sup>7</sup> The microlithic components of these industries were dominated by simple obliquely blunted points, and small geometric types were completely absent. Other forms present were burins, truncated blades, end scrapers and saws. The Shapwick and Middlezoy sites also produced clear evidence for the use of tranchet axes. Fresh chalk flint was the basic raw material at all three sites, although at Shapwick and Middlezoy a significant proportion of Greensand Chert was used.

Although there are some differences in detail, these well documented industries show a close overall resemblance to those of the Greenway Farm group and they undoubtedly provide the closest parallels at present available from the South West of England. The most diagnostic features of the West Somerset industries are the microlithic types from

Doniford and Greenway Farm, the tranchet axe fragment from Fideoak and the occurrence of burins, saws and truncated blades at all four sites. Also of interest is the abundance of two-platformed blade cores, a feature which can be paralleled at such well known Maglemosian sites as Thatcham in Berkshire.<sup>8</sup>

On present radiocarbon evidence, industries of Maglemosian type in England appear to belong mainly to the Pre-Boreal and Early Boreal phases of the Early Postglacial period. Actual radiocarbon dates range from 8,415 bc ( $\pm 170$ ) for a site at Thatcham, Berkshire, to 6,829 bc ( $\pm 110$ ) for a site at Greenham Dairy Farm, also in Berkshire.<sup>9</sup> However, no radiocarbon dates are as yet available for similar sites in the West of England.

Taken as a whole, the typology of the Greenway Farm assemblage suggests that this industry may date to before 6,800 BC and this is demonstrated most clearly by the range of microlithic types present. Although the assemblages from the other sites are less conclusive, their overall close similarity to the Greenway Farm material suggests that they might also belong in an Early Mesolithic context, although they are not necessarily of the same date.

It is to be hoped that future field work in this area will lead to the discovery of more Mesolithic sites of this type. The numerous tributary streams and gravel spreads in the Tone Valley may have provided suitable conditions for extensive Mesolithic activity, particularly along the course of the river between Wellington and Creech St. Michael. The present writer believes that many sites may exist along this stretch of valley, although most are probably beneath recent alluvial deposits. The investigation of an undisturbed Maglemosian site in this area would doubtless be an important development in the study of the Mesolithic in South Western England.

#### REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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9. Dates given in uncalibrated radiocarbon years bc. A useful radiocarbon date list for the British Mesolithic can be found in *British Prehistory, a New Outline*, ed. Colin Renfrew (Duckworth, 1974), pp. 94-98.

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