

38. THE CURRENT STATUS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS
IN OWENS VALLEY , CALIFORNIA

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Of the slightly more than 400 sites from Inyo County, east central California, on file with the University of California Archaeological Survey office, more than half are from Owens Valley. The major portion of the known sites in Owens Valley have been investigated by Mr. and Mrs. Harry Riddell, and exhaustive surface collections were made by them from these sites. These collections, totaling approximately 10,000 specimens, are now being cataloged by the University of California Museum of Anthropology and will become a part of the permanent collections of that institution. Not until this task is completed will it be possible to study the collection in detail. However, for the purposes of this report it is possible to present, with reference to the collection, some information on the archaeological aspects of Owens Valley.

Controlled archaeological excavations by trained individuals in the immediate Owens Valley area consist solely of the excavation of a proto-historic and historic Paiute village site, Iny-2, in Cottonwood Canyon, and the excavation of several small rock shelters and caches. The excavation of the late village site has appeared in published form in the UCAS Reports (Riddell, H., 1951). All of the specimens from this excavation are in the UC Museum of Anthropology at Berkeley. The material from the rock shelters and caches form a part of the collection now in the process of being cataloged by the UCMA. These excavations, plus the test excavation of a deep, culturally stratified site, have been made by Mr. and Mrs. Harry Riddell.

Owens Valley, lying east of the Sierra Nevada, was at time of contact inhabited by a southern segment of the Northern Paiute. Extensive ethnographic investigations of these and neighboring peoples have been made by Julian Steward (1933) and others. From the work of these various ethnographers we have a rather comprehensive picture of the life of the native peoples of this general region at the time of white contact. However, the archaeological picture must be presented in order to obtain any depth to our understanding of the area. The present archaeological investigations have begun to give us a view into the prehistory of the valley, and it is hoped that the studies currently being carried on will help define the cultural relationships of the Southwest and the Yuman area with the Owens Valley region. It is also expected that the question of the place and time of origin of the Owens Valley Brown Ware will be answered. These studies also will aid in the clarification of problems regarding the amount, type, and time of cultural contact with the southern San Joaquin Valley and the coastal region of California, as well as those of cultural affinities between the people of Owens Valley and other regions of the Great Basin. We already know from ethnographical and archaeological sources that the Owens Valley people had late contact with the groups to the west over the Sierra. This relationship is observable in projectile point types, shell beads and other artifact types. A comparable earlier contact will likely be demonstrated as research progresses in the Owens Valley area.

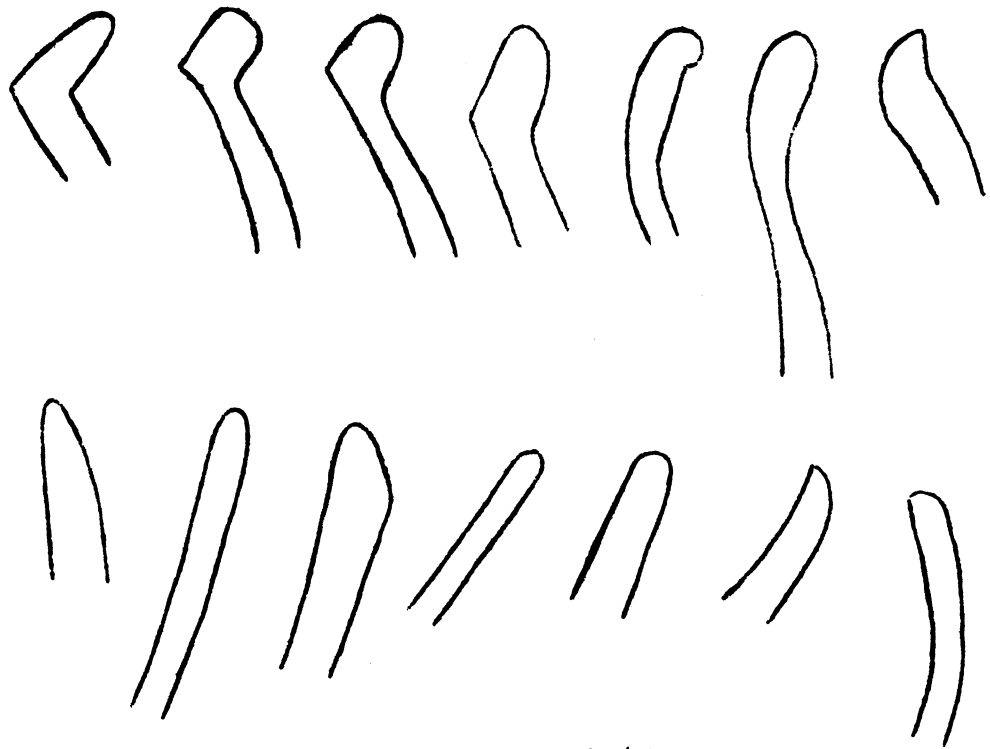
The locally manufactured pottery has been described (Riddell, H., 1951, pp. 20-23); it is now known as Owens Valley Brown Ware (and will henceforth in this paper be indicated by "OVBW"). This utility ware is the same as the pottery made in recent times by the Mono and Yokuts on the west side of the Sierra, as recorded by Gayton (1929). Owens Valley Brown Ware is quite similar to Southern Paiute Utility Ware described by Baldwin (1950), but was not made with the use of the paddle and anvil as described for the latter. There are other differences in firing and vessel shape. Nevertheless we recognize that close relationships between the two wares probably exist, and a determination of these relationships is sought.

Figure 1 illustrates a selection of pottery rim sections and pottery vessel shapes. The rims of the OVBW fall roughly into two distinct types: outcurving, and straight to incurving. Straight to incurving rims are most common and are from bowls of various sizes. This rim type usually occurs with vessel Types 1, 2, and 3 (Fig. 1). The outcurving rims are generally associated with Type 4. Types 1 and 3 are forms illustrated by Gayton (1929) for the Mono and Yokuts; not illustrated, however, are large vessels (like Type 2) with rounded, conical bases, nor vessels like Type 4. Bases of Type 1 vessels may often be slightly concave. The vessels of OVBW range in diameter from a few inches to approximately a foot, and they may stand as high as 12 or more inches (cf. Steward, 1933, pp. 266-269). As is usual in pottery-using areas cracked pots are mended by the technique of crack sewing.

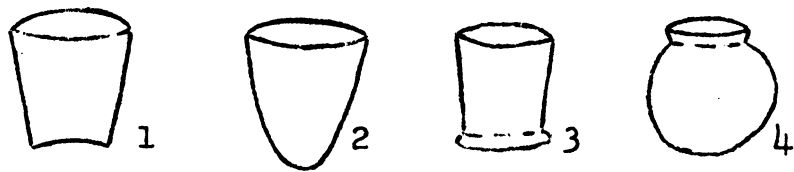
The feeling that OVBW is a relatively recent introduction to the local cultural inventory is strengthened by the fact that in a site with a depth of deposit of 90 inches, pottery is found only in the top 18 inches. However, pottery may have been known to the area before it became a manufactured item there. Evidence of this is in the form of a few sherds of corrugated pottery of Pueblo II or Pueblo III derivation, recovered from the surface of sites in Owens Valley. Just what influence the Pueblo and Yuman pottery making traditions had on the introduction and manufacture of pottery into Owens Valley and neighboring areas is not yet clearly understood. This is one of the more important problems awaiting solution.

Evidence from the collections from the sites in Owens Valley indicates the contemporaneous use of steatite and pottery vessels on the latest sites. The absence of pottery from some sites at which steatite vessels occur is of interest because it suggests to us a possible earlier use of steatite vessels, and a continuation of their use after the introduction of pottery. Steatite vessel rim sections (Fig. 2) are straight or incurving and resemble some of the pottery rims. The steatite vessels are globular in shape but since only fragments have been found it is difficult to determine the size range.

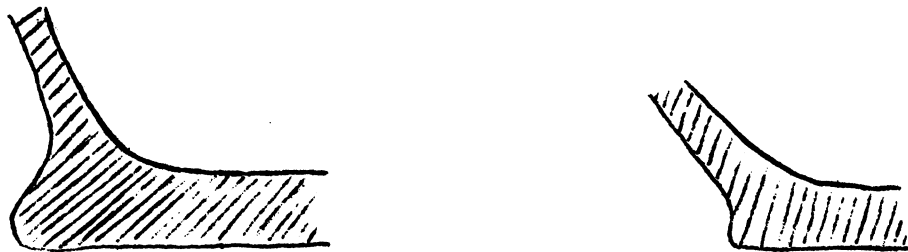
The concave-based projectile point (Fig. 3, center) is of special interest because of its rather common occurrence in Owens Valley, and its recovery by Harrington at the important Stahl site near Little Lake (cf. Hamilton, 1951). This artifact type was the most common variety found by Meighan (1955) in his 1953 archaeological site survey in Mono County, California. This specimen type may have a long and continuous history as suggested by its occurrence at the early site at Little Lake and its recovery from the late site in Cottonwood Canyon.



Pottery Rim Sections (1/1)



Pottery Vessel Types

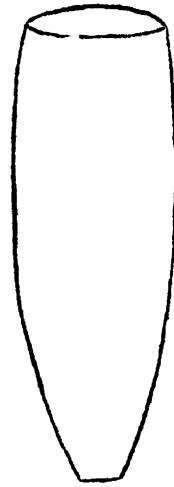


Partial Cross-sections of Bases of Type 3 Vessels (1/1)

Fig. 1



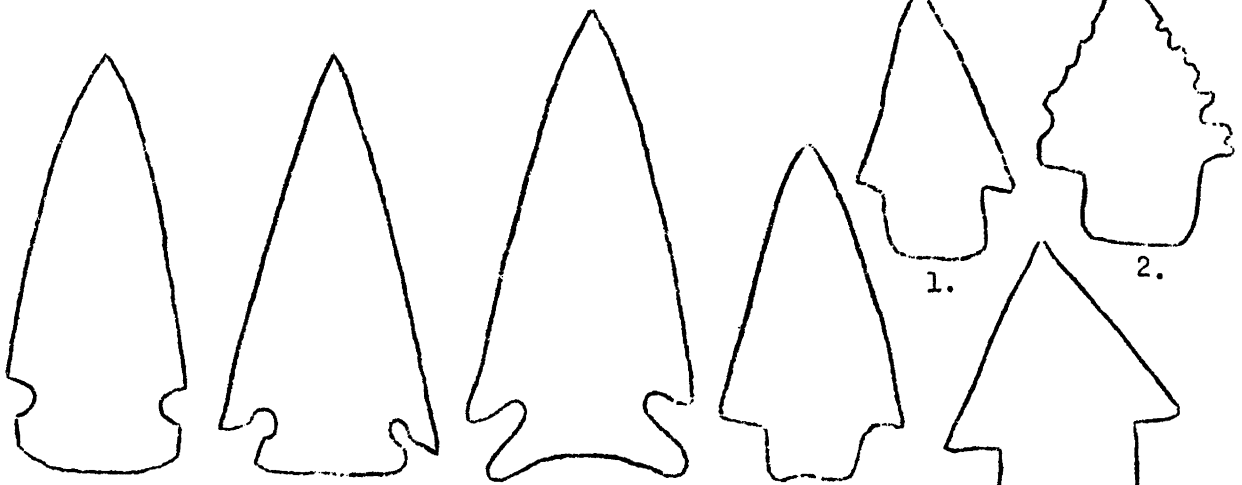
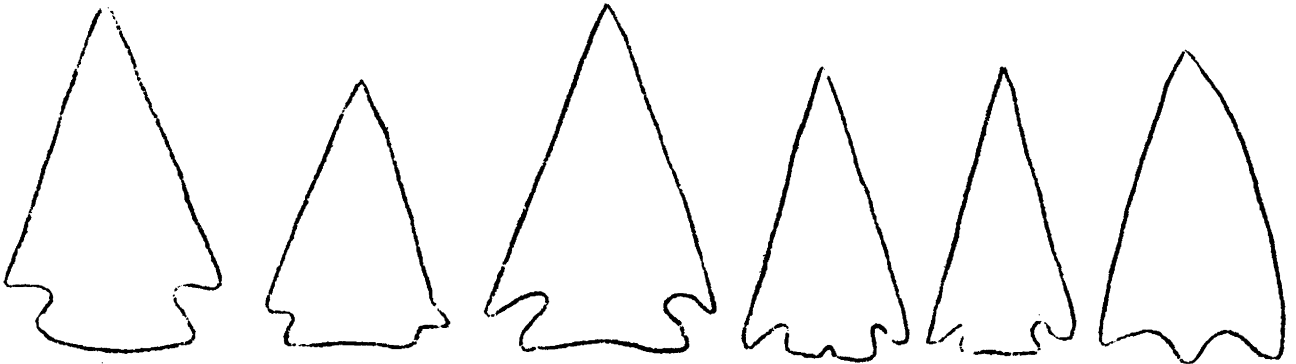
Steatite Vessel Rim Sections (ca. 2/3)



Pottery Pipe (1/1)



Boatstone (1/1)



Large Projectile Points (1/1)

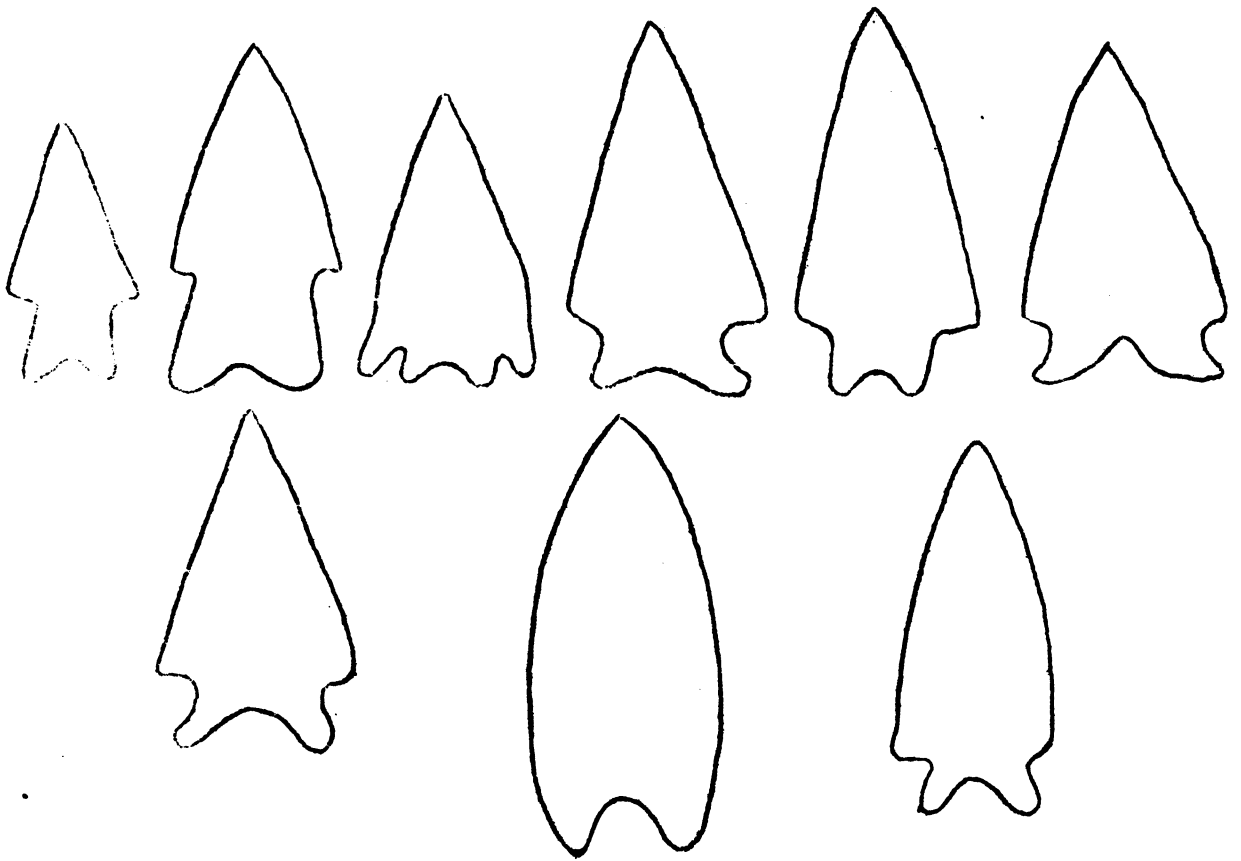
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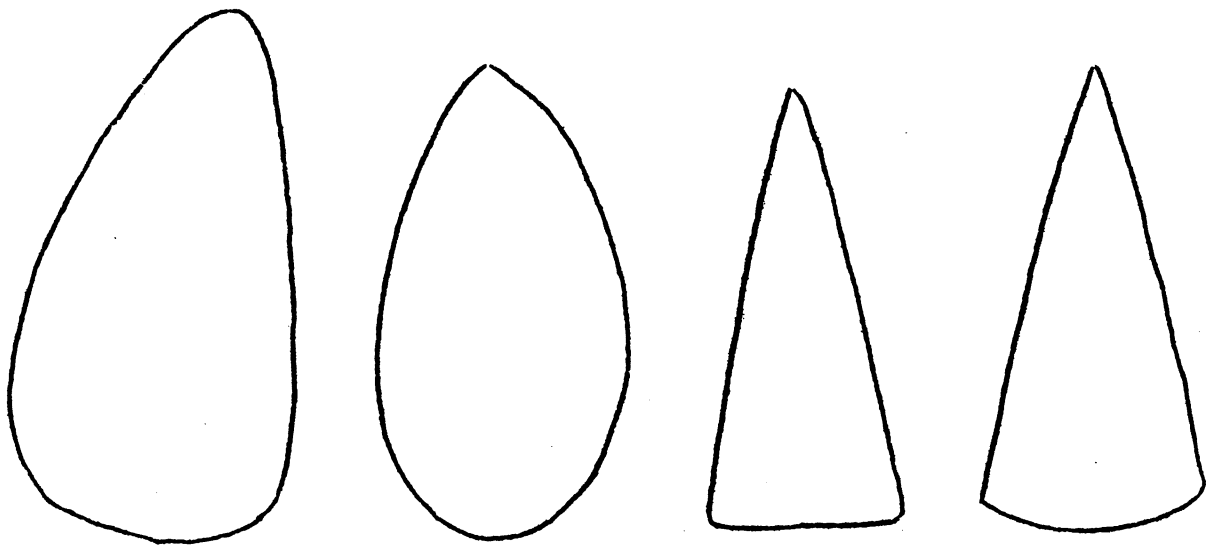
2.

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Fig. 2



Large Projectile Points (1/1)



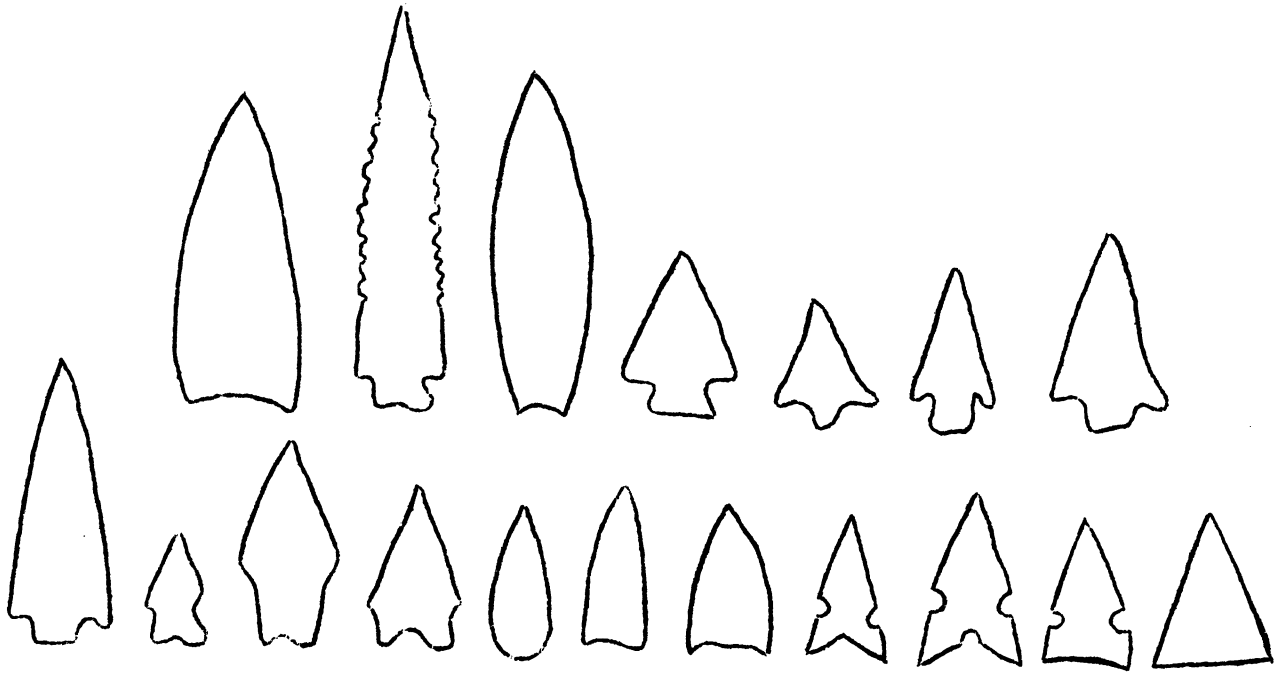
Chipped Stone Knives (1/1)

Fig. 3

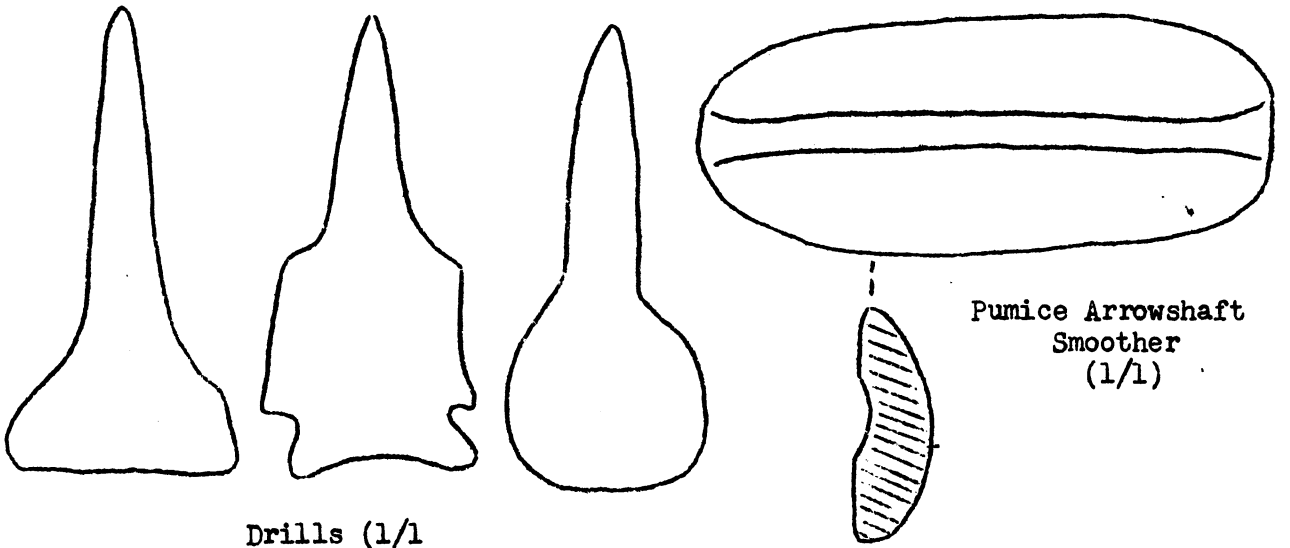
The projectile point types will be of considerable importance in establishing cultural and temporal differences in the Valley, and in demonstrating certain affinities with other regions of the Great Basin and California. It appears that a number of sites from which collections have been made yield projectile points and other artifacts of more than one period of occupation. We feel justified in making this statement on the grounds of a clearly observable difference in projectile point size and weight. Apparently two projectile point traditions are represented in the collections...a large point tradition and a small point tradition (cf. Fenenga, 1953). We have ethnographic evidence (cf. Steward, 1933, pp. 259-263) that some of the small projectile points shown in Fig. 4 were used in recent times. We also know that these small points are to be found commonly in late and historic Paiute sites such as the one excavated in Cottonwood Canyon. It seems possible, therefore, that nearly mutually exclusive traditions of large versus small projectile points ultimately can be demonstrated. This opinion is also held by Meighan as a result of his Mono County survey. He states: "There appears to be a late proto-historic period characterized by small corner-notched points, and an earlier period containing larger and coarser points of several varieties" (Meighan, 1955, p. 13).

A "boatstone" found in Owens Valley was recorded in a private collection by H. Riddell. As shown by the drawing (Fig. 2) this artifact type is characterized by an upper convex and a lower concave surface. At the ends of the upper surface grooves are present which would be useful in the lashing of these elongate stones to shafts. Heizer and Elsasser (1953) have noted from their own field work and a review of collections and literature that the boatstones from California and Nevada, when found in cultural context, are of considerable antiquity. There is no record of a boatstone having been found in a purely recent context. In fact boatstones have been recovered from the Sacramento region of the Central Valley of California from Middle Horizon sites which have a possible maximum antiquity of 4,000 years. Heizer and Elsasser endorse the possibility that boatstones may have served as atlatl weights, although they are anxious to see a situation in which boatstones are in clear association with atlatl remains such as atlatl hooks and dart points. They point out the possible genetic connection "with artifacts of generally similar form in the Gulf Southwest States and in the states east of the Mississippi River" (Heizer and Elsasser, 1953, p. 28). The association of boatstones with atlatl hooks and dart points sought by Heizer and Elsasser seems now to be a fact if the preliminary observations made by F. Riddell of the collections obtained from the Karlo site (Las-7) near Honey Lake in northeastern California are correct. Specimens which were tentatively identified as boatstones, bone atlatl hooks and dart points were excavated under F. Riddell's direction at the Karlo site during the months of July and August, 1955. This information, when applied to the Owens Valley occurrence of a boatstone, lends considerable support to the belief that there are two projectile point traditions in the Valley.

In further support of an early occupation of the Owens Valley are the four projectile points illustrated in Fig. 2 (lower right: numbered 1-4). These points are not unlike specimens illustrated by Haury (1950, Pl. 22) from Ventana Cave, Arizona, and called Ventana-Amargosa I. Haury's specimens lay in a deposit of Ventana Cave below that where were found the orthodox Amargosa II, or Pinto points. The two projectile points (Fig. 3, two specimens in upper row, left) can be typologically correlated with points

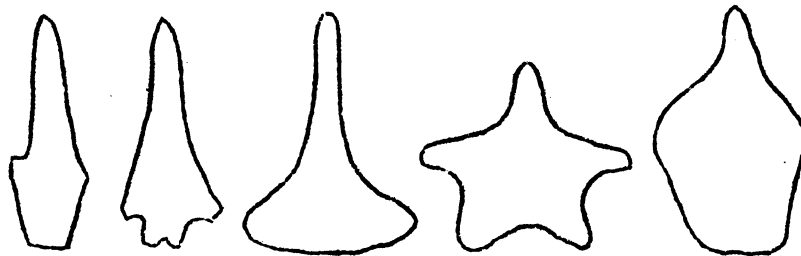


Small Projectile Points (1/1)

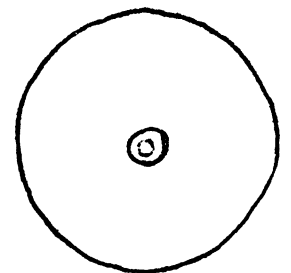


Drills (1/1)

Pumice Arrowshaft
Smoother
(1/1)



Drills (1/1)



Pismo Clamshell
Disc Bead
(1/1)

Fig. 4

coming from the next level above in Ventana Cave, which is termed Chiricahua-Amargosa II. Meighan (1955) in his Mono County survey also notes a suggestion of this Pinto Complex. In addition, this complex seems to be strongly evident at the Stahl site near Little Lake (Hamilton, 1951).

Manos from Owens Valley are of several types. The most common type is the ovoid mano which is usually bifaced, although it may be unifaced. Sub-rectangular manos also are common and may be ground on one or both faces. Probably the most specialized in shape are the wedge-shaped (cross-section) manos and the thin manos. The former have a thick edge on one side but taper to a single edge on the other side. The thin manos are often sub-rectangular in shape and presumably were useful when a light mano was necessary for grinding. The ordinary mano of Owens Valley tends to be quite large and heavy, though well-made.

Common to the Owens Valley is the thin schist metate which is said to have been favored in historic times because of its light weight and portability. Other, heavier, metates were made of a variety of materials, although granitic materials were favored for the manufacture of manos. Bedrock mortars with metate areas adjoining the mortar pits are found on late sites at the higher elevations at the base of the Sierra. The postle for the bedrock mortar is usually a crude, heavy granitic cobble.

Tubular pipes are made either of pottery, scoria or pumice. The finding of pumice pipe fragments at Iny-2, the late Paiute site, shows that both stone pipes and pottery pipes were used in proto-historic times. A detailed study of the collections very likely will demonstrate that the stone pipe preceded the late occurrence of pottery and pottery pipes in the area.

Shell beads consist mainly of circular or oval beads cut from the body whorl of the Olivella shell. There are several varieties of this type of bead. Spire-lopped Olivella beads are scarce, and so are clam-shell disc beads. A large disc bead of the Pismo clam is shown in Fig. 4. Abalone shell ornaments are also uncommon. Small steatite disc beads are abundant on some late sites as evidenced by the yield at Iny-2.

From the surface of one site several small lumps of turquoise were found. This material probably came from aboriginal mines in San Bernardino County near the Mojave Sink (Helzer and Treganza, 1944, pp. 335-336). It is possible, however, that these pieces came from the Burkhardt turquoise mine located three or four miles east of Kearsarge, and at the base of the Inyo Mountains (Ingalls, 1949, pp. 13-15). At the present time it is not known that this mine was worked aboriginally, but the Puebloan pottery mentioned above may have reached Owens Valley with Puebloan people who had come to the region to work the Burkhardt mine.

A very common implement from the Valley is the stone tule knife. One example measures 26 cm. long, 3.5 cm. wide, and 9 mm. thick. Usually these tools are long, thin, bars of basalt which may or may not have been chipped along the edges. Those which have had some care in their manufacture also often show some evidence of wear through use. A local white man informed H. Riddell that the Owens Valley Paiute had told him that these stone tools were used in cutting tules and to open freshwater mussels. Even though they are a rather crude implement the stone tule knives may be useful in helping to delimit the late cultural horizon in Owens Valley.

The small rock shelters excavated by Mr. and Mrs. Harry Riddell have yielded material entirely typical of the late aboriginal occupation of the valley. Among the specimens recovered from the shelters are fragments of open-twined burden baskets, diagonal-twined winnowing trays, open-twined trays, cordage, tule matting, and parts of what appear to be small game snares. One cache recovered in a shelter consisted of a nest of grass and sagebrush bark in the center of which were 9 lengths of native rope, each with a loop spliced-in at one end. Probably these excellently preserved specimens were deer snares.

The foregoing has been little more than an outline of the archaeological picture for the Owens Valley region of the Great Basin, but it shows that it will be possible to determine cultural and temporal differences from the evidence, and that relationships with other regions of the Great Basin, the Southwest and California can be demonstrated.

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