

---

FLINT IMPLEMENTS AND FOSSIL REMAINS FROM A SUL-  
PHUR SPRING AT AFTON, INDIAN TERRITORY.

BY

WILLIAM HENRY HOLMES,  
*Head Curator, Department of Anthropology.*

---



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

---

- Plate 1. Site of Afton sulphur springs.  
2. Discovery of a flint implement in the superficial sands.  
3. Difficulties met with in making excavations.  
4. Mammoth teeth found in the gravels.  
5. Section of spring and associated geological formations.  
6. Fragmentary condition of fossil bones.  
7. Mastodon teeth.  
8. Mammoth teeth.  
9. Mammoth teeth.  
10. Arrow and spear heads.  
11. Arrow and spear heads.  
12. Spearheads.  
13. Spearheads.  
14. Spearheads.  
15. Spearheads.  
16. Blunt-pointed spearheads.  
17. Well-worn knives.  
18. Knives.  
19. Symmetric blades.  
20. Roughed-out blades.  
21. Roughed-out blades.  
22. Roughed-out blades.  
23. Freshly sharpened implements.  
24. Antler implements.  
25. Antler implements.  
26. Bone implements.



# FLINT IMPLEMENTS AND FOSSIL REMAINS FROM A SULPHUR SPRING AT AFTON, INDIAN TERRITORY.

---

By WILLIAM HENRY HOLMES,  
*Head Curator, Department of Anthropology.*

---

## INTRODUCTION.

During the summer of 1901 the attention of the Smithsonian Institution was called to a new site yielding fossil remains of the mastodon and mammoth and numerous flint implements in close association with them. The information was furnished by Dr. R. H. Harper, of Afton, Indian Territory, who, on making a superficial examination of the site, became convinced that the phenomena were of much scientific interest. Through his solicitation the National Museum took the matter up, and Mr. F. A. Lucas, curator of comparative anatomy, sent his assistant, Mr. A. Stewart, to make investigations, the particular object being to procure a complete skeleton of mammoth or mastodon for the Buffalo Exposition; but Mr. Stewart found that the parts of fossil animals at Afton were dissociated and fragmentary, and the investigation was abandoned after slight excavations had been made.

Owing to the report that relics of human handiwork were found associated with the fossil remains, I resolved to visit Afton and make investigations. Setting out for the West on September 26, I stopped a few days at St. Louis to visit the fossil mastodon beds at Kimmswick, 25 miles south of the city, and, in company with Mr. C. W. Beehler and Mr. T. D. Townsend, who are interested in the property and engaged in its exploration, spent a very instructive day at the site. The question of the association of human remains with those of the mammoth and mastodon has been raised at this place also, but up to the present time the evidence collected is not at all conclusive. It is believed that the bones found, which so closely resemble the humerus of man, may be portions of the fibula of young mastodons, and that the flint implements reported as occurring with the fossil remains may have been recently introduced, since identical forms are plentiful on the surface of the site. At any rate, it seems wise to suspend judg-

ment in the case until more critical and exhaustive studies have been made. Resolving to return at an early date and make fuller examinations, I hastened on to Indian Territory.

#### THE SPRINGS AT AFTON.

The village of Afton, Indian Territory, a station on the St. Louis and San Francisco Railway, is in the midst of a plain which occupies the angle between the Arkansas River and its northern tributary, the Neosho or Grand River. The former stream enters the Territory from Kansas on the north, flowing southeastward and passing into Arkansas at Fort Smith, while the Grand rises in southeastern Kansas and southwestern Missouri and flows southward across the plains, joining the Arkansas in the Cherokee Nation, 45 miles south of Afton. Forests grow along the more rugged bluffs and on the occasional low hills, but the general region is almost treeless. The country is now very well settled, and farming and grazing are carried on with success.

The geologic formations underlying the immediate region of Afton appear to be of Carboniferous age, the strata being approximately horizontal, but they are much obscured by superficial deposits save in the banks of the rivers and their larger tributaries.

The springs with which the fossil remains and artifacts were associated are in a shallow wash at the very head of one of the lateral branches of Horse Creek, a tributary of the Neosho which falls into it from the north. The wash has no water, and has probably never carried a stream save in times of heavy rainfall or as a result of the melting of snow in the spring. In summer the water of the springs sinks from sight a few hundred yards from the source. The wash, which ramifies in various directions, is in places 200 feet wide and has a level floor only slightly depressed beneath the surface of the surrounding prairie. In this flat space the water of the springs, spreading out, forms a marshy area an acre or more in extent, which is much trampled by cattle when they have access to it, as it doubtless was at an earlier date by herds of buffalo and possibly by greater mammals that went before them. The surface is soft and spongy, sinking beneath the feet, and in approaching the basin of the principal spring it was necessary to lay down boards to insure a footing. The photograph (Plate 1) conveys a good idea of the appearance of the spring with which we are mainly concerned and of the general surroundings. The upper ends of the rough boards of the box forming the spring basin appear above the surface of the marsh. Besides this large spring, a second very weak spring occurs some 40 feet to the west, and a third, a little stronger, rises in a side wash perhaps 150 yards to the northeast. The water rising in the principal spring flows

so strongly that it requires quite steady dipping on the part of a single workman to keep the flow down. It is clear and so slightly impregnated with sulphur that it is used by the people of the vicinity for drinking purposes. The flow is steady, not changing winter or summer, a fact which indicates the great depth of the source—probably in the reservoirs from which the artesian water of the region is obtained.

#### TRADITIONS REGARDING THE SPRING.

In the neighborhood of Afton the relic-bearing spring has the reputation of possessing unusual medicinal qualities, and it is said that the aborigines of the region were formerly in the habit of gathering from all directions and camping near it for the purpose of drinking the water. This tradition refers, apparently, to the Cherokees; but since these people are recent arrivals in the West and appear to have no definite knowledge of the matter, I was inclined to believe that the tradition related to the tribes who preceded them in the Indian Territory, and that the qualities of the spring were not medicinal, as we understand the term, but were magical—such qualities as are commonly associated with sources of water supply by primitive peoples. This point will receive attention later. Careful search in the vicinity of the springs failed to bring to light even the most meager traces of aboriginal occupancy.

#### FIRST CLEARING OUT OF THE SPRING.

At an early date a barrel was set into the soft ground to receive and retain the water, and about fourteen years ago this was superseded by a strong box, but as the boards were sharpened and driven down the deposit of flints in the spring was not seriously disturbed. Later a new box was set inside of the old one, and in the cleaning out of the reservoir many implements and bones were found. It is said that at that time a bushel or more of the flints were thrown out and distributed among various persons.<sup>a</sup> It is much to be regretted that none of these have been preserved. Subsequent cleanings out yielded additional implements, and in the summer of 1901 Dr. Harper obtained about 150 specimens and some fossil teeth, which have been presented to the Smithsonian Institution. In June, 1901, Mr. Stewart visited the place and made the slight excavations already referred to, but did not penetrate deep enough to discover the deposit of implements.

---

<sup>a</sup> It should be noted that the stories relating to this period of the history of the spring vary considerably.

FINAL EXAMINATIONS. <sup>a</sup>

Having procured workmen and supplied myself with all necessary tools and appliances, I built a long trough to carry the water well away from the spring, and at once began the work of bailing out the basin. The box was about 4 feet square, and made of heavy boards held in place by timbers on the inside. About 4 feet from the surface of the ground silt was encountered, then sand and fine gravel, with which came up teeth of small mammals and an occasional mammoth tooth, also some flint implements, the number increasing as descent was made. When comparatively firm gravel was reached, at 5 or 5½ feet, the teeth and flints were found in great abundance, and the shovel, which was now brought into use, when inserted beneath the lower ends of the boards at the northern side came out half filled with the handsome blue and white spear points and knives, and along with these were bones of horses, deer, buffalo, and wolves. A little further excavation beneath the northern margin of the box brought to light the head of a buffalo and antlers and bones of two or more deer. In the deposit were also a number of implements made of deer antlers, which resemble very closely the hammers and pressure-flaking implements used by the tribes of the region in shaping flint.

The spring box, now being without sufficient support on the inside, collapsed, letting in the beds of soft muck and sand. It thus became necessary to make excavations outside of the spring basin sufficiently extensive to enable the workmen to clear away the wrecked box and provide against further caving in. When the superficial muck, which was about 2 feet in thickness, was removed from a considerable area, it was found to have rested on the surface of a bed of compact and extremely fine sand, which was quite firm save about the spring box, where it had been disturbed by the original cleaning out of the spring and by the slight excavations of Mr. Stewart. In the muck nothing excepting a few fragments of bones of buffalo were encountered, and there were only occasional specimens in the sand beneath. The discovery of a large spear point in the sand at a depth of 3 feet from the surface of the ground was a surprise. Plate 2 shows the implement as it appeared at the point of the shovel. This was about 3 or 4 feet north of the northern side of the box as it originally stood. Since this locality was undoubtedly a resort of the buffalo for a long period, instances must now and then have occurred of the death of wounded animals whose bodies contained the missiles shot into them by hunters, and in this way it is easy to account for the finding of stray spear

---

<sup>a</sup>My thanks are due to Dr. Dawson, owner of the property, for the privilege of making excavations. I must add, also, that most valuable aid was given in the work of excavation by Mr. DeLancey Gill, of the Bureau of American Ethnology, who accompanied me on the trip.



points, and these naturally would occur at depths in the formations as great as were reached by the bones of the animals themselves.

Half a day was consumed in getting rid of the wrecked box and clearing out the muck and water, the difficult nature of the work being well indicated in Plate 3. A pump was used to remove the water, and the work was kept up all night to prevent flooding; but on the second night the pump failed and the whole place was soon under water, which caused much delay. Reaching finally the level of the flint deposit in the spring, we began to encounter the implements again and took out a hundred or more, besides additional bones of the buffalo, elk, deer, and wolf. The finding of the flints was under such conditions of water encroachment and deep shadow that it was not possible to obtain photographs; but this seemed of little consequence, as the specimens did not occur in any particular order. They were piled together as if deposited, mainly at least, at one time, in the mouth of the spring. Most of them had descended to a depth of from 4 to 7 feet, and with the exception of a few stray pieces, such as those already referred to, they were included in a space not more than 3 feet in diameter. In this cluster were also most of the modern bones as well as many of the ancient animal remains. At a depth of 7 feet there were no more flints, but occasional teeth of the horse occurred along with the great teeth of the mammoth. The illustration, Plate 4, shows our party working in the wet gravels at a level only a few inches below the lowest flints and a little to the north of the position of the main deposit. Two fine mammoth teeth are in sight in the view, and the teeth of a recent horse were found a few inches behind the tooth held in the right hand of the workman in the shadow. Work was continued long enough to make sure that there were no more flints, and some time was spent in adding to the collection of fossil teeth. Before the excavation was filled a new box, 4 feet square and 7 feet deep, was set in the spring, and we had the pleasure of seeing the bubbling water rise in it as the work of filling went on around it.

#### THE FORMATIONS.

Other excavations were made at various points, with the view of determining the nature and extent of the formations. After our departure from Afton, Dr. Harper, working under my instructions, sunk three pits—one, north of the spring, 20 feet long and 13 feet deep, which practically connected with the original excavation; a second, 11 feet deep, 25 feet west of the spring, and a third, 9 feet deep, south of the spring and 25 feet away.

The section (Plate 5) shows the geological formations, together with the position and relations of the various finds of bones and implements. It is clear that the deposits of sand and gravel are not local, pertaining exclusively to the spring or even to the spring group, but

that they occupy a considerable area, as if deposited in a large body of water or by a river of considerable size. Our deepest excavation penetrated to a depth of only 13 feet, but the sounding rod indicated at least 16 feet of finely comminuted deposits. There is, however, considerable irregularity in the thickness of the several formations examined. The muck bed, which is 2 or 3 feet deep in the vicinity of the springs, gradually changes to sandy loam as the margins of the wash are reached. This muck represents merely the depth of disturbance by the feet of cattle and the consequent interference with free drainage of the water, the growth of marsh vegetation being the result of the constantly moist condition of the trampled area. The bed of sand beneath the muck has an approximately level upper surface, but is not of uniform thickness. It is 3 or 4 feet thick at the spring, and 10 or more 20 feet away. In the upper part it is extremely fine in texture, but lower there are layers of fine gravel, and Dr. Harper reports, as a result of his examinations, that the sand and gravel are distinctly bedded as if laid down in water. The gravel consists almost wholly of chert, and is in the main finely comminuted, but not uniformly waterworn. Many of the pebbles, and even some of the fossil teeth, are coated completely with sulphide of iron, which gives the effect of gilding.

#### FOSSIL REMAINS.

Our examinations developed the fact that the fossil remains were much more numerous in the spring and near it than elsewhere. There were more mammoth and mastodon teeth within a radius of 3 feet from the spring basin and between 4 and 7 feet in depth than in all the other material examined. In this restricted area there were at least 100 mastodon teeth and perhaps 20 mammoth teeth, besides considerable numbers of teeth of fossil bison and horse, as well as the whole deposit of implements and recent bones. In the excavation north of the spring, 20 feet long, 4 feet wide, and 13 feet deep, not half a dozen teeth of all varieties were found. In all the excavations outside of the spring the distribution of fossil remains was apparently quite uniform throughout the sand and gravel. Some of the teeth were perfectly preserved, while others were so disintegrated as to fall to pieces on being touched, and fragments were common and presented the appearance of attrition from water transportation.

In seeking an explanation of the prevalence of mastodon and mammoth teeth in the spring, several surmises may be made. Possibly, if the spring is very ancient, the great pachyderms mired more frequently in its basin than elsewhere, leaving their bones in the muck. Possibly the spring funnel was, in comparatively recent times, a receptacle for such bones as were weathered out of neighboring formations and carried by water or by gravity into the opening; and possibly movements of the soft deposits, on occasions of particular disturbance

or of strong pressure from beneath, have been toward the points of least resistance at the spring. The finely comminuted materials, the sand and clay, would be carried away by the strong flow of water, and the great teeth and the coarse gravel would remain in the basin. At least one instance was observed of such movement in the deposits near the spring. A year or two previous to my visit to Afton, and during the wet season, a body of liquid and semi-liquid material suddenly broke through the surface of the ground near the spring, like a bursting bubble, leaving a little hillock which is still distinctly visible. Such movements may have occurred from time to time, the direction being horizontal and toward the spring or directly or obliquely upward.

But perhaps the most plausible theory that can be advanced to account for the accumulation of bones in the spring is that when the place became an object of special attention on the part of the native tribes, such bones as were exposed in the vicinity were gathered and cast in as appropriate offerings to the beings supposed to inhabit it. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that the ancient bones are more plentiful in exactly the area in which the bones of modern creatures and Indian implements are found. Indeed, it is not improbable, as has been elsewhere remarked, that the occurrence of these huge bones gave rise to the superstition in the native mind that powerful spirits made this their dwelling place—that the spring was the doorway to the realm beneath. The remains of recent forms occurred nowhere at a depth of more than 4 or 5 feet, except in the immediate vicinity of the spring funnel, where they were deeper, and the teeth of a modern horse were, as has been stated, found associated with mammoth teeth at a depth of 7 feet.

It is clear that in the formations outside of the spring remains of the ancient creatures are quite uniformly distributed, and it appears that everywhere they are fragmental, the bones being separated and broken up as if subjected, at some past period, to vigorous transportation by water or to crushing under the feet of monsters trampling in the muck. In some instances two or more teeth were so related as to show that they had been in place in the jawbone when carried to their present position.

The remains of tusks were also fragmental, and in all cases in a state of disintegration so advanced that only small portions could be saved. The bones are broken with a sharp fracture, as if already brittle from decay or silicification when the disturbing agencies were active. Examples are illustrated in Plate 6. In the neighborhood stories are told of the discovery about the spring of bones of great size, but the largest piece encountered in our excavations was half of the lower jaw of a mastodon. Plate 7 illustrates a number of mastodon teeth, the one shown in *e* being of unusual shape, the result probably of disease.

Mammoth teeth are shown in Plates 8 and 9. The largest, a lower tooth, 16 inches in length, appears in Plate 8, while the larger of the

specimens shown in Plate 9, an upper tooth, is 11 inches in length, and very massive. Mr. Lucas, observing the differences between the two specimens shown in Plate 9 (the one being finely and the other coarsely ribbed), expresses the opinion that they may possibly represent two varieties of mammoth—*Elephas primigenius* and *Elephas imperator*, the latter species, proposed by Leidy, not as yet having been generally accepted.

Associated intimately with the flint implements in the spring were bones of two or three buffalo, four or more deer, one elk, half a dozen wolves, and one or more horses. These were a little more widely distributed than the flints, but were distinctly a spring deposit, and it is not unlikely that their presence also was partly or wholly due to human agency.

#### STONE IMPLEMENTS.

The implements found in the spring had been subjected to so much disturbance before my arrival that the exact nature of the original deposit could not be determined. They were in compact order, as if dumped in a body, but much the same result would have followed from the casting in of single specimens or small lots at various times, since all would settle to the deepest possible point in the spring basin, the position and character of which has probably remained unchanged for a long period. It is impossible to say whether or not the native tribes ever took the trouble to excavate the basin, either for convenience in using the water, to increase the flow in dry seasons, or to facilitate the introduction of the implements; but if the objects deposited were, as we suppose, in the nature of offerings, the spring was a sacred place and no one would venture to disturb it under any circumstances.

It was noted that the remains of buffalo, deer, and wolf were intermingled with the implements and that they were not associated as though the animals had died on the spot, but rather as if the separate bones or dismembered parts of the creatures had been thrown in with the implements. I am inclined to the view that they were cast in as offerings, since there seemed to be a very large and disproportionate number of bones of one kind; for example, not fewer than twenty or thirty of the large, straight leg bones of the deer were associated directly with the flints.

If statements coming from apparently reliable sources be correct, more than half the deposit of implements had been removed before my arrival. I obtained altogether, counting fragments and partially shaped pieces, more than 800 specimens, not quite half a bushel, so that there must have been at least a bushel (some say a barrel) of implements in the original deposit, the number reaching somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000. They include arrowheads, spear points, knives, and unspecialized blades, besides some roughed-out forms and

unshaped fragments. All the implements were shaped by flaking, and the work was for the greater part exceedingly well done. The finished forms appear to be such as would be appropriate to the buffalo hunter equipped for the chase. The spear was, it is believed, the main reliance of the Great Plains hunter, but bow and arrow were also in general use, especially for the smaller varieties of game. To pierce successfully the tough hide of the buffalo and penetrate to a vital part, the projectile point had to be thin, long, and incisive; the sulphur spring has furnished many perfect specimens of such implements (Plate 13). Our museum collections contain nothing comparable with them, and, except such as were probably broken by our excavating tools, nearly all are in perfect condition, as if just from the finishing shop. It is a noteworthy fact that a large number of the spear points, as well as the knives, had been freshly sharpened when the deposit was made, the old discolored surface being easily distinguished from the more recently chipped portions (Plate 22).

The knife also, of which there are many specimens, was of primary importance to the hunter. The thin blades are from 3 to 6 inches in length and from 1 to 4 inches in width, and show various stages of specialization and wear. Many are, apparently, freshly made, symmetric, leaf-shaped blades, while others have been sharpened and resharpened on one side so as to be scarcely more than half the original width (Plate 17). One end of the blade is in all cases wider than the other, and, taking the narrow end as the point of the implement, the sharpening is such as to indicate a right-handed use in nearly all cases.

The chert of which the implements are made is of excellent quality; it is white and bluish-gray in a majority of cases, but some specimens are quite dark. It is not of the variety found so plentifully in the quarries of the region about Afton, but is of finer grain. The quarries 4 miles south of the village, as well as those on the Peoria reservation, 25 miles to the northeast, furnish a coarser material, generally somewhat yellowish in color. It is manifest that the flint is nearly all from a single quarry or from a group of sites yielding identical material, and there is no doubt that these quarries will be found in good time not far distant from the Afton Springs. A very few pieces are of other varieties of flint, such as are sometimes found scattered over the surface of the country, and some of these may have been brought in from distant points.

Owing to the unusual interest attaching to this collection, I deem it wise to present a full series of illustrations. The objects are shown actual size or as nearly so as circumstances permit. Plates 10 to 16 are devoted to arrowheads and spear points, the two classes being placed together because it is quite impossible to draw the line separating them. We assume that the smaller forms (Plate 10) were

generally used as arrowheads and the larger ones as spear points. The groups assembled in the plates are, as far as may be, representative of different types.

In Plate 13 examples of large, superbly finished spear points are presented. They represent the highest and most prevalent type of these objects, having long, thin blades, prolonged acute points, and deep notches separating the stem and the wings. Plate 14 shows less typical examples of the same general shape. Plate 15 shows five examples of spear points of unique form, very probably made especially for sacrificial purposes. They are wide and thin, and are characterized by an almost rectangular body, an abrupt triangular point, a wide, square base, and concave lateral margins. Hardly less remarkable are the roundish, blunt-pointed spear points shown on Plate 16. The deposit did not contain more than a dozen of these unusual implements, and nothing resembling them is found in the Museum collections. It may be suggested that they possibly served in the ceremonial shooting of spirits.

Plates 17 and 18 illustrate knives that have been specialized in various degrees. Examples of the smaller unspecialized leaf-shaped blades are shown in Plate 19, and specimens of medium size appear in Plates 20, 21, and 22. Plate 23 illustrates four rudely outlined discoidal blades, while other still ruder specimens, not included in the plates, probably belong to the class of failures or rejects.

One of the most striking features of these implements is that many of them show distinct evidences of recent reshaping. The old surfaces are quite dark, as is well shown in Plate 22, while the new flaking has exposed the clean white material. Many arrowheads and spear points have been retrimmed, some slightly, others over a large part of the surface (*a*, *b*, and *c*), while the knives have been carefully sharpened along one edge, as is seen in *d* and *e*. It is interesting to note that the sharpening occurs on the left side of the blade, indicating right handedness of the owners. Strangely enough, there were many fragments and chips of chert scattered through the spring deposits, as if work had been done on the spot or near at hand, and the flakage thrown in along with the shaped objects. Traces of what appeared to be arrow shafts of reed were also found.

#### BONE AND ANTLER IMPLEMENTS.

The bone implements were not at first recognized as such, and probably many were thrown away, being taken for mere fragments of bone. There are three varieties of these objects—two made of antler and the other from leg bones of deer and birds. The most numerous are from the heavy end of the antler; their length varies from 4 to 7 inches.

The base retains nearly its natural form and the other end is slightly rounded off, as is shown in Plate 24. These objects are of the type known as flint flakers in the Middle West, and were probably supplied with handles fastened about the middle portion, making them available for roughing out the flint blades by percussion.

A second form is such as would be produced by dividing longitudinally the implement described above and rounding down the ends and edges. Examples are shown in Plate 25. They were associated with the flint knives in such an intimate way as to lead to the supposition that they may have served as handles. They could have been set together in pairs inclosing the upper edge or back of the knife blade and lashed or cemented firmly in place. In two or three cases pairs were found so nearly matching in size and curvature as to allow successful employment in this way. It is to be noted that these objects are very like implements used in some regions for pressure flaking in the final trimming and sharpening of flint implements. Such implements would naturally form a part of the set of tools carried by a hunter of the Stone Age when about to set out on a prolonged expedition.

Among the many partially decayed objects of bone there were specimens resembling awls; two of these appear in Plate 26. The larger is made of one of the lower leg bones of deer or antelope, and the smaller of the leg bone of some large bird—a heron or a sand-hill crane. Such utensils were an essential feature of the outfit of the lodge dweller of the Great Plains, whose clothing and dwellings were often made of skins sewed together.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DEPOSIT.

As has been indicated, the conclusion was reached at the outset that the casting of implements into the spring was not a caching or hiding of these precious objects, much less an idle, meaningless act. Stone implements were the most important possessions of the hunting tribes. Stone was their iron and steel. A vast amount of labor was expended in digging it from its bed in the hills and in reducing it to the forms desired, a work necessarily performed by men possessing particular skill. The placing of these articles in the spring must, therefore, have been an act of great importance to the people concerned, and was doubtless in response to the demands of superstition. Water, and especially sources of water supply, have ever been regarded by primitive men, and even by some more advanced peoples, as dwelling places for spirit beings, and when sacrifices were believed to be necessary, the most precious possessions were cast in, and no one was sufficiently bold to molest them. In fact, such a spot was generally regarded as sacred, and was avoided by all save those who were properly qualified to

approach and make the offerings—the medicine men or priests. One of the most striking facts connected with the Afton spring is that, although tradition indicates that it was a great gathering place for the native tribes, no traces of camps or dwellings were found in the vicinity.

That sacrifice to spirit occupants of springs was a widespread practice among the tribes of the West is clear, although observations of the fact are somewhat rare. Dr. J. Owen Dorsey tells us that the Dakotas believe the buffalo to be of subterranean origin, and refers to a tradition which asserts that one day when a principal man of one of the tribes was fasting and praying to the Sun god he saw the ghost of a buffalo rising from a spring. <sup>a</sup> The Sioux have also water gods and mystic beings associated with bogs.

In a recent publication by Dr. A. S. Gatschet reference is made to a sacred spring or well of the Omahas, located in western Kansas, as follows:

This curious water receptacle is situated on the top of a hill, and has a nearly circular form with about 30 feet diameter. All the hunting tribes of the prairie regarded it with a religious interest mixed with awe; the Páni called it, or call it still, Kitch-Wálushti; the Omahas, Ní-wáxube, both names signifying "sacred water." The miraculous quality of this pool which chiefly astonishes the Indian mind, consists in a *slow rising* of the water whenever a large number of people stand around the brink. The water of the pool is perfectly limpid and considered to be bottomless; it harbors an aquatic monster which engulfs all the objects thrown into it, and never sends them up again. Indians offered to it beads, arrows, kerchiefs, earrings, even blankets, and all sink down immediately. Before putting clay or paint on their faces, the Indians impregnated these substances with the water of the well. They never drink of this water, but to allay their thirst they go to the neighboring Salomon River. Before buffalo hunting became a thing of the past, large hunting parties of natives often gathered around this pond-source, and the following narrative circulated among them as a truthful report of what really occurred: Two Pánis once returned with their horses. Having dismounted near the sacred water, one of the men stepped upon a turtle of the large species frequently found in the vicinity, about 3 feet long. The man's feet stuck to the turtle; he could not disengage himself from its treacherous shell, and when the turtle ran with his charge into the pool, the Indian was soon beyond possible rescue. His stupefied companion had seen the occurrence and went home to tell the tale. <sup>b</sup>

#### PEOPLES CONCERNED IN THE DEPOSIT.

The Afton region was occupied by tribes of Siouan stock, and particularly by the Osages, who in historic times overran Neosho Valley and neighboring districts. That it was some of these people who cast the offerings into the spring seems highly probable from the fact that the whole group of artifacts was just such as they would have used before the introduction of iron, and facts brought out by recent

<sup>a</sup>J. Owen Dorsey, Eleventh Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, 1894, p. 538.

<sup>b</sup>A. S. Gatschet, Journal of American Folk-Lore, II, 1899, pp. 68-69.



correspondence with the Indian agent for the Osage tribe make it certain that they alone were largely, if not wholly, responsible for the deposit.

The following paragraph is quoted from a letter from Mr. O. A. Mitscher, Indian agent at Pawhuska, Indian Territory, to Dr. R. H. Harper, of Afton, who had written making inquiries:

SIR: Referring to your letter of the 7th instant relative to a certain spring located between Afton and Miami, in which were found numerous large teeth, about five hundred arrow points or spearheads, etc., asking me to learn from the Osage Indians what, if anything, these signified, I have the honor to report that I submitted this matter to old man Red Eagle, the oldest man in the Osage tribe, who distinctly remembers the spring, and states that it used to be the meeting place of the old medicine men of the tribe when he was a young man; that the spring was held as a sacred place, and the doctors met there to hold their councils.

The arrow-points and spearheads were worn by the medicine men as medals. It was the custom of the tribe to offer the spearheads and other tokens to appease nature or their gods by depositing them in the spring, which they considered holy ground. This custom was observed whenever the tribe went on the warpath, to insure victory; when a child was born, to secure blessings for the child; and for any unusual undertaking, to make it successful. These deposits of tokens in the springs were also good-luck offerings.

The spring was usually a shrine resorted to by the old-time Indians to commune with the unseen world. This custom, however, is not now in vogue, and has not been practiced by the Indians for some time.

I am assured by Red Eagle that when he was a boy, and before the white people intermingled with the Indians, it was the practice of the medicine men and the leaders to gather at these springs for the purpose of holding councils, etc.

Some of the tribes farther west seem to have had similar practices, and instances of sacrifice to springs are recorded. Mr. F. H. Cushing and Dr. Walter Hough report the ceremonial use of springs in various localities, and Mr. Thomas Ewbank speaks of a sacred spring near Zuni, New Mexico, as follows:

The spring is cleared out every year, when an offering is made to the spirit of the font of one or more waterpots, which are placed on the wall. A dozen or more whole ones were observed, while fragments abounded. Some of the remaining vases are reputed to have been offered centuries ago by the pueblo caciques. Specimens were brought away, notwithstanding the tradition that whoever abstracted one would be struck by lightning. As the Zuni Indians do not have recourse to artificial irrigation, they depend entirely on rain; and it is their belief that if they neglected the annual ceremonies at the spring their crops would be destroyed by drought."

Early in 1893 some Navaho Indians brought to Mr. T. V. Keam, the trader at Keams Canyon, in northeastern Arizona, several specimens of antique pottery which they had uncovered while digging for water at a point about 5 miles from the trading post. Mr. Keam had the Indians continue the work, with the result that in the course of a week's digging they unearthed several hundred specimens of ancient

"Ewbank, Report on Indian Tribes, Pacific Railroad Surveys, III, 1856, pp. 44-45.

pottery. Mr. James Mooney, of the Bureau of American Ethnology, published the following statement relating to these finds:

On Sunday, February 12, in company with Mr. Keam, I rode over to the spot where the discovery had been made. It is in a *rincon*, or side canyon, walled in by steep cliffs perhaps 150 feet in height. Toward the south the canyon opens out into an extensive valley occupied by several families of Navajos with their herds of sheep and goats. At the north end of the canyon several springs ooze up through the rocks and sand drifts, and it was in excavating one of these that the discovery was made. Several springs have now been dug out, but pottery has been found only at one. On climbing the steep ascent to the top of the mesa we find the remains of the ancient pueblo overlooking the valley on the east. It must have been an extensive settlement in its day, as large as any of the existing Hopi villages, as the ruins cover an area of perhaps 4 acres, and the whole neighborhood is strewn with fragments of stamped [coiled] and painted pottery and flakes of flint and obsidian. The foundations of the walls are still well preserved, so that the outlines of the room can be distinctly traced, and by digging out the accumulated sand and débris it is probable that nearly the whole ground-plan might be restored. At the foot of the cliff, toward the south, traces of burnt clay and charcoal show where the pottery was made, and the steps cut into the rock by which the ancient inhabitants descended to the spring are still plainly visible.

Several of the Indians were at work digging while we were there. They had excavated the principal spring, where the pottery had been found, down to bed clay, and had thrown the loosened sand out at the top. The instruments used were their hands and two long-handled shovels. The ground all around was strewn with fragments of pottery thrown out, and numerous other fragments were embedded in the sand. It was evident that probably half the original number, including the largest specimens, had been destroyed in the digging process. By working in from the side, instead of from above, and proceeding carefully to remove the sand with the hands and some such small tool as a knife or a stick, probably three hundred or more pieces might have been taken out intact. Most of those preserved were small, finely decorated with designs in black and reddish brown, and of most unique shapes. . . . According to the statement given to Mr. Keam by the Hopi, who have occupied this region from time immemorial, the ruined pueblo, which they call Kawaika, was formerly occupied by the Indians now in Laguna pueblo, west of the Rio Grande. They state also that their ancestors used to deposit jars and bowls near springs as votive offerings to the water gods. This would account for the fact that the vessels were all found close together at the principal spring, and appear from their size and shape to have been intended for religious rather than practical purposes. The custom of making offerings at springs to the water deities is common to all primitive tribes, and among the Arapahos and Cheyennes I have myself seen shawls and strips of calico hung up as sacrifices upon the bushes about every little watering place in the vicinity of a regular camp."

Recent correspondence with Mr. A. R. Graham, of Ferro, New Mexico, has brought to my attention the discovery of an offering spring at Hudson, New Mexico, and the following interesting paragraphs are quoted from his letter of January 18, 1902:

The Hudson hot spring (now called Faywood) is situated at the foot of a mesa 4 miles west of the Rio Mimbres, 25 miles due east of Silver City, this county, and about the same distance from Deming, New Mexico. It is directly on the old California highway, called the Santa Fé trail, and was used for many years prior to the

coming of the railroad in 1884 as a stage station, being the first station west of Cooks Peak Canyon, famous for its numerous hold-ups and Indian massacres in the early days.

The very high medicinal virtues of the waters were first discovered by Richard Hudson while serving as colonel of California volunteers in 1863. He located at the spring after being mustered out, and held possession until 1894, when I purchased the property. The flow from the spring then came from a cistern-shaped hole in the center of a round-top mound, elevated about 30 feet above the surrounding surface.

The regular flow of the spring is 5,000 gallons per hour, and it never, to my knowledge, varies from this. I purchased the property for the purpose of establishing a health resort, the analysis showing the water to be unexcelled for the cure of rheumatism and stomach disorders. I built a large hotel at the east foot of the spring mound, and in order to utilize the hot water for bath-house and hotel use, including heating of the hotel through radiators, I found it necessary to clean out the spring and wall it up to prevent loss through various small leaks through the mound formation. It proved a costly task, but I felt remunerated by the discoveries. The diameter of the spring excavation was 25 feet, and when I reached the depth of 26 feet I found the spring inclosed by a wall of red marlite stone, round and symmetrical as man could build. Thousands of tons of dirt and rock had been thrown into the spring, and after removing this to the depth of 26 feet, I began to find Indian remains and relics of Indian art. The mound, 26 feet in height, formed on top of the red marlite formation, had been made from the deposit of minerals in the water.

At a depth of 28 feet we discovered a distinct burial of a human being covered with mesquite bush, on top of which were bowlders. There were three such burials discovered between the 28th or 31st foot levels, and with each one were found war clubs of stone, spear points, arrowheads, one wooden bow, almost complete, beads, mortars, etc.

We secured quite well-preserved parts of several skulls and other parts which would indicate that the people were of average stature. I supervised the whole work, and, with the assistance of my wife, have now nicely preserved and arranged in a cabinet every relic taken from the spring, the principal ones being: (1) Parts of skulls and bones of several human beings; (2) over 50 spearheads and arrow-heads of every shape and style of workmanship, the spearheads being notable for size and symmetry; (3) nine large war clubs, made of stone; (4) a large variety of teeth of animals, as well as large bones of extinct animals; (5) ten stone pipes from 4 to 7 inches in length—the most interesting relics found; (6) a flint hatchet and a stone hammer, together with stones worn flat from use, beads made from vegetable seed and bird bones, part of two Indian bows, with a quiver, in which was quite a bunch of long, coarse black hair that was soon lost after being dried.

In the vicinity of Hudson Springs, within 3 to 8 miles, there are numerous burying grounds and other evidences of dwellings of the earlier Indian tribes, the graves all containing more or less decorated pottery, a few good examples of which I also have.

Within 1 mile of this hot spring are two cold springs, while  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles to the west is another warm spring of medicinal water (temperature  $98^{\circ}$ ) that flows nearly 1,000,000 gallons daily. This spring comes up from the south base of stone fortifications of considerable extent, which stand out on a level mesa in a commanding position.

In the East instances of the discovery of relics of arts in springs are rare. A deposit of flint blades found in a spring in North Carolina is exhibited in the Smithsonian Institution.

The most notable examples of sacrifices of this general class are recorded by explorers of Central and South America, where offerings of gold and precious things of various kinds were cast into lakes,

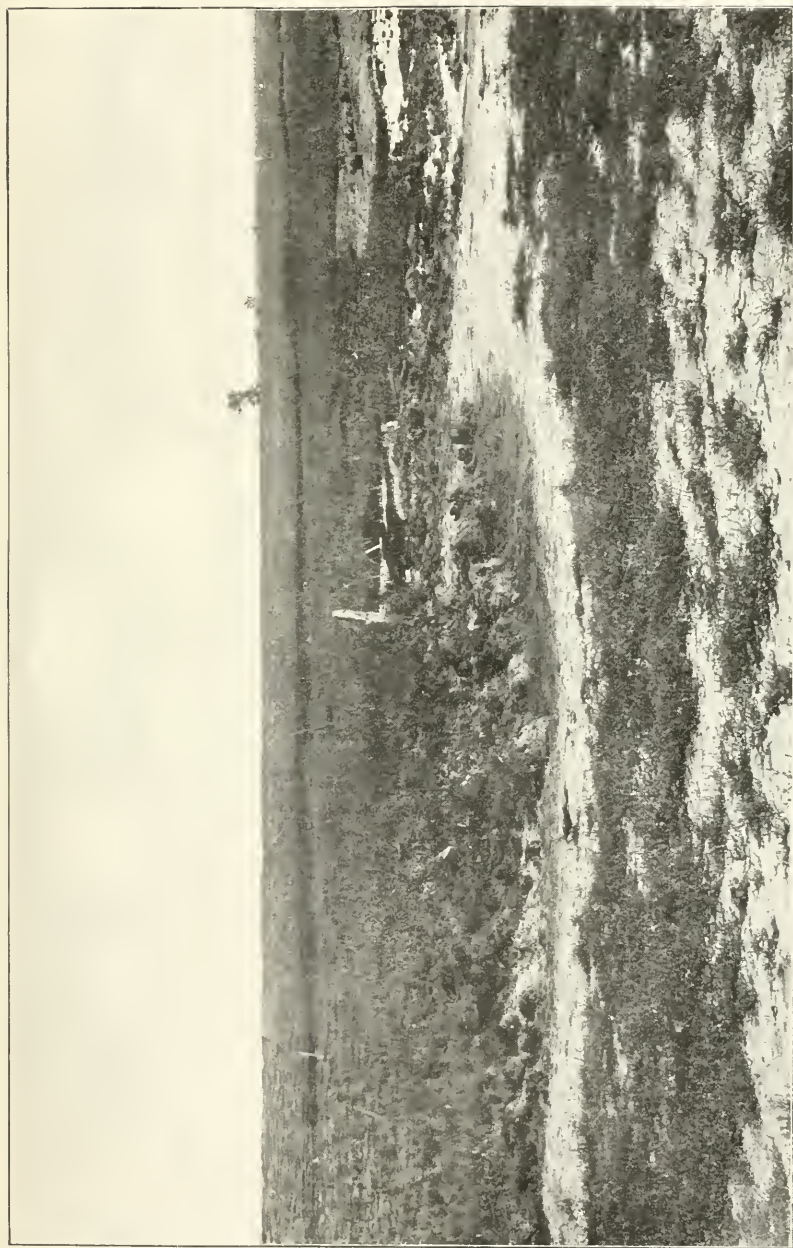
streams, springs, and the deep cenotes, or natural wells, to appease the gods believed to dwell therein.

Perhaps the most important fact connected with the finds at Afton is that we have here, for the first time, a large assortment of stone implements and other objects identified fully with a particular tribe and period. We have, as it were, recovered a notable chapter directly out of the prehistory of the primitive buffalo-hunting tribes of the Great Plains.

A second advantage of these over other deposits or caches of implements in the great Mississippi Valley region is that the exact motives of the makers of the offerings are made known to us. The story of the old Osage medicine man agrees in every respect with ideas formulated by ethnologists as a result of studies in other regions and among distinct peoples. It is a remarkable fact that the practice of sacrificing to the spirits of springs is almost universal amongst primitive men.

The association of human relics with the remains of extinct animals is always a matter of much scientific interest, but it appears that in this case the association has little significance. The fossil bones belong to the early geological formations of the region, while the human relics are of recent introduction into the spring.

The course of events witnessed by the fleeting ages in the region of the Neosho Valley may be outlined somewhat as follows: About the close of Pliocene times, or in the earlier part of the Pleistocene, the great plains of the interior of the continent were overrun by vast herds of elephants, horses, bison, and other strange creatures, which slaked their thirst at the bubbling springs, if these then existed, or otherwise in the streams and lakes of that time, leaving their carcasses to rot there. Then the Ice Age supervened, and vast changes came over the region and its life. The glacial chill drove the herds to the south or destroyed them, and the glacial floods buried their remains in deposits of sand and gravel. Then there arrived, from no one knows where, the buffalo, the elk, and the deer, with attendant swarms of carnivora and minor beasts. With these, or following them, came the Indian, with spear and bow and arrow, and the era of the chase began. Afton Springs were flowing, as they had been no doubt for ages, and the beds of muck received the bodies of the dying herds as before. But with the coming of man a new element was introduced—the springs, abounding in bones of unknown monsters, became places of veneration and were peopled with spirits of the savage pantheon, and to these sacrifices were made, the most precious possessions of the hunter peoples finding a resting place in the sulphurous shrine. The last, the present episode in Afton's history, witnessed the disappearance of the buffalo and the red hunter and the coming of new cattle and a strange people. Then followed the keeping of herds on the plains about, the building of towns, the construction of railways, and finally the cleaning out of the springs and the discovery of its interesting treasures.



SITE OF AFTON SULPHUR SPRINGS.





DISCOVERY OF A FLINT IMPLEMENT IN THE SUPERFICIAL SANDS.







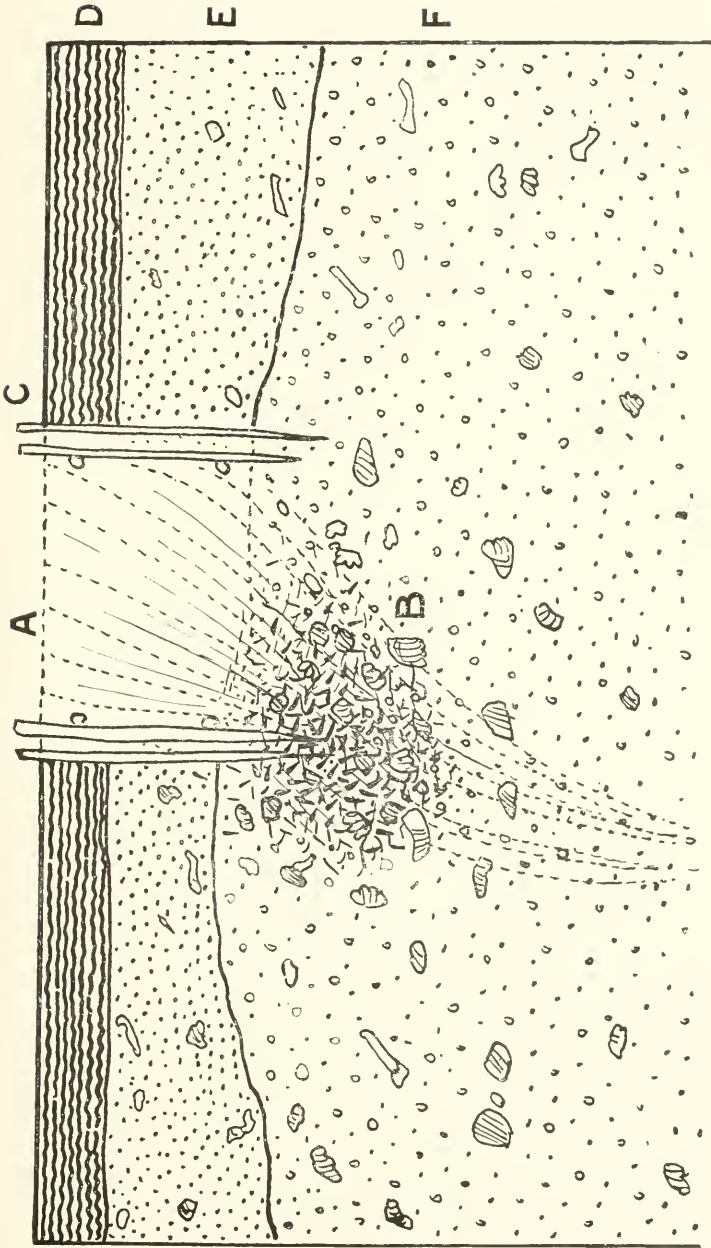
DIFFICULTIES MET WITH IN MAKING EXCAVATIONS.





MAMMOTH TEETH FOUND IN THE GRAVELS.





SECTION OF SPRING AND ASSOCIATED GEOLOGICAL FORMATIONS.





FRAGMENTARY CONDITION OF FOSSIL BONES.

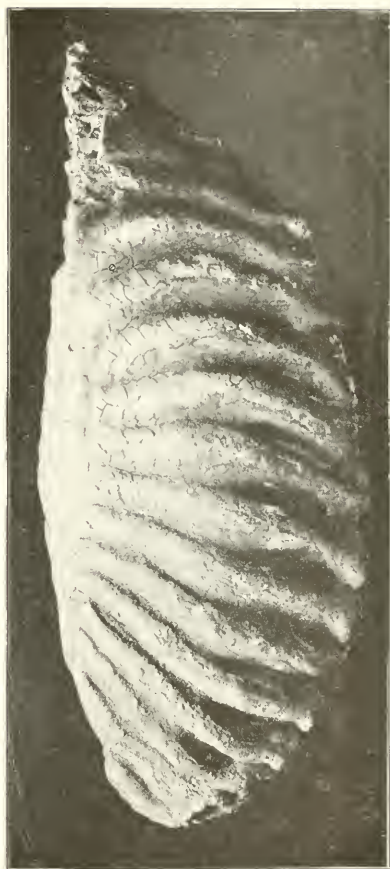
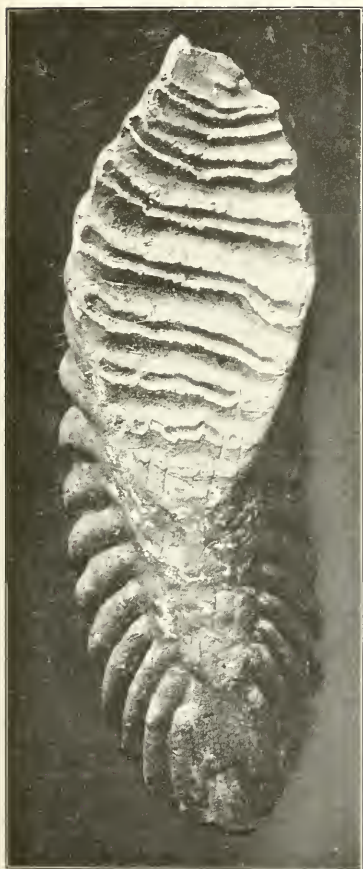






MASTODON TEETH.





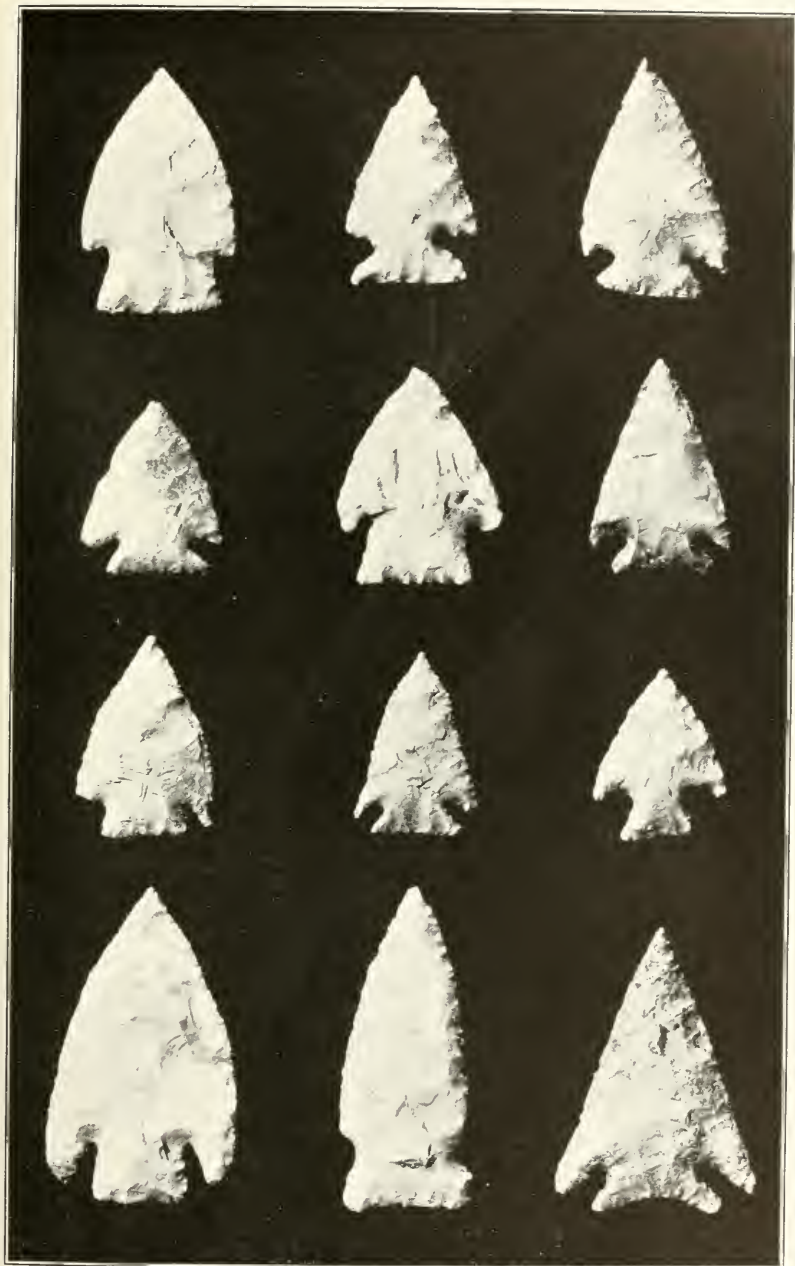
MAMMOTH TEETH.





MAMMOTH TEETH.

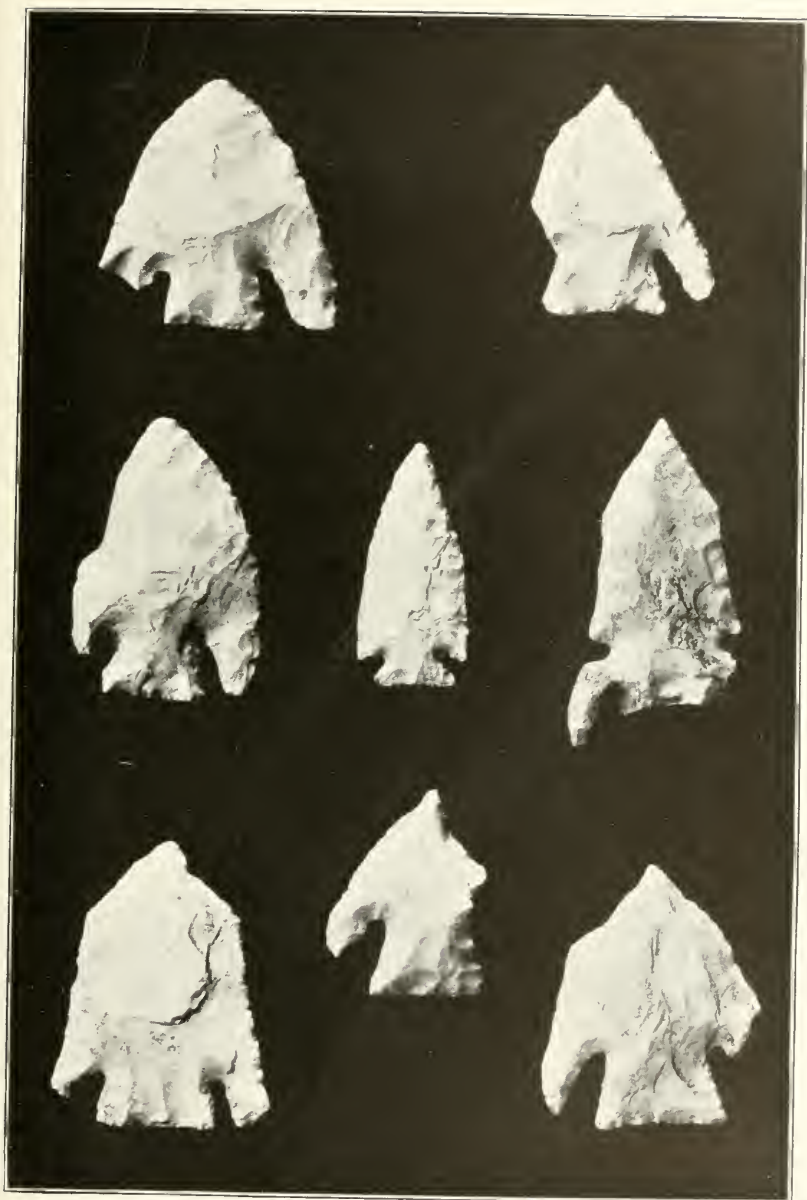




ARROW AND SPEAR HEADS (THREE-FOURTHS ACTUAL SIZE).







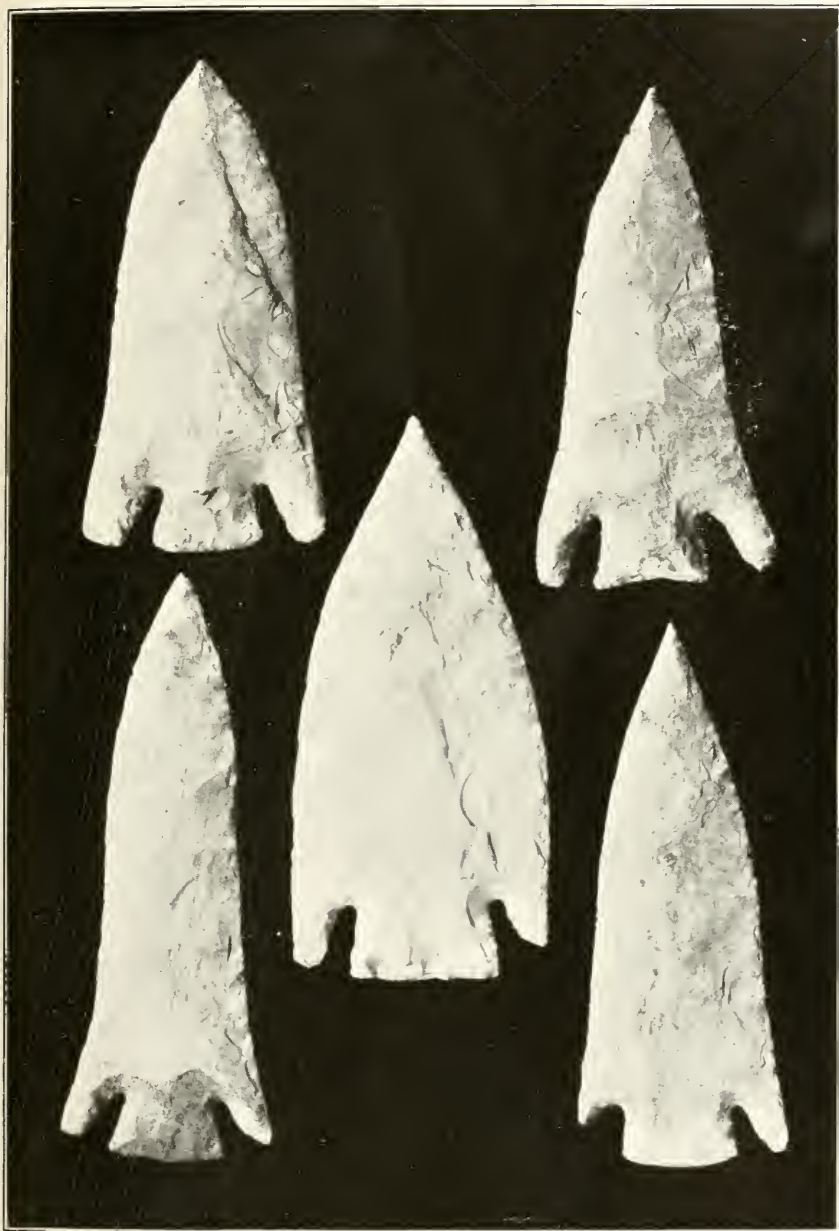
ARROW AND SPEAR HEADS (ABOUT THREE-FOURTHS ACTUAL SIZE).





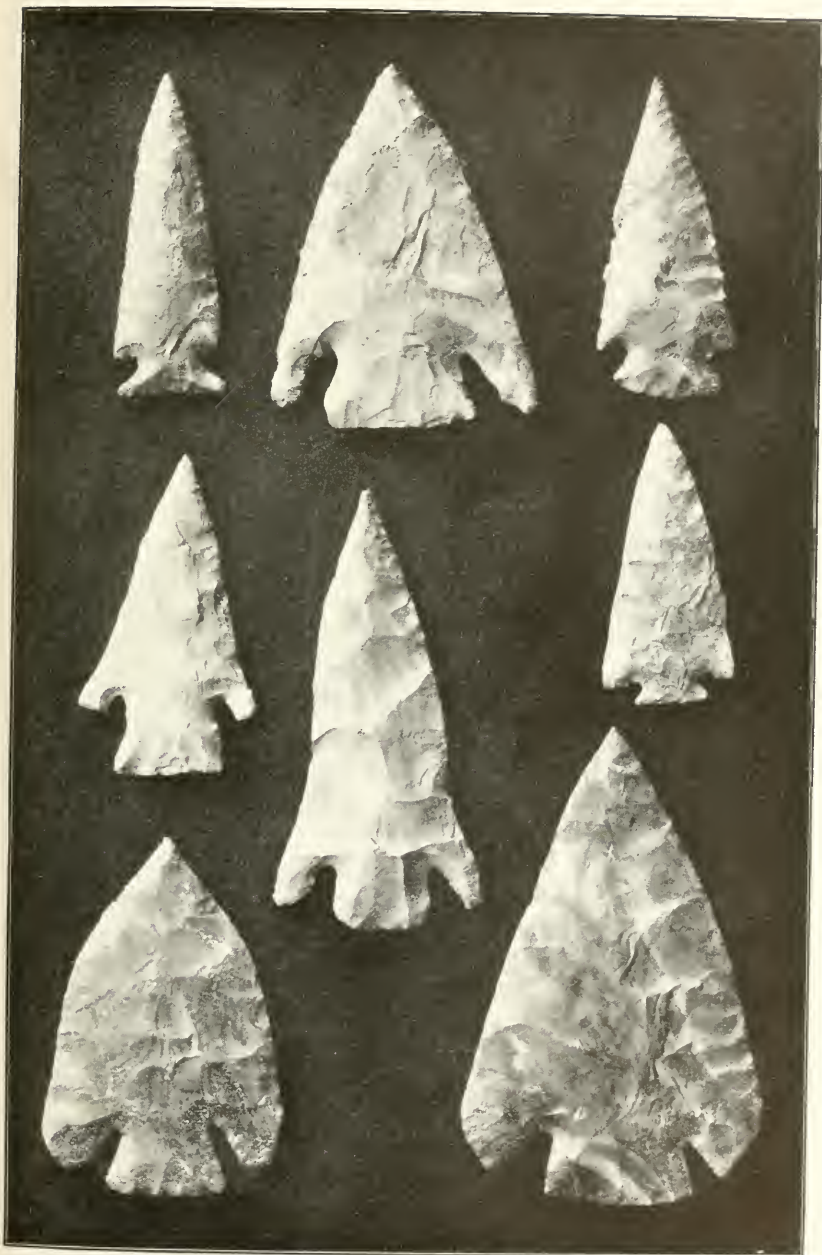
SPEARHEADS (THREE-FOURTHS ACTUAL SIZE).





SPEARHEADS (THREE-FOURTHS ACTUAL SIZE).

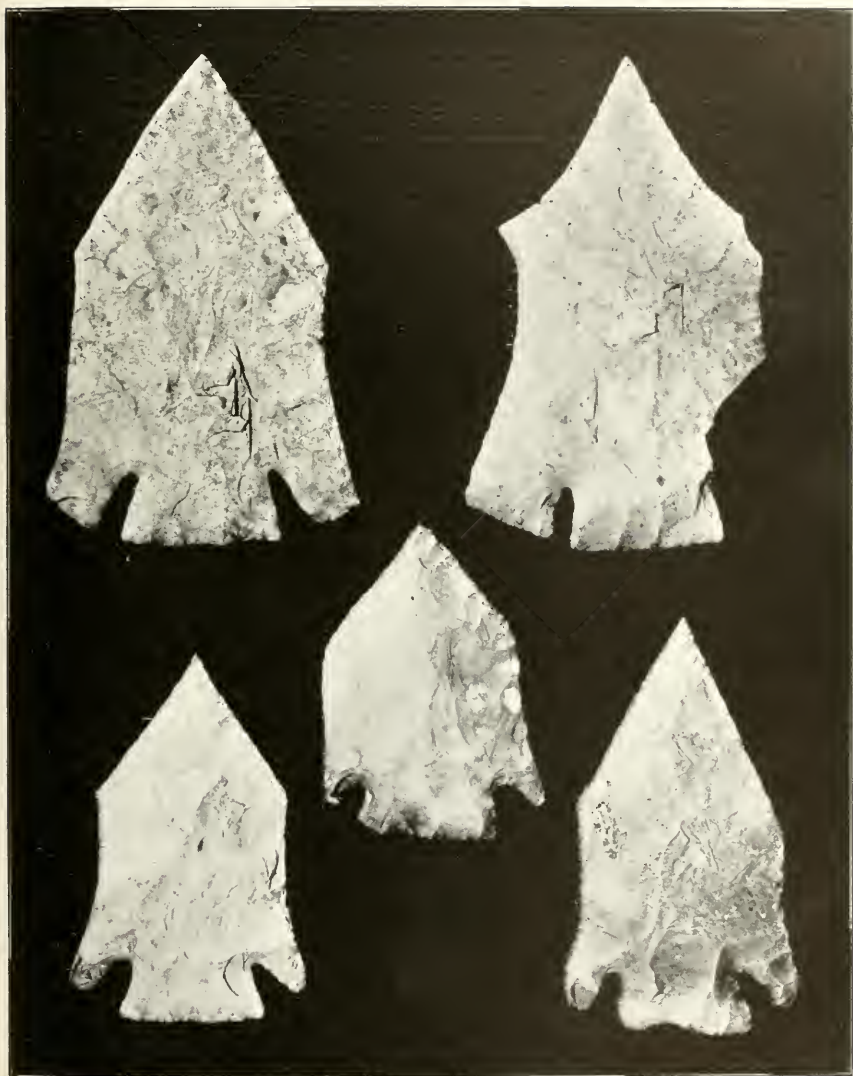




SPEARHEADS (ABOUT THREE-FOURTHS ACTUAL SIZE).







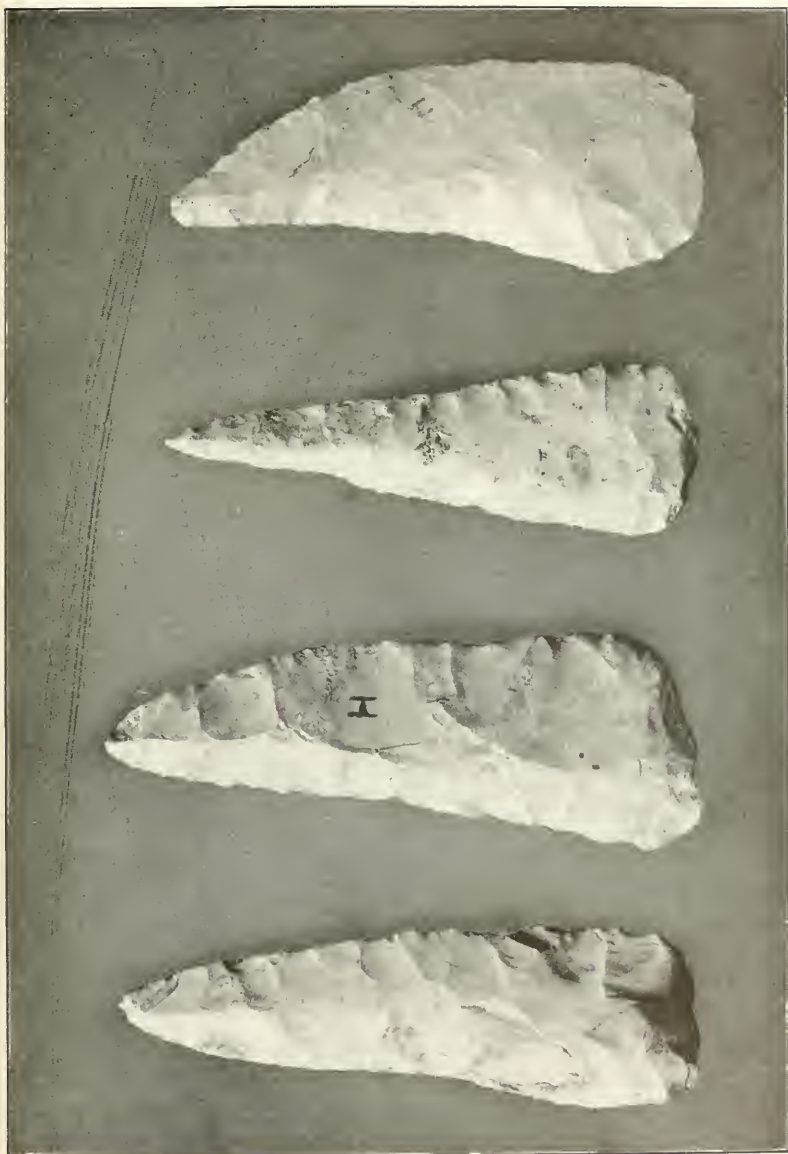
SPEARHEADS (TWO-THIRDS ACTUAL SIZE).





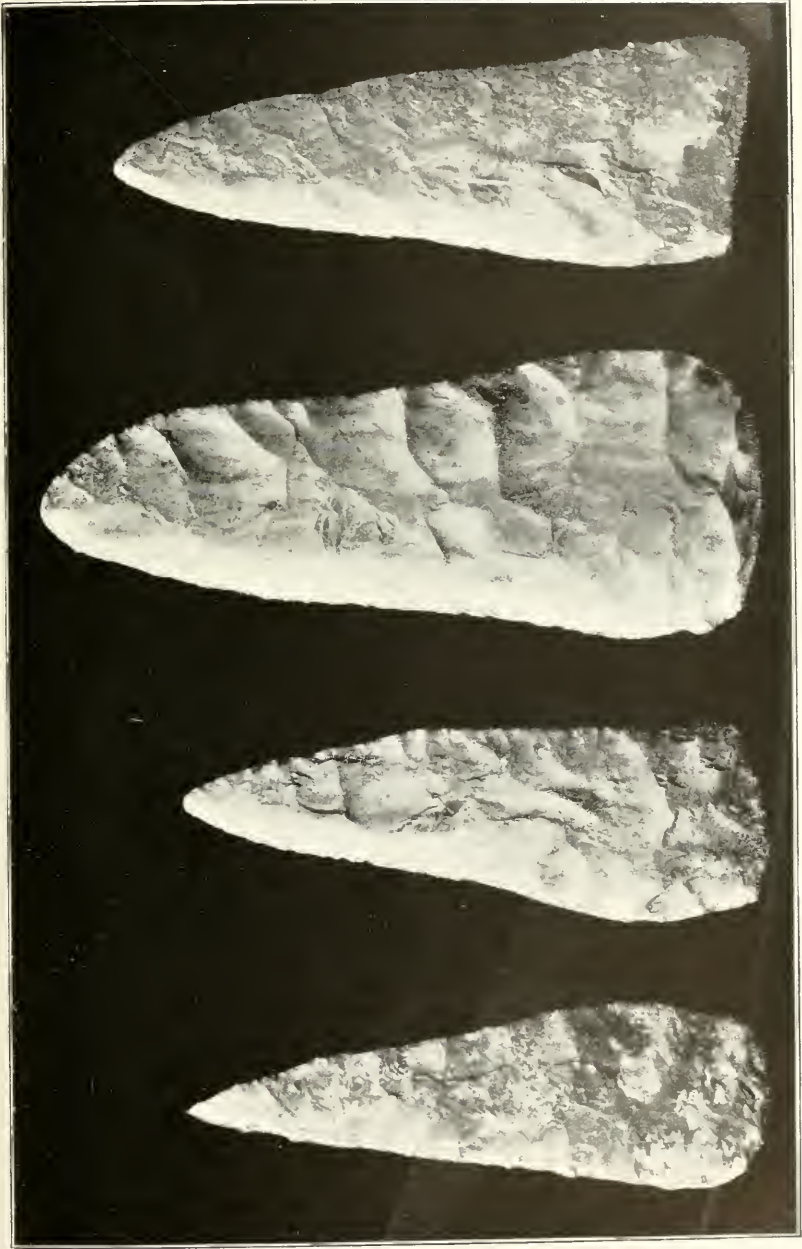
BLUNT-POINTED SPEARHEADS (ABOUT ONE-HALF ACTUAL SIZE).





WELL-WORN KNIVES (THREE-FOURTHS ACTUAL SIZE).





KNIVES (THREE-FOURTHS ACTUAL SIZE).







SYMMETRIC BLADES (ABOUT THREE-FOURTHS ACTUAL SIZE).





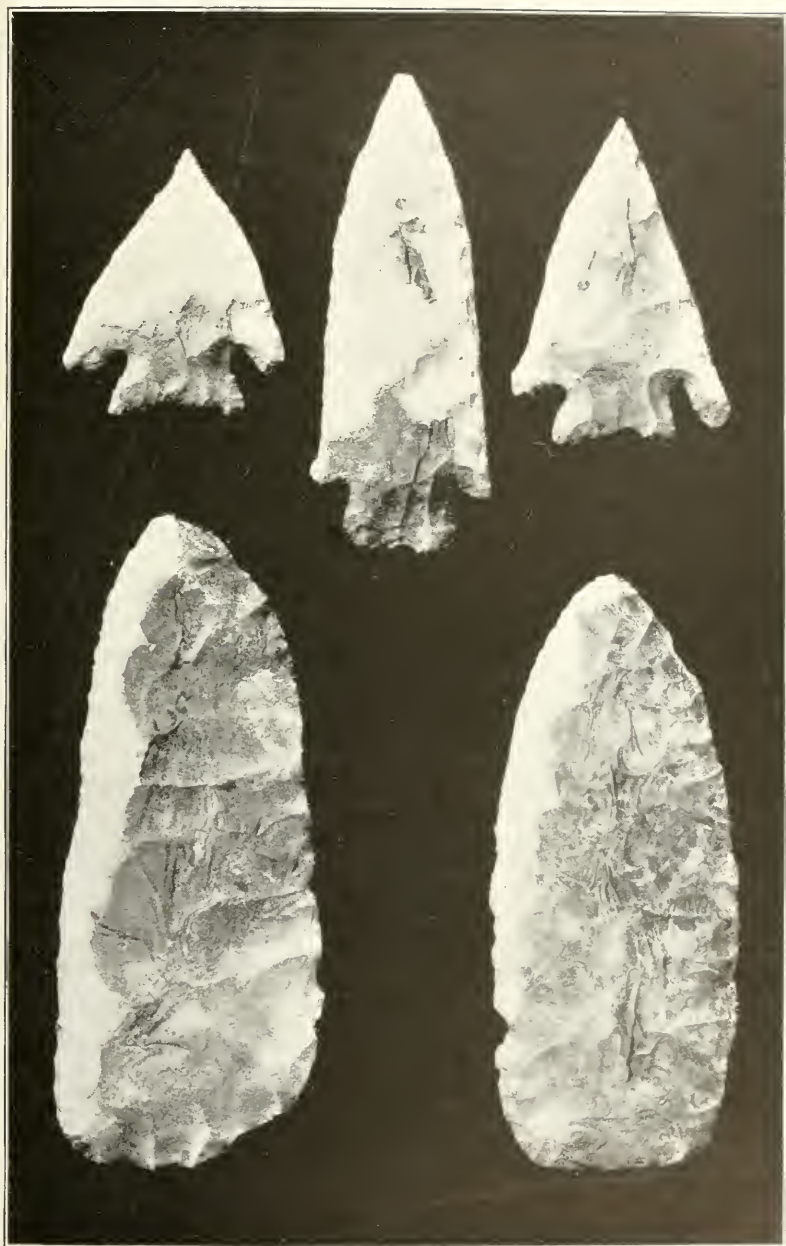
ROUGHED-OUT BLADES (THREE-FOURTHS ACTUAL SIZE).





ROUGHED-OUT BLADES (THREE-FOURTHS ACTUAL SIZE).

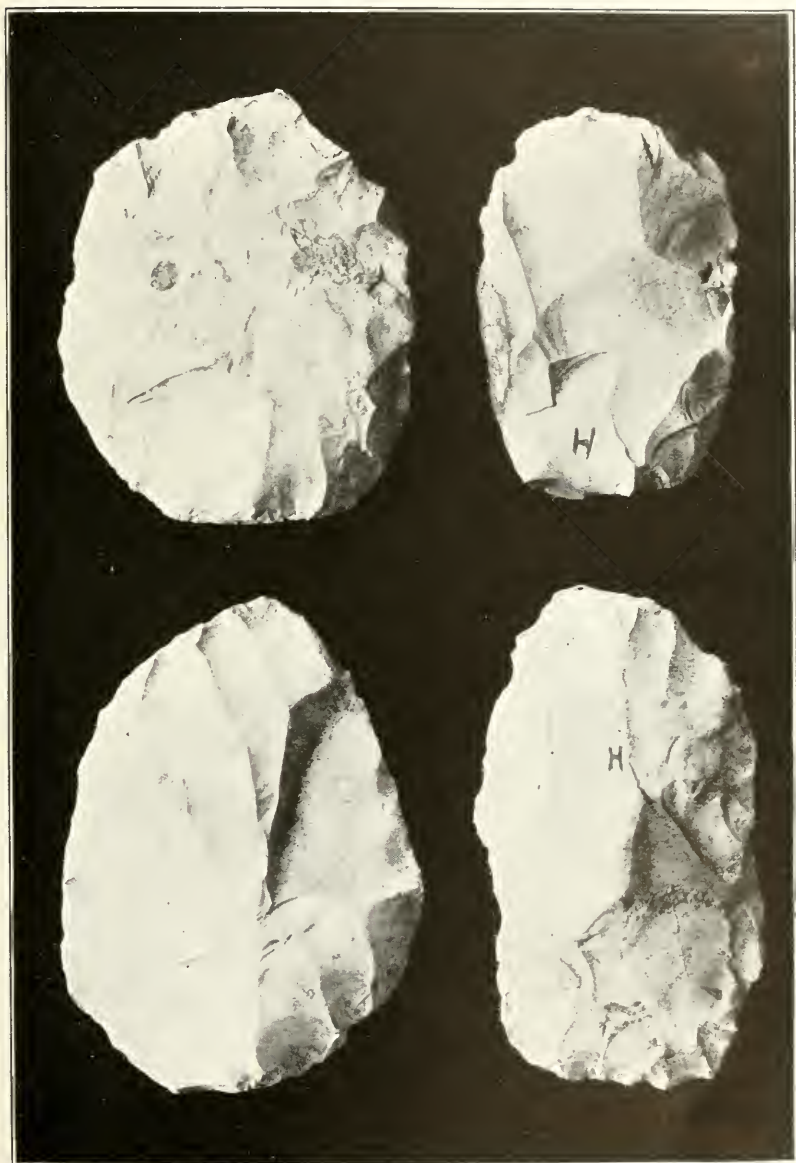




ROUGHED-OUT BLADES (THREE-FOURTHS ACTUAL SIZE.)

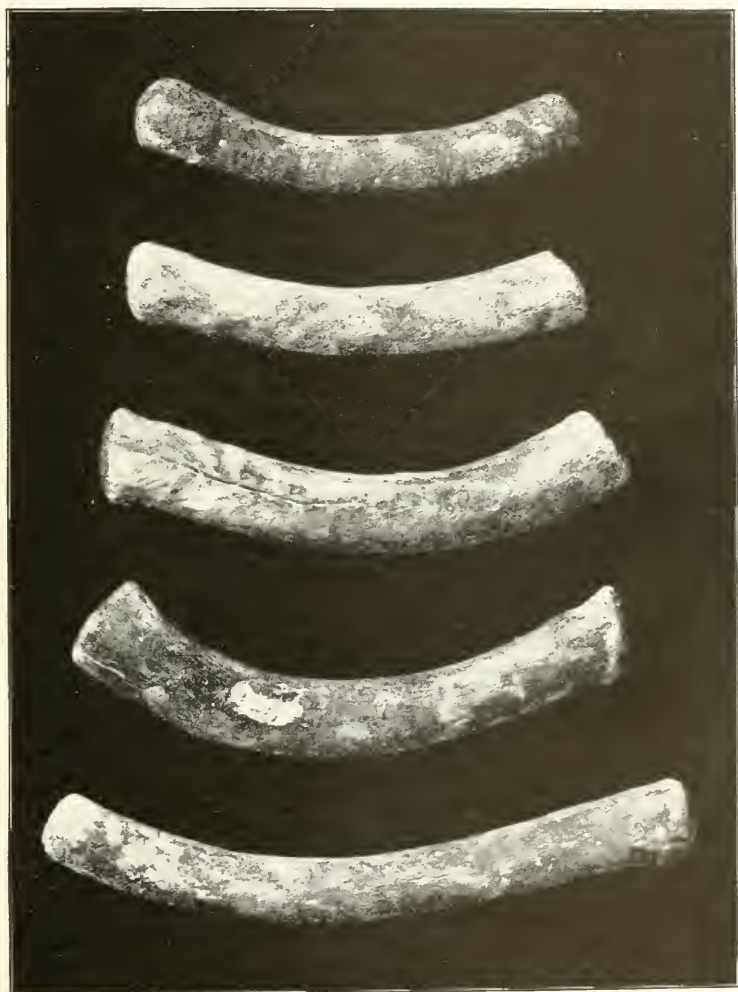






FRESHLY SHARPENED IMPLEMENTS (THREE-FOURTHS ACTUAL SIZE).





ANTLER IMPLEMENTS (ONE-HALF ACTUAL SIZE).





ANTLER IMPLEMENTS (ONE-HALF ACTUAL SIZE).





BONE IMPLEMENTS (ONE-HALF ACTUAL SIZE).