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**Archeological Research at 4ISA25,
Mission Dolores De Los Ais
1977**

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ARCHEOLOGICAL RESEARCH AT 41SA25,

MISSION DOLORES DE LOS AIS

1977

A Preliminary Report

submitted to

the Texas Historical Commission

by

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All of the work detailed in the following report was made possible by significant contributions of interested Texans, both at the local and state level. The excavations would not have been possible without the permission and cooperation of the landowners, Mr. and Mrs. David Maxwell. Funding and services significant to the accomplishment of the tasks carried out were contributed by the citizens of San Augustine, Texas, the San Augustine Historical Society, the City of San Augustine, the Texas Historical Foundation, the Texas Historical Commission, Southland Paper Mills, the Stephen F. Austin Archeological Field School, the SFASU Anthropology Club, and the Nacogdoches Archeological Society. Of primary significance was the money (\$7,000) raised by the citizens of San Augustine and donated to the San Augustine Historical Society to contract with the SFASU Anthropology Program for six weeks' archeological research in the summer of 1977. All of these contributors are to be commended for their interest and investment of time, effort and money.

ARCHEOLOGICAL RESEARCH AT 41SA25, MISSION DOLORES DE LOS AIS
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During 1976, student volunteers from Stephen F. Austin State University conducted cursory excavations at the supposed site of Mission Dolores de los Ais. This work comprised approximately 8 working days at the site. As a result of this work, a number of facts became evident. First, there was indeed some sort of Spanish colonial site in the vicinity of Mission Hill. Secondly, there were more archeological remains pertaining to this occupation than was believed from earlier archeological work (Gilmore 1976), which had concentrated on the area of the hill north of FM 147. On the basis of the weekend work, a \$2,000 grant (\$1,000 from the San Augustine Historical Society, \$1,000 from the Texas Historical Foundation) was obtained to begin the highly important research into contemporary Spanish documents. This research is being carried out by the Old Spanish Missions Research Library in San Antonio; the first reports indicated a very limited amount of new data are being uncovered.

At this point, it was felt that more exploratory archeological research was needed before more time and money could or should be allocated to the project. With this in mind, the SFASU Archeological Field School agreed to excavate for ten days at the site, with the option to continue if sufficient archeological remains were uncovered. Within the allotted time period, it was soon evident that more work would be advantageous to the project. Thus the field school continued excavations for the remainder (four weeks) of their schedule. As a result, a number of archeological features pertaining to the Spanish occupation of the site were uncovered and thousands of artifacts were recovered, washed and catalogued. This work showed that much more archeological work needed to be done at the site in order to have a more complete understanding of the nature of the Spanish occupation, the plan, if possible, of the mission settlement, and the structural aspects of the building walls, etc., which most certainly occurred at the site. To this end, the citizens of San Augustine raised \$7,000 to continue excavations for six more weeks.

A preliminary report (Corbin 1976) of the weekend work at 41SA25, detailed the archeological assessment at that point. The following sections will describe the results of the six-weeks' excavation by the SFASU Archeological Field School (1977) and the subsequent six weeks of excavation at the site funded by monies raised by the citizens of San Augustine.

The 1977 Excavations

The first portion of the 1977 field season was conducted under the auspices of Stephen F. Austin State University as an archeological field school (Ant. 440). Thus the primary focus of this session was teaching archeological field methods. Nevertheless, we feel that archeological field schools should also be designed to contribute to general archeological data, and the preservation of our historical and cultural resources. Therefore, general excavation strategy was designed to locate archeological features associated with the presumed location of the Spanish Colonial Mission Dolores de los Ais. The preliminary work in 1976 had indicated that a portion of Mission Hill (south of FM 147), heretofore only cursorily examined, contained archeological data (numerous artifacts and what appeared to be trash pits) which supported the contention that Mission Dolores de los Ais had indeed been located on the hill. By the end of the first two weeks, the field school excavations had yielded enough data to warrant spending the remainder of the six-weeks' session at the site. The area in the vicinity of N100/W100 (Fig.1), known as the French Area, was producing hundreds of artifacts on what appeared to be the floor of a structure. Other field school participants had uncovered a large trash pit and portions of a second. As the field school excavations progressed, portions of a jacal wall, a well, and the subsurface remains of what appeared to be two structures were revealed. It soon became apparent that this portion of the site was rich in archeological remains of the Spanish Colonial activity associated with what had to be Mission Dolores de los Ais. It was also apparent that an extended field season was highly desirable, particularly in terms of more fully exploring the features uncovered by the field school participants.

A proposal was submitted to the San Augustine Historical Society, and the citizens of San Augustine, for six more weeks of excavation. The money was raised within two weeks, and, utilizing students trained in the field school, the excavations continued without a break. The second half of the 1977 season concentrated on expanding our knowledge of several important archeological features discovered in the exploratory phase carried out by the field school. This subsequent work revealed no new features, but did confirm our earlier interpretations. By the end of this second six weeks there was no question that Mission Hill was the site of Mission Dolores de los Ais. This conclusion is based primarily on the presence of archeological remains of structures and other cultural features in direct association with thousands of Spanish Colonial period artifacts.

The Archeological Features

Although the thousands of artifacts recovered during the excavations suggested that Mission Hill was a significant

archeological site, it was the presence of subsurface features which indicated we were dealing with a significant Spanish Colonial presence. These features are: the archeological remains of structures and other cultural activity which suggest strongly that Mission Hill was something more than an occasional camping spot along El Camino Real. Significantly, the features were non-Indian (i.e., this is not the site of a historic Ais Indian village) and in fact duplicated features uncovered at other Spanish Colonial sites in Texas.

The Refuse Pits (Figs. 1, 4, 5, 6)

One of the first tasks of the field school exploration was to profile the ditch wall that paralleled FM 147. It was hoped that this would reveal concentrations of cultural debris and features which might be related to the Spanish occupation. This profile revealed what appeared to be portions of two refuse pits. A test pit (1976) (Fig. 4) a few meters to the south of this part of the ditch had also indicated that this general area was rich in cultural debris. Expanded excavations in the vicinity uncovered a third refuse pit as well as a portion of one of the pits revealed in the ditch profile. The third trash pit (F-8) and the remainder of a second (F-18) were completely excavated. They contained large rocks, animal bone, and hundreds of artifacts which dated the pits to the period of the mission occupation. Pits of this type also occur at the site of Los Adaes (Robeline, La.), which was the capital of Texas during the period Mission Dolores was occupied, and other Spanish Colonial sites in Texas.

A fourth refuse pit, Feature 34, was uncovered while investigating the well (see below) on the west end of the site. This pit (Fig. 1), more elongated than the other pits, differed from those described above in that it contained no rocks and almost no bone. In addition it contained much more ashy material, large Indian sherds (as well as European goods), and a lot of charred organic remains, primarily corncocks. At this point the relationship between this pit and the well are uncertain, but it is felt that the pit was excavated after the well had been filled by its users.

The Jacal Wall (Feature 25)

Near the end of the field school season, three small post molds were discovered near the west end of a one-meter wide trench (Fig. 1) that paralleled the ditch profile. Using the alignment of the post molds as a guide, additional units were excavated to see whether there were other post molds in that line. These excavations revealed the post molds were associated with what had been a narrow trench oriented in the line of the post molds. Subsequent excavations uncovered other segments of the trench and associated post molds (Fig. 1, 7, and 10). This feature is aligned NE-SW and, at present, is approximately

12 meters long. The configuration of this feature suggests a wall of jacal-type construction. The size of the elements and the length of the feature also suggest this was a perimeter wall rather than a wall associated with a building. Fired clay fragments and charcoal indicate that the wall was plastered and, at some time, had burned.

The Well (Feature 13)

The field school reopened the backhoe trench (Fig. 1) excavated by North Texas State University in 1973 to further investigate trash pits reported, but not excavated. The new trench was started further north and excavated deeper than the previous trench. This work revealed that one trash or refuse pit was in fact the upper portion of a filled well. The artifacts from the "pit" safely date the well to the Spanish occupation.

The well (Fig. 5, 8) is ca 2 meters in diameter at the top and then steps down to ca 1.5 meters. The backhoe trench and additional probing revealed that the well extends to a depth of at least 3.3 meters (ca eleven feet). After the well was originally filled, several additional fill episodes were necessary as the fill settled and compacted in the well. The last filling was primarily refuse. A similar well was uncovered at the site of Los Adaes (Gregory, personal communication).

Feature 32

This feature is a concentration of what appear to be fragments of adobe bricks, post molds and portions of a wall-setting trench. The wall-setting trench (Fig. 11) and associated clay wall-footings (and/or adobe blocks) were discovered while profiling the west wall of the backhoe trench. Schnittting of the ground surface to the west of the trench revealed large, amorphous concentrations of clay similar to that in the setting trench. A portion of this area was then excavated, in 1.0cm levels, revealing some large fragments of what appear to have been adobe blocks. At approximately 6.0cm below ground surface, the associated post molds were discovered.

At this point it is difficult to interpret this feature. Similar clay material occurs for at least 3 meters south of the excavated area. Additional material is present in portions of the east wall of the backhoe trench opposite that on the west side of the trench. The maximum extension of this feature to the east, west and south is not known. At present it is hypothesized that Feature 32 is the remains of a substantial structure which was constructed of large vertical posts and adobe brick. Numerous Spanish and French artifacts as well as presumed construction type and material suggest this feature was definitely a significant part of the mission complex.

Feature 17 (Fig. 1, 9)

This feature is a series of post molds (Features 17, 44, 45, 46, 48, 50, 61, and 62) and associated fragments of charred posts which appear to have been associated with a small rectangular structure (?) adjoining the well. Most of the large post molds were preceded (stratigraphically) by horizontal or near-horizontal sections of charred posts. Significantly, the post mold alignments are parallel and perpendicular to the line of Feature 25, the jacal wall, indicating that it is part of a general architectural plan. The probable function of this feature is a mystery at this point since almost no artifacts were found in its vicinity. In fact the 3x4-meter unit (Fig. 1) to the east of F-17 was almost totally devoid of artifactual material, which is in stark contrast to most areas of the site that have been excavated.

Feature 6 and the French Area

The original SFASU excavations (Fig. 2) were begun in this area of the site. It was here that Spanish colonial, French and aboriginal artifacts were found eroding from the ditch face early in 1976. The original ditch profile revealed a shallow ash lens (F-6), and excavations from ground surface produced numerous artifacts. Expanded excavations during the field school season revealed the ash lens to be rectangular in shape. The original size and shape of the lens is unknown since some portions of the feature were probably destroyed when the ditch was constructed. The lens is associated with a shallow (3-4cm) but extensive concentration of generally small fragments of artifacts and bone. This area has the appearance of a living (working) surface (centered around the ash lens?) which has had bits of cultural refuse trampled into it. No artifacts were recovered from in or under the ash lens, indicating it was in use (as a fireplace?) when the surface containing the artifacts was in use. At this point the true nature of this feature is not understood. Since the majority of the French faience sherds and a number of gunflints were recovered from this feature, it may relate to French trading activities at the mission.

The Artifacts (Figs. 12-20)

During the excavations, nearly all of the matrix from the excavations was passed through $\frac{1}{4}$ "-mesh screen. This allowed the recovery of several thousand artifacts. The most numerous ceramic artifacts are sherds from vessels of Indian manufacture (Fig. 12) Although analysis has not begun, field inspection has identified the types similar to Patton Engraved, Natchitoches Engraved, and Y'Barb Incised, all of which have been recovered in historic contexts in East Texas. Of the non-Indian ceramic types, French faience (Fig. 13) is the most common, followed by Chinese porcelain (Fig. 14), Mexican majolica (Fig. 15) and English salt-glazed stoneware and creamware. Glass artifacts

(Fig. 16) are primarily bottle sherds and trade beads. The most common metal artifacts are hand-forged iron nails (Fig. 19) but many articles of brass (Fig. 18) and lead (Fig. 20) also occur. Artifacts of stone (Fig. 17), including three small triangular arrowpoints (common at mission sites), gunflints, and a leg fragment from a basalt metate, also occur. With the exception of a few beer bottle sherds, barbed wire and staples, recent artifacts are conspicuously absent. All in all, the artifacts recovered make a nice package of data, all relating to the Spanish colonial period.

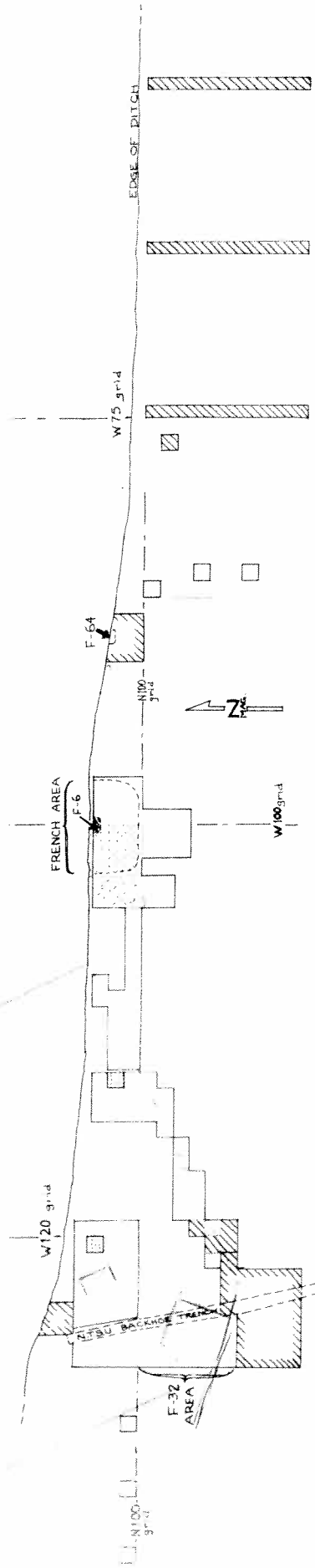
Summary and Conclusions


Archeological investigations carried out under the auspices of the SFASU Archeological Field School (Ant. 440) and the Anthropology Program at SFASU have succeeded in uncovering archeological remains associated with the Spanish Colonial site of Mission Dolores de los Ais. This identification is based on the association of Spanish Colonial and other artifacts with architectural remains typical of frontier missions of this period of Texas history. In addition, the location of these remains fits the general description of the location of the mission derived from contemporary Spanish documents. It is significant to note that this is the first of the five known Spanish Colonial missions in East Texas to be so identified and placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

As can be seen from the excavation plan (Fig. 1), much more archeological work needs to be conducted before we can know more about this important historic Texas site. Placement on the National Register of Historic Places will facilitate matching fund grants which will allow this work to be continued. Although Federal monies for 1978 are not available, a matching fund grant proposal is being prepared for 1979. In the meantime, the SFASU Archeological Field School plans to conduct its 1978 season at the site to continue this very important research into Spanish colonialism in East Texas.

03

FIGURE 1 Excavation plan of 41SA25, Mission Dolores de los Ais.



-  1976 Excavation
-  1977 Excavation
-  1978 Excavation

 N74
W55

 N74
W84

 N65
W75

EXCAVATION PLAN MISSION DOLORES

FIGURE 2 View of site area, looking south, showing initial excavations by SFA and Nacogdoches Archeological Society in area along ditch where Spanish colonial artifacts were eroding. F-6 is a shallow rectangular ash "lens" which is believed to be the base of a fireplace. Because of the predominance of French trade goods in this immediate vicinity, this area is referred to as "the French area". The area exposed is 3x5m.



appx. Hiway
Easement on
South side of
147.

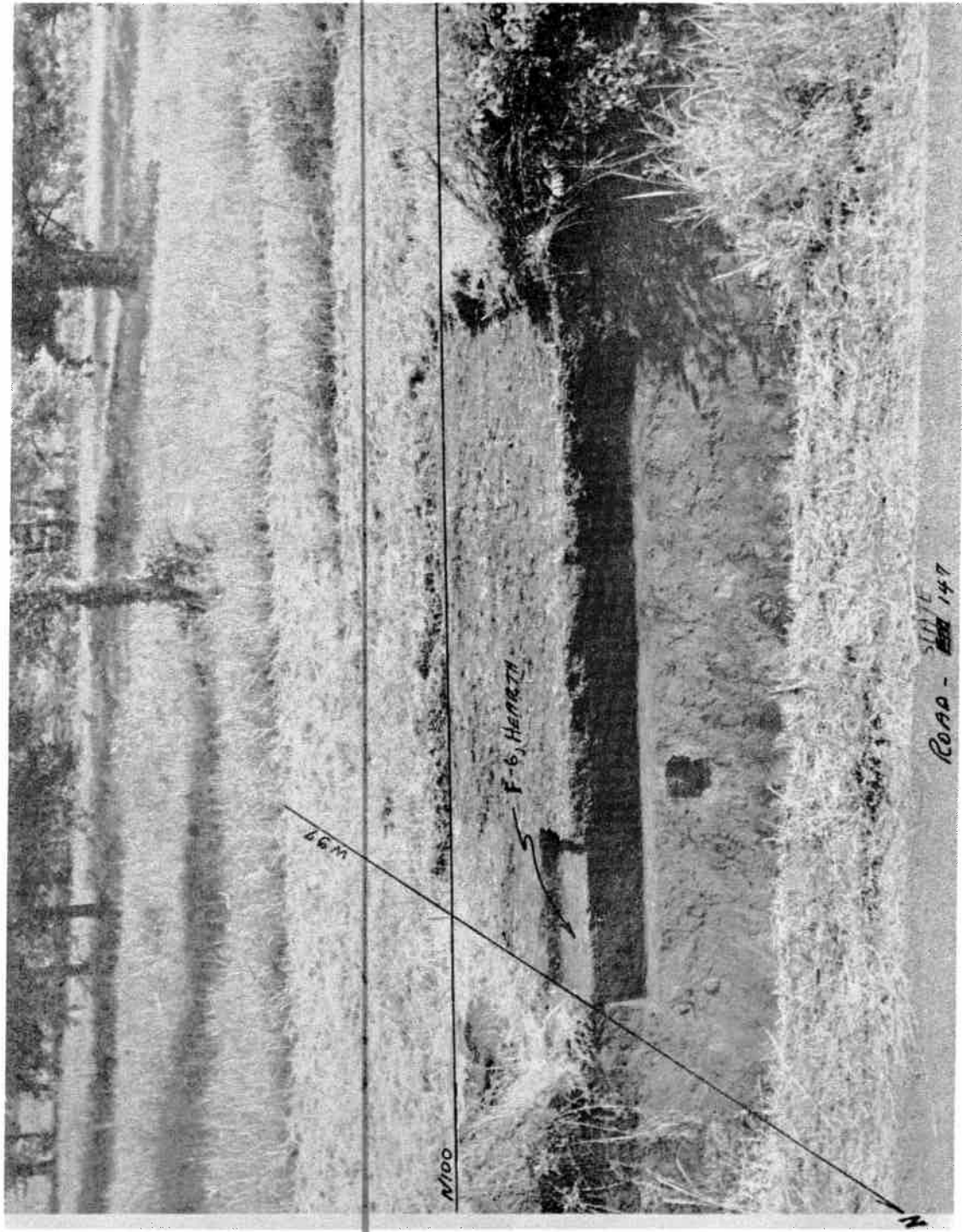


FIGURE 3 View of site area, looking southwest, at
the beginning of the 1977 summer field
season.

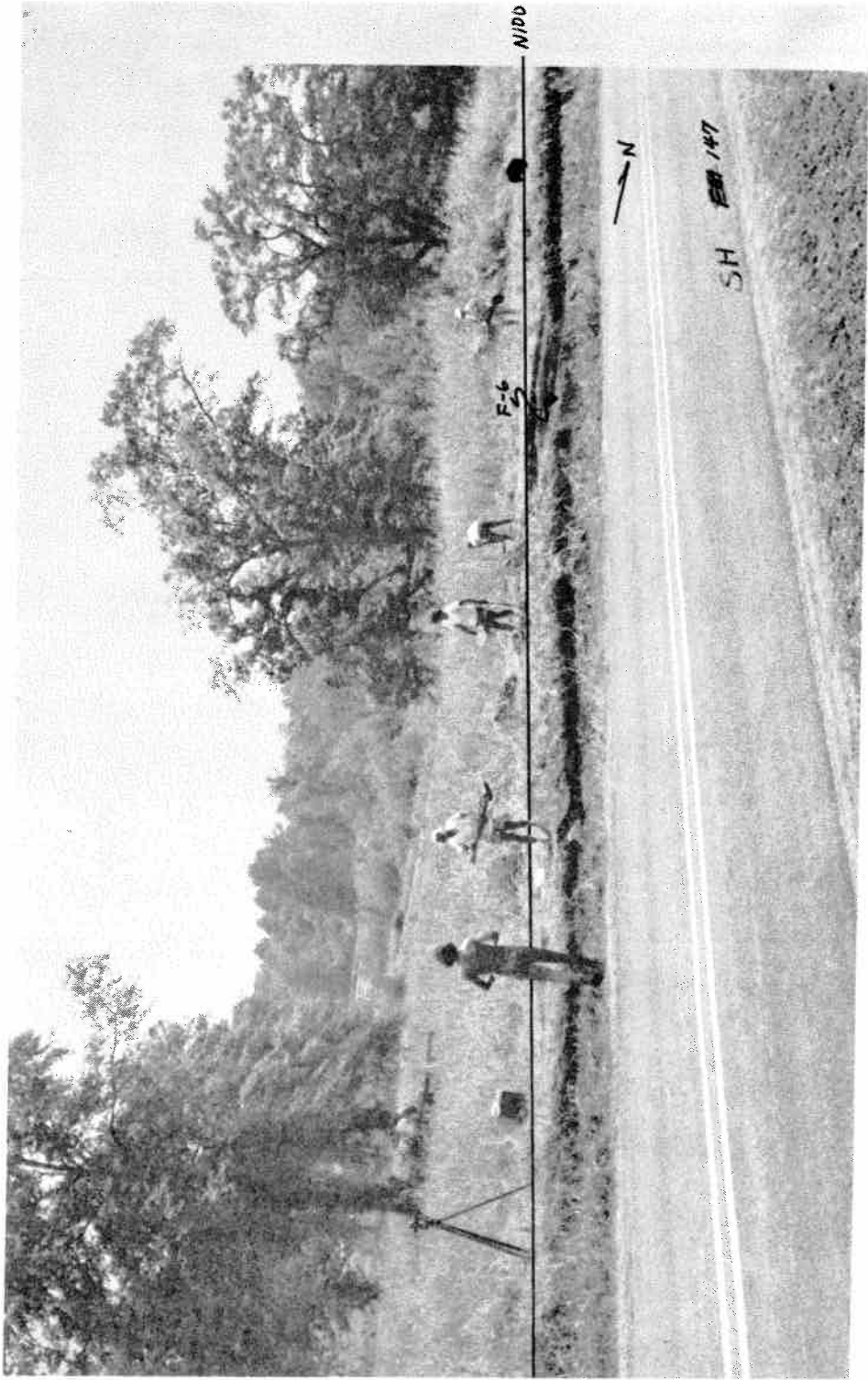


FIGURE 4 View of site area, looking northeast, at the end of the first six weeks' excavation, 1977.

Legend:

- F-8 trash pit, showing stones in bottom of pit
- F-18 about half of this pit has been excavated; the remainder is in the balk between the excavation units and the ditch.
- the line of F-25, the jacal wall
- locate some of the first post molds found in association with the wall trench
- A one of the original 1976 SFA test pits



appx. location
of Highway
easement

W1100

W115

SH 197

HW

A

V

FIGURE 5 View of site, looking west, at the end of the first six weeks of excavation, 1977.

Legend

F-8 trash pit

F-13 filled well

F-17 small rectangular structure (?)

F-32 adobe structure (?)

..... NTSU backhoe trench

----- line of F-25, the jacal wall, at ground surface. It should be noted that the post mold alignments in F-17 and F-32 parallel this line.

→ post molds in F-25

x postholes which belong to a fence we believe may mark boundary of the original Quinalty-Quirk survey. This boundary line followed approximately the line of El Camino Real as of ca 1827.



W115

FIGURE 6 Excavation of Feature 8, a large trash pit, in progress (looking approximately south). The pit contained primarily bone and rocks. Many ceramic, glass, and metal artifacts of the Spanish colonial period were, however, also recovered.



FIGURE 7 Typical tapering post mold in Feature 25,
the jacal wall (see Fig. 10).

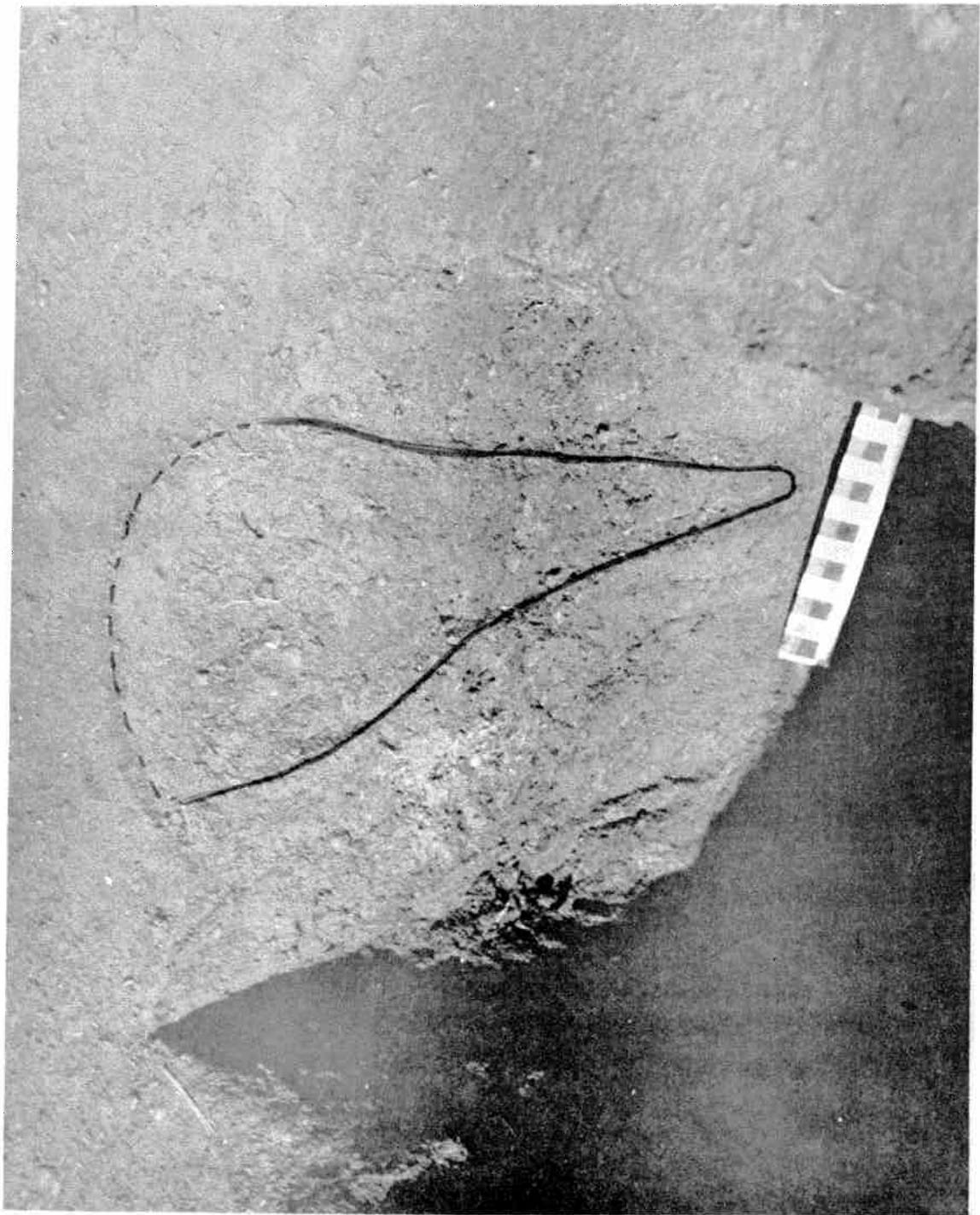
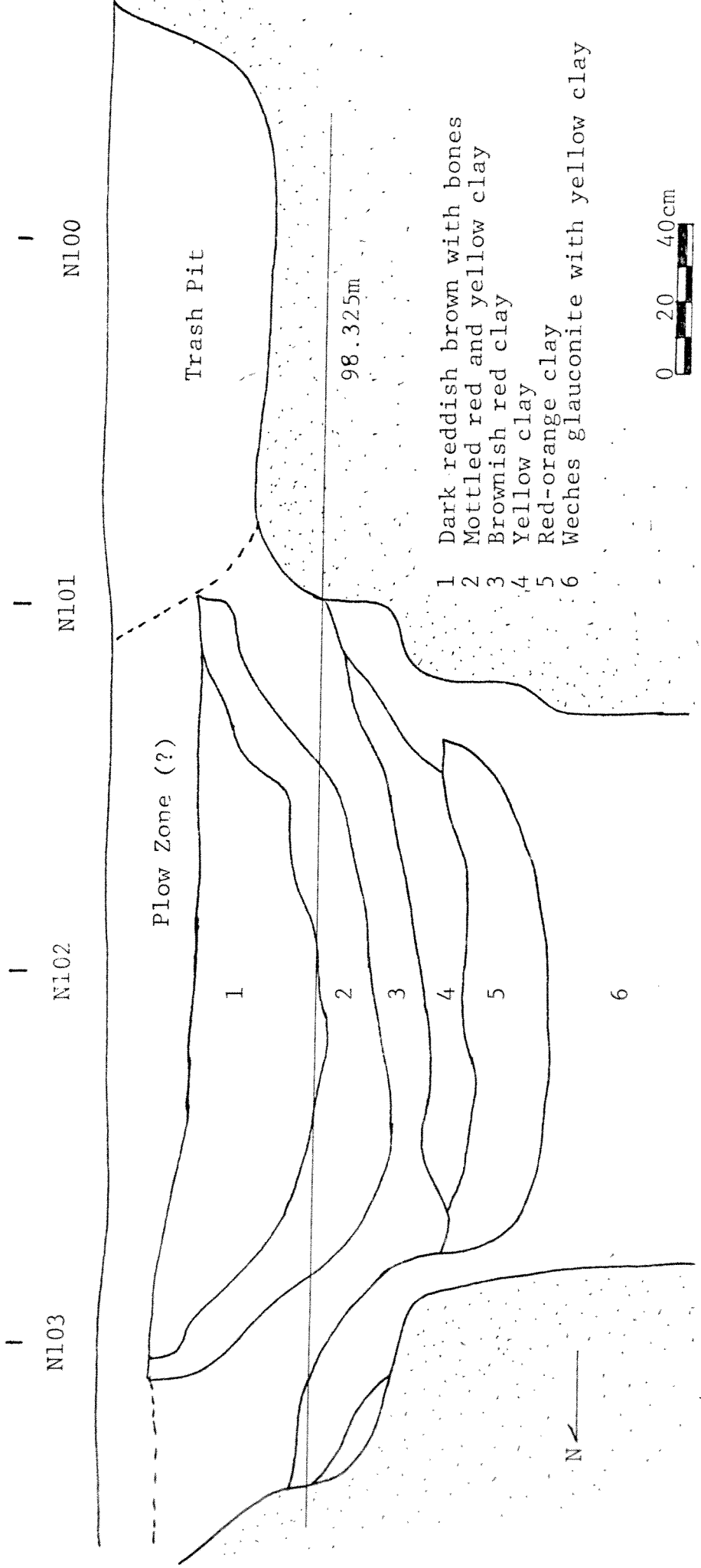


FIGURE 8 Profile of F-13, filled well.

PROFILE OF FEATURE 13, A FILLED WELL
 East Wall, NTSU Trench



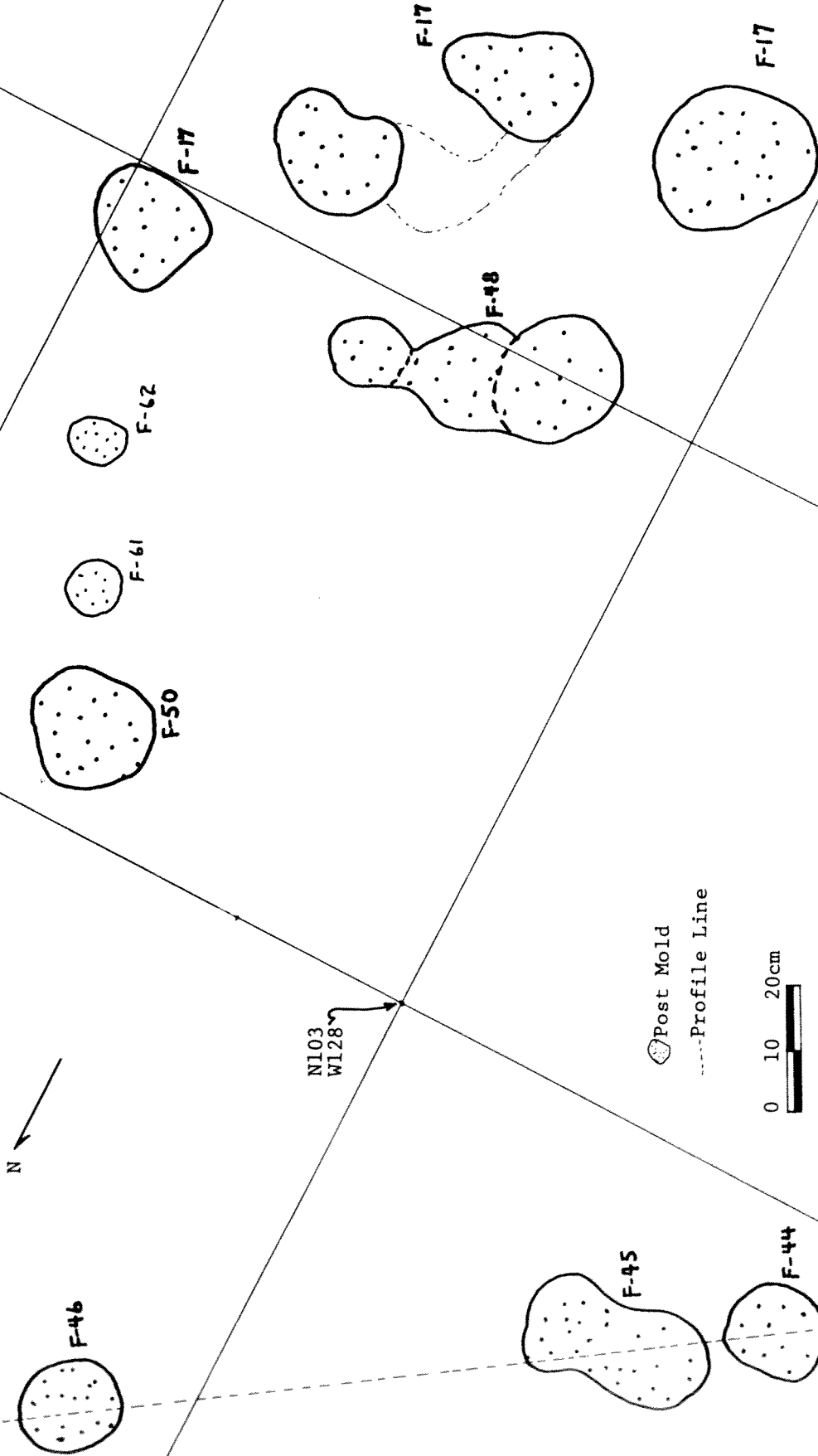
- 1 Dark reddish brown with bones
- 2 Mottled red and yellow clay
- 3 Brownish red clay
- 4 Yellow clay
- 5 Red-orange clay
- 6 Weches glauconite with yellow clay



N ←

FIGURE 9 Plan and profile of F-17, structure

FEATURE 17, A SMALL RECTANGULAR STRUCTURE(?)



PROFILE OF THREE POST MOLDS IN FEATURE 17, A SMALL RECTANGULAR STRUCTURE (?)
(See Plan Map)

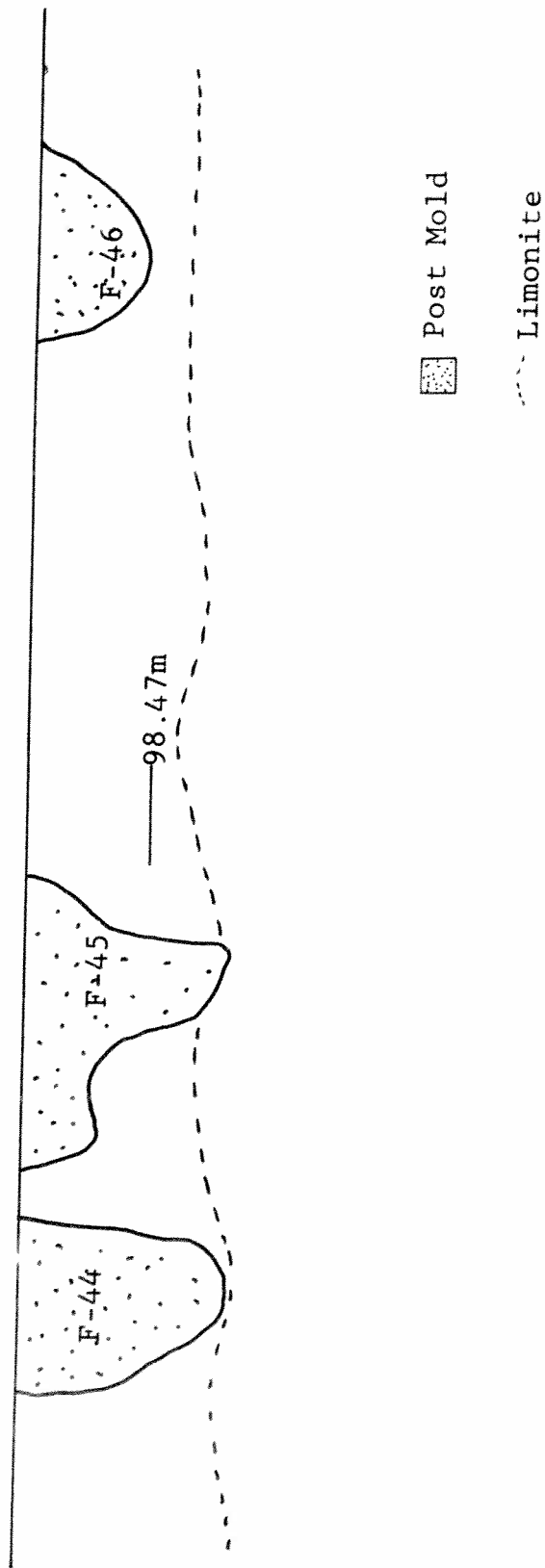


FIGURE 10 Plans and profiles from F-25, jacal wall

PLAN AND PROFILE OF A PORTION OF F-25, A JACAL WALL TRENCH (WITH POSTS)

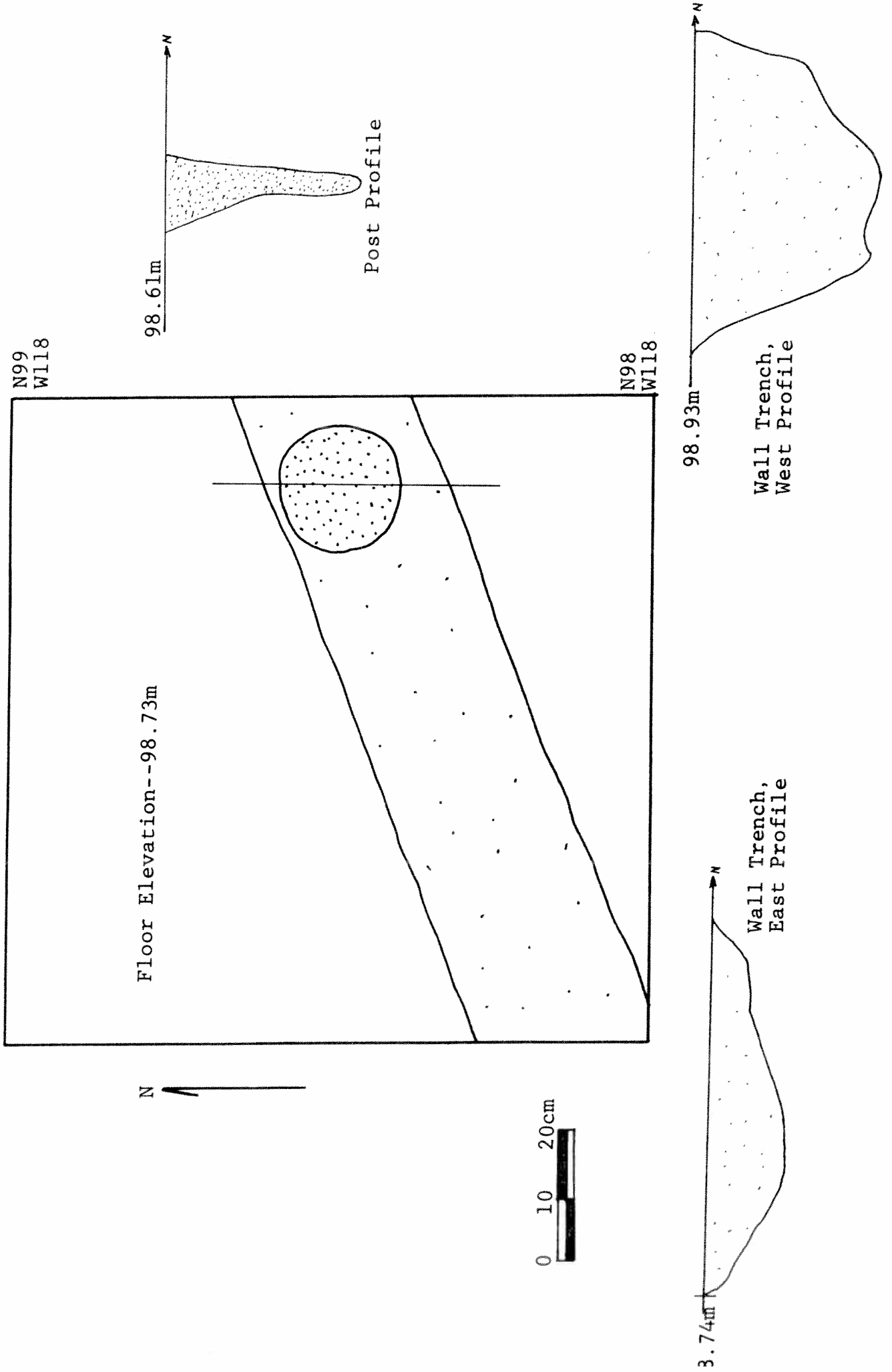
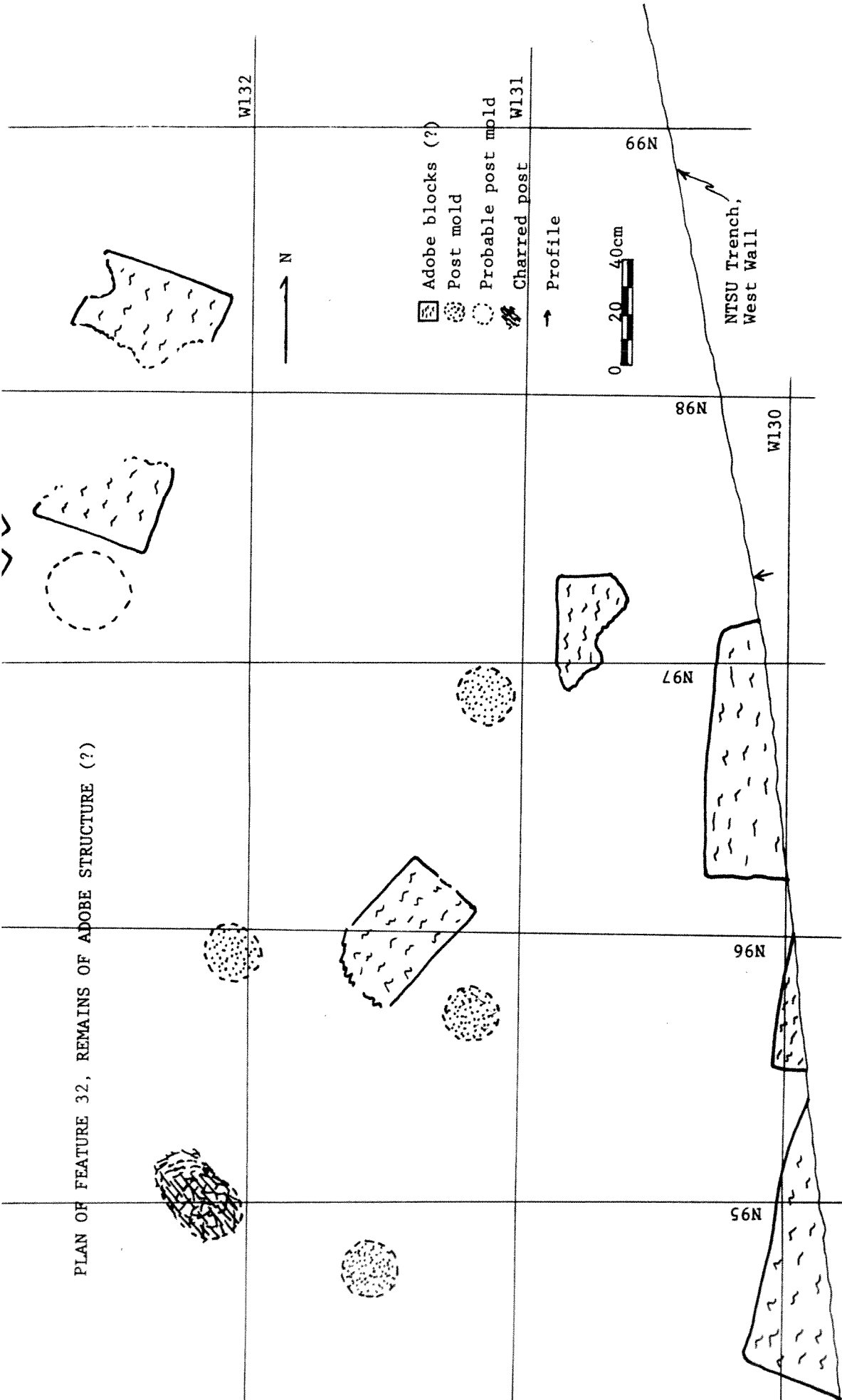


FIGURE 11 Plans and profiles from F-32, adobe
structure (?)

PLAN OF FEATURE 32, REMAINS OF ADOBE STRUCTURE (?)



WEST PROFILE OF NTSU TRENCH SHOWING WALL-SETTING TRENCHES AND ADOBE (?) BLOCKS

Feature 32

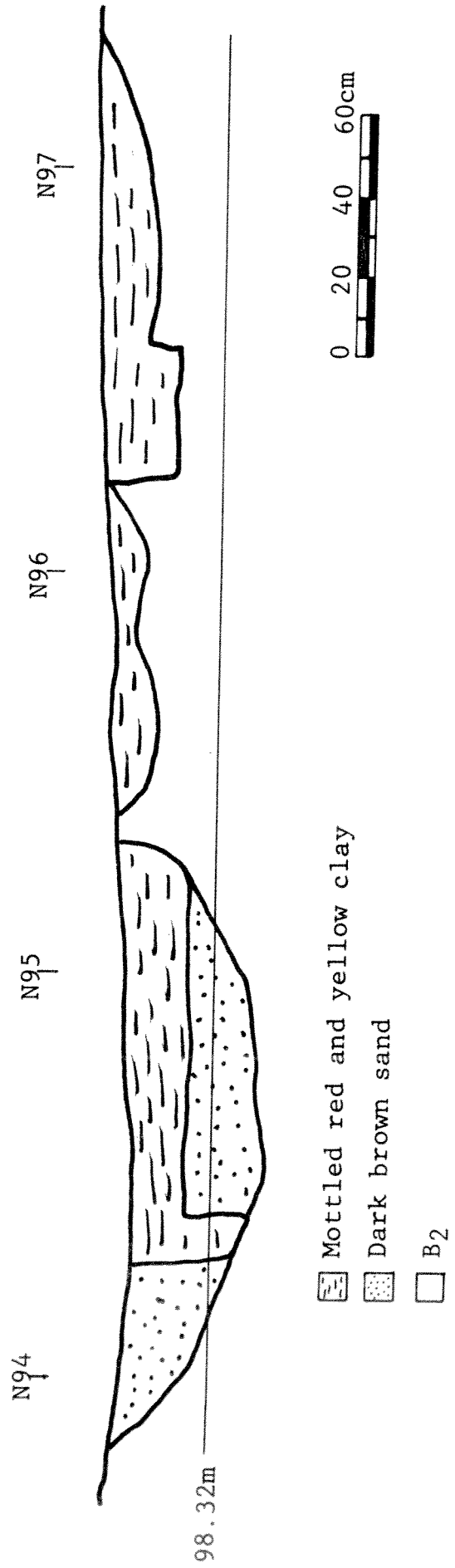


FIGURE 12 Typical Indian ceramics from the site of Mission Dolores. Bone tempering is the rule. Many sherds exhibit small fused silica particles. This can occur at low temperatures (ca 800°F) when iron and silica are present in a reducing atmosphere. Sherd 1 is from fill in F-13, the well. The design execution of the Patton Engraved Sherds (2, 3) is exceptional. All of the design elements pictured are duplicated in the collection from the site of Los Adaes in Louisiana. The punctations on sherds (4, 5, 6) are on a raised ridge. This design element is very common at Mission Dolores and Los Adaes.

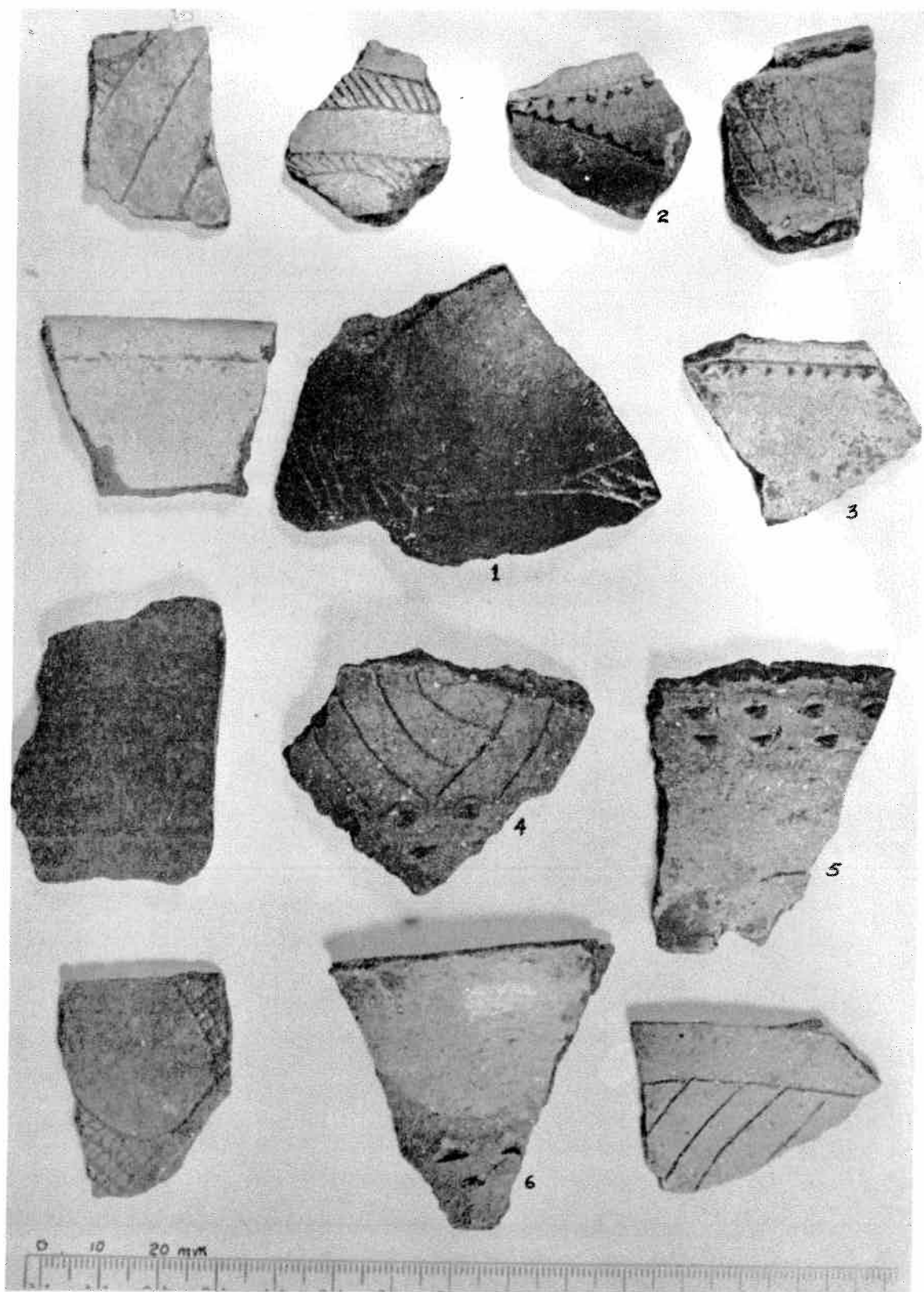


FIGURE 13 Typical French faience from Mission Dolores. Most of the designs are typical of French export faience of the period 1725-50.



0 10 20 mm

FIGURE 14 Chinese trade porcelain from Mission Dolores. All fragments appear to be from small, footed bowls.

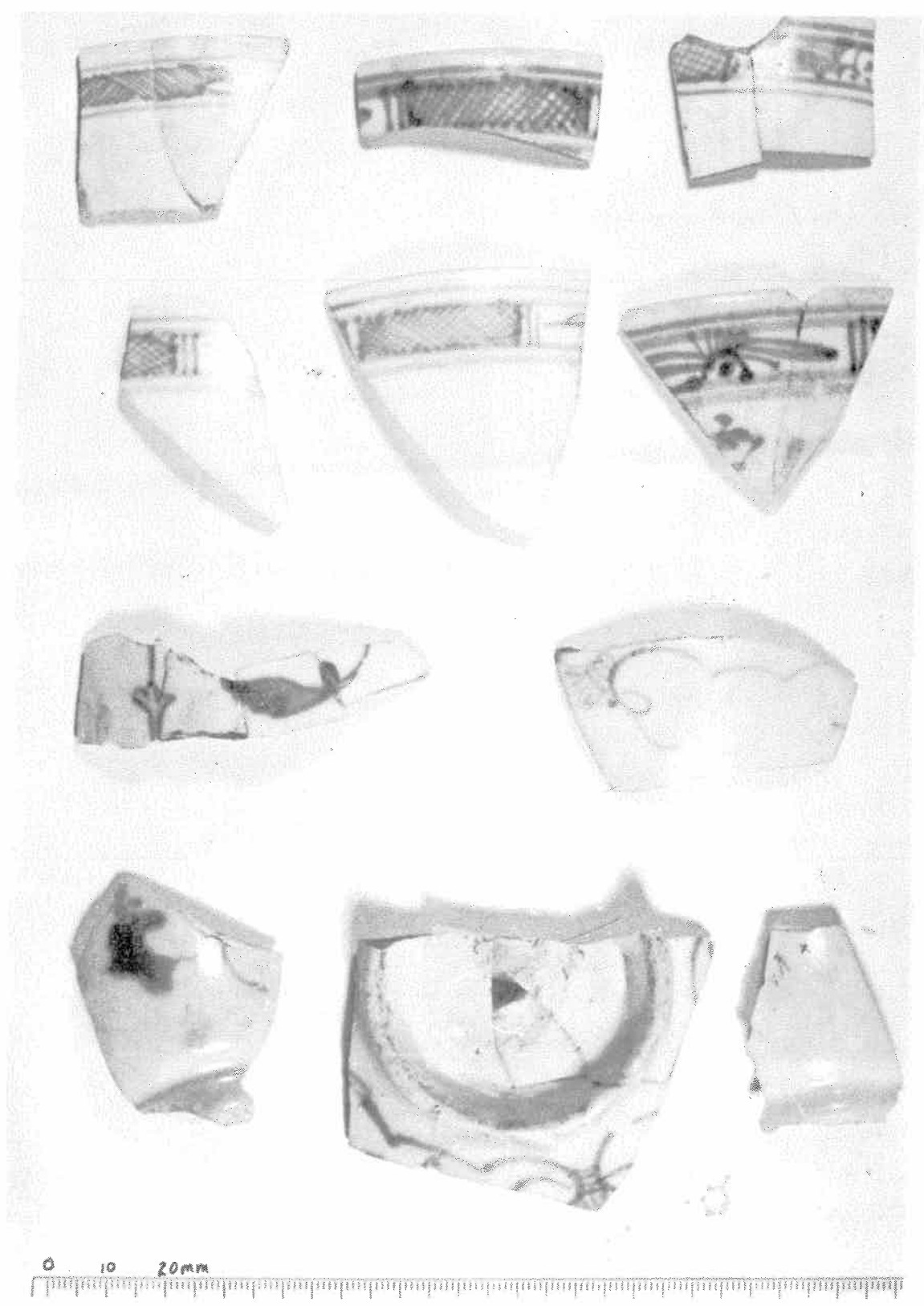


FIGURE 15 Mexican majolica from Mission Dolores.
Most has been identified as Puebla
Blue on White. Compare the size of the
majolica fragments (the largest) with
that of the faience, aboriginal pottery,
and the Chinese porcelain.



FIGURE 16 Glass artifacts from Mission Dolores.
The spherical beads are blue-green,
the cylindrical bead is red. The typical
bead from the site is smaller (ca 2-3mm)
and black.



FIGURE 17 Stone artifacts from Mission Dolores:
a-g are gun and/or strike-a-light flints;
i-j, arrowpoints; k, a fica carved from jet;
and l, a basalt metate leg fragment.
The jet fica is a Spanish artifact associated
with the Pilgrimage of St. James. The
metate fragment and most of the gunflints
were recovered in the "French area" near
F-6.

0 10 20 mm



a



b



c



d



e



f



g



h



i



j



k



l

FIGURE 18 Brass/copper artifacts from Mission Dolores.

a, French claspknife sideplate. The uppermost edge has been ground to a sharp edge. This artifact recovered while troweling the ditch profile near F-17.

b-c, copper tinklers

d, buckle fragment

e-f, brass trigger guard fragments

g, spoon

h, scissor handle

i, handle; recovered in Feature 8, a large trash pit

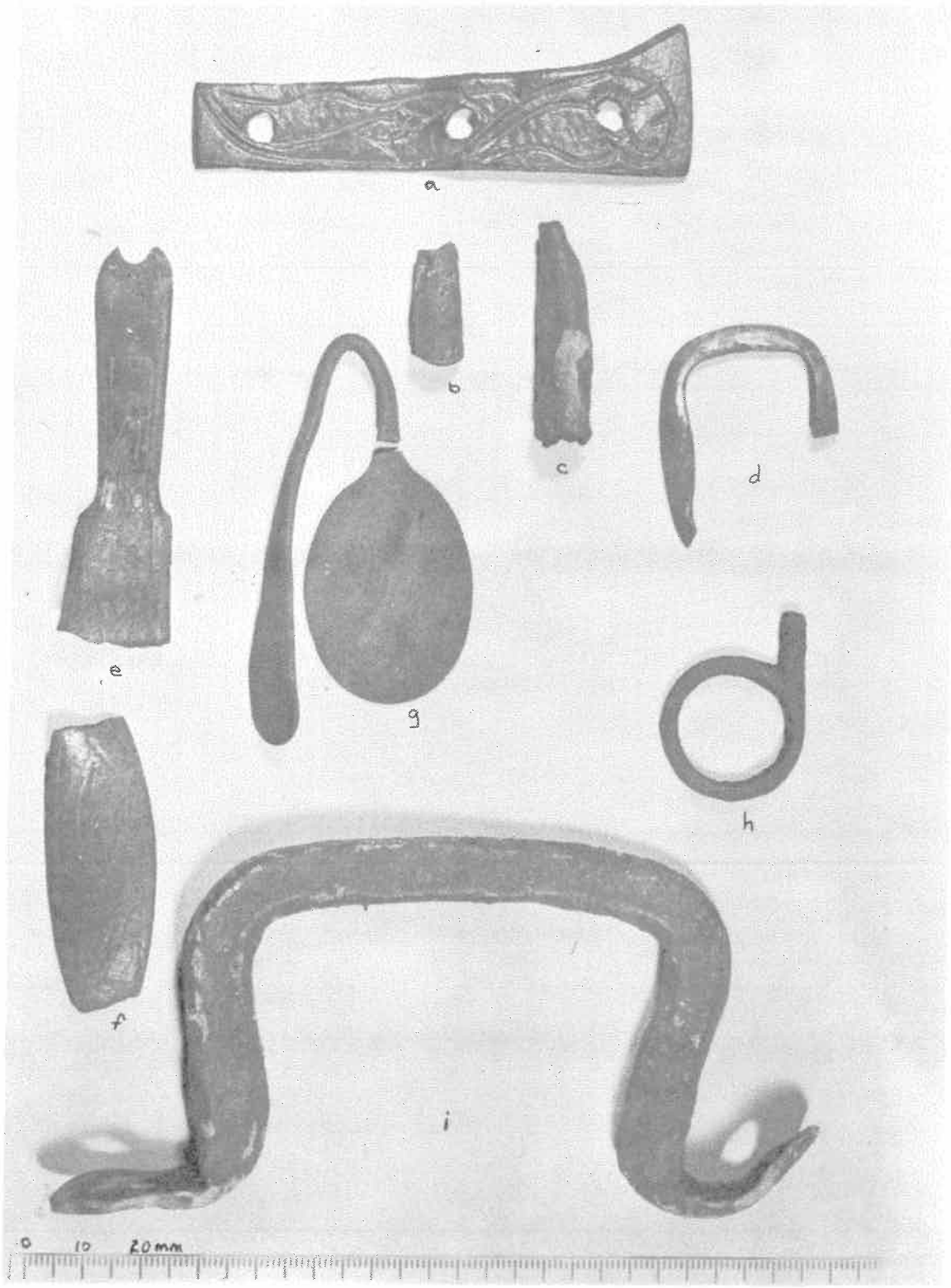


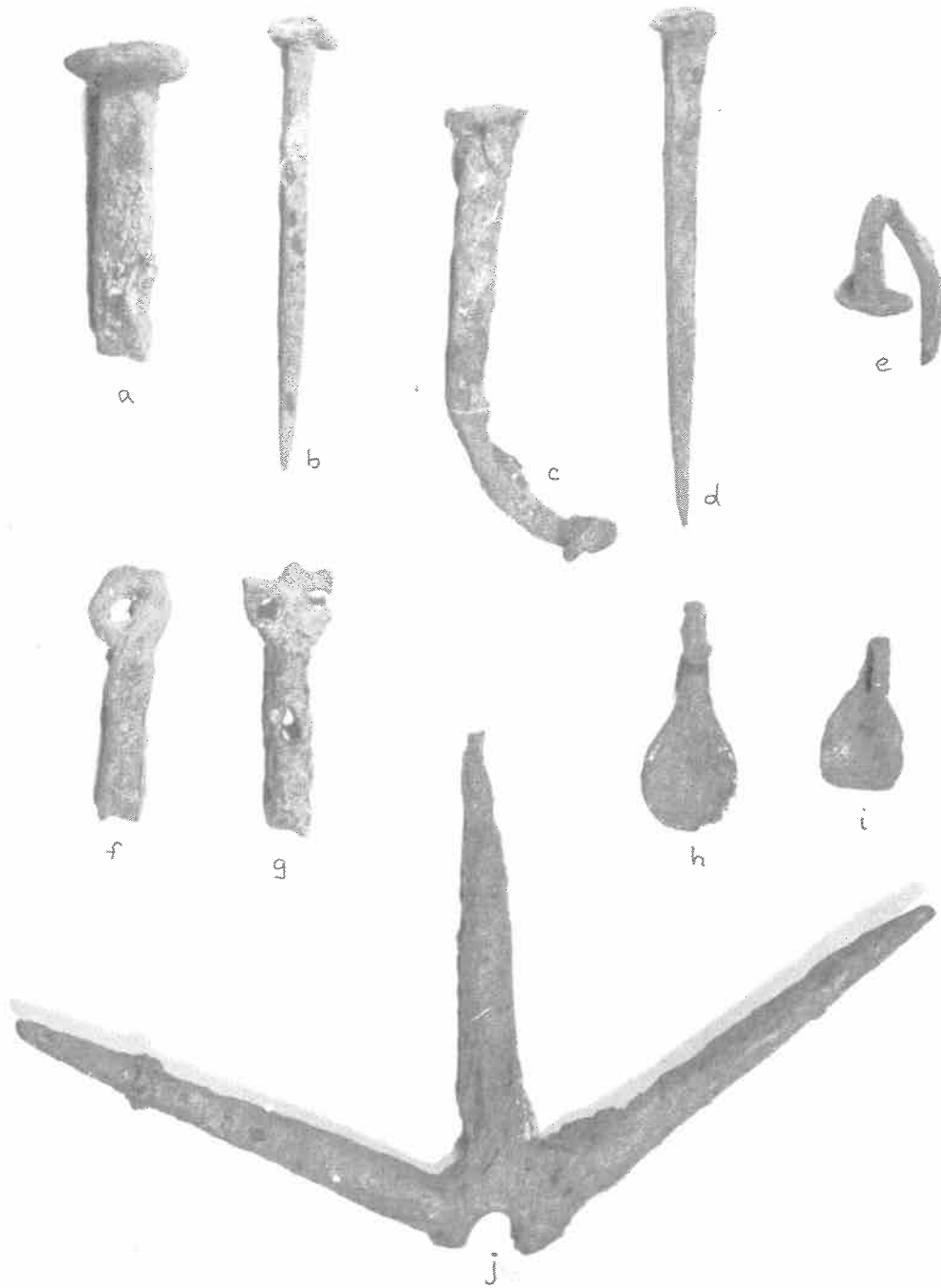
FIGURE 19 Iron artifacts from Mission Dolores.

a-e, hand-forged nails. This is a very common artifact at the site, surpassed only by aboriginal ceramics. Many have been clinched

f-g, Ficas. Both are incomplete.

h-i, small, spoon-shaped "dangles"

j, large spur rowel fragment



0 10 20mm



FIGURE 20 Lead/pewter artifacts from Mission Dolores.

a, e flattened shot

b, unidentified object

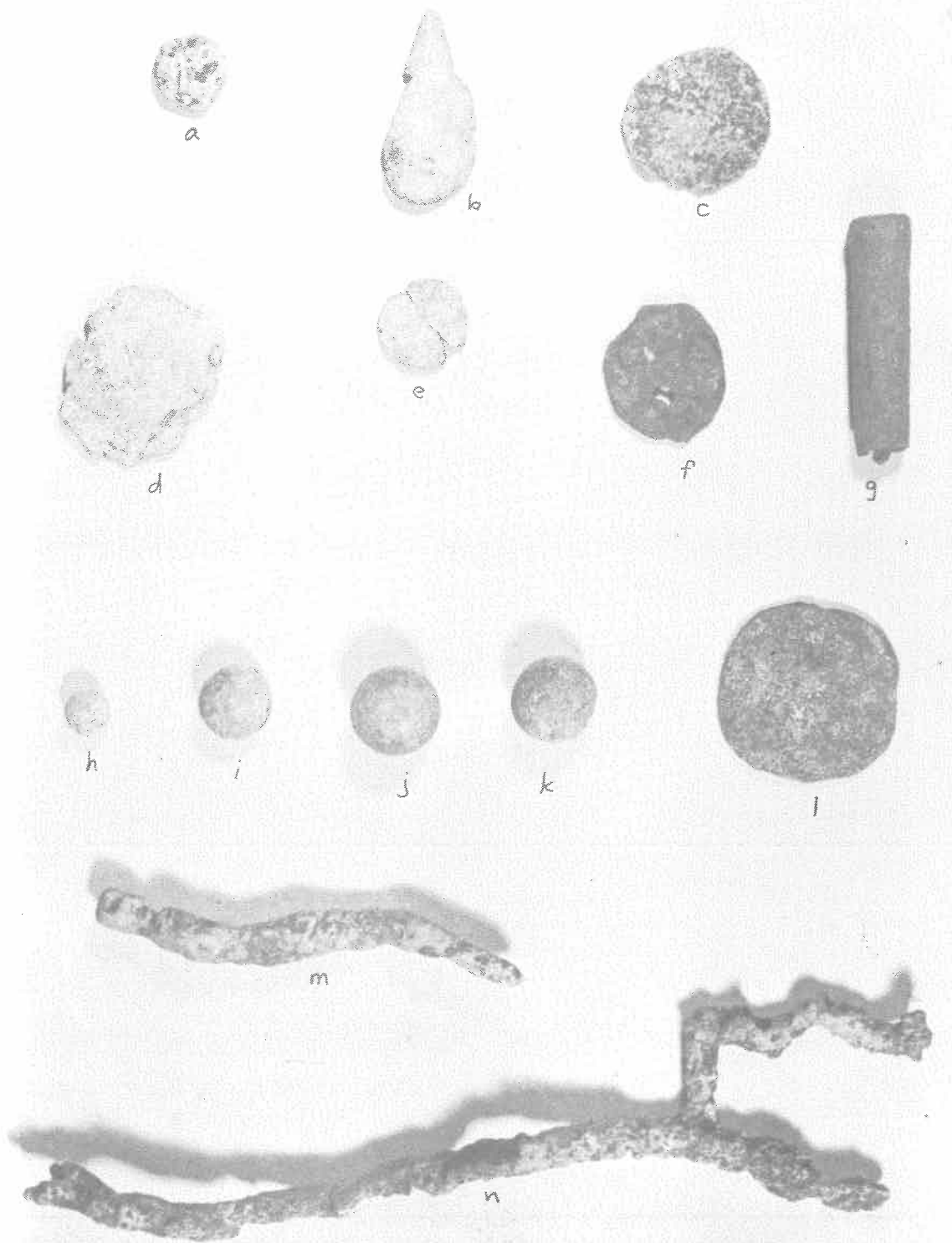
c, d, f, small lead seals (?)

g, pewter (?) handle

h-k, shot/musket balls

l, lead hide-bale seal. Various unidentified inscriptions occur on both surfaces

m-n, lead pieces, probably from molding musket balls or shot. A number of these items were found in (next to) a small portion of F-25, the jacal wall.



0 10 20mm

