

# Ṭāṅgū Nao Smast: A Palaeolithic Cave Site at the Bājaur Agency in Pakistan

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## Introduction

The Bājaur Agency lies between 34°-33' and 34°-58' north latitudes and 71°-15' and 71°-45' east longitudes (*Atlas*, 1985: 42-3). The present climate of the valley is moderately hot in summer and cold in winter. It is a hilly area watered by perennial streams Suran, Sukmār, Watālai, Jandul and Anbār—tributaries of the Panjkōra River in the Dīr District. Due to the rocky surface the region is not very fertile, however, wheat, maize, mustard and barley are grown as the main crops.

Bājaur is located on an ancient route linking South Asia with Central Asia. The Valley has low mountains—the southern and eastern extension of the Hindu Kush range. It also served as corridor between the Kabul valley (ancient Kapiśa), Swāt (ancient Suvastu) and the Peshawar valley (ancient Gandhāran). Its surrounding mountains have natural passes providing easy access for transportation. The famous historic Nawa Pass is situated here connecting Kabul to Swāt in the north-east and Chārsadda (ancient Pushkalāvati) in the south-east. Alexander the Great followed this route while invading Pakistan in 327 BC (Mc Crindle, 1984). Menander, the great Indus-Greek ruler, built Buddhist Stupas and monasteries here. From Shinkōṭ his famous inscription and a relic casket dated to ca. 165 BC were recovered (Majumdar 1937-38: 1-8).

The Bājaur Agency having a great archaeological potential is yet to be thoroughly investigated by scholars and researchers. The Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan, has explored 101 archaeological sites in 1995 (Rahman, S. *et alii* 1996: 122-175). In a similar but separate survey other 107 settlement and religious sites, apart from rock carvings and two inscriptions, were recorded (Rahman, L. 1996).

These surveys indicate that the Bājaur valley was densely inhabited during the early historic period in the times of the Aryans, Greeks, Buddhists, Indus-Greeks, Scythians, Parthians, Kushans, etc. The present discovery of Ṭāṅgū Nao Smast has pushed the cultural horizon of the valley back to the late phases of the Middle Palaeolithic period in Pakistan. Preliminary analysis of stone tools shows the site comparable to the Saṅghāo Cave in the Mardān District. (See Dani 1964; Renere 1982; Khan *et al* 1997 for excavation of the Saṅghāo Cave.).

## Discovery

While collecting data for his Ph.D. research, Lutfur Rahman of the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, discovered the cave. Dr. Ihsan Ali led a team comprised of the present authors to confirm the discovery by visiting the Ṭāṅgū Nao Smast and a couple of other small rock-shelters nearby on January 23, 2002. The team realised its significance and observed that it could be an ideal place for the prehistoric settlers.

## Nomenclature

The name 'Ṭāṅgū Nao Smast' is derived from three Pukhtō (Pushtō) words, i.e., *ṭāṅgū* meaning 'pear-tree' or its fruit, *nao* meaning 'canyon' and *smast* meaning cave. The whole combination of words means 'the cave of the pear-tree-canyon'. A number of canyons in the valley provide easy passes, which might have been in use since time immemorial, and the presence of the cave and two other rock-shelters *en route* supports our this supposition.

## Location

The Ṭāngū Nao Smast, situated about 166 km north of Peshawar, lies at a distance of 5.0km to the northwest of Nāwagai—the Tehsil Headquarters of the Bājaur Agency—near a small hamlet of Khaṛai Kamān Garah in a hilly area. A stupa with a settlement site and a rock engraving have already been reported from here (Rahman, S. *et alii* 1996: 146-7; Khan, M.A. *et alii* 2000: 11). A shingled track, leading to the site either in the dry bed of a rivulet or at the foothill, branches off the left side of the main Nāwagai-Khār Road. The cave is located on the right-bank of a rivulet, which might have formed a suitable ecosystem for flora and fauna in the past. It seems most probable why the prehistoric man selected the site for his habitation. There are other caves and rock-shelters in the region still providing retreat to the homeless nomads and shepherds.

## Description of the Smast

A common feature in the lime stone region, the cave is a natural formation during a geological period, so far unknown to the present authors. It is located at the southern end of a limestone spur in north-south orientation. It is bigger than the Saṅghāo Cave, 10.5m deep (Dani 1964: 12). Facing towards south, it has a very smooth and vertical facade. Internally, it comprises of two chambers A and B, the former being larger than the latter (see Figs. 1, 2). The width of entrance to the chamber A, lying to the front, is 3.5m, while that of the chamber B, in the rear, is 3.0m. The total depth of the cave is 17.0m, while width of the chambers A and B is 14.0m and 12.0m respectively. Although slightly different at various points, the average height from the present ground level to the ceiling of the cave is 2.8m. Its irregular ceiling is blackened by soot. Two Gūjar families still occupy the cave for more than a couple of years.

## Stone Tools

During the preliminary survey, we collected some struck stone outside the cave entrance and from the surrounding area suggesting its human occupation in the Stone Age. We also located close to the cave a couple of other small rock-shelters, the smaller to the west and the larger a few hundred metres to the northeast (Pl. 3). From the hill torrent in front of the cave, we collected a total number of 40 struck stone of different shapes, sizes and colour. Some of them have whitish encrustation due to burial for a long period. They are broadly divided into two categories of (1) Flake-Blades and (2) Scrapers and Burins.

## Material

The poor quality of Chert—in grey, green and brownish colours—used for these tools is probably due to non-availability of good material in the region. Quartz is rarely used for making stone artefacts. All of them are locally available and still quarried for the daily use.

### 1. FLAKE-BLADES

The stone tools of this category are comparatively larger in size than the scrapers and burins (Pl. 4). Most of them are finely struck flake-blades, having parallel working edges with signs of utilisation. Due to poor quality of stone, many of them are broken in the middle. Only one pointed flake has the cortex (Pl. 4, no 2), and another flake used as a side scraper as suggested by its shape and blunted edge.

### 2. SCRAPERS AND BURINS

This category of the stone tools includes scrapers and burins (Pl. 5). The former are smaller and pointed ranging to 4.0 cm in length. There are only four burins, made on small blades through secondary flaking. The three different varieties of scrapers include two side and one end scrapers. The last two are round in shape with convex working edges and one of them has a small projection and probably was fixed in a handle. All of them have traces of whitish crust on their working edges.

Table 1. Showing Statistics of the tools.

Flakes	Flake-Blades	Blades	Burins	Scrapers	Total
26	6	1	4	3	40

Table 2. Showing Material of the tools.

Jasper	Chert	Quartz	Lime stone	Total
1	34	2	3	40

Table 3. Description of Selected Tools

S. No.	Size in Cm	Material	Description of the Stone Tools
1.	3.8x6.6x1.6	Grey Chert	Broken half of a long flake.
2.	6.7x4.2x2.2	Greenish Chert	Pointed flake, cortex on the dorsal surface, shiny.
3.	5.0x4.0x1.7	Grey Chert	Discoidal flake with retouched edges.
4.	4.5x8.0x1.3	Grey Chert	Broken flake, no ridges and negative bulb of percussion on the dorsal surface, encrusted.
5.	3.8x3.9x1.2	Grey Chert.	Broken blade, striking platform and bulb of percussion clearly visible, dorsal surface heavily encrusted.
6.	4.0x3.0x2.0	Grey Chert	Blade, distal end missing, broad triangular striking platform, bulb of percussion visible clearly.
7.	6.4x5.5x1.7	Grey Chert	Flake scraper, thick in section, round in shape, encrusted, bulb not clear, signs of utilisation on edges.
8.	7.0x6.0x2.0	Grey Chert	Thick flat knife on blade, one edge retouched the other blunted, striking platform and bulb of percussion clear, encrusted on the dorsal surface.
9.	7.7x3.6x1.0	Grey, Chert	Large knife on blade, blunted on one side retouched on the other, bulb of percussion, the only complete tool.
10.	4.6x4.0x1.3	Brownish Chert	Broken blade, sharp edge, bulb of percussion visible.
11.	4.1x2.3x1.3	Grey, Chert	Narrow pointed tool with blunted edges, negative bulb on the dorsal surface, encrusted.
12.	2.8x1.3x0.5	White Quartz	Tiny burin.
13.	3.0x1.6x0.7	Grey Chert	Small triangular borer on blade, signs of utilisation on edges, dorsal surface encrusted.
14.	3.5x2.0x1.0	Greenish Chert	Small borer with narrow pointed end.
15.	4.5x2.3x1.2	Greyish Limestone	Thick pointed tool.
16.	5.1x3.1x1.0	Brown Chert	Oblique burin-on-flake, cortex on striking platform, bulb of percussion visible.
17.	3.4x3.2x1.0	Brownish Chert	Round scrapper, heavily encrusted on the working edge.
18.	4.0x3.5x1.0	Grey, Chert	Convex end scrapper with a pointed butt for hafting, retouched on the edges.
19.	4.4x2.6x1.2	Grey Chert	Broken burin-on-blade, encrusted on the dorsal surface.
20.	3.3x1.8x0.5	Brownish Chert	Leaf shaped thin blade, striking platform and bulb of percussion visible.

## Technique

The stone tools from Ṭāngū Nao Smast are manufactured indicating a developed and advance technique borrowed from other Palaeolithic sites in Pakistan such as the Soan Valley and Saṅghāo Cave. The flakes, small and fine, are struck on Mousterian tradition, preparing core before knocking flakes and blades off (Sankalia 1964: 26-7). In Pakistan the Levalloisian and Mousterian techniques are used at other prehistoric sites like the Saṅghāo Cave, situated some 100km to the east of this site (Dani 1964; Renere 1982; Saleem, 1986; Khan *et al* 1997). As a whole the stone tool industry follows flake-blade tradition.

## Chronology

Unless proper excavation is conducted, no scientific dating is possible at this initial stage on the basis of stone tools picked up from the surface out side the cave. Typologically and technologically, some of the tools are similar to those from the Saṅghāo Cave and Soan Valley. Moreover, structurally the cave and the two rock-shelters bear close affinity to those inhabited in the Middle Palaeolithic in Europe, Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan. Relying on the comparative analysis, we can assign tools from the Ṭāngū Nao Smast to the Palaeolithic period.

## Conclusion

The Bājaur area seems to be very rich in antiquity and may yield encouraging results if extensively investigated on scientific basis. Before the present discovery, history of the region went back to 'the second half of the second millennium BC', established on the Gandhāran Grave Culture (L. Rahman, 1996). Preliminary examination of the stone tools suggests their antiquity prior to the Neolithic period. The Ṭāngū Nao Smast represents a manufacturing technique of the stone tools homogeneous to the Levalloise-Mousterian tradition, practised from the Middle Palaeolithic onwards. It has opened vistas of knowledge for researches in the Stone Age Archaeology of Pakistan. It is need of the day to survey systematically this so far unexplored area to complete cultural sequence from the Stone Age onward.

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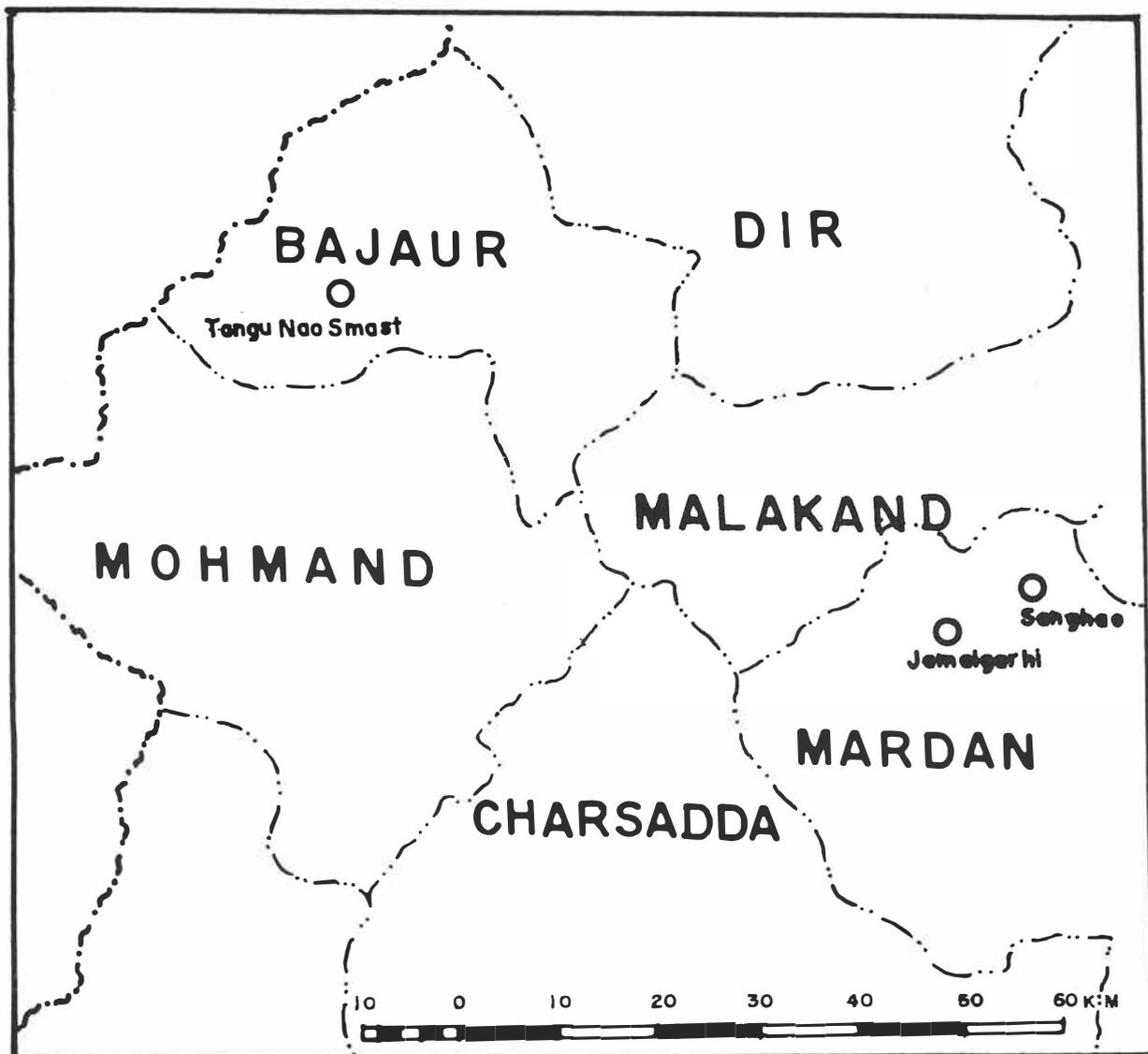
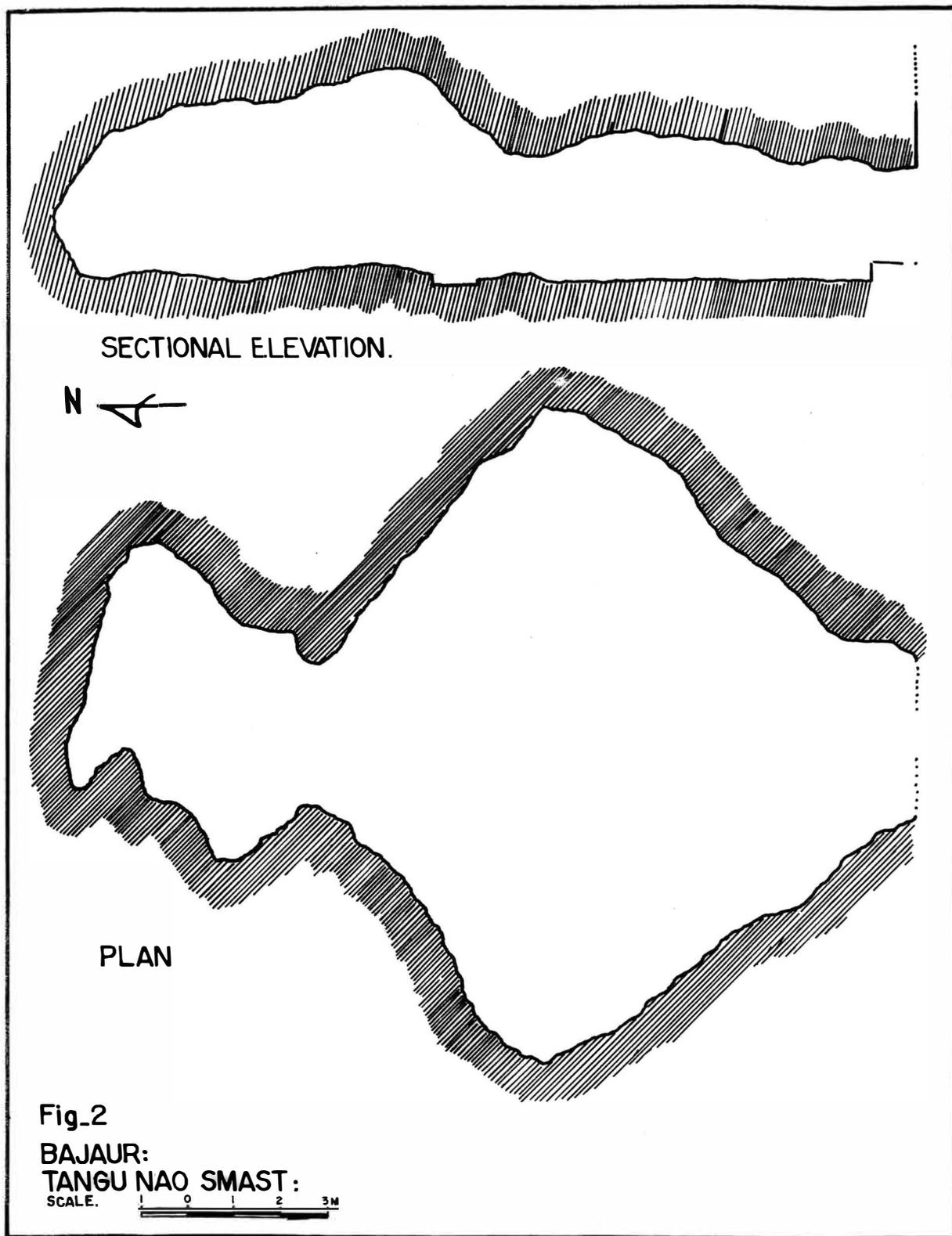
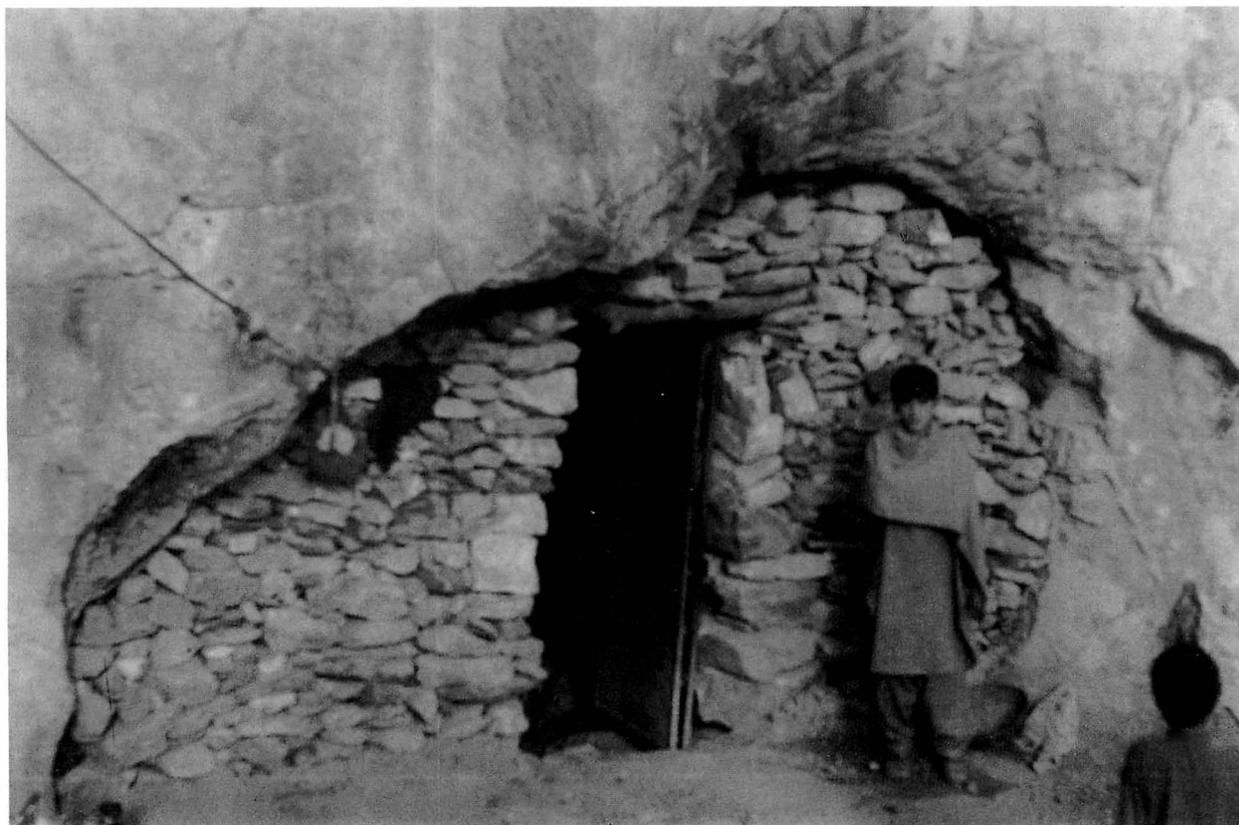


Fig. 1: Location map of Tangu Nao Smast, Bajaur Agency.





Pl. 1: Bajaur: Tangu Nao Smast, General view.



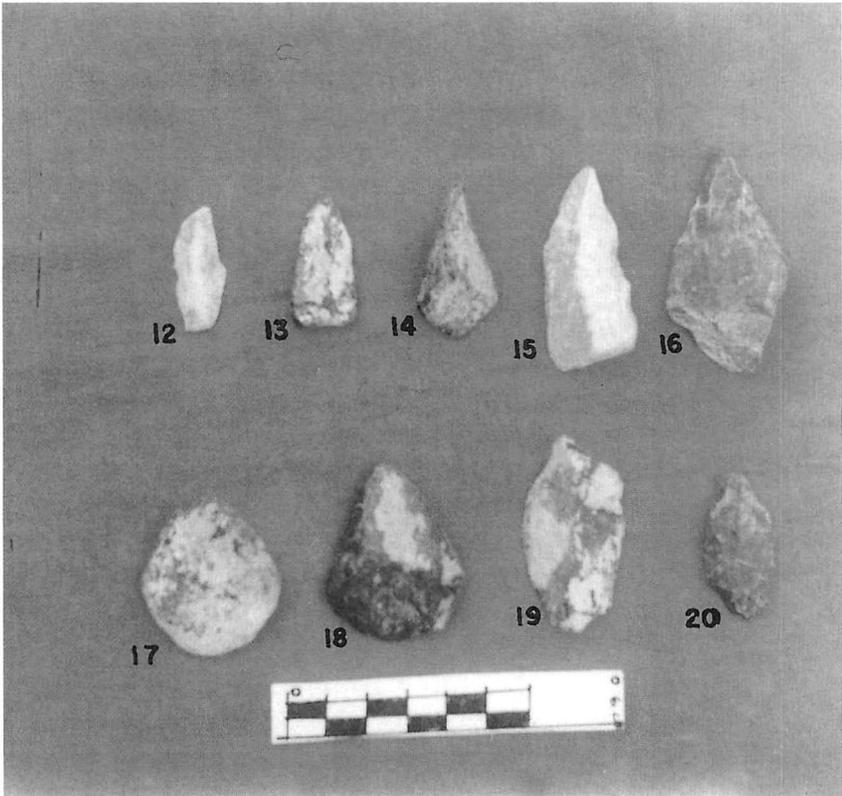
Pl. 2: Tangu Nao Smast with blocked entrance by the modern inhabitants.



Pl. 3: The north eastern Rock shelter.



Pl. 4: Flakes and Blades, Tango Nao Smast, Nawagai, Bajaur.



Pl. 5: The borers and scrapers, Tango Nao Smast, Nawagai, Bajaur.