INTRODUCTION

History and archaeology concern themselves with people. People enter an area, adopt some form of settlement and may eventually be driven out by pressure from a different group of people. There is a continual process of change, sometimes slow, sometimes very rapid, in the peoples who move across the face of the land. But they not only move across the face of the land; they use the land and they inevitably disturb the ecosystems which were present there in the first place. Today we are very concerned about the impact of mankind on the environment; many people think this is a recent problem and that 50, 100 or perhaps 250 years ago no such troubles existed.

Ever since agriculture was devised, man has altered the environment for his own purposes; he has also altered it unwittingly. Even before agriculture he had potent ecological influences at his disposal, such as fire, or the manipulation of populations of wild herbivores, and we are able to detect the local impact even of Mesolithic man upon the ecosystems of north west Europe. Agriculture was brought to this region by Neolithic peoples using crops that had been developed in the very different environments of south east Europe and south west Asia. Such crops were light-demanding and could not be grown at these higher latitudes without the removal of overhead forest canopy; that is, the ecological dominants had to go.

The first land clearance (Figure 1) - called landnam by Iversen (1941) - was surprisingly widespread considering the small populat-
Fig. 1. Pollen diagram from Fallahogy, Ireland, showing a primary early neolithic episode of clearance for farming. (From J.G. Evans, The Environment of Early Man in the British Isles).