PREHISTORIC AND HISTORIC NATIVE AMERICANS IN PIUTE COUNTY

For at least 10,000 years before the first Anglo explorers reached Piute County, humans had hunted, fished, made camps, and built homes along the Sevier River and the creeks and streams that feed it. When the Mormon pioneers arrived to build farms and homes in the Sevier River Valley in the 1850s, they settled in the same natural locations that the native peoples had used for thousands of years.

Modern archaeologists and anthropologists have identified more than 500 prehistoric Native American sites in Piute County. Their careful scientific analyses of fill dirt, artifacts, pollen, and other materials found at these and additional locations helps enable us to piece together the larger picture of the lifeways these ancient peoples.

Paleo-Indian Cultures: 12000–7000 B.P.

The first human inhabitants to enter the southwestern region of North America, possibly as early as 12,000 years ago, were big-game hunters. These people were part of a group known as the late Pleistocene Native Americans, or Paleo-Indians, and are believed to
have migrated from Asia across the Bering Strait land bridge that existed between today’s Alaska and Russian Siberia.

As the Paleo-Indian culture spread throughout the Southwest, including Utah and Piute County, its members left evidence of their presence. These prehistoric artifacts, mostly projectile points, can be dated in several ways. Among general dating information is their discovery with mammoth and camel bones in areas outside of Utah. They also can be classified according to their particular size and shape. Clovis points represent the oldest type (12000–10500 B.P.) and are generally a minimum of three to four inches long, having no notches, but with a concave base with a flute or long flake chipped out of it. The flute extends about a third of the way toward the point. Folsom points (11000–9000 B.P.) are smaller and thinner with a more deeply concave base than the Clovis, indicating a transition from the hunting of large Ice Age megafauna such as mammoths and now-extinct bison and camels to somewhat smaller game animals. Plano points (9500–7000 B.P.) represent a variety of shapes and sizes indicating the development of more advanced craftsmanship and the hunting of smaller animals. All of these projectile points are usually found with the bones of large animals. The earliest Paleo-Indians hunted big game in small groups, most likely a group of several families. Some smaller animals, fish, and plants made up the remainder of their diet. Later, as their hunting skills and point technology became more refined and varied, they traveled in much larger groups.

At least one Paleo-Indian site still exists in Piute County on a sage-covered flat north of Circleville. Another lies just over the county line into Sevier County near Koosharem, indicating that, at the very least, these people passed through the area in search of game. Evidence of Paleo-Indian presence—both camps and settlements—also abounds in the counties surrounding Piute: Millard and Juab Counties along the shores of old Lake Bonneville, Sevier and Emery Counties, including the San Rafael Swell, and Garfield County along the Circle Cliffs east of Boulder and sites near the present-day town of Escalante.

No one is sure what became of the Paleo-Indian people, whether they left the region, became integrated into other cultures, or adapted
to a changing environment over generations until what archaeologists regard as a new distinct culture emerged. The Circleville site may yield the answer to that secret when it is fully studied, for remnants of both Paleo-Indians and the later Western Archaic culture people are evident there. At an elevation of 6,220 feet, aligned stones mark what appears to have been surface structures, suggesting longer term occupation rather than a camp. When first studied, some thirty-odd stone tools of chert and obsidian littered a 270-by-135-foot area. If, indeed, this proves to be a Paleo-Indian habitation site rather than a camp, it is of particular significance, since no other site of this kind has been found in Utah. Even later Desert or Western Archaic sites built in open areas are extremely rare in the state. Most evidence for these later people comes from dry caves. In any event, other cultures followed and even overlapped that of the Paleo-Indians.

**Western Archaic Cultures: 11000–3500 B.P.**

At least 8,000 years before the Christian era, the Western Archaic people, hunters and gatherers, roamed the mountains and valleys of the Sevier River region. Distinct from the Paleo-Indian peoples, this culture is marked by different artifacts and the use of more technologically advanced projectile points, which differ in style from those of the Paleo-Indians. Carefully crafted obsidian projectile points found in Piute and surrounding counties place the Archaic people in the area from about 11000 to 9000 B.P. By this time, the region’s animals and vegetation had evolved similarly to those of today—as had the climate, altering in warm-wet, cool-dry cycles. The Archaic people adapted accordingly, using a larger variety of foods and shelters than had preceding cultures, which may explain why they were more numerous than their predecessors.

Small bands, perhaps families, of Western Archaic people found protection from the elements underneath a 200-foot cliff on the southern Wasatch Plateau east of present-day Richfield. The shelter extends as much as twenty-three feet under the sandstone overhang and is four times that long, offering dry lodging from the rain and the snow that can come early at that 7,500-foot elevation. There the people roasted plant foods and meat over open hearths or firepits. Some 150 hearths (open fires), 114 unlined fire pits, and eighteen
slab-lined fire pits were discovered in the excavation of Sudden Shelter. Ivy Creek cut a channel through the canyon below, providing fresh water and an occasional fish. Archaic people used this particular location, called Sudden Shelter, from around 5770 B.P. through 5420 B.P., or for about 350 years. It is the most extensively studied archaeological site close to Piute County that documents these people’s presence in the area.

At least fifteen Archaic sites have been identified within Piute County itself. Of these, one (near Circleville mentioned above) is a Paleo-Indian and Archaic site, and six are Archaic and Fremont culture sites, demonstrating that these individual cultures—separated in time—used some of the same locations. Only a scattering of projectile points on the ground surface identified the culture that used most of these fifteen sites. Locations of these lithic material sites in the county include the mouth of Oak Basin Canyon, Lum Canyon, Otter Creek Reservoir, City Creek, and the Greenwich townsites. A couple, which were probably camps, include flaked tools and grindstone artifacts (manos and metates) used in food preparation. Another site a few miles north of Greenwich is on top of a chert outcropping where
Archaic people—and very likely other cultures both before and after them—quarried the smooth stone, chipping and shaping the pieces into various tools.

Evidence from these sites and others—such as Acord Lakes several miles north of Sudden Shelter on the Wasatch Plateau and Clyde’s Cavern in the San Rafael Swell—suggest the Archaic people were highly mobile, ranging widely over a variety of landscapes and altitudes in search of food. Although both hunting and gathering activities are evident at most sites throughout Utah, the ancient peoples apparently shifted from hunting in the higher elevations to gathering plant food around the lower valleys at different times of the year rather than settling in a specific area year-round. They had an excellent knowledge of when and where they could locate plants, animals, and material for their life-sustaining tools, and where they could find shelter.

The fractured cliffs above Sudden Shelter provided shelter for at least three distinct but adjoining living areas used both as short-term camps as well as longer seasonal homes. From one to twenty-five people may have stayed there at any given time. Their diet consisted of large mammals such as bison, bighorn sheep, deer, and antelope, and smaller animals like coyote, beaver, badger, marmot, rabbit, prairie dog, squirrel, woodchuck, and a variety of small rodents. The ancient Native Americans made use of more than forty plant species for food and other purposes.⁸

Archaic people used simple, usually portable, tools. These included baskets for storing and harvesting plants, berries, and seeds; hand stones and milling slabs for grinding seeds; spears, knives, and scrapers of various kinds for killing and butchering larger game; and snares and nets for capturing birds and small mammals. After about 6000 B.P. they learned to fashion needles by splitting long bones of animals. This enabled them to sew skins and hides into moccasins and simple clothing. They also used grasses and plant fibers to weave sandals.⁹

A basic tool of the Archaic people was the atlatl, or spear thrower. The shaft was usually made of cane or wood, from fourteen to about twenty-eight inches in length, with a hollowed-out end. This hollowed end was bound with sinew to keep the wood from splitting
when a smaller foreshaft with a spearhead lashed to it was inserted. It is likely that the hunters carried several foreshafts (darts or spears) that could be fitted easily into the hollow for “reloading” quickly. The foreshaft could then be left in the target—animal or enemy—while a new one was inserted into the hollow of the main shaft. Leather loops or carved finger holes provided a firm grip on the throwing end. Feathers tied to the foreshaft helped the aim and straight trajectory of the projectile. This atlatl arrangement allowed a hunter to hurl a spear much harder and farther than was possible using just the arm.¹⁰

For some 8,000 years these Western, or Desert, Archaic people occupied and traversed the Utah region. Their adaptability allowed them to survive—and in some cases, flourish—through periods of environmental change. There are at least two schools of thought on the disappearance of the Archaic peoples. One is that their lifestyle was gradually replaced as corn agriculture from Mexico gradually migrated northward—a development that happened at different times in different places. Another is that the Archaic peoples simply disappeared from the landscape around 3,500 years ago, leaving it to some future inhabitants. In the Piute County area, those new inhabitants were people known today as the Fremont culture.

**The Fremont Culture: 1800–700 B.P.**

Archaeologists and anthropologists have long debated the origins of the Fremont culture, but no one has yet solved the riddle. They were one of several cultures that emerged in the Formative, or Late Prehistoric, period (1800–700 B.P.).¹¹ The Fremont people inhabited the northern Colorado Plateau region and the eastern Great Basin until about 750 years ago. They were contemporary with the Anasazi people found in the Four Corners region. Some archaeologists until recently thought that the Fremont were a subdivision or variant of the Anasazi.¹²

The Anasazi occupation in Utah, for the most part, occurred along the Colorado River and its tributaries, extending into Arizona and as far west as Boulder Mountain, but the Anasazi were apparently not part of Piute County’s prehistory. The two cultures did overlap farther east and south of the county, including the Escalante River drainage and the Kaiparowits Plateau. Artifacts from those particu-
lar regions indicate, at the least, some cultural exchange and perhaps even an intermingling of sorts between the two groups.\textsuperscript{13}

While archaeologists commonly recognize some five regional variants of the Fremont culture, all shared some common characteristics. All were agriculturally based. The Formative period, in which the Fremont culture emerged, began with the introduction of cultivated crops such as corn (or maize), beans, and squash. With this came a more stable food supply that was still supplemented by hunting and gathering. Villages with above-ground and permanent adobe and masonry structures began to replace the seasonal camps, allowing for a more complex social organization in the resulting small villages. For the first time pottery, bows, and arrows became common.

The structures Fremont people built varied from area to area, but some types were more common than others, with pithouses being the most common. Usually the structures had a number of firepits and storage rooms or granaries associated with them. In the flatter terrains these dwellings could be built from carefully made adobe. In more rocky or mountainous areas the walls of these dwelling were often constructed of stone masonry, although Fremont people did not build the elaborate complex structures for which the Anasazi are noted. Fremont people also took advantage of natural terrains, building against ledges high on the canyon walls or under cliff overhangs.

A number of artifacts set the Fremont apart from other prehistoric societies. One particular type of basketry with a one-rod-and-bundle method of construction is distinctive enough that its presence at a site can alone identify it as Fremont. The troughed “Utah” metates (or grinding slabs), with one end open and a shelf at the other, are also indicative of the Fremont culture.

The Fremont people made distinctive pottery pieces early in their cultural development: it was plain gray ware, usually without paint or design but well crafted and functional. Later potters, perhaps influenced through contact with the Anasazi, often decorated their ware by pinching corrugated ridges or painting black lines into geometric designs; some added a red wash. The Fremont people expressed an artistic flare not only through their pottery but also in their rock art and modeled clay figurines.

Another identifying characteristic of the Fremont people was
their footwear. They made two types of moccasins that are notable. One is particularly distinctive because it is unlike those found from any other culture. This particular moccasin was fashioned from the untanned leg hide of large animals such as deer with the hair left intact, presumably for traction and warmth in cold weather. A less-common style was made of three pieces of untanned hide. The sole was cut from the front leg—usually of a mountain sheep, deer, or elk—leaving both hair and dewclaw attached (which provided extra grip on the sole of the moccasin). They also made one-piece “hock”-style moccasins (also common to other cultures) from the back leg of a bison, cutting around the leg several inches above the dewclaw and making another circular cut just above the hoof. The Fremont artisan could then slip the tube-shaped hide, which had a natural ankle curve, off the bone and sew the lower end to form the toe of the moccasin.

Although the Fremont people shared the above cultural characteristics, a great deal of diversity existed in regional sub-cultures or variants. The degree to which each sub-culture depended on agriculture varies, as does their rock art and influences from adjacent non-Fremont cultures. The Fremont people south and west of Piute County and those to the east along the San Rafael Swell are geographically closest to the Anasazi, and the painted pottery and architecture from these regions most closely resembles Anasazi types. Other culture variants north of Piute County along the Sevier River, the Great Salt Lake, and the Uinta Basin share more similarities with the western and northwestern Plains cultures.14

The Fremont in the northwest corner of Utah and those who lived in the northeast corner were far removed from the Piute County area. Three other regional variants, however, came together in a triangular juncture within the county boundaries, making this tiny geographic area an unusually interesting location for the study of the Fremont people. As many as a twenty Fremont sites are scattered throughout the county (including the six previously discussed Archaic/Fremont sites). Two of the sites also have artifacts from the later Indian cultures of the Shoshoni, Ute, and Paiute tribes.

More recent studies argue for identifying sub-groups, not by pottery or architecture, but by their subsistence lifestyle variations based
on different sets of environmental conditions and the methods used to adapt to them. Suffice it to say, the Fremont peoples are one of the more poorly understood prehistoric groups, and only further research will allow archaeologists to tell their story more completely.15

For about four hundred years, from about A.D. 800 to 1200, Fremont people lived along the Sevier River as it meandered through the Piute County area. Unfortunately, when a team of scientists, led by Ohio archaeologist John Gillin, arrived to study the area's sites in 1937, cattle grazing and farmers' plows had either destroyed most of them or curious diggers seeking pots and arrowheads had caused so much damage that they were no longer viable for scientific analysis. Old-timers in Marysvale remembered the days before farmers cultivated that part of the valley and told of a dozen or more mounds that had dotted the area. Only one remained.

This large mound, which would become known as the Marysvale 3 site, was located on George T. Henry's farm just north of Marysvale and less than half a mile from his house. George T. Henry was an educated Englishman who came to Marysvale in 1878 to open an assay office. Considered one of the leading mining experts in southern Utah, he also farmed and held several elected offices.16 The mound protruded three feet above the surrounding field on the rolling bottomland. It stood some five miles west of the river itself and about a half mile from where the foothills start their gentle slope up to the Tushar Mountains. The mound was oriented in a north-south direction and was about eighty-eight feet long and seventy-two feet wide.17

In the early 1890s, Professor Henry Montgomery had made an initial investigation of the mound. He opened a hole about six feet in diameter and two and a half feet deep and made "a few shallow 'pot-holes' around the center." Apparently, Montgomery didn't publish a detailed description of what he found, but he did leave this more generalized statement:

An account of my investigations in the pre-historic town near Marysvale in Piute County, and elsewhere in the valleys of Utah, would be almost a repetition [of those given of other Utah counties]. . . . everywhere the same permanent buildings, the same walls, roofs and floors . . . the same wonderful pottery, and the
same stone and bone implements, utensils and ornaments are presented to the eye of the explorer.\textsuperscript{18}

John Gillin reported that “Later, local amateurs had enlarged Montgomery’s original excavation in desultory fashion.”\textsuperscript{19}

As he worked his land, George Henry had picked up numerous potsherds and enough arrowheads for an impressive collection, which he allowed the archaeologist to study, photograph, and classify. Several years earlier, his wife, Joanna Dennis, reportedly had even removed a skeleton from the mound, which had since been lost.\textsuperscript{20}

Gillin and his team plotted the mound into one-foot-square sections and dug narrow trenches north, south, east, and west from the center point. They noted individual artifacts and any other materials according to the square foot in which they were found. Eventually they uncovered the remnants of two dwellings and four different levels of floor, indicating that the site had been occupied at least that many separate times.

In his report, Gillin supplied drawings of the excavation plan and a cross-section, and he concluded that the site had first been occupied by people living in semi-subterranean pithouses (floor 4). A flood later ravaged the original dwelling, leaving a layer of sand and gravel on top of this deepest floor. The site was reoccupied sometime after the flood had taken place (floor 3), and then was probably occupied almost continuously with only temporary intervals of vacancy until its final abandonment.

Floor 2a represented the next definite level of occupation. With it came the construction of a free-standing adobe house, with walls up to a foot thick. There was an adobe-rimmed firepit in the center of the room (House I). Gillin explained: “A second floor covering the fireplace (floor 2) occurred within the walls of this house, showing it was reoccupied or repaired, possibly after a short desertion. Floor 2 extends outside the house and is associated with House II, which also lacks an interior fireplace.” By this stage, it appears that the Fremont occupants had adopted the practice of locating the fireplace outside. Both houses probably had flat roofs with an entry hole, for no doorways were evident in any of the walls. Gillin’s crew unearthed an irregular slab of sandstone nearby, which probably served as a cover
for one of the openings. Sometime after the abandonment of both structures, which occurred before A.D. 1150, a later group built a final (or top) floor over the ruins of House I.²¹

Gillin and his crew also excavated a second site, which had no mound associated with it, but pottery pieces, arrowheads, and other projectile points littered the area. This site, located on top of a steep-sided ridge a half-mile west of Marysvale at the mouth of Bullion Canyon, was designated Marysvale 7. In their digging, the archaeological team discovered the remnants of a small village with enough artifacts to suggest a well-established culture that lived there for several hundred years. This site dates somewhat later than Marysvale 3, and perhaps continued well into the twelfth century.²² Although it is unlikely that the team found all of the original village, the excavated site extended about 135 feet in a north-south direction and 300 feet east-west. Freshwater Bullion Creek ran some 450 feet below the site.

Most of the seventeen houses unearthed were pit or subterranean structures, three of which were five feet or less in diameter and were most likely used for storage. It appears that all the structures had roof entrances. Several sandstone disks, presumably covers for these entrances, were found. The square pithouses once had woven stick walls and ceilings, most likely plastered over with several inches of adobe. Floors all consisted of about three inches of smooth adobe, some with an underlayer of cobblestone. An adobe rim circled the firepits, which were also lined with adobe plaster.

Three structures were kiva-like houses with central adobe-rimmed firepits and ventilation tunnels. These houses may have been used for ceremonial purposes or simply as family or community gathering places. Five other houses were rectangular, with freestanding adobe walls but no fireplaces. One had two rooms. The walls varied in thickness up to about fourteen inches, with the average being about eleven inches thick. Among the artifacts in one house, set off to the north from the rest, was a stone grinding slab and several manos along with an unbroken gray pitcher, indicating that this was likely a room for storing and perhaps preparing seeds and corn for food.

Artifacts from the site consisted of projectile points of varying sizes (arrowheads, knives, spear points), clay disks and rectangular
bone pieces (perhaps used as game counters), pipes of stone or clay, figurine or doll-like objects, bone pendants, awls, whistles, stone balls, shell beads, and manos and metates. From this basic archaeological information researchers have pictured a small village of perhaps six to ten families living and working on this remote knoll. They planted and harvested crops such as corn and squash, wove baskets, made pottery, fashioned clay figurines either for play or for ceremony, gathered seeds and nuts, hunted game in the nearby mountains, fashioned tools from stone and bone, and made clothing from grasses and animal skins. They ground and pounded medicines from the roots and leaves of plants, had religious ceremonies, played games, and perhaps traded with other cultures.

Although pictographs were not found in the immediate vicinity of Marysvale 1 or 7 sites, they are scattered throughout the Piute County area, reaffirming the Fremont people’s artistic flair that is so evident in their pottery and figurines.

Between A.D. 1300 and 1400 the Fremont culture disappeared. A severe and prolonged period of drought most likely made it impossible for them to maintain their horticultural-based food supply. Several related theories attempt to explain what happened to these
people. One suggests that they became a nomadic people that eventually evolved into the Numic-speaking tribes of Paiute, Ute, and Shoshoni. Another theory proposes that the Numic groups, which are believed to have originated in the southern California area, moved into the Great Basin, displacing—and perhaps absorbing—the Fremont peoples. Others believe that the Fremont migrated north and east to become the Dismal River Apache or Plains Apache, or that they moved south to be absorbed into or become the ancestors of today’s southwestern cultural groups.

Southern Paiutes have their own tradition of the disappearance of the earlier culture. It tells of an ancient people who migrated eastward “from a place of high mountains and endless waters to the red mountains.” There under the influence of their benevolent gods, Tabats and Shinob, they tilled the soil, hunted, and prospered. However, when many years of drought dried streams and land, the game fled and the people began to starve. Shinob told them “to take council from the animals.” Thereafter, the Southern Paiutes became a nomadic people, following the game from lowlands in the winter to highlands in the summer, who “gathered in gratitude the food which the gods distribute every year over the face of tu-weep, the earth.”

Whatever happened to the Fremont people, one thing is apparent: artifacts from their culture have not been identified in any significant quantity outside their original range and period of history. The Fremont cultural identity was entirely lost.

The Numic Peoples

The Native Americans who occupied the Piute County area during the last 600 to 800 hundred years were part of a Numic (Shoshoni language-speaking) group—a branch of the Uto-Aztecan language family. Represented in this group are several Utah Indian tribes that all speak dialects of the Shoshoni language: Paiutes, Utes, Goshutes and, of course, the Shoshoni themselves. Early development of the Numic language began about the time of Christ in northern Mexico and southern California. Linguists, archaeologists, and anthropologists agree that by A.D. 1200, Numic-speaking peoples had expanded
into the eastern Great Basin, and, by A.D. 1300, into southwestern Colorado.29

The pottery of these people is unlike any other in the western United States. It is fragile and somewhat crudely formed from a course clay through a combination of coiling and pounding (the paddle-anvil method), and fired at low temperatures. The vessels are usually thick, with a wide mouth and flat bottom, the only decorations being indentations near the rim. This distinctive pottery plays a prominent roll in confirming when the Shoshoni-speaking peoples first appeared on the Utah scene. In the upper strata of numerous archaeological sites throughout the state, particularly in caves and shelters, these vessels are found mixed with Fremont material, indicating that the Numic speakers arrived before the Fremont left, which may help provide a possible explanation for the disappearance of the Fremont. Archaeologist Jesse D. Jennings, explained:

The Paiute were highly skilled foragers, not farmers, and the peaceful (soft) pressure of a new population, able to forage for the same food species with even more skill than could the Fremont, may have taxed the carrying capacity of the land. The Fremont could have lost the competition and withdrawn, leaving the Ute and Paiute in possession of the Eastern Basin and the Colorado Plateau.30

The small area that comprises Piute County today is a microcosm of the landscape these groups occupied for centuries. It is marked by high plateaus to the east and west, with the fertile valleys of the Sevier River between, and it is bordered by arid desert land that stretches north and south. The survival of the Paiutes and Utes who lived here depended upon their ability to adapt to the conditions these varied terrains presented. Their small-group hunting and gathering subsistence lifestyle mirrored that of the earlier Archaic peoples. Moving in little family bands, they were “a people of the land.” Not only were their lives profoundly immersed in the cycles of nature but they had become completely reliant on such cycles.

**Paiute Indians**

The Southern Paiutes occupied the land that stretched from California’s Sierra Nevada south along the Colorado River to the con-
fluence of the Colorado and San Juan Rivers at Glen Canyon. Their territory extended north through Piute County to about the area of Clear Creek Canyon. They fashioned seasonal shelters, called wickiups, from brush and tree limbs, which they formed into a dome shape with a side entrance. The mountain streams that cascade into the valleys allowed limited irrigation of small gardens in summer. They used bones and sticks for digging; wove baskets for gathering, drying, and storing; pounded and coiled clay into pottery for cooking and storage; made atlatls and bows and arrows for hunting, and made nets and snares for trapping. As the seasons changed from cold to hot, they followed the terrain from the valleys to the mountains. In the spring, when food supplies were low, Paiutes planted corn in the bottom elevations and dug the roots and bulbs of young plants. This heavy reliance on plants continued into the summer as fruits and berries ripened and tubers grew fat. In the fall, the Paiutes gathered seeds and pinenuts to be stored for the winter. Throughout the year, they might kill an occasional large game animal, but more usually they hunted and trapped smaller game, rodents, and insects with skill and perseverance.

When European explorers and trappers—and later the Mormon settlers—encountered the Paiutes they universally declared them to be inferior to the more aggressive Shoshoni and Utes. In this they failed to recognize the degree to which the Paiutes had accommodated their lifestyle to their particular surroundings and circumstances. In spite of the fact that they did not have horses, they successfully sustained their culture in an unbelievably harsh environment, unappreciated by those accustomed to living in a more hospitable habitat.

Ute Indians

Ute lands covered some 200,000 square miles, including two-thirds of Utah and one-half of Colorado. Near Sevier Lake in central Utah their territory met the Shoshoni-Goshute lands to the north and the territory of the Paiutes to the south and west. Ute territory extended eastward over the rest of central and eastern Utah and across the Colorado Rockies. The Utes were divided into bands, with the Uintah in northeastern Utah, the Timpanogos around Utah Lake,
the Sanpitch northeast of the Pavant Mountains along the Sevier River, and the Pahvants from Clear Lake east to the Fishlake Plateau. Explorer Jedediah Strong Smith described the Utes. He said they were

cleanly quiet and active and made a nearer approach to civilized life than any Indians I have seen in the Interior. Their leggings and shirts which are made of skins of the Deer Mt Sheep or Antelope are kept quite clean. . . . They appear to have very little disposition to steal and ask for nothing unless it may be a little meat.31

Two Ute groups are of particular importance to Piute County’s prehistory: the Pahvant band, whose home was the Fishlake Plateau, and the Koosharem band, who lived in Grass Valley (which runs north and south along Otter Creek). For subsistence, both groups gathered plant foods, including pinyon nuts, fished the Sevier and Fremont Rivers, Otter Creek, and other streams in the area, and hunted large and small animals in the forests of the Fishlake Plateau and the Tushar Mountains. In the early nineteenth century, however, the incursion of Spanish traders would dramatically alter the lives of both Utes and Paiutes.

The Spanish Explorers and Indian Trade

When a Ute Indian traded a solid silver ingot to a blacksmith near Sante Fe in 1765, it ignited a Spanish search for mines and easy wealth in the lands north. Soon a small expedition headed by Juan Maria Antonio Rivera headed into western Colorado; but it returned in July with no discoveries of great wealth. New Mexico Governor Tomas Velez de Chupin sent Rivera back to explore farther into the unknown lands. This expedition took Rivera and his party into eastern Utah along the base of the La Sal Mountains and across the Colorado River near present-day Moab. This crossing would later become an established ford of the Colorado River for travelers on the Old Spanish Trail.

In 1776 two Franciscan friars, Silvestre Velez de Escalante and Francisco Atanasio Domínguez, accompanied by ten men, journeyed into Utah from Santa Fe in search of a new route to Monterey, California, where the Spanish had established a colony in 1770.
Escalante and another Catholic priest, Father Francisco Garces, had already pioneered a trail to California through the deserts of New Mexico and Arizona; but, because of the hostile Hopis and Apaches along the route, the Spanish wanted to find a better route, and chose to traverse the lands of the more friendly Utes. The Domínguez-Escalante party traveled as far north as Utah Valley and then south along the east side of Sevier Lake in present-day Millard County. With winter threatening, they feared being trapped by snow in the mountain ranges that still stretched before them to the west and abandoned their quest, returning to Santa Fe. Even though they failed to reach their goal, they had explored and mapped new territory along their way and helped open the way for later extensive Spanish trade.

As evidence that the Spanish also mined in the Marysvale area, perhaps as early as the 1700s or after the development of the Old Spanish Trail in the late 1820s, modern-day residents of Piute County point to an old arrastra wheel found along Bullion Creek by the early settlers. The arrastra was used to crush ore and extract metals, and, according to former mining inspector and resident of Marysvale Rell Frederick, predates early Mormon exploration and settlement. Another arrastra found near the Carrissa Mine also may be of Spanish origin.32

By the 1790s nearly all the Ute bands from the Uinta Basin to the western slopes of the Wasatch Mountains had acquired horses from the Spanish in New Mexico, giving them a clear advantage over their peaceful and unmounted Goshute and Paiute neighbors who occupied the deserts of the Great Basin. Astride their horses, Utes could travel farther in search of large game animals—deer, elk, buffalo, and antelope—which became their primary food source and also provided skins for their clothing and tepees. Traits of the Plains Indians were adapted by the Utes. Large hunting and raiding expeditions were an added boon, making it unnecessary for the Utes to move their camps in search of food as frequently as they had done in the past. When they did make seasonal moves, horses dragged or carried the increased weight of tepees and other belongings. The Utes began living in bands larger than the earlier extended family groups, with a chief as leader and loose ties with other bands. Their mobility and
the more readily available furs expanded their opportunities for exchanging goods with other tribes as well as trappers, explorers, wandering merchants, or Spanish and Indian slave traders.

From the beginning of Spanish occupation of the New World, the work force in the Spanish colonies in Mexico had been based upon slave labor. Wealthy households and rancheros throughout the Rio Grande Valley in the Spanish province of New Mexico were also in need of servants and laborers—and the Indian trade offered solutions to the labor shortage. The Utes, in need of horses, took advantage of the lucrative slave market that developed with the Spanish and Mexicans in California and New Mexico. Young Paiutes and Goshutes, especially the women, were submissive, making excellent servants. These groups became the objects of Ute raids.33 For over fifty years (from the late 1700s to the mid-1800s) the Utes kidnapped women and children from the Paiutes, Goshutes, and other bands for trade with the Spanish for guns, knives, blankets, and horses.

Long before the Old Spanish trail became a recognized route, Spanish trading parties had begun regular forays into Ute lands. Entering Utah near Moab, some snaked and bartered their way in a northwesterly direction across the Wasatch Mountains. Roughly following the original Escalante and Dominguez route to trade blankets, guns, and horses to the Timpanogos Utes for furs and slaves. Some returned to New Mexico with their goods; a few continued south through today’s Millard and Beaver Counties and across the inhospitable southern deserts to California.

An increasing number of traders took established Indian trails and detoured through the southern regions of Utah, forming a route that would become the Old Spanish Trail. They crossed the Colorado River near Moab and forded the Green River near the present Utah town of that name. From there the trail swung southwest, and after about 1830 split at Fremont Junction. The older section snaked west through Salina Canyon and then turned south to follow the Sevier River Valley through present-day Sevier and Piute Counties. An alternate route traversed the Forsyth Valley to the Loa-Fremont area and then west across the high country of Fishlake Plateau, entering Piute County by way of Otter Creek. It traced the creek south through Grass Valley along the eastern side of the county until it met the
Sevier River’s East Fork north of Antimony. The two trails came together again at the junction of the East Fork and the main flow of the Sevier River.  

From the junction of the two forks, the Spanish traders continued south with their captives and other trade items, following the Sevier River through Circle Valley and the northwest corner of Garfield County to the present site of Orton. There the trail curved west, and then went south along Bear Creek and over the Markagunt Plateau (a Paiute word meaning “highland of trees”). The users of the trail then descended down the west side of the mountain, following Little Creek to the site of the present town of Parowan before meeting the Domínguez-Escalante trail around Cedar City.

The earliest indication of American trappers passing through Piute County is the story of James Workman and William Spencer. The two had been part of a larger group of fur trappers in 1829, but became lost when a Comanche war party separated them from the others. In search of a route to Sante Fe, they wandered to the Moab crossing of the Colorado River, where they met up with a Spanish trading caravan. The traders had already left Sante Fe and were headed for California, so the trappers, probably in the interest of their own safety, went with them. They followed the Old Spanish Trail through Castle Valley, up the Sevier River, through the future Piute County region, and on across the western deserts.

Lagos Garces and Mauricio Arze are two Spanish traders who very likely frequented Piute County. A record of their trial for trading with the Utes without a license indicates that they knew both the Ute language and the Sevier River country. In the spring of 1813, after trading with the Timpanogos Utes around Utah Lake, they made their way south to the Sevier River. The traders had a brush with a hostile band of Sanpitch Utes and probably escaped through Salina Canyon.

In 1821 Utah became the territory of the Mexican government when the Mexicans won their independence from Spain. The newly liberated Mexicans lost no time in taking over the trade and mining enterprises of the Spaniards, continuing contact between Santa Fe and the Indians in Utah until well after the Mormons reached the Salt Lake Valley.
In 1841 a French observer, Duflot de Mofras, described the Mexican trading parties.

Caravans travel once a year from New Mexico to Los Angeles. These consist of 200 men on horseback, accompanied by mules laden with fabrics and large woolen covers called serapes, jerzas, and cobertones. . . . This merchandise is exchanged for horses and mules, on a basis, usually, of two blankets for one animal. Caravans leave Santa Fe, New Mexico, in October, before the snows set in . . . and finally reach the outlying ranchos of California from where the trail leads into El Pueblo de los Angeles. This trip consumes two and one-half months. Returning caravans leave California in April in order to cross the rivers before the snow melts, taking with them about 2,000 horses. The expedition that reached El Pueblo in November, 1841 included in addition to some 200 or more New Mexicans, 60 or more North Americans.\textsuperscript{39}

The traders wore a curious assortment of apparel. Elaborately embroidered jackets and vests adorned with silver bell-shaped buttons contrasted with the scanty buckskin loincloths of the captured Indians.

The Mexicans knew the profit to be made in the slave trade, as did the Utes. Since the two sections of the Old Spanish Trail joined at the junction of the two forks of the Sevier River, the Paiutes who lived in that valley and along Otter Creek became particularly vulnerable to the Ute kidnapping raids. Sometimes the trading parties themselves even found a destitute Paiute family willing to trade a child for a poor horse or mule they could butcher for food. These bartered humans were either strapped to the backs of horses or walked—herded through agonizing miles of desert to the Pacific Coast. At trail’s end, the women and children purchased along the route were either sold for cash or traded for more horses. The scenario repeated itself on the return trip, with new captives bought along the trail being taken back to Sante Fe to be sold into Mexico. While the going rate was from $50 to $100 for children between ten and fifteen years of age, strong boys could bring as much as $100 each. Girls, who were in greater demand as house servants, often sold for an even higher price, up to $150 to $200.\textsuperscript{40} Even though California outlawed the slave trade in 1824, it reached its peak throughout the
Great Basin in the 1830s and 1840s and did not end until nearly a decade after the arrival of the Mormons.

Today, very little remains in Piute County to attest to this history or the people who experienced it. Only four Ute and Paiute sites and two Shoshoni sites have been identified in Piute County. Another site shows Fremont and Shoshoni use, and still another Fremont, Ute, and Paiute use. These “mixed sites” may demonstrate an overlap of the cultures, or they may merely indicate the propensity of various groups or individuals to choose the same places to camp. In either case, other than some pottery, Desert Side-notched arrowheads, and an occasional wickiup or tepee ring, there is little archaeological evidence today of the Utes or Paiutes in the Sevier River valleys. The sites of these nomadic peoples have disappeared with them.  

ENDNOTES

1. The author is indebted to Craig Harmon, archaeologist for the Bureau of Land Management, Richfield District. He provided an impressive array of information on the 127 Piute County prehistory sites that are on BLM land in the county.

2. The term B.P. (Before Present) currently is preferred to the old B.C. (Before Christ) by geologists, archaeologists, and anthropologists, as it does not require the cumbersome adding of B.C. and A.D. (Anno Domini—the year of our Lord) to dates to tell how many years ago an event took place. I have used either B.P. or “years ago” throughout this history.


4. The presence of these projectile points at mammoth kill sites in Wyoming and Idaho demonstrate that Paleo peoples and mammoths were coexistent. While both mammoth bones and Clovis points used by Paleo-Indians have been discovered in Utah, they have not been found together. See David B. Madsen, “The Human Prehistory of the Great Salt Lake Region,” in J. Wallace Gwynn, ed., Great Salt Lake: A Scientific, Historical and Economical Overview, Bulletin 166 (Salt Lake City: Utah Geological and Mineral Survey, 1980).

5. For details on these sites see G.W. Tripp, “A Clovis Point from Central Utah,” American Antiquity 31 (1966): 435–536, and “Bill Mobely


7. Ibid., xv. The emergency excavation of Sudden Shelter was done in 1974 by the University of Utah under a contract with the Utah State Highway Department. Sudden Shelter was one of a number of pre-history sites in the path of new highway construction. Fortunately, Interstate 70 construction would not obliterate this site, as it did a Fremont site (the largest ever found) in Clear Creek Canyon.


12. The Fremont culture was first named for the Fremont River drainage in east-central Utah by archaeologist Noel Morss. Although Morss was the first to define the Fremont Culture as separate from the Anasazi as early as 1931, it did not become a widely accepted premise among archaeologists and anthropologists until 1978. See Noel Morss, “The Ancient Culture of the Fremont River in Utah,” *Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology*, 12, no. 3: 2–3, 31–33; and William D. Lipe, “The Southwest,” in *Ancient Native Americans* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Co., 1978), 326–401.


15. Craig B. Harmon to Linda King Newell, n.d.


17. The archaeological team was headed by John Gillin (Ohio State Museum at Columbus), Robert Lister (University of New Mexico), William Mulloy (University of Utah), and six University of Utah students, Arden King, Shirl Winder, James Miller, Mckeen Brimhall, Lawrence Angleman, and Carling Malouf. The results of the excavation were published in John Gillin, *Archaeological Investigations in Central Utah*, Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology 17, no. 2.


19. Ibid., 3.

20. Ibid. Photographs of pieces in the George Henry collection and their classification are also found here.

21. Ibid., 3–7. The date for Marysville 2 is derived from pottery variations recovered at the site, see page 42.

22. Ibid., 42.

23. Ibid., 131–33.


30. Ibid.
34. The town of Junction, which is the Piute County seat, gets its name from the junction of the Sevier River and its East Fork about a mile east.
35. Van Cott, Utah Place Names, 244.
37. Smart, Old Utah Trails, 31.
39. As quoted in Smart, Old Utah Trails, 49.