Chapter 2
The Earliest Peoples

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To adjust the framework of the Utah story from geological time, it may be helpful to recall how brief is the written history of the area which became the state. Although Spain claimed the region for three centuries after Columbus and Cortez, the vast expanses north of New Spain emerged from Indian lore only late in that period. The first record which precisely documents events in Utah—the journal of the Domínguez-Vélez de Escalante expedition—was written while signatures were still fresh on the American Declaration of Independence. Thus the history of Utah encompasses only the last half-century of Spanish possession, 27 years as a part of Mexico, and a little more than 125 years in the United States. Before 1850 Utah had no political limits or status, and Utah Territory did not shrink to the present state boundaries until 1868.

The story of man in Utah, however, goes back much farther than the written records. Indian cultures, identified through the work of anthropologists, archeologists, and historians as Desert, Basket Maker, Pueblo, Fremont, Ute, Paiute, Gosiute, Shoshoni, Navajo, and others, have been present in the Great Basin-Colorado Plateau region for about 10,000 years. Indian peoples had their own boundaries that separated the territory of one group from another, but these had no relationship to the present boundaries of Utah. (See map, p. 721.)

The Desert Culture

During the 1920s and 1930s archeologists began to report discoveries in the American Southwest that carried the story of man
back more than a hundred centuries. In the 1950s excavations in caves near Wenden, Utah, produced evidence of continuing seasonal occupancy going back to about 9000 B.C., and tending to confirm the earlier findings. As the hunting and gathering patterns that typified desert regions like the Great Basin were analyzed, it seemed apparent that the lifeways were similar enough to identify them as the Desert Culture. The people were primitive, but it should be remembered that agricultural civilizations capable of furnishing a livelihood based on the regular planting and harvesting of crops and the domestication of animals did not exist anywhere on earth 10,000 years before the beginning of the Christian era.

Within the Great Basin and Colorado Plateau there are different elevations and climatic conditions. Plants and animals can be found on a mountainside, on tablelands, or by streams flowing from higher ground that are not normally seen in the lower desert areas. Different seasons also bring variety to the foodstuffs available on mountain and desert. The peoples of the Desert Culture learned where to find and how to make use of the plants and animals around them for food, clothing, shelter, and medicinal purposes. Living and moving about in extended family units of fifteen to thirty men, women, and children, these people had few tools and a relatively simple lifestyle, but they survived.

The Western Shoshone still depended on hunting and gathering to furnish a livelihood when the white man arrived in their area. They say their land was “rich enough to provide for all their needs until the white man destroyed its resources.”

The Anasazi

Anasazi is a Navajo word which means “the ancient ones.” Archaeologists have labeled the early Anasazi period Basket Maker and the later Anasazi period Pueblo. Each of these major divisions is further subdivided to assist in giving a time sequence to pre-Pueblo and Puebloan development.

A preagricultural, ancestral stage, probably prior to or about the time of Christ, has been assumed for the Basket Maker. This was followed by an early agricultural stage, then a period of further development and dependence upon agriculture in a semiaricultural, semihunting stage in which pottery appeared. Basket Maker remains have been found in the Four Corners Region of Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado. These people probably reached their highest development in the San Juan drainage basin.

It is interesting to trace the developments in building through the Basket Maker and on into the Pueblo period. Although it is believed that constructions of the Basket Maker period was well thatched, the inhabitants lived in a semi subterranean house, in shallow caves, or in rooms under the ground, and their remains have been very fragmentary; thus, many important details of their home life and their way of living are still obscure.

From the Basket Maker stage, the ancestors of the Hopi, and from the Pueblo stage, the ancestors of the present-day Hopi, Anasazi are both found in the same area, and their intermarriage to several centuries.

During the Anasazi period, the so-called Anasazi drew from many influences, both regional and national. Several distinct sections and cultures developed. Several patterns of architecture characterize the homes, and many variations of decoration are evident. The one thing necessary to all is a basic simplicity, and a sophistication and refinement, like the basket weavers. These people were skilled in making baskets, blankets, and pottery, and they were often traders in foreign goods.

The Fremont

North of the Snake River and east of the Wasatch Mountains, the Fremont people of the Archaic period are well represented. Their culture was well developed, and their lifeway was similar to that of the Anasazi. The Fremont people were skilled in making pottery, and their culture appears to have been a highly developed one.
believed that house structures were built and used earlier, excavations near Durango, Colorado, indicate that house construction was well developed early in the fourth century A.D. During the Modified Basket Maker Period (A.D. 500–700), houses were entered through a passageway leading from the ground outside. Later, in the Developmental Pueblo Period (A.D. 700–1100), this ground entrance became smaller and was used to provide ventilation; the entrance for residents became the conventional pueblo hole in the roof, from which one descended by ladder to the floor inside.

From about A.D. 1100 to 1300 the Pueblo Culture was most widely extended and also reached a climax in the development of the house structure. Masonry walls, often plastered and decorated, ceremonial kivas, storage space, and living quarters characterized these Anasazi communities. Built in cliff caves, on mesa tops, and in sheltered box canyons, the pueblos housed from a few families to several hundred people. Fine pottery, cotton cloth, feather robes, and jewelry reflect the craftsmanship of these “ancient ones.” Their archaeological remains dot southeastern Utah, with some of these impressive sites now federally administered in Hovenweep National Monument.

During the last part of the thirteenth century the Anasazi withdrew from their settlements in Utah and Colorado, and only the pueblo villages of New Mexico and northern Arizona remained. Several reasons have been suggested for this retreat. A period of successive dry years and crop failures may have been a cause. The lowering of stream beds and the elevation of crop lands through many years of flood-water irrigation may have produced a condition where the water could no longer flow over the land as necessary to produce crops. The incursion of nomads whose new weapons, like the bow and arrow, were more effective than the atlatl (spear thrower) may have forced the pueblo dwellers to relocate and redesign their dwellings to make them less accessible from the outside, and ultimately to abandon the region. When Columbus came to America, the great age of Utah's “ancient ones” was already blending into Indian mythology.

The Fremont Culture

North and northwest of the area occupied by the Anasazi the somewhat parallel Fremont Culture developed after about A.D. 400, retaining some traits of the Desert people but adding Basket Maker-Pueblo characteristics. The Fremont was different from the Desert Culture in that corn, beans, and squash were raised, and by
A.D. 800 or 900 the people were living in simple but more or less permanent dwellings. Products of the small settlements included baskets, pottery, and clay figurines which seem to have had a special religious significance. From contacts with the Plains Indians the Fremont people adopted the buffalo hide and other leather products; on the other hand, they did not adopt the more sophisticated elements of the nearby Pueblo Culture.

At the end of the thirteenth century a cultural regression occurred among the Fremont peoples which paralleled the retreat of the Anasazi from Utah and may have had similar causes. They were replaced, displaced, or absorbed by peoples of a different cultural and linguistic background, who probably began to move into the region sometime after A.D. 1000.

The Shoshoni Peoples

There is a tradition among the Southern Paiutes that helps to bridge the gap between the peoples known only from archeological remains and the Indians who were living in the same area when the white man arrived. It describes a people who anciently made an arduous trek eastward from a land of high mountains and endless waters to the red mountains. There, under the benign influence of their gods, Tobats and Shinob, they developed a happy way of life in which irrigated gardens, abundant game, and wild seeds amply met their needs. Then came many years without moisture, and the streams dried up and the game fled. As famine threatened, they appealed to Tobats and Shinob, and after three days Shinob appeared, heard their problem, and instructed them to take counsel from the animals. Since that time the Southern Paiutes have been nomads. “Leaving their homes in the caves, they have followed the game from high land to low and gathered in gratitude the foods which the gods distribute every year over the face of Tu-weep, the earth.”

Anthropologists have developed various methods to identify different groups of Native Americans. Reference has been made to culture traits and culture areas. Another method relates to the use of language. Even as the peoples of western Europe are described as speaking Germanic and Romance languages, so the native peoples of the Americas have been grouped into large, inclusive language families. Thus, the Ute, Paiute, and Shoshoni spoke languages identified as Shoshonean (just as English is a Germanic language), and Shoshonean is a branch of the Uto-Aztec language family (as the Germanic tongues are Indo-European). Uto-Aztec also includes the languages spoken by the Hopi, Pima,
Papago, Yaqui, Comanche, Aztec, and some other tribes of Mexico and the American Southwest.

The Northern Shoshoni, the Gosiutes and other Western Shoshoni, the Southern Paiutes, and the Utes are all Shoshonean speakers. The Northern Shoshoni were located in what is now northern Utah, southern Idaho, and Wyoming. The Gosiute were found in northwestern Utah and northeastern Nevada along with other Western Shoshoni. The southern Paiute were in southwestern Utah, southern Nevada, and northern Arizona. (See map, p. 722.)

Chiefly situated to the north and east of present Utah, the Northern Shoshoni developed many of the characteristics of the nomadic Plains Indians. Hunting and trading were the basis of their economy when they appeared in history in the early nineteenth century.

The Gosiutes occupied what seems today some of the dreariest territory in the American West, and the lifestyle which they developed led early white observers to label them Digger Indians. They roamed the desert in family bands, gathering seeds and insects, trapping small game, hunting antelope and deer, wearing skin blankets in winter and little of anything in summer, and improvising wickiups of brush for shelter. They were few in number, peaceable in disposition, and reliant on medicine men to placate the invisible forces with which their world was filled.

The Southern Paiute lived on lands almost as formidable, except for a limited irrigation potential. Some of these bands, therefore, augmented nature's harvest with small gardens; but even among these clothing and housing were meager. Basketmaking was a functional art form. Like the Gosiutes, these Paiutes used the bow and arrow for hunting but rarely for warfare. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries their women and children were sometimes taken by Ute raiding parties to be sold to the Spanish and Mexicans in New Mexico.

During the period before Anglo-Americans began to push them around, the Utes were described in terms of eastern and western bands. The eastern bands occupied the mountainous areas of Colorado and part of northern New Mexico. From their homeland they went on to the plains to hunt and farther south into New Mexico to trade with the Pueblo Indians. Spaniards and mountain men spoke of the Yamparika or White River band, the Tabeguache (later known as the Uncompahgre), the Moache, the Capote, and the Weeminuche. The Weeminuche were found both in southwestern Colorado and southeastern Utah, adjacent to a group the Spanish identified as Payuchis, or Ute people.
The Western Utes occupied approximately the eastern two-thirds of the present state of Utah, south of the Shoshoni and north of the San Juan River and the Southern Paiute. They were divided into bands known as the Uintahs in northeastern Utah, the Timpanogos around Utah Lake, the Pahvant around Fillmore and Sevier Lake, the Sanpete (or Sanpitch) in the same general north-south area but ranging farther east, and the Weeminuche. Utah Valley was a favorite gathering place of the western Utes, which may be the reason why it was the first point of major conflict between the Indians and the Mormon settlers.

Unlike the Gosiutes and Southern Paiutes, the Utes adopted the horse into their culture soon after Spaniards brought it into the Southwest in the late sixteenth century. Like the Plains Indians, they exploited the buffalo when available; their food, clothing, and tepee shelters reflected their primary reliance on hunting. Tribal groupings larger than extended family units were useful in hunting and warfare, but ties of obligation were loose and whites who later sought to negotiate with the Utes found that the jurisdiction of individual “chiefs” was often uncertain.

The area occupied by all the Ute bands in what is now Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico was very large—some 200,000 square miles—and they moved beyond that heartland to hunt and trade. Their far-ranging and predatory manner of living virtually guaranteed friction if outsiders moved into their country. After a half-century of conflict, the Uintah, Timpanogos, Pahvant, Yamparka (White River), and Uncompahgre were eventually settled on reservations in northeastern Utah and came to be known as the Northern Utes. The Moache, Capote, and Weeminuche were moved onto a reservation in southwestern Colorado and were called the Southern Utes. A small group of the latter remained in Utah and became identified as the Allen Canyon Utes.

The Navajo

Although the Navajo probably comprise half of the Indian population of Utah today, “old Navajoland” was centered in northern New Mexico. The Athapaskan-speaking Navajo were relatively recent arrivals in the Southwest, having probably migrated from western Canada not long before the arrival of the Spanish. Under pressure from Utes and Comanches, and to find grazing for the livestock they acquired from the Spaniards, the Navajo gradually moved westward in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, scattering their flocks and hogans over northeastern Arizona and southeastern Utah. They crossed the San Juan River regularly to
The ancient builders of the Anasazi culture constructed many remarkable homes and fortifications before leaving southern Utah near the close of the thirteenth century. This site, built on an exposed rock foundation, displays the “kiva,” a community center that is quite common in other ruins located in the Bryce Canyon National Monument.

Indian populations in northern Utah gradually relocated from the area, leaving the site abandoned. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the region was occupied by the Shoshone, Paiute, and Ute, who followed a semi-nomadic lifestyle, depending on hunting, berry gathering, and domesticated livestock.
trade with the Weeminuche and other bands of the Utes, and there is evidence that a few were living north of the river as early as the 1700s. The rapid growth of the Navajo populace in San Juan County, however, is largely a twentieth-century phenomenon.

First Contacts with Spaniards

Beginning in 1540 and continuing during the sixteenth century, Spanish explorers moved north from New Spain to discover the territory occupied by the Pueblo Indians in New Mexico and Arizona. They heard of a Lake of Copala in the mysterious land north of the Colorado and San Juan rivers, and eventually the territory west of the Rocky Mountains came to be known as the Land of Teguayo. East of the Rockies was Quivira, the land of the Plains Indians and the buffalo.

A form of the word Yuta was probably first recorded in the 1620s by the Franciscan missionary, Father Geronimo de Zarate Salmeron. He likely wrote it down as it sounded coming from the lips of the Indians of Jemez Pueblo, his assigned station on the northwestern Pueblo frontier. Later Spanish chroniclers followed his example. By Yuta they meant Ute people; the Spanish did not identify different Ute bands until the eighteenth century.

Early in the seventeenth century Spaniards began to raid the Utes to acquire slaves for trade elsewhere in New Spain. Before midcentury the Utes had acquired the horse, which greatly aided them in hunting and transporting larger game like the buffalo and eventually becoming slave traders themselves. As the Spanish learned that Utes had been trading with Pecos and Taos pueblos for many years, they sought to regulate this trade to their own advantage. Records refer to a treaty made with the Utes as early as the 1670s. Father Alonso de Posada, in New Mexico from 1640 to 1654, reported to the King of Spain in the 1680s that the Utes were all along the northern frontier and shared the buffalo plains northeast of Santa Fe with the Apaches. Fray Alonso stated further: “These Indians are fond of the Spaniard, are well built, brave and energetic; for only these carry on campaigns against the valiant Apachas with a courage equal to theirs . . . they do not retreat; they win or die.” He explained that the San Juan and Colorado “divides Yuta and Apache.” Here the term Apacha includes the Navajo as well as those now designated Apaches.

Ute pressure against the Navajo in northern New Mexico began in the 1720s. As earlier noted, fear of such attacks caused the Navajo to move westward, sometimes leaving their farms and losing part of their flocks. The Navajo sought peace with the Spaniards,
and the Franciscan missionaries assigned to work with them in the 1740s encouraged them to move nearer to the pueblos of Encinal and Caboletta, where they would receive protection from their enemies.

While assigned to the Navajo mission, Fray Carlos Delgado learned of the Land of Teguayo that lay northward through Ute country. He resolved to go there, being told that the remote land included people from various nations, both "civilized" and "heathen." One "division" or "city" was reported by the Navajo to be so large that "one cannot walk around it within eight days." In that country "lives a king of much dignity and ostentation, who, as they say, neither looks or speaks to anyone, except very briefly, such is his severity."

Fray Carlos never made his exploration, and the myth persisted. The desire of the Spanish for new discoveries, for precious metals, and for souls to convert to Christianity seems to have led the Indians to conjure up stories to satisfy them. Still, concepts of "civilization" are relative. The pueblo villages may have been to the nomadic tribes surrounding them what Rome was to the German tribes in ancient times, and the deserted structures that lay northward in the Four Corners area may have seemed fabulous indeed to the Navajo, who thought of them as the homes of the Anasazi—the ancient ones.

During the 1760s and 1770s a new surge of interest in the land north of New Mexico and Arizona developed in connection with the extension of the Spanish frontier into Alta California and the desire to establish a land route between Santa Fe and Monterey. The story of the epic exploration of Fathers Domínguez and Escalante is for another chapter, but some of their observations about the native inhabitants of Utah are appropriate here. Escalante divided the Ute people they encountered into two major groups: the "Yutas we knew before," or the Eastern Utes including the Payuchis of southeastern Utah; and those they had not known before, including the Lagunas in the vicinity of Utah Lake and the Yutas Cobardes, or timid Utes. Groups encountered were listed as the Huascaris (Cedar Indians), the Parusis (Shiwits), the Yubuincarriris (Unkarits), the Ytimpabichis (Timpeabits), and Pagampabichis (Kaibab Indians).

The Indians identified as timid Utes were the Southern Paiutes. They lived in houses made of willow or cane framework covered with brush in the summer and with earth or animal skins in cold weather. From Utah Lake southward to the Colorado River, west of the Payuchis, the bands encountered were reported to be in-
creasingly gentle and more sedentary. They possessed skill in basket handicrafts, some agriculture, the ability to spear fish and conduct communal rabbit drives, and they made extensive use of plant food and small animals. Their clothing was of poorer quality than that of the Eastern Utes. In a letter written later, Father Escalante stated:

*From the poorly understood relations of the heathen Indians, many were persuaded that on the other side of the Colorado ... lived a nation similar to the Spanish, wearing long beards, armor like our old sort, with breast-plate, steel helmet, and shoulder-piece; and these, no doubt, are the bearded Utes of whom the Reverend Father Custodio and I speak in the diary of the journey which we made through those lands in 1776; who live in rancherias and not in pueblos. They are very poor; they use no arms other than their arrows and some lances of flint, nor have they any other breast-plate, helmet, or shoulder-piece than what they brought out from the belly of their mothers.*

Although another set of myths about exotic Indian civilization thus died, and although promises of missionary settlement among the Great Basin natives were not fulfilled, there seem to have been continuing contacts between Spaniards and Utes as far north as Utah Lake from 1776 until after the arrival of the Mormons sixty years later. Spanish references usually mention Yuta Indians and do not always name particular bands. An example is the record of Manuel Mestas, a Genizaro or Indian of mixed blood, being among the Timpanogos Yutas about 1800. He was said to be seventy years old, a Yuta interpreter “for approximately fifty years,” and “the one who reduced them to peace.” Several charges of horse stealing against the Utes were referred to Mestas for action during 1805 and 1806; he recovered at least seventeen horses and mules, several of which had passed through more than one Indian band.

Another example of Spanish contact is from the records of the trial of Mauricio Arze and Lagos Garcia, charged with trading with the Yutas without a license. Since it was illegal to trade except at authorized times and places, the traders known to history are those who were caught in illicit business and tried in cases for which the court records have survived. Arze and Garcia left Abiquiu on March 16, 1813, en route to Lake Timpanogos. The party traded with the Indians there for three days and then left for the Sevier River. West of the river they encountered an armed and hostile band of Sanpete Utes, although the Sanpetes were reported to have been friendly when contacted by the Dominguez-Escalante company. Several statements in this trial suggest that
members of the trading party knew the country well, that they could converse in the Ute language, and that the only group of Indians they had not previously contacted was the Sanpetes.

The First Anglo-Americans

The Spanish received word about 1800 of activities on the part of Anglo-Americans to the north of their holdings in Texas and the Southwest. The Spanish reacted by organizing a group of Ute and Genizaro spics that were sent among the Kiowas, Pawnees, and other Great Plains tribes south of the Missouri River. They were to keep Santa Fe constantly informed concerning British and American activity in that area. Utes were with Spanish officers observing Zebulon Montgomery Pike while he was operating in Colorado in 1807. James Workman and Samuel Spencer were probably in Ute territory two years later, accompanying a Spanish caravan. It is fair to speculate that there were other Anglo-American as well as Spanish incursions into the “land of the Yutas” in the years that followed.

As the 1820s saw the fur trade invade the Great Basin and the Colorado Plateau, and the Mexican revolution broke Spanish power over the Indian trade in the Southwest, a new era dawned for the Native Americans. Their lives increasingly intertwined with mountain men, explorers, cross-country emigrants, and Mormon pioneers; by midcentury their history was becoming a very different, sadder tale.

Chapter 2
Bibliographical Essay

The story of man in the mountain-plateau-basin region of the American West has lengthened in time span considerably during the past several decades. The work of Alfred V. Kidder, first published in 1924 and now available in paperback as An Introduction to the Study of Southwestern Archaeology (1969), synthesized the conclusions reached by the early 1920s. The discoveries of Mark R. Harrington reported in two articles, “Paiute Cave,” Southwest Museum Papers (No. 4, 1930), and “Gypsum Cave, Nevada,” Southwest Museum Papers (No. 8, 1933), extended knowledge of early man further to the north and west.

H. M. Wormington’s Prehistoric Indians of the Southwest (1947), published by the Colorado Museum of Natural History, included chapters on “The Most Ancient Cultures” and “The Anasazi Culture” written in language that is relatively easy for the layman to understand. The seminal work by Jesse D. Jennings, Danger Cave,
University of Utah Anthropological Papers, No. 27 (1957), considerably enlarged concepts concerning the Desert and Fremont cultures. Professor Jennings' "Early Man in Utah," UHQ, January 1960, places these cultures in perspective with those that followed in an article written for the layman. The work edited by Jennings and Edward Norbeck, Prehistoric Man in the New World (1964), with chapters on "The Desert West" by Jennings and "The Greater Southwest" by Erik K. Reed, synthesizes the knowledge available to that date and places those culture areas in perspective in western North America and in the Americas generally.


Joseph G. Jorgensen, "The Ethnohistory and Acculturation of the Northern Ute," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Indiana (1964), surveys Northern Ute history from precontact through the Spanish period and down to the early 1960s. The same author's The Sun Dance Religion (1974) gives less historical detail than the above work and more attention to religious concepts.

A special issue of the UHQ, Spring 1971, with C. Gregory Crampton as guest editor, is entirely devoted to Indian tribes or groups that have had some relationship to Utah, past or present, and should be examined by students of the Indian. Helen Z. Papani-kolas (ed.), The Peoples of Utah (1976), includes important material on the Gosiute, Navajo, Southern Paiute, and Ute by both Indian and Anglo-American authors.