

**UTE MATERIAL CULTURE DURING THE HISTORIC PERIOD
AS REPRESENTED BY SITES IN THE MONTROSE AREA**

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Over the past few years, I have been fortunate to have been able to participate in the investigation of a few historic Ute sites on the east edge of the Uncompahgre Plateau near Montrose. In this, I have been primarily working with Rich Fike, the BLM Archaeologist in Montrose. The first historic Ute site we worked on was a component of the Harris Site – 5MN2341. The Colorado Archaeological Society (CAS) Chapter in Montrose was doing some archaeological work at a rockshelter on the north side of the drainage through the site. This work was reported in the BLM Cultural Resource Series (Tucker 1989). While working at the Harris Site, a few seed beads were found in an anthill on the south side of the drainage. A more detailed examination of the area revealed a small quantity of historic items, including decorative chain dangles from a Spanish bit and a .45-70 Government cartridge with a military headstamp indicating manufacture in April 1879. Knowing that the Utes were removed from the area in late 1881, it was clear that we had a Ute component datable to about a two-year period.

Artifacts were then point plotted and collected using a metal detector. The distribution of items indicated two separate concentrations. In addition, ashy soil indicative of a firehearth was discovered in one of the concentrations. Soon thereafter, block excavations were carried out under the direction of Rich Fike and myself as a CAS project. Both of the concentration areas were investigated with block excavations and both concentrations were found to be centered on small firehearths. These are interpreted as two teepee locations. Burned artifacts in the firehearths demonstrated they were the result of Ute occupation, and cross-mending of artifacts demonstrated contemporary occupations for the two concentrations.

In order to identify additional historic Ute sites in the area, the BLM conducted a large block inventory on a parcel of land adjacent to 5MN2341. Numerous sites were found, including two that are historic Ute – 5MN3854 and 5MN3937. Again, point plotting and collection of artifacts using a metal detector was carried out at the two sites. 5MN3854 is a large complex campsite that appears to date to the 1860s or early 1870s that may represent multiple camping episodes. 5MN3937 appears to be the result of a single occupation from the 1860s.

From the historic record, it is clear that a wide variety of Euroamerican manufactured items were provided to the Utes of Colorado by the U.S. government from the late 1840s through the early 1880s. Additional items were certainly acquired through trade by the Ute during the same period. Prior to government provisioning, the Utes had access to goods through trading posts such as Bent's Fort and Fort Uncompahgre, and contact with New Mexican traders and settlements.

Based on historical records and what have been found at the Ute sites we have worked on, at least in the 1860s to early 1880s, we know the Utes were well armed, wore a certain amount of Euroamerican clothing, probably ate some canned foods, used some utensils, played the harmonica, and preferred Spanish bits. Items that can be considered typical of Native Americans of the period that have been found at the Ute sites we have investigated include large and small trade beads in a

wide variety of colors (but mainly light blue and white), cone tinklers, brass tacks for decoration, bead and silver concho hair plates, and metal arrow points.

What stands out about the artifact assemblages found so far is the considerable amount of modification and use of items as raw materials for manufacturing. Artifacts exhibiting modification include an octagonal muzzle loading rifle barrel and corresponding ram rod bracket that were filed and broken off, and unfired .50 caliber rimfire cartridges from which the bullets have been removed with scissors – presumably so the lead and powder could be reused. Ute manufactured items include earrings made of scrap brass, pounded and decorated pieces of brass, and cans and other sheet metal items cut in irregular shapes. At 5MN3937, it appears that there is a discrete area where cans were being cut up and made into cone tinklers. Trapezoidal-shaped cut can pieces found there are likely cone tinkler blanks. It seems that scissors were used to cut up the cans and were probably a versatile tool that had no prehistoric counterpart. Contrary to expectations, no evidence of flaking of glass has been observed. The only glass found so far has been from small mirrors.

An important research avenue at historic Ute sites is the replacement of items in the prehistoric tool kit with Euroamerican items and, conversely, the retention of certain prehistoric tools into the historic period. The use of scissors is a good example of a Euroamerican tool being incorporated into the Ute tool kit. We know scissors were used to work on materials not present prehistorically – cans and cartridges – but it is possible they also replaced certain prehistoric tools as well.

Beginning in 1867, the Utes began asking to be issued rifles and ammunition because, with increased white entry into their territory, game was increasingly difficult to approach within bow and arrow range. This request seems to have been granted for the first time at the distribution of annuity goods in Saguache in October 1868. Guns, powder, lead, percussion caps, and cartridges were commonly distributed by the government to the Utes from that time until 1876, when the practice was terminated as a result of Custer's demise and subsequent fear of arming Indians. It is possible that the demise of bow and arrow hunting can be detected archaeologically. I am willing to predict that we will find that the use of bow and arrow technology had ceased among the Ute by the middle 1870s. It is possible that the functional ability to use the bow and arrow effectively for subsistence may have disappeared within a single generation.

In addition, the demise of formal flaked tool manufacture and replacement with metal knives and arrow points may also be recognizable archaeologically. At the Harris Site, dating just prior to the Ute removal in 1881, we were able to demonstrate that chipped stone tools were still in use, but were largely expedient in nature. At 5MN3937, an 1860s encampment, there appears to be chipped stone tool use as well. Excavation at the site could provide an excellent assemblage for comparison. Introduction of metal knives and metal arrowpoints may have resulted in rapid replacement of stone knives and stone arrowpoints. Importation of metal knives and arrowpoints in sufficient quantities for widespread replacement to take place probably did not occur until expansion of the fur trade in the 1820s after Mexican independence. This was as a result of American-made goods being imported for use in trade. Previously, the Spanish settlements and traders do not appear to have had large quantities of metal items to trade and dealt largely in textiles and food items. As a result, I would expect that formal flaked tool manufacture among the Ute to have remained largely intact until the beginning of the fur trade, with rapid replacement taking place in the 1820s through 1840s. This can be tested archaeologically with well-dated sites.

Glass beads are commonly found at historic Ute sites. However, I believe that they may also be artifacts that were first introduced in quantity during the fur trade era. Spanish bits may also fall into this same category. Again, well-dated Ute components will allow us to identify the introduction sequence of these items.

Recently, Rand Greubel of Alpine Archaeological Consultants conducted excavations at a large Ute site on the Uncompahgre Plateau near Redvale (5MN4253). Uncompahgre Brown Ware found at the site was dated by thermoluminescence to A.D. 1717+45 and 1778+33. Another Ute site excavated by Greubel near Redvale (5SM2425) includes a wickiup containing a hammered piece of brass with Uncompahgre Brown Ware in association. Chronometric dates from this component are not yet available, but the brass artifact places it in the historic period. Uncompahgre Brown Ware is one of a few artifacts that is typically used to define a prehistoric site as Ute. The upper date range for Uncompahgre Brown Ware is unclear because previous dating has been from radiocarbon assays with long calibrated ages that extend to the present time. Clearly Uncompahgre Brown Ware was still in use during the historic period, but has not been found at the more recent historic Ute sites I am familiar with. Because of its friable nature, I would expect Uncompahgre Brown Ware to have been among the earliest artifact types replaced as a result of Euroamerican contact, whether it was because of its impracticality in a horse culture or actual replacement by more durable vessels. If it was the victim of replacement, it may have been as a result of the introduction of Euroamerican items beginning with the fur trade. Another possibility is that the horse-mounted Ute replaced their pottery as a result of contact with Plains Indian groups, exchanging their traditional use of pottery for cooking and food storage for that of other Native American groups. We know that the Ute acquired many Plains Indian attributes as a result of their increased mobility through horse use, so this is not out of the question. The mechanisms and time frame for the Ute's acquisition of Plains Indian attributes is even more poorly understood than for assimilation of Euroamerican goods. The two processes certainly overlap, are probably closely intertwined, and bespeak very complex culture change among the Ute during the historic period.

In 1988, at the CCPA Ute Symposium, I advocated using a direct historical approach to investigating Ute sites (Horn 1988). Although Bill Buckles believed such an approach to be impractical, I am still an advocate. If we can follow the Ute back through time starting at the most recent point in the historic period, we will very likely be able to detect mechanisms of culture change as a result of Euroamerican contact. We may also be able to distinguish characteristics in the archaeological record that we can recognize as typically Ute. These characteristics may then allow us to follow the Ute back into prehistory. If we reach a point in the historic or prehistoric periods where typical Ute attributes cannot be discerned from comparable aged sites in other regions, so be it. That in itself is valuable information.

Critical to the study of historic Ute sites is accurate dating of components. Radiocarbon ages are generally of little utility because the resulting age ranges are not refined enough and use of old wood cannot be controlled for very well. Tree-ring dates are better, but in the superstructure of wickiups, old wood may have been used that can result in too early of an age estimate. Freshly cut branches used to cover wickiups may be a better source for tree-ring dates, but may not survive well. For sites containing brownware pottery, thermoluminescence assays appear to provide the best chronometric control. In the absence of ceramics, thermoluminescence may still be applicable to fire-cracked rock, as long as it is not sandstone. For more recent sites, cross-dating of historic artifacts can provide a fairly restricted age range. For the best estimate of age to be obtained, particularly for the earlier historic Ute or prehistoric Ute sites, a variety of chronometric dating techniques should be attempted if the samples are available.

This leads me to my last thoughts. Over the years, it has become common practice to give names to regional phases for prehistoric and historic periods of aboriginal occupation. I have always found regional phases using the names of individuals or places to be more confusing than helpful. In the case of historic period Ute sites, there is not yet a sufficient body of archaeological data to assign phases. In addition, for the historic aboriginal period, there is too little recognition of similar culture change caused by Euroamerican contact among neighboring or distant aboriginal groups. If phases are based on local or regional historical events, they are likely to be of little utility in looking at culture processes except in an insular way.

There are already some models for culture change resulting from Euroamerican contact available that can be tested with data from historic Ute sites. One that I find particularly interesting was developed as a result of work done on Arikara sites along the middle Missouri River (Rogers 1990). The Arikara initially treated trade items as powerful and fantastic, even though they held Euroamericans in contempt or fear. The actual item that was acquired did not matter so long as it was of Euroamerican origin. This is referred to the Maintenance period, where the aboriginal cultural system remained intact despite external pressure. This was followed by the Replacement period, when the usefulness of particular items was the reason for acquisition. During this period, traditional items were replaced by Euroamerican goods. Later, instead of being considered luxury items, Euroamerican goods became necessities. This is referred to as the Addition period and can be viewed as a period of destabilization of traditional life where, not only were outside material items added, but the social system underwent substantial change. Among the Arikara, there was then a period where a return to traditional values was attempted and Euroamerican goods were rejected. This is referred to as the Rejection period where cultural coherence seemed to be making a comeback. The final period is that of Transformation, where considerable addition and replacement took place that is indicative of significant culture change.

Whether these same processes took place among the Ute is unknown, but it is likely that some of them did, and the Ute probably had their own twist. At any rate, with a little thought, the model posed for the Arikara can probably be tested archaeologically for any historic period aboriginal group and is not bound to a particular culture by regional nomenclature.

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