

Way We Were

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The Earlier People of Summit County

Josephine Yanasak-Leszczyński, Education Intern

Before Park City was mining country, the area attracted humans to hunt wild game and fish. While we have yet to find evidence of permanent settlement in Summit County until after the mining boom, both European fur traders and American Indian groups traveled through the area before Parley's Park City was established. Unlike the fur traders, who may have been coming to the area as early as the 1700s and passed through relatively quickly, the Ute and Northwestern Shoshone had been hunting the valley annually for centuries.

The earliest evidence of human habitation in Utah was left between 11,000 and 12,000 years ago. Due to the harsh climate, Summit County was only habitable during the spring and summer months. There is evidence around 5,000 years ago of cultures related to the Fremont camping temporarily in the Summit County area to hunt.

Approximately 700 years ago, Shoshonean people began settling in Northeastern Utah. The descendants of these people interacted with white visitors to the area. In spring, Shoshonean groups split up to hunt, lodging in conical constructions crafted from a variety of materials. Similarly, recorded oral histories from the Ute describe climbing into the Uinta mountain range with their men, women, and children to live and hunt from early June to late September. This continued well into the 19th century.

However, as more white trappers entered the area and settlements sprung up, available food sources were the first to be threatened. While records from the 1830s describe a multitude of game, resources were already dangerously depleted by the 1850s. This created serious conflicts between the settlers and groups like the Shoshone and Ute.

In 1853, four customers at Samuel C. Snyder's sawmill in the Parley's Park area (now the Snyderville Basin) were fired upon by a party of Ute. Two were killed, while the other two escaped on horses, leaving behind their lumber and beasts of burden. This and other violent incursions resulted in the eventual evacuation of settlers and construction of forts in Henefer, Chalk Creek, Rockport, and Peoa.

This may seem to paint a grim picture of relations between the settlers and hunters, but it was not always war between these two groups. Early citizens of Peoa and Wanship reported interacting with large parties of Shoshone, sometimes as many as 300 and 400. In the case of these large groups, settlers actually shared food and kindled close friendships. White settlers living permanently along the Ute's seasonal paths also reported positive relationships with the Ute camped along the outskirts of their towns.

By 1868, around the time silver was discovered in Park City, things had changed. Ute raids ceased and settlers moved out of their forts and back to the Snyderville area. Various treaties and the establishment of reservations limited the lands used by the American Indian

peoples and they were eventually forcibly relocated. This left the area open for white settlement and continued development. It was the end of an era for Summit County.



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Image Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Pop Jenks Collection

Caption: Mirror Lake in the Uinta Mountains, taken by local photographer Pop Jenks in 1933. The Ute camped and hunted seasonally in the Uintas and likely camped here, or nearby, at some point.

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