They came to hunt, Early man in the San Luis Valley

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"THEY CAME TO HUNT"
Early Man In the San Luis Valley

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The men who first came to the North American continent over 20,000 years ago were following big game animals over the Bering Strait when a land bridge existed there. His continued quest for game led him to all parts of the continent, and although it is questionable exactly how many thousands of years ago he first entered the San Luis Valley, he was undoubtedly following the big game trail. It seems he first came here after he had been on the continent for a considerable time because climatic conditions of the Wisconsin Glacial Period persisted longer in the valley than on the plains and conditions would not have been favorable for man or animals. But we do know he was here since we find nonperishable artifacts made of stone. It is only in the 20th Century that archaeologists have been able to establish any kind of definite dates for these artifacts when they have been found at sites connected with animal bones which could be dated. The oldest projectile point of the Paleo-Indians is the Sandia, dated at about 15,000 B.C. and associated with mastodon and mammoth bones. This was followed by the Clovis dated around 12,000 B.C. and associated with mammoth bones. A small number of each of these points have been found in the valley but not in connection with established sites.

Of Folsom man, dated at about 8,000 B.C., we have more evidence. Two sites, the Linger and the Zapata sites, located in the sand dunes area of the foot of the Sangre de Cristo Range, have been excavated, yielding bones attributed to a "Bison taylori," and Folsom points and scrapers. In 1941, C. T. Hurst with Gene Sutherland and Al Pearsall dug the Linger site and took from it 22 Folsom stone artifacts. Animal bones in a badly disintegrated condition were found with the artifacts and were identified as bison, which were in all probability an extinct species called "Bison taylori" (Hurst-1941). About a mile distant from the Linger site F. V. C. Worman investigated similar finds at the Zapata site. Six artifacts were found there in association with bones identified as bison. Folsom points found in other areas indicate men of this age hunted in most of the valley.

Following Folsom on the time scale is the Yuma, later more specifically called Eden, and Scottsbluff included in the Cody Complex. A number of these points have been found here. Points identified as Agate Basin, Meserve, Midland, and Plainview have also been found in small numbers, none however with identifiable sites. It would seem likely that as time progressed the lithic industry changed; and while we speak of Sandia, Clovis, Folsom and Yuma, we speak of an industry rather than a separate and distinctly different type of human being. Each point, in all probability, overlapped and then evolved. As an example the flaking on Clovis, Folsom and Yuma are of a similar, very fine type of workmanship. E. B. Renaud (1945) believes that Folsom man did not just disappear, but rather that his lithic industry underwent a change and evolved into another type of weapon which replaced the classical Folsom. After detailed study he feels that Folsom and Yuma (Cody Complex) are related.

Over these thousands of years—20,000 to 5,000 B.C., the big game hunters must have been influenced by the weather and came into the San Luis Valley only on brief sojourns, in small numbers, to hunt during the late spring, summer and early fall, retiring to warmer climates when winter approached. No evidence of human skeletons has been found in the valley so we have no evidence of their physical makeup. As to the clothing they wore, it must have been made from the skins of the animals they killed. In excavating kill sites it has been found that the tail bones are often missing indicating that the animals were skinned and the tail left intact on the hide.

There seems to be a span of time after 5,000 B.C. when occupancy of the valley, even briefly, died out. This could be accounted for by a look at the physiographic evidence. Starting about 8,000 B.C., the region became warmer and drier than at present and was not conducive to animal migration into the area (Ives, 1941). At this time the big game would have gone further north following the climate that produced food for their livelihood, and man would have followed them. When conditions again became favorable for animal forage, the bison, antelope, deer and elk began to frequent the area. With the influx of this new type of game we find a new type of artifact. Prior to 1942 E. B. Renaud became acquainted with points in the San Luis Valley indicating a different culture which he felt were distinct enough to warrant placing in a category of their own—the Rio Grande Points. These points were made in almost all cases from basalt, with a few from obsidian, and were found mostly along the Rio Grande in the San Luis Valley and north to the sand dunes area. Also, in a few sites in the vicinity of San Antonio Mountain in New Mexico, and west of the Rio Grande in northern New Mexico. The artifacts, Renaud states, were generally of simple form and non-specialized shapes and were
made by the percussion method. Some were fairly large, but most were of medium dimensions and very few were small and fine. Many were not retouched (Renaud, 1942). A. L. Pearsall and Gene Sutherland excavated a rock shelter site in the southern part of the valley, east of the Rio Grande, in 1942 and there found a number of these artifacts below later Pueblo occupancy. While dating has not been definite, evidence indicates these people were moving up and down the Rio Grande for some time before the birth of Christ and left extensive artifacts, indicating larger groups and longer periods of occupancy. However, there is still no evidence to indicate a permanent type of occupation but only migrations in the more temperate weather. Bones found in excavating were those of deer, antelope, bison and smaller animals.

As horticulture extended northward into the southwest area of Colorado in the San Juan Basin, the nomadic Indians became semi-sedentary. Corn was the first cultivated crop, followed by squash and beans. These people in the San Juan area have been named Basket Makers and their development divided into three periods. Basket Maker I was the period during which these people first entered the area, but about whom little evidence exists. James D. Jennings (1965) states that the widespread desert culture has been accepted as accounting for them, forming the base with the requisite traits upon which pottery, horticulture, etc. were grafted. Basket Maker II (1 A.D. to 400 A.D.) was a period when the people lived in caves, alcoves or overhangs. Perishable artifacts and bodies were preserved in their living quarters because of the dry, arid conditions. During this period pit houses came into existence, and horticulture expanded. Tabeguache Cave, located in the Uncompahgre National Forest, southwest of Montrose, Colorado, revealed occupancy by Basket Maker II people when it was dug by C. T. Hurst. He felt it to be a peripheral site, probably used as a summer camp, indicating people migrating northward from the culture area of the San Juan. Occupancy was apparently not continuous, but occurred during three separate intervals (Hurst, 1942). Basket Maker III (400 A.D. to 700 A.D.) was the period when pit houses developed into a more rectangular style, still built partly into the ground, and then into surface masonry structures, while the kiva, a subterranean ceremonial structure used for ceremonies, came into existence. Weaving and basketry were more refined, and true fired, masonry structures, while the kiva, a subterranean ceremonial structure used for ceremonies, came into existence. Weaving and basketry were more refined, and true fired, gray pottery was developed. No evidence of a pit house type structure has been found in the San Luis Valley.

It was during the Basket Maker III period and the following Pueblo I period that the bow and arrow were introduced, probably by immigrants from the north—the Athapaskans (ancestors of the Navajo and Apache), and projectile points became smaller and of a different style. Until this time projectile points were affixed to a shaft and used as a spear or as a dart propelled by the atlatl or dart thrower. The atlatl was a wooden device used to give more length to the arm of the hunter and more power to the thrust of the dart. The points were larger than later arrowheads and had notches close to the base. The Pueblo I culture developed from the third Basket Maker period and lasted from 700 A.D. to 900 A.D. At this time the rigid cradle board was first used and as a result the children’s heads were permanently flattened in the back. At one time, because of the difference in cranial structure, it was thought a different people had replaced the previous dwellers. Horticulture developed to a more extensive degree—cotton was being raised and used extensively for cloth. Previously cloth had been made from feathers or rabbit fur. Yucca leaves were used to make sandals, as well as to weave baskets. This was a craft that had carried over from earlier periods. Pottery was more refined in construction and more variety of shapes was introduced.

Pueblo II, 900 A.D. to 1100 A.D., saw the advent of small one-clan masonry houses with contiguous rooms and kivas built in front of them. Corrugated pottery for cooking ware was in general use, with black-on-white decorated vessels used for containers. At about this time the mug became a popular and useful pottery piece. Pueblo III, the Golden Age of the culture, lasted from 1100 A.D. to 1300 A.D. and was characterized by the highly specialized development of pottery types and the high degree of perfection of architecture in the great multi-story communal pueblos and cliff dwellings. Great kivas were constructed, and crafts became very specialized. It was at the latter part of this period when the large pueblos and cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde, Chaco Canyon and Canyon de Chelly began to experience adverse conditions. Drought, overcrowding, nomadic invaders, all seemed to be factors in the movement from these established settlements south to areas along the Rio Grande and to Acoma, Zuni and the Hopi pueblos.

A decline in living conditions seemed to exist until about 1600 and this period is classified as Pueblo IV. While there were changes in pottery making, and some advance in other crafts, it was after the contact with white men that many changes were made in the Indians’ way of life. This period is called Pueblo V and exists to the present time.

During the entire development period, from 1 A.D. to 1600 A.D., there were evidently no attempts made to settle in the San Luis Valley, as evidence of these missing structures. They, too, apparently came as hunters from spring to fall, seeking the bountiful game and wild fowl. It is thought the birds were especially hunted for their feathers which were used in various ceremonies and dances, as well as for cloth. From evidence found at camp sites it is apparent three approaches into the valley were used by the Pueblo Indians. The one traveled most often was north from Taos, along the east side of the Rio Grande into the sand dunes area. Another route existed along the west side of the Rio Grande and extended west into the valley, but also continued north. Indians from Chama and the Pajarito Plateau came in from the San Antonio area along the Rio Tucurs, the Rio San Antonio and the Rio Vallecito. Very little pottery has been found along the last two trails. Since the horse was unknown at that time women and dogs packed the provisions. Artifacts found at the eastern sites—pottery shards, manos, metates and tools in large amounts, indicate that families traveled together and spent some time in the area. The metate and
years have an important place in the culture of these people. Legends existing for many hundreds of years have an important place in the culture of these people. The Puebloan dwellings were constructed with the use of a great deal of adobe mortar, which style he was sure would have been used here if they were responsible for the construction. Heathirs were also evident in the ruins of Puebloan dwellings while there were no hearths in the stone enclosures. Cooking had evidently been done outside the enclosure. It is along Rock Creek that petroglyphs have been found in the area known as "picture rocks." They present pictorial evidence of the passing of people for hundreds of years and can be attributed to Basket Maker, Pueblo and Ute, even though the stories they tell cannot be clearly interpreted.

In rock shelters and caves located along the west San Juan Range, stone artifacts, corrugated Pueblo pottery, bone tools and perishable artifacts such as basketry and sandals have been found. The arid climate of the Southwest has helped to preserve many otherwise perishable artifacts and has provided archaeologists with a wider variety of evidence of occupation.

About the time that the Athapaskan-speaking Navajo and Apache were migrating from the north, another migration was taking place from the Great Basin area in the Far West. This desertic region offered little in the way of livelihood and the Shoshonian-speaking Indians who had made this territory their home began to look for better living areas. The Pieutes, Shoshone, Hopi, Ute and certain California tribes began to push eastward. Reaching Arizona and Utah they established permanent dwellings, but some of the Utes continued on east and north in their wanderings and arrived in southwestern Colorado. These nomads could have been another tribe who, with the Apache and Navajo, harassed the Pueblo people and were responsible in part for the desertion of the cliff dwellings and the great pueblos.

The Southern Utes were made up of three bands—the Wiminite (Wininuche), the Mowatsi (Moache), and...
The Southern Utes encountered Spanish conflict sometime before the Tabeguache. The earliest known conflict came about when Governor Luis de Rosas, governor from 1637 to 1641, waged an unjust war against the Utes near the southern Colorado border. About eighty Indians were captured and forced to labor in a workshop in Santa Fe (Schroeder, 1965). Spanish and Ute conflict continued in northern New Mexico until the Pueblo Revolt in 1680 when the Spanish withdrew to the south. Then the Utes attacked the northern pueblos and by the time the Spanish returned in 1694, the strength of the Southern Utes was highly respected. Combining their efforts with the Comanches, they had open hostility with the Jicarilla Apaches and the northern Pueblos. Raiding and looting continued for a number of years, but after the Comanches gained possession of firearms in the 1720’s and rose as a power in the plains, these two tribes gradually became hostile to each other and the Utes became more friendly with the Spanish. At this time they combined efforts to effect a check on the Comanche and Navajo raiding parties.

By the early 1800’s the Southern Utes and Jicarilla Apaches had become friendly and were making hunting excursions across the San Luis Valley onto the eastern plains. In 1818 Jose Maria de Arze, who led a force up the Rio Grande into Colorado on a scouting expedition into Comanche country, reported Ute and Jicarilla tracks in the Alamosa area leading west toward the San Juan Mountains (Schroeder, 1965). When the Mexican people began to settle in the San Luis Valley, after the treaty following the Mexican War, the Utes were anything but friendly. In 1851 a body of soldiers were sent to establish a fort in the valley to protect the settlers. With the establishment of Ft. Massachusetts, the Utes became increasingly hostile and attacked Guadalupe and Conejos, where they were repulsed. They continued on to San Luis where the settlers had fled from their homes, so they stole horses, cows and sheep. Forces from New Mexico joined those from Ft. Massachusetts and pursued the raiders over Cochetopa Pass. Later Colonel Fauntleroy surrounded a Ute camp on the north side of Poncha Pass, killing a number of the Indians, after which the Utes asked for peace. That fall a treaty was signed with them (Bean, 1962).

Indian conflict in the valley came to an end when Chief Ouray made treaties with the United States; after which the Utes were moved onto a reservation.

Through these more than 200 years of conflict, tribes continued to traverse the San Luis Valley. The many passes in the surrounding mountains offered access to areas in all directions. To the north a favored route was from South Park across the Park Range into the upper Arkansas Valley and then across the low Poncha Pass. Utes traveling from Pagosa Springs into the valley and across the north-west foothills on their way to Bayou Salude (South Park), also made use of the easily traversed Poncha Pass. Mosca Pass was used often, as well as Medano Pass, to gain access to Wet Mountain Valley. Cochetopa Pass (Buffalo Pass) was used extensively by the Utes to reach their winter homes; and although there were never extensive herds of buffalo in the San Luis Valley, they too must have used this route for migration since the Indians named the pass for them. Migration from the southwest was accomplished by coming through the area of Wolf Creek Pass and Cumbres Pass. Southern routes skirted San Antonio Mountain in New Mexico on both sides, or followed up the Rio Grande. For thousands of years nomadic Indians have used these routes into the San Luis Valley, leaving artifacts from which we can identify them, but never staying long enough to be classified as permanent dwellers. It was only after the white men came and built houses from adobe or logs that sufficient shelter was provided to endure the winter weather. While they, too, depended on hunting for food, this was soon supplemented through the practice of horticulture and agriculture. One wonders, if the white man had not arrived when he did, would the Indians have eventually established permanent, year round dwellings here?
REFERENCES


