



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

Dorothy D. Wilson

1971, pp. 203-207. <https://doi.org/10.56577/FFC-22.203>

*in:*  
*San Luis Basin (Colorado)*, James, H. L.; [ed.], New Mexico Geological Society 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Fall Field Conference Guidebook, 340 p. <https://doi.org/10.56577/FFC-22>

---

*This is one of many related papers that were included in the 1971 NMGS Fall Field Conference Guidebook.*

---

### **Annual NMGS Fall Field Conference Guidebooks**

Every fall since 1950, the New Mexico Geological Society (NMGS) has held an annual [Fall Field Conference](#) that explores some region of New Mexico (or surrounding states). Always well attended, these conferences provide a guidebook to participants. Besides detailed road logs, the guidebooks contain many well written, edited, and peer-reviewed geoscience papers. These books have set the national standard for geologic guidebooks and are an essential geologic reference for anyone working in or around New Mexico.

#### **Free Downloads**

NMGS has decided to make peer-reviewed papers from our Fall Field Conference guidebooks available for free download. This is in keeping with our mission of promoting interest, research, and cooperation regarding geology in New Mexico. However, guidebook sales represent a significant proportion of our operating budget. Therefore, only *research papers* are available for download. *Road logs*, *mini-papers*, and other selected content are available only in print for recent guidebooks.

#### **Copyright Information**

Publications of the New Mexico Geological Society, printed and electronic, are protected by the copyright laws of the United States. No material from the NMGS website, or printed and electronic publications, may be reprinted or redistributed without NMGS permission. Contact us for permission to reprint portions of any of our publications.

One printed copy of any materials from the NMGS website or our print and electronic publications may be made for individual use without our permission. Teachers and students may make unlimited copies for educational use. Any other use of these materials requires explicit permission.

*This page is intentionally left blank to maintain order of facing pages.*

# "THEY CAME TO HUNT"

## Early Man In the San Luis Valley

by

DOROTHY D. WILSON

Anthropology Museum  
Adams State College  
Alamosa, Colorado

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 occupancy 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 (1968) 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, 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. Drouth, 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 this 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 Tuscas, 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

mano were used to grind wild grass seeds picked along the way, and who knows—maybe they were in the area long enough to harvest corn planted around springs and waterways. Many varieties of wild plants were plentiful and it is known they made use of yucca, cat tails (tules), piñon nuts and berries. In all probability the paleo-Indians before them also made use of the bountiful plant supply to supplement or eke out their meat diet. There is no evidence, however, of the paleo-Indians using grinding stones.

The Anasazi—a name applied to the Basket Makers and Pueblo Indians by the Navajo, meaning the "Old Ones" had no glyphic system of writing nor a calendar, but as with all people legends existing for many hundreds of years have an important place in the culture of these people. Some Pueblo Indians, whose legends tell of their ancestors emerging from the underworld through a lake to the north of New Mexico, believe the San Luis Lakes are that sacred place and also hold Sierra Blanca to be a sacred mountain (Bean, 1962).

While the remains of Basket Maker and Pueblo structures have not been found in the San Luis Valley, stone enclosures have been found south of Saguache that indicate an establishment of occupancy for short periods of time. Because of their locations on a high rocky ridge which provided a view of surrounding land for many miles, Renaud believed them to be an observation camp. The circles are made of slabs of lava rock standing on edge or leaning against one another and are enclosures rather than tepee rings. There is no evidence of mortar being used to cement the rocks in the structure. Renaud felt that the camp seemed loosely established and because of rocks, cactus and snakes would not appear attractive as permanent dwellings. Further to the south in the Rio Grande Valley and Carson National Forest, Renaud found similar sites (three in Colorado and five in New Mexico), more indicative of being dwelling places and workshops. Renaud (1941) and Huscher (1943), after examining a number of these sites and other similar ones, arrived at the conclusion that they were not early Basket Maker or Pueblo immigrants, but were rather a southward migration of Athapaskan-speaking people (probably Navajo). The stones in the enclosures were laid up without mortar and called dry-mortar construction. 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. Hearths 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. While artifacts found at these sites were in some cases similar to both Pueblo and eastern tribes, he felt there was sufficient difference to classify them as belonging to a particular people migrating southward. Similar sites were found north and east of the valley, as well as south into Mexico, denoting a trail of migration. Renaud did not believe these structures could be contributed to the Utes who later occupied this area, for when the Spaniards first came into the area, the Utes they came in contact with told them the enclosures were built by the "old ones," seeming to place them at a much earlier

date. In 1877 Franklin Rhoda reported a masonry ring built on the summit of Mt. Blanca and questioned its usefulness as either a lookout or hunting station. The question arises here as to whether the structure was a ceremonial ring and could be connected with the Pueblo legend.

The fact that at a number of these sites, located not only in the Rio Grande drainage but also in the drainages of the upper Colorado, the Yampa, the San Miguel, the Uncompahgre and the lower Gunnison, there were walls so located as to resemble a fort. Hurscher did not believe that they were ever used in the same way a fort would have been, but rather the walls were a type of barricade to obscure the residents. The roofs of the round stone huts would be difficult to define since no debris relative to the roof could be identified. They could have been made of brush, matting, bark or hides. Hurscher believes that these sites represent a migration over several hundreds of years and took place before and up to 1000 A.D. This would place the hogan builders in this area early enough to have influenced the Basket Maker-Pueblo culture change.

While more artifacts have been found in the eastern part of the valley and in the Saguache area, it does not mean other areas were neglected. Rock Creek, with headwaters in the San Juan Range, evidently was often the scene of hunting activities as artifacts have been found along its banks even out into the middle of the valley. Paleo-Indian points, early Pueblo pottery shards and points and Ute stone artifacts indicate that game was abundant in this area; and stone chips, tools, manos and metates in some numbers tell us the Indians camped at various sites. 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 Piutes, 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 wandering 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 Wiminute (Wininuche), the Mowatsi (Moache), and

the Kapote (Capote). Both the Moache and Capote were in and out of the San Luis Valley, but it was the Tabeguache or Uncompahgre band who claimed the valley as their territory. They seem to have entered this area through Utah. When the Utes first came to this area they had no horses, did not practice farming and their tools and weapons were fashioned from stone. Each family unit hunted in a certain area. Provisions were carried by the women and dogs. Because of severe winters the families moved across Cochetopa Pass when cold weather came and sought more sheltered areas along the Uncompahgre and Gunnison Rivers. When spring came they would gather for the ceremonial bear dance and social activities before moving out in small family groups again for summer living. Tribes from the plains to the east of the valley visited the region to hunt, and when danger threatened from the Arapahoes, Cheyennes, Comanches, Kiowas, Sioux or Pawnees, the Ute families grouped together for defense.

These were the conditions the Spanish found when they first entered the area between 1630 and 1640. First encounters were peaceful and trading flourished. The Utes traded meat and hides for trade goods from the Spanish, but above all they bartered for the horse. Sometimes, not having sufficient meat and hides to trade, they would trade their children and the Spanish trained these children to herd sheep and cows (Rockwell, 1956).

With the added mobility provided by the horse the Utes' hunting grounds spread over the mountains to the east where they found the buffalo in plentiful numbers. Now they had a resource that provided them with tepee covers, blankets, sinew thread, bowstrings, horn glue, skin bags, moccasins and more meat than they had ever known. No longer did they have to depend on women and dogs to carry provisions. Likewise, the horse permitted them to invade and withdraw quickly from enemy territory and they became warlike and aggressive (Rockwell, 1956). Another factor that brought about the change to a more warlike nature was the influx of traders and trappers and later settlers, who were encroaching on the territory the Tabeguache had known as their own for so many years.

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

- Bean, Luther E., 1962, *Land of the Blue Sky People*. Monte Vista, Colorado: The Monte Vista Journal.
- Hurst, C. T., 1941, "A Folsom Location in the San Luis Valley, Colorado," *South Western Lore*. Boulder, Colorado: University of Colorado. 1942, "Completion of Work in Tabaguache Cave," *South Western Lore*. Boulder: University of Colorado.
- Huscher, Harold, 1943, "The Hogan Builders of Colorado," *South Western Lore*. Boulder: University of Colorado.
- Ives, Ronald L., 1941, "A Cultural Hiatus in the Rocky Mountain Region," *South Western Lore*. Boulder: University of Colorado.
- Jennings, James D., 1968, *Prehistory of North America*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Renaud, E. B., 1945, "About the 'Disappearance' of Folsom Man and Folsom Points," *South Western Lore*. Boulder: University of Colorado. 1941, "Indian Stone Enclosures of Colorado and New Mexico," *Archaeological Series, Second Paper*. Denver: University of Denver.
- Rockwell, Wilson, 1956, *Utes: a Forgotten People*. Denver: Sage.
- Schroeder, Albert H., 1942, "Comments on 'Transition to History in the Pueblo Southwest'," *American Anthropologist*. 56:597-99. "A Brief History of the Southern Utes," *South Western Lore*. Boulder: University of Colorado.