

ARCHEOLOGY OF GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK

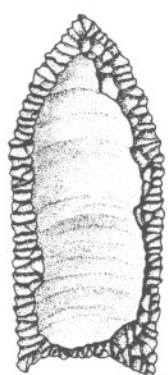
12,000 YEARS OF SEASONAL USE

Long before tourists pulled their travel trailers into Jackson Hole, Native American families pulled their travois into similar campgrounds. Prehistoric people came to Jackson Hole for abundant fishing, hunting, and plant resources, as well as access to obsidian sources and the high country. People used the mountainous regions in three ways: (1) occasional forays into the mountains by lowland groups seeking specific resources, such as obsidian, (2) seasonal movements of family groups and bands seeking a variety of plant and animal resources, and (3) year-round exploitation of mountain environments by permanent populations. Throughout prehistory, and down to the present day, seasonal use was the predominant lifestyle in Jackson Hole because of the harsh winters.

Radiocarbon dates and pollen analysis indicate that vegetation changed dramatically from about 15,000 to 5,000 years ago. Birch and juniper were the first trees to appear after the glaciers receded, and were replaced by spruce as the dominant tree about 10,000 years ago. From about 9,000 to 6,000 years ago, the climate was generally warmer than today, and the regional vegetation was a lodgepole pine forest with some Douglas fir and aspen. After about 5,000 years ago, the vegetation became similar to that of today.



Clovis
About 10,000 B.C.



Folsom
About 9,500 B.C.



Hell Gap
About 8000 B.C.

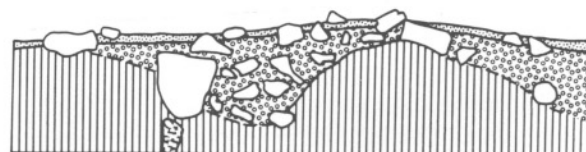
The Paleoindians (10,000 to 6,000 B.C.)

About 11,000 years ago, small groups of people arrived in the valley. These were very mobile Paleoindians who camped, hunted, fished, and gathered plants on a seasonal basis. Sites this old are very rare and little known about these people. About 9,000 years ago, Paleoindians began developing lifestyles specific to the mountains, although keeping ties with the plains cultures to the east. Mountain-oriented lifestyles focused on more intensive use of plant foods than plains-oriented lifestyles. Also, mountain sheep and deer were an important source of food in the mountains, while bison were more important on the plains.






Archaic Cultures (7,500 B.C. to A.D. 500)

The Archaic cultures exploited many species of animals and plants. This broad base of resources resulted in continued survival when certain resources were scarce. If, for instance, mountain sheep were not plentiful during one year, these people survived by eating smaller mammals, birds, and plant foods. Winter shelters found in the Green River valley and elsewhere show these people lived in that small, semi-subterranean houses during cool seasons. Summer shelters, like those used in Jackson Hole, were probably temporary and made of brush or skin.

About 5,800 years ago, people in Jackson Hole began to use a new cooking technology, based on large pits filled with heated stones for cooking meat, roots from the camas and yampa plants, and seeds from goosefoot and pigweed plants. The roasting of seeds and roots preserves their nutrition and provides efficient long-term storage. Over 500 of these roasting pits were found when the Jackson Lake water level was lowered during the period from 1983 to 1988.



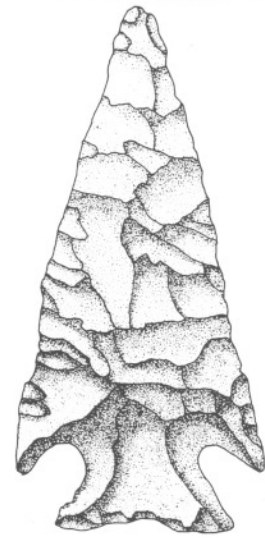
0 25
Centimeters

-  Rodent burrow
-  Fired rock
-  Loose unconsolidated sand
-  10YR 4/2 dark grayish brown loamy sand
-  10YR 4/3 brown - dark brown sandy loam

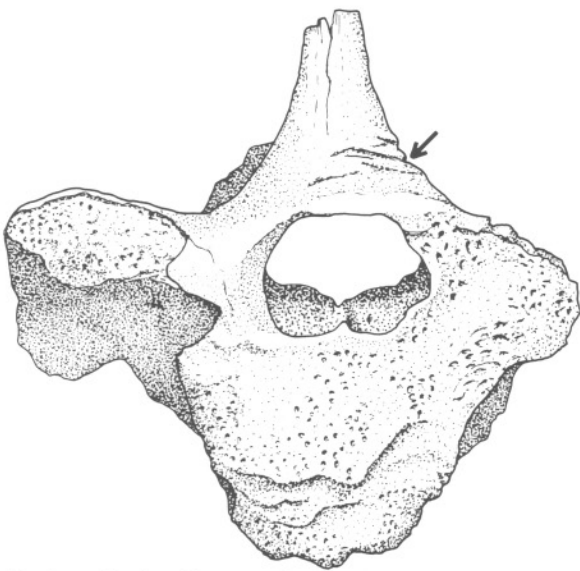
Profile of a roasting pit found at a site now under Jackson Lake. The site was excavated when the water level was lowered for dam repair.

About 5,000 years ago, a number of new artifacts appeared in the mountains and plains in Wyoming. In fact, so many new traits appeared so quickly that most archeologists think new people moved into the area. Archeologists call this the McKean Phase. McKean people used the roasting basins more than previous cultures and also relied more heavily on seeds for food. Outside of Jackson Hole, McKean artifacts are frequently found at sites where deer, mountain sheep, or bison were slaughtered and butchered. Large mammals were probably killed in the late fall or early winter to procure meat to be stored over winter. Because these kill sites are not found in Jackson Hole the McKean people probably made only seasonal use of the valley. McKean artifacts are common in the valley, and Jackson Hole appears to have been a favorite place of these people. These people disappeared about 3,000 years ago.

The Pelican Lake Phase succeeded McKean in the central and northern Rocky Mountains and the Pelican Lake lifestyle may have evolved out of the McKean lifestyle. These people continued to depend on both hunting and gathering plant foods, with the hunting of mountain sheep of particular importance in the mountains. Artifacts associated with the Pelican Lake Complex are concentrated near lakes and waterways throughout Jackson Hole.



*Pelican Lake
About 1000 B.C.*



Bison vertebra found at an archeological site near Jackson Lake. Arrow points to marks made while butchering the bison.

Late Prehistoric Cultures (A.D. 500 to A.D. 1750)

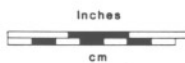
The next several thousand years saw further increases in valley populations. Innovations in weaponry and food processing allowed increasingly efficient exploitation of the environment to support these people. About 1,500 years ago, the spear-thrower (atlatl) was replaced by the bow and arrow. The bow and arrow spread so quickly it appeared almost simultaneously throughout North America. There is also evidence of pemmican production during this period. Pemmican is a form of dried meat mixed with berries which lasts for a long time and is highly portable. Finally, tepee rings are a common archeological feature of this period, suggesting that the familiar skin tepees were in use.

Archeologists debate how long the Native American groups had been in the mountains when the Euro-americans appeared. One school of thought says that the Shoshone and Bannock are descendants of people who had lived in the mountains for thousands of years. Another school, based on linguistic similarities between groups, suggests the Shoshone and Bannock (Numic speakers) are relatively recent migrants to the area. Both schools may be right. Small groups of Numic speakers may have migrated into the mountains, intermarrying with the people already living there.

The newly arrived Numic speakers would have brought with them new ideas for pottery and rock art styles. In blending their culture with the indigenous mountain peoples, they would create the unique culture that greeted the first fur traders and trappers.

Throughout prehistory, seasonal users of Jackson Hole probably wintered at lower elevations to the east. Probable locales include the Big Hole basin, the Wind River basin, and the Green River basin. Smaller groups of people from northern Idaho appear to have used Jackson Hole, particularly in the Late Prehistoric. Permanent mountain populations may also have wintered in Idaho. These groups would have been small family bands, seldom composed of more than 30-40 people. Most of the archeological sites in the valley represent repeated camping over thousands of years.

The story of Jackson Hole prehistory is the story of human interaction with the environment. Through time, increasingly efficient means of exploiting the valley's resources supported increasing human populations, which in turn had an increasingly dramatic impact on the environment. These are trends which continue today and our study of the past helps us to better understand today's problems.



Bone flesher (hide-working tool) found at a site now under Jackson Lake.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I FIND AN ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE?

- If you find archeological materials report them to park rangers. Rangers will inform Park Service archeologists who will record your find as soon as possible. This information adds to our archeological knowledge of the area.
- Collecting artifacts from federal land is illegal. Please report to park rangers anyone that you see collecting in the park. Besides being illegal, collecting damages the information in sites and, in some cases, makes it impossible to understand the story present in the site.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Prehistoric Hunters of the High Plains. Second Edition. By George F. Frison. Published by Academic Press, 1991. A clearly written outline of the prehistory of Wyoming and the High Plains. A basic reference for both the layperson and the professional.

Archaeology: Theories, Methods, and Practice. By Colin Renfrew. Published by Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1991. Clearly presents the methods and theory of archeology. Draws on fascinating examples from digs around the world to illustrate specific techniques.