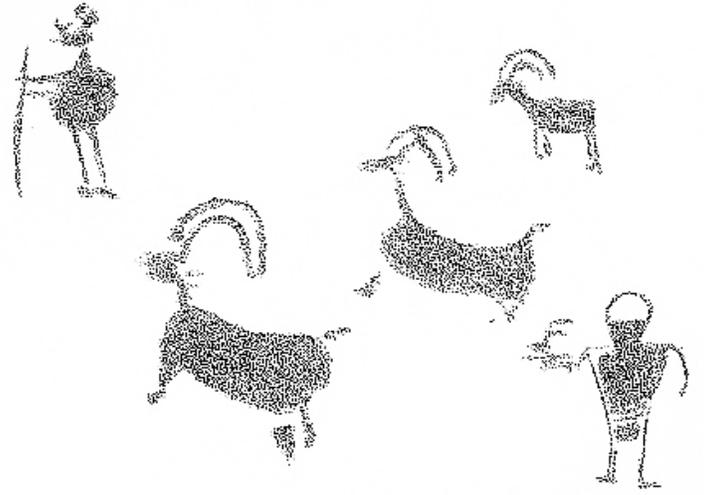


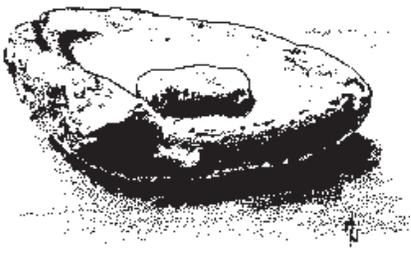
The Fremont Culture



The prehistoric Fremont Culture existed throughout Utah and adjacent areas of Idaho, Colorado and Nevada from approximately AD 600 - 1300. Fremont 'culture' is primarily defined by a consistent set of traditions and practices that have been identified as unique and separate from their contemporaries, the Ancestral Puebloans, better known as the Anasazi. The Fremont Culture was named for the Fremont River Valley in which sites were discovered and first defined.

The Fremont lived in pit houses (dug into the ground and covered with a brush roof) and natural rockshelters. Their social structure was likely composed of small, loosely organized bands consisting of several families. They had to be closely tied to nature and flexible, diverse and adaptive -- requiring that they make frequent modifications in their lifeways as social or environmental changes occurred.

Diet



Anthropologists suggest that the Fremont were an assemblage of hunter-gatherers who supplemented their diet by farming, growing corn, beans and squash along the river bottoms. Edible native plants included pinyon nuts, rice grass and a variety of berries, nuts, bulbs, and tubers.

Corn was ground into meal on a stone surface (metate) using a hand-held grinding stone (mano). Deer, bighorn sheep, rabbits, birds, fish and rodents were hunted using snares, nets, fish-hooks, the Atlatl (spear-throwing stick) and the bow and arrow.

Unique Artifacts

Archeologists have identified several kinds of artifacts that are distinctive to the Fremont. A singular style of basketry, called one-rod-and-bundle, incorporated willow, yucca, milkweed and other native fibers. Pottery, mostly graywares, had smooth, polished surfaces or corrugated designs pinched into the clay.

Unlike the fiber sandals of their contemporaries, the Ancestral Puebloans or Anasazi, the Fremont made moccasins from the lower-leg hide of large animals, such as deer, bighorn sheep or bison. Dew claws were left on the sole, possibly to act as hobnails, providing extra traction on slippery surfaces.

Food in pottery or baskets was kept inside masonry structures called granaries and in storage cists and bins. These structures are typical components of Fremont architecture.

The most unique and characteristic Fremont artifacts were unfired clay figurines. Small figures resembling people show intricate details such as ear bobs, necklaces, clothing, hair and facial decorations and anatomical characteristics. The purpose of these figurines is unknown, but archeologists suggest that they may have had religious significance or may have been associated with fertility rites.

Rock Art

Fremont figurines and rock art resemble each other. Pictographs (painted on rock surfaces) and petroglyphs (carved or pecked into the rock surface) depict people, animals and other shapes and forms on rock surfaces.

Anthropomorphic (human-like) figures usually have trapezoidal shaped bodies with arms, legs and fingers. The figures are often elaborately decorated with headdresses, ear bobs, necklaces, clothing items and facial expressions. A wide variety of zoomorphic (animal-like) figures include bighorn sheep, deer, dogs, birds, snakes and lizards. Abstract designs, geometric shapes and handprints are also common.

The meaning of rock art is unknown. Designs may have recorded religious or mythological events, migrations, hunting trips, resource locations, travel routes, celestial information and other important knowledge. Many archeologists propose that rock art uses symbolic concepts that provide an observer with important information and that it was not simply artistic expression.

Some day we may better understand rock art, but only if these sites are not destroyed. The slightest touch removes fine granules of sand and leaves behind a residue of sweat and oil. Please refrain from touching the panels. If you see anyone damaging rock art or any archeological site, report it immediately to a ranger.

Fremont cultural activity peaked around AD 1000, with a marked decline beginning AD 1150. Archeological evidence of the Fremont ceases to exist by AD 1300, indicating the final abandonment of this particular lifeway. A combination of pressures may have caused this.

Fremont people tended to live in very marginal, high-altitude environments, and their population densities (with few exceptions) were low even in peak years.

The disruption of the nearby Ancestral Puebloan cultural centers, with their long-distance trade systems and huge population centers, upset interactions between the two cultural groups. This possibly lessened the availability of trade goods and marriageable partners.

After AD 1300, Numic hunter-gatherers expanded into areas abandoned by the Fremont. There may have been some overlap, but their interactions were most likely peaceful.

No archeological studies support a single factor responsible for the end of the Fremont culture. In the period leading up to their demise as a culture, strong environmental, social and cultural forces were at work throughout the entire Southwest. Cultural flux and population movement was the norm during this period of time, and the Fremont were undoubtedly affected by these changes. The most plausible explanation for their disappearance is probably best understood as an eventual abandonment of the area, and subsequent emigration to other areas.



Additional information is available on our website www.nps.gov which also links to the Capitol Reef Natural History Association, a non-profit cooperating association that sells publications on Capitol Reef's cultural and natural history.