

Historic American Indians

After the Fremont and Anasazi (or Ancient Puebloans) disappeared from Utah, other groups lived here. We refer to the later groups as “historic” Indians because there is a written history about them.

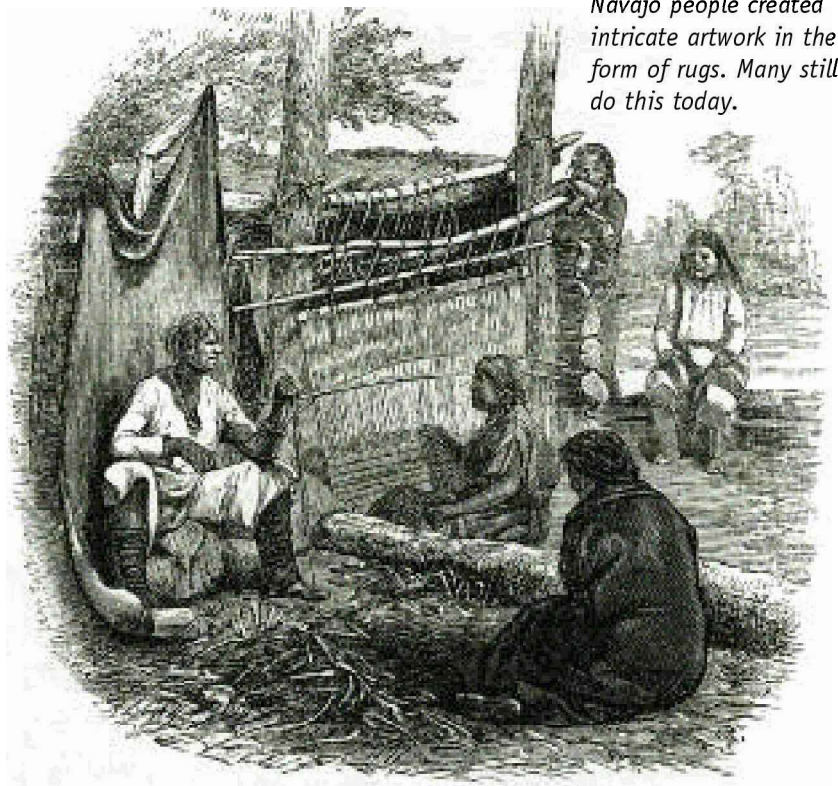
About 250 years ago, explorers and settlers started coming to the land that groups of Indians had lived on for thousands of years. These newcomers were Spanish explorers and Catholic priests, then fur trappers and government explorers, and then pioneers. Many of these people wrote in their diaries about the American Indians they met.

When the explorers came, they found many bands of native people. Each band had leaders. Each band traveled together. Sometimes the bands fought each other and sometimes they joined together against their enemies. The bands were part of larger groups that had migrated here from other places. (Among the Navajos, the smaller groups were called “clans.”)

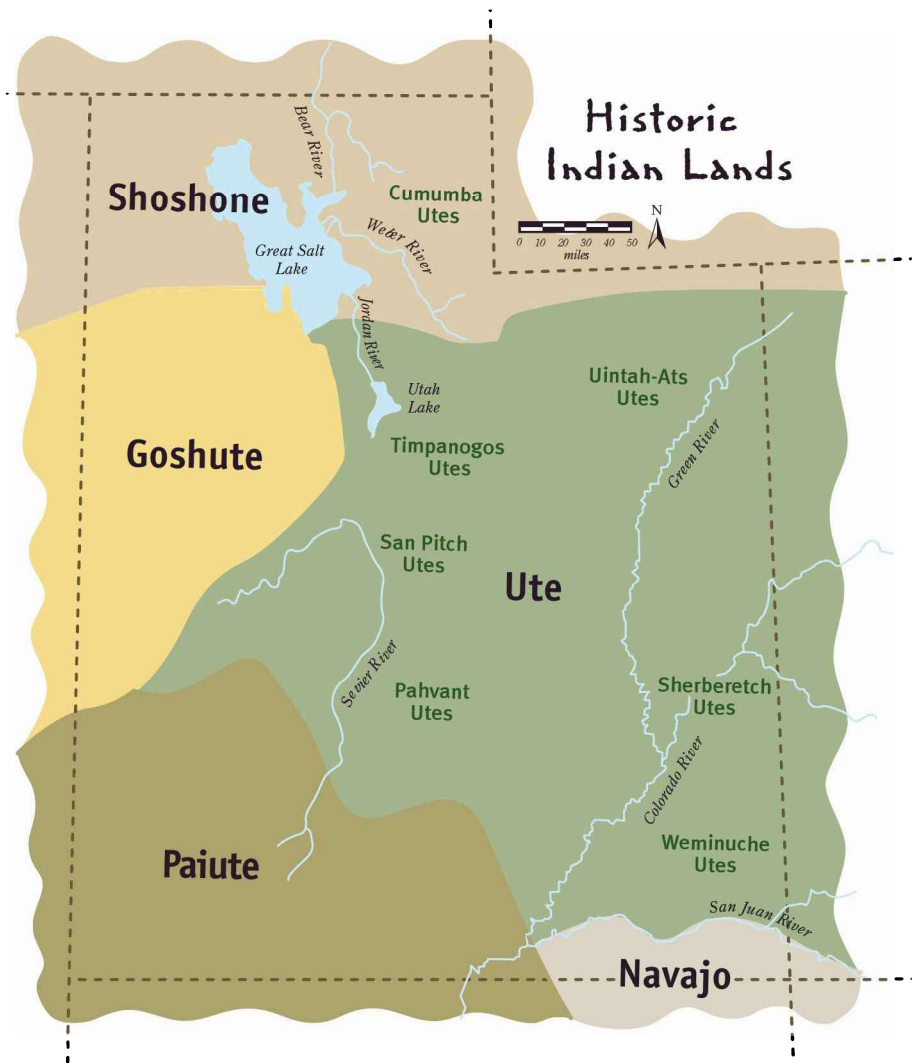
These larger groups are sometimes called “tribes.” Many of these tribes have descendants who live in Utah today. At the time of the explorers, the Utes were the largest tribe. There were least seven bands of Utes who lived over a wide land region in Utah. Other bands lived in Colorado and New Mexico. There were also the Goshute, Paiute, Shoshone, and Navajo (Diné) tribes. Each group had a distinct culture because they had come from different places. They spoke different languages and had different rituals, dances, and ceremonies. This is still true today.

While each tribe had a homeland tribal area, no one in a band or tribe owned the land. The land was used by everyone. But tribal lands were important. If a person from an enemy tribe came onto tribal land, the intruder might be taken prisoner or killed. Some tribes were more friendly to newcomers than other tribes.

The map shows the general regions where the tribes lived, but groups were constantly moving. Often different bands lived miles and miles from each other, with plenty of open land in between.



Navajo people created intricate artwork in the form of rugs. Many still do this today.





The Land Provides Food

All the native people relied on nature, their own skills and knowledge, and each other to survive. They got food by hunting both large and small animals and gathering seeds, roots, and nuts. They went to the mountains to harvest pine nuts and acorns. They fished in the streams and lakes. A few of the groups raised animals, and a few bands irrigated and farmed. The groups who had horses could go farther to find animals and places to gather food.

The **Utes**, the largest group, lived in fertile valleys near the mountains and lakes. They used horses to hunt buffalo, antelope, deer, and other large animals.

Larry Cesspooch is a modern Ute. He and historian Kathryn MacKay said:

Nuche [Utes] traveled with the seasons. They went to high mountains in the summer, living by hunting small and big game animals and birds, fishing and gathering a variety of berries, nuts, seed, and plants. ... Hunting, fishing, and gathering sites were not owned ... [they were] communal [shared] and granted to all.

The **Shoshone** also had horses and hunted and gathered much like the Utes did. They lived in the mountains and valleys of northern Utah and in Idaho and Wyoming.

Hunting and Horses

With bows and arrows, spears, clubs, and knives, the people hunted whatever animals they could find. In most regions there were deer, buffalo, elk, mountain sheep, antelope, rabbits, and squirrels. For a long time the men, women, and children traveled to hunting grounds on foot. Men usually hunted the large animals while women and children gathered plants, seeds, and insects.

Later, some groups got horses from the Spanish in New Mexico or from the Plains Indians. At first they used the horses only as pack animals. Only later did they start to ride them and travel over large areas. The Utes, Shoshones, and Navajos used horses for hunting, moving about, and carrying heavy loads. The Goshutes and Paiutes did not raise horses.

Shoshone and Ute men rode horses to find buffalo herds. Then they rode around the herds and shot arrows into the large buffalo. Buffalo had long been important to the people. The fur was used for winter blankets, and buffalo skins without the fur were made into tepee covers and clothing. Some of the meat was eaten fresh. The rest was cut into long strips and dried on wooden racks in the sun. It lasted a long time without rotting.





The Navajos called themselves the *Diné*. They lived in the very dry region of southern Utah and Arizona where there is very little rain. They raised sheep and goats and sometimes built log corrals for them. Some Navajo clans irrigated and farmed. The Navajo people had horses, but they got them later than the Utes.

The Paiutes and Goshutes also lived in very dry regions. They did not use horses to help them hunt. Some of the Paiutes irrigated crops of corn, beans, squash, and even wheat. They also hunted small animals and collected nuts and wild plants.

The Goshutes found uses for more than 100 different kinds of desert plants. They drove crickets into a pit and roasted them for food. Because they dug for roots and burrowed into the ground for small animals, other people called them "Root Diggers."

In such a harsh environment, the people were often hungry. After visiting the Goshutes in the West Desert of Utah in 1859, Captain James Simpson, wrote:

Found some Root-Diggers here, one a very old woman, bent over, ... very short in stature. ... Notwithstanding the old woman looked as if she was

famished, it was very touching to see her deal out her bread, first to the little child at her side, and then, only after the others had come and got their share, to take the small balance for herself. At camp, the feast we gave them made them fairly laugh for joy.

The Land Provides Building Materials

Different tribes lived in different kinds of homes according to the materials available and their spiritual *traditions*.

Navajo families built hogans. While they cut and placed the logs, the people sang special songs. The hogan was a symbol of the spiritual connection to Mother Earth. It was a home for the spirit. Its door always faced east to meet the rising sun.

Five-sided hogans were built of sturdy logs packed with earth. After the 1900s, when trains brought in more logs, larger hogans were made of six or eight sides. Navajos did not live in villages, but placed their hogans far apart from each other on the *sparse* desert land.

Today, most Navajos live in modern homes, but many still build hogans to use mainly for family ceremonies.

Traditional wood-frame hogans were covered with a layer of mud both inside and outside as added protection from cold and heat.

"After the first Hogan was built, everyone rested. The First Woman lay her feet to the west, and the First Man lay his feet to the east. Their heads crossed and their thoughts mingled, and these thoughts were sacred."

—Navajo Tradition

Paiutes and **Goshutes** lived in large family groups in small villages. They built as many wicki-ups as they needed close to each other. These small brush shelters were made by making a frame of branches and then weaving more branches and grasses on the frame. The doorway was open. The wicki-ups were summer shelters that provided some shade and a place to sleep. Most of the daily activity took place outside. In the winter the people often lived in mountain caves where they could build a fire and stay out of cold winds.

Utes and **Shoshones** made tepees of tall poles covered with buffalo skins. Tepees could be taken down and moved if necessary. In the center of a tepee, the family built a fire on the ground. They cooked on the fire and used it to keep the tepee warm. The smoke went out through an opening at the top of the tepee. Large bands of about 200 people lived in a tepee village near a stream or beside a lake.



Paiute groups built wicki-ups like these to protect them from the weather.

In the western and southern regions, Ute families also lived in brush wicki-ups. In the eastern regions, they made tepees from animal hides.

