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ADAPTING TO A CHANGING WORLD:
AN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF THE EASTERN SHOSHONE, 1000-1868

by

Adam R. Hodge

A DISSERTATION

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ADAPTING TO A CHANGING WORLD:
AN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF THE EASTERN SHOSHONE, 1000-1868

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University of Nebraska, 2013

Adviser: Margaret D. Jacobs

Using the Eastern Shoshone Tribe as a case study, this dissertation argues that the physical environment must be considered integral to processes of ethnogenesis. It traces the environmental history of the people who became known as the Eastern Shoshone over the course of several centuries, exploring how those Natives migrated throughout and adapted to a significant portion of the North American West – the Great Basin, Rocky Mountains, Columbia Plateau, and Great Plains – prior to the reservation era. In examining that history, this project treats Shoshones, other Natives, and Euro-Americans not as people who simply used the environment, but as major parts of ecosystems. It also critiques existing scholarship on Native American and Western history by asserting that instead of producing narratives that emphasize “post-contact” environmental degradation and the destruction of indigenous lifeways, historians should devote more attention to the dynamic and often catastrophic history of “pre-contact” Native America to reveal how the ramifications of that deeper past persisted into the “post-contact” era.

Utilizing the analytical lens of environmental history requires this study to employ a highly interdisciplinary methodology. Drawing information from historical documents, historical scholarship, archaeological studies, anthropological reports, and works in the natural sciences (including climatology, epidemiology, biology, and ecology), it throws light on the relationship between the environment and everyday life.

This includes Shoshone resource procurement and use, their dynamic gendered divisions of labor, their adoption of new technologies, their involvement in an expanding global market economy, how “Old World” infectious disease epidemics affected them, how they responded to climate change and the depletion of resources, and the relationship between the physical environment and intercultural relations. So, instead of presenting a human story in which the natural world functioned as a setting that only occasionally influenced the storyline, this dissertation offers a narrative in which humans interacted with one another and the world around them to make history.

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to Matt McDonough, who has since become a good friend; his award-winning approach to teaching influences how I approach the classroom. I also have to thank these gentlemen because our common interest in playing online video games together provided us all with a much-needed diversion from the academic life. I am grateful for the pre-class dinner discussions that I had with Kellie Wilson about research, teaching, and life. Many other graduate students at UNL and Kent State University provided food for thought as well as enjoyable off-campus experiences; thank you all.

I want to thank the faculty and staff in the Department of History at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for teaching me, training me, and backing my research. I could not have completed my work without the help of the folks at Love Library (particularly Interlibrary Loan). My work also benefited from the generous support of the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University, which came in the form of a 2012 Summer Award for Off-Campus Upper Division and Graduate Students. I used that fellowship to visit the archives at the University of Wyoming's American Heritage Center, where Ginny Kilander and her staff facilitated a pleasant and productive visit. I also traveled to the Wind River Reservation, where John Washakie and Ben Snyder, Jr. graciously took some time to speak with me. I also enjoyed productive interviews with Pat Hnilicka and Bob Trebelcock in Lander.

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INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 1843, an unidentified Shoshone woman joined John C. Frémont's expedition as it prepared to depart from Fort Saint Vrain, at the confluence of the South Platte River and Saint Vrain Creek in what is now Colorado, to explore beyond the Rockies. Her husband, a French engagé, had been murdered at Fort Lupton on the Fourth of July, and she wanted to return to her people, whom she expected to find in the Bear River country in what is now Wyoming, Utah, or Idaho.¹ Within days of that journey's start, she provided her American companions with a glimpse into a longstanding core of Shoshone subsistence: women's labor to dig up edible roots. While stopped along the Laramie River in what is now southern Wyoming, Frémont wrote:

“At this place, I became acquainted with the *yampah*, (anethum graveolens), which I found our Snake woman engaged in digging in the low timbered bottom of the creek. Among the Indians along the Rocky mountains, and more particularly among the Shoshonee or Snake Indians, in whose territory it is very abundant, this is considered the best among the roots used for food. To us, it was an interesting plant – a little link between the savage and civilized life. Here, among the Indians, its root is a common article of food, which they take pleasure in offering to strangers; while with us, in a considerable portion of America and Europe, the seeds are used to flavor soup. It grows more abundantly, and in greater luxuriance, on one of the neighboring tributaries of the Colorado than in any other part of this region; and on that stream, to which the Snakes are accustomed to resort every year to procure a supply of their favorite plant, they have bestowed the name of *Yampah river*.”²

After traveling with Frémont's expedition for about three weeks, the Shoshone woman left it in the vicinity of the Green River because she anticipated finding some of her people at Fort Bridger, a trading post and emigrant station located in what became southwestern Wyoming. Frémont and his men continued on their journey, and they

¹ John C. Frémont, *Frémont's First Impressions: The Original Report of His Exploring Expeditions of 1842-1844*, ed. Anne F. Hyde (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 123-124.

² Frémont, *First Impressions*, 128.

ultimately encountered many Shoshone groups en route to what became California and Oregon. While his account of the “Snake woman’s” work exhibited no judgments regarding the relationship between root-digging and the Shoshones’ state of existence, his later notes did. He wrote, for instance, that “[r]oots, seeds, and grass, every vegetable that affords any nourishment, and every living thing, insect or worm, they [Shoshone “*root diggers*”] eat. Nearly approaching to the lower animal creation, their sole employment is to find food; and they are constantly occupied in a struggle to support existence.”³ Such remarks that cast Shoshones as a “miserable” and “poor” people pervaded the writings of many other Americans who encountered them during the nineteenth century, yet few captured what Frémont did in the first quotation – that the yampa and other roots provided a reliable and often abundant form of sustenance. Women’s root-gathering activities were not efforts defined by desperation. They were, rather, part of a mosaic of activities that comprised a dynamic Shoshone approach to existence that developed over hundreds of years prior to the time that Frémont and others encountered them.

Analyzing such accounts of seemingly mundane events, this project examines the intersection of environmental, indigenous, and gender history to explain the origins of the Shoshones that Americans encountered and interacted with in the nineteenth century. Focusing on the period of approximately 1000 CE to 1868, this dissertation explores how Eastern Shoshone interactions with the world around them evolved over time and space. Geographically spanning the Great Basin, Rocky Mountains, Columbia Plateau, and Great Plains, this study uses the analytical lens of environmental history to explore the synergistic relationship between a people’s subsistence and the lands that they inhabited. It asserts that in order to more fully understand Shoshone history, we must dissect the

³ Frémont, *First Impressions*, 153-154.

complex, evolving relationships between a people, their lands and resources, and the actions of other peoples. What follows is, at its most basic level, a story of ecological change, human agency, and adaptation. Examining this story allows us to better understand the complex origins of the people today known as the Eastern Shoshone. Investigating this environmental history, moreover, allows us to see beyond the highly racialized and misleading comments produced by nineteenth-century observers such as Frémont and more sensitively understand how and why Shoshones lived as they did.

Far too often, historical studies treat the environment as a mere setting or backdrop for a predominantly human story. Without denying human agency, this dissertation places the natural world at the center of attention, as something that influenced Shoshone actions and as something that Shoshones affected. Taking heed from the work of Richard White, it treats the physical world as a product of the interactions between historical and non-human processes. In this interpretation of Eastern Shoshone history, therefore, the environment is dynamic and almost always changing – just like Shoshone culture. Changing climates, landscapes, and biota, as well as human actions, affected the synergistic relationship between the land and its Shoshone inhabitants. The histories of environments and Native societies (or any human society for that matter) are so tightly intertwined that their stories cannot be told separately. Yet, it is important to note that this dissertation eschews environmental determinism, for it again agrees with White, who writes that “[e]nvironmental constraints set certain boundaries on human actions, but they only limit; they do not dictate.”⁴ This approach to history, of course, is based upon earlier work, particularly that of anthropologist Julian H. Steward,

⁴ Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), xii.

whose concept of “cultural ecology” stressed the importance of analyzing the interrelationships between culture and environment.⁵

A number of influential historical studies highlight the significance of evolving relationships between Native societies and the environment. Many of those works emphasize how Euro-American colonialism irrevocably altered environments and Native subsistence. The works of Richard White and William Cronon, for instance, demonstrate how the expansion of capitalism and the integration of Native societies into a growing global economy led to such things as overhunting, which immersed North America’s indigenous peoples into positions of dependency.⁶ Although White and Cronon devote some attention to “pre-contact” Native North America, other scholars place greater emphasis on the dynamic nature of Native American environmental history before direct contact occurred between Indian and European cultures. Andrew C. Isenberg, Theodore Binnema, and Pekka Hämäläinen, for example, reveal the transformations that occurred in the Native West as indigenous groups interacted with one another and with the environment to produce sometimes drastic changes in the form of major migrations and transformations in subsistence systems.⁷ This study does both – it begins its examination of Shoshone environmental history centuries before Europeans “discovered” mainland

⁵ Julian H. Steward, *Theory of Culture Change: The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1955). Steward’s approach to cultural ecology emerged during his earlier works, including Julian H. Steward, *Basin-Plateau Aboriginal Sociopolitical Groups* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1938); Julian H. Steward, “Native Cultures of the Intermontane (Great Basin) Area,” *Essays in Historical Anthropology of North America* 100 (1940): 445-502.

⁶ William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); White, *Roots of Dependency*; Richard White and William Cronon, “Ecological Change and Indian-White Relations,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 4, *History of Indian-White Relations*, edited by Wilcomb E. Washburn, 417-429 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).

⁷ See Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001); Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

North America and concludes with Eastern Shoshone bands agreeing to a treaty that established the Wind River Reservation. In taking such a broad, sweeping look at Eastern Shoshone environmental history, it reveals the myriad continuities and changes that occurred over time and space. The subject of Eastern Shoshone environmental history constitutes a pervasive theme that allows us to better understand the complex historic roots of the people who today live on the Wind River Reservation.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to discuss the term “Eastern Shoshone.” Today, most enrolled members of the Eastern Shoshone Tribe live on the Wind River Reservation in western Wyoming. Their occupation of a single reservation and identification by a single tribal name, however, obscure their heterogeneous historical roots. This project uses the term “Eastern Shoshone,” but since it focuses on the pre-reservation era, its definition of the people who fall under that title is necessarily broad and dynamic.⁸ In endeavoring to explain the origins of the people today known as the Eastern Shoshone, it discusses all Shoshones who at one time or another inhabited parts of what are now the states of Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and Utah, as well as the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. This includes peoples who are now known as the Northern and Lemhi Shoshone. Historically, but especially before Americans encountered Shoshones in the early 1800s, no clear boundaries distinguished one Shoshone group from another. Individuals who eventually settled on the Wind River and Fort Hall reservations were descendants of peoples who migrated throughout (and often

⁸ For more on the topic of “assumption[s] of uniformitarianism” regarding Native American groups, see Gregory R. Campbell, “The Lemhi Shoshone: Ethnogenesis, Sociological Transformations, and the Construction of a Tribal Nation,” *American Indian Quarterly* 25, 4 (Autumn, 2001), 539-578: 539-540.

beyond) the extensive area described above.⁹ Only over time did the core group of each reservation population develop particularly strong ties to its respective area. This dissertation pays homage to their rich history and once-vast territory by treating Eastern, Lemhi, and Northern Shoshones as a conglomeration of peoples whose ancestors migrated north and east beyond the Great Basin, thereby creating the eastern branch of the Shoshone language family long before any notion of the term “tribe” existed.¹⁰

With that in mind, this project accomplishes two main things. First, it uses the analytical lens of environmental history to throw light on the ethnogenesis of the people now known as the Eastern Shoshone. Introduced by William C. Sturdevant and subsequently developed by many scholars, ethnogenesis can be broadly defined as the processes “by which the ethnic identities of human societies are quantitatively or qualitatively changed over their histories.” Ethnogenetic theory treats societies as “social species” that evolve and adapt to the exigencies of the world around them, thereby recreating themselves as distinct, autonomous ethnic groups, sometimes repeatedly. To date, many of these studies – such as Campbell’s history of Lemhi Shoshone ethnogenesis – have emphasized how Native American societies reinvented themselves in

⁹ For further discussion of the difficulty defining different Shoshone groups prior to the reservation era, see Demitri Boris Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography,” *University of California Anthropological Records*, 5, 4 (1947), 245-288: 246; Robert F. Murphy and Yolanda Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock Subsistence and Society,” *Anthropological Records* 16, 7 (1960), 293-338: 300; Colin G. Calloway, “Snake Frontiers: The Eastern Shoshones in the Eighteenth Century,” *Annals of Wyoming* 63, 3 (Summer 1991), 82-92: 83-84.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that outside of direct quotations, this dissertation does not use the term “Snakes” to refer to the Shoshone. A title used by French, British and, later Americans, “Snake” originated from names used by other Native societies to refer to Shoshone groups. The genesis of the name remains unclear, but by the early nineteenth century Euroamerican explorers and traders had developed a stereotype of the “Snake” Indian as an impoverished, cowardly, and deceptive Native. For example of a historical document in which the term “Snake” is used in a derogatory manner, see Charles Le Raye, “The Journal of Charles Le Raye,” *South Dakota Historical Society Collections*, vol. 4, 150-180 (Sioux Falls, SD: Mark D. Scott, 1908), 176-177.

the midst of the turmoil that came with Euro-American colonialism.¹¹ So, this dissertation uses ethnogenetic theory to explain how a variety of indigenous groups with a common linguistic heritage coalesced to form the Eastern Shoshone Tribe, but it diverges from the existing body of literature in a couple of ways. Whereas the works of Campbell, Gary Clayton Anderson, and others tend to focus on political, social, and cultural history to explain ethnogenetic processes, this project demonstrates that scholars must devote greater consideration to a given group's ecological history when discussing its origins. In order to better understand the tribes that the United States government confined to reservations, historians should take a long look at how their ancestors' interactions with the world around them evolved over time and space. This dissertation also challenges scholars to devote more attention to the "pre-contact" period when discussing indigenous ethnogenesis. As the Shoshone case demonstrates, change and reinvention occurred before Natives came into contact with Euro-Americans. Some scholars, such as John R. Alley, who discusses the "acculturation" that occurred as early Shoshones interacted with other Natives, do not wholly neglect pre-contact Shoshone ethnogenesis. This project emphasizes environmental history in addition to intercultural exchanges.¹²

The most basic elements that defined the ancestors of the Eastern Shoshone were the lands that they inhabited and how those lands affected Shoshone lifeways. Those

¹¹ Campbell, "Lemhi Shoshone," 540; For more on the concept of ethnogenesis, see William C. Sturdevant, "Creek into Seminole," in *North American Indians in Historical Perspective*, edited by Eleanor Burke Leacock and Nancy Oestreich Lurie, 92-128 (New York: Random House, 1971); Susan R. Sharrock, "Crees, Cree-Assiniboine, and Assiniboines: Interethnic Social Organization on the Far Northern Plains," *Ethnohistory* 21, 2 (1974): 95-122; Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); John H. Moore, "Ethnogenetic Theory," *National Geographic Research and Exploration* 10, 1 (1994): 10-37; Joane Nagel, *American Indian Ethnic Renewal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Mark J. Hudson, *Ruins of Identity: Ethnogenesis in the Japanese Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999); Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Indian Southwest, 1580-1830: Ethnogenesis and Reinvention* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999); Jonathan D. Hill, ed., *History, Power, and Identity: Ethnogenesis in the Americas, 1492-1992* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996).

¹² John R. Alley, "Great Basin Numa: The Contact Period" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1986), 65.

ancestors utilized a wide variety of environments, so the Eastern Shoshone Tribe was an agglomerate group. This project, therefore, takes a broad look at how Shoshones engaged with a variety of ecosystems scattered throughout the Intermountain West. So, instead of presenting a human story in which the natural world functioned as a setting that only occasionally influenced the storyline, it offers a narrative in which humans interacted with one another and the world around them to make history. Focusing on daily life among common Shoshones, this dissertation reveals many ways that the environment influenced their lifeways and vice versa. That Shoshone groups historically identified one another by their primary food source – hence “Buffalo-eaters,” “Sheep-eaters,” “Salmon-eaters,” “Root-eaters,” and the like – highlights the centrality of the environment to their history. Such a naming system, in fact, appears to have been unique to the Shoshone (and the Comanche, an offshoot of the Shoshone); apparently no other Native American people frequently identified themselves or one another by the foods that they ate. This phenomenon points to the diversity of the ecosystems that Shoshone groups utilized and how they defined one another not by where they lived, but by the resources that they used.

Several thematic threads within the broad subject of Eastern Shoshone environmental history bind the individual chapters of this dissertation together. One of those is the evolution of Shoshone resource procurement and use. The resources that Shoshones used and how they used them undergirded the entirety of Shoshone history. During the period of 1000-1868 CE, Shoshones used a wide range of environments that provided them with an equally diverse array of challenges and opportunities in terms of the resources that they offered. Likewise, ecological transformations triggered by

Shoshones, other Natives, Euro-Americans, or the environment itself required Shoshones to adapt to new resources or else perish. The transformation of Shoshone methods of resource procurement usually altered other areas of their lives, so the following pages trace the causes and effects of those changes. By devoting attention to the plants and animals that they ate, the water sources that they used, the wood that they burned, and the forage that they fed their horses, as well as the methods by which they obtained those things, this study offers a deeper understanding of the life experiences of thousands of nameless Shoshones who inhabited the West.

Gender is the second major theme. Taking cue from Margaret Jacobs' recent challenge to Western historians, this dissertation demonstrates that women should be more fully integrated into Western and Native American history alike. It embraces Jacobs' point that "[g]ender history analyzes the changing meaning and value attached to maleness and femaleness and the relationship between the two. Gender manifests itself in production (economics and labor) and reproduction (both physical and social), bedrocks of any society." So, by highlighting Shoshone women's agency and exploring the dynamism of indigenous gender roles, this project strives for a "genuine incorporation" of Native women's history in an effort to offer a "more complex and nuanced" understanding of Western and Native history.¹³

Evolving Shoshone relationships with key resources had gendered dimensions, for Shoshone men and women did not interact with the environment in the same way. Examining the long period of 1000-1868 allows this study to highlight how Shoshone gender roles transformed over time. Moreover, the treatment of a broad geographical area

¹³ Margaret Jacobs, "Western History: What's Gender Got to Do With It?" *The Western Historical Quarterly* 42, 3 (Autumn 2011), 297-304: 303-304.

encompassing the Great Basin, Columbia Plateau, Rocky Mountains, and Great Plains enables this project to throw light on the centrality of ecosystems to gender systems. Traditionally, Native men and their activities received the most scholarly attention, but this dissertation endeavors to establish women as a crucial component of Shoshone history by drawing upon a growing body of scholarship on Native women. Collectively, these studies of women's work and status among Native societies use ethnographic and ethnohistorical approaches to challenge stereotypes of indigenous women as "drudge laborers." Rather, they have demonstrated that Native societies often utilized gender complementarity – through which both men and women performed tasks that were essential to a group's survival and wellbeing – and that men therefore generally did not treat women as downtrodden "beasts of burden."¹⁴ Eschewing any sort of "declension model," this project uses an integrated approach to gender to demonstrate that women performed a variety of tasks that were integral to the survival of Shoshone groups.¹⁵ Although women remained important contributors to Shoshone subsistence during the entire study period of 1000-1868, the value of their work varied depending upon specific conditions such as the environments they inhabited, the resources they used, and how other peoples affected relationships between Shoshones and their lands.

The third prominent theme is environmental change. Both "natural" and human-induced environmental changes transpired in the Shoshone world between 1000 and 1868. This dissertation's broad temporal scope, for instance, provides an opportunity to

¹⁴ For example, see Laura F. Klein and Lillian A. Ackerman, eds., *Women and Power in Native North America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995); Nancy Shoemaker, ed., *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); Lillian A. Ackerman, *A Necessary Balance: Gender and Power among Indians of the Columbia Plateau* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003); Loretta Fowler, *Wives and Husbands: Gender and Age in Southern Arapaho History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010).

¹⁵ For a discussion of "declension" in historical narratives, see Perdue, *Cherokee Women*, 7-10.

examine the impact of ongoing climate change on the lifeways of a particular Native American group. By affecting waterways, plant regimes, wildlife populations, and human societies, short and long-term climate events challenged Shoshones by influencing them to migrate, alter their methods of resource use, or starve. As Brian Fagan observes, “[c]limate has never been a fashionable topic in historical circles, largely because, until recently, paleoclimatology was a crude and infant science.” Now, however, historians have access to reliable sources of information that they cannot afford to disregard. This project, for one, takes advantage of the opportunity to integrate climate studies into its narrative.¹⁶ On the other hand, the following pages highlight the ways that Shoshones, other Natives, and Euro-Americans affected the environment. By using new technologies, exhausting resources, and altering habitats, Natives and Euro-Americans alike reshaped how Shoshones interacted with the world around them.

The fourth and final major theme is the relationship between environmental history and intercultural relations. This includes interactions among Native groups (intertribal affairs) as well as relationships between Native groups and Euro-Americans. The acquisition of new technologies, the impact of “Old World” infectious disease epidemics, and competition over resource-rich areas influenced the position of Shoshones within intertribal balances of power. This, in turn, had a direct bearing on the places that Shoshones inhabited and the resources that they used. Likewise, European and American colonial expansion had major implications for Shoshone subsistence, for the transformation of biota, the destruction of landscapes and resources, and Native dispossession compelled Shoshones to adapt. As the following pages demonstrate,

¹⁶ Brian Fagan, *The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History, 1300-1850* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 58. For one of the few studies of Native America that devotes considerable attention to both short and long-term climate events, see Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*.

Shoshones were sometimes themselves agents of change while other times they responded to transformations produced by other humans or the environment itself.¹⁷

This focus on the centrality of environmental history to Eastern Shoshone ethnogenesis allows this dissertation to accomplish a second important goal, which is to provide a fresh look at Shoshone history. The recent publication of Pekka Hämäläinen's provocative *The Comanche Empire* suggests that historians can benefit from applying innovative approaches to other Native societies.¹⁸ As the group from which the Comanche splintered, as well as one that receives relatively little scholarly attention, the Eastern Shoshone constitute an obvious candidate for such a study. Outside of a pair of notable exceptions, Sacajawea – the woman who aided Meriwether Lewis and William Clark during their journey to and from the Pacific Ocean in 1805-1806 – and Washakie – the great chief of the second half of the nineteenth century – Shoshones are largely absent from mainstream American history. This study brings their history to the forefront in an effort to give it the attention that it deserves, as well as to use their story as a case study of the oft-overlooked environmental dimensions of indigenous history.

That is not to say that there is an absolute dearth of literature on the Eastern Shoshone. Twentieth century-anthropologists, for instance, devoted considerable attention to Shoshone ethnography.¹⁹ Historians have also written much about Sacajawea,

¹⁷ For a study that examines the intercultural and environmental history of a particular region (the northwestern Great Plains), see Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*.

¹⁸ Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*.

¹⁹ Robert H. Lowie, "The Northern Shoshone," in *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, vol. 2, part 2, 165-306 (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1909); Robert H. Lowie, "Notes on Shoshonean Ethnography," in *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, vol. 20, part 3, 183-314 (New York: American Museum Press, 1924); Steward, *Basin-Plateau*; Steward, "Native Cultures"; Shimkin, "Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography"; Murphy and Murphy, "Shoshone-Bannock Subsistence and Society"; Åke Hultkrantz, "The Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area," in *Shoshone Indians*, edited by Carling I. Malouf and Åke Hultkrantz, 178-217 (New York: Garland, 1974); Omer C. Stewart, "The Shoshoni: Their History and Social Organization," *Idaho*

Washakie, and their roles in American history. In fact, nineteenth-century Shoshone history has been reasonably well covered.²⁰ The more distant Shoshone past, however, remains largely neglected despite the fact that Colin G. Calloway drew attention to the subject in a 1991 article.²¹ As Calloway observes, the eighteenth century – which historians typically treat as mere background material – was an eventful one that saw Eastern Shoshones rise as a military power on the northern Great Plains, only to abandon the grasslands by 1800. Far more than a mere backdrop for the stories of Sacajawea and Washakie, earlier Shoshone history provides insight into how and why many of those Natives welcomed Americans into their lands during the 1800s. Shoshones were, however, much more than simple helpers of the famed Lewis and Clark and those who followed them; a look at Shoshone history prior to 1800 indicates that they were major players in the history of the Great Basin, Rocky Mountains, Columbia Plateau, and northern Great Plains.

Despite the appearance of Calloway's article, later books on Shoshone history continued the old mold of offering cursory treatments of the period before 1805, and then focusing on the nineteenth century and beyond.²² These works certainly contribute to our understanding of Shoshone history, but the ongoing relegation of the Shoshones' early past to the background obscures much of the group's historical significance, as well as

Yesterdays 9 (Fall 1965): 2-5, 28; Åke Hultkrantz, "Shoshoni Indians on the Plains: An Appraisal of the Documentary Evidence," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 93 (1968): 49-72.

²⁰ Grace Raymond Hebard, *Washakie: An Account of Indian Resistance of the Covered Wagon and Union Pacific Railroad Invasions of Their Territory* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1930); Grace Raymond Hebard, *Sacajawea: Guide and Interpreter of Lewis and Clark* (New York: Courier Dover Publications, 1932); Virginia Cole Trenholm and Maurine Carley, *The Shoshonis: Sentinels of the Rockies* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964); Brigham D. Madsen, *The Lemhi: Sacajawea's People* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1979); Henry E. Stamm, IV, *People of the Wind River: The Eastern Shoshones, 1825-1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999); John W.W. Mann, *Sacajawea's People: The Lemhi Shoshones and the Salmon River Country* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

²¹ Calloway, "Snake Frontiers."

²² Stamm, *People of the Wind River*; Mann, *Sacajawea's People*.

the roots of their later history. Some regional studies have enhanced our understanding of the Shoshone past prior to 1800, although they do not focus on the Shoshone.²³ Theodore Binnema, for instance, has explored the environmental history of the eighteenth-century northwestern Plains. Delving into how Shoshone, Blackfoot, Assiniboine, and other groups interacted with one another and the grasslands, Binnema reveals just how inseparable are the human and natural worlds in history. This study pairs Binnema's emphasis on environmental history with a focus on the Shoshone to demonstrate the value of examining indigenous relationships with landscapes and peoples across several distinct geographical areas. This is important because it highlights how a wide variety of landscapes and peoples influenced the ethnogenetic development of the Eastern Shoshone. The bottom line is that little has been done to formulate a narrative that truly bridges Eastern Shoshone history prior to and after 1800. Consequently, the continuities and changes that mark that past remain largely obscured. Moreover, cursory treatments of Shoshone history prior to 1800 leave the origins of the Eastern Shoshone people too murky. So, by covering a span of several centuries, this project sheds light on the currents of history that created the people today known as the Eastern Shoshone.

This dissertation utilizes a highly interdisciplinary approach. Since few historical documents exist for much of the time period that this study covers, it relies heavily on information gathered from archaeological findings, anthropological research, and works on the natural sciences (particularly climatology, biology, ecology, and epidemiology). It consults ethnographic data that often relates to Shoshone life in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so that data is often tainted with contemporary racial beliefs; this

²³ Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*; Colin G. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

dissertation handles those materials carefully. In using those studies, this project employs the method of “upstreaming,” by which ethnographic data is cautiously projected back in time with reference to archaeology, linguistics, and ecology. More sparingly, it makes use of “side-streaming,” the method of applying data relating to neighboring Native groups or even more general models to supplement available information relating to the Shoshone specifically.²⁴ Examining this information alongside available historical documents, this project dissects what those sources explicitly say and tacitly suggest about how Shoshones interacted with landscapes and resources. Using the analytical lens of environmental history to approach and synergize these various source materials, the following pages present descriptions of landscapes and biota, explain how ecosystems presented themselves to Native societies in the form of “functional environments,” discuss how Shoshones utilized those environments, and illuminate how their adaptations to particular environments interacted with their social, cultural, and military lifeways.²⁵

The story of Eastern Shoshone ethnogenesis begins long before Natives of the North American West encountered peoples of European descent, their material goods, or their animals and diseases. Chapter One examines the lifeways of the Numu – the ancestors of the Shoshone – in the Great Basin. When Numic-speaking peoples expanded throughout the generally hot and arid semi-desert valleys and mountains of the Great Basin sometime before 1200 CE, they adapted to survive in difficult environments. In doing so, they developed hunter-gatherer or forager subsistence strategies influenced by

²⁴ For a brief discussion of “upstreaming” and “side-streaming,” see Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 13.

²⁵ The term “functional environment” refers to the direct relevance of a given environment to human subsistence. See Donald L. Hardesty, “Comments on Cultural Ecology Papers,” in *Great Basin Cultural Ecology: A Symposium*, edited by Don D. Fowler, 155-157 (Salt Lake City: Desert Research Institute Publications in the Social Sciences, 1972), 157.

their interactions with a land containing scattered resources, as well as resident Basin Natives and Indians inhabiting adjacent areas. Thus, in the Great Basin, early Shoshones acquired traits that their descendants eventually carried into neighboring regions. A treatment of the Eastern Shoshones' Great Basin roots provides us with a solid foundation for understanding their later ethnogenetic development, and it reveals the dynamism of pre-contact Native America. Indeed, this look at Numu history demonstrates that migrations, transformations, and struggles to survive predated Euro-American invasions of Native lands.

Chapter Two examines Numu migrations into the Columbia Plateau, Rocky Mountains, and Great Plains. By 1500, ancestors of the Eastern Shoshone carried their Great Basin heritage into these areas and adapted their subsistence strategies to the exigencies of new ecosystems. Scholars have devoted little attention to Shoshone history in these areas prior to the introduction of the horse.²⁶ This chapter, therefore, explores how migrating Shoshone groups transitioned from forager subsistence systems to ones that focused more on hunting bison and other big game. Whether a particular Shoshone group inhabited the western Plains, the Wyoming Basin, or the Salmon River country at a given time, it adapted to local environmental conditions and resource availability while maintaining varying degrees of its foraging tradition. Shoshones that migrated north and east prior to 1700 moved back and forth between different areas, capitalizing on the resources of ecosystems on both sides of the Continental Divide. Chapter Two devotes

²⁶ For examples of scholarship that emphasize post-horse Shoshone expansion onto the Great Plains, see Frank Raymond Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns of the Great Plains Indians (17th Century through Early 19th Century)* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953, 1992), 33; Anthony R. McGinnis, *Counting Coup and Cutting Horses: Intertribal Warfare on the Northern Plains, 1738-1889* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990, 2012), 8. Studies that recognize pre-horse Shoshone expansion onto the Plains include Hultkrantz, "Shoshoni Indians on the Plains"; Mark Q. Sutton, "Warfare and Expansion: An Ethnohistoric Perspective on the Numic Spread," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 8, 1 (1986): 65-82; Calloway, "Snake Frontiers," 84.

special attention to the Wyoming Basin because by the early 1700s that transitional area emerged as the core of Eastern Shoshone territory.

Chapter Three covers the period of 1690 to 1780, examining how Shoshones acquired their first horses and subsequently introduced equestrianism to the northern Great Plains. Using this new technology to revolutionize their subsistence practices and military tactics, Shoshones emerged as the dominant people on the northern Plains during the first half of the eighteenth century. Challenging historical interpretations that focus on military events to explain Shoshone expansion, this chapter argues that more attention should be devoted to the ways that horses transformed Shoshone relationships with the environment, particularly by enhancing their ability to subsist on bison herds. Moreover, it argues that historians must likewise acknowledge that the spread of horses beyond the Shoshones – especially to their Piegan, Blood, and Blackfoot enemies – revolutionized the ecological interrelationships of other groups and thereby exerted as much of an influence on Shoshone intertribal relations as did firearms (which typically receive the most credit for enabling the tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy to turn the tide against the Plains Shoshones). Most fundamentally, this chapter highlights the transformative effects of a European-introduced animal – the horse – which altered the course of Shoshone history before those Natives actually came into contact with Euro-Americans.

Chapter Four examines the years of 1780 to 1806, a brief yet tumultuous phase of Eastern Shoshone history. In 1781, the first documented “Old World” infectious disease epidemic struck Shoshones when an outbreak of smallpox swept north from the southern Great Plains. This epidemic was disastrous for the Shoshone, but not simply because of the population losses that it caused; it signaled the end of a considerable Shoshone

presence on the northern Plains and a related change in subsistence patterns. Again centralized in the Wyoming Basin as well as what are now southern Idaho and northern Utah, the easternmost Shoshone groups utilized a blend of big-game hunting and foraging economies. It was after this reorganization in the Intermountain West that Euro-Americans first encountered Shoshones, inaugurating a new period of Shoshone history. European-introduced organisms and material goods had influenced the Shoshone world for over a century, but when Euro-Americans entered Shoshone country and established direct contact with them soon after 1800, their world began to again transform.

Chapter Five explores the period of 1807 to 1840, highlighting the initial impact of American expansion on the Eastern Shoshone world. During this time, Shoshones throughout the Intermountain West became (to varying degrees) acquainted with Euro-American colonialism by way of the Rocky Mountain and Snake River country fur trade systems. The influence of direct relations between Shoshones and Euro-American trappers and traders varied based on the locality, but the net result of the fur trade was similar across Shoshone country: it depleted resources such as beaver and bison populations. Furthermore, during the era of the fur trade era, relations between Shoshones and Euro-Americans in different areas contributed to the emergence of increasingly distinct geopolitical groups: the immediate precursors of the Eastern, Northern and Lemhi Shoshone. Despite the environmental degradation that the fur trade brought, it benefitted many Shoshones by providing them with the means of establishing stability and building up their military strength in the wake of their retreat from the Plains.

The heyday of the Rocky Mountain fur trade passed by the 1840s, but an even more disruptive force followed in the wake of the trapper era: American overland travel.

Chapter Six spans from 1840 to 1868, exploring how the combination of American overland emigrants and settlers further depleted Shoshone resources, limited Native access to their lands, and ultimately led to dispossession. The Oregon Trail and other routes cut through the heart of Shoshone country, and those Natives became increasingly displeased with how the migrants treated their lands and some violent episodes transpired. Consequently, the United States federal government stepped in and began negotiating treaties with Shoshone groups throughout the Intermountain West. In 1868, two Shoshone reservations – including the Wind River Reservation – moved Shoshones out of the way of American expansion. With the government's confinement of Shoshones to relatively small, well-defined reservations, the people known as the Eastern Shoshone tribe crystallized. An amalgamation of various groups who utilized several ecological regimes and, therefore, a variety of subsistence systems, the Eastern Shoshone began the challenging task of adapting to reservation life.

The concluding pages of this study provide a glimpse into Eastern Shoshone environmental history since 1868. Since the creation of the Wind River Reservation, Eastern Shoshones faced a number of daunting challenges related to their interactions with the natural world. Several reductions in the size of their reservation, their forced cohabitation with their former Northern Arapaho enemies, allotment, the “Indian New Deal,” the decline of animal populations, and the enactment of game management policies all influenced how Shoshones interacted with the environment.

Ultimately, this project demonstrates that when examined through the lens of environmental history, the Eastern Shoshone past assumes a significance that transcends that particular tribe and their geographical area. This study, by emphasizing the basic

point that the most fundamental aspects of a given historical group – their means of subsistence – must be examined before, during, and after periods of change, points to avenues of inquiry beyond the Shoshone. Historians have uncovered much about the military, political, and cultural history of North America's indigenous peoples. This dissertation highlights the value of exploring how their everyday life changed over time as a result of climatic events, disease outbreaks, growing enemy pressure, Euro-American colonial intrusion, the acquisition of new animals, and the evolution of biota. Focusing on the environmental history of a given Native group uncovers stories that might otherwise go overlooked. The nuances of both everyday life and extraordinary events must be examined if we hope to gain a deeper understanding of the historical and natural processes that shaped the Native societies that exist today.

This project is also significant because it draws our attention to pre-contact Native American history and it, moreover, underscores the importance of bridging the gap between pre-contact and post-contact Native pasts. Euroamerican influences on Native societies were overwhelmingly catastrophic, but we must also understand that Native North American worlds were hardly static, idyllic paradises prior to contact. As the Eastern Shoshone case demonstrates, they were worlds in which humans interacted with one another and the physical environment to produce almost constant change. Native Americans and their environments were each dynamic and, consequently, relationships between the two were in constant flux.

CHAPTER 1
IN THE “LAND BEYOND THE SETTING SUN”:
GREAT BASIN NUMU SUBSISTENCE PRIOR TO 1500

“They live in the Great Basin, and exhibit human nature in its lowest form and its most elementary state; dispersed in single families; without fire-arms; eating seeds and insects; digging roots, (and hence their name); a rabbit the largest animal in the desert; their greatest skill to snare it... All other Indians living in communities repulse the miserable Digger.”¹

“In the seventeenth century the Snakes probably held the lands west of the Rockies that they still occupied after the year 1800... a vast area of semidesert lands, where in primitive times food was difficult to obtain and the Indians (split up into small, loosely organized groups, all on foot) spent the whole of their lives searching for something to eat. There was little big game. Rabbit-snaring was a principal business of these poor Indians, and, whereas the Plains Indians made handsome garments of buffalo, antelope, and elk skins... the Snakes west of the mountains – when they had any clothing at all – had beaver robes and robes made by cutting rabbit skins into narrow strips and weaving a furry fabric... They were too preoccupied with finding something to eat to care much about housing... These poor Snakes were so immersed in food-gathering that they apparently did not organize themselves into real tribes.”²

These quotations sum up the unfavorable image of the Great Basin Numu that pervades both scholarship and popular lore. The popular misconception is that since Shoshones and their ancestors inhabited a supposedly resource-poor land, they too were impoverished. That fallacy is based upon the idea that big-game hunting equaled prosperity and that subsisting on plants and small game meant hunger, material deprivation, and a lack of social and political organization. Such depictions of the Basin Numu emerged during the nineteenth century as American explorers, trappers, travelers, and a host of others visited the Great Basin and viewed the region’s indigenous peoples through eyes tainted by Anglo-American values. Early anthropologists took up the

¹ John C. Frémont, “The Digger Indians,” *Friends’ Intelligencer* 11 (1855): 103.

² George E. Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains: From the Prehistoric Period to the Coming of Europeans* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), 118-119.

mantle, preserving the “miserable Digger” in academic writings. Scholars have only recently begun a full-scale assault on the stereotype.³

This chapter contributes to that effort, for it emphasizes the complexity and dynamism of pre-contact Basin Numu lifeways while exploring the roots of Eastern Shoshone ethnogenesis. In doing so, it uses the term “Numu” to refer to the Numic-speaking ancestors of those who later spoke distinct Shoshone, Paiute, Ute, and Comanche dialects of that language. Focusing on the emergence of the Numu from the southwestern corner of the Great Basin sometime before 1200 CE, the following pages demonstrate how the ancestors of the Eastern Shoshone efficiently utilized the resources available to them in one of North America’s most challenging environments. Seen through Euro-American eyes, much of the Great Basin appeared a wasteland that was unsuitable to all but the most “wretched” Natives. Yet, examined from a Numu perspective, the Basin offered an opportunity to not merely survive, but also to thrive.

Understanding how Numic-speaking peoples adapted to Great Basin landscapes and resources requires that we examine what they used and how they organized the labor required to use what they did. Looking at those traits reveals that Basin Numu subsistence systems were composite developments. That composite nature began with the survival strategies that Numic speakers carried with them from the southern Sierra Nevada into the Great Basin, a land that they later referred to as the “land beyond the

³ For a more in-depth discussion of the stereotypical “Digger” image and examples of revisionist works, see John R. Alley, “Great Basin Numa: The Contact Period” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1986), 379-386; Melvin G. Brewster, “Numu Views of Numu Cultures and History: Cultural Stewardship Issues and a Punown View of Gosiute and Shoshone Archaeology in the Northeast Great Basin” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Oregon, 2003), 27-28; Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

setting sun.”⁴ Great Basin environments influenced those survival strategies, placing some limitations on cultural development while simultaneously presenting opportunities. Within this context of environmental influence (not determinism), the Numu interacted with other Basin Natives, as well as indigenous visitors from neighboring regions, particularly California and the Southwest. Pre-existing strategies and local adaptations to ecosystems, then, combined with external stimuli to influence Numu cultural ecology. The amalgamation of these influences enabled the Numu to establish subsistence systems that best utilized the functional environments that they inhabited.⁵

Both men’s and women’s work were crucial to Numu survival in the Great Basin. In the Basin – where family-based social units (“microbands”) were the dominant form of social organization – gendered divisions of labor ensured a remarkable level of gender “complementarity” or “parity.”⁶ In fact, as the quotations that open this chapter suggest, women’s work – gathering roots, nuts, seeds, and other plant matter – provided the bulk of the food that the Basin Numu consumed. Men, on the other hand, hunted small game and large animals as a supplementary effort. Women, moreover, completed a wide variety of other tasks that ensured a family’s well-being, including (but not limited to) the preparation of food, making clothing, constructing and maintaining shelters, and bearing and caring for children. While scholars have begun examining the pivotal roles that women played in Native American societies, the history of Eastern Shoshone women and

⁴ Virginia Cole Trenholm and Maurine Carley, *The Shoshonis: Sentinels of the Rockies* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), vii.

⁵ This chapter expands upon John R. Alley’s emphasis on “acculturation” as evidence of pre-contact Numu dynamism. See Alley, “Great Basin Numa,” 65.

⁶ For discussions of “complementarity” or “parity,” see Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 5; Lillian A. Ackerman, *A Necessary Balance: Gender and Power among Indians of the Columbia Plateau* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 228; Nancy Shoemaker, ed., *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 5.

their Numu ancestors remains largely overlooked.⁷ Moreover, that Basin Numu and their descendents depended largely upon women's foraging efforts to survive helps to explain why Euro-Americans later saw them as "poor" or "wretched"; Euro-American men valued men's work and saw it as integral to any group's prosperity.

Examining the resources that the Basin Numu utilized, how they procured and processed those resources, how those adaptations to the environment influenced their culture, and how they interacted with other Natives allows us to better understand the origins of the people who later became known as the Eastern Shoshone. Indeed, tracing Eastern Shoshone ethnogenesis requires one to examine centuries of history. Early anthropological studies emphasized the Shoshones' deep roots in the Great Basin, but recent historical works tend to gloss over their rich pre-contact past, favoring recent history over the more distant past.⁸ Moreover, because Americans first encountered Eastern Shoshones in areas that became parts of Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, they often treat those Natives as primarily Great Plains or Rocky Mountain peoples. Focusing on the more recent past, however, stresses their recently-developed Great Plains and Rocky Mountain traits to the neglect of their enduring Basin characteristics.

⁷ The closest example might be Martha C. Knack's analysis of women's roles among the Southern Paiute, a Numic-speaking southern Basin group. See Martha C. Knack, "The Dynamics of Southern Paiute Women's Roles," *Women and Power in Native North America*, ed. Laura F. Klein and Lillian A. Ackerman, 146-158 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).

⁸ For examples in anthropology, see Julian H. Steward, "Native Cultures of the Intermontane (Great Basin) Area," *Essays in Historical Anthropology of North America* 100 (1940), 445-502: 449-450; Alfred L. Kroeber, *Cultural and Natural Areas of Native North America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939), 52-53. For recent works of history, see Henry E. Stamm, IV, *People of the Wind River: The Eastern Shoshones, 1825-1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 4-7; John W.W. Mann, *Sacajawea's People: The Lemhi Shoshones and the Salmon River Country* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 1-12. Works such as Stamm's and Mann's perhaps take cue from Demitri Boris Shimkin's works on Eastern Shoshone history that emphasize Great Plains influences. See, for instance, Demitri Boris Shimkin, "Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography," *University of California Anthropological Records* 5, 4 (1947): 235-288. For further discussion of the debate surrounding how to define Northern and Eastern Shoshones, see Robert F. Murphy and Yolanda Murphy, "Shoshone-Bannock Subsistence and Society," *Anthropological Records* 16, 7 (1960), 293-338.

By throwing light on the Basin Numu past, the following pages allow us to glimpse the sheer dynamism and complexity of the pre-contact North American West. As the Numu case demonstrates, it was a world in which Natives and the environment interacted to produce a rich, complex history. Looking at that history more closely and from a different angle, this chapter lends credence to archaeologist Brian M. Fagan's observation that, "[m]obility, flexibility, and detailed ecological knowledge were always the secrets of survival in the Great Basin from the earliest human settlement of this varied region before 9000 BC."⁹ The Numu were no exception to this, for they skillfully adapted to a challenging environment and they did much more than merely survive in it. Their intensive use of wild plant matter for sustenance and their utilization of a wide variety of meats as supplementary sources of nourishment were crucial to their success in the Basin. They were far from impoverished peoples struggling to merely survive who had a culture that "was simple in structure and meager in content."¹⁰

Before examining Basin Numu lifeways, it is necessary to briefly address the ongoing scholarly debate regarding Basin Numu origins and expansion. Scholars once discussed from where the Numu entered the Great Basin, but they now mostly agree that the southern Sierra Nevada in present-day California was their ancestral homeland.¹¹ The remaining questions, then, concern the timing and nature of Numu expansion throughout the Great Basin. Many different theories exist, but most ultimately fall into one of two

⁹ Brian M. Fagan, *Ancient North America: The Archaeology of a Continent* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 219.

¹⁰ Steward, "Native Cultures," 474.

¹¹ Robert M. Zingg, for instance, asserts that the Uto-Aztecs (the parent linguistic group of the Numic speakers) entered the Great Basin from the north several thousand years ago. Robert M. Zingg, "A Reconstruction of Uto-Aztecan History" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1933); Robert M. Zingg, "The Ute Indians in Historical Relation to Proto-Azteco-Tanoan Culture," *The Colorado Magazine* (July 1938): 148-156.

general groups: *in situ* arguments and hypotheses of a relatively recent migration (beginning in about 1000 CE).

Many early ethnographers and anthropologists argued that Numic-speaking peoples had long inhabited much of the Great Basin, hence *in situ*. Alfred L. Kroeber and others asserted that the Numu spread throughout the Basin several thousand years ago, and therefore treated them as the region's original inhabitants.¹² This theory has since evolved and become more complex. Proponents no longer assert that the Numu were the original Native inhabitants of the Basin, but they argue that the Numu migrated into the Basin no later than 2000 BCE. They, moreover, offer a wide variety of explanations for why the Numu expanded into and throughout the region, one of which is that the Numu entered the central Great Basin during the Late Holocene (3000 to 2500 BCE), after a prolonged dry period drove the previous human inhabitants out of the region. Generally, *in situ* scholars downplay linguistic evidence (which is important to the second general theory), instead favoring the continuity of material culture over time.¹³

The second and more recent argument is that Numic speakers expanded north and east from their southern California homelands into the Great Basin later. Julian H. Steward pioneered this thesis in 1940, in response to earlier arguments in favor of ancient Numu roots in the Basin. The archaeological foundation of his theory (basketry) did not

¹² Kroeber in 1907 treated the Numu as recent migrants to the Great Basin, but reversed himself by the time of a 1925 publication. See: Alfred L. Kroeber, "Shoshonean Dialects of California," *American Archaeology and Ethnology* 4, 3 (Feb., 1907), 66-165: 164; Alfred L. Kroeber, *Handbook of Indians of California* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1925), 577, 580. Also see Zingg, "Reconstruction"; Zingg, "Ute Indians."

¹³ For example, see Donald K. Grayson, "Chronology, Glottochronology, and Numic Expansion," in *Across the West: Human Population Movement and the Expansion of the Numa*, edited by David B. Madsen and David Rhode, 20-23 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994); C. Melvin Aikens, "Great Basin Numic Prehistory: Linguistics, Archaeology, and Environment," in *Anthropology of the Desert West: Essays in Honor of Jesse D. Jennings*, edited by C.J. Condie and Donald D. Fowler, 7-20 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Anthropological Papers 110, 1994).

survive radiocarbon dating, so scholars now see Sydney Lamb as the innovator of this “recent occupancy” model. In 1958, Lamb cautiously suggested a glottochronological estimate of approximately 1000 CE for Numic expansion out of southern California.¹⁴ Adherents of this “Lamb Theory” contend that the recent division of the Numic language into Shoshone, Ute, Paiute, and Bannock dialects indicates that the geographical diffusion of Numic-speaking peoples was therefore also recent. Some emphasize archaeological evidence (such as pottery) that mirrors the trajectory of Lamb’s linguistic diffusion model. Others argue that ethnohistoric data indicating ongoing Numic expansion at the time of Euro-American contact supports this theory.¹⁵ One of the most provocative theories is that of Robert L. Bettinger, who argues that the Numu began migrating out of the southern Sierra Nevada in about 1000 CE, and then utilized efficient subsistence systems to out-compete the existing Great Basin populations that they encountered.¹⁶

The Lamb model was once almost universally accepted among scholars, but more recent incarnations of the *in situ* argument broke that consensus. There remains enough disagreement among scholars to leave the question open for further debate. Ultimately, we must, as Robert L. Kelly observes, for the time being accept that we simply cannot know precisely when Numic expansion throughout the Great Basin transpired. Nor, for that matter, can we confidently make claims regarding the nature of the migration. Was

¹⁴ Steward, “Native Cultures,” 478; Sydney Lamb, “Linguistic Prehistory in the Great Basin,” *International Journal of Linguistics* 24, 2 (1958): 95-100.

¹⁵ Morris Swadesh, “Linguistic Overview,” in *Prehistoric Man in the New World*, edited by Jesse D. Jennings and Edward Norbeck, 527-556 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 548-552; Gary A. Wright, “The Shoshonean Migration Problem,” *The Plains Anthropologist* 23, 80 (May 1978): 113-137; Mark Q. Sutton, “Warfare and Expansion: An Ethnohistoric Perspective on the Numic Spread,” *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 8, 1 (1986): 65-82; David B. Madsen, “Prehistoric Ceramics,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*: vol. 11: Great Basin, edited by Warren L. d’Azevedo, 206-214 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986), 213-214.

¹⁶ Robert L. Bettinger and Martin A. Baumhoff, “The Numic Spread: Great Basin Cultures in Competition,” *American Antiquity* 47, 3 (1982): 485-503; David A. Young and Robert L. Bettinger, “The Numic Migration: A Computer Simulation,” *American Antiquity* 47, 1 (Jan., 1992): 85-99.

there a single great migration or a series of smaller ones? Did these happen in the form of wave-front advances, or were they “braided stream[s]”?¹⁷

Unfortunately, scholars have paid little attention to Numu viewpoints regarding their origins. Only recently has a Numu scholar, archaeologist and anthropologist Melvin G. Brewster, weighed in on the debate. He challenges Lamb’s model of Numu expansion, asserting that it is ethnocentric, formulated from a blend of American national mythology and an effort to disassociate Numic peoples from their homelands (for the purpose of dispossession). Brewster rails against post-1000 CE expansion theorists and *in situ* proponents alike who base their arguments on such things as linguistics, material culture, and environmental circumstances while wholly dismissing Numic traditions. In doing so, he writes, scholars disregard Numu spiritual knowledge. Based upon the traditions of his people, as well as his own archaeological work, Brewster concludes that “the People have always been here, ‘just like the trees and the grass.’”¹⁸

In the face of such a contentious scholarly debate, this chapter must proceed based upon what little scholars know and (mostly) agree upon. As David Rhode and David B. Madsen point out, there is a general consensus among Basin anthropologists that “Numic expansion *probably* occurred during the past several thousand years, that Numic peoples *probably* originated in the southwestern Great Basin, and that they *probably* spread into the eastern Great Basin, Colorado Plateaus, and Rockies relatively late in prehistory.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Robert L. Kelly, “Late Holocene Great Basin Prehistory,” *Journal of World Prehistory* 11, 1 (Mar., 1997), 1-49: 33.

¹⁸ Brewster, “Numu Views,” 119 (quotation), 5-6, 16, 31-32, 43, 80-81, 87-89, 94, 106. Brewster also takes issue with the Lamb model because it equates cultural and material change in the Great Basin with the migration of peoples, rather than considering that resident peoples might, in fact, be changing. So, he argues that the recent expansion theorists portray Numic speakers as static peoples unable to change over time. Brewster, “Numu Views,” 110.

¹⁹ The emphasis is that of the original authors. David Rhode and David B. Madsen, “Where Are We?” in *Across the West: Human Population Movement and the Expansion of the Numa*, edited by David

In a nutshell, sometime between 3000 BCE and 1000 CE, the Numu spread north and east from their southern Sierra Nevada homelands.²⁰ There may have very well been a series of migrations that began as early as 3000 BCE, the last of which was a major movement that began in about 1000 CE. Nevertheless, by about 1500 CE, the Numu had diffused throughout the whole of the Great Basin, moving onto the fringes of neighboring areas, especially to the north and east. Indeed, it was only after about 1400 CE that eastern Basin Native cultures were clearly Numic. Since one cannot with full confidence endorse any of the viewpoints discussed above, discussions of Basin Numu lifeways presented later in this chapter focus on the period after 1000 BP, thereby concentrating on the time during which the Numu presence in the Great Basin is agreed upon by all parties.²¹

Regardless of when the Numu began migrating into and throughout the Great Basin, they adopted lifeways that allowed them to survive in environments that required them to seek resources over large expanses of territory. Indeed, their adaptive strategies demonstrate that they developed keen understandings of the relationship between ecosystems and their survival. In fact, they were a highly adaptive, dynamic people who

B. Madsen and David Rhode, 213-221 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 219. Madsen's and Rhode's collected volume provides an excellent overview of the many viewpoints on the subject of Numic migration. David B. Madsen and David Rhode, eds., *Across the West: Human Population Movement and the Expansion of the Numa* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994).

²⁰ Catherine S. Fowler asserts that early Numic peoples migrated to what is present-day Southern California from a previous homeland in southern Arizona and Sonora some 5000 years ago. She hypothesizes that they followed the watercourses of the Gila and Salt Rivers to the foothills of the southern Sierra Nevada. Catherine S. Fowler, "Some Ecological Clues to Proto-Numic Homelands," in *Great Basin Cultural Ecology: A Symposium*, edited by Don D. Fowler, 105-121 (Salt Lake City: Desert Research Institute Publications in the Social Sciences, 1972).

²¹ Brewster's discussion of Numu origins somewhat muddies my approach. Since most scholars agree that the Numu likely migrated throughout the Great Basin from homelands in the southern Sierra Nevada, the following pages endorse that hypothesis. However, that this chapter does leave open the possibility of millennia-old Numu roots in the Basin acknowledges Brewster's assertion that the Numu have been in the Basin for a very long time. On the other hand, Alley's work supports my approach. See Alley, "Great Basin Numa," 55, 70.

utilized subsistence systems that allowed them to in many ways thrive in a challenging environment that was itself dynamic. Their success in many ways stemmed from their roots in the deserts of southern California, a region that was generally drier, hotter, and more resource-deficient than the adjacent Great Basin.

The ancestral Numu homelands in the far southwestern Great Basin, where the Basin meets the Mojave Desert, was and remains a desert region. Most of the area, with the exception of Death Valley and the Mojave Sink, lies at least 2000 feet above sea level. The nearby Sierra Nevada Range has peaks that reach over 10,000 feet in elevation. This is the driest portion of the Great Basin, as the majority of the region receives less than ten inches of precipitation annually, most of which falls during the winter. The higher elevations receive greater precipitation and have lower evaporation rates. Below 5000 feet, though, evaporation far exceeds precipitation, rendering the area especially arid. Here, the arid sagebrush-covered Basin lands transition to a true desert ecosystem where prickly pear and cholla cacti, as well as mesquite, Joshua tree, and Mojave yucca dominate the landscape. The most readily available animal food came in the form of reptiles such as the desert tortoise and chuckwalla. Numic speakers likely also ranged farther west into southern California, where they would have benefitted from supplies of piñon nuts and acorns. This seems feasible, for these seeds and others later defined Numic subsistence in the Basin proper.²²

²² Claude N. Warren and Robert H. Crabtree, "Prehistory of the Southwestern Area," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 11: Great Basin, edited by Warren L. d'Azevedo, 183-193 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986), 183; Dean R. Snow, "The First Americans and the Differentiation of Hunter-Gatherer Cultures," in *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, vol. 1: North America, part 1, edited by Bruce G. Trigger and Wilcomb E. Washburn, 125-199 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 167; Catherine S. Fowler, "Subsistence," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 11: Great Basin, edited by Warren L. d'Azevedo, 64-97 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986), 65, 88; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 219; Steward, "Native

When the Numu migrated into the Great Basin, they found a region largely comprised of rugged, semiarid, semidesert lands. The region consists of some 400,000 square miles of land between Utah's Wasatch Range of the Rocky Mountains on the east, the Sierra Nevada Range to the west, the Columbia Plateau on the north, and the Colorado Plateau to the south. The Great Basin was and is not, as its name suggests, a single large basin, but rather a collection of more than 100 separate basins divided by about as many mountain ranges; these are generally oriented in a north-south manner. It is an elevated region that mostly lies between 3000 and 5000 feet above sea level and is distinguished by a lack of outward drainage; waterways tend to drain into valley bottoms, and then they empty into alkaline lakes or absorb into the hot sands.²³

The Great Basin presented the Numu with a largely dry environment, even if those were not as dry as their ancestral homelands. The Sierra Nevada Range intercepts moisture moving from west to east, rendering the interior Basin, as anthropologist Jesse D. Jennings writes, "an environment characterized by chronically deficient moisture."²⁴ The air that reaches the Basin is usually dry and precipitation is light, with no part of the Basin receiving more than an average of twenty-five inches of rainfall per year; most of

Cultures," 483; Peter Farb, *Face of North America: The Natural History of a Continent* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 238-241; Fowler, "Some Ecological Clues," 110.

²³ The Wasatch Mountains receive their name from the Shoshone leader Wasatch (Wasattsi), whose name means "Blue Heron." William Bright, *Native American Placenames of the United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 549; Jesse D. Jennings, "The Desert West," in *Prehistoric Man in the New World*, edited by Jesse D. Jennings and Edward Norbeck, 149-174 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 149; Julian H. Steward, *Basin-Plateau Aboriginal Sociopolitical Groups* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1938, 1997), 10-11; Eliot Blackwelder, "The Geological Background," in *The Great Basin, with Emphasis on Glacial and Postglacial Times*, Bulletin of the University of Utah 38, 20 (June 1948), 3-16: 3; Colin G. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 51-52; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 219, 221; James M. Adovasio and Gary F. Fry, "Equilibrium Model for Culture Change in the Great Basin," in *Great Basin Cultural Ecology: A Symposium*, edited by Don D. Fowler, 67-71, Desert Research Institute Publications in the Social Sciences no. 8 (1972), 67; Steward, "Native Cultures," 448; Alley, "Great Basin Numa," 36-40.

²⁴ Jennings, "Desert West," 149.

the area receives an average of twelve inches or less. Most precipitation occurs in the mountains and falls in the form of snow. Moreover, annual evaporation rates far exceed precipitation, as most areas of the Basin have evaporation rates of at least 40 inches per year. Consequently, there are a number of usually dry lake beds or playas scattered throughout the Basin, although they periodically hold water for brief periods after flash runoffs. Many of the region's permanent lakes are saline, brackish, or alkaline, and, therefore, of limited use to humans. Temperatures in the Basin, like precipitation, vary based on altitude, but are generally high. Summer temperatures typically reach upwards of 100 degrees during the day, except in the mountains. There, milder summer heat is balanced by extreme winter cold. Winter temperatures are milder in the valleys, but the Natives found most of their principle winter foods in the mountains so they tended to winter at the foot of those ranges.²⁵

It is worth noting that the Numu entered a historically dynamic environment. Evidence in the form of dry lakes and riverbeds indicates that the Great Basin was once more hospitable to plant and animal life than it is today. Between ten and twelve thousand years ago, the Basin emerged from the last great ice age and at that time it had considerably greater supplies of water than it has at any time since. However, the region became increasingly warm and arid, especially when compared to other parts of North America, and many of its lakes and rivers dried up. Moreover, the soils of the Basin absorbed but little of the rainfall that fell while evaporation rates rose far above those of precipitation. Between 7000 and 9000 years ago, temperatures and precipitation were comparable to those of today. But temperatures thereafter generally rose for several

²⁵ Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 219, 221; Blackwelder, "Geological Background," 5; Steward, *Basin-Plateau*, 11-13; Jennings, "Desert West," 150; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 52; Steward, "Native Cultures," 448; Alley, "Great Basin Numa," 36-40.

millennia, with lakes, woodlands, and big game animals disappearing. As temperatures continued to increase and precipitation declined, vegetation retreated to higher elevations and, especially in parts the southern portion of the region, vanished altogether. Yet, this desiccation may have benefitted humans by transforming somewhat useful lake areas into marshes, which were typically more accessible and resource-rich.²⁶

The peak of this warming period, sometimes referred to as the Altithermal (about 6500 to 2000 BCE), brought the period of greatest heat and lowest precipitation to the Basin. After the Alithermal, mean temperatures and evaporation rates decreased while precipitation increased; the conclusion of that warm interval brought an expansion of existing lakes and fostered the return of some that had dried up (in the process eliminating some marsh areas). Environmentally, the present-day Great Basin emerged some 4000 years ago. The end of the Altithermal at about that time brought milder climate conditions, but considerable heat and aridity have nevertheless defined the region ever since. Historically, then, water was perhaps the single scarcest resource that the Numu and other Basin peoples depended upon to survive. In such a dry environment, wood was also in short supply (especially at lower elevations). The return of milder conditions allowed plant species to return to many areas that they had earlier deserted. With the exception of some droughts and relatively cool spells, though, the Great Basin climate has remained relatively stable during the past 2000 or so years.²⁷

²⁶ Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 52; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 92-93; Ernst Antevs, "Climatic Changes and Pre-White Man," in *The Great Basin, with Emphasis on Glacial and Postglacial Times*, Bulletin of the University of Utah 38, 20 (June 1948), 168-191: 176-178; Brewster, "Numu Views," 3.

²⁷ Stacy Kowtko, *Nature and the Environment in Pre-Columbian American Life* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 17; Robert F. Murphy and Yolanda Murphy, "Northern Shoshone and Bannock," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 11: Great Basin, edited by Warren L. d'Azevedo, 248-307 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986), 285; Blackwelder, "Geological Background," 15;

Yet, it would be a mistake to simply characterize the post-Altithermal Great Basin that the Numu inhabited as a desert or semidesert region.²⁸ The topography of the Basin, as well as its floral and faunal composition, was and remains quite diverse for a region often mischaracterized as a barren wasteland; it includes much more than vast stretches of rugged sagebrush valleys. An important component of the region is high-altitude alpine forest microenvironments comprised of junipers and pines. In these mountainous areas, Natives could find strawberries and gooseberries and, throughout southern Great Basin, piñon nuts (which did not occur north of the Humboldt River). They might also find various small mammals and birds, such as squirrels and sage grouse, as well as deer and desert mountain sheep in the mountains and their foothills. These mountain ranges received most of the Basin's precipitation, usually about twenty to thirty inches annually. Since most of that precipitation fell during the winter, the mountains usually retained it as snow well into the summer. It then gradually became runoff that fed streams and springs. In the foothills between the high-elevation microenvironments and valley floors, sagebrush and rice grasses flourished, and juniper grew along streams.²⁹

In the typically long, broad alkaline valley floors that ran between the parallel mountain ranges, sagebrush, rabbitbrush, shadscale, creosote bush, greasewood, various grasses (such as saltgrasses and wheatgrass), and, in the far southern Basin, cacti dominated the landscape. Tubers such as yampas, camas, and biscuit roots were common in the valleys of the northern Basin. Grasslands were never extensive in the most valleys

Antevs, "Climatic Changes," 178-182; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 93-94; Brewster, "Numu Views," 66.

²⁸ For dated treatments of the Great Basin as a mere "desert," see Farb, *Face of North America*, 238-241; Adovasio and Fry, "Equilibrium Model," 68.

²⁹ Kowtko, *Nature and the Environment*, 18; Kelly, "Late Holocene," 3-4; Steward, "Native Cultures," 448; Steward, *Basin-Plateau*, 12-13; Blackwelder, "Geological Background," 5; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 222-224; Alley, "Great Basin Numa," 45-46.

after the last great ice age, so they could not support larger game. However, pronghorn ranged throughout the valleys, as did jackrabbits and sage grouse. Bison inhabited fringe areas of the Basin such as in the Snake River Plain and the Bear River country in the far northeastern portion of the region. The few localities with perennial river flow attracted animals in need of water and also fostered the growth of some low-growing plant species such as berry bushes. These areas, mostly on the fringes of the Basin – in southern Idaho (Snake and Salmon Rivers), northern Nevada (Humboldt River), Utah (Bear, Weber, and Sevier Rivers), and southern Nevada (Colorado River drainage) – also had many fish. Natives could also find fish, waterfowl, and reptiles in lakes and marshes, although many lakes were temporary or alkaline. Swamp areas, such as parts of the western Basin, were resource-rich but rare ecosystems.³⁰

Archaeological evidence suggests that humans first inhabited the Great Basin by about 11,000 BCE. The first occupants originated north of the Basin and when they moved into the region, perhaps via a corridor through the ice that then covered much of present-day Canada and the northwestern United States, they developed a hunter-gatherer or forager culture known as the “Archaic Desert Tradition” or, more simply, the “Desert Culture”. These early occupants were in many ways the cultural ancestors of the Numu, but they were not Numic speakers, nor were they of the larger Uto-Aztecan linguistic stock; they were Hokan speakers. Nevertheless, these early Basin peoples and their successors over time developed foraging strategies that allowed them to subsist in a harsh environment only superseded in North America by the arctic and sub-arctic regions of what is now Canada. The basic contours of the Desert Culture evolved into the nineteenth

³⁰ S.J. Fox, “Cultural Ecological Patterns of the Eastern Shoshone,” *Tebiwa* 19 (1976), 1-8: 3; Kelly, “Late Holocene,” 3-4; Steward, “Native Cultures,” 448-449; Kowtko, *Nature and the Environment*, 18; Steward, *Basin-Plateau*, 13; Fowler, “Subsistence,” 87-88; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 223-224.

century, when Anglo-American expansion into the Great Basin disrupted indigenous subsistence patterns.³¹

Regardless of which Numic expansion model one endorses, it appears that climate events influenced both. The end of the aforementioned Altithermal (about 2000 BCE) coincides with many *in situ* arguments of long-term Numic occupation of the Great Basin. Anthropologists once believed that the onset of the Altithermal at about 6500 BCE caused a widespread depopulation of the Basin. More recently, though, scholars have concluded that the effects were milder than previously supposed; it appears that while humans largely abandoned the central Basin during the Altithermal, some continued to occupy other portions of the region (even if their subsistence patterns changed to accommodate the more arid climate conditions). According to some *in situ* theorists, Numic speakers capitalized on the opportunity afforded by the drought-induced abandonment of the central Great Basin and migrated into the area.³²

On the other hand, a significant drought also likely played a role in the possible Numic expansion that began as late as 1200 BCE. Scholars note that a long dry and warm spell began in the thirteenth century, which may have been part of a broader trend called the Little Climatic Optimum. This event appears to have adversely influenced much of the North American West and its inhabitants, including those of the Great Basin. Like the earlier Altithermal, this dry period also cleared vast tracts of the interior west of human inhabitants, creating a vacuum for others to move into. So, this provided the Numu with the opportunity to spread north and east across the Basin from the southern Sierra

³¹ Kowtko, *Nature and the Environment*, 17-18; Jennings, "The Desert West," 162; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 90, 225; Brewster, "Numu Views," 4.

³² Jennings, "The Desert West," 153; Antevs, "Climatic Changes," 183-184; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 93, 221; Grayson, "Chronology," 20-23; Kelly, "Late Holocene," 8-11.

Nevada, and eventually into the Rocky Mountains and onto the western fringes of the Great Plains.³³

This drought appears to have aided Numu expansion by contributing to the downfall of existing Basin cultures. This dry period, for instance, played some role in the disappearance of the Basin's few agriculturally-oriented cultures. In particular, the Fremont-Promontory culture, a tradition defined by maize horticulture, ceramics, and pit houses, existed in the eastern Great Basin as well as along the banks of the Colorado River in the Colorado Plateau from about 400 to 1300 CE. Evidence suggests that drought troubled the Athabaskan-speaking Fremont-Promontory peoples during the last century or so of the culture's existence by deteriorating agricultural conditions. By 1350 CE, forager cultures replaced the Fremont-Promontory peoples as the dominant tradition in the region; some scholars contend that these new occupants were the Numu. Similarly, researchers have linked the decline of southern Nevada's Anasazi tradition in about 1150 CE to this period of drought. Those horticulturalists grew maize, beans, squash, and sunflowers along the Virgin and Muddy Rivers, where they also gathered agave, rice grass, and other plant matter. Some adherents of the Lamb model argue that drought conditions weakened these societies prior to the arrival of Numic speakers from the southwest, allowing the latter to out-compete the former for key resources.³⁴

³³ Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 59; Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 21; Kelly, "Late Holocene," 31-32; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 94. The Little Climatic Optimum is broadly defined as the last major warm spell before the Little Ice Age (which began during the fourteenth century). It was a respite from ongoing neoglaciation patterns in North America that occurred at different times in different places. While it transpired less than a thousand years ago in the interior West, it occurred as far back as 2000 years ago in other areas of North America. See E.C. Pielou, *After the Ice Age: The Return of Life to Glaciated North America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 305.

³⁴ Young and Bettinger, "Numic Migration," 95; Kelly, "Late Holocene," 20, 22-23, 30; John P. Marwitt, "Fremont Cultures," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 11: Great Basin, edited by Warren L. d'Azevedo, 161-177 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986); Calloway, *One*

Archaeological evidence in the form of Numic-style pottery also appears to support the Lamb model of Numu expansion. Findings of distinctive flat-bottomed pottery place Numic speakers in southern Nevada and east-central California in approximately 1000 CE, in east-central Nevada and southern Utah between 1100 and 1200 CE, in northern Utah and west-central Nevada by 1300 CE, and, finally, in southern Idaho between 1300 and 1400 CE. This evidence, however, is not conclusive. The Numu, for instance, may have very well occupied much of that region long before those dates and only later adopted the pottery as others carried it beyond the southwestern Basin. Similarly, scholars have carefully noted that Numic contact with groups of the Fremont-Promontory and Anasazi traditions likely did not cause the downfall of the latter. They contend that those cultures were already in decline because of climate conditions that hurt their subsistence base and that the Numu out-competed their final remnants. Similarly, the Numu may have also out-competed groups of big-game hunters that utilized a narrower resource base than the broad-based systems that the Numu employed; big-game hunters were more specialized and, therefore, more susceptible to losing access to vital resources.³⁵

On the other hand, some scholars assert that aggressive military expansion defined post-1200 CE Numic migrations throughout the Great Basin. In particular, Mark Q. Sutton asserts that as the Numu spread north and east throughout the Basin, they occupied resource-rich areas (using force to remove current human occupants, if necessary), and then defended those patches from use by other peoples. Pointing to the

Vast Winter Count, 52; Brewster, "Numu Views," 68-70; Paul S. Martin et al., *Indians Before Columbus: Twenty Thousand Years of North American History Revealed by Archaeology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947), 226-227.

³⁵ Madsen, "Prehistoric Ceramics," 213-214; Young and Bettinger, "Numic Migration," 95; Kelly, "Late Holocene," 27.

highly effective pre-horse pedestrian style of warfare that Shoshones later employed on the Great Plains, Sutton asserts that their Numu ancestors developed those during their expansion throughout the Basin. In the Basin, he argues, they used the devastating strategy of launching surprise attacks on small, isolated camps or villages with overwhelming numbers. Their goal was nothing less than the destruction of their enemies and their villages, for the Numu wanted sole access to local resources. They were able to amass the necessary overwhelming numbers because of their greater population density compared to their competitors who hunted large game in small groups, as well as their economic and military adaptations to the environment. Scholars hypothesize that as the Numu moved into the Basin, they developed an effective “fusion-diffusion” strategy that pulled individual subsistence units together for food-gathering activities, communal hunts, and military expeditions, and then allowed them to splinter into smaller groups when larger ones were no longer necessary or feasible. If this aggressive military expansion did indeed occur, it is unclear whether the Numu killed off, displaced, or absorbed their competitors.³⁶

On the other hand, archaeologists have found little material evidence which suggests that the Basin Numu engaged in intertribal warfare. Archaeological sites contain many hunting, gathering, food preparation, and storage tools, but weapons are few. Some anthropologists explain this by asserting that the Basin Numu were too absorbed in their pursuit of adequate substance to make war, while others have suggested that the lack of competition over those resources made warfare unnecessary. Historically, conflict among different Numic-speaking groups appears minimal, but Basin Numu relations with other

³⁶ Sutton, “Warfare and Expansion”; Wright, “Shoshonean Migration Problem,” 113, 130; Young and Bettinger, “Numic Migration,” 85-86; Kelly, “Late Holocene,” 26-27.

indigenous peoples remain largely a mystery.³⁷ One finds it difficult to believe that there was little competition over the Great Basin's relatively scarce and scattered resources, even if relatively few Natives populated the region at a given time. Moreover, Sutton's point that the military prowess displayed by Shoshones on the Plains (a topic undertaken in Chapter Two) had to develop sometime, somewhere, is well taken. Ultimately, warfare in the pre-contact Basin might not have been as rampant as, say, on the Great Plains (especially after the arrival of the horse), but one has trouble imagining the Great Basin as something of a war-free idyll.

Aggressively or not, Numic speakers occupied much of the Great Basin by 1400 CE. As they diffused throughout the Basin, they developed subsistence strategies highly tuned to the local environments that they occupied. Their ancestral roots in southern California had provided them with a tradition of knowledge and skills to help them survive in challenging environments, for the Mojave Desert is one of the driest areas of the North America. Since the Mojave itself offered little in the way of food and water, the mountainous areas of southern California that provided access to acorns and piñon nuts were probably important to early Numic peoples. In their southern Sierra Nevada homelands, Numic speakers learned to tap into every possible resource in order to subsist. This was a key to their success when they expanded throughout the Basin.³⁸

So, contrary to what the "Digger" image suggests, Basin Numu drew upon a wide variety of animal and plant resources for nourishment, and they rarely starved. Plant matter provided their primary source of sustenance. Hard-shelled seeds and piñon nuts

³⁷ Abram Kardiner, *The Psychological Frontiers of Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), 49; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 119; Steward, "Native Cultures," 492-493; Sutton, "Warfare and Expansion"; Kelly, "Late Holocene," 27.

³⁸ Fowler, "Subsistence"; Fowler, "Some Ecological Clues," 110; Young and Bettinger, "Numic Migration," 85-86.

were a key resource, but depending upon their specific locale, groups might also consume acorns, wild beans, roots, and berries, as well as many stalks and leaves (they used many of the latter in medicinal teas). In fact, some scholars assert that intensive seed (including piñon nut) gathering was a relatively recent development (post-1000 CE), for archaeologists have found few grinding tools at earlier sites. The timing of this apparent innovation, then, might help to explain why the Numu successfully expanded throughout the Basin after that time. Yet, Basin Numu could not obtain sufficient protein from plant matter alone. Their most common source of meat was small game, particularly jackrabbits, cottontails, and ground squirrels. They supplemented their diets with pronghorn, deer, bighorn sheep, sage grouse, waterfowl, and reptiles. Basin Numu consumed insects such as grasshoppers, crickets, cicadas, and caterpillars, as well as ant and bee eggs that they sometimes mixed into seed cakes. The late Pleistocene big game species that still existed when Hokan speakers occupied the Basin were long gone by the time that Numic speakers expanded out of the Sierra Nevada. In the northern and eastern edges of the Basin, though, they could hunt bison, elk, and other game.³⁹

So, on a day-to-day basis individuals and small groups sustained Numu groups through a variety of gathering and hunting activities. In order to complete those tasks, the Numu employed a gendered division of labor that placed considerable emphasis and value on women's work. Women gathered seeds, nuts, roots, and other plant foods, prepared all food (including the meat that the men got), produced many material goods, and controlled the distribution of those resources. Men, on the other hand, hunted,

³⁹ Kelly, "Late Holocene," 5, 8; Fowler, "Subsistence"; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 90, 219, 221; Alex D. Krieger, "Early Man in the New World," in *Prehistoric Man in the New World*, edited by Jesse D. Jennings and Edward Norbeck, 23-81 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 35; Kowtko, *Nature and the Environment*, 16-18; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 52; Alley, "Great Basin Numa," 87, 98-99.

protected their family groups, and went on the warpath. Therefore, women and men performed gender-specific tasks that were essential to the survival of Numu Basin groups. This system of “complementarity” or “parity” gave women a degree of influence that defies popular Anglo-American conceptions of Native women’s status.⁴⁰

Women gathered and prepared the foods that comprised the foundation of Basin Numu diets. They harvested a wide variety of seeds, nuts, roots, and berries, many of which required much labor to make them edible. To gather piñon nuts, they constructed long, hooked poles to remove the green cones from the trees. Women then pit-roasted the cones so they would release the nuts (or, more accurately, seeds) inside. After they shelled the nuts with a mortar or a metate (a thin stone tool), they could serve them raw, parched, or as a mush or gruel (most Numu reportedly preferred the latter form). Women cached surplus seeds in underground storage pits, where they remained edible for four or five years. They returned to these reserves to provide their families with much-needed nourishment during the winter months, or whenever supplies of fresh food ran short. In some areas of the Great Basin, Numu women also gathered and prepared acorns, which required leaching processes to remove the bitter tannic acids and make them edible. They also ground acorns as well as pods of mesquite and screwbeans into edible meals. Since such seed-processing efforts were labor intensive and since many groups relied upon these foods for subsistence, these female-controlled activities heavily influenced group movements. Women also crafted and used pointed sticks to extract roots such as yampas,

⁴⁰ Knack, “Dynamics,” 146-158; Shoemaker, *Negotiators of Change*, 5-8, 20; The Shoshone Woman and her Status in the Tribe, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

biscuit roots, camas, and other tubers from the ground, and then they cooked them in earthen pit ovens.⁴¹

That Basin Numu women used pointed sticks to pry roots out of the ground – especially in the northern Great Basin, where tubers commonly grew – led Anglo-Americans to call them the “Digger Indians.” The term was a derisive one, for early ethnologists and historians entrenched in the literature the idea that Basin Numu and their ancestors were economically and culturally “poor” because they had to do something so seemingly degrading as subsist on roots. Since they spent the majority of their time searching for food, scholars such as historian George E. Hyde write that they had little time to devote to warfare, political organization, social activities such as ceremonies, housing, and clothing. Hyde writes that, “[t]he very names they gave to their groups indicate their absorption in the quest for food. The Snakes or Shoshonis were divided into Root Eaters, Rabbit Eaters, Squirrel Eaters, Salmon Eaters, Seed Eaters, Pine Nut Eaters, and one poor group was known as the Earth Eaters.” As a result of such descriptions, the “miserable” Basin Numu and their ancestors are generally treated as the most primitive and poverty-stricken of all North American Natives. However, Basin Numu lifeways were far more complex and dynamic than these descriptions suggest – the digging sticks were but one dimension of a reliable subsistence system.⁴²

⁴¹ Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 89, 222; Fowler, “Subsistence,” 64-65, 67, 69; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 52; Steward, “Native Cultures,” 481, 483-484; Kelly, “Late Holocene,” 4; Brewster, “Numu Views,” 62; Knack, “Dynamics,” 148-151.

⁴² Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 118-119 (quotation); Edward B. Tylor, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1865, 1964), 161; Frederick Hodge, ed., *Handbook of the American Indians North of Mexico*, vol. 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907), 555, 557; Kroeber, *Cultural and Natural Areas*, 49; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 5; Kardiner, *Psychological Frontiers*, 48; Steward, “Native Cultures,” 464-466, 481; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 223.

A look at how women gathered and processed grass seeds, as well as how they helped their groups store and transport water, further demonstrates their industry, innovativeness, and importance to Basin Numu subsistence. They made basketry beaters to knock hard-shelled grass seeds from bushes into woven baskets. After winnowing those seeds on fiber basketry trays and removing their heads with stone, wood, or bone knives, women boiled or stored them in nearly waterproof woven baskets. Using mortars or metates (grinding tools made of stone) to mill seeds and vegetal matter on the fiber trays, they made meal that they sometimes made into cakes and left in the sun to dry. Sometimes, women made those cakes richer on protein by gathering and mixing insects such as grasshoppers into the seed cakes. The Numu consumed most of these cakes immediately, but they sometimes had enough to store in the ground for times when fresh food was scarce. The aforementioned lightweight but versatile baskets indicate how women's crafts enabled the Basin Numu to survive in areas lacking ready supplies of water. Basin Numu women constructed and used watertight baskets to transport fresh water across vast expanses that lacked streams or springs. Without such tools, it would have been difficult (if not almost impossible) for the Basin Numu to migrate and use resources as they did. Women also made and used more elaborate pitch-covered ollas or jugs to store and transport water. All of these containers were highly versatile, for women also used them to gather plant foods, to cook (they placed fire-heated stones in the basket to boil water), and to store and transport a family's material goods. Numu women actively adopted new technology, for soon after 1000 CE they began to make and use more twined baskets than coiled ones. Twining methods – which reached the Numu from California or the Southwest – allowed women to more quickly construct baskets. They

also made and used some wooden bowls and pottery, but these items were far less practical for a people who remained mobile.⁴³

Although women gathered the core of Basin Numu sustenance, men performed important supplementary activities that helped to balance their diets. As the primary hunters of Numu groups, men made and employed a number of tools to kill or trap pronghorn, deer, bighorn sheep, rabbits, and game birds. Like big-game hunting Natives to the north and east, they made stone or bone weapon points that they mounted on sticks and used atlatls (spear or dart-throwing devices) to launch them at animals. In contrast to the points used by the big-game hunters, though, these ones were generally smaller and broader because the quarry was generally smaller. Sometime prior to 1000 CE, Numu hunters adopted bows and arrows to use for hunting. Numu men typically constructed early bows out of juniper, gluing sinews to the backs of the bows to improve their performance. They reportedly sometimes applied poisons such as rattlesnake venom and plant juices to the projectile points. Working individually or in small groups, hunters usually stalked and killed one animal at a time. Even on the rare occasions when men could kill multiple animals, Numu group mobility and the Basin climate rendered long-term meat preservation impractical.⁴⁴

Numu men also used snares and fiber nets to catch a wide variety of rodents, birds, reptiles, fish, wildcats, and coyotes. Women also help to hunt small game,

⁴³ Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 89, 223; Brewster, "Numu Views," 94; Fowler, "Subsistence," 69; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 52; Steward, "Native Cultures," 477, 481-484; Kowtko, *Nature and the Environment*, 18; George C. Frison, *Prehistoric Hunters of the High Plains* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 369; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 5; Kardiner, *Psychological Frontiers*, 48; Knack, "Dynamics," 148-151.

⁴⁴ George C. Frison, *Survival by Hunting: Prehistoric Human Predators and Animal Prey* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 202-203; Snow, "First Americans," 171; Fowler, "Subsistence," 79, 82; Kowtko, *Nature and the Environment*, 18; Steward, "Native Cultures," 483; Kelly, "Late Holocene," 28; Brewster, "Numu Views," 70.

particularly rabbits. Men and women used long nets to capture jackrabbits during their communal drives, and then they killed the animals that they caught with wooden clubs or stones. Cottontails, on the other hand, were more solitary and therefore easier to hunt with projectile weapons. Natives also used forked branches to snare rabbits hiding in holes by their long fur and then pull them out, or they simply flooded or smoked them out. Men sometimes obstructed game trails with logs or other barriers to compel animals to take a specific path into a natural barrier that functioned as a trap. They constructed more elaborate pronghorn, deer, and bighorn sheep corrals or pens out of rock, brush, and wood, with brush fences placed to channel animals into the usually circular enclosures. Men cooperated in driving the game into such traps, although some scholars speculate that they used dogs to assist them. Once trapped in a pen or corral, the hunters typically ran the game to exhaustion and then killed it with clubs. They also built brush enclosures to capture sage grouse, especially during the strutting season, when females tended to remain on the ground rather than fly. In lake, marsh, and riverine areas, such in the Humboldt River country, men employed duck decoys to lure waterfowl, and they used nets, weirs (stone or wooden traps), hooks, spears, and even bows and arrows to take fish.⁴⁵

Once hunters killed their game and took it into their camp, women did the rest of the work. Using chipped-flint knives and scrapers, they removed the meat and other usable parts of the carcass. Women then boiled much of the fresh meat in vessels containing fire-heated stones or broiled over an open pit fire, and then their families immediately consumed it. Women also dried small quantities of meat and sometimes

⁴⁵ Fowler, "Subsistence," 79, 82, 87-88; Frison, *Survival by Hunting*, 131-132, 162, 191, 193-194; Kelly, "Late Holocene," 29; Steward, "Native Cultures," 477, 482-483; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 5.

pounded berries, marrow, and fat into it for preservation. They generally used as much of an animal as possible, turning horns and bones into various tools and fashioning skins into clothing.⁴⁶

Basin Numu families based their day-to-day operations upon a well-tuned system of seasonal migrations. Indeed, in the vast, diverse Great Basin environment that had relatively scarce and scattered supplies of water and food, the Numu employed seasonal subsistence patterns adapted to the cyclical availability of key resources. Those patterns required a deep understanding of the land, its vegetation, and its animal inhabitants, as well as careful use of those resources. So, as anthropologist Julian H. Steward notes, the Great Basin “environmentally conditioned to a marked degree” human activities.⁴⁷ Naturally, the presence (or lack thereof) of known springs or streams exerted a major influence on human movements. Most of the time, the Basin Numu moved in small family-sized units from one location to another as they exhausted local food supplies and occupied particular areas during their optimal periods of production. Their resource use focused on low-quality but widely-available plant matter (mostly seeds, nuts, and roots), harvesting high-yield but relatively scarce animal meat to complement to their diet. So, the seasonal availability of desired foodstuffs combined with known climate patterns to influence these movements. Migrations were annually cyclical; Numu groups tended to return to particular sites each year, after they recovered from the previous year’s use.⁴⁸

Numu subsistence varied based on a group’s occupation of a particular area of the Basin, but a general migration cycle nevertheless emerged. During the winter months,

⁴⁶ Fowler, “Subsistence,” 82; Jennings, “Desert West,” 160-161; Steward, “Native Cultures,” 483.

⁴⁷ Steward, “Native Cultures,” 445.

⁴⁸ Fowler, “Subsistence”; Young and Bettinger, “Numic Migration,” 85-86; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 52; Steward, *Basin-Plateau*, 10; Waldo R. Wedel, *Prehistoric Man on the Great Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 252-253.

Numic-speaking subsistence units gathered in relatively large villages (perhaps 40 to 50 people) at the bases of the mountain ranges to subsist on stored food supplies and gather additional provisions when possible. Natives typically chose areas that sheltered them from the cold and wind, as well as provided them with adequate supplies of water and fuel, and usually remained at that place for the duration of the winter. Their food supplies, however, often ran out and the Natives therefore grew hungry before spring. Some scholars report that during times of great nutritional stress, the Basin Numu might engage in cannibalism, first targeting those who contributed the least to a group's subsistence. Such assertions, however, remain more speculative than factual.⁴⁹

With the exception of their winter settlements, Basin Numu likely relocated their camps frequently, probably remaining in most spots a week or less at a time. With the arrival of spring, they diffused into smaller groups as they moved to gather cool-season berries, roots, and vegetables. It was during the spring and fall that the lower valleys were most inhabitable as well as accommodating to their dietary needs. There, the men hunted antelope and, in the foothills, they pursued deer and bighorn sheep. Higher elevations were most accessible during the summer and fall (snow only gradually melted after winter ended), so Native hunters visited them to hunt bighorn sheep during that time. When they visited the valleys, men hunted pronghorn and entire families and even larger groups engaged in jackrabbit hunts. In the late summer and early fall, natives located in the southern portion of the Basin moved as small groups into higher-elevation mountain foothill areas to collect, process, and store piñon nuts. Also during the fall, groups

⁴⁹ Steward, *Basin-Plateau*, 13; Steward, "Native Cultures," 487; Kardiner, *Psychological Frontiers*, 47-48; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 8; Snow, "First Americans," 171; The Shoshone Woman and her Status in the Tribe, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

(especially those in areas lacking piñon nuts) gathered and stored grass seeds as well as edible roots that they found, mostly in the valleys.⁵⁰

That Basin Numu historically engaged in some level of environmental management further demonstrates that their subsistence methods were far from simple. Unfortunately, it is not clear when, precisely, Basin Numu groups began managing ecosystems. They, for instance, burned vegetation in order to renew plant growth and increase the nutritional value of that forage for game. The burning of grasses increased the natural yields of the important seed-bearing grasses upon which many Numu relied. Some may have also broadcasted (intentionally scattered) wild seeds, but it is unknown if the practice predated the period of Euro-American contact. They may have also pruned plants to remove dead portions and thereby foster renewed growth. They reportedly also watered or irrigated wild plants in order to keep them alive and productive. Although ethnographic sources rarely report who precisely completed such tasks, that foraging was women's work indicates that they directed any efforts to manage areas in which they gathered. Apparently, Basin Numu hunters also refrained from killing female game animals during seasons which they gave birth or cared for their young.⁵¹

That the Basin Numu did not concentrate on hunting big game and that they did not engage in agriculture helps to explain the image of the "miserable Digger." Indeed, although the contemporaneous Fremont and Anasazi cultures practiced horticulture, no evidence indicates that the Numu also did so. Their subsistence systems were strictly of the hunter-gatherer or forager type. That being said, the Numu did procure sustenance in

⁵⁰ Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 222-223; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 52; Kardiner, *Psychological Frontiers*, 48; Snow, "First Americans," 171.

⁵¹ Brewster, "Numu Views," 96; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 90-91, 224-225; Fowler, "Subsistence," 93-95.

environments that are not typically associated with them (in other words, non-desert lands). For instance, recent research suggests that the Basin Numu utilized the region's marshlands more than one might assume. These areas contained water-dwelling mammals, waterfowl, fish, bulrush seeds, roots, shoots, and cattail pollen, all of which the Natives used. Resource-rich swamps such as those of the Humboldt Sink, the Carson Sink, and Walker Lake in the western Basin may have permitted permanent or semi-permanent occupation; larger settlements might have also existed in those areas.⁵²

At a glance, Basin Numu social organization superficially indicates simplicity, but a closer look reveals flexibility, security, and pragmatism. Most of the year, Basin Numu living groups were highly mobile and only gathered in larger groups periodically. Native foragers understood that the Basin environment required them to live in "microbands" (small family or extended-family groups) typically comprised of twenty or fewer people; the land simply could not support large concentrations of people. Scholars estimate that on the eve of Columbus's arrival in the "New World," the harsher areas of the Great Basin supported a population density of less than 10 people per 40 square miles while the more hospitable regions supported perhaps 25 per 40 square miles. Areas in which resources were relatively dense, such as the piedmonts of the Wasatch and Sierra Nevada ranges, as well as the Humboldt River country, however, supported considerably more people and allowed the establishment of sedentary villages. Throughout much of the Basin, though, political and social development was relatively limited, for such things as social hierarchies, ranks, and men's societies apparently did not develop (although social organization was not as limited as Steward and other anthropologists asserted). Each

⁵² Kelly, "Late Holocene," 4, 14-18; Kowtko, *Nature and the Environment*, 18; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 223-224; Fowler, "Subsistence," 87-88.

microband tended to remain within a particular area, but group relocations were not uncommon. Few groups became rigidly territorial, although exceptions may have occurred near Death Valley and in the Reese River valley, where Shoshonean families later claimed piñon nut groves. Generally, microbands could pass through one another's foraging areas, and they typically met one another with hospitality rather than hostility.⁵³

A look at the most basic and most vital Basin Numu economic units – families – throws light on the intricacy of Numu social organization and the role of gender. A typical Basin Numu living unit might be comprised of a mother, a father, and their unmarried children, as well as any grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives. Basin Numu groups practiced both polyandry and polygyny, so a man might be married to multiple wives (usually sisters) and a woman might have multiple husbands (usually brothers). Since such families or extended families comprised Basin Numu microbands, marriage was the bedrock of group survival and the gendered division of labor provided the means of efficiently completing subsistence-related tasks. Marriage required that typically scattered and fairly isolated groups meet with one another every now and then so individuals of a sufficient age could find a partner. Through a well-balanced system of “complementarity,” Basin Numu men and women ensured their own survival as well as that of those who depended on them. Basin Numu groups were typically matrilineal, for married couples usually lived with the woman's family. This was flexible, however, as the distribution of resources might make it more practical for a young couple to live with the husband's family. On the other hand, Basin Numu groups were patrilineal, for individuals traced their descent through their father's side of the family. Finally, they

⁵³ Kowtko, *Nature and the Environment*, 17-18; Steward, *Basin-Plateau*, 2-3; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 221; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 52; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 4; Steward, “Native Cultures,” 449, 475, 493; Wedel, *Prehistoric Man*, 252-253; Alley, “Great Basin Numu,” 68-70.

traced their kinship bilaterally (through both their mother's and father's sides), completing a balanced system of social organization that reflected the Basin Numu's recognition of the importance of both men and women to group survival.⁵⁴

This system of social organization facilitated gender equality, for men and women had separate although complementary roles in society. Although men hunted game and defended their microbands from other groups, women gathered the primary food sources – plant matter – and controlled the distribution of all food and many material goods. Men made and owned their weapons and other tools, but women manufactured and controlled clothing, housing materials, and instruments used for food preparation and consumption. That both polygyny and polyandry existed among Basin Numu groups lends further credence to the idea of gender equality. Polyandry was an unusual practice which indicated that men did not necessarily see women as inferior members of society. Moreover, matrilocality pointed to greater autonomy and authority for women, for this system represented the fact that women secured the bulk of a group's food and controlled it. Matrilocal residence also indicated that a man did not have a significant role in the upbringing of his own children; his wife's family raised them.⁵⁵

The subject of population control also indicates the influence that Basin Numu women wielded. Fully aware of the fact that they inhabited a challenging environment

⁵⁴ Chuck Smith, "The Native People of North America: Great Basin Culture Area," *Native Peoples of North America: History and Culture*, Anthropology Department, Cabrillo College, http://www.cabrillo.edu/~crsmith/noamer_basin.html (accessed January 8, 2013); Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 11; Steward, "Native Cultures," 488; Knack, "Dynamics," 148-151; The Shoshone Woman and her Status in the Tribe, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁵⁵ Kowtko, *Nature and the Environment*, 17-18; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 11; Kardiner, *Psychological Frontiers*, 48-49; Steward, "Native Cultures," 488; Steward, *Basin-Plateau*, 2-3; Knack, "Dynamics," 148-151; The Shoshone Woman and her Status in the Tribe, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

that could not support exceptionally large groups, Basin Numu groups apparently used infanticide to deliberately limit their population sizes. In doing so, they kept their numbers in line with available food supplies, maintained their group's mobility, and eliminated weak newborns. No evidence specifically relating to the Basin Numu indicates that one gender or the other controlled this practice, but that mothers alone usually had the right to abandon or take the life of their offspring among other Native groups indicates that this was the case among the Numu as well. Curiously, several scholars indicate that the Basin Numu preferred female infanticide. This is perplexing, given that women were vital to any given microband's subsistence as gatherers, preparers, and caretakers. Women, on the other hand, were the most direct source of a group's reproduction, so controlling the number of women meant controlling future birth rates. Female infanticide was not common in Native North America. Inuit populations in Arctic serve as the most prominent example, although the Mariame of present-day southern Texas also reportedly practiced female infanticide. The common denominator of each of these cases is that each group inhabited a particularly harsh environment that simply did not have the resources to support large populations. Finally, perhaps Numu microbands valued male newborns over females because they needed warriors to defend them and facilitate their territorial migrations or expansion.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ While Basin Shoshone groups practiced infanticide at least as early as the seventeenth century, there is little indication of the temporal depth of the institution's use, or its use among other Basin peoples. Perdue, *Cherokee Women*, 33, 148; Richard A. Sattler, "Women's Status among the Muskogee and Cherokee," in *Women and Power in Native North America*, ed. Laura F. Klein and Lillian A. Ackerman, 214-229 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 220; Lee Guemple, "Gender in Inuit Society," in *Women and Power in Native North America*, ed. Laura F. Klein and Lillian A. Ackerman, 17-27 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 23; Vern L. Bullough, ed., *Encyclopedia of Birth Control* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 2001), 143, 184-187; Dan Flores, *The Natural West: Environmental History in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 58; Kardiner, *Psychological Frontiers*, 49, 83; Demitri Boris Shimkin, "Eastern Shoshone," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 11: Great Basin, edited by Warren L. D'Azevedo, 308-335 (Washington, D.C.:

That Basin Numu groups usually lived in microbands but occasionally gathered in larger groups demonstrates their flexibility and dynamism. Individual Numu subsistence units congregated in larger groups comprised of several families or more for a variety of purposes, depending upon which portion of the Basin they inhabited. In piñon-rich areas, for instance, Numu families would gather in the fall to harvest piñon nuts, to hold an important ceremony or celebration, or to establish winter settlements. In the north, microbands might congregate so women could dig camas or other roots together and their families could intermarry and trade. Individual men or small groups of them typically stalked pronghorn antelope, deer, and mountain sheep, but several families might conduct communal rabbit hunts and grasshopper drives. For the latter, a group of Natives surrounded an area encompassing several acres swarming with grasshoppers and then drove them toward the center, where the Natives had dug a hole in the ground. They usually drove the grasshoppers with basketry beaters or fire. Once the drive ended, the Natives ate the grasshoppers various ways; some preferred them boiled in a soup, others roasted them on sticks over a fire, and others mashed them into a paste and dried them in the sun or by a fire. Women saved some grasshoppers to mix them into their seed cakes.⁵⁷ Such communal events might have been relatively rare, but they were nevertheless important to the typically isolated Basin Numu groups.

Some scholars, such as Steward, assert that the Basin's scarce supplies of food hampered the development of Basin Numu cultures and religions, but some examples point to the contrary. For instance, later Basin Shoshone groups used shamanism to help

Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986), 330; T.N. Campbell, "Coahuitlecans and Their Neighbors," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 10: Southwest, edited by Alfonso Ortiz, 343-358 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983), 352.

⁵⁷ Fowler, "Subsistence," 91; Kowtko, *Nature and the Environment*, 17; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 5-6; Steward, "Native Cultures," 482; Alley, "Great Basin Numa," 80.

them procure game, such as when medicine men “charmed” pronghorn and thereby make them easier to hunt. They did so by visiting the herds, singing to them, and sometimes sleeping among them in order to keep them in place for the hunt. In fact, the perceived power of these medicine men was so great that Numu groups would sometimes not pursue pronghorn if one was not present. Such events drew family groups together in something of a religious communal drive characterized by song and ritual. Men later excluded women from such activities – such as among the Paiutes – but women’s continued involvement in similar Basin Shoshone hunts indicates that their participation was a tradition. Menstruating women, however, were confined to menstrual huts because it was believed that they would otherwise jeopardize the hunt. Basin Numu might have used similar shamanism to support some group deer hunts. In general, it appears that Numic-speakers respected and honored the plants and animals that served their needs with rituals, ceremonies, and prayers. Hunters sometimes left portions of animals, such as their eyes or skulls, in a tree or bush after a kill, or they buried them. Women said prayers and sometimes made offerings to the plant spirits to express gratitude for their bounty.⁵⁸

Early anthropologists claimed that Numic speakers had very few or no ceremonial traditions because of their small-group, transitory lifestyle, but that was not the case. Men largely developed and conducted Numu ceremonies – even ones that focused on seeds or plants – for their hunting and warring efforts were highly sporadic in intensity; women’s work was more routinely intensive, which limited the time that they could devote to community rituals. Some Numic-speaking groups held celebrations during the spring of each year to encourage the seeds to grow; additional celebrations sometimes followed in

⁵⁸ Brewster, “Numu Views,” 96; Fowler, “Subsistence,” 79, 95-97; Frison, *Survival by Hunting*, 131-132; George C. Frison, *Prehistoric Hunters*, 363; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 6; Steward, “Native Cultures,” 493.

the summer when the seeds began to ripen and then when it came time to harvest them in the fall. Fall harvest celebrations were important to piñon-focused groups because they gave them a rare opportunity to gather in large groups. When Basin Numu congregated to conduct communal rabbit hunts – often in the fall – they hunted during the day and danced at night. Scholars estimate that Numic groups were safely able to gather a few times each year, for about three to four days at a time; food supplies usually determined the meeting length. As many as 300 people gathered to participate in such an event, but attendance was fluid from year to year; the same family groups did not always gather. The Basin Numu had puberty ceremonies for both sexes, and these aimed to give individuals skills for their future labor. In particular, the Numu believed that such events would turn young men into excellent hunters and women into strong providers for the family units. Another example of Basin culture is the petroglyphs found in cave and shelter sites scattered throughout the region. Anthropologists have attributed some of these renderings to Basin Numu groups and they have concluded that at least some of them were ritual accompaniments to Native hunting activities.⁵⁹ It would appear, then, that their seemingly endless efforts to procure food supplies little stifled the development of culture among Basin Numu; in some ways, that quest encouraged it.

The homes that Basin Numu women constructed reflected their efficient approach to group survival. During the summer and other times of the year in which climate conditions allowed, women constructed temporary lean-tos and windbreaks out of brush.

⁵⁹ David Hurst Thomas, “Western Shoshone Ecology: Settlement Patterns and Beyond,” in *Great Basin Cultural Ecology: A Symposium*, edited by Don D. Fowler, 135-153 (Salt Lake City: Desert Research Institute Publications in the Social Sciences, 1972), 150; Steward, “Native Cultures,” 489-490; Kardiner, *Psychological Frontiers*, 47-49; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 13-16; Robert F. Heizer, “The Western Coast of North America,” in *Prehistoric Man in the New World*, edited by Jesse D. Jennings and Edward Norbeck, 117-148 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 125-126.

These dwellings provided shelter from the wind and sun during the hot daylight hours and insulation from the cold of night. Yet, they required little time to build, which was a boon to the busy women of mobile societies. During the winter, women built wickiups (cone-shaped dwellings made of lodge poles covered with sod, grass, brush, or animal skins) for their families. Whenever possible, they constructed these so that their inhabitants could live at least partially underground in order to better shield themselves from the cold. It also appears that the Numu also sometimes inhabited caves and rock formations. Similarly, the Basin Numu constructed small, temporary sweathouses that held perhaps three or four people and were heated with hot stones. Unlike the larger, more permanent fire-heated subterranean versions constructed in such places as Owens Valley, where people established more sedentary villages, these were used only for sweating (rather than as a men's clubhouse, as was the case in Owens Valley).⁶⁰

The industry of Basin Numu women also becomes evident when one examines how they clothed their families. Just as they made do with what the environment offered to build their homes, the same held true for clothing. For the warm months, women did not need to provide men with much more than a breechcloth while women donned animal skin skirts or fiber double aprons woven from sagebrush. Women reportedly went to great lengths to honor a taboo that anyone looking upon a nude woman would become blind; they apparently went so far as to fashion aprons from green scum found in stagnant watering holes. For the cold months, women crafted robes made out of beaver and rabbit furs. The rabbit-skin robes were particularly elaborate, for women sliced many rabbit skins into strips and then wove them into a single garment. Since it took approximately

⁶⁰ Kowtko, *Nature and the Environment*, 17, 73; Heizer, "Western Coast," 126; Kardiner, *Psychological Frontiers*, 48; Steward, "Native Cultures," 485.

forty rabbits to construct a single robe, they were not exactly common. Women also wove sage bark into robes and, in areas where they found many birds, they also made feather robes. They also crafted sage bark blankets and bags. Many Basin Numu went barefoot, but women sometimes made moccasins out of sage bark and, later, some adopted northern-style animal skin moccasins.⁶¹

So, although the Basin environment influenced Numu material culture in many ways, those Natives efficiently used the variety of resources that they found. Their transitory existence, of course, limited their accumulation of material goods, and it rendered the portability of their few goods of utmost importance. That women produced woven baskets and relatively little pottery illustrates this point. Part of the reason that Euro-Americans later saw Basin Numu women as downtrodden or ill-treated was because part of their gendered division of labor required that they carry the majority of a group's possessions in those baskets on their backs. On the other hand, one can make the argument that since women were in charge of transporting a group's possessions, they exerted considerable influence over microbands by determining what was and was not worth transporting. Basin Natives had dogs, but they apparently served more as pets than beasts of burden (although they may have been used for hunting purposes as well). Men sometimes used the baskets to transport goods, but they apparently preferred to use nets, buckskins, and ropes when they did carry goods. Ultimately, the storage of food in underground pits, the general reliance on temporary, easily abandoned structures, and the

⁶¹ Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 6-7; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 118; Jennings, "Desert West," 160-161; Steward, "Native Cultures," 454, 477, 486; The Shoshone Woman and her Status in the Tribe, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

use of minimal clothing points not to an impoverished people, but a practical one that endeavored to utilize the Basin environment as efficiently as possible.⁶²

That Numic-speaking peoples widely adopted material culture from Native visitors from neighboring regions highlights their pragmatism. For instance, they borrowed some of their hunting tools and methods from Natives inhabiting adjacent areas. Many of the snares, nets, and traps that they used had either a northern influence or originated in the Southwest, depending upon their particular style. Natives from the north undoubtedly introduced the bow and arrow, and those weapons began to gradually replace the spear-throwing atlatl before 1000 CE. Mortars, which women used to grind nuts, seeds, and beans, likely originated in California. Likewise, Basin Numu women also seem to have borrowed twined basketry from cultures of California and/or the Southwest, and they adopted metates from the latter. However, women generally adapted those often heavy and bulky stone tools to better fit their migratory lifeways by making them thinner and therefore more portable. The Fremont-Promontory peoples introduced northern-style moccasins to the Basin about 900 years ago. Although Numu groups actively borrowed material culture and subsistence strategies from other groups, it appears that they did not adopt related taboos and rituals.⁶³

Scholars generally depict Basin Numu microbands as scattered, isolated groups, but their involvement in interregional trade points to the importance of their interactions with the Natives of neighboring areas. Sometime before the time that Columbus reached the Americas, the Great Basin was the nexus of a vast trade network that spanned from

⁶² The Shoshone Woman and her Status in the Tribe, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Steward, "Native Cultures," 484; Kardiner, *Psychological Frontiers*, 48.

⁶³ Steward, "Native Cultures," 449, 450, 453-454, 482, 484; Snow, "First Americans," 171; Alley, "Great Basin Numu," 56-60.

the Columbia Plateau in the north to the Pueblo communities to the south. Contacts with the east did not appear to be significant, but Numu commerce extended through California to the Pacific coast. From the coast, they received marine shells and, from the Southwest, pottery and vegetal produce from the Pueblos. Their exchanges with the Plateau region mostly involved the acquisition of fish and shells. Obsidian was the primary commodity that the Numu offered; Natives fashioned obsidian into projectile points and other material goods. They found that desirable stone in parts of Nevada, Utah, and Idaho. Arizona and New Mexico also offered sources of obsidian, and some of that material filtered into the Basin as well. Scholars estimate that this obsidian-shell trade complex peaked between 2000 and 200 BCE, declined between 200 BCE and 750 CE, and then increased again from 750 to 1750 CE before dropping to its lowest level; the increase of the period of 750 to 1750 CE, of course, mirrors the “Lamb model” of Numu occupation of the Basin. Unfortunately, the true extent of such exchange networks remains unclear, but that vestiges of its surface in the archaeological record indicates that cross-regional interactions were important to the Numu.⁶⁴

A final point lends further credence to the assertion that Basin Numu groups were far more complex than the “miserable Digger” image suggests. Although many Numu groups spread throughout the Great Basin by about 1400 CE and they exhibited a fundamentally similar foraging culture, there were significant differences that distinguished them based upon their specific location. Indeed, the gradual diffusion of

⁶⁴ Timothy G. Baugh and Jonathan E. Ericson, *Prehistoric Exchange Systems in North America* (New York: Plenum Press, 1994), 245; Jerry R. Galm, “Prehistoric Trade and Exchange in the Interior Plateau of Northwestern North America,” in *Prehistoric Exchange Systems in North America*, edited by Timothy G. Baugh and Jonathan E. Ericson, 275-305 (New York: Plenum Press, 1994), 296; Sydney H. Ball, “The Mining of Gems and Ornamental Stones by American Indians,” *Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin*, No. 128, Anthropological Papers, No. 13 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941), 1-77: 52-55; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 52-53; Kelly, “Late Holocene,” 18-19; Alley, “Great Basin Numa,” 56-60.

Numic-speaking peoples throughout the Basin took those peoples into areas that afforded access to a variety of resources which produced some diversity in terms of localized subsistence systems. For instance, Numu groups in the southern Basin focused more on piñon nut processing while their relatives to the north used more camas, yampas, and other roots. Moreover, while most Basin Numu groups largely occupied areas of significant aridity and inhabited lands that did not exactly teem with food supplies, there were exceptions. Some portions of the region were simply more resource-rich than others. Much of that had to do with a given place's proximity to other regions and their respective ecosystems.

By 1300 CE, for instance, Numic-speaking peoples inhabited the northern Basin, occupying parts of what is now southern Idaho. Unlike Numic speakers inhabiting, say, the southwestern Basin that focused largely on piñon nut-harvesting, they benefitted from their position on the fringe of the Great Basin and Columbia Plateau ecosystems. Living and traveling in clusters of small family bands, they hunted deer, and pronghorn antelope, as well as the bison that inhabited the Snake River plain. They also benefitted from living in the southern reaches of the Columbia River drainage, for they had access to some excellent fishing waters; the tributaries of the Columbia provided them with ample supplies of salmon. Yet, like their relatives elsewhere, they gathered a variety of roots, seeds, herbs, and berries. The availability of bison and salmon, however, provided them with a more varied subsistence base. Fall bison hunts and spring salmon-fishing rendered them considerably more reliant on animal foods than other Basin Numu groups. Ultimately, living in this distinct environment and interacting with Columbian Plateau Natives molded northern Numu groups into something of hybrid Basin-Plateau culture.

Thus, the diversification of the Basin Numu began even before Columbus encountered his “Indians” in the Caribbean. Such adaptations to myriad environments demonstrate the dynamism of pre-contact Native North America.⁶⁵

This diversification of Numu lifeways in the Great Basin laid the foundation for the eventual emergence of distinct Numic-speaking tribes. Indeed, Numu migrations and adaptations to local ecosystems set the gears in motion for the Shoshone, Ute, Paiute, Bannock, and Comanche to later emerge. So, well before Europeans even “discovered” the New World in 1492 and subsequently initiated the “Columbian Exchange,” the Numic-speaking peoples who originated in the southern Sierra Nevada had a dynamic past. An analysis of that history demonstrates the insulting inaccuracies of the common “Digger” image; Basin Numu cultures were more diverse and complex than is generally assumed.

Carrying their tradition of foraging from the deserts and mountains of what is now southern California into the comparatively resource-rich Great Basin, Numu groups used familiar resources, utilized new ones, and adopted new technologies that they adapted to their needs. It appears that a gendered division of labor which established complementary gender roles was crucial to Basin Numu microband survival in what was a challenging environment. This system, in which women gathered plant foods that were paramount to group subsistence, gave women considerable responsibility, influence, and status. Over

⁶⁵ Murphy and Murphy, “Northern Shoshone and Bannock,” 285. Steward, *Basin-Plateau*, 10-11; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 3; Steward, “Native Cultures,” 475; Shimkin, “Eastern Shoshone,” 308; Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 84; Merle W. Wells, “Introduction,” in Brigham D. Madsen, *The Northern Shoshoni* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton, 1979), 17-18; Deward E. Walker Jr., *American Indians of Idaho* (Moscow, ID: University of Idaho Press, 1973), 113.

time, moreover, influxes of different indigenous groups left a lasting impact on the Natives and their environments. Likewise, changing climate conditions influenced Basin Numu subsistence. In particular, it appears that the great drought of the interior West during the thirteenth century played a major role in Numic expansion throughout the Great Basin. Although the post-1000 CE Numic migration may have not been the original Numic expansion, it is clear that in the wake of that great drought Numic-speaking groups began pushing out of the Basin into neighboring regions. In particular, by about 1500 CE the Numu began to enter the archaeological records of the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains. The next chapter examines Numu adaptations to those new environments, devoting special attention to the emergence of the Shoshone.

CHAPTER 2
EXPANDING NORTH AND EAST OF THE “LAND BEYOND THE SETTING SUN”:
PEDESTRIAN SHOSHONE MIGRATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS, 1500-1690

Before the end of the fifteenth century, Numic-speaking peoples entered areas adjacent to the Great Basin. Some of the new environments that they encountered were remarkably similar to those of the Basin, but others were quite different. So, just as Basin Numu lifeways were a composite development – emerging from the interplay between culture, environment, and external stimuli – a similar array of forces continued to reshape Numu culture beyond the Basin. In fact, it was with this diffusion beyond the Basin that the Numu began to splinter into smaller groups that later became distinct geopolitical tribal entities. So, with their movement into the present-day states of Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana, the people whose descendants became known as the Eastern Shoshone began to emerge.

The following pages continue the story of Eastern Shoshone ethnogenesis, tracing how Numic speakers occupied lands in the Rocky Mountains, Great Plains, and Columbia Plateau between 1500 and 1690. As the Numu migrated into those areas, ongoing processes of ecological adaptation and cultural amalgamation continued. The upshot was that parts of their Basin heritage persisted even as the migrants adapted to the exigencies of new environments. Of particular importance was that many migrating Numu began to move away from their forager traditions, for they made bison hunting a key means of subsistence. Nevertheless, even as some of these early Shoshone groups focused on bison hunting, they continued to gather plant foods, as well as trap and hunt small game species. This shift in emphasis had gendered implications, for it placed greater importance on men’s work while making some of women’s work more

supplementary than crucial to group survival. Yet, since women continued to perform a multitude of tasks that were integral to Shoshone subsistence, they still wielded considerable influence and therefore did not lose status. Moreover, just as climate events figured into Great Basin Numu history, they also influenced Numu expansion. In fact, a major climate trend – the Little Ice Age – appears to have exerted a “push-pull” effect on Numic-speaking peoples, giving them reason to leave the Basin while providing them with more favorable conditions elsewhere.

Numu adaptations to areas north and east of the Great Basin during the period of approximately 1500 to 1690 CE remain largely an enigma to scholars. Many, such as anthropologist Åke Hultkrantz, recognize that, “[t]he Shoshoni were representatives of a Great Basin and (partly) Plateau culture which was successively adapted to the ecology of the Plains.”¹ The story of pre-horse Numu adaptations to the Great Plains and other areas remains an unfortunately overlooked period of Shoshone history and, when discussed, that subject receives a cursory treatment at best. This neglect masks the depth and complexity of the Shoshone presence on the grasslands, for Plains-oriented Numu cultures developed prior to the re-introduction of horses to that portion of the North American West. This chapter endeavors to fill that historiographical niche by pulling together information scattered throughout many ethnographic and historical works. In doing so, the following pages demonstrate how inherited Numu culture gradually evolved in lands beyond the Basin. Subsistence systems, gendered divisions of labor, and material culture all transformed as Numic-speaking peoples adapted to new environments.

¹ Åke Hultkrantz, “Shoshoni Indians on the Plains: An Appraisal of the Documentary Evidence,” *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 93 (1968), 49-72: 72.

When the Numu migrated into the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains, they left a lasting impact on those regions. Early anthropologists such as Robert H. Lowie downplayed the Shoshone presence on Plains (both before and after the arrival of the horse), as well as the region's influence on their cultural development. Subsequent scholarship, however, revealed that their presence to the east was considerable, as were related cultural transformations.² Yet, many such studies examine Shoshone history on the Plains after they acquired horses and reintroduced them to the northern grasslands.³ This chapter challenges such interpretations, arguing that pedestrian Numu groups established a considerable presence on the Great Plains prior to acquiring mounts. In fact, the roots of Shoshone military might lie in the pedestrian era. Yet, while military patterns developed in the Great Basin possibly enabled the Numu to occupy a portion of the northwestern Plains prior to the eighteenth century (as Mark Q. Sutton hypothesizes), this chapter asserts that Numu adaptations to the Plains environment, particularly their subsistence patterns and related social organization systems, also played major roles.⁴ Scholars generally neglect the importance of bison to Native cultures before the equestrian era. As the Numu case demonstrates, however, bison drew Natives to the Plains earlier than is generally assumed. A clearly formidable style of Numu warfare emerged on the Great Plains prior to the arrival of the horse and that, combined with a

² Robert H. Lowie, "The Northern Shoshone," in *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, vol. 2, part 2, 165-306 (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1909), 173.

³ The seminal work here is that of Frank Raymond Secoy, which holds that Shoshone expansion onto the Great Plains followed their acquisition of horses. See Frank Raymond Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns of the Great Plains Indians (17th Century through Early 19th Century)* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953, 1992), 33. Also see Anthony R. McGinnis, *Counting Coup and Cutting Horses: Intertribal Warfare on the Northern Plains, 1738-1889* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990, 2012), 8.

⁴ Mark Q. Sutton, "Warfare and Expansion: An Ethnohistoric Perspective on the Numic Spread," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 8, 1 (1986): 65-82.

flexible, diversified subsistence system, allowed those early Shoshones to spread rapidly throughout the western portions of the central and northern Plains. Their gendered divisions of labor based upon “complementarity” were crucial to this development, for although bison hunting became central to Plains Shoshone subsistence, women’s work supported families and groups, thereby enabling men to go to war.

Ultimately, the following pages highlight both the continuities and the transformations in Numu subsistence and culture as they expanded beyond the Basin. This transitional period of approximately 1500 to 1690 is important, because it allows us to make connections between the Basin Numu and the equestrian Eastern Shoshone who entered the historical record in the eighteenth century. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates the high level of adaptability exhibited by pedestrian Shoshones, for they successfully expanded beyond the Basin by blending traditional and new practices. That this success began before the acquisition of horses suggests that this crucial period of two centuries merits far more attention than the existing literature gives it.

A little more than 500 years ago, Numic-speaking groups migrated into areas adjacent to the Great Basin in what became Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana. Some scholars assert that these early Shoshones first entered the Rocky Mountains, Columbia Plateau, and western Great Plains between 2000 and 3000 years ago, a view that falls in line with the *in situ* arguments discussed in the previous chapter. Adherents base that hypothesis on archaeological evidence which also suggests an early Numu occupation of the Rockies and Plains. Other scholars, using linguistic models and more recent archaeological evidence that more clearly relates to the Shoshone (such as

their distinctive pottery, tri-notched arrow points, and carved steatite vessels), argue for a circa 1500 CE migration. Regardless of which argument is more accurate (and we may never know for sure), it is clear that by 1500 CE at the latest, many Basin Numu had begun migrating north and east, where their lifeways evolved in new environments. Yet, while many of the Shoshones' ancestors expanded well beyond their Basin homelands during this time, others remained behind. Their descendants eventually became known as the Paiute, Western Shoshone, and others, and they continued to focus on gathering wild seeds and other plant foods to survive.⁵

Archaeological evidence, though, suggests that long before this migration – approximately 9500 years ago – Great Basin peoples migrated into the Rockies. They used some basic stone tools, including seed and other plant matter-grinding implements, and they combined their foraging efforts with small-game hunting to develop a hunter-gatherer “Mountain Tradition.” This culture lasted some 5000 years (until about 2500 CE) in present-day Montana and Wyoming, while to the south it persisted until about 1300 CE. It is not clear if Numu groups that might have been migrating beyond the Basin during the latter time displaced those earlier occupants or absorbed them.⁶

⁵ Sally T. Greiser, “Late Prehistoric Cultures on the Montana Plains,” in *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500: The Archaeological Past of Historic Groups*, edited by Karl H. Schlesier, 34-55 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 49; Colin G. Calloway, “Snake Frontiers: The Eastern Shoshones in the Eighteenth Century,” *Annals of Wyoming* 63, 3 (Summer 1991), 82-92: 84; Hultkrantz, “Shoshoni Indians on the Plains,” 58-59, 70; Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 21; Henry E. Stamm, IV, *People of the Wind River: The Eastern Shoshones, 1825-1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 3; Virginia Cole Trenholm and Maurine Carley, *The Shoshonis: Sentinels of the Rockies* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 17; Julian H. Steward, “Native Cultures of the Intermontane,” *Essays in Historical Anthropology of North America* (1940), 445-502: 454, 478-481; John Washakie, interview by author, Fort Washakie, WY, September 11, 2012; S. J. Fox, “Cultural Ecological Patterns of the Eastern Shoshone,” *Tebiya* 19 (1976), 1-8: 6.

⁶ Colin G. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 59.

Scholars place great emphasis on how the environment and cultures of the Great Plains influenced those who migrated to the region (especially during the equestrian era), but they devote less attention to the importance of those migrants to Plains history. In fact, Basin-type foragers (rather than big-game hunters) dominated the western Plains at various times. Some 10,500 years ago, Plains subsistence strategies shifted from broad-spectrum big-game hunting to more specialized bison-hunting. This was possible because in the wake of the Late Pleistocene extinctions, bison (*bison bison*, as opposed to its larger relatives) expanded throughout the grasslands and diversified to become short-grass feeders, thereby succeeding where larger species failed. But about 7000 years ago, during the Altithermal, bison declined in numbers and their range diminished as lower precipitation and higher temperatures reduced their forage. Consequently, small, scattered hunter-gatherer groups akin to those of the Great Basin replaced bison-hunting cultures, and their subsistence systems characterized western Plains cultures for the next several millennia. These peoples were possibly refugees from the Basin, where the Alithermal rendered an already difficult environment even harsher. Archaeological sites in present-day Wyoming and Montana dating to about 2000 BCE uncovered plant-milling stones and bone refuse indicating that the Natives relied more on plants and small game such as rodents, reptiles, and insects than large mammals. The Altithermal ended in approximately 2500 BCE, but it was not until about 500 CE that big-game hunting again defined western Plains cultures. The return of cooler temperatures and greater rainfall to the grasslands fostered the gradual recovery of large herbivores, particularly the bison, and again made their pursuit a feasible option for humans. Between this time and a drought that began during the thirteenth century, conditions in the Basin were relatively

mild and perhaps some of the foragers returned there. Others likely remained in the Rockies and on the Plains, reorienting their subsistence toward the growing bison herds.⁷

A series of climate events immediately preceded the Numu expansion beyond the Great Basin. Just as the Little Climatic Optimum affected the Basin beginning in the thirteenth century, it also affected the Great Plains.⁸ Drought conditions again caused a sharp decline in the bison population and compelled many Natives to withdraw to the margins of the grasslands and use the Plains only for seasonal hunts. The onset of the Little Ice Age in the 1300s, however, brought five centuries of more temperate conditions to much of the Western Hemisphere. As glaciers and ice caps expanded, including those of the Rocky Mountains, cooler temperatures and increased precipitation followed the previous warm and dry period. Scholars observe that the Little Ice Age also brought greater variations in annual precipitation to the Plains, but also that those fluctuations were more intense on the southern Plains than the northern. On the northwestern Plains in particular, annual precipitation generally increased. The Black Hills and the surrounding grasslands perhaps benefitted the most from the onset of the Little Ice Age, and it was in that area that Numic-speaking peoples made a strong push onto the Great Plains.⁹

⁷ Brian M. Fagan, *Ancient North America: The Archaeology of a Continent* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 97, 104-105; E.C. Pielou, *After the Ice Age: The Return of Life to Glaciated North America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 296; Alfred L. Kroeber, *Cultural and Natural Areas of Native North America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939), 49-50; Waldo R. Wedel, "The Great Plains," in *Prehistoric Man in the New World*, edited by Jesse D. Jennings and Edward Norbeck, 193-220 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 201, 214; Waldo R. Wedel, *Central Plains Prehistory: Holocene Environments and Culture Change in the Republican River Basin* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 72-73, 214; Waldo R. Wedel, *Prehistoric Man on the Great Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 249-251, 254-255, 282-283; Hultkrantz, "Shoshoni Indians on the Plains," 59.

⁸ For the Little Climatic Optimum, see previous chapter, pages 36-37.

⁹ Pielou, *After the Ice Age*, 305, 308-309; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 4; Some scholars have compared Little Ice Age climate conditions on the Great Plains to modern climate conditions, concluding that winters were colder than they are now while summers were comparable. This, however, fails to consider conditions *before* the Little Ice Age. Douglas B. Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization on the Great Plains* (New York: Plenum Press, 1988), 67-72.

The Little Ice Age apparently had a “push-pull” effect on Numu groups, simultaneously pushing them from the Basin and pulling them to the Plains. The Little Ice Age made vast areas that Native societies had abandoned during the previous hot and dry period again inhabitable. Of particular importance was that the Little Ice Age gradually rejuvenated the grasslands of the Great Plains, enhancing both the quantity and quality of forage, thereby increasing its carrying capacity. Conditions thus improved for big game such as the bison, so their populations grew and they congregated in larger herds. Bison also settled into more predictable migration patterns on the northern Plains and, moreover, they often remained within smaller ranges than before as vegetation became considerably richer and denser (especially in the Black Hills region). With conditions for human hunters thus improved, the Numu were among the many Native groups who increasingly oriented their economies toward the Plains. On the other hand, some evidence suggests that the Little Ice Age proved detrimental to the Great Basin; vegetation might have suffered and already limited game populations perhaps declined as droughts continued to visit the Basin. If this was indeed the case, it likely encouraged Numic-speaking peoples to seek subsistence elsewhere.¹⁰

Once Numu groups reached the Rocky Mountains by about 1500, they, like their Basin predecessors before them, spread out to capitalize on the relative bounty of those eastern lands. As the Little Ice Age revitalized the Plains, the Numu occupied the valleys and mountains of Wyoming, Colorado, and Montana while some used the western edges

¹⁰ Peter D. deMenocal, “Cultural Responses to Climate Change during the Late Holocene,” *Science*, New Series, 292 (Apr. 27, 2001), 667-673: 668; Reid A. Bryson and Thomas J. Murray, *Climates of Hunger: Mankind and the World’s Changing Weather* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 71-88; Pielou, *After the Ice Age*, 308-309. Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 4; Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization*, 72-84; Dan Flores, *The Natural West: Environmental History in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 56.

of the Plains at least as far east as the North Platte River. It is unclear when exactly Numu groups first occupied the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, but it appears that some did so about 500 years ago. Other Numu groups moved into the Salmon River country of present-day Idaho sometime between 1200 CE and 1600 CE. The Numic-speaking peoples who became known as Shoshone and Ute established roots in much of Utah and Colorado by the sixteenth century. Some scholars speculate that the migrating Numu were, in part, able to expand and efficiently exploit dry areas such as the high Plains because they carried their traditional basketry jugs that allowed them to carry water over vast stretches of land that lacked readily available water sources.¹¹

Most of the Numu who headed east did not simply abandon the Great Basin. Rather, what initially emerged was an annual migration cycle in which they spent much of the year in the mountains and valleys of the Basin, but for the winters traveled through South Pass (in what late became southwestern Wyoming) to the eastern side of the Rockies. Indeed, the Wyoming Basin served as something of a natural corridor that connected the Great Basin and the Great Plains, providing Natives with relatively easy

¹¹ John Washakie, interview by author, Fort Washakie, WY, September 11, 2012; Åke Hultkrantz, "The Indians in Yellowstone Park," in *Shoshone Indians*, edited by Carling I. Malouf and Åke Hultkrantz, 217-250 (New York: Garland, 1974), 231-233; Åke Hultkrantz, "The Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area," in *Shoshone Indians*, edited by Carling I. Malouf and Åke Hultkrantz, 178-217 (New York: Garland, 1974), 184; Philip Duke and Michael Clayton Wilson, "Cultures of the Mountains and Plains: From the Selkirk Mountains to the Bitterroot Range," in *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500: The Archaeological Past of Historic Groups*, edited by Karl H. Schlesier, 56-70 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 69; Sutton, "Warfare and Expansion," 76-77; Greiser, "Late Prehistoric Cultures," 55; Calloway, "Snake Frontiers," 84; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 4; Richard Adams, "The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, Soapstone Bowls, and the Mountain Shoshone," *World Archaeology* 38, 3 (2006), 528-546: 532; Joel C. Janetski, *The Indians of Yellowstone Park* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 33; Pielou, *After the Ice Age*, 305, 308-309; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 17-18; Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization*, 88-89; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 133; Lowie, "Northern Shoshone," 171; Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 84; Karl H. Schlesier, "Commentary: A History of Ethnic Groups in the Great Plains, A.D. 150-1500," in *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500: The Archaeological Past of Historic Groups*, edited by Karl H. Schlesier, 308-383 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 329; Fox, "Cultural Ecological," 6.

passage through the Rocky Mountains. In the Rocky Mountain-Great Plains ecological borderland, they found relative shelter from the cold, as well as plentiful supplies of bison, elk, and other big game foraging in their annual wintering grounds. In doing so, early Shoshones capitalized on their position at the meeting ground of distinct ecosystems that were each rich in their own way. As one historian writes, they produced a “flourishing and eclectic culture that belies the traditional image of the brutal, impoverished existence of Basin peoples.”¹² Changing climate patterns that altered the floral and faunal complexion of the land – namely the Little Ice Age – made this development possible.

As they migrated beyond the Great Basin, the Numu found some areas that resembled their Basin homelands. That corridor that connected the Great Basin and Great Plains – the Wyoming Basin – presented the Numu with a series of basins and mountain ranges that in many ways resembled those to the west. Climatologists largely define these basins – the Green River, Big Horn, Wind River, Red Desert, Jackson Hole, and Yellowstone basins – as either “cold desert” or “dry cold steppe” regions. These areas were arid or semiarid, with high summer temperatures and low winter temperatures. Rugged mountain ranges separated areas of open plains, and climatologists generally classify these as cooler and wetter “taigas.” Western Wyoming, then, presented migrating Numu with some environments similar to those of their Basin homelands; semidesert sagebrush or grass-covered plains interspersed with alpine mountain ranges and their resource-rich foothills characterized western Wyoming.¹³

¹² Hämmäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 22 (quotation), 21; Pielou, *After the Ice Age*, 305, 308-309; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 17-18; Fox, “Cultural Ecological,” 2.

¹³ This discussion is based on Shimkin’s treatment of C.W. Thornthwaite’s and R.J. Russell’s largely coincidental earlier maps. “Cold desert” is defined as an area with mean January temperatures

After the Numu began moving into the Wyoming Basin between 1300 and 1500 CE, several of those basins became central to Shoshone history. The Green River basin, west of the Continental Divide and the closest of the Wyoming basins to the Great Basin itself, received perhaps fifteen inches of precipitation annually and had a largely barren surface featuring some sagebrush, desert shrubs, and cacti. Unlike the Great Basin, it supported a significant number of large game animals, particularly bison and pronghorn. Numu hunting activities in the area also included communal jackrabbit drives. To the east, the Wind River country, although physiographically classified as part of the Rockies, was vegetationally similar to the Great Basin; it was a sagebrush country. Largely comprised of open plains, this area lay among the outlying broken mountain ranges of the Rockies, and drained through the Big Horn, Powder, and North Platte River systems into the Missouri River. The lower altitudes of the Wind River area were semiarid, but because of the region's greater altitude it was generally not as dry as the Green River or Big Horn basins. Here, Natives found bison, pronghorn, small mammals, berries, and waterways what teemed with fish. Ecologists classify the Big Horn Basin, to the north, as a "cold desert," unlike the Green River and Wind River basins, both of which they classify as "dry cold steppe" regions. Several major mountain ranges, including the Big Horns on the east and the Absarokas on the west, border this area, which received an average of just six inches of precipitation per year. It was nevertheless the home of small mammals, deer, pronghorn, and bison, while the neighboring mountain areas provided access to higher-elevation species such as bighorn sheep and elk.

below freezing and dry climate conditions. "Dry cold steppe" is defined as an area that has mean January temperatures below freezing and is still dry, but with greater humidity than desert. "Taigas" are also cold, but wetter than the steppe areas. Demitri Boris Shimkin, "Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography," *University of California Anthropological Records* 5, 4 (1947), 245-288: 259-262. Also see Wedel, *Prehistoric Man*, 241, 289; Fox, "Cultural Ecological," 2.

Mountainous areas adjacent to the Green River and Wind River valleys provided were also home to elk and bighorn sheep.¹⁴

Despite some climatic and geographical similarities to the Great Basin, the Wyoming Basin environment offered early Shoshones different resource bases to subsist upon. In particular, the relative abundance of the large game available in the Wyoming Basin allowed them to expand their hunting practices. That area, moreover, placed early Shoshones reasonably close to the game-rich western Plains, which made it attractive to people who wanted to blend the comfort of a familiar forager lifeway with the benefits of seasonal bison hunts. The Wind River Valley in particular afforded convenient access to the bison herds that grazed on the grasslands of eastern Wyoming. The Big Horn Basin, cradled between the Big Horn Mountains and the area that one day became Yellowstone National Park, provided Shoshones with bountiful supplies of bighorn sheep, elk, deer, moose, and other game species. Some groups apparently began to live year-round in such high-altitude areas, but others were temporary visitors who went when winter snows melted and permitted access to the game-rich upper Yellowstone region. Traversing the mixed scrubland-grassland plains that extended north and east out of north-central and

¹⁴ John Washakie, interview by author, Fort Washakie, WY, September 11, 2012; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demetri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 131; Merritt Cary, *Life Zone Investigations in Wyoming*, North American Fauna no. 42. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), 13-14, 17-19, 21-24; O.E. Baker, *A Graphic Summary of Physical Features and Land Utilization in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1937), 10; George C. Frison, *Prehistoric Hunters of the High Plains*, 2nd ed. (San Diego: Academic Press, 1978, 1991), 275-276; Shimkin, "Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography", 256, 271-278; Kroeber, *Natural and Cultural Areas*, 80, 82; Lawrence M. Woods, *Wyoming's Big Horn Basin to 1901: A Late Frontier* (Spokane, WA: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1997), 10; Demetri B. Shimkin, "Eastern Shoshone," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 11: Great Basin, edited by Warren L. d'Azevedo, 308-335 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986), 316-317; Wedel, *Prehistoric Man*, 240; Fox, "Cultural Ecological," 3; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 19-20.

northeastern Wyoming into present-day Montana and South Dakota, respectively, the Numu found additional hunting grounds.¹⁵

Early Shoshone adaptations to these Wyoming Basin environments and their resources further diversified their subsistence systems while at the same time skewing them toward big-game hunting. Bison became the single most important resource upon which many eastern Numu groups depended, but elk and fish also comprised much of their diets. The waterways of western Wyoming teemed with such species as cutthroat trout, grayling, and whitefish. Shoshones primarily harvested these in the spring, when other food supplies were in short supply. In upland valleys and forested areas, especially the mountains of the western portion of the future state, large elk herds attracted Shoshone hunters. Other mammals, such as the white-tailed deer, mule deer, moose, beaver, rabbits, squirrels, and groundhogs also provided sources of protein. Sage grouse and pronghorn were numerous in the drier, lower-elevation plains and semi-deserts. In the Green River area, Numic-speaking groups also reportedly added lampreys, ants, locusts, crickets, and owls to their diverse diets. Foraging for vegetal foods became a supplementary source of nutrition, but women still gathered a variety of roots, berries, and green plants. In the late summer and fall, they picked strawberries, rose berries, currants, hawthorns, and gooseberries. In the spring and fall, they dug up camas, yampas, and bitterroots. Seeds, once a staple of many Basin Numu diets, became less important; thistle and sunflower seeds were the only seeds of significance. Some Shoshone groups in the Green River valley had access to piñon nuts, but those elsewhere in the Wyoming

¹⁵ Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Shimkin, "Eastern Shoshone," 317; Shimkin, "Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography," 265-266; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 41; Susan S. Hughes, "The Sheepeater Myth of Northwestern Wyoming," *The Plains Anthropologist* 45, 171 (Feb., 2000): 63-83.

Basin did not. Plant matter, however, remained important for medicinal purposes. For instance, Shoshones used wild geraniums to remedy stomach ulcers, selfheal to sharpen eyesight, and snowberry tea to help mothers recover from childbirth. So, in general, despite a turn toward big-game hunting, early Shoshone subsistence remained broad-based. This is important, for this expanded diet probably allowed Shoshone population numbers to grow.¹⁶

The Numu groups that pushed further east and entered the Great Plains became even more oriented toward bison-hunting. Although Shoshone groups apparently did not permanently occupy the western Plains prior to 1600, it appears that many did so afterward. The Little Ice Age only gradually revitalized the grasslands, so it took time for flora and fauna to recover from the prolonged dry period that preceded it. With the plains rejuvenated, intensive bison-hunting again became a dependable means of subsistence. Pre-horse bison-hunting required careful orchestration among large groups of well-organized pedestrians to surround groups of bison and then drive them off a cliff (“jump”) or into a man-made corral or a natural trap of some sort (usually some sort of ravine or canyon, or an area covered with deep snow or thin ice). Shadowing the bison herds on foot, early Shoshones used dogs outfitted with packs to help transport their goods; they seemingly adopted this practice from other Plains peoples. Pedestrian bison-hunting, of course, demanded that Natives become familiar with the lay of the land and the habits of the bison. The availability of the bison varied with the seasons, for those animals had migration patterns that made their presence “boom” or “bust” on the western

¹⁶ Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography,” 268-269, 271-278; Shimkin, “Eastern Shoshone,” 316-317; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 83-84; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 27-28.

Plains. Pedestrian Shoshone groups simply could not rely upon them year-round, which made continued foraging efforts essential to their survival.¹⁷

Indeed, this increasing focus on the bison herds for subsistence came with a price. Like other bison-hunting groups, Shoshones found that the ungulate's presence in a given place at a given time was never a certainty. So, while bison tended to follow fairly predictable seasonal migration patterns, those grazing animals sometimes deviated from them based upon climate variations such as fluctuations in precipitation that affected the nutritional value of forage in a particular area. Moreover, the hunting activities of other Natives could drive bison away from a group preparing to begin their own hunt. In response to seasonal climate patterns that affected the grasslands, bison congregated during wetter, more vegetationally-rich times of the year and diffused into smaller groups as forage became sparser during drier times. Shoshone hunting groups generally mirrored the actions of their prey, grouping together or splitting up as was necessary. The subsistence activities of Plains Shoshones were therefore contingent upon the condition of the bison's range at a given time. As Bamforth convincingly argues, bison herd densities on the grasslands related not to the total annual forage production, but to the carrying capacity during the leanest period of the year.¹⁸

¹⁷ George C. Frison, *Survival by Hunting: Prehistoric Human Predators and Animal Prey* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 62-120; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 97-102; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 22; Shimkin, "Eastern Shoshone," 309; Lowie, "Northern Shoshone," 184-185, 187-188; John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 9-15; Calloway, "Snake Frontiers," 85; Robert H. Lowie, "Notes on Shoshone Ethnography," *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* vol. 20, pt. 3, 185-314 (New York: American Museum Press, 1924), 199, 215-216.

¹⁸ Douglas B. Bamforth "Historical Documents and Bison Ecology on the Great Plains," *Plains Anthropologist* 32 (Feb., 1987), 1-16: 3-4; Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization*, 53-84; Lauren Brown, *Grasslands* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 50; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 114; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 19, 37-54.

The far northwestern area of the Plains (encompassing the grasslands of present-day Montana and Alberta, between the Yellowstone River on the south and the North Saskatchewan to the north) was an attractive region to bison-hunting peoples. The region was generally arid, with the high Plains along the eastern foot of the Rockies rarely receiving more than fifteen inches of precipitation per year. However, its unique mixture of warm and cool-season grasses supported bison and other game species better than did the shortgrass plains to the south. Moreover, many wide valley bottoms and depressions provided bison with cover from the elements, while riparian areas supplied much-needed winter forage. Small ranges of hills lay scattered across the Plains, affording shelter for humans and animals alike. The northwestern Plains supported extraordinarily large bison herds, which were perhaps the largest in all of the Great Plains, and this fact apparently encouraged Numic-speaking groups to expand north along the eastern foot of the Rocky Mountains. Archaeologists have discovered many bison jumps throughout the region, especially in the Missouri, upper Bow, and Oldman River basins. That the area contained a reasonable number of water sources, as well as shelter and supplies of wood, also made the area attractive to Natives. The Numu left evidence of their presence in such places as along the Milk River in what is now southern Alberta, where scholars have found rock art depicting pedestrian shield-bearing warriors. Some archaeologists attribute them to early Shoshones, for similar pictographs remain on rock ledges and canyon walls throughout lands that were once Numu territory: in Wyoming and Montana, as well as in Colorado and Utah. Some scholars dispute the origins of those rock art renderings, but archaeologists have found further evidence supporting the notion of a northward Numu

push, particularly in the form of distinctive Shoshone-style tri-notched obsidian arrowheads and pottery as far north as the Milk River.¹⁹

Even as some Numic-speaking peoples migrated into the northwestern Plains, others began to push southward along the foot of the Rockies toward the southern Plains. These people maintained some contact with their northern relatives even as they pushed well into what is now Colorado through occasional trade and other means, but they nevertheless constituted the beginnings of a separate Numic-speaking people: the Comanche. Drawn to the large bison herds of the central and southern Plains, they began to incorporate pedestrian bison-hunting methods into their subsistence systems. Their southward push, moreover, put them in position to benefit from the future center of horse distribution: northern New Spain. As the next chapter will demonstrate, this early Comanche split from the main Shoshone body was crucial to the development of Eastern Shoshone equestrianism.²⁰

The relative abundance offered by the Wyoming Basin and Great Plains allowed early Shoshones to reorganize their traditional Great Basin-type social and political patterns. On the Plains, Shoshones lived in extended family units for much of the year, establishing seasonal camps along crucial waterways. During the winter months, they settled in sheltered areas rich in supplies of water and wood, with reasonable access to bison wintering grounds. They periodically gathered in larger groups to conduct

¹⁹ John Washakie, interview by author, Fort Washakie, WY, September 11, 2012; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 133; Wedel, *Prehistoric Man*, 240, 275-276; Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization*, 65; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 21, 27, 35-36; Calloway, "Snake Frontiers," 84; Greiser, "Late Prehistoric Cultures," 50. Some scholars attribute the shield-bearing rock art motifs not to Shoshones, but to southward-migrating Athapaskan speakers. See J. Roderick Vickers, "Cultures of the Northwestern Plains: From the Boreal Forest Edge to Milk River," in *Plains Indians, A.D. 500-1500: The Archaeological Past of Historic Groups*, edited by Karl H. Schlesier, 3-33 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 30; Schlesier, "Commentary," 329-330; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 29-30.

²⁰ Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 4; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 22-23.

cooperative bison hunts, in which both men and women participated. In general, the more plentiful Plains environment allowed Shoshones to travel and live in larger groups than before, as well as to congregate more often and for longer periods of time. In fact, larger groups and larger general populations were now both feasible and desirable. Bison-hunting on a large scale required significant-sized parties; family groups were too small to successfully engage in bison “jumping” and “pounding.” Moreover, the bison-rich Plains required larger camps for the sake of defense. As a result of their increasing tendency toward bigger groups for the purposes of hunting, warfare, and ceremonies, early Shoshone political and social organization became more complex. In particular, they needed strong leaders to organize and direct these groups, which more often than in the Basin numbered in the hundreds. Local band-level organization gradually developed, although it remained looser than it would become during the horse era.²¹

As Numic-speaking groups moved onto the Plains and adapted to new ecosystems, many of them abandoned parts of their former subsistence systems. The abundance of new resources – such as bison – and the absence of some staples –such as seed-bearing grasses and bushes, as well as piñon nuts – rendered some traditional practices and tools unnecessary. Women, as we shall see, continued to gather roots, berries, and other plant foods whenever possible. In fact, it appears that some Shoshone groups routinely made trips into such areas as the Yampa River valley of what is now northwestern Colorado for the express purpose of digging up yampa roots. However, many Shoshone diets became more focused on animal flesh. Consequently, seed baskets,

²¹ Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 83-84; Sutton, “Warfare and Expansion,” 76-77; Abram Kardiner, *The Psychological Frontiers of Society* (New York: Columbia University Press), 83; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 17-19; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 4-5; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 9-12; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 85.

parching trays, and seed knives fell into disuse among many groups, although some women continued to use stone mortars and pestles to grind up roots and other plant matter. This transition from foraging to hunting affected Shoshone subsistence in many ways, from their gendered divisions to their material culture.²²

Indeed, this shift toward intensive bison-hunting had gendered dimensions. Women's foraging efforts were the backbone of Basin Numu subsistence while men's hunting activities provided supplementary foods, but on the game-rich grasslands hunting became more important than gathering. Women continued to gather berries and roots, but vegetal food sources became secondary to faunal foods. This, however, varied on a seasonal basis, for Shoshone women continued to provide a considerable portion of a group's sustenance in the spring when they dug up roots and in the late summer and early fall when they gathered berries. Moreover, as their predecessors did in the Great Basin, they continued to engage in a wide variety of tasks relating to a family's survival and comfort, including preparing meals, gathering water and firewood, making clothing, maintaining homes, transporting a family's possessions, and bearing and raising children. Yet, even as their gathering became less integral to group survival, women's work in other areas intensified. In particular, they became engaged in processing bison and other big-game hides. The preparation of bison hides, which included repeated cycles of scraping a skin, soaking it in water, and drying it out, was hard work that consumed much of a woman's time. So, as women's lives became more and more centered around the production of bison-related material goods, they became adept butchers, meat-driers, and

²² "Yampa" is a Shoshone term of a particular type of tuber or root and the Yampa River earned its name because of its abundance of those plants. William Bright, *Native American Placenames of the United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 578; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 18; Steward, "Native Cultures," 482.

hide-preparers. Moreover, although men were the primary hunters, women actively assisted in these cooperative bison hunts among the Blackfeet and, considering that Numu women participated in Basin antelope and jackrabbit hunts, it is likely that Shoshone women also participated in communal bison hunts. Finally, early Shoshone groups found that infanticide was no longer necessary to ensure continued group survival. Mothers continued to give up children for adoption for spiritual reasons or when times were tough and a child might be better off with a well-provisioned group, but killing infants to limit population sizes was simply unnecessary in the new environment.²³ Some scholars maintain that this transition led to a loss of women's status among some Native groups that migrated to the Plains, but no formal customs developed among the ancestors of the Eastern Shoshone that relegated women to an inferior role. In fact, no evidence suggests that Basin-style systems of "complementarity" significantly changed despite the shift in emphasis in terms of subsistence. Women, in fact, maintained much of their influence by controlling the distribution of all food – whether they gathered it or men killed it. This was of great importance, for they had to preserve and ration food supplies in a manner that would ensure their family's survival throughout the year – including the difficult winter months when fresh food was often in scarce. Moreover, women could gain social prestige through their achievements as midwives and by proving proficient at curing the sick. Menstrual huts that secluded women from men in observance of taboos

²³ The Shoshone Woman and her Status in the Tribe, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 3, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 134; Steward, "Native Cultures," 488; Shimkin, "Eastern Shoshone," 317; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 16-17; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 4-5; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 26; Lowie, "Notes," 203.

as well as group activities such as basket weaving provided women with distinct spheres of influence and solidarity. Furthermore, their skill at particular tasks and their crafts provided them with critical knowledge that was essential to group survival; men honored and respected them for their specialized contributions.²⁴

Shoshone adaptations to the Great Plains environment included alterations to their material culture. Many elements of Basin Numu material culture translated to the Plains environment – such as some grinding implements, bows and arrows, skinning tools, and some clothing – but some did not. Although they initially used basin-style grass lodges when they began using the Plains, access to bison enabled them to adopt bison-hide tepees. Men’s big-game hunting efforts also provided women with ample supplies of skins and furs to fashion into garments and blankets. Bison provided much of the material for skirts, dresses, and leggings, but women also utilized bear, wolf, elk, pronghorn, bighorn sheep, beaver, and other game skins. Woven rabbit-skin robes fell out of favor because rabbits were less important in this new environment and also because those robes were much more time consuming to make. Likewise, women made fewer garments out of sagebrush and other plant materials. They also fashioned weasel skins, eagle feathers, and porcupine quills into headgear, with the first two providing protection from evil spirits, and the tail feathers of the flicker worn to provide curative effects. They initially adopted one-piece buckskin moccasins, but they began applying hard soles made from the tough neck of deer to their footwear after Arapahos introduced them to that custom. Some migrating Numu carried their pottery tradition with them into the Rockies and Plains, but

²⁴ The Shoshone Woman and her Status in the Tribe, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Steward, “Native Cultures,” 488; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 3, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

they also used locally available resources to produce such items. In the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and surrounding areas, they found sources of steatite (or soapstone), which they fashioned into vessels. Although considerably heavier than their traditional pitch-coated baskets and their pottery, these steatite bowls cooked better than either and were more durable than pottery. Archaeologists have found these throughout the northwestern Plains, the Green River basin, the upper Snake River drainage, the Absaroka Range, and the upper Yellowstone River drainage. The Teton Range, the Wind River Mountains, and the Big Horn Mountains contain steatite sources, and since soapstone vessels are particularly heavy, their use indicates that their Shoshone users were permanent occupants rather than transitory visitors.²⁵

Shoshone adaptations to the Great Plains also brought further complexity to their ceremonial lives. Coming into contact with Plains Natives and more frequently congregating in larger groups, they gradually adopted Plains war dances and other rituals. Likewise, Plains Shoshones – unlike their Basin relatives – eventually adopted formalized vision quests. Whereas Basin Numu men did not actively seek dreams, Shoshones sought out dreams near springs, and in mountains and caves. Men usually engaged in these vision quests for the express purpose of gaining war powers. Such rituals, then, provided men with routes to prestige and power while women had no similar means of gaining status. The adoption of Plains-style rituals, however, occurred gradually

²⁵ Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Adams, “Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem”; Wedel, *Prehistoric Man*, 273-274; Steward, “Native Cultures,” 486; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 26-27; Lowie, “Notes,” 221-222.

over time and it is unclear just how much of a Plains-style ceremonial life the ancestors of the Eastern Shoshone embraced prior to the equestrian era.²⁶

Yet, Shoshone adaptations to the Plains were not so immediate or so complete that no vestige of their Basin heritage remained. What ultimately emerged was something of a Basin-Plains hybrid culture, one that maintained many Basin cultural elements – particularly spiritual beliefs and some material culture – while exhibiting material and social adaptations to grassland environments. For instance, that other Plains Natives identified the Shoshone by their distinctive grass lodges points to their gradual adaptation. Plains Shoshone groups eventually adopted Plains-style tepees, but Crows and Hidatsas nevertheless referred to them as the “Grass Lodges,” Kiowas called them “Grass House People,” and Arapahos referred to them as “People-Who-Use-Grass-or-Bark-for-Their-Lodges”. These references might explain why they became known as the “Snakes,” for Natives made weaving motions with their hands (thus symbolizing their grass-weaved homes) to refer to the “Snakes” in sign language. Moreover, archaeologists have found Numic-style pottery – distinguished by its Basin-style flat bottoms and flowerpot shape – dating at least as far back as the mid-1600s throughout Wyoming and Montana. The adoption of steatite-carving, though, exhibits the impact of new environments and their resources on existing practices. Shoshone petroglyphs found in Wyoming often exhibit a blend of Basin-Plateau and Great Plains influences, especially in sites that contain multiple renderings depicting different periods of time.²⁷

²⁶ Steward, “Native Cultures,” 489-490, 492-493; Lowie, “Northern Shoshone,” 193-194; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 26-27, 32.

²⁷ Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 3-4, 18; Adams, “Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem,” 528; Frison, *Prehistoric Hunters*, 64-65; Frederick Webb Hodge, *Handbook of the American Indians North of Mexico*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1907), 556-557; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 85.

Indeed, one must be wary of overstating the Shoshone transition to bison-hunting. Especially before the reintroduction of the horse to western North America, Basin-style Numu hunting practices continued in the Wyoming Basin, Great Plains, and other areas. Archaeologists, for instance, have discovered pronghorn traps of probable Shoshone origin in what is now southwestern Wyoming, such as the Fort Bridger trap and another at the Eden-Farson site. The Native hunters constructed the former near two playas, in an area that attracted pronghorn herds. Shoshones constructed many of their traps out of sagebrush, but this one was comprised largely of juniper. This site predates influxes of Euro-American trade goods into the region, as it contains a variety of stone projectile points and other lithic tools but no items of European manufacture. Despite the presence of projectile points, the Native hunters probably ran the pronghorn trapped in the enclosure to exhaustion, and then beat them to death with clubs; firing arrows was simply dangerous and unnecessary in such traps. At the Eden-Farson site, researchers attribute the remains of over 200 pronghorn to a Shoshone hunt of a single season spanning late October and early November of 1720 ± 100 years. The complete absence of Euro-American material goods at the site points to an earlier rather than a later date. There is no remaining evidence of a trap or corral used at this site, but the presence of tall sagebrush in the area (which deteriorates more rapidly than juniper) leaves that possibility open. There exists no concrete evidence of Shoshones using net traps to capture jackrabbits in Wyoming, but those animals were present there in large numbers (especially in the southwestern portion of the future state) and they congregated in large groups, so Numic-speaking groups may have also conducted rabbit drives there as well.²⁸

²⁸ Frison, *Survival by Hunting*, 132-133, 136-137.

Numu migrations beyond the Great Basin facilitated interactions with new Native groups and intensified exchanges with existing interregional contacts. When they moved east and north beyond the Basin, for instance, Shoshones seized upon an opportunity to expand their trading activities. It appears that by the early fifteenth century, Shoshones established an annual rendezvous in western Wyoming that other Natives attended from afar. This trade center linked the Mandan and Arikara trade centers on the northeastern Plains, The Dalles of the Pacific Northwest, and the Pueblo villages of the Southwest. Trade continued to flow through the Great Basin, but Shoshones in western Wyoming constituted the primary conduit between groups living on opposite sides of the Continental Divide. At trade fairs, men traded with one another while women exchanged the fruits of their labor with other women, a fact which demonstrates women's continued autonomy and economic clout. As Shoshone access to the bison-rich Plains increased, animal-based material goods such as hides became a bigger part of these exchanges. Obsidian, however, remained the key Shoshone commodity, especially as they began quarrying rich sources of the material in the Yellowstone and Snake River valleys, and especially at Obsidian Cliff in present-day Yellowstone National Park. In the eighteenth century, Europeans found Natives on the upper Missouri, such as the Mandans, remelting glass items and recasting them as beads; they reportedly learned the practice from Numic-speaking groups who used obsidian for the same purpose. Evidence indicates that the Shoshone controlled the obsidian trade of the Intermountain West.²⁹

²⁹ Gresier, "Late Prehistoric Cultures," 55; Henry F. Dobyns, "Part I: the First Americans," in *The Settling of North America: The Atlas of Great Migrations into North America from the Ice Age to the Present*, edited by Helen Hornbeck Tanner, 10-31 (New York: Macmillan, 1995), 15; Sydney H. Ball, "The Mining of Gems and Ornamental Stones by American Indians," in *Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin*, No. 128, Anthropological Papers, No. 13, 1-77 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941), 52-55; Susan H. Vehik and Timothy G. Baugh, "Prehistoric Plains

Other intercultural exchanges were more hostile in nature. Indeed, as Shoshones expanded onto the Great Plains, they became engaged in intense intergroup warfare. During their initial push onto the central Plains, for instance, they apparently came into conflict with Kiowa groups that they displaced eastward from the Missouri and Yellowstone River headwaters toward the Black Hills. Numic-speaking groups that migrated northward along the eastern foot of the Rocky Mountains became involved in bitter conflicts with groups such as the Blackfeet and Gros Ventre, peoples who were moving onto the grasslands from the north to capitalize on the resource-rich northwestern Plains environment. In particular, their developing hostile relationship with the Algonquian-speaking tribes of the Blackfoot Confederation (Nitzitapi) became an integral part of Shoshone history from the 1600s onward. Although the territories claimed by the separate divisions of the Blackfoot Confederacy overlapped in some areas, the Piegans (Pikuni) were the most southwestern group, with the Blackfoot proper (Siksika) the furthest northeast and the Bloods (Kainai) in between the two. At stake in these intertribal conflicts was nothing less than access to some of the richest bison-grazing grounds on the Plains. Anthropologists once believed that intertribal warfare was almost nonexistent on the Plains prior to the arrival of the horse, but scholars now believe that such conflict was endemic before that time.³⁰

Trade,” in *Prehistoric Exchange Systems in North America*, edited by Timothy G. Baugh and Jonathan E. Ericson, 249-274 (New York: Plenum Press, 1994), 264; Lowie, “Northern Shoshone,” 173-174; Wedel, *Prehistoric Man*, 273-274; Virginia Bergman Peters, *Women of the Earth Lodges: Tribal Life on the Plains* (North Haven, CT: Archon Books, 1995), 88.

³⁰ John C. Ewers, “Intertribal Warfare as the Precursor of Indian-White Warfare on the Northern Great Plains,” *Western Historical Quarterly* (Oct. 1975): 397-410; Douglas B. Bamforth, “Indigenous People, Indigenous Violence: Precontact Warfare on the North American Great Plains,” *Man*, New Series, 29, 1 (Mar., 1994): 95-115; Sutton, “Expansion and Warfare,” 69-70; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 22-23; Steward, “Native Cultures,” 492; Greiser, “Late Prehistoric Cultures,” 51, 55; Schlesier, “Commentary,” 329; R.G. Robertson, *Rotting Face: Smallpox and the American Indian* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Press, 2001), 119-120.

Pre-horse warfare between Shoshones and their enemies took two general forms. The first type was large-scale “formal” battles. This sort of fighting usually occurred when a large war party openly approached a village or camp of an enemy and the latter responded by sending a group of its own warriors to confront the aggressors. The two sides then lined up opposite one another, bearing bison-scrotum rattles, bison-hide shields, bows and arrows, and hand-to-hand weapons such as stone clubs (pukamoggan). Shoshones and other groups reportedly sometimes poisoned their projectile points, usually with either rattlesnake venom or a mixture comprised of crushed ants and a rotten animal spleen. The fighting commenced with the opposing sides firing arrows at one another, both attempting to set up an eventual charge. If one side or the other concluded that it possessed superior numbers or some tactical advantage, it might charge. The battle then became a frenzy of close-quarters combat that ultimately resulted in one side or the other retreating, with the victors sometimes in hot pursuit. More often than not, however, such encounters never moved beyond the relative posturing of long-range bow and arrow fighting; the rawhide shields that Shoshones and their enemies used far outclassed their stone and (later) metal-tipped arrows. In the event of such a stalemate, the aggressors withdrew to their camp at nightfall.³¹

When North West Company trader David Thompson visited a Piegan Blackfoot camp during the late 1780s, he conversed with an old warrior, Saukamaptee (Young Man), who recalled the days of fighting the Shoshone before the equestrian era.

Saukamaptee’s account indicates that the Shoshone warriors held the upper hand in those

³¹ David Thompson, *David Thompson’s Narrative, 1784-1812*, edited by Richard Glover (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1962), 328-330; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 34; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 8; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 18-19, 29; Thomas W. Kavanagh, *Comanche Political History: An Ethnohistorical Perspective, 1706-1875* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 60; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 16.

early conflicts. The account is dated to approximately 1730, but it is indicative of the nature of large-scale pre-horse (and pre-gun) Shoshone-Blackfoot intertribal warfare:

“The Peeagans were always the frontier Tribe, upon whom the Snake Indians made their attacks, these latter were very numerous, even without their allies; and the Peeagans had to send messengers among us to procure help. Two of them came to the camp of my father, and I was then about his age (pointing to a Lad of about sixteen years) he promised to come and bring some of his people, the Nahathaways [Crees] with him, for I am myself of that people, and not of those with whom I am. My father brought about twenty warriors with him. There were a few guns amongst us, but very little ammunition, and they were left to hunt for the families; Our weapons was a Lance, mostly pointed with iron, some few of stone, A Bow and a quiver of Arrows; the Bows were of Larch, the length came to the chin; the quiver had about fifty arrows, of which ten had iron points, the others were headed with stone. He carried his knife on his breast and his axe in his belt. Such was my fathers weapons, and those with him had much the same weapons. I had a Bow and Arrows and a knife, of which I was very proud. We came to the Peeagans and their allies. They were camped in the Plains on the left bank of the River (the north side) and were a great many. We were feasted, a great War Tent was made, and a few days passed in speeches, feasting and dances. A war chief was elected by the chiefs, and we got ready to march. Our spies had been out and had seen a large camp of the Snake Indians on the Plains of the Eagle Hill, and we had to cross the River in canoes, and on rafts, which we carefully secured for our retreat. When we had crossed and numbered our men, we were about 350 warriors (this he showed by counting every finger to be ten, and holding up both hands three times and then one hand) they had their scouts out, and came to meet us. Both parties made a great show of their numbers, and I thought that they were more numerous than ourselves. [*sic*]

After some singing and dancing, they sat down on ground, and placed their large shields before them, which covered them: We did the same, but our shields were not so many, and some of our shields had to shelter two men. Theirs were all placed touching each other; their Bows were not so long as ours, but of better wood, and the back covered with the sinews of the Bisons which made them very elastic, and their arrows went a long way and whizzed about us as balls do from guns. They were all headed with a sharp, smooth, black stone (flint) which broke up when it struck anything. Our iron headed arrows did not go through their shields, but stuck in them; On both sides several were wounded, but none lay on the ground; and night put an end to the battle, without a scalp being taken on either side, and in those days such was the result, unless one party was more numerous than the other. The great mischief of war then, was as

now, by attacking and destroying small camps of ten to thirty tents, which are obliged to separate for hunting...³²

This testimony suggests that Numic-speaking peoples might have invented or introduced to the grasslands the useful rawhide shields that were so central to intertribal engagements between large groups on the Plains. Moreover, it appears that Shoshones also possessed superior bow and arrow technology, which was another significant advantage in a style of warfare that usually did not progress beyond long-range arrow bombardments. Shoshone men most commonly constructed bows out of juniper (as did their rivals), which they improved by adding sinew backings (a Great Basin tradition that migrating Numu groups introduced to the Plains). Increasing access to bighorn sheep and elk, as well as to hot springs such as those in western Wyoming enabled them to produce even better bows. These, made of horns backed with sinews (the hot springs made the horns more pliable and, therefore, easier to make into bows), outperformed their juniper counterparts and helps to explain the Shoshone warriors' early advantages over their adversaries. Where and when, precisely, the Shoshone acquired or developed these tools of war is not altogether clear, although Mark Q. Sutton asserts that Plains Shoshone warfare patterns developed while Numic speakers expanded throughout the Basin. What is clear, though, is that this style of warfare enabled the Shoshone to become a military power on the northwestern Plains before the dawn of the horse era. Some scholars point to their superior military organization as one source of their prowess. As ethnologist Demetri B. Shimkin observes, Shoshones quickly developed "high competence" as a "militaristic" buffalo-hunting people on the Plains. Perhaps their efficient gendered division of labor contributed to Plains Shoshone military prowess, for women's work of

³² Thompson, *Narrative*, 228-230.

processing, preparing, and distributing food (not to mention their myriad other tasks) allowed men to make war. Saukamappee, as seen above, also alludes to their greater numbers; whether Shoshones simply outnumbered their Blackfoot rivals as a whole or their political organization allowed them to more routinely send out larger war parties is unclear.³³

Saukamappee also mentions the second style of pre-horse Plains warfare in which Shoshones and their enemies engaged. This type encompassed smaller-scale activities, such as raids and ambushes. In such an event, a party of warriors stealthily moved up to a usually small, unsuspecting enemy village and rushed its occupants before they had an opportunity to mount a defensive. A group of raiders ideally waited until most of a target camp's men were out hunting or warring before making such an attack, thereby ensuring a greater chance of success. Whereas the larger-scale battles between lines of warriors often yielded minimal results, these smaller-scale assaults more frequently led to the dislocation and even the destruction of entire camps. During the equestrian era, raiding parties usually killed grown men, but took women and children captive; this may have also been the case during the pedestrian era. Little evidence, however, relates to the fates of individual victims before the eighteenth century.³⁴

Military pressure exerted from the south by expanding Numic-speaking groups apparently limited the success of Blackfoot pushes onto the northwestern Great Plains. This may have even resulted in the displacement of Blackfoot groups that had at one time

³³ Shimkin, "Eastern Shoshone," 309 (quotation); Sutton, "Expansion and Warfare," 69-70; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 83-84, 89; Kavanagh, *Comanche Political History*, 60; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 34; Lowie, "Northern Shoshone," 191-192; Frison, *Prehistoric Hunters*, 66-67; Frison, *Survival by Hunting*, 205-206.

³⁴ Thompson, *Narrative*, 230; Sutton, "Expansion and Warfare," 69-70; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 34; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 16.

managed to establish a foothold on the grasslands. Until sometime in the eighteenth century, then, the Shoshone presence on the Plains confined the Blackfoot to the fringes of the Plains-parkland environment in what is now Canada. Similarly, Shoshones apparently pushed the Kutenai out of the northern Rockies and onto the western high Plains, where they also fought the Blackfeet. Aggressive pre-horse Numu expansion, then, played a major role in establishing the intergroup configuration of the region.³⁵

To the west, other Numic-speaking groups migrated into the ecological borderland between the northern Great Basin and the Columbia Plateau. The ancestors of the people who later became known as Northern Shoshone migrated into the Snake River country of present-day southern Idaho sometime before 1500, and they also ranged into what is now northern Utah. Until the mid-1800s, bison herds inhabited the Snake River Plain, a large stretch of sagebrush plains watered by the tributaries of the region's namesake river. Unlike their relatives to the east, however, these Shoshones did not widely utilize large game animal skins for clothing and shelter; they continued to mostly wear rabbit-skin attire and sage bark footwear, and they still inhabited conical grass huts. Salmon, jackrabbits, cottontails, groundhogs, squirrels, prairie dogs, sage grouse, and other small animals provided Shoshones with sustenance. The western part of southern Idaho received ten inches of rain or less per year, whereas the eastern portion (where many Shoshones centralized) received more, about ten to twenty inches annually. Accordingly, the eastern portion of the Snake River plain was richer in grasses than the west. Yet, even the western Snake River Plain provided women with access to camas roots; they also gathered prairie turnips, berries, and sunflower seeds. Snake River

³⁵ Schlesier, "Commentary," 315; Greiser, "Late Prehistoric Cultures," 48.

Shoshones could hunt elk and other big game in the mountains that rimmed the eastern and northern reaches of the Snake River Plain. In general, these groups became less oriented toward migratory bison-hunting than their eastern relatives – foraging and small-game hunting remained more central to their survival.³⁶

The Numic-speaking people whose descendents became known as the Lemhi Shoshone established their homelands in the Salmon River country north of the Snake River Plain. Geographically, this area contrasted with the Snake River Plain; it was a rugged area defined by the immense mountains of the Sawtooth, Bitterroot, and other ranges, as well as the deep canyons that divided those mountains. It was also a considerably cooler and wetter area than that to the south. Shoshone groups that inhabited this region made salmon central to their subsistence activities, but they also caught and speared other fish, primarily trout and sturgeon. Natives occupying the lands of the Columbia River tributaries also gathered salmon eggs to eat. They hunted mountain sheep, too. Groups of women gathered chokeberries, serviceberries, and other berries in the foothills of the mountains; they dried some of those with the fish that men caught. These early Shoshones also conducted fall bison hunts on the Snake River Plain or on the Great Plains to the east. Family groups remained the typical level of daily social organization among these northernmost Shoshone groups, although they occasionally gathered in larger groups to hunt bison. They designated local families or family groups by their choice food at a given time, hence, “sheep eaters,” “salmon-eaters,” and so forth.

³⁶ Merle W. Wells, “Introduction,” in Brigham D. Madsen, *The Northern Shoshoni* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton, 1979), 18; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 191-196; Baker, *Graphic Summary*, 10; Lowie, “Northern Shoshone,” 206; Robert F. Murphy and Yolanda Murphy, “Northern Shoshone and Bannock,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 11: Great Basin, edited by Warren L. d’Azevedo, 284-307 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986), 285-286; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 19-20.

These names changed periodically, often with the seasons, as individual subsistence units shifted their focus from one food type to another.³⁷

Even this brief sketch of how other early Shoshone groups who migrated beyond the Great Basin adapted to their respective environments highlights the lack of homogeneity among Numu lifeways beyond the Basin. Just as diversity developed among Numic-speaking groups during the centuries following their ancestors' diffusion beyond the southern Sierra Nevada, further diversification came as their descendants moved into the areas that later became parts of Utah, Colorado, Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, and Alberta. Standing in contrast to the early Shoshones who focused on bison-hunting on the Great Plains were the aforementioned Numic speakers of the Salmon River country. They engaged in bison-hunting on the grasslands of Montana, as well as on the Snake River Plain, but only seasonally. These people occupied a rough, mountainous country that accommodated salmon-fishing and bighorn sheep-hunting more than anything else. These early Shoshone groups, as well as their relatives in southern Idaho, benefitted from living at the nexus of the Great Plains, Great Basin, and Columbia Plateau environments; they had the ability to take the best of what each offered them in terms of subsistence. Perhaps predictably, the Columbia Plateau and its Native peoples influenced Snake and Salmon River country Shoshone cultural development. Indeed, those Shoshone groups became immersed in Plateau intertribal affairs (although they, like their Plains relatives, had hostile interactions with Plains Natives such as the Blackfeet). Substantial trade developed between these Numic-speaking peoples and their Plateau neighbors, such as

³⁷ Hultkrantz, "Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area," 187-191; Baker, *Graphic Summary*, 10; Murphy and Murphy, "Northern Shoshone," 285-286; John W.W. Mann, *Sacajawea's People: The Lemhi Shoshones and the Salmon River Country* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 1; Lowie, "Northern Shoshone," 184-185, 206.

the Cayuse, Salish, and Nez Perce. Hostilities eventually developed between Basin-Plateau Shoshone groups and the Walla Walla, Yakima, Cayuse, and the Nez Perce, but it is not clear if these conflicts predated the horse era. The Flatheads, Salishan speakers who utilized the Big Hole (Montana) area during the 1600s, came into conflict with Shoshone groups and the Blackfoot Confederacy.³⁸

So, by the final decade of the eighteenth century, Numic-speaking peoples inhabited and used a vast portion of the North American West. Many remained in the “land beyond the setting sun,” continuing their foraging lifeways. But many others migrated well beyond the Great Basin, into the central and northern Rocky Mountains and onto the western Great Plains. By the turn of the eighteenth century, then, the Numu occupied parts of what are now California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and Alberta. As a result of this geographic diffusion, the lifeways of those Numic-speaking groups became increasingly diverse. Depending upon the resources available in their particular environments, some became predominantly buffalo-eaters, while others became salmon-eaters, sheep-eaters, or root-eaters (as they would later refer to one another and themselves). Numu adaptations to new environments, moreover, began to reshape their material cultures and gendered divisions of labor. Women remained integral to Numu survival, but the ways that they contributed to group subsistence transformed. Their shared Great Basin heritage to some degree united them all, but with environmental

³⁸ Hultkrantz, “Shoshones,” 187-191; Murphy and Murphy, “Northern Shoshone,” 285-286; Lowie, “Northern Shoshone,” 191; Steward, “Native Cultures,” 495-496; Mann, *Sacajawea’s People*, 11-12; Deward E. Walker Jr., “Introduction,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 12: Plateau, edited by Deward E. Walker Jr., 1-7 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 3; Carling I. Malouf, “Flathead and Pend d’Oreille,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 12: Plateau, edited by Deward E. Walker Jr., 297-312 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 302.

diversity came cultural diversity. Thus, the myriad ecosystems that the Numu began occupying by about 1500 CE laid the foundation for the eventual formation of distinct band and tribal identities: the ancestors of the Northern, Eastern, and Lemhi Shoshone began to emerge as historically recognizable groups.³⁹

The period of 1500 to 1690 thus constitutes a pivotal if much-overlooked era of Eastern Shoshone history. Pedestrian Numic-speaking groups revolutionized their subsistence systems as they migrated beyond the Great Basin as well as employed what appear to have been highly effective methods of warfare. Sustained by diversified and highly efficient resource usage as well as empowered by a dynamic system of gender “complementarity,” early Shoshone groups established claims to vast stretches of territory beyond the Great Basin. This period of expansion and transformation is important, for it throws light on pre-equestrian Eastern Shoshone ethnogenesis while further highlighting the dynamism of pre-contact Native America.

Yet, a great ecological and cultural event awaited these scattered groups. Perhaps the single greatest period of transformation for the Numu (and for many Natives throughout the West for that matter) began when horses made their return to western North America by way of New Spain. For Shoshones, the arrival of the horse heralded the dawn of a new era, one in which changing relationships with the land, as well as its various animal and human inhabitants, carried them even further from their roots in the “land beyond the setting sun.”

³⁹ Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization*, 88-89; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 84; Wedel, *Prehistoric Man*, 275-276; Hultkrantz, “Shoshone Indians on the Plains,” 63.

CHAPTER 3
“A BRAVE PEOPLE DREADED OF ALL THE OTHER TRIBES”:
THE EPOCH OF PLAINS SHOSHONE EQUESTRIANISM, 1690-1700

By the end of the seventeenth century, Numic-speaking peoples inhabited a vast portion of the North American West, including parts of the Great Basin, Columbia Plateau, Rocky Mountains, and Great Plains. Yet, those widespread groups maintained direct or indirect contact with their relatives elsewhere, and this enabled many Shoshones to engage in the burgeoning trade that came with the Spanish colonization of what is now the American Southwest. This commerce provided Shoshones with access to livestock and material goods that they used to revolutionize subsistence and warfare on the northern Plains. This transformation began in about 1700, when Shoshones acquired horses from their Numic-speaking relatives to the south. The adoption of horses was a key event in the story of Eastern Shoshone ethnogenesis, for the adoption of those animals further distinguished them from their Great Basin heritage. The development of Shoshone equestrianism, however, in many ways represents the continuation of the ingenuity and dynamism displayed by their Numic-speaking ancestors during the previous centuries, as they first adapted to the Great Basin, and then to the mountains and grasslands to the north and east of the Basin.

In discussing the integration of horses into Shoshone lifeways, this chapter challenges several predominant historical interpretations. Two of those emphasize the centrality of military developments to eighteenth-century northern Plains history. The following pages collectively argue that underlying ecological transformations enhanced Plains Native military capabilities. Taking cue from archaeologist Douglas B. Bamforth, this chapter presents an ecological interpretation of eighteenth-century northern Plains

history.¹ Bamforth draws attention to the ways that the transition to mounted bison-hunting enabled Plains Natives to aggregate and thereby gain a military edge over their rivals. This chapter applies Bamforth's broad theoretical model to Shoshone history in an effort to provide a deeper look at the crucial role of evolving relationships between Natives and their environments in that past. Military developments were the most obvious factors in equestrian Shoshone expansion and the subsequent Blackfoot challenge, but a closer look at ecological history uncovers a more complex past.

The first interpretation challenged here concerns equestrian Shoshone expansion. Scholars widely acknowledge that horses provided Shoshones with a major military advantage over other Plains peoples.² However, they generally neglect the ecological dimensions of the Shoshone transition to equestrianism. This chapter asserts that while the military advantages of horses helped Shoshones control much of the northern Plains for a time, changes in the ways that Shoshones interacted with the environment were also important. In particular, it emphasizes how horses transformed Shoshone subsistence systems, enhancing their mobility and enabling them to more efficiently utilize the resources of the Plains environment, especially the bison herds. Scholars have analyzed how a similar horse revolution altered Comanche ecological relationships and thereby

¹ Douglas B. Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization on the Great Plains* (New York: Plenum Press, 1988).

² For example, see Frank Raymond Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns of the Great Plains Indians (17th Century through Early 19th Century)* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953, 1992); Anthony R. McGinnis, *Counting Coup and Cutting Horses: Intertribal Warfare on the Northern Plains, 1738-1889* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990, 2012).

transformed them into the dominant Native power on the southern Plains, but treatments of the Shoshone story continue to focus on military developments.³

This chapter also challenges narratives that focus on how European-introduced firearms led to the decline of Shoshone power on the northern Plains. According to such interpretations, the Blackfeet began to acquire fur trade guns in the mid-1700s, and then they turned the tide against the Shoshone.⁴ The following pages demonstrate that while the Blackfoot acquisition of firearms affected Shoshone-Blackfoot warfare, those guns had a more limited impact on intertribal conflicts than scholars assume. This point is important because it challenges us to look elsewhere to explain the rise of the Blackfeet, particularly to the changes that came with the Blackfoot acquisition of horses. Mark A. Judy offers perhaps the most in-depth treatment of this subject, but his study examines why equestrian Blackfeet later became hostile toward Americans; this project applies his insights to a treatment of the Shoshone-Blackfoot rivalry.⁵ In doing so, it reveals how the Blackfoot horse revolution counteracted the ecological and military advantages that Shoshones held after they introduced equestrian bison-hunting to the northern Plains.

³ See Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 25; Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850," *The Journal of American History* 78, 2 (Sept., 1991), 465-485: 471-472.

⁴ See Loretta Fowler, "The Great Plains from the Arrival of the Horse to 1885," in *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, vol. 1, part II: North America, edited by Bruce Trigger and Wilcomb E. Washburn, 1-56 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 14-15; Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization*, 94-95; Douglas B. Bamforth, "Indigenous People, Indigenous Violence: Precontact Warfare on the North American Great Plains," *Man*, New Series 29, 1 (Mar., 1994), 95-115: 99; Colin G. Calloway, "Snake Frontiers: The Eastern Shoshones in the Eighteenth Century," *Annals of Wyoming* 63, 3 (Summer 1991), 82-92: 87-88; Robert H. Lowie, "The Northern Shoshone," *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, vol. 2, part 2, 165-306 (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1909), 171; Clark Wissler, "Influence of the Horse in the Development of Plains Culture," *American Anthropologist* 16, 1 (Jan.-Mar., 1914), 1-25: 13.

⁵ Mark A. Judy, "Powder Keg on the Upper Missouri: Sources of Blackfeet Hostility, 1730-1810," *American Indian Quarterly* 11, 2 (Spring 1987), 127-144: 131.

The relationship between equestrianism and Native women constitutes the third subject that this chapter challenges. The following pages argue that the Shoshone transition to equestrian bison-hunting was crucial to their brief period of dominance on the Plains, but it is careful to not place too much emphasis on the importance of bison hunting itself to Shoshone survival and prosperity. Taking cue from Margaret Jacobs' observation that historical studies tend to emphasize a "horse-as-empowerment" narrative while at the same time claiming that equestrianism diminished Native women's status by turning them into drudge laborers and by expanding the practice of polygyny, this chapter examines the place of women in equestrian Shoshone subsistence systems.⁶ It therefore diverges from the work of Pekka Hämäläinen, which, according to some critics, takes an "emphasis on the wretchedness and misery of Plains women" to "new heights"⁷ in its treatment of polygyny and bison-hide processing even as it celebrates that Comanches and Utes were "[l]iberated and empowered by the horse."⁸ Similarly, Andrew C. Isenberg discusses how the rise of equestrianism generally led to the decline of Plains women's status while observing that "[t]he bison liberated and empowered the nomads."⁹

⁶ Margaret Jacobs, "Western History: What's Gender Got to Do With It?" *The Western Historical Quarterly* 42, 3 (Autumn 2011), 297-304: 303. For equestrianism as an explanation for the "declension" of women's status, see Alan M. Klein, "The Political-Economy of Gender: A 19th Century Plains Indian Case Study," in *The Hidden-Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women*, edited by Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine, 143-173 (Lanham, MA: University Press of America, 1983); Colin G. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 272-273.

⁷ Sarah Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous: Marriage and Nation Building in Western Canada to 1915* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2008), 133.

⁸ Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 29. Carter focuses on Hämäläinen's earlier remarks on the relationship between equestrian bison-hunting, polygyny, and women's status in Pekka Hämäläinen, "The Rise and Fall of Plains Indian Horse Cultures," *The Journal of American History* 90, 3 (Dec., 2003), 833-862: 851. Jacobs' subsequent essay critiques Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 29, 247-250. See Jacobs, "Western History," 300, 303.

⁹ Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 65 (quotation), 95-103.

This chapter, then, demonstrates that although bison constituted the core of Plains Shoshone subsistence, women's work remained important and dignified, for women not only processed the game that men killed, but they continued to balance diets by foraging and they generated commodities that they traded for produce and other goods. That women controlled the distribution of food and many material goods, gathered supplies of water and fuel, reared children, and engaged in myriad other tasks that sustained Shoshone groups on a day-to-day basis highlights their centrality to group survival and their autonomy. So, by throwing light on women's work among mounted Shoshone groups, this chapter offers a more nuanced understanding of equestrian Native subsistence and the dynamic gendered divisions of labor that some Natives used to most efficiently utilize the technologies and resources available to them.¹⁰

The horse species once inhabited North America, but the animals vanished during the Late Pleistocene extinctions, about 11,000 years ago. Horses returned to the continent in 1519, when Hernán Cortés reintroduced them to what is now central Mexico. By the mid-sixteenth century, tens of thousands of horses had repopulated Mexico. These were Spanish Barbs which were, relatively small, hardy, heat-resistant riding horses with great stamina. By 1600, some were in northern New Spain (future New Mexico). A popular

¹⁰ For works that examine the importance of women to group subsistence among other Plains societies, see Virginia Bergman Peters, *Women of the Earth Lodges: Tribal Life on the Plains* (North Haven, CT: Archon Books, 1995), 63-64, 87-89, Chapter 11; Alice B. Kehoe, "Blackfoot Persons," in *Women and Power in Native North America*, edited by Laura F. Klein and Lillian A. Ackerman, 113-125 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 114-116, 120-121; Loretta Fowler, *Wives and Husbands: Gender and Age in Southern Arapaho History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 301-306. It is worth noting that Peters argues that women's status among the Plains "nomads" declined with the rise of mounted bison-hunting while women of the Missouri village tribes (Mandans, Hidatsas, and Arikaras) maintained their status through continued corn cultivation and trade. If this was the case among the Plains "nomads," the Shoshone, as will be further discussed below, constituted an exception to that rule. See Peters, *Women of the Earth Lodges*, 155-156.

legend once held that the Natives of the North American West acquired horses descended from a small number of strays that escaped from or were abandoned by the expeditions of Francisco Vásquez de Coronado and/or Hernando de Soto, but scholars have debunked that myth. Natives totally unfamiliar with horses simply lacked the necessary knowledge to care for horses, breed them, and create vast herds out of a few strays.¹¹

Spaniards officially prohibited their Indian subjects from riding horses at first, but that changed in 1621 when colonial authorities permitted Native converts to work as teamsters and herders. The knowledge necessary to use and care for horses thus began to gradually diffuse throughout Native populations, as did horses themselves. During the 1600s, trade gradually spread horses throughout New Mexico. The animals trickled onto the southern Great Plains beginning in about the 1630s, as Apaches traded war captives and hides to the Pueblos and Spaniards for them and, when unsatisfied with trade, they raided Spanish and Pueblo settlements alike. A deluge of horses followed the 1680 Pueblo Revolt. When the Pueblos evicted the Spanish intruders from New Spain, they channeled thousands of horses into indigenous trade networks. Thereafter, Apache, Jumano, and Ute raiders and traders trafficked horses to the north and east.¹²

¹¹ Francis Haines, "Where did the Plains Indians Get Their Horses?" *American Anthropologist*, New Series 40, 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1938), 112-117; Francis Haines, "The Northward Spread of Horses among the Plains Indians," *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 40, 3 (Jul.-Sept. 1938), 429-437: 429; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 268; Dan Flores, *The Natural West: Environment History in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 57; Hämäläinen, "Rise and Fall," 835-836; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 33, 39, 41; Wissler, "Influence of the Horse," 9-1.

¹² The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1993, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Haines, "Northward Spread," 429, 431, 434; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 268; Flores, *Natural West*, 57; Hämäläinen, "Rise and Fall," 835-837, 845; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 39-40; Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 87-88; Fowler, "Great Plains," 6, 8; Flores, "Bison Ecology," 469; Wissler, "Influence of the Horse," 2.

Horses repopulated the grasslands, settling back into the ecological niche once occupied by their now-extinct predecessors. The southern Plains environment was perfect for the Spanish Barbs. Tough, resilient animals (they were, after all, descendants of animals bred in northern Africa), the horses thrived in the hot, arid southwestern Plains. The grasslands had a long growing season and, aided by the rejuvenating effects of the Little Ice Age, the Plains provided sufficient supplies of forage. Relatively mild winters, as well as interspersed river bottoms that offered shelter and additional forage, made the Plains hospitable to the horses. Their primary competition for forage was, ironically, the species that had most benefitted from the Pleistocene extinctions: the bison.¹³

The first Numic-speaking peoples to encounter horses were probably ancestors of the Southern Paiutes in the southern Great Basin. Horses, however, were of little use to the Basin Numu. The Great Basin was a region that was not particularly rich in forage and, moreover, horses actually competed with the Numu for the same resources – the grasses which produced seeds that women gathered and prepared as food. Basin Natives also did not need horses for hunting. In fact, mounted hunting would scare away the most of the game that Basin Numu hunters trapped or stalked. Ultimately, Basin Numu groups made some use of horses for transportation and as beasts of burden. They also reportedly used them as sources of food at times. After all, one should not assume that when Basin Numu groups first encountered horses in the early 1600s that they saw them as a new technology. At the same time, it is conceivable that they would seize upon an opportunity to obtain such a large volume of food. Other Numic-speaking groups in the Basin, including Shoshonean groups, likely also encountered horses at an early date. In general,

¹³ Hämäläinen, “Rise and Fall,” 836; Flores, “Bison Ecology,” 469. For the Little Ice Age, see previous chapter, pages 73 and 77.

though, horses did not become integral to Basin Numu lifeways. Grass growth throughout much of the Basin was too scant to support horse herds and Basin Numu subsistence systems would little benefit from the added burden of large herbivores to care for.¹⁴

The same cannot be said for the Utes, who occupied much of the eastern Great Basin and southern Rocky Mountains by the beginning of the seventeenth century. They acquired their first horses sometime before 1640, and soon thereafter began travelling onto the Plains of present-day Colorado to hunt bison. With a more abundant source of subsistence at their disposal, Utes gathered in larger groups (bands) and that, combined with their increased mobility, enabled them to more effectively respond to Apache and Navajo raids that emanated from the south and east. At the same time, their mounts improved their own offensive capabilities, helping them to more successfully raid their Apache and Navajo rivals. Moreover, they directed their mounted raids at some of their pedestrian Numu relatives in the Basin, reportedly ambushing Shoshone and Paiute camps early each spring, before they had recovered from the harsh winter months that left them hungry and weak. “[T]he Shoshonis,” as one historian writes, “had neither the weapons of war nor the inclination to fight” and were therefore “considered easy prey.”¹⁵ Ute raiders apparently used this advantage to their economic benefit, for the diffusion of horses went hand-in-hand with the rise of a market in indigenous captives. Thus, the

¹⁴ The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1993, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 282-283; Robert H. Lowie, *Indians of the Plains* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1954), 42.

¹⁵ Virginia Cole Trenholm and Maurine Carley, *The Shoshonis: Sentinels of the Rockies* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 5 (quotation); Hämäläinen, “Rise and Fall,” 836-837; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 283; The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1993, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Abram Kardiner, *The Psychological Frontiers of Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), 49; George E. Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains: From the Prehistoric Period to the Coming of Europeans* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), 118-119; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 87; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 87-88; Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization*, 89-91.

advent of Spanish colonialism in the Southwest and the extension of a “slaving frontier” drew Utes into what historian Ned Blackhawk terms “economies of violence.”¹⁶

The emergence of equestrian Native societies such as those of the Ute and, later, the Comanche and Shoshone, revolutionized a captive trade that existed during the pedestrian era. When a one group raided another, they often made captives of those whom they did not kill or drive away – usually women and children. Over time, many of these became integrated into the societies that took them, or their captors gave them away as gifts, or they arranged for them to marry among another group. This form of violence was, then, local rather than far-reaching. With the arrival of the Spanish and their horses, though, such captives became commodities to obtain and exchange through often extensive trade networks. So, in an effort to build up their horse herds, Utes and other Natives began to conduct more frequent raids on other groups, often with the express intent of capturing women and children. Thus, women – whom Spanish traders valued because there were far more Spanish men than women in northern New Spain and because women posed less of a violent threat as captives than men – lived under the constant threat of being taken in an enemy raid as a result of their potential value as commodities. In northern New Spain, the captive economy bound Natives and Spaniards in “long-term relations of violence, exchange, interdependence, and interdevelopment” based upon the efforts of both Native and Spanish men to establish and preserve their honor. The women and children of rival groups thus became commodified by others, but it is worth noting that the Southwest captive economy did not resemble chattel slavery, such as the African-American slave economy that developed in the American colonies to

¹⁶ Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 19-20.

the east; Spaniards focused not captive labor itself, but on kinship-based systems that tried to build prestigious social units. As we shall see, even those groups who usually did not directly trade with the Spanish tapped into the burgeoning market by taking captives and then trading them to other Natives who, in turn, functioned as middlemen by conveying them to the Spanish. So, while the captive system of the Southwest was more focused on kinship and honor than economics, Natives elsewhere engaged in it as a primarily economic endeavor.¹⁷

Utes traded some of their horses to other Numu groups, especially the Comanche. It appears that the people who became known as the Comanche began moving south from the Wyoming Basin prior to the Pueblo Revolt, but the ultimate splintering of the Shoshone and Comanche into separate groups occurred during the second half of the 1600s, at about the time that Utes began trading horses to the latter. Wanting more direct access to the horse trade of the Southwest, as well as to capitalize on the bison-rich southern Plains, Comanches pushed south along the front range of the Rocky Mountains. Interacting with their Ute relatives in what is now Colorado, Comanches proved highly adaptive by smoothly integrating horses into their lifeways. Borrowing the Utes' mounted hunting techniques, partially equestrian Comanche groups moved down the Arkansas River valley onto the grasslands. They entered written history when Spanish officials noted their presence on the southern Plains in 1706. Some Comanches joined with Utes

¹⁷ James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 31 (quotation), 3, 26, 29-30, 33, 34; Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land*, 7, 19-20, 22, 24.

in raiding into New Mexico from the Colorado Plateau, and, following the Ute example, Comanches became fixtures in the Southwest captive economy.¹⁸

The grasslands that the Comanche occupied were resource-rich, offering plenty of bison and relatively mild wintering grounds, as well as areas containing water and timber. On the southern Plains, however, Comanches had to compete with Apaches for the same river bottoms, which the former needed for their horses and the latter used for their mixed hunting and farming economy. Comanches also challenged Apaches for control of regional trade, especially that with New Mexico. Fully equestrian (not, like Apaches, committed to defending horticultural villages), Comanches relentlessly raided Apaches for horses and captives. Comanches generally outmaneuvered their rivals and, assisted by firearms acquired from French traders to the east (strict Spanish policies forbade trading guns to Natives), they muscled Apaches toward the south and west, claiming the Arkansas Valley during the 1720s. During the 1730s, the now fully-mounted Comanches pushed the Apache further toward New Mexico. By the 1740s, they operated an extensive trade network spanning from the Rio Grande to the Mississippi River and from central Texas to the upper Missouri River, with its nexus in the upper Arkansas River valley.¹⁹

Some Comanche groups remained geographically close to Shoshones. For instance, Yamparika Comanches inhabited the Yampa River valley (in northwestern

¹⁸ Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 18, 22-26; Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization*, 89-91, 94; Kardiner, *Psychological Frontiers*, 47, 51; Åke Hultkrantz, "Shoshoni Indians on the Plains: An Appraisal of the Documentary Evidence," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 93 (1968), 49-72: 60; Henry E. Stamm IV, *People of the Wind River: The Eastern Shoshones, 1825-1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 6; Lowie, *Indians of the Plains*, 192; Flores, "Bison Ecology," 468; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 283-284; Hämäläinen, "Rise and Fall," 836-837; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 19; Flores, *Natural West*, 56; Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land*, 19-20, 25, 37.

¹⁹ Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 31-40; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 284-286, 288; Hämäläinen, "Rise and Fall," 837; Flores, *Natural West*, 56-57; Pekka Hämäläinen, "The Western Comanche Trade Center: Rethinking the Plains Indian Trade System," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 29, 4 (Winter, 1998), 485-513; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 134, 147; Fowler, "Great Plains," 8, 11-12; Flores, "Bison Ecology," 469; Brooks, *Captives and Cousins*, 33.

Colorado) and ranged into the Green River and Platte River areas, where they gathered a variety of roots, nuts, seeds, and berries, snared jackrabbits and other small game, and also hunted some larger game such as bison. In contrast to their increasingly Plains-oriented relatives, these peoples remained largely dependent upon women's work for subsistence, so women therefore did not make a comparable shift from being obvious producers of sustenance to appearing mere processors of what men obtained. To the south of the Yamparikas, the Kwahari (Antelope-eaters) linked the northernmost Comanches to other groups that focused more on bison hunting. Once horses reached Kwaharis and Yamparikas from their southern relatives, they became the conduit by which the animals reached Shoshones living to the north, as nearby as the Green River basin. During the early 1700s, two main branches of Comanches emerged. The first was the Northern or Western Comanche, comprised of the Yamparika and Kwahari, as well as Jupes (Timber People) and Kotsotekas (Buffalo-eaters). These groups concentrated between the upper Canadian and Arkansas River, although some ranged north of that area and thereby connected Shoshones to the horse supply of the Southwest. These groups linked Shoshones to the other Comanche branch, the Southern or Eastern Comanche who centralized in the Red River country. Shoshone-Comanche ties remained so close throughout the 1700s that their relations extended well beyond trade. Individuals, families, and even larger groups commonly migrated back and forth between Shoshone and Comanche groups.²⁰

²⁰ Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 2, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; John Washakie, interview by author, Fort Washakie, WY, September 11, 2012; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 34; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 288; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 134; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 6; Hultkrantz, "Shoshoni Indians on the Plains," 61-63; John W.W. Mann, *Sacajawea's People: The Lemhi Shoshones*

Between 1690 and 1700, Shoshones in what is now southern Idaho and western Wyoming came into possession of their first horses. Using two primary routes, both Utes and Comanches channeled horses northward. First, along the eastern foot of the Rockies, Comanches moved horses north to their Shoshone relatives. Second, Utes trafficked horses north along a route west of the Continental Divide, by way of the headwaters of the Colorado, Grand, and Green Rivers. The Shoshone trade rendezvous in the upper Green River basin appears to have been a key means by which horses passed from Comanches and Utes to Shoshones. Once Shoshone groups – such as those in the Snake River country – acquired horses, they passed some along to their northern neighbors, such as the ancestors of the Lemhi.²¹

Shoshones, then, introduced horses to the northern Great Plains. Their early possession of horses, combined with their close ties to the middlemen who supplied them, endowed them with major ecological and military advantages over their pedestrian rivals with whom they had been warring for decades. Shoshone range on the Great Plains was extensive before they acquired horses, apparently stretching from the Platte in the south to the Milk River in the north, although they likely did not extend too far east onto the Plains. But once they received horses, they expanded further, often into areas already

and the Salmon River Country (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 13; Elizabeth A. Fenn, *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 207.

²¹ The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demetri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1993, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demetri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 2, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Hämäläinen, “Rise and Fall,” 845; Haines, “Northward Spread,” 430, 435, 436; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 269-270, 294; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 85-86; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 19-20; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 9; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 134; Mark Q. Sutton, “Warfare and Expansion: An Ethnohistoric Perspective on the Numic Spread,” *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 8, 1 (1986), 65-82: 77; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 23; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 6; Hultkrantz, “Shoshoni Indians on the Plains,” 61; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 84, 88, 91; Fowler, “Great Plains,” 8; Lowie, *Indians of the Plains*, 40-41.

inhabited or used by other Natives. By the 1720s, for instance, Shoshones and Piegans fought in the Saskatchewan River country of southern Alberta. The range of Shoshone activity also reached further east, well beyond the western high Plains. Throughout much of the eighteenth century, for example, the semisedentary villagers on the Missouri River feared Shoshone raiders. As a Mandan or Hidatsa chief informed some French explorers in 1739, the Shoshone were “a brave people dreaded of all the other tribes” and that they “wander about occupying a large extent of territory.” As late as the 1770s, their range may have extended into southern Saskatchewan. All the while, Shoshones maintained their territory in what are now parts of Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, and Utah.²²

Much of the territory into which Shoshones introduced horses was hospitable to the species. Many Shoshones, for instance, hunted in the valleys of the Big Horn and Wind Rivers for most of the year, and then wintered west of South Pass in the Green or Bear River region. This allowed them access to game rich-areas for much of the year while providing horses with quality wintering grounds. In this Great Plains-Rocky Mountain borderland, Shoshones (and later Crows) benefitted from longer growing

²² “Extract from the Journal of La Verendrye,” in *Journals and Letters of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de la Verendrye and His Sons*, edited by Lawrence J. Burpee, 366-373 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1927, 1968), 368 (quotations); David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative, 1784-1812*, edited by Richard Glover (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1962), 328-330; Matthew Cocking, “An Adventurer from Hudson Bay: Journal of Matthew Cocking, from York Factory to the Blackfoot Country, 1772-3,” in *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, series 3, vol. 2, edited by Lawrence J. Burpee, 89-121 (Ottawa: The Royal Society of Canada, 1908), 103; Hultkrantz, “Shoshoni Indians,” 63-67, 72; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 2, 8; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 86; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 294; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 119-120; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 38; Sutton, “Warfare and Expansion,” 70; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 84, 87; Brian M. Fagan, *Ancient North America: The Archaeology of a Continent*, 3rd edition (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 134; Preston Holder, *The Hoe and the Horse on the Plains: A Study of Cultural Development among North American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970, 1974), 111-112; Lowie, “Northern Shoshone,” 189-190; Åke Hultkrantz, “The Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” in *Shoshone Indians*, edited by Carling I. Malouf and Ake Hultkrantz, 178-214 (New York: Garland, 1974), 184; Åke Hultkrantz, “The Indians in Yellowstone Park,” in *Shoshone Indians*, edited by Carling I. Malouf and Ake Hultkrantz, 217-250 (New York: Garland, 1974), 231-233; Wissler, “Influence of the Horse,” 13, 23-24; Judy, “Powder Keg,” 135-136; The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1993, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

seasons (for forage), milder winters, and mountain valleys that sheltered their herds. Shoshones farther north, such as those in present-day Montana and Alberta, introduced horses to areas that were simply harder on the descendants of the Spanish Barbs. The northern Plains were bountiful for humans, as they were rich in game, forage, waterways, and wooded ranges of hills, but they also had notoriously long and cold winters. Nevertheless, they did benefit from the availability of such areas as the Marias River valley, a haven that provided horses with food and shelter during the winter months. Moreover, some Shoshones wintered in the Chinook belt along the eastern foot of the northern Rockies, where drier winds made the winters less hostile toward humans and horses alike. Others wintered to the west, in the mountain valleys. In fact, it is possible that the rich forage, ample sheltered areas, and more hospitable climate available west of the Continental Divide, on the Columbia Plateau in particular, enabled Shoshones living in that region to accumulate larger horse herds than their relatives did on the northern Plains.²³

This brings us to the complex relationship between horses and Shoshone culture. As Pekka Hämmäläinen demonstrates, the story of Plains Indian equestrianism is far from an overwhelming success story.²⁴ Native groups benefitted from horses in many ways, but they also presented major challenges and even subjected some people – particularly women – to increasing violence and difficult labor. We must therefore be wary of making sweeping statements such as that Comanches and Utes were “[l]iberated and empowered

²³ Hämmäläinen, “Rise and Fall,” 847-848, 853; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 86; Wissler, “Influence of the Horse,” 20-21; Robert F. Murphy and Yolanda Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock Subsistence and Society,” *Anthropological Records* 16, 7 (1960), 293-338: 325-329; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 29-30.

²⁴ Hämmäläinen, “Rise and Fall,” 833-834.

by the horse.”²⁵ As the following pages demonstrate, the horses did indeed “liberate” and “empower” some, but it led to the opposite for others.

In some ways, horses clearly benefitted Shoshone men and women. Both men and women, for instance, rode and owned horses. The most obvious influence of horses was that they enabled Shoshones to travel farther and faster than ever before. Of great importance was that they decreased the time of travel from one water source to another on the arid high Plains. Horses also enabled Shoshones to conduct commerce more frequently, more quickly, and over far greater distances. Indeed, those animals fueled trade in more ways than one; horses themselves were a high-demand commodity, and they increased the rate, range, and volume of commerce. The amount of goods that family groups and individual traders could transport also grew. Horses, then, helped women – who controlled the transportation of a family’s homes and transportation – by giving them a powerful new beast of burden to ease their labor. Likewise, horses enhanced women’s foraging efforts by allowing them to cover more ground and transport more roots and berries. Yet, as we shall see, women now had to transport more material goods than they did prior to the equestrian era. Horses could carry as much as a couple hundred pounds on their backs, and then pull another three hundred or so pounds on a travois (if used, which Shoshones apparently did not until the nineteenth century). Dogs, which had been the Shoshones’ primary beast of burden to this point in time, carried maybe a quarter of the weight that a horse could. Horses also traveled considerably faster than dogs – about twice the rate. However, Native groups continued to use dogs for

²⁵ Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 29.

transporting material goods well into the 1700s, for until a group accumulated many horses, men usually preserved mounts for hunting.²⁶

Shoshones in what is now Wyoming and Idaho got their first horses by about 1700, but their relatives on the plains of Montana and Alberta received them later. Saukamaptee's account of a 1730s Piegan-Shoshone "infantry-style" battle suggests that Shoshones on the grasslands of present-day Canada either did not have horses by that date, or that they had too few to risk in warfare and used them only for hunting and travel.²⁷ Within a decade, however, the situation changed. As Saukamaptee recalled, "the Snake Indians and their allies had Misstutum (Big Dogs, that is Horses) on which they rode, swift as the Deer, on which they dashed at the Peeagans, and with their stone Pukamoggan knocked them on the head, and they had thus lost several of their best men." Unfamiliarity with this new beast aroused fear among Native groups, as Saukamaptee recalled that, "[t]his news we did not well comprehend and it alarmed us, for we had no idea of Horses and could not make out what they were."²⁸

As Saukamaptee suggests, horses enhanced the military capabilities of Shoshone men. Mounts enabled warriors to travel faster and farther to raid their enemies, or, in the event of defeat, to flee more quickly. Pedestrian combat still occurred at times (especially before Shoshones accumulated large horse herds), with horses providing warriors with

²⁶ The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1993, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 268, 273-274, 276; Julian H. Steward, "Native Cultures of the Intermontane (Great Basin) Area," *Essays in Historical Anthropology of North America* (1940), 445-502: 484-485; Fowler, "Great Plains," 8-9; Lowie, *Indians of the Plains*, 41, 199; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 25; S. J. Fox, "Cultural Ecological Patterns of the Eastern Shoshone," *Tebewa* 19 (1976), 1-8: 5.

²⁷ For this pedestrian-era warfare, see previous chapter, pages 91-92.

²⁸ Thompson, *Narrative*, 330. Also see Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 35; Calloway, "Snake Frontiers," 86; Bamforth, "Indigenous People," 99; The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1993, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

transportation to and from the battlefield. As Shoshones obtained more horses, however, men increasingly used them to assault enemy villages and encampments. In doing so, they intensified and revolutionized northern Plains warfare. Shoshones in Montana and Alberta were well-supplied with horses by the late 1730s, and as they expanded the range of their devastating equestrian raids, they became the terror of the grasslands. Riding mounts armored with dressed pronghorn skins and themselves wearing quilted armor (both of which they adopted from southern Plains Natives), Shoshones usually targeted small, isolated enemy encampments, and swooped in while swinging their deadly stone-headed clubs (pukamoggan). Their enemies responded by establishing larger and therefore less vulnerable camps whenever possible. Since they now engaged in more mounted raids than pedestrian battles, Shoshones abandoned large shields for small, round ones that were less cumbersome to use on horseback. They also shortened their bows and lances to better accommodate mounted warfare. When opposed by stationary lines of “infantry,” they usually broke through them with relative ease.²⁹

This powerful new instrument of war enabled Shoshone men to gain a foothold in the captive economy of the Southwest. Using the effective style of equestrian warfare described above, Shoshone warriors targeted the women and children of neighboring

²⁹ Thompson, *Narrative*, 330-332; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1993, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 35-37; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 133-134, 144; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 57-58; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 6, 11; John C. Ewers, “Intertribal Warfare as the Precursor of Indian-White Warfare on the Northern Great Plains,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* (October 1975), 397- 410; 401-402; Sutton, “Warfare and Expansion,” 70-71, 77; Fowler, “Great Plains,” 9; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 20; Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization*, 126; Wissler, “Influence of the Horse,” 17-18; Judy, “Powder Keg,” 135-136; Lowie, *Indians of the Plains*, 73; Lowie, “Northern Shoshone,” 192-193; Bamforth, “Indigenous People,” 99; The Shoshonis of Wyoming, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

Plains groups, taking them captive and turning them into commodities that they exchanged for more horses as well as other items, such as Spanish saddles, bridles, and metal goods. In fact, the value that those captives held on the market may have contributed to the increase in Shoshone raiding activity on the Plains. Shoshones usually channeled these individuals into the burgeoning Spanish captive trade via their Ute and Comanche relatives. As the Chevalier de la Verendrye, a French explorer seeking a route to the “Western Sea,” remarked in his account of a 1742-1743 visit to the northern Plains, “[the Snakes] are not friendly with any tribe. It is said that in 1741 they had entirely ruined seventeen villages, killed all the men and the old women, made slaves of the young women and sold them on the coast for horses and merchandise.” Shoshones raided neighboring groups indiscriminately and relentlessly, earning the lasting enmity of their many victims even as they subjected the women of other groups to the persistent threat of violence and captivity. This aggressive captive-raiding encouraged the Shoshones’ enemies to see past their own rivalries, and, on at least a temporary basis, trade with one another and conduct joint military expeditions. Ultimately, the Shoshone threat was the impetus behind the formation of a loose alliance between the tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy, Plains Crees, Assiniboines, and Gros Ventres. Assiniboine and Blackfoot groups had, for instance, fought one another during the late 1600s, but by the 1730s they entered a relatively peaceful period marked by trade and joint war expeditions. Some conflict erupted between these various groups during the next few decades, but for most of the eighteenth century they remained friendly.³⁰

³⁰ “Journal of the Chevalier de la Verendrye, 1742-43,” in *Journals and Letters of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de la Verendrye and His Sons*, edited by Lawrence J. Burpee, 406-432 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1927, 1968), 412 (quotation); Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming;

The unifying power of the Shoshone threat was evident during the Chevalier de la Verendrye's visit to the Plains. Scholars debate where exactly the Chevalier traveled, but the most likely scenario is that his party trekked through South Dakota, turning back in the vicinity of the Black Hills or the Big Horn Mountains. It is also difficult to identify most of the tribes to which he refers, but it is clear that they had a common enemy: the Gens du Serpent, or "Snakes". When the Chevalier encountered the Natives that he called the Gens des Chevaux, for instance, he noted that they "were in great distress, nothing but tears and groans, all their villages having been destroyed by the Gens du Serpent and very few having escaped."³¹ The Natives agreed to escort the Chevalier to a distant Spanish settlement, but it soon became apparent that they had another motive in mind: revenge. During their journey, the party met up with other Natives, including a village of the Gens de l'Arc, "the only tribe sufficiently brave not to stand in dread of the Gens du Serpent."³² As a chief informed the Frenchman, "[d]on't be surprised if you see so many villages assembled with us. Word has been sent in all directions for them to join us. You are hearing war shouts every day; it is not without intention." Before long, some two thousand warriors gathered and advanced westward. Once the war party located the

The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demetri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1993, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 297-298; Calloway, "Snake Frontiers," 87; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 38, 47; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 8-9; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 134; Sutton, "Expansion and Warfare," 76; Judy, "Powder Keg," 135-136; Oscar Lewis, *The Effects of White Contact upon Blackfoot Culture, with Special Reference to the Role of the Fur Trade* (New York: J.J. Augustin, 1942), 14; David G. Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree* (New York: The Museum of Natural History, 1940), 31-33; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 92, 100; Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization*, 87; Brooks, *Captives and Cousins*, 33.

³¹ "Journal of the Chevalier de la Verendrye," 411-412 (quotation). Also see Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 131; The Shoshone Role in Western History, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; The Shoshonis of Wyoming, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

³² "Journal of the Chevalier de la Verendrye," 413.

“main” Gens du Serpent village, however, they found it deserted and they therefore feared that the Shoshone had moved to attack their women and children. Much to the Chevalier’s dismay, the Natives hastened back the way from which they came. The power of the Shoshone, whether real or imagined, was clearly tremendous. By the early 1740s, they had become the dominant military power on the northern Plains.³³

It would be difficult to overstate the disruptive nature of Shoshone equestrianism for their pedestrian rivals. On horseback, Shoshones increased their own access to the bison herds (as will be further discussed below) while they circumscribed their pedestrian rivals’ access to those same herds. Moreover, by the 1740s, Shoshone raiding activities reportedly made it dangerous for Assiniboines and others to make the long journey east to visit Hudson Bay Company trading posts. This by no means completely prevented Natives from trading with Europeans, but it likely had a detrimental effect on their commerce. It appears that Natives to the south faced similar problems. In 1739, two Frenchmen employed by Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de la Verendrye, the father of the Chevalier de la Verendrye, reported that Natives wanting to travel to trade with the Spanish risked running into the much-feared “Gens du Serpent.” One also wonders how much of an influence the looming threat of Shoshone raids had on the daily lives of their enemies. Ever fearful of a sudden mounted attack, the Blackfeet and others likely took measures for the sake of defense that altered their everyday activities. One effect was that the Shoshones’ victims tried to remain in larger groups for much of the year, rendering

³³ “Journal of the Chevalier de la Verendrye,” 416 (quotation), 420-421; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 87.

their encampments too large for Shoshones to risk raiding. Small pedestrian hunting camps were no match for equestrian Shoshone raiding parties.³⁴

Horses were obviously useful in war, but they triggered changes beyond military life. In particular, horses revolutionized Shoshone subsistence, producing the first equestrian bison-hunting societies on the northern Plains. The integration of horses into Shoshone subsistence systems made them generally more productive and secure. This “solar economy,” in which Shoshones – much like their Comanche relatives – tapped into the thermodynamic energy of the sun by exploiting horses, which fed upon the grasses that the sun nurtured, enabled them to more reliably depend upon the bison, the most plentiful resource on the Great Plains. Unlike dogs, horses ate the very plants fed by the sun, and could be ridden to pursue game. Changing ecological relationships, namely the development of subsistence systems that more efficiently used readily available Plains energy sources, allowed Shoshone hunters to thrive on the grasslands and were, therefore, the foundation of Shoshone military might. Yet, as we shall see, when Shoshone groups abandoned their ecological “safety nets” by specializing in bison hunting, they needed essential trade contacts and women’s foraging efforts to provide foods rich in nutrients that meat was not.³⁵

That Shoshone groups apparently used horses for bison hunting before they employed them in war speaks volumes. Shoshones had hunted bison on the Plains before they acquired horses, with both men and women participating in “surround” methods of

³⁴ “Extract from the Journal of la Verendrye,” 366-368; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 6; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 6; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 134; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 91-92.

³⁵ Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 275-276; Flores, “Bison Ecology,” 471-472; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 25; Elliott West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), 70-72; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 39, 68.

hunting. The use of horses, though, made bison hunting not only more efficient but also a largely male endeavor. Mounted Shoshone hunters could more effectively scout areas for bison, follow the animals more reliably, and therefore have more consistent access to fresh meat than they did on foot. Bison migrations, which could be unpredictable as the ungulates searched for food and water, tried to escape danger, and searched for other bison herds, were now less problematic. Short-term, seasonal, and annual variations in bison migration patterns still produced occasional shortages, but horses were a form of insurance that helped to mitigate those. Women continued to engage in a variety of foraging and food-rationing activities that also alleviated periodic bison shortages as well as contributed to a well-rounded diet; and horses helped to make this work more efficient. On horseback, a few men armed with bows and arrows could “run” a herd and, in less time and with less effort, kill as many or more bison as could a pedestrian “surround.” In some areas, such as the far northern Plains, where horses arrived only gradually, Natives used their mounts to enhance existing “jumping” and “pounding” techniques. Horses, however, gradually freed Natives from their reliance upon fixed geographical hunting devices, thereby enhancing their overall mobility. By allowing hunters to kill more bison in less time, horses also simultaneously required and enabled women to transport more meat and hides over greater distances. The improved efficiency of equestrian bison-hunting may have allowed young men to go on more raids even as it gave women more work to do in terms of meat and hide processing. Additionally, research on the relationship between equestrianism and Native population growth suggests that the Shoshones’ increased supplies of protein-rich food contributed to a rise in their population over the course of several decades, enabling them to field more hunters and

warriors. The extension of the practice of polygyny, as we shall see, likely also contributed to this phenomenon.³⁶

Women's work was integral to equestrian Shoshone subsistence. Shoshones – or any people for that matter – could not survive on bison meat alone, so women continued to gather roots and berries as they did in the past. They certainly did not engage in such efforts to the degree that their Basin counterparts did, but the chokeberries, gooseberries, currants, bitterroots, yampas, camas, and other berries and roots that they gathered provided human bodies with essential nutrients that bison flesh did not. Although horses constituted a more visible addition to Native bison-hunting methods, we must not forget that women usually had their own horses (ones typically deemed unfit for hunting or warring) that they used to aid them in their foraging. Women, moreover, transformed the bison and other game that men killed into usable resources – namely food and material goods. They butchered, dried, and cooked meat, stored some of it for later use, and generally distributed a family's food supplies. This was important, for they had to expertly prepare, store, and ration foods, especially in preparation for the winter months when fresh foodstuffs were usually in short supply. Furthermore, women engaged in the

³⁶ Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 3, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Lowie, *Indians of the Plains*, 42; Douglas B. Bamforth, "Historical Documents and Bison Ecology on the Great Plains," *Plains Anthropologist*, 32 (Feb. 1987), 1-16: 5-7; Holder, *Hoe and the Horse*, xii, 20, 110-112, 130, 142; Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization*, 9, 116-117, 126; George C. Frison, *Survival by Hunting: Prehistoric Human Hunters and Animal Prey* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 82, 83, 86, 87, 120; Judy, "Powder Keg," 131, 133; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 9, 42; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 272, 275-276; Calloway, "Snake Frontiers," 86; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 88-89; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 134; Fowler, "Great Plains," 9; Waldo R. Wedel, *Prehistoric Man on the Great Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 242; The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1993, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Fox, "Cultural Ecological" 5; The Shoshonis of Wyoming, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

time-consuming work of turning raw hides into tipis, robes, clothing, parfleche bags, and other items that they and their families used. The fruits of their labor were theirs to keep, give away, or trade – they did not simply surrender their finished products to their husbands. Their crafts – such as making the tipis that they owned, cared for, and transported – were highly specialized efforts that most men did not know how to themselves complete.³⁷

While some historians conclude that equestrianism reduced Native women's status by transforming them into mere processors of the bison that men killed, a closer look at equestrian Shoshone gender relations provides a more nuanced interpretation. Indeed, the development of mounted bison-hunting did include women engaging in more meat and hide preparation, but their completion of such hard work, their many “domestic” duties, and the extension of polygyny hardly signified any loss of status. Likewise, that horses became the most valued component of the “bride-prices” that fathers desired from their daughters' suitors did not necessarily indicate a loss of female autonomy and influence. So, on the one hand, men who owned many horses could afford to pay higher “bride-prices” and “buy” more wives, pointing to the growing importance

³⁷ Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 2, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 3, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 73-74; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 26; Peters, *Women of the Earth Lodges*, 63-64, 87-89, Chapter 11; For a discussion of Plateau Native women controlling the distribution of the goods that they produced, see Lilian A. Ackerman, “Complementary but Equal: Gender Status in the Plateau,” in *Women and Power in Native North America*, edited by Laura F. Klein and Lillian A. Ackerman, 75-100 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 77-78; Kehoe, “Blackfoot Persons,” 114-116; Fowler, *Wives and Husbands*, 297.

of male honor, status, and masculinity.³⁸ On the other hand, equestrian Shoshone societies remained matrilineal, meaning that a man typically moved in with his bride's family and married one or more of her sisters (sororal polygyny). The husband, then, did not simply take his wife or wives away from their families and put them to work. Rather, he entered their household and performed work – killing bison and making war – that benefitted his wife's (or wives') family. Men, moreover did not have a monopoly on horse use or ownership. Women used horses to travel and transport goods; both Shoshone men and women were experts at riding horses. Men owned and cared for their bison-hunting horses and warhorses (or had boys do so), but women tended to the pack-horses that they sometimes owned; they often inherited those animals from their fathers or acquired them when their husbands traded goods that they produced. Moreover, as a group's horse herds grew, surplus animals that men deemed unsuitable for warring or hunting became beasts of burden that helped women. Women also maintained autonomy through gender-specific group activities and institutions. These included menstrual huts – which it was taboo for men to enter – and group berry-picking efforts that gave women their own space in which to congregate and socialize as well as, in the case of midwives, gain status through their skills. Finally, that women controlled the distribution of food and many essential material goods served as a further indicator of their status. Also, that horses allowed women to harvest and transport more roots or berries at a given time

³⁸ Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 244, 247-250, 259-266, 288, 290; Hämäläinen, "Rise and Fall," 851; Flores, *Natural West*, 58; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 47, 95-103; Peters, *Women of the Earth Lodges*, 155-156; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 28; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 272-273. For the use of polygyny not constituting a "handicap" for Native women, see Ackerman, "Complementary but Equal," 77-78; Lillian A. Ackerman, *A Necessary Balance: Gender and Power among Indians of the Columbia Plateau* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 91-92. For horses as prized marriage-related gifts, see Carter, *Importance of Being Monogamous*, 108-109, 127.

might have given them greater status through the trade of surplus food.³⁹ Ultimately, the benefits of horses were superficially skewed toward men, with horses providing them with prestige (through warfare) and a highly visible economic activity (hunting), but that did not mean that equestrianism diminished the status of Shoshone women.

Women's work included the production of essential material goods, and those evolved as Shoshones became enmeshed in equestrian bison-hunting. During their pedestrian-era migrations into bison-rich areas, Shoshone women began to construct bison-skin tipis instead of Basin-style grass lodges. But as group mobility and access to bison increased, women made greater use of skin tepees, which they became proficient at constructing, setting up, taking down, and transporting; horses proved particularly useful for the latter. Similarly, bison-hide clothing became more common among Shoshone groups, although women also made deer, elk, pronghorn, bighorn sheep, and other animal skins into garments. So, women fashioned a variety of robes, leggings, moccasins, and other attire for their families from the animals that men killed, and they controlled the manner in which these were distributed. Particularly skillful tipi construction and clothing manufacture earned women recognition and the respect of other women and men alike. Far from mere laborers who produced goods at the behest of others, women took pride in their efforts and exceptional work received due credit. Their production of material goods was also important because women made surplus goods that, through trade, became

³⁹ Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 244; Frank Roe, *The Indian and the Horse* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 321-322; Fowler, "Great Plains," 9; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming. Peters points to matrilineal residence and sororal polygyny – both of which existed among the Shoshone – as part of the means by which Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara women maintained their autonomy and influence. Peters, *Women of the Earth Lodges*, 156.

horses, produce, and other commodities. Indeed, women themselves traded these goods to the women of other Native groups, often obtaining pack animals, produce, and material goods such as shells that they then used as they wished.⁴⁰

Equestrian Shoshone migration patterns reflected that men's and women's activities sustained them. Over the course of the year, Shoshones generally mirrored the movements and actions of the bison herds, migrating as well as gathering into larger groups or splintering into smaller groups as the bison did. On the other hand, growing seasons – particularly the availability of certain roots and berries – also affected Shoshone movements. During the winter months, they generally dispersed in small bands, seeking shelter, water, and forage for their horses in river bottoms. Conveniently, that was also where many bison wintered. During the spring and summer, when grasslands production was at its annual peak, bison groups congregated. So did Native groups, and during that time they conducted communal bison hunts and ceremonies as well as dispatched the large war parties that their enemies feared. When Shoshone groups gathered in the spring, groups of women dug up yampas, bitterroots, and other tubers that they prepared along with bison meat. As Shoshones again gathered in the late summer and fall for the major annual bison hunt, groups of women picked chokeberries, currants, and others that they served fresh, dried for later use, or pounded with meat.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 2, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1993, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 47, 50-51; Lowie, "Northern Shoshone," 179-180, 183; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 27; Peters, *Women of the Earth Lodges*, 146.

⁴¹ Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 37-54; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 9, 43, 45, 65-75; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 275-276; Bamforth, "Historical Documents," 3.

Shoshones used horses to hunt animals other than the bison. Shoshone men, for instance, adopted horses for pronghorn hunting. On occasion, mounted hunters (usually several dozen riders) would surround a herd of pronghorn, and then take turns driving them in circles until the animals collapsed from exhaustion. Alternatively, several riders might take turns chasing small groups of the animals over the course of many miles, switching to riders with fresh mounts until the pronghorn tired and could be easily killed with clubs or arrows. This latter method, however, was likely more for sport than subsistence. As Shoshone men focused more on mounted hunting methods, small-game hunting increasingly became the province of women and children. Especially in the Wyoming Basin, they used traps and snares to capture rabbits, birds, and other small animals. Some groups on the Plains, however, became so specialized toward bison that they all but abandoned the use of small-game trapping and hunting devices.⁴²

This specialization toward bison hunting made Shoshone trading activities more important. Indeed, although women continued to forage, their efforts perhaps provided Shoshone groups with fewer plant-based nutrients than they did in the past. One solution to this issue was Shoshone trade with the Crow, who inhabited what is now northeastern Wyoming and southern Montana. Crows obtained vegetables (particularly maize) that their female Hidatsa relatives and Mandan women cultivated on the upper Missouri. Functioning as middlemen, Crows traded some of this produce to Shoshones, who gave them bison meat, obsidian, and material goods that women made. It appears that women were vital components of this process, for while men performed elaborate ceremonial trades involving such things as horses and firearms, women traded food, clothing, and

⁴² Frison, *Survival by Hunting*, 132; Lowie, "Northern Shoshone," 185; Hultkrantz, "Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area," 199-201.

other goods with one another on a more informal basis. An important means by which Shoshones acquired key goods items was the Green River rendezvous in southwestern Wyoming, which linked the Great Basin, Columbia Plateau, Great Plains, and New Mexico. At this rendezvous, Natives exchanged horses, produce, and Spanish material goods from the Southwest, vegetables from the upper Missouri, meat and hides from the Great Plains, fish and shells from the Columbia Plateau, and nuts, obsidian, and roots from the Great Basin. Shoshone women – who processed meat and skins – were thus central to equestrian Shoshone trade. Yet, especially as their rivals themselves adopted equestrian warfare, this trade became vulnerable to disruption.⁴³

The horse revolution also affected Shoshones west of the Continental Divide. There, horses enabled many Shoshones living on the Columbia Plateau and fringes of the northern Great Basin to make annual trips to the Plains so they could harvest bison. Some made periodic trips east for bison during the pedestrian era, but the arrival of horses facilitated more regular expeditions. After they began accumulating horses in about 1700, some Agaidikas (Salmon-eaters) and Tukudikas or Dukurikas (Sheep-eaters) began crossing the Rockies from what is now central Idaho to the grasslands of what became Montana. Late each summer, these groups made the long journey east, often gathering in the Yellowstone River valley to hunt bison. Once they procured enough dried meat and hides, they packed their horses and returned west. They usually made it back before snow blocked the mountain passes, but sometimes they did not. In such an event, they camped in a sheltered valley and resumed the journey once the passes cleared in the spring. Shoshones living in the Snake River Plain made similar journeys east into the Big Horn

⁴³ Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 46-47; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 93; Fowler, “Great Plains,” 5; Peters, *Women of the Earth Lodges*, 146.

Basin. Others eschewed bison-hunting, instead traveling to hunt elk in what became northwestern Wyoming or pronghorn in present-day southwestern Wyoming and Idaho. Some of these travelers, however, permanently relocated to the Plains and became Kukundikas (Buffalo-eaters).⁴⁴

While some mounted Shoshones relocated or periodically travelled east of the Divide to hunt bison, others adopted horses and remained in the Snake River country. Bison inhabited that area, so some northern Great Basin Shoshones and others from the mountains to the north exploited those herds rather than those to the east, integrating mounted bison-hunting into their subsistence systems. Northern Basin Shoshones continued to gather roots and trap small game, while Shoshones in the mountains to the north conducted fall bison hunts after fishing on the tributaries of the Columbia during the spring and summer. The ancestors of the Lemhi, scattered in small groups, tended to focus on a single subsistence activity for much of the year (one group would focus on fishing, another on hunting, another on gathering, and so forth), but Snake River Shoshones migrated more frequently and in larger groups, moving from one activity to another more often.⁴⁵

Other Shoshone groups, particularly many “Sheepeaters” of what became central Idaho and northwestern Wyoming, made little use of horses. They continued to focus on hunting bighorn sheep, for which equestrianism was not useful. They, moreover, largely

⁴⁴ Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 187-191, 203-209; Hultkrantz, “Indians in Yellowstone,” 240-242; Lowie, “Northern Shoshone,” 184; Mann, *Sacajawea’s People*, 13-14; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 156-157; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 329-331; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 22-23; Merle W. Wells, “Introduction,” in Brigham D. Madsen, *The Northern Shoshoni* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton, 1979), 18-19; James A. Teit, “The Salishan Tribes of the Western Plateaus,” in *The Forty-Fifty Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, edited by Franz Boas, 23-396 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1930), 305.

⁴⁵ Mann, *Sacajawea’s People*, 13-14; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 191-196; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 325-329; Hämläinen, “Rise and Fall,” 853; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 22; Wells, “Introduction,” in *Northern Shoshoni*, 18-19.

inhabited rugged, climatically harsh, high-elevation areas such the Sawtooth Range and present-day Yellowstone National Park – areas simply inhospitable to horses. Shoshones of the upper Yellowstone, Big Horn, and Wind River regions used the lowlands that afforded seasonal access to bison, elk, deer, and other game, but during the 1700s many withdrew into the mountains to escape competition with equestrian groups such as the Crow. Others joined their equestrian relatives and transitioned to bison-hunting.⁴⁶

Some scholars have downplayed the importance of bison to mounted Shoshone groups. For instance, in reference to Wyoming Basin Shoshones, ethnologist Demitri Boris Shimkin writes that, “[i]n all, the efficiency of bison economy was almost incredibly low. With all their slaughter, the Shoshone could scarcely have lived more than six months a year on bison meat.” However, Shoshone groups did not need to depend on bison for more than that. As demonstrated above, bison hunting became more important to many Shoshone groups after the arrival of horses, but previous subsistence patterns did not simply disappear. Indeed, although many Shoshones increasingly focused on grasslands environments, they generally capitalized upon the mobility afforded by the horse and migrated between the grasslands, mountain parklands, the Great Basin, and the Columbia Plateau. To varying degrees, they all continued to benefit from women’s foraging efforts. Some Shoshone groups west of the Divide migrated east to hunt bison, but others that primarily used the Plains sometimes went west to fish for salmon. Groups from the Wyoming Basin and adjacent areas often trekked into the Yampa River country so women could dig up yampa roots. So, their great mobility enabled Shoshones

⁴⁶ Mann, *Sacajawea’s People*, 13; Hultkrantz, “Indians in Yellowstone,” 233-239; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 322-323, 331; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 22-24; Wells, “Introduction,” in *Northern Shoshoni*, 19.

everywhere to tap into many different resource bases, all within a vast territory claimed by Shoshone-speaking groups.⁴⁷

The mobility that came with the adoption of horses brought Shoshone raiders and traders into greater contact with other Native groups. Indeed, the extension of commerce and warfare brought equestrian Plains Shoshones into more frequent contact with such peoples as Crow, Blackfeet, and Cree. Along the eastern foot of the northern Rockies, Shoshones encountered Plateau peoples such as the Kutenai, Nez Perce, Salish, and Cayuse. Shoshones, as well as these peoples, inhabited or used to varying degrees the valleys and mountains of what became western Montana and Idaho, which had large deer, elk, mountain goat, and bighorn sheep populations. The aforementioned Crows had split from their Hidatsa relatives on the upper Missouri in the early eighteenth century, becoming primarily hunters as they moved westward into the Yellowstone River country along the Wyoming-Montana border. During the first half of the 1700s, Kiowas inhabited the country surrounding the Black Hills, where they, like Crows, used hunting grounds that Shoshones also visited. For most of the eighteenth century, Shoshones were on friendly terms with these groups (except for the Blackfeet), as they conducted trade and sometimes hunted together. In particular, they had peaceful relations with Salish and Kutenai groups with whom they traveled and hunted bison. Sometimes, however, Shoshones clashed with these peoples over choice hunting grounds.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Demitri Boris Shimkin, "Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography," *University of California Anthropological Records*, 5, 4 (1947), 245-288: 266 (quotation); Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 145; Murphy and Murphy, "Shoshone-Bannock," 315, 332.

⁴⁸ The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1993, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Lowie, "Northern Shoshone," 184, 191; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 7; Deward E. Walker Jr. and Roderick Sprague, "History Until 1846," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 12: Plateau, edited by Deward E. Walker Jr., 138-148 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 139; Deward E.

Horses also made Shoshone social and political organization more complex. In general, equestrian Shoshone groups were frequently larger than they were during the pedestrian era. Their greater ability to relocate as necessary, as well as their enhanced capacity to more readily harvest bison and seek forage, allowed Shoshone groups to regularly consist of hundreds of people. Larger groups were an invaluable asset in an area increasingly characterized by intense competition over resources, so Shoshone families adopted some of the captives that their warriors took in raids. Furthermore, that women could effectively transport forage, as well as the meat and hides harvested from game that the men killed many miles away from a camp, allowed them to provide for more people. Group sizes varied seasonally, especially as supplies of food and forage fluctuated. Moreover, the migrations of these groups became more frequent as they pursued the bison and as horses grazed areas out. Collective action in bison hunts became more common, requiring chiefs for guidance. These men arranged the hunts, maintained order, and organized military efforts. Their influence, however, was far from absolute. It was more advisory than anything else. Especially large gatherings were infrequent and small groups splintered off from larger bodies as they wished, so the chiefs' authority was rather temporary and limited. It was not until later, when Americans entered the West, that chiefs gained greater power and influence.⁴⁹

Walker Jr., "Introduction," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 12: Plateau, edited by Deward E. Walker Jr., 1-7 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 3; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 138; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 19, 22; Hämäläinen, "Rise and Fall," 853; Teit, "Salishan Tribes," 303-305; Hultkrantz, "Shoshoni Indians on the Plains," 68.

⁴⁹ The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1993, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Calloway, "Snake Frontiers," 86; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 294; Steward, "Native Cultures," 487; Mann, *Sacajawea's People*, 13; Lowie, "Northern Shoshone," 208; Murphy and Murphy, "Shoshone-Bannock," 333-334; Hultkrantz, "Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area," 187-189, 191-196; Fox, "Cultural Ecological," 5; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 80-88.

Although it is problematic to conclude that horses diminished the status of women among Shoshone groups, it is important to note that the integration of those animals into Shoshone lifeways altered how men gained status and authority. Indeed, the rise of equestrianism created a new set of masculine ideals, providing young men with new means of achieving honor and status. During the pedestrian era, political and social status came largely with one's age and wisdom, although a particularly successful hunter might obtain a position of influence before he grew old. With the onset of the equestrian era, however, warfare and trade afforded young men the opportunity to gain status and honor. Since horses themselves constituted the primary source of "wealth" among Shoshones, men who built up their herds by capturing enemy horses or taking female captives that they then exchanged for horses were able to gain social and political influence. Horse ownership, then, combined with war honors to allow for "[t]he concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few." Hämäläinen observes that since horses provided Comanche men with a crucial path to marriage – for men "rich" in horses could afford to offer high "bride-prices" for the women that they wanted – the rise of equestrianism subjected women to lives of drudge work as part of polygynous households. Horses likely also provided Shoshone men greater ability to marry the women that they wanted to, but since Shoshones continued to practice matrilineal residence, men took their wealth and influence into their wives' households. In such households, wife hierarchies (usually headed by the first wife) organized labor, parceling out tasks and maintaining an efficient productive relationship among the women.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Hämäläinen, "Rise and Fall," 851 (quotation); The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demetri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1993, Accession Number 9942, Box 17, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 259-269.

Despite the many benefits of horses, one must keep in mind that those animals had limitations and that they challenged their Native owners in many ways. First and foremost, without the necessary knowledge, Natives could not adequately care for horses. So, as horses diffused north from New Spain, so did acquired knowledge. Similarly, so did the necessary material culture: Spanish-style saddles, bridles, and stirrups. Over time, however, Natives produced their own horse-riding equipment. Bison-hunting Natives such as Shoshones used parfleche bags that women made. As another example, fur trader Alexander Henry found Blackfeet making two different types of saddles when he visited them in the early 1800s: ones made from wood overlaid with bison rawhide (often covered with a bison robe) and others made from dressed leather stuffed with moose or deer hair. Becoming adept at hunting on horseback took much practice, for taking accurate shots at moving targets was not easy. Once Natives began using horses, they found that what the horse required in terms of forage and water influenced group actions. When horses grazed out an area, for example, a group had to relocate. Generally, the larger a group became, the more frequently they had to relocate because of their horses' needs. The acquisition of horses may have encouraged Natives to set portions of the grasslands on fire each fall to ensure that the next spring's growth provided high quality forage. During the winter, horses were often of little use; Natives corralled them in river valleys so they could feed on cottonwood bark and branches. Horses required much care, for in addition to having access to ample forage they had to be protected from predators such as wolves and bears, the elements, and enemy raiders. In sum, the maintenance of horse herds demanded a tremendous amount of their owners' time and energy.⁵¹

⁵¹ Alexander Henry, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger, 1799-1814*, vol. 2, edited by

Indeed, horses were in many ways a mixed blessing. One of the most easily overlooked effects of horses was that they competed with the Plains Indians' primary source of subsistence – the bison. By cutting into indigenous animals' forage, they upset the balance of grassland ecologies and reduced the number of bison that the grasslands could effectively support. Horses sometimes overgrazed the bison's favorite areas, forcing them to seek sustenance elsewhere. As Natives followed the bison to those grounds, their horses again wreaked havoc on ecosystems. Horses, moreover, simply could not be taken to any given place and be expected to thrive or even survive. While horses did well on the southern Plains, environments to the north were increasingly inhospitable. Whereas the Little Ice Age provided horses with near-ideal conditions on the southern Plains, cooler, wetter patterns on the northern Plains limited the ability of horses to flourish there. Wetter conditions improved the available forage, but greater cold and shorter growing seasons were not particularly beneficial to the descendants of Spanish Barbs. In particular, the longer, colder, and snowier winters were hard on horses, killing many each year. North of the Platte River, winters were inhospitable to horses, but north of the Missouri, they were simply harsh, with feet of snow, hard winds, and frequent below-zero temperatures producing an unforgiving environment for non-native animals. So, it was not merely distance and the rate of diffusion that limited the number

Barry M. Gough (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1992), 378; Hämmäläinen, "Rise and Fall," 841-842, Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 270; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 9; Fowler, "Great Plains," 9; Lowie, "Northern Shoshone," 191-192; Wissler, "Influence of the Horse," 17-18; Shimkin, "Wind River Shoshone," 265-266, 268; Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree*, 64; Lowie, *Indians of the Plains*, 41-42; Judy, "Powder Keg," 132-133.

of horses on the northern Plains during the early eighteenth century; Shoshones also had to learn how to preserve the few horses that reached them.⁵²

Even before the Chevalier de la Verendrye visited the northern Plains in 1742-1743, Shoshones were no longer the only people who possessed horses. Indeed, while traveling through what is now part of South Dakota, the Chevalier noted that “[a]ll the tribes of those countries have a great many horses, asses, and mules.”⁵³ As Shoshones expanded throughout the northern Plains during the early 1700s, their trade partners and enemies alike began to acquire horses. Most groups likely obtained their first mounts through trade, and then augmented them by raiding and trading (breeding required additional knowledge and experience, so it was likely not yet a factor). Soon after 1700, Shoshones supplied horses to Natives in the Rockies and the Columbia Plateau, such as Nez Perce, Cayuse, Kutenai, and Salish, as well as their few friendly contacts on the Plains, particularly Crows. The Piegan, the southwestern portion of the Blackfoot Confederacy, first got horses from Plateau groups prior to the 1740s. Once Piegans accumulated horses, they passed some on to the other Blackfoot divisions, the Blood and Siksika, who traded some to the Gros Ventre, Assiniboine, and Cree by the 1750s. By the early 1740s, horses had also reached the Mandan and Hidatsa villages on the upper Missouri (likely via the Crows), and from there they also reached Cree and Assiniboine traders. Thus, by mid-century, horses had diffused throughout the northern Plains.⁵⁴

⁵² Hämäläinen, “Rise and Fall,” 837, 844; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 45; R.G. Robertson, *Rotting Face: Smallpox and the American Indian* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton, 2001), 158.

⁵³ “Journal of the Chevalier de la Verendrye,” 414.

⁵⁴ Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 269-271, 294-296; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 85-86; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 88, 91, 93-94; John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 22-23; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 9; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 135; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 134; Fowler, “Great Plains,” 8; Wissler, “Influence of the Horse,” 3-4, 21-22, 24; Haines, “Northward Spread,” 434-436; Lowie, *Indians of*

So, Shoshones lost their monopoly on horses, but they nevertheless maintained the largest herds on the northern Plains. Close ties with Comanches, as well as the productive Green River trade rendezvous, ensured that they had continued access to the horse trade. Indeed, trade, rather than propagation, appeared to be the primary source of horses on the northern Plains, for traders and explorers found Natives in possession of many horses with Spanish brands, as well as mules and donkeys. Moreover, as one moved away from the point of entry of horses on the northern Plains, one found fewer and lower quality animals. Natives generally did not hurry to trade away their best mounts. Rather, they tended to keep the best for themselves and trade animals that were older, injured, starved, or somehow weakened. The Shoshones' superiority in terms of both quantity and quality of horses went a long way toward preserving their military dominance throughout the first half of the eighteenth century and into the second half. Their neighbors all had some horses by about 1750, but many groups had few and were still learning how to use and care for them. Their wealth of horses, however, made them something of a target for their neighbors. Blackfeet, as well as usually friendly Salish, Crow, Nez Perce, and Cayuse groups seized upon opportunities to raid Shoshones.⁵⁵

Unfortunately for Shoshones, their Blackfoot enemies quickly accumulated many horses and they used them to push onto the grasslands. By the mid-1750s, when Hudson Bay Company (HBC) trader Anthony Hendry visited them, the Blackfeet possessed large horse herds. Travelling along the Saskatchewan in pursuit of Blackfoot groups that he

the Plains, 40-41; Arthur J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: The Role as Trappers, Hunters, and Middlemen in the Lands to the Southwest of Hudson Bay* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 59-60; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 40; Lewis, *Effects of White Contact*, 11-13.

⁵⁵ Calloway, "Snake Frontiers," 87; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 47; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 91; Fowler, "Great Plains," 11; Wissler, "Influence of the Horse," 24; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 295-296; Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree*, 60-61; Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 207.

hoped to persuade to visit York Factory to trade furs, Hendry and his party tracked those Natives by following “their horses dung and foot-steps [*sic*].”⁵⁶ Once they found a Blackfoot camp, the trader observed that they had many “fine tractable animals” and that “[t]he Natives are fine Horsemen & kill Buffalo on them.” The Piegan, the Blackfoot group nearest to the Shoshone, had more horses than any other Blackfoot group, for their trade with Plateau Natives, as well as their raids on Shoshones and others, proved fruitful. Moreover, they inhabited the Chinook belt along the eastern foot of the Rockies, which helped their horses survive the winter months. The horse revolution thus came to the Shoshones’ bitter enemies. All of the benefits that Shoshones previously enjoyed – intensified bison hunting, greater mobility, an expanded hunting range, greater transportation abilities, and improved military tactics and technology – now extended to the Blackfeet. Moreover, just as Shoshone women continued to forage for plant foods to balance Shoshone diets, Blackfoot women gathered berries that they used to augment their meat-heavy diets. However, they likely did not do so to the same extent as their counterparts of Basin heritage; women’s foraging was never as central to Blackfoot subsistence as it was to that of the Numic speakers. To some degree, then, the Blackfoot adoption of equestrian bison-hunting and mounted warfare negated the Shoshone advantage. Horses helped Blackfeet to expand further onto the game-rich northwestern Plains, and gave them reason to do so; the grasslands were a better country for horses than were the hilly, wooded parklands (except in winter). Also, over time, horses helped the Blackfoot population grow (as had happened among the Shoshone). This was possible

⁵⁶ Anthony Hendry, “Journal of a Journey Performed by Anthony Hendry, to Explore the Country Inland, and to Endeavor to Increase the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Fur Trade, A.D. 1754-1755,” in *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, series 3, vol. 1, edited by Lawrence J. Burpee, 321-354 (Ottawa: The Royal Society of Canada, 1907), 330.

because the transition to mounted bison hunting made food more readily available. With food shortages less frequent, Natives were generally healthier and propagated more frequently. Increased supplies of protein-rich foods also enabled them to feed more people than before. This growth in numbers likely enabled the Blackfeet to send more men on the warpath.⁵⁷

Historian Colin G. Calloway writes that after horses spread throughout the northern Plains, “[r]aiding for horses became both a cause of war and a way of war.” Native groups that possessed many horses raided their vulnerable pedestrian neighbors, and they also raided other equestrian groups to capture their mounts. Groups that had few horses tried to remedy that by raiding those who did. Groups retaliated against enemies who raided them by launching revenge expeditions. When bison were few in an area, horses enabled hungry Natives to travel into richer territories claimed by other groups; intertribal conflicts sometimes followed. As horses became a key form of wealth and status for Native men, raiding became more important economically and socially. So, a vicious cycle developed in which horses strengthened a Native group’s military power even as the desire for more mounts motivated warriors to conduct more raids. The sheer power of the horse as a tool of subsistence and warfare facilitated the spread of horses to Native groups throughout the northern Plains. Mounted horse raids thus became the dominant form of military action on the grasslands. Few men typically lost their lives in

⁵⁷ Hendry, “Journal,” 338 (quotation); Alexander Mackenzie, *The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie*, edited by W. Kaye Lamb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 117; Henry, *Journal*, vol. 2, 380-381; Judy, “Powder Keg,” 131, 134; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 295-297; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 39.

these raids, although defending groups occasionally wiped out entire parties of attackers. Large-scale engagements became few and far between.⁵⁸

However, subsistence problems began to surface as more Plains Native groups obtained horses. The rise of equestrianism intensified pressure on the bison herds, and the ungulates became increasingly wary of hunters. Bison migration patterns likely varied more as a result of this, with bison avoiding particular areas or vacating an area after a hunt. The depletion of the bison herds did not become a major problem until the nineteenth century, but the development of Plains equestrianism sowed the seeds for the ungulate's eventual near-extinction. Indeed, as more Native groups acquired horses during the 1700s, they collectively applied unprecedented pressure on the bison herds and bison numbers began to slowly decline. Moreover, contrary to popular myths that depict Natives as astute environmental managers, they often overhunted bison and left much of their kills to waste. Horses, in short, made bison hunters too many and too efficient.⁵⁹

Even before Blackfeet acquired horses, they enjoyed the military advantages afforded by European-introduced firearms. Crees and Assiniboines first obtained guns during the late 1600s, and then they pushed west and south, searching for fresh fur-trapping areas in which they could harvest beaver to trade for more arms. By the early 1700s, this expansion produced some initial conflict with Blackfoot groups, but by the 1720s the Shoshone threat established general peace and cooperation between those groups. Sometime during the 1730s, Piegans appealed to friendly Crees and Assiniboines

⁵⁸ Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 276 (quotation); Fowler, "Great Plains," 9; Holder, *Hoe and the Horse*, 117; Lowie, *Indians of the Plains*, 109; Judy, "Powder Keg," 135; Ewers, "Intertribal Warfare," 402.

⁵⁹ Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 10; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 134; Bamforth, "Historical Documents," 5.

for assistance against the now-mounted Shoshones. Among those who responded to the call were Saukamappee and nine other Cree warriors, each of whom carried a gun. In the ensuing battle, their firearms played a decisive role. Unfamiliar with those new weapons, Shoshones fled after the Crees opened fire and shot a number of their warriors; the battle became a rout. According to Saukamappee, after that fight Shoshones generally avoided large battles between lines of “infantry.” So, the arrival of guns on the northern Plains reinforced the Shoshones’ movement toward quick, hard-hitting mounted raids. Using their horses to surprise their enemies and then quickly escape, Shoshone war parties minimized the effects of guns and other weapons, such as steel-headed arrows, bayonets, and “long knives” that their enemies got from traders (mostly through Cree and Assiniboine middlemen). During the following decades, the Blackfeet and their allies gradually accumulated more guns that they used in battle against Shoshones.⁶⁰

Fortunately for Shoshones, those guns had some limitations. Like horses, they required both knowledge and maintenance. The few muskets that Blackfeet got through the fur trade needed supplies of balls and powder, the availability of which fluctuated (although supplies of both generally increased over time). Such things as bad weather that affected travel and trade, as well as wars between European powers (particularly between the French and British), affected the flow of goods. Moreover, early muskets were, for lack of a better term, primitive. Well-practiced users could reload and fire only a couple

⁶⁰ Thompson, *Narrative*, 330-332, 335; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 36-37, 45-46, 53-54; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 298; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 9; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 133-134; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 21-22; Sutton, “Expansion and Warfare,” 70; Fowler, “Great Plains,” 9; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 20; Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 13, 21, 23; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 88; The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1993, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Bamforth, “Indigenous People,” 99; Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree*, 31; The Shoshonis of Wyoming, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

of times per minute. Such a slow fire rate might suffice against pedestrian enemies, but those muskets were too slow and cumbersome to be effective against mounted raiders. Finally, Cree and Assiniboiné middlemen tended to keep the newest, best-working guns for themselves, passing along heavily-used older models to their trade contacts (much like Shoshones did with horses). As a result of these limitations, guns likely did not play a major role in northwestern Plains warfare until after 1750. Until that time, the primary effects of firearms were probably more psychological than anything else as Shoshones and others encountered them for the first time. The Blackfeet needed time to accumulate more of the weapons and become adept with them before they made a decisive impact.⁶¹

During the subsequent decades, however, the Blackfeet and their allies amassed many guns and horses. The loose alliance between the Blackfeet and the Crees and Assiniboines proved useful, for Blackfeet dealt surplus horses and furs to their eastern neighbors for firearms, ammunition, and other goods. Hendry made no comment about the Blackfeet possessing guns during his 1754 visit, but he mentioned little about Blackfoot warfare and, when he did mention their weapons, he discussed how they used bows to hunt. In all likelihood, they preserved such precious commodities as guns and ammunition for the warpath because they found them too cumbersome for mounted bison hunting. Nevertheless, Hendry indicated that firearms were in high demand, writing as he began his return journey to York Factory, “there are scarce a Gun, Kettle, Hatchet, or Knife amongst us, having traded them with the Archithinue [Blackfoot] Natives.”

⁶¹ Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 45-46; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 95-96; Holder, *Hoe and the Horse*, 114-115; Judy, “Powder Keg,” 137; Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 13; Carl P. Russell, *Guns on the Early Frontiers: A History of Firearms from Colonial Times through the Years of the Western Fur Trade* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1957), Chapter 1; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 33; Dale R. Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours* (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1991), 14-15.

However, the Blackfoot chiefs to whom Hendry spoke were unwilling to send young men to trade at York Factory, a trip of several hundred miles by canoe. Satisfied with the material goods that they obtained from Cree and Assiniboine middlemen, the chiefs argued that they needed to care for their horses, and they could not send away men that they needed for bison hunting.⁶²

From the 1730s through the first half of the 1750s, the Canadian fur trade intensified as competition between the British HBC and French companies increased. The growth of the fur trade ensured that more firearms reached the Blackfeet through Cree and Assiniboine middlemen. Moreover, the fur trade strengthened the bonds between the Blackfeet and their allies, thereby not only increasing the volume of horses, guns, and ammunition exchanged, but also making joint war parties against the Shoshone more frequent. On the other hand, Spanish policy forbade the trading of firearms to Natives while Plains-parkland Natives strove to ensure that no guns reached Shoshones from the east. So, Shoshones acquired few, if any guns during the 1700s. A few possibly reached them through their Comanche relatives, but if they did so, they had no visible impact on Shoshone-Blackfoot affairs. Still bearing clubs, bows, lances, and other indigenous weapons, Shoshones were at a disadvantage when faced by enemies armed with guns. Moreover, their hide armor and shields (which stopped enemy arrows) provided little protection against musket balls.⁶³

⁶² Hendry, "Journal," 351(quotations), 337-339; Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 61-62, 73, 75; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 298-299.

⁶³ Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 297-300; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 9; Calloway, "Snake Frontiers," 88; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 53; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 23-28; Binnema *Common and Contested Ground*, 94, 100-102, 104-106; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 146-147, 176; Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree*, 31; Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 69, 91; Fowler, "Great Plains," 14-15; Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization*, 94-95; Lewis, *Effects of White Contact*, 16-17; Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 204; The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demetri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1993, Accession Number

It appears, however, that the collapse of the French fur trade during the Seven Years War (1754-1763) initially brought Shoshones some respite. The withdrawal of French traders from much of North America, as well as the demands of the war effort itself, temporarily deprived the Blackfeet of crucial supplies of guns and ammunition. Moreover, since the HBC lacked any real competition from the mid-1750s into the mid-1760s, there was little incentive for that outfit to keep pushing west. So, that company continued to rely upon Cree and Assiniboine middlemen. By 1766, though, the rise of independent traders – remnants of the old French companies (derisively called “peddlers” by the HBC men) – not only filled the competitive void left by the exit of the official French traders, but they escalated commerce to unprecedented heights. During the 1770s, competition drove the HBC and the “peddlers” to establish posts farther and farther inland, and the Blackfeet thus gained easier access to European goods. Between 1754 and 1774, no less than sixty HBC men traveled into Blackfoot country to persuade them to travel to company posts; few Blackfeet did so. This compelled the HBC to establish a series of posts along the Saskatchewan River: Cumberland House (1774), Hudson House (1778), and, in Blackfoot country, Buckingham House (1780). In 1779, a group of independent traders established the first North West Company, giving the HBC its first organized competition in over twenty years. This competition combined with the general inland push of the fur traders to erode the need for Cree and Assiniboine middlemen. Shoshones, on the other hand, gained no direct contact with traders as Blackfoot pressure

mounted. They continued to acquire few or no firearms from their Comanche relatives and Crows.⁶⁴

The spread of the horse revolution combined with the benefits of the fur trade to eventually end Shoshone dominance on the northern Plains. Sometime about mid-century, the Blackfeet and their allies began to turn the tide against the Shoshone. They did so by forging a deadly style of warfare that harnessed the power of both horses and guns. Growing supplies of firearms, as well as improvements in their quality, made them more useful to mounted warriors who surprised enemy camps defended by men armed with bows and arrows. Mercilessly pressuring the hated Shoshones, the Piegans led the Blackfoot push south and turned the land between the North Saskatchewan and South Saskatchewan rivers into a battleground. Harried by mounted raiders armed with guns, Shoshones lost increasing numbers of men in battle as well as women, children, and horses as captives. But they retreated slowly, ceding the Red Deer River country before clinging to the Bow River by 1780. The Blackfoot push to the south took them into bison-rich lands, for in 1772 HBC trader Matthew Cocking remarked that Blackfoot country was a “plentiful Country of provisions, for when the present stock is expended, an Indian need only to mount his Horse, taking his Gun or Bow, & in a short time return with his Horse loaded with meat, supplying his neighbors also.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 48, 50; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 134-137; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 26; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 104-110, 115-116; Fowler, “Great Plains,” 15; Judy, “Powder Keg,” 137; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 299-300; Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 102, 117; Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization*, 94-95; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 87-88; Lewis, *Effects of White Contact*, 17-18.

⁶⁵ Cocking, “An Adventurer,” 107 (quotation); Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 87, 108, 115-16, 198-99; Ewers, “Intertribal Warfare,” 403-404; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 38, 51-55; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 88; Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone,” 245; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 6-7; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 23; Hultkrantz, “Shoshoni Indians on the Plains,” 67, 68, 70; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 7; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 300; Fowler, “Great Plains,” 14-15; Lowie, “Northern Shoshone,” 171; Sutton, “Expansion and Warfare,” 71; Bamforth, “Indigenous People,” 99; The Shoshonis

Their loss of territory was relatively slight, but Shoshones faced some challenges as their enemies' newfound military might generated several problems. First, Shoshone access to key hunting grounds decreased. The threat of mounted enemy raids loomed, which jeopardized Shoshone hunting efforts. Second, their reversal of fortunes left Shoshones with less ability to conduct the raids that provided them with the captives that they needed to exchange for horses. Their trade likely suffered as a result. Third, the Blackfeet and other rivals now conducted increasingly successful raids of their own, taking greater numbers of Shoshone women and horses. Indeed, the Shoshones' enemies now had the means of conducting a relentless campaign of retribution against their longtime antagonists, who had carried off countless captives during the previous decades. The Blackfeet and their allies now returned the favor, harassing Shoshone camps and capturing the women and children who fell into their hands. Thus, the spread of horses throughout the northern Plains exposed Shoshone women to the same vulnerability that others had endured when Shoshones warriors had used their monopoly on mounts to capture the women of rival groups. It was little surprise, then, that Hendry reported that during his visit to a Blackfoot camp that he "[s]aw many fine Girls who were Captives; & a great many dried scalps with fine long black hair, displayed on poles, & before the Leader's tent."⁶⁶ During the second half of the 1700s, the Blackfeet began to replace the Shoshone as the most powerful people on the northwestern Plains.

Despite this turn of events, Shoshones maintained a considerable presence on the northern Plains and they remained, as Cocking learned in 1772, feared by other Natives.

of Wyoming, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁶⁶ Hendry, "Journal of a Journey," 339 (quotation); Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 56-58; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 108; Calloway, "Snake Frontiers," 87-88.

As his party traveled along the Saskatchewan toward Blackfoot country, he noted that his Indian “hunters saw several Horses up the branch of the other side: they are all in general afraid [*sic*], supposing the horses to belong to the Snake Indians with whom they are always at variance.” During the subsequent weeks, Cocking made several similar reports as his Native companions perceived seemingly every strange horse and unidentified fire as belonging to the Shoshone. Shoshones might have lost their monopoly on horses and they lacked guns, but they remained a formidable threat on the northern Plains into the 1770s. Yet, as Cocking also learned during his visit, his Blackfoot contacts frequently raided Shoshone groups, thereby obtaining many horses and captives.⁶⁷

As the fur trade brought a previously unknown volume of European goods to the Blackfeet and their allies, Crees and Assiniboines increasingly used the Plains. From the 1750s onward, these groups acquired horses and pushed south from the Canadian parklands, where many of them adopted equestrian bison hunting. Intense competition between the HBC and the “peddlers” that erupted during the 1760s encouraged more Crees and Assiniboines to migrate to the Plains, for the geographical expansion of the fur trade ensured that they no longer needed to remain in the parklands as middlemen in order to benefit from the commerce. On the grasslands and in closer proximity to their Shoshone enemies, mounted and armed Crees and Assiniboines constituted another threat to the Shoshone presence on the northern Plains.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Cocking, “An Adventurer from Hudson Bay,” 103 (quotation), 110, 112; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 6; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 136-37; Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 215.

⁶⁸ Dale Russell argues that there was no significant Cree expansion during the eighteenth century, but other scholars have generally concluded that, with the acquisition of horses and guns, some Cree groups became increasingly oriented toward the Plains. Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 213-218; Also see Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 116-117; Fowler, “Great Plains,” 15; Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree*, 31; Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 104; Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization*, 91.

By the late 1770s, though, fissures in the Blackfoot-Cree-Assiniboine alliance became evident. Those groups had based their relationship upon the threat of a powerful common enemy, as well as mutually beneficial trade. The decline of the Shoshone threat, therefore, reduced the need for cooperation. Moreover, since European fur traders provided Blackfeet with the guns that they needed, and Assiniboines and Crees obtained more horses from the upper Missouri trade centers (as opposed to from the Blackfeet), both relied upon one another for key goods less and less. Additionally, it appears that during the second half of the 1700s, fur-bearing animal populations in Cree and Assiniboine territory in the parklands northeast of the Plains began to decline because of over-trapping. That and the allure of equestrian bison hunting encouraged Crees and Assiniboines to migrate toward the southwest which was, incidentally, Blackfoot and Gros Ventre country. Competition over game in that area grew, and intense warfare erupted.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, Shoshones shared in increasingly friendly relations with other groups. For decades, the horse trade bound Shoshones in generally amicable relations with such groups as the Crow, Salish, Kutenai, Nez Perce, and Kalispel. Like the Shoshone, those peoples also suffered as the Blackfeet prosecuted their deadly armed and mounted style of warfare, so cooperation between those groups became increasingly vital. There exists no clear evidence of military cooperation between those groups and Shoshones during the 1700s, but trade and joint hunting expeditions apparently transpired. On the other hand, some scholars assert that the Shoshone-Crow relationship turned hostile as the eighteenth

⁶⁹ Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 108-109; Fowler, "Great Plains," 15; Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 102, 104, 117; Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree*, 31; Lewis, *Effects of White Contact*, 14.

century progressed and the latter pushed deeper into the former's Montana and Wyoming hunting grounds.⁷⁰

The eighteenth century had, for many Shoshones, begun with overwhelming success as they transitioned to equestrian bison-hunting and expanded their range. During the first few decades of the 1700s, they commanded a near-monopoly on horse power and used those animals to revolutionize their subsistence systems and military life. Their hunting territory expanded, their travels reached farther, and their raids were a threat to all on the northern Plains. Shoshone hunters, traders, and warriors throughout the Plains, Rockies, and Plateau benefitted from the horse, and their close ties with their suppliers – their Comanche and Ute relatives to the south – ensured a steady stream of fresh mounts. At the same time, horses provided Shoshone men with new avenues to honor and status while extending the practice of polygyny and increasing the amount of time that women spent processing hides and meats. Yet, this did not necessarily denote a decline in women's status; women continued forage and control the distribution of essential foods and goods, so they maintained considerable autonomy and influence. In fact, women in many ways benefitted from having their own horses to use as they wished.

Sometime in the middle of the 1700s, however, the tide began to turn against the Shoshone on the northern Plains. Their rivals – led by the Blackfeet – acquired horses, offsetting that Shoshone advantage, and they began accumulating firearms and ammunition through the fur trade. While Shoshones acquired few guns, the combination

⁷⁰ Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 298; Sylvester L. Lahren, Jr., "Kalispel," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 12: Plateau, edited by Deward E. Walker Jr., 283-296 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 284; Lewis, *Effects of White Contact*, 14; Ewers, "Intertribal Warfare," 406; Bamforth, *Ecology and Human Organization*, 91.

of horses and guns revolutionized Blackfoot subsistence and warfare. By 1780, Shoshone groups had lost access to some of their northernmost territory, as well as some of their ability to raid their enemies for women and children that they exchanged for livestock and material goods. Moreover, they now dealt with the looming threat of Blackfoot raids as they worked to harvest bison on the Plains and such activities likely suffered as a result.

So, the arrival of European-introduced horses and firearms deeply influenced Shoshone interactions with their environments and Native neighbors. Over the course of several decades, those foreign elements transformed the cultures of the northern Plains, Rockies, and Plateau, despite the fact that the Natives of those areas had relatively few interactions with Europeans during that time. Yet, further changes loomed on the horizon, for in 1780, another European-introduced organism preceded Euro-Americans into Shoshone country. After a long history in other parts of the New World, smallpox finally visited the Shoshones and their neighbors.

CHAPTER 4
TO “LIVE ON ROOTS AND BERRIES AS THE BEAR DO”:
SHOSHONE SUBSISTENCE IN A WORLD OF EPIDEMICS, ENEMIES, AND
EXPLORERS, 1780-1806

In a June 1811 letter to William Clark, Nicholas Biddle wrote that he planned to deliver an oration in Philadelphia on Independence Day, “which in our heats is more fatiguing than an elk hunt among the Shoshonees [*sic*].”¹ Only five years earlier Clark, Meriwether Lewis, and others had completed their expedition to and from the Pacific Ocean and, as one of its many results, introduced Americans to Shoshones. Biddle’s brief comment, derived from the reports of Lewis and Clark, demonstrates how they depicted the Shoshones that they met: they hunted and their pursuit of game was difficult, but bison was not their primary game. Indeed, the explorers did not encounter any Shoshones on the Great Plains; they met people who became known as Lemhis who lived in what is now eastern Idaho and only ventured to the Plains each fall to hunt bison. Shoshones thus entered American popular lore as inhabitants of the Columbia Plateau.

Lewis and Clark met the ancestors of the Lemhi during a tumultuous era of Shoshone history. This chapter explores the events of this brief period – 1780 to 1806 – that led to Eastern Shoshones reinventing themselves as inhabitants of the Intermountain West. Scholars acknowledge that this was a challenging time for Shoshone groups, but none provide an in-depth look at what it meant for their everyday subsistence.² This chapter does just that, placing special emphasis on the ecological dimensions of

¹ Nicholas Biddle to William Clark, June 26, 1811, in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, with Related Documents*, vol. 2, edited by Donald Jackson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 568-569.

² For example, see *Historic and Ethnographic Sketches*, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Colin G. Calloway, “Snake Frontiers: The Eastern Shoshones in the Eighteenth Century,” *Annals of Wyoming* 63, 3 (1991), 82-92: 88-90.

equestrian Shoshone history after they withdrew from the northern Plains. The key event in this story was the smallpox epidemic of 1780-1782, which revealed how ongoing invasions by European-introduced organisms irrevocably altered indigenous biota. Whereas the earlier introduction of horses initially fueled Shoshone expansion, the spread of smallpox had an immediate negative impact on those peoples. Scholars, however, have devoted only cursory attention to the effects of this particular epidemic on Shoshone groups. Historians recognize that this outbreak probably killed much of the Eastern Shoshone population and that it played a major role in the survivors' withdrawal from the Plains, but the depth of the outbreak's impact remains unclear. The following pages demonstrate that while this outbreak was initially disastrous for both individuals and groups, it also left lasting impressions on daily life for decades to come by depriving Shoshones of important eastern lands.³

Indeed, the 1780-1782 smallpox epidemic combined with the Blackfoot offensive that began decades earlier to push Shoshones off of the resource-rich grasslands. Between 1780 and 1806, Eastern Shoshones withdrew from the Plains, centralizing in what is now southwestern Wyoming, northern Utah, and eastern Idaho. This loss of bison-rich hunting territories reshaped their everyday subsistence, culture, and military life. Their enemies enjoyed growing trade with Euro-American fur traders and reaped the benefits of inhabiting the grasslands, but Shoshones accustomed to the Plains environment had to acclimatize to areas that their ancestors had once called home – the transitional area between the Great Plains, Great Basin, and Columbia Plateau. Contrary to the claims of some scholars, this retreat from the Plains led not to Shoshone “deculturation,” but to the

³ For one of the better treatments, see Calloway, “Snake Frontiers.”

utilization of a highly complex and dynamic subsistence culture that borrowed liberally from Great Plains, Columbia Plateau, and Great Basin traditions.⁴

As equestrian Shoshones adapted to life in the Intermountain West, the groups that eventually became known as the Eastern or Wind River Shoshone, the Northern Shoshone, and the Lemhi began to emerge. Although home to diverse landscapes, flora, and fauna, the Wyoming Basin, northern Utah, and eastern Idaho contrasted sharply with the northern Plains. Bison were relatively few and game populations were generally less dense. So, instead of using specialized hunting as many did on the Plains, Shoshones again relied on diversified foraging and hunting strategies that depended upon both men's and women's work to capitalize on a wide array of animal and plant resources. This shift affected material culture, gendered divisions of labor, and intertribal affairs. Yet, despite their emphasis on Basin-type strategies, many Shoshone groups – especially those of the Wyoming Basin – maintained some vestige of their recent Plains heritage with an economy that featured periodic intensive bison-harvesting efforts. Other Shoshones, such as those who became known as the Lemhi, utilized hybrid Basin-Plateau-Plains subsistence systems that utilized the key resources of each area, such as plants, fish, and bison respectively.

Indeed, the post-smallpox world was a dangerous one that required many adaptations. It was clear by the time of Lewis and Clark that the resulting changes were unwanted. The coming of American explorers and fur traders, however, provided Shoshones with the hope that they could challenge their enemies and re-establish their former territory on the Plains. Cameahwait, a Shoshone leader, informed Lewis that his

⁴ For example, see Åke Hulkrantz, "Shoshoni Indians on the Plains: An Appraisal of the Documentary Evidence," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 93 (1968), 49-72: 72.

people largely lived in the mountains and ate fish, elk, pronghorn, and roots, and that this “would not be the case if we had guns, we could live in the country of buffaloe and eat as our enemies do and not be compelled to hide ourselves in these mountains and live on roots and berries as the bear do [*sic*].”⁵ It was little surprise, then, that Cameahwait and other Shoshones accommodated the Euro-Americans that they encountered, making friendly overtures and providing assistance in an effort to establish much-needed economic ties.

Drawing upon documents produced by Euro-American explorers and traders, as well as anthropological and historical research, the following treatment of the pivotal period of 1780-1806 highlights the dynamic nature of Eastern Shoshone groups. During this time, they faced major obstacles – the 1780-1782 smallpox epidemic, enemy pressure, adjustments to marginal environments, deficiencies of firearms, and another smallpox epidemic in 1801-1802 – that fundamentally altered their lifeways and thereby influenced how explorers and traders wrote about them. Yet, visible in those reports are clues as to how Shoshones adapted to their changing world; their evolving subsistence systems, gendered divisions of labor, and intertribal relations reflected their efforts to survive and again thrive. In doing so, Eastern Shoshones displayed remarkable flexibility and strength that allowed them to endure and, by 1806, establish the means by which they might launch a nineteenth-century resurgence.

Variola, the virus that causes smallpox, made a long journey across space and time before it reached Shoshone groups in the Intermountain West and Great Plains in

⁵ Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804-1806*, vol. 2, edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 383.

1781. The great epidemic of 1780-1782 had its roots in the Spanish colonization of the “New World” that began in 1492. The long overseas journey, combined with the fact that many conquistadores had acquired immunity, delayed smallpox’s arrival in the New World until 1518. After reaching the Caribbean in 1518, the virus accompanied Spaniards to what is now Mexico, where it helped Hernán Cortés conquer the Aztecs before it swept west and south along routes of Native travel, trade, and warfare. Smallpox apparently did not yet spread northward; to the north of central Mexico lay vast expanses of land containing relatively sparse Native populations.⁶

The case of the Aztec demonstrated just how deadly *variola* could be among populations that lacked acquired immunity to infection. Smallpox was a disease that either killed its victims or left them with lifelong immunity. The parasitic virus therefore required a constant supply of vulnerable individuals in order to become endemic in an area. Without fresh supplies of susceptible individuals to infect in a given area, the disease would, in effect, kill itself off. So, all populations – whether Native American or not – were susceptible to contracting the virus and suffering heavy death tolls if it had not before visited them or if it had not done so for decades. Native Americans had no inherent biological weakness that rendered them more susceptible to contracting the virus or dying from smallpox than Europeans. Rather, they simply lacked the acquired immunity that came with exposure to endemic smallpox; throughout much of Europe,

⁶ Noble David Cook and George W. Lovell, “Unraveling the Web of Disease,” in “*Secret Judgments of God*”: *Old World Disease in Colonial Spanish America*, edited by Noble David Cook and George W. Lovell, 213-242 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 218; Hanns J. Prem, “Disease Outbreaks in Central Mexico during the Sixteenth Century,” in “*Secret Judgments of God*”: *Old World Disease in Colonial Spanish America*, edited by Noble David Cook and George W. Lovell, 20-48 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 26-27; Ian Glynn and Jennifer Glynn, *The Life and Death of Smallpox* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 31-34; Daniel T. Reff, *Disease, Depopulation, and Culture Change in Northwestern New Spain, 1518-1764* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991), 102-103.

smallpox was a childhood disease. Smallpox, however, was not indigenous to North America, nor were most Native American populations large enough to enable the *variola* virus to become endemic once introduced. So, the disease was particularly deadly in the New World.⁷

A look at the clinical attributes of smallpox reveals that *variola* could be highly mobile. Individuals usually contracted the virus through the respiratory tract by breathing in tiny particles produced by infected individuals, but contaminated food, drink, or fingers could lead to oral infection. The virus had no known non-human host, so the disease largely spread through direct human-to-human contact. Under favorable (cool and dry) conditions, the virus could remain alive on bedding, clothing, and scabs shed by a victim for weeks after implementation, but human contact was the most common means by which *variola* spread.⁸ Once someone contracted smallpox, an incubation period of typically 10 to 14 days began, during which they exhibited no symptoms and were not infectious. The first symptoms (headaches and general malaise) and communicability immediately followed the incubation period. The first lesions soon appeared, signaling the onset of the deadliest and most contagious stage of infection. During the nearly two

⁷ William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 12; Glynn and Glynn, *Life and Death of Smallpox*, 2; Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 122; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 53-55; F. Fenner et al., *Smallpox and its Eradication* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1988), 51, 117, 144, 190, 208, 235-238; R. G. Robertson, *Rotting Face: Smallpox and the American Indian* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton, 2001), 40.

⁸ Fenner, *Smallpox and its Eradication*, 70-71, 96, 117, 123, 182-183, 186-189, 191-194, 207; Jody F. Decker, "Tracing Historical Diffusion Patterns: The Case of the 1780-1782 Smallpox Epidemic among the Indians of Western Canada," *Native Studies Review* 4, 1&2 (1988), 1-24: 4-5; Elizabeth A. Fenn, *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-1782* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 5-7, 15; Paul Kelton, *Epidemics and Enslavement: Biological Catastrophe in the Native Southeast, 1492-1715* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 37-38; Glynn and Glynn, *Life and Death of Smallpox*, 2; Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972), 44, 46; Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 38-39; Michael K. Trimble, *An Ethnohistorical Interpretation of the Spread of Smallpox in the Northern Plains Utilizing Concepts of Disease Ecology* (Lincoln: J&L Reprint Co., 1979, 1986), 24; Colin G. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 416-417.

weeks between the development of the lesions and the beginning of the convalescent (recovery) period, a victim was highly contagious, although infectiousness declined as the days passed. The entire course of smallpox infection ran roughly one month and, if one survived the ordeal, he or she gained lifelong immunity to the virus.⁹ Smallpox, then, could travel long distances between the time an individual became infected and the time that symptoms actually emerged. A victim was rarely contagious during the incubation period, but he or she could unknowingly transport the virus hundreds of miles before becoming infectious. The onset of the harshest symptoms often immobilized individuals, but any further travel – on the part of a victim or by individuals who came in contact with an infected person – would transport the disease even further. It was, in short, a deadly parasite that could travel far.¹⁰

Spanish expeditions to the north laid the foundation for the virus's spread beyond central Mexico. Smallpox did not accompany Francisco Vásquez de Coronado during his 1540-1542 exploration of what is now the southwestern United States, nor did it go with Juan de Oñate when he established the colony of New Mexico in 1598. However, the construction of the *Camino Real*, a road connecting central New Spain to its expanding northern frontier, and the founding of missions and mining settlements, enabled smallpox to gradually diffuse northward. During the 1630s, *Camino Real* travelers carried the virus as far as the Pueblo villages in what is now New Mexico. By the 1660s, most New Mexican Natives had encountered the disease, but it did not become endemic among them. Periodic epidemics ravaged previously unexposed Spanish and Native populations

⁹ Fenner, *Smallpox and its Eradication*, 5, 188-189; Decker, "Tracing Historical Diffusion," 4-6; Crosby, *Columbian Exchange*, 46; Glynn and Glynn, *Life and Death of Smallpox*, 2-3; Kelton, *Epidemics and Enslavement*, 37-38; Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 15-20; Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 39-40; Trimble, *Ethnohistorical Interpretation*, 28-30; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 416-417.

¹⁰ Fenner, *Smallpox and its Eradication*, 202-203; Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 5-6.

alike. On several occasions between 1670 and 1706, the virus spread from northern Mexico's Conchos River valley into New Mexico and western Texas.¹¹ It was not until the late seventeenth century that smallpox reached beyond those areas. In eastern Texas, the Caddos suffered their first outbreak in 1690-1691 after Spaniards built a local mission. In 1706, perhaps the worst epidemic to date struck New Mexico and Texas. This was the last of several to strike the Jumanos, a powerful interethnic people whose villages stretched from eastern Texas into New Mexico. The outbreak apparently did not reach their Apache rivals or the newcomers to the southern Great Plains: the Comanche. The great distances that separated the relatively small, scattered Native populations of the southern Plains limited smallpox's ability to spread.¹²

Numu migrations onto the Great Plains and subsequent Comanche, Ute, and Shoshone interactions with one another, other Native groups, and Europeans enabled *variola* to eventually diffuse well beyond the southern Plains. When Comanches split from their Shoshone relatives in the late 1600s, their subsequent southward migration along the Rocky Mountains and their expansion onto the southern Plains established a vast network of human contact. Although centered in the upper Arkansas valley, this web of trade and warfare spanned from New Mexico to the Mississippi River valley, north to

¹¹ Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 6, 8; Reff, *Disease*, 131, 134, 171-172, 178-179, 275; Robert H. Jackson, *Indian Population Decline: The Missions of Northwestern New Spain, 1778-1840* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 16; Elizabeth A.H. John, *Storms Brewed in Other Men's Worlds: The Confrontation of Indians, Spanish, and French in the Southwest, 1540-1795* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1975), 83; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 278; Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Indian Southwest, 1580-1830: Ethnogenesis and Reinvention* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 55-56; Thomas L. Percy, "The Control of Smallpox in New Spain's Northern Borderlands," *Journal of the West* 29 (July 1990), 90-98: 91.

¹² John, *Storms Brewed*, 189; Anderson, *Indian Southwest*, 56; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 278; David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 154-155; Pekka Hämmäläinen, "The Rise and Fall of Plains Indian Horse Cultures," *The Journal of American History* 90, 3 (Dec., 2003), 833-862: 835-836.

Shoshone groups in the Rockies and northern Plains, and from there into the Saskatchewan River parklands and beyond. Even as ties between Numic-speaking groups remained strong prior to the onset of the 1780 smallpox epidemic, European activities linked Native populations to distant places. French traders, for instance, entered Comanche country during the 1720s and thereby bolstered the trade network that reached from the upper Arkansas valley to New Orleans by way of Native middlemen and European traders. In northern New Spain, the founding of silver mines and Catholic missions established centers of smallpox infection and provided routes of diffusion.¹³

In Comanche country, the years preceding the 1780-1782 smallpox epidemic buzzed with activity. Comanches and Utes engaged in a complex relationship with New Mexico's Native and Spanish inhabitants, vacillating between trading and raiding. During the late 1770s, war between Spaniards and western Comanche groups engulfed New Mexico, but a decisive Spanish victory in 1779 ended the violence. Meanwhile, Utes and Comanches struggled against one another, for a 1770s Comanche advance into Ute territory displaced many Ute groups westward. By about 1780, though, the tide turned against the Comanche and they withdrew from Ute territory. Meanwhile, Comanches continued their ongoing merciless campaigns against Apache groups, pressuring them further south and west in the Llano Estacado and Rio Grande areas. In the north, they fought with Kiowa, Pawnee, and Osage groups over key resources and trade on the Plains. During the late 1770s and early 1780s, Comanches raided Spanish settlements and missions in Texas while trading with Wichita middlemen who had ties to the Mississippi valley. All of this activity fed into the far-reaching Comanche trade center that had its

¹³ For Comanche equestrian expansion, see the previous chapter, pages 109-111; Also see John, *Storms Brewed*, 218-220, 307; Glynn and Glynn, *Life and Death of Smallpox*, 86-87.

nexus in the upper Arkansas valley, giving the widely-dispersed Comanche divisions a firm foundation for material exchange, as well as political and social cohesion.¹⁴ This bustling Comanche world was simply ripe for a major smallpox epidemic should the virus arrive in its midst.

Likewise, intertribal commerce and warfare brought groups into frequent contact with one another in Shoshone country. The longstanding friendship between Shoshones and their Comanche relatives remained alive and well on the eve of the 1780-1782 epidemic, for the same trade routes that carried the first horses north in about 1700 continued to shuttle goods from New Mexico to the northern Plains. Shoshones still traded with Crows, Flatheads, and others, which extended the reach of the Comanche network east into the Plains and west into the Columbia Plateau. Meanwhile, warfare between the Blackfoot Confederacy and Eastern Shoshone groups continued unabated. Although Shoshones had ceded some territory and were on the defensive, their presence on the northern Plains still spanned hundreds of miles, from the grasslands of what is now Wyoming north into Alberta and Saskatchewan.¹⁵

Further north, the Comanche-Shoshone network butted against the growing fur trade of the Saskatchewan River basin. Only tenuously linked to eastern hubs of commerce – Hudson Bay and Montreal – prior to the 1770s, as Native middlemen constituted the backbone of the Saskatchewan basin fur trade, the system entered a new life stage in the 1770s and early 1780s as European traders built posts and attempted to reach fur-rich western lands. Since this network was for the longest time based upon the

¹⁴ Pekka Hämmäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 76, 81, 90-99, 105-106, 109-112, 178-179; John, *Storms Brewed*, 231-232, 256-257, 584-591, 612-614, 630.

¹⁵ For, Shoshone intertribal affairs on the eve of the epidemic, see the previous chapter, pages 145-147; Also see Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 207; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 174.

annual travels of a few Native middlemen over distances of hundreds of miles, it was little surprise that smallpox did not spread west from Montreal or some other distant place prior to 1781. Even Canada's greatest smallpox epidemic – that which ravaged eastern Canada from 1755 to 1757 – failed to reach far beyond the Great Lakes region. By 1781, however, commercial networks had expanded and trade had intensified. Although the loose alliance between Blackfoot, Cree, Assiniboine, and Gros Ventre groups had begun to disintegrate, they continued to trade and send out joint war parties.¹⁶

This was the increasingly tight-knit world that *variola* entered in 1780. The smallpox strain(s) that engulfed the North American West between 1780 and 1782 emanated from New Orleans and Mexico City. During the winter of 1778-1779, the disease appeared in New Orleans and, in August 1779, it began to circulate in Mexico City. It is unknown if the same strain that made its rounds in New Orleans also appeared in Mexico City. By mid-1780, smallpox raged in northern New Spain, striking mining camps as well as the missions and Native villages of New Mexico. The virus appeared among Baja California Natives during the spring of 1781 and, later that year, in Alta California. Another wave of smallpox also struck New Mexico during the first half of 1781.¹⁷ Even before the disease began diffusing northward from Mexico City in 1780,

¹⁶ For the pre-epidemic expansion of the Canadian fur trade, see the previous chapter, pages 143-145, 147. Also see Glynn and Glynn, *Life and Death of Smallpox*, 34-36, 87; Decker, "Tracing Historical Diffusion," 2; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 298-299; Arthur J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Trappers, Hunters, and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 13, 47, 55; Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 172-173; David G. Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree* (New York: The Museum of Natural History, 1940), 38; Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 131-135.

¹⁷ Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 137-138, 146-147, 156-157, 162; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 417-418; Robert H. Jackson, "The Great 1780-1782 Smallpox Epidemic in Baja California," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 3 (1981): 138-143; Thomas L. Percy, "The Smallpox Outbreak of 1779-1782: A Comparative Look at Twelve Borderland Communities," *Journal of the West* 34 (Jan., 1997), 26-37: 26-34; Marc Simmons, "New Mexico's Smallpox Epidemic of 1780-1781," *New Mexico Historical Review* 41 (Oct., 1966), 319-326: 321-324; John, *Storms Brewed*, 596, 629; Andrew C. Isenberg,

though, it also spread west from New Orleans. During the winter of 1776-1777, the virus reached into eastern Texas from Spanish Louisiana, but it evidently did not yet travel beyond the Wichita villages. In 1778, however, an outbreak occurred in New Orleans and the disease again entered Texas, where it struck Natives throughout the region in 1779 and 1780, spanning from the Caddos in the east to the Apaches in the west. Comanche raids on Spanish settlements abruptly ceased in 1781, and only resumed a year and a half later. The Mexico City and New Orleans smallpox outbreaks apparently merged on the southern Plains by early 1781.¹⁸

Horses played a pivotal role in smallpox's northward spread into Shoshone territory. By the winter of 1781, mounted raiders and traders had carried the virus hundreds of miles north, where it struck Native populations living in the Saskatchewan River parklands. The catastrophe on the northern Plains began after Shoshone groups contracted the disease, probably from Comanche traders.¹⁹ Thereafter, Natives throughout the northern Plains and Plateau contracted smallpox, as Shoshones unknowingly infected Crow, Blackfoot, Salish, and other groups. Crow traders carried smallpox to the semisedentary villages of upper Missouri, where Lakotas, Crees, and Assiniboines contracted it. Piegan Blackfoot warriors infected during raids on Shoshone camps carried the virus into the Saskatchewan parklands, where it struck Crees,

The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 56; Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 126.

¹⁸ Percy, "Smallpox Outbreak," 26, 29; Simmons, "New Mexico's Smallpox Epidemic," 323-324; Anderson, *Indian Southwest*, 219-220; Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 211-215; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 417-418; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 96, 111-112; John, *Storms Brewed*, 612-614, 630.

¹⁹ No direct evidence indicates that Comanches spread smallpox to their Shoshone relatives, but their well-documented interactions suggest that this was likely. See Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 221-222.

Assiniboines, and others. By infiltrating key indigenous trade networks and the fur trade, smallpox reached as far as the Pacific Northwest and Hudson Bay by the end of 1782.²⁰

There exists no clear evidence regarding how many Shoshones died as a result of this epidemic, but scholars widely agree that it struck them hard. Anthropologist Åke Hultkrantz writes that the epidemic “eradicated whole camps of Shoshoni Indians,” a claim that is likely based upon Saukamappee’s oft-cited story of how the Piegans contracted smallpox. According to Saukamappee, a Piegan war party spotted a large, suspicious-looking Shoshone camp in the Red Deer River valley in 1781. It was probably too large to raid under the usual circumstances, but the scouts saw no activity in the camp; they spotted no people, and they noted that the horses were unattended while bison grazed up to the very edge of the camp.²¹ After further scouting, the Piegans determined to assault the encampment, and what they found shocked them. As Saukamappee recounted to Hudson Bay Company (HBC) trader David Thompson in 1787:

²⁰ Alexander Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Laurence through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in the Years 1789 and 1793*, edited by John W. Garvin (Toronto: The Radisson Society of Canada, 1927, 1931), 75; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 111; Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 175-179, 182-183, 195, 215-216, 220-222, 226-227, 252-255; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 56-58; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 418-423; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 88-89; Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree*, 44-45; Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 105-107; Decker, “Tracing Historical Diffusion,” 12-13, 17, 21; Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 126-129, 164-165, 189, 239-240; George E. Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains: From the Prehistoric Period to the Coming of Europeans* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), 174; Dale R. Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours* (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1991), 216; Hultkrantz, “Shoshoni Indians on the Plains,” 70; Loretta Fowler, “The Great Plains from the Arrival of the Horse to 1855,” in *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, vol. 1, North America, part II, edited by Bruce Trigger and Wilcomb E. Washburn, 1-55 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16-17; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 119-121.

²¹ Hultkrantz, “Shoshoni Indians on the Plains,” 68 (quotation); David Thompson, *David Thompson’s Narrative, 1784-1812*, edited by Richard Glover (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1962), 335-336; Demitri Boris Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography,” *University of California Anthropological Records* 5, 4 (1947), 245-288: 254; Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 270; Anthony McGinnis, *Counting Coup and Cutting Horses: Intertribal Warfare on the Northern Plains, 1738-1889* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990, 2012), 11; Henry E. Stamm IV, *People of the Wind River: The Eastern Shoshones, 1825-1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 7; John Taylor, “Sociocultural Effects of Epidemics on the Northern Plains: 1734-1850,” *The Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 7, 4 (1977), 55-81: 64-65; Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 129, 188.

“Next morning at dawn of day, we attacked the Tents, and with our sharp flat daggers and knives, cut through the tents and entered for the fight; but our war whoop instantly stopt, our eyes were appalled with terror; there was no one to fight but the dead and they dying, each a mass of corruption. We did not touch them, but left the tents, and held a council on what was to be done. We all thought the Bad Spirit had made himself master of the camp and destroyed them. It was agreed to take some of the best of the tents, and any other plunder that was clean and good, which we did, and also took away the Horses they had, and returned to our camp.”²²

Unsurprisingly, the warriors took the *variola* virus home along with their plunder. Before long, many of Saukamaptee’s people developed smallpox and, by his estimation, one-third of his camp perished. Piegans thought that the illness was a manifestation of the Good Spirit’s displeasure with their excessive warring and, not comprehending the epidemiology of smallpox, parklands Natives utilized sweat baths and other practices that heightened their suffering. Due to a lack of documentary evidence regarding the Shoshone response to smallpox, it is unknown how exactly Shoshones understood the epidemic in spiritual terms.²³ The death toll was staggering, and the terror of the outbreak and its effects on Native subsistence were tremendous. As Saukamaptee told Thompson:

“War was no longer thought of, and we had enough to do to hunt and make provision for our families; for in our sickness we had consumed all our dried provisions; but the Bisons and Red Deer were also gone... Our hearts were low and dejected, and we shall never be again the same people. To hunt for our families was our sole occupation and kill Beavers, Wolves and Foxes for trade our necessaries; and we thought of War no more...”²⁴

All three Blackfoot divisions – the Piegan, Blood, and Siksika – lost many to the epidemic. As much as half of the entire Blackfoot Confederacy perished as a result the

²² Thompson, *Narrative*, 336-337.

²³ Thompson, *Narrative*, 337-338; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 88-89; Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 220-221; John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 28-29; Virginia Cole Trenholm and Maurine Carley, *The Shoshonis: Sentinels of the Rockies* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 20-21.

²⁴ Thompson, *Narrative*, 337.

outbreak. Evidence suggests that their Cree and Assiniboine allies also suffered great losses during this time.²⁵

Since smallpox was eradicated during the 1970s, we must make a special effort to grasp the suffering that infected Shoshones and others endured.²⁶ Smallpox was a particularly painful disease for those who contracted it and a horrific experience for those who watched others suffer from it. Early symptoms of smallpox infection included high fevers, vomiting, headaches, general body aches, and anxiety. The worst stage of illness, however, began when the lesions emerged. They tended to first appear in the mouth, throat, and nasal passages, making simple functions such as eating and drinking excruciating. The rash ultimately spread all over a victim's body, often concentrating in the most painful areas – on the soles of the feet and on one's palms, face, neck, and back. Sometimes, the pustules concentrated under the skin, hemorrhaging. In extreme cases, the lesions merged together and produced confluent smallpox, which was even more painful and deadly. Depending upon the severity of infection, smallpox victims might become delirious or even comatose as they transformed into oozing, disfigured messes. Even after the pustules began to scab over, the pain continued; attempts to move produced agony, especially for those unfortunate enough to develop the confluent variety. In general, the course of smallpox infection physically and mentally ravaged its victims, as well as emotionally tested those who tended to infected individuals.²⁷

²⁵ Alexander Henry, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger, 1799-1814*, vol. 2, edited by Barry M. Gough, vol. 2 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1992), 370-371, 381, 535; Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 129, 188.

²⁶ The World Health Organization declared the global eradication of smallpox in May 1980. See Fenner, *Smallpox and its Eradication*, 1134-1140.

²⁷ Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 39-41; Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 16-19; Glynn and Glynn, *Life and Death of Smallpox*, 2-3; Decker, "Tracing Historical Diffusion," 10; Trimble, *Ethnohistorical Interpretation*, 24-26, 29-30; Fenner, *Smallpox and its Eradication*, 54, 164; Crosby, *Columbian Exchange*, 46, 56; Clyde D.

Smallpox infection had many long-term effects on both individuals and societies. Victims might sustain permanent damage to their eyes, liver, intestine, lungs, and reproductive system; the results included blindness, sterility, and death. The disease tended to be most deadly among the youngest and oldest sectors of a population, and its ravages therefore produced periods of low population growth in the future. Research suggests that pregnant women often perished as a result of smallpox, a fact that also inhibited population growth. Healthy adults had the strongest resistance to smallpox infection, but epidemics often incapacitated enough adults so as to hamper the completion of essential family and community tasks. Widespread infection affected a group's ability to gather water, firewood, and food, which, in turn, made possible further suffering and death as a result of exposure, dehydration, and starvation.²⁸

Many factors influenced the chances that a given group might contract smallpox and the resulting mortality. Three chief factors comprise a "disease ecology" and must be considered when examining a particular smallpox outbreak: the agent (or specific pathogen), the host, and the environment. Regarding the first, it appears that the particular strain(s) of smallpox that swept the North American West between 1780 and 1782 was especially virulent. Euroamerican traders and explorers observed that the virus simply devastated Native bodies. William Tomison, the factor at the HBC's Cumberland House, for instance, remarked that "there is something very malignant, that we ar[e] not sensible of, either in the Constitution of the Natives, or in the Disorder." Alexander Mackenzie later visited the parklands and noted that smallpox once "spread its

Dollar, "The High Plains Smallpox Epidemic of 1837-38," *Western Historical Quarterly* 8 (Jan., 1977), 15-38: 17; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 416.

²⁸ Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 122; Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 24; Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 40-41; Decker, "Tracing Historical Diffusion," 10; Fenner, *Smallpox and its Eradication*, 54, 164.

destructive and desolating power, as fire consumes the dry grass of the field. The fatal infection spread around with a baneful rapidity which no flight could escape, and with a fatal effect that nothing could resist. It destroyed with its pestilential breath whole families and tribes.”²⁹ Second, we must examine the conditions of individual hosts and groups of hosts. A group’s previous contact with smallpox (or lack thereof) overwhelmingly influenced if an epidemic would occur and, if so, how severe it might be. Also, malnourished or undernourished populations were more biologically susceptible to contracting smallpox, not to mention more likely to move about in search of food and thereby come into contact with the virus. Patterns of social and economic interaction, such as camp sizes, travel, and trade, also influenced the probability and morbidity of an outbreak.³⁰ Third, we must consider the relationship between smallpox and the physical environment, including climate patterns and seasonal conditions. Smallpox was typically a disease of the dry season, which on the northern Plains was the long winter months that often spanned from October into March (although the late summer and fall months were also usually dry). Low humidity and cooler temperatures allowed the virus to survive outside of a host longer than did high humidity and warmer temperatures. Also, since weather patterns influenced human conditions – such as when periods of drought produced food shortages and, therefore, Native hunger – they could also affect the course of an outbreak.³¹

²⁹ William Tomison and George Hudson, “Cumberland House Journal, 1781-1782,” in *Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals, 1775-82*, vol. 2, edited by E.E. Rich (London: The Hudson’s Bay Record Society, 1952), 234; Mackenzie, *Voyages*, 74; Trimble, *Ethnohistorical Interpretation*, 1, 6, 11-20; Decker, “Tracing Historical Diffusion,” 4-5, 10, 17-18.

³⁰ Fenner, *Smallpox and its Eradication*, 164, 196-198; Trimble, *Ethnohistorical Interpretation*, 11-20.

³¹ Trimble, *Ethnohistorical Interpretation*, 11-20; Decker, “Tracing Historical Diffusion Patterns,” 10; Fenner, *Smallpox and its Eradication*, 179-180.

Using these concepts of disease ecology, we can briefly reconstruct the general conditions under which smallpox struck Shoshone groups. As we have seen, the strain(s) of smallpox that reached Shoshone country was particularly virulent. Moreover, no evidence suggests that Shoshones or their neighbors encountered smallpox prior to this epidemic, meaning that their entire population was susceptible to infection.³² The virus probably reached Shoshone country in the late summer or fall, which meant that Shoshone groups had gathered into bands to conduct communal bison hunts while others completed their final trading efforts before winter set in and, with it, a long season of relative immobility. As noted above, this was also part of the long dry “season” on the northern Plains, and that, combined with high biological susceptibility, large group interactions, considerable travel, and a particularly virulent pathogen, rendered Shoshone camps as vulnerable to smallpox as a tinderbox would be to a flame.

Ultimately, the best historical evidence regarding the epidemic’s immediate impact on the Eastern Shoshone population was that most Shoshone groups withdrew from much of the northern Plains in its aftermath. The epidemic shook the Piegan so badly that they attempted to make peace with the Shoshone, but the latter could not be found. According to Saukamappee, “[we] perhaps would have made peace with them for they had suffered dreadfully as well as us and had left all this fine country of the Bow River to us.” That Shoshones abandoned the rich bison-hunting grounds of the southern Saskatchewan basin speaks volumes. Withdrawing from that hotly contested area, Shoshone groups evidently sought refuge in the mountains while they recovered from the epidemic. As the people who carried the virus onto the northern Plains, they were likely

³² Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 119-121.

the first to suffer from infection. Since they may have, like the Piegan, construed the epidemic in spiritual rather than epidemiological terms, they had no way of knowing that their enemies would likewise contract the disease and also lose many people.³³

Although Eastern Shoshones withdrew from the grasslands in the wake of the 1780-1782 epidemic, their enemies were in no shape to immediately pursue them. Like the Blackfeet, the Cree and Assiniboine had sustained terrible losses and they, too, needed to recover. As Saukamappee's comment that "we thought of War no more" suggests, Piegans briefly abandoned intertribal warfare and focused on recuperating. For the next two or three years, Saukamappee's people reportedly sent no war parties against the Shoshone. Their losses to the epidemic had been great and the effects of the outbreak evidently lingered for several years.³⁴

In the fall of 1783 or 1784, however, Shoshone raiders reignited their conflict with the Blackfoot Confederacy. A Piegan hunting party comprised of about five lodges separated from a large group and encamped on the upper Bow River to hunt bighorn sheep. Other Piegans later discovered their camp destroyed, and all of its former inhabitants apparently killed or captured. Based upon sticks planted in the ground that bore the image of snakes' heads, the Piegans concluded that Shoshones had made the attack. A Piegan council determined that a war party should avenge the blow, but a

³³ Thompson, *Narrative*, 337-338 (quotation); Hultkrantz, "Shoshoni Indians on the Plains," 68, 70; Calloway, "Snake Frontiers," 88-89; Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 129, 188; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 174; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 29; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 127-128; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 422; S.J. Fox, "Cultural Ecological Patterns of the Eastern Shoshone," *Tebiwa* 19 (1976), 1-8: 2; Demitri Boris Shimkin, "Shoshone-Comanche Origins and Migrations," *Proceedings of the Sixth Pacific Science Congress* 5 (1940), 17-25: 22; The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

³⁴ Thompson, *Narrative*, 337; Henry, *Journal*, vol. 2, 370-371; Calloway, "Snake Frontiers," 88-89; Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 188-189; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 11-12; John S. Milloy, *The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy, and War, 1790 to 1870* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988), 12; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 29.

prominent elder asserted that, with the recent epidemic in mind, the raiders should kill only enemy warriors. They should take women and children captive; they did not want to displease the spirits again. Moreover, taking captives would simultaneously weaken their enemies while boosting Piegan numbers. So, the longtime practice of raiding other groups for female captives received greater emphasis as Piegans and others tried to rebound from the recent epidemic. One of the war chiefs voiced additional words of caution: “The country where they now are is but little known to us, and if they did not feel themselves strong they would not have dared to come so far to destroy our people.” The implications of this statement are clear: the Shoshone occupied unfamiliar territory and their bold assault indicated that they had quickly recovered from the epidemic. The subsequent scouting party returned after five days, having not encountered Shoshones and the war chief expressed concern about their inability to locate the enemy. An old chief, however, brushed those worries aside, remarking that “the Snake [Shoshone] Indians are no match for us; they have no guns.” He nevertheless conceded that Shoshones had the ability to overwhelm small Piegan encampments, so they therefore “always keep us on our guard.”³⁵

No major fights reportedly occurred between Blackfoot and Shoshone groups between 1781 and 1786, but the 1780-1782 epidemic combined with ongoing disparities in gun ownership to reconfigure the tribal composition of the northern Plains. In 1787, the famed Piegan war chief Kootanae Appe (Kutenai Man) led a war party on a long journey that yielded neither scalps nor captives. Upon discovering a large Shoshone

³⁵ Thompson, *Narrative*, 338-340 (quotations); Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 29; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 174-175; Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 188-189; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 89; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 11-12.

camp, the party erred on the side of caution and made off with about 35 horses and 15 mules. This expedition, however, symbolized a new era of Blackfoot expansion on the northern Plains. That same year, Thompson wintered at a Piegan camp about 80 miles south of the Bow River and their war parties entered lands drained by the tributaries of the Missouri River. During the late 1780s and 1790s, the well-armed Piegans led the renewed Blackfoot push southward along the eastern foot of the Rockies, compelling Shoshones, Flatheads, and Kutenais (all of whom still had few guns) to seek refuge in the mountains. Piegans and their allies also raided into the mountains for Shoshone horses and female captives, and they disrupted Shoshone attempts to hunt on the Plains. By about 1800, the Blackfoot Confederacy claimed control of the grasslands and parklands between the North Saskatchewan and the Missouri, and their territory stretched hundreds of miles east from the foot of the Rockies. Their raids extended well into what became Idaho and they sometimes hunted in the game-rich Yellowstone River country. One early nineteenth-century trader wrote that Blackfoot territory, much of which was once part of Shoshone country, “abounds in Animals of various kinds.” Indeed, by the early 1800s, Blackfoot groups enjoyed increased access to bison herds and other game, even as their successful raids on Shoshones and others provided them with many horses and captives.³⁶

³⁶ Henry, *Journal*, vol. 2, 380-381 (quotation), 378, 527; Mackenzie, *Voyages*, 116-117; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 174-175; Hultkrantz, “Shoshoni Indians on the Plains,” 70; Oscar Lewis, *The Effects of White Contact upon Blackfoot Culture, with Special Reference to the Role of the Fur Trade* (New York: J.J. Augustin, 1942), 15; Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 263; James A. Teit, “Salishan Tribes of the Western Plateaus”, in *The Forty-Fifty Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, edited by Franz Boas, 23-396 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1930), 316-318; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 89; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 9-10, 12-13, 16, 25, 30; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 115, 127-128, 137; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 30, 40; Mark A. Judy, “Powder Keg on the Upper Missouri: Sources of Blackfoot Hostility, 1730-1810,” *American Indian Quarterly* (Spring 1987), 127-144: 137; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 9; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 300; John C. Ewers, “Intertribal Warfare as the Precursor of Indian-White Warfare on the Northern Great Plains,” *Western Historical Quarterly* (Oct., 1975), 397-401: 403-404; Frank Raymond Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns on the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953, 1966), 51, 52, 58; John Rees to Charles H. Burke, 1925, Box

A pair of factors explain the resounding success of Blackfoot expansion following the 1780-1782 epidemic. The first was that while they lost many to the outbreak, their population reportedly rebounded quickly. As Alexander Henry of the North West Company (NWC) noted in 1809 of the entire Blackfoot Confederacy, “the Small Pox [*sic*] has destroyed great numbers of them. However they are still very numerous, and are increasing very fast every day.” He later made similar reports about the Piegan in particular. He observed that women far outnumbered men (perhaps at a rate of three men to every five women), likely because of war casualties and hunting accidents. Scholars believe that the increasing practice of polygyny boosted Blackfoot reproduction. Although Shoshone warriors had once made female captives integral to their horse-trading efforts, it appears that their Blackfoot counterparts – at least after the 1780-1782 epidemic – stepped up their raiding in an effort to rebuild their own populations.³⁷ As a Piegan chief stated, when raiding enemies “the young women must all be saved, and if any has a babe at the breast it must not be taken from her, nor hurt; all the Boys and Lads that have no weapons must not be killed, but brought to our camps, and be adopted amongst us, to be our people, and make us more numerous and stronger than we are.”³⁸ Conversely, perhaps part of the reason that Shoshones struggled after the epidemic was that they had less ability than their Blackfoot enemies to effectively raid for captives to boost their population.

54, Folder 9, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; The Shoshone Role in Western History, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Aubrey L. Haines, *The Yellowstone Story: A History of Our First National Park*, vol. 1 (Yellowstone National Park, WY: Yellowstone Library and Museum Association, 1977) 21; Shimkin, “Shoshone-Comanche Origins,” 22-23; J.C. Janetski, *Indians of Yellowstone Park* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 29-32.

³⁷ Henry, *Journal*, vol. 2, 381, 535; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 36.

³⁸ Thompson, *Narrative*, 339.

The second factor was the further expansion of the Saskatchewan basin fur trade. This trade network that stretched southwest from Hudson Bay and far west from Montreal began to boom prior to 1780, but the depletion of beaver populations in the eastern Saskatchewan parklands and the ravages of smallpox propelled it to new heights. The death of many Cree and Assiniboine middlemen caused trade to decline initially, but the HBC and the NWC responded by founding of a string of posts along the North Saskatchewan River. Several other companies, the most notable of which was the New North West Company (XY Company) that competed between 1798 and 1804 and then merged with the NWC, encouraged the rivals to establish more posts toward the Rockies. Blackfoot bands had infrequent contact with traders prior to 1782, but between 1782 and 1806 the companies established Buckingham House, Fort George, Rocky Mountain House, Manchester House, Chesterfield House, Fort Augustus, Edmonton House, Acton House, South Branch House, and other posts in or on the fringes of Blackfoot territory. The rivals often built their posts close to one another, which attracted Natives but drove down the companies' prices. At these posts, Blackfeet traded furs, meat, and horses for guns, ammunition, and other European-manufactured goods. No longer dependent upon Native middlemen, the traders tightened their economic ties with Blackfoot bands. Yet, even as economic exchanges soared to unprecedented heights, relations between traders and increasingly well-armed Blackfoot bands became less friendly. Native traders expected European traders to trade only with them and any attempt to do business with their enemies provoked hostility. Moreover, the fur trade had by the early 1800s provided Blackfoot groups with great power, but with that came dependency.³⁹ As NWC trader

³⁹ Henry, *Journal*, vol. 2, 401; Daniel Williams Harmon, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country: The*

Daniel Williams Harmon observed in 1802 of the Natives who engaged in the Saskatchewan basin fur trade:

“The Indians in this quarter [near Bird Mountain] have been so long accustomed to use European goods, that it would be with difficulty that they could now obtain a livelihood without them. Especially do they need firearms, with which to kill game, and axes, kettles, knives, &c. They have almost lost use of bows and arrows; and they would find it nearly impossible to cut their wood with implements, made of stone or bone.”⁴⁰

Harmon referred to Native groups in the eastern Saskatchewan basin, but the general idea also applies to the Blackfeet, who were admittedly less immersed in the fur trade than their eastern neighbors. The fur trade brought conveniences and power to Natives and, over time, certain trade goods became central to their lives. The source of those items – the fur trade – thus became increasingly important to them if they wanted to maintain their “livelihood.”

The growing fur trade, however, affected the loose alliance between Blackfoot, Cree, Assiniboine, and Gros Ventre groups even as it altered the ways that they engaged in the trade itself. Blackfeet continued to trade with Crees and Assiniboines, but they no longer depended upon that commerce, rendering their relations less essential than they had been in the past. By the mid-1790s, relations between the Blackfeet and their eastern allies strained, but they did not dissolve. Competition for the traders’ business, as well as the depletion of fur-bearing animal populations in Cree and Assiniboine lands, produced

Journal of Daniel Williams Harmon 1800-1816, edited by W. Kaye Lamb (Toronto: Macmillan, 1957), 69-70, 97; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 15-116, 124, 128, 130-135, 140, 164-167, 176-177, 179; Hämäläinen, “Rise and Fall,” 848; Fowler, “Great Plains to 1885,” 15; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 88; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 48-51; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 52-53; Lewis, *Effects of White Contact*, 16-18; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 299-300; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 28, 30, 41-44; Barry M. Gough, “Introduction,” in *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger, 1799-1814*, vol. 1, edited by Barry M. Gough, (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1992), xxx; Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 13; Milloy, *Plains Cree*, 18, 27-28; Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree*, 35; Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*, vol. 1 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 91-93; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 12.

⁴⁰ Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, 64-65.

mounting tension. Some Cree and Assiniboine bands pushed south and west, seeking game on Blackfoot lands. Their position as middlemen all but lost, they took on a new role in the fur trade. The number of European traders inhabiting the parklands increased, and they needed to eat. Portions of the parklands were rich in valuable fur-bearers such as beaver, but they were not home to many large game animals. So, what developed was the pemmican complex in which Native groups on the fringes of the Plains harvested bison meat that they processed into pemmican (a mixture of dried and pounded meat, fat, and berries). Although Native men killed the bison, women gathered berries and created the pemmican before giving some of it to their husbands to trade; they kept some of it to support their families. This development did not fundamentally alter gendered divisions of labor, but it highlighted and perhaps even intensified the complementarity of men's and women's work – they performed different tasks yet ultimately worked together to produce key trade goods. Furthermore, the intensification of pemmican production provided Native groups with additional insurance against the “boom and bust” nature of bison availability; pemmican that women made and stored could be used when fresh meat was in short supply. A related development was the growing commerce in bison hides, which Natives exchanged along with pemmican for guns and ammunition. Since traders typically did the utmost to obtain the business and loyalty of Native groups, they often traded for what they could, even bulky and relatively low-value bison robes. In fact, traders expressed displeasure regarding the lack of Blackfoot interest in trapping beaver; they preferred to hunt bison and other game. This practice, too, concerned women, for

men could only trade hides once women processed the animals that they killed. Women were therefore crucial to the Saskatchewan basin fur trade.⁴¹

That many Cree and Assiniboine groups transitioned from the parklands environment to the Plains affected Eastern Shoshones. During the final decades of the eighteenth century, the promises of equestrianism and mounted bison-hunting, as well as the depletion of beaver populations in the parklands, drew many Crees and Assiniboines onto the Plains, at least seasonally. By the 1790s, Plains-dwelling Cree and Assiniboine bands that specialized in bison hunting ranged as far south as the Missouri. In the early 1800s, Harmon observed that the Natives of the grasslands south of the Saskatchewan thrived on “the wealth of their country,” which included “innumerable herds of buffaloes.” Increasingly well-mounted and armed with guns that they used in warfare, Cree and Assiniboine groups also traded with the Mandans and Hidatsas, from whom they acquired many mounts. Moreover, they sent war parties to the west, where they raided Shoshones and others who inhabited or used the western fringes of the Plains.⁴²

Shoshones had an increasingly small place on the post-epidemic northern Plains. Their enemies benefitted from the expanding fur trade, but Shoshones continued to acquire few, if any, firearms. Blackfoot groups blocked Shoshone access to the Saskatchewan network and few guns made their way into Shoshone country from the

⁴¹ Mackenzie, *Voyages*, 238; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 117-119, 130, 140, 173-175; Hämäläinen, “Rise and Fall,” 848; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 299-300; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 32-33; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 48-51, 60; Russell, *Eighteenth-Century*, 13; Milloy, *Plains Cree*, 26, 32; Ewers, “Intertribal Warfare,” 404-405; Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 189-19; Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree*, 40; Fowler, “Great Plains,” 15.

⁴² Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, 237, 238 (quotations), 41, 72; Mackenzie, *Voyages*, 116; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 116-117; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 52-53; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 299-300; Milloy, *Plains Cree*, xiv-xv, 26-28, 32, 34; Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree*, 38-40, 61-62; Ewers, “Intertribal Warfare,” 404-405; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 9-10; Dale Russell asserts that the “Plains Cree” were never such, arguing that they were instead a Cree group that straddled the Plains-parkland environment and only used the Plains seasonally. Yet, he does observe that they began to use the Plains more extensively in the late 1700s than they had before. See Russell, *Eighteenth-Century*, 218.

upper Missouri (by way of the Crow) or from New Mexico (from Comanches); Spanish restrictions on the trade of guns to Natives remained in effect. Shoshones remained rich in horses, but their Comanche and Crow trade contacts provided them with few guns and so their many horses were at the mercy of enemy raiders. Between the late 1780s and the beginning of the 1800s, Shoshones gradually withdrew from the northern Plains, first from the grasslands of what is now Canada, and then from those of Montana. As late as the 1790s, Shoshone territory included some of the grasslands of Montana and Wyoming. But by 1805, their presence on the Plains was largely limited to periodic trading expeditions and seasonal bison hunting trips in such areas as the Three Forks of the Missouri River, often in the company of Flathead or Kutenai bands. None of these groups acquired many guns before 1806.⁴³

Another smallpox epidemic that struck in 1801-1802 helps to explain why Shoshones did not inhabit or extensively use the Plains by the time of Lewis and Clark. As with the 1780-1782 epidemic, we do not know how many Shoshones perished when smallpox revisited them twenty years later. On this occasion, however, we know that Shoshones, Flatheads, and Kutenais contracted the disease while their Blackfoot, Cree, and Assiniboine enemies apparently did not. Evidence suggests that this time the virus

⁴³ Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 300; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 175, 194-195; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 115, 135, 168; Lewis, *Effects*, 18-20; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 13-14, 25, 31; Shimkin, "Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography," 245; The Shoshone Role in Western History, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Hultkrantz, "Shoshoni Indians on the Plains," 65-66, 68-69; Lawrence M. Woods, *Wyoming's Big Horn Basin to 1901: A Late Frontier* (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark, 1997), 16; Merle B. Wells, "Introduction", in Brigham D. Madsen, *The Lemhi: Sacajawea's People* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton, 1979), 23; Teit, "Salishan Tribes," 316; Merle B. Wells, "Introduction", in Brigham D. Madsen, *The Northern Shoshoni* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton, 1980, 2000), 18; Calloway, "Snake Frontiers," 88; Milloy, *Plains Cree*, 12; John Rees to Charles H. Burke, 1925, Box 54, Folder 9, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Fowler, "Great Plains," 15; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 7; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 51-52; Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 204.

spread up the Missouri and then west from the Arikara, Mandan, and Hidatsa villages by way of Crows, Arapahoes, and Gros Ventres. Once smallpox reached the Rockies, trade and travel circulated it among groups situated west of the Continental Divide. These groups likely did not suffer as much as they did twenty years earlier, for the survivors of the first great epidemic had acquired immunity. Nevertheless, smallpox found plenty of new victims in those who had been born since 1782. This epidemic further weakened the military situations of Shoshones and others, rendering them less able to defend themselves against Blackfoot raids, let alone reclaim territory on the Plains.⁴⁴

It was little surprise, then, that by 1806 most Shoshones occupied lands west of the Continental Divide. Early nineteenth-century explorers and traders found them almost entirely west of the Divide, as did other Native groups. One map produced by an unidentified Gros Ventre in 1801, for example, places Shoshone groups south of the Beartooth Mountains, near the headwaters of the Musselshell River, and southwest of the Wind River Range. As this map suggests, the “retreat group” of Shoshones (as one anthropologist referred to those who left the Plains) diffused into several general areas upon leaving the grasslands. In those areas, the Plains “refugees” augmented existing local Shoshone populations and the distinct groups that later became known as the Wind River or Eastern Shoshone, the “Sheepeaters,” the Northern Shoshone, and the Lemhi began to crystallize. Yet, before these groups formally emerged, they knew and defined one another by what they ate. Those names not only reflected a given group’s particular

⁴⁴ Francois Antoine Larocque, “Yellowstone Journal,” in *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains: Canadian Traders among the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians, 1738-1818*, edited by W. Raymond Wood and Thomas D. Thiessen, 159-220 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 206; Taylor, “Sociocultural Effects,” 64-65; Fox, “Cultural Ecological,” 2; Teit, “Salishan Tribes,” 319; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 90; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 180; D.B. Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Geography,” *American Anthropologist* 40, 3 (1938), 413-415: 414; Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 192-198; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 7; Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography,” 254.

relationship with the environment, but the dynamism of their interactions with lands and resources; a group's name often changed several times over the course of a year as it migrated.⁴⁵

The Shoshone group that maintained the closest ties to the Plains centralized in the Wyoming Basin, particularly the Green River area and adjacent areas of what are now Idaho, Utah, and Colorado. Shoshones who inhabited the Wyoming Basin, a great corridor that linked the Great Basin and the Great Plains by way of South Pass, were the direct ancestors of the people today known as the Wind River or Eastern Shoshones. They were a combination of several different groups, for a variety of peoples, including northeastern Great Basin Shoshones, joined the portion of the Plains Shoshone "retreat group" that inhabited this region. They perhaps did so because horses remained scarce throughout much of the Great Basin and this gave them an opportunity to shed their status as "Walkers." Wyoming Basin Shoshones continued to maintain large horse herds, which they used for travel, hunting, foraging, and warfare. They routinely ventured throughout the Wyoming Basin and onto the Plains to hunt bison and pronghorn, but it was not until the second half of the 1800s that this group inhabited the Wind River valley on anything more than a seasonal basis. Their hunting and gathering trips occasionally

⁴⁵ Åke Hultkrantz, "The Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area," in *Shoshone Indians*, edited by Carling I. Malouf and Åke Hultkrantz, 178-217 (New York: Garland, 1974), 173-184; Map by Unidentified Gros Ventre Cartographer, 1801, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, E.3/2, fols. 105d-106, in Binemma, *Common and Contested Ground*, 150-151; Binemma also provides a more polished version of the map on page 152 of his book; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 181; Woods, *Wyoming's Big Horn Basin*, 16; Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 189; The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 8; Hultkrantz, "Shoshoni Indians on the Plains," 70; Robert Francis Murphy and Yolanda Murphy, "Shoshone-Bannock Subsistence and Society," *Anthropological Records* 16, 7 (1960), 293-338: 295; Susan S. Hughes, "The Sheepeater Myth of Northwestern Wyoming," *The Plains Anthropologist* 45, 171 (Feb., 2000), 63-83: 66; Åke Hultkrantz, "The Ethnological Position of the Sheepeater Indians in Wyoming," *Folk* 8-9 (1966-1967), 155-163: 156; Gregory R. Campbell, "The Lemhi Shoshone: Ethnogenesis, Sociological Transformations, and the Construction of a Tribal Nation," *American Indian Quarterly* 25, 4 (Autumn 2001), 539-578: 543.

took them north into the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), northeast into the Wind River area and the Bighorn Basin and Mountains, south into the Uintah Range, east into the future Laramie area, and west into the Snake and Bear River region. They sometimes went on even longer trips, for they reportedly visited Camas Prairie in western Idaho and the Bitterroot valley of western Montana.⁴⁶

Wyoming Basin Shoshones had meat-heavy diets, so their relatives in other areas often referred to them as “Kō’gohue” (Guts). Yet, women’s foraging was more central to Wyoming Basin Shoshone diets than it had been to groups who lived on the Plains. These Shoshones used Wyoming Basin environments that had little changed since the onset of the Little Ice Age in the 1300s. Climate conditions remained relatively cool and wet, which provided ample forage for bison, elk, deer, pronghorn, and smaller game. Landscapes, which included deserts, grasslands, foothills, and alpine mountains, presented varied ecosystems and resources. Shoshone seasonal migrations reflected this diversity and its cyclical nature, for they hunted, as well as gathered roots and berries, when and where it was best to do so. A gendered division of labor based upon complementarity, as we shall see, was therefore a major component of Wyoming Basin

⁴⁶ Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 3, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 6, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography,” 245; The Shoshone Role in Western History, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Hultkrantz, “Shoshoni Indians on the Plains,” 53, 68-70; Teit, “Salishan Tribes,” 316; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 300, 310-311, 334; Wells, “Introduction,” in *Northern Shoshoni*, 18; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountains,” 178-184, 196-197, 201-209; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 182-183; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 422; Fox, “Cultural Ecological,” 2; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 9, 11; Åke Hultkrantz, “The Indians in Yellowstone Park,” in *Shoshone Indians*, edited by Carling I. Malouf and Åke Hultkrantz, 217-250 (New York: Garland, 1974), 244-246; Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Geography,” 414; F.M. Fryxell, “The Former Range of the Bison in the Rocky Mountains,” *Journal of Mammalogy* 9 (1928), 129-139: 135.

Shoshone subsistence. They spent winters in large camps, subsisting on foodstuffs that women stored during the fall. In the spring, men fished for trout and whitefish and went on a communal bison hunt; women spent that time gathering roots and processing meat and hides. With the onset of summer, Shoshone groups splintered into smaller groups to engage in a variety of hunting, gathering, and trading activities. During the late summer, the small groups came together as bands for the largest annual gathering, the fall bison hunt on the grasslands east of the Rockies. During this time, men primarily engaged in “running” bison and providing for group defense while women prepared food, maintained their homes, and processed meat and hides. Some areas west of the Divide, such as the Green River valley and the Uintah basin, had local bison herds until they became extinct in the mid-1800s. Wyoming Basin Shoshone subsistence focused on bison well into the nineteenth century, but they did not entirely depend upon that animal. In fact, when bison were plentiful, Shoshones took only the choice portions of a kill and left the rest to the scavengers. The second most important food source was the elk, which migrated on a north-south axis in what is now western Wyoming, wintering as far south as the Green River valley and summering in the Yellowstone area. Individual men or small groups of men hunted them year-round. Shoshone women and boys also hunted rabbits, prairie dogs, and other small game, often with the assistance of their dogs. Some small groups whom the other Shoshones derisively called “Tóyani” (mountain dwellers) inhabited the Wind River Range and had few horses. They sometimes travelled with their relatives, but they mostly remained in the mountains where the men hunted bighorn sheep and women foraged. Ultimately, Eastern Shoshone subsistence resembled that of their sixteenth-

century ancestors who inhabited the same area, although they had horses and therefore placed more emphasis on bison hunting.⁴⁷

Shoshone women utilized a variety of plant resources found in the Wyoming Basin. These were of secondary importance to the animal foods that comprised the majority of Eastern Shoshone diets, but plant matter provided vitamins and nutrients that “balanced” diets while providing low-fat, low-calorie supplements to protein-dense meats. Bitterroots, camas, wild carrots, wild onions, yampas, currants, chokeberries, serviceberries, gooseberries, and other berries and tubers helped to prevent diseases and generally enhanced Native health by improving such things as blood pressure, eyesight, and the composition of blood. Women fashioned other plants into material goods. They, for instance, made rope out of Indian hemp and processed prickly pears into glue. They also found many plants that they used for medicinal purposes. Sagebrush, rabbit brush, rye grass, and pine needles each had their own use. For example, women gathered portions of sagebrush and boiled it into a tea that treated cold and fever symptoms. For infected wounds, women burned joint weed and applied the smashed poultice to the injured area. They sometimes burned and pulverized bison and bighorn sheep horns, and

⁴⁷ For the Wyoming Basin environment, see Chapter Two, pages 73-77; Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography,” 256-269, 279-281; V. Bailey, *Animal Life of Yellowstone National Park* (Springfield, IL: 1930), 45; Janetski, *Indians of Yellowstone Park*, 39, 57; Fox, “Cultural Ecological,” 2-4; Robert H. Lowie, “Notes on Shoshone Ethnography,” *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* vol. 20, part 3, 185-314 (New York: American Museum Press, 1924), 199, 215-216; Robert H. Lowie, “The Northern Shoshone,” *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* vol. 2, part 2, 165-306 (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1909), 206, 208; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 315, 332; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 180; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 201-209; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 3, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; D. Dominick, “The Sheepeaters,” *Annals of Wyoming* 36, 2 (1964), 131-168: 145, 149, 152; Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Geography,” 413.

then applied the ashes to wounds, sores, or scummy eyes. Men picked tobacco in the mountains that they smoked for ritual purposes, but they acquired most through trade.⁴⁸

In a world where nuclear families were the basic economic units, women were integral to Shoshone subsistence. Men hunted and fished, thereby providing the bulk of a Shoshone group's sustenance. Women, on the other hand, gathered a wide variety of roots and berries, and those vegetal foods comprised a larger part of Shoshone diets in the Intermountain West than they did on the Plains, where there was an even greater specialization toward bison hunting. Women usually did their gathering in small groups of about four or five while a couple of men guarded them. When they left their camp to gather, they did not quit until they filled their bags; they therefore often did not return to camp for several days at a time. Like their Basin relatives, they used obsidian-sharpened sticks to dig roots from the ground. They dried and stored much of what they gathered, providing their families with reliable supplies of food for the long, difficult winter months. Women sometimes pounded berries into meat prior to storage. They washed, peeled, ground up, and ate some of the roots immediately, usually in a soup. Piñon nuts were not available locally, but when Shoshone groups visited the Great Basin or they traded for some, they consumed them after women extracted the toxins from them. Women, moreover, continued to prepare, store, and distribute all foods. They utilized a time-consuming and difficult process to prepare bison hides and other furs for use as

⁴⁸ Lowie, "Notes," 309-311; Lowie, "Northern Shoshone," 187-189; Interviews with Lucy Bonatsie, Box 1, Folder 4, Warm Valley Historical Project Records, 1961-2001, Collection Number 11457, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 3, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Shimkin, "Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography," 269; Interview with Marie Washakie, Box 1, Folder 35, Warm Valley Historical Project Records, 1961-2001, Collection Number 11457, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Fox, "Cultural Ecological," 3-4.

clothing, lodge coverings, and blankets. They also completed many other basic yet important tasks, for they gathered firewood and water, prepared all food, cared for the home, and reared the young. So, with the withdrawal of Shoshone groups from the Great Plains, women's work – especially their increasingly important foraging activities – ensured that their work remained integral to group survival.⁴⁹

Shoshone social practices highlighted that women shared in a complementary system of gender relations. Men typically initiated marriage, usually giving gifts of horses and/or food to his bride's parents. Sometimes a young girl's father might promise her to a man and accepted a preliminary gift of horses. She then remained with her parents until she was older (usually about 13 or 14) and then they married, the groom gave the father additional horses and/or meat. Since Eastern Shoshones practiced matrilineal residence, a girl's parents preferred a man who was a good hunter and could therefore support them. So, men had to prove themselves and earn the women that they wanted to marry. On the other hand, because hunting accidents and warfare took many men's lives, men frequently had more than one wife, and those were usually sisters. Women, however, rarely had more than one husband; with gender ratios typically skewed toward there being more women than men among a given group, polyandry was hardly practicable. Women usually had limited roles outside of the family, for most leaders were

⁴⁹ Interviews with Lucy Bonatsie, Box 1, Folder 4, Warm Valley Historical Project Records, 1961-2001, Collection Number 11457, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 3, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Shimkin, "Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography," 269; Lowie, "Notes," 226-228; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; The Shoshone Woman and her Status in the Tribe, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; The Changing Role of the Shoshone Women on the Wind River Reservation, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 7, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

men who gained status through hunting and warfare; since hunting was the primary activity that sustained these Shoshone groups, the hunters – men – governed the camp. There was, therefore, little place in a group's political realm for women. On the other hand, women gained prestige through their efforts as midwives, healers, foragers, and hide-workers. So, despite the observations of Euro-American men who wrote that of Plains Natives generally that, “[a]ll the Indians consider woman as far inferior in every respect, to men; and, among many tribes, they treat their wives much as they do dogs,” Shoshone women existed within a system of gender complementarity that accorded status to both men and women within their respective areas of expertise.⁵⁰

Wyoming Basin Shoshone material culture exhibited a significant Plains influence. Women produced a variety of animal furs and skins for their families to wear, but Plains-style buckskin was common. Unlike their Basin relatives who continued to inhabit brush lodges, Shoshones retained the hide tipi tradition that they used during their time on the grasslands (although women constructed grass lodges when they were unable to set up a tipi). Into the 1800s, Eastern Shoshone weapons were mostly bows and arrows, pukamoggans, spears, and bison-hide shields. Guns were few and far between, and ammunition supplies were scarce and unreliable. They rarely used horse or dog travois, instead using packs that they strapped to the animals' backs and sides.

Apparently, Shoshones who inhabited the Wyoming Basin after their withdrawal from

⁵⁰ Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, 217 (quotation); The Shoshone Woman and her Status in the Tribe, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 334; Lowie, “Notes,” 278; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 47; The Changing Role of the Shoshone Women on the Wind River Reservation, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 7, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

the Plains did not make pottery, and ethnographic studies offer conflicting accounts of whether or not they made baskets and used metates to grind up vegetal matter as did their Basin relatives. They used bags and wraps made out of rawhide, as well as cups and other eating utensils fashioned from bison and bighorn sheep horns.⁵¹

As Shoshones adapted to the Wyoming Basin, their social and political organization reflected their Plains heritage and the demands of their foraging lifeways. Their sociopolitical life was, in a word, fluid. They spent most of the year in relatively small groups comprised of one to several extended families (perhaps a few dozen people) and gathered in larger groups or bands for bison hunts each late summer and fall (reportedly numbering a thousand or more). Several family groups often established winter encampments together, but that was not always the case. Other than the annual bison hunt, Shoshone living groups were smaller than they were on the Plains, but not so small as to render them defenseless. As their relatives in the Great Basin and Columbia Plateau did, Wyoming Shoshone groups defined one another by their primary subsistence activity. There were sheep-eaters, dove-eaters, squirrel-eaters, and so forth, although the “Kutsinduka,” or buffalo-eaters, were the most numerous and influential. As a result of their loose and dynamic social organization, Shoshone political organization was less developed than it was during their time on the Plains. Chiefs decided where the people hunted bison and camped, but positions of leadership were temporary and subject to the

⁵¹ Pierre Antoine Tabeau, *Tabeau's Narrative of Loisel's Expedition to the Upper Missouri*, edited by Annie Heloise Abel (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939, 1968), 160-161; Lowie, “Notes,” 2-4, 215-222, 241-242; 245, 249, 309-310; Lowie, “Northern Shoshone,” 191-193; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 3, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Fox, “Cultural Ecological,” 3.

acquiescence of the many; families and individuals joined other groups as they wished. Indeed, many families and groups of families migrated back and forth between bands in the Wyoming Basin, and some ventured west to travel with relatives in what is now Idaho. The historical record is mostly silent regarding prominent Shoshone chiefs prior to the emergence of Chief Washakie and others during the 1840s, but there was one leader – Ohamagwya or “Yellow Hand” – who stood out during the early 1800s.⁵²

Ohamagwya’s story demonstrates how, despite their withdrawal from the Plains, Eastern Shoshones continued to adopt and maintain Plains-type customs. Ohamagwya was born a Comanche between the 1760 and 1765, and he emerged as a prominent leader during the 1780s. Precisely when and why he traveled north to live among the Shoshone remains a mystery, but he was a Wyoming Basin Shoshone leader by the 1820s. The impact of his relocation was tremendous, for after a wise bison or eagle appeared to him in a vision, he introduced the Shoshone to a distinct version of the Sun Dance. The Sun Dance, of course, was a Plains Native ritual, but the Eastern Shoshone style blended practices and imagery from the Plains and Great Basin. Also known as the “Fasting Dance,” the Sun Dance was a great communal event (reportedly held during late spring gatherings) during which male dancers abstained from eating and, during several days of dancing, looked to the sky and prayed to “Our Father,” who gave the sun as a gift to enlighten the world. In contrast to the Plains version, the Shoshone Sun Dance did not include such details as self-torture. Women did not play a direct role in the Sun Dance,

⁵² Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 3, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Lowie, “Northern Shoshone,” 206, 208-209; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 311, 332-334; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 180; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 201-209; Fox, “Cultural Ecological,” 3, 7; Shimkin, “Eastern Shoshone Geography,” 413; Lowie, “Notes,” 283-284; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

although they did engage in some of the rituals leading up to the main ceremony and they served as vital sources of support and encouragement for their husbands or male family members who did participate. Of particular importance was that they prepared food and arranged vital ceremonial feasts.⁵³

Other Shoshones inhabited the rugged mountain areas of northwestern Wyoming and southeastern Montana. These were the mysterious “Sheepeaters,” who apparently arrived in the area as late as 1800 and were probably the only permanent early nineteenth-century residents of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE). Other Shoshone groups, such as those of the Wyoming Basin, derisively referred to them as “Tóyani” (Mountain Dwellers) because they lacked horses and did not make bison central to their existence; mounted Shoshones therefore viewed them as poor. In some ways, they did constitute something of a “cultural backwater,” for the difficult terrain and climate of the GYE limited their contact with Natives in surrounding areas, including other Shoshones. Some scholars, such as Susan S. Hughes, challenge the Sheepeater “myth,” arguing that the “Sheepeaters” were simply Wyoming Basin Shoshones who used high-altitude areas seasonally. In a more recent study, however, Richard Adams demonstrates that although migratory bands visited the GYE, some Shoshone groups permanently occupied parts of the region.⁵⁴

⁵³ Lowie, “Northern Shoshone,” 193-195; Hultkrantz, “Shoshoni Indians on the Plains,” 56, 61-63; Lowie, “Notes,” 283, 298; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 11-15; Eastern Shoshone, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 15, Folder 16, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Wind River Shoshone Political History Shimkin, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 10, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Chief Dick Washakie Tells about the Origin of the Sun Dance, Box 56, Folder 27, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Fox, “Cultural Ecological,” 4; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 37-40; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 11.

⁵⁴ Adams, “Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem,” 537-542; Hughes, “Sheepeater Myth,” 63, 67, 77, 79; Janetski, *Indians of Yellowstone Park*, 28-29, 39, 43; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 8-9; Mark

These mountain-dwelling Shoshones had a difficult but rich environment at their disposal, and they therefore employed a diversified subsistence system reminiscent of that of their Great Basin relatives. The ecologically-diverse GYE provided access to bighorn sheep, bison, elk, deer, pronghorn, small game, and fish, as well as limber pine nuts, roots, and berries. Shoshones of the GYE lived in small groups comprised of two to five families and migrated in accordance with food availability cycles. Their social and political organization reflected this migratory existence. One man led each small group for as long as he ensured successful hunting and defense. Marriage was, most fundamentally, an economic union designed to ensure survival. Men hunted, defended the group, and maintained their weapons and tools while women gathered plant foods, made clothing and other material goods, cared for the home, and prepared meals. These Shoshones used dogs to transport their goods, which included fur clothing, digging sticks, wood and horn bows, steatite vessels, and, later, metal axes, knives, and other European-manufactured goods. They lived in brush wickiups that they reinforced with wood, stone, and earth for the winter. During the summer, they usually constructed simple windbreaks. Because harvest seasons were generally more predictable than game migration patterns, these Shoshones often depended more on vegetal foods and therefore based their movements on seasonal ripening cycles. Many berries matured during the summer, but roots provided some flexibility; yampas, bitterroots, and camas could be gathered from the spring through the fall. During the warm months, mountain-dwelling Shoshones used higher-elevation areas, since the mountains of the GYE were nearly inaccessible until

David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 45-47; Hultkrantz, "Indians in Yellowstone Park," 219, 233-236; Hultkrantz, "Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area," 201-203; Dominick, "Sheepstealers," 146-147, 149-151; Haines, *Yellowstone Story*, vol. 1, 22, 24; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 24.

winter snow thawed. There, they hunted bighorn sheep and any other game that they found as well as gathered nuts and berries. They wintered at lower altitudes in creek and river bottoms that afforded shelter from the elements, and they ate stored foods while taking the occasional elk, bison, and other animals. In the mountains, they constructed timber traps to capture multiple animals and they used their dogs to chase and corner game. In general, it appears that Shoshones of the GYE used or inhabited high-altitude areas more than is generally assumed.⁵⁵

Shoshone groups that retreated from the Plains also migrated to lands in what are now southern Idaho and northern Utah. Some lived in the Bear River and Snake River areas, but others lived to the north in the mountains and valleys of the Lemhi and Salmon Rivers. Shoshones of this area west of the Continental Divide inhabited varied landscapes and they therefore employed diverse yet dynamic subsistence systems. Snake River and Bear River groups utilized mixed Great Plains-Great Basin subsistence systems while their northern relatives used approaches more influenced by the Plains and Plateau environments.⁵⁶

The subsistence cycles of these mounted Shoshones resembled those of their relatives to the east. Many maintained large horse herds and emphasized bison hunting. Bison inhabited such areas as the Snake River Plain, but many Shoshones who spent most of their time west of the Divide also hunted on the grasslands to the east each fall.

⁵⁵ Janetski, *Indians of Yellowstone Park*, 12, 43, 46-54; Adams, "Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem," 541; Hultkrantz, "Indians in Yellowstone Park," 233-236; Hultkrantz, "Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area," 201-203; Dominick, "Sheepeaters," 146, 151-165; Hultkrantz, "Ethnological Position," 156-162; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demetri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁵⁶ The Shoshonis of Wyoming, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Wells, "Introduction," in *Northern Shoshoni*, 18; Hultkrantz, "Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area," 183-186; Murphy and Murphy, "Shoshone-Bannock," 315; Wells, "Introduction," in *Lemhi*, 26.

Bison were simply far more numerous on the Plains and those trips provided the many Shoshone groups with the chance to interact and trade with others elsewhere. Idaho and Utah Shoshones usually took one of two primary routes east. The first was a northern route over Lemhi pass, through the GYE, and into the Three Forks of the Missouri area. The second was a southern route that went through South Pass to the Plains of eastern Wyoming. They often travelled with relatives from the north (as discussed below), Bannocks, and Flatheads for the first trip and, for the second, with Wyoming Basin Shoshones and Bannocks. Idaho and Utah Shoshone subsistence systems, however, were diverse, for, like the Wyoming Basin, their territory mostly supported low population densities. Their food-procurement efforts included pronghorn, sage hen, and (sometimes communal) rabbit hunts, as well as considerable foraging; each spring many groups traveled west to dig roots on Camas Prairie. Shoshones who inhabited the Snake River area, especially “Walkers” who had few or no horses, also fished. In fact, there were several Shoshone groups scattered throughout the fringes of the northern Great Basin that maintained pedestrian lifeways that focused on procuring small game, fish, roots, and nuts. Some groups maintained such a Basin-style subsistence system that they, unlike their mounted relatives, continued to use conical seed baskets and beaters.⁵⁷

Equestrian Shoshones in Idaho and Utah displayed gender, social, and political systems that reflected their Plains heritage and their existence in the northeast corner of

⁵⁷ Janetski, *Indians of Yellowstone Park*, 33-37, 57-60; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 178-182, 191-196; Lowie, “Northern Shoshone,” 184; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 315-332; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 9; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 179, 194-195; Dominick, “Sheepeaters,” 133-134, 144-145; Deward E. Walker, Jr., *American Indians of Idaho: Aboriginal Cultures* (Moscow, ID: University of Idaho Press, 1973), 15, 22, 71-72, 76, 117; E. Adamson Hoebel, “Bands and Distribution of the Eastern Shoshone,” *American Anthropologist* 40, 3 (1938), 410-413; Jack Harris, “Western Shoshoni,” *American Anthropologist* 40, 3 (1938), 407-410; Wells, “Introduction,” in *Lemhi*, 26-28; Wells, “Introduction,” in *Northern Shoshoni*, 13, 19, 23; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 23.

the Great Basin. Extended families constituted their primary social units and while mounted groups formed bands, pedestrian groups rarely did. Men hunted, fished, and went to war while women foraged, maintained the home, and raised children. Girls reportedly made a quick transition from childhood to womanhood; their mothers taught them how to support the family before they married. On the other hand, boys experienced a longer adolescence comprised of a series of hunting and war-related challenges. These Shoshones practiced both polygyny and polyandry, but their practice of the latter declined by the early 1800s. Like their eastern relatives, Shoshones in Utah and Idaho identified one another by their primary food source, and those names also often changed with the seasons. By the late 1700s, these Shoshone groups intermixed with eastward-migrating Numic-speakers from the Oregon area. These were Northern Paiutes who became known as Bannocks. Mounted Shoshone-Bannock groups travelled extensively, spanning from western Idaho to the western Plains and south into Utah; their annual migrations covered an estimated 1,200 miles. Wyoming Basin Shoshones reported that visitors from the west – whether individuals or larger groups – were common. Snake River Shoshone political organization was slightly less developed than that of their eastern relatives. Farther away from enemy Plains groups, they simply did not require strong leaders. Certain men held power during the annual Plains bison hunt, but otherwise they had limited influence.⁵⁸

In the mountains to the north, two different Shoshone cultures emerged. These coalesced to form the Lemhi Shoshone in the late 1800s, but prior to that time they were

⁵⁸ Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 191-196; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 315-329; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Wells, “Introduction,” in *Lemhi*, 24; Wells, “Introduction” in *Northern Shoshoni*, 18-20, 23; Walker, *American Indians of Idaho*, 71, 118, 120.

distinct. The lifeways of one of these groups, the Tukudikas (“Sheepeaters”), strongly resembled those of the Shoshone who inhabited the mountains of what are now Wyoming and Montana. They lived in small family groups, had few horses, and focused on bighorn sheep hunting and some foraging. Some Tukudika groups inhabited the Sawtooth Range and other mountain regions almost exclusively, but others joined their nearby relatives for bison-hunting trips. These relatives were called Agaidikas (“Salmon-Eaters”), for they fished for salmon on tributaries of the Columbia River, particularly the Lemhi and Salmon Rivers, and foraged. Whereas equestrian Shoshones to the south used a Basin-Plains subsistence system, these Shoshones utilized a Plateau-Plains system that focused on resources found in more temperate environments. Indeed, in contrast to their relatives to the south, Agaidikas devoted little energy to hunting small game and probably placed less emphasis on foraging. They fished in the spring and once supplies of salmon slowed during the summer, they hunted as well as foraged for roots and berries in small groups. Each fall, some of the dispersed groups merged and hunted bison on the Plains with Flatheads and others, usually over Lemhi Pass in the Three Forks area. Now called “Kucundikas” (“Buffalo-eaters”), they procured much-needed supplies of meat for the long winter months and hastened back across the Divide. They could hunt bison in the Snake River valley, yet they informed Meriwether Lewis in 1805 that “there was no buffaloe on the West side of these mountains; that the game consisted of a few Elk deer and Antelopes, and that the natives subsisted on fish and roots principally [*sic*].”⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 2, 383 (quotation), 341, 345, 370-379; Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 3, 11-12, 41; Charles Le Raye, “The Journal of Charles Le Raye,” *South Dakota Historical Society Collections*, vol. 4, 150-180 (Sioux Falls, SD: Mark D. Scott, 1908), 174-175; Hultkrantz, “Ethnographic Position,” 160; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 295, 315, 322-323, 329-331; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 187-191; James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 140-143, 150-153; Hyde, *Indians*

Agaidika and Tukudika social and political organization were even more fragmented than that of their southern relatives. These groups were generally smaller, for they mostly subsisted in small, scattered groups, when not hunting bison to the east. Perhaps predictably, chieftaincy was less developed among these Shoshones than it was among their more bison-oriented relatives. Yet, each small group interacted with one another extensively. As was the case in the Snake River area, Bannocks joined Salmon-eater and Sheep-eater groups. Those groups were largely organized around extended families, so gender again ordered everyday life. Despite the cultural bias of Anglo-American observers, women's many duties indicated their importance to group subsistence and their status within the tribe. Lewis, for example, noted that Agaidika men "treat their women with but little respect [*sic*]," expecting them to forage, cook, dress skins, collect firewood, make all clothing, transport the homes and goods, and raise children; he did not comprehend that women controlled the distribution of most things. Fathers reportedly "disposed" of their daughters as they pleased, "selling" them at young ages for horses and then receiving more upon her marriage as a teen; again, Lewis did not understand the nuances of matrilineal residence. Yet, since they had many horses at their disposal, women were "seldom compelled like those in other parts of the continent to carry burthens on their backs." They used skin tipis whenever possible, but could construct brush lodges when tipis were not an option. Their attire consisted of a variety of furs and skins, although bison provided much of the material. As was the case with all other Shoshone groups, Agaidikas and Tukudikas possessed few guns by the early 1800s;

of the High Plains, 175-176; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 8-9; Adams, "Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem," 532-533; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 22-25; Hoebel, "Bands and Distribution," 410-411; Dominick, "Sheepeaters," 149; Wells, "Introduction" in *Lemhi*, 24-28; Lowie, "Northern Shoshone," 184; Wells, "Introduction," in *Northern Shoshoni*, 19; Janetski, *Indians of Yellowstone Park*, 37.

they used bows and arrows, lances, clubs, and hide shields. Ethnographers suggest that an additional Shoshone group inhabited southwestern Idaho: “Elk-Eaters” who reportedly used the western slopes of the Teton Range. This group, however, was likely part of one of the Idaho Shoshone groups which visited the Tetons for seasonal hunts.⁶⁰

All of these Shoshone groups had complex relationships with one another and their neighbors, many of which were friendly and mutually beneficial. First and foremost, trade, joint hunting trips, intermarriage, and other interactions continued to bind the various Shoshone groups of the Wyoming Basin, northern Great Basin, and Columbia Plateau. Moreover, all of these groups also interacted with non-Numic speaking peoples. Many of their friendly intertribal relations were with groups who also suffered from the depredations of Blackfoot raiders. Some of them had also lost their prime bison-hunting territories to their enemies. For example, Kutenais had once shared the grasslands of Alberta and Montana with Shoshones (although not always peacefully), but by 1800 Blackfoot pressure forced them into the Rockies. Forming loose alliances with Shoshones, Flatheads, and others, they went east in large intertribal groups to hunt bison seasonally. They lacked reliable access to the Saskatchewan basin fur trade and, therefore, firearms – as did their Flathead allies. Prior to 1780, Flatheads and Shoshones warred, but after the 1780-1782 smallpox epidemic they formed a loose alliance based upon trade, cooperative hunting, and joint war parties. Yet, by 1800, hunting pressure began to reduce the bison herds in what are now the mountain valleys of western Montana (in the Plains-Plateau ecological borderland). As a result, Shoshones and their

⁶⁰ Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 2, 371 (quotation); Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 3, 41 (quotation), 3-5, 19-21; Le Raye, “Journal,” 174-175; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 187-191; Campbell, “Lemhi Shoshone,” 542-543; Lowie, “Northern Shoshone,” 175-184; Hoebel, “Bands and Distribution,” 410; Wells, “Introduction,” in *Northern Shoshoni*, 19-20; Wells, “Introduction,” in *Lemhi*, 27-28; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 332-334.

Plateau allies banded together for more extensive trips onto the grasslands further east. Shoshones sometimes also traded with other Plateau peoples, such as the Nez Perce and Cayuse. Although the most interaction between Shoshone and Plateau groups occurred in the north, Wyoming Basin and southern Idaho Shoshones also traded, intermarried, and traveled with Flatheads, Kutenais, and others. Individually, all of these groups were susceptible to enemy attacks, but their cooperation eventually helped to halt Blackfoot expansion and blunt the impact of their raids.⁶¹

Indeed, Shoshones established new friendly relations even as they maintained those with their longtime allies. Among the newcomers were Bannocks, the eastward-migrating Northern Paiutes. Some Shoshone groups intermarried with Flatheads and Kutenais, but their ties with Bannock groups extended well beyond periodic trade, travel, and intermarriage. Integrated Shoshone-Bannock bands emerged as individuals and families of both groups inhabited single camps and, moreover, many traveled together to hunt bison on the Plains and to forage at such places as Camas Prairie. Shoshones also traded with Crows. Although they possessed relatively few guns by the early 1800s, Crows had more than the Shoshone, which gave them an upper hand in commerce. Some Shoshones and Crows traveled together to trade at the Mandan and Hidatsa villages on the upper Missouri. As trader Tabeau learned soon after 1800, “[a]ll these people come

⁶¹ Larocque, “Yellowstone Journal,” 218-219; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 3, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 2, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 127-128, 180-185; Haines, *Yellowstone Story*, vol. 1, 25; Lowie, “Notes,” 194; Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Geography,” 413; Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 3, 54; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark*, 154-155; Wells, “Introduction,” in *Northern Shoshoni*, 19; Teit, “Salishan Tribes,” 316-320, 322, 357-360; Fox, “Cultural Ecological,” 3; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 22; Wells, “Introduction,” in *Lemhi*, 26; Lowie, “Northern Shoshone,” 171, 191; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 194-195; Janetski, *Indians of Yellowstone Park*, 57; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 203-209; Milloy, *Plains Cree*, 12-13; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 31; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 58-59.

every year to the Mandanes [*sic*] with whom they trade horses for merchandises of various kinds, for guns and ammunition.” Larocque, on the other hand, noted in 1805 upon finding some 20 Shoshone lodges traveling with a Crow band that, “[t]his nation [Shoshones] as well as the Flatheads trade as yet no guns from the Ererokas [Absarokas, or Crows].”⁶² Some Shoshone bands continued to interact with Comanches, for families traveled back and forth between the southern Plains and the Wyoming Basin. In fact, it appears that once Comanches signed a peace treaty with the Spanish in 1786, their ties to Shoshones and other northern groups grew. Shoshones visited the Comanche trade center in the upper Arkansas valley and even accompanied Comanches to New Mexico, for Larocque wrote in September 1805 that while he was on the Bighorn River “a Snake Indian arrived, he had been absent since the spring and had been part of his nation who trade with the Spaniards.” Unfortunately for Shoshones, while horses and material goods changed hands through their trade with Comanches, few firearms did. Finally, Shoshone participation in extensive trade networks, especially their own “rendezvous” in southwestern Wyoming, maintained ties to far-off places like New Mexico, The Dalles of the Columbia River, and the semisedentary villages of the Upper Missouri. Bison and other big game products, fish, produce, shells, tobacco, obsidian, European material goods, and cultural elements thus continued to travel to and from Shoshone groups.⁶³

⁶² Tabeau, *Tabeau's Narrative*, 160-161; Larocque, “Yellowstone Journal,” 220.

⁶³ Larocque, “Yellowstone Journal,” 189 (quotations), 170, 184, 185, 191, 206, 213-215, 219; Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 6, 103; Lowie, “Northern Shoshone,” 171, 191, 212; Haines, *Yellowstone Story*, vol. 1, 25; Lowie, “Notes,” 194; Dan Flores, “Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850,” *Journal of American History* 78, 2 (Sept., 1991), 465-485: 472; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 162-164, 168-169, 174-175; Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Geography,” 413; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark*, 169; Wells, “Introduction,” in *Lemhi*, 18; Fox, “Cultural Ecological,” 3; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 136, 180-182; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 22; Shimkin, “Shoshone-Comanche Origins,” 22-23; Hultkrantz, “Shoshoni Indians on the Plains,” 56, 61-63, 65; T. Stern, “Columbia River Trade Network,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 12: Plateau, edited by Deward E. Walker, Jr., 641-652 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1998), 642, 645;

Many of the Shoshones' intertribal relationships were hostile in nature. Even after Shoshone groups withdrew into the mountains, their enemies continued to pursue their game, horses, and women. The 1780-1782 smallpox epidemic, moreover, combined with American westward expansion to trigger major Native population movements. Captives and horses were the most visible objectives in the conflicts stemming from these migrations, but access to bison-rich areas was perhaps the overriding cause of struggle. Even as American expansion pushed eastern tribes west into Sioux country, the impact of the recent epidemic enabled Lakota Sioux and Cheyennes to push west of the Missouri and thereby displace Crows and others. Crows struggled with the Lakota, but they continued their westward push along the Yellowstone River, depriving Shoshones of prime hunting grounds. Indeed, many traders who visited that area between 1802 and 1806 noted that the Yellowstone valley teemed with game. Larocque, for one, observed that "the country abounds so much in Buffaloes and Deer that they [Crows] find no difficulty in finding provision for a numerous [*sic*] family." But this was not Shoshone country, for by 1800 Crows claimed lands as far west as the Absaroka and Wind River Ranges. Crows and Shoshones sometimes fought as a result, but they had common enemies in the Blackfeet, Sioux, and Gros Ventre and occasional truces resulted. Also by 1800, Arapahos expanded into Shoshone country near the head of the North Platte and raided into the Green River country. Shoshones and Arapahos reportedly traded on occasion, but their relationship was typically hostile. Cheyennes also raided into

Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 179-180, 183, 191-193; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 9; Murphy and Murphy, "Shoshone-Bannock," 332; Tabeau, *Tabeau's Narrative*, 160-161; The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 2, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Wells, "Introduction," in *Northern Shoshoni*, 23; Calloway, "Snake Frontiers," 90.

Shoshone lands from what is now western Nebraska and South Dakota, and they took many captives. Shoshones also had to be wary of Hidatsa raiders who ventured west from the upper Missouri to capture women, children, and horses. Even Native groups that inhabited the far northeastern Plains raided into Shoshone country, for NWC trader John McDonnell wrote in the 1790s that “Most of the Red River Indians go to war... upon the Rocky Mountain Snake Indians or any of the nations at some distance from their own country upon which they first fall.” Finally, Blackfoot groups continued to raid Shoshones for horses and captives, traveling as far as the Boise valley, the Fort Hall area, and the Great Salt Lake.⁶⁴

Shoshones also fought with groups that resided west of the mountains. Perhaps in an effort to acquire rich fishing and hunting areas, they warred with Yakimas, Walla Wallas, Umatillas, and others in the far northwestern corner of their territory, forcing those groups to abandon some of their lands south of the Snake and Columbia Rivers. Shoshones traded with Nez Perce and Cayuse bands, but they sometimes raided one

⁶⁴ Larocque, *Yellowstone Journal*, 207 (quotation), 187-188, 192-197, 209; John McDonnell, “The Red River,” in *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains: Canadian Traders among the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians, 1738-1818*, edited by W. Raymond Wood and Thomas D. Thiessen, 79-92 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 92 (quotation); Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 6, 103; Charles Mackenzie, “Some account of the Missouri Indians in the years 1804, 5 6, & 7,” in *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains: Canadian Traders among the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians, 1738-1818*, edited by W. Raymond Wood and Thomas D. Thiessen, 241-296 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 241-242, 257, 263-264; Le Raye, “Journal,” 169-172, 176; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 176-178, 181-183, 188-191, 195, 197; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark*, 111-112, 116; Hämäläinen, “Rise and Fall,” 858-859; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 59; Haines, *Yellowstone Story*, vol. 1, 21, 26; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 8-9; Hultkrantz, “Indians in Yellowstone Park,” 242-243; The Shoshonis of Wyoming, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demetri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Hultkrantz, “Shoshoni Indians on the Plains,” 69; Janetski, *Indians of Yellowstone Park*, 29-33; Fox, “Cultural Ecological,” 2, 6; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 90; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 21-22; Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 47-48; Lowie, “Northern Shoshone,” 171-172; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 180-182, 185; Lowie, “Notes,” 194, 241-242, 245; Ewers, “Intertribal Warfare,” 405-406, 408; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 10-11, 29-30; Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 186-187; Fowler, “Great Plains,” 22.

another or fought over resource-rich areas. Shoshone-Bannock groups even had occasional violent encounters with Kutenais and Flatheads. Shoshones, unable to maintain the flow of captives that they took from the Plains during the early eighteenth century, apparently tried to compensate by raiding Plateau groups for captives to trade for horses and other goods. The Plateau groups retaliated against those raids while at the same time targeting the Shoshones' massive horse herds. As those groups acquired more horses during the late 1700s and early 1800s, they challenged Shoshones for control of hunting and fishing territories in western Idaho.⁶⁵

Perhaps predictably, their withdrawal from the northern Plains and their continued lack of firearms affected Shoshone military and economic life. Shoshones suffered from devastating raids that harnessed the power of guns and horses as their enemies on the Plains procured more guns and more reliable supplies of ammunition. The Rockies, which the Arapaho believed the "Man Above" had created to keep them and the Shoshone apart, were an imposing but passable obstacle for determined raiders. After their retreat from the Plains, Shoshones lost increasing numbers of captives and horses to their enemies. This may have led to men placing greater value on women and horses, for short supplies of both affected a group's ability to complete essential labor. At the same time, the women who were not taken captive perhaps saw their workloads increase as a result of having fewer with whom to share their labor. Wyoming Basin Shoshones

⁶⁵ Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 8; Teit, "Salishan Tribes," 318; The Influence of the Horse on the Numic People, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 16, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 58-59; Deward E. Walker, Jr., "Nez Perce," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 12: Plateau, edited by Deward E. Walker, Jr., 420-438 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 425; Stern, "Columbia River," 397, 400, 403; Helen H. Schuster, "Yakima and Neighboring Groups," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 12: Plateau, edited by Deward E. Walker, Jr., 327-351 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 330; Wells, "Introduction," in *Lemhi*, 26; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark*, 226.

endured Blackfoot raids, but their relatives to the northwest appeared to bear the brunt of Blackfoot pressure. Yet, Shoshones in Wyoming faced pressure from other groups. Unable to muster the offensive power that they once possessed and having to focus on defense, Shoshones could not conduct the successful captive raids that they did in the past. Their trade likely suffered as a result, for captives were the primary commodity that they traded to Comanches for horses and Spanish goods. Although they were now on the defensive, they still sent raiding parties into Blackfoot country in pursuit of prestige and captives. However, they tried to avoid pitched battles and, therefore, the full wrath of their enemies' guns. They raided deep enough into Blackfoot country that they came close to fur trade posts, but company men were largely unable to open up trade with them. Also, when attacked by their enemies, they sometimes inflicted heavy losses on them. In 1795, for instance, after he lost his brother during a raid on the Shoshone, a Blackfoot chief adopted NWC trader Duncan M'Gillivray as a brother. Similarly, when Charles Mackenzie visited a Hidatsa camp in 1806, he found that "the villages did not appear to be so gay as they use to have been – the reasons of these changes were that some of their young men had been killed by the Serpents, among whom there was the son of one of the Chiefs & all those who were able to Carry Arms had been gone to revenge the Stroak [*sic*]."⁶⁶

Fortunately for Shoshones, events in the Saskatchewan basin provided them with a bit of a reprieve. The Blackfoot Confederacy was at the peak of its power at the turn of

⁶⁶ Mackenzie, "Some account," 270 (quotation); The Shoshone Role in Western History, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Duncan M'Gillivray, *The Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray of the North West Company at Fort George on the Saskatchewan, 1794-5*, edited by Arthur S. Morton (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada, 1929), 73-74; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 52, 55-57; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 174-175, 183; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 25; Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 129; Calloway, "Snake Frontiers," 89; Ewers, "Intertribal Warfare," 401-402.

the nineteenth century, but its loose alliances with Assiniboines, Crees, and Gros Ventres deteriorated after 1780. The unifying Shoshone threat became a thing of the past and, moreover, the growing fur trade drove wedges that produced tensions. No longer dependent upon Assiniboine and Cree middlemen for firearms and ammunition as the HBC and NWC founded posts in their territory, the Blackfeet had little reason to remain friendly with those groups. Furthermore, Blackfeet were rich in horses compared to Crees and Assiniboines, so the latter raided them constantly, especially as their trade declined. Cree and Assiniboine groups, however, maintained a major advantage: they had more experience using guns and they possessed greater supplies of them. At the same time, Crees and Assiniboines focused their efforts as middlemen to the south, where they traded with Mandans and Hidatsas. This provided them with horses, but it also reignited a decades-old conflict with their Lakota Sioux enemies. Tensions between Blackfeet, Crees, and Assiniboines rose during the 1780s, but violence erupted during the 1790s, causing Harmon to remark in 1803 on a longstanding “bloody War” between those groups. After a brief truce, the alliance shattered in 1806 when Crees, Assiniboines, and Blackfeet formed a joint war party but “fell out on the way and fought a Battle” over some horses. In the midst of these conflicts, Piegans dealt primarily with Shoshones while Siksikas focused on the Assiniboines and Crees; Bloods split their attention between the east and west. Meanwhile, Gros Ventres fought with various Saskatchewan country Natives. A relatively small group located on the edge of the Missouri and Saskatchewan basins, Gros Ventres resented their peripheral position in the fur trade. During the 1790s, their raids put them on bad terms with both traders and other Natives. By 1795 one Gros Ventre band reportedly formed a brief alliance with Shoshones, but

within a few years all Gros Ventre bands were reportedly pushing south into the Missouri basin, where they interacted with their southern relatives, the Arapaho. With the Blackfeet warring with Crees and Assiniboines, their loose alliance was all but dead. Assaults on Shoshones and their allies continued throughout this period, but they probably lacked the force that they might have otherwise had if the alliance had endured.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, between 1780 and 1806 Shoshones lost access to key hunting grounds. They resented that loss of territory, as Cameahwait demonstrated when he told Lewis how his people wanted to again “live in the country of buffaloe and eat as our enemies do and not be compelled to hide ourselves in these mountains and live on roots and berries as the bear do [*sic*].”⁶⁸ Harmon, on the other hand, observed how other Natives prospered on the grasslands: “In fact these Indians who reside in the large plains appear to be the happiest and most contented People upon the face of the Earth. They subsist on the Flesh of the Buffaloe and of the Skins they make the greater part of their Cloathing, which is both warm and convenient [*sic*].” However, constant conflicts between them and other Natives resulted in an important ecological development from which Shoshones, their allies, and enemies all benefitted: hotly contested areas became havens for game. Since no group could safely occupy some areas (such as parts of the western Plains) for a great amount of time, game populations that might otherwise decline because of hunting instead thrived. Moreover, the depopulation of Native groups that resulted from the 1780-1782 and 1801-1802 smallpox epidemics probably also

⁶⁷ Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, 68-69, 100 (quotations); M’Gillivray, *Journal*, 69-70; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 144-145, 149, 153-162, 173-175, 178, 186-196; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 72; Fowler, “Great Plains,” 15; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 58; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 30; Milloy, *Plains Cree*, xv, 32-36, 45-46, 50-51.

⁶⁸ Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, 383.

lessened pressure on game, especially in areas where the threat of intertribal raids or warfare was high.⁶⁹

Prior to the first decade of the nineteenth century, few Shoshones came into contact with Euro-American explorers or traders. In 1792, HBC trader Peter Fidler reported that several Shoshone peace emissaries visited the Piegan and that some Piegans subsequently made an eight-day journey by horseback to visit a Shoshone camp. Such overtures, however, established no enduring peace, and neither Fidler or his associates (or rivals) began trading with Shoshones. Until after 1800, Shoshones simply remained distant from traders and therefore reportedly unfamiliar with their goods. As M’Gillivray noted during the mid-1790s, Shoshones “inhabit the Rocky Mountains, unacquainted with the productions of Europe, and strangers to those who convey them to this country.”⁷⁰

Soon after the turn of the nineteenth century, though, explorers and traders began to enter Shoshone country. The first to do so was a French-Canadian named Charles Le Raye, who in 1802 or 1803 recorded the first firsthand account of those people.⁷¹ During his tour of the Yellowstone River valley, Le Raye met some Shoshones and he wrote:

“On the 13th [of October] a large party of Snake Indians arrived. This nation resides principally on the headwaters of the Big Horn river, and in the most inaccessible parts of the Rocky mountains, where they have frequently to hide in caverns from their enemies. Owing to their defenseless situation they become an easy conquest to any nation disposed

⁶⁹ Lewis, *Original Journals*, vol. 2, 383; Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, 72-73; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 425; Dan Flores, *The Natural West: Environmental History in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 79; Flores, “Bison Ecology,” 475-476; Richard White, “The Winning of the West: The Expansion of the Western Sioux in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *The Journal of American History* 65, 2 (1978), 319-343: 334-335.

⁷⁰ M’Gillivray, *Journal*, 69-70; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 137-139.

⁷¹ Some scholars question the existence of Charles Le Raye and, therefore, this journal’s credibility. Whether or not a man named Charles Le Raye wrote that journal, someone visited the Yellowstone valley and produced an insightful (if racialized) account of the environment and its Native inhabitants.

to attack them, and they are frequently attacked for no other reason than the pleasure of killing them. Their appearance bespoke their distressed situation to which they are reduced. The complexion of these Indians is dark, but their features are regular, although their visage is thin and their eyes pretty much sunk into their heads. Their bodies are frequently crooked, a thing rarely to be seen among Indians; of a small size, thin and slender. Both men and women have their hair hanging loose on their heads and only cut short over the eyes. Their dress consists only of mountain sheep, cabree [pronghorn], or deer skins thrown over their shoulders. The women sometimes wore a girdle of loose bark, tied round their middle, which was but an indifferent covering. Their ornaments consisted of white bears' claws and a few beads. The men were armed with the Casoe-tite, or war club, a target or shield made of raw buffalo hides, a dagger made of bone, ten inches long, and a small bow. We were the first people that they or the Flatheads had ever seen. The Flatheads, likewise, arm themselves with a war club, in which a bone is fastened that projects three inches, a bone dagger and sometimes one made of iron, which they work out themselves, ten inches long and three wide at the handle; a spear pointed with bone or iron, and when they cross the mountains to hunt the buffalo they carry a bow with them. The buffalo is not found on the west side of the Rocky mountains and there these people subsist on fish and roots.⁷²

Le Raye thus presented an unfavorable image of the Shoshone as an impoverished, cowardly people. Yet, his highly racialized description of the Shoshone includes insights into their relationships with the land. Poorly armed and lacking ready access to bison, Shoshones subsisted on less than ideal resources and were at the mercy of their enemies.

Shoshones soon encountered others. In 1805, NWC trader Francois Antoine Larocque visited the upper Missouri and then traveled with band of Crows into the Yellowstone country to scout an area that reportedly abounded in beaver. Prior to Larocque's departure from the upper Missouri, though, one of his companions, Charles Mackenzie, wrote that a Mandan chief appealed to his Crow friends to "be kind" to the traders and to give furs to them for guns as well as other goods. He said that, "[w]e live better than our Fathers lived. Do your Neighbours the Serpent nation enjoy the Security

⁷² Le Raye, "Journal," 174-175.

and happiness we enjoy? If the white men could furnish the Serpents as they furnish us with arms, we should not carry away so many of the Serpents' scalps [*sic*].”⁷³ Thus, the chief used the Shoshone as an example of what a group's lack of firearms could do to them. Better armed than the Shoshone, Mandans and Hidatsas were able to prey upon them. Yet, as Mackenzie further explained, the Mandan only grudgingly accepted that the Euro-Americans would trade with western groups. He wrote that a Mandan chief “asserted that if the white people extend their dealings to the Rocky Mountains, the Mandanes [*sic*] would thereby become great sufferers – as they not only would lose all the benefit which they had hitherto derived from their intercourse with these distant tribes; - but in measure as these tribes obtained arms they would become independent and insolent in the extreme.”⁷⁴ Mandans recognized their important place as middlemen and expressed displeasure that the Frenchmen wanted to circumvent them. Their commerce with Crows and others was based upon the ability of the Mandan to extort their partners with their highly desirable supplies of firearms and other goods. However, reassurances that the Mandan would continue to prosper, as well as the obvious determination of the traders to explore westward, convinced the Natives to acquiesce.

Larocque's trip was productive, for his company and for historians. During that trip, he found rivers that contained many beaver dams and lands that teemed with bison, elk, deer, and predators of various kinds. He also met a small group of Shoshones who traveled with the Crows and he acquired some furs from them. Although Larocque's primary purpose was to survey the Yellowstone country's fur-trapping potential, there was another major reason: Americans were reportedly on the upper Missouri by the end

⁷³ Mackenzie, “Some account,” 247, 244; Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, 88.

⁷⁴ Mackenzie, “Some account,” 244.

of 1804. Sensing that competition over a beaver-rich area might soon commence, Larocque also went into Crow country to secure their loyalty for future commerce. Indeed, upon his departure from the Yellowstone, Larocque asked his Crow and Shoshone companions to kill beavers and bears during his absence, for they would be rewarded with a rich trade that included guns and ammunition.⁷⁵

In 1805, the Lewis and Clark expedition entered Shoshone country and thereby ushered in the era of Shoshone-American relations. The explorers began their journey to the Pacific Ocean in 1804 and they wintered at a Mandan village on the upper Missouri. When their trip resumed in the spring of 1805, Sacajawea, a young Shoshone woman of about 16 years, was among them. About five years earlier, she was with a Shoshone camp near the Three Forks of the Missouri when Hidatsa raiders struck. She was among the several women taken captive and she eventually married Charbonneau, a Frenchman whom Lewis and Clark hired as a translator. If Charbonneau's service proved useful to the Americans, Sacajawea's was invaluable; she was a guide, translator, and most importantly, a means by which the Americans established a friendly relationship with Shoshones. Pushing up the Missouri from the Mandans, Lewis and Clark "set out in search of the Snake Indians or Sosonees [*sic*]," who were reportedly rich in horses. They knew that they would be unable to reach the Pacific only by water (but they planned to stay on rivers for as long as possible), so they decided that they needed Shoshone horses in order to cross the Columbia Plateau. They expected to find Sacajawea's people between the

⁷⁵ Larocque's notes on Shoshones are included throughout the ethnographic discussions above. Larocque, "Yellowstone Journal," 160-161, 177, 181-184, 192, 219; Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, 88; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 27-28.

Great Falls of the Missouri and the Three Forks.⁷⁶ Early on, Lewis and Clark learned of the Shoshones' recent difficulties, for they wrote that “[o]ur Indian woman said & it is generally known that the Shoshonees Liatans & other Snakes of the Mountains formerly lived in the plains of this side & by war were obliged to take refuge in the mounts [sic].”⁷⁷

Lewis and Clark found the Shoshone difficult to locate. After several months of travel, Clark despaired of finding them, writing in July that “We begin to feel considerable anxiety with respect to the Snake Indians. If we do not find them or some other nation who have horses I fear the successful issue of our voyage will be very doubtful or at all events much more difficult in it’s accomplishment [sic].” Even after they entered territory that Sacajawea recognized and then encamped near the Three Forks, they found no Shoshones. In early August, Lewis decided to cross the Beaverhead Mountains and seek Shoshones on a river that Sacajawea informed him lay west of Lemhi Pass. Just prior to crossing the Continental Divide several days later, Lewis finally spotted a lone “Sosone” man on horseback. However, he failed to make contact; the man, perhaps perceiving that the distant American and his companions were enemies, rode off in the opposite direction. Disappointed yet hopeful, Lewis led his contingent across the Divide along an “Indian road” and thence along the banks of the Lemhi River. A second

⁷⁶ Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 2, 294 (quotation), 321; Meriwether Lewis to Thomas Jefferson, Apr. 7, 1805, in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, vol.1, 231-242: 233; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark*, 133, 137; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 24; John W.W. Mann, *Sacajawea’s People: The Lemhi Shoshones and the Salmon River Country* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 16; The Shoshonis of Wyoming, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; John Rees to Charles H. Burke, 1925, Box 54, Folder 9, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁷⁷ “The Nicholas Biddle Notes,” in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, vol. 2, 497-545: 528.

Shoshone sighting proved as unfruitful as the first, as a group of three Shoshones fled as Lewis approached them.⁷⁸

On August 13th, 1805, Lewis finally encountered his “Sosone” Indians. After breaking camp, Lewis spotted several women whom he approached. Several fled, but he befriended the others by giving them gifts. The women who escaped alerted a nearby camp and a party of 60 warriors in full regalia soon confronted Lewis and his men. Months earlier, Clark noted his reservations about meeting Shoshones, observing that “not haveing seen the Snake Indians or knowing in fact whither to calculate their friendship or hostility [*sic*], we have conceived our party sufficiently small [to send some of the men to report to St. Louis].” They need not have worried. The women that Lewis met explained to the Shoshone chief, Cameahwait, that the Americans were friendly. What followed was a warm reception, as Lewis quickly grew tired of what he termed their “national hug.” He noted that the warriors carried bows and arrows, lances, and clubs, with the exception of three men who carried NWC muskets that they obtained from their Crow allies. The Shoshones then took the Americans to their camp on the Lemhi.⁷⁹

Lewis’s visit to the Lemhi camp produced a rich body of ethnographic information. Soon after their arrival, the Shoshones happily fed the hungry Americans, but they could only offer salmon and some cakes made of serviceberries and

⁷⁸ Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 2, 271 (quotation), 321-322, 329-331, 335, 337; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark*, 136-141; Mann, *Sacajawea’s People*, 16-17; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 42-45.

⁷⁹ Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 2, 175 (quotation), 337-341. Apparently, Cameahwait was not a very accomplished rabbit hunter. His name means “he who misses jackrabbits when he shoots at them.” William Bright, *Native American Placenames of the United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 78; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark*, 141-142; Wells, “Introduction” in *Lemhi*, 28-29; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 24-25; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 175-176; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 52.

chokeberries. They were at the end of their summer subsistence cycle, preparing to cross the Divide with some Flatheads for a bison hunt. Their principal game west of the Divide was pronghorn, elk, and deer, but they were hungry; a disgusted Lewis watched the Natives “tumbling over each other like a parcel of famished dogs” to feast on an uncooked deer that the Americans killed.⁸⁰ Later in his visit, Lewis saw a Shoshone woman digging yampas and remarked that, “it is really distressing to witness the situation of those poor wretches.”⁸¹ In an effort to ease their hunger, Lewis gave Cameahwait’s people some of the corn and beans that he had with him. According to the explorer, “the Chief wished that his nation could live in a country where they could provide such food. I told him that it would not be many years before the white-men would put it in the power of his nation to live in the country below the mountains where they might cultivate corn beans and squashes. He appeared pleased with this information.”⁸²

During the previous spring, moreover, a Gros Ventre raid on this Shoshone camp had resulted in 20 dead or taken captive, the loss of many horses, and the destruction of all of their skin tipis except for one; most of the people now inhabited brush lodges. But Lewis did not despair – he observed that hundreds of horses and mules still grazed outside of the Shoshone camp, many of which bore Spanish brands. The American also learned that the Shoshones hesitated to meet him because they thought that he and his men were in league with their enemies. For his part, Cameahwait expressed no reservations about hosting the Americans and agreed to lead his people to a rendezvous

⁸⁰ Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 2, 354-355 (quotation), 342, 345; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark*, 137, 140-143; Mann, *Sacajawea’s People*, 17; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 45-47; John Rees to Charles H. Burke, 1925, Box 54, Folder 9, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 183.

⁸¹ Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 3, 41.

⁸² Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 3, 14.

with Clark. Yet, others in the camp continued to harbor concerns and some tense days followed as the camp accompanied Lewis to meet with Clark.⁸³

On August 17th, the Americans accidentally quashed any concerns about their intentions. An unexpected event occurred when Lewis reunited with Clark: Sacajawea reunited with her camp, the leader of which, Cameahwait, was her brother. The joyous reunion secured the Shoshones' confidence, and Lewis and Clark met with Cameahwait to explain their needs. Asking about a route through the mountains to the west, they gained much information about lands to the southwest and west, including reports about the hostile nature of the northern Great Basin and the impassability of the Salmon River country (which the Shoshones knew as the "River of No Return").⁸⁴ Clark decided to scout the Salmon River route, but the captains seemed to accept the Shoshones' advice to go north into the Bitterroot valley and cross the mountains by way of Lolo Pass. Cameahwait also assured the Americans that his people would trade them some horses and provide them with a guide. When Lewis and Clark promised that the Shoshone would be involved in the coming American fur trade, Cameahwait stated that he "was sorry to find that it must be yet some time before they could be furnished with firearms but said that they could live as they had heretofore untill [*sic*] we brought them as we had promised." Yet, he was unhappy with Spanish policies regarding trading firearms to Indians, so the eventual trade with Americans would be an improvement. Cameahwait

⁸³ Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 2, 354-355 (quotation), 343, 347, 349-350, 356-357, 370-372; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark*, 137, 142; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 25.

⁸⁴ Mann, *Sacajawea's People*, xix.

was also satisfied to learn that Mandans, Hidatsas, and others had promised Lewis and Clark that they would stop raiding Shoshone camps.⁸⁵

As Clark explored the Salmon River country, Lewis remained with the Shoshone camp and prepared for the probable journey into the Bitterroot valley. Meanwhile, he produced more ethnographic material. He wrote that Shoshones “live[d] in a wretched stait [*sic*] of poverty” but also that he admired their “character.” While he described the villagers of the upper Missouri as dirty, poor, and extravagant, and the Lakota, Assiniboine, others as violent, hostile, and unreliable, he liked the friendly, honest, and generous Shoshones. His Shoshone hosts, we must remember, were desperate for American trade and went to great lengths to ensure Lewis’s friendship. Lewis learned much about Shoshone lifeways, including their principal foods, gendered divisions of labor, and material culture. They had some metal knives, arm bands, buttons, projectile points, and other items, but very few guns and no ammunition.⁸⁶ He also noted that “these people have suffered much by the small pox.”⁸⁷ Of perhaps the greatest importance to the expedition, Lewis learned that this camp was preparing to join its Flathead allies for their annual hunt on the Plains. The Americans needed to leave quickly in order to not delay the hunting trip, but the days dragged by and the Natives grew impatient with the slow pace of the travel preparations. When a party of 50 more Shoshones joined Cameahwait’s band, Lewis wrote that, “I now learnt that most of them were thus far on their way down the valley towards the buffaloe county, and observed that there was a good deel of

⁸⁵ Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 2, 362 (quotation), 361-362, 280-384; Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 6, 106-107; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark*, 137, 146-147, 151; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 26; Mann, *Sacajawea’s People*, 17-18; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 42, 46.

⁸⁶ Lewis’s notes on these subjects are included throughout this chapter. Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 2, 370 (quotation), 371-379; Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 3, 3-5, 11-12, 19, 30-32; Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 6, 106-107; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark*, 149.

⁸⁷ Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 2, 373.

anxiety on the part of some of those who had promised to assist me over the mountains [sic].” On one occasion, Cameahwait prepared to leave Lewis and guide his people toward the grasslands, but the explorer learned of his plans and reprimanded the chief, reminding him of his promise and asserting that guns and ammunition would only come after complete cooperation. Cameahwait acquiesced and further delayed the hunt.⁸⁸

At two major meetings with the explorers, Cameahwait explained how badly his people needed guns and ammunition. Poorly armed, they suffered from enemy attacks and were stuck west of the Divide, where they lived on fish, roots, and berries; they wanted secure and reliable access to the bison herds of the Plains. For Lewis and Clark, the meetings with Cameahwait were the means of achieving immediate goals. But for Cameahwait, the meetings were about the future of Shoshone trade, military power, and subsistence.⁸⁹

In late August, after Clark confirmed the impassibility of the Salmon River route, the Shoshones and Americans prepared to part ways. The Shoshones proved as good as their word, for they traded 29 horses to Lewis and Clark, in the process displaying proficiency in their craft; they reportedly traded at generous rates early on, but made deals heavily in their favor by the end. They also provided the explorers with a guide named “Old Toby” to lead them into the Bitterroot valley and over Lolo Pass. These contributions were crucial to the success of the Lewis and Clark expedition. For their

⁸⁸ Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 3, 18 (quotation), 34-36; Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 2, 374; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark*, 153; Mann, *Sacajawea's People*, 19-20; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 175-176; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 301, 422; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 183.

⁸⁹ Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 2, 373-374, 383; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark*, 151-154; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 90; Wells, “Introduction” in *Lemhi*, 28-29; The Shoshonis of Wyoming, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

part, the explorers renewed their promises of future trade. Several days after parting ways with the Shoshones, Lewis and Clark entered the Bitterroot valley, where they encountered a Flathead camp “[s]et out on their way to meet the Snake Indians at the 3 forks of the Missouri.” Just as the Shoshones had been friendly to the Americans, so were the Flatheads, who traded 11 horses to the Americans during their brief meeting.⁹⁰

The period of 1780-1806 had been a challenging one for the Shoshone of the Plains and Intermountain West. Although their power on the northern Plains had been declining for several decades prior to the 1780-1782 smallpox epidemic, that event combined with continued shortages of firearms to complete the Blackfoot conquest of the grasslands. In the Wyoming Basin and west of the Continental Divide in what is now Idaho and Utah, “retreat” group Shoshones generally turned away from intensive bison hunting and their diversified subsistence efforts placed greater emphasis on women’s foraging efforts. The decline of their military strength as well as that of their captive-raiding economy, however, left them vulnerable to continued enemy pressure. By reorganizing their subsistence systems, maintaining key intertribal contacts, and establishing new intercultural relations, Shoshones tried to stabilize in the midst of what was a difficult situation.

So, the Lewis and Clark expedition heralded a new era of Shoshone history. Shoshone groups that had endured two difficult decades since the 1780-1782 smallpox epidemic now entered a new world. Le Raye, Larocque, and Lewis and Clark finally

⁹⁰ Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 3, 54 (quotation) 43-48, 52-54; William Clark to George Rogers Clark, Sept. 23, 1806, in *News of the Plains and Rockies*, vol. 1: Early Explorers, 1803-1812 and Fur Hunters, 1813-1847, edited by David A. White, 67-71 (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark, 1996), 69; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 26; Wells, “Introduction,” in *Lemhi*, 28-29; Mann, *Sacajawea’s People*, 18-20; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 48.

established direct contact between Shoshones and Euro-Americans. The expeditions themselves immediately changed little, but they offered shades of things to come. Shoshones entered into friendly relations with Americans and secured promises of future trade, but years passed before those promises began to be fulfilled. Lewis and Clark made many observations about Shoshones that they met, but their data lacked breadth; they encountered a very small portion of the Shoshone language family. Based upon secondhand information, they divided all Shoshones (whom they numbered at 20,000) into two broad groups: the “Alitans of the Plains” and the “Alitans of the West.” The former were Comanches and the Shoshone groups who visited the Plains seasonally while the latter “group” encompassed all Shoshones who lived west of the Divide. So, as Lewis and Clark introduced Shoshones to the American imagination, they presented a numerous people who inhabited a large expanse of territory. However, their encounters with a few Shoshone groups in the Lemhi valley and then others on the Columbia River did not provide them with the means of adequately describing their sheer diversity.⁹¹

On the other hand, the first American interactions with the Blackfeet were anything but friendly. During their trip down the Missouri in 1806, Lewis and several men met a party of Piegians during a side-trip along the Marias River. Those Natives expressed displeasure upon learning that the Americans intended to open trade with Shoshones and others, but they did not become violent. However, what followed was a confused series of events that led Lewis to believe the Piegians were attacking them. The Americans opened fire on the Piegians, killing two. These casualties became the

⁹¹ Lewis and Clark, *Original Journals*, vol. 6, 107, 114, 118, 119; “The Nicholas Biddle Notes,” in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, vol. 2, 525-526; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark*, 143-144, 150-151; Mann, *Sacajawea’s People*, 15; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 195-197; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 183-184.

foundation for decades of hostility between Americans and the Blackfoot Confederacy. Even as the Blackfeet became enmeshed in hostile relations with the “Long Knives” (as they called Americans), they faced trouble in the north. With beaver populations declining east of the Rockies, HBC and NWC traders tried to reach areas in the Rockies that were reportedly rich in beaver. In 1800-1801, David Thompson angered the Blackfeet when he escorted several Kutenais to Rocky Mountain House in what is now Alberta. Thompson again tried to reach the Kutenai in 1805, but he had to abandon the effort in the face of staunch Blackfoot opposition.⁹²

The expeditions of Le Raye, Larocque, and Lewis and Clark confirmed rumors that the headwaters of the Missouri were rich in fur-bearing animals. In fact, their glowing reports of the area’s trapping potential preceded the Americans’ return to St. Louis, for during their journey down the Missouri in 1806 they met several parties of trappers heading upriver. One of Lewis and Clark’s men, a hunter named John Colter, left the expedition near the Knife River (by the Mandan and Hidatsa villages) and joined two men from Illinois who planned to trap far up the Missouri. Colter thus became the first known non-Native to visit the area that became Yellowstone National Park. Unfortunately, little is documented about this trip except that the men trapped their way through the Yellowstone valley before returning east.⁹³

Sometime during Lewis and Clark’s expedition to the Pacific, a Shoshone woman gave birth to a boy in the Bitterroot Mountains of what is now western Montana. The boy’s father was a Flathead and they lived among his people, so the baby received a

⁹² Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 45-48; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 301; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 90; Fowler, “Great Plains,” 17-18; Lewis, *Effects*, 18-20, 23; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 169-170; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 31.

⁹³ Fowler, “Great Plains,” 17; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, xxvii; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 48-49; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 49; Woods, *Wyoming’s Big Horn Basin*, 28.

Flathead name. Years later, however, he earned a name that became central to Eastern Shoshone history: Washakie. Distinguished by his performance on the battlefield against Blackfeet, Crows, and others, Washakie (whose name – “to rattle” – was a reference to the war rattles that Shoshone men used while on the warpath) eventually emerged as the chief who helped the Eastern Shoshone adapt to a rapidly changing world during the nineteenth century.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Unfortunately, no one knows the exact year that Washakie was born. Generally, the dates range from 1798 to 1806, with many sources listing the period of 1804-1806 as the most likely range. Marshall Washakie to Grace Raymond Hebard, 1926, Box 46, Folder 16, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Bright, *Native American Placenames*, 550.

CHAPTER 5
“THEY HAVE NOT YET BEEN ABUSED... THEY ARE IN A PRIMITIVE STATE:”
SHOSHONE SUSBSITENCE IN THE ERA OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN
TRAPPING SYSTEM, 1807-1840”

When American artist George Catlin visited the upper Missouri River during the 1830s, he learned about Shoshones from various explorers, trappers, and traders who had interacted with them. His informants collectively produced a generally favorable image of the Shoshone “as a kind and hospitable and harmless people” who had “a good character.” They also informed him that, despite their involvement in the fur trade, they had not yet suffered from the ill effects of American “civilization.” Catlin, therefore, reported that, “they have not as yet been abused – that they are in their primitive state.”¹

Catlin was wrong on that final point. During the decades that had passed since Shoshones met Lewis and Clark, American trappers and traders, as well as agents of the Hudson Bay Company and North West Company, integrated Shoshone groups into a global economy. Between 1807 and 1840, Shoshones functioned within this system as trappers, producers, traders, guides, hosts, and even wives of the Euro-American men. The fur trade thus immersed Shoshones in a highly lucrative economy in which they found the very items that Euro-Americans wanted – furs and meats – in great quantities in their own lands. So, the fur trade, particularly material goods and its exploitative nature, affected the Shoshone world. Shoshones hardly remained in a “primitive state,” for their altered relationships with their lands and their material culture alike reflected their involvement in the fur trade. The fur trade, moreover, depleted resources on Shoshone lands while callous and ignorant Euro-Americans sometimes mistreated

¹ George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1841, 1965), 114.

Shoshones that they encountered. However, the seeds of that economy's destruction were sown in the very nature of the exploitative fur trade; the fur trade provided Shoshones with material wealth at the cost of helping trappers to over-harvest key resources.

Yet, there is something of value to take away from Catlin's report. The fur trade affected those Natives in both positive and negative ways, but Shoshones did not yet bear the full brunt of American colonialism. They integrated fur trapping and trade into their subsistence efforts, but those systems remained fundamentally unchanged. Shoshones also continued to inhabit and use a large area. Trappers lived off of their lands and gradually depleted their resources, but they did not dispossess Shoshones of their territory. The fur trade acquainted Shoshones with Euro-American conceptions of economics and required that Shoshone groups have influential leaders to deal with the traders and trappers, but they remained free to live wherever and however they wished. Yet, the world that they inhabited transformed between the onset of the Rocky Mountain trapping system in 1807 and its end in about 1840. Natives and Euro-Americans alike pushed beaver populations to the brink of extinction and reduced other game populations, such as those of the bison. Indeed, American expansion, including the fur trade, was highly destructive, as Tim Flannery observes that, "[a]s the reach of the United States spread west, much of the native fauna and flora of the continent came to be seen as either a resource to be exploited to the full, or a pest to be gotten rid of."²

In this manner, the fur trade acquainted Shoshones with American colonialism. Scholars have devoted considerable attention to the fur trade, particularly its prominent figures, events, features, and places, but the trappers' relationships with and impact on

² Tim Flannery, *The Eternal Frontier: An Ecological History of North America and Its Peoples* (New York: Grove Press, 2001), 312.

Native societies remains less understood. As the preeminent scholars of the fur trade have noted, the trappers and traders were the “spearheads” of American exploration, colonialism, and “civilization.” They were the vanguards of American expansion, for they blazed trails and established relations with Shoshones and other Native groups that paved the way for the generations that followed in their wake.³ The following pages, therefore, explore how Euro-American trappers and traders provided Shoshones with a sort of “soft” introduction to exploitative colonial systems.

The following pages discuss how the fur trade entered Shoshone country, how Shoshones engaged with the fur trade, and how their participation affected their lifeways. In doing so, it reveals how distinct Shoshone groups began to emerge in the Intermountain West during the time of the fur trade. Arriving in the aftermath of the Shoshone withdrawal from the Plains prior to 1800, the economic and material fruits of the fur trade provided Shoshone groups with the means of establishing stability and building up their military strength. Especially from the 1820s onward, Euro-American trappers and traders established a major enduring presence in Shoshone lands, which allowed them to more extensively than ever before document Shoshone territorial claims and their lifeways. Pairing these sources with influential scholarship that analyzes the historic relationships between Native women and the fur trade, this chapter demonstrates that Shoshone women were important to the Rocky Mountain fur trade.⁴ In contrast to

³ David J. Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807-1840: A Geographical Synthesis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 18, 22, 208-209, 215; Mari Sandoz, *The Beaver Men: Spearheads of Empire* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 311-312.

⁴ Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980); Jennifer S. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980); Virginia Bergman Peters, *Women of the Earth Lodges: Tribal Life on the Plains* (North Haven, CT: Archon Books, 1995); Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, “Autonomy and the Economic Roles of Indian Women the Fox-Wisconsin

studies which conclude that women's status within Native societies generally suffered as a result of the fur trade, the Shoshone case indicates that women could benefit from it.⁵ In fact, it appears that, as crucial intercultural mediators as well as the producers and distributors of essential trade goods, Shoshone women wielded considerable socioeconomic influence that they could use to augment their own authority and that of their households in what remained a matrilineal society.

The trappers' records, moreover, throw light on the ongoing story of how the distinct groups eventually known as the Eastern or Wind River Shoshone, Northern Shoshone, and Lemhi emerged in the wake of their retreat from the Plains during the late eighteenth century. During the 1820s and 1830s, a few general Shoshone groups crystallized in the Intermountain West. This chapter devotes special attention to the immediate ancestors of those who later became known as the Eastern Shoshone. During the era of the fur trade, their territory was centralized not in the Wind River valley, but in an area that spanned from the Green River valley west into the Bear River country. Their homelands were west of the Continental Divide, but they ranged north and east into the Wyoming Basin to hunt, trap, trade, and war. Although this group remains at the center of this chapter, it does discuss other areas of Shoshone occupation, particularly the Snake

Riverway Region, 1763-1832," in *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women*, edited by Nancy Shoemaker, 72-89 (New York: Routledge, 1995); Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Carolyn Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Susan Sleeper-Smith, ed., *Rethinking the Fur Trade: Cultures of Exchange in an Atlantic World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 439-620.

⁵ For example, see Mary C. Wright, "Economic Development and Native American Women in the Early 19th Century," *American Quarterly* 33 (1981): 525-536; Kathryn E. Holland Braund, "Guardians of Tradition and Handmaidens to Change: Women's Roles in Creek Economic and Social Life During the Eighteenth Century," *American Indian Quarterly* 14 (1990): 239-258; Karen Anderson, *Chain Her By One Foot: The Subjugation of Women in Seventeenth-Century New France* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Carol Devens, *Countering Colonization: Native American Women and Great Lakes Missions, 1630-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 14-18.

River valley. Since Shoshone groups remained highly fluid and migratory throughout the pre-reservation era and even into the reservation period, the following pages consider developments beyond the immediate area of Eastern Shoshone occupation in order to better understand the roots of the people who later settled on the Wind River Reservation. Processes of relocation and amalgamation were still under way, and the people who settled at the Wind River Reservation during the second half of the 1800s remained scattered over a vast stretch of territory.⁶

Yet, as we shall see, a pair of distinct fur trade regimes influenced Shoshone ethnogenesis. Along the tributaries of the Columbia River (particularly in the Snake River country), the North West Company and Hudson Bay Company employed an intentionally destructive fur trade system that fostered some interaction with Shoshones – many of these later became known as Fort Hall Shoshone. To the east – from the Wyoming Basin to the Bear River country – those who became known as the Eastern Shoshone largely engaged with a distinctive American fur trade. The amicable relations based upon this more interactive style of commerce laid the foundation for the emergence of the Eastern Shoshone as a people who were friendly to Americans even after the demise of the fur trade. So, Shoshone interactions with contrasting fur trade regimes laid the foundation for their post-fur trade experiences with American expansion.

As Meriwether Lewis and William Clark had promised Shoshone chief Cameahwait in 1805, American trappers and traders soon approached Shoshone territory.

⁶ Robert F. Murphy and Yolanda Murphy in particular stress that it is often difficult to define particular Shoshone groups during the pre-reservation era because of their high degree of fluidity. See Robert F. Murphy and Yolanda Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock Subsistence and Society,” *Anthropological Records* 16, 7 (1960), 293-338: 332.

It remains unclear whether many of these early adventurers actually encountered Shoshones, but they collectively laid the foundation for a full-scale invasion of Shoshone country. As Lewis and Clark descended the Missouri in 1806, for instance, they met a pair of trappers headed for the Yellowstone River; little is known about their adventure except that they reportedly trapped lands west of the Continental Divide before returning east in 1810. John Colter, who had trapped tributaries of the Yellowstone in 1806, met St. Louis businessman Manuel Lisa as he descended the Missouri in 1807. Lisa hired Colter to guide his party into the Yellowstone country, and they established a post at the mouth of the Big Horn River. Colter then ventured further and found some Crows on the Shoshone River. The Crows were amicable, but a hostile party of Blackfeet compelled Colter to leave the area. Colter's 1807-1808 tour of the Yellowstone headwaters possibly took him into the Wind River valley and across the Divide into areas watered by tributaries of the Columbia River. No record remains regarding whether Colter encountered any Shoshones during his journey, but it is possible since those Natives sometimes wintered in the Wind River valley and elsewhere in the Wyoming Basin. Similarly, a party of "lost trappers" departed from Lisa's fort in 1808 and explored at least as far as the Green River, but no record remains of their contact with Natives. Shoshones may have interacted with some of these men and thereby acquired some trade goods, but conversely they may have seen them as some Shoshones initially saw Lewis and Clark's men – as a potential threat – and therefore avoided contact with them.⁷

⁷ Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 41-42; Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*, vol. 1 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1902, 1935, 1986), 114-123; Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 196-197; Virginia Cole Trenholm and Maurine Carley, *The Shoshonis: Sentinels of the Rockies* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 49-50; John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 48-49;

Shoshones definitely interacted with some subsequent trapping parties, but it does not appear that this contact was substantial. Influxes of trappers followed in the wake of Lisa's return to St. Louis in 1808, which confirmed reports of the upper Missouri's beaver-trapping potential and thereby spurred further interest in the area. One manifestation of that interest was the formation of the Missouri Fur Company, which during the next two years sent several parties into Yellowstone country. These gathered considerable numbers of high-quality "Crow beaver" pelts despite the persistent Blackfoot threat. In 1810, Colter and Andrew Henry established a short-lived post in the Three Forks area. Perhaps predictably, the precedent established by Lewis and Clark continued as Henry provoked Blackfoot hostility by trading with any and all Natives – apparently including Shoshones. He sent for Shoshones and Flatheads to help him fight off the Blackfeet, but he had to abandon the post before they showed up. Henry and some others then continued into the upper Snake River valley where they established Fort Henry, the first American post west of the Continental Divide and the first in Shoshone territory. Shoshones engaged with him in a friendly manner, but Henry abandoned the post after one difficult winter. Many of those who visited the upper Missouri at this time, such as Henry Marie Brackenridge, did not encounter Shoshones, but nevertheless heard about them. He depicted them much as Lewis and Clark and others had several years earlier, writing about the "Ayutan Bands, or Snake Indians, A very numerous race, who have as yet but little intercourse with the whites. They are badly armed, and much at the

Sandoz, *Beaver Men*, 245-246, 249; Lawrence M. Woods, *Wyoming's Big Horn Basin to 1901: A Late Frontier* (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark, 1997), 28; W. Raymond Wood and Thomas D. Thiessen, eds. *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains: Canadian Traders among the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians, 1738-1818* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 31; George E. Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains: From the Prehistoric Period to the Coming of Europeans* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), 192; Henry Marie Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana, Together with a Journal of a Voyage up the Missouri River, in 1811* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1814, 1962), 89-92.

mercy of the other Indians, by whom they are made slaves when taken prisoner.” He also noted that they obtained great numbers of horses, donkeys, and mules by way of their trade connections with New Mexico. Although we have no record of what Shoshones had to say about their infrequent visitors, the above comments indicate that they as yet enjoyed little benefit from the extension of the American fur trade into their country. Their bitter enemies of more than a century – the Blackfeet – posed a serious threat to Shoshones as well as to small groups of traders and trappers.⁸

The comments of those who met Shoshones during the early years of the fur trade suggest that those Natives had not yet derived any major benefits from their limited interaction with trappers. Indeed, many of those who entered Shoshone lands and/or encountered Shoshones made remarks comparable to those of their predecessors. In 1811, for example, men employed by John Jacob Astor’s Pacific Fur Company passed through Shoshone country en route to Astoria (Oregon). While in Crow country near the Big Horn Mountains, they reported that the country abounded with bison. But they found the Wind River area to be a “rough, and, in many parts, sterile mountain country” lacking game.⁹ Some Shoshones and Flatheads welcomed the Astorians to their camp set up along a tributary of the Big Horn River, and they made their hardships of the previous decades clear to their visitors. The Astorians learned that the Shoshones were “a branch of the once powerful and prosperous tribe of the Snakes, who possessed a glorious

⁸ Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana*, 80 (quotation), 79, 92, 94, 96; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 127, 138-144; Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 29, 42-46; Merle B. Wells, “Introduction,” in Brigham D. Madsen, *The Northern Shoshoni* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton, 1980, 2000), 24; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 51; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 50.

⁹ Washington Irving, *Astoria, or, Anecdotes of an Enterprise beyond the Rocky Mountains*, edited by Richard Dilworth Rust (Boston: Twayne, 1836, 1976), 185 (quotation); 179-180; For more on the westward overland journey of the Astorians, see Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 116-119; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, vol., 167-170, 182-198; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 51-52; John Bradbury, “Travels in the Interior of America in the Years 1807, 1810, and 1811,” in *Early Western Travels*, vol. 5, edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland: A.H. Clark, 1904), 9-11.

hunting country about the upper forks of the Missouri abounding in beaver and buffalo” before their Blackfoot enemies got guns and drove them into the mountains. The travelers reported that the Shoshone were now “a scattered, broken spirited, impoverished people; keeping about lonely rivers and mountain streams and subsisting chiefly upon fish.” They and their allies ventured onto the Plains briefly each fall, harvested meat and hides, and then tried to return home before encountering any Blackfoot raiders. Shoshones thus presented themselves as a militarily vulnerable people who were unhappy with their position on the fringes of the grasslands; Cameahwait had expressed similar sentiments to Lewis and Clark several years earlier.¹⁰

Further west, other Shoshones also encountered the Astorians. The travelers referred to the people who inhabited the Snake River country as the “Shuckers, or more commonly Diggers and Root eaters.”¹¹ Some Shoshones in the Snake River country had horses and hunted bison, but farther west they were mostly pedestrian and subsisted largely on fish, berries, and seeds. Most Shoshone camps in the Snake River country were apprehensive as the Americans as approached them, and some even fled. Others let them arrive, only to have the Astorians harangue them to “procure a quantity of beaver skins for future traffic.” Shoshones, however, had every right to be fearful of the Astorians’ approach as the latter grew hungrier during the course of their long journey. On one occasion, Shoshones deserted their camp as a party of Astorians approached it. The hungry Americans took five of the Natives’ horses and immediately killed one to eat. On several occasions, Shoshone camps peacefully traded food in the form of horses, fish, dogs, and roots for guns, ammunition, and other goods. The Astorians’ accounts reveal

¹⁰ Irving, *Astoria*, 181-182. Also see previous chapter, pages 153-154 and 210.

¹¹ Irving, *Astoria*, 182.

that they saw the “Shuckers” as “poor,” but one wonders how the Shoshones saw the hungry travelers who approached them in dire need of food.¹²

Shoshones met more Pacific Fur Company trappers during the next couple of years as the latter explored the country between Astoria and the Continental Divide. In 1812, Shoshone groups scattered throughout the waters of the Columbia encountered a large party of Astorians traveling from Oregon to the Missouri. Shoshones in the Boise River area, which abounded in both beaver and salmon, again appeared “poor” to the travelers. The Astorians remarked that those Natives “have to struggle hard for a livelihood, even though it is the prime of the fishing season in this country – so poor are they that we can seldom or never can get a single salmon from them.” The Americans apparently failed to consider that perhaps the Shoshones simply did not find it expedient to trade at that time. In the Green River country, a Shoshone camp that had recently been struck by Crow raiders (who took many women and horses) had little to trade to the Astorians. Nevertheless, they bartered several horses for a pistol, an axe, and some other items. They also warned the Americans that Blackfoot and Crow war parties lurked ahead of them and, since Shoshones and trappers alike had suffered from their depredations, “the calumet of peace was produced, and the two forlorn powers smoked eternal friendship between themselves and vengeance upon their common spoilers the Crows.”¹³ After this council, the Astorians soon resumed their journey and – perhaps under the advice of their Shoshone friends – crossed the Divide by way of what is now known as South Pass, thereby becoming the first Euro-Americans documented to do so. Located at

¹² Irving, *Astoria*, 186, 196, 206, 216, 222.

¹³ Irving, *Astoria*, 288-289. For more on the eastward overland journey of the Astorians, see Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 119; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 203-213; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 52.

the southern foot of the Wind River Range, this wide, relatively-low elevation pass provided travelers with an easy route through the central Rocky Mountains. Yet, another decade passed before traders and trappers began to realize South Pass's potential as a travel route. Shoshones had likely been using it for many decades by this time.¹⁴

Despite these early contacts with Americans, most Shoshones did not yet establish any lasting or frequent contact with traders. Lisa's efforts on the upper Missouri crumbled in the face of Blackfoot opposition in 1811, so from 1812 until Lisa's death in 1820, Missouri Fur Company operations centered on the Council Bluffs area, although a few minor expeditions headed far up the Missouri. Also, Astor's effort to turn the Pacific Northwest into a fur trade empire collapsed in 1813. Moreover, the United States and Great Britain engaged in the War of 1812, draining resources, manpower, and attention from the pursuit of furs. Finally, the cumbersome "factory system of trade," adopted by the United States government in 1796 to regulate interactions with Natives, posed major obstacles for those who wished to enter the trade. The government abolished this policy, which quashed interest in the fur trade, in 1822 (in the wake of the financial panic of 1819). As was often the case in United States history, economic crises compelled men to look west in hopes of making a living or a profit. Thus, the American fur trade entered a new era in the early 1820s. The first renewed efforts, however, did not reach directly into Shoshone country. The operations of Andrew Henry and the new Missouri Fur Company, for example, both extended as far as the mouth of the Bighorn River, but Blackfoot

¹⁴ Robert Stuart, *On the Oregon Trail: Robert Stuart's Journey of Discovery 1812-1813*, edited by Kenneth A. Spaulding (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), 83 (quotation), 77-78, 80-84, 118, 122-123; Irving, *Astoria*, 312-313; Harrison Clifford Dale, ed., *The Explorations of William H. Ashley and Jedediah Smith, 1822-1829* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1941, 1991), 38-39, 88-89; Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 25; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 196; Bradbury, *Travels*, 11; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 74-75.

hostility played a role in both withdrawing from the area. So, ongoing intertribal hostilities as well as American politics and business isolated Shoshones from the American fur trade.¹⁵

In the meantime, Shoshones began to interact with agents of the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) and North West Company (NWC). This, however, was also a gradual development, for the HBC and NWC efforts began with the work of David Thompson and Alexander Henry, who between 1807 and 1811 finally extended the fur trade from the Saskatchewan basin into the Rockies. Thompson in particular went to great lengths to establish ties between the NWC and such Columbia Plateau groups as the Flathead, Kutenai, and Nez Perce. Piegans prevented Thompson from venturing into the mountains in 1805, but in 1807, Piegan attention focused on the south in the wake of their bloody meeting with the Lewis and Clark expedition the previous year and Thompson crossed the Continental Divide. On the headwaters of the Columbia in what is now southwestern British Columbia, he established Kootenae House, thus opening commerce with the Kutenais and their allies, perhaps including (indirectly) Shoshones – much to the chagrin of Blackfoot groups. In 1809 and 1810, Thompson founded three more posts: Saleesh House in northwestern Montana, Kullyspell House in northern Idaho, and Spokane House in eastern Washington. In subsequent years, Shoshones likely came into contact with NWC and, later, HBC companies that used Saleesh House as a jumping-off points for expeditions to the south.¹⁶

¹⁵ Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 46-47; Dale, *Explorations*, 52-56.

¹⁶ David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative, 1784-1812*, edited by Richard Glover (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1962), 375-376; Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 196-197; Colin G. Calloway, "Snake Frontiers: The Eastern Shoshones in the Eighteenth Century," *Annals of Wyoming* 63, 3 (Summer 1991), 82-92: 90; Oscar Lewis, *The Effects of White Contact upon Blackfoot Culture, with Special Reference to the Role of the Fur Trade* (New York: J.J. Augustin, 1942), 18-20;

The extension of the fur trade into the Rockies affected Blackfoot interactions with other groups. In 1809, Alexander Henry reported that the Blackfeet claimed a vast territory along the eastern foot of the Rockies and that they raided into the mountains, where they found Shoshones and others who had “vast numbers of horses and who appear to be a defenceless race. Having no Fire Arms, they easily fall prey to the Slave [Blackfoot] Indians, who are tolerably well provided in arms and ammunition.” But in 1810, a Piegan war party suffered a defeat to Flatheads who had guns. Piegans and their allies consequently became more vigilant about cutting off traders bound for the mountains, but to no avail.¹⁷ Now at least lightly armed, loosely allied Flathead, Kutenai, and Nez Perce groups better defended themselves against Blackfoot raiders. Henry observed that their involvement in the fur trade benefitted them, for “[f]ormerly, all those tribes became an easy prey to their enemies, having no other weapons of defence than the Bow and Arrow. But within those few years they have acquired the use of firearms, and got supplies of arms and ammunition from us, and are now become a formidable enemy whom the Slave Indians no longer dare to annoy with impunity.”¹⁸ Relationships between Blackfoot groups and traders soured as a result, for Henry noted that “our supplying the Columbia Indians with Arms and Ammunition has rendered them fully as troublesome and turbulent, while at our Houses, as any other Tribe.”¹⁹

Meanwhile, the Blackfeet devoted much attention to their southern enemies.

Indeed, as American trappers and traders entered the Missouri headwaters, the Blackfeet

Anthony McGinnis, *Counting Coup and Cutting Horses: Intertribal Warfare on the Northern Plains, 1738-1889* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1990, 2012), 31.

¹⁷ Alexander Henry, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger, 1799-1814*, edited by Barry M. Gough (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1992), vol. 2, 378 (quotation), 376-377, 432, 480.

¹⁸ Henry, *Travels*, vol. 2, 527 (quotation), 522-526, 538; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 32-33.

¹⁹ Henry, *Travels*, vol. 2, 535.

struggled to ensure that Crows and Shoshones did not establish ties to them. Torn between two fronts (so to speak) the Blackfeet also failed in this area. Crows accumulated significant supplies of arms and ammunition after meeting Colter and his successors. By 1811, they frequently raided north into Blackfoot country and were therefore one of the few groups bold enough to challenge the Blackfeet. On the other hand, Shoshones apparently did not accumulate guns as early or as quickly as their Crow neighbors. More distant from the HBC and American traders than were the Crows, Flatheads, and others, they remained at the mercy of the Blackfeet. As the Piegans boasted to Henry in 1811, “[t]he Snake Indians are a miserable and defenceless nation that ever ventured abroad. The Peagans [*sic*] compare them to old women who they can kill with sticks and stones.”²⁰ That vulnerable state, however, was contingent upon Shoshones remaining at the periphery of the fur trade.

Yet, many Shoshones – especially those of what is now Idaho – soon became acquainted with the fur trade. In 1818, the NWC launched the first of a series of annual expeditions that traveled far to the south of the HBC’s and NWC’s usual territories. Spurred by a political contest between the United States and Great Britain over the Oregon territory, these campaigns finally carried fur traders into Shoshone country on a consistent and considerable basis. These expeditions took the form of “brigades” comprised of several dozen men who “trapped out” stretches of water and visited Native camps to trade. Thus, in 1819 camps of the “Snake nation” met the first Euro-Americans known to enter that area – an NWC brigade that encouraged them to trap beaver for future trade. The reports of the 1818-1819 expeditions captured some of the diversity of

²⁰ Henry, *Travels*, vol. 2, 533, 538, 543.

this “Snake nation,” for the NWC men distinguished between the “Sherry-dikas or Dog-Eaters,” “Rar-are-ree-kas or Fish-eaters,” and “Ban-at-tees or Robbers”. All of them lacked firearms and therefore fell prey to their gun-bearing enemies, but the trappers noted that engaging in trade would allow them to better defend themselves; many of them proved eager to do so. Subsequent campaigns entrenched the fur traders’ presence in the Snake River country, especially after the HBC-NWC merger in 1821. The 1823-1824 HBC “Snake country expedition” trekked through the Bitterroot valley and thence along the Lemhi and Salmon Rivers before returning north. A detachment went east into Blackfoot country where they predictably clashed with a party of those Natives. So, at least some of the Shoshones later known as the Northern and Lemhi Shoshones had thus come into direct contact with Euro-American trappers. They began to engage in an economy that would alter their lifeways and help them better defend themselves.²¹

So, by the mid-1820s, many Shoshones scattered throughout the Columbia watershed interacted with fur traders who visited from the north. It appears that Wyoming Basin Shoshones, moreover, had established some degree of contact with HBC men, who called these Shohones the “Lower Snakes.” HBC operations expended when, in the mid-

²¹ These campaigns were in part spurred by the conflict between the United States and Great Britain over the Oregon country, known as the contentious “Oregon Question.” The two sides held a convention to discuss the topic in 1818, but they did not permanently resolve the issue. So, the NWC sought to make a profit and to secure the region for Britain. Several of its “Snake country expeditions” therefore ventured into what became California, Nevada, and Utah, but they mostly focused on the Snake River valley. From the HBC-NWC merger in 1821 until the United States and Great Britain settled the “Oregon question” in 1846, the HBC remained at the front line of the British battle for the Pacific Northwest. John Work, *The Snake Country Expedition of 1830-1831: John Work’s Field Journal*, edited by Francis D. Haines, Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), xvi-xvii; Jennifer Ott, “‘Ruining’ the Rivers in the Snake Country: The Hudson’s Bay Company’s Fur Desert Policy,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 104, 2 (2003), 166-195: 167-168; Dale, *Explorations*, 42-48; John W.W. Mann, *Sacajawea’s People: The Lemhi Shoshones and the Salmon River Country* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 20; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 196-197; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 53-55; Wells, “Introduction,” in *Northern Shoshoni*, 24; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 295-296; Lewis, *Effects*, 21; Washington Irving, *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, U.S.A.* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), xxxvi.

1820s, Peter Skene Ogden assumed command of the Snake country expeditions. The brigades began to cover even more territory, trap more intensively, and more vigilantly pursue Native furs than they had before. As American trapper Jedediah Smith learned in 1824 when he visited Saleesh House, the HBC had about 60 men employed in the Snake River country and another 20 or so elsewhere in the Rockies. Ogden boasted that during the previous four years, the HBC had harvested some 80,000 beaver in the Snake River country. This was clearly an exaggeration (the HBC officially reported only 35,000 beaver pelts taken during its entire course of Snake River operations), but it nevertheless impressed upon Smith the intensity of the HBC's efforts. Shoshones engaged in much of that commerce, helping the trappers denude their rivers and streams of beaver.²²

Shoshones unknowingly lent their hands to an intentionally destructive effort. Indeed, profit was only part of the reason that the HBC devoted special attention to trapping what became southern Idaho. Cognizant that American trappers began to approach the Oregon country from the east, HBC authorities in 1823 adopted the so-called "fur desert policy." As HBC Northern Department governor George Simpson wrote in 1824, that "[i]f properly managed no question exists that it would yield handsome profits as we have convincing proof that the country is a rich preserve of Beaver and which for political reasons we should endeavor to destroy it as fast as possible." So, in an effort to limit American intrusions into the Oregon country, HBC trappers tried to make the Snake River country economically undesirable. With no regard to Native land rights, they endeavored to exterminate every beaver in the area. The first HBC Snake country expedition set out in 1823 while Simpson's fur desert policy was still

²² Dale, *Explorations*, 153; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 197; Ott, "'Ruining' the Rivers," 173.

developing and it therefore focused on competing with Americans rather destroying beaver populations. However, when Ogden directed the 1824-1830 expeditions, the brigades were ruthlessly effective in carrying out Simpson's policy. During that time, Ogden completed the HBC's final explorations while executing the fur desert policy.²³

Shoshones along the fringes of the Wyoming Basin came into occasional contact with NWC and HBC brigades, but it appears that those Natives did not establish sustained contact with Euro-Americans until American trappers entered the Rockies in the mid-1820s. In 1824, a party of Americans employed by William H. Ashley made the first recorded Euro-American trip east-to-west through South Pass. That year and the next, Shoshones living north and east of the Great Salt Lake established friendly ties with the Americans and openly welcomed their trade. Ashley's men trapped along the Green, Bear, and upper Snake rivers, finding plenty of beaver, as well as bison, elk, bear, pronghorn, mountain sheep, and other sources of food. The Americans' reports of the Shoshones' friendly nature and their country's abundance drew over a thousand trappers to the region during the next decade. A few traveled through South Pass to trap on the headwaters of the Columbia River, where they inadvertently aided the HBC's fur desert policy. But most, including Ashley's men, based their operations in the Green River country and thereby capitalized on the opportunities provided by the geography of the Wyoming Basin. Traveling north from the South Pass Route, these men entered a series of mountain ranges that ran from south to north and were separated by alluvial valleys

²³ Governor and Committee, London, to John D. Cameron, July 22, 1824, in George Simpson, *Fur Trade and Empire: George Simpson's Journal*, edited by Frederick Merk (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 242 (quotation); Wells, "Introduction," in *Northern Shoshoni*, 25; Ott, "'Ruining' the Rivers," 166-168, 173; Irving, *Adventures*, xxxv; Mary Rusco, "Fur Trappers in Snake Country: An Ethnohistorical Approach to Recent Environmental Change," in *Holocene Environmental Change in the Great Basin*, edited by Robert Elston, 152-173 (Reno: University of Nevada, 1976), 159.

often rich in big game and drained by beaver-rich waterways. These streams and rivers east of the Divide ran north and fed into the Missouri River by way of the Yellowstone, so trappers could approach Crow country from the south, thereby reducing the risk of Blackfoot hostility. This ability to circumvent the Blackfoot threat enabled Shoshones to finally gain access to considerable and sustained contact with Americans.²⁴

Wyoming Basin Shoshones did not simply become involved in the American market; they, in fact, saw their country become the center of the American Rocky Mountain trapping system. After Ashley's initial expeditions established the foundation of that system in the mid-1820s, a variety of interests capitalized on it. Until about 1828, though, a company formed by Ashley's protégés – the Rocky Mountain Fur Company (RMFC) – dominated the trapping and trading industry in the Wyoming Basin and northeastern corner of the Great Basin. After 1828, the American Fur Company (AFC) and many independent competitors descended upon Shoshone country. The RMFC reached west from St. Louis via the Platte River route while the AFC operated a string of posts that stretched along the upper Missouri into Blackfoot country. These companies contracted trappers, obtained furs from Shoshones and other Natives, and procured more pelts from “free” or “independent” trappers. The companies fought for the loyalty of the Natives that participated in the market, thereby driving up the prices that Shoshones and others received for their furs. As a group that had long lacked access to Euro-American material goods, Shoshones seized upon the opportunities presented by the fur trade. Of great importance was that they had local access to the items that Americans wanted.

²⁴ Dale, *Explorations*, 38-39, 88-89, 151; Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 25, 50-52, 121-127; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, vol.1, 261-277, 283-287; Henry E. Stamm IV, *People of the Wind River: The Eastern Shoshones, 1825-1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 19; Ott, “‘Ruining’ the Rivers,” 183-185; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 91; Julian H. Steward, *Basin-Plateau Aboriginal Sociopolitical Groups* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1938, 1997), 6.

Whereas their earlier trade goods were primarily horses, captives, and other commodities that they acquired or took from other groups, they now found that Americans wanted products – beaver furs as well as the meat and hide of bison and other game – that were readily available in their homelands and neighboring regions.²⁵

The longstanding Wyoming Basin Shoshone rendezvous (or trade fair) became the basic model upon which the Rocky Mountain trapping system developed. During the summer of 1825, Ashley's outfits held an informal meeting on Henry's Fork of the Green River, where they resupplied and turned in their packs of furs. Each summer thereafter, fur company men and independent trappers – often attached to bands of Shoshones or other Natives – gathered along with Shoshones, Flatheads, Crows, Bannocks, Nez Perces, Utes, and others in a locale selected during the previous year's meeting. For about a week, all of the men drank alcohol, gambled, socialized, and exchanged their year's take of furs for supplies of trade goods brought overland from St. Louis by wagon. The importance of this system to the Shoshone should not be underestimated, for they likely saw it as an expansion of their annual trade fair rather than the implementation of an entirely new system. Indeed, every single fur-trade era rendezvous transpired in Shoshone country, for the 1826-1828 meetings occurred in what is now southeastern Idaho or northern Utah and thereafter the locations moved to the north and east, which demonstrated the importance of the Wyoming Basin trapping grounds. Between 1829 and 1840, most of the annual meetings happened in the Green River valley although some

²⁵ Thomas Jefferson Farnham, "Farnham's Travels in the Great Western Prairies, etc., May 21 - October 16, 1839," in *Early Western Travels*, vol. 28, edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland: A.H. Clark, 1906), 288-289, 290-292; Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 132-152; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 4-5, 151-153, 291-306, 329-362; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, vol. 2, 756; Woods, *Wyoming's Big Horn Basin*, 28-29; Frank Raymond Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns on the Great Plains (17th Century through the Early 19th Century)* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1953, 1992), 92-93; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 56, 73.

occurred in the Wind River country. With bison, timber, and water abundant, the Green River was “a veritable paradise for the fur trader.” Many of the trappers remained in Shoshone country year-round, traveling with Shoshones between each rendezvous and wintering together in game-rich areas. By the late 1830s, though, the area’s beaver populations had declined noticeably, and, by 1840 – the date of the last rendezvous – the Rocky Mountain trapping system collapsed.²⁶

To the west, Shoshones engaged in a different kind of fur trade. From the first NWC Snake country expedition in 1818 through the final one under the HBC in 1832, many Shoshone camps received annual visits from fur-trapping brigades. When they did, Shoshones traded beaver pelts, other skins, and food for guns, ammunition, knives, axes, cloth, and other goods. Shoshones also provided information about the location of other trappers, hostile Natives, and where beaver, bison, and other animals were either abundant or scarce; such help often secured them additional “presents.” During the 1825-1826 HBC expedition, two Shoshone men worked for Ogden as hunters. Once Ogden outfitted them, he dispatched them to trap beaver on the Snake River by themselves and

²⁶ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, vol. 2, 770 (quotation); James Beckwourth, *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth, Mountaineer, Scout, and Chief of the Crow Nation of Indians*, edited by T.D. Bonner (Minneapolis: Ross and Haines, 1965), 138-139; William Marshall Anderson, *The Rocky Mountain Journals of William Marshall Anderson*, edited by Dale L. Morgan and Eleanor Towles Harris (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 134-136; Dale, *Explorations*, 296; John B. Wyeth, *Oregon; Or a Short History of a Long Journey*, edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites (Fairfield, WA: YE Galleon Press, 1970), 84-85; Osborne Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, edited by Aubrey L. Haines (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), 41; F.A. Wislizenus, *A Journey to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1839* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society, 1912), 86, 88-90; Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 190-193; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 15, 20; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 38-39; Mrs. Cyrus Beard, “Some Early Wyoming History West of the 108th Meridian,” *Annals of Wyoming* 3 (1925), 127-136: 133; Woods, *Wyoming’s Big Horn Basin*, 28-29; T. Stern, “Columbia River Trade Network,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 12: Columbia Plateau, edited by Deward E. Walker, Jr., 641-652 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 645; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 295; John K. Townsend, “Narrative of a Journey across the Rocky Mountains, to the Columbia River,” in John B. Wyeth, *Oregon; Or a Short History of a Long Journey*, edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites, 107-369 (Fairfield, WA: YE Galleon Press, 1970), 192; Irving, *Adventures*, 33-34, 37, 39, 47, 257-260; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 61-63; Åke Hultkrantz, “The Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” in *Shoshone Indians*, edited by Carling I. Malouf and Åke Hultkrantz, 178-217 (New York: Garland, 1974), 199-201.

then met up with the brigade later. They carried with them some goods to exchange with other Natives for furs. After the Snake country expeditions ended, Shoshones had access to Fort Hall, a permanent trading post that Boston businessman Nathaniel J. Wyeth established near the mouth of the Portneuf River in 1834. He had originally traveled overland to the Green River rendezvous under contract with the RMFC with wagonloads of supplies, but the RMFC was in the midst of dissolving and it forfeited on the contract, leaving Wyeth with a large quantity of goods. He then traveled 150 miles to the west and established Fort Hall, where he traded with Shoshone groups that he found “porrly [*sic*] off for food and clothing but perfectly friendly.” Shoshones traded with Wyeth at Fort Hall for three years before stifling competition on the part of the HBC compelled the American to sell his interests to that company in 1837. The HBC thereafter operated it as an outlying post in the company’s Columbia River fur trade system based in Fort Vancouver. At Fort Hall, Shoshones traded horses, furs, and provisions for firearms, ammunition, blankets, tobacco, and other goods. Farther west, Boise River area Shoshones gained access to trade at a similar post when the HBC opened Fort Boise in 1834 in an effort to undercut Wyeth’s operations.²⁷

It appears that some Shoshones capitalized on the opportunity to trade with both Americans and HBC traders. Equestrian Shoshones were highly mobile, as groups in the Snake River area visited their relatives to the east and vice versa. It is likely, then, that

²⁷ Nathaniel J. Wyeth, *The Correspondence and Journals of Nathaniel J. Wyeth, 1831-1836*, edited by F.G. Young (Eugene: University of Oregon Press, 1899), 164 (quotation); Peter Skene Ogden, *Peter Skene Ogden’s Snake Country Journals, 1824-1825 and 1825-1826*, edited by E.E. Rich (London: Hudson’s Bay Company Record Society, 1950), 91, 128, 140, 194; Peter Skene Ogden, *Peter Skene Ogden’s Snake Country Journals, 1827-1828 and 1828-1829*, edited by E.E. Rich (London: Hudson’s Bay Company Record Society, 1971), 12, 13, 15, 29, 41, 53, 55, 57, 58, 60, 69-70, 92, 102, 113, 114, 126, 130, 142, 143, 164, 165; Work, *Snake Country Expedition*, xix, 11, 15, 19, 135, 136; Farnham, “Travels,” 306-307; Wells, “Introduction,” in *Northern Shoshoni*, 25; Steward, *Basin-Plateau*, 6; Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 5; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 85, 87.

Shoshones throughout the country west of the Divide attended the annual rendezvous, which transpired well within the range of mounted Snake River country Shoshones. Likewise, it is probable that the easternmost Shoshone groups occasionally trekked west to trade at Fort Hall, or that they encountered HBC brigades that visited the western fringes of their homelands. Ogden, for instance, in 1826 reported meeting a Shoshone camp in the Snake River country that had wintered with American trappers on the Bear River. Five years later, his successor, John Work, wrote that “[l]ate in the evening three Flat Heads [*sic*] and a Snake Indian arrived from the American camp which they left two days ago on the opposite side of the mountains, near the head of Portneuf’s River.” These references highlight the Shoshones’ willingness to trade with anyone would provide them with much-needed goods, as well as the limited success of the HBC’s effort to forestall American intrusions beyond the Continental Divide. However, American trappers never established a major presence beyond the far northeastern corner of the Great Basin before the end of the fur trade. Explorer and trader Benjamin Bonneville summed up the Americans’ hesitancy to penetrate the Snake River country when he reportedly compared the region to the Arabian Desert.²⁸

Shoshones who became known as the Lemhi apparently did not become deeply engaged in the HBC or American fur trade systems. Some of them certainly traveled into the Snake River Plain or to the annual rendezvous, but no fur traders visited their country regularly or for long periods of time. Situated across the Divide from Blackfoot lands in what is now Montana, the Lemhi and Salmon River areas posed challenges to Shoshones

²⁸ Work, *Snake Country Expedition*, 91 (quotation); Irving, *Adventures*, 71; Ogden, *Snake Country Journals, 1824-1825 and 1825-1826*, 146; Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 26; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, vol. 2, 785; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 181-182, 191-196; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 332; Wyeth, *Oregon*, 69.

and Euro-Americans alike. Some of Ogden's Snake country expeditions passed through Lemhi country, but the Blackfoot threat hastened their departure. Work spent the winter of 1831-1832 along the Salmon River, laboring under the constant threat of Blackfoot raids while dealing with hostile climate conditions and hunger. Few Shoshones interacted with Bonneville when wintered on the Salmon River in 1832-1833, although he did entertain Nez Perce and Flathead visitors. Shoshones did, however, meet Nathaniel Wyeth's cousin, John Wyeth, who also spent that winter on the Salmon River. In 1835, Russell wrote that a trader set out from Fort Hall to build a post on the Salmon River, "but had been defeated by the Blackfeet with the total loss of his outfit excepting his men and horses." The trader abandoned his plan to build a fort in that area. Ultimately, the trappers had a transitory presence in the Lemhi country and their impact on that region was minimal. During their brief visits, trappers met and traded with Shoshones, but the fur trade did not affect them as much as it did their southern relatives. Yet, since the Blackfoot threat discouraged trappers from remaining in the Salmon and Lemhi River areas, they did not deplete game populations to the degree that they did elsewhere. Local Shoshones who traveled to do business with HBC men or Americans elsewhere, however, likely trapped the waterways more extensively than they did before the onset of the fur trade.²⁹

Likewise, the so-called "Sheepeaters" of the mountains of what are now Wyoming and Idaho had little contact with trappers and traders. Several Euro-Americans

²⁹ Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 13 (quotation); Ogden, *Snake Country Journals*, 23; Work, *Snake Country Expedition*, xix; Irving, *Adventures*, 69, 156; Wyeth, *Oregon*, 69, 83; Merle B. Wells, "Introduction," in Brigham D. Madsen, *The Lemhi: Sacajawea's People* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton, 1980, 2000), 29-30; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 23; Mann, *Sacajawea's People*, 15, 20, 22; Gregory R. Campbell, "The Lemhi Shoshone: Ethnogenesis, Sociological Transformations, and the Construction of a Tribal Nation," *American Indian Quarterly* 25, 4 (Autumn 2001), 539-578: 542.

did report that Shoshone-speakers inhabited the Wind River, Abasaroka, Teton, Gros Ventre, and Sawtooth mountain ranges. Their encounters, however, were usually brief and the trappers' accounts were cursory and ambiguous, causing some scholars to question whether those Shoshones were mountain-dwellers or temporary visitors. In 1811, Shoshones that may have been "Sheepeaters" encountered a party of Astorians near the Teton Range. In the 1830s, Bonneville reported seeing several "poor" pedestrian Shoshones in the Wind River Mountains. In 1835 and 1836, camps of "Snake" Indians in the Lamar Valley of what is now Yellowstone National Park interacted with American trapper Osborne Russell. In 1837, a camp of "Mountain Snakes" near Eagle Creek in northwestern Wyoming traded with Russell, receiving ammunition, axes, tobacco, and other goods in exchange for beaver pelts and other furs. Shoshone-speakers in the mountains north of the Snake River valley likewise made periodic and brief contact with HBC trappers. Ultimately, the combination of Native traditions, anthropological studies, and Euro-American testimony suggests that small groups of Shoshone-speakers extensively used high-altitude environments in the GYE and adjacent areas. Euro-Americans depicted these peoples as impoverished and cowardly because they had few horses, did not regularly trade with Euro-Americans, and they opted to fish and hunt bighorn sheep rather than compete with other Natives for bison. Euro-American observers, however, failed to note that those peoples inhabited rich environments that gave them access to a wide variety of resources which, with adequate knowledge of growing seasons and game migration patterns, could easily support small groups of foragers.³⁰

³⁰ Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 26-27, 46, 65; Irving, *Adventures*, 137-138; D. Dominick, "The

As we have seen, Shoshones interacted with Euro-American fur trappers and traders in several general areas of the Intermountain West. Shoshones informed trappers such as Zenas Leonard that they “were once a powerful nation, possessing a glorious hunting ground on the east side of the mountains” but that their “nation has been entirely broken up and scattered throughout this wild region.”³¹ There were some who lived along the Snake River west of Fort Hall toward the Boise River. These “Root Diggers” and “Fishing Shoshones” focused on gathering roots, seeds, and fish in areas that trappers reported were “destitute of game.” Shoshones in the eastern portion of the Snake River Plain inhabited “the more genial and richer parts of the country” and therefore had access to more large game, including deer, elk, pronghorn, and, until the 1840s, bison. North of them were relatives who inhabited the “ruder mountains” and valleys of the Lemhi and Salmon Rivers. They mostly focused on fishing for salmon, although they sometimes visited areas rich in bison. Shoshonean “Sheep eaters” also used high-altitude environments scattered throughout the mountains of what are now Wyoming, Idaho, and southeastern Montana, where they hunted bighorn sheep and foraged. Finally, there were the Shoshones who inhabited the Green River and Bear River areas but periodically ranged northeast into the Wyoming Basin and south at least as far as Brown’s Hole on the

Sheep eaters,” *Annals of Wyoming* 36, 2 (1964), 131-168: 131, 137-140, 143; Åke Hultkrantz, “The Ethnographic Position of the Sheep-eater Indians in Wyoming,” *Folk* 8-9 (1966/1967), 155-163: 155, 158; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 322-323; Joel C. Janetski, *The Indians of Yellowstone Park* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 39-41; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 189-191, 201-203; Åke Hultkrantz, “The Indians in Yellowstone Park,” in *Shoshone Indians*, edited by Carling I. Malouf and Åke Hultkrantz, 217-250 (New York: Garland, 1974), 219, 233-236; Åke Hultkrantz, “Accommodation and Persistence: Ecological Analysis of the Religion of the Wind Sheep-eater Indians in Wyoming, U.S.A.,” *Temenos* 17 (1981), 35-44: 36-38; G.A. Wright, *People of the High Country: Jackson Hole before the Settlers* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 115, 118, 122-123; Richard Adams, “The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, Soapstone Bowls, and the Mountain Shoshone,” *World Archaeology* 38, 3 (Sept., 2006), 528-546: 532; Susan S. Hughes, “The Sheep-eater Myth of Northwestern Wyoming,” *The Plains Anthropologist* 45, 171 (Feb., 2000), 63-83.

³¹ Zenas Leonard, *Narrative of the Adventures of Zenas Leonard: Five Years as a Mountain Man in the Rocky Mountains*, edited by Milo Milton Quaife (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, 1923), 80.

Green River and the Yampa River (in what is now northwestern Colorado). Their territory, which sat at the axis of the Great Plains, Rocky Mountain, and Great Basin environments, afforded easy access to bison, elk, deer, pronghorn, bighorn sheep, fish, various small game species, and a wide variety of roots, berries, and nuts.³²

More often than not, Shoshones were friendly toward trappers and eager to engage in the fur trade. They traditionally affixed no special significance to the beaver, so they had few qualms about trapping them. Shoshones were fixtures at the annual rendezvous that blended their longstanding trade fair with American business, and trappers often visited or traveled with them between each meeting. After visiting the 1837 rendezvous, artist Alfred Jacob Miller immortalized the relationship between Shoshones and fur traders when he produced “Indian Hospitality – Conversing by Signs,” which depicted a Shoshone family entertaining a trapper in their lodge. Shoshones often strove to preserve their friendly relations with American trappers, as evidenced by an incident that occurred during the 1820s while some trappers and Shoshones jointly hunted pronghorn in northeastern Utah. During the hunt, a Shoshone who was decoying a pronghorn died after a trapper accidentally shot him. Instead of responding with violence, the Shoshone chief calmly spoke to his people, and then he told the trappers that “[y]ou and the Snakes are brothers; we are all friends; we can not at all times guard against

³² John C. Frémont, *Frémont's First Impressions: The Original Report of His Exploring Expeditions of 1842-1844*, edited by Anne F. Hyde (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1845, 2012), 153-154 (quotations); Farnham, “Travels,” 261, 293, 312, 314-316; Beckwourth, *Life and Adventures*, 94; Wyeth, “Correspondence,” 167; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 3, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 92; Leonard, *Narrative*, 80; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 300-303, 310-311, 316-323, 325-329, 39-331; Demitri B. Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography,” *University of California Anthropological Records* 5, 4 (1947), 245-288: 247.

accidents.”³³ Other times, Shoshones went out of their way to help Americans who fell victim to a raid by another Native group. Ogden, for example, noted how he once met a Shoshone horse-raiding party that had fallen upon Blackfoot raiders that had recently plundered a party of Americans. The Shoshones had recaptured the stolen horses and trade goods from the Blackfeet, and they informed Ogden that they planned to visit the Great Salt Lake area, where they expected to find the Americans and return their possessions to them.³⁴

Despite their generally friendly disposition toward Euro-Americans, Shoshones sometimes tried to take advantage of them. They reportedly took goods when traders turned their backs, picked up their traps, plundered trappers’ caches, and raided their camps for horses and other goods. They sometimes also attacked small parties of trappers, killed or injured them, and made off with their possessions. The combination of such activities and their trading efforts led American adventurer Warren Angus Ferris to describe Shoshones as “brave, robust, active, and shrewd, but suspicious, treacherous, jealous, and malicious.” Yet, as Ferris continued, “[n]otwithstanding the bad quality of these Indians, their country is rich in game, and the whites have thought proper to overlook many serious offences.”³⁵ Reports of Native thefts and attacks – whether or not Shoshones perpetrated them – led some trappers to abuse innocent Shoshones that they met. Catlin, for instance, learned that trappers became enraged when traps or other goods

³³ Beckwourth, *Life and Adventures*, 97 (quotation); Alfred Jacob Miller, *Alfred Jacob Miller: Artist on the Oregon Trail*, edited by Ron Tyler (Fort Worth, TX; Amon Carter Museum, 1982), exhibit 106; The Shoshoni Role in Western History, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 296; Rusco, “Fur Trappers,” 164, 166, 170; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 70; Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 143.

³⁴ Ogden, *Snake Country Journals, 1827-1828 and 1828-1829*, 81-82.

³⁵ Warren Angus Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains*, edited by Paul. C. Phillips (Denver: Old West Publishing Co., 1940), 248 (quotations), 226; Rusco, “Fur Trappers,” 166-169; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 63.

vanished and they then killed the next Native that they saw, even if he or she was innocent. Other times, traders perceived approaching parties of Shoshones to be hostile and opened fire on them, only to later discover their peaceful intentions.³⁶

The fur trade era had much to do with the rise of the “Digger” image, for it was during this time that Shoshones of the Snake River country unjustly gained a reputation as poor “wretches,” beggars, thieves, and murderers. Ogden, for example, depicted the “Lower Snakes” or “Diggers” as inhabitants of a “wretched Country” who wished to hunt bison to the east but could not on account of their many enemies and lack of horses. They therefore survived by eating roots, berries, fish, and whatever small game they could find, although trappers often reported meeting starved Shoshones in the Snake River country. During the following decades, the American trappers and travelers who succeeded the HBC brigades perpetuated such unflattering images of pedestrian Shoshones who inhabited the Snake River country and adjacent areas. On the other hand, HBC men and American trappers alike thought more highly of the “riding” or “Buffaloe Shoshones” who focused more on big game hunting and had less of a history of theft and violence toward Euro-Americans. So, trappers chalked up pedestrian Shoshone “poverty” and “hostility” to the lack of big game and other resources that they valued for food, but periodic tensions and conflicts likely had more to do with the fact that the NWC and HBC had ruthlessly exploited the Natives and their country. Indeed, violence committed by traders provoked retaliatory acts on the part of Natives. Although they infrequently remarked on depredations committed by trappers, HBC chroniclers frequently reported that Shoshones attacked and killed small groups of trappers, compelling subsequent

³⁶ Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, vol. 2, 252-253.

brigades to approach Native camps tentatively. Considering that Shoshones often suffered at the hands of callous HBC trappers, it was little surprising that they reportedly made off with trappers' horses or trade goods, as well as some of their traps, on occasion. By the late 1820s, some Shoshone groups in the Snake River country had accumulated many firearms, most of which they reportedly took in war with the Blackfeet, from small parties of trappers that they raided, and from trappers' caches. Focusing on Shoshone activities while neglecting the provocations of trappers, on one occasion Ogden vehemently wrote that, "I will not hesitate to say I would most willingly sacrifice a year and even two to exterminate the whole Snake tribe, women and children excepted."³⁷ One can only imagine how Shoshones felt about the men who invaded their lands.

Despite such tensions and conflicts, most Shoshones ultimately maintained friendly relations with Euro-Americans because of the benefits that they reaped from doing so. One observer wrote in 1843 – after many years of interactions between Shoshones and Americans – that the Shoshone "have suffered the trappers to hunt their streams unmolested, and have behaved more uniformly well to the whites than any other mountain red men." Yet, their cooperation and happy participation in the fur trade did not translate into just treatment, for "in return [for their collaboration] they have experienced less liberality and have received worse treatment than any Indians who have mixed with

³⁷ Ogden, *Snake Country Journals, 1827-1828 and 1828-1829*, 52 (quotation), 24-25, 29, 32-37, 51-52, 55-56, 59, 62, 65, 67, 124, 126, 128; Ogden, *Snake Country Journals, 1824-1825 and 1825-1826*, 90, 129-130, 133, 136, 146, 166, 175, 183; Work, *Snake Country Expedition*, xvii-xviii, xix, 63-64; Anderson, *Rocky Mountain Journals*, 134-136, 154-155, 157, 200-201; Pierre-Jean de Smet, *Life, Letters, and Travels of Father Pierre-Jean de Smet, S.J., 1801-1873*, vol. 1, edited by Hiram Martin Chittenden and Alfred Talbot Richardson (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1905), 301; Irving, *Adventures*, 162-164; Murphy and Murphy, "Shoshone-Bannock," 301; Steward, *Basin-Plateau*, 8-10; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, vol. 2, 871-872; Hultkrantz, "Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area," 191-196.

white men in the mountains.”³⁸ The bottom line was that most Shoshone groups generally tried to establish and maintain commerce with Euro-Americans. The upshot was that after 1825, Eastern Shoshone groups enjoyed something of a renaissance, for they, according to anthropologist Demitri B. Shimkin, “enjoyed some economic surplus over sheer survival.”³⁹

Participation in the fur trade influenced Shoshone subsistence patterns, but it did not fundamentally change them. Most Shoshone groups maintained their existing annual subsistence cycles, continuing to migrate with the seasons into areas that could reliably support them at a given time. They adopted beaver-trapping as a supplementary effort, one that was important to their material comfort and military power but not to their everyday survival. The most valuable beaver pelts were those harvested during the winter and spring, after the animals’ fur had thickened to help them survive the cold. So Shoshones, many of whom wintered along sheltered waterways and fished in the spring, had ready access to beaver populations. They sometimes also harvested beaver after they completed their fall bison hunts, but the quality of those pelts was generally poor after the summer and they therefore held less value than prime winter furs. The summer rendezvous held in the Green River country, moreover, simply augmented the longstanding Shoshone trade fair that transpired in the same general area.⁴⁰

On the other hand, their involvement in the fur trade facilitated some underlying changes in ways that Shoshones interacted with their lands and resources. In particular,

³⁸ Matthew C. Field, *Mountain and Prairie Sketches*, edited by Kate L. Gregg and John Francis McDermott (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 141-142.

³⁹ Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁴⁰ Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 19-20; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 41-42; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 296.

many Shoshone groups transitioned from using resources on a near-subsistence level to exploiting them for profit. In doing so, they integrated beaver-trapping for commercial purposes into their daily lives, broadening their hunting and skin-preparation activities to include species that they normally did not harvest in any great quantity. Meanwhile, they killed greater numbers of big game animals than before in an effort to meet the dietary demands of the increasing number of trappers who worked in their country. The price of engaging in this “economy of abundance” was nothing less than the depletion of the abundant game populations that made their lands so attractive to trappers and traders in the first place.⁴¹

Shoshone women played a pivotal role in the fur trade economy, which scholars once depicted as “a totally male sphere” of activity.⁴² Men were the primary trappers and traders, but between the time that they killed animals and exchanged them to Euro-American men, women performed the important work of processing hides. Shoshone groups traditionally processed few beaver pelts, so their involvement in the industry added further work to women’s daily duties. Indeed, Shoshone women added beaver hide-working to their already heavy workloads, for a visitor to a Bear River-area Shoshone camp in 1830 noted that the women were “industrious”; they dressed skins, prepared meat, foraged for vegetable foods, gathered firewood, cooked, and performed other labor that supported families on a daily basis. On the other hand, this same observer reflected unfavorably upon the men, writing that “[t]he women were all at work, but not so the men. Half of them were asleep in the lodges, and the rest either gaming, keeping

⁴¹ Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 19-20; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 92-93; Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography,” 268-270.

⁴² Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 3.

guard over their horses, or leisurely strutting about camp.”⁴³ Such an observation was in line with those of other Euro-American men who misunderstood what they saw and thereby produced misleading stereotypes about the nature of Native societies and gender systems. These views contributed to lasting images of Native women as downtrodden “beasts of burden” – and these long permeated even scholarly literature.⁴⁴ Shoshone women developed a reputation as excellent hide-workers, for Beckwourth observed during the 1830s that “[t]he Snake women were very skillful in dressing robes – far superior to our own [Crow women], as they had been more engaged in it.” Shoshone groups that were particularly involved in the fur trade may have developed a stronger tendency toward polygyny, as pelt and hide production was demanding, time-consuming labor. Yet, as discussed in the previous chapter, the practice of sororal polygyny within a matrilineal society did not necessarily signal that women were inferior to men.⁴⁵

A look at the place of Shoshone women within the Rocky Mountain fur trapping system contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions of the relationship between Native women’s status and the fur trade. The combination of historic and ethnographic evidence as well as information derived from studies of Native women in other areas of North America indicates that Shoshone women’s status did not suffer as a result of their involvement in the fur trade. When Shoshone groups engaged in the fur trade, men and women alike procured material goods that in some ways made their work easier. When

⁴³ Ferris, *Life*, 44.

⁴⁴ For discussions of women as “drudges” in the fur trade, see Devens, *Countering Colonialism*, 2, 14-18; Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 251; Susan Sleeper-Smith, “Women, Kin, and Catholicism: New Perspectives on the Fur Trade,” in *Rethinking the Fur Trade: Cultures of Exchange in an Atlantic World*, edited by Susan Sleeper-Smith, 443-480 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 443.

⁴⁵ Beckwourth, *Life and Adventures*, 367 (quotation); Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 144; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 19, 21.

women acquired metal knives, kettles, awls, and woolen cloth, for example, they could devote less time to making tools and attire, and some of those tools were more efficient than previous stone, wood, and bone implements. The writings and actions of traders, moreover, demonstrate that Shoshone women continued to be central to group socioeconomics. Women simply did not transform raw beaver skins into finished products and then hand them over to men to trade. Although Shoshone men usually traded with Euro-American men (while Native women traded with other Native women and sometimes with Euro-American men), Shoshone women controlled the means of production and they distributed the fruits of their labor as they wished; part of the goods that Shoshone men acquired by trading furs went directly back to the women who processed them. Meanwhile, that women continued to gather vegetal foods, butcher and dry meat, cook meals, and control the distribution of that food attests to their enduring influence.⁴⁶

Furthermore, Shoshone women – like Native women elsewhere – were often important liaisons in developing relationships between their groups and traders. So, Shoshone women were fixtures at the annual rendezvous, for one observer noted that at the 1833 meeting “[t]he Shoshonie [*sic*] beauties became objects of rivalry among some of the amorous mountaineers.” This brief mention of Shoshone women, however, does not fully capture the breadth of women’s involvement in the fur trade and their

⁴⁶ Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 93-96; Beckwourth, *Life and Adventures*, 367; Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 6; Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 257-260; Lillian A. Ackerman, *A Necessary Balance: Gender and Power among Indians of the Columbia Plateau* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 18; Murphy, “Autonomy,” 67-77, 84; Brown, *Strangers*, 64-66; Sleeper-Smith, “Women,” 444; Loretta Fowler, *Wives and Husbands: Gender and Age in Southern Arapaho History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 303.

importance to it. Shoshone women were not mere sexual objects that their husbands casually offered to traders in exchange for their business. Rather, women generally had a say in whether or not they acted as such liaisons and, when they did so, they usually benefitted socially and economically from their efforts to bind together Natives and Euro-Americans. Acting as mediators through such “wife-sharing” rituals, women earned respect and recognition for forging ties with outsiders as well as material wealth that came with that commerce. Trappers might share a brief sexual encounter with a Shoshone woman because the former wanted temporary companionship, but sometimes Shoshone women and Euro-American men maintained long-term relationships. Some such unions occurred as Native men tried to cement economic ties between themselves and fur traders by encouraging the latter to marry their sisters or daughters – but women had to agree to such arrangements. Euro-American men had ample reason to marry Shoshone women and enter their kinship systems, for doing so produced profitable commercial relationships, secured valuable guides, and afforded protection from other Natives. At the same time, Native women had their reasons for marrying trappers. By making trappers and traders into friends, allies, and kin, women brought those men’s economic production into their matrilocal households, thereby gaining authority and prestige. Even on occasions when women agreed to marry Euro-American men and leave their villages, they demonstrated their autonomy by pursuing an alternative way of life. Such relationships that resulted in marriage often ended after several years, but unions based upon Native notions of “fluid monogamy” were important to cross-cultural relations and a group’s ability to engage in the fur trade. Thus, by the time that the fur trade ended, many interethnic camps inhabited Shoshone country. Russell, for example, wintered in

northern Utah in 1839 with eighteen lodges of Shoshones. He noted that “Snake” families occupied fifteen of those lodges, but three others were home to a variety of individuals, including Euro-Americans, Shoshones, Nez Percés, and Crees, some of which were of mixed descent. Ultimately, Shoshone women appeared to be active agents rather than passive victims of the fur trade as they benefitted from their efforts to address their own needs and interests (as well as those of their kin).⁴⁷

Perhaps predictably, Shoshone involvement in the fur trade enhanced their military might by providing them with firearms, metal projectile points, and other goods. Beginning with the NWC and HBC Snake country expeditions and especially after the American rendezvous system began in the mid-1820s, Shoshones procured greater numbers of guns and gained access to increasingly reliable supplies of ammunition, as well as metal knives and projectile points. When John Wyeth, for example, visited a trade fair in Pierre’s Hole, he recorded that he met “the Shoshonees, or Snake-tribe, so well provided with muskets, powder and ball, woollen cloth, and many other articles, until we were informed that Mr. Mackenzie, an established and wealthy Indian trader, had long supplied them with every article they desired.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Irving, *Adventures*, 112 (quotation); Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 112-114; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demetri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 4, 6-8; Brown, *Strangers*, 64-66; Peters, *Women of the Earth Lodges*, 153; Murphy, “Autonomy,” 67-77, 84; Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men*, 4-5; Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 11-13, 15, 17, 248, 257-260; Carter, *Importance of Being Monogamous*, 31-32; Sleeper-Smith, “Women, Kin, and Catholicism,” 443-444, 467; Margaret Jacobs, “Western History: What’s Gender Got to Do With It?” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 42, 3 (Autumn 2011), 297-304: 300-301. Conversely, Carol Devens asserts that the fur trade negatively affected many Native women in the Great Lakes region by eroding interdependent complementarity across genders. She argues that women became marginalized as men’s involvement in the fur trade transformed women from producers into “auxiliaries” who became “alienated” from the fruits of their labor. Overloaded with work and receiving “trinkets” rather than items of considerable value in exchange for their difficult skin-working (which diverted their attention from food-production and other activities that granted them autonomy and influence), women became increasingly subordinate to men. Devens, *Countering Colonialism*, 14-18, 123-124.

⁴⁸ Wyeth, *Oregon*, 83.

Their enhanced military capabilities enabled Shoshones to begin re-establishing a stronger presence east of the Continental Divide. Better armed and still well-supplied with horses, Shoshones tried to reclaim a share of the beaver and bison-rich areas of the Wyoming Basin. The easternmost Shoshone groups remained centralized in the area encompassing the Green and Bear Rivers, but from the mid-1820s onward they increasingly ranged into the Wind River, North Platte, Big Horn, Jackson Hole, and Yellowstone countries, often in the company of trappers and traders. They sometimes wintered in such areas as the relatively hospitable Wind River valley, or, as they called it, “Warm Valley.” Trappers followed their example by also wintering in such areas, and they reveled in the bounty of the Wind River valley in particular. As Leonard observed in 1834, “beaver appeared to be quite numerous” in that country. It, moreover, appeared to be a perfect wintering ground; it was rich in forage for horses, game, and timber. The only drawback of that bounty was that other Native groups (often hostile) also visited the area. Nevertheless, by the mid-1830s “a great many” Americans reportedly wintered in the valley.⁴⁹ Shoshones tended to visit such contested areas in large groups or with their allies, as Catholic missionary Pierre-Jean de Smet during the early 1840s noted that, “[a]t the mouth of the Twenty-five Yard river, a branch of the Yellowstone, we found 250 huts

⁴⁹ Leonard, *Narrative*, 223 (quotation), 225-227, 255, 260-261; Dale, *Explorations*, 294; Woods, *Wyoming's Big Horn Basin*, 30-33; Pekka Hämäläinen, “The Rise and Fall of Plains Indian Horse Cultures,” *The Journal of American History* 90, 3 (Dec., 2003), 833-862: 853; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 1, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 181, 198; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, xiii, 11, 15; Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography,” 245; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 92; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 310-311; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 203-209; Wright, *People of the High Country*, 101, 126; Irving, *Adventures*, 133, 147-149; Åke Hultkrantz, “Shoshoni Indians on the Plains: An Appraisal of the Documentary Evidence,” *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 93 (1968), 49-72: 53-54; Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied, *The North American Journals of Prince Maximilian of Wied*, vol. 2, edited by Stephen S. Witte and Marsha V. Gallagher (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 448; Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 11, 23, 64, 143; Hultkrantz, “Indians in Yellowstone Park,” 236-239.

belonging to several nations, all friendly to us – the Flatheads, Kalispels, Pierced Noses [Nez Perces], Kayuses, and Snakes [*sic*].”⁵⁰

Unfortunately, how deeply the fur trade affected Shoshones remains unclear. Shoshones clearly came into possession of more Euro-American goods, such as firearms, metal axes and knives, woolens, and flour. The annual rendezvous and everyday encounters also brought Shoshones into contact with Euro-American culture. Bonneville, for example, reported that some Shoshones with whom he spent the winter of 1834 on the Green River had taken to Christianity, observing Sundays and holidays. In 1840, de Smet attended the final rendezvous on the Green River, where he found a great number of Shoshones, Flatheads, and Nez Perces to proselytize. When some Shoshones met with de Smet during the trade fair and he exposed them to the Catholic doctrine, they reportedly seemed interested what he had to say. The missionary noted that the Shoshone were very friendly in general, yet he was dismayed at their apparent poverty, for he believed they inhabited the “barrenest country in all the region west of the mountains.”⁵¹

Increasing interactions with Euro-Americans compelled Shoshone groups to develop strong leaders. These men took charge of the overall administration of large camps, directed group travel, presided over councils, received visitors, and organized hunting and fishing expeditions. Their power emanated from personal influence and prestige; stronger “official” authority awaited the later period of interactions with representatives of the United States federal government. By the 1830s and 1840s, though, several important leaders had emerged among the Wyoming Basin Shoshone. One of

⁵⁰ Pierre-Jean de Smet, “Letters and Sketches, 1841-1842” in *Early Western Travels*, vol. 27, edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland, A.H. Clark, 1906), 392.

⁵¹ de Smet, *Life, Letters, and Travels*, 216 (quotation), 262; Irving, *Bonneville*, 257; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 15; Beard, “Some Early Wyoming History,” 133.

those was Tavonasia, who led a band of Shoshones who mostly hunted bison in what is now western Wyoming, although he sometimes guided them north into the Yellowstone Park area to hunt elk or west into the Snake River country. Another was “Horn Chief,” a Shoshone leader who was friendly with trappers further west. Ferris reported how this chief convinced some of his tribesmen who had robbed a trappers’ cache to return all of the goods that they still had in their possession. Another time, his people conspired to assault Ferris’s party and thereby take all of their guns, horses, and other goods, but Horn Chief persuaded them not to. Field met two others in 1843, “Cut-Nose” and “Waks-ka,” who fostered smooth, friendly interactions with Americans. Another prominent Shoshone leader during this time was Ma-wo-ma, who led as many as 3000 people. Miller wrote that he was a “man of high principle, in whom you could place confidence” and that he was “decidedly in every sense superior to any Indian that we had met.”⁵²

Field’s “Waks-ka” may have been Washakie, who was born soon after 1800 in the Bitterroot valley of what is now Montana. When he was but four or five years old, Blackfoot raiders struck the Flathead camp in which he lived and his father was among those that they killed. His mother fled with him and his four siblings, making her way into the Salmon River area where she found her Shoshone kin. Washakie remained with them until he was a young man, even after his mother returned to Flathead country. Several years later, he joined a party of Bannocks that ventured into the Snake River country, and then traveled east into the Green River region. As early as the mid-1830s, his achievements in war against Crows and Blackfeet made him a respected man among

⁵² Miller, *Artist on the Oregon Trail*, exhibit 85 (quotations); Field, *Prairie and Mountain Sketches*, 140, 141, 151, 223; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 19; Dominick, “Sheepeaters,” 147-148; Ferris, *Life*, 61-62; Robert H. Lowie, “Notes on Shoshone Ethnography,” *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* vol. 20, part 3, 185-314 (New York: American Museum Press, 1924), 208-209.

the Shoshones, if not a minor chief. With his people, he traveled north and east into the Wyoming Basin to hunt and raid their enemies, but he called the Bear and Green River country his home. Washakie did not become a major Shoshone leader until the 1850s, but he began to establish friendly ties with Americans during the late 1830s and 1840s. The fur trade appears to have facilitated his initial interactions with Americans.⁵³

Shoshones also needed strong leaders because a great deal of intertribal conflict surrounded the fur trade. During the 1820s and 1830s, Blackfoot, Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Ute, Gros Ventre, and other groups raided into the Wyoming Basin and deeper into Shoshone territory to capture horses, women, and material goods, as well as to disrupt commerce between Shoshones and Euro-Americans. The Blackfeet were particularly troublesome to Shoshones and Euro-Americans alike, and their raids were often successful. This is evidenced by the fact that in 1833 Prince Maximilian of Wied observed while visiting a Blackfoot camp near Fort MacKenzie that, “several Shoshone Indian women [are] here from beyond the Rocky Mountains; [they] had been taken captive.” Both Shoshones and Crows vigilantly opposed such incursions, often in the company of trappers. Sometime in the late 1820s, for instance, Blackfoot raiders attacked the annual rendezvous in what is now northeastern Utah only to meet staunch opposition on the part of the Shoshones, trappers, and other Natives present at the meeting, and they suffered a defeat. Since intertribal warfare gave Shoshone men the opportunity to gain social prestige, warriors commonly raided into neighboring areas, where they preyed upon small or unsuspecting camps of Blackfeet, Sioux, Cheyennes, Arapahos, and Utes.

⁵³ Marshall Washakie to Grace Raymond Hebard, Box 46, Folder 16, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 90-92; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 21; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 303, 211-312; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 203-209.

As Shoshones and Columbia Plateau groups, particularly the Nez Perce and Cayuse, acquired firearms and their military power grew, their loose alliances (based on common weakness) eroded and they raided one another. On the other hand, Shoshones remained on generally good terms with Flatheads and Kutenais.⁵⁴

By and far, the Blackfeet constituted the greatest threat to all of their neighbors. In the mid-1830s, for instance, Catlin observed that:

“The Blackfeet are, perhaps, one of the most (if not entirely the most) numerous and warlike tribes on the Continent. They occupy the whole of the country about the sources of the Missouri, from this place to the Rocky Mountains... [they are] warlike and ferocious, i.e. they are predatory, are roaming about the country, even into and through every part of the Rocky Mountains, and carry war against their enemies, who are, of course, every tribe who inhabit the country about them.”⁵⁵

Fifty years had passed since the great smallpox epidemic of 1780-1782 enabled the Blackfoot Confederacy to become the most powerful Native group on the northwestern Plains, and they remained a constant threat to Shoshones, other Natives, and trappers in neighboring areas. Yet, even as Blackfoot activities limited trappers' intrusions into some areas and kept Euro-Americans and Natives alike constantly on their toes, Shoshones engaged in the fur trade, in part, to turn the tide against their hated enemies.

⁵⁴ Maximilian, *North American Journals*, vol. 2, 369 (quotation); Beckwourth, *Life and Adventures*, 101-109, 153-154, 165; Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 144; Irving, *Adventures*, 74, 117-118, 254-255; Simpson, *Fur Trade and Empire*, 55; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, xiii, 20-21; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 119, 198; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 54-55; Ferris, *Life*, 149, 210-211, 217, 245, 249; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, vol. 2, 870-871; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 2, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; James A. Teit, “Salishan Tribes of the Western Plateaus,” in *The Forty-Fifty Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, edited by Franz Boas, 23-396 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1930), 319-320; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 59-60; The Shoshonis of Wyoming, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 91-92; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 303; Lowie, “Notes,” 172, 242, 283; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 52-53, 64-65; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 203-209; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 70; Hultkrantz, “Indians in Yellowstone Park,” 244-246.

⁵⁵ George Catlin, *North American Indians*, edited by Peter Matthiessen (New York: Penguin, 1841, 1989), 41.

Even Shoshones and trappers operating in the Snake River country had to beware of Blackfoot raiders. HBC chroniclers observed that the Blackfoot threat to Shoshones and trappers alike was constant. During the 1825-1826 fur-trapping season, for example, Shoshones fled as Ogden's brigade approached their village near the Boise River, leaving behind everything except their horses. "[B]ut on discovering we were not Black Feet," wrote Ogden, "they Soon came back" and although they had little of value, they traded what they could.⁵⁶ The Blackfoot threat continued into the 1830s, for Work noted during his 1830-1831 Snake country expedition that, "[Shoshones] are very afraid of the Blackfeet." In fact, the Blackfoot threat was so great until the late 1830s that Shoshone groups in the Snake River country remained in several large composite bands for much of a given year in an effort to better defend themselves. When they hunted bison on the Snake River plain or traveled east to hunt them on the Plains or to trade, they usually did so in the company of other Natives, such as Flatheads or Kutenais.⁵⁷

Throughout the fur trade era, Shoshones and Crows continued their longstanding relationship that vacillated between hostile and friendly interactions. During the 1820s and 1830s, Crow and Shoshone groups both frequented particular areas, such as the Wind River valley, and resulting competition over the same lands and resources engendered some conflict. Beckwourth's recollections of his time living among the Crows highlights how those two groups were often "extremely amicable." Yet, the groups periodically raided one another for horses, guns, and other items. On one occasion, a Shoshone camp

⁵⁶ Ogden, *Snake Country Journals, 1824-1825 and 1825-1826*, 89 (quotation), 147, 149, 158; Ogden, *Snake Country Journals, 1827-1839*, 20, 88.

⁵⁷ Work, *Snake Country Expedition*, 84 (quotation), 13, 22-23, 30, 65, 71, 78, 100, 102; Wyeth, *Oregon*, 69-74; Farnham, "Travels," 261-263, 277; Irving, *Adventures*, 40-44, 74, 88-89, 92-94; Wells, "Introduction," in *Northern Shoshoni*, 24-25; Ogden, *Snake Country Journals, 1827-1828 and 1828-1829*, 68; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 85.

invited Beckwourth and some Crows to trade and they completed their business without incident, but afterward some of the Shoshones followed him and killed several of his companions in an attempt to take their goods. Beckwourth, by this time a prominent figure in Crow society, organized a retaliatory expedition that killed many Shoshones and compelled them to pursue a more peaceful relationship. Not long after that incident, a large Shoshone camp visited Crows in the Big Horn River country and accompanied Beckwourth on a visit to Fort Cass, an AFC post located at the mouth of the Big Horn River. These Shoshones had apparently never before visited a trading post, since they were dumbfounded by the quantities of guns, axes, and other items that they saw there. They promptly traded all of the furs that they had on hand, thereby obtaining “large supplies in exchange.” So impressed were the Shoshones that some 200 of their lodges (out of 800) remained with the Crow band for some time thereafter.⁵⁸

It appears that the fur trade weakened Shoshone ties to distant groups whom they had once depended upon for commercial exchanges. Able to trade with Euro-Americans in the heart of their own country at the annual rendezvous, Shoshones had less reason to embark on long trips to visit their Comanche relatives in the upper Arkansas River valley or to venture to the Mandan and Hidatsa villages on the upper Missouri. As late as 1821, the Glenn-Fowler expedition listed the “Snakes” among the groups that attended the Comanche trade fair. This, of course, was several years before the Ashley-Smith expedition established the Rocky Mountain rendezvous system. Shoshones and Comanches continued to visit one another after that time, especially to see their kin.

⁵⁸ Beckwourth, *Life and Adventures*, 139, 165, 233-235, 364-367; Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 70; Leonard, *Narrative*, 82-83; Dale, *Explorations*, 132; Woods, *Wyoming's Big Horn Basin*, 28; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 301-302; Lowie, “Notes,” 241; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 52, 63-64; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 72.

Reports of Shoshone visits to the Mandan and Hidatsa villages all but ceased during the fur trade era. On the other hand, the annual fur trade rendezvous that became integrated into the traditional Shoshone trade fair maintained some contact with other groups.⁵⁹

The fur trade also affected Shoshone intertribal affairs by playing a prominent role in nineteenth-century smallpox epidemics. The *variola* virus appears to have visited Shoshone country several times between 1806 and 1843. No historical evidence indicates that Shoshones suffered from smallpox when it struck their Comanche relatives and Kiowas in 1815-1816 or Blackfoot and Lakota groups in 1817-1818. But since Shoshones were situated near these groups and they interacted with all of them, they may have also been infected during this time. Crows reportedly contracted smallpox from a party of overland travelers in 1833, but it is not known if they spread the virus to Shoshones. In 1837-1838, another major epidemic struck the northern Plains. This was a widespread and deadly outbreak, for it swept from the semisedentary villagers of the upper Missouri to the Lakota, Kiowa, Assiniboine, and Blackfeet, killing thousands in the process. The American fur trade introduced the virus to the region and facilitated its spread throughout the grasslands. The AFC vessel *St. Peter's* carried the virus up the Missouri to Fort Union near the present-day North Dakota-Montana border, where it devastated Assiniboines and Blackfeet that traded at that post. Smallpox might have then spread to the Shoshones, but it also could have reached them by way of Crows, Kiowas, or others who interacted with Mandans, Hidatsas, or Arikaras. The famed Shoshone chief

⁵⁹ Jacob Fowler, *The Journal of Jacob Fowler*, edited by Elliot Coues (New York: Harper, 1898), 58; Edwin James, "James's Account of S.H. Long's Expedition, 1819-1820," in *Early Western Travels*, vol. 16, edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland: A.H. Clark, 1905), 55; Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 162-164, 168, 174-175; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 20; Demitri Boris Shimkin, "Shoshone-Comanche Origins and Migrations," *Proceedings of the Sixth Pacific Science Congress* 5 (1940), 17-25: 23-24; Calloway, "Snake Frontiers," 91; Shimkin, "Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography," 269-270.

Ohamagwaya and many of his people reportedly died of smallpox at about this time, suggesting that one of these outbreaks did indeed visit Shoshone country. However, it appears that Shoshones largely avoided the ravages of the fur trade-era epidemics.⁶⁰

Yet, the 1837-1838 smallpox epidemic influenced the Shoshone world, for it led to the downfall of one of their great enemies while giving rise to another. That outbreak utterly devastated the Piegan, Blood, and Siksika; an estimated one-half to two-thirds of the Blackfoot Confederation perished. The Lakota Sioux also suffered from the epidemic, but they lost a lower percentage of their population than did the Blackfeet. The upshot was that in the aftermath of the epidemic, the Blackfeet were simply unable to maintain their large territory. Their incursions into Shoshone country decreased as they dealt with the rising tide of Sioux westward expansion. Consequently, by the 1840s Lakotas as well as their Cheyenne and Arapahoe allies had replaced the Blackfeet as the greatest threat to Shoshones, Crows, and Americans in the Intermountain West. Sioux and allied warriors had raided into the Wyoming Basin prior to the 1837-1838 outbreak, but they now seized upon the opportunity to expand into areas once hotly contested by Blackfeet, Crows, and Shoshones, as well as raid well beyond them.⁶¹

⁶⁰ S.J. Fox, "Cultural Ecological Patterns of the Eastern Shoshone," *Tebiwa* 19 (1976), 1-8; Shimkin, "Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography," 254; Linea Sundstrom, "Smallpox Used Them up: References to Epidemic Disease in Northern Plains Winter Counts, 1714-1920," *Ethnohistory* 44, 2 (Spring, 1997), 305-343; 309; Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 67-69; Michael K. Trimble, *An Ethnohistorical Interpretation of the Spread of Smallpox in the Northern Plains Utilizing Concepts of Disease Ecology* (Lincoln: J&L Reprint Co., 1979, 1986), 37-45; Clyde D. Dollar, "The High Plains Smallpox Epidemic of 1837-38," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 8 (Jan., 1977), 15-38; D.B. Shimkin, "Wind River Shoshone Geography," *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 40, 3 (Jul.-Sept., 1938), 413-415; 415; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 13; R. G. Robertson, *Rotting Face: Smallpox and the American Indian* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton, 2001), 152-153, 173-177, 205-212; J. Lee Humfreyville, *Twenty Years among Our Hostile Indians*, 2nd ed. (New York: Hunter, 1899, 1903), 219-221; Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 114-119; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 60, 62; Edwin Thompson Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri*, edited by John C. Ewers (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 169.

⁶¹ Robertson, *Rotting Face*, 284, 310-311; Elliott West, *The Way to the West: Essays on the Central Plains* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 86-87; Dollar, "High Plains," 24;

The exploitative fur trade placed unprecedented pressure on the resources of Shoshone country. By the late 1830s, beaver populations in the Wyoming Basin and Snake River country had plummeted. As German visitor F.J. Wislizenus noted in 1839, “[h]undreds of thousands of [beaver] have been trapped here in the last decades, and a war of extermination has been waged against the race.” He added that areas that were once rich in beaver were now home to few while the animals remained most abundant in areas occupied by “hostile” Natives such as the Blackfeet.⁶² During the 1820s and 1830s, American trappers had carelessly exploited beaver populations in the country to the east and immediately west of the Continental Divide while HBC trappers intentionally overharvested the animals to the west of the mountains. Consequently, many observers justifiably blamed Euro-American trappers for the decline of beaver populations. Field, for instance, in 1843 met Shoshones east of the Divide and remarked that “the trappers have so thinned their country of beaver that they are now in an impoverished condition.” Yet, it must be remembered that many Shoshones themselves participated in the fur trade, for they trapped beaver, attended the annual rendezvous and other smaller meetings, and capitalized on the demand for pelts, thereby contributing to the animal’s demise. In doing so, Shoshones helped to undo the very economic system that had brought them material wealth, including firearms.⁶³

Wells, “Introduction,” in *Northern Shoshoni*, 26; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 54-55; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 303; Lewis, *Effects*, 25; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 62.

⁶² Wislizenus, *Journey to the Rocky Mountains*, 121.

⁶³ Beavers had notoriously low rates of reproduction, a fact that contributed to their quick decline. But after the heyday of the Rocky Mountain fur trapping system, beaver populations gradually rebounded. Field, *Mountain and Prairie*, 141; Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 31-33, 212-213; Fox, “Cultural Ecological,” 5; Flannery, *Eternal Frontier*, 312; Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 104; Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography,” 268; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demetri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 178; Rusco, “Fur Trappers,” 169-170.

In the Snake River country, beaver populations did not plummet because of simple overexploitation. As noted above, in 1823 the HBC developed a “fur desert policy” that called for the extermination of beavers in the Snake River and neighboring waterways in an effort to impede the westward extension of the American fur trade. Implemented and executed under Peter Skene Ogden between 1824 and 1830, that policy was highly effective, as his successor Work discovered during his operations of 1830-1831. When his expedition set out, it was under orders to “trap out” the remaining beaver-rich areas of the Snake River. Work, however, reported that those target areas had already been all but trapped out. So, by the time that the final Snake country expedition wrapped up in 1832, the HBC had fulfilled its mission, although it maintained a less intensive effort for another decade; this one relied upon Natives continuing to harvest beaver to exchange at Fort Hall and other posts for goods that they needed. Ultimately, the HBC’s “fur desert policy” sacrificed the Snake River country in an effort to protect its vital operations in the Pacific Northwest that centered on Fort Vancouver. When Americans officially gained control of the region in the mid-1840s, they inherited a Shoshone world largely devoid of beaver, bison, and other game.⁶⁴

Other game populations – particularly that of the bison – suffered as a result of the fur trade, and this affected Shoshone subsistence systems. Bison were numerous in the Portneuf River country when Shoshones began trading with Nathaniel Wyeth at Fort Hall in 1834, but Field wrote in 1843 that the game “in the Snake country ha[s] been thinned off and nearly killed up by the hunting of the whites.”⁶⁵ American explorer John

⁶⁴ Work, *Snake Country Expedition*, xix; Ott, “‘Ruining’ the Rivers,” 172, 175-176, 178-179; Sandoz, *Beaver Men*, 301; Wells, “Introduction,” in *Northern Shoshoni*, 25.

⁶⁵ Field, *Mountain and Prairie*, 141 (quotation); Irving, *Adventures*, 153-154, 235-236, 253-254; Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 123, 138.

C. Frémont traversed the route from Fort Laramie to Fort Hall in 1843, and he noted that while there was an “extraordinary abundance” of bison east of the Continental Divide, they had disappeared from most areas to the west. The Green and Bear River valleys had bison when the American fur trade in the central Rockies began in 1824, “but so rapidly have they disappeared within a few years that now, as we journeyed along, an occasional buffalo skull and a few wild antelope were all that remained of the abundance which had covered the country with animal life.” As was the case with the demise of the beaver, Shoshones and other Natives who congregated in beaver-rich areas contributed to the decline of bison, deer, elk, pronghorn, and other animals. Natives and Americans alike “slaughter[ed] them with a thoughtless and abominable extravagance” to sustain themselves and to trade surplus meat. Shoshones that lived west of the Divide now had to rely upon cross-mountain trips to procure adequate supplies of bison meat and hides. Shoshones of the Green and Bear River area apparently began spending more time in the bison-rich areas of the Wyoming Basin. Many Snake River Shoshones, on the other hand, now only had access to large bison herds during the annual fall hunt; after the depletion of the bison herds that once inhabited the Snake River Plain, traffic reached unprecedented levels on the so-called “Bannock Trail” through the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Otherwise, they had to rely more on harvesting local supplies of pronghorn, elk, and other game, as well as salmon, roots, and berries.⁶⁶

Yet, even to the east bison herds began to decline by the early 1840s. As the beaver pelt economy faltered, traders and Natives had turned to a new resource to exploit

⁶⁶ Frémont, *First Impressions*, 155-158; Fox, “Cultural Ecological,” 3, 5; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 19; Work, *Snake Country Expedition*, 48-57, 68-70; Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 5; Janetski, *Indians of Yellowstone Park*, 36-37, 60-61; Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography,” 269-270; Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 35; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 23; Dominick, “Sheepeaters,” 144-145; Rusco, “Fur Trappers,” 158; Flannery, *Eternal Frontier*, 317; Hultkrantz, “Indians in Yellowstone Park,” 242.

for profit. Bison had once been a peripheral source of skins for the market (although invaluable locally as food and attire for trappers and traders), for their bulky, relatively valueless hides were hardly worth transporting over long distances. However, as beaver supplies diminished and Americans utilized improved methods of transportation and travel in the West (such as the steamboat), bison hides became a viable commodity for exportation to eastern markets. Consequently, by the early 1840s bison became scarce in some areas – such as around the Three Forks of the Missouri – as a result of Natives engaging in the bison robe trade in order to acquire arms, ammunition, and other goods. During the period of 1833 to 1843, the AFC alone reportedly dealt 70,000 bison robes annually. Nevertheless, the bison herds of the Plains remained numerous enough to give the illusion that they might last forever. Wyoming Basin bison herds – such as those that migrated throughout the Wind River, Sweetwater, and Big Horn River countries – remained robust despite hunting for subsistence and trade; much of the early exploitation occurred along the Missouri River itself.⁶⁷

Fur trade-induced game depopulation affected Shoshone relationships with other Native groups. As beaver populations plummeted, intertribal warfare escalated as Shoshones, Blackfeet, Arapahoes, Cheyennes, Lakotas, and other groups struggled over control of the areas in which they remained abundant. One of the most hotly contested areas was the Wyoming Basin east of the Divide, for its beaver and bison populations attracted many Native groups long after the fur trade itself waned. As Leonard wrote in 1834, “when game gets scarce in one part of the country claimed by a certain tribe, they

⁶⁷ Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 66; Lewis, *Effects*, 25, 29; Hämäläinen, “Rise and Fall,” 852; Preston Holder, *The Hoe and the Horse on the Plains: A Study of Cultural Development among North American Indians* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 113.

remove to another part, until after a while their game becomes scarce, when they are induced to encroach upon the territory of a neighboring tribe, which will at once create a fearful strife.”⁶⁸ For Shoshones living beyond the Wyoming Basin, the decline of game populations sometimes deterred other groups from raiding into their country. As traveler Thomas Jefferson Farnham observed in 1839, “as the passes through which [enemy raiders] entered the Snake country are becoming more and more destitute of game on which to subsist, their visits are less frequent, and their number less formidable. For several years, [Shoshones] have been in a great measure relieved from these annoyances.” In the early 1840s, Russell made a similar comment, writing in reference to the Salt Lake area that “The Buffaloe [*sic*] have long since left the shores of these Lakes and the hostile Blackfeet have not left a footprint here for many years.”⁶⁹

Drawn to the abundance of game east of the Continental Divide, during the late 1830s or early 1840s Shoshones began to establish a stronger presence in the Wind River country and adjacent areas of the Wyoming Basin to the east and north. This country, wrote AFC trader Edwin Thompson Denig, was at the time “perhaps the best game country of the world,” as bison, elk, pronghorn, and other game species were numerous.⁷⁰ It was perhaps during this period that the present-day Wyoming town of Meeteetse earned its Shoshone name, “meeting place”; the general area was probably a rendezvous point for various Shoshone bands to gather in preparation for a major hunt in the Big Horn Basin. Shoshones, moreover, wanted access to the trading posts that American fur

⁶⁸ Leonard, *Narrative*, 227 (quotation), 237-244; ; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, xiii, 20-21; Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 198; Calloway, “Snake Frontiers,” 92; Wells, “Introduction,” in *Northern Shoshoni*, 26; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 325-329; Holder, *Hoe and the Horse*, 113; Hämäläinen, “Rise and Fall,” 854.

⁶⁹ Farnham, “Travels,” 262-263; Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 121.

⁷⁰ Denig, *Five Indian Tribes*, 139 (quotation); Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 303, 310-311; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 203-209.

traders established along the Yellowstone River. In order to do so, they had to establish an enduring peace with the Crows, who claimed the lands of the Wyoming Basin east of the Divide. They reportedly did so by 1843, for that year Field reported that Shoshones and Crows had recently formed “union” to fight against the Blackfeet, Sioux, and others who encroached on their lands. They ceased to raid one another and commenced frequent visits for the purposes of trading and horse-racing. Crows traded items of European manufacture to Shoshones in exchange for horses, riding gear, blankets, horn bows, and other items. In making peace, both groups not only ended their periodic conflicts, but they also formed a united front in a struggle over the rich supplies of beaver and other game that inhabited their commonly claimed territory.⁷¹

And so the great but brief era of the Rocky Mountain trapping system came to an end. By the mid-1830s, wrote Russell, many trappers in the beaver country west of the Divide realized that their industry was evanescent, as he wrote that, “[t]he Trappers remarked to each other as they rode over these lonely plains that it was time for the White man to leave the mountains as Beaver and game had nearly disappeared.” Indians, Americans, and the HBC brigades had exploited the fur-bearing animals of the Intermountain West to the fullest and, with those populations giving out, it was time for non-Native men to move on. Russell, for instance, remained a “free” trapper for several years after the companies abandoned the Rocky Mountains in the 1840s before becoming a prominent figure in Oregon Territory politics and then joining the California gold “rush” in 1848. Many other men remained “independent” trappers as well, with some

⁷¹ Field, *Mountain and Prairie*, 141 (quotation); William Bright, *Native American Placenames of the United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 276; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 106-107; Denig, *Five Indian Tribes*, 144, 147, 184-185, 201-202; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 203-209. According to one tribal elder, “Meeteetse” means “over there.” John Washakie, interview by author, Fort Washakie, WY, September 11, 2012.

also becoming regional political figures and/or pioneers to California or Oregon. Others, such as former RMFC trapper Jim Bridger, remained in Shoshone country well after the trade ended. This, perhaps, had much to do with the fact that Bridger's wife at the time was a Flathead woman. After she passed way in the 1840s, Bridger married a Shoshone woman and, after she died, one of Chief Washakie's daughters married him.⁷²

Although the heyday of the Rocky Mountain fur trade had passed, Shoshones continued to enjoy access to American trade – even if at a diminished level. Their ongoing commerce centered on Jim Bridger's operations on Black's Fork of the Green River. After the final rendezvous occurred in 1840, Bridger ran an informal trade operation in the Green River area before establishing Fort Bridger in 1843. Every summer, Shoshones from the Bear and Green River countries visited Fort Bridger to trade and socialize – this was the new site of their annual rendezvous. This event still attracted many Shoshones, Flatheads, Utes, Crows, and others, but Shoshones now also had the convenience of trading at a permanent post whenever they wished to do so. To the east, Fort Hall continued to function in a similar role for the Shoshone of the Snake River country, although it apparently did not feature a major annual meeting. Jim Bridger, however, did not necessarily have the dwindling fur trade at the front of his mind when he established his post along the primary route from South Pass to the Great Salt Lake; he primarily founded Fort Bridger “for the convenience of emigrants.”⁷³

⁷² Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 123 (quotation), viii, ix, xiii; Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 209-210.

⁷³ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, xxvii (quotation), 475; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 21; Beard, “Some Early Wyoming History,” 134; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 199-201; Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography,” 270; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 105.

So, by the early 1840s, Eastern Shoshones again adapted to a changing world. The brief period of the fur trade had brought them into unprecedented contact with Euro-Americans and had subtly altered their relationships with the environment. The fur trade influenced Shoshone gendered divisions of labor, but no evidence suggests that women lost status as a result of it. The fur trade had, moreover, provided Shoshone men with material goods that strengthened their military power. The fur trade, furthermore, had permeated much of the Intermountain West, finally producing records of the diverse Shoshone groups that existed. Those documents shed some light on the peoples later known as the Eastern, Northern (or Fort Hall), and Lemhi Shoshone, including how they used the fur trade to stabilize in the aftermath of the tumultuous decades that followed the 1780-1782 smallpox epidemic. Some groups, particularly Lemhis and their “Sheepeater” relatives, had limited relations with trappers and traders, but others, especially Eastern and Northern Shoshone bands, had established ties with Euro-Americans.

Yet, that economic system and its stability were both fleeting, for the parasitic fur trade destroyed itself, leaving Shoshones to engage in a withered economy. They, moreover, had to draw subsistence and surplus goods for trade out of lands whose resources had been strained and reduced. Shoshone lands west of the Continental Divide offered little in terms of game, so many therefore increasingly turned their attention to the east. Those who did so became the core group of those who in several decades became known as the Eastern or Wind River Shoshone.

Yet, even before the fur trade officially ended with the final major rendezvous in 1840, the next great wave of change began to sweep through Shoshone country. During the second half of the 1830s, as the next chapter details, Americans began migrating

westward along the famed “Oregon Trail” and other routes. Since Shoshone country afforded one of the most convenient paths through the Rockies – South Pass – a trickle of American emigrants began moving through it. Following routes established by Natives as well as Anglo-American fur trappers and traders, their travels portended an eventual tidal wave of emigrants that eventually devastated the Shoshone world and compelled them to seek refuge on reservations.

CHAPTER 6
“WILD INDIANS, LIKE WILD HORSES, MUST BE CORRALLED UPON
RESERVATIONS”: OVERLAND TRAVELERS, GOVERNMENT AGENTS, AND
THE SHOSHONE WORLD, 1840-1868

In the summer of 1855, a party of Mormon missionaries led by James S. Brown traveled from Salt Lake City to meet with Washakie and other Shoshone leaders. The missionaries found them in the Wyoming Basin, and Washakie welcomed them to a council. The suspicious Shoshone elders asked the Mormons to state their business, so Brown detailed Brigham Young’s hopes for friendship with the Shoshones and his desire to help them learn how to farm as well as to convert to the Mormon faith. His speech met a cool response, for all of the leaders except Washakie did not trust the missionaries. Washakie, however, said that the elders should heed Brown’s words, for “this country was once covered with buffalo, elk, deer and antelope, and we had plenty to eat, and also robes for bedding, and to make lodges. But now, since the white man has made a road across our land, and has killed off our game, we are hungry, and there is nothing left for us to eat. Our women and children cry for food, and we have no food to give them.”¹ So, in order to survive, the Shoshones should cooperate with Americans and thereby gain the favor of the “Great Father,” who would provide for them.

As Washakie’s comments suggest, the era of overland travel by way of the Oregon Trail and other routes had not been kind to the Shoshones. Even before the Rocky Mountain fur trade collapsed in 1840, American emigrants began traveling westward along the Platte River “road” and thence through South Pass, the Green River country, the northern Great Basin, and the Snake River Plain. Overland travel increased during the

¹ James S. Brown, quoted in Virginia Cole Trenholm and Maurine Carley, *The Shoshonis: Sentinels of the Rockies* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 154.

1840s before becoming a tidal wave once Americans discovered gold in California in 1848. Emigration continued at a brisk pace even after the California gold “rush,” spiking periodically as prospectors founded new mining areas. Although most of the emigrants passed through Shoshone country, they negatively influenced those lands and their inhabitants. Already depleted resource bases were further taxed, and conflicts between Shoshones and Americans sometimes led to violence. The impact of the emigrants combined with increasing settlement on Shoshone lands to compel the United States government to step in and begin organizing and managing Shoshone territory. One result was a series of treaties that culminated with the 1868 Fort Bridger Treaty, which established the Wind River Reservation. Thus, less than three decades after the demise of the Rocky Mountain fur trapping system, Shoshones had been stripped of the majority of their lands and left to subsist on a dwindling supply of resources.

The expansion of United States government authority into the Intermountain West facilitated the emergence of distinct Shoshone groups. Negotiations between government agents and Shoshones produced geographically and politically distinct bands, and those were led by prominent chiefs whose influence rested upon the support of their people as well as American recognition. So, when overland travelers began to sweep westward through Shoshone country and some permanently settled there, they initiated the final steps of the ethnogenetic process by which the Eastern or Wind River Shoshone, Northern or Fort Hall Shoshone, and Lemhi Shoshone “tribes” emerged as formal geopolitical entities. By requiring government intervention and treaties that ultimately led to the creation of reservations, emigrants and settlers triggered the ultimate collapse of Shoshone resources and the dispossession of Shoshone lands.

This chapter explores how the Shoshone world transformed in the years leading up to the reservation era. In doing so, it augments literature which argues that the fur trade was largely compatible with Native lifeways and that it therefore did not lead to dramatic upheaval or require confinement on reservations (as the previous chapter demonstrated).² Rather, permanent settlement and the mass emigrations associated with mining rushes confronted Native peoples – including Shoshones – with an increasingly narrow range of options and ultimately led to dispossession.³ Indeed, during the period of 1840 to 1868, American pioneers traversed or settled in Shoshone country, depleting resources upon which Shoshones depended and restricting their access to the land. As game populations further declined, Shoshones became increasingly reliant upon women's plant-gathering efforts to sustain them. So, in a world superficially defined by interactions between men across cultures, indigenous women remained integral to group subsistence. Yet, the impact of overland travelers on Shoshones and their lands produced resentments on the part of many Natives. Thus, the need to protect the Americans who preceded the government into the Intermountain West and the desire to lay the foundation for future development compelled the United States government to do great injustices to Shoshone groups. Still, many Shoshones usually remained friendly with Americans despite the obvious fact that the intruders were responsible for their hunger. Washakie and some other Shoshones understood that their days as free-roaming hunters were numbered and that they needed to contemplate a future as farmers and ranchers. Nevertheless, even those who were ready to adapt to this changing world found their

² See, for example, J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).

³ Loretta Fowler makes a similar point regarding the Southern Arapaho. Loretta Fowler, *Wives and Husbands: Gender and Age in Southern Arapaho History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010).

efforts challenged by a negligent United States government that wanted Shoshone lands and made promises in exchange for them, yet often failed to fulfill them.

This period of Shoshone history has received considerable scholarly attention. Historians, however, often focus on political narratives, treating environmental developments such as the depletion of resources as mere background material. Examining the interplay among Shoshones, local agents, and higher-level government officials, these histories highlight how Shoshones became confined to reservations while providing little analysis of why reservations became seen as a necessary measure.⁴ This chapter therefore explains how Shoshone and American interactions with environments played a pivotal role in the creation of Shoshone reservations and the emergence of geopolitically distinct Shoshone “tribes.” It emphasizes that political events resulted from Shoshone struggles to adapt to and subsist in a changing world. As Washakie himself indicated, his people were hungry because of American activities and he was willing to do whatever was necessary in order to better their lot.

When Shoshones encountered the U.S. government-supported expeditions of John C. Frémont during the early 1840s, they sat at the divide between the fur trade and the subsequent period of heavy overland travel. Shoshones did not encounter Fremont during his first foray into the Wyoming Basin in 1842, but they did during his longer expedition of the following year. At that time, the easternmost Shoshone groups engaged in intense warfare with their enemies to the east, particularly the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho. A party comprised of warriors of the latter groups, Frémont learned, had recently raided a

⁴ See, for example, Henry E. Stamm, IV, *People of the Wind River: The Eastern Shoshones, 1825-1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999); John W.W. Mann, *Sacajawea's People: The Lemhi Shoshones and the Salmon River Country* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

Shoshone camp along the Green River near Fort Bridger, taking several scalps and horses in the process. A Shoshone war party, however, caught up to the raiders and returned the favor, killing several men and taking back their horses. Shoshone camps along the Green, Bear, and Snake Rivers welcomed Frémont's men to their camps. These groups mostly subsisted on roots, berries, and whatever game they could find. Their lands, wrote Frémont, were destitute of game and they lived under the constant threat of Sioux raids. In general, he found that for most Shoshone groups that he met, "their sole employment is to obtain food; and they are constantly occupied in a struggle to support existence."⁵ Biased toward seeing hunting and farming as viable bedrocks of a people's subsistence, the explorer failed to see foraging as a real alternative to those methods.

Shoshones and their country left an indelible impression on Frémont, whose narratives (first published in 1845) became a major guidebook used by the overland travelers who began pouring westward several years later. Filled with descriptions of the route across the Great Plains, through South Pass and across the Green River, and thence to the Great Salt Lake and through the northern Great Basin or Snake River Plain to California and Oregon, Frémont's account provided travelers with important information about Shoshone territory and a little about the Natives themselves. His reports told aspiring travelers where they might find friendly and hostile Natives, game-rich and game-poor areas, and particularly difficult or easy terrain. He, for instance, wrote favorably of the Green River area, for he enjoyed the "refreshing appearance of the broad river, with its timbered shores and green wooded islands in contrast to the dry sandy

⁵ John C. Frémont, *Frémont's First Impressions: The Original Report of His Exploring Expeditions of 1842-1844* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 153-154 (quotation), 10, 127-128, 132, 143, 162, 179, 191-192, 199. For relevant notes regarding his 1842 expedition, including reports about Shoshone intertribal warfare and environmental conditions, see Frémont, *First Impressions*, 44-46, 51, 57-60, 62, 67, 70-73, 77-88.

plains” that his men crossed beforehand.⁶ As another example, Frémont noted that Fort Hall, the next major stop on the route west from Fort Bridger, was located in a resource-rich river valley. The trail west from Fort Hall, however, passed through the “barren valley of the Upper Columbia [Snake River].” Potential travelers relished such descriptions while Shoshones – who saw and used the land differently – would have likely not agreed with some of his assessments.⁷

Yet, Shoshones already witnessed a significant flow of traffic pass through their country by the time of Frémont’s explorations. Following the Platte River “road” into and through Shoshone territory, those emigrants followed trails that Natives and trappers had established. For these emigrants, Fort Bridger and, further west, Fort Hall, became vital havens for rest and supplies. So, for Shoshones, those places became areas of cross-cultural interaction at which they could trade and socialize with Americans. Even at an early date, though, this increasing travel began to take a toll on Shoshone landscapes and resources. As Frémont’s expedition took up the trail along the Sweetwater in 1843, for instance, he observed that “the numerous heavy wagons of the emigrants had entirely beaten and crushed the Artemisia [a type of plant].” That was only the beginning of the destruction; Shoshones quickly found that American emigration also meant decreased supplies of game, the destruction of timbered areas, and damage to waterways.⁸

⁶ Frémont, *First Impressions*, 136 (quotation), vii, 72-73; Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*, vol. 1 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 458-481.

⁷ Frémont, *First Impressions*, 183 (quotation), 123.

⁸ Frémont, *First Impressions*, 134; John Work, *The Snake Country Expedition of 1830-1831: John Work’s Field Journal*, edited by Francis D. Haines, Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), xix-xx; Robert F. Murphy and Yolanda Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock Subsistence and Society,” *Anthropological Records* 16, 7 (1960), 293-338: 296; John D. Unruh, Jr., *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 44-45; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 474-475; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, vol. 2, 726-727.

Shoshones met emigrants on the overland trails who passed through their country for a variety of reasons. Many of them went west to find adventure, riches, better health, or to escape debt or the social ills associated with an industrializing America. The accounts of explorers and trappers painted idyllic images of the West that gave rise to boosterism. It appears, however, that one of the strongest currents of pre-gold rush emigration was the missionary impulse. Favorable reports of the Columbia River area and its many indigenous inhabitants in need of “civilization” – including Shoshones – compelled Christian missionaries to travel along the fur trade trails through South Pass and the Snake River country. In doing so, they achieved what the Hudson Bay Company had sought to prevent when its agents exterminated beaver populations west of the Continental Divide; they – not American trappers – spearheaded American expansion into the disputed Oregon territory. Whereas most American fur trappers did not extend their operations far beyond the Great Salt Lake, by the second half of the 1830s religious migrants had established several missions along the waters of the Columbia.⁹

Many Shoshones treated missionaries just as they did the fur trappers – hospitably. They usually entertained those emigrants who visited their country during the annual Green River fur trade rendezvous, and the emigrants found, as did Jason Lee in 1833, that they felt “perfectly safe” while visiting Shoshone camps.¹⁰ Shoshones and fur traders informed the travelers of the Natives’ turbulent past, as one noted that, “[i]t will remembered that the Snakes once belonged to the eastern waters, and have been driven

⁹ Unruh, *Plains Across*, 91-94; Work, *Snake Country Expedition*, xx; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 90-91; Jennifer Ott, “‘Ruining’ the Rivers in the Snake Country: The Hudson’s Bay Company’s Fur Desert Policy,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 104, 2 (2003), 166-195: 180.

¹⁰ Jason Lee, quoted in William Marshall Anderson, *The Rocky Mountain Journals of William Marshall Anderson*, edited by Dale L. Morgan and Eleanor Towles Harris (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967, 1987), 31; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 90-91.

into, and nearly, over the mountains, by the more eastern tribes.”¹¹ A variety of Shoshones interacted with the emigrating missionaries, as one writer reported that west of the Continental Divide there were “two classes of the Snake nation. one is the Shoshonees [*sic*], or those who have horses. They are friendly; but some of the roving, savage disposition. The others are called Diggers, from the fact that they live principally upon roots. They inhabit the mountains, seldom venturing to the plains, and are a harmless, inoffensive people.”¹² Another, Henry Spaulding, who dubbed much of the Intermountain West “a barren desert” that was largely devoid of game, wrote an unfavorable if exaggerated account of northern Great Basin Shoshones:

“One portion of their tribe is called Diggers, are extremely poor, own no horses, and of course cannot go for buffalo; but are obliged to subsist upon roots, grass, and crickets, except in the salmon season, when they can get a good supply of fish. In consequence of their poverty, multitudes die every season from actual starvation. Many are found in the spring of the year, before the salmon come up, so reduced by famine as to be unable to rise upon their feet, but dragging their emaciated forms about, upon their hands and knees, they feed upon grass, till death puts an end to their wretchedness in this world.”¹³

Thus, beyond their periodic references to mounted Shoshones, Euro-Americans continued to depict Shoshones as generally impoverished peoples. Yet, the chroniclers noted that the hardships endured by Shoshones west of the Divide were closely linked to the loss of their eastern lands and their current occupation of lands that offered relatively

¹¹ William Gray, “Extracts from a Letter of Mr. Gray, dated Jan 10, 1838,” in *News of the Plains and Rockies, 1803-1865: Original Narratives of Overland Travel and Adventure Selected from the Wagner-Camp and Becker Bibliography of Western Americana*, vol. 3, edited by David A. White, 146-151 (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark, 1996), 150.

¹² Cornelius Rogers, “The Journey to the Rocky Mountains,” in *News of the Plains and Rockies, 1803-1865: Original Narratives of Overland Travel and Adventure Selected from the Wagner-Camp and Becker Bibliography of Western Americana*, vol. 3, edited by David A. White, 165-169 (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark, 1996), 168.

¹³ Henry Spaulding, “Letter from Mr. Spaulding, dated at Fort Vancouver, Sept. 20th, 1836,” in *News of the Plains and Rockies, 1803-1865: Original Narratives of Overland Travel and Adventure Selected from the Wagner-Camp and Becker Bibliography of Western Americana*, vol. 3, edited by David A. White, 126-138 (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark, 1996), 129-130.

few and scattered resources. So, even as they generally welcomed emigrants into their camps, they unknowingly enabled those visitors to produce records of their lifeways that were tinged with a cultural bias that equated foraging with poverty.

Although Shoshone country became a major thoroughfare of overland travel by the early 1840s, many Shoshones and Anglo-Americans continued to interact through the fur trade. Indeed, many Shoshones still engaged in the remnant fur trade economy centered at Fort Bridger. Each year – usually during the summer – Shoshones visited Bridger’s post to exchange furs, robes, moccasins, and horses for manufactured goods and food such as flour. There, they also intermingled with “independent” Anglo-American fur trappers such as W.T. Hamilton, who learned that the easternmost Shoshones used a vast expanse of territory. Shoshone groups invited these men to travel with them, as Hamilton reported accompanying them to Brown’s Hole on the Green River (in what is now northwestern Colorado) as well as into the Wind River valley and Big Horn Basin. At Brown’s Hole, the Shoshone participated in an annual meeting with Utes and Navajos during which they traded and raced horses. The Shoshone also hunted in the Uintah Mountains, which at the time offered a wide variety of game species. When Shoshones traveled north into the Big Horn Basin, they hunted bison as well as traded and raced horses with Crows.¹⁴

Shoshones also continued to participate in annual bison hunts and trade fairs with other Native groups. They conducted their major hunts east of the Continental Divide – in the Wind River valley or Big Horn Basin – and they often allowed trappers such as Hamilton to accompany them. During such a bison hunt, the Shoshone hunters carefully

¹⁴ W.T. Hamilton, *My Sixty Years on the Plains: Trapping, Trading, and Indian Fighting* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 31, 44, 56, 58, 60, 64, 69-71, 84-85, 135-138, 148-152.

approached a large herd of bison, and then descended upon it and killed dozens, if not hundreds of animals. After doing so, they remained at the kill site for as long as it took to process the bounty of the hunt. This often required days of work, as the women cured the meat and made pemmican as well as dressed the bison hides, and the men scouted for enemy raiders and prepared to defend the camp if attacked. As Hamilton learned, “[t]he Shoshones expected to remain in this camp for several days, to give their women an opportunity to finish dressing robes and drying meat.”¹⁵ Women, moreover, had to gather firewood and water, so the kill site was usually located close to a waterway that afforded access to timber, as well as an area that provided forage for the horses. The men had multiple wives who worked together to complete this work, as Hamilton noted that one wife was “superior to the others, who do all the hard work, such as dressing robes, collecting fuel, and packing the horses.”¹⁶

By the mid-1840s, Washakie had emerged as a prominent Shoshone leader and his people utilized a vast stretch of territory. Washakie’s approach to relations with Americans – one based on friendship – allowed Shoshones to interact and trade with Americans on good terms while encouraging the latter to value Washakie’s influence among his own people. As Hamilton observed, “[t]ake them as a whole, the Shoshones are a contented and hospitable tribe and, no doubt owing to Washakie’s great influence, friends of the whites.”¹⁷ Led by a strong leader in the form of Washakie and militarily strengthened by their commerce with Anglo-Americans, Shoshones reported that they “claimed the country to the Elk River (Yellowstone), and had done so as far back as their

¹⁵ Hamilton, *My Sixty Years*, 48 (quotation), 135-138.

¹⁶ Hamilton, *My Sixty Years*, 58.

¹⁷ Hamilton, *My Sixty Years*, 58 (quotation), 42; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 311-314; *Historic and Ethnographic Sketches*, Demetri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

fathers could recollect. [Washakie] said the Crows, Flatheads, and Nez Perces hunted upon their land. In fact, it was held by other tribes as neutral ground, claiming the right to hunt thereon.”¹⁸

Yet, Shoshones did not make the Wyoming Basin east of the Divide their home. As Hamilton observed, “[t]hey avoided the plains as much as possible on account of the numerous war parties to be found there.”¹⁹ Despite their population losses during the 1837-1838 smallpox epidemic, Blackfeet continued to occasionally raid into Shoshone country during the 1840s. Particularly contested were the Wind River and Big Horn countries, the latter of which Hamilton described as “a hunter’s paradise.” Shoshones and Americans who visited this “dangerous country” therefore “kept constantly on the alert, to avoid losing their stock and even their scalps.” On at least one occasion, a party of trappers reportedly helped a Shoshone band scour the Wind River valley for Blackfoot camps and drive them out of the area.²⁰ Kalispell, Nez Perce, and other Columbia Plateau groups also raided into the Wyoming Basin. At the same time, Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors invaded Shoshone country from the east, as Hamilton noted on one occasion that Cheyennes raided Shoshones in western Wyoming, only to have the latter catch up with them along the North Platte and recover their horses. That same year, Francis Parkman portrayed the situation in a different light, for his Lakota contacts depicted themselves as the victims of Shoshone hostility. Upon encountering a party of

¹⁸ Hamilton, *My Sixty Years*, 138-139.

¹⁹ Hamilton, *My Sixty Years*, 41.

²⁰ Hamilton, *My Sixty Years*, 33 (quotations), 34, 41-46, 48-56, 74, 85-87, 129-130, 137-138; Ewers, *Blackfeet*, 124-125, 213; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

Lakotas west of Fort Laramie, he noted that “they are very apprehensive on acct. of the Snakes, who they fear will attack them.”²¹

In the midst of this turmoil, Shoshone country experienced increasingly heavy overland travel. During the second half of the 1840s, Shoshones met the first Mormons bound for the Salt Lake valley, and then the aspiring prospectors headed to capitalize on the California gold strikes. As the hundreds of overland travelers became thousands and reports of the California’s rich gold deposits circulated, the few trappers who remained among the Shoshone – Hamilton included – got swept up in the frenzy and themselves became “forty-niners.”²² By the late 1840s, several factors – the settlement of the “Oregon question” (1846), the beginning of the Mormon exodus to what became Utah (1847), the favorable end of a war with Mexico (1846-1848), and, most significantly, the discovery of gold in California (1848) – fueled American interest in the West and compelled more and more of them to trek through Shoshone territory in pursuit of riches. Between 1840 and 1848, an estimated 18,850 Americans traveled west through South Pass, but the period of 1849-1860 saw approximately 277,400 emigrants make that journey. This heavy traffic, as we shall see, was not kind to Shoshone country.²³

Shoshones found that the bulk of those emigrants traveled west along the “Oregon Trail” that cut across the heart of their territory as part of “trains” that often consisted of

²¹ Francis Parkman, *The Journals of Francis Parkman*, vol. 2, edited by M. Wade (New York: Harpers, 1947), 459 (quotation), 445, 456, 458-461; Hamilton, *My Sixty Years*, 44, 46, 148-152; Åke Hultkrantz, “The Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” in *Shoshone Indians*, edited by Carling I. Malouf and Åke Hultkrantz, 178-217 (New York: Garland, 1974), 203-209; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Fitzpatrick, “Appendix to the Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs,” in *News of the Plains and Rockies, 1803-1865: Original Narratives of Overland Travel and Adventure Selected from the Wagner-Camp and Becker Bibliography of Western Americana*, vol. 3, edited by David A. White, 380-292 (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark, 1996), 386.

²² Hamilton, *My Sixty Years*, 130, 132, 139, 145-147.

²³ Unruh, *Plains Across*, 94-98, 119-120; Mrs. Cyrus Beard, “Some Early Wyoming History West of the 108th Meridian,” *Annals of Wyoming* 3 (1925), 127-136: 134; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 110.

dozens of wagons. But why did those emigrants choose to pass through Shoshone territory en route to distant places? Fur traders and the few emigrants who trickled west during the late 1830s and the 1840s had debunked earlier notions that the Rocky Mountains were impassable. Especially in the wake of Frémont's expeditions, newspapers and politicians extolled the virtues of South Pass as the gateway to the Pacific West. Even as alternate routes such as overseas passages around South America and the shortcut over Panama emerged, the trail through South Pass remained the most affordable route for those traveling to California or Oregon. That route was a challenging one, for Matthew C. Field earlier wrote unfavorably of his experience, curtly noting that, "[t]ravelled from 7a.m. till 6p.m. today without stopping, for want of water, through this "South Pass" seeing no game, and tramping through sage bushes all day."²⁴ Yet, it remained the most practical route for transporting men, families, and their belongings.

More often than not, Shoshones were friendly with emigrants and even helped them. This was in large part due to Washakie, who by the early 1850s earned a reputation as "a great friend of the whites." Cognizant of the military and material benefits that came with establishing friendly relations with Americans (as evidenced by the events of the fur trade era), Washakie and other Shoshone leaders understandably endeavored to assist overland travelers. So, Washakie's growing influence over many Shoshone bands helped to ensure that the emigrants had secure access to South Pass, Fort Bridger, Fort

²⁴ Matthew C. Field, *Mountain and Prairie Sketches*, edited by Kate L. Gregg and John Francis McDermott (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 133 (quotation); Unruh, *Plains Across*, 44-45, 66-68, 87; Murphy and Murphy, "Shoshone-Bannock," 296; *The Shoshone Role in Western History*, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

Hall, and unmolested travel in between those places.²⁵ The records of overland travelers are ripe with accounts of Shoshone hospitality and assistance. One emigrant, for instance, observed in 1850 that Shoshones he met near the Bear River were “extremely friendly, and evinced every disposition to render us an assistance that might be in their power.” Shoshones led thirsty travelers to water sources that they might have otherwise missed, helped them ford rivers, and corralled and returned lost stock. Shoshones sometimes traded horses to overlanders, as was the case when a group of emigrants on the Sweetwater exchanged four yoke of cattle and a wagon (including all of its contents) to some Shoshones for five horses. Other travelers, however, became exasperated when Shoshones needed their horses and therefore refused to part with them. That Washakie and his people adhered to agreements to not trouble overland emigrants did not escape the United States government’s attention; in 1856, Indian agents awarded Washakie some \$4500 in gifts for his people’s friendship.²⁶

The heavy volume of overland traffic through Shoshone country, however, affected the environment and its indigenous inhabitants for the worse. By the early 1850s, travelers killed or drove off the game that once frequented trail areas. The fur trade had already reduced the bison and other game populations that inhabited the river valleys west of the Continental Divide, but the era of overland travel completed their destruction. The thousands of emigrants and their stock overran areas that were once rich in forage. Riverine areas were particularly devastated, for most emigrants visited the same portions

²⁵ Hamilton, *My Sixty Years*, 42 (quotation); *The Shoshone Role in Western History*, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 312-314.

²⁶ Osborne Cross, “Report of the Oregon Expedition,” in *News of the Plains and Rockies, 1803-1865: Original Narratives of Overland Travel and Adventure Selected from the Wagner-Camp and Becker Bibliography of Western Americana*, vol. 5, edited by David A. White, 80-90 (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark, 1996), 82 (quotation); Unruh, *Plains Across*, 157, 160, 163, 164.

of waterways to gather wood and water. By the late 1850s, overland travelers could count on finding very little game along the trails, especially west of the Divide. As one experienced overland traveler noted in 1858 while preparing to trek from southwestern Montana to Fort Bridger, “[w]e knew that as soon as we crossed the Rocky mountain divide onto the sagebrush plains of the Snake river, there would be no game of any kind and also none from there to Fort Bridger.”²⁷

Shoshones found that emigrants not only destroyed the environment along the main trail, but they also caused additional devastation along new trails and “cutoffs” established during the 1840s and 1850s. In a twist of irony, the efforts of Shoshone guides as well as the Natives’ longstanding use of particular trails were instrumental in the establishment of such routes. Shoshones found that when pioneers and United States government engineers extended trails or established “new” ones, they often simply them over existing Shoshone routes of travel. Such was the case in 1858, when F.W. Lander proposed to establish a trail north of the main Oregon Trail “through a pass used by the Shoshonee [*sic*] tribe of Indians, in returning from the “buffalo” during the winter season.” So, from 1849 onward, the United States government established a greater presence in Shoshone country, which began with the purchase of Fort Laramie and Fort Hall to use as centers of trail management and protection. Usually guided by Shoshones, other Natives, or Anglo-American “mountain men,” government agents then set about improving the routes west of the Platte. Within months of beginning that work, army engineers established an alternate trail south of and parallel to the original route along the

²⁷ Granville Stuart, *Forty Years on the Frontier*, edited by Paul C. Phillips (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1925, 2004), part I, 130 (quotation), 124-125; Elliott West, *The Way to the West: Essays on the Central Plains* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 26, 30, 98; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 110-111, 114, 160, 162; Brigham D. Madsen, *The Northern Shoshoni* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton, 1980, 2000), 27; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 20; Mann, *Sacajawea’s People*, 13.

Sweetwater that reduced the length of the journey from the Platte to Fort Bridger. This was perhaps a boon to Shoshones, for that route diverted many emigrants from traveling through and affecting their territory to the north. Further west, engineers pioneered a route that provided more expedient passage to from Fort Bridger to the trail along the Humboldt River in what is now northern Nevada. Throughout the 1850s, Shoshones met government officials and emigrants who were exploring additional options, as they ever endeavored to reduce distances and travel times, as well as to provide travelers with access to areas not yet depleted of forage, timber, and game. Indeed, additional efforts in the 1860s tried to link Fort Bridger directly to Montana through the Wind River valley and Big Horn Basin. Fortunately for Shoshones, no major new route developed out of these efforts; those important hunting grounds fortunately did not yield practical passage. Yet, with the construction of each new trail and cutoff, the emigrants introduced their destructive influence to more of Shoshone territory.²⁸

At times, Shoshones experienced blatant abuse from the interlopers in their territory. Much to the detriment of Shoshones and others, most Americans harbored racialized perceptions of Natives as “uncivilized” peoples who were inferior to Anglo-Americans, although some exhibited “paternalistic” sympathies while others feared those that they saw as ruthless “savages.”²⁹ Crueler men sometimes took potshots at Shoshones and other Natives along the Oregon Trail, killing them for mere sport and to brag to their

²⁸ F.W. Lander, “Practicability of Railroads through the South Pass,” in *News of the Plains and Rockies, 1803-1865: Original Narratives of Overland Travel and Adventure Selected from the Wagner-Camp and Becker Bibliography of Western Americana*, vol. 6, edited by David A. White, 213-333 (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark, 1996), 329 (quotation); Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 111-114; Lawrence M. Woods, *Wyoming’s Big Horn Basin to 1901: A Late Frontier* (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark, 1997), 35-47; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 296.

²⁹ For a discussion of American perceptions of Natives during the era of westward expansion, see Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Knopf, 1978), 134-152.

fellows. In 1849, several Shoshone women suffered when some men belonging to an emigrant train abused and killed them. This act prompted their tribesmen to assault subsequent parties of overlanders. In 1851, another emigrant train reached what was reportedly the best camping spot along the Snake River only to find a Shoshone village already established at that place. The travelers, however, were determined to have that spot; they ordered the Natives to depart and when the Shoshones did not leave fast enough, they fired their shotguns into the air. Perhaps predictably, Shoshone raiders harassed that particular train during the following days. Unfortunately, it appears that Shoshones camping or traveling near the trails lived under the constant threat of emigrants in need of horses, food, or other items simply taking them by force.³⁰

Shoshones and other Natives also dealt with further outbreaks of infectious diseases as overland travel intensified. Emigrants often traveled in rather large “trains,” which provided many crowd diseases such as smallpox with the opportunity to circulate among a group for weeks on end. So, the near-constant contact that some Shoshones established with a steady stream of emigrants enabled more frequent if less deadly epidemics to strike the Shoshones. In 1848, the first year of the “rush” to California, Shoshones contracted smallpox from Oregon Trail emigrants, and then inadvertently infected some Crows. The historical record does not indicate how many Shoshones died during this outbreak, but it could not have been many, for an epidemic that struck them only three years later reportedly killed as much as half of the Eastern Shoshone population. Crows again contracted the virus from the Shoshone at that time, highlighting just how much those two groups interacted. In 1856, yet another smallpox outbreak

³⁰ Cross, “Report of the Oregon Expedition,” 82; Unruh, *Plains Across*, 187; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 112; Madsen, *Northern Shoshoni*, 33-36.

occurred as the American steamboat *Clara* carried the virus to the Arikara villages and it spread from there to the Crows and, perhaps, to Shoshone groups. Several winter counts note that smallpox visited Lakota Sioux, Mandans, and Kiowas in 1861-1862, so it could have very well reached Shoshones again at that time. This series of epidemics hindered Shoshone population growth and they combined with the depletion of resources by overland travelers to devastate the Shoshone world.³¹

Shoshones also contended with an influx of permanent settlers, the bulk of whom were Mormons. Thwarted in their attempts to establish a series of colonies in the East because many Americans did not approve of their practices (particularly polygyny), Mormons turned their attention to “unsettled” tracts of the West during the 1840s. Beginning in 1847, Shoshones began encountering Mormons who entered their country and, of the nearly 300,000 Americans who traveled westward through South Pass between 1840 and 1860, nearly 43,000 of those ended their journey in Utah.³² Jim Bridger reportedly met with Brigham Young in 1847 as the initial Mormon trains made their way beyond the Continental Divide and tried to dissuade him from settling in the Salt Lake country. He admitted that the soil was fine for agriculture, but he also asserted that the nights were too cold for most crops. Yet, Young led his people into their new promised land, Deseret. By the end of 1848, that portion of Shoshone country was home to

³¹ Edwin Thompson Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri*, edited by John C. Ewers (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 185; R.G. Robertson, *Rotting Face: Smallpox and the American Indian* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton, 2001), 290; Demetri B. Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography,” *University of California Anthropological Records* 5, 4 (1947), 245-288: 254; S.J. Fox, “Cultural Ecological Patterns of the Eastern Shoshone,” *Tebiwá* 19 (1976), 1-8: 2; Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 119; West, *Way to the West*, 86-87; Dan Flores, “Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850,” *The Journal of American History* 78, 2 (1991), 465-485: 484; Linea Sundstrom, “Smallpox Used Them up: References to Epidemic Disease in Northern Plains Winter Counts, 1714-1920,” *Ethnohistory* 44, 2 (Spring, 1997), 305-343: 309.

³² Unruh, *Plains Across*, 18-19, 119-120; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 296; Julian H. Steward, *Basin-Plateau Aboriginal Sociopolitical Groups* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1938, 1997), 6.

approximately 4,600 Mormons. So, as Mormons flooded through South Pass, past Fort Bridger, and into the Salt Lake area, they, too, posed challenges for the Shoshones. Their settlements soon sprawled north into the Bear River area and east into the corridor between the Great Salt Lake and Fort Bridger. These settlements deprived Shoshones of lands and resources, limiting, for example, their access to key hunting areas in the Uintah Mountains and elsewhere.³³

Until the early 1860s, management of Indian affairs in Shoshone country – at least in the area encompassing what is now Wyoming, northern Utah, and southern Idaho – was effectively up to Mormons in Salt Lake City rather than United States federal government. Shoshone leaders such as Washakie made their concerns about emigrants depleting resources and settlers taking their lands clear to Young, who in turn called for the federal government to create Native reservations and provide them with instruction in farming. The government offered little response – other than making Brigham Young the *ex officio* director of the newly-created Utah Superintendency of Indian Affairs in 1850 – so Young developed a system by which Mormon missionaries visited Shoshone (and other Native) camps in an effort to disarm them, convert them spiritually, and convince them to transition from foraging to farming. The idea was to “civilize” the Natives and thereby enable the Mormons to more effectively manage land claims.³⁴

Shoshones quickly found that despite Young’s good intentions, they had ample reason to resent his followers’ actions. Indeed, Young’s approach to Indian policy, based

³³ Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 108-110; Gregory R. Campbell, “The Lemhi Shoshone: Ethnogenesis, Sociological Transformations, and the Construction of a Tribal Nation,” *American Indian Quarterly* 25, 4 (Autumn 2001), 539-578: 543; Unruh, *Plains Across*, 120; Madsen, *Northern Shoshoni*, 33-34.

³⁴ Campbell, “Lemhi Shoshone,” 543; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 116; Madsen, *Northern Shoshoni*, 30.

upon a “feed rather than fight” dictum, did not prevent many Mormons from taking liberties with informal agreements with Shoshones. During an 1852 meeting with Washakie, Young asked if the Shoshone would allow Mormons to settle in the Green River area, and the chief replied in the affirmative. Washakie reportedly said that he no longer claimed that area; his people now lived in the Wind River country and along the Sweetwater, only venturing west of the Continental Divide to trade at Fort Bridger. He also informed Young that if the Mormons began to colonize the Green River valley, his people would visit them to trade. When Mormons moved into the Green River area during the following year, however, they affronted Shoshone groups by replacing former trappers or “mountain men” – many of whom were married to Shoshone women – as ferrymen, by building toll bridges, and by taking over Fort Bridger; they also built another post named Fort Supply nearby. Most Shoshones also resented the missionaries’ efforts to convert, disarm, and “civilize” them. So, Washakie was in the minority when it came to being receptive of the Mormons’ appeals. Yet, even Washakie’s willingness to tolerate the Mormons had its limits, for by 1854 he railed against those who encroached on their lands and used up their resources. Washakie, in fact, even informed army officials that he would lend several thousand Shoshone warriors to support government operations in the Salt Lake area during the so-called “Mormon War” in 1857, but the offer was denied. So, as Washakie led his people east of the Divide where they remained effectively neutral, the army wrapped up its punitive expedition during which the Mormons abandoned and burned both Fort Bridger and Fort Supply; the former was rebuilt as an army post.³⁵

³⁵ Madsen, *Northern Shoshoni*, 40 Stuart, *Forty Years*, part I, 48; The Shoshone Role in Western History, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American

To the northwest, the people who became known as the Lemhi finally came into sustained contact with Americans. This began in 1850, when Shoshones inhabiting the Salmon and Lemhi River areas began interacting with Americans after the founding of Fort Owen, a trading post located at a Catholic mission in the Bitterroot River valley of present-day Montana. While Shoshones occasionally visited Fort Owen, traders from that post periodically visited Shoshone camps during their trips to and from Fort Hall. In 1855, Shoshones welcomed the first American settlers into the Salmon River country when 27 Mormons established a mission in that area. Until its abandonment in 1858, the Mormons' Fort Limhi attracted local Shoshones and other Natives (such as Nez Perce bands), who visited the mission to trade and interact with the Mormons. Some Shoshones established semi-permanent villages near the mission and left for a couple of months each fall to hunt bison to the east. For others, the mission was the site of their winter encampments and a reliable source of food during the hard winter months. Most Natives established purely economic relations with the missionaries, but some converted to the Mormon faith and a few Shoshone women married Mormon men. Historians generally believe that most Shoshone (and other Native) converts to Mormonism only did so nominally, in order to secure important economic relationships.³⁶

Political rivalries among Shoshone and other Native groups, however, played a key role in the downfall of the Fort Limhi mission. Longstanding rivalries among prominent Shoshone leaders influenced their interactions with the missionaries, for the

Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 131-132, 133-134, 144, 147, 149-153, 157; Beard, "Some Early Wyoming History," 134; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 30, 32.

³⁶ The Mormons named their mission "Fort Limhi" in reference to King Limhi of the Book of Mormon, who organized a journey of 22 days – the same length as the Mormon journey from the Great Salt Lake to the mission site on the Salmon River. Local Shoshones soon became known by a slightly altered version of that name, "Lemhi." Mann, *Sacajawea's People*, 22-24; Brigham D. Madsen, *The Lemhi: Sacajawea's People* (Caldwell, ID; Caxton, 1979), 32-40; Campbell, "Lemhi Shoshone," 544, 547; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 150-151, 155.

various leaders tried to gain greater influence by currying the Mormons' favor. Also, while some Shoshone leaders initially welcomed the missionaries and encouraged them to cultivate their lands, others resented the Mormon invasion. They railed against the cutting of timber, the impact of cattle-grazing on their hunting grounds, and the shipment of eight wagonloads of smoked salmon to Salt Lake City; Shoshones had agreed that the Mormons could use their resources so long as they did not do so for economic gain. Shoshones also watched as the mission grew at an alarming rate, for the number of missionaries increased to 100 by 1857, with the post featuring 16 cabins, a blacksmith shop, a sawmill, a corral, and irrigation works. As Shoshone groups politically struggled amongst themselves and with Nez Perce bands for the favor of the Mormons, the missionaries interacted with them all and they thereby alienated some groups. Meanwhile, Natives dealt with traders in the Bitterroot valley who reportedly promoted anti-Mormon sentiment and encouraged them to attack the mission. In 1857, Brigham Young visited the Lemhi mission and left encouraged by what he saw – a thriving settlement that had begun farming and converting local Natives – but the effort collapsed soon after he departed. Simmering resentments manifested in a Shoshone raid that drove off many of the missionaries' horses and cattle. Young then ordered the missionaries to return to Salt Lake City. The Mormon mission apparently had a minimal ideological impact on the Natives, but its brief existence brought together previously scattered Shoshone groups in a relatively small area and, through economic, social, and political interactions, Agaidikas (salmon-eaters), Tukudikas (sheep-eaters), and Kucundikas (buffalo-eaters) began to coalesce under the title of "Lemhi."³⁷

³⁷ Campbell, "Lemhi Shoshone," 542, 548; Mann, *Sacajawea's People*, 23-25; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 158-159.

Shoshones struggled to subsist as Mormons and overland travelers further depleted the resources available in lands west of the Continental Divide. Many of the Shoshones who once centralized in the Green River-Bear River region began spending more of their time to the northeast, wintering in the Wind River valley and hunting bison each spring and fall in such areas as the Big Horn Basin to the north and along the North Platte to the east. They sometimes traveled further north and hunted in what is now southwestern Montana. Each summer, some visited the Yampa River valley to dig yampa roots and some traded at Fort Bridger or Salt Lake City, but they otherwise occupied lands east of the Divide. Other Shoshone groups still remained in the Green River-Bear River area more permanently, only going east to hunt each fall. Nevertheless, Utah Indian agents frequently reported that Shoshones within their jurisdiction were hungry, as they noted in 1854 when Washakie bluntly stated that “my people are starving.” The first Utah agency report in 1850 noted that large game was scarce in Shoshone country and that they therefore needed government relief. By the mid-1850s, the United States government began helping the Mormons support the Shoshone, but Washakie lamented that the agents frequently gave his people blankets when they really needed food.³⁸

Changing climate conditions help to explain why Shoshones were hungry during the mid-1800s. The onset of the Little Ice Age in the 1300s had brought generally greater annual precipitation and lower temperatures to the Plains and Rockies, which benefitted forage growth, grazing animals, and their human hunters. The Little Ice Age came to an end in the mid-1800s as warmer temperatures and decreased rainfall prevailed across

³⁸ Washakie, quoted in G.A. Wright, *People of the High Country: Jackson Hole before the Settlers* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 146 (quotation); Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography,” 247; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 20, 30, 34; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 114, 160, 162; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 304; Colin G. Calloway, “Snake Frontiers: The Eastern Shoshones in the Eighteenth Century,” *Annals of Wyoming* 63, 3 (Summer 1991), 82-92: 92.

North America. Historical drought severity indices derived from tree-ring studies reveal that the area encompassing southwestern Wyoming, northern Utah, and southeastern Idaho emerged from a seven-year stretch of relatively wet conditions in 1840, with the period of 1842-1848 constituting the driest stretch since the 1820s. Between 1842 and 1872, the region experienced 19 dry years compared to 12 wet years, contrasting with the period of 1806-1841, which had 20 wet years, 13 dry years, and four in which relatively wet and dry conditions prevailed in different parts of the region. When Frémont visited the Wyoming Basin in 1842, for instance, he noted that “the present year had been one of unparalleled drought, and throughout the country the water had been almost dried up.” He discussed the drought’s impact on the area’s inhabitants, writing that “I was informed that the roving villages of Indians and travellers had never met with difficulty in finding an abundance of grass for their horses; now it was after great search that we were able to find a scanty patch of grass.” He learned from Lakotas that drought and grasshoppers had combined to destroy forage and drive bison out of the general area, remarking that “[t]his was bad news. No grass, no buffalo – food for neither horse nor man.” Stretches of dry conditions also transpired in 1851-1852, 1855-1857, and 1861-1865.³⁹

Ultimately, Shoshones seemed to find food either scarce or in great abundance.

Standing in contrast to the reports of Shoshone hunger are accounts such as one provided

³⁹ Frémont, *First Impressions*, 57-59 (quotations); Paul J. Krusik and Edward R. Cook, “North American Drought Atlas: A History of Meteorological Drought Reconstruction from 835 Tree-Ring Chronologies for the past 2005 Years,” Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory and the National Science Foundation, <http://iridl.ldeo.columbia.edu/SOURCES/LDEO/TRL/NADA2004/pdsi-atlas.html> (accessed February 13, 2013); Brian M. Fagan, *The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History, 1300-1850* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 49-50, Chapter 12; Colin G. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 272; Flores, “Bison Ecology,” 481-482; Ernst Antevs, “Climatic Changes and Pre-White Man,” in *The Great Basin, with Emphasis on Glacial and Postglacial Times*, Bulletin of the University of Utah 38, 20 (June 1948), 168-191; 180, 182; E.C. Pielou, *After the Ice Age: The Return of Life to Glaciated North America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 15, 308, 310.

by an Englishman who traversed the Oregon Trail in 1855. Of his visit to a Shoshone camp near the Green River, he wrote:

“The wigwams were very irregularly erected, composed chiefly of skins, stretched over a few sapling stems, drawn together to a point overhead, The interior was very filthy and disorderly, men, women, and children herding promiscuously, but except at night, the families appeared to live almost entirely in the open air; under the trees and by the river’s bank they clustered in blissful idleness or dreamy childish play. Inside and outside, the huts were covered, in festoons, with dried venison and buffalo-meat; and Mr. Edwardson procured from an elderly squaw, for an old shirt, several pair of deer-skin moccasins and as much venison as he could carry. Moreover, the white visitors smoked with the chief men of the settlement the pipe of peace, which gave them the entrée of all the dwellings...”⁴⁰

This account depicts a people who heavily used resources from the Plains to the east and had plenty. Furthermore, Shoshones happily entertained and traded with the curious emigrants. Such interactions between emigrants and Shoshones were not limited to men; women also engaged in commerce with the travelers.

Many Shoshone groups likely compensated for the loss of access to game by relying more on women’s foraging efforts. Especially in areas not overrun by emigrants, Shoshone women still found yampas, bitterroots, camas, chokeberries, serviceberries, and other roots and berries that they gathered, dried, and prepared as food. This work, in fact, likely intensified even as women engaged in less labor preparing beaver skins and – outside of the major annual hunt – processing bison products. So, despite the fact that the era of overland travel exposed Shoshone women to occasional sexual violence on that part of American emigrants, their status and autonomy may have even increased during this time. As Shoshone groups became less able to depend on men’s hunting efforts to

⁴⁰ Anonymous [Englishman], “Journey from New Orleans to California,” in *News of the Plains and Rockies, 1803-1865: Original Narratives of Overland Travel and Adventure Selected from the Wagner-Camp and Becker Bibliography of Western Americana*, vol. 6, edited by David A. White, 116-120 (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark, 1996), 118-119.

procure adequate sustenance, the value of women's efforts to support them by gathering vegetal foods took on greater importance, even as such labor helped entrench the "poor Digger" image.⁴¹

Shoshones further west – those in the Snake River country – suffered greater hardships than their eastern relatives. Each year, many mounted groups traversed the "Bannock Trail" and other routes to the "buffalo country" of Montana or Wyoming to hunt, eat, and live as they did before trappers and emigrants destroyed their local game. Some, such as those who inhabited the Fort Hall area, often remained with their eastern relatives for several months after the annual bison hunt instead of hastening home to their game-depleted lands along the Snake River. In general, these Shoshones received less attention from United States government officials than the Shoshone of southwestern Wyoming and northeastern Utah. The creation of the Oregon and Utah superintendencies in 1850 placed Shoshones of the Wyoming Basin and northern Utah under the control of agents nearby, in Salt Lake City. Arbitrarily-drawn lines, however, placed Snake River Shoshones under the responsibility of farther-off Oregon agents.⁴²

Yet, the United States government and its problematic treaty-making system produced challenges for Shoshones who made increasing use of lands east of the Divide. In 1851, government officials held their first major treaty council at Fort Laramie. Agents invited the Shoshone to attend, but since the meeting took place in the late summer – just as they prepared for their fall bison hunt – few Shoshones went to the meeting. Washakie was among those who did, so it was during this time that Americans began to recognize

⁴¹ Murphy and Murphy, "Shoshone-Bannock," 306-309; Hultkrantz, "Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area," 203-209.

⁴² Madsen, *Northern Shoshoni*, 27, 30-33; Joel C. Janetski, *The Indians of Yellowstone Park* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 57; Mann, *Sacajawea's People*, 13; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 164.

him as the primary Shoshone chief. The Shoshone, however, had been invited to Fort Laramie as guests, not as participants; their typically strong presence west of the Continental Divide led government officials to think that they did not claim lands east of the Divide. So, as Washakie awaited his turn to speak (which never came), the government agents divided up the western Plains and much of the Wyoming Basin among other Native groups. Of particular importance was that the agents awarded the Big Horn Basin and Wind River valley to the Crow. After the meeting, Washakie expressed displeasure at being unable to voice his concerns about American emigrants and settlers, and their detrimental impact on Shoshone lands. He was also understandably upset that the American officials did not consult him before determining that the Wind River valley belonged to the Crow.⁴³

During the 1850s, Shoshones clashed with many other Natives – particularly Crows – east of the Divide. In 1851, even as Shoshones traveled to the Fort Laramie council, they suffered from a Cheyenne raid that left two Shoshones dead and nearly convinced the party to not attend the meeting. Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos entered Shoshone country to hunt bison and to take Shoshone women, horses, and scalps. Blackfoot invaders entered the Wyoming Basin from the north, but they infrequently traveled far beyond the Yellowstone River country. The major intertribal conflict in which Shoshones engaged during the 1850s was with the Crow, who had received legal right to some lands claimed by Shoshones, especially the Wind River valley. After being at peace for most of the 1840s, Shoshones and Crows now struggled with one another for

⁴³ The Shoshone Role in Western History, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 28-29, 34; Anthony McGinnis, *Counting Coup and Cutting Horses: Intertribal Warfare on the Northern Great Plains, 1738-1889* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990, 2012), 85-86; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 120-123; Woods, *Wyoming's Big Horn Basin*, 20-22.

control of “Warm Valley.” The conflict reached a climax at the 1856 Battle of Crowheart Butte, where an estimated 100 Crows and 50 Shoshones perished after the two groups collided as Shoshones returned to the south after wintering in what is now Montana. Nevertheless, raids and skirmishes persisted during the following years, disrupting Shoshone subsistence, travel, and trade. It appears that by the end of the decade, Shoshones and Crows were again at peace, for they again united to oppose the incursions of Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos.⁴⁴

Most Shoshones, resentful of the ongoing detrimental impact of emigrants and settlers on their environments, became less friendly with the American invaders. Throughout the 1850s, Washakie lamented that emigrants and settlers took Shoshone lands and resources, but he maintained that war was not the answer. By the late 1850s, he reported that many other Shoshone leaders leaned toward war, although he noted that some committed acts of violence only to receive gifts intended to dissuade further attacks. Yet, a decade of emigrants and settlers had produced rifts between Shoshones who wanted to war on the Americans and those who did not; by 1859, Washakie led the minority who favored peaceful relations. Those who supported war, such as Pocatello in southern Idaho, reportedly saw Washakie as an “old woman” because he refused to fight. Growing Shoshone hostility toward Americans had much to do with the fact that, even as American emigration to California and Oregon slowed, new attractions – such as the

⁴⁴ According to a legend, Crowheart Butte earned its name after Chief Washakie defeated a Crow warrior in a one-on-one fight and then ate his heart. William Bright, *Native American Placenames of the United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 126-127; Pierre-Jean De Smet, *Life, Letters, and Travels of Father Pierre-Jean de Smet, S.J.*, vol. 2, edited by Hiram Martin Chittenden and Alfred Talbot Richardson (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1905), 679; Margaret Irvin Carrington, *Absaroka: Home of the Crows, being the Experience of an Officer's Wife on the Plains* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1868), 14; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 117-118, 168-174; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 85-86; Denig, *Five Indian Tribes*, 203; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 34; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 181; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 304-305.

Comstock Lode in western Nevada – still drew emigrants through and into Shoshone territory.⁴⁵ The “miserable Digger Indians” of the Great Basin, who inhabited lands that were once of little interest to Americans, grew unhappy as Americans traveled through and then settled on their lands. To the east, other Shoshone groups seethed as the 1862 discovery of gold in western Montana led to the establishment of a trail from Salt Lake City to the Montana gold fields that cut through Shoshone lands which Americans had hitherto little affected.⁴⁶

In Lemhi country, Shoshones had a brief respite following the end of the Mormon mission. During the next few years, their primary interactions with Americans consisted of visits to Fort Owen, as well as their encounters with various travelers, traders, and “mountain men” during their hunting and winter camping in southwestern Montana. But during the early 1860s, the discovery of gold in Montana brought new challenges. Gold strikes such as that on Grasshopper Creek 1862 led to the birth of Bannack City and other boomtowns as prospectors flooded into the area to “strike it rich.” Shoshones who depended upon a strong fall bison hunt for winter provisions suffered and tensions arose as settlements as well as travel routes drove game out of key hunting areas. It appears, however, that despite some violence – such as when a “road agent” killed Lemhi chief Snag near Bannack City in 1862 – leaders like Tendoy were able to establish and maintain peaceful if tense relations with the miners. As one English traveler remarked in

⁴⁵ Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 165-168, 176; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 323-325; Campbell, “Lemhi Shoshone,” 544.

⁴⁶ Steward, *Basin-Plateau*, 6-7 (quotation); Madsen, *Northern Shoshoni*, 27, 33-36, 40-41; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 27-28.

1862, “[t]he Snake Indians, occupying the Salmon River country, manifest a disposition to be hostile, but have committed no depredations of consequence yet.”⁴⁷

Yet, by the early 1860s hunger resulting from environmental degradation compelled many Shoshones to turn to war. As travelers and settlers exterminated the remaining game populations west of the Divide, new routes of travel and the founding of gold-mining settlements depleted areas that had remained bison-rich into the 1850s, such as parts of southwestern Montana. Consequently, by the early 1860s the “wretchedness” and “poverty” of the Lemhi became the subject of Anglo-American observations of those Natives.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Shoshones struggled as the efforts of Utah Indian agents to feed them lacked strong organization as well as adequate government support. In 1861, the Utah Indian agent at Salt Lake City traveled west along a route toward California, noting the “poverty, misery, and wretchedness” of the Shoshones and others that he met in the northern Great Basin. He concluded that “[t]hese are unquestionably the poorest Indians on the continent” and called for the creation of reserves or farms in the Green River area to help them survive.⁴⁹ The next year, the agent based at Fort Bridger reported that his Shoshones were “in a destitute condition,” for there was “very little game in this territory.” He went on to suggest the creation of a Shoshone reservation in the Wind

⁴⁷ Wadsworth, “Route to Cariboo,” in *News of the Plains and Rockies, 1803-1865: Original Narratives of Overland Travel and Adventure Selected from the Wagner-Camp and Becker Bibliography of Western Americana*, vol. 8, edited by David A. White, 107-109 (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark, 1996), 109 (quotation); Stuart, *Forty Years*, part I, 125-127, 129; Campbell, “Lemhi Shoshone,” 549-550; Madsen, *Lemhi*, 44-45; Mann, *Sacajawea’s People*, 25-26.

⁴⁸ Madsen, *Lemhi*, 44; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 38-39; Madsen, *Northern Shoshoni*, 40-41; Campbell, “Lemhi Shoshone,” 549-550.

⁴⁹ 1861 Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Box 60, Folder 3, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

River valley, for doing so would remove those Natives from areas of travel and settlement while providing them with a homeland that had agricultural potential.⁵⁰

During the late 1850s and early 1860s, many Shoshone bands began assaulting emigrant trains and settlements. While Washakie maintained relative peace in western Wyoming, Shoshones elsewhere raided travelers along the trails to California, Oregon, and Montana, taking lives, livestock, food, and goods. Even some of the easternmost Shoshones disregarded Washakie's wishes and participated in a widespread 1862 joint Shoshone-Bannock assault on Oregon Trail stations that stretched from the North Platte to the Bear River. Those depredations culminated in what became known as the Bear River Massacre. In January 1863, a detachment of California volunteers under Colonel Patrick Connor fell upon a Shoshone camp along the Bear River and what began as a battle evolved into a rout as the Natives ran out of ammunition. By the time the fight ended, the toll included over 200 Shoshones killed, 160 women and children taken captive, 175 horses captured, and 70 lodges destroyed. Among the contents of the camp were items taken during raids on American settlements and emigrant trains. But that hardly justified the harsh treatment of Shoshone women and children after the "battle" ended; the soldiers reportedly raped many women and brutally killed infants.⁵¹

In the aftermath of the Bear River Massacre, Shoshones met with Utah Indian Agency superintendent James Doty to negotiate a series of treaties between the United States government and Shoshone groups with the intention of preventing future conflicts. The Fort Bridger Treaty of July 2, 1863, signed between "Shoshone Eastern Bands" and

⁵⁰ 1862 Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Box 60, Folder 3, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁵¹ Madsen, *Northern Shoshoni*, 33-36; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 156, 178, 180-197; Murphy and Murphy, "Shoshone-Bannock," 305; Campbell, "Lemhi Shoshone," 549-550; Madsen, *Northern Shoshoni*, 36; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 27-28.

representatives of the federal government, marked the formal emergence of the Eastern Shoshone as a distinct geopolitical entity. This treaty, signed by Washakie and others who led Shoshone groups in southwestern Wyoming, secured Shoshone promises that they would not trouble overland travelers, provided for the protection of future telegraph, stage, and railroad lines through their country, and established that the government would provide annuities as compensation for the depletion of Shoshone resources. Doty concluded four similar treaties with other Shoshone groups during the next several months, and these collectively defined the first Shoshone “reservation,” which encompassed some 44,672,000 acres of the Intermountain West. It included what became southeastern Idaho, northern Utah, a strip of northwestern Colorado, and about one-third of Wyoming, but it honored the government’s 1851 agreement with the Crow by giving Shoshones lands in Wyoming west of the Divide and south of the Wind River valley to the North Platte River, but not the Wind River valley itself. Other Shoshone groups were unable to attend their respective treaty negotiations because they were hungry and their meetings transpired during their annual bison hunt. Tendoy, for instance, sent word that “hunger had caused them [his Lemhis] to go in search of game,” but that he agreed to the terms of a treaty signed at Soda Springs.⁵²

⁵² Campbell, “Lemhi Shoshone,” 551 (quotation); Copy of Fort Bridger Treaty, July 2, 1863, Box 6, Folder 14, James K. Moore Family Papers, 1824-2001, Collection Number 00051, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; The Wind River Reservation Yesterday and Today, Box 3, Folder 8, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Wind River Reservation Resume, as of December, 1976, Box 3, Folder 8, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; The Shoshone Role in Western History, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 305-306; Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography,” 270; Woods, *Wyoming’s Big Horn Basin*, 22; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 201-206; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, xiii; Madsen, *Northern Shoshoni*, 36-37; Mann, *Sacajawea’s People*, 27.

Doty was happy with the agreements, but Washakie and other Shoshones were not. Washakie had, as early as 1858, expressed interest in leading his people onto a permanent reservation where they would be safe from Americans and other Natives alike. There, they would continue to hunt as they learned how to farm and ranch. His initial proposals concerned a reservation along Henry's Fork of the Green River or in the Uintah Mountains, but by 1861 Washakie stated that he would cede all Shoshone claims to their Green River, Bear River, and Salt Lake lands in exchange for a reservation east of the Divide, as well as more annuities to help his people make the transition to a settled life. He therefore found the 1863 Fort Bridger Treaty lacking in many ways. It defined a vast Shoshone "reservation" that included existing American travel routes and settlements within its boundaries, thereby not giving Shoshones their own land; the treaty simply defined their territory for the purposes of Indian management. By including few bison-rich areas within that Shoshone "reservation," the 1863 treaties failed to provide Washakie's Shoshones with the lands that they needed the most – the Wind River valley and adjacent areas.⁵³ Clearly, Doty did not truly care about what the Shoshone needed, as he summed up the significance of his 1863 treaties by writing that:

"The importance of these Treaties to the Government and to its citizens can only be appreciated by those who know the value of the Continental Telegraph and Overland Stage to the commercial and mercantile world, and the safety and security which peace alone can give to Emigrant Trains, and to the Gold Discoveries in the North which exceed in richness – at least in the quality of gold – any discoveries on this Continent."⁵⁴

In the end, the 1863 treaties changed little as far as Shoshones were concerned. The ongoing depletion of game compelled them to rely upon a broader subsistence base as well as government annuities. For many groups, bison remained important to their

⁵³ Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 35-37, 40.

⁵⁴ James Doty, quoted in Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 206-207.

diets, but in areas depleted of bison, other large game as well as smaller animals, fish, and plants gained greater importance. Despite the terms of the 1863 treaties, many Shoshones continued to use lands beyond their “reservation,” for the bison herds of central and eastern Wyoming were among the most numerous in the West. Shoshones often wintered in the Wind River valley, and they hunted to the north in the Big Horn Basin and along the Yellowstone River. Indian agents reported that Shoshone groups that were able to routinely access those areas were the “most wealthy” while their relatives to the west were “very poor.” Each summer, Shoshones had further incentive to visit Fort Bridger, where they picked up their annuities that were supposed to arrive prior to their annual bison hunt. Unfortunately, the annuities often arrived late and Shoshones either had to delay their hunt, skip it, or return to Fort Bridger for the goods immediately after the hunt concluded instead of wintering at one of their usual locations. Further issues arose as the United States government concluded treaties with other groups – such as one with Bannocks in 1865 – which, without the consent of the Shoshone, diverted portions of their annuities to other groups.⁵⁵

Yet, the abundance of the Wind River country declined during the 1860s as Shoshones, Crows, Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos competed over bison herds. Commercial hide-hunting depleted the herds on the Plains during the 1850s and 1860s, so Plains groups turned to the Powder River valley, Big Horn Basin, Wind River valley, and

⁵⁵ Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1864, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 2, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; 1865 Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Box 60, Folder 3, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; 1867 Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Box 60, Folder 3, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Anonymous Interview, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 3, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 42-45; P.L. Williams, “Personal Recollections of Wash-A-Kie, Chief of the Shoshones,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 1 (1928), 101-106: 103-106; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 209.

other areas to kill bison for sustenance and the market. Shoshones sometimes clashed with Crow bands as they encountered one another, but Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos posed the greatest threat. The government had given those groups northeastern Wyoming as a hunting ground, but they frequently raided west and south into Crow and Shoshone lands, thereby disrupting their hunting efforts. Sometimes, Shoshone bands refused to leave the Green River area to hunt bison to the northeast, instead opting to subsist on government rations and whatever game and plants they found west of the Divide. During the mid-1860s, though, the Lakota reportedly sent emissaries to tribes throughout the western Plains and the Intermountain West – including Shoshones – to “form a confederation of all the tribes and sweep the white man from the face of the earth.” Washakie and other Shoshone leaders rebuffed the offer, honoring their pledge to remain at peace with the Americans. Lakotas and Cheyennes did not take kindly to their decision and they renewed their efforts to take Shoshone captives, horses, and scalps.⁵⁶

Shoshones, however, were minimally involved in the destruction of the bison herds for solely commercial purposes. They traded many robes at Fort Bridger, but their harvests apparently focused first and foremost on their own sustenance and outfitting. In 1866, for instance, the agent at Fort Bridger noted that Shoshones brought some 1000 bison robes to trade after their fall and winter hunts, but one cannot assume that Shoshones killed bison specifically for the market. They harvested bison for their meat, kept some robes for themselves, and then traded surplus hides for goods that they needed.

⁵⁶ Stuart, *Forty Years*, part II, 60 (quotation); Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1866-1867, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 2, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 40-44, 47-48; Preston Holder, *The Hoe and the Horse on the Plains: A Study of Cultural Development among North American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 113; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 109, 115; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 208-209, 212, 214.

They probably often killed more bison than they needed, but the fact of the matter was that bison availability came in boom and bust cycles, and Shoshones knew that.⁵⁷

Although Washakie led a substantial number of Shoshones – and in American eyes represented even more of them – political organization was a little more complex than that. All told, during the mid-1860s some 4000-4500 total Shoshones and Bannocks reportedly inhabited western Wyoming, southeastern Idaho, and northern Utah. Of those, agents counted between 1500 and 1900 as members of Washakie’s “band,” or, more accurately, mounted Shoshones who visited Fort Bridger, hunted and wintered in the Wyoming Basin, and occasionally ventured into Utah and Idaho. Indeed, agents associated all of the easternmost Shoshone groups with Washakie, but the reality of the situation was that he guided his own band of several hundred people and only occasionally led larger groups, such as during the fall bison hunt. For much of the year, though, other men led the various bands. For instance, Tavonasia’s Shoshones lived mostly west of the Divide, ranging from north to south between the future Yellowstone Park area and northern Utah. Others, such as Basil and Baptiste, led bands that followed migration cycles similar to that of Washakie’s band, but for most of the year remained separated from Washakie’s leadership.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ 1866 Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Box 60, Folder 3, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 333.

⁵⁸ 1864 Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Demetri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 2, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; 1865 Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Box 60, Folder 3, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; 1866 Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Box 60, Folder 3, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; 1867 Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Box 60, Folder 3, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1866-1867, Demetri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 1, Folder 2, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Charles Eastman Indian Testimonies, 1925, Box 53, Folder 8,

By the mid-1860s, it was clear to Shoshones, Indian agents, and other Natives alike that the 1863 “reservation” was not working out. Taghee, a Bannock chief who led his people on hunts along with Shoshones in western Wyoming and southwestern Montana, lamented in 1867 that “[o]ur hunting is not so good as it used to be” and asserted that his people’s future reservation must provide local access to one of the few remaining bison-rich areas.⁵⁹ At about the same time, Washakie reportedly “expressed the hope and desire that his young men would settle down and engage in raising cattle and other domestic animals. He seemed to have realized that in the development and progress of the human race from barbarism to the higher civilization, that the pastoral life naturally precedes agricultural pursuits.” Although composed by an Anglo-American and therefore fraught with contemporary racialized language, this passage demonstrates that Washakie understood that his people’s days as migratory hunters were nearly over and that they needed to begin taking up ranching and farming.⁶⁰ Indian agents agreed with Washakie, for in 1865 one argued that “[w]ild Indians, like wild horses, must be corralled upon reservations.” Constructive advice followed in 1866, when the agent called for the creation of a reservation, preferably in the Wind River valley, so Shoshones could stop “roaming” and begin farming. Indeed, that area was one of the few in the region that had high agricultural potential, and it still offered game for the Natives to hunt as they transitioned to farming. Another agent noted that the Wind River valley’s isolation from the major lines of travel and transportation might be problematic in terms of getting

Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 203-209.

⁵⁹ Taghee, quoted in Mann, *Sacajawea’s People*, 52.

⁶⁰ Williams, “Personal Recollections,” 103-106.

annuities to the Shoshones, but that very “isolation” from settlers and travelers was part of the reason why there was still game in that area and why Shoshones wanted it.⁶¹

There was, however, a potential obstacle that might stand in the way of Shoshone desires for a reservation in the Wind River valley. The Indian agent at Salt Lake City recommended that valley as a reservation site in 1866, “unless it shall be found to be rich in mines of gold and silver and springs of petroleum. Should this be the case, it would not perhaps be the policy of the government to prevent the development of its mineral resources by setting it apart as a reservation.” Years earlier, one of Washakie’s sons reportedly discovered oil along the Wind River during a bison hunt when he fetched water from a spring. Washakie said that Shoshones used petroleum as a lubricant and for medical purposes. The first known American “discovery” of oil in the Wind River country occurred in 1834, when trapper Zenas Leonard found a petroleum spring that ran into the Popo Agie River. Although oil extraction eventually became a significant part of the Eastern Shoshone economy, it did not yet emerge as a major issue. But gold did. As early as 1842, an American Fur Company trapper found gold south of the Wind River valley near South Pass, but the initial finds did not warrant anything more than periodic small-scale prospecting during the next two decades. In the second half of the 1860s, however, further findings in the area produced a “rush,” and in 1867, the Sweetwater Mining District was founded to manage three boomtowns, the largest of which, South Pass, had 1000 American occupants by the end of 1868.⁶²

⁶¹ 1865 Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Box 60, Folder 3, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming (quotation); 1866 Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Box 60, Folder 3, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 209.

⁶² 1866 Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Box 60, Folder 3, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

Although it was in some ways problematic for the Shoshone, the emergence of the Sweetwater Mining District did not deter them from wanting the nearby Wind River valley as a reservation. Indeed, Shoshones and miners remained on generally friendly terms, despite the fact that influxes of prospectors, settlers, and businessmen into the Sweetwater area depleted game herds. As of yet, though, the miners and settlers made few inroads into the Wind River country, but their close proximity afforded Shoshones more convenient trade. At the same time, the miners appreciated having friendly Natives nearby to help them fend off the Lakota raiders who visited the area with alarming frequency. In fact, most miners favored the creation of a Shoshone reservation in the Wind River valley, for it would serve as something of a buffer zone against “hostile” raiders from the northeast. Shoshones likewise probably hoped that having settlers and perhaps an army garrison nearby would help them ward off enemy incursions.⁶³

Lemhi Shoshones dealt with growing subsistence issues after Americans also found gold in their territory. In 1866, miners who crossed the Bitterroot Range into Lemhi country discovered gold on Napias Creek and another “boomtown” soon emerged. This post-Civil War settlement, established by former Confederates and Unionists, was divided into a portion known as Grantville and another part called Leesburg. In 1867, a supply center that became known as Salmon emerged about 17 miles east of the mining district, and the area developed rapidly as ranchers and farmers followed in the wake of

(quotation); Zenas Leonard, *Narrative of the Adventures of Zenas Leonard: Five Years as a Mountain Man in the Rocky Mountains*, edited by Milo Milton Quaife (Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1923), 226; A Short Sketch of Old Chief Washakie, Box 2, Folder 17, John Roberts Papers, Collection Number 00037, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 296; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 217; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 36.

⁶³ Report on the Proceedings of the 1868 Fort Bridger Treaty Meeting, Box 53, Folder 8, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 217; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 44-45, 49-50; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 121.

the miners. So, game populations declined and American fishing activities disrupted Shoshone efforts to catch salmon. Furthermore, settlers moved onto Shoshone lands, cut timber, and turned hunting grounds into farmlands and pastures. Consequently, Thomas F. Meagher, the Montana Territory governor, soon wrote of the Lemhis' "misery, filth, and dire want." Whereas mining operations in the Sweetwater area led to minimal encroachment on key Eastern Shoshone lands, gold strikes in Lemhi country drew prospectors directly onto vital Lemhi lands and they suffered as a result.⁶⁴

To the south, Shoshones also struggled with influxes of American settlers. These Shoshones, who annually migrated between the Bear River valley, the Snake River Plain, and the Great Plains, typically had little access to large game and were, according to local agents, therefore "very poor" and in need of a reservation. One of the few areas that still had some game was the Portneuf River or Fort Hall region, which by the mid-1860s emerged as a frontrunner for a reservation. To the west, the American settlement of the Boise region gave rise to further calls for a reservation. Development in the Boise area from 1863 onward produced conflicts as settlers took Shoshone lands, Shoshones raided settlements, the Americans organized retaliatory attacks, and so forth. The settlers even resented Shoshones who remained friendly with them, for those Natives took refuge among the Americans in order to distinguish themselves from their hostile relatives; Americans grew tired of their pleas for food. Boise-area settlers, therefore, wanted the nearby Shoshones removed to the Fort Hall area which, unlike the Wind River area, was well-located in terms of agency management (annuity transport).⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Thomas F. Meagher, quoted in Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 223-224 (quotation); Madsen, *Lemhi*, 48-53; Mann, *Sacajawea's People*, 15, 26-27.

⁶⁵ 1866 Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Box 60, Folder 3, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

In 1868, prominent Shoshone leaders again met with United States government representatives to make treaties. In an effort to preserve peaceful relations with Shoshone groups, foster their transition to agriculture, and secure lands for the Union Pacific Railroad route that would soon pass through Shoshone country, officials sought to establish Shoshones on small, well-defined reservations. One of the resulting agreements was the second Fort Bridger treaty, which created the Wind River Reservation for the Eastern Shoshone and Bannock as well as the Fort Hall Indian Reservation for the Shoshone and Bannock groups of southern Idaho. The Wind River Reservation encompassed 3,054,182 acres of land in the newly-formed Wyoming Territory and the reservation at Fort Hall consisted of some 1,800,000 acres on the Snake River Plain in the Portneuf River drainage. The treaty also gave Shoshones the right to hunt on adjacent unoccupied off-reservation lands, which intended to appease them and help them subsist until they became full-time farmers. As government negotiators informed the Shoshone, “[i]n a few years the game will become scarce and you will not find sufficient to support your people. You will then have to live in some other way than by hunting and fishing.” The treaty, therefore, included “civilizing” provisions for each reservation, such as for the eventual parceling out of farm lands and the building of schools and other institutions.⁶⁶

(quotation); 1867 Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Box 60, Folder 3, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Madsen, *Northern Shoshoni*, 43-51.

⁶⁶ Report on the Proceedings of the 1868 Fort Bridger Treaty Meeting, Box 53, Folder 8, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming (quotation); Wind River Reservation Resume, as of December, 1976, Box 3, Folder 8, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; The Wind River Reservation Yesterday and Today, Box 3, Folder 8, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, ix, 50; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 219-222; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 296; Woods, *Wyoming’s Big Horn Basin*, 22-23; Mann, *Sacajawea’s People*, 28; Madsen, *Northern Shoshoni*, 53-56.

Shoshone signatories, particularly Washakie, lauded the 1868 Fort Bridger Treaty.

After the meeting concluded, he reportedly said that:

“I am laughing because I am happy. Because my heart is good. As I said two days ago, I like the country you mentioned, then, for us, the Wind River valley... When we want to grow something to eat and hunt I want the Wind River Country... We may not for one, two or three years be able to till the ground. The Sioux may trouble us. But when the Sioux are taken care of, we can do well. Will the whites be allowed to build houses on our reservation? I do not object to traders coming among us, and care nothing about the miners and mining company where they are getting out gold. I may bye and bye get Some of that myself. I want for my home the valley of Wind River and lands on its tributaries as far east as the Popo-Agie, and I want the privilege of going over the mountains to hunt were I please [sic].”⁶⁷

Washakie was happy to have the Wind River valley as a home, but he expressed some concerns about the future. He wondered about the extent of American encroachment on his land and warned the agents that the looming Lakota threat might delay their transition to farming. Migratory bison-hunting would therefore likely remain a fixture of Shoshone subsistence during the coming years.⁶⁸

Beginning in 1868, then, most Shoshones of the Intermountain West began relocating to their respective reservations. This process constituted the final major component in the centuries-long process of ethnogenesis. Shoshones from throughout southern Idaho, from the western groups of the Boise area to the mounted groups that

⁶⁷ Report on the Proceedings of the 1868 Fort Bridger Treaty Meeting, Box 53, Folder 8, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁶⁸ Bannocks, however, were unsatisfied with the results of the meeting. Their leader, Taghee, argued that even though his people were friends of the Shoshone and they therefore often traveled and camped with them, they did not want to share the Wind River Reservation; they wanted their own land. The Bannocks therefore only inhabited the Wind River Reservation until 1869, when the government moved them to Fort Hall (where they nevertheless had to share land with the Shoshones of southern Idaho who coalesced there). Report on the Proceedings of the 1868 Fort Bridger Treaty Meeting, Box 53, Folder 8, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; The Shoshone Role in Western History, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 226; Madsen, *Northern Shoshoni*, 52-53.

ranged between the Bear River and upper Snake River, thus became the Fort Hall Shoshone. By the end of 1869, most Idaho Shoshones consolidated on the Fort Hall Reservation, except some “Sheepeaters” whom agents reported still inhabited the rugged mountain ranges north of the Snake River Plain. Various Bannock groups joined them in entering a new era defined by farming and ranching rather than hunting and foraging.⁶⁹

The people now known as the Lemhi did not yet settle on a reservation. Government representatives had met with Tendoy and other Lemhi leaders in 1868 and drawn up the Virginia City Treaty, which provided for annuities and the creation of two Lemhi “townships” along the North Fork of the Salmon River. In exchange, Lemhis agreed to surrender their claims to all other lands. That treaty, however, was never ratified by the United States Senate and the Lemhi position in the Salmon River country continued to erode as increasing numbers of miners, settlers, and ranchers undermined Lemhi subsistence systems into the 1870s.⁷⁰

At the Wind River Reservation, several groups coalesced to form the Eastern Shoshone tribe. The core of the tribe was Washakie’s band and other bison-hunting Shoshones who had long used the Wind River valley and adjacent areas. This group was highly interethnic, for Bannocks, Flatheads, Crows, and others frequently intermarried with Shoshones; Washakie himself was half Flathead and he had Crow and Ute wives. The Wind River population also included Haivodikas (“Dove-eaters”) who had splintered from the bison-hunting bands during the 1830s or 1840s and thereafter largely remained in southwestern Wyoming, where they acted as middlemen in the trade between Plains

⁶⁹ Mann, *Sacajawea’s People*, 28; Madsen, *Northern Shoshoni*, 53-56; Campbell, “Lemhi Shoshone,” 551.

⁷⁰ Madsen, *Lemhi*, 53-60; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 223-224; Mann, *Sacajawea’s People*, 28.

Indians and Fort Bridger although they continued to hunt some bison. Finally, the “Sheepeaters” of the Wind River Mountains and other nearby ranges joined the reservation population. Many of these remained in their high-altitude hunting territories into the 1870s, but they gradually relocated to the Wind River valley or to Fort Hall, especially as Lakotas and other enemies raided their homelands.⁷¹

Together, these groups began the long, difficult process of adjusting to reservation life. Indian agents wanted Shoshones to immediately take up farming, but it was simply not yet possible. The constant threat of Lakota raiders rendered the construction of permanent settlements and farming communities a near-impossibility. Into the early 1870s, Shoshones and Sweetwater District settlers cooperated to repel Sioux invaders, which produced some interethnic solidarity that overshadowed some brewing conflicts between Shoshones and the settlers. By 1870, no agency had been established on the Wind River Reservation, so Shoshones did not receive much-needed farming supplies prior to that time. Meanwhile, the military post established in 1869 at the future site of Lander, Camp Augur (soon relocated and renamed Camp Brown), did little to deter Lakota raiders and the Eastern Shoshone remained unable to farm. Finally, it is worth noting that although Washakie expressed interest in having government agents transform his people into farmers, it is possible that many Shoshone men – including Washakie himself – ultimately resisted that transition for as long as possible. Working with plants –

⁷¹ Shimkin, “Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography,” 255; Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demetri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 185-186, 199-203, 209-210; Janetski, *Indians of Yellowstone Park*, 42; Hultkrantz, “Accommodation and Persistence: Ecological Analysis of the Religion of the Wind Sheepeater Indians in Wyoming, U.S.A.,” *Temenos* 17 (1981), 35-44: 36-37; D. Dominick, “The Sheepeaters,” *Annals of Wyoming* 36, 2 (1964), 131-168: 137, 138-140, 143; The Shoshone Role in Western History, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 24.

whether foraging or cultivating crops – was traditionally women’s labor among Native groups. Most Native men, therefore, did not embrace what they saw as an emasculating transformation and they continued to hunt for as long as they could. This may have been the case among Shoshones despite Washakie’s statements in favor of farming.⁷²

Fortunately, the government had given Eastern Shoshones one of the most hospitable and resource-rich areas in the Wyoming Territory. The Wind River valley had a pleasant year-round climate, including about 15-20 inches of annual precipitation, a mean July temperature of 72° Fahrenheit, and a mean January temperature of 18° F. It was also one of the best-watered areas of Wyoming, with the Wind, Little Wind, and Popo Agie river systems providing reliable access to fresh water. The geographically-diverse reservation included high mountain peaks, conifer forests, sagebrush hills, grass-covered plains, and timbered river valleys. A wide variety of flora and fauna were also found in the area, for its altitude range of 5000 to 12,000 feet allowed many species to inhabit particular areas. Shoshones had access to bighorn sheep, elk, deer, pronghorn, a variety of smaller mammals and birds such as rabbits and sage hens, as well as trout, grayling, and other fishes. Although few bison remained in the Wind River valley itself, large herds ranged to the north, in the valleys of the Big Horn and Powder Rivers. Women also had ready access to currants, gooseberries, hawthorns, gilia, cinque-foil, tobacco roots, biscuit roots, wild onions, wild turnips, and other plant foods. All of this was important, for

⁷² 1870 Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Box 60, Folder 3, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Hultkrantz, “Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area,” 209-210; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 54-57; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 224-225, 227; Murphy and Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock,” 306; McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 134-135.

government annuities were usually inadequate and often included more material goods (such as blankets) than food.⁷³

So, during the early years of the Wind River Reservation's existence, Shoshones continued to subsist much as they did before. In the spring, men hunted bison locally, fished, and hunted small game such as rabbits while women gathered roots as well cinque-foil, gilia, and other greens. Summer found Shoshones in their smallest living groups of the year performing a wide variety of activities, from trading at Fort Bridger to hunting elk and deer as well as gathering berries in the mountains. During the fall, they congregated as one large group in the Wind River valley and then ventured north into the Big Horn or Powder River area to hunt bison. These trips into bison-rich lands were usually not extensive, however, for Washakie reported during the early 1870s that Sioux hostility limited his peoples' ability to access the Plains. As winter approached, they broke into smaller family or band-based camps and lived along wooded waterways while subsisting on pemmican, stored plant foods, and occasional fresh game.⁷⁴

Yet, the Wind River Shoshone faced some challenges. Almost as soon as their reservation came into existence, Northern Arapaho bands claimed the Wind River valley. Washakie allowed his former enemies to camp on reservation lands in 1868-1869 while they waited for a permanent home, but the Shoshone chief made his distrust of the Arapaho clear. During this period of peace between Shoshones and Arapahos, the agents at Fort Bridger drew rations out of the Shoshone annuities to give to the hungry

⁷³ Wind River Reservation Resume, as of December, 1976, Box 3, Folder 8, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 48-49, 51, 53.

⁷⁴ 1870 Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Box 60, Folder 3, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Murphy and Murphy, "Shoshone-Bannock," 306-309; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 53; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 225; Woods, *Wyoming's Big Horn Basin*, 23-24; Hultkrantz, "Shoshones in the Rocky Mountain Area," 203-209.

Arapahos. Although the Shoshone agent reported in 1870 that the two groups were at peace and moving toward an agreement to share the Wind River Reservation, any such effort collapsed as Arapaho warriors lent credence to Washakie's distrust by committing some depredations on Shoshone camps.⁷⁵

Furthermore, the growth and development of the Sweetwater area far outpaced that of the Wind River Reservation. Even before the Eastern Shoshone agency relocated from Fort Bridger to Camp Brown (later renamed Fort Washakie), the Union Pacific Railroad reached and extended through southern Wyoming (1869), bringing even more Americans to the Sweetwater area. To protect the railroads and the emigrants, the government established Fort Stambaugh near South Pass City in 1869. By 1870, some 3000 Americans inhabited the Sweetwater Mining District and their attention increasingly focused on the Wind River valley, which offered the most arable land within a 100-mile radius of South Pass City. Furthermore, the boundaries drawn up during the 1868 Fort Bridger Treaty negotiations placed three mining towns on or at the fringes of the reservation. To the dismay of Shoshones, some settlers entered their territory and began homesteading in the eastern portion of the reservation along the Popo Agie River.⁷⁶

So, Eastern Shoshones had a complex relationship with Sweetwater area settlers. Washakie, for example, reportedly visited South Pass City once or twice each year, visiting, trading, and eating with Americans while traders and others sometimes visited Shoshone camps. Each year, Shoshones traded a reported \$20,000 in bison robes at South

⁷⁵ 1870 Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Box 60, Folder 3, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 227-228.

⁷⁶ Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 46, 51, 54-57; Murphy and Murphy, "Shoshone-Bannock," 296; Campbell, "Lemhi Shoshone," 552; Shimkin, "Wind River Shoshone Ethnogeography," 270; Beard, "Some Early Wyoming History," 134-135.

Pass City and Fort Bridger combined. Moreover, as the Union Pacific Railroad approached South Pass, Eastern Shoshones supplied the workers with bison meat. On the other hand, resentments brewed as settlers hunted on reservation lands and Shoshones exercised their right to hunt off-reservation, killing game that Americans claimed as theirs. In 1870, for instance, the Shoshone agent noted that there were some “very bad men” from the Sweetwater Mining District living on the reservation and killing game. Washakie reported that these men and others drove game off of his reservation, thereby compelling the Shoshone to further expose themselves to enemy raiders in order to hunt. The agent confronted the men violating the treaty, but they disregarded him and continued their illegal activities. Fortunately for Shoshones, their hunts to the north – despite the pervasive Lakota threat – remained successful into the 1870s.⁷⁷

The era of overland emigration and settlement had dispossessed Shoshones of most of their land and ushered in a new era of challenges. Whereas the previous period of the fur trade certainly had a detrimental effect on the quantity of resources available in Shoshone territory, that economy was largely compatible with Shoshone lifeways and did not deprive them of their lands. So, regardless of their intentions, travelers and settlers picked up where the fur trappers left off, further depleting resources and leaving most Shoshones hungry and resentful. Some Shoshones, such as Washakie’s band, remained largely friendly toward Americans, providing assistance even as the “white man’s road” affected the Shoshone world for the worse. Yet, violence directed against emigrant trains compelled the federal government to begin managing all Shoshone groups, whether they

⁷⁷ 1870 Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Box 60, Folder 3, Grace Raymond Hebard Papers, 1829-1947, Collection Number 400008, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming (quotation); Williams, “Personal Recollections,” 103-106; Trenholm and Carley, *Shoshonis*, 225.

were “hostile” or peaceful. Ultimately, travel, settlement, and the discovery of gold in Shoshone country ushered in the reservation era. Although the easternmost Shoshone groups were given two relatively game-rich areas as reservations, the fact remains that Americans depleted their resources elsewhere and left the Wind River and Fort Hall areas the only viable options for reservations in their once-vast territory.

So, the period of 1840-1868 thus constituted the final stage of pre-reservation Eastern Shoshone ethnogenesis. By formally dividing up the Shoshone world and defining distinct reservation populations, the treaties of 1863 and 1868 crystallized hundreds of years of ethnogenetic development. Each portion of the once widespread and fluid Eastern Shoshone “retreat group” now had their own well-defined area, their own distinctive ecosystems, and unique subsistence systems. The people now known as “the” Eastern Shoshone were associated with the Wind River valley and adjacent areas, while the Fort Hall Shoshone emerged along the Portnuef River to the west and the Lemhi struggled for control of lands in the Salmon River country.

The events of the mid-1800s had brought much change to Shoshone country, yet in some ways they simply formalized processes that had been ongoing for centuries. Fairly distinct Shoshone groups had long occupied different areas of the Intermountain West and defined one another based upon their primary means of subsistence. Ecology and Native adaptations to specific environments, therefore, laid the foundation upon which American geopolitical distinctions later developed. American emigration, settlement, and government intervention had, however, degraded Shoshone environments and streamlined Shoshone subsistence. The Eastern Shoshone – now defined as the bands at the Wind River Reservation – again adapted to a changing world.

EPILOGUE

At first, life on the Wind River Reservation was not all that different than it was before. Until the early 1870s, Eastern Shoshone bands continued to hunt and forage in order to procure adequate sustenance. In 1872, Indian agents finally provided Eastern Shoshones with an agency and farming implements, and the Natives tried their hand at agriculture. Despite the Natives' association of farming with traditional women's work, it appears that many Eastern Shoshone men made a genuine effort to take up farming. Unfortunately, Lakota and Cheyenne raids, difficult weather conditions, and plagues of grasshoppers thwarted their early attempts, compelling Shoshones to continue to rely upon some migratory hunting and gathering. Meanwhile, agency employees and government vendors grazed their stock on reservation lands without compensating the Shoshone. This was counterproductive, for the agents contributed to the depletion of reservation resources even as they strived to transform Shoshones into farmers. The desire to secure more government rations for their women and children was, in fact, part of the reason that many Eastern Shoshone men lent their services to the U.S. Army in 1876, when Washakie led a contingent of Shoshone auxiliaries that fought the Sioux and Cheyenne at the Battle of the Rosebud.¹

Additional challenges soon arose. The Wind River Reservation was but four years old when government representatives began meeting with Washakie and other leaders to discuss a deal that would involve the Natives ceding the southern portion of their

¹ Henry E. Stamm, IV, *People of the Wind River: The Eastern Shoshones, 1825-1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999)77, 96, 101-103, 111-112; Colin G. Calloway, "Army Allies or Tribal Survival?: The "Other Indians" in the 1876 Campaign," in *Legacy: New Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Bighorn*, edited by Charles E. Rankin, 63-81 (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1996), 70-71.

territory. Sweetwater Mining District settlers wanted that area and many had disregarded the provisions of the 1868 Fort Bridger Treaty from the start, encroaching on the rich southern lands of the Wind River Reservation to hunt and graze cattle. The negotiators offered Washakie some land in the Big Horn Basin (north of the reservation) as compensation for the cession area, but Washakie stated that he wanted the resource-rich Popo Agie River country and not the Crow lands to the north. So, when Congress ratified the “Brunot Cession” treaty in 1874, the Shoshone lost some 710,600 acres of their 3.3-million acre reservation and instead of receiving land they got \$25,000, to be paid annually in cattle.²

Even as the federal government reduced the size of the Wind River Reservation and pushed Shoshones toward a sedentary life, it produced additional problems. Over the objections of Washakie and other Shoshone leaders, the federal government settled their longtime enemies, the Northern Arapaho, on the Wind River Reservation in 1878. Shoshones now had to share their reservation and its diminishing resources with a people who outnumbered them. Arapahos wanted their own reservation, and they struggled until 1885 to obtain land elsewhere. After their final denial that year, they changed tactics. Thereafter, they and the Eastern Shoshone engaged in a struggle in which the Arapaho endeavored to establish their legal rights to the Wind River country while the Eastern Shoshone Tribe opposed their claims.³

² The Wind River Reservation Yesterday and Today, Box 3, Folder 8, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 85, 87, 91-96; Lawrence M. Woods, *Wyoming's Big Horn Basin to 1901: A Late Frontier* (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark, 1997), 68-69, 152.

³ Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 126-134, 235-236; The Shoshonis of Wyoming, Box 2, Folder 3, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Woods, *Wyoming's Big Horn Basin*, 23.

The 1880s brought further challenges to Shoshone subsistence. Since the establishment of the Wind River Reservation, Eastern Shoshones (and after 1878, Northern Arapahos) had gone on many off-reservation bison hunts. Those came to an end in the early 1880s when the final remnants of the once-great bison herds vanished from the grasslands. Shoshones had been able to use their off-reservation hunting activities to help feed themselves and fuel their economy as they resisted the efforts of government agents to convince them to remain on the reservation full-time as farmers and ranchers. On the heels of the extermination of the bison came the Dawes Act of 1887, which intended to accelerate the “civilizing” process of Native groups across the United States. As Shoshone individuals and families occupied relatively small, well-defined parcels of land and began to farm and ranch as their agents had long wanted, the government sent representatives to acquire their “surplus” lands. In an 1897 treaty, the government acquired the 6400 acres that comprised the northeastern corner of the reservation and contained the Thermopolis Hot Springs. The ultimate post-allotment treaty, that of 1904, saw the government acquire another 1,346,320 acres, leaving Eastern Shoshones and Northern Arapahos to share a diminished reservation of just under one million acres.⁴

By 1900, it was clear that the early reservation era was a major catastrophe for the Eastern Shoshone Tribe. The transition from migratory hunting and foraging to farming had not gone smoothly, as most Shoshones were reliant upon government rations of beef and pork to support their local produce. The end of off-reservation hunting, the depletion of local game populations, the difficult transition to farming and ranching, inadequate

⁴ The Wind River Reservation Yesterday and Today, Box 3, Folder 8, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Stamm, *People of the Wind River*, 236; Woods, *Wyoming's Big Horn Basin*, 179-180; Robert F. Murphy and Yolanda Murphy, “Shoshone-Bannock Subsistence and Society,” *Anthropological Records* 16, 7 (1960), 293-338: 296.

government rations, and epidemics of measles and tuberculosis reduced a population that numbered about 1500-2000 in the mid-1850s to approximately 800 in 1900. The Eastern Shoshone, moreover, lost their strong leader of more than half a century when Washakie died in 1900.⁵

The twentieth century brought both challenges and promises. The economic troubles of the Great Depression compelled many Shoshones – most of whom already struggled to procure adequate sustenance – to rely more heavily upon “traditional” foods such as game and berries to supplement meager supplies of government beef and pork. Indeed, both men and women had long maintained their traditional subsistence practices into the reservation era, as men had continued to hunt while women gathered roots, berries, and other vegetal foods. Fortunately, some relief came as John Collier, the commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, during the 1930s instituted his “Indian New Deal,” which included some initiatives for the Wind River Reservation. Collier’s programs promoted self-government, namely the establishment of a joint tribal business council that managed the reservation’s resources, which included an award of \$4.4 million for previously ceded lands, numerous oil and uranium mining leases, and increased ranching efforts. The tribes also regained some of their lost territory when a 1939 act restored most of the land ceded in 1904 to the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho, thereby establishing the present-day reservation size of some 2.2 million acres.⁶

⁵ Historic and Ethnographic Sketches, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 18, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Essay on Eastern Shoshone for Encyclopedia, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 15, Folder 16, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁶ Interviews with Lucy Bonatsie, Box 1, Folder 4, Warm Valley Historical Project Records, 1961-2001, Collection Number 11457, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Essay on Eastern Shoshone for Encyclopedia, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 15, Folder 16, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; The Wind River Reservation Yesterday and

After reaching a nadir in about 1900, conditions on the Wind River Reservation gradually improved, even if they remained far from ideal. The “Indian New Deal” programs triggered some economic growth on the reservation, enhanced education, and improved health conditions. The Eastern Shoshone population consequently climbed from about 800 in 1900 to 1700 in the 1950s and then to 2200 by the 1970s. Most of that growth had much to do with economic security derived from the exploitation of reservation resources, for in 1957, for example, 60% of all Shoshone income came from tribal leases and funds while only 23% came from wages and 17% from agricultural self-employment. Many on-reservation businesses and industries were operated by non-Natives who employed Shoshones to help them extract materials such as oil and uranium from their own land. Meanwhile, largely unrestricted hunting activities continued to deplete game populations that had been declining since the establishment of the reservation in 1868.⁷

In fact, game management emerged as a major issue on the Wind River Reservation during the early 1980s. Washakie and other Shoshones had originally wanted the Wind River valley as a reservation because it abounded in game and other species, but less than a century after its establishment, “Warm Valley” was destitute of pronghorn, elk, bighorn sheep, and deer. The winter of 1983-1984 was a particularly severe one for those few animals, as heavy snows limited their mobility and the forage available to game, killing many and forcing the rest to seek food and shelter at lower elevations. There, human actions complicated matters. Over the course of several days in December

Today, Box 3, Folder 8, Virginia Cole Trenholm Papers, 1929-1979, Collection Number 3597, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁷ Essay on Eastern Shoshone for Encyclopedia, Demitri Boris Shimkin Papers, 1890-1994, Accession Number 9942, Box 15, Folder 16, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

1983, several hunters slaughtered 50-60 elk that became trapped in deep snow, with some using snowmobiles to chase down the stranded animals. One hunter alone reportedly bagged fourteen elk and eight deer during that time. Most of the slaughter occurred just off of U.S. Highway 287 in the southern portion of the reservation, and many passersby witnessed the scene. Wyoming Game & Fish authorities expressed their concern about the situation, but they could do nothing; tribal sovereignty ensured that only the Wind River Reservation's resident tribes – the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho – or the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) could step in.⁸

The events of that winter brought a long-brewing crisis to a head. Game populations on the reservation – mule deer, pronghorn, elk, bighorn sheep, and moose – had declined during the 1960s and 1970s. During that time, Native hunters further reduced animal populations that had diminished throughout the twentieth century by using four-wheel drive vehicles to access areas that had once been havens for game and by using high-power rifles with scopes. Eastern Shoshones and Northern Arapahos enacted a short-lived game code (1948-1953), but otherwise hunters had no bag limits, they could hunt year-round, and they did not have to buy licenses or tags. The only restrictions were that hunters could not sell meat, they had to avoid wanton waste, and they could not spotlight animals. This lax hunting policy aimed to preserve tribal hunting traditions, but by the 1970s the reservation had small, scattered game populations.⁹

⁸ Unpublished Notes on Indian Game Code, Box 23, Folder 1, Neal L. Blair Papers, 1869-1987, Collection Number 10483, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Pat Hnilicka, interview by author, Lander, WY, September 12, 2012.; Doug Crowe and Dale Strickland, "The Winter of 83-84 Pushed Many Big Game Animals to the Brink – How can we Bring More Critters Through?," Box 23, Folder 2, Neal L. Blair Papers, 1869-1987, Collection Number 10483, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; "Hunters Should be Prepared for Tough Season," *Laramie Boomerang*, July 13, 1984.

⁹ John Washakie, interview by author, Fort Washakie, WY, September 11, 2012; Ben Snyder, Jr., interview by author, Ethete, WY, September 12, 2012; Pat Hnilicka, interview by author, Lander, WY,

The Eastern Shoshone Tribe confronted the problem head-on. In 1977, the Shoshone and Arapaho tribes requested that the United States Fish & Wildlife Service begin surveying game populations on the reservation and develop a management plan. After several years of research, the Eastern Shoshone council in 1980 approved a game code that included bag limits and other provisions to facilitate the recovery of game populations. Northern Arapahos, however, did not approve the measure and the code did not go into effect. They, along with many Shoshones, were wary of the code's infringement upon their traditional hunting culture. Even in the game-deficient days of the 1970s, many families bolstered their food supplies by hunting. Shoshone leadership, however, saw the need to push through measures to ensure the future of hunting.¹⁰

The severe winter of 1983-1984 combined with widespread media attention on the slaughter of elk to bring the issue to a climax. During the summer of 1984, an Arapaho vote again rejected the proposed Shoshone game code of 1980. The Eastern Shoshone Tribe then appealed to the BIA to impose hunting regulations on the reservation. Over the protests of Arapaho leaders, the BIA established a game code that went into effect that fall. The code required hunters to purchase a permit and big game tags, hunt only during specific seasons, and kill only one each of elk, antlered deer, and buck antelope; moose, bighorn sheep, and predator species were protected. No code violations were reported during the ensuing hunting season. Nevertheless, the Northern Arapaho Tribe filed an injunction against the BIA and the Eastern Shoshone for their

September 12, 2012; "Hunting Closure on Reservation First in 20 Years," *Powell Tribune*, December 4, 1984; "Hunting Regulations Boost Wind River Game Numbers," *Billings Gazette*, January 22, 2005.

¹⁰ John Washakie, interview by author, Fort Washakie, WY, September 11, 2012; Pat Hnilicka, interview by author, Lander, WY, September 12, 2012; Unpublished Notes on Indian Game Code, Box 23, Folder 1, Neal L. Blair Papers, 1869-1987, Collection Number 10483, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

actions. In a series of court decisions that culminated in 1987, the judicial system upheld the BIA's right to force a game code on the Wind River Reservation.¹¹

In 1988, the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho tribes assumed joint responsibility for the Wind River Reservation game code and it remains in effect today. Game management on the reservation has been nothing short of a resounding success. Cooperation between the tribes, the state of Wyoming, and the federal government enabled game numbers to explode by the mid-1990s. Elk, pronghorn, deer, and bighorn sheep numbers have tripled while those of the moose have doubled. Hunting regulations, as well as aerial animal monitoring and some transplants, fostered this dramatic recovery. Game management on the Wind River Reservation continues today, and the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho tribes have even begun a process that will lead to the reintroduction of bison to the Wind River Reservation. Yet, this rebound, in tandem with predator protection programs, has also produced new issues in terms of mountain lion, wolf, and grizzly bear management.¹²

The story of the Wind River Reservation game code highlights one way that Eastern Shoshones recently adapted to a changing world. During the past several centuries, the ancestors of the Eastern Shoshone who now inhabit the Wind River Reservation shared in a synergistic relationship with the world around them. Just as the adoption of horses in the early 1700s had altered how Shoshones interacted with lands

¹¹ Northern Arapahoe Tribe v. Hodel, 808 F.2d 741 (10th Cir. 1987), <http://bulk.resource.org/courts.gov/c/F2/808/808.F2d.741.85-1007.html>.

¹² Jack McNeel, "Bison Likely to Return to Wind River Reservation," *Indian Country Today Media Network*, Sept. 21, 2012, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/article/bison-likely-to-return-to-wind-river-reservation-135121> (accessed February 13, 2013); John Washakie, interview by author, Fort Washakie, WY, September 11, 2012; Ben Snyder, Jr., interview by author, Ethete, WY, September 12, 2012; Pat Hnilicka, interview by author, Lander, WY, September 12, 2012; Bob Trebelcock, interview by author, Lander, WY, September 12, 2012; "Hunting Regulations Boost Wind River Game Numbers," *Billings Gazette*, January 22, 2005.

and resources, so too did the use of four-wheel drive vehicles and high-powered rifles with scopes in the second half of the twentieth century. Yet, even as Shoshones actively utilized new technologies to harvest game, those animals became scarce – whether that was in the Bear River country by the mid-1800s or on the reservation in the 1980s – and Shoshones had to adapt to a world that they and others had influenced.

The environment thus constituted far more than a mere backdrop to Eastern Shoshone history. It is central to their recent history, just as it was an integral component of the processes that led to the emergence of the Eastern Shoshone Tribe during the second half of the nineteenth century. Since the time that their ancestors began to migrate northeastward from the southwestern corner of the Great Basin until the time that Washakie and his people settled on the Wind River Reservation, Shoshones constantly adapted to a changing world. Some of those changes came in the form of climate events and ecological transformations that were beyond human control. Others, however, were intentionally or unintentionally triggered by Shoshones, other Native groups, or Euro-Americans who altered landscapes and thereby affected their inhabitants. Political and military events that often receive the most scholarly attention certainly merit discussion, but we must remember that environmental history undergirded those narratives.

Since their ancestors emerged in the Great Basin in about 1000 CE, Eastern Shoshones displayed great dynamism as they adapted to various environments. As they utilized particular ecosystems, their daily lives reflected the exigencies of specific environmental conditions and historical circumstances. This dissertation has highlighted the mosaic of human and environmental interactions that influenced Shoshone daily

subsistence, gendered systems of labor, individual and group health, and intertribal relations. By examining Eastern Shoshone environmental history across the “pre-contact” and “post-contact” periods, this project demonstrates that changing Native relationships with the physical world were central to their ethnogenesis. Their specific interactions with particular landscapes distinguished them from other peoples and, during a past shaped by ecological change and human events, the Eastern Shoshone demonstrated both agency and resilience.

This dissertation’s several pervasive themes highlight the dynamism of the Eastern Shoshones and their ancestors. First, between 1000 and 1868 CE, Shoshone groups utilized a wide variety of environments and adapted their resource procurement methods in response to the opportunities and challenges presented by specific ecosystems. Second, those adaptations had gendered dimensions, for adjustments to landscapes, resources, and technologies often affected the nature and value of both men’s and women’s work. Far from presenting a “declension model” of Native women’s history, this project demonstrates that although Shoshone women’s labor and status changed between 1000 and 1868 CE, they remained crucial to group survival. Third, “natural” and human-induced environmental change was central to Eastern Shoshone ethnogenesis, for climate change, transforming biota, and the depletion of resources affected the lifeways and identities of Shoshone groups before and after “contact.” Finally, the dynamic environment was a major actor, point of contention, and victim in the story of Shoshone relations with other Natives, Europeans, and Americans. The environment affected intercultural relations and vice versa, so it therefore constituted far more than a mere setting for unfolding human dramas.

Although this study focuses on the ethnogenesis of a single Native American group and therefore covers only a fraction of North America's indigenous history, it points to ways that we might better understand that broader past. Instead of producing narratives that emphasize "post-contact" environmental degradation and the destruction of Native lifeways, we might want to devote more energy to examining the dynamic and often catastrophic history of "pre-contact" Native America to reveal how the ramifications of that deeper past persisted into the "post-contact" era. Historians should also make a stronger effort to utilize an integrated approach to gender history, for doing so allows for more nuanced understandings of a complex past. Also, instead of assuming that human interactions defined the past, we must explore the possibility that their everyday relationships with the physical world were at least equally significant. With that in mind, we must recognize that while Natives and Euro-Americans influenced landscapes and biota, the environment itself manipulated the course of human history in many ways that we have only begun to understand. The analytical lens of environmental history therefore presents itself as a powerful means of better understanding the history of North America's indigenous peoples, as well as the lands that they inhabited. Doing so requires that we treat Native Americans – and Euro-Americans – not as people who simply used the environment, but as a *part* of the environment.

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