The WYOMING EXPEDITION of 1968

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The Shoshone, like many other nomadic peoples of the Plains and the Rockies, are scarcely known to archaeology. Their ways of life left scant traces on our landscape. When we do find their scattered archaeological record in many areas, it becomes apparent that they had been newcomers with little relationship to older complexes. The Ute and Shoshone hunted over many parts of Colorado, Utah, and Nevada that had earlier supported sedentary farming peoples of the Pronontory, Fremont, and other non-nomadic cultures. The sedentary peoples withdrew to the south about A.D. 1300, probably to become the Navaho, and to be replaced by Shoshonozans. The Shoshone, guardians of the Rockies, are among the most elusive folk in American Indian prehistory.

We selected the Bridger Basin in southwestern Wyoming to survey and search out traces of the Shoshone for three reasons. Our museum collections include stone tools and flint-tipped arrows collected there from Shoshone a century ago, when the Indians were still carrying on their Stone Age arts. We wanted to find the same tool types in the ground. The Bridger is so high and cold that horticulture is impossible today. Thus we felt that sedentary cultures of earlier times had never occupied the area, and that it lay within the original territory of the Shoshone. Finally, no one had studied the archaeology of this basin, so that it stood out as a completely unknown region closely tied to Shoshone history.

We spent two weeks in the Bridger in 1967, scouting out the landscape, meeting local collectors, making collections from twenty sites, and defining problems in the field. We found a semi-arid land eaten up by sheep and blown away by the wind, where excavatable sites scarcely survived. We returned over the summer of 1968 to test our ideas by further site survey methods and to collect better samples. We are now working at description of late prehistoric stages in Shoshone and Ute archaeology and at problems of earlier culture stages in the Basin.

We stressed late sites in our sampling, attempting to get an adequate series of early points, of the roughouts for them, and of associated tools and lithic debris. We also made latex molds of critical specimens from key sites in local collections. We now have samples adequate to the definition of three technologies of very late date, one of them Shoshone and the other two probably Ute. We also worked back into time, building a chronology for earlier industries. We found no traces of the pottery or other tools of the sedentary farming cultures, but we have good samples from the nomadic occupations.

Earlier students of Wyoming archaeology have focused their attention upon problems of early man in the area. We felt that each concentration was one-sided, and that the greatest gaps in knowledge pertained to recent times. We did little survey on the highlands around the Basin where early material might be expected, aiming our efforts at the least-known and most recent periods. We partially failed in this effort; we could not avoid finding industries which have been described as Lower Paleolithic complexes.

Our favorite road. We are looking south toward Fort Bridger, Wyoming, from the glacial terrace of Quarry Creek, over an unpaved section of the original Lincoln Highway which has been bypassed by later road construction. The Bridger Basin spreads back through most of the view, with the Black's Fork River in the foreground.

We found then upon very recent land forms and as part of post-Pleistocene soils. By attacking problems of the recent past we had stumbled upon new information which suggests practically no human occupation in the Basin more than nine thousand years ago.

No Clovis (eleven to twelve thousand years ago) nor Folsom (ten to eleven thousand years ago) tools of any type have been found within or near the Bridger. Tools of the Eden Valley Complex or Cody Complex are scant, and are found only on the high rims of the Basin and on Pleistocene terraces by stream heads within the Basin. Our studies of the landscape and of its glacial geology suggest that the area was not fit for human occupation during Paleo-Indian times, was subject to great diurnal floods from the mountain glaciers of the Uinta Range. Man can scarcely live upon a glacial outwash plain. The Bridger, like much of the Interior Basin to the west, appears to have been a frequently flooded wasteland during glacial times, its buttes standing as islands above the flood.

The Black's Fork Culture, defined by Renuard in the 1930's from sites farther down the valley, is thus a controversial complex. Great antiquity has been claimed for it. It consists of crude massive tools of quartzite and flint, notable for their primitive character and large size. They
Shoshone arrowpoints of the type Elkro notchcd from four sides north of Fort Bridger, along with leaf-shaped spears, and lengths from which they were made. These denticulate tools were the only arrow-like used by the Shoshone in recent times; they served to kill bison, antelope, deer, and even men. All of the are of the barbs on these arrowpoints have been broken by impact against bone. They were pressure-flaked from moss agate, chalcedony, chert, and sometimes from quartzite. The smallest specimen is half an inch long, and was made by an Indian after it had broken.

An archaeological Shoshone techoa and the core from which it was struck. The techoa (from the Shoshone word tasso, "white knife") is a sharp-edged scythe fide struck from a quartzite cobblestone and used as a butchering and hide-working knife. This tool was still being made and used by Shoshone women in 1873, and has been studied elsewhere by Prances ("The techoa: a Shoshone women's knife: a study of American chopper industries.") In proa, Pennsylvania Archeologist.) This techoa was the first specimen found by Franches on our site #1, a mile north of Fort Bridger, at the beginning of our 1967 survey. John later found the core on the same site. The techoa is notable as the most simple stone tool type made by ancient man. The maximum width of this techoa is three and three-quarters inches. Drawing by Margaret Day Dilks.

A techoa and a chopping tool made by flaking down quartzite cobblestones from site #1. Choppers and techoes were the butchering and hide-working tools made by Shoshone women at the same time that their men were making denticulate barbed arrowpoints from moss agate by delicate pressure-flaking. Maximum diameter of the techoa is four inches. Drawing by Margaret Day Dilks.

A massive core and anvil, weighing thirty-six and a half pounds, representing a quartzite boulder from which chips have been struck to use as knives. This specimen was found weathering out of a layer of bison bone in a gulley beneath a cliff in the National Corrals near Church Butte, Wyoming. It had been carried about a quarter of a mile from the bed of the Black's Fork River and up a twenty-four cliff, and was left with arrowpoints and with chips of quartzite which had been used as butchering knives. Bisons were smudged over the cliff above, finished off with arrows, and butchered with crude quartzite tools at various times from A.D. 500 until recent times; most of the arrowpoints found here were of the recent Shoshone type. Frances says that the boulder is a monument rather than an Indian relic, and that we should leave it behind as part of the landscape. It is the largest quartzite boulder core found, with a maximum length of eleven inches.

A chopper (massive unflaked knife) which was made from one of the large chips knocked from the boulder core. It is typical of the butchering tools used by the High Plains tribes, and especially by the Shoshone, during late prehistoric and historic times. From the bison drive site in the National Corrals near Church Butte, Wyoming. Three and a fourth inches long.

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have been compared with the most ancient stone tools from Eurasia and Africa.

As a result of our survey data, we can now divide the Black's Fork Culture into at least three different technologies of different ages. The most recent of them, in Clovisian style, is part of the material culture of the Shoshone which persisted into the last century. The most ancient Black's Fork types which we found are less than eight thousand years old on geological evidence.

The earliest material in the area is anything but crude. It is identical with specimens from the nine-thousand year old Finley Site in the Eden Valley north of the city of Green River, Wyoming, which was excavated by Linton Satterthwaite for the University Museum on earlier expeditions. Cataloguing and analysis, drawing and graphing of our half-ton sample are in process. Defining and dating the various technologies of the Bridger Basin is the immediate objective. Back of that lies a still-undefined story of the evolution of the culture of a nomadic tribe, the Shoshone.