Indian Participation in the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade.

Jay H. Buckley
THE FUR TRADE & RENDEZVOUS
of the Green River Valley

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TITLE PAGE PHOTO: "BEAVER LODGE ON GRANITE CREEK" BY PINEDALE ONLINE
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*by Brenda D. Francis*

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Indian Participation in the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade

By Jay H. Buckley

The Eastern Shoshones represent one of the most influential Indian groups in the histories of Wyoming and the Rocky Mountain fur trade. Before European contact their ancestral lands covered most of western Wyoming. After acquiring horses in the early eighteenth century, the eastern bands adopted the nomadic lifestyle and culture of the buffalo-hunting Plains’ tribes. Leaving their lands between the Great Basin and Wind River Mountains, Shoshones ventured eastward via South Pass onto the plains to hunt bison. This expansion eastward brought contact with European traders offering horses, guns, and other manufactured goods that altered Shoshone life-ways and economic patterns. Contact also introduced horrific epidemics that decimated the Shoshones’ population, the worst being the smallpox epidemics of 1780 and 1805. These diseases, along with mounting pressure from other tribes pushing westward onto the Northern and Central Plains, drove the Shoshones back across the Continental Divide.

The Eastern Shoshones called themselves “Nimina,” meaning “the people.” Enemy tribes referred to them derogatorily as “the Snakes.” The term may also be traced to the French expression Gens du Serpent or perhaps to a misinterpretation of the tribe’s sign language motion depicting a salmon or a grass weaver as representing a snake. The two major Eastern Shoshone groups were the Mountain Sheep Eaters (Mountain People) of the Yellowstone region and the Buffalo Eaters (Sage Brush People) of the valleys of the Green and Wind rivers. Combined, the two groups numbered close to three thousand at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

“Blackfeet Springs,”
by Nicholas Coleman.
TRAILSIDE GALLERY AND NICHOLAS COLEMAN

82 Museum of the Mountain Man
Bison formed the heart of the Buffalo Eaters’ economic and spiritual life. They provided food, clothing, lodging, and played a significant spiritual role, especially after the introduction of the Sun Dance from the Great Plains around the year 1800. Northern Shoshones and Bannocks, the latter recent migrants from Oregon who enjoyed a close coexistence with the Shoshones, usually joined the Eastern Shoshones on their hunts. They gathered for the annual fall buffalo hunt beyond the Wind River Mountains in the valleys of the Wind and Big Horn rivers, and often wintered together along the Green River. After the spring melt the Eastern Shoshone bands reunited together in the Wind River Valley for another hunt before separating into family bands for the summer.

Though many Shoshones lived as decentralized kinship groups, a number of factors increasingly consolidated the Eastern Shoshones together. Warring with the Blackfeet brought bands together for protection and occasioned the growth and importance of war societies and
"They call themselves Sho-sho-nies but 'during an acquaintance of nine years during which time I made further progress in their language than any white man had done before me I never saw one of the nation who could give me either the derivation or definition of the word Sho sho nie' - Their country comprises all the regions drained by the head branches of Green and Bear rivers and the East and Southern head branches of Snake River - They are kind and hospitable to whites thankful for favors indignant at injuries ... A plurality of wives is very common among the Snakes and the marriage contract is dissolved only by the consent of the husband after which the wife is at liberty to marry again Prostitution among the women is very rare and fornication whilst living with the husband is punished with the utmost severity. The women perform all the labor about the lodge except the care of the horses. They are cheerful and affectionate to their husbands remarkably fond and careful of their children ... The Snakes who live upon Buffaloe and live in large villages seldom use poison upon their arrows either in hunting or war - They are well armed with fuses and well supplied with horses they seldom stop more than 8 or 10 d[a]ys in one place ... their lodges are spacious neatly made of dressed Buffaloe skins, sewed together and set upon 11 or 13 long smooth poles to each lodge[.]"

military leaders. Religious ceremonies like the Sun Dance brought people together as well and increased the importance of a more centralized religious leadership provided by healers and holy men. Adopting other elements of Plains Culture facilitated a more centralized political organization than existed among their western and northern cousins and led to the rise of principal chiefs like Pah-da-hewakunda, Mawoma, and Washakie in the early nineteenth century.

The Shoshones' language is part of the Numic (Shoshonean) branch of the Uto-Aztecan linguistic family. A myriad of other tribes with different languages and cultures surrounded them: Western Shoshones in Nevada and northern Utah; the Northern Shoshones and Bannocks in southern Idaho; the Nez Percé (Nimipu) in central Idaho; the Flatheads (Salish) in western Montana; the Blackfeet and Atsinas (Gros Ventres of the Prairie) in Montana; the Crows (Apsaalooke or Absaroka) in northeastern Wyoming; Arapahos (Hinanaeina) and Cheyennes (Tsiististas) in southwestern Wyoming; and the Utes in eastern Utah and western Colorado.

The Eastern Shoshones got along well with their western and northern relatives, as well as with the Flatheads, Nez Percé, and occasionally the Crows. Their principle enemies, however, were the Blackfeet and Arapahos, especially after British traders from Canada began supplying the Blackfeet with firearms. What resulted was a powerful Blackfoot Confederacy that allied northern plains tribes of the Blackfeet (Siksikas), Bloods (Kainahs), Piegans, and the Atsinas. This confederacy outnumbered the Shoshones more than five-to-one and ranged from the Saskatchewan to the Yellowstone rivers. The Atsinas proved a most troublesome foe since they regularly traveled through western Wyoming to visit their Arapaho cousins to the southeast.

The advance of American traders into the American West only intensified the cultural conflict and violence between those nations with British ties and those relying upon Americans for trade goods and firearms to defend themselves and their natural resources. The Lewis and Clark expedition had initiated friendly relations with the Shoshones. But Meriwether Lewis intensified the animosity of the Blackfeet towards Americans and their Indian allies when a chance encounter led to the death of two Blackfeet warriors in a fight. Following the Corps of Discovery's return to St. Louis, American fur traders and trappers like John Colter, Wilson Price Hunt, and Robert Stuart crossed Shoshonean
The Flatheads

The history connecting the Flathead Indians (the Salish) to the Rocky Mountain fur trade closely mirrors that of their neighbors the Nez Percé. Like the Nez Percé, the Flatheads were plateau Indians who adopted a more Plains-like culture after obtaining the horse. Their traditional enemies included the Shoshones and Bannocks to the south and the powerful Blackfoot Confederacy to the north who had access to British guns. So promises of trade by Lewis and Clark easily allied the tribe to American fur trade interests, and the tribe became very friendly toward Americans.

The Rocky Mountain rendezvous became the trade nexus between the Flatheads, other tribes, and American traders. Nearly every rendezvous included a large congregation of Flatheads who came with meat, leather goods, and horses to trade for a variety of items, but most importantly for guns and ammunition. As with the Nez Percé, the influences of the fur trade, especially at the rendezvous, transformed the life-ways of the Flatheads variously. But beyond the trade, the gambling, the liquor, or the intimate liaisons that drew both Indians and Americans together at the rendezvous, the Flatheads became important actors in the periodic, violent episodes that marked rendezvous history.

As early as the 1828 rendezvous one Flathead who was part of Robert Campbell’s trapping brigade taunted his old enemy the Apsaroke (also known as the Gros Ventre of the Prairie), who were attacking the brigade, telling them that many Flathead and American allies were not far off. But more noteworthy was the action of another Flathead at the 1832 rendezvous. In a moment of parley with an Apsaroke leader, a vengeful Flathead shot him, igniting the conflagration known as the Battle of Pierre’s Hole. Soon after the battle erupted more Flathead and Nez Percé fought side by side with their American allies, demonstrating their bravery and helping defeat the Apsaroke.

Alliance in conflict was not the only bond forged between the Flatheads and the Americans. Some Flathead men became part of trapping brigades. More often it was Flathead women who became the wives of trappers. As with Nez Percé women, Flathead women were among those most desired by the mountain men for marriage. These marriages created important bonds and benefited both partners in their respective societies. Though advantageous at times, in some cases mountain men found themselves more tightly bound by kinship obligations than they cared. Joe Meek recounts that in 1838 many mountain men and their families spent the fall and winter among the Flatheads and that the mountain men, those fiercely independent sorts, were obligated to obey the tribal leaders due to kinship ties and needed trade.

In the grander history of the fur trade, what emerged between the Flatheads and the Americans was a powerful relationship, to the extent that mountain man Joe Meek referred to the tribe as “the allies of the Rocky Mountain company, and the friends of the whites.” That abiding relationship, however, would usher in greater cultural transformation of the Flatheads, the most noted presence being Jesuit father Pierre-Jean De Smet and his mission in the Bitterroot Valley just after the rendezvous era ended.

- S. Matthew Despain

This French edition of Father De Smet’s Oregon Missions and Travels over the Rocky Mountains in 1845-1846 (Paris, 1848) displays a portrait of a Flathead chief on the lefthand page.
land and increased American commercial interests in the region. Other fur trade entrepreneurs like Manuel Lisa and Andrew Henry ventured into the region and built trading posts and trapped the areas near Henry's Fork (a tributary of the Snake), the Yellowstone River system, and the upper Missouri River watershed from 1807 until the War of 1812 when the Blackfeet drove the Americans out.

During the rendezvous era (1825-1840) the Americans returned to the land of the Shoshones. The mountain men, America's early economic and imperial vanguard into the West, forged good relationships with most of the tribes of the northern and central Rockies. Tribes like the Crows and the Shoshones increased their commercial interactions with Euro-Americans for manufactured goods, horses, and weapons. The fur trade era allowed tribes to essentially maintain their economic, political, and social systems, and to retain their land. In many ways the relationships were bi-cultural, symbiotic, and reciprocal. Yet, this era of contact and trade wrought changes in political structures, gender roles, material culture, and subsistence strategies. Closer links to America's market economy and society did eventually tear the social, cultural, and economic fabric of western tribes. With contact came inevitable change.

One of the greatest influences upon western tribes came through intimate relationships. Some mountain men strengthened trading relationships with tribes by taking Indian women as wives. According to historian William Swagerty, nearly one of every three mountain men married a Native American woman, and most of those women came from the Shoshone, Flathead, or Nez Percé tribes. This “custom of the country” forged significant social and economic alliances with trading privileges between white and indigenous societies, especially when the women came from influential families. Jim Bridger and John Robertson (a.k.a. Jack Robinson), for instance, married Shoshone women to monopolize trading along the Green River. Polygamy among both Indians and trappers increased as having more wives connotated a man's success and ability to provide, and a woman's status may have actually increased with her role in forming trading relationships and securing manufactured goods for her tribe. The majority of these marriages were loving and long-lasting and provided their husbands with physical and emotional intimacy. Equally important was how these women served as cultural brokers, translators,
camp keepers, and as important labor sources in maintaining hunting camps and preparing beaver pelts so they would not spoil.

For centuries the Shoshones traded with the Utes, Crows, Flatheads and Nez Percé at intertribal trade fairs along the Green River in southwestern Wyoming. These regional fairs were centrally located within a much larger trading network that stretched from the Dalles on the Columbia River, eastward to the Mandan Villages on the upper Missouri River, and then southward to Santa Fe and Taos. At these fairs the Shoshones acquired Spanish, French, and English goods, along with another principal trading item, horses. When American trappers and traders arrived in the Rockies they simply attached another component onto this existing trade network.

Indeed, all of the fur trade rendezvous occurred in Shoshone territory on the tributaries of the Bear, Green, Snake, and Wind rivers. During the 1820s, the first rendezvous were held on the western edge of the Eastern Shoshone’s land at Henry’s

The Nez Percé

Among American Indians most affected by the Far West fur trade were the Nez Percé, or the Nimiipu (Nee-me-poo), in actuality a large collection of Columbian plateau groups. Already before Lewis and Clark encountered them the Nez Percé had horses, had adopted a Plains Indian-like culture, and were considered outstanding horse breeders. The fulfilled promises by Lewis and Clark of American trade further transformed the Nez Percé and the balance of power in the West as the tribe became a staunch ally of the Americans.

When American fur trade men entered the Far West they first tapped into existing trade systems. The goods they brought and their interaction with the Nez Percé altered the tribe’s life-ways vastly. The most visible relationships came at the rendezvous. At nearly every rendezvous the Nez Percé were a numerous force. They came trading horses, meat, leather goods, and occasionally furs for beads, bells, cloth, knives, mirrors, blankets, and the like. But mostly they sought guns and ammunition to counter the firepower of the their enemy the Blackfeet. Horses became their main bartering item, which mountain men preferred for their fleetness and durability in the mountains.

Relations between fur trade men and the Nez Percé, however, went far beyond trade. Horse racing and gambling between the young men of both cultures occurred, each seeking status and identity in their own world and in that of the other. Relationships of intimacy, both short liaisons and marriages of the country, bound many Nez Percé women, and by extension their families and bands, to the American fur trade system. These relationships were far more than sexual; they benefited both partners in many ways. Mountain men in these unions were drawn into new and complex kinship systems. Those harbingers of American imperialism gained trading and status privileges among the Nez Percé. And Nez Percé women gained power and status among their people. These women also became important laborers in the fur trade as camp tenders and those who prepared the hides. More importantly, they became the cultural mediators between their kinpeople and their partners. So beneficial were these women to success and survivability in the fur trade that many mountain men sought Nez Percé women for marriage, and many of these unions lasted many years and produced children. These connections of marriage and trade drew the two cultures closer together. Mountain men began wintering in places like the Limhi and Salmon valleys, traditional wintering sites of the Nez Percé.

And the Nez Percé remained an important part of the rendezvous experience. At the rendezvous the Nez Percé not only traded and intermingled with the Americans, they fought by their sides on occasion (for example, at the battle at Pierre’s Hole in 1832) and received their first experiences with Christianity from westbound missionaries. Most mountain men, according to Washington Irving, saw them as very honest, with “purity of purpose,” and as a “remarkable...nation of saints.” More important and more lasting, in the process of the fur trade a series of complex links were forged between the Nez Percé and the mountain men wherein cultures were interwoven and inevitable change resulted.

- S. Matthew Despain
Fork (WY: 1825), Cache Valley (UT: 1826, 1831), Bear Lake (UT: 1827, 1828), and Pierre’s Hole (ID: 1829, 1832). During the 1830s the majority of rendezvous were held on the Green River (1833, 1835, 1836, 1837, 1839, 1840) and its tributaries: Henry’s Fork (1825); and Ham’s Fork (1834); or on the Popo Agie tributary of the Wind River (1829, 1830, 1838). Shoshone territory formed a middle ground where Indian groups and traders could set aside their cultural differences and play, eat, sleep, and trade together. After the rendezvous ended, the participants could go their separate ways.

A diverse gathering of thousands of Indians joined several hundred mountain men during those summers at the annual rendezvous. Members of the Shoshones, Bannocks, Nez Percé, Flatheads, Crows, and Utes were all regular visitors. Tribes attended the rendezvous for a variety of reasons. But most came to acquire colorful mackinaw blankets, red flannel and calico cloth, vermilion paint, buttons and thread, steel knives, awls, glass beads, kettles and pans, tobacco, and assorted filigree. Others wanted metal tools or guns for hunting and defense against their enemies. Some of the Indian leaders who frequently attended rendezvous included Shoshones like Mawoma, Cut Face, Bracelette de Fer (Iron Wristbands); Nez Percé such as Bull’s Head, Blue Cloak, and Tackensquats (Rotten Belly); Flathead leader Insullah (Red Feather or Little Chief) and Crow leader Esheunskw (Long Hair, Old Burns). The Crows, in particular, became some of the most successful trappers while the Shoshones did not engage much in fur trapping themselves.

Not all of the Indians attending the rendezvous were interested in companionship, goods, entertainment, or furs. Some attended simply as horse traders. The Indian tribes that participated in the Rocky Mountain fur trade were usually those who possessed a significant number of horses. Bareback horse racing served as a major recreational event at the Green River rendezvous. Horses were won and lost in wagers. Others were appropriated from inattentive owners. Tribes like the Nez Percé and Flatheads brought large numbers of horses to the rendezvous. They camped along bends in the river to provide protection to their villages and to keep an eye on their grazing mounts. The vast herds, numbering in the thousands, often determined how long a group could camp in one location. They also proved tempting for enemy tribes such as the Blackfeet who tried to expropriate them through raiding instead of trading. Horses represented a vital component of tribal culture. They were necessary for traveling, moving villages, hunting, acquiring a wife, waging war, and...
Jim Norton's painting "Crow Warriors" depicts a hunting party in the sagebrush hills above the Green River Valley, with the Wind River Range in the distance. TRAILSIDE GALLERY AND JIM NORTON

achieving honor and status in society.

Indians could be powerful commercial allies as well as producers and consumers in the trade. American trappers worked at expanding United States fur interests by courting various nations and offering commerce as a means whereby peace and friendship might be established and maintained. Much of the Eastern Shoshones' land lay within a jointly-occupied region established in 1818 between the British and the United States. The British-owned Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) sent trapping brigades into the Snake River region
during the 1820s to trap out all of the beaver and create a "fur desert." This imperial maneuver was designed to dissuade Americans from venturing into the Oregon Country, to undermine American competition, and to expand their regional influence. The British worked to gain Indian alliances by providing better quality goods at cheaper prices than the Americans could offer.

Some Indians joined the mountain men in their trapping operations. In the spring of 1825, several dozen Iroquois trappers, formerly of the North West Company (a Canadian firm which merged with the HBC in 1821), met American trappers near present-day Ogden, Utah. Twenty-nine men – most of them John Grey's Iroquois trappers – left the HBC to join the Americans with the promise of higher wages and status as free-trappers. These Iroquois joined Robert Campbell (an influential clerk, partner, and supplier for several American enterprises) and his northern brigade in trapping excursions among the Flatheads and Nez Percé in the late 1820s. Indian trappers and mountain men joined together in harvesting beaver. They maintained goodwill among the tribes whose territory they hunted by honoring requests not to hunt beaver in the Bitterroot Valley until after the Flatheads had completed their buffalo hunt. Iroquois trappers had been active participants in the fur trade for centuries and their presence had a significant impact on Rocky Mountain tribes. Pierre's Hole was named after Iroquois leader Pierre Tevanitagon, who died there. Some Iroquois who had converted to Catholicism even sparked an interest among the Flatheads and Nez Percé to send a delegation to St. Louis to inquire after the "Black Robes" and their Bible. An Iroquois guide accompanied Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, S.J., sometimes referred to as the "Apostle of the Rockies," and two Flatheads (Salish) from the 1840 Green River rendezvous to Pierre's Hole, where they met several hundred Flatheads, with whom they returned home and began to proselytize. By the following year, De Smet had founded Saint Mary's mission near present-day Missoula, Montana, and within a few more years, had opened a number of Catholic missions throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Like commercial alliances, military alliances also fostered friendship and trust between Indians and mountain men. Mountain men often joined their Indian trading partners in retaliations against Blackfeet, Assinibo, and Arapaho raiders. The Blackfeet did not welcome American trappers because they realized the rendezvous system aided their native rivals by providing armaments and supplies to their enemies. Confederacy members, benefiting from trading with the British along the Saskatchewan River, feared losing the advantages the trade with the British granted. As hundreds of mountain men and thousands of Indians gathered to resupply and to participate in games and recreation, the presence of many trade goods and the abundance of horseflesh served as the ultimate
"The Crows who live on the head waters of Yellow Stone and extend from this neighbourhood also to the base of the Rocky Mountains, are similar in the respects to the Blackfeet; roaming about a great part of the year - and seeking their enemies where they can find them.

"They are a much smaller tribe than the Blackfeet, with whom they are always at war, and from whose great numbers they suffer prodigiously in battle; and probably will be in a few years entirely destroyed by them.

"The Crows, of all the tribes in this region, or on the Continent, make the most beautiful lodge. They often times dress the skins of which they are composed almost as white as linen, and beautifully garnish them with porcupine quills, and paint and ornament them in such a variety of ways, as renders them exceedingly picturesque and agreeable to the eye. The poles which support it are about thirty in number, of pine and are cut in the Rocky Mountains, having been some hundred years, perhaps, in one. Their tent, when erected, is about twenty-five feet high, and bar a very pleasing effect; with the Good Spirit painted on one side, and the Evil Spirit on the other.

"A Crow is known wherever he is met by his beautiful white dress, and his tall and elegant figure; the greater part of the men being six feet high.

"These people to be sure, have in some instances plundered and robbed trappers and travellers in their country; and for that I sometimes hear them called rascals [and] thieves, and rogues of the first order, &c; yet they do not consider themselves such; for thieving in their estimation is a high crime, and considered the most disgraceful act that a man can possibly do.

"They call this cerpluting, where they sometimes run off a Trader's horse and make their boast of it; considering it a kind of retaliation or summary justice, which they think it right and honourable that they should administer. And why not for the unlicensed trespass committed through their country from one end to the other, by mercenary white men, who are destroying the game, and catching all the beaver and other rich and valuable furs out of their country, without paying them an equivalent, or, in fact, anything at all, for it; and this too, when they have been warned time and again of the danger they would be in, if they longer persisted in the practice.

"Messrs. Sublette and Campbell, two gentlemen of the highest respectability, who have traded with the Crows for several years, and they tell me they are one of the most honourable, honest and high-minded races of people on earth; and with Mr. Tullock, also, a man of the strictest veracity, who is now here with a party of them; and, he says, they never steal, - have a high sense of honour, and being fearless and proud, are quick to punish or retaliate."
temptation for the raiders of the northern Plains. So pressing was the Blackfeet threat that Americans were forced to forestall plans for trapping in Montana, and to keep their brigades large enough to withstand an attack, even though large parties reduced trapping efficiency and profits.

A number of violent encounters took place during the rendezvous era at the Three Forks of the Missouri, near Yellowstone Lake, near the Tetons, and near Bear Lake. When Blackfeet attacked the trappers’ Indian allies, mountain men usually joined them in battle to support their friends. Such was the case for the two Blackfeet attacks at the Bear Lake rendezvous in 1827 and 1828. At the first one, a Blackfeet war party surprised and killed five Shoshones. The Shoshone chief Cut Face asked the mountain men to show their friendship and loyalty by assisting them in a counterattack. William Sublette (namesake of Sublette County, partner with Jedediah Smith, David Jackson, and later, Robert Campbell) gathered three hundred trappers and charged the enemy. The following year the Blackfeet attacked once again near Bear Lake. After nearly four hours of fighting and with ammunition running low, volunteers rode eighteen miles to Bear Lake to summon reinforcements, which prompted the Blackfeet to retreat. Sometimes these conflicts were retaliations against previous actions. This was the case after the 1832 Pierre’s Hole rendezvous, when an Iroquois man avenged the death of his father, who had been killed a year earlier. The son engaged an Atsina raiding party near Teton Pass, wherein both sides suffered significant losses.

The fur trade era was, however, generally marked by amiable relations between fur trappers and Rocky Mountain tribes. Fur trade posts including Fort Hall (1834) and Fort Bridger (1843) lay in the heart of Eastern Shoshone country. They, along with Fort Laramie to the east, served the tribes but also became important connecting points for future emigrant trails and, the intrusion of whites into the Far West. The post-rendezvous era became a difficult time for western tribes, a period marked by disease, depopulation, and land loss. When emigrants began settling in the Mountain West, Indian life-ways came under more direct attack.

Nearly half a million people traveled along
American Indian Tribes Today

Though only one reservation – the Wind River Reservation – exists in Wyoming, all the American Indian tribes which participated in the Rocky Mountain Rendezvous survive and endure to this day. Their stories and perspectives differ radically from those of the Americans who invaded native lands as they moved across the continent.

Native cultures changed drastically once Europeans arrived in the western hemisphere. Access to European trade items, such as woven cloth, iron tools and utensils, and guns, affected many tribes, including those who did not have direct contact with European traders. Diseases which native populations had little or no natural immunity to had a devastating effect on Indians, at times wiping out entire bands or villages. Emigrants traveled through Indian lands to reach the West Coast, utilizing routes used by fur traders and trappers. The military followed soon after to construct forts in Indian territory. Even after treaties were signed and tribes moved to reservations, the loss of native land continued as American settlers continued to expand westward.

Today, American Indians fight a different battle. As the elderly speakers of native languages die, so does the ability to teach the languages to younger generations. And as the languages die, portions of native cultures die with them. Some tribes have implemented native language immersion programs in an effort to boost the number of native speakers and reverse the trend of language extinction, though lack of funding, as well as the need to support other programs such as health care and economic development, inhibits more expansive programs.

Each American Indian tribe has a heritage rich in native culture. Many have cultural centers located on the reservations; please visit the web sites listed below for more information.

- Lawrence L. Francis

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the Oregon-California and Mormon trails through Shoshone lands during the 1840s-1860s and consumed resources of wood, water, grass, and game, and made subsistence difficult for tribes along the trail. Bison numbers plummeted in the Snake and Green River valleys. Mormon settlements on the Bear and Green rivers in the 1850s further strained available resources. Nevertheless, the Shoshones assisted travelers in many ways, helped recover lost stock, and offered protection from raiders, hoping friendship and accommodation to whites would prove more advantageous in the long run than resistance and warfare.

Chief Washakie and a Shoshone delegation even attended the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 although they were not a part of the official treaty and its provisions because they were under Utah Territory jurisdiction. They were affected by the treaty, however, because the government recognized the Crows as possessors of all of the lands north and west of the Wind River Mountains including the Wind and Big Horn rivers. The following year Washakie signed a peace and friendship treaty with Utah territorial governor and Indian superintendent Brigham Young in Salt Lake City.

During the Civil War, Colonel Patrick Conner and his California Volunteers marched east to protect the overland trails. On January 29, 1863, Conner's militia massacred Bear Hunter's Band in its winter camp on Bear River. In July the Shoshones gathered at Fort Bridger for a treaty to reestablish amicable relations and peace between the Shoshones and the United States and to secure safe passage for white emigrants traveling west. Other provisions secured the rights to establish military fortifications and transportation and communication lines across Shoshone lands. The Eastern Shoshones found themselves at Fort Bridger again in the summer of 1868, this time signing a treaty that resulted in their removal to the Wind River Reservation on the eastern side of the Continental Divide.

Chief Washakie, 1890. J. E. STINSON COLLECTION, WYOMING STATE ARCHIVES, DEPARTMENT OF STATE PARKS AND CULTURAL RESOURCES