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## Waccara's Utes: Native American equestrian adaptations in the Eastern Great Basin, 1776-1876

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**WACCARA'S UTES: NATIVE AMERICAN  
EQUESTRIAN ADAPTATIONS IN  
THE EASTERN GREAT BASIN,  
1776-1876**

by

**Stephen P. Van Hoak**

**Bachelor of Science  
Regents College, Albany  
1995**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Arts**

**in**

**History**

**Department of History  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
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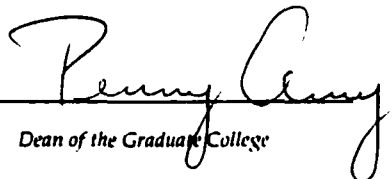
Waccara's Utes: Native American Equestrian Adaptations

in the Eastern Great Basin, 1776-1876


is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in History

  
Examination Committee Chair

  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Waccara's Utes: Native American Equestrian Adaptations in the Eastern Great Basin, 1776-1876**

by

**Stephen P. Van Hoak**

**Dr. Willard H. Rollings, Examination Committee Chair  
Associate Professor of History  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas**

The equestrian adaptations of the Western Utes of the Eastern Great Basin were distinct from the stereotypical Plains Indian adaptation to the horse. The range and mobility of the Western Utes was enhanced by their acquisition of horses, but the Utes did not abandon their diversified subsistence system to specialize in buffalo hunting as did many Plains equestrian groups. Western Ute equestrian adaptations changed and evolved throughout the nineteenth century in response to environmental, cultural, economic, and political issues. Waccara's Western Utes represented the most conspicuous stage of Native American equestrianism in the Eastern Great Basin, and the success of their diversified and far-ranging annual migratory subsistence cycle resulted in their becoming one of the most prosperous and powerful equestrian bands in the nineteenth century Southwest. The entry of the Mormons into the Eastern Great Basin initially complemented the annual cycle of Waccara's Utes but eventually caused such extreme environmental changes and cultural conflict that most Western Utes were forced to abandon equestrianism and leave the Eastern Great Basin.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Waccara watched as the Mexican posse on the far bank of the Mojave river turned and started back for their homes beyond the snow capped mountains to the west. With his pursuers defeated, Waccara knew his *puwa*, or power, would now be unquestioned and that many more of his people would seek his leadership. He and his people had good reason to be pleased with the results of their winter sojourn in California. The Utes' horses fared far better there in the mild littoral climate than in the long and frigid winters typical of their homeland in the Eastern Great Basin, and though it would be several days before the remainder of the Ute warriors returned from their scattered horse raids, the hundreds of Mexican-branded cattle and horses already in the Ute camp ensured that it would be a good year for Waccara and his people.

The difficult trek through the desert that lay ahead would take its toll on the horses of Waccara's band, but ultimately most would reach the grasslands of southwestern Utah, where melting snow gave life to vast and luxurious fields of grass. In the next few weeks, Waccara's Utes would gradually follow the melting snow northward to the Sevier Valley. By May, after months of fattening on fresh grasses, the Ute herd would be in peak condition for the Western Ute spring trade gathering. There Waccara's people would barter many of their fine horses to obtain guns, ammunition, blankets, and other goods, while enjoying horse races, dances, and other events with their kinsmen.

Retaining the majority of their best horses, Waccara's band would then head northeast in the summer to pursue the buffalo.

The annual buffalo hunt was an event eagerly anticipated by Waccara's Utes. With many strong and healthy horses, the Ute warriors would likely have a very successful hunt, procuring an abundance of meat and skins. After the women of the band cleaned and tanned the valuable buffalo hides, extensive feasting would customarily follow. As Waccara's Utes proceeded back to Utah in September, their large herds helped ensure they could travel quickly and evade other Native American hunting bands. If forced into a confrontation, the Utes' guns and plentiful ammunition would give them an edge in the ensuing battle.

In the fall, the Ute warriors would hunt antelope, deer, elk, and other large game, while the women gathered nuts, berries, and plants. Some of the skins and pelts of the animals would be bartered to fur traders for guns, ammunition, tobacco, and other Euroamerican goods, while the remainder of the pelts and skins were retained to trade in the winter. The exhausted Ute herd rested and recovered on the grasses of the Sevier Valley, growing strong in preparation for the return in winter across the desert to California, where another successful season of equestrian raiding and trading might follow.<sup>1</sup>

The stereotypical Plains adaptation to the horse has long been dominant in both popular and historical literature. Hunting the buffalo throughout the year over seemingly

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<sup>1</sup> This recreation of the yearly cycle of Waccara's band was composed through the use of scattered references from the sources cited in this essay. The account features events that were known to have occurred in different years, and is intended only to be representative of a typical year for Waccara and his band. Sufficient sources do not exist to create a narrative of an entire actual year in the life of Waccara's Utes.

endless expanses of tall grass, the galloping, culturally-indistinguishable Plains Indian warrior with his breech-loading rifle and spectacular headdress is an image familiar to many. Yet the equestrian adaptations of Plains tribes were far from uniform and differed significantly from adaptations of Native Americans in other regions, particularly in the Eastern Great Basin. There the Western Utes, faced with relatively severe ecological constraints on equestrianism, adapted to the introduction of the horse in a substantially different way from the "Plains Indian."

The Western Utes were distinct among equestrian Native Americans most notably in their diversification of food resource exploitation and in the geographic scope of their migrations. Rather than becoming more resource specialized after the acquisition of the horse, the Western Utes continued a resource diversified subsistence pattern that predated the acquisition of the horse, where buffalo hunting played an important, but not a dominant role. Equestrianism among the Western Utes changed and evolved throughout the tumultuous nineteenth century in response to both internal and external pressures. Waccara's mounted band represented the most conspicuous stage of Native American equestrianism in the Eastern Great Basin, and the success of their diversified subsistence cycle resulted in their becoming in the mid-nineteenth century one of the most prosperous and powerful equestrian bands in the Southwest. Waccara's Utes ranged from the Pacific Ocean to the Platte River, following a diversified yearly migratory cycle that circumvented many of the ecological and geographic limitations on successful equestrianism in the Eastern Great Basin.

An investigation of Western Ute equestrianism faces a number of difficulties. There is virtually no previous scholarship on which to build, as historians have focused



almost solely on Plains Indian adaptations to the horse.<sup>2</sup> Notable exceptions include John C. Ewers' study of horses among the Blackfeet and James T. Carson's article on the Choctaw's adaptation to the horse.<sup>3</sup> Numerous works investigate the spread of horses northward from New Mexico to the Plains, but none focus on the diffusion of horses west of the Rockies.<sup>4</sup> The value of horses in buffalo hunting is well-documented and there are a number of studies that investigate the habits and ecology of the bison.<sup>5</sup> Yet these works virtually ignore the distinctiveness of the buffalo west of the Rockies and the impact of this distinctiveness on Native American hunting practices in the region. Though useful studies of Plains buffalo populations exist, there are currently no published estimates of Western bison populations.<sup>6</sup> The lack of established scholarship on many of these issues is surprising considering that virtually all these questions are addressed to some extent in the journals of Western settlers, trappers, and explorers.

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<sup>2</sup> Among the better recent such works are Elliot West, *The Way to the West: Essays on the Central Plains* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), and Anthony McGinnis, *Counting Coup and Cutting Horses: Intertribal Warfare on the Northern Plains, 1738-1889* (Evergreen, Colorado: Cordillera Press, Inc., 1992).

<sup>3</sup> John C. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture, with Comparative Material from other Western Tribes*, Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin no. 159 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1969); James Taylor Carson, "Horses and the Economy and Culture of the Choctaw Indians, 1690-1840," *Ethnohistory* 42:3 (Summer 1995): 495-513.

<sup>4</sup> See Frank Raymond Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns of the Great Plains Indians, 17<sup>th</sup> Century through Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, with an Introduction by John C. Ewers (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), and Francis Haines, "Horses for Western Indians," *American West* 3:2 (Spring 1966): 5.

<sup>5</sup> See Francis Haines, *The Buffalo* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1970), David A. Dary, *The Buffalo Book: The Full Saga of the American Animal* (Ohio University Press, 1989), and William T. Hornaday, *The Extinction of the American Bison with a Sketch of Its Discovery and Life History*, in *Report of the United States National Museum for 1887* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1889).

<sup>6</sup> See Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850," *Journal of American History* 78:2 (September 1990): 465-485.

The Western Utes as a people have largely been ignored by historians. The subject of Mormon-Western Ute relations has received considerable attention by scholars, particularly Mormon historians, but the Western Utes in these works tend to be portrayed as passive victims of Mormon settlement rather than as active participants in their own history.<sup>7</sup> Western Ute culture remains a mystery in most contemporary studies of the Western Utes, despite the work of a number of anthropologists that have studied the Western Utes since the establishment of the Indian Claims Commission.<sup>8</sup> Though the work of these anthropologists has yielded substantial information regarding Western Ute culture, historians have been slow to embrace their studies.<sup>9</sup>

Many other obstacles hinder an investigation of Western Ute equestrianism. Until recently, the historiography of Western Utes has been dominated by Mormons, who have generally been perceived as the “authorities” on the Western Utes. As such, a Mormon “filter” must be circumvented in both primary and secondary sources when studying the Western Utes. Prior to Mormon settlement of the Eastern Great Basin, there are few documented observations of Western Utes that give clues concerning their culture and

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<sup>7</sup> See Juanita Brooks, “Indian Relations on the Mormon Frontier,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 12:1-2 (January-April 1944): 1-48.

<sup>8</sup> One of the first such works was Julian Haynes Steward, *Aboriginal and Historical Groups of the Ute Indians of Utah: An Analysis with Supplement*, in *Ute Indians I*, Garland Series, American Indian Ethnohistory: California and Basin-Plateau Indians, ed. David Agee Horr (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1974); also see Joseph G. Jorgensen, “The Ethnohistory and Acculturation of the Northern Ute” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1964), Anne M. Smith, *Ethnography of the Northern Utes*, Papers in Anthropology no. 17 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), and Joel Clifford Janetski, “The Western Ute of Utah Valley: An Ethnohistoric Model of Lakeside Adaptation” (Ph.D. diss., University of Utah, 1983).

<sup>9</sup> A recent exception is David Rich Lewis, *Neither Wolf nor Dog: American Indians, Environment, and Agrarian Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

beliefs.<sup>10</sup> Only 20 years elapsed between Mormon settlement and Western Ute removal to reservations, a window of time too small in many cases to adequately study cultural change. The amalgamation of many different Ute bands in the Uintah Basin in the latter part of the nineteenth century partially blurred Western Ute distinctiveness to the ethnographers that began to study the Utes in the twentieth century. The relative lack of sources on Western Ute culture have undoubtedly discouraged many ethnohistorians from focusing their studies on these people.

This thesis will attempt to circumvent many of these problems and limitations of studying Western Ute culture. Preeminent studies of diverse equestrian Native American groups are used to show the potential benefits and limitations of equestrianism, and how environmental, geographic, and cultural factors influenced these peoples' adaptations to the horse. Accounts of a number of diverse Euroamericans have been pieced together and augmented by anthropological studies of the Western Utes to reconstruct the annual migratory equestrian cycle of Waccara's Utes. Environmental studies of the Eastern Great Basin are used to show how this migratory cycle fit into the ecological constraints of the region. Waccara's Utes are featured as they are the most well-documented of all Western Ute bands and provide the best opportunity to show how equestrianism transformed Western Ute culture and migratory habits. Investigations of the Plains buffalo are combined with journals of Western fur trappers to establish the distinctiveness of the Western buffalo and also to show how this distinctiveness affected Western Ute

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<sup>10</sup> For surveys of the few recorded Euroamerican encounters with the Western Utes prior to Mormon settlement, see Joseph P. Sánchez, *Explorers, Traders, and Slavers: Forging the Old Spanish Trail, 1678-1850* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1997), and Joseph J. Hill, "Spanish and Mexican Exploration and Trade Northwest from New Mexico into the Great Basin, 1765-1853," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 3:1 (January 1930): 3-23.

hunting practices and eventually resulted in the demise of the Western bison. This study attempts to go beyond traditional historical perspectives by examining environmental, cultural, political, economic, and social issues in an attempt to achieve a more complete understanding of Western Ute equestrianism. Diversity and close scrutiny of all sources is used throughout this thesis to avoid bias and provide multiple perspectives.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE PRE-HORSE WESTERN UTES

#### Ute Origins

The Western Utes, or *Nüciu* as they refer to themselves, had inhabited the Eastern Great Basin for centuries prior to Escalante's arrival in 1776. The Ute creation story alleges that the Utes, along with many other tribes of Native Americans as well as whites, were released by Coyote, the trickster, from the bag of Wolf, the creator. Each tribe settled in a different region, but Sinawaf (Wolf) proclaimed that the Utes "will be very brave and able to defeat the rest."<sup>11</sup> The Utes are a Numic people, whose arrival in the Eastern Great Basin is believed by archaeologists to have occurred around 1300 A. D. Though alternative theories exist, it appears that the Utes were able to displace the region's previous inhabitants, the agriculturalist Anasazi and Fremont peoples, through superior hunting and gathering adaptations. Dividing into numerous groups, the Utes concentrated in areas of high resource density. The group that would come to be known as the Western Utes settled in the Eastern Great Basin.<sup>12</sup>

#### The Eastern Great Basin

The Eastern Great Basin is a diverse region, ranging from arid and bleak desert

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<sup>11</sup> Lewis, *Wolf nor Dog*, 22-23.

<sup>12</sup> David B. Madsen, "Dating Paiute-Shoshoni Expansion in the Great Basin," *American Antiquity* 40:1 (1975): 82-85; Jorgensen, *Ethnohistory*, 5-15; Smith, *Ethnography*, 10-17.

landscape in the west, to beautiful, spring-fed meadows further east in the foothills, to high, timber and snow covered mountains at its eastern extremity. Many peaks in the Wasatch and Uintah mountains exceed 10,000 feet and support year-round snow caps. Several lakes are fed by the numerous mountain streams of melting snow, the most significant being the freshwater Utah Lake and the briny Salt Lake. The lush areas surrounding the streams and lakes of the Eastern Great Basin are a stark contrast to the rest of the arid Great Basin, and it was in these foothills and valleys, particularly Utah Lake Valley and Sevier Valley, that the Western Utes made their home.<sup>13</sup>

The foothills and mountain slopes of the eighteenth century Eastern Great Basin and the mostly north-south valleys between them were rich in plant and animal life. The seasonal flooding resulting from melting snow made the valleys natural meadows of luxuriant grass. Many edible roots, seeds, grasses, berries, and nuts, including pinion nuts, abounded in the hills and valleys, and this dense vegetation supported a large number of small and large game, including buffalo, deer, antelope, elk, and rabbits. Beaver was abundant in the streams, and fish and geese were plentiful in and around the freshwater lakes.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Wayne L. Wahlquist, ed., *Atlas of Utah* (Ogden, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1981), 16-19; John Wesley Powell, *Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States, with a More Detailed Account of the Lands of Utah*, ed. Wallace Stegner (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962), 109-111.

<sup>14</sup> Silvestre Vélaz de Escalante, *The Dominguez-Escalante Journal*, ed. Ted J. Warner, trans. Fray Angelico Chavez (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), 59-60; Wahlquist, *Atlas of Utah*, 30-31; Ivar Tidestrom, *Flora of Utah and Nevada*, Contributions from the United States National Herbarium vol. 25 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925), passim; Janetski, *Western Ute*, 38-49; Donald Callaway, Joel Janetski, and Omer C. Stewart, *Ute*, in *Handbook of the North American Indians* vol. 11, *Great Basin*, ed. Warren D'Azevedo, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1986), 336-338.

The climate of the Eastern Great Basin is largely influenced by the presence of the Wasatch Mountains on its eastern boundary. This chain forms a barrier to eastward-moving storms, forcing clouds to halt and deposit their moisture on the west face of the mountains. Precipitation in the region varies from 10-20 inches per year, decreasing as one moves further west away from the mountains. Most precipitation in the region arrives in the winter and is consequently usually in the form of snow. Winters tend to be severe both in terms of snowfall and temperature, especially when high pressure systems dominate and form an inversion layer, creating a blanket of fog that dramatically lowers temperatures below the seasonal average of 25-30 degrees (Fahrenheit).<sup>15</sup>

### Subsistence

Prior to Euroamerican contact, the Western Utes survived in the Eastern Great Basin through the exploitation of the many varied, though limited, food sources in the region and through the use of seasonal migrations to maximize these resources. In the spring, the Western Utes converged at Utah Lake as various fish began their spawning runs up the numerous mountain streams feeding the lake. Trout, chub, and suckers were so profuse in the early spring that they were often seized from the streams by hand, and waterfowl, attracted by the fish, were also available to supplement the Utes' diet.<sup>16</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup> Wahlquist, *Atlas of Utah*, 55-70; Powell, *Arid Region*, 63, 144-146; James Harvey Simpson, *Report of Explorations across the Great Basin of the Territory of Utah for a Direct Wagon Route from Camp Floyd to Genoa, in Carson Valley, in 1859* (Vintage Nevada Series Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1983), 182.

<sup>16</sup> George Washington Bean, *Autobiography of George Washington Bean, a Utah Pioneer of 1847 and His Family Accounts*, (Provo: Utah State Historical Society, 1974), 51.

Western Utes also hunted ground squirrels and sage grouse in communal drives as these animals converged in the spring to mate.<sup>17</sup>

In the summer, food sources were far less abundant, and the Utes dispersed into smaller groups and spread out in their quest for food.<sup>18</sup> Some Western Utes remained at Utah Lake, fishing and hunting waterfowl in communal drives as these birds molted and became unable to fly. Berries, edible plants, roots, and seeds formed the basis of the diet of most Western Utes through the warm summer months. Seeds matured first in the valleys and then later in the season in the uplands, so many Utes followed the maturing seeds up the hills through the summer. Groups of Western Utes cooperated in large cricket and grasshopper drives as these insects reached their peak populations.<sup>19</sup> Buffalo assembled to mate in the summer, and the Utes likely used cooperative hunts to slaughter these animals and obtain fresh meat to augment their summer diet.<sup>20</sup>

The Utes continued to operate in small groups throughout the fall, but switched their subsistence efforts to hunting the mature large game that began to leave higher elevations and head for sheltered valleys in anticipation of winter. Antelopes gathered in large herds of as many as 100 animals during the fall, providing the Western Utes with excellent hunting opportunities. Rabbits and waterfowl reached their full maturity at this time, and the Western Utes used communal drives to hunt these animals in large numbers. Pinion nuts were also harvested in the fall by the Utes every few years whenever a good crop became available.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Janetski, *Western Ute*, 39-40, 57-60, 71; Callaway, Janetski, and Stewart, *Ute*, 342.

<sup>18</sup> Stewart, *Groups of the Ute*, 7-8.

<sup>19</sup> The month of August was known to the Utes as *tuwana matukuci*, a term that referred to the singing of crickets; see Smith, *Ethnography*, 279.

<sup>20</sup> Janetski, *Western Ute*, 38-39, 57, 71-73; Callaway, Janetski, and Stewart, *Ute*, 341.

<sup>21</sup> Janetski, *Western Ute*, 58-59, 73; Callaway, Janetski, and Stewart, *Ute*, 342-343.



The coming of winter meant a return to Utah Lake for most of the Western Utes, where fish, cached food, and wintering game in the river valleys provided sustenance for the Utes, and firewood was at hand to give warmth through the often bitterly cold months. Whitefish were plentiful in the winter as they spawned in the streams of Utah Lake. Many large game, including bison, sought out and congregated in sheltered valleys surrounding Utah Lake and became easy prey to the Western Utes. If the winter were especially severe and the Utes' movement was restricted, cached food such as pinion nuts and dried fish often provided them sustenance.<sup>22</sup>

Mobility and diversity were the keys to Western Ute survival in the Eastern Great Basin. Though many food sources were only exploited seasonally and in specific locales where most abundant, the majority of resources available to the Western Utes were present year-round in most areas, though in less impressive numbers. Opportunistic hunting and gathering out of season was common, such as the killing of a wandering buffalo in spring. The Western Utes had fewer food taboos than most Native Americans, as food sources were comparatively less abundant in the Eastern Great Basin than in other regions.<sup>23</sup> Overall, the Western Utes depended on fishing for 30% of their subsistence, gathering for 40%, and hunting for 30%.<sup>24</sup> Land use was communal among the Utes, but visitors to Ute lands were often expected to request and possibly pay for use of resources.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Janetski, *Western Ute*, 42-43, 58-59, 73; Callaway, Janetski, and Stewart, *Ute*, 344-345.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, *Ethnography*, 46-47.

<sup>24</sup> Callaway, Janetski, and Stewart, *Ute*, 341.

<sup>25</sup> Callaway, Janetski, and Stewart, *Ute*, 340; Stewart, *Groups of the Ute*, 10-11.

### Sociopolitical Organization

The social organization of the Western Utes supported their varied subsistence cycle. Bilateral, nuclear families formed the basic social unit in Western Ute culture, and in the summer and fall small groups of interrelated families usually operated communally in search of resources.<sup>26</sup> Some tasks were gender-specific while others were performed by both sexes. Men were generally responsible for hunting and protection of the family, but collaborated with women in pinion nut gathering, fishing, and cricket, grasshopper, and rabbit drives. Women, in addition to cooperating with men in certain activities, were responsible for food gathering and the skinning and cleaning of animals. Women also tanned hides and crafted clothing and other leatherwork.<sup>27</sup>

Large “tribal” gatherings were limited to the winter and spring months when the Western Utes converged at Utah Lake. As the snow began to melt in the late spring, the Western Utes engaged in special social events such as dances, gambling, and other festivities. Large groups of Utes also converged occasionally in other seasons for communal hunting or gathering activities such as rabbit drives. Yet at no time did families surrender their autonomy to the “tribe” or group – they were always free to leave one group and either join another group or remain alone. Leaders were generally selected only to direct specific group activities, such as coordinated raiding or defensive efforts or communal rabbit drives, and were severely limited in the scope and duration of their power.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Callaway, Janetski, and Stewart, *Ute*, 352-353; Stewart, *Groups of the Ute*, 5-9; Smith, *Ethnography*, 123-124.

<sup>27</sup> Callaway, Janetski, and Stewart, *Ute*, 341-343, 346.

<sup>28</sup> Stewart, *Groups of the Ute*, 5-6.

Specific divisions of eighteenth and nineteenth century Western Utes are difficult to distinguish, but five distinct historical divisions of Utah Utes, based largely on geography, are commonly recognized by modern historians and anthropologists.<sup>29</sup> As shown on map “a,” these are the Pahvant, Sanpits, Moanunts, Timpanogots, and Uintahs, though the Uintah group did not exist until the 1830s. Divisional membership in some cases indicated year-round residence in the vicinity, but many Western Utes frequently hunted, gathered, and fished in the “territory” of other divisions of Utes, especially at Utah Lake.<sup>30</sup> Membership in these groups was typically fluid and temporary, and it is doubtful that members of these groups identified themselves as distinct from other Western Utes. But although Western Utes shared a common culture and environment and in most cases had similar experiences with equestrianism, they were not uniform in their adaptations to the horse. This thesis will therefore address, wherever possible, distinct adaptations among individual Western Ute groups or bands. Conversely, the term “Western Ute” will be used without reference to specific geographic divisional nomenclature whenever divisional membership is unknown or when it is apparent that all Western Utes shared the same experience.

### Religion

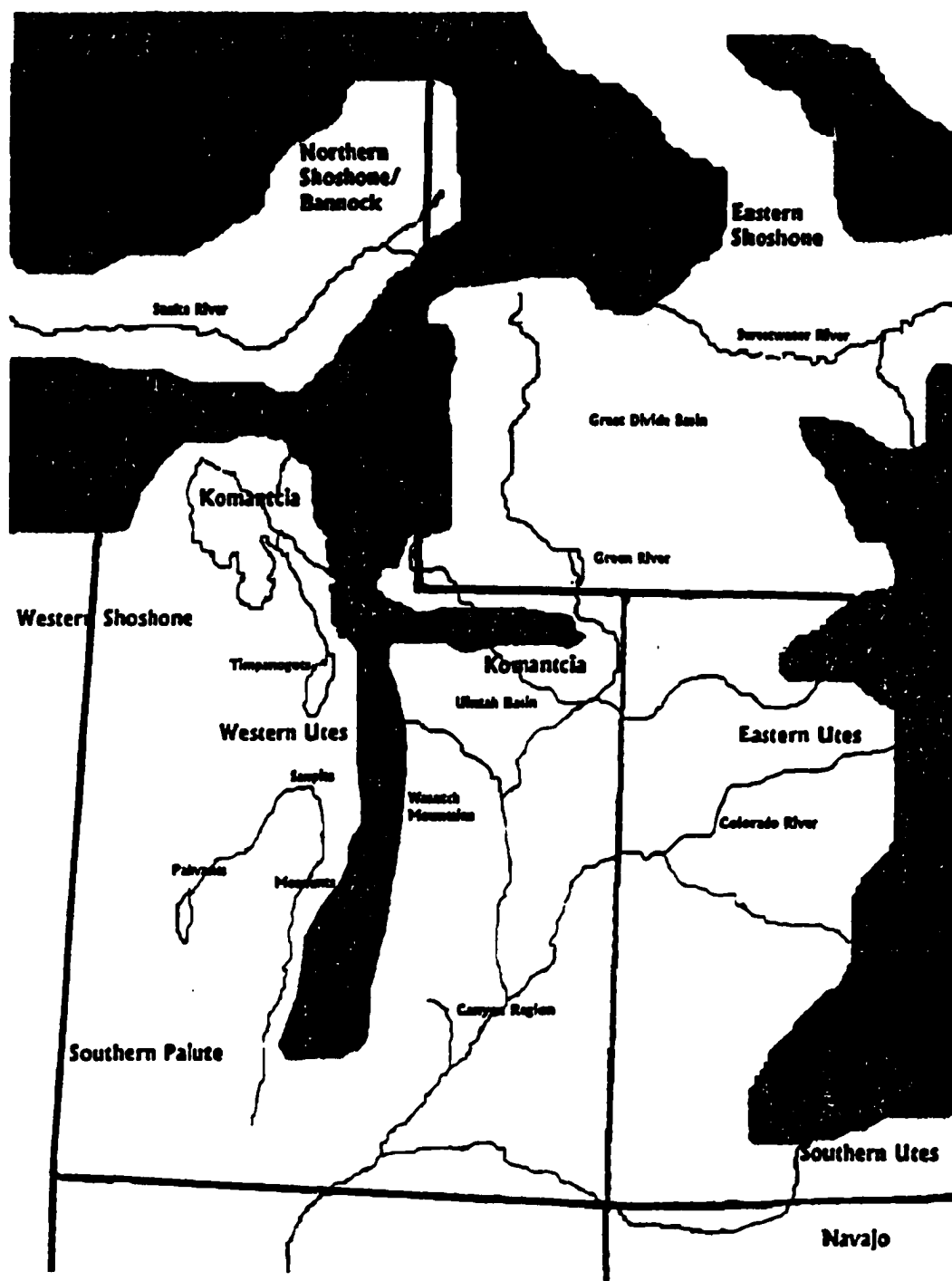
Ute religion centered around *puwa*, or power, a force which could be harnessed and used to aid the Utes in hunting, raiding, battle, and healing. Specially trained shamans and other leaders were often conferred *puwa* through recurrent spirit dreams.

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<sup>29</sup> Only when the Mormons began to settle in Utah in the late 1840s did observers of Western Utes begin to note the primary residence or divisional membership of particular groups of Utes.

<sup>30</sup> Callaway, Janetski, and Stewart, *Ute*, 338-340; Steward, *Groups of the Ute*, passim; Smith, *Ethnography*, 17-27.

## MAP A



## Western Utes in 1776

shaded areas represent mountains

Those who received *puwa* were expected to use their power for the benefit of their people; those who used their *puwa* to the detriment of the group were seen as “sorcerers.”<sup>31</sup> Aside from their belief in *puwa*, the Western Utes generally did not incorporate their religious beliefs and mythology into rituals or their every-day life.<sup>32</sup> Most Ute tales typically involved supernatural animal figures, but Ute stories were not didactic lessons and were told primarily for entertainment.<sup>33</sup>

### **Relations with Others**

Prior to Euroamerican contact, the Western Utes had cordial relations with most of their neighbors. To the west and the southwest were the unmounted Western Shoshone and Southern Paiutes, who were culturally and linguistically-related to the Western Utes.<sup>34</sup> These groups and the Western Utes were familiar with each other’s territory and likely traded with each other.<sup>35</sup> The Spanish to the southeast did not come into contact with the Western Utes until 1776, though the Southern Utes were allies with the Spanish in conflicts with the Navajo.<sup>36</sup> The Navajos may have had some trade contact with the Western Utes, but the conflict between Southern Utes and Navajos probably limited such exchanges. The Eastern and Southern Utes of Colorado had some

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<sup>31</sup> Jay Miller, “Numic Religion: An Overview of Power in the Great Basin of Native North America,” *Anthropos* 78 (1983): 337-354.

<sup>32</sup> Jorgensen, *Ethnohistory*, 34.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, *Ethnography*, 261.

<sup>34</sup> There is some scholarly debate concerning the cultural distinction between Southern Paiutes and Western Utes prior to the introduction of the horse; see Steward, *Groups of the Ute*, 2-5; Smith, *Ethnography*, 17-27.

<sup>35</sup> Vèlez de Escalante, *Dominguez-Escalante Journal*, 63-81.

<sup>36</sup> Hill, *Exploration and Trade*, 3-23; S. Lyman Tyler, “The Spaniard and the Ute,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 22:4 (October 1954): 343-361.

interaction and trade with the Western Utes, but the presence of the “Komantcia” in the Uintah Basin between the two groups of Utes made such contact hazardous.<sup>37</sup>

In 1776, when Escalante encountered the unmounted Western Utes, they clearly feared the mounted “Komantcia” who occupied valuable hunting grounds to the east and north.<sup>38</sup> The people to the north were almost certainly Northern Shoshone, while those to the east were likely a related sort of “transitional” people between the Shoshone and their Comanche cousins who broke off in the seventeenth and eighteenth century to move to the Southern Plains.<sup>39</sup> The dominance of the Comanche/Shoshone over the Western Utes rested upon their early acquisition of new weapons of war: horses.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Vèlez de Escalante, *Dominguez-Escalante Journal*, 27-58.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Steward, *Groups of the Ute*, 32; Flores, *Bison Ecology*, 468; West, *Way to the West*, 10. An official letter dated 20 April 1828 refers to hostilities between the Western Utes and the neighboring “Camanches Sozones”; Juan De D. Cañedo, “Letter from Mr. Cañedo to Mr. Poinsett Dated 12 April 1828,” U. S. Congress, 25<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., House Ex. Doc. 351, Serial 332, 228-229.

<sup>40</sup> Guns were not a significant factor in the Shoshoni dominance over the Utes, as neither tribe was able to obtain guns in large numbers until the 1820s, after the introduction of the fur trade west of the Rockies and the easing of enforcement of the New Mexican ban on trading guns to the Indians following Mexican independence. See Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 4-5, 20, 60, 84-85.

## CHAPTER 3

### EQUESTRIANISM

#### **The Spread of Horses**

Horses were originally introduced into New Mexico by the Spanish in 1598 to aid in the transportation of people and goods and for their value as weapons of war against the Indians. For decades the Spanish managed to preserve a virtual monopoly on these animals through vigorously enforced laws. But after the Pueblo revolt of 1680, vast Spanish herds were seized by Indians, and in the next few decades horses quickly spread to the plains north and east of New Mexico. Horses reached the Southern Utes and Navajos almost immediately and were among the Plains Comanche within a decade, as shown on map "b." At the turn of the eighteenth century, the horse "frontier" stretched beyond the Great Plains and into the Intermountain region to the west, where the Northern Shoshone began to acquire their first animals.<sup>41</sup> By the time Escalante penetrated the Eastern Great Basin in 1776, the Shoshone had likely reached their maximum herd size and were fully adapted to equestrianism.<sup>42</sup>

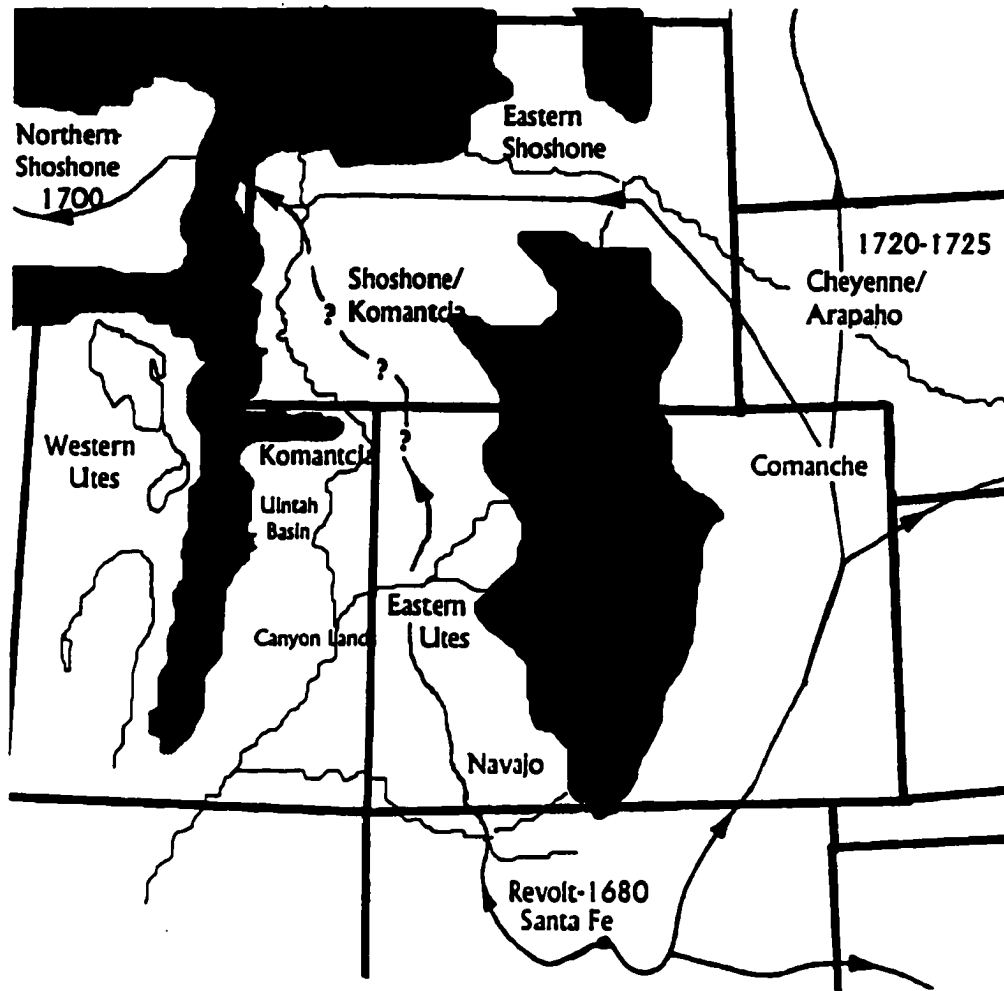
The Western Utes, though much closer to New Mexico, the original source of horses, were unable to secure horses until nearly a century after the Northern Shoshone.

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<sup>41</sup> Haines, *Horses for Western Indians*, 5-15; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 20-22, 27-29, 33.

<sup>42</sup> John C. Ewers estimated it required about 75 years from a tribe's first acquisition of horses for the tribe to reach its maximum herd size; see Ewers, *The Horse*, 23.

## MAP B



## Spread of Horses 1680-1725

shaded areas represent mountains  
arrows represent diffusion of horses



The first known reference to horses among the Western Utes was in 1805, when a Spanish official reported that the Western Utes had stolen a few dozen horses from the “Comanche.”<sup>43</sup> The assertion of some historians that horses in large numbers diffused northward through Western Ute middlemen in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century appears flawed.<sup>44</sup> Escalante did not report any horses among the Western Utes in 1776, and considering Escalante’s frequent notations of horses among the Eastern Utes and spoor sightings in the Uintah Basin, it is exceedingly unlikely that he would have failed to report the presence or recent presence of horses among the Western Utes.<sup>45</sup> While it is possible that some eighteenth century diffusion of the horse to the north occurred through Eastern Ute middlemen west of the Rockies, it is far more likely that the Shoshoni acquired their first horses from their Comanche relatives.<sup>46</sup> In any case, it is clear that the Western Utes did not secure their first horses until some time between 1776 and 1805. The explication for the slow spread of horses to the Western Utes centers around the environment and geographic setting of the Eastern Great Basin, and the severe limitations these factors imposed upon the acquisition and useful employment of horses.

### Potential Uses of Horses

One of the more noted applications of horses involved combat. In battle, the power and speed of horses dramatically increased the deadliness of shock weapons such

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<sup>43</sup> Hill, *Exploration and Trade*, 16-17.

<sup>44</sup> Haines, *Horses for Western Indians*, 12-13.

<sup>45</sup> Vèlez de Escalante, *Dominguez-Escalante Journal*, 27-61.

<sup>46</sup> Frank Raymond Secoy concluded that Utes who stole horses from the New Mexicans – obviously Southern/Eastern Utes from contemporary accounts – were responsible for aiding the northward spread of horses; see Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 33. Tribes with cultural or linguistic ties are more likely, however, to trade with each other for horses; see Ewers, *The Horse*, 14.

as clubs and lances.<sup>47</sup> Bows could be used while mounted with little loss of effectiveness, though muzzle-loaded guns were more problematic to aim and reload while mounted.<sup>48</sup> Horses also amplified pursuit and evasion capabilities, allowing the possessor to avoid more numerous unmounted foes and to apprehend slower unmounted enemies.

The speed of horses was also beneficial in hunting and pursuing large game, particularly slow-moving buffalo, in open plains where mobility was unimpaired.<sup>49</sup> Unmounted buffalo hunting demanded large numbers of warriors to surround and confuse a buffalo herd. This type of hunting usually only resulted in the capture of a few animals and was extremely hazardous, as an unexpected stampede could potentially result in many of the unmounted hunters being trampled. Mounted warriors typically operated independently using the chase method, where hunters rode alongside buffalo and used arrows at close range to kill the animals.<sup>50</sup> Mounted warriors were able to get closer and more frequent shots at buffalo and were also far less vulnerable to stampedes than were unmounted hunters.<sup>51</sup> In effect, the value of horses increased the operative density and value of buffalo in a region to equestrian peoples in that region.<sup>52</sup>

The carrying capacity of the horse was also a significant advantage for equestrian peoples. A full-grown buffalo bull contained up to 800 pounds of edible meat,

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<sup>47</sup> For the effectiveness of horses in combat, see Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, passim; Ewers, *The Horse*, 309-310.

<sup>48</sup> Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 63, 96-103; Ewers, *The Horse*, 200-202, 309-310.

<sup>49</sup> Most other game tended to be too fast for most horses to pursue; see Ewers, *The Horse*, 170.

<sup>50</sup> Bows were the preferred weapon of equestrian buffalo hunters as a result of the difficulty in aiming and reloading muzzle-loaded guns while mounted; see *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 154-159, 304.

<sup>52</sup> Alan J. Osborn, "Ecological Aspects of Equestrian Adaptations in Aboriginal North America," *American Anthropologist* 85:3 (September 1983): 563-591.

and mounted warriors could rapidly kill many such animals once a herd was discovered. Successful hunts were therefore dependent more on the availability of excess pack horses to carry the meat and skins than on large numbers of warriors.<sup>53</sup> The superior load-bearing capacity of horses also allowed equestrian peoples to transport heavier, bulkier, and more numerous goods between camps and thereby enhance their material culture. Tepees, pottery, and metal goods became far more practical to hunters and gatherers following the acquisition of horses.<sup>54</sup>

The enhanced mobility and range provided by horses allowed greater potential success in trading, raiding, and resource exploitation. Horses extended the range of equestrian peoples by a multiple of five and increased their average daily distance traveled by a factor of three.<sup>55</sup> Equestrian peoples could journey longer distances to trade, return with more numerous and heavier goods, and had mobile units of barter in the form of their horses.<sup>56</sup> Raids for captives and horses were far less hazardous for equestrian peoples with their quick-strike and retreat capabilities, especially when targeting unmounted foes.<sup>57</sup> The range of horses also provided equestrian peoples with access to more distant potential targets of raids. Annual migrations to hunt and gather were enhanced by the mobility of the horse, and equestrian peoples were able to move to a new area more rapidly as they exhausted the resources in a particular locale.<sup>58</sup>

Discovering a large buffalo herd was usually far more difficult than the actual hunt, and the mobility of horses enabled wider geographic migrations in search of buffalo herds.

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<sup>53</sup> Ewers, *The Horse*, 168-169, 304-305.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 306-309.

<sup>55</sup> Osborn, *Equestrian Adaptations*, 581.

<sup>56</sup> Ewers, *The Horse*, 217-221; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 24.

<sup>57</sup> Ewers, *The Horse*, 184-185.

<sup>58</sup> Carson, *Choctaw Indians*, 497-498.

### Potential Liabilities of Horses

Equestrianism also had significant liabilities, as horses were not merely objects or tools and required sustenance and care to survive. The constant need for water and feed to sustain their animals forced equestrian peoples not only to spend the vast majority of their time in locales with abundant water and forage, but also to frequently shift camp as forage was exhausted. Equestrian peoples were limited to travelling through areas that provided water and feed and were also limited in herd and group size by the relative abundance of forage and water in their vicinity.<sup>59</sup> In response to the needs of their animals, most equestrian Native Americans acquired an extensive working knowledge of diverse grass and forage types and their relative value to horses.<sup>60</sup> Most equestrian Native Americans became “pastoralists” - they depended upon animals for exploiting their physical environment and were forced to move periodically in response to the needs of their animals.<sup>61</sup>

Many aspects of equestrianism diverted considerable time from traditional activities and subsistence efforts. While an equestrian group was encamped, someone had to be assigned daily to drive the family herd to pasture and water.<sup>62</sup> Diseased or injured horses required specialized care, often from shamans or others specifically trained in medicinal remedies.<sup>63</sup> The manufacturing of saddle bags, bridles, saddles, stirrups, and

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<sup>59</sup> Ewers, *The Horse*, 40-42. An average mustang required 20 pounds of grass and 10-12 gallons of water each day; see James E. Sherow, “Workings of the Geodialectic: High Plains Indians and their Horses in the Region of the Arkansas River Valley, 1800-1870,” *Environmental History Review* 16:2 (Summer 1992): 69-70; for additional nutritional requirements of horses, see Osborn, *Equestrian Adaptations*, 576.

<sup>60</sup> Ewers, *The Horse*, 301.

<sup>61</sup> Clyde Wilson, “An Inquiry into the Nature of Plains Indian Cultural Development,” *American Anthropologist* 65:2 (April 1963): 362-363.

<sup>62</sup> Ewers, *The Horse*, 37-38.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-49.

saddle blankets added significantly to the workload of women, and children required adult guidance and training to learn to control and ride horses.<sup>64</sup> The demands of equestrianism reduced the time and manpower available for traditional hunting and gathering efforts and, in some cases, caused an erosion of traditional skills.<sup>65</sup>

Possession of horses could also increase the threat of enemy raids and warfare. The high value of horses as a trade commodity, hunting and gathering aid, and object of status and wealth within the tribe, as well as the constant need to replace horse losses, were strong motivations that fueled prolific horse raiding and retaliation between equestrian peoples.<sup>66</sup> Unlike many other domesticated animals, horses generally made no sound to warn of the approach of intruders, and many equestrian Native Americans rarely posted sentries and guards for their horses.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, horse raiding was dangerous both for the raider and the victim, and these raids and the resultant retaliatory warfare often caused significant casualties to the male population of equestrian tribes.<sup>68</sup>

Winter often aggravated many of the difficulties of equestrianism as well as presenting new problems. Thick layers of snow or ice blanketing grass required clearing in order for horses to feed, and equestrian peoples were often forced to resort to bark or branches to feed their horses.<sup>69</sup> Much of the nutritional value of grasses retreated underground in winter to avoid harsh winds and cold temperatures, so winter forage provided less energy to horses at precisely the time of year that the horses needed more

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 66-67, 73-95.

<sup>65</sup> Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 70.

<sup>66</sup> Ewers, *The Horse*, 173-175.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 207-208.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 212; for more on horse raiding, see Ibid., 176-193.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 43-44; Osborn, *Equestrian Adaptations*, 566-567, 570; Sherow, *Geodialectic*, 72-73.

energy in order to survive the elements.<sup>70</sup> Vitamin A was particularly lacking in winter grasses, leaving horses vulnerable to a variety of ailments, including seizures, anorexia, and reproductive failure.<sup>71</sup> The low nutrient density of winter grasses necessitated frequent moves by equestrian peoples, but shifting camp was more problematic in winter snow and drained precious energy from both people and animals.<sup>72</sup> Remaining in the same camp for an extended period of time forced horses to graze increasingly further from camp, intensifying the danger of enemy horse raids.

Crowded and stationary winter conditions magnified the threat of disease. Equestrian peoples were often compelled to remain for long periods of time in the same camp not only by the extreme physical difficulty of moving camp in severe winter weather, but also by the minimal availability of suitable camps that provided ample water, feed, shelter, and firewood in close proximity.<sup>73</sup> A variety of diseases and parasitic infections thrived in such environments, including one form of parasite that was passed in manure and remained on a pasture for up to three months in search of a host. Lice, including blood-sucking and chewing species, feasted upon horses in crowded winter camps.<sup>74</sup>

Even when horses survived the winter, they often did so malnourished and weakened by disease, with serious long term effects on their health, reproductive ability, and that of their potential offspring. Late winter was an especially dangerous time for

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<sup>70</sup> West, *Way to the West*, 24-25; Osborn, *Equestrian Adaptations*, 569-570; Sherow, *Geodialectic*, 70-71.

<sup>71</sup> Sherow, *Geodialectic*, 73-74.

<sup>72</sup> Ewers, *The Horse*, 124.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 124; West, *Way to the West*, 25-26.

<sup>74</sup> Sherow, *Geodialectic*, 74.

pregnant mares, as it was their crucial nutritional period.<sup>75</sup> The dramatic reduction in the value and availability of winter forage and other problems associated with severe winter conditions usually resulted in severity of winter being the predominant limiting factor in the size of most Native American herds.<sup>76</sup> Consequently, increased winter severity in a region usually decreased the value of horses in that area.

The replenishment of herds following raids, disease, or winter required breeding, raiding, or trading, all of which were problematic to some extent. Breeding was often ineffective and troublesome as a method for increasing herd size, not only as a result of the damaging impact of winter on reproductive ability, but also due to the extensive time required to break horses for riding.<sup>77</sup> Raiding for horses eliminated the need to break horses and was therefore a less time-consuming technique of herd replacement and enlargement, but horse raiding also risked failure and possible battle casualties. The most obvious drawback of trading for horses was the necessity and difficulty of obtaining a desirable product in exchange, the most coveted such commodity being slaves. Nevertheless, eventually most equestrian Native Americans developed a system of obtaining horses based upon raiding other tribes and Euroamericans for horses and captives, and bartering the captives to Euroamericans for more horses.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Osborn, *Equestrian Adaptations*, 574-576.

<sup>76</sup> Osborn, *Equestrian Adaptations*, 569-572. Osborn's data, consisting of comprehensive weather data from dozens of stations on both sides of the Rockies as well as historical references to Native American herd sizes, supports his conclusion that winter severity accounted for two-thirds of Native American herd size variability.

<sup>77</sup> Ewers, *The Horse*, 53-63.

<sup>78</sup> Useful studies of raiding and trading adaptations to equestrianism include Russell Mario Magnaghi, "The Indian Slave Trader: The Comanche, a Case Study" (Ph.D. diss., Saint Louis University, 1970), Frank McNitt, *Navajo Wars: Military Campaigns, Slave Raids, and Reprisals* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1972), McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, and Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*.

### Reasons for Slow Spread of Horses to the Western Utes

The inability of the Western Utes to adopt equestrianism in the eighteenth century rested upon many of the limitations on equestrianism outlined above. Opportunities to utilize the horse to hunt buffalo were severely restricted as a consequence of the Komantcia/Shoshoni occupation of the Uintah Basin and Salt Lake Valley, the only adjoining regions with large numbers of buffalo.<sup>79</sup> Limited access to bison significantly reduced the value of horses to the Western Utes. The Utes also had few occasions to trade for horses, with bleak and arid landscapes adjoining their lands to the southeast, southwest, and west, and their enemies, the Northern Shoshoni/Komantcia, on the other sides of the compass.<sup>80</sup> In any case, the Western Utes did not have any commodities of sufficient value to trade to neighboring tribes for horses, and the potential risk and cost for the unmounted Western Utes to raid the mounted Shoshonis for horses was prohibitively high.<sup>81</sup>

Winters in the Eastern Great Basin were exceedingly long and characterized by high winds, heavy precipitation, and freezing temperatures, especially prior to the end of the Little Ice Age in 1850.<sup>82</sup> High pressure inversion layers aggravated conditions and

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<sup>79</sup> Vèlez de Escalante, *Dominguez-Escalante Journal*, 46, 60.

<sup>80</sup> The canyonlands to the south and east of the Western Utes were exceedingly barren and had numerous river and mountain barriers. Traders would have crossed such terrain only if there was known potential for significant profits; see Janetski, *Western Ute*, 23; Smith, *Ethnography*, 30-31; Powell, *Arid Region*, 119-120; Steward, *Groups of the Ute*, 21, 58.

<sup>81</sup> Significant trade between Native American peoples generally only occurred when both adjacent tribes possessed articles of trade unavailable to the other group - horses for guns was one such common exchange. But the Western Utes did not possess any commodity to which any of its equestrian neighbors did not already have access; see Ewers, *The Horse*, 11-14. Raiding is an unlikely method for a tribe to acquire its first horses; see Ewers, *The Horse*, 14-15.

<sup>82</sup> The Little Ice Age decreased temperatures by about two degrees Fahrenheit; see Osborn, *Equestrian Adaptations*, 579-580.



caused dense fog which decreased temperatures to as low as thirty degrees below zero (Fahrenheit). From 100 to 200 inches of snow were common in the higher elevations.<sup>83</sup> The survival of horses in such conditions was threatened not only by the extreme cold, but also by the thick snow and ice that often prevented horses from feeding.<sup>84</sup> Winter conditions in Western Ute lands contrasted sharply with the weather in the Uintah Basin to the east, where the Komantcia resided. The Komantcia horses enjoyed mild winters, protected by winter storms by the shield of the Wasatch and Uintah mountains.<sup>85</sup> Eastern Great Basin winters also differed from winters on the central and southern Plains— the Western Utes experienced longer winters and had more precipitation and colder temperatures as a result of inversion layers.<sup>86</sup> In effect, the cost of acquiring horses and maintaining those horses throughout the harsh winter in the Eastern Great Basin was greater than the potential benefits of equestrianism to the eighteenth century Western Utes.

Although successful equestrianism in the Eastern Great Basin did experience multiple obstacles, there was excellent forage in the region. The growing season was typically brief and dry, so grass was limited to the river valleys and moisture-rich higher

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<sup>83</sup> Wahlquist, *Atlas of Utah*, 55-70.

<sup>84</sup> William Chandless, *A Visit to Salt Lake; Being a Journey across the Plains and a Residence in the Mormon Settlements at Utah* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1857), 143.

<sup>85</sup> Warren Angus Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains, 1830-1835*, ed. J. Cecil Alter and Herbert S. Auerbach (Salt Lake City: Rocky Mountain Book Shop), 223.

<sup>86</sup> For a comparison of winter severity and its effect on horses in Utah as opposed to other regions, see Osborn, *Equestrian Adaptations*, 572; Ewers, *The Horse*, 22; West, *Way to the West*, 23-25; Chandless, *Visit to Salt Lake*, 143, 149, 268-271; *Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, microfilm copy available in Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, 29 January 1849, 9 March 1849, 24 March 1849, 31 March 1849, 17 April 1849, 2 June 1849, 3 December 1849, 20 February 1850, 24 March 1850, 17 January 1851.

elevations.<sup>87</sup> The valley of the Sevier River to the south of Utah Lake had tens of thousands of acres of grass, and many other rivers and streams were also covered with thick swards of grass.<sup>88</sup> The foothills and mountains, including the area around Utah lake, supported “bunchgrass,” a grass so-named as a result of its tendency to grow in bunches for protection against the relative aridity of the environment. This type of grass adapted to frequent cold temperatures by maintaining a strong stem that resisted being cut by ice or snow. Bunchgrass therefore cured standing and retained much of its nutrition through the winter.<sup>89</sup> Cottonwoods were prolific near Utah Lake, and the bark and branches of these trees were also a valuable source of forage in the winter.<sup>90</sup> The value of winter forage in the Eastern Great Basin partially offset the winter’s detrimental climactic effect on horses, and allowed the Western Utes to adapt to equestrianism once a reliable and affordable source of horses became available.

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<sup>87</sup> The growing season in the Eastern Great Basin was only one-third as long and two-thirds as wet as on the Great Plains; see Wahlquist, *Atlas of Utah*, 59, 66-69.

<sup>88</sup> Powell, *Arid Region*, 120.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 120-124; Tidestrom, *Flora of Utah*, passim; Chandless, *Visit to Salt Lake*, 139; John C. Fremont, *Narratives of Exploration and Adventure*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1956), 419-420.

<sup>90</sup> Powell, *Arid Region*, 120.

## CHAPTER 4

### EARLY WESTERN UTE EQUESTRIANISM: 1800-1840

#### Spanish Trail Trade

The prohibitive cost of acquiring horses in the Eastern Great Basin was remedied after 1776, when Spanish missionary Francisco Anathasio Dominguez led the first recorded Euroamerican expedition into the Great Basin.<sup>91</sup> At Utah Lake, Dominguez found the Western Utes to be unmounted and eager to procure Spanish trade and assistance against their Northern Shoshoni/Komantcia enemies.<sup>92</sup> Although Dominguez' promise to return for the purpose of building settlements and a mission there did not come to fruition, the expedition was instrumental in opening a trade corridor from New Mexico into the Eastern Great Basin – the Spanish Trail.

Western Ute-New Mexican trade was extremely lucrative to both groups. The Western Utes bartered beaver pelts and captives procured from neighboring tribes to New Mexican traders seeking the enormous profits these commodities, especially the captives, brought in New Mexico.<sup>93</sup> The Western Utes, in exchange for their pelts and captives,

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<sup>91</sup> The Spanish were seeking a land path to their California settlements as well as attempting to establish alliances with their Indian neighbors to the north. The Escalante expedition failed to achieve either objective; see Sánchez, *Explorers*, passim; Hill, *Exploration and Trade*, 6-13.

<sup>92</sup> Vélez de Escalante, *Dominguez-Escalante Journal*, 54-56.

<sup>93</sup> For the fur trade market in New Mexico, see David J. Weber, *The Taos Trappers: The Fur Trade in the Far Southwest, 1540-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971). Slavery in various forms existed in New Mexico since the first arrival of the

received horses directly from the New Mexicans and were thus able to bypass Indian middlemen. The New Mexicans attached less value to horses and more value to pelts and captives than did the Native American trading partners of the Western Utes, while the Western Utes, as a result of their greater distance from New Mexico, attached more value to horses and less value to pelts and captives than did other potential trading partners of the New Mexicans. The results of this trade were cheap horses for the Western Utes and often vast profits for the New Mexicans.<sup>94</sup>

Prior to 1821, trade between Western Utes and New Mexicans was hindered as a result of Spanish *bandos* prohibiting or restricting such activity. The Spanish were apprehensive that traders following the trail of Escalante might disrupt their alliance with the Colorado Utes against the Navajos. In 1778, soon after the return of Escalante, the Spanish governor of New Mexico, Francisco Trebol Navarro, declared a prohibition against New Mexican settlers trading with the Indians. In later years, trade with the Utes was permitted only if an expensive license was obtained and in no case could such trade involve guns or slaves.<sup>95</sup> The legal difficulties of early New Mexican trade with the Utes

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Spanish. The *encomienda* and *repartimiento* were systems that the Spanish used to exploit Indian labor early in their colonization of New Mexico. Captives from 'wars' with the Navajos and other Indians were used by the Spanish as mining and manufacturing laborers. Although enslavement of Indians other than captives of war was illegal in New Mexico, this restriction was rarely enforced, and wealthy New Mexicans often sought Indians as domestic servants under the guise of "apprenticeship." By 1813, Indian women and children sold for several hundred dollars each in Santa Fe. For the extensive slave market in New Mexico, see Lynn Robinson Bailey, *Indian Slave Trade in the Southwest* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1966), Magnaghi, *Indian Slave Trader*, and McNitt, *Navajo Wars*.

<sup>94</sup> For more on Western Ute-New Mexican trade, see John R. Alley, Jr., "Prelude to Dispossession: The Fur Trader's Significance for the Northern Utes and Southern Paiutes," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 50:2 (Spring 1982): 107-108; Sánchez, *Explorers*, 91-108.

<sup>95</sup> Sánchez, *Explorers*, 91-102.

unfortunately leaves historians with few records of such activity during the years between Escalante's expedition in 1776 and the Mormon arrival in Utah in 1847, and increases the difficulty of pinpointing the exact date of the Western Utes' first acquisition of horses.

### **Western Ute Acquisition of Horses**

There are only two historical references to the Western Utes between the dates of the Escalante expedition in 1776 and the opening of the American fur trade west of the Rockies in the 1820s. The first account refers to Western Ute horse raiding. According to Manuel Mestas, a New Mexican interpreter to the Utes, the Western Utes in 1805 successfully raided the Komantcia for 28 horses.<sup>96</sup> Mestas unfortunately provides no other clues as to the numbers of horses among the Western Utes, but does refer to continuous interaction and trade between the Western Utes and New Mexicans following the Escalante expedition in 1776.<sup>97</sup> The second document refers to the prosecution of a New Mexican trader, Miguel Tenorio, for violations of the Spanish prohibitions against the Indian slave trade. According to trial testimony, the Western Utes were accustomed to bartering captives and pelts to Spanish traders. Presumably these products were bartered for horses, though the document does not specifically refer to the Western Utes possessing or trading for horses.<sup>98</sup> In any case, it is unlikely the Western Utes were able to acquire significant numbers of horses through the limited trade of the Spanish period or by raiding the better armed and mounted Northern Shoshone/Komantcia.

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<sup>96</sup> Hill, *Exploration and Trade*, 16-17; Tyler, *Spaniard and the Ute*, 356-357; Sánchez, *Explorers*, 99-100.

<sup>97</sup> Hill, *Exploration and Trade*, 17; Sánchez, *Explorers*, 99-100.

<sup>98</sup> Hill, *Exploration and Trade*, 17-19; Tyler, *Spaniard and the Ute*, 359; Sánchez, *Explorers*, 101-102.

The easing of trade restrictions following Mexican Independence in 1821 and the inauguration of the American Western fur trade dramatically enhanced Western Ute access to Euroamerican trade. Old Spanish laws regulating trade with the Indians were weakly enforced after 1821, and as a result the decades-old trade with the Western Utes blossomed.<sup>99</sup> The Western Utes were able to acquire horses in greater numbers, and by 1826, fur trapper Jedediah Strong Smith estimated that Western Ute families each owned an average of four to five horses - sufficient animals to allow them to trade some to Smith's group.<sup>100</sup> Beginning in 1829, annual Mexican caravans crossed the Spanish Trail from New Mexico to California, trading woolen goods for horses and then returning to New Mexico with vast herds of animals.<sup>101</sup> Western Utes intercepted these caravans as they returned to New Mexico, trading for horses or seizing animals by force.<sup>102</sup> In addition to horses, New Mexican traders after 1821 also bartered guns and ammunition to the Western Utes.<sup>103</sup> As shown on map "c," virtually all Western fur trapper rendezvous sites and trading posts were located near Western Ute territory, providing the Utes with another potential source of guns and ammunition.<sup>104</sup> The Western Utes' superior trade

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<sup>99</sup> Sánchez. *Explorers*, 102; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 84-85.

<sup>100</sup> Jedediah S. Smith, *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah Strong Smith: His Personal Account of the Journey to California, 1826-1827*, ed. with an Introduction by George R. Brooks (Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1977), 42.

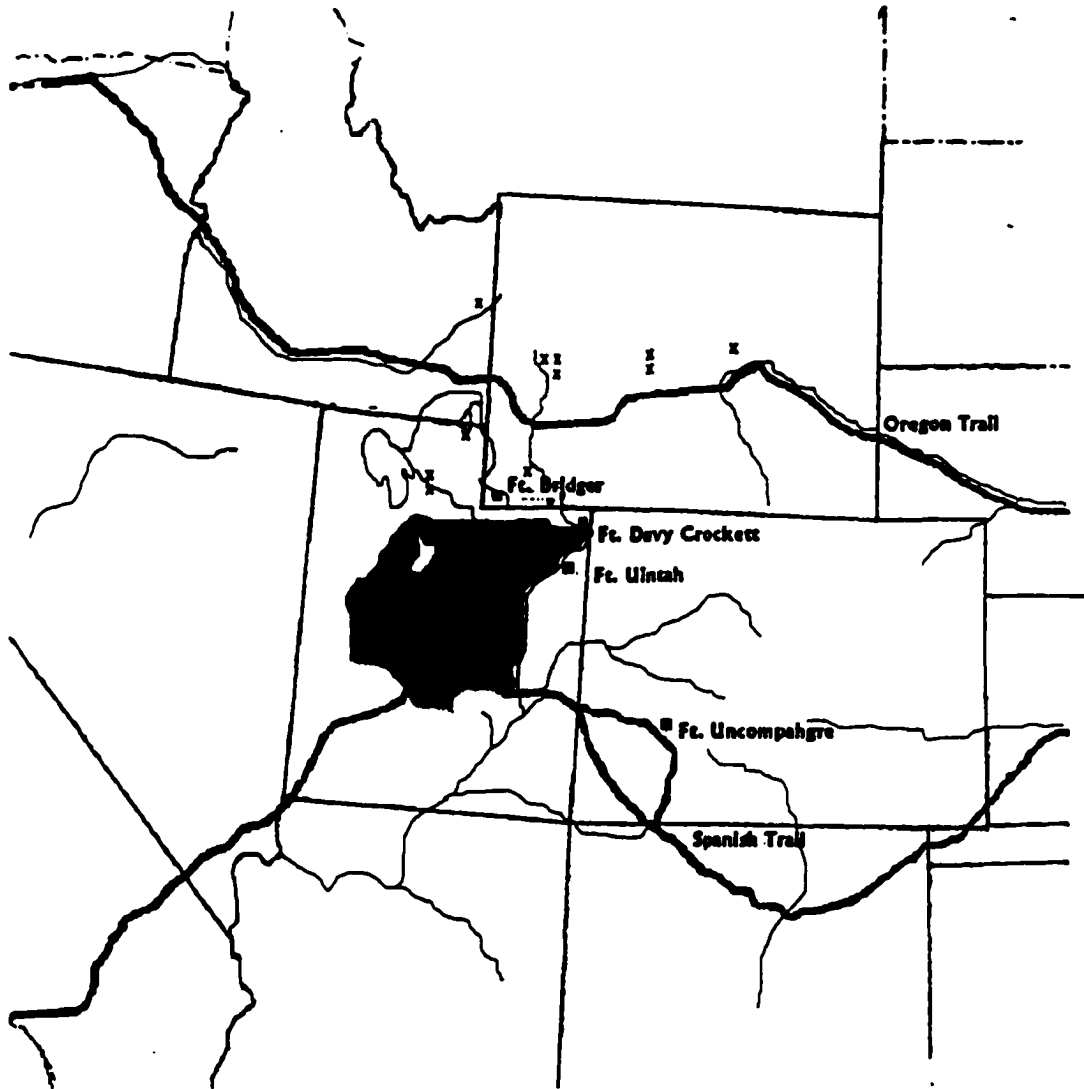
<sup>101</sup> For an excellent overview of the Spanish Trail caravans, see Eleanor Lawrence, "The Old Spanish Trail from Santa Fe to California" (thesis, Berkeley, 1930); for a description of one such caravan, see George Douglas Brewerton, *Overland with Kit Carson, A Narrative of the Old Spanish Trail in '48*, with an Introduction by Stallo Vinton (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1930), 57-60.

<sup>102</sup> Caravans were also occasionally stopped on their outbound journey by Western Utes who were destitute of horses; see Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 220.

<sup>103</sup> Smith, *Jedediah Strong Smith*, 43; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 84-85.

<sup>104</sup> Fred R. Gowans, *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous: A History of the Fur Trade Rendezvous, 1825-1840* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs M. Smith, Inc., 1985), passim.

# MAP C



## Western Ute Trade, 1825-1847

- x Location of Fur Trade Rendezvous 1825-1840
- Spanish (1830) and Oregon (1841) Trails
- Trading Posts/Forts 1830s/1840s

Dates indicate year established  
 Shaded area indicates home of Western Utes

access to guns and horses eventually afforded them a decisive military advantage over the Shoshone/Komantcia.

The transition to equestrianism was an especially slow process for the Western Utes. Most other Native American tribes fully adapted to the use of horses within five to ten years after they had acquired their first animals, but the limited trade access enjoyed by the Western Utes between 1776 and 1821 resulted in the process taking considerably longer for them.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, the Western Utes adapted quickly once their supply of horses was expanded. By the mid-1820s, significant numbers of Western Utes began to secure multiple animals and coalesce into mounted “bands,” and by the 1830s, the Western Utes were being described by fur trappers as “the most excellent horsemen in the mountains” possessing horses that were “the finest we had ever seen among the Indians.”<sup>106</sup>

The types of horses employed by the Western Utes reflected the tasks the Utes required of their horses. The Utes generally used the “Indian pony,” an animal that had transformed significantly through breeding and use from the Spanish horses that were released over a century earlier. The Indian pony was generally tougher, sturdier, faster, and more durable than “Spanish” or “American” horses, but also smaller and less “handsome.”<sup>107</sup> Such animals suited the Western Utes well as they migrated through mountainous terrain that contained relatively sparse forage. From among their herd,

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<sup>105</sup> Once a tribe secured their first horses, they had to learn by trial and error how to feed and care for their animals. In the many intervening years until they collected a large herd, any horses they acquired were generally saved for use in hunting rather than risked in battle; see Haines, *Horses for Western Indians*, 11; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 35.

<sup>106</sup> Smith, *Jedediah Strong Smith*, 42; Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 220, 251.

<sup>107</sup> Ewers, *The Horse*, 33-34; Gowans, *Rendezvous*, 187-188.



Western Utes likely selected some horses as “buffalo runners.” These animals were especially fast, responsive, durable, and agile, allowing the rider to pursue buffalo more effectively and minimize his chances of being thrown by his mount in the rocky and jagged terrain common to the buffalo grounds west of the Rockies. Equestrian hunters west of the Rockies thus had an especially acute need for good buffalo runners, and such horses were highly prized and typically received specialized care and training.<sup>108</sup> The best of the buffalo runners were also used as war-horses, as the same qualities that made a good buffalo hunting horse were also crucial in battle.<sup>109</sup> The remainder of the horses in a family’s herd were used as pack mounts and every-day riding animals. The value of a horse varied greatly according to its qualities and potential usage, with buffalo runners being worth as much as seven good pack mounts.<sup>110</sup> Large and “handsome” Spanish or American horses were also highly prized, even though these animals required considerably more training to become acclimated to the often rigorous migrations of the Western Utes.<sup>111</sup>

### **Benefits of Equestrianism to the Western Utes**

To the Western Utes, the most immediate and significant benefit of acquiring horses, or *kavwàs* as they were known to the Utes, was the advantage they provided in battle. The equestrian Western Utes dominated the unmounted Western Shoshone and

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<sup>108</sup> Osborn Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, ed. Aubrey L. Haines (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), 142; Ewers, *The Horse*, 153-154.

<sup>109</sup> Ewers, *The Horse*, 196-197.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>111</sup> Gowans, *Rendezvous*, 187-188.

Southern Paiute, raiding them for captives with relative impunity and bartering these captives for more horses.<sup>112</sup> The unmounted and bow-armed Paiutes and Western Shoshone were unable either to effectively defend against such raids or to retaliate against their more mobile foe. By the mid-1820s, the equestrian Western Utes were also able to force the Komantcia out of the Uintah Basin and gain access to the abundant large game in the region as well as the buffalo in the valleys of the Green and Colorado rivers to the east and northeast of the Basin.<sup>113</sup>

The equestrian Western Utes were well-prepared to exploit their new-found access to the buffalo. Although buffalo hunting tended to be a dangerous pursuit in the rocky and jagged terrain common to buffalo environs west of the Rockies, the Western Utes and their horses adapted, eventually including buffalo hunting as an annual element of their subsistence cycle.<sup>114</sup> The equestrian Utes were able to locate large herds more quickly and more frequently, and their swift mounts allowed them to pursue and kill buffalo more efficiently and rapidly. The only factor limiting the success of their hunts

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<sup>112</sup> Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 219; Thomas J. Farnham, *Travels in California and Scenes in the Pacific Ocean* (New York: Saxton and Miles, 1844), 377; Daniel W. Jones, *Forty Years Among the Indians: A True Yet Thrilling Narrative of the Author's Experiences Among the Indians* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1960), 48.

<sup>113</sup> Western Utes apparently dominated the Uintah Basin by 1825; see William H. Ashley, *The Ashley Narrative*, in Harrison Clifford Dale, ed., *The Explorations of William H. Ashley and Jedediah Smith, 1822-1829*, with an Introduction by James P. Ronda (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 47; also see Steward, *Groups of the Ute*, 23-24, 66. The expulsion of the Shoshoni from the Uintah Basin in the 1820s mirrors their ousture from the Plains decades earlier by the Blackfeet and other Plains tribes, who, similarly to the Western Utes, had superior access to guns and horses; see McGinnis, *Counting Coup*, 9-10, 16.

<sup>114</sup> For the difficulty in hunting Western buffalo, see Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 140-142. Western Ute buffalo hunting parties were often seen by trappers; see Smith, *Jedediah Strong Smith*, 43; Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 219.

was the availability of enough pack animals to carry the meat back to camp.<sup>115</sup> Often restricted by the size of their herd, the Western Utes likely began to practice “light butchering,” selecting and retaining only the choicest parts of the buffalo.<sup>116</sup>

The acquisition of horses allowed the Utes to significantly expand the range, efficiency, and diversity of their preexisting system of food source exploitation and trade. Traditional Western Ute migratory hunting and gathering activities in the summer and fall were aided by the increased mobility and range of the horse, and the food and animal skins obtained were more easily stored and transported by the mounted Utes.<sup>117</sup> The equestrian Western Utes used their abundant skins and hides to manufacture skin lodges, parfleches, and other goods, and to barter for Euroamerican products.<sup>118</sup> Trade opportunities were significantly improved by the range and carrying capacity of the horse. Able to transport more goods further distances to market, the Western Utes found it easier to acquire Euroamerican tools and weapons such as muskets that enhanced Ute hunting and combat efficiency.<sup>119</sup> In addition to conventional trading, the well-armed

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<sup>115</sup> After a successful hunt, it was important for the hunters to carefully load the meat onto their horses. After one such hunt in 1834, fear of Shoshone attack induced a group of Utes to carelessly load their horses with meat. After a long journey home, the Utes found the skin on the backs of most of their pack mounts were worn through; see Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 216.

<sup>116</sup> Ewers, *The Horse*, 160, 169. Buffalo meat was typically cut into thin strips and preserved by drying it in the sun.

<sup>117</sup> Fur trapper Jedediah Smith found a mounted band of Western Utes gathering berries in the early fall of 1826. According to Smith, these Utes moved about frequently – apparently as they exhausted the berry supply in a particular area; see Smith, *Jedediah Strong Smith*, 42.

<sup>118</sup> Sánchez, *Explorers*, 91-108; Alley, *Prelude to Dispossession*, 107-108; Smith, *Jedediah Strong Smith*, 43-44.

<sup>119</sup> Smith noted the relative abundance of guns among the Western Utes in 1826; see Smith, *Jedediah Strong Smith*, 43.

and mounted Western Utes also used the threat of force as leverage to enact “tribute” from some traders.<sup>120</sup>

### **Detrimental Effects of Equestrianism on the Western Utes**

Despite the many benefits of equestrianism, maintaining their herd throughout the year inflicted numerous hardships on the Western Utes. Northern Shoshoni raids likely became more frequent as they targeted Western Ute horses as well as captives.<sup>121</sup> On at least one occasion, the entire herd of a Western Ute band was captured by the Shoshoni.<sup>122</sup> Winters in the Eastern Great Basin were also capable of depleting a herd, and some Western Utes began to winter in areas with less severe weather, such as in the river valley gathering sites of fur trappers or in the relatively mild Uintah Basin.<sup>123</sup> Enemy raids, severe winter weather, irregular forage, and frequent moves by the Western Utes limited the value of breeding in sustaining their herd, and raiding was hazardous and often instigated a series of costly retaliatory raids by the Northern Shoshone.<sup>124</sup> The Western Utes were thus compelled to spend considerable time and effort raiding the Paiutes or Western Shoshone for captives and hunting for pelts in order to barter these commodities for more horses. The Utes were also forced to spend time caring for, training, and manufacturing equipment for their horses, all of which diverted them from traditional hunting and gathering activities.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 220.

<sup>121</sup> Fear of such raids was prevalent among the Western Utes; see Smith, *Jedediah Strong Smith*, 41-42; Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 216.

<sup>122</sup> Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 210-211, 220.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-211.

<sup>125</sup> Steward, *Groups of the Ute*, 9-10. This diversion tended to result in an erosion of traditional skills; see West, *Way to the West*, 19-21.

### **Other Effects of Equestrianism on Western Ute Culture**

The advent of equestrianism in the Eastern Great Basin deeply imprinted Western Ute social and political organization, as the Western Utes increasingly began to organize into mounted bands. Larger than the Ute family unit, but smaller than “tribal” gatherings, these bands typically included 10-100 warriors with usually four to five horses per warrior.<sup>126</sup> Western Ute trading, raiding, and buffalo hunting were all enhanced by the band formation, which was flexible, mobile, and usually strong enough in numbers to ward off enemy attack, but small enough in numbers not to experience problems obtaining feed for their animals. Ute leaders directed the activities of these bands with more authority and for longer durations than did traditional Western Ute leaders, as raids and hunts extended further into enemy “territory” and for longer periods of time than previously. Yet most Western Utes in the early nineteenth century continued to operate outside these band structures, and most of those that did coalesce into bands did not do so on a permanent basis. Bands formed only for specific tasks, and the women, children, and elderly were often left to continue other hunting and gathering efforts while the warriors raided, traded, or chased the buffalo. After the band completed its task, most of the warriors returned to their families.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> For examples of early Western Ute bands, see Smith, *Jedediah Strong Smith*, 41-46; Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 216-220.

<sup>127</sup> Studies of Western Ute sociopolitical organization and leadership structures are variable and controversial as a result of an overall dearth of primary sources and because of the amalgamation of Eastern and Western Utes onto a single reservation in 1878, which made the task of distinguishing between bands difficult for the ethnographers of the twentieth century. Ethnographer Anne Smith carefully differentiated between groups when she did her work among the “Northern Utes,” pointing out distinct Eastern Ute and Western Ute political and social formations; see Smith, *Ethnography*, 121-127; also see Jorgensen, *Ethnohistory*, 25-33; Steward, *Groups of the Ute*, passim; Callaway, Janetski, and Stewart, *Ute*, 353-354.

Some effects of equestrianism are difficult or impossible to gauge. References to the material culture of the Western Utes between 1776 and 1847 are too few to provide any insight into possible changes resulting from equestrianism. Virtually no information is available concerning the impact of equestrianism on Western Ute rituals, except a few references to horses being buried with the dead. The Utes are known to have buried the horses of prominent leaders with the corpse of the deceased, with the number of horses buried likely reflecting the importance of the deceased to his people.<sup>128</sup> Horses are also known to have been a focus of Western Ute recreation, as horse racing became a frequent activity during the Western Utes' spring gatherings at Utah Lake.<sup>129</sup> How equestrianism may have affected Western Ute population is more difficult to ascertain. Some have suggested that Ute population increased as a result of their expanded access to resources, but any Ute increase in population resulting from equestrianism may well have been offset by the intensified exposure of Western Utes to Euroamerican diseases in the post-horse era.<sup>130</sup> Though any conclusions regarding an increase in Ute population as an overall result of equestrianism are speculative, it is certain that enhanced access to food sources, especially bison, did have a positive impact on Western Ute demographics.

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<sup>128</sup> William L. Knecht and Peter L. Crawley, ed., *History of Brigham Young, 1847-1867* (Berkeley: Mass Cal Associates, 1966), 153; John Williams Gunnison, *The Mormons, or, Latter-Day Saints, in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake: A History of their Rise and Progress, Peculiar Doctrines, Present Condition, and Prospects, Derived from Personal Observation during a Residence among Them* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), 149.

<sup>129</sup> Janetski, *Western Ute*, 71.

<sup>130</sup> Jorgensen, *Ethnohistory*, 20. There is little concrete data or references to directly ascertain the impact of Euroamerican-imported diseases on the Western Utes. The overall lack of primary sources available between the years 1776 and 1847 precludes any more than speculation regarding the prevalence of such cases; see Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 219.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE DECLINE OF THE WESTERN BUFFALO: 1776-1840

#### Numbers

Even as equestrianism and the buffalo began to imprint Western Ute subsistence patterns, bison numbers west of the Rockies began to significantly diminish. The semi-arid and sagebrush-dominated lands of the Intermountain region were marginal buffalo environs, serving only as periodic population overflow zones for Plains bison. The last westward migration of buffalo occurred through Bozeman and South Pass around 1600 A.D. The migrating herds of bison west of the Rockies eventually settled in the foothills of mountains and in river valleys – locales with an abundance of water and forage.

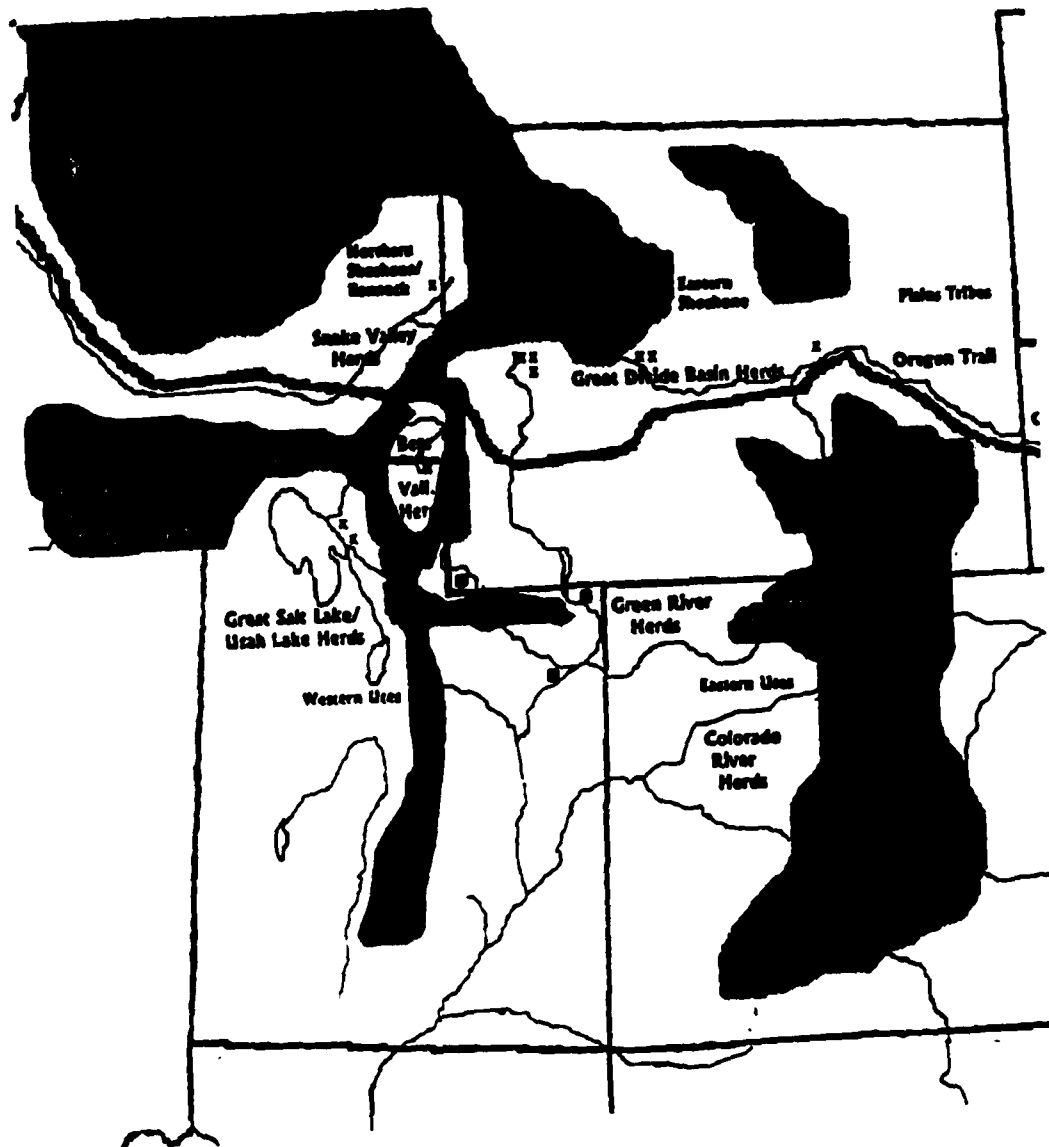
As shown on map “d,” seven principal regions west of the Rockies supported significant historic populations of buffalo: the valley of the upper Snake River in southeastern Idaho, the Bear River valley north of Salt Lake, the valleys of Utah Lake and the Great Salt Lake, the Great Divide Basin, the valleys of the Green River and its tributaries, and the region surrounding the upper reaches of the Colorado River.<sup>131</sup> Bison herds thrived for centuries in these prime forage areas.<sup>132</sup> But by the 1820s, the herds at Utah Lake and the Great Salt Lake were gone, and by the early 1840s, the buffalo was

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<sup>131</sup> Haines, *The Buffalo*, 31-32, 156-157.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

# MAP D



## Western Buffalo Prior to 1841

- X Fur Trade Rendezvous
- Trading Posts/Forts
- shaded areas represent mountains



extinct in the valleys of the Bear and Snake rivers as well. Both Euroamerican travelers and Native Americans lamented over the declining numbers of buffalo, offering explanations as diverse as severe winters to overhunting by fur trappers.<sup>133</sup> The timing and location of the demise of Western buffalo would seem, however, to refute any single cause.

### Reasons for Decline

One popular rationale for declining numbers of bison west of the Rockies is the deadly effect of especially severe winters in the early 1800s. Buffalo are, however, remarkably weather-resistant animals, with a very thick winter coat that insulates them from all but the coldest temperatures, and an innate sense to face and move through winter storms rapidly. They are known to be able to detect and feed on grass under banks of snow unless the snow is several feet deep or encrusted with ice.<sup>134</sup> A severe winter storm on the Laramie Plains in 1844-1845 was illustrative of the type of extreme conditions that posed a threat to the survival of bison – significant snowfall was followed at first by sunlight to melt the snow, and then by severe cold and darkness to freeze a

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<sup>133</sup> Western Ute leaders spoke often about the abundance of buffalo in their youth; see Frederick Hawkins Piercy, *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake City*, ed. Fawn M. Brodie (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1962), 277; Kate B. Carter, *The Indian and the Pioneer*, Daughters of Utah Pioneers Lesson for October 1964 (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1964), 97; Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 122; also see Smith, *Jedediah Strong Smith*, 41, 47; Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 216-220; William Marshall Anderson, *The Rocky Mountain Journals of William Marshall Anderson: The West in 1834*, ed. Dale L. Morgan and Eleanor Towles Harris (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1967), 178; Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 122-123, 138-139; "Some Source Documents in Utah Indian Slavery," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 2:3 (July 1929): 75; Fremont, *Narratives*, 233-234.

<sup>134</sup> Hornaday, *Extirmination of the American Bison*, 423; Dary, *Buffalo Book*, 36-38; Haines, *The Buffalo*, 30.

sheet of ice over the snow. Unable to get at the grass below, thousands of buffalo died of starvation.<sup>135</sup>

The buffalo grounds west of the Wasatch Mountains at Utah Lake and Great Salt Lake were periodically subject to severe winter weather patterns, including inversion layers that decreased temperatures to as low as thirty degrees below zero (Fahrenheit).<sup>136</sup> Such conditions could have posed a serious threat to the survival of bison. The "Little Ice Age," which lasted until 1850, intensified severe winter weather.<sup>137</sup> Kanosh, a Western Ute leader, stated that he was born in the same year (about 1821) that "so many buffalo died from the hard winter," and Warren Angus Ferris, an American fur trapper, described an especially severe 1831 early spring storm in which many buffalo were immobile and starving as a result of deep snow and ice.<sup>138</sup> While it is likely that one or more severe winters were the principle cause of the extermination of buffalo in the harsh winter regions on the western face of the Wasatch, severe winter does not explain the depletion of Western buffalo in the regions to the east of the Wasatch that were shielded from most harsh winter weather.

Overhunting of bison by equestrian Native Americans is another common explanation for the demise of the Western buffalo. Though exact population figures of Native Americans and the numbers of bison they slaughtered west of the Rockies at the end of the eighteenth century are unknown, rough estimates are possible. In the regions surrounding the Western buffalo grounds shown on map "d," approximately 3,000

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<sup>135</sup> Dary, *Buffalo Book*, 38.

<sup>136</sup> Wahlquist, *Atlas of Utah*, 55-70.

<sup>137</sup> Osborn, *Equestrian Adaptations*, 579.

<sup>138</sup> Carter, *Indian and the Pioneer*, 97; Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 65; also see Chandless, *Visit to Salt Lake*, 143.

Eastern Utes and 6,000 Shoshoni and Bannock were mounted bison hunters. Given the relative importance of buffalo hunting to these peoples and known statistics of annual per capita bison kills on the Southern Plains, it can be estimated that the Utes killed 3 buffalo per person per year, while the Shoshoni/Bannock killed 3.5 buffalo per person per year.<sup>139</sup> Even though these Indian groups first acquired horses by 1700, it is probable that it required approximately 75 years for them to reach their maximum horse herd size and hence maximum bison kill ratio – coincidentally this would have been approximately the time of the Western Utes' first contact with Euroamericans.<sup>140</sup> Based on the population figures cited above, the Native American bison kill ratios therefore amounted to a total of approximately 30,000 Western buffalo killed each year beginning about 1776.

The apparent lack of significant decline in Western bison numbers prior to the early 1820s – 35 years after Native Americans reached their maximum buffalo kill ratios – and the substantial decline thereafter, indicates that hunting by equestrian people could not have accounted for more than a net one-half of one percent drop in Western bison population each year. That would have been enough to cause approximately a 20% drop in buffalo numbers between 1776 and 1821 – possibly not enough of a decline to be noticed by Native Americans in such a long span of time. Yet it is equally improbable

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<sup>139</sup> West, *Way to the West*, 66; Callaway, Janetski, and Stewart, *Ute*, 341; Osborn, *Equestrian Adaptations*, 582; Flores, *Bison Ecology*, 476-481. The figures cited are based on Flores' assignment of a 6.5 kill ratio to tribes of the pre-robe trade Southern Plains and Osborn's estimate of 80%-90% reliance on hunting by these tribes. This indicates a kill ratio of about 7.6 for a theoretical tribe with 100% reliance on hunting. Callaway's and Osborn's comparative estimates of 40%-45% Ute reliance on hunting and 50% Shoshoni/Bannock hunting dependence therefore indicate a kill ratio of 3.2 and 3.8 respectively. These figures have been rounded down to 3 and 3.5 kills per person per year, since these groups were somewhat diversified in their game hunting and did not solely hunt buffalo. Note that these figures are based on the native population as a whole, even though only the warriors of these tribes actually hunted buffalo.

<sup>140</sup> Ewers, *The Horse*, 23.

that overhunting by equestrian peoples did not account for at least some of the decline in Western bison population. If buffalo numbers were healthy and increasing, some would have migrated west over the Wasatch following any severe winter there. But even considering the exponential demographic effect of consistent hunting on decreasing bison populations, overhunting alone does not appear to explain the precipitous decline in Western buffalo numbers that began in the 1820s.

In addition to slaughtering Western bison directly through the hunt, equestrian peoples may have also killed buffalo indirectly through competition for forage. Considering the previously cited estimates of annual losses of 30,000 Western bison to human predation, and the resultant net one-half of one percent decrease in buffalo population, it is likely that the bison population west of the Rockies in 1776 numbered approximately 315,000.<sup>141</sup> Considering that bison on the Southern Plains numbered six million and that both the environment and the number of potential suitable locales for buffalo west of the Rockies were substantially inferior to the Southern Plains, this figure appears reasonable. As noted previously, the Shoshoni and Eastern Ute likely averaged three horses per person, amounting to 27,000 horses total in the regions traveled by Western bison. Despite the relative lack of forage in the Intermountain area as compared to the Plains, the combination of 315,000 buffalo and 27,000 horses would not have strained the carrying capacity of the region. But grass was not the only need of bison and horses – they also required water and winter shelter. Large river valleys provided abundant water and forage, as well as shelter in winter, and direct competition for these

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<sup>141</sup> Flores, *Bison Ecology*, 471, 476, 481. The estimates cited are based on Flores' figures of 18% natural buffalo increase and 9% mortality by natural causes, indicating that hunting by humans at a 9.5% rate would decrease net buffalo populations by the net one-

“microenvironments” between equestrian peoples and buffalo did likely cause significant damage to the Western bison population.

River valleys were essential habitats for buffalo west of the Rockies.<sup>142</sup> The semi-arid environment common to this region meant that only snow-fed waterways provided abundant year-round forage and water. Though their habits varied, Western bison tended to seek out and congregate in river valleys to mate during the dry and hot summer seasons. In the fall, these buffalo herds dispersed, and small groups of bison wandered to the uplands and the numerous small meadows of nutritious bunchgrass common at higher elevations. As winter approached, many buffalo headed back to the river valleys for the shelter and forage those areas provided, though they still remained dispersed in small groups. In the spring the scattered bison again sought the bunchgrass of the uplands, “following the [melting] snow” up the mountainside.<sup>143</sup> The river valleys were therefore used by Western buffalo during two seasons: winter, and most importantly, summer.

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half of one percent previously cited in this essay. Taking the figure of 30,000 buffalo killed each year by humans, this indicates a total herd of 315,000.

<sup>142</sup> These microenvironments were of significant import in the Great Plains as well; see West, *Way to the West*, 21-37.

<sup>143</sup> Thomas J. Farnham, *An 1839 Wagon Train Journal: Travels in the Great Western Prairies, the Anahuac and Rocky Mountains, and in the Oregon Territory* (New York: Greeley and Mc Elrath, 1843), 47. This description of the yearly cycle of buffalo west of the Rockies is based primarily on various accounts of travelers to the region; see Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 3, 139-140; Ashley, *Narrative*, 138-139; James P. Beckwourth, *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth*, ed. T. D. Bonner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 52-57; Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 39; LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *To the Rockies and Oregon, 1839-1842, with Diaries and Accounts by Sidney Smith, Amos Cook, Joseph Holman, E. Willard Smith, Francis Fletcher, Joseph Williams, Obadiah Oakley, Robert Shortess, T. J. Farnham*, The Far West and the Rockies Historical Series, 1820-1875, vol. 3 (Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1955), 138, 175-176, 180, 182; also see West, *Way to the West*, 73-77; Dary, *Buffalo Book*, 45. Dary's assertion that trappers and buffalo rarely encountered each other is definitively incorrect as evidenced by the wealth of trapper accounts to the contrary. Though he does describe a “mountain buffalo” as distinct from the “plains” buffalo, Dary does not account for the many buffalo encountered west of the Rockies by

The annual cycle of Native Americans and, beginning in the 1820s, fur trappers, often brought them to large river valleys at precisely the same times as the buffalo. In the winter, these groups would journey to such valleys seeking firewood, food, shelter, and forage for their animals. The frequent availability of bison in river valleys during winter added to the attraction of these sites as winter campgrounds.<sup>144</sup> With their mobility and strength often reduced by deep snow and severe winter conditions, buffalo that were discovered at these sites were easy prey for hunters seeking winter sustenance. Summer was the season for the annual rendezvous of fur trappers and Native Americans, and these groups once again flooded into a selected major river valley seeking water, firewood, food, and forage for their animals. Often they discovered massive herds of bison which they typically proceeded to slaughter, either for food or just to “get them out of the way.”<sup>145</sup> The selective killing of buffalo at the sites needed most by these animals, and often during their mating season, did likely contribute to the demise of Western bison.

In two of the fur trade’s most traveled areas, the valleys of the Snake River and Bear River, bison were extinct within twenty years after the inauguration of the fur trade.<sup>146</sup> In the Great Divide Basin, another well-traveled area, buffalo numbers began to

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trappers. This third type of buffalo migrated seasonally to river valleys, unlike the “mountain buffalo” described by Dary and also distinct from the Plains buffalo described by Elliot West.

<sup>144</sup> Brown’s Hole on the Green River was one of the winter sites most favored by trappers and Indians; see Farnham, *Great Western Prairies*, 55-56.

<sup>145</sup> Beckwourth, *Life and Adventures*, 53-54; Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 65. The Western buffalo was not typically hunted for its hide as a result of the lack of waterborne routes over which the hides could be transported east to markets. The Western bison was killed usually for food – most trapping expeditions included a buffalo-hunting specialist who would hunt and slaughter buffalo for the group’s sustenance; see Anderson, *Rocky Mountain Journals*, 178.

<sup>146</sup> Fremont, *Narratives*, 233-234; Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, 123.

significantly decline during the fur trade era.<sup>147</sup> Nevertheless, Native Americans had been hunting bison in river valleys for centuries, and fur trappers west of the Rockies never numbered more than 200. Selective predation as a result of the fur trade likely served only to intensify the effects of previous human predation on buffalo populations. But the fur trade also presented the bison with an invisible and more deadly threat to their survival.

Diseases brought into “virgin” lands by Euroamericans and their animals have been conclusively determined to have had a catastrophic impact on Native American populations in those regions. Animals native to those “virgin” lands were also susceptible to many of these diseases. Fur trappers and their horses traveled over virtually every waterway in the West in pursuit of the beaver, exposing buffalo to a multitude of new diseases and parasites. The areas that were first depleted of bison, the valleys of Utah Lake and the Great Salt Lake, were the first regions to be penetrated by the Western fur trade. Beginning in 1825, massive summer and winter gatherings of hundreds of fur trappers and their animals magnified the threat to buffalo in the surrounding areas, with the danger continuing even after the departure of the trappers. At least one type of parasite, *Strongyles*, was passed in manure and could survive on a pasture for several months, even under harsh conditions.<sup>148</sup> This type of biotic killer would have acted as an unseen scourge, killing bison as well as crippling their capacity to reproduce, without the Euroamericans who introduced the parasite even knowing what had happened.<sup>149</sup> Though conclusive proof of the transmission of European diseases and

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<sup>147</sup> *Source Documents*, 75.

<sup>148</sup> Sherow, *Geodialectic*, 74.

<sup>149</sup> West. *Way to the West*, 72-73.

parasites to Western bison populations and the effects of these diseases on bison is unavailable, it is probable that disease played a major role in the demise of the Western buffalo.

The depletion of bison herds west of the Rockies by the early 1840s appears to be the result of a number of factors: severe winters west of the Wasatch, overhunting by equestrian peoples, selective microenvironment human predation, competition for valuable river valleys between equestrian peoples and buffalo, and biotic contamination by Euroamerican fur trappers. It is unlikely that it will ever be known exactly how significant each of these factors was in the demise of Western bison. It is apparent that few bison would have been able to migrate west to replace Western buffalo losses, as both Bozeman and South Pass were areas heavily hunted by Native Americans. It is also apparent that by 1841, 9,000 mounted Shoshoni, Bannock, and Eastern Utes, along with at least a thousand newly-mounted Western Utes, were in direct competition for a rapidly diminishing resource – the Western buffalo.



## CHAPTER 6

### WACCARA'S UTES: 1840-1847

#### **Western Ute Need to Expand Equestrianism**

As the Western buffalo became increasingly scarce in the early 1840s, the Western Utes found they needed more horses to continue the hunt. The Western Utes were compelled to travel longer distances for greater spans of time in order to find significant herds of bison. Such journeys taxed the endurance of the Utes' horses and encouraged the Utes to utilize multiple pack animals in rotation or reduce the load of individual horses to avoid exhausting their herd.<sup>150</sup> Increased Native American competition for the diminishing Western buffalo herds made buffalo hunting a more dangerous occupation, and tired horses were a definite liability in battle. Larger herds of horses were the key to effective Western buffalo hunting, by providing the means to transport the proceeds of a successful hunt and to evade competitors.<sup>151</sup>

The decline of the Western fur trade in the late 1830s and 1840s encouraged the Western Utes to expand their system of equestrianism. Relatively easily obtained beaver pelts were a key commodity for the Western Utes that allowed them to barter for guns,

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<sup>150</sup> The danger and uncertainty of buffalo hunting likely reduced the Ute practice of "light butchering" of selective parts of a buffalo and encouraged "heavy butchering," or utilization of nearly all the meat of a buffalo; see Ewers, *The Horse*, 160, 169.

<sup>151</sup> Ewers, *The Horse*, 139, 160. The disadvantage of having few horses on an extended hunt is apparent by a comment from a Ute woman that "when they [Western Ute hunters]

ammunition, blankets, and other Euroamerican goods. As fur prices dropped, the Western Utes sought a new commodity desired by Euroamericans that would allow the Utes to continue to barter for the Euroamerican goods on which they had become dependent.<sup>152</sup> Buffalo robes were of minimal value to Euroamerican traders west of the Rockies, as the lack of waterborne transport made it difficult to bring the heavy robes to market.<sup>153</sup> The New Mexicans still desired captives, but the availability of such captives was limited by the small populations of the Western Shoshone and Southern Paiutes and the inherent danger of raiding better armed and mounted tribes such as the Northern Shoshone. Among the other commodities available to the Western Utes, only horses held significant value to Euroamericans. The Western Utes therefore needed a new and better source of horses that would provide them with a surplus of animals for trade.

Further aggravating the Western Ute need for larger horse herds was the effect that decades of equestrianism had in transforming horses into highly desired symbols of status and wealth in Ute society. The proven value of horses in hunting, raiding, and trading resulted in Western Utes measuring individual status as much by “wealth” in horses as by their skills as a warrior or hunter.<sup>154</sup> One Ute woman summed up the disparity in wealth within her tribe by stating “Those who had plenty of horses were rich,” and that “Those who didn’t . . . were not so well fixed.”<sup>155</sup> To “wealthy” Eastern

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<sup>152</sup> For Native American dependence on Euroamerican goods, see Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

<sup>153</sup> Ewers, *The Horse*, 319.

<sup>154</sup> Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States: Collected and Prepared under the Direction of the Bureau of Indian Affairs per Act of Congress of March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1847, part V* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1969), 200.

<sup>155</sup> Smith, *Ethnography*, 33.

Utes, Western Utes with few or no horses were seen as “dumb” or “stupid.”<sup>156</sup>

Leadership positions among the Western Utes were often conferred on those who were “wealthy,” as these individuals had proven their ability as a provider.<sup>157</sup> Wealthy Western Utes, in contrast to the “poor,” could barter horses to obtain better clothing and weapons, and more numerous Euroamerican goods. The acquisition of horses even beyond the needs of a individual’s family became valuable to a warrior not only as an expression of wealth but also of his capacity to help others of his tribe by loaning out his horses to the “poor.”<sup>158</sup>

### **Waccara’s Cycle**

The Western Utes of the early 1840s found it difficult to expand their herds within the Eastern Great Basin. Acquiring more horses through trade was problematic after the fur trade began to decline, and even if the Western Utes were able to acquire more horses, the winter in the Eastern Great Basin was too severe to allow the year-round maintenance of such herds. The response of many Western Utes to these obstacles was to modify their annual migratory cycle to circumvent the environmental and trade constraints of the Eastern Great Basin. The Western Ute leader who inaugurated this new system was Waccara.

Born in Utah Lake Valley in the early nineteenth century, Waccara witnessed the advent of equestrianism among his people. According to Waccara, his father purchased

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>157</sup> Ewers, *The Horse*, 247-248.

<sup>158</sup> Daniel H. Wells, “Daniel H. Wells’ Narrative,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 6:4 (October 1933): 127; Ewers, *The Horse*, 161-162. For an excellent study of status and wealth in Native American equestrian societies, see Bernard Mishkin, *Rank and Warfare among the Plains Indians*, with an Introduction by Morris W. Foster (Lincoln: University

the tribe's first horse from Spanish traders, but knowing little about the care of horses, the father kept the animal tied up for several weeks until it died of starvation. Horses acquired thereafter fared better, however, and Waccara began to see his people form into equestrian bands for hunts and raids. Waccara's family was prominent among the Western Utes, and after he grew to maturity, Waccara began to lead many of his people in hunting and raiding expeditions.<sup>159</sup>

By the early 1840s, Waccara began to have a year-round following of Western Utes. As was the case with all large Western Ute gatherings, membership in Waccara's "band" consistently fluctuated, as many families or individual warriors joined Waccara only for a few hunts or raids and then returned home to more traditional activities. Waccara's "band" of Western Utes was a relatively small group, limited by the relatively few food sources for both people and animals west of the Rockies and the limited and seasonal availability of the Western buffalo. Generally, Waccara was never accompanied by more than forty to fifty families, with about seven horses per family. In contrast,

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of Nebraska Press, 1992); also see Ewers, *The Horse*, 28-30, 249, 314-316; Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 239-240.

<sup>159</sup> It is likely that Waccara's family was "wealthy" in horses, as others in his family were also given leadership positions on raids and hunts; see Gunnison, *Valley of the Great Salt Lake*, 149; Ewers, *The Horse*, 247. Stories of the early life of Waccara are generally unreliable as a result of the legendary status Waccara acquired among both the Western Utes and the Mormons who wrote these accounts. No accounts of first-hand observers of Waccara in his youth exist. Dimick B. Huntington, interpreter for the Mormons, claimed Waccara's father was the leader of a band of Western Utes, until a dispute with other Western Utes resulted in the father's death around 1840. Thereafter Waccara assumed leadership of the band and moved them south to the Sevier Valley. Some time later, according to Huntington, Waccara had a spirit visitation that advised him to welcome the Mormons into Utah; see Dimick B. Huntington, *Vocabulary of the Utah and Sho-sho-ne or Snake Dialects, with Indian Legends and Traditions, including a Brief Account of the Life and Death of Wah-ker, the Indian Land Pirate* (Salt Lake City: Salt Lake Herald Office, 1872), 27-28; Piercy, *Route from Liverpool*, 277-278. Sources alternatively date the year of Waccara's birth as 1808 or 1815. The most common variations of the spelling

Great Plains Indian bands often numbered in the thousands with 5-13 horses per person.<sup>160</sup>

Waccara's hunting and raiding expeditions were the framework for a new annual equestrian cycle for many Western Utes. This annual cycle centered around seasonal migrations that maximized their access to traditional food sources, trade, and potential victims of raids for horses and captives, while avoiding the severe winter weather of the Eastern Great Basin. As shown on map "e," the Western Utes journeyed southwest to California in the winter, raiding for horses and bartering their pelts and captives for more horses. Returning to Utah Lake in the spring, Waccara's Utes feasted on trout with other Western Utes and traded with the Euroamerican and Native American traders who visited the lake. Waccara's Utes traveled east in the summer to pursue the buffalo, returning to Utah in the fall to hunt large game and gather nuts and berries. As fall turned to winter, Waccara's people again headed south to California.

### Winter Horse Raiding

The migratory cycle of Waccara's Utes began each year with a winter journey to the Mexican settlements of Southern California. Interaction between the Western Utes and the annual New Mexican caravans to California provided the Utes with knowledge of the abundant horses and vibrant slave markets in the far-flung Mexican province. The mild climate and luxuriant pasturelands of Southern California were a virtual paradise for horses, who grew healthy and strong through the winter months, reproducing in such numbers that thousands were slaughtered every year by Euroamericans to prevent

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of Waccara include Walker, Walkara, and Wakara. Waccara's name meant "brass" or "yellow" in Ute.

<sup>160</sup> West, *Way to the West*, 21.

overpopulation.<sup>161</sup> Initially the Utes traveled to California primarily to barter their pelts and captives for relatively cheap horses and to avoid the Eastern Great Basin winter, but eventually the Utes were enticed by the abundance of Californian horses into raiding for horses as well.<sup>162</sup> The thinly populated and dispersed Mexican ranches and settlements could muster little defense against Waccara's mounted warriors.

A typical expedition to California by Waccara's band started in the late fall with a long journey southwest over the Spanish Trail. The Western Ute horses, robust from months of grazing in the Sevier Valley grasslands, were laden with a multitude of fine pelts and skins obtained earlier that fall. As Waccara's Utes journeyed along the trail, their passage through the broken and arid lands of the Southern Great Basin was eased by the cool winter temperatures and the few sites along the trail that afforded good pasturage and water. Most of these locations were inhabited by the unmounted and bow-armed Southern Paiutes. Waccara's Utes rested and recruited their horses at these sites, and often pressured the Paiutes to give or trade away some of their women and children.<sup>163</sup> The speed, mobility, and firepower of Waccara's Utes usually precluded any resistance or evasion by the Paiutes.

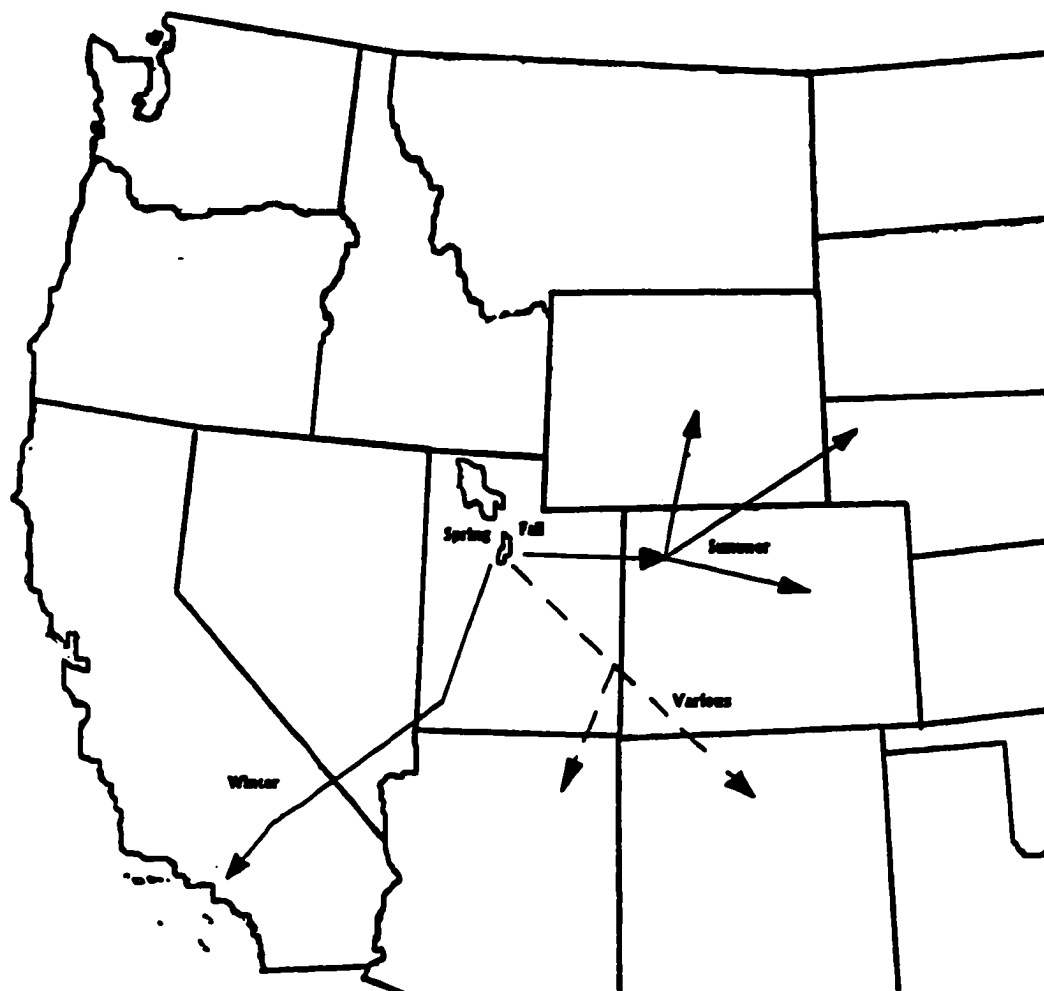
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<sup>161</sup> Clifford J. Walker, *Back Door to California: The Story of the Mojave River Trail*, ed. Patricia Jernigan Keeling (Barstow, California: Mojave River Valley Museum Association, 1986), 122-123.

<sup>162</sup> Bean, *Autobiography*, 55. New Mexican caravans annually traveled the Spanish Trail to California specifically to trade for the cheap horses and mules available there; see Lawrence, *Spanish Trail*. Western Utes may have first journeyed to California in the 1830s, but no significant migrations or raids by Utes likely occurred until those directed by Waccara in the 1840s, when Californian sources first began to specifically mention Ute raids; see Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 251; Lawrence, *Spanish Trail*, 66-100.

<sup>163</sup> Huntington, *Vocabulary of the Utah*, 27; Jones, *Among the Indians*, 48; *Journal of Discourses by Brigham Young, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, His Two Counselors, the Twelve Apostles, and Others*, vol. 1 (Liverpool, England: F. D. and S. W. Richards), 170; Carter, *Indian and the Pioneer*, 114; *Journal History*, 11 June 1853.

## MAP E

**Movements of Waccara's Utes****1 inch = 250 miles**

Continuing along the Spanish Trail through the Mojave Desert, the Utes eventually reached Cajon Pass, the gateway to Southern California. Emerging through the San Bernardino Mountains, the Utes proceeded to visit friendly ranchers and traders met on previous expeditions or through the fur trade.<sup>164</sup> In addition to bartering their pelts, skins, and captives to these traders for horses and Euroamerican goods, the Utes also procured the land of these traders for use as a safe haven for the women and children of the tribe, a grazing area for their animals, and as a base of operations from which the warriors could conduct horse and cattle raids.

The Southern California raids of Waccara's Utes took many forms, from small and scattered forays against distant ranches to large and concentrated raids against a single ranch.<sup>165</sup> To the frustration of the Mexicans, the well-armed, mobile, and numerous Western Utes were usually able to evade or repulse pursuers.<sup>166</sup> Though fierce battles between Mexican posses and the Utes occasionally erupted, the Utes typically lost their pursuers in the myriad of mountain canyons surrounding Cajon Pass.<sup>167</sup> The

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<sup>164</sup> *Journal History*, 4 March 1851.

<sup>165</sup> At times, the Utes were joined on their raids by bankrupt American fur trappers seeking to regain their fortune at the expense of Mexican ranchers; see Lawrence, *Spanish Trail*, 66-99.

<sup>166</sup> The Californians' numerous attempts to deter horse raids, including counter-attacking, building and manning outposts, and further colonization of outlying areas, usually were ineffective, though the latter method eventually met with some limited success; see George William Beattie, "San Bernardino Valley Before the Mormons Came," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 12:2 (April 1933): 111-124.

<sup>167</sup> For Waccara's expeditions to California, see Gustive O. Larson, *Walkara, Ute Chief*, in LeRoy R. Hafen, ed., *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West: Bibliographical Sketches of the Participants by Scholars of the Subject and with Introductions by the Editor*, vol. 2 (Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1965), 341-344; Juan Caballeria, *History of San Bernardino Valley from the Padres to the Pioneers* (San Bernardino: Times-Index Press, 1902), 103-104; George William Beattie and Helen Pruitt Beattie, *Heritage of the Valley: San Bernardino's First Century*, with a Foreword by Henry R. Wagner (Pasadena, California: San Pasqual Press, 1939), 65-66, 84; Robert Glass Cleland, *The Cattle on a Thousand Hills: Southern California*,



Western Utes often left Southern California with hundreds of Mexican-branded horses and cattle, experiencing such success that Waccara reportedly once boasted that ranches remained in Southern California solely for his benefit.<sup>168</sup>

Following their raids, Waccara and his people paused on the eastern side of the mountains to reassemble and slaughter their cattle, jerking the meat for sustenance during the long journey back to Utah.<sup>169</sup> The Utes typically began their return to Utah in January or February, before the massive annual New Mexican caravan commenced its trek back to New Mexico, depleting the limited grass surrounding the desert water-holes.<sup>170</sup> As the Utes journeyed through the desert, Waccara usually again demanded women and children from the Paiutes, occasionally offering in exchange horses that were unlikely to survive the remainder of the journey.<sup>171</sup> Within a few weeks, Waccara's Utes reached the extensive pasture lands of southwestern Utah, where they rested and recruited

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1850-1880 (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1964), 65-66; Huntington, *Vocabulary of the Utah*, 27-28; Schoolcraft, *Indian Tribes*, 200; *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1849* (Washington: Government Printing Office), 1003; Bean, *Autobiography*, 55; Jones, *Among the Indians*, 39; *Discourses* I:170; Carter, *Indian and the Pioneer*, 92; *Journal History*, 4 March 1851; Lawrence, *Spanish Trail*, 86-100.

<sup>168</sup> Caballeria, *San Bernardino Valley*, 103. Fear of Waccara's raids was prevalent in Southern California. The Spanish Trail was referred to by some as "Walker's [Waccara's] Trail"; see Beattie and Beattie, *Heritage*, 66. The Mexicans apparently placed a bounty on Waccara; see Schoolcraft, *Indian Tribes*, 200.

<sup>169</sup> Carter, *Indian and the Pioneer*, 92.

<sup>170</sup> The Utes were not the only travelers who sought to avoid following the New Mexican caravans along the Spanish Trail. Getting a late start back to New Mexico, an 1848 expedition led by American trapper Kit Carson hurriedly overtook the annual caravan which traditionally "ate up or destroyed the grass and consumed the water at the few camping grounds upon the route"; see Brewerton, *Overland with Kit Carson*, 58. Those who followed the Western Utes and their massive herd would have found the grass and water at these sites similarly depleted, but virtually no other travelers used the trail so early in the season.

<sup>171</sup> Jones, *Among the Indians*, 47-48; *Journal History*, 30 December 1849.

their expanded herd. In this new equestrian system, winter served to increase, rather than decrease, the size and quality of the Western Ute herd.

### Western Ute Spring Gathering

Waccara's Utes usually remained with their herd in southwestern Utah for several weeks. Many of the Utes' horses were weakened and malnourished from their journey through the desert, and the Western Utes arrived in Utah just as luxuriant grasses began to emerge from melting snow.<sup>172</sup> Increasingly dependent on their horses, the Western Utes were, in effect, "chasing grass" – migrating seasonally to areas with abundant forage.<sup>173</sup> From California in December and early January, to southwestern Utah in late January and February, to the Sevier Valley in central Utah in March and early April, the Western Utes responded to the needs of their horses by providing them with access to grass during the months when deep snow covered the grass further north at Utah Lake.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> The journey along the Spanish Trail between California and Utah was a difficult passage for horses. Rocky and jagged terrain injured animal hooves, the arid environment often caused severe dehydration, and the continual use of the relatively few water-holes along the trail by a multitude of travelers and their animals increased the exposure of horses to diseases and parasites that lingered at these sites; see Sherow, *Geodialectic*, 74; West, *Way to the West*, 72. Many skeletal remains of horses were seen by travelers along the trail; see Farnham, *Travels in California*, 315-317. New Mexicans primarily used mules during their travels along the Spanish Trail, as these animals were stronger, more durable, and more sure-footed than horses, and could travel further with less water; see Lawrence, *Spanish Trail*, 8; Ewers, *The Horse*, 341-342; Sherow, *Geodialectic*, 80.

<sup>173</sup> "Chasing grass" was a fundamental aspect of equestrianism; see West, *Way to the West*, 20-22.

<sup>174</sup> For Waccara in southwestern Utah, see *Journal History*, 15 January 1851, 27 February 1851, 5 February 1853; for Waccara enroute from southwestern Utah to the Sevier Valley, see *Journal History*, 14 March 1852; for Waccara in the Sevier Valley, see *Journal History*, 24 March 1850; 11 June 1853; Fremont, *Narratives*, 417; Solomon Nunes Carvalho, *Incidents of Travel and Adventure in the Far West with Colonel Fremont's Last Expedition across the Rocky Mountains: Including Three Months' Residence in Utah, and a Perilous Trip across the Great American Desert, to the Pacific* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1859), 188. Many of the valleys of southwestern Utah

By April or May, the snow melted at Utah Lake and Waccara's Utes converged there with most other Western Utes for their traditional spring gathering.

The spring gathering at Utah Lake remained an integral part of the modified yearly cycle of Waccara's Utes. As they had done in the past, Waccara's people feasted on trout as a variety of visitors arrived in the valley to trade.<sup>175</sup> Seeking Waccara's Paiute captives came Navajos offering their well-crafted blankets and New Mexican slave traders bartering guns, ammunition, knives, and other Euroamerican products.<sup>176</sup> The large annual New Mexican caravans returning from California coveted Waccara's strong and healthy horses, as well as his captives, and offered similar items as the other New Mexican traders.<sup>177</sup> Many Western Utes who had remained in Utah during the previous

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remained uncovered by snow throughout the year; see *Journal History*, 5 February 1853. The Utes burned the grass at choice locations along their migratory path in the fall in order to induce earlier and more prolific growth in the spring when they returned from California; see Charles Preuss, *Exploring with Fremont: The Private Diaries of Charles Preuss, Cartographer for John C. Fremont on His First, Second, and Fourth Expeditions to the Far West*, ed. and trans. Erwin G. Gudde and Elisabeth K. Gudde (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 87. The Utes had been burning grass since pre-horse days to increase game and round up crickets; see Vèlez de Escalante, *Dominguez-Escalante Journal*, 54; Gunnison, *Valley of the Great Salt Lake*, 21.

<sup>175</sup> For the Western Ute spring gathering, see Bean, *Autobiography*, 51.

<sup>176</sup> For Navajos seeking captives, see Simpson, *Report*, 35; they apparently traveled as far as Brown's Hole on the Green River. The Navajos had annual reciprocal visits with the Western Utes; see Smith, *Ethnography*, 252. For New Mexican slave traders, see *Journal History*, 2 May 1853, 28 May 1853; Jones, *Among the Indians*, 48; Lawrence, *Spanish Trail*, 100-116. Both New Mexicans and Navajos had a long history of slave raiding and trading; see McNitt, *Navajo Wars*.

<sup>177</sup> For New Mexican caravans near Utah Lake, see *Journal History*, 2 May 1853. Waccara's trade and interaction with the New Mexicans was not always friendly - many accounts describe Waccara levying "tribute" on New Mexican caravans; see Beattie and Beattie, *Heritage*, 66; Brewerton, *Overland with Kit Carson*, 100; Fremont, *Narratives*, 417; *Discourses* I: 170.

winter also desired Waccara's many robust horses as replacements for their dilapidated herds, probably offering Waccara's people hides and skins in return.<sup>178</sup>

The spring gathering was a significant cultural event for the Western Utes. During most of the year, Western Utes spread out in search of the scattered resources of the Eastern Great Basin, and equestrianism increased this dispersal by allowing the Utes to travel greater distances in search of food sources. Only in the spring, as fish began their spawning runs up the feeder streams of Utah Lake, was it possible for Western Utes to assemble in large numbers.<sup>179</sup> The spring gathering provided an opportunity for dances, festivals, horse races, and other cultural activities.<sup>180</sup> Social fission and tribal fragmentation were a common by-product of equestrianism, and the Western Ute spring gathering became essential to preserving Western Ute cohesion and identity.<sup>181</sup> With the coming of summer, however, the Western Utes again scattered for their summer hunting and gathering cycle.

### Summer Buffalo Hunting

After spending the early summer gathering seeds, plants, roots, and berries, Waccara's Utes journeyed northeast in July and August to pursue the buffalo. Annual summer buffalo hunts provided Waccara's Utes with an alternative to the limited food sources available in Utah during that time. Summer was the mating season of the buffalo, and large herds of these animals congregated at that time in the valleys of the

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<sup>178</sup> Relations between Western Ute bands were occasionally strained. Rivalry between Waccara's band and other Western Utes based at Utah Lake once prompted Waccara to attempt to move the annual trade gathering to the Sevier Valley; see *Journal History*, 21 April 1850.

<sup>179</sup> Bean, *Autobiography*, 51-52.

<sup>180</sup> Janetski, *Western Ute*, 40; Bean, *Autobiography*, 52.

<sup>181</sup> For the effect of equestrianism on tribal cohesion, see West, *Way to the West*, 20, 68.

Green and Colorado rivers, in the Great Divide Basin, and on the Great Plains.<sup>182</sup>

Summer on the Great Plains was an ideal time for buffalo hunting, typified by mild temperatures and plentiful forage.<sup>183</sup> Waccara's Utes continued their migratory cycle by "chasing grass" north in the summer to hunt the buffalo, ranging as far as the Platte River in Nebraska.<sup>184</sup> Although these hunts frequently brought the Utes into conflicts with Plains tribes, including the Sioux, the large Western Ute herd helped ensure their escape back to the Eastern Great Basin.<sup>185</sup>

Waccara's Utes brought their swiftest "buffalo runners" for the hunt, as well as numerous sturdy pack animals and some cattle as an emergency food source in case of a delay in finding buffalo.<sup>186</sup> The expanded herd the Western Utes acquired over the winter improved the potential success of their hunt by allowing them to carry greater quantities of meat.<sup>187</sup> Nevertheless, once a large herd was found, the Ute warriors with their bows and arrows quickly dispatched enough buffalo to fully load their numerous pack horses.<sup>188</sup> In the summer, unlike other seasons, buffalo bull meat was quite

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<sup>182</sup> Osborne, *Journal of a Trapper*, 139; West, *Way to the West*, 75; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 24.

<sup>183</sup> West, *Way to the West*, 22, 75.

<sup>184</sup> Bean, *Autobiography*, 55, 105. The Western Utes probably preferred hunting bison on the Great Plains because of the larger herds found there and the comparative safety of hunting in plains as opposed to the rocky and uneven terrain frequented by Western buffalo; see Osborne, *Journal of a Trapper*, 140-141; Ewers, *The Horse*, 159; also see William L. Manly, *Death Valley in '49*, The Lakeside Classics, ed. Milo Milton Quaife (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, 1927), 102-111; Carter, *Indian and the Pioneer*, 94.

<sup>185</sup> For Western Ute conflict with Plains tribes, see Garland Hurt, *Indians of Utah*, in Simpson, *Report*, 461; Smith, *Ethnography*, 247-252. Waccara apparently had a number of scars from wounds he received fighting Plains tribes; see Bean, *Autobiography*, 98;

<sup>186</sup> For the qualities of a good buffalo hunting horse, see Ewers, *The Horse*, 153. For Ute use of cattle as an emergency food source on the hunt, see Manly, *Death Valley*, 111.

<sup>187</sup> Smith, *Ethnography*, 54.

<sup>188</sup> Bows were the Utes' preferred weapon in hunting buffalo as guns were more difficult to aim, fire, and reload while mounted; see Manly, *Death Valley*, 109-110; Ewers, *The Horse*, 156.

palatable, and the Western Utes feasted on whatever meat they could not jerk and transport back to Utah.<sup>189</sup> Unless the threat of enemy attack precluded their lingering in the area, buffalo hides were cleaned and tanned by the Western Ute women at the site of the hunt.<sup>190</sup> The short haired hides typical of buffalo in summer were of little value to fur traders, but quite valuable to the Western Utes, who used the hides to manufacture bags, parfleches, clothing, horseshoes, and lodgings.<sup>191</sup> Nevertheless, Waccara's Utes still likely stopped at fur trading posts on their return journey, bartering some of their skins, jerked meat, and horses for guns, ammunition, and occasionally liquor.<sup>192</sup> By September, Waccara and his band were back in Utah.

In contrast with Plains Indians, Waccara's Utes did not specialize in buffalo hunting. The availability of fish at Utah Lake and the relative scarcity and seasonal availability of Western bison encouraged the Utes to remain diversified in their subsistence efforts.<sup>193</sup> In any case, the relatively small size of Western Ute horse herds, even those of Waccara's Utes, were insufficient to support continuous or intensified

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<sup>189</sup> For the palatability of buffalo meat in the summer, see Ewers, *The Horse*, 152.

<sup>190</sup> Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 216; Carter, *Indian and the Pioneer*, 83; Huntington, *Vocabulary of the Utah*, 30; Callaway, Janetski, and Stewart, *Ute*, 346.

<sup>191</sup> For the value of short hair buffalo hides as opposed to long haired robes, see Ewers, *The Horse*, 152. For Western Ute use of buffalo hides, see Smith, *Ethnography*, 42, 77, 97; Ewers, *The Horse*, 149-152.

<sup>192</sup> For bartering at trading-posts, see Gowans, *Rendezvous*, 36-37, 187-188. Western Utes did not struggle with alcoholism to the extent that many Native Americans did, likely because the lack of a waterborne transportation system west of the Rockies limited the amount of liquor available to trade. When the Mormons settled in the Eastern Great Basin they restricted the trading of liquor to the Indians and strongly discouraged the Utes from indulging in liquor. Waccara was known to enjoy liquor, but would not trade while under its effects; see Huntington, *Vocabulary of the Utah*, 27; *Journal History*, 2 February 1849, 26 March 1850; also see Carter, *Indian and the Pioneer*, 78; Bean, *Autobiography*, 94.

<sup>193</sup> Another equestrian Native American tribe, the Coeur d'Alene, chose to abandon their lakes and move to the Plains following adoption of the horse. One reason the Utes

buffalo hunting. In contrast with 80% dependence on all types of hunting by the Plains Indians, Waccara's people only depended on hunting for 35% of their sustenance, with buffalo hunting likely only accounting for a third of that amount.<sup>194</sup>

### Fall Activities

In the fall, Waccara's warriors rested their weary horses and set down their bows in favor of guns.<sup>195</sup> As they had done for centuries, the men spread out into the woods in search of game, while the women gathered nuts, berries, and wild plants. After a few weeks of hunting, Waccara's people often visited the Navajos or New Mexicans to the south, or the fur trading posts to the east, to barter some of their pelts, captives, and horses for guns, ammunition, and blankets.<sup>196</sup> Some of Waccara's trips to New Mexico took the form of horse raids, although the relative dearth of horses in New Mexico as opposed to California discouraged the Utes from raiding in that region.<sup>197</sup> Waccara's

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declined this option was that a number of large tribes already fought over the region of the Plains closest to the Western Utes. See Mishkin, *Rank and Warfare*, 12-13.

<sup>194</sup> Osborn, *Equestrian Adaptations*, 582; Callaway, Janetski, and Stewart, *Ute*, 341.

<sup>195</sup> Guns, likely as a result of their superior range and penetrative power, were preferred by Western Utes over bows for hunting game other than buffalo; see Carter, *Indian and the Pioneer*, 121; Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns*, 19.

<sup>196</sup> For trade with the Navajos, see Smith, *Ethnography*, 252. Small groups of New Mexicans occasionally visited Utah Lake in the fall to trade for captives and pelts; see *Journal History*, 3 November 1851.

<sup>197</sup> For Waccara's Utes raiding in New Mexico, see "Reminiscences of the Early Days of Manti," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 6:4 (October 1933): 123; Gwinn Harris Heap, *Central Route to the Pacific, from the Valley of the Mississippi to California: Journal of the Expedition of E. F. Beale, Superintendent of Indian Affairs in California, and Gwinn Harris Heap, from Missouri to California, in 1853*, *The Far West and the Rockies Historical Series, 1820-1875*, ed. with an Introduction by Le Roy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, vol. 7 (Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1957), 225; *ARCI* 1849: 1003.

Utes were more inclined to barter their horses, which commanded high values in that region.<sup>198</sup>

As the cold winter weather began to descend upon the Eastern Great Basin, Waccara's Utes once again "chased grass" south. After a few weeks in southwestern Utah, the Utes loaded their remaining pelts and skins onto their fresh and rested horses and began their journey to California.<sup>199</sup> Having traded away many of their horses during the fall, Waccara's Utes were ready in the winter to once again expand their herd. The remaining pelts and skins the Utes acquired during their fall hunt and the Paiute captives they would seize on their way to California ensured the Utes that they could increase their herd through trade regardless of the success of their raids. Buying horses for low prices in California and selling them to New Mexicans for high prices was the stimulus for the annual New Mexican caravans, and the winter raiding and trading of Waccara's Utes was a variation of this traditional practice.<sup>200</sup>

The timing of each seasonal migration of Waccara's Utes was closely tied to the environment. Horse raiding in California during the winter brought the Utes and their horses out of the Eastern Great Basin during the time the weather was most inhospitable in the region and allowed them to return ahead of the Spanish caravans that devastated the water-holes along the trail in April. Congregating at Utah Lake Valley to trade and interact with other Western Utes was made possible in the spring by the spawning of fish at that time. Hunting buffalo on the Plains was simplified in the summer, as bison congregated to mate and plentiful forage and mild temperatures were common. Summer

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<sup>198</sup> For Waccara's Utes trading in New Mexico, see Hurt, *Indians of Utah*, 461.

<sup>199</sup> For Waccara's late fall/early winter stay in southwestern Utah, see *Journal History*, 7 November 1854.

<sup>200</sup> Lawrence, *Spanish Trail*, passim.



buffalo hunts also provided an alternative to the more limited food sources available in the Eastern Great Basin at that time. Deer, elk, and other large game fattened as they stored up food in the fall in anticipation of the lean winter months, and became easily accessible to the Utes as they left higher elevations seeking winter shelter. Hunting such animals in September and October also provided Waccara's Utes with their best opportunity to obtain skins and hides for trade, as the animals had thick fur coats in preparation for the upcoming winter. Most importantly, the timing and location of the seasonal migrations of Waccara's Utes provided their horses with the best possible forage throughout the year.

### **Effects of Waccara's Cycle**

The numerous benefits of Waccara's annual equestrian cycle quickly became apparent to the Western Utes. Their winter raids dramatically increased the size of their herds - on one raid alone, 150 Utes led by Waccara purportedly captured over one thousand horses. Though both these figures are likely exaggerated, the netting of about seven horses per warrior is probably accurate and is indicative of the high numbers of horses often secured by Waccara's Utes.<sup>201</sup> Migrating seasonally to regions with abundant pasturelands and mild climates allowed Waccara's band to maintain their enlarged herd throughout the year. Avoiding the negative impact of severe winter conditions on the reproductive ability of their horses resulted in even further increases in the size of the Ute herds.

In addition to enlarging their herds, the equestrian cycle of Waccara's Utes had

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<sup>201</sup> Lawrence, *Spanish Trail*, 87-90; Jones, *Among the Indians*, 39-41; Huntington, *Vocabulary of the Utah*, 27-28; *Journal History*, 4 March 1851.

other benefits. The enhanced access to large game and trade enjoyed by Waccara's Utes was evidenced by the large number of high-quality blankets, guns, knives, rawhide bags, and skin lodges in their camp, distinguishing their material culture from that of other Western Utes.<sup>202</sup> By leaving the Eastern Great Basin during winter and summer, when food sources were most limited, and by obtaining lavish supplies of cattle and storable jerked buffalo meat, Waccara's Utes significantly augmented their yearly food supply. The vast herds of Waccara's Utes formed a potentially disposable pool of wealth that further insulated them from deprivation or starvation during periods of scarcity.

Waccara's annual cycle dramatically increased the prestige of both Waccara and his followers. As a result of their annual raids to California, Waccara's Utes had large numbers of "Spanish" horses that were highly revered by Euroamericans and other Utes in comparison to common "Indian" ponies.<sup>203</sup> The "wealth" of Waccara's warriors increased their status within the tribe. Joining Waccara on his yearly cycle of hunting, raiding, and trading became very lucrative to Western Ute warriors, and many of these warriors and their families began to remain with Waccara throughout the year. The success of Waccara at obtaining horses and trade, and at directing successful hunts and

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<sup>202</sup> Smith, *Ethnography*, 42, 77, 97; Brewerton, *Overland with Kit Carson*, 101, 106, 109; Manly, *Death Valley*, 103, 104, 107; Fremont, *Narratives*, 417. Brush shelters were the most common lodging used by Western Utes, but tepees were used by Waccara's Utes and other Western Utes when sufficient hides were available; see Smith, *Ethnography*, 42; Brewerton, *Overland with Kit Carson*, 106, 109; Manly, *Death Valley*, 103, 107. Waccara's Utes were mentioned by many Euroamerican traders and explorers as being exceptionally well-equipped with guns and ammunition; see Carvalho, *Travel and Adventure*, 190; Brewerton, *Overland with Kit Carson*, 101. The fine and elaborate dress occasionally displayed by Waccara's Utes was distinct from that worn by other Utes; see *Journal History*, 26 March 1850. For a comparison of the equipment and dress of Waccara's Utes as compared to other Western Utes, see Carvalho, *Travel and Adventure*, 200.

<sup>203</sup> *Journal History*, 26 March 1850; Gowans, *Rendezvous*, 187-188.

raids, was evidence of his *puwa* to other Western Utes, as well as to other Native Americans and Euroamericans.<sup>204</sup> Euroamerican explorers, trappers, and travelers, as well as Native Americans, began to fear and respect the power and influence of Waccara and his band.<sup>205</sup>

Despite their importance to Waccara's Utes and other Western Utes, horses did not impact Western Ute culture to the extent they transformed the culture of many Plains Indians. Other than burying a leader's horses with the dead, Waccara's Utes are not known to have incorporated horses into their rituals, mythology, or religion.<sup>206</sup> The material culture of Waccara's Utes also differed from that of the Plains Indians. Waccara's Utes did use tepees as lodgings, but did not use the horse travois to transport the lodges.<sup>207</sup> They used leather bags and clothing and wore elaborate costumes on occasion, but did not typically dress in decorative clothing for hunts, raids, or battles as did most Great Plains Indians.<sup>208</sup> Metal goods and blankets were generally abundant in Waccara's camp, though the relatively small size of the Ute herd probably prevented Waccara's Utes from owning and transporting as many heavy items as could other

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<sup>204</sup> For Waccara's leadership skills, see Lawrence, *Spanish Trail*, 87-90; Jones, *Among the Indians*, 39-41; Manti, 123; Schoolcraft, *Indian Tribes*, 200.

<sup>205</sup> Some Euroamericans referred to Waccara as "Napoleon of the Desert" or "Hawk of the Mountains"; see Jones, *Among the Indians*, 39; *Journal History*, 15 January 1851.

<sup>206</sup> The Choctaws, another equestrian Native American group in an area marginal to horses, also limited the ritualistic use of horses to the burying of these animals with the dead; see Carson, *Choctaw Indians*, 498; also see Ewers, *The Horse*, 196, 290-291, 316-318, 326.

<sup>207</sup> Manly, *Death Valley*, 103; Brewerton, *Overland with Kit Carson*, 106; Smith, *Ethnography*, 42.

<sup>208</sup> For leather clothing and bags, see Smith, *Ethnography*, 77, 97. For one of the few instance of Waccara's Utes wearing elaborate clothing, see *Journal History*, 26 March, 1850.

equestrian Native American groups.<sup>209</sup> In general, the material culture of Waccara's Utes appears to be a composite of that of the pre-horse Western Utes and the Plains Indians.

The comparative social structure of Waccara's Utes is difficult to gauge, as a window of only ten years is available to view their interrelations. In contrast to most Great Plains Indian groups, kinship and gender relations appear to have remained constant for all Western Utes after the acquisition of horses, though like many Plains Indians, the labor of women intensified as they struggled to clean and tan the increased number of buffalo hides that the mounted warriors obtained.<sup>210</sup> But Waccara's Utes procured far fewer buffalo hides than did equestrian Plains Indians, and there is some evidence that Western Ute men assisted women in cleaning and tanning hides.<sup>211</sup> As the Western Utes were accustomed to breaking into small groups throughout most of the year, they likely experienced less social fragmentation than did equestrian peoples of the Plains.<sup>212</sup> The power and authority of Waccara was more limited than most Plains groups, though Western Ute leadership roles were expanding in the years after Waccara came to prominence.

War honors and battle feats held little significance to Waccara's Utes, and standing battles were avoided by the Utes whenever possible.<sup>213</sup> Expediency and resource collection were the primary objectives of Waccara's Utes on hunts and raids, and a proficient provider such as Waccara was respected by the Western Utes more than

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<sup>209</sup> Manly, *Death Valley*, 104.

<sup>210</sup> The Utes remained primarily bilineal and matrilineal; see Jorgensen, *Ethnohistory*, 27-28.

<sup>211</sup> Smith, *Ethnography*, 80.

<sup>212</sup> For social fission among Plains peoples, see West, *Way to the West*, 20, 68.

<sup>213</sup> Waccara was not engaged in battle by the Mormons at any time, even during the Waccara War; see Jorgensen, *Ethnohistory*, 20.

was a victorious warrior.<sup>214</sup> This contrasted sharply with the role of warfare in the society of the Kiowa and other Great Plains tribes, who considered bravery and success in battle the ultimate objectives of a warrior.<sup>215</sup> Yet Waccara's Utes were apparently beginning to place more emphasis on war honors, as evidenced by Waccara's proud proclamation in 1854 that he had fought the Sioux, Shoshone, Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Crow, and that his wounds were all in his front – not his back.<sup>216</sup>

The value of horses as objects of wealth and status was nearly as important among Waccara's Utes as among most Plains Indian groups. Horses were held as private property among Waccara's Utes, and differences in "wealth" among them were likely significant.<sup>217</sup> Waccara's people selected him as their leader for his ability to provide them with more horses and possibly also for his preexisting "wealth" in horses. Like many Plains Indian bands, Waccara's Utes displayed a positive correlation between numbers of horses owned and the quality and quantity of other possessions.<sup>218</sup> Horses were used as forms of payment for offences among the Western Utes and, in contrast with Plains peoples, Waccara's Utes displayed little hesitation in selling their horses.

Although the emphasis in these comparisons of Waccara's band has been on "Plains Indians," there were significant variations in the equestrian adaptations of different Plains tribes, and even more variations between different Native American

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<sup>214</sup> Beverly P. Smaby, "The Mormons and the Indians: Conflicting Ecological Systems in the Great Basin," *American Studies* 16:1 (Spring 1975): 38.

<sup>215</sup> See Mishkin, *Rank and Warfare*, and McGinnis, *Counting Coup*.

<sup>216</sup> Bean, *Autobiography*, 98.

<sup>217</sup> Struggles over the possession of horses occasionally turned violent. A dispute between Waccara and another Western Ute over the ownership of captured Shoshone horses eventually resulted in the two men killing all the animals to prevent the other from taking them; see *Journal History*, 27 June, 1850.

<sup>218</sup> Waccara's Utes possessed significant numbers of Euroamerican goods, in contrast to other Western Utes; see Manly, *Death Valley*, 103-107.

equestrian groups. The Apaches and Pawnees integrated a horticultural phase into their annual equestrian cycle, remaining in stationary villages for a significant portion of the year.<sup>219</sup> The Choctaws and many Eastern tribes used horses only for riding and packing, rather than as a means for hunting buffalo.<sup>220</sup> In the interior of California, a number of tribes used horses for food as well as riding.<sup>221</sup> The Nez Percés adapted in various ways to the introduction of the horse, in a similar fashion as the Western Utes.<sup>222</sup> In the Pacific Northwest, most Native American groups used the horse to increase their proficiency in slave raiding and trading.<sup>223</sup> Waccara's Utes adapted to equestrianism in a unique way that was particular to their culture and environment, but other Western Utes responded in different ways.

### Other Western Ute Adaptations

Despite many advantages, the annual cycle of Waccara's Utes was not the only Western Ute equestrian adaptation. In the mid-1820s, following Ute acquisition of horses, some Utes left the Eastern Great Basin and migrated east to the Uintah Basin.<sup>224</sup> Shielded from severe winter storms by the Wasatch and Uintah mountains, the Uintah Basin enjoyed mild winters by Eastern Great Basin standards.<sup>225</sup> Bunchgrass abounded

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<sup>219</sup> Mishkin, *Rank and Warfare*, 14-15.

<sup>220</sup> Carson, *Choctaw Indians*, 495-498.

<sup>221</sup> James F. Downs, "Comments on Plains Indian Cultural Development," *American Anthropologist* 66:2 (April 1964): 421.

<sup>222</sup> Haines, *Horses for Western Indians*, 14.

<sup>223</sup> See Robert H. Ruby and John A. Brown, *Indian Slavery in the Pacific Northwest*, with a Foreword by Jay Miller (Spokane, Washington: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1993).

<sup>224</sup> Opinions vary as to the timing of Western Ute migration into the Uintah Basin; see Steward, *Groups of the Ute*, 24-25; Callaway, Janetski, and Stewart, *Ute*, 339. For examples of some Uintah bands, see Schoolcraft, *Indian Tribes*, 199-200.

<sup>225</sup> Ferris, *Rocky Mountains*, 223; Wahlquist, *Atlas of Utah*, 67.

in the region, especially in the higher elevations.<sup>226</sup> Game and edible plants were plentiful, allowing the Western Ute migrants to remain there during their fall hunting and summer gathering cycles.<sup>227</sup> The "Uintah Utes," as these people became known, traveled back to the Eastern Great Basin only for the Western Ute spring gathering. Though they did incorporate buffalo hunting into their annual cycle, the Uintah Utes did not raid into California and likely experienced more difficulty maintaining large herds of horses than did Waccara's Utes.

Other Western Utes chose to reject equestrianism or to adopt equestrianism on a more limited scale. The Pahvant Utes, whose primary residence was in the southern portion of Western Ute territory, acquired horses but remained in the Eastern Great Basin throughout the year.<sup>228</sup> Though their annual movements are somewhat unclear, there is no evidence that they raided into California or hunted buffalo on the Plains. They did migrate to Utah Lake in the spring, but otherwise hunted and gathered in the foothills of the Pahvant Mountains in southwestern Utah. Other Western Utes at Utah Lake, including some without any horses, elected to remain there throughout the year and build permanent settlements, taking advantage of the limited quantities of fish and fowl available year-round.<sup>229</sup>

Though clues can be gleaned from historical evidence, conclusive data on the annual migrations of most Western Utes is unavailable. Waccara's Utes are the only

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<sup>226</sup> Powell, *Arid Region*, 118-119.

<sup>227</sup> Steward, *Groups of the Ute*, 20.

<sup>228</sup> Callaway, Janetski, and Stewart, *Ute*, 339; Carter, *Indian and the Pioneer*, 97.

<sup>229</sup> These "Timpanogots" were particularly injured by Mormon settlement of the region, and many fought or raided the Mormons continuously from the time of first Mormon settlement. The Ute-Mormon conflicts at Battle Creek and Provo in 1849 and 1850 involved a number of mounted and unmounted Timpanogots; see *Journal History*, 28 February 1849, and the entries between 31 January 1850, and 19 February 1850.

Western Ute group to be sufficiently mentioned in historical sources to form solid conclusions regarding their migratory habits. Waccara and his people became quite well-known by the early 1850s, and were frequently mentioned in the journals and diaries of Euroamerican explorers, travelers, and settlers. As such, they are the only Western Ute group that can be adequately compared to other Native American equestrian bands, though most aspects of equestrianism even among Waccara's Utes remain unknown.



## CHAPTER 7

### DECLINE OF WESTERN UTE EQUESTRIANISM: 1847-1855

#### **Mormon Entry into the Eastern Great Basin**

The Mormons arrived at Salt Lake Valley in 1847 intent on establishing a new home in the “wilderness” where they could be undisturbed by those intolerant of their beliefs. They selected Salt Lake Valley for the site of their initial settlement as they knew it to be a “buffer zone” between the Shoshone and Western Utes and therefore not the exclusive territory of either tribe.<sup>230</sup> The valley had abundant pasture for the Mormons’ animals, good soil for their crops, and plentiful timber. The Mormons believed God would ensure their prosperity in their new home, and within two years the Mormon population had swelled to several thousand.

The intrusion of the Mormons into Utah initially complemented the yearly cycle of Waccara’s Utes by providing them with an improved outlet for the proceeds of their raids and an enhanced source of Euroamerican products. Horses fetched high prices in Salt Lake City, as overland travelers on the Oregon Trail detoured there seeking replacements for their exhausted, diseased, or malnourished horses.<sup>231</sup> The Mormons

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<sup>230</sup> *Journal History*, 28 June 1847, 21 July 1847.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 June 1849, 4 March 1851; Brooks, *Mormon Frontier*, 6. A good “Indian” pony was sold for up to 50 dollars in 1850; see Chandless, *Visit to Salt Lake*, 143-144. Horses were especially in demand after 1849, as hundreds of gold-hungry “49ers”

sought both the meat of the buffalo as a supplement to their diet, as well as buffalo skins for their clothing.<sup>232</sup> Buckskin suits also became quite fashionable to the Mormons, who repeatedly paid the Utes higher prices for their deer and other animal skins than did the fur traders.<sup>233</sup> The Mormons also bartered with the Utes for many of their Paiute child captives, whom the Mormons hoped to raise in their homes to become “white and delightsome” according to Church doctrine.<sup>234</sup> In exchange for these commodities, Waccara’s Utes received not only such familiar items as guns, ammunition, knives, tobacco, and blankets, but also cattle, oxen, and other livestock that served the Utes as a year-round secondary food source.<sup>235</sup> “Friendly” Indians, such as Waccara’s Utes,

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detoured through Utah to reach the Spanish Trail route to California. The Western Utes and Mormon middlemen both profited from the need of these emigrants for replacement horses; see Bean, *Autobiography*, 55-56.

<sup>232</sup> Solomon F. Kimball, “Our Pioneer Boys,” *Improvement Era* 11:9 (September 1908): 837; Bean, *Autobiography*, 55. Early Mormon settlers hunted for buffalo on the Plains as well as trading for its products.

<sup>233</sup> *Journal History*, 27 May 1849, 2 June 1849, 13 June 1849, 21 April 1850; Brooks, *Mormon Frontier*, 6; Carter, *Indian and the Pioneer*, 111. Jim Bridger and other American fur trappers were injured by their loss to the Mormons of much of their Western Ute trade. On several occasions, Bridger attempted unsuccessfully to splinter Mormon-Western Ute relations; see *Journal History*, 28 June 1847, 17 April 1849, 27 May 1849.

<sup>234</sup> Brooks, *Mormon Frontier*, 4-9. Brigham Young advised his people “to buy up the Lamanite children as fast as they could, and educate them and teach them the gospel so that many generations would not pass err they should become a white and delightsome people”; see *Journal History*, 12 May 1851. Mormon doctrine as well as compassion moved many Mormons to adopt Indian children found abused or starving, while other Mormons likely purchased children for their value as laborers; children were valuable assets on small farms. West, *Way to the West*, 93-94, 97. Waccara was given a traveling paper by a Mormon church official that certified him as a friend of the Mormons, and indicated Waccara’s intent “to trade horses, Buckskins, and Piede [Paiute] children - we hope them success and prosperity and good bargains”; see Brooks, *Mormon Frontier*, 6.

<sup>235</sup> *Journal History*, 2 June 1849, 13 June 1849, 4 March 1851; Bean, *Autobiography*, 55; Manly, *Death Valley*, 104, 111. Liquor was not an element of barter in Mormon-Western Utes trade, as it was in many other Native American-Euroamerican trading relationships; see Piercy, *Route from Liverpool*, 282; Carter, *Indian and the Pioneer*, 78; *Journal History*, 26 March 1850.

occasionally received some of these products as “gifts” from the Mormons.<sup>236</sup> For Waccara’s Utes, trading with the Mormons was more profitable, convenient, and diversified than with any other trading partners.

### **Cultural Differences and Early Conflict**

Although the Mormons and Western Utes found common ground through their mutually beneficial trading relationship, they were diametrically opposed in their views and usage of land and resources. The Mormons arrived in Utah with a belief that nature was imperfect, and that rather than adapt to nature, one should strive to change and improve nature. Unlike the Western Utes, who adapted to limited resources through dispersal and migration, the Mormons reacted to the limitations of their environment by concentrating their population for support and altering their ecosystem through the creation of new resources. The Mormons brought their own domestic plants and animals to Utah and required comparatively little from nature – specifically an area for settlement that had abundant water, timber, good soil, and forage for their livestock.<sup>237</sup> Unfortunately, most such areas in Utah, aside from Salt Lake Valley, were already used by the Western Utes.

Nineteenth century Mormon doctrine specifically addressed relations with Native Americans. Central to the views of Brigham Young and the Mormon leadership was the belief that the Indians of North America were descendants of a fallen tribe of Israel: The Lamanites. According to *The Book of Mormon* and Mormon theology, the formula for

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<sup>236</sup> In 1852, Brigham Young, Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Utah Territory, submitted a bill to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs detailing \$12,000 in expenses for presents, including blankets, shirts, hats, caps, shoes, pants, ammunition, guns, and tobacco; see *ARCIA* 1852: 438-439.

<sup>237</sup> Smaby, *Conflicting Ecological Systems*, 38-42.

the redemption of the Lamanites involved resettlement of Lamanite lands by whites, the teaching to the Indians of their true history as recounted in *The Book of Mormon*, and the restoration of the “true church” among the Indians. With all this accomplished, the Lamanites would have their curse of dark skin removed and once again become a “white and delightsome people,” assisting the Mormons in preparing for the second coming of Jesus Christ.<sup>238</sup>

Once in Utah, Mormon religious beliefs regarding the “Lamanites” often became secondary to pragmatic concerns. To most Mormons, Indians were a hindrance to further expansion that necessitated forcible removal or destruction.<sup>239</sup> Of foremost importance to Brigham Young and the Mormon leadership was the securing of a safe new home for their people, and if necessary, they were “prepared . . . to kill all . . . [the Utah Indians] . . . if obliged to do so.”<sup>240</sup> Young cautioned his settlers not to become too friendly with the Indians, trust them, or “mix promiscuously” with them.<sup>241</sup> He asserted that “most Indians would dwindle away [following Mormon settlement],” but he also believed that “a remnant should be saved” and frequently admonished his settlers against killing Indian “thieves.”<sup>242</sup> Settlers often ignored such admonitions. In early 1850, several Mormon

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<sup>238</sup> The theory that Native Americans were descendants of a tribe of Israel was not originated by the Mormons. As early as the seventeenth century, the theory was popular in Europe; see *Discourses* II: 143, IX: 174-179, XIV: 10-11, XV: 283.

<sup>239</sup> Western Utes were most visible to Mormons during the Western Ute gathering at Utah Valley in the spring, when resources were abundant and easy to obtain. Observing the Utes as they danced, gambled, and raced their horses, Mormons considered the Utes “lazy” and “idle.” Western Utes were less visible to the Mormons during more “productive” times, such as in the summer and fall, when the Utes did most of their hunting and gathering.

<sup>240</sup> *Discourses* I: 105.

<sup>241</sup> *Journal History*, 19 May 1849, 15 October 1849; *Discourses* I: 106-107, VI: 327-329, XI: 262.

<sup>242</sup> *Journal History*, 9 January 1850, 12 May 1851.

settlers killed and disemboweled a sick Western Ute who entered a Mormon fort seeking medicine for his illness.<sup>243</sup>

Western Utes were divided in their views on Mormon settlement. Although the first Mormon settlement in Utah was in Salt Lake Valley, an area disputed between Western Utes and Shoshonis, subsequent Mormon settlements extended southward into the heart of Western Ute territory and beyond. The Mormons settled in Utah Valley and at Manti in the Sevier Valley in 1849, and at Parowan in southwestern Utah in 1850. Many Uintah Utes, whose hunting grounds in the Uintah Basin of northeastern Utah remained untouched by the Mormons, supported Mormon settlement of western and southern Utah. Since Waccara's Utes benefited from trade with the Mormons, and their annual migrations brought them out of the Eastern Great Basin for much of the year, they too initially welcomed Mormon settlement. Western Utes in the path of Mormon settlement, such as the Utah Lake Utes, were less supportive. They began to raid the fledgling Mormon settlements for cattle, leading to several bloody engagements with the Mormon militia in 1849 and 1850.<sup>244</sup> Waccara applauded the Mormon attacks and personally "chastised" many other "bad" Indians who were hostile to the Mormons.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 31 January 1850.

<sup>244</sup> *Journal History*, 28 February 1849, 31 January 1850, 12 February 1850, 14 February 1850. Captain Stansbury of the United States Army offered troops from Fort Hall to assist the Mormons, but deep snow prevented their deployment; see *Journal History*, 28 February 1850.

<sup>245</sup> Waccara's Utes were initially very friendly with the Mormons, marching in the 1849 Founder's Day parade in Salt Lake City; see *Journal History*, 26 March 1850. Waccara was designated an Elder of the Mormon church in 1851; see *Journal History*, 9 June 1851.

### New Problems for Waccara's Utes

Waccara's support of the Mormons began to waiver by 1853, as environmental changes wrought by the Mormons combined with other external pressures to threaten the continuation of the yearly cycle of Waccara's Utes. Netting by Mormons at Utah Lake dramatically reduced fish populations, resulting in food shortages during the Western Ute spring gathering.<sup>246</sup> The alteration of the Eastern Great Basin ecosystem by Mormon importation of domestic plants, diversion of waterways, game hunting, and the cutting of pinion trees for firewood, reduced the fall resources available to Waccara's Utes.<sup>247</sup> The movement of American troops and colonists into outlying regions of the Mexican California settlements in the late 1840s significantly stiffened resistance to Ute winter horse raids and increased the risk of such raids.<sup>248</sup> Mormon occupation and fencing of grasslands limited the forage available to feed Western Ute horses in the Eastern Great Basin.<sup>249</sup> Euroamerican-imported diseases, such as measles, began to ravage the Western Utes, reducing the numbers of Waccara's warriors available for hunting and raiding throughout the year.<sup>250</sup> Without large numbers of healthy warriors and horses, Waccara's yearly cycle became increasingly impractical.

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<sup>246</sup> *ARCIA* 1849: 1003.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*; *Journal History*, 15 December 1849, 20 November 1850. Mormons killed game both directly for food and indirectly by killing the plants that supported the game; see Smaby, *Conflicting Ecological Systems*, 40-42. Smaby's contention that Mormon "pest" hunting contests further disrupted the Western Ute subsistence system seems invalid. Few of the species killed by Mormons in these contests were eaten by the Utes, and most of these animals were predators whose death would have likely served to actually increase the game population.

<sup>248</sup> Beattie, *San Bernardino*, *passim*.

<sup>249</sup> Hamilton Gardner, *History of Lehi, Including a Biographical Section* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1913), 34.

<sup>250</sup> *Journal History*, 8 December 1849, 14 February 1850, 20 February 1850. Waccara was struck with illness in 1850, 1854, and 1855; see *Journal History*, 22 May 1850, 11 May 1854; Knecht and Crawley, *History of Brigham Young*, 153. Western Utes often

The continuing and precipitous decline of the buffalo west of the Rockies in the 1840s and 1850s further injured the subsistence cycle of Waccara's Utes. By 1841, Western bison had likely been reduced in numbers by at least a third of their original numbers – to about 200,000.<sup>251</sup> As shown on map “f,” Western buffalo survived in significant numbers in only three areas: the valleys of the Green River and its tributaries, the region surrounding the upper reaches of the Colorado River, and in the Great Divide Basin. There is no evidence that overall Native American hunting declined significantly, so it is probable that 30,000 Western bison were still being killed each year by human predation, enough to cause an annual 6% decrease in bison numbers.<sup>252</sup> The effect of this decline was compounded as Native American hunting remained constant and buffalo populations diminished.

Thousands of American settlers began to cross the Oregon Trail into Utah and Oregon in the 1840s, resulting in even more Western bison losses. Approximately 20,000 settlers traveled to Oregon along the Oregon Trail between 1841 and 1848, along with several thousand Mormons destined for Utah. The gold rush years between 1849

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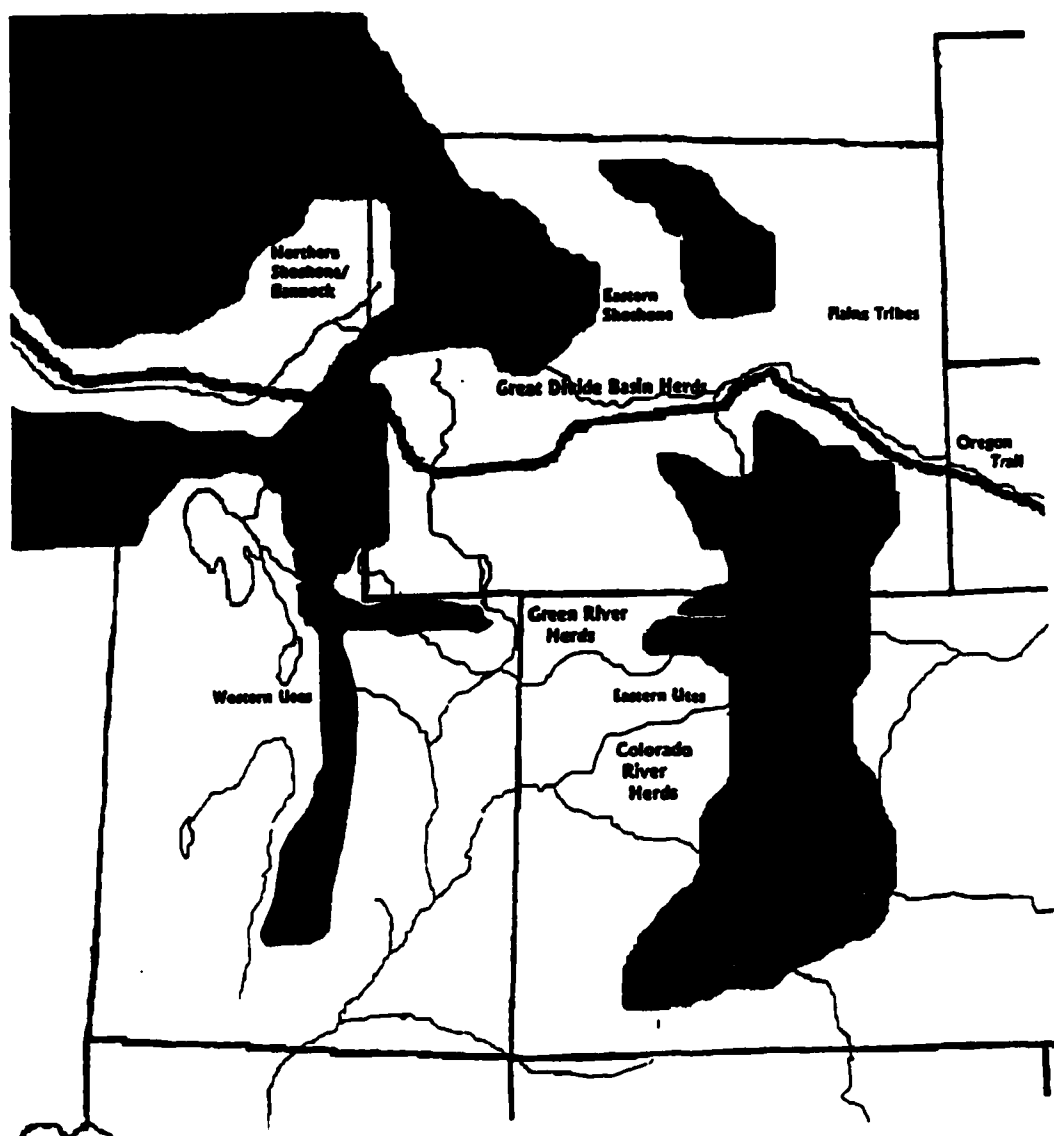
reacted to the onset of the new Euroamerican-introduced pathogens by killing captives in the hope of saving the ill members of their tribe; see *Journal History*, 8 December 1849. The new diseases struck all members of a tribe, not just the young and old as did previous diseases. This not only reduced the numbers of warriors available to hunt and defend the group, but also hindered their ability to reproduce, as women of child-bearing age were killed or rendered sterile from disease; see West, *Way to the West*, 89-90.

<sup>251</sup> The reduction of buffalo populations from 315,000 in 1776 to 200,000 in 1841 is based upon the previously cited compounded rate of buffalo reduction of one-half of one percent per year. The total reduction for the 55 year span amounts to about 35%, leaving a population of 200,000 in 1841.

<sup>252</sup> Flores, *Bison Ecology*, 471, 476, 481. The estimates cited are based on Flores' figures of 18% natural buffalo rate of increase and 9% natural mortality rate, resulting in a net increase of 18,000. Therefore hunting by humans of 30,000 buffalo/year would have combined with losses by natural causes to decrease net buffalo populations by 12,000, or

6% of the total estimated 1841 population.

## MAP F

**Western Buffalo After 1841**

shaded areas represent mountains



and 1852 saw an explosion of traffic on the Oregon Trail – almost 200,000 travelers in those years alone.<sup>253</sup> The trail west cut straight through the buffalo grounds of the Great Divide Basin, and many travelers detoured from the main trail to hunt on the Green River and its tributaries. In addition to hunting bison for food, and in some cases for robes, the travelers also brought further biotic contamination into these areas. Buffalo were beginning to find ever-fewer environs to which to migrate in their summer mating season.

By 1850, buffalo hunting was becoming increasingly difficult for the Western Utes. East of the Rockies, the bison frontier began a slow retreat in the 1840s. The “buffer zones” between Plains tribes were being plundered following a general peace in the region, and soon buffalo were rarely seen within a hundred miles east of the Rockies.<sup>254</sup> This effectively eliminated any opportunity for the Utes to hunt Plains bison and also precluded any migration of buffalo west to replace Western buffalo losses. Waccara’s people were compelled to depend on the rapidly decreasing Western bison herds, competing with the Shoshone, Bannock, and occasionally the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Flatheads, and Crow.<sup>255</sup> With more Native Americans competing for fewer buffalo west of the Rockies, bison hunting became a more dangerous occupation.

Waccara’s Utes once again attempted to modify their system of equestrianism in response to the new pressures of the 1850s. Waccara initially countered the increased danger of horse raiding into California by leaving the women and children of his band in Utah during the winter, while he and his warriors proceeded with their annual raid.<sup>256</sup> But Waccara and his warriors soon found their families were not safe even at home, as

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<sup>253</sup> West, *Way to the West*, 18.

<sup>254</sup> West, *Way to the West*, 63; Flores, *Bison Ecology*, 483.

<sup>255</sup> *Source Documents*, 75; Bean, *Autobiography*, 98.

<sup>256</sup> *Journal History*, 19 February 1851.

Euroamerican gold seekers began to cut through the Eastern Great Basin, leaving a trail of pillage and murder in their wake.<sup>257</sup> Further pressuring Waccara were the Mormons, who encouraged Waccara to give up his raids entirely, apparently in an effort to gain Californian support for Utah statehood.<sup>258</sup> Waccara eventually did cease his raids after a particularly disastrous expedition in the winter of 1850-1851 and began to winter with the Navajos when healthy enough to travel and rich in trade goods, or in Utah when he and his people were sick or “poor.”<sup>259</sup> Unable to raid as they had in the past, and occasionally forced to stay in Utah during extreme winter, the quantity and quality of the Western Ute’s horses began to suffer.

The massive exodus of Mormons into Utah in the 1850s aggravated the cultural clash between Western Utes and Mormons. The Western Utes did not have a concept of land ownership as did the Mormons – they invited the Mormons to settle and use the land in exchange for trade.<sup>260</sup> But the Mormons believed the Western Utes’ seasonal migratory use of land was not “valid” usage, and they began to restrict Western Ute access to the lands they believed were theirs by virtue of their “improvements” to the land. To the Mormons, only those who “improved” the land should be able to use it, and within a few years after their arrival in Utah, Mormon fences, corrals, roads, and settlements cut through most of the best Western Ute lands.<sup>261</sup> By 1853, Waccara’s band

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<sup>257</sup> Carvalho, *Travel and Adventure*, 190-193, 197; *Journal History*, 19 February 1851, 26 October 1853; Knecht and Crawley, *History of Brigham Young*, 140, 184; *ARCLIA* 1857: 599.

<sup>258</sup> Lawrence, *Spanish Trail*, 98.

<sup>259</sup> For the raid of 1850-1851, see *Journal History*, 3 March 1851. For wintering with the Navajos, see Bean, *Autobiography*, 105; *ARCLIA* 1852: 438; *Journal History*, 17 March 1852, 13 November 1854. For wintering in Utah, see *Journal History*, 8 December 1849.

<sup>260</sup> *Journal History*, 2 June 1849, 13 June 1849; Steward, *Groups of the Ute*, 10-11.

<sup>261</sup> Smaby, *Conflicting Ecological Systems*, 38-42.

and other Western Utes returning from seasonal migrations became “intruders” on their own land. Walls, fences, and forts, symbols of law, order, and control to the Mormons, became proof to the Western Utes of Mormon obstruction and unwillingness to share.<sup>262</sup>

With diminished buffalo hunting opportunities, and decreasing resources available in Utah during the spring and fall as a result of Mormon settlement, Waccara’s people began increasingly to rely on the slave trade to obtain guns, ammunition, and food. However, the Mormons were simultaneously becoming less willing to trade for captives or to furnish the Utes with guns or ammunition, and further attempted to restrict trade in Utah between the Western Utes and New Mexicans.<sup>263</sup> One Western Ute complained that “Without our guns we cannot hunt or defend our families . . . we are not anybody now.”<sup>264</sup> By 1853, Waccara and his people, frustrated over declining food sources and Mormon trade restrictions, decided to obtain resources in one of the few remaining methods available to them: raiding Mormon settlements.

### **The Waccara War**

The Waccara War of 1853-1854 was more a struggle by the Western Utes to regain their access to trade and food resources than an effort to extricate the Mormons from Utah. Waccara and his people, though willing to grant the Mormons use of their land in exchange for trade, were angered by Mormon attempts to change the land, restrict Ute access to their land, and limit Ute trade. Waccara’s limited goals in the series of

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<sup>262</sup> *Journal History*, 11 June 1854; Bean, *Autobiography*, 96; Carter, *Indian and the Pioneer*, 94.

<sup>263</sup> *Journal History*, 3 November 1851; Piercy, *Route from Liverpool*, 282. The disruption of their trade with the Western Utes angered many New Mexican traders. One such trader threatened Brigham Young with attack if he continued his policies; see *Journal History*, 2 May 1853; *Discourses I*: 104.

<sup>264</sup> Carter, *Indian and the Pioneer*, 121.

raids he directed in the summer of 1853 were to obtain Mormon cattle to feed his people, and to force the Mormons into perpetually purchasing his Paiute captives.<sup>265</sup> Although Waccara's raids were initially successful, the Mormons soon began to "fort up" and station armed guards with their cattle. The Mormons outlawed trade between Euroamericans and Waccara's Utes, effectively cutting the flow of guns and ammunition to the Western Ute warriors.<sup>266</sup> The greater numbers, tight organization, central control, and communal support of the Mormons provided them with a significant military edge over the dispersed Western Utes, whose loose, task-oriented social organization was ill-suited for military operations.<sup>267</sup> Young declared that Waccara's Utes must "bow down to the gospel or be slain," and within four months Waccara began to make peace overtures, his people hungry and their ammunition exhausted.<sup>268</sup>

Both Waccara and the annual migratory cycle of his people met their demise shortly after the conclusion of the war. With his *puwa* at its lowest point, Waccara died in 1854, after a protracted struggle with lung fever.<sup>269</sup> The band Waccara had led fragmented, with a remnant coming under the leadership of his brother, Arrapene.<sup>270</sup> Winter raids into California had become too hazardous, buffalo hunting was prohibitively dangerous and uncertain, and hunting and gathering in the Eastern Great Basin met with

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<sup>265</sup> *Journal History*, 2 May 1853. The cattle raids in the summer of 1853 in effect substituted for the Western Utes' annual buffalo hunt.

<sup>266</sup> Knecht and Crawley, *History of Brigham Young*, 135-136; *ARCIA* 1853: 441-442.

<sup>267</sup> Smaby, *Conflicting Ecological Systems*, 38-42.

<sup>268</sup> *Discourses* I: 171; Knecht and Crawley, *History of Brigham Young*, 138; Carvalho, *Travel and Adventure*, 96-97; Bean, *Autobiography*, 93, 95. For the Waccara War, see H. Bartley Heiner, "Mormon-Indian Relations as Viewed through the Walker War" (thesis, Brigham Young University, 1955).

<sup>269</sup> Knecht and Crawley, *History of Brigham Young*, 153.

<sup>270</sup> *Journal History*, 29 May 1855.

less success every year.<sup>271</sup> The annual Western Ute gathering in the spring at Utah Lake became more problematic to attend, as increasing numbers of Mormons in the region reduced fish and game supplies, and restricted Western Utes from recruiting their horses on the adjacent grasslands.<sup>272</sup> With Waccara's annual cycle no longer practical, the Western Utes began to face some very difficult choices.

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<sup>271</sup> Overhunting diminishing game supplies was especially damaging to game populations in the fall and winter, when the killing of does often left fawns vulnerable to the elements; see White, *Roots of Dependency*. 27.

<sup>272</sup> *ARCLIA* 1855: 521-526.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE DEMISE OF WESTERN UTE EQUESTRIANISM: POST-1855

By the 1860s, the Southwest was rapidly becoming filled with Euroamericans, and the migratory and diversified equestrian subsistence system that had allowed the Western Utes to thrive in the Eastern Great Basin was no longer practical. Following the death of Waccara, Western Ute equestrianism in the Eastern Great Basin became untenable as the slave markets in Utah, California, and New Mexico closed, the buffalo disappeared, and wild game became scarce.<sup>273</sup> Ever-increasing Mormon settlement threatened the very survival of the Western Utes, who began to fragment, as disease, emigration, and starvation took their toll.<sup>274</sup> Mormons warned the Western Utes to reject their old ways or they would “go like Walker [Waccara] did,” and many Utes responded by “settling down” and practicing agriculture.<sup>275</sup> But most Western Utes were unsuccessful in their attempts to adapt to the Mormon way of life, and those who failed

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<sup>272</sup> *ARCLIA* 1855: 521-526.

<sup>273</sup> *ARCLIA* 1855: 521-525, 1861: 745-750, 1862: 348, 1865: 313-314, 1866: 127, 1868: 618, 1870: 608.

<sup>274</sup> Jorgensen, *Ethnohistory*, 73-79; *ARCLIA* 1855: 521-526, 1856: 786-787, 1859: 733-734, 1862: 348-354, 1866: 124-130, 1868: 612-613.

<sup>275</sup> *Journal History*, 1 September 1856.

either relied on Mormon “charity” for their sustenance or joined other refractory Western Utes in mounted bands, raiding Mormon settlements for their necessities.<sup>276</sup>

While some Western Utes attempted to remain in the Eastern Great Basin and either raid Mormon settlements or continue to hunt and gather for the declining resources of the region, their situation was rapidly deteriorating. The Western Utes were becoming increasingly outnumbered by the Mormons, whose higher reproductivity, lower death rates, and immigration formed a sort of “generational juggernaut.”<sup>277</sup> The Mormons used their greater numbers and tight organization to quash Western Ute resistance. To the Mormons, the Western Utes became divided into two principal factions: the “good” Indians, who attempted to adopt Mormon ways, and the “bad” Indians, who continued to raid Mormon settlements. The Mormons kept “good” Indians alive but in a continual state of dependency, while “bad” Indians were either killed or imprisoned.<sup>278</sup> By the 1870s, the Mormon juggernaut was becoming too powerful to resist, and most surviving Western Utes moved to a reservation established in the Uintah Basin.<sup>279</sup> Waccara’s life and death proved to be a mirror to Western Ute equestrianism, as Waccara’s generation

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<sup>276</sup> Carter, *Indian and the Pioneer*, 106. Acknowledging the Mormon role in disrupting the Western Ute subsistence system, Brigham Young and other church leaders directed their followers to help feed the Indians; see *Discourses* XI: 264. For a ledger of some disbursements of food to Indians, see Carter, *Indian and the Pioneer*, 80-81.

<sup>277</sup> This “generational juggernaut” of Euroamerican population was a consistent theme in Anglo western expansion; see West, *Way to the West*, 91. The age-sex pyramid of the Mormons in 1850 reflects the high reproductivity of the early Mormon settlers; see Wahlquist, *Atlas of Utah*, 113.

<sup>278</sup> Knecht and Crawley, *History of Brigham Young*, 147, 155, 169.

<sup>279</sup> Lewis, *Wolf nor Dog*, 38-39; Callaway, Janetski, and Stewart, *Ute*, 356. There were also several small reservations established in the Eastern Great Basin, including the Kanosh Reservation, which included a large number of the surviving Pahvant Western Utes; see Wahlquist, *Atlas of Utah*, 104-105. The Pahvant Indians, especially their principal leader Kanosh, were considered by the Mormons to be “good” Indians.

became not only the first, but also the last, to practice equestrianism in the Eastern Great Basin.

Despite rapidly declining functional value, equestrianism among the Utes persisted for decades outside the Great Basin on the Uintah Reservation. Agents consistently and aggressively pressured the Utes to abandon equestrianism and pursue agriculture or livestock raising, even to the point of disbanding the tribal herd in the 1880s.<sup>280</sup> Yet by 1922, the Utes had again increased their herd to 3,700 animals. Horses remained symbols of status and prestige among the Utes, and those without horses were often considered “stupid” by the more “wealthy” Utes.<sup>281</sup> Mounted Ute bands continued to operate in Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming into the twentieth century, hunting buffalo and other game. But times were changing, and stock-raising, mineral leasing income, and federal assistance became the key components of the Ute economy, eventually replacing the equestrian way of life.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Lewis, *Wolf nor Dog*, passim.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 50-51, 57, 65-66; *ARCI* 1867: 179.

<sup>282</sup> Lewis, *Wolf nor Dog*, 51.



## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSION

Through the first half of the nineteenth century, the Western Utes were successful at gradually adapting and transforming their system of equestrianism in response to the changing world around them. Waccara's Utes exemplified the success of the Western Utes in gradual adaptation, and their unique diversified migratory cycle illustrates the fallacy of the stereotypical Native American system of equestrianism. The equestrian adaptations of the Western Utes also demonstrate how environmental, political, cultural, social, and economic factors interplay to uniquely shape a people's response to new cultural stimuli. Initially, the environmental and geographic constraints of the Eastern Great Basin precluded the useful employment of horses in the region. This changed beginning in 1776, when political objectives of the Spanish New Mexican leadership prompted Escalante's expedition to the Eastern Great Basin. Fueled by economic incentives, the subsequent trade that developed between the New Mexicans and Western Utes reduced the relative cost of horses to the Utes and spurred the initial Western Ute adaptations to the horse. As equestrianism began to thrive among the Western Utes, changes in their cultural values concerning wealth and status combined with economic factors, such as the decline of the fur trade, and environmental factors, including the decline of the Western buffalo, to prompt Waccara's Western Utes to adopt a new annual equestrian cycle. After political and social pressures drove the Mormons into Utah in

1847, cultural conflict and the deadly effect of new pathogens eventually compelled the Western Utes to leave the Eastern Great Basin and abandon equestrianism.

Although Western Ute equestrianism in the Eastern Great Basin ended in the nineteenth century, Mormons continued into the twentieth century to raise horses, cattle, and other livestock on many of the same lands that had been used by the equestrian Western Utes. Wheat, hay, and barns insulated the Mormon animals from the deadly effects of severe winter weather, and the lush grasslands of the Sevier Valley and other areas eventually made the Eastern Great Basin one of the premier stock-raising regions in the West. But the prosperity of the Mormons had largely come at the expense of the Western Utes, a fact that did not go unnoticed by many Mormons.<sup>283</sup> To this day, the Utes remain dispossessed of most of their lands but intact as a people. As one Ute recently remarked, “The *Noochew* [Utes] have been here the longest, we are still here, and we will always be here.”<sup>284</sup>

Nearly a century after the demise of Western Ute equestrianism in the Eastern Great Basin, historian Charles Kelly followed his Ute guide, Joe Pickyavit, up a steep mountain slope in search of the grave of the great equestrian Western Ute leader, Waccara. Climbing past a loose rock slide, Pickyavit directed Kelly to the white stone that marked the gravesite. Although an initial search of the area by Kelly did not locate any evidence that the grave was Waccara’s, a further examination revealed a large number of bones of horses that Kelly knew to have been buried with Waccara.

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<sup>283</sup> As early as the 1920s, Mormon scholars took the lead in criticizing nineteenth century Church policy toward the Western Utes; see issues of the *Utah Historical Quarterly* beginning at that time.

<sup>284</sup> “Uintah and Ouray Ute Indian Tribe, Northern Utes, Fort Duchesne, Utah: A Special Information Handout Compiled by the Ute Bulletin,” *Ute Bulletin* 30:14 (26 March 1996): 1.

Ironically, the scattered horse bones were all that remained to mark the passing of Waccara and the age of Eastern Great Basin equestrianism he personified. Although this incident was a poignant reminder of the death of Western Ute equestrianism, the continued persistence of Western Ute culture was evidenced by a remark from Pickyavit to Kelly on the climb back down the mountain. Pickyavit, once a Western Ute leader himself, claimed that he had never before been to the gravesite he knew only through oral tradition, and had been guided there by unseen forces – the *puwa* of Ute religion.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Charles Kelly, "We Found the Grave of the Utah Chief," *Desert Magazine* 9:12 (October 1946): 17-19.

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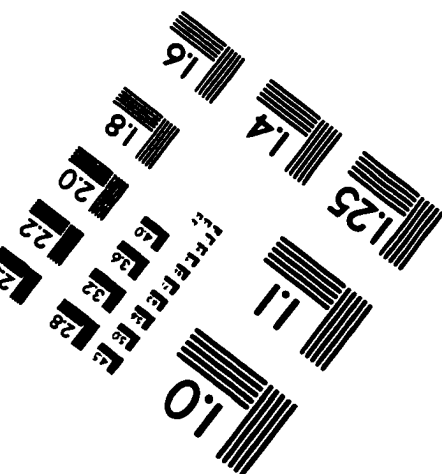
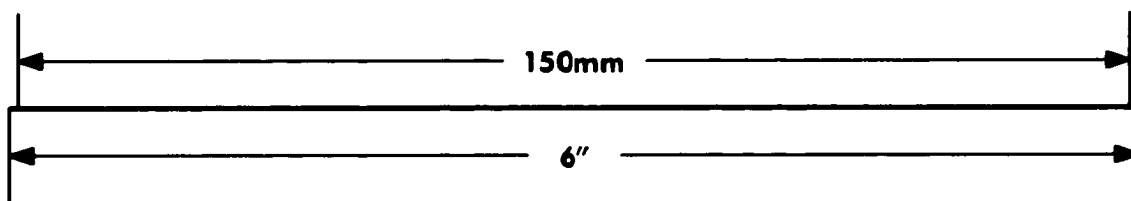
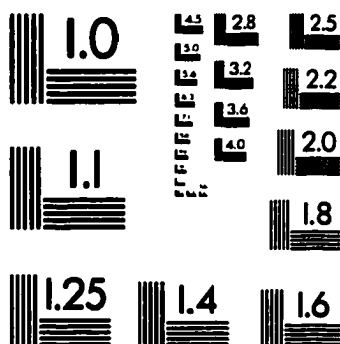
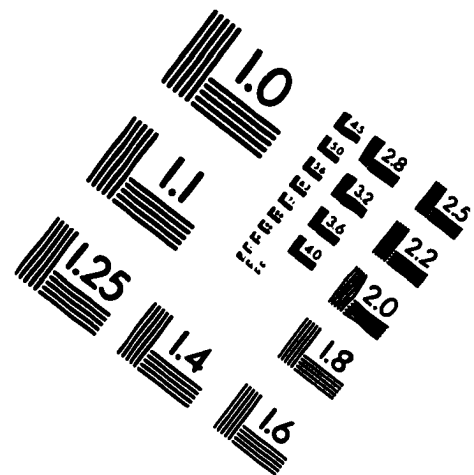
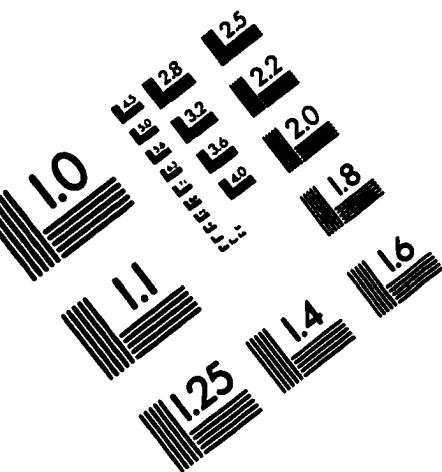
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**Waccara's Utes: Native American Equestrian Adaptations  
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**Thesis Examination Committee:**

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