
Prelude to Dispossession: The Fur Trade's Significance for the Northern Utes and Southern Paiutes

BY JOHN R. ALLEY, JR.

WRITING IN THE 1840s, RUFUS B. SAGE mentioned a native people who had come increasingly to the American public's attention during the previous two decades:

The Taos Utahs are a brave and warlike people, located upon the del Norte a short distance to the northwest of Taos. These subsist principally by hunting, but raise large numbers of horses.

. . . The Lake Utahs occupy the territory lying south of the Snakes, and upon the waters of the Colorado of the west, and south of the Great Salt Lake.

These Indians are less warlike in their nature, and more friendly in their disposition, than the Taos Utahs. The persons and property of whites, visiting them for trade or other purposes, are seldom molested; and all having dealings with them, so far as my information extends, unite to give them a good character.

. . . The Diggers, or rather a small portion of them, are a division of the Utah nation, inhabiting a considerable extent of the barren country directly southwest of the Great Salt Lake. They are represented as the most deplorably situated, perhaps, of the whole family of man, in all that pertains to the means of subsistence and the ordinary comforts of life.

The people Sage described are known today as the Southern Utes, the Northern Utes, and the Southern Paiutes.¹ When he wrote, the Southern

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¹ Rufus B. Sage, *Scenes in the Rocky Mountains . . .*, in *Rufus B. Sage: His Letters and Papers, 1836-1847*, ed. LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, 2 vols. (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark, 1956), 2:91-92. As used in this paper Northern Utes refers to those bands who resided most of the time north and west of the Colorado River and generally within the present boundaries of Utah. Notably, this includes the Tumpanawach and Uinta Ats bands. It might also include the Yamparika band of Colorado, although the primary sources of the fur trade era do not mention them by name. The San Pitch and Pahvant bands in Utah did not, as will be seen, play the same role as other Northern Utes. Southern Paiutes refers to members of that tribe living north and west of the Colorado River, with the primary focus on those occupying the Virgin River and Sevier River drainage basins. Unless otherwise specified, references to Utes and Paiutes in this paper are to the above-named groups.

Opposite: *J. K. Hillers, a member of the Powell expedition, took some of the first photographs of Utah Indians, including this Uinta Ute camp, ca. 1873. Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology photograph, USHS collections.*



Utes had been trading with Euro-Americans for some one hundred and fifty years. But the Northern Utes' and Southern Paiutes' relationship with Euro-Americans developed at a slower pace: it did not significantly affect their lives until the early nineteenth century. The attitudes and situations of these two peoples, who at first accepted but then resisted Mormon settlement in Utah, emerge only through an understanding of the years during which their lives developed under the influence of expanding trade.

Sometime shortly before 1813 New Mexican traders established direct trade with the Northern or Utah Utes. This was followed in the 1820s by the equally important arrival of American fur trappers who spread across Ute and Paiute territory. As a result, the international position of these tribes changed dramatically. This trade established patterns of intercultural contact which laid the groundwork for the later dispossession of the Utes and Paiutes by white settlers and the United States government. Long before this process was complete, the fur trade introduced new technology and new forms of social and economic organization that significantly changed the life-style of Utah Indians. Thus, although the fur trade in Utah built on earlier, culturally influential contacts with New Mexicans, it had effects similar to those long identified by historians in other parts of North America.²

The journal of the Domínguez-Escalante expedition of 1776 provides a glimpse of Northern Ute and Southern Paiute life at the end of the eighteenth century. It is clear from the descriptions therein that neither had yet been directly affected by the introduction of European culture. The most revolutionary Spanish introduction, the horse, had reached only those Utes who lived southeast of the Colorado River. Although Comanches to the north had horses, the journal does not mention horses or metal tools among either the Northern Utes or Southern Paiutes. The Utes were concentrated at Utah Lake and farther south, having been pushed out of much of northeastern Utah, including the Uinta Basin and Strawberry Valley, by the Comanches.³ Many of the latter may have been Shoshones, whom the Spanish later called "Comanches

²For a recent discussion of this process in relation to the central Rockies fur trade see David J. Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807-1840: A Geographical Synthesis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 214-15.

³It should be pointed out that on one occasion the padres seem to designate the Uinta Mountains as the boundary between Utes and Comanches, but later they clearly designate the Uinta Valley as Comanche territory. Fray Francisco Atanasio Domínguez and Fray Silvestre Vélez de Escalante, *The Domínguez-Escalante Journal*, trans. Fray Angelico Chavez, ed. Ted J. Warner (Provo, Ut.: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), pp. 40, 43, and 45.

Sozones," but it is also quite possible that all of the Comanches proper had not yet moved on to the plains from their original homes in Wyoming. Some Northern Utes, whom the padres called Lagunas or Timpanogotzis, were visiting Colorado Utes when the expedition arrived, so they were obviously aware of the flow of Spanish goods that had reached their cousins; but the Comanches appear to have cut them off from this northward flow. Those Southern Paiutes who lived north of the Colorado River had also heard of the Spanish, notably Fray Francisco Garcés who had recently contacted Chemehuevi Paiutes on the lower river. The Paiutes who met the explorers demonstrated greater involvement in a trade network than the Utes. The journal mentions Paiute trade with Hopis, Havasupais, Mojaves, and Apaches.

In most regards the Utes and Paiutes lived similar lives in 1776. Their housing, clothing, and hunting-gathering subsistence patterns were basically the same although the Utes relied on fish from their lake and occasionally hunted bison while some of the Paiutes practiced horticulture. The Utes lived in more concentrated villages on Utah Lake and showed signs of more defined political leadership. This was probably due to the dependable food supply the lake provided and to Comanche pressure, since these social characteristics were not evident among the Bearded Utes farther south. Although the padres recognized the Utes and Paiutes as different nations, the only other distinctions they mentioned were slight linguistic variations and greater Southern Paiute timidity.

After 1776 the Southern Paiutes disappear from the record until the arrival of trappers in the 1820s. During this fifty-year interval only a few documents mention the Northern Utes, but these sources make it clear that their life-style had begun to change. By 1805 the "Yutas Timpanoges" were resisting their Comanche or Shoshone nemesis more successfully and apparently obtaining horses in the bargain. In that year Manuel Mestas journeyed to Utah Lake and recovered horses and mules the Comanches had stolen from New Mexicans and then lost in a war with the Northern Utes.

By 1813 the initial tentative contacts of Domínguez and Escalante and Mestas were transformed into direct trade with the Utes. According to reports in that year, a company of traders led by Mauricio Arze and Lagos García visited the Timpanogos Utes, the Sanpuchi or San Pitch Utes, and the Bearded (probably Pahvant) Utes. The Spanish traded horses for slaves and pelts. The trade was still not completely

secure, since the Utes threatened to destroy the traders on several occasions, but a link had been created that only awaited the arrival of more extensive markets to turn the Northern Utes into a major trading nation. This would not happen until the fur traders began to compete with the New Mexicans because, as David Weber has pointed out, "Aside from being illegal, the Spanish trade with Utes . . . was a small-scale, individual, and rather shabby affair."⁴

In 1822 the Southern Utes indicated to Thomas James their desire to increase the trade:

You are Americans, we are told . . . We want your trade. Come to our country with your goods. Come and trade with the Utahs. We have horses, mules, and sheep, more than we want. We heard that you wanted beaver skins. . . . Come over among us and you shall have as many beaver skins as you want. . . . These Spaniards . . . wont even give us two loads of powder and lead for a beaver skin, and for a good reason. They have not as much as they want themselves.

American fur traders responded. Within two years they had moved north from New Mexico through the lands of the Southern Utes and into the Utah homelands of the Northern Utes. Of the several parties that entered Utah in 1824, none was more important than that led by Etienne Provost. After Shoshones under Bad Gocha killed eight of Provost's men on the Jordan River, Provost turned to nearby Utes for protection as well as trade. When Peter Skene Ogden met him the next spring in Weber Canyon, Provost was accompanied by a band of twenty Utes, three of whom wore Spanish crosses. He apparently obtained many of his furs that year from the Utes.⁵

Ogden, of the Hudson's Bay Company, was part of the northern frontier of the fur trade which also approached Ute lands in the mid-1820s. However, the British left the Ute country to their American competitors who had recently come west across South Pass. Americans may have encountered Utes in this area as early as 1812 when a returning party of Astorians mentioned the "Black Arms, about 3,000 strong . . .

⁴ Joseph J. Hill, "Spanish and Mexican Exploration Northwest from New Mexico into the Great Basin," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 3 (1930): 16-19; David J. Weber, *The Taos Trappers: The Fur Trade in the Far Southwest, 1540-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), p. 27.

⁵ Thomas James, *Three Years among the Indians and Mexicans*, ed. Milo Milton Quaife (New York: The Citadel Press, 1966), pp. 160-61. For Provost and other Taos trapping parties of 1824-25 see Weber, *Taos Trappers*, pp. 71-78; "The Diary of William H. Ashley, March 25-June 27, 1825," in Dale Morgan, ed., *The West of William H. Ashley, 1822-1838* (Denver: Old West Publishing, 1964), pp. 113-17; and Peter Skene Ogden, *Peter Skene Ogden's Snake Country Journals, 1824-25 and 1825-26*, ed. E. E. Rich (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1950).

whose territories extend to the neighbourhood of the spainards." Probably Utes, these "Black Arms" were at war with the Arapahoes and in possession of "the best beaver country on this side the mountains."⁶ By 1825 Americans in the employ of William H. Ashley were moving south to test this conclusion which their fellow citizens moving north from New Mexico had already confirmed.

The records Ashley and his men kept from 1825 to 1827 provide the first substantial post-1776 description of the Northern Utes. In May 1825 Ashley himself met a band of Utes near the junction of the White and Green rivers. They met him "with great familiarity and Ease of manner" and showed signs of having prospered since 1776. The Utes, who would later be renowned among the trappers for their quality animal skins, "were clothed in mountain sheep skin & Buffaloe robes superior to any band of Indians in my knowledg west of Council Bluffs." They not only had "a great number of good horses" but also had enough English fusils to arm half their number. Since the only source of English guns was to the north and since there is no evidence of Ute trade with the Hudson's Bay Company, these guns were probably acquired from Shoshones. Ashley's account provides other evidence that the Utes were doing better in their relations with the Shoshones although the two tribes remained at war. The Shoshones' territory still extended down the Green River as far as Brown's Hole, but the Utes controlled the Uinta Basin, and some of them lived north of Utah Valley on the Weber River near present Wanship. Provost, accompanying Ashley's party, went even farther down the Weber to trade with another Ute encampment.⁷

The following year Jedediah S. Smith opened trade with Utes at Utah Lake. Despite greater mobility, the largest concentration of Utes still lived near the lake much of the year and depended on it for their principal food supply of fish. Smith, however, found most of them up nearby Spanish Fork Canyon gathering service berries. He confirmed a number of Ashley's comments: the Utes had many horses, were clothed in well-cared-for mountain sheep and antelope skins and buffalo robes, and had even more guns than the Shoshones. He disagreed with Ashley about the source of the latter, concluding that they came from Spanish New Mexico rather than the English; but given the general spread of firearms in North America, Ashley's conclusion seems more reasonable.

⁶ Robert Stuart, *The Discovery of the Oregon Trail: Robert Stuart's Narratives*, ed. Philip A. Rollins (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 86.

⁷ "Diary of Ashley," pp. 113-17.

Smith was greatly impressed by the character of the Utes, describing them in terms most of the trappers who followed him would repeat:

I found these Indians more honest than any I had ever been with in the country. They appear to have verry little disposition to steal and ask for nothing unless it may be a little meat. . . . The Uta's are cleanly quiet and active and make a nearer approach to civilized life than any Indians I have seen in the Interior.

Anxious to encourage their friendship, Smith "concluded a treaty with these Indians by which the americans are allowed to hunt & trap in and pass through their country unmolested." Before moving on he purchased three horses at an unspecified high price and gave the Utes a "handsome present" of "1 Tin Kettle, 3 yards Red Strouding, 4 Razors, 2 durk knives, 50 balls 1 lb Powder, 3 looking Glasses, 2 dozen Rings, 1 dozen combs 4 hawk Bills, 2 stretching needles, 2 doz. awls, Buttons 1 large green handle knife."⁸

Most important for the future of Ute trade, Smith invited them to meet him at the rendezvous the following year to conclude a treaty with the Shoshones that would make the country safer for Indians and whites alike. The Utes agreed and thus were present to earn the trappers' "great applause for their bravery" in a battle with the Blackfeet. They also concluded the treaty with the Shoshones, sending repercussions as far as Mexico City where the Mexican secretary of state protested to the American minister in 1828 that

at four days' journey beyond the lake of Timpanagos, there is a fort situated in another lake, with a hundred men under the command of a general of the United States of North America . . . that the said general caused a peace to be made between the barbarous nations of the Yutas Timpanagos and the Comanches Sozones, and made presents of guns, balls, knives, &c., to both nations; . . . that the Yuta Timpanago Indian, called *Quimanuapa*, was appointed general by the North Americans, and that he states the Americans will have returned to the fort by the month of December.

Quimanuapa, one of the few Northern Utes mentioned by name during the trapping era, was apparently the "principal Chief" whom Smith had met the year before. The trappers called him Conmarrowap when in 1834 he reappeared in their journals. Ironically, his reappearance coincided with a renewed outbreak of war between the Shoshones and Utes. This war did not last long, for both Utes and Shoshones were at

⁸ Jedediah S. Smith, *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith: His Personal Account of the Journey to California, 1826-1827*, ed. George R. Brooks (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark, 1977), pp. 41-43, 208.



Above: *Young Uinta Ute woman on a horse with heavily beaded martingale and crupper. Right: Uinta Utes making a calculation. Note powder horn on man at left. Both pictures are Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology photographs by J. K. Hillers, USHS collections.*



the rendezvous the following summer.⁹ In later years the two tribes still demonstrated a cautious attitude toward each other but remained generally at peace.

The 1827 rendezvous was a turning point for the Northern Utes. They had not only mitigated the Shoshone threat, which had long restricted them, but they had also opened up trade with Americans on their northern frontier through the reciprocal arrangement of annual visits to the rendezvous coupled with trapper excursions into their country. This trade complemented and expanded that with the American trappers and New Mexican traders who continued to visit the Utes from a base in Taos and Santa Fe. The friendship of the Utes was probably even more important to the Americans. The late 1820s and early 1830s were the heyday of Rocky Mountain trapping. During those years Taos became an increasingly important competitor with the rendezvous for mountain man business. Hundreds of trappers moved back and forth between the two, trapping for furs and trading with Indians. It was therefore necessary to maintain the trust and cooperation of the Northern and Southern Utes who occupied the land the whites had to cross.

Kit Carson's travels in 1833 and 1834 provide a good example of this movement. In the fall of 1833 he joined a trapping party that followed the Spanish Trail north to the Uinta Valley. On the Uinta River (the trappers included the present Duchesne below its junction with the Uinta under this name) they found another party under one of the Robidoux brothers trapping and trading with the Utes. The combined parties went into winter camp at the mouth of the Uinta River near a Ute village. During the winter Carson and one of the Utes pursued a California Indian who had stolen some horses from his employer, Robidoux. The pursuit covered some one hundred miles before the horses were recovered. The following spring Carson joined Jim Bridger and Thomas Fitzpatrick in northwestern Colorado, accompanying them to the summer rendezvous on Green River.¹⁰

⁹ Daniel T. Potts, letter, July 8, 1827, *Philadelphia Gazette*, October 19, 1827, in Charles L. Camp, "The D. T. P. Letters," *Essays for Henry R. Wagner* (San Francisco: The Grabhorn Press, 1947), pp. 18-19; House Doc. 351 (Ser. 332), 25th Cong., 2d sess., pp. 228-30, quoted in Dale Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953), p. 229; W. A. Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains*, ed. Paul Phillips (Denver: Old West Publishing, 1940), pp. 266, 275-78; William Marshall Anderson, *The Rocky Mountain Journals of William Marshall Anderson*, ed. Dale Morgan and Eleanor Towles Harris (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1967), pp. 160-63, 168-69. The editors of Anderson have included a short biography of Conmorrowap on pages 290-91.

¹⁰ "The Kit Carson Memoirs, 1809-1856," in Harvey Lewis Carter, ed., *'Dear Old Kit': The Historical Christopher Carson* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), pp. 58-61.

The fur trade began a long decline in the late 1830s as both the supply of and demand for furs diminished. Stationary trading posts appeared during this time as traders turned more and more to the alternative of buffalo robes while trying to stabilize trade for other animal skins. The beaver trade remained extensive, though, and some posts, such as those built by Antoine Robidoux in the Ute country, still concentrated on these smaller animals. Although Robidoux's primary business was with independent trappers, the Ute trade was an important supplement. At his post on the Uinta River near present Whiterocks the Utes provided "horses, with beaver, otter, deer, sheep, and elk skins in barter for ammunition, fire-arms, knives, tobacco, beads, awls, &c." In 1844 the Southern Utes went to war with New Mexico after an attack on one of their camps. They attacked Robidoux's Fort Uncompahgre and killed all the Mexican employees. Although they did not kill American citizens and did send word to the Uinta fort that Robidoux and his peltry were safe, this long-time Ute trader decided to abandon the post and retire from the trade, possibly because he felt that his practice of supplying guns to the Utes would ultimately involve him in the war.¹¹

Other posts such as Fort Hall, Fort Davy Crockett in Brown's Hole, Bent's Fort, and the Platte River posts also traded with the Utes, occasionally dispatching traders to the Ute camps in northern Utah. The companies established different trading rates for Indians and trappers, resulting in a higher percentage profit from the former. As the Ute trader Richens Wootton said, "Trading with the Indians had its attractions, the chief of which was of course, the very handsome profits which we made out of the business." At the Uinta fort one of the Utes' excellently finished and large sheep and deer skins could be purchased for the equivalent of eight or ten charges of ammunition or two or three awls and then resold in New Mexico for one or two dollars. Wootton noted that even if the Utes "knew nothing about money," they could drive a hard bargain when it came to barter. Once an agreed value was set, though, one or two thousand dollars' worth of trade could be conducted in half a day. Although the Utes were considered keen traders, they were also known as honest collectors of "considerable fur" and thus profitable trading partners.¹²

¹¹ Sage, *Scenes in the Rocky Mountains*, p. 97; Janet Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn: The Upper Arkansas, 1832-1856* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), pp. 137-38; Weber, *Taos Trappers*, pp. 213-17.

¹² Osborne Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, ed. Aubrey L. Haines (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), pp. 120-22; Howard Louis Conard, "Uncle Dick" Wootton: *The Pioneer*

Besides the men who actively sought out Ute trade, all trappers regularly carried such things as knives, tobacco, awls, vermilion, blankets, and beads when traveling through Ute lands. If Utes who had furs were then found, trade would occur. In addition, it was usually necessary to engage in formal gift exchange as a sign of friendship. Associated with this practice are the frequent trapper allusions to Ute demands for tribute. Having opened their territory to outsiders, the Utes commonly insisted that the intruders pay for the privilege. After the "tribute" or "presents" were provided the Utes would formally grant rights to travel and trap in their territory. Although considered honest, hospitable, and friendly, the Utes could be forthright and candid in their demands if the trappers were not willing to share food and other items while in Ute country. Such incidents occasionally led those who did not fully understand to accuse the Utes of begging. Taken as a whole, though, the trapper accounts make it clear that the Ute practice was consistent, and the whites had little excuse for ignoring a well-established tradition.¹³

The only reported battles between trappers and Utes involved trapper unwillingness to pay tribute. In 1839 traders from Bent's Fort in Colorado traveled to the Uinta River in an effort to compete with Robidoux for the Ute trade. The Utes informed them that "on no account could they enter the Eutaw country without paying tribute in some form." The traders refused, and some fighting occurred before the outnumbered whites decided to leave the area. In the fall of 1842 a more serious battle was reportedly fought near the Great Salt Lake after a band of trappers refused to pay tribute.¹⁴

Northern Utes were most commonly met by trappers at Utah Lake which was considered their "headquarters," on the Sevier River, near Brown's Hole, and on the Uinta River, particularly near the junction of it and the White with the Green River. They were also seen occasionally in Shoshone territory along the Bear and upper Green rivers.

Frontiersman of the Rocky Mountain Region (Chicago: W. E. Dibble, 1890), pp. 101, 110-11; Sage, *Scenes in the Rocky Mountains*, pp. 97-98; William T. Hamilton, *My Sixty Years on the Plains Trapping, Trading, and Indian Fighting*, ed. E. T. Sieber (New York: Forest and Stream Publishing, 1905), pp. 97-98.

¹³ Charles L. Camp, ed., *George C. Yount and His Chronicles of the West* (Denver: Old West Publishing, 1966), pp. 70, 86; John Charles Fremont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains* (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1845), p. 272. These are two examples among many.

¹⁴ Thomas J. Farnham, *Travels in the Great Western Prairies, Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites, vol. 28 (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1906), pp. 166-70, describes the 1839 incident while the conclusions stated here are based on Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn*, p. 162. For the 1842 incident see Hamilton, *Sixty Years on the Plains*, pp. 104-14.

They became particularly noted for their fine horse herds. One trapper called them "by far, the most expert horsemen in the mountains." The horses provided a link between the Spanish Trail traders from whom the Utes frequently purchased or stole them and the trappers who then bought them from the Utes. Whites also frequently remarked on how well-armed the Utes were. By the late 1830s a diarist could typically note that "These Indians are the best marksmen in the mountains and are armed with good rifles" as well as the earlier fusils.¹⁵

Between the mid-1820s and mid-1840s the Utes developed an important and mutually respectful relationship with the fur hunters of the Rocky Mountain West. News of the favorable reception the Utes had given the trappers had spread back east as early as 1826, the year the *Missouri Advocate and St. Louis Enquirer* announced that

*The Indians, west of the mountains are remarkably well disposed toward the citizens of the United States; the Eutaws and Flat-heads are particularly so, and express a great wish that the Americans should visit them frequently.*¹⁶

When the trappers included respect with their trade goods, the Utes welcomed them into their territory without realizing that once the Anglos came they would never leave.

It is easy to overlook the importance of the fur trade to the Utes. The central Rockies fur trade was different from that in much of the rest of North America, particularly with regard to the organization and makeup of the labor force. White trappers did the trapping in the Rockies and then traded their catch at rendezvous. In other parts of the continent the basic work was done by unsupervised Indians who traded their pelts at posts. However, the assumption cannot be made that Rocky Mountain fur men were solely trappers. Trade with Indians continued to be an important, if supplementary, source of pelts. Over the years its contribution became more and more important as whites abandoned a depressed industry. Moreover, it was not a fur trade alone. Isolated, annually supplied trappers often depended on the Indians for many items that could not wait for the next rendezvous. Horses and food, among other things, were often supplied by Indians. The Utes, like all

¹⁵ Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains*, p. 312; Hamilton, *Sixty Years on the Plains*, pp. 97-98, 117; "The E. Willard Smith Journal, 1839-1840," in LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, eds., *To the Rockies and Oregon, 1839-1842* (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark, 1955), p. 180.

¹⁶ *Missouri Advocate and St. Louis Enquirer*, March 11, 1826, quoted in Morgan, *Ashley*, p. 141.

the Rockies tribes, were eventually connected to the European market system that followed the trappers.

Although portions, and only portions, of their territory were outside the prime trapping areas, the Utes were in a crucial geographic position between Taos to the south and the Snake country to the north, between Santa Fe to the east and California to the west. The north-south trade route connected Taos-based trappers with the rendezvous while the east-west Spanish Trail linked the northern Mexico provinces of California and New Mexico.

The Spanish Trail's importance to the Northern Utes was a direct continuation of the few pre-1820s contacts they had made with New Mexican traders. Such traders continued to visit the Northern Utes during the trapping era.¹⁷ The 1830 opening of the Spanish Trail between Santa Fe and Los Angeles gave a new boost to this trade. Annual Mexican caravans loaded with woven goods moved over the trail to California where they exchanged their loads for horses and mules to drive back to New Mexico. Along the way they traded with Utes and, occasionally, American trappers. By the 1840s the Utes were meeting the returning caravans annually to trade and levy tribute. Even as early as 1834 W. A. Ferris noted that Conmarrowap had recently acquired ten of the finest horses the trappers had ever seen from the passing traders. Ferris claimed to know of many instances when Conmarrowap had taken such animals by force.¹⁸ Besides furs, the Utes traded Indian captives for these horses, demonstrating that they had gained considerable power over neighboring tribes such as the Southern Paiutes.

The man most closely associated with the Spanish Trail is the Ute leader Wakara. He first emerged to importance in 1840 when, in association with a band of trappers who had left the depressed fur trade for more lucrative pursuits, he raided the ranches of southern California and made off with hundreds of horses and mules. Many of the animals that survived the transit east were later traded to trappers in the mountains. Wakara and other Utes continued to join trappers in these raids throughout the 1840s, carrying on the practice into the 1850s after the American conquest of California ended trapper participation.¹⁹

¹⁷ For example, Weber mentions an 1827 party which included the same Pedro Leon who is well known in Utah history for his 1851 conflict with Brigham Young over the Indian slave trade; see *Taos Trappers*, p. 162.

¹⁸ Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains*, p. 277.

¹⁹ LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Old Spanish Trail: Santa Fe to Los Angeles* (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark, 1954), pp. 236-57.

Wakara and the Utes who followed him are representative of a portion of the Northern Utes who eventually made trading and raiding their primary means of support. During the 1840s Wakara's activities carried him over a great amount of territory, trading with New Mexicans and Americans alike. He was seen pursuing his business at places as widely separated as San Luis Obispo in California, southern Wyoming, the San Juan River, and the Sevier River. In 1843 when Theodore Talbot found him in the company of the American fur trader Louis Vasquez, he noted that "He owes his position to his great wealth. He is a good trader, trafficking with the Whites, and reselling goods to such of his nation as are less skillful in striking a bargain."²⁰

Many Utes adopted to some degree the trading life-style of men like Wakara, which meant greater mobility, increased dependence on white goods and technology, and considerable adjustment in traditional subsistence patterns. While most of them still depended on the traditional activities of hunting, fishing, and gathering and still resided much of the year in the old villages like those on Utah Lake, they were no longer the same people who had visited with Domínguez and Escalante. There were other Utah Utes, however, who had shared very little in this transformation. Throughout the trapping era the San Pitch Utes, for example, reportedly led lives more consistent with the hunting and gathering, nonequestrian life-style of the Southern Paiutes. Although trappers occasionally met the San Pitch, there is no evidence that they played a role in the trade like that of other Utes.

The Utes always displayed forthright confidence in their meetings with Euro-Americans. This confidence must have reflected an awareness of the power that trade had brought to them. When George Brewerton met them in 1848 at the end of one era in their history and the beginning of another, they were at the pinnacle of their political strength. Brewerton noted that "The Eutaws are perhaps the most powerful and warlike tribe now remaining on this continent. They appear well provided with fire-arms, which they are said to use with the precision of veteran riflemen."²¹ Their location on the axis of the north-south and east-west trade routes heightened the Utes' power and importance while also providing them with that tool which best represents the advance of European culture,

²⁰ Theodore Talbot, *The Journals of Theodore Talbot*, ed. Charles H. Carey (Portland: Metropolitan Press, 1931), p. 42.

²¹ George D. Brewerton, *Overland with Kit Carson*, ed. Stallo Vinton (New York: Coward-McCann, 1930), pp. 99-100.

the firearm. Ironically, a similar strategic location had an opposite effect on the Southern Paiutes during these same years.

The Southern Paiutes' experience during this time can be more easily summarized. They did not acquire horses or firearms in the early years when the Northern Utes were obtaining them. Their isolation in southwestern Utah made these items less accessible, and the Paiutes were not at first under the same pressure that the Northern Utes were encountering from the mounted Shoshones. They probably saw little need for the animals or the guns. By the time they were under such pressure and therefore had such a need, they were cut off by their primary enemies, the Utes. The Utes had learned that New Mexicans would exchange horses for Indian slaves, so they began to take captives from neighboring tribes such as the Paiutes. It is difficult to say how extensive this traffic in Southern Paiute slaves was before 1830, though it is clear that the southwestern slave traffic in general was very extensive. After the Yount-Wolfskill party of trappers opened the Spanish Trail in 1830, capture of Paiute slaves became regular and persistent. The trail ran directly through the heart of Southern Paiute territory, allowing New Mexican slave traders direct access to potential victims.²² Thus threatened, the Southern Paiutes were a harassed people leading disrupted lives when they first met Anglo-Americans.

Fur trappers only rarely visited Southern Paiute territory. With the possible exception of Thomas Smith they did not consider this region where the borders of Utah, Nevada, and Arizona now meet good beaver country. In 1828 Smith during a few weeks reportedly "secured enough skins to make a cargo" from the valleys of the Virgin River basin, but he was the exception.²³ Most trappers lumped the area in with the bulk of the Great Basin which was known as the "land of starvation." Nevertheless, the Americans, while adding little to Paiute culture, left a definite legacy with these people.

Jedediah Smith was the first American trapper to meet the Paiutes, passing through their lands twice, in 1826 and 1827. Moving south in 1826, Smith and his party began encountering shy "Pa utch" and "Sam-pach" on the Sevier River. He drew little distinction between the two groups, but he did note that their appearance "strongly contrasted" with the Utes. Farther south the Paiutes tended to avoid him, but when

²² For discussions of the slave trade see Hafen and Hafen, *Old Spanish Trail*, and Carling Malouf and A. Arline Malouf, "The Effects of Spanish Slavery on the Indians of the Intermountain West," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 1 (1945): 378-81.

²³ Camp, *Yount's Chronicles*, p. 235.

they approached him near the Santa Clara River, they brought a rabbit "as a token of friendship" and an "ear of corn as an emblem of peace." In return for some small presents, they supplied the hungry trappers with corn and pumpkins. Smith's men were pleased but surprised to find these crops in what they considered an inhospitable region. Here, at the junction of the Santa Clara and Virgin rivers and at the mouth of the



Southern Paiute children working on fur pelts, early 1870s. Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology photograph by J. K. Hillers, USHS collections.

Muddy River, the Paiutes grew corn, pumpkins, squash, and gourds. They had dammed the Santa Clara and were irrigating their fields through a tree trunk. While the whites needed to replenish their food supply, the Indians were interested in acquiring pieces of iron that could be used for knives and arrow points. The Paiutes also wore deer, antelope, and mountain sheep skins, and a few of them had beaver moccasins; but the lack of beaver in the area hindered potential trade.²⁴

When Smith reached the Santa Clara the following year the situation had changed: "Not an Indian was to be seen, neither was there any appearance of their having been there in the course of the summer their little lodges had burned down." Wherever he went in their country, the Paiutes avoided him. Clearly something or someone had changed their attitude. When Smith reached the Mojave villages, the Mojaves informed him that, as he had suspected and had seen various signs of, another party of whites had recently visited the area. James O. Pattie has left a confused account of this party of Taos trappers. They had traveled up the Colorado in late 1826, had fought with the Mojaves, and had then had two battles with the Paiutes, on the Colorado and later on a tributary, probably the Paria River.²⁵ By 1827 the Paiutes had a totally different image of the trappers than the one the friendly Smith had left.

In the spring of that year still another party of American trappers met "Pie-Utaws" on the Sevier and Fremont rivers. For three nights the Indians harassed the trappers, stealing two horses and wounding four others with arrows. When they later made another attempt on the animals, the whites attacked, but the Indians escaped across the river. The trappers then returned north. Jedediah Smith had remained fairly objective in his descriptions of the Indians residing in central and southern Utah, but Daniel Potts of this 1827 party introduced an image of them that remained firmly entrenched in the minds of the trappers. Referring to the Sevier, Potts wrote:

This river is inhabited by a numerous tribe of miserable Indians. Their clothing consists of a breechcloth of goat or deer skin, and a robe of rabbit skins, cut in strips, sewed together after the manner of rag carpets, with the bark of milk weed twisted into twine for the chain. These wretched creatures go out barefoot in the coldest days of winter. Their diet consists

²⁴ Smith, *Southwest Expedition*, pp. 49-63.

²⁵ Maurice S. Sullivan, ed., *The Travels of Jedediah Smith* (Santa Ana: Fine Arts Press, 1934), pp. 28-29; James Ohio Pattie, *The Personal Narrative of James O. Pattie of Kentucky*, ed. Timothy Flint (Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1930), pp. 132-38.

of roots, grass seeds, and grass, so you may judge they are not gross in their habit. They call themselves Pie-Utaws, and I suppose are derived from the same stock.²⁶

This description, while containing some information on actual cultural traits, is in large part a variation on the Digger image trappers applied to nonequestrian hunters and gatherers throughout the West. Although applied to many tribes, one of the most consistent usages of this ethnocentric terminology was in reference to Southern Paiutes and neighboring bands of Utes such as the San Pitch and Pahvant.

George Yount, who met the Paiutes in 1830, recorded one of the most offensive examples of this kind of characterization:

These people are an anomaly—apparently the lowest species of humanity, approaching the monkey—Nothing but their upright form entitles them to the name of man . . . Their food consists of occasionally a Rabbit, with roots and mice, grasshoppers & insects, such as flies, spiders & worms of every kind—Where nuts exist, they gather them for food—They also luxuriate and grow fat when they find a patch of Clover—On many kinds of grass they feed like cattle—They are covered with vermine and whenever they take these from their heads or persons they appropriate them for food—Hence in point of economy they are truly remarkable—These are the lowest grade of species of the Digger Indians, which are found spread over all the eastern & middle portions of California—Probably there is not in all the world a race of human beings more low and degraded than the Diggers.²⁷

Yount, at least, could justify his remarks on the basis of first-hand observation. However, although few Americans had actually met them, such descriptions of the Southern Paiutes and San Pitch Utes appear in numerous accounts. The image performed an ideological role far beyond factual observation.

Personal observation also does not adequately explain the extreme value judgments in Yount's remarks. Their accuracy need not be accepted simply because he was there. More careful modern investigations lead to the conclusion that the Southern Paiutes lived quite well within the limits of a varied environment. They developed carefully balanced patterns of exploiting the available resources. As one ethnologist put it, "These . . . patterns show the Southern Paiute Indians not as pawns of a harsh environment, but rather as culturally adapted peoples capable

²⁶ Potts, letter, July 8, 1827, pp. 18–19. These "Pie-Utaws" may have been Pahvant or Koosharem Utes, bands closely related to the Paiutes. If so, they, like the San Pitch Utes, were included in the Digger characterization of the Paiutes.

²⁷ Camp, *Yount's Chronicles*, p. 89.

of exploiting a variety of conditions in numerous ways." The image of the Paiutes corresponded with the attitude trappers had toward Paiute territory. Yount felt that a "half starved, nakid" Paiute "well corresponded with the region where he dwelt." Warren Ferris mentioned "the barrenness of their country, and scarcity of game."²⁸ Paiute territory contained alpine forests as well as arid deserts, but it produced little fur, so it is not surprising that the fur hunters considered it barren. The Paiutes also gave little to the trade, and the trappers' attitude toward Indian tribes was always based on whether a particular tribe contributed to or hindered the business.

The image of Diggers fit nicely into the Anglo-American ideology of savagism. Indians as savages acted as symbols of all that progress left behind. Whites felt that Indians had ultimately to pass away or be destroyed in order to prove the worth of civilizing ideals. In their minds the savage Indian stood in direct opposition to the civilized American. Despite the romance that has surrounded and obscured the actuality of their lives, trapper values were not far from those of most Americans of their time. Even when referring to more respected Indians like the Utes, trappers made it clear that they considered Indians inferior to themselves and other men whom they considered civilized.²⁹ They used Paiutes and other "Diggers" to confirm American ideas of the Indians' basic nature, a nature that at its heart had to be miserable, impoverished, and degraded to justify the ethnocentrism of the savagism/civilization dichotomy. The danger in these negative images was that they provided justification for overlooking the Paiutes' stake in their world.

Trapper images of the Northern Utes and the Southern Paiutes present a great contrast. In one sense this contrast is valid: it is clear that the two peoples, who appear to have led quite similar lives as late as the last quarter of the eighteenth century, had moved in different directions in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Utes had increasingly moved away from a traditional life-style toward one involving more wide-ranging hunting, trading, and raiding. The Southern Paiutes' traditional life-style had also changed as a result of outside pres-

²⁸ Catherine S. Fowler, "Environmental Setting and Natural Resources," in Robert C. Euler, *Southern Paiute Ethnohistory*, University of Utah Anthropological Papers no. 78 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1966), p. 14; Camp, *Yount's Chronicles*, p. 88; Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains*, p. 269, referred specifically to San Pitch Utes.

²⁹ See Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Idea of Civilization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), especially pp. 73-75, 154, 168, 223, 232; William H. Goetzmann, "The Mountain Man as Jacksonian Man," *American Quarterly* 15 (1963): 402-15; and Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, pp. 205-7. For example, see Conard, "Uncle Dick" Wooten, pp. 118-19.

sure, but for them the change had been in the direction of disintegration of cultural stability as others violently invaded their lands and enslaved their people. Yet, both tribes had a similar reaction when Mormon settlers arrived in the late 1840s. Both seemed to welcome or at least accept settlement and the opportunity for increased trade, but they probably had different reasons for doing so.

The Utes had no reason to fear such an intrusion. They had gained wealth and power through their contact with outsiders. There were some obvious negative results of the fur traders' invasion. Intensive trapping and hunting undoubtedly had reduced game. Buffalo, for example, no longer ranged onto Northern Ute lands. But damage to the local ecosystem would not become a serious problem until alternative forms of economic support were no longer available. Although it did not take the Utes long to recognize the danger of permanent white settlement, at first it must have seemed a source of more stable trade, especially since the initial settlement lay between Shoshone and Ute lands. The Southern Paiutes actually asked the Mormons to settle in their area, with good reason.³⁰ The settlers offered a buffer for the Southern Paiutes, a barrier to their many enemies. Moreover, they offered access to the technology and knowledge neighbors had so long used to the Paiutes' disadvantage.

Thus, the trappers and traders of the early nineteenth century prepared the way for later dispossession of the Utes and Paiutes. These harbingers of more permanent change had helped alter the lives of the Utes. Through their participation in the trade the Utes had augmented their stature among the varied populations of the Intermountain West. Their cooperation had become, if not necessary, at least very important to the fur trade's success. But while increasing their short-term power, trade had connected the Utes to the forces of Euro-American expansion that would eventually end their sway in the Utah region. The Paiutes, on the other hand, while struggling to survive their contact with the Spanish Trail trade, had received little besides hostility from fur trappers. The importance of the Paiute-trapper encounter, then, was not due to its role in the fur trade, which was negligible, but derived rather from the fact that trappers helped open the region to later whites who accepted and reinforced the Digger image and, like their predecessors, allowed themselves maximum leeway in their treatment of the Paiutes.

³⁰ John Brown, *Autobiography of Pioneer John Brown, 1820-1896* (Salt Lake City: John Z. Brown, 1941), p. 110; John D. Lee to editor, *Deseret News*, September 4, 1852.