



AN INTRODUCTION TO UTAH'S INDIAN HISTORY

AT A GLANCE: UTAH INDIANS' ART AND CULTURE

Utah's Indian peoples share many of the same artistic traditions and technical skills. The use of an example for one tribe does not imply that they are the only tribe that developed this skill.

NAVAJO WEAVING

When the Spanish entered what is now the American Southwest in 1540, they introduced domesticated animals to the region. This addition affected each of Utah's tribal communities differently. Though many tribes adopted the horse—either as transportation or as food—the sheep took on a greater importance for the Navajos than any of the other Utah tribes. The Navajos took the sacred colors and skills they had long used in basketmaking and adapted them to weaving with sheep's wool. Navajo weavers incorporated the complex geometry and symbols relating to the Navajo creation story and other traditions into the patterns of their rugs.

Weaving represented a way for Navajos to adapt old art forms and transmit cultural symbols, but by the end of nineteenth century it took on economic significance as well. An economy based on money emerged in the area between 1870 and 1900, and Navajo blankets became highly prized items by white traders. As large trading posts were established in Navajo territory, rugs woven by the women of the family became a family's main source of income. The arrival of the railroad to Navajo territory in 1881 increased trade possibilities. It also introduced dyes and yarns from the eastern United States, allowing Navajo weavers to add new colors and patterns to their traditional repertoire.

PAIUTE BASKETRY

The Paiutes moved frequently according to the seasons, plant availability, and animal migration patterns, and baskets served as vital tools in this highly mobile lifestyle. The Paiutes used baskets to

process, store, and carry their staple foods, and basketry was highly specialized depending on the use. Twined baskets were most typical, but some bands made coiled baskets. (Twining is a process involving twisting fine fibers together; coiling is a process where thick coils are wrapped together with finer fibers.) Coiled jugs sealed with pinyon pitch carried water. Seeds, particularly pinyon nuts, formed an important part of the Paiute diet because they could be stored for the winter months, and the Paiutes made specific baskets for collecting, beating, winnowing, parching, sifting, and storing them. They also made special wickerwork basket for berries. The larger holes and strong shapes protected delicate berries without allowing them to become moldy. The size of the holes, the shape, even the size of the opening were all designed for the different functions a basket served.

Paiute baskets were the tools that made the work of Paiute women incredibly productive. Each Paiute woman had a set of harvesting and cooking baskets, food bowls, water jars, and a basketry hat to protect her from the sun. They used basketry cradles to carry their children. Treasure baskets, which were hung inside the house, held personal items.

Although made for utility, Paiute basketry could also be highly decorative. Basketmakers wove the fibers of a dark grey plant, called "devil's horn" or "claws," into intricate patterns that stood out against the lighter willow. Color was also added by rubbing crushed berries on the basket. Today basket weaving is still taught to young members of the tribe to instill the importance of tradition.



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GOSHUTE BOTANY

Of the diverse tribes of Utah, the Goshutes are known and respected for their vast botanical knowledge. Within their homeland, the Goshutes knew and used nearly one hundred different species. The Goshutes used seeds from forty-seven different plants. They harvested twelve types of berries, eight different roots, and twelve different types of greens. The Goshutes knew where each valuable food plant could be found, the best time to harvest it, and what could be stored for the lean times. Though the Goshutes did have a shaman to handle serious problems, most tribal members had an understanding of the most useful medicinal plants. For example, some forms of mountain thistle were eaten, rubbed on the skin to ease pain, or mixed with dirt and made into a drink to induce vomiting.

After whites settled in the Salt Lake Valley and began to put pressure on the resources of the Goshute homeland, some Goshutes attempted settled agriculture, but farming was difficult in the arid environment of the Goshute homeland. Though the modern Goshute people no longer need a detailed knowledge of plants for sustenance, they continue to pass on that knowledge as part of their cultural heritage.

SHOSHONE BEADWORK

Because the Northwestern Shoshones inhabited an area that was visited by early trappers and traders and had contact with various Plains Indian tribes, they were able to obtain the materials and inspiration for beautiful and intricate beadwork. Before the Shoshones had access to European beads, they decorated their buckskin dresses with elk teeth and often adorned themselves with polished bones, animal claws, and porcupine quills. In the 1820s trappers and traders traveled through their homeland in what is today northeastern Utah and southeastern Idaho. The Shoshones traded furs and supplies for a variety of beads and then used these beads to adorn clothing, particularly gloves and moccasins.

The influence of Plains Indian design can be seen in Shoshone clothing and parfleche bags (a parfleche bag is a rectangular leather bag that many tribes used to carry valuables). This influence is evident in Shoshone beadwork as well. Geometric designs and linear patterns are common and perhaps influenced by Arapahoe artwork. Some floral designs, though originally inspired by the art of the Plains Indians, were popularized and perfected by the Shoshones. A beaded rose pattern, for example, usually connotes that the person wearing the beadwork is of Shoshone heritage, meaning that he or she could be a member of the closely related Shoshone, Goshute, Ute, or Paiute tribes, or descend from a combination of these groups. Contemporary examples of Shoshone beadwork may use modern materials, but the methods used to create the intricate pieces of art, such as bead looming, have been passed down since the earliest days of the tribe.

UTE BUCKSKIN TANNING

The introduction of the horse to the Ute way of life changed many of their cultural practices. The horse made travel and hunting much easier. With increased hunting success, the already-established tradition of making buckskin from the hides of deer, elk, and buffalo became even more important. The Utes could produce more buckskin and at a fine level of quality. Other tribes traded with the Utes for their buckskin, and it also became a highly valued trade item for non-Indians in the West.

Traditionally, the women of the tribe tanned buckskin. Though tanning is no longer only done by women, and the hides can be soaked and stretched using modern equipment, quality Ute buckskin is still valued. Deer hunting is still an important activity in the Ute culture, but the decimation of the wild bison herds has made the tanning of buffalo robes a less common activity.

NAVAJO WEAVING

Navajo Weaver



The clothes you are wearing right now are made of tiny threads woven or knitted together. If you

look very closely, you may be able to see the tiny threads. Your clothes were woven together by a machine, but the Navajos in southern Utah weave beautiful blankets and rugs by hand.

The Navajos say that Spider Woman taught them how to weave long ago. Ever since that time, Navajo mothers and grandmothers have taught their daughters and granddaughters the art of weaving. Navajo weavers use a large standing loom that they work with wool thread.

The Navajos make yarn from the wool of the sheep that they raise. The Spanish brought sheep to the Americas. The Navajos started to herd sheep and were very successful.

The colors and patterns that Navajo weavers use have special meanings. Some rugs and blankets are made for family and friends. Some blankets and rugs are made to sell.

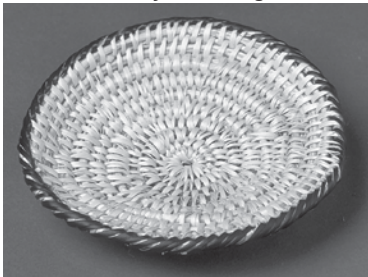


Navajos with Loom

UTAH'S INDIANS

PAIUTE BASKETRY

Paiute Basket by Leta Seegmiller



Think about all the useful things in your kitchen. How many of them are made of plastic? Food is kept in plastic. Water is held in plastic. Even strainers and serving

spoons can be made of plastic. When the Southern Paiutes traveled through southwestern Utah, they did not have plastic. They needed to prepare and store food, so they made the things they needed with the materials in their environment.

The Paiutes used strips of wood and bark from the willow and cedar trees to make baskets to store food and water. They made baskets that helped them to harvest seeds and protect their favorite things. Sometimes the Paiutes wove soft wood strips into baskets. Other times they made baskets with coils of

wood that were wound together. They made different shapes of baskets for different jobs. They filled water jugs with heated tree sap that would dry on the inside so the jugs would not leak.

The Southern Paiutes moved with the seasons to grow, find, and hunt the best food. Baskets are light and easy to move. They could carry food and water with them in baskets or store food in baskets in the ground and come back for it later.



Eleanor Tom with Basket

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GOSHUTE BOTANY

*Molly McCurdy with Her
Winnowing Baskets*



How many of the plants in your yard or neighborhood do you know the names of? The Goshute people of northwestern Utah knew almost all of the plants in their homeland. They knew which plants were good for food or could be used for medicine. The Goshutes did not live in a place with a lot of food. Knowing about all of these plants helped the Goshutes survive.

The Goshutes knew which plants had edible roots, leaves, seeds, or stems. They knew when plants would be ready to eat and where to find them. Some foods, like pine nuts, could be stored for the difficult winter months. The Goshutes knew twelve different kinds of berries on their land.

Headaches, burns, and other sickness could be healed with plants found in the Goshute homeland. Parents and grandparents taught their families the secrets of these important plants.

The Goshute people did not keep horses or hunt large game very often. They added meat like rabbit and other small animals to the many different plants they ate. Rabbits were hunted in a process called a “drive.” The success of rabbit drives and their knowledge of plants kept the Goshutes healthy.

UTAH'S INDIANS

SHOSHONE BEADWORK

Rois Alex Pacheco's Beadwork



The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone lived in the northeastern corner of Utah. Trappers and traders often visited the area. The trappers and traders brought beautiful beads with them. The Shoshones

traded furs and other supplies for the beads. Trade beads can be made of glass, metal, shell, and bone.

The Shoshones use colorful beads to decorate clothing and bags. They group the beads together into geometric designs and borders. Some Shoshones make pictures that look like flowers or animals

with beads. Sometimes Shoshones wear clothes with beaded roses to show that they belong to the Shoshone tribe.

A young Shoshone girl or boy learns bead-working skills from an older relative. These skills are still passed on this way today. Modern Shoshone buy their beads and supplies at a craft store, but the patterns they make have been passed down through families from long ago.



Shoshone Baby Shoes

UTE BUCKSKIN TANNING

Ute Girls in Buckskin



After the Spanish brought the horse to the Americas, the Ute people began using horses for transportation. The Utes became great riders and hunted large game on their horses. Ute men went on buffalo (bison), deer, or elk hunts and came back to camp with food for months. But that is not all a buffalo, deer, or elk could be used for. The hides of the animals

could be made into clothing and shelter.

Before the hide could be used, it had to be treated. This treatment is called tanning, and the tanned hide is called buckskin. The women of the Ute tribe did the buckskin tanning. It is a difficult process with lots of steps. Today a Ute woman teaches her daughter or granddaughter to help, and when that girl grows up she can teach her own family.

To tan the skin, first they scrape the hide away from the meat. Then they soak the hide so the hair can be removed. After the hair is taken off, they boil the brains from the animal and rub the brains on the

hide. This is why the process is called brain tanning.

The hides dry in the sun with the brains rubbed into them for a few days. Then the hides are soaked again and stretched. The hides need to be left over a fire so that the smoke can work through them before they are done. Once the buckskin is ready it can be made into dresses, pants, bags, shoes, or even teepees.



Ute Leather Bag

Though most modern Ute people are much more likely to be seen walking around town in jeans and a t-shirt, they might have a pair of buckskin pants and a ribbon shirt in their closets for special occasions.

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