

Ute Indians of Fremont County Legends and Stories

Researched and written by Kathryn Vinyard as scholarship essay submission, 2014

Fremont County has a large history of Native Americans. The most noted were the Utes, the Cheyenne, and the Arapaho. Prior to the late 1700s, the Utes were the predominant tribe of the area. They were largely impoverished and forced to remain in or near the mountains by the more forceful plains tribes. They occupied some twelve million acres of land when Colorado first became a state. They were known as the Blue Sky People. (Source: *People of the Shining Mountains*, author, Joseph Kinsey Howard) Roughly four thousand of them were divided into three bands, the Southern, the Uncompagne, and the White River Utes. (Colorado Magazine).

The three great dances of the Utes signified their place in the "Shining Mountains", the swoop and the flight of the eagle told the Indian of lands he could dream about, the coyote told of the use of the good earth, and the bear brought the wonder and the glory of a new season.

From the very beginning of Colorado statehood, forces were at work to extinguish Indian land titles and to move the Indians out of the way of the advancing white civilization.

During periods of Spanish exploration in the late 1700s, tribal raids on expeditions and outposts yielded horses and weapons. When peaceful trading began to occur, local Indian tribes learned some of the Spanish language that would later aid in trading with the forts and outposts of American traders and the military.

In 1829, a trading outpost was set up on Hardscrabble Creek, south of present day Florence. The purpose of the post seems to have been to supply whiskey and cattle to the trapper trade, and to do bartering with the Native Americans. As early settlers', traders', and trappers' presence began to take a toll on the wildlife supply, accounts of the Indian/white man incidents began to appear. Most subsequent accounts of Indian incidents following the 1860s were of the mutual (benefit) or nuisance variety. Hostilities were few in the Fremont County area, although nearly every pioneer family has an Indian incident as part of their history.

The Ute Chief Ouray, was known to frequent the Cañon City area, then nicknamed the "Gate City to the Mountains," He was well-known to the first Indian agents in the late 1860s as a truthful, clear thinking man. It was by Ouray's command that his braves did not harm settlers. Any who did, Ouray was known to turn over for the "white man's justice." He became a skilled negotiator and leader. He married Chipeta in 1859.

The Utes behaved well in the settlements, having a greater hatred of the Plains Indians than toward the whites. Early settlers considered them an addition to the fighting strength of the county in case of incursions by the Sioux or Arapahos. In those days, early into the winter, bands of Utes made incursions on the Plains Tribes' territory, after coming into collision with their enemies. On one occasion, in December 1869, the Utes killed many of their enemies. They captured a large number of ponies, dry goods, canned goods, including brandy, which the Arapahos had recently stolen from captured trains. On their return, the Utes built signal fires on "Signal Mountain" near the head of "Oil Creek," about twenty miles north of Cañon City. (source: The Florence Citizen 1971 Pioneer Edition.) This rallied all their tribes and they had the greatest war dance and Indian spree they were ever known to indulge in.

Over the years, the federal government negotiated several treaties and agreements in which the Utes traded land for money, food, and other annuities. They hoped that through these treaties they would be able to hold on to part of their land. In the resulting conflicts and negotiations between various Ute bands and the U.S. Government, leaders such as Shavano, Colorao, and Ouray played important roles.

In 1863, the government attempted to negotiate a land deal with the Utes. Ouray made the first of many trips to Washington D.C. to negotiate the treaty. It was then that the "Treaty with the Utah -Tabeguache Band" was signed. Four years later, the government negotiated a similar agreement with a more representative group of Ute Bands, which created the "Consolidated Ute Reservations. When Ouray would return from these trips, after being bedridden and in great pain, with a large contingent of family and followers, Ouray and Chipeta set up winter camp at "Four Mile Creek", east of Cañon City. There, it offered the benefits of nearby hot springs and a growing white community eager for trade. The Utes used the thermal waters for their aches and pains. An oil seep north of the river town site oozed a greasy product the tribes may have used as a body massage.

Continued from Page 3 - Vinyard essay for scholarship

On one trip between camp and town, a Ute named Tabweah spotted his recently stolen horse tied up at a home of a man called Marksberry. Tabweah removed the saddle and bridle and took his horse. Marksberry, seeing this, followed Tabweah, and slipped into the Utes' grazing area and took the horse back. Upon discovering this, Tabweah went after Marksberry, shot him dead, and took the horse. (Source; *Chipeta, A Biography*).

It is said that there are Ute burial grounds along Grape Creek through Temple Canyon. The Ute Trail, as it is known today, was at one time used by the Indians in their excursion to and from the plains country. Along some of these trails, occasionally, are piles of rocks. They were always on top of a hill along the trails. Some say that they mark the site where the Ute were killed, and others say that they buried their dead in rock slides. (Source: *Ute Indians: Where and how did they bury their dead?* Fremont Custer Historical Society, Inc. 1974).

An early Ute camp was located near the foot of "Baldy Mountain" near Coaldale. It was here, along with other similar camps, that the white people became acquainted with the camp customs of the Indians. It was shortly after the white people came here that the camp near Baldy Mountain was abandoned. One night, after a great deal of confusion, the sound of drums and wailing was heard from the camp.. The white people thought perhaps the Chief had died, and went to the camp to see the reason for all the excitement of the night before. They found no signs of a grave or anything else to show they had left. Everything had been left, and the Indians were never known to use that camp again. (Source; Carol McNew- *Beyond the Gorge*).

These are just a few stories and legends that I found when reading into the history of the Utes. There are so many more interesting pieces. The Utes left a rich history to Fremont County.

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Beyond the Gorge, by Carol McNew; Copyright 2001, Coaldale, CO

Continued from Page One: Our Presenter: Gene Johnson, "Buffalo Bill" Cody enactor, Red Herring Productions



Gene is a ninth-generation descendant of frontiersman Daniel Boone, verified by Ancestry.com. Gene was born in the Daniel Boone National Forest in central Kentucky. He grew up as a hunter, fisherman, falconer, naturalist/ornithologist. Trained at the Ohio State University, he earned a B.S. in Natural Resources. He studied Art at Wichita State U. and Kent State U., majoring in Fine & Professional Art, Sculpture, Jewelry Design & Fabrication and Knife Making. His current artwork was exhibited at Arati Artists Gallery in Old Colorado City (Colorado Springs). For over forty years, he has produced falconry equipment, knives and artwork for falconers worldwide. Since 2003, he has performed with Red Herring Productions, an improvisational theater company presenting murder mysteries in venues around Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico. He has performed over thirty characters with Red Herring in 26 different scripts. He feels privileged to meet and perform for audiences interested in experiencing America's living history.