



## The Nature of Prehistory

In Colorado, mountains ascended past clouds and were eroded to valleys, salty seas flooded our land and were dried to powder or rested on us as freshwater ice, plants rose from wet algae to dry forests and flowers, animals transformed from a single cell to frantic dinosaurs and later, having rotated around a genetic rocket, into sly mammals. No human saw this until a time so very recent that we were the latest model of *Homo sapiens* and already isolated from much of the terror of that natural world by our human cultures' perceptual permutations and reflections. We people came late to Colorado.

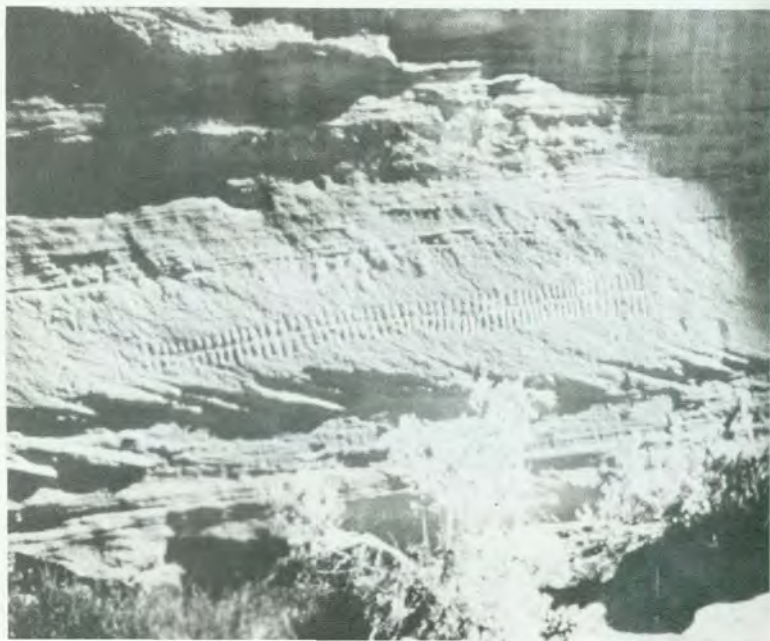
The first humans, in the over one hundred thousand square miles of what we now call Colorado, saw a landscape partitioned not by political fences or the orthogonal architecture of wall, floor, and roadway, but by gradations in game abundance, time to water, the supply of burnables, shelter from vagaries of atmosphere and spirit, and a pedestrian's rubric of distance and season. We people came as foragers and hunters to Colorado.

We have lived here only for some one hundred fifty centuries—not a long time when compared to the fifty thousand centuries that the European, African, and Asian land masses have had us and our immediate prehuman ancestors. It is not long compared to the fifty million centuries of life on the planet. We humans, even the earliest prehistoric



*Anasazi period hand and foot holds cut into sandstone to afford cliff top access from the bottom of McElmo Canyon, west of Cortez. A modern irrigation canal is visible at the cliff base.*

*Fremont period rock art on a sandstone cliff-face south of Grand Junction. The dominant element, a multi-legged, insect-like depiction, is some eight feet long and some five feet above the present soil accumulation.*



societies, are all colonists in Colorado. And, except for the recent passing of a mascara of ice and rain, we have not been here long enough to see, or study, her changing face.

Yet, if the nature of prehistory teaches humility on the grand scale of life, it also teaches pride on a smaller scale of experiences. In that atomistically short one hundred fifty centuries, we see that prehistoric humans in Colorado changed from an extremely rare species of omnivorous, seasonally wandering, male-kin-related foragers with a stone, bone, and wood technology, into increasingly sedentary, female-kin-related villagers increasingly exploiting the energy and the predictability of tended plants and the storage capabilities of ceramics, who dwelt in revolutionized social, political, and religious worlds.

We see that we dwelt through times of severe environmental and climatic shifts and biotic cycles and that we dwelt across spaces and zones as diverse and opposite as any fantasy. We see that the first prehistoric colonists were themselves inoculated and then assimilated some fifteen millennia later by another wash of colonists from the other side of our ancestral land mass. It has required immense anguish but only two centuries for us to arrive here, now, where we can look back and see that we humans have survived the last of the Pleistocene and the first of the future.

## The Archaeology of Prehistory

Archaeology is the only way of knowing about prehistory. It is also an important corroboration of what we know in so-called literate, historic times. We have some one hundred fifty centuries of the human experience in Colorado. Some one hundred forty-eight of these centuries are solely of the aboriginal, prehistoric Indian cultures, and we can know of these 5.5 million days only via the abstract, refracted time machine of archaeology. What we know, we call culture history.

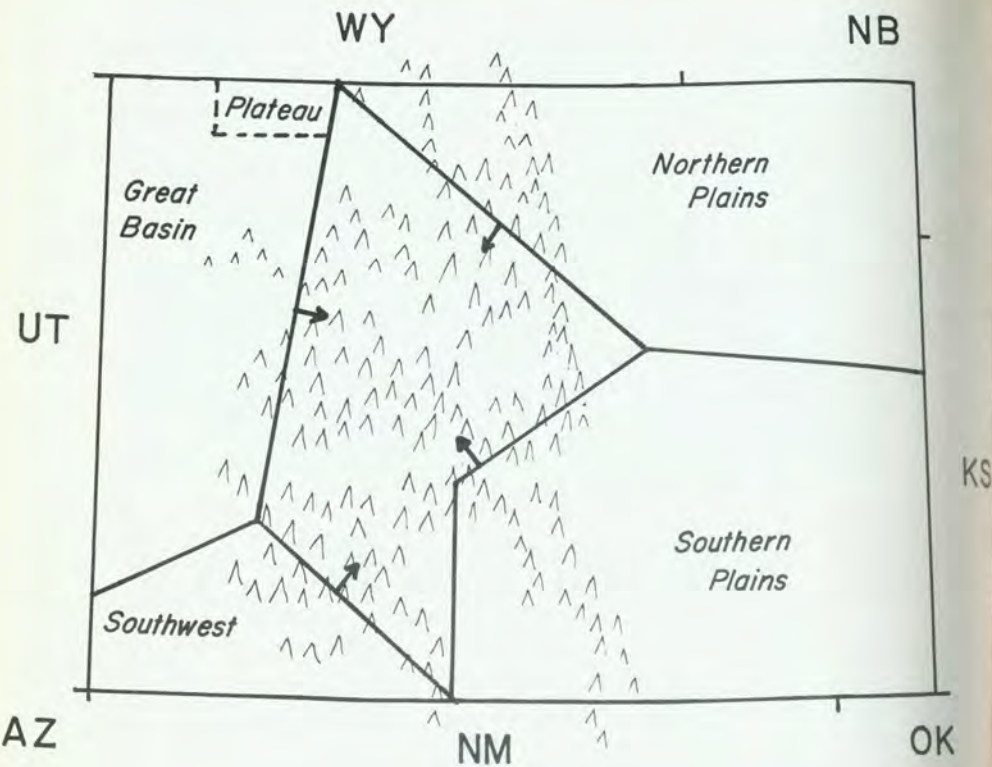
Archaeology generally consists of two processes. The first, field archaeology, recovers from the landscape the artifacts and residues showing previous human life and then analyzes that material in ways that the second process, the anthropology of culture history, can use to re-create past physical and social systems. Field archaeology is very difficult: useful sites are rare, the work is hard and subject to weather, the methods are ever changing, and the knowledge, that excavation is a process of destruction, weighs heavily. The laboratory analyses, which include some two hundred technical tests and a plethora of statistical and social studies, are physically easier but also require advanced, intellectual training to accomplish properly.

The archaeological data base in Colorado consists of the remaining structural and chemical residues and material culture, which record incompletely the passing of humans through their societies, their cultures,



*The Elk Track War Lodge (State Archaeologist Site Number 5SH242) near Saguache being disassembled for preservation and future exhibition at the Colorado Historical Society in Denver. This Plains Indian tipi is presumed to be a war lodge because of its small size, lack of accumulated artifacts, and secluded location on a promontory. The Dutton site (5YM37) near Wray (below) is being excavated by the Smithsonian Institution. The Dutton site was discovered in the course of modern water management construction when excavation uncovered a layer of large animal bones, and archaeology showed the bones to be a result of human hunting intervention. Eleven thousand years ago, this immediate area was one of hundreds of small swamps in the Peorian loess, a soil left by winds from the last continental glaciation. Here the great Pleistocene animals gathered for water, some to be killed by a new predator, man. The permission and support of the farm owners, the Duttons, have allowed this very important Paleoindian site to become one of the modern elements to contribute to our understanding of the earliest Coloradans.*





*An idealized map of the prehistoric culture areas of Colorado. The Northern and Southern Plains of the east slope look downriver to the central plains and the wooded East. The Southwest and the Great Basin Culture Areas of the Western Slope look downriver to the aridity of the Southwest and ultimately, Mexico. The Plateau indication is a relatively minor, and here a largely heuristic, manifestation that represents the very minor influence from the northwest. The arrows, from these culture areas into the very high country of the central Rocky Mountains, represent the irregular, but long-term, exploitations of this great rampart of game, wood, and flint.*



*A spectacular view of the reconstructed village (5AA83-90) at Chimney Rock, northeast of Durango. This Anasazi trade center of Chaco origin is scheduled to be a major United States Forest Service visitor center, but an endangered Peregrine Falcon breeding area has recently delayed the re-opening of the village.*

and their lives. Sometimes no evidence of any sort marks a transaction, and even that which does is ephemeral and ever slipping into higher orders of small scale chaos. In early 1979 the master State Archaeologist site file listed about thirty thousand sites (some eight thousand of which are in the National Register of Historic Places). There might be twenty million extant, yet to be recorded. A single site may be as humble as a scatter of chipped stone flakes or a single burial, or as massive as a village, such as the Colorado town sites of historic Dallas or prehistoric Cliff Palace.

The prehistoric culture history of Colorado has challenged archaeologists since the 1870s. This is so, in large part, because of the sheer quantity and quality of prehistoric remains. Archaeological sites, in many cases, have been uncommonly well preserved by the long-term dry climates and the relatively late arrival of Euroamerican develop-



Domestic rooms and associated activity areas, such as those for crop storage, religion, and food preparation, at Chimney Rock habitation in the process of excavation by the University of Colorado. Archaeology in the field is often a hot and tiresome experience of seemingly interminable length, yet most of the workers, college students, and local crews, to the end of their lives, fondly remember the comradery and worth of the effort. Rock art impressions (below) at the Hackberry Springs site (5LA1115), south of La Junta. This millennial site contains many cultural evidences, from Archaic lithic tools of hunters to an 1868 military engagement to late Euroamerican homesteading. The particular linear counts, shown here, have been believed to be Celto-Iberian inscriptions proving trans-Atlantic travel in the A.D. 800s. To others, including the author, these inscriptions are Indian wild game or early Euroamerican ranch stock counts. In this locale, a joint survey by the Colorado Archaeological Society, the State Archaeologist, and scholars from the Bureau of Land Management also recovered flint tools believed to have been used to incise the relatively soft sandstone.



The Escalante site (5MT2149) north of Cortez being stabilized prior to its opening as a Bureau of Land Management visitors center with modern and durable mortars and cements. Escalante was a major Anasazi trading center from Chaco in the first century after A.D. 1000. The Escalante site is also believed to have been actually seen by the Dominguez-Escalante Expedition of 1776. Comments by Friar Escalante make this one of the first, if not the first, of the identified, ancient, cultural sites in the New World. Below, members of the Denver Chapter of the Colorado Archaeological Society photograph, draw, and closely study the now faint incisions of the Fremont rock art (site 5MF685) in Vermillion Canyon northeast of Dinosaur National Monument.



ment. In addition, the topographic circumstance of the modern, politically generated boundaries of the state remarkably embody the intersection of many prehistoric culture areas. Many of these culture areas are a casual function of the hydrologic basins that find origin where the height of the "Rockies . . . end the world and meet the sky."<sup>1</sup> The radially adjoining prehistoric culture areas bearing upon Colorado are: the Southwest (the area of the four-corners and to the south), the Great Basin (Utah, Nevada, and eastern California), the Plateau (weakly refracted from the northwest coast), the Northern Plains (Wyoming, Montana, Nebraska, and the Dakotas), and the Southern Plains (Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and eastern New Mexico). Additionally, the prehistoric culture areas in Colorado often contain classic, or the "type-site," expressions of several cultures and time periods of the western United States. Thus, the Lindenmeier site in northeastern Colorado is one of the New World's classic manifestations of the Paleoindian period, as are the forty-five hundred sites in the Mesa Verde the type-sites for one of three major variants of the Anasazi peoples.

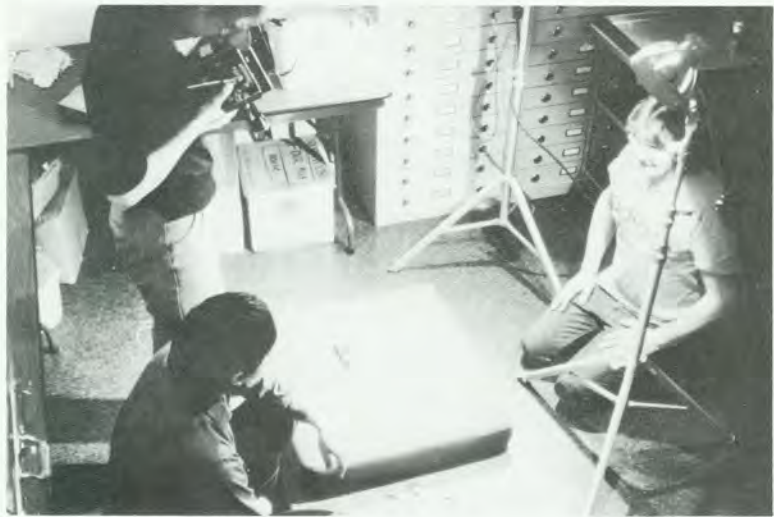
Archaeology rarely allows more than a general concept of the duration and the past cultural milieu of the recovered remnants. Furthermore, the very act of excavation totally, irrevocably destroys the primary data base. Yet, anthropological archaeology, which has generated our knowledge of Colorado prehistory, has an extraordinary power because of its short remove from primary data, because of its generality, and because of its sweep of climate, social orders, and technology—all changing across large space through immense time. And, often enough, this culture history is of societies more alien to us than all the diversity in our own planet-wide society.

One convention will assist, for of the three dimensions of time, space, and culture, the first two may be graphically depicted with an extreme compaction of data. There is another assistance, for of those three, culture is adaptive and shows change, as the elements (such as physical environment and human knowledge) of two-dimensional space and one-dimensional time change. Thus, we do have both a beginning and subsequent evolutionary change to partition and contrast the prehistoric cultures.

The primary unit of embodying and representing culture is the society, as a group of related humans, coupled with their material and mental culture. This culture articulates their energies and organization with the natural world and consists of mental culture (ideas about meaning, social-organization, ownership, and so on) and material culture (the physical manifestation of those mental constructs, such as bone-sewing



*Avocational archaeologists provide an immense public contribution to the archaeological field, and here two experiment with pottery making as an element of the analysis of Woodland sites near Denver. Many avocational archaeologists spend their Saturdays in the State Archaeology laboratory performing the long and careful artifact processing subsequent to excavation and prior to interpretation. University of Colorado at Denver students (below) at the laboratory prepare a film on Colorado archaeology by photographing such prehistoric artifacts as projectile points, scrapers, and a mano and metate.*



<sup>1</sup> M. O'Neill, *A Lady's Life on a Ranch* (New York: MacMillan, 1898).

*The storage area for Anasazi material culture recovered from Mesa Verde National Park. Excavation, itself an immense undertaking, implies a curation commitment of considerable ongoing and indefinite effort that includes the prevention of artifact and document deterioration or theft.*



needles and fortifications). However difficult it is to discover, recover, and analyze the material culture and the biological remains of past humans, it is yet more difficult to discover and formally state the mental culture of those people. Yet, it is this mental culture that archaeologists wish to know. In the archaeology of our prehistory, it is not idiosyncratic artifacts that are important, but pattern and process. It is not even, especially, a single society that we examine, but assemblages of cultures and traditions of societies. That is, many human patterns and processes over the time, and across the space, that was, and is, Colorado.

## The Prehistory of Colorado

The prehistory of Colorado begins not with the creation of the land or with the temporal march of faunal and flora forms. It begins with the arrival of the first humans. The year of this we do not know, and the millennium of this we are not certain. The best, most knowledgeable supposition is that humans were quite probably in the western United States by 13,000 B.C., which is about 15,000 years ago. The earliest radiometrically dated archaeological site in Colorado is the Dent site (5WL269) in Weld County, Carbon-14 dated at  $9,250 \pm 500$  B.C. This site, the remains of a small hunting society, clearly represents the first well-developed, or at least well-documented, North American cultural tradition: the Paleoindians. It is also the first site where Clovis projectile points were found in situ and in association with the extinct mammoth.

Elsewhere in the New World are hints of humans present by 40,000 B.C.; yet few of these alleged evidences have withstood professional examination. The earliest most generally accepted evidence for human presence comes from the Meadowcroft rockshelter in Pennsylvania and consists of an obvious firepit (without, however, any chipped stone artifacts, etc.) that has been dated to  $14,225 \pm 100$  B.C., although this date may have been prehistorically contaminated with coal and therefore spuriously appear to be too old for its actual date of use.

The most tantalizing of archaeological sites earlier than some



TIME LINE: THOUSANDS OF YEARS

YEARS

WESTERN SLOPE

MOUNTAINS

EASTERN / PLAINS SLOPE

CULTURE

2,000

A. D. 1,000

0

B. C. 1,000

2,000

3,000

4,000

5,000

6,000

7,000

8,000

9,000

10,000

11,000

12,000

13,000

14,000

40-15,000

FREMONT

ANASAZI

DESERT CULTURE

?

Introduction of horticulture and subsequent population increase

Introduction of horticulture and subsequent population increase

PLAINS WOODLAND

PLAINS ARCHAIC

(PLANO)

PALEOINDIAN

First known Coloradoans arrive in state

Extinction of most megafauna ca. 9,000 B.C.

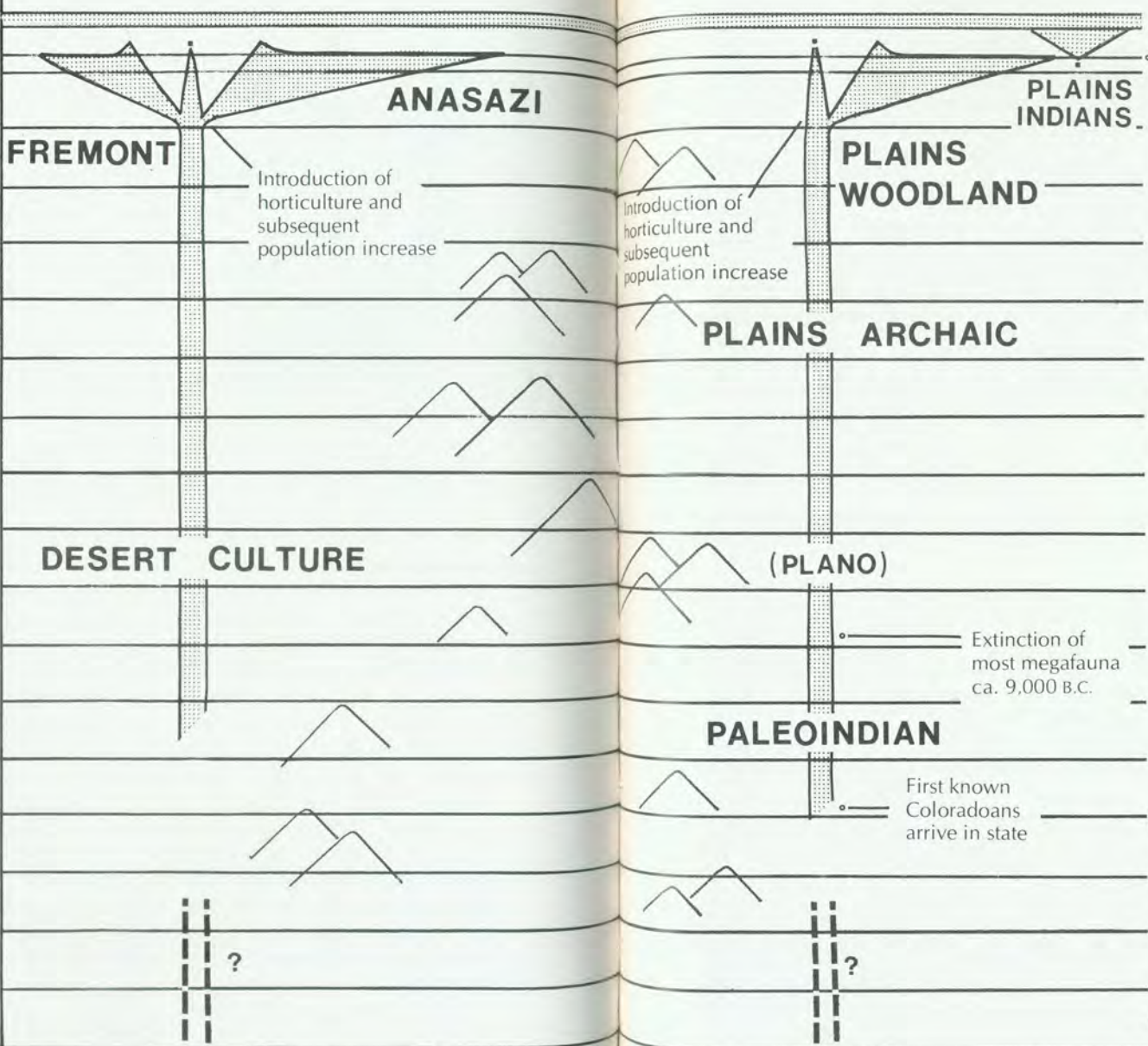
Historic Euroamerican presence ca. A.D. 1500/1800-2000

Many prehistoric cultures became locally extinct A.D. 1200-1300

Prehistoric tribal-level horticulturists appear ca. A.D. 0-1000

Prehistoric band-level hunters and foragers ca. 12,000 B.C. to A.D. 1300

Unknown (if any) cultures ca. 12,000 B.C. and earlier



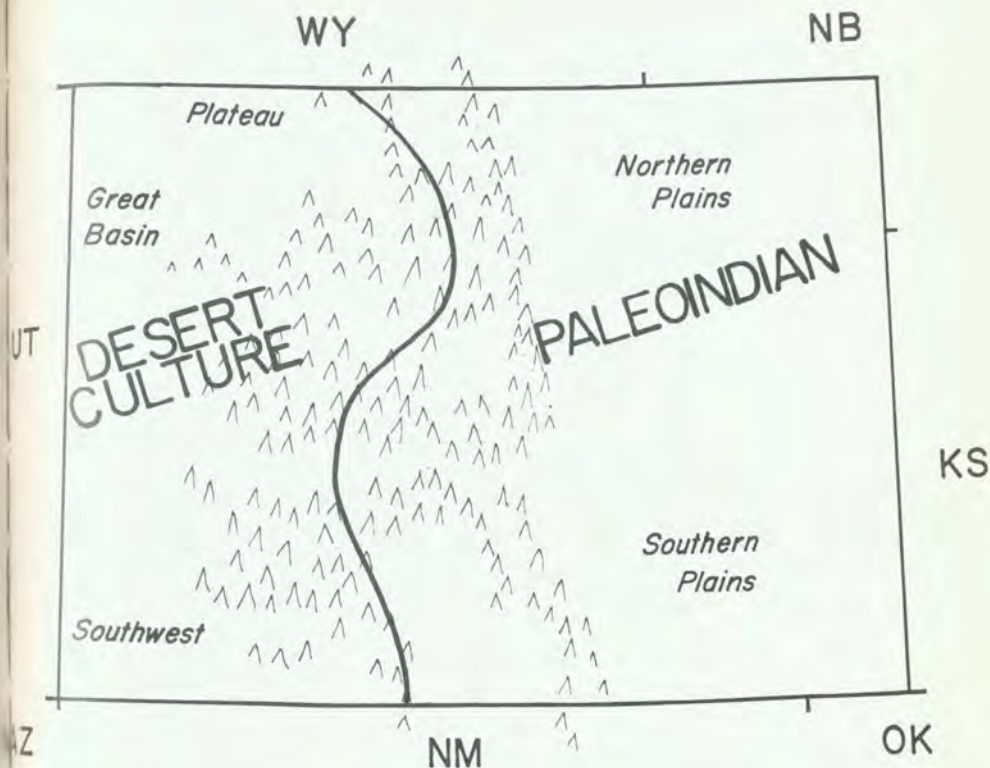
12,000-14,000 B.C. are those that are only a few thousand years earlier and thus are more believable than the hints at 40,000 B.C. Some of the best New World sites of this genre are in eastern Colorado. There, at the Dutton and Selby sites, as revealed by the excavations of the Smithsonian Institution, are located what appear to be very old bone artifacts and animal dismemberments caused by humans. This enigmatic evidence awaits acceptable radiometric dating, but it seems to be clearly a part of the Peorian loess deposited around or before 15,000 B.C. The lack of a radiometric date on undeniably human artifacts renders these sites problematical—not only from a merely evidentiary point of view but also from one that attempts to interpret the societies and the cultures that left those remains.

There is no speculation, however, that the first humans in Colorado were the same as, or the immediate kin of, the first to visit the New World. That is, they were people out of northeastern Asia (with the obvious physical characteristics of such biological populations) living in relatively simple societies, such as male-kin-related bands, with a complex and sophisticated Stone Age, big and small game, hunting technology who walked to the New World over a land crossing or came by boat along the coast of the late-Pleistocene, emergent, arctic Bering land-bridge.

## Paleoindian and Desert Culture

The first human societies in Colorado, of which there is unequivocal evidence and a reasonable understanding, are those of the Paleoindian cultural tradition. However, we know less about these nameless, faceless (to us) Paleoindian people than we know about our own personal relatives ten generations removed. The Paleoindians are life forms seen through a rainy window. We have some of their material culture remains but hardly any of their own bones;<sup>2</sup> we have a clear idea of the basic parameters of their physical and social worlds, but we have nothing of those worlds at hand. For both their Pleistocene landscape of tundra, snow, and lakes, with a rich animal menagerie, and their Paleoindian societies, are now extinct.

<sup>2</sup> Colorado happens to have two of the four Paleoindian burials known in North America. The first is the Gordon Creek Burial (5LR99). This late Paleoindian (Plano's Hell Gap in age) red ocher, flexed burial in Larimer County contained an adult male (probably 25-30 years old) with various of his surviving bone and stone tools and was dated to 7,750 ± 250 years B.C. This exceptionally important grave became part of a more modern arroyo and is now destroyed. The second is Piel Burial (5LO24) in Logan County, which evinces no human bone from the mortuary pit, perhaps due to pre-interment cremation, but did yield a supply of a dozen very large Clovis blades, perhaps as a ceremonial gesture.



*The eastern portion of Colorado at 10,024 B.C., for example, was occupied by roving foragers whom we now call the Paleoindians. These band-level, male-related hunters and gathers are not well known to us except for their harvesting of large mammals, some now extinct, such as the mammoth and the giant bison. On the Western Slope, fundamentally similar foragers were called Desert Culture and apparently specialized in smaller game such as deer and rabbit. Dry western caves have preserved certain Desert Culture perishable material, such as rabbit skin clothing and extensive plant cordage and basketry.*



*An artistic depiction of a late spring Paleoindian camp on the tundra of eastern Colorado in the year 9,788 B.C., with the Rocky Mountains in the distance. A father with his son creates knife blades and a mother with her daughter cooks the noon meal outside of the portable shelters of skin made with mammoth ribs or tusks.*

The Paleoindians apparently lived in small bands of perhaps no more than fifty people of all ages, counted at a yearly rendezvous held in the spring and fall, and probably in smaller, dispersed family groups much of the year. Knowledge about one of the main subsistence bases, hunting, and the possible ownership of hunting rights no doubt passed through the male line from fathers to sons. Also, without much doubt, females married into such a hunting band, leaving their natal bands for the strangeness of their new families. In this female exogamy, a woman might see only two such band territories in her life, whereas a male hunter, on long rounds, might actually come face-to-face with many more people. Yet, the women may have actually been the year-round providers, seeking, as they did daily, the seasonally diverse vegetal resources.

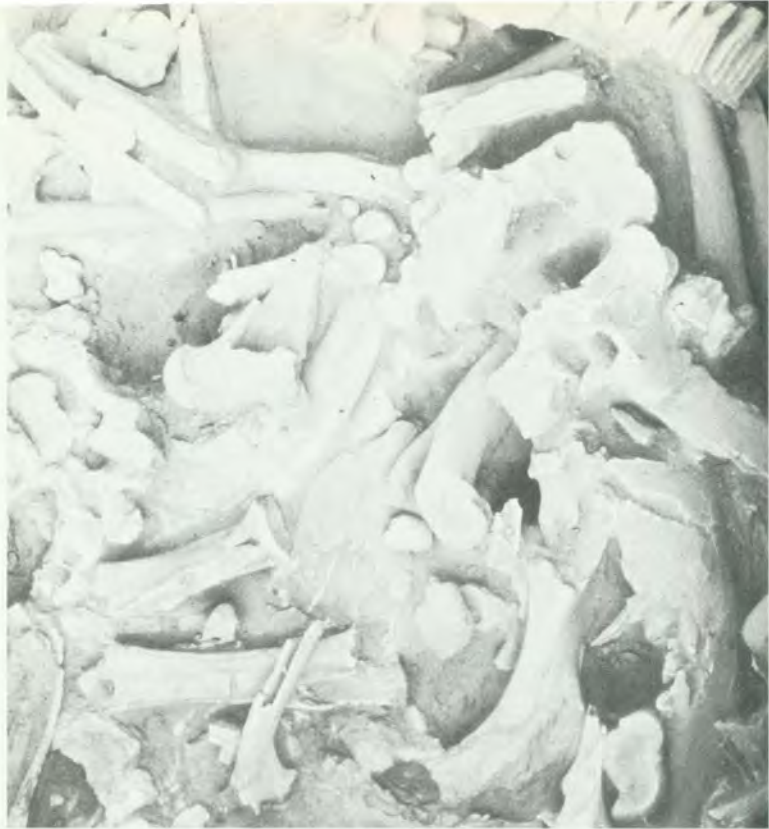
The Paleoindian bands probably can be classified as restricted wanderers. They were open to opportunity in a relatively large hunting and gathering area. As seasonal plants, such as berries in the spring and nuts in the fall became available, the bands moved and were further modulated in their travels for food by roving herds of the great Holocene megafauna.

The average life span of the Paleoindians could have been under thirty years of age and, probably, infant mortality was extremely high. This would be the case for more than another ten millennia. The nutritional state was, on the whole, decent, but there were great periods of starvation or one-item diets. The Paleoindians probably dwelt in skin houses built upon wood or animal rib-frames during the colder part of the year and in equally portable, but more open, structures in the summers.

The physical world of the Paleoindians appears to have been one of plains, tundra, and swampy terrain, upon which seasonally immense herds of mammoth, mastodon, bison, horse, and camels ranged. These walking meat lockers—possibly along with many other nonherding but large herbivores as the giant ground sloth, giant bear, dire wolves, saber-tooth cats, and giant deer—were the prey of the Paleoindians, the top carnivore of that Holocene faunal assemblage.

Their climate was colder and apparently wetter than today, the result being a world of long, cold, wet winters and short, cool, wet summers. Large lakes and a great deal of swampy land characterized the Paleoindians terrain. They neither lived on ice nor had bountiful seacoasts at hand, but their Paleoindian and Holocene world in Colorado must have been much like present-day northern Canada (except for the absence of the many, now-extinct, large animals). No doubt, Paleoindians, beset by horrid mosquitoes and flies, nevertheless, saw wondrous landscapes of snow and large herds of animals, which we now cannot. As we understand this long-ago time, Paleoindians in Colorado dwelt mainly on the vast eastern plains and the Rocky Mountain foothills. Only occasionally did they enter the high mountains, and we have only rare evidence that their societies inhabited the Western Slope.

The dominant item of material culture left by the Paleoindians is a big-game harvesting technology. This technology consisted of fluted, lanceolate and later parallel-flaked, projectile points that were hafted on detachable foreshafts and delivered to the vitals of the unfortunate bison and mammoth by strong shafts, possibly pitched by atlatls, certainly by hand-held thrusting spears. Of the wooden atlatl we know little, but the flint tips of death are well known by such names as (first) Clovis and (later) Folsom, and still later, the Plano series. Atlatl systems are superior to bows for short range artillery, because of their great shaft



*A vertical view of the bone bed at the Paleoinidian kill site of Jones-Miller (5YM8) near Wray. These ancient bison were stamped, killed en masse, and their bones, some butchered, many not, left scattered. Fortuitously, the bones were covered by soils and remained to puzzle archaeologists eleven thousand years later.*

delivery weight and subsequent deep penetration, and without too much doubt this procurement system was as familiar to the Paleoinidians as can openers are to us.

The dominant remaining archaeological site type of the Paleoinidian is the "kill" site, where the great animals were driven, killed, and butchered. Some campsites and some flint quarry stations are rather poorly known except, for example, at Lindenmeier in north central Colorado where a fortuitous hydrological steam piracy has preserved remnants of a Folsom kill site with its campsite. Many varieties of animals were no doubt killed, but the Clovis Paleoinidians did seem to harvest primarily mammoth, and the Folsom and Plano people, the antique, giant bison.

During this same time period, on the Western Slope a separate cultural tradition called the Desert Culture existed. This tradition may have



*An overview depicting the world-famous Lindenmeier site (5LR13) north of Fort Collins. Embedded in the soil block to the left center are the remains of a Folsom Paleoinidian campsite, radiocarbon-dated to ten millennia B.C. A stream piracy at the headwaters of this arroyo prevented its sediment block, with the site, from being eroded as have, obviously, almost all other such blocks along the front of the Rockies. The stratigraphy at the Selby site (5YM36), near the Dutton site, reveals the relative cultural encapsulations of a Paleoinidian site buried deeply in the eastern Colorado loess. Various zones of differing soil deposits can be seen, requiring careful excavation due to confusing trauma by rodents, water table fluctuations, and plant root activity.*



had much in common socially, biologically, and environmentally, with the Plains Paleoindian, but it was significant in its lack of many of the large herd mammals as protein resources. The Desert Culture peoples foraged more, and the universal and heavy use of very small game, such as waterfowl and rabbits, is obvious.

Little is known about the Desert Culture peoples in Colorado, but just to the west in Utah and Nevada are very well-preserved "perishables" from these peoples. These include rabbit-skin clothing and footwear, weapons, and skin food-pouches. Compared to the Paleoindian Culture, the Desert Culture existed as a less spectacular but an equally viable, human life, support system. In fact, as the great megafauna became extinct and the climate became warmer and drier, it outlived the Paleoindian.

Actually, the Desert Culture has persisted, off and on, until the Ethnographic Present of the late A.D. 1800s. It also has much in common with the cultural stage succeeding the Paleoindian—the Archaic. In fact, milling stones were already hallmarks of Desert Culture peoples and were used in the processing of seeds and rough vegetation, such as roots. Another Archaic-like material culture hallmark was the use of basketry for transportation and storage. The dry preservation of such Desert Culture perishables may be influencing archaeological interpretations. It would appear that the Paleoindians were more reliant upon animal skins, but the possibility is that basketry may have been equally important to Paleoindians. Clearly, Desert Culture peoples were as much masters of basketry and cordage as we are of cloth and plastic.

Evidence now suggests that many, perhaps thirty genera, of the large Pleistocene animals of North America had become extinct by about 8,500 B.C. Many of these easily killed herd animals (with the severe procreation-scheduling problems of large mammals) were, in fact, the preferred prey of the Paleoindian. The causal relationship of these "Pleistocene Extinctions" to the activity of the Paleoindian societies is not known. Some scholars, myself included, strongly argue that Paleoindians overhunted or in various ways overstressed some of them to extinction, others disagree.

At any event, around and after 8,500 B.C., the big-game hunting way of life transforms to two new guises of human adaptation in Colorado. One is the Archaic and connects these distant times with the much later Horticulturalists by being the intervening cultural stage. The other is called Plano and persisted until 6,000 or 5,000 years B.C. on the eastern plains of the state until these people, too, entered the Archaic.

The Plano peoples bore the Paleoindian big-game procurement technology but specialized almost solely on the bison. Plano people in Colorado, and their kin in bands that roamed from the Rockies eastward

to the western Great Lakes, manifest a relatively well known lithic toolkit, which shows an evolution of projectile point styles that archaeologists have given such now romantic names to as Agate Basin, Hell Gap, Alberta, and Cody.

Plano societies, in their great attention to the bison, developed and perfected extraordinarily effective mass-kill systems, such as are illustrated at the famous Jurgens, Jones-Miller, Claypool, and Olsen-Chubbuck sites in Colorado's northeastern counties.

Although the surviving knives and projectile points of the Plano men's toolkits, and the inferred details of their evolving herd stampede and trap procurement methods, are exceptionally diverse, it must also be said that Plano cultures very ably illustrate the overall and strong continuity of a foraging subsistence economy of hunting and gathering that characterizes most of prehistory on the Colorado plains.

The Plano period lingered in vigor for 3,000 years, but drying, warmer climates reduced the great bison herds and the big-game economy as a subsistence strategy became extinct. Necessity caused the people to change their social and cultural heritage, not their genes, and soon all of the people in Colorado were foragers of smaller game. They would remain so, locked to such limiting resources for another 7,000 years.

## Archaic Period

The Archaic is a time period from about 8,500 years B.C. (or as late as 5,000 B.C. for the late-Paleoindian's Plano on the plains) to around A.D. 0 years. The Archaic is also a way of subsistence adaptation best called foraging and may be said to be the longest human way of life in Colorado, since all cultures, all time periods, relied upon hunting and gathering activities.<sup>3</sup> The Archaic may, furthermore, be said to continue

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that some scholars restrict the usage of the term Archaic until after the end of the Plano Culture, around 6,000 or 5,000 B.C., since Plano continued the Paleoindian big-game harvesting. While recognizing this continued and vital economic exception, I prefer the heuristic simplicity, here appropriate, of using the Archaic for this time period beginning around 8,500 B.C. Furthermore, this usage foretells the evolving context and future economy of the Plano peoples, and this usage is also fully proper for the Western Slope during these millennia. I should also note that certain important questions do exist for the transition from Plano to Archaic: for example, an evidential hiatus and the role and the exact influence of the climatic shift, which we call the Altithermal.

The Archaic was first made a formal designation by the state archaeologist of New York in 1932, and although his specific trait lists, as amended, primarily apply to the eastern United States Woodlands, it is a useful concept for Colorado and is widely used. Clearly, for example, the "Plains Archaic" of Colorado is a local expression of earlier developments in the eastern Archaic.

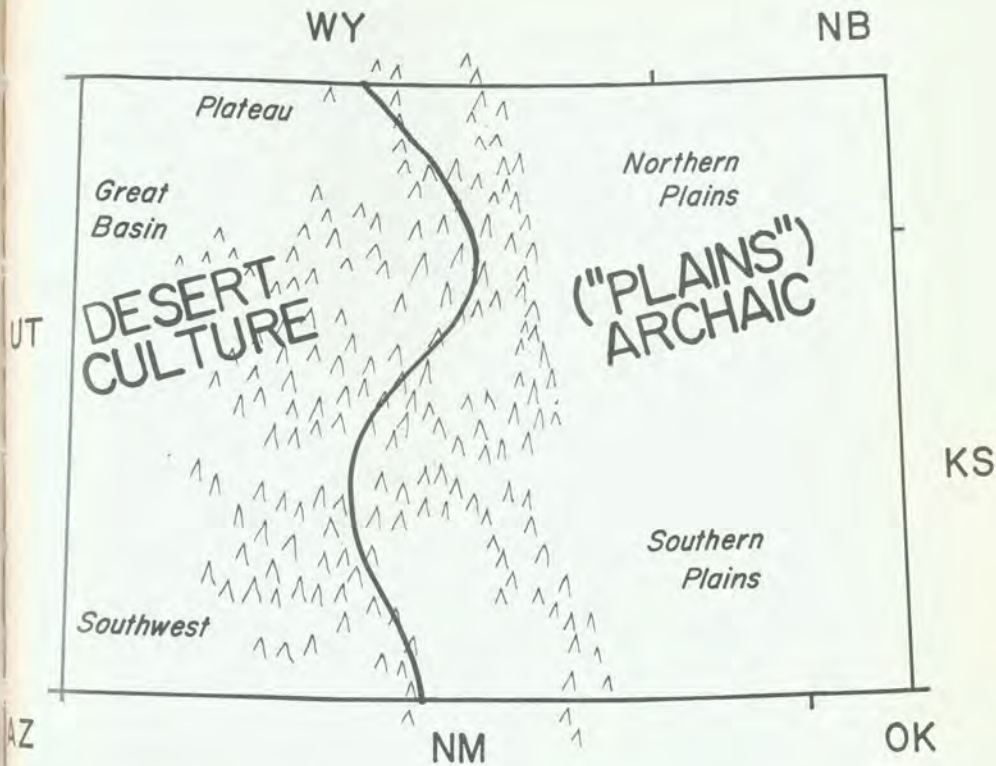
to the Ethnographic Present of the late 1800s since not all parts of Colorado were amenable to the horticultural developments of the early years of the first millennium A.D. and the people in such zones continued an archaic foraging way of subsistence.

On the Western Slope the Desert Culture, really an Archaic-aforgers life style, persisted quite successfully until historic times. Several authors have, as a matter of fact, termed this the Uncompahgre Complex and see it as culminating in the historic Ute. As stated previously, we know more about the Desert Culture than the Plains Archaic of the eastern slope because of the excellent dry preservation of the west, and we know much about the diet of the Desert Culture people due to finding coprolites in dry caves. We also have good examples of basketry, woodwork, cordage, and even several desiccated human bodies. On the whole, the Desert Culture, as an adaptation, remained an arid lands life style and survived until the later 1880s, or the Ethnographic Present of Colorado—that last period when the native Coloradoans were still in an aboriginal culture and society.

Except for the aridity and the details of actual material culture, most of what can be surmised about the Plains Archaic and its penetrations of the mountains and its general cultural influence is true for the Desert Culture. However, it is in the Archaic on the eastern slope that anthropologically interesting changes of great consequence can be seen. Therefore, the eastern slope more completely exemplifies the enormity of the Archaic.

Two, primary, environmental changes beginning the Archaic period, about 8,500 B.C., greatly influenced the plains inhabitants—the extinction of the megafauna and the warming of the climate. First, taking into account the lingering, several thousand years of Plano, the great Colorado megafauna of mammoth, horse, and giant bison became rare, then extinct. Not only was a great class of food resources lost forever, but presumably the people were now less bound by the herd's schedules.<sup>4</sup> Also, the technology, hunting techniques, and social organizations of the people were probably less constrained by the rigors of megafaunal entrapment and utilization.

Second, the climate continued a general warming trend that had begun around 20,000 B.C. with the retreat of the great Wisconsin continental ice sheet. This ice sheet did not encroach upon Colorado but bordered to the north. There were, of course, Alpine glaciers in the



*In the western section of Colorado at 4,007 B.C., for example, Desert Culture persists beyond Paleoindian times. In fact, its material cultural traits, and possibly the human genetic stock, appear to persist in various guises through the later horticultural period up to the midst of the second millennium A.D. In the east, however, the great "megafauna" are mostly gone and apparently the cold/warm tundras of the Paleoindian times have become cold/hot plains. Environmental conditions are not yet as today, but the succeeding Archaic foragers live on in small, band-level societies of moderate-to-small-sized game procurement and an extraordinary (to us) subsistence knowledge of the food values of the local flora. As with the Desert Culture, many aspects of the Archaic universally persist through later times as fundamental cultural survival means and values.*

<sup>4</sup> There is an important possibility that future genetic technology may allow the re-creation of modern populations of mammoth by "cloning" cells recovered from archaeological sites in dry caves or perpetually frozen bogs. The scientific and economic rewards almost hurt to contemplate, but for Coloradoans of the Archaic the subsistence world was simply depleted immensely.

mountains. This trend saw not only the flora and faunal change in Colorado but also the physical geography of transportation.

Cold or cool, wet summers and winters became warmer and drier. Changes in the storm tracks dried up the great Pleistocene and Early Holocene lakes and swamps of the Paleoindian. The flora and fauna underwent continuing replacement, probably in both north-south, and altitudinal, gradients. In fact, around 5,000 to 3,500 years B.C. fossil pollen and human subsistence evidence and other archaeologically recovered environmental data appear to indicate a rapid climate fluctuation involving at least two periods of real drought. This is called the Altithermal and has rough correlations to similar, rapid climatic fluctuations known for Northern Europe.

By 3,000 or 2,000 B.C., however, it seems that many of the modern faunal and flora elements of the Colorado biomes and ecotones had been established. Although not completely certain as to details, it is fair to characterize this Archaic time period as environmentally distinct from the Paleoindian and closer to modern conditions. For example, most of the great Late Pleistocene megafauna were gone, leaving relatively few large mammals. And of these latter, many were more solitary forms, dwelling in flora cover, making their procurement difficult and less rewarding. The exception is the continuing, extremely important, presence of the buffalo (that is, the small bison) and the increasing presence of deer and their clear importance as eastern slope protein and fabric resources. Contrarily, it would also appear that deciduous forests in the plains drainages and the lower mountains became established and supported on their vegetal foods heavy populations of small ground game and large birds. These vegetal foods, such as copious amounts of nuts, were also now becoming available to humans, although it is assumed that vegetation was always important to all preceding economies.

These environmental changes and their ramifications greatly affected the lives of Archaic humans. Gradually, through generations of humans and thousands of years, but so rapidly by the standards of archaeological time and evaluation, the subsistence adaptations of the Paleoindian became extinct and the procurement inventions for deer, rabbits, nuts, and fish, increased in complexity, areal extent, and effectiveness.

The principal, probable changes found in the new Archaic period, known or suggested by archaeology, are the reduction of the home range of bands to much smaller areas, the rise of a weapons technology appropriate to smaller game, the clearly increased severity of seasonal scheduling of plant resource availability, the invention and the refinement of ground or pecked heavy stone vegetation processors, and the rise of inter-band, sociocultural isolation over previously inconse-



*The bison filled many of the previously excluded plains environmental niches left when the majority of megafauna became extinct about 9,000 B.C., and thus, they may have become much more numerous than in a previous climax faunal assemblage.*



*During the Archaic period, bison procurement was probably by hunting stealth and entrapment. And, deer were also important resources as is shown by the portrayal of these Archaic hunters returning from a successful hunt.*



quential distances. The home range reduction is a second order, but reasonable inference, based upon the new geography of resources and the apparent change of small-scale, concurrent cultural-evolutionary trajectories in certain material culture remains—such as the shapes of arrowheads.

Based in large part on the archaeology of several plains states to the east and upon ethnographic analogy (since the Archaic as a foraging adaptation was here and elsewhere actually seen by Euroamericans, and can, therefore, be extended to observed patterns to explain archaeological remains), we can speculate that the early Archaic cultures were slowly restricted to smaller cells of resource procurement. That is, they “settled-in” to individual drainage systems and became fully familiar with the availabilities of food in what can be described as their home territories.

Clearly, Archaic peoples invented vegetive rendering processes not previously seen and weapons systems that were refined for smaller game in tighter quarters. The former processors took the form of grinding stones (perhaps newly invented to process the highly nutritious, but difficult, seeds), and no doubt included various fresh-water shells, wooden beaters, and pulping tools that are not now preserved. Only the grinding stones remain, but they indicate both the use of nuts and rough vegetation and the probable return to favored groves, since many of the ground stones seem nonportable and would have been secluded at the grove.

By ethnographic analogy and the study of botany, it is known that the availability of vegetation may vary radically from week to week. The archaeological model of Archaic vegetative foraging would, therefore, envision a detection system based upon the reports of scouts or hunters and the subsequent, every-few-days movement by the band to appropriate groves, brooks, bushes, and so on. The actual collection work was probably accomplished by females. This movement and the gathering formed the essence of their subsistence.

We can speculate that the Archaic saw the invention, or perhaps simply the predominant use, of fishing and unattended small-game collection systems. Perishable fishhooks, nets, and poisons are lost, and even rock weirs in streams are scattered by the millennia of yearly ice. Likewise, snares, nets, and deadfalls for lagomorphs and rodents decay out of our perception. We do know from refuse left at their sites, however, that fish, small game, and birds must have been very important in the protein intake of the Archaic foragers in Colorado.

Much of the material culture and the social elements of the Archaic remained unchanged from the Paleoindian equilibria. The band could have been the basic organizational unit for sociocultural integration and

could have consisted of thirty to fifty members of all ages. Perhaps several bands assembled at especially rich plant or fish resource areas in the spring, and perhaps the bands also became dispersed to individual family groups due to the rigors of winter foraging. Each band was led by a hunting chief and/or a religious shaman and was influenced by the relative, sometimes conflicting, merits of protein versus vegetive resource availability. Within the band, not only the leadership but also the descent of wealth and the rules of marriage were male-related, for these were patrilineal, patrilocal bands where the females married outside of their natal band. Each band was largely on its own, and although resources might be shared by neighboring bands along kinship lines, the entire human society in a region was very close to the fluctuations of the environment.

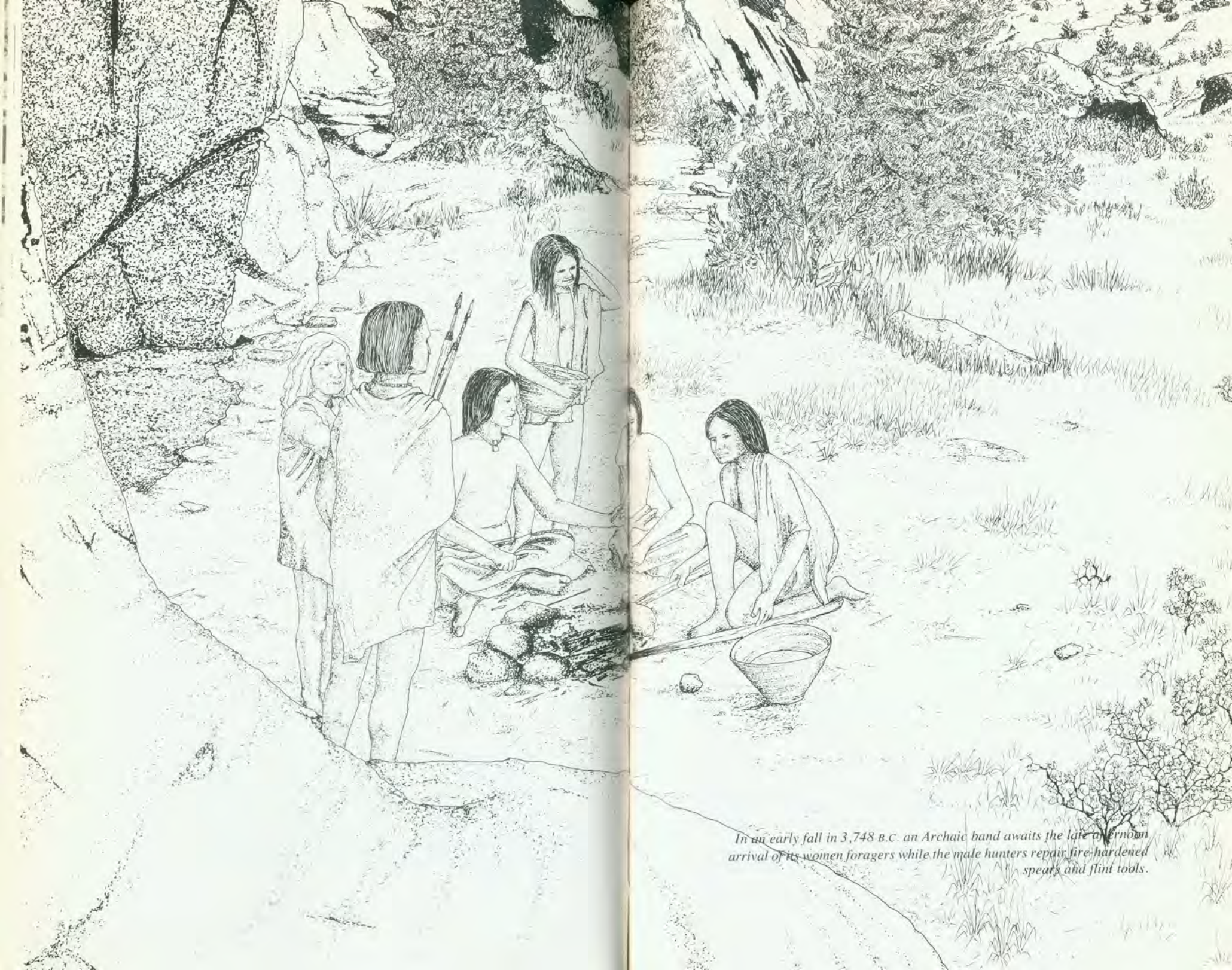
There was no pottery in the Archaic period since the ceramics of making rock-like objects out of such rock decay products as clay was not yet known. Consequently, food storage methods were simple and probably not very effective for a longer period than a week or two. The Archaic cooks were caught between the previously reliable, nearly year-round freezing ground, or air temperatures, of the Paleoindian, and the future refrigerators and neutron-cleansers of today. The icy grip of winter for perhaps two months, the smoking of fish and meat, and the drying of nuts and berries all were food preservation tactics, but bacteria, rodents, and frequent band movement no doubt created a world of alternating surfeit and agony that we today cannot easily imagine.

On a theoretical note, however, we may speculate that a lack of food storage technology that was effective over a season or more quite likely precluded the regional “resource crashes” so common in our times. And, we can surmise that the Archaic peoples had a mythology and religious-support system sufficient to transcend the obvious terrors of their forager lives.

Of mythology, health, burial practice, language, demography, and warfare, we know little by direct evidence. By analogy we suspect little warfare, and raiding beyond female capture or winter desperation attacks at a family or individual level. We suspect simple burials because there was little social stratification to give impetus to mortuary elaboration, because soil working tools and excavation techniques associated with later horticulture had not been invented, and because so many band members would have died—perhaps two-thirds of the newborn or first-year children—without a social identity beyond parental grief.

We suspect reasonable health, and those ill no doubt partitioned themselves into those who soon recovered and those who soon died. Poorly healed fractures might have been common, and teeth may well have been heavily abraded by fragments from stone milling or even the





*In an early fall in 3,748 B.C. an Archaic band awaits the late autumn arrival of its women foragers while the male hunters repair fire-hardened spears and flint tools.*

vegetation. The oral decay, however, of enamel, dentine, or gums may not have been the apparent agony that it is to us, since refined sugars were not available to Archaic palates. Furthermore, the daily physical activities, varied diet, and the lack of the major disease vectors or reservoirs, which are common to denser populations, no doubt all conspired to spare Archaic people many of our advanced afflictions.

The few hogback and northeastern Colorado Archaic burials are insufficient to suggest demographic age profiles, but assuredly the first two years were hideously halving, or more. Further, many women must have died in childbirth-related infirmities, male hunters must have suffered serious traumas, and the whole society may well have been grievously stressed by starvation on an annual basis. The average age at death, excepting that possibly two-thirds of the band who died or were allowed to die before age one, was probably thirty or less.

We suspect many dialects within several languages, the mutual intelligibility of which was lost after a hundred miles. And of the mythology, we can do little but ponder the probable alienism to us of a spirit world based upon death and chance and hunting, an alienism that our modern farming-religions do not well equip us to perceive.

Thus passed, in Colorado, the shorter lives of hundreds of generations of but tens of thousands of people. People who were as much a part of the landscape as the wind and the deer; people who were as hard to see then as the wind and deer are for us to see today. They existed as an occasional glimpse of a traveling band, the nonforest-fire smoke of a cook fire, the nonwoodpecker ring of human flint-working or wood-gouging. They lived and died while the transcendental heritage of Colorado consisted of the descent of knowledge about ever oscillating food resources and the mythically dim tales of creation, or perhaps of a great hunter of some long past age.

## Horticulture Period

The archaeologists have told us that there was a primitive agriculture in parts of Colorado—an agriculture so old that by comparison our present historical agriculture seems to be but of yesterday. . . . They who laboriously erected the cliff dwellings in the southwestern part of the state did better than to gather the piñon nuts and other vegetable products that grew of themselves and were suitable for human food; they did more than to hunt and fish for animal food for themselves and

their children. These early settlers, who came into this region in the remote past and remained for hundreds of years, building their houses, rearing their families, and developing what seems to have been a genuinely satisfying culture, were real farmers and stockgrowers: [To the best of present-day knowledge, stockgrowers is a complete misconception.] they planted, cultivated, harvested, and stored their crops of corn and beans and pumpkins; . . . But they passed away, and only the more enduring articles of their handiwork remain to testify to their intelligence and skill and to mystify us and make us wonder how they lived and throve. . . . Well may we reflect in our pride that these simple people of long ago may have been wiser in their day of prosperity than we are in our own.<sup>5</sup>

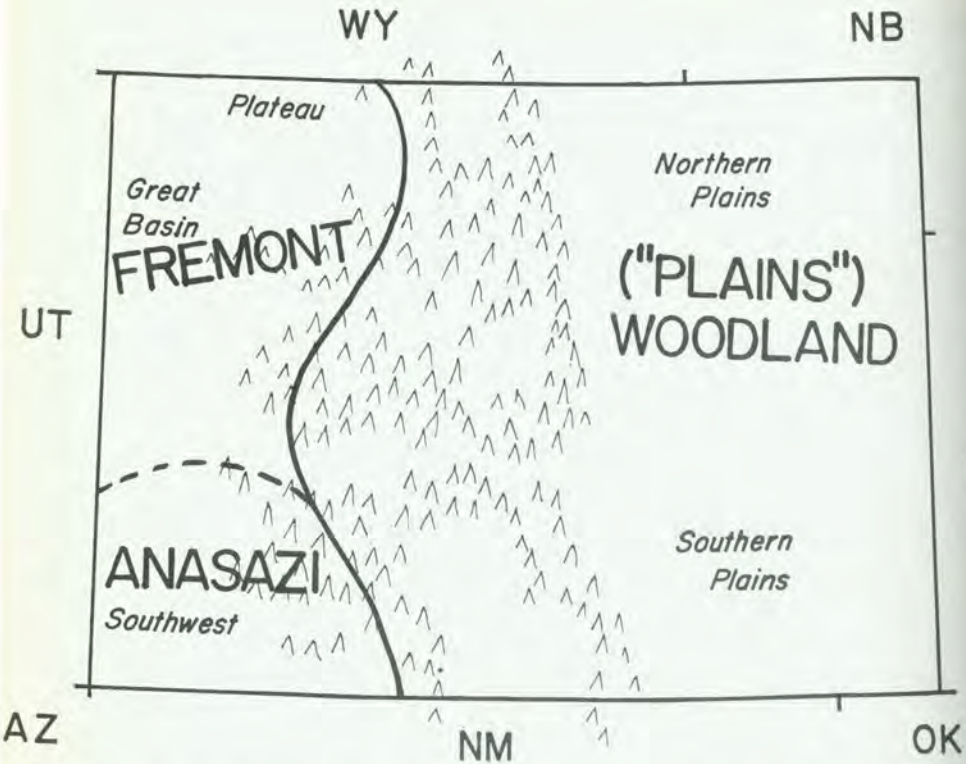
The concept of agriculture (or rather in scope: horticulture and definitely not connected with any significant animal domestication) and specific cultigens came to Colorado around the time of Christ, that is in the several centuries around the calendrical convention of A.D. 0. These new energies entered from at least two, independent corridors, were adopted or rejected on nonlinear schedules, and revolutionized the societies and cultures who dwelt in the prehistory of Colorado.

What we shall analytically call these last major developments of Colorado prehistory is a matter of taste. There are proper cultural names such as Woodland, Plains Village, Anasazi, and Fremont. There are artifact descriptors such as Early, Middle, and Late Ceramic. There are culture-stage names such as Formative. And, there are adaptation terms such as Horticulturalists, as the predominant subsistence element, and to distinguish them from the preceding foragers. Whatever these developments are called, the time period from about A.D. 0 until about A.D. 1300 is a remarkable era.

No climatic change is known to be directly, causally, involved with the coming of horticulture, and, of course, foraging by hunting and by gathering continued. Yet, the simple introduction of concept-and-cultigen caused transcendent changes in the lives of the people of the late prehistory period. The stimulus for this, earliest, Colorado horticulture comes, after much time, from its invention in central and lower Mexico in the fourth or fifth millennia B.C. At that time Archaic-like peoples in Mexico somehow entered a symbiotic relationship with certain plants, such that each can be said to have domesticated the other.

As also happened in the eastern Mediterranean area several thousand years earlier (about 9-6,000 B.C.), the initial plant domestication in Mexico (about 5-3,000 B.C.) did not immediately revolutionize human populations. Rather, slowly and perhaps without much rational perception, a new relationship of environmental zones and human plant selec-

<sup>5</sup> Daniel W. Working, "Agriculture," *History of Colorado*, eds. LeRoy R. Hafen and James H. Baker, 5 vols. (Denver: Linderman Co., 1927), 2:575.



By A.D. 1071 horticulture had been practiced for hundreds of years and in the west villagers were living in stone hamlets and villages. Drought and aridity were dominant worries of these tribal, female-related societies, but crop storage and water control technologies provided some control of fate as did, perhaps, the ever-more socially powerful priestly mediators of the spirits. The Fremont people of northwestern Colorado, a variant of a cultural heartland to the west in the Great Basin, are not so well known except for their vast pantheon of spirits who survived their human makers as spectacular rock art in the canyons of the Western Slope. The Anasazi of the Southwest are relatively well known, not only for certain large villages tucked into cliffs but also for their overall dense occupation throughout the southwestern tier and their economic, social, artistic, and material cultural trade ties to even higher cultures to the south. On the east slope the horticulturalists are not so sedentary and look, in contrast, to the wetter east for a sociocultural homeland. The lack of convenient water control and architectural opportunities, possibly fundamentally different social perceptions and values, and certainly the continuing presence of the monotonous bison herds create a different life style for eastern Coloradoans in these years.

tion and cultivation caused those Archaic hunters and foragers to rely gradually, more and more, upon controlled abundances of grasses and timbers that would become, after several thousand generations of selection, the magic New World plant triumvirate of corn, beans, and squash.

Unlike the Old World, New World plant domestication was not accompanied by animal domestication. Beasts of burden, such as horses and cows, or large mammal protein crops, such as the above and sheep, goats, and so forth, never existed in these New World cultures. The regional New World revolution, which was induced by 1,000 B.C., saw the rise of local, early civilizations in Mexico. These civilizations lacked the wheel, except on children's toys, but had forms of writing, advanced mathematics and astronomy, monumental architecture, state religions, and complex political and economic systems.

Outside of the central zones of plant domestication, foraging continued to be everything. Only slowly did the twenty or thirty cultigens, or perhaps more accurately, the idea of their use, spread northward from Mexico, and only slowly were they understood and embodied in the no-mistakes-allowed subsistence of foragers. Partly, it took time for appropriate genetic strains to develop viability in the increasing cold, aridity, and shorter growing season of the northward diaspora. Partly, the constellations of plant-culture knowledge, the lore, and the tactics had to be discovered for every new zone, and they had to be incorporated into sociocultural systems—the bearers of which were not easily convinced of the future of such horticulture. Also, some of the bearers of the foraging life were not necessarily desirous of the changing sexual emphasis, the changing daily and seasonal schedules, or the discomfort in magical-religious meanings.

Yet, the abundance and the increasing predictability of horticulture could not be denied. And once culturally adopted in an environmental zone, horticulture could spread to the limits of that zone, which often meant the headwaters of drainage patterns, Colorado being the greatest headwater of all. Thus did horticulture come to Colorado in the many centuries around A.D. 0—on the Western Slope—up the Colorado and its big tributaries, the Green, Yampa, White, Gunnison, Mancos, Dolores, and San Juan; and on the eastern slope—by way of the Platte (especially the South Platte and her parallel tributaries, the Arickaree and Republican), the Arkansas and her Purgatoire, and the Rio Grande. It was the dissemination of the knowledge of horticulture along extant trade routes, coupled with the success of planting and then harvesting on the river bottoms or terraces that allowed old foragers to become new horticulturalists.

The western Colorado horticulturalists developed differently from,

and largely out of meaningful contact with, the eastern ones. Before rendering the accomplishments of each, it is important to savor the parallel, and perhaps obligatory, changes common to nearly all foragers who would become horticulturalists. Although archaeologists and anthropologists cannot properly explain the energetics and the mechanics of this very rapid shift in social, cultural, and economic equilibria, little doubt exists about the before and the after worlds.

Where horticulture was embraced, band-level, patrilineal, patrilocal, lithic-limited societies of foragers close to the monthly resource abundances became, over the period of 1,000 years, tribal societies of matrilineal, matrilocal, pottery-released horticulturalists. These societies became locked into a routine of planting, nurturing, harvesting, and storing artificially abundant products. Wanderers became villagers. Hunter-shamans became farmer-priests. Portable homes became earth-lodges or pueblos. And man became more common on the landscape.

The eastern slope horticulturalists of the plains are harder to envision because a minor drought cycle in the centuries just before substantial Euroamerican contact (and, perhaps, the reverberations of new, rampant Euroamerican disease) conspired to warp the plains horticulturalists into a period of severe depopulation. Perhaps they are also harder to envision because the nonhorticultural horse-culture and nomadism were then (ca. A.D. 1500 to 1700) ascendant and caught the Euroamerican chroniclers' eyes.

When horticulture, as an adaptation, worked its cultural way up the drainages, it did not wholly replace the very, very old hunting and utilizing of the bison. The yearly subsistence system came to be a cycle of planting (often, two plantings a few weeks apart) of corn and other crops in the river bottoms in the spring; then a summer of wandering for procurement of both vegetation and bison, using very portable homes and tools; then a fall harvest back in the bottom lands with, lastly, a late fall, winter, and early spring using of small earthlodge villages.

The plantings would have appeared to be more like the gardens of today rather than fields, and the sod-breaking and the plant cultivation were done by women with hoes made of bison scapulae. Gardens were owned by women and usually marked. They, as wealth, were not rigidly passed from mother to daughter because mortality dealt any given generational cohort an uneven hand of succession. Men did often assist in the harder field work, but they had their own challenges in procuring bison and other game.

The earliest eastern slope horticulturalism begins around A.D. 0 and lasts for a millennium. In this period, the Woodland, pottery also first appears and transforms the storage technology of the newly emerging

agricultural base. Rodents and the wet found the armour of even crude pottery more proof than skins, wood, or pits in the ground. Fall crops could last well into the winter, and the seeds of next spring could be reliably cached in lidded jars of millennial pottery.

Later, after a short period of poorly understood climatic hostility, a florescence called Plains Village occurs and substantial horticultural villages appear. The evidence for these developments comes from the east, down rivers. According to the present evidence, however, Colorado did not have the classic expressions of large, often fortified villages that characterized late plains prehistory to the east. Instead, in the late (local) prehistory period, there is evidence of a new nomadism rising, based upon the new availability of the European horse and grafted onto the marginal horticultural need for continued bison hunting. Archaeologically identified as the Dismal River aspect of late prehistory, we can see, in the centuries after A.D. 1500, the origins of the seminomadic, plains horse culture that was known to the Euroamericans.

The horticultural marginality of the Colorado eastern, short-grass plains cannot be overemphasized. In good years of abundant rain and short winters, horticulture was a good life. In bad years, people starved or left. The great moderator of subsistence fluctuations continued to be the bison, that ambulatory meat and clothing locker.

This marginality constrained the eastern slope horticulturalists to a relatively poor material culture and an impermanence uncharacteristic of the Western Slope or of the peoples farther down river to the east. Unlike horticultural Anasazi, the plains peoples had simple and relatively undecorated pottery wares. These elongated, utilitarian pots and jars were (relatively) crudely made, and decoration was a matter of surface roughening and molding, not of slips and complex tessellations. The origins of the pottery manufacturing techniques and styles are clearly to the east, in the Mississippi River drainage area where the relatively advanced Hopewell and later Mississippian cultures dwelt. The burial mounds of these cultures are not known in Colorado.

The available knowledge of social organization is poor for these eastern slope horticulturalists in Colorado, but by evidence down river, it is known that the relatively settled Plains Village peoples dwelt in small hamlets adjacent to water. Families apparently shared house sites, typically semisubterranean lodges, and were not stratified in social classes or even specialized in arts and crafts. Men hunted and women gardened and they were more numerous on the landscape than during the Archaic. The end of the Plains Village period occurred around A.D. 1400, no doubt due to a minor drought. Before wetter times returned, the horse

and the Euroamerican pioneers arrived and savaged the indigenous horticultural trajectory.

The Western Slope of Colorado is, and was, also dry. Yet, the greater predictability of water and perhaps the greater flow from the mountain snows saw more sociocultural, technological elaboration in horticultural times. Perhaps also the propinquity to the center of the Southwest culture area was a factor. Two main branches are archaeologically distinguishable, the Anasazi and the Fremont.

The Fremont peoples dwelt in the northwestern two-thirds of Colorado as the Uinta and San Rafael variants, and they clearly derive from the Great Basin cultural tradition. Some sources suggest that the Fremont culture owes much to the northwest plains, and several others have argued that it derives from the Pueblo II culture of the Anasazi to the south. Although these adjacent areas and cultures participated in some trade, few scholars accept these simple origin views. Fremont, though diverse and marginal, is properly regarded as a distinct, centrifugal system of adaptation—the eastern margin of which can be seen in Colorado.

The Fremont peoples are best known for their abundant and often spectacular rock art. They used a crude, gray pottery and lived in small

*Three trapezoidal Fremont humanoid figures (#s 1, 4, 9) from the Uinta Fremont culture at the Bassett Cemetery petroglyph site (5MF687) in Brown's Park. These figures have not been chalked, yet spirals (2), stars (7), and Mountain sheep heads (8, 6, the latter facing downward), and various indistinct figures (3, 5) clearly cover this five-foot wide rock art boulder from, perhaps, A.D. 1000.*



family houses partly excavated, partly built aboveground of masonry and some adobe. These homesteads of remarkable architectural diversity were often quite scattered within small villages. The level of the sociocultural integration was probably tribal.

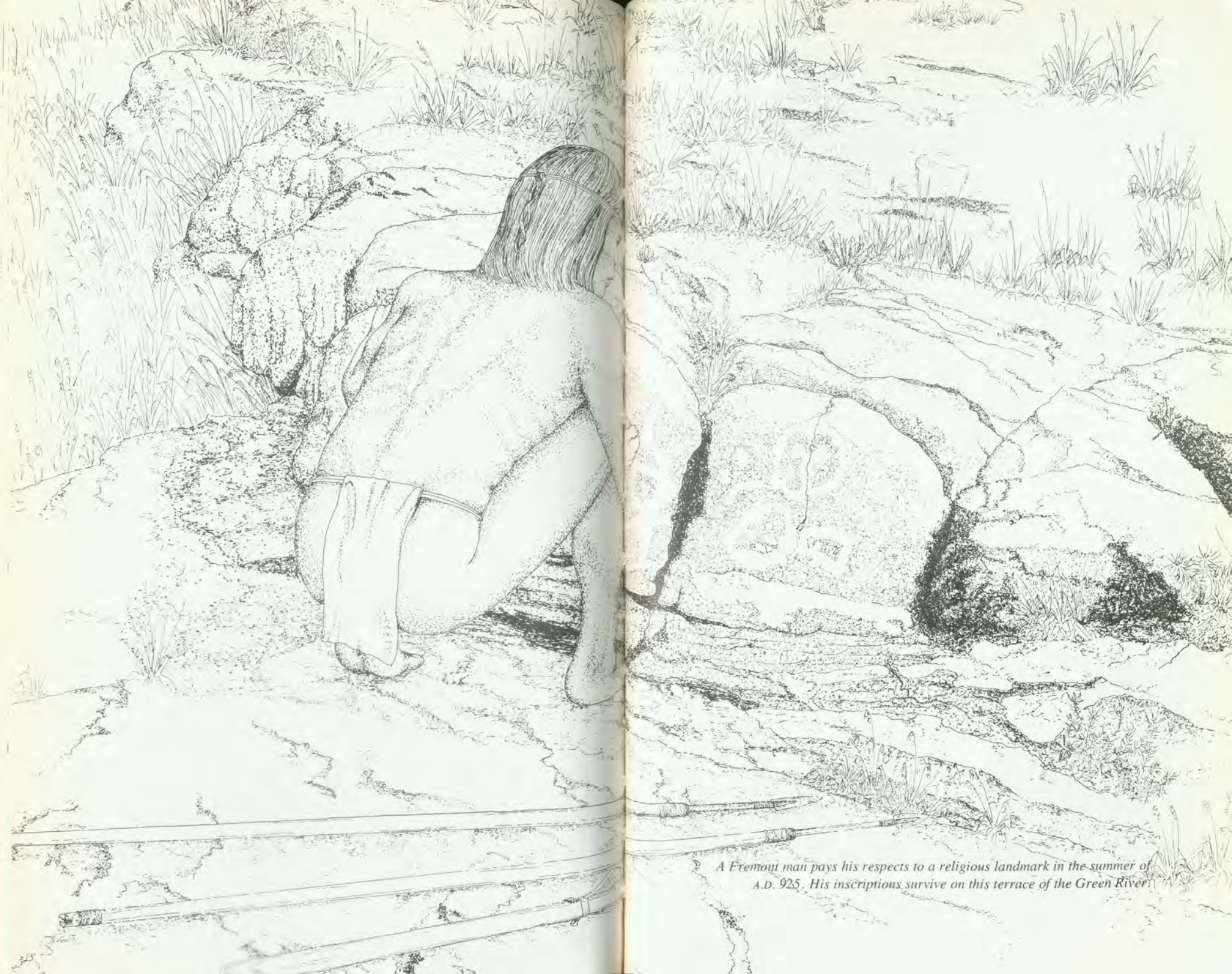
Their crops of corn, beans, and squash were stored in specialized masonry units resembling nothing so much as granaries. In addition to pottery, Fremont peoples had an exceptionally well-developed basketry tradition, no doubt a heritage from their Desert Culture ancestors. The seasonality of the Fremont yearly economy is not known, but we can speculate that populations were relatively thin and were rather concentrated in the valleys with strong seasonal exploitation of the game and the vegetation in the upland forests.

Clearly, religious life was advanced, as the pecked and painted rock art alludes to amazing creatures and to the stylism of advanced experience. However, ceremonial structures appear to be absent and only small village plazas suggest any complex social or community religious arrangements.

Sometime around A.D. 1200 or 1300, the Fremont peoples ceased their traditional life style of sedentary horticulture and became lost to the archaeological view. The cause is most likely a minor drought cycle causing the horticultural base to pass beyond marginality to extinction. We do not know where the people went. Perhaps it was back to a predominantly Desert Culture-like hunting and gathering band level known to the early Colorado Ute, the northwestern plains, or the Great Basin. Or perhaps they, in one or two generations, became biologically extinct concomitantly with their cultural extinction. Unlike the horticulturalists of the plains of the eastern slope, or their neighbors the Anasazi, the Fremont live for us in their vast murals of secular and sacred rock art. Yet, their art is enigmatic and can lead us to speculation, no doubt unjustified by their actual culture and society.

The other major Western Slope horticultural tradition is the celebrated Anasazi. The classic expression of this culture in Colorado is Mesa Verde, one of the three major variants of the Anasazi (also Kayenta in northern Arizona and Chaco in northwestern New Mexico). The Anasazi were one of the three major Southwest culture area traditions (Mogollon *et alii* in southern and western New Mexico and Hohokam *et alii* in middle and southern Arizona.)

Of all of the horticulturalists in prehistoric Colorado, the Anasazi, as Mesa Verdeans, are most prominent in scholarly literature and in the public mind alike. Perhaps this is due to the preservation of substantial architectural and village remains that had to survive only two-thirds of a millennium, perhaps to the very familiarity of their pueblos, perhaps to the clear cultural (if not biological) descendants living in the modern



*A Fremont man pays his respects to a religious landmark in the summer of A.D. 925. His inscriptions survive on this terrace of the Green River.*



*A diorama showing the first known peoples of Mesa Verde dwelling in a general Archaic and Basketmaker economic mode. The fiber basketry and the use of natural shelters are prominent in this reconstruction.*

Rio Grande pueblos, or perhaps to the truly impressive United States national parks that have been dedicated to the Anasazi villages. Mesa Verde National Park in its twelve by thirteen mile boundary embraces over four thousand archaeological sites (from a very, very short prehistoric duration), which range from small lithic processing sites to large villages hung over the sides of cliffs.

The first people of the Mesa Verde area appeared around the time of Christ and persisted for the next five hundred years as hunters and gatherers. Interestingly, little archaeological data exists about those who may have lived in this general southwestern Colorado area earlier than these last two thousand years. These hunters and gatherers were Archaic-like or Desert Culture-like peoples who had no knowledge of horticulture or probably the bow and arrow. They appear to have been small patrilineal, patrilocal bands of foragers using spears and excellent basketry instead of clay pottery, who wandered in resource cells according to the seasonal availability of food.

Sometime about A.D. 400 and 500, the concept of horticulture having entered, was adopted. The sedentariness engendered by crops, and no doubt the ideas accompanying horticulture, encouraged the development of stable home sites. These small, shallow pithouses were semisubterranean, squarish dwellings that had flat floors, earth and wood perimeter benches, much internal woodwork for roof support and



*Depicting the continued evolution after the horticulture impact was felt around A.D. 500, the diorama illustrates the shallow pithouses with a squarish superstructure that were used in latter Basketmaker times. In the early Pueblo period of about A.D. 800, small house units, constructed of wood and mud, were contiguously formed into a hamlet or a village. In the background corn fields of that village and a neighboring village shimmer in late summer.*



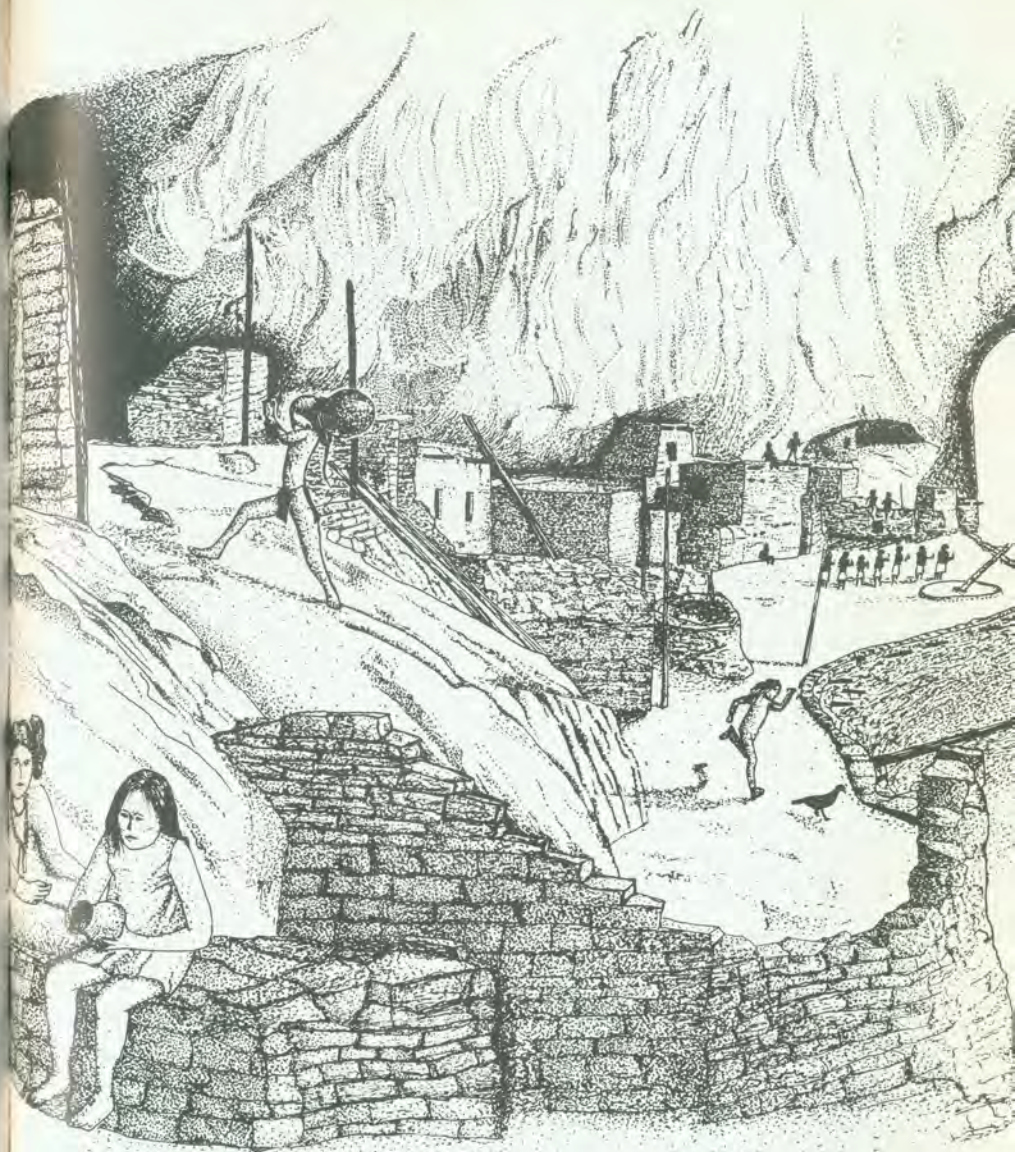
partitions, and roofs of thatch covered with packed earth. These pithouses had much thermal inertia and were, consequently, good engineering solutions to the temperatures of their environs. Additionally, of course, the very nature of massive earth, and its subsequent collapse scenario, have preserved many of these pithouses in thick soils for study.

This whole period is known as Basketmaker and it lasted from A.D. 0 until around A.D. 750. It was only after A.D. 500 (scientifically known as Modified Basketmaker) that sedentariness with pithouses and horticulture appeared. This last one-third also saw people actually occupying the Mesa Verde itself, rather than just hunting its bounty.

During the Modified Basketmaker times, the concept of small villages began to arise, judging from the remains of pithouses clustered in localities. We can also surmise that the inhabitants made a decision to devote the best creek bottom or terrace land to crops, resulting in the placement of domiciles on mesa tops or rock overhangs. Some use of caves apparently continued, but later developments have covered or erased the evidence. Interestingly, there was considerable variability in the layout of the pithouses and their subsidiary structures. This suggests an early period of experimentation or at least an as-yet undefined expectation of proper layout.

Pottery appeared as a light or gray colored utilitarian ware of relatively crude manufacture whose shapes sometime mimed gourds and the other flora items that it replaced. Pottery was not invented in southwestern Colorado, or Mesa Verde, but once introduced, it was elaborated upon according to very local and considerable talents. Pottery, beginning in this late Basketmaker Period of A.D. 550 to 750, also suggests that family sedentariness increased; pottery was also an important advance in storage technology, resisting as it did dampness and rodents. Baskets did continue, as did the use of flora in cordage and clothing as in sandals and fauna for skin and leather apparel.

Another archaeological and cultural indicator of the sedentariness and the increasing socio-technical complexity of this period is the proliferation of heavy stone grinding implements. Typically these implements had a movable (i.e., easily portable) mano for hand use and a slab or basin matrix (the metate, large and not so portable) to grind the corn against. It seems apparent that corn, and of course other flora, was being milled to flour, and the flour then reprocessed into breads or soups by cooking. Except for the new presence of the bow and arrow and the apparent domestication of turkeys, which is an indication of the reliance on animal protein as a continuing resource, the evidence indicates that by A.D. 750, the southwestern Colorado Anasazi (as here exemplified by the Mesa Verde people) were primarily horticulturalists.



*A drawing showing domestic and religious activities in the late Pueblo period (around A.D. 1200) in the spectacular villages, newly created in the cliffs of the Mesa Verde.*





*Spruce Tree House at Mesa Verde in the winter. The Anasazi of the Mesa Verde utilized almost entirely the southerly facing overhangs so that the winter sun would illuminate the pueblo front.*

As time passed their populations seem to have been numerically expanding and at the same time to be perfecting their horticultural resource base. They appear to have entered a particular and dynamic relationship of ever increasing growth and cultural elaboration, which led to a revolution in the sociocultural integration and the rise of architecturally complicated villages. This self-sustaining, oriented trajectory can lead to civilization, as it did many times, or it can lead to an environmental and cultural collapse and mass abandonment, as it did in southwestern Colorado in the late prehistoric Pueblo Period, just five hundred years later.

The Pueblo Period began by A.D. 750 and after but a couple of cultural phases terminated by A.D. 1250 or 1300. The first fifty years of the Pueblo Period did not consist of the monumental cliff dwellings that might spring to mind, but was rather a seminal period of cultural change. Localities became villages, mostly on the mesa tops. The pithouse dwellings split architecturally and functionally into the aboveground, masonry (often of multi-story efficiency) pueblos for domicile and secular use and into the belowground sacred structure of the kiva. Some kivas were further developed into absolutely immense subterranean structures of great and mysterious complexity.

The increasing familiarity with construction, the obviously increased social conformity and formal cooperation, and the probable need for increased crop production and reliability, all materialized into an archaeological view as the great storage dams and small canals were created and maintained. Village and community patterning became doctrine; pueblo room units were adjacent, often in lines or in L or U shapes with the kivas and public courtyards to the south and east. In general, the world of the Anasazi became orthogonal, specified, and oriented beyond the immediate family.



*Many domestic activities were performed in the communal plazas in front of the villages, as is shown in this reenactment.*



*A Hopi man, possibly related to the descendants of, and certainly representative of, the southwestern Colorado Anasazi, tends his wife's cornfield about 1902.*



*In 1899 the pueblo house unit was the center of numerous activities of the Walpi family.*



*A Zuni harvest ceremony, around 1905, also exemplifies ancient Anasazi ways.*

Social revolution went deeper than community patterning and mass cooperation. It included the relatively rapid and fundamental shift from a patrilineal, patrilocal, band-level-social integration to a matrilineal, matrilocal, tribal (or even perhaps chiefdom) level. By A.D. 1000 we must conclude that the descent of much pertinent economic wealth, such as the ownership and the use of fields, was vested in the female line of inheritance, that the marriage rules of Pueblo life stated that the male must move to the village of the woman and her kin, that the ever increased social definition of the villages now included the strong social intervillage partitions of clans, and that the administrative power was vested in a chief-like person.

These chiefs qualified for the job by personal talent, experience, and probably by certain, now intangible, social or descent criteria. No doubt they were guided by councils of peers (whether physically or socially) from whom they derived their immediate rights of leadership.

The male line of descent continued to be important. Hunting rights and knowledge, for example, passed along male-related systems as did the right to use kivas, which may have been "men's houses" as much as sanctuaries. In a matrilineal, matrilocal social integration, however, the "mother's brother(s)" or "father's sister(s)" were also central pathways for social interaction, learning, responsibility, and duty.

Less provable from the material culture that archaeologists find, but quite obvious from the circumstance, is the rise of new religious worlds.

Hunter spirits became, or were replaced by, farmer spirits. Water, those humans who controlled it and those spirits who mediated it, became a central theme. The increasing seriousness of minimal or delayed rain became almost a hysterical force that came to guide the private and public behavior of people. Elaborate ceremonies and a class of priests arose to coach nature and to police the social and biological harmony of the village and its crops.

Technological advances continued at Mesa Verde and most of southwestern Colorado. For example, pottery styles were elaborated by new shapes, applied designs, variations in black and white slip contrasts, technical perfections in production, and wider ranges of secular and sacred uses. Pottery, which survived the brush of time so well, intimates by its complex but ruled decoration both the probable close mental culture of the female pottery makers and the partitioning of time by temporal units as small as decades.

The pottery of the Anasazi did not see the use of the wheel; rather, it was basically constructed by coiling and smoothing—as was all of the New World pottery in prehistory. An example of pottery technology is the development of corrugations on the cooking ware. It can be speculated that the corrugations, beyond design and motif, greatly increased hand adhesion when carrying large vessels and the surface of the pot for heat transfer from fire.

*This small, pottery pitcher from Mesa Verde is now in the Colorado Historical Society collections. The simplicity of the neck designs is apparently a Mesa Verde style, but the hatched, filled designs on the sides recall Chacoan styles from the south.*



*Utilitarian pottery of the Anasazi—from the collections at the Colorado Historical Society—were daily wares and are often the bulk of the pottery recovered by archaeologists. The surface texture may have been decorative, to improve adhesion when carrying heavy loads and to increase the surface area for heat transfer in a fire. Additional and eminently important pottery paraphernalia include lids, carrying straps, and woven grass potholders. On the left rear, large cooking pot, a dark and light area is prominent, which is a result of microenvironmental factors in the pottery firing process (particularly the presence of oxygen) and of daily use wherein a particularly hot fire may have ashed or spalled a dark surface.*

*A large storage vessel, a bowl with a unique and possibly unfinished exterior, and a ladle, displayed with the heavy sandstone grinding slab (metate) on which the Anasazi women ground their corn a thousand years ago.*



*Pitchers, bowls, and ladles were only part of a rich ceramic assemblage. Also shown are two tobacco smoking tubes (Cloudblowers), a small container with hanging lugs, and a finely made mug. In the front are necklaces of white beads, probably Olivella shell, a trade item ultimately from the Gulf Coast.*



*These bowls for eating and storing reveal and are an expression of individual, artistic genius. With the previous illustrations, these pieces of pottery were recovered as unbroken, intact artifacts as the result of the Wetherill expeditions of the late 1880s. These bowls have not been reconstructed by glue, but rather were lifted whole from the pueblo ruins where they had laid, undisturbed save for the wind, snow, and animals, since the A.D. 1350s.*

The Anasazi became very adept at, and uniform in, their village and house constructions, which included the use of both wood and masonry. The press of stomachs with burgeoning populations sees the wholesale incorporation of previously marginal land into crop land. Even erosional soils are captured by check dams and other water management technology.

Little is known about the human biology of the Anasazi. Populations were now large compared to the hunting and gathering periods; most burials were made by folding up the body and subsequently interring them in trash mounds, which were by now sufficiently deep to cover the body and not an indication of disrespect. And we now archaeologically see human skulls that show evidence of flattening due to the new use of childhood cradle boards.

Around A.D. 1100 sufficient elaboration and solidification of pueblo traits had occurred that prehistorians set aside the period of A.D. 1100 to 1300 as the Great Pueblo period. This period of but two centuries is unique and spectacular in Colorado so far as surviving material culture, such as architecture, new village locations, and pottery, is concerned.

The most obvious development in the Great Pueblo period is the coalescing of populations into larger villages. The villages saw a walling up of outside doorways, the sitting of kivas inside villages, and the constructing of new stone towers, some of which may have been lookout structures. The people at Mesa Verde who dwelt in these large villages quite suddenly found it appropriate to abandon the mesa tops of the Mesa Verde to build whole new villages in its massive rock overhangs. This amazing shift occurred around and after about A.D. 1200. Most of southwestern Colorado was abandoned by A.D. 1300. The magnificent villages in the rock overhangs, exemplified by Cliff Palace, Spruce Tree House, and Balcony House, were of a remarkably short, temporal duration. It is, therefore, also remarkable that one of the favorite areas of modern tourists should be from such a short time span (1/10) of the already short Anasazi period and that the cliff dwellings were so prehistorically aberrant.

Why was it appropriate to live on, and in, the sides of cliffs? Not only was the re-creation of their villages a monumental task, but these new locations must have been less convenient in many ways; certainly they were quite dangerous for the old and the young. The backs of the overhangs, however, often had water from seeps and the climatic protection was enhanced not only by shelter from the wind but also by the thermal inertia of the rock and the seasonal effects of sun-warming on the south-facing villages. There is almost no evidence of warfare, even in the guise of raiding. Although a number of local villages had become recognized in the area as trade centers for goods from, and for, the large

southwestern culture area, it is not clear that this need for security would explain the village relocations.

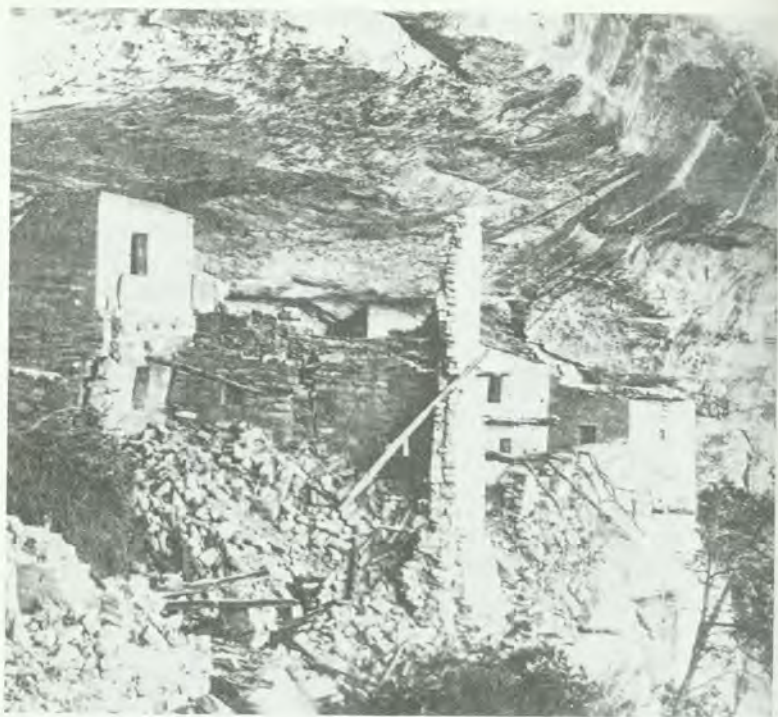
Otherwise, life in the villages seems to have gone along as usual; water control systems were maintained and architectural techniques were further refined, particularly in the increased rigor of masonry block preparation and the substantially decreased use of mortar. The manufacture of the characteristic Mesa Verde black-on-white ware culminated these hundreds of years of local development.

With the agglutination of populations, social leadership undoubtedly became more complex as several clans and larger numbers of people lived in smaller, more limiting space. Indeed, the relocation of the villages must have been one of the major group decisions and efforts in the prehistory of Colorado. The increasing importance of horticulture to existence no doubt saw an ever increasing complexity of religious guidance. The rise of oppressive political leadership, so characteristic of many other horticultural trajectories from band-level hunters to crop-raising villages to urban states is not apparent. No slavery is evident and little suggestion of other than a local, egalitarian society exists, even during the Great Pueblo times.

Yet, after several generations, less than 100 years after the Great Pueblo period, the people throughout southwestern Colorado disappeared. Mesa Verde, Hovenweep, all the many, many other Anasazi village centers became empty. This is a great mystery to archaeologists of today. We surmise that drought (for example, a medium-long, dry period from A.D. 1273 to 1287 as recorded in the tree rings), that the human depletion of the soil, that the local deforestation of the mountains and mesa tops, and that the hunting pressure and possible local extinction of various game—all combined to create an intolerable subsistence effort. The role of warfare is, again, not clear or apparently important. The people appear to have left peacefully and in good order. Except for the aged who may have refused to move and remained behind, entire villages may have left, probably with substantial planning.

The sudden overuse of local subsistence resources is a possible generic explanation. We must all admit how human societies can fail to recognize and abide by the average carrying capacity of the land, and perhaps the pueblos were victims of this human trait.

We must note that southwestern Colorado, in this period of A.D. 1000 to 1300, was also a very important trading post for somewhat more advanced pueblo communities to the south. The most obvious scenario involves the villages of Chaco, just seventy-five miles to the southeast. This major religious and trade center, as it too became pressured by environmental and social circumstance, may have exploited by trade and physical presence, the remaining largesse of the Mesa Verde and



*This early 1900s view of Balcony House at Mesa Verde, prior to its reconstruction as a national park visitation area, shows the remarkable and romantic aura, resulting from over seven centuries of abandonment, of a resistant and orthogonal architecture. Below, the Fairview House in the 1920s was visited by local tourists to observe excavations.*



surrounding locales. This is to say, of course, that the social factors of departure from the Mesa Verde are even less understood than the physical.

We do not actually know where the people of southwestern Colorado went. It is as difficult to believe that they walked away individually to become extinct locally as it is to not believe that the bulk of the villages saw members go south 100 to 200 miles and join the Rio Grande pueblos, probably along clan or other kinship lines.

We can speculate that the social organization among these Anasazi villages of southwestern Colorado was important to the withdrawal. Sufficient order existed to be manageable, and this level of social order probably could respond to such a slow disaster without the sociocultural fragmentation expectable from more complex political systems. It is just this clear mystery of abandonment, coupled with the facilely familiar architecture and village life of the pueblo, which so forcefully attracts our romantic curiosity about the late prehistory of Colorado.<sup>6</sup>

The Anasazi of southwestern Colorado have been said to illustrate one of the several dynamic outputs of introducing horticulture into an area. One result is the rise of a stable village life, increased populations, ever more complex socio-cultural-political-religious- and physical-maintenance systems. The obvious approach to the unforgiving limits of subsistence procurement may well, however, send some other populations to growth and then to a major collapse. Rather than a transition to some new subsistence capture or some quantum change in a sociocultural integration, which would be capable of even greater environmental insulation, such societies become locally extinct.

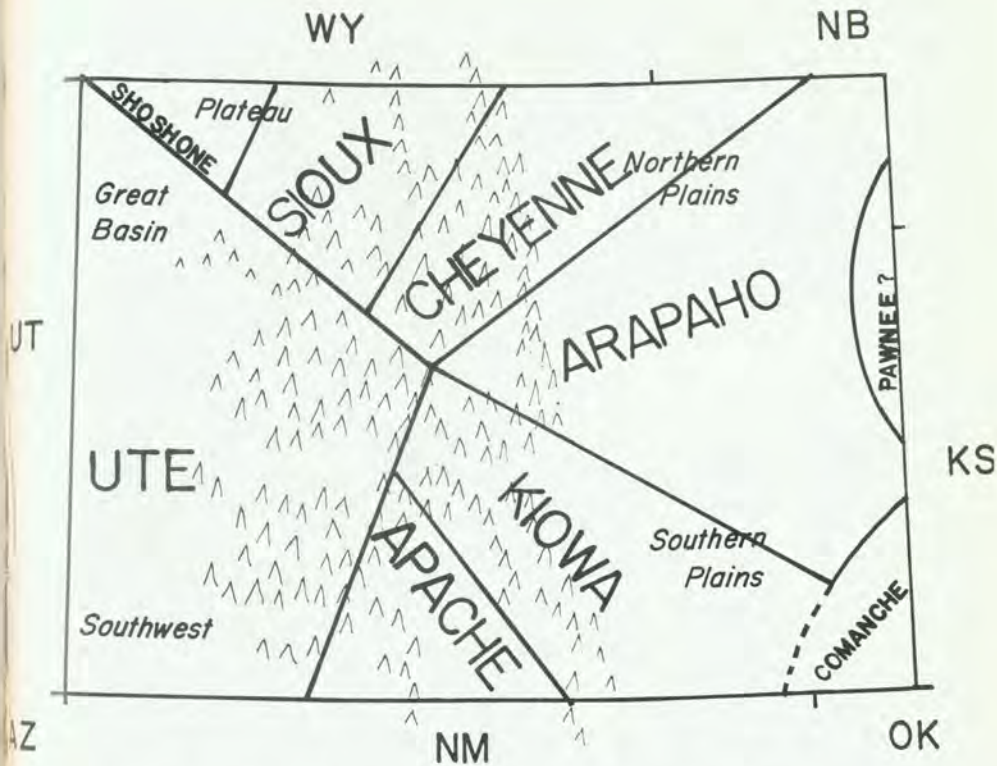
The Anasazi were not alone in abandoning Colorado as horticulturists of late prehistory. The Fremont and the Woodland/Plains Villagers also went. This may mean we must seek very high-level explanations, such as broad climatic influence involving changes in storm tracks or perhaps other human activities, such as migrations, rather than any specific cultural failings. Instead of an advancing horticulture and a continuing cultural evolution, the late prehistory of Colorado is the story of mass abandonment, depopulation, and the loss of various cultural continuities. We cannot help but speculatively dwell upon the enormity of this fate.

<sup>6</sup> It can also be noted that Mesa Verde material culture formed the contribution of Colorado to the remarkable 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, and that the 1906 National Antiquities Act was a direct result of Colorado Senator Thomas M. Patterson's efforts to protect Mesa Verde from commercial and private ravage.

## The End of Prehistory

The period from about A.D. 1300 or 1400, until the substantial Euroamerican local documentation of the 1700s and 1800s, is a period of protohistoric transition into the awareness of history. Yet, the succeeding, almost instantaneous, historical period comprises the majority of what is known about the culture history of Colorado. The temporal transition zone of protohistoric and early historic people, seen largely by archaeology, to the embracement by the vision of A.D. 1900s history, is difficult to traverse. Much of our perception and understanding of this protohistoric period lies only in the realm of archaeology and its sister anthropological discipline of native ethnography. In addition to the historical Euroamerican written sources, Industrial Archaeology, Urban Archaeology, Historical Archaeology, and Architecture also contribute to the perceptions we have of the Colorado of just yesterday. Yet, the criteria of recognition and familiarity shifts and there is often an actual hiatus of compelling episodes.

The protohistoric period sees the conflicts and the new, vigorous equilibria of the Euroamerican inoculations. As such, Colorado is a classic statement of the second inoculation by the Old World of the New World. While the history of the Euroamerican peoples in Colorado was springing de novo but with patent continuity, the native peoples were transiting a difficult one-half millennium from A.D. 1400 to 1900, with



*This map depicts the "Ethnographic Present" of the 1820s, for example, when a confusion of native Coloradoan's lore and newly arrived Euroamerican reports ended prehistory. This idealized sketch suggests the political landscape apparent to historic Indian nations (to respect the conservative term in modern Indian usage), since such a map cannot yet be validated by historical identification, since boundaries do not probably embody the actual Colorado Indian mental percepts of the time, and especially since territorial claims shifted rapidly over time. Note that the sociocultural world here represented is alien to the previous maps. Not only is the last of the indigenous megafauna, the bison, beginning to fall to the Euroamerican needs, but the great prehistoric horticulturalists are so far gone that memory fails and only great mysteries dwell in the old villages going to soil. The native people are now again foragers, not only of food, but also of the metal, glass, and society of the new Euroamerican nations. Some native peoples have horses, and the horses coupled with new weapons and trade opportunities create a transient Plains Culture.*



*A quiet, summer, domestic scene in a camp of the 1830s on the plains of Colorado, this drawing is based upon an archaeological site south of La Junta and emphasizes traditional material culture.*





*A not so peaceful, domestic, 1890s scene of Ute women and children in a fort where the power of traditional society is manifested in jugs, clothing styles, and portable shelters.*

disintegrating societies and values. What we now read as the hostiles in most historical prose and see as their sad or glaring faces in early photographs came into history concomitantly with their own, near extinction. Euroamerican history captures them, and we often fail to perceive their own thin, but still unbroken, continuum of fifteen millennia.

Most of the Indians of Colorado, as known from the historical period, were a mosaic reflection of a particular earlier time, the Archaic. The Ute bands of the mountains, the Western Slope, and the Front Range, and the Apache, Arapaho, and Cheyenne nations and their subdivisions of the historic plains were essentially band-level hunters and gatherers, who in this foraging existence were scattered as seasonal wanderers over immense resource collection areas. Other Indians reflected the previous Horticulturalists and knew well of maize. All, with their attention to the bison, faintly reflected the Paleoindians.

The Apaches' southward passage along the Front Range to the southeastern plains of Colorado in early protohistory, the reverberating pressure of the native Great Lakes peoples' displacement west by Euroamerican events around A.D. 1500 and 1600 on the East Coast, the coming (actually the return) of the horse, and particularly the introduction of a trade-and-raid economy by Euroamericans, all combined into a unique, aberrant era, made golden to many readers by the retrospect of the survivors.



*An 1890s child conveys the human cost of contesting Colorado and later, in a family context, a handsome Southern Ute couple with their children sit for their portrait in 1906. The man's employment, suggested by a billy club and committee identification, may perhaps be as a tribal peace officer.*





*A Middle Park Plains Indian encampment, date unknown but probably from the 1870s, contrasts with another Plains Indian, early 1900s, encampment in northeastern Colorado, showing an exciting and varied village noontday.*



*A 1904 painting by Frederic Remington portrays an attack on a wagon train in the days when the "hostiles" were a threat to Euroamerican transportation. In 1913 Oliver Toll (below, right) organized a tour to establish local geographic place-names, based upon Indian perceptions. He enlisted the expertise of two Arapaho men, Sherman Sage and Gun Griswold, for accuracy.*





*In Meeker County park in the 1880s, where the courthouse now stands, these Ute huddled against the early morning chill and the gaze of more recent immigrants. Below, an 1880s view on the flats of a life-giving river in southeastern Colorado shows an abandoned Apache camp.*



By the time that an exploitive mineral and agricultural economy, with rail transportation and national market orientation with urbanism had occurred in the later A.D. 1800s, the Indians of Colorado had passed out of that warm and savage age into the disastrous trend that has led most to reservations, and many to urban orthogonals.

There is a lesson of sorts in the anthropology of this aberrant instant that transcends the mystery of actual peoples and material culture. The lesson is the monstrous cost when two constellations of societies, each with subdivisions and distinctions of culture, contest the land. In the case of Colorado, the second inoculation of Euroamericans, as a highly technological, populous, empire-motivated people, clearly was to prevail over the first of the Indians. Both sides mingled, physically suffered, and agonized into a new, mostly single, equilibrium. The Indians were starved and brutalized by developments and ultimately their pristine societies and culture were essentially destroyed by new diseases and the uselessness of old meanings. Many of the Euroamericans of those times, though much, much less depleted, also recognized and bore a parallel burden of pain and perception. It would, however, be arrogant for us to very deeply dissect the moral values of this refracted parable on the face of our Colorado.

## A Colorado Book of the Dead



During prehistory, we were close to the landscape. In our Paleolithic times, we lived on a tundra, and even some ice. In Archaic and Horticultural times, we lived on plains and in mixed forests, in the invisible rain of pollen that tells the kingdoms of our plants. Now we dwell, ever more so, in landscapes of our own choice. Or even, of our own design. Perhaps the glaciers, and dry and wet colds, will return, but now we have the fusion power of the sun to resist. In the 5.5 million days of our prehistory, we could not.

Before history, we first dwelt in small, personal, egalitarian societies, and more than one-half of us never got to age five. Later, much, much later, we became more populous and even had tribes to be our social worlds. Most of us, then, never saw more than a thousand other people in an entire lifetime, and less than a hundred in the earlier times. And some of us, lacking the optical magic of glass, never saw anything very clearly, except our essential equality.

In Colorado past, we walked a lot. We were rare on the landscape, and we did not, could not, mold it to our desires. Energy was ourselves, lifting or pulling. Only in the last moments, after most of us were gone, did we get the horse back, and we did not even have time to invent saddles. Now we can fly.

In Colorado past, we were diverse. Some of us looked toward chiefdoms with burial and temple mounds, down river, to the distant, very distant, east. Some of us looked toward villages with great irrigation works, down river, to the distant, very distant, south. Over time, our direction of influence rotated as much as does a flower stalk in the wind. Our boundaries were closer. And our view of the physical world was smaller, but our vistas of the unseen world larger.

In Colorado past, change was slower. We were revolutionized by horticulture and the passing of the great megafauna. Yet these took many generations and we, as persons, hardly perceived the changes. Most of the time, there was no change, for generations without meaningful number.

We were many things as the best adults in our societies, which we now can contemplate only as children. We broke the land with our own hands, our own hands and back, always, and carried water to see the corn spirit grow us life. Now we browse for glass and metal-contained delights from a thousand origins, in any season. Then, we ran the bison off cliffs and by our own hand ran shafts into his churning guts.

We thanked the unseen world of spirits. And even if they do not exist, even if they did not exist, we were harmonious with these spirits. We walked to out-crops of flint and broke it out, broke it up, whacked it down, and shattered it into extensions of our own teeth and eyes.

We built villages when we could, wandered in our territories when

we could not. We now drive birds, pour rock, explode liquids, own everything, and worship ourselves.

Like the fading of rainbows when the water withdraws from the air or the sun from its geometry with our eyes, we died, all the time, then. And being gone, we returned our borrowed flesh to our creators by burial in mother earth, or father sky. The meaning of the depths of deep water and where it went, or the comfort of the night sky, cloud upon cluster of delicious lights horizon to horizon piling like the sparkling billows of thunderstorms, were powerful mysteries. Our living worship was, more humbly, to divine the coordinates and gifts of fellow life expressed as the grass and trees, the birds and bison, and the rotations and reflections of surficial wind and water.

And in the permutations of all this, our lives, our fears and prides, we managed to make more of us, that our children might carry our human essence off into unguessed futures, and pasts, like the petals of flowers forever emerging and opening. And in this, carrying the rebus of humanity over the arroyos of oblivion, we-then are like we-now.

The meaning of seeing the silent, hued people of prehistory, whether of Colorado or of Planet Earth, is that this rare knowledge allows us to transcend the limits of our own ephemeral vigil. Sight of the past frees us to perceive the pattern and the process of our creation and existence, before we individually fold into the night, which has embraced, automatically and ignorantly, all of our earlier relatives. And will so, us. Hail darkness.

Knowledge of prehistory, or more broadly cultural history, is not explanation or redemption. It is a sunny tool to approach the heritage of ourselves, and our brothers and sisters, in order that we might appreciate the sensate present, always departing, and anticipate the hopeful future, ever approaching. Both ever as distant as the far, and speechless, past.

And those of you beyond tomorrow who read this after we have gone to memory, be charitable. Think of how much more you must know about Books of the Dead, and how much wiser that must make you and your world.

