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Occupying a territory of remarkably diverse natural resources in a borderland with access to several natural cultural regions, Idaho offers superior opportunities for investigation of cultural interchange and diffusion. A broad east and west oriented valley provides an excellent route through generally mountainous country which interrupts travel between Mississippi Valley and Pacific Coast settlements. Great Plains, Great Basin, and Northwestern Plateau cultures have come in contact through Idaho for a hundred centuries or more. Prehistoric Idaho peoples have exhibited cultural traits from all these areas. Historic settlements have been influenced by similar contacts. Southeastern Idaho has a strong affiliation with Utah. Miners from California and Nevada expanded into Idaho just when Mormons began their colonization north from Utah. North Idaho miners, in turn, extended their mineral empire on into Montana and British Columbia. A close cultural association resulted from this movement. Occupation of farm lands of eastern Washington and eastern Oregon continued on into Idaho. Geographically a segment of an arid interior Pacific Northwest Columbia Basin area with some Great Basin fringe lands, Idaho traditionally has maintained an economic affinity with Portland and Seattle. Spokane developed as a North Idaho mining and transportation center as well as a Washington farming metropolis. Southeastern Idaho, however, has an economic as well as religious capital in Salt Lake. Southwestern Idaho has economic and social connections with Pacific Coast centers as well as with Utah communities. An interesting zone of cultural transition emerged in this strategic geographical location.

Aside from natural opportunities for cultural interchange, Idaho has extremely odd political boundaries which bring diverse sections together in political and administrative units. This situation, decidedly unsatisfactory for efficient management or legislative operations, has had a cultural impact that merits investigation. For a quarter century prior to state admission, North Idaho went to great effort to achieve almost any kind of boundary reform in a geographically ludicrous situation. Failure of a long series of territorial reorganization projects engendered sectional conflict and bitterness which persisted after Idaho became a state in 1890. Yet with no option aside from overcoming natural mountain and canyon barriers to political convenience, Idaho's legislature and

government has functioned in spite of having to serve a disconnected community which lacks a plausible geographic base.

Over more than a century of northwestern settlement has brought a varied set of close relationships between parts of North Idaho and Washington, Montana, and British Columbia. Southern Idaho has represented a Pacific northwestern extension toward basin and plains regions farther south and east during that same era. As a corridor of transportation and communication from those regions, Idaho's Snake Plains continue to provide an avenue of cultural interaction which has been prominent for thousands of years and which has continued to influence settlement patterns ever since emigrant wagons came through after 1840.

No other state matches Idaho in a combination of internal geographic separation and access to major western cultural areas, although most western states have a variety of physiographical sections with clashing interests imposed by economic geography. Pacific Northwest political boundaries generally fail to coincide with natural economic units. Each state, therefore, has areas with interests allied more closely to those of adjacent parts of other states rather than to other sections to which they are attached by inappropriate state boundaries. Identification of cultural geographic areas independent of political boundaries has to precede demarcation of cultural resource study units. Eastern Washington (increased by part of adjacent northeastern Oregon), northwestern Montana, and southeastern British Columbia form a region with North Idaho which can be subdivided into several convenient cultural resource areas. Much of eastern Oregon and southwestern Idaho have a similar close association. Northern Utah, southeastern Idaho, and southwestern Wyoming go together. A portion of south central Idaho combines well with some of southwestern Montana. When these relationships are recognized, Idaho's traditional sectional division of north and south can be explained more fully in terms of segments of a broader region incorporating various parts of Idaho's two sections. Altogether, Idaho has a half-dozen or so areas which combine into two major sections which have been recognized since 1864.

Although a variety of Idaho cultural subdivisions, most of them overlapping into other states, can be identified. They can be grouped into a half-dozen useful cultural resource units as follows:

North Idaho

Kootenai
 Pend d'Oreille
 Coeur d'Alene
 Clearwater-Palouse

South Idaho

Salmon River Mountains and associated ranges
Southwestern Snake River Plains and Owyhee area
Southcentral Snake River Plains
Southeastern Snake River Plains and Bear River region

Each of these areas contains segments appropriate for independent detailed investigation. Movement of cultural traits through these areas (some of which act as barriers and some as avenues of communication) provides important interrelationships. Although they cannot be studied in isolation, they offer good contexts for specific examination in a substantial number of subjects.

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