



IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
REFERENCE SERIES

BOISE SHOSHONI PEOPLES

Number 1024

September 1994

Shoshoni inhabitants of Boise Valley had a great economic advantage of salmon fisheries and vegetable resources like bitterroot plants during many centuries of life here. Then they acquired horses from New Mexico more than a century before a local gold rush disrupted their community after 1862. With horses, they could go buffalo hunting and reach camas grounds much more easily. Camas plants (an onion-like vegetable) became especially important.

When Donald Mackenzie and Wilson Price Hunt discovered Boise Valley in 1811, they found a Shoshoni camp near Table Rock, "with a great many horses grazing around it." Hunt noticed that Boise's earlier "inhabitants, too, appeared to be better clad than usual." During that fur trade era, Peiem, a prominent Boise Shoshoni leader, managed to negotiate successfully with trappers and other Indian peoples for a peaceful economic development. That arrangement helped his people adjust to a transition in which products available from Hudson's Bay Company and Saint Louis sources gave them equipment like knives and needles to help make their lives easier. But European diseases like smallpox devastated Boise Shoshoni peoples, particularly after 1780 and 1837.