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BOISE SHOSHONI

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As one of the most prominent Northern Shoshoni mounted bands at the time of white exploration of the Snake country, the Boise Shoshoni ranged over a wide territory during the fur trade era. (So did the other major Northern Shoshoni mounted bands.) Occupying the northwestern borderland of the Northern Shoshoni region, they had important early contacts with the Northern Paiute, many of whom infiltrated into the Northern Shoshoni portion of the Snake country through Boise Shoshoni territory. Actually, such a Northern Paiute transition was not too difficult to make: linguistically, both the Northern Shoshoni and Northern Paiute are Shoshonean peoples (as were all Shoshoni and Paiute), and although the Boise Shoshoni traditionally resisted such a Northern Paiute advance for a long time, a powerful Northern Paiute leader (whom the English would have called Mr. Foote) eventually reconciled the Boise Shoshoni to allow ambitious Northern Paiute Indians to join them in the Snake country. A substantial number of Northern Paiute gradually obtained horses from the Shoshoni and became buffalo hunters in the upper Snake country and on the plains of Montana and Wyoming. Those who hunted buffalo in association with the Fort Hall Shoshoni were known as Bannock. Those associated more with the Boise Shoshoni were identified only as Northern Paiute, if they were distinguished at all.

During the time of the fur trade, the Boise Shoshoni retained their important position in the large composite bands in which the Northern Shoshoni had begun to travel. Donald Mackenzie and Alexander Ross regarded Peiem (or Big Jim) as the most noted of all the Northern Shoshoni leaders in one of the composite bands. A second major composite band, led by The Horse--a Bannock--had more of a Northern Paiute identification with the Fort Hall Shoshoni. Both traveled widely over the Northern Shoshoni range, as well as Crow, Blackfoot, and other hunting and trading lands. After the fur trade, large composite bands of the earlier nineteenth-century broke up into more modest groups, with Peiem's son, Captain Jim, as leader of the Boise Shoshoni.

Most white travelers through the Snake country had a hard at all. Conventional practice was to identify any Shoshonean

time distinguishing Northern Shoshoni and Northern Paiute Indians they happened to meet, if they bothered to try to separate them

at all. Conventional practice was to identify any Shoshonean

people in the Snake country as Snakes, for whom the country was named. Sometimes these Shoshoneans have been referred to as mixed bands of Northern Shoshonean and Northern Paiute. A more accurate designation of this kind would be "bands of mixed Northern Shoshoni and Paiute." Some small Northern Paiute bands actually did frequent parts of the Boise Shoshoni terrain-- notably in one area near New Plymouth and another near Nampa. But in southwestern Idaho and eastern Oregon, small Boise Shoshoni groups often included Northern Paiute members, while Northern Paiute bands had Northern Shoshoni members. Within the Northern Shoshoni and Northern Paiute community, individual Indians and families shifted from one band to another with ease.

This same kind of transition, in which Northern Paiutes moved into a Northern Shoshoni band (or vice versa) became more common as their contacts increased, especially after 1860 when white settlement changed their situation. Santomeco, a Jordan Valley Boise Shoshoni leader who subscribed to the treaty of Fort Boise of October 10, 1864, was Northern Paiute, for example, while Egan, the leader of an upper Malheur Northern Paiute band in eastern Oregon during the Bannock War, was Northern Shoshoni. (This kind of situation should not surprise white observers too much: Christopher Columbus, who led an important Spanish expedition in 1492, was an Italian--as was John Cabot who performed the same kind of service for the English in 1497. Spanish and Italian may generally be regarded as the equivalent of Shoshoni and Paiute in this context.)

During a century and more of reservation life, Shoshoni and Northern Paiute integration has increased in places like Fort Hall and Duck Valley. When the Boise Shoshoni were displaced by white settlement of southwestern Idaho after the gold rush, the Fort Hall reservation was established for their benefit (but not very close to their home base) in 1867, and after the treaty of Fort Bridger in 1868, the Bannock and Fort Hall Shoshoni were able to arrange for admission to Fort Hall Reservation (located centrally in their homeland) in place of Wind River to which white negotiators of the Fort Bridger treaty had assigned them. As a major band at Fort Hall during reservation times, the Boise Shoshoni still had representatives on the Western Shoshoni Duck Valley Reservation as well as in other western areas. Because of difficulties in resolving their Boise claim for southwestern Idaho lands to which the United States has never succeeded in acquiring title, the Boise Shoshoni continue to retain an identity that otherwise might have been lost in the confusion that attended their exile from their homeland in 1869.

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