

Between the Rivers and the Desert

The archaeology of the North
American Plateau

The
plateau's
main
'compass':
east and
west (wetter
and drier)
and north
and south
(colder and
warmer)

Hell's Canyon,
Snake River,
Idaho...

Fraser River Plateau, western section...

Environmental
diversity and
complexity
fosters cultural
diversity and
(ranges of)
complexity...

Plateau Environment and Landscape

- Environment deeply affected by:
 - relative aridity (rainshadow effect)
 - glacial “relandscaping” that shaped ridges, and water courses
 - volcanism (volcanic eruptions and earthquakes)
- Generally: dry, rolling uplands running north/south, cross-cut by a few major river channels running east/ west

Cultural Timeline:

- Early:
- 11,500 BP and earlier = PaleoIndian
- marked by very large Clovis points
- But also marked by increased diversity and specialization, esp. river fishing, and north (microblade) vs. southeast (Windust and Cascade style points)

East Wenatchee Clovis
Cache artifacts...

Cultural Timeline, continued...

- Middle:
- 8,000-4,000 BP
- Development of highly diverse economies and societies
- linked to each other and to PNW by river travel and trade
- rise of complex ceremonialism associated with burial
- pithouse village settlement pattern emerges

Sewepemc pithouse, Kamloops area

Cultural Timeline, part 3...

- Late:
- 4,000 BP – 500 BP
- Emergence of modern ethnic groups and societies
- Responses to fluctuating climate cycles affecting primarily relative aridity
 - some periods people are more sedentary, some periods people are more mobile.
 - Trade links also fluctuate. In places where larger pithouse villages appear, increased social hierarchy also appears.
 - Possible emergence of trade specialists/brokers along long-distance trade routes
 - New movements of Salish people in from coast, Athapaskans from subarctic, and Numic speakers from the south...

Historical Period:

- 500 BP to present
- First area where we see impact of both the horse and the fur trade at beginning of modern period
- European occupation of this region characterized by extensive, diverse, and continuing interaction with large numbers of indigenous peoples.
- Archaeology of the modern period shaped by major extractive industries: fur, timber, minerals, and industrial agriculture (range cattle industry)

Key theme to take home:

- Opting for strategies of flexibility rather than intensification:
 - In the Plateau, over time, we see some people opting for intensification (like PNW) and some opting for flexibility (like Great Basin)