A BRIEF HISTORY AND PREHISTORY OF CENTRAL OREGON

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Prehistory

Portions of Central Oregon exhibit evidence of human occupation for at least the last 12,000 years. There are no known sites representative of the Paleo-Indian period prior to 10,500 years ago in Central Oregon, that is, sites with pre-10,500 dates and corresponding fluted points. However, there are sites in Central Oregon with dates that fall into this period without the cultural elements, specifically Fort Rock Cave (Bedwell 1973) and the Paulina Lake Site (Connolly 1995). Typically in Western North American, elements of settlement and land use during this period with archaeological implications include: small site sizes, very infrequent occurrences, low assemblage diversity, fluted point types (Clovis, Folsom) and raw material types derived from sources at great distances. Collectively, these attributes document a pattern dominated by short-term, non-recurrent use/occupation of particular sites and locales (Houser 1996). Their occurrence is thought to likely exist in and around Central Oregon, but likely obscured by deposition such as that caused by aeolian and fluvial forces, and Mt. Mazama in particular.

As the climate became warmer and drier during the early Holocene, large game became less abundant and subsistence necessarily became more diversified with increasing reliance on a wider range of plant foods. Considerable more evidence of human use of Central Oregon appears at this time, i.e., between about 10,500 and 7,000 years ago. There may be some locations within Central Oregon which contain **Early Archaic** sites dating from this period; however, as with sites assigned to the Paleo-Indian period, sites of the Early Archaic are also thought to be buried under Mt. Mazama ash and pumice and more difficult to locate (Houser 1996).

Between 7,000 and 2,000 years ago, known as the **Middle Archaic**, there is a virtual explosion in the physical evidence for human presence in the Pacific Northwest and in Central Oregon. The number of archaeological sites dating to this period increases dramatically, as Native populations expanded into environments only previously minimally visited or exploited. During this same period, inter-regional trade networks became more firmly established, with trade goods helping to offset periodic, localized shortages of food and other commodities. The "winter village pattern" emerged during this period. Although definitions vary among researchers, its primary characteristics include clusters of pithouse dwellings. These features are considered to mark the beginning of the pattern of culture on the Plateau and contiguous portions of the Great Basin that still existed at the time of Contact (i.e. between Native and European populations).

The final episode of prehistory in Central Oregon begins about 2,000 years ago and is referred to as the **Late Archaic**. While there appear to have been no fundamental shifts in cultural adaptation from the preceding period, regional variation and adaptation appear to have continued, resulting in even more distinctive local cultures, which may have involved migrations of Numic speaking peoples into the area (Aikens and Jenkins 1994). While there is an abundance of sites dating to the Late Archaic, some areas may actually have seen reduced use and visitation during this period. Mack's survey at Glass Buttes (Mack 1975) clearly demonstrates reduced use of this region during the Late Archaic. Connoly (1995) also notes a reduction of obsidian procurement from Newberry Caldera sources at this time.

History

The earliest Euroamerican entry into the semiarid interior of Oregon was in 1825 with the explorations of Finan McDonald and Peter Skene Ogden. Following Indian trails, Hudson's Bay trappers set out to explore the upper Deschutes watershed and traveled as far south as Klamath Lakes. The British intended to trap out the area so that Americans crossing the Rockies would find hundreds of miles of terrain barren of fur resources. Initially, contact with native peoples was friendly; however, by 1826, Ogden's camp was threatened when local Indians set the plain near his camp on fire late one windy night. American fur trappers arrived in the 1830's, but encountered extreme difficulties and near starvation. It was truly a beaver desert (LaLande 1987).

In the 1840's, the promotion of the Trans-Mississippi West by Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton led to a round of governmental supported exploring expeditions. Lt. John C. Fremont of the Topographical Engineers explored the eastern flank of the Cascades in 1843-1844. His diary celebrates the beauty of Central Oregon, "the beautiful pine forest, the deep and swift Deschutes, and the bottomlands of lush grass" (Fremont 1970[1]:582-583).

In 1855, the Department of the Army dispatched an expedition of Topographical Engineers to explore a variety of railroad routes to link the Pacific with the Mississippi Valley. Under the direction of the Lt. Henry L. Abbot and Lt. Robert Stockton Williamson, the expedition passed through the Deschutes country in the fall of 1855. The Pacific Railroad Survey provided detailed scientific information on geology, mapped the land, and collected botanical specimens. Slowly, information on the Oregon Territory was accumulated. These early explorations between 1825 and 1855 were limited to recording data, trapping furs, and collecting food as small groups moved through new territory (Williamson and Abbot, 1855).

In the 1840's - 1850's, the lure of Oregon Country stimulated thousands to set across the plains and cross the Rockies over the Oregon Trail that traversed western states north of present day Central Oregon. In 1843, 700 settlers crossed along the trail; in 1845, 3,000 emigrants traversed the trail. The discovery of gold in California in 1848 prompted a great rush of emigrants across the west. Several "shortcuts" also were used in 1854 and again in 1852. Crossing due west across central Oregon after the Oregon trail crossed the Snake River, more than 1,000 emigrants followed a former fur trapper named Stephen Meek over the disastrous Meek Cutoff. One contingent crossed near the present town of Bend. Emigrants suffered illness from fevers, hunger, and lack of water. Many died during the crossing of the Oregon Desert; others perished later as a result of the rigors of the journey (Minor et al. 1987).

By the mid-1850's, conflicts between native peoples and emigrants became more numerous. Between 1855 and 1865, several bands were engaged in open warfare against the settlers. Treaties initially were negotiated between 1851 and 1855, but few of these gained Senate ratification. In 1855, the tribes of Central Oregon (including the Upper Deschutes Band of the Walla Wallas, Tenino Band of Walla Wallas, John Day Band of Walla Wallas, Dalles Band of Wascoes, Ki-gal-twal-la Band of Wascoes, and the Hood River Band of Wascoes) signed the Treaty of 1855.

These were Chinookan and Shahaptian-speaking peoples who occupied the western part of the Columbia Plateau and the lower Deschutes watershed. Overlooked in the treaty were the numerous bands of Northern Paiute who also used this area in common with the Tenino (Minor et al. 1987).

The Yahooskin Band of the Paiute, likely centered along the Sycan March and Summer Lake, signed the Treaty of 1864 along with the Klamath and Modoc. The Walpapi Band under the Leader Paulina, however, withdrew from the conference and refused to sign. Northern Paiute Bands frequently raided the Warm Springs Reservation, driving off horses and cattle, and raided emigrants and early settlers. A series of military campaigns were mounted against the Paiute, notably Paulina's Band, between 1860 and 1864. The leader Paulina was killed in 1867 and his death signaled the end of Indian wars in Central Oregon (Minor et al. 1987).

Initial settlement of the Deschutes Basin began in the 1870's and 1880's. The earliest settlers focused on stock raising, especially sheep. Stock were pastured in river bottoms and meadows during the summer and trailed to the gold camps of Oregon and California in the fall. Other settlers took advantage of preemption laws, donation claims, and the Homestead Act to make their claims more permanent.

Agricultural development of the arid central Oregon lands depended upon developing a reliable irrigation system. The Carey Act of 1864 provided a method whereby states could select lands from the public domain if they could reclaim the lands by developing a series of dams, canals, and systems for irrigation. The intention was to have private developers develop the irrigation systems, settlers could then tap the water by paying a tithe to the developer, and when the system was in place, the settler could file claim for his land. Unfortunately, the developers often proved to be more interested in speculation than in actual development, the water systems were not property measured for actual flow, irrigation canals had more paper reality than construction features, and settlers found themselves without reliable water (Winch 1984; Hall 1994).

The Tumalo Project, which was begun in 1900, attracted numerous settlers to the area west of Bend during several bursts of optimism between 1900 and 1935. Unfortunately, the most ambitious construction project, and one critical to agriculture development of the Tumalo project, failed when the Tumalo reservoir failed to hold water. Engineers had simply overlooked the characteristics of the local volcanic landscape with its porous underlying rock and numerous subterranean lava tubes (Hall 1994; Winch 1984-1986).

At the turn of the century, landlocked central Oregon focused on the developing of rail lines to their small communities. Rails meant prosperity, stability, and economic survival to small western communities. The importance of railroads in the Deschutes Basin was heightened by the connection between railroads and lumber. Without an access to national markets, lumber mills were restricted to small operations for local (or even personal) use. For an industrial mill to succeed, it needed access to sell box stock in California, select grades in the MidWest, and specialized products throughout the nation (Tonsfeldt 1987a, 1987b).

Central Oregon was a battle between two railroad giants, E.H. Harriman (Southern Pacific) and James J. Hill (Great Northern and Northern Pacific). Both had close connections with the lumber industry. In 1910, both sides were building up the Deschutes from the Columbia Gorge, one on each side until they reached a narrow point where there was room for only one railroad. Conflict ensued with fights and dynamiting, but agreement was reached in 1911 so that Hill's Oregon Truck reached Bend in 1911 (Tonsfeldt 1987a, 1987b).

In 1915, two Minnesota based lumber firms, Brooks-Scanlon and Shevlin-Hixon, built mills to cut timber they had been acquiring in central Oregon. Both build extensive logging railroad systems throughout the area. In the early period (before about 1935), logging railroads were used to haul timber directly from the woods to the mill. After about 1935, trucks were used to haul timber from the woods to reloading areas along mainline railroads where logs were loaded and hauled to the mill by rail. Logging has remained an important activity in the Deschutes Basin up to the present, although the logging railroad era was replaced with truck based systems (Tonsfeldt 1987a, 1987b).