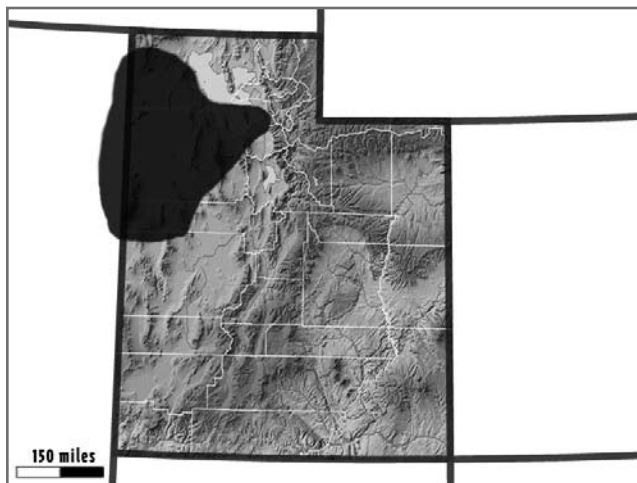


A BRIEF HISTORY OF UTAH'S GOSHUTES



ANCESTRAL GOSHUTE TERRITORY



CURRENT GOSHUTE RESERVATIONS

According to the Goshutes, their people have always lived in the desert region southwest of the Great Salt Lake. Scientists argue that the Goshute Indians migrated along with other Numic-speaking peoples from the Death Valley region of California to the Great Basin, probably around one thousand years ago. The word Goshute (Gosuite) is derived from the native word Kuttuhsippeh, which means “people of the dry earth,” and the name is fitting. The Goshute people occupied some of the most arid land in North America and exemplified the Great Basin way of life. As highly efficient hunters and gatherers, the Goshutes maintained the fragile balance of the desert, providing for their needs without destroying the limited resources of their arid homeland. They knew and used at least eighty-one species of vegetables. They harvested and cultivated seeds from many of these species. For the most part, the Goshutes lived in extended family units, but larger groups would sometimes come together to hunt. Goshute bands chose a local wise man to lead them, but he had limited political power.

The Goshutes have both benefited and suffered from their desert isolation. The harsh desert conditions provided an effective barrier against white encroachment until the middle of the nineteenth century, although the Goshutes did encounter transient trappers, emigrants, and slave traders in their territory before that period. While they encountered few whites, the Goshutes were not unaffected by Spanish settlement of New Mexico. They were the frequent victims of slave raids between 1829 and 1859.

Major white settlement began in the 1850s with the arrival of the Mormons. Permanent settlements encroached upon Goshute lands and resources, upsetting the careful ecological balance the Indians had cultivated. Mormon settlement also displaced nearby Ute Indians, who, after 1854, were forced from their homeland around Utah Lake and began encroaching on Goshute territory. Facing competition for scarce natural resources, the Goshutes responded by raiding Mormon settlements and



stealing livestock. Mormons retaliated by raiding Goshute encampments to retrieve stolen goods, sometimes resulting in Indian casualties.

Federal authorities established a government farm at Deep Creek for the Goshutes in 1859, but the project was abandoned by the next year. Attacks on the Pony Express and Overland Stage, which ran through traditional Goshute territory, resulted in an 1863 treaty between the Goshutes and the federal government to allow peaceful travel through Goshute country. The Goshutes did not cede any of their territory in the treaty, but federal officials were intent on removing the Indians. Between 1864 and 1912 they undertook efforts to remove the Goshutes to the Uintah Basin, Idaho, Nevada, and Oklahoma, but when these attempts failed, the Goshutes received reservation land in their native Utah. The Skull Valley Reservation was created in 1912, and the Deep Creek Reservation was formed in 1914.

The creation of reservations ensured the Goshutes ownership of some of their traditional homeland, but the reservations also brought Indian agents and federal employees with the mission of reordering Goshute life along a white model. Tensions between the Goshutes and federal authorities frequently resulted, although the conflicts were generally civil and peaceable. The Goshutes, who had always been extremely skilled and efficient in their use of wild plants, took up farming as early as the 1860s. In the reservation period, federal agents promoted agriculture as a means of “civilizing” the Goshutes, but their desert lands generally could not support self-sufficient farming. Without a strong economic base, unemployment and poverty have been constant problems on the reservations.

In the second half of the twentieth century, lack of economic opportunity led the Goshutes to seek outside development. A now-defunct steel fabrication plant opened at Deep Creek in 1969. The Deep Creek Band currently manages an elk herd, and profits from the sale of hunting permits go back to the tribe. In 1976 the Skull Valley Band of Goshutes built a rocket motor testing facility, which it leases to Hercules, Inc. The Skull Valley Band also is actively pursuing the development of a storage facility for spent fuel rods from nuclear power plants. This controversial project is opposed by the governor of Utah, environmental groups, and the Deep Creek Band of Goshutes.