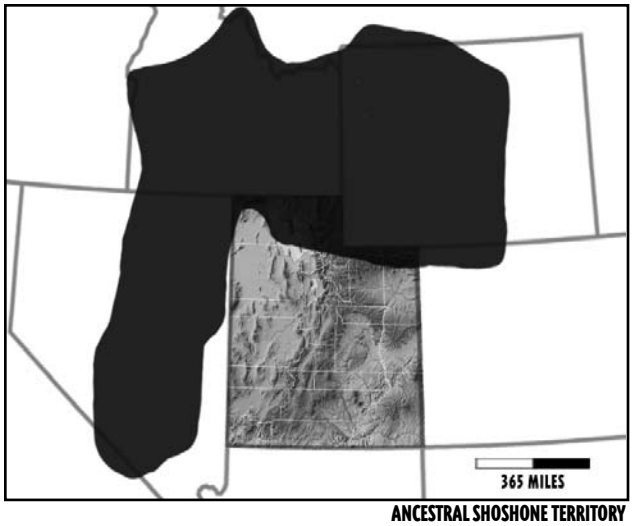
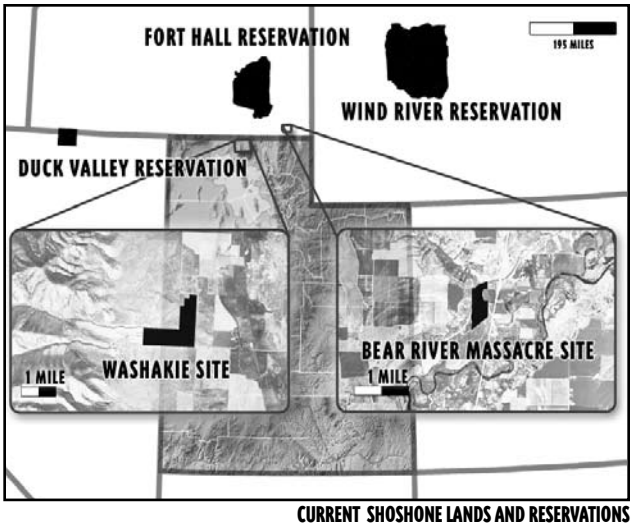
A BRIEF HISTORY OF UTAH'S NORTHWESTERN SHOSHONES



ANCESTRAL SHOSHONE TERRITORY



CURRENT SHOSHONE LANDS AND RESERVATIONS

The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation is a branch of the larger group of Shoshone people that traditionally lived in Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, and Nevada. When whites began encroaching on the area that is now Utah in the 1840s, three different groups of Northwestern Shoshones lived here. The misnamed Weber Utes lived in Weber Valley near present-day Ogden, Utah. The Pocatello Shoshones dwelt between the northern shore of the Great Salt Lake and the Bear River. A third group lived in the Cache Valley along the Bear River. They called themselves kammitakka, which means "jackrabbit-eaters."

The Shoshone people were very mobile and skilled at hunting and gathering, and with each change of the season they migrated to obtain the food and other resources they depended on to survive. In the early autumn, the Northwestern Shoshones moved into the region near what is now Salmon, Idaho, to fish. After fishing was over, they moved into western Wyoming to hunt buffalo, elk, deer, moose, and antelope. They sun-dried the meat for winter and used the hides as clothing and shelter. In the spring and summer, the Northwestern Shoshones traveled around southern Idaho and throughout Utah.

During these months, they spent their time gathering seeds, roots, and berries and socializing. In late summer they dug roots and hunted small game. Around late October, the band moved into western Utah and parts of Nevada for the annual gathering of pinyon nuts (or pine nuts), a nutrient-rich food that formed an important part of the Shoshone diet. The wintering home of the Northwestern Shoshones was in an area around what is now Preston, Idaho. Based on these migration patterns, experts have claimed that the Northwestern Shoshones were among the most ecologically efficient and well-adapted Indians of the American West.

By the 1840s, the Northwestern Shoshones had adopted some aspects of Plains Indian culture, using the horse for mobility and to hunt large game, such as buffalo. The Shoshone way of life came under attack when non-Indian emigrants began to traverse Shoshone lands on the trails to California and Oregon in the early 1840s. The arrival of the members of the LDS Church in 1847 brought added pressure. The Mormons initially settled in the Salt Lake Valley but quickly spread into the Weber

and Cache Valleys, entering Shoshone lands and competing for vital resources. Conflict between the Shoshones and white settlers and emigrants became a serious problem in the late 1850s and early 1860s. Responding to the destruction of game and grass cover and the unprovoked murder of Indians, Shoshone leaders like Chief Pocatello retaliated with raids on emigrant trains. After the discovery of gold in Montana in 1862, more and more whites traveled over Shoshone land. In response to incidents of violence committed by the travelers, some Shoshones, including a group led by Chief Bear Hunter of the Cache Valley, began to raid wagon trains and cattle herds.

Violence erupted on January 29, 1863 when Colonel Patrick Edward Connor and about two-hundred army volunteers from Camp Douglas in Salt Lake City attacked Bear Hunter's people. A group of 450 Shoshone men, women, and children were camped on the Bear River twelve miles from Franklin, Washington Territory (now Idaho). In the early hours of the morning, Connor and his men surrounded the Shoshones and began a four-hour assault on the virtually defenseless group. Some 350 Shoshones were slaughtered by the troops, including many women and children. This was one of the most violent events in Utah's history and the largest Indian massacre in U.S. history.

In the aftermath of the Bear River Massacre, white settlers moved unopposed into traditional Northwestern Shoshone lands. As American settlements grew around them, the few remaining Northwestern Shoshones lost their land base and could no longer sustain their traditional nomadic lifestyle. In 1875, after years of struggle and starvation, many Northwestern Shoshones converted to Mormonism and settled on a church-sponsored farm near Corrine, Utah, an area where the Shoshones had traditionally wintered. The farm was short-lived, as federal officials, responding to unfounded rumors that the Shoshones were planning an attack on Corrine, expelled them from the farm and attempted to force them onto the newly founded Fort Hall Reservation in Idaho.

Some Northwestern Shoshones did move to Fort Hall, but those who wanted to remain in their traditional homeland were left without a reservation and had to search for alternative means to secure a land base. Beginning in 1876, using rights guaranteed under the Homestead Act, the Northwestern Shoshones acquired and settled land between the Malad and Bear rivers. The Malad Indian Farm was eventually discarded due to its insufficient size and the difficulty of irrigating in the area. The Northwestern Shoshones considered moving back to the Cache Valley but instead moved to a new farm in the Malad Valley just south of Portage, Utah. They named the farm after their admired leader Washakie, and the settlement, which was managed by members of the LDS Church, was the Northwestern band's home for the next eighty years. Tragically, in the summer of 1960, representatives of the LDS Church, who mistakenly believed that Washakie had been abandoned, burnt the Shoshones' houses to the ground in preparation for the sale of the church farm. The church later gave the band 184 acres of land near Washakie to atone for this mistake.

Until 1987, the Northwestern band was administered by the federal government as part of a larger Shoshone tribe. That year the government recognized the tribe as independent, and the Northwestern Shoshones adopted a constitution and tribal council. In addition to the Washakie land, the tribe holds some private lands held in trust by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and is attempting to purchase more land to solidify its home in Utah. The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation is quickly developing and, in so doing, is reasserting its rightful place in the history of Utah.