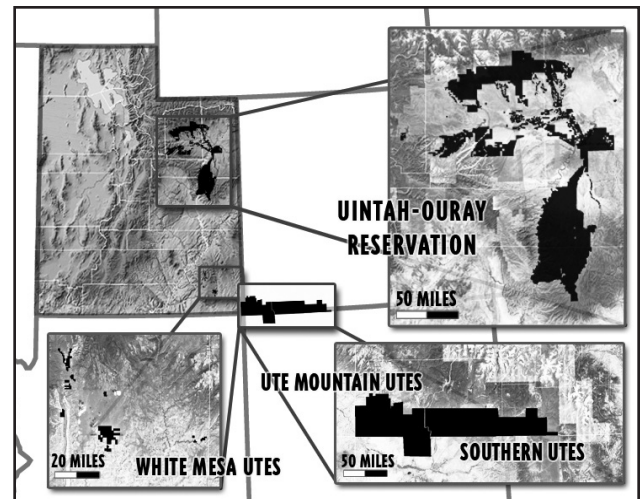


A BRIEF HISTORY OF UTAH'S UTES



ANCESTRAL UTE TERRITORY



CURRENT UTE RESERVATIONS

Ute tradition suggests that the Ute people were brought here from the south in a magic sack carried by Sinauf, a god who was half wolf and half man. Anthropologists argue that the Utes began using the northern Colorado Plateau between one and two thousand years ago. Historically, the Ute people lived in several family groups, or bands, and inhabited 225,000 square miles covering most of Utah, western Colorado, southern Wyoming, and northern Arizona and New Mexico. Each of these bands was independent, but the Ute people were bound by a common language, close trade relationships, intermarriage, temporary military alliances, and important social and religious events. The major event for the Utes was, and still is, the Bear Dance, an annual gathering to celebrate the coming of spring. The Ute people ranged over a wide but well-known area to engage in a sophisticated gathering and hunting economy. They gathered seeds, berries, and roots, and hunted deer, rabbits, birds, and fish. Long before white settlers arrived in Utah, many of the Utes raised corn, beans, pumpkins, squashes, and potatoes.

The introduction of the horse in the 1600s brought major changes to the Ute way of life, although some Ute bands used the horse more than others. The horse allowed the Utes to travel farther and more quickly, and the Utes began to adopt many aspects of Plains Indian culture, living in mobile teepees and hunting buffalo, elk, and deer over long distances. They developed trade relationships with the Spanish and tribes that were once out of reach and earned a reputation as fierce warriors and raiders and expert horseman.

Contact with the Spanish also introduced the violent slave trade. Ute children were captured as slaves, and the Utes captured members of other tribes, such as the Paiutes, and exchanged them with the Spanish for horses, guns, and other goods. As a result of the slave trade, violence between the Utes, Paiutes, and Navajos became frequent, particularly after the 1829 opening of the Old Spanish Trail, a trade route that connected New Mexico to the Pacific Ocean and transversed Ute lands.



Further disruption to Ute life came with the arrival of LDS settlers in the Salt Lake Valley. Although the valley was an area of joint occupancy between the Utes and Shoshones, the Mormons expanded quickly into Ute territory, and competition for resources resulted in conflict. Led by Wakara and his brother Arapeen, the Utes retaliated against encroaching settlers with a series of raids. The so-called Walker War (1853–54) resulted in some Mormon and many more Ute casualties and began the process of Ute displacement. Brigham Young outlined his policy toward the Indians by suggesting “it is cheaper to feed than fight them,” but because the Mormons desired Ute land, fighting was perhaps inevitable.

Between 1855 and 1860, local Indian agents undertook an initiative to create organized Indian farms, but the traditionally nomadic Utes resisted settling on the farms, which soon collapsed. In 1861, at the request of the Mormons, Abraham Lincoln established the Uintah Valley Reservation by executive order. Congress confirmed this order in 1864, but at least initially, the government made few efforts to force the Utes onto the reservation.

The Utes still hunted and gathered over large portions of land, but game became increasingly scarce and whites began to occupy the Uintah Reservation. After suffering a smallpox epidemic and famine in the winter of 1864–65, Ute leader Black Hawk intensified the raiding of nearby settlements, seizing livestock and supplies. Black Hawk agreed to peace in 1868, although some of his followers continued the raids until 1872. That year federal officials began to send supplies to the Uintah Agency, and many Utes peacefully gathered on the reservation.

Some Northern Ute bands continued to resist reservation life, but their efforts eventually proved futile. In 1881 the federal government forcibly removed the Yamparka and Parianuc (White River) Utes from Colorado to the Uintah Reservation. In 1882 the federal government established the Uncompahgre (later renamed Ouray) Reservation adjacent to the Uintah Reservation and moved the peaceful Taviwac (Uncompahgre) Utes to this remote, dry area. The two reservations were consolidated in 1886.

The General Allotment (Dawes) Act of 1887, which gave tribal members individual parcels of land and opened the rest of the reservation to white homesteaders, immensely decreased Ute tribal lands; between 1882 and 1933, the Uintah and Ouray reservation lands decreased by over ninety percent. Allotment scattered the Utes’ land base and made the traditional lifestyle of hunting and trading over long distances impossible. The Utes were expected to farm, but this proved disastrous due to cultural resistance and competition from better-equipped and more-experienced white neighbors. Accordingly, the Utes turned raising sheep, cattle, and horses, which also proved challenging because of limited grazing lands. In 1906, as an act of protest and defiance to land loss and bad government administration, a group of between four hundred and six hundred Utes left their reservation and trekked to South Dakota, hoping that the Sioux would join them in their defiance. The Sioux refused, and after two years of little rations or support, the federal government escorted the Utes back to their reservation.



The Southern Utes in living southeastern Utah avoided reservation life for a while longer. They repeatedly resisted attempts by the federal government to remove them to Ute Mountain Ute Agency at Towaoc, Colorado, but in 1923 tensions between the Utes and white settlers culminated in the “Posey War” in San Juan County, Utah. In reality the “war” was a few shots meant to delay a white posse chasing local Utes and Paiutes who were fleeing for a traditional sanctuary. However, the Posey incident became an excuse for the federal government to send many Ute children to the boarding school at the Ute Mountain Ute Agency and force the remaining Utes onto small land allotments near Allen Canyon and Montezuma Creek.

The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 facilitated major changes by allowing the Utes to organize their own tribal government. In 1938, the Utes filed a lawsuit against the U.S. government claiming forty million dollars in losses from the dispossession of their land. In the 1950s the Utes won a series of legal battles and settled for \$32 million in reparations.

Starting in the 1950s, the Allen Canyon Utes began to build houses on Ute-owned land eleven miles south of Blanding, Utah. Now known as White Mesa, the new settlement fostered a sense of community among the local Utes. Today White Mesa residents’ biggest challenge is that they are isolated from their tribal headquarters at Tawaoc. Still, they have successfully developed several education and health programs and run a cattle company and convenience store.

Today the Northern Utes also operate several businesses. Cattleraising and mining of oil and natural gas are vitally important to the reservation economy. While the Northern Ute Tribe is becoming a more powerful force in local and state politics, they continually strive to maintain their language and culture while also developing the economy and education of the tribal members.

