Promontory Caves Revisited: Preliminary Analysis of Faunal Material from 42BO1 and 42BO2

Lindsay Johansson
Joel Janetski

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Introduction:

Promontory Caves (42BO1 and 42BO2) are located on Promontory point and were excavated in 1930 and 1931 by Julian Steward from the University of Utah. The caves are the type site for Promontory Phase occupation in the Great Basin and the work being done currently concerning the caves is one aspect of a larger project by Jack Ives of the University of Alberta and Joel Janetski of Brigham Young University concerning the Promontory culture and its relationship to the Athapaskan migration.

Based upon the presence of moccasins and ceramics recovered at the site, Steward (1937:87) concluded that Promontory cultures were neither Puebloan nor Shoshonean in origin. Recently, the upper levels of occupation at Promontory Caves have been dated to what is termed the Promontory phase of the Late Prehistoric, occurring from approximately AD 1300 to 1550 (Forsyth 1986:190; Janetski 1994:176). Here, I present preliminary data from my analysis of the faunal collection recovered by Steward. This is one portion of my thesis research, in which I will be comparing the faunal collections from various Late Prehistoric sites in the Eastern Great Basin.

Research Design:

The aims of this project is to understand diet during the Late Prehistoric occupation in the Eastern Great Basin. The specific questions I am attempting to answer are:

1. What does the faunal material tell us about the seasonality of occupation at the site,  
2. What differences, if any, exist between the earlier occupation in Cave 1 and the later occupation in Cave 2, and  
3. Is the faunal collection from the Late Prehistoric occupation at Promontory Caves consistent with the faunal collections from other Late Prehistoric sites in the region.

Conclusions:

1. Two seasonal occupations were identified, one during the winter, from December to February, and one in the late spring through early fall. This is based upon the presence of crania with shed antler and sub-adult dentition.

2. The main difference between the occupations in the two caves is that the earlier occupation in Cave 2 contains a higher percentage of mule deer, while the later occupation in Cave 1 is predominantly pronghorn antelope. This could signify environmental differences between the two occupations.

3. Comparison with faunal assemblages from Late Prehistoric sites in the region indicate that both occupations at Promontory Caves are distinctive. While typical Promontory phase sites are characterized by small game and fish bones, the Caves are typified by the bones of artiodactyls (see Allison et al 2000, Allison et al 2002, and Simms and Heath 1990).

References:


