

Festivals as Context for Exchange in the Great Basin–Columbia Plateau Region of Western North America

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*We soon found out that [the] Provo River region was the great place of gathering of all Ute tribes of central Utah valleys, too, on account of the wonderful supply of fish moving up the stream from the Lake to their spawning ground every spring. . . . While these Bands of Indians met each spring for fishing, they engaged in good sporting as well, horse-racing, trading, gambling, footracing, wrestling, etc. Some spent weeks here.*¹

The exchange of goods and ideas in western North American aboriginal societies occurred in diverse social and economic contexts, such as festivals, life-crisis events, opportunistic bartering, structured trade, and gambling. As indicated by the introductory quotation, festivals, the focus of this study, were times of excitement, sociability, and renewal for the hunting and gathering peoples of the Great Basin and Columbia Plateau.

W. Raymond Wood argues that the intense and regular interaction that occurred at festivals was an important catalyst for cultural change among the participants.² Likewise, Robert F. Spencer, in his study of trade fairs among the North Alaskan Eskimo, states, “Trade, in short, was the factor which brought tremendously widely separated people together and which promoted the spread of ideas and culture elements from one center to another.”³ H. Edwin Jackson also has emphasized the importance of trade fairs as a mechanism for social and economic interaction among hunter-gatherers across the globe during recent times and has argued for the existence of similar events rather deep in prehistory.⁴ However, the incomplete ethnographic record and the difficulties inherent in identifying short-term social gatherings (however large) through archaeology tend to distort or underplay the importance of regular social interactions that occurred among ethnically distinct groups, even in demographically sparse areas such as the Great Basin–Columbia Plateau region of the western United States.

Wood has described a “trade net” that blanketed pre-European North America.⁵ Critical to his model are major (primary) and secondary centers, which acted as points of regional aggregation. Primary centers are defined as villages occupied by sedentary populations, a circumstance made possible by the presence of a substantial resource base (such as crops or fish). Populations swelled at these centers during the trade fairs. Secondary centers were impermanent or floating concentrations of people who aggregated solely for the short-term trade activity. The mountain man rendezvous epitomizes secondary centers, while the Missouri River horticultural villages are typical of primary centers. The trade-oriented gatherings at both the primary and the secondary centers have often been referred to as trade fairs.

Following a probe of the ethnographic and historic literature for the southern Columbia Plateau and the Great Basin area, I offer a refinement of Wood’s characterization of the trade net by suggesting a tertiary level of distributory mechanisms in the Great Basin. This level consists of the ubiquitous “festivals” recorded for most Great Basin peoples. I propose that these events, whose basis was more social than economic, were effective link in exchange systems (with emphasis on the exchange of information and ideas rather than goods alone) of the desert West. The empirical basis for this conclusion follows a brief discussion of the social role of exchange.

How, when, and why did exchange occur in aboriginal societies in western North America? George Dalton's comments from more than three decades ago are worth repeating as preface to this issue: "Primitive economy is different from market industrialism not in degree but in kind."⁶ Joseph G. Jorgensen, in his exhaustive review of western Indian society, notes the variety of contexts wherein goods were moved from one individual to another and comments that trade in the formal sense may have been the least important of these.⁷ This notion is made clear in Marshall Sahlins's classic treatment of economics in simple societies, wherein he states that redistribution of commodities cannot be understood apart from social context. Circumstance, kinship, and history all play a part in determining direction, quantity, and quality of the flow of goods. In Sahlins's scheme of reciprocities, which reflects the array of circumstances and expectations that surround gift giving and trade, reciprocity has three levels—generalized, balanced, and negative—with kin distance decreasing and economic interests and potential tension increasing at each level.⁸ For example, gift giving among kin on such occasions as birth, puberty, marriage, and death carries little economic expectation and exemplifies generalized reciprocity, whereas balanced and negative reciprocity characterize exchange among distant relations and unrelated persons and carries greater economic impact.

Exchange relaxed tensions between unrelated groups. Sahlins, paraphrasing Marcel Mauss from *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, states, "Menaced always by deterioration into war, primitive groups are nevertheless reconciled by festival and exchange."⁹ Similarly, Lorna Marshall quotes an African bushman: "The worse thing is not giving presents. If people do not like each other but one gives a gift and the other must accept, this brings a peace between them. We give what we have. That is the way we live together."¹⁰ Viewed in this light, exchange assumes diplomatic dimensions apart from economics: "The gift is the primitive way of achieving the peace that in civil society is secured by the State."¹¹

Feasting solidified social relations, and giving food demonstrated generosity. Sahlins argues that food moved mostly in generalized rather than balanced exchange. He states as principle that "one does not exchange things for food, not directly that is, among friends and relatives. Traffic in food is traffic between foreign interests."¹² Spencer's account of restrictions on trade in food among the Alaskan Eskimo illustrates this notion: "Again, the feeling was present that to trade for food was reprehensible, but since each setting had its own specialties, this attitude was in some measure obviated. . . . The pattern with respect to food was less concerned with formal exchange. It was used to cement good relations between partners and when given as a gift, the notion of trading for food was avoided."¹³

It is no surprise that trade events typically included or concluded with feasts, a pattern that is exemplified by numerous cases. North Alaskan trade fairs concluded with the Messenger Feast, and the Pomo of California participated in trade feasts during which foodstuffs, especially fish, were traded for shell or stone beads.¹⁴ Feasts were associated with most gatherings in the Great Basin–Columbia Plateau region: the Sun Dance (Ute), datura ceremony (Southern Paiute, Chemehuevi), Bear Dance (Ute), and Girls' Dance (Washo) all concluded with feasting.¹⁵ Social, political, and economic purposes blended in these occasions. In ecologically or economically contrasting regions, food naturally and appropriately became a common commodity in the marketplace. Mandan/Arikara-Plains and Plains-Pueblo peoples exemplified this kind of complementary, mutualistic relationship; in both cases garden produce of the farmers moved against the meat and hides brought by hunters.¹⁶

Several expectations concerning festivals can be surmised from the foregoing discussion. The social atmosphere of festivals should vary depending on who attended: close kin, distant relatives, or unrelated groups. Underlying tensions would be most expected in the context of intertribal trade, and gift exchange and feasting would reduce that tension and set the scene for serious trading. In all cases festivals should occur during times of food abundance. Trade in foodstuffs, however rationalized, would be more likely to occur between individuals from ecologically contrasting regions. And importantly, festival participants attended for social rather than commercial purposes.

Accounts of Festivals and Trade in the Ethnographic Great Basin and Columbia Plateau Region

Great Basin

The hydrographic Great Basin encompasses the region from the Sierra Nevada of eastern California on the west to Utah's Wasatch Mountains on the east, and the drainages of the Snake and Virgin Rivers on the north and south, respectively. The cultural Great Basin, however, spilled beyond this physiographic area well into the Columbia Plateau to the north to include portions of eastern Oregon, western and southern Idaho, the Colorado Plateau of eastern Utah and western Colorado, and the plains of Wyoming.¹⁷ Linguistic and cultural similarities combine to group the aboriginal peoples of this area, which once encompassed the Northern Paiute, Western and Northern Shoshone, Ute, and Southern Paiute peoples (see figure 1).

Information on trade among Great Basin peoples is generally sparse or at best erratic. It is not clear whether this deficiency is due to the interest (or lack of it) of ethnographers or to real patterns. Festivals, on the other hand, are mentioned or described for most groups (see table 1, located at the end of this chapter). Richard E. Hughes and James A. Bennyhoff, in their synthesis of exchange in the ethnographic Great Basin, conclude that organized festivals provided the context for much traditional trade activity in this region.¹⁸ Areas with particularly rich information include Owens Valley, Humboldt Sink, and Yainax Butte.

Western Great Basin

Owens Valley, on the extreme western edge of the Great Basin, was home to the Northern Paiute. Julian H. Steward described their annual festival, or fandango: "The Paiute . . . assembled each fall for dancing, gambling, and festivities."¹⁹ Typically, fandangos were held after seed harvest or around rabbit-hunt time, with the location varying annually. Steward does not discuss trade as an activity accompanying the fandango, although the Owens Valley Paiute were certainly involved with trade.²⁰ Most trade occurred with California peoples, particularly the Western Mono and Miwok, and was accomplished in "hurried trips."²¹ There is no mention of just how the trade occurred, but considerable quantities of goods—mostly perishables (foodstuffs such as pine nuts and berries, sa rabbit-skin blankets, baskets) but some nonperishables (clamshell beads, obsidian)—were toted in burden baskets mostly by women, across the Sierras. The Paiute traded little with other Great Basin peoples to the east. Steward stressed the importance of gambling during the fandango, although gambling occurred year-round.

East and north of Owens Valley, the Humboldt Sink is the terminus of the Humboldt River, which drains all of northern Nevada, and was another population center for Northern Paiute people.²² Broad, grassy, and rich in wetland resources that flourished in the marshes and ephemeral lakes, the sink was attractive to hunting and gathering peoples who lived in the arid environment of the western Basin. Early travelers commented on the large numbers of people concentrated there. Jedediah Smith camped at the sink in 1827 and was threatened by twen

to thirty mounted Paiute who, because they had buffalo robes and Spanish blankets with them, were apparently involved in long-distance trading with both Plains Indians and the Spanish.²³ Two years later, in May 1929 at the Humboldt Sink, Peter Skene Ogden had a similar encounter with “upwards of two hundred” mounted Indians, probably from California, whom he described as not “well inclined toward us.”²⁴ Ogden was struck by the large populations of Indians along the Humboldt River. As he traveled east of Winnemucca along the Humboldt in November 1928, he wrote, “It is almost indescribable how numerous the natives are in this quarter.”²⁵ Zenas Leonard, who traveled down the Humboldt in September 1833 with the Joseph Walker party, also described large numbers of people at Humboldt Sink, although these people were not mounted: “Here [at the sink] the country is low and swampy, producing an abundance of very fine grass. . . . On taking a view of the surrounding waste with a spy-glass, we discovered smoke issuing from the high grass in every direction. This was sufficient to convince us that we were in the midst of a large body of Indians. [Eventually] the Indians issued from their hiding places in the grass, to the number, as near as I could guess, of 8 or 900.”²⁶

Eight or nine hundred people seems a very large concentration by Great Basin standards. It is possible, given the fall date and the abundant resources of the sink, that the people had gathered for fall festivities (see table 1); however, such a conclusion is conjecture. On the basis of the presence of mounted, apparently hostile Indians, Thomas N. Layton concludes that the Humboldt Sink was a trading center, albeit a secondary one, that also functioned as a stopover where raiders and traders from Walker River and California fed their horses as they moved across the Great Basin to Idaho for buffalo products.²⁷

Yainax Butte in southern Oregon, an area in traditional Klamath territory, was apparently another location for annual trade fairs.²⁸ In 1873 Clarke described a fair in the area: “To this mountain’s base came the Columbia River Indians to exchange fleet cayuse coursers for slaves, to barter the blankets and nicknacks furnished by the Fur Company traders for the furs gathered by Modocs and Klamaths, and the bows and arrows. . . . Yainax was a great slave mart in the long ago, for Klamaths and Modocs, being first cousins, . . . made war indiscriminately on weaker tribes and took captives to swell the importance of the Yainax fairs.” In a 1905 account Clarke related the following: “The Yahooskin or Summer Lake Snakes did not hesitate to take part in these gatherings, for, though neutral as to their fellow Snakes, they liked to take a hand in the games, make good trades, and swap horses—whenever they could do so to advantage. There was pleasure and honor, as well as plenty of business, here at Yainax on the gala days in October.”²⁹

Layton described the Humboldt Sink and Yainax Butte as intermediate nodes for trade. The former linked California with the Rockies via the Humboldt River, and the latter connected California with the major trade center at The Dalles on the Columbia River. Layton maintains that the pattern was in place before 1800, although the movement along these routes, especially long-distance movement, would have increased greatly with the introduction of the horse.³⁰

To the west of the Northern Paiute lay Washo territory, which centered on Lake Tahoe and its outlet, the Truckee River. James F. Downs describes Washo trade with the neighboring Paiute as “lively.”³¹ Commodities of exchange included deer for antelope or occasionally bison hides, pigments, and tool stone. The Washo, whom Downs characterizes as middlemen between the “rich country of California and the relatively impoverished Basin,” traveled to California to obtain shell and obsidian knives for exchange with groups to the east. James T. Davis names the Miwok, Maidu, and Mono as primary trading partners for salt, pine nuts, rabbit-skin and buffalo robes

baskets, and shell beads, among other things. He does not mention trade with Pyramid Lake or other Northern Paiute neighbors.³²

The annual Washo festival, or Gumsaba, included games, fasting, feasting, gambling, and dancing. Warren d'Azevedo describes late spring and early summer first-fish rites held by the Washo at the mouth of Long Valley Creek near Honey Lake, and he makes note of gift exchanges that occurred during these and other festivals.³³ Attendees other than the Washo are not mentioned, although nearby Honey Lake was occupied by Northern Paiute and Maidu.³⁴ Interestingly, ethnographer Francis Riddell states that Honey Lake Paiute described gambling as a form of trade that served to move deer hides, baskets, dentalia, and rabbit-skin blankets between them and the Washo.³⁵ These comments suggest that gambling occurred at intertribal gatherings of Washo, Northern Paiute, and perhaps Maidu.

Central Great Basin

There is little information about trade activities among the Western Shoshone in the central Great Basin. In fact Julian Steward, the premier ethnographer of Basin aboriginal peoples, maintains that Nevada Shoshone traded little or not at all.³⁶ Festivals, on the other hand, were typical; people from nearly every valley participated in them at least annually (see table 1). The following excerpts from Steward's monograph describe what occurred at these festivals:

Owens Valley. "Six-day festivals, involving dances, gambling, and rabbit drives, were held by each band in the fall after the pine-nut harvest. These were planned, organized, and managed by the band chief. Invitations were sent to neighboring villages. Large villages . . . attracted people from distant places. . . . Sometimes villages held festivals at different times in the fall so that people from elsewhere could attend after completing their own festival."³⁷

Steptoe Valley. "Festivals, involving the round dance, back-and-forth dance, 'war dance' or *paminukep*, and considerable gambling, were held, usually after pine-nut harvest, at various localities, depending partly upon abundance of seeds. People after dancing at home, often went elsewhere to dance again; there was frequent reciprocation in this manner."³⁸

Skull Valley/Deep Creek. "Festivals were held independently at Skull Valley, Deep Creek, and perhaps elsewhere under different directors. . . . Festivals were held by members of several neighboring villages, principally in the spring. They performed the round dance to make seeds grow. If, however, many people were assembled in some area of abundant seeds during the summer, and especially when gathering pine nuts in the fall, they might also hold dances. . . . When such dances were to be held the chief sent out messengers to invite people to attend. The main festivals lasted 5 days."³⁹

Steward mentions festivals for each Great Basin valley he describes, and although these festivals varied somewhat, some common patterns are evident. Festivals were not located in the same place each year, nor did the same people attend each time, though the events usually included people from nearby valleys. Festivals were held when foods were relatively abundant, especially around the pine-nut harvest and fall rabbit drives. Activities included dances and gambling. Trade is seldom mentioned for regions south of the Snake River.

Eastern Great Basin

The Shoshone, Ute, and Southern Paiute peoples occupied the eastern Great Basin and the northern Colorado Plateau to the east. Traditional Ute territory covered much of eastern Utah and Colorado, with the groups in the former region often referred to as the Western Ute and those in the latter as the Eastern Ute. Reference was made in the introductory quote to the spring gathering in Utah Valley, which was in Western Ute territory. Various sources make clear this area's importance, a result of its rich fishery and population concentrations.⁴⁰ Utah Valley as a gathering place is further documented in an 1849 book by T. J. Farnham: "The great Yutas tribe . . . is divided into two families which are contradistinguished by the names of their respective head-quarters; the Taos Yutas, so called, because their principal camp is pitched in the Taos mountains, seventy miles north of Santa Fe; and the Timpanigos Yutas who hold their great camp near the Timpanigos lake."⁴¹

Farnham's reference to sizable camps at Taos and "Timpanigos lake" (Utah Lake) in the same breath could imply that both were locations for trade fairs. Taos is well-known as a major fair location that attracted Plains Indians as well as Pueblos.⁴² The description of the spring gathering of "all Ute tribes of central Utah valleys" (see introductory quotation) at Utah Lake strongly suggests that Utah Valley served as the location for a large festival. Omer C. Stewart's comments regarding the Bear Dance imply that this renewal ceremony was very likely a part of the festival in Utah Valley. One of his informants reported that the Bear Dance started after the "Pagonunts (Utah Lake Indians) came to [the] Uintah Reservation."⁴³

Another indication that Utah Valley was a trade center is the fact that it was a primary stop for the Dominguez-Escalante party. They traded in the valley for fresh supplies and pondered establishing a Spanish colony. Subsequently, Spanish traders visited the valley to barter for slaves and horses.⁴⁴ Utah Valley's rich fishery and permanent population density also suggest the area was a primary trade center.

Utes in the southern portion of the region traded with their linguistic cousins—the Southern Paiute, the Navajo, and the Pueblos.⁴⁵ Isabel T. Kelly identifies the Utes as important in Southern Paiute trade activities (see section below).

Southern Great Basin/Colorado Plateau

Kelly's research on the Southern Paiute is by far the most important source of information on trade in the southern Great Basin. She reports trade activity for all groups studied (Kaibab, Kaiparowits, San Juan, and Panguitch).⁴⁶ The Kaibab, for example, traded with other Southern Paiute bands as well as with the Ute and Navajo. Most intriguing are insights into trade between nonagricultural and agricultural groups. The Kaibab, who did not farm, traded with Paiutes at St. George, receiving "about 50 lbs of maize, beans" for a deer hide.⁴⁷ After 1800, trade was vigorous with the Ute, who brought horses, buffalo robes, metal knives, and guns to trade for buckskins and Navajo blankets. In this latter case the Southern Paiute acted as middlemen. Little trade crossed the imposing Grand Canyon and Colorado River. Kelly offers no insights into when such trade occurred or the circumstances surrounding the exchange. She collected no information on social gatherings such as the Washo *Gumsaba*, although she and Stewart both record dances and numerous gambling activities that would have taken place during such festivals. Dances most commonly occurred in the fall, in concert with communal rabbit hunts and a pine-nut gathering and after crops were harvested.⁴⁸

Stewart's brief description of Southern Paiute bands in southern Nevada is important because it does mention festivals reminiscent of the central Great Basin pattern. These three- or four-day events included several village

in the Las Vegas or Moapa area and consisted of dances and annual mourning rites.⁴⁹ Robert C. Euler, in his exhaustive compendium of Southern Paiute ethnohistory, relates numerous accounts of Navajo in the vicinity of Kanab during the 1870s. He cites John D. Lee's journal, which remarks that Kanab was "full of NavaJoes in to trade" and that "13 NavaJoes started to visit the settlements North as far as Beaver [Utah]."⁵⁰ Euler also cites Lee's midsummer descriptions of Indians at Panguitch Lake (in south-central Utah) who had laid out "Strings of Trout to trade."⁵¹ These Indians were likely from the Panguitch band of Southern Paiute. Like Kelly, however, Euler provides no accounts of gatherings other than those orchestrated by Anglos, though he offers many instances of individual bartering. Given the accounts of annual festivals among the Moapa Paiute, it seems reasonable to assume that festivals occurred among Paiute to the east as well.

Columbia Plateau

The Snake River–Columbia River system drains the vast region north of the Great Basin from Yellowstone to Canada and was a traffic corridor for aboriginal peoples in southern Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. Its role as a transportation route was and is critical to the lives of people in these areas. The Columbia River, which forks near Umatilla, Washington, drains eastern Washington, and the Snake drains the country to the east and south across southern Idaho. Aboriginal peoples in this area include the Northern Shoshone and Bannock of southern Idaho, the Northern Paiute of southeast Oregon, the Nez Percé of western Idaho and Oregon, the Cayuse and Umatilla of eastern Oregon, the Spokane of eastern Washington, the Kalispel of northern Idaho, and others. Two important trading centers flourished in protohistoric times on the Snake River: the first and the best known was Camas Prairie, located on the northern edge of the Snake River plain; the second was at the mouth of the Weiser River, close to the Idaho-Oregon border.

Camas Prairie lies northwest of Twin Falls, in southern Idaho. Camas roots were abundant in late spring and attracted people from throughout the Snake River country.⁵² These gatherings were important social and economic events: "This was also a time of dances and festivities, for a large part of the Shoshone and Bannock population of Idaho, plus a sprinkling of the Nez Percé and Flathead resorted at the same time to these root grounds. These were probably the largest gatherings of people among all the Shoshone. There was no large single encampment, but families and camp groups were in such close contiguity that social interaction was intense."⁵³

Trade was an important aspect of the Camas Prairie gathering. Bannock, Shoshone, Nez Percé, Flathead, Pend d'Oreilles, and people from the Northern Great Basin all participated. According to Sven Liljeblad, "The Bannock traded buffalo hides to the Nez Percé for horses. The downstream Shoshoni came loaded with salmon; groups who wintered in northern Utah brought seeds and pine nuts; the impoverished local Shoshoni had nothing to offer but seeds, roots, and dried crickets."⁵⁴

In the years after the demise of bison on the Snake River plain, Camas Prairie was also the point of departure for the annual buffalo hunt over the Bannock Trail, which went across extreme northwestern Wyoming in the area of present-day Yellowstone National Park. Much could be said about the importance of Camas Prairie in the lives of the Shoshone and Bannock of southern Idaho. Suffice it to say that the intrusion of whites into this area was the impetus for the Bannock War of 1878.⁵⁵

It is important to note that Liljeblad considered the tradition of gathering at Camas Prairie in the late spring for camas harvest, trade, and socializing as predating the European invasion, although the arrival of the horse greatly intensified these activities: "From time immemorial, the Nez Percé had traded with the Pacific coastal Indians

along the lower Columbia River at The Dalles. They now came into the position of controlling a flourishing exchange of goods between east and west. In addition to the traditional dentalium and other sea shells, they now brought in this trade European articles which had passed through the hands of the Chinook who were the chief traders on the Northwest Coast."⁵⁶

Steward places several villages along Camas Creek, which flows through Camas Prairie, although he locates winter camps along the Snake River below Twin Falls.⁵⁷

The mouth of the Weiser River, about 150 miles down the Snake from Camas Prairie, was another major trading center. Robert F. Murphy and Yolanda Murphy note that "the Nez Perce joined the Cayuse, the Umatilla, and the Shoshone at an annual trading market" there.⁵⁸ Again, Liljeblad asserts that trade activity on the Weiser dated to pre-Anglo times:

From early prehistoric times there was communication up and down the Snake River. . . . Olivella shells have been found in sites far upstream. Also in more recent times, the Shoshoni in East Idaho, on their trading expeditions to the Weiser River, obtained obsidian which they rated higher than the inferior kind from Yellowstone and the Big Butte. This obsidian must have come from Glass Buttes in central Oregon. Direct contact between the upper Snake River area and the Weiser region without intermediary agents could not have taken place, however, before the Fort Hall Indians had horses. From then on, [the Weiser River area] became the most important center of intertribal horse trade west of the Rockies.⁵⁹

Much farther down the Snake and the Columbia, at the upstream end of the Columbia River Gorge, is The Dalles: one of the best-documented aboriginal trade centers west of the Rocky Mountains (see figure 1). The local Wishram and Wasco exploited their enviable position as middlemen moving goods from the coast to the interior and vice versa. Washington Irving, in his invaluable *Astoria*, captures the essence of the hustle and bustle of this marketplace:

We have given this process at some length, as furnished by the first explorers, because it marks a practiced ingenuity in preparing articles of traffic for a market, seldom seen among our aboriginals. For like reasons we would make especial mention of the Village of Wish-ram at the head of the Long Narrows, as being a solitary instance of an aboriginal trading mart, or emporium. Here the salmon caught in the neighboring rapids were "ware housed" to await customers. Hither the tribes from the mouth of the Columbia repaired with the fish of the sea cast, the roots, berries and especially the Wappatoo, gathered in the lower parts of the river, together with goods and trinkets obtained from the ships which casually visited the coast. Hither also the tribes from the Rocky Mountains brought down horses, bear grass, Quamash and other commodities of the interior. The merchant fishermen at the Falls acted as middle men or factors: and passed the objects of traffic as it were cross handed, trading away part of the wares received from the mountain tribes, to those of the river and the plains, and vice versa: their packages of pounded salmon entered largely into the system of barter and being carried off in opposite directions, found their way to the savage hunting camps far in the interior, and to the casual white traders who touched upon the coast.⁶⁰

The image communicated by Irving is vivid indeed, as is the economic emphasis of these sharp traders. This mechanism of intertribal trade clearly functioned as a profit-making enterprise. The participation of "tribes from the Rocky

Mountains” and “hunting camps far in the interior” most likely refers to the Nez Percé, but they could be mounted Bannock or Shoshone who were exploring well beyond their traditional grounds.

Green River Basin

An important point of trade on the northeastern periphery of the Great Basin culture area was apparently the Green River Basin of southwestern Wyoming. Raymond Wood, for example, identified this area as a major center of trade, a “Shoshone rendezvous,” although it is difficult to identify specifics on the trade activities or the exact area where aboriginal trading occurred.⁶¹ Liljeblad specifically mentions Black’s Fork, and Murphy and Murphy identify the Green River Basin as an important resource area.⁶² Demitri B. Shimkin describes “intertribal games that were held in the summer months and attended by Shoshone and Bannock. These games took place “in the mountains,” but there is no mention of which mountains.⁶³

Apparently the source that first identified southwestern Wyoming as a trading center is a book by John C. Ewers who stated that “no contemporary source definitely located this Shoshoni rendezvous. On my map I have placed in its most probable location, in the river valleys of southwestern Wyoming west of the South Pass. This was the same region in which the Mountain Men later held their annual rendezvous.”⁶⁴

Although the location of this trading center is uncertain, its existence is important to various arguments on aboriginal trade. In describing his trade net, Wood, building on the arguments of Ewers, characterizes the southwestern Wyoming locale as a “trading center in the Great Basin.”⁶⁵ Both Wood and Ewers suggest that the highly popularized mountain man rendezvous were held at locations that were established aboriginal trade centers, a conclusion that Dale L. Morgan and Eleanor T. Harris tend to view with caution.⁶⁶ Historic fur trade rendezvous certainly occurred in the general region (Hamm’s Fork and Black’s Fork of the Green River),⁶⁷ and they may have been related to a preexisting pattern, although historical accounts (such as those available for the previously described Weiser River, Camas Prairie, and Utah Valley gatherings) of this area as a place for intertribal gatherings are lacking. In addition, this area is not known for its seasonally abundant resources, and such resources appear to have been a requisite for aboriginal trade centers (e.g., The Dalles, Utah Valley, and Camas Prairie). It is also of interest that no mountain man rendezvous are known to have been held in the places just mentioned, although they were without question important points of social aggregation and economic interaction for native peoples. It could be that the Shoshone gatherings described by Ewers and Wood was held elsewhere but nearby, perhaps Bear Lake, Utah Valley (both have great fisheries), or Cache Valley.⁶⁸

Discussion

Wood’s definition of primary and secondary trade centers allows some expansion of his western trade net⁶⁹ to include the area south of the Snake River. As noted, Thomas Layton considers Yainax Butte in southern Oregon to be an important node in trade between the Klamath, Modoc, and Great Basin peoples. However, Yainax Butte is poorly described in the literature. Leslie Spier makes only a couple of passing remarks about it, and there is no reference to it as a trade area. The Humboldt Sink, on the other hand, is well described in a number of places, and along with the bottomlands along the Humboldt River, it clearly supported large numbers of people in the past. On the eastern perimeter of the Great Basin, Utah Valley may have been a primary center because of its resident population and ready supply of fish and other resources. The available ethnographic data certainly argue for large gatherings in Utah Valley in the spring. Interestingly, these discussions not only extend Wood’s western trade we

to the south but also suggest that Steward accurately concluded that trade occurred mostly on the perimeters in the Great Basin (he was referring to the northern and western peripheries, of course). Adding Utah Valley to the trade net would include the eastern periphery as well.

The trading that occurred at the primary and secondary centers offers only a partial explanation of how goods moved from group to group. As intimated in the introductory section, I would argue that socially important festivals that occurred at least annually provided both a context and a mechanism for moving goods and ideas across all of the Great Basin. Although these festivals are not usually described as commercial or even as including trade, trade was imbedded in the always-present hand game or in other forms of gambling that occurred at social gatherings. The explicit recognition by Honey Lake Paiute that gambling was trading is evidence that this social form of entertainment also served commercial ends. This conclusion, and the fact that festivals were held in nearly every Great Basin valley, clarifies the role of these events in terms of cultural exchange. Figure 1 displays known festival locations in the Great Basin and surrounding areas based on Steward's work and the several other sources cited herein. The distribution represented in the chart is obviously incomplete. However, the ubiquity of these events, their typical inclusion of attendees from adjacent valleys, and the fact that festival locations moved on a regular basis suggest that information and goods could have moved across this region relatively rapidly to reach even the most remote populations within a couple of seasons.

Why is trade seldom mentioned in the Great Basin ethnographic literature? This is a difficult question because, to begin with, one cannot be completely sure whether the scarcity of information is due to (1) the biases of ethnographers, (2) the loss of trading traditions through cultural change, or (3) reality (i.e., actual infrequency of trade activity within the Great Basin). Wherever they went, Fremont and Ogden encountered people who were very willing to trade, suggesting that commerce was not a new concept. Trade is documented for all groups around the Great Basin, including the Southern Paiute, whose populations and resource abundance were also low. Steward's explanation for the near absence of trade within the Great Basin (resources were too scarce to provide surpluses for trade) may apply only to the Western Shoshone of the central Basin, where the ecology and resources, compared with those elsewhere in the Basin, were not unique or diverse enough to stimulate the kind of exchange seen on the Basin perimeter and elsewhere. Thus exchange in the central Basin occurred mostly in the form of gift giving at important social events and as a consequence of gaming during festivals.

Interestingly, the empirical data make clear that trading food was very common. At The Dalles, for example, the primary item for barter was fish; at Camas Prairie roots, pine nuts, salmon, and crickets traded hands. What do these examples say about the earlier remarks that traffic in food was reprehensible? Were such attitudes reflective of an ideal that simply was not practiced? Was trade in foodstuffs actually as common as the evidence suggests? It may be that the majority of the food moved between tribal groups rather than among tribal members. Robert Spencer's comments make a good argument that food from outside one's area was an acceptable trade item.⁷⁰ Inland Nuunamiut, for example, traded caribou marrow or pemmican and berries to coastal dwellers for *muktuk* (skin and fat from baleen whales). This pattern is somewhat supported by James Davis, who reported that foods from the interior of California moved against foodstuffs from the coast. It is clear, however, that in some cases items (acorns, for example) were traded that must have been available in both areas.⁷¹ Isabel Kelly's description of southern Paiute food trade, in which food moved between hunter-gatherer groups and horticultural groups, although all were Paiute, also supports Spencer's model.

To return to the several expectations stated at the onset, it is clear that social gatherings, though variable, can be broadly characterized. Festivals varied in timing, scale, attendees, and economic emphasis. Those that were held on major transportation routes or in regions of resource abundance and that were attended by numerous ethnic

groups were characterized by greater commercial interests or balanced reciprocity. Thomas Layton's accounts of trade activity at the Humboldt Sink suggest the tension present during Indian-European exchange, and although a few additional accounts were noted in the literature reviewed for this paper, Raymond Wood has described the "latent hostility" underlying trading activities on the Plains.⁷² In the central Basin, where resource availability was variable, festivals were more about sociability, and exchange took the form of generalized reciprocity. The rarity of both formal trade and warfare in the Great Basin may, in fact, be related.⁷³ In all cases, however, as with the Plains groups described by Wood, festivals constituted social interaction and thus were instruments of change. Without exception, aboriginal festivals were held in places and at times when a major food item was in season, be it rabbit, pine nuts, fish, or camas roots.

Despite the often highly ethnocentric descriptions by early travelers of native peoples living in the lowest form of humanity,⁷⁴ people in the Great Basin and surrounding regions were not isolated. They maintained and participated in a structured system that facilitated information flow and, to a lesser extent, goods. This system interacted in down-the-line fashion, although probably not in a strictly linear sense. Ultimately, this tertiary system connected with Wood's trade net that stretched from coast to coast. Components of this system were primary as well as secondary trade nodes that have been well described in the historic and ethnographic literature. This paper argues for the importance of tertiary nodes—annual festivals that, characterized by a strong social flavor, also served to move thoughts, people, and sometimes things into all the valleys of the lightly populated regions of the Great Basin and southern Columbia Plateau.

Notes

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1. *Autobiography of George Washington Bean: A Utah Pioneer of 1847*, comp. Flora Diana Bean Horne (Salt Lake City: Utah Printing, 1945), 51–2.
2. See W. Raymond Wood, "Plains Trade in Prehistoric and Protohistoric Intertribal Relations," in *Anthropology on the Great Plains*, ed. W. Raymond Wood and Margot Liberty (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1980), 98.
3. Robert F. Spencer, *The North Alaskan Eskimo* (New York: Dover, 1976), 199.
4. See H. Edwin Jackson, "The Trade Fair in Hunter-Gatherer Interactions: The Role of Intersocietal Trade in the Evolution of Poverty Point Culture," in *Between Bands and States*, ed. Susan A. Gregg (Carbondale: Center for Archaeological Investigations, Southern Illinois University, 1991).
5. See Wood, "Plains Trade," 99.
6. George Dalton, "Economic Theory and Primitive Society," *American Anthropologist* 63 (1961), 20.
7. See Joseph G. Jorgensen, *Western Indians: Comparative Environments, Languages, and Cultures of 1 Western American Indian Tribes* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1980), 138.
8. See Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1972), 191–6.
9. *Ibid.*, 182.
0. Lorna Marshall, "Sharing, Talking, and Giving: Relief of Social Tensions among !Kung Bushmen," *Africa* 31 (1961): 245.
1. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, 169.
2. *Ibid.*, 216.
3. Spencer, *North Alaskan Eskimo*, 204–5.

4. See Lowell J. Bean and Dorothea Theodoratus, "Western Pomo and Northeastern Pomo," in *California*, ed. Robert F. Heizer, vol. 8 of *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 298.
5. See Joseph G. Jorgensen, "Ghost Dance, Bear Dance, and Sun Dance," in *Great Basin*, ed. Warren L. d'Azevedo, vol. 11 of *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. Sturtevant, 660–72.
6. For examples of Plains-Pueblo mutualism, see the various articles in Katherine A. Spielmann, ed., *Farmers, Hunters, and Colonists* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1991).
7. See Warren L. d'Azevedo, introduction to *Great Basin*, ed. d'Azevedo.
8. See Richard E. Hughes and James A. Bennyhoff, "Early Trade," in *Great Basin*, ed. d'Azevedo.
9. Julian H. Steward, *Ethnography of the Owens Valley Paiute* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1933), 320.
0. See James T. Davis, *Trade Routes and Economic Exchange among the Indians of California* (Ramona, Calif.: Ballena Press, 1974), 20–1.
 1. Steward, *Owens Valley Paiute*, 257.
 2. See Catherine S. Fowler, ed., *Willard Z. Park's Ethnographic Notes on the Northern Paiute of Western Nevada, 1933–1940* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989).
 3. See Thomas N. Layton, "Traders and Raiders: Aspects of Trans-Basin and California-Plateau Commerce 1800–1830," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 3/1 (1981): 127–37.
 4. *Peter Skene Ogden's Snake Country Journals: 1827–28 and 1828–29*, ed. Glyndwr Williams (London: Hudson's Bay Records Society, 1971), 153.
 5. *Ibid.*, 108.
 6. Zenas Leonard, *Adventures of a Mountain Man: Narrative of Zenas Leonard*, ed. Milo Milton Quaife (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 112–14.
 7. See Layton, "Traders and Raiders," 135.
 8. See *ibid.*, 128.
 9. Cited in Layton, "Traders and Raiders," 129.
 0. See *ibid.*, 135.
1. James F. Downs, *The Two Worlds of the Washo* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 36–7.
2. See Davis, "Trade Routes and Economic Exchange," 42.
3. See Warren L. d'Azevedo, "Washo," in *Great Basin*, ed. d'Azevedo, 470.
4. See Francis A. Riddell, *Honey Lake Paiute Ethnography* (Carson City: Nevada State Museum, 1978); and William S. Evans Jr., *Ethnographic Notes on the Honey Lake Maidu* (Carson City: Nevada State Museum, 1978).
5. See Riddell, *Honey Lake Paiute*, 89.
6. See Julian H. Steward, *Basin-Plateau Aboriginal Sociopolitical Groups* (1938; reprint, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1970), 44–5.
 7. *Ibid.*, 54.
 8. *Ibid.*, 122.
 9. *Ibid.*, 139.
0. See my *The Ute of Utah Lake* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991) for discussions.
 1. T. J. Farnham, *Life, Adventures, and Travels in California* (New York: Nafis and Cornish, 1849), 371.
 2. See, for example, Charles H. Lange, "Relations of the Southwest with the Plains and Great Basin," in *Southwest*, ed. Alfonso Ortiz, vol. 9 of *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. Sturtevant (1979), 202.
 3. Omer C. Stewart, *Ute–Southern Paiute*, Culture Element Distributions XVIII (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942), 348.

4. See Joseph J. Hill, "Spanish and Mexican Exploration and Trade Northwest from New Mexico into the Great Basin," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 3/1 (1930): 3–23.
5. See Jorgensen, *Western Indians*, 142.
6. See Isabel T. Kelly, *Southern Paiute Ethnography* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1964).
7. See *ibid.*, 90.
8. See *ibid.*, 103; and Stewart, *Ute–Southern Paiute*, 321.
9. See Stewart, *Basin-Plateau*, 184.
0. Robert C. Euler, *Southern Paiute Ethnohistory* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1966), 82–3.
1. *Ibid.*, 83.
2. Various scholars report on the importance of Big Camas Prairie. For helpful insights, see Sven Liljeblad, "Indian Peoples in Idaho" (Pocatello: Idaho State University, 1957, manuscript on file), 47; Dawn S. Stratham, *Camas and the Northern Shoshoni* (Boise: Boise State University, 1982), 74; and Stewart, *Basin-Plateau*, 191.
3. Robert F. Murphy and Yolando Murphy, *Shoshone-Bannock Subsistence and Society* (Berkeley: University of California, 1960), 319.
4. Liljeblad, *Indian Peoples*, 46–7.
5. For a full discussion, see Brigham D. Madsen, *The Northern Shoshoni* (Caldwell: Caxton, 1980).
6. Liljeblad, *Indian Peoples*, 46–7.
7. See the map in the front of Stewart, *Basin-Plateau*.
8. Murphy and Murphy, *Shoshone-Bannock*, 286.
9. Liljeblad, *Indian Peoples*, 88–9.
0. Washington Irving, *Astoria* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), 69–70.
1. See Wood, "Plains Trade," 100.
2. See Liljeblad, *Indian Peoples*, 47; and Murphy and Murphy, *Shoshone-Bannock*.
3. Demitri B. Shimkin, "Eastern Shoshone," in *Great Basin*, ed. d'Azevedo, 323.
4. John C. Ewers, *Indian Life on the Upper Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1968), 17 n. 2.
5. See Wood, "Plains Trade," 102.
6. See Dale L. Morgan and Eleanor T. Harris, *The Rocky Mountain Journals of William Marshall Anderson* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1967), 18.
7. See *ibid.*, frontispiece maps.
8. Stewart, *Basin-Plateau*, 218–19, mentions that Cache Valley was the site of the 1826 rendezvous and discusses the importance of Bear Lake to Cache Valley Shoshone. Ethnographers have paid little attention to Cache Valley since Stewart, despite its probable importance to indigenous peoples.
9. See Wood, "Plains Trade," 101, fig. 1.
0. See Spencer, *North Alaskan Eskimo*, 204–5 (see n. 3).
1. There are various examples of this in Davis, *Trade Routes* (see n. 19).
2. See Wood, "Plains Trade," 104.
3. See Stewart, *Basin-Plateau*, 238.
4. See Fremont, *The Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1988), 276.
5. Sources that are not found in the endnotes for this paper are S. Catherine Fowler, *In the Shadow of Fox Peak: An Ethnography of the Cattail-Eater Northern Paiute People of Stillwater Marsh* (Washington, D.C. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992); Robert H. Lowie, *Notes on Shoshonean Ethnography*, *Anthropological Papers*, vol. 20, no. 3 (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1924); and Julia H. Stewart, *Nevada Shoshoni*, *Culture Element Distributions XII* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1941).