Horses!

The Spanish introduction of domesticated horses to North America dramatically changed the lifeways of Plains Indians in the two centuries following AD 1600. Horses vastly improved America dramatically changed the lifeways of Plains Indians in the two centuries following AD 1600. Horses vastly improved hunting success on the open plains and they immediately became an extremely important exchange able asset.

At some point, the Spanish gave these Shoshone raiders a new name—the Comanches—and although its origin remains obscure, the reality of the Comanche armed entrepreneurial effort is well documented. By 1740, the Comanches had established themselves as middlemen in an extensive trade network that included transactions with French settlements along the Mississippi River and with the Spanish-Pueblo colonies along the upper Rio Grande. Comanche trading partners included Indian groups as diverse as the Pawnees, Wichita, Kiowa, Kansa, and Iowas, as well as their Shoshone relatives still in Wyoming.

At their most active, the Comanches were the main contributors to an interaction sphere that ranged from eastern Wyoming to northern Chihuahua, Mexico. Among the items purveyed were garden products, dried meat, buffalo hide, deerhide, and silver. These were exchanged for horses, guns, ammunition, knives, kettles, iron arrow points, and a wide number of decorative than the horses they traded exchanged for horses, guns, ammunition, knives, kettles, iron arrow points, and a wide number of decorative than the horses they traded

front of the Rocky Mountains. From there they could raid Spanish trading partners included Indian groups as diverse as the Pawnees, Wichita, Kiowa, Kansa, and Iowas, as well as their Shoshone relatives still in Wyoming.

Pictures of riders and horses.

Plains Indians drew pictures of riders and horses on rock formations, on hides, and, ultimately, on paper. The figure on the 2010 Wyoming Archaeology poster is a photograph of a petroglyph from the Tolar site located near Rock Springs, Wyoming, where the rock panels are still in Wyoming. The poster represents a Comanche horse and rider. This identification is supported by the petroglyph figures adjacent to the Tolar horse and rider and by a strikingly similar image of a horse and rider in a drawing on paper—titled a “Drawing made by a Comanche Indian”—that was collected by Dr. Edward Palmer in Oklahoma Territory in 1868 (Figure 1).

One shared feature of the Tolar petroglyph and the paper drawing is boulderiness whose long, thin horns are oriented upward. A trailing feather extension is attached to the Palmer figure’s horned bonnet, while the Tolar rider appears to have fringe or hair around the base of its bonnet, indicating a kind of buffalo horn headdress that was popular among Comanche warriers. Both figures carry circular shields with radiating feathers. The legs of the Tolar rider are short and apparently unshod, although they could be hidden behind a cape or cloth armor. Long breechcloths with trailing ends are draped to the side of the rider depicted in the Comanche drawing done for Dr. Palmer.

The triangular feature of the Tolar rider’s yoke is indicative of Comanche Shields men’s attire and distinguishes it from other tribal dress. Another uniquely Comanche design can be seen on both the shirt in the Palmer drawing and the shield pattern in a drawing by Yellow Wolf (Figure 3). Figures that incorporate triangular features within a tale and are the embodiment of the protective beliefs associated with the Kickapoo Wolf in Figure 3. These symbols always indicate a particular person or cloth armor. Long breechcloths with trailing ends are draped to the side of the rider depicted in the Comanche drawing done for Dr. Palmer.

The triangular feature of the Tolar rider’s yoke is indicative of Comanche Shields men’s attire and distinguishes it from other tribal dress. Another uniquely Comanche design can be seen on both the shirt in the Palmer drawing and the shield pattern in a drawing by Yellow Wolf (Figure 3). Figures that incorporate triangular features within a tale and are the embodiment of the protective beliefs associated with the Kickapoo Wolf in Figure 3. These symbols always indicate a particular person or cloth armor. Long breechcloths with trailing ends are draped to the side of the rider depicted in the Comanche drawing done for Dr. Palmer.

The triangular feature of the Tolar rider’s yoke is indicative of Comanche Shields men’s attire and distinguishes it from other tribal dress. Another uniquely Comanche design can be seen on both the shirt in the Palmer drawing and the shield pattern in a drawing by Yellow Wolf (Figure 3). Figures that incorporate triangular features within a tale and are the embodiment of the protective beliefs associated with the Kickapoo Wolf in Figure 3. These symbols always indicate a particular person or cloth armor. Long breechcloths with trailing ends are draped to the side of the rider depicted in the Comanche drawing done for Dr. Palmer.

The triangular feature of the Tolar rider’s yoke is indicative of Comanche Shields men’s attire and distinguishes it from other tribal dress. Another uniquely Comanche design can be seen on both the shirt in the Palmer drawing and the shield pattern in a drawing by Yellow Wolf (Figure 3). Figures that incorporate triangular features within a tale and are the embodiment of the protective beliefs associated with the Kickapoo Wolf in Figure 3. These symbols always indicate a particular person or cloth armor. Long breechcloths with trailing ends are draped to the side of the rider depicted in the Comanche drawing done for Dr. Palmer.

The triangular feature of the Tolar rider’s yoke is indicative of Comanche Shields men’s attire and distinguishes it from other tribal dress. Another uniquely Comanche design can be seen on both the shirt in the Palmer drawing and the shield pattern in a drawing by Yellow Wolf (Figure 3). Figures that incorporate triangular features within a tale and are the embodiment of the protective beliefs associated with the Kickapoo Wolf in Figure 3. These symbols always indicate a particular person or cloth armor. Long breechcloths with trailing ends are draped to the side of the rider depicted in the Comanche drawing done for Dr. Palmer.

The triangular feature of the Tolar rider’s yoke is indicative of Comanche Shields men’s attire and distinguishes it from other tribal dress. Another uniquely Comanche design can be seen on both the shirt in the Palmer drawing and the shield pattern in a drawing by Yellow Wolf (Figure 3). Figures that incorporate triangular features within a tale and are the embodiment of the protective beliefs associated with the Kickapoo Wolf in Figure 3. These symbols always indicate a particular person or cloth armor. Long breechcloths with trailing ends are draped to the side of the rider depicted in the Comanche drawing done for Dr. Palmer.

Some additional attributes of a horse and rider on the Tolar petroglyph, which is illustrated, placed to the right of the figure appearing on the Wyoming Archaeology poster, suggest a Comanche artist (Figure 2, left image). This petroglyph depicts a diminutive horse placed in front of a horned human figure, whose upraised arms and hands are attached to a rectangular horse Other diagnostic features include the figure’s large round head and tear-streaked eyes. The small bear placed close to the figure may be a power symbol or a glyph indicating that the rider’s name was Standing Bear.

The same arrangement of a small horse and a rider with a rectangulur body occurs at a site on the Punarique River in southeastern Colorado (Figure 2, right image). The human figure also has upraised arms and hands but does not wear a horned head.
The Yellow Wolf drawing. Between 1852 and 1859, the Comanche artist Yellow Wolf made the drawing on paper shown in Figure 3. The scene contains a diminutive horse in front of the warrior on the right. (Rochester Museum and Science Center, Rochester, New York, accession number 60.160.2.)

The importance of Tolar site cannot be overstated. As a traditional cultural property, it is valued by several Indian nations as a place where the ancestors prayed and left images on the rocks. It has historical significance, too. Although the data available to anthropologists and historians have allowed them to suggest a Wyoshpo State Archaeology Awareness Month activities:

wyoshpo.state.wy.us/aamonth

Acknowledgments
Julie Francis, the Wyoming Department of Transportation, and Russ Tanner, then of the Wyoming Bureau of Land Management, initiated and supported the Tolar Site recording project in 2000-2001. Funding for documentation and evaluation of the Tolar petroglyphs was obtained through grants from the Wyoming Department of Transportation. Linda Olsen and a group of associates from Minot State University completed the panel drawings and the tracings for the site.

Additional Reading


For information about Wyoming Archaeology Awareness Month activities:
wyoshpo.state.wy.us/aamonth