



Killpecker Sand Dunes. Photograph courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management, Rock Springs Field Office.

The intervening landscapes which link these lands in question are a complex of interrelated and essential places of religious and cultural significance to our people. All of the lands and elements of the environment within the landscape are related.

—Betsy Chappoose, spokesperson for the Ute Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation.

Boar's Tusk is the most prominent feature within a sacred cultural landscape of importance to several Native American Tribes. Together with the Table Mountains, Pilot Butte and other features of the Leucite Hills, the landscape stands out against the backdrop of the white Killpecker Sand Dune Field.

Geologically, Boar's Tusk is an ancient volcanic plug composed of lamproite rock that rises nearly 400 feet above the surrounding Killpecker Sand Dunes, the second-largest active sand dune complex in the world. The dune field contains numerous freshwater ponds where meltwater from buried snow or infrequent showers accumulates in interdunal sand depressions.

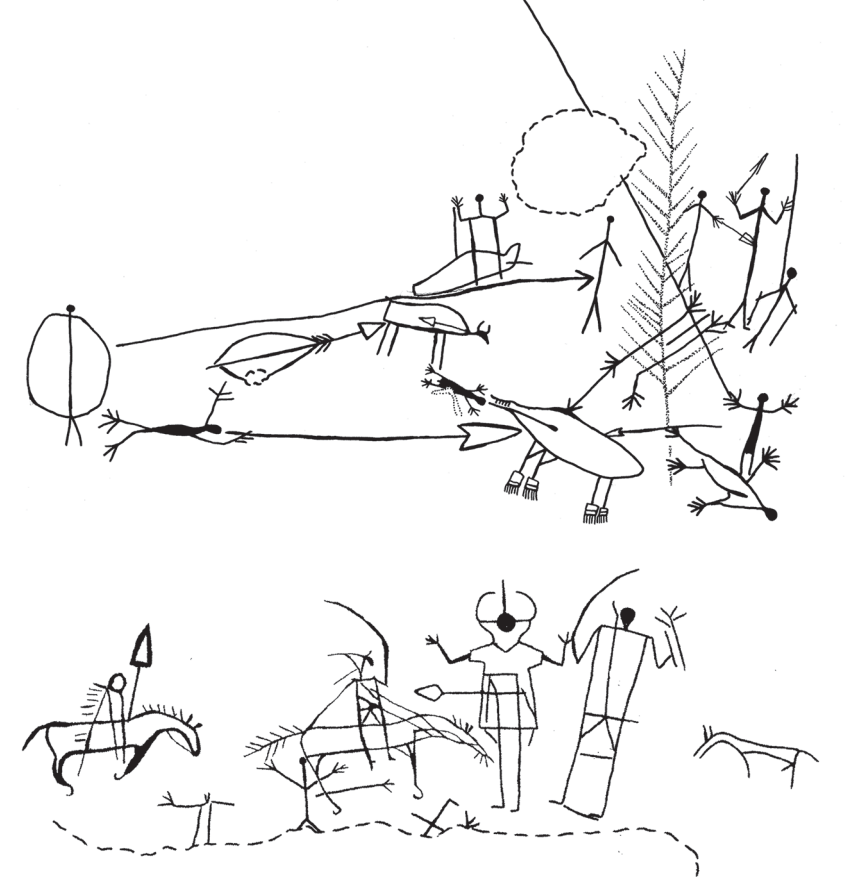
This unique landscape has long attracted the attention of Native Americans. The archaeological record of the area includes a number of rock art sites, several important Paleoindian sites, the Eden-Farson site which is a Late Prehistoric/Protohistoric campsite associated with a large pronghorn processing area, and a historic (and perhaps older) Indian Trail network.

Shoshone homeland

Boar's Tusk is at the edge of the Green River Basin about 30 miles north of Rock Springs, Wyoming. Since the 1720's the Plains Shoshone tacitly controlled this area under the leadership of various headmen. According to historian Henry Stamm, in 1786 a headman known as Obamagwaya "Son of Ecuercapca," held sway. The next fifty years saw several bands of Shoshone develop around charismatic leaders such as Cut-Nose who held dominion over the Green River Valley from about 1830 to 1850. By 1850 many white people had taken to calling all Eastern Shoshone bands Washakie's people as the famed war chief Washakie, or Gourd Rattle lead a tribe of several thousand warriors. Washakie is noted for forming a strategic alliance with whites in order to preserve his people who were in danger of being overrun by the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Sioux.

Contested hunting grounds

The Green River Basin, while a critical part of the Shoshone homeland, was also hunting ground for numerous tribes even prior to the acquisition of the horse. The Plains Shoshoni acquired the horse in about 1720 and other tribes followed suit. With increased mobility came increased conflict. In the canyons surrounding Boar's Tusk there are three major petroglyph sites, each of which contains scores of images indelibly



Top: Pine Canyon petroglyph panel depicting a combat scene. Illustration by James D. Keyser.

Middle: Battle scene at the White Mountain petroglyph site. Illustration by James D. Keyser.

Bottom: White Mountain petroglyph site. Photograph courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management, Rock Springs Field Office.

carved into the sandstone rock. These sites recount biographical and religious events in the lives of Late Prehistoric and early historic inhabitants of the region but one of the most common themes recorded in rock art sites at Pine Canyon and White Mountain is inter-tribal conflict. The evidence of warfare is also written in the bones of a Native American commonly called Deer Butte Man. He had the tip of a Plains arrow point lodged in his sternum but he survived the attack, the wound healed and he lived for many more years.

Sand Dune Sanctuary

A large number of human remains have been discovered in this region. Almost all are old, quite decrepit, and battered. They show signs of having had an arduous lifestyle including warfare, as exemplified by Deer Butte Man discussed



Cedar Canyon petroglyph site. Photograph courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management, Rock Springs Field Office.

earlier. Healed broken bones, highly worn teeth, and evidence of respiratory ailments are very common on the skeletal remains of these people. A statistical analysis of the numbers and conditions of human remains found in the surrounding area have lead this researcher to hypothesize that the region served as a sanctuary for elderly individuals relying on the unique resources around the dunal ponds within the shifting sand dunes.

Sacred space

This landscape has been identified as sacred by Eastern Shoshone, and Uintah and Ouray tribal officials. Consultations with Native American elders indicate that many Vision Questing sites are located within this landscape. Sometimes these sites are marked by stone rings, cairns, or spoke-wheeled alignments of stones set in



Boar's Tusk landscape. Photograph courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management, Rock Springs Field Office.

the ground. But more often than not a mesa or ridge and undoubtedly Boars Tusk itself served to assist native people in their quest for spiritual guidance according to their beliefs.

Native American Consultation

Today it may seem simply natural to recognize the interconnectedness of the archaeological resources, the landscape features, and the historical record of the greater Boar's Tusk area. As Ute expert Betsy Chapoose says, "...These places are interconnected in a living landscape." But this realization was not a natural leap for scholars, in particular, because this is not the typical training of archaeologists, anthropologists and historians.

Identification of this area as special, respected and sacred is the result of over three decades of consultation by the Rock Springs BLM office staff with representatives of several tribal entities including Eastern Shoshone, Northern Arapaho, Northern Ute and Shoshone Bannock and others. Some 30 years ago Shoshone elder Haman Wise identified these areas as 'Respected Places,' a term that made its way into Federal planning documents concerning this area. Our understanding of this unique landscape setting owes much to consultation with the descendants of the people who have lived in this area since time immemorial.

Dedicated to the memory of my friend Clifford Duncan, Tribal Elder and historian, Ute Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray.



For information about Wyoming Archaeology Awareness Month activities, visit our Web page:

<http://wyoshpo.state.wy.us/AAmonth/Index.aspx>

Sponsored by: Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office; U.S. Bureau of Land Management; Office of the Wyoming State Archaeologist; Wyoming Association of Professional Archaeologists; George C. Frison Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology; Wyoming Army National Guard; U.S. Forest Service; National Park Service; Western Area Power Administration; U.S. Bureau of Reclamation; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Wyoming Department of Transportation; EcoLogic Environmental Consultants, LLC; SWCA Environmental Consultants; Cultural Resource Analysts, Inc.; TRC Environmental Corporation; Cardno ENTRIX; Western Archaeological Services; USU Archeological Services, Inc.; HDR Environmental, Operations and Construction, Inc.; Kyak Marook Heritage Research; Bonneville Archaeology; Wyoming Archaeological Society; University of Wyoming Department of Anthropology.

Cover photograph by George Bruckner
Graphic design by Mariko Design LLC/Elizabeth Ono Rahel

Boar's Tusk and the Sacred Landscape of the Red Desert

By Russel L. Tanner