

People knew right away that frontier photographer and painter, William Henry Jackson, had accomplished something important when he made a series of photographs in the Eastern Shoshone camp led by Chief Washakie during September 1870. The village was located about two miles up Willow Creek from the gold mining boom town of South Pass City. Jackson was there as the photographer for the Hayden Expedition, sent by Congress to document Yellowstone for evaluation as a national park. The photos show a still-nomadic band of Plains Indian big game hunters and gatherers living in hide tepees whose economy still depended on hunting buffalo. Though their reservation on Wind River had been created in 1868, the Shoshones did not reside there. The expedition leader, F.V. Hayden, called the photos “remarkable . . . a real contribution to Indian history.”

Jackson, a Civil War vet from New England who first came west in 1866 as a bullwhacker and then earned a national reputation as a photographer, described his visit: “During the expedition [we] came across the above village of the Shoshones, numbering nearly one hundred lodges, encamped among the southern foothills of the Wind River Mountains . . . They were under the well-known chief [sic] Washakie, and were on their way to the Wind River Valley to hunt buffalo for the winter’s supply of food and clothing. Although the village had all the appearance of being a permanent abiding place, yet the following morning, before the sun was an hour high, there was not a tent in sight, and the last pack-pony with trailing lodge-poles had passed out of sight over the hills to the eastward.”

Modern archaeologists and historians continue to reap the benefits of Jackson’s work. Using his camp overview, we can see what is only imagined on most archaeological sites—“site structure.” Archaeologists typically only glimpse vague remnants of past human behavior in the form of stone tool fragments and circles or piles of rocks. It is often unclear if clusters of stone circles or tepee rings were occupied simultaneously, or at different times over the course of centuries. The photo of the western third of the Shoshone village lets us see a camp while it was in use and the patterning is clearly visible.

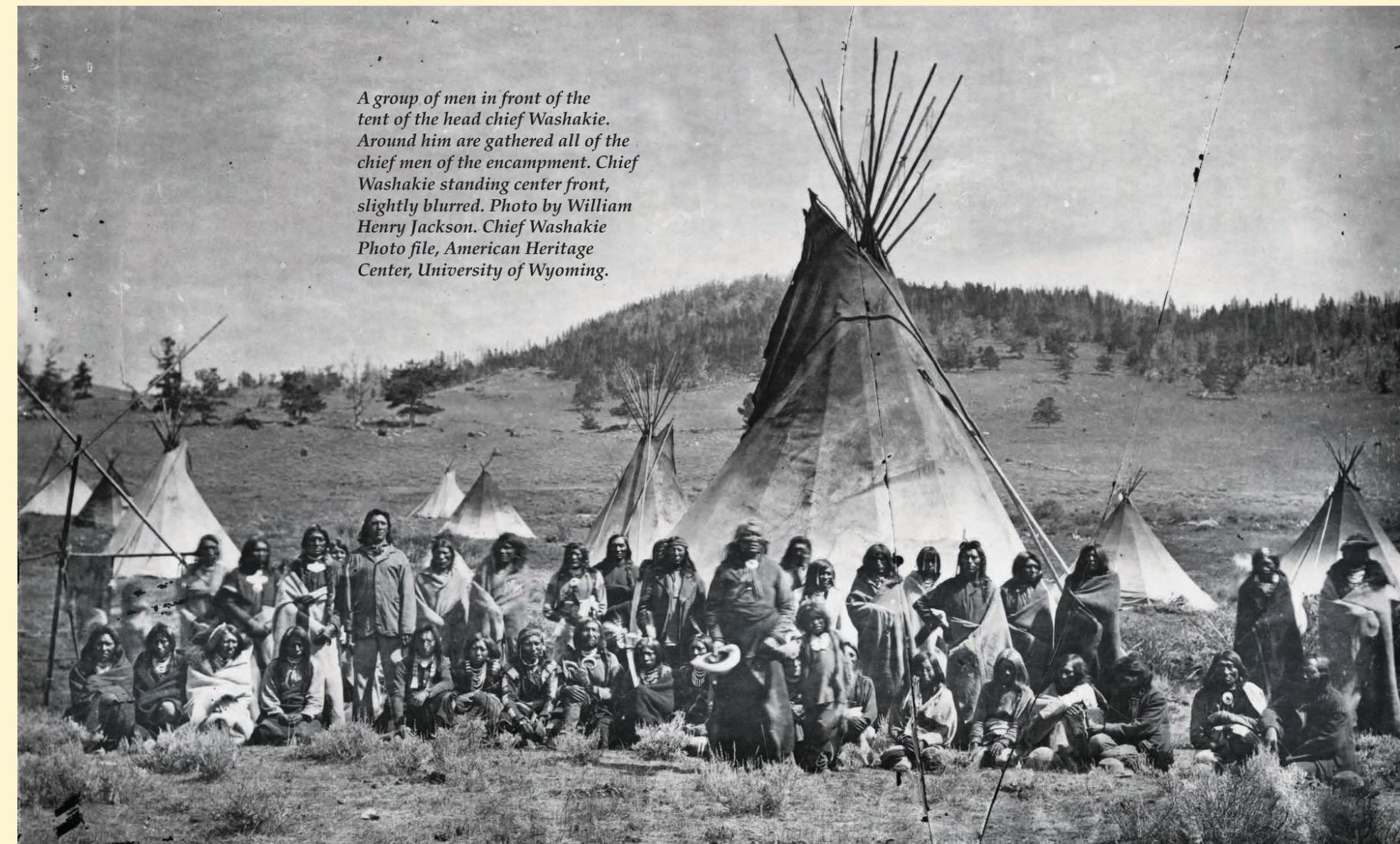


William Henry Jackson in 1872 during a U. S. Geological Survey exploring the Yellowstone and Teton country in Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana. Image courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

This photo allows the observer to almost stroll through the camp with the people who were there that day. The camp was probably home to some 1,000 to 1,500 people. The U.S. estimated that in 1866 Washakie led about 4,500 people, and in 1878 his band consisted of 1,250 people. Notice the clusters of tepees scattered across the valley. These are probably family groups made up of three or four generations of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, other close

relatives and friends. These family bands probably spent much of the summer alone, scattered across the west but typically came together in early fall for a large hunt before winter. Some of the lodges face north or south or any variation of east. Others open to the west. Some are very large, perhaps the homes of the best hunters. Some Shoshone men had large families with several wives and needed more room. Other tepees are very small and might have been children’s playhouses, residences of elderly family members, menstrual shelters, home to unmarried adults, or even used to shelter dogs and puppies. A few of the tepees have favorite hunting or war horses tied near where they could not be stolen.

One thing that leaps out of the picture is that, unlike in movies and tv shows, the tepees are not decorated. They are unadorned buffalo hide discolored near the top by smoke staining from the fires inside. In the entire camp, only one lodge is painted. That special structure is located near the center of the photo, and was the focus of attention in times of peace and crisis. Jackson called it Washakie’s “War Chief’s Tent” and explained that it functioned something like a modern ‘city hall,’ where decisions were made which governed people’s everyday lives as well as during times of turmoil. Its central location and unique decoration meant that any little toddler or confused



A group of men in front of the tent of the head chief Washakie. Around him are gathered all of the chief men of the encampment. Chief Washakie standing center front, slightly blurred. Photo by William Henry Jackson. Chief Washakie Photo file, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.



“The War Chief’s Tent”, Washakie’s headquarters, was the only decorated tepee in the entire village. The lodge is decorated with broad bands of black, yellow and white and a large star burst or medicine wheel, another circle, and an animal, possibly a deer. The tepees are staked down with wooden pegs, and surrounded by pieces of firewood, horse manure, iron pots and pans for cooking. Men, women, children, and one blurry dog are shown sitting and standing around this tepee dressed in traditional and manufactured clothing. The Shoshone camp was full of trade goods because the Shoshones had been bartering hides, beaded and quilled moccasins and other items with mountain men, trading posts, and Oregon Trail emigrants for almost forty years when this photo was taken by Jackson. Chief Washakie Photo file, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

elderly person could find it through the smoke, dust and fear of crisis and know they would be taken care of, while other adults would receive instructions about how to respond to any threat.

Jackson described Washakie’s tepee as “adorned with broad bands of black, yellow and white, rendering it quite conspicuous.” The yellow band at the top represented Washakie’s membership in the “Yellow-bangs clan,” while the dominant black band signified war and the lower white band indicated purification. The Yellow-bangs group travelled at the head of the people when they moved camp and their role was to repel an enemy’s attack from the front.



CWC archaeology students comparing historic images to the modern landscape for a georeferencing project to determine the location and the site boundaries of Washakie’s September 1870 camp on Willow Creek. Photo by Todd Guenther.

Jackson went on to say that the “chief, or his lieutenant, issue forth frequently to announce, in the far-reaching voice peculiar to Indians, the orders which are to govern their actions, while within is an almost uninterrupted thumping on drums”. An ethnographer added that, “The head chief was a brave man who had killed some enemies. The chief would decide where the buffalo were to be hunted and where to camp. There was another position of distinction, that of herald, which likewise depended on a man’s martial record. There might be three heralds at one time, in which case the one with the best voice would make the announcements.”

Traditional archaeological field methods involve walking the ground, but this site is closed to the public. Central Wyoming College archaeology students rephotographed the site from public land to compare with Jackson’s historic photos. Using these images in conjunction with geospatial information systems data and georeferencing software they were able to calculate where Jackson put his camera, determine the location of Washakie’s painted war tent, clusters of family or clan lodges, and map the site boundaries

without setting foot on privately owned portions of the site. The area in the site overview photograph is about 12 acres. The other 1870 photos indicate the camp extended quite a distance to the north and was over 30 acres in total size.



Recent September view to the northwest over the valley where Washakie and the Eastern Shoshones camped in September 1870. The two highest mountains on the horizon are Renneker and Pabst Peak. Notice that after a century of fire suppression on the national forest there is much more timber now than during early historic times. Photo by Todd Guenther.

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Image is an artistic rendering by Brett Bott, Digital Blues, based on an 1870 photograph by William Henry Jackson (Chief Washakie Photo file, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming). Graphic design by Mariko Design LLC/Elizabeth Ono Rahel

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SHOSHONE ENCAMPMENT AT SOUTH PASS

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