

HISTORY, CULTURE, AND TRADITIONS OF THE NORTHWESTERN SHOSHONE

Early History

The Shoshone, Paiute, Bannock, and Ute peoples are related, and call themselves *Newe* and *Neme* (the People). Prior to contact with Europeans, the *Newe* groups formed small extended-family groupings that traveled extensively as semi-nomadic hunter-gathers to survive in the harsh environment of the Great Basin desert. Horses, guns, white contact, and disease destroyed this social organization, resulting in more formal tribal identities and band loyalties. Pre-contact identities did exist to some extent according to the influence of horse ownership and resource use. What became the Northwestern Shoshone band was a part of those groups who had traveled largely on foot in a delicate balance of living off the land. The expression *So-so-goi* means “those who travel on foot.” The old ones called the Shoshone by that name. When horses became available, the *So-so-goi* joined the mounted hunting groups in annual harvests.

The Northern Shoshone traveled with the changing seasons. They looked upon the earth as more than just a place to live; in fact, they called the earth their mother - she was the provider of all they needed for their livelihood. The mountains, streams, and plains stood forever, they said, and the seasons walked around annually. The *So-so-goi* believed all things came from Mother Earth.

In the spring and summer, the Northwestern band traveled around southern Idaho and throughout Utah. During these months, they spent their time gathering seeds, roots, and berries and socializing with each other. This was the time when women talked about the latest happenings of the tribe. Late summer was root-digging time and smaller game-hunting time. In the early autumn, the Northwestern Shoshone moved into the region near what is now Salmon, Idaho, to fish. They caught salmon and dried them for winter use. After fishing was over, they moved into western Wyoming to hunt for buffalo, elk, deer, moose, and antelope. It was very important to get the big game, for it meant the difference between feast and famine. It also meant clothing and shelter for them. Around late October, the band moved into western Utah and parts of Nevada for the annual gathering of pine nuts. The nutrient-rich nuts were an important part of the Shoshone diet. They could be ground up into meal for mush (cereal) or roasted and eaten as a dessert or snack.

The area around what is now called Franklin and Preston, Idaho, was a permanent wintering home of the Northwestern Shoshone. It was known as *Mo-so-da Kahni*, which means Home of the Lungs. The rocks in the area looked sponge-like and made the Shoshone think of lungs. In this area and the rest of Cache Valley were natural places for the Indians to make their homes. The land along the Bear River was in a natural depression with lots of willows and brush they could use. Hot springs were plentiful, as were fish and wild game. The willows and brush also served as wind and snow breaks during the winter months.





Fur Trappers' Arrival

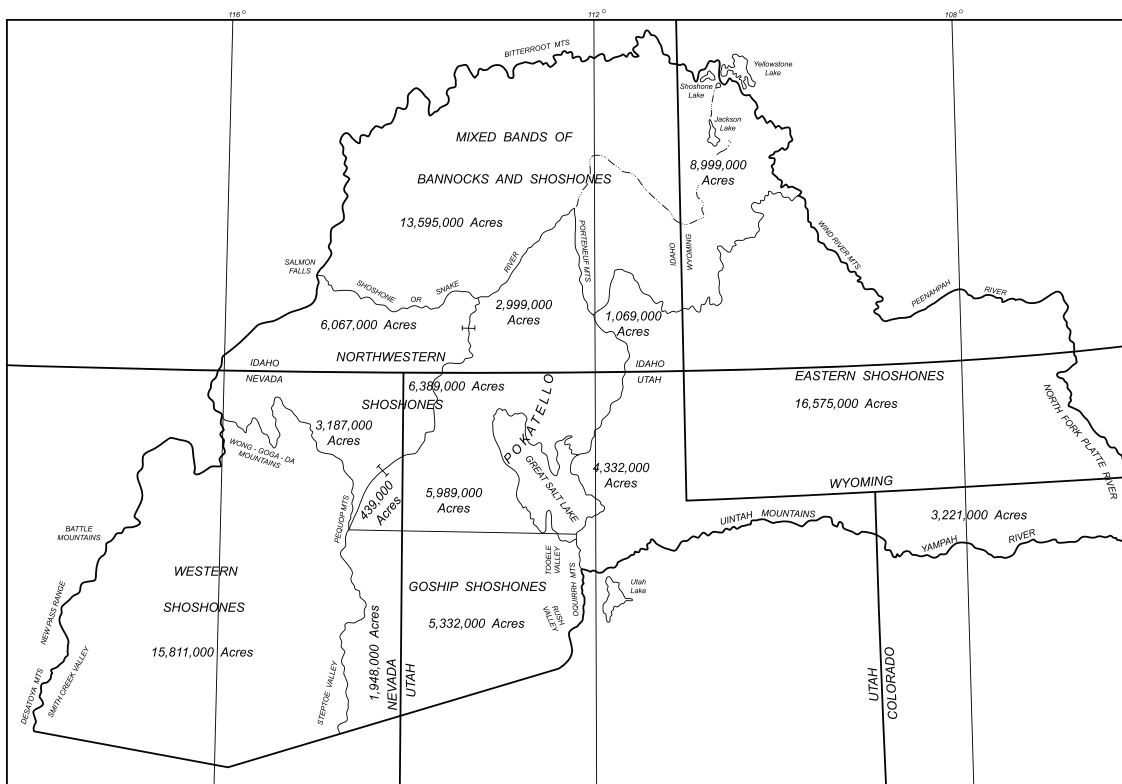
As early as 1810, the fur trade between the American states and Europe brought trappers to Northwestern Shoshone territory. This began the So-so-goi's first extended exposure to non-native culture.

In the 1840s, the presence of non-native culture in Shoshone territory increased significantly as settlers started moving west along the Oregon Trail. These settlers were primarily Americans, moving from the States in the East to claim the land and gold in Oregon, California, and other parts of the West. Some of them migrated to escape religious or political persecution, and some came to find work in the new timber, mining, and railroad industries as they were established.



Bear River Massacre

On January 29, 1863, U.S. Army Colonel Patrick E. Connor and a group of California volunteers, with Utah Mormon guides, attacked the Northwestern Shoshone at their winter campsite along the Bear River. Over 300 people were killed, including Chief Bear Hunter and Chief Lehi, and many women and children. The army said this attack was necessary because of Shoshone raids against prospectors and immigrants traveling through the area. These raids, however, had been conducted by a different band of Shoshone.



Aboriginal territory of the Shoshone. Map courtesy of the Indian Claims Commission



Conversion to Mormonism

The Northwestern Shoshone appealed to Mormon leader Brigham Young after years of struggle to recover from the massacre. Brigham Young sent George W. Hill in the capacity of missionary to aid them. The band, under their leaders Sagwitch and Sanpitch, decided that joining the Mormon church might be the only way to keep from being driven out of their homelands and onto a reservation. By August 1875, over 600 Northwestern Shoshones had been baptized.

Corinne Settlement

In 1875, a site near Corinne, Utah was established as the first permanent home for the Northwestern Shoshone. Forced to give up their nomadic lifestyle, they started learning how to farm, under the guidance of George W. Hill. Many white citizens of Corinne, however, were fearful of a Mormon-Indian alliance, and after wild rumors were started, they called for army protection. The army forced the Shoshone to leave the area, abandoning their new farms and crops.

Homesteading

Beginning in the spring of 1876 and continuing into the 1880s, some Northwestern Shoshone applied for land in Box Elder County, Utah, under the Homestead Act. Most of these lots were later sold by heirs of the applicants.

Washakie Day School

The Washakie Day School was established in 1882. The Northwestern Shoshone learned early on that formal education was important for their children if they were to succeed in the new world that white settlement brought to the area.

World War II

Many members of the Washakie community left during World War II. Some members went to work in the defense industries, and others went to war. For some, it was a chance to see the world; for others, a chance to improve their lives with a steady income. Native Americans from all over the U.S. fought bravely for their country.

Washakie Farm Sold

On November 24, 1960, the LDS Church sold the Washakie Farm. The Northwestern Shoshone had believed that the farm belonged to them, but they were told, to their surprise, that the church had never formally transferred ownership to them. Today, the Northwestern Shoshone own 180 acres of the land close to the original Washakie settlement. They have a sacred burial site there, but no tribal members currently live there.

Federal Recognition

On April 29, 1987 the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation became a federally recognized tribe, separate from other bands of Shoshones.

Massacre Site Saved

On March 24, 2003, with help of the Trust for Public Land Tribal Lands Program, and the American West Heritage Center in Wellsville, Utah, twenty-six acres of the Bear River Massacre site were donated back to the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation.



CULTURE, TRADITION AND EDUCATION

The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation honor and preserve their traditional cultural heritage. They also place importance on education as a tool for success in the modern world. These values are reflected in four projects the Northwestern Band is currently working on at their tribal center in Brigham City, Utah.

Singing Project

The Northwestern Shoshone are learning traditional Great Basin poetry songs called Shoshone Huvia, which are the songs their grandmothers and grandfathers sang long ago. To better understand the songs, tribal members participate in field trips to ancestral places. They observe and learn about the native plants, animals, mountains, rivers, and sky, which inspired their ancestors to sing. Northwestern Shoshone elders help guide and inform this activity.

Library Project

The library of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation serves two purposes: to encourage literacy among tribal members of all ages and to be a repository of Native American cultural knowledge. The library's collection focuses on Native American contemporary literature, poetry, art, traditional stories and songs, history, cultural traditions and arts, and modern social issues.

Shoshone Language Revitalization and Maintenance Project

The primary objective of this project is to generate previously unavailable documentation of the Shoshone language by describing and analyzing the dialect of Shoshone most closely associated with the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation. The language is considered endangered because the younger generation is no longer acquiring the language. The project is thus urgently needed before the last fluent speakers are no longer available to pass on their knowledge. Dr. Mauricio J. Mixco (Project Director) and Marianna Di Paolo are the principal researchers on this project.

Beading Project

By meeting once a week for beading class, the Northwestern Shoshone want to preserve the aesthetic heritage of their tribe. During class, they enjoy associating with each other and teaching the younger members how to make beautiful adornments.