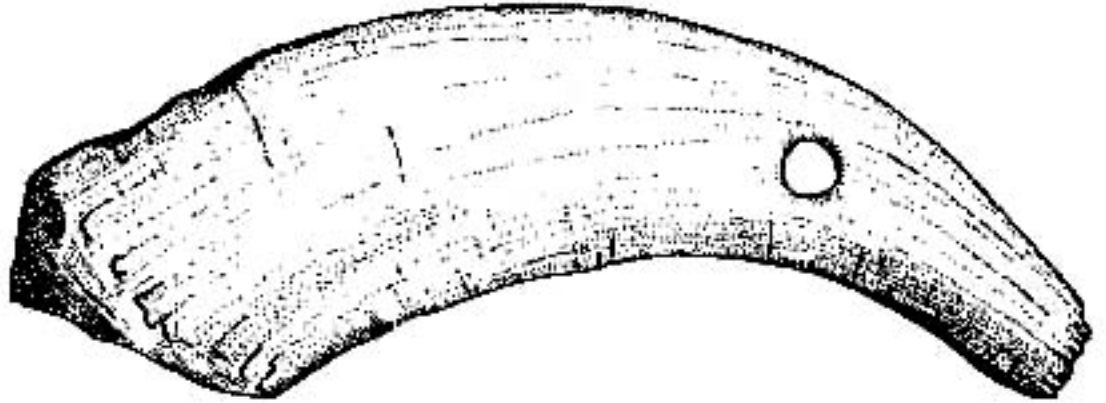




Archaeology



Park Prehistory

Colorado, including Rocky Mountain National Park, has been the home to prehistoric Indians since at least 12,000 years ago at the end of the last Ice Age of the Pleistocene era.

All American Indians are the descendents of people who originally occupied eastern Asia (China/Siberia). Sometime before 12,000 years ago, the first migrations took place from Siberia over the Bering Land Bridge and then through Alaska and Canada to the “lower 48.”

Throughout prehistoric and early historic times, seasonal use by hunters and gatherers was the predominate life-style in the park because of the harsh winters. Archeological sites in the park reflect cultural relationships to both the Plains and the Great Basin, as well as indigenous peoples.

The earliest people identified by archeologists in North America are known as the Paleo-Indians who hunted extinct big game such the woolly mammoth (Clovis culture) and a giant bison (Folsom culture). Although most Paleo-Indian sites in the region are concentrated in the Plains, projectile points, i.e., “arrowheads,” reflecting

Clovis (about 9500 to 8500 B.C.E. (before common era)) and Folsom occupations (about 8,500 to 7,000 B.C.E.) have been collected from the park indicating the presence of these peoples.

The Paleo-Indian period is followed by the Archaic period. Archaic peoples were generalized hunters of modern fauna, and gatherers of plant foods. They occupied the entire state from about 7000 B.C.E. until about 100 C.E. (common era). Several Archaic sites are known in the park.

Game drives in the park above timberline consist of long lines of rocks which were used to channel excited animals (most likely big horn sheep) to an area where they could be dispatched. A very similar technique is known from the Plains where bison (sometimes in the hundreds) were driven over cliffs to their death.

Our knowledge of the Woodland peoples are known best from the Plains area from about 100 to 1250 C.E. However sites of this time period are known in the park. Woodland peoples used the bow and arrow and pottery which were derived from peoples in eastern Kansas and Nebraska.



Historic American Indians



People have been extensively using the mountains from at least 11000 B.C.E. to sometime in the 1300s or 1400s C.E. Although archeologists have a great difficulty in identifying cultural groups after this time, it is suspected that they very likely may have been the predecessors of the modern Utes.

The major inhabitants of the park area in historic times were the Ute and Arapaho. Ute origins may have been in the Great Basin and/or the mountainous areas of the

Colorado; they may have been here for thousands of years.

The Arapaho homeland was originally in Minnesota and they migrated into Colorado by about 1790. Several oral histories from the Ute and Arapaho tell of their many battles in the area. No less than 36 place names in the park are of Ute or Arapaho origin. By about 1880 the Ute had been removed to reservations in Colorado and Utah, and the Arapaho to Oklahoma and Wyoming.

What Do I Do If I Find an Archaeological Site

If you find archeological materials, report them to a park ranger. Rangers will inform the Park Archeologist who will record your find as soon as possible. This information will add to our understanding of the prehistory of the park.

The collecting and removing of artifacts such as broken pottery, arrowheads, and other stone tools, or writing on rocks, destroys our heritage and makes it almost impossible to tell the story about the earliest inhabitants. Moreover it is illegal to collect on federal and state lands, and private lands without permission of the landowner.



Further Information

The best overall book on the archeology of the Colorado and the region is *The Archaeology of Colorado* by E. Steve Cassells. (Johnson Books, Boulder, Colorado, 1983).

The State Historic Preservation Office in every state can provide further information on archeology and prehistory, and local amateur archeological societies.

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Park information is available at 970-586-1206 or on-line at www.nps.gov/romo

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