

## VARIATION AT HIGH ELEVATION: REPORTING NEW CERAMIC SITES FROM THE SOUTHERN COLORADO ROCKIES

By  
WADE BROADHEAD

### ABSTRACT

*The study of Post-Archaic/Late Prehistoric occupations in west-central Colorado has focused primarily on the Fremont, Gateway, and Puebloan cultures. With limited evidence to the contrary, the Late Prehistoric (ceramic era) occupation of the central Colorado Rocky Mountains largely involves discussion of the Ute culture and Uncompahgre Brown ware, the predominant ethnic group and ceramic type found in west-central Colorado. This article reports ten new ceramic sites representing at least twelve different vessels in the Gunnison Basin, a geographic region where evidence of numerous variations in ceramic traditions—Numic and otherwise—have been discovered. This report describes ten new high elevation ceramic sites found from 1990 to 2000, and also reports ancillary studies associated with these sites. The paper demonstrates that high elevation ceramic sites are more common than once believed and suggests that the Late Prehistoric-Protohistoric period in the Colorado mountains was dynamic and diverse. These sites document significant interchange between the central Colorado high country and southwestern Colorado-northern New Mexico. They also suggest that, if a "Numic spread" affected the Gunnison Basin, the Numic populations maintained ancient connections to the south and did not prefer the traditional Ute punctate pottery found elsewhere in the Colorado mountains. This article also presents cursory evidence for possible Athapaskan visitation into traditional Ute homelands, but by no means suggests an intermountain migration route.*

### INTRODUCTION

The Rocky Mountains of Colorado were traditionally seen as a region on the periphery of other cultural groups and traditions, benefiting from the good graces of those neighboring groups who passed them various technological traits (Black 1991). In the past couple of decades, research into the Colorado mountains has multiplied, and the importance of this as an archaeologically-rich region has been documented (Benedict 1989; Black 1991; Frison 1991; Kornfeld and Frison 2000; Pitblado 1999; Reed and Metcalf 1999; Stiger 2001). Full time, year round residence has now been posited by numerous researchers from the Late Paleoindian (Pitblado 1999) to the Archaic periods (Black 1991; Stiger 2001). In contrast to the Archaic and Paleoindian eras, we are fortunate enough to have eyewitness accounts of Numic speakers as the primary residents of west-central Colorado (Buckles 1971; Reed 1995; Warner and Chavez 1995). While the growing corpus

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Wade Broadhead ■ RMC Consultants, Inc., 12345 West Alameda Parkway, Suite 205, Lakewood, CO 80228

of research concerning the Colorado Rocky Mountains has centered on the Archaic and Paleoindian eras, research on ceramic sites is still rare.

Even where ceramic sites have been discovered on the Western Slope of Colorado, such as in the Uncompahgre and Grand valleys, they are few and far between—usually containing only a few sherds. Most of the ceramic sites that have been discovered in the western/central Colorado Rockies are “rough plain” or “finger-impressed brown ware” sites taken to be evidence of Ute occupation of the region (Reed 1995). The newly discovered high elevation ceramic sites reported here show that the Late Prehistoric–Protohistoric era was probably as rich and dynamic as that of bordering regions. Unfortunately, due to a lack of masonry architecture and decorated ceramics, this region sometimes has been relegated to the lackluster cultural ‘rainshadow’ of neighboring traditions.

In reality the lack of ceramics in the high country probably represents numerous factors, including a lack of research centered on the Late Prehistoric–Protohistoric era in the mountains, a lack of published accounts of many of the gray literature sites where these ceramic finds now reside, and the difficulty locating small gray/brown sherds in a mountain landscape littered by small brown and gray stones.

The observed variation in mountain ceramics should be expected considering west–central Colorado offers a wide diversity of environmental and geologic settings providing easy access to almost all possible construction materials. Variations also reflect a significant interchange between south-central Colorado inhabitants and northern New Mexico–southwestern Colorado, bonds that may have existed for millennia as reflected by obsidian artifacts that overwhelmingly come from sources in the Jemez Mountains, and not western or northern sources (Stiger 2001).

## REVIEW OF KNOWN SITES

While very uncommon, ceramic sites do occur in the southern Rocky Mountains, sometimes at extreme elevations. A search of ceramic sites in the Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (OAHHP) database revealed six ceramic sites in Gunnison County. Three of these six sites are isolated finds, while the remainder consist of larger archaeological sites with projectile points, debitage, and ground stone. The attributes from the three sites are summarized in Table 1.

The first site, Pioneer Point (5GN41), is located in the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. Over 700 Uncompahgre Brown ware sherds were recovered from excavations at the Pioneer Point site. These ceramics were found with Desert Side-notched points and features dating to the fifteenth century A.D. (Dial 1989:117). The Pioneer Point sherds were tempered with a poorly sorted volcanic tuff and tuff fragments, which are available in abundance in the West Elk Mountain Range to the north of the site (Dial 1989:33).

Black (1982:Table 4) also found ceramics on 5GN1618, located north of Gunnison near Taylor Reservoir. A Desert Side-notched projectile point

**TABLE 1. Previously documented ceramic sites in the Gunnison Basin.**

Site	Elevation	# Sherds	Type	Temper	Surface Treatment
Monarch Pass (5CF426)	11,520 ft	71	unknown	fine grained quartz sand	curvilinear lines
Pioneer Point (5GN41)	7,040 ft	700+	Uncompahgre Brown ware	volcanic tuff	none
Taylor Reservoir (5GN1618)	9,500 ft	7	Uncompahgre Brown ware	quartz sand	none

and seven sherds of what are described as “Uncompahgre Brown ware, Plain type” were recovered from the site (Black 1982:68-76). The vessel was coiled and displayed interior striations, while the exterior was badly eroded and pitted. The sherds were measured between 5.1 and 5.8 mm in thickness and were tempered with quartz sand (Black 1982:74-75).

On the eastern fringe of the Gunnison Basin on Monarch Pass, another ceramic site has been reported. A total of 71 gray ware sherds was recovered from the site in addition to projectile points, flakes, and ground stone fragments (Hutchinson 1990). The very dark gray/black to yellowish red ceramics contained temper of very fine grain size that appears to be quartz sand. Atypical curvilinear lines were present on 17 sherds with occasional pendant triangles (Hutchinson 1990:105). Comparisons with Great Salt Lake Gray ware and possibly wares from the Anza-Borrego area of southwestern California were made since, “Typical wares associated with the Ute and Apache cultures are much thicker and lack the firing characteristics evident in this vessel” (Hutchinson 1990:105). Indeed, “typical” Ute pottery seems to be marked only by fingernail impressions, and the majority of ceramics are undecorated in any way (Reed 1995). Curvilinear lines and a wide variety of punctations and designs are common on Taos Incised pottery (Levine 1994).

A review of the Rio Grande Basin centered on Alamosa, Colorado lists 129 sites with ceramic components (Martorano et al. 1999:166). Of these 129 resources, 48 were labeled Southwestern in affiliation, 31 as plain ware locations, and 46 unknown type locations. Recent work conducted in the Great Sand Dunes National Monument and Preserve by the Smithsonian Institution and RMC Consultants has discovered numerous ceramic sites attributed to the Ute, Apache, Woodland, and Rio Grande Puebloan peoples (Broadhead 2002; Reed 2000) The Rio Grande Basin appears to be a border region where different styles attributed to Ute, Navajo, Puebloan, Apache, and Plains Woodland all intermingled. Ceramics found in the Gunnison Basin strongly suggest close relationships with the Rio Grande Basin.

In other attempts to explain mountain ceramics, an Intermountain ceramic tradition has been described by Eighmy (1995) regarding sites along Colorado’s Front Range that resemble Shoshonean Brown ware sites to the

north of the study area. Four such Colorado sites appear to be more "plains distal" sites than Intermountain sites. The Intermountain ceramics are recognized by the presence of "flower pot shaped" vessels with a flat bottom instead of a conical base. The Intermountain tradition vessels are located in Colorado and Wyoming. Intermountain vessel fragments also have been recently reported near Steamboat Springs, Colorado (Ross 2001), suggesting this style may be a Numic ware made by groups outside the trade sphere of Southwestern Puebloan and Navajo influence. This may also suggest that Numic peoples relied more heavily on traded ceramics than locally made wares as they neared the ceramic-producing localities of the Southwest. Since entire vessels are rarely found in the southern Colorado Rockies, researchers will have to rely heavily on good descriptions and an increased use of petrographic analysis and Neutron Activation Analysis (NAA) to sort out and define "types."

Evidence of Plains Woodland ceramics has also been documented in the Colorado mountains. These finds are very rare and limited to Middle Park and the Front Range mountains (Irwin-Williams and Irwin 1966; Reed and Metcalf 1999), although newly reported ceramic sites show that possible Woodland ceramics may have penetrated far into the Colorado mountains. Recent work in the Great Sand Dunes area suggests that Plains Woodland cord-marked ceramics in the Rio Grande Basin may be more numerous than once expected (Broadhead 2002; Martorano et al. 1999).

In the recently published context for the Northern Colorado River Basin, all sites with excavated contexts for Uncompahgre Brown ware are mapped (Reed and Metcalf 1999). They state, "Uncompahgre Brown Ware is the primary ceramic type of the region's Protohistoric era" (Reed and Metcalf 1999:155). Reed and Metcalf (1999:155) acknowledge that "Compared to ceramic types of the Mesa Verde region Anasazi, the understanding of Uncompahgre Brown Ware ceramics is incomplete," an assertion also documented by Stiger (1998). Various analysts are overcoming this shortcoming due to recent interest and research into mountain ceramics. David V. Hill and Animas Ceramic Consulting Inc. are two such groups beginning to develop methods to distinguish and identify Uncompahgre Brown ware from Dinetah Gray and other plain wares.

In addition to 129 ceramic sites found in the Rio Grande Basin at high and moderate elevations, pottery has been described in numerous northern locations in Colorado. For instance Puebloan sherds have been found in Rocky Mountain National Park (Husted 1964). Benedict (1989) has also recovered finger-impressed brown ware samples from high elevation contexts along the Front Range, and plain ware pottery was recovered from the Yarmony site in Eagle County although it could not be associated with dated features (Metcalf and Black 1991). Finally, "Apachean" pottery also has been recovered from high elevations in the Front Range (Cassells 1997:238). Other sites have yielded ceramics in the Colorado high country but a complete review of all those sites is beyond the scope of this paper. However, these sources presented here provide groundwork data that show

that ceramic sites are intermittently found in the high country of Colorado, representing both locally and non-locally produced vessels.

### **TEN NEWLY REPORTED CERAMIC SITES**

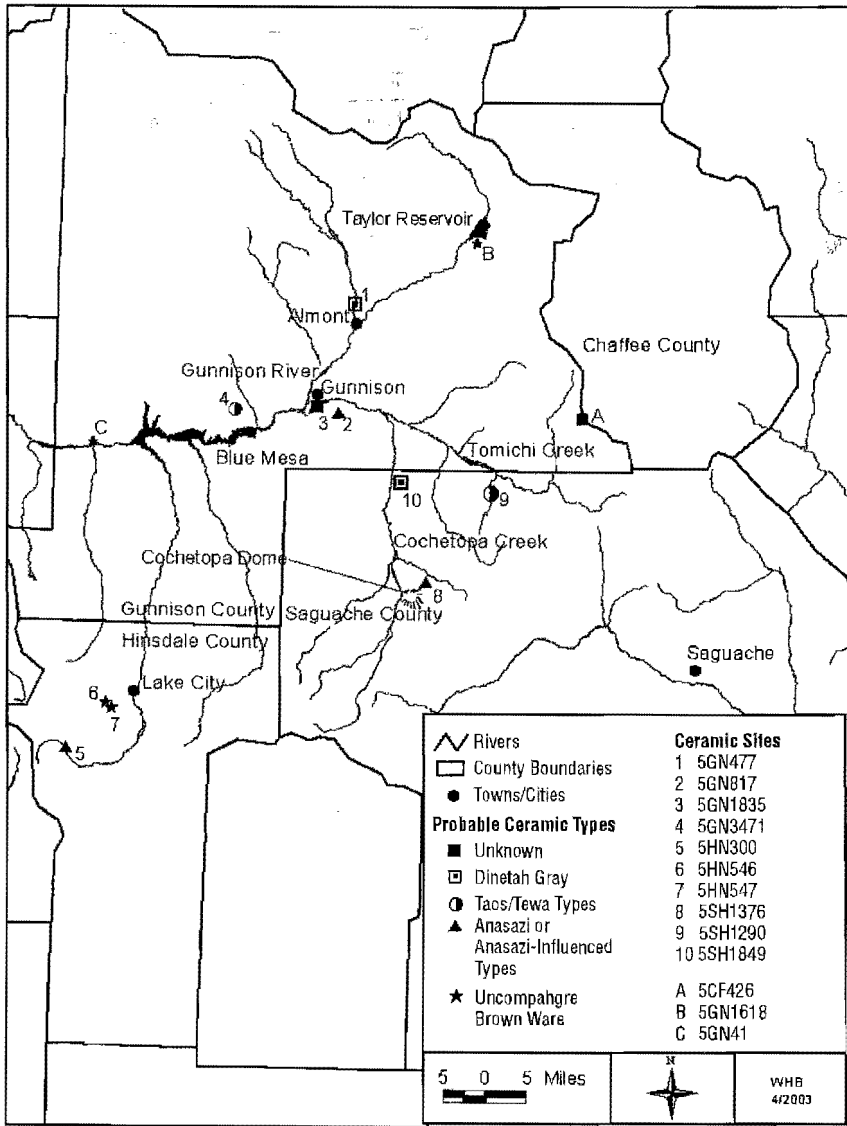
Ten sites possessing ceramic sherds have been identified in the last twelve years by archaeologists from the Bureau of Land Management–Gunnison Field Office (BLM), United States Forest Service (USFS), and Western State College of Colorado. Two of the ten sites are newly recorded, while one, the Tenderfoot site (5GN1835), has been under excavation for 10 years. Another location, the Chance Gulch site (5GN817), is being investigated. Of the specimens found, all were sherds, and no whole or reconstructable vessels were discovered. None of the specimens was an isolate (or isolated occurrences). In general, ceramics were found on relatively larger sites with lithic debitage and many containing diagnostic projectile points, other flaked stone and ground stone tools, and features. The sites were found in varying environments from the sagebrush-covered center of the Gunnison Basin to its alpine southern and southwest periphery. Four sites were recorded in Gunnison County, three in Saguache County, and three in Hinsdale County (Figure 1).

#### **Gunnison County Sites**

Four sites possessing ceramics have been documented in Gunnison County in the last 13 years. The first locality is the Tenderfoot site, a large camp site representing the full time range of Paleoindian occupation through the late nineteenth century (Stiger 1993, 2001). The Tenderfoot site is located on a small terrace overlooking the confluence of Tomichi Creek and the Gunnison River and has yielded over 100 features and thousands of artifacts (Stiger 1993, 2001). The Tenderfoot site has been surface collected four times as well. Each event involved a 100 percent surface collection of a majority of the known site. In the summer of 1999 three pottery sherds were recovered from the site, one from the surface and two from excavation. These three very small, plain gray sherds have yet to be analyzed.

A second new ceramic site was discovered in the summer of 2000. Excavations are being led by Dr. Bonnie Pitblado at the Chance Gulch site (5GN817), a multicomponent Paleoindian, Archaic and Late Prehistoric camp site situated at 8,000 ft (2,438 m) on and around two spring sources. The site yielded one ceramic sherd, probably from a Northern San Juan Gray ware jar (Reed 2000b). The thickness is 8 mm, and the paste is light gray with abundant temper particles identified as diorite porphyry and sand (Table 2, Figure 2e). Northern San Juan Gray ware dates from the Basketmaker III to Pueblo III periods (A.D. 600-1300). The undecorated sherd was found while screening back dirt from a backhoe trench on site, and unfortunately, this sherd could not be associated with any features or artifacts.

This rich site already has yielded over 20 projectile points, some of them clearly post-Archaic in age. Jemez as well as Cochetopa obsidian also



**FIGURE 1. Location map for the Gunnison Basin, Colorado ceramic sites.**

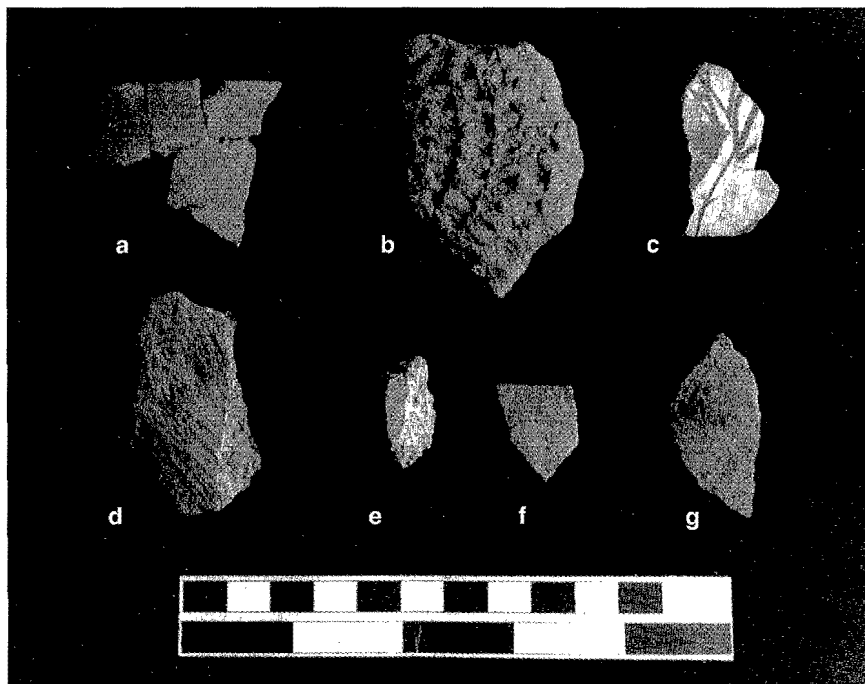
has been recovered from excavations. The Jemez caldera is located in north central New Mexico and the Cochetopa obsidian is found as small pebbles near Cochetopa Dome in Saguache County (Ferguson and Skinner 2003; Stiger 2001). Investigations are planned for the next few years and hopefully more post-Archaic ceramics and associated artifacts will be discovered in addition to the wealth of Paleoindian materials.

The third and northernmost site that has yielded pottery from Gunnison County is 5GN477. This site is located seven miles north of Almont, Colorado. A single sherd of pottery was found approximately 100

**TABLE 2. Analytical summary.**

Site	Sherds Examined	Paste	Temper	Treatment
5GN477	1	silty texture	natural fine sand	striations from a vegetal scraper
5GN817	1	light gray	diorite porphyry and sand	plain
5GN3471	5	highly micaceous	micaceous schist	striations from a ceramic scraper; light stone polishing
5HN546	1	light brownish gray	dioritic material	wiped with a vegetal material
5HN547(a)	4	dark gray	sand and mica flecks	exterior is fabric impressed, interior is wiped
5HN547(b)	3	dark gray	dioritic	scraped with an inflexible tool
5SH1290	reconstructed rim	dark	micaceous schist	either scraped with a ceramic scraper or a wet hand
5SH1376	1	dark brown	natural, mostly feldspar and quartz; also porphyritic tuff, basalt, schist	corrugated
5SH1849	6	dark and carbonaceous	fine/medium sand	wiped with a wet hand

Remaining samples from 5GN1835, 5SH1249, and 5HN300 were not available for analysis



**FIGURE 2. Selected sherds from the Gunnison Basin. Top row: a, 5SH1290; b, 5SH1376; c, 5SH1290. Bottom row: d, 5GN3471; e, 5GN817; f, 5GN477; g, 5SH1849.**

meters south of a Navajo rock art panel representing three Yei figures, briefly reported by Stiger (1998:14). This small rim sherd was probably from a wide-mouthed jar. The exterior and interior surfaces have light parallel striations similar to those produced by vegetal scraping. This sherd is classified as Dinetah Gray (Reed 2000a). Further, dark cultural deposits full of ground stone and lithic debitage occur here although the pottery was found down slope from these deposits. Since rock art styles are usually not imitated, and if the cultural deposits adjacent to the rock art date to the Protohistoric period, a strong case can be made for genuine Navajo visitation to the Gunnison Basin.

The fourth site found in Gunnison County is 5GN3471. Site 5GN3471 is located on a small flat near Stevens Creek, just north of Blue Mesa Reservoir (Broadhead 2000). This is a large camp site containing projectile points, stone tools, lithic debitage, and ground stone. The site is located in the bottom of a small valley between steep mesas where extensive cobble testing activity was occurring. The surface assemblage at 5GN3471 consists of two rough quartzite bifaces, one caramel chert uniface, one white quartzite point tip, and one almost complete white quartzite, shallow corner-notched projectile point. The quartzite point indicates a Late Prehistoric date and is probably constructed from cobbles that are common on the surrounding slopes. A small complete Desert Side-notched point also was found on 5GN3471, made from what appears to be locally available white quartzite. A single flake of optically clear quartz also was recovered from the site. Optically clear rock crystal is very rarely found on sites in the Gunnison Basin and may have been imported to the region. A similar artifact recently has been found at another nearby site.

The ceramics at 5GN3471 are unusual for the Gunnison Basin. Twenty-five sherds of highly micaceous pottery were recovered from the site. Five sherds were submitted to Animas Ceramic Consulting Inc. for analysis. The wall thickness varied from 4.7 mm to 6.0 mm. Pastes are highly micaceous and tempering material appears to be micaceous schist that probably occurred as natural inclusions in the clay. Exterior and interior surfaces have even striations that were probably produced with a ceramic scraper. Analysis of these sherds yielded two different results. Animas Ceramic Consulting typed these as being from a Taos/Picuris Micaceous utility jar, while David V. Hill believes these are Uncompahgre Brown ware sherds since sources for highly micaceous clays are found in the Gunnison River Basin and Elk Mountains, both traditional Ute homelands. I agree with Animas Ceramic Consulting that these are more likely of a Taos/Picuris Micaceous vessel because—although micaceous ceramics have been reported in Ute contexts—pottery so overwhelmingly mica-rich to the extent it almost resembles schist is not common on Ute sites in the mountains or Western Slope. Hill's recent work with Ute ceramics in western Colorado may help to understand the range of variation and differentiation of these two types (Hill 2003).



## Hinsdale County Sites

A total of three ceramic sites yielding seven sherds was found in Hinsdale County, high in the San Juan Mountains near Lake City. Two of these sites, 5HN546 and 5HN547, were found by James Davies, a graduate student working for the BLM–Gunnison in the summer of 1995. The third site, 5HN300, yielded pottery after a reevaluation of the historic mining town of Argentum by the Grand River Institute for a Save America's Treasures project in 1999.

Site 5HN547 was recorded as a small lithic scatter located at an elevation of 9,420 ft (2,871 m). The site yielded four sherds of thick, dark brown pottery. The paste of these three sherds has a dioritic origin and the exterior has dimpled impressions from light random finger placements. These three sherds fall into the range of Uncompahgre Brown ware while one sherd displays different characteristics.

The atypical sherd has thin exterior fabric-impressed lines with dark gray paste containing rounded sand and flecks of mica temper. This sherd proved difficult to identify. According to Animas Ceramic Consulting (Reed 2000a), it is definitely not a Navajo sherd, nor is there any evidence for Utes using any type of cord or fabric impressions on their ceramics. The closest corollary appears to be cord-marked ceramic traditions from the southern Front Range and eastern plains of Colorado (Ellwood 2001), although the impressions are much less defined and subtle compared to most cord-marked pottery.

Site 5HN546 is another small lithic scatter located near 5HN547. One rim sherd of pottery is identical to that found at 5HN547. The paste is light brownish gray. Tempering is of dioritic material with a few dark minerals. The surfaces of the sherd appear to have been wiped with vegetal material. This sherd is probably Uncompahgre Brown ware; since 5HN546 and 5HN547 were found so close to one another, the sherds from each site may even represent the same vessel.

The final site, which yielded one sherd of pottery, is 5HN300. In addition to numerous historic structures and artifacts, a biface and four chert flakes also are present. One possible prehistoric firepit and burned bone also have been identified. The sherd closely resembles Ancestral Puebloan/Anasazi styles of black-on-white decorated pottery. Since this sherd was found and recorded by an archaeologist in its primary context, away from Euroamerican habitation, it is believed to be the result of aboriginal activities (Carl Connor, personal communication 2000).

One final ceramic site, 5GN2620, the Indian Creek Rockshelter, supposedly yielded black-on-white ceramic sherds from the surface. However, a private citizen took these artifacts to the BLM before the land was exchanged, then disappeared. BLM archaeologists are highly skeptical of the find and therefore it has been omitted as one of the genuine "new" nine ceramic sites, although there is a possibility that the sherds were taken from the rockshelter, which has seen extensive pot hunting while in private pos-

session. The site does contain an extensive prehistoric/protohistoric component including a standing juniper log corral.

While the San Juan Mountains form an imposing barrier to Durango and the Ancestral Puebloan tradition in that area, they can be crossed for over three months in the summer and the mean distance from Hinsdale County to Durango or Cortez is meager in terms of hunter-gatherer settlement systems; one should then expect more Puebloan ceramics to be found on hunter-gatherer sites in the southern Colorado Rockies.

### **Saguache County Sites**

Three sites containing 219 sherds have been documented in northern Saguache County. Site 5SH1376 was found by a Forest Service archaeologist near Cochetopa Dome. The site was found on an ecotonal forest-sagebrush boundary near a slight knob overlooking Saguache Park.

Site 5SH1376 was recorded as a lithic scatter and possible camp site spanning 1.6 acres. The site yielded three gray corrugated ceramic sherds, a finely made white chert side-notched projectile point, and a roughly made corner-notched projectile point of brown quartzite (Figure 3). Debitage found on site is exclusively chert and mainly locally available white (agate) chert resembling the projectile point. The second quartzite point closely resembles points found in the Gunnison Basin and may represent an Archaic occupation of the site or may be unrelated to the pottery.

One sherd was studied from 5SH1376 through petrographic analysis

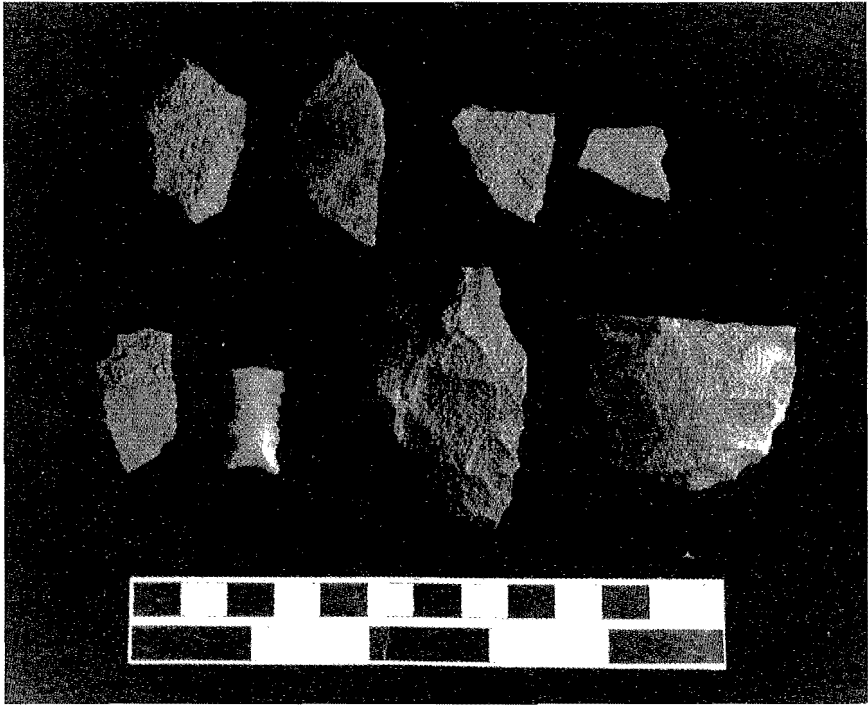


**FIGURE 3.** Diagnostic tools and ceramics from 5SH1376.

(Hill 2003) and a number of minerals present in the paste were noted. Volcanic and plutonic rock fragments and mineral grains derived from the same sources as the rock fragments were present in the ceramic paste. The rock fragments included porphyritic tuff, fine-grained equigranular textured basalt, and quartz mica schist. Minerals in the ceramic paste include feldspar, biotite mica, and quartz. Based on the wide variety in the types of rock fragments present, the general abundance of mineral grains in the ceramic paste, and the variation in the degree of weathering observed in the feldspar grains, the inclusions observed in the paste from 5SH1376 were naturally present in the source of clay (Hill 2003). Given the variation in the paste of the region, Hill suggested the sherd could have been produced anywhere in the San Luis Valley province, since the right combination of minerals is present in the San Luis Valley, particularly on the western slope of the valley (Atwood and Mather 1932). This site appears to indicate both in point style and in pottery type a strong Anasazi influence on a typical, small hunter-gatherer camp. This is also one of the first sites identified with Puebloan style pottery made with local mountain materials. Similar sites have been discovered in the San Luis Valley near the Great Sand Dunes National Park but have not been formally reported (Broadhead 2002). Locally made corrugated ceramics suggest interaction between hunter-gatherers and the surrounding Puebloan societies, although further comprehensive research is ongoing to identify this potential new ceramic tradition and its implications. Excavations here could reveal tremendous amounts of information about hunter-gatherer/Puebloan exchange. This find also may be viewed in the context of the Saguache Shelter reported by Hurst (1943), where turquoise, corn, human bones, and other perishables were found with Puebloan style pottery.

The second site, 5SH1849, is an open camp site located in a tributary canyon feeding into Cochetopa Creek 22 km southeast of Gunnison, Colorado. The tool assemblage on 5SH1849 consists of quartzite bifaces, and one unusual white quartzite projectile point base (Figure 4). This point fragment is irregularly flaked and displays a concave base and serrated blade edges. The point is not a part of any recognized style in the Gunnison/Montrose/Grand Junction area. The point was shown to three Western Slope archaeologists with long experience in both southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. None could identify the point style (Richard Fike, personal communication 2000; Alan Reed, personal communication 2000; Patricia Walker-Buchanan, personal communication 2000). Due to its small size and manufacture, the point may represent a Late Prehistoric occupation contemporaneous with the pottery, although admittedly much research is still needed for projectile point sequences in this region.

Site 5SH1849 also yielded the largest and most enigmatic collection of sherds. The 15 ceramic artifacts were sent to Animas Ceramic Consulting Inc. and typed as "good examples of Dinetah Gray" (Reed 2000a). The sherds average 4.5 mm in thickness, and the paste is carbonaceous with fine to medium sand temper. The interior surfaces appear to have been wiped

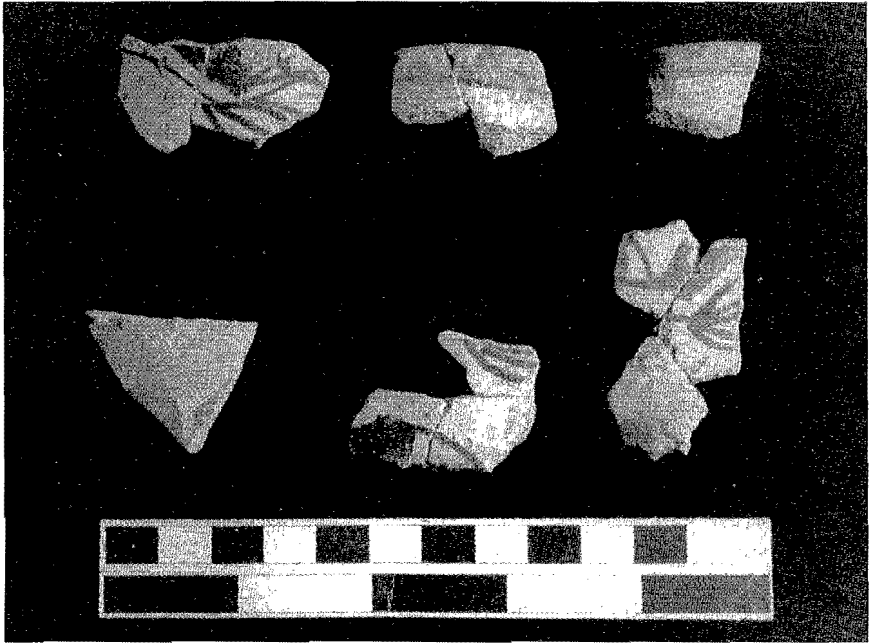


**FIGURE 4. A selection of ceramics and stone tools from 5SH1849.**

with a wet hand. Exterior surfaces appear to have been smeared as the coils were applied and then smoothed with a wet hand.

Site 5SH1849 also yielded one small piece of obsidian. This tiny flake was found close to the pottery and closely resembles obsidian from the Cochetopa Dome source area in Saguache County that occurs in small pebbles, usually no more than in golf ball-sized nodules (Stiger 2001). The black obsidian with a chalky sheen is almost identical to an obsidian pebble found less than 200 m to the south on a separately numbered site, although the two sites are probably one larger contiguous site. This unusual pebble is rare in that it is quite large and used as a bipolar prismatic core with numerous flake scars. The obsidian found at 5SH1849 is probably part of this core (Craig Skinner, personal communication 2000). The obsidian was sent to Northwest Obsidian Laboratories for sourcing, who identified the large (Apache tear) pebble to have originated from the Cochetopa Dome source. The smaller flake found in association with the pottery cannot be positively identified, but is almost certainly from the Cochetopa Dome source as well (Craig Skinner, personal communication 2000).

A final Saguache County site, 5SH1290, was originally recorded by Western State College in 1990. This large lithic scatter is situated on a flat adjacent to Needle Creek four miles south of U.S. Highway 50. Site 5SH1290 yielded approximately 100 sherds from two different vessels (Figure 2a and 2c, Figure 5). One group of sherds represented black-on-white



**FIGURE 5.** Tewa Polychrome sherds from 5SH1290.

Tewa Polychrome with distinctive red paste (Figure 5). The second vessel was typed by both Animas Ceramic Consulting and David V. Hill as a Taos/Picuris Micaceous utility olla (Figure 2a). The ceramics contained dark paste with micaceous schist as temper. The finishing techniques were indeterminate, either a ceramic scraper or hand wiped. This site also contains features, tinklers, and numerous projectile points, although drawings were not furnished of any of the artifacts.

### **PATTERNING OF MOUNTAIN CERAMIC SITES**

However limited these data are, they do begin to display some patterning (Table 3). The limited data show that the Gunnison Basin as not tied exclusively to one region, nor did it rely solely on locally produced vessels. A number of strategies and networks must have existed to generate the pattern in the observed data over time. Others have argued that obsidian was indicative of Late Prehistoric occupation (Buckles 1971:1215), although obsidian points have been found from Paleoindian to the Archaic. Some have suggested that chert was more prevalent among post-3000 B.P. occupations in the Gunnison Basin (Stiger 2001:91-92). The sites discussed in this paper show that chert is common on ceramic sites, but that chert is more common on sites found outside the center of the Gunnison Basin where chert sources are more prevalent. Sites within the central Gunnison Basin exhibit more quartzite since numerous quarries and cobble deposits of that material occur here. Obsidian commonly occurs on ceramic sites, although

**TABLE 3. Attributes of newly reported mountain ceramic sites.**

Site	Elevation	Sherds	Distance to Water	Ceramic Type/Tradition	Diagnostics	Desert Side-Notched Points	Obsidian Present?
5GN477	8,220 ft	1	240 ft	Dinetah Gray	Navajo Style Rock Art	No	No
5GN817	8,000 ft	1	0 ft	San Juan Gray	Many	Unknown	Yes
5GN1835	7,700 ft	3	100 ft	Unknown	Many	Unknown	Yes
5GN3471	8,400 ft	10-20	100 ft	Picuris Tradition	Desert Side-notched	Yes	No
5HN300	10,560 ft	1	0 ft	Unknown Anasazi	none	No	No
5HN546	9,460 ft	1	500 ft	Uncompahgre Brown ware	none	No	No
5HN547	9,420 ft	5	330 ft	Uncompahgre Brown ware & Unknown	none	No	Yes
5SH1290	8,450 ft	100+	61 ft	Tewa Polychrome and Penasco Micaceous	Tinklers, Points	Unknown	Yes
5SH1376	9,320 ft	5	4500 ft	Corrugated/Puebloan(?)	Side-notched Point	No	No
5SH1849	8,500 ft	14	122 ft	Dinetah Gray	Concave Base Point	No	Yes

sourcing data are sorely lacking to help fit these sites into a regional framework. Obsidian data compiled by Stiger (2001) proves that almost all artifacts come from local (Cochetopa) or southern (Jemez) sources, while some exceptions are being documented (Hughes 2002). Ceramics tend to occur commonly on smaller lithic scatters/camps, but also on vast multicomponent sites (e.g., 5GN817, 5GN1835, 5SH1290). Ceramics also commonly occur with ground stone implements indicating their possible use for the cooking and preparation of foodstuffs, as discussed by McDonald (1995).

As one might expect, mountain ceramic sites tend to be found close to water, especially adjacent to tributary or secondary drainages within 3 km of main drainages as in the case of 5GN477, 5GN3471, 5SH1849, 5HN546, and 5HN547. The “lower” mountain elevation zones, especially from 7,700–8,500 ft, seem particularly favorable. Mountain ceramic vessels also appear to have been discarded on larger sites where other activities were occurring, such as butchering and seed processing; isolated pot drops are rarely reported.

Reed and Metcalf (1999:159) state that “projectile points in the study area (Northern Colorado River Basin) primarily consist of Cottonwood Triangular and Desert Side-notched types.” Reed and Horn (1990) also note that these points are common on Navajo sites. Reed and Metcalf (1999:159) state that “Desert Side-notched projectile points have a broad geographic distribution. . . . Furthermore, Desert Side-notched points in the study area tend to occur in association with Uncompahgre Brown Ware ceramics—most likely a Ute ceramic type—and not at sites yielding ceramic types attributed to other cultural groups.” While these point styles are common on previously documented ceramic sites in the Gunnison Basin (Black 1982; Dial 1989), they are not common on these newly reported sites. The one exception is 5SH3471, where one Desert Side-notched point was found. Since all data reported are from surveys, these points may represent earlier occupation of the sites. While not altogether absent, Desert Side-notched and Cottonwood Triangular points are uncommon in general in the Gunnison Basin, as noted by the author during over three years of survey. Desert Side-notched points are often found in association with ceramics, while small corner-notched points, often constructed from quartzite, are the norm for post-Archaic sites in the Gunnison Basin (Black 1982; Dial 1989). Further research is needed to test this observation.

The lack of pottery also seems to reflect the length of investigation. Ceramics were found at Tenderfoot after ten years of excavation, and at the Chance Gulch site after two years of excavation and a third year of re-recording. Further excavation of sites in the Gunnison Basin will probably yield ceramics if enough time and space are invested. The difficulty finding the errant brown ware sherd in a mountain environment characterized by small black and brown rocks has also probably contributed to the apparently low numbers of ceramic sites in the mountains. Finally, until recently archaeologists did not expect to find ceramic sites, and therefore did not look for them. The author has noted multiple examples in Colorado and

Wyoming of highly skilled archaeologists sometimes revisiting a site numerous times and still missing quite large ceramic scatters because ceramics on mountain sites are still not yet part of the expected material culture; hopefully these data will help rectify this situation.

## DISCUSSION

The ceramic sites reported here suggest affinity with regions to the south and southwest of the Gunnison Basin. "Early" ceramics appear to have originated in the northern Rio Grande and San Juan Basin, which is supported by recent findings of Puebloan wares in the San Luis Valley (Broadhead 2002). These sites imply local hunter-gatherer bands roaming along north/south lines, and/or the limited incursion of non-local peoples from the south and southwest. Fremont ceramics, found in low numbers in northwest Colorado, are noticeably absent. Apache ceramics are also missing from the study area, although current research may reveal Apache sites in the Colorado mountains (Sunday Eiselt, personal communication 2002). Figure 1, showing locations of ceramic sites in the Gunnison Basin, seems to suggest that penetration of the Gunnison Basin occurred from the south. A possible main route may be from Saguache along Saguache Creek and then down Cochetopa Creek. Cochetopa Pass may have been the primary gateway to the Gunnison Basin in the ceramic era. Sites found on the northern, eastern, and western edges of the Gunnison Basin appear to contain typical Uncompahgre Brown ware or Shoshonean sherds and not Apachean or Fremont varieties, with the possible exception of the Monarch Pass ceramics (Hutchinson 1990).

If Stiger (2001:92) is correct that occupation of the Gunnison Basin was non-residentially based after 3000 B.P. and inhabited by non-locals utilizing the Basin seasonally, then one would expect only a few ceramic finds and most of the sherds would be manufactured outside the Basin. The data reported here is inconclusive; while some of the ceramics are definitely imported, some could have been made locally. Further petrographic analysis is needed on ceramics found in the Gunnison Basin to determine imports from locally made artifacts.

Another interpretation being debated is that Protohistoric period sites in the Gunnison Basin are small or sparse (that they contain very few artifacts compared to Archaic and Paleoindian period sites). Others (Wilshusen and Towner 1999:362) have made these same observations concerning Ute sites in the Southwest. Stiger (2001:171) states that after 3000 B.P. in the Gunnison Basin, "At some ephemeral camps, small-shallow fire-cracked-rock features are built and used, but no artifacts deposited. At a few ephemeral camps, some artifacts are used, but rarely is a large number of artifacts made and deposited."

The data from what can be inferred as "single/limited occupation" ceramic sites (5GN3471, 5HN546, 5HN547, 5SH1849, 5SH1346) seem to support this assertion. The author's experiences during three years of survey in the Gunnison Basin also tend to support Stiger's observation. Sites



with diagnostic post-Archaic points, and that *appear* to be single occupation, tend to be small or at least smaller than sites with strong evidence of Archaic settlement. It is uncommon for one to find a large lithic scatter with many exclusively Late Prehistoric projectile points, although exceptions are documented (Dial 1989). Ceramic sites in the Basin are limited in number and do suggest that vessels were both locally and non-locally produced, although Stiger's suggestion should be held to further scrutiny. Further study and excavation of post-3000 B.P. sites in the Gunnison Basin are needed to test this assertion, since in neighboring regions the trend appears to be the exact opposite.

Understanding of mountain plain ware pottery may be helped by McDonald (1995), who counters claims that ceramics were not used by highly mobile hunter-gatherers suggesting that, in some cases, ceramic vessels offer superior technology for cooking certain types of plant and animal matter. She discusses the ramifications of firing temperature and construction materials as a reflection of intended use, instead of cultural origins. Her important work based on that of Reid (1990) may begin an important step for research that begins to explain the variability of mountain plain wares. McDonald also discusses the relations of ceramics to mobility, stating that ceramics could be quite useful to mountain groups, and not necessarily carried, but cached, in predictable locations and reused annually. The ceramics from the study area also suggest that some ceramics were probably carried great distances from northern New Mexico or far southwestern Colorado. The small overall number of ceramic sites in the Gunnison Basin suggests that mobile hunter-gatherers used this technology sparingly, although further excavations and research addressing this assertion may reveal that in certain cases ceramics were an important part of prehistoric hunter-gatherer material culture. This research demonstrates that mountain peoples did produce ceramic vessels and also traded or otherwise obtained vessels common to other regions. This report suggests that ceramics should be an expected part of hunter-gatherer material culture in the central Colorado mountains.

Regarding the ethnic affiliation of the ceramics, Reed and Metcalf (1999:156) state, "Only limited evidence suggests that groups other than the Ute or their ancestors occupied the study area. It is, perhaps, more plausible that different bands may have manufactured different types of Uncompahgre Brown Ware. Because the amount of labor to construct either ceramic type [plain or fingernail impressed] is roughly equivalent. . . ." Reed and Metcalf also mention that obsidian differences may mirror ceramic differences. They state, "That ceramic variation may reflect ethnic differences is also suggested by studies of obsidian sources. Protohistoric-era sites in the northern portion of the study area [western Colorado] tend to yield obsidian from sources in Idaho or western Utah, whereas sites in the southern portion of the study area tend to yield obsidian from sources in north-central New Mexico" (Reed and Metcalf 1999:156).

Reed and Metcalf (1999:158) also state, "The range of variation is less well understood for the Plain type than for the Fingertip-Impressed type." Martorano (1999:169) also states, "detailed analysis of plain ware ceramics is important in order to delineate the range of variation found in the Rio Grande Basin and the potential for assigning cultural affiliation." Even Buckles (1971:505), who defined Uncompahgre Brown ware, describes the similarities of Uncompahgre Brown ware to ceramics of neighboring groups such as the Navajo, and that sometimes it is a "difference by degrees." Specialists in mountain ceramics agree that variation among western and southern Colorado plain ware specimens is not yet well understood.

Understanding of mountain ceramics also will be considerably extended by the advancement of petrographic and ceramic analyses to establish the sources of pottery found in the mountains. With the increased use of petrographic analysis, we may be able to identify which sherds were locally produced and which were produced elsewhere, thereby helping to understand the range of movement and exchange systems in the Southwest and what role the mountains played in this interchange. Also we may be able to get a handle on various traits common to the ceramics of certain areas, and thereby begin to develop and describe mountain pottery in a more efficient manner than the "could be anything" description currently used by some archaeologists.

If, as one might expect, the Gunnison Basin was part of a 'core' area surrounded by 'peripheral' regions (i.e., Rio Grande Basin, San Juan District) for Late Prehistoric hunter-gatherers and Historic Utes, as some have posited, then one would expect the ceramics in that core region to be mainly Uncompahgre Brown ware. Small amounts of exotic trade wares, mainly from northern New Mexico, would be present, which the obsidian data suggest. The ceramic data may support this assertion. Variants of Uncompahgre Brown ware are found throughout the Gunnison Basin, but typical Southwestern styles are also numerous and interspersed, occurring both near the southern border and well within the Gunnison Basin. Albeit the sample is still very small, trade wares or non-"Ute" wares are quite numerous. It is very possible that intermarriage is responsible for the variation and, therefore, this is all genuine "Ute" pottery in the broadest sense of the word. Any of the historic period vessels described here could have been obtained by Utes in the surrounding areas, while the nature of prehistoric exchange systems is unknown and under current investigation (Broadhead 2003).

Another possibility is that if Stiger (1998) is correct that the Gunnison Basin was denuded around 3000 B.P., it was wide open for various groups as a seasonal hunting ground. Since the easiest access from the south is over Cochetopa Pass, southerly tribes could have utilized the Basin to a greater extent bringing their pottery with them. With the introduction of the horse, the Utes may have begun year-round utilization of the Basin and asserted their control, leading us to believe they had always been the only inhabitants of the Basin. Hill (1995:100) describes a similar situation where the

Utes pushed the Navajo out of Colorado by 1756. The presence of Navajo rock art with Dinetah Gray pottery, as well as a small prismatic core and possible Navajo style projectile point with Dinetah Gray on a second site, strongly suggest that Navajo visited the Gunnison Basin, since both occurrences of Dinetah Gray pottery are with art and artifacts atypical of the Utes.

## CONCLUSIONS

The sites reported here represent a long montane adaptational continuity. The obsidian data suggest links between the Gunnison Basin and northern New Mexico since Archaic (Ferguson and Skinner 2003; Stiger 1998) and Paleoindian times. 'Early' (circa A.D. 500-1000) ceramics originate to the south or southwest both in the Gunnison Basin and in the San Luis Valley (Broadhead 2002). If there was indeed a Numic spread then the Numic speakers or Utes appear to have maintained these north-south connections. Further research and dating of ceramic sites from the early ceramic era are badly needed. There is nothing to discredit Ute claims that the Gunnison Basin is a part of their homeland, since any of these sherds could have been acquired through trade, raiding, from earlier archaeological contexts by Native Americans (Stiger 1998), or intermarriage. It is also easier to identify 'southerly' produced ceramics because of distinctive Puebloan styles, compared to northerly influences of plain ware pottery.

Dinetah Gray sherds recently have been found on what look like traditional Ute sites on the Western Slope and probably represent trade (Reed 2001). Conversely, the presence of these two Dinetah Gray sites probably represents genuine Navajo visitation to the Gunnison Basin since these sites contain material culture common on Navajo sites, which are usually absent on Ute/Numic sites. Of course, these samples are still very small, and they are based on survey data. These sites by no means provide proof of an intermountain Athapaskan migration route. Rather they may be proof that groups other than the Utes made incursions into the Gunnison Basin and surrounding Colorado mountains for trade, hunting, or warfare. This should come as no surprise since the cultural and exchange systems of Native Americans were known to span hundreds of kilometers, and since large-scale migrations are quite common in human history.

These ten sites demonstrate that ceramic sites may not be as rare in the high country as once believed. The incidence of high elevation ceramic sites is highest where the most work has been conducted such as in the Front Range of Colorado (Benedict 1989; Husted 1964). Rather than create another new "mountain ceramic tradition" defined by "thick/thin-micaceous/non-micaceous-cord impressed/plain-golden to brown to light gray ware," I would rather describe the variability and begin to develop an explanation.

These ten ceramic sites demonstrate that the Gunnison Basin and its periphery house a diverse mountain ceramic history. As a whole, they indicate high mobility by groups based in central/western Colorado and/or small incursions or occupations by southerly Puebloan and Navajo peoples and, most likely, both. As one might expect, Southern Utes maintained interac-

tion with Southwestern groups. Unlike ceramic sites in sandy western Colorado with easily identifiable preprints (Horn 1989), only a few of these sites have obvious datable features; although all of these sites remain relatively undamaged with adequate soil depth, and intact subsurface features are very likely. These sites also may be capable of revealing significant amounts of information on the character of post-3000 B.P. occupation of the Colorado high country and the Gunnison Basin in particular.

These ceramic sites offer a small glimpse into the social/exchange systems workings of mountain ceramic era peoples. These finds illustrate that hunter-gatherers operating in the south-central Colorado mountains were involved in the sociopolitical landscape of the Southwest at the beginning of the ceramic era (A.D. 200-1000). These new data do suggest that there was moderate to significant interchange between the valleys of west-central Colorado and northern New Mexico peoples, a fact which is becoming better documented (Broadhead 2002; Hill 2002). This may be the evidence Reed and Metcalf (1999) are looking for, that groups other than the Ute inhabited/visited the northern Colorado River study area, if only on a short term basis. These sites also provide a perfect opportunity for further research into the range of variation of mountain plain ware ceramics. These sites also may work to shed light on the role of the Colorado high country during the florescence of the neighboring Southwestern traditions and their demise. With further research and scrutiny, archaeologists should be able to detect and develop a meaningful interpretation of the ceramic variation at high elevation in the Gunnison Basin and surrounding regions.

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