

Chapter 6 - Obsidian conveyance in the Mountain World of the Numa

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In a volume dedicated to the legacy of Jim Benedict, this study may appear as an outlier. We do not focus on environmental reconstruction, glacial geomorphology, or high elevation archaeological survey (Todd, this volume) – topics close to our collective research interests – but instead we examine hunter–gatherer mobility. Our study area is at the convergence of three major physiographic provinces, the Central Rocky Mountains, eastern Great Basin, and northern Colorado Plateau, where ancient landuse patterns are inherently linked to high elevation environments. As nearly every historic American immigrant party discovered, knowledge of passes through mountain valleys is critical, and timing is everything. In what is now western Wyoming, the core of our study area, there are places you certainly do not want to be when snow falls. So in this regard our work follows Benedict's (1992) *Footprints in the Snow*, a consideration of mountain mobility. In our theoretical framework, mobility and landuse are key components of identity (Boyd and Richerson 1987; Hu 2013; Jones 1997) where movement through a landscape becomes a historically structured practice in keeping with Bourdieu's (1977) notion of *habitus*. Here we attempt to move Benedict's footprints a few steps forward by arguing that mobility as a practice leads to a unique mountain identity evident in regional ethnohistoric records (Nabokov and Loendorf 2004). Furthermore, we argue that an archaeologically stable mobility pattern is evidence of long-term proto-Numic cultural continuity at the convergence of the three major physiographic provinces. While Benedict used novel methods to address his questions about mountain lifeways (e.g., lichenometry, thermoluminescence geochronology; Morgan, this volume), we argue that obsidian conveyance serves as a reliable marker for regional landuse, social practice, and hence, social identity.

We examine regional social interactions within the traditional archaeological domains of mobility and technological organization. Two aspects of technological organization – the procurement and discard of raw materials – allow us to analyze settlement patterns in ways that inform us about Numic social history. We analyze sourced obsidian artifacts to monitor regional settlement patterns and find that twentieth century ethnographic models based on Eastern Shoshone lifeways are not a good fit for the archaeological data (Fawcett and Latady 1983). One primary objective of