

Distributions of Desired Protohistoric Trade Items in the Absaroka Mountains

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Abstract:
 The introduction of European-manufactured goods had dramatic impacts on pre-contact trade networks and group socioeconomic dynamics. Research in the greater Yellowstone ecosystem of northwestern Wyoming has made it clear that during the protohistoric period, in addition to obsidian (which had always been valued), glass beads became a desired trade item. Even populations that had never encountered non-natives began to reevaluate commodities based on these new materials. Analyzing and typing of beads, sourcing of associated obsidian, and examining their distributions will expose changes in the obsidian/glass bead relationship that took place during this dynamic period.

Research Questions:

- Is there a relationship between bead and obsidian artifact quantities at hearth and bone concentration features?
- Are there multiple obsidian sources represented at hearth and bone concentration features?

Figure 1

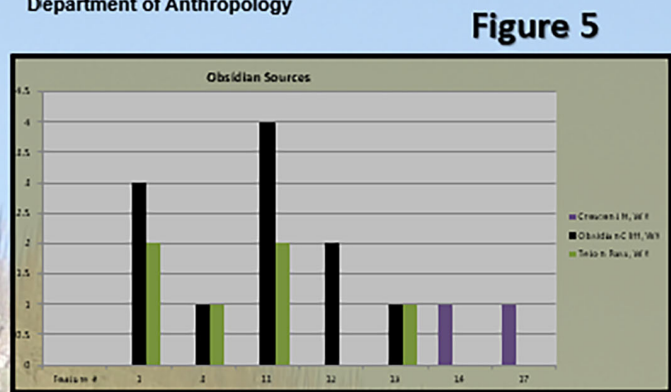
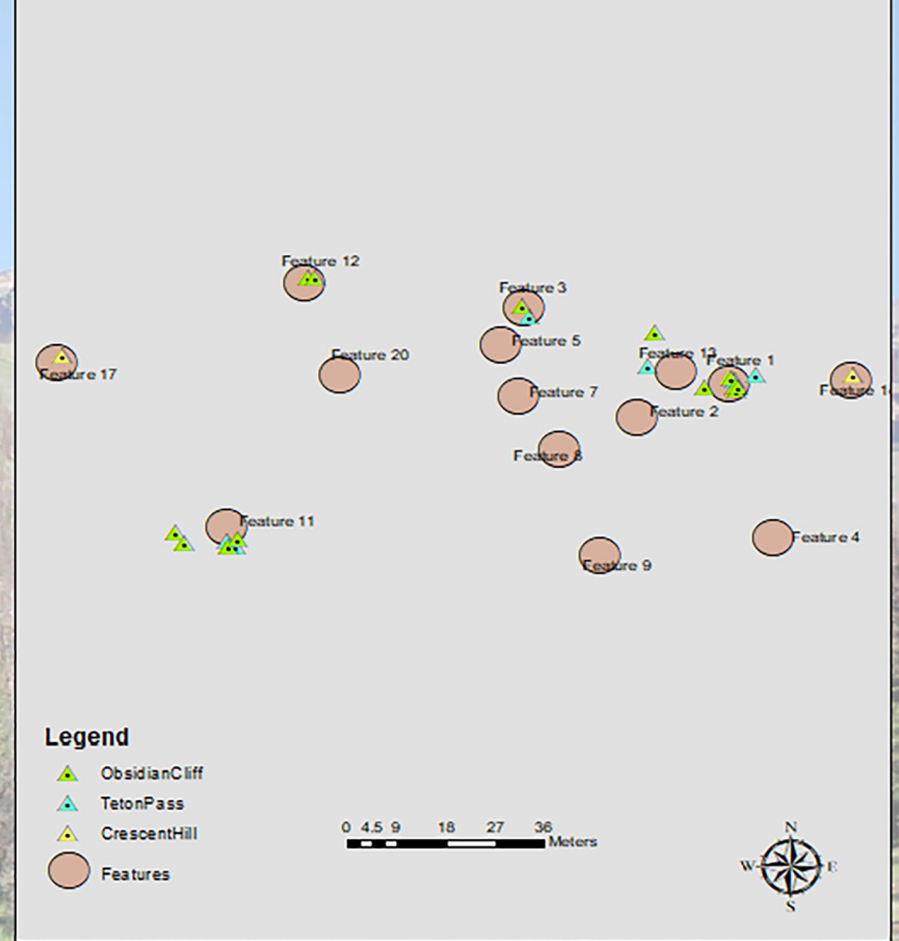


Figure 5

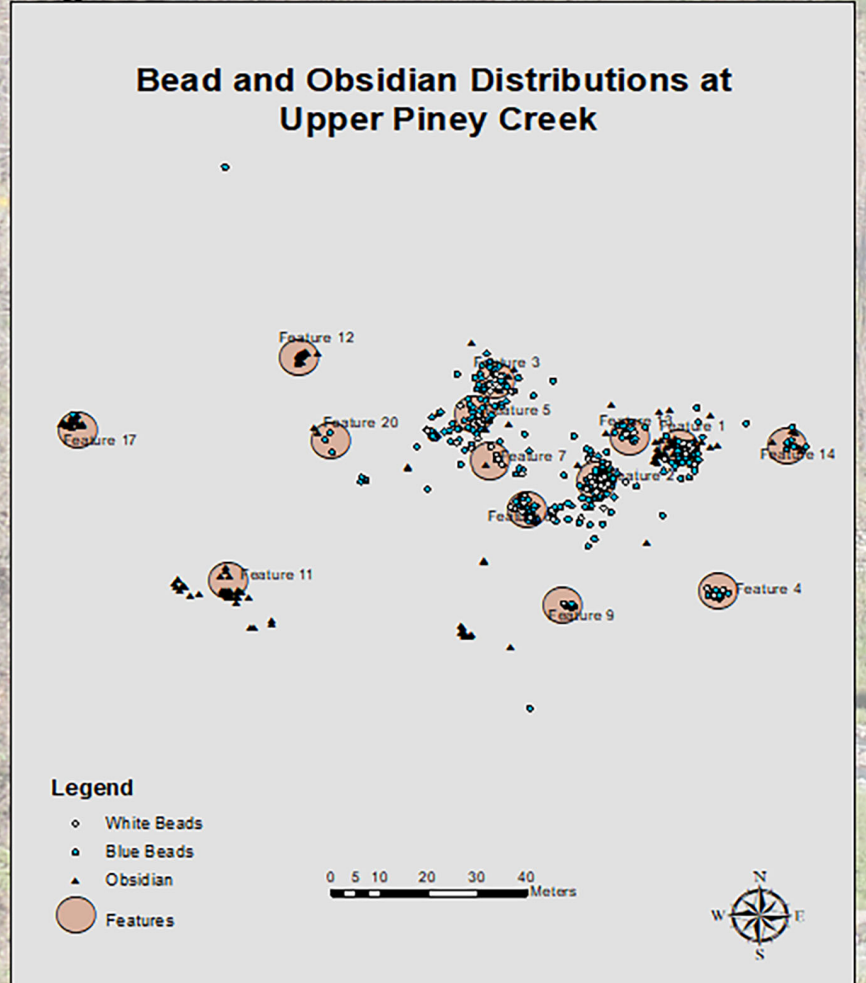
Figure 2 Obsidian Sources at Upper Piney Creek



Legend

- ▲ ObsidianCliff
 - ▲ TetonPass
 - ▲ CrescentHill
 - Features
- 0 4.5 9 18 27 36 Meters

Figure 6 Study Area



Legend

- White Beads
 - Blue Beads
 - ▲ Obsidian
 - Features
- 0 5 10 20 30 40 Meters

Initial Findings:

Obsidian Sourcing:

- Crescent Hill is the closest obsidian source to this site (~ 50km), but more obsidian was sourced to Obsidian Cliff and Teton Pass (both ~ 100km away) See Figures 6,5, and 2.
- Obsidian sourced to Teton Pass and Obsidian Cliff are associated at features, whereas obsidian sourced to Crescent Hill are not See Figures 2 and 5.
- Obsidian from other sites in the area sourced to California and Idaho ; on this site they are exclusively from Wyoming.

Trade Bead and Obsidian Distributions:

- Both glass beads and obsidian appear on contact period sites See Figure 1.
- Features containing beads tend to have less obsidian than features without beads See Figure 3.
- Only trade beads were identified on this site. This may indicate a shift in tradition which relied more heavily on trade.
- Blue beads are the dominant artifact on the site See Figure 4.
- Red beads were also identified , but not in large numbers. These are rare and can provide clearer temporal context for this area.

Field Methods:

- Revisited previously recorded site after 2006 Little Venus Fire See Figure 7.
- Recorded surface artifacts and visible features using EDM.
- Collected obsidian larger than 1cm
- Collected all beads for further analysis.

Analysis Methods:

- Sourced sample of collected obsidian.
- Spatial analysis using ArcMap 9.3
- Excluded features not including beads or sourced obsidian.
- Excluded red beads from analysis (N=2)

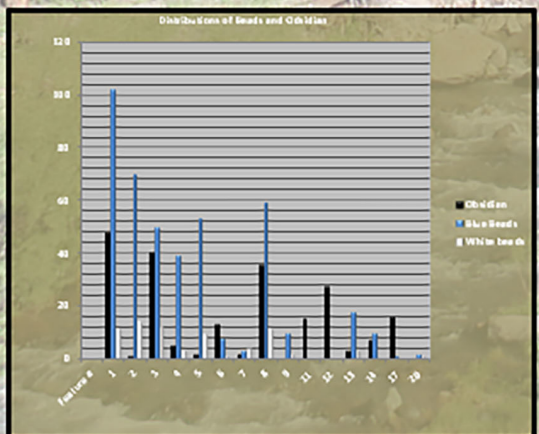


Figure 3

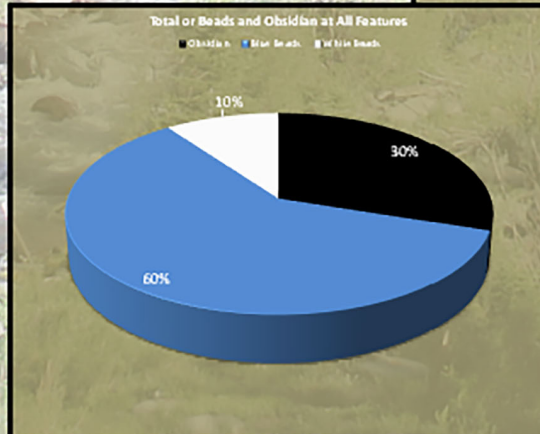


Figure 4



Figure 7

Further Research:

Further research and analysis may lead to inferences about the changes taking place in the lives of natives during 17-1800s. Distributions of other materials as well as comparisons to other sites from the same time period will give evidence for the socioeconomic behaviors of these people.

Trade networks played an important role not only in the desire for exotic trade items but also the way in which they were obtained. Cultural traditions were highly susceptible to change during European contact in North America and the analysis of these commodities can show the transition made by people living in this area. Future research can also trace the origins of glass beads, which may lead to inferences about the changing trade routes of this time period. Additional obsidian samples have been collected in 2008 and will be sent for sourcing.

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