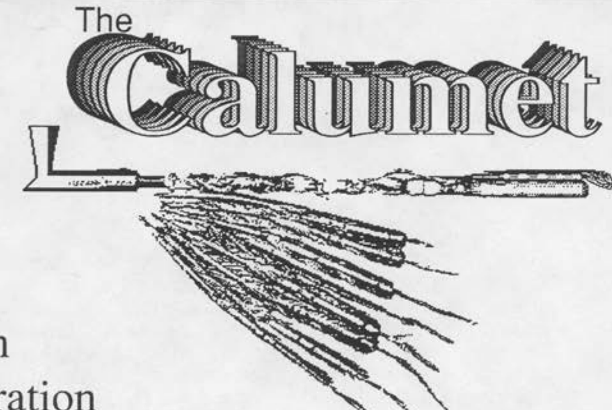


Indian Peaks Chapter
Colorado Archaeological Society

Conservation
Preservation
Education
Exploration

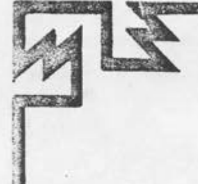
Calendar of Events

DECEMBER '92 & JANUARY '93

NOTE;	**Aztec exhibit at the Denver Museum of Natural History continues through Feb 20, 1993.**
December 16	IPCAS Holiday Party!!! Foothills Nature Center, 4201 N. Broadway, at 7:30 pm. Bring an archaeological "white elephant" from your household midden for the gift exchange and a snack to share. Always a great party!!
January 20	IPCAS Executive Board Meeting, same as above.
January 20	Denver Chapter, CAS. Kevin Black will be speaking on the Yarmony Site. Denver Museum of Natural History, Ricketson Auditorium, 7:30 pm.
January 27	Indian Peaks Regular Meeting. Speaker: Roger Echo-Hawk. "The Use of Oral Tradition and Archaeology in Understanding Ancient Indian History".

NEXT NEWSLETTER - FEBRUARY 1993

HAPPY HOLIDAYS



Indian Peaks Horizons

Welcome to winter! Do you remember that terrific early season snow storm that hit full force on Friday, November 20th? That was the evening we'd set aside for the IPCAS tour of the Aztec Exhibit at the DMNH. Twenty-four people signed up. We were on a tight schedule: meet at the Table Mesa Park and Ride at 5 pm, car pool to Josephina's restaurant in Denver, dine there and be at the museum in time to start our tour at 7:30. 22 people signed up with Anita McHugh. By prior arrangement, Josephina's, a delightful cafe convenient to the museum, offered us a limited choice menu with three entrees ($9 per person), assigned us an especially capable waitress, set up a long table, and promised to see us through the meal in sixty minutes flat. The restaurant cooperated, but the weather didn't. Despite white-out conditions, 8 people made it to the park and ride and decided to push on to Josephina's where we met 3 more of our party. Josephina's had us out in 45 minutes, so that we reached the museum by 8. You can figure out how long the trip took, but that's not the point. Braving the weather forged a bond among the 11 foolhardy survivors, and we discovered a great place to dine close to the museum. The exhibit is an absolute marvel. Don't miss it.

The nominating committee is making calls to enlist IPCAS members for several desirable positions in this organization. Please say yes if you possible can. And by the way, please come to the Holiday Party. We play a game with the white elephant gifts (from your household midden) that would have mammoth hunters in stitches. No gift is too small or too outrageous. Besides a snack to share, bring photos and other mementos of IPCAS adventures. As tradition dictates, the chapter's handcrafted calumet will be on display.

Look for the next Calumet in February, and an announcement of Kevin's PAAC class on Perishable Materials. Yes, it's still snowing. A white and bounteous Thanksgiving et alia, and a happy new year to all of you!

Ann Hayes
President, IPCAS

BOOK REVIEWS

Light on Dark Matters

Prehistoric Cannibalism at Mancos 5MTUMR-2346. TIM D. WHITE. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1992. xxiv, 462 pp., illus. $62.50.

Human cannibalism is a controversial topic. Like other taboos, it arouses feelings of curiosity mixed with a reluctance to confront the darker side of human nature; thus people find the subject both repugnant and fascinating. The frequency of its occurrence in non-Western societies has been the subject of heated debates among anthropologists. The credibility of the ethnographic record is disputed; some scholars believe that cannibalism has never been customary in any society and only occurs in rare cases of starvation or insanity. Unfortunately ethnography does not provide an objective way to settle the dispute, because accounts of institutionalized cannibalism can no longer be grounded in the testimony of direct participants.

In prehistoric archeology, evidence of putative cannibalism is so rare and controversial that questions of whether cannibalism was an isolated event or an institutionalized practice appear premature. Recent efforts have been directed at establishing what constitutes convincing evidence of cannibalism; Tim White's splendidly illustrated and carefully researched book represents an important contribution to this issue.

The most effective approach to the recognition of cannibalism in the archeological record is provided by comparative analyses of human remains and animal bones known to represent food refuse; this is an accepted notion. The principle of faunal analogy has been used by Old and New World scholars since the last century, but until recently similarities in butchering techniques, marrow fracturing, traces of cooking, and modes of discard were only superficially assessed, thus defying independent evaluation. Here, for the first time in the study of Anasazi cannibalism, faunal comparisons are explicitly used as a central criterion, and the most meticulous analytic procedures are applied to human and animal bones alike.

Mancos, a small pueblo site on the Colorado Plateau, which dates to A.D. 1200, is one of several Anasazi sites in the southwestern United States that have yielded assemblages of disarticulated and broken human bones, interpreted previously as evidence of cannibalism by Turner, Nickens, and other researchers. Painstaking conjoining work by White suggests that the 2106 bone fragments found on the floor and throughout the fill of several abandoned rooms correspond to a single event or, more likely, to a small series of similar events involving the dismemberment, cooking, and presumed consumption of the meat and marrow of at least 29 individuals, including nine children aged 12 or younger.

Preceded by a critical and very useful survey of methods and procedures, the taphonomic analysis of the human remains—the core and chief strength of the book—convincingly documents the sequence of butchery and food preparation steps with close observation of their telltale marks on the bones. Analytical details are illustrated with high-quality photographs and are well presented, but White does not let the reader forget their grim implications. The insights regarding traces of burning and breakage are remarkable, a testimony to the author's observational skills. This analysis sets very high standards for future research.

Frequencies of skeletal parts—of which the Mancos assemblage, with its predominance of cranial parts and scarcity of vertebrae and hand and foot bones, offers a skewed representation—are considered by White to be a key element in the recognition of cannibalism. To interpret them he presents published skeletal-part data from other "cannibalized" assemblages in the Southwest, from primary burials in Californian and Romano-British cemeteries, and several ethnographic and archeological faunal assemblages. Detailed bone modification data are provided for a mule deer and bighorn sheep assemblage from an Anasazi site as well.

This part of the analysis is less incisive and clear-cut. White's argument is that Mancos skeletal-part frequencies are unlike those from primary interments (the norm for Anasazi burials) and broadly similar to those in faunal assemblages and other "cannibalized" assemblages. He uses different measures of element representation for different assemblages, making it difficult for the reader to follow the argument throughout the numerous diagrams. The percent-age-survival statistic is not based on minimum number of element (MNE) values, as prescribed by the author who defined the statistic, but on total counts of identified fragments (NISP, or number of identified specimens). Given the high degree of long-bone fragmentation in the Mancos assemblage, use of NISP values has the effect of transforming the percent survival from a measure of element representation into an inconsistent measure of fragmentation (values above 1.0 are controlled by fragmentation, whereas values below may more accurately inform on proportions of missing bones). White is aware of this fact but appears to consider it unimportant. Comparisons with faunal assemblages from Early Stone Age Africa to Neolithic Sweden do not seem very useful; perhaps deeper insights could have been gained by a more specific discussion of the frequencies of element portions, the context, and the accumulation history of Anasazi faunal assemblages.

Interpretations of element disproportions are notoriously difficult; White argues that some at least can be explained as resulting from removal of spongy bone parts for the rendering of grease from bones. But element frequency data are most useful for behavioral inferences when the assemblage under study is fully recovered from a closed depositional unit. This is not the case at Mancos because of the lack of screening during excavation and because the bones were not discarded at a single locus but were spread vertically and horizontally in different depositional units. Thus one cannot be certain that the scarcity of spongy bone portions is the result of destruction for bone-grease rendering and not of postdepositional crushing of fragile cancellous bone, incomplete recovery during excavation, or discard of missing parts into unexcavated refuse deposits. The comparative analysis of the Anasazi fauna does not include data on limb-shaft fragmentation and destruction of articular ends; breakage of vertebrae, less advanced in the fauna, may be due to forceful butchery of the backbone with a stone ax, but does not necessarily imply bone-grease exploitation. Thus the bone-grease hypothesis is plausible but remains untested.

The comparative analysis of butchery strategies applied to humans and animals strongly supports the cannibalism hypothesis. I only wish it included tables or standardized sets of drawings with frequency data on placement of tool marks in specific anatomical areas of human and animal bones for a more complete assessment of butchery and consumption practices. Finally, I hesitate to consider "pot polish" on bones (presumably due to boiling) as a definitive argument for consumption, since

JANUARY 27TH REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING

On January 27th, at our general meeting at the foothills Nature Center we are pleased to have as our guest speaker Mr. roger Echohawk. His subject is entitled **"The Use of Oral Tradition and Archaeology in Understanding Ancient Indian History"**.

Roger is a graduate student in History at CU Boulder. His main interest over the last four years has been the reconciling of archaeological evidence with Indian oral traditions. He has encouraged communication between scientists and Indian oral historians, to mutually enrich their understanding of history. Roger's talk will focus on this topic.

In addition to his studies, Roger also serves the Pawnee Nations as tribal historian. He is on the Board of Directors of The Center of the American West, and works as a private consultant to other Indian tribes and archaeological projects on issues of repatriation and reburial.

P. S. David Tucker who was scheduled to speak about stone circles at our snowed out field trip on Saturday, November 28th, has agreed to speak to the chapter on this topic during the spring of 1993. Look for the date of this lecture in the upcoming newsletter this spring.

Book review continued from page three.

other causes of polish can be envisaged and have not been refuted. But the strength of White's argument is elsewhere, solidly grounded in observations of cut marks, marrow fracturing, and burning.

Given the skepticism surrounding the topic and its sensitivity for Native American groups, it is unlikely that all scholars will view this work as a final demonstration of Anasazi cannibalism, settling the question once and for all. Indeed, a debate is already developing. Bullock (*Kiva* **57**, 5 [1991]) suggests that American Indian warfare practices, not cannibalism, could have caused the traces observed in these assemblages. Death by battering and subsequent corpse mutilation (from scalping to skull crushing, cutting of parts, and even burning) are documented by historic accounts, by soldiers' remains at the 1876 Battle of Little Bighorn, and by skeletal analyses of victims of prehistoric and post-contact intertribal wars, such as the Crow Creek and Larson Village massacres in South Dakota, which involved large numbers of individuals. In the Southwest comparable occurrences suggestive of interpersonal violence, although with fewer victims, are briefly discussed by White. Most involve partially articulated skeletons, a condition that is not found in the Mancos assemblage and that White includes as a diagnostic criterion of cannibalism. But secondary burial of the decomposed remains by survivors might explain the disarticulated condition of the bones. This hypothesis is less fanciful than it might appear if we consider that secondary burial was a common practice in the Great Plains of the central United States and was occasionally practiced by the Anasazi and that there is archeological evidence that burials of disarticulated bones of warfare victims did in fact occur (O'Shea and Bridges, *Plains Anthropologist* **34**, 7 [1989]). Although White could not anticipate Bullock's challenge, which was published after his manuscript was completed, his careful taphonomic analysis provides the reader with enough arguments to refute it. Numerous percussion marks show that the percussor contacted bones in a defleshed state and that bone breakage followed dismemberment and burning, instead of preceding them as required to support a hypothesis of death by battering. The very high degree of long-bone fragmentation also cannot be reconciled with Bullock's hypothesis.

The competing explanation of mortuary practices will not easily go away; other researchers have suggested that such practices might include deliberate bone breakage, which would mimic the effects of marrow extraction from animal bones, and cause loss of skeletal elements (Bahn, *New Scientist* **134**, 40 [11 April 1992]); reply by White, *ibid.*, 49 [20 June 1992]). There is no evidence that Anasazi and other American Indian burial practices ever included deliberate bone breakage; nevertheless White deals too briefly with that issue. Undoubtedly the question has never been properly addressed; contextual and taphonomic analyses of American Indian human remains are a recent development. But until the counter-argument is checked for correspondence to facts, it will persist.

The book is lavishly produced, almost without flaws; its masterful analysis of the Mancos assemblage and critical compilation of data from the literature are mandatory reading for taphonomists and archeologists on both sides of the Atlantic and will stimulate research for years to come. That it is the source of some unanswered questions is, I believe, a measure of its success.

Paola Villa
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