

CHAPTER 4. PREHISTORY

Throughout the prehistory of the Great Basin, occupants exercised subsistence patterns rooted in the seasonal procurement of resources found in particular environments. In many parts of the Great Basin, traditional hunter/gatherer patterns gave way to increased sedentism and agriculture.

The prehistoric context for the Promontories diverges somewhat from this general model. Subtle deviation occurs because of the unique physiographic setting of the northern Salt Lake Basin. In this area, cultural change has been affected through time by the activity of the Great Salt Lake shoreline. The evolving geology of the Great Salt Lake has created a changing environment different from that of the rest of the Great Basin. This unique environment has exposed its human occupants to resources and constraints not associated with more arid and physiographically diverse landscapes. As such, there are chapters of the region's prehistoric context that differ from the general models commonly accepted for the rest of the Great Basin (Aikens 1970; Jennings 1978; Madsen 1980).

It has been demonstrated that the prehistoric occupants of the Great Salt Lake margin remained focused upon marshland resources even as most of the Great Basin experienced human sedentism and agriculture (Russell, et al. 1989). Capitalization of the Great Salt Lake marshlands resulted in adherence to the hunter/gatherer strategies that were abandoned much earlier in more physiographically diverse areas of the Great Basin. These patterns of mobility influenced prehistoric use. Marshes located in the lowlands near bodies of water provided the primary resources required by these hunter/gatherers. The broad basin located north of the Great Salt Lake was utilized primarily for the seasonal hunting of large game. This supplemented the marshland resources that served as the foundation for subsistence in the Salt Lake Basin. As a result, hunter/gatherer economies have been dominant in the area from the Pleistocene through the early Historic Period (Figure 4.1). All prehistoric sites located within and near the park are listed in the following table (Table 4.1).

Paleo-Indian Period

The Pleistocene, or the most recent "Ice Age," is divided into a number of periods marked by warming and cooling trends that resulted in the repetitive advance and retreat of continental ice masses across North America. The Wisconsin glaciation (20,000 to 18,000 years before present [B.P.]) of the terminal Pleistocene created much cooler and moister weather patterns across North America. The advancement of glaciers in higher elevations and northern latitudes trapped much water in the form of ice. This resulted in lower sea levels that exposed the Beringian Landmass connecting Siberia and Alaska. Archaeological evidence from across the continent indicates that humans may have crossed the Beringian Landmass into North America as early as 16,000 B.P. (Taylor, et al. 1999:455). These early aboriginal inhabitants are referred to as Paleo-Indians.