Teacher Resource Information:
Northwestern Band of Shoshone Nation

The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone was a nation of semi-nomadic hunter-gathers who covered an extensive territory that included parts of Idaho, Utah, Nevada, and Wyoming where they traveled in extended family groups according to the changing seasons. At the time of the pioneer expansion into Cache Valley, one of the areas where the Northwestern Shoshone lived, pioneer settlers recognized Chief Bear Hunter as the leader of the band. This group was one of three main bands of Shoshone at the time of the pioneer settlement.

Northwestern Shoshone contact with Euro-Americans began around 1810, when the fur trade was established in the Rocky Mountains. This and subsequent contact with the pioneer settlers forever altered the Northwestern Shoshone way of life. As pioneer settlers made Cache Valley their home, they encroached on the traditional homelands of the band. The pioneer's grazing livestock and farms overtook the traditional ways of hunting and gathering of the Northwestern Shoshone. This left the Northwestern Shoshone with limited means to survive as they traditionally had. Renegade members of Shoshone bands sometimes took extreme measures and raided the settlers' cattle. The settlers did not distinguish between bands and blamed the Northwestern Shoshone band for crimes they did not commit.

Tensions between pioneer settlers and the Northwestern Shoshone reached their height in early 1863. On the morning of January 29, 1863, Colonel Patrick E. Connor and about 200 California Volunteers from Camp Douglas in Salt Lake City attacked the Northwestern Shoshone winter camp along the Bear River near present day Preston, Idaho (known to the Northwestern Shoshone as Boa Ogoi). Because many of the men were away from the camp at the time of the attack, the camp was comprised of mostly women and children. Colonel Conner and his men sustained most of their limited casualties in the first charge across the river. After that, Colonel Connor and his men enveloped the camp, killing men, women, and children indiscriminately, often resorting to cruel and brutal methods. In all, about 300 men, women, and children of the band were killed.

As the band was under attack, many jumped into the freezing river to try and save themselves or their children. Most of these people died. Chief Bear Hunter was among the casualties of the Northwestern Shoshone. Chief Sagwitch had two horses shot out from under him, but was finally able to escape on a third horse. His son, Yeager Timbimboo, also managed to survive the battle. His grandmother told him to lie still among the dead and not make a sound. Yeager lay among the dead on the cold ground, but after some time did make some movement. A soldier saw this movement and held a rifle to Yeager. Yeager later told that the soldier raised his gun and lowered it two times while looking into his eyes. The soldier finally lowered the gun and, perhaps weary from the blood spilled there, walked away.

The Bear River Massacre had more Native American casualties than any other of the six major Indian Massacres in the West, including Wounded Knee. It is an event that is not well known in American History, perhaps because it took place during the Civil War and was overshadowed by that conflict. In 2003, 26 acres of the Bear River Massacre site were donated back to the Northwestern Band of Shoshone Nation. "This is sacred land to us. It is the burial ground of our ancestors and it is deeply satisfying to have it protected," said Bruce Parry, Northwestern Band Shoshone, Executive Director.

The Treaty of Box Elder was signed in July 1863, and government officials tried to get the Northwestern Shoshone to settle in the Fort Hall Reservation in Idaho. Many gave up their homelands and moved to Fort Hall. By 1875, other members of the Northwestern Shoshone band had settled in Corinne, Utah, giving up their traditional nomadic hunter-gather way of life and began farming. Many converted to the LDS Church around this time. However, settlers in Corinne worried that the Mormons and the Indians would unite against the non-Mormons in any situation that may arise. The U.S. Army ordered those Northwestern Shoshone living in Corinne to move to Fort Hall.

At this time, many of the Northwestern Shoshone applied for land under the Homesteading Act of 1862 in Elwood, Utah. Insufficient funds eventually made this effort fruitless and they began farming at the LDS Cooperative Farm in Washakie, about four miles south of present day Portage, Idaho. Individuals were called by the LDS to teach the Shoshone farming and industrial practices to make them self sufficient; houses and a school were built at Washakie.

During WWII many Northwestern Shoshone left Washakie to serve in the war or help with war related industry in Ogden, Utah where there were better economic opportunities for them. In December 1959, only three Shoshones were working at the Washakie farm. In the 1960's, the homes at the Washakie farm were burned in anticipation of the sale of the church land. These homes were mistakenly identified as being abandoned, and still held some personal belongings of members of the Northwestern Band of Shoshone.

In 1984, in consolation for the sale of the LDS church-owned land, the LDS church gave the Northwestern Shoshone 184 acres in the vicinity of Washakie to enable them to receive government aid. Finally, in 1987, the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation was federally recognized as a band separate from the other Shoshones.

Today, members of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation live primarily in northern Utah and southern Idaho. There are approximately 400 tribal members. Tribal offices are located both in Brigham City, Utah and Pocatello, Idaho.

Sources:
Utah History To Go:
http://historytogo.utah.gov/utah_chapters/american_indians/bearrivermassacre.html

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http://www.nwbshoshone-nsn.gov/culture/history/index.htm