

## Ancient Indians of the Wasatch Front

### *Biography*

Steve is a professor of Anthropology at Utah State University. To be an effective archaeologist, it is important to blend fieldwork with the abstractions of anthropological theory. My field experience began in 1972, and while I have done archaeology field projects in ten states and in the Middle East, the field of evolutionary ecology informs my research. Courses I teach include World Archaeology, History and Theories in Anthropology, Archaeological Method and Theory, Cultural Resource Management, Ancient Desert West and Archaeology Field School.

I direct projects and train students in the applied field of Cultural Resource Management and have done so for nearly 20 years. Having authored over 100 scientific papers, technical reports and monographs, I am currently working on a popular book on ancient Indians of the Wasatch Front. I also edit the journal "Utah Archaeology", a publication that bridges the interests of professional and avocational archaeologists.

Archaeology is important to all educated people because it enables an understanding of human behavior on time scales that transcend the short-term interests of people. Archaeology is unique in providing a view of the systems that underlie human behavior – systems that are often obscured by politics, historical studies, religion and folklore. Archaeology is thus complementary to other ways of knowing about the past. Humans have always been part of the landscape, thus it is important that land managers be aware of the human past. While I am unconvinced that the study of archaeology will enable anyone to "avoid the mistakes of the past," I am certain that archaeology can help us understand why things are like they are and where they are headed.

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### *Abstract*

Along the vast, nearly flat, and often waterlogged fringes of the Great Salt Lake, we would find much of interest one thousand years ago. The sight of dozens, perhaps over a hundred settlements stretching from what is now Provo to Brigham City might tug at some of our stereotypes about life before pioneers and scattered Indians with horses, guns, and tipis. One thousand years ago the Wasatch Front was probably the most densely populated part of Utah. The Great Salt Lake wetlands and surrounding areas provide an abundance of archaeology, including a large sample of human remains enabling study of paleohealth, diet, life history patterns, and population genetics. We know life was more dynamic and interesting than is conveyed in images of quaint, mysterious native peoples wandering endlessly in search of food. During some periods, the ancient Wasatch Front was a built environment featuring highly systemized human exploitation. Archaeology also provides data that contribute to the study of past climates and environments on a larger time scale than the brief historic record. This presentation

will have some fun with the archaeology, but will use the subject to make observations possibly relevant to modern management of the area:

- It is important for management to move beyond the popular images of ancient peoples as either savages, noble savages, environmentalists, or passive spiritualists and of past peoples and environments as pristine and stable.
- The idea that what is now called America was in pre-Columbian times underoccupied, even unoccupied and definitely underutilized is deeply ingrained in the American spirit and is simply wrong. Our perceptions about pre-Columbian America hold implications for how we conceptualize landscape, wilderness, and how we manage "natural" systems in Utah that in fact included humans for the past 13,000 or more years.
- The vast archaeological resources of the Great Salt Lake wetlands are under-managed, and under destruction, contrary to laws and regulations governing the activities of government agencies. The abundant human remains are an especially potent management issue subject to politics and media scrutiny. While Utah's native past is of endless fascination to the public, and cultural resources hold unrealized educational potential, the resource is fragile and difficult to manage by simply opening it up to the public.