Protophistic Period and European Contact  
A.D. 1450 - 1900's

The Protophistic Period concluded the prehistoric era. The people of this period were hunter-gatherers and part-time horticulturalists who pursued a more nomadic lifestyle after the introduction of the horse. 

Euro-American settlers began to move into the area in the 1800’s and to trade with the American Indians (Apache, Arapahoe, Cheyenne, Comanche, Kiowa, and Ute) who lived here. The metal arrow tip shown here is an example of one of the prevalent trade items. During the 1880’s, Euro-American settlers homesteaded this land. In the early 1990’s, the colorful clay was mined to make bricks for buildings in Colorado Springs and Pueblo. Grazing and agricultural use by long-time local residents played an important role in the history of the Paint Mines.

HISTORY

Archaeological studies indicate that humans have inhabited the Paint Mines for nearly 9,000 years. The plants, animals, and colorful clays encouraged prehistoric people to return to the area, year after year, for centuries. The Paint Mines are considered significant in the prehistory of the area, and this park is listed as an Archaeological District in the National Register of Historic Places. Throughout the history of the Paint Mines, people are known to have visited the area to gather the colorful clays, tinged with red, orange, yellow, purple, and gray hues, to produce ceramics.

Paleoindian Stage  7000 - 5500 B.C.

The earliest people to live in the Paint Mines area are commonly known as Paleoindians. These people were likely the descendants of the first Americans who migrated over the Bering Land Bridge from north-eastern Asia. The Paleoindian people hunted large game species such as mammoth, caribou, deer, and large bison, some of which are now extinct.

THE STORY OF  
THE PAINT MINES

For well over 100 years, Coloradans have enjoyed Paint Mines scenery as well as its geological, archaeological, historical, and ecological resources.

Geology

The Paint Mines are named for their colorful clays that were collected by American Indians to make paint. Brightly colored bands, caused by oxidized iron compounds, are found in varying amounts throughout the many different layers of clay. When the outcrops erode, a hard capstone allows columns of clay to be preserved beneath them, creating fantastic spires called hoodoos. Selenite (gypsum) contributes to the color, and white quartzitic crystals dazzle the eye.

Natural geologic outcrops occur in the Dawson Formation that formed 55 million years ago during the Tertiary age when the region was wetter, warmer, and tropical. The Dawson Formation also contains the petrified tropical hardwoods used as materials for stone tools by prehistoric people.

Ecology

Paint Mines ecology represents the connection among all elements of the park. The geologic formations create natural drainages abundant with wetland and riparian habitat.

The open plains dominate the area and support a mix of native short-grass and mid-grass prairie communities typified by blue grama and buffalo grasses. Some stream bottoms retain enough water to support vegetation such as mountain mahogany, low sagebrush, chokecherry, wild rose, and a variety of grasses, sedges, and reedy plants. A few junipers and pines are also found here.

Before the Euro-American settlers arrived, the area supported large herbivores including bison. Pronghorn antelope, mule deer, and coyote are found in this area today. Small mammals, such as raccoons, skunks, and rabbits, as well as burrowing rodents, are also present. These diverse habitats support a variety of birds including owls, Swainson’s hawks, ducks, Canada geese, mourning doves, magpies, and horned lizards. Various species of frogs and reptiles, including the short-horned lizard are also present.

Archaic Stage 5500 B.C. - A.D. 100

The Archaic Stage followed the Paleoindian Stage and was characterized by distinctive stemmed, corner-notched, and side-notched stone points fastened on darts. Throwing sticks called atlatls were used on the end of the dart to increase the projectile force. Archaic people relied on a wide range of foodstuffs, hunted game animals such as deer and pronghorn antelope, and gathered locally available plant foods. Archaic sites have grinding stones, known as manos and metates, that were used for processing plant material for food.

Ceramic Stage A.D. 100 - 1450

The Ceramic Stage (called the Developmental Period by archaeologists) was the time of the Plains Woodland culture. This culture was heralded by the appearance of pottery, the adoption of the bow-and-arrow, and a greater dependence on domesticated plants such as corn, beans, and

Paint Mines Interpretive Park

29950 Paint Mines Road
Calhan, CO  80808

Life has been a tapestry
Of rich and royal hue.
An everlasting vision
Of the ever-changing view.
--- Carole King
This fragile environment requires many years for nature to restore it once the vegetation and soil have been damaged. These rules have been established for your safety and enjoyment and for the protection of this unique resource.

- Park Hours: Dawn to Dusk
- All plants, wildlife, rocks, minerals, and historic artifacts within park boundaries are protected by law. Do not remove, destroy, or disturb any of these features.
- Pets, horses, and bicycles of any kind are prohibited.
- Please stay on designated trails at all times.
- Entering the Paint Mine formations is prohibited. Avoid gulches and gullies during wet weather. Climbing is prohibited.
- Motorized vehicles must remain in parking area.
- Overnight parking is prohibited.
- Please remove your own trash and litter.
- Alcoholic beverages and glass containers are prohibited.
- Discharge of guns, BB guns, pellet guns, or paintball guns is prohibited.
- Fireworks and explosives are prohibited.

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Suggestions for further reading: