



Reading #1 The Indians Are Numerous

Unit 1 Lesson 3

In the late 1500s a summer expedition of Spanish explorers encountered* an Indian camp in the San Luis Valley, just south of today's Colorado–New Mexico border. In his report to the Spanish king, written the following spring, expedition leader Juan de Oñate observed: "The Indians are numerous in all that land. They always follow the cattle [buffalo] and . . . kill them at the first shot with the greatest skill, while ambushed* in brush blinds made at watering places."

The encounter may have been the Utes' first-ever meeting with Europeans — and Oñate's account is certainly the oldest written description* of the Ute people. Unfortunately, the Utes' earliest impressions of the Spanish do not survive. But the sight of white men probably did not come as a total shock to the Ute people; they had probably heard about the bearded, light-skinned strangers from neighboring pueblos*.

Since establishing their New World empire at Mexico City in 1521, the Spanish had pushed their colonial boundary far north. In 1607, they founded Santa Fe as the capital of New Mexico province. From there they hoped to expand their settlements northward — directly into the Utes' territory.

*encounter(ed): to meet (someone) without expecting or planning to

*ambush(ed): a surprise attack

*description: words that describe something or someone

*pueblo: an American Indian settlement of the southwestern U.S.

Source: This reading is excerpted, with permission, from The Ute Indian Museum: *A Capsule History and Guide* (Denver: History Colorado, 2009).

