



## THE UTE DRESS

Women of the five Ute bands underwent significant changes beginning in the 1890s. The earliest photographs of Ute peoples show them wearing clothes made of woven fibers and threads along with elegant fringed buckskins decorated with distinctive beadwork of the Jicarilla Apaches. By the 1890s, much of their clothing is like that of the Arapaho, Cheyenne and Sioux. While the clothing was made by the Utes themselves, they imitated the beadwork of the other Plains-area tribes. Very popular among the Utes after 1890 was the “Sioux style” which featured a fully beaded yoke over a deer hide dress with beaded lanes along the bottom border and relatively long, applied fringe. The Sioux preferred the fully beaded yoke over painted designs and the fashion spread quickly among the other Plains nations.

Because of the interaction among the native Plains nations, it is very difficult to attach a specific style or decoration characteristic to one specific nation. The “deer tail” dress that we commonly associate with the Plains peoples originated with the Nez Perce, a northwestern tribe located in Idaho and Montana. Beading the yoke completely was a Sioux innovation, but the Arapaho, Cheyenne and Jicarilla Apache incorporated their own designs into the beadwork. The Utes contributed directly to this interchange as Ute women were known for their skill in tanning deer, elk and mountain sheep hides. The Utes, residing between the Plains nations to the east and the Trans-Mountain nations to the north and west were in a perfect location to borrow elements from both sides of the Continental Divide as they created and decorated their clothing.