Hunting Structures in the Absaroka Mountains of Northwestern Wyoming

By Christopher C. Kinney, Lawrence C. Todd, Paul C. Burnett

Abstract
Hunting strategies in high altitude environments often involved the systematic construction of stone and drift-walls to funnel game animals (mule deer [Odocoileus hemionus], elk [Cervus canadensis], and bighorn sheep [Ovis canadensis]) towards predetermined kill locations. These systems are positioned to take advantage of natural landscape attributes.

To date, many of these systems have been recorded in Colorado and Wyoming (see Benedict and Frison). During the 2004 field season new hunting structures were identified in three valleys of the Greybull River watershed. Structures overlooking the Pickett Creek valley situated on open ridges and saddles (>1075-3200 m elevation) consist of stone walls, blinds, and an anomalous platform. A single structure was recorded on an ice-core rock glacier (>3000 m elevation) above the Wood River valley and a second isolated structure was documented near Jack Creek (<2900 m elevation). A preliminary age for these structures is suggested by lithic bridging among the individual, dry-pack, stones. As with other such systems, no artifacts are associated with these structures.

The discovery of these structures extends the use of game procurement systems to this portion of the Absaroka Mountains and ultimately broadens the knowledge base associated with prehistoric use of the greater Yellowstone ecosystem. Additionally, the data gathered from these structures has the potential to expose predictable topographic signatures with value for understanding high elevation landscapes.

Learning from the Locals
This research was motivated by and recorded during the 2004 field season near Wyoming (see Benedict and Frison). During the 2004 field season new hunting structures were identified in three valleys of the Greybull River watershed. Structures overlooking the Pickett Creek valley situated on open ridges and saddles (>1075-3200 m elevation) consist of stone walls, blins, and an anomalous platform. A single structure was recorded on an ice core rock glacier (>3000 m elevation) above the Wood River valley and a second isolated structure was documented near Jack Creek (<2900 m elevation). A preliminary age for these structures is suggested by lithic bridging among the individual, dry-pack, stones. As with other such systems, no artifacts are associated with these structures.

Results and Discussion:
A number of key features identified on the Pickett Creek platform include (1) a suspected ‘blind’ and (2) a probable ‘structure’. These features are situated above and below the saddle, respectively, and are situated on the east-facing side of the ridge. The use of these structures is uncertain; however, their function is likely related to hunting. The presence of these structures suggests a high degree of prehistoric occupation and use of the area.

Acknowledgments:
This research was made possible through funding by the National Science Foundation. The authors would like to thank the locals for their assistance and support throughout the field season. This research was conducted under the authority of the Wyoming Archaeological Council and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.