

## Ute Mortar Holes

By Susanne Bloomfield



The area that is now Blackhawk Ranch was once the winter homelands for the Capote/Kapota band as well as other Ute bands and neighboring Native American tribes. While all of Colorado and Utah as well as southern Wyoming and northern New Mexico comprised the Ute hunting grounds, late in the fall, small bands of extended families would descend from the high altitudes to escape the winter cold, living close together for defense and to gather supplies. Since the Utes were one of the first Native American tribes to acquire horses, the lower altitudes also afforded better forage for their herds.

Dr. James Jefferson, Ute Tribal Elder, and John Anderson, author of *Ute Indian Prayer Trees of the Pikes Peak Region*, visited Blackhawk Ranch in 2015 to view our many culturally modified trees. During their visits, they pointed out the many bedrock mortars visible in the rock outcroppings, circular holes that Native tribes used for grinding food. The holes served as bowls, and foods, including grains, animal flesh and fat, fruits, and the pinon nuts and acorns found so plentifully on the ranch, were ground with a smooth stone or blunt stick, known as a pestle, into pemmican, a concentrated, long-lasting high energy food.

The mortar holes observed around Blackhawk Ranch are usually from 6-10 inches in diameter and 4-7 inches deep and often appear in clusters of from two to six on large stone outcroppings. At least one lot on the Ranch has about a dozen mortar holes of various sizes and shapes. Some sources speculate the grinding was also a social activity for the women, so that is why there are often multiple holes. Occasionally, shallower, trough-like depressions can be found in nearby rocks. These are more like the typical *metate*. In fact, one Blackhawk couple also found a small, moveable metate and mano on their property. Normally, the Utes used antlers for grinding.

Sources: [Southern Ute Indian Tribe](#), [Caprock Canyoneer](#), *Utes: The Mountain People* by Jan Pettit, and John Anderson.