

Ute Prayer Trees on Blackhawk Ranch

By Susanne Bloomfield

The Ute tribes, who once inhabited this region of Colorado, often culturally modified trees as a part of their ceremonies. The people would stop and pray four times on the way to their sacred mountain, Pikes Peak. The Ute called the mountain *Tava*, meaning Sun, and they were the *Tabeguache*, or People of the Sun, the largest of the ten bands of Utes.

On each prayer stop on their journey to Tava, they would choose a pliable sapling, bend it parallel to the ground, and secure it with a yucca rope. "Then everyone circled the tree and prayed, for they knew it would hold their prayers for 800 years, and each breeze would give their prayers new breath."



Another type of ceremonial tree is the Medicine Tree. The National Park Service explains that Utes would insert a sharp stick into a tree and peel the bark away to the inner layer, which would be used in a healing ceremony. Since a tree cannot add growth rings to such scars, historians are able to date the ceremony by comparing the rings in the scarred and unscarred areas.

Historian Celinda Kaelin of the Pikes Peak Historical Society has identified over 500 ceremonial trees in the region so far, and more are being discovered near Black Forest, Fox Run, Cuchara, and La Veta. John Wesley Anderson, who gives presentations on this subject, has also written two books, titled *Ute Indian Prayer Trees of the Pikes Peak Region* and *Native American Prayer Trees of Colorado*, that describe in more detail the history of the Ute practices.

These photos are some of the trees discovered on Blackhawk Ranch that appear to be culturally modified by the Utes. The last two trees can be



viewed on the east side of the road on Wapiti Drive between Mule Deer and just north of Canyon View. If you see similar trees on your property, please do not destroy such historically and culturally significant artifacts!

Check out this website: www.pikespeakmuseum.org/indians

