The History of Pronghorn (Antilocapra americana) Communal Hunting: Archaeological Evidence from Hogup Cave, Utah, Mortality Profiles

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Historic accounts of Native American pronghorn hunting describe a variety of methods that were utilized to hunt this species across western North America. These include single hunters killing one animal on encounter to large-scale communal drives where many animals were killed en masse. Recent data has shown that prehistoric hunters in the Great Basin participated in communal hunts of pronghorns, much like their historic counterparts. However, this work also suggests that communal hunting was practiced only after pronghorn populations expanded about 5000 years ago. Reconstructed age structures, or mortality profiles, have considerable potential for addressing the mode of capture for hunted animals. Communal hunting is typically indicated by catastrophic age profiles, while on-encounter hunting results in age profiles dominated by prime-aged adults. I examined pronghorn mandibular dentitions from Hogup Cave, Utah, to determine their age of death, reconstruct mortality profiles and test the hypothesis that communal hunting began only after 5000 years ago. Hogup cave is a limestone cavern located on the southern end of Hogup Mountain in the Great Salt Lake Desert that was occupied by people between about 8400 to 500 years and yielded a large sample of pronghorn remains. Found that there is evidence for catastrophic age profiles and communal hunting across the entire occupational history of the site, not just during the last 5000 years.