Projectile Points: Our Key to the Past

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In this project, a dichotomous key developed by archeologist David Hurst Thomas for the classification of projectile points from Monitor Valley, Nevada, was used to classify points from the Carbon/Emery county area of Utah. Point attributes such as shouldering, weight, length, thickness, base characteristics, notching, and stem characteristics were measured and compared to the key to determine each points' respective grouping. The points can be classified into ten different groupings, or types. These groups are the Cottonwood Triangular, Cottonwood Leaf-Shaped, Humboldt Series, Desert Side-Notched, Large Side-Notched, Rosegate Series, Elko Corner-Notched, Elko Eared, Gatecliff Split Stem, and the Gatecliff Contracting Stem classifications. These groups correlate to matching time periods in history. From the number of points in each time-sensitive grouping, we can determine rough population estimates for the area in which the points were collected. The significantly larger number of points in the Elko Series shows that there was a higher human population during the period between 1,500 cal B.C. and 650 cal B.C. relative to that of the other periods. Eighty-one percent of the points in the collection were able to be typed using Thomas' key. This tells us that the key is applicable to other Great Basin points outside of Monitor Valley, Nevada. Also indicated in the data is a high percentage of projectile points relative to more domestic artifacts, such as drills. From this, we can infer that many of these tools reflect the importance of hunting in the region where the artifacts were discovered.

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