



Alpine Archaeology of Alta Toquima and the Mt. Jefferson Tablelands (Nevada) is the first volume in a trilogy about the Central Mountains Archaic foragers who populated the alpine Intermountain West about 6000 years ago. This migration coincided with the “extremely dramatic” winter-wet event of 4350 cal B.C. and the arrival of piñon pine forests in the central Great Basin. For thousands of years, logistically organized bighorn hunters worked the alpine Mt. Jefferson tablelands, leaving the hundreds of rock hunting features described here for the first time. High elevation bighorn hunting lasted until the onset of the Late Holocene Dry Period about 850 cal B.C.

Sometime ~1370–790 cal B.C., Central Mountains Archaic people began building alpine residences at Alta Toquima (26NY920), located at exactly 11,000 ft (3352 m) above sea level on the third-highest spot in the state of Nevada. When first recorded in 1978, this was the highest American Indian village site known in the Northern Hemisphere. The earliest summertime houses at Alta Toquima were occupied only during the driest intervals in these times of abrupt climate change and temporarily abandoned when lowland habitats were sufficiently well-watered to again support summertime patches of seeds and geophytes. The Monitor Valley sequence documents several syncopated lowland-alpine, wet-dry reversals, reflecting an adaptive diversity that spanned more than two millennia. The drought terminating cal A.D. 1150 devastated much of the arid American West, but its impact was less severe in central Nevada. Although subalpine settlements were again abandoned during the drought buildup that peaked in the mid-13th century, summertime occupation of Alta Toquima became more commonplace, persisting throughout the Little Ice Age.

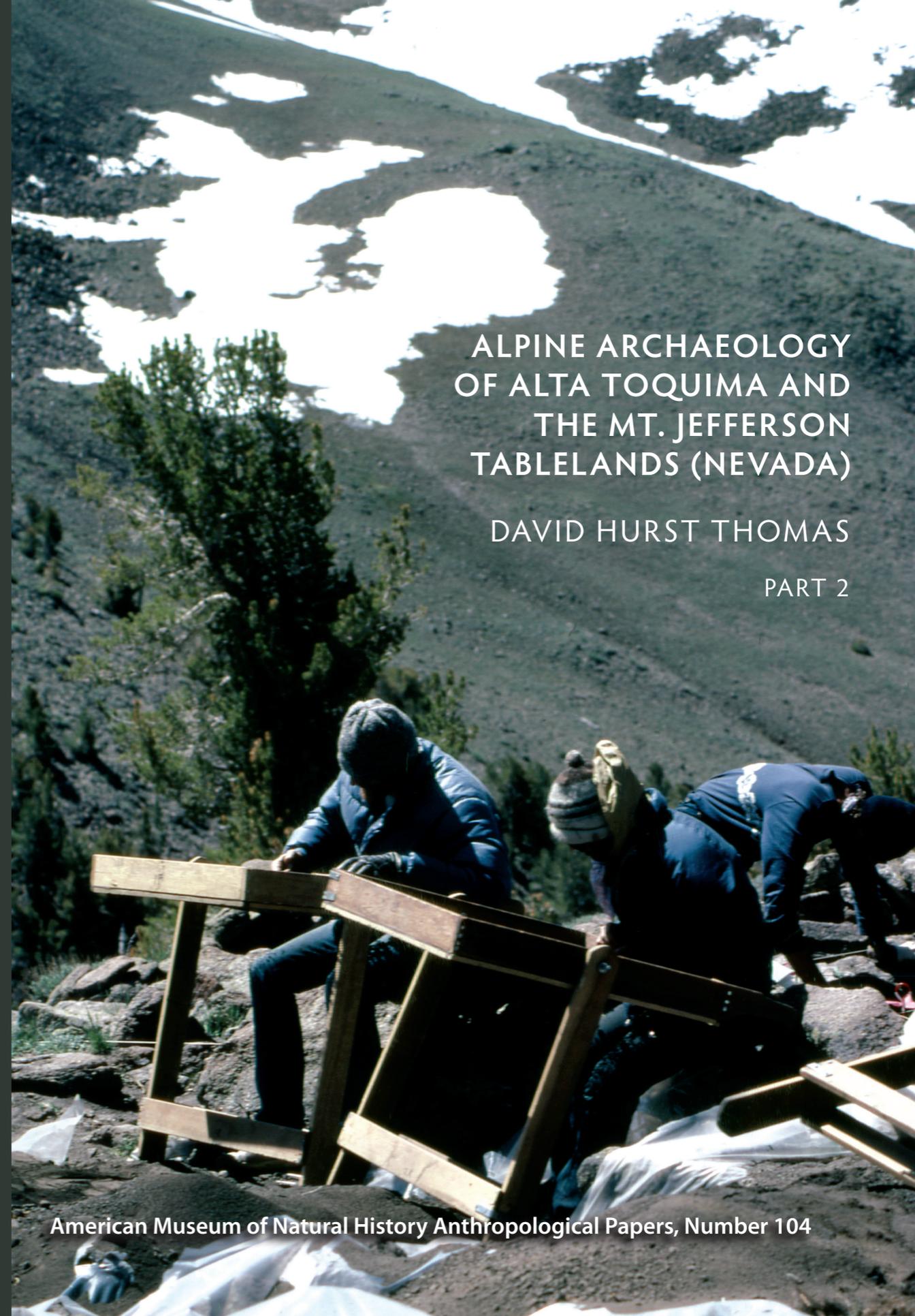
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ON THE COVER: Lori Pendleton, Brian Hatoff, and Kelly McGuire doing summertime archaeology at Alta Toquima (July 1983). Photograph by Dennis O'Brien.



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