

Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site

On November 7, 2000, the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site was authorized by Congress and signed by the President to recognize the national significance of the massacre in American history and its ongoing significance to the Arapaho and Cheyenne descendants of the massacre victims.



An annual Spiritual Healing Run is held for descendants of the Cheyenne and Arapaho people every year. Image courtesy of Tom Meier.

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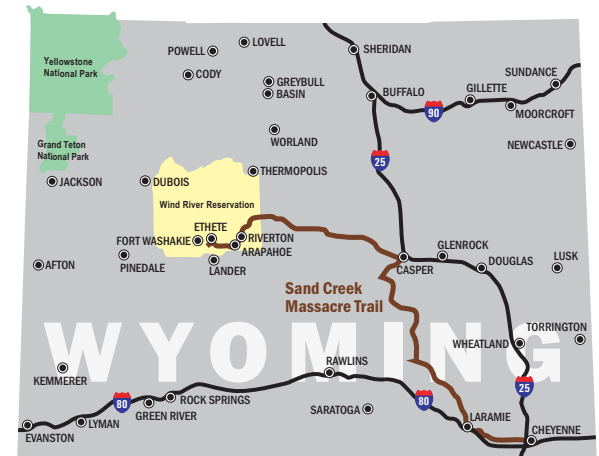
The Sand Creek Massacre Trail in Wyoming



The Sand Creek Massacre Trail in Wyoming exists as a memorial to the Arapaho and Cheyenne who lost their lives at the Sand Creek Massacre in Colorado in 1864.

Members of the Tribal Relations Committee of the Wyoming State Legislature sponsored a resolution to designate a route along Wyoming highways, reaching from the Wyoming-Colorado border to the Wind River Reservation via Cheyenne, Laramie, Medicine Bow, Casper, Shoshone, and Riverton. The trail was dedicated on August 16, 2006.

The trail represents a modern-day link between the massacre site and the current home of the Northern Arapaho.



Location of the Sand Creek Massacre Trail in Wyoming

The Sand Creek Massacre



Site of Sand Creek Massacre in Colorado

With the discovery of gold in Colorado in 1858 and the influx of American settlers in the west, tensions eventually developed between the settlers and Plains Tribes. By 1864 with the establishment of reservations throughout the west, smaller conflicts escalated resulting in a series of unprovoked U.S. Military interventions.

In September of 1864, Colonel John Chivington, Governor John Evans and representative chiefs from the Arapaho and Cheyenne Tribes met to discuss peace. Northern and southern bands existed within both of these tribes. As a result of the meeting, the tribes living in the Colorado area were directed to move to Fort Lyon in the eastern side of the state. Both tribes, as well as visiting tribal members, thought that peaceful relations and protection would be afforded to them as had been stated in established agreements and treaties. In the meantime, Chivington made plans for a winter campaign and went against all “honored words.”

November 29, 1864



This hide painting of the Sand Creek Massacre, done by Eugene Ridgely, Sr. in 1994, was completed through an oral history project with massacre survivors in Oklahoma and is based on an Arapaho oral tradition. Ridgely is a descendant of Chief Little Raven, who led many Arapahos to safety before the attack, and Lame Man, who survived the attack.

The silence of dawn broke violently as Colonel Chivington, formerly a Methodist minister, routed the peaceful encampment with federally enlisted Colorado volunteers and proceeded to massacre many of the villagers. Chaos within the village ensued. The Arapaho and Cheyenne bands ran toward the banks of Sand Creek or scattered across the plains, while others ran for their weapons. Chief Black Kettle raised an American flag but the firing continued. At least 165 Arapaho and Cheyenne, many of them women and children, died.

Chivington returned to Denver, where he declared a great victory had taken place, despite the cowardly massacre of unarmed women and children. His actions, regarded as Chivington’s alone, were indicative of a national sentiment toward Native Americans and the further marginalization of them as a people.

Three federal investigations ensued as questions arose about the attack. Some, like Captain Silas Soule, condemned the attack,

writing, “I refused to fire and swore that none but a coward would, for by this time hundreds of women and children were coming towards us and getting on their knees for mercy ...”

The Northern Arapaho (known to the Arapaho as the Mother Tribe and fiercest warriors of Hinnoeino, which is Arapaho for “the people”) along with the Northern Cheyenne allied with the Oglala Sioux and led attacks across the plains in retribution for Sand Creek. These and other attacks led up to the Battle of Greasy Grass (Battle of the Little Bighorn) and the defeat of the United States Army.



Looking Southwest on the Massacre. Image courtesy of the Denver Public Library, Western History Collection.

Some of surviving Southern Cheyenne eventually settled with the Fighting Cheyenne of Lame Deer, Montana, and some of the surviving Southern Arapaho settled with the Mother Tribe on the Wind River Reservation in central Wyoming. Other survivors from both the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes settled in Oklahoma.

The Wind River Reservation was originally home to the Eastern Shoshone tribe and continues to be home for both Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone as well as many Arapaho descendants of survivors of the Sand Creek Massacre.