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2006

Book Review: Finding Sand Creek: History, Archeology, and the 1864 Massacre Site

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Faller, Lincoln, "Book Review: Finding Sand Creek: History, Archeology, and the 1864 Massacre Site" (2006). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 143.

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Finding Sand Creek: History, Archeology, and the 1864 Massacre Site. By Jerome A. Greene and Douglas D. Scott. Foreword by Christine Whitacre. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004. xxvi + 241 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95.

Metal detritus of war and an old map recently discovered in Chicago helped an interdisciplinary team of historians, archeologists,

geomorphologists, ethnographers, remote imagers, and descendants of the victims of the Sand Creek Massacre to find the exact site where that atrocity was enacted; so this book reports. It begins a little further to the north and west than previously supposed and where Cheyenne tradition and belief would have located it, about a mile up the stream bed, and extends over two miles. At that site, roughly nine miles north of where Chivington, Colorado, now stands, more than a hundred fifty Native Americans, mostly Cheyennes but including some Arapahos, were killed on November 29, 1864. Most of the victims were women, children, and old people. Their village, consisting perhaps of some five hundred people in all, was attacked without warning by the Colorado militia and elements of the U.S. Army. The troops were well armed with rifles, carbines, and pistols, and their attack was supported by field howitzers firing explosive shells. On their return to Denver the militiamen, who suffered few casualties, were greeted by adoring crowds to whom they displayed the trophies they had taken, which included not only scalps but other, more private, bodily parts.

The Indians had camped on Sand Creek in response to an ultimatum from the governor of Colorado indicating that any groups not submitting to military control would be considered hostile and treated accordingly. The commander at Fort Lyon, where they had gone to register their peaceable intentions, did not want them camping too close to the post. So they camped where they did with his full knowledge and indeed his encouragement. As it happened, he was among the attackers. The attack itself was led by Col. John Chivington, a Methodist minister celebrated for his previous victory over Confederate troops at the Battle of Glorieta Pass, a man with great political ambitions and, of course, the person after whom the town nearby would later be named.

Outside Colorado, where some people still refer to it as a "battle," Sand Creek was quickly recognized for the atrocity it was. Congressional investigations and a military hearing elicited horrific testimony, outraged

condemnations from leading politicians, and a promise of reparations to the survivors and relatives of the victims. As it happened, no one was ever punished for the savageries committed at Sand Creek, and the promised reparations have yet to be paid. In 1998, however, prompted by Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell, himself a Cheyenne, Congress took an important step toward recognizing the wrong that had been done by passing legislation that would lead to establishing a national park on the site of the massacre. Determining the exact location of the site was a crucial early step in this process.

Finding Sand Creek reports on the evidence and the interdisciplinary methodology used to accomplish this goal. Of its kind, it is a model of clarity and can be read with profit by interested nonprofessionals. Perhaps most valuable to such readers will be the historical background provided by chapter 1, which offers a brief account of the massacre, including the events leading up to it and its aftermath. It's one of the best such accounts available and ought to be made accessible to future visitors to the park. Later chapters describe the ways in which historical and archeological evidence weighed in on making the final site determination. Bullets, bullet casings, and shell fragments uncovered with metal detectors provided the majority of the latter kind of evidence. The Chicago map, drawn according to military regulations by an Army lieutenant escorting General Sherman from Fort Lyon to the nearest railhead some four years after the massacre, offered a good deal more precision than the several maps drawn some fifty or more years later by a Cheyenne survivor.

Passing near the site stirred Sherman's curiosity enough for him to order that the skulls and scattered bones still remaining be gathered up and shipped to Washington, D.C. The military was interested in the destructive effect of modern arms on the human body. There is pathos, too, in this book's listing in one of its appendices of each and every one of the bullets, bullet casings, and shell fragments recovered in and around the area of the doomed Cheyenne and Arapaho camp. Until further archeo-

logical work is done, the primary evidence for where and how these people lived and died will be the things that killed them.

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