



# Foundation Document Overview

## Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site

Colorado



### Contact Information

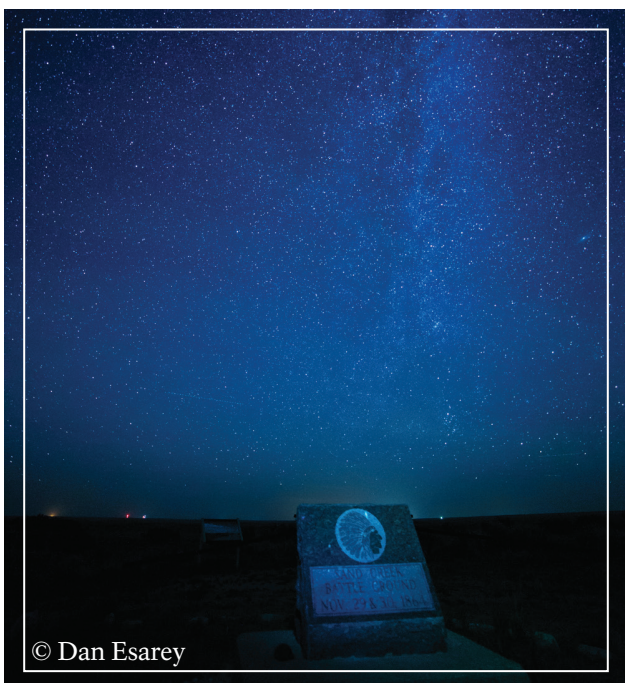
For more information about the *Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site Foundation Document*, contact: [sand\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:sand_superintendent@nps.gov) or (719) 438-5916 or write to:

Superintendent, Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site, 910 Wansted, POB 249, Eads, CO 81036-0249

## Purpose



*The purpose of SAND CREEK MASSACRE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE is to protect and preserve the landscape of the massacre site and interpret the associated cultural values to enhance public understanding of the massacre and assist in minimizing the chances of similar incidents in the future.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The site of the Sand Creek Massacre has sacred significance to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, particularly those tribal members who are descended from victims and survivors of the massacre.
- The site is a reminder of the tragic extremes of the 500 years of conflict between American Indians and European Americans over land that now comprises the United States.
- The intense distrust resulting from the Sand Creek Massacre influenced virtually all subsequent conflicts between American Indians and the U.S. Army.
- The Sand Creek Massacre is an essential symbol of the struggles of American Indian tribes to maintain their ancestral ways of life.
- The massacre profoundly disrupted the social, political, and economic structures of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes.
- By eliminating most Cheyenne advocates for peace, the massacre hardened resistance to white expansion and escalated warfare between the U.S. Army and the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Sioux Tribes.
- The circumstances of the massacre elicited widespread national outrage, even against the backdrop of the Civil War, which forced substantial changes in U.S. Indian policy.



# Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **The Massacre Site.** The massacre site includes the Big Sandy Creek, three escape avenues, sand pits, the village site, bluffs, the troops' baggage drop site, routes of the troops' approach, lines of the companies' deployment, and the sites of skirmishes.
- **Cultural and Natural Landscape.** The intact short-grass prairie ecosystem closely resembles the appearance of the 1864 landscape, including the open views and vistas, ridgelines, riparian areas, and other topographical features. In addition, the remote location of the historic site allows for a similar night sky, natural sounds, and feeling of solitude that would have existed at the time of the massacre, providing for both cultural and natural continuity from 1864 to the present.
- **Museum and Archival Collections.** Historical objects, archival collections, library materials, and tribal records focused on the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864, including original manuscripts and family histories, are included in the museum and archival collections.
- **Place of Healing.** The national historic site creates an environment conducive to opportunities for healing for tribal members and descendants of those who were in the village and those killed in the attack.
- **Sense of Place, Memorialization, and Commemoration.** The contemplative atmosphere of Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site fosters an awareness of the intangible spiritual qualities of the landscape and the lingering imprint the massacre left on the landscape, and contributes to a visceral and emotional response to the massacre. The site provides a physical location for commemorating those who were killed during the massacre, including locations that have been blessed or where tribal ceremonies occur and have occurred and through events such as the annual Sand Creek Massacre Spiritual Healing Run/Walk.

- **Repatriation Site.** This site includes interments of the remains of massacre victims that have been repatriated to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes from museums and private individuals and interment sites for those that may be repatriated in the future.
- **Tribal Cultural Observances and Ethnographic Resources.** The national historic site creates a setting in which tribal members may connect with each other, their ancestors, their histories, and their current identities as descendants of the Sand Creek Massacre. Part of this connection includes the physical landscapes, topography, plants, animals, and in situ archeological resources that hold cultural value for the Arapaho and Cheyenne Tribes. The site is also a place where the general public and tribes can continue to learn about and understand the ongoing relevancy of the Sand Creek Massacre in the present day through the intangible and tangible ethnographic resources of the site.

Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Sand Creek Massacre and the Legacy of Conquest.** The Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site is an important symbol of the struggles of American Indian tribes. The site was established in part to provide for public understanding and appreciation of this tragic event, and facilitate continued research and study to help prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future. An off-site research and interpretive facility will allow for opportunities to study and learn from the past, without impacting the sacred landscape of the massacre site.



## Description

Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site commemorates the November 29, 1864, attack on a village of about 700 Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho people along Sand Creek (Big Sandy Creek and Sand Creek refer to the same drainage and are synonymous terms) in southeastern Colorado Territory, about 170 miles southeast of Denver. At dawn, approximately 675 soldiers of the 1st and 3rd Regiments, Colorado Volunteer (U.S.) Cavalry, killed more than 230 Cheyenne and Arapaho over the course of seven hours.

Colonel John M. Chivington, a Methodist minister, led an unprovoked surprise attack on a peaceful camp using small arms and howitzer fire to kill as many Cheyenne and Arapaho as possible. While many managed to escape the initial onslaught, others, particularly noncombatant women, children, and the elderly, fled into and up the bottom of the dry creek channel. The soldiers followed, shooting them as they struggled through the sandy ground. At a point several hundred yards above the village, the fleeing people frantically dug pits and trenches along either side of the streambed in a desperate attempt to escape the soldiers' bullets. Some tried to fight back with whatever weapons they had managed to retrieve from camp. At several places along Sand Creek, the soldiers shot from opposite banks in a cross-fire. Finally, the howitzers were brought forward to drive the Indians from their makeshift defenses.

Among the dead were 13 Cheyenne peace chiefs and one Arapaho chief, whose deaths severely disrupted the tribes' traditional forms of governance for generations. During that afternoon and the following day, soldiers committed atrocities on the dead, including taking human body parts as trophies. They departed the massacre site on December 1, taking 600 captured horses with them.

For more than 150 years, the Sand Creek Massacre has maintained its significance as one of the most emotionally charged and controversial events in U.S. history; a tragedy reflective of its time and place. The background of the Sand Creek Massacre lay in a whirlwind of events and issues triggered by the ongoing Civil War in the East and West, overreactions to the 1862–1863 Dakota uprising in Minnesota, the constant undercurrent of threatened Confederate incursions, the political and financial ambitions of Territorial Governor John Evans, and the substantial involvement of the Methodist Church in politics and the military in Colorado Territory.

Perhaps most importantly, the causes of the Sand Creek Massacre lay in the irresistible momentum of Manifest Destiny—the U.S. belief in its right to establish dominance over the lands between the Mississippi River and the Pacific coast.

The National Park Service prepared a special resource study to evaluate the inclusion of the site as a national park unit in 2000. Congress designated Sand Creek Massacre as a national historic site in 2000, and the site was dedicated and formally opened to the public on April 27, 2007. The national historic site consists of 3,025 acres, of which about 1,560 acres are owned by the National Park Service and 1,465 acres are held in trust by the United States for the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes and managed by the National Park Service (see appendix E for a list of tribes traditionally associated with the historic site).

The site is on the grassland plains of southeast Colorado and remains largely undeveloped, but offers a visitor picnic area and visitor contact station with bookstore. Visitors can access the national historic site via a county road off Colorado State Highway 96. The Monument Hill area includes an overlook above Big Sandy Creek, a shade structure, and the Repatriation Area. A primitive trail continues along the bluff beyond the Monument Hill overlook, overlooking the creek bed and following the course of the massacre as tribal members fled along the creek with soldiers in pursuit. A number of interim interpretive wayside exhibits provide visitors with information about the massacre. Visitor information is also provided by a ranger-led interpretive program, a park brochure, site bulletins, and other printed material.

