

TRI-STATE EXCURSION



MONTANA - SOUTH DAKOTA - WYOMING



Rise and shine early to experience more of the historic Old West. Start the day with a hardy buffet-style breakfast at the Holiday Inn restaurant. The first stop on this busy day is Fort Phil Kearny, 25-30 minutes south of Sheridan. It was the largest of three garrisons placed along the Bozeman Trail to render military control throughout the Powder River region of southeastern Montana Territory and northern Wyoming Territory. The presentation here involves indoor and outdoor sessions lasting a total of about two hours.

Fort Phil Kearny was the focal point of two key clashes—the Fetterman Massacre (1866) and the Wagon Box Fight (1867)—during Red Cloud’s War, the military campaign waged by local Sioux, assisted by their Cheyenne and Arapaho allies, to hamper white traffic passing through the Powder River country.

The resulting Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868) was a bittersweet moment for the Plains Indians. It called for abandonment of all three Bozeman Trail posts, but more broadly, the treaty represented clear victory by tribes of the Northern Plains over the United States government. Thus, Red Cloud is forever identified by many historians as the only Native American leader to win war against U.S. federal forces.

However, in addition to closing the forts guarding the Bozeman Trail, the Fort Laramie Treaty unwittingly created conditions that would soon elevate hostilities between the United States and Plains Indians. The Sioux Nation was given enormous territory approximating the western half of present-day South Dakota (known as the “Great Sioux Reservation”) as well as vast additional land that can be loosely described as extending from the Black Hills west to the Bighorn Mountains and south to the North Platte River (called “Unceded Territory”). Essentially, the Sioux could elect to reside on the designated reservation and draw regular provisions from the government, or opt to roam freely in the Powder River Basin to hunt buffalo and other game, but with no government promise of supplies. Regardless, there was to be no significant interference from whites. Triggered by discovery of gold in the Black Hills in 1874 and the ensuing influx of prospectors hoping to get rich quick, both treaty parties would violate agreements reached under the Fort Laramie Treaty within the next few years culminating in the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

