

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	
DATE ENTERED	

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC  
Washita Battlefield  
AND/OR COMMON  
The Battle of the Washita

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER  
Northwest of Cheyenne U.S. 283  
CITY, TOWN  
Cheyenne  
STATE  
Oklahoma  
VICINITY OF  
6th  
COUNTY  
Roger Mills  
CODE  
40  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
6th  
CODE  
129

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME  
Oklahoma Historical Society  
STREET & NUMBER  
Wiley Post Historical Bldg.  
CITY, TOWN  
Oklahoma City  
VICINITY OF  
Oklahoma  
STATE  
Oklahoma

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.  
County Clerk's Office  
STREET & NUMBER  
Courthouse -- Main Street  
CITY, TOWN  
Cheyenne  
STATE  
Oklahoma

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE  
None  
DATE  
DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS  
CITY, TOWN  
STATE

FEDERAL     STATE     COUNTY     LOCAL

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Washita Battlefield lies in the center of Roger Mills County, which borders the Texas Panhandle. The essential features of the site are generally unchanged and the area of original military action stretches some six miles along the Washita River. Though the original features are the same, there have been a number of man made intrusions which prevent encompassing the entire area of military activity.

The city of Cheyenne now sits in the center of the six mile action area. Numerous roads and highways cut across the battlefield. However on the west side of the city is located the site of the Custer surprise attack which was the focal point of the Battle of the Washita. This area likewise is impaired by the construction of various roadways as well as the Panhandle and Santa Fe Railroad Line which cuts across a significant portion of the site of Black Kettle's camp.

The routes of attack are indicated on the accompany sketch map titled "The Battle of the Washita- November 27, 1868," prepared by the Oklahoma Historical Society and found in the Special Report on Washita Battlefield prepared by Historian William Brown. This map indicates that the area of fighting was concentrated on the plains at the bend of the Washita or at the site of Black Kettle's encampment.

The terrain of this battlefield was most important in the success of the campaign. Custer and his subordinate commanders used the various ridge lines and mountains as a shelter to completely encircle the camp and effectively reduce the escape route. Black Kettle's forces were thereby trapped in the valley, causing such a high number of killed.

The Oklahoma Historical Society has purchased a small number of acres on a secondary road, just west of Cheyenne. On this tract they have built a small park and observatory. In this area are two shelters with picnic tables, rest facilities and numerous interpretive markers. The most impressive facility is the observatory. A small round structure with a brick base the observatory sits on the knoll of the park and looks out over the battlefield area. Facing north one can see to the ridge line from behind which Custer made his attack. Directly in front of the viewer has been placed a map, similar to the accompanying map, and shown on an accompanying photograph, which locates the routes of advance, attack and pursuit. The landmark plaque sits to the north of the observation point and faces south.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The cultural collision between white man and Indian reached its tragic climax in the post-Civil War years on the Great Plains. The white pioneer-settler-- with his farms, villages, rails and roads-- aimed to domesticate the land, to own it, to locate permanently upon it. The nomadic Plains Indian-- with his horse, mobile home and migratory buffalo herds-- aimed to adapt to bluntness nature, not conquer and subdue it. Two such diametrically opposed philosophies were like flint and steel: whenever they met sparks flew.

The Battle of the Washita, November 27, 1868, was the first victory in a campaign destined to bring an end to the Plains Indian barrier. By demonstrating that U. S. troops would fight in the winter when the Indians preferred to be left alone, it dealt a heavy blow to Indian morale. It also demonstrated the practicality and effectiveness of winter campaigning in the long struggle against the hostile Plains Indians.

General Sheridan's six-month Winter Campaign of 1868-69 was spearheaded by Col. George A. Custer's 7th Cavalry. After a hard, forced march through heavy snow, Col. Custer and 800 men made a surprise dawn attack on the village of Black Kettle, the peace leader of the southern Cheyenne. The soldiers laid waste to the town and destroyed a large herd of horses. When they departed with fifty-three women and children as prisoners, they left behind over one hundred dead warriors, including Chief Black Kettle.

The Battle of the Washita exerted a severe psychological impact, and thousands of Indians, their security shattered, broke camp and fled. Similar operations followed during this campaign, and by spring all of the southern tribes had been forced onto the reservations set aside for them. The continuation of this brutal strategy brought an end to the resistance of the Plains Indians.

The Washita Battlefield lies in the center of Roger Mills County, which borders the Texas Panhandle. The essential features of the site are generally the same and the area of Army and Indian activity stretches some six miles along the Washita River. The verdant valley, sheltered by surrounding hills, has scarcely changed in nearly a century.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Custer, George A., My Life on the Plains (New York, 1873)  
 Godfrey, E. S. "Some Reminiscences of the Washita Battle," Cavalry Journal, October, 1928.  
 Whittaker, Frederick, Life of Gen. George A. Custer (New York, 1876)  
 "Washita Battlefield" special study by William E. Brown, in National Historic

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 12 sq. miles - 7,680 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,4	4,3,9	5,0,0	3,9	4,7	2,0,0	B	1,4	4,3,9	5,0,0	3,9	4,1	7,5,0
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING				ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING		
C	1,4	4,3,3	8,0,0	3,9	4,1	6,0,0	D	1,4	4,3,3	8,5,0	3,9	4,7	4,5,0
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING				ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING		

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See Continuation Sheet

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Joseph Scott Mendinghall, Historian

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey - National Park Service

DATE

6/13/76

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL HISTORIC  
LANDMARKS)

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

9/30/83

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC  
LANDMARKS)

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Washita Battlefield

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

History

Government policy had been to insulate Indians from whites by means of a vast Indian territory comprising the Great Plains between Missouri and the Rocky Mountains. But in the decade of the 1840's the Indian frontier was breached, and by the end of the Civil War land-hungry settlers were penetrating the plains along the river valleys. Thus, the Indian hunting grounds were encroached upon from the east. To the west were inhospitable mountains and deserts-- and more white men of the eastward moving mining frontier. The Indian had his back to the wall. No longer could he strike at the white man, then retreat into the wilderness. He had to stand fast and protect his way of life.

During the spring and summer of 1868 the Southern Plains ran red with blood. From the Platte to the Rio Grande, from Council Grove to Denver, the Indians went to war. Operating in small bands of 50 to 100 warriors, they swept through the inadequate frontier defense system and spread death and destruction to those who had encroached their domain. Cheyennes and Arapahoes struck in Kansas and Colorado. Comanches and Kiowas raided in Texas and New Mexico. Knowing every water hole in this arid region, traveling lightly and swiftly from place to place, living off the land, the Indians seemed to appear out of nowhere to pillage and burn-- they then disappear with the same alacrity. When the supply-laden army troopers attempted to follow the war parties, the Indians dispersed in all directions, reuniting again at some prearranged meeting place a hundred miles distant.

Confounded by these tactics General Phil Sheridan was forced to develop a strategy that would counteract the Indians. Sheridan's experience with the Plains Indians during the 1868 raiding season convinced him that only a strong offensive blow could halt these depredations. He had learned, too, the rhythm of the seasons that set the pattern of Indian warfare and dictated the strategy of reprisal.

The fast striking war parties and combined efforts of tribes produced Indian fighting in the spring and summer when war ponies were nourished on rich plains grass. Winter was a different matter. Then the horse herds starved and the ponies were unfit for all but the most limited service. Plains blizzards forced the Indian into sheltered breaks and river valleys where he could warm himself by his tepee fire. In his refuge, immobilized by the condition of his horses, surrounded by his women and children, the Indian was vulnerable. His only protection was isolation and brutal weather.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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General Sheridan proposed to ally himself with the weather. He would thus expose his troopers to hardship and suffering. He would go counter to the advice of scouts and plainsmen, who pronounced the sleet and ice and snow of winter an insurmountable barrier to the prosecution of a successful winter campaign. But if he could pull it off, a successful winter campaign-- possible because they army could transport its forage and supplies in wagons-- could not only punish the guilty Indians, but would destroy their belief that winter protected them from reprisal for thier summer misdeeds. It would be a psychological blow of the first magnitude-- a revolution in plains warfare. Thus Sheridan settled on a winter campaign, the most formidable yet undertaken and one that would set the pattern for the final defeat of the Plains Indians.

Sheridan planned a 6 months' campaign, one that would keep the Indians reeling throughout the winter. It was decided by General Sheridan that the 7th Cavalry spearhead the campaign. Custer had made the 800-man command an elite corps.

The general plan for the battle called for the 800-man command to break up into four attack groups of 200 men each, surround the village in the remaining hours of darkness, and at the first light strike the Indians from all sides. Major Elliot was to take the first group and circle east. Capt. William Thompson, with the second group, was to circle right and take the Indians from the southwest. These two columns set out at once for they had to march several miles to reach their attack points. The third detachment, commanded by Captain Edward Meyers, moved to the right into the timber about an hour before daylight. Custer's column, accompanied by the band, the Osages, the scouts, and the sharpshooters, prepared to charge frontally from the crest of the hill where the horse herd and village had been discovered. Lt. James Bell, in charge of the ammunition wagons, was to wait until the firing began, then make a dash for the village.

With devastating results, on the morning of November 27, 1868, General George A. Custer and the 7th Cavalry, operating from Camp Supply, 70 miles to the north, surprised and wiped out the forces of Black Kettle. At dawn the 7th charged the camp from three directions. Surprised and stunned, the Indians were driven from their lodges out into the snow and the awaiting sabers of the 7th. Completely sacking the village and destroying the pony herd, Custer escorted a large number of prisoners back to Camp Supply.

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After celebrating the tremendous victory with a parade, Custer immediately went into a huddle with Sheridan and reported the results of the battle. He claimed 102 warriors killed (bodies later found on the field raised this total by a third), 53 women and children prisoners, and total destruction of the village.

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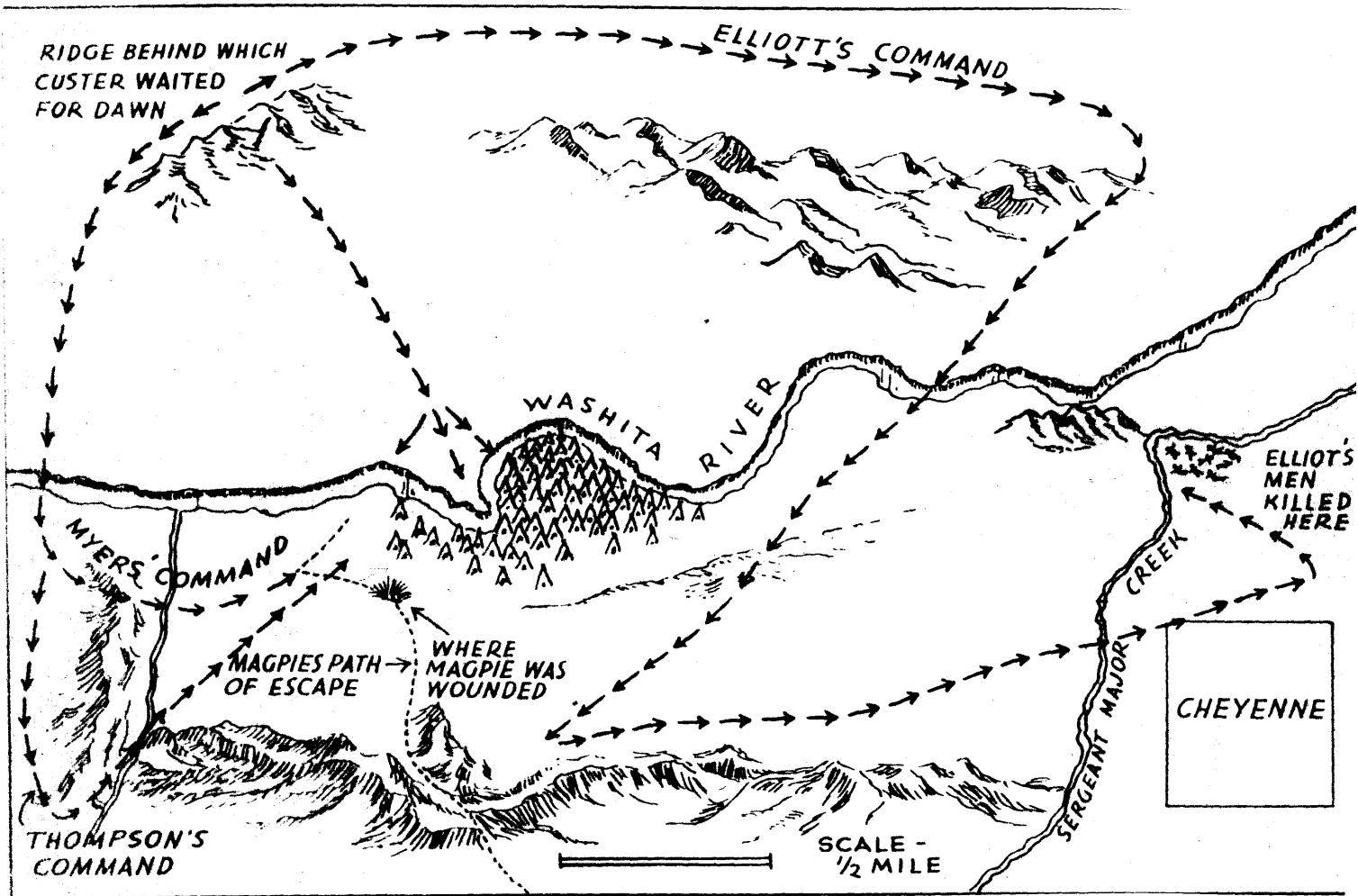
CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

The boundary encompasses the area of the primary focus of the battlefield-- Black Kettle's campsite (outlined in red on the USGS map)--as well as the area of primary military maneuvers as shown on the accompanying copy of the Oklahoma Historical Society sketch map entitled "The Battle of the Washita, November 27, 1968."

Beginning at the northwest corner of sec. 26, T.14 N., R.24 W. proceed east along the northern section lines of secs. 26 and 25, T.14 N., R.24 W. and secs. 30 and 29, T.14 N., R.23 W. but along the line of sec. 29 only to the intersection of that line with the west right-of-way of U.S. Route 283; thence south along said right-of-way to a point about 500 feet north of the city limits of Cheyenne; thence west one mile; thence south about 1200 feet to the intersection of the north edge of a light-duty road; thence west along this north edge extended in a straight line to a point of intersection with the west section line of sec. 11, T.13 N., R.24 W.; thence north along this line extended along the west section line of sec. 2, T.13 N., R.24 W. and secs. 25 and 26, T.14 N., R.24 W., to the point of beginning.





The Battle of the Washita  
Map compiled by the old Historic Sites Survey