

The Beecher Island Staff Ride and Battlefield Tour

by
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“..... the greatest battle on the plains.”
LTC George A. Custer

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
I. Background and Engagement	8
II. Staff Ride and Battlefield Tour Stands	15
Appendix	
A. Characters for role playing	23
B. Medal of Honor Recipient	25
C. Scout Roster and Equipment	26
D. Forsyth Scouts Chronology of Events	29
Bibliography	34

MAPS

Map 1	10
Map 2	12
Map 3	19
Map 4	31
Map 5	31
Map 6	32
Map 7	32
Map 8	32
Map 9	33

Introduction

After the Civil War, in the late 1860s, the land bordering the Republican River in Nebraska and Colorado was a busy place. There was a steady stream of prospectors eager to strike it rich in the gold fields of California and the mountains of Colorado. But there was also a small group of settlers who believed that they could make a living as farmers on these High Plains, which Zebulon Pike once dubbed "The Great American Desert."

By the Medicine Lodge Treaty of 1867 Plains Indian Tribes were forced into a smaller area than had been granted previously. Under terms of the Treaty, Settlers were prohibited from entering this region (except for traders, educators, and churchmen). In return, the Indians guaranteed the safety of travelers along the existing routes along the Platte River. Almost as soon as the Medicine Lodge Treaty was signed, the treaty was violated, by both Settlers and the Indian Tribes. President Grant soon revoked the law, under tremendous pressure from influential "western expansionists." This effectively opened up the land to the buffalo hunters, traders, and settlers. The Indian Wars resumed with great violence on both sides. Indians overran the few frontier settlements, which were virtually defenseless against such attacks. During the spring and summer of 1868 some 79 settlers were killed on farms, ranches and way stations between Nebraska and Utah in attacks by various tribes of Indians.

In August 1868 MG Philip Sheridan authorized MAJ Forsythe, of the 9th Cavalry, to enlist "50 first class hardy frontiersmen" for a new type of Cavalry Force-one that could move with the same rapidity as the Indians they were fighting. This would contrast with the large military wagon trains that become easy targets of the Indian raids. These Frontiersmen, under the command of MAJ Forsythe and 1LT Beecher, would be equipped with the new 7 shot repeater Spencer rifles and 140 cartridges, plus a Colt .45 revolver and 30 rounds of ammunition. The troop carried a store of some 4,000 rounds of ammunition on four pack mules.

Forsythe's force tracked a band of Indians from the Solomon River in Kansas, to the Beaver Creek, in Nebraska, then to the Republican River Valley, near to the junction where the Arikaree Fork of the Republican joins with the main Republican River in Eastern Colorado, south of Wray in Yuma County, Colorado. One of the most famous clashes of the Indian wars, the nine-day Battle of Beecher Island, was about to take place.....

*Source: The Battle of Beecher Island, Story of CO Plains 1868
John G. Neihardt's "Twilight of the Sioux", "SW Nebraska", by E.S. Sutton*

Battlefield Tour

This guidebook outlines the general usefulness of Beecher Island for both battlefield tours and staff rides. A battlefield tour is defined as

... a visit to the site of an actual campaign (or battle) but with little or no preliminary or systematic study. If led by an expert, the historical battlefield tour can stimulate thought and encourage student discussion but within limits set by the lack of systematic preparation and involvement. A historical battlefield tour uses both terrain and a historical situation but does not have a preliminary study phase.^[1]

A successful battlefield tour of Beecher Island can achieve many objectives. It can (1) expose students to the “face of battle” and the timeless dimension of warfare; (2) Furnish case studies in the relationship between technology and doctrine, particularly as they relate to trained and untrained forces; (3) provide case studies in the effects of logistical operations on military operations; (4) shows the effects of terrain on military plans and battles; (5) furnish a framework for studying battles and an introduction for studying campaigns; (6) encourage the use of military history to develop expertise in the profession of arms; and (7) kindle or reinforce interest in the history of the US Army, the Indian Wars, and the evolution of modern warfare.

A Battlefield tour of Beecher Island requires six hours of instructor preparation time, including a preparatory visit to the battlefield to conduct reconnaissance. If possible students should read a battle overview prior to their arrival on the battlefield.

^[1] This quote and the list of objectives that follow it come from William G. Robinson, *The Staff Ride* (Washington DC: Center of Military History, US Army 1987), 5-6

STAFF RIDE

A staff ride goes beyond the scope of a battlefield tour and consists of a

...systematic preliminary study of a selected campaign, and extensive visit to the actual sites associated with the actual campaign (and battle), and the opportunity to integrate the lessons derived from each. It envisions maximum student involvement before arrival at the site to guarantee thought, analysis, and discussion. A staff ride links a historical event, systematic preliminary study, and actual terrain to produce battle analysis in three dimensions. It consists of three distinct phases: preliminary study, field study, and integration.^[2]

A staff ride has the potential to accomplish all the objectives of a battlefield tour, plus it provides case studies in the application of the operational art by focusing on the theater campaign, supplies the introduction to the study of strategy, and furnishes a framework for a systematic study of campaigns in general.

The preliminary study phase for the staff ride to Beecher Island should take about four hours of student preparation and small-group seminar time. In this period, students will familiarize themselves with the battle and prepare to represent a particular character or event in the battle as their personal responsibility of their group's discussion in the field (See appendix A). As part of the staff ride and tour package for Beecher Island Battlefield, vignettes are provided that may be read at various stands to enhance student involvement. These vignettes will give the students an insight into the emotional disposition and attitudes of the battle participants.

During the field study phase, the instructors must show greater flexibility in the time spent at each stand, because student discussions will continue to cause each stop to be longer than the battlefield tour. The integration phase-a meeting of the staff ride group after the tour of the battlefield-should take about one hour and occur as soon as possible after the field study phase to allow synthesis of observations and insights. At this time instructors should encourage students to evaluate the staff ride experience and make suggestions for its improvement.

^[2] Ibid, 4-6 The distinction between staff rides, battlefield tours, and other forms of field study is important because of the nature of small-group instruction, so popular now in military training. A battlefield tour is similar to a classroom lecture, while a staff ride is similar to a seminar where all participants have prepared in depth.

THE BATTLEFIELD ADDRESS

Beecher Island Battle Memorial Museum

20697 County Rd KK

Wray, CO 80758



Wray Museum (The Wray is 18 Miles North of the Battlefield) - The Beecher Island Room at the Wray Museum is devoted to the battle and includes; the rock marker that was carved 30 years after the battle with the inscription “Battle of Beecher, Sept. 17, 1868”, a 1863 Mountain Howitzer cannon donated in 1916 by Congress, and a large acrylic on canvas painting, entitled “Forsyth’s Arickaree”, featuring Captain Allison Pliley, painted by Irene Selonke. As well as, a detailed diorama of the battle, Roman Nose bronze sculpture, Native American regalia, U.S. Army cavalry saddle, a Spencer repeating rifle and other armaments. Several photographs and memorabilia from the Beecher Island Reunions help to round the exhibit.

Address P.O. Box 161

205 East Third Street

Wray, CO 80758

Phone: 970-332-5063

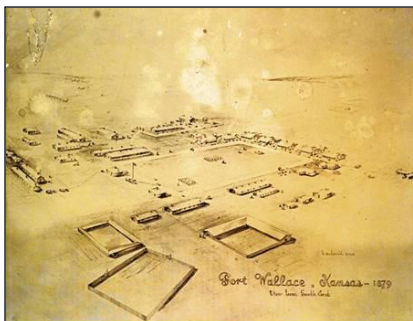
Point of Contact: Ardith Hendrix

Website: cityofwray.org

Email: wraymuseum@cityofwray.org

Facebook-Wray Museum

Hours: Tuesday - Saturday Noon to 4 PM



Fort Wallace Museum

2655 Highway 40 Wallace, KS 67761

(785) 891-3564

www.ftwallace.com



Fort Harker- The Fort Harker Guardhouse Museum Complex in Kanopolis, Kansas is operated by the Ellsworth County Historical Society. Four buildings have been preserved from the fort which operated from 1866 to 1873. The original guard house houses a small museum.

308 W. Ohio St., Kanopolis, KS 67454
 Email: fortharkerguardhousemuseum@gmail.com
 Facebook-Fort Harker Guardhouse Museum
 Phone: 785-472-5733
 Open 10 am to 4 pm Tuesday-Saturday



Fort Hays- In the spring of 1867 Fort Hays was relocated 15 miles west to its present location on the south edge of present-day Hays, Kansas. It became a major supply depot for other forts as well as a base for troops. Famous units stationed at Fort Hays included the 9th and 10th Cavalry (the famed "Buffalo Soldiers"), the 5th Infantry, and the 7th Cavalry. It was closed in 1889 and in 1965 became a state historic property administered by the Kansas Historical Society.

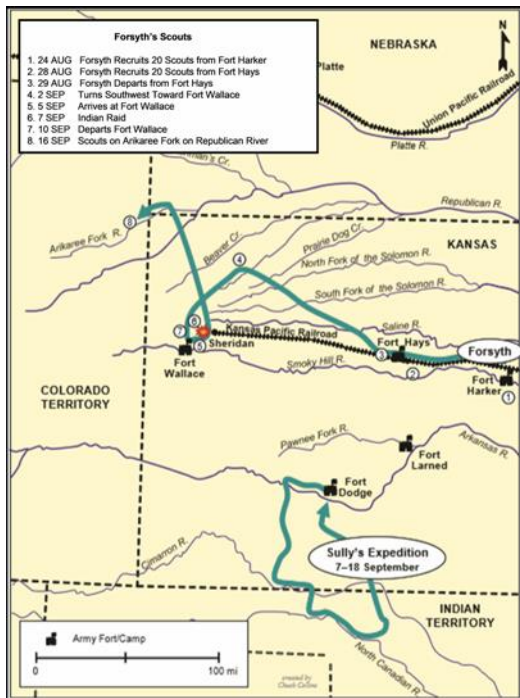
Fort Hays Museum
 1472 U.S. 183 Alternate Hays KS 67601
 785-625-6812
kshs.forthays@ks.gov
 Hours Wednesday through Saturday 9 AM to 5 PM

BACKGROUND AND ENGAGEMENT

In the summer and fall of 1868, continuing their annual seasonal raiding activities between the Arkansas and Platte Rivers in what was also the region of their best buffalo hunting, bands of Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians conducted raids against whites throughout the western Great Plains in Kansas. In addition they found incentive in the warfare that had been waged specifically against their clans by the military in 1867 and by memories of such atrocities as the Sand Creek massacre. Finally, the westward movement of the transcontinental railroad had stretched all the way across Kansas, bringing with it with many permanent white settlements. During the 1867-1868, the Cheyenne were in disagreement, with those advocating peace retreating south out of Kansas and the younger, warrior societies continuing to raid. Those Cheyenne war parties (along with the Sioux and other tribes) began to strike back against the travelers, ranches, and settlements that were threatening to destroy their way of life. As the attacks increased, so did the pressure on the Army to stop them. Responsibility fell to MG Phil Sheridan, the former Union cavalry leader who now commanded the sprawling Division of the Missouri. Sheridan had too few men to adequately patrol the vast, sparsely populated frontier regions, and some of the soldiers he did have were infantry or artillerymen who had little chance of catching up to the fast-moving mounted war parties of the various hostile Indian tribes.

One solution came from Sheridan's aide, Pennsylvania-born MAJ Forsyth, who had accompanied Sheridan on his famous ride at the Battle of Winchester, Virginia, in 1864. Forsyth envisioned a picked force of frontier scouts who were familiar with the Indian way of warfare. Sheridan agreed and drafted orders on August 24, 1868, authorizing Forsyth to "employ 50 first-class, hardy frontiersmen to be used as scouts against the hostile Indians. " Although organized along the lines of a company of cavalry, Forsyth's scouts were not officially soldiers. They were tallied in military reports as employees of the quartermaster department. Their base pay was \$50 a month, and 18 of the men were allowed an extra \$25 a month for providing their own horses and equipment. Some of the men borrowed horses from C.W. Parr, the post scout at Fort Hayes, agreeing to pay Parr the extra money.

Forsyth's second in command was 1LT Frederick H. Beecher of the 3rd U.S. Infantry. Beecher's uncle was the famous abolitionist minister Henry Ward Beecher and his aunt was Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Beecher had served in the Union Army and still walked with a slight limp from a bullet wound taken at Gettysburg. Orders had just been drafted for Beecher's transfer to the Signal Corps, but he intended to finish the upcoming expedition before reporting to his new assignment.



Map 1. Recruitment and scout movement
24 AUG-16 SEP 1868

Forsyth appointed Abner T. “Sharp” Grover as chief of scouts and chose William H.H. McCall to serve as Detachment Sergeant of the. McCall was, if anything, overqualified, having commanded a Pennsylvania regiment during the Civil War. By the end of the war he was a brevet Brigadier General and was one of the officers assigned to guard the Lincoln conspirators before their trials. Discharged in June 1865, McCall headed west, where his fortunes worsened. Before being picked as Sergeant, McCall was one of the \$50-a-month scouts, suggesting that he couldn’t provide a horse for the expedition.

Each rider had 140 rounds for a Spencer repeating carbine, and another 30 rounds for an Army Colt revolver. The seven-shot Spencer repeaters enabled a rate of fire of about 20 shots per minute. Four pack mules carried camp kettles, medical supplies, picks and shovels, coffee and salt, and another 4,000 rounds of ammunition. Doctor John H. Mooers accompanied the scouts as their medical officer. Mooers had served as a surgeon in the 16th and 188th New York regiments during the Civil War, moving to Kansas after the war. He was a contract surgeon, a physician hired on a temporary basis when a regular Army surgeon was not available.

Forsyth left Fort Harker on August 26, arriving at Fort Hays two days later. On August 30, he headed for Fort Wallace, with orders to scout the headwaters of the Solomon River. As they neared Fort Wallace on September 5, Beecher thought he spotted Indians lurking atop a bluff. Forsyth ordered a charge, but as they drew closer to the Indians, they saw that it was only a train of hay wagons headed for the fort. During the charge, scout Wallace Bennett broke his leg when his horse stumbled in a prairie dog hole.

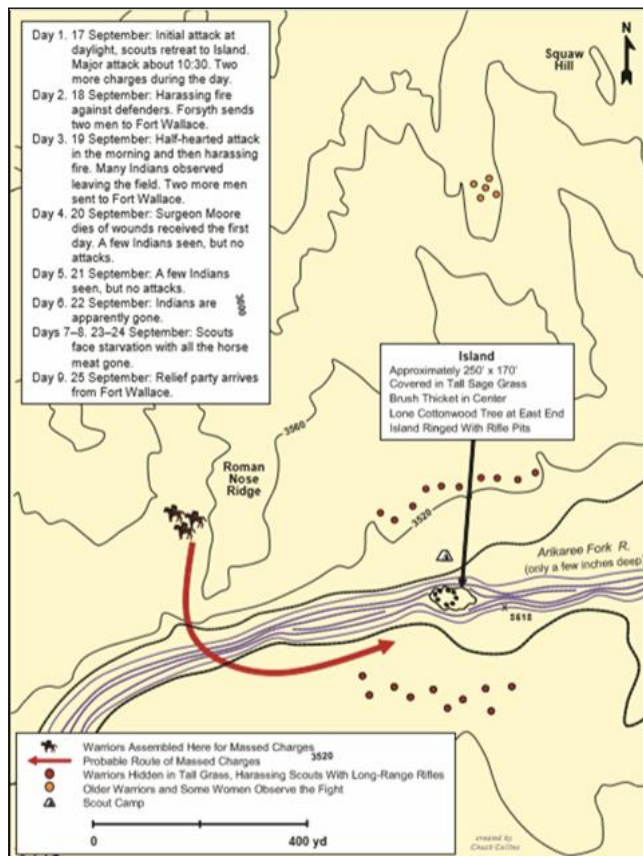
The expedition stayed at Fort Wallace until September 10, when word reached the fort of an Indian attack on a freight wagon train near the western terminus of the Kansas-Pacific Railroad. In the raid, just 13 miles from the fort, two teamsters were killed and some animals taken. Scout G.W. Chambers was left behind to tend Bennett and another man who had fallen ill at the fort, leaving 51 men ready to ride in pursuit of the hostiles.

The scouts trailed the Indian raiding party from Sheridan into Colorado; signs indicated that the opposing force considerably outnumbered the scouts, but the unit nonetheless pressed on. Around dusk on the 16th, Forsyth and his men arrived in the vicinity of the "Dry Fork of the Republican River" and made camp on the south bank of the Arikaree River. Much of the Arikaree River had dwindled away, leaving only a small stream flowing through the middle of the wide river bed. At the island, which was only a foot or so above the waters, the river split into two streams 15 feet wide and five inches deep. Sage grass grew at the head of the island and a lone 20-foot-high cottonwood tree stood at the foot, with a four- or five-foot high thicket of scrubby willows and alders in between. The horses were worn down from the hard riding and the valley had abundant grass, so Forsyth decided to call an early halt and camp near the river for the night.

Twelve miles away from the scouts' camp were two large Sioux villages; nearby was another village of Cheyenne Dog Soldiers, a fierce warrior society within the tribe, along with some Arapaho as well. Warning reached the villages by accident. A war party had left a day or two before, and some of its members, returning to the villages, had observed Forsyth and his men while on their way back. Word spread quickly through the villages, and about 600 Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors readied themselves for a united attack on the invading force.

Dawn found several hundred mounted warriors poised to rush down upon the camp of Forsyth's scouts. The War Chiefs planned a dawn raid to overrun the camp of 50 U.S. scouts, but the element of surprise was lost when a few eager warriors rushed the camp before the order to attack was given. The band of warriors made their own plans to stampede the Cavalry horses during the night. Led by Cheyenne warriors Starving Elk and Little Hawk, the band included one of the Sioux who had discovered Forsyth's force. The raiders could not find their quarry until near daylight, when they spotted the campfires in Forsyth's camp. Forsyth sensed trouble and spotted the silhouette of a feathered head against the skyline. He fired his weapon, instantly killing the Indian warrior. Meanwhile the Indians, making all the noise they could and waving robes and blankets, rode through the herd to stampede the animals. The animals had been carefully secured, and only a few broke loose from their picket-pins. The Scouts immediately responded to the sound of Forsyth's gunshot and only the four pack mules were lost

Forsyth's party was in danger of being wiped out in a few minutes. Forsyth gave orders to saddle the horses. Seeing that no escape route was open, he directed his men to take cover on a sand bar in the middle of the Arikaree.



Map 2. Battle and Relief
17-25 SEP 1868

The initial assault by the Indians was cut down by the accurate, quick-firing Spencer rifles. The combined force of Oglala Sioux and Cheyenne Indians were surprised and changed their tactics.

During the early morning of the first day of battle, small parties of Indians dashed up to the sand bar on horseback several times, but they did little damage to the scouts. The scouts killed their horses for breastworks and dug pits into the soft sand behind them. When the scouts opened fire, the Indians attacked the island on both sides. Later they crawled through the grass and shot through the grass. Several scouts who were killed or wounded were hit by the Indian snipers hidden in the grass. The Indians surrounded the island and repeatedly attacked the Scouts. Three scouts hidden in hole on the riverbank shot several Indians from the shore

Among the Indian casualties early in the battle was a Cheyenne named White Weasel Bear who was shot by one of the men hidden in the tall grass on the bank opposite the island. Weasel Bear's nephew, White Thunder, came to look for him and was shot dead. Meanwhile, the most famous Indian leader on the scene, Roman Nose, had so far held back from the fighting. Although he was not a chief, Roman Nose's courage, boldness, and phenomenal luck in battle had made him legendary. As a ranking Dog Soldier, he normally was foremost in any fight, but that day on the Arikaree, Roman

Nose had a premonition of death. Not long before, he had eaten a meal with a metal fork, and he believed that this faux pas nullified the power of his protective talisman. Many Plains Indians avoided eating food touched by metal utensils, believing that to do so attracted metal bullets in battle.

Roman Nose decided that he had to ride into battle. There was no time for the purification rituals necessary to restore his magic, and he rode down toward the enemy, leading many riders behind him. A bullet fired by one of the scouts hidden in the tall grass along the river bank struck Roman Nose by the riverbank at the west end of the sand bar. He jumped back into the grass where other warriors retrieved him. It is estimated that he died at 10 pm that night.



Cheyenne Warrior Roman Nose, leading a charge at Beecher Island, is fatally struck by a cavalryman's bullet.

The fall of Roman Nose, the most famous Indian in the battle, became a focal point in later retellings of the fight. But at the time, the scouts may not have recognized him during the battle. Forsyth described seeing him fall, distinguished by a “magnificent war bonnet” with “two short black buffalo horns,” but Western artist George Bird Grinnell, in his talks with many Indian veterans of the battle, was told that Roman Nose never wore such a war bonnet.

Many other warriors fell, while four of the scouts including Beecher, Acting Surgeon J.H. Mooers, George W. Culver, and William Wilson were killed. Another 15 scouts were wounded, including MAJ Forsyth. Forsyth received a mild head wound and his leg was fractured by a gunshot wound.

Before dawn on the second day, Forsyth said, "Some one must go to Fort Wallace for assistance." Sharp Grover, who was chief of scouts, said "It is impossible to get out." Then Stilwell came forward and said, "Let me choose the man to go with me and I will go." Grover said, "Jack is too young and inexperienced, he can't get through." Ft. Wallace was about 70 miles to the south east. But Forsyth tore off the fly leaf out of his daybook, wrote a note to CPT Bankhead at Ft. Wallace, and gave it to Stilwell.

Simpson "Jack" Stilwell chose Pierre Trudeau to come with him. They crawled for 3 miles the first day before they took cover in the daylight. They were forced to evade Indians for four days during their journey. They had only horse meat for food and when it

spoiled they got sick. Trudeau was so weak he could only stand with assistance, but after resting and traveling for four days they reached Fort Wallace. Two nights after Stilwell and Trudeau left, Scouts John J. Donovan and Allison J. Pliley left the island to seek relief. It was unknown if Scouts Stilwell and Trudeau had made it through the Indian lines. In the mean time, Forsyth and his men survived on muddy river water and rotting horse meat. Forsyth was wounded twice and others thought he would die of his wounds before they would be rescued

Three rescue parties departed following different routes due to the uncertainty of the Scout's location. The first was CPT Louis H. Carpenter leading Troop H & I of the 10th Cavalry Regiment with CPT Baldwin. MAJ Brisbin in command of two troops of the 2nd Cavalry took another route. CPT Bankhead took a third route from Fort Wallace with about 100 men of the 5th Infantry.

About daybreak on 25 September, CPT Carpenter's Troops H & I were intercepted on the plains by Scout John Donovan and four riders he had recruited after reaching Fort Wallace and starting back for the battlefield. They were the first to arrive and relieve Forsyth's unit. Forsyth was nearly overcome with his ordeal, but still managed to put on a show for Carpenter, a wartime comrade. Borrowing a copy of *Oliver Twist* that one of the men carried in his saddlebags, the major looked to be calmly reading the novel in his hospital bed dug into the sand. Seeing Carpenter, Forsyth greeted him by saying, "Welcome to Beecher's Island." The once nameless little sandbar in the Arikaree now had an immortal name.

Carpenter immediately secured the area and pitched a number of tents up some distance away, to allow the wounded to get away from the stench of the rotting horses. The survivors eagerly devoured the bacon, hardtack, and coffee brought by the relief party. Assistant Surgeon J.A. Fitzgerald arrived with Carpenter and began treating the wounded. The wounded men were carefully carried there for more healthy air and the dead men were buried to reduce the stench and possibility of disease. Fitzgerald had the single cottonwood tree on the island cut down. The doctor shaped the wood into a split, which he lined with cotton to protect Forsyth's leg. The surgeon managed to save Forsyth's legs, but the major would need two years for a complete recovery.

Twenty-six hours later, Carpenter sent a detachment to look for Bankhead's unit. They found Stilwell and Trudeau several miles in advance of Bankhead. CPT Bankhead followed bringing with him the two troops of the 2nd Cavalry.

The following day, a fifth scout died of his wounds and was buried on the battlefield with the other four scouts. Walter Armstrong died in a hospital later. Beecher, Culver, Farley, Wilson and Doctor Mooers were buried on the island. Sixteen others were wounded. On 27 September, the Forsyth Scouts departed for Fort Wallace, escorted by the 10th Cavalry. Carpenter would later receive the Medal of Honor for his relief of Forsyth's command and for his actions during the battle on Beaver Creek.

During his backbrief at Fort Wallace Forsyth estimated that 35 Sioux and Cheyenne had been killed, although other accounts pushed the toll to several hundred dead. From interviews compiled long afterward, George Bird Grinnell wrote that only nine Indians were killed: six Cheyenne, one Arapaho, and two Sioux. There was no reliable estimate of the number of wounded.

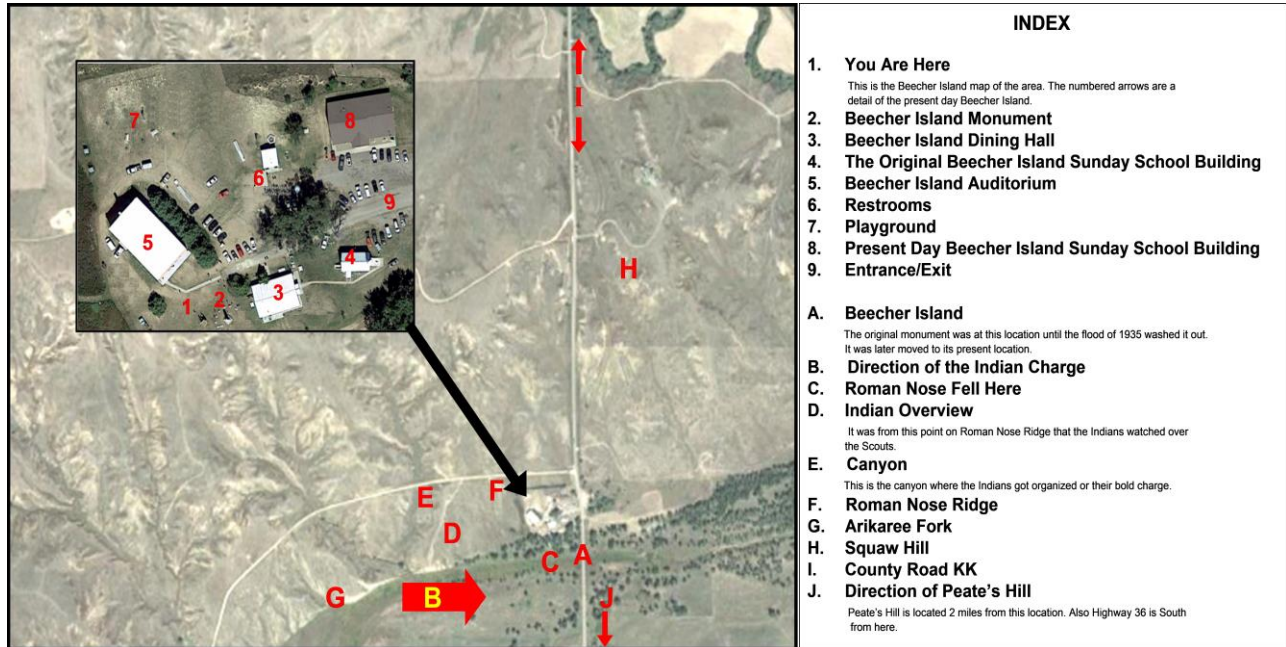
The Battle of Beecher Island was not important in a strategic sense, as it did nothing to halt Indian raids on the Great Plains. Whatever the merits of a company of skilled frontiersmen such as Forsyth's Scouts, the battle showed that such a force was simply not large enough to make much difference in a major campaign. Harking back to the harsh lessons of the Civil War, Sheridan decided on a winter campaign to deprive the Indians of their horses, food, and shelter during the lean months of the year. Relentless attacks in the bitterly cold winter of 1868-1869, including LTC George Armstrong Custer's victorious attack on a Cheyenne camp at the Washita River, brought a temporary and uneasy peace to the region.

After years of pondering the issue, Congress in 1914 provided the survivors of Forsyth's scouts, or their widows, with pensions. In their later years, survivors of Forsyth's scouts attended reunions and led efforts to place a monument to commemorate the battle. The States of Kansas and Colorado teamed up in 1905 to establish a small battlefield park at the site, but a 1935 flood washed away Beecher Island as well as a stone monument commemorating the battle. In 1976 the location became a National Historic Site. The island itself may be gone, but the fierce battle fought there and the long, grim siege that followed created an imperishable legend that time has not effaced.



The Arikaree River, site of the battle, is shown in this 1917 photograph of the annual reunion of Forsyth's Scouts. Beecher Island had washed away by the time the photo was taken.

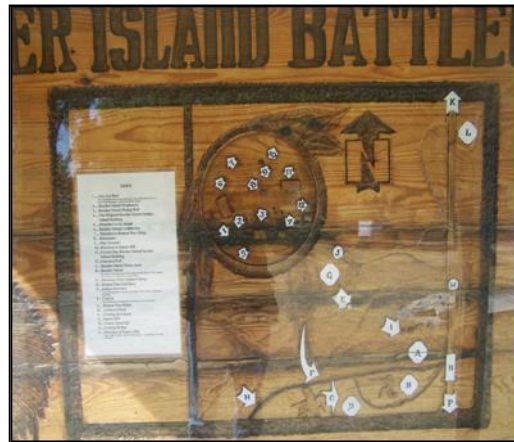
STAFF RIDES AND BATTLEFIELD TOUR STANDS



Map 3. Beecher Island Battleground Today

Stand 1

Beecher's Island Monument/Map



Situation: The Battlefield Monument (along with the Battlefield Map which is directly next to it) is a logical place to begin a staff ride or battlefield tour because a clear, concise overview of the campaign and battle can be obtained there. A short slide program at the center provides a good campaign overview, and a good terrain model demonstrates the battle with colored lights and audio narration. Unlike most presentations of this kind, this one is quite effective and helps clarify tactical movements and the battle's flow. Preferably, this presentation should be experienced before and after walking the

battlefield. In addition, the park historian may be available for a short demonstration of Native American and Cavalry tactics.

Stand 2



Situation (located in the current Beecher Island camping area): The north bank where the scouts were camp the night of September 16.

Vignette: Major Forsyth remembered that Sharp Grover placed his hand on his shoulder and said, “Oh, heavens, General, look at the Indians!” Grover’s statement was a mild reaction indeed to the sight of hundreds more Cheyenne and Sioux charging down upon them from the distant hills overlooking the camp. “The ground seemed to grow them,” Forsyth recalled. “They appeared to start out of the very earth. On foot and on horseback, from over the hills, out of the thickets, from the bed of the stream, from the north, south and west, along the opposite bank, and out of the long grass on every side of us.”

Mounted or on foot, firing from cover, the Indians poured rifle fire into the island. Fearing that they would be shot down like dogs, some men were ready to make a run for the opposite bank. Forsyth and McCall, seeing the island as their only chance of survival, vowed to “shoot down any man who attempts to leave the island.” Beecher backed them up, shouting at the wavering men, “You addle-headed fools have you no sense?”

Teaching Points: Security, surprise, and the experience of real battle. Compare the reactions of the Scouts. What was the effect of the Native Americans initial attack? Discuss movement from staging area to the Island itself.

Stand 3



Situation (From Island Looking upriver from island): It is from where the camera stands that five scouts were killed on the island in the middle of the river. Lt. Fred Beecher was killed here.

Vignette (From Jack Stilwell's Notes): "I then joined the main party and for the first time learned the effect of the fire of the Indians. Colonel Forsyth had both legs broken, Lieutenant Frederick Beecher had a broken back and three bullets in his body, and Dr. John Mooers had been fatally shot in the head...more than one half our force were either dead or wounded.

Teaching Points: Ambushes are a great tool in a commander's toolbox. The attacker gets the element of surprise, usually has numerical superiority, and almost always has the good ground. With all of those advantages on one side, the fight usually plays out about the way you'd expect.

Sometimes, however, U.S. Soldiers can use a mixture of technology, skill, and straight guts to turn the tables. Even though this was a 19th Century battle, what similarities does Beecher Island have with Combat in the 21st Century? Similarities with the attack on Combat Outpost (COP) Keating on October 3, 2009?

Stand 4



Situation (Beecher's Island looking upstream): The white marker is the center of Beecher's Island. This is a view upstream of the Arickaree River. The Indian attacks came from all sides but the main thrusts, including the one by Roman Nose and Medicine Man of the Cheyenne, came from this direction.

Vignette: Scout John Hurst recalled, “We all made a grand rush for cover like a flock of scared quail.” Once on the island, the scouts tied their horses to bushes, forming a rough defense perimeter, and started feverishly digging rifle pits with tin plates, knives, or their bare hands.

A few men remained hidden in thick, tall grass on the river bank opposite the tip of the island. One of them, Frank Harrington, was struck by an arrow just above his left eye socket. The arrowhead lodged tightly in his skull without breaking through to puncture his brain, and could not be pulled out. Shortly after Harrington was wounded, a mounted Indian rode near and fired a rifle almost point-blank at the scout's head. The bullet struck the arrowhead and knocked it loose. Covered with blood, Harrington somehow managed to reach his comrades on the island. Wearing a bandage around his head like a red badge of courage, Harrington picked up his carbine and joined the others in returning the Indians' fire.

Teaching Points: Subordinates acting without detailed instructions, loss of momentum effect of “waves” on the Scouts morale, advantages of position, and principle of the defensive.

Stand 5



Situation (Upriver, South side): It is believed that

Situation (Upriver, South side): It is believed that Roman Nose was shot just before the dark green trees as the Indians attacked downriver toward the end of the first day of battle.

Vignette (From Jack Stilwell's Notes): At 10 o'clock old Roman nose, chief of the Dog Soldiers and the most celebrated Indian fighter of that day, assumed command.... The Indians bore down on our center, and, breaking it, dashed almost half way to the main party of our men when a bullet (said by fellow scout Amos Chapman to have been from Jack's rifle) struck Roman Nose behind and pierced his abdomen...he soon fainted and was borne off the field by his soldiers. A young warrior...relative of Dull Knife now assumed command... but he, too, fell dead with a bullet in his head. From that moment the Indians didn't recognize any commander, but kept up the fight in a haphazard way until after 5 o'clock when they received reinforcements and a new man in command.... At sundown the Indians drew off their horsemen, but left their sharpshooters.

Teaching Points: Effect on morale of leader's death, effect of battle on both the Native Americans and the Scouts, using civilian facilities to support military operations, and care of the dead and wounded (both Native Americans and the Scouts).

Stand 6



Situation (Upriver, North side. At the base of Roman Nose Ridge): Discussion on the camp location of the Natives in the adjacent ravines

Stand 7



Situation (Arickaree River from Roman Nose Ridge): This is a view that some of the Indians may have had as they watched the warriors sweep down the river toward Beecher's Island.

Teaching Points: What advantages did the Indians from this view? How are they similar to the view that the Taliban had to COP Keating or the Battle of Wanat on July 13, 2008?

Stand 8



Situation (Roman Nose Trail, View toward river): Discussion Roman Nose

Teaching Points: What effect did Roman Nose's death have during the Fight? What Morale issues arise during battlefield operations when a leader is taken out of the fight?

Stand 9



Situation (Peate's Hill. 2 Miles South of Battlefield): On September 25, a relief party consisting of five Scouts came to this point overlooking the path of the Arickaree River

Vignette: Scout J.J. Peate spotted the Camp and said, "Yes, by God! There's the Camp!"

Teaching Points: The conduct of the relief parties' linkup with the Scouts, their withdrawal off the Island, and the problems in dealing with a battlefield when it is left in a unit's possession.

Stand 10



Situation (Squaw Hill): location of Indian women and children during the Battle.

APPENDIX A

CHARACTERS FOR ROLE PLAYING

To implement a successful staff ride that addresses the important events of the battle and their significance, participants of the staff ride can be assigned characters to play (important commanders in the conflict). Assuming the role of these characters at a significant point in the battle, the staff ride participant will explain why his or her character acted the way he did and the impact of those actions on the outcome of the battle. These presentations can occur at a stand that illuminates the action that took place there more than a century ago.

The Beecher Island Battle has a sufficient number and diversity of characters involved in its action to satisfy almost any staff ride requirement. The following are some of the characters that most easily lend themselves to role playing because of the parts they played in the battle and the availability of their recorded actions.

Native Americans:

1. Chief Starving Elk



2. Chief Little Hawk



3. Roman Nose



US Army Scouts:

1. Major George Forsyth



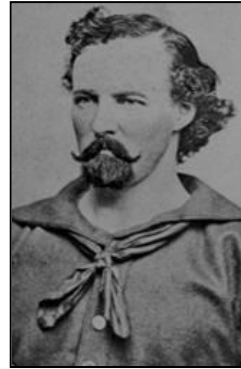
2. LT Frederick Beecher



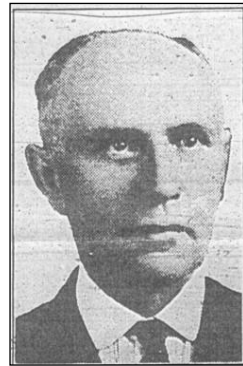
3. Detachment SGT Wm McCall



4. Simpson “Jack” Stillwell



5. Scout Sigmund Schlesinger



APPENDIX B



CARPENTER'S MEDAL OF HONOR

Captain Carpenter received the Medal of Honor for his relief effort and another action October 15, 1868 at Beaver Creek.

Orders and Citation:

CARPENTER, LOUIS H. Captain, Company H, 10th U.S. Cavalry.

Place and date: At Indian campaigns, Kansas and Colorado, September-October 1868.

Date of issue: 8 April 1898.

Citation: Was gallant and meritorious throughout the campaigns, especially in the combat of October 15 and in the forced march on September 23, 24 and 25 to the relief of Forsyth's Scouts, who were known to be in danger of annihilation by largely superior forces of Indians.

APPENDIX C

SCOUT ROSTER AND EQUIPMENT

US Army regulars detailed to the Scouts:

Brevet Colonel George A. Forsyth, Major 9th US Cavalry Regiment, US Army, Commanding. Lieutenant Fredrick H. Beecher, Third US Infantry Regiment, US Army. Acting Assistant Surgeon J. H. Mooers, Medical Department, US Army. (Other accounts indicate that J. H. Mooers was a civilian contract surgeon with a Hays City, Kansas practice.)

The 57 civilians employed as Forsyth Scouts as reported to the War Department by Major Henry Inman, Army Quartermaster, Fort Harker, Kansas, August 26, 1868. Reported wages were \$50.00 per month with most of the scouts receiving an additional \$25.00 per month for furnishing their own horse and saddle.

NOTE: Those scouts shown (name) have names that differ in spelling among the three rosters of the scouts published.

1. Alderdice, Thomas
2. Armstrong, Walter
3. Bennett, Wallace
4. Burke, Martin
5. Clark, George B.
6. Culver, George W.
7. Curry, James
8. Davenport, Harry
9. Day, Barney
10. Donovan, John "Jack"
11. Dupont, Alfred
12. Eutsler, Andrew J. (Entsler, A. J., Eutster, A. E. Entler, A. J.)
13. Farley, Hudson
14. Farley, Lewis
15. Gantt, Richard
16. Green, George
17. Haley, John
18. Harrington, Frank
19. Hurst, John
20. Ketterer, J. H. (Kitver, J. H.)
21. Lane, Joseph
22. Lane, M. R.
23. Lyden, John
24. McCall, William. H. H. Scout First Sergeant

25. McGrath, H. T.
26. McLaughlin, Lewis A. (McLoughlin, Lewis, A.K.A Gilbert E. A.)
27. Mapes, M. R. (Mapes, W. R.)
28. Morton, Howard
29. Murphy, Thomas
30. Nichols, C. B.
31. Oakes, George
32. O'Donnell, Thomas
33. Piatt, C. C.
34. Piley, Allison J.
35. Ranahan, Thomas
36. Reilley, William (Reilly, William)
37. Schlesinger, Sigman
38. Simpson, Edward
39. Smith, Chalmers
40. Stewart, William
41. Stillwell, S. E. "Jack" (Stillwell, J. E.)
42. Thayer, Isaac
43. Trudeau, Pierre
44. Tucker, Henry H.
45. Vilott, Fletcher (Violet/Villot/Violete)
46. Whitney, Chauncey B.
47. Wilson, John
48. Wilson, William
49. Ziegler, Eli (Zigler/Zeigler)

The following Forsyth Scouts were detailed to separate duty about August 27, 1868 with orders to follow the main party to Fort Wallace. Due to a Fort Hays misunderstanding of their orders, these scouts reported to Fort Wallace after Col. Forsyth had departed on September 10th. They were detailed to Lt. Col. L. H. Carpenter, 10th US Cavalry Regiment (Colored), September 21, 1868, and participated in the 10th Cavalry's relief of Col. Forsyth's Scouts at Beecher Island on September 25th.

50. Boyle, Thomas
51. Green, John E.
52. Johnson, Edward E.
53. Peate, James
54. J. Skinner, Calvin
55. Stubbs, William
56. Tozier, Edward T.
57. Tozier, Richard R.

Additional Forsyth Scouts hired at Fort Wallace, Kansas on September 5-10, 1868, who participated in the Sept 17-19 battle:

Davis, T. K.
Groves, Abner T. Chief Scout

Scouts reported sick at Fort Wallace on September 9/10 and later detailed to scout for other elements of the 10th Cavalry during the relief.

Ranahan, Thomas

Scout's individual equipment:
Spencer repeating rifle (.56 cal)
Colt's Army revolver
140 rounds of rifle ammunition
30 rounds of revolver ammunition
Blanket
Saddle and bridle
Lariat and picket-pin
Canteen Haversack
Seven days' cooked rations
Butcher knife
Tin plate and cup

Troop equipment (carried by four pack mules):
Camp kettles
Picks and shovels (to dig for water)
4,000 rounds of rifle and revolver ammunition
Medical supplies
Extra rations of salt and coffee

APPENDIX D

FORSYTH SCOUTS CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

Summary of Forsyth Scouts' service:

25-26 AUG 1868: Scouts recruited at Fort Harker. (30 scouts were from the Ellsworth area according to Gen. Forsyth's 1900 account. However, the Fort Harker Quartermaster's report of 26 Aug shows 57 Scouts without any note for location.)

26 AUG: Scouts departed Fort Harker for Fort Hays arriving 28 Aug. (According to Gen. Forsyth's 1900 account the balance of the scouts were recruited at Fort Hays.)

30 AUG: Departed Fort Hays for Fort Wallace with orders to scout the headwaters of the Solomon River while in route.

5 SEP: Arrived Fort Wallace.

10 SEP: Departed Fort Wallace with orders to counter raid on Kansas Pacific railhead near Sheridan, Kansas (about 13 miles east of Ft. Wallace.)

Note: On the Morning of September 10, word was received that Indians had attacked a freighter's train near Sheridan, Kansas (13 miles east of Ft Wallace), then the railhead of the Kansas Pacific railroad. Col. Forsyth took his command to investigate.

11-16 SEP: Trailed Indian raiding party from Sheridan to vicinity of what is now Beecher Island, Colorado on the "Dry Fork of the Republican River." Reported as "Delaware Creek." (Now known as the Arikaree River.)

Determining that a force of about 25 Indians were responsible for the attack, Col. Forsyth trailed the war party into what is now Yuma County, Colorado arriving at what is now Beecher Island the evening of September 16. Col. Forsyth's Scouts camped in a meadow on the south bank of the river. By this point, Col. Forsyth suspected that considerably more Indians than the small force he was trailing were in the area.

17-19 SEP: Main battle of Beecher Island between the scouts and a force now estimated to be 750 Cheyenne and Sioux who were encamped on the Arikaree near Beecher Island.

On the morning of September 17, a force now estimated to be 750 Indians attacked the scouts shortly after dawn. Forsyth ordered his scouts to take positions on an island in the middle of the what he thought was Delaware Creek (Arikaree River). The scouts dug in and defended the position against several attacks September 17 through 19. Four of the Scouts killed are in action (They are buried on the Beecher Island Battlefield 25

September 1868). They are:

1. Lieutenant Fred H. Beecher, 3rd U.S. Infantry
2. Surgeon J. H. Mooers, US Army Medical Department
3. George W. Culver
4. William Wilson

20-24 SEP: Scouts under siege on the island waiting relief.

25 SEP: Elements of the 10th US Cavalry under Lt. Col. Carpenter arrive to relieve Col. Forsyth.

26 SEP: A fifth Scout and is buried on the battlefield with the other four Scouts (This Scout is Louis Farley who dies of wounds received earlier during the Battle).

27 SEP: Forsyth Scouts depart for Fort Wallace escorted by 10th Cavalry.

30 SEP: Scouts arrived back at Fort Wallace.

31 DEC: Forsyth Scouts were formally disbanded

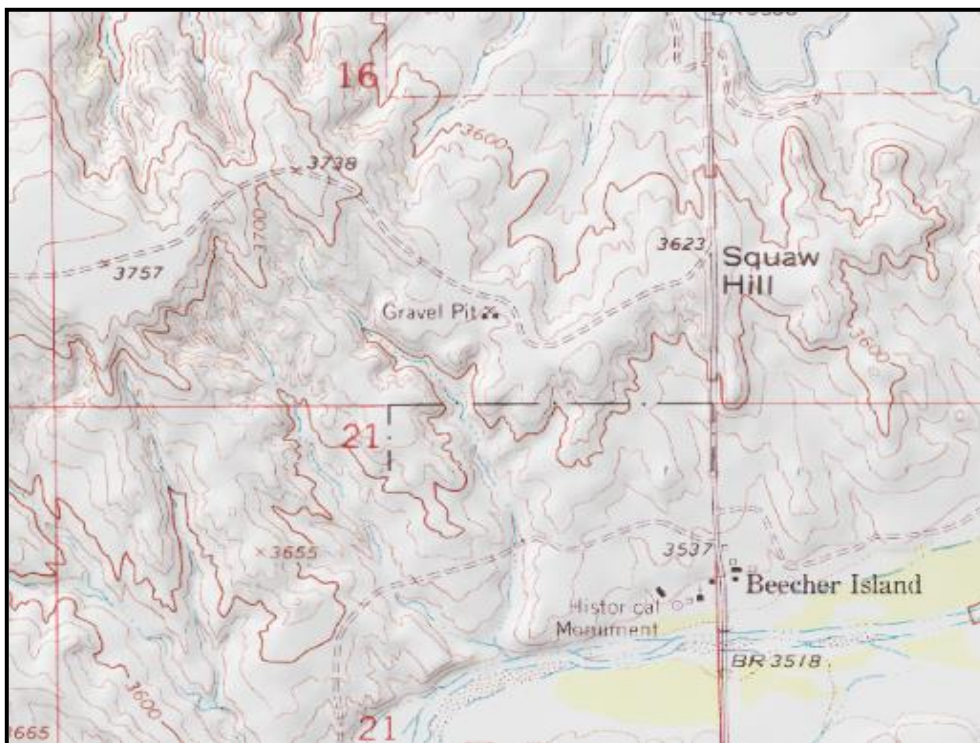


APPENDIX E

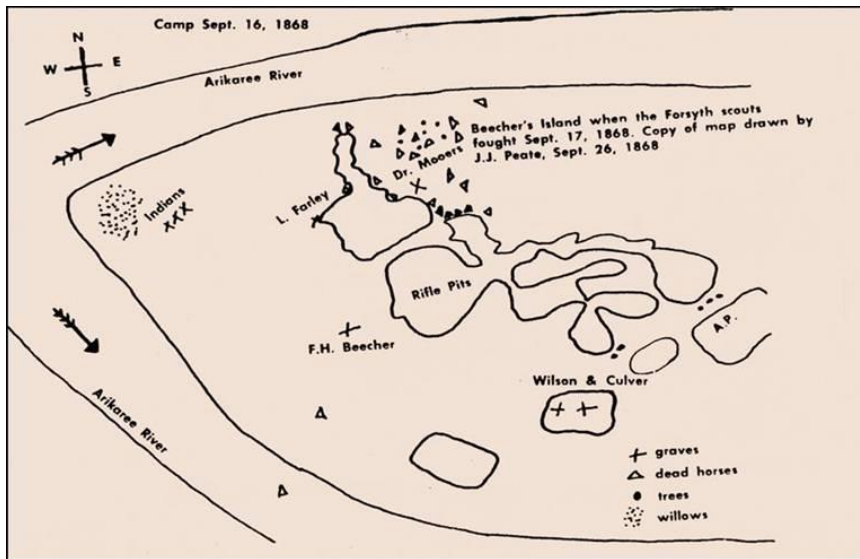
ADDITIONAL MAPS



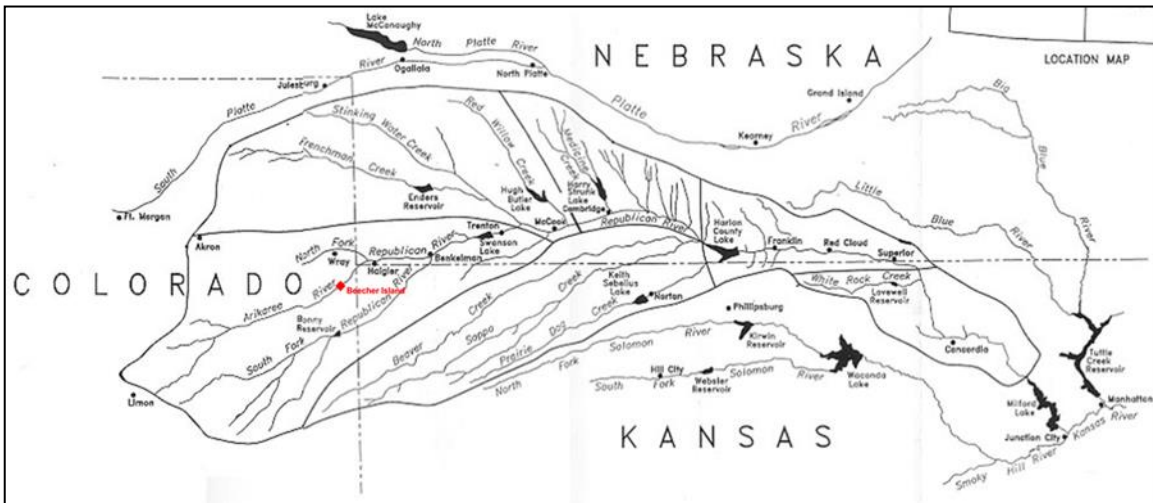
Map 4. Aerial View of Beecher Island Battleground



Map5. Topographic Map of the same area of the Beecher Island Battleground as the Aerial Map (above).



Map 6. Peate's sketch of the battlefield as he remembered it.

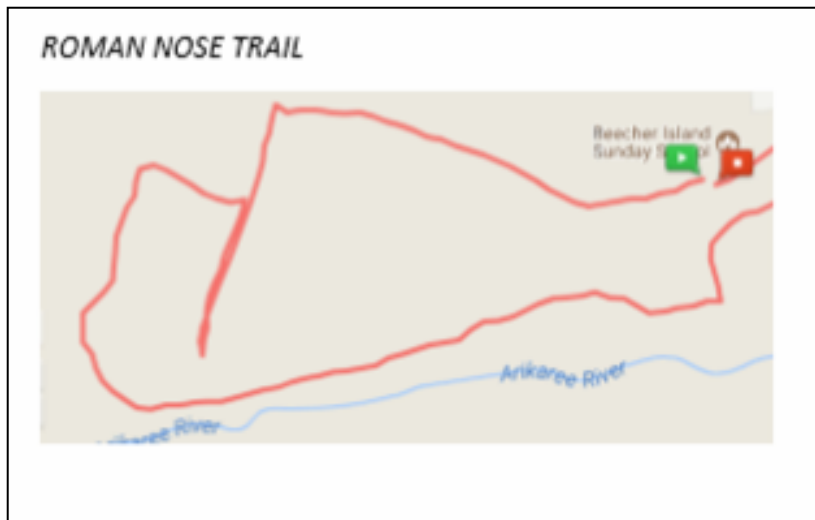


Map 7. Republican River with Beecher Island highlighted.

SQUAW HILL MONUMENT TRAIL



Map 8. Location of Squaw Hill Monument.



Map9. Roman Nose Trail

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Recommended Readings for Staff Ride and Battlefield Participants

Books:

The Battle of Beecher Island, Fought September 17 & 18, 1868 Published by The Beecher Island Battle Memorial Association. A collection of the scouts accounts of the battle and has been in print since 1904.

Fifty Fearless Men by Orvel A. Criqui. The book follows each of the scout life events before and after the battle (The Fort Wallace Museum in Kansas received permission to reprint the book before the author passed away).

Dog Soldier Justice The Ordeal of Susanna Alderdice in the Kansas Indian War by Jeff Broome. The chronicle of the Kansas Indian raids of 1868 and 1869.

Indian Yell: The Heart of an American Insurgency by Michael Blake. The Chapter Island of Rotting Horses (Pages 57-67) is devoted to Beecher Island.

Frontier Regulars, the United States Army and the Indian 1866-1891 by Robert M. Utley. An Army perspective of the battle is covered on pages 152-153.

Action at Beecher Island by Dee Brown. An overall account of events leading up to the battle, the battle, and its aftermath.

Websites:

The Cheyenne War Atlas by Charles D. Collins, Jr. available to download for free at http://www.cgsc.edu/carl/download/csipubs/collins_cheyenne.pdf

Indian Raids in Lincoln County by Christian Bernhardt's 1910. This can be found on line at: <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/lincoln/indian.htm> Since many of the Scouts were from Lincoln County, there is information about the scouts.

Forsyth Scout-Beecher Island Battle Newsletters by Mike Day are archived on line at <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/kansas/genweb/lincoln/index.html>. The search function will find many of the Scouts listed as well as the writings of many of the early settlers, including Roenigk and Erhardt.

<http://www.usgarchives.org/co/yuma/costones/beecher.htm> also contains information concerning the battle.