

Sioux Indians

The Sioux Indians were the most feared warriors on the Plains. They originally came from Minnesota, but were pushed west by other tribes. Because they were forced to give up their land in Minnesota, they were very hostile to whites. Some of them moved as far west as Montana. Although they were not one of the biggest tribes in Montana, the Sioux were very important to the history of Montana because the Powder River country of southeastern Montana was considered their prime hunting land, and they fought to protect it from white intrusions.

The Sioux were involved in the Fort Laramie treaty of 1851, when they agreed to let whites pass through their land. When the Bozeman Road was built, however, passing through some of their best hunting land, the Sioux resisted. They continuously attacked travelers and forts on the Bozeman Road,, until the massacre at Fort Fetterman led to the closing of the forts and the abandonment by the Army of the Bozeman Road. This was a victory for Red Cloud the main Sioux chief. The Sioux signed the Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868, agreeing to a reservation in South Dakota. They were also to have exclusive hunting rights in the Powder River Country as far as the Big Horn River. In 1869, the band of Sioux in Montana were joined by the

Lower Assiniboine, and in 1871 the Fort Peck Agency was established for these tribes to receive their annuities.

Some Sioux still refused to live on the reservation. They continued to attack whites. The chiefs Sitting Bull, Gall, and some others refused to be part to the treaties. They went to the valleys of the Powder and Little Big Horn Rivers determined to live in the old ways. They were known as non-treaty Indians.

In the 1870's, the Sioux reservation itself was threatened. General Custer moved onto the reservation to build an army outpost to protect crew from the Northern Pacific Railroad which was being built across Sioux land. Then gold was discovered in the Black Hills of South Dakota, land considered by the Sioux to be sacred. This gold rush, with thousands of whites entering the Black Hills looking for gold couldn't be stopped even by government. When the Sioux refused to sell the Black Hills to the government, the government ordered all Indians to report to the Indian Agency on the Reservation by January 31, 1876. Even if the Indians had wanted to, they couldn't have made it in the time given them. Most of them Sioux refused. In February, the army began a campaign against the Indians which led to the Battle of the Little Bighorn, where the whole battalion of George Armstrong Custer was annihilated by Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse,

Hump, and Gall, the important Sioux chiefs.

Although the Indians were victorious at the Little Big Horn, their end was near. They were chased and attacked by the United States Army until finally, by 1877, they could fight no longer.

In the early 1880's, Fort Peck Agency was a place of tension. Many of the Indians had fought in the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Many were followers of the famous chiefs Sitting Bull and Gall, who were the last to agree to live on the reservations. In 1886, the Sweetgrass Hills Treaty finally established the Fort Peck Reservation for the Yanktonai Sioux and the Band of the Lower Assiniboine.