

Cheyenne River Sioux History

Welcome to the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation!

The name Sioux is part of the Ojibway/Chippewa/Anishinabe word “Nadoweisiweg,” which the French shortened to Sioux. The original word meant “little or lesser snakes/enemies.” The Sioux are really three groups comprised of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota, each having slightly different language dialects. Geographically, the Lakota are the most western of the groups and there are seven distinct bands. Four of the Lakota bands (Minnicoujou, Itazipco, Siha Sapa, and Oohenumpa) are located on the land known as the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation. The other three (the Oglala of Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, Hunkpapa at Standing Rock Reservation, and Sicangu at the Rosebud Indian Reservation and also at Lower Brule Indian Reservation), are all located in western South Dakota. The Standing Rock Reservation also stretches into North Dakota. Some of the Lakota also settled in Canada at Wood Mountain Reserve in Saskatchewan beginning in 1876. Collectively the bands are part of the Oceti Sakowin (Seven Council Fires) of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota.

The present land base of the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation was established by the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. Prior to this, the bands placed within this reservation knew no boundary to their territory. They were a hunting people and traveled frequently in search of their main food source, the sacred American bison or buffalo.

The Sioux Agreement Act of 1889 set reservation boundary lines and was named the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation. West of the Missouri River was the waters of the Cheyenne River, known to the Lakota as the Good River (Wakpa Waste’). The “Post at Cheyenne River Agency” was established seven miles above Fort Sully on the Missouri River in 1870 and became known as Fort Bennett. Fort

Bennett was next to the village named Cheyenne Agency, and was the quarters for the Indian Agent and soldiers. Separate from the fort was the agency town which housed U.S. Government employees and this location would later be moved to higher ground away from the river. The fort and town would be moved a total of four times in the coming years, with the name Cheyenne Agency attached to the town adjoining Fort Bennett. As reservation land was ceded following the Dawes Act of 1887, the town was moved again since it was now off the new reservation boundaries. After 1891, Fort Bennett was closed by the military and the reservation was believed to be safe without a military fort beside it. The next location of the agency would be between the Cheyenne River (Good River) and the Moreau (Owl) River at the site of Chief Martin Charger's camp. It was called Cheyenne Agency.

The final location of the Agency would be to the town of Eagle Butte in 1959, a move necessitated due to the construction of the Oahe Dam near Pierre, South Dakota, which flooded tribal lands along the Missouri River. When people refer to the Old Agency or Old Cheyenne Agency, they are referring to the Agency location prior to the move to Eagle Butte, which is now the tribal headquarters offices. There is also confusion about the name Cheyenne as people often think the four bands here are of the Cheyenne Tribe. Although the Lakota's have been close allies with the Cheyenne, they are, nevertheless, a separate tribe. The tribal headquarters of the Northern Cheyenne are located in Montana and the Southern Cheyenne are in Oklahoma.

The first towns were Evarts and then LeBeau which were trading posts. LeBeau was established by Antoine LeBeau, a French trader. Evarts and LeBeau became non-existent when railroad service left and the town of LeBeau burned. Both locations are now under the waters of the Missouri River. The old main home camps of the Minnicoujou were in the towns of Cherry Creek, Bridger, and Red

Scaffold in the western area of the reservation. Cherry Creek is believed to be the oldest permanent community in South Dakota. The home camps of the Oohenumpa went from Iron Lightning, Thunder Butte, Bear Creek, and White Horse along the Moreau (Owl) River. The Siha Sapa located around the Promise and Blackfoot areas in the northeast part of the reservation. Green Grass and On The Tree communities were home to the Itazipco. Green Grass is the home to the sacred Buffalo Calf Pipe. There would soon be some reshuffling of the band locations as allotments were chosen and intermarriage. Many Itazipco joined the Minnicoujou and the Siha Sapa had earlier camped in close proximity to the Hunkpapa on the neighboring Standing Rock Reservation. Today, other communities on or near the reservation include Eagle Butte, Dupree, Red Elm, Takini, Bridger, Howes, Glad Valley, Isabel, Firesteel, Timber Lake, Glencross, Swiftbird, La Plant, Ridgeview, Parade, and Lantry. There are also many rural areas on the reservation.

There are different spelling preferences by individuals of the band names and the spellings in this writing appeared on a tribal flag. An older name for Minnicoujou was Howoju meaning “the people.” Minnicoujou means “planters by the water,” Itazipco means “Without Bows,” and the French called them Sans Arc. Siha Sapa means “Black Foot,” and Oohenumpa means “Two boilings/Two Kettle.” The Black Foot Lakota should not be confused with the larger Blackfeet/Blackfoot nations of Montana and Canada. Many tribal members are a mixture of the four bands.

Cheyenne River Indian Reservation members are proud ancestors of family members who participated in every major event in early Lakota history including the 1743 arrival of the French explorers La Verendrye Brothers Expedition and 1804 meeting of Lewis and Clark Expedition; 1854 Grattan Incident; 1851 and 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty conferences; 1862 Fool Soldier Band rescue of captives; Bozeman Trail Wars – (including the 1866 Fetterman Fight; 1867 Wagon Box

Fight; 1867 Hayfield Fight); 1876 Battle of the Rosebud and Battle of the Little Bighorn; 1876 Slim Buttes Battle; 1876-1881 trek to Canada and surrenders from Canada; Feb. 1877 surrender/arrival at Cheyenne River of Spotted Elk (Si Tanka/Big Foot); April-May 1877 surrenders of band leaders Crazy Horse, Hump, Touch The Cloud, Lame Deer, and Dull Knife (Chief of Cheyenne Tribe); September 5, 1877 Crazy Horse killing at Camp Robinson; 1887 Dawes Allotment Act and beginning of Reservation era; 1889-90 Ghost Dance movement/Sitting Bull killing at Standing Rock and Wounded Knee Massacre of Spotted Elk (aka Si Tanka/Big Foot and his followers. This well-known Spotted Elk became known as Big Foot but family members always knew him as Spotted Elk. He was called Si Tanka (Big Foot) just prior to the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre due to an incident which happened regarding his boot/moccasin. There are many photos attributed to him of various people but very few are him. The Lakota of Cheyenne River still have their men and leaders of today.

Source: *Cheyenne River Sioux* by Donovin Sprague. Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, S.C., 2003.