

# George Custer, U.S. Cavalry passed this way

By CASEY MCCORMICK  
*The Saint Francis Herald*

From the moment the first white people came into contact with the native inhabitants of northwest Kansas, an exciting page of history began. One of the leading players in the Indian Wars of the American plains was George Armstrong Custer. Cheyenne County became familiar territory to Custer and his cavalry soldiers.

Between his daring exploits in the Civil War and his demise at the Little Big Horn, Custer's path crossed Kansas several times.

Historical markers in this area can be found with his name, including the Round Hole Campsite. It is located 11 miles north of Bird City on Hwy. 161.

Noted historian, Dr. J. Jefferson Broome, recently published a book that focuses on Custer's activities in this area.

"My second book came out two months ago," Dr. Broome said. "It's titled *Custer into the West.*"

The book covers Custer's 1867 Indian campaign, which left Ft. Hays on June 1, and traveled to a spot just west of Benkelman, Neb., where his party camped for a week. Next they pushed on into Colorado along the Platte River Trail, which was the road to Denver at that time.

Word reached Custer that 10 soldiers, led by Lt. Kidder, had left Ft. Sedgwick with news of Indian raids along the Smoky Hill Trail and for Custer to head back to Kansas.

When he realized that Kidder and his party had missed him at the Benkelman camp, Custer backtracked in search of the lost men. On July 12 the remains of Kidder and his men, killed by hostile Indians, were located on the north bank of Beaver Creek, about eight miles south of Bird City.

Custer came through the area, where the town of St. Francis was later erected, with soldiers of the Seventh Cavalry in 1867. In 1896 the Fifth Cavalry, under General Carr, also came through the same spot.

# Cheyenne County



**ROUND HOLE CAMPSITE**, 11 miles north of Bird City on K-161 marks the camp site for military men under the leadership of General George Armstrong Custer, Colonel Bankhead and Lt. Colonel Bradley, as well as native Americans.

— Photo is by Casey McCormick

Dr. Broome's first book, *Dog Soldier Justice*, tells of the events of the second campaign as troops were in search of the band of Cheyenne Dog Soldier militants who had kidnapped two white women, named Susan Alderdice and Maria Weichell.

The book covers from Mrs. Alderdice's abduction near Lincoln on May 30, 1869, up to her attempted rescue

at Summit Springs, southwest of Sterling, Colo., on July 11. She was killed by her captors when the 5th Cavalry attacked the Indian position.

Dr. Broome has researched his subject as well as traveled to the areas to retrace the participants tracks.

"From the maps, which I discovered in the National Archives in Washington, D.C.," Dr. Broome said,

"I was able to locate Custer's camp just west of Benkelman, and also the Kidder massacre site."

Both books tell of the dangerous and exciting events in the history of northwest Kansas.

Those interested in a copy of the two books can contact Dr. Broome at 303-794-8120 or email [jjeffersonbroome@comcast.com](mailto:jjeffersonbroome@comcast.com).

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