



## Introduction

The decade after 1865 was a period of great transition for the United States. The nation had experienced and narrowly survived a bitter civil war and many of its citizens were now seeking new beginnings in the West. As a result, a massive migration of easterners moved toward the Pacific Ocean and straight into conflict with the various Native American tribes that occupied the Great Plains—that vast middle one-third of the continental United States that stretches from Canada to Texas. Though conflicts between Anglos and Indians had occurred in the past, neither side was prepared for the scale and intensity of the battles that would be waged over the next twenty-five years. For the most part, the majority of the battles would be fought on the Great Plains, which was the homeland of numerous Indian tribes. As the number of settlers encroaching on their homelands increased, so too did the number of Indian attacks on wagon trains, miners, and buffalo hunters. White settlers demanded that the U. S. Army be mobilized to protect them, a demand that could not be ignored since westward expansion was being actively encouraged by the government.

As federal troops moved onto the Plains, they built forts and established reservations for the Indians. It soon became the army's duty to not only put the Indians on the reservations but also ensure that they remained there. But the concept of reservations was totally alien and unacceptable to the free-roaming Plains Indians and, as they saw it, their only recourse was to fight. With the end of the Civil War in 1865, the U.S. Army began operations against the Sioux on the Northern Plains and over the next two and one-half decades would continue to pursue and engage the various tribes of the Great Plains in what would come to be known as the Plains Indian Wars, which culminated in 1890 with the Sioux massacre at Wounded Knee, Dakota Territory. With the end of these wars came the end of the traditional nomadic lifestyle of the Plains Indians as the West was colonized by white settlers.

On the Southern Plains, during the summer of 1874 the U.S. Army launched a major offensive against the Indians in an effort to remove them permanently from the region and force them onto reservations that had been established in western Indian Territory, now western Oklahoma. The army's offensive against the Southern Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, and Comanche tribes was officially referred to as the Indian Campaign of 1874, but it is better known today as the Red River War. Fought largely on and near the headwaters of the Red River in the Texas Panhandle, the Red River War resulted in the defeat of the Southern Plains Indians and their removal from their homelands on the buffalo plains.

## Previous Research

The Red River War was, without question, one of the most significant events in the history of the state of Texas and the western expansion of the United States. Yet it has received relatively little attention from historians and researchers of military history and, until now, no investigation by professional archeologists. Of the books that have been written on the Red River War, James L. Haley's (1976) *The Buffalo War: The History of the Red River Indian Uprising of 1874* is the most comprehensive and thoroughly researched. This book is an excellent study of the events leading up to the war, and it provides good overviews of the major battles. Specific chapters in William H. Leckie's (1963) *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains* give general overviews of the war, as does Frederick Rathjen's (1973) *The Texas Panhandle Frontier* and Robert M. Utley's (1973) *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866–1891*.

Other books have focused on specific aspects of the Red River War. For example, William Y. Chalfant's (1997) *Cheyennes at Dark Water Creek: The Last Fight of the Red River War* examines the events that led to the Battle of Sappa Creek, which was the last engagement of the war that took place in Kansas, in April 1875, between a band of Cheyennes and a company of the 6th Cavalry. In *The Moccasin Speaks: Living as Captives of the Dog Soldier Warriors* (1998), Arlene F. Jauken relates the story of how sisters Catherine, Sophia, Julia, and Adelaide (Addie) German (also spelled Germain or Germaine) were taken captive by Southern Cheyennes after their father, mother, and other siblings were killed by the Cheyennes and how the sisters were later rescued by army forces during the Red River War. Charles M. Neal's (2002) *Valor across the Lone Star* provides excellent summaries of the engagements fought in frontier Texas, including those of the Red River War, where soldiers earned Congressional Medals of Honor.

Still other books are autobiographies and biographies of some of the soldiers, scouts, and civilians who saw action in the war. These include *Personal Recollections and Observations of General Nelson A. Miles* (1896), Virginia W. Johnson's (1962) *The Unregimented General: A Biography of Nelson A. Miles*, Robert Wooster's (1993) *Nelson A. Miles and the Twilight of the Frontier Army*, Robert G. Carter's (1935, 1961) *On the Border with Mackenzie*, Ernest Wallace's (1964, 1993) *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, Michael D. Pierce's (1993) *The Most Promising Young Officer: A Life of Ranald Slidell Mackenzie*, Robert H. Steinbach's (1989) *A Long March: The Lives of Frank and Alice Baldwin*, Olive K. Dixon's (1927) *Life of "Billy" Dixon*, and J. T. Marshall's (edited by Lonnie J. White, 1971) *The Miles Expedition of 1874–1875: An Eyewitness Account of the Red River War*.

Two books by Wilbur S. Nye, *Carbine and Lance: The Story of Old Fort Sill* (1937) and *Bad Medicine and Good* (1962), attempt to relate accounts of the war from the perspective of the Native Americans who participated in some of the battles. Finally, two journals have published collections of army records related to the Red River War. These are "Ranald S. Mackenzie's Official Correspondence Relating to Texas, 1873–1879," *Museum Journal* 10 (1968), edited by Ernest Wallace, and "The Indian Campaign on the Staked Plains, 1874–1875: Military Correspondence from War Department Adjutant General's Office, File 2815-1874," *Panhandle-Plains Historical Review* 34–35 (1961–62), compiled and edited by Joe F. Taylor.

Although all of these works are by and large good resources and generally reliable, the Red River War lacks a definitive and comprehensive history. The general histories of the war rely largely on personal letters and diaries of army soldiers along with military accounts that often are riddled with large gaps in their sequence of events, sometimes raising more questions than they answer. For the most part, these general



histories have not attempted to record or use Native American accounts or oral histories of the events. As a result, these histories reflect, to a large extent, the army's perspectives and biases of the reasons for the war, its attitudes toward the Indians, and how the battles unfolded and were fought. In addition, some authors have misinterpreted or misunderstood certain statements in the military records, resulting in inaccurate or incorrect placement of some locations and events.

The purpose of the present study of the Red River War is not to fill all the gaps or correct all the shortcomings of the previous studies. Nor is it to provide a definitive and all-encompassing history of the war. Rather, the primary focus of this book is the archeological investigations conducted between 1998 and 2003 by the Texas Historical Commission at six of the Red River War battle sites. One purpose is to demonstrate how archeology can supplement the historical documents and provide a level of detail that is not always available in the historical records.

None of the previous scholarly studies of the Red River War has enjoyed the benefits that archeology can provide to complement the historical documents. Historical records and documents, especially firsthand accounts, are critical to understanding what happened at a particular time and place, but so too are the artifacts left behind. The archeological record contains historical clues in the form of physical remains, including artifacts, and their contextual relationships. The distributions and spatial associations of various types of artifacts can relate a great deal about what happened at a site.

Because human behavior is patterned, the artifacts at a site, which are the residue of that behavior, are also patterned and reflect details of that behavior. It is through the careful retrieval and analysis of artifacts that archeology can either corroborate the historical accounts or bring into question certain aspects of the historical documents and can aid in overcoming the biases that are often contained in the documents. In the case of battlefields, an example is the archeological investigations conducted at the Little Bighorn battle site in Montana. At this famous battle, archeological investigations showed that, though some of the traditional views of the battle were accurate, others were not. In addition, by discovering and accurately plotting the cartridges and bullets at the battle site the investigators were able to reconstruct the various tactical positions of the combatants through time and space.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Red River War Battle Sites Project**

In 1998, a year before the 125th anniversary of the Red River War, the Archeology Division of the Texas Historical Commission recognized the historical significance of the occasion and initiated the Red River War Battle Sites Project. The primary goals of the project were twofold: (1) to locate precisely and document through archeological means some of the more significant battle sites of the Red River War, to assess their conditions, and to see what additional information the artifacts at the battle sites could provide to supplement the historical records and documents; and (2) to conduct a more thorough search of the unpublished historical documents that relate to the war than had been accomplished in the past.

Though there were as many as twenty battles and smaller skirmishes during the Red River War, most historians generally recognize seven battles as being the most significant (fig. 1.1). These are, in chronological order, Colonel Miles's battle on Red River, the Battle of Lyman's Wagon Train, the Buffalo Wallow fight, Major Price's battle at Sweetwater Creek, Colonel Mackenzie's battle in Palo Duro Canyon, Lieutenant Farnsworth's engagement on Round Timber Creek, and Lieutenant Baldwin's battle on McClellan Creek. Not all of these engagements were significant for their tactical



importance to the outcome of the war. The Buffalo Wallow battle, for example, which was militarily insignificant, was nonetheless widely publicized at the time as a heroic engagement, and it has subsequently come to be viewed as an important event in the development of local lore and a source of regional pride.<sup>2</sup> Though the four soldiers and two scouts who were in the battle were surrounded by an overwhelming force of Indians, five of the six white men survived and all six were awarded Congressional Medals of Honor, a feat unparalleled in U.S. military history.

With the aid of a modest grant from the National Park Service's American Battlefields Protection Program (ABPP), the Red River War Battle Sites Project began in May 1998. The project initially attempted to locate four of the better-known battle sites precisely through archeological means and to document and record the sites. The four battles, all of which took place on what is now privately owned property, are the Battle of Red River (also known as the First Battle of Palo Duro Canyon)<sup>3</sup> in present Armstrong and Briscoe counties, the Battle of Lyman's Wagon Train (also referred to as the Battle of the Upper Washita) in present Hemphill County, the Battle of Buffalo Wallow also in Hemphill County, and the Battle of Palo Duro Canyon (also known as the Second Battle of Palo Duro Canyon) in Armstrong County. Unfortunately, we were not able to persuade the owners of the Battle of Palo Duro Canyon site to grant us access to the site, and it was necessarily dropped from the project.

The field investigations showed that, for the most part, the battle sites retained excellent integrity and had the potential to yield significant new information regarding combatant positions and movements at the battles, as well as information on weapon types and the number of weapons represented at the battles. During this initial phase of the project, which was conducted from May through September 1998, we completed the investigations at two of the targeted sites and estimated that approximately 40 percent of the Battle of Red River site had been investigated.

The project continued in 1999, with support again coming from the ABPP as well as several foundations and a private individual. The goals during this season were to complete the investigations at the Battle of Red River site and to attempt to locate and document the Battle of Sweetwater Creek (Price's engagement), which was believed to have taken place in the northwestern portion of present Wheeler County, Texas. During this season we also attempted to gain access to the Battle of McClellan Creek site (Baldwin's battle) in Gray County but were not granted access to the site from the landowner. Our fieldwork in 1999 was conducted from June through October and was successful in completing the investigations started the previous summer at the Battle of Red River site and in locating and documenting the Battle of Sweetwater Creek site. In addition, we identified a probable Cheyenne village site near the mouth of Tule Canyon that appears to have been one of the villages the army was attempting to capture during the Battle of Red River. This is apparently also where Colonel Nelson Miles temporarily established his headquarters camp after the battle.

With the completion of the 1999 field season, four battle sites had been investigated and more than 3,100 battle-related artifacts recovered. At this point in the project it was decided that no additional fieldwork would be undertaken until the artifacts from the 1998 and 1999 field seasons could be cleaned, cataloged, conserved, and analyzed and the necessary reports to our project donors completed. These tasks were accomplished during 2000 and 2001. In the meantime, historian and consultant Martha Doty Freeman was hired to conduct searches for previously unpublished Red River War battle-related historical documents at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and other repositories. During her search in 2001, Freeman found several documents and maps that shed new light on the location of Lt. Henry J. Farnsworth's engagement (termed by us the Battle of Round Timber Creek) with Chief Grey Beard's band



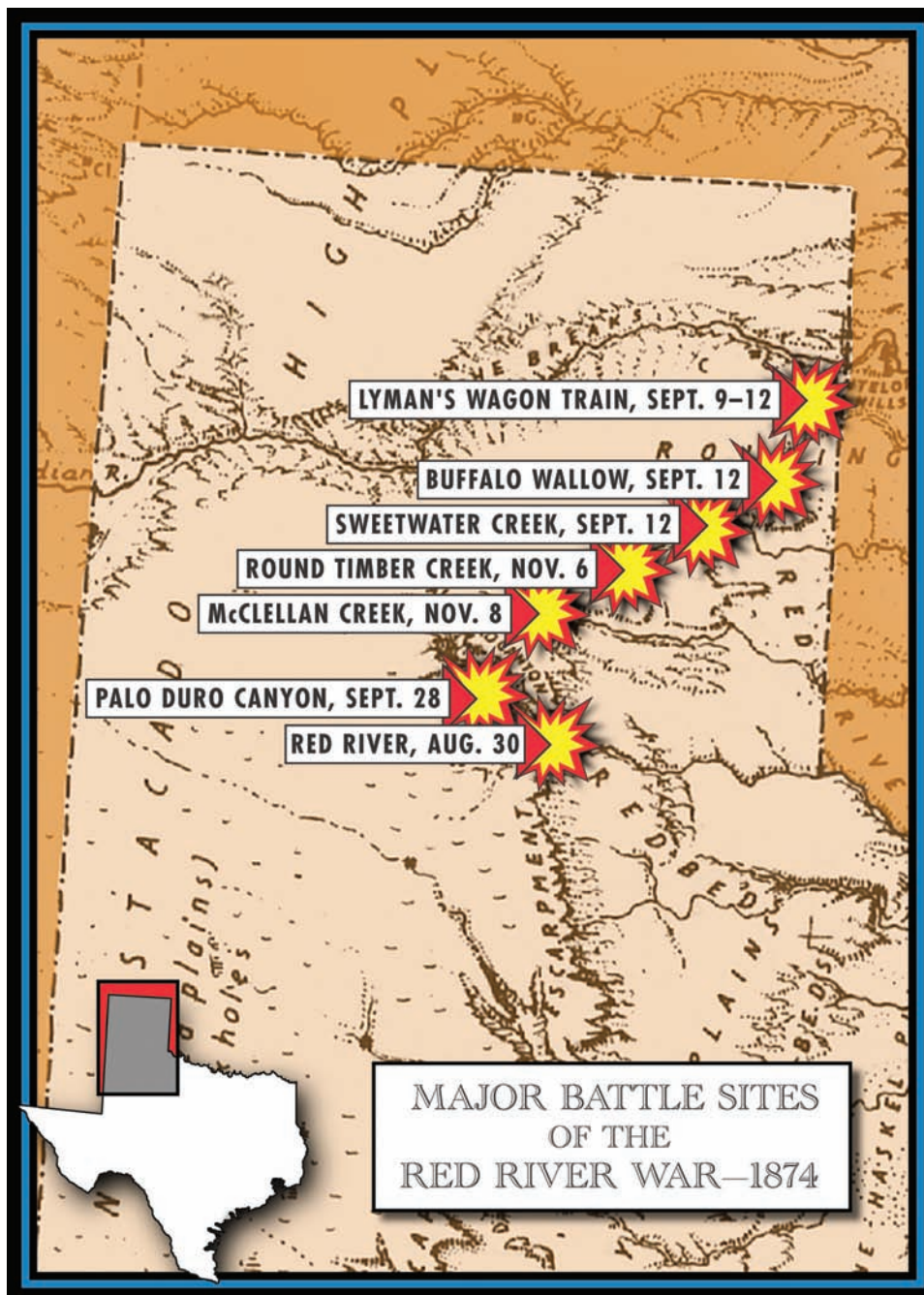


Fig. 1.1. Though there were as many as twenty battles and smaller skirmishes during the Red River War, seven battles are generally viewed by most historians as most significant. Illustration by Roland Pantermuehl

of Southern Cheyenne near the North Fork of the Red River in present Gray County. With this newly found information we began to make plans to locate and investigate the Battle of Round Timber Creek site, but additional funding would first have to be secured before the fieldwork could take place. A grant proposal was written and again submitted to the ABPP as well as to the David D. and Nona S. Payne Foundation to support the proposed investigations. The Payne Foundation approved funding in October 2002. With funding for the fieldwork in place, the investigations at the Battle of Round Timber Creek site were conducted in April and May 2003. These investigations were successful in locating and documenting not only the battle site proper but also Grey Beard's village where the Battle of Round Timber Creek actually started.

