

Farwell was on good terms with the Nakoda, some of them having worked for him. The Nakoda had also recovered and returned George Hammond's horse that had been stolen by a passing war party. Hammond had rewarded them with liquor.

Farwell's concern was focused on a group of wolfers who had just set up camp near Solomon's post. They were led by Thomas Hardwick and John H. Evans, two renowned horse thieves and hardened criminals. This group of men were later referred to as "persons of the worst class in the country." They had arrived in the Cypress Hills on the last day of May searching for horses that had been stolen from them two weeks previously. The trail cold, and their frustration mounting, the wolfers traded for what was left of Farwell's whiskey and settled in nearby.

The Nakoda across the creek were also drinking their "reward" for returning Hammond's horse. A young Nakoda eyewitness later recalled: "That morning whiskey flowed like water...and by midday the tribesmen were all hopelessly drunk."

THE MASSACRE

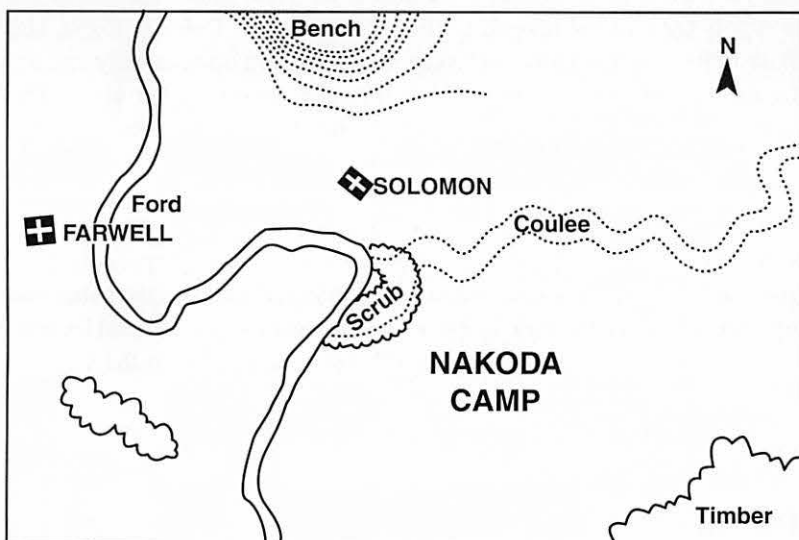
Around noon of June 1, the situation reached a climax when Hammond's horse went missing again. Cursing and accusing the Nakoda of stealing it he asked the wolfers to join him in seizing some Nakoda horses in retaliation. The wolfers needed little encouragement. The drunken, angry mob headed for the camp ignoring the shouts of Alexis Lebombard who had discovered the Hammond's horse grazing nearby. Farwell's efforts to avert a confrontation by persuading the tribesmen to give him two horses until Hammond's was recovered failed. The situation was out of his control.

A shot rang out, from which side is unclear, and the slaughter began. Hidden in the coulee bordering the camp, the wolfers fired round after round at anyone that moved. The men at Solomon's joined in, firing from the safety of their rooftop. Men, women and children fell under the onslaught. The end came when one of the wolfers, Ed Legrace, was killed. But the atrocities continued - the camp was destroyed, bodies mutilated, four women were raped. It is uncertain how many perished, twenty according to some accounts, as many as eighty according to others.

The next morning the traders at both posts hastily finished packing while the wolfers burned the remains of the Nakoda camp. As they pulled out both posts were set afire. The valley was again quiet, deserted except for the dead who lay where they had fallen.

THE AFTERMATH

News of the Cypress Hills Massacre finally reached Ottawa in August 1873. Canada demanded the extradition of the wolfers but this was not acted upon until the newly formed North West Mounted Police took up the case. In 1875, five of the wolfers faced an extradition commission in Helena, Montana but the case was weak and the wolfers were released. A year later two traders and a wolver were arrested in Canada and tried in Winnipeg. The case was weakened once again by insufficient and contradictory evidence and the men were acquitted. Further investigations proved fruitless and the case was dropped in 1882.



The Cypress Hills Massacre demonstrated the vulnerability of life on the Canadian frontier and the need for an official presence in the region. By the summer of 1874, three hundred men, most of them raw recruits, were dispatched into the Canadian West. The North West Mounted Police orders were simple - to preserve peace, prevent crime and protect the border. To accomplish these tasks a string of forts and outposts were established in strategic positions throughout the Canadian West. In 1875, under the leadership of Major James Morrow Walsh, Fort Walsh was established in the Cypress Hills 2.5 km north of the site of the Cypress Hills Massacre.

CYPRESS HILLS MASSACRE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



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INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years the Cypress Hills have attracted people to their shelter and resources. During the bitter winter months bands of Cree, Siksika, Nakoda, and Gros Ventre camped and hunted in the protected valleys. Lodgepole pine trees were harvested for use as tipi poles, and for dog and horse travois. The Cypress Hills were also believed to be a spiritual place where the young men came on vision quests and where thunder came from.

Since no First Nations peoples claimed the Cypress Hills as their own, all were free to use them and occasionally, clashes between enemies such as the Cree and Siksika occurred. By the mid-nineteenth century the Metis established their wintering camps in the Cypress Hills so as to be closer to the dwindling bison herds they depended upon.

It was not until the 1870's with the influx of whiskey traders into the area did the Cypress Hills and its First Nations people see change - destructive and irreversible change - that culminated in one explosive event known as the Cypress Hills Massacre.

WHOOUP COUNTRY

During the latter half of the nineteenth century the demand for tough buffalo hide and the subsequent rise of buffalo robe prices drew many American and Canadian traders into what is now northern Montana, southeastern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan. Known as Whoop-Up Country this area experienced its own 'wild west' period from 1869



Farwell's Trading Post

until the arrival of the North West Mounted Police on the Canadian side in 1874. The focus of Whoop-Up Country trade was whiskey. An open violation of Canadian and American law, trading whiskey to the First Nations peoples was done openly. Once across the border there were no Canadian law officials to stop them and the alcohol demanded by the customers - watered down and "doctored" into a vile brew known as Rotgut - was extremely profitable.

The traders based their operations out of Fort Benton, Montana. From this rugged little town on the banks of the Missouri River mule and bull trains loaded with pots, blankets, tobacco, food and trinkets headed north to supply forts like Whoop-Up, Slide-Out, Standoff, Robbers Roost, and those in the Cypress Hills. Whiskey was often sent up separately in carts drawn by fast horses that could outrun the American lawmen. The expression "whoop it up" describes a run for the border by traders trying to avoid capture.

Within a few short years, the whiskey trade had taken its toll on the First Nations people. Ravaged by whiskey and disease and desperately poor from the cheating ways of the traders, the relations between the tribes and the traders had deteriorated to openly abusive at its worst, tense at its best. It was this atmosphere that fuelled the events leading up to the Cypress Hills Massacre.

THOSE INVOLVED

The Nakoda:

The winter of 1872-73 had been a hard one for the First Nations people. Chief Manitupotis moved his band from the Battle River on a 480 km trek south to the Cypress Hills. Game was abundant in the Cypress Hills and the band began to recover its strength. Hoping to trade with the Americans they knew were in the area, Manitupotis' band set up camp near two trading posts on the north fork of the Milk River. They were joined by another small band under Chief Inihan Kinyen. Together they numbered 300 people which included fifty warriors.

The Traders:

Abel Farwell's post was built on the west side of the creek within sight of his competitor, Moses Solomon. Farwell worked for T.C. Power Company while Solomon worked for I.G Baker Company both of which were based out of Fort Benton. Farwell, originally from New York, had one of the largest posts in the area. A number of people were with him: his wife, a River Crow woman known as Horse Guard or Mary; George

Hammond, a Canadian, and his mixed blood wife, Rosalie; Alexis Lebombard, the Metis interpreter and his wife, Nancy; and 2 to 4 hired men.

Solomon, who had emigrated from Germany in 1848, had followed the lure of gold from one gold rush to another. Failing to strike it rich he began a new venture in 1865 when he built his first trading post in Montana. Solomon's third trading season in Canada was spent in the Cypress Hills during the winter of 1872/73. He had five men working for him.

The Wolfers:

Hunting wolves was a hard life and attracted equally hard men. They made their living by poisoning buffalo carcasses and then collecting the pelts of the wolves that came to feed on them. First Nations people detested the wolfers since their valuable dogs often fell victim to the wolfers' poison.

CONTRIBUTING EVENTS

By May 1873, the trading season was virtually over and the traders were eager to leave - the tension in the area was unmistakable. A few weeks before a trader to the west had been killed by native people and there had been a skirmish between some Siksika and Nakoda nearby. The Nakoda were openly threatening Solomon who they claimed had cheated them.



A Nakoda Camp in the Cypress Hills