Exploring The Black Hills, 1855-1875: Reports of the Government Expeditions

JAMES D. McL AIRD AND LESTA V. TURCHEN

The expedition of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark began a long series of explorations of the American West sponsored by the United States government. By the 1850s settlers and gold-seekers followed explorers and fur traders across the Great Plains to California, Oregon, and Utah. The Black Hills, centrally located in the northern Plains, potentially strategic for military operations against the Plains Indians, and a rumored source of gold, attracted official and unofficial intruders.

This article is the first in a series on government explorations of the Black Hills preceding the gold rush of 1876. Reports published by the government served as a basis for the determination of policy and provided information for future settlers and miners. The reports are difficult for the general reader to locate and include much extraneous material for any but the avid academic. This series of articles reprints significant excerpts from the reports within a framework of biographical data about the explorers. Much of the material omitted is technical or scientific data such as weather charts and barometric readings. These articles will discuss reports by Lieutenant Gouverneur K. Warren, General William F. Raynolds, Ferdinand V. Hayden, Colonel William Ludlow and General George A. Custer, and Professor Walter P. Jenny and Henry Newton.
"I aided in bringing in the wounded women and children who were found near the place to which the Indians first fled," wrote Lieutenant Gouverneur Kemble Warren after the battle at Ash Hollow on 3 September 1855. This official report revealed little of the emotions apparent in Warren's hurriedly written journal:

The sight on the top of the hill was heart rending—wounded women & children crying & moaning, horribly mangled by the bullets. Most of this had been occasioned by these creatures taking refuge in holes in the rocks and armed Indians sheltering themselves in the same places. These latter fired upon our men killing 2 men and wounded another of the Artillery Company. Our troops then fired in upon their position. Two Indian men were killed in the hole & 3 children, 2 of them in their mother's arms. One young woman was wounded in the left shoulder the ball going in above and coming out below her arm. I put her on my horse. Another handsome squaw was badly wounded just above her left knee and the same bullet wounded her baby in the right knee. Her

case interested me much she cried so much, and was continually
turning to her babe and singing in the most distressing tones
“tu-kee-e-e-e Chick-a-see-e-e-e with sobs and sighs. Her words
mean O god my poor child. Her father has also been killed. I had a
litter made and put her and the child upon it. I found another girl
of about 12 years lying with her head down in a ravine and
apparently dead observing her breath I had a man take her in his
arms she was shot through both feet. I found a little boy, shot thro
the calves of his legs & thru his hams. I took in my arms he had
enough strength left to hold me round the neck, with this piteous
load we proceeded down the hill and placing them on the bank of
the Blue Water, I made a shelter to keep off the sun and bathed
their wounds in the stream. This same office was performed for
those brought in wounded by the others in the morning. One little
girl shot in the right breast, a boy in the thigh another in his arm.
A poor Ogallallah woman was shot badly in the shoulder by a
dragoon after the fight was over he saw her concealed in the grass
and mistook her for a man. This woman & the one I brought down the hill on my horse were in some way left behind. All the others were brought to Doctor Ridgely and from him and his assistants received all the attention that skill and humanity could bestow.

I did not get back to camp till the last of the command (10 P.M.). . . . After getting to camp I aided to dress their wounds.

I had endeavored to make a topographical sketch of the scene, but the calls of humanity prevented me doing much.

The wounds received by our men were very severe 5 of them mortal ones. The Indian men did not fight while running would do but when cornered they defend themselves nobly. The spirit of our men in no instance failed them in their attack on these desperate savages and all that stopped were killed some it is said with the sword but I was disgusted with the tales afterwards were of valor on the field, for their were but few who killed anything but a flying foe.

One of the Indian guides Desmet who went out with the Dragoons armed with my shot gun had a most narrow escape with his life. The infantry took him for an enemy and charged upon him he laid down the gun to show he was a friend (he could not speak English) and the arrival of some one who knew him saved his life. The gun however was captured by a man of Capt Todd’s Co who claimed to have shot an Indian with his own gun. The hero of this achievement felt very little next morning when I proved the gun was mine and the man who carried it was alive.

The feeling of sympathy for the wounded women and children and deep regret for their being so, I found universal. It could not be helped.

Many papers were picked up belonging to the mail that was robbed at the time 3 men killed and other evidences showing there were plenty of bad Indians in Camp. Bayonets were also found supposed to have been taken at the Grattan Massacre. In fact Little Thunder did not deny that his band was engaged in these affairs. Little Thunder it is thought is not killed and as he impressed us favorably we felt glad he was not. Campbell says there was 31 lodges of Brules 11 of Ogallallahs. There were between 60 & 70 prisoners (5 Ogallallas the Squaw & 3 children 2 of the latter wounded, of Chanta Pertan gali, he is probably a good indian I have his papers). There were horses & mules taken & all the lodges with nearly all their property. The Indian camp was broken up in great haste breakfast was just cooking, many of them had not eaten. When I gave the little girl I took first, a piece of chocolate no one could get her to leave me, she was so hungry.

Tuesday Sept 4th

The mounted force under Col. Cooke were sent out this morning to scout and complete the gathering of the Plunder.

I went with him and had an opportunity to perfect my sketch.
Exploring the Black Hills 363

There was no evidence of any Indians having returned. Genl Harney moved camp from Ash Hollow to mouth of Blue Water encamped on north side of Platte days march 3 miles. . . .
The wounded baby died this morning its mother does nothing but cry and moan and as my tent is near the hospital tents it distresses me greatly. 2

The government in 1851 attempted to provide lasting peace in the northern Plains through the famous Treaty of Fort Laramie. However, the flow of emigrants through Indian land produced confrontations such as the Grattan fiasco of 19 August 1854 in which a military patrol from Fort Laramie was killed while attempting to avenge the death of a Mormon's cow. 3 Public and military demands for retaliation resulted in the Sioux Expedition of 1855 led by General Harney. Lieutenant G.K. Warren accompanied the expedition as topographical engineer to obtain information on the Plains region necessitated


by the demands of war and emigrants. Warren’s journal substantiates that the United States Army massacred large numbers of women and children at the Battle of Ash Hollow. Although disheartened by the Indians’ suffering, Warren agreed with General William S. Harney that the Brule village deserved punishment for its involvement in the Grattan incident and in raids on the United States mail. 4

Born at Cold Spring, New York, on 8 January 1830 the fourth of twelve children, Warren was named for his father’s intimate friend Gouverneur Kemble, an important Democratic politician and member of Congress from New York. At the age of sixteen Warren received an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point and graduated second in his class in 1850. Warren’s initial appointment in 1851 to the army’s elite Corps of Topographical Engineers was to assist

Captain A.A. Humphreys in flood control surveys of the Mississippi River delta from New Orleans to Natchez. The young lieutenant spent a reasonable amount of time on less serious matters. In a letter to his sister Eliza he mentioned three ladies of interest:

Miss Estelle is another of the three—hasn’t she got a pretty name?—and she is not a dancing girl either. But if you could only see her profile and hear her speak, you would think somebody was in danger.

Yesterday I played backgammon with her and was beaten. Baxter called to see her last evening, and she told him to write home to my friends that I had been conquered by a lady, but need not say what in. I said ‘No, they all know how I played backgammon too well to be conquered at that,’ and made my best bow-wow-wow. 5

As active work on the delta project neared an end in 1852, Warren was assigned briefly to Philadelphia and then sent to Louisville. He described his social life to his father Sylvanus:

Another young lady whose dress was too long and had had it frayed out by being stepped on, wished very much she had a pair of scissors, whereupon I produced a pair, and in the parlor in the presence of the whole room of company, I gallantly kneeled at her feet and reduced it to the right length and was considerably applauded. She gave me a kiss, but, it was a French kiss i.e a kind of candy. 6

The prominent political and social issues of the 1850s received no comment in his correspondence. Warren apparently had no desire to be involved in these nonmilitary issues.

In 1854 Warren was transferred to the army’s Pacific Railroad Office in Washington, D.C., and was entrusted with preparation of a map of the United States from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. An unexpected interruption occurred with orders that “2d Lieut G.K. Warren, Corps of Topographical Engineers, is assigned to duty with the Sioux Expedition, and will repair to St. Louis, and report to Brevet Brigadier Genl W.W. Harney, the commander of the Expedition

5. Taylor, Gouverneur Kemble Warren, p. 11. The authors were unable to locate this letter in Warren’s correspondence received from the New York State Library.

as soon as his services in connection with Pacific Railroad Survey can be dispensed with.”

Warren noted that “duties in connexion with the ‘Sioux Expedition’ required me to go up the Missouri river to Fort Pierre, lay out a military reserve for that post, and examine the river as high up as the mouth of the Shyenne.”

He described the thirty-nine-day voyage up the river in his official report:

The Clara was so hard to handle when the wind blew strong, that she frequently could not be kept in the channel. The requisites of a good steamboat for Missouri navigation are, a strong bottom, a boiler that burns the minimum amount of wood, as little as possible to top hamper, wheels well forward, and considerable breadth of beam, so as to give as much control over her motions as possible. The Clara was the reverse of all this, but Captain Cheever, her commander, was a most skilful river man, and his untiring efforts overcame all difficulties.

After surveying the military reserve, Warren rejoined General Harney. Concerned lest his return journey lead to criticism, he wrote:

It is, perhaps, proper to allude here to the journey performed from Fort Pierre to Fort Kearny, since nearly all the knowledge I have gained, and whatever services I may have rendered, resulted immediately from it.

When I was preparing for the undertaking, and had secured a party of six persons, exclusive of Mr. Carrey and myself, I was counselled most earnestly by my brother officers not to make it, and the commanding officer at Fort Pierre thought seriously of interposing his authority as my military superior to prevent so “rash” an attempt, which presented to him nothing but a prospect of my certain destruction. The route was known to lead through

8. Warren, Explorations in 1855, p. 5. Warren’s journey to Fort Pierre and survey of the military reserve has been misrepresented by Taylor (Gouverneur Kemble Warren, pp. 22-23) and Flanagan (“Gouverneur Kemble Warren, Explorer,” p. 172) as an unexpected and undesired assignment that prevented his participation in the major campaign. However, “Warren’s Journal 1855,” 27 May-8 Aug., Warren Papers, indicates that Warren suggested that he undertake the survey. Warren’s Explorations in 1855 suggests that he viewed the location of a military post at or near Fort Pierre as an integral part of Harney’s campaign against the Sioux. Furthermore, Warren’s journal entries do not reveal that he spent his time at Fort Pierre impatiently as suggested by Flanagan and Taylor.
the country of the Brules, (supposed to be our worst enemies,) and nothing was known as to their position or intention. We would, also, it was said, meet the Poncas and Pawnees, and neither would hesitate to rob, or even "wipe out" a party as small as mine, well knowing the offence would be charged upon the Brules. Moreover, much of the route was wholly unknown and untravelled, and there was no estimating the obstacles and delays we might encounter. My intention, however, had not been formed without due consideration of these things, and careful conversation with the men of the country. The weather was as yet too warm, it being the first of August, for the war parties to have formed, and it was the season for making "sweet corn," so that the Indians would likely be thus engaged. The party was made up of the most experienced prairie men, four of them being half-breed Dacotas, and we were well armed; we were determined to be constantly on our guard, and to travel in the night if we came in the vicinity of an enemy; no fire was to be lighted at night, nor tent pitched. Mr. Galpin, of the Fur Company, assured me he did not believe I would meet an Indian, and the result verified his prediction. We saw fresh trails of the Poncas on l'Eau qui Court, and of the Brules in the Sand Hills, and some deserted Pawnee camps on Loup Fork, but no Indians. We performed the journey in fifteen days.
I was thus enabled to carry out the instructions under which I had gone to Fort Pierre to participate in the campaign under General Harney, and perform the duties required of me as topographical engineer of the expedition.

I hope this explanation will free me from any charge of having acted with rashness or imprudence. ¹⁰

Warren arrived at Fort Kearny just in time to accompany Harney’s troops west along the Oregon Trail to Blue Water Creek and the Battle of Ash Hollow. After establishing Fort Grattan near the battlefield, the expedition continued its march to Fort Laramie.¹¹ Warren’s journal records Harney’s bullying council with the Indians:

... if Little Thunder would now make peace his women & children would be returned to him, otherwise they would be given up to his worst enemies. ...Genl told them they must do what he asked or fight, and that if they even killed all of us for every one ten more would come, and their Great Father was determined to make them give up. That he was never angry with them before but now he was aroused. That their buffalo would all be driven away, and that the Dacotah’s would be no more.¹²

After the Indians agreed to Harney’s demands, the Sioux Expedition marched uneventfully to Fort Pierre. Warren did not share the hardships endured by the troops at Fort Pierre during the winter of 1855-1856. He had returned to Washington, D.C., to complete his report and to resume preparation of a general map of the western United States.¹³ The report was officially printed in 1856 and entitled *Explorations in the Dacota Country in the Year 1855.* Secretary of War Jefferson Davis’s letter, which accompanied Warren’s report and maps on the

¹⁰. Ibid., p. 21.

¹¹. “Genl Harney having decided to leave a Company at Ash Hollow in charge of the wounded I went down with him accompanied by Capt Todd to lay out a fort for them. It was all done by noon. Genl H. Said “it must be a square and enclosed all around. ...The fort was commenced in the afternoon it is called fort Grattan. All the officers opposed building this fort.” Warren’s Journal 1855,” 5 Sept., Warren Papers.

¹². Ibid., 22 Sept. 1855.

¹³. Ibid., 22 and 23 Oct. 1855.
region between the Missouri and Platte rivers and the Rocky Mountains, suggested that “they will be very useful to the troops on that frontier and to travellers and emigrants.” Unable to complete his topographical examinations during the Sioux Expedition of 1855, Warren realized the need for further exploration. He therefore closed his report with these recommendations and conclusions:

Very little is known as to the accurate geography and topography of the Crow country and Black Hills, and, in fact, of any portion of Nebraska west of the Missouri, and the roads from Fort Pierre to Fort Laramie.

The same causes that brought on the war with the Sioux will, no doubt, continue to operate, and the time is not distant when we shall have a similar necessity for chastising the Crows and northern Missouri Dacotas, who have, as yet, seen nothing of the power of the United States, nor feel any respect for it. It seems to me, therefore, in a purely military point of view, of the greatest importance to gain a knowledge of that region, while the peaceful disposition of these tribes may permit, and before they become maddened by the encroachments of the white man. It is, therefore, respectfully requested that a recommendation be made to Congress, through the proper channel, for an appropriation of $50,000, for military and geographical explorations in the territory of Nebraska.

The following year Warren returned west to survey the Missouri River “from the southern boundary to Nebraska to a point sixty miles above the mouth of the Yellowstone, and of this latter stream to Powder River.” This survey did not include the Black Hills region. However, his report described the difficulty of travel on the Missouri River:

In 1856 I started from Saint Louis for Fort Pierre, in the middle of April, accompanied by my assistants, Messrs. W.H.

15. Ibid., p. 19.
Hutton, J.H. Snowden, and F.V. Hayden, on board Captain Throckmorton's steamboat Genoa. During our passage up the Missouri we made a careful sketch of the river above the southern boundary of Nebraska by means of compass courses, and distances estimated from the rate of travel of the steamboat, and by astronomical observations for latitude. The elevated position of the pilot-house of the steamboat, which the politeness of the captain allowed us to occupy, afforded advantages for gaining a knowledge of the river, the extent of the sand-bars, and the size and quantity of timber on the banks, the nature of the bottom lands as regards marshes, &c., not equaled by those of any other means of reconnaissance, and the topographer at the same time could avail himself of the extensive and accurate knowledge of the pilot. . . .

As far up as the mouth of James River our advance had been quite rapid, the river being at a good stage; but a short distance above that point we encountered a sudden and heavy freshet in the river, (produced by rains,) with a current so rapid that our boat was unable to advance against it. From this cause we remained tied up to the bank a whole day. As soon as the river began to fall the velocity abated, and we proceeded on the voyage. So sudden, however, was the subsidence of the flood that, in five days after we had escaped the embargo of too much water, we found ourselves aground and drawing several inches more water than there was anywhere on the bar, which stretched across the river. This occurred to us near the first Cedar Island.

Under these circumstances, being anxious to reach Fort Pierre as soon as possible, as was also Captain Frost, (who was sutler at the fort, and whose goods were the principal freight of the boat,) we determined to leave the boat and proceed on foot to the dragoon camp, at the mouth of American Crow River, about eighty miles distant. Our means of transportation were two horses, the property of Colonel Lee, Second Infantry, and Lieutenant-Colonel Andrews, of the Sixth Infantry, which carried our blankets and provisions; and we were accompanied by a Mr. Moore and two men. On arriving opposite to the dragoon camp on the evening of the third day's travel, we were informed that there was no boat to bring us across. We stayed on the bank of the river that night, and the next morning renewed our signals to communicate with the camp. These, however, failed to attract attention to us, and, our provisions being short we were obliged, though much wearied by our journey on foot, (there having been a cold rain one day and night,) to attempt to reach Fort Pierre, eighty miles distant. This we accomplished in three days, and arrived there on the 20th of May, completely exhausted, having subsisted mainly on the birds killed with our shot-guns. The journey gave me an opportunity of viewing the country and its appearances a few miles back from the Missouri.
The steamboat, having landed a portion of her freight at the place where we left her, reached Fort Pierre three days after us. On my arrival all the tribes of the Dakotas west of the Missouri, except the Sichangu and Ogallalas, were assembled in council, and a treaty of peace was made with them by General Harney, which terminated the Sioux war.17

General Harney explained to the Indians that "he was going to send me up the river to make a map that they must respect us, that no harm was intended. Our Great Father wanted to know where all his people lived." 18 After completing this exploration, Warren returned to Washington for the winter to continue compilation of the general map.

In 1857 there followed a third expedition:

... from Sioux City to the mouth of Loup Fork; thence up this stream to its source in the Sand Hills; and thence by the Niobrara to Fort Laramie. From this point the party proceeded north, and carefully examined the Black Hills, and, returning to the Niobrara, explored this stream to its junction with the Missouri; and also a route from the mouth of Turtle Hill River to Fort Randall. Finally, the road from Fort Randall to Sioux City was surveyed. 19

Warren’s 1857 report is his most significant writing on the Black Hills region. Because of its importance, an extensive excerpt from that report follows:

I received my instructions from the Hon. John B. Floyd, Secretary of War, May 7, 1857, the general terms of which were to make the necessary examinations to determine the best route for continuing the military road between Mendota and the Big Sioux westward to Fort Laramie and the South Pass; thence to proceed northward and make such examinations on the Black Hills as my time and means would permit, and to return by the valley of the Niobrara, and make a careful examination thereof. I was assisted in the examination by Messrs. J.H. Snowden and P.M. Engel, as topographers; Dr. F.V. Hayden, as geologist, W.P.C. Carrington, as meteorologist, Dr. S. Moffitt, as surgeon; and Lieut. Jas. McMillan commanding the escort.

The escort, numbering twenty seven men and three noncommissioned officers, under Lieutenant McMillan, all of the

Second Infantry, was directed to meet me at Sioux City, transportation for it being furnished by the Quartermaster's Department. Transportation for the remainder of the party was assembled at Omaha City as soon as possible, and on the 27th of June, under the charge of Mr. Snowden, set out for the rendezvous at the mouth of Loup Fork.

Accompanied by Mr. Engel, I then proceeded to Sioux City, where we found the escort had been awaiting us several days on the Big Sioux River. Through some misunderstanding there were no teamsters furnished for the wagons of the escort; and the mules, from a disease of the hoof, and the wagons, and especially the harness, from long use, were of very inferior quality. It occupied me six days in getting the train in traveling condition, which was only done by abandoning one wagon and a large supply of stores for the escort. During this time a rumor* [*This rumor was without foundation, as it afterwards appeared.] reached there of a fight having taken place between the soldiers and the Shyennes at Ash Hollow, in which a hundred of the former were killed. Twelve of the soldiers of the escort, tempted by the high prices of labor in this vicinity, and tired of the toils and privations of campaigning, deserted as we were about to set out, and some white thieves who infested the neighborhood of Sioux City carried off two of my best horses. These losses occurring in a civilized community, where we supposed ourselves among friends, were quite annoying, and gave rather unpleasant forebodings of what might occur to us when we should come among our enemies, the Indians. . . .

During the journey there had been considerable sickness in the camp from fevers, and one of the men was so near the point of death that a halt of several days was made for his benefit. Dr. Moffitt also became so ill as to require a delay of one or two days. These necessary stoppages, the difficulties of the route, rainy weather, together with my being obliged to leave so much of our provisions behind at Sioux City, reduced our supplies to a small amount, and for nearly two weeks we were without sugar or coffee. We had also been very much disappointed in the amount of game; and though the country gave evidence of having recently been occupied by large herds of buffalo, only a few bulls were seen. During the early part of the journey, mosquitoes were abundant, and allowed our animals no rest at night, and immense numbers of flies attacked them by day. These insects, combined, exhausted and worried the animals more than the labor they performed, and the lives of one or two were saved only by covering them with grease and tar to keep the flies and mosquitoes away.

At Fort Laramie we entirely refitted the party. . . .

The party, on leaving Fort Laramie, was divided into two parts, as, owing to the lateness of the season, it was impossible to accomplish all the objects of the expedition by keeping together.
Warren's sketch of Beaver Creek.

Though in doing this I subjected each portion to the possibility of being defeated by the Indians, I deemed the case to justify the risk. The wagons were, half of them, turned in to the quartermaster, and the remainder, with the escort under Lieutenant McMillan, were to proceed down the Niobrara, and await me in longitude $101^\circ30'$. Mr. J.H. Snowden went with this party to make the topographical reconnaissances; Dr. Moffitt also accompanied it. My own party consisted of Dr. Hayden, Mr. Carrington, and Mr. Engel, and we had with us 17 men as packers, &c., and Mr. Morin as a guide and interpreter. Our supplies were packed on mules.

Setting out from Fort Laramie on the 4th of September, we proceeded direct for the Black Hills via Raw Hide Butte, Old Woman Creek, the South Fork of the Shyenne, and Beaver Creek; up a branch of this last we entered the Black Hills. We continued north to the vicinity of the Inyan Kara, (or the peak which makes the mountain,) a remarkable high basaltic peak, one of the highest of these mountains, and so far to the north that we had a full view of the prairie beyond.

Here we were met by a very large force of the Dakotas, who made such earnest remonstrances and threats against our proceeding into their country that I did not think it prudent for us, as a scientific expedition, to venture further in this direction. Some of them were for attacking us immediately, as their numbers would have insured success; but the lesson taught them by General Harney, in 1855, made them fear they would meet with retribution, and this I endeavored to impress upon them.\(^20\) We were at the time almost in sight of the place where these Indians

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\(^20\) A more detailed record of the discussions with the Dakotas is contained in "Lt. G.K. Warren's Journal Explorations in 1857," 9, 16, and 17 Sept., Warren Papers.
had plundered Sir George Gore in 1856, for endeavoring to proceed through their country, and one of them was actually mounted on one of his best horses, taken at that time. Sir George Gore’s party was only about half as numerous as mine; but there were a number of my party which I had picked up at Fort Laramie on whom we placed very little reliance.

The grounds of their objections to our traversing this region were very sensible, and of sufficient weight, I think, to have justified them in their own minds in resisting; and as these are still in force for the prevention of the passage of any other party of whites not large enough to resist successfully, they are of sufficient importance to be repeated here. In the first place, they were encamped near large herds of buffalo, whose hair not being sufficiently grown to make robes, the Indians were, it may be said, actually herding the animals. No one was permitted to kill any in the large bands for fear of stampeding the others, and only such were killed as straggled away from the main herds. Thus the whole range of the buffalo was stopped so that they could not proceed south, which was the point to which they were traveling. The intention of the Indians was to retain the buffalo in their neighborhood till their skins would answer for robes, then to kill the animals by surrounding one band at a time and completely destroying each member of it. In this way no alarm is communicated to the neighboring bands, which often remain quiet almost in sight of the scene of slaughter.

For us to have continued on then would have been an act for which certain death would have been inflicted on a like number of their own tribe had they done it, for we might have deflected the whole range of the buffalo fifty or one hundred miles to the west, and prevented the Indians from laying in their winter stock of
provisions and skins, on which their comfort if not even their lives depended. Their feelings towards us, under the circumstances, were not unlike what we should feel toward a person who should insist upon setting fire to our barns. The most violent of them were for immediate resistance when I told them of my intentions; and those who were most friendly, and in greatest fear of the power of the United States, begged that I would “take pity” on them and not proceed. I felt that, aside from its being an unnecessary risk to subject my party and the interests of the expedition to, it was almost cruelty to the Indians to drive them to commit any desperate act, which would call for chastisement from the Government.

But this was not the only reason they urged against our proceeding. They said that the treaty made with General Harney gave to the whites the privilege of traveling on the Platte and along White River, between Forts Pierre and Laramie, and to make roads there, and to travel up and down the Missouri in boats; but that it guaranteed to them that no white people should travel elsewhere in their country, and thus frighten away the buffalo by their careless manner of hunting them. And, finally, that my party was there examining the country to ascertain if it was of value to the whites, and to discover roads through it, and places for military posts; and that having already given up all the country to the whites that they could spare, these Black Hills must be left wholly to themselves. Moreover, if none of these things should occur, our passing through the country would give us a knowledge of its character and the proper way to traverse it in the event of another war between themselves and the troops. I was necessarily compelled to admit to myself the truth and force of these objections.

The Indians whom I first met were the Minikanyes, to the number of forty lodges, near whom, as they were very friendly, we encamped.* [I am much indebted to the influence of Major Twiss, the Indian agent near Fort Laramie, for his efforts to give the Dakotas a favorable opinion of my expedition, and to secure us a friendly reception.] They were soon joined by the warriors of a large camp of Unkpapas and Sihasapas, and our position, which was sufficiently unpleasant in the presence of such a numerous party of half-avowed enemies, was rendered doubly so by a storm of sleet and snow, which lasted two days and two nights, and against which we had but little protection.

A young Indian, who had accompanied us from Fort Laramie, considered the danger to us so imminent that he forsook our camps and joined his friends, the Minikanyes.

Under these embarrassing circumstances my associates evinced the most resolute bravery and determination to abide the result like true men.

I consented to wait three days without advancing, in order to
meet their great warrior, Bear's Rib, appointed first chief by General Harney's treaty, merely changing our position to one offering greater facilities for defense. At the expiration of the time, Bear's Rib not making his appearance, we broke up camp, and, traveling back on our route about forty miles, struck off to the eastward, through the southern part of these mountains. The point where we turned back is well marked by the Inyan Kara Peak, whose position was fixed by us.

After we had proceeded two days on our journey eastward, we were overtaken by Bear's Rib and one other Indian who accompanied him. He reiterated all that had been said by the other chiefs, and added that he could do nothing to prevent our being destroyed if we attempted to proceed further. I then told him that I believed he was our friend, but that if he could do nothing for us, he had better return to his people, and leave us to take care of ourselves, as I was determined to proceed as far as Bear Butte. After a whole day spent in deliberation, he concluded to accompany us a part of the way, and he said he would then return to his people and use his influence to have us not molested. In return for this, he wished me to say to the President and to the white people that they could not be allowed to come into that country; that if the presents sent were to purchase such a right, they did not want them. All they asked of the white people was, to
be left to themselves and let alone; that if the presents were sent to induce them not to go to war with the Crows and their other enemies, they did not wish them. War with them was not only a necessity but a pastime. He said General Harney had told them not to go to war, and yet he was all the time going to war himself. (Bear’s Rib knew that when General Harney left the Sioux country he had gone to the war in Florida, and was at the time in command of the army sent against the Mormons.) He said, moreover, that the annuities scarcely paid for going after them; and that if they were not distributed to them while they were on their visit to the trading posts on the Missouri to dispose of their robes, they did not want them.

(It is a fact that for several years, owing to this cause, these Indians have not come in for their goods at all.)

He said that he heard that the Ihanktonwans were going to sell their lands to the whites. If they did so, he wished them informed that they could not come on his people’s lands. They must stay with the whites. Every day the Ihanktonwans were coming there but were always turned back.

Whatever may have been Bear’s Rib’s actions after leaving us, it is certain we saw no more Indians in the Black Hills. We completed our reconnaissance along the eastern portion of these mountains as far as Bear Peak, which forms another convenient and accurate point with which any future reconnaissance may connect with our own. We also visited the North Fork of the Shyenne, in this vicinity. On our return we took a southeast direction, striking the South Fork of the Shyenne at the mouth of Sage Creek. We then proceeded up the South Fork to French Creek; thence southeast, through the Bad Lands, to White River; thence along the sources of White Clay Creek and Porcupine Creek; and thence to the Niobrara, striking it in longitude 102°03’.

At the Niobrara River the Warren and Snowden-McMillan parties rejoined and completed the road survey to Fort Randall. Returning to Washington, Warren completed his general map of the West and published his Memoir to

21. Warren, Explorations in 1855-’56-’57, pp. 16-21. Warren’s journal 24 Sept. 1857 included Bear’s Rib’s assessment of the Lieutenant’s character. The chief said that “he had watched how I treated my men I gave them all plenty to eat, and treated them well and did not give them only a few mouthfuls like the traders. I was a small man but he knew that small men would be listened to as well as large ones. He did not think it was necessary to be a tall man to be great.”

Accompany the Map of the Territory of the United States from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, Giving a Brief Account of Each of the Exploring Expeditions Since A.D. 1800, with a Detailed Description of the Method Adopted in Compiling the General Map. Warren's map, which accompanied the Pacific Railroad Reports, provided a reasonably accurate outline of western geography; the Memoir furnished a concise history of explorations west of the Mississippi.

Warren planned another expedition that failed to materialize. Early in 1859 the War Department assigned him to West Point as an assistant professor of mathematics. The government published a full report of the three western expeditions as the Preliminary Report of Explorations in Nebraska and Dakota, in the Years 1855-'56-'57. Warren's reports provided general impressions of topography, agricultural prospects, military concerns, and Indians.

Warren's topographical impressions were romantically portrayed in his reaction to the Bad Lands:

> These Bad Lands of the White River country have frequently been spoken of as a vast grave or sepulchre, from the amount of bones found there; and this figure of speech has somewhat tended to give a gloomy idea of the place which it does not especially deserve, as it abounds in the most beautiful and varied forms, in endless variety, giving the most striking and pleasing effects of light and shade. It has also been described as having sunk away from the surrounding world, with the country rising like steps to the Black Hills, which is not the case, many portions of these Bad Lands being higher than all the intervening country between them and the Black Hills, from which the portions on White River are distant about thirty miles.

Although Warren merely skirted the Black Hills, the information gathered enabled him to make general observations:

23. Lieutenant Gouverneur Kemble Warren, Memoir to Accompany the Map of the Territory of the United States from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, Giving a Brief Account of Each of the Exploring Expeditions Since A.D. 1800, with a Detailed Description of the Method Adopted in Compiling the General Map (n.p.: War Department, 1859).

24. According to Taylor, Gouverneur Kemble Warren, pp. 43-44, Warren wrote that "the death of my father has entirely changed my plans. I shall not now wish to go to Nebraska again. I must stay awhile with my mother."

A very different condition of soil, water, and building-material of stone and wood, exists when we reach the mountain region.

The Black Hills, or more properly mountains, lying between the forks of the Shyenne, on the 44th parallel, between the 103d and 105th meridians, cover an area of 6,000 square miles. Their bases are elevated from 2,500 feet to 3,500 feet, and the highest peaks are about 6,700 feet above the ocean level.

The different rocks which compose these mountains, as determined by our exploration, are—

I. Metamorphosed azoic rock, including granite.
II. Lower Silurian, (Potsdam sandstone.)
III. Devonian?
IV. Carboniferous.
V. Pemain.
VI. Jurassic.
VII. Cretaceous. . . .

A result of this formation is that the upturned rocks break off abruptly on the side toward the interior of the mass, and leave an open valley in many places between this steep slope and the gentle one which succeeds it as we approach the interior. In these valleys the best roads are found, and one, which nearly encircles the Black Hills, is known among the Indians and traders as the Race Course or Running Road. . . .

In these mountain formations, which border the great plains to the west, are to be found beautiful flowing streams, and small rich
valleys covered over with fine grass for hay, and susceptible of cultivation by means of irrigation. Fine timber for fuel and lumber, limestone and good stone for building purposes are here abundant. Gold has been found in places in valuable quantities, and without doubt the more common and useful minerals will be discovered when more minute examinations are made. 26

In 1855 Warren observed that "continuous settlements cannot be made in Nebraska, west of the 97th meridian, both on account of the unfavorable climate and want of fertility in the soil." The severity of the winters, the lack of "timely rains," and the grasshoppers that sounded like "the passage of a train of cars on a railroad when standing two or three hundred yards from the track" added to his pessimism. 27 Further expeditions in 1856 and 1857 somewhat modified his opinion:

In my former report I said that but a small portion of Nebraska which I had visited is susceptible of cultivation west of the 97th meridian. I did not mean to imply that good land on these prairies would not be found west of it, for there are fertile tracts as far west as the 99th meridian, in the neighborhood of streams that are valuable, and contain wood enough to support settlements. In stating that the Territory is overspread by powerful tribes of roving savages, and is only adapted to a life such as theirs, I did not mean to imply that white men could not occupy it, but that if they ever did they would have to lead a life similar to that of the Indians, depending mainly for subsistence, not upon the buffalo, but their own herds and flocks for support; and this is most emphatically true of the region between the 99th meridian and the base of the mountains. 28

In addition to concern for agricultural prospects, Warren commented on military problems posed by the Indian threat to settlement. He concluded that permanent posts would impress the Indians with the power of the United States, that Fort Laramie and Fort Pierre were "the most important positions yet occupied," and that Fort Kearny was necessary for the

26. Ibid., pp. 29-30.
27. Warren, Explorations in 1855, pp. 6, 39; and Explorations in 1855-'56-'57, pp. 27,28.
28. Ibid., p. 28.
He included a detailed survey of the military reserve surrounding Fort Pierre:

It embraces 310½ square miles, about fourteen only of which are of any value. . . . At the site of the fort the grass has been killed by the Indian lodges, and all the cottonwood destroyed in giving the bark to their horses in winter. . . . It, in fact, seems to be the most barren of the low prairies I have visited. The landing here is very changing; this season it is better than usual, but any high water may put a dry sandbar in front of the fort half a mile wide; at

29. Warren mentioned that additional posts should be established near “the mouth of l'Eau qui Court to restrain the Poncas . . . in the neighborhood of the mouth of Big Sioux river, as protection . . . from the Ihanktonwans and Isanties, . . . and near the Moreau river, among the Unkpapas.” Warren, *Explorations in 1855*, pp. 18, 22.
present the steamboats discharge their freight nearly a mile from the depot. 30

He tempered this dismal picture commenting that the deficiency of spring rains in 1855 presented the country in its most unfavorable aspect. The island eight miles below the fort, he added, yielded good grass and timber and the ravines along the Missouri provided excellent shelter and food for cattle. He concluded that "within the limits of the reserve, there is no place for a fort on the right bank of the river superior to the one now occupied." 31

Warren's preoccupation with the location of military posts overshadowed his topographical and agricultural observations. Within this frame of reference, he viewed the Indians as a military concern:

Of all the aborigines in the Territory under consideration, the Dakota are probably the ones that have undergone the least material diminution of their numbers since their discovery by the whites. They are still numerous, independent, warlike, and powerful, and contain within themselves means of prolonged and able resistance to further encroachments of the western settlers. Under the present policy of Government, which there is no reason to believe will ever be changed, these encroachments will continue and new wars will result. I do not mean to say that a peaceful advance of the settlements westward might not be effected, but under the operation of present causes it will not. All of these conflicts end in the discomfiture of the native races, and they are fast melting away. It is not, as many suppose, that those dispossessed retire farther west; this they cannot do, for the region to the west of one tribe is generally occupied by another with whom deadly animosity exists. Hence, when the white settlements advance their frontier, the natives linger about till disease, poverty, and vicious indulgence consign them to oblivion. The present

30. Ibid., p. 36. According to an army legend, Fort Pierre "was founded by the illustrious Peter the Hermit, who miraculously survived the first crusade, and selected this point near the mauvais terre, because of its unmitigated dreariness and its indescribable desolation." Frederick T. Wilson, "Fort Pierre and its Neighbors," South Dakota Historical Collections, 1 (1902):263. In the same volume under "Official Correspondence Relating to Fort Pierre," pp. 390-93, is a letter describing the Fort Pierre survey that Warren wrote to Major O.F. Winship, Assistant Adjutant General of the Sioux Expedition. The article also includes correspondence to and from General Harney.

31. Warren, Explorations in 1855, p. 36.
policy of the Government seems, therefore, the best calculated that could be devised for exterminating the Indian.

The advance of the settlements is universally acknowledged to be a necessity of our national development, and is justifiable in displacing the native races on that ground alone. But the Government, instead of being so constituted as to prepare the way for settlements by wise and just treaties of purchase from the present owners, and proper protection and support for the indigent race so dispossessed, is sometimes behind its obligations in these respects; and in some instances Congress refuses or delays to ratify the treaties made by the duly-authorized agents of the Government. The result is, that the settler and pioneer are precipitated into the Indian’s country, without the Indian having received the just consideration promised him; and he often, in a manner that enlist the sympathies of all mankind, takes up the tomahawk in defense of his rights, and perishes in the attempt.

It is frequently the case that the settlers are unjustly charged with bringing about these wars, and, though I feel for the Indian, I cannot but sympathize with the pioneer, whose life is liable to be sacrificed to the Indian’s vengeance.

The western settlers are now fighting the battle of civilization exactly as our forefathers did on the Atlantic shores, and under circumstances that command an equal amount of our admiration and approval.

We are in the habit of looking on the power of the United States as invincible, but it is far from being so regarded by the savages on our frontier. Many of them have never seen or felt it. There the Indians far outnumber the whites, and, if our sympathies must go with the weak, they should be with the settlers, who are only able, after all, to maintain their ground by the aid of the Army.

One of the chiefs of the Dakotas told me that they had a grand council in the summer of 1857, on the North Fork of the Shyenne, and that their hearts felt strong at seeing how numerous they were; that if they went to war again they would not yield so easy as they did before. At that council they solemnly pledged to each other not to permit further encroachments from the whites, and he fully believed they were able to whip all the white men in the world. In truth, they are not without reason in thinking so. They have never seen the whites except in small parties, stealing through their country, unable to resist them or protect themselves from insolence; or they find them shut up in little trading posts, where for days they dare not, at times, open the gates or show their heads above the inclosure, and where, whenever a band of young warriors wish to have a frolic, they go shoot their dogs, chickens, cattle, &c., break the windows, and commit any other outrage their fancy
may suggest, as a diversion. They have seen the Indian agent, (their father, as he is called,) the direct representative of the President, insulted and abused with impunity by their own race, and sometimes in dread of losing his life, and they, many of them, entertain no respect for the power of our Government. Numbers of them have never seen a soldier of the United States Army, and scarce credit their existence.

Bear's Rib (a great friend to peace with the whites and the most influential warrior in his nation) said his people could not be controlled by him, and that if he should attempt it in some cases his own life would be the forfeit.

There are so many inevitable causes at work to produce a war with the Dakotas before many years, that I regard the greatest fruit of the explorations I have conducted to be the knowledge of the proper routes by which to invade their country and conquer them. The Black Hills is the great point in their territory at which to strike all of the Teton Dakotas, except the Brules and Okandandas. Here they can assemble their largest force, and here I believe they would make a stand. In the event of another outbreak, a post should be established at the mouth of the Shyenne, on the north side, from which to operate simultaneously with troops from Fort Laramie. From both of these points wagon-trains could move with ease, and supplies could without difficulty be sent thus to the troops in the field. These operations would undoubtedly bring on a battle, where the superiority of the weapons of civilized warfare would secure a victory to us. They will not, I think, permit the occupation of the vicinity of these hills without offering a determined resistance. Driven from these they must go north towards the Missouri, where a still better field to operate against them will be found, as this region is everywhere practicable. In this event it might become necessary to establish a temporary post above the Shyenne, and a most suitable and effective location is to be found near Long Lake, on the Missouri.

Those who may take refuge in the ravines and fastnesses along the Niobrara, or in the sand-hills, should be operated against from Forts Randall, Kearney, and Laramie. Should the Isanties and Ihanktonwannos be hostile at the same time as the Titonwans, they should be operated against from Fort Ridgeley.

It will be perceived that in this plan I have considered a war with all the Dakotas to be on our hands, which at no distant day is probable, and that there will be required a number of columns and a very large force to successfully operate over so much country. These columns need not exceed in any case a strength of 400 men, and these should be sub-divided so as to beat up the country as much as possible, and endeavor to draw the Indians into an engagement where they may have some hope of success. With proper troops and commanders we need not even then fear the result.
The movement of large compact columns is necessarily slow, and they can easily be avoided, which the least military skill teaches the Indian to do. The war once begun should not be stopped till they are effectually humbled and made to feel the full power and force of the Government, which is a thing in which the Northern Dakotas are entirely wanting.

I believe a vigorous course of action would be quite as humane as any other, and much more economical and effectual in the end. With proper arrangements the Assiniboins and Crows and Pawnees could be made most useful allies in a war with the Dakotas. I see no reason why they should not be employed against each other, and thus spare the lives of the whites.

In giving my opinion of the best way of bringing the Dakotas to submission, in the event of a war, I think it my duty to state that I believe many of the causes of war with them might be removed by timely action in relation to the treaties, which are from time to time made with them, and a prompt and faithful fulfillment of our own part of the stipulations, and it is to be hoped that Congress will afford the means of carrying into effect the treaty made by General Harney in 1856, and those made by the Indian Bureau in 1857 with the Ihanktonwans and Poncas, and that it will provide liberally for those who have been dispossessed of their lands or impoverished by having their game driven off by the approach of the whites.

I have always found the Dakotas exceedingly reasonable beings, with a very proper appreciation of what are their own rights. What they yield to the whites they expect to be paid for, and I never have heard a prominent man of their nation express an opinion in regard to what was due them in which I do not concur. Many of them view the extinction of their race as an inevitable result of the operation of present causes, and do so with all the feelings of despair with which we should contemplate the extinction of our nationality. 32

Warren’s experience with the Indians and his knowledge of the Plains region made him an outstanding officer in western exploration. At the outbreak of the Civil War he obtained a leave of absence from West Point and joined the Fifth New York Regiment Volunteer Militia as a lieutenant colonel. Before the end of that conflict Warren saw action in approximately forty engagements, was twice wounded, and rose to the rank of general and chief of staff under General George

32. Warren, Explorations in 1855-'56-'57, pp. 51-54. In addition to a similar discussion, Warren’s report of the 1855 expedition included an explanation of the various Sioux bands and a tabulation of their numbers (pp. 15-19).
Meade; he especially distinguished himself at the battle of Gettysburg. In spite of these military achievements, Ulysses S. Grant authorized Warren's removal from his command in 1864 on charges of misconduct during the battle of Five Forks. Warren requested a court of inquiry, which was denied, seemingly for political reasons, until 1879. During the intervening years Warren served in the Corps of Topographical Engineers with assignments that included superintending engineer on the Upper Mississippi and in the Long Island sound region. He died on 8 August 1882, just three months before a military court cleared him of Grant's charges of misconduct.

Warren's military career is commemorated by a statue on Little Round Top at Gettysburg. Less attention has been given to the results of his explorations in the Plains region: "In scientific investigations General Warren had few superiors; and his elaborate reports on some of the most important works which have been confided to the Corps of Engineers are among the most valuable contributions to its literature." Warren's significance to Black Hills history resides in his map and reports, which reveal his cartographic genius and provide a valuable documentary history. His records clearly illustrated the strategic military aspects of the Black Hills during the opening stages of the Indian wars on the northern Plains and the inevitability of white intrusion.

33. Manarin, "Major General Gouverneur Kemble Warren: A Reappraisal," in a revisionist tone, shows that Warren's removal from command was caused by his attitudes and behavior prior to the battle of Five Forks, especially the critical attitude toward his superior officers and refusal to act as a subordinate in battle.

34. General Henry L. Abbot, "Gouverneur Kemble Warren," Annual Reunion (12 June 1883): 38. This document was provided by the United States Military Academy Library, West Point, New York.

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