

FORT LARAMIE

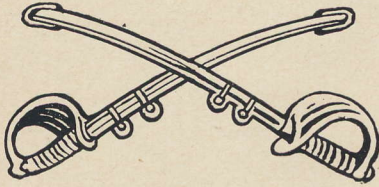
National Monument . . . WYOMING



FORT LARAMIE

National Monument

United States Department of the Interior
Oscar L. Chapman, *Secretary*
National Park Service
Conrad L. Wirth, *Director*



The surviving buildings and ruins of Fort Laramie recall its distinguished role in the conquest of the West

FORT LARAMIE was the fur trade center for a large area from 1834 to 1849. Here early emigrants to California, Oregon, and Utah found shelter and supplies. At the beginning of the California gold rush the fort was acquired by the United States, and, until 1890, it functioned as the most important and longest lived of the Army posts guarding the overland trails to the Far West.

The Fur Trade Era

FOLLOWING the trail-blazing journey of Robert Stuart and the Astorians down the North Platte during the winter of 1812-13, trappers and fur traders pushed ever westward along the valley of the Platte. They probably reached the Fort Laramie region as early as 1821, when, according to tradition, one Jacques La Ramee was killed by Indians near the stream which now bears his name.

Near the junction of the Laramie River and the North Platte was a favorite camping spot for trappers and traders en route to and from the great annual rendezvous in the Rocky

Mountains. There, in 1834, the first fort on the Laramie, a log stockade called Fort William, was erected by the veteran traders, William Sublette and Robert Campbell. The site was strategically located on the great central route to the mountains.

James Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick, and Milton Sublette, then partners in the fur trade, purchased Fort William in 1835, but soon turned their interests over to the increasingly powerful American Fur Co. That same year Dr. Marcus Whitman and Rev. Samuel Parker passed by on their way to Oregon as missionaries to the Indians. From the trappers' rendezvous on the Green River, Whitman returned to the States, and in 1836 he and Rev. Henry Spalding paused at the fort with their wives, the first white women to use the overland route which later became known as the Oregon Trail.

In 1841, the company replaced Fort William with a pretentious adobe-walled post. It was officially named "Fort John on the Laramie," but in common usage it was "Fort Laramie," an immortal name in the annals

Cover: "Old Bedlam," officers' quarters, and the sutler's store as they appear today.—Photo by Littler.

of the West. At this time a rival post, Fort Platte, was built nearby on the Platte River by L. P. Lupton, but after less than 5 years of competition it was abandoned.

Fort Laramie as a Military Post

DURING his explorations of the West in 1842, Capt. John C. Fremont foresaw the coming covered-wagon migrations. He recognized the strategic location of Fort Laramie and recommended that it be purchased by the Government and made an Army post to curb the hostile Indians and protect the wagon trains. It was not, however, until 1849 that the fort was purchased by the United States Government for \$4,000. Meanwhile, the first great migration to Oregon in 1843, Col. S. W. Kearny's Dragoons in 1845, and the first Mormon emigration to Utah in 1847 had paused at Fort Laramie.

By 1849, covered wagons were making the westward trek by the hundreds, spurred on by the discovery of California gold. In 1850, over 19,000 wagons and 40,000 animals were

estimated to have passed the fort. In their mad rush to the West they carried only long enough to obtain mail and supplies or to repair broken equipment.

Because the Indians were becoming alarmed over this increasing encroachment on their hunting grounds by the white man, a parley to draw up a treaty with the Plains Indians was called in 1851. Ten thousand Indians gathered near Fort Laramie, and as a result of the conference the Sioux, Cheyenne, and other tribes agreed to allow passage of the wagon trains over their lands in return for annual payments by the Government of goods valued at \$50,000.

However, sporadic incidents continued to strain relations between Whites and Sioux. A climax was reached in 1854 when Lieutenant Grattan, an inexperienced young officer, sought to use force in arresting an Indian for the theft of a cow. The officer, his interpreter, and 29 soldiers were slain at an Indian camp a few miles east of the fort.

The Pony Express, which began in April 1860, brought speedier mail service to Fort

"Old Bedlam" about 1889. From *Annals of Wyoming*.





Fort Laramie today.—*Photo by Littler.*

Laramie. A little over a year later it became one of the stations between St. Joseph and San Francisco which were linked by the Pacific Telegraph. During the Civil War, when regular troops were needed on the eastern fighting fronts, the task of guarding the telegraph, mail, and stage routes to the Pacific coast was assigned to volunteer troops. From Fort Laramie, small detachments were sent out to stations along the route such as Fort Mitchell, near Scotts Bluff, and Platte Bridge Station, near what is now Casper, Wyo.

The construction in the middle 1860's of a series of forts along the Bozeman Trail to the Montana gold fields infuriated the Indians. The resultant fighting was climaxed by the destruction of Capt. W. J. Fetterman and his entire command of 80 men near Fort Phil Kearny, 235 miles north of Fort Laramie, on December 21, 1866. John "Portugee" Phillips, trader and scout, volunteered to summon aid from Fort Laramie for the remaining Fort Phil Kearny garrison. Braving blizzards and lurking Indians for 4 days, he reached the fort

on Christmas night with the shocking news, and a relief column pushed northward at once.

Such successful Indian resistance led the Government to negotiate a peace treaty at Fort Laramie in 1868. The Indians, under Chief Red Cloud, obtained all the concessions they demanded, including abandonment of three forts along the trouble-making Bozeman Trail. The treaty also gave the Indians control of the lands north of the North Platte River. For a few years there was a lull in Indian warfare.

Completion, in 1869, of the Union Pacific Railroad altered modes of overland passenger, freight, and mail traffic and shifted it southward, bypassing Fort Laramie and diminishing its importance.

News of the discovery of gold in the Black Hills, in 1874, was brought to Fort Laramie by a scout from Custer's expedition. The resulting inrush of miners, contrary to treaty provisions, again enraged the Sioux. Indian resistance to the White advance was climaxed by their annihilation of Custer's command on

the Little Bighorn, June 25, 1876, but eventually the Indians had to yield this choice part of their lands.

After 1876, the fort became a station on the Cheyenne-Deadwood Stage Route and a social center for ranchers and cowboys, but with the Indians subdued it had outlived its usefulness. Its abandonment, recommended in 1886, was ordered 3 years later and carried out in April 1890.

When the soldiers marched away, the 65 fort buildings were auctioned off at a bargain price to homesteaders who dismantled most of them. Many years passed before the historic importance of the old fort was recognized. Wyoming citizens urged its preservation, and in 1937 the State purchased 214 acres, embracing the surviving buildings, for presentation to the Federal Government. The national monument was established by Presidential proclamation in 1938.

Features of Interest for Visitors

REMAINS of 21 historic structures are evident. A few retain much of their original appearance, while others are crumbling ruins. "Old Bedlam," the first Army building and for many years a social center at the fort, has been preserved by stabilization work. The sutler's store, the original adobe wing of which may have been started in 1849, still stands.

Explanatory signs tell the story of buildings still standing, including the well-preserved guardhouse with thick masonry walls and

barred windows, the haunting ruins of the post hospital, several officers' quarters, and the cavalry barracks which now houses a small museum and National Park Service offices. Similar signs mark the sites of the fur trading post, the adobe walls of which were razed in 1862, and other buildings long ago destroyed.

Service to the Public

THE MONUMENT area is open to visitors throughout the year. Literature and information are available at the office, and special interpretive service is available to groups making prior arrangements with the superintendent.

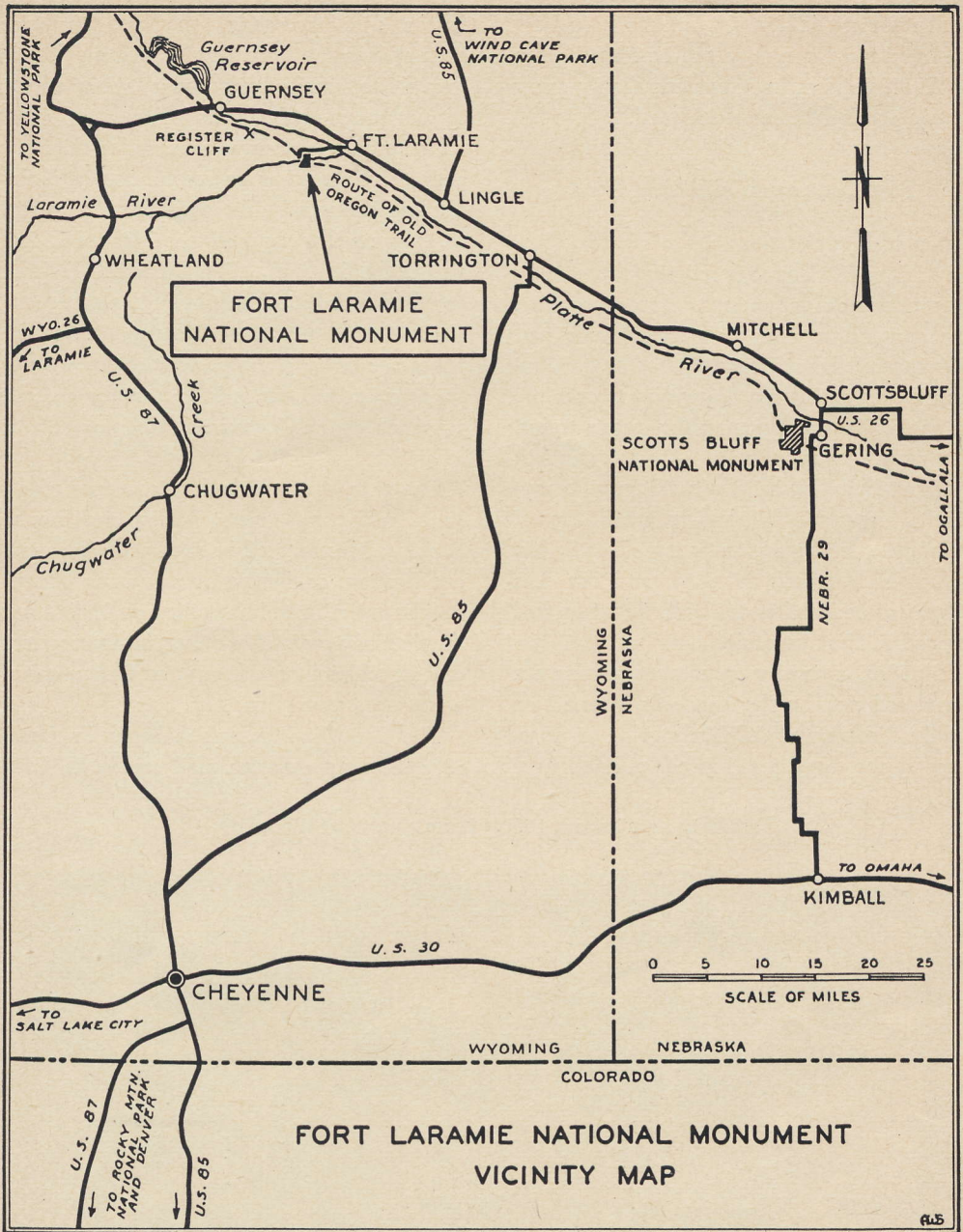
Location

FORT LARAMIE National Monument is on a paved county road 3 miles southwest of the town of Fort Laramie, Wyo., which is on U. S. No. 26 between its junctions with U. S. Nos. 85 and 87. It may also be reached by the Burlington Railroad and Bus Lines.

Administration

FORT LARAMIE National Monument is a part of the National Park System owned by the people of the United States and administered for them by the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior. A superintendent is in immediate charge of the monument. All inquiries and communications concerning the monument should be addressed to the Superintendent, Fort Laramie National Monument, Fort Laramie, Wyo.

Visitors are requested not to disturb or deface structures, signs, or natural features; trap, hunt, or carry firearms; or drive off the established road. PLEASE BE CAREFUL WITH FIRE.



**FORT LARAMIE NATIONAL MONUMENT
VICINITY MAP**

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