

O.C. Marsh, Chief Red Cloud and the 'Thunder Horses'



Fossil, Oregon
(Precancel Overprint)

The American west was a fertile landscape for fossil hunters of the late 1800s. Remains of plants, fish, large shells and giant bones were recognized as fossils by geologists and surveyors preparing the untamed land for the transcontinental railroad in the 1860s.



Transcontinental Railroad
(1st Class Rate as of 6 July 1932)

Explorers reported their findings to scientific journals and sold articles describing their experiences to newspapers in the east. These were very enticing new discoveries but subject to life-threatening hazards as the American Indians living in the area were unwelcoming hosts to these pale-faced newcomers.



American Indian
(Woodcut Typograph Essay)



American Indian
(Fancy Hand Cancel)

The American Indians were protecting their hunting grounds and the tribal territory of their forefathers on which their culture depended. It was not easily given up as the white man encroached and ever more gold prospectors and settlers claimed vast areas for their own.



Hunting Buffalo



Gold Prospector



Settlers

(1998 Bi-Color Reprints of the 1898 Trans-Mississippi Commemorative Issue)



Petrified (Fossil) Wood
(1st Class Rate as of 2 May 1974)

A rush to uncover western fossil riches began in 1871, the same year the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone were being explored. Reports of undocumented fossil types by these new expeditions lured major scientists into the great outdoors regardless of the hardships.



Grand Canyon
(Commemorative Issue)

One of the most renowned of these new explorers was Othniel Charles Marsh, a professor of paleontology at Yale College in New Haven, Connecticut. Marsh explored many western sites with mixed results after receiving various geologic reports and maps.



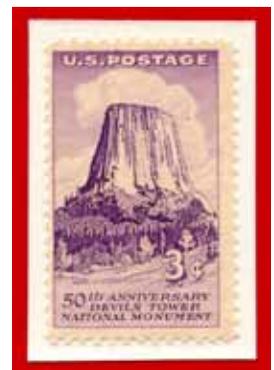
Othniel Charles Marsh, Professor at Yale College, New Haven, Connecticut
(Illustrated Commemorative Cancel, People's Republic of China)

On hearing of interesting samples found in the Dakotas, he decided to explore the area in November of 1874. His move into the Wyoming Territory badlands was accompanied by a full entourage of wagons and a number of hired hands to do the heavy lifting and digging.



Chief Red Cloud of the Oglala Sioux
(Zip Code Slogan Corner Block of Four)

The expedition originated from an Indian agency near a Northern Pacific Railroad railhead. The agency was named for Chief Red Cloud, the local Oglala Sioux chief and war leader who led the resistance in the Indian wars at the Powder River hunting grounds where the U.S. Army was soundly defeated.



Wyoming Badlands
(Anniversary Issue)



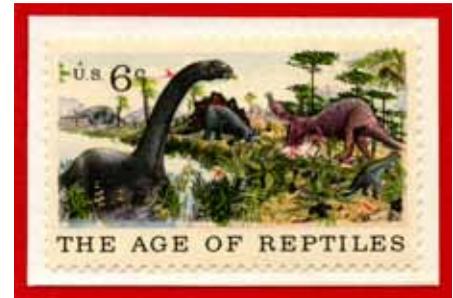
U.S. Army Troops
(Specimen Hand Overprint)



Gold Rush Fever
(Statehood Centennial Issue)

Evidence of gold quartz had been found in earlier expeditions in the area and that news brought more unwelcome fortune hunters onto Sioux lands. Marsh arrived white skinned and a stranger to the area. To the Sioux, these two traits marked him as another gold seeker. Some were so upset by his presence, especially by the number of wagons and men he brought with him, that they demanded the local Indian agent tell him and his party to return to the train and leave the area.

Marsh, a stubborn man by nature, refused to leave and insisted on meeting Red Cloud to discuss the purpose of his expedition. On hearing of this white man's refusal to leave, even after being told to do so by the Indian agent, Red Cloud's curiosity outweighed his distaste and he agreed to talk. The meeting resulted in Marsh obtaining Red Cloud's permission to look for fossils on Sioux lands. The Sioux were also familiar with fossils and called the remains '*Thunder Horses*' in recognition of their size.



'Thunder Horses'
(1st Class Rate as of 7 Jan 1968)



Digging for '*Thunder Horses*'
(Polish Commemorative Issue)

Using his survey maps and following Red Cloud's instructions, Marsh found several wagon loads of fossils and returned to the agency so the Indians could examine the rocks and fossils. After seeing that no gold was secretly hidden and Marsh had kept his promise, Red Cloud was impressed with his honesty and invited him to visit the nearby Sioux encampment.

While in the Sioux encampment, Marsh viewed food and supplies provided by the U.S. government's Bureau (Office) of Indian Affairs and became outraged after seeing spoiled foodstuffs and poor quality goods in terrible condition. He listened to accounts of general corruption among U.S. government officers and Bureau agents. Returning east, Marsh reported on 'our vile bureaucrats' as he called them, to anyone who would listen, but few did.

The matter did not end there as Red Cloud sent further information to Marsh in the Spring of 1875 indicating no supplies had been provided to the Sioux after Marsh left the agency.

Public reaction was immediate when Marsh reported these further activities to the New York Herald, resulting in a series of articles outlining the misdeeds of the Interior Department's Bureau of Indian Affairs. Shortly thereafter, President Ulysses S. Grant "regretfully accepted" the resignation of Christopher Delano, U.S. Secretary of the Interior. A full investigation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs followed and Red Cloud's Oglala Sioux finally received the subsistence aid they were promised.

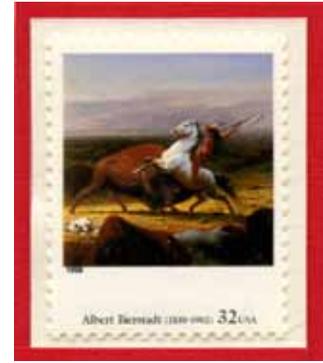


President U.S. Grant
(Definitive Issue)



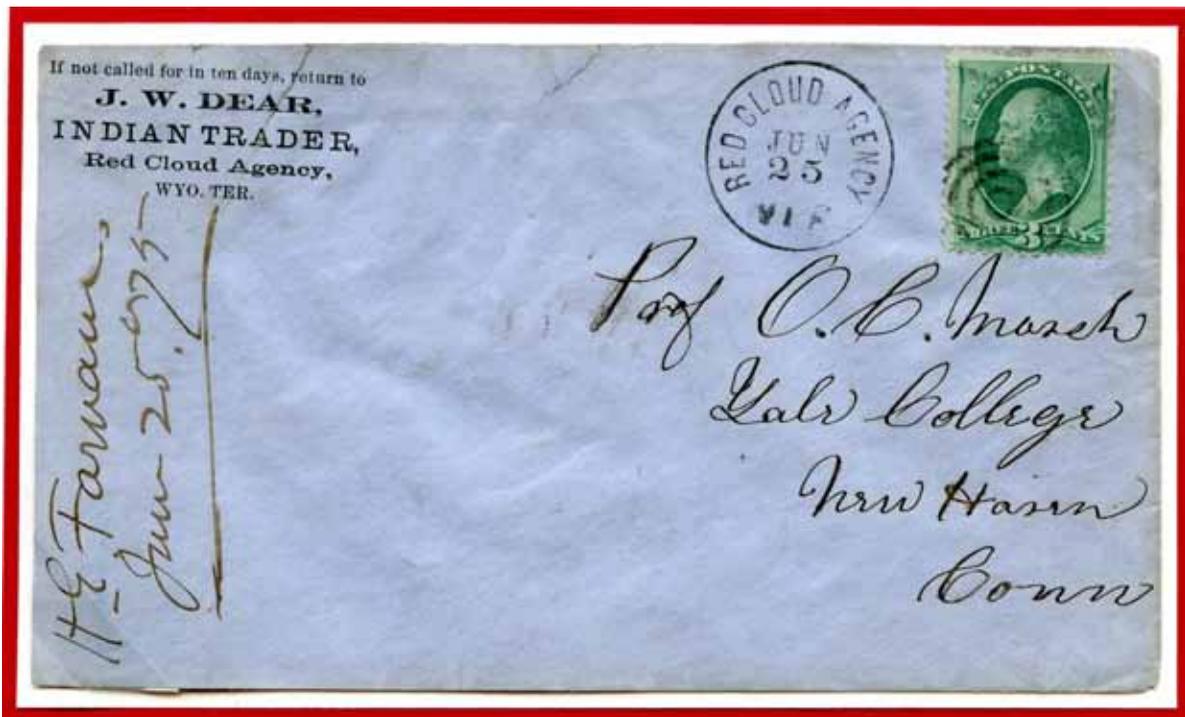
Chief Red Cloud
(U.S. Possession Issue)

Red Cloud was impressed with Marsh's continued efforts on behalf of the Sioux and named him "the best white man I've ever seen". Further explorations by Marsh's workers were always accompanied by Sioux braves to protect and guide the diggers. In 1880, Red Cloud visited Marsh in New Haven and the two men became fast friends.



Sioux Brave
(1st Class Rate as of 1 Jan 1995)

The cover below was posted from the Red Cloud Agency, WYO (Wyoming Territory) on 25 June 1875 (two digit year date noted in manuscript) and is addressed to Prof O.C. Marsh, Yale College, New Haven, Conn (Connecticut). Script docketing on the envelope's left side indicates the letter was posted by H.E. Farnam using an imprinted envelope of J.W. Dear, an Indian trader at the agency. This most likely indicates the letter's content was not trader or agency business, but an envelope used on behalf of a third party.



Letter addressed to O.C. Marsh from the Red Cloud Indian Agency, 25 June 1875

Only recorded example of mail to O.C. Marsh during springtime of 1875 from the Red Cloud Agency

As the contents are no longer with the cover, the following is speculation based on research to date from available historical information. Very little mail was sent from the Red Cloud Agency addressed to Marsh. This cover correlates with the reported springtime message sent by Red Cloud to Marsh and may well have been the one asking for assistance with his continuing problems with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. It's a gem of a cover and historical testimony to Marsh's presence and activity in Wyoming.