




BROWSE



 ***Archaeological Insights into the Custer Battle* by Douglas D. Scott and Richard A. Fox, Jr. (review)**

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Western American Literature

University of Nebraska Press

Volume 23, Number 3, Fall 1988

pp. 277-278

[10.1353/wal.1988.0205](https://doi.org/10.1353/wal.1988.0205)

REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviews 277 A Long Way to See, subtitled “Images and Voices of North Dakota,” has many photographs by Wayne Gudmundson, poems (more like unrhymed proems) by Michael Moos and an introduction by Lois Phillips Hudson (who now teaches fiction writing at the University of Washington in Seattle). Actually, this is a truly loving, soft-bound coffee table production, a monument to black and white photography that mostly views and celebrates the Red River Valley of the North. What a marvelously self-serving, self-congratulatory fantasy. There are no urban scenes in the entire book, though there are few collapsing, abandoned barn pictures either. Mostly what we see here is seemingly endless panoramas with almost no distinction or differentiation. Oh, some are frosted or dusted with snow. Perhaps this is the internal fantasy about what

North Dakota is really like. If so, it is appallingly similar to what the external fantasy of the state is, namely a cold and abandoned land, the amazingly boring, sensory deprivation capital of North America. Once again, North Dakota becomes celebrated as a mentally and physically healthy place to live. Emerson gets roundly quoted (did he ever visit North Dakota?) with such marvelously “looking out of the window” invocations as “The health of the eye seems to demand a horizon. We are never tired so long as we can see far enough” College writing teachers learn to name such statements “unsupported assertions.” Still, the B/W landscape photos might give some credence to this healthy Emersonian perspective if the photos were not uniformly and mercilessly bounded and enclosed by white borders. What one perceives with this arrangement is spatial limitation, not an endless horizon. The text by Hudson and Moos delivers anecdotal reminiscences in poetry and prose, getting backed into corners either by telling truly antique tales, or by making some amazing statements, such as Hudson’s thesis that, unlike the rest of the world, North Dakota people do not destroy their own habitat. Personally, I would feel a lot more comfortable about that statement if Hudson happened presently to be living in missile-rich North Dakota. It is true that with almost nothing to do up there, one’s personal narcissism can run wild. Perhaps, in a book with no pictures of communities or of any people, here is the rationale behind the Emersonian organization. But just once, I would like to see a book that makes some accounting for why so many generations have abandoned the state of North Dakota to live elsewhere, PATRICK D. MORROW *Auburn University Archaeological Insights into the Custer Battle*. By Douglas D. Scott and Richard A. Fox, Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987. 138 pages. \$9.95.) A chance grassfire in August, 1983, burned off 107 years of densely-matted grass and sagebrush that had accumulated on the battlefield where Custer and his men died. Subsequently, Richard Fox reconnoitered the denuded areas 278 *Western American Literature* and concluded that enough evidence of the battle remained to make a controlled archaeological survey worthwhile and “perhaps address some of the still unanswered questions about the battle.” A two-year, two-phase project was then designed, and this book describes phase one, the archaeological investigations of 1984, conducted at Custer Battlefield National Monument. The text, while meeting professional requirements for reporting methodology, excavations, inventory summaries, and artifact descriptions and analyses, has been written for general as well as scientific readers. However, the extreme care and attention to detail which archaeology requires may make portions of the text tedious reading for the non-scientist, although the firearms portion of chapter five should interest gun enthusiasts especially, as “it is the first time modern firearms-identification techniques have been applied to a battlefield situation.” What would seem to be of most interest to Custer buffs and also liable to spark new debate about the century-old mystery is found in the last chapter, where the authors interpret their finds. First, they identify the firearms used by the Indians and offer “at least a partial answer regarding the minimum number of guns used by the Indians.” A chronology and sequence of the battle follows, “derived from...

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PATRICK D. MORROW

Auburn University

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