

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

For Release December 18, 1979

Mark Trahant 202/343-7435

SECRETARY APPROVES LAND PURCHASE OF INDIAN RELIGIOUS SITE

Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus said today that he is approving the purchase by the United States of 120 acres of land at Bear Butte, South Dakota, for use by the Cheyenne and Arapahoe tribes. Bear Butte has religious significance for these and other Plains tribes

The land will be purchased with funds donated, by the private sector, to the Bureau of Indian Affairs for unspecified purposes.

Bear Butte is a lone mountain located on a prairie near Sturgis, South Dakota. It is generally thought that it was named after the likeness this mountain has to a bear sleeping on his belly, with the head to the east and the rump to the west.

Bear Butte is considered the site of the origin of the Cheyenne religion, between seven hundred and three thousand years ago. It is still used as a sacred place of worship.

The current owner of the land has allowed Indians access to the land for ceremonial purposes. Now he is ready to sell the land in order to protect the land for future ceremonial use.

The land--which will be placed in trust status--will be specifically purchased for the Cheyenne--Arapahoe Tribes of Oklahoma and the Northern Cheyenne Tribes of Montana, with a reserved right for access of other Indians for whom the area has traditional, religious significance.

Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Forrest J. Gerard said, "the purchase of these lands for the Cheyennes and Arapahoes will preserve their right to worship in their sacred grounds. We are moving to insure the cultural heritage of these tribes, for today's members as well as future generations."

The Congressional delegations of South Dakota, Montana, and Oklahoma have all requested the Interior Department to approve and purchase the property.

Local entities, such as the Sturgis Chamber of Commerce, have also recommended the U. S. purchase of the land for the Indians. The land is adjacent to a South Dakota State Park.