

## Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument Superintendent's Update, September 2011

Kate Hammond

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

As the flood waters of the Little Bighorn River recede and the dust settles from the temporary move of the museum collections, I am pleased to be back at work. Many thanks to Barbara ("B. J.") Johnson for filling in as acting superintendent during my maternity leave.

As of Sept. 30, visitation to the Battlefield is down about 3% compared to last year. Spring flooding, high gas prices and economic uncertainty may be contributing to these numbers.

### **Management Issues**

We continue to focus on addressing the four management issues that were the topic of public discussion over the past year: inadequate, undersized Visitor Center; insufficient museum collection storage; failing roads and insufficient parking; and significant portions of the Battlefield that remain unprotected.

Torrential rains and serious flooding this spring reaffirmed the perils of storing the Battlefield's precious museum collection in the Visitor Center. When the basement flooded, National Park Service (NPS) staff had fortunately boxed the museum and archival collections in preparation for their temporary relocation to the NPS's Western Archeological Conservation Center (WACC). That, and quick response by park staff, avoided any damage.

The majority of the park's museum collection that is not on display has been safely and temporarily relocated to its temporary home at WACC, the NPS's state of the art repository. A small number of ethnographic items remain temporarily onsite as the park works with the 17 historically associated tribes to address any potential Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act claims. Items on display in the museum exhibits will remain; objects on exhibit will continue to be rotated. White Swan Memorial Library remains onsite and is open to researchers by prior appointment. I would like to thank Friends of Little Bighorn for their generous donation that is supporting the digitization of the White Swan Library card catalog to make it more available to researchers. [See "*Battlefield Research Access*," Fall 2011 *Battlefield Dispatch*.]

Since April we have hosted a series of meetings between the NPS, Crow Tribe and Custer Battlefield Preservation Committee (CBPC) to discuss whether an agreement can be reached to allow for the construction of a new visitor center, museum collection storage facility and parking area outside of the current park boundaries, as called for in the park's 1986/1995 General Management Plan (GMP).

The GMP had proposed that these facilities be constructed on the southwest corner of the intersection of Highway 212 and the park entrance road. This coming year we will be doing some initial site planning and analysis of this proposed location as we continue the dialog with the Crow Tribe and CBPC.

An Alternative Transportation Feasibility Study will be starting this fall as well. The Battlefield has long-standing transportation challenges, including the fact that current parking lots and the existing tour road were not constructed to accommodate the number and size of today's vehicles safely. Alternative transportation including a shuttle bus system has been proposed as a possible solution since the 1986 GMP. The purpose of this project is to determine if alternative transportation (and what type) is economically feasible at the Battlefield, considering the park's location, visitation patterns, alternative transportation costs and possible funding sources.

### **Storm Damage**

Record-setting rain in May caused damage to portions of the Visitor Center basement, bookstore and roof. As a result of the intense rain, erosion and slumping occurred throughout the Battlefield. Deep Ravine Trail was seriously impacted and closed temporarily while our maintenance staff, in conjunction with a Montana Conservation Corps crew, made hasty temporary repairs to allow the trail to be reopened in time for the 135th Anniversary weekend. Additional erosion remediation projects are planned for the upcoming year.

### **Interpretive Projects**

The Long Range Interpretive Plan has been completed and we thank all stakeholders and tribes that assisted in its development. The second rough cut of the new 20 minute orientation film was sent to tribes and stakeholders for review. A project to replace the front desk in the Visitor Center is underway and should be completed by the end of the calendar year.

Three new podcasts are now up and running on our website. To view, go to the park's website [www.nps.gov/libi/](http://www.nps.gov/libi/). On the left side of screen click on "Photos and Multimedia," then click "Multimedia Presentations."

We are working with the 17 historically associated tribes to finalize the designs for the permanent interpretive panels for the Indian Memorial. We have hired a stone carver/artist to evaluate techniques for translating the designs into the granite medium.

I would like to thank the Friends volunteers for working the trails during the anniversary weekend, June 24-25, 2011. Volunteers helped provide information to visitors at Last Stand Hill, Indian Memorial, Deep Ravine and Keogh Trails, and Reno Benteen Battlefield.

### **Custer National Cemetery**

We continue to straighten headstones and to conduct other cyclic gravesite maintenance in the Custer National Cemetery. This summer work focused on Section C. Thanks to a donation from Friends of Little Bighorn Battlefield, we are developing two new porcelain enamel wayside exhibits about the Cemetery to replace outdated old-style plaques.

In years of drought, the Monument has insufficient water available to irrigate the Cemetery. This coming year, we will be starting a project to return a substantial portion of adjacent landscape to natural conditions, increase the water supply for cemetery irrigation and also reduce labor costs. The project will also restore degraded cemetery turf.

### **Cultural and Natural Resource Project**

We have started work on a Cultural Landscape Report that will outline specific treatment recommendations to restore the Battlefield and Cemetery landscapes. In association with this

project, we are updating the National Register nomination for Little Bighorn that was completed in 1987. We are conducting an evaluation of the park's Mission 66-era resources to determine if any are eligible for National Register listing.

Park non-native plant control activities continued this summer. Over 11 acres were treated using integrated pest management that includes manual, mechanical and chemical treatment methods. An Invasive Plant Management Plan for 10 Northern Rockies parks including Little Bighorn is complete.

Thanks to a donation from Friends of the Little Bighorn, we will produce and print at least 5000 copies of a "Potential Invaders" (weeds) flier as part of Little Bighorn's Early Detection Rapid Response strategy for invasive plants.

Friends also funded the purchase of curatorial supplies to store the Elizabeth Bacon Custer Collection at the WACC properly.

Subj: **Little Bighorn Battlefield NM Superintendent's Update**  
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Hello folks,  
Hope this email finds you well.

I am attaching the latest Superintendent's Update from Kate Hammond for your distribution.

(See attached file: Supt Update9.30.doc)

Thanks,

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Wednesday, November 02, 2011 AOL: CLeeNoyes