

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument Superintendent's Update, January 2011

Kate Hammond

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

Happy 2011! It's been a snowy winter thus far in Montana. I hope this update finds you enjoying better weather wherever you are.

On a personal note, my husband and I are thrilled that our family will be growing by one in April, when we are expecting the birth of our second child. Assuming all goes well, I plan to take three to four months off after the baby is born, so will miss much of the 2011 summer season, including the Anniversary of the Battle.

Public Engagement about LIBI Management Issues

It's been a busy fall and winter. As most of you know, the park embarked on a series of stakeholder, tribal and public meetings between July and December 2010 to discuss four big management issues with which Little Bighorn Battlefield (LIBI) has been struggling for more than 30 years. Those four issues are 1) an inadequate visitor center; 2) insufficient museum collections storage; 3) outdated roads and parking; and 4) park boundaries that don't adequately protect park resources.

The park's last major planning document—the 1986 General Management Plan—attempted to address these issues with some ambitious recommendations including relocating the Visitor Center to lands currently outside the park, an 11,400 acre boundary expansion and extending the park tour road several miles to loop back to I-90 near Garryowen. The National Park Service (NPS) has never been able to implement these recommendations for a variety reasons. We don't want to go another 30 years with these critical management issues unaddressed. So the purpose of meetings this summer, fall and early winter was to discuss these issues with the public, stakeholders, public, tribal leaders and elected officials in order to brainstorm possible solutions and to help the park determine if the 1986 General Management Plan is still valid. If it is, how do we make progress on implementing it? If not, then what?

Over the course of this effort, I had the opportunity to visit with our Congressional delegation, stakeholder groups, our historically associated tribes and interested parties. We hosted a formal government-to-government tribal consultation meeting with our associated tribes and a series of three face-to-face public meetings in Hardin, Billings and the Denver area as well as two Internet-based public meetings.

Over the course of these meetings I heard from over 150 individuals, representing themselves, various interest groups or various tribes. I am very pleased with the response that we received—many people took the time to ponder the issues and come up with some well-thought out feedback. There was consensus that the four issues are indeed serious and all expressed an interest in finding workable solutions. Over the coming weeks and months we will synthesize this input and formulate strategies as to how to move ahead. Thanks to all of you who participated and shared your comments.

Visitation

2010 calendar year visitation was 323,766, a 5.99% increase over 2009 when visitation was 305,463.

Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) & Cultural Landscape Report (CLR)

The CLI is now officially complete with concurrence from the Crow Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) and will be posted on the NPS website later this year. The CLI recommends changing the period of historical significance of the Battlefield—as reflected on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) nomination—from 1875-1899 to 1876-1940, that is to the year that administration of Little Bighorn Battlefield was transferred from the War Department to the NPS. The NRHP nomination of the park has not been updated since 1987 and it does not adequately address the landscape attributes of the Battlefield. We hope to find funding to update the nomination in the next few years. We also hope to begin development of a CLR later this year that will make actual treatment recommendations for the Battlefield landscape.

Historic Base Map Project and Environmental History Project

As previous updates have discussed, Paul Hutton, University of New Mexico, is working with LIBI and NPS Geographic Information System (GIS) staff at our regional office in Denver to develop an advanced GIS historic base map of the Battlefield. We also continue to work with Colorado State University on development of an environmental history. The project will use historic photography, maps, historic accounts and oral history to develop an understanding of how the Battlefield looked in 1876.

“History Uncovered” LIBI Archeological Overview & Assessment

Doug Scott has completed his archeological overview and assessment entitled “Uncovering History: The Legacy of Archeological Investigations at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument.” Scott’s work (which was funded by a \$10,000 donation from Friends of Little Bighorn Battlefield) provides the first ever in-depth review of archeology at the park and will be a valuable resource for NPS staff and the public. This important document is scheduled for publication by Friends in 2011. More information on this project may be accessed at www.FriendsLittleBighorn.com.

Little Bighorn River Oxbow Archeological Survey

In July 2010 Doug Scott led an archeological survey investigation to determine if historic metal artifacts from the Battle were present on three oxbows on the Little Bighorn River within the Custer Battlefield unit to mitigate their potential future loss by erosion and river course changes. The survey utilized standard metal detection and a new pulse induction system that locates deeply buried metal objects. The survey revealed valuable data on artifact concentrations that were post-battle and 20th century.

Scott also conducted an analysis of the Little Bighorn River channel using a series of historic topographic maps that were overlaid onto modern aerial photographs. The results will help us understand the dynamics of the river and potential areas of concern and to identify the riparian zone and its long-term effects on resources. *[Please refer to 2010 Greasy Grass article by Douglas Scott and Michael Donahue. Ed.]*

Scott also sampled artifacts on Greasy Grass Ridge and Finley-Finckle Ridge that provided additional data on firearm types and use during the Battle. His final report is available at www.friendslittlebighorn.com. I wish to thank Bob Reece and Friends of LIBI for their \$5000 donation to fund this important survey.

Northern Rocky Mountains Invasive Plant Management Plan Environmental Assessment

LIBI is participating with nine other National Park Service units in the development of an Environmental Assessment (EA) looking at alternative approaches to invasive plant management.

NPS intends to continue managing nonnative invasive plants at LIBI and nine other parks in Montana, Wyoming, Idaho and Utah. The purpose of this plan is to reduce the adverse effects of nonnative invasive plants on native plant communities and other natural and cultural resources within the 10 parks.

During preparation of this plan, the 10 partner parks consulted with other federal and state agencies, counties, Native American Indian tribes and the general public. NPS has completed its internal review of the EA, which will be released in January 2011 for public review for 45 days. *[See February 16, 2011 LIBI news release. Ed.]* During this review period LIBI will consult with the THPO to affirm determination of effect.

Historic Photograph and 7th Cavalry War Record Digitization

We are continuing to make progress on the digitization of approximately 2000 original historic 19th Century photographs, glass lantern slides and historic color slides from our museum and library collections. An updated photographic register will be created and made available to the public as well as on site access to many images through an interpretive kiosk at the Visitor Center. We are also making progress on digitizing many of the 7th Cavalry historic records, a project that is being supported by a generous donation from CBHMA.

Interpretive Plan/New Film/Cell Phone Stations

For the past year we have been working closely with stakeholders and our associated tribes on our Long Range Interpretive Plan. It will be completed in 2011 and guide the park's interpretive programs and projects for the next 5 to 10 years. *[CBHMA President Ted Heath participated in two such interpretive workshops. Ed.]*

A new 20 minute orientation film is also being created and should be completed in the fall of 2011. The overriding theme is the *causes and consequences* of the Battle of the Little Bighorn rather than the Battle itself. This is a new approach for an interpretive film at the park. We have worked closely with the 17 associated tribes and stakeholders in its development.

In 2010 the 30-station "OnCell" phone tour was completed and enjoyed by 13,616 calls in 2010. Visitors can experience this tour by dialing an indicated number on their cell phones at designated locations within the park and listen to short interpretive messages about that location. The OnCell company has recently informed us that LIBI has taken the lead in the number of cell phone tour "hits" over any other battlefield that it manages.

LIBI Interpretive Division has initiated a multi-faceted educational program in 2010-2011. The two year project involved creating a "traveling trunk," arranging children's battlefield activities, updating the Junior Ranger program and revising teacher/student resources that the Battlefield sends to teachers and students upon request. We are reaching out to the younger population who visit our site as well as extending educational opportunities to local schools. [A photo of the "travelling trunk" appeared in the *Fall Dispatch*. Ed.]

135th Anniversary

2011 will mark the 135th Anniversary of the Battle of the Little Bighorn. We are still in the early planning stage of coordinating events for June 24-26, 2011 and will have additional information in the next update. The NPS, as steward of this special place, has traditionally served as host to our related organizations, affiliated tribes, Battle descendants and visitors during the anniversary observance. I encourage everyone to participate actively and attend the many unique anniversary activities at this special time at Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument.

Maintenance Division

I am pleased to announce that we have selected a new Facility Manager, Rene Laya, to replace Lonnie Hergenrider, who transferred to Denali National Park last fall. Rene has a cultural resource preservation and maintenance background and comes to us from Fort Davis National Historic Site in Texas. We anticipate that he will start at the Battlefield in early February. Les Frickle has done a wonderful job as Acting Facility Manager in the interim.

The maintenance building received new energy efficient and safety compliant electric and manually operated garage bay doors this past fall. The front screen door of the Old Stone House was damaged beyond repair last spring by extreme wind gusts of over 70 miles per hour. A new historic replica of the door built by local vendors will be installed in 2011. Plans are underway this year for installation of an ADA compliant lift in the Administration Building to provide universal accessibility to the second floor training area. The Recreational Fee Demonstration program [*park entrance fees*] will fund this project. The old water pump house system near the Little Bighorn River that supplies all of the water at LIBI is scheduled to be upgraded this year.

Custer National Cemetery

Continued realignment of headstones in Section F, Custer National Cemetery by seasonal staff in 2010 has received many visitor compliments. Such work will continue for several years. There were seven interments in 2010 and two authorized scatterings of veteran cremains.

Friends of Little Bighorn

During the Friends general membership meeting on June 26, 2010 Friends President Bob Reece and [I] signed an extension of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for another year until a revised MOA is completed.

Friends have a great line-up of events planned for June 25-26, 2011. You can volunteer to interpret the Battle along the trails or attend their annual program. For more information on these events and on-line registration, visit the Friends website at www.friendslittlebighorn.com. I also encourage all of you to join and become actively involved.

*We thank Superintendent Hammond for this comprehensive overview of the many significant accomplishments and initiatives at Little Bighorn Battlefield. A condensed version of her report appeared in the Winter 2011 **Battlefield Dispatch**. Ed.*

Subj: **January 2011 LIBI Superintendent's Update**
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Bob & Lee:

Please find attached the January 2011 Superintendent's Update from Kate as requested. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

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(See attached file: Superintendent Update January 2011.doc)

Wednesday, March 23, 2011 AOL: CLeeNoyes