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National Park Service  
Cultural Landscapes Inventory  
2010



Sunrise over Battle Ridge: Indian Memorial & 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Memorial (John A. Doerner, NPS-LIBI)

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument



Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning  
February 2010



**Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning  
Utah State University, Logan, Utah 84322**

**February 2010**

Principal Investigator – Associate Professor Michael Timmons  
Graduate Research Assistant – Emily Wheeler

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**Completed in fulfillment of  
Rocky Mountain Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit  
Cooperative Agreement #H1200400**

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## Inventory Unit Summary and Site Plan

Cultural Landscape Inventory Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Cultural Landscape Inventory Number: Number

Parent Cultural Landscape Inventory Name: Name

Parent Cultural Landscape Inventory Number: Number

Park Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Park Alpha Code: LIBI

Park Org Code: 1380

### Landscape/Component Landscape Description:

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (formerly Custer Battlefield National Monument and referred to here as "the monument") is located in Big Horn County, southeast Montana, on the right bank (east side) of the Little Bighorn River, at Lat. 45.5689748, Long. 107.43362, and comprises 765.34 acres. The acreage is divided into two separate parcels of land: the Custer Battlefield Historic District (includes Last Stand Hill, Indian Memorial, visitor center/museum, Custer National Cemetery, & Stone House-NPS buildings/housing); and the Reno-Benteen Battlefield, located 5 miles south, consisting of 162 acres. The land between the two battlefields is under private ownership. The right-of-way for the battlefield road (Route 10) connecting the two battlefields was granted to the War Department on June 28, 1938 by the respective landowners. The entire monument lies within the Crow Indian Reservation, one of seven Indian reservations in Montana. The monument is serviced by Interstate 90 (1 mile west), leading to the nearest large cities of Billings, Montana, 65 miles to the northwest, and Sheridan, Wyoming 72 miles to the southeast and by U.S. Highway 212 (1/4 mile northeast), which connects the monument to the Black Hills in South Dakota. The town of Crow Agency is located 2 miles north, Hardin 15 miles northwest of the battlefield, and Busby (located on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation) is 25 miles east via HWY 212. The monument consists of natural hills and hogback ridges cut by ravines and coulees, which lead to the Little Bighorn River. The river is flanked on the east (battlefield) side by steep bluffs and on the opposite side by the broad Little Bighorn Valley. The vegetation is mainly native grasses, sagebrush, yucca, and prickly pear cactus across the upland grassland. Western snowberry, common chokecherry, and Rocky Mountain juniper inhabit the ravines, and green ash, box elder and cottonwoods occupy the riparian zone.

The battle was a major conflict of the Sioux War of 1876-1877. Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument commemorates one of America's most famous battles, the Battle of the Little Bighorn (known to the victors as the Battle of the Greasy Grass). Here, two culturally divergent forces clashed in a life and death struggle, one to perpetuate national expansion, and the other to preserve a traditional nomadic way of life. A large coalition of Lakota Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho gathered together along the Greasy Grass River (Little Bighorn) under the political and spiritual leadership of Tatanka Iyotaka (Sitting Bull), rejecting the government edict to move to the reservation, preferring instead the nomadic way of life of their forefathers. On 25 June 1876 they annihilated Lt. Col. George A. Custer and five companies of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry under his command, and laid siege to the remaining seven companies for 36 horrific hours before finally withdrawing after their scouts reported another army column converging toward them from the north (Col. John Gibbon's Montana Column). The defeat of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry shocked the nation in the midst of celebrating America's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its independence from Great Britain, however to the Lakota Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho, it was their greatest victory against the United States in their long struggle to retain their nomadic way of life (Doerner).

Following the failure of the U.S. Government to purchase the sacred Pa Ha Sapa “Black Hills” from the Lakota Sioux earlier in 1875, Indian runners were sent out in December to all non-reservation Lakota Sioux and Cheyenne Indians in the region, requiring them to report to the reservations by January 31, 1876 or be deemed “hostile” and forced in by the U.S. Army. This was clearly a reversal of President Grant’s Indian Policy, bowing to political pressure to extract gold from the Black Hills to bring the nation out of financial recession, and legally allow a flood of prospectors and settlers in the region in violation of Article 2 of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, which forbade trespass or settlement on the Great Sioux Reservation and their sacred Black Hills. The non-reservation Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho, under the leadership of Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Two Moons, Lame White Man and others who were in winter camp in Powder River Country of eastern Montana ignored the summons, and after two battles with forces under Gen. George Crook, moved west to the Little Bighorn valley in late June in search of buffalo and antelope to feed their families. Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer, leading the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, spotted the village and, fearing the Indians would flee, attacked on the morning of June 25, 1876. During the ensuing battle, all the men under Custer’s immediate command (210 men) were annihilated, and seven companies under Reno and Benteen held out at their defense site until the main army column finally arrived on June 27, 1876. Total 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry casualties numbered 268 killed or mortally wounded. The number of Lakota and Cheyenne casualties is not known, but has been estimated at over 100 killed or mortally wounded. Victory over Custer and his 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry however, was short lived. The death of the much-admired Custer and his command shocked the nation and the army renewed the Campaign, ultimately ending the Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho nomadic way of life forever (Doerner).

Custer’s men were hastily buried following the battle in shallow graves marked with crude cedar stakes from tipi poles from the abandoned Indian village. The following year Custer, 10 officers and two civilians were transferred to eastern cemeteries. In 1881 the remaining 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalrymen were placed in a mass grave on Last Stand Hill. Lakota and Cheyenne casualties were placed in tipis and burial scaffolds, or interred along hillsides or sandstone outcroppings in the Little Bighorn valley. Families later erected stone cairns at many casualty sites to preserve the location where their loved ones died or were mortally wounded. In 1890, white marble markers replaced the original 7th Cavalry burial stakes, leaving a unique record of where the soldiers fell on the field that provides a visual understanding of the battle absent from most battlefields. The need to honor the fallen men also led to the designation of the site as a national cemetery, and subsequent reinterments from Indian War forts and burials from U.S. wars fill the cemetery. Because of the important cultural associations of the battle beginning immediately after it occurred, the battlefield has also been the site of cultural disputes, especially by Native Americans demanding more recognition. Beginning in 1999, the National Park Service began erecting red granite markers for Cheyenne and Lakota warrior casualties from the battle, and in 2003 the Indian Memorial was dedicated. These two historically significant changes are important additions to the powerful cultural landscape and provide a unique interpretive balance and perspective that was lacking for over 120 years. Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument now acknowledges both the U.S. Army and the Cheyenne and Lakota sacrifice and loss that occurred during the battle, and provides long-overdue interpretive balance to the story for universal populations of park visitors (Doerner).

#### Integrity and condition:

Though many alterations have occurred at Little Bighorn Battlefield over the years, the site retains integrity and the condition is good.

Inventory Unit Size (Acres): 765.3 acres

Property Level: Landscape

CLI Hierarchy Description:

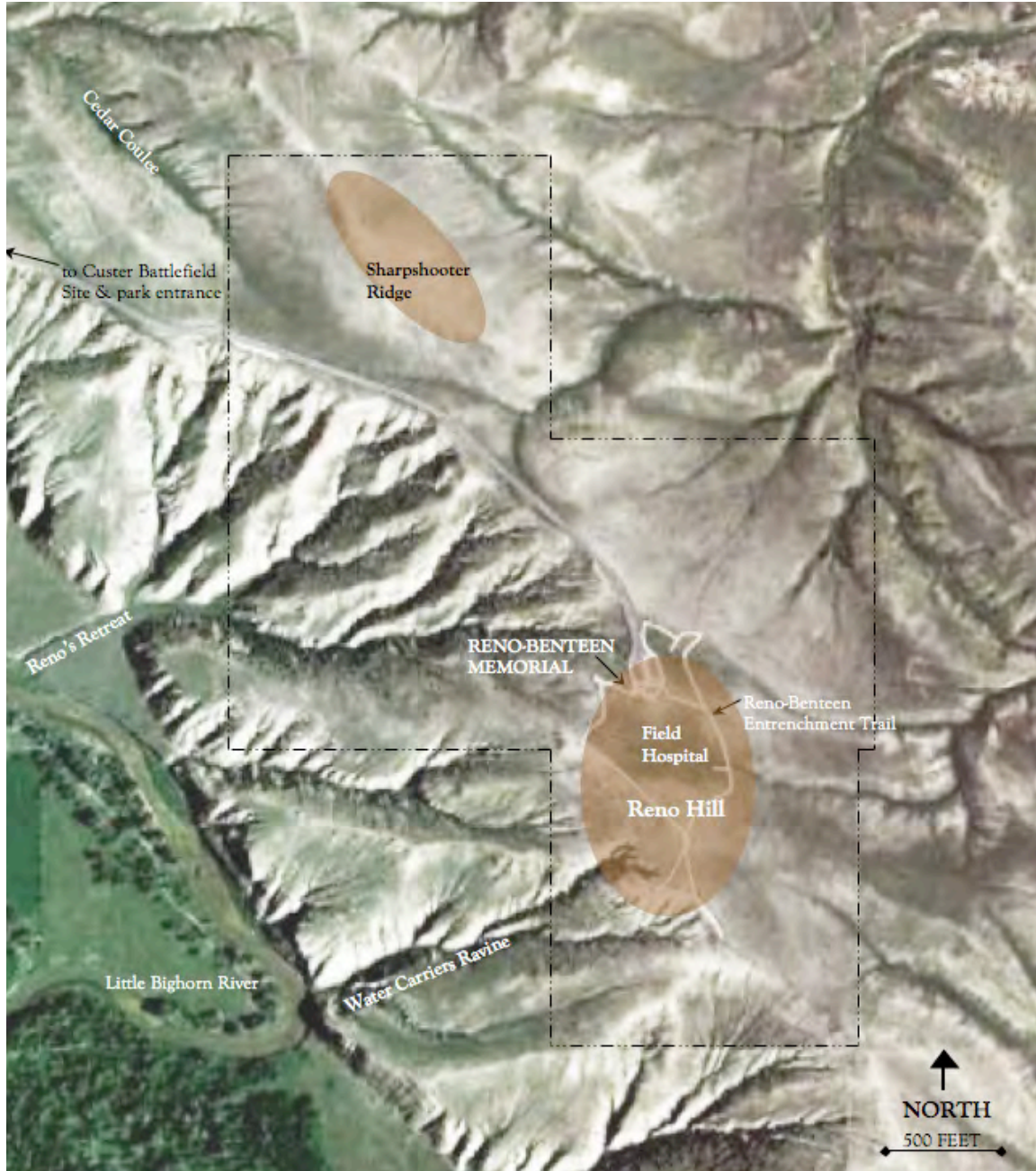
### Site Plan Graphic Information



**Custer Battlefield Historic District -- 2007 Conditions**  
(Aerial photography from Google Earth, 2005 image)



## Site Plan Graphic Information



**Reno Benteen Historic Site -- 2007 Conditions**  
(Aerial photography from Google Earth, 2005 image)

## Concurrence Status

Cultural Landscape Inventory Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Cultural Landscape Inventory Number: Number

Parent Cultural Landscape Inventory Name: Name

Parent Cultural Landscape Inventory Number: Number

Park Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Park Alpha Code: LIBI

Park Org Code: 1380

Inventory Status: Incomplete

Hide Inventory Unit:

Completion Status Explanatory Narrative:

Park Superintendent Concurrence:

Date of Superintendent Concurrence

National Register Eligibility:

National Register Eligibility  
Concurrence Date (SHPO/Keeper):

## Concurrence Graphic Information

### Revisions



## Geographic Information and Location Map

Cultural Landscape Inventory Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Cultural Landscape Inventory Number: Number

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Park Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

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### Inventory Unit Boundary Description:

The CLI boundaries are the same as the National Register District boundaries, which match the National Monument boundaries.

### Verbal Boundary Descriptions (from National Register Nomination Form)

“The Custer Battlefield Historic District boundary is delineated by an irregular rectangle whose vertices are marked by the following UTM reference points: A 13 310750 5049540, B 13 311640 5048110, C 13 310560 5047400, and D 13 309440 5048610. The boundary follows the National Monument boundary.”

“The Reno-Benteen site is delineated by an irregular shaped area whose vertices are marked by the following UTM reference points: A 13 313880 5044200, B 13 314270 5044200, C 13 314280 5043800, D 13 314630 5043780, E 13 314640 5043370, F 13 314610 5043360, G 13 314600 5042960, H 13 314220 5042980, I 13 314250 5043390, and J 13 313840 5043390. The boundary follows the National Monument Boundary.”

Park Management Unit:

Land Tract Number (s):

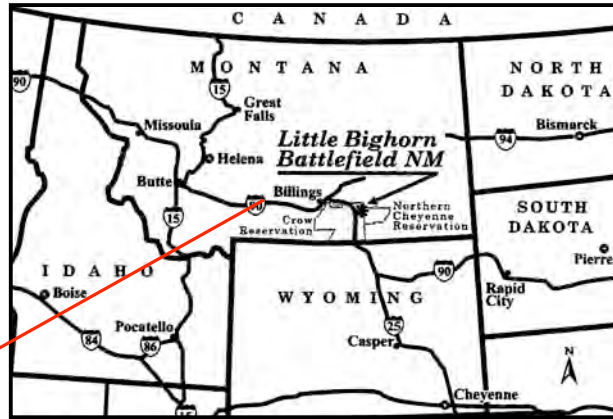
GIS File Name:

GIS File Description:

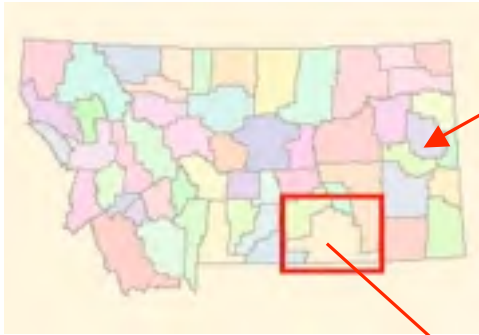
### Counties and States

State: Montana

County: Big Horn



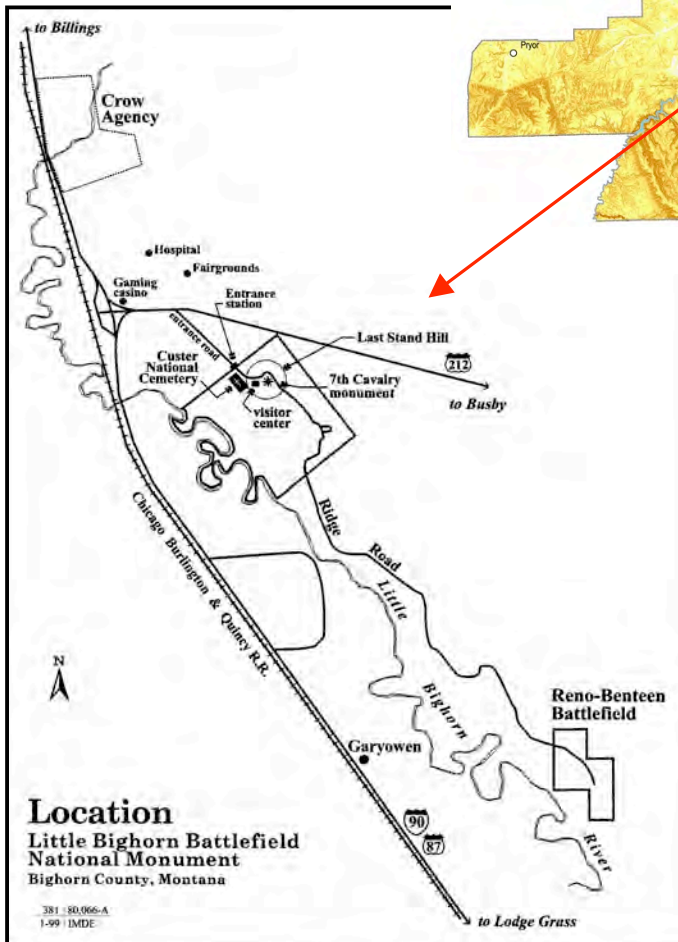
Region



State of Montana



Big Horn County



## Boundary UTM

| Boundary Source | Boundary Point Type | Boundary UTM Datum | Boundary UTM Zone | Boundary UTM Easting | Boundary UTM Northing |
|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|

USGS Map  
1:24,000

Area

NAD27

13

### 1. Custer Battlefield Historic District

|   |        |         |
|---|--------|---------|
| A | 310750 | 5049540 |
| B | 311640 | 5048110 |
| C | 310560 | 5047400 |
| D | 309440 | 5048610 |

### 2. Reno-Benteen Site

|   |        |         |
|---|--------|---------|
| A | 313880 | 5044200 |
| B | 314270 | 5044200 |
| C | 314280 | 5043800 |
| D | 314630 | 5043780 |
| E | 314640 | 5043370 |
| F | 314610 | 5043360 |
| G | 314600 | 5042960 |
| H | 314220 | 5042980 |
| I | 314250 | 5043390 |
| J | 313840 | 5043390 |

## Regional Landscape Context

### Physiographic:

Jerome Greene offers the following description of the physiographic setting of the site in his administrative history of Little Bighorn, *Stricken Field*:

The Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument is “part of the Missouri Plateau section of the Great Plains Physiographic Province, characterized by eroded uplifts and terraced lands segregated by myriad streams, and whose gravelly soils of sand, clay, and volcanic ash run from yellowish to ash gray in color. They are the products of all preceding geologic periods, including a time when much of present-day Montana comprised inland seas, as evidenced by the fossil of a Mesozoic-era plesiosaur excavated in the Custer National Cemetery.” To the southwest are the Big-Horn Mountains, which angle to the northwest, as does the Pryor Range to the west. To the east is the Davis range [also the name of the northern tip of the Wolf Mountains] and the Wolf or Little Chéetish Mountains [also known as the Rosebud Mountains]. The battlefield lies some 2,750 feet above sea level, and comprises the lowlands portion of Big Horn County. It is further defined by the presence of vast sandstone and shale formations topped by depositions of sand and gravel.

“The climate is semiarid, with precipitation averaging around sixteen inches per year. Winds are common and typify much of the winter season, when temperatures can reach -50 with the chill factor. Conversely, at the height of summer, temperatures average in the 60s or 70s, with extreme highs occasionally climbing to 100 degrees or more.” “Southeast Montana is an area of short grasslands sparsely punctuated in the higher elevations by scattered scrub pine and cedar trees. Cottonwood, poplar, ash, willow, alder, and other deciduous trees abound along tributary streams, such as the Little Bighorn.” Ground cover is made up of diverse grasses – including wheat grass, bluestem, and grama – along with prickly pear cactus, yucca, and sagebrush (Greene, 4,5). Wildlife includes white-tailed and mule deer, coyote, porcupine, grouse, silver-haired bat, northern grasshopper mouse, prairie rattlesnake, and other species.

### Cultural/Ethnographic:

The Little Bighorn area of southeastern Montana has been home to various Native American tribes since prehistoric times. Archaeological evidence suggests that human activities have taken place in the region for the last 10,000 years. Throughout most of that time, people using the area practiced a highly mobile hunting and gathering subsistence. Nomadic tribes demonstrating a bison-centered lifestyle characterize the historic period beginning around 200 years ago. The Apsáalooke people had entered the area by the early 1600s, and acquired horses by the beginning of the 1800s. Apsáalooke, meaning “children of the large-beaked bird”, was later misinterpreted by white people as “Crow.”

Although the Little Bighorn was acquired by the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, few whites aside from sporadic traders and explorers ventured into the area before the late 1800s. With the discovery of gold bringing eager prospectors, and the westward migration fueled by manifest destiny, increasing conflict between the native population and the Anglo newcomers was inevitable. Tensions were further increased by strife between the Crow population, and neighboring Lakotas, Cheyennes, Arapahos, and Blackfeet who began to encroach into the region by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The resulting Great Sioux War of 1876-77, of which the Battle of Little Bighorn was one of many skirmishes, was part of the Indian Wars occupying much of the latter part of the century.

In the 1870’s, the Little Bighorn valley was on a part of the Crow reservation that had been invaded by non-reservation Lakota Sioux, Cheyenne, and other tribes who were hostile to the

U.S. government and white settlers who had begun invading their homelands. The area was important to both the Crow and the non-reservation Lakota Sioux and their Cheyenne and Arapaho allies because for generations it provided game and shelter for them to continue to live their traditional nomadic lifestyle, living off the land and following the ever dwindling buffalo herds. Whites had come to the area previously in small numbers for fur trading and trapping, but were beginning to invade the Lakota Sioux, Cheyenne, and Crow homelands in large numbers as they ventured to western Montana in search of gold or new land. A year after the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Fort Custer was established north of the battlefield as part of the Sioux Wars of 1876-1877 to help protect the Crow from their Lakota and Cheyenne enemies. Following the battle, the Crow regained control of the area as part of their reservation. The battlefield retained significance to participating cultures for different reasons. The Anglo population saw Custer's defeat on the site as martyrdom in the cause of advancing civilization across the plains. To the Lakota Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho, it was a place of victory in defending their way of life. And to the Arikara and Crow, it was a site honoring their participation as U.S. Indian Scouts fighting their traditional enemies, and where they kept the history of the battle alive through oral history, honor songs, and Indian Scout Veteran associations. In the 1960s and 70s the battlefield was the source of cultural conflict as the American Indian Movement (AIM) and other activist groups sought for inclusion of the Indian viewpoint in the park's interpretive program, while others sought to maintain the site's dedication to Custer and the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry.

The change of the park's name from Custer Battlefield National Monument to Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument in 1991 and the dedication of the Indian Memorial in 2003 are evidences of great change that has taken place at the monument. From an ethnographic perspective, the battle became, and remains to this day, a significant symbolic event for two major cultural groups (Indian and non-Indian) seeking to maintain their respective values and life ways in the face of cross-cultural contact and conflict. Today the healing process is evident in the theme of the Indian Memorial dedication at Little Bighorn Battlefield: "Peace Through Unity." Diverse groups each visit Little Bighorn and reflect upon the battle fought here in their own unique way. Indian visitors remember this battle as their greatest victory over the U.S. Army (west of the Mississippi River) and the high point of their traditional way of life, while also remembering the sacrifices and losses resulting from the battle (Doerner).

Today the monument remains culturally important to the tribes associated with its history. The Little Bighorn area comprises a portion of the Crow Reservation, so this CLI includes more details about the Crow than the other associated tribes, but this is not a reflection of the importance of the site to the other tribes. About 75 percent of the Crow tribe's approximately 11,000 or more enrolled members live on or near the reservation. Eighty-five percent of tribal members speak Crow (part of the greater Siouan language family) as their first language, and many also use a writing system known as Apsáalooke ammaalaátuua. Each August the Crow Fair, held on fairgrounds located about 2 miles from Little Bighorn Battlefield, draws many more tribal members and visitors to the area. (Crow Tribe website)

#### Political:

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument is located in Big Horn County, southeast Montana, on the right bank (east side) of the Little Bighorn River, at Lat. 45.5689748, Long. 107.43362, and comprises 765.34 acres. The acreage is divided into two separate parcels of land: the Custer Battlefield Historic District (includes Last Stand Hill, Indian Memorial, visitor center/museum, Custer National Cemetery, & Stone House-NPS buildings/housing); and the Reno-Benteen Battlefield, located 5 miles south, consisting of 162 acres. The land between the two battlefields is under private ownership. The right-of-way for the battlefield road (Route 10) connecting the two battlefields was originally granted to the War Department on June 28, 1938 by the respective landowners for public purposes.

The entire monument lies within the Crow Indian Reservation, one of seven Indian reservations in Montana. It is just 25 miles west of Busby, Montana and the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. The surrounding land is used for agriculture including livestock grazing, gravel mining, and commercial ventures related to tourism. The monument is serviced by Interstate 90 (1 mile west), and U.S. Highway 212 (1/4 mile northeast), which connects the monument to the Black Hills in South Dakota and Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. The town of Crow Agency is located 2 miles north, and Hardin 15 miles northwest of the battlefield. The nearest cities are Billings, Montana 65 miles northwest via I-90 & I-94, and Sheridan, Wyoming located 72 miles southeast via I-90.

Associated communities and groups include the Lakota Sioux (divided into the seven bands or council fires of Itazipzo/Sans Arc, Minniconjou, Oo-Henumpa/Two Kettles, Siha Sapa/Blackfeet, Oglala, Sicangu/Burnt Thigh and Hunkpapa), Dakota Sioux/Hunkpati, Nakota Sioux/Assiniboine, Crow, Northern Cheyenne, Southern Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Arikara Indian tribes, the Friends of Little Bighorn Battlefield, Custer Battlefield Historical and Museum Association, Custer Battlefield Preservation Committee, Little Bighorn Associates, and the Order of Indian Wars.

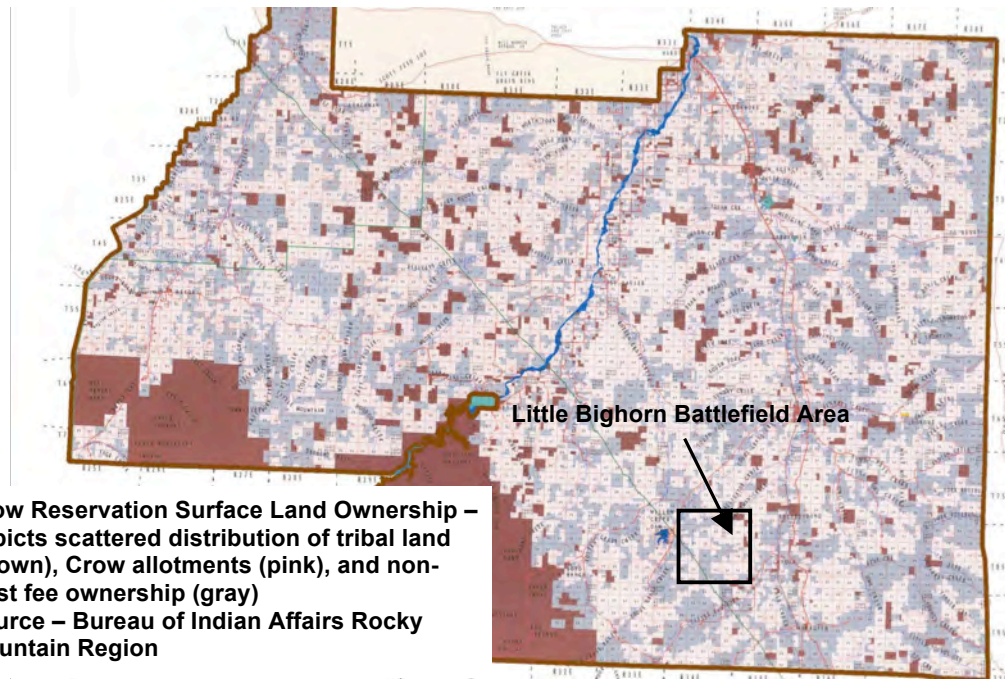
The Crow Tribe website, <http://www.crowtribe.com/about.htm>, contains the following information about the tribe and the reservation, from which it is paraphrased: The 2.3 million acre Crow (Apsáalooke) Indian Reservation is located in the south central part of the state, and bordered by Wyoming to the south and the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation to the east. The Crow Tribe signed treaties with the U.S. Government in 1825, 1851, and 1868, defining its relationship with the United States, establishing its boundaries, and recognizing the Tribe's rights as a sovereign government. The Crow Indian Reservation was established by the Treaty of 1851.

The tribal government, as a sovereign entity, maintains jurisdiction within the external boundaries of the reservation over all lands, rights-of-way, waterways, watercourses and streams, as allowed or limited by Supreme Court case law. The Crow Tribal General Council as governing body of the Crow Tribe of Indians adopted a new constitution in 2002, establishing a three-part government comprised of Executive, Legislative and Judicial Branches. The Crow Tribal Administration's facilities are located in Crow Agency, which is also the business district of the reservation.

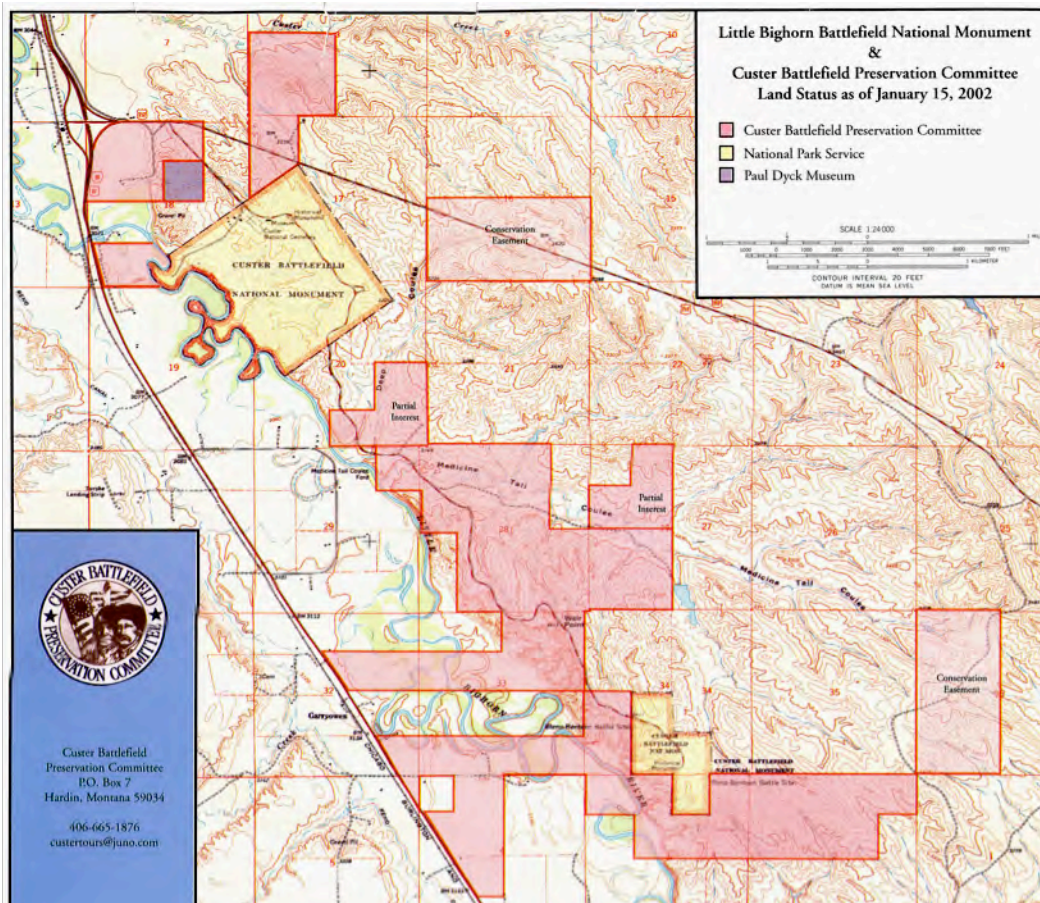
Land ownership within the Reservation is rather complex. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the federal government, hoping to turn the Indians into farmers and assimilate them into white society, allotted Crow Reservation lands to individual tribal members. According to recent Bureau of Land Management figures, ownership within the reservation is 45% Crow allotments, 20% Crow Nation trust land and 35% non-Indian fee land. Much of the privately owned Crow Indian Reservation land base has been decimated by fractionated ownership of various allotments. The Crow have numerous parcels of allotted lands that have more than 10 owners and sometimes more than 100 owners. (Venne)

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument comprises 765 acres surrounded by reservation land. Various attempts have been made over the years to secure broader control over land development of adjacent parcels. The 1986 "Custer Battlefield National Monument General Management Plan" proposed extensive land acquisition, and a complete restructuring of the way the site is interpreted, but did not advance due to cost concerns, lack of enabling legislation, and the potential need to relocate families in the area of consideration. The Custer Battlefield Preservation Committee (CBPC), a private nonprofit group, uses donations to purchase private land around the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, with the ultimate goal of returning the land to the federal government for preservation. As of January, 2002, the CBPC controlled 3,500 acres of land surrounding the 765-acre national monument.





**Crow Reservation Surface Land Ownership – depicts scattered distribution of tribal land (brown), Crow allotments (pink), and non-trust fee ownership (gray)**  
**Source – Bureau of Indian Affairs Rocky Mountain Region**



**Land Ownership (LIBI = yellow, CBPC = pink)**  
**Source: Custer Battlefield Preservation Committee, 2002**

## Management Information

Cultural Landscape Inventory Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Cultural Landscape Inventory Number: Number (automatic)

Parent Cultural Landscape Inventory Name: Name

Parent Cultural Landscape Inventory Number: Number

Park Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Park Alpha Code: LIBI

Park Org Code: 1380

Management Category:

Management Category Date:

Management Category Explanatory Narrative:

Do Adjacent Lands Contribute? Yes

### Adjacent Lands Description:

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument is surrounded by lands that are part of the Crow Reservation. Many of these lands outside of the monument were part of or significant to the battle, such as the Crow's Nest, Reno Creek, Lone Tipi (Indian Encampment during Battle of the Rosebud on June 17, 1876), Reno's Crossing (Ford A), Sitting Bull's village, Indian Pony Herd Grazing Sites, Reno's Skirmish line, Shoulder Blade Creek (Warrior Staging Area), Reno's Retreat Crossing (Ford B), Medicine Tail Coulee, Luce Ridge, Nye-Cartwright Ridge, Minnikojou Ford (Ford C), Deep Coulee, Ford D, and Helpless Ones' Ravine, also known historically by the culturally insensitive name Squaw Ravine. Though some of these lands remain relatively pristine and contribute to the sense of place at Little Bighorn, others have been encroached upon by commercial development related to tourism at the park, a railroad and Interstate highway transportation corridor, and agricultural and residential uses, including extensive horse and cattle grazing, by members of the Crow tribe and non-tribal members.

### Adjacent Lands Graphic Information

#### Management Agreement

#### NPS Legal Interest

Type of Legal Interest: fee simple

Fee Simple Reservation for Life:

Fee Simple Reservation Expiration Date:

Other Organization/Agency:

NPS Legal Interest Explanatory Narrative:

#### Public Access to Site

Public Access:

Unrestricted

Public Access Explanatory Narrative:

**FMSS Asset**

## National Register Information

Cultural Landscape Inventory Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Cultural Landscape Inventory Number: Number

Parent Cultural Landscape Inventory Name: Name

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Park Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Park Alpha Code: LIBI

Park Org Code: 1380

National Register Landscape Documentation: Entered - Inadequately Documented

National Register Reference Number: 66000428, Smithsonian number 24BH2175

### National Register Explanatory Narrative:

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument was administratively listed on October 15, 1966, and further recorded on the List of Classified Structures on November 15, 1982. In 1985 a nomination was submitted for the entire monument called "Custer Battlefield National Monument (Multiple Resource Nomination)". NRHP documentation was not entered until May 1, 1987, and does not adequately address the landscape attributes of the site. The 1987 NRHP documentation includes two nominations, one for the Custer site and one for the Reno-Benteen site. It lists the period of significance as 1875, the year before the battle, to 1899, an apparently arbitrary cut-off date. This CLI proposes that the period of significance should be extended to 1940, when the property was transferred from the War Department to the Department of the Interior. By that date, the majority of the current site plan had been established or set in motion.

National Register Eligibility: Listed

National Register Eligibility Concurrence Date:

National Register Concurrence Explanatory Narrative:

National Register Significance Level: National

National Register Significance Contributing/Individual: Individual

National Register Classification: Multiple Resource; District

National Historic Landmark Status:

National Historic Landmark Date:

National Historic Landmark Theme:

World Heritage Site Status: not listed

World Heritage Site Date:

World Heritage Category:

### Statement of Significance:

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument was initially listed on the National Register of Historic Places on October 15, 1966, by administrative action. A detailed nomination form was subsequently submitted on March 18, 1987, and entered on May 1, 1987. This CLI proposes an adjustment to the period of significance, and adds a higher level of detailed descriptions of the features and the cultural landscape as a whole.

When evaluated within its historic context, a property must be shown to be significant for *one or more of the four Criteria for Evaluation - A, B, C, or D*. The Criteria describe how properties are significant for their association with important events or persons, for their importance in design or construction, or for their information potential. (Bulletin 15)

The Battle of Little Bighorn was a landmark episode in the struggle between Native Americans and Anglo and other settlers expanding westward across North America. As noted in the Statement of Significance on the 1987 NRHP nomination form, the historic resources of Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument have national significance in the areas of military, politics/government, and as a historical interpreted/preserved site under Criterion A. The monument “vividly interprets by the use of scattered, mute materials and memorials, the monument’s nationally significant role and purpose under Criterion A.”

The nomination form also lists a portion of the monument as locally significant under Criterion C, architecture. Reference is made to the numerous marble markers scattered about the battlefield as being architecturally significant “in the broadest sense of the term”, adding to the area’s interpretive value and increasing the realism of the event itself as well as contributing to “the feeling, association, and setting of the cemetery. In addition, the civilian headstones located in the cemetery represent examples of funerary art which are unique to the region.” The Superintendent’s House is also listed as possessing local significance under Criterion C, as the “only example of military architecture in the vicinity”, and exhibiting the type of construction and craftsmanship typical of the period.”

Several updates and additions to the National Register are warranted as relate specifically to the monument. Although not listed on the NRHP form, the site is clearly eligible at the national level under Criteria B, for its significant association with several figures important to American history, especially George Armstrong Custer, Sitting Bull, and Crazy Horse. Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer, referred to by Native Americans as “Yellow Hair”, embodied the frontier-conquering image of the U.S. Army. Robert Utley describes his significance in the Official National Park Handbook:

*The Little Bighorn lives on in our imagination in part because of Custer himself. For 13 years he presented a hero-worshipping public with an irresistible combination: dashing, flamboyant, youthful war hero, and major general at 25: controversial explorer, hunter, plainsman, sportsman, author, and publicist of the West; Indian fighter, crusader against political corruption, personification of the U.S. Cavalry, and ideal husband. Yet he was also an enigma, a man of bewildering contradictions, both despised and loved, ridiculed and idolized. All this, and dead on the Little Bighorn at 36.” (Utley, 8).*

The tribes were represented by several distinguished leaders, including the Cheyenne Chief Lame White Man, and the legendary Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse. The association of Little Bighorn with these figures is indelibly etched in the collective American identity. Again in Utley’s words:

*The Little Bighorn lives on because people have found cavalymen and Indians compelling subjects. The man on horseback has always ridden in the vanguard of our folk heroes, and in our image of the West the blueclad trooper and painted warrior have never been far behind the cowboy. And when these stereotypes are particularized, it is usually to Custer and his 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry and the Sioux Indians of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse. (Utley, 8)*

Under Criterion D, properties may be eligible for the National Register if they have yielded, or

may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history. The 1987 nomination form states that “the Battle of Little Bighorn is represented by a variety of archaeological artifacts. The artifacts include the non-systematically collected materials in the museum collection, those artifacts recovered during the systematic 1958, 1983, 1984, and 1985 investigations, and those artifacts not recovered which still lie on the field. These artifacts are the physical evidence of the fight and thereby constitute an additional assemblage of information related to the historic record.” As evidenced by this statement and by still more recent finds, Little Bighorn Battlefield is clearly eligible under criteria D.

Custer National Cemetery should be added under both Criteria A, B and C. “To be eligible for the National Register, a cemetery or burial place must be shown to be significant under one or more of the four basic Criteria for Evaluation. Criteria A, B, C, and D indicate the several ways in which a property may be significant in American history, architecture (including the disciplines of landscape architecture and planning), archeology, engineering, and culture.” (Bulletin 41, 15)

Under Criterion A, the events or trends with which the burial place is associated must be clearly important, and the connection between the burial place and its associated context unmistakable. Historic association began with the act of designation of the national cemetery in 1879, to protect the graves of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalrymen who fell in the Battle of Little Bighorn. In 1888, the bodies of soldiers killed in the Fetterman Fight (also called the Fetterman Massacre or the Battle of the Hundred Slain) were transferred here from Ft. Phil Kearney. Once established, the national cemetery became associated with the Indian Wars as the preferred site of re-interment for bodies moved from decommissioned frontier forts. Burials in Custer National Cemetery represent 23 abandoned military posts from the Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming.

Under Criterion B, the person or group of persons with which the burial place is associated must be of outstanding importance to the community, State, or nation. The remains of most of the soldiers killed on June 25 and 26, 1876, were buried in a mass plot surrounding the Custer Monument in 1881. The bodies of several other soldiers unearthed subsequently are buried in the main cemetery. Lieutenant J.J. Crittenden and Major Marcus Reno are both interred in the cemetery, the only officers from the battle actually buried at Little Bighorn. Here, too, are the graves of Custer’s Indian scouts Curly, Goes Ahead, White-Man-Runs-Him, and White Swan. Many other important individuals associated with the Indian Wars are also interred here, including a number of recipients of the Medal of Honor.

Under Criterion C, funerary monuments and their associated art works, buildings, and landscapes associated with burial places must be good representatives of their stylistic type or period and methods of construction or fabrication. The landscape architecture of the national cemetery demonstrates the orderly arrangement of the grounds and layout of headstones typical of the War Department administration.

The period of significance of LIBI is currently listed as 1875 to 1899. It is proposed that the end date be extended to 1940, the year of transfer of the monument from the War Department to the National Park Service. In 1899, the National Cemetery portion of the site had a much different appearance from today. Although the basic burial plot layout had been determined by Owen’s survey in 1894, the grounds remained largely covered by native prairie / sagebrush vegetation until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The stone lodge had been built in 1894, but stood starkly isolated on a cemetery site with no trees, enclosed only by a crude fence. The transformation of the cemetery landscape to its present appearance occurred primarily during the first four decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including construction of most of the cemetery roads and walks, the fence and gate, flagpole, and most of the planting. While the manicured treatment of lawns and trees was not fully complete until under NPS administration, the pattern that was to guide early NPS landscape treatment had been well established by 1940, making the year of transfer (1940) a convenient date to end the period of significance. This date also marks the beginning of an emerging new philosophy of site administration focused increasingly on the battlefield and its interpretation, and less on the cemetery.



## NRIS Information

Alpha Code/ NRIS Name (Number): LIBI  
 Other National Register Name: Custer Battlefield National Monument  
 Primary Certification Date: 10/15/66

### Other Certifications

Other Certification:

Other Certification Date:

### National Register Significance Criteria

National Register Significance Criteria:

1. A – Event – Battle of Little Bighorn
2. B – Person – George Armstrong Custer, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Lame White Man
3. C – Architecture – stone lodge, landscape architecture
4. D – Archeology – related to the Battle of Little Bighorn

### National Register Significance Criteria Considerations

Records:

### National Register Period of Significance

1875 – 1940 AD

#### Historic Context Theme

Historic Context Theme: Peopling places  
 Historic Context Subtheme: Ethno-history of Indigenous American Populations  
 Historic Context Facet: Varieties of Conflict, Conquest, or Accommodation

Historic Context Theme: Peopling places  
 Historic Context Subtheme: Westward Expansion of Colonies and the United States  
 Historic Context Facet: 1763-1898, Military-Indigenous Peoples Contact

Historic Context Theme: Shaping the political landscape -  
 Historic Context Subtheme: Political and Military Affairs 1865-1939  
 Historic Context Facet: Indian Wars (1860-1890)

Historic Context Theme: Expressing Cultural Values  
 Historic Context Subtheme: Other – Military commemoration

### National Register Areas of Significance

#### Area of Significance Category

1. Exploration/Settlement
2. Military

#### Area of Significance Subcategory

**State Register Documentation**

Records:

**Chronology and Physical History**

Cultural Landscape Inventory Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Cultural Landscape Inventory Number:

Parent Cultural Landscape Inventory Name:

Parent Cultural Landscape Inventory Number:

Park Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Park Alpha Code: LIBI

Park Org Code: 1380

Primary Historic Function - Major Category: 13 - Defense

Primary Historic Function - Category: 13D - Battle Site

Primary Historic Function: Battle Site

Primary Current Use - Major Category: Recreation and Culture

Primary Current Use - Category: Museum

Primary Current Use: National Monument

Ethnographic Study Conducted: No Survey Conducted

Ethnographic Explanatory Narrative: n.a.

**Cultural Landscape Types**

Cultural Landscape Type: Historic Site, Ethnographic Landscape

**Other Current and Historic Uses/Functions**

1. Other Historic Function or Current Use – Major Category: 07 - Funerary  
 Other Historic Function of Current Use – Category: 07A - Cemetery  
 Other Historic Function or Current Use: Cemetery  
 Other Historic Function of Current Use Type: Historic
2. Other Historic Function or Current Use – Major Category: Commemoration /  
 Memorialization

**Ethnographic Associated Groups**

1. Lakota Sioux (seven bands)
  - a. Itazipzo/Sans Arc
  - b. Minniconjou
  - c. Oo-Henumpa/Two Kettles
  - d. Siha Sapa/Blackfeet
  - e. Oglala

- f. Sicangu/Burnt Thigh
- g. Hunkpapa
- 2. Dakota Sioux/Hunkpati
- 3. Nakota Sioux/Assiniboine
- 4. Northern Cheyenne
- 5. Southern Cheyenne
- 6. Arapaho
- 7. Crow
- 8. Arikara

### Current and Historic Names

| Name  | Name Type<br>(Historic; Current, or Both) |
|---|---|
| 1. Greasy Grass Ridge                                       | Historic                                  |
| 2. National Cemetery of Custer's Battlefield<br>Reservation | Historic                                  |
| 3. Custer Battlefield National Cemetery                     | Historic                                  |
| 4. Custer Battlefield National Monument                     | Historic                                  |
| 5. Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument             | Current                                   |
| 6. Custer National Cemetery                                 | Current                                   |
| 7. Custer Battlefield                                       | Historic and Current                      |
| 8. Reno-Benteen Defense Site                                | Historic and Current                      |
| 9. Reno-Benteen Battlefield                                 | Historic and Current                      |

### Chronology

| Date            | Event              | Description  |
|-----------------|--------------------|--|
| 1600s-<br>1700s | Inhabited          | The Crow people arrive in the area after splitting off from the Hidatsa and adopt a buffalo-horse culture.   |
| 1700s-<br>1800s | Military Operation | Crow in conflict with Lakota Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Blackfeet invaders. Lakota's Chief Standing Bear mentions Black Hills in 1775 winter count. Cheyenne and Lakota soon occupy area and force Crow and Kiowa from the Black Hills region.  |
| 1851            | Treaty             | Ft. Laramie Treaty signed between U.S. Government & Lakota Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Arikara, and Crow to help prevent inter-tribal warfare by establishing separate reservation boundaries.   |
| 1866-<br>1868   | Military Operation | Army builds forts along Bozeman Trail, and start what is known as Red Cloud's War between Lakota, Cheyenne, and the U.S. Army. Lakota and Cheyenne defeat Captain William Fetterman and his command 21 December 1866 in "The Battle of 100 Slain", and engage the army in two more battles the following year (Wagon Box Fight and Hayfield Fight) and succeed in closing the Bozeman Trail. |

|                  |                    |   |
|------------------|--------------------|---|
| 1868             | Treaty             | New Ft. Laramie Treaty signed between U.S. Government and Chief Red Cloud and the Lakota Sioux. Army abandons forts on Bozeman Trail. Lakota Sioux awarded Great Sioux Reservation consisting of all land in present day western South Dakota including sacred Black Hills. Unceded Territory established north of Platte River to Big Horn Range and portions of present day southeast Montana as hunting ground for Lakota. |
| 1874             | Exploration        | Lt. Col. G.A. Custer & 7 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry lead scientific expedition into Black Hills to map and survey region, select a new fort site, and confirmed rumors of gold, leading to conflict between Lakota and illegal miners flooding into the area.  |
| 1876             | Military Operation | Battle of Powder River. Col Joseph Reynolds attacks Cheyenne camp of Two Moons and Lame White Man and destroy winter stores and capture pony herd. Pony herd is recaptured by Cheyenne and refugees flee to Tasunke Witko (Crazy Horse's) village on lower Powder River.  |
| 1876             | Military Operation | Tanka Iyotake (Sitting Bull) conducts a sacred sun dance at Deer Medicine Rocks on Rosebud Creek and receives vision of "Soldiers Falling Into Camp" signifying a great future victory over the U.S. Cavalry. He also warns his Lakota and Cheyenne followers not to take the spoils of battle.   |
| 1876             | Military Operation | Battle where the Sister Saved Her Brother (Battle of the Rosebud).  |
| June 25-26, 1876 | Military Operation | The Battle of Little Bighorn  |
| June 28, 1876    | Memorialized       | Burial of the dead soldiers in shallow graves, marked with wooden tipi poles from abandoned Indian village  |
| 1877             | Military Operation | Army establishes new forts in northern Black Hills (Ft. Meade); Mouth of Tongue River (Ft. Keogh); and confluence of Bighorn/Little Bighorn River (Ft. Custer) to protect Northern Pacific Railroad and Crow from Lakota & Cheyenne   |
| July, 1877       | Memorialized       | Custer and other officers' remains re-interred at various sites in eastern U.S. Other soldiers reburied; cedar stakes used to mark where soldiers had fallen.   |
| April, 1878      | Memorialized       | Sheridan recommends the battlefield be set aside as a national cemetery (Greene, 26)  |
| August 1, 1879   | Established        | Secretary of War George W. McCrary authorizes Custer Battlefield National Cemetery (Greene, 30; Doerner)  |
| 1879             | Built              | Mound-shaped memorial constructed of cordwood on Last Stand Hill, and filled in the center with horse bones found on the field. Several human remains re-interred in mound ten feet square and eleven feet high. (Greene, 29)   |
|                  | Platted            | Surveyed by Lieutenant Edward Maguire, Corps of Engineers.  |

|                 |              |   |
|-----------------|--------------|---|
| July 29, 1881   | Erected      | Boundary posts erected, establishing first proposed boundary of eighteen square miles.<br>Granite obelisk monument bearing names of 261 dead erected by the War Department to replace earlier cordwood memorial; remains of approximately 220 soldiers re-interred in a mass grave around base of memorial (Greene, 33) |
| 1881            | Moved        | Battle-related horse skeletons deposited in horse pit during installation of the 7 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry Memorial on Last Stand Hill  |
| 1883/1884       | Built        | Iron fence established around memorial to prevent vandalism of tourists chipping off pieces as souvenirs; fence removed in 1963 (Greene, 38, 303)   |
| 1886            | Established  | Custer Battlefield National Cemetery boundary established, setting aside one square mile within the Crow Reservation (Doerner)  |
| 1888            | Developed    | 111 bodies from the historic Fetterman Fight which had been previously buried at the abandoned Fort Phil Kearney were moved to Custer Battlefield, and re-interred in three rows just south of Last Stand Hill mass grave (Greene, 38)  |
| 1889            | Memorialized | Headstones installed for Fetterman Fight casualties on Last Stand Hill from Ft. Phil Kearney (Greene, 39)   |
| Oct. 28-31 1889 | Platted      | One-mile square cemetery reservation surveyed by Sgt. Herman Vance, and iron posts placed at corners of tract. (Greene, 39)   |
| May, 1890       | Memorialized | 249 standard government regulation white marble markers replace cedar poles marking 7 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry death sites (Greene, 40)  |
| 1890            | Memorialized | First burials in new cemetery on plateau west of Last Stand Hill, although there was no organized plan (Greene, 42)   |
| 1891            | Altered      | Custer Battlefield fenced off (LIBI Admin History files)  |
| 1891            | Built        | Wooden flagpole installed in Custer National Cemetery.  |
| 1892            | Moved        | First of the abandoned military post cemetery internments arrive and are re-interred in Sections A & B, Custer National Cemetery (Doerner)  |
| 1892            | Memorialized | Bodies of soldiers killed in 1867 Hayfield Battle moved to new cemetery plot from Fort C.F. Smith, along with 1868 stone memorial (Rickey, 51)  |
| 1893            | Designed     | 6.91 acre Cemetery plot plan surveyed by Owen (Greene, 46)  |
| 1893            | Inhabited    | First superintendent of the cemetery, Andrew Grover, was appointed in 1893, living first in a tent and then a temporary frame building while a permanent brownstone home was being constructed (Rickey, 46)   |

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|---------------|---------------|--|
| 1894          | Developed     | Burlington-Quincy Railway line came to the valley (Greene 82 & Doerner)  |
| 1894          | Built         | Stone superintendent's lodge completed; said to be one of the first permanent dwellings in eastern Montana (Rickey 56)   |
| 1894          | Replaced      | Lt. Col. Custer's marker erected in 1890 to denote his original grave replaced with wooden cross due to vandalism (Doerner)  |
| 1895          | Altered       | Cactus and sagebrush removed from cemetery tract (Greene, 72)  |
| 1895          | Built         | Maintenance building built behind the Stone House (Greene, 47)   |
| 1896          | Built         | Wooden flagpole installed in new cemetery (Rickey 57)  |
| 1896          | Memorialized  | 68 bodies from Ft. Custer re-interred at Custer Battlefield National Cemetery (Rickey, 53)   |
| 1896          | Memorialized  | Over 150 bodies from Fort Buford, ND, re-interred at Custer Battlefield National Cemetery (Rickey, 53)   |
| 1896          | Memorialized  | Kellogg marker provided (Greene, 47)   |
| 1898          | Memorialized  | Cairn erected on Reno-Benteen site where Lakota Long Road was killed (Greene, 181; Doerner)  |
| 1907          | Destroyed     | Original flagpole destroyed by lightning (Greene, 51; Doerner)   |
| 1908          | Reconstructed | 75' metal flagpole (originally a ship mast) installed (RMP, 13)  |
| July 31, 1908 | Damaged       | A Prairie fire burned the Keogh Sector & cemetery area (Green, 51)   |
| 1909          | Memorialized  | Fort Keogh remains re-interred at Custer National Cemetery, and marker placed (Greene, 51)   |
| 1909          | Altered       | Stone House improvements made – roof replaced (Greene, 78)   |
| 1910          | Developed     | A single lane wagon road traversed the ridge from the monument to Crittenden's grave (Greene, 82)  |
| 1911          | Built         | 20,000 gallon wooden cistern erected on north slope of Last Stand Hill to supply drinking water and irrigation, and Army Water Wagon received to haul water from Little Bighorn River. (Doerner) |
| 1911          | Memorialized  | Bivouac of the Dead iron markers on Last Stand Hill placed in cemetery (Greene, 52; Doerner)   |
| 1912          | Altered       | Footstones removed from graves (Green, 80)   |
| 1912          | Built         | First pumphouse built on riverbank; small gasoline powered pump installed (Rickey 57)  |



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| 1912               | Memorialized       | Bodies from Ft. Assinniboine reinterred at Custer Battlefield National Cemetery (Rickey, 53)   |
| 1913               | Planted            | First two trees planted in cemetery (Rickey 111)   |
| 1915               | Improved           | Improved water pump system installed allowing for irrigation of the cemetery for the first time (Rickey 111)   |
| 1915               | Graded, Engineered | Roads through cemetery graded; old wagon road leading to monument, and following Battle Ridge to loop at Calhoun Hill, graded and widened for automobiles. (Greene, 53)        |
| c. 1916            | Memorialized       | Cheyenne place stone cairn marker for Lame White Man (WPNA, 21; Doerner)   |
| 1917               | Paved              | Concrete sidewalks added around Stone House area and cemetery street leading into cemetery (Greene, 52)  |
| 1917               | Memorialized       | Butler marker placed in Deep Coulee (Greene, 229)  |
| 1924               | Engineered         | Road surveyed from Custer to Reno sites (Greene, 68)   |
| 1925               | Memorialized       | Mrs. Thomas Beaverheart, daughter of Lame White Man, writes a letter to the superintendent requesting a marker for her father, but receives no response (Greene, 187; Doerner) |
| June 24, 1926      | Memorialized       | Largest commemorative gathering during 50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Observance occurs at Little Bighorn (WNPA, 20)   |
| 1926               | Expanded           | Act passed allowing the formation of the Reno-Benteen site (Greene, 67)  |
| Shortly after 1926 | Altered            | Fetterman headstones removed from Custer Hill to Section B, Custer National Cemetery (Rickey p. 53)  |
| 1928               | Planted            | A few Douglas fir trees planted around lodge (Rickey 111)  |
| July 1929          | Memorialized       | Reno-Benteen memorial placed (Greene, 68)  |
| 1930               | Purchased          | Reno-Benteen site turned over to the control of the US Army (Greene, 68)   |
| 1930               | Altered            | Last Stand Hill grouping of markers enclosed in low-profile wrought iron fence (Greene, 57)  |
| early 1930s        | Built              | Stone gates added in front of cemetery with plaques "Custer Battlefield" and "National Cemetery" (Greene, 58)  |
| 1931               | Moved              | Body of Lieutenant Crittenden and his headstone moved into the cemetery from Custer Ridge (Greene, 59)   |
| 1931               | Planted            | 13 trees (Cottonwood and ash) planted in cemetery (Greene, 58)   |
| 1932               | Built              | Comfort station built at south of cemetery (Greene, 58)  |
| 1932               | Moved              | Fort Phil Kearney remains moved from monument ridge to   |

|                |                    |  |
|----------------|--------------------|--|
|                |                    | cemetery (Greene, 59)  |
| 1933           | Planted            | 25 red cedars and 150 blue spruce planted in cemetery (Greene, 58)   |
| 1934           | Built              | Stone garage/storage facility built adjacent to maintenance building behind lodge (Greene, 58)   |
| 1934           | Built              | Stone rostrum built in NW corner of cemetery (Rickey 57)   |
| 1937           | Grazed             | Land between river and boundary fence leased for grazing   |
| 1938           | Memorialized       | Crittenden marker placed at his former burial site on Calhoun Hill   |
| 1938           | Memorialized       | Private marker placed for scout Charley Reynolds in valley (Greene, 68)  |
| 1938           | Built              | Concrete pump house built (Greene, 58)   |
| 1938-40        | Engineered, Graded | Reno-Benteen road (Battlefield Tour Road / Route 10) constructed, likely disturbing archeological sites (Scott, 2; Greene, 69)   |
| 1938           | Planted            | Honeysuckle hedge planted on west and north sides of cemetery (Rickey 1938)  |
| July 1, 1940   | Land Transfer      | Custer Battlefield National Cemetery transferred to the National Park Service. This ends the battlefield's major service as a commemorative place maintained by the War Department, and the site's period of significance. |
| 1941           | Graded             | Battlefield tour road (Route 10) to the Reno-Benteen site was completely graveled. (Greene, 76)  |
| 1941           | Excavated          | 7 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry Horse Cemetery discovered by Luce during excavation of a drainpipe for cistern tank (Greene, 196)  |
| 1941           | Removed, Planted   | Cemetery sagebrush removed and replaced with sod; 140 new evergreen trees planted (Greene, 76,77)  |
| March 22, 1946 | Memorialized       | Name changed to Custer Battlefield National Monument   |
| 1947           | Damaged            | 7.5 acres burned by wildfire at Reno-Benteen site (Greene, 168)  |
| 1947           | Fenced             | Reno-Benteen unit partially fenced (Greene, 85)  |
| 1947           | Moved              | Temporary structure / Quonset hut (Building #8) obtained from Yellowstone NP; erected on current site in maintenance yard  |
| 1949           | Moved              | Butler marker moved (Greene, 196)  |
| 1950s          | Built              | Gas stations, souvenir shops, and cafes built near park entrance   |

|                       |                           |   |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|---|
| 1950                  | Built                     | Temporary structure / Quonset hut (Building #9) erected on river bluff  |
| 1950-51               | Built                     | Modernist international style museum-administration building, designed by Omaha architect Daniel Robbins, constructed between cemetery and Last Stand Hill as part of Mission 66 Program; museum opened to public on Memorial Day, 1952 (Greene, 81)                                      |
| 1952-53               | Built                     | 100,000 gallon underground water tank installed just south of 7 <sup>th</sup> Calvary Monument.   |
| 1953                  | Built                     | Under historian James Bowers, ten aluminum interpretive signs on concrete bases are installed (Greene, 175)   |
| 1954                  | Upgraded                  | Reno-Benteen Road oiled   |
| 1954                  | Fenced                    | Fencing of Reno-Benteen unit completed (Greene, 85)   |
| 1955                  | Damaged                   | Trucks from Standard Gas and Oil Company illegally enter the Reno-Benteen area, tearing down fences and leaving deep, rutted tracks (Greene, 91)  |
| 1956                  | Memorialized              | A wooden marker is placed commemorating where Lame White Man fell (WNPA, 21)  |
| 1957                  | Engineered, Graded, Built | New entrance road configured to enter the park from the NW corner of the cemetery rather than in front of the superintendent's house, to create an all-season roadway (Greene 133 & Doerner) ; new park entry gate constructed; cemetery road from gate to flagpole re-built (Greene, 87) |
| 1957                  | Altered                   | Gravel Reno-Benteen self-guided trail opens(Greene, 177)  |
| 1958                  | Memorialized              | A sign was placed on the location where Lame White Man fell (Greene, 167)   |
| 1958                  | Damaged                   | A human-caused fire burned about 2 acres (Greene, 168)  |
| 1958                  | Restored                  | Original 1876 rifle pits were restored (Greene, 199)  |
| 1958                  | Moved                     | A soldier's remains from the Reno-Benteen site were re-interred in the Custer National Cemetery (Greene, 199)   |
| pre-1959              | Removed                   | Temporary structure / Quonset hut (Building #8) removed   |
| 1956-63<br>Mission 66 | Built                     | Above-ground enlargement of reservoir on Battle Ridge   |
|                       | Altered                   | Remodeled irrigation in cemetery  |
|                       | Built                     | Trail from museum to Custer Monument built  |
|                       | Altered                   | Masonry gateposts for the iron gates added  |
|                       | Altered                   | New parking area extended from the museum to the cemetery pedestrian gate.  |
|                       | Memorialized              | Interpretive markers added  |

|         |                               |  |
|---------|-------------------------------|--|
|         | Removed<br>Planted            | Former stable-turned-residence removed in 1957<br>Trees and shrubs planted on the north and west side of the visitor center; nearly 100 deciduous and conifer trees and nearly 150 shrubs planted in cemetery, (Greene, 86,87)                         |
| 1961-62 | Built                         | 3 single-level 3 bedroom homes built SW of the cemetery for full-time staff use, along with a 4-unit apartment building for seasonal staff and a utility building for maintenance and storage (Greene, 86)   |
| 1962    | Paved                         | Battlefield Road re-graded, leveled, and paved (Doerner)   |
| 1963    | Altered                       | Stone lodge converted into reception area, chapel (Greene, 87)   |
| 1963    | Removed                       | Fences around 7 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry and Reno-Benteen Memorials removed after complaint by National Geographic Society photographer (Greene, 87; Doerner)   |
| 1964-65 | Designed, Altered             | The Battlefield visitor center is redesigned by Max R. Garcia, modifying the entrance and adding restrooms and the observation deck (Greene, 89)   |
| 1965    | Altered, Moved.<br>Built      | Reno-Benteen parking lot is expanded and the monument is moved from the south side of the parking lot loop to the west side, at the start of the Entrenchment Trail. (Greene, 88)  |
| 1966    | Memorialized                  | Interpretive markers created for Reno-Benteen site, including cast aluminum on concrete description of defense, 18 cast concrete numbered posts for leaflet reference, hospital markers, and leaflet / coin box. (Greene, 178)                         |
| 1967    | Moved                         | Major Marcus A. Reno interred in Custer National Cemetery (Doerner)  |
| 1968    | Built                         | Reno-Benteen concrete signs, pamphlet/cashbox, and number markers for self-guided tour were installed (Greene, 179)  |
| 1960s   | Memorialized                  | Interest in recognizing the Indian side of the battle grows, including interviewing Northern Cheyenne tribal historian John Stands in Timber to hear Indian side. (Greene, 180-182; WNPA, 21)  |
| 1975    | Built                         | Concrete walks and new landscaping around visitor center   |
| 1976    | Memorialized                  | Centennial Celebration; the American Indian Movement (AIM) holds protests over interpretation  |
| 1978    | Engineered, Altered,<br>Built | Cemetery infiltration system modified, new buried concrete reservoir added, water treatment system/evaporation pond built at NW boundary of the park; new potable water and fire protection lines installed to administrative area and visitor center. |
| 1978    | Restored                      | Interior of the Stone Lodge restored (Greene, 150)   |

|                 |                |   |
|-----------------|----------------|---|
| 1978            | Closed         | Custer Battlefield National Cemetery closed to further non-reservation internments.   |
| 1980s           | Built          | Souvenir stands set up on Realbird property near Medicine Tail Coulee (Scott) and family threatens to build a house on their property. Custer Battlefield Preservation Committee formed by Superintendent James V. Court to purchase adjacent battlefield land for NPS. (Doerner) |
| 1989/1990       | Altered, Paved | The trail at the Reno-Benteen site was repaved with beige-pink concrete. (Greene, 167) 7 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry skull discovered at Reno Crossing later identified as Sgt. Edward Botzer, Co. G KIA 25 June 1876. (Doerner)  |
| August 10, 1983 | Damaged        | Fire burns 600 acres of grass (Greene, 200)   |
| 1984            | Restored       | Broken markers and headstones replaced (Greene, 166)  |
| 1984            | Excavated      | Systematic archeological research begins, with metal detectors and visual surveys (Greene, 201)   |
| June 25, 1986   | Moved          | Human remains found during the archeological excavation were re-interred in the national cemetery (Greene, 200)   |
| 1986-1987       | Built          | New wayside exhibits added at Reno-Benteen Battlefield (Greene 210)   |
| 1988            | Memorialized   | AIM places Indian memorial plaque at base of 7 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry memorial near 1881 memorial, soon removed to visitor center observation room (Greene, 167)   |
| 1989            | Excavated      | Seventh Cavalry dump site excavated and additional field work investigation on Custer Battlefield markers and Deep Ravine (Doerner)   |
| 1991            | Memorialized   | Name changed to Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument Indian Memorial is authorized; cemetery renamed Custer National Cemetery (Doerner)   |
| 1991            | Rehabilitated  | Visitor center renovated; Museum Exhibits upgraded. (Doerner)   |
| August 20, 1991 | Damaged        | Fire burns 10,000 acres from HWY 212 to Keogh/Calhoun Sectors-Deep Coulee-Medicine Tail Coulee, Weir Point-Cedar Coulee, and Reno-Benteen Battlefield. (Greene, 168; Doerner)   |
| 1992            | Conserved      | Trail from Last Stand Hill to Deep Ravine closed to protect resources (Greene, 167)   |
| 1993            | Planned        | Construction to start on new entrance gate (Greene, 164)  |
| June 28, 1994   | Damaged        | Fire burns 150 acres on Last Stand Hill (Greene, 168)   |
| 1995            | Built          | Maintenance storage area completed (Greene, 164)  |

|               |                                      |  |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1996          | Designed                             | Design contest for Indian Memorial begins (Greene, 231)  |
| 1997          | Engineered, Built, Restored, Altered | 3 acre sewer drain field, appurtenant dosing, septic tanks, sewer lines completed, pump house re-roofed and an addition constructed, visitor center rehabilitated, new restrooms in parking area added (Greene, 164)   |
| 1998          | Restored                             | After renovations, the Stone Lodge is dedicated as the White Swan Memorial library and Chief Historian's office (Greene, 165)  |
| 1999          | Memorialized                         | Groundbreaking for Indian memorial (Greene, 232)   |
| 1999          | Memorialized                         | First red granite warrior markers, championed by Chief Historian John A. Doerner, placed for Lame White Man and Noisy Walking (Greene, 191; Doerner)   |
| 1999          | Restored                             | Active management of invasive plants / noxious weeds in the grassland prairie begins   |
| 1994-1999     | Excavated                            | NPS archeological survey outside battlefield boundaries; Reno's Skirmish line, Spotted Tail Agency warrior village on east side of LBH River, & Luce Ridge. A metal detection survey of Custer's June 23, 1876 7 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry camp on Rosebud Creek was also done. (Doerner)                          |
| 2000          | Altered                              | Park fences replaced and extended to include park land along the river   |
| 2000          | Paved                                | Deep Ravine and Keogh marker trails reopened after Environmental Assessment completed. Deep Ravine Trail paved with all-weather gravel and lined with cedar (Greene, 168; Doerner)   |
| 2000          | Altered                              | New updated and balanced wayside exhibits replace the older concrete and aluminum ones (Greene, 192)   |
| 2001          | Memorialized                         | Long Road marker dedicated at the site of his cairn at the Reno-Benteen site (Greene, 191)   |
| 2002          | Excavated                            | The 7 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry horse cemetery on Last Stand Hill was excavated and reburied (Greene, 203)   |
| 2002          | Restored, Built                      | Efforts begin to replace the weathered Fort C.F. Smith marker and place the original in storage (determined to be infeasible); replace the cemetery street and curbing from the Stone Lodge gate to the flagpole, add accessible parking, and recondition the original war department iron gates (Greene, 166) |
| 2003          | Rehabilitated                        | Employee permanent residence converted to two storey administration building and training facility (Greene, 165)   |
| June 25, 2003 | Built                                | Indian Memorial dedicated to the public (Greene, 234)  |
| 2003          | Established                          | The National Trust for Historic Preservation identified Little   |

|      |              |  |
|------|--------------|--|
| 2003 | Memorialized | Bighorn as one of the eleven most endangered historic places in the U.S. (Greene, 169)<br>Unknown Lakota marker erected on Wooden Leg Hill (Doerner) |
| 2003 | Altered      | 7 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry Horse Cemetery and Wooden Leg Hill wayside exhibits erected on Last Stand Hill (Doerner)                                     |
| 2004 | Excavated    | Archeological survey of Battlefield Road corridor in response to proposed widening of road to meet federal safety standards                          |
| 2006 | Restored     | Efforts begin to restore gravel pit loop on bluffs at west corner of Custer unit.  |

## History

### I. Native occupation: pre-1876

Since prehistoric times the Little Bighorn valley has been home to various Native American tribes. Archaeological evidence suggests that human activities have taken place in the region for the last 10,000 years. Throughout most of that time, the people of the plains were hunter-gathers following the vast herds of animals including woolly mammoth that frequented the fertile grasslands in the region (Doerner), and gathered berries and other plants to supplement their high protein diet. The Late Prehistoric period (1,500-500 years ago) is evidenced by increasing numbers of lithic and bone artifacts, and is thought to represent a period of population increase and movement following prehistoric bison herds. European trade goods become apparent over the past 500 years, as well as habitation structures (wickiups and conical vertical pole lodges). Nomadic tribes adopted a buffalo-horse culture with the introduction of the horse to the northern plains by the 1750's. The fertile grass in the Little Bighorn valley was grazed by bison, making it an important hunting ground. In fact the immense herds created trails/terraces leading down from the surrounding bench lands to the Little Bighorn River that are still visible on the landscape today throughout the valley, and are used by domestic horses and cattle. (Doerner)

Early Native inhabitants left geometric rock arrangements, known as medicine wheels, in the Big Horn Mountains southwest of the battlefield, but little is known about the early inhabitants of the region before the arrival of the Crow. The Crow migrated west to the present-day site of their reservation by the 1700s. The Lakota Sioux and Cheyenne wanted to gain access to the Crow's rich hunting grounds in the Little Bighorn region, leading to years of intense inter-tribal warfare. A treaty in 1851 attempted to establish tribal boundaries between the Lakota, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and the Crow, but failed to establish peace, and on-going skirmishes left the Lakota and their Cheyenne and Arapaho allies in possession of the Little Bighorn valley by 1876.

### II. Euro American exploration and settlement, pre-1876

The area was originally part of the Louisiana Purchase, but, aside from a few traders and explorers, few whites ventured into the area before the mid 1800s, and the area remained largely in the control of various Native tribes occupying the region. The Crow had become allies of whites who came to the area, and many served as scouts in the United States Army. The Lakota Sioux were hostile toward whites who were invading their sacred hunting grounds. Gold prospectors and other white settlers who crossed in or near Lakota Sioux and Cheyenne territory were demanding increased government protection, despite the fact that these lands were set aside to the Lakota and Cheyenne by the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty and were off-limits to white encroachment. This set the stage for the Sioux Wars of 1876-1877 and the Battle of Little Bighorn

### III. Sioux War: 1876-1877

The opening of the Bozeman Trail, a shortcut from Fort Laramie on the North Platte River in Wyoming to the western Montana goldfields, led to Red Cloud's War (1866-1868). Lakota Sioux and their Cheyenne allies led by Oglala Lakota Chief Red Cloud offered fierce resistance against white encroachment of their sacred hunting ground, forcing the U.S. Army to abandon its newly established forts along the Bozeman Trail. Cessation of hostilities between the Lakota (led by Red Cloud) and their Cheyenne and Arapaho allies (under Little Wolf), and the U.S. Army, was negotiated at Fort Laramie, Wyoming, resulting in the signing of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. The army agreed to abandon its forts along the Bozeman Trail. The Lakota were granted the Great Sioux Reservation, consisting of all land west of the Missouri River in present day South Dakota, including their sacred Black Hills. Whites (with the exception of the U.S. government carrying out official duties) could neither trespass nor settle there. In addition, an unceded territory north of the Platte River to the east of the summit of the Bighorn Mountains was set aside



for the Lakota to hunt, leaving southeastern Montana in Indian control. Many of the Lakota Sioux, including those led by Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, shunned the reservation for life in southeastern Montana, where they were joined by non-reservation Cheyenne and Arapaho.

In 1874, Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer led an exploration party into the Black Hills on the Sioux Reservation, where his confirmation of gold deposits fueled the movement of prospectors and settlers into the area. Tensions grew between whites, trespassing in the Black Hills in pursuit of gold, and Indian bands hunting off the great reservation. Lakota Sioux, distraught with the influx of whites, left the reservation for Sitting Bull's camp. Whites viewed the situation with the Lakota as out of control, and asked the army for help.

In an attempt to keep the peace, the government tried to purchase the Black Hills from the Lakota, however they refused to sell. On December 6, 1875, the Commissioner for Indian Affairs, Edward P. Smith, issued an ultimatum, through Indian Agents, for all Indians to return to the reservations by January 31, 1876. All Indians off the reservation after that date would be considered hostile and face military consequences. The ultimatum was largely ignored, as bad weather, communication delays, and general mistrust resulted in large numbers of Indians being off the reservation and in noncompliance of the 1875 order.

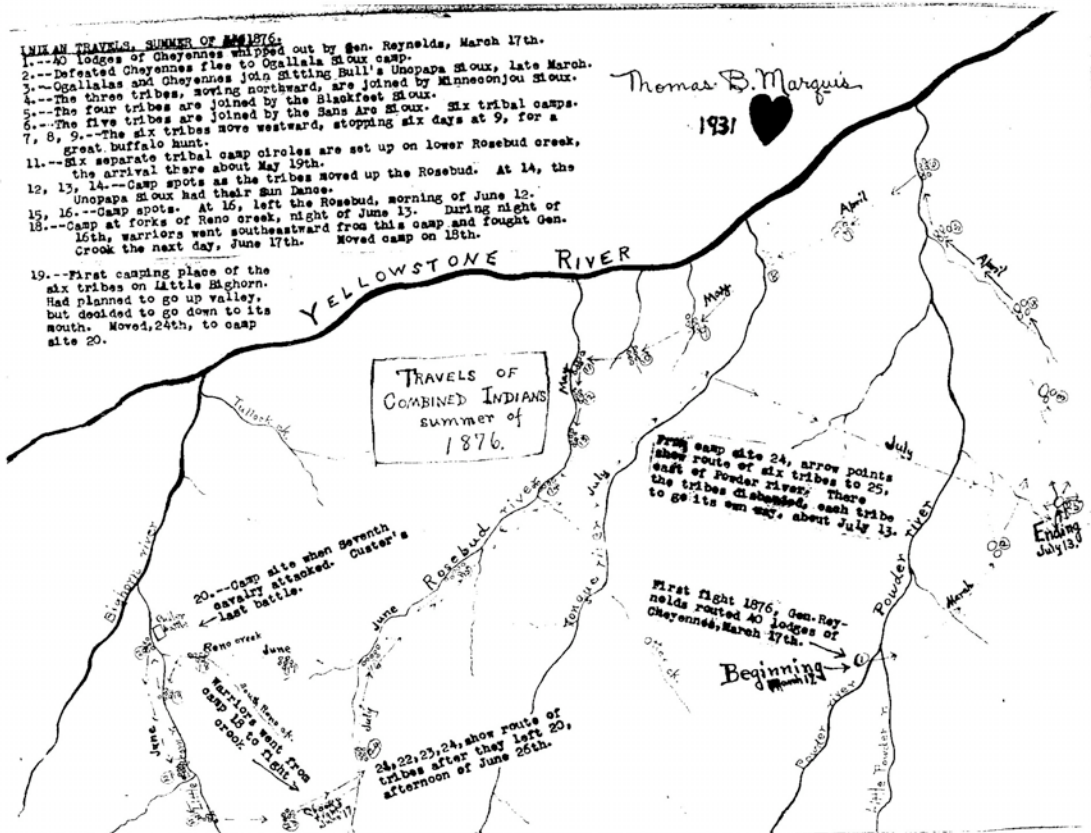


Some of the Indian leaders at Little Bighorn. Clockwise from bottom left: Tatanka Iyotake (Sitting Bull), Hunkpapa Lakota; Ve'ho'ehonenehe (Lame White Man), Southern Cheyenne; Éše'heo'óhnešese (Two Moons), Northern Cheyenne; Pizi (Gall), Hunkpapa Lakota; Tāšúnke Witkó (Crazy Horse), Minnikojou Lakota (previously identified as Oglala). Photos courtesy of LIBI archives (Crazy Horse sketch courtesy of Douglas War Eagle/Crazy Horse family; Sitting Bull courtesy of Library of Congress).

The non-reservation Lakota and Cheyenne had rejected the government's December ultimatum to move to the reservation, preferring their traditional nomadic way of life. Having spent the winter of 1875-1876 along the Powder River in eastern Montana, they were joined by numerous Lakotas from the Agencies in the spring, and by late June 1876, were encamped along the Little Bighorn River under the leadership of Tatanka Iyotake (Sitting Bull), Hunkpapa Lakota spiritual and political leader. One of the largest gatherings of Native Americans in history, the encampment numbered approximately 7,000, men, women, and children, including all seven bands of Lakota Sioux: Hunkpapa, Oglala, Minnikojou, Two Kettle, Blackfeet, Brule, Sans Arc; along with Cheyenne and Arapaho.

Meanwhile, an army campaign had been organized in 1876 on request of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, through the Secretary of the Interior. The campaign involved a three-pronged offensive with 2,500 soldiers, Indian scouts and attached civilian personnel, designed to force Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and their followers onto the reservation. One of the three columns headed by Brig. General Alfred H. Terry, commander, Department of the Dakotas, was stationed at Fort Abraham Lincoln, Dakota Territory. With two companies of the Seventeenth United States Infantry, one company of the Sixth United States Infantry, and twelve companies of the Seventh Cavalry – which included Lt. Col. George A. Custer, Marcus A. Reno, and Frederick W. Benteen – General Terry marched west in May 1876 ultimately to rendezvous with the other two forces and subdue the Lakota Sioux and Cheyenne Nations, and force them onto the reservation.

Detached on orders from General Terry, and under the charge of Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer, the Seventh Cavalry reached the mouth of Rosebud Creek about noon on June 21. As



This important map drawn by Thomas B. Marquis in 1931, from Northern Cheyenne testimony of Wooden leg and other veterans, retraces the movements and historic sequence of events of the allied Lakota and Cheyenne, from their winter camps on Powder River, west to the Little Bighorn valley in 1876. NPS-LIBI Collection

planned, Custer led the Seventh Cavalry up Rosebud Creek, following an Indian trail discovered earlier by Major Reno and his Indian scouts. The objective was to reunite with General Gibbon's column then making its way up the Yellowstone River and isolate the Indians between the two columns. Custer's 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry set out on June 22<sup>nd</sup> and reached the Wolf Mountains early on June 25<sup>th</sup>. On the early morning of June 25 Custer's Crow and Arikara Scouts discovered Sitting Bull's village in the Little Bighorn valley.

Fearing that he had been sighted by Indians, Custer altered the plan, perceiving it urgent to attack immediately. A delay of one night might allow the Indians adequate time to abandon the Little Bighorn region. On June 25, Custer divided his command into three battalions: Companies H, D, and K under Captain Benteen were to reconnoiter the bluffs south of the present Reno Creek, while Companies A, G, and M under the command of Major Reno, along with Companies C, E, F, I, and L under Custer, marched along opposite banks of the Reno Creek to attack the Indian camp in the valley of the Little Bighorn. Sighting a portion of the Indian encampment when they were almost upon it, Major Reno, on orders from Custer, crossed the Little Bighorn, advanced down the Little Bighorn, and struck the southern end of the Indian camp.

Custer continued north and headed down Medicine Tail Coulee. Sighting the village at a distance, he sent a messenger back to hurry Benteen and the reserve ammunition, the note reading "Come on, Big Village, be quick, bring packs." Custer split his command into two wings. One wing conducted a reconnaissance of the river ford (one of several natural crossings in the area) and after engaging warriors withdrew north. The other wing on Nye-Cartwright Ridge engaged warriors in upper Medicine Tail Coulee before continuing north to the Custer Battlefield.

Meanwhile, Reno, outflanked by the defending warriors, retreated in disarray to the river and ultimately took up a defensive position on the bluffs beyond. Reno's beleaguered troops eventually were aided by Captain Benteen, who had pushed forward hastily having received the message from Custer, but was stopped by Reno, who entreated him to help hold his defensive position. Some of Reno and Benteen's men rode north to Weir's Point after hearing distant firing from Custer's position and saw Custer fighting, but were driven back by Indian warriors.



Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer, 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry in 1876, Source: LIBI Archives

For two days the companies of Reno and Benteen battled sporadic long range Indian sniping fire and attacks. Late afternoon on June 26 the attacks ceased after Lakota and Cheyenne scouts reported more soldiers approaching from the north. The Indian village packed up and moved off in a great procession south up the valley toward the Big Horn Mountains. At the end of the two-day siege, 53 men were dead and 59 wounded from the Reno-Benteen battalion.

Five miles northeast, Custer and the five companies under his command had met their deaths; the troopers slain with Custer numbering 210. (Rickey, 72). The exact details of Custer's demise are unknown, but evidence suggests the companies of his command were killed at various stands along Battle Ridge, until finally Custer and his remaining men were wiped out at Last Stand Hill. With the arrival of the relief columns on June 27<sup>th</sup>, the fate of Custer and his command was realized. The troops withdrew June 28<sup>th</sup>, after hastily burying the soldiers where they had fallen, and the area was left mostly undisturbed by either side as the Sioux Wars continued.



Earlier, Lakota and Cheyenne families had removed their dead and buried them in traditional ways in the Little Bighorn valley and adjacent hillsides. The Lakota dead were placed on scaffolds or in tipi's while the Cheyenne were buried along the bench land on the western side of the Little Bighorn valley. The final number of Indian casualties has never been determined (although estimated to be over 100), many of them dying later of wounds sustained during the battle.



**Painted by White Bird, Northern Cheyenne, who at 15, participated in the battle. This ledger-drawing map depicts the entire Battle of the Little Bighorn and cultural landscape in vivid detail. U.S. Military Academy Library Collection**

#### **IV. War Department Years: 1877 – 1940**

A year after the battle, Fort Custer was built some 15 miles from the battlefield to help secure and stabilize the region. Members of the Crow nation returned to reclaim the area, and the War Department, through Fort Custer, became the custodian of the battlefield and its burials. There was immediate interest in creating a monument to commemorate Custer and his men, and concern over the poor condition of the soldiers' graves. While the remains of most of the officers had been gathered and sent east for re-interment by their families in 1877, the shallow burial plots dug so hastily a few days after the battle were constantly washing out, exposing skeletal remains.

The battleground area was dedicated as Custer Battlefield National Cemetery in 1879, for the protection of the remains of the men who died there, although the boundaries of a one-mile square site were not defined until the signing of an executive order by President Grover Cleveland in 1886. A temporary monument of stacked cordwood (stone could not be found locally) was erected on Last Stand Hill in 1879, near the site where Custer had fallen, and horse bones, which still littered the battleground, were gathered and placed inside the structure. In 1881, the remains of the soldiers were gathered and reburied around the base of a new permanent monument erected on Last Stand Hill. Built of granite in the form of a truncated pyramid, the 11.5 foot high 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Memorial was inscribed with the names of all of the troopers, Indian scouts, and attached personnel who fell on the battlefield. An iron fence was constructed around the obelisk two years later, to prevent direct access to tourists who had been chipping away at the granite to collect a "souvenir" of their visit. The fence around the monument was removed in 1963.



**Cordwood Monument, erected 1879**  
Source: LIBI archives



**Granite Monument, erected 1881**  
Source: LIBI archives

Sites where soldiers had fallen on the battlefield remained marked with wooden stakes until 1890, when they were replaced with official War Department headstones of white marble. Their overall placement creates a stark image of patterns of movement through the landscape and helps visitors visually reconstruct the progress of the battle. Although most of the Indian dead were removed from the battlefield immediately following the clash, small stone cairns were placed in many instances (either immediately or in ensuing years) by family members, to mark the place of death.

Because of the designation of the site as a National Cemetery, it was made available to receive other eligible deceased military personnel. The first additions to the Custer dead were the bodies of 80 soldiers and four civilians killed in the “Fetterman Fight” transferred from the formerly abandoned Fort Phil Kearny in the autumn of 1888. They were buried in three rows of orderly plots just south of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry monument, becoming the first of many to occur on the Little Bighorn Battlefield, as former military posts of the Indian War era were abandoned.



**“Fetterman Fight” burial plots, 1888**  
Source: LIBI archives

In 1890, the remains of 40 deceased arrived for reburial from Fort Sisseton, Dakota Territory. Earlier that year, Captain Owen Sweet, who had overseen the placement of the marble headstones for the Custer dead, had noted in his report to the Secretary of War that the 1888 Fetterman burials on Last Stand Hill within such close proximity to the hallowed ground of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was *“unfortunate, and is to be regretted as there are numberless excellent locations outside of these lines that could have been most fortunately & appropriately selected for the purpose.”* (Greene, 41) Sweet’s words appear to have been taken to heart, as the new arrivals were interred in a new location, on a plateau below and to the west of Last Stand Hill. The site used for the Ft. Sisseton burials was further supported in a letter from A.N. Grover to the

Quartermaster General with comments regarding the disposition of the grounds, dated June 23, 1892, in which he suggests that this new site offers a preferred location for burial, as *“the sod is firm and not liable to wash out as it is on almost every part of the Battlefield, especially near the monument.”* (Grover) The following year, civil engineer W.H. Owen was commissioned to conduct a survey and determine the most appropriate location for the cemetery. His final report to the Quartermaster General, issued August 3, 1893, recommended a 6.91 acre site encompassing the Ft. Sisseton (and several other fort) reburials which had occurred in the interim. In it, he states *“it would be better in my opinion, as a matter of sentiment and historical fitness, to leave the battlefield intact, and to establish the Cemetery elsewhere for the interment of others than those who fell in the Custer fight.”* (Greene, 46) Owen’s plan was evidently accepted, as it is the footprint of the Custer National Cemetery today.

On into the 1890s, forts built during the Indian Wars were de-commissioned and abandoned: Forts Totten, Rice, Buford, Sisseton, Pembina, Assiniboine, and others. All told there are re-interments from 23 abandoned military posts in sections A&B of the cemetery. Ironically, 68 bodies were relocated to Little Bighorn in 1896 upon the closure of nearby Fort Custer, which had been established in 1877 to secure the territory a year after Custer’s defeat. The remains of the dead from the Battle of Little Bighorn discovered after 1891 have also been buried in the National Cemetery, rather than in the mass grave on Last Stand Hill. The Fort Phil Kearny burials were eventually moved to the new location as well but not until after 1926. (Rickey 53)

Andrew Grover, a retired regular soldier, was appointed as the first superintendent of the National Cemetery in 1893. He lived with his family, first in a tent and then a temporary frame building while a permanent brownstone home was being constructed. The stone lodge was completed in 1894, and was said to be one of the first permanent dwellings in eastern Montana. Although burials were already occurring in the cemetery, it had no guiding master plan and the landscape consisted of sparse native shrub-steppe groundcover. Superintendent Grover oversaw the layout of the present cemetery plot in the spring of 1894, cleared some of the brush, and attempted to plant some lawn ... which failed due to lack of water. (Rickey, 56) A wooden flagstaff, erected in 1896, was destroyed by lightning in 1907 and replaced with the present pole of steel, a former ship mast, in the following year (Rickey 57). Additional structures were added throughout the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including new iron gates in 1931, a native stone rostrum in 1934, and a stone garage building in 1934.

As late as July, 1908, there were no roads or walks within the cemetery, but by 1915, a road had been graded through the middle of the cemetery, and grading had been done on the access road to the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Memorial and continuing the length of Battle Ridge to Calhoun Hill. At the fiftieth anniversary of the battle in 1926, acquisition of the Reno-Benteen Defense Site was authorized. Funds for acquisition were appropriated in 1928, and in 1929, a granite monument was placed on the site (Rickey, p. 64). A rough 5-mile road connecting the two sites was cut into the site that same year and in 1938 the road was graded for year-round use. The construction of the Battlefield Road continued until 1940, and likely caused significant disturbance and distortion of the landscape through the site. (Greene, 69)



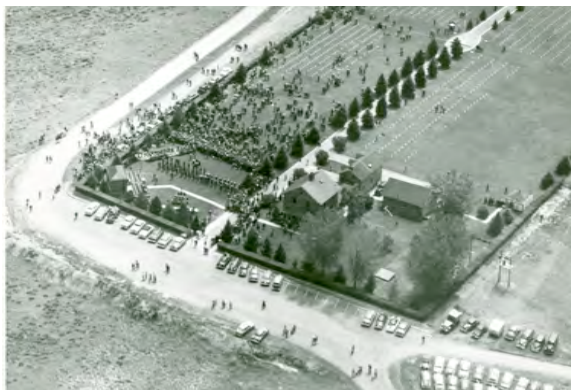


**Aerial view of cemetery, June 11, 1935, shortly after planting of evergreens.  
Source: LIBI archives**

Water for use on-site use was hauled in buckets from the river until 1912, when the first pumphouse was built on the riverbank. This system didn't yield enough water for irrigation, but Superintendent Dommitt wrote in 1913 that two trees had been planted in the cemetery. With the completion of a water line in 1915, irrigation was finally made possible, and landscaping took on increasing importance, continuing through the War Department era. Douglas fir was planted around the stone lodge in 1928, and some cottonwood and ash in 1931. The most significant planting campaign occurred in 1933, when 25 red cedars and 150 blue spruce were planted, creating the primary structure evident today. The last major improvement of war department era was the planting of Tartarian honeysuckle hedge screening along the west and north sides of the cemetery in 1938. When the site was transferred to the NPS in 1940, nearly all native ground cover had been removed, and part of cemetery plot had been graded and sown to grass (though the grass was apparently not well established).

Under the administration of the War Department for 61 years, development had centered primarily upon the National Cemetery, with minimal attention accorded to maintenance outside the cemetery boundaries. During the course of the War Department years, Indians also placed cairns to mark where their warriors had fallen, but no official recognition was given to the warriors at this time

## V. National Park Service: 1940 – Present



**Left: Aerial view of cemetery, June, 1951, 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Battle (note tree growth in 16 years from previous image, and addition of enclosing hedge).**



**Right: Visitor Center shortly after opening.**

**Source of images: LIBI archives**

In 1933, events were set in motion to transfer the Custer Battlefield National Cemetery to the National Park Service, although the actual hand-over did not occur until 1940. The NPS initially

continued to focus on the cemetery aspect of Little Bighorn, but tourist interest in the battle continued to increase, especially after World War II, and in 1946 the name and designation of the property was changed to Custer Battlefield National Monument. Facing increasing visitation, the road connecting the Custer Battlefield with the Reno-Benteen site was graveled in 1941, and ultimately oiled in 1954. On June 25, 1952, the 76<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle, the long awaited museum and visitor center was dedicated. Interpretive signage, which had been woefully absent in earlier years, was added to the site beginning in 1947 with the fabrication of initial panels, and in 1953, in the form of cast aluminum panels mounted on concrete bases. A new access road into the park from Montana Highway 8 was opened in 1957, along with a new entry gate and parking lot for the museum.

In the Custer National Cemetery, native vegetation had essentially all been cleared by the time of transfer to the NPS in 1940. The structural framework of evergreen trees lining the pathways had been established and grass turf established. In the following year 140 evergreen trees were added "to complete the symmetry of the landscape." (Rickey 99). There are approximately 4,950 individuals interred in the cemetery, which was closed to new burials in 1978, except for approximately 50 spaces reserved for the spouses of veterans buried in the cemetery. In addition to veterans of the Indian Wars (soldiers, civilians, and Indian guides), those interred include military soldiers and sailors killed in action or veterans and their spouses that served in the U.S. Military during the Spanish American War, World War One, World War Two, the Korean War, and Vietnam.

Major site development continued in 1961, with the construction of a residential and administrative complex west of the cemetery. Three single-family residences were opened that year, followed by a four-unit apartment building, maintenance facility, and water system the following year. Construction continued in 1965, with remodeling and addition to the visitor center, razing of obsolete buildings in the cemetery, and construction of a new amphitheater.

In the 1960s and 70s, the monument and the events it commemorated became hotly contested, as the American Indian Movement and others used the site as a platform for their protests of the historical exclusion of the Native American point of view. Although some small stone cairns had been placed by relatives of fallen warriors at their place of death, no official recognition had ever occurred. As early as 1925, a request was made by the daughter of a Cheyenne warrior killed in action to place a memorial stone in her father's memory, but that request was denied. (Rickey, 70) The first "official" Indian memorial was a wooden marker placed by historian Don Rickey in 1958, to honor Lame White Man. This marker was replaced several times during the 1970s and 1980s due to deterioration. (Doerner, 6) In 1988, AIM placed a marker on the Last Stand Hill monument commemorating the warriors who fell in the battle; the marker was removed to the visitor center museum, but it spurred official action to get an Indian Memorial placed in the park.

In 1991, the name of the site was changed to Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. In 1996, a design competition for an Indian Memorial was held. Construction of the winning memorial design began in 1999 on ground just north of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry monument. This area had been previously disturbed, so the new construction did not further damage the archeological potential or topography of the landscape. Also in 1999, the first red granite markers were placed to mark where two Indian warriors fell. The Indian Memorial was dedicated in 2003.





**Indian Memorial, dedicated in 2003.**  
Source: left image, M. Timmons; right image, J. Doerner

## Analysis and Evaluation of Integrity

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Cultural Landscape Inventory Name:          | Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument |
| Cultural Landscape Inventory Number:        | Number                                       |
| Parent Cultural Landscape Inventory Name:   | Name   |
| Parent Cultural Landscape Inventory Number: | Number                                       |
| Park Name:                                  | Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument |
| Park Alpha Code:                            | LIBI   |
| Park Org Code:                              | 0000   |

## Landscape Characteristics Analysis and Evaluation Summary:

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument is comprised of two distinctly different landscape character areas: the historic battlefield of June 25-26, 1876, and the Custer National Cemetery. The historic battlefield, comprising two separate units (the Custer Battlefield and the Reno-Bentzen Defense Site), retains historic integrity as representative of the natural landscape on the dates of battle, overlain with memorial elements. The national cemetery retains integrity as a designed cultural landscape representative of War Department administration of the site, which ended in 1940.



**Air photo showing distinct differences of landscape character between battlefield and cemetery**  
**Source: Google Earth**

Nine landscape characteristics assessed for this report have retained high degrees of integrity and contribute to the historic character of the landscape. *Archeology, buildings and structures, cluster arrangement, cultural traditions, land use, small-scale features, spatial organization, topography, and vegetation* all played an important role in the historic events and remain in context on the landscape. Two additional characteristics, *circulation, and views and vistas*, also contribute strongly to the historic context of the site but suffer in part due to compromised integrity.

The wealth of *archaeological* artifacts uncovered from the battlefield, as well as the potential for further discovery that may lead to a greater understanding of the battle, are considered significant and contribute to the cultural landscape of Little Bighorn Battlefield.

There are 65 separate entries on the List of Classified Structures at Little Bighorn, of which only one, the Stone Lodge, is a building. Whether categorized for purposes of this CLI under *buildings and structures* or as *small-scale features*, the many monuments and headstones on the battlefield and in the national cemetery are integral to its meaning and sense of place.

The *cluster arrangement* of markers on the battlefield helps to interpret the locations of both soldiers and warriors during the engagement, and their placement for the most part in precise locations where bodies were disinterred or cairns erected lends to their authenticity and integrity. This feature of marked mortality sites is unique to the Little Bighorn among American battlefields.

The Anglo-American *cultural traditions* of battlefield commemoration and orderly military cemeteries are both well represented at Little Bighorn, as well as Native American tributes of stone cairns.

The native grass prairie ecosystem at Little Bighorn was used for grazing buffalo before the battle. Following the battle, which begins the period of significance, memorialization of the event became the dominant *land use* on monument lands, and has continued to the present day. Because of early efforts to preserve the battlefield as a memorial, its appearance has been well preserved and it has been fenced off since 1890 to cattle and horse grazing. The national cemetery is the other dominant *land use* on the site, again perpetuating a pattern dating to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In addition to the markers and monuments on the site, *small scale features* such as the rifle pits on the Reno-Benteen site, stone warrior cairns, the 1908 cemetery flagpole, decorative cemetery gates, and even the iron fencing around the Custer group all reinforce the integrity of the site.

*Spatial organization* of the battlefield remains very close to what existed on the days of the battle, due to the characteristics of the natural topography. Within the cemetery, the orderly arrangement of burial plots, headstones, walks, and planting maintains the spatial integrity of that district.

*Topography* played a crucial role in battle strategy and outcome, and it has experienced minimal modification since 1876. As a result, topography at Little Bighorn continues to remain significant and contributes strongly to the historic scene of the Monument.

*Vegetation* within both the battlefield and national cemetery districts also contributes to the historic integrity. The relatively intact grass and sagebrush prairie vegetation creates a visual scene of high integrity. Plantings in the cemetery, while highly artificial in the context of the surrounding prairie, is strongly representative of national cemetery landscape treatment and retains its own historic integrity.

As noted, the integrity of both the *circulation* and *visual characteristics* of the landscape have been significantly compromised. While the *circulation* of troop movement across the site has been captured in time by placement of markers, and pathways through the cemetery are true to their original intent, road grading, vehicular movement across the site, and parking lot encroachment causes disruption to the historic scene.

*Visually*, although many of the primary on, off, and of-site views retain near-historic authenticity, the encroachment of the visitor center on Last Stand Hill, parking lots, and vehicles moving along Battle Ridge Road, along with off-site views of development on adjacent and distant lands reduce the overall visual integrity.

## **Analysis of Landscape Integrity**

The National Register program identifies seven aspects of integrity: Location, Design, Setting, Materials, Workmanship, Feeling, and Association. Three additional criteria can be relevant in the assessment of the integrity of biotic landscape elements: Community Organization/Structure (can replace Design), Species Composition (can replace Materials), and Management Techniques/Technology (can replace Workmanship). Retention of these qualities is essential for a property to convey its historic identity or evoke its appearance during a significant period in history; however, all seven qualities are not required in order to convey a sense of past time and place. The CLI provides additional documentation related to these aspects.

### **Location**

This aspect of integrity refers to the place where the landscape and its component elements was

constructed or evolved into being. The location of the battlefield itself occurred by chance encounter, resulting from maneuvers and counter-maneuvers made by the opposing combatants. Although the size and boundary locations of the federally administered commemorative grounds have changed over time, the location of the battlefield itself has remained fixed.

The Custer Battlefield portion of the monument was designated as a National Cemetery of the fourth class on August 1, 1879, by General Order No. 78, Headquarters of the Army. The order did not specify exact boundaries, but was understood to encompass Last Stand (Custer's) Hill, based on a recommendation made by Lt. General Philip Sheridan to Commanding General William Sherman. In fact, the boundaries of the original one-square-mile of land encompassing the hill were not established until proclamation by President Grover Cleveland on December 7, 1886. The final placement of an actual burial ground within the square mile was contested until 1893. Ironically, the parcel of land surveyed by W.H.Owen and designated as the National Cemetery was a 6.91 acre plot between 500 and 1200 feet west of Custer Hill, where the slope and soil conditions were more suitable for burial. Given the roughness of the terrain in between, it was deemed too difficult to enclose the entire area within one stone wall, and thus the cemetery had effectively been moved from the originally intended location on Custer Hill. This action also allowed Battle Ridge to retain the visual integrity of the June 25, 1876 battle date, rather than developing into a ridgeline cemetery as had been championed by some in Washington.

The location of many of those interred has also changed over time. General Custer himself, along with nearly all of the officers killed at Little Bighorn Battlefield, were removed for final burial in the East. The remains of the troopers, who had been hastily buried beneath shallow cover, were ultimately removed from the field and buried in a mass grave around the Custer Monument in July, 1881. The locations of original burial sites, where soldiers had actually fallen in the field, were marked with individual white marble stones. Several skeletal remains discovered subsequent to the mass burial have been interred in the national cemetery proper. The bodies of soldiers killed in other skirmishes during the Indian Wars have likewise changed location, moved to the national cemetery as isolated frontier forts where original interment had occurred were decommissioned.

Despite some shifts in boundaries and numerous re-interments of bodies, the site retains strong integrity of location. The spirit of place evoked by the battlefield and the memorial qualities of the cemetery are very strong.

### **Design / Biotic Community Organization**

The combination of elements that create the form, plan, spatial organization, and style of a cultural landscape or historic property fall under this category.

#### Battlefield

Because of early efforts to protect the battlefield as a memorial, its original natural appearance has been generally well preserved. "Designed" modifications made to the site began during the battle itself, as soldiers of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry attempted to protect themselves in their defensive stand. These modifications to the landscape were crude and quickly done, and are manifest today by shallow entrenchments dug on the top of Reno-Benteen Hill.

The design overlay of commemoration began with the first intentional acts following cessation of hostilities, most likely the erection of small stone cairns by Lakota and Cheyenne to mark the spots where warriors had fallen. Memorialization of the Cavalry began with shallow burials marked by wood stakes a few days later. Sites where soldiers had fallen on the battlefield remained marked with wooden stakes until 1890, when they were replaced with official War Department headstones of white marble. A temporary monument built of stacked cordwood was erected on Last Stand Hill in 1879. It was replaced with the present granite obelisk in 1881. In 1929, a granite monument recognizing the companies under the command of Reno and Benteen

was placed on the site of their defense. Recently additions to the designed commemorative landscape have focused attention on Native American casualties. In 1999, a program was commenced to place red granite markers where Indian warriors fell, and in 2003, a major Indian Memorial was dedicated. The commemorative landscape of Little Bighorn expresses strong design integrity.

The designed landscape of interpretation was more recent in arriving. Although visitors began coming to the site almost immediately after the battle and grew steadily in number, the primary site development emphasis of the War Department administration was on the national cemetery. In 1915, an old wagon road leading to monument and following Battle Ridge to loop at Calhoun Hill was graded and widened for automobiles. With the addition of the Reno-Benteen unit, a 5-mile road connecting the two sites was cut into the site, and in 1938, the road was graded for year-round use. The construction of the Battlefield Road continued until 1940, and likely caused significant disturbance and distortion of the landscape through the site.

With the NPS Mission 66 program came major additions, including a visitor center, parking lots, and an employee housing and maintenance facility complex. The Mission 66 Visitor Center has been determined to be ineligible for the national register, and evaluation of the Mission 66 features as a district is beyond the scope of this CLI. Most of the architectural and landscape development related to site visitation and interpretation post-dates the period of significance and lacks design integrity as related to the historic context of the site. A notable exception is the new entry gate facility, built in the early 1990s, which was patterned after the architecture of the Stone Lodge.

#### Cemetery

Custer National Cemetery is spatially distinct from the battlefield site. Designed as an independent military composition, it expresses aspects of form, plan, spatial organization and style of the traditional national military cemetery, retaining an orderly rectilinear and utilitarian configuration. Spatial containment is provided by vegetation, defined primarily by the rows of non-native evergreen trees lining much of its perimeter. The edge thus created creates a zone set apart from the surrounding prairie by its irrigated lawns and neat straight-row orthogonal arrangement of headstones. The cemetery is further divided into very ordered sub-spaces or sections defined by tree rows and walkways. The cemetery portion of the site retains integrity of design reflecting the period of significance,

#### **Setting**

Setting is the physical environment of a historic property that illustrates the character of the place. The setting of Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument varies significantly across the site. The prairie uplands along the northeast side of the site, and separating the Custer Battlefield and Reno-Benteen units of the monument, extends the battlefield scene into surrounding areas and retains a high level of integrity. Aside from occasional fence lines and subtle vegetative differences due to grazing, the sense of place reflects the period of significance, and even more narrowly, the date of the battle itself. Private tourism-related development was at one time proposed on private land along Battlefield Road, adjacent to the Reno-Benteen site. If allowed to happen, this development would seriously threaten the integrity of the battlefield setting.



**Panoramic view from Sharpshooter Ridge to northeast, depicting integrity of setting**



The landscape of the Little Bighorn Valley, south and west of the site, has been converted to a variety of land uses. To date, development is minimal and low density, with the greatest visual contrast resulting from straight lines imposed by land platting and reinforced by field patterns, tree lines, and road alignments. Tourism-related development that has occurred adjacent to the Monument entrance road and in the Garryowen area conflicts with the historic character of the site, as does the nearby interstate highway and other lineal elements such as utility lines. Continued future development threatens to erode the integrity of the setting in this area.



**View of setting looking southwest from Battle Ridge across Little Bighorn Valley**

### **Materials / Species Composition**

The original character-defining materials of both the battlefield and the cemetery are relatively intact. The primary culturally significant materials on the battlefield are the white marble soldier markers and stone commemorative monuments on Custer and Reno-Benteen Hill. The materials of some of the markers and memorials have had to be replaced or repaired over the years due to vandalism and weathering, but this has been accomplished in an appropriate manner. Headstones in the cemetery conform to the standard for military burials.

During the historic period, new structures were built of materials sympathetic with earlier design. An example was the Rostrum, built in the northeast corner of the cemetery in 1932 of native stone, and a garage behind the Superintendents Lodge built in 1934, also of stone to match the lodge itself. (Note: both have since been removed). Materials used on the Monument since the period of significance have been somewhat haphazardly applied. Brick and concrete block used on the very visible visitor center and parking lot restroom facility reflects a lack of sensitivity to the contextual use of materials in earlier eras. Likewise, small scale features in the landscape lack the quality and richness of historically appropriate materials. As noted in the design section, the new entry gate facility presents a significant exception to recent trends, with its use of native stone echoing materials of the old Stone Lodge.



**Historic materials**



**Recent materials**

The vegetative composition of the two areas possesses high integrity. The monument has two distinct ecological and topographic zones of the Northern Great Plains, dry uplands and the Little Bighorn River floodplain. (Rice, 4) These were the dominant plant communities at the time of the battle and during the War Department era. Fencing of the Custer Battlefield site in 1891 created a cattle-grazing enclosure, which has helped retain the pre-battle integrity of the natural site vegetation. The Reno-Bentzen unit was not fully fenced until the 1954, but has largely self-restored to the pre-grazing plant community in subsequent years. Despite the occurrence of some invasive plant species and the temporary loss of big sagebrush due to wildfire, the natural vegetative structure is fairly intact. The pristine quality of the prairie grasslands is relatively unusual within the region and supports considerable wildlife diversity.

The cemetery landscape has been retained and enhanced in keeping with the War Department precedent established on the grounds, allowing the biotic community of introduced exotics in the cemetery to retain a high level of historical integrity as well. Most of the evergreen trees planted in the cemetery are originals planted between 1933-1941 and appear to be in reasonably good condition. The use and management patterns have remained consistent, as has the species composition of plantings. The biotic community within the national cemetery possesses a high level of integrity.

### **Workmanship / Biotic Management Techniques**

The aspect of workmanship refers to the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular period. Whether critiquing small-scale features such as the markers on the battlefield or the Stone Lodge, a level of careful craftsmanship is evident in elements representing the period of significance. As is the case with several other aspects of integrity evaluated at Little Bighorn, there is a significant loss of integrity of workmanship evident in features post-dating the period of significance. Whereas elements produced in earlier eras display a hand-crafted quality, expressing careful attention to detail, the typical built form of recent decades tends to be mass-produced, and generic in appearance as can be seen in contemporary site furnishings such as benches and trash receptacles. The vegetative community in the battlefield is passively managed as prairie. Ongoing assessment of invasive plants and the development of a management plan to control non-natives will insure that the historic character of the site perpetuates.

The landscape of the cemetery is reasonably well cared for, retaining a well-manicured look representing its appearance from the late period of significance (1930s). There is a concern that ageing evergreen structure trees planted in the 1930s and 40s will become increasingly susceptible to disease and infestation, as well as windfall and other natural causes. A vegetation management plan should be implemented to develop an ongoing replacement program to ensure that uniform aged trees do not all succumb at the same time.

### **Feeling**

A property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period is evaluated under this aspect of integrity. Major Alfred Reynolds, inspector general of the Department of Dakota, who toured the site in 1902, commented on the need for an improved source of water for irrigation of the cemetery "if it is deemed advisable to plant trees and otherwise improve the cemetery proper." But out of respect for the historic significance of the battlefield, he added, "it occurs to me that the scene of this memorable fight would be better left in its natural state." (Greene, 49) The intact quality of the battlefield site that has been perpetuated through the decades has remained thanks to the compounded decisions of numerous superintendents and advisors who have, like Reynolds, prioritized its protection.

Issues of development outside Monument boundaries raised in the discussion of Setting have also influenced (and have the potential to further influence) the feeling of period authenticity. Unfortunately, more recent ancillary development related to visitation and interpretation also intrudes in the scene.

Despite external encroachment and ever-increasing visitation, Little Bighorn largely retains its qualities of remoteness and history. The natural setting of the battlefield appears much as it did in 1876, with its scattered markers in isolation or in larger clusters poignantly expressing a moment frozen in time that can be felt and appreciated by visitors to the site. Overall, the strong commemorative message of this memorial landscape has changed only modestly since the time of the War Department administration, and still retains much of its historic character.

### **Association**

This aspect of integrity refers to the direct link between the significant historic event, period, person, design, etc., and the cultural landscape. The association of Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument with one of the defining moments in the history of the American West is central to its existence. The mere name of the place creates strong mental imagery, and the integrity of the site does not disappoint. Sufficient physical characteristics and features survive from the historic period to sustain the association between the property and its historic importance.

### **Integrity of the Property as a Whole**

According to National Register guidelines, a property does or does not retain its overall historic integrity. The seven qualities of integrity need to be evaluated together - leading to an overall conclusion regarding the integrity of the property. Ultimately, the question of integrity is answered by whether or not the property retains the identity for which it is significant. All properties change over time. It is not necessary for a property to retain all its historic physical features or characteristics. The property must retain, however, the essential physical features that enable it to convey its historic identity. The essential physical features are those features that define both why a property is significant (Applicable Criteria and Areas of Significance) and when it was significant (Periods of Significance). They are the features without which a property can no longer be identified.

Of the seven aspects of defined by the National Register program, the cultural landscape of Little Bighorn dating from the period of significance retains integrity in all seven. Given the retention of high or partial integrity in all seven aspects, Little Bighorn does retain its integrity as a historic property. The landscape experienced within the support zones, however, does not contribute to, and in fact conflicts with, the integrity of the primary resource areas of the historic battlefield and the cemetery. The aspects of feeling and setting are diminished by the overlay of poorly conceived visitor-oriented development dating primarily from the Mission 66 era. Mission 66 era landscape resources are not evaluated within this CLI. In 2006, the Mission 66 Visitor Center structure was determined by the NPS and by the Montana State Historic Preservation Office to be ineligible as an individual structure due to lack of historic integrity (Montana SHPO letter dated 3/7/06).

As relates specifically to Custer National Cemetery, the National Register Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places suggests the following: "Assessing the integrity of a historic cemetery entails evaluating principal design features such as plan, grave markers, and any related elements. In essence, the researcher should ask the following questions in evaluating integrity: 1) To what degree does the burial place and its overall setting convey the most important period(s) of use? 2) To what degree have the original design and materials of construction, decoration, and landscaping been retained? 3) Has the property's potential to yield significant information in American culture been compromised by ground-disturbance or previous investigation?" (National Register, Bulletin 41, 18) Based on these guidelines, the national cemetery clearly retains its integrity as a historic landscape.



## Landscape Characteristics

### 1. ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES

The whole of Little Bighorn Battlefield is an archaeological site in the broadest sense; it holds the possibility of yielding important new information about the Battle of Little Bighorn, and is still a virtual time capsule for archeologists and historians. With the complete annihilation of Custer and his battalion of five companies of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, the story of the battle has been left to archeologists to attempt to decipher. In the years following the battle and well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the site was literally mined of artifacts by collectors. Even the earliest legitimate surveys were very random and haphazard. An archeological survey of a 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Horse Cemetery on Last Stand Hill took place in 1941 following its accidental discovery while laying a new drain from the water tank. The first systematic archeological investigation did not occur until 1958. Since that time, techniques and recording tools have become increasingly sophisticated. Many significant archeological finds have been uncovered during construction projects and following fires that cleared vegetative cover from the site. Perhaps the most notable survey occurred in 1984, following the most significant wildfire experienced on the battlefield since 1876. Volunteers assisted professional archeologists in locating and cataloguing numerous items exposed on the ground surface. Artifacts found included cartridges, bullets, iron arrowheads, personal adornment items, army equipment, firearms parts, buttons, and clothing fragments, as well as fragments of human and animal remains.

Notable archeological sites on the Custer Battlefield unit include Last Stand Hill and the locations of the various other last stands as indicated by marker groupings, Deep Ravine, where the remains of Company E are believed to be buried and where Tasunke Witko (Crazy Horse) crossed the river and attacked Lt. Col. Custer's Battalion, and the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Horse Cemetery. Significant sites on the Reno-Benteen Defense Site include the rifle pits, field hospital, 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry dump, and the warrior positions around the defense site. Historic stone cairns commemorating warrior casualty sites throughout the battlefield still await discovery, and artifacts may also be found within surrounding lands, including the historic Indian village site under private or Crow tribal ownership.



**Volunteers collect archaeological relics (inset) from Last Stand Hill in 1984, following a major wildfire in 1983 that exposed artifacts on the surface. (NPS poster)**

Little Bighorn Battlefield holds the possibility of continuing to yield hidden clues. Recent efforts to locate the remains of approximately 28 soldiers of Company E, suspected to be buried beneath

up to 8' of erosional deposition in Deep Ravine, have employed ground-penetrating radar. The sophisticated geophysical remote sensing instrumentation detected subsurface anomalies in the ravine. The continued development of such new technologies may help to understand the events of June 25, 1876, underscoring the significance of this archaeological landscape.

Future archeological excavations may yield additional information concerning the interpretation of events in the battle on June 25-26, 1876. An archeological survey of a historic 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry horse cemetery on Last Stand Hill took place in 1946 (and 2002), followed by an archeological survey at Reno-Benteen Battlefield in 1958 by Mr. Robert Bray. Additional archeological surveys of the battlefield took place in 1984-1985-1989-1991-1999 & 2004 respectively. The results of the surveys, supervised by the Midwest Archeological Center, Lincoln, Nebraska, were published and the appropriate documentation will be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places.

#### CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:

All in-situ artifacts relating to the battle, including bullets, cartridges, clothing, arrowheads, personal effects, equipment, and any undiscovered human or animal remains are contributing features. Undisturbed areas of the site are contributing in the sense that they hold the potential for future discovery and adding insight into details of the battle itself.

#### NON-CONTRIBUTING/COMPATIBLE

Any artifacts relating to pre-1876 Native American use of the area, or artifacts left later as a result of tourism, reenactments, or movie productions. These may have historical, cultural, or archeological value, and relate to the ongoing story of the Battle of Little Bighorn, but do not contribute to the period of significance.

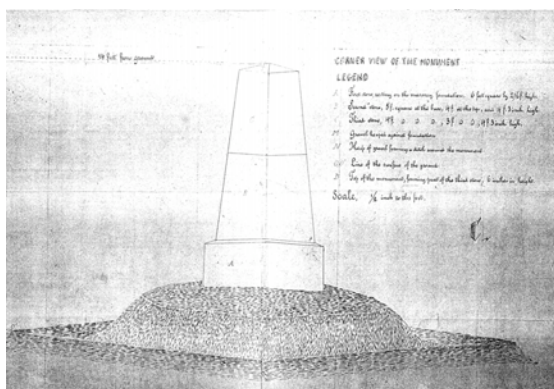
#### NON-CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:

Areas of the battlefield disturbed during construction, particularly of Battlefield Road in 1938-40, have lost their potential for yielding meaningful archaeological information.

## 2. BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

(Note: Nearly all of the List of Classified Structures (LCS) listed structures on the site are headstones and memorial markers, which might fit more appropriately within Section 9, Small Scale Features. However because they are listed as “structures” on the LCS, they have been addressed in this section with the exception of the Reno-Bentzen Earthen Fortifications, which are discussed in section 9.)

Prior to June 25, 1876, there were no buildings or structures either on or within the area surrounding what would become one of the most significant battlefields in American history. The erection of crude markers three days later began an ongoing culture of memorialization that continues to the present time.



A permanent monument to the memory of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was erected on Last Stand Hill in 1881, and is the oldest structure on the site. Specifications for the monument were developed by the army's quartermaster general, Brigadier General Montgomery Meigs, and the monument was created by the Mount Auburn Marble and Granite works of Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was constructed in three pieces for the arduous journey to the site, and placed according to the head of the detail 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Charles Roe, “on the point of the hill within six feet of the place where the remains of General Custer were found after the fight.” (Greene, 32)

Built of granite in the form of a truncated pyramid, the 11.5 foot high obelisk is inscribed with the names of all of the troopers, Indian scouts, and attached personnel who fell on the battlefield. The face of one side of the base bears the following inscription: “In memory of officers and soldiers who fell near this place fighting with the Seventh United States Cavalry against Sioux Indians, on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of June, A.D. 1876.” The remains of the soldiers were gathered from their shallow earthen graves and reburied in a trench approximately 10 feet in width around the perimeter of the shaft, in which all but one of the bodies that could be located (approximately 220) were re-interred. An iron fence was constructed around the obelisk two years later (1883), to prevent direct access by tourists who had been chipping away at the granite to collect “souvenirs” of their visit. The corners of the monument were actually beveled in 1890 to disguise rough edges caused by this vandalism. The fence around the monument was removed in 1963, but holes in the stone curb indicate the location of former fence posts.



**Custer Battlefield Memorial**

Sites where soldiers had fallen on the battlefield remained marked with wooden stakes until 1890, when they were replaced with 246 white marble markers. The markers conform to the official War Department standard for national cemetery headstones, and special dispensation was necessary to use them to mark places of death rather than burial sites. They are approximately 2' wide by 3' high, with slightly curved tops, reading simply “U.S. soldier 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry fell here June 25,



1876". Stones for officers include their name, rank, and unit. The largest concentration of markers occurs near the top of Last Stand Hill, clustered around the stone denoting the place of death of General George Armstrong Custer himself. A low iron fence was added around this grouping of stones in 1930 to keep tourists at a distance.



**Above: clustering of markers on Last Stand Hill  
Right: marker stone denoting location of fallen soldier  
Below: Reno-Benteen Memorial**



A granite monument was placed on the Reno-Benteen defense site in July, 1929, following the act authorizing the site in 1926. The actions of Major Marcus Reno on the battlefield had been subject to controversy, with many blaming him for Custer's defeat. Despite being cleared of charges of cowardice, dereliction of duty, and disobeying orders at a court of inquiry in 1879, numerous objections to commemorating Reno continued to be voiced by veterans of the battle and other skirmishes of the Indian Wars, causing lengthy delays in the memorialization. The impasse was solved by the decision not to place Major Reno's name on the marker.

Nearly 5,000 burials have occurred in Custer National Cemetery. They, too, are marked by official white military headstones. Their identical size, shape, and color, and even spacing in straight rows creates a memorable impression of pattern and order that typifies national cemeteries elsewhere. Only a few irregular markers or memorials, such as the Fort C.F. Smith Memorial (moved with the deceased from that site in 1890), Fort Keogh Monument, and a few ornamental stones disrupt the otherwise orderly uniformity of the site.



**Headstone of Marcus Reno among the rows of markers in Custer National Cemetery**

The dominant structure in the cemetery is the two-storey stone lodge, completed in 1894 as a residence for the superintendent, and said to be one of the first permanent dwellings in eastern Montana. It is constructed of local red sandstone, rock-face on the exterior, laid in a random ashlar pattern. It has a cedar-shingled gable roof, and features a three-bay north porch with ½ hip roof. Restoration of the building was undertaken in 1978-79, but it retains its historical and architectural integrity and is in good condition. Several out-buildings of similar construction and vintage, along with a stone garage built in 1934, were demolished in 1964 to enlarge the cemetery.



**Stone Lodge in National Cemetery**

Other significant structures in the cemetery include a turn-of-the-century U.S. Army steel flagpole, originally a ship's mast, which was erected in 1908 near the center of the cemetery, and ornate double iron gates and pedestrian gates (1931) at the cemetery entry. (RMP, 13)



**Dedication of red granite warrior marker on battlefield** Source: LIBI archives

The park installed red granite markers marking the place of death of Indian warriors on the battlefield beginning in 1999. The NPS determines the sites for the warrior markers “contingent on a solid foundation of historical evidence including physical evidence (stone cairns) and written or oral histories.” (Doerner, 10) The markers themselves are of identical size and shape as the standard U.S. military markers of white marble used to denote commemorate fallen soldiers on the battlefield. Lettering is cut into the stone and given a white paint treatment to highlight legibility against the red granite. Markers are installed several yards away from historic stone cairns placed by families of the deceased shortly after the battle, to protect the integrity of the historic recognitions. (Doerner, 7) The warrior markers contribute to the period of significance by providing a more complete picture of the Battle of Little Bighorn and the commemorative efforts that followed, as the locations of the warrior markers are based on oral history traditions and cairns placed by the families of the warriors following the battle.

In 1996, a design competition for an Indian Memorial was held. Installation of the winning entry began in 1999 at a site just north of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry monument, on ground that had been previously disturbed, and dedication occurred on June 25, 2003. As the most recent memorial addition to the battlefield, the memorial helps to interpret and tell the story of the Battle of Little Bighorn from the Indian perspective, providing a more balanced understanding of the battle and the cultures involved in the conflict. The low-lying earth-bermed configuration of the monument is generally not intrusive in the landscape. It is architecturally and visually non-contributing.





**Indian Memorial. Note Spirit Warriors Sculpture in foreground; Seventh Cavalry Monument on top of Last Stand Hill is visible through the Spirit Gate in background Source: LIBI archives**

The museum-administration building, designed by Omaha architect Daniel Robbins in a modern international style, was built in 1950/51 as part of the NPS Mission 66 program. It is a one-story frame building with basement, foundation of poured concrete, cinder block masonry walls, and tar and gravel roof. An entrance vestibule was added in 1955.

Several additional buildings were built southwest of the cemetery in the 1960s, completing the Mission 66 agenda. These included a new superintendent's residence and two duplex employee residences for full-time staff use, an apartment building for seasonal staff, and a utility building. The most recent structure to be added was an administration building in 2003, which was actually a remodel of the former superintendent's residence.



**Administration Building**



Employee Housing

**CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:**

In addition to the buildings and structures listed below, the warrior markers are important to the site's history because they provide a more complete picture of the Battle of Little Bighorn and the commemorative efforts that followed, as the locations of the warrior markers are based on oral history traditions and cairns placed by the families of the warriors following the battle. Thus, although dating from outside the period of significance, they are noted as non-contributing / compatible resources.

| <b>LCS ID &amp;<br/>STRUCTURE NUMBER</b> | <b>STRUCTURE NAME</b>                             |
|--|---|
| 011525 HS-0001                           | National Cemetery Superintendent's House          |
| 011530 HS-0002B                          | Bear Paw Battle Monument                          |
| 023057 HS-0003A                          | Shilling, Mary Grave Marker                       |
| 023058 HS-0004B                          | McVey, John Grave Marker                          |
| 023059 HS-0026A                          | Hubner, Francis Grave Marker                      |
| 011520 HS-0031                           | Custer Battlefield Memorial                       |
| 011521 HS-0032                           | Reno-Benteen Battlefield Memorial                 |
| 011522 HS-0033                           | Custer Battlefield Stone Markers                  |
| 011523 HS-0034                           | Reno-Benteen Earthen Fortifications               |
| 011526 HS-0036                           | National Cemetery Iron Flagpole                   |
| 023060 HS-0037                           | National Cemetery Markers Civil War Type          |
| 023061 HS-0038                           | National Cemetery Markers Spanish American War    |
| 023062 HS-0039                           | National Cemetery Markers General Type Vertical   |
| 398314 HS-0040                           | National Cemetery Markers General Type Flush      |
| 023063 HS-0102B                          | Low, William Grave Marker                         |
| 023064 HS-0126A                          | Raymond, Charles H. Grave Marker                  |
| 023065 HS-0136A                          | Littlejohn, Margaret J. Grave Marker              |
| 023066 HS-0194B                          | Bradley, Charles O. Grave Marker                  |
| 023067 HS-0290A                          | Mercer, Richard and Lena Grave Marker             |
| 023068 HS-0296A                          | Morrison, Sylvia Wyatt and George Grave Marker    |
| 023069 HS-0316B                          | Fort C.F. Smith Memorial                          |
| 023070 HS-0370A                          | Fleury, George Grave Marker                       |
| 023071 HS-0372A                          | Coonrad, Aquila Grave Marker                      |
| 023072 HS-0375A                          | Birch, James Grave Marker                         |
| 023073 HS-0381B                          | Manley, John A. Grave Marker                      |
| 023074 HS-0387B                          | Rehberg, Hattie Grave Marker                      |
| 023075 HS-0398A                          | Smith, Margaret and Theodore Grave Marker         |
| 023076 HS-0460A                          | White Swan Grave Marker                           |
| 023077 HS-0480B                          | Brown, James Grave Marker                         |
| 023078 HS-0483B                          | Jones, Ben Cornelius Grave Marker                 |
| 023079 HS-0487B                          | Turner, Roy Grave Marker                          |
| 023080 HS-0545A                          | Cornwall, Michael Grave Marker                    |
| 023081 HS-0546A                          | Philips, William & Scott, Newton Grave Marker     |
| 023082 HS-0570A                          | Dalton, John Grave Marker                         |
| 023083 HS-0573B                          | Booth, George C. Grave Marker                     |
| 023084 HS-0577B                          | Donaldson, Thomas & William Grave Marker          |
| 023086 HS-0671B                          | Daly, William James Grave Marker                  |
| 023087 HS-0686A                          | Quigg, Patrick Grave Marker                       |
| 023088 HS-0697A                          | Tyrell, Annie H. Grave Marker                     |
| 023112 HS-0701A                          | Tyler, Florence Grave Marker                      |
| 023089 HS-0714A                          | Mayer, A.H. Grave Marker                          |
| 023090 HS-0744A                          | Van Orsdale, Emily & Logan, Arthur Grave Marker   |
| 023091 HS-0745A                          | Logan, Capt. Wm. & Van Orsdale, John Grave Marker |
| 023092 HS-0746A                          | Gerhard, Capt. Charles Grave Marker               |
| 023093 HS-0765B                          | Ross, Bella Grave Marker                          |

|                 |                                     |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| 023094 HS-0767B | Glenn, Mary Grave Marker            |
| 023095 HS-0768B | Lov, Mary A. & Matilda Grave Marker |
| 023096 HS-0789A | Kirley, John Grave Marker           |
| 023097 HS-0792A | Jones, Hartwill G. Grave Marker     |
| 023098 HS-0814A | Hazlett, Harry Newton Grave Marker  |
| 023099 HS-0820A | Leary, Raymond F. Grave Marker      |
| 023100 HS-0821A | Leary, John B. Grave Marker         |
| 023101 HS-0835A | Grover, Minnie & John Grave Marker  |
| 023102 HS-0876A | Timpany, Robert Grave Marker        |
| 023103 HS-0952A | Walker, William Grave Marker        |
| 023104 HS-0957B | Haigler, William A. Grave Marker    |
| 023105 HS-0960A | Davis, James N. Grave Marker        |
| 023106 HS-0965A | Cruis, John H. Grave Marker         |
| 023107 HS-1040A | Coale, John H. Grave Marker         |
| 023108 HS-1045A | Pryor, James L. Grave Marker        |
| 023109 HS-1053A | Logan, Thomas A. Grave Marker       |
| 023110 HS-1057A | Ross, Clifford A. Grave Marker      |
| 023111 HS-1141B | Paul, Lewis Rains Grave Marker      |
| 011529 HS-1236B | Bear Paw Monument                   |
| 023085 HS-601AA | Crittenden, John J. Grave Marker    |

**NON-CONTRIBUTING / COMPATIBLE FEATURES:**

Indian Memorial, 2003  
Warrior markers

**NON-CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:**

Museum-administration building, 1950/51  
Quonset hut (building #9), 1950s  
Residential buildings, 1960s  
Utility building, 1960s  
Administration building, 2003



### 3. CIRCULATION

#### Vehicular Circulation

Private or rental vehicles or commercial bus tours are the usual means of reaching Little Bighorn Battlefield, as the site is not accessible by public transportation. The monument entry road from US Highway 212, near the junction with I-90, was constructed in 1957, replacing the historic route that wound its way past the Superintendent's Residence, with a direct alignment leading to a new parking lot on the north side of the cemetery. The new entry road has created significant cut and fill impact through the natural hill and coulee landscape, as well as imposed a straight line alien to the context. The parking lot is the first element of the monument experienced by most visitors, creating an entry image contradictory to the spirit of the place.

From the parking lot, the monument road climbs Custer Hill to the Custer Battlefield Memorial. Parking at the top of the hill, as close as 25 feet to the memorial, detracts from an appreciation of the site in both a reverential and historic sense. Grading that occurred for the parking lot during construction in 1938-40 likely disturbed and distorted the primary landscape. (Greene, 69). Vehicles parked in this lot are silhouetted on the skyline, detracting from the historic scene as viewed from the Little Bighorn Valley.

Battle Ridge Road follows a former army maintenance route along Battle Ridge to Calhoun Hill. This track was widened and graded to twelve feet in 1915, with a loop provided at Calhoun Hill for automobile turnaround. Road improvements undertaken in 1938-40 "seems to have demolished several hillocks that appeared on the 1891 topographic map of the field." (Greene, 69)

After the US Army took control of the Reno-Benteen site in 1930, a 5-mile road, now called Battlefield Road, was created connecting it to the Custer Battlefield (Greene, 69). Battlefield Road does not follow an historic alignment, and the lack of sensitivity paid to the historic landscape during its construction between 1938-40 caused damage to the primary landscape. As noted in Jerome Greene's *Stricken Field*, an administrative history of the monument, construction of the two lane gravel-based roadway (twenty feet wide with five foot shoulders on each side) "materially affected the original condition of the battlefield and possibly altered interpretive conclusions about the site" due to "the lack of period sensitivity regarding historic landscapes". (Greene, 69)

Construction of a reinforced concrete culvert over Medicine Tail Creek resulted in a significant realignment of the creek channel from its probable 1876 configuration. At Weir Point, a formerly modest dip in the terrain where Reno and Benteen's forces gathered to watch action on Custer Hill was drastically altered with a road cut. Finally, grading of the road terminus near the Reno-Benteen memorial likely flattened significant battle-related landforms. (Greene, 69)



**Battlefield Road cutting through Weir Point**

The maintenance road leading down the bluffs to the pump house was created during the War Department Era in approximately 1912, to provide access to the first wooden pump house. A second pump house made of local Parkman Sandstone and concrete, was built into the bluffs in 1938 (adjacent to the first building) and although no longer in service, is still preserved. A spur road loop to access the gravel pit and Quonset hut was created in more recent times.

## Pedestrian Circulation

The placement and treatment of trails has long been debated within monument grounds. Trails leading from Last Stand Hill to the head of Deep Ravine, and into the Keogh group of markers have been alternately opened and closed over the last several decades, in efforts to strike a balance between interpretation and resource degradation. In 2000, the Deep Ravine Trail was paved with all-weather gravel and re-opened. (Greene, 168) A gravel self-guided trail around the defense line on the Reno-Benteen site was opened in 1957, and sections of the trail were repaved with beige-pink concrete in 1989-90, creating considerable controversy. (Greene, 177) Trail routes tend to adhere closely to historical circulation routes, having originated as paths followed by Army maintenance workers tending the gravesites.



**Left: Aerial view of Reno-Benteen Defense Site on bluff top above Little Bighorn River. The route of concrete interpretive walk is clearly evident encircling the defensive positions. (Google Earth)**  
**Right: Interpretive path leading up Last Stand Hill from Deep Ravine, following approximate route of Company E and subsequent army maintenance trail.**

A dirt path/trail to Lame White Man & Noisy Walking Cairns/Red Granite Markers known as the Cheyenne Marker Trail was initially established as a social path through regular visits beginning around 1916 by the Cheyenne, to pay homage and respect to Chief Lame White Man, Southern Cheyenne, and Noisy Walking, Northern Cheyenne. Extensive use of the trail began in the spring of 1958, when at the urging of John Stands In Timber, the grandson of Chief Lame White Man, the NPS erected a wooden sign identifying Lame White Man's casualty site on Battle Ridge, with the words "Lame White Man, a Cheyenne leader, fell here." This encouraged public access, which intensified in 1999 with the placement of the first red granite markers for warriors at LIBI beginning with the two erected for Lame White Man and Noisy Walking.

Although the exact circulation routes used by the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry and the Indians cannot be precisely located, white marble markers placed at the locations where soldiers died and the newer warrior markers provides visual evidence of the flow of the battle, tracing the paths of advance and retreat. The visual paths traced across the landscape by these markers creates a unique "ghost image" of historic circulation routes followed on June 25, 1876. The linear array of bullet cartridges plotted following archaeological analysis reinforces the placement of markers.

Roads and paths through the cemetery have grown over time with expansion of burial plots, but alignments have conformed to the overall layout of the parcel. Surfacing has gradually transitioned from initial rough grading to more permanent materials.

**CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:**

The known routes of soldiers and warriors during the Battle of Little Bighorn, conveyed through oral history: Reno's Retreat, Water Carrier's Ravine, Deep Ravine, the Koegh/Crazy Horse Trail and Medicine Tail Coulee

The likely routes of soldiers and warriors during the Battle of Little Bighorn, interpreted through marker placement and archaeological evidence (and often followed by army maintenance trails and modern interpretive paths): Deep Ravine, the Koegh/Crazy Horse Trail and Medicine Tail Coulee.



**Main route through center of cemetery**

The cemetery roads and paths laid out during the War Department years.

The pump house road dates to 1912, and was used in association with maintaining the exotic species in the cemetery landscape.

**NON-CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:**

Battlefield Road alignment and construction features (1938-40)

Battle Ridge Road grading, including parking at Custer Monument

Park entrance road, which was moved from its original route in 1957

Paving materials of the roads and footpaths, particularly the pink concrete at Reno-Benteen

Visitor center and Reno-Benteen parking lots



**Pink sidewalk in Reno-Benteen area**



**Asphalt parking lot and concrete sidewalks on the Reno-Benteen site exhibit materials and scale outside the period of significance.**

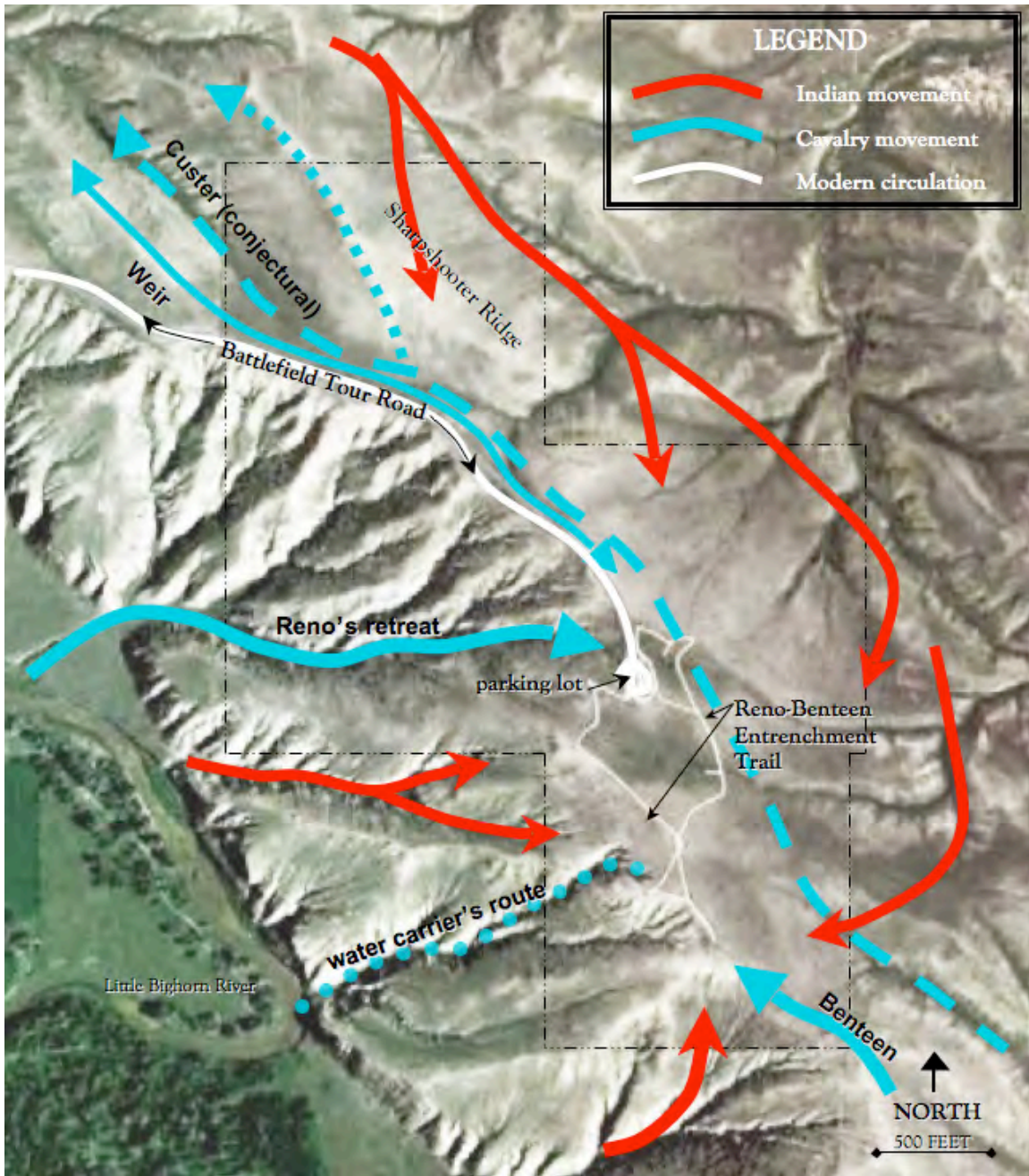


**Visitor Center parking lot**





Circulation: Monument Hill Unit



Circulation: Reno Benteen Unit



#### 4. CLUSTER ARRANGEMENT

The locations of markers on the battlefield, placed on the casualty sites of soldiers (and more recently warriors) tell a vivid story of battle on the plains. Though a few spurious soldier markers are known to exist, and the process of placement of warrior markers is ongoing, the patterns are clear. The markers on the open battlefield stand in small groups or alone, depending on how the bodies of the soldiers were found or where warriors were known to have fallen. Clustered white markers in small patches delineate groupings of soldiers, perhaps bunched together in retreat forming small pockets of futile defense. Linear configurations of markers trace lines of advance or retreat in the battlefield. The largest concentration of soldier markers occurs on Monument Hill, where approximately 40 members of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry circled together in a final desperate entrenchment formed of dead horses in an attempt to survive. In contrast, the pattern of warrior markers is widely dispersed, indicative of a surrounding position and individualized attack and retreat tactics.



**Linear pattern of markers show where soldiers fell along route of Keogh retreat**

The national cemetery forms another unique cluster. Headstones in the cemetery are orthogonally oriented, as was the tradition in Anglo cemeteries during the War Department years, depicting deliberate and precise planning and execution.

Structures in the administrative compound are organized in a pattern representative of a master planned development, typical of NPS Mission 66 projects.

#### CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:

The groupings of markers on the battlefield indicating casualty sites of soldiers and warriors, representing various situations of attack and defense.

Arrangement of burial plots in the national cemetery, representing the order and precision of the War Department era.



**Orderly orthogonal grouping of headstones in Custer National Cemetery.**

#### NON-CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:

The planned configuration of administration and maintenance buildings, post-dating the period of significance.

## 5. CONSTRUCTED WATER FEATURES

Constructed water features on the site relate to supply for culinary and irrigation purposes. The cemetery is irrigated by sprinkler irrigation, fed by an on-site pump house adjacent to the river. Water is stored in an underground reservoir, just east of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Monument, adjacent to the accessible parking area on Last Stand Hill. Prior to the construction of the present system, water was drawn from the Little Bighorn River and stored in an above-grade water cistern built in 1911, located adjacent to the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Horse Cemetery. The cistern was removed following construction of the current buried reservoir in 1952/53.



**Former cistern on top of Last Stand Hill  
Source: LIBI archives**

### NON-CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:

The old pump house dates to 1938, within the period of significance, but it does not contribute to the significance of the site.

The current cemetery irrigation system was remodeled in the 1950s as part of Mission 66.

The buried water reservoir, built in 1952/53, is located at the top of Last Stand Hill, mere feet from the most significant portion of the battlefield. Its construction doubtless disturbed a significant resource.



**Underground water reservoir on top of Last Stand Hill under construction in 1952/53. Note proximity to battlefield on left and Custer Monument above.  
Source: LIBI archives**



## 6. CULTURAL TRADITIONS



**Cairn marking location of fallen warrior**

Cultural traditions expressed in the battle itself have left few lasting physical remains, but are nevertheless significant to the meaning of the landscape, as are later modifications of the landscape in accordance with the customs of the U.S. military, white American society, and Native American groups.

Stone cairns were placed on the field by Indians shortly after the cessation of hostilities to mark the place of death of fallen loved ones. Markers and monuments placed on the field for the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, and Military Staff Rides (educational excursions conducted by the Army) including the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, reflect the parallel

cultural tradition of memorialization of the U.S. Army and American public. The design and arrangement of headstones in the national cemetery reflect the culture of military burials, in the uniformity of white stone markers arranged in orderly cardinaly-oriented rows, accessed by straight paths, and surrounded by a fence and introduced vegetation.

Modern Indian markers, the Indian Memorial, and associated spontaneous shrines and prayer offerings, while not dating to the historical period, play an important part in the continuing cultural significance of the site. Items left at spontaneous shrines by visitors reflect modern cultural ways of marking the sites of tragic events and modern material culture, in that the gifts left are often items the person had for consumption, such as sticks of gum, which they leave spontaneously when they are moved by the site.



**Spontaneous offerings at base of Indian marker**

Throughout the landscape surrounding the battlefield, Lakota and Cheyenne families buried their deceased in traditional ways in the Little Bighorn valley and adjacent hillsides. The Lakota dead were placed on scaffolds or in tipi's while the Cheyenne were buried along the bench land on the western side of the Little Bighorn Valley. These sites are sacred, and have been threatened since 1876 -- today by continued encroachment and development, including gravel mining, cell phone towers, private businesses, residential housing and ranches, and a future state rest area (at Exit 510) on the Crow Reservation, and private non-Indian owned property throughout the Little Bighorn valley.

### CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:

Stone cairns placed in respect of fallen warriors  
Cemetery headstones and memorial markers

### NON-CONTRIBUTING FEATURES/COMPATIBLE:

Battlefield markers placed in respect of fallen soldiers and warriors  
Spontaneous shrines and prayer offerings



## 7. LAND USE

*“Anyone who visits this hallowed spot today knows that commercial development threatens Monument lands.”* Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell, 2001

Prior to the battle, the vast open landscape that would become a battleground was a natural prairie ecosystem. Human use would have been limited to occasional buffalo hunts, as the native grass for bison grazing was plentiful. Buffalo terraces -- parallel trails following the contours of hillsides compacted in the soil following centuries of buffalo grazing -- are still visible in the area today.

From June 25, 1876, the site transitioned rapidly from a grisly killing field, strewn with half-buried bodies and sun bleached bones, to a pilgrimage site, visited by ever growing numbers of tribute-bearers and the curious. Commemoration, begun ever so crudely three days after the fall of Custer and his men with the placement of broken tipi poles, grew in scale over time. Recognition of the site as a national cemetery added a different layer of land use to 7 acres of the site. Educational study by students of military history, another early use, still continues today. Tourism and battlefield interpretation grew steadily through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a fact formally recognized by the transfer of the site from the War Department to the National Park Service in 1940. The land use of tourism is manifest today in the parking lots full of out-of-state vehicles, paved interpretive trails, information signs, a visitor center, and a compound of administrative support buildings.

The land surrounding the Monument is part of the Crow Reservation. The course of the Little Bighorn River cuts a marked line of demarcation between upland and valley bottom. Lands to the northeast of the river are upland prairie, and have remained as essentially undeveloped grazing land perpetuating the visual qualities of 1876. Land southwest of the river lies in the more fertile valley bottom, and has been cut by transportation corridors, converted to agriculture, and settled as farmsteads. Commercial ventures have appeared at the northwest entry to the site, near the highway interchange, at Garryowen, and even threaten to intrude on a site along Battlefield Road near the Reno-Benteen Battlefield. (RMP, 8)

Various attempts have been made over the years to secure broader control over land development of adjacent parcels. The 1986 long-range master plan for the monument proposed extensive land acquisition, and a complete restructuring of the way the site is interpreted, but did not advance due largely to cost concerns. The Custer Battlefield Preservation Committee, a private nonprofit group, uses donations to purchase private land around the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, with the ultimate goal of returning the land to the federal government for preservation. As of January, 2002, the CBPC controlled 3,500 acres of land surrounding the 765-acre national monument.

### CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:

Open prairie grassland representative of the characteristic landscape in 1876.

Commemorative aspect of the national cemetery and monuments/memorials throughout the site.

### NON-CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:

Visitor use and interpretation, though important to the NPS mission, does not contribute to the period of significance.

Commercial and residential development of adjacent land.

## 8. NATURAL SYSTEMS AND FEATURES

Note: Topography and Vegetation, the primary Natural Systems contributors at Little Bighorn, are discussed in their own respective sections.

Soils on the site range from deep to very shallow, and from clay to loamy fine sands. The lower slopes and shales have deep soils, which are prone to both wind and water erosion. The effect is a soil that is easily eroded by both natural and human factors. Natural erosional processes are occurring along the river on the monument boundary, and present some concern regarding potential loss of artifacts during major flooding events (RMP 21)



**Clay soils typical of much of the site**



**Bluff and riparian flood plain along Little Bighorn River**

## 9. SMALL SCALE FEATURES

The most important small scale features at Little Bighorn Battlefield are the monuments and markers on the battlefield, and the headstones in the national cemetery. Because these are listed LCS structures, they have been discussed in section 2, Buildings and Structures.



**Reno-Benteen rifle pits, following excavation and restoration in 1958 (Source: LIBI archives)**

Soldiers in the companies of Major Reno and Captain Benteen spent much of the night of June 25 and early morning of June 26, 1876, creating a defensive perimeter around the top of what is now called Reno Hill. The exposed nature of the natural “hogback” landform afforded little protection from attackers, so trenches were dug with whatever implements could be found. As recalled later by Private William C. Slaper, M Company, *“We were not very well entrenched, as I recall that I used my butcher knife to cut loose and throw a mound of it in front of me upon which to rest my carbine.”* (WNPA Reno-Benteen, 5)

These shallow “rifle pits” were reinforced with dead horses to provide cover against enemy fire. A few original rifle pits survive on the Reno-Benteen site, as well as several which were restored in 1958.

Stone cairns were often placed on the battlefield by participants and family members to mark the locations where Indian warriors had fallen. These are significant, because the bodies of dead warriors were removed from the battlefield after cessation of fighting for traditional rites, leaving no other record of location other than oral history. The stones were probably collected shortly after the battle on the far side of Battle Ridge, where caprock formations of Parkman’s sandstone are exposed on the ground surface. (Doerner, 6). Indian stone breastworks are located on Sharpshooter Ridge north of the Reno-Benteen defense site.



**Left: iron fence around Last Stand markers, erected 1930**



**Right: holes in granite curb around Custer Monument, showing placement of former fencepost**

The low iron fence on Last Stand Hill, surrounding the grouping of markers just below the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Monument, was built in 1930 to prevent damage to the site and memorial stones. Another iron fence which had been constructed around the Monument in 1883 to prevent tourists from chipping “souvenirs” from the granite, was removed in 1963, but is recalled by the holes in the curb denoting where the fence posts had previously been.



Several small-scale features contribute to the landscape quality of the national cemetery, in addition to the headstones and memorials. The iron boundary posts for the Custer Battlefield, erected in 1885 for the proposal of the National Cemetery of Custer's Battlefield, MT, mark the second and final boundary for the Custer unit. The flagpole, installed in 1908 to replace the earlier wooden pole destroyed by lightning, is a distinctive landmark rising above cemetery markers (see buildings and structures). The ornate double iron entry gates to the national cemetery, along with a pedestrian gate, were added in the early 1930s. Bronze tablets cast with the words "Custer Battlefield" and "National Cemetery" were mounted on the flanking stone portals.

Interpretive panels and numbered posts have been placed throughout the monument, beginning as early as 1953, to help tell the story of the battle. Although these help in the interpretive function of the site, they do not contribute to the historic site qualities.

Numerous other necessary but non-contributing functional elements are scattered throughout the site, including site furnishings (benches, litter receptacles, etc.), directional and information signage, etc.

#### CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:

- Soldier markers
- Custer and Reno-Benteen Memorials
- Stone cairns
- Reno-Benteen rifle pits
- Cemetery headstones
- Cemetery flagpole
- Cemetery gate
- Iron fence at Last Stand Hill
- Iron boundary posts for the Custer Battlefield
- Indian stone breastworks on Sharpshooter Ridge
- Field hospital site at Reno-Benteen

#### NON-CONTRIBUTING/COMPATIBLE FEATURES:

Warrior markers

#### NON-CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:

- Interpretive panels
- Directional and informational signage
- Recent site furnishings



**Flagpole in National Cemetery**



**Markers and iron fence on Last Stand Hill**



**Cemetery gate**

## 10. SPATIAL ORGANIZATION

The spatial organization of Little Bighorn National Monument is, for the most part dictated by the natural terrain of open, hilly land dissected by incised ravines and coulees. There is a dramatic contrast between the enclosed spatial qualities felt inside the ravines versus the outward-oriented spatial expanse experienced from the ridgelines. In the tight spatial enclosure of the ravines, there is a sense of visual and psychological security afforded by the containing landform walls.



**Tight spatial enclosure of Deep Ravine**

This condition is evidenced in Deep Ravine and Calhoun Coulee in the Custer Battlefield site, and in the coulees of Reno's Retreat and Water Carrier's coulees on the Reno-Benteen site. Moderate spatial enclosure occurs where the sense of separation is still perceptible and views are still contained, but the open ceiling of the sky begins to dominate. This condition exists at Cedar Coulee, Medicine Tail Coulee, and Deep Coulee. Open expanses experienced on ridgelines and hilltops form the other extreme of the spatial spectrum. In these extroverted, outward-oriented settings, the feeling is one of exposure and vulnerability. Expansive spatial qualities are experienced from Battle Ridge, and other high points throughout the site. The spatial qualities of the site played a key role in the battle, alternately concealing and revealing opposing combatants.



**Reno's Retreat Ravine, showing steep banks forming spatial enclosure**

The national cemetery is spatially distinct from the battlefield site. Here, the spatial containment is provided by vegetation, defined primarily by the rows of non-native evergreen trees lining much of its perimeter. The edge thus created creates a zone set apart from the surrounding prairie by its irrigated lawns and neat straight-row orthogonal arrangement of headstones. The cemetery itself is further divided into very ordered sub-spaces or sections defined by tree rows and walkways. Section A consists primarily of veterans of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, plus those who fell at the Battle of Bear Paw Mountains. Sections B and C contain men from several troops of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, as well as veterans of the Spanish-American War, both World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam. Men of the 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, Companies B, C, G, and I, are buried in Section D.

### CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:

Natural spatial organization of the battlefield site, comprised of open expanses and enclosures.

Orthogonal organization of the national cemetery creates a designed space distinct from the natural spaces of the battlefield.

### NON-CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:

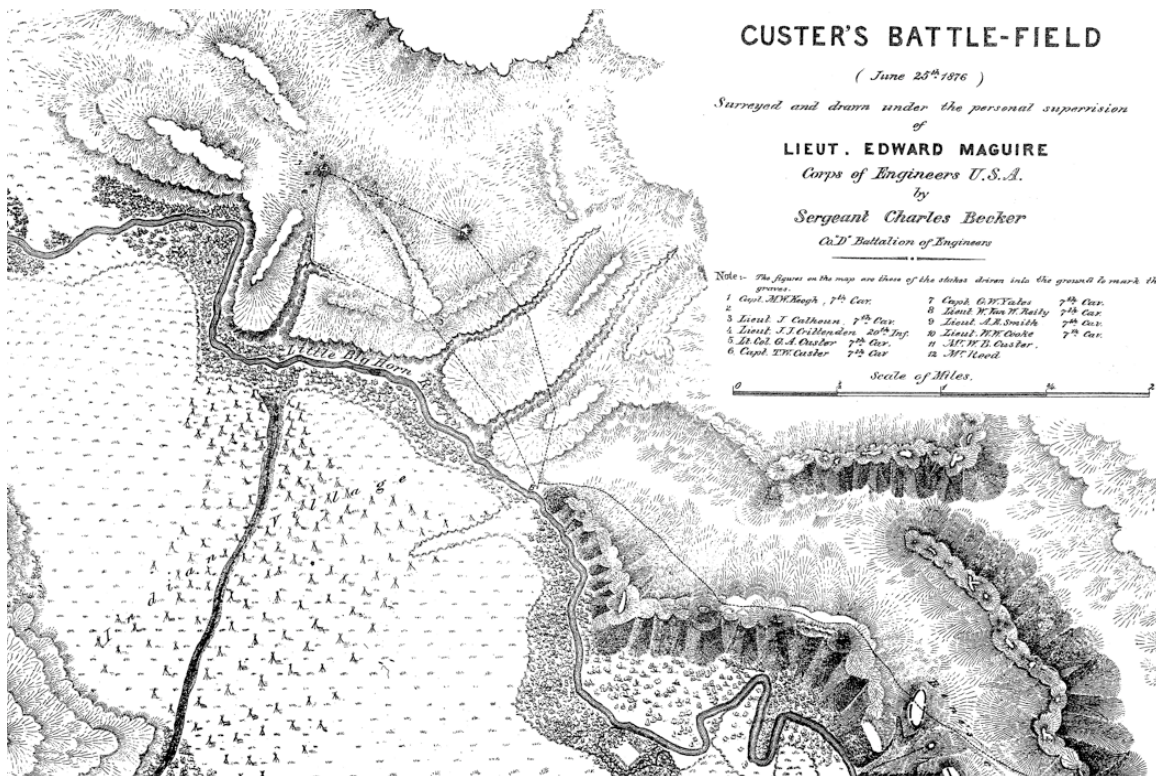
The distribution of the Mission 66 buildings and their related infrastructure on the site does not contribute to its significance.



## 11. TOPOGRAPHY

The topography of the site is dominated by hogback ridges and dissected by ravines and coulees, which rise above the floodplain of the Little Bighorn River and support several non-perennial streams. Salt flats documented in historical aerial photography persist today. The ridge formation, so important as the battle unfolded, is prominently situated above the Little Bighorn Valley. The landforms of the site are essentially intact and unchanged from 1876, with the exception of work that occurred in connection with the construction of Battlefield Road, between 1938-1940. A rather heavy-handed approach to road building seen frequently during an era not yet enlightened to sensitive treatment of historic landscapes resulted in the probable degradation of several primary landscape features, including the original contours of Last Stand Hill, the demolition of several smaller hillocks along Battle Ridge, the re-alignment of Medicine Tail Creek from its 1876 channel, a major road cut at Weir Point, and the flattening of significant landforms near the Reno-Bentzen Memorial. (Greene, 69)

Natural landforms greatly influenced tactical movements during the Battle of Little Bighorn. An accounting of the battle is intertwined with the topography of the site ... the matrix upon which the life and death struggle played itself out. It was the terrain which obscured the full extent of the Indian village from the advancing Custer's view, perhaps lulling him into the false belief that the encampment was much smaller than it turned out to be. The steep bluffs, which line the east bank of the Little Bighorn River, form an abrupt edge, limiting access from the floodplain. In early stages of the Battle, Reno's men, having struggled to cross the river, were caught scrambling up the steep riverbanks and pulled or gunned down by Crazy Horse and his followers.



**Maguire map of battlefield, drawn June 27, 1876, emphasizing topography as dominant site feature.**  
Source: LIBI archives

Hogback ridges afforded outward views across the broad valley below, and theoretically provided defensible high ground for soldiers of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. At the same time, it exposed them on an open landform dissected with ravines and coulees allowing for the secluded advance of Indian attackers. The primary landform on the Custer Battlefield site is Battle Ridge, anchored by Last Stand and Calhoun Hills at either end. Running roughly parallel is Greasy Grass Ridge, which



offered a clear prospect for Indian warriors. The high ridges remain much the same today as they were on June 25, 1876. This is true even of Last Stand Hill, despite numerous disturbances caused by burials, reburials, and the construction of monuments, water tanks, roads and paths. As noted by Bob Reece in *Interment of the Custer Dead*, "It's a myth that the elevation of Last Stand Hill was drastically lowered; minimal grading was done to level the spot where the monument was placed. Today, Last Stand Hill sits very much as it did at the time of the battle." (Reece)

The Reno-Benteen site is dominated by Reno Hill, the high ground successfully defended by survivors of the Little Bighorn Battle. A shallow depression on the top of the hill, encircled by entrenched defenses during the battle, and by a concrete interpretive trail today, was used as a makeshift field hospital to care for the wounded. A portion of the hill was leveled for construction of the parking lot, causing alteration of the landform.

In between the NPS sites, the dominant landforms of Weir Point, Sharpshooter Ridge, Luce Ridge, and Nye-Cartwright Ridge all played prominent roles in the battle. As Custer's route led him toward his ultimate fate, he would have looked down on the broad valley below from the high ground of Sharpshooter's Ridge, observing the Indian encampments including that of Sitting Bull some 300 feet below. From here, he would also have viewed Reno's skirmish lines in the valley. His decision to pull away from the ridge and follow the inward oriented Cedar and Medicine Tail Coulees carried him out of visual contact with his supporting columns as well as with the Indian attackers. Road construction in 1938-40 created a major cut slope near Weir Point. The incised erosional gullies or coulees were equally significant as strategic topographic landforms. To the retreating soldiers under Reno's command, they delineated access portals to the safety of higher ground. During the following siege of Reno's position, the bravery of men using the steep-banked terrain of Water Carriers Ravine to provide cover as they scrambled to the river below with canteens to fill, saved the lives of thirsting soldiers entrenched on their ridge-top defenses.

The topography of Deep Ravine, incised sharply into the rising Battle Ridge, played a key role in the assault on Last Stand Hill. When Captain McDougall scoured the terrain for bodies three days after the engagement, he found significant numbers of dead in the ravine, where it was clear they had used the upper sides of the cut-bank as a kind of breastwork, sliding down as they were struck. McDougall had his men cut chunks of earth and sod from the banks to cover the decomposing bodies in the ravine, a natural burial trench. This act filled in parts of the ravine, slightly altering its character. Erosional deposition in subsequent years has deposited at least eight feet of additional overburden over the suspected burials of approximately 28 soldiers of



Dissected topography above Little Bighorn River at Reno's Retreat Crossing  
Site view and aerial of same area from Google Earth, August, 2008 (red mark indicates site of photo)

Company E, whose bodies have never been recovered. (RMP, 12) Earlier photographs of Deep Ravine show much steeper embankments (in some places becoming vertical earthen cliffs) than what is evident today. Thus, although landforms are similar and very close to those of June 25, 1876, earth processes are dynamic and the topography will continue to evolve.

**CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:**

The topography is mostly unchanged from the time of the battle, and contributes strongly to an understanding of the landscape on June 25 and 26, 1876.

Buffalo terraces on hillsides

**NON-CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:**

Grading has significantly disrupted the original topography along the park entrance road.

Grading for Battlefield road created significant cut embankments and level changes at Weir Point.

Grading impact has occurred for road, parking, and buried water tank construction at Last Stand Hill

Grading for parking lot at the Reno-Benteen Defense Site leveled a portion of the entrenchment position on the hilltop.

Grading for the Indian memorial altered a portion of previously disturbed terrain on Last Stand Hill



**Cut and fill along LIBI entry road**

## 12. VEGETATION

“...everybody now lay down and spread himself out as thin as possible. After lying there a few minutes, I was horrified to find myself wondering if a small sagebrush, about as thick as my finger, would turn a bullet...” Lt. Edward S. Godfrey, commenting later on defending the Reno-Benteen site under siege. (WNPA, Reno-Benteen Entrenchment Trail Guide, 2002)

The native vegetation of the site played a significant role in the 1876 battle. Broad, expansive prairies provided distant views both of and from the site. The openness due to lack of cover on the hillsides and ridges made the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry vulnerable to attack. Yet within the relatively open prairie landscape, tall grasses and sagebrush tufts provided the visual cover that concealed the Lakota and Cheyenne as they advanced toward the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry on Battle Ridge. Shrub thickets of common chokecherry, western snowberry, wild rose, and others, afforded even denser cover for Indian warriors moving through the coulees. Riparian woodland of willow and cottonwood, which had initially afforded cover for Reno’s troops, was set on fire by the Lakota and Cheyenne to drive them out. Despite this, some soldiers remained hidden in the timber, protected from view until the Indians had broken camp and departed the following day. All of these vegetative elements persist on the site today in relatively intact condition, although big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), is temporarily lacking on most of the site due to recent wildfires. Fire suppression since the early 1900s has allowed the riparian woodland to accumulate unnatural fuel loads in the understory, possibly hindering the health and growth potential of the overstory.

The grassland within the monument boundaries, which has been fenced on the Custer Battlefield site to exclude grazing since 1891, comprises one of the most pristine prairie grasslands in the region. (NPS EA 2005, 14) It has been designated a Unique Natural Area because of the intact native plant community representative of the Northern Mixed Grass Prairie of southeastern Montana. (NPS EA 2005, 13) Northwestern Great Plains Mixed grass Prairie constitutes the extensive upland slopes. (Rice, 12) Prior to fencing, the land was subject to bison grazing, however, “their migratory and nomadic behavior would have resulted in relatively episodic grazing compared to that of fenced domestic livestock”. (Bock, 23) Since fencing, adjacent lands (and indeed most of the entire region) have been heavily grazed by cattle. The Reno-Benteen unit, partially fenced-off in 1947, was not completely enclosed until 1954, but has largely self-restored to the pre-grazing plant community in subsequent years. Grass cover is primarily comprised of western wheatgrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, green needlegrass, needle and thread, prairie sandreed, blue grama, threadleaf sedge, and sideoats grama. Two exotic annual bromes, cheatgrass (*B. tectorum*) and Japanese brome (*B. japonicus*, *B. arvensis*) are not uncommon in these uplands. (Rice, 4)



Air photo showing distinct ground cover vegetation difference between cemetery lawn, native prairie on Monument land (excluded from grazing since 1891), and grazed adjacent property.

(source: National Agricultural Imagery Program, 2005)





**Sagebrush at Park Entry**



**Sagebrush, bottom of Deep Ravine**



**1937 photo of Last Stand Hill showing historic density of sagebrush**



**Recent photo of Last Stand Hill from similar viewpoint, showing loss of sagebrush due to fire**



**Grassland along slopes of Last Stand Hill**



**Grassland and coulee bottom vegetation**

Sagebrush and Yucca are naturally dominant species in the system, although the presence of big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), has been temporarily reduced as the result of a major wildfire in 1983. The fire, which burned approximately 90% of the upland mixed grass prairie, killed 100% of big sagebrush in those areas, and subsequent field analysis showed no evidence of recovery following the first 20 years. (Bock, 23) Big sagebrush is lacking except in areas that were not

burned due to road/walkway firebreaks, including Calhoun Hill Loop and in isolated areas at the Reno-Benteen Battlefield. Big sagebrush is well-known to be killed by fire, with post-burn recovery taking 35 to more than 200 years. Silver sagebrush (*Artemisia cana*), has re-established readily following the fire, and its somewhat similar visual character to *A. tridentate* has insured that the battlefield probably appears much the way it did during the battle, despite being a less robust relative. (Bock, 29) Despite the occurrence of some invasive plant species and the temporary loss of big sagebrush on the site due to wildfire, the natural vegetative structure is relatively intact, and the pristine quality of the prairie grasslands is relatively unique within the region. (NPS 2005, 14)

Other site vegetation includes black greasewood, skunkbush sumac, and prickly pear cactus. Scattered salt flats, persistent since the time of the Battle, support very little vegetation and are relatively barren. Western snowberry, Rocky Mountain juniper, common chokecherry, and box elder are common in the ravines, or woody draws. Some ravines support non-perennial streams. The edges of these intermittent tributaries could be considered wetlands. Green ash can inhabit the lowest reaches of the ravines to the floodplain. The Little Bighorn River riparian zone belongs to the Northwestern Great Plains Floodplain Ecological System. (Rice, 12)

Common floodplain vegetation includes green ash, cottonwood, common chokecherry, box elder, silver sage, silver buffalo berry, and sandbar willow. Native willow species (*Salix* spp.) appear to have declined since the time of the Battle. As an important species to the pre-Anglo settlement population and a critical habitat component, the LIBI vegetation study suggests that they should be considered for judicious re-introductions into riparian bottomlands. (Bock, 23) The exotics salt cedar (*Tamarix* sp.) and Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*) have made a few small inclusions on the floodplain. (Rice, 4)



**Riparian vegetation along Little Bighorn River**

In the national cemetery, ornamental planting has occurred since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Superintendent Dommitt wrote in 1913 that two trees had been planted in the cemetery, and with the completion of a water line in 1915, irrigation was finally made possible. Sporadic landscaping continued through the War Department era, including the planting of a few Douglas fir near the lodge in 1928, and 13 cottonwood and ash in 1931. The most significant planting campaign occurred in 1933, when 25 red cedars and 150 blue spruce were planted in the cemetery. (Greene, 88) By the time the site was transferred to the NPS in 1940, nearly all of the native ground cover had been removed. The final major landscape “improvement” of the war department



**Evergreens and lawn in cemetery**



era was planting of a Tartarian honeysuckle hedge screening the west and north sides of cemetery in 1938. The honeysuckle (*Lonicera tatarica*) has since naturalized, and along with the invasive Russian olive (*Eleagnus angustifolia*), holds the potential for crowding out native riparian species. The vegetation report prepared for the park suggests that both species need to be removed or at least discouraged. (Bock, 30) One year after the 1940 transfer of the battlefield to the NPS, the last of the remaining sagebrush in the cemetery was replaced with sod, and 140 new evergreen trees planted (Greene, 118). The introduced vegetation, especially evergreen trees, has modified the natural ecosystem and provides a wide a variety of bird habitat.

Exotic and other invasive species occur along the road corridor, particularly on the road shoulders disturbed by earlier construction projects, and susceptible to transportation of seeds dropped from passing vehicles. The vegetation study by Bock and Bock concludes that “the most obvious ongoing and increasing threat to Battlefield biodiversity comes from the enormous visitor pressure on this famous spot in American history. The potential visitor impacts on LIBI grasslands include the destruction of native vegetation through trampling, and increased abundance and distribution of exotic species through propagule dispersal and creation of bare ground for colonization.” (Bock, 28) Some problem exotics include bulbous bluegrass (*Poa bulbosa*), St. Johnswort (*Hypericum perforatum*), and field bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*). In 2003 bulbous bluegrass was noted sporadically, but by May 2006, it lined the entrance road to the Battlefield and was conspicuous along the Battlefield roads themselves, even invading established grasslands away from roadsides and trails in places where vegetation cover is not dense. (Bock, 29) Despite park control efforts, St. Johnswort has invaded the natural prairie, spreading from a one-acre, scattered infestation in 2004 to five acres in 2008. Field bindweed is a prime example of distribution by human and wildlife travel, occupying 62 acres, nearly all visitor access areas, the remaining in ravines near the park boundary where adjacent lands are grazed regularly.

Areas of the site disturbed by the battle and subsequent burials, as well as post battle visitation to the area, are typically evidenced by the invasion of yellow clover, Japanese brome, common salsify, prairie milk vetch, and broom snakeweed. (NPS 2005, 13) Small, distinct patches of smooth brome also could indicate burials after the battle. Native species that are weedy in nature, such as showy milkweed, common sunflower, netseed lambsquarters, and curlycup gumweed can occupy disturbed lands before natural grassland is established.

#### CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:

Sagebrush, yucca, native grasses, and prickly pear cactus on the ridges, and chokecherry, willow, cottonwood, and other native deciduous trees in the riparian zones.

Ornamental plantings of lawn and evergreens in the Custer National Cemetery

#### NON-CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:

Exotic grasses and plant species, especially along the roadways.

Absence of big sagebrush.

Shade trees and other landscaping in visitor center and administrative complexes.

### 13. VIEWS AND VISTAS

Views and viewsheds were critical as the battle transpired on June 25, 1876. Views can be categorized as on-site, off-site, and of-site, all of which played important roles during the battle.



**Comparable views to southwest from Last Stand Hill in 1894 vs 2007, depicting both on and off site landscapes (left view from LIBI archives)**

On-site views are those contained within the battleground proper. Although not all of this land is in NPS jurisdiction due to several miles of separation between the Custer Battlefield and Reno-Benteen Defense Site by Crow Reservation land, on-site views have nevertheless retained integrity. Subtle changes in vegetative cover between NPS enclosures and surrounding grazed grassland are a minor exception.

By far the greatest disruption to the June 25, 1876 scene is the national cemetery as seen from Last Stand Hill. The stark contrast between natural and designed forms, and color and textural contrast between muted native grassland and irrigated dark green lawn and evergreens creates a visual impact that detracts from attempts to imagine the battle scene. Because the commemorative aspect of the site contributes to its significance, as do the dates of the cemetery creation, this anomaly cannot be regarded as non-contributing, despite the conflict it poses between the battle landscape and the later cultural landscape of the War Department era.

Development related to tourism and interpretation, however, largely post-dates the period of significance. The placement of the visitor center, while affording a convenient location from which visitors can view the site of Custer's Last Stand, created a significant intrusion within the immediate viewshed of Last Stand Hill. Parking lots encroaching on the cemetery, Custer Monument, and Reno-Benteen entrenchments detract from the historic scene. The visual impact of vehicles moving along Battle Ridge Road, especially large RVs, creates an incompatible contradiction of the visual scene, especially as viewed from the terrace at the visitor center.

Off-site views comprise the distant scene as viewed from vantage points within the Monument. Key off-site views at the time of the battle were those glimpsed by Custer of the Indian encampment in the valley below, as well as 360 degree views of the surrounding landscape and Indian positions from both Last Stand Hill and Reno Hill. The site of the Indian encampment is now on private land within the Crow Reservation, and has been converted to a variety of land uses, but to date is minimally developed, with the greatest visual contrast resulting from straight lines imposed by land platting and reinforced by field patterns, tree lines, and road alignments. Tourism-related development adjacent to the Monument entrance road northwest of the site creates a jarring and incongruous off-site view for visitors departing Little Bighorn, but the prairie dog colony parallel to the entrance road paints a more historic scene.

Views within, from, and of the site have experienced moderate modification since 1876. The feeling of the site has been well preserved, especially in areas where the visual intrusion of encroaching development on adjacent lands is not visible. The association of the site with the

battle has remained strong over the years. Upland areas adjoining the northeastern half of the site, and including the Crow Reservation lands crossed by Battlefield Road, are topographically, spatially, and visually intact with the exception of vegetative cover, which shows the effects of grazing. Although privately owned land, the lack of development of these areas projects the sense of isolation experienced on June 25, 1876. The southwestern aspect, covering the Little Bighorn Valley, exhibits land use modification, and also reveals two prairie dog colonies, likely descendent of colonies existing during the time of the Battle. The distant views and spatial qualities of the Battle date are retained. Visitors standing along Battle Ridge or walking the Reno-Benteen Entrenchment Trail experience the expansive panorama across the valley, scene of the Indian encampment on the day of battle. Unfortunately, the view is one of straight edged fields, linear plantings, dotted structures, and an interstate highway as opposed to a pristine pre-settlement valley. To prevent further development and convert crop fields to grazing areas within the viewshed of Little Bighorn Battlefield, the NPS should seek a conservation easement.

Views within the site, or of the site from adjacent areas, can similarly transport the visitor 132 years back in time, aside from the intermittent intrusion of RVs silhouetted on the skyline. Internal site modifications to accommodate visitors (roads, parking lots, paved trails) have created impact in localized areas, yet the overall visual landscape is acceptably intact, and possesses integrity.

Of-site views are those observed of the monument from adjacent or more distant vantage points. To many passers-by on I-90, a panoramic view of the elevated site across the valley from a car window may form the only impression of Little Bighorn they ever acquire. For site visitors, this same view forms their first impression. And for history buffs attempting to become immersed in the aura, a prolonged detour on the Garryowen loop and other local roads recreates the view of the battlefield observed by women and children from the Indian encampment, as well as the daunting cliffs facing Reno during his retreat. Due to NPS administration and protection of much of this scene, it remains largely intact.

Vistas, which differ from views because they are intentionally designed instead of being natural, exist in the national cemetery consisting of the rows of headstones and designed walkways, and views of the Little Bighorn valley including the Big Horn Mountains. The flagpole is an important focal point of the vistas in the cemetery. The amphitheater encompasses a panoramic view of the battlefield and Little Bighorn Valley. The east side of the visitor's center provides a view toward Monument Hill and out into the battlefield. The Indian Memorial was designed with a framed view of the Custer Memorial from within the Indian Memorial.

#### CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:

On-site views of battlefield from Last Stand Hill, Battle Ridge, Battlefield Road, Reno-Benteen Hill, and Monument trails to Deep Ravine, Keogh group, and Reno-Benteen entrenchment.

Off-site views of prairie landscape along the northeast half of the site

Off-site views of battlefield as observed from Little Bighorn Valley

Views and vistas within Custer National Cemetery

#### NON-CONTRIBUTING FEATURES:

On-site views of visitor center, parking lots, and vehicles moving along Battle Ridge Road

Off-site views of development (including cell towers) on adjacent and distant lands



**Panoramic on-site view looking north from Greasy Grass Ridge toward Battle Ridge**



**Panoramic off-site view toward west across valley from Greasy Grass Ridge**



**On-site view up Deep Ravine from banks of Little Bighorn River toward Last Stand Hill, as may have been viewed by advancing warriors.**

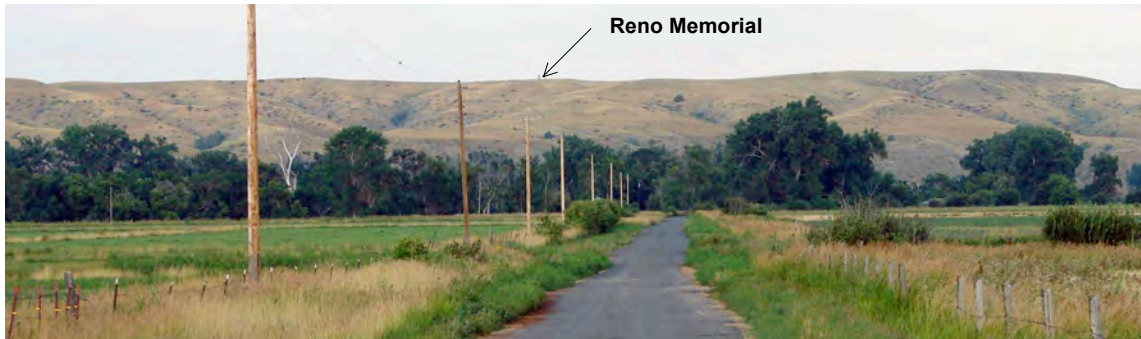


**Panoramic on and off-site view across valley from southernmost end of Reno-Bentley Site**





**Panoramic on and off-site view of Reno-Benteen Defense Site from Sharpshooter Ridge**

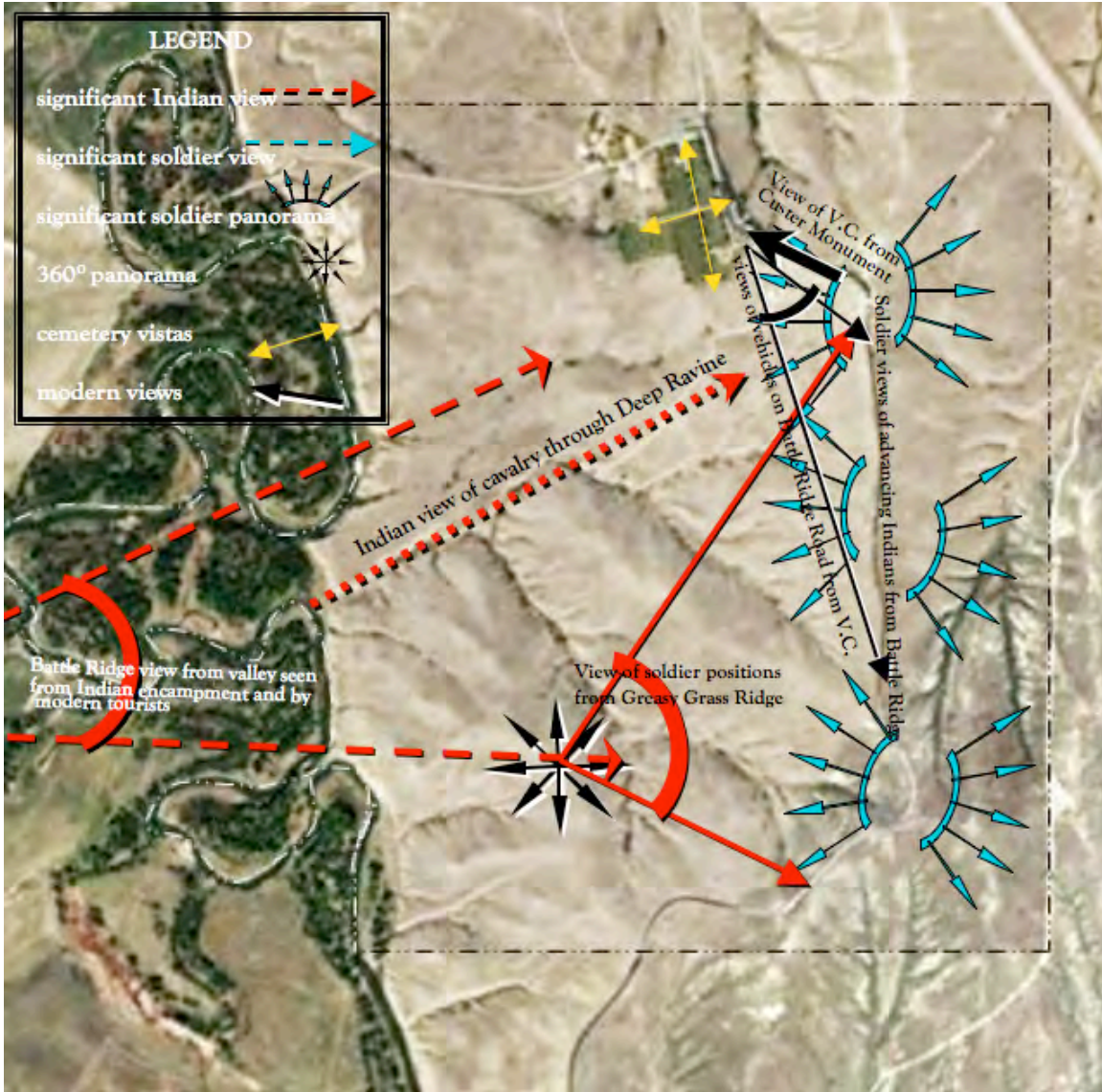


**Off-site view of Reno-Benteen Defense site from valley near Garryowen, as would have been viewed from southern end of Indian encampment**

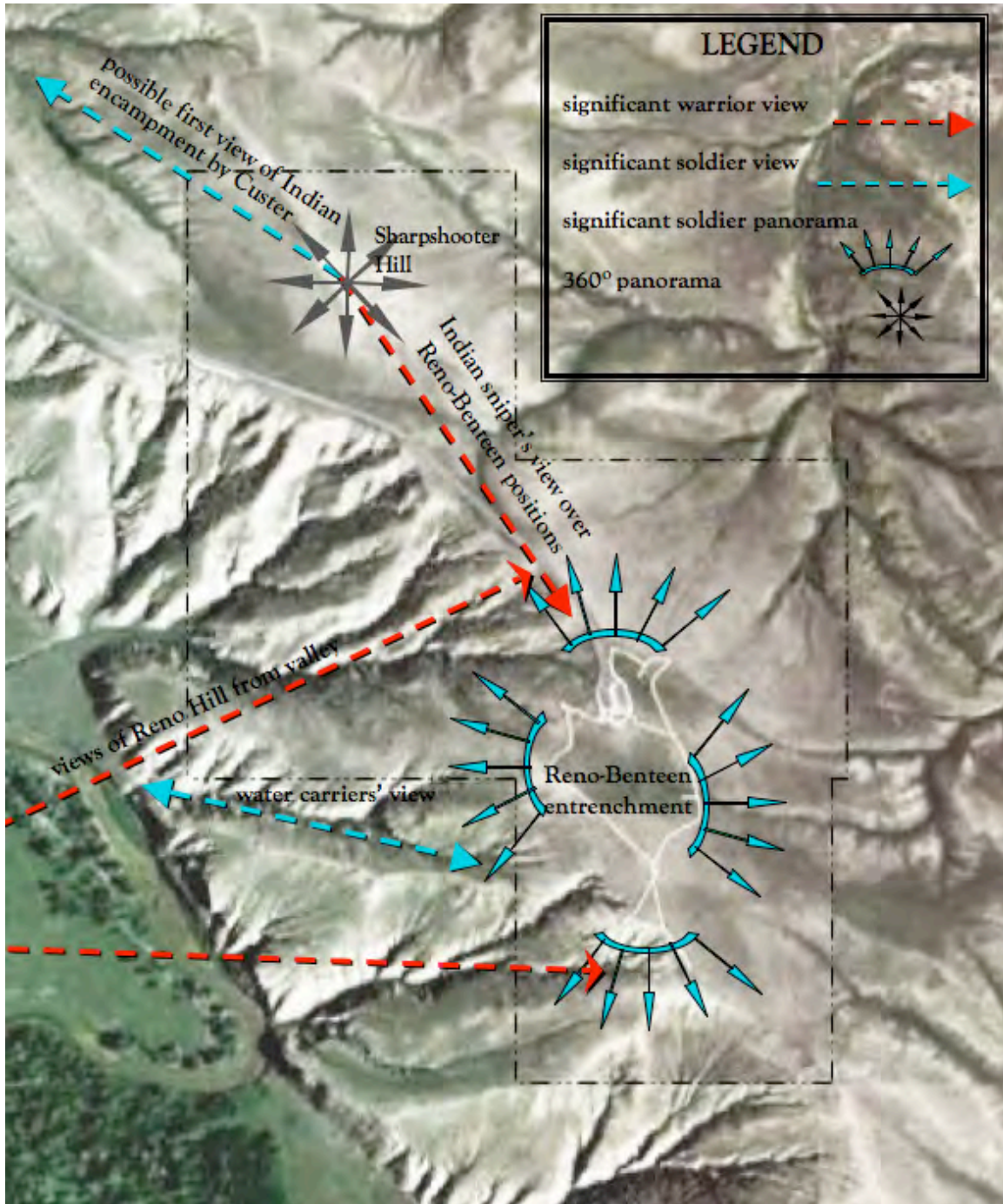


**Clockwise from upper left: Last Stand Hill from porch of visitor center – note vehicle on Battle Ridge Road in upper right; Visitor center and cemetery in battlefield viewshed; Parking lot encroachment in on-site views from cemetery.**





Views and vistas: Monument Hill Unit



Views and vistas: Reno Benteen Unit

**Condition**

Cultural Landscape Inventory Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Cultural Landscape Inventory Number: Number

Parent Cultural Landscape Inventory Name: Name

Parent Cultural Landscape Inventory Number: Number

Park Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Park Alpha Code: LIBI

Park Org Code: 0000

Stabilization Cost:

Stabilization Cost Date:

Stabilization Cost – Level of Estimate:

Stabilization Cost Estimator:

Stabilization Measures Description:

Stabilization Cost Explanatory Narrative:

**Condition Assessment**

| Condition Assessment | Assessment Date | Condition Assessment Explanatory Narrative |
|----------------------|-----------------|--|
| 1.                   |                 |  |

**Impacts to Inventory Unit**

| Impact Type        | External/Internal | Impact Explanatory Narrative   |
|--------------------|-------------------|--|
| 1. Adjacent Lands  | External          | Development in surrounding tribal lands has impacted the views from the site, and may continue to do so in areas where conservation groups have not purchased rights |
| 2. Fire            | External/Internal | Fires have destroyed much of the big sagebrush that was an important component of the historic vegetation on the site  |
| 3. Invasive Plants | External/Internal | Invasive plants are a problem in maintaining historic vegetation, especially along roadways  |

**Treatment**

Cultural Landscape Inventory Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Cultural Landscape Inventory Number: Number

Parent Cultural Landscape Inventory Name: Name

Parent Cultural Landscape Inventory Number: Number

Park Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Park Alpha Code: LIBI

Park Org Code: 0000

Approved Landscape Treatment:  
Approved Landscape Treatment Document:

Approved Landscape Treatment Document  
Date:

Approved Landscape Treatment Cost:

Approved Landscape Treatment Cost Date:

Approved Landscape Treatment  
Level of Estimate:

Approved Landscape Treatment  
Cost Estimator:

Approved Landscape Treatment  
Explanatory Narrative:

Approved Landscape Treatment Completed:

Approved Landscape Treatment Cost  
Explanatory Narrative:



## Bibliography and Supplemental Information

Cultural Landscape Inventory Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument  
 Cultural Landscape Inventory Number: Number  
 Parent Cultural Landscape Inventory Name: Name  
 Parent Cultural Landscape Inventory Number: Number  
 Park Name: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument  
 Park Alpha Code: LIBI  
 Park Org Code: 0000

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 Citation Type: Guidebook.

Citation Title: *Deep Ravine Trail: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, Montana*  
 Year of Publication: 2002  
 Publisher: Western National Parks Association  
 Citation Type: Guidebook.

Citation Title: *History of Custer Battlefield*  
 Citation Author: Don Rickey, Jr.  
 Year of Publication: Second printing, reprint edition, 2005  
 Publisher: Old Army Press, Inc.  
 Citation Type: Administrative history

Citation Title: *Little Bighorn Battlefield: A History and Guide to The Battle of Little Bighorn*  
 Citation Author: Robert M. Utley  
 Year of Publication: Reprint, 1994  
 Publisher: Division of Publications, National Park Service  
 Citation Type: Official National Park Handbook

Citation Title: *Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument*  
 Citation Author: Mark L. Gardner  
 Year of Publication: Reprint, 2005  
 Publisher: Western National Parks Association  
 Citation type: Battlefield history

Citation Title: *Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument Resources Management Plan (RMP)*  
 Year of Publication: (2007)  
 Citation Type: Unpublished manuscript  
 Citation Location: Little Bighorn National Monument.

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 Year of publication: 2002  
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Source Name: The Journal of the Little Big Horn Associates

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Citation Author: Bob Reece

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Citation Author: Jane H. Bock and Carl E. Bock

Year of Publication: 2006

Publisher: University of Colorado

Source Name:

Other Source Name:

Citation Number:

Citation Type: pdf download from website

Citation Location: <http://www.friendslittlebighorn.com/plantsbirdsoflittlebighornbattlefield.htm>

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Citation Author: NPS

Year of Publication: June, 2005

Citation Location: Little Bighorn National Monument

Citation Title: *An Enduring Monument – the Enigma of Custer Hill*

Citation Author: John Doerner

Year of Publication:

Publisher:

Source Name:

Other Source Name:

Citation Number:  
 Citation Type:  
 Citation Location:

Citation Title: Crow Tribe website  
 Citation Type: Internet  
 Citation Location: <http://www.crowtribe.com/about.htm>

Citation Title: United States Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Oversight Hearing on Indian Energy Development, "Regaining Self-Determination Over Reservation Resources"  
 Citation Author: Testimony of Chairman Carl Venne, Crow Nation  
 Year of Publication: May 1, 2008  
 Publisher:  
 Source Name:  
 Other Source Name:  
 Citation Number:  
 Citation Type: internet  
 Citation Location: [indian.senate.gov/public/files/CarlVennetestimony.pdf](http://indian.senate.gov/public/files/CarlVennetestimony.pdf)

Citation Author: A.N. Grover to the Quartermaster General  
 Year of Publication: June 23, 1892  
 Citation Number: NARA 197  
 Citation Type: Letter  
 Citation Location: LIBI

Citation Title: National Register Bulletin Number 41: Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places  
 Citation Author: Elisabeth Walton Potter and Beth M. Boland  
 Year of Publication: 1992  
 Publisher: National Park Service  
 Source Name:  
 Other Source Name:  
 Citation Number:  
 Citation Type:  
 Citation Location:

Citation Title: National Register Bulletin Number 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation  
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 Year of Publication: 1990; revised for internet 1995  
 Publisher: National Park Service  
 Source Name:  
 Other Source Name:  
 Citation Number:  
 Citation Type:  
 Citation Location:

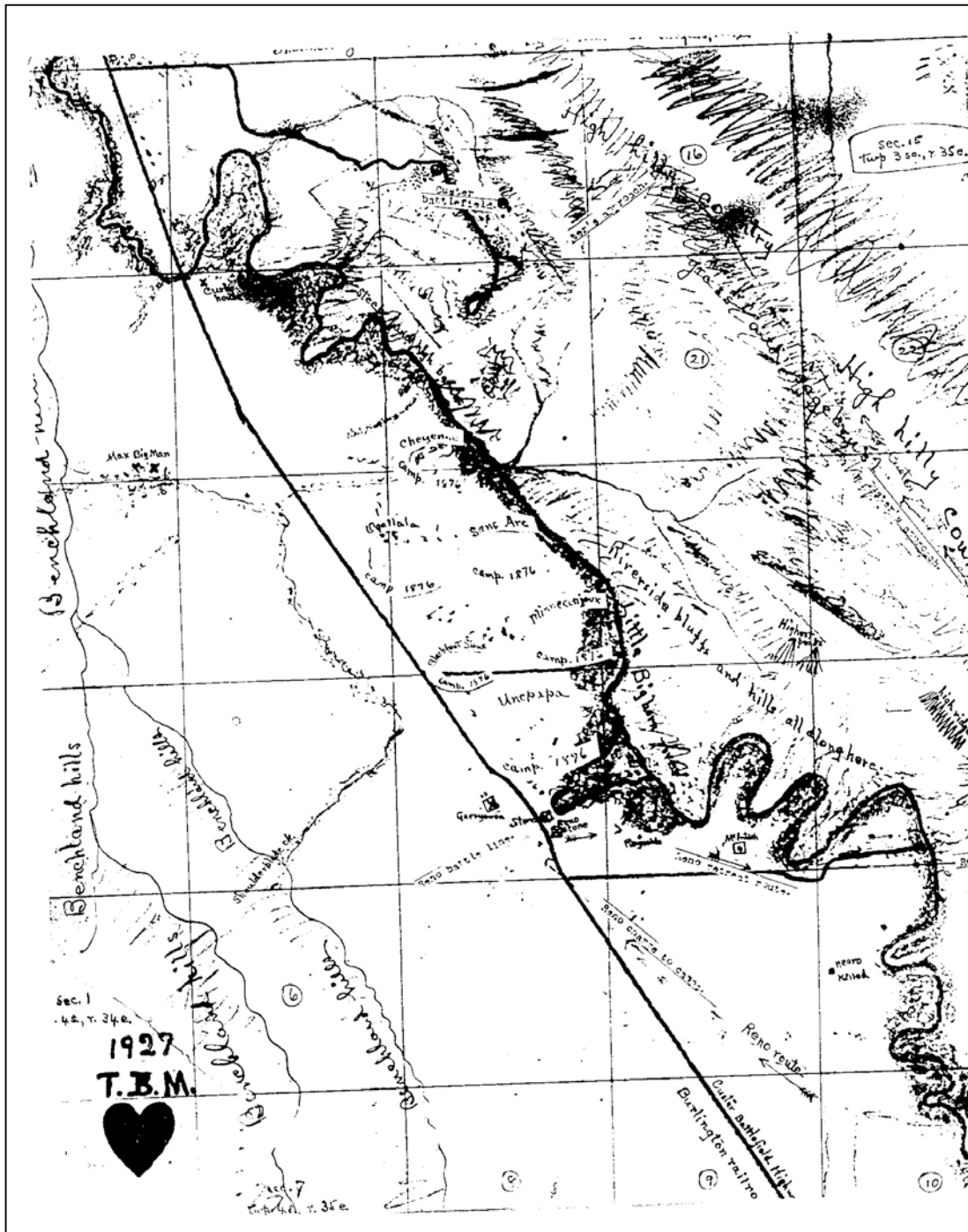
Citation Title: *Second Draft (May 7, 2008) LIBI Vegetation Mapping Report*  
 Citation Author: Peter M. Rice, et al.  
 Year of Publication: (2008)  
 Citation type: Unpublished manuscript  
 Citation Location: Little Bighorn National Monument.

Supplemental Information



Battle map Source: NPS, LIBI archives





Drawn by Thomas B. Marquis in 1927 from interviews with Wooden Leg, and other Northern Cheyenne veterans of the battle, this historic map identifies battle movements-positions, Sitting Bull's village, and important cultural landscape features. NPS-LIBI Collection