

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument Superintendent Update, April 2009

Kate Hammond

Hello! And thanks to all you friends of Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument who have welcomed me so warmly in my first 2½ months on the job. I am thrilled to be here and am excited about the many opportunities and challenges at this iconic national monument.

I look forward to meeting many of you in person in June and others of you over the course of the year over the phone, by email or at other meetings. It's an honor and a pleasure to work with all of our battlefield support groups, historically affiliated tribes and nearby communities.

Spring has officially arrived; however, we continue to have a periodic mixture of severe winter weather, along with the expected normal warming trends here in Montana.

I thought that I would pass on a few updates about what we've been up to at the battlefield.

133rd Anniversary Observance – As you know, June 25 & 26, 2009 mark the official 133rd Anniversary observance of the Battle of the Little Bighorn and this is the date that the national monument honors each year. We are here primarily in a support role as host to the public and all the various support groups including Friends of the Little Bighorn (Friends); Custer Battlefield Historical & Museum Association and Lakota, Cheyenne, Arapaho and Arikara/Crow Scout organizations.

The schedule of activities is still in the planning stage and additional information will be made available as we firm up activities. I plan to authorize that entrance fees be waived again on June 25, 2009 in honor of the 133rd Anniversary Observance and I hope to see many of you at the national monument during the anniversary week.

Battlefield Spring Hours Change – Effective April 1, 2009, Little Bighorn Battlefield will begin spring hours of operation. Custer National Cemetery, Indian Memorial, 7th Cavalry Memorial, Calhoun Loop and the Visitor Center/Museum will be open daily from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM through May 24, 2009. The self-guiding battlefield tour road to Reno-Benteen Battlefield and Entrenchment Trail and Deep Ravine Trail will be open from 8:00 AM to 5:30 PM daily. The Visitor Center will continue to offer the 18-minute orientation film *Their Shots Quit Coming* hourly.

Entrance fees are \$10.00 per private vehicle or \$5.00 per pedestrian if hiking or arriving on a motorcycle or bicycle. Holders of an interagency Annual Pass (\$80.00), Senior Pass (\$10.00, one-time fee for U.S. Citizens 62 years and older) and Golden Access Card (handicapped U.S. citizens) enter free of charge.

Visitation – Chief Ranger Michael Stops reports that visitation is down 2.9% for February 2009 compared to February 2008. With the down turn of the national economy and a fairly snowy February we did fine to remain about par for the month. Year-to-date visitation is down 6.2% with 5,153 visitors in 2009 compared to 5,494 visitors in 2008.

Interpretive Division – Ken Woody, Chief of Interpretation, announced the implementation his year of a new **Cell Phone Interpretive Tour** for Little Bighorn Battlefield (LIBI). Visitors will be able to utilize their cell phones at 30 interpretive stations throughout the battlefield by dialing a special telephone number that will provide a brief one-minute interpretive message to visitors. Our interpretive touch screen kiosk was just repaired and is back in service in the visitor center. The kiosk provides important interpretive information on 7th Cavalry and Lakota, Cheyenne and Arapaho participants in the battle; 1876 Army Sioux War Roster; 1876 Outline of Army Forts Atlas; and Custer National Cemetery Register. The kiosk now features improved ventilation and a back-up battery system to prevent overheating and to operate during electrical power failures.

We are in the second year of the National Parks Service (NPS) wide program called **Teacher-Ranger-Teacher** (TRT) program. Francis Takes Enemy from nearby Fort Smith, Montana is returning this year and a new TRT will be Aniha Perez from Brownsville, Texas. Aniha worked as TRT last year at Black Canyon, Colorado. We are thankful to the Friends of Little Bighorn Battlefield for graciously funding one of these positions this year. The TRTs will function as seasonal ranger-interpreters to present not only interpretive programs but also assist other divisions (including museum curation and White Swan Library) with a schedule that exposes the teacher to the interdisciplinary jobs available in the NPS. When the teachers return to teaching, they are required during NPS Week to wear their NPS uniform at school and to share their work experience with their students. The program is designed to get children interested in learning about our National Parks.

Veteran Ranger Michael Donahue of Belton, Texas is also returning again this summer as a seasonal interpreter.

Safety Review – In response to NPS safety awareness at LIBI, we recently conducted a comprehensive on-site review of all of our buildings and work stations and identified and corrected deficiencies. We also took a look at past practices and appointed a new safety committee to address safety at LIBI in order to take a more proactive approach to this important issue.

Friends of The Little Bighorn Battlefield – I met with the Board of Friends of Little Bighorn Battlefield during its meeting here in March, 2009. We discussed important future projects for Friends to assist us with at the battlefield including the purchase of new batteries for the Chief Historian's electric cart and of some construction materials to help us address some storage issues in our museum collections area.

Bob Reece, President of Friends, provided the following news on Friends activities at the battlefield this year:

Trail Volunteers, June 26-27, 2009 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM

The NPS is excited to host volunteer interpreters from Friends of Little Bighorn along Deep Ravine, Keogh-Crazy Horse Sector Trails, and Last Stand Hill (if we have enough volunteers). Friends members interested in volunteering this year can send us an email to interpreter@friendslittlebighorn.com or call Mike Semenock at (425) 334-9719. Let us know your first and second choices to be stationed and times that are best for you.

Old Historic Movies of Little Bighorn Battlefield, LIBI Administration Building, Friday June 26, 2009, 6:30 PM – 8:00 PM

We will have an encore showing of the documentary “Superintendent Edward Luce: Memories of Little Bighorn” in the Administration Building second floor Training Room (which does not currently meet accessibility requirements). We premiered this documentary at our fundraiser during the 130th Anniversary Observance at LIBI. Former Battlefield Supt. Luce (1941-1956) purchased an 8MM home movie camera and began to record important daily events at the battlefield. Luce preserved a virtual time capsule of important historic administrative history at LIBI! You don’t want to miss this. Please note that seating is limited to the first 60 people so we will have to limit participation to the first 60 that register. To register please send an email to edwardluce@friendslittlebighorn.com or call Bob Reece at (303) 776-9419. Donations are welcome at the door to help the battlefield with future projects.

Friends General Membership Meeting, LIBI Administration Building, Saturday June 27, 2009, 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM

We will bring our membership and guests up to date with the business of Friends of the Little Bighorn Battlefield. Supt. Kate Hammond will attend and briefly address the membership. She will spend the evening with us, so this is your chance to get to meet her. We hope to provide dinner to members and one guest. More information will be available as we firm up plans. To register you and your guest (to guarantee we can feed you if we have enough food) it is imperative you email us at feast@friendslittlebighorn.com or call Bob Reece at (303) 776-9419 no later than June 8, 2009.

Last year we had a great turnout for all of our events. Please remember that you do not have to be a Friends member to participate in the volunteer program or our other events in June 2009.

I’ll see you on Last Stand Hill.

Bob Reece

Rehabilitate Battlefield Tour Road – Since 2004 the NPS and Federal highway officials have been planning to rehabilitate the park tour road and to expand parking lots at the visitor center and Reno-Benteen unit to address traffic congestion and safety issues. The construction work is currently scheduled for 2011. However, the project meets the “shovel-ready” and job-creation criteria of the economic stimulus legislation that recently was enacted, so it is possible that this project could be funded sooner. We will keep everyone posted on this important project.

Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) – Our Chief Historian John Doerner reports that we are nearing completion of our Cultural Landscape Inventory and are now at 80% draft. The LIBI CLI is a joint partnership with NPS and Utah State University and provides an important up-to-date baseline on our powerful cultural landscape. We will have a revised draft for review by all of our historically affiliated tribes by early summer and hope to complete the project by the end of 2009.

Curation – The **Sitting Bull exhibit** was completed last summer and recently a new **Cavalry Horse exhibit** has been completed. The Cavalry Horse exhibit displays an illustrated chart of the colors of horses assigned to each company at the battle; photos of *Comanche* dispelling

the myth that the horse was the only survivor of the battle; and a letter and an application to General George Armstrong Custer from the Hartford Insurance Company dated March 28, 1868 to insure his horses. It is unknown if he actually followed through with an insurance policy.

The Regional Archivist and assistant from the Western Archival Conservation Center (WACC) visited the Museum Collections this past week. It was a very productive meeting. The national monument's first natural history collection was recently cataloged. The herbarium collection was gathered in 1996 by Little Bighorn College students and is a significant addition to our museum collection.

Law Enforcement/EMS/FEE Operation – Chief Ranger Michael Stops reports that Skeeter He Does It will be working again this summer as our Protection (LE) Ranger. Skeeter will be assisting with law enforcement and entrance fee operations through September.

Natural Resources –

Invasive Plant Management: Melana Stichman, Biological Technician (who is funded through our Fee Demonstration project **Restore Historic View-shed For Visitor Enhancement and Photography**) treated 30 acres of noxious weeds throughout the monument. Targeted invasive plants included: field bindweed, St. Johnswort, houndstongue, Russian thistle, whitetop, yellow sweetclover, curly dock, Russian olive, prickly lettuce and several thistles and knapweeds. The Exotic Plant Management Teams (EPMTs) from Glacier National Park and Yellowstone National Park helped national monument staff treat Russian olive and salt cedar along the Little Bighorn River at the Custer unit boundary.

Efforts continue on developing an **Invasive Plant Management Plan** involving ten parks located in the northern Rocky Mountains, including Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. This plan will be used to direct the management of invasive plants/noxious weeds and will include the use of a suite of tools that allow the park to manage area natural and cultural resources effectively with minimal effects from non-native invasive plants.

Restoration: Monitoring revegetation and noxious weeds throughout the park continues under the Fee Demonstration project **Restore Historic View-shed For Visitor Enhancement and Photography**. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Plant Materials Center in Bismarck, North Dakota continues to cultivate and harvest native grass seed for the battlefield. Native plant species include green needlegrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, sideoats grama and blue grama. Seeds were originally collected in the park in 2005 as part of a revegetation plan for the Battlefield Tour Road Rehabilitation Project. The NRCS has met the target seed amounts for the project and 2009 will be the last growing season of the seed fields cultivated for the battlefield.

New Project: Our Fee Demonstration program has funded a project to **Interpret and Preserve Resources for Park Visitors' Enjoyment and Education** that will begin in 2009. The project will provide updated interpretation material for the understanding of park resources to visitors and other public institutions. Primarily the park species checklist and an upgraded park map are the two by-products of the project that will be used to enhance the visitor understanding of the park resources.

Visitor Center Electrical Line Failure/Maintenance Operations – Lonnie Hergenrider, Facility Manager, reports the replacement of the new electrical line to the Visitor Center, which had failed in September and again in December 2008, requiring use of a temporary backup generator to provide power to the building. The electrical line was old and did not meet current safety codes. This important project was funded through emergency Fee Demonstration funding.

Several other Fee Demonstration projects are planned this year including: 1) repair grass turf in Custer National Cemetery; 2) expand cemetery irrigation system; 3) finish rehabilitation of flagpole and cemetery monuments and replacement of cemetery trees; 4) complete rehabilitation of Entrenchment Trail and Deep Ravine Trail.

Lonnie has also submitted eight new Fee Demonstration projects to improve the LIBI infrastructure, including rehabilitation of the historic stone house (re-point sandstone and replace windows for energy efficiency and protect against insect infestation.)

Maintenance Mechanic Jimmie Brothers was selected for a 120-day detail to Bandelier National Monument in New Mexico to serve as Maintenance Supervisor.

Subj: **LIBI Superintendent Update April 2009**
Date: 4/1/2009 10:17:00 A.M. Eastern Daylight Time
From: John_Doerner@nps.gov
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Attached is the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument Superintendent Update, April 2009 from Kate Hammond.

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(See attached file: SupUpDateApril 2009.doc)