
National Park Service
Cultural Landscapes Inventory

2008



Big Hole National Battlefield Site
Big Hole National Battlefield

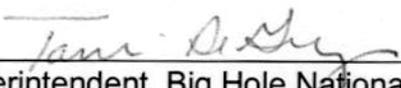
**National Park Service
Cultural Landscapes Inventory
2008**

Big Hole National Battlefield

Big Hole National Battlefield concurs with the findings of the CLI, including the management category and condition assessment as identified below:

MANAGEMENT CATEGORY: **A: Must be preserved and maintained**

CONDITION ASSESSMENT: **Good**



Superintendent, Big Hole National Battlefield

8/18/08

Date

Please return to:

Erica Owens
Cultural Landscape Inventory Coordinator-Seattle
National Park Service
Pacific West Regional Office
909 First Avenue
Seattle, WA 98104-1060

BIG HOLE NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD

Montana SHPO Consensus Determination of Eligibility

Actions Requested:

1) SHPO concurrence on the clarification of the period of significance in the Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI). The period of significance for the site is listed on the National Register as 1800-1899 by default. The CLI recommends the period of significance be 1877-1883 to include both the year of the Big Hole battle and the year the Soldier's Monument was erected (which is already listed on the National Register).

I concur , I do not concur that the period of significance for the Big Hole National Battlefield is 1877-1883, as documented in the CLI.

2) SHPO concurrence with the cultural landscape boundary for Big Hole National Battlefield which differs slightly from the 1984 National Register nomination boundary to include the top of Ruby Bench where the visitor center and park housing have been developed (see Boundary Description in the CLI).

I concur , I do not concur with the cultural landscape boundary described for the Big Hole National Battlefield cultural landscape as described in the CLI.

3) SHPO concurrence that the landscape characteristics as identified in the CLI contribute to the historic character of the Big Hole National Battlefield (see the following landscape characteristic descriptions in the Analysis and Evaluation section of the CLI: Natural Systems and Features, Vegetation, Cultural Traditions, Views and Vistas, Circulation, Topography, and Archeology):

I concur , I do not concur that the landscape characteristics as described in the CLI contribute to the historic character of the Big Hole National Battlefield.

4) SHPO concurrence with the list of contributing and non-contributing structures to the Big Hole National Battlefield, (see tables below and the following landscape characteristic descriptions in the Analysis and Evaluation section of the CLI: Buildings and Structures, Circulation, and Topography):

Existing National Register Status: The following structures are already listed on the National Register of Historic Places as contributing features of the Big Hole National Battlefield:

Structure Name	NRIS Number
Soldier's Monument	#66000427

Non-contributing Structures: Based on the information provided in the CLI, the following structures have been identified as non-contributing features of the Big Hole National Battlefield:

Non-contributing Structure Name	Date Built	Concur	Do Not Concur
Irrigation ditches	1890-1910		
Trail system and footbridge	1940-1977		
Parking lot and access road	Post-1960		

Reasons/comments why any 'Do Not Concur' blocks were checked:

Alan Wilmoth Deputy, SHPO
for Montana State Historic Preservation Officer,
MARK BAUMER

09/15/08
Date

Please return forms to the attention of:
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Cultural Landscape Inventory Co-ordinator - Seattle
National Park Service
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Inventory Unit Summary & Site Plan

Inventory Summary

The Cultural Landscapes Inventory Overview:

CLI General Information:

Cultural Landscapes Inventory – General Information

The Cultural Landscapes Inventory (CLI) is a database containing information on the historically significant landscapes within the National Park System. This evaluated inventory identifies and documents each landscape's location, size, physical development, condition, landscape characteristics, character-defining features, as well as other valuable information useful to park management. Cultural landscapes become approved inventory records when all required data fields are entered, the park superintendent concurs with the information, and the landscape is determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places through a consultation process or is otherwise managed as a cultural resource through a public planning process.

The CLI, like the List of Classified Structures (LCS), assists the National Park Service (NPS) in its efforts to fulfill the identification and management requirements associated with Section 110(a) of the National Historic Preservation Act, National Park Service Management Policies (2001), and Director's Order #28: Cultural Resource Management. Since launching the CLI nationwide, the NPS, in response to the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), is required to report information that respond to NPS strategic plan accomplishments. Two goals are associated with the CLI: 1) increasing the number of certified cultural landscapes (1b2B); and 2) bringing certified cultural landscapes into good condition (1a7). The CLI maintained by Park Historic Structures and Cultural Landscapes Program, WASO, is the official source of cultural landscape information.

Implementation of the CLI is coordinated and approved at the regional level. Each region annually updates a strategic plan that prioritizes work based on a variety of park and regional needs that include planning and construction projects or associated compliance requirements that lack cultural landscape documentation. When the inventory unit record is complete and concurrence with the findings is obtained from the superintendent and the State Historic Preservation Office, the regional CLI coordinator certifies the record and transmits it to the national CLI Coordinator for approval. Only records approved by the national CLI coordinator are included on the CLI for official reporting purposes.

Relationship between the CLI and a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR)

The CLI and the CLR are related efforts in the sense that both document the history,

significance, and integrity of park cultural landscapes. However, the scope of the CLI is limited by the need to achieve concurrence with the park superintendent resolve eligibility questions when a National Register nomination does not exist or the nomination inadequately addresses the eligibility of the landscape characteristics. Ideally, a park's CLI work (which many include multiple inventory units) precedes a CLR because the baseline information in the CLI not only assists with priority setting when more than one CLR is needed it also assists with determining more accurate scopes of work.

In contrast, the CLR is the primary treatment document for significant park landscapes. It, therefore, requires an additional level of research and documentation both to evaluate the historic and the existing condition of the landscape in order to recommend preservation treatment that meets the Secretary of Interior's Standards for the treatment of historic properties.

The scope of work for a CLR, when the CLI has not been done, should include production of the CLI record. Depending on its age and scope, existing CLR's are considered the primary source for the history, statement of significance, and descriptions of contributing resources that are necessary to complete a CLI record.

Inventory Unit Description:

Big Hole National Battlefield was the site of a battle on August 9-10, 1877 between the U.S. Army and Montana citizen volunteers and the Nez Perce people. The battle was part of a five-month conflict in which the army, intent on moving the Nez Perce to the Lapwai Reservation in Idaho, pursued roughly 750 men, women, and children across 1,170 miles from the Wallowa Valley in Oregon to the Bear Paw Mountains, just 40 miles from the Canadian border in northern Montana. Along the way, the two sides fought a series of confrontations during which scores of people were killed, including soldiers, citizen volunteers, and Nez Perce men, women, and children. Exhausted, cold, and hungry, the remaining Nez Perce surrendered at the Battle of Bear Paw on October 4, 1877.

The Battle of the Big Hole was a critical event in the war. After some success against the army in the earlier skirmishes in Oregon and Idaho, the Nez Perce believed that they had eluded their pursuers and were relatively secure. They had planned to either solicit help from the Crow bands of Montana or to continue to Canada where they might be safe from the U.S. forces. Believing the army well behind them, they no longer felt the urgency of the pursuit, and planned to take some time for needed rest and to gather necessary supplies. At the Big Hole, however they were overtaken by Colonel John Gibbon and the 7th U.S. Infantry, who surprised the Nez Perce in a pre-dawn attack on the morning of August 9. The Nez Perce would eventually gain the upper hand in the battle, dealing a decisive blow against the infantry, but it would be at a dire cost. The actual count of Nez Perce wounded and dead is unknown, but between 80 and 90 are believed to have been killed, with at least two-thirds of those women and children. On the side of the military, 3 officers, 21 enlisted men, and 5 civilians were killed. Although the battle is generally considered a tactical victory for the Nez Perce, who held the soldiers at siege long enough to bury their dead, gather their camp, and escape with the majority of their horses, the great losses they suffered were devastating and contributed to their ultimate defeat two months later.

Big Hole National Battlefield Site

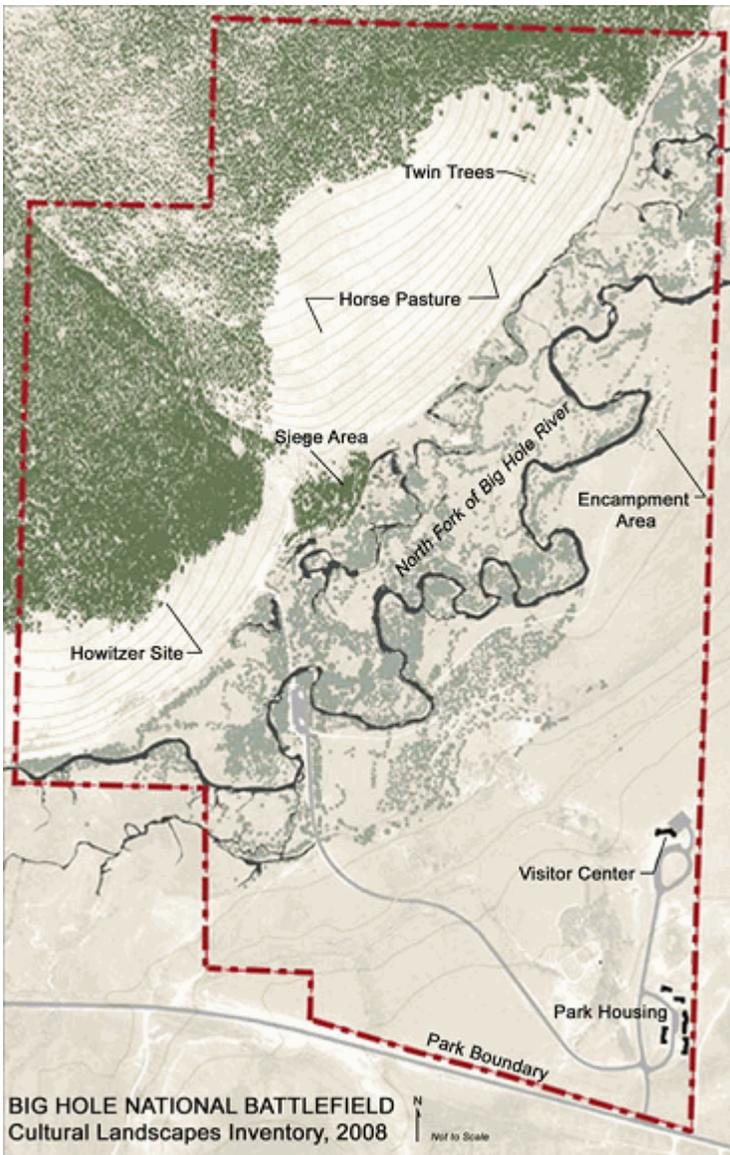
Big Hole National Battlefield

Big Hole National Battlefield is astride a western tributary valley of the Big Hole basin in southwestern Montana. Vegetation varies from stands of second growth lodgepole pine on the slopes of Battle Mountain on the north to willow swamps and grasslands on the banks of the meandering North Fork of the Big Hole River, which flows through the middle of the valley. Battle Mountain forms the northwest side of the valley, while Ruby Bench forms the southeast side of the valley. Battle Mountain is largely covered in a mixed lodgepole pine and Douglas fir forest, with a broad open sagebrush steppe on its lower slopes. Ruby bench is a tableland formation, mostly of glacial alluvial deposits, covered by sagebrush and grass. Trail Creek and Ruby Creek enter the battlefield property in the west and converge to form the North Fork of the Big Hole River, which leaves the battlefield property to the northeast.

Since the battle, the Big Hole Battlefield has been recognized and honored both as a historic site and as a memorial for those who lost their lives in the battle. The site was entered on the National Register of Historic Places with the register's creation in 1966. The National Register Nomination Form was completed in 1977 and updated in 1984. The National Register nomination establishes national significance of the site for its association with events that have bearing on our national history. The period of significance includes the battle and its immediate aftermath, beginning in 1877 and concluding with the placement of the soldiers' monument in 1883.

Much of the development of the site that has happened since the battle has since been removed, and little trace remains today. Agricultural use of the meadows in the battlefield has stopped and the meadows reverted to a more natural state. Furthermore, larger scale landscape changes over the years, such as encroachment of the forest into historically clear areas and the proliferation of the willows in the river bottom, have been mitigated and in some cases reversed. The evolution of the site has come full-circle, returning in recent years to a state much closer to its original. Through its essential physical features and landscape patterns, the battlefield today conveys a strong sense of its importance to history.

Site Plan



Site map of Big Hole National Battlefield. See Supplemental Information for full size map.

Property Level and CLI Numbers

Inventory Unit Name:	Big Hole National Battlefield Site
Property Level:	Landscape
CLI Identification Number:	725543
Parent Landscape:	725543

Park Information

Park Name and Alpha Code: Big Hole National Battlefield -BIHO
Park Organization Code: 9374
Park Administrative Unit: Nez Perce National Historical Park

CLI Hierarchy Description

Big Hole National Battlefield is a landscape with no component landscapes.

Concurrence Status

Inventory Status: Complete

Completion Status Explanatory Narrative:

Fieldwork for the Big Hole National Battlefield CLI was completed by John Hammond and Erica Owens in 2006. John completed the CLI documentation in 2008.

Concurrence Status:

Park Superintendent Concurrence: Yes
Park Superintendent Date of Concurrence: 08/08/2008
National Register Concurrence: Eligible -- SHPO Consensus Determination
Date of Concurrence Determination: 09/15/2008

Revisions Impacting Change in Concurrence: Change in Acreage

Revision Date: 09/16/2008

Revision Narrative:

In response to the Montana SHPO's review comments, the boundary for the CLI was expanded to follow the park boundary to include Ruby Bench. The Superintendent's concurrence is documented in an email dated 9/16/2008 located in the project files.

Geographic Information & Location Map

Inventory Unit Boundary Description:

The boundary for the cultural landscape inventory follows the boundaries of the Big Hole National Battlefield, which encompasses the area included in the 1984 National Register Nomination as well as the Ruby Bench area. (See the Site Plan.)

The boundary does not include Bloody Gulch, a potentially eligible area associated with the historic events of the site, due to legal restrictions; the CLI can include only those lands managed or owned by the NPS. Because Bloody Gulch is located outside of the current NPS boundary, it cannot be inventoried in this CLI document. However, if the NPS were to acquire the property, it is recommended that the boundaries of the CLI be expanded to include this area.

State and County:

State: MT

County: Beaverhead County

Size (Acres): 571.00

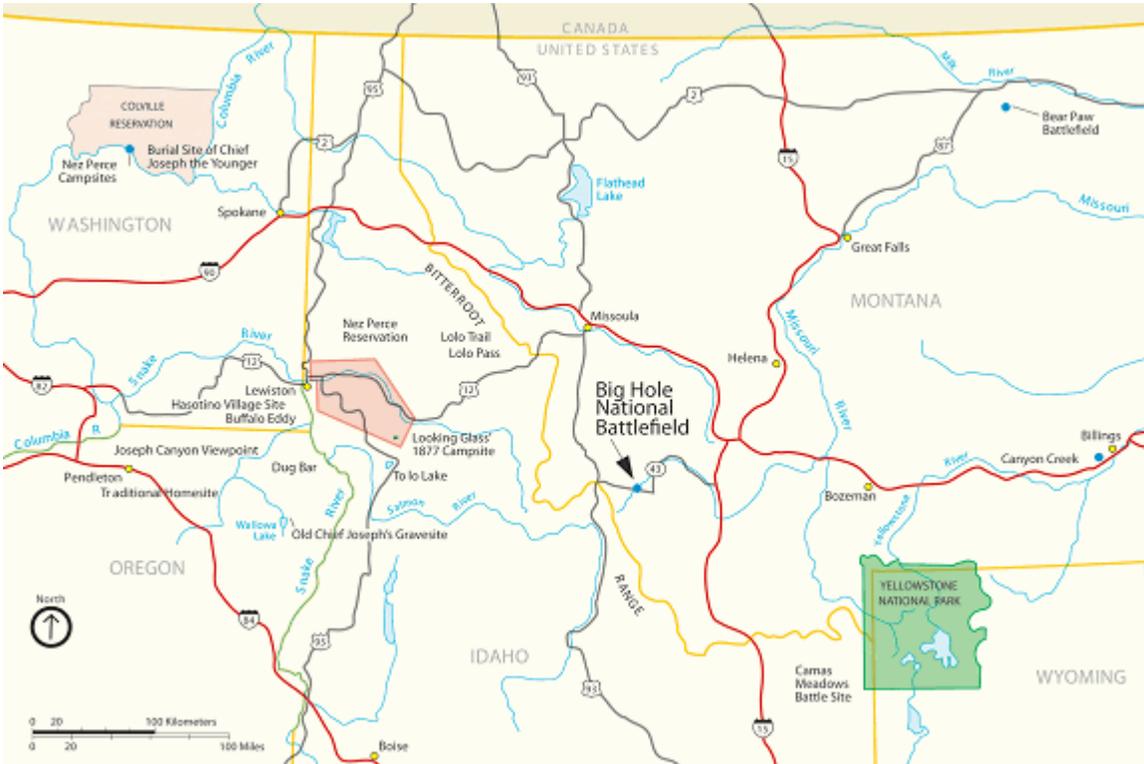
Boundary UTMS:

<u>Source</u>	<u>Type of Point</u>	<u>Datum</u>	<u>UTM Zone</u>	<u>UTM Easting</u>	<u>UTM Northing</u>
GPS-Differentially Corrected	Area	NAD 83	12	294,140	5,059,280
GPS-Differentially Corrected	Area	NAD 83	12	294,090	5,057,768
GPS-Differentially Corrected	Area	NAD 83	12	293,064	5,057,319
GPS-Differentially Corrected	Area	NAD 83	12	293,080	5,057,680
GPS-Differentially Corrected	Area	NAD 83	12	292,680	5,057,700
GPS-Differentially Corrected	Area	NAD 83	12	292,696	5,058,911
GPS-Differentially Corrected	Area	NAD 83	12	293,070	5,058,910
GPS-Differentially Corrected	Area	NAD 83	12	293,075	5,059,300

Big Hole National Battlefield Site

Big Hole National Battlefield

Location Map:



Map showing the location of Big Hole National Battlefield

GIS File Name: big hole.mxd

GIS File Description: On disk in the CLI library at the Pacific West Regional Office, Oakland.

Management Information

General Management Information

Management Category: Must be Preserved and Maintained

Management Category Date: 08/08/2008

Management Category Explanatory Narrative:

The battlefield is directly related to the park unit's legislated significance, and therefore must be preserved and maintained.

NPS Legal Interest:

Type of Interest: Fee Simple Reservation

Explanatory Narrative:

A number of private entities still own water rights and easements for irrigation ditches that cross the battlefield.

Public Access:

Type of Access: Other Restrictions

Explanatory Narrative:

The battlefield is open to the public seven days a week from 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM in the summer and from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM in the winter. The battlefield is closed to the public Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years Day.

Adjacent Lands Information

Do Adjacent Lands Contribute? Yes

Adjacent Lands Description:

During the battle, after the Nez Perce warriors had driven the soldiers back to the siege area and held them with persistent fire from the surrounding terrain, the balance of the band gathered what belongings they could and escaped to the south. The route out of the encampment area the river took them up a gully to the southeast, sometimes referred to as Bloody Gulch. The gully offered the Nez Perce some cover as they climbed the bench, allowing them to escape without risking further losses from the soldiers still entrenched on the hillside to the north.

Due to legal restrictions, the CLI can include only those lands managed or owned by the NPS. Because Bloody Gulch is located outside of the current NPS boundary, it cannot be inventoried in this CLI document. However, based on the findings of this report, the gully is potentially eligible as part of the larger historic site and it is recommended that if the NPS were to acquire the property that the boundaries of the CLI be expanded to include this area at a future date.



Graphic showing the approximate area of the contributing adjacent lands including the gulch through which the Nez Perce escaped during the battle.

National Register Information

Existing National Register Status

National Register Landscape Documentation:

Entered Inadequately Documented

National Register Explanatory Narrative:

By virtue of its status as a national battlefield, Big Hole Battlefield was entered into the National Register of Historic Places in 1966. In 1984 a National Register nomination was completed by Alfred Schulmeyer and Paul Hedren to document the contributing features, including the Nez Perce camp site, siege area, howitzer capture site, battle zone, and soldiers' monument.

Existing NRIS Information:

NRIS Number:	66000427
Primary Certification Date:	10/15/1966
Name in National Register:	Big Hole National Battlefield

National Register Eligibility

National Register Concurrence: Eligible -- SHPO Consensus Determination

Contributing/Individual: Individual

National Register Classification: Site

Significance Level: National

Significance Criteria: A - Associated with events significant to broad patterns of our history

Period of Significance:

Time Period: AD 1877 - 1883

Historic Context Theme: Peopling Places

Subtheme: Westward Expansion of the Colonies and the United States, 1763-1898

Facet: Military-Indigenous Peoples Contact

Area of Significance:

Area of Significance Category	Area of Significance Subcategory
Military	None

Statement of Significance:

National Register Status and the role of the CLI

Big Hole National Battlefield was originally listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1966. The National Register Nomination Form was completed in 1977 and updated in 1984. The nomination form describes the following areas and features as contributing to the historic site: the Nez Perce camp site, the siege area, the Howitzer capture site, the battle zone (comprising the twin trees area and the retreat area), and the soldiers' monument. The period of significance for the site, not explicitly defined in the nomination, is listed by default as 1800-1899, but it is implied that the period of significance includes the 1877 battle itself and the year the soldiers' monument was established (1883). The National Register nomination establishes national significance of the site for its association with events that have bearing on our national history. With further research and documentation and a national comparative analysis, the site could be shown to be eligible as a National Historic Landmark.

This CLI is intended to be an extension of the existing National Register nomination, providing a more detailed analysis of the role the natural systems and features play in understanding the significance of the site. The natural landscape of the site, including the natural topography, vegetation patterns, climate, and hydrology, directly influenced the events and outcome of the battle, from the Army's initial attack to the Nez Perce's counter attack, the siege, and ultimately the escape of the Nez Perce bands to the south. Furthermore, the natural features have strong associations with the cultural traditions of the Nez Perce, featuring in traditional practices and stories endemic to the Nez Perce culture for centuries. Patterns in the landscape that are essential to understanding the battle and its implications are plainly evident on the site today, contributing strongly to the historical legibility of the site. This CLI describes those patterns and the role they play in the site's significance.

Summary of Significance

Big Hole National Battlefield is a historic site significant under National Register criterion A as the location of the Battle of the Big Hole, fought on August 9th and 10th, 1877 between U.S. Army soldiers and volunteers and Nez Perce people. The battle was part of a five-month conflict in which the U.S. Army, intent on moving the Nez Perce to the Lapwai Reservation in Idaho, pursued roughly 750 men, women, and children across 1,170 miles from the Wallowa Valley in Oregon to the Bear Paw Mountains, just 40 miles from the Canadian border in northern Montana. Along the way, the two sides fought a series of confrontations during which scores of people were killed, including soldiers, citizen volunteers, and Nez Perce men, women, and children. Exhausted, cold, and hungry, the remaining Nez Perce surrendered at the Battle of Bear Paw on October 4, choosing to submit to the government rather than face certain decimation in the rugged mountains and the oncoming winter of northern Montana.

Fought roughly midway through the overall conflict, the Battle of the Big Hole dealt a serious blow to the Nez Perce. Nearly 200 men of the 7th U.S. Infantry led by Lt. Colonel John Gibbon overtook the Nez Perce as they camped on the banks of the Big Hole River, launching a surprise attack in the hours before dawn. As the soldiers overran the camp, they fired their rifles into the lodges, aiming low to hit the sleeping occupants. Men, women, and children ran from the lodges under the relentless fire of the

Big Hole National Battlefield Site

Big Hole National Battlefield

attackers. Some ran to the surrounding knolls and open prairie to the south and west, while others sought shelter in the willows along the banks of the river. During the ensuing chaos, dozens of Nez Perce were killed, including many women and children. The Nez Perce warriors regrouped, however, and repulsed the attack, pushing the soldiers back across the river and into a small wooded point where they held the troops at siege for the rest of the day and night. The following day, as reinforcements for the beleaguered troops approached, the last of the Nez Perce warriors abandoned the fight to catch up to the rest of the Nez Perce retreating to the south.

The actual count of Nez Perce wounded and dead is unknown, but between 80 and 90 are believed to have been killed, with at least two-thirds of those women and children. On the side of the military, 3 officers, 21 enlisted men, and 5 civilians were killed. Although the battle is generally considered a tactical victory for the Nez Perce, who held the soldiers at siege long enough to bury their dead, gather their camp, and escape with the majority of their horses, the great losses they suffered were devastating and contributed to their ultimate defeat two months later.

In 1883, a granite monument was erected at the battle field to honor the soldier dead. Who initiated the project and precisely what the monument meant were details soon forgotten. Cut in the shape of a stout obelisk and bearing an inscription that honored the U.S. soldiers who fell in the battle while making no mention of Nez Perce casualties, the "soldiers` monument" conveyed a nationalistic sentiment of honorable sacrifice. The dimensions and placement of the soldiers` monument near the Siege Area were suggestive of a large, common gravestone. Indeed, like the granite obelisk placed at the Little Bighorn Battlefield in 1886, it bore the names of all the officers and enlisted men killed in the conflict. Yet the soldiers' monument made no specific reference to soldiers' graves.

The Battle of the Big Hole represents a pivotal moment in the Nez Perce War, which is itself a critical chapter in the story of the Indian Wars. In the years since the battle, the Big Hole Battlefield has been recognized and honored both as a historic site and as a memorial for those who lost their lives in the battle. Relatively unchanged since the time of the battle, the site preserves the scene of one of the most tragic and well-known battles of the Indian Wars and is an essential part in understanding the epic clash of cultures and the devastating results.

Integrity

The landscape of the Big Hole Valley at the time of the battle was devoid of human development, including roads, buildings, and other structures. What defined the landscape were the natural components, including the vegetation, the natural topography, the river, and the sweeping views of the valley and surrounding mountains. These features not only set the scene and defined the character of the battlefield, they also played a major role in the events and outcome of the battle itself. It is through these features that the significance of the site and its association with the battle and the larger Indian Wars can be understood.

Today, the elements of the landscape that are essential to convey the site's significance are remarkably intact, combining to set a scene very similar to the one that greeted the battle participants on the

Big Hole National Battlefield Site
Big Hole National Battlefield

morning of August 9, 1877. Of particular contribution are the vegetation patterns, including the extent and character of the forest, the open horse pasture, the dense willow thickets, and the open meadows; the meandering river, with its associated bogs, sloughs, and ponds; the topography of the mountain slope, low river bottom, the prairie bench, and the point of timber where the soldiers were besieged; and the unobstructed views. Comparison of the current landscape with first-hand descriptions of the battlefield and with drawings that were made by battle participants reveals a high degree of similarity.

In addition to the natural features of the site, there still exist physical records of the battle itself etched in the landscape. Notably, the snaking rifle pits hastily dug by the U.S. soldiers in the siege area are still visible. Archeological resources that bear record of the battle are still scattered throughout the site as are the remains of the fallen soldiers and Nez Perce. These physical traces help connect the site directly to the events that occurred there.

Since the battle, the site has seen a certain degree of development, some of which has been removed and some of which still remains. A visitor center was built by the NPS on Ruby Bench (a terrace above the battleground) in the 1960s during the Mission 66 era. Additionally, park housing was added to Ruby Bench in the 1990s. These developments are partially visible from the battlefield area. In addition, the open meadows southeast of the river were cultivated for hay and other crops, and irrigation canals were dug across the hillslope to provide water. While many of these ditches remain, they are relatively inconspicuous within the boundary of the historic site.

Those structures associated with the ranger station that occupied the site from 1912 until around 1935, the museum structure that once housed the howitzer display, and the visitor camp sites on the slope just outside of the siege area, have since been removed, and little trace of them remains today, increasing the historic integrity of the site. In addition, interpretation efforts that were at times visually intrusive by today's standards have also been removed, replaced by less conspicuous techniques. Despite the development on Ruby Bench, the evolution of the site has come full-circle, returning in recent years to a state much closer to its original. Through its essential physical features and landscape patterns, the battlefield today conveys a strong sense of its importance to history, retaining the integrity aspects of location, setting, feeling, and association.

National Historic Landmark Information

National Historic Landmark Status: No

World Heritage Site Information

World Heritage Site Status: No

Chronology & Physical History

Cultural Landscape Type and Use

Cultural Landscape Type: Historic Site

Current and Historic Use/Function:

Primary Historic Function: Battle Site

Primary Current Use: Interpretive Landscape

Current and Historic Names:

Name	Type of Name
Big Hole Battlefield	Both Current And Historic

Ethnographic Study Conducted: Yes-Unrestricted Information

Associated Group:

Name of Group: Nez Perce

Type of Association: Both Current And Historic

Ethnographic Significance Description:

Ethnographic studies of the Big Hole Battlefield as it is associated with the Nez Perce include ethnographic reviews and ethnobotanical reviews.

Chronology:

Year	Event	Annotation
AD 1877	Military Operation	<p>Nearly 200 men of the 7th U.S. Infantry led by Lt. Colonel John Gibbon overtook the Nez Perce as they camped on the banks of the Big Hole River, launching a surprise attack in the hours before dawn. As the soldiers overran the camp, they fired their rifles into the lodges, aiming low to hit the sleeping occupants. Men, women, and children ran from the lodges under the relentless fire of the attackers. Some ran to the surrounding knolls and open prairie to the south and west, while others sought shelter in the willows along the banks of the river. During the ensuing chaos, dozens of Nez Perce were killed, including many women and children. The Nez Perce warriors regrouped, however, and repulsed the attack, pushing the soldiers back across the river and into a small wooded point where they held the troops at siege for the rest of the day and night.</p> <p>See the History Narrative for a full account of the battle.</p>
AD 1877	Military Operation	<p>Even before the battle had ended, the Nez Perce began burying their dead. The U.S. soldiers buried their own on August 11th, after the siege had lifted and the Nez Perce had left. Both the Nez Perce and the soldiers appear to have buried most of their dead near where they lay. A number of bodies were placed along the river banks where the earth could be caved in over them. Others were buried in camas ovens. Gibbon`s burial detail made some effort to deepen these graves, but without much success. Many of the graves were desecrated in the days after the battle as soldiers, other native people, souvenir hunters, and wild animals dug up the dead. Some of the bodies were since removed from the site and interred elsewhere, while others were reburied on site. It is unknown whether most of the soldiers` remains were removed or remain buried beneath the soldiers` monument or elsewhere in the battlefield.</p>

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AD 1877 - 1910	Damaged	<p>In the days following the battle, many people from the Bitterroot Valley and elsewhere visited the battlefield to satisfy their curiosity or collect souvenirs. This continued over several years, as visitors removed artifacts, bullets and shells, and natural material that showed signs of the battle. Many of the trees in the siege area were scarred when souvenir hunters carved bullets and bullet holes out of the trunks. This continued until the Forest Service established a presence at the site around 1910.</p>
AD 1883	Memorialized	<p>In 1883 a granite monument was erected at the battlefield to honor the soldier dead. Who initiated the project and precisely what the monument meant were details soon forgotten.</p> <p>Cut in the shape of a stout obelisk and bearing an inscription that honored the U.S. soldiers who fell in the battle while making no mention of Nez Perce casualties, the "soldiers` monument" conveyed a nationalistic sentiment of honorable sacrifice. The dimensions and placement of the soldiers` monument near the Siege Area were suggestive of a large, common gravestone. Indeed, like the granite obelisk placed at the Little Bighorn Battlefield in 1886, it bore the names of all the officers and enlisted men killed in the conflict. Yet the soldiers' monument made no specific reference to soldiers' graves.</p>
AD 1883	Established	<p>By this year, a wagon road had been established that ran southeast through the willows toward the Nez Perce encampment area. The wagon road's alignment beyond the river crossing is unknown. It may have continued southeast toward Bloody Gulch and on to the community of Wisdom. In the willows, it passed a homestead site and blacksmith shop that post-dated the war, but both were removed by the time the USFS began managing the site.</p>
AD 1890 - 1910	Settled	<p>A number of families established ranches along the North Fork of the Big Hole around the turn of the century. Most of the land entries in the vicinity of the battlefield were made under the Desert Land Act of 1877. Settlers formed irrigation companies for mutual assistance in developing ditch systems and establishing their land claims.</p>

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AD 1890 - 1910	Built	A number of small irrigation ditches near and through the battlefield were built in the early years of the twentieth century. These included the Ruby ditch, which featured a large wood flume and trestle.
AD 1908	Built	In the absence of a physical presence at the site, it was decided that an iron fence be erected around the soldiers` monument to protect it from vandals and souvenir hunters, who chipped away pieces of the granite. The fence, nearly eight feet tall with a domed roof, was very conspicuous in photographs from that period, having the effect of a cage around the monument. The fencing was in place for 60 years before it was removed.
AD 1909	Established	<p>The U.S. Forest Service decided to protect the battlefield by withdrawing the area as an administrative site. 115 acres in three adjoining rectangular blocks along the foot of the mountain were withdrawn from settlement, including the Soldiers` Monument.</p> <p>Just as the War Department had largely determined the size, shape, and character of this commemorative site from the day after the battle until its establishment as a national monument 33 years later, the Forest Service put its unique stamp on Big Hole National Battlefield over the next 30 years. In contrast to the War Department`s rather narrow focus on honoring the soldier dead, the Forest Service took a more expansive approach by encouraging public use of the area for historical interest and recreation. This led to the development of a year-round ranger station and public campground facilities near the battlefield.</p>
AD 1910	Established	A presidential proclamation established Big Hole National Monument. The site, comprising five-acres immediately surrounding the Soldiers` Monument, would be administered by the War Department. The National Monument site was surrounded by the Forest Service Administration Site. From 1910 to 1936, the national monument was primarily under the care of the U.S. Forest Service. Although the War Department retained jurisdiction over the five-acre site around the soldiers` monument, War Department officials supported virtually every recommendation of the Forest Service concerning the proper protection and development of the grounds.

AD 1912 - 1920	Built	A ranger station was built 400 feet up the draw from the soldiers` monument, less than 150 feet west of the five-acre national monument boundary. The ranger station, consisting of a four-room frame house, horse stable, and tool house, was well within the area of the battle. Over the following years the ranger station was expanded to include a garage, woodshed, two machine storage sheds, latrine, corrals, pasture fences, water pipe line, and yard fence.
AD 1912 - 1919	Built	Some time between 1912 and 1919 the forest service built a summer cottage in Battle Gulch for Tom C. Sherrill, a former Bitterroot volunteer and caretaker of the battlefield. Sherrill spent many summers at the battlefield, interpreting the battle for visitors.
AD 1912 - 1930	Built	As more visitors began camping at the battlefield, the Forest Service sought to improve services, both to accommodate recreation and to protect the resources. By 1919 they had installed outdoor fireplaces for use by campers. By 1925, camping facilities consisted of two sites: one directly uphill from the national monument fence, and the other farther uphill above the road. The forest Service had installed more fireplaces, garbage cans, and two toilets, the latter inside the battlefield enclosure. Despite these improvements, facilities were still insufficient for the level of recreational use.
AD 1912 - 1919	Memorialized	During his tenure as caretaker, Tom C. Sherrill staked the ground where he recalled certain people to have been killed, wounded, or buried. Eventually he prepared a series of texts, which were printed on white signboards and placed at appropriate locations around the site. These texts had a rustic character and were written utterly from the soldiers` point of view. For example, one sign noted "Where the Indian was killed that crawled [sic.] the closest to our breast works," and another "Where the Indian was killed that sang his death chant for thirty minutes before he died." Significantly, some of the signs marked the spot where soldiers were buried. There were some 37 signs altogether. Although they were removed in the 1930s, the locations and texts of each sign were preserved in a memorandum prepared by Sherrill and Ranger Ramsey titled "Points of Interest," dated October 7, 1921.

AD 1925 - 1935	Damaged	<p>During the 1920s and 1930s, the lodgepole trees around the Siege Area were attacked by insects. By 1932, some 80 "historic trees" were dead. The trees were significant because they dated back to 1877 and related to the combatants` positions; many also bore battle scars. Three years later, Ranger Ramsey and Forest Supervisor E. D. Sandvig estimated the number of insect-killed trees in the area at 2,000. The dead trees occasionally toppled over, presenting a hazard to visitors. Moreover, they were aesthetically displeasing. To Sandvig, the dead trees presented "a picture of untidiness and forlornness [sic]," and needed to be cut down and removed.</p>
AD 1927 - 1937	Memorialized	<p>Lucullus V. McWhorter brought to light the Nez Perce side of the battle just when it was in danger of dying with the last of the Nez Perce war veterans. On five separate occasions between 1927 and 1937, McWhorter visited the Big Hole Battlefield with his Nez Perce friends and elicited their recollections of what happened on August 9, 1877. Accompanied by a surveyor, McWhorter and the Nez Perce veterans staked the battlefield in 1928 and again nine years later. The staking superseded the earlier staking done by Tom Sherrill and greatly amplified the Nez Perce perspective of the battle.</p>
AD 1928	Memorialized	<p>As part of the 1928 trip to stake the battlefield, the McWhorter party placed a small memorial shaft with a bust of Chief Joseph on the head near the soldiers` monument.</p>
AD 1928	Built	<p>After Sherrill left the battlefield in 1919, there was concern for the protection of the resources at the battlefield. In 1928, several years after Sherrill`s position was eliminated, District Ranger Marshall G. Ramsey built a rough picket fence of lodgepole pine around portions of the battlefield, and a pole fence around the rifle pits. Photographs of these improvements show that they were highly intrusive on the scene. With no caretaker at the site, however, Ramsey believed the fences were necessary to protect the resources.</p>

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AD 1928	Preserved	<p>Assistant Forester Will C. Barnes, a former cattleman and veteran of the campaign against the Apaches in Arizona in the 1880s, developed an interest in the national monument after taking the opportunity to inspect the battlefield on a trip to Montana in 1925. Following the trip, D.C., Barnes served as the Forest Service's liaison with the War Department. His chief interest was to recover and rehabilitate the 12-pounder mountain howitzer used by Gibbon's command.</p> <p>According to the best information available in the 1920s, Nez Perce warriors had overrun the howitzer and had disabled the weapon by hacking spokes from the wheels and rolling the carriage into the river. Some weeks after the battle in the fall of 1877 a party from Deer Lodge hauled the cannon out of the river and took it back to Deer Lodge. The wheels were repaired and for many years the cannon sat in front of the State Penitentiary in Deer Lodge. The cannon was finally restored and returned to the battlefield in 1928.</p>
AD 1928 - 1929	Built	<p>The museum building was built in 1928 or 1929. Its walls were made of lodgepole pine peeled logs and the gable roof was covered by hand-split cedar shakes. Measuring 14 by 18 feet, the building housed the cannon as well as other relics of the battle. In 1929, an inspector reported that the building conformed "very well to the surroundings," and that local citizens had agreed "to return articles in their possession which will add great interest to the collection."</p>
AD 1929	Abandoned	<p>In 1929, Gibbon's Battlefield and Steel Creek ranger districts were combined to form the Wisdom Ranger District, the headquarters of which were moved to the town of Wisdom. The ranger station at the battlefield was abandoned, officially ending the physical presence of the Forest Service at the monument.</p>

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AD 1932 - 1935	Preserved	Removal of the dead trees in the siege area was no ordinary salvage logging operation, however, because the trees in the Siege Area constituted historic resources. Many bore scars from the hail of bullets during the battle. Souvenir hunters also saw them as historic objects; they had been chopping away at the trees for years, taking splintered sections out of the trunks and carrying them home for use as desk fixtures or mantle ornaments. The "Unit Recreational Plan" of 1932 stipulated that "historic trees that are killed will be taken down and sections preserved in the Museum."
AD 1933	Established	On July 28, 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order No. 6228, transferring jurisdiction of the five-acre national monument from the War Department to the National Park Service. Yellowstone Superintendent Roger W. Toll acted as the first "coordinating superintendent," a usual procedure for remote NPS units. As the land around the five-acre plot was still managed by the Forest Service, that agency continued to influence the management of the monument until the monument was expanded in 1939.
AD 1935	Demolished	After the national monument was transferred to the National Park Service in 1933, the Forest Service sought to reduce their presence at the site. By 1935, the ranger residence and outbuildings were partially dismantled and the structures that remained were slated to be burned down.
AD 1935	Maintained	To help mitigate the effects of several years of neglect, the Forest Service moved in a crew of Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) enrollees to do a general cleanup of the monument. It is uncertain precisely what this entailed, but it likely involved general repair and maintenance of structures and cleanup of brush and debris.
AD 1936	Demolished	In 1936, many of the remaining improvements developed by the Forest Service were removed. The caretaker's cabin and the log museum were retained.

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AD 1939	Expanded	<p>On June 29, 1939, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Presidential Proclamation No. 2339, expanding the monument boundaries from 5 to 200 acres, including "public lands within the Beaverhead National Forest...contiguous to the said national monument and...necessary for proper care, management, and protection of the historic landmarks." The site of the Nez Perce encampment was not included in the boundary expansion.</p>
AD 1940 - 1950	Rehabilitated	<p>Interpretive trails, developed during the Forest Service administration were reconstructed and maintained by the NPS, including trails leading from the museum to the siege area and the "old soldier trail" leading to the howitzer pit above and outside the boundaries of the monument.</p>
AD 1940 - 1950	Memorialized	<p>Walking tours of the monument were augmented with a series of signs, marking known points of conflict. Through the early 1940s, the Park Service manufactured and placed 75 rustic interpretive signs, which differed from the Forest Service's black and white signs in style, but not in text. As late as 1946, Yellowstone Chief Ranger Maynard Barrows recommended development of a sign program because "many of the old markers are misleading in text."</p>
AD 1952	Memorialized	<p>Shortly after the 75th anniversary of the battle, a small stone monument honoring the Nez Perce dead was erected without the knowledge or permission of the NPS. Despite the fact that the monument had been placed surreptitiously, the NPS, recognizing the public-relations hazards inherent in public dispute over the monument placement, retained the monument in its original place until the 1980s, when it was moved to the museum.</p>

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AD 1956	Planned	<p>By 1956, visitor facilities were limited to pit toilets, a drinking fountain, an incoherent collection of poorly displayed artifacts, and the old log museum that transgressed upon the Siege Area. A registration book rested on a shelf outside the museum. A "large number" of signs related to the soldiers of Gibbon`s Command and to the Bitterroot Volunteers were incised with outdated text developed during the Forest Service`s tenure. Markers related to the Nez Perce dated to McWhorter`s investigations of the 1920s and 1930s. The signs and pedestrian trails were in good condition only if one considered the serious lack of help and funds availed the seasonal ranger. These developments neither adequately served visitors` needs nor adequately reflected the importance of the site.</p>
AD 1953 - 1956	Planned	<p>The draft Mission 66 prospectus or "master plan" submitted to Washington in late 1956 addressed these needs in gross abstractions. The Park Service promised to preserve battle remains for posterity and to interpret the battle and its relation to the broad sweep of western American history. To this end it promised construction of trails and walkways; water, sewer, power, and communication systems; a visitor center and administration building with exhibits; a residential and utility compound; new directional and informational signs and markers in the battlefield area and on the approach roads; and a boundary fence. These improvements would not include overnight accommodations or additional camping facilities: Big Hole Battlefield would remain primarily a day-use area, with recreational use encouraged on adjacent forest service land; the air of quiet dignity appropriate to a memorial would therefore be preserved.</p>
AD 1957	Planned	<p>In 1957, landscape architects Sanford "Red" Hill and Frank Mattson of the Branch of Plans and Design proposed to locate park headquarters and a visitor center one-half mile south of the estimated southern end of the Encampment Area, on a flat bench named Ruby Bench that provided a panoramic view of all phases of the conflict without intruding on the battlefield.</p>

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AD 1963	Expanded	<p>On May 17, 1963, the 88th Congress approved Public Law 88-24, authorizing the addition of 160 acres of national forest land and 295.6 acres of private land to the monument boundaries. The private land included the visitor center building site on Ruby Bench, right-of-way for an access road to the new alignment of State Highway 43, and the Encampment Area as defined by the McWhorter survey and subsequent investigations. Shown through "recent" studies to be significantly associated with the battle, the acreage also included the Horse Pasture/Twin Trees Area and the Howitzer Capture Site, both on national forest land. The Forest Service had agreed to this transfer and the land would be acquired at no cost. The bill also redesignated the monument a national battlefield, a title more descriptive of the historic events and in keeping with NPS policy to designate uniform and appropriate administrative titles to units in the national park system.</p>
AD 1964	Demolished	<p>The water flume trestle that carried water from Ruby Creek to irrigation ditches on the bench south of the river was removed.</p>
AD 1967 - 1968	Built	<p>On August 26, 1967, the Park Service broke ground on a new visitor center on Ruby Bench. In conformity with a service-wide Mission-66 trend, the building was titled a "visitor center" rather than a museum and served multiple functions, providing administrative, museum, and utility space. In this initial and in all subsequent design proposals, the panorama of the battlefield served as the major display. Artifact collections and informative panels were intended to be "minor in extent," with exhibits related to Nez Perce culture and the political and military underpinnings of the campaign to the left of the panoramic windows and those related to the Nez Perce flight from Big Hole to Bear's Paw to the right. The visitor center was completed in July 1968.</p>
AD 1967	Demolished	<p>The fencing around the soldiers' monument was removed.</p>
AD 1968	Demolished	<p>The log museum and caretaker's house were removed.</p>

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AD 1973	Damaged	<p>By the latter half of the twentieth century, increasing populations of beavers in the bottomlands in and around the monument had altered the hydrodynamic patterns of the North Fork of the Big Hole River causing flooding in the low lying meadow areas and an increase in the number and density of the willow thickets. Secondary historic and biological studies suggested that the Big Hole beaver would have been all but destroyed during the fur trade of the early to mid 19th century and that the population had not sufficiently recovered by 1877 to impact the landscape through flooding and the creation of willow habitat. Through the 1960s, the NPS participated in a beavers transplant program with the state of Montana; four to thirty beaver were removed per year, depending on the time spent trapping. In December 1973, Schulmeyer directed removal of a driftwood and beaver dam that had caused the North Fork of the Big Hole River to abrade into the Indian Encampment Area.</p>
AD 1974	Restored	<p>In 1974, a Yellowstone maintenance crew spent a week on a partial restoration of the old road cut to the Siege Area. Their effort included application of excelsior matting and the distribution of sagebrush seed.</p>
AD 1976	Built	<p>In anticipation of the 1977 centennial of the battle, a number of teepee frames were installed at the site of the Nez Perce camp. The frames had been approved in the 1964 interpretive prospectus as a means of conveying the extent and the size of the Indian camp. Completion of the visitor center had heightened the need for the display. Superintendent Alfred W. Schulmeyer noted that erection of 10 to 20 frames of 4 to 8 poles each would visually place the camp while still "challenging" the visitor to "fill in the details" of a much larger populated camp of 87 hide-covered tepees of 20 to 40 poles each. Accurate, quality re-creation of the camp site was "out of the question financially" as each tanned teepee hide would cost more than \$2,000. Instead, bare teepee frames were erected to provide a more symbolic suggestion of the Nez Perce Camp.</p>
AD 1976 - 1978	Removed	<p>The Chief Joseph monument, erected by McWhorter's party in 1928 near the soldiers' monument, was moved to the museum in the visitor center sometime between 1976 and 1978.</p>

AD 1977	Built	<p>Also in anticipation of the centennial, Denver Service Center and HFC officials concurred on Schulmeyer's request for an interpretive walking trail to the newly acquired Encampment Area. As built in the spring of 1977, the encampment trail was 4 feet wide and extended 3,000 feet from the existing trail parking area to the camp site. Any visual intrusion to the historic scene, the Park Service argued, paled in contrast to the current "indiscriminate tracking" created by the estimated 10,000 visitors who wandered the meadow. Construction of the trail marked completion of the NPS interpretive trail program. All five principal battle areas as described by Landscape Architect "Red" Hill in 1939 – the howitzer capture site, the Siege Area, the initial assault, the Horse Pasture/Twin Trees, and the Indian Camp – could be easily accessed by visitors.</p>
AD 1985 - 1988	Restored	<p>In 1985, the NPS began a program of prescribed burns to control sage brush on the horse pasture and willows in the river bottom. Prescribed burns were conducted in 1986 and 1988.</p> <p>Park service personnel had long lamented the changes in vegetative cover, particularly the willow growth of the bottomland, the second-growth lodgepole pine of the Siege Area, and the second-growth encroaching upon the Horse Pasture/sagebrush steppe. Prior to the battle and until substantial settlement of the Big Hole Valley in the 1890s fire had burned through the willow bottoms every eight to ten years. These fires were part of the natural cycle; the altered and deteriorated willow community was both historically inappropriate and unnatural, representing "over 100 years of human interference in the natural process of fire."</p>

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AD 1991 - 1993	Restored	<p>A third prescribed burn was conducted on the willows in the river bottom to reduce the number and density of the thickets and return the scene closer to its 1877 conditions. In preparation for the major burn, smaller burns were carried out in 1991 and 1992 to reduce fuel loads. Finally another major willow burn was undertaken in May 1993 – the first of that magnitude since 1988. Although weather conditions were within the prescription, they were marginal. The burn did not accomplish the desired results and the ignition was terminated early.</p>
AD 1993 - 1994	Built	<p>A new park housing complex was built between 1993 and 1994 on Ruby Bench south of the visitor center near the park entrance.</p>
AD 1998	Restored	<p>A fourth willow burn was conducted in the spring of 1998.</p>
AD 2004 - 2008	Restored	<p>In an effort to limit seepage from the irrigation canals along the face of Ruby bench, the NPS applied an organic compound called polyacrylamide (PAM) to the inverts of the canals. This material acts as coagulant binding with particles in the water and precipitating out of solution to form a cohesive mass on the interior of the earthen canal that then helps to reduce water seepage. In conjunction with the PAM applications, the park is working to remove the woody vegetation growing along the canal inverts by hand. This will help minimize leakage from the canal and reduce the visual impact of the horizontal strips of willows growing along the canal face. This is an ongoing project as of 2008.</p>
AD 2006	Established	<p>NPS Inventory and Monitoring projects were implemented, including the camas monitoring project, the stream channel characteristics/surface water dynamics of the Big Hole River monitoring project, and a riparian zone vegetation monitoring project. Data collected will provide vital information to park management regarding trends and status of key natural/cultural resources.</p>

Physical History:

1877-1883: The Battle and Its Aftermath

The following history is excerpted from “Commemoration and Preservation: An Administrative History of Big Hole National Battlefield” by Theodore Catton and Ann Hubber, 1999. The narrative history section primarily covers the battle and its immediate aftermath. For a full chronology of the physical development of the battlefield after the historic period, please refer to the Chronology section of this report.

1877-1883: The Battle and Its Aftermath

The Nez Perce Camp

In the second week of August, 1877, about 750 Nez Perce made camp in a lush meadow on the south side of the North Fork of the Big Hole River. Known to their white adversaries as the "non-treaty Nez Perce," most of the group had been on the move since early June, forced by the U.S. Army to leave their homelands in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho and to resettle on the Nez Perce Reservation in Idaho. En route to the reservation, several young men in the group attacked and killed 14 or 15 white settlers in Idaho, and U.S. troops under the command of General Oliver O. Howard had begun their pursuit. Joined by other disaffected bands of Nez Perce, the non-treaty Nez Perce had fought a series of battles and skirmishes in Idaho during the latter half of June and the first part of July, before crossing the Bitterroot Mountains.

The Nez Perce intended to remain in their camp on the North Fork of the Big Hole River for several days. They believed that the war was behind them. Having eluded General Oliver O. Howard in Idaho and crossed Lolo Pass into Montana, they thought the U.S. soldiers would cease their pursuit. Proof of this, it seemed, lay in the Nez Perce's successful maneuver around Fort Fizzle on the Montana side of Lolo Pass, where the soldiers who had been called up from Fort Missoula let them pass without a fight. "Thinking in tribal terms, rather than national," historian Aubrey Haines explains, "their war had been with the Idaho people; there was no need to fight the Montanans, who had always been their friends." Adding to their newfound sense of security, they had traveled through the Bitterroot Valley without serious incident, buying fresh supplies of ammunition from white traders along the way. [1]

At the Big Hole, they arranged their 89 lodges on the east side of the river in the form of a V with the apex pointing upstream. On the west side of the river, in the intervening area between the village and the foot of the mountain, stretched a stand of willows about one-quarter mile wide laced by an irregular pattern of shallow sloughs and grassy patches. Pine forest covered most of the mountainside, making the camp vulnerable to a surprise attack from across the willow-covered bottomland. [2] The site of the encampment was not chosen as a defensive position, but rather because it was a familiar site to the Nez Perce who had passed this way before on their way to the buffalo country. There was a part of the mountainside across the river that was bare of trees, making excellent pasturage for the horses. There were also plenty of trees nearby which could be cut and dried to make travois and lodge poles.

Making their camp on the North Fork of the Big Hole, Chief Looking Glass counseled rest and calm. While the women gathered firewood, cut and peeled lodge poles, and laid them out to dry for several days, the men formed hunting and fishing parties. A few Nez Perce remained uneasy about the threat of attack, but the leaders insisted that the bands were no longer at war. [3] On the night before the dawn attack, the Nez Perce did not post any sentries. [4]

The Battle

Contrary to the Nez Perce leaders' hopes, the American officers had no intention of letting the bands of Nez Perce alone. While General Howard marched his command over the Bitterroot Range, Colonel Gibbon took up the pursuit with a force of 17 officers and 146 enlisted men from various posts across Montana. Trailing the Nez Perce up the Bitterroot Valley, Gibbon's force was augmented by volunteers from the Bitterroot settlements. The volunteers were added to a small detachment of cavalry under Lt. James H. Bradley. It was this cavalry detachment that Gibbon sent ahead to scout for the Nez Perce, and which discovered the camp on the North Fork of the Big Hole River. [5]

Gibbon's plan was to surprise the Nez Perce, flush them onto the open ground east of the river bottom, and separate them from their horses. During the night of August 8, he moved his force into position at the foot of the mountain, above and to the west of the camp. In the pre-dawn hours of August 9, 1877, Colonel Gibbon assembled his men at the base of the mountain slope in preparation for the surprise attack. The companies were deployed in a long line that was to attack the camp broadside. On the left flank, Lieutenant James Bradley was to attack the north end of the camp with two companies and the volunteers. Captain James Sanno to Bradley's right was to attack with his company at the middle of the camp, while Captain Richard Comba was to attack the southern end of camp on the right flank. Bradley's men crossed the river and then headed into the dense willows that continued to the edge of camp. Because of the meander of the river, Comba's men were entangled in the willows across the river from the camp. When the attack was alerted with the killing of a Nez Perce herdsman, Bradley's men attacked from the willows to the north. Bradley was killed early in the attack, and unable to make headway against the defending warriors, his men broke ranks and joined Captain Sanno's company, who had already gained the camp.

Believing the attack was coming from the north where the first shots had been fired, many of the Nez Perce took cover in the willows on the south end of the camp. Men took cover in the thickets to fire on the soldiers in the camp, while many of the women and children entered the river channel believing the willows along the bank would shield them from view. Comba's men, delayed by the willows on the western bank of the river emerged to find several Nez Perce crouching in the channel, killing them where they hid. As the tide of battle turned, the soldiers found themselves caught in a deadly crossfire. Gradually Gibbon and his force fell back. After about an hour and a half or two hours of fighting, the colonel ordered his men to move back to the timber from which they had originally deployed. [9]

The soldiers retreated to a low promontory at the edge of the timber. Gibbon had noted the

defensive advantages of this Point of Timber (the Siege Area) while moving his men into position. It was hardly an ideal defensive position, but it afforded some cover and modest high ground on three sides. The men used the limited supply of rocks and downfall to form breastworks and they dug rifle pits with their trowel bayonets. The Nez Perce warriors slowly encircled them, one warrior getting behind a log within fifty yards of their position.

Meanwhile, some distance away, Gibbon's single 12-pounder mountain howitzer and gun crew were attacked on their way to support the assault on the village and the gun was captured. When Colonel Gibbon moved his men out from the Trail Creek camp on the night before the battle, he gave instructions that the howitzer team follow with the gun at daybreak. This would allow the soldiers to surprise the Nez Perce without the movement of the heavy gun betraying their presence. When the howitzer arrived the next morning, the battle was underway in the river bottom below. The howitzer team set the gun up at a position high on the mountain slope south of the camp and managed to fire two rounds. Before a third shot could be fired, a small group of Nez Perce intercepted the gun crew, overpowering them and capturing the gun along with a mule laden with extra ammunition. With no help in sight, Gibbon ordered his men to conserve their ammunition and prepare for a siege.

With Gibbon's force pinned down across the river, the Nez Perce gathered their dead from the village and the surrounding area. "As the people mourned," writes Merrill D. Beal, "they wept with such feeling that the battle-toughened men in the trenches listened and trembled." Some thirty Nez Perce – men, women, and children – were slain in the village and many more, perhaps as many as sixty, died while trying to escape or counterattack. Nearly every family lost someone. The Nez Perce buried the dead as well as they could, wrapping them in buffalo robes and placing them under cut banks. [10]

At the end of the long day, Gibbon sent three runners out under cover of darkness in the hope of obtaining help from General Howard and medical supplies from the town of Deer Lodge. Some 20 or 30 Nez Perce warriors maintained the siege of Gibbon's position through the night and into the next day, while the rest of the bands made haste to get away before the arrival of General Howard's troops. Finally, in the evening of the second day, the warriors lifted their siege and melted away. [11]

The Battle of the Big Hole was a turning point in the Nez Perce War. Although the Nez Perce avoided defeat and capture, they sustained grievous losses. Moreover, they now knew that the U.S. Army would not give up its pursuit. After the battle, the Nez Perce fled south and east in the hope of finding sanctuary on the Crow Reservation in eastern Montana, then north in a bid to reach Canada. Howard summoned other forces to head them off, and at the Battle of the Bear's Paw in north central Montana the Nez Perce were once more attacked and brought to surrender after a six-day siege.

Despite their captors' promise that they would be allowed to return to their homeland, most of the non-treaty Nez Perce were exiled in Oklahoma. There, many of them died of malnutrition. When the survivors were allowed to return to the Pacific Northwest many years later, some settled on the Colville Reservation in Washington, others on the Nez Perce Reservation in

Idaho. Later, some went to the Umatilla Reservation in Oregon. The Nez Perce War exacerbated differences between the treaty and non-treaty bands of Nez Perce. The bitter legacy of war and exile left the Nez Perce a divided people. Tragic in its own right, the persistence of intratribal differences would profoundly affect administration of the battlefield site throughout the twentieth century.

The Aftermath

When dawn came on August 11, Gibbon's force was in possession of the field. But he could hardly claim victory. His losses in the Battle of the Big Hole were heavy: 29 dead and 40 wounded. The volunteers had sustained a 30 percent casualty rate, the officers 50 percent. Although two volunteers reported the whereabouts of the fleeing Nez Perce cavalcade – distinguished by the dust cloud rising on the west edge of the valley about 30 miles to the south – Gibbon's force was in no shape to pursue. [12]

Most of the non-Nez Perce dead lay among the willows where the initial attack had occurred or at the Point of Timber, to be known henceforth as the "Siege Area." Most of the wounded lay in the rifle pits. When General Howard arrived with his advance party of cavalry about 10:00 a.m. on the 11th, he found the place resembling a hospital ward:

“So many wounded; nearly half lying cheerful, though not able to move; many white bandages about the head and face; some arms in slings; there were roughly constructed shelters from the heat of an unrelenting August sun.” [13]

Two doctors with Howard's command provided medical care until more help arrived. On August 13, a force of thirty-five volunteers, two doctors, and four wagons arrived from Butte. Another party of 60 volunteers, three doctors, and twenty wagons arrived from Helena. These relief parties also brought ambulances and tents. Eventually the wounded men were transported to St. Joseph's Hospital in Deer Lodge. [14]

While doctors attended the wounded, the able-bodied soldiers and volunteers buried their fallen comrades. In general, the volunteers and the soldiers each buried their own. Aubrey Haines, an historian with the National Park Service who served on the Big Hole staff in the 1960s, made a close study of both the physical and documentary evidence concerning the location of these burials. Haines concludes that the bodies were probably buried near where they lay rather than gathered together in a common grave. He quotes a statement by Cpl. Charles W. Loynes that the dead "were buried as best we could at that time." Haines notes the lack of digging tools and the difficulty of transporting bodies across the sloughs. [15]

G. O. Shields, author of *The Battle of the Big Hole* (1889), described the initial burials as somewhat more dignified:

“Captain [Richard] Comba was sent out on the morning of the 11th with a party of men to bury the dead soldiers and citizens, all of whom were found, recognized, and decently interred. Rude head boards, obtained by breaking up cracker boxes, were placed at the heads of the graves, on

which were written, or carved, the name, company, and regiment of the citizen whose grave each marked.” [16]

Even if Shields' account was colored by sentimentality, it still lends support to the theory that the soldiers were buried about where they lay.

No one could report with certainty how many Nez Perce were killed in the Battle of the Big Hole. Colonel Gibbon reported that his burial detail counted 83 dead Nez Perce at the battlefield plus 6 more who died from their wounds and were found in a ravine some distance from the battlefield. [17] Like the soldiers, the Nez Perce appear to have buried most of their dead near where they lay. A number of bodies were placed along the river banks where the earth could be caved in over them. Others were buried in camas ovens – pits that the Nez Perce had dug for roasting camas. Gibbon's burial detail made some effort to deepen these graves but without much success. In the days following the battle General Howard's Bannock scouts returned to the site, broke into these shallow graves, and desecrated the remains of their erstwhile enemies. White souvenir hunters defiled the Nez Perce burials as well. [18]

The many corpses were not the only sign of battle. A number of the Nez Perce's horses lay dead and bloating in the summer sun. The battlefield was littered with equipment, clothing, blankets, and spent cartridges. There were several tepees still standing in the Encampment Area, stripped of their skin covers, and dozens of tepee poles lay scattered about where the Nez Perce women had peeled them the day before the battle. [19] Around the Siege Area, the lodgepole pines showed numerous abrasions where flying bullets had grazed the bark or embedded themselves in the trunks of these trees. The rifle pits, which the men had gouged out of the soil in desperate haste on August 9, probably still smelled of newly turned earth in the days after the battle. These impressions in the trees and earth would soon dull with exposure to rain and sun, but in muted form they would last for decades.

General Howard waited for the arrival of the rest of his command on August 12, and with the addition of 50 men from Gibbon's command he resumed his pursuit of the Nez Perce on August 13. Gibbon, meanwhile, dismissed the volunteers and led the remainder of his force, including the wounded, to Deer Lodge. [20] Three days after the battle the place was already deserted.

In the following weeks, many people from the Bitterroot Valley and elsewhere visited the battlefield to satisfy their curiosity or collect souvenirs. A circuit-riding Methodist minister, Rev. W. W. Van Orsdale, passed by the battlefield in mid-September en route from Bannack to the Bitterroot Valley. He reported the grim news that bears and other wild animals had dug up a number of the human remains and dragged them from their graves. As a result, a party of Bitterroot settlers was organized to retrieve the bodies of the volunteers for reburial in cemeteries in the Bitterroot Valley, and a detail of soldiers from Fort Missoula was dispatched to rebury the soldiers' remains at the battlefield. The officer in charge of the latter, Lt. J. T. Van Orsdale, 7th Infantry, had been in the fight. [21]

Van Orsdale's report was unusually vague regarding locations of the soldiers' graves. [22] Since it is the only first-hand account of where the bodies were laid to rest it is quoted here in

full:

“I have the honor to report that in compliance with Post Order No. 54, dated Hdqrs. Post Near Missoula, M.T., Sept. 19, 1877, I left said Post with party of 8 enlisted on the morning of the 20th and proceeded via Deer Lodge to the Battlefield of the Big Hole for the purpose of re-burying the dead, etc. I found that some fourteen (14) including Capt. [William] Logan and Lieut. Bradley had been disinterred; the officers had been scalped showing that Indians as well as wolves and other animals had been at work at the dead. I reburied the same with the exception of Capt. Logan whose remains I brought to this place and deposited in the Cemetery for the time being. I examined the Field thoroughly with a view of finding out if possible the numbers of Indians killed and determined the presence of more than eighty (80) scattered from a point one mile below where the lower end of their Camp rested at time of battle to a point opposite the rifle pits constructed by troops, a total distance of nearly 1-1/2 miles. Said number included those visible or partially so.”

Haines suggests that Van Orsdale placed all of the soldiers' remains in a common grave on the edge of the bluff below the point where the granite soldiers' monument would be situated six years later. He cites as evidence Colonel Gibbon's poem of the battle, in which he writes,

“There is the very spot where [William] English fell,
Close by the spot where our dead soldiers sleep.” [23]

Moreover, this would have been standard military practice. (Soldiers' remains were placed in common graves after the Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876 and after the Battle of the Bears' Paw in 1877.)

There is some evidence to the contrary, however. Thomas C. "Bunch" Sherrill, a Bitterroot volunteer, later served as caretaker of the battlefield and placed a number of interpretive signs around the site. A number of Sherrill's interpretive signs described not only where soldiers and Nez Perce were killed or wounded, but also where the dead were buried. "Three soldiers burried [sic] here one shot thru the head, names unknown," stated one sign. "Another soldier burried [sic] here with [Sergeant Edward] Page," read another. [24]

Sherrill may have been ignorant of the soldier reburials; however, his description is corroborated by mountain man Andrew Garcia's description in the posthumously published Montana classic, *Tough Trip Through Paradise* (1967). Garcia visited the battlefield in 1878 at the behest of his young Nez Perce bride, In-who-lise, who had lost her father and sister and was herself wounded in the battle. Although Garcia wrote his account more than fifty years later – after visiting the battlefield a second time in 1930 when Sherrill's interpretive signs might have "refreshed" his memory – his description nonetheless casts doubt on the supposition that the soldiers were reburied in a common grave:

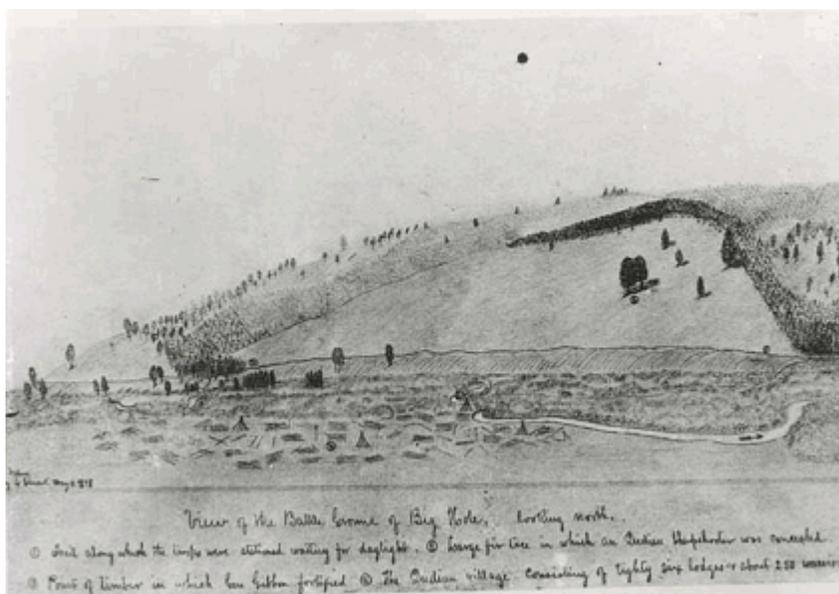
“We tried to find the grave of In-who-lise's sister, Lucy, but our search was in vain. The sight was awful to see. Human bones were scattered around as though they had never been buried. Still, it looked as if the soldiers had been buried where they fell and their graves were in fair

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condition.” [25]

Another document written in 1910 further clouds the issue of where the soldiers' bodies lie. U.S. Army Quartermaster General J. B. Alshire was asked how much area should be reserved for the War Department to protect the national monument. He replied as follows:

“The only interments ever made on this site were of those who were killed in the battle of 1877. There are no marked grave sites now, and according to the best information obtainable it seems that all these bodies have since been removed. All that there is there is a monument erected in 1883 by authority of the Secretary of War, around which a protective steel fence was erected in 1909. It is thought that all that is necessary is to have sufficient ground set apart for the protection of this monument.” [26]



Historic drawing showing the battlefield at the time of the battle. (NEPE Image Catalog BIHO-HI-0026)



Historic image showing the log museum in the siege area. The museum was built in 1928 or 1929 and removed in 1968. (NEPE Image Catalog BIHO-HI-0187)



Historic Image showing the soldiers' monument encased in its protective fencing. The fencing was installed in 1908 and removed in 1967. Also visible in the image are stumps of pine trees killed by insects. (NEPE Image Catalog BIHO-HI-0188)



Historic image showing the irrigation trestle that carried water across the river bottom through the heart of the battlefield. The trestle was built in the late 1890s or early 1900s and removed in 1964. (NEPE Image Catalog BIHO-HI-0202)



Historic image of the ranger cabin ca. 1920s. The cabin was built in 1912 and removed around 1935. (NEPE Image Catalog BIHO-HI-0205)

History Endnotes

1 Aubrey L. Haines, *An Elusive Victory: The Battle of the Big Hole* (West Glacier, Montana: Glacier Natural History Association, 1991), p. 35.

2 Merrill D. Beal, "I Will Fight No More Forever": Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce War (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), p. 113. The willows may have been less dense in 1877 than today due to occasional fires.

3 L. V. McWhorter, *Yellow Wolf: His Own Story* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1940), pp. 112-113.

4 Mary Paddock Berthold, *Big Hole Journal* (Detroit: Harlo Press, 1973), p. 53.

5 Bruce Hampton, *Children of Grace: The Nez Perce War of 1877* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), p. 158.

6 Beal "I Will Fight No More Forever," p. 116.

7 McWhorter, *Yellow Wolf* p. 117.

8 Mark H. Brown, *The Flight of the Nez Perce* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), p. 255.

9 Brown, *The Flight of the Nez Perce*, pp. 255-256.

10 Apparently some of the dead were taken away for later burial.

11 Brown, *The Flight of the Nez Perce*, p. 259. There is some question as to how many warriors stayed to conduct this siege and for how long.

12 Haines, *An Elusive Victory*, p. 106.

13 Quoted in Haines, *An Elusive Victory*, p. 107.

14 Beal "I Will Fight No More Forever," p. 135.

15 Haines, *An Elusive Victory*, p. 108.

16 G. O. Shields, *The Battle of the Big Hole* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., Publishers, 1889), p. 81.

17 Another account, by Will Cave of the Bitterroot Volunteers, may be found in *Nez Perce Indian War of 1877 and Battle of the Big Hole*, printed by The Missoulian (date unknown, copy in vertical file at Ravalli County Museum). Cave states (p. 22): "On the 11th, when the soldiers and volunteers were burying their dead on the field, they found the Indian dead wrapped in robes, all in a row, under the edge of the river bank, with but a slight covering of earth, and were counted as being 89."

18 Beal, "I Will Fight No More Forever," pp. 123, 127. The soldiers' bodies may have received similar treatment. One of the volunteers, Thomas C. "Bunch" Sherrill, reported many years later that "the Indians treated our dead good, as none of them were mutilated." Sherrill was referring, of course, to the Nez Perce people rather than the Bannock scouts. Others supported the claim that the Nez Perce did not scalp their enemies. However, Lt. Jr L. Van Orsdale stated that some of the soldier and citizen corpses were scalped in the weeks after the battle (see below). Years later he was very insistent on this point. G. O. Shields in his book, *The Battle of the Big Hole* (pp. 88-89) quoted a January 4, 1889 letter by Van Orsdale: "About six weeks after the fight, I returned to the battle-ground to rebury our dead, many of them having been dug up by Indians, bears, and wolves; and, to destroy one more fiction which has obtained credence, to the effect that these Indians did not scalp their victims, I must say that both Captain Logan and Lieutenant Bradley, as well as several private soldiers, had been dug up and scalped, presumably by those Indians who had been left behind to care for the wounded hidden in the hills near there."

19 See Granville Stuart's sketches, dated May 11, 1878, which are included in the Big Hole files in the records of the National Park Service, History Division, Washington Office (hereafter

WASO). Andrew Garcia saw the same scene in 1879 and described it from memory years later: "Some of the tepee poles of this once large Injun camp still lay scattered around. The peeled ones were as good as they were two years ago on the day when some unfortunate squaw hauled and set them up here, her lips breathing with song and laughter, not knowing that tomorrow would bring their death song." *Tough Trip Through Paradise*, edited by Bennett H. Stein (Sausalito, California: Comstock Edition, 1979), p. 275.

20 Haines, *An Elusive Victory*, p. 113.

21 Alva A. Simpson, "Unit Recreation Plan, Big Hole Battlefield, Beaverhead National Forest, Wisdom District," May 23, 1932, Folder 98, H14, BHNBA.

22 E. D. Sandvig, Forest Supervisor, "Memorandum," June 19, 1935, Folder 98, H14, BHNBA.

23 L. V. McWhorter to Marshall G. Ramsey, September 23, 1936, Folder 143, K3827, BHNBA.

24 Alva A. Simpson, "Unit Recreation Plan, Big Hole Battlefield, Beaverhead National Forest, Wisdom District," May 23, 1932, Folder 98, H14, BHNBA.

25 Marshall G. Ramsey to L. V. McWhorter, October 6, 1936, Folder 143, K3827, BHNBA.

26 Steven Ross Evans, *Voice of the Old Wolf: Lucullus Virgil McWhorter and the Nez Perce Indians* (Pullman: WSU Press, 1996), pp. 1-8.

Analysis & Evaluation of Integrity

Analysis and Evaluation of Integrity Narrative Summary:

Big Hole Battlefield is a historic site significant as the location of a battle between the U.S. Army and the Nez Perce Bands on August 9 and 10, 1877. As a historic site, the battlefield need not possess physical features that were present at the time of the battle, but it does need to exhibit the essential character and appearance that would allow it to convey its significance. The battlefield does this through its natural systems and features, including its natural topography, vegetation patterns, hydrology, and overall setting, which establish a scene very similar to that which characterized the site during the historic period. The landscape features that not only determined the location of the battle but also directly affected the events and outcome of the battle are still evident today. In addition to the natural scene, the battlefield retains physical traces of the battle, including the rifle pits that the soldiers dug during the siege and archeological resources throughout the site. The association between the site and its historic events is strengthened further by the cultural traditions of the Nez Perce people, which instill meaning in every aspect of the landscape and which continue to place the battle and the battlefield squarely in its history.

At the time of the battle, there were no buildings, roads, or other development at the site. What defined the landscape were the natural components, including the vegetation, the natural topography, the river, and the sweeping views of the valley and surrounding mountains. These features not only set the scene and defined the character of the battlefield, they also played a major role in the events and outcome of the battle itself. The natural landscape that battle participants experienced was well documented in descriptions and accounts of the battle and in drawings made shortly after the battle. The primary components were the lodgepole pine forest that covered the mountain slope to the northwest; the open horse pasture at the toe of the slope; the alluvial fan timbered in an open lodgepole pine forest where the soldiers were besieged; the river bottom and camas meadow, where the Nez Perce had set their camp; and the high bench to the south, over which the Nez Perce escaped. Each element of the landscape played its part in the events of the battle, and each features prominently in the narrative accounts. Today, the natural patterns on the land that were present in 1877 are largely intact, creating a scene that is remarkably similar to what would have been experienced by the participants on the morning of the battle.

As with any living landscape, the natural systems of the Big Hole National Battlefield are in constant flux, evolving, growing, declining, and dying over time. With a few exceptions, notably the twin trees, the vegetation that exists today can not be definitively identified as having been present at the time of the battle. Trees that bore the marks of bullets in the siege area, for example, were ravaged by a beetle infestation in the early twentieth century, and none are known to survive today. But the integrity of the battlefield landscape depends not on individual historic features nor on freezing the landscape in an unchanging historic state, but rather on the overall patterns, composition, and organization of the landscape that comprise the historic scene.

The integrity of the site is strengthened by the practices, rituals, stories, and traditional uses of vegetation and other landscape features by the Nez Perce at the time of the battle. In many cases,

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these cultural traditions have persisted into modern times and continue to define the relationship between the Nez Perce people and the site. The cultural traditions of the Nez Perce that have relevance to the battlefield site include traditional uses of many of the plants at the site, including the lodgepole pine, camas, willow, kouse, yampa, yarrow, and balsamroot. The presence of these plants influenced the choice of the site for the Nez Perce camp and thus the location of the battle, and the use of the resources, such as cutting and drying lodgepole pines for teepee poles and digging and cooking camas, occupied the Nez Perce in the camp for much of the day before the battle. Traces of these activities still exist in the archeological resources of the site, such as buried camas ovens.

Traditional Nez Perce stories are another important part of tribal cultural heritage, recording the tribe's history and connecting them to the natural world. The stories are typically tied to the natural world, with plants and animals playing major roles. Thus the stories are directly tied to the environment, with elements of the landscape serving as direct reminders of the lessons. Plants in the Big Hole area that are tied to specific Nez Perce Stories include the dogwood, lodgepole pines, cedars, willows, yarrow, and of course, camas.

In addition to the natural landscape and Nez Perce cultural traditions, the battlefield possesses a number of features that relate directly to the battle and the aftermath, strengthening the site's historic association. Snaking in an irregular ring through the siege area, the rifle pits, dug by the U.S. soldiers during the battle, are a powerful reminder of the soldiers' peril and resolve to survive. They also represent standard army technique for the period of field fortification and defensive tactics. Other contributing features include the soldiers' monument, erected in 1883 to honor the soldiers and volunteers that were killed in the battle.

Since the battle, the site has seen a certain degree of development, some of which has been removed and some of which still remains. A visitor center was built by the NPS on Ruby Bench (a terrace above the battleground) in the 1960s during the Mission 66 era. Additionally, park housing was added to Ruby Bench in the 1990s. These developments are partially visible from the battle areas. In addition, the open meadows southeast of the river were cultivated for hay and other crops, and irrigation canals were dug across the hillslope to provide water. While many of these ditches remain, they are relatively inconspicuous within the boundary of the historic site. Those structures associated with the ranger station that occupied the site from 1912 until around 1935, the museum structure that once housed the howitzer display, and the visitor camp sites on the slope just outside of the siege area, have since been removed, and little trace of them remains today, increasing the historic integrity of the site. In addition, interpretation efforts that were at times visually intrusive by today's standards have also been removed, replaced by less conspicuous techniques.

Despite the development on Ruby Bench, the evolution of the site has come full-circle, returning in recent years to a state much closer to its original. Through a combination of the intact historic setting established by the natural systems and features, vegetation, cultural traditions, and views and vistas, and extant physical traces of the battle in the form of the rifle pits and archeological resources, the Big Hole battlefield site retains a remarkably strong ability to convey its significance.

Landscape Characteristic:

Natural Systems and Features

In the case of a historic site with few built features, the natural systems and features that make up the site's setting are instrumental in establishing the historic scene, contributing to an understanding of the landscape, and helping to convey the site's significance. At Big Hole National Battlefield, the natural systems and features, including the natural topography, vegetation, hydrology, and climate, influenced the choice of the site by the Nez Perce and had direct impact on the battle itself. Today the natural patterns on the land that were present in 1877 are largely intact, creating a scene that is remarkably similar to what would have been experienced by the participants on the morning of the battle. Furthermore, the events of the battle, so heavily influenced by the land on which they unfolded, can be easily read in the patterns of land, water, and vegetation of the site today. The natural systems and features at Big Hole National Battlefield contribute to the integrity aspects of setting, feeling, and association of the historic site and help convey the site's significance.

The Big Hole Valley is a long north-south oriented crescent-shaped valley bounded by the Anaconda-Pintlar Range in the northwest, the Beaverhead Range in the southwest, and the Pioneer Range in the east. The broad flat valley is drained by the Big Hole River, which is fed by a latticework of tributaries entering the valley from the rugged mountain ranges that hem it in. The battlefield itself is nestled against the foothills on the western edge of the valley where Trail and Ruby Creeks converge to form the North Fork of the Big Hole River. The battlefield is characterized by three distinct zones defined by topography, water, and vegetation: mountain slope, floodplain, and benchland.

The mountain slope is a steep toe of the foothills that lie to the northwest. While the majority of the foothill area is covered with forest, a large section of the southwest-facing slope is a treeless sagebrush steppe. Prospects from this slope offer commanding views of the river bottom below and the larger valley spreading out to the east. The slope ends abruptly at the edge of the floodplain. In this low, flat area, the North Fork of the Big Hole River meanders through marshy ground. The flood plain is cut with sloughs and ox-bow ponds and is covered with dense thickets of willow and open patches of grassland. On the southeastern side of the floodplain the ground climbs toward the center of the valley. The top of the bench, roughly 100 feet above the river, is characterized by open grassland and sagebrush. Today, the slope up to the bench is cut by a number of irrigation ditches that date to ranching activities in the years after the battle. The park visitor center, park housing, and other services are on the top of the bench. While the lower slopes of the bench are within the historic site boundaries, the top of the bench, including the developed areas of the visitor center and park housing, are outside of the boundary.

Directly to the northwest of the battlefield lies an area of rugged low mountains that bridge the gap between the Anaconda-Pintlar and Beaverhead Ranges. These mountains are cut by Trail Creek, which flows through a narrow gorge connecting the Big Hole and Bitterroot Valleys. It was down this gorge that the Nez Perce, followed by Colonel Gibbon and his troops, traveled in the summer of 1877. The Nez Perce, unaware of the presence of Gibbon's forces or that they were being pursued so closely, made camp on the banks of the North Fork of the Big Hole

River, hoping to rest and replenish their supplies.

Before 1877, Nez Perce had often camped at this site during their regular transits from their home valleys in Idaho and eastern Washington and Oregon to the buffalo hunting plains to the east. The site offered a number of resources important to the Nez Perce and other Native American tribes that lived and hunted in the area. Among native peoples it had long been used as a summer hunting ground, a traditionally neutral zone frequented by plains tribes to the east and plateau tribes to the south and west. The Nez Perce people regarded the Big Hole as a middle ground between their homeland in the river valleys of Oregon and Idaho and the buffalo country east of the Rocky Mountains. The camp site offered ample young lodgepole pines that the Nez Perce cut and dried for their lodges to take with them to the treeless plains. The river provided water, fish, beaver, and other small game. Numerous plants available in the forest and on the grassland were used for food or for their medicinal, spiritual, or ceremonial uses. Perhaps most importantly, the grasslands in the floodplain along the riverbank provided camas, a root vegetable deeply entwined in the Nez Perce culture and an important food staple.

The Nez Perce, believing they had left the trouble and conflicts with the government troops behind them in Idaho, planned to spend several days at the Big Hole camp before proceeding east to the buffalo lands. The day of August 8, the day before the battle, was spent gathering resources for the trip ahead. While the men hunted for game, the women cut lodge poles, stripping the bark and laying them in the sun to dry. Women and children also spent the day digging camas in the meadow around the camp, which they cooked in pit ovens. The following day, as the battle between the Nez Perce and the U.S. soldiers raged, the natural features of the site that played such an important role in the daily life of the Nez Perce would also strongly influence the progression and outcome of the battle.

Natural Topography

The Natural topography played an important part in the Battle of the Big Hole. As Colonel Gibbon moved his troops into position, they traversed the slope above the Nez Perce camp. This position cut the Nez Perce off from their horse herd grazing on the slope and offered the troops an excellent view of the sleeping camp below. Once even with the camp, Gibbon moved his men down to the base of the slope where they assumed company formation for the move across the river and the surprise attack on the camp. After the attack commenced, it was the Nez Perce who took advantage of the high ground to repel the attack and drive the soldiers back. While some Nez Perce warriors took to the bench, others circled around the reserve forces still waiting on the west side of the river at the base of the hill and took positions high on the slope. These high positions provided the Nez Perce sharpshooters valuable advantage, and their relentlessly accurate fire helped turn the tide of the attack and force a retreat.

As Gibbon ordered the retreat, he directed his men back to the point of timber at the mouth of a gulch on the hillside. Although not an ideal defensive position, the siege area did offer high ground on three sides and modest cover of the trees. Flushing out the handful of Nez Perce

warriors that were already occupying the area, the troops climbed the steep sandy slopes from the river and proceeded to hastily dig a ring of rifle pits. Meanwhile, Nez Perce warriors took positions along the forest edge on the uphill slope from the siege area, pinning the soldiers in for the rest of the day and night.

Running through the siege area was a shallow gulch, later named Battle Gulch, that proved to be a defensive weakness of the siege area. Throughout the siege, Nez Perce warriors were able to use the gulch as cover and approach the entrenched soldiers at very close range. It also allowed Nez Perce sharpshooters hidden in trees on the opposite side of the river a relatively clear shot into the pine grove. This gulch features prominently in many of the accounts of the battle from both U.S. and Nez Perce participants.

Although the defensive attributes of the siege area were sufficient for the soldiers to avoid large-scale losses and hold up under the pressure of the Nez Perce, they also allowed a small number of Nez Perce to keep a superior force pinned down long enough for the rest of the Nez Perce to escape. Today the natural topography and large-scale landforms of the battlefield retain the qualities that influenced the progress and outcome of the battle.

Hydrology

The grade along the river is exceedingly low, dropping only about 15 feet in the mile of river length that crosses the battlefield site. This creates a broad meandering river bottom of marshy bogs, backwater sloughs, and disconnected oxbow ponds. Slight variations in ground elevation result in significant differences in ground moisture and plant communities. Willows dominate the lower areas along the riverbank, in former river channels, and in the marshy areas. Where the ground is slightly higher, it is covered with open grassland. Outside of the floodplain, the steeper well-drained soil is considerably dryer and supports sagebrush and grassland steppe communities.

The Nez Perce camped within the floodplain in a meadow directly on the riverbank. The meadow, being a foot or so above the river, supported a variety of grass and forb species, including camas, while the river provided fish and drinking water. The supple stems of the willows that grew along the riverbank were used to make a variety of practical items from baskets and cradleboards to ropes and fish nets. Rivers were of primary importance in the choice of camps and villages for the Nez Perce.

On the morning of the battle, the U.S. soldiers and volunteers had to cross the river from their position at the base of the slope to attack the sleeping camp. In doing so they not only had to cross the river channel itself, but a number of deep sloughs and marshy areas. This, in combination with the dense willows, caused the advancing troops to break rank and become disorganized, disrupting the attack to a degree and giving the Nez Perce enough of a chance to escape the camp. When the troops retreated again towards the siege area, they began an orderly retreat consistent with their training, but again became disorganized in the marshy area

west of the camp. A number of soldiers were killed or wounded during the retreat across the river bottom.

Today, the river and its floodplain remain a dominant feature of the battlefield landscape. Although the channel continues to shift and change as it meanders across the floodplain, the essential characteristics of the main channel, ponds, sloughs, and marshy areas that played such a prominent role in both the selection of the site as a camp and in the battle itself persist, contributing strongly to the historic site.

Vegetation

The vegetation of Big Hole National Battlefield has been carefully described and analyzed in a number of reports. Notably, “A Floristic Study of the Big Hole National Battlefield” by John R. Pierce in 1981 carefully catalogs the existing plant species and compares the battlefield’s vegetation to that which might have been present in the summer of 1877. The vegetation of the battlefield has changed since the study was conducted, thanks in part to management efforts to restore the historic character of the site. Field surveys of the existing conditions (2006) together with the findings of the 1981 study were used for the following analysis.

The patterns of natural vegetation of the site follow the patterns of the site’s topography outlined above: the mountain slope, floodplain, and benchland. The mountain slope is largely covered by a forest dominated by lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*) and Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), with inclusions of ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) and white bark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*). Descending the forested slope is a ravine or gulch with a spring-fed stream flowing through it. Many of the plant species found here are typical of the floodplain. A large area of the slope is treeless, covered instead with a sagebrush and grass steppe, dominated by sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) and Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*), as well as a number of other grasses and forbs.

Vegetation in the floodplain varies with ground elevation and available water and includes aquatic vegetation in wet areas and along the water edge; dense willow thickets on the banks of the river, sloughs, and ponds; and grassland on the higher ground. The benchland is covered by sagebrush steppe, with areas of willow, cottonwood, and other water-loving trees and shrubs in the drainages and along the irrigation ditches.

Like the other aspects of the natural systems and features of the site, vegetation was influential both in the Nez Perce’s selection and use of the site as a camp and in the events of the battle. Specific elements of the vegetation are discussed below. Nez Perce cultural relationship and traditional uses and practices involving particular plant species are discussed in the Cultural Traditions section of this document.

Forest and siege area

The forested areas, and in particular the lodgepole pines (*Pinus contorta*), were important both as a resource for the Nez Perce and as an influential element of the battle. Although few individual trees that remain today can be positively dated to the time of the battle, the patterns of forestation, as well as the character and composition of the pine forests, continue to reinforce the historic scene and contribute to an understanding of the site's significance.

Descriptions of the battlefield from participants, as well as photographs, drawings, and maps done in the years after the battle, give a relatively clear picture of the extent and character of the forested areas in 1877. Much as it does today, the forest covered the majority of the mountain slope, with the exception of the open steppe where the Nez Perce grazed their horses.

Where the drainage gulch cut down the slope, the trees extended to the river bottom, covering a small alluvial point often referred to as the point of timber or the siege area. It was in this area that Gibbon's men took refuge, using the lodgepole pines as cover. Many of the trees were scarred by bullets, and numerous bullets were lodged in the trees. Because of the prominent role that these trees played in this part of the battle, they were the focus of much attention in the years following the battle, both from historical interpreters and from souvenir hunters. Many of the trees were damaged as people either dug out the bullets or cut pieces containing bullets from the trees. Protection of these trees was an effort of the early managers of the battlefield.

In the 1910s and 1920s, a pine beetle blight decimated the forests around the Big Hole Valley, hitting the trees in the siege area particularly hard. By the early 1930s, nearly all of the mature trees in the siege area had died or were declining. In 1935, Forest Service officials "topped" the dead and dying bullet-scarred trees, creating a false and unhealthy natural environment while attempting to preserve cultural relics. By the 1950s, these trunks, most as tall as 10', were also collapsing. In an effort to preserve the trunks, the Park Service cemented the root bases. While these efforts preserved the trees as artifacts, they also created unhealthy and unnatural forest conditions and a visual scene markedly different from that at the time of the battle. By the 1980s, the Park Service and Forest Service cooperated on "reconstruction" of the Siege and Horse-Pasture areas to more natural and historically accurate growth patterns. Today there are no identified trees that date to the period of the battle, and no evidence of damage to the trees from bullets. However, thanks to careful management of the forest, the composition and character of the siege area more closely resembles that at the time of the battle than it has in a century.

The extent of the forest edge around the siege area and along the perimeter of the horse pasture has fluctuated over the years. Several of the battle participants who visited the site in the 1920s and 1930s suggested that the trees had grown and covered more ground than they had in 1877. Yellow Bull had difficulty recognizing elements of the site when he visited in 1927 because of the change in the forest. Likewise, one of the citizen volunteers in the battle stated in 1934 that the gulch above the siege area, open during the time of the battle, had been

encroached upon by the forest, making it look different. Photographs taken in the 1980s show clear expansion of the forest edge and encroachment on the horse pasture when compared to historic photographs and drawings. Particularly, the twin trees that sheltered a Nez Perce sharpshooter during the battle were nearly indistinguishable from the encroaching forest. Since then, management efforts have reduced this encroachment. Many of the young trees around the twin trees were removed, reestablishing their original prominence on the slope. Fire has been used in recent years to suppress new growth of conifers on historically clear areas on the open hillside. Trees have also been removed on the southwest end of the horse prairie near the gulch. Historic photos show a more sparse character to the forest here, with patches of clear area. These ongoing efforts to manage the forest extent have helped preserve the historic character of the battlefield.

Twin Trees

As the tide of the battle turned in favor of the Nez Perce, warriors took up positions on the high ground around the encampment area and pressed the soldiers with persistent fire. At least one Nez Perce sharpshooter took a position at the location that has become known as the twin trees. The twin trees were two large fir trees situated high on the slope above the river at the northeastern edge of the clear area. They were conspicuous at the time of the battle because of their size and the fact they were isolated from the surrounding forest. From this position, a Nez Perce sharpshooter fired on the soldiers as they retreated toward the siege area. By all accounts, his aim was deadly and he contributed to the disorganization of the soldiers' retreat. The marksman was finally killed when Gibbon dispatched two shooters of his own to return fire.

In drawings of the battlefield from the time of the battle and in photographs from the early years after the battle, the twin trees appear as grand, isolated trees on the slope above the river. Their prominence, both in the landscape and in the accounts of the battle, has added to their significance as features of the battlefield. Over the years, the forest around the horse pasture encroached on the clearing, overtaking the twin trees and obscuring them. Since the 1980s, however, management of the forest, through clearing and periodic burning, has restored the trees' prominence. Today, one of the trees is dead, but still standing, and the other is in decline. Both trees will likely be dead and gone within a few years. The current management policy that addresses the trees' loss is not to replace them in kind, but to allow similar trees to grow naturally adjacent to the historic trees, thus marking their location without trying to recreate the scene. There are currently a small number of fir trees growing just upslope from the twin trees that are ready to take on this role when the trees fall.

Willows

Dense thickets of willows (*Salix* sp.) cover much of the river bottom area, lining the river banks and choking the bogs and ponds. The Nez Perce camped on the riverbank beside the willows, incorporating them into a number of practical and recreational uses, including rope-making and

children's games. As the battle began, the willows played an active role in determining the events of the day.

In the pre-dawn hours of August 9, 1877, Colonel Gibbon assembled his men at the base of the mountain slope in preparation for the surprise attack. The companies were deployed in a long line that were to attack the camp broadside. On the left flank, Lieutenant James Bradley was to attack the north end of the camp with two companies and the volunteers. Captain James Sanno to Bradley's right was to attack with his company at the middle of the camp, while Captain Richard Comba was to attack the southern end of camp on the right flank. Bradley's men crossed the river and then headed into the dense willows that continued to the edge of camp. Because of the meander of the river, Comba's men were entangled in the willows across the river from the camp. When the attack was alerted with the killing of a Nez Perce herdsman, Bradley's men attacked from the willows to the north. Bradley was killed early in the attack, and unable to make headway against the defending warriors, his men broke ranks and joined Captain Sanno's company, who had already gained the camp.

Believing the attack was coming from the north where the first shots had been fired, many of the Nez Perce took cover in the willows on the south end of the camp. Men took cover in the thickets to fire on the soldiers in the camp, while many of the women and children entered the river channel believing the willows along the bank would shield them from view. Comba's men, delayed by the willows on the western bank of the river emerged to find several Nez Perce crouching in the channel, killing them where they hid.

After an hour or more of fighting in the camp, and experiencing increasing fire from the Nez Perce Warriors who had managed to take up positions in the surrounding hills, Gibbon realized his position was untenable and ordered a retreat back across the river toward the point of timber at the foot of the slope. What might have been an orderly retreat quickly broke down as the soldiers made their way across the swampy area. Battle survivors attributed this to the dense willows, the frequent water channels, and the intense pressure from the Nez Perce. Several soldiers were killed or wounded as they made their way back to what would be the siege area.

The willows' prominent position on the battlefield and the significant impact they had on the events of the battle make them an important element in the cultural landscape. Today willow thickets still fill much of the low areas around the river. Dense, lush, and green, these willows create a sense of enclosure when near the river and are in many places so dense as to be impassible. In "A Floristic Study of the Big Hole Battlefield" completed in 1981, John Pierce speculated that a fire sometime around 1861 burned through the floodplain, killing the crowns of the willows. Sprouting again from the roots, the willows would have been thinner and contained less dead wood by the time the battle occurred 16 years later than they do today. Pierce claims that it is because of this that the soldiers could get as close as they did to the Nez Perce camp without detection.

A general increase in the number and density of the willows in the bottomland has been documented at least since the 1960s. In addition to the decrease in the frequency of fire through the area, this may also be due to an increase in beaver activity along the river as well as climate change. Beginning in the 1980s, a program was undertaken to reduce the willows in the river bed with prescribed burns. Burns in 1986, 1988, 1993, and 1998 reduced the willows to some extent, but logistical issues with burning in such a wet area produced mixed results. In some instances, the crowns of the larger willows were killed but not consumed, leaving unsightly charred snags that took years to either lay down or be concealed by new vegetation.

Today the willow community in the river bottom is healthy and vigorous. It is likely that there are still considerably more willows growing on the banks and in between the river channels and ponds, creating a denser, more enclosed character than what would have been present during the battle. Notwithstanding this difference, however, the descriptions of the willows by battle participants on both sides agree remarkably well with existing conditions in character, quantity, and location of the willows in the area near the camp and on the route of retreat back to the siege area.

Another change in the willows that has been documented in recent years is their spread up the slope to the southeast of the river. This is caused at least in part by altered hydrology due to the irrigation ditches that traverse the bench slope. Ditches have cut across the meadow since the late nineteenth century delivering water to cultivated fields and grazing land to the north. Today several of these ditches remain, two of which are still in use. The excess water leaching from these ditches into the adjacent meadows is encouraging the willows to spread from their historic extents. Efforts have been made in recent years to stem this spread, including attempts to reduce the water seepage, cutting of the willows that grow on the ditch shoulders, and burning of some of the larger areas of willows to the south of the site of the camp. These efforts have had mixed success, and the spreading willows continue to be an issue, changing the character of parts of the battlefield.

Camas

Camas, one of the cultural and nutritional cornerstones of the Nez Perce, is found growing on the meadow areas to the east of the river. Because of its importance to Nez Perce culture, it is discussed in the Cultural Traditions section of this document.

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:

Big Hole National Battlefield Site
Big Hole National Battlefield



Contemporary image showing some of the major natural features of the battlefield. View is from the howitzer capture site looking east. (PWRO 2005)



Contemporary image showing the open character of the lodgepole forest in the siege area. The spacing of the trees and lack of underbrush allowed views and lines of fire into and out of the area during the battle. (PWRO 2005)



Contemporary image showing the willow thickets along the river bank in the Nez Perce encampment area. View from the encampment area looking west. (PWRO 2005)



Contemporary image showing the gulch in the siege area, called Battle Gulch. This topographic feature allowed Nez Perce warriors both lines of fire and a route of approach to the besieged soldiers. View from the siege area looking south. (PWRO 2005)



The difficult terrain, including dense willows, boggy ground, mud, and water, across which the soldiers had to retreat toward the siege area is still clearly evident in the landscape. View from the horse pasture looking southwest. (PWRO 2005)

Vegetation

As there is no historic designed vegetation at Big Hole National Battlefield, this section will be used to address native vegetation composition and character as well as invasive species that threaten to disrupt both the natural and cultural landscape of the battlefield. Larger vegetation patterns as they relate to the battle narrative and to the Nez Perce use of the site are discussed in the Natural Systems and Features and the Cultural Traditions sections of this document.

A number of documents have been prepared in the last several years that address the vegetation at the battlefield. Among these are the “Floristic Study of the Big Hole National Battlefield” by John R. Pierce in 1982, and the “Vegetation Management Plan for the Nez Perce National Historical Park and Big Hole National Battlefield” completed in 2002. In the interest of consolidating information about the battlefield cultural landscape, those two vegetation documents will be summarized here. The vegetation communities at the site consist of coniferous forest, open hillside, riparian and wet meadow, and sandy bench.

The coniferous forest

The coniferous forest consists of lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*), ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), various huckleberry species (*Vaccinium* spp.) and snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*). Fire suppression has allowed the lodgepole pine to grow thick and dense, creating a monotypic canopy that limits the understory vegetation. The density of the forest could be a fire hazard and may be detrimental to the health of the trees. A

small stream runs southeast through the forest in the ravine, which has such native plants as currant (*Ribes* sp.), buttercup (*Ranunculus* sp.), paintbrush (*Castilleja* sp.), horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*), sedge (*Carex* sp.), and rush (*Juncus* sp.).

Open hillside

The sandy hillside has a diverse mix of dry, open exposure species, such as arrowleaf balsamroot (*Balsamorhiza sagittata*), buckwheat (*Eriogonum umbellatum*), low pussy toes (*Antennaria dimorpha*), big sage (*Artemisia tridentata*), rabbit-brush (*Chrysothamnus* sp.), lomatium (*Lomatium* sp.), creeping Oregon grape (*Mahonia repens*), lupine (*Lupinus* sp.), owl clover (*Orthocarpus tenuifolius*), paintbrush, shooting star (*Dodecatheon pulchellum*) and goldenrod (*Solidago* sp.).

Riparian and meadow areas

The riparian and wetland areas are in the center of the site and adjacent to the river. Willow (*Salix* sp.), cottonwood (*Populus* sp.), and quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) make up most of the trees in the area. Mannagrass (*Glyceria* sp.), sedge, rush, cattail (*Typha latifolia*), fireweed (*Epilobium angustifolium*), golden currant (*Ribes aureum*), snowberry, iris (*Iris* sp.) and various other wetland species are found in this area. In the meadow to the southeast of the river, camas (*Camassia quamash*), elk thistle (*Cirsium scariosum*), mountain bistort (*Polygonum bistortoides*), buttercup, and iris are found in the surrounding meadow intermixed with various grasses, rushes, and sedges.

The sandy bench

The bench area consists of dry prairie land and is dominated by prairie grasses and big sage. Most of the disturbance in the battlefield occurs on the bench, including the visitor center, the park housing, roads, and the water treatment facilities. These disturbed areas contain by far the highest concentration of exotic species, including knapweed, dandelion, plantain, mallow, and sweet clover. For the most part, however, the bench and its disturbed areas are outside of the historic site boundary.

Invasive species

Disturbance by decades of farming on and around the battlefield site has allowed a number of invasive exotic species to move in. The most aggressive of these found in the battlefield is spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*). This invasive perennial is found throughout the bench area, the open hillside, the dryer areas of the bottomland, in the camas meadow, and in disturbed areas throughout the site. In the context of the fragile native ecosystems of the battlefield, control of the weed is best achieved through manual removal and/or spot treatment with herbicide. Other invasive species located in the battlefield area that have been identified as potential problems include yellow sweet clover (*Melilotus officinalis*), dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), mallow (*Malva neglecta*), and knotweed (*Polygonum* sp.).

Cultural Traditions

Cultural traditions are the beliefs and practices that have influenced the development of a landscape or imbued it with meaning. In the case of Big Hole Battlefield, contributing cultural traditions include the practices, rituals, stories, and traditional uses of vegetation and other landscape features by the Nez Perce at the time of the battle. In many cases, these traditions have persisted into modern times and continue to define the relationship between the Nez Perce people and the site.

The transhumant practices of the Nez Perce followed seasonal cycles, moving with the resources as they became abundant, from protected valleys to high plains. Before 1877, Nez Perce bands often traveled between the valleys and rivers of eastern Washington, Oregon, and Idaho and the buffalo hunting grounds of Montana and Wyoming. The Big Hole Valley was frequently used as a camp location, allowing the traveling bands a chance to rest and replenish their supplies. The lodgepole forests that covered the slopes provided poles for the lodges, as well as medicinal barks and forest plants. Other important plants, including willows, Kouse or biscuit root, yampa, yarrow, and balsamroot were found along the river banks and on the meadows adjacent to the river. These plants were important to the Nez Perce for food, medicine, tools and fiber, and spiritual practices. Primary among the plants found in the Big Hole Valley was camas, a staple of the Nez Perce diet and a prominent element in their social and cultural practices.

Plants were gathered by the Nez Perce for numerous purposes including use as food, clothing, tools, medicine, and spiritual purification (Mastrogiuseppe, 2000). Plant food gathering was often a community event, where families and bands would gather at areas where resources were plentiful and ripe. Roots were one of the main staples of the Nez Perce diet, next to fish. The most important roots were kouse (*Lomatium* spp.), camas (*Camassia quamash*), and yampa (*Perideridia gairdneri* and *P. boanderi*). Another important part of the Nez Perce diet included a variety of berries, the most important being serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) and bearberry (*Arctistaphylos nevadensis*), huckleberry (*Vaccinium* sp.), and elderberry (*Sambucus cerulea* and *S. racemosa* var. *melanocarpa*). Hunting was primarily conducted by the men. The Kamiah valley and surrounding plains were reportedly home to elk (*Cervus canadensis nelsoni*), white tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), and bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*).

Storytelling

Nez Perce stories and legends are an important aspect of the tribal cultural heritage. Intended to preserve and pass on tribal culture and to educate the youth of the tribe, they were indicative of social and moral prerogatives. Stories were passed on for generations, serving to instill guidelines concerning desirable behavior. Qualities such as honesty, obedience, generosity, and tolerance were illustrated through these lessons. In addition to the moral objectives, Nez Perce stories served a more practical purpose, passing on important information on things like tool making, the behavior of animals, and the use of plants.

Stories are typically tied to the natural world, with plants and animals playing major roles. Thus the stories are directly tied to the environment, with elements of the landscape serving as direct reminders of the lessons. One Nez Perce story tells of a man that killed his wife with an arrow in a fit of anger and jealousy. In an attempt to get rid of the evidence of his crime, the man shot the arrow into the sky. Where the arrow struck the ground sprouted a red osier dogwood, the bright red twigs a reminder of the blood of his slain wife. Now, red osier dogwood in the landscape serve to call the story and its moral lessons to mind. Such is the case with countless other plants and animals that the Nez Perce encountered regularly. Plants in the Big Hole area that are tied to specific Nez Perce stories include the dogwood, lodgepole pines, cedars, willows, yarrow, and of course, camas.

Camas

Camas (or gemes, quamash) is a lily-like perennial native to the moist meadows of western North America. The plants emerge from bulbs in early spring to produce vivid blue or violet flowers, sometimes covering entire meadows in shimmering color. Toward the middle of summer, the flowers give way to seeds before the stems and leaves wither and the bulbs go dormant for the winter.

Camas was one of the most important plants to the Nez Perce people, both culturally and nutritionally. Before Euro-American contact, it made up a significant portion of their diet, providing a basic staple that could be relied upon year after year. The seasonal round of the Nez Perce bands coordinated with the harvest times of known Camas meadows. Camas collection and preparation was an integral part of camp life during the summer months.

Camas bulbs were harvested in late July or August after the flowers had faded. The bulbs were dried in the sun until their skins could be removed and then baked for several days in shallow pit ovens lined with stones. A number of foods were made with the cooked camas bulbs, including porridge and bread. Cooked camas also preserved well and was stockpiled for winter and carried as travel food. Camas, however, was more than simply an important food source. The practices involved in its gathering, preparation, and eating were interwoven in the social and spiritual fabric of the people. Although occasionally collected by individuals or individual families, camas digging was often done as part of large social gatherings. Such gatherings were opportunities to renew family relationships and often included activities such as dancing, storytelling, and horse racing (Mastrogiuseppe 2000).

The camas digging at the Big Hole camp site in 1877 was far from a festive event, but rather a necessity brought on by the dire circumstances of the Nez Perce's flight. After they eluded the Army at Fort Fizzle and passed through the Bitterroot Valley without incident, the Nez Perce thought their pursuers were far behind them. The very fact that the Nez Perce had begun to collect and cook camas, a process that took several days, was evidence of their relative sense of security. The Big Hole camp site was familiar to the Nez Perce, who had camped there before on hunting expeditions in the area. They knew that they could find game, fish, lodgepole

pinus for teepee poles, and camas. On the day before the battle, the Nez Perce began to gather these resources for the long journey ahead of them.

In the meadow around the camp on the south bank of the river, women and children gathered camas bulbs and dug ovens. (At least one oven was found in an archeological survey in 1992, and historical accounts indicate that several ovens were dug in and around the camp.) After the attack on the camp, these ovens became impromptu graves for Nez Perce that were killed.

Today, camas still grows in the meadow around the Nez Perce encampment site. Its continued presence at the battlefield strengthens the site's association with the Nez Perce people, their cultural traditions, and the events of the battle. Ongoing monitoring programs are trying to determine the current extent and concentration of camas bulbs in the meadow and whether it is changing over time.

Views and Vistas

The visual relationships between the various areas of the Big Hole National Battlefield are important in experiencing the historic scene and understanding the events of the battle. Important views and visual characteristics that played key roles in the battle itself include views from the horse pasture over the encampment area, views from the bench area over the encampment area, view of the battle zone from the howitzer site, and screened views into and out of the siege area.

The similarity between existing vegetation patterns and historic vegetation means that important views throughout the battlefield are generally unobstructed. The lack of tall vegetation on the horse pasture provides open views of the river and encampment area below. This is especially important from the vantage of the twin trees, where Nez Perce sharpshooters were able to hold pressure on the soldiers during the fighting in the encampment and help turn the tide of the battle. From this point it is easy to see both the encampment and the area between the encampment and the siege area, often referred to as the battle zone. It was through this area, a maze of water, bogs, and willow thickets, that the soldiers retreated while the Nez Perce sharpshooters fired at them. This pressure, combined with the difficult terrain, is credited for the disorganization of the soldiers' retreat and the losses they incurred there. The view from the twin trees emphasizes the advantage that the Nez Perce had once they escaped the camp and established positions on high ground, as well as the skill they possessed as marksmen to shoot soldiers at that distance.

A similarly important view is from the site of the howitzer capture. When Colonel Gibbon moved his men out from the Trail Creek camp on the night before the battle, he gave instructions that the howitzer team follow with the gun at daybreak. This would allow the soldiers to surprise the Nez Perce without the movement of the heavy gun betraying their presence. When the howitzer arrived the next morning, the battle was underway in the river bottom below. The howitzer team set the gun up at a position high on the mountain slope south of the camp and managed to fire two rounds. Before a third shot could be fired, a small group of Nez Perce intercepted the gun crew, overpowering them and capturing the gun along with a mule laden with extra ammunition. The view of the battlefield from the point the howitzer was

captured dramatically conveys the strategic significance of the position for the soldiers and the importance of the gun's capture in the outcome of the battle. Today this view remains open and continues to convey the importance of the location.

Views into and within the siege area are filtered through the trunks of the pine trees. The open character and lack of underbrush in the siege area allowed visibility and lines of fire both into and out of the forested point. This allowed Nez Perce warriors positioned around the siege area to take shots at the entrenched soldiers, but it also prevented them from approaching too closely undetected. While it is debatable which side this benefitted more, it is certain that the open character and filtered lines of fire through the tree trunks determined the course of the fighting that afternoon. Accounts from Nez Perce warriors also describe using the opening of the gulch in the siege area, now referred to as Battle Gulch, as a line of sight into the forest. They were able to fire into the siege area from some point across the river to the south. These views continue to be important in establishing the historic scene at the battlefield. The siege area today is similar to descriptions of the area at the time of the battle, characterized by spaced pine tree trunks with low or no undergrowth. Whether the overall density of trees in the siege area, and therefore the site distance through them, is the same as it was during the battle is not certain, but from available information, it appears to be comparable. The view out of the siege area along Battle Gulch also remains relatively open, with just a few small pines growing in the gulch filtering the view.

In addition to these specific views, the overall open character of the battlefield site allows panoramic views of the battlefield itself and the surrounding scenery from most points within the park. This allows the current-day visitor to take in with one look the entirety of the battlefield and the larger land patterns that determined the battle's events and outcome. It also establishes the wild and vast setting of the battlefield, strongly influencing the site's feeling and historic character. The few modern visual intrusions on the historic scene include the visitor center on Ruby Bench and the road and parking area south of the siege area. Despite these elements, the visual scene is remarkably close to historic conditions, and views throughout the site are an important contributing characteristic of the site.

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



View from the howitzer capture site over the siege area toward the encampment area. (PWRO 2005)



View from the twin trees area toward the Nez Perce encampment site. (PWRO 2005)

Circulation

Circulation patterns include the spaces, features, and applied material finishes which constitute systems of movement in a landscape.

Historic Circulation

Circulation during the battle was determined not by circulation features such as roads and trails, but by the natural topography, vegetation, and the river. These elements as they relate to the historic events are discussed in detail in the Natural Systems and Features section of this document. The circulation patterns themselves are described here to help reveal how these natural patterns determined movement through the site during the battle.

The Battle of the Big Hole was one episode in a series of confrontations between the U.S. Army and the Nez Perce as the Nez Perce fled the pursuing army through Oregon, Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana. The route traveled by the Nez Perce as they sought refuge, first with Native American tribes to the east and then in Canada, brought them over established migratory routes through valleys and mountain passes that had been used by the Nez Perce and other tribes for centuries. Known today as the Nez Perce Trail or the Nee Mee Poo Trail, the route comprises a string of these migratory segments and sites related specifically to the events of the summer of 1877.

When the Nez Perce left Missoula they traveled south up the Bitterroot Valley, crossing into the Big Hole Valley along Trail Creek. As they emerged from the Trail Creek draw, they likely traveled along the dry level land adjacent to the riverbed, which would have accommodated their number and their herd of horses. Arriving at the Big Hole campsite on August 8, they established the encampment on the south side of the river, pasturing their horses on the open slope north of the river. Colonel Gibbon, having traveled to Missoula from Helena, traced the steps of the Nez Perce up the Bitterroot Valley and over the mountains to Trail Creek. At this point, in hopes of surprising the camp, he took his men along the lower slope of the mountain, just above the river bottom. He passed through the point of timber that would later be the location of his siege, he continued into the horse pasture, where he was able to observe the sleeping village below. Just before dawn, he deployed his men in a line along the toe of the slope before launching the attack.

During the battle itself, movement through the battlefield was less organized. Gibbon's men crossed the river in more or less a line, attacking the camp broadside. Difficulty in crossing the river, bogs, and willow thickets caused the line to become disorganized, with different companies reaching the camp at different times. When the attack was discovered, the Nez Perce dispersed in all directions, eventually organizing a counter attack that forced the soldiers to retreat. The retreat roughly retraced the initial approach, as soldiers fought their way back across the river to the slope and then back to the point of timber. This retreat was disorganized, thanks again to the difficult terrain and the counterattacking Nez Perce. Eventually the soldiers made their way back to the siege area, where they dug in while the Nez Perce warriors pinned them down with rifle fire. This gave the band a chance to bury their dead, gather what belongings they could, and escape. From the camp area, they climbed the bench through the gulch to the east (currently outside of the National Battlefield boundary) and

then south up the Big Hole Valley.

Existing circulation

Vehicular circulation within the battlefield is limited to access to the visitor center, park housing complex, and the parking lot south of the siege area. The roads and parking lot are paved with asphalt. The lot offers parking for about fifty cars and provides access to the pedestrian trails to the Nez Perce encampment, siege area, and howitzer site. The roads and parking lot are substantial enough to accommodate the number of visitors and the larger vehicles and RVs that visit the park and are significant impacts on the visual scene of the battlefield. The route of the roads and the location of the lot were chosen to strike a balance between access to the important areas of the battlefield and intrusion on the historic scene. Although the vehicular circulation features are a visible element of the landscape from much of the battlefield, their location south and west of the siege area, encampment, and the zone where much of the fighting took place minimize their impacts.

Two pedestrian trails originate at the parking lot, providing visitors access on foot to the battlefields sites. One begins at the southern end of the parking lot and leads to the Nez Perce encampment area. This trail was constructed in 1977 in anticipation of the battle's centennial. This trail is currently four to five feet in width and is defined by compacted and denuded ground, with a double-track configuration over much of its length. The trail is about two-thirds of a mile long with a loop through the teepee frames at the encampment site. The unpaved trail represents a relatively minor impact to the historic scene that provides needed access to the encampment site and prevents excess social trails through the meadow.

The second trail begins at the northern end of the parking lot and provides access to the siege area and howitzer capture site. Upon leaving the parking lot, the path crosses a timber footbridge over the river, and then continues across the river bottom via a raised causeway to the foot of the mountain slope. There it intersects a trail that follows the grade of an old road along the foot of the slope from outside of the park to the south to the siege area. Efforts since the 1970s have reduced the road cut width topographically and with revegetation, however, the trail is still passable on foot.

A loop interpretive trail brings visitors through the siege area, allowing them to view the rifle pits and soldiers' monument. Another trail continues north from the siege area and through the forested slopes to the west arriving at the location of the howitzer capture site. The walking trails are all constructed of compacted earth with no surfacing material.

All existing circulation within the battlefield was constructed after the historic period and does not contribute to the historic landscape. The walking trails are particularly low impact on the historic scene and do not significantly detract from the site's integrity. The vehicular circulation, although relatively substantial in construction, is placed where it will have minimal impact on the historic site.

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



*View from the siege area across the encampment area toward the gulch used by the Nez Perce to escape the battle. The gulch is outside of the park boundary and is described in *Adjacent Lands*. (PWRO 2005)*



Contemporary image of the non-contributing timber footbridge leading out of the parking lot. (PWRO 2005)

Topography

Topography is the three dimensional configuration of the landscape surface characterized by features and orientation. Discussion of topography here is limited to the manipulation of the ground plane by human action, and does not include the natural topography of the land. Natural topography is discussed in the Natural Systems and Features section.

The topography of the battlefield landscape has been altered very little from its natural state. Many of the topographic features at the site today, including the old road cut on the hill slope west of the siege area and the grading for the road, parking lot, and trails, post-date the period of significance and do not contribute. The prominent exceptions to this are the rifle pits dug by the embattled soldiers in the siege area. Dug during the battle, the irregular and broken line of defenses that snake through the pine forest are still clearly visible today and contribute to the historic scene.

As the tide of the battle turned against the soldiers, Col. Gibbon ordered a retreat to the wooded point they had passed through the night before in preparation for the attack. The point offered a modicum of cover and a vantage point to the battlefield below. Upon reaching the fan, Gibbon deployed his men in an area about 100 feet on a side near the eastern edge of the fan. As some men began dragging in logs to form firing positions, the men of the two companies issued trowel bayonets began to dig rifle pits. Others used knives and make-shift tools to create cover. The Nez Perce in the timber on the south side of the fan, as well as on the hill slopes above the soldiers, continued to fire. The soldiers hunkered in the rifle pits through the long night and next day, some gravely wounded, and all cold and thirsty.

A significant portion of what would become the narrative of the battle concerns the time the soldiers spent besieged in the rifle pits. Throughout the afternoon of the day of the initial attack, the Nez Perce put enormous pressure on the soldiers. Not only did they fire into the area from surrounding hillsides, many of the warriors made close advances into the trees to fire at close range, causing much damage both physically and psychologically. Stories of the Army battle participants tell of long hours spent in the pits nearly overcome by fear, fatigue, hunger, thirst, and the sounds of wounded men all around them. This continued through the long night, when volunteers shimmied down the slope to the water below to bring back full canteens for the soldiers. It wasn't until the morning of the third day that it became clear that the last of the Nez Perce warriors had left and it was clear to leave the security of the pits.

The rifle pits were not merely haphazardly and hastily dug holes made by scared men hoping to find what protection they could from the fire of the Nez Perce. Rather, they represent standard techniques for field fortification used by the army during the period. The techniques, involving digging a shallow pit or trench deep enough to lie in and mounding the soil in front to provide cover, were described in field manuals of the times and would have been part of the soldiers' training. In particular, the companies issued trowel bayonets, designated specifically for the construction of field fortifications, would have been trained in their use. The location and arrangement of the pits also indicate proper defensive field tactics. The nearly closed ring of pits allowed the soldiers to defend their position from all sides. Altogether, the rifle pits

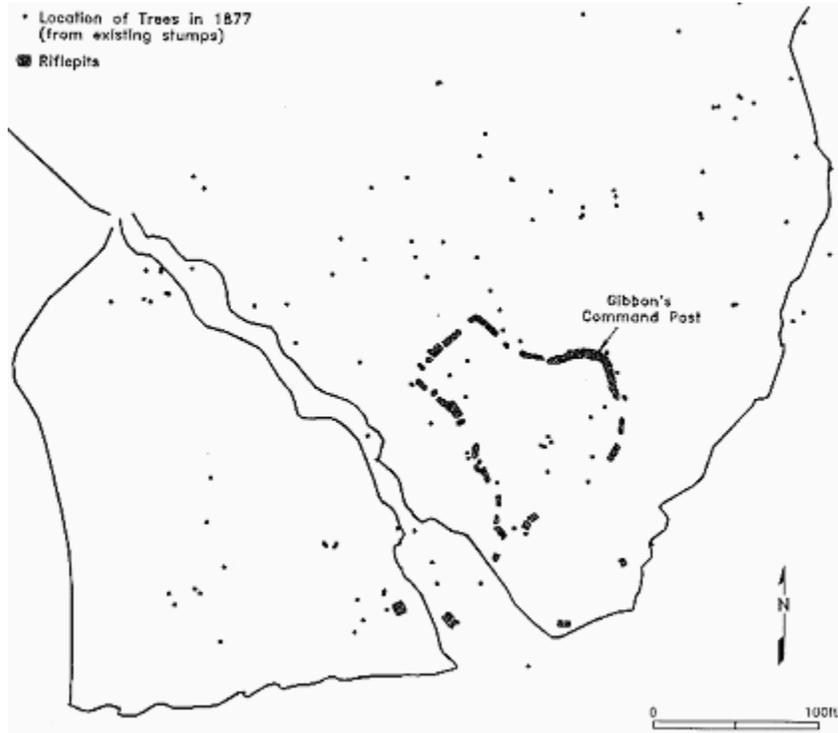
demonstrate that although the soldiers were in retreat and under intense fire from the Nez Perce, they were able to establish organized defenses consistent with training and proper battle tactics, undoubtedly saving the lives of many men.

Although the pits have filled to some degree with soil and forest duff and have been impacted by erosion, the physical evidence of the entrenchments or rifle pits dug by Gibbon's men is clearly evident in the Siege Area today. There are visible signs of at least twenty-three rifle pits of different sizes in the Siege Area. They are arranged in a roughly shaped rectangle. There are several isolated pits, three along the sides of Battle Gulch and one to the northeast of the main group. An old prospect pit west of Battle Gulch was also used by some volunteers. The pits are a vital part of the historic landscape and contribute to the integrity of the site.

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Contemporary image of rifle pits in the siege area. (PWRO 2005)



*Diagram showing the general location and layout of the rifle pits in the siege area.
(Adapted from Scott 1994)*

Buildings and Structures

There were no permanent structures at the Big Hole Battlefield at the time of the battle in 1877. A number of buildings and structures have occupied the battlefield since the battle, including the Forest Service ranger station, caretakers cabin, and log museum. All of these were constructed after the period of significance as part of the interpretation of the site and to accommodate visitors, and have since been removed. The only contributing structure within the historic site boundaries include the soldiers' monument. Non-contributing structures include the parking lot and footbridge near the encampment area (discussed in the Circulation section), the irrigation ditches (discussed in the Topography section), and the buildings and circulation features built by the NPS in the 1960s and 1990s on Ruby Bench.

The soldiers' monument is the only structure listed as contributing on the National Register nomination form completed in 1984. Although the monument was not installed until 1883, six years after the battle, it was determined that because it was installed so soon after the battle and has long been a part of the historic identity of the battlefield, it contributes to the significance of the site.

From the National Register nomination:

Located in the Siege Area, the monument consists of six tons of New Hampshire granite divided into three sections joined with concrete mortar. The base is a granite slab

approximately six feet square. The upper edges are chamfered, sloping in to receive the second section. This section is approximately four feet four inches square and three feet six inches in height. The sides of the last section slope inward and form a truncated pyramid. The monument was erected by the Army in 1883 to commemorate the soldiers and volunteers who died here. The inscription reads: “TO THE OFFICERS AND SOLDIERS OF THE ARMY/AND/CITIZENS OF MONTANA/WHO FELL AT/BIG HOLE/AUGUST 9TH 1877/IN BATTLE WITH NEZ PERCE INDIANS.”

Inscriptions adorn the other three sides of the base as well, including a description of the battle, the names of the soldiers and volunteers that were killed, and a statement that the monument was erected by the United States. Once surrounded by a four-sided iron fence with a domed top to protect it from vandals, the monument today is situated alone in a gravel circular space within the siege area. Although it shows slight signs of damage from the elements and from vandals, it is overall in good condition.

Character-defining Features:

Feature: Soldiers' Monument

Feature Identification Number: 127849

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

<u>Feature UTM Source</u>	<u>Type of Point</u>	<u>Datum</u>	<u>UTM Zone</u>	<u>UTM Easting</u>	<u>UTM Northing</u>
GPS-Differentially Corrected	Point	NAD 83	12	293,339	5,058,278

Archeological Sites

By its very nature, the entire battlefield is an archeological site. To this day, it still contains unknown numbers of artifacts and traces of the historic events buried beneath its soil, vegetation, and water features. These may include bullets and bullet casings, weapons, soldiers' equipment and articles, elements of the Nez Perce camp, camas ovens, and other features. It is also assumed that the battlefield also contains human remains of those killed in the battle, particularly of the Nez Perce in the area of the encampment. (It is unknown whether soldiers' remains are still buried at the site or whether they were moved to other locations after the battle.)

Artifacts have been collected from the battlefield since the first days after the battle. In the early days, these primarily became the treasures of souvenir hunters. In the days of the Forest Service administration of the site, many of the artifacts were kept and displayed for interpretive purposes. It was not until the 1950s, however that any systematic archeological surveys were conducted. The first was completed in 1959 by Don Rickey. Other surveys followed in the 1960s and 1970s, notably by Kermit Edmonds in 1964 and by Aubrey Haines in the 1960s.

In the early 1990s, an extensive survey was conducted in an effort to resolve a number of

research questions. Among these were the chronology of the battle, the types and number of weapons used, and other equipment used in the campaign. The survey, published in the book “A Sharp Little Affair” by Douglas D. Scott (1994), analyzed a number of battlefield features, including a rifle pit and camas oven. In addition, the team matched bullet shells together based on the individual weapons that fired them to map shooting locations and troop movements during the battle.

Together, these archeological surveys have done much to complete the picture of the Big Hole Battle. But although the battlefield has been the subject of such focused investigation and although the major artifacts have likely all been removed from the battlefield, the battlefield still holds countless smaller artifacts and traces of the battle. Not only do these hold the potential to divulge yet more information to the events of August 9th and 10th 1877, but they serve as physical connections to the battle and its participants.

Archeological sites that post-date the period of significance and are noncontributing, include a homestead site, a blacksmith shop, and a wagon road. The homestead was located in the willows between the siege area and the Nez Perce encampment. Unfortunately, almost nothing about this homestead has been documented, except that it postdates the battle and was likely gone by the time the USFS arrived. Also a blacksmith shop was supposedly located just south of the river, near the southern edge of the Nez Perce encampment. Most likely, it was related to the homestead, but again there is very little to no documentation to support this. (Scott 1994, 120)

In addition, in 1883, there was a branch of the wagon road that went past the homestead site and crossed the river near the southern edge of the encampment (possibly past the blacksmith shop). The wagon road branched off the existing main trail at the northeastern edge of the siege area and ran southeast through the willows toward the Nez Perce encampment. The wagon road’s alignment beyond the river crossing is unknown. It may have continued southeast toward Bloody Gulch and on to the community of Wisdom. Portions of the wagon road (between the siege area and the river) are still visible today in aerial photographs.

Condition

Condition Assessment and Impacts

Condition Assessment: Good
Assessment Date: 08/08/2008

Treatment

Treatment

Approved Treatment: Undetermined

Bibliography and Supplemental Information

Bibliography

- Citation Author:** Douglas D. Scott
Citation Title: A sharp little affair: the archeology of the Big Hole Battlefield
Year of Publication: 1994
Citation Publisher: Lincoln, Nebraska: J & L Reprint Company
Source Name: Library of Congress/Dewey Decimal
Citation Number: F737.B5 S3 1994
Citation Type: Narrative
Citation Location: Nez Perce National Historical Park library (NEPE)
- Citation Author:** Aubrey L Haines
Citation Title: Big Hole National Battlefield historical research management plan
Year of Publication: 1967
Citation Publisher: NPS
Source Name: Library of Congress/Dewey Decimal
Citation Number: 571.796 N NEPE
Citation Type: Narrative
Citation Location: Pacific West Regional Office Seattle library (PWSE)
- Citation Author:** Theodore Catton and Ann Hubber
Citation Title: Commemoration and preservation: an administrative history of Big Hole National Battlefield
Year of Publication: 1999
Citation Publisher: Prepared for USDI National Park Service, Columbia Cascades Support Office by His
Source Name: Other
Citation Type: Narrative
Citation Location: Online

Citation Author: Cyrus Townsend Brady
Citation Title: Northwestern fights and fighters
Year of Publication: 1907
Citation Publisher: New York: The McClure Company
Source Name: Library of Congress/Dewey Decimal
Citation Number: E 83.866.B82 1907
Citation Type: Narrative
Citation Location: Pacific West Regional Office Oakland library (PWRO)

Supplemental Information

Title: A floristic study of the Big Hole National Battlefield

Description: By John R. Pierce, Masters Thesis, 1982

Title: Big Hole National Battlefield existing conditions site map

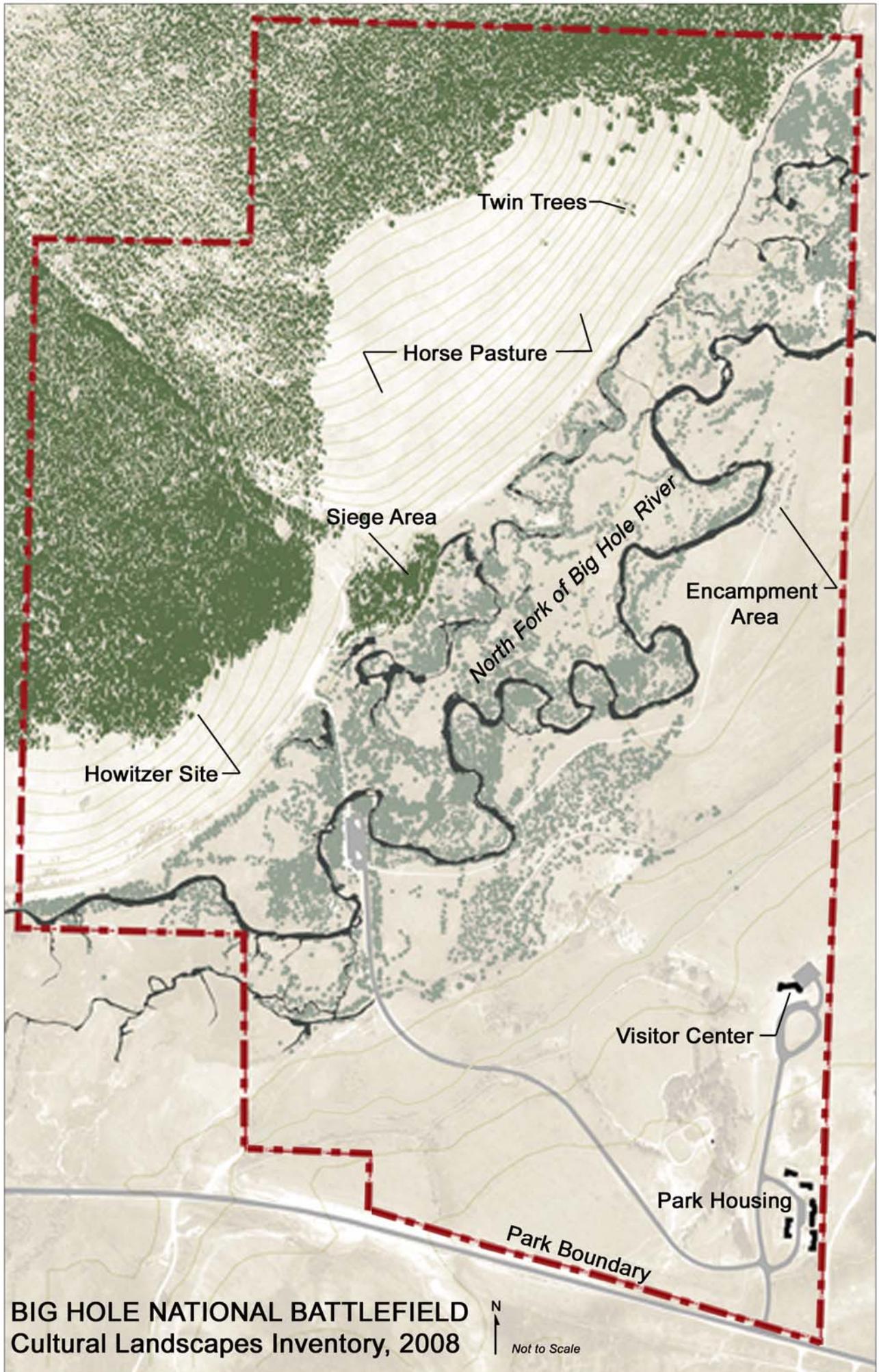
Description: Attached

Title: Nez Perce ethnobotany: a synthetic review

Description: Report by Joy Mastrogiuseppe for the Nez Perce National Historical Park, November 2000

Title: Vegetation management plan, Nez Perce National Historical Park and Big Hole National Battlefield

Description: 2002



BIG HOLE NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD
Cultural Landscapes Inventory, 2008

N
Not to Scale