



# Foundation Document Overview

## Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

### Montana



#### Contact Information

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## Purpose



*The purpose of LITTLE BIGHORN BATTLEFIELD NATIONAL MONUMENT is to preserve, protect, memorialize, and interpret the cultural and natural resources, including landscape, pertaining to the Battle of Little Bighorn and to provide visitors with an understanding of the events leading up to the battle, the sequence of activities by military and Native American participants on June 25–26, 1876, and the consequences of those fateful days.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The Battle of the Little Bighorn, one of the most famous and decisive battles in American history, holds a unique place in the national consciousness as a high-water mark in the 400-year struggle between European Americans and American Indians.
- Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument preserves and interprets a near pristine field of engagement that includes critical combat sites, archeological artifacts, and numerous monuments commemorating the combatants, including the congressionally designated Indian memorial that honors the American Indian perspectives on the battle.
- Little Bighorn is the only known battlefield where commemorative markers denote the casualty site of every soldier, embodying a distinctive approach to memorializing and honoring the memories of the 7th US Cavalry who lost their lives at this climactic battle.
- The Little Bighorn battlefield's sense of place transcends military significance, allowing profound personal reflection on this historic event and its role in creating the western empire of the United States.
- The larger than life personalities in the battle, including George Custer, Sitting Bull, and Crazy Horse, and Elizabeth Bacon Custer's efforts to enshrine the memory of her husband, profoundly shaped popular culture's portrayal of the battle and the Indian Wars of the trans-Mississippi West in film, theatre, art, and literature.
- The national monument protects and manages world-class material and archival collections that includes unique artifacts and documents associated with the battle, the individuals who fought there, and the history and traditions of the northern Plains Indians.
- Custer National Cemetery at Little Bighorn Battlefield contains the remains of soldiers from many abandoned western military posts, as well as peacetime and combat veterans and their dependents, from 1867 through the Vietnam era, and serves as a monument to US military service.

## Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **The Battlefield**
- **Custer National Cemetery**
- **Museum, Archival, and Library Collections**
- **Landscape Setting**
- **Flora and Fauna**
- **Memorials and Markers**
- **Sense of Place**

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Relationships with Traditionally Associated Tribes**
- **Relationships with Nontribal Stakeholders**



## Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Overall Story.** Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument is sacred ground valued by generations of Americans, contested ground at the center of violent conflict and decades of controversy, and shared ground now protected and memorialized in ways that explore and respect multiple points of view on one of the nation's iconic historic events.
- **Context for Conflict.** The Battle of the Little Bighorn has become a symbol of centuries of conflict, intensified by the philosophy of Manifest Destiny and sustained by Indian defense of their traditional ways of life, their tribal lands, their physical existence, and their spiritual survival.
- **Battle, Natural Landscape, and Evidence.** Details of the battle have been reconstructed from a variety of sometimes contradictory sources, providing insight into how to understand and study the past using varied sources and multiple academic disciplines.
- **Policy Outcomes, Impacts.** The battle's outcome shocked the nation, ended debate over the immediate future of official Indian policy, and heightened threats to the cultural survival of all Indian peoples.
- **Evolution of an Icon.** In the aftermath of the battle, Little Bighorn entered tribal oral and pictorial narratives as well as the American historical narrative as sensational news stories, heated debates, extended controversies, commemorations, and reenactments that cemented the iconic status of Custer, Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, and the battle itself.
- **Today.** For most visitors, the significance of the battlefield transcends, without forgetting, the events and controversies of the past. Today, it is a spiritual landscape, a learning place where multiple points of view can be expressed and explored respectfully.

# Description

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument commemorates the June 25-26, 1876, Battle of the Little Bighorn and its resulting effects on westward expansion. At the battle, Lakota and Cheyenne warriors defeated Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer and the US 7th Cavalry. Preservation of the battlefield provides the historical context of the European American and American Indian conflict, as well as a cultural reminder of American Indian ways of life. This is largely accomplished through preservation of the landscape, interpretation of the site and battle, access to museum and library collections, and viewing of memorials and the Custer National Cemetery.

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument is in southeast Montana, 65 miles south of Billings, and 73 miles north of Sheridan, Wyoming. Visitors can access the park via an interchange with US Highway 212 (US 212). The national monument contains 765 acres in two separate parcels within the exterior boundaries of the Crow Indian Reservation. The northern parcel is the Custer Battlefield proper and the southern parcel is the Reno-Bentzen Battlefield. The two parcels are separated by a combination of non-Indian lands, Indian-allotted lands, and Crow tribal lands. A 4-mile-long national monument road connects the two units.

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument preserves in perpetuity the natural and cultural resources of the site of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, fought June 25 and 26, 1876, between 12 companies of the 7th US Cavalry under the command of Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer, including Arikara and Crow Indian scouts and attached civilian personnel; and allied Lakota Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahos encamped along the Little Bighorn River and under the spiritual leadership of Tatanka-Iyotanka (Sitting Bull) and other Lakota Sioux and Cheyenne leaders.

Custer National Cemetery, in the northern parcel of Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, memorializes and commemorates casualties and veterans of the Indian Wars (including US Indian scouts and Buffalo Soldiers), the Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the war in Vietnam.

The Indian Memorial was dedicated on June 25, 2003, to honor Indian participation in the battle. The memorial's theme, "Peace Through Unity," promotes peace, unity, and friendship among all the tribes that fought at the battle as well as others who visit the living memorial.

