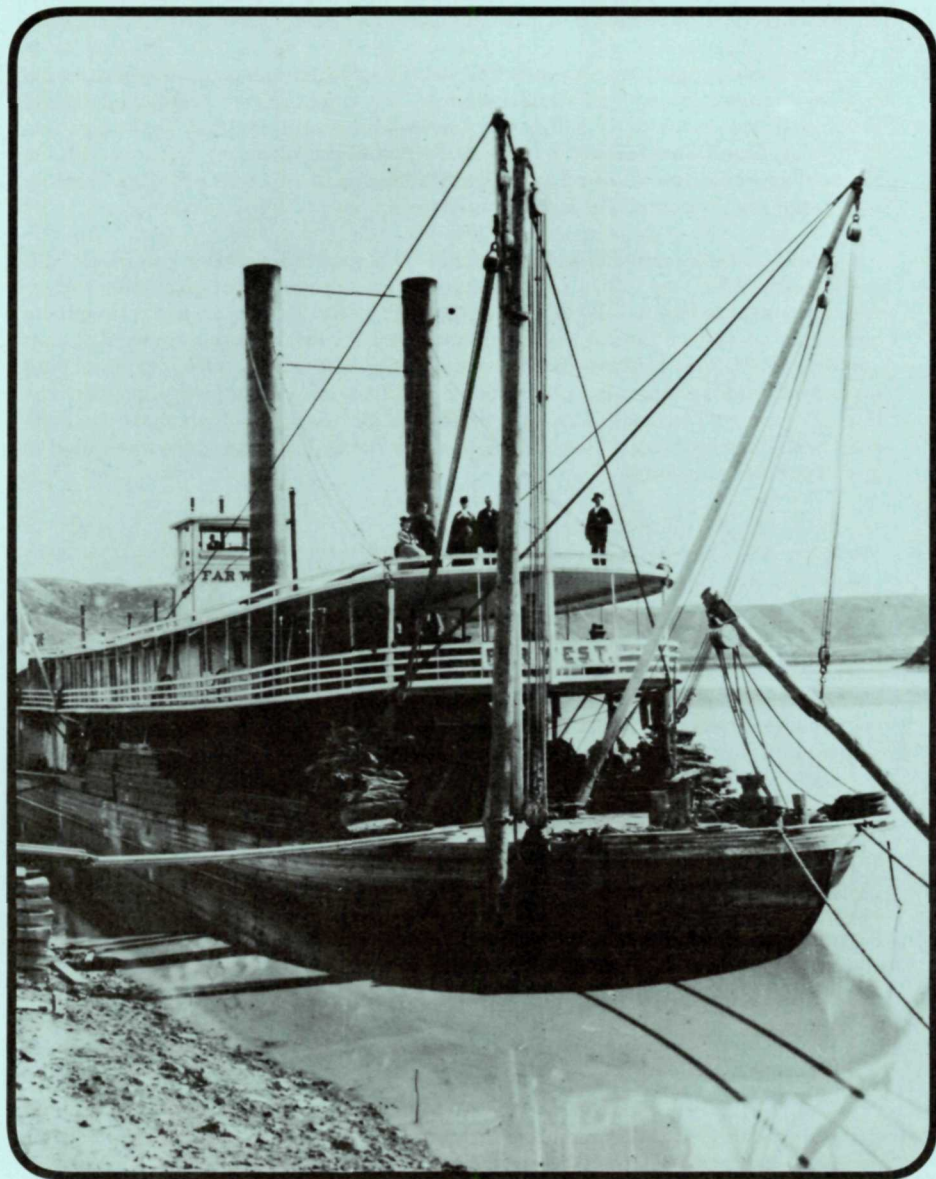


Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument



The steamboat **Far West**, commanded by veteran pilot Grant Marsh, carried the wounded from the hilltop and valley fights as well as the news of Custer's fate to Ft. Lincoln in a record trip of 710 miles in 54 hours.

A Clash of Cultures

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument memorializes one of the last armed efforts of the Northern Plains Indians to preserve their traditional way of life against the encroachment of white civilization. In the valley of the Little Bighorn River in June of 1876, 263 soldiers and attached personnel of the U.S. Army met death at the hands of an overwhelming number of Sioux and Cheyenne warriors. Among the dead were Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer and every member of his immediate command.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn was but the latest encounter in a centuries-old conflict between Indian and white cultures. This confrontation intensified on the Northern Plains in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In 1868, representatives of the U.S. Government signed a treaty at Fort Laramie, Wyoming Territory with the Sioux, Cheyenne, and other tribes whereby a large area in western Dakota Territory was designated a permanent Indian reservation.

Peace, however, was not to last. In 1874 gold was discovered in the Black Hills in the heart of the new Indian reservation, and soon thousands of gold seekers were swarming into the region—in violation of the 1868 treaty. The army tried to keep them out, but to no avail. Efforts to buy the Black Hills from the Indians to prevent further conflicts also failed. Many of the Sioux and Cheyenne left the reservation, raiding settlements and travelers along the fringes of Indian domain. In December 1875 the U.S. Government ordered the tribes to return to their reservation by January 31, 1876, or face military reprisals. When the Indians did not comply, the army was called in to enforce the ultimatum.

Campaign of 1876

Three columns of soldiers entered the field in the spring of 1876. General George Crook commanded an expedition from Wyoming. Colonel John Gibbon led a force from western Montana. General Alfred Terry commanded a third army—including Custer and the 7th Cavalry—which marched from near Bismarck, Dakota. These columns were to search for Indians thought to be gathered under Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse and other leaders in southeastern Montana.

Crook was temporarily knocked from the summer campaign after colliding with Sioux and Cheyenne at the Battle of the Rosebud, June 17. Terry and Gibbon joined forces on the Yellowstone River near the mouth of the Rosebud on June 21. Terry ordered Custer and the 7th Cavalry up the Rosebud valley to follow an Indian trail believed to be heading toward the Little Bighorn valley. Custer was to reach the Little Bighorn from the south while Terry would accompany Gibbon's force up the Yellowstone and Bighorn Rivers to approach from the north.

Battle of the Little Bighorn

The 7th Cavalry, about 600 men, located the Indian village at dawn on June 25. Custer, probably underestimating the size and strength of the village, divided his regiment into three battalions. He retained five companies under his personal command while assigning three companies each to Major Marcus Reno and Captain Frederick Benteen. One company was assigned to guard the slow-moving pack train in the rear.

Benteen was ordered to scout the bluffs to the south, while Custer and Reno moved toward the village in the valley of the Little Bighorn. Approaching the valley, Custer ordered Reno to cross the river and attack. Custer then turned toward the lower end of the village. Unknown to the soldiers, this huge encampment contained a force of approximately 2,000 warriors.

As Reno charged toward the village, a large number of warriors advanced to confront him. Forming a skirmish line, Reno attempted to make a stand, but was soon forced to retreat to high bluffs beyond the river. He was soon joined by Benteen, who had received written orders from Custer to "Come on, big village, be quick, bring packs."

The whereabouts of Custer and his command was unknown. Heavy gunfire to the north indicated that he was under attack. Reno and Benteen advanced toward the firing but were unable to reunite with Custer. They fell back to Reno Hill where they were besieged by the Indians for two days, suffering heavy casualties. On the evening of June 26 the Indians withdrew as the Terry-Gibbon column advanced up the Little Bighorn.

No word had been received from Custer since the battle began. Scouts from Terry were the first to discover the fate of Custer and his men. On the bluffs east of the Little Bighorn River, four miles north of Reno Hill, Custer and his entire five company battalion—210 men—lay in death. Indian warriors would later provide vivid descriptions of the fierce fighting on Custer field. Probably fewer than 100 warriors died in the battle.

The great Sioux and Cheyenne confederation dispersed soon after this—the Indians' greatest victory. Within a few years they would be subjugated and confined to reservations. Custer's Last Stand was also the last stand of the Sioux and Cheyenne.

When You Visit

Little Bighorn Battlefield is a fee area. Entry fee is \$4.00 per vehicle; \$2.00 for bus passengers or pedestrians; no charge for Golden Age or Golden Access cardholders.

The Park and the National Cemetery are open every day except New Years, Christmas and Thanksgiving. All programs are free except guided tours. The Visitor Center contains exhibits on the battle, Indian culture, and frontier soldiers. The Visitor Center is open 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.—Memorial Day to Labor Day; 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. during spring and fall; 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. winter. There are no camping or picnicking facilities. Little Bighorn Battlefield is a federal area—use of metal detectors is strictly prohibited. **Tour road weight limit 8 tons (16,000 pounds) strictly enforced. Step on guides are not available.**

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For a free catalog on publications sold at the battlefield write:

SOUTHWEST PARKS &
MONUMENTS ASSOCIATION
P.O. BOX 190
CROW AGENCY, MT 59022

Programs

(June through August)

GUIDED BATTLEFIELD TOURS (Fee charged.)

Visit the site of the Indian village, Reno's valley fight, Reno-Benteen Battlefield, Medicine Tail ford, as well as Little Bighorn Battlefield. Inquire about schedules and routes.

ROAD TO LITTLE BIGHORN

Discussion of the causes of the battle.

BATTLE OF THE LITTLE BIGHORN

An interpreter discusses the Campaign of 1876, troop and Indian movements, and battle theories.

PLAINS INDIAN

Native Americans present programs on the life and social customs of the Plains Indian.

U.S. CAVALRY

An interpreter explains the uniform, equipment, and life of the enlisted soldier of the 1870s.

EXAMINING THE BATTLE THROUGH ARCHEOLOGY (Slides)

A slide program investigating archeological discoveries on the battlefield.

WEAPONS AND TACTICS

Explores the weapons and tactics used by both sides.

"LAST STAND AT LITTLE BIG HORN MOTION PICTURE"

A documentary film about the Battle of the Little Bighorn, its causes and aftermath. (Off season presentations only. Not available June through August.)

NATIONAL CEMETERY TOUR

A self-guided walk through the historic National Cemetery. Booklets at boxes in cemetery and the Visitor Center.

RENO-BENTEEN ENTRENCHMENT TRAIL

Self-guided tour of the Reno-Benteen Battlefield, where seven companies of the 7th Cavalry were besieged by Indians on June 25-26, 1876. Booklets available at the trail head and the Visitor Center.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

School Groups—Park staff offer guided tours on the battlefield subject to availability of guide; reservations requested.

Movie "Red Sunday" is available for groups through the mail. For more information write: **Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument**, P.O. Box 39, Crow Agency, Montana 59022, (406) 638-2621.