



Little Bighorn Battlefield Update - Spring 2014

By Denice Swanke, Superintendent



Greetings!

By the time you read this message plans for the 138th Anniversary events at Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument will be in place.

The focus of this year's activities will be the recent completion of the Indian Memorial. I know that you will be pleased with the high quality of the granite engraving that honors warriors from the battle and conveys the message of *Peace Through Unity*, which was the theme of the 2003 dedication.

This summer the Battlefield will be one of the first National Park Service sites to participate in a new program in partnership with the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Historic Preservation Training Center. In the spirit of partnership, innovation and resource stewardship commensurate with the significance of the site, these entities are working together to spearhead the **Hands On Preservation Experience (HOPE)** program at the park.

This exciting program is designed to introduce youth to historic preservation trade skills in order to foster a new generation of artisans in such resource management. Recruitment for these positions will occur through the Corps Network, an association of 127 youth and service corps from across the country and descended from the Depression era Civilian Conservation Corps.

Little Bighorn Battlefield will take advantage of this program to conduct crucial preservation and stabilization activities on the park's headstones and five monuments within Custer National Cemetery. Bear's Paw, Fort C.F. Smith and the 7th Cavalry memorials are among those that will be cleaned. They will also receive critical stabilization and repair to address chipping, fragmenting and weathering caused by more than a century of exposure to the elements. The program will also begin a systematic headstone alignment and cleaning program within Custer National Cemetery.

Other harsh environmental conditions have adversely affected these hallowed markers that date from the 1860's to the present day. Many are heavily iron stained by the water used to irrigate the Cemetery lawn. Most of the headstone rows must be aligned to conform to National Cemetery standards. Not only will the HOPE program begin to address these defects but special crews will also work with park staff to standardize procedures and skills to guide similar future work.

This project is scheduled for four weeks from mid-July to mid-August. In addition to the involved park staff, there will be four journeyman level artisans from the Historic Preservation Training Center and two crews of seven people each from the Montana Conservation Corps, each working two week shifts. MCC personnel will consist of a youth crew (ages 18-25) and a special crew of Armed Forces veterans training for civilian based trade skills.

Finally, I am pleased to share some good news about work on the Battlefield's archaic, overworked water system. We recently completed our **Corrective Action Plan** with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. This initiative will bring the park's drinking water system back to compliance with ground water rules.

In March, we finalized installation of backflow prevention devices and other needed work, which includes the following:

- disconnecting non-functioning watering system at the Indian Memorial
- installation of backflow prevention for 7th Cavalry Monument irrigation
- installation of backflow prevention at Administration Building
- installation of backflow prevention for the Stone House boiler
- removal of non-functioning fire pump and capping of lines

By summer we anticipate that the drinking fountains will be on again—they have been off since the summer of 2012 because of the above deficiencies. The maintenance staff will replace the outside drinking fountain at the restroom building with a new frost-free fountain that will include a filter and faucet for filling water bottles. We recently repaired a significant water line break discovered in the Visitor Center parking lot when removal of large snow piles revealed a growing layer of ice.

Although progress on this ongoing issue is certainly a nice change to report, our antiquated water system must be replaced. So, you will likely hear about many more “Band-Aid” repairs while our folks work hard to keep the system functional to irrigate the National Cemetery and to provide potable water. We have worked closely with the regional engineering staff over the past year to develop a comprehensive approach to upgrading the system.

Funding for such an extensive project is not likely to be available for another five years or more but we have clearly identified the park’s critical needs and are now “in line” for funding.

Thank you all for your continued support of the Battlefield.

I look forward to seeing you soon!

Denice