

STEPPING OUT OF BOUNDS AT LITTLE BIGHORN BATTLEFIELD  
20<sup>th</sup> AVA Biennial Convention in Billings  
by Sherry Sayers

The second pre-convention walk will be at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument in Crow Agency, Montana on June 6<sup>th</sup>. This walk is going to be very special as getting permission for this walk was challenging. The park is very small with limited parking and gets very busy throughout the day. We have been requested to start early and be done early before the crowds arrive. In addition, we will be walking down a very narrow road, so please everyone be extra vigilant and cautious. That being said, I want to let you know this is truly a special place.

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument memorializes the major battle fought between Lakota, Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians and the United States Army led by Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer on June 25, 1876. All 262 men in Custer's command, including Custer himself, were killed on that day. The tribes were fighting to preserve their way of life as nomadic buffalo hunters, and the US Army was carrying out President Ulysses Grant's instructions to remove the tribes back to the Sioux reservation in Dakota Territory. No more than 100 Indians were killed, and most of them were removed from the battlefield by the families, who then scattered, some going north, some going south. Most of them eventually returned to the reservations in the following years and subsequently surrendered. On June 28, 1876, Custer and his soldiers were hastily buried in shallow graves at or near where they fell. In 1877, the remains of 11 officers and two civilians were transferred to eastern cemeteries, and Custer's remains were reinterred at West Point. Captain Tom Custer, George's brother; Boston Custer, another brother, who was a civilian contractor; Lt. James Calhoun, George's brother-in-law; and Henry Armstrong Reed, George's nephew, who was only 18, all lost their lives at Little Bighorn. Tom and James were both reinterred at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas at the request of their families. The anniversary of Little Bighorn takes place on June 25 of every year. There is also a Crow Indian Fair and rodeo held in Crow Agency the third weekend in August.

We will walk through the National Cemetery, which was closed for internments in January 1978. Like many other national cemeteries, Custer National Cemetery was created after those killed in battle were already buried here. Between 1877 and 1881, troops that were garrisoned at nearby Fort Custer, which is the modern-day town of Hardin, Montana, regularly gathered remains for reburial, re-covered graves, and policed the battlefield for exposed bones. In order to protect these graves, General William Tecumseh Sherman in 1879 issued General Order No. 78 designating the Custer Battlefield as a national cemetery.

After walking through the National Cemetery, the trail will then go to the deep ravine where remains of soldiers from company E were discovered, back up to the Visitor Center and up the short, steep hill to Last Stand Hill, where you will see Custer's marker. Across the road is the Indian Memorial. The wide open spaces here and the views are amazing. There are talks by the rangers about the battlefield and a short movie in the Visitor Center. In addition, there are informative cellphone stops available at selected sites throughout the Monument.

If you are over 62, we recommend you obtain a National Parks Senior Pass as this will allow you and three passengers to enter for free. Go to <https://www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/passes.htm> to learn more. Otherwise, the cost is \$20 per vehicle, \$10 for pedestrians and \$15 for motorcycles. Carpooling is highly recommended! Please note that pets are not allowed out of vehicles except in the designated pet walking area. No pets are allowed on the trail.

So come and see where history was made, and if you happen to see Charlie at a walk dressed "funny," be sure and say "Hi!" to the reincarnation of Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer and thank him for suggesting we have a convention walk at his infamous battlefield.