

*A 2020 BGES Indian Wars Field University Program:
On Sacred Grounds: The Indian Wars on the
Northern Plains*

With Neil Mangum

June 8-13, 2020, from Billings, MT

The Manifest Destiny of the United States dictated the unrestricted movement of white settlers across the country to exploit and benefit from the resources of the wild western lands. These lands for generations had been the essence of the Native American experience, and the movement along settlement trails forced the United States government to deal with the Natives in harsh and restrictive ways.

The centerpiece of most people's understanding of the Indian Wars on the northern plains is the Custer battle at the Little Big Horn, but, as this tour will showcase, it was much more. The central conflict between 1866 and 1877 is known as Red Cloud's War. Join us as we explore many lesser known sites and engagements that are the essence of this ongoing war. You will be better educated on this remote section of America's history by one of America's national treasures. Neil Mangum is a retired National Park Service regional historian, superintendent at the Little Big Horn Battlefield, and author of the definitive work on the Battle of the Rosebud.

Monday, June 8, 2020

6:00 PM. We will have an informal meeting in the front lobby so that you may pick up your name tags and reading books, and meet with your host and guide, Neil Mangum, before breaking for dinner on your own.

Tuesday, June 9, 2020

While the majority of our tour will focus on the Red Cloud War, we cannot overlook a major battlefield right in our backyard, And so, the first stop this morning will be to the Canyon Creek battlefield on the outskirts of Billings—this is a little sampler of the Nez Perce War but was critical as the penultimate battle in the long and tragic pursuit of the Nez Perce. We then will move over to the Bozeman Trail, a bloody and difficult passage for western settlers. We have four sites to visit, the first of which is the location of the Hay Field fight. It is what it says it is, an attack by Indians against people collecting forage for the soldiers' and settlers' horses. The forage was essential to these hearty souls, and the denial of such a basic staple could affect their standard of living.

Next we will introduce you to Gen. Patrick Connor, who commanded about 2,500 troops along the Bozeman Trail. They built Fort Connor, and we will study his August 1865 attack against Black Bear and the Arapaho along the Tongue River. The attack precipitated a running fight for several days, in which Big Bear struck back. Properly provoked after the Connor fight, the Arapaho fell on a surveying party and soldiers harassing them for approximately two weeks. Known as the Sawyer fight, it is typical of the encounters between the soldiers and the Indians. Afterward, en route to Sheridan, we will stop at a campsite and talk about the legendary Indian fighter Gen. George Crook. Lunch will be provided, and dinner is on your own. You will be at the Sheridan Hotel for the next three nights.

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

Having introduced General Crook, this day will be devoted to his operations against the Cheyenne at Red Fork near the headwaters of the Powder River. Army doctrine recognized that the Indian warrior operated best away from their encampments and were understandably constrained when forced to defend their women and children. Thus, Army expeditions sought to attack and defeat Indians in and around their camps. Here the Indians had settled in for the winter along the eastern slope of the Big Horn Mountains. We will meet Gen. Randal Slidell Mackenzie, who leads the 4th US Cavalry against the Cheyenne. This entire day is devoted to the fight around the Dull Knife battlefield in November 1876. This is private property that Neil has secured access to. Lunch is included, and dinner is on your own.

Thursday June 11, 2020

This will be another exciting day as we work toward Fort Phil Kearny. The day starts with a unique opportunity not directly related to the Indian Wars but instructive to life on the plains. Our first stop is the Gatchell Museum, which was a trading post in 1900. The museum is a collection of gifts and artifacts Gatchell acquired and retained—there are both Indian and trader objects.

We then visit Fort Phil Kearny, one of three forts constructed along the Bozeman Trail to protect traffic passing through. After a visit to the museum and fort, we will have lunch and spend the afternoon finding out why the fort was built in late 1865. The first walk is the site of the Fetterman Massacre. This ambush planned by the Indians resulted in the largest death of American soldiers at the hands of the Indians until the Little Big Horn ten years later. Ironically, it was a typical military operation. Word came to the fort that wood gatherers were being harassed and soldiers were sent out to protect them—they outran their coverage. There was no harassment; Indians were awaiting the soldiers with no purpose other than to assassinate them. As the commander overstepped his authority, his bad judgment put his soldiers in a vulnerable and deadly position.

Our second encounter is the Wagon Box fight, another typical operation where, in August 1867, some 32 soldiers and civilians deployed from the fort in two camps:

one to protect the woodcutters who were cutting additional wood for the construction of the fort; and the other to protect the base camp where the lumber would be loaded and transported back to the fort. This encounter turned out much different and the Indians, facing the strong firepower of Henry repeating rifles and a relief force with artillery, withdrew. Life was dangerous along the Bozeman Trail. Ironically, in less than a year, with the Treaty of Fort Laramie, the need for the trail went away, as did the forts, and the area slipped into oblivion. Lunch is provided.

Friday, June 12, 2020

We head back to Billings and the end of our program, but today is perhaps the best of the week. On board by 0815, we are headed to the Rosebud battlefield. The Rosebud is a wide open and pristine site. We could walk 8 or 9 miles if we did the entire field, but Neil has picked a route of some 3 miles start to finish. The Rosebud often is overlooked in the larger Little Big Horn story, but this fight between Civil War-era Gen. George Crook's 1,300 men and Crazy Horse's 1,300 braves was a strategic Indian victory in that it kept Crook from joining in the converging maneuver that Custer was a part of. Crook and his troops were not there to support Custer at the Little Big Horn.

We will continue on to have lunch at the Custer Battlefield Trading Post.

There are some places that America cannot define but which instead define America—Lexington Green, Chalmette, Gettysburg, and Greasy Grass Ridge overlooking the Big Horn River. This is a place to visit again and again.

We return to Little Big Horn to follow the attack of Custer and how he and his men are systematically pushed from every position with steady and discouraging precision. A soldier killed here, another over there—two or three on that ridge and six across the swale, until the remaining soldiers find themselves pushed back to a slight hill that they will never leave alive. If you have never been to the Little Big Horn Battlefield, you will be struck by its stark and haunting beauty.

We return to Billings and our hotel for the last evening before dispersing. Dinner is on your own, but we will arrange an optional dinner trip for those who would like to spend time with old and now new friends before heading out.

Note: If you do not intend to stay at the headquarters hotel on the night of the 12th, please let us know and we will adjust your registration fee.

Saturday, June 13, 2020

Depart at your leisure. If you are driving, there are certainly many other neat and unique places to visit as you head home. Safe travels.

About the Faculty

Neil Mangum, one of the nation's foremost historians, is an expert on frontier life. Not surprisingly, his favorite baseball team is the Cleveland Indians. However, Neil is a Virginian who grew up in the shadow of the Petersburg National Battlefield, which was one of his very first assignments in the NPS. He still has deep ties. A retired National Park Service official, he served as superintendent at the Little Big Horn National Battlefield as it transitioned from Custer National Battlefield. The popular Mangum only allows himself four or five tours a year, and BGES is fortunate to enjoy his favor. He enjoys the clientele and the small folksy nature of the group that is usually well prepared. Neil is author of *The Battle of the Rosebud: Prelude to the Little Big Horn*. He has a following, and most people on this trip will have traveled with him before, which makes this event even nicer.

Hotel Information

Your registration fee includes the hotel. The headquarters hotel will be the [Boothill Inn and Suites](#) (242 E. Airport Rd., Billings, Montana 59105). You will have a room on June 8th and June 12th. They have a courtesy van that goes to and from the airport and local restaurants. Your registration fee also includes three nights hotel in Sheridan, Wyoming—these five nights add \$650 to your registration fee. Sadly, both areas have gotten much more expensive over the past five years.

Transportation

Our servicing airport is Billings (BIL). It is an expensive destination. Our headquarters hotel will provide transportation to and from the airport. The closest major airport is Denver (DIA), which is a full-day drive (more than 500 miles of high-speed, 80 mph interstate—stop in Chugwater and have some chili) from Billings.

Recommended Reading

You will be provided with a reading book and maps upon arrival. The following books are suggested to enhance your readiness for the program. Amazon.com has a program to support non-profits IF YOU SIGN UP to support Blue and Gray Education Society (EIN 54-1720582) at [AmazonSmile](#). When you sign up there rather than the normal Amazon site, one-half of one percent of your purchase price will be provided to BGES as a donation from Amazon. This will apply not only on this purchase but others you may make at other times.

Bob Drury and Tom Clavin: [*The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud, An American Legend*](#)

Charles River Editors: [*Red Cloud's War: The History and Legacy of the Only 19th Century War Won by the Native Americans against the United States*](#)

General John Gibbon: [*The 1876 Yellowstone Expedition: Catastrophe at the Little Big Horn*](#)

Jerome Greene: [*Morning Star Dawn: The Powder River Expedition and the Northern Cheyennes, 1876*](#)

Neil C. Mangum: [*Battle of the Rosebud: Prelude to the Little Big Horn*](#)

Daniel Sharfstein: [*Thunder in the Mountains: Chief Joseph, Oliver Otis Howard, and the Nez Perce War*](#)

General Alfred Terry: [*The Terry Diary: Battle of the Little Bighorn \(Expanded and Annotated\)*](#)

Registration Form
On Sacred Grounds: The Indian Wars on the
Northern Plains

Presented by Neil Mangum
June 8-13, 2020, from Billings, MT

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Registration includes four lunches, five nights lodging, a reading book with maps, the academic program, support of a professional historian, tour director, all admissions and transportation. The program will be restricted to just 19 people—two vans which are needed due to access considerations. Register early and do not be disappointed. We will also provide snacks, bottled water, and a limited selection of sodas.

_____ Registration \$1,600 Single occupancy

_____ Registration \$1,280 per person Double occupancy

_____ BGES member registration \$1,495 single occupancy

_____ Dues paying BGES member \$1175 per person double occupancy

_____ I am sending a deposit of \$300 per person

Total enclosed is \$ _____.

_____ I will pay the balance due before the event.

_____ Check enclosed.

Charge my (circle one) MC VISA AMEXP Discover \$ _____

Exp: _____ CVV: _____

Signature: _____

Mail to BGES Seminars, P.O. Box 1176, Chatham, VA 24531; or fax credit cards to 434-432-0596. You may also register online at www.blueandgrayeducation.org.