

SORTING THROUGH FIELD RESEARCH NOTES ON BATTLEFIELDS IN MONTANA

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Today, I am sorting through my 2010 and 2011 field research notes about four battlefields in Montana. My doctoral work focuses on the ways people use archaeological resources, historical records, and oral accounts to create and maintain the sacredness of four historic battlefields: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (LIBI); Nez Perce National Historic Park- Bear Paw Battlefield (BPB); Nez Perce National Historic Park- Big Hole

National Battlefield (BIHO); and Rosebud Battlefield State Park (RBSP). My study uses the “memory archaeology” approach to look at how people relate to a place using their personal memories or cultural heritages. Focusing on place-based narratives, which are on-site interpretative methods and anniversary practices, my research asks in what ways these interpretations contribute to the perception of these battlefields as sacred landscapes.

Although they may not be intended to be used in this manner directly, archaeological data can contribute to the intellectual and emotional responses about historic events, especially ones with a long-term history

of commemorations like at BIHO, BPB, LIBI, and RPSB. The interpretation of archaeological, historical, and oral accounts as credible bases has immediate social impacts and responses.

I believe that all archaeologists should have good ethnographic field skills. Why? Over the decades, more local communities around the world have become involved in archaeological projects. Archaeologists, whether as principal investigators, consultants, or liaisons, must be able to communicate well with the public. Archaeologists having good ethnographic field skills can lead to excellent public relations with local communities and an increased public awareness on the importance preserving heritage sites.

So, on this lovely day in Missoula, I am typing up some of my handwritten field research notes. I am also revisiting many of my digital photographs and short videoclips of each battlefield. (And, it is always a joy to see the beautiful Montanan landscapes!) These recorded observations will help me in analyzing and answering my research questions.