

Where else would you find blacktop trails to a 130-some year old ravine”:  
Negotiated authenticity at the  
Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

by  
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**“Where else would you find blacktop trails to a 130-some year old ravine”: Negotiated authenticity at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument**

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Presented as part of the requirement for the award of MA Degree in Sustainable Leisure Management within the Department of Recreation and Tourism Management at Vancouver Island University  
April, 2016

## DECLARATIONS

This thesis is a product of my own work and is not the result of anything done in collaboration.

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Jeff Wahl

## THESIS EXAMINATION COMMITTEE SIGNATURE PAGE

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Department of Recreation and Tourism Management for acceptance, the thesis titled “*Where else would you find blacktop trails to a 130-some year old ravine*”: *Negotiated authenticity at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument* submitted by Jeff Wahl in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sustainable Leisure Management.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Heritage tourism is an industry fundamentally bound to the presentation of history for tourist consumption. As such, the concept of authenticity is a central focus of heritage tourism experiences. The two predominant views of authenticity, objectivism and constructivism, respectively circumscribe authenticity as a historically grounded concept, bound to toured objects that is measured by its accuracy to the original, as well as a socially constructed notion that is subjectively experienced by tourists. Objective forms of authenticity have been positively linked to heritage tourists' motivations, expenditures and experiences. However, juxtaposing this view, constructivist ideology holds that objective authenticity is challenging to define and express as a singularity, and that symbolic cultural representation is more important to tourism experiences. Between these opposing views, the negotiated view of authenticity seeks to strike a balance between the objectivist/constructivist paradigms, allowing for both historically grounded and socially constructed elements to be experienced by tourists.

The purpose of this research was to explore heritage tourists' experiences with negotiated authenticity at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. The Little Bighorn Battlefield is a heritage tourism site that presents both historical facts and symbolic cultural meaning for tourism consumption, where neither the views of objectivism, nor constructivism adequately describe tourism experiences. The research employed case study methodology, utilizing semi-structured interviews and unstructured observations conducted at the battlefield, as well as the content analysis of online reviews to explore the experiences of tourists with five distinct manifestations of authenticity (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). The findings of this research suggest that tourists' experience negotiated authenticity in three forms: historical accuracy, socially constructed representations, and individual meaning making.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank the many visitors at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument who courteously took the time from their visits to participate in this research, as well as the countless people I was fortunate enough to meet during my time in Montana; your passion, kindness and company will not be forgotten. I would like to thank my gracious hosts from the United States National Park Service and the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument for permitting this research to be conducted on-site. Personally, it was indefinably rewarding to have the opportunity to conduct this research at a place I first visited as a child, and a testament to the lifelong interest a heritage tourism site can sustain.

I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Pete Parker, for his timely motivation, helpful feedback, extensive patience and most importantly his unwavering support throughout this process. A great deal of appreciation is due to Dr. Kellee Caton and Billy Collins of Thompson Rivers University for their support, feedback and not least of all pushing me to attend graduate school. I would also like to thank the faculty of Recreation and Tourism Management at Vancouver Island University for their support, as well as for giving me the opportunity to come and study in one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

Most importantly I would like to thank my family for their support and inspiration in undertaking this endeavour, the immense meaning of which cannot justly be put into words. Thank you Mom, Dad, Kristin, and Megan.

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## Chapter 1 – Introduction

Heritage tourism is a distinct subsection of the greater tourism industry that allows tourists to engage with an array of objects and places that represent the past (Timothy & Boyd, 2006). Heritage tourism is a globally prevalent and persistently popular form of travel, involving the annual movement of millions of tourists who seek to consume and experience various objects, places and performances associated with history (Timothy & Boyd, 2006). Heritage, or history, is manifested in a multitude of manners; Jewell and Crofts (2002, p. 15) note, “Buildings, artefacts, folk stories, landscapes, languages, art and music are all expressions of heritage.” Heritage tourism is an activity that has been associated with economic stimulation through both the influx of tourists’ spending and the creation of new jobs in a host community (Cela, Lankford, & Knowles-Lankford, 2009). The worldwide popularity of heritage tourism positions the industry as an important economic activity, the enormity of which it is opined “cannot be overstated” (Timothy & Boyd 2006, p. 4). However, heritage tourism operators are challenged to balance the presentation of the past while also striving to meet the experiential needs of contemporary tourists. The presentation of heritage relies on a great deal of user support, public advocacy and external funding in order to operate (Jewell & Crofts, 2002; Timothy & Boyd, 2006). As an industry dependent on tourist visitation, the management and understanding of heritage tourism experiences is of paramount interest to site managers and academics (Chen & Chen, 2013; Jewell & Crofts, 2002).

Heritage tourism involves an innumerable array of historic sites and activities that are reliant on tourist visitation to sustain them. As such, understandings of heritage tourism involve considerations for both the supply of historic sites, and the demand of tourists who consume sites through their experiences. From a managerial supply perspective, heritage tourism refers to the different elements of history that are made available for tourism consumption (Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003). The supply of heritage tourism is distinguished by the distinct historical narratives and unique objects presented by different sites (Jewell & Crofts, 2002). Examples of different types of heritage tourism sites include: commemorative monuments, museums, battlefields, archaeological sites, cultural events, as well as significant places associated with the natural record (Chhabra et al., 2003; Timothy & Boyd, 2006; Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2003).

Commemorating and experiencing the past through heritage tourism is an important sociological practice. Park (2010, p. 116) emphasizes that, “Heritage is an essential element of national representation with the potential to perpetually remind nationals of the symbolic foundations upon which a sense of belonging is based.” Jewell and Crofts (2002, p. 15) advocate that all aspects of heritage, “Inform us of our past – where we have been, how we have shaped our present, and where we are going.” As important places of socio-cultural exchange, heritage tourism sites are typically managed by government or not-for-profit preservation structures and are promoted in order to enact top-down forms of community and economic development (Chhabra et al., 2003; Moscardo & Pearce, 1986). However, objective history is not always a focus of heritage presentation. Heritage tourism is a medium through which governing and managerial structures may deliberately stage and communicate particular messages to tourists (Chhabra et al., 2003). Heritage tourism is frequently used as a front to reinforce narratives of patriotism and nationalism to visitors, and sites, “are often shown in an effort to highlight the virtues of particular political ideologies” (Timothy & Boyd, 2006, p. 3). The process by which heritage tourism may be managed as a tool to achieve a calculated social outcome has been termed heritagization (Poria & Ashworth 2009). Heritage tourism sites are characterized as diverse places of economic and socio-cultural exchange that while intrinsically related to history, are also deliberately managed and staged for tourism consumption.

Descriptive, supply-focused perspectives of heritage tourism management do not account for the role of tourists’ experiences, which characterize the demand of heritage tourism (Jewell & Crofts, 2002; Timothy & Boyd, 2006). From a demand perspective heritage tourism is characterized by the desire that tourists have to directly experience and interact with the past (Chhabra et al., 2003; Timothy & Boyd, 2006). Corresponding with this view, heritage tourism is defined as, “the experience of spaces which present tangible and intangible elements perceived by the visitors to be a part of their own personal heritage” (Poria & Ashworth, 2009, p. 522). Heritage tourism visitation is an individual and personally variable experience that provides visitors with a medium through which they may appease a number of their personal needs (Chhabra et al., 2003; Chen & Chen, 2013). As individual engagements, tourists experience different elements of heritage tourism sites uniquely (Jewell & Crofts, 2002). Tourists’ experiences with heritage, however unique, are often associated with the concept of authenticity (Chronis & Hampton, 2008).

As an industry intrinsically bound to representing the past, authenticity is a central concern of heritage tourism (Alberts & Hazen, 2010; Andriotis, 2011; Belhassen, Caton, & Stewart, 2008; Belhassen & Caton, 2006; Black, 2012; Chhabra, 2010a; Dunkley, Morgan & Westwood, 2011; Lau, 2010). Authenticity is used to describe social constructions, toured objects, and personal experiences in different research contexts (Wang, 1999). Heritage tourism managers use authenticity as tool to increase tourism visitation and to help distinguish specific sites from other tourism offerings (Chhabra, 2010b). Authentic versions of heritage also increase both tourist satisfaction (Chhabra, 2010b) and expenditure (Chhabra et al., 2003). The management of authenticity is especially critical at sensitive heritage sites such as battlefields, which must balance seemingly polarized forces, by solemn honouring the casualties of war on one hand, and mass tourism visitation on the other (Black, 2012; Chronis, 2008). The authenticity of battlefield landscapes has a direct impact on tourism experiences, allowing tourists to better understand the events that have taken place by visiting actual historical locations (Chronis & Hampton, 2008; Dunkley, Morgan, & Westwood, 2011). Recognizing the importance of authenticity to heritage experiences, some battlefields actively improve their historical appearance through measures such as the restoration of natural vegetation to its period-appearance and the clearance of unnatural features (Black, 2012; Chronis & Hampton, 2008; Hurt, 2010).

The traditional association of authenticity in tourism literature refers to objective authenticity, which pertains to the accurate, historically grounded representation of objects and sites for tourism consumption (Wang, 1999). Objective authenticity is presented as a greatly desired feature of heritage tourism, wherein tourists seek to experience original historical objects (Belhassen et al., 2008; Chhabra, 2010a). However, the importance of objectively authentic representation is not universally held. In contrast to the objectivist view, constructive authenticity holds authenticity as a socially constructed notion that transforms over time and is invariably subjective on an individual level (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). The constructivist philosophy critiques objective authenticity as an unessential facet of heritage tourism that is difficult to reconcile theoretically (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006), and one which may not be discerned from the 'inauthentic' by tourists as it is presented for consumption (Hampp & Schwan, 2014). Between these two divergent perspectives, negotiated authenticity strives to achieve a balance, advancing that as a foundation of heritage tourism, some historically authentic site elements can

be maintained, while also acknowledging the pragmatic role of staged versions of heritage and tourist subjectivity in negotiating authenticity (Chhabra, Zhao, & Lee, 2012).

The purpose of this research was to explore heritage tourists' experiences with negotiated authenticity at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument in five distinct categories of authenticity. The research was conducted at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, a heritage tourism site that commemorates a decisive engagement fought between the 7<sup>th</sup> United States cavalry and members of the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho Nations in 1876. The Little Bighorn Battlefield presents an interesting case study context in which to explore negotiated authenticity in heritage tourism experiences; the Battlefield presents different categorical features of authenticity for tourism consumption, specifically object-related authenticity, factual authenticity, personage authenticity, locational authenticity and contextual authenticity (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). Heritage tourists with an interest in the history of the Battle must negotiate an authenticity that involves facets of objective historical fact, socially construed remembrances of the past, and staged site features. By exploring tourists' experiences with negotiated authenticity, a more comprehensive understanding of the blended concept may be reached that will benefit future tourism research. From a practical perspective, The United States National Park Service is currently considering amendments to the Little Bighorn Battlefield management plan, and has acknowledged a need to better understand the experiences of tourists at the site (National Park Service, 2014). The study was conducted using case study methodology, utilizing semi-structured interviews and unstructured observations during a 10-day data collection period at the Battlefield, as well as the content analysis of online tourist reviews. Data was first coded deductively against the five categories of battlefield authenticity for the purpose of initial categorization (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). Pattern coding was then applied to each individual category, which inductively revealed emergent experiential themes relating to negotiated authenticity.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

### Authenticity

Authenticity is a contentious and contested concept within tourism academia. Authenticity represents a significant and vast collection of academic theory that is applied dynamically in different tourism contexts (Alberts & Hazen, 2010; Andriotis, 2011; Belhassen & Caton, 2006; Mkono, 2012; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). Authenticity is a concept that may be related to the historical properties of tourism sites, staged representations of popularly held understandings, mental states of self-actualization (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006), or even a combination of these views (Chhabra, 2010a). Current conceptions of authenticity were first introduced to tourism studies through the seminal work of Dean MacCannell (1976), who first proposed that tourists undertake all leisure travel as a quest for authentic experiences (Andriotis, 2011; Belhassen et al., 2008; Lau, 2010; Jamal & Hill, 2004; Wang, 1999). MacCannell's notion of authenticity interrelated the concept as a property of both the sites visited and the experiences felt by tourists. Under MacCannell's (1976) indistinct usage, authenticity reflects the historical properties of objects and places, as well as the ability of the tourist to interact with and actualize their true inner-selves (Lau, 2010; Wang, 1999). Jamal and Hill (2004, p. 354) admit, "While a number of scholars have made key contributions in this study area, authenticity appears to remain an ill-defined and puzzling concept." As a singularly indefinable notion, it has been stated that authenticity has not reached the status of a basic, universally accepted concept within tourism studies (Mkono, 2012; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). A singular definition or not, authenticity has persisted as a major stream within tourism research. This persistence is due to the expansive applicability of authenticity theory to both the practical supply and demand of tourism, as well as academic inquiry (Belhassen & Caton, 2006; Jamal & Hill, 2004; Timothy & Boyd, 2006).

Different claims are made as to what is authentic within tourism studies and practices. Congruently, authenticity is a concept that is often used without a clear statement of theoretical delineation (Belhassen & Caton, 2006; Mkono, 2012; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Jamal & Hill, 2004). The ambiguity of authenticity is demonstrated in heritage tourism marketing, where the concept is used as a popular, though often nonspecific, promotional theme (Hede & Thyne, 2010; Timothy & Boyd, 2006). Understanding the different views and nuances of authenticity is important knowledge to possess in understanding the positions of those making such claims.

Wang (1999) advanced three foundational views on authenticity that have principally been embraced and further built upon within tourism literature: objective, constructive, and existential authenticity. These core perspectives have been complemented by the views of theoplicity and negotiated authenticity (Chhabra, 2012).

### **Objective authenticity**

Objective authenticity in heritage tourism refers to various displays of heritage and culture presented for tourist consumption in a historically measurable manner (Wang, 1999). Objective authenticity is concerned as to whether toured objects are historically accurate or not, and is equated with terms, such as accurate, genuine, or true” (Andiotis, 2011, p. 1614). The objectivist view supports the significance of history in defining authenticity, which Chhabra (2012, p. 499) notes “...advocates pure, frozen, original, made by locals and genuine versions of heritage.” Objective authenticity is associated with the philosophical views of modernism, or realism (Lau, 2010; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). Realism “is based on the idea that there is an objectively real world to which one can refer as a standard or for confirmation when making judgments about what is true, genuine, accurate, and authentic” (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006, p. 69). Like realism, objective authenticity advocates that the legitimacy of what is presented to tourists can be measured against the known records of history (Belhassen et al., 2008; Wang, 1999). As determined by the historical record, objective authenticity represents the knowable properties of tourism sites, rather than tourists’ subjective knowledge or feelings about those sites (Lau, 2010). Objective authenticity allows experts to establish what is authentic, rather than relying on the subjective nature of tourists’ perceptions (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). In this view of authenticity if tourists’ perceive a site to be authentic but it is not actually an accurate representation of heritage, then it cannot be considered authentic (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999). Without a historically accurate representation of the past, objective authenticity cannot be attained.

There has been some debate as to the value of objective authenticity in tourism research. Wang (1999) suggests that the existential view of authenticity, as will be discussed, might be able to explain a greater variety of tourism experiences than objective authenticity, and that objective representation may be inconsequential to tourists, advancing, “what tourists seek are



their own authentic selves and intersubjective authenticity, and the issue of whether the toured objects are authentic is irrelevant or less relevant” (Wang, 1999, p. 365-66). Reisinger and Steiner (2006) amplified this principle, advocating for the complete purge of objective authenticity from tourism studies, suggesting that “tourism research might be well served by scholars agreeing that the concept and term object authenticity no longer have a place in it” (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006, p. 80). The call to abandon objective authenticity is based in part upon the determination that nothing can ever singularly be considered objectively authentic. Claims to objective authenticity face the challenge of determining who has the unilateral power to determine what is objectively authentic (Belhassen et al., 2008). This reverberates the constructivist view of authenticity, in which it is recognized that reality is individually understood: due to the individual and greater cultural forces that play upon tourists’ personal understandings of reality, that there can be no single, commonly held understanding of what is historically true (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). Social constructivism values the symbolic meanings associated with a subject, holding authenticity as a commonly accepted cultural meaning that is co-created over time (Belhassen et al., 2008). As Park (2010, p. 117) states, “Heritage is a sign and symbol of people’s ethnicities, nationalities and identities but subject to different meanings and multiple interpretations.” What one tourist may deem to be authentic, another may dismiss for not fitting with his or her socially constructed mental framework. Claims of objective authenticity are unsound due to the multitude of ways tourism sites and objects may be individually interpreted (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). The historical record by which objective authenticity is judged may itself not be deemed objectively authentic. The notion of history itself as it is remembered is consistently subjective and socially constructed, being drawn from multiple sources of irregular qualification over long periods of time while historical perspectives change (Chronis, 2008).

### **Constructive authenticity**

The constructivist approach to authenticity emphasizes that authenticity is a symbolic cultural meaning created over time that tourists accept to be true (Belhassen et al., 2008). In the constructivist view of authenticity, what is authentic is ultimately co-created between tourists and tourism sites. Rather than observing a single, measurable authenticity, constructivism, “celebrates a mutual meaning-making process—embracing the idea that tourists actively

construct their own meanings in negotiation with various environmental factors” (Robbinson & Clifford, 2012; p. 574). Timothy and Boyd (2006) define this exchange as relative authenticity, in which it is suggested that authenticity is derived not directly from an object, but from the way the object is displayed and the viewer’s personal background. In order to determine what is authentic, constructivists rely on the perceptions of tourists, allowing whatever an individual perceives as authentic within his or her socially constructed understanding to be so (Belhassen et al., 2008; Wang, 1999).

Visitors may perceive a single tourism site a variety of different ways. Speaking to the partiality of heritage, Timothy and Boyd (2006, p. 3) advance, “there is no such thing as a single history. Each view of the past and each way of presenting it will be subjective in nature and will vary between interest groups.” This view of historic perception echoes Wang’s (1999, p. 352) statement regarding constructive authenticity, that “There are various versions of authenticities regarding the same objects.” In this sense, authenticity is a reflection of the symbolic or representative meanings that visitors associate with tourism sites and objects, rather than the specific knowable historical properties of sites and objects themselves (Belhassen et al., 2008; Robbinson & Clifford, 2012; Wang, 1999). Constructive authenticity also allows a great deal of power to reside within the governing structures that manage tourism sites and are able to guide and amend the presentation of what is authentic to visitors in order to satisfy a desired managerial narrative (Belhassen et al., 2008; Timothy & Boyd, 2006). The process through which authenticity is curated and managed for tourism consumption is related to the concept of staged authenticity. In staged authenticity tourists are presented with arranged, sanitized, and carefully manufactured, though not necessarily superficial, sites and objects for consumption (Chhabra et al., 2003; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). Faced with deliberately constructed versions of the past, tourists accept these contrived forms of authenticity to be true; it is proposed that there is “tolerance on the part of tourists who, in ignorance of any standard against which to judge authenticity, are prepared to accept the perspective of the hosts without feeling deceived” (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006, p. 71). Constructivism emphasizes the role of both tourism suppliers and consumers in determining what is authentic, while simultaneously diminishing the importance of accurate history in the context of heritage tourism.

## **Existential authenticity**

Existentialism is a view of authenticity that further distances itself from an objectively measurable historical grounding (Wang, 1999). Existential authenticity builds upon MacCannell's notion (1976) that tourists are desirous of authentic experiences, referring to a realized state of mental self-actualization (Belhassen et al., 2008; Wang, 1999). Existential authenticity refers to the ability of tourists to act in accordance with their true inner selves during a tourism experience, free from the everyday constraints and expectations of society (Ivanovic, 2014; Wang, 1999). Rather than pertaining to the properties of an object or historical perceptions of it, existential authenticity is an extremely subjective and individual concept that deals with lived experiences: "authenticity is an existential state in which one is true to one's real self in a given moment" (Belhassen et al., 2008, p. 671). Existentially authentic tourism experiences are inherently personal occurrences, which can be triggered either individually or through a shared group experience (Wang, 1999). A tourist visiting a heritage site may experience an existentially authentic experience; however, this is no guarantee that the next heritage tourist will enjoy a similar experience. The variable and unique personal experience of existential authenticity has no direct criteria that relate to historical accuracy, or the perception of such (Belhassen et al., 2008; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999).

## **Theoplacity**

In an effort to better understand the concept of authenticity in tourism contexts, an pragmatically blend the values of other concepts, additional theories have been developed that further those advanced by Wang (1999). The framework of theoplacity interconnects elements from the three views of objective, constructive, and existential authenticity, while seeking to establish a compromise that accounts for the greater meanings and contributions of each theory in religious tourism experiences (Belhassen et al., 2008). While emphasizing the lived experiences of tourists, theoplacity also succeeds in representing the importance of places and objects in authentic religious tourism experiences – elements neglected in the constructivist and existentialist theories (Belhassen et al., 2008). The significance of recognizing multiple facets of authenticity is evidenced in tourists' pilgrimages to the Holy Land, where individual belief,

personal experiences, and the perception of the place all contribute to an authentic experience (Belhassen et al., 2008).

### **Negotiated authenticity**

While objectivism emphasizes the role of producers and historians in determining and regulating the authenticity of sites, and constructivism stresses tourist subjectivity and sociocultural constructions, negotiated authenticity follows a middle path, striving to strike a balance that encompasses elements of both of these concepts (Chhabra, 2010a). Negotiated authenticity involves tourists experiencing historically accurate elements that are arranged in staged tourism settings (Chhabra et al., 2012). Negotiated authenticity does not limit tourists to passive agents who merely experience authenticity as it is presented by sites, but sustains the importance of tourists' perceptions and imaginations, while also acknowledging the importance of original places and objects to tourism experiences (Chronis, 2008; Jones, 2008). This makes negotiated authenticity particularly relevant to the study of authenticity in heritage tourism, where tourists at sites such as the Louvre, or along Route 66 desire experiences with original, historic objects (Belhassen & Caton, 2006). Negotiated authenticity respects the foundational importance of historical representation to heritage tourism, but also recognizes the difficulty of presenting an objectively authentic product, as heritage site development itself requires some level of commodification and modern development (Robinson & Clifford, 2012). However, while objectivists would categorize such developments as inauthentic, "The essentialist [objective]/constructivist negotiation perspective argues that authenticity can still be sustained while adapting to the requirements of the market" (Chhabra, 2010a, p. 795). Negotiated authenticity acknowledges the constructivist critique that objectivity is invalidated as heritage is distorted and reconstructed for functional purposes, but unlike constructivism, negotiated authenticity maintains a place for historical accuracy within the dichotomy of authenticity (Chhabra et al., 2012).

Negotiated authenticity permits a reasonably objective, yet functionally constructive, version of heritage to be promoted (Chhabra et al., 2012). At heritage tourism sites, producers manage and stage objects, messages, and locations, which tourists then negotiate and interpret during their experiences through the filters provided by their existing knowledge of the historical subject, own contemporary lived experiences, and greater social understandings of the subject

(Chronis, 2008; Chronis, Arnould, & Hampton, 2012; Jones, 2008). Negotiated authenticity accounts for each of these influences in heritage tourism experiences. While authenticity is a concept that may be understood from the perspectives of accurate historical representation, or socially constructed representations, a negotiation of these concepts allows for a more holistic understanding of authenticity (Belhassen et al., 2008). Little empirical research, however, has dealt exclusively with heritage tourists' experiences with negotiated authenticity.

### **Authenticity and heritage tourism visitor experiences**

Heritage tourism is an experiential process through which tourists consume the past (Chen & Chen, 2013). A tourism experience refers to “the subjective mental state felt by tourists during a tourism service encounter” (Chen & Chen, 2013, p. 236). Heritage tourism experiences occur when tourism demand meets the supply of heritage sites. Tourism experiences occur on an individual level and influence the satisfaction, or lack thereof, that tourists derive from visiting a site (Chen & Chen, 2013). Heritage tourism experiences are also uniquely dissimilar between tourist typologies, as the demand for heritage tourism is not composed of a homogeneous subset of tourists (Chhabra, 2010a; Poria, Reichel, & Biran, 2006). Within the heritage tourism market, “Some are interested in being emotionally involved and being educated, whereas others are interested in less serious activity” (Poria et al., 2006, p. 324). Poria et al. (2003, p. 249) make a distinction between those tourists who visit a heritage site simply because of convenience, or proximity and those with deeper motivations, stating “there are differences between *heritage tourists* and *tourists at heritage places*.” Tourists with an interest in the history of the heritage site they visit have been identified as a significant sub-section of the greater heritage tourism market (Dunkley et al., 2011; Poria et al., 2003). Heritage tourists who are drawn to a site in order to nurture their specialized interests in history enjoy historically authentic site elements and also appreciate a deeper understanding of the history being presented because of their pre-existing knowledge (Kerstetter, Confer, & Graefe, 2001). For the purpose of this research, heritage tourists are defined as tourists who are motivated to visit the site by their interest in the historical subject matter presented.

Heritage tourism experiences are inherently diverse and personal activities (Chen & Chen, 2013), and are driven by a range of motivations including learning, leisure, or perceived personal connections (Poria et al., 2003). However, despite the inherent individuality of the

engagement, authenticity, in various forms, is often posed as an important concern for heritage tourism experiences. Naoi (2004, p. 59) relates authenticity to satisfaction in heritage tourism experiences, suggesting “Tourism managers may need to maintain the authenticity of the historical districts that they manage to ensure visitors’ favourable impressions of their experiences of these districts.” However, the current understanding of heritage tourists’ experiences with authenticity is incompletely developed. Chhabra (2010, p. 805) contends, “It cannot be disputed that several types of tourists exist. Some like contrived settings and experiences; some might prefer genuine settings, while others can prefer negotiated versions with traces of genuineness.” Despite the apparent shortcomings of a purely objectivist view of authenticity, the desire for objective forms of authenticity within heritage tourism experiences persists (Chhabra, 2010a). Tourists want to consume the original features of specific sites and truthful representations of history (Belhassen et al. 2008; Chhabra, 2010a; Chronis, 2008). The objectively authentic elements of a heritage site have been found to be the primary source from which tourists are able to enjoy personally meaningful experiences (Ivanovic, 2014). Heritage tourists’ interest in objective authenticity also transcends different demographics. As Chhabra (2010a, p. 805) notes, “Regardless of age and generation cohorts, the desire for essentialist [objective] authenticity in heritage settings persists.” While Resinger and Steiner (2006) suggest that visitors are often devoid of a standard by which to judge authenticity, Chronis and Hampton (2008) suggest that knowledgeable tourists don’t simply accept battlefield objects as being historically accurate; rather, they employ on-site information and their pre-existing historical knowledge to judge the authenticity of objects (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). At heritage sites where tourists possess a great deal of familiarity and understanding with the history of the site, it is an expectation of tourists that the historical narrative be “presented as accurately as possible” (Chronis & Hampton, 2008, p. 116). In a practical battlefield heritage context, Black (2012, p. 373) affirms, “In the twenty-first century, Americans need and expect to see historical authenticity in their preserved landscapes.” While a strictly objective authenticity may be unattainable, historical accuracy and originality clearly have relevance to heritage tourism experiences.

The place and importance of historically grounded notions of authenticity in heritage tourism experiences, however, are not universally held. The process of determining what is historically accurate complicates the delivery of objective authenticity in heritage experiences.

The contemporary understanding of history is more cultural production than objective presentation of the past, which is based on the representative amalgamation of socially significant symbols and commonly held values (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). In addition to being a social construction, history is also fluid and its meanings change over time (Chronis, 2008). This complicates the theoretical identification of a single objective past. Tourists' individual subjectivity also plays a role in heritage experiences; heritage tourists utilize their existing historical knowledge, personal experiences, and cultural values when experiencing a site (Chronis et al., 2012). Multiple and competing narratives can co-exist for tourists at a single heritage site, depending on how the site is perceived (Chronis, 2012). What members of one socio-cultural group hold to be objectively authentic can be contested and understood differently by competing interest groups (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). "For any story there are multiple narrative texts that can be constructed, and the public is often faced with the challenge of multiple competing narratives" (Chronis, 2008, p. 388). In light of the varying ways in which history is interpreted by conflicting interests and the importance of individual perceptions to tourism experiences, a single objective view of authenticity is unattainable (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). In concert with the multitude of meanings that may be drawn from the symbolically constructed nature of history, the decriers of objective authenticity propose that the perception of authenticity is more important to heritage tourists than its objective representation (Chhabra et al., 2003; Wang, 1999). Heritage tourism sites should present the past in a manner that allows tourists to decipher their own meanings from its representation, rather than attempting to unrealistically prescribe a single authenticity (Jones, 2010).

In order to suit tourists' pre-conceived expectations, or to promote a desired managerial narrative, heritage sites often stage authenticity in representative forms, rather than presenting objective historical accuracy (Alberts & Hazen, 2010; Chhabra, 2010a; Hede & Thyne, 2010; Hurt, 2010; Naoi, 2004). Though some forms of staged authenticity are presented in a superficial manner, staged authenticity can also be presented in a manner that portrays heritage environments and information in an accurate manner that is grounded in history (Chronis & Hampton, 2008; Kerstetter et al., 2001). Tourists respond positively to experiences where heritage tourism is staged in a manner that pays homage to historical accuracy (Chronis & Hampton, 2008; Hampp & Schwan, 2014; Hede & Thyne, 2010). Although staged authenticity is representative and diminishes the importance of objective authenticity in heritage tourism

experiences, it also underscores the importance of an essence of historical accuracy within the engagement.

The practical necessities of delivering heritage products for tourist consumption also undermine purely objective representations of authenticity. The preparation of historic sites for tourism consumption requires some form of modern development and commodification (Hughes & Carlsen, 2010). Objective authenticity is difficult for heritage sites to maintain, as heritage tourism development “essentially requires a management shift from a site focus on conservation or preservation of a cultural heritage site or asset to a tourism product that caters to current markets demands and is commercially viable” (Hughes & Carlsen, 2010, p. 17). The development of essential, though invasive, site infrastructure such as visitor centres, seating, parking lots, signage, and roads serves to undermine accurate historical representation (Alberts & Hazen, 2010; Black, 2012; Naoi, 2004).

Heritage sites are developed and staged with varying degrees of historic accuracy in their presentation; heritage tourists who possess their own subjective understanding of history then negotiate the authenticity of these products during their experiences. In a study focusing on perceived authenticity at the Gettysburg Battlefield, Chronis and Hampton (2008) found that as a feature of the site, visitors experience authenticity through five distinct categories: object-related, factual, personage, locational, and contextual authenticity. It is evident from the prevailing literature that certain considerations of objective and constructive authenticity, including historically accurate elements and the ability to subjectively make meaning, both play a part in the negotiation of authenticity (Chhabra, 2012). However, further research is required to explore and clarify tourists’ experiences with negotiated authenticity. The purpose of this research is to explore heritage tourists’ experiences with negotiated authenticity at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument.

### **The Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument**

The Battle of the Little Bighorn was a critical event in American history; on June 25-26, 1876, Lieutenant Colonel George Custer and soldiers of the 7<sup>th</sup> United States Cavalry fought, and were defeated by, the greatest conglomerate of American Indians ever assembled on the Western plains under the spiritual leadership of the renowned Lakota chief Sitting Bull (Greene, 2008). A combined force of over 1,500 Lakota Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors, fighting to defend their culture, had wiped out Custer – perhaps America’s most renowned figure at the time – and



268 soldiers of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry (Greene, 2008). Since the culmination of the Battle, the conflict has been celebrated as an important event in Western history, as the National Park Service (2015, p. 5) notes, “The Battle of the Little Bighorn, one of the most famous and decisive battles in American history, holds a unique place in the national consciousness as a high-water mark in the 400-year struggle between European Americans and American Indians.” The totality of the American Indian victory, which left no survivors of Custer’s battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, shrouded the Battle of the Little Bighorn in a great deal of mystery and intrigue. For over a century, numerous Hollywood films, a plethora of popular historical research, best-selling books, and lingering cultural politics have fuelled the popularity of the event worldwide.

The history of the Battle of the Little Bighorn represents a fascinating, complex, and much deliberated subject of historic inquiry, the intricacies of which fall outside the scope of this research. There is, however, a need to introduce a simplified synopsis of the conflict in order to better understand both the modern Battlefield as a heritage tourism site and the site features as they relate to tourists’ experiences with negotiated authenticity. On June 25, 1876, the combined American Indian village was located along the west bank of the Little Bighorn River in the valley below the National Monument. Approaching the village from the south, Custer divided the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry into three battalions. The first under Captain Benteen was ordered to reconnoiter the land to the west of the cavalry’s approach. The second battalion under Major Reno was directed to directly attack from the South, while the final detachment under Custer would sweep to the north and attack the far end of the village. Reno’s attack was quickly repulsed and forced across the Little Bighorn River. Benteen’s battalion soon met the remnants of Reno’s command and this combined force entrenched into the hills that now bear the two commanders names. This force endured an arduous two-day siege before being reinforced. Approximately four miles to the north, American Indian warriors engaged Custer’s battalion in a conclusive affair that left all 210 men of the military command dead on the field (Fox, 1993).

For over 130 years, the Battle of the Little Bighorn, or ‘Custer’s Last Stand’, has endured as one of the most important events in Western history. The site, officially commemorated as the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, is located in southern Montana and consistently attracts over 300,000 annual visitors (National Park Service, 2014). Managed by the National Park Service, the Battlefield consists of two separate parcels of land totalling 765 acres, connected by 4 miles of paved, single lane road surrounded by parcels of privately owned land

and the expansive holdings of the Crow Indian Reservation (National Park Service, 2015). The Little Bighorn Battlefield boasts an exceptional natural landscape composed of long ridges, slight hills, and winding ravines that lead west towards the Little Bighorn River (Greene, 2008). In his comprehensive work chronicling the history of the Little Bighorn Battlefield since the fighting occurred, historian Jerome Greene (2008) traces the development of the modern site, noting that when founded in 1879, War Department landholdings encompassed just a square mile plot that included only the northern area of the field where Custer's direct command had been defeated. This is the portion of the Battlefield that relates to this research and is referred to hereafter. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Battlefield landholdings were expanded to the south to include the Reno-Benteen entrenchment area, where a corresponding memorial was erected (Greene, 2008). These two separate land parcels appear highlighted in green in Figure 1; the northern land parcel appears on the left-hand-side of the image.

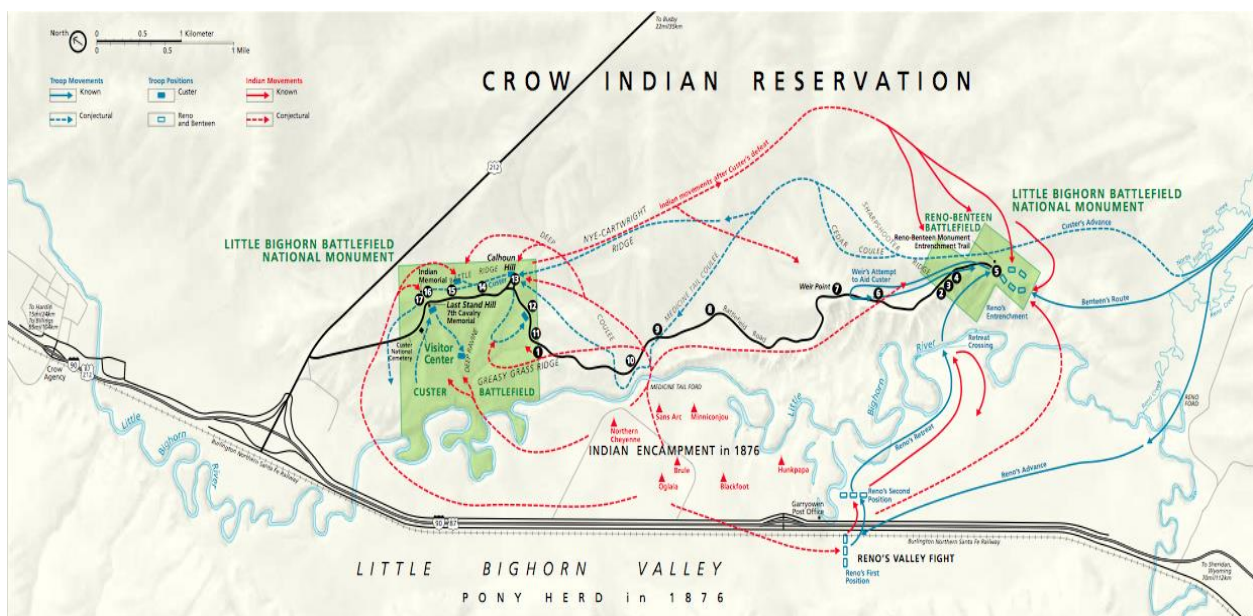


Figure 1. Map of the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (National Park Service, 2015).

Culturally, a great deal of work has been done to contextualize the sociology of the Battle's controversial legacy and the contested meanings of the events that transpired between the diverse cultural groups and stakeholders involved (Buchholtz, 2005; Elliott, 2007; Greene, 2008). The majority of academic focus on the Battle of the Little Bighorn has been and continues

to be centred on the infamous last stand. Historians continue to debate and attempt to decode the Battlefield's mysteries in an attempt to better understand the fighting (Scott, Fox, Connor, & Harmon, 1989; Scott, 2013). However, little research has explicitly focused on the experiences of tourists at the Battlefield.

### **Presentation of authenticity at the research site**

Tourists may experience battlefield authenticity across five distinct categorical manifestations: object-related authenticity, factual authenticity, personage authenticity, locational authenticity, and contextual authenticity (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). In order to explore negotiated authenticity in the experiences of heritage tourists at the Little Bighorn Battlefield, it is essential to first qualify the categories through which authenticity is presented at the site. While each category is centered on representing different forms of history relating to the site, in the case of the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, objective authenticity, which relates to the historical accuracy (Wang, 1999), cannot be applied across the five categorical representations of authenticity, and thus cannot be the theoretical foundation of authentic tourism experiences in this study. Similarly, a purely constructivist view of authenticity across the five categories mitigates the importance of the historical foundations of the site, a theoretical impasse, as heritage tourists possess a deep interest in the knowable history of the site (Kerstetter et al., 2001). The discussion that follows presents the five categories in which tourists may experience authenticity at the Little Bighorn and reveals how authenticity is staged as a site feature for tourism experiences, blending elements of objective history, socially constructed understandings, and practical tourism site requirements.

### **Object-related authenticity**

Object-related authenticity at a battlefield refers to the presentation of tangible objects related to the historic conflict (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). Historical objects help tourists visualize the events that have taken place, allowing them to better comprehend and connect with history (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). While cannons and notable historic buildings are objects that mark the Gettysburg landscape (Chronis & Hampton, 2008), the Little Bighorn Battlefield is unique in that it is the only battlefield in the world where individual grave markers denote the locations where soldiers fell in combat (National Park Service, 2015). The markers are an

important and distinguishing feature of the Little Bighorn Battlefield that also serves to interpret the conflict. The placement of the markers “provides a visual understanding of the battle absent from most battlefields” (Scott, 2013, p. 211). While the grave markers are unique and distinct objects that represent where soldiers fell, they are not objectively authentic and reveal the manner through which history is constructed over time.

On the northern portion of the Battlefield where Custer’s command was defeated – the area in which this research is focused – over 250 markers currently represent the historic gravesites of 210 soldiers (Greene, 2008; Scott et al., 1989). The objectively inaccurate number of cavalry markers is a complicated and longstanding Battlefield issue that can be traced to the initial burials of Custer’s soldiers, held shortly after the Battle on June 28, 1876. Initially, “Custer’s men were hastily buried after the battle in shallow graves marked with crude markers made from tepee poles from the abandoned Indian encampment” (Scott, 2013, p. 205). This effort to mark the field arguably represents the objectively authentic placement of the markers. However, these crude original grave markings did not last long. In 1881 a granite monument was installed atop Last Stand Hill and the remains of the cavalrymen, or as many as could be located at the time, were reinterred in a mass grave beneath the monument (Greene, 2008). An army officer present during the 1881 re-interment recorded, “Whenever I found the remains of a man [on the field], I planted a stake well into the ground, so that future visitors can see where the men actually fell” (Greene, 2008, p. 33). Objective representation, already compromised, did not persist; in 1890 another military detachment was sent to the Battlefield with marble headstones to more appropriately and permanently mark the places where soldiers had fallen. This detachment was furnished with the number of markers meant to correspond with the total number of military dead of both the northern Custer, and southern Reno-Benteen Battlefield areas; however, all but three of these markers were erroneously placed within the northern area of the greater Little Bighorn Battlefield, where Custer’s command had been engaged (Greene, 2008; Scott et al., 1989). As a result, when first set in 1890, 246 markers initially represented the death sites of 210 men, a number that has increased over the years to currently include more than 250 markers for 210 men (Greene, 2008; Scott et al., 1989).

The saturation of military markers on Custer’s field has long compromised the objective authenticity of their representation. One of the Battle’s earliest researchers, Walter Camp, wrote privately to a Little Bighorn veteran on the matter of correcting the markers in 1920 stating,

“...unless something is done before many years, it will likely never be done, and people will come to lose confidence in the marking of that historic spot” (Hardorff, 1999, p. 5). However, nothing has ever been done to correct the grave markers. Over time the grave markers and their positioning became a focus of Battle students, contributing to the historiography of the Battle. Greene’s (2008) work focusing on the development of the Battlefield specifies several persistent historical marker inaccuracies: on Last Stand Hill there are currently 52 markers where there should be 42; Deep Ravine, which primary accounts indicate should contain 28 markers, contains none; and too many markers are placed along Deep Ravine Trail. Studying the archaeology of the Battlefield, including the placement of the markers following a major grassfire in 1983, Scott et al. (1989) located a total of 252 markers on Custer’s field: 42 more markers than there were men who had fallen. This work also found that the prevailing side-by-side, or paired, markers on the Battlefield, originally fatalistically assumed to represent close army bunkmates who had perished together, were found to account for a portion of this anomaly and truly represent the graves of lone men (Scott et al., 1989; Scott, 2013). This is an example of how historical understandings change over time (Chronis, 2008). The rich history and evolving understanding of the grave markers on the Battlefield demonstrates that not only are the objects not represented in an objectively authentic manner, but also that the understanding of them has evolved from individual death sites to representative objects.

The practical forces of tourism visitation have also skewed current marker positioning. On Calhoun Hill, located within the northern area of the Battlefield, Scott et al. (1989, p. 53) found that grave markers, “... seem to have been moved to be more visible to the motoring public.” It has also been discovered that markers in the Deep Ravine Trail area, the location of a popular tourist walking trail, were placed on solid bedrock where no remains could possibly have been hastily buried after the Battle (Scott et al., 1989). Personal grave markers have also been placed on the Battlefield to represent the graves of three officers and a surgeon whose remains were never identified or recovered amongst the fallen, their placement completely speculative (Greene, 2008). In addition to superfluous grave markers being added to the site, other objects have disappeared; throughout the site’s history markers have sporadically been stolen (Greene, 2008). Although care was taken to mark the original locations where soldiers fell, and each stone symbolizes an individual who died somewhere near the Battlefield, the placement of soldier

markers on the northern section of the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument are representations created by practical managerial need and historical circumstance.

### **Factual authenticity**

Factual authenticity refers to the historical narrative that is delivered to visitors and the ideas that are presented by the site with regard to the battle (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). The history of a battle is not the product of a single understanding; rather it is an expansive narrative that is created from individual stories from participants and period documents (Chronis, 2008). This is the case at the Little Bighorn Battlefield, where accurate historical information is promoted, despite the fact that there is no single objectively understood history of the Battle. There are a number of unknown facts and ‘what if’ scenarios associated with the Battle of the Little Bighorn due to the lack of European American survivors from Custer’s command and the unreliable early techniques used to interview many American Indian participants. The minutia of the fighting in Custer’s northern sector of the Battlefield is conjectural, and conclusions have transformed over time, coming to be drawn from primary American Indian participant sources, combat stress modeling, modern archaeological techniques, and forensic evidence (Greene, 2008). Ultimately these multiple sources provide a deeper understanding of the Battle than ever before; however, the lack of objective fact that exists between the beginning of the Battle and its conclusion complicates the presentation of factual authenticity. Different historical authors have proposed competing models of the Battle and have interpreted existing evidence differently, at times challenging the dominant narrative.

At the Little Bighorn Battlefield, the information that is presented may be interpreted differently based on who is experiencing the factual narrative, and how they individually experience it. Between debates on the number of American Indian participants, the length of the fighting, the locations of soldiers’ bodies, and whether or not a ‘last stand’ ever took place, there is a great deal of conjecture within historical studies on the Battle. Given this factual limitation, interpretive methods at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument do an excellent job presenting factual authenticity that embraces elements of both known historical fact and greater social constructions. The fact-based presentation of history at the Little Bighorn Battlefield acknowledges the fluidity of history: incorporating the latest research, addressing longstanding myths, and embracing the greater sociological meanings of the Battle to the different cultures

involves. However, Battlefield interpretation also promotes a version of history that is true to the historical record, given the limitations and unknowns previously discussed. The site's foundational document identifies the Battle itself, the greater impacts, and the enduring meanings of the event as major themes of on-site interpretation, providing visitors with a comprehensive understanding of the history surrounding the conflict that is drawn from a rich compendium of sources (National Park Service, 2015).

Factual authenticity is expressed in both tangible and intangible forms at the Little Bighorn Battlefield through the presentation of ideas and facts across different narrative mediums including National Park Ranger talks held directly on the Battlefield, self-guided cell phone audio tours, informative brochures, commemorative plaques, and explanatory signage at several key locations. The factual narrative at the Little Bighorn dispels commonly held misconceptions and myths about the event – the soldiers were all drunk and committed suicide; the soldiers fought a courageous last stand to the last bullet – while promoting a realistic presentation of Battle events with historically grounded references to back claims, without taking an objectivist view. The Battlefield also acknowledges the enduring meanings of the event, which continue to shape cultural identities to this day (National Park Service, 2015). This presentation allows tourists to understand the Battle from their own perspectives and enhance their existing knowledge, guided by historical facts, rather than attempting to prescribe a single factual outcome (Chronis, 2008). The interpretive efforts of the Little Bighorn Battlefield provide tourists with facts surrounding the battle that are historically substantiated, embrace ever-evolving social understandings, and allow for individual interpretation.

### **Personage authenticity**

The narrative of the Little Bighorn Battlefield is not solely constituted by information about the event itself, but by information on the people who lived it as well; for “There can be no national story without protagonists and there can be no national epic without heroes” (Chronis & Hampton, 2008, p. 117). The third manifestation of battlefield authenticity, personage authenticity, includes information on the historical people that populate the narrative (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). Battlefield tourists have a deep interest in the human participants associated with a site, and tourism experiences are improved by the accurate presentation of people who participated in the battle (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). The Battle of the Little Bighorn, which is

perhaps better known as ‘Custer’s Last Stand’, is a historical event that will forever be entwined with its historic participants. The site is associated with several iconic personalities of the American West including Custer, Sitting Bull, and Crazy Horse, and further resulted in the awarding of 24 Congressional Medals of Honor to participants (Brust, Pohanka, & Barnard, 2007). A great deal of specialized heritage research has been conducted on Battle participants, detailing specific issues ranging from individual post-death mutilations recorded, to specific equipment used, clothing worn, and personal biographies (Hardorff, 1999; Nichols & Sills, 2000).

Like the story of the Battle itself, the characters involved in the narrative of the Little Bighorn have not always been represented in a historically accurate manner, and understandings of individuals have transformed over time. The Battle of the Little Bighorn is a complex event that is associated with diverse cultural meanings. Once known as the Custer Battlefield National Monument, the site originally focused primarily on the military and European-American aspects of the conflict while memorializing the cavalry commander in its name; the contemporary Battlefield, however, has succeeded in shaking its original Custer-focused narrative and has strived to embrace the greater meanings of the Battle to all of the cultures involved (Greene, 2008). Current Battlefield interpretation acknowledges and deconstructs the iconic status of notable participants including Custer, Crazy Horse, and Sitting Bull and speaks of them with honest detail that provides facts, when available (National Park Service, 2015). While fact-based, this nonetheless represents a constructed remembrance of the past, as we can never objectively understand the lives of historic people, only to selectively choose which known facts and features to promote as we remember them. In addition to commemorating major historical figures, the narrative of the Little Bighorn Battlefield also includes stories of private soldiers and individual American Indians. Battlefield signage, printed material, and information presentations frequently utilize participant quotes and personal facts in order to provide a deeper, more personalized understanding of the events described, serving to humanize the participants.

Though personage authenticity is a relatively intangible, narrative-driven notion, commemorative monuments do represent a tangible form of personage authenticity (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). Tangible representations of personage authenticity at the Little Bighorn include the longstanding cavalry memorial, originally erected in 1881, and the long-overdue American Indian monument, which was erected in 2003. Each monument commemorates the names of



Battle participants and casualties, while the American Indian memorial also promotes the narrative theme of “Peace Through Unity” (National Park Service, 2015, p. 3). While the theme of this monument and its recent construction reflect modern, socially constructed remembrances of the Battle’s participants, both Battlefield monuments also do convey historical fact. Personage authenticity at the Little Bighorn Battlefield is presented in a manner that commemorates participants from both sides of the conflict through monuments and narratives by blending historical facts and social creations.

### **Locational authenticity**

Locational authenticity refers to the physical embodiment of the places contained within the historical narrative, specifically the battlefield locations where notable events took place (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). Locational authenticity strengthens tourists’ connections with heritage by taking them to the actual locations where events transpired, which helps tourists better understand the events that have transpired there (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). Tourists experience locational authenticity both by viewing and by physically accessing places, though it is conceded that physically visiting a historical location is a more powerfully authentic experience than gazing from afar, as “Locational authenticity most intensely operates when visitors stand at specific spots that became salient in a military sense during the battle” (Chronis & Hampton, 2008, p. 120). The Little Bighorn Battlefield encompasses many locations that are well known by those with an interest in the conflict. Examples of these locations include Last Stand Hill, Deep Ravine, Calhoun Hill, and Greasy Grass Ridge. Locational authenticity is presented in a staged manner that guides tourists to these and other original Battle locations, which can be viewed from tourists’ vehicles along the single-lane touring road that winds through the Battlefield, or inspected more intimately from one of a number of strategically positioned roadside pull-outs that offer information on the specific location. While many different Battlefield locations may be viewed from the touring road, few Battlefield areas are physically accessible to tourists by foot. Aside from limited areas on Last Stand Hill, Deep Ravine Trail, and the Keogh Sector Trail, where tourists are permitted to walk on Battlefield land, physical access is restricted on the majority of the land where fighting occurred in order to protect archaeological and natural resources, as well as to mitigate human-wildlife encounters. The Little Bighorn Battlefield contains several key original battle locations; however, the

practical needs of protecting historic resources and managing tourist visitation limits the experiential interaction that tourists can enjoy with most of these locations beyond passively gazing at them.

In addition to the lack of physical access to key Battlefield locations on the site itself, current landholdings fail to encompass the complete area of the historic conflict. Movements made by both sides during the Battle are conjectural and are the subject of historical research (Fox, 1999); however, many of these important historic locations also largely fall outside of current Battlefield boundaries (Greene 2008). The historic site of the American Indian encampment now resides in a valley full of private farm properties, intersected by the interstate. Fox's (1993) model of the fighting, based on his and other archaeological contributions and Tribal oral history, has the cavalry traveling northwest from Last Stand Hill, beyond the modern National Cemetery grounds to an area well outside of current park boundaries towards the Little Bighorn River. The land outside of National Park Service boundaries that is associated with the Battle is largely inaccessible to tourists due to private land ownership, or lost to modern development. In order to both better interpret the Battle and accommodate the needs of tourists, the National Park Service has repeatedly sought to acquire additional land holdings (Greene, 2008). However, stakeholder disagreement, political disputes, and other managerial concerns have consistently prevented any land expansions (Greene, 2008). Tourists at the Little Bighorn Battlefield are offered a representative experience with locational authenticity that guides them to popular historic locations, which are a focus for Battle enthusiasts; however, because the site is unable to encompass the complete area of the fighting and certain historic locations are speculative, locational authenticity is not objectively presented.

### **Contextual authenticity**

At a battlefield, contextual authenticity refers to the historic representation of the natural surroundings and the greater environment in which the conflict took place (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). This category of authenticity is manifested in three forms at the Little Bighorn Battlefield: an absence of human involvement at the site and incongruent foreign objects, a commitment to historic preservation, and a lack of commercial development (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). When unnatural, modern buildings are constructed on a battlefield they diminish contextual authenticity (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). Though some limited development is essential to facilitate tourism

development (Hughes & Carlsen, 2010), some battlefields actively mitigate modernity by removing unnatural objects (Black, 2012) and staging natural vegetation (Hurt, 2010). Modern development has threatened contextual authenticity at the Little Bighorn Battlefield throughout the site history. In 1954, then Battlefield superintendent Edward Luce speaking to the motivations of visitors to the site admitted, “They wish to visualize the conditions of the battlefield without any modernization. However, the true picture of the battlefield is disturbed by having living quarters, utility buildings and the National Cemetery encroaching on the picture” (Greene, 2008, p. 85). The development of the National Cemetery on the site, which includes the remains of soldiers from multiple American military conflicts, began in the 1890s and continued until after the Vietnam War, all the while altering the Battlefield ‘s original historic landscape (Greene, 2008). Fox (1993) contends that both sides occupied positions upon the cemetery grounds during the conflict, the development of which destroyed original artefacts and locations. In addition to the National Cemetery, the development of tourism infrastructure has also affected the historic Battlefield. Major construction in 1938-40 during the building of the touring road between the northern to southern land parcels, “materially affected the original condition of the Battlefield and possibly altered interpretative conclusions about the site” (Green, 2008, p. 69). During this period, invasive developments such as grading occurred without prior archaeological surveying and altered the natural appearance of several historical resources, including Last Stand Hill (Greene, 2008). Similar developments continued throughout subsequent decades, including the expansion of visitor parking areas, National Park Service staff buildings, paved trails, and the construction of the Battlefield museum and visitor centre. The construction of the museum on primary Battlefield land adjacent to Last Stand Hill is a major detriment to the historic appearance of the site, the proximity of which has led to calls from management to have the building removed (Greene, 2008).

The contextual authenticity of historic Battlefield land outside of the confines of National Park boundaries is also an issue within tourism experiences. While the National Park Service cannot stipulate the appearance and preservation of these private locations, they are of interest to Battle enthusiasts. Public interest in the Battle and the subsequent development associated with that popularity “has resulted in a boom of development beyond park boundaries but on documented Battlefield terrain, to the further detriment of the primary resource lands embraced by the national monument” (Greene, 2008, p. 169). Surrounding service developments that have

encroached upon the Battlefield include fuel stations, restaurants, private museums, and gift shops (Greene, 2008). The heavily trafficked Interstate 90 and an active railroad are also situated within a mile of the Battlefield and are clearly visible from Last Stand Hill (Greene, 2008).

The natural environment in which the Battle took place is an important element of contextual authenticity; tourists are interested in experiencing unchanged natural environments that represent the period of the conflict (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). Despite the damage that has been done to the historic landscape during the years of the site's existence, the National Park Service has done an excellent job preserving the natural setting. The current natural landscape "retains a high degree of integrity," and is directly managed to preserve the appearance of the site as it was on June 25, 1876 (National Park Service, 2015, p. 6). While not objectively authentic by definition, the importance of historic preservation to contemporary Battlefield management reflects the significance of historical legitimacy in heritage representation. In response to the developments that have undermined the Battlefield's contextual authenticity, not-for-profit groups such as the Custer Battlefield Preservation Committee and the Friends of the Little Bighorn have also been active alongside the National Park Service in protecting Battle-related natural resources whenever possible (National Park Service, 2015). The contextual authenticity of the Little Bighorn Battlefield is presented in a manner that respects history while embracing its limitations: despite early disturbances to the site and the construction of limited visitor facilities that have altered the appearance over time, the remaining natural landscape has been exceptionally well preserved, and the site is free of on-site commercialization.

## **Conclusion**

Heritage tourists may experience authenticity in five categorical forms at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. In each category of authenticity the presentation of authenticity is neither objectively authentic, nor is it overly contrived and sanitized. There are historic discrepancies in the presentation of objects. Facts about the Battle and its participants will forever be skewed and unknowable. Some areas of the Battlefield are inaccessible, while others have forever been altered by development. Yet a historic sense of authenticity and a commitment to present history is reflected in each of the five categories. The presentation of authenticity at the Little Bighorn Battlefield is staged through a combination of history, social

understandings, and practical needs. This makes negotiated authenticity an appropriate theory to apply to heritage tourism experiences.

### **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

In order to explore negotiated authenticity in heritage tourism experiences at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, this study employed case study methodology to evaluate the experiences of tourists. Case studies focus on the exploration of a specific topical phenomenon in a purposefully chosen setting (Veal, 2011). This methodology allows for the applicability of existing academic theory to be tested in new and potentially illuminating research locations, which may improve existing understandings and yield new results (Veal, 2011). A key feature of case study methodology is the contextual utilization of different qualitative research approaches in order to strengthen the validity of results (Veal, 2011). For the purpose of this research, three types of data collection were employed: semi-structured interviews, content analysis of online tourist reviews, and unstructured on-site observations.

Extant literature focused on authenticity in tourism has employed a range of comparable research approaches in different settings, and there is no standardized methodology by which studies on authenticity are undertaken. Studies on heritage tourism experiences have previously been conducted through a combination of semi-structured interviews and participant-observation (Andriotis, 2011; Dunkley et al., 2011). Exploring tourism experiences at a museum with both objectively authentic and inauthentic elements, Hede and Thyne (2010) employed an in-depth interview with the site curator, the analysis of promotional documents, a respondent-completed survey, and participant observation. In a battlefield-specific setting, Chronis and Hampton (2008) utilized in-depth interviews, participant observation, and photo elicitation. The variety of approaches that have been employed suggests that heritage sites, which are individually dissimilar in terms of product offerings, require uniquely appropriate approaches to research.

The Little Bighorn Battlefield offered an illustrative case example in which to study negotiated authenticity in heritage tourism experiences because the site featured clear categorical representations of authenticity that are both historically focused and staged for tourism consumption. Research was conducted on-site at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument during the week closest to the anniversary commemoration of the Battle, June 21-30,

2015 – a popular time for heritage tourist visitation. The research proposal and instruments were subject to review and approval by the Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board prior to the data collection period, number 2015-019-VIUS-WAHL. The Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument also issued a research permit, number LIBI-2015-SCI-0001, in order to ensure that the research was conducted in accordance with National Park Service regulations.

### **Sampling Strategy**

Semi-structured interview and online review participants were selected using a form of purposeful sampling to ensure their suitability as heritage tourists, defined for this research as tourists who are motivated to visit the site by an interest in the historical subject matter presented. Purposeful sampling is a theory-driven form of respondent selection that relies on specific criteria and parameters to determine participant suitability (Miles & Huberman, 1994a). Rather than undertaking a broad, convenience-based sample, which would include all of the different tourist typologies at the Battlefield, selective purposeful sampling allowed for only those visitors with an interest in the history of the site to be chosen (Miles & Huberman, 1994a). This was an appropriate sampling strategy to employ, as there are experiential differences between tourist typologies at heritage sites (Poria et al., 2006). Respondent parameters for purposeful selection included visitors to the Battlefield over the age of 18 years old, whose visitation was driven by an interest in the historical subject matter presented beyond the general convenience, curiosity, or proximity that define mass travel (Poria et al., 2003). Interview respondent suitability was determined after a brief initial conversation that probed tourists' motivation for visiting the Battlefield and personal interest in the history of the site. If an interest in history was expressed, the tourist was then verbally recruited, given an opportunity to voluntarily participate, and provided with a consent form to sign. When a group of tourists was encountered, the same initial conversation was initiated to determine if one or more group members were suitable respondents. These respondents were interviewed away from their group members. Online reviews were selected for content analysis after an initial reading indicated that the author possessed an interest in the Battlefield that overtly differentiated him or her from mass travelers through means such as an explicit statement of his or her historical interest, or demonstrating an extensive knowledge of the event. This ensured a reasonable level of congruency between the two samples, as heritage tourists who explicitly expressed interest and knowledge with regard to the Battle of the Little Bighorn constituted both.

In order to ensure respondent anonymity when presenting the results, each dataset was coded with the surname of a soldier who served in ‘E’ Company, 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry on June 25, 1876, as listed in *Men With Custer: Biographies of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry* (Nichols & Sills, 2000). Table 1 illustrates the pseudonyms attached to each semi-structured interview participant.

Table 1. Semi-structured interview 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry pseudonym

Interviewee	Characteristics
Abbotts	Male in his 60s, from Mississippi, had visited the site 1 time previously
Ackison	Male in his 30s, from Ontario, Canada, had visited the site 12 times previously
Baker	Male in his 50s, from the United Kingdom, had visited the site 1 time previously
Barth	Male in his 60s, from Georgia, had not visited the site previously
Berwald	Male in his 40s, from California, not visited the site previously
Boyle	Male in his 40s, from Minnesota, had visited the site 6 times previously
Brogan	Male in his 30s, from Ohio, had not visited the site previously
Bromwell	Male in his 60s, from Louisiana, had not visited the site previously
Bruns	Male in his 50s, from Scotland, had visited the site 15 times previously
Chapman	Male in his 70s, from Indiana, had visited the site 4 times previously
Connor	Male in his 40s, from Minnesota, had not visited the site previously
Darris	Male in his 40s, from Oregon, had not visited the site previously
Davis	Male in his 60s, from Colorado, had not visited the site previously
Farrell	Male in his 40s, from Michigan, had visited the site 1 time previously
Forbes	Male in his 50s, from Iowa, had visited the site 19 times previously
Gilbert	Female in her 60s, from Colorado, had not visited the site previously
Heim	Male in his 60s, from New York, had visited the site 1 time previously
Henderson	Male in his 30s, from South Dakota, had not visited the site previously
Huber	Male in his 50s, from South Carolina, had not visited the site previously
Hutter	Male in his 50s, from Manitoba, Canada, had not visited the site previously
James	Male in his 60s, from Iowa, had visited the site 1 time previously
Kimm	Male in his 40s, from Delaware, had visited the site 12 times previously
Knecht	Male in his 40s, from California, had not visited the site previously

### Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a qualitative method in which researchers guide respondents through flexible and deep verbal exchanges that encourage respondents to speak to the research phenomenon in their own words (Veal, 2011). Semi-structured interviews are an appropriate method to employ in research contexts where individual responses are both valuable and unique in addressing the purpose of the research (Veal, 2011). This positions semi-structured

interviews as an appropriate instrument of inquiry by which to explore the distinct and personal experiences associated with negotiated authenticity at the Little Bighorn Battlefield. The ways in which tourists experienced and interacted with the Battlefield and its differing categories of authenticity were expected to be both personal and unique. Individual tourists spent different amounts of time at the Battlefield and visited different areas, emphasizing different aspects of authenticity in their individual experiences uniquely. The distinctiveness of the individual experiences available at the Battlefield necessitated a research approach that could capture the richness and dissimilarity of responses, while allowing participants to describe their experiences in their own words.

The interview guide for the semi-structured interviews was composed of five broad questions, developed to provoke conversations relating to the Battlefield, as well as unique probes to guide responses towards the themes of authenticity. The interview guide was developed based on the theoretical framework and research question. The core interview questions were: 1) *Can you describe your visit to the Battlefield today?* 2) *What about visiting the Battlefield did you enjoy?* 3) *What about visiting the Battlefield did you not enjoy?* 4) *What are your thoughts on the modern developments here at the Battlefield?* 5) *Is there anything else you would like to say about the Little Bighorn Battlefield?* It was anticipated that the proposed line of questioning would generate broad responses relating to the negotiation of authenticity, given the prominence of features that relate to authenticity and history at the Battlefield. Probing questions were also employed to direct responses towards different categories of authenticity as necessary. Probes specifically petitioned respondents about their experiences with grave markers, preservation, physical access, and information presentation. The interview guide did not insinuate to respondents what was or was not historically authentic in any sense, or limit the categorical possibilities of respondents' experiences, influencing responses accordingly. The semi-structured interview design was developed to permit flexibility within responses, so as to allow respondents to speak about the elements of their experiences that they deemed to be the most relevant to the question posed. This broad, open-ended form of questioning generated diverse responses that touched on different aspects of negotiated authenticity.

The semi-structured interview data and unstructured observations were conducted first and concurrently at the Battlefield. A total of 23 semi-structured interviews were gathered during the data collection period that each took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Respondents



were recruited atop the iconic Last Stand Hill landmark, which was found to be a popular location for tourist congregation and reflection. Interviews were conducted on the backside of Last Stand Hill, a relatively quiet and secluded area, not far removed from the areas occupied by tourist foot-traffic and National Park Ranger presentations. All interviews were recorded on a handheld audio recording device.

### **Content Analysis of Online Tourist Reviews**

Content analysis is a form of textual analysis that refers to the examination of previously compiled texts (Veal, 2011). Content analysis allows for collections of various types of text that have been previously compiled for purposes other than academic research to be studied (Veal, 2011). Content analysis data may be drawn from a range of textual sources including organizational information, personal letters, web-based information, and novels (Veal, 2011). These data sources represent information that has been compiled without the personal influence of the researcher and accordingly can add unanticipated findings to primary research results (Veal, 2011). Pre-collected forms of data such as online reviews also allow for a relatively large sample of information to be gathered relatively instantaneously without the need to undertake a lengthy data collection period (Veal, 2011).

Tripadvisor.com is an online tourism and vacation intermediary service that provides users with free access to a variety of web-based tools including accommodation and transportation booking, as well as destination information (TripAdvisor, 2014). TripAdvisor also features an expansive database of public travel reviews, which contains over 200 million user-generated travel reviews and opinions (TripAdvisor, 2014). Authors are required by TripAdvisor to provide a review title and a minimum of 100 words that describe their experience visiting a specific tourism site. At the time this research was conducted, there were over 300 TripAdvisor reviews online for the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. These reviews represent a collection of pre-existing, similarly structured responses relating to tourism experiences at the Battlefield. Though typically more concise than the semi-structured interview data, the online reviews provided candid and unstructured insights into the experience of visiting the Battlefield. Rich understandings of tourism experiences with authenticity in its different forms were gleaned from online TripAdvisor reviews of the Little Bighorn Battlefield. TripAdvisor reviews were selected after returning from the research site, allowing for the sampling selection criteria to mirror that used for the semi-structured interview instrument. In order to maintain temporal

comparability between data sets to ensure the content analysis respondents enjoyed the same experiences as those interviewed and observed, reviews of Battlefield visits from June 2015 to September 2015 were selected. A total of 25 online reviews were selected for analysis, this represented all of the reviews that were written during the period specified by those qualifying as heritage tourists.

### **Unstructured Observation**

In order to augment the semi-structured interview and content analysis data, direct, unstructured observations of tourists were also conducted at the Battlefield. Unstructured observation is characterized as a qualitative method in which informal, descriptive observations are made in order to develop a greater understanding of research subjects in an unobtrusive manner (Veal, 2011). As a non-invasive form of data collection, unstructured observation may provide additional depth to research by yielding unexpected results that may go otherwise unreported (Veal, 2011). Unstructured observation is also characterized as a complementary research approach that is the, “Observational equivalent of the informal, in-depth interview” (Veal, 2011, p. 208). Unstructured observations are initially recorded in the field, and may be written as unstructured occurrences that form freely (Veal, 2011). These rough initial recordings are then re-written to form a narrative that is comparable to other forms of qualitative data, such as semi-structured interviews and content analysis texts (Veal, 2011). The comparability of unstructured observation to other approaches extends to the analysis, wherein, “The inductive interaction between data collection, data analysis and theory development which apply to qualitative research generally also apply to unstructured observational research” (Veal, 2011, p. 225). During this research, observational notes were recorded in a notebook as they occurred in the field and were expanded upon at the earliest possible convenience, being rewritten in full at the conclusion of the data collection period.

Conducting unstructured observations of tourists at the Battlefield provided additional insights into experiences that could be collected in a natural, uninterrupted setting. Unstructured observations took place at the specific locations where tourists assembled to experience history: on Last Stand Hill, along the tour road on Battle Ridge, Calhoun Hill, Deep Ravine Trail, and the Keogh Sector of the Battlefield. Relevant observations were recorded as they occurred and included tourists deliberately straying from established trails, trying to locate salient historical places outside of site boundaries, and posturing as historical participants in an attempt to better

understand the conflict. These honest and often spontaneous experiential happenings would have been difficult to capture, or may have been unreported, under different approaches that rely on tourists to recall their own experiences.

### **Data Analysis**

The combined approaches yielded a total of 23 interviews, 25 online reviews, and 4 pages of observational notes. All raw forms of unedited data, including interview audio recordings, observation notes, and online reviews, were manually transcribed to an electronic document for the purpose of analysis. In order to gain familiarity with the interview data that was collected, the audio was listened to and manually transcribed by hand. This process was then repeated and transcribed to an electronic document, which was then compared against the original recordings for accuracy. All transcribed data was read and re-read for the purpose of manual thematic coding and analysis.

The flexibility of case study methodology allows for any appropriate form of analysis to be applied to data (Veal, 2011). Additionally, in the process of case study data analysis, it is possible for both deductive research-objective based and inductive emergent themes to surface within data (Veal, 2011). In this case, the thematic analysis occurred in both manners at different stages. The data was first coded deductively using the five categories of Battlefield authenticity (Chronis & Hampton, 2008), with the purpose of segregating strings of text that dealt specifically with factual authenticity, locational authenticity, and so on.

In order to develop themes relating to tourists' experiences with negotiated authenticity, pattern coding was then applied to the five segregated groupings of text. Pattern coding is an analysis method used to identify and group emergent sub-themes within data sets (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Pattern coding allowed for a number of different experiential outcomes to be identified and clustered as themes in order to then draw conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As each of the responses had been deductively coded as they related to the five categories of Battlefield authenticity, pattern coding allowed for all of the data specifically pertaining to each category to be collected and analyzed individually. From this process themes relating to tourists' experiences with negotiated authenticity became clear and conclusions could be drawn between the similar themes within the five categories.

## **Chapter 4 - Results**

Each of the five categorical representations of authenticity presented at the Little Bighorn Battlefield provided tourists with different aspects of the site to experience and distinct facets of authenticity to negotiate. Semi-structured interview subjects spoke clearly to the five categories of authenticity and emphasized different site elements in their responses, discussing the presence of Battlefield objects, the presentation of facts, the inclusion of historical characters, natural preservation, and land access issues among others. This data was complemented by the unstructured observations on site. The data generated from the analysis of online tourist reviews did not deviate from that of the semi-structured interviews and observations. In each category of authentic manifestation – object-related, factual, personage, locational, and contextual – data indicated that heritage experiences with negotiated authenticity involve elements of fact-based history, social constructions of the past, and individual meaning making. The results that follow are presented around the five categories in which authenticity is presented at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument and the experiential themes that each contain.

### **Object-Related Authenticity**

Object-related authenticity refers to the tangible representations of the battle that stand on the site (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). At the Little Bighorn Battlefield, object-related authenticity is dominated by the presence of grave markers placed on the field that denote where individuals died. The Battlefield contains both red and white grave markers that symbolize where American Indian warriors and 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry soldiers died, respectively. The American Indian markers have been placed within the last three decades – their placement carefully researched using primary historical sources and Tribal history. The cavalry markers however, as previously introduced, are too many in number and are representations of where men fell rather than being objectively historically placed. For these reasons, the placement of the cavalry markers, a unique and longstanding feature of the site, cannot be considered objectively authentic. Despite the inauthenticity of the markers – a fact acknowledged both by the Battlefield and tourists – respondents expressed satisfaction with the placement and existence of the markers as objects that tangibly represent the deaths of real, once-living men; they add unique historical interest to the site; and help better elucidate the fighting that occurred. Tourists' responses regarding object-

related authenticity demonstrate the importance of historical accuracy, social constructions of the past, and individual meaning making in the negotiation of authenticity.

### **Historical accuracy**

Despite the lack of objective authenticity of cavalry grave markers as they correlate to historic 1876 body positions, respondents demonstrated that facets of historical accuracy were still important to the negotiation of authenticity. Information that cavalry grave markers are not all objectively authentic death sites is widely available to tourists: grave marker discrepancies are admitted and presented honestly by the National Park Service through means such as signage on Last Stand Hill and on-site literature, as well as during Ranger presentations and the following question and answer sessions. Respondents for their part made no negative mentions of the marker placements. Respondents both self-reported and were observed anxiously seeking out additional information on the grave markers from National Park Rangers and signage, and desired to locate the grave markers of specific historic individuals, from well known participants such as General Custer and Lame White Man, to the more obscure like Sergeant Butler and the recently discovered grave of Mitch Boyer. This reflects respondents' interest in the historical accuracy of the grave markers as it relates to experiencing negotiated authenticity; tourists desired to see graves that had been erected to honour real historical figures and sought out additional information on the history of the objects and how they came to be placed over time.

A collection of respondents reported that while the grave markers are not objectively authentic to 1876 specifications, they nevertheless enjoyed the objects' contested placement, which originally dates back to 1890, because the information surrounding spurious marker placements added historical interest to the site. In this sense the markers are not inauthentic as being staged by contemporary management in an insincere manner, but hold authentic historical value beyond the Battle itself. This supports the interest of heritage tourists in historical fact, but not necessarily a single objective authenticity. Brogan (interviewee) enjoyed the grave markers because of their longstanding and unique history at the Battlefield, noting that the objects went "way back." Forbes (interviewee) gave a similar response, outlining his interest in the history of the Battlefield following the fighting in 1876 and the current placement of the markers. James (interviewee) specifically admitted that there were both too many grave markers and that some markers have been moved due to construction on-site; however, James also reflected positively

on the historical interest the spurious objects add to the site. Bruns (interviewee) emphatically spoke to the added historical value of the markers and the impossibility of objective historic representation:

They were never going to get the placement right. They came back here years later; the Battlefield had been overrun with wolves and wild animals. What they've done, they've done their best. I'm quite sure some of the markers are wrong, maybe half... virtually fifty percent of the markers are wrong, but they ended up putting all of the bodies together when they buried them underneath the monument. But that doesn't bother me; it just gives a bit of interest to the Battlefield. I'm glad the markers are there; I wouldn't take them away for anything, though maybe fifty percent are wrong and I may be wrong, it could be one hundred percent. (Bruns – interviewee)

By acknowledging that the markers are incorrect by 1876 standards, while also praising their added historical value with the 1890 placements, tourists demonstrated that their interest in history is not confined to the battle-event itself, but that the historic value of the objects beyond the battle also holds historical interest for knowledgeable tourists. This also demonstrates the ability of knowledgeable heritage tourists to discern their own authenticity and apply their knowledge during their heritage experiences. Objectively authentic representation of Battlefield objects was not fundamental to experiences with negotiated authenticity because so long as tourists could still identify a level of historical accuracy, the objects could be regarded as having historical value.

### **Social constructions**

Respondents also indicated that the greater socially constructed cultural meaning associated with the grave markers was important to their experiences with negotiated authenticity. The commemorative quality of the current objects is based on the socially constructed meaning of grave markers as representations of death. Battlefield respondents enjoyed the demonstrative properties of the markers as sites that respectfully represent where individuals fell in combat, despite the fact that no current graves contain full skeletons, and some are completely spurious. Respondents praised the representative meanings of the objects in a

constructive sense, while making no mention as to their objective accuracy. Interview respondent Barth (interviewee) reported that the part of his visit to the Battlefield he had most enjoyed was looking at General Custer's headstone, reporting that he found it "kind of chilling," while making no mention of the fact that a nearby interpretative sign indicates that Custer fell further up Last Stand Hill than his current grave marker indicates. O'Toole (online reviewer) described a pleasant, yet surreal feeling visiting the Battlefield and attributed this to the markers: "Maybe it's seeing grave stones with no name, just 'U.S. Soldier, 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Fell Here'." Baker (interviewee) also reported that the markers were his favourite element of his visit because they showed him where the soldiers had died in Battle. Van Sant similarly commented in an online review, "The markers where each soldier and Native American fell are a poignant reminder of a not very distant past." Henderson and Liddiard emphasized the representative properties of the markers as denotations of loss and sacrifice in their Battlefield experiences, reporting:

I really like them [the markers]. I think it's a very nice touch. I particularly noticed that there's a grave right in the middle of Deep Ravine Trail. I thought, that's good to actually put it right there, where they fell. (Henderson – interviewee)

Seeing the little white markers that indicate where the soldiers fell in Battle was really thought provoking together with the group of markers indicating where Custer and members of his family met their end. (Liddiard – online reviewer)

Congruent with those respondents who made no mention as to the accuracy of marker placements, while praising the objects' representative qualities, those respondents who did speak to the accuracy of marker placement also reported that they enjoyed the greater meanings of the objects as representations of where soldiers fell. Interviewees Brogan, Bruns, Forbes, Heim, James, Kimm, as well as online reviewers Murphy and Wells each recognized that marker placements are not completely accurate and accepted this within their experiences. Heim (interviewee) reported that although the marker placements were not all accurate, "I think it's a good idea that they have them because you can see where these guys fell." Kimm (interviewee) similarly reported that he enjoyed the markers because they tangibly represent where men fell in Battle, though admitted, "Obviously there's a lot of errors and certain mistakes that were

made.” Detailing his sojourn to see the location of Sergeant Butler’s marker and pay his respects to the fallen soldier, Bruns (interviewee) noted [my emphasis added]:

He was known to be a bit of a drinker so we took some whiskey up to the gravestone. *Whether he’s actually buried there or not it doesn’t matter*, but we took whiskey up and we dug a hole and left it. It was a nice touch, you know? (Bruns – interviewee)

The representation of death through grave marker placement was an authentic experience for tourists at the Little Bighorn. Tourists embraced the socially constructed meaning of grave markers as objects that honour the lives of real historical persons who fell in Battle, regardless of the historical accuracy of the grave marker placement.

### **Individual meaning making**

In addition to valuing historical facts and embracing social constructions, respondents also engaged their imaginations to create individual meaning from their Battlefield experiences. Respondents indicated that the objects helped bring the Battle to life for them and increased their understanding of the Battle by showing where combatants had been positioned. While objectively knowing what the Battle looked like is an impossible task, the historically valuable, representative objects lead tourists to feel as if they have a better understanding. Interviewees Abbotts and Bromwell reported that the grave markers brought the Battle to life for them, helping to clarify the conflict, while making no reference to any historical inaccuracies pertaining to object locations:

It [the markers] gives you a better appreciation for the vastness and what was really going on. You watch the old western movies about the Battle and everything, it leads you to the impression that it’s a pretty small area, but it’s really strung out. I think it emphasizes the whole event because you can tell where the soldiers were and where they had their losses in one spot versus another. (Abbotts – interviewee)

To me [the grave markers are] really striking because of what those things do, they can say these people died here, or these people fought here. To be able to see the actual



movements, it makes it real. Man, it was war. It was dirty, nasty war and it makes it real... Again it makes it where you can actually see what was happening, you can see people in their last moments. (Bromwell – interviewee)

Guided by a cursory sense of historical accuracy and a desire to understand certain unknowable Battle outcomes within their own individual mental frameworks, respondents create their own mind's-eye version of the event, imaging what the engagement would have looked like for those involved.

### **Factual Authenticity**

Tourists at the Little Bighorn Battlefield encounter factual authenticity throughout the site that strives to provide tourists with a balanced understanding of the event that is grounded in historical facts and allays popular misunderstandings. Several narrative vehicles serve to present historical information to tourists including National Park Ranger presentations, roadside information panels, cellphone audio tours, printed material, and signage. Tourists' responses regarding factual authenticity demonstrate the importance of historical accuracy, social constructions of the past, and individual meaning making in the negotiation of authenticity.

### **Historical accuracy**

The most prevalent theme amongst tourists relating to factual authenticity was satisfaction with the presentation of the historical narrative. Respondents possessing interest in and knowledge of the facts that they were presented expressed general satisfaction that, across its various mediums, the historical narrative had a high degree of accuracy, depth, and quality. Gilbert (interviewee) complimented the historical interpretation, reporting that "It was very interesting, the information presented was very good and I enjoyed it." Barth (interviewee) commented that the presentation of factual authenticity was, "Very, very informative, great, they display it in a manner you can understand." Bromwell (interviewee) also approved of the presentation of facts, noting, "I wouldn't detract from anything I've seen or been told or read here yet." Walker (online reviewer) stated, "The National Park System has done a phenomenal job in capturing the details and accuracy of this event."

The narrative element used to communicate factual authenticity that was most frequently mentioned by visitors was the National Park Ranger presentations. Respondents strongly

emphasized the quality of these presentations in terms of their historical substance. The delivery of the Ranger presentations was consistently observed being well received by tourists: two tourists were observed being moved to tears at separate presentations, a phenomenon reported again by Torrey (online reviewer). Multiple Ranger presentations were observed ending with boisterous applause from audiences. Additionally, tourists were observed approaching the National Park Rangers afterwards to have their detailed, specific questions addressed. KcKenna (online reviewer) noted, “We were fortunate enough to hear a ranger talk outside the patio overlooking the Battlefield. He was so knowledgeable and did a fantastic job giving an unbiased account of the Battle.” Reese (online reviewer) reiterated, “I found the honest and accurate presentation by [a National Park Ranger] exceptional. He was passionate in the telling, and passionate in both detail and historical accuracy.” Torrey (online reviewer) spoke of the totality of the information provided at the Ranger presentation he attended, noting:

By the time you walked up the hill you understood the history, the key locations, the fact that the two sides were fighting for their way of life, the implications as a result of the Battle and the personal hell these soldiers must have suffered on that hot day. (Torrey – online reviewer)

Multiple respondents noted they had enjoyed attending an interpretive presentation so much that they had attended a second Ranger talk. Online reviews supported this occurrence. After attending two Ranger presentations Barth (interviewee) complimented, “I found both talks very interesting and very informative.” Thompson (online reviewer) similarly reflected on the multiple presentations he had attended:

We listened to the Ranger’s presentation – in fact we listened to one by one Ranger, walked to the top of Last Stand Hill, then listened to the next Ranger. Very informative and beyond interesting. This is an incredible experience, whether you are a student of the Battle or not. (Thompson – online reviewer)

Respondents noted that the Battlefield was well appointed with historical signs and information panels to communicate facts. Interviewee Ackison, as well as online reviewers

Lange and Pendle commented on the high quality of historical information presented by the signage. Rood (online reviewer) summarized, “All along the road there are turnouts with very well presented explanations of what happened at that point. Overall a lot of effort has been put out to provide the historical context of the site.” The self-guided cell phone audio tour of the Battlefield was also discussed as an enjoyable factual medium. Though this was the least mentioned narrative vehicle, it was suggested that this was a useful way to experience the historical narrative from different Battlefield locations by online review authors Pendle, Schete and O’Connor. Though the factual presentation may not be deemed to be objectively authentic based on the fundamental unknowns that will forever persist in Battle studies, such as the length of the engagement or the number of American Indian casualties, the inclusion of available, known historical facts was still an important element to tourism experiences. The responses of historically interested tourists indicate that a desire to see historical accuracy reflected in Battlefield information provision persists.

Though there was almost unanimous satisfaction expressed by respondents in terms of the quality of historical information provided by the National Park Rangers and the manner that it is presented, James (interviewee) expressed strong displeasure with the factual authenticity presented by the Battlefield. Speaking to the information provided by the site, James reported:

Philosophically they’ve gone sideways, but that’s just my opinion... What these people do here, I don’t know how many thousands come, but it’s a respectable number of people come for how hard it is to get to this place, I know that, but unless you’ve really studied it, they are sending people home thinking the TV version is correct and it’s not. (James – interviewee)

### **Social constructions**

The Little Bighorn Battlefield is a heritage tourism site that originally focused on the European-American aspects of the Battle at the expense of the American Indian perspective. The factual presentation of more recent decades reflects how a greater historical understanding of the event has been socially constructed over time, coming to embrace the American Indian perspectives and accounts of the Battle. Tourists frequently spoke of the greater socially constructed meanings of the Battle that are engendered by factual authenticity. Mason (online

reviewer) reflected on the totality of factual authenticity, “I think a wonderful and necessary accomplishment here has been to provide a balanced account in an unbiased manner of what transpired and to provide dignity to all who lost their lives, Cavalry and Native Americans.” Similarly, both Knecht (interviewee) and Mason (online reviewer) enjoyed the compassion that was expressed for both sides. Kimm (interviewee) enthusiastically commented that the greater socially constructed meanings of the Battle, or the “full story” enhanced his overall understanding of the event:

I think a lot more people should come out here and get the full story and understand what exactly this was historically speaking. It was the high-water mark for the Native Americans because of the decisive victory; however, it was the beginning of the end. They never formed again or were able to mount this type of victory. It all culminated right here. (Kimm – Interviewee)

O’Toole (online reviewer) also spoke to the conscious inclusion of facts on the Battle from both cultural perspectives, noting “Something I’ve seen at no other Battlefield is the respect given to both sides of the Battle, which gives context few realize.” The perspectives of the Battle for both participant cultures are based on current understandings of the event and the greater context that has been decoded over time. While the balanced narrative perspective is inarguably more accurate than a one-sided factual presentation, it also represents historical understandings that have developed over time and continue to change. Acknowledging the fluidity of how the past is interpreted and the contemporary social responsibility of representing both cultural perspectives, Brogan, Henderson, and Kimm reported:

The first time I came here was probably forty years ago. At that time it was Custer Battlefield and there wasn’t much focus on the Indian’s side, it’s good to see some parity now. (Brogan – interviewee)

I’m a history professor, so I like to see things, the story, be even handed and the fact that they’ve recognized that this was a very important Battle for the Natives as well, I think

that's something they've done a really nice job with, that I'm very impressed with.  
(Henderson – interviewee)

I think it's great that they've boiled it down to the struggle of white European-Americans that were fighting for their way of life and the Native Americans who were fighting for their way of life and it's just a Battle of two different kinds of Americans. (Kimm – interviewee)

### **Individual meaning making**

In addition to enjoying factual authenticity in terms of its fact-based presentation and greater contextually constructed substance, a concentration of tourists commented that they had learned as an outcome of their visits to the Battlefield. For tourists prepared with a pre-existing level of historical knowledge about the site, learning was an individual mental outcome of their experiences that allowed them to make their own meaning from their visits. Barth (interviewee) admitted that the factual presentation enhanced his own understanding of the information surrounding the Battle. Hutter (interviewee) similarly noted, “There are areas where the different books that I've read give me some information, but you really get the understanding coming here.” Separate respondents who had visited the Battlefield multiple times also advanced that they had learned during their visits; Ackison (interviewee) stated, “Coming back you can get more information and can read between the lines of what you've read [prior to visiting]. You get something more each time.” Forbes (interviewee) similarly commented, “The park talks are always really good, you talk to the Rangers, they always make time. I always learn so much.”

While some respondents merely spoke of learning as a pleasant outcome of their experiences, others specified that learning was a direct goal of their visit and that they hoped to increase their historical knowledge by visiting the Battlefield. This emphasizes the role of individual meaning making in the negotiation of authenticity. Hutter (interviewee) reported, I came down here to do some research like you're doing because I've read so many books, they contradict one another, so I get such mixed feelings I said, ‘Well the Battlefield is the place to start’.” Bruns (interviewee) emphasized learning in his experience, noting that factual authenticity helped him make individual meaning from his experience:

We're always looking for more information on the Battle, any updates, has anybody discovered something new; you're always looking for that. I used to do a lot of talks back home on the Indian Wars. The very end was the Battle of the Little Bighorn, so to be able to add new information was great... I've been coming here for fifteen years; I'm absolutely fascinated by this and when I can go home with new information it's just great. (Bruns – interviewee)

### **Personage Authenticity**

Tourists at the Little Bighorn Battlefield spoke of personage authenticity, or the people and figures that fill the historical narrative (Chronis & Hampton, 2008) with great salience. The Battlefield provides tourists with known facts on the historical figures involved in the conflict; famous figures are humanized and spoken of in terms of fact rather than myth; real, once-living people are celebrated from the level of top-end leadership down to American Indian non-combatants and army privates; and both cultural points of view are represented within the narrative. Separate memorials on the site also honour the fallen on both sides of the Battlefield. Data indicated that personage authenticity was important to visitor experiences; tourists enjoyed receiving both sides of the story, obtaining facts on individuals, and connecting with historic participant experiences. Tourists' responses regarding personage authenticity further validate the importance of historical accuracy, social constructions of the past, and individual meaning making experiences in the negotiation of authenticity.

### **Historical accuracy**

In addition to enjoying the historical representation that is presented by forms of factual authenticity, respondents also reflected positively on the presentation of facts and information about specific individual historical figures. Tourists were observed carefully analyzing and seeking out the names of specific participants engraved on each of the American Indian and cavalry memorials. Tourists additionally sought information on participants from both sides of the conflict, from obscure participants including White Bull and James Butler, to iconic figures including Custer and Sitting Bull. Respondents pointed out where specific individuals, such as civilians Boston Custer, or Arthur Reed were, and the position occupied by the Cheyenne Suicide Boys. Forbes (interviewee) spoke excitedly about specific individuals during his experience "You know, Custer was actually really killed right about there [pointing near the

cavalry monument] and [Lieutenant] Cooke and Tom [Custer] were close by too.” Interviewees Baker, Bruns, and Forbes, as well as online review authors Kimm, Schete, and Ogden positively reflected on receiving historical information about individuals as a significant part of their experiences. James and Hutter (interviewees) expressed a desire to understand Battle participants beyond the commonly held myths, such as that Custer desired to be elected president in 1876 or that Major Reno was an incompetent drunk, and receive historical facts. These knowledgeable visitors hoped to increase their historical understanding of specific individuals through known facts. Though much objective personal information on the historic persons will always be unknown, facts on Battle participants’ physical characteristics, diets, and equipment provide tourists with a historically focused understanding of personage authenticity. Berwald (interviewee) indicated that the presentation of personage authenticity through historic facts clarified for him that many of the soldiers were young men, many of whom were recent immigrants to the United States with few other opportunities. Stafford (online reviewer) enjoyed receiving the historical information provided by different interpretative strategies that focused on the everyday lives and duties of soldiers and American Indians, information that is based on history.

### **Social constructions**

In addition to undertones of historical fact, tourists were interested in experiencing the greater social understandings of the historical people involved in the Battle. Similar to the presentation of factual authenticity, the social appreciation of personage authenticity involves the evolving concern for both belligerent cultures – again a progressive departure from the Battlefield’s focus throughout the 1960s and 70s, which strongly focused on military aspects from a European-American perspective. The shifting social value of memorializing participants on both sides is evidenced in the renaming of the Battlefield from the Custer Battlefield National Monument to the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument in the 1990s, as well as the construction of the American Indian Memorial in 2003. Many respondents reflected positively on the experience of receiving the perspectives of participants on both sides of the conflict, citing their enjoyment of the balanced representation of personage authenticity offered. Interview participants Huber and Hutter described the perspectives and outcomes of both cavalrymen and warriors in their respective visits to the Battlefield, stressing the importance of understanding the

meaning of the Battle to both sides to create a more holistic understanding of the event. Speaking to the representation of individuals from both sides of the conflict, respondents strongly advanced that their experiences had been positive. Farrell (interviewee), Smallwood (online reviewer), and Riley (online reviewer) expressed satisfaction that participants on both sides were memorialized by the site and honoured for their sacrifices. Connor (interviewee) stated, “It just stands out as a really emotional and brilliant moment in history and a really tragic episode for the people involved.” Knecht (interviewee) similarly reflected, “They cover our expansion with compassion for both sides... I think it’s great.” Speaking to the balanced presentation of personage authenticity, Ogden complimented interpretive efforts:

Anyone with an interest in history will find this national monument – a testament to a difficult and hubris filled period in American history – informative and insightful. Both the history and fallen of Native Americans as well as the U.S. cavalry are treated respectfully. (Ogden – online reviewer)

Respondents also emphasized the role of memorials as tangible site features that represent personage authenticity. While some tourists referenced the cavalry memorial atop Last Stand Hill as a respectful commemorative feature to the men who died, both interview and online review data made more frequent mention of the memorial erected in 2003 to honour the American Indian participants in the Battle – known popularly as the ‘Indian Memorial’ – as an enjoyable element of their experiences. Respondents emphasized the importance of the Indian Memorial as a physical element of personage authenticity that serves to balance the historical perspective. Conner (interviewee) described the American Indian memorial as magnificent; Bruns (interviewee) as marvellous; Darris (interviewee) as interesting and nicely done; and Riley (online reviewer) simply as beautiful. Brogan (interviewee) reported that the Indian Memorial was a memorable part of his experience because of the commemorative balance it provided to the historic participants. Smallwood (online reviewer) similarly was pleased that individuals on both sides were memorialized. These responses show that personage authenticity, while reflecting historical facts in some respects, can also embrace socially constructed meanings and modern cultural interpretive needs. Reflecting on the importance of honouring fallen American Indian warriors in modern times, Kimm (interviewee) aptly concluded:



As time wore on there was a switch if you will, from remembering it one-sidedly as a white-European fight to a Native American fight got into the memorialization. I was here when they dedicated that memorial, the Indian Memorial; that was neat to see that year. (Kimm – interviewee)

In addition to recognizing and embracing the modern value realized through the commemoration of participants on both sides of the conflict, some respondents demonstrated their subjectivity by advancing that, while socially necessary, one side of the conflict was over-emphasized within the presentation of personage authenticity. Brown (online reviewer) appreciated the inclusion of both perspectives, but did not feel as though personage authenticity was presented in a balanced manner, reporting “It was good to see the Native Americans now have some representation here, but this site remains a monument to the genocide and ethnic cleansing of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.” Heim and James also each reflected negatively on the way that the personage authenticity of the once-opposing cultures was presented, subtly noting that while a balanced presentation is important, they also felt it was skewed and could be improved, though in different manners:

I would like to see more notation to the Native Americans. They were the victors and we were invading their territory. So I would like to see more recognition of the fact that they fought bravely too. (Heim – Interviewee)

I grew up in the 60s when every movie and TV show was, ‘Custer the idiot’, ‘Custer the crazy guy’. These guys are so PC here though. I heard two lectures yesterday; the entire thing was about the bravery and nobility of the Sioux and Hunkpapa... I think that’s unfair, I think there was a sacrifice made on both sides. (James – Interviewee)

These comments reflect the importance of individuals from both sides being presented at the Battlefield; even those tourists who are subjectively predisposed to supporting one side acknowledge that a recognizable sacrifice was made on each side of the conflict.

## **Individual meaning making**

Respondents engaging with forms of personage authenticity felt as though they had better understood the lived experiences of historic Battle participants. The lived experiences of Battle participants are neither known objective facts, nor a commonly held cultural understanding, but an individually imagined outcome. The perceived improved understanding of the lived experience of historic participants represents the use of tourists' imaginations in individual making meaning during their experiences. Interviewees Barth, Bruns, Forbes, Heim, and Kimm each indicated a desire to understand what it would be like to be a Battle participant. Ackison (interviewee) reflected:

It is my curiosity to find out how the soldiers would really feel. How it would feel like to be a soldier in those days and to experience such a drama as this. Try to imagine what it would be like to be them. That's probably my biggest quest when I visit the Battlefield, today or any other day. [I feel like the Battlefield does a good job providing me with this experience] because it's got step-by-step, these marked out stations where you can stop and where you can imagine. (Ackison - interviewee)

The desire to understand personage authenticity in an experiential notion was also expressed by Bromwell and Huber:

What stands out the most from my visit is just the fact of what these guys were facing. I'm a veteran. I've done a lot of Civil War battlefields and there's a feeling that you get, it's an understanding of what they [the soldiers] faced. It's kind of like going to Rome and then suddenly all the stuff you've ever read about it, it's real. All the sudden this is real. That's what this place does for you. (Bromwell – interviewee)

I just like to stand where these guys stood and try to experience what they [the soldiers] experienced. I'm sure it was a horrible experience. They were outnumbered somewhere near 10:1. It's fantastic to stand here and see this and sort of realize. (Huber – interviewee)

Tourists were also observed on seven occasions, at various Battlefield locations and roadside pull-outs, posturing as Battle participants in an attempt to imitate historical participant experiences – squatting low along ridgelines mimicking men taking cover or shouldering imaginary rifles to take aim. These observational occurrences support the role of individual meaning making with personage authenticity through desire to better understand historic participant experiences during the negotiation of authenticity.

### **Locational Authenticity**

Locational authenticity refers to the specific places where historic events took place (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). Locational authenticity at the Little Bighorn Battlefield is represented by several locations that prominently feature into the history of the site. Historical locations may be viewed from the Battlefield touring road and its various pull-outs, and tourists are also welcomed to walk on Last Stand Hill in addition to two short trails that offer restricted access to separate sides of Battle Ridge. The majority of key historic Battlefield locations are not physically accessible to tourists, which it is posed as the apex of locational authenticity (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). Locational authenticity proved to be an important facet of heritage tourism experiences. Tourists desire to see the actual places where historic events happened. Additionally, tourists relish the opportunity to view the Battlefield from different viewpoints; tourists enjoyed both looking at and standing on actual historic locations. However, when not provided with adequate opportunities to physically access Battlefield locations, tourists expressed dissatisfaction.

### **Historical accuracy**

Tourists strongly emphasized their interest in visiting specific historic locations at the Battlefield. Beyond the wide-reaching interest to see iconic, well-known locations such as Last Stand Hill and Deep Ravine, respondents specifically mentioned their interest in visiting specific and obscure locations. Ackison (interviewee) enjoyed being able to find and view the specific locations that he had read about prior to arriving. Interviewees James and Kimm boasted about the number of specific Battle-related locations that they had visited over the years they had been visiting the site, and each reflected pleasantly on walking Deep Ravine trail to enjoy a more intimate experience with the historic location. Forbes (interviewee) spoke of multiple excursions that he had arranged to explore specific historic locations on the privately owned land that

surrounds the Battlefield, as well as on restricted areas of the Battlefield proper: “I’ve done just about everything here. I’ve gotten special permits; we got to walk on Greasy Grass Ridge one time. Another time a guy and I went up Nye-Cartwright [Ridge], so I’ve done just about everything.”

Respondents emphasized real, fact-supported historical locations in their experiences: where bodies, artefacts, and primary participant accounts place fighting in 1876. There was, however, a strong concern expressed with regard to the level of access to these historic locations. Tourists expressed dissatisfaction that important locations were not physically accessible. Hutter (interviewee) felt as though physical access to historic locations was too restricted, supporting the importance of original historic places to his experience: “Like any other place there’s always restrictions on what you can do, you can’t really get around it. If they weren’t so scared that you’re going to pick up some artefacts...” Kimm also reported that he felt as though Battlefield management too closely restricts the physical access to historical locations:

Except for in certain instances they don’t like to take people onto the Battlefield itself. The National Park Service is very fussy and particular about that. But if you’re on Indian land, and remember that this Battlefield is just a square in the middle, it gives you a better perspective... I think there should be a little more access... More trails, more access to for example Sharpshooter Ridge. It would be fascinating to go up there. (Kimm – interviewee)

Tourists used their pre-existing historical knowledge to identify specific Battlefield locations and desired to visit these places. Forbes (interviewee) indicated he desired to specifically visit the river fording area popularly known as ‘Ford D’, situated northeast of current Battlefield boundaries on private land, Forbes also applied his historical knowledge to physically point out the location during his interview. Accessing different historic locations was of such importance to some respondents that they were willing to violate Battlefield regulations in order to access them. In concert with the number of illegal trails that mark the battlefield, tourists were observed wandering from trails to more intimately explore historic locations. Bruns candidly remarked about his experience wandering from established trails:

There are some points that they don't like you to access. You can get down to Deep Ravine and that now, but there are some areas that they're not too keen on you visiting. There's no pathway that takes you down there, but to be honest we went to see Sergeant Butler's grave, headstone, and it's way up the hill along the road and then you walk up. (Bruns – interviewee)

These comments are supported by a number of illegal trails that were observed at several important, but physically inaccessible, Battlefield locations. These illegal trails are countered with signs posted by the National Park Service, where individual trailheads meet the tour road, warning that walking on unmarked trails and the Battlefield itself is not permitted. Despite site regulations and posted signage, multiple tourists were observed straying from permitted areas. Tourists were specifically observed wandering from the paved section of Deep Ravine trail to get a closer look at specific grave marker groupings, including that of legendary western guide Mitch Bouyer, and stepping onto Calhoun Hill beyond the roadside pull-out to closer inspect the area to the southeast, which is a historic American Indian firing position known as Henryville. Tourists are able to identify and recognize actual historic locations, and they desire to visit them.

### **Social constructions**

In addition to desiring physical access to specific historic locations, tourists embraced the greater representative locational perspectives offered from the staged confines of the Battlefield tour road, as well as its numerous vehicle pull-outs and viewpoints. The Battlefield tour road, which runs along historic Battle Ridge through the length of the site, is not a historic site feature, but rather a modern method of vehicle access created by Battlefield management in the 1940s to provide tourists with prescribed viewshed and a representative form of locational authenticity from the comfort of their vehicles. The Battlefield tour road holds social value as a common and comfortable way to view the site. Experientially, tourists enjoyed that the site offers them a representative view of much of the Battlefield from the tour road. Interview participants Ackison, Boyle, and Huber, as well as online reviewer Rood spoke of being glad to have driven the touring road in general terms, enjoying the opportunity to view the Battlefield landscape at large. The aforementioned respondents praised the tour road, not as a strictly historical feature or intimately moving experience, but as a functional medium created to easily view locations.

O'Connor (online reviewer) also praised the roadway, noting "Driving along the four-and-a-half miles gives you a good perspective of the entire area." After detailing her experience visiting the site, Gilbert (interviewee) singled out the driving tour as something she had yet to do, but absolutely could not miss because of the perspectives it could offer of a number of historic locations within the short time she had allowed herself to visit the Battlefield. Bruns (interviewee) also praised the general landscape views offered on the Battlefield tour road: "Its wide open, you've got a great opportunity to view all of the land, it's not as if you're a great distance from anything, you've got a terrific view of the lay of the land." Huber (interviewee) specifically acknowledged the modern value of the tour road to experiences with locational authenticity: "Put all this modern stuff further away. The touring road is good because some people cannot walk. My legs and knees are getting bad, but I'm going to walk it anyway." Darris also reflected on the modern practicality of the tour road:

I'm undecided whether I'll drive back out there [to the south end of the Battlefield] or not, just because it seems so sacrilegious to drive. But anyway, I think for people with disabilities it's probably important that they be able to access it by vehicle, but you know, it's so American to drive through and say, 'I've been there.' (Darris – interviewee)

### **Individual meaning making**

Tourists utilized the presentation of locational authenticity to make individual meaning during their experiences at the Little Bighorn Battlefield. Comparable to experiences with forms of personage authenticity, locational authenticity improved individual perceived understandings of what transpired historically, in this instance by allowing tourists to imagine the Battle at actual locations. Respondents emphasized the importance of seeing the 'actual spot' where historic events occurred in their experiences in terms of individually understanding the event. Kimm (interviewee) reported that visiting Calhoun Hill helped him better understand the specific fighting and that went on there. Similarly Stafford's (online reviewer) understanding of the Battle was improved by viewing the sites unique topography first-hand.

In addition to viewing historic locations, tourists also favourably mentioned that physically being at the places where history happened helped them better understand the event. Detailing his hike on Deep Ravine Trail, Henderson (interviewee) reported that the historic

location had improved his perceived understanding of the Battle, “You’re literally walking back up the ravine and you’re seeing, you can just kind of get it in your head, oh they’re retreating. Oh they’re dying.” Visiting historic locations helped Baker (interviewee) comprehend the Battle better. He reported, “To actually be on the site where it all happened. You can just imagine what happened here all those years ago.” Barth (interviewee) commented that his favourite part of visiting the Battlefield had been “Coming up here [Last Stand Hill] and actually being on the spot.” This sentiment was reiterated by Huber (interviewee) who said, “I’d never been here before and wanted to experience this. It sends a chill up your spine, thinking you stood in the place that these guys did.” Forbes (interviewee) also commented on how the different perspectives offered by walking trails contributed positively to his comprehension of Battle events:

You can go down the Keogh trail, they’ve got that open, that’s neat. You couldn’t always do that...I think that’s excellent [Deep Ravine trail], that gives you a different perspective down there... there are places on that trail [Deep Ravine] that are so lonesome. You get down there and look up and you can’t see Last Stand Hill. (Forbes – Interviewee)

In an objective sense it is nearly impossible for modern tourists to understand the experience of historic combatants. What happened at historic locations, precisely who occupied them, and at what point is conjectural within Battle studies. However, locational authenticity in terms of both seeing and accessing a historic location allows tourists to better individually imagine what went on in that location.

### **Contextual Authenticity**

Contextual authenticity refers to the unchanged greater environmental setting in which the Battlefield is situated, pertaining to managerial influence, historic preservation, and a lack of on-site commercialization (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). Little Bighorn Battlefield presents contextual authenticity through historic preservation within its boundaries, accepting the developments that have taken place in order to facilitate tourism visitation. The Battlefield is also free of invasive commercial undertakings. Experiences pertaining to contextual authenticity were the most frequently mentioned amongst respondents, who valued historically preserved

landscapes, could recognize and accept on-site development to a certain extent, and made their own meaning with regard to better comprehending the Battle.

### **Historical accuracy**

Respondents singled out Battlefield preservation as a distinguishable element of their experiences with contextual authenticity. In this experiential realm of authenticity, preserved historic landscapes represent the interest of historical accuracy in the negotiation of authenticity. A concentration of tourists praised the level of preservation at the site outright: interviewees Abbotts, Barth, Berwald, Darris, Brogan, Davis, Gilbert, and Hutter, as well as online reviewers Smith and Mason, complimented the historic preservation and enjoyed that the natural setting reflected 1876 conditions. The condition of the natural environment is a focus for heritage tourists, including Stafford (online reviewer) who was interested in the site's natural geography, Forbes (interviewee) who spoke about the historic weather conditions, and in the cases of Kimm (interviewee) and Ackison (interviewee) even the type of grass on the field. James (interviewee) applied his historical knowledge to conclude that the Battlefield is "very much [now] as it was then." Knecht (interviewee) similarly commented, "It's the same now as it was then. It's the same terrain, the same everything and I think that's fantastic... The place hasn't changed a bit." Chapman (interviewee) hoped that the high degree of historic preservation would persist, stating "I hope this is preserved like this for eternity." When specifically petitioned as to what he had enjoyed most about visiting the Battlefield, Ackison (interviewee) passionately spoke about the historical context of the site: "It's the surroundings. It's the nature around it. The grass. The smell. It's the sagebrush. It's the view of the Little Bighorn River below. It's the view of the distant mountains."

Undoubtedly the Battlefield has changed, the roadway and modern buildings have altered the historic context, and the field itself cannot be qualified as objectively authentic, yet respondents indicated that respect to historical accuracy through natural preservation was important to their experiences. Respondents made a clear distinction between historic preservation and modern development, stressing that while the site was staged with tourism infrastructure, historic representation was still fundamental. Connor (interviewee) reflected that historic preservation was important while conceding, "There was a lot of damage done before they took a responsible attitude towards the place, but I think it's well preserved." Forbes



(interviewee) stated, “They’ve talked about widening the road up here [on Battle Ridge] but I don’t see how they could. Think of the artefacts that were lost when they levelled this [the current tour road area].” Thompson (online reviewer) remarked, “Other than the few buildings on the Battlefield, this place has changed very little since June 25, 1876.” Murphy (online reviewer) also acknowledged modern elements: “The general appearance of much of this land remains as it was in 1876 except, of course, the nearby roads, fences, buildings, etcetera.” Heritage tourists are able to differentiate modern site elements from those that represent preservation, and desire to see history presented at the Battlefield.

### **Social constructions**

While respondents were eager to praise preservation efforts and speak to the importance of preserving the historic landscape, modern on-site developments were a sensitive issue. Respondents widely acknowledged that the site is not an objective representation of the Battlefield, but rather a place has been staged, managed, and altered over time in order to facilitate their own desire to visit the site and celebrate the Battle. When petitioned as to the extent of Battlefield development, tourists acknowledged that forms of limited development are necessary to facilitate their visitation. Baker (interviewee) commented that the modern features of the Battlefield ultimately took away from his experience, but that he understood they were necessary to support tourist visitation. Henderson (interviewee) remarked on the obligation to balance the social needs of modern tourists, while maintaining well-preserved historical landscapes at the Battlefield: “With National Parks and National Monuments its always a balance, if you leave it completely natural then nobody can go see it. Then no sees it and there’s no educational value. They’ve done the balance here pretty good.” Hutter (interviewee) also recognized that on-site development and contextual alterations have been social necessities:

You have to have those things [modern developments] to draw people. You don’t want to over-develop the place, you’ve got to keep it to a limit, but you’ve got to meet the needs of the public, cause their spending keeps it going. (Hutter – interviewee)

While acknowledging the role that practical tourism visitation has played in altering the historic site, many respondents also commented that they strongly felt as though a development

equilibrium had been reached and that further modern developments at the Battlefield would not fit within their zeitgeist as heritage tourists. Interviewees Barth and Farrell reported seeing no reason to expand the modern facilities beyond their current level. Boyle (interviewee) added, “I think it’s fine [the current level of development]. I don’t think they should add anything else though.” When asked about the prevalence of modern developments on the Battlefield, Knecht (interviewee) urged that any further development would compromise the site and stressed, “No expansion. No more modern development.” Davis strongly underscored these sentiments:

I would not be in favour of expanding facilities on the Battlefield. All that’s going to do is encourage more people to stay in their cars and drive around and do the usual superficial sort of visit... I think this here [current developments] is probably as good a compromise as we can come up with. (Davis – interviewee)

Commenting on what he felt was actually a shortage of parking facilities on the Battlefield, Ackison also expressed the opinion that no further on-site expansion should occur, advancing:

How would you fit more roads or parking? Here on the Battlefield I wouldn’t know myself where to fit more parking where you wouldn’t destroy the surroundings and I think the surroundings should be kept as they are, as natural and as undisturbed. (Ackison – interviewee)

While recognizing the need for modern facilities, some respondents also felt as though tourism facilities should be relocated. Bromwell (interviewee) felt as though necessary modern amenities, such as the visitor centre, should be relocated further away from where the fighting occurred. Bruns (interviewee) suggested that current visitor facilities were inadequate and should be expanded, offering the solution that “they should open up more land. Not on the Battlefield, but outside near the Battlefield.”

While tourists were able to accept the practicality of the limited modern developments that already exist on the Battlefield amid their desire to see the historic context preserved, data also indicated that facets of incongruent contextual modernity took away from tourist’s

experiences and overshadowed preservation efforts. Tourists specifically mentioned the negative impacts of heavy site traffic on their experiences. Bromwell (interviewee) felt as though large recreational vehicles served to clutter the site and should be parked outside of Battlefield boundaries, at a location from which tourists could then be shuttled to the site. Farrell (interviewee) also noted that the large number of recreational vehicles cluttering the site during his visit detracted from his experience. Reflecting negatively on vehicle congestion, return-visitor Bruns (interviewee) negatively predicted, “Cars will be parked two miles away on the 25<sup>th</sup> [the Battle anniversary], down to the bottom of the entrance road.” The noise of vehicle traffic was continuously observed disrupting visitation. Each day visitors were observed struggling to hear Ranger presentations and were visibly upset, turning en masse to look when loud traffic drove past on the touring road, located just a short distance to the rear of the presentation space. Henderson’s only negative comment on his experience also centred on vehicle congestion:

I’m kind of amazed at all these people dragging their enormous trailers up here and down the road. There could be somewhere else they could leave them... with all the trailers and RV’s this place could definitely be a little ugly. (Henderson – interviewee)

Tourists desire preserved historic landscapes and could accept limited modern features that serve to facilitate their visits. However, respondents reported no instance in which they felt that the construction of modern features should expand, and further reported that experiences were disrupted by incongruent contextual modernity.

### **Individual meaning making**

Tourists consistently reported that while contextual preservation was desired, it was not the primary focus of their meaning making experiences. Rather, the prevalence of modern site features regularly disrupted tourists’ meaning making with forms of contextual authenticity. Davis (interviewee) reported that other visitors who had violated Battlefield rules by having their dog out of their vehicle served to diminished his experience. Huber (interviewee) was adamant in his disdain for modernity and reported that the paved parking lot on Last Stand Hill spoiled his appreciation of the site: “I don’t like the parking lot this close. This is an attraction that people

want to come see, but it's a sacred spot and this [the proximity of the parking lot] desecrates that.”

The contextual authenticity of the area that surrounds primary Battlefield landholdings also played a role in how tourists made meaning from their experiences. Though the locations discussed are not owned or managed by the National Park Service, tourists indicated that they played a role in the way they experience and negotiate the contextual authenticity of the Battlefield. While the Battlefield itself is deliberately protected and preserved by the National Park Service, the same cannot be said of the surrounding area, which has been marred by modernity. An abandoned gas station and the faded red and white façade of a long-closed Kentucky Fried Chicken are situated just beyond the Battlefield entrance. In the valley below the Battlefield a railroad shadows the heavily trafficked Interstate-90, where the American Indian encampment once stood and the noise of passing locomotives sounding their horns was observed disrupting Battlefield visitors multiple times a day. Darris and Hutter (interviewees) each noted that developments beyond the Battlefield had clouded their understanding of historic event. Darris admitted, “I know it was huge [the American Indian encampment] but if there was a way to make it more discernable, I think that might be kind of interesting. There's lots of traffic down there with the highway and everything, it's just hard to imagine.” Hutter similarly remarked, “Can you think there were like 20,000 horses down there with the camp [historic grazing area west of the Battlefield]. Can you see 20,000 horses down there on the farmland? It's hard to imagine.” James (interviewee) negatively singled out a specific nearby development that bothered him during his experience, stating “Down at the bottom of the frontage road, that Conoco station. That's where [Major] Reno first crossed [the river] and it's a Conoco station now. I can't believe that.” Tourists recognize and appreciate forms of historic preservation and are willing to accept limited modern developments to facilitate visitation; however, the overshadowing presence of modernity disrupted individual meaning making with contextual authenticity.

## **Chapter 5 – Discussion**

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to explore heritage tourists' experiences with negotiated authenticity at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. Unlike objective authenticity, which stresses historical accuracy in a strict sense and is difficult to reconcile theoretically, and constructive authenticity, which completely discounts history while allowing anything perceived to be authentic to be so (Wang, 1999), negotiated authenticity strives to strike a pragmatic balance that advocates for aspects of both historical representation and social constructivism in determining what is authentic (Chhabra, 2012). The experiences of heritage tourists who possess an interest in the history of the Battle in each of the five categorical representations of authenticity – object-related, factual, personage, locational, and contextual – demonstrate that negotiated authenticity is experienced in three forms: 1) historical accuracy, 2) greater social constructions and 3) individual meaning making. This chapter will present a discussion of the key findings and theoretical implications of this research, introduce practical managerial implications, make suggestions for future research, and acknowledge the limitations of this research.

Historical accuracy is a foundational way that tourists experienced negotiated authenticity at the Little Bighorn Battlefield. In each of the five categorical representations of authenticity, tourists stressed the interest they had in experiencing authenticity that involved real, fact-based historical presentation. Incorrect Battlefield grave marker placements in relation to the 1876 Battle did not matter to tourists, because tourists were able to locate historical value by applying their existing knowledge of the site to assess the objects, stressing the value of the 1890 placements to the history of the Battlefield beyond the fighting in 1876. This demonstrates that a singular, objective version of history need not be reflected, as the value of history changes over time (Chronis, 2008). Tourists also appreciated that the grave markers represented actual persons and had historical underpinnings related to their placement. Historical accuracy was also an important feature of experiences with negotiated forms of factual and personage authenticity. Heritage tourists who possess the background knowledge necessary to make informed judgements as to the accuracy of the historical narrative were satisfied that when available, historical facts and true information relating to both the event itself and the persons involved in it were presented by the National Park Service. This supports Chronis and Hampton (2008), who

found that Battlefield tourists seek accuracy within the historical narrative. In the single instance when a respondent was displeased with factual authenticity, it was because he felt as though historical accuracy was not well represented, further highlighting the importance of historical accuracy to experiencing negotiated authenticity. Tourists desired truthful information on both famous and obscure historic people associated with the Battle and expressed little interest in personage myths. Visiting actual historic locations was an important way for tourists to experience a sense of historically accurate authenticity. Respondents used their knowledge of the site to identify historical locations, and desired to access as many as possible, arranging private excursions and even trespassing to satisfy the desire for historic land access. This supports previous research indicating that visiting actual historic locations is an important element of heritage tourism experiences (Chronis & Hampton, 2008; Dunkley et al., 2011). Heritage tourists' preoccupation with historically accurate forms of authenticity was further reflected by the desire to see the environmental context of the Battlefield preserved to Battle-time conditions and free of overbearing modern features. This supports the importance of preserving historic places (Black, 2012; Chronis & Hampton, 2008). The data further indicated that contextual preservation was a concern both inside of site boundaries and for the greater surrounding area as well; as the historic Battle was not confined to the current National Park Service land boundaries, tourists' interest in preserved environments was also not confined to these boundaries. In each of the five categories that tourists may experience battlefield authenticity, a historically accurate sense of authenticity is desired.

Heritage tourists also experienced forms of authenticity beyond knowable historical accuracy. In each of the five categories that authenticity may be experienced tourists indicated their willingness to embrace greater socially constructed meanings associated with the site as authentic. Experiencing the Battlefield objects, tourists embraced the greater socially constructed meanings of the grave markers as objects that memorialize once-living men and evoke feelings of sadness and remembrance. Regardless of if the graves were correctly positioned in a historically accurate sense, or were completely spurious, tourists appreciated the importance of being able to see commemorative representations of where men died. Tourists also embraced the socially constructed meaning of the factual narrative, which has developed over time and now celebrates the participation and outcomes of all of the cultures associated with the conflict. The socially constructed meaning of the Battle, which recognizes the fight as a watershed event for

both participant cultures with lingering consequences, made tourists feel as if they had a more comprehensive understanding of Battle. Similarly, experiences with the presentation of historic persons welcomed the socially held importance of commemorating and memorializing participants from both sides of the conflict for their sacrifices and participation. Even tourists who subjectively felt as though persons from one side of the conflict were over represented stressed the importance of honouring both sides. Responses such as “It was good to see the Native Americans now have some representation here,” “I would like to see more notation to the Native Americans,” and “I think there was a sacrifice made on both sides” demonstrate heritage tourists desire to experience socially constructed forms of authenticity. Tourists accepted that the site is not only a battlefield, but also a tourism site. Tourists praised the views of different Battlefield locations that have been staged and made available to them through the planning and management efforts of the National Park Service. While these staging efforts often restrict physical access to historic locations, they do offer mediated views of several significant historic locations, which tourists experienced as authentic. Additionally, in the context of contextual authenticity, tourists were willing to acknowledge that while historic preservation was of the utmost importance, their very presence altered the appearance of the site and directly caused modern development. Tourists can accept parking lots, roads, and restrooms as part of an authentic experience because they realize that beyond being a historic site, that a battlefield is also a tourism site. What is unclear is the degree of modern developments that tourists are willing to accept. Tourists are conflicted when out-of-place modernity threatens historical representation and would much rather see the Battlefield preserved than developed.

Tourists also imaged a sense of authenticity individually. Individual meaning making represents the subjective mental outcomes that tourists’ conjured during their experiences at the Battlefield. While embracing social constructivism and valuing historical accuracy, tourists also use their minds to fill-in knowledge gaps and process individual mental outcomes. The outcomes of these experiences in each of the five categories of Battlefield authenticity relate in general to an improved mental understanding of the historic event. Viewing Battlefield objects that represent historic positions tourists felt as though the Battle was being brought to life and that they better understood what had happened. This sense of authenticity supports Chronis and Hampton (2008), who found that Battlefield objects helped visitors better visualize the historic conflict. The quality, fact-based Battle narrative that also embraced multiple cultural meanings

allowed tourists to make meaning from their experiences in the form of learning. Learning was both an explicitly desired and a pleasant outcome of tourists' individual mental experiences negotiating factual authenticity. These findings further support learning as a motivation of heritage tourism visitation (Chhabra et al., 2003; Kerstetter et al., 2001). Making meaning from their experiences with personage authenticity, tourists reported that they understood the experiences of historic participants in the Battle and had gained an appreciation of what it was like to be there in 1876. This of course is a near impossible objectively authentic experience, but is a possibility within the meaning-making realm of negotiated authenticity. Tourists meaning making with contextual forms of authenticity demonstrate the importance of balancing both social constructivism and historical accuracy, not necessarily as individual meaning making is a direct output of these forces, but as a pleasant experiential outcome. When non-essential modern features such as traffic noise, vehicle congestion, pets, and surrounding modern developments overshadowed the historical context of the Battlefield, tourists experienced dissonance with authenticity were able to derive little positive meaning from their experiences. Appropriately, it has been suggested that the more historically accurate the greater natural context is, the better connection visitors will share with the site (Chronis & Hampton 2008).

The historic value of Battlefield elements, socially constructed meanings, and individual meaning making each matter to heritage tourists' experiences with negotiated authenticity. However, embracing social constructivism does not come at the sacrifice of historical accuracy within experiences. The only negative comments tourists had about their experiences at the Little Bighorn Battlefield centred on perceived shortcomings with regards to historical accuracy. When historical accuracy is compromised heritage tourists are unable to enjoy negotiated authenticity. This is evidenced in the realm of contextual authenticity where historic preservation was praised as an essential and attractive site feature that was also being threatened by the propensity of modern elements that tourist visitation itself has caused to be developed. The lack of historical representation skewed the personal meanings that were made from the experience wherein the overbearing contextual modernity of the Battlefield made it difficult for tourists to imagine how the greater environment may have looked during the Battle. Individual contextual outcomes focused on the noise and congestion of vehicle traffic, rather than better comprehending the historic environment. The interest that heritage tourists have in historically accurate site elements



is wide reaching and suggests that genuine versions of history do feature prominently in heritage tourism experiences with negotiated authenticity.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Authenticity is not a concept that can singularly be defined by the principals of objective authenticity or constructive authenticity. Heritage tourists experience authenticity in forms of accurate history, greater perceived meanings, and individual understandings. An authentic sense of historical accuracy, while not strictly objectively authentic, is important to heritage tourists' experiences. Heritage tourists possess a deep interest in the history of the sites they visit and apply this knowledge to each categorical representation of authenticity they experience. An authentic sense of place is also important to heritage tourists' experiences. Heritage tourists can identify specific historic locations; desire to see them preserved and to physically access them. However, authenticity is not bound to forms of historical accuracy. Socially constructed meanings are also experienced as authentic. Heritage tourists are conscious of the greater authentic value that a site holds in a beyond measurable history: that a battlefield is also a graveyard, and a place of cultural exchange, and a place of heroism and sacrifice, as well as a tourism site. Finally, authenticity is not anything that a tourism site can singularly prescribe. Serious heritage tourists, while interested in the history of an event, possess uneven bases of knowledge, obtained from different sources, and have diverse understandings of a single historical event. Tourists imagine their own personal sense of authenticity based upon their own understandings, believing that they better comprehend the historical event. Due to the range of authentic experiences that heritage tourists enjoy, negotiated authenticity may be the most suitable theory to describe them.

### **Managerial Implications**

In October 2014, the National Park Service and the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument initiated a public engagement process to discuss amendments to the 1986 General Management Plan (National Park Service, 2014). As the National Park Service prepares to recommend changes to the General Management Plan, including considerations for an alternative museum and visitor center facility, it has acknowledged a need to better understand the experience of visitors to the Battlefield, explicitly stating (National Park Service, 2014, para. 5):

The National Park Service once believed that in all national park units it was best to keep buildings close to main attractions, such as Last Stand Hill. More recently, the National Park Service has focused on restoring historic landscapes. Would moving the visitor center enhance or undermine the visitor experience?

In response to this query, data indicated that although some limited modern developments are acceptable on the site, tourists were overwhelmingly not in favor of expanding modern facilities on the Battlefield. Contextual authenticity is important to tourism experiences at the Little Bighorn Battlefield. The most common suggestion made by respondents in implicit relation to the question posed by the National Park Service was that any additional developments be added nearby, but not directly on Battlefield ground. Tourists indicated that they greatly value the preserved historic landscape and felt as though it should remain as untouched as possible. Modern detractors such as buildings, parking lots, vehicle congestion, and noise are detriments to the negotiation of contextual authenticity that diminish the personal meaning tourists are able to imagine during their experiences.

With regard to the negotiation of locational authenticity, tourists indicated that they felt their experiences would be improved should more Battlefield locations become physically accessible. The number of illegal trails that run throughout the Battlefield, as well as the tourists observed and reporting straying from them support tourists' desire to physically access more Battlefield land. This represents the desire of tourists to experience historical accuracy as they negotiate locational authenticity. Tourists specifically expressed interest in accessing different Battlefield locations including the 'flats' beyond the modern cemetery, the North Ford area, Greasy Grass Ridge, and Sharpshooters Ridge. The National Park Service should offer more opportunities to heritage tourists to physically access specific historic locations in organized manners, such as seasonal trails, which allow for greater access to those with a serious interest in the location, yet can mitigate illegal user-impacts on natural resources.

### **Future Research**

Future research should further explore the phenomenology of negotiated authenticity in additional tourism and battlefield settings. Additional studies in different tourism contexts will further enhance our understanding of how negotiated authenticity is experienced. In battlefield

contexts, where different sites are distinct in terms of history, presentation, and preservation, validating the findings of this research would further our understanding of how heritage tourists experience negotiated authenticity. In contrast to relatively pristine battlefields such as the site of the Fetterman Fight in Wyoming, data from heavily developed sites such as the Alamo in urban San Antonio, Texas may yield valuable findings as to how authenticity is negotiated and experienced by tourists.

From a demand perspective, future research should also examine specialization within the heritage tourism enterprise. Multiple respondents indicated that the visiting the Little Bighorn Battlefield was part of a larger form of leisure engagement for them, wherein they read books, participate in online discussions, attend annual symposiums, volunteer to interpret at the Battlefield, and visit related historical sites. Although limited research has been conducted on heritage tourism specialization (Kerstetter et al., 2001) this phenomenon merits further exploration.

Future research should also consider the social and economic outcomes of repeat heritage visitation. As the tourism adage goes, sites should covet tourists willing to ‘stay longer, spend more.’ Several respondents in this study reported that they had visited the Battlefield numerous times; some respondents specified that they had visited 6, 12, 15, and as many as 19 times. Tourists also reported spending anywhere from several hours to multiple days visiting the site. Data indicated that both many first time visitors, and those who had visited previously, desired to return to the Battlefield again. The impacts of this visitation are deserving of additional inquiry.

### **Limitations**

The findings of this research are supported by the validity offered by the case study methodology, which draws upon multiple sets of data to address the research question (Veal, 2011). However, this research is not without its limitations. The limited representativeness of a single case study restricts the generalizability and applicability of the research results beyond the Little Bighorn Battlefield (Veal, 2011). Future research should explore these findings in additional research locations, where the negotiation of authenticity may take on different forms. This research is also limited temporally, offering an understanding of tourism experiences only at the time the research was conducted (Veal, 2011). As management policy, land access, and the physical appearance of the Little Bighorn Battlefield change, so to will tourism experiences with negotiated authenticity.

My own historical interest in the research location withstanding, the interview guide developed for this research was intended to not influence responses as to what was, or was not, 'authentic' by any definition. The presence of the researcher during the interview process, however, may have influenced respondents, causing them to limit their criticisms of the Battlefield or misreport their experiences. Small-scale qualitative sampling was also a limitation of this research that diminished the generalizability of the findings. From the perspective of operationalizing the research, while respondents on-site were typically eager to share their experiences visiting the Battlefield and participate in the research, four potential respondents were unwilling to sign a waiver, and a fifth was unwilling to commit his or her time to participate. These instances meant disqualifying potentially valuable respondents from participating. The semi-structured interview participant sample was also disproportionately composed of male participants, at a ratio of 22:1. Though the heritage tourism population on-site appeared to be heavily represented by older men from an observational standpoint, it is still conceivable that this sample did not accurately represent the heritage tourism market on site. While the Little Bighorn Battlefield does maintain visitor count statistics, these are not segregated by gender.

### **Sustainable Leisure Management**

This research has immediate implications relating to the field of sustainable leisure management. First, from the perspective of environmental sustainability, original heritage resources are extremely finite. At the Little Bighorn Battlefield this has been evidenced by the loss of artefacts due to road construction on Battle ridge, physical alterations influencing interpretive conclusions, and the inability of tourists to visualize the American Indian village against the traffic on Interstate 90. There is only one Little Bighorn Battlefield and once the historic environment is altered it is forever compromised. Notions of authenticity that disregard the value of historical originality, such as constructive authenticity, discount the emphasis that heritage tourists at the Battlefield focused on original historic locations. In terms of influencing change, heritage sites should move to present and protect elements of historical accuracy. The sustainable use of historic environments in a manner that ensures their viable use in the future dictates that these malleable places be protected and that a level of natural historical integrity be maintained.

From the perspective of social sustainability, this research clarifies what type of authenticity is socially sustainable to the heritage tourism market by suggesting that tourists undertaking heritage tourism as a form of recreation desire a negotiated sense of authenticity. Culturally, heritage tourists yearn for elements of both the past and present, valuing historically accurate properties, modern significances, and the opportunity to make their own meanings. Socially sustainable representations of authenticity in heritage tourism should embrace modern cultural meanings, but should also accurately present the history that led to those meanings, blending historical accuracy with social constructivism and allowing for individual meaning making. Finally, tourist funding and advocacy often sustain heritage tourism operations. A better understanding of what theoretical view of authenticity is socially sustainable in heritage tourism allows for a better understanding of the types of experiences that the heritage market desires. This permits heritage sites to be managed in an economically sustainable way that better addresses the needs of the market and is financially viable.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A – Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

#### **Core interview questions**

- 1) Can you describe your visit to the Battlefield today?
- 2) What about visiting the Battlefield did you enjoy?
- 3) What about visiting the Battlefield did you not enjoy?
- 4) What are your thoughts on the modern developments here at the Battlefield?
- 5) Is there anything else you would like to say about the Little Bighorn Battlefield?

#### **Probing questions**

What areas of the Battlefield did you visit?

Was there anything you were hoping to do that you were unable to?

What could be improved?

What are your thoughts on the grave markers?

What are your thoughts on preservation?

Have you enjoyed the way information is presented?

## **Appendix B – Semi-Structured Interview Oral Recruitment Script**

Hello, my name is Jeff. I am a graduate student from Vancouver Island University. I am currently doing my masters thesis on accurate historical representation in tourism experiences. The goal of the study is to better understand the importance of accurate historical representation in visitor experiences. I would like to hear about your experience visiting the Battlefield today and have a brief set of general questions that I would like to ask you. The interview will take approximately 15-25 minutes to complete.

Your participation in my research will be completely anonymous; you will not be identified publically in any manner and you are free to withdraw at any time. The information that you provide will be used in the completion of my master's thesis.

### **If 'Yes'**

Thank you. Is it alright with you if I record our conversation with my audio device? I would like to use the recording later to verify your answers. The audio will not be shared with anyone and will be destroyed once I have completed my research.

I also have a consent form for you to sign, as well as a copy for yourself, to provide you with information on my research; my contact information; and details on how the information you provide me will be used.

Are you still interested in participating?

Following interview: Thank you so much for your time and participation. Have a nice day.

### **If 'No'**

Thank you. Have a nice day.

## Appendix C – Research Consent Form

### Objective Authenticity in Heritage Tourism Experiences

Jeff Wahl, Master's Student  
Sustainable Leisure Management  
Vancouver Island University  
Email: jeffwahl37@gmail.com  
Phone: (403)-952-5489

Pete Parker, Ph.D., Supervisor  
Department of Recreation and Tourism  
Vancouver Island University  
Email: pete.parker@viu.ca  
Phone: (250)-753-3245 ext 2259

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The purpose of this study is to explore the importance of historical authenticity in heritage tourism visitor experiences. This research is being conducted as part of a thesis in order to satisfy my requirements as a student in the Master of Arts in Sustainable Leisure Management program at Vancouver Island University. I am not an employee of the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument or the United States National Park Service. I currently hold a permit to conduct research at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, permit number LIBI-2015-SCI-0001.

You have been asked to participate in a semi-structured interview that will last between 15 and 25 minutes. Questions relate to your experience visiting the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. Any personal information provided will not be made public and your identity will be anonymized in the research results. There are no risks or harms associated with participation in this research. The potential benefit of this research is the improved understanding and management of historic resources for visitor use, including the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. With your permission I will record your interview using a digital audio recording device. The audio will be transferred and stored in a secure computer at my residence and will only be used for the purpose of this research. The digital files will be deleted following the completion of this research, planned for December 2015. In the final thesis report no quotations will be used that directly identify you as a participant. Information that will identify you as a participant in this research will not be made public at any time and will be held in strict confidentiality; only myself and thesis supervisor Dr. Pete Parker will have access to the raw research data. No personal participant information will be supplied to the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may ask any questions that you have at any time. You may choose not to answer any question for any reason. You may withdraw your participation at any time for any reason without penalty. Should you choose to withdraw your participation, all information that you have provided will be removed from the study. If you have any concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study please contact the Vancouver Island University Review Ethics Officer by telephone, at 250-753-3245 extension 2665, or by email at reb@viu.ca. If you have any questions about this research project, or would like more information, please feel free to contact the primary researcher.

I have read the above form, understand the information read, and understand that I can ask questions or withdraw at any time. I consent to participate in today's research study.

Participant Signature

Date

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