Form 10-300
(Rev. 6-72)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY – NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Wyoming
COUNTY: Hot Springs
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE: NOV 2 1974

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1. NAME

COMMON: Bates Battlefield

AND/OR HISTORIC: Bates Battlefield

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: S½ Section 1, Section 12 T41N R90W

CITY OR TOWN: N/A

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: First

STATE: Wyoming — CODE: 56

COUNTY: Hot Springs — CODE: 017

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP		STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
☐ District ☐ Building	☐ Public	Public Acquisition:	☐ Occupied	Yes:
☒ Site ☐ Structure	☐ Private	☐ In Process	☒ Unoccupied	☒ Restricted
☐ Object	☒ Both	☐ Being Considered	☐ Preservation work in progress	☐ Unrestricted
				☐ No

PRESENT USE *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

☒ Agricultural	☐ Government	☐ Park	☐ Transportation
☐ Commercial	☐ Industrial	☐ Private Residence	☐ Other *(Specify)*
☐ Educational	☐ Military	☐ Religious	☐ Comments
☐ Entertainment	☐ Museum	☐ Scientific	

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4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: See Continuation sheet

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:

STATE: Wyoming — CODE: 56

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: Hot Springs County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Thermopolis

STATE: Wyoming — CODE: 56

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Wyoming Recreation Commission Survey of Historic Sites, Markers & Mon.

DATE OF SURVEY: 1967 (1973 revised) ☐ Federal ☒ State ☐ County ☐ Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Wyoming Recreation Commission

STREET AND NUMBER: 604 East 25th Street

CITY OR TOWN: Cheyenne

STATE: Wyoming — CODE: 56

STATE: | COUNTY: | FOR NPS USE ONLY | ENTRY NUMBER | DATE

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	☒ Excellent	☐ Good	☐ Fair	☐ Deteriorated	☐ Ruins	☐ Unexposed
	(Check One)		(Check One)			
	☒ Altered	☐ Unaltered	☐ Moved	☒ Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL *(if known)* PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Bates Battle took place in Hot Springs County in North-central Wyoming. The battlefield lies in the southeast corner of the Big Horn Basin, in the dissected, mountainous terrain where the Big Horn Mountains merge into the Owl Creek Mountains. The lodges of the Arapaho Indian village which came under attack were strung along a narrow valley situated in a general north-south direction. From the sides of the valley emanate several springs, their combined flow forming Bates Creek. This small creek joins waters flowing from other drainage systems in the southeast Big Horn Basin, and together they form the Nowood River. The course of Bates Creek in its headwater ravine is at first to the south, but gradually it is forced eastward and then northward to join the Nowood which snakes its way along the southeast rim of the basin, ultimately to empty into the Big Horn River at Manderson in Big Horn County*. Less than a mile north of where Bates Creek has its origins, and over a small divide, No Water Creek also finds its origins and flows northwest to join the Big Horn River at Winchester in Washakie County. A short distance to the west of the battlefield and over another divide is another watershed where Bridger Creek is born. From that watershed Bridger Creek wends its way south to join Badwater Creek, which in turn empties into Boysen Reservoir. Of course, at the time the Bates Battle was fought Boysen Reservoir was still the Wind River. Thus the location of the battlefield, where an Arapaho band chose to make its camp, is within the ridges which divide three watersheds. The waters of all three are east of the Continental Divide and eventually empty into the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, and finally the Gulf of Mexico.

The near future may bring significant changes to the area of the Bates Battlefield, but except for the addition of four small ponds used for watering stock, and a small wooden shack, the battlefield has remained essentially unchanged since the historic clash took place almost 100 years ago. The west side of the valley in which the Arapaho lodges were located is a slightly irregular slope whose grassy sides form a gradual approach to Bates Creek below. The center of the village was probably just below Dead Indian Spring, near which the main valley is joined from the southwest by another valley or ravine. Across, or to the southeast of this ravine, is a hill which further encloses Bates Creek, forcing the stream to flow in an eastward direction. In order to hit the Arapahos in the flank of their village Captain Bates probably had to descend from the northwest, down the grassy slopes previously mentioned. The east side of the valley is formed by the more angular slope of Battle Mountain. This thinly-vegetated prominence rises about 700 feet above the floor of the valley and is capped

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* The Wind River receives a name change as it issues from the Wind River Canyon, where it is called the Big Horn River.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

- ☐ Pre-Columbian
- ☐ 15th Century
- ☐ 16th Century
- ☐ 17th Century
- ☐ 18th Century
- ☒ 19th Century
- ☐ 20th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) *(If Applicable and Known)* 1874

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

- ☐ Aboriginal
- ☐ Prehistoric
- ☐ Historic
- ☐ Agriculture
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Art
- ☐ Commerce
- ☐ Communications
- ☐ Conservation
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Engineering
- ☐ Industry
- ☐ Invention
- ☐ Landscape Architecture
- ☐ Literature
- ☒ Military
- ☐ Music
- ☐ Political
- ☐ Religion/Philosophy
- ☐ Science
- ☐ Sculpture
- ☐ Social/Humanitarian
- ☐ Theater
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Urban Planning
- ☐ Other *(Specify)* _____

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

In July, 1874 at least two significant events in the history of the West will observe their centennial anniversary: the Bates Battle fought on Independence Day, July 4, 1874, and the Custer Expedition through the Black Hills, an expedition which left Fort Abraham Lincoln (Bismark, North Dakota) two days prior to the Bates Battle. The two events will not be treated together in this essay but it may be mentioned that both events fit into a particular historical framework, of which a major concept is the rapid advance of the white man's culture into the American Far West with its effects upon native populations. Both events relate specifically to relations between the High Plains Indians and the United States Army during a period which saw the last significant clashes between the two. Both the Bates Battle and Custer's Black Hills Expedition have been documented, but it would be appropriate at this time to prepare for their centennials by placing in the National Register of Historic Places historic sites relevant to those events.

There are more than a few accounts of the Bates Battle and no two are alike in every respect. Taken as a whole the various accounts reveal discrepancies on every substantial action relative to the battle: the motives for the fight; the incidents prior to, during and following the fight; and the results of the fight. The number of those who were attacked is disputable, as is the number of losses suffered by each side. In fact there seems to be more than one name for the conflict which has been called Bates Battle, the Battle of Young's Point, the Battle of Snake Mountain, and the Nowood Battle. Despite the morass into which one may easily fall if he attempts to trace out each incident of the battle, its basic outline is discernible. What follows is a description of events as related by several sources, although principal reliance is placed upon the reports of Captain Alfred E. Bates, Brigadier General Frank Robinson and Assistant Surgeon Thomas G. Maghee. Arapaho history relative to the battle, orally transmitted, has unfortunately not received much attention or interpretation, and there is little that is written expressing the Arapaho point of view.

For many years prior to the arrival of the white man in what is today the State of Wyoming, much of the southwestern part of the state was Shoshone Indian country. In the 1850's and until the late 1860's the home of this tribe centered upon the Upper Green River. The Northern Arapahos, who were traditional enemies of the Shoshones, settled mainly east and south

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Addendum

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY

CORNER	LATITUDE			LONGITUDE		
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	43°	33'	9"	107°	36'	53"
NE	43°	33'	9"	107°	35'	40"
SE	43°	31'	50"	107°	35'	40"
SW	43°	31'	50"	107°	36'	53"

OR

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES

LATITUDE			LONGITUDE		
Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
°	'	"	°	'	"

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 960 acres

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Mark Junge, Historian

ORGANIZATION: Wyoming Recreation Commission

DATE: Sept. 25, 73

STREET AND NUMBER: 605 East 25th Street

CITY OR TOWN: Cheyenne

STATE: Wyoming

CODE: 56

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐ State ☒ Local ☐

Name Paul H Westedt
Paul H. Westedt

Title Historic Preservation Officer
Wyoming

Date October 18, 1973

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date 11/20/74

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date 11-14-74

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

☆ U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1973—729-147/1442 3-1

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4. Owner or Property:

1. Norman & Kathleen Sanford
   Lucerne Route, Wyoming 82443

2. Orchard Ranch Limited
   % Robert W. Orchard
   Tensleep, Wyoming 82442

3. United States Department of the Interior
   administered by the Bureau of Land Management
   Worland District Office
   Worland, Wyoming 82401

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by white limestone. Large chunks of it have broken loose from the cap, fallen, and have come to rest here and there on the slope. These boulders and the rock fortress above them were sought by the Arapahos as the troopers and Shoshones charged into their village from the north and west. The rock-strewn height commands the valley below and was an obvious objective, a key to the battle in fact, for both attackers and attacked. At the bottom of the valley are no trees, only sagebrush and grass, which during the battle afforded no natural defense for the Arapahos or the military. The essential openness of the bed of the valley thus accounted for both the large number of Arapaho dead—probably those who could not quickly ascend the heights—and for the reason why the Bates command, once the Arapahos gained control of the heights, could not continue to suffer further losses, as the Arapahos rained death upon them from above.

Today the battlefield is accessible by several roads or trails which are too rough for a conventional automobile. But upon arriving at the battlesite, it is obvious that this remote ground has been visited by others, and is being utilized today. From the head of Bates Creek to Dead Indian Spring are spaced four, small reservoirs or watering ponds. Near the head of the ravine is also a small, frame building. The building, trails, springs and reservoirs and the presence, in the summer at least, of forty or fifty head of cattle evidence the livestock operations owned by the Sanford and Orchard ranches.

The deployment of forces, and the diverse actions which took place during the battle, described in the following Statement of Significance, determine the amount of land which ought to be included in the area which is to be labeled an historic place. Although the area which the designated site ought to encompass depends upon the interpretation of the battle, it is safe to assume that the lines describing one and one-half sections of land (Section 12 and half of Section 1) are adequate, minimum boundaries enclosing the site as much as it is possible for one to enclose a site where controversial events took place. Included within these boundaries, at least, is the terrain over which was fought the main action of the battle. The further significance of including this large area of land in the National Register is that Battle Mountain is underlain with zeolite, a sought-after mineral which is available by strip-mining techniques. A strip-mining operation upon or near the Bates Battlefield could damage not only the character of the historic terrain but could actually disrupt the ground which may yet contain artifacts from the battle, artifacts which may help us to understand and interpret the historic event which took place there in 1874.

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Statement of Significance - 2

of the bend of the North Platte River. However, by the late 1860's the location of the Northern Arapaho and Shoshone tribes had changed, bringing them into closer contact with one another.

The growing power and influence of the white man in the American Far West brought white and aboriginal into an increasingly smaller area, one result being that agreements were drawn up between these two major cultural groups. For example, treaties were made at Fort Laramie between whites and various Indian tribes in 1851 and 1868, and at Fort Bridger in 1863 and 1868. These treaties more or less determined spheres of influence for various tribes in Wyoming, including the Arapaho and Shoshone. Through the influence of Chief Washakie the Eastern Shoshones obtained in the Fort Bridger Treaty of 1868 an area known as the Wind River Reservation. The new home of this tribe was a large tract of land centering upon the Upper Wind River in west-central Wyoming. This reservation was originally much larger than it is today, but through treaties and cessions was reduced to its present size.

Since the Shoshone reservation was located in country over which the Arapahos once roamed, the latter felt that the land which was given to their enemy belonged just as much to them as to the Shoshones. Strict national boundaries, however, did not exist for the bands of High Plains Indians who, especially after the introduction of the horse, were nomadic and wandered far in order to obtain favorable hunting in what were considered traditional hunting grounds. Disputes between tribes such as the Shoshones on the one hand, and the Arapahos on the other, were common. On occasion they were provoked perhaps by territorial claims, but perhaps also because fighting was to them a tradition, a part of their way of life. Whatever the case may be, raids were not uncommonly staged against their enemies by these tribes, and this ought to be kept in mind when reflecting upon the causes of the Bates Battle.

The attempts of the United States Government to change the living habits of Indian tribes such as the Eastern Shoshone from that of a migratory to a sedentary nature were hampered by sporadic raids staged by the traditional enemies of the Shoshones—the Sioux, the Northern Cheyennes, and the Northern Arapahos. According to Historian James C. Murphy, the Arapahos tried hard to accommodate themselves to the incursion of the white man. However, bands of Arapahos did form temporary alliances with bands of Sioux and Northern Cheyennes for the purpose of raiding the Shoshones. Because of such raids the Shoshone Chief Washakie asked that protection be given his tribe by the United States Government. Accordingly, Camp Augur was established on the Big Popo Agie River on July 28, 1869 at what is today the site of Lander, Wyoming. The next year the camp was moved to a point not far from the junction of the North and South Forks of the Little Wind River, and received the new name of Camp Brown. That name was used until December 30, 1878 when a government

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Statement of Significance - 3

order designated the post as Fort Washakie in honor of the great Shoshone chief. The raids of roaming Indian bands also made it necessary to establish Fort Stambaugh near South Pass City in June, 1870 for the protection of the miners and settlers of the troubled Sweetwater Mining District.

The Big Horn Basin country of Wyoming was one of the last areas of the state to be settled by white men. Consequently, except for the Bates Battle, there were in the Basin no major confrontations between whites and Indians. During the 1870's when the Powder River Basin east of the Big Horn Mountains was bathed in the blood of warring whites and Indians, the Big Horn Basin area saw only sporadic fighting. It is possible, however, that there was more serious fighting among the several tribes which claimed that area as their own. There was game, including buffalo, in the Basin and no doubt hunting prerogatives provided at least one reason for traditional tribal conflicts.

According to a report by Lieutenant General Phillip Sheridan dated October 1, 1874, fired-up bands of Northern Cheyenne and Arapahos were making trouble for the Shoshones, the allies of the white man. Sheridan wrote that the Cheyennes and Arapahos officially belonged to the Red Cloud Agency, in what is now Nebraska, and usually made their home near Pumpkin Butte in Powder River country or sometimes further west in the lower valley of the Wind River where it flows through the Owl Creek Mountains. Therefore it would not have been unusual for a band of Arapahos to be in the latter area, and that is where they were, at the head of the Nowood River, in late June and early July, 1874.

The reason why an Arapaho band was singled out for attack, rather than one belonging to the Sioux or Cheyenne peoples, is not known for certain. One explanation is that this area was Arapaho territory and that bands of Arapahos under leaders such as Black Coal or Sharpnose, during a period which saw the gradual constriction of Indian land by white settlement, were there looking for a permanent home. Since the Arapahos sought and claimed the same land occupied by the Shoshones, their presence in the vicinity of the Shoshone reservation would not be surprising. Another explanation is that the Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho had experienced a dispute over the objectives of their planned raids against the Shoshones. The Sioux and Cheyennes, it is said, wanted scalps and the spoils of war but when the Arapahos learned of this they had nothing further to do with those plans. The result was that the Sioux and Cheyenne left the Arapahos on the Nowood, went north and then swung west to head for Camp Brown. Meanwhile the Arapahos remained in their encampment on Bates Creek. Another account relates that July was the month of the Sun Dance celebration and that the three tribes were celebrating the event together. It was not, indeed, unusual for these tribes to come together for such a celebration even though they did not speak the same language. Then,

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again, perhaps the Sun Dance had already been held in June near the Sioux reservation in Nebraska and the bands in the southern Big Horns were those which had previously split up after the dance to go their own separate ways. Perhaps the reason the Arapaho band was attacked was because they were the enemies of the Shoshone, and Shoshone scouts happened to see that particular band first. Perhaps there is some truth in more than one of the foregoing reasons. In any case the Arapaho camp which Captain Bates and the Shoshones chose to attack, located in the extreme southeast corner of the Big Horn Basin on a tributary of the Wind River System, was out of the boundaries of the Shoshone reservation. It was also beyond the western boundary of the area designated for the Arapahos by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868.

During the latter part of June, 1874 certain bands of Northern Cheyenne and Arapaho were making raids upon Shoshones near Camp Brown, and running off horses and other stock from settlers living in the valley of the Little and Big Popo Agie Rivers. Frank U. Robinson, who was at that time a Second Lieutenant in Troop B, Second Cavalry commanded by Captain Bates, explained that something had to be done to hit the hostile tribes in a vital part and teach them that they were not perfectly safe in their own country. "Heretofore," he stated,

> They could dash in and kill someone, steal what stock they could, and then ride hard for their own country. After putting in 75 or 100 miles they were perfectly safe. Our only chance of punishing them was to overhaul them before they could get well out of our lines. That was next to an impossibility for they would usually commit their depredations from 20 to 50 miles from our camp and, by the time we received word and got fairly on their trail, they would be well out of the country. Our force was entirely too small to go further than 60 or 75 miles into the hostile country. Our force at Fort Washakie at this time was Company E, 13th Infantry, Troop B, 2nd Cavalry, and 20 Snake (Shoshone) scouts, a force entirely too small, situated as we were directly west of the vast Sioux country in which all the Sioux and hostile Cheyennes and Arapahos were congregated. It is true we had at this point the Snake Indians as our allies as they were always deadly enemies of the Sioux, but they numbered, I am quite sure, not more than 300 warriors who were not fond of going very far into the Sioux country. It was resolved to make the best of what we had and give the hostiles a lesson teaching them that they could not raid into our line of country with impunity.

Accordingly, Captain Bates prevailed upon Chief Washakie to put out scouts well into hostile country, "and if possible," wrote Robinson, "to get wind of and inform us of any raiding hostiles, but more especially to see if they could locate some hostile village or camp that it would be possible for us to reach and surprise. This Washakie did and had scouts well down to the Sweetwater and up toward the head of Powder River."

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On June 29, 1874 there arrived at Camp Brown on a tour of inspection a group of high-ranking army officers. They were Generals Sheridan, Ord, and Rucker; Colonel Gillespie and Major Lester M. Drake. During the excitement attending the visit by the officers, Washakie's scouts returned with news of a nearby tribe of hostile Indians. James I. Patten, who was a teacher and lay missionary to the Shoshones, described the return of the scouts:

> They first called on Dr. Irwin, the agent, to whom they told with wild gesticulations their experiences, how they had slipped away down the Wind River, over the Rattlesnake Range, scaled the Big Horn Mountains, and looked down upon the beautiful meadows above mentioned, and beheld the tepees of the enemy, closely villaged, and two thousand head of horses grazing, how they had each managed to get a good horse which they mounted and rode back to the agency without being captured to give warning to their friends and relatives of the approach of hostile bands in their territory.

The number of Indian lodges reported to have been found by the scouts varies widely, but there were probably at least 40 and probably not more than 112, the figure reported by Bates. The lodges discovered by the Shoshone scouts were not identified in official reports but James Patten later identified them as belonging to the Arapahos. Application was soon made to agent Irwin to allow the Shoshones to take part in a foray against the Arapahos, and Captain Bates was ordered to attack and break up the Arapaho camp at once. The anxious, perhaps over-anxious Bates could hardly wait to launch the expedition, and it has been written that General Sheridan had to warn Bates not to start out from the post before dark. Lieutenant Robinson wrote that Bates took a lively interest in putting a stop to the raids and that, "In this I was with him 'hand and glove'."

On July 1, Company B, 2nd Cavalry which included 63 men in the saddle, twenty Shoshone and white civilian scouts under the command of Lieutenant R. H. Young, 4th Infantry, 167 Shoshone Indians under Chief Washakie, acting Assistant Surgeon Thomas Maghee and his assistants, and a pack train of ten mules left Camp Brown moving down the Little Wind River. Remaining hidden during the day in order to prevent their enemy from learning of their presence, Bates' command traveled at night. After traveling a distance of 31 miles the group camped at daylight about three miles below where the Little Wind joins the main Wind River. They then moved in a northeast direction, heading for the headwaters of Nowood Creek.

The second night's march took them across what Lieutenant Robinson described as "undulating sage brush country." Relating further his personal experiences on the expedition Robinson wrote:

> Our course was a little north of east. Just as the day was breaking we went into camp in the brush on a little creek which, I presume or

am quite sure, was Bridger Creek, named after old Jim Bridger, and scout of this line of country. This bivouac was, I am quite satisfied, near the old Bridger Trail leading up into Montana. Here we lay well concealed all that day, taking more precautions than on the preceding day. By this time men, horses, and mules had taken on that quiet business air that is noticeable when all realize that something serious is at hand, nothing of note transpiring we were in the saddle again as the darkness set in and marched at a rapid rate around the eastern point of the Owl Creek Mountains. The night was clear and starlit and I noticed, by the stars, that our course was about northeast.

Crossing over the range where the Southern Big Horn and Owl Creek Mountains meet, the command led by Bates came into the vicinity of the Arapaho encampment about the break of day on the 4th. The general location of the village was revealed by the discovery of two stray ponies, but either the village had been moved or his scouts had missed the place reported Captain Bates, and as a result the progress of the men was slowed while more reconnoitering was done by the scouts. When the scouts returned with news of the discovery of the village Bates turned his command around, moving back in the direction of the village. It seems that Bates, in his search for the Arapaho village, was traveling in a northwesterly direction, parallel to the ravine containing Bates Creek, and had unknowingly passed the Indian village. He then had to turn around and backtrack along the trail approximately a mile and a half in an easterly direction. Halting the command about halfway toward the village, Bates rode forward to personally reconnoiter the place where the battle was to be fought. "I found the village," he wrote in his report of July 9, 1874, "which consisted of 112 lodges, placed in a deep ravine, near the head of which the column was halted, and just at the mouth where this ravine was cut by another at nearly right angles." It is probable that the first ravine of which Bates spoke was that containing Bates Creek and the second ravine, coming into the first from the southwest at right angles, is that which is shown on the enclosed map to lie just below, or south of Dead Indian Spring. The side of the ravine from which Bates made his survey was a gentle slope, leading to the village about 500 yards below, but on the opposite side was a steeply-sloped hill capped by a sandstone bluff, rising about 700 feet above the lower end of the village. This bluff proved to be the key to the battle; whoever controlled it could dominate the ravine below and any persons who might venture into or out of it.

The village had not yet taken alarm when Bates led his command of about 30 men of the line and about twenty Shoshones down the grassy slope to take the village in the flank. Lieutenant Young and his scouts were apparently to make an approach by way of the upper end of the village, presumably as part of a pincer movement to aid in cutting off the village from the possibility of obtaining a secure position on the bluff. Moving rapidly downslope Bates advanced upon the village, which soon became awake and active. Bates wrote:

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> I found upon getting down into it that it was divided nearly through the center by a gully washed out of the center of the ravine which was about fifteen feet wide and ten or twelve deep. In this a great number of Indians had placed themselves, and from it they opened a sharp fire upon us as we approached, but fortunately without damage. We quickly drove them down through this gully, where they were crowded so closely together near the lower end that we had a splendid chance to catch them, and counted afterward 17 dead almost in one pile. In about 20 minutes or half an hour at farthest, there was not an Indian in the village, excepting the dead, and numbers of children who were left in the lodges.

The fighting in the village at first went to the advantage of the attackers, and was intense. "Part of the time it was hand to hand fighting" wrote Lieutenant Robinson, "and in some instances the Indians and our men were wrestling for the same gun." Chief Black Coal of the Arapahos had three fingers shot off and had his horse shot from under him. Surgeon Maghee, who had been directed to hold himself to the rear of the action, eventually pushed into the village and also encountered some action. While dressing a wounded man he was grazed by a bullet. A Shoshone then pointed toward a Sioux Indian, and Maghee shot the Sioux with his revolver. Maghee later wrote in his diary, "This the_____battle of my life will bring me reputation at least being as cool under fire as in a drawing room."

The Arapahos, naturally seeking the best advantage from which to repel the attackers, prevented the Bates command from reaching the high bluffs above the village and themselves scaled the heights. From there they laid down a devastating fire. "Now the fight became deadly." wrote Lieutenant Robinson, "Yells, cries and curses rang out far above the incessant rattle of the carbines and the sharp crack of the Winchesters with which the enemy was mostly armed. In a short time two soldiers and two Shoshones were dead and three soldiers and three Shoshones wounded." Surgeon Maghee later wrote, "These disasterous (sic) results of a fire from an enemy inaccessible rendered necessary a hurried withdrawal from what had now become a slaughter pen."

Bates shortly withdrew his men from the village, sent for the horses, and went back to the heights to observe the course of the battle. Upon reaching the heights Bates learned that Lieutenant Young was still on the opposite side of the ravine where he had been wounded and was in a dangerous position because the Arapahos had begun to encircle him. Enroute to the aid of the Lieutenant, Bates met a scout named Cosgrove who, along with several others, had already rescued Young. Following this incident Bates surveyed his condition and decided that the Arapaho position was by this time very strong. "The rocks on the point," he wrote, "were so worked out as to afford a perfect shelter to the Indians there from every side, and to take it I must necessarily move

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over 300 to 400 yards of ground, exposed to a fire I had already found very effective. To take the point I estimated would cost me about ten men killed and wounded, and require more than half of my remaining command."

Bates then withdrew his forces without destroying the village, capturing the enemy wounded, or even recovering his own dead. With their Shoshone allies Bates and his men began the long march back to Fort Washakie. The immediate casualties of the battle for the attackers were four killed and five or six wounded. The Arapahos experienced somewhere between 10 and 125 casualties. The latter figure is an approximation by Captain Bates who reported that 25 Indians were known to be killed, while the usual proportion of wounded to killed was four to one.

In estimating the immediate results of the battle it should be noted that if the raid was meant to be a punitive one it was not completely successful. Both sides experienced human loss, with the Arapahos probably suffering the greatest number of casualties. Although they suffered heavier losses, the Arapahos controlled the bluffs and thus maintained control of their village. The attackers were forced to evacuate the village without even destroying it. Neither did the attackers manage to drive away all of the Arapaho stock, a significant factor since horses were the chief mode of transportation at that time, and the loss of them could render a real blow to the ability of a group to defend themselves. According to Lieutenant Robinson 350 head were captured out of the 1200 to 1400 head of stock he estimated belonged to the village.

Considering the near surprise attack which was made upon the Arapaho village, that the Bates command did not perform more effectively is a matter which requires some deliberation upon the strategy of the attackers and the circumstances of the attack. By the tone of his report, Bates was extremely nonplussed by his failure to cause more damage to the Arapahos than was accomplished. For this he blamed his allies the Shoshones. According to both Robinson and Bates, the element of surprise was lessened by the noise made by the Shoshone warriors. Upon receiving the news of the whereabouts of the Arapaho village, Bates noted that "The Shoshones set up the most infernal yelling and shouting I ever heard, from which they did not desist until after the fight had commenced." And Robinson stated that:

> The Indians under Washakie having by this time come up, commenced chanting their war chant, decking themselves in their war bonnets and feathers, and making a horrible din. I tried my best to stop them. I cursed and swore, calling on Washakie in Heaven's name to stop them or all hope of surprising the village would be at an end. He did what he could but these Indians were so terribly excited that they could not keep still, so I resolved to push on and join Captain Bates, for now we had not a moment to lose.

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Bates claims that he recognized the importance of the sandstone bluff on the other side of the village, and reported that he would have occupied it with some of his men had the Shoshones remained quiet. But he was afraid that if he attempted to gain the height before mounting an attack, the terrific howling of the Shoshones would arouse the village before he could advance into it. Nevertheless, Bates sent Lieutenant Young and the scouts off to his left in order to come down on the head of the village. These were followed by Washakie and some of his warriors. As was mentioned previously, Bates with about 30 men in the line and about 20 Shoshones in the rear moved down into the village. According to Bates, his instructions to the Shoshones were to follow him down the ravine into the village and cut off the Arapahos from the heights above. Robinson wrote that the Shoshones halted when partly down the hill and commenced firing over the heads of the soldiers. According to Indian agent James Irwin, Bates' orders were misunderstood by even the Shoshone interpreter because Bates talked so fast. In addition, Irwin notes that the Shoshones were reluctant to scale the heights since they wore no distinguishing clothing and felt that in the desperate firing and charging the soldiers would fire at them as well as the Arapahos, not being able to distinguish between them. In defense of the Shoshones, Irwin also pointed out that just as many Shoshone warriors as soldiers were lost in the battle.

Bates blamed the Shoshones not only for spoiling his chance to reconnoiter the area more carefully and ruin his chance to carry out the best possible strategy, he also blamed them, excepting Washakie and some others, for cowardice by not advancing into battle. According to him some of the Shoshones remained two to three thousand yards to the rear and drove away ponies when they considered themselves to be a safe distance from the action. Some of them, he claimed, were never near the enemy and even started for home before the fight was over, arriving at the post that night between midnight and daylight. He wrote:

> Had the Shoshones in the first instance kept quiet and given me the opportunity to reconnoiter the ground thoroughly so as to take possession of the commanding points, or had they followed Lieutenant Young who received my order correctly, and attempted to lead them to the attack, I should have been able to report the most complete victory our company ever achieved, for I do not think half a dozen would have escaped.....but owing to their bad conduct first and cowardice afterwards, I think we achieved only about half as much as was intended.

Bates' attempt to lay blame upon his Shoshone allies was neither supported nor denied by the reports issued by Generals Sheridan and Ord, and the latter reported the expedition a success. Sheridan praised Bates for moving promptly

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on the enemy and, in a gallant fight, completely routing him. Ord noted that the attacking party was about half the strength of their enemy, and that the unusual execution of the men could be attributed to the continual target-practice which the department commander had enforced at every post in the department.

Bates deprecated the actions of the Shoshones, implying that their main concern was to save themselves and take Arapaho ponies*. But it is important to note that perhaps the loss of their war stock prevented the Arapahos from chasing their attackers back to Fort Washakie and inflicting heavy casualties. Bates himself admitted that, following the battle, he had to go back through a country in which for 70 miles twenty resolute men could have held an army in check. It is interesting to note that whereas, according to Surgeon Maghee, the Bates command could have taken the high bluff with ten men and thus burned the village, the tables were turned when the Arapahos occupied the bluff and the attackers had to retreat. Lieutenant Robinson noted that with the command in a retreat, the enemy had somewhat recovered themselves and were following in quite a force, ".....but," he said, "I would hold the rising ground long enough to let the column gain the hill far in advance. As soon as it had disappeared I would take the gallop and hold that point in the same manner. I am quite sure the Indians were as bad off for ammunition as we, for they did not offer to come close nor attempt to fire a single shot, and besides they had been so roughly handled that they evidently had no stomach for more."

Another problem Bates experienced was the lack of adequate ammunition. The men were armed with Colt revolvers, and prior to the fight had in their belts 80 rounds of cartridges for their Springfield 45 caliber carbines, in addition to more ammunition in saddle bags. However, following the fight there was an average of only seven rounds per man. The reason for this was that the pack mules carrying additional ammunition were lost during the night. Not only were those supplies lost but also, apparently, the roll of bedding containing all the medical supplies including medicines, surgical instruments and bandages. One of the men was sent back to secure these supplies and was in sight of them when he was driven back by six hostile Indians. As a result Surgeon Maghee was deprived of almost all of his equipment. The homeward march, for the wounded, must have been difficult until the group arrived at the mouth of the Little Wind River where, as requested by Bates, they were met on July 5th by Captain Robert Torrey** with ambulances.

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*Bates believed that the Arapahos had saved about one-half of their stock.
**Robert Torrey was the brother of C. L. Torrey, who was famous for his volunteer outfit in the Spanish American War.

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A final factor influencing Bates' consideration to press the attack was that, upon considering the possibility of taking the sandstone bluff on which the Arapahos were entrenched Bates saw a signal smoke emanating from the point. He concluded that the signal was meant to secure aid from the allies of the Arapahos who were suspected to be in the neighborhood. Under the circumstances—the strong position of the Arapahos, the possibility of the Arapahos securing aid from other villages, the lack of ammunition and medical supplies for his soldiers, and the loss of some of his Shoshone allies—Bates considered his position untenable and began the retreat to Fort Washakie, leaving his dead behind him.

The Arapahos moved back to Red Cloud Agency after the battle. In Sheridan's report we learn that two bands of Cheyennes and Arapahos moved to Pumpkin Butte in Powder River country, and sent a delegation to Fort Fetterman asking whether the soldiers wanted war. "The reply", he wrote, "was 'yes', and that we would kill as many of them as we could, unless they stopped their depredations and returned to their agency, which they concluded to do, and accordingly lost no time in coming in."

It was late in 1877 when almost 1000 Arapahos were authorized by the United States Government to settle in the eastern half of the Wind River Reservation on a "temporary" basis, only three years after they had fought a major engagement with the Shoshones. Washakie, Chief of the Shoshones, knew that this was to be a long-term arrangement even though he asked repeatedly that the Arapahos be removed from the reservation. Thus the traditional enemies were joined, for better or for worse. In 1897 one author wrote in the Collections of the Wyoming Historical Society that, "A strong feeling, almost amounting to enmity, exists between the two tribes now here, and the presence of the military alone prevents a quarrel." If there is antagonism between the two tribes today, it is not as distinct as it once was, although it seems that no complete transformation of traditional differences between the two tribes has taken place.

The Bates Battle probably did not solve any basic problems. It did not result in a complete victory for the attackers whose aim was punitive, even though the losses suffered by the Arapahos were heavy. The battle possibly prevented any immediate raids upon the Shoshone by the Arapahos, if it was Arapahos who actually were to blame for them. In the wider perspective, the Bates Battle was one of many engagements fought on the Northern High Plains during the period of the 1870's, a period described by Historian T. A. Larson as a "troubled decade." It was fought during what was an era of conflict between whites and Indians, an era climaxed by the Custer Massacre of 1876. However, the Bates Battle is complicated by the fact that fighting took place between Indian and Indian, between Shoshone and Arapaho. In this respect, the Battle

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is most significant, since the two tribes have since 1877 been made to live next to each other. The Bates Battle could surely not have been of help in bringing together two tribes who were enemies of long-standing tradition. Thus, the Bates Battle probably accomplished nothing of lasting, positive significance. It remains as one of a series of events which accompanied the development of the American Far West by the white man. For Wyoming it remains, as described by Hugh Knoefel, the editor of the Northern Wyoming Daily News, "Wyoming's Bloodiest Fourth of July."

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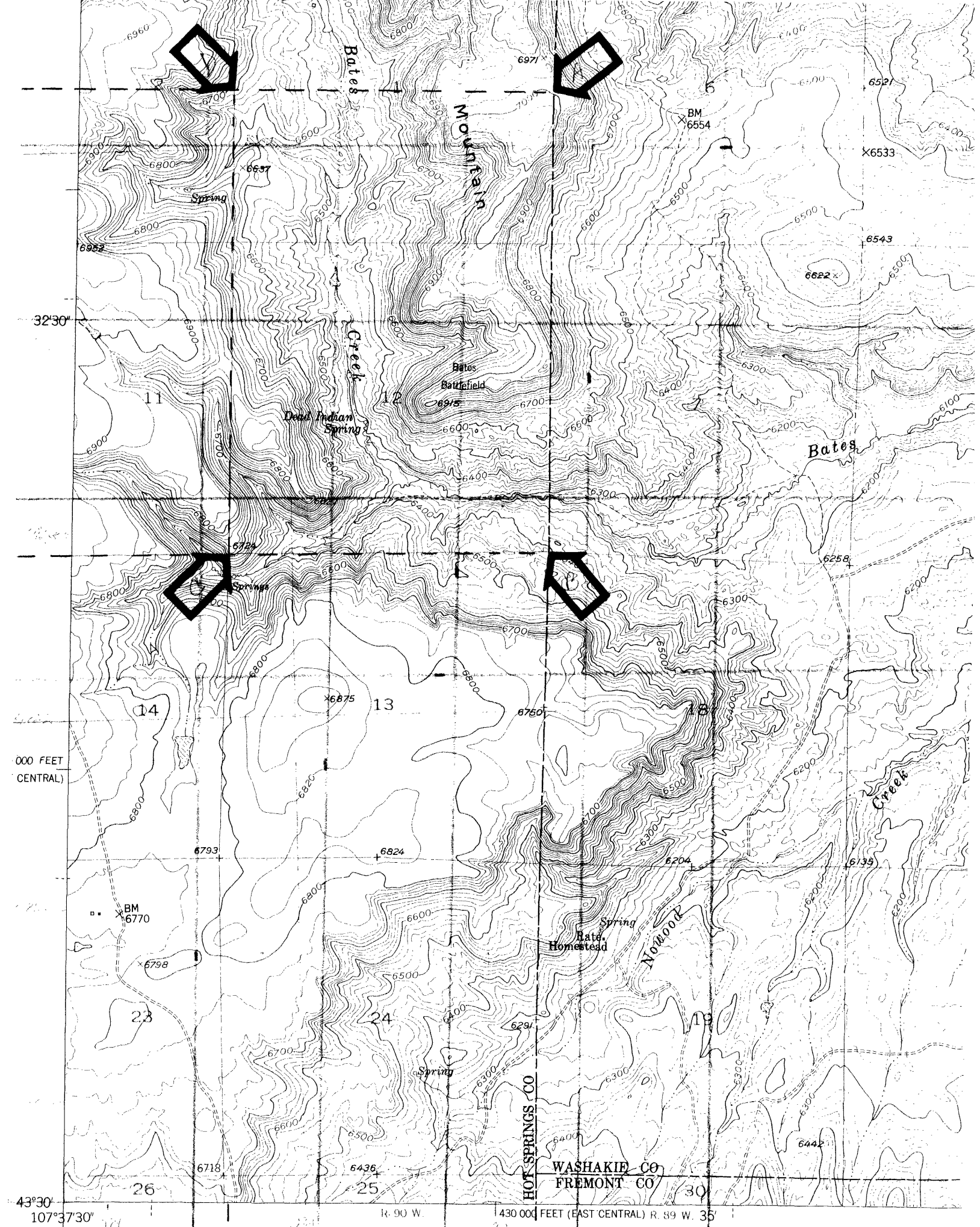

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