

Mystery Files in Montana: The Myths of Sitting Bull at the Battle of the Little Bighorn

By: Kiley Molinari, 2010 Summer Intern, Custer Battlefield Museum

Mystery Files, a series for National Geographic International, which examines historical figures, such as Billy the Kid, Jack the Ripper, and Cleopatra, has set out to debunk the mysteries and myths that have followed Tatanka Iyotanka, Sitting Bull's Sioux name, long after the Battle of the Little Bighorn.



Mystery Files crew films at the Custer Battlefield Museum, Garryowen

The crew, who spends six weeks researching for each 26-minute episode they produce, arrived in Montana on August 1st, to begin their filming in Garryowen at the Custer Battlefield Museum.

While the crew is on its whirlwind trip to Montana, they will be filming and researching not only at Garryowen, which was the site of Sitting Bull's camp the day of the battle, June 25, 1876, but also at the Little Bighorn National Monument, and talking to various historians and a documented relative of Sitting Bull.

Sitting Bull's name still stands as prominent, mystical, and sometimes mysterious, as he once stood over 130 years ago at the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

Different myths and legends have built up around historical figures like Sitting Bull, and Adelaide Lane, Associate Producer of *Mystery Files*, which is run by Parthenon Entertainment based in the United Kingdom, and her team are trying to figure out fact from fiction, myth from actuality.

“What we are trying to do is go back to the time when these people lived and look at what actually happened, and try to break those myths and legends down,” said Lane.

Sitting Bull, who was a Hunkpapa Lakota medicine man has, over the years, garnered the image of a warrior, fighting Custer at his Last Stand.

After reading books and articles on not only Sitting Bull but the Lakota people, Lane found the Sun Dance to be the most fascinating part of Lakota life. “I never realized what the Sun Dance was about, but for someone to put themselves through that for their community, I am in awe. It is just amazing. That was the biggest wow factor for me.”

It was during a Sun Dance held a week before the Battle of Little Bighorn that Sitting Bull had his now famous vision of soldiers and their horses falling into the Lakota and Northern

Cheyenne camp. This vision became known to symbolize a victory for the Lakota, because of how powerful a medicine man Sitting Bull was.

“We are excited to be working and filming at these places, and honored to have the chance to talk to a relative of Sitting Bull,” said Lane.

An author and historian was also present in Garryowen to do an interview with the *Mystery Files* crew. “I grew up in Montana and have always had an interest in the Indian Wars. I actually remember visiting the Battlefield when I was 12.” The historian, who has written a book on the Indian Wars along with one on Sitting Bull, enjoyed looking at microfiche and microfilm of old newspapers, while conducting his research. “I wanted to write a biography on Sitting Bull as a person, to take a look at him before all of the perceptions of him came about. Looking at early years of the Bismarck Tribune really helped me with that,” said the historian.

The second season of *Mystery Files* will air world-wide, but first and foremost on National Geographic International in the spring of 2011. If you would like more information you can visit www.custermuseum.org or you can visit the *Mystery Files* season one website at www.mysteryfiles.com.