



Foundation Document Overview

Fort Laramie National Historic Site

Wyoming



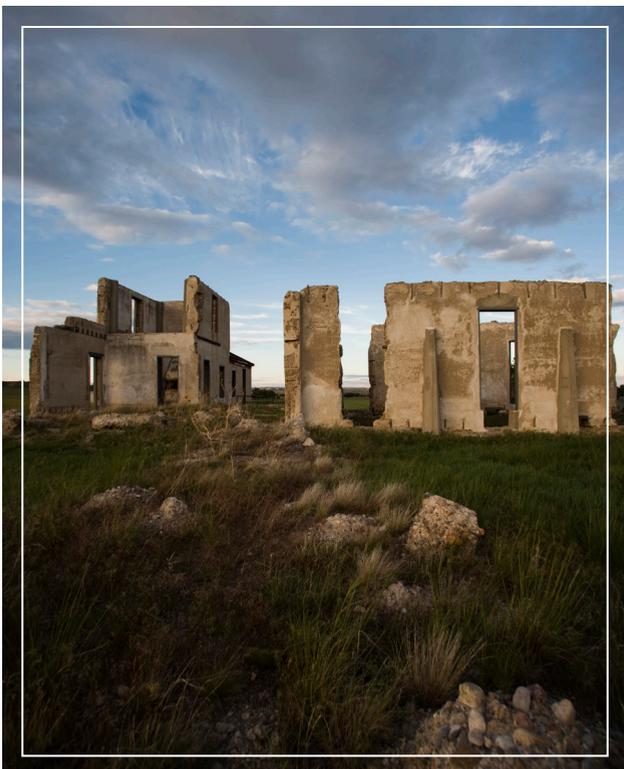
Contact Information

For more information about the *Fort Laramie National Historic Site Foundation Document*, contact: foia_superintendent@nps.gov or (307) 837-2221 x. 3004 or write to: Superintendent, Fort Laramie National Historic Site, 965 Gray Rocks Road, Fort Laramie, WY 82212

Purpose

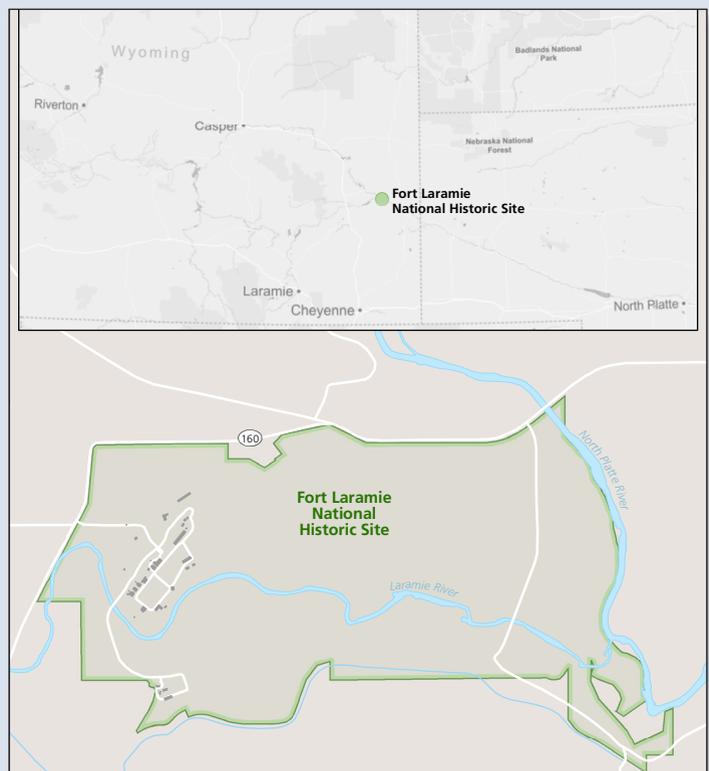


The purpose of FORT LARAMIE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE is to preserve the historic scene and resources at the confluence of the Laramie and North Platte Rivers, and to interpret the roles and significance of the diverse and vibrant cultures that interacted at this crossroads of the West.



Description

Fort Laramie National Historic Site lies along the Laramie River at its confluence with the North Platte River in southeastern Wyoming. Originally the homeland of the Arapaho and Cheyenne tribes, the “fort” was established as a private fur trading post in 1834. From 1849 to its abandonment in 1890, Fort Laramie evolved into the largest military post on the Northern Great Plains. For 56 years, successive waves of American Indians, trappers, traders, missionaries, emigrants, soldiers, miners, ranchers, and homesteaders interacted with, and left their mark on, a place that would become famous in the history of America’s westward expansion. Fort Laramie stood witness to strong Indian resistance to encroachment on their homelands, and played an important role as host to treaty negotiations, including the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. Today, park visitors are immersed in the historic scene and complex history through a variety of experiences: exhibits and video in the visitor center; interpretive waysides placed at known sites and ruins; living history demonstrations; and access to restored and furnished structures of the military period. Scholars and researchers enjoy access to an extensive collection of museum objects and archives housed at the park. The historic site, which encompasses 833 acres, hosted 51,980 visitors in 2015.



Significance



Significance statements express why Fort Laramie National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- **Commercial Hub.** Fort Laramie served as a commercial and social hub of the Northern Plains for much of the 19th century. It was the location of one of the first fur trading posts in the central Rocky Mountains and was instrumental in the establishment of trade relationships with many of the Northern Plains tribes. This exchange of goods and services also supported overland migration, as well as early ranching, farming, and homesteading interests.
- **Historic Structures.** Fort Laramie, continuously operating between 1834 and 1890, influenced the exploration and settlement of the West. It became a large military post on the Northern Great Plains serving as the major logistical and provisioning point. Many of the original structures have been preserved, providing visitors with a tangible connection to the history of this place.
- **Historic Setting.** A rich natural history exists at Fort Laramie as a result of its geographic location between the Rocky Mountains and the Northern Great Plains. Here, the North Platte and Laramie River Valleys created a natural migration corridor that influenced the location of historic trails and contributes to the historic scene and sense of place.

- **Historic Trails.** Fort Laramie was the “Crossroads of the Nation.” It served as a major landmark and an important stop and resupply point on the Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, Pony Express, Bozeman, and Cheyenne-Deadwood Trails.
- **Center for Negotiations.** Fort Laramie hosted a number of treaty negotiations between the U.S. government and the Northern Plains tribes. The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 marked the beginning of the reservation system, displacing tribes from large portions of their original homelands.
- **Museum Collections and Archives.** The park preserves a comprehensive collection of original objects, furnishings, uniforms, and weaponry related to the story of Fort Laramie and its role in shaping the West, as well as those documenting American Indian occupation of the area. Its expansive archival collection includes documentation from more than 39,000 of the more than half million individuals associated with Fort Laramie from the fur trade through the homestead periods.
- **Archeology.** The archeological resources at the park illustrate a vast period of human history that includes Paleo-Indian sites (up to 12,000 years old) and historic Indian sites; a number of fur trading sites, including Fort William and Fort John (1834–1849); the remnants of a large military post (1849–1890); and the Fort Laramie homesteading era (1890–1938).



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Cultural Landscape.** Over the centuries, the landscape at the confluence of the North Platte and Laramie Rivers has evolved. Today, visitors experience the setting of the historic landscape.
- **Historic Structures.** A collection of buildings, ruins, and foundations surround the post's parade grounds, including "Old Bedlam," the oldest standing military structure in Wyoming.
- **Opportunities to Step Back in Time (Sense of Place).** The fort sits below the surrounding high plains, invoking a sense of place and a tangible connection to the past.
- **Tribal Relations.** Fort Laramie continues to be regarded by American Indian tribes as the gathering site for treaty negotiations. Respectful discourse will bring tribal perspectives to the complete story of the fort.
- **Museum Collections and Archives.** Museum objects and archives inform research, understanding, and interpretation of Fort Laramie's history.
- **Archeological Resources.** The archeological resources unearthed at Fort Laramie to date, while including American Indian artifacts dating to Paleo times, is predominantly historic and represents farmsteads, hearths, dumps, and military structures.



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Fort Laramie was a vital military outpost charged with ensuring westward migration, the flow of goods and communications, and access to desirable natural resources—implementing policies made far to the east; it embodies the U.S. Army's role in fulfilling the 19th century vision of "Manifest Destiny" that continues to shape life in the American West.
- The confluence of the Laramie and North Platte Rivers has always been a natural crossroads for plants, animals, and people—a diverse ecological zone, plentiful hunting grounds, a gathering place for trade and interaction, a strategic military location, natural population center, and now a place set aside for heritage appreciation. Fort Laramie embodies the idea that geography influences destiny.
- The 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie (Horse Creek Treaty) and the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie—both "agreements" between most of the Northern Plains tribes and the U.S. government—were momentous in their impact, invoking trust responsibilities that continue in perpetuity and affect America today.

