



PHOTO: AMY BULGER

After fall strips the aspens around this peak, gales whine through bare branches, unleashing whispers from the bones of long-dead mountain men in the valley below. They tell of a fight over fur mighty enough to change the name of a mountain. Can you guess where it is? Turn the page to find out.

Battle Mountain, Wyoming (from page 21)

By August 1841, mountain man Henry Fraeb had been trapping in the Rockies for more than a decade. A former brigade leader, he and more than 20 trappers fought for survival near this hill (until then known among trappers and Army scouts as Bastion Mountain) that rises in southwest Wyoming near the Colorado border. A force of Cheyenne, Arapaho and Sioux warriors had united against them. Tensions were high between the Native Americans and the men who had discovered the area's flourishing beaver population. The ensuing clash—the largest battle between Native Americans and trappers in Wyoming history—left both warriors and trappers dead, but marked the birth of Battle Mountain.

Fraeb had recently become business partners with famed mountain man Jim Bridger, who heard of the unrest from nearby in the Green River Valley. Bridger sent 21-year-old Jim Baker to warn Fraeb, but the tribes confronted the trappers in their camp near the confluence of Battle Creek and the Little Snake River.

Baker's description of the fight appeared in the *Denver Tribune-Republican* newspaper on July 10, 1886:

"Shortly after I came out here a second time we were camped on the very creek where I live now—Battle Creek, Snake River we called it then—and there we had a lively fight with a party of about 500 Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapahos...There were twenty-three in our party...Old Frapp (Fraeb) was in command. The Indians made about forty charges...but Old Frapp kept shouting, 'Don't shoot till you're sure! One at a time!'"

Fraeb was killed along with three trappers and numerous warriors, leaving Baker in charge of the men. Ironically, by the time Fraeb lost his life, cosmopolitan



Jim Baker

European cities had already decided beaver pelt hats were out of style and silk would soon be the new rage.

Still a sentinel, Battle Mountain rises to 9,100 feet above sagebrush and farmlands near the small town of Savery. A few other places named for the infamous engagement dot Wyoming's Sierra Madres. Heading west on Battle Highway (State Highway 70) from Encampment to Baggs, travelers encounter the ghost towns of Battle and Battle Lake before cresting the Continental Divide at the summit of Battle Pass.

By 1873, Baker returned to Battle Mountain after his trapping and Army careers ended, spending his last 25 years raising livestock where he and Fraeb came under fire. In 1881, a new era of conservation began when A.W. and Anna Louise Salisbury bought land from Baker's son-in-law and established the Ladder Ranch at the base of Battle Mountain. More than 120 years later, the family still runs cattle and sheep here—and works for conservation and habitat protection in a valley that pronghorn, elk, deer, sharp-tailed grouse and many more species call home.

They partnered with the

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Nature Conservancy in 2009 to forever protect 1,518 acres in a conservation easement that safeguards migration routes and winter range for the roughly 6,000 elk that make up the Sierra Madre herd. The ranch earned the Wyoming Leopold Conservation Award in 2014 for the work they've done to improve the health of both Battle Creek and the Little Snake, which come together on the Ladder Ranch. They've also protected habitat for greater sage grouse and Columbian sharp-tailed grouse.

On top of that, RMEF has helped improve habitat on more than 17,000 acres surrounding Battle Mountain and parts of the Sierra Madre and Snowy ranges. Together with our partners, RMEF has invested more than \$750,000 in projects including prescribed burns, elk winter range fertilization, weed treatments, closing and restoring roads to native vegetation and more.

Late into September, elk bugles echo from Battle's flanks, calling hunters to scale its deceptively steep sides in search of up to 500 elk that can call the mountain home in the fall. In 2016, 27 percent of the 3,688 general-tag elk hunters found success in the hunt area that includes Battle Mountain—ranking it the top area for harvest success in the state.

But as hunting season passes, the aspens and cottonwoods are quickly stripped to expose hidden homesteader cabins that point the way to where Fraeb's bones are buried along the banks of Savery Creek. Baker lies a short distance away in Savery's cemetery. And in the whine that comes through skeleton trees, it's not hard to imagine Fraeb and Baker are still talking strategy at the shadowy base of Battle Mountain.

—Amy Bulger

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