

The Nez Perce eluded more than 2,000 soldiers, civilian volunteers, and scouts from other Indian tribes on a circuitous route through four states. They sought safety among Crow allies on the eastern Montana plains. When this failed their last hope was sanctuary in Canada. After fleeing more than 1,100 miles they were trapped at Snake Creek, at the base of the Bears Paw Mountains in Montana, and forced to submit to Colonel Nelson A. Miles on October 5, 1877 – only 40 miles from Canada.

General William T. Sherman called the Nez Perce saga “the most extraordinary of Indian wars.” Today, their route is designated the Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail by act of Congress.

This historic route was used in its entirety only once, however, component trails and roads making up the Trail saw generations of travel prior to and after the 1877 conflict. Some became linked to modern road systems while other stretches were abandoned for more direct routes better suited to automobiles. In places, the original Nez Perce Trail can be experienced on the landscape today.



Nez Perce at Lapwai, Idaho

Fort Vancouver, Washington

In July of 1877 *Tim'íne 'ilp'ilpnm* (Chief Redheart's) band and other Nez Perce returned from a buffalo hunt in Montana to discover their homeland embroiled in conflict. Determined not to join the war, they believed General Howard when he promised them safe conduct to the reservation. Instead their horses were seized, their hair cut, and they were forcibly taken, all 33 men, women, and children, to Fort Vancouver. There they were held as Prisoners of War until April, 1878, when they finally returned to Idaho.

Fort Walsh, Canada

Between September 30 and October 5, 1877, nearly 300 Nez Perce men, women, and children managed to escape the Bears Paw battle and make their way the last forty miles to Canada. Along the way some of the people stopped at Cree, Assiniboine, Gros Ventre, and Metis villages strung along the Milk River. At some camps the Nez Perce found refuge, at others, death.

For a time some Nez Perce found refuge with the Lakota who had also fled to Canada after the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876. The North West Mounted Police at Fort Walsh assured them they were welcome as long as they remained peaceful and stayed in Canada.

In summer 1878 the U.S. government sent a delegation to persuade the Nez Perce refugees to return to American soil and rejoin Joseph's people. Some, like *Piyóop'yoo xayxáyxnim* (Chief White Bird's) followers, chose to remain in Canada, while others opted to return on their own.



Ask Us About Our
“Experience the Nez Perce Trail”
Auto Tour Brochures

*The Trail is sacred ground;
please respect the
resources during your travels.*

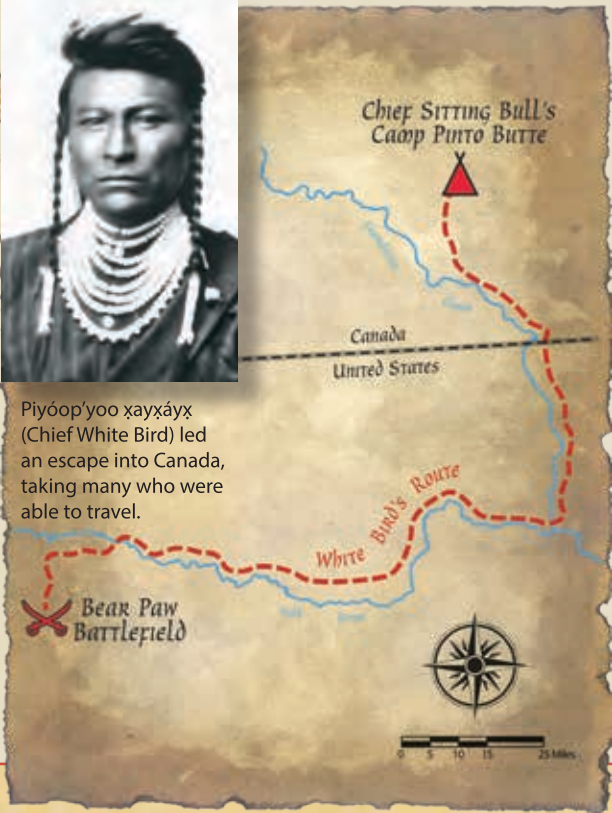
Nez Perce in Exile



Fort Vancouver 1854 from a lithograph by Gustavus Sohon

Ee Yak ish Pah (‘íyeq’iispe) The Hot Country

The Nez Perce National Historic Trail ends at the Bear Paw Battlefield, but the story does not end there. Colonel Nelson A. Miles had begun implementing the terms of Chief Joseph's surrender when the army's senior commander, General William T. Sherman, announced an alarming change of plans. Rather than returning to Idaho as Miles promised, the Nez Perce were ordered to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. From there they were sent on to Baxter Springs, then the Quapaw Reservation and Ponca Agency in Oklahoma. The conditions were so dire that most Nez Perce babies born in Indian Territory died and were buried there.



“A worse place to put a camp of four hundred human beings, mostly women and children could not have been selected; in fact it would seem as if this spot had been selected for the express purpose of putting an end to Chief Joseph and his band....One half were sick.....All were filled with the poisonous malaria of the camp.”

Council Fire, August 1878

“I cannot tell how much my heart suffered for my people while at Leavenworth. The Great Spirit Chief who rules above seemed to be looking some other way, and did not see what was being done to my people.”

Hinmatóowyahtq’it (Chief Joseph)

In July, 1878, leaving an unknown number who had died and were buried near Fort Leavenworth, the Nez Perce were transported by rail car to Baxter Springs, Kansas, enroute to what would be their final “home in exile” at a reservation set aside for them near present-day Tonkawa, Oklahoma.



In 1885 these remaining people boarded a train at Arkansas City to start the bittersweet journey west, some to reservations at Lapwai or Umatilla and others who chose to go with Chief Joseph to the Colville reservation. Their hearts were heavy with the memories of those they had lost along the trail and those they were leaving behind in this country of exile.

Experience the Nez Perce Trail...



The Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail stretches from the Wallowa Valley of Oregon to the Bear Paw Battlefield in north central Montana. Today, travelers can retrace the approximate route of the 1877 Nez Perce flight by following the Nez Perce Trail auto route. The auto route crosses three-season, all-weather

roadways ranging from high-standard gravel segments to Interstates. Nez Perce Trail signs, like the one shown here, mark the entire route.

For more information, contact Forest Service

Nez Perce National Historic Trail
Administrators Office
12740 Highway 12
Orofino, ID 83544
208-476-8234
<http://fs.usda.gov/npnht>

Nez Perce National Historic Trail
Public Affairs
U.S. Forest Service
26 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula, MT 59804
406-329-3540
<http://fs.usda.gov/npnht>

Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests
903 3rd Street
Kamiah, ID 83536
208-935-4275
<http://fs.usda.gov/nezperceclearwater>

Wallowa-Whitman National Forest
1550 Dewey Ave. Ste A
Baker City, OR 97814
541-523-6391
<http://fs.usda.gov/wallowa-whitman>

Lolo National Forest
24 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula, MT 59804
406-329-3750
<http://fs.usda.gov/lolo>

Bitterroot National Forest
1801 North 1st Street
Hamilton, MT 59840
406-363-7100
<http://fs.usda.gov/bitterroot>

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest
420 Barrett Street
Dillon, MT 59725-3572
406-683-3900
<http://fs.usda.gov/bdnf>

Salmon-Challis National Forest
1206 S. Challis St.
Salmon, ID 83467
208-756-5100
<http://fs.usda.gov/scnf>

Caribou-Targhee National Forest
1405 Hollipark Drive
Idaho Falls, ID 83401
208-524-7500
<http://fs.usda.gov/ctnf/>

Custer and Gallatin National Forests
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406-587-6701
<http://fs.usda.gov/custergallatin/>

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Dworshak National Fish Hatchery
P.O. Box 18
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208-476-4591
www.fws.gov/dworshak

Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 110
Airport Road
Lewistown, MT 59457
406-538-8706
www.fws.gov/refuge/charles_m_russell

Custer Gallatin National Forests
5001 Southgate Drive, Suite 2
Billings, MT 59101
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<http://fs.usda.gov/custergallatin/>

Shoshone National Forest
808 Meadow Lane
Cody, WY 82414-6241
307-527-6241
<http://fs.usda.gov/shoshone/>

Hells Canyon National Recreation Area
201 East 2nd Street
P.O. Box 905
Joseph, OR 97846
541-426-5546
<http://fs.usda.gov/wallowa-whitman>

Snake River Office 2535 Riverside Drive
P.O. Box 699
Clarkston, WA 99403
509-758-0616

Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge
4567 Wildfowl Lane
Stevensville, MT 59870
406-777-5552
www.fws.gov/refuge/lee-metcalf/

Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge
27650B South Valley Road
Lima, MT 59739
406-276-3536
www.fws.gov/refuge/red_rock_lakes/

Organizations

Nez Perce Trail Foundation
www.nezpercetrail.net

Partnership for the National Trails System
www.pnts.org/

National Park Service

Nez Perce National Historical Park
39063 US Hwy 95
Spalding, ID 83540
208-843-7009
www.nps.gov/nepe

Big Hole National Battlefield
P.O. Box 237
Wisdom, MT 59761
406-689-3155
www.nps.gov/biho

Yellowstone National Park
P.O. Box 168
Yellowstone, WY 82190-0168
307-344-7381
www.nps.gov/yell

Bear Paw Battlefield
P.O. Box 26
301 Ohio St.
Chinook, MT 59523
406-357-3130

State Agencies

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P.O. Box 25
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208-334-3700
www.idfg.idaho.gov

Bureau of Land Management

Vale District Office
100 Oregon Street
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West, Havre, MT 59501
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For an interactive, Google Earth virtual tour of the trail please visit the Nez Perce Trail Foundation website at www.nezpercetrail.net



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