

Congress enacted the National Trails System in 1968 to establish a framework for a nationwide system of scenic, recreational and historic trails.

The Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail was authorized in 1986. Commemorating the 1877 war and flight, the trail extends about 1,170 miles from the vicinity of Wallowa Lake, Oregon to Bear Paw Battlefield near Chinook, Montana.



Bear Paw Battlefield, Montana Joni Packard - USDA/Forest Service ince aiding the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1805, whites knew the Nez Perce Indians as friends. The Nez Perce (in their language, Niimíipuu, meaning "the people") lived in bands, welcoming traders and missionaries to a land framed by the rivers, mountains, prairies, and valleys of present day southeastern Washington, northeastern Oregon, and north central Idaho. They moved throughout the region including parts of what are now Montana and Wyoming to fish, hunt, and trade.

Fifty years after the Corps of Discovery, Washington Territorial Governor Isaac I. Stevens met in council with Nez Perce leaders. The resulting 1855 Treaty with the U.S. Government guaranteed the tribes rights to their ancestral homeland in perpetuity, and set aside a Nez Perce reservation of some 5,000 square miles.

In 1860, encroaching prospectors struck gold in Idaho. Thousands of miners, merchants, and settlers overran Nez Perce land, seized resources and committed depredations against tribal members. In 1863 the federal government responded with new treaty talks. This time the U.S. wanted most of the Nez Perce reservation – including their treasured Wallowa region of northeastern Oregon and the Payette Lake region.

Many chiefs refused and angrily departed. Amid uncertainty, pressure, and promises, the remaining chiefs reluctantly agreed to a reservation 90 percent smaller than that of 1855. Without authority they ceded lands of Nez Perce who left the council in a document thereafter called "the Thief Treaty."

Non-Indians distinguished those who signed as "treaty" Nez Perce and those who had not as "non-treaty." The 1863 Treaty divided the tribe and foreshadowed a war with repercussions that are still felt today.



BLACKFEET INDIAN RESERVATION MONTANA WASHINGTON 12 THE NEZ PERCE (NEE-ME-POO) NATIONAL Nez Perce Homelands HISTORIC TRAIL Nez Perce Trail --- Nez Perce Homelands BLM National Park Forest Service Indian Reservation 1855 Treaty Reservation 1863 Treaty Reservation USFS - R1 - Clearwater National Forest - S.M.Grabb 6/03 For some years non-treaty Nez Perce continued to live in the Wallowas and other locations within traditional homelands. But conflict with newcomers increased, particularly in the Wallowa region, home of *Hinmatóowyalahtq'itnim* (Thunder Rolling over the Mountains - Chief Joseph) and his band. Settlers petitioned the government to relocate the

Nez Perce to the reduced 1863 Treaty reservation in Idaho, and in 1877 the U.S. Army was commanded to do so.

In May, 1877, General Oliver Otis Howard and the non-treaty Nez Perce chiefs held a council at Fort Lapwai, in Lapwai, Idaho. Howard summarily ordered them to bring their families and livestock to Lapwai in 30 days – or the army would make them comply, by force. The chiefs argued the time

was inadequate to gather the people and their horses and cattle and asked for an extension, which Howard brusquely refused.

Years of high-handedness and mistreatment, and the prospect of losing their homelands, provoked several young warriors to vengeance. Riding from camp at Tolo Lake, Idaho, they avenged past murders of relatives by killing some white settlers.

The Nez Perce flight began June 15, 1877, and intensified on June 17 after they defeated a cavalry force at the Battle of White Bird Canyon. Two weeks later, an unprovoked army attack brought 'Elelímyete'qenin'm (Wrapped in the Wind - Chief Looking Glass) and his band into conflict. The village had sought to avoid any involvement in it whatsoever.

Swept into a fight they did not seek, nearly 750 Nez Perce desperately fled for their lives. Only 250 were warriors and the

rest were women, children, elderly, and sick. Leading a herd of 2,000 horses, they fought masterfully in some 20 battles and skirmishes with the U.S. Army, and repelled a devastating army attack on their sleeping village at the Big Hole on August 9.

Mountainous terrain along the trai Crandall Creek, Wyoming

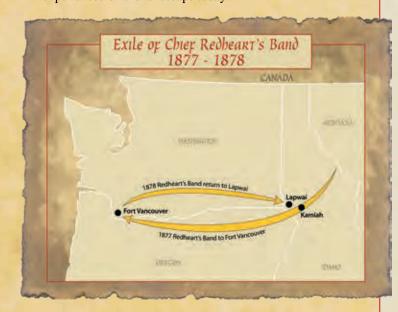


Steamboat Rock near Cow Island crossing of the Missouri River, Montana

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'ine 'ilp'ilpnim (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.



Colonel Nelson A. Miles
Courtesy of Montana Historical Society
Research Center - Photograph Archives,
Helena Montana (943-884)

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 ('iyeq'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."

Hinmatóowyalahtq'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

Orofino, ID 83544 208-476-8234 http://fs.usda.gov/npnht Nez Perce National Historic Trail

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

1550 Dewey Ave. Ste A Baker City, OR 97814 541-523-6391 http://fs.usda.gov/wallowawhitman

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/

National Forests
10 E. Babcock Avenue,
P.O. Box 130
Bozeman, MT 59771
406-587-6701
http://fs.usda.gov/custergallatin/

#### Custer Gallatin National Forests

5001 Southgate Drive, Suite 2 Billings, MT 59101 406-255-1400 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-

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

whitman

metcalf/

#### U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Dworshak National Fish Hatchery P.O. Box 18

P.O. Box 18 Ahsahka, ID 83520 208-476-4591 www.fws.gov/dworshak

Charles M. Russell NationalWildlife Refuge P.O. Box 110 Airport Road Lewistown, MT 59457 406-538-8706

www.fws.gov/refuge/

charles m russell

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

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/

Yellowstone, WY 82190-0168

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

Yellowstone

**National Park** 

P.O. Box 168

307-344-7381

www.nps.gov/yell

## State Agencies Montana Department of Fish,

Wildlife & Parks 1420 East 6th Avenue Helena, MT 59620 406-444-2535 http://fwp.mt.gov Idaho Department of Fish & Game P.O. Box 25 Boise, ID 83707 208-334-3700 www.idfg.idaho.gov







For an interactive, Google Earth virtual tour of the trail please visit the Nez Perce Trail Foundation website at www.nezpercetrail.net

#### **Bureau of Land Management**

Vale District Office 100 Oregon Street Vale, OR 97918-9630

541-473-3144 https://www.blm.gov/office/valedistrict-office

Salmon Field Office

1206 S.Challis St. Salmon, ID 83467 208-756-2215 www.blm.gov/idaho

Upper Snake Field Office 1405 Hollipark Drive Idaho Falls, ID 83401 208-524-7500 www.blm.gov/idaho

Cody Field Office 1002 Blackburn P.O. Box 518 Cody, WY 82414-8464 307-578-5900 www.blm.gov/wyoming

Lewistown Field Office 920 NE Main St Lewistown, MT 59457 406-538-1900

www.blm.gov/montana-dakotas

Missoula Field Office
3255 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula, MT 59804
406-329-3914

www.blm.gov/montana-dakotas

Upper Missouri River
Breaks Interpretive Center
701 7th Street
Fort Benton, MT 59442
406-622-4000
www.blm.gov/montana-dakotas

Dillon Field Office
1005 Selway Drive
Dillon, MT 59725

406-683-8000
www.blm.gov/montana-dakotas/
Billings Field Office
5001 Southgate Drive

406-896-5013
www.blm.gov/montana-dakotas

Cottonwood Field Office
2 Butte Drive

2 Butte Drive Cottonwood, ID 83522 208-962-3245 www.blm.gov/idaho

Billings, MT 59101

Havre Field Office 3990 Highway 2 West, Havre, MT 59501 406-262-2820 www.blm.gov/montana-dakotas/

Malta Field Office 501 South 2nd Street East, Malta, MT 59538, 406-654-5100 www.blm.gov/montana-dakotas

