

Leadore and Island Park, Idaho,
to Yellowstone National Park, Montana



Discover the
**Nez Perce
Trail**

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AUTO TOUR





The Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail

Designated by Congress in 1986, the entire Nez Perce National Historic Trail stretches 1,170 miles from the Wallowa Valley of eastern Oregon to the plains of north-central Montana.

This segment of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail from **Leadore, Idaho, to West Yellowstone Montana** is one of five available tours. As you travel this historic trail, you will see highway signs marking the official Auto Tour route.

Each designated Auto Tour route stays on all-weather roads passable for all types of vehicles. Adventure Routes are an alternative for those seeking the most authentic historic route. They are often on gravel or dirt roads, so plan ahead.



Check weather and road conditions before embarking on your journey.

Current Auto Tour Opportunities

See the available Auto Tour brochure for each trail segment indicated on map below for specific route information.



- Nez Perce National Historic Trail
- Leadore/Yellowstone National Park
- Trail Segments (Auto Tour brochure available)
- Traditional Nez Perce Tribe Homelands
- Nez Perce Indian Reservation
- Colville Indian Reservation
- Yellowstone National Park
- Umatilla Indian Reservation

Two Ways to Experience



this segment
of the



Nez Perce Trail

This brochure describes the sad and difficult journey of the Nez Perce as they fled the U.S. Army under General Howard's command, following a surprise attack on their camp along the Big Hole River. Carrying their dying and wounded with them, the Nez Perce traveled southward through a vast and rugged landscape of wind-swept, sagebrush plains and high mountain valleys from Leadore, Idaho, to West Yellowstone, Montana.

Nez Perce Route

Cross the Continental Divide on Beaverhead County Highway 324 at Bannock Pass then pick up Idaho State Highway 29 into Leadore, Idaho. Once in Leadore take Idaho State Highway 28 south through the Birch Creek Valley to the intersection with Idaho State Highway 22. Here you turn northeast onto Idaho State Highway 22 and follow it into Dubois, Idaho. At Dubois take Clark County Road A2 east until you come to U.S. Highway 20. Turn north onto U.S. Highway 20, past Henry's Lake, over Targhee Pass and back into Montana.



The Army Route

Take Interstate 15 south to Spencer from Dillon, Montana, through Monida Pass, or follow Interstate 15 north to Spencer, Idaho from Idaho Falls, Idaho. At Spencer, turn east onto Idmon Road and follow it to Idmon where it intersects with Clark County Road A2. Follow Clark County Road A2 east to U.S. Highway 20, then turn north over the Targhee Pass and back into Montana.



Prelude to the Flight of the Nez Perce

Prior to 1855 the Nez Perce homeland extended throughout much of north-central Idaho, northeastern Oregon and southeastern Washington. Tension mounted as whites moved West and settled in the Nez Perce territory. In that same year, the United States government made a treaty that established a 5,000-square-mile Nez Perce Indian Reservation encompassing most of their traditional homeland.

However, the discovery of gold on Nez Perce land triggered an influx of more settlers and fueled more conflicts. A new treaty in 1863 shrank the reservation to one-tenth its original size. Some bands of Nez Perce refused to sign the treaty and became known as the "non-treaty" Nez Perce.

The government, responding to pressure from settlers, called on the military to force the non-treaty Nez Perce onto the new reservation in Idaho Territory. General Oliver Otis Howard, a Civil War veteran, was to carry out the task.

From June to October of 1877, Chief Joseph, Chief Looking Glass, Chief White Bird, Chief Ollokot, Lean Elk and others led nearly 750 Nez Perce men, women and children, along with twice that many horses, over 1,170 mountainous miles to what they hoped would be safety with their friends to the east.

The 1877 flight of the Nez Perce from their homelands pursued by U.S. Army General Howard and Colonels Sturgis, Gibbon and Miles is one of the most fascinating and sorrowful events in Western U.S. history.



Chronology of the 1877 Flight of the Nez Perce from Leadore to West Yellowstone

- August 13–** Nez Perce cross the Continental Divide at Bannock Pass and set up camp just outside Junction. General Howard departs Big Hole Battlefield leaving most of his infantry behind and camps 23 miles south of the battlefield. The remainder of Howard's troops leave on August 15 and catch up with him a few days later.
- August 14–** Nez Perce move camp to Gilmore Summit area at the head of Birch Creek. General Howard advances 25 miles to Horse Prairie Creek.
- August 15–** Nez Perce move south through the Lemhi Valley on Old Mormon Road. Along Birch Creek warriors encounter a wagon train carrying food and supplies. A fight ensues, leaving five members of the wagon train dead and one Nez Perce mortally wounded.
- Aug. 16-17–** Nez Perce stop at Hole-in-the-Rock, then cross the wagon road above Dry Creek Station near present-day Dubois, Idaho, and camp in Camas Meadows. General Howard's troops camp at Red Rock Station and then Junction Station. Lieutenant Bacon is dispatched to the vicinity of Henry's Lake via Red Rock to watch for and intercept the Nez Perce. Captain Calloway and a group of Montana volunteers join General Howard.
- August 18–** Nez Perce camp near the junction of Camas and Spring Creeks. Captain Norwood joins General Howard, now camped at Dry Creek Station, eight miles below Pleasant Valley on the stage road.
- August 19–** Nez Perce camp southeast of Camas Meadows. General Howard reaches Camas Meadows and establishes Camp Calloway.
- August 20–** A group of warriors raid General Howard's camp and make off with the mule herd. Captain Norwood's command, one of three, is sent in pursuit and later skirmishes at Camas Meadows battleground with the Nez Perce.
- August 21–** General Howard moves his troops to Shotgun Creek. The Nez Perce camp in a meadow southwest of Henry's Lake.
- August 22–** Nez Perce cross the Continental Divide at Targhee Pass, enter Montana and descend to the Madison River Valley, where they enter Yellowstone National Park.
- August 24–** General Howard moves camp to Henry's Lake inlet at Sawtell Ranch. He then leaves for Virginia City, Montana, for supplies and mules.
- August 28–** After returning from Virginia City on August 27, General Howard and his men leave Henry's Lake and proceed to Yellowstone National Park. The Montana volunteers leave General Howard's command and head for home.

— AS YOU TRAVEL THE TRAIL—

*The trail memorializes not only
those who died during the flight,
but also those who survived.*

*Their tragic journey marked the end
of freedom for the Nez Perce
and opened their lands to settlement.*

*As you travel this historic trail,
between Leadore and
Yellowstone National Park,
whether you drive, ride or walk,
you will gain an understanding
and appreciation
for the difficulty of their journey
and the tremendous odds
the Nez Perce had to face and overcome.*

The Chase Begins

Rather than risk conflict by continuing to resist relocation, the non-treaty Nez Perce gathered their livestock and belongings and began a painful and difficult journey to the new reservation.

On June 14, 1877, the Nez Perce bands reached a familiar camas-gathering site at Tolo Lake near Grangeville, Idaho.

That night several young warriors, angered by past atrocities and injustices at the hands of white settlers, set out to avenge their people. Their raid left a number of local settlers dead. The Nez Perce decided to flee and thus embarked upon a four-month journey, General Howard in full pursuit.



camas plant

The camas bulb, a staple food of the Nez Perce, is more nutritious than a potato. It is gathered with a digging stick, then roasted, baked, broiled, steamed or dried.

1 Bannock Pass

Before starting over the Lolo Trail, the chiefs proclaimed there would be a peaceable and law-abiding passage through all the country.

After a bloody two-day battle at the Big Hole River, the Nez Perce gathered their wounded and traveled south through the Big Hole and Horse Prairie Valleys of Montana, raiding a few ranches on the way. On August 13 they crossed the Continental Divide at Bannock Pass into Idaho.

2 Meeting With Chief Tendoy

“He (Lean Elk) understood and would have the people up early in the morning, and traveling till about ten o’clock. Then he ordered a stop and cooking was done while the horses filled upon grass. About two o’clock he would travel again. Kept going until about ten o’clock at night. We had no timepiece, but we could easily judge our movements. In this way the people covered many miles each sun. They were outdistancing the soldiers. Everybody was glad ...”

*—Hair Combed Over Eyes (Wottolen),
Tribal Historian and Warrior*

After crossing Bannock Pass, the Nez Perce moved down Cruickshank Canyon to the mouth of Timber Creek. At the small town of Junction (two miles east of Leadore) locals awaited them behind a small, hastily constructed stockade. Here, Chiefs White Bird and Looking Glass met with Chief Tendoy of the Lemhi Shoshone to ask for his support. Instead, Chief Tendoy advised the Nez Perce to move on. The Nez Perce complied and camped that night near what is today Nez Perce Canyon. Lean Elk (Wa-wook-ke-ya Was Sauw) knew this country well and accepted leadership of the main group.

3 Trouble at Birch Creek

On August 14, the Nez Perce traveled south through the vast expanse of the Lemhi Valley on Old Mormon Road (Idaho State Highway 28).

As you drive down this valley, you are surrounded by two magnificent mountain ranges. To the west are the Lemhi Mountains, with peaks rising to more than 10,500 feet. To the east you will see the Bitterroot Range. Here, the Continental Divide defines the border between Idaho and Montana.

The Nez Perce moved quickly, crossing Gilman Divide (Salmon River Pass) and traveled south along Birch Creek. While crossing the Corrine-Virginia City Wagon Road, around noon on Wednesday, August 15, a group of Nez Perce warriors crossed paths with several heavily laden freight wagons heading for the mining camps near Salmon City and Leesburg. The three teamsters and four passengers had stopped at Birch Creek to eat lunch. Before the men could grab their rifles, the warriors surrounded them. Desperate for food and supplies, the Nez Perce tried to barter with the teamsters.

Things turned ugly when whiskey was found among the supplies. Albert Lyonsk happened upon the Nez Perce while hunting for lost cattle, slipped out of camp and hid in Birch Creek until nightfall when he made his getaway. Two Chinese cooks also escaped when they were sent for firewood. The struggle that ensued over the contents of the wagons left five men—three teamsters and two miners—dead. Ketalkpoosmin was mortally wounded in a scuffle when he tried to persuade the warriors to leave and return to the main Nez Perce group.



Birch Creek encounter

Word of the killings spread quickly across the valley throwing fear into the local residents. A rescue party arrived to find the wagons burned and five dead. They were buried where they fell, but later disinterred and reburied in the cemetery at Salmon, Idaho.



Birch Creek, Idaho

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4 Moving On

Forty animals from the wagon train were absorbed into the Nez Perce herd. From Birch Creek the Nez Perce moved east, skirting the foothills of the mountains and crossing Medicine Lodge Creek and Beaver Creek. They again crossed Corrine-Virginia City Wagon Road a few miles north of Dubois. They stopped at Hole-in-the-Rock Station and cut the telegraph lines.

The Nez Perce left a broad trail—50–100 feet wide. Vegetation was almost entirely obliterated by tramping horses dragging scores of travois poles pulling wounded. That evening they set up camp in Camas Meadows.

Camas Meadows encompasses an area about five miles east to west at its widest point and ten miles from north to south. Today it is bordered east, north and west by the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. Camas and Spring Creeks flow through the meadows. The meadows have lush grassy areas punctuated by basalt fields. Basalt fields are lava flow outcroppings left from volcanic upheavals that occurred more than a half million years ago.



Camas Meadows, Idaho

5 General Howard Takes Up the Pursuit

After the battle at Big Hole, Colonel Gibbon's pursuit of the Nez Perce was taken up by General Oliver Otis Howard. Howard and his men proceeded hastily east to head off the Nez Perce. They were spurred on by news of disastrous encounters between Nez Perce warriors and settlers at Horse Prairie. On August 14 General Howard and a small group of his soldiers traveled 25 miles; the balance of troops followed with slower moving wagons full of supplies. Passing through the town of Bannack, they were greeted by cheering settlers. The troops camped 12 miles beyond the town on Horse Prairie Creek, then moved on to Red Rock Station.

6 Howard's Strategy

On August 17 near Snowline, fearing the Nez Perce might escape back into Montana, Howard sent 40 cavalry men under the command of First Lieutenant George R. Bacon and several Bannock scouts under the command of Orlando "Rube" Robbins to proceed via Red Rock Lake to Reynolds Pass near Henry's Lake. Lieutenant Bacon was to wait in the vicinity of Targhee Pass and watch for the Nez Perce for 48 hours, and, if they showed up, to detain them and send word back to Howard.



7 Camp at Dry Creek

General Howard and his men crossed the Continental Divide at Monida Pass and made their way to Junction Station, where Captain James E. Calloway and 55 Montana volunteers armed with a mountain howitzer joined them. After the arrival of Captain Randolph Norwood's Second Cavalry on August 18, General Howard's forces moved on. They rested that night at Dry Creek Station just 18 miles west of the Nez Perce camp. On Sunday, August 19, the command started east and shortly thereafter came upon the trampled trail of the Nez Perce.



Dry Creek near Dubois, Idaho

8 Camp at Camas Meadows

"Each knoll so much like another, that you cannot fix your whereabouts by the distinct and diverse features around you. Should you drive to pasture five horses over these wave-like knolls for a mile, and then leave them for an hour to graze, it would be next to impossible to find them."

—General Oliver Otis Howard

General Howard camped near where the Nez Perce had been observed the day before in Camas Meadows. It was Sunday, August 19. All day the soldiers followed a broad trail left by the Nez Perce. After an 18-mile march across the sagebrush prairie, General Howard arrived at Camas Meadows. He camped along the high ground fringing the bottom of Spring Creek and named the camp in honor of Captain Calloway.



General Oliver Otis Howard



Camas Meadows Battle monument, Idaho

9 Encounter at Camas Meadows

Eighteen miles away, the Nez Perce scouts had returned to camp, bringing word of the soldiers's location. Black Hair had a strong vision in which he saw himself and others escaping with the army's horses. He told the chiefs of his vision, and 28 men were organized under the leadership of Ollokot, Looking Glass and Toohoolhoolzote to carry out a raid.

Near midnight, they approached the army camp. Several warriors crept quietly among the herd of animals, cutting them loose and removing warning bells. The main group of warriors rode four to a column, as would a cavalry unit. The sentry mistook them for Lieutenant Bacon's returning men. He called out a challenge that resulted in a shot being fired that awakened the troops and spurred the Nez Perce to action.

Earlier, up ahead near Henry's Lake, Lieutenant Bacon waited and watched for the Nez Perce. After two days he assumed they had taken another route and, as ordered, returned to General Howard's camp. Ironically, the Nez Perce departed Camas Meadows and arrived near Henry's Lake later that day, narrowly missing Lieutenant Bacon.

General Howard ordered three companies of about 150 men to recapture the mules and horses that were by this time far down the trail. Captain Norwood's company was ordered to follow the Nez Perce. He caught up with them after about six miles. They dismounted to exchange shots. The skirmish lasted more than four hours. Just as the men began to realize they were being circled by the sound of firing from a flanking maneuver of the Nez Perce, "recall" was sounded.

"The race to the thicket was something never to be forgotten, for a cavalryman is not trained for a five hundred yard sprint ... I had a horse's nose-bag slung over my shoulder containing extra cartridges, and a bullet cut the strap and it fell to the ground. A hero would have stopped, gone back and recovered that bag, but not I."

—Lieutenant Henry M. Benson

The troops hastily built rock cairns as a defense and remained until reinforcements came. The Nez Perce left as reinforcements arrived.

Meanwhile, the Nez Perce warriors assessed the success of their raid. As the sun arose, the warriors realized they had captured most of the mule herd and a few horses. Their raid proved a tactical success by leaving General Howard with too few pack animals forcing him to go to Virginia City to get more mules to continue his pursuit. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the Nez Perce gathered their stock, broke camp and left Camas Meadows. For their part the military paid a high price for the few mules they recovered: Bugler Brooks lay dead, two soldiers died later and five men were wounded, which Captain Calloway's volunteers escorted to Virginia City.

"Those soldiers ... we must have hit one or two ... they became scared ... A bugle sounded down among the timber, and those soldiers skipped for their lives for that shelter. We sent bullets flying after them but they all reached the brush and disappeared."

—Bird Alighting (Peopeo Tholekt)

"The soldiers did not hurry to follow us. They slowed after losing their pack mules."

—Yellow Wolf (Hemene Moxmox)

10 The Nez Perce Reach the Madison River

After spending one day at Henry's Lake, the Nez Perce departed on August 22. They crossed the 7,072-foot Targhee Pass and descended to the Madison River. They then began a journey through the Yellowstone wilderness, an area revered by the Nez Perce for its spiritual power. This area was designated as Yellowstone National Park in 1872.

Henry's Lake

11 On August 24 General Howard and his troops reached the southern end of Henry's Lake. There he learned of Lieutenant Bacon's return and his failure to intercept the Nez Perce. With that news General Howard realized this desperate chase would continue.

Both the Nez Perce and the U.S. Army spent time at this shallow lake located in a grassy, seven-mile-wide basin surrounded by mountains. Nearby Reynolds Pass funnels traffic on Idaho State Highway 87 to the north towards Bozeman or Ennis, Montana, while U.S. Highway 20 crosses Targhee Pass at the Continental Divide and leads to West Yellowstone. As Idaho State Highway 87 passes the north shore of Henry's Lake, it meets Forest Service Road 55, which continues around the lake to Staley Springs. This is where Gilman Sawtell, the first homesteader in Island Park, bivouacked General Howard's troops while the general rode to Virginia City for supplies.

A loop can be made around the lake by continuing on to Forest Road 53. The road ends at U.S. Highway 20 and is a lovely drive.

Henry's Lake, Idaho



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The Final Weeks

On August 27 General Howard returned from Virginia City. The following day he moved his troops past Henry's Lake over Targhee Pass and entered Yellowstone National Park.

By the time General Howard entered Yellowstone the Nez Perce were deep within the park. They captured and later released a group of tourists and eventually made their way to the park's eastern border, where they exited through Hoodoo Pass. After leaving Yellowstone Park, the Nez Perce continued on toward the buffalo country of the Upper Missouri River. When they learned their Crow allies could not offer them refuge, the Nez Perce turned north toward Canada. There, they hoped to gain asylum among Sitting Bull's Sioux Tribe, already exiled from the United States following their defeat of Colonel Custer at the Little Big Horn the year before. Sadly, the Nez Perce flight ended just 40 miles south of the Canadian border.

We walked out, leaving many of our friends. Some were too bad wounded to travel and had to stay...

—Wetatonmi



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Horse Butte Lookout and Hebgen Lake, Montana as seen from Targhee Pass

This Trail Is a Sacred Trust for All Americans.

“We, the surviving Nez Perces, want to leave our hearts, memories, hallowed presence as a never-ending revelation to the story of the event of 1877. These trails will live in our hearts.”

“We want to thank all who visit these sacred trails, that they will share our innermost feelings. Because their journey makes this an important time for the present, past and future.”

—Frank B. Andrews, Nez Perce descendant

For more information on the Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail visit on the Web at www.fs.fed.us/npnht or contact:

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