

Big Hole, Horse Prairie
and Lemhi Valleys



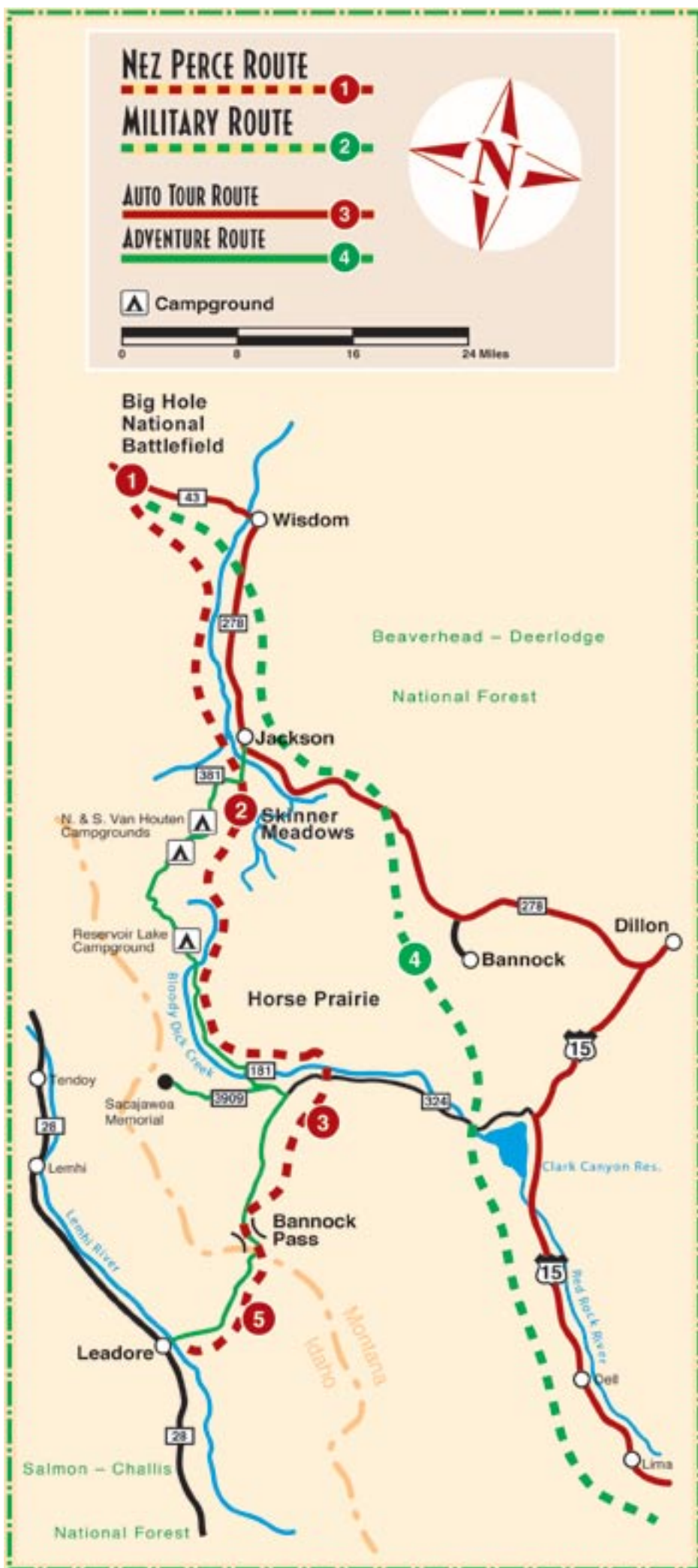
Discover the
**Nez Perce
Trail**



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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 the **Big Hole National Battlefield, Montana, to Leadore, Idaho** 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
- Big Hole, Horse Prairie and Lemhi Valleys
- Trail Segments (Auto Tour brochure available)
- Traditional Nez Perce Tribe Homelands
- Nez Perce Indian Reservation
- Colville Indian Reservation
- Yellowstone National Park
- Umatilla Indian Reservation

Experience the Nez Perce Trail



This brochure describes the Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail between Big Hole National Battlefield, Montana, and Leadore, Idaho.

In August 1877, the tranquility of the Big Hole Valley was shattered by the sound of gunfire as a battle erupted between five bands of Nez Perce Indians and U.S. military forces along the banks of the Big Hole River.

For valley settlers, anxiety turned to fear and concern. Nearly 800 Nez Perce men, women and children gathered their wounded and fled southward toward Skinner Meadows and the country beyond. Today you can retrace the route used by the Nez Perce and their military pursuers.

Driving Tips

- Many historic sites are on private property and should not be explored without permission.
- Watch out for weather changes! Most of the dirt roads, when dry, are fine for passenger cars but may become impassable when it rains or snows. Four-wheel drive may be needed on some roads. Snow is possible at any time of the year.
- Plan on a full day. This is big country, and some roads are slow. Be sure your fuel tank is full, and remember that if you stop to explore, the trip will take more time than you think.
- Treat all historic sites with respect. Memories of war and death still fill many places you will visit.
- Take away only pictures as mementos.

As you follow this historic trail, you can either stay on the designated Auto Tour route along paved and gravel roads or explore the adventure route that more closely follows the historic trail. On either, you'll find a story of courage and great sadness. You will see where history happened and realize that this story is more than dates and events. It is about real people caught up in turmoil beyond their control.

Auto Tour Route (passable for all types of vehicles)

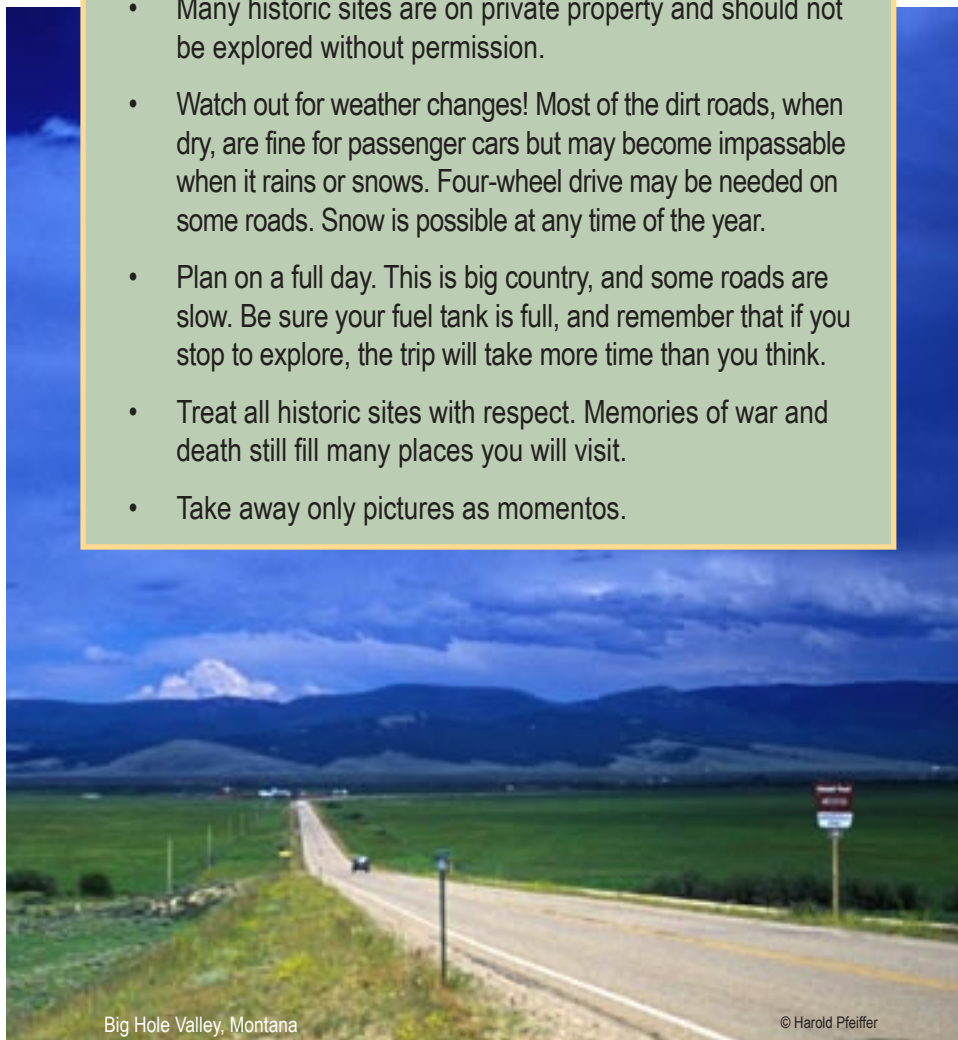
Staying on all-weather roads, this Auto Tour route allows visitors to experience the Nez Perce National Historic Trail from a distance. This route begins near Lost Trail Pass on the Montana/Idaho border and heads south along U.S. Highway 93 and Idaho State Highway 28 to Salmon and Leadore, Idaho.



Big Hole National Battlefield, Montana

Adventure Route (not recommended for motor homes or vehicles towing trailers; usually passable from July to October)

For those who want to see the more authentic historic route, a rough two-lane road connects Jackson and the Horse Prairie Valley in Montana. Before you leave, examine the map carefully, and watch for signs along the way. You may want to have a more detailed Forest Service map. The adventure route follows the Nez Perce (Nee Me Poo) National Historic Trail as it traces the route traveled by five bands of Nez Perce people in 1877.



Big Hole Valley, Montana

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The War Nobody Wanted and Everybody Lost

“My son, my body is returning to my mother earth and my spirit is going very soon to see the Great Spirit chief. When I am gone think of your country ... A few more years and the white men will be all around you. They have their eyes on this land. My son, never forget my dying words. This country holds your father’s body. Never sell the bones of your father and mother.”

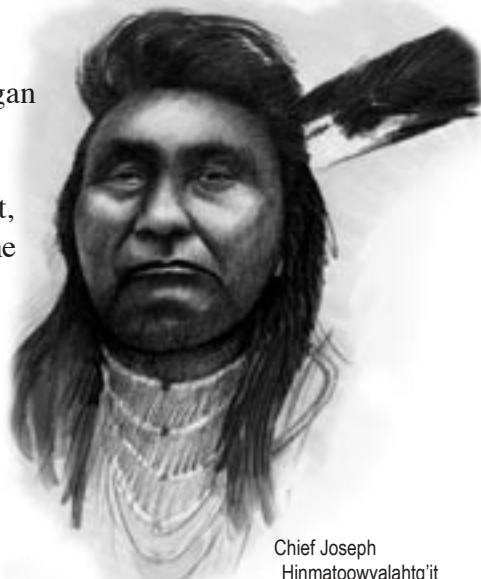
—Old Chief Joseph to his son, Young Joseph, 1871

In the mid-1800s settlers began encroaching upon Nez Perce homelands protected under the treaty of 1855. As a result, tension and anger between the Nez Perce and the settlers grew. In 1863 the United States government forced a new treaty that reduced Nez Perce lands to a reservation one-tenth the size of the 1855 boundary and ordered all Nez Perce to live there.

Some of the bands refused to sign the 1863 treaty. In May of 1877 these five bands known as the “non-treaty Nez Perce” were ordered by General Oliver Otis Howard to report to the reservation at Lapwai, Idaho, within 30 days. Some of these bands reluctantly agreed.

During their journey to Lapwai, fighting broke out when several young warriors, avenging past wrongs, attacked and killed white settlers along the Salmon River. When word of the attacks reached Lapwai, the military responded. On June 17, 1877, the first major battle of the Nez Perce campaign took place at White Bird Canyon, Idaho.

Other skirmishes followed as army units and citizen volunteers commanded by General Howard tried to rein in the Nez Perce. The Nez Perce fled to Montana, hoping to leave the conflict behind them. Escaping a barricade near Lolo, Montana, they traveled peacefully up the Bitterroot Valley toward a favorite camping spot in the Big Hole Valley. There, in a meadow near the North Fork of the Big Hole River, they rested, gathering camas bulbs and cutting tipi poles in preparation for their journey to the plains farther east.



Chief Joseph
Hinmatoowyahtq'it
(Thunder Traveling to Higher Areas)

Chronology of the 1877 Flight of the Nez Perce Through the Big Hole, Horse Prairie and the Lemhi Valleys

- August 7–** After a difficult climb over the Continental Divide, Nez Perce camp along the Big Hole River. Colonel Gibbon is now at the Continental Divide. Lieutenant Bradley is sent ahead with volunteers to scout. General Howard is 22 miles east of Lolo Hot Springs.
- August 8–** Nez Perce camp at the Big Hole. Colonel Gibbon crosses crest of the Continental Divide, parks wagons and deploys his command just a few miles from the Nez Perce camp. General Howard enters the Bitterroot Valley, camps north of Pine Hollow.
- August 9–** Just before dawn, Colonel Gibbon and his troops charge the sleeping Nez Perce village at the Big Hole. Some 90 Nez Perce are lost, many of them women and children. General Howard is near the mouth of Rye Creek.
- August 10–** Howard goes with his fastest cavalry to Trail Creek, a 53-mile trek. The Infantry are now north of Stevensville.
- August 11–** General Howard reaches the Big Hole. The Nez Perce camp on Horse Prairie. Montague, Flynn, Smith, Farnsworth and Cooper are killed.
- August 12–** Remaining cavalry reach the Big Hole.
- August 13–** Nez Perce cross the Continental Divide at Bannock Pass and set up camp just outside Junction. General Howard departs the Big Hole Battlefield leaving most of his infantry behind and camps 23 miles south of the battlefield. The remainder of his troops leave on August 15 and catch up with General Howard a few days later.
- 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 results, leaving five members of the wagon train dead and one Nez Perce mortally wounded.
- August 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 Rocks to watch for and intercept the Nez Perce. Captain Calloway and a group of Montana volunteers join General Howard.

— AS YOU TRAVEL THE TRAIL—

The trail memorializes not only
those who died during the flight,
but 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 Big Hole National Battlefield
and Leadore, Idaho, 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.

1

Big Hole Battlefield to Skinner Meadows “A Rifle Shot At First Light”

“That night the warriors paraded about camp, singing, all making a good time. It was first since the war started, everybody with good feelings. Going to the buffalo country! No more fighting after Lolo Pass. War was quit! All Montana citizens [are] our friends. This land had belonged to the Flatheads, our old time friends. They called it Iskumkselalik Pah; meaning ‘place of the ground squirrels.’”



—Yellow Wolf (Hemene Moxmox)

The Nez Perce, however, were unaware that another pursuer had taken up the chase. Ordered to Missoula from Fort Shaw, Colonel John Gibbon and his 7th Infantry made a forced march through the Bitterroot Valley, covering upwards of 30 miles a day. After reaching the Big Hole Valley, scouts quickly located the Nez Perce camp.

Looking down on more than 90 tipis spread out along the North Fork of the Big Hole River, Gibbon ordered his men to prepare for a surprise attack. At 4 a.m. on August 9, 1877, as the first light of dawn broke the eastern horizon, Gibbon’s troops awaited the signal to start their assault.

“Our skirmishers were advanced a short distance where we remained for the signs of the coming daylight, when a solitary Indian came out from the lodges, riding directly towards us, evidently going to their herd of horses ... we had come between them and their stock. In order for the Indian to reach the horses, he would have to come through our line, and we could not remain long without being discovered. My men had been instructed (to shoot the first Indian they saw) and the poor devil paid the penalty. Some four or five of the boys helped him on his way.”

—Captain John Catlin

The soldiers descended upon the sleeping village, plunging into willows and icy water as they set the stage for the battle of the Big Hole.

“About early morning I was awakened. My father and Chief Yellow Bull were standing, talking low. They thought they saw soldiers across the creek. Next instant we heard shots from above the creek across the canyon, maybe a quarter mile away. I heard the loud call, ‘We are attacked! We are attacked!’”

—Red Elk (Wewúkiye ‘ilp’ilp)

“Few of us will soon forget the wail of mingled grief, rage and horror which came from the camp four or five hundred yards from us when the Indians returned to it and recognized their slaughtered warriors, women and children. Above this wail of horror we could hear the passionate appeal of the leaders urging their followers to fight and the war whoops in answer which boded us no good.”

—From Colonel John Gibbon’s report

For two days the fighting wore on. Despite Gibbon’s surprise attack, the Nez Perce rallied and turned the tide of battle. On a wooded knoll above the river, Gibbon and his men found themselves pinned down in rifle pits, hastily dug with tools at hand, including trowel bayonets. As the fighting continued, the Nez Perce quickly broke camp. They buried their dead as best they could, loaded the wounded on travois and set off south through the Big Hole Valley.

“All along the trail was crying. Mourning for many left where we thought no war would come. Old people, half grown boys and girls, mothers and little babies. Many only half buried and left for the wolves and coyotes. I can never forget that day.”

—Black Eagle (Tipyeléhne cimúuxcimux)

Travel Tips

As you leave the Big Hole National Battlefield and journey on to Jackson, Montana, you’ll travel through country that today looks much like it did in 1877. Ranching is still the primary way of life here. The valley’s fertile soil grows rich, thick grass, which attracted settlers to this region over a hundred years ago. Evidence of its bounty can be seen in the loaf-shaped mounds of hay that lie scattered across the valley, giving this area its name, “Land of Ten Thousand Haystacks.”

After passing through Jackson, you can drive a road that closely approximates the actual Nez Perce route. The adventure route provides access to several camping and picnic areas. Watch for signs!

Big Hole National Battlefield, Montana



© Harold Pfeiffer

Finally, with one last volley of shots at the entrenched soldiers, the warriors set off to reunite with their families.

“From the Big Hole, Chief Hototo [Lean Elk] was the guide and leader of the Nez Percés. He had been all over the country, east and north, and he knew the land and the trails ... The people covered many miles each sun. They were outdistancing the soldiers, gaining on them all the time. Everybody was glad.”

—Hair Combed Over Eyes (Wottolen)

Wounded in battle, Colonel Gibbon was taken to Deerlodge, Montana, for treatment. Meanwhile, General Howard took up the chase and continued his pursuit of the Nez Perce.

“There was no stuttering about picking up trails along there, for the main big trail of the hostiles led right off to the south. Horse tracks and mule tracks, and the tracks of 200 troopers and doughboys following them.”

—John (J. W.) Reddington

About 12 miles from the battlefield the Nez Perce made camp along the banks of Lake Creek at a place known as Takseen or “willows.” It is believed they constructed rifle fortifications by digging shallow depressions and surrounding them with stone cobbles. General Howard’s pursuing forces reportedly camped at this same location a few days later.

Looking west you’ll see the southern end of the Bitterroot Mountains. Along this boundary between Montana and Idaho is the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, with excellent daytime and overnight hikes.



The headwaters of the Big Hole River, one of Montana’s blue-ribbon trout streams, are found at the base of the Big Hole Divide. As you look at the lush grass and gentle waters of Skinner Meadows, you can easily imagine the Nez Perce or military stopping here to rest.

Fishing on the Bitterroot River, Montana



© Jerry Bauer

To stay on the designated Auto Tour route, continue on Beaverhead County Road 278 from Jackson to Dillon, Montana. Along the way, stop at Bannack State Park. The ghost town of Bannack was Montana’s first territorial capital. This is where frightened citizens barricaded themselves in Hotel Meade following word the Nez Perce were approaching. Allow an hour or two for your visit.

Nex Perce Horses (Máamin)

The Nez Perce were introduced to horses in the 1730s. Their mastery of the animal soon went beyond the ability to pack and ride; they learned that through selective breeding they could cultivate a horse uniquely suited to the country in which they lived.

Sure-footed, hard-hoofed, strong-winded and powerful, Nez Perce ponies became prized among both whites and Indians. Meriwether Lewis called them “lofty, elegantly formed, active and durable.” Though the Nez Perce used and bred all types of horses, some were developed with distinct markings; large spots colored various shades of brown, white, and grey set them apart from other horses. Early fur traders knew them as Nez Perce horses. Homesteaders to the area called them “appalousey” after the Palouse River region of eastern Washington. The Palouse horse became known as an Appaloosa, a name they carry to this day.

Riding an Appaloosa near Three Buttes, Montana



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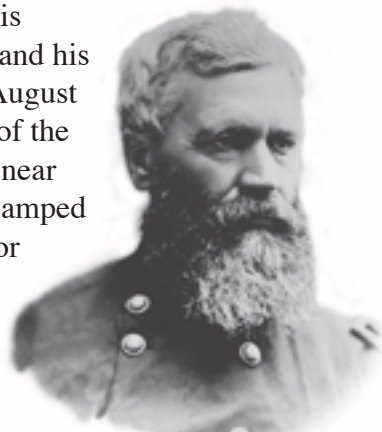
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Skinner Meadows to Horse Prairie

Leaving Behind the Big Hole Valley

Leaving the Takseen camp, the Nez Perce moved south through the Big Hole River drainage. A few miles beyond where Skinner Meadows Road 381 enters the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest is the broad expanse of Skinner Meadows, bordered on the east and west by thick-timbered slopes. With General Howard three days behind them, this area offered the Nez Perce an excellent place to stop and rest.

General Howard's movements through the Big Hole are unclear. His written records indicate he and his men left the battlefield on August 13 and kept "far to the left of the Indians' trail." Somewhere near the town of Bannack they camped at a site they named in honor of Lieutenant Bradley, killed three days earlier at the Big Hole battle.



General Oliver Otis Howard

"The balance of Howard's cavalry (some 180) ... left on the morning of the 13th ... following the trail of the Nez Perces up the Big Hole River to Poplar Creek."

—Henry Buck



Moving southeast, the Nez Perce crossed the Big Hole Divide and followed Bloody Dick Creek downstream toward Horse Prairie.

North of Lemhi Pass, Montana



© Jerry Bauer

As you leave Skinner Meadows and cross over the Big Hole Divide, you pass Reservoir Lake Campground, a great place for a picnic and overnight stay. Driving down Forest Service Road 181, you enter Horse Prairie, a place similar to the Big Hole Valley in its rural lifestyle.



Bloody Dick Creek, Montana

© Harold Pfeiffer

3

Horse Prairie to Bannock Pass

In The Wrong Place At The Wrong Time

Once on Horse Prairie, near Trail Creek, the Nez Perce crossed a well-worn trail used in 1805 by Lewis and Clark to reach the Lemhi Valley on their westward trek. Today, this route is designated as part of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.



Tragedy struck again. While searching for horses, a group of warriors came upon the Montague-Winters ranch. As they approached the house, shooting broke out and four settlers, including William Montague, were killed. After ransacking the house for supplies and bandages, the warriors rounded up all the available horses and left.

“We now kept moving for three suns, watching always for horses. It was good to have fresh ones. Best too, that none be left for soldiers. It was aimed that no horses could be found by soldiers anywhere we passed.”

—Yellow Wolf (Hemene Moxmox)

Meanwhile, citizens of the territorial capital at Bannack braced for the worst. The Hotel Meade became a fortress where women, children and the elderly sought safety. With feather beds piled against the windows and food and water stored inside, the townsfolk prepared for a prolonged siege. Lookouts on nearby hilltops watched for approaching danger and prepared to warn those below by beating on drums.

Fear of a Nez Perce attack spread to other parts of the region as well. East of Bannack, settlers in Marysville and Argenta sought refuge in a mining tunnel. Others barricaded themselves at ranches where log corrals and stout buildings were available.

The fear of attack felt by the people of Bannack proved unfounded, as the Nez Perce bypassed the town by more than 15 miles. Led by Lean Elk, the bands traveled almost due south across Horse Prairie toward Bannock Pass. Today, this route closely parallels Beaverhead County Road 324 as it leaves Horse Prairie and approaches Bannock Pass.

As you reach the summit of Bannock Pass, take time to read the informational signs. Step outside your car and notice the old rail bed, where the Gilmore and Pittsburg Railroad wound its way up the mountain. Built in 1867, the road leading over the pass and into Idaho was known as the Bannock Wagon Road; it served as a route to the gold fields at Bannack.



View of Horse Prairie from Bannock Pass, Montana

© Harold Pfeiffer

4

The Military Route

The Trail Divides: Horse Prairie and Beyond

The movements of General Howard and his troops through the Horse Prairie region differ from those of the Nez Perce. Howard received word of the warriors' attacks at Horse Prairie while encamped north of Skinner Meadows. He left the main trail and pushed his troops toward Bannack on August 14. At Bannack they were met by grateful citizens who cheered them on "by their happy faces and welcome word." Such a pleasant reception was a welcome change for the general, who had complained that people in the Bitterroot Valley "stoutly blamed us for chasing the Indians to their neighborhood."

Continuing south, General Howard reached Horse Prairie on August 15 and camped on a nearby ranch, "a grand farm, well fenced and well kept." His hosts, the Barretts, were less than enthusiastic about the military invading their home.

"My husband ... buried account books, etc. and came home, and cached household goods in the willows, and when Gen. Howard came through with his soldiers, he put a guard with the goods ... one brave fellow took a Confederate bill out of my cabinet, also a switch of hair! Was his wife in need of it or did he think it would serve as a scalp-lock?"

—Alice Barrett

Convinced the Nez Perce would head for the plains of central Montana, Howard scrapped his plan to assist the fortified community of Junction, Idaho, and stayed east of Bannock Pass.

"I moved forward, keeping far to the left of the Indians' trail, and did not forget that the said buffalo country was still eastward."

—General Oliver Otis Howard

General Howard followed the Corrine-Virginia City Wagon Road to Junction Station in southern Idaho, hoping to intercept the Nez Perce before they crossed the stage road and headed for Yellowstone Park. General Howard traveled south toward Dubois, Idaho, along a route closely paralleled today by Interstate 15.



"We made a drive for the Corrine and Deer Lodge stage-road, hoping almost against hope to catch the Indians as they emerged from the mountains, and attempted to cross this road."

—General Oliver Otis Howard

The Soldier

U.S. soldiers in the war of 1877 came from a variety of backgrounds. Many were recent immigrants barely able to speak English, others were educated Americans and a few joined simply for adventure.

Known as "walking soldiers," the infantry proved to be the backbone of the frontier Army, more so than the glorified cavalry.

A soldier's life meant low pay, ill-fitting clothing and bad food. Outfitted with outdated Civil War surplus and arms, they sometimes found themselves out-gunned by better equipped adversaries.

As tension and hostilities between settlers and Indians increased, the poor foot soldier often ended up in harm's way as he did his best to enforce what were sometimes unpopular government demands and policies.



5

Bannock Pass to Leadore Back Into Idaho

Exactly which route the Nez Perce followed as they left Montana and entered Idaho is unclear. Possibilities include Deadman Pass or a trail leading to the Lemhi Valley through Jakes Canyon. The most probable, however, is the route over Bannock Pass.



On August 13, 1877, an advance party of Nez Perce set up camp outside the town of Junction, Idaho.

“The Nez Perce came in here at 10 a.m., about 60 in number with Looking Glass and White Bird. We had a talk with them; they seem to be friendly disposed toward the citizens. They say for us to go home and attend our business. They say Joseph will be here today with 100 men.”

—Jacob Yearian

A small group of Lemhi Shoshone Indians acted as emissaries between Chiefs Looking Glass and White Bird and the townspeople. The Nez Perce chiefs intended no harm and only wished to pass by in peace. They hoped to convince Chief Tendoy of the Lemhi Shoshone and his people to accompany them on their journey to the buffalo grounds. Chief Tendoy’s only reply was a request that they leave as quickly as possible.

Coming down from Bannock Pass, you follow Railroad Canyon down to Leadore, Idaho. Look around the hills for signs of the mining industry that brought settlement to this area. You are now on lands administered by the Salmon-Challis National Forest.

Near Leadore, Idaho



© Harold Pfeiffer

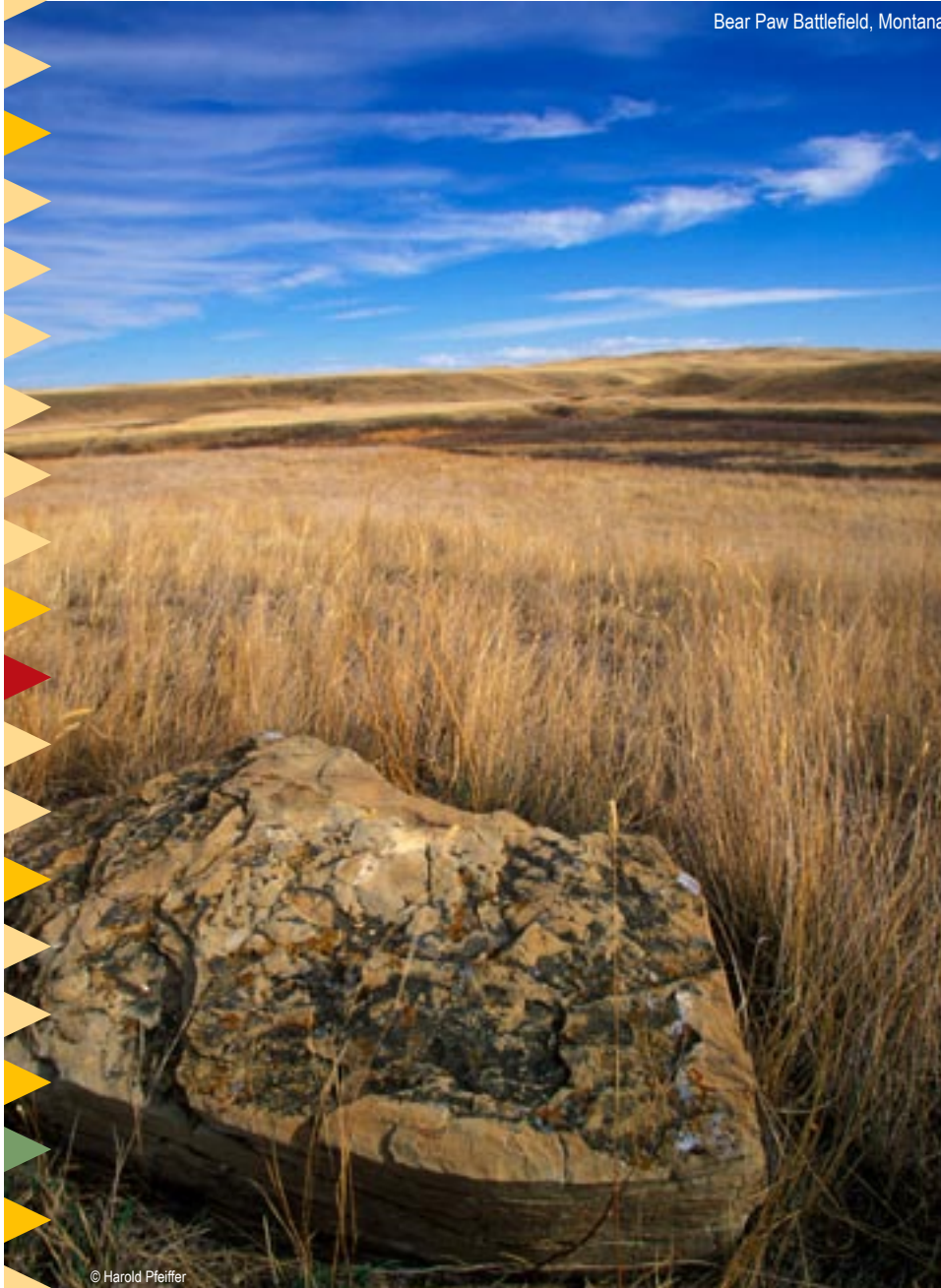
The Remaining Journey

Never to Return Home

From Junction, the weary Nez Perce headed south and east, hoping to put as much distance as possible between themselves and General Howard.

Several skirmishes followed as the Nez Perce struggled across Yellowstone National Park and eastern Montana, pushing hard to reach Canada and the sanctuary they hoped to find. Only 40 miles from the Canadian border, those hopes were crushed.

Bear Paw Battlefield, Montana

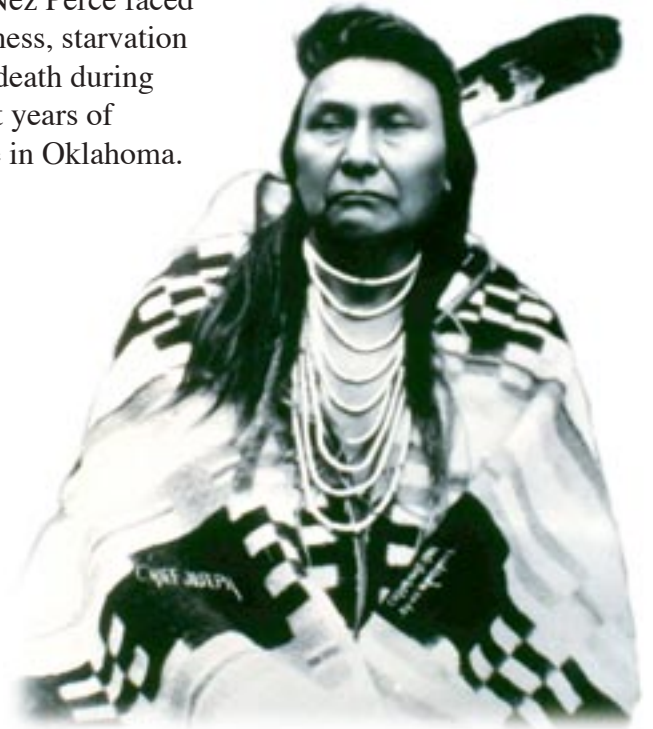


© Harold Pfeiffer

Along Snake Creek, just north of the Bear Paw Mountains, the Nez Perce engaged the combined forces of Colonel Nelson Miles and General Howard. During a six-day siege, many prominent Nez Perce leaders died, including Chief Looking Glass, Lean Elk and Ollokot.

Chief White Bird led a group to safety in Canada, where they joined Sitting Bull and members of the Sioux tribe. Sitting Bull and his people had escaped to Canada a year earlier after helping defeat Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer at the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

On October 5, 1877, Chief Joseph handed his rifle to Colonel Miles. The Nez Perce War was over. Following their surrender at Bear Paw Battlefield, the Nez Perce faced sickness, starvation and death during eight years of exile in Oklahoma.



During this time Chief Joseph became a powerful and eloquent spokesman pleading for the return of the surviving Nez Perce to their homelands. In 1885, they at last returned west, but not to their homes.

Some were sent to the Nez Perce Reservation in north-central Idaho, the Umatilla Indian Reservation in north-central Oregon and Joseph and his people faced further banishment on the Colville Indian Reservation in northeastern Washington, where he died on September 21, 1904.

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:

Nez Perce National Historic Trail
12730 Highway 12
Orofino, ID 83544
208.476.8334

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest
420 Barrett Street
Dillon, MT 59725
406.683.3900
www.fs.fed.us/r1/b-d

Salmon-Challis National Forest
PO Box 729
Salmon, ID 83467
208.756.2215
www.fs.fed.us/r4/s-c

Big Hole National Battlefield
PO Box 237
Wisdom, MT 59761
406.689.3155
www.nps.gov/biho

Dillon Field Office
Bureau of Land Management
1005 Selway Drive
Dillon, MT 59725
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