

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

OREGON



IDAHO



MONTANA



WYOMING



*Big Hole National Battlefield,
Wisdom, Montana*



Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture



Bureau of Land Management
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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



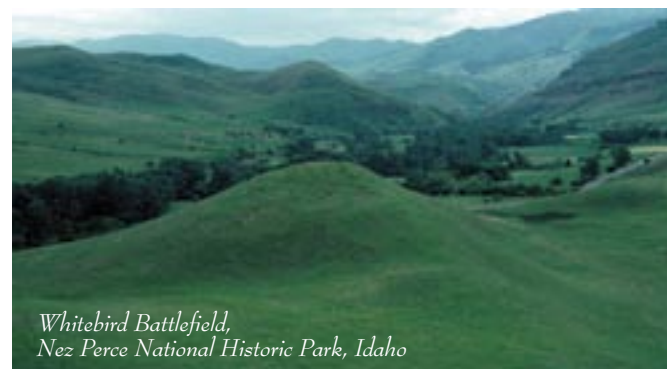
US Fish & Wildlife Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Congress passed the National Trails System Act in 1968 establishing a framework for a nationwide system of scenic, recreational and historic trails. The Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) Trail, extending about 1,170 miles from the vicinity of Wallowa Lake, Oregon, to Bear Paw Battlefield near Chinook, Montana, was added by Congress as a National Historic Trail in 1986.

The Nez Perce Indians, originally composed of independent villages and bands, were long known as friends of the whites. They had welcomed Lewis and Clark, fur trappers, and missionaries to their homeland in the mountains, valleys, and along the rivers of southeastern Washington, northeastern Oregon, and north-central Idaho. In 1855, Washington Territorial Governor Isaac I. Stevens responded to increasing white expansion and negotiated a treaty with Nez Perce chiefs. This treaty recognized Nez Perce peoples' rights to their traditional homeland and established it as a reservation of some 5,000 square miles.

In 1860 prospectors encroached on Nez Perce lands and struck gold. In the ensuing rush, thousands of miners, merchants and settlers disregarded Steven's treaty, overran large parts of the reservation, took Indian lands and livestock, and heaped mistreatment and injustices on Nez Percés. To cope with the crisis, the US Government engaged the enraged Nez Perce in new treaty talks in 1863. Nearly all tribal bands were represented.

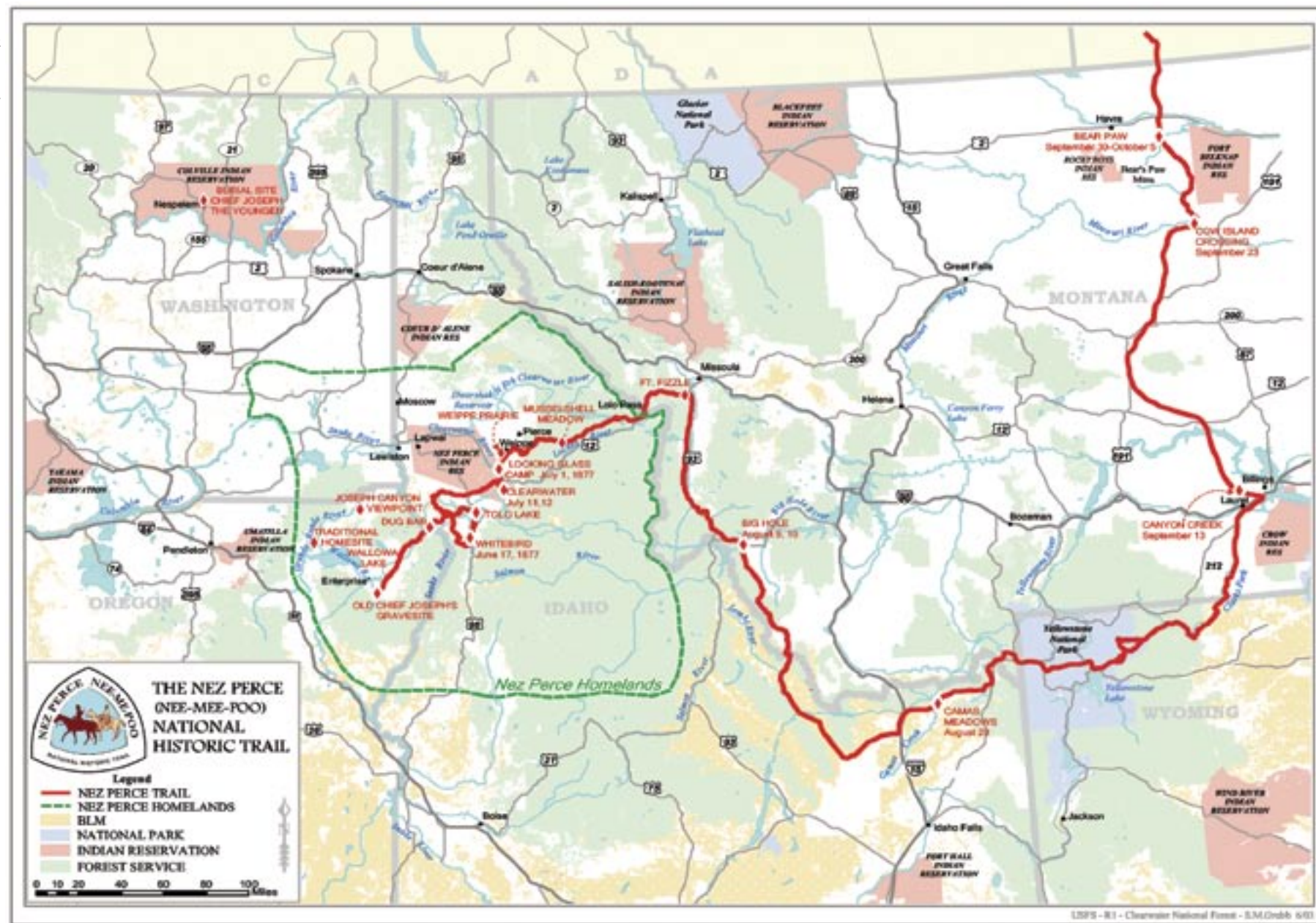
When the government tried to get some bands to cede all or most of their lands, they refused and left the council. In their absence, other chiefs, without tribal authority to speak for the departed bands, did



Whitebird Battlefield,
Nez Perce National Historic Park, Idaho

so anyway, and ceded lands of those who had left the council. Their act resulted in a division of the tribe. The whites praised those who had signed as "treaty" Indians; those who did not sign became know as the "nontreaty" Nez Perce.

For some years nontreaty bands continued to live on their lands, insisting no one had the right to sell them. But conflicts with growing white populations increased, particularly in the Wallowa country of northeastern Oregon, homeland of Chief Joseph's band. In May, 1877 the Army finally ordered



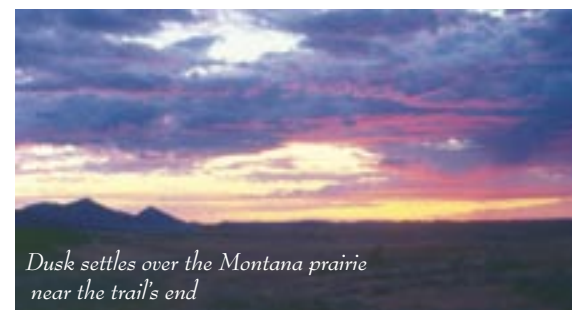
nontreaties to turn over their lands to whites and move onto a small reservation at Lapwai, Idaho. Pent-up emotions stemming from years of high-handedness and mistreatment by whites, as well as orders to leave their homelands, moved several embittered young warriors to ride to Salmon River. There they avenged past murders of tribal members by killing some white settlers. The hope for a peaceful move to the small reservation at Lapwai thus ended, and the flight of the Nez Perce began on June 15, 1877.

Pursued by the Army, nontreaties left Idaho intending to seek safety with their Crow allies on the plains to the east. When this failed, flight to Canada became their only hope. Their long, desperate and circuitous route as they traveled and fought to escape pursuing white forces is what we now call the Nez Perce National Historic Trail.

This route was used in its entirety only once; however, component trails and roads that make up the route bore generations of use prior to and after the 1877 flight of nontreaty Nez Perce. Trails and roads created through continued use often

became portions of transportation systems, though some were later abandoned for more direct routes or routes better suited for modern vehicles. Most abandoned segments can be located today but are often overgrown by vegetation, altered by floods, powerlines, and other manmade structures, or cross a variety of ownerships.

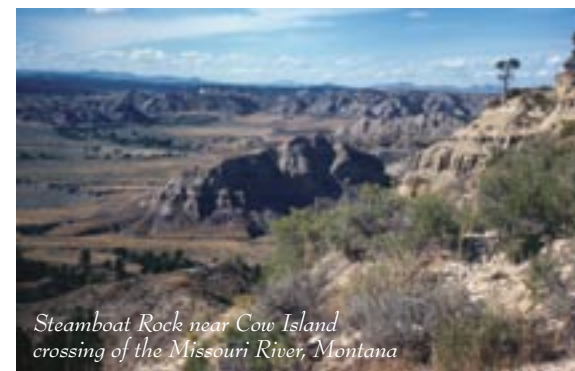
General William Tecumseh Sherman called the saga of the Nez Perce "the most extraordinary of Indian wars." Swept into a fight they did not seek by impulsive actions of a few revengeful young men, nearly 750 non-treaty Nez Percés fought defensively for their lives in some 20 battles and skirmishes. Only 250 were warriors, most were women, children and old or sick.



Dusk settles over the Montana prairie
near the trail's end



Mountainous terrain along the trail,
Crandall Creek, Wyoming



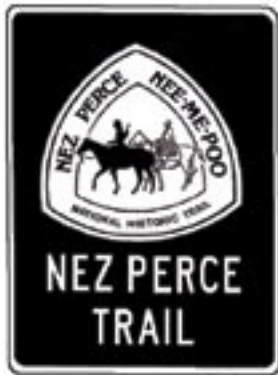
Steamboat Rock near Cow Island
crossing of the Missouri River, Montana

Together with nearly 2,000 horses, they battled against more than 2,000 soldiers, numerous civilian volunteers and Indians of other tribes. Their route through four states, dictated by topography and their own skillful strategy, covered over 1,100 square miles before they were trapped and surrendered at Montana's Bears Paw Mountains just short of the Canadian border and safety on October 5, 1877.

The Nez Perce National Historic Trail ends at Bear Paw Battlefield, but the Nez Perce story did not end here. The 431 Nez Perce survivors were taken down the Missouri River by flatboat to an unexpected exile, first at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, then Indian Territory, Oklahoma. Others captured while trying to return to Idaho from Canada later joined them. Despite efforts of honorable officers and citizens throughout the country, the Nez Perce remained in exile for eight years.

Of nearly 500 Nez Perce exiled to Indian Territory, only 301 survived extreme weather and poor conditions. In 1885 non-treaty Nez Perce returned to the Northwest. Joseph and 149 Nez Perce were re-settled on the Colville, Umatilla and Nez Perce reservations. Some chose to stay in Canada. Chief Joseph was never again permitted to live in his ancestral home in the Wallowa Valley.

Follow 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
12730 Highway 12
Orofino, ID 83544
208-476-8334
www.fs.fed.us/nphnt

Wallowa-Whitman National Forest
1550 Dewy Ave, PO Box 907
Baker City, OR 97814
541-323-1315
www.fs.fed.us/r6/w-w

Hells Canyon National Recreation Area
88401 Highway 82
Enterprise, OR 97828
541-426-4978
www.fs.fed.us/hellscanyon

Nez Perce National Forest
1005 Highway 13
Grangeville, ID 83530
208-983-1950
www.fs.fed.us/r1/nezperce

Clearwater National Forest
12730 Highway 12
Orofino, ID 83544
208-476-4541
www.fs.fed.us/r1/clearwater

Forest Service (Cont.)

Lolo National Forest
Building 24, Fort Missoula
Missoula, MT 59804
406-329-3814
www.fs.fed.us/r1/lolo

Bitterroot National Forest
1801 North 1st Street
Hamilton, MT 59840
406-363-7100
www.fs.fed.us/r1/bitterroot

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest
420 Barrett Street
Dillon, MT 59725-3572
406-683-3900
www.fs.fed.us/r1/bdnf

Salmon-Challis National Forest
50 Highway 93 South
Salmon, ID 83467
208-756-5100
www.fs.fed.us/r4/sc

Caribou-Targhee National Forest
1405 Hollipark Drive
Idaho Falls, ID 83401
208-524-5760
www.fs.fed.us/r4/caribou-targhee

Gallatin National Forest
10 E. Babcock Avenue, PO Box 130
Bozeman, MT 59771
406-587-6701
www.fs.fed.us/r1/gallatin

Shoshone National Forest
808 Meadow Lane
Cody, WY 82414-6241
307-578-1200
www.fs.fed.us/r2/shoshone

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Dworshak National Fish Hatchery
P.O. Box 18
Ahsahka, ID 83520
208-476-459
www.fws.gov/dworshak

Organizations

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nezpercetrail.net



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National Park Service

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39063 U.S. Highway 95
Spalding, ID 83540-9715
208-843-2261
www.nps.gov/nepe

Big Hole National Battlefield
P.O. Box 237
Wisdom, MT 59761
406-689-3155
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Yellowstone National Park
P.O. Box 168
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307-344-7381
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Bureau of Land Management

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1002 Blackburn
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Cody, WY 82414-8464
307-578-5900
www.wy.blm.gov/cyfo/info

Butte Field Office
106 North Parkmont
Butte, MT 59701
406-494-5059
www.mt.blm.gov/bdo

Miles City Field Office
111 Garryowen Road
Miles City, MT 59301
406-233-2800
www.mt.blm.gov/mcfo

Lewistown Field Office
Airport Road, P.O. Box 1160
Lewistown, MT 59457
406-538-7461
www.mt.blm.gov/ldo

State Agency

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www.fwp.state.mt.us/parks