



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Big Hole, Horse Prairie
and Lemhi Valleys

4

Experience the Nez Perce Trail

Roger Peterson - USDA / Forest Service



AUTO TOUR



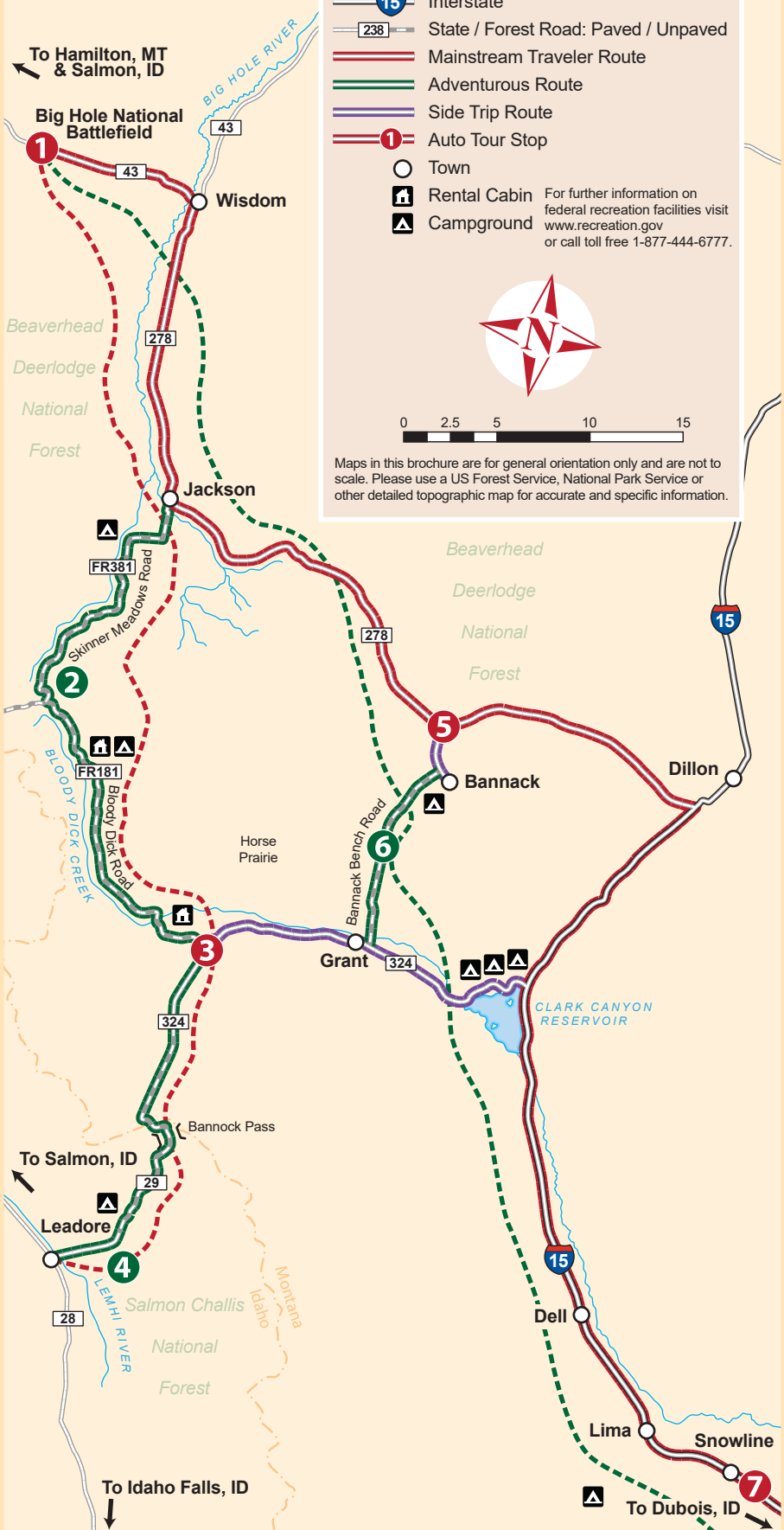
Forest
Service

Big Hole, Horse Prairie & Lemhi Valleys

- Nez Perce Route
 - US Army Route
 - Interstate
 - State / Forest Road: Paved / Unpaved
 - Mainstream Traveler Route
 - Adventurous Route
 - Side Trip Route
 - Auto Tour Stop
 - Town
 - Rental Cabin
 - Campground
- For further information on federal recreation facilities visit www.recreation.gov or call toll free 1-877-444-6777.



Maps in this brochure are for general orientation only and are not to scale. Please use a US Forest Service, National Park Service or other detailed topographic map for accurate and specific information.





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

Designated by Congress in 1986, the entire Nez Perce National Historic Trail (NPNHT) stretches 1,170 miles from the Wallowa Valley of eastern Oregon to the plains of north-central Montana. The NPNHT includes a designated corridor encompassing 4,161 miles of roads, trails and routes.

This segment of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail from **Big Hole National Battlefield, Montana, to Leadore, Idaho**, is one of eight available tours (complete list on page 35). These are available at Forest Service offices and other federal and local visitor centers along the route.

As you travel this historic trail, you will see highway signs marking the official Auto Tour route. Each Mainstream Auto Tour route stays on all-weather roads passable for all types of vehicles. Adventurous and Rugged Routes are an alternative for those seeking the most authentic historic route. They are often on gravel or dirt roads, so plan ahead.

Many locations along all Auto Tour routes may not have cell phone coverage. Do not rely on cell phone as a safety net. Designate a contact person at home to communicate through.

Check weather and road conditions before embarking on your journey. Call 511 for road condition reports on major routes. For road condition information on Adventurous and Rugged routes inquire locally.



Experience the Nez Perce Trail

How do I get there?

This Auto Tour brochure describes the Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail between Big Hole National Battlefield, Montana, and Leadore, Idaho. The tour begins at Big Hole National Battlefield, 10 miles west of Wisdom, Montana. Covering the routes of both the Nez Perce and the military may require backtracking or choosing between stops.

From Missoula, MT, head south on US Highway 93 for approximately 84 miles to the junction with Montana State Hwy 43 at Lost Trail Pass. Turn east onto Montana State Hwy 43. Continue east for approximately 16 miles to Big Hole National Battlefield.

From Butte, MT, head west on Interstate 90 for approximately 3.5 miles. Turn south on Interstate 15 for approximately 19 miles and take exit 102 heading west on Montana State Highway 43 towards Divide / Wisdom. Stay on Montana State Highway 43 through Wisdom for approximately 61 miles to Big Hole National Battlefield.

Near Big Hole National Battlefield, Montana





Mainstream Traveler

(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 and will diverge from the routes actually traveled. This route begins at Big Hole National Monument and follows Montana State Highway 43 to Wisdom, Montana. From Wisdom the route follows Montana State Highway 278 through Jackson, Montana to Interstate 15 and then south into Idaho.

Adventurous Traveler

(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, (obtained at local Forest Service offices). 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.

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.

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 (or, in their language, Niimípuu, meaning “the people”) homelands protected under the treaty of 1855. As a result, tension and anger grew between the Nez Perce and the settlers. 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 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 U.S. Army units and citizen volunteers commanded by General Howard tried to rein



General Oliver O. Howard
by Mathew Brady, Courtesy Library of Congress

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, *'ickumcilé·likpe*. 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.

In the early morning hours of August 9th, 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 North Fork of the Big Hole River.

Two days later, 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.

As you follow this historic trail, you can either stay on the designated Mainstream Auto Tour route along paved roads or explore the Adventurous Route that more closely follows the historic trail, on mostly gravel or dirt roads. On either route, 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.

"If the white man wants to live in peace with the Indian he can live in peace. There need be no trouble. Treat all men alike. Give them all the same law. Give them all an even chance to live and grow ... Whenever the white man treats the Indian as they treat each other, then we shall have no more wars. We shall be ... brothers of one father and one mother, with one sky above us and one country around us ... Then the Great Spirit ... will

smile upon this land, and send rain to wash out the bloody spots made by brothers' hands upon the face of the earth. For this time the Indian race are waiting and praying."



*– Chief Joseph
Hinmatóowyalahṭq'it
(Young Chief Joseph)*

Photo courtesy of National Park Service,
Nez Perce National Historic Park. NEPE-HI-2313

The Flight of the Nez Perce of 1877 symbolizes the dramatic collision of cultures which continues to shape the West and its people. A native people were forced to flee their homelands in a futile attempt to avoid war and save their traditional ways. Immigrated European people found themselves fighting neighbors who had been their friends for many years. Traditional trails, which had long been a source of joy and sustenance, became a trail of flight and conflict, a trail of sorrow.

Chronology of Events

The events in this timeline coincide with the sites seen on this auto tour:

- August 7** – After a difficult climb over the Continental Divide, Nez Perce camp along the Big Hole River. ❶ 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. ❶ 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 killed, many of them women and children. ❶ 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. The Nez Perce camp near Skinner Meadows ❷
- August 11** – General Howard reaches the Big Hole. The Army is attending to 40 wounded and burying 29 dead. ❸ The Nez Perce camp on Horse Prairie. Montague, Flynn, Smith, Farnsworth and Cooper are killed.
- August 12** – Remaining cavalry reach the Big Hole. ❶
- August 13** – Nez Perce cross the Continental Divide at Bannock Pass and set up camp just outside Junction. ❹ 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. At Horse Prairie, near Trail Creek the Nez Perce killed four settlers at the Montague-Winters ranch. This event marked the first killing of civilian settlers in MT during the conflict.
- August 15** – Howard passes Bannack ❺ and camps on Horse Prairie. ❻
- August 17** – Howard camps at Snowline. ❼ He sends a detachment under the command of Lt. Bacon to Henry's Lake.

— 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
through the Big Hole, Horse Prairie,
and Lemhi Valleys and
whether you drive, ride, or walk,
you will gain an
understanding of and appreciation for
the difficulty of their journey
and the tremendous odds that
the Nez Perce had to face and overcome.

Nez Perce Dreamers in Traditional Dress.
courtesy of WSU L.V. McWhorter Collection



1 Big Hole Battlefield to Skinner Meadows

"A Rifle Shot At First Light"

"That night the warriors paraded 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.'"

- Hímiin maqsmáqs (Yellow Wolf)



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 B. 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!’”

– Wewúkye 'ilp'ilp (Red Elk)

Big Hole National Battlefield

Big Hole National Battlefield tells the story of what happened at this site on August 9-10, 1877, through the words, voices, and objects of the people who were here.

The Park's visitor center offers compelling new exhibits, a 26 minute film, indoor and outdoor viewing areas, ranger led programs, and a 3D map of the entire Nez Perce route. For those wishing to learn more, books about the Nez Perce and this era of history are available for sale at the book store.

Trails throughout the battlefield are open year round and during the summer months ranger programs are offered daily.



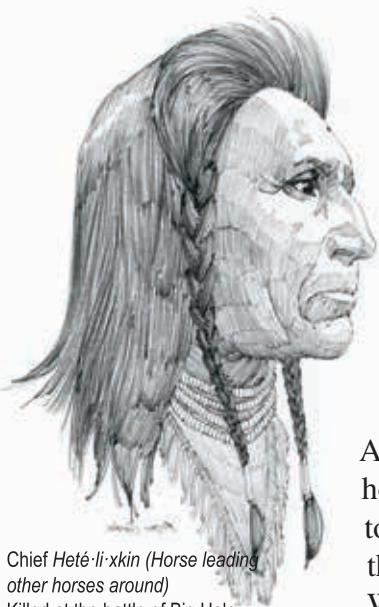
“Few of us will soon forget the wail of mingled grief, rage and horror which came from the camp four or five hundred yards from us when the Indians returned to it and recognized their slaughtered warriors, women and children. Above this wail of horror we could hear the passionate appeal of the leaders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

– Colonel John Gibbon

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.

At one point during the siege the howitzer Gibbon’s had brought began to fire. However, after only two shots the gun was captured by Nez Perce Warriors.

As the fighting continued, the Nez Perce quickly broke camp. They buried their dead as best they could, loaded the wounded on travois, and headed south through the Big Hole Valley.



Chief *Heté-li-xkin* (Horse leading other horses around)
Killed at the battle of Big Hole
by Roger Cooke



Big Hole National Battlefield, Montana

“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.”

– Tipyeléhne cimúuxcimux (Black Eagle)

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

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 W. Reddington (U.S. Army Scout)

Travel Tips

As you leave the Big Hole National Battlefield and journey on to Jackson, MT, 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 the rich, thick grass, which attracted settlers to this region over a hundred years ago. This area has long been called the "Land of Ten Thousand Haystacks". Modern farmers roll their hay rather than stack it and these rolls of hay that lie scattered across the valley are evidence of the region's bounty.

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

Alternatively travelers can choose the Mainstream Auto Tour Route which more closely follows the military route. Watch for signs or inquire locally. For more information see page 16.

About 12 miles from the battlefield the Nez Perce made camp along the banks of Lake Creek at a place known as *Táxsiin* or “with 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 Mountains. Along this boundary between Montana and Idaho is the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, with excellent daytime and overnight hikes and camping.



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.



2 Skinner Meadows to Horse Prairie

Leaving Behind the Big Hole Valley

Nez Perce Appaloosa Horse (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.

Faith Sobbota on her Appaloosa.



From Big Hole National Battlefield, proceed east on Montana State Highway 43 for 10 miles to Wisdom, MT. Turn south (right) on Montana State Highway 278. Continue south for 18 miles to Jackson, MT.

Note: In Jackson the traveler must make a decision about which route to take. The Adventurous Route closely follows the Nez Perce National Historic Trail and the route taken by the Nez Perce across Horse Prairie and over the Continental Divide at Bannock Pass. This Adventurous Route ends in Leadore, Idaho, and continues on main roads in Auto Tour 5, (Leadore and Island Park, Idaho to Yellowstone National Park, Montana, and Wyoming).

Alternatively the traveler can follow the Mainstream Route detailed in this brochure which more closely follows the route taken by the U.S. Army over Horse Prairie and beyond.

These two routes converge in Auto Tour 5, at Spencer, ID, and then continue east towards Yellowstone National Park.

To follow the Mainstream Traveler Route continue on page 24.

To follow the Adventurous Traveler Route continue south on Montana State Highway 278 for 1 mile and turn south (right) onto Skinner Meadows Road / FR 381. In 9 miles you will cross the Forest boundary. In another 1.8 miles near the Van Houton campground keep left to stay on Skinner Meadows Road / FR 381. Continue for 3.2 miles and turn left again to stay on Skinner Meadows Road / FR 381. In about 2.9 miles the NPNHT Interpretive signs Skinner Meadows will appear on your left. A very short and level gravel trail will lead you to the signs and a view point.

Leaving the Takseen camp, the Nez Perce moved south through the Big Hole River drainage. A few miles beyond where Skinner Meadows / Forest 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.

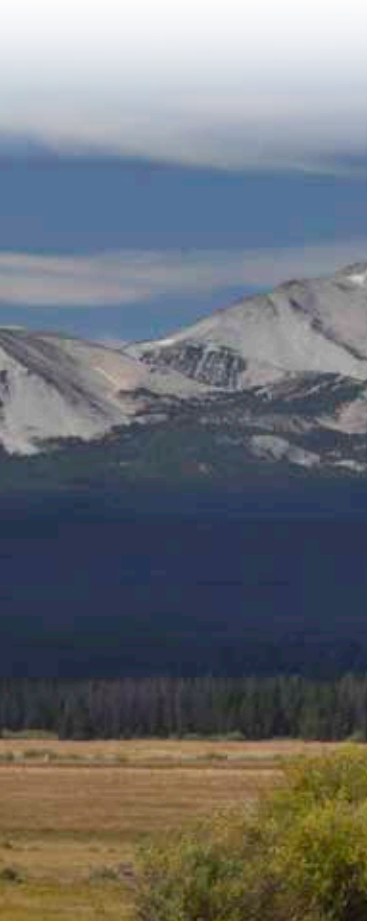


There is an abundance of wildlife along the Nez Perce National Historic Trail. All wild animals need to be treated with caution and respect. If you are planning to hike, check with the nearest land management agency for information on local wildlife. Know how to be safe in wild country.

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

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, similar to the Big Hole Valley in its rural lifestyle.



3 Horse Prairie to Bannock Pass

In The Wrong Place At The Wrong Time

Leaving Skinner Meadows, head south on Skinner Meadows Road / FR 381. In about 2.2 miles Skinner Meadow Road / FR 381 turns into Bloody Dick Road / FR 181. In 1 mile turn east (left) to stay on Bloody Dick Road / FR 181. In 0.4 miles keep right to stay on Bloody Dick Road / FR 181. In 16 .8 miles turn right towards Brenner Rd / Brenner Ln, and in 0.2 miles again turn right onto Brenner Rd. In 2.7 miles you will join Lemhi Pass Road. Follow Lemhi Pass Road for 1.9 miles to the junction with Montana State Highway 324.

To the southwest of here is where the Montague-Winters ranch was located.

To continue with the Adventurous Route to Ledor, Idaho turn south on Montana State Highway 324 and in 12.2 miles you will reach Bannock Pass and the Idaho / Montana border.

To join the Mainstream Route head east on Montana State Highway 324 towards Grant, Montana, and Interstate 15.

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.

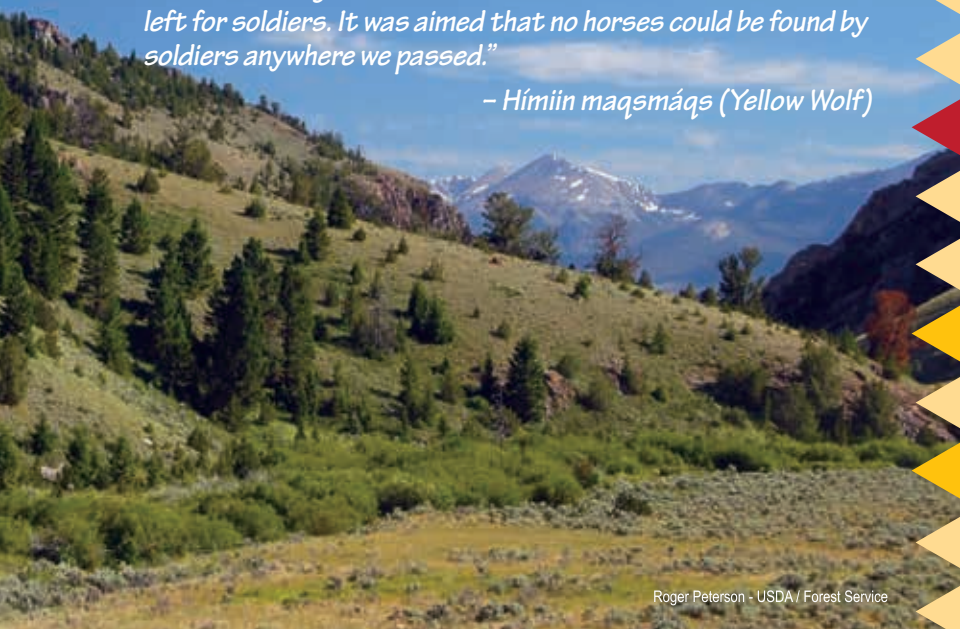


After the events at Big Hole, exchanges with the settlers changed dramatically. Tragedy struck again. While searching for horses, a group of warriors came upon the Montague-Winters ranch. As they approached the house, shooting broke out and four settlers, including William Montague, were killed. After 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."

– Hímiin maqsmáqs (Yellow Wolf)



Roger Peterson - USDA / Forest Service

By mutual consent, leadership had passed from Looking Glass to Lean Elk (Poker Joe) who kept the people moving at a fast pace. The bands traveled almost due south across Horse Prairie toward Bannock Pass. Today, this route closely parallels Montana State Route 324 as it leaves Horse Prairie and approaches Bannock Pass.

“From the Big Hole, Chief Hóototo [Lean Elk or Poker Joe] was the guide and leader of the Nez Percés. He had been all over that country, east and north, and he knew the land and the trails. He understood, and would have the people up early in the morning, and travel 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 till about ten o’clock at night. ... In this way the people covered many miles each sun. They were outdistancing the soldiers, gaining on them all the time. Everybody was glad.”

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



Chief Looking Glass,
'E'lelimyete 'qenin' (Wrapped in Wind/Cyclone)
by Roger Cooke

Wottolen (Hair Combed Over Eyes) and his son Many Wounds ('iléxni 'éewteesin') or Sam Lott.
Photo courtesy of WSU L.V. McWhorter Collection



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.

Lemhi Mountains near Leadore



Roger Peterson - USDA / Forest Service



Elk at Bannock Pass

Roger Peterson - USDA / Forest Service

4 Bannock Pass to Leadore

Back Into Idaho

From Bannock Pass continue south on Idaho State Route 29 / Railroad Canyon Road. In about 13.5 miles you will reach Leadore, ID, the final stop for this Adventurous Route. The tour continues in Auto Tour 5, Leadore, ID, to West Yellowstone, MT.

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.

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 briefly on lands administered by the Salmon-Challis National Forest.

On August 13, 1877, an advance party of Nez Perce set up camp outside the town of Junction (now present day Leadore), Idaho.



Flight
Roger Cooke

“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 Yearrian

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.



5 The Military Route

The Trail Divides: Horse Prairie and Beyond

From Jackson, MT, continue east on Montana State Highway 278 E for 25.7 miles to Bannack Bench Road.

Here the traveler can take a sidetrip to Bannack State Park by turning south (right) onto Bannack Bench Road for 2.9 miles. Turn east (left) onto Bannack Road to enter the Park.

After touring the Park, travelers can either continue south on a gravel road Adventurous Route that closely follows the route taken by the U.S. Army as they crossed Horse Prairie or they can return to Montana State Highway 278 and join the Mainstream Route.

General Howard's movements through the Big Hole are unclear and they differ from those of the Nez Perce through the Horse Prairie region. His written records indicate he and his men left the Big Hole battlefield on August 13 and kept "far to the left of the Indians' trail."

"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, Stevensville shopkeeper

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.

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.



Near Wisdom, Montana

The Soldier

U.S. 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. The majority were young men but ranged in age from 19 to 56.

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.

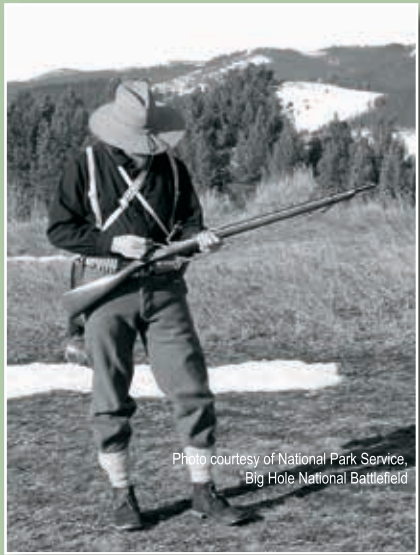


Photo courtesy of National Park Service, Big Hole National Battlefield

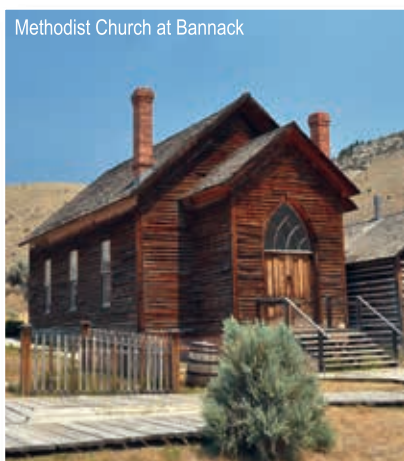


Roger Peterson - USDA / Forest Service

Meanwhile, citizens of Bannack, the Beaverhead County seat, braced for the worst. The Beaverhead County Courthouse, later 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. The fear of attack felt by the people of Bannack proved unfounded, as the Nez Perce bypassed the town by more than 15 miles.

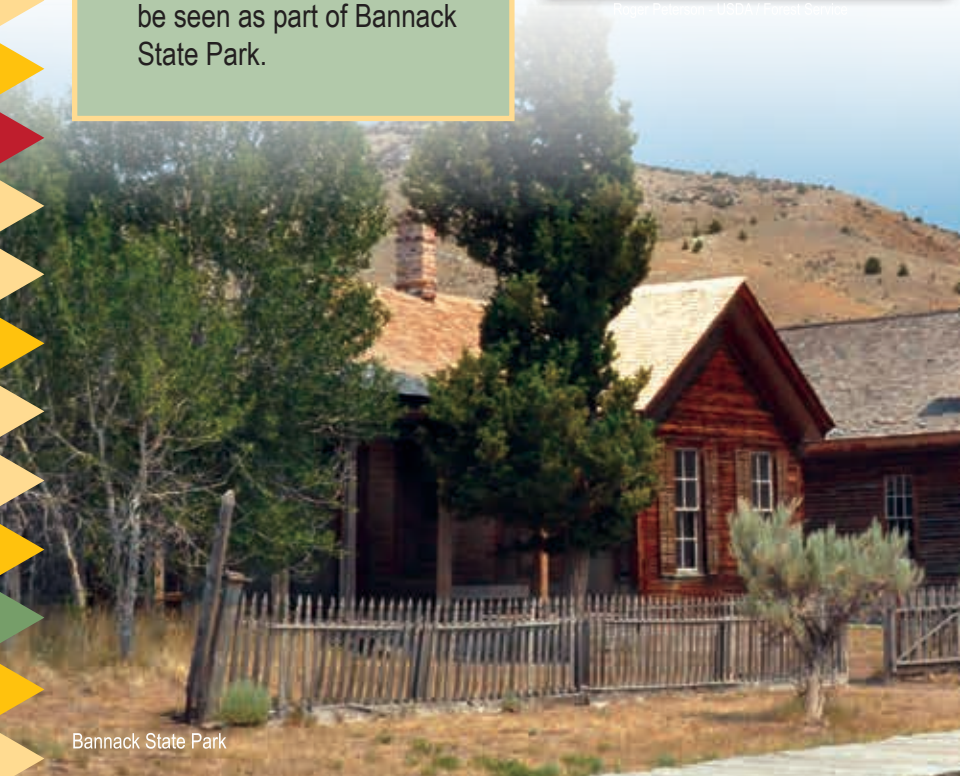
Methodist Church

The Methodist Church in Bannack owes its existence to the events of 1877 and one enterprising minister, Brother William Wesley Van Orsdel, who had arrived as a civilizing force in this churchless community. Once it was apparent that the community was safe from attack, “Brother Van” took advantage of the large number of settlers in town and recruited them to finish the construction of this church which can still be seen as part of Bannack State Park.



Methodist Church at Bannack

Photo: National USPA Forest Service



Bannack State Park

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.

At Bannack General Howard's troops 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."

Bannack State Park

John White discovered gold on Grasshopper Creek in 1862.

As news of the gold strike spread many prospectors and businessmen rushed to the area hoping to strike it rich.

Bannack served as the first Territorial Capital of Montana during the winter of 1864-1865. In 1863 many prospectors left Bannack in hopes of striking it rich in Virginia City where gold had been discovered. From the late 1860's to the 1930's, Bannack continued as a mining town but by the 1950's gold workings had dwindled and most of the population had moved on. In 1962 the area was declared a National Historic Landmark. Today, Bannack State Park has over sixty structures, many of which can be explored. Tours and other activities scheduled throughout the season make this a worthwhile stop. Camping is available nearby.



Hotel Meade

In 1881 the county seat was moved from Bannack to Dillon and the large brick building that had been the county courthouse remained empty until about 1890 when it was purchased by Dr. John Singleton Meade for \$1,250. Dr. Meade remodeled and turned the building into a plush hotel. It became the center of Bannack social activity and temporary home of many Montana travelers. A large kitchen, dining room, and living quarters were added to the back of the hotel. The dining room was filled with tables to seat four or six and could be rearranged for larger parties. Beautiful white linens graced the tables along with fine china. Hotel Meade remained open for business for many years, abandoned at times only to reopen to meet the needs of Bannack each time mining activity in the area revived. The hotel operated off and on until the 1940s.

Hotel Meade



Roger Peterson - USDA / Forest Service

6 Barrett's Ranch

From Bannack State Park return to the junction with Bannack Bench Road and turn south (left). In approximately 10 miles you will reach the Cross Ranch which is the present day location of the Barrett Ranch.

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 E. Barrett, *Horse Prairie Settler*

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.

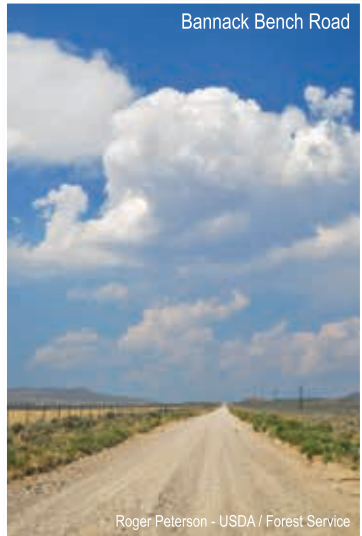
"I moved forward, keeping far to the left of the Indians' trail, and did not forget that the said buffalo country was still eastward."

– General Oliver O. Howard

General Howard followed the Corrine-Virginia City Wagon Road to Williams Junction in southern Montana, 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 O. Howard



7 Howard's Strategy at Snowline

From Bannack State Park return to the junction with Bannack Road and turn north (right) to rejoin Montana State Highway 278. Turn east (right) towards Dillon. In 17.2 miles turn south (right) onto Interstate 15. Continue south on Interstate 15 for 50.1 miles to exit 9, Snowline.

From Barrett's Ranch continue south on Bannack Bench Road for approximately 2 miles. Turn east (left) towards Montana State Highway 324. Continue east on Montana State Highway 324 for 11.4 miles and then merge onto Interstate 15 southbound. Travel south for 34.9 miles to exit 9, Snowline.

On August 17 at Williams Junction, which is now present day 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.

At this point if travelers followed the Adventurous Route over Bannock Pass they will connect with the Mainstream Auto Tour Route for Auto Tour 5 in Leadore, ID. If you followed the Mainstream Auto Tour Route in this brochure, continue south on Interstate 15 connecting with Auto Tour 5 near Spencer, ID.

Just Following Orders

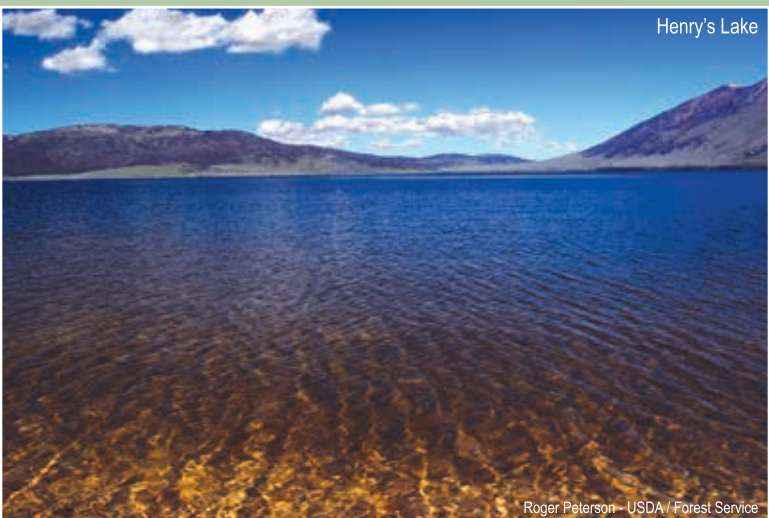
At Williams Junction, now present day Snowline, General Howard was faced with a crucial decision; turn east and head for Henry's Lake in an effort to get ahead of the Nez Perce or continue south into Idaho and pick up their trail. In the end he compromised and dispatched Lieutenant Bacon with a small contingent of 40 men to Henry's Lake, while he headed south with the majority of his force.

Lieutenant Bacon must have known the futility of this operation. There was little chance a force of 40 men could stand against the Nez Perce. Fortunately for Bacon and his men, his orders were to wait at Henry's Lake for 48 hours and if there was no sign of the enemy, return to Howard. That is exactly what he did, leaving the lake mere hours before the Nez Perce arrived and by a route that ensured no contact with the enemy.

An Adventurous Route following Lt. Bacon is detailed in Auto Tour 5.

I was made one of a special detail to make a detour and get ahead of the Indians and fortify at Henry Lake. This detachment consisted of Lieuts. Bacon and Hoyle, myself, Guide Poindexter and 15 men. We started out at 3 a.m., and nearly all the camp saw us off, never expecting to see us again. We travelled hard for two days. ... I never knew what Lieut. Bacon's orders were. They were evidently to wait at the lake for two days and if the main column did not reach us by the expiration of that time to return as best we could. Whatever his orders may have been, that is exactly what we did, rejoining Howard's main column four or five miles from the lake, near the trail we had previously passed over. But on our return we made a wide detour in order to avoid the Indians.

-Pvt. William Connolly



Henry's Lake

Roger Peterson - USDA / Forest Service

The Remaining Journey

Never to Return Home

From Junction, near Leadore, Idaho, 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 at the Battle of Bear Paw.

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

On October 5, 1877, Chief Joseph, believing the remaining Nez Perce would be sent to the Lapwai Reservation, agreed to stop fighting, the 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 before they were allowed to return to the west.



Bear Paw National Battlefield, Montana

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 homeland.

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

Bear Paw National Battlefield, Montana



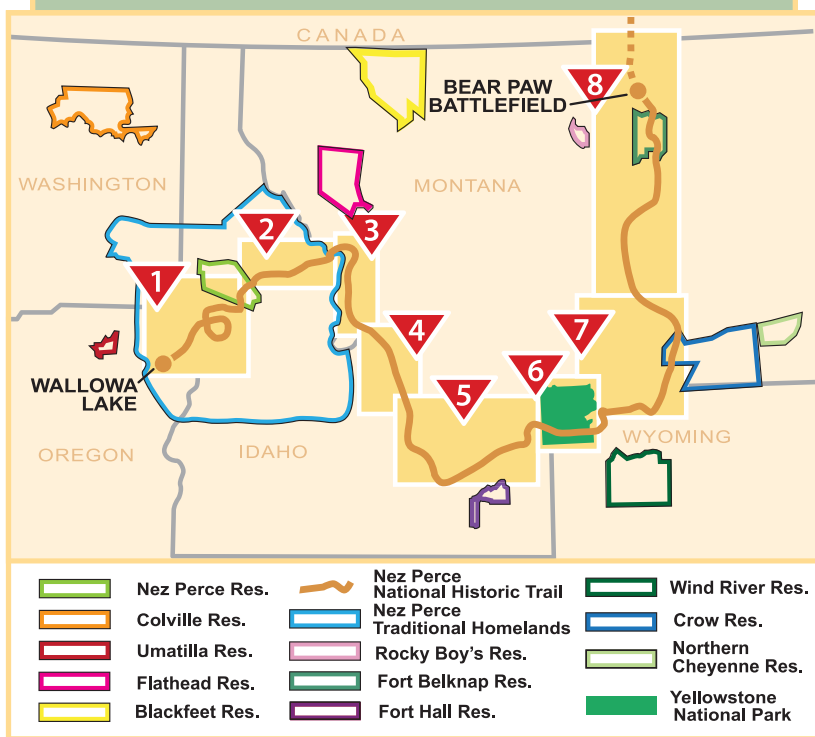
Roger Peterson - USDA / Forest Service



Roger Peterson - USDA / Forest Service

Nez Perce National Historic Trail Auto Tours

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



- 1** Wallowa Valley, Oregon, to Kooskia, Idaho
- 2** Orofino, Idaho to Lolo, Montana
- 3** Lolo, Montana, to the Big Hole National Battlefield, Montana, through the Bitterroot Valley
- 4** Big Hole, Horse Prairie and Lemhi Valleys
- 5** Leadore, Idaho, to Yellowstone National Park, Montana
- 6** Through Yellowstone National Park
- 7** Yellowstone National Park to Canyon Creek, Montana
- 8** Canyon Creek to Bear Paw

Auto Tour Brochures are available at local visitor centers, from the NPNHT Staff or from the NPNHT website at, www.fs.usda.gov/npnht/



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

This Trail is a Sacred Trust for All Americans

“We, the surviving Nez Percés, 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.usda.gov/npnht or contact:

Nez Perce National Historic Trail
12740 Highway 12
Orofino, ID 83544
(208) 476-8234
SM.FS.npnht@usda.gov

Nez Perce National Historical Park
39063 US Highway 95
Spalding, ID 83540
(208) 843-7001
www.nps.gov/hepe

Nez Perce Trail Foundation
www.nezperctrail.net

Nez Perce Tribe
P.O. Box 365
Lapwai, ID 83540
(208) 843-2253
www.nezperce.org

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest
420 Barrett Street
Dillon, MT 59725
(406) 683-3900
www.fs.usda.gov/bdnf

Salmon-Challis National Forest
12065 Challis Street
Salmon, ID 83467
(208) 756-2215
www.fs.usda.gov/scnf

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
(406) 683-8000
www.blm.gov/mt/

Bannack State Park
4200 Bannack Road
Dillon, MT 59725
(406) 834-3413
www.bannack.org

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

Centennial Valley Historical Society
(406) 276-3465 summer
(406) 276-3463 winter

Heritage Hall Museum
110 South Reynolds Street.
Dubois, ID 83423



U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service



U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management



U.S. Department of the Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service



The USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



R1-17-09
Slightly Revised June 2020