



When I walk the battlefield  
it's sacred ground. . . . A lot of  
relatives are buried there, but  
the memories of them are still  
living on. We are here today  
because of them. Their love for  
us lives in my heart.

—<sup>2</sup>ipelikitemucet (Frank Andrews)

Nez Perce camp at  
Big Hole Battlefield  
© CHUCK HANEY

# 1877

## THE FLIGHT

After the battle at Big Hole, the nímí-pu- fled. Each time the military caught up, they escaped. “Every day was struggling,” said kulkulsiyeké-t (Matthew Whitfield). “Fighting and hurrying on. Faint for food; tired with the hard traveling. . . . Little children, some of them wounded. Women dying of wounds on the trail. Men left to die or be killed by the soldiers and scouts because they were too old to travel further, or too badly shot to ride.”

On September 29, they camped at čāynim ʔá-likaʔspa (today known as Bear Paw Battlefield) near Canada. That night watóʔlin (Hair Combed Over Eyes) dreamed: “I saw the waters of the stream all red with blood of both Indian and Soldier. I saw falling from trees, frost-yellowed leaves; mingling with with-

ered flowers and grass. . . . Those leaves are dead, those flowers are dead. This tells of the end of fighting. Soon we are to be attacked for the last time. Guns will be laid down.”

## THE LAST BATTLE

The attack began the next morning and the siege lasted five days. Lt. Woodruff recalled: “General Miles struck . . . attacked and surrounded Joseph, and after . . . days of fighting . . . compelled the surrender of Joseph and all of his band, except those under White Bird, who escaped through his lines and fled to British America.”

hínmató-wyalahtqít (Young Joseph) explained why he made the choices he did: “I could not bear to see my wounded men and women suffer any longer; we had lost

enough already. General Miles had promised that we might return to our own country. . . . I thought we could start again. I believed General Miles, or I never would have surrendered. . . . He could not have made any other terms with me at that time. . . . On the fifth day I went to General Miles and gave up my gun and said, ‘From where the sun now stands I will fight no more.’ My people needed rest—we wanted peace.”

## ESCAPE TO CANADA

Those who did escape during the battle, did so with heavy hearts. “With women’s hearts breaking, children weeping and men silent, we moved over the divide,” said piyó-piyó xayxâyx (White Bird), “and closed our eyes upon our once happy homes. We were wanderers on the prairie. . . . The white man wanted the wealth our people possessed;

he got it by the destruction of our people. We who yesterday were rich are beggars today. We have no country, no people, no home.” He and over 250 others made it to Canada and safety.

## EXILE

More than 400 nímí-pu- were captured at Bear Paw and considered prisoners of war. They were sent to Kansas and then to Indian Territory (Oklahoma). kulkulsiyeké-t (Matthew Whitfield) said: “I always think of our slavery in Indian Territory. I cannot forget it! Held in bondage till half our band died in that hot, flat country. Babies and children dying. . . . I can never put its memory from my mind.”

## SCATTERED

When finally released in 1885, hími-n maqsmáqs (Yellow Wolf) explained: “Religion

had to do with where they placed us. . . . The interpreter asked us, ‘Where you want to go? Lapwai and be Christian, or Colville and just be yourself?’ No other question was asked us. . . . Chief [Young] Joseph was not given choice where to go. But he had promise . . . he could go [to his homeland in Oregon] with his band. That was never to be.”

More than a century later, xíst (Sharon Redthunder) said, “It’s something that just breaks my heart when I think of everything our people went through, and how we’re so scattered. We’re still scattered . . . all the way to Oklahoma, Kansas, Canada, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Montana. We’re all bonded together because of our encounter we went through in 1877.”



hinmató-wyalahtqít (Young Joseph) and  
General Gibbon, 1889  
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION / NAA



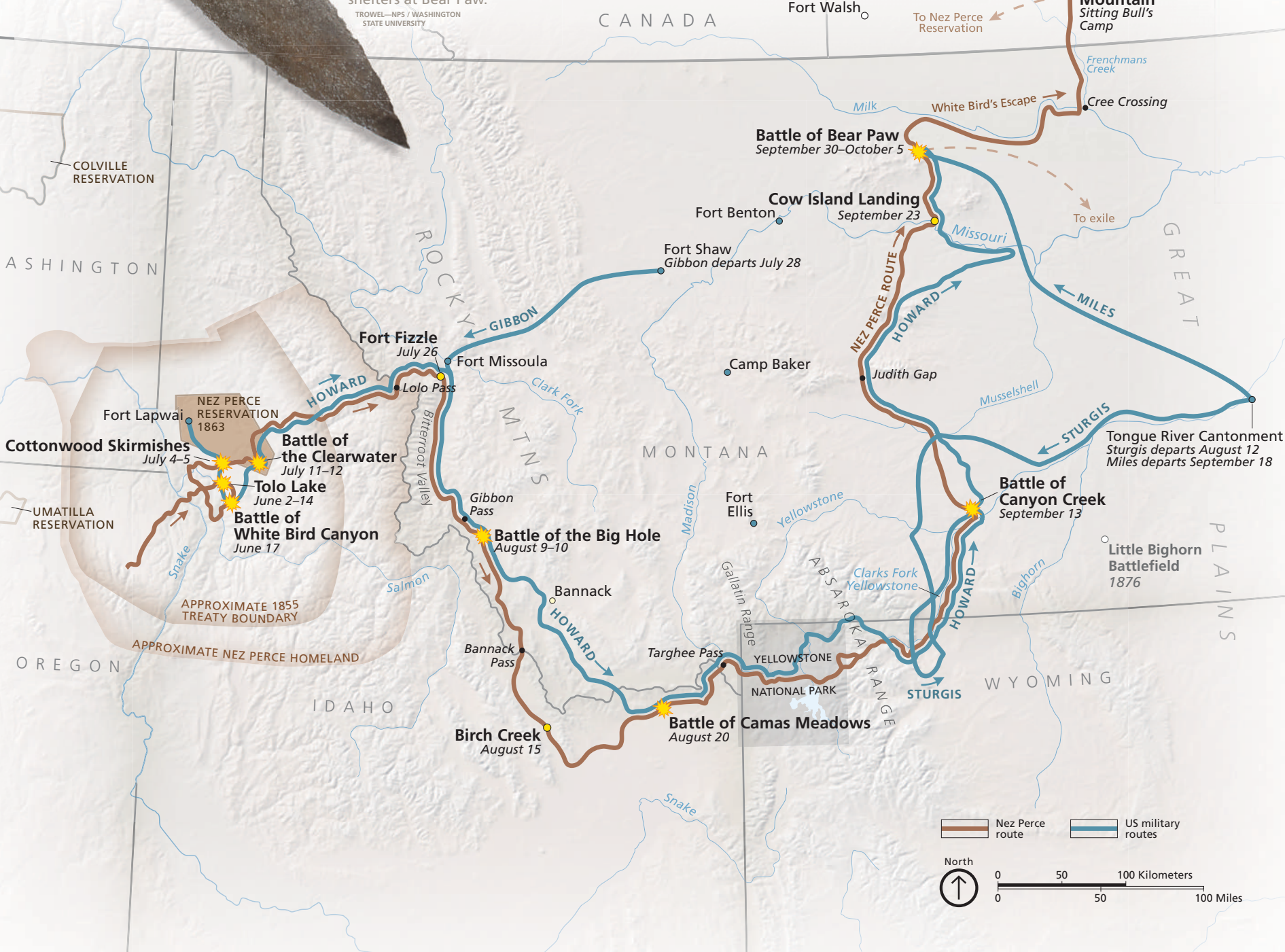
TROWEL BAYONET This sharp trowel  
transforms from digging tool to  
deadly weapon. Soldiers dug emergency  
rifle pits with them at Big  
Hole; nímí-pu- dug emergency  
shelters at Bear Paw.

## Lessons from the Tragedy

hinmató-wyalahtqít (Young Joseph) 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. . . . For this time the Indian race are waiting and praying.

Corporal Charles Loynes (when he was 90) As I sit retrospect [sic] so vividly on those distant days when battles took place between your brave ancestors and my fellow soldiers, it is with saddened regret that I, and they, were compelled to carry out the orders of our superior officers, when we knew they were fighting for the preservation of their homes and the right to live their own lives, and their own religious beliefs.

sísa-wípam (Roberta Conner) This history is kept alive no matter how sad it is, no matter how much injustice and tragedy it carries. Doesn’t matter. We keep it alive because if we forget this history, we forget part of our identity. This history not only has made us sad, it’s made us strong, it’s made us resilient.



Members of the Nez Perce Appaloosa  
Horse Club at Big Hole Battlefield  
NPS / STEPHANIE MARTIN

## Hope for the Future

Rebecca Miles There’s no future without forgiveness. If we can forgive, there’s nothing this tribe can’t do.

<sup>2</sup>ipelikitemucet (Frank Andrews) Our victory is that we are still here. We are still surviving, we are going on. We still have our culture, traditions, customs, united together. Maybe one day we can share each other’s different ways and . . . join hands together and work for that.

temiýwrtu-t (Albert Andrews Redstar) So to the young people, “Don’t forget who you are. Learn how to pick up those drums and sing the songs that we sing, learn how to speak in the fashion of our old people. Because it’s in those songs and in the speech of our people that we learn the lessons to carry our lives. Don’t forget those old teachings.”

taʔmapcáʔyoaxâyx (White Hawk / John Miller) Now, all this trouble is past. It is like two different trees, young trees. Planted, they grow together their branches intertwining. Hereafter, both races, red and white are friendly always. . . . That this would last as long as the world exists.

## Visiting Other Battle Sites of the People’s Flight



White Bird Battlefield  
US FOREST SERVICE

In addition to Big Hole National Battlefield, Nez Perce National Historical Park includes sites in four states related to nímí-pu- history and the events of 1877. Visit White Bird Battlefield (above), where the battles began, and Bear Paw Battlefield (far right), where they ended. Learn more at the visitor center in Spalding, ID, or on the park website. The Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail also commemorates the flight.



Canyon Creek Battlefield  
US FOREST SERVICE

The battle at Canyon Creek (above) took place 10 miles north of present-day Laurel, MT. Most of the battlefield site is on private property, but Nez Perce National Historical Park maintains an outdoor exhibit at the junction of MT 532 and 401 and provides information about the battle on its website.



Bear Paw Battlefield  
NPS / STEPHANIE MARTIN

Bear Paw Battlefield is along MT 240, 16 miles south of Chinook, MT. It is part of Nez Perce National Historical Park and is open year-round from dawn to dusk. Outdoor exhibits explain the events of 1877. The Blaine County Museum (www.blainecountymuseum.com) in Chinook serves as the visitor center for the battlefield and has exhibits and a film about the battle.

## Planning Your Visit

Big Hole National Battlefield is on MT 43 between US 93 on the west and I-15 on the east.

**VISITOR CENTER** Open daily 9 am to 5 pm in summer; 10 am to 5 pm in winter. Closed all federal holidays in winter and spring. The battlefield is open daily, sunrise to sunset.

**CAMPING AND LODGING** National forest campgrounds are nearby; Wisdom, MT, has limited lodging and services. More services are available in Butte, Dillon, or Hamilton, MT, or in Salmon, ID.

**FISHING AND HUNTING** Montana laws apply. Ask at the visitor center or check the park website for more information.

**FIREARMS** For firearms regulations check the park website.

**ACCESSIBILITY** We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

**Emergencies call 911**  
(Limited cell phone service.)

**MORE INFORMATION**  
Big Hole National Battlefield  
PO Box 237  
Wisdom, MT 59761  
406-689-3155  
www.nps.gov/biho

Nez Perce National Historical Park  
39063 US 95; Spalding, ID 83540  
208-843-7020; www.nps.gov/nepe

Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo)  
National Historic Trail  
www.fs.usda.gov/hpnht

Big Hole National Battlefield is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks, go to www.nps.gov.

**National Park Foundation.**  
Join the park community.  
www.nationalparks.org