



*The way we were taught is that we are part of Mother Earth. We're brothers and sisters to the animals, we're living in harmony with them. From the birds to the fish to the smallest insect.*

Herman Reuben

## A Park About a People, for All People

Long before Meriwether Lewis and William Clark ventured west, before the English established a colony at Jamestown; before Christopher Columbus stumbled upon the "new world," the Nez Perce, who called themselves Nimipuu, lived in the prairies and river valleys of north Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. Despite the challenges of two centuries of threats and assaults on the Nez Perce homeland, their voices are still heard, strong and resilient. The thread of the past meets the future as the language, culture, and traditions of the Nez Perce move forward through the 21st century.

Nez Perce National Historical Park is a park about a people, for all people. It is not one place but many. It is not one story, but a multitude of them. The stories to be discovered are often emotional and sometimes controversial, but they bind us together in a common history and define us as a nation. Today 38 sites in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington commemorate the legends

and the history of the Nez Perce and their interaction with others. This includes other Indian peoples as well as the explorers, fur traders, missionaries, soldiers, settlers, gold miners, loggers, and farmers who moved through and into the Nez Perce homeland. As you travel from site to site you will come to sense the rich and diverse cultural history they represent.

The culture and history of the Nez Perce are intertwined with the land they live in. Two sites, **Ant and Yellowjacket** near park headquarters in Spalding, Idaho, and **Heart of the Monster** in Kamiah, Idaho, preserve features on the landscape that form the basis of stories relating to the origins of the Nez Perce and the beginnings of their relationship with the land. At **Buffalo Eddy** along the Snake River outside Asotin, Washington, the ancestors of the Nez Perce left their mark on the landscape in the form of rock drawings or petroglyphs. **Weis Rockshelter**, close to the Salmon River, near the town of Cottonwood, Idaho, is a site inhabited by the Nez Perce for thousands of years.

Chief Joseph's band lived in the Wallowa Valley in northeast Oregon. The **Old Chief Joseph Gravesite** is located outside the town of Joseph at the edge of Wallowa Lake. **Joseph Canyon Viewpoint**, 30 miles north of Enterprise, Oregon, on OR 3, is an example of the canyon-bottomland environment in which the Nez Perce people lived in the winter.

The arrival of the Lewis and Clark expedition triggered an era of change that would have lasting consequences for the Nez Perce. In 1805, after an arduous journey across the Bitterroot Mountains via the **Lolo Trail and Pass**, the Corps of Discovery, as the group led by Lewis and Clark was known, arrived in Nez Perce country. Today, US 12 parallels the historic route Lewis and Clark traveled. Those with a high-clearance vehicle can travel US Forest Road 500, the Lolo Motorway, a primitive dirt road that roughly follows the overland route taken by the expedition.

Lewis and Clark emerged from the mountains on the **Weippe Prairie**, and came upon the Nimipuu at a site three miles outside the town of Weippe. Along the Clearwater River, at **Canoe Camp**, in Orofino, Idaho, Lewis and Clark built the canoes they needed to continue their journey to the Pacific Ocean.

Following in the footsteps of Lewis and Clark came fur trappers and Christian missionaries. Henry H. Spalding built the first Nez Perce mission on the site that is below the visitor center at **Spalding**, Idaho. The remains of his mission, the Indian Agency it evolved into, and the town of Spalding can be seen. Father Joseph Cataldo established **Saint Joseph's Mission**, the first Catholic mission in Nez Perce country. The church is still standing, 10 miles southeast of Lapwai.

The establishment of white settlements in the lands of the Nez Perce coincided with the treaties of 1855 and 1863. The treaties divided Nez Perce families and ushered in a period of tumultuous change. Growing resentment over loss of land and unpunished

atrocities helped to bring on a war in 1877 between the Nez Perce and the US government. The first battle of that war was fought in June 1877 in White Bird Canyon and resulted in a Nez Perce victory. **White Bird Battlefield**, north of the town of White Bird, can be seen from an overlook off US 95 and a self-guiding trail.

The pursuit of the Nez Perce by troops commanded by Gen. Oliver O. Howard led to the battle at Big Hole in western Montana. In August 1877 soldiers surprised the encampment, killing between 60 and 90 Nez Perce men, women, and children. The National Park Service has preserved the site as **Big Hole National Battlefield** west of Wisdom, Montana. In October 1877, after a 1,100-mile chase, the US Army besieged the Nez Perce at Bear Paw, 40 miles from the US-Canada border and brought an end to the war. **Bear Paw Battlefield**, south of the town of Chinook, Montana, appears much as it did more than a century ago during the last battle of the Nez Perce War.

These are only a few of the sites comprising Nez Perce National Historical Park. An auto tour of the entire park is more than 1,000 miles in length. The map below shows all 38 sites. Many can be experienced in segments of one or two days travel. Sites associated with the war of 1877 are also part of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail. For information, check the trail's web site at [www.fs.fed.us/npnhtr](http://www.fs.fed.us/npnhtr).

If you intend to stay in Nez Perce country while touring the park's sites, plan ahead. Food, gasoline, and accommodations are not available in the park. Many sites, however, are within easy driving distance of urban centers where services are available. Some park sites have opportunities for recreational activities such as hiking, picnicking, and viewing wildlife. Opportunities for camping and backpacking, while plentiful in the region, are not available in the park. Inquire locally for information.

Remember: All natural and cultural features are protected by federal and state law.

Top: Nez Perce tomahawk drop (attachment). Background: White Bird Battlefield.



Heart of the Monster



Camas blooming near Lolo Pass



Petroglyphs at Buffalo Eddy



Big Hole National Battlefield

### Plan Your Visit

Nez Perce National Historical Park has visitor centers in Spalding, ID, and at Big Hole National Battlefield. Both offer information, films, exhibits, ranger-led programs, and bookstores.

Bear Paw Battlefield is 16 miles south of Chinook, MT. Information is available at the Blaine County Museum in Chinook or at 406-357-3130.

### Accessibility

We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information, ask at a visitor center or check the park website.

### More Information

Nez Perce National Historical Park  
39063 US 95  
Lapwai, ID 83540  
208-843-7009  
[www.nps.gov/nepe](http://www.nps.gov/nepe)

Big Hole National Battlefield  
PO Box 237  
Wisdom, MT 59761  
406-689-3155  
[www.nps.gov/biho](http://www.nps.gov/biho)

Nez Perce National Historical Park is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more, visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).

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