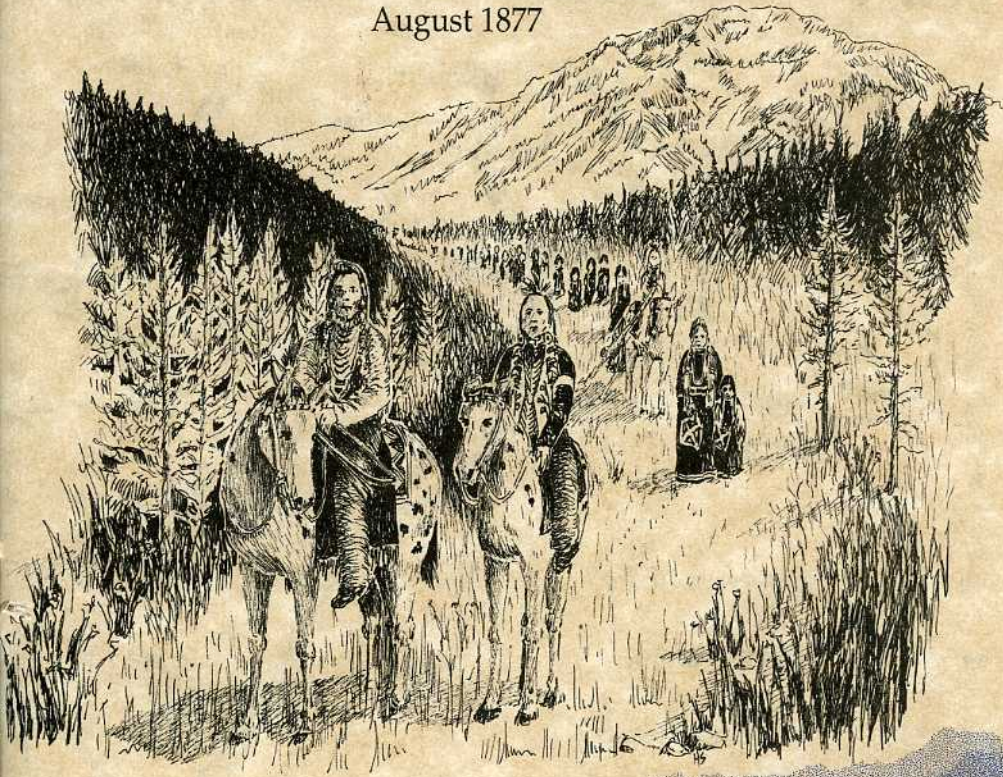


*The flight of the*  
**NEZ PERCE**

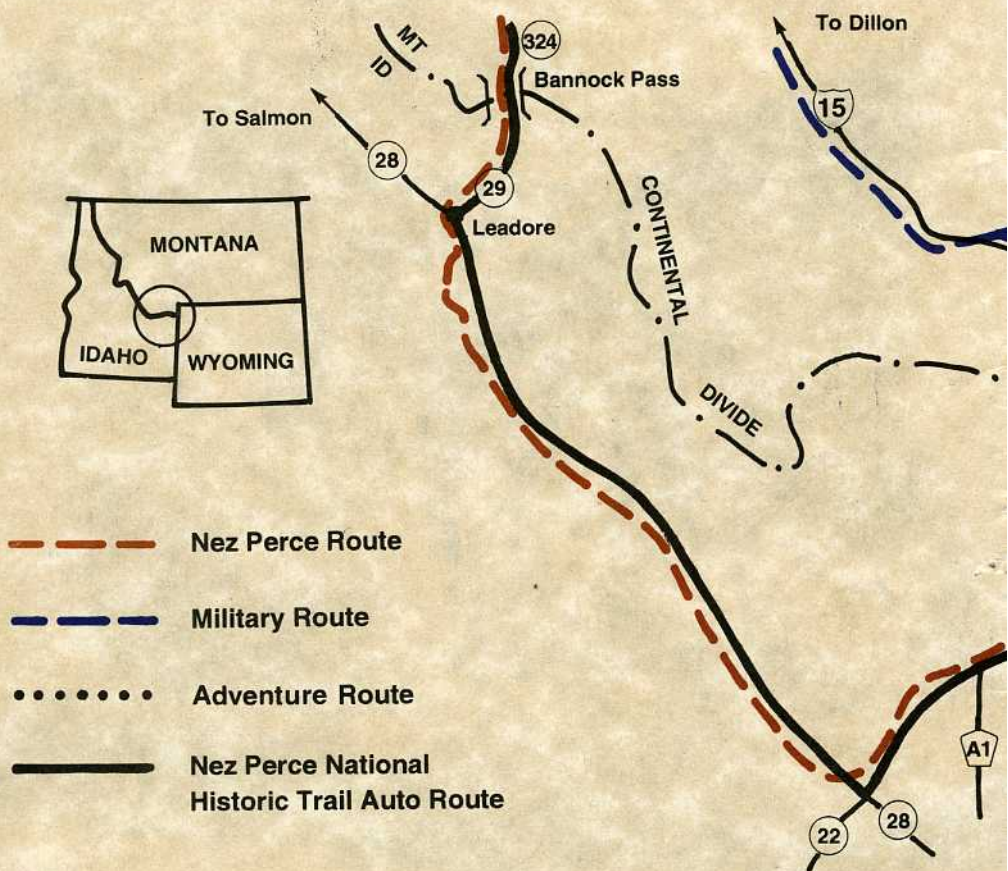
...through Leadore and Island Park, Idaho  
to West Yellowstone, Montana  
August 1877

Auto  
Tour



In August of 1877 a group of nearly 800 Nez Perce, ranging from infants to elders, traveled a tortuous route through the territories of Idaho and Montana. For two months they evaded pursuing military forces sent to place them on a new reservation. Then, on August 9th, the Nez Perce suffered terrible casualties following a surprise attack on their camp along the Big Hole River in southwest Montana. Carrying their wounded and dying with them the Nez Perce traveled southward through a vast and rugged landscape of wind-swept sagebrush plains and high mountain valleys as they made their way from Leadore, Idaho to West Yellowstone, Montana. This brochure describes that segment of their sad and difficult journey. Today, the entire 1,170-mile route of the 1877 Nez Perce flight is commemorated by the Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail. Established by Congress in 1986, the trail memorializes not only those who died during the flight, but also those who survived. Their tragic journey marked the end of freedom for the Nez Perce and opened their former lands to settlement.

As you travel this historic trail you will see highway signs marking the official auto route of the Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail. Whether you drive, ride, or walk this segment between Leadore and West Yellowstone 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.



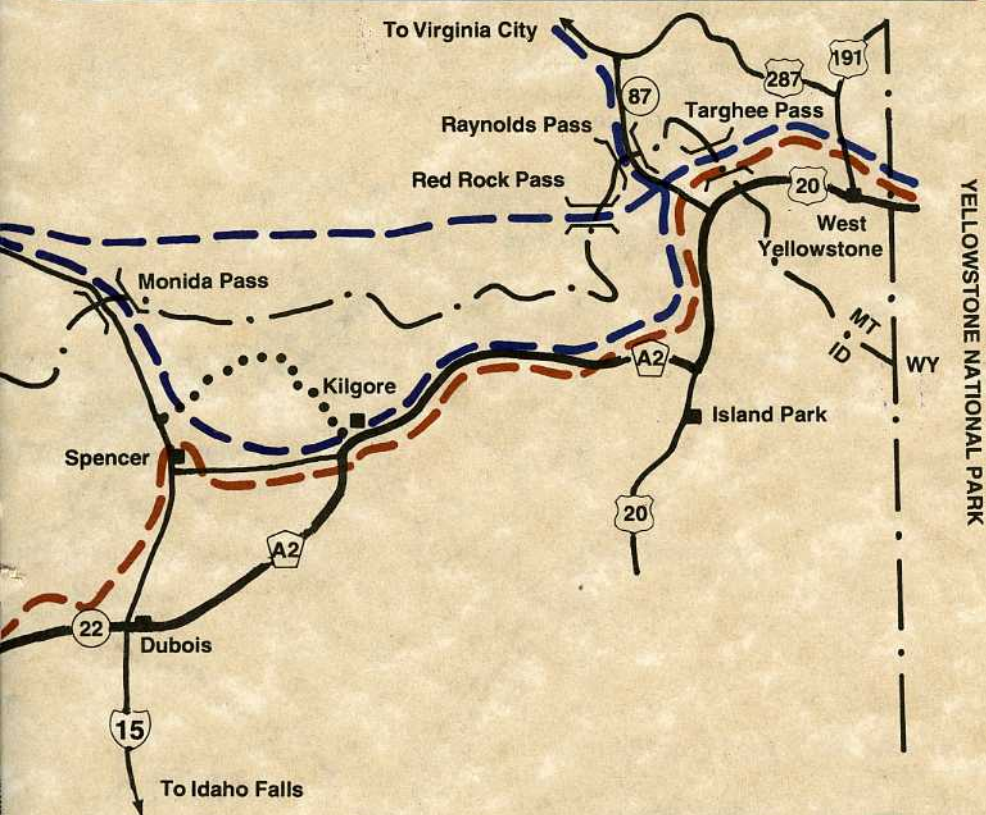
## Driving Tips

Plan ahead. Check the weather and road conditions before embarking on your journey. Most dirt roads are fine when dry but can become impassable when it rains or snows.

Be sure your fuel tank is full and plan on a long day. Remember that if you stop to look and explore, it will take more time than you think.

Many of the sites are on private property and should not be explored without permission. Please treat all historic sites with respect.

Be alert for deer, elk or moose on or near the roads, especially during the early morning hours and evenings. Drive safely and enjoy your trip.



## Chronology of the 1877 Flight of the Nez Perce from Leadore to West Yellowstone

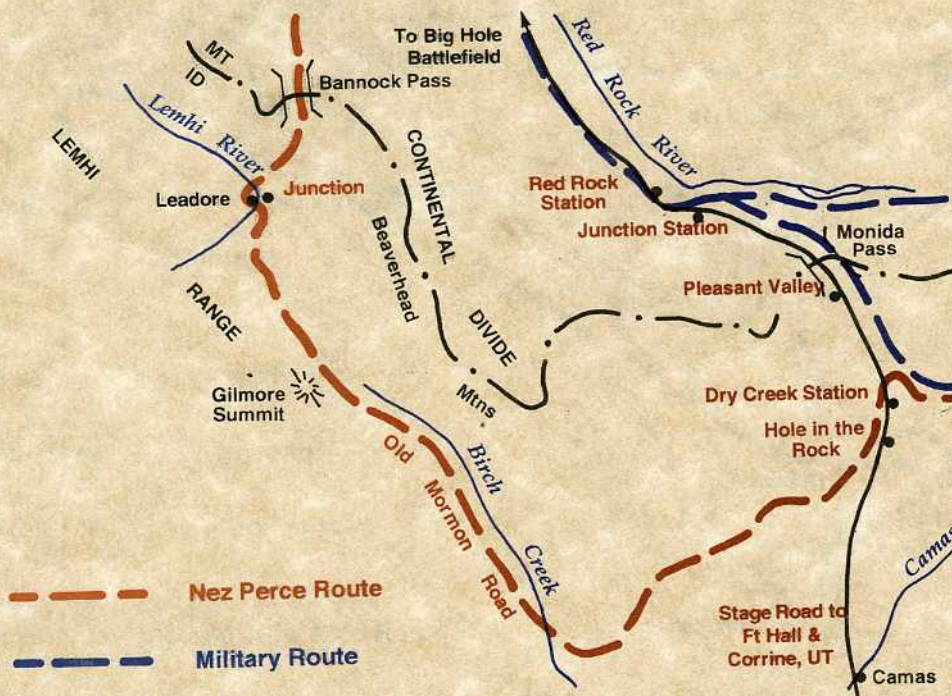
**August 13** - Nez Perce cross the Continental Divide at Bannock Pass and set up camp just outside of Junction. General Howard departs the Big Hole battlefield leaving most of his infantry behind and camps twenty-three miles south of the battlefield. The remainder of his troops leave the battlefield on August 15th and catch up with him a few days later.

**August 14** - Nez Perce move camp to Gilmore Summit area at the head of Birch Creek. General Howard advances twenty-five miles to Horse Prairie Creek.

**August 15** - Nez Perce move south through the Lemhi Valley on Old Mormon Road. Along Birch Creek the warriors encounter a wagon train carrying food and supplies. A fight ensues 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 and camp in Camas Meadows. General Howard's troops camp at Red Rock Station and then Junction Station. Lt. Bacon is dispatched to the vicinity of Henrys Lake via Red Rocks to watch for and intercept the Nez Perce. Captain Calloway and a group of Montana volunteers join General Howard.

**August 18** - Nez Perce camp near the junction of Camas and Spring Creek. Captain Norwood joins General Howard, now camped at Dry Creek Station, eight miles below Pleasant Valley on the stage road.



**August 19** - Nez Perce camp in an area southeast of Camas Meadows. General Howard reaches Camas Meadows and establishes Camp Calloway.

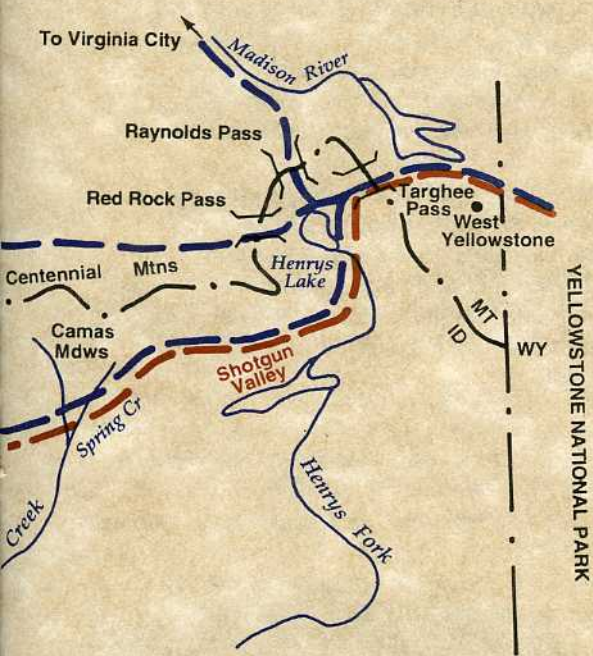
**August 20** - Nez Perce warriors raid Camp Calloway. After staying his assigned forty-eight hours, Lt. Bacon leaves Henrys Lake area to rejoin General Howard.

**August 21** - A group of Nez Perce warriors raid General Howard's camp and make off with the mule herd. Captain Norwood's command is sent in pursuit and later skirmish with the Nez Perce. The warriors rejoin the main group at the Nez Perce camp in a meadow southwest of Henrys Lake. General Howard moves his troops to Shotgun Creek.

**August 22** - Nez Perce cross the Continental Divide at Targhee Pass, enter Montana and descend to the Madison River Valley, where they enter Yellowstone National Park.

**August 24** - General Howard moves camp to Henrys Lake inlet at Sawtell Ranch. He then leaves for Virginia City, Montana for supplies and mules.

**August 28** - After returning from Virginia City on the 27th, General Howard and his men leave Henrys Lake and proceed to Yellowstone National Park. The Montana volunteers leave Howard's command and head for home.



## According to Nez Perce legend



In the dawn of time, before men lived, animals inhabited the earth and had the characteristics of humans. A monster dwelt in the Kamiah Valley near the forks of the Clearwater River. One day Coyote, a trickster and transformer, discovered that the Monster was eating all the animals. To save the animals, Coyote tricked Monster into swallowing him. While inside its belly, Coyote severed the Monster's heart with his stone knife, killing him. Coyote then carved the Monster into pieces and cast them throughout the land creating the various Indian tribes. But Coyote forgot the area where the Monster lived. When reminded of this he sprinkled the land with the blood of the Monster and created the Nimiipuu, (Nee-Me-Poo), "the people," now known as the Nez Perce.

Ever since that time the Nez Perce have lived in the valleys watered by the Snake, Clearwater, and Salmon Rivers, existing in a loose federation of small bands, each with a village that occupied a specific place within the tribal territory. They depended on the bounty of their native homeland for survival and thrived on the roots, berries, fish and game the earth and rivers provided. The Nez Perce relationship to this land is one of reverence, not ownership.



*"The earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it." Chief Joseph*

## Prelude to the Nez Perce flight of 1877

Prior to 1855, the Nez Perce lived within a homeland extending throughout much of northeastern Oregon and central Idaho. But as fur traders, missionaries, and settlers moved westward and encroached upon Nez Perce lands, tensions between the Nez Perce and the newcomers increased. In 1855, the U.S. government brokered a treaty that gave the Nez Perce a 5,000 square mile reservation containing most of their traditional homeland. The discovery of gold on Nez Perce land triggered another influx of settlers, fueled more conflicts and led to another treaty. The Treaty of 1863 shrank the Nez Perce reservation to one-tenth its original size. Separate bands of Nez Perce refused to sign the 1863 treaty, a legitimate act of defiance that branded them as "non-treaty" Nez Perce, and held fast to their traditional homelands.

Finally, as pressure from settlers increased, the government reacted in the spring of 1877 by calling on the military to force the non-treaty Nez Perce onto the new reservation in Idaho Territory. They chose General Oliver Otis Howard, a Civil War veteran, to carry out this formidable task.



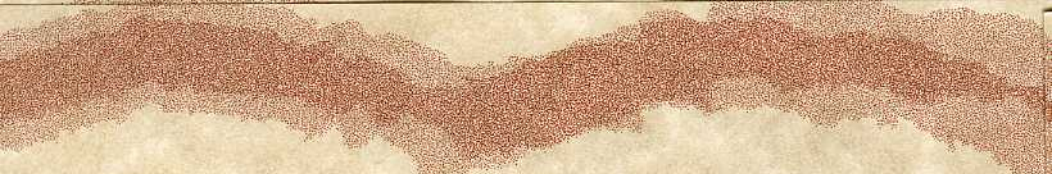
*General Oliver Otis Howard*

*Illustration courtesy Idaho State Historical Society.*

## The Chase Begins

Rather than risk conflict by continuing to resist relocation the Nez Perce gathered their livestock and belongings and began a painful and difficult journey to the new reservation, a journey that led many of them from their traditional homelands forever.


On June 14th the Nez Perce bands reached a familiar camas gathering site at Tolo Lake near Grangeville, Idaho. That night several young warriors, angered past atrocities and injustices at the hands of non-Indians, set out to avenge their people. Their raid, followed by a second one a day later, left a number of local settlers dead or wounded and brought fear and turmoil to the Nez Perce camp. With General Howard now in full pursuit the Nez Perce bands embarked upon a four-month journey that encompassed over 1,170 miles. Heartache and suffering followed them nearly every step of the way.



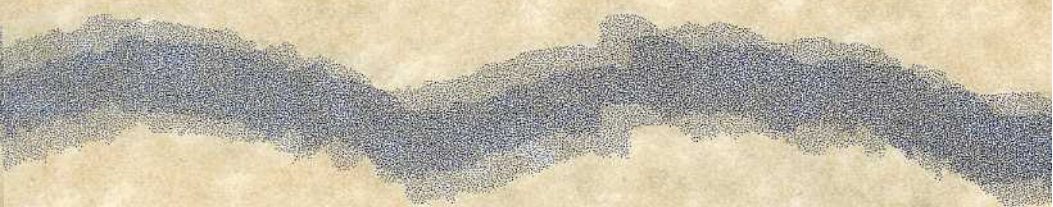
On the morning of August 9th the Nez Perce suffered a devastating surprise attack on their camp along the Big Hole River in southwest Montana Territory. After routing a contingency of soldiers and civilian volunteers during bloody two-day battle the Nez Perce gathered their wounded and traveled south through the Big Hole and Horse Prairie valleys of Montana. On August 13th they crossed the Continental Divide at Bannock Pass and entered Idaho Territory.

As you drive through the Lemhi Valley you are surrounded by two magnificent mountain ranges. To the west are the Lemhi Mountains, with peaks rising to more than 10,500 feet. On the east side of the valley is the Bitterroot Range. Here, the Continental Divide defines the border between Idaho and Montana.

After crossing Bannock Pass the Nez Perce moved down Cruickshank Canyon to the mouth of Timber Creek. At the small town of Junction (two miles east of Leadore) locals awaited them behind a small, hastily constructed stockade. Here, Chiefs White Bird and Looking Glass met with Chief Tendoy of the Lemhi Shoshone to ask for his support. Instead, Chief Tendoy advised the Nez Perce to move on. The Nez Perce complied and camped that night near what is today Nez Perce Canyon. Chief Lean Elk (Wa-wook-ke-ya Was Sauw), knew this country well and accepted leadership of the main group.



*"He [Lean Elk] 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 until about ten o'clock at night. We had no timepiece, but we could easily judge our movements. In this way the people covered many miles each sun. They were outdistancing the soldiers. Everybody was glad...." Wottolen*





On August 14th the Nez Perce traveled south through the vast expanse of the Lemhi Valley on the Old Mormon Road (ID Hwy 28). They moved quickly, crossing Gilman Divide (Salmon River Pass) and traveled south along Birch Creek. The following day an incident took place that frightened the local residents and spurred General Howard to move his troops south and east toward the Corrine-Virginia City Wagon Road in hopes of intercepting the Nez Perce.

The Lemhi Valley has a colorful and interesting history. Take time to stop and read the roadside historical markers scattered along this route.



## Trouble along Birch Creek

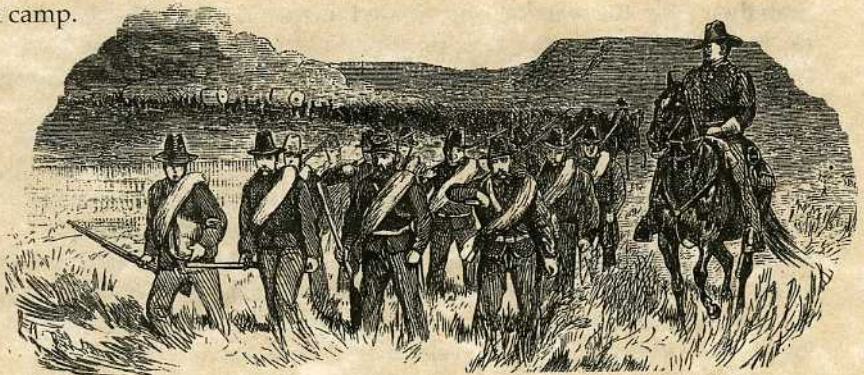
Around noon on Wednesday, August 15th, a group of Nez Perce warriors encountered several freight wagons heavily laden with supplies for the mining camps near Salmon City and Leesburg. The three teamsters and four passengers on board stopped at Birch Creek to eat lunch but soon found themselves face-to-face with the Nez Perce. Before the men could grab their rifles the warriors surrounded them and marched everyone to the main Nez Perce camp, including Albert Lyons, who happened upon the freighters while hunting for lost cattle. Desperate for food and supplies the Nez Perce tried to barter with the teamsters. When this failed the warriors took what they needed and set fire to the wagons. A struggle ensued that left five men - 3 teamsters and 2 miners - dead. Whiskey found among the supplies fueled a scuffle among the warriors that mortally wounded Ketalkpoosmin. Fearing for their lives two Chinese cooks escaped when sent to fetch firewood, while Albert Lyons slipped out of camp and hid in Birch Creek until nightfall. After the warriors departed the terrified survivors crept from their hiding places and sought help. Word of the killings at Birch Creek quickly spread across the valley, prompting a rescue party that arrived only to bury the five men where they fell. Their bodies were later disinterred and reburied in Salmon, Idaho.

From Birch Creek, the Nez Perce moved east, crossing Medicine Lodge Creek. Further on they crossed the Corrine - Virginia City Road a few miles north of Dubois, stopping at Hole-in-the-Rock Stage Station, where they cut the telegraph lines. That evening they set up camp in Camas Meadows.

A white marble marker is visible on the west side of Birch Creek at a way-side on Highway 28 just 13.5 miles north of the ID hwy 22 & 28 junction.

## The troops march on ... Big Hole to Camas Meadows

On August 14th General Howard's troops camped on Horse Prairie Creek, then moved on to Red Rock Station. Three days later he and his men crossed the Continental Divide at Monida Pass and made their way to Junction Station, where Capt. James E. Calloway and fifty-five Montana volunteers joined them. With the arrival of Captain Randolph Norwood's Second Cavalry on August 18th, General Howard's forces moved on, resting that night at Dry Creek Station just 18 miles west of the Nez Perce camp. Fearing the Nez Perce might escape back into Montana, General Howard ordered First Lt. George R Bacon to ride ahead with forty men to the vicinity of Henrys Lake. There, Lt. Bacon was to wait and watch for the Nez Perce for forty-eight hours and, if they failed to show up, return to the main camp.



*Illustration from Harper's Weekly courtesy Idaho State Historical Society.*

## Tall Grass and Cool Water

All day Sunday, August 19th, the soldiers followed a broad trail left by the Nez Perce. After an eighteen-mile march across the sagebrush prairie, General Howard arrived at Camas Meadows. He camped along the high ground fringing the bottom of Spring Creek and named the camp in honor of Captain Calloway.



*"It was a very strong natural position on the first elevated ground which overlooks the meadows toward the west and some lava-beds toward the north and east... before night every animal was brought within, the horses tied to the picket-ropes, the animals to the wagons and the bell mares hobbled. Captain Calloway's volunteers came up and encamped about one hundred yards from me, across a creek. They are between two streams of water whose banks were fringed by thickets of willows."* General O. O. Howard

## A Daring Raid

General Howard's arrival at Camas Meadows did not go unnoticed. When Nez Perce scouts returned with word of the military's location a plan evolved to slow the movement of the troops. In a vision Black Hair saw himself and other warriors escaping with the army's horses. Under the leadership of Chiefs Looking Glass and Toohoolhoolzote, as well as Chief Joseph's younger brother, Ollokot, a group of warriors set out on a daring raid.

The Nez Perce arrived at Howard's camp before dawn on August 21st. Several warriors dismounted and crept quietly among the herd, cutting loose animals and removing mare bells. A sentry noticed riders approaching and called out to them. Suddenly, shots rang out in the darkness and chaos spread quickly throughout the camp.



Camas



*"Too soon the alarm is sprung! Not many cavalry horses are yet cut loose when a gun gives off a report. It is back of the front riders, back toward the rear. 'Who in hell do shooting?' Our plans are now spoiled." Wottolen*



*...we were awakened by a disconcerting concert of demoniacal yells and a crackling of rifles, while the whizzing of bullets could be heard well overhead. Every one was out in a minute, and all we could see was a magnified imitation of a swarm of fireflies flittering in the alders as the rifles spoke, while the tramping of hundreds of hoofs added to the din." Sergeant H.J. Davis*

It took several minutes for General Howard and his men to overcome their surprise and organize themselves. They struggled to get dressed and find their weapons amongst the noise and confusion. As bullets flew through the cool night air the Nez Perce escaped unscathed with the military stock in tow.

## Captain Norwood Pays the Price

At sunrise General Howard ordered three companies of about 150 men to recapture the stolen stock. After a six mile pursuit Captain Norwood's company caught up with the Nez Perce, dismounted and exchanged shots. As the cavalry moved in the warriors executed a swift flanking maneuver and attacked from three sides. Captain Norwood and his men quickly found themselves cut off from the other two units.



*"Those soldiers...we must have hit one or two... they became scared...A bugle sounded down among the timber, and those soldiers skipped for their lives for that shelter. We sent bullets flying after them but they all reached the brush and disappeared. Peopeo Tholekt*





*"The race to the thicket was something never to be forgotten, for a cavalryman is not trained for a five hundred yard sprint. . . I had a horse's nosebag slung over my shoulder containing extra cartridges, and a bullet cut the strap and let it fall to the ground. A hero would have stopped, gone back and recovered that bag, but not I." Sergeant Harry Davis*

Retreating to a nearby aspen grove, Captain Norwood and his troops hastily built rock rifle pits for defense and hunkered down to await reinforcements.

Meanwhile, the Nez Perce warriors assessed the success of their raid. As the sun rose the warriors realized they had captured most of the mule herd and a few of the horses. Still, their raid proved a tactical success by leaving General Howard with too few pack animals to continue his pursuit. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the Nez Perce gathered their stock, broke camp and left Camas Meadows. For their part the military paid a high price for the few mules they recovered... Bugler Brooks lay dead, two soldiers died later, and five men were wounded.



*"The soldiers did not hurry to follow us. They slowed after losing their pack mules." Yellow Wolf*

Up ahead near Henrys Lake, Lt. Bacon waited and watched for the Nez Perce. After two days he assumed they had taken another route and, as ordered, returned to General Howard's camp. Ironically, the Nez Perce departed Camas Meadows and arrived near Henrys Lake later that day, narrowly missing Lt. Bacon.



*Illustration from Harper's Weekly courtesy Idaho State Historical Society.*

## Henry's Lake

On August 24th General Howard and his troops reached the southern end of Henry's Lake. There he learned of Lt. Bacon's return and his failure to intercept the Nez Perce. With that news General Howard realized this desperate chase would continue.

In need of fresh pack animals and supplies for his men, General Howard moved camp to the north end of Henry's Lake at Staley Springs. Here the men rested, relaxed, swam, and fished for trout, a welcome supplement to their otherwise tedious diet. Meanwhile, General Howard left camp for Virginia City to replenish supplies, purchase pack animals, and send telegrams to his commanding officers.



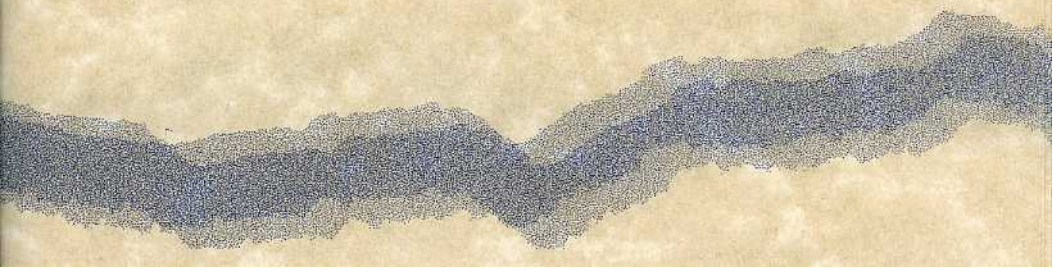
### Henry's Lake

Both the Nez Perce and the U.S. Army spent time at this shallow lake located in a grassy, seven-mile-wide basin surrounded by mountains. Nearby Reynolds Pass funnels traffic on State Hwy 87 to the north towards Bozeman or Ennis, MT while US Hwy 20 crosses Targhee Pass at the Continental Divide and leads to West Yellowstone. As State Hwy 87 passes the north shore of Henry's Lake it meets Forest Road 55, which continues around the lake to Staley Springs. This is where Gilman Sawtell, the first homesteader in Island Park, bivouacked General Howard's troops while the general rode to Virginia City for supplies.

A loop can be made around the lake by continuing on to Forest Road 53. The road ends at US Hwy 20 and is a lovely drive on a dirt road.

## The Nez Perce reach the Madison River

After spending one day at Henrys Lake the Nez Perce departed on August 22nd. They crossed 7,072-foot Targhee Pass and descended to the Madison River just outside of Yellowstone National Park, newly created by Congress just five years earlier. They then began a journey through the wilderness of America's first national park, an area revered by the Nez Perce for its spiritual power.



## The Final Weeks

On August 27th General Howard returned from Virginia City. The following day he moved his troops past Henrys Lake, over Targhee Pass, and entered Yellowstone National Park.

By the time General Howard entered Yellowstone the Nez Perce were already deep within the park. They captured and later released a group of tourists and eventually made their way to the park's eastern border, where they exited through Hoodoo Pass. After leaving Yellowstone Park the Nez Perce continued on toward the buffalo country of the Upper Missouri River. When they learned their Crow allies could not offer them refuge the Nez Perce turned north toward Canada. There, they hoped to gain asylum among Sitting Bull's Sioux tribe, already exiled from this country following their defeat of Colonel Custer at the Little Big Horn the year before. Sadly, the Nez Perce flight ended just forty miles south of the Canadian border.



## The Fighting Ends...


As they passed the Bear Paw Mountains group slowed its pace and set up camp along the banks of Snake Creek, where they rested and made preparations for the final push to Canada. Then, on September 30th, the military caught up with the Nez Perce.

Colonel Nelson Miles, dispatched from Tongue River (Miles City, MT), reached the Nez Perce camp first and launched a fierce attack that turned into a five-day siege. Four days later, on October 4th, General Howard reached the battlefield to reinforce Colonel Miles's command.



Cold and weary, the Nez Perce put up a valiant fight, but at a human cost too great to bear. To save them from further death and suffering Chief Joseph surrendered his rifle to Colonel Miles and General Howard on October 5, 1877.

But not all of the Nez Perce accepted the surrender. That night Chief White Bird led a group numbering approximately fifty men, women and children to the camp of Chief Sitting Bull. Among them was Wetatonmi, Ollokot's widow.



*"We walked out, leaving many of our friends. Some were too bad wounded to travel and had to stay. . . Night drew on as we left. We had blankets but not too heavy for the traveling. Not enough to keep us warm when camping...I do not know how long, but it must have been several days we were on that journey. Two days we had nothing to eat." Wetatonmi*

## Exiled Far From Home

Following their surrender at the Bear Paw battlefield, the 418 Nez Perce survivors faced a bleak and uncertain future. They ended up in Oklahoma, where they suffered eight years of exile in a land they called "Eekish Pah," the hot place.

Throughout their captivity Chief Joseph petitioned tirelessly for a return to their homelands. His efforts finally paid off and on May 22, 1885, the 268 surviving Nez Perce boarded a train for the journey westward. While many returned to the reservation in Idaho, Chief Joseph and his people faced a difficult dilemma. They hoped to return to their homelands in Oregon but were told that a hostile homecoming awaited them there. Fearing legal indictments and retribution at the hands of disgruntled settlers now living on Nez Perce homelands, Chief Joseph's Wallowa band and Chief Hatalakin's Palouse band accepted an invitation from Chief Moses to live on the Colville Indian reservation in the town of Nespelem, Washington. Joseph returned to visit his homeland only once, when on a brief visit to Wallowa Lake in 1900, he stood quietly at the grave of his father and wept. Four years later, on September 21, 1904, Chief Joseph died of what many contend was a broken heart.



*To learn more...*

**Nez Perce Summer 1877** by Jerome A. Greene. 2000. Montana Historical Society Press

**I Will Tell My Story - A Pictoral Account of the Nez Perce War** by Scott Thompson. 2000. University of Washington Press, in association with the Idaho Historical Society.

**Children of Grace** by Bruce Hampton. 1994. Henry Holt Co.

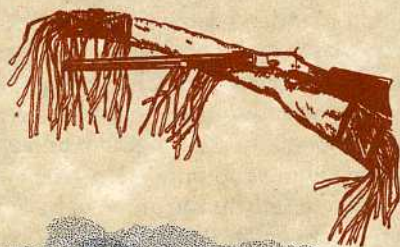
**The Nez Perce and the Opening of the Northwest** by Alvin J. Josephy, Jr. 1965. Yale University Press

**Hear Me My Chiefs! Nez Perce Legend & History** by Lucullus V. McWhorter. First printing 1952. The Caxton Printers, LTD.

**Yellow Wolf: His Own Story** by Lucullus V. McWhorter. First printing 1940. The Caxton Printers, LTD.

**Following The Nez Perce Trail: A Guide to the Nee-Me-Poo National Historic Trail with Eye-witness Accounts** by Cheryl Wilfong. 1990. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press.

**That All People May Be One People, Send Rain to Wash the Face of the Earth** by Chief Joseph. 1879 (reprinted 1995). Kooskia, ID: Mountain Meadow Press.



*For more information contact one of the following...*

**ORGANIZATIONS**

West Yellowstone Historical Society  
P.O. Box 1225  
West Yellowstone, MT 59758

Island Park Historical Society  
P.O. Box 224  
Island Park, ID 83429

**FOREST SERVICE**

Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) N.H.T.  
Lolo National Forest  
Bldg. 24, Ft. Missoula  
Missoula, MT 59804  
406-329-3814

Salmon-Challis National Forest  
RR2, Box 600  
Salmon, ID 83467  
208-756-2215

Caribou-Targhee National Forest  
Ashton-Island Park Ranger District  
HC 65, Box 975  
Island Park, ID 83429  
208-558-7301

Salmon-Challis National Forest  
Leadore Ranger District  
P.O. Box 180  
Leadore, ID 83464  
208-768-2500

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

Nez Perce National Historical Park  
RR1, Box 100  
Spalding, ID 83540-9715  
208-843-2261

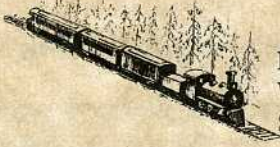
Big Hole National Battlefield  
P.O. Box 237  
Wisdom, MT 59761

**BUREAU OF LAND  
MANAGEMENT**

Salmon Field Office  
RR2, Box 610  
Salmon, ID 83467  
208-756-5400

Idaho Falls Field Office  
1405 Hollipark Drive  
Idaho Falls, ID 83401-2100  
208-524-7500

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Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation



Idaho State Historical Society.