

THE NEZ PERCE [NEE-ME-POO] NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL

August, 1990
REVISION 1985
Scale: 1:1,000,000



LEGEND

Nez Perce Trail

- Principal Roads
- National Forests & Grasslands
- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- National Park
- Private Land
- Indian Reservation
- Military Reservation
- National Wildlife Refuge
- Department of Energy
- Bureau of Reclamation

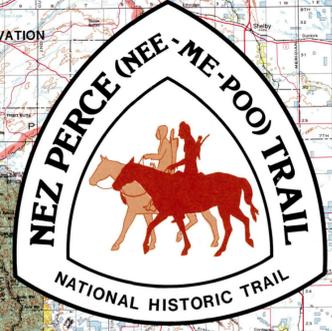
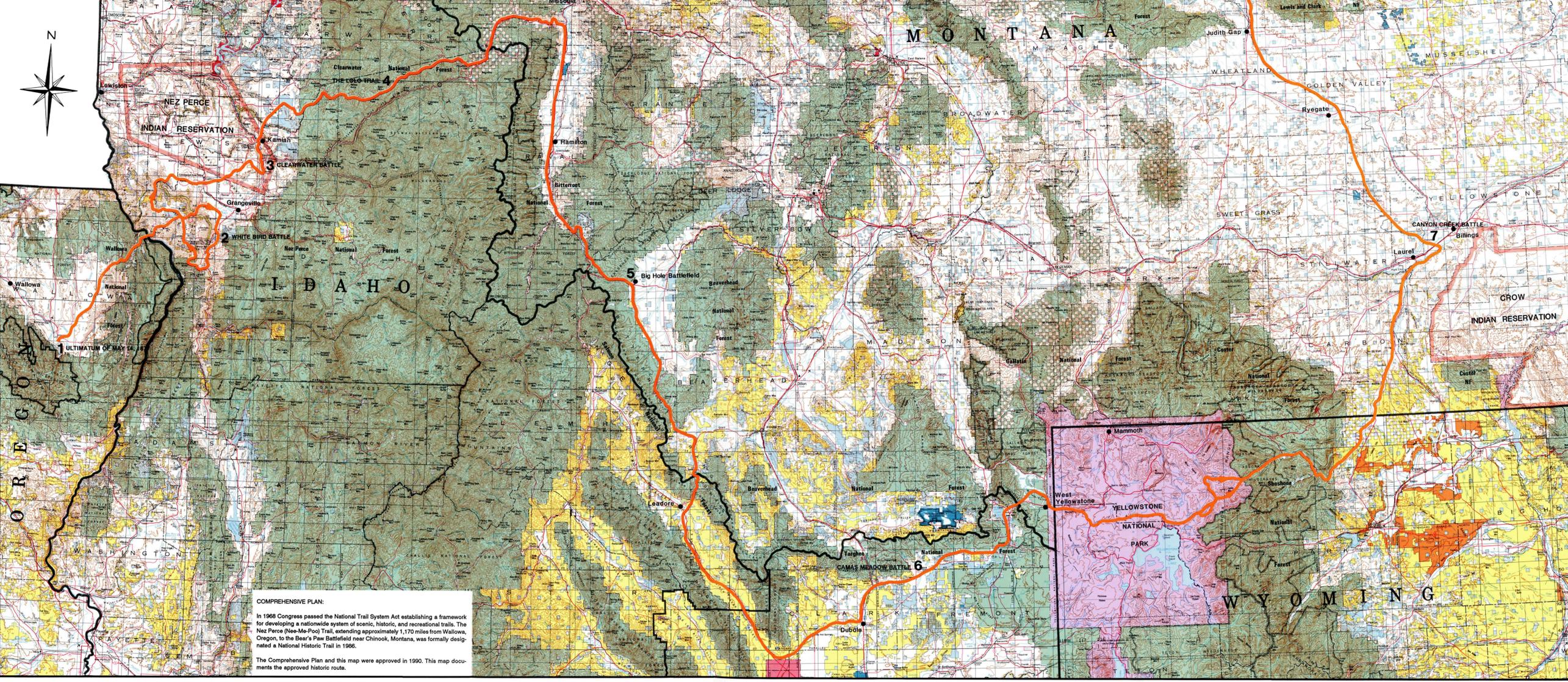
Contour Interval: 500 Feet

HISTORIC OVERVIEW . . .

THE NEZ PERCE WAR OF 1877...In the summer of 1877 a small group of Nez Perce Indians began a journey along this route from eastern Oregon, through Idaho Territory, and into Montana Territory, stopping finally at the Bear's Paw Mountains just south of Canada. Five Nez Perce bands were involved - about 800 people herding more than 2,000 horses - and carrying whatever possessions they could manage. Yet they made this trek in less than 4 months - for they were fleeing from the U.S. Army, which was under orders to place them on a reservation in western Idaho Territory.

Although these Indians hoped to peaceably escape from the Army, they were forced to combat their pursuers nearly a dozen times. The following briefly describes the significant events of that trek.

- 1 ULTIMATUM OF MAY 14, 1877...**The non-treaty bands remained on their homeland outside the reservation until increasing demands for settlement and mining forced the Indian Bureau to order the various bands of Nez Perce to move onto the reservation. The military command of General O. O. Howard was ordered to support the local Indian agent.
- 2 WHITE BIRD BATTLE OF JUNE 17, 1877...**General Howard sent a force comprised of Companies F and H, 1st US Cavalry and about a dozen volunteers to White Bird Canyon to quell the uprising. A Nez Perce truce party, still hoping to avert a war, was fired upon by the Army. The poorly armed and smaller band of non-treaty Indians routed and inflicted heavy casualties on the Army. Sobered by the defeat, Howard mustered several hundred men and so triggered the historic chase.
- 3 CLEARWATER BATTLE OF JULY 11 AND 12, 1877...**During the following month, the Indians moved east from White Bird Canyon, their journey marked by only minor skirmishes. Then on July 11, Howard's forces met the Nez Perce at the Clearwater River at Sities, Idaho, and they fought a 2-day battle, with neither side victorious.
- 4 THE LOLO TRAIL...**Having decided to seek haven with the Crow Indians, the Nez Perce withdrew, following their ancient Lolo trail over the Bitterroot Mountain Range into the buffalo plains of Montana.
- 5 BIG HOLE BATTLE OF AUGUST 9 AND 10, 1877...**By the afternoon of August 8, Colonel Gibbon's advance party from Ft. Shaw, Montana, had found the Nez Perce camp at the Big Hole. Shortly before dawn on August 9, Gibbon's men, joined by civilian volunteers, launched a surprise attack on the camp. The soldiers soon overpowered the camp of the sleeping Nez Perce, but the Nez Perce rallied, found sniping positions and with deadly accurate shooting forced Gibbon's men to retreat and dig in. While the Indians held the soldiers in place, Chief Joseph gathered his people and hurriedly led them southward.
- 6 CAMAS MEADOW BATTLE OF AUGUST 20, 1877...**A small band of Nez Perce Indians, led by Chief Joseph's brother, Ollokot, raided Howard's Camp Calloway and stampeded many of the horses and mules. While pursuing the Indians, Captain Norwood and his company were surrounded and held by the Indians until reinforcements arrived. The capture of the large number of pack animals resulted in an extended delay of Howard until the stock could be replaced.
- 7 CANYON CREEK BATTLE OF SEPTEMBER 13, 1877...**General Sturgis and 400 soldiers overtook the Indians near the mouth of Canyon Creek and engaged in a running battle to control this gateway to the broad prairies between the Musselshell and the Yellowstone Rivers. The desired result failed. Green recruits failed to understand orders to bring up the horses and the Indians soon outdistanced the troops and gained advantage of the open country before them.
- 8 COW ISLAND SKIRMISH OF SEPTEMBER 24, 1877...**Denied permission to purchase needed food for their families at the Cow Island Landing, warriors raided and burned over 50 tons of supplies awaiting transfer to Fort Benton.
- 9 BEAR PAW BATTLE AND SURRENDER OF OCTOBER 5, 1877...**Finally, on September 30, in the Bear Paw Mountains of Montana, just south of the Canadian border, the Nez Perce were surprised by Army troops under the command of Colonel Nelson A. Miles. The chiefs rallied their followers, but after 5 days of fighting and intermittent negotiations, they finally surrendered to Miles.



COMPREHENSIVE PLAN:
In 1968 Congress passed the National Trail System Act establishing a framework for developing a nationwide system of scenic, historic, and recreational trails. The Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) Trail, extending approximately 1,170 miles from Wallowa, Oregon, to the Bear's Paw Battlefield near Chinook, Montana, was formally designated a National Historic Trail in 1968.
The Comprehensive Plan and this map were approved in 1990. This map documents the approved historic route.