

Canyon Creek to Bear Paw



Experience the Nez Perce Trail



Near Molt Montana
Roger Peterson - USDA / Forest Service

8

AUTO TOUR



Nez Perce Trail

Canyon Creek to Bear Paw



0 5 10 20 30 Miles

Maps in this brochure are for general orientation only and are not to scale. Please use a Bureau of Land Management map 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 Nez Perce National Historic Trail stretches 1,170 miles from the Wallowa Valley of eastern Oregon to the plains of north-central Montana.

This segment of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail, Canyon Creek to Bear Paw, is one of eight available tours (complete list on page 31). As you travel this historic trail, you will see highway signs marking the official Auto Tour route.



Each designated Auto Tour route stays on all-weather roads passable by all types of vehicles. Adventurous and Intrepid Routes are alternatives for those seeking the most authentic historical route. They are often on gravel or dirt roads, so plan ahead.

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 Intrepid routes inquire locally.



Experience the Nez Perce Trail



How do I get there?

This Auto Tour begins in Broadview, Montana. Broadview is located approximately 32 miles north of Billings, Montana.

Take Interstate 90 to Billings, MT. Take exit 450, 27th Street exit, and proceed north on Montana State Highway 3 for 31.8 miles to Broadview, MT.

If you are continuing from Auto Tour 7, take the Buffalo Trail Road from Canyon Creek Monument to Montana State Highway 3 and proceed north to Broadview, MT.

Mainstream Traveler

For most travelers this will be the appropriate route. The roads are generally paved and won't pose a challenge for typical cars, campers with trailers, and RVs.

Mainstream travelers take Montana State Highway 3 from Broadview to US Highway 12, and then follow US Highway 12 west to US Highway 191. Then drive north on US Highway 191 from Harlowton to Lewistown, Montana, and again north to Montana State Highway 66.

Following Montana State Highway 66 north through the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation to US Highway 2. Mainstream travelers then head west on US Highway 2 to Chinook, Montana. At Chinook take Montana State Route 240 south 16 miles to the Bear Paw Battlefield.



Adventurous Traveler

Adventurous travelers will have the option of following more closely the route of the events of the summer of 1877. Beginning just north of Ryegate, the Adventurous travelers follow Careless Creek toward Judith Gap. There they rejoin the Mainstream traveler for a short distance and then take an alternate route to Lewistown. North of Lewistown, Adventurous travelers take Montana State Highway 236 directly north to the Bear Paw Battlefield over unimproved roads. Adventurous Travelers and Intrepid Travelers should make sure to have a full tank of gas before leaving Lewistown. It is 160 miles from Lewistown to Chinook, Montana.



Intrepid Traveler

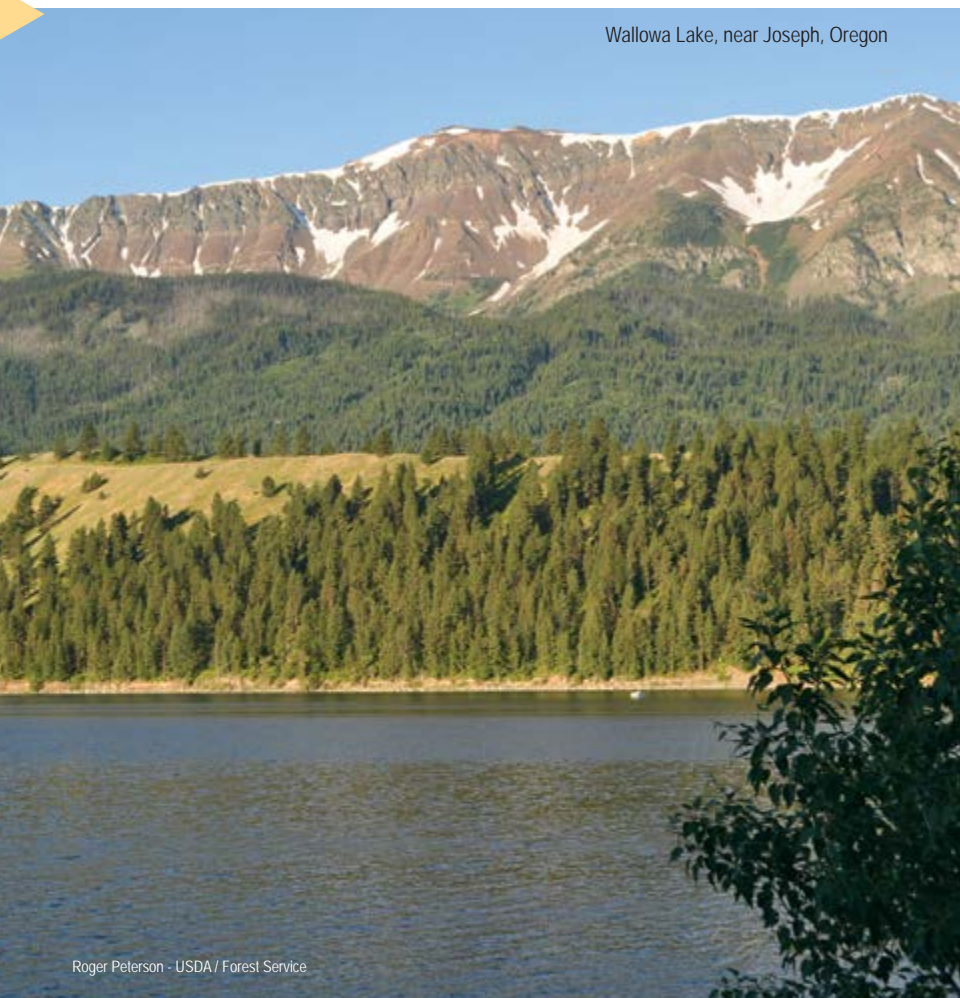
Intrepid travelers are taken even closer to the actual sites of many of the events of the summer and fall of 1877. Travelers may leave the route of the Mainstream traveler or the Adventurous traveler at a couple of points between Lewistown and Bear Paw. This route takes travelers over roads that are gravel or even just dirt. Please be sure your vehicle is appropriate to those conditions.

Note that some roads along the intrepid routes can be impassable during periods of inclement weather.

The Flight of the Nez Perce

Cheated of their Wallowa homeland in northeastern Oregon by the 1863 Treaty, in May 1877 the Nez Perce (or, in their language, Niimípuu, meaning “the real people” or “we the people”) were again being asked to leave. Tribal leaders met with General Oliver O. Howard and local Indian agent John B. Montieth at Fort Lapwai in a final effort to avoid conflict. Howard and Monteith demanded the Niimípuu move to a vastly reduced Idaho reservation—if necessary, by force. The failed negotiation reflected the gulf separating two cultures.

As the Niimípuu left lands in northeastern Oregon for the Nez Perce Reservation, the final insult was the ridicule of the warrior Wailaytiic, whose father was murdered by settlers years earlier. Three young Nez Perce reacted by attacking settlers on the Salmon River who were known to have murdered or mistreated generations of Niimípuu.



Wallowa Lake, near Joseph, Oregon

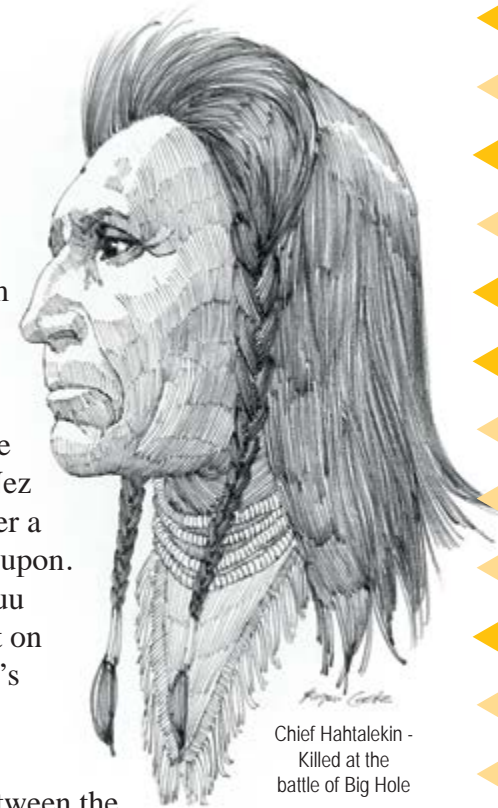
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In response, Captain William Perry rode from Fort Lapwai to White Bird Canyon with 130 Army regulars and volunteers. A last chance to avoid war ended as Nez Perce, approaching under a flag of truce, were fired upon. Of the 70 or so Niimípuu warriors, none were lost on June 17, 1877. Of Perry’s command, 34 lay dead.

A series of running engagements ensued between the “Non-Treaty” band of the Niimípuu, and the U.S. Army joined by civilian volunteers and scouts drawn from at least seven different tribes. Some 800 Niimípuu —mostly women, children, and elderly—herded 2,000 horses in a relentless quest for sanctuary.

Their 1,170-mile flight was punctuated by clashes at Clearwater, Weippe, Big Hole, Camas Meadows, Canyon Creek, and Cow Island. The ordeal culminated at Snake Creek, near the Bear Paw Mountains in Montana, on October 5, 1877.

Today, at the various sites associated with the 1877 conflict, the Niimípuu annually recognize and honor the fortitude of our ancestors. Reflecting on these important events enables our people to gather strength from the examples set by our ancestors in the face of adversity.



Chief Hahtalekin -
Killed at the
battle of Big Hole



Joni Packard - USDA / Forest Service

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 for the Nez Perce and other tribes, became a trail of flight and conflict, a trail of sorrow.

Chronology of Events

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

September 18 – October 7, 1877

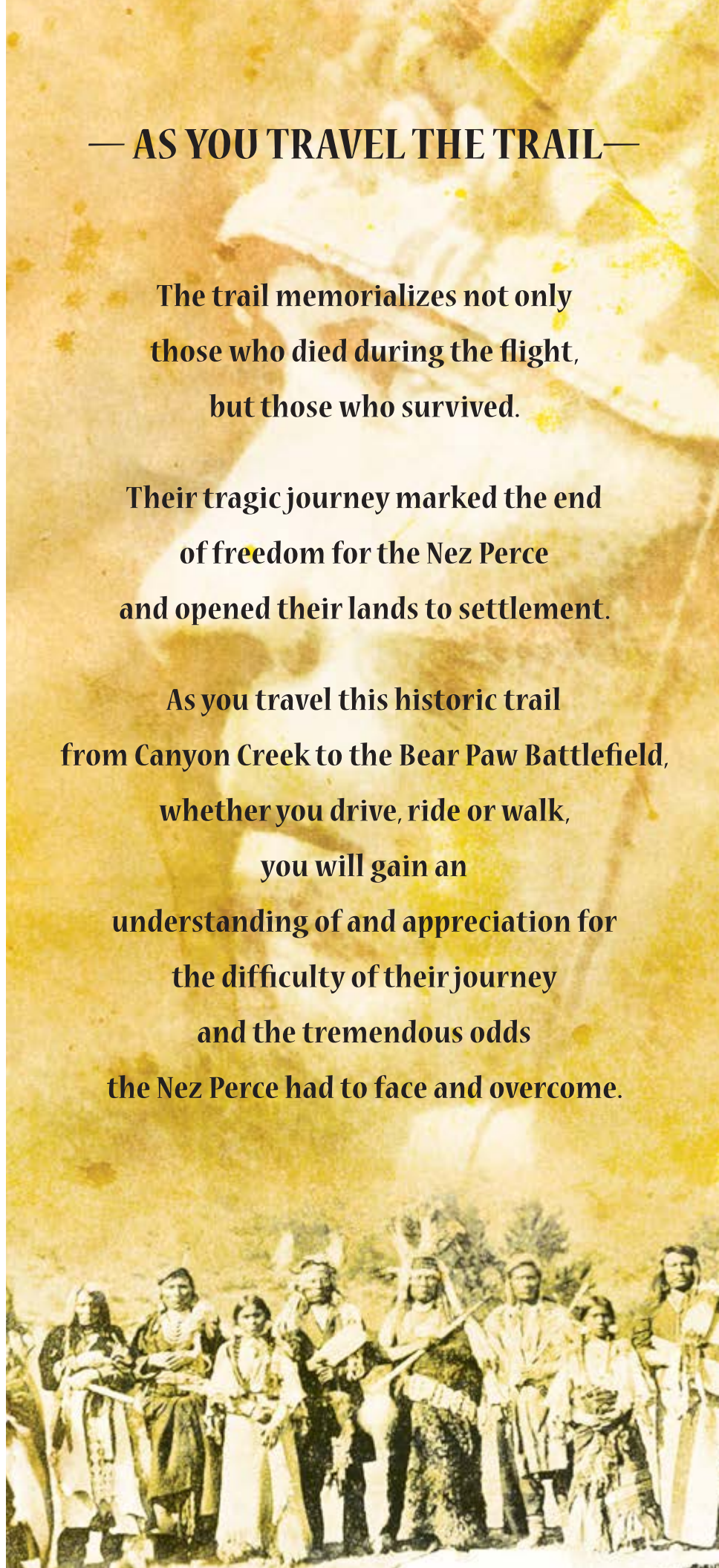
- September 13** – Nez Perce warriors take control of a stagecoach. The Battle of Canyon Creek occurs when Colonel Sturgis catches up with the Nez Perce.
Sturgis camps on the battlefield. *See Auto Tour 7.*
- September 15** – Sturgis camps on the Musselshell and decides not to continue pursuing the Nez Perce. *See Auto Tour 7.*
- September 18** – Colonel Miles leaves the Tongue River Cantonment (near Miles City).
- September 20** – General Howard camps on the Musselshell River. The Nez Perce camp near Judith Gap.
- September 21** – The Nez Perce camp near Reed and Bowles trading post where they had often traded in the past. **2**
Howard joins Sturgis on the Musselshell River.
- September 22** – Howard and Sturgis camp on Careless Creek.
- September 23** – The Nez Perce cross the Missouri River at Cow Island. **3 4 5**
After failed negotiations, they attack the supply depot.
- September 24** – Major Ilges and thirty-six citizen volunteers arrive at Cow Island. **3 4 5**
- September 25** – Ilges skirmishes with Nez Perce on Cow Creek. **3 4 5**
Miles hears that the Nez Perce have already crossed the Missouri. He crosses the Missouri at the mouth of the Musselshell.
- September 30** – Miles charges the Nez Perce camp on Snake Creek and later lays siege to the camp. **6**
- October 1** – General Howard and Colonel Sturgis arrive at Carroll City on the Missouri River. Howard and seventeen men board the steamer *Benton* to go upriver.
- October 3** – Howard debarks the *Benton* at Cow Island. **3 4 5**
- October 4** – Howard arrives at the Bear Paw Battlefield after dark. **6**
- October 5** – Chief Joseph surrenders with 430 Nez Perce. Chief White Bird and nearly 300 Nez Perce cross the border into Canada.
- October 7** – Miles leaves Bear Paw Battlefield with the Nez Perce who surrendered and returns to the Tongue River Cantonment.

— 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 from Canyon Creek to the Bear Paw Battlefield, whether you drive, ride or walk, you will gain an understanding of and appreciation for the difficulty of their journey and the tremendous odds the Nez Perce had to face and overcome.



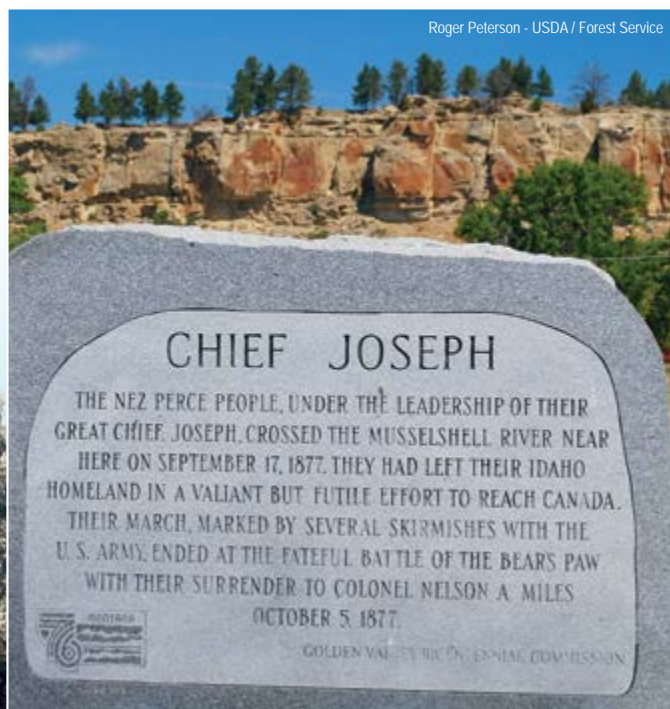
Broadview to Ryegate

Mainstream Traveler

① Musselshell River

Proceed north on Montana State Highway 3 for 14.8 miles to the junction with US Highway 12. Turn west on US Highway 12 for 12.5 miles to the bridge over Careless Creek; a simple granite monument commemorating the passage of the Nez Perce through this area is located on the north side of the highway approximately 3.4 miles west of Careless Creek and on the eastern edge of the town of Ryegate, MT.

The Nez Perce, with the Army behind them, crossed the Musselshell River after the skirmish at Canyon Creek (see Auto Tour 7 for a detailed account) and followed Careless Creek northwest to Judith Gap. Although the exact route taken by the Nez Perce is not known, the Adventurous Traveler route follows Careless Creek which is presumed to be the route they followed.



Musselshell River near Ryegate, Montana

Ryegate to Judith Gap

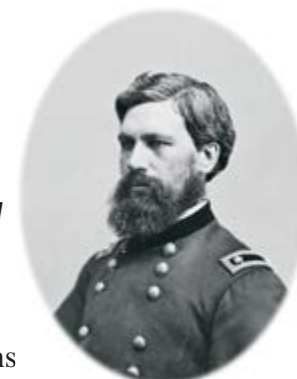
Mainstream Traveler

From Ryegate, MT, proceed west on US Highway 12 for 29.5 miles toward Harlowton. At the junction with US Highway 191, on the east side of Harlowton, MT, turn north on US Highway 191 and follow it for 17.6 miles to Judith Gap, MT.

After the battle at Canyon Creek, the Nez Perce stayed well in front of the military. Utterly worn out and with no hope of catching the elusive Nez Perce, General Howard deliberately slowed his pursuit. In a last attempt to stop the Nez Perce, General Howard sent an urgent message to Colonel Nelson Miles asking for his help.

I earnestly request you to make every effort in your power to prevent the escape of this hostile band, and at least to hold them in check until I can overtake them.

– General Oliver Otis Howard



General O. O. Howard

Miles set off immediately, dispatching this reply and requesting “an abundance of rations and grain.”

I fear your information reaches me too late for me to intercept them, but I will do the best I can.

– Colonel Miles

Roger Peterson - USDA / Forest Service

Colonel Miles, heading northwest from the Tongue River Cantonment (present day Miles City, Montana) and General Howard, following the Nez Perce, were both positioning their troops to intercept the Nez Perce before they could reach Canada.



Colonel Nelson Miles

After Howard's and Sturgis' commands had come together at the Musselshell river, the chase was kept up through the alkali plains and Judith Basin at comparatively slow marches. The reason being that General Howard had sent couriers ahead to Colonel Miles to look out for the Indians making towards the Upper Missouri. Miles sent back word that if eight days could be given him he would succeed in getting beyond the hostiles, and would strike them. To bring about so favorable a result our marches were "slowed," so that the Indians not finding us within a dangerous proximity would slacken their pace too.

- Thomas Sutherland (war correspondent)

The Nez Perce were weary. Many of the old and sick had dropped out and were never heard from again. Those who were left were pressing on but they were in need of supplies because food was scarce.

I was too small to fight in the war, but I heard the bullets. I remember the hunger, the cold and freezing nakedness of us children.

- Black Eagle

Near Chinook, Montana



Roger Peterson - USDA / Forest Service

Ryegate to Judith Gap

Adventurous Traveler

This route closely follows Careless Creek and is the presumed route that the Nez Perce took.

At Ryegate, the Adventurous Traveler can turn north on First Street, which becomes Rothiemay Road / Montana State Route 238, to a railroad crossing and further along the road crosses Careless Creek. Here the pavement ends. Continue north on Rothiemay Road for 8.2 miles. Turn west on Hedgesville Road, which will jog to the south, and travel approximately 12.5 miles to Hedgesville. At the intersection continue straight (west) on Hedgesville Road which in 1.5 miles turns north. In 5.3 miles the road turns west and becomes Upper Nihill Road. Continue west for 6.0 miles. Turn north on Pronghorn Road. Follow this road for 6.0 miles then turn west on Judith Gap Road. Continue west 2.0 miles, past where Judith Gap Road turns south (Oxford Rd). At this point the traveler continues straight on Judith Gap Road, which then jogs northwest and parallels the railroad tracks. In 6.2 miles this road joins Montana State Route 297. Turn west and follow Montana State Route 297 1.2 miles to the town of Judith Gap, MT, where you once again join the Mainstream Traveler on US Highway 191.



Roger Peterson - USDA / Forest Service

Judith Gap to Lewistown

Mainstream Traveler

From Judith Gap, follow US Highway 191 north for 21.3 miles to Eddie's Corner and the junction with US Highway 87. Turn right (east) on US Highway 87 for 17.1 miles to downtown Lewistown. At the junction of First Avenue North and Main Street, follow Main Street, which is US Highway 87 and Montana State Highway 200, east 0.5 mile from downtown. On the north side of the highway, the Chamber of Commerce offers an information center as well as a museum. 1.6 miles east of the museum, a historic sign along the roadside tells about the Nez Perce route through this area.



Judith Basin Near Hilger, Montana.

Roger Peterson - USDA / Forest Service

② Reed and Bowles Trading Post

Adventurous Traveler

Note: This route is recommended for Adventurous Travelers because there is no turnaround for large vehicles at the Reed and Bowles Trading Post.

Travel north along US Highway 191 for 21.3 miles to Eddie's Corner then turn east on US Highway 87 and follow it for 14.3 miles. Turn left onto US Highway 87 truck route. Follow this truck route, which bypasses downtown, for 2.2 miles to Joyland Road and turn left (north) onto Joyland Road. The pavement ends in 0.9 mile, and in another 0.5 mile a driveway enters from the north. Turn right into this driveway and cross the narrow steel bridge across Big Spring Creek. The Reed and Bowles Trading Post is just beyond the bridge to the east.

This site is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is managed by the Lewistown Historical Society.



“Major” Alonzo S. Reed and his partner, John J. Bowles, bought the buildings of the trading post, Fort Sherman, in 1874 and moved them two miles down Big Spring Creek. Close enough to Camp Lewis that they could get protection if needed, but far enough that they could carry on illegal trade in alcohol, guns and ammunition. The Nez Perce were familiar with this establishment from trips to the buffalo country and visited it from their camp a couple of miles away on the evening of September 21.

Lewistown to Hilger

Mainstream Traveler

In downtown Lewistown, MT, turn north on US Highway 191 and follow it for 14.7 miles to Hilger, MT.

At Hilger you are crossing the historic Carroll Trail. The Carroll Trail was established in the 1870s to transport freight from the Missouri River to Helena, Montana, and the gold fields. At this point the Nez Perce headed north, while Howard's command, a week later, followed the Carroll Trail northeast toward the landing at Cow Island on the Missouri River.

The Nez Perce, constantly on the move and unable to replenish their stores, raided a Crow village about twelve miles northwest of Lewistown where they acquired horses and dried buffalo meat. The results of that encounter were recorded in the diary of scout John W. Redington.

In one part of the Judith we found the remains of a wrecked Indian camp and wondered how it happened. From the way things were torn up around there, there had certainly been quite a little battle. George Huston figured out that the camp had been occupied by Dumb Bull's outfit of River Crow Indians, who were drying buffalo meat and were attacked by the Nez Percés.... We found by moccasin tracks that several Indians had skipped out afoot, and when we passed Reed's Fort later in the day we found that the scout's conclusions were correct. Dumb Bull was there, and was feeling pretty sore about the way the hostiles had cleaned him out of all his horses. But still he declined the invitation to come along with the scouts and get some sweet revenge.

– John W. Redington

Hilger to James Kipp Recreation Area

Mainstream Traveler

③ James Kipp Recreation Area

From Hilger, continue north on US 191 for 48.9 miles to the bridge over the Missouri River at James Kipp Recreation Area. This is as close as most travelers can comfortably get to Cow Island where the next events took place.

Although steamboats could travel as far up the Missouri River as Fort Benton during spring runoff, the lower water of summer and fall meant that Cow Island, near where Cow Creek joins the Missouri River, was the farthest upstream boats could run. Freight was off-loaded at Cow Island and stored beside a bluff in an open-air depot. Fifty tons of government and commercial freight lay under tarpaulins at the landing awaiting shipment.

After passing through the Judith Basin the Nez Perce approached the Missouri River (which they called Seloselo Wejanwais, colored paint, or Attish Pah, place of the Cave of Red Paint) and the supply depot at Cow Island. There they crossed the river and moved two miles upstream to make camp. Two of the Nez Perce then approached the depot to ask for food. Their encounter, begun peaceably, soon degenerated to a point where the Nez Perce realized the only way they would get the supplies they needed was to take them by force.



Things went along for a while quietly till we saw an Indian coming between our breastworks and the foot hills stripped naked, when we know this means fight. Having previously distributed the ammunition and giving each man his place, we were standing around and taking our supper as I jokingly remarked to the men that this might be their last sow belly and hard tack, when without any warning they commenced to fire from the hills, the balls going in every direction between us but luckily nobody was hurt. This was sun down and from that time on till day break we were fighting for our lives. Of course the freight we could not save as it was piled right up against the bluff. The agent had a hospital tent there for his quarters with 500 sacks of bacon piled against it, which they set on fire that lit the country up for miles. . . . They charged us three times during the night through high willows, impossible to see any one.

– Sergeant William Moelchert

After defeating the small guard at Cow Island, the Nez Perces had a picnic helping themselves to all the stores. They loaded every pack-horse they had with the best of groceries and canned goods, and for many miles up Cow Creek and Bull Creek we could trail them by the packages of finecut tobacco, beans and coffee that had trickled and dripped off their packs.

– John W. Redington (scout)

We took whatever we needed, flour, sugar, coffee, bacon, and beans. Anything whoever wanted it. Some took pans and pots for the cooking. We figured it was soldier supplies, so set fire to what we did not take. We had privilege to do this. It was in the war.

– Peopeo Tholekt (Bird Alighting)



4 Hilger to James Kipp Recreation Area Missouri Breaks Backcountry Byway Intrepid Traveler

Note: Just a slight rain will turn the dirt roads of the Missouri Breaks into a sticky, messy mud which will cling to tires and make travel very difficult. Inquire locally about road conditions.

This route will take you closer to Cow Island, deep into the Missouri Breaks to the Woodhawk Bottom Recreation Area. The roads are rough and you will be required to ford the Two Calf Creek. Be prepared and have a full tank of gas, extra food and water. There is no cell phone coverage in this area.



Stephanie Martin - National Park Service

Road conditions can be challenging on the Backcountry Byway.

Major Guido Ilges arrived from Fort Benton with soldiers and volunteers after the fight at Cow Island but engaged in a battle 10 miles north where Nez Perce warriors had surrounded a wagon train.

“Any one who has ever traveled through Cow Creek Canyon, with its 31 crossings, its narrow bottom, its high and precipitous sides, shutting off the traveler from the outside world, will know what a task was before the volunteers should the Indians still be in the canyon and disposed to dispute its passage.”

– Publisher of the Fort Benton Record after interviewing a member of Ilges’s expedition.

In Hilger, turn north on County Highway 236 for 23.5 miles to Winifred, MT. At the east edge of Winifred, follow the sign for Woodhawk Bottom by turning east on D-Y Trail / Knox Ridge Road. In 2 miles, continue east, following D-Y Trail / Knox Ridge Road, a Backcountry Byway. In 2.9 miles, follow the Backcountry Byway by continuing east on D-Y Trail / Knox Ridge Road for 3.9 miles. The Backcountry Byway continues by turning north onto D-Y Trail / Knox Ridge Road. In 2.9 turn north on the D-Y Trail, which joins with and changes to Lower Two Calf Road, for 15.0 miles.

Leave the Backcountry Byway by turning north to the Woodhawk Bottom Recreation Area. In 1 mile, you will have your first view of the Missouri River. Enjoy the spectacular views over the next 2.6 miles to the Woodhawk Bottom Recreation Area.

The right fork leads to a primitive campground with tables, firepits, and an outhouse. The left fork leads to another campsite in 1.1 miles. Cow Island is about 1.5 miles up river from here.

Return to Lower Two Calf Road, the Backcountry Byway, and turn east for 1.6 miles. Turn south on to Middle Two Calf Road. In 8.3 miles, a very steep grade begins to go down to Two Calf Creek which you will ford in 1.6 miles. Continue on for another 2.9 miles, then turn east on Knox Ridge Road. In 0.1 mile, you enter the Charles M. Russell Wildlife Refuge. For the next 7.6 miles, the road roughly parallels the Missouri River. Turn north on US Highway 191 and join the Mainstream Traveler at the James Kipp Recreation Area.



Hilger to Bear Paw Battlefield

Adventurous Traveler

Note: This route is over 145 miles of backcountry roads. Just a slight rain will turn the dirt roads of the Missouri Breaks into a sticky, messy mud which will cling to tires and make travel very difficult. Inquire locally about road conditions.

Fill up your fuel tank in Winifred, MT. The next gas station is in Chinook, 120 miles further. Be sure to bring food and water.

The McClelland-Stafford Ferry is a free ferry across the Missouri River. It operates from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. between May and October depending on river conditions. It has a fifty-foot, fourteen-ton vehicle limit. For more information call 406-462-5513.

From Hilger, MT, turn north on County Road 236 for 23.5 miles to Winifred, MT. At the east edge of Winifred turn east onto D-Y Trail. This is a wide gravel road; 2.0 miles out of Winifred stay straight/north on Stafford Ferry Road. The wide road continues another 9.0 miles, where it begins to narrow. Continue another 5.0 miles down to the McClelland-Stafford Ferry.

From the ferry continue north and in 14.2 miles, at the “T” intersection, head west onto Lloyd Road. Follow Lloyd Road for 24.6 miles then turn east onto Peoples Creek Road. In 9.6 miles you will reach Cleveland, MT.

It was in this area that scouts for Colonel Nelson Miles found the Nez Perce.

We saw a bunch of them running buffalo, probably ten or twelve of them. They soon discovered us, as they had glasses. I soon noticed that they were the Nez Perces as they had striped blankets—the other tribes had solid colors. I sent another Indian back to tell the General [Miles] that we had found the Nez Perces and that they had better hurry up. The Nez Perces took what meat they wanted, as we did not crowd, not getting nearer than one-half mile.

– Louis Shambo (scout)

In Cleveland turn north onto State Route 240, Cleveland Road. In 8.8 miles you will reach Bear Paw Battlefield.

James Kipp Recreation Area to Bear Paw Battlefield

Mainstream Traveler

From the James Kipp Recreation Area, continue north for 14.3 miles to the junction with Montana State Highway 66. (The Nez Perce actually traveled 10 to 15 miles west of Montana State Highway 66.) Turn north on Montana 66 for 50 miles to US 2 through the Fort Belknap Reservation. Turn northwest on US Highway 2 and follow it for 24.8 miles to the junction with State Route 240 on the west side of Chinook. (While you are in Chinook, you may want to stop at the Blaine County Museum before proceeding south to the battlefield.) The Bear Paw Battlefield is reached by turning south on State Route 240 for 16.3 miles.

Overlooking Cow Island on the Upper Missouri River



5 Cow Island

Intrepid Traveler

Note: With even a slight bit of rain the Missouri Breaks can turn treacherous. The mud of these dirt roads becomes a gumbo that clings to tires and collects in wheel wells. The road itself can become extremely slick. Even when dry, these roads can be very rough and rutted.

1.7 miles north of the junction of US Highway 191 and Montana State Highway 66, turn west on a dirt road. At any Y, always stick to the more traveled route. In 12.0 miles, continue straight ahead to Bull Creek. In 1.2 miles, you may use the pullout for your first glimpse of the Missouri River. Continue 0.6 mile farther and park near the Y in the road at N47° 46.490', W108° 54.054'. Both forks become rugged from there. The downhill road has one-half mile of washouts, and is **not** recommended for vehicles.

From the Y, hike up the high road for 0.7 mile to N47° 46.363', W108° 54.877' for an excellent view of Cow Island.



Stephanie Martin, NPS

After leaving Cow Island the leadership of the Nez Perce passed from Poker Joe to Chief Looking Glass.

Looking Glass upbraided Poker Joe for his hurrying; for causing the old people weariness; told him that he was no chief, that he himself was chief and that he would be the leader. Poker Joe replied, "All right, Looking Glass, you can lead. I am trying to save the people, doing my best to cross into Canada before the soldiers find us. You can take command, but I think we will be caught and killed."

– Many Wounds



Chief Looking Glass - Allalimya Takanin

6 Bear Paw Battlefield

After staying ahead of the military for five months and 1,170 miles, months in which they had crossed mountains, suffered hardship, and lost many friends and relatives, approximately 700 Nez Perce made a final camp on Snake Creek, south of present day Chinook, Montana, 40 miles from the Canadian border.

It was growing colder every day as we headed northward. On September 29 when we finally arrived in the Bear Paws at the place we called "Ali-Kos-Pah" (Place of Manure Fires), it was already started to snow. I helped to gather buffalo chips and before long many fires were burning.

- Suhm-Keen (Shirt On, ten years old)

Colonel Nelson Miles, after a hard 12 day's march, had discovered the Nez Perce trail and was closing in on the camp.

Weather thawing. There's not as much snow now as there was on going to bed last night... We had marched about 2 ½ hours when we saw the scouts coming back full tilt. The command halted & we learned that the Nez Percés' camp was about 5 miles ahead....Extra clothing were stripped & every man supplied himself with 100 rounds of ammunition. Cheyenne Indians were making themselves ready at the same time by doing away with their blankets & adorning themselves & ponies with feathers & their war hats. In a short time everything was in readiness & we started off at a brisk trot, leaving one co. of infantry with the pack train.

- Pvt. William Zimmer, September 30, 1877

Word was sent to General Howard and Colonel Sturgis who were just arriving at Carroll sixteen miles east of Cow Island on the Missouri River.

Almost simultaneously with the arrival of the supply steamer, came a courier from General Miles, of whose exact location we had, up to this time, been unaware, telling us that he had the Indians corralled in the Bear Paw Mountains, and asking that all available troops be rushed forward to his assistance.

- Pvt. Theodore Goldin

The attack on the Nez Perce camp began with a charge by Miles's command.

On the morning of September 30th, 1877, the battalion.... moved from its camp near the northeast end of Bear Paw Mountain, M.T., at 2:30 o'clock A.M.... The march was continued until about 8 O'clock A.M....when the trail of the Nez Perce Indians was discovered pointing in a northerly direction; it was pronounced by the Cheyenne Indian scouts who accompanied the command, to be two days old. After a short halt on the trail the march was resumed.... The command had marched about five or six miles... when information was received from the Cheyenne scouts that the Nez Percés' village was located on a creek about seven miles in front. The command was immediately given for the column to take the trot, and subsequently the gallop was taken up.

- Capt. Myles Moylan, August 16, 1878

This gallop forward, preceding the charge, was one of the most brilliant and inspiring sights I ever witnessed on any field. It was the crowning glory of our twelve days' forced marching.

- Col. Nelson Miles



Monuments at Bear Paw Battlefield

Stephanie Martin, NPS

The Nez Perce were preparing to start north again, confident that Howard's army was still well behind them. Some of the men rode off to hunt, while some women left the camp to skin, butcher, and pack the meat from buffaloes killed the preceding day. Still others were out catching horses along Snake Creek or packing while children played and others finished their breakfast when two scouts raced in yelling that soldiers were approaching. Immediately the camp sprang to action, arming themselves and hurrying women and children north out of the camp.

Soon, from the south came a noise, a rumble like stampeding buffaloes.

*– Yellow Wolf
(Hímiin Maqsmáqs)*



Shortly after 9:00 a.m. Colonel Nelson Miles and his troops descended on the Nez Perce camp. The warriors, hidden in the coulees and washes, halted the initial charge but the military attacked relentlessly. The battle went on as the days grew colder, with heavy casualties on both sides, until October 5 when Chief Joseph and the approximately 430 remaining Nez Perce surrendered. Those survivors began the last leg of their journey, farther away from their homeland than any of them could have dreamed.

Interpretation at the battle site and at the Blaine County Museum in the town of Chinook tells more of the story of those last few days. Blaine County Museum is the interim visitor center for the Bear Paw Battlefield. The battlefield located 16 miles south of Chinook, MT, is part of the Nez Perce National Park and Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail. The Museum houses three exhibits of historic artifacts found at the Bear Paw Battlefield, time-period photographs, and military gear from the late 1800's. One of the highlights of the museum is the outstanding twenty-minute multi-media presentation "Forty Miles from Freedom". This presentation which combines video, sound, lighting effects, is centered on artist Lorenzo Ghiglieri's spectacular paintings.

On the morning of October 5, Chief Joseph, believing the Nez Perce would be sent to the Lapwai Reservation, agreed to stop fighting. The often quoted words he sent to General Howard were written down by Howard's adjutant, Lieutenant C.E.S. Wood. Although Joseph had determined that to quit the fight was the best thing to do, each individual was free to decide for himself or herself whether he wished to surrender.

Tell General Howard I know his Heart. What He told me before I have in my heart. I am tired of fighting. Our chiefs are killed. Looking Glass is dead. Toohoolhoolzote is dead. The old men are all dead. It is the young men who say, "Yes" or "No." He who led the young men is dead. It is cold, and we have no blankets. The little children are freezing to death. My people, some of them, have run away to the hills, and have no blankets, no food. No one knows where they are - perhaps freezing to death. I want to have time to look for my children, and see how many of them I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead. Hear me, my chiefs! I am tired. My heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever.



- Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekt
(Chief Joseph)

Lieutenant Wood went on to become a noted poet and satirist as well as a defender of radical and feminist causes as a lawyer in Portland, Oregon but more significantly, he maintained a friendship with Joseph for the rest of his lifetime.



Not all of the remaining non-treaty Nez Perce were among those who surrendered. Red Heart and 33 of his people were still being held prisoner in Fort Vancouver, Washington Territory, where they had been since July. Led by Chief White Bird, nearly 300 Nez Perce men, women, and children managed to escape the battle at Bear Paw and make their way the 40 miles into Canada where, for a time, they joined Sitting Bull and the Lakota near Fort Walsh.

In spite of promises that they would be returned to their homeland, Joseph and the other survivors were relocated first to Fort Leavenworth then Baxter Springs, Kansas, and eventually sent to the Quapaw Agency in Oklahoma. Only 268 survived the the eight years in exile. Their eventual release was bittersweet for although they could leave Oklahoma, they were never allowed to return to their Wallowa homelands.

Notes

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

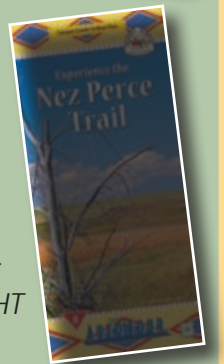
5 Leadore, Idaho, to Yellowstone National Park, Montana

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 Foundation website at www.nezpercetrail.net

This Trail is a Sacred Trust for All Americans

“We, the surviving Nez Perces, 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:

NPNHT Administrator
12730 Highway 12
Orfino, ID 83544
(208) 476-8334
npnht@fs.fed.us

Nez Perce National Historical Park
39063 US Hwy 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

Bear Paw Battlefield
P.O. Box 26
Chinook, MT 59523
(406) 357-3130
www.nps.gov/hepe

Billings Field Office
Bureau of Land Management
5001 Southgate Drive
Billings, MT 59101
(406) 896-5013
www.blm.gov/mt/

Blaine County Museum
501 Indiana Street
Chinook, MT 59523
(406) 357-2590
www.blainecountymuseum.com
blmuseum@mtintouch.net

Lewistown Field Office
Bureau of Land Management
920 NE Main Street
Lewistown, MT 59457
(406) 538-1900
www.blm.gov/mt/

Charles M. Russell
National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 110
Airport Road
Lewistown, MT 59457
(406) 538-8706
www.fws.gov/cmrr

Parks Canada
Fort Walsh National Historic Site
P.O. Box 278
Maple Creek, Saskatchewan
Canada S0N 1N0
(306) 662-2645
www.pc.gc.ca/lhn-nhs/sk/walsh/index.aspx

Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Interpretive Center
701 7th Street
P.O. Box 1389
Fort Benton, MT 59442
(406) 622-4000
www.blm.gov/mt/



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