



Tolo Lake



Nestled among the wheat fields of the Camas Prairie is Tolo Lake, Idaho. While locals often visit this small, quiet pond to fish or watch migratory birds, the lake is best understood as a time capsule. If you could peer deep into the sediments of this ancient pond you could see the bones of Columbia Mammoths who died struggling to extricate themselves from this muddy hole. For the Nez Perce or Nimiipuu, this place has deep meanings - the lake served as a backdrop to the tragic events that triggered the conflict of 1877.

Tepahlewam

Tepahlewam is a Nimiipuu word that means Split Rocks, referring to Rocky Canyon west of the lake. Since time immemorial Nimiipuu gathered to dig camas, race horses, play games and socialize. In June 1877, the Wallowa Nez Perce paused here, a day's journey from their new home.

They were sorrowfully complying with General O.O. Howard's demand: leave their traditional Wallowa Valley home in northeast Oregon to re-settle on the Nez Perce Reservation near Lapwai.

This demand stung—the reservation was a tenth of that guaranteed by the Treaty of 1855, now reduced by the “Thief Treaty” of 1863, which the Wallowa Nez Perce had never signed.

Emotions ran high. Defying their leaders, a few angry young warriors slipped away from White Bird's camp to avenge past crimes committed against their people. From June 13 to 14, fifteen settlers were slain; fear gripped the Salmon River and Camas Prairie.

Tolo

The lake was named after a Nez Perce woman who brought news of the outbreak to miners in Florence. Known as Tulekats Chikchamit, her Nez Perce name was corrupted to “Tule” and then “Tolo” by non-Indians. In gratitude for her courage and loyalty, she was the only Nimiipuu given an allotment outside the reservation. She died in 1920, and is buried in Winona, Idaho.

Right: A portrait of Tolo, taken after 1877.



Mammoth Discoveries

The 30-acre Tolo Lake is owned by the Idaho Department of Fish & Game (IDF&G). In September 1994 IDF&G cooperated with The Friends of Tolo Lake to improve fish and wildlife habitat. A century of silt was removed and refashioned into islands for waterfowl.

In September, 1994 a worker saw something in the muck—a huge bone! Authorities identified it as a Columbian Mammoth. A hasty two-week paleontological recovery of prehistoric mammoth and bison ensued.

Work resumed in August 1995, resulting in recovery of three mammoth skeletons and an ancient bison skull. Other fossils were left in place as a preservation measure.

The Columbian Mam-

Mammoths became extinct around 12,500 years ago. The Columbian Mammoth (*Mammuthus columbi*) stood 13 feet at the shoulder and weighed up to ten tons. They were similar to modern African Elephants and like their cousins, were herbivores whose family groups tended to move in herds. The largest tusks found measured 16 feet.

There is some debate over how much hair the Columbian Mammoth would have had. Some scientists think they were not as furry as woolly mammoths and may have had only tufts of hair on

their head and along their back.

A replica mammoth skeleton can be seen in a pavilion near the visitor bureau at Eimer's Park on U.S. 95 at Grangeville.

**Help Future Generations
Enjoy Tolo Lake.**

Tolo Lake is an affiliated site of Nez Perce National Historical Park and the Nez Perce National Historic Trail.

To get there, follow the mammoth signs leading along Tolo Lake Road from U.S. Highway 95 at Grangeville. The site, near the intersection of Tolo Lake Road and Lake Road, has a vault toilet, picnic tables, fire pits, and boat launch.

Archaeological sites, battlefield, and artifacts are protected by state and federal law. Anyone who injures, destroys or appropriates artifacts or objects of antiquity on park lands are subject to arrest and prosecution.

Please call the park, (208) 843-7001 or Idaho Department of Fish & Game, (208) 799-5010 to report incidents at Tolo Lake.