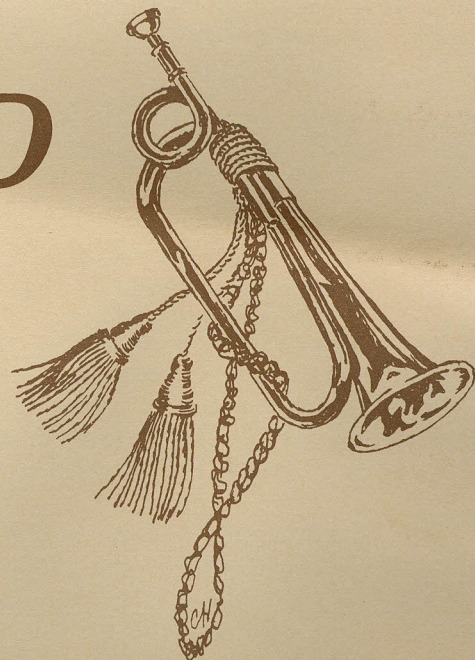
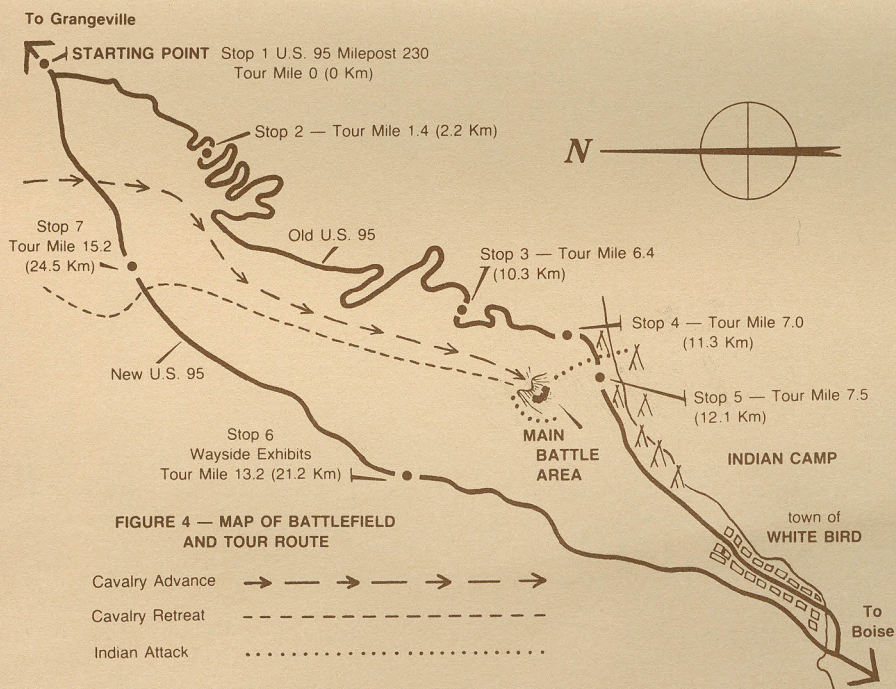


WHITE BIRD BATTLEFIELD AUTO TOUR



Much as it was a century ago, when warrior met soldier in the decisive opening encounter of the Nez Perce War, the White Bird Battlefield remains a place of rounded grassy ridges and knolls, as well as steep slopes and rocky ravines. Modern roads encircle the battlefield and allow visitors to see it with relative ease, but it is still not an easy place to travel on foot or horseback

As you follow the tour route, you will be able to view the landscape from the perspectives of both warrior and cavalryman. With a little imagination, it will not be difficult to catch glimpses of a furious battle under way.

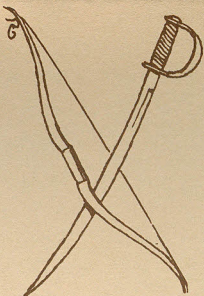


WHITE BIRD BATTLEFIELD

The tour begins at Milepost 230 on U.S. Highway 95, 9.6 miles (15.5 kilometers) southwest of Grangeville and 0.8 miles (1.3 kilometers) south of the State wayside area at White Bird Hill. Tour stops are marked with red marker posts placed at each parking area. They will be easiest to find if you keep track of mileages between stops using your car's odometer. Where it is necessary to walk a short distance to a viewpoint, the best viewing area is marked with a blue marker post.

In some cases you will have to cross or walk alongside old U.S. 95 for short distances. PLEASE USE EXTREME CAUTION IN CROSSING THE ROAD. Traffic on the old highway is very light, but numerous curves make visibility poor and increase the risk of an accident.

Tour length is 16 miles (25.8 kilometers). Allow a minimum of two hours to complete the loop, which returns you to the starting point.



STOP 1 — PRELUDE TO WAR

U.S. Highway 95, Milepost 230, Tour Mile 0 (0 kilometers).

Park near the red post in the large paved parking area across the road from Milepost 230.

Lewis and Clark called them “Cho-pun-ish or Pierced Nose Indians” — they called themselves Nee-Me-Poo (the people) — but the French Canadians named them, Le Nez Perce, “The Pierced Nose”. Nee-Me-Poo or Nez Perce, the whites had known them as an honorable and friendly people. In the early years of intrusion, they had shown remarkable restraint, as miners and settlers steadily encroached upon their land.

In an 1855 Treaty, United States negotiators had promised these people virtually all of their ancestral homelands as a reservation. The discovery of gold on the reservation in 1860, however, caused an uncontrollable influx of whites into the area. The Nez Perce were alarmed, but remained peaceful.

Some of the Indian leaders negotiated a new treaty with the U.S. Government in 1863 which created a much smaller reservation. The chiefs whose bands lived outside the new boundaries refused to sign this “steal treaty”. The bands of White Bird, Too-hool-hool-tzote, Joseph and others were in this group and became known as “non-treaty” bands. These people continued to live outside the new reservation, but remained at peace.

In January of 1877, however, Nez Perce Indian Agent, John B. Monteith ordered all bands living outside of the 1863 reservation boundaries to move inside by April 1. General O. O. Howard, Commander of the U.S. Army's Department of the Columbia, soon made it clear that he would put the Indians on the reservation by force, if necessary.

The non-treaty bands could only manage to postpone the date of removal until June 14. By June 2, they had gathered near Tolo Lake on the Camas Prairie (Park Site 12, 2.5 miles [4.0 kilometers] north of here on U.S. 95). There the people remained to enjoy the last few days of freedom.

The chiefs intended to comply with Howard's ultimatum, for they wished to avoid war. Indignation ran high among the young warriors, however. They burned

with anger at some of the settlers — unscrupulous whites who had cheated in trade, had found various ways to humiliate and even murder their people, especially the Nez Perce on the Salmon River.

On June 13, three young men left camp and killed four whites, notorious for their hostility to Indians. The three then returned to the Camas Prairie Encampment and raised a bigger party. This second party killed fourteen or fifteen more whites along the Salmon River during the next two days. Expecting reprisals from Howard's troops, the bands at the encampment retreated, one by one, to Lah-mah-tah, a traditional village site along White Bird Creek in the bottom of the canyon south of here.

At Fort Lapwai, Howard hastily ordered F and H Companies, 1st Cavalry, Captain David Perry, commanding, to ride to the area and prevent further bloodshed. About a dozen treaty Nez Perce Scouts accompanied the cavalry, which numbered about one hundred men.

After a two-day forced march of nearly eighty miles (129 kilometers), Perry learned of the Nez Perce camp at Lah-mah-tah. He took on eleven civilian volunteers from Grangeville and Mount Idaho, then prepared to attack the Indians early on Sunday morning, June 17, 1877.

The command moved out at 4:00 a.m. with strong confidence. Arthur Chapman, a guide and leader of the volunteers had assured Captain Perry there would be no problems in subduing the Indians. These inadequately trained troops had little grounds for confidence other than Chapman's words, however. Already they had traveled two weary days through mud and rain with only a few short rests. Such travel had worn down their battle-green mounts — always a factor in cavalry combat.

The weary soldiers and horses came down one of the first two major ravines to the west of here, crossing new U.S. 95, a few hundred feet (100-120 meters) down the road from this point. The advance followed the bottom of the drainage on the right (southwest) side of the ridge along which you will drive to Stop 2.

Follow old U.S. 95 for 1.4 miles (2.2 kilometers) downhill to Stop 2, a turnout on the left side of the road, just above the U-turn of a switchback.

STOP 2 — CAVALRY ADVANCE

Tour Mile 1.4 (2.2 kilometers).

The first two miles (3.2 kilometers) of the cavalry advance followed the bottom of the draw immediately west of here, and are therefore hidden from view. As passage grew more and more difficult in the narrow ravine, the detachment most probably left this drainage and rode through the gap in the next ridge to the southwest, toward the lone, tall cottonwood tree visible in the middle distance. The route approximately followed the road you can see winding through the gap toward the lone tree.

The troops turned to the left before reaching the area of the tree and followed along the southwest side of the ridge they had just crossed. This maneuver put them on the side of the ridge opposite the long section of a relatively straight road visible beyond the switchbacks below.

Their objective, the Nez Perce camp, that Capt. Perry knew lay somewhere along White Bird Creek.

The creek followed the line of trees visible at the bottom of the broad canyon to the south. Though the stream is visible from this vantage point, the cavalry commander was unable to see it from the time the column began its advance until fighting started some two hours later.

Somewhere in the ravine below, the troops came upon Mrs. Isabella Benedict with her two small children. Indians had killed her husband three days before. She pleaded with Perry to give up his plans for attack, predicting disaster if he continued. The captain took the precaution of deploying an advance guard and pressed on.

Stop 3 is located 5.0 miles (8.0 kilometers) below Stop 2 and is a turnout on the left side of the road.

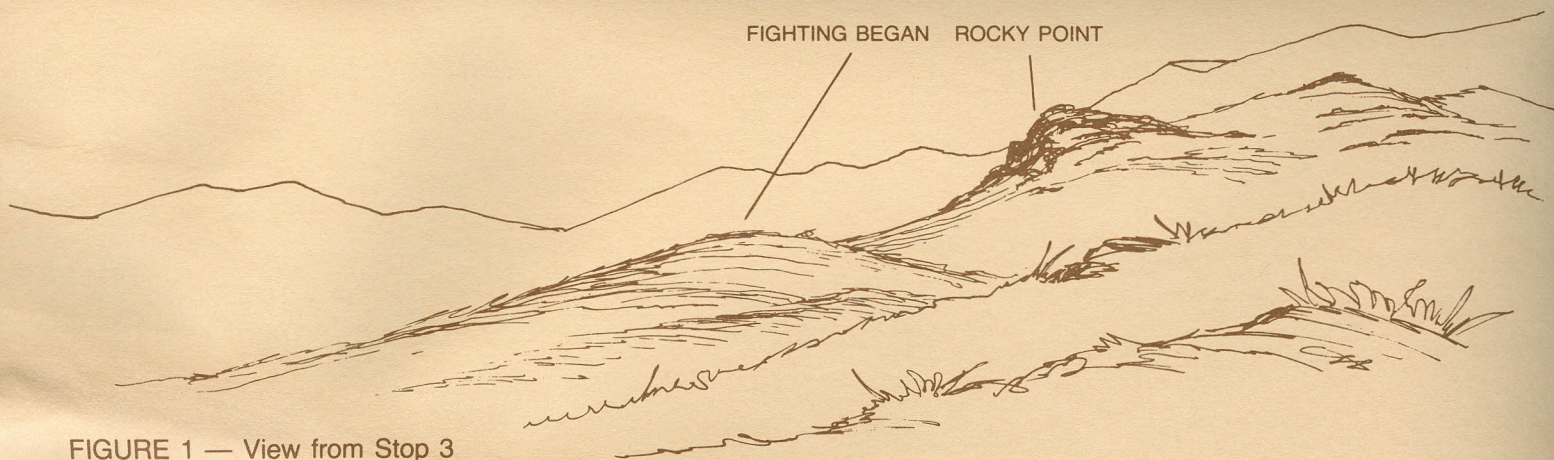


FIGURE 1 — View from Stop 3

STOP 3 — FIGHTING BEGINS

Tour Mile 6.4 (10.3 kilometers).

Here you will need to walk alongside the roadway for short distances in both directions from your car. Please use caution in walking along the road.

First, walk about 200 feet (60 meters) back up the road to the blue viewpoint marker post and look to the south.

Lt. Edward Theller commanded the advance guard which Capt. Perry had deployed. It consisted of eight cavalymen, Arthur Chapman, several treaty Nez Perce Scouts and Trumpeter, John Jones. This detachment rode toward the ridgetop to the left of the rocky point in the middle distance.

Unknown to the advancing troops, Nez Perce sentries had kept the soldiers under close surveillance after the column left Grangeville. Even as Theller's command neared the ridgetop, warriors moved to intercept them.

Now walk back down past your car to the grave site inside the turn of the switchback below, again taking care to watch for traffic on the road.

When the troopers reached the viewpoint, they saw the Indian camp and the warriors advancing below.* The lieutenant immediately deployed the men as skirmishers and ordered Trumpeter Jones to blow the battle call. Jones started the call, but an Indian bullet fired from long range, abruptly struck him dead.

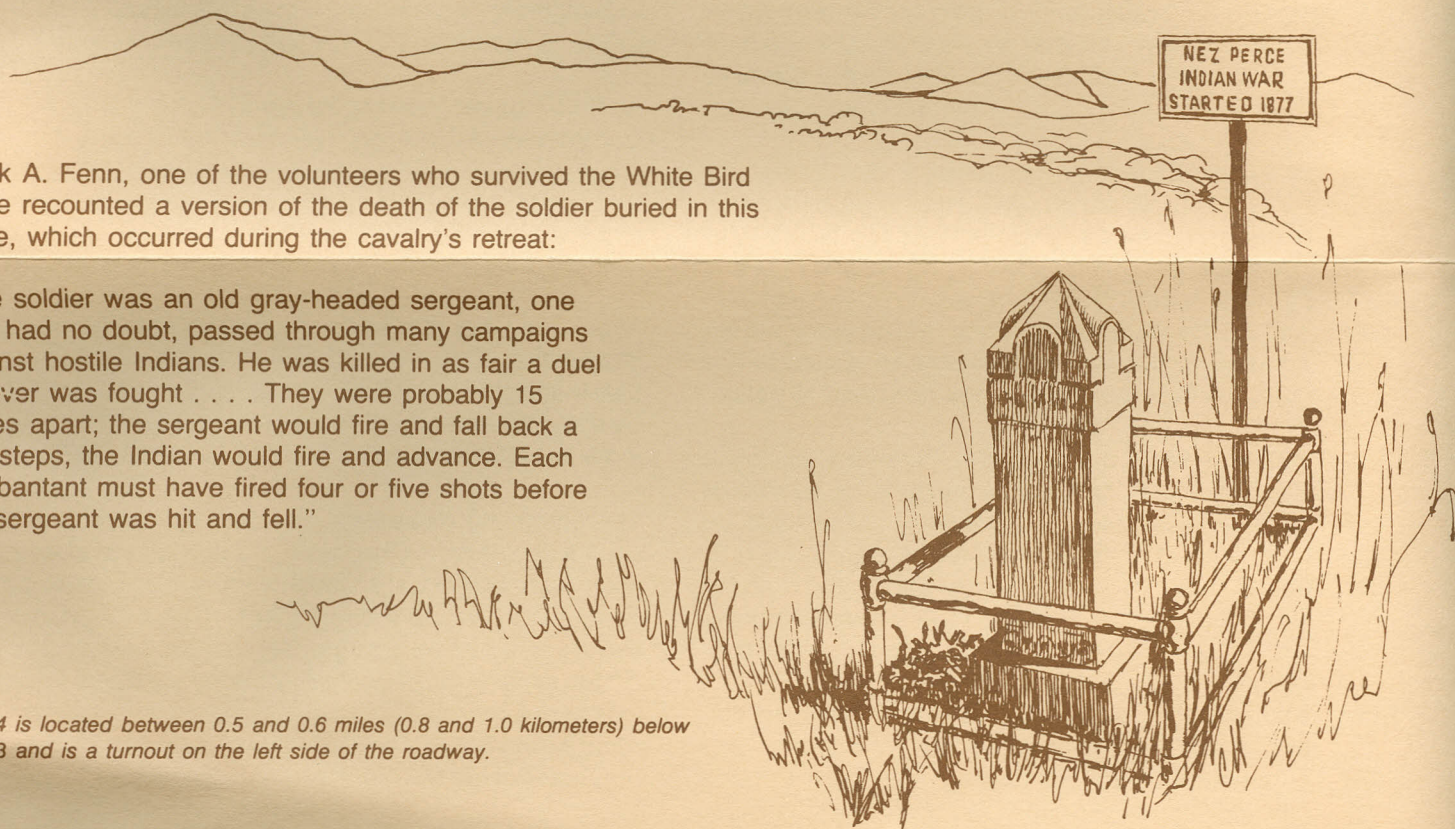
In the meantime, two trumpeters who rode with the main column had somehow unknowingly dropped their trumpets on the march to this point. This left the cavalry without a trumpet. Captain Perry soon found himself without any effective means of communicating commands to his troops.

Frank A. Fenn, one of the volunteers who survived the White Bird Battle recounted a version of the death of the soldier buried in this grave, which occurred during the cavalry's retreat:

"The soldier was an old gray-headed sergeant, one who had no doubt, passed through many campaigns against hostile Indians. He was killed in as fair a duel as ever was fought . . . They were probably 15 paces apart; the sergeant would fire and fall back a few steps, the Indian would fire and advance. Each combatant must have fired four or five shots before the sergeant was hit and fell."

Stop 4 is located between 0.5 and 0.6 miles (0.8 and 1.0 kilometers) below Stop 3 and is a turnout on the left side of the roadway.

*Frank Husush, a treaty Nez Perce Scout, riding with Theller's detachment reported that a small group of warriors appeared carrying a truce flag as the soldiers began to ascend the ridge. Husush said he saw Arthur Chapman quickly fire two shots at the advancing Indians, who turned and rode away. Yellow Wolf and Three Eagles also reported this flag of truce, but other Nez Percés claimed that no truce team existed and that the Indians took the troopers completely by surprise.



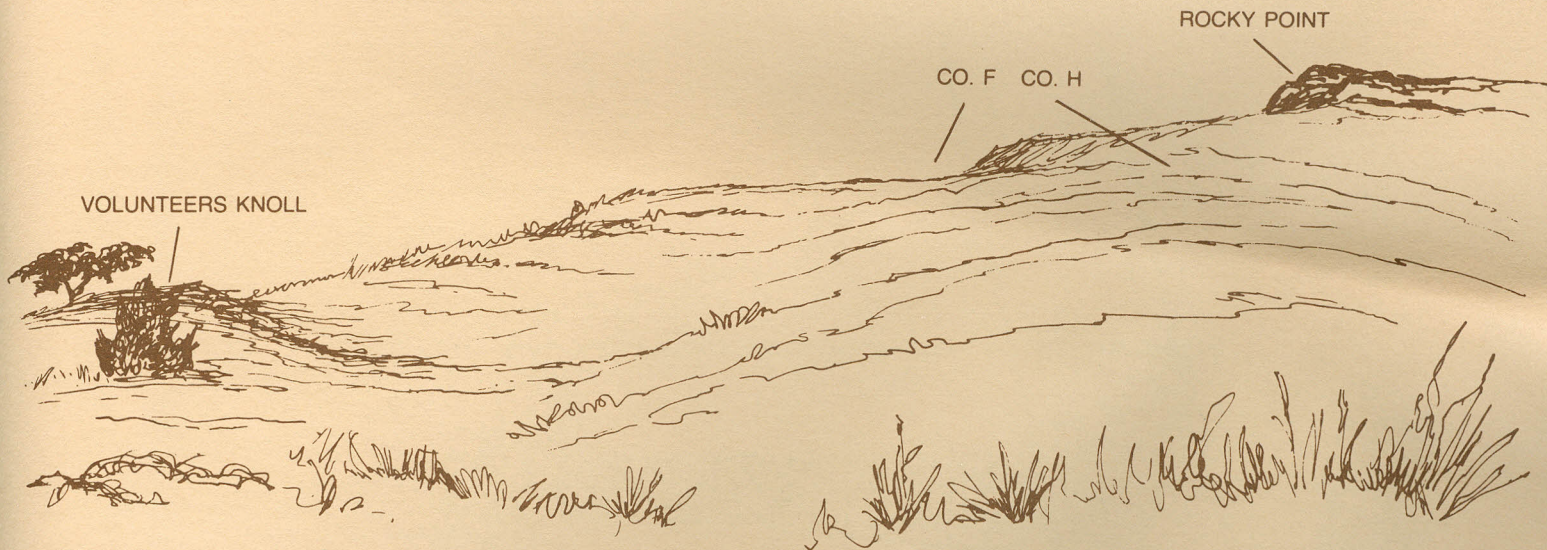


FIGURE 2 — View Southwest from Stop 4

STOP 4 — TROOP DEPLOYMENT

Tour Mile 6.9 (11.1 kilometers).

When Captain Perry saw his advance guard come under fire, he ordered Company F “left front into fire” and prepared to charge the Indians. While the Captain was busy organizing the charge, the civilian volunteers under exconfederate officer George Shearer galloped past the “Volunteers Knoll” and over the ridge toward White Bird Creek. The Nez Perce opened fire and quickly drove the volunteers back to a defensive position on the knoll.

Meanwhile, events took place which proved just how ineffective a cavalry unit could be without a trumpet. Perry and Company F advanced to the crest of the ridge at a trot, arriving at the point marked “Co. F” in Figure 2.

There, the Captain gained his first view of the Indians rushing up the ridge to flank his line. He quickly saw that if he charged, he would at best succeed only in driving the Indians back to brush cover along the stream, while his command would be exposed to fire. He immediately decided to halt the advance and hold the ridge. He gave the order to dismount and fight on foot.

Company H, under the command of Captain Joel Trimble was far to the rear when the fighting began. Trimble formed the company left front into line and deployed the men to the right at five yard (4.6 meter) intervals, still mounted.

As Company H advanced toward the ridge, forty or fifty Nez Perce horsemen began to ride around the west end of the ridge in a flanking movement. Soon, some of the warriors were behind Trimble’s line, pressing Company H from the rear.

After advancing to the point marked “Co. H” in Figure 2, Trimble detailed Sgt. Michael McCarthy and six troopers to hold the rocky point and protect the soldiers’ far right flank. At about this time, the Indians drove the volunteers on the far left from the knoll.

Stop 5 is 0.6 miles (1.0 kilometers) below Stop 4 and is a turnout on the left side of the road.

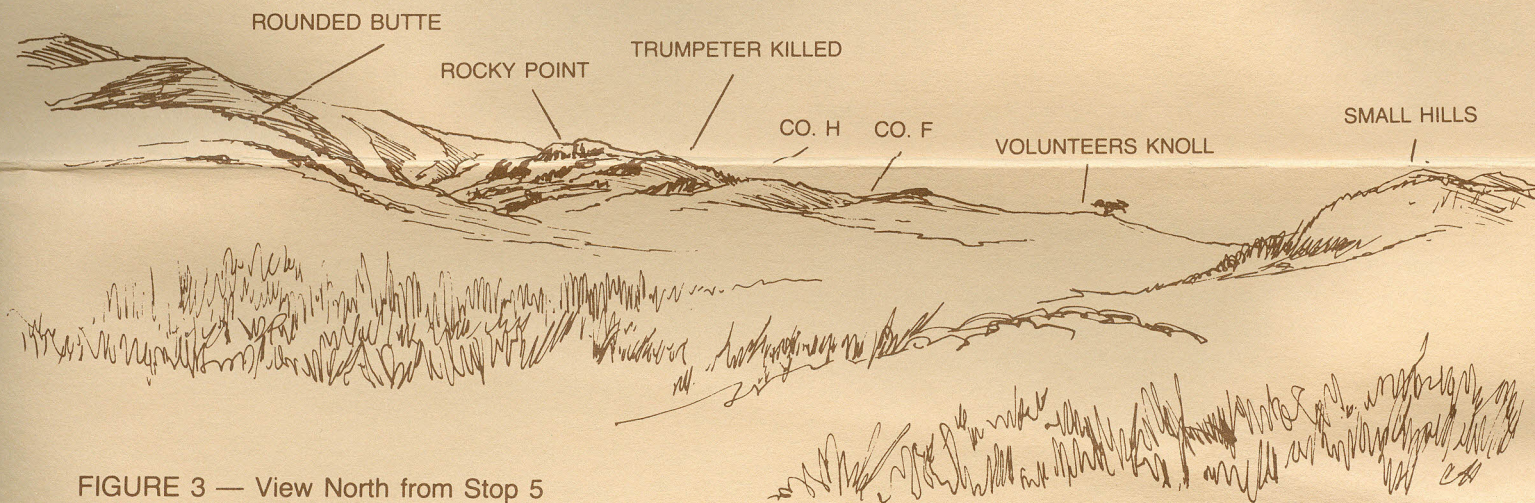


FIGURE 3 — View North from Stop 5

STOP 5 — INDIAN ATTACK

Tour Mile 7.5 (12.1 kilometers).

Carefully cross the road and walk back 200 feet (61 meters) to the blue viewpoint marker point.

The Nez Perce had pitched about thirty lodges along the stream in the trees to the south. The watching sentries had sent word of the soldiers' movements to the main Indian encampment. The chiefs had learned late Saturday evening that an attack was imminent. At the first word of the Army's approach, White Bird, Too-hool-hool-tzote and Joseph's brother, Ah-low-khut (Ollicut) had a hurried council. The decision — stay and fight if the soldiers forced them to!

Over a hundred fighting men had gathered in that camp, but some were in no condition for battle as the troops approached. Whiskey seized during the raids of the previous few days had taken its toll. About seventy Nez Perce prepared to face the soldiers as dawn arrived. Now these warriors moved through the early morning light to take up positions on the hills and ridges to the north.

Made up mostly of experienced fighters, veterans of tribal wars and excellent horsemen with well-trained mounts, it did not take long for this fighting force to take position in the field. Their arms could not compare with those of the military command they faced. Superior weapons do not always carry the battle, however. There is a mysterious, almost mystical "something", that can turn the tide in favor of the underdog. On this June 17th morning, it showed in the Nez Perce as a grim determination in every man to fight for freedom and for the family left behind in the camp below.

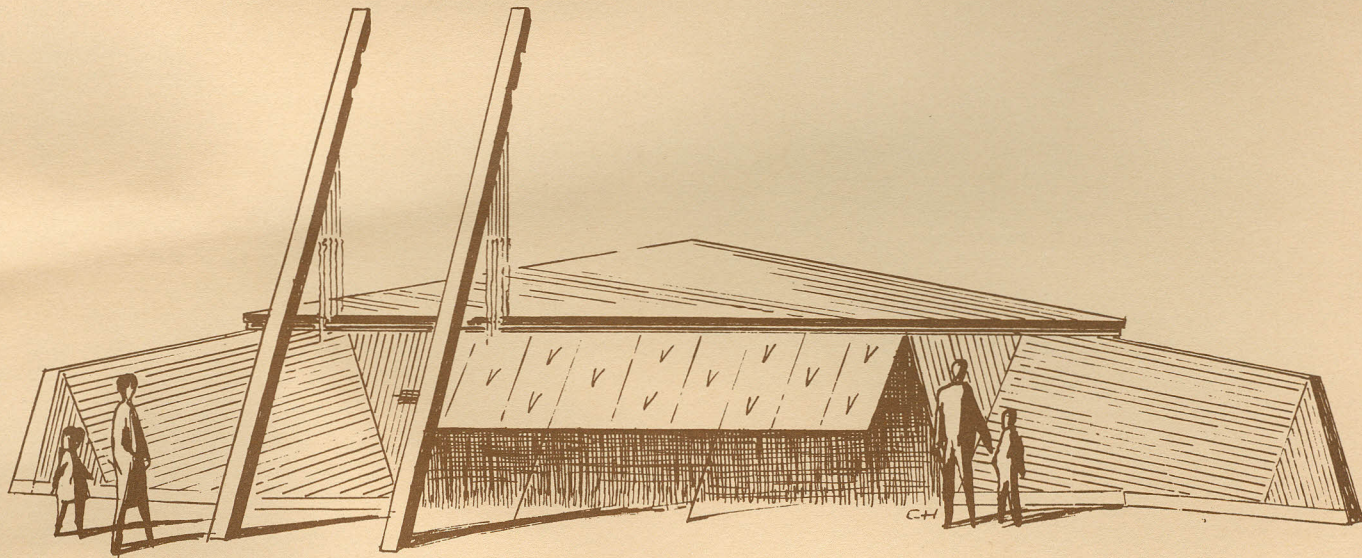
Unlike their opponents, the Indians did not have a rigid chain of command. Each warrior positioned himself and

fought as he saw fit, being in effect his own general. Those who led, did so more by setting an example than by giving orders. One such well respected war leader was Ah-low-khut (Ollicut), Joseph's younger brother. Joseph, himself fought as any other warrior in this battle, and did not hold a position of command.

Looking to the north you can see the two main areas where the Nez Perce gathered to wait for the soldiers. A group of forty or fifty warriors hid behind the large rounded butte to the left of the rocky point, including Ah-low-khut (Ollicut), Shore Crossing, Red Moccasin Tops and Strong Eagle. A smaller group of about fifteen warriors, middle-aged or older had taken position on the small hills to your right. Two Moons, Fire Body and Yellow Wolf had joined this smaller group.

When the advance soldier guard appeared over the ridge, the warriors on the small hills to the right opened fire. Fire Body made a good long-distance shot and killed Trumpeter Jones. Soon the volunteers came into view. The Indians quickly pushed them back to the knoll and then drove them from it. Said Two Moons of the citizens, "They did not stay there any time, and, I, Two Moons, hardly saw them at all."

The troopers could hold their position for only a few minutes. The Indians forced an unceremonious retreat. The battle became a rout, with small groups of warriors forcing the disorganized and panicky soldiers steadily back up the slopes toward Grangeville. *Not a single cavalry bullet had reached the Indian camp!*



STOP 6 — WAYSIDE EXHIBIT SHELTER

Tour Mile 13.2 (21.2 kilometers).

The National Park Service has placed exhibits here, telling the story of the battle. This vantage point provides an excellent overall view of the battlefield.

The scene of the initial fighting is about 35° to your right as you look across the exhibits in the shelter. From there, small groups of Indians pursued the fleeing cavalymen, killing and wounding many in small encounters all along the route back across the rolling landscape. The retreat generally followed the line of advance, except that most of the troops ascended the west wall of the canyon near Stop 7 further up the highway on the tour route.

The Nez Perce soundly defeated a much larger force generally possessing superior weapons. The Indians killed thirty-four soldiers while losing none of their own number, but the cavalry *did* wound three or four warriors. Clearly, this small, valiant band of not more than seventy stood out as the superior force on the field that day, in terms of fighting skill, if not in numbers of men.

Stop 7 is 2.0 miles (3.2 kilometers) beyond Stop 6 at tour mile 15.2 (24.5 kilometers). Go to the second large paved parking area above this one.

STOP 7 — CAVALRY RETREAT

Tour Mile 15.2 (24.5 kilometers).

Walk to the blue viewpoint marker post located about 20 feet (6.0 meters) south of the parking area. An excellent view of the route of retreat is available there.

On the other side of the ravine, across the highway to your right are two bluffs, or ridges, extending up the wall of the canyon. The majority of the retreating troops under Captains Perry and Trimble ascended these two bluffs and then moved toward Grangeville, with the Indians in hot pursuit.

Lt. William Parnell and a small group of veteran soldiers made a somewhat more orderly retreat. Following the same ravine the troops had descended a few hours earlier, they reached the top of the wall about one-half mile (0.8 kilometers) north of here.

Lt. Theller and seven men did not fare so well. Their exhausted horses refused to climb beyond the brush-choked ravine just below you, and this situation forced them to take refuge in the thornbushes. Yellow Wolf, one of the warriors who surrounded these men said, "Those soldiers put up a fight." A trooper managed to wound one of the Indians slightly, but before long the cavalrymen lay dead.

The Nez Perce chased the scattered remnants of Perry's command for several more miles before calling off the fight. Returning to the field, they gathered up the many guns left by the troops. A weapons count showed over sixty U.S. Army rifles and a smaller number of pistols now in the Indian arsenal. The victorious warriors did not scalp or mutilate the dead in any way.

Though they had won an important victory, the Indians realized that many more of Howard's troops would ride against them now. Wishing to avoid further trouble, the chiefs decided to move into the mountainous country across the Salmon River.

Eventually, the Army followed them across the river. The Nez Perce moved back across the river and on to the South Fork of the Clearwater. There another major battle was fought on July 11 and 12. The long and bitter journey toward the final tragic showdown in the Bear Paw Mountains of Montana had begun.

This concludes the auto tour of the White Bird Battlefield. The tour starting point (Stop 1) is 0.8 miles (1.3 kilometers) above this parking area. We hope you have enjoyed the tour and have a chance to visit other sites in Nez Perce National Park.

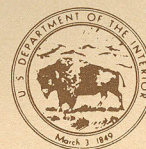
The following sources will be helpful if you are interested in reading more about the Battle of White Bird, the Nez Perce War, or Nez Perce history in general.

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As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

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