Lewis and Clark Among the Nez Perce

The Nimiipuu or Nez Perce people have always lived here. When the expedition led by Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark ventured into this country in the fall of 1805, they encountered a society tied closely to the land. A land of plenty, a sacred land of rivers, canyons, prairies, mountains. Home.

Imagine the questions that must have been asked as these strangers walked out onto the camas fields of the Weippe Prairie: Who are they? What do they want? Should we fight? Should we help? Why? Why not?

A respected Nez Perce elder, Wetxuuwís (Wet-k’ho-wees), responded to these questions. Captured by the Blackfeet as a young girl, she went east and became acquainted with fur traders that treated her with kindness. Her memories compelled her to speak, urging that the band do no harm to these strangers.

The Nez Perce ultimately provided assistance to the Expedition in the form of food, horses, directions, and guides in the fall of 1805. When the Expedition returned again in the spring of 1806, Lewis and Clark spent nearly a month living among the Nez Perce. With the possible exception of the winter encampments, Lewis and Clark spent more time with the Nez Perce than any other group. When the Expedition left the Nez Perce, they had established the first formal relationship between nations.

Explore these places. Learn there stories and treat them with care. They are still called Home.

The Nimiipuu have been in this land since time immemorial. Nez Perce National Historical Park tells the story of the Nez Perce, offering all Americans an important perspective about our history as a people. This is not a story told from the Mississippi looking west; it is a view from a homeland looking out, witnessing the march of history and change. It is a park about a people for all people.
Idaho

Confluence Overlook
Donald MacKenzie established a trading post near the confluence of the Clearwater River in September 1812. The Nez Perce were not interested in the fur trade and MacKenzie sold out to the British.

Coyote's Fishnet
Coyote and Black Bear got into an argument. In frustration, Coyote threw his fishing net on a hill and tossed Black Bear on another, turning him into stone. Both features are visible today.

Ant and Yellowjacket
Ant and Yellowjacket were arguing over who had the right to fish for Salmon when they got into an argument. Coyote asked them to stop and they did heed his warning, whereby Coyote turned them into a stone arch.

Spalding
The Spalding site has seen many uses by the Nez Perce and was the location of Henry and Eliza Spalding’s mission. Also here is the park’s visitor center and museum is located here as well. Nearby is where the Spalding’s first settled in 1836.

Northern Idaho Indian Agency
As part of the treaty process, the U.S. Government set up an agency to oversee the implementation of the terms of the treaties.

Fort Lapwai
In the fall of 1862, a detachment of volunteers chose this location for their fort. The 1883 officers’ quarters at the southwest end of the parade ground is one of the few buildings that survive.

Craig Donation Land Claim
This is the site of the first claim by the first Euro-American settler in Idaho. William Craig was a mountain man, an interpreter, and friend of the Nez Perce.

St. Joseph’s Mission
This was the first Roman Catholic mission among the Nez Perce. It was dedicated on September 8, 1874 by Father Joseph Cataldo, who had built it.

Cottonwood Skirmishes
After skirmishes with the U.S. Army and volunteers here on July 3 and 5, 1877, the main body of Nez Perce was able to evade the Army.

Weis Rockshelter
More than 8,000 years ago humans first made this home and continuously inhabited the area until about 600 years ago.

Camas Prairie
Where wheat fields stretch to the horizon today, camas lilies once grew. Camas bulbs were a major food source for the Nez Perce, and they came here in late summer and early fall to dig them.

Tolo Lake
In 1877, the non-treaty bands congregated at this ancient council site known as Tepahlewam before moving onto the reservation. Frustrated by injustices against the Nez Perce, three Nez Perce warriors raided homesteads on the Salmon River from this site.

White Bird Battlefield
On June 12, 1877, the first battle of the Nez Perce War was fought here. The U.S. cavalry was defeated with heavy losses and the Nez Perce began their long journey to find safety and sanctuary. A self-guided walking tour of the battlefield is available at the trailhead.
Clearwater Battlefield
On July 11, 1877 Gen. Oliver O. Howard crossed the Clearwater River and hoped to take the Nez Perce by surprise. His hopes came to naught and the fighting ended with the Nez Perce withdrawing.

Heart of the Monster
This is the location of the Heart of the Monster, where Coyote defeated a monster and, in turn, created the Nez Perce people. Audio stations tell the story in English and in the Nez Perce language.

Asa Smith Mission
In April 1839, Rev. and Mrs. Asa Smith established a mission in the Kamiah area. Unsuited to the demands of such work, the Smiths left in 1841.

Lewis and Clark Long Camp
Near here Lewis and Clark camped in the spring of 1806 heading east for home. Here they waited for the snow in the Bitterroot Mountains to melt and stayed among the Nez Perce for a month.

Canoe Camp
In the early fall of 1805, the Lewis and Clark expedition rested here and built canoes of hollowed-out logs for the final leg of their trip to the Pacific Ocean.

Lenore
For thousands of years, this site was used by the Nez Perce and their ancestors.

Weippe Prairie
This was a root-gathering place for the Nez Perce and it was here on September 20, 1805, that Lewis and Clark first met the Nez Perce. During the 1877 War, the Nez Perce came here after the Battle of the Clearwater.

Pierce
In September 1860, gold was found on the Nez Perce reservation, triggering another treaty that reduced the size of the reservation. The other site of interest is the old Shoshone County courthouse, completed in 1862.

Musselshell Meadow
For many generations, Nez Perce have come here to dig for camas. General Howard camped here at the end of July, 1877 while pursuing the Nez Perce over the Lolo Trail.

Big Hole National Battlefield
On the morning of August 9, 1877, U.S. troops surprised the Nez Perce who crossed the Bitterrootz trying to evade capture. Between 60 and 90 Nez Perce men, women, and children were killed. The Army lost 29 soldiers and 40 wounded.

Canyon Creek
After emerging from Yellowstone National Park, the Nez Perce were pursued by the cavalry. In a rearguard action the Nez Perce were able to gain time by successfully stopping the pursuing troops.

Bear Paw Battlefield
Just 40 miles short of the Canadian border, the Nez Perce were besieged by the Army and forced to surrender on October 5, 1877. They had traveled 1,170 miles in the nearly four months since the first skirmishes.

Oregon
Dug Bar
At this traditional crossing of the Snake River, Joseph and his band crossed the river in May, 1877 as they left their homes in Oregon for the reservation in Idaho. Located in Hell’s Canyon National Recreation Area, the site is accessible by either boat or a high clearance vehicle.

Joseph Canyon Viewpoint
This was one of the winter homes of the Nez Perce. Tradition holds that Chief Joseph was born in a cave along the east bank of the creek.

Old Chief Joseph’s Gravesite
The remains of the elder Chief Joseph were reburied here in 1926. Nearby are the graves of other Nez Perce and some settlers.

Lostine Homesite
At the junction of the Lostine and Wallowa Rivers is a traditional Nez Perce summer campsite where Old Chief Joseph died in 1871. This landscape has changed little from the days before the area was settled. Not a developed site.

Washington
Burial Site of Chief Joseph the Younger
In 1885 Chief Joseph and his band were allowed to return to the Northwest from Indian Territory in Oklahoma. Joseph spent his remaining years on the Colville Reservation and died here in 1904. The cemetery is private property and a sacred place.

Nez Perce Campsites at Nespelem
Chief Joseph’s band continued their traditional way of life while living on the Colville Reservation. These were their winter and summer homes and were the last places where Joseph lived. Not a developed site.

Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail
In 1986, Congress established the Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail to commemorate the 1877 war. The trail begins at Wallowa Lake in Oregon and extends 1,170 miles to the Bear Paw Battlefield. The trail is managed by the U.S. Forest Service in cooperation with other partners, including the National Park Service. Information on sites to see, and events along the trail can be found on the web at: www.fs.fed.us/npnht/
Lewis and Clark Sites

Nez Perce National Historical Park includes a number of sites that Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark passed through or camped at on their journey across western Montana and central Idaho.

Spalding Visitor Center
See a Jefferson Peace Medal given to Kepowian, a Palouse/Nez Perce headman in October of 1805. Nez Perce history and culture is featured in exhibits, a film, and bookstore.

Canoe Camp
At Canoe Camp Lewis and Clark made the transition from land to water. From September 26 to October 7, 1805, with some assistance from the Nez Perce, the Corps of Discovery built several dugout canoes for the trip down the river. Canoe Camp is located 2.5 miles west of Orofino, Idaho on U.S. Highway 12 and has outdoor exhibits.

Weippe Prairie
On September 20, 1805 William Clark came onto the prairie after ten days of atrocious weather and arduous trail conditions. The approximate location where Clark entered the prairie is off of Highway 11 approximately 3 miles southeast of the town of Weippe. Follow the signs to the turn out. The Weippe Discovery Center also has exhibits related to Lewis and Clark.

Lolo Trail and Pass
Visitors can retrace the route that Lewis and Clark took in 1805 and 1806 on U.S. Highway 12 over Lolo Pass or on primitive dirt road known as the Lolo Motorway (Forest Road 500). A rest area and visitor center are located at Lolo Pass. The rest area is open twenty-four hours a day; the visitor center is open seven days a week from early June through Labor Day from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm (PDT). Call (208) 942-1234 for more information.

PLEASE NOTE: Forest Road 500 is suitable only for high clearance vehicles. Trailers are not recommended. A fee, first come, first serve permit is required to travel a segment of the Lolo Motorway from July 15 to October 1, 2005. For more information please contact the Lochsa Ranger District office at (208) 926-4274 or on the web at www.fs.fed.us/r1/dearwater.

Long Camp
In 1806, the expedition lived among the Nez Perce for a month at a site known as Long Camp in present day Kamiah, Idaho. The site of Long Camp and is now occupied by a sawmill and lumber yard. This is private property - there is no public access. An interpretive sign is located on a pull out south of Kamiah on Hwy 12.

Big Hole National Battlefield
On July 3, 1806 at Travelers Rest near Missoula, Montana, Lewis and Clark split the expedition into two groups. On July 6, Clark’s group camped at Trail Creek, a few miles west of the Battlefield. The next day they crossed into the Big Hole valley and continued to a campsite near present day Jackson. Regional information on Lewis and Clark is available at the park’s visitor center.

Archeological sites, battlefields 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 to the maximum extent of the law.

Please call (208) 843-2261 in Idaho and (406) 689-3155 in Montana to report incidents.

Nez Perce National Historical Park - Quick Reference

Nez Perce National Historical Park
39063 US Hwy 95
Spalding, ID 83540

Phone: (208) 843-2261, ext. 199
Fax: (208) 843-2001
E-Mail: NEPE_Visitor Information@nps.gov
Web Site: www.nps.gov/nepe

Spalding Visitor Center
Located ten miles east of Lewiston, Idaho on U.S. Highway 95.
Summer: Memorial Day to Labor Day - Daily 8:00 am to 5:00 pm
Rest of the Year: Daily, 8:00 am to 4:30 pm
Closed: Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s.
The visitor center offers exhibits, a film, and a bookstore on Nez Perce culture and history.
Fees: Free
Restrooms are accessible. Audio description available for park film and museum exhibit.

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

Phone: (406) 689-3155
Fax: (406) 689-3151
E-Mail: BigHO_Visitor.Information@nps.gov
Web Site: www.nps.gov/bih0

Visitor Center
Located ten miles west of Wisdom, Montana on State Highway 43.
Summer: May 28 - September 10, 2005
Monday-Friday, 1pm-5pm
Closed between noon and 1 pm
Closed between noon and 1 pm
Closed between noon and 1 pm
Closed between noon and 1 pm

Visitor Center
Located in the Blaine County Museum
501 Indiana St., Chinook, MT

Summer: Memorial Day to Labor Day
Monday-Saturday 8:00 am to 5:00 pm
Rest of the Year: Monday-Friday, 1pm-5pm
Closed between noon and 1 pm

Bear Paw Battlefield
301 Ohio
Chinook, MT 59523

Phone: (406) 357-3130
Fax: (406) 357-3140
E-Mail: NEPE_Bear_Paw@nps.gov
Web Site: www.nps.gov/nepe

Visitor Center
Located on a pull out south of Kamiah on Hwy 12.

West Glacier, MT 59936-0310

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