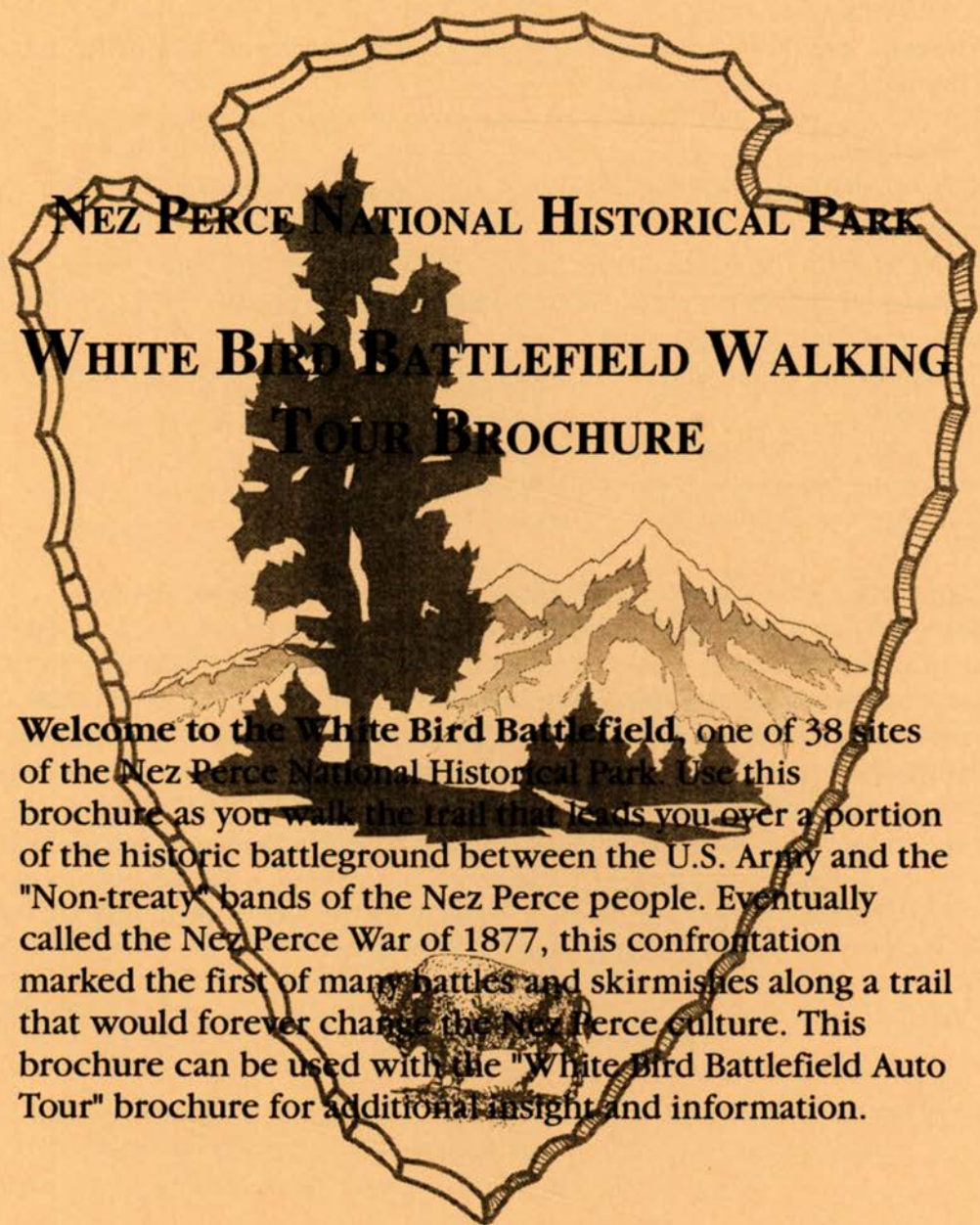




NEZ PERCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

**WHITE BIRD BATTLEFIELD WALKING
TOUR BROCHURE**

Welcome to the White Bird Battlefield, one of 38 sites of the Nez Perce National Historical Park. Use this brochure as you walk the trail that leads you over a portion of the historic battleground between the U.S. Army and the "Non-treaty" bands of the Nez Perce people. Eventually called the Nez Perce War of 1877, this confrontation marked the first of many battles and skirmishes along a trail that would forever change the Nez Perce culture. This brochure can be used with the "White Bird Battlefield Auto Tour" brochure for additional insight and information.

Some things to remember before you decide to walk the trail:

- If you have a medical condition, and exertion poses a risk to your health, do not continue!
- The total length of the round trip hike is approximately 1-1/2 miles (2-1/2 kilometers).
- The walking trail consists of four interpretive stops marked by numbered site posts.
- After stop #1, the trail becomes strenuous as it climbs approximately 460 feet in elevation.
- Please stay on the marked trail. Travel off of the path can cause unnecessary erosion and poses potential hazards in the form of poison ivy, rattlesnakes, uneven terrain and high cliffs.
- Remember to bring water! Summer temperatures make hiking much more strenuous.
- Wear proper footwear (light hiking boots).
- Collecting artifacts, rocks, or plants is illegal.
- Hunting is prohibited in this National Park Service site.

Before you start your walk, imagine the scenery of 1877. If you are at the trailhead, you are standing on a remnant of the old wagon road that connected the Camas Prairie to the north with the Salmon River canyons. Look back (south) across the old highway towards White Bird Creek. At least thirty Nez Perce tepees were pitched on the flat land below you. While the trees along the creek and grasslands on the hillsides looked much like they do today, the ravines were filled with brush and thickets that stood between two and ten feet tall. This is Lahmotta, now called White Bird Canyon, one of many traditional winter camps of the Nez Perce. It was here that four non-treaty bands under the leadership of White Bird, Joseph, Toohoolhoolzote (Tuxhulxhulxhosut), and Hahtalekin were camped before the fighting began on June 17, 1877.

PRELUDE TO WAR:

The original treaty between the U.S. government and the Nez Perce, signed in 1855, established a reservation that acknowledged the ancestral homelands of the Nez Perce, or Nee-Mé-Poo, as they called themselves. In 1860, the discovery of gold on the reservation brought an uncontrolled influx of miners and settlers into the area. Despite numerous treaty violations and crimes committed by the new arrivals that went unpunished, the Nez Perce remained peaceful. In 1863, the U.S. government, responding to pressures to make reservation land available to settlers, forced another treaty on the Nez Perce, reducing the size of the reservation by 90%. The leaders of the bands living outside of the new reservation refused to sign the "steal treaty" and continued to live outside the boundaries of the reservation until the spring of 1877.

In May of 1877, under threat of force from the U.S. Army, the non-treaty bands moved from their homelands toward the new reservation. The Wallowa Band, led by Chief Joseph, crossing rivers that were swollen with spring runoff, lost large numbers of their horses and cattle. The bands eventually gathered at Tephalewam, the traditional camping ground on the Camas Prairie at Tolo Lake, to enjoy the last days of their traditional lifestyle.

It was an emotional rendezvous. Not all of the people agreed to the course of peace and compliance. On June 14, a few warriors led by Wahlitits (Wahlietiits), entered the Salmon River area to seek revenge for the 1875 murder of Wahlietiits' father, Tipyahlanah Siskan (Tipyahlan-ah Tsi-kun). The proclaimed success of their mission roused the desire for vengeance among other warriors and resulted in more attacks on settlers in the area. The settlers sought refuge in some of the larger townships hastily converted to forts. Messengers were sent from the community of Mt. Idaho to Fort Lapwai, describing the events and demanding assistance from the military.

The Nez Perce at Tephalewam were aware that General Howard would be preparing to send his soldiers against them. By June 16th, the bands had moved to the defensible canyons of Lahmotta. That night, sentinels reported to camp and warned of the approaching soldiers. After much deliberation, it was decided that they would stay at Lahmotta, make an effort to avoid war, and fight if forced to.

Please walk to Interpretive Stop #1 approximately 300 feet from the trailhead sign. Note: there is a directional sign on top of each post at the four interpretive stops that may help you interpret the battle.

INTERPRETIVE STOP #1

At daybreak on June 17th, approximately 60 to 70 Nez Perce warriors were in various stages of preparation for the expected attack. Many had left camp and were positioning themselves in the ravines and on the hills around you. On the small knolls east and south of you (towards the village site), Two Moon, Otstotpoo, Yellow Wolf, and approximately 12 other warriors awaited the arrival of the soldiers. Groups of mounted warriors waited between the camp and the knolls, while others, under Ollokot's leadership, moved toward the large hills to the west. A few warriors on foot hid in the bushes that would have been in the bottoms of the drainages between this point and the steep hillsides. The truce party waited with their white flag.

Meanwhile, 106 mounted soldiers from companies F & H of the First Cavalry commanded by Captain David Perry, along with 11 civilian volunteers from Mt. Idaho, descended the canyon. The Advance Guard, consisting of Lieutenant Edward Theller, Trumpeter John Jones, a few Nez Perce scouts, seven other soldiers from Company F, and Arthur "Ad" Chapman, who had left his position as commander of the volunteers to assist in guiding the Advance Guard, made first contact with the truce party. Yellow Wolf later gave this account:

"Five warriors, led by Wettiwetti Houlis . . . had been sent out from the other [west] side of the valley as a peace party to meet the soldiers. These warriors had instructions from the chiefs not to fire unless fired upon. Of course they carried a white flag. Peace might be made without fighting."

For reasons never fully explained, Ad Chapman shot twice at the small party, the Nez Perce returned fire, and the battle began.

Advancing to the ridge line (immediately below the steep rocky cliffs northwest of you), Lieutenant Theller deployed his men. Trumpeter Jones was ordered to signal a call to arms. Before he could finish his trumpet call, he was shot from his horse by Otstotpoo, positioned over 300 yards away on one of the knolls east of this point. Captain Perry's Company F dismounted and formed a skirmish line on the east (your right) side of the Advance Guard, while Company H, led by Captain Trimble, deployed a mounted line on the west side of Theller's position. The volunteers attempted to position themselves on the north ridge line (near the small tree on the horizon).

The trail becomes much steeper beyond this point! Do not continue to Interpretive Stop #2 if you have a medical condition that, upon exertion, poses a risk to your health.

INTERPRETIVE STOP #2

Captain Perry thought that his company's left flank would be protected from attack if the volunteers were positioned along this ridge line. Because of his position behind the knoll immediately above you (west), Perry could not see the activities of the volunteers. Shortly after leaving the main column, the volunteers, now led by George Shearer, encountered warriors among the thickets below and east of this ridge line. Shearer ordered his men to dismount and fight on foot. A few men obeyed but the majority retreated back toward Mr. Idaho. Seeking protection in Perry's command, Shearer led his few remaining men to the top of this ridge line. To his surprise, Shearer found himself between the devastating attack led by Two Moon on Perry's left flank, and the sniping fire from warriors protecting the village. Shearer quickly realized that he was witnessing the beginning of the retreat of Company F and, sensing the precariousness of his own position, raced to catch up with Perry's command.

Please follow the trail to Interpretive STOP #3.

INTERPRETIVE STOP #3

You are standing on the ridge line where the U.S. Cavalry deployed to attack the Nez Perce. If you stand looking down the hill, Company F and the remainder of the Advance Guard would have eventually been on foot and deployed at three foot intervals to your left. Earlier, a succession of orders had been issued by Perry who had intended to charge the warrior who appeared to pose an immediate threat. He yelled, *"left front into line - drop carbine and draw pistols!"* Perry then called for Trumpeter Daly to sound the charge, but was dismayed to find that Daly had lost his trumpet along the trail. Without trumpets, Perry's lines of communication to his officers and soldiers were lost. *"Dismount and fight on foot!"* he yelled above the growing din. *"Number fours"* came the command added by subordinates. Every fourth man took the reins of the horses of three other soldiers and led the animals back into a swale, out of the line of fire. The rest of Company F then advanced on foot to the ridge line.

To your right Company H attempted to deploy at five yard intervals along the ridge line while still mounted. The tactic proved to be disastrous as the horses were "flighty" and unused to the sound of gunfire. The soldiers, many of them

inexperienced and poorly trained, could not shoot accurately, especially from the backs of their terrified horses.

Captain Perry, riding back and forth between the companies and yelling orders over the flurry of gunfire, saw the volunteers retreating up the canyon. Several other significant events occurred almost simultaneously. Perry's left flank and Trimble's right flank were being severely compromised. Perry's men were falling back under the deadly fire from Two Moon's attacking warriors. Wahlietiits, Sarpsis Ilpilp (Sahpsis Ill-pillp), and Tipyahlanah Kapskaps, flaunting their bravery by wearing red blanket coats, attacked Company H's right flank. Leaning to the opposite sides of their horses, they concealed their bodies as they fired at the soldiers. Dropping to the ground, their close-range fire added confusion and panic to the chaos.

Meanwhile, Captain Trimble of Company H had dispatched Sergeant Michael McCarthy and six men to the highest point (look behind and to your right, or west, at the short rocky cliffs), to protect the rear and right flank. Perry also noticed the rocky cliffs and sent some men from Company F to assist McCarthy.

Seeing that the collapse of his flank left the rest of his command exposed, Perry sent word down the line to withdraw to the rock line (about 300 yards to the north). Since his men had suffered numerous casualties and were already falling back, his order was misinterpreted as a general retreat and perhaps added to the urgency of the movement. Company H, also suffering casualties, began to retreat as well, leaving McCarthy and his men stranded on the cliffs above.

Please follow the trail to Interpretive Stop #4.

INTERPRETIVE STOP #4

Near the lower end of the short rocky ridge line stretching to the north of you, Captains Trimble and Perry tried to rally the remains of their fractured force.

Sweeping around the large butte to the west, Ollokot's mounted warriors joined the warriors who were surging around and through the ranks of the retreating cavalry. Aroused by a growing sense of victory, warriors chased down soldiers who became separated from the larger groups struggling to establish defensive lines.

Sergeant McCarthy, aware of the retreat and seeing that he and his detachment were in danger of being cut off from the main command, galloped down from the butte. Within yards of relative safety, Captain Trimble ordered them back to the butte in preparation for an attempt to take the high ground. McCarthy could enlist the help of only three men but returned to his former position. Trimble's attempt never materialized, and McCarthy once again was left stranded. Lieutenant Parnell saw McCarthy's predicament and rallied about ten men from Company H, but was able to rescue only McCarthy and one other soldier.

The retreat of the command followed two general routes. Captain Perry, struggling to keep the remnants of men he had collected in the retreat together, followed Captain Trimble who in turn followed Ad Chapman. Their course led them northwest, up the steep hillsides to the far ridge line.

Some men, including those led by Lieutenants Parnell and Theller, followed the wagon road they had used that morning. Lieutenant Theller and seven men retreated up the road, turned their exhausted horses up a boxed ravine, and became trapped. The soldiers ran out of ammunition and were killed by the pursuing warriors.

Converging on the top of the ridge line (look north to the distant horizon), the combined forces of Captain Perry and Lieutenant Parnell reorganized. They divided their 28 men and established a cover and retreat strategy all the way to Johnson Ranch, at the southwestern edge of the Camas Prairie. At the ranch, Perry and Parnell rallied the men and allowed them a brief, but much needed rest. Within minutes, Nez Perce warriors pressing their attack, forced the soldiers to leave the ranch. The command fought off numerous flanking attacks across the prairie but were rescued by fresh volunteers four miles from Mt. Idaho.

By mid-morning of the same day, 34 soldiers had been killed and two were wounded. Two of the volunteers were wounded within the first moments of the battle. In contrast, only three Nez Perce warriors had been wounded. Approximately 63 carbines, many pistols, and hundreds of rounds of ammunition, all lost or abandoned by the soldiers, were picked up off the battlefield by Nez Perce warriors and women. The weapons greatly enhanced the Nez Perce arsenal and would be used in action against the army in the weeks and months ahead.

Although not generally acknowledged for the Nez Perce, the battle in White Bird Canyon was a one-sided victory of legendary proportions. Outnumbered two to one and fighting uphill with mostly inferior weapons, the Nez Perce warriors marshaled their intuitive fighting skills to defeat the army and protect their homes and families. But the Nez Perce were aware of the consequences of wars fought against the army. They knew, through stories passed from tribe to tribe, that the military would eventually pursue and retaliate against them.

As the Nee-Mé-Poo prepared to move their families from the Lahmotta area, perhaps they remembered their elder's stories of Lewis and Clark. In 1805, the people had welcomed the starving and ragged assembly of men into their homeland and tepees. But after the explorers, the Nez Perce relationship with the white settlers had become increasingly difficult. Despite seventy-two years of determined peace, the war that no one wanted had finally begun.

Please follow the trail back to the trailhead where you began. For more information, see the Park and Auto Tour Brochures, or call the visitor center at Spalding, Idaho (208) 843-2261 or the White Bird Unit office at (208) 983-2034.

Written by Mark O'Neill & Teresa Seloske
Edited by Carol Sperling

For more information about Nez Perce History, read;

Josephy, Alvin M., Jr. THE NEZ PERCE INDIANS AND THE OPENING OF THE NORTHWEST. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, 1965.

McDermott, John D. FORLORN HOPE, THE BATTLE OF WHITE BIRD CANYON AND THE BEGINNING OF THE NEZ PERCE WAR. Idaho State Historical Society, Boise, Idaho, 1978.

McWhorter, L.V. YELLOW WOLF: HIS OWN STORY. The Caxton Printers, Ltd. Caldwell, Idaho, 1983.