

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE ROUTE

OVERVIEW

From the deeply incised Columbia Plateau, across the Continental Divide and a succession of ranges, canyons and valleys, through forests and plains, across thermal areas and mighty rivers, the Nez Perce Trail winds through some of the most rugged and spectacular scenery in western America. Yet the route was not chosen by the Nez Perce for its scenery. From Ft. Fizzle onward, expediency and strategic advantage dictated their course. While modern travelers enjoy the vast scale and scope of the setting of the Nez Perce flight, following the Indians' route can also offer opportunities to relate geographic factors to the stratagems of retreat and pursuit.

The Nez Perce Trail cannot be followed in its entirety by wheeled vehicles. Except for portions where existing roads coincide with or intersect the Indians' route, the trail is in rugged country largely inaccessible to vehicles. Neither historic continuity of trail use nor accessibility is a standard of the trail's significance, however. Rather its historic values are enhanced, not diminished, by the fact that much of the Nez Perce Trail has been spared pavement and other imprints of modern use. More than a century after the epic event, the flight of the Nez Perce awaits full recognition and offers discovery.

LOCATION CRITERIA

The route described in this report was used in its entirety only once. However, component trails and roads that made up the route bore generations of use prior to and after the 1877 flight of the nontreaty Nez Perce. Trails and roads perpetuated through continued use often became portions of transportation systems, though some were later abandoned for more direct routes or routes better suited for modern conveyances.

The abandoned segments can be located today but are often overgrown by vegetation, altered by floods, powerlines, and other man-made structures, or cross a variety of ownerships.

Where the elements have erased all traces of the Nez Perce's momentary passing, our judgment has been based upon historical research, topography, and a "best guess" as to where these cross-country portions of the route occurred.

High potential route segments identified in the Study Report exhibited the following characteristics:

- (1) trail integrity, with original trail tread still visible,*
- (2) historic integrity with the presence of historic sites and landscapes related to the Nez Perce flight or culture,*
- (3) significant recreation potential,*
- (4) scenic quality, and*
- (5) significant opportunities for interpretation.*

The Decision Notice of July 1985 and P.L. 99-445 of October 1986 establishing the Nez Perce National Historic Trail, modified the Study Report recommendation by restricting development to 319 miles of the high potential route segments located primarily on Federal and State lands. Relatively small segments of private lands intermingled within these segments that have a high potential probability of acquisition by the adjoining agencies and that meet the acquisition authorities specified in the National Trails System Act may be included. Two of the original Study Report high potential route segments, Rocky Canyon and Dry Creek Station, were eliminated as they do not meet the criteria established in the Decision Notice of July 1985 and P.L. 99-445 of 1986. (A summary of the high potential route segments is in Appendix D, Table 1.)

TRAIL CORRIDOR DESCRIPTION

The route has been divided into seven sections for descriptive purposes beginning with the gathering in Oregon and ending with the surrender site in Montana's Bear's Paw Mountains.

The four-state route is depicted in its entirety in the enclosed folded map. This small-scale map is supplemented with larger scale maps in Appendix E that provide additional details on the route location, high potential route segments, associated trail routes, and associated historical sites.

SECTION 1 WALLOWA VALLEY TO WEIPPE PRAIRIE

****THE STORY****

Having been decided in council that a move to the reservation was inevitable, families and livestock were gathered and the move to the ancient gathering place of Tepahlewam, near Tolo Lake, began on May 14, 1877.

When the orders came for all nontreaty bands to move onto the reservation, the Wallowa band was at its winter camp on the lower reaches of the Grande Ronde.

They gathered at Dug Bar and, with considerable loss of young livestock, crossed the formidable Snake River. After ascending to Joseph Plains and crossing the Salmon River, they proceeded up Rocky Canyon to Tepahlewam.

It was here, south of present-day Grangeville, that a majority of the nontreaty Nez Perce had gathered to await the final move onto the reservation. These last few days of freedom were marred by the flaring of pent-up emotions precipitating the Salmon River raids in which several young warriors avenged the deaths of tribal members killed by miners and settlers a few years before during settlement of the Nez Perce homeland.

The Nez Perce bands camped near Tolo Lake knew they must move to more defensible terrain in the event of an Army reprisal. They moved into Chief White Bird's camp on a creek, that now bears his name, and waited for Army action. On June 17, 1877, Companies F and H of the 1st US Cavalry and volunteers under General Howard's orders arrived at White Bird to quell

the raids and escort the Indians onto the reservation. In violation of a truce flag, a single shot from a volunteer's rifle began the bloody Battle of White Bird Canyon, a war, and a tortuous journey for the Indians.

In a series of moves and river crossings, the Nez Perce outdistanced the Army and outfought settlers (the Cottonwood Skirmishes), and arrived near the Looking Glass Camp on the South Fork of the Clearwater River. The military, under Howard's personal command, circled in behind and above the Nez Perce camps. There, on July 11, 1877, the Battle of the Clearwater confirmed the war between Indians and Army, which resulted in many dead and wounded on both sides, and a considerable loss of tribal possessions and food. It brought to a head the Indians' need to move either onto the reservation or to the east to seek asylum with their Crow allies. The latter was decided upon and confirmed at the Kamiah and Weippe Prairie camps.

*****THE ROUTE*****

MAPS 1, 2, AND 3

The beginning of the trail from the vicinity of Wallowa Lake to Dug Bar on the Snake River was not used in its entirety during the 1877 Nez Perce trek. This Wallowa segment was normally a route between the summer home of Chief Joseph's Wallowa band and their winter homes in the canyons of the Imnaha, Snake, and Grande Ronde Rivers. Therefore, to symbolize the departure from traditional homelands, the gathering of people and livestock, and their move to the ancient gathering place of Tepahlewam, the route between Wallowa Lake and this traditional campsite is included.

Several sections of aboriginal trail exist along this route. These have been incorporated into the high potential route segments shown on Map 2.

The Imnaha River high potential route segment from Corral Creek to Dug Bar includes both primitive roads and horse trails. A 7-mile segment over Lone Pine Saddle has been named a National Recreation Trail within the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area (NRA), ending at Dug Bar on a designated scenic section of the wild and scenic Snake River.

The White Bird Canyon high potential route segment is a route within the White Bird Battlefield. Seven stops along the loop interpret events of the initial encounter between the Nez Perce and General Howard's soldiers and volunteers. The loop route is managed by the National Park Service as part of the 23-unit Nez Perce National Historic Park. The park was authorized by Congress in 1965, and administered in cooperation with the Nez Perce Tribal Council, Federal, State, and private landowners. Roadside interpretive signs mark the Clearwater Battle Site, the Cottonwood Skirmishes, and Weippe Prairie.

SECTION 2

WEIPPE PRAIRIE TO LOLO

****THE STORY****

Seeking to avoid further bloodshed, the Indians moved along the Lolo Trail into the Bitterroot Range, hoping to leave General Howard and the war behind them. The arduous 10-day march over formidable mountains and down Lolo Creek was interrupted by a bloodless confrontation with Captain Rawn and a small command of Regular Army troops, the 7th US Infantry, and a complement of civilian volunteers from newly commissioned Fort Missoula.

In answer to Rawn's demand for surrender, the Nez Perce stated, "We are going by you without fighting if you will let us, but we are going by you anyhow."

In a bold move, the travelers flanked the log barricade now known as Fort Fizzle and proceeded down Lolo Creek to Lolo on July 28, 1877 where they entered the Bitterroot Valley.

*****THE ROUTE*****

MAPS 3, 4, AND 5

The Lolo Trail, called the Khoo-say-na-is-kit by the Nez Perce, was developed from generations of use by their traveling to and from buffalo country as well as Flathead and Kootenai Indians traveling into Idaho for trade. Not until the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804-1806 did white men follow its path thus opening the way for trappers, traders, miners, and military expeditions of the mid- to late 19th century. The route was improved in 1866 to facilitate passage between gold fields in Idaho and Montana. Limited maintenance accounted for the difficult passage of the Nez Perce. Except for the 34 miles from Weippe Prairie east to Willow Ridge, the route used by the Nez Perce is identical to that of Lewis and Clark.

Over a considerable portion of its length, the tread of the Lolo Trail exists nearly as it was 100 years ago. The trail is not usable by the public in its present state, but the Lolo Motorway, constructed between 1930 and 1935, provides access to its remnants on the Clearwater National Forest. Seldom does the motorway deviate more than a mile from the ancient trail.

Its historic integrity, scenic value, high recreation potential, and interpretive value earmark the Lolo Trail as a high potential segment of the Nez Perce Trail. In 1978, Congress designated the route of the Lewis and Clark Expedition as a National Historic Trail.

The Lolo Trail is a National Historic Landmark. Additionally, other sites along the route are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and several nominations to the register are pending. These sites relate to traditional uses and the 1877 campaign activities of the Nez Perce, or to the Lewis and Clark Expedition. In addition, there are over 50 inventoried sites of historical or archaeological interest along the trail.

SECTION 3

LOLO TO BANNOCK PASS

****THE STORY****

Entrance of the Nez Perce into western Montana Territory caused anxiety to local residents and settlers throughout the territory who had not yet recovered from news of the Custer defeat of 1876. With traditional amity, the Nez Perce passed through the Bitterroot Valley and over Gibbons Pass without incident, much to the relief of the settlers.

Concerned with the Nez Perce's presence in Montana, the Territorial Government organized units of civilian militia and pressured the military commands to pursue the Indians. The Nez Perce, however, considered themselves in peaceful country and enjoyed the leisurely pace ordered by Chief Looking Glass. They stopped at the Big Hole camp on the North Fork of the Big Hole River to rest, gather food, and cut and dry tipi poles for their long trip through the treeless regions of Idaho and Montana.

In the early morning of August 9, Army troops and civilians under Colonel John Gibbon attacked the Nez Perce at the Big Hole camp. A 24-hour battle ensued with heavy casualties on both sides. The Nez Perce knew war was now inevitable on all fronts and moved rapidly from the Big Hole Battlefield under the leadership of Lean Elk.

Lean Elk had met and joined the nontreaty Nez Perce in the lower Bitterroot where he and his band intended to stay for the summer. He believed Wahlitits' premonition and the warning to move rapidly, but could not persuade Looking Glass to hurry through friendly country. It was not until after the Big Hole that other chiefs recognized the truth of the warning and replaced Looking Glass, who did not regain a position of leadership until after the Cow Island skirmishes.

As the Nez Perce hurried through the upper Big Hole, they had several skirmishes with settlers. Stories of these encounters caused panic in the mining town of Bannack. Residents prepared for war as did the Indians. Rifle pits dug by the Nez Perce near their Horse Prairie camp tell of their vigilance and expectations as they moved south over Bannock Pass and re-entered Idaho.

*****THE ROUTE*****

MAPS 5, 6, AND 7

The actual route of the Nez Perce up the Bitterroot Valley is speculative. Historical accounts and local residents generally agree that the Indians followed then-existing trails and roadways on both east and west benches above the river. Apparently the main body of the Nez Perce moved up the west side, with small groups crossing the river to trade at Stevensville, Corvallis, and Skalkaho (Hamilton). Historians think that when General Howard entered the valley, his command crossed to the east side of the river near Lolo and paralleled the Indians' route.

The trails and roadways in the Bitterroot were part of a network traditionally used by the Nez Perce to cross the Bitterroot Mountains enroute to the upper Missouri buffalo grounds. As the

Bitterroot was the home of the Flatheads, a tribe friendly toward the Nez Perce, their use of these trails was significant.

Early residents of the Bitterroot relate that the old trails, with improved creek crossings, became the original roads. These roads matured into country roads and later into the modern highway system. Thus, U.S. Highway 93 follows the route of the Nez Perce through the valley.

The Gibbons Pass high potential route segment begins near the Scarred Trees, proceeds up and over Gibbons Pass, then down Trail Creek to the Big Hole camp on a traditional hunting trail. This portion also duplicates the return route of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

A general cross-country route was followed from Big Hole Battlefield to the head of Bloody Dick Creek where portions of the Overland Trail high potential route segment were used to Horse Prairie. A hunting trail was used in Horse Prairie and over Bannock Pass to the Town of Junction.

Local and State historical societies have been active in the Bitterroot and Big Hole Valleys for nearly 100 years documenting and interpreting sites of many events and places relative to Indian and non-Indian history.

Fort Owen, temporarily remanned during the Nez Perce War, is administered as an historic site by the State of Montana. The sites of two temporary forts constructed at Corvallis and Skalkaho have been monumented by local historical societies. Big Hole Battlefield is administered and interpreted by the National Park Service. Several sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places are also found in the Bitterroot and Big Hole Valleys.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition used the same route as the Nez Perce in the Bitterroot Valley and in a portion of the Big Hole Valley. As stated earlier, the Lewis and Clark route has been named a National Historic Trail under National Park Service administration. The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail established in 1978 crosses the Nez Perce route at Gibbons and Bannock Passes; this trail is administered by the Forest Service.

SECTION 4

BANNOCK PASS TO TARGHEE PASS

****THE STORY****

After losing many of their people at the Big Hole, the Nez Perce chiefs made a considerable effort to reach their Crow allies without further incident. Crippled by the effects of battle, they wanted no more war, and several times passed by white settlements pausing only long enough to secure provisions. The sparsely populated area aided their travel; the barrier of mountains on their left flank added to their security. Only a chance meeting at Birch Creek on August 15 with supply wagons and the resulting bloodshed marred their journey to Camas Meadows. The lush Camas Meadow country was likely a welcome sight as it offered good water and grazing -- similar to that of their homeland.

General Howard caught up with the Nez Perce on Camas Meadows, but on August 20 the Indians took the offensive and captured nearly all of the army pack mules. This slowed Howard's advance and allowed the beleaguered Indians to escape over Targhee Pass into the Yellowstone country.

*****THE ROUTE*****

MAPS 7, 8, 9, 10, AND 11

The bleak high country of the Lemhi-Birch Creek Valley and the northern Snake River plain offered little relief for the dispirited Nez Perce as they followed the old Mormon Missionary Road south out of Junction, and then a cutoff east toward the headwaters of the Yellowstone.

Segments of these wagon roads have persisted through the years. The old Mormon Missionary Road, traceable over most of its length, parallels present Highway 28 in the Lemhi-Birch Creek Valley. Highway 22 follows the wagon road cutoff from the Mormon Road to the mouth of Beaver Canyon on the Corrine-Bannock Stage Road.

In the vicinity of present-day Spencer, Idaho, portions of the Nez Perce route followed the historic Bannock Indian Trail.

Little interpretive work has been done along this section of trail where many historical sites are known that relate to local historical events and the Nez Perce campaign. Most sites occur on private land.

Currently, the Birch Creek and Camas Meadow skirmish sites are the only Nez Perce campaign sites interpreted in this segment. Local and State groups accomplished the interpretive efforts. Eight National Register sites not related to the Nez Perce war occur in this section of the study area.

SECTION 5

TARGHEE PASS TO CLARK FORK OF THE YELLOWSTONE

****THE STORY****

Shortly after entering the then 5-year-old Yellowstone National Park, the Nez Perce became confused about which route to take through the wilderness to reach the Crow's homeland east of the Absaroka Mountains. The advice of a prospector and park tourist, whom they captured, guided them across the Absaroka Divide. Once across the divide, they proceeded into the Clark Fork of the Yellowstone Canyon.

General Howard did not immediately follow the Nez Perce through Yellowstone Park but ordered Captain S.G. Fisher and his Bannock Indian scouts to follow them. Howard went to Virginia City to replenish supplies and secure livestock lost to the Nez Perce in the skirmishes at Camas Meadows. While in Virginia City, he telegraphed the military in eastern Montana to inform them of the Nez Perce's activities. The strategy was for Colonel Samuel Sturgis and Major Hart to block escape routes into the plains while Howard's forces pushed in from the Park.

The Seventh Cavalry under Sturgis was anxious to regain its reputation which suffered during Custer's defeat. In his haste, Sturgis misjudged the Nez Perce's intention and ordered his troops to leave their position on the Clark Fork and proceed south toward the Shoshone. His decision allowed the Indians to escape the "Absaroka Blockade."

Their escape did not guarantee the Nez Perce's good fortune. They soon learned that the Crows had no intentions of giving asylum or assistance; rather, their intentions were more along the lines of stealing the Nez Perce horses.

For the Nez Perce, the only hope for peace seemed to be to follow what Sitting Bull and the Sioux had done a year earlier -- go to Canada.

Leaving the box-like Clark Fork River Canyon, the Nez Perce moved rapidly northward hoping to avoid contact with Howard and his forces.

*****THE ROUTE*****

MAPS 11, 12, 13, AND 14

A host of scholars and interested persons have studied the trail across Yellowstone National Park and out into the Clark Fork Valley. The route is well documented from West Yellowstone up the Madison, Firehole, and Nez Perce drainages to May Mountain and into Trout Creek and the Yellowstone River north of Yellowstone Lake. However, authorities disagree on the trail's location east of Pelican Valley. Two alternate routes are shown on Map 13 that represent the most popular theories of travel through the Absaroka Range. From the convergence of these two routes at Hoodoo Basin, authorities generally agree that the trail proceeds along the southern rim of the Clark Fork Canyon, climbs Dead Indian Hill, and descends to the plains near the mouth of Clark Fork Canyon.

The Yellowstone high potential route segment through Yellowstone National Park and the North Absaroka Wilderness appear today much as they did in 1877. Interpretive signs mark many historic sites within the Park and the Shoshone National Forest; several of these document activities of the Army and the Nez Perce. None of the National Register sites in this section of the study area commemorate Nez Perce culture or activities of the 1877 campaign.

At Targhee Pass, the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail intersects the Nez Perce Trail.

SECTION 6

CLARK FORK YELLOWSTONE TO JUDITH GAP

****THE STORY****

As the Nez Perce exited the rugged Absaroka Range, their thoughts and efforts focused on the long ride across the central Montana prairies to Canada. They knew the Crows would not claim them as friends and the Army would do anything in its power to stop their final flight toward Canada.

When Sturgis realized the Indians had started down the Clark Fork, he hurried to join Howard's forces who had just crossed Yellowstone National Park, hoping to find the Nez Perce stalled ahead of them. Both commanders, marvelling at the Nez Perce's escape of the "blockade," realized their shrinking opportunities to catch the Indians before they crossed into Canada. Howard dispatched messengers to Colonel Nelson Miles at Fort Keogh requesting him to move rapidly to the northwest and intercept the Nez Perce before they reached Canada or joined forces with Sitting Bull.

Sturgis, anxious to capture the Nez Perce, moved ahead of Howard and caught the Indians' rear guard just north of the Yellowstone River on September 13. In a brief skirmish, the rear guard effectively held off the much-advantaged military force, permitting the Nez Perce's main cavalcade to escape through the rimrocks of Canyon Creek to the high plains above the Yellowstone.

The trail-weary Nez Perce knew Howard's troops were well behind them but pushed northward as fast as their foot-sore horses could carry them. Only occasionally did parties of Crows harass them, intent on stealing horses.

Traveling through these familiar buffalo hunting grounds, the Nez Perce widened the gap between them and the military. The pace was too swift for Sturgis who temporarily abandoned pursuit at the Musselshell River to wait for and reunite with Howard. With the Missouri River ahead, the Nez Perce considered the remaining miles to Canada a small hurdle compared to what they had been through the past 3 months.

*****THE ROUTE*****
MAPS 14, 15, AND 16

From the foot of the Absaroka Mountains to Judith Gap, the Nez Perce crossed the open prairie in a wide front. This method of travel afforded the Indians opportunities to gather game and find water and forage for their large horse herd. Although their general route is known, the Nez Perce's one-time pass through open country left few, if any, visible remains. Wagon roads, generally aligned east-west, were not used to any appreciable extent.

Little has been done to locate and interpret sites relating to the Nez Perce campaign in this section of the study area. The Canyon Creek Battle site and the Musselshell Crossing have been monumented as a result of local and State efforts. All of the historic sites and most of the proposed trail route are on private land. Existing public roads parallel the Nez Perce's route through this entire section, and commemoration by interpretive markers appears feasible. State and local historic societies should continue to work with landowners to locate, document, and interpret high potential-potential historic sites.

The National Register of Historic Places lists many sites in this section of the study area but none relating to the Nez Perce. Two historic routes, the Bozeman Trail (near Bridger, Montana) and the Lewis and Clark Trail (along the Yellowstone River), cross the Nez Perce Trail in this section.

SECTION 7
JUDITH GAP TO BEAR'S PAW
*****THE STORY*****

The Nez Perce pushed rapidly through Judith Gap northward. The plains country between the Judith and Snowy Mountains provided good water and forage which gave the Indians' horses a chance to regain their strength. Wild game was abundant. Some of the Nez Perce warriors knew this area as it was a traditional hunting ground. Trails to the Missouri were easily followed. They stopped briefly on September 21 at the Reed and Bowles Stockade to trade before heading north into the Missouri River Breaks. In just 36 hours, the Indians covered 70 miles through the rough breaks country, arriving at Cow Island crossing. This crossing provided easy access to the north bank of the Missouri. The Nez Perce had passed the last major physical barrier between them and Canada.

After establishing camp a few miles up Cow Creek, several Nez Perce rode back to the Cow Island steamboat landing for supplies. Denied their request for provisions, the Indians ran off the landing attendants, took what supplies they needed, and burned the rest.

The Nez Perce again placed Looking Glass at their head for the final leg of their flight. Again, against the warnings of Lean Elk, Looking Glass slowed the pace.

The Nez Perce were weary, and Howard and Sturgis were several days' journey behind. The Nez Perce did not know of Howard's message to Miles, who was fast closing upon them. The Missouri proved no obstacle to Miles. He chanced upon a steamboat at Carroll Landing and used it to carry his troops across.

Miles' cavalry with a large contingent of Sioux and Cheyennes swept down upon the Nez Perce's Snake Creek camp on September 30. They succeeded in running off most of the Nez Perce horses, but suffered 60 casualties in the initial assault. Seeing that direct assault was too costly, Miles laid siege to the camp.

Miles negotiated daily with the Nez Perce. Joseph of the Wallowa band was now the only chief left to speak for the Nez Perce. Toohoolhoolzote, Lean Elk, Ollokot, and Looking Glass were dead. White Bird managed to escape past military outposts and eventually got to Canada. When Howard and Miles stated through interpreters that there would be no more war, Joseph thought he could surrender on his own terms as an equal to the generals. These terms were: should the Nez Perce give up their arms, they would be returned to the Lapwai Reservation with what stock they had left. Joseph's famous surrender speech on October 5, 1877 is a fitting conclusion to the flight of the Nez Perce:

"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 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."

The apparent terms for surrender were never kept. Eight years passed before Joseph and 267 of the 400 Nez Perce who surrendered with him were allowed to return to the Pacific Northwest. Joseph himself was never again permitted to settle on his homeland or the reservation at Lapwai.

Thus ended one of the most dramatic and incredible episodes in Army-Indian warfare on the western frontier.

*****THE ROUTE*****
MAPS 16, 17, 18, AND 19

The Nez Perce paralleled the Carroll Trail, a freighting road between Helena and Carroll Landing, for several miles in the vicinity of present-day Lewistown. Once they turned north toward the Missouri, the Indians followed a series of open ridges along Dog Creek. West of Cow Island, the Nez Perce followed a long ridge lying immediately south of the river. This ridge ends in rough breaks just above the Cow Island crossing, but nevertheless provided easy

access to the river. Cow Island crossing was used for many years by migrating buffalo as well as the plains Indians.

North of the Missouri, the trail up the Cow Creek canyon bottom and the Cow Island wagon road provided direct access to the foothills of the Bear's Paw Mountains. Until ascending the glacial plains east of the Bear's Paw, the Nez Perce used canyon bottom trails to avoid the piercing winds and watchful eyes of Cheyenne scouts. Once on the high plains, the Nez Perce skirted the foothills of the Bear's Paw Mountains. The campsite on Snake Creek apparently was selected more for protection from an impending storm than for its virtues as a defensible camp since the Nez Perce thought the army was several days behind. Roads now parallel much of the route north of Judith Gap, but the historic landscape has changed little in the past 100 years.

The Missouri River Breaks high potential route segment begins east of Winifred and shows high potential route segment characteristics: exceptional scenery; presence of significant historic sites; opportunities for historic interpretation; and numerous recreation opportunities. Where not erased by modern-day uses, location of several trails and wagon roads used by the Nez Perce provides the element of route integrity. The wagon road along Cow Creek affords exceptional opportunities for primitive recreation based on historic interpretation and scenic viewing.

Local and State historical societies in eastern Montana pioneered location and preservation of significant historical sites. The only Nez Perce activity-related site interpreted through their efforts is the Chief Joseph Battleground of the Bear's Paw State Monument on Snake Creek. It is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Other campaign sites occur on Federal, State, and private lands, but no efforts have been made to preserve or interpret them. Other national register sites in this section relate to steamboat and freighting activities on the Missouri River, a designated Wild and Scenic River.

The Nez Perce National Historic Trail also intersects Bureau of Land Management's Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River corridor in the Cow Island area. This is unique in that three Congressional designations--Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail, Nez Perce National Historic Trail, and Upper Missouri National Wild & Scenic River--are focused in the same area along this high potential route segment.