



Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail (NPNHT) Comprehensive Plan (CP)

Brief Background History for the NPNHT

The NPNHT consists of many trails that have been in existence since prehistoric times. These trails were used by Native American peoples as travel and trade corridors between the Columbia River basin and the buffalo hunting grounds of the Great Plains. The NPNHT along with the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail were found to follow well defined and established trails when the European explorers arrived in the early 1800's.

The event for which the NPNHT is named centers around the 1877 Flight of the non-Treaty Nez Perce from their homelands while being pursued by the U.S. Army under the command of General Oliver Otis Howard along with Colonels John Gibbon, Samuel D. Sturgis and Nelson A. Miles. This Flight has been characterized as one of the most fascinating and sorrowful events in Western U.S. history.

Contrary to popular belief, the Flight was led by several Chiefs: Joseph, Lean Elk, Looking Glass, Ollokot, White Bird, and sub-chiefs. From June to October 1877, they led more than 750 Nez Perce men, women and children along with 2,000 horses, over nearly 1,200 miles through mountains, eluding the U.S. Army across much of the Pacific Northwest and Great Plains.

More than 200 people, led by Chief White Bird, did reach sanctuary in Canada. Nez Perce descendants still live in Canada today.

Around 400 people surrendered with Chief Joseph at the Bear Paw Battlefield. Rather than being returned to Idaho as promised, General William T. Sherman ordered the Nez Perce people to Fort Leavenworth in Kansas and later to Oklahoma. In 1885 (nearly 130 years ago) non-treaty Nez Perce returned to the Northwest and were re-settled on the Colville, Umatilla and Nez Perce reservations.

The NPNHT crosses landscapes that even today are historically unaltered from what was seen in 1877. Auto Tour routes parallel the Trail and interpretive sites have been developed along the routes.

The process to designate the Trail can be traced to 1961 when the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee established the Nez Perce Tribal Development Advisory Committee. The committee worked with National Park Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs officials to develop a proposal that in 1965 authorized the Nez Perce National Historical Park. In 1986, the NPNHT was authorized by Congress as a National Historic Trail administered by the U.S. Forest Service. The Comprehensive Management Plan was completed in 1990.

Many Native American tribes have an interest in the NPNHT as it passes through traditional hunting grounds and homelands. Another part of the NPNHT story is that through the National Historic Trail site certification process, designated sites in Washington, Kansas and Oklahoma are part of the NPNHT. Parks Canada has designated sites in cooperation with the NPNHT.

For additional information please visit the NPNHT website at: www.fs.usda.gov/npnht

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