

“The Historic Lolo Trail” by Lolo Trail Ranger Brenda Yankoviak from the  
Bitterroot Valley News, June 2003.

Take some time to experience the rich history of the Lolo Trail. More than a simple path, the Lolo Trail is a network of trails that formed a vital travel corridor across the northern Rocky Mountains. For the Nez Perce, it was known as the “*Road to the Buffalo*,” since this route provided access from west of the Bitterroot Mountains to the bison-rich plains of eastern Montana and Wyoming. The Salish, living east of the Bitterroot Mountains, called it the “*Trail to the Nez Perce*,” and it provided them access to the salmon-rich Lochsa and Clearwater Rivers.

Lewis and Clark were some of the first Europeans to use the route on their historic journey to the Pacific and back. They crossed the trail going west to the Pacific in September, 1805, and again on their return trip in late June, 1806. In the two centuries following Lewis and Clark, trappers, traders, miners, settlers, and hikers have all used the trail. The Lolo Trail is a National Historic Landmark and part of the Nez Perce and Lewis and Clark National Historic Trails.

In preparation for the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial, the Lolo National Forest has purchased land and obtained easements from private landowners to provide public access to the 14-mile section of the historic Lolo Trail. In Montana, this fourteen-mile section lies up Lolo Creek between Grave Creek and Lolo Pass. The trail continues into Idaho and can be accessed near Powell Ranger Station.

Interpretive signs and points of interest are located at various points along Highway 12 to provide information on both the Nez Perce and Lewis and Clark National Historic Trails. The Lolo National Forest recently hired a Lolo Trail Ranger, Brenda Yankoviak, who will schedule and present interpretive programs at campgrounds and picnic sites along Highway 12, and patrol and monitor historic sites on the Trail.

Please be aware this trail is managed as “self-discovery” and will not be maintained to recreational trail standards. The trail can be extremely steep, slick, and narrow. The goal of the Lolo National Forest is to protect and preserve this historic artifact and educate the public about its historical significance. Remember that Native Americans traveled the Lolo Trail for centuries before Lewis and Clark passed through, and it is very important to respect their sacred sites along the trail.