

Yellowstone National Park to Canyon Creek, Montana



# Experience the Nez Perce Trail



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7

## AUTO TOUR



# NEZ PERCE TRAIL

## Yellowstone National Park to Canyon Creek, Montana

Maps in this brochure are for general orientation only and are not to scale. Please use a US Forest Service or other detailed topographic map for accurate and specific information.



**AUTO TOUR ROUTE**  
with Point of Interest



**ADVENTURE ROUTE**  
with Point of Interest



**Nez Perce National Historic Trail**



**▲ Forest Service Campground**   **🏠 Forest Service Rental**

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# The Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail

**D**esignated by Congress in 1986, the entire Nez Perce National Historic Trail stretches 1,170 miles from the Wallowa Valley of eastern Oregon to the plains of north-central Montana.

This segment of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail, **Yellowstone to Canyon Creek** is one of six available tours. As you travel this historic trail, you will see highway signs marking the official Auto Tour route.

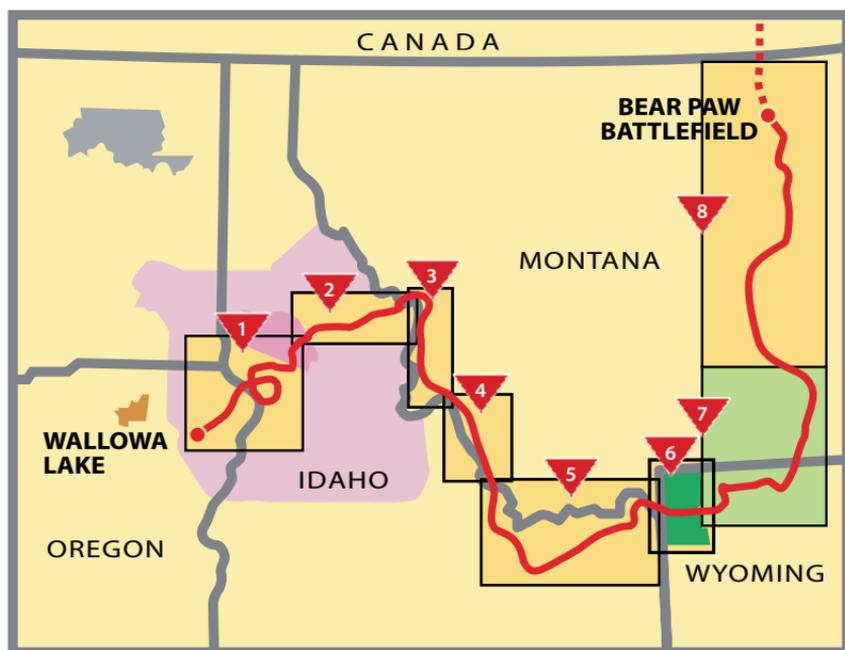
Each designated Auto Tour route stays on all-weather roads passable by all types of vehicles. Adventure Routes are an alternative for those seeking the most authentic historic route. They are often on gravel or dirt roads, so plan ahead.



Check weather and road conditions before embarking on your journey.

## Current Auto Tour Opportunities

See the available Auto Tour brochure for each trail segment indicated on map below for specific route information. Auto Tour 6 is currently in development and will be available in 2011. Auto Tour 8 is currently in development and will be available in 2012.



- Nez Perce National Historic Trail
- Yellowstone National Park/Canyon Creek, Montana
- Trail Segments (Auto Tour brochure available)
- Traditional Nez Perce Tribe Homelands
- Nez Perce Indian Reservation
- Colville Indian Reservation
- Yellowstone National Park
- Umatilla Indian Reservation



# The Nez Perce Flight of 1877

## The story up to this point

The summer of 1877 brought tragedy to the Nez Perce (or Ni-Mii-Puu as they called themselves). Many of their tribe had been removed from homelands to a reservation. Now the U.S. Army was ordered to put the remaining Nez Perce bands there. Most objected because they had neither sold their land to the U.S. government nor signed the Nez Perce Treaty of 1863. Nez Perce leaders had actually decided to move to the reservation but certain events caused them to leave the area to avoid further confrontation with the US military.

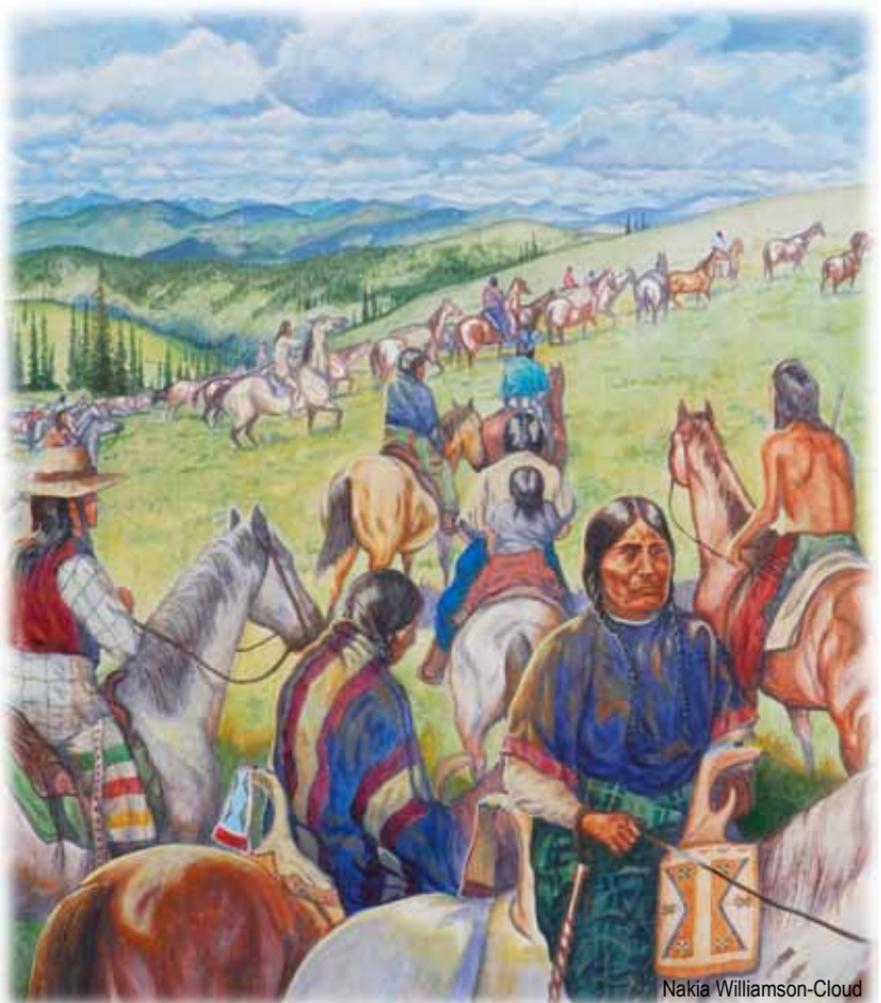
The move onto the reservation of more than 800 people and 2,000 horses was to be peaceful. But, warriors who killed Idaho settlers as revenge for earlier murders caused the Army to pursue the Nez Perce. The trek of the non-treaty Nez Perce, became a flight marked by skirmishes and battles, the last of which stopped them more than 1,000 miles away from their homeland and less than 40 miles from safety in Canada.

Events set in motion that summer forced these Nez Perce from their homeland into north-central Idaho. After a battle at Whitebird Canyon, they were pursued by General O.O. Howard across Idaho and Montana. Following the well-worn Lolo Trail across the rugged Bitterroot Mountains, they entered Montana near Lolo Pass. They moved without conflict south through the Bitterroot Valley to the Big Hole Valley, where the Army caught them by surprise and killed Nez Perce men, women and children. After that, the Nez Perce

moved as quickly as they could through more mountains and through Yellowstone National Park hoping to enlist the help of the Crow people.

**W**hile in Yellowstone National Park, the Nez Perce encountered several parties of tourists. By this time they were in need of supplies and many of them were intent on revenge for the earlier battles. Several of the encounters ended in death for those they met.

**B**y September of 1877, Colonel Samuel Sturgis and his men joined in the pursuit, waiting for the Nez Perce to emerge from the park on the east side of the Absaroka Mountains. The Nez Perce eluded Army troops, passing through the deep, narrow canyon of the Clarks Fork on the Yellowstone River. At Canyon Creek, near Billings they engaged in another battle with the Army before continuing their flight north toward Canada.



Nakia Williamson-Cloud

# Chronology of Events

The events of 1877 symbolizes the dramatic theft of land and human response from that crime that shaped the West and its people. A native people were forced to flee their homelands in a futile attempt to avoid war and save their traditional ways. Immigrated European people found themselves fighting neighbors who had been their friends for many years. Traditional trails, which had long been a source of joy and sustenance, became a trail of flight and conflict, a trail of sorrow.

**The events in this time line coincide with the sites seen on this auto tour: September 1 - 15, 1877**

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>September 1</b>  | Colonel Samuel Sturgis parks his command near Clarks Fork Canyon.   |
| <b>September 6</b>  | Sturgis moves his camp closer to Heart Mountain.  |
| <b>September 7</b>  | General Howard passes Cooke City.   |
| <b>September 8</b>  | Howard's scouts meet Sturgis's couriers. Sturgis heads to the Shoshone River. The Nez Perce descend into Clarks Fork Canyon.  |
| <b>September 9</b>  | Howard camps at the foot of Dead Indian Hill. Sturgis reaches the Shoshone, near Cody, does not find the Nez Perce, and heads north into the Absarokas.                         |
| <b>September 10</b> | Howard descends into Clarks Fork Canyon.  |
| <b>September 11</b> | Sturgis catches up with Howard near Belfry.   |
| <b>September 12</b> | The Nez Perce cross the Yellowstone River near Laurel.  |
| <b>September 13</b> | Nez Perce warriors take control of a stagecoach. The Battle of Canyon Creek occurs when Colonel Samuel Sturgis catches up with the Nez Perce. Sturgis camps on the battlefield. |
| <b>September 15</b> | Sturgis camps on the Musselshell and decides not to continue pursuing the Nez Perce.  |

— **AS YOU TRAVEL THE TRAIL** —

**The trail memorializes not only  
those who died during the flight,  
but also those who survived.**

**Their tragic journey marked the end  
of freedom for the Nez Perce  
and opened their lands to settlement.**

**As you travel this historic trail  
between Yellowstone National Park  
and Canyon Creek, whether you drive,  
ride or walk,  
you will gain an understanding  
and appreciation  
for the difficulty of their journey  
and the tremendous odds  
the Nez Perce had to face and overcome.**



# Experience the Nez Perce Trail: How do I get there?

As you exit Yellowstone through the Northeast park entrance, headed toward Cooke City on US Highway 212, you will be following the military thread of the story. The Nez Perce, avoiding miners in Cooke City, exited the park 10 to 12 miles south of here at an unknown location.

Two companies of troops positioned themselves to overtake the Nez Perce. Those of General Howard approached from the north and Colonel Sturgis, from the south, to trap the Nez Perce between them as they exited Yellowstone. The Nez Perce evaded both groups and headed north up Clarks Fork on the Yellowstone River.

The tour follows Wyoming 296 approximating the route taken by Howard's troops south across Clarks Fork Canyon and then swings north on Wyoming State Highway 120 to follow along the Clarks Fork to where Howard and Sturgis finally met, and then up the Yellowstone River into Montana and north on U.S. Highway 310 to Laurel. From there a side trip to Billings, then back to Laurel and north to the site of the eventual encounter between the Nez Perce and Sturgis' troops at Canyon Creek.



## 1

## Cooke City to Colter Pass



**From Cooke City, Montana follow US Hwy 212 for about 4 miles to a wayside at the top of Colter Pass.**

On September 7 General Howard and his men, passing through Cooke City, noted that armed miners had gathered there, armed and manned a stockade, to barricade themselves against the Nez Perce. The events that unfolded the past couple of weeks in Yellowstone had everyone on edge. But the Nez Perce were actually making their way through the rugged Absarokas 10 to 15 miles south of here.

Colonel Samuel D. Sturgis was waiting near the mouth of Clarks Fork Canyon hoping to catch the Nez Perce as they emerged from the park. General Howard, approaching from the northwest, hoped to trap them between their two forces.

*Chases after Indians in so vast a country where we must go with a limited quantity of supplies is but a chance in a thousand to hit the mark you are aiming at. 'Tis terribly hard on horses and men – and but poor satisfaction at best should you gain the end."*

– Capt. Frederick Benteen, August 11, 1877

*Every white man in those mountains could be counted our enemy.*

– Yellow Wolf

*In case I should learn that the hostiles had moved up the East Fork of the Yellowstone [Lamar River], then I would move up the cañon of Clark's Fork, going on if necessary until we should encounter them in the Soda Butte Pass; otherwise I would establish my camp near Heart Mountain, and from that central point observe the outlets both on the Stinking Water and Clark's Fork, all depending on the information I might receive in the mean time.*

– Colonel Sturgis

## 2

## Chief Joseph Scenic Highway to Crandall Creek Bridge

Once you have crossed Colter Pass, you are in the drainage of the Clarks Fork River. Head southeast on Wyoming State Highway 296, *Chief Joseph Scenic Highway*. The Nez Perce route closely parallels most of this highway, beginning at Crandall Creek (Milepost 8).

Attempts by Howard and Sturgis to communicate were interrupted and met with disastrous results as the Nez Perce had killed the messengers. This left Sturgis wondering if he had missed the Nez Perce and should have been stationed instead on the Shoshone River (Stinking Water) to the south. He left the Clarks Fork and traveled south, second guessing the earlier conclusion about where the Nez Perce would emerge.

In the meantime General Howard's troops were moving south. When General Howard crossed Crandall Creek on September 8 he intersected the trail of the Nez Perce.

*Dead couriers, miners, and prospectors were found in this vicinity in fearful frequency, showing how difficult it had been for Sturgis and me to communicate.*

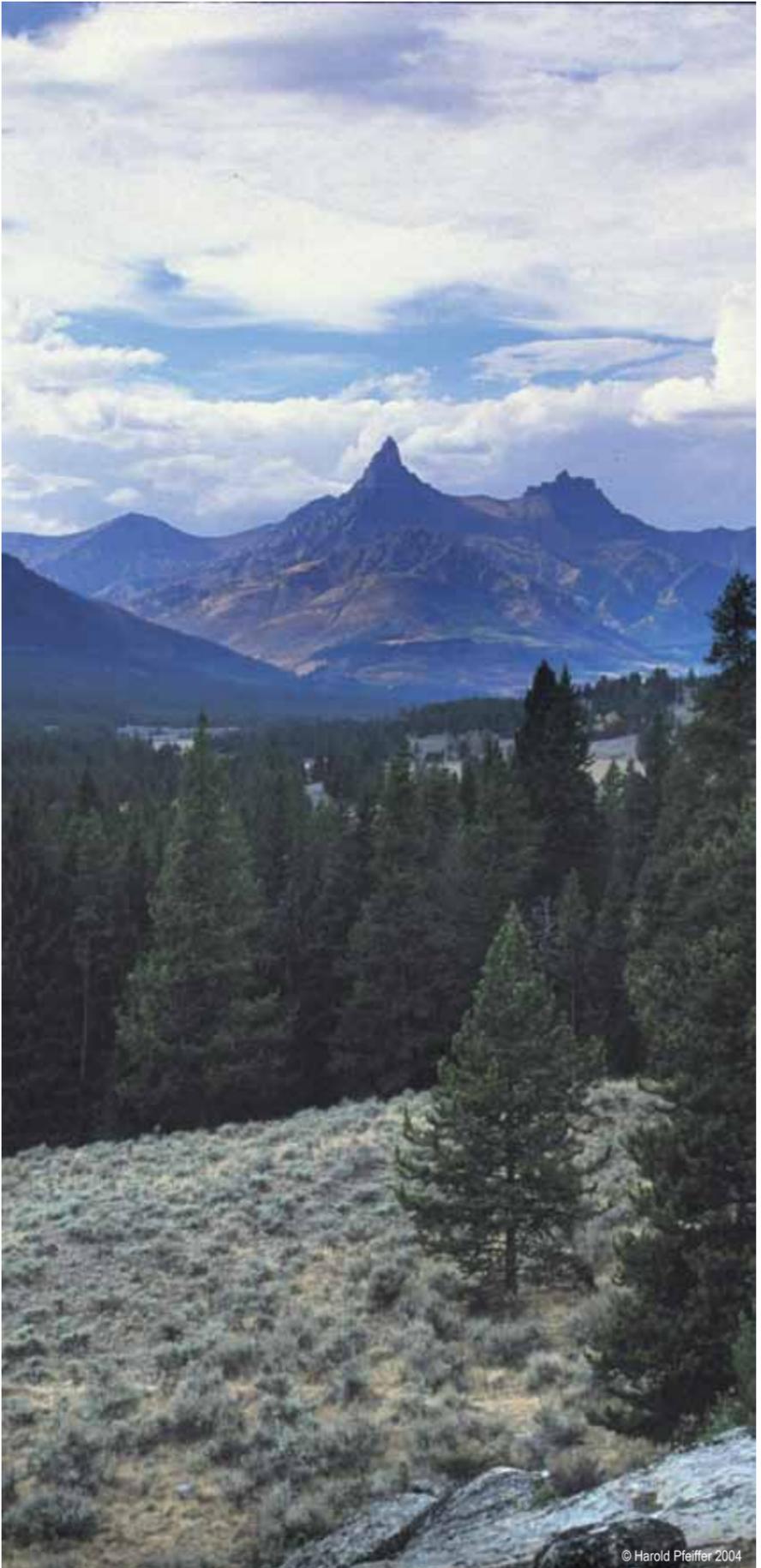
– General Oliver Otis Howard

*The Indians' big trail, now in plain view, swept down the valley, and not a soul was in sight for ten miles and more.*

– General Oliver Otis Howard



296



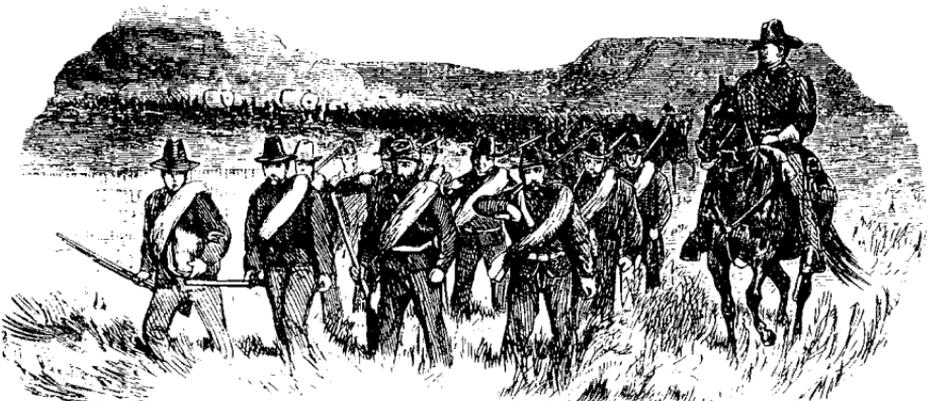
View of Pilot and Index Peak, Wyoming from Chief Joseph Scenic Highway

## Crandall Creek Bridge to Sunlight Creek

From the Crandall Creek Bridge, continue southeast on Wyoming State Highway 296. A pullout in 13.6 miles offers an excellent view of the Clarks Fork Canyon through which the Nez Perce were expected to pass. Continue for 1.6 miles to Sunlight Creek. Here you may join the Adventurous Traveler for a short side trip to the Sunlight Picnic Area or continue to Sunlight Creek.

Howard's troops took the Lodgepole Trail from Crandall Creek and probably crossed Sunlight Creek about 5 miles upstream from here. Sturgis, however, could not find a trail leading from the park and was convinced that the immediate country was impassable.

Troops, gathering intelligence from the top of a nearby mountain, had seen the tribesmen moving and had assured Sturgis ".....that from the point where the Indians had disappeared behind the mountain range, it was altogether impossible for them to cross over to Clark's Fork, and that they must necessarily debouch on the Stinking Water." This led him to move south to the Stinking Water (Shoshone River) in hopes of intercepting the Nez Perce.

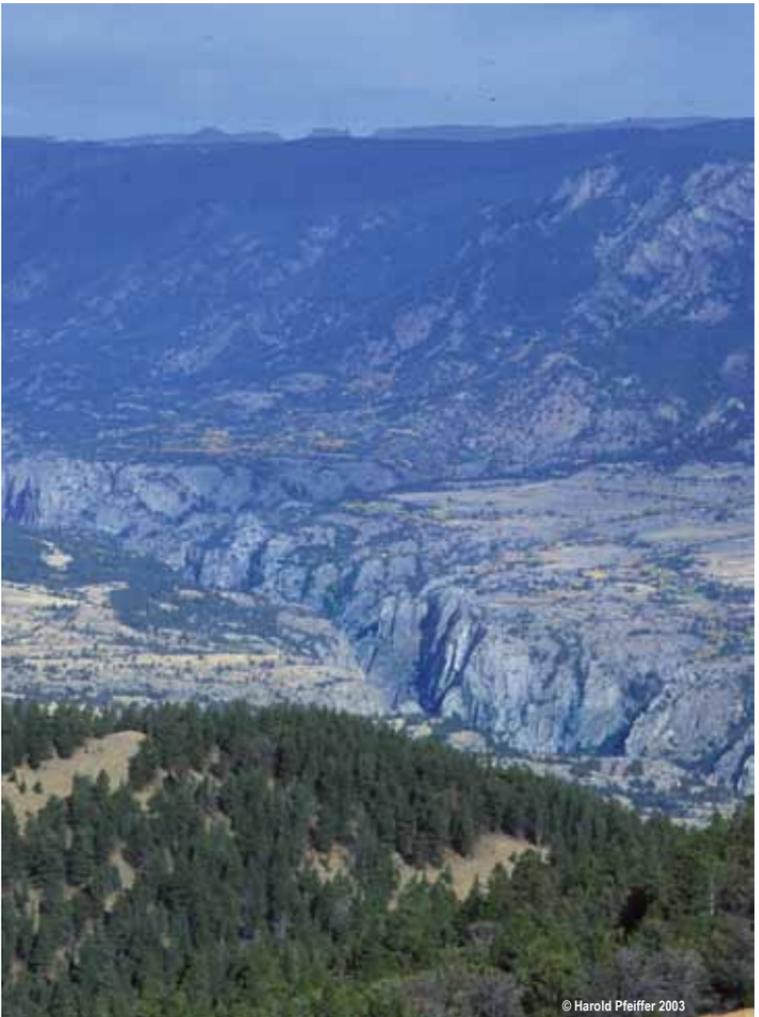


## 4

## Sunlight Creek to Sunlight Picnic Area Side Trip (2.8 mile round trip)

The highway here bridges a 350 foot deep chasm created by Sunlight Creek. Since this gorge was a formidable obstacle, a short side trip to the Sunlight Picnic Area presents a more accessible crossing of the creek.

**Backtrack by driving west on the *Chief Joseph Scenic Highway* for 0.5 mile. Turn south on *Park County Road 7GR*, which switchbacks down to cross Sunlight Creek in 0.7 mile. The Sunlight Picnic Area is just 0.1 mile farther on. Return to *Chief Joseph Scenic Highway* at Sunlight Creek and continue with the Mainstream Traveler.**



Sunlight Creek Gorge

© Harold Pfeiffer 2003

## Sunlight Creek to Dead Indian Pass (Wyoming 296 to Wyoming 120 to Park County 1AB)

**From the Scenic Area east of the bridge over Sunlight Creek, continue east for 2.1 miles to Dead Indian Campground. From Dead Indian Campground, continue uphill. In 6.5 miles, pull over for a view of the Clarks Fork Canyon. Continue on for 0.9 mile to Dead Indian Pass. An overlook with wayside signs tells of the origin of the name of the pass and the unfolding events.**

The site of Dead Indian Campground has always been a popular camping area as it was for the Nez Perce and the scouts that sought them that September.

*On the 10th we came to a hostile camp which had just been abandoned, at the base of the last mountain necessary to climb before reaching the buffalo plains at Heart Mountain.*

Frank Parker (scout and war correspondent),  
September 16, 1877

A wounded elderly Nez Perce remained behind but he was discovered by the scouts a short distance up the creek from the campground. Although they had been told not to kill prisoners, one of the scouts disobeyed those instructions.

*Got there just in time to see a Nez Perce breathe his last. He had been wounded in the hip and had been left by his comrades who had evidently left here this morning... Sumner said he rode up near where he lay and the Indian threw the robe off that covered him and raised up in a setting posture. Sumner waited no longer but jerked his pistol and shot him through the chest.*



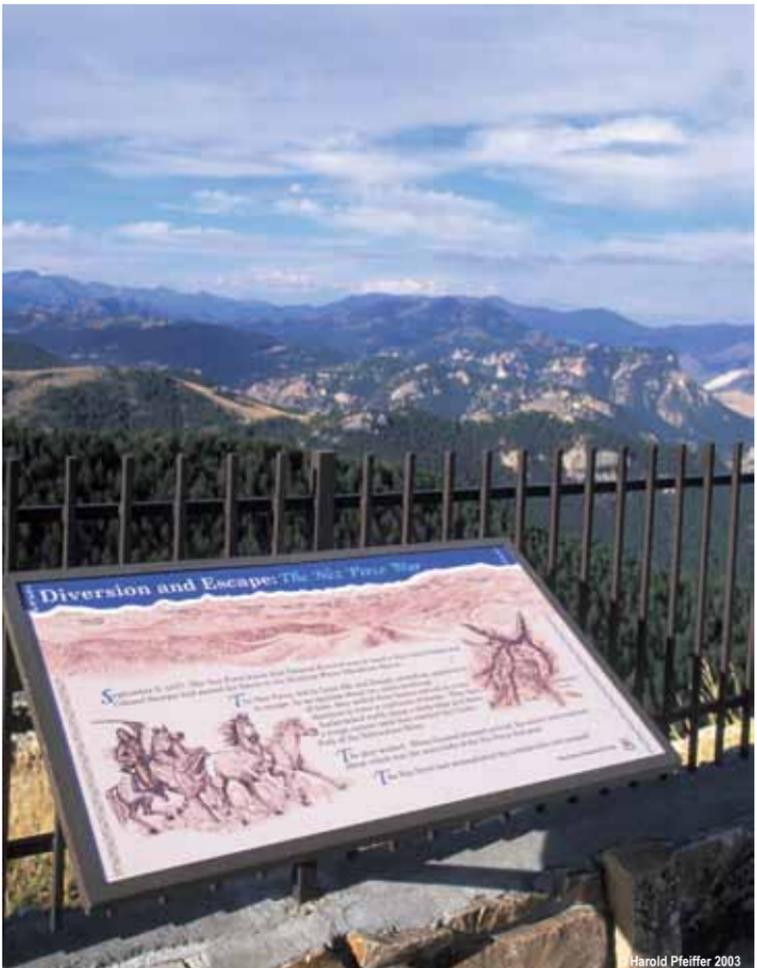
S. G. Fisher

S.G. Fisher (scout), September 9, 1877

Having gained the summit, the Nez Perce followed the trail south toward Stinking Water for about two miles then rode randomly milling their horses to confuse the scouts and doubled back on their trail heading north again and following along the steep canyon.

*The scouts scattered out in every direction to hunt for their trail. I finally stumbled on it. Instead of going out of the basin on the open plain, they had turned North, passing along the steep side of the Mountain through the timber for several miles... The trail led us through a rough canyon very narrow in places.*

S.G Fisher (scout), September 10, 1877



Wayside sign at Dead Indian Pass overlook

## 6

## Dead Indian Pass to Clarks Fork Canyon

Continue on 11.2 miles to the junction with Wyoming State Highway 120. Just before you reach the junction, the southern portal to the Chief Joseph Scenic Byway shows a map of the route of the Nez Perce. Proceed north on Wyoming State Highway 120 for 12.6 miles to the junction with Park County Road 1AB.

Troops throughout Montana had been alerted to the movements of the Nez Perce and an all out effort was assembled to converge from several directions to halt their progress.

*The Nez Perce.....may continue down the River to the bridge at the forks, go up the East fork and so over into Clarks fork or one of several passes leading towards the Yellowstone or Bighorn. East of the Yellowstone River and Lake, elk and deer are plentiful and both are filled to quantities of large trout. Your best and surest plan is to cling to the trail to the last, as you may rest assured other troops will sooner or later get in front of these Indians hampered as they are with their wounded and large herds.*



General Oliver Otis Howard

Colonel Gibbons to General Howard,  
August 26, 1877



120



Colonel Nelson A. Miles

Courtesy of Montana Historical Society  
Research Center - Photograph Archives,  
Helena, Montana (943-884)

*With six companies of your regiment and the Artillery Detachment [a bronze twelve-pounder Napoleon gun] with your command you will proceed by rapid marches, via the valley of the Yellowstone and Musselshell Rivers to the vicinity of Judith Gap, sending forward rapidly to Fort Ellis, M.T., to obtain possible information regarding the movements of the hostile band of Nez Percés...*

Colonel Nelson A. Miles to Colonel Samuel Sturgis, August 12, 1877

Scouts gathered information about the movements of the Nez Perce relaying that information back to the troops over rugged terrain and hostile encounters making communication difficult. Ultimately it fell to the judgment and intuition of the army leaders to decide the best course of action.

*What hurt us worse than all else, was the discovery that the Indian trail entered the valley hardly more than a mile or two above the camp from which we had so recently started on that night march [September 8]. Had we remained where we were the Indians would almost have walked into our arms.*

Trooper Theodore W. Goldin, years later

Butte Overlook at Dead Indian Pass, Wyoming



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## 7

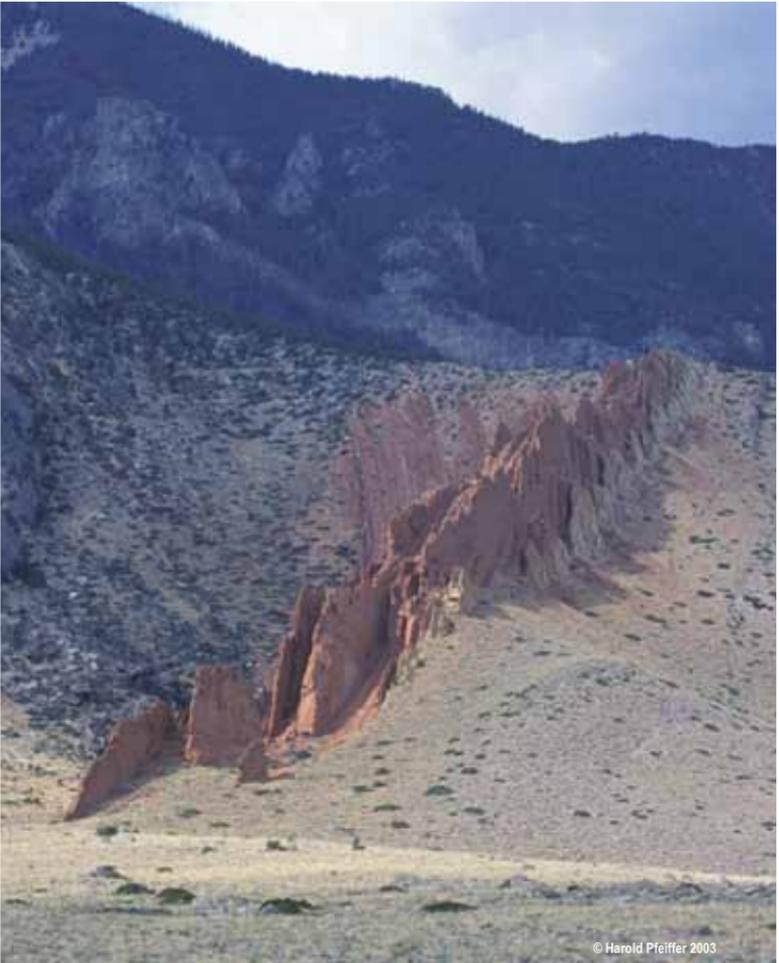
## Clarks Fork Canyon

**Between Milepost 123 and Milepost 124 look to the west toward the mouth of Clarks Fork Canyon.**

**I**t was about half way between the current highway and the canyon that Sturgis and his men camped, waiting to intercept the Nez Perce before they turned south to the Shoshone River.

*Waiting a full day longer than the time agreed upon for the return of our scouts, the Colonel became anxious, and dispatched two scouting parties... with orders to penetrate into the range and try and discover traces of our overdue scouts.*

*– Pvt. Theodore Goldin*



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Sandstone outcrop, Clark's Fork Canyon

## 8

## Clarks Fork Canyon Side Trip

### Park County 1AB to Clarks Fork Canyon

**Just after crossing the Clarks Fork on State Highway 120 turn west at mile post 128 on Park County 1AB to see where the Nez Perce made their daring escape. After traveling 3.3 miles bear southwest on Park County 8VC. Continue 4.4 miles to the dead-end at the Clarks Fork Canyon. Here you may want to hike up the canyon or formulate your own opinion about the most likely route taken by the Nez Perce. Return the way you came to Wyoming State Highway 120.**

*My command, discovering Joseph's ruse, kept the trail which Sturgis had been so near, but had not seen, and, finally, slid down the canyon, many a horse, in his weakness, falling and blocking the way. The mouth of this canyon, which debouches in to Clark's Valley, was not more than twenty feet across from high wall to high wall. And one may imagine the scene of cavalry, infantry and pack-mules crowding through it, and admire the quick wit of an Indian who had the hardihood to try the experiment, and break the almost impassable roadway.*

– General Oliver Otis Howard

### Hiker

Clarks Fork Canyon (11 miles round trip)

Map: USGS quad, Deep Lake, Wyoming.

This is a two and a half hour hike up a jeep trail along the Clarks Fork River. Although some may be tempted, this route is not well suited to vehicle travel. Large and small boulders, dips and gulches, and not many chances to turn around will ruin your tires and offer little opportunity to travel faster than a walker.

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## Clarks Fork Canyon to Belfry, Montana



**Junction of Wyoming State Highway 120 and Park County 1AB to Belfry, Montana. From the junction of Wyoming 120 and Park County 1AB, proceed north for 18.5 miles on Wyoming 120 which becomes Montana State Highway 72 in Belfry.**

On the evening of September 11 General Howard was camped on the Clarks Fork just a few miles south of Belfry when he was finally joined by a frustrated Sturgis. According to a witness “[Sturgis was] so bitterly chagrined at the escape of the Indians from one of the best laid traps of nature and man that he exclaimed: - ‘Poor as I am I would give \$1,000 if I had not left this place.’” Perhaps to make up for his error in judgment, Sturgis roused his hungry men early the next morning and set off on a quick march up the Clarks Fork to the Yellowstone after the Nez Perce.

*We had nothing to eat, so we merely drew our belts one hole tighter, took a drink of water, threw the saddles on our horses... and hit the trail.*

– Unnamed trooper

By the time Sturgis’ men made camp for the night they had been in the saddle for eighteen hours and covered more than sixty miles.

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## Belfry to Bridger, Montana

**From the junction of Montana State Highway 308 with Montana 72 in Belfry, proceed north on Montana 72 for 10.8 miles to the junction with U.S. Highway 310. Turn north on U.S. 310 continuing for 1 mile to the highway historic sign in Bridger, which mentions the Nez Perce retreat.**

At this point the Nez Perce were only a few hours ahead of Sturgis, camped on the Yellowstone River. The Nez Perce had long hoped they might find refuge



Clark Fork River near Belfry, Montana

with their old friends the Crows but it was evident by this time that the Crows had sided with the government. Politically they could not afford to fight the U.S. Army. The Nez Perce had to keep moving. The only option now was to try to join Sitting Bull in Canada.

*A few Crow Indian warriors joined us at a point on Clark's Fork thirty or forty miles above where it empties into the Yellowstone... The Crows attached themselves to Fisher's little band of Bannock scouts. Other Crows arrived. Within a day or two they greatly outnumbered the Bannacks. The whole body of Indian special detectives were going here and there, in groups, presumably searching for the enemy. Most likely, they were searching for loose horses – or for anything else that was loose and desirable and conveniently transportable.*

– Pvt. William White

*I do not understand how the Crows could think to help the soldiers. They were fighting against their best friends!*

– Yellow Wolf

While the Crows may have felt compelled to join the government, their sympathies may have still been with the Nez Perce.

*An old Indian woman and her daughter came across the trail of Joseph and his band and saw a horse tied in the brush and riding down there found a young woman had dropped out of Joseph's band and confined herself and was trying to wrap her baby up and join the band. The old woman and daughter coaxed the woman to go home with them and not try to overtake Joseph, which she did. Three or four years afterwards the government learned that there was a Nez Perce renegade Indian among the Crows and ordered her sent in exile with the others.*

– C.T. Stranahan  
(agent for Nez Perce Reservation)



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## Bridger to Laurel, Montana

**From Bridger, continue north on U.S. Highway 310 to the junction with U.S. Highway 212. Turn north on U.S. 212 and U.S. 310 for 10.5 miles to Laurel Riverside Park on the south bank of the Yellowstone River. In downtown Laurel, a statue of Chief Joseph stands on the southeast corner of First Avenue and Old U.S. 10.**

While most of the Nez Perce crossed the Yellowstone River near Laurel and headed north toward Canyon Creek, a couple of raiding parties followed the Yellowstone River to the small community of Coulson in present day Billings. They burned some buildings and haystacks, stole a few horses, killed two men, and hijacked a stagecoach. When Sturgis and his men crossed the river several hours later they could see the smoke in the distance.

*Early in the forenoon we forded the river, where there was ample evidence that our wily foes had crossed, apparently many hours before... The old colonel [Sturgis]...gave the order to go into camp....*

*Captain Benteen...picked out the most desirable place possible, and we swung into line, dismounted and were just preparing to unsaddle, when one of our scouts came galloping into camp, shouting at the top of his voice: "Injuns, Injuns! Big fight and fire down river!" One hasty glance confirmed his report, as dark clouds of smoke could be seen rolling up, and now and then came the faint, distant sound of rifle shots to our ears.*

– Pvt. Theodore Goldin



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Yellowstone River, near Laurel, Montana



© Harold Pfeiffer 2003

Chief Joseph Monument, Laurel, Montana



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## Laurel to Billings

**From Laurel turn east onto I-90. In 8.8 miles you will cross Canyon Creek between mileposts 442 and 443. Another 4.6 miles brings you to exit 447, S. Billings Avenue.**

### **Exit 447 to Riverfront Park**

**This side trip will take you to the site of a ranch raided by the Nez Perce scouts. Turn south on S. Billings Avenue for 0.6 mile to Riverfront Park on the bank of the Yellowstone River. Drive into the park and at the T, turn north and follow the road around little Josephine Lake for 0.6 mile to an information plaque and the site of the Cochran homestead.**

Early on the morning of September 13 with the main party of Nez Perce camped near Canyon Creek a group of warriors headed south into the Yellowstone Valley to forage for supplies.

Joseph Cochran had been farming here less than a year. He was upriver doing some logging. Two trappers, Clinton Dills and W.M. Sumner, were camped at his place eating dinner when six Nez Perce raiders rode up. Thinking these were friendly Crows the trappers made no move to protect themselves and were shot and killed.

*The damage done by the Nez Percés on the Yellowstone is as follows: Stone & Rouse's stage station, hay and corrals burnt; Ed. Forrest's hay burned and stock stolen; at Josephine Tree two men killed (Clinton and Sumner), camp burned and fourteen head of horses stolen; near McAdow's mill the houses of Egestone and Ralson were burned, no damage done the mill or property of McAdow excepting the loss of three ponies.*

*– Rocky Mountain Husbandman, October 4, 1877*

**Leaving Riverfront Park, turn north on S. Billings Ave for 0.5 mile. Turn east on South Frontage Road. In 2.1 miles it changes its name to Garden Avenue. Continue on Garden Avenue for 1.2 miles to 27th Street. Continue for the Adventure Traveler side trip to Coulson Park or return to I-90.**



Canyon Creek, Montana



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## Exit 450 to Coulson Park

(4 miles round trip)

**Travelers who take this side trip will see the site of the town of Coulson, Montana Territory, where the Nez Perce raiders burned a saloon and a house.**

**From the junction of 27th Street and Garden Avenue (0.1 mile south of exit 450) proceed north on Garden Avenue for 0.2 mile to Belknap Street. Turn west on Belknap for 1 block and the north on Charlene Street. In 0.3 mile the pavement ends at a railroad track beside the PP&L coal fired electric generating plant which is situated on the original old site of Coulson. Continue for 1 more mile, alongside the Interstate, to the park entrance.**



Coulson Park  
along the Yellowstone River,  
Billings Montana

**At the farther (east) end of the park, 0.4 mile away, sits a boulder with a plaque that marks the townsite of Coulson.**

**A**t the settlement of Coulson Nez Perce warriors burned a shack and exchanged shots with residents secured in hastily constructed rifle pits.

They continued on to near the present town of Huntley before returning back to rejoin the main assemblage moving up Canyon Creek.

**Return to the junction of 27th Street and Garden Avenue and turn west on 27th Street for 0.1 mile to the Interstate Highway 90 overpass. Proceed west on I-90 back to Laurel.**

*The town of Coulson was a stop for steamboats traveling up the Yellowstone River. However when the Montana & Minnesota Land Company acquired land for railroad development in 1877, they ignored Coulson and platted the new town of Billings several miles to the west. As Billings flourished, Coulson died.*



Nez Perce tribal members

## Laurel to Canyon Creek Monument

Here the Mainstream Traveler follows the route taken by the Seventh Cavalry as they headed due north to intercept the Nez Perce caravan.

**From Interstate Highway 90 continue north on U.S. Highway 310 into Laurel and past the statue of Chief Joseph. Continue up First Avenue until it changes its name to Montana State Highway 532. It is 8.3 miles from I-90 to the Canyon Creek pavilion and monument at the end of the pavement.**

The main body of Nez Perce was moving up Canyon Creek while their scouts watched from the top of the bluffs as they passed. The warriors who had been in the vicinity of what is now Billings were returning to the main party as the military was heading north from Laurel.

Just a little south of where I-90 runs today, the stagecoach road, from the Tongue River (Miles City) and points east, passed on its way to Helena. A stage station was located between the interstate and the river, west of Canyon Creek. In fact, a stagecoach had pulled in just moments before the Nez Perce raiders appeared.

*The stage had just arrived, when the lookout discovered a hostile war party dashing down the river, and everybody made a run for the thick willows with hostile bullets flying around them. There were half a dozen stage passengers, most of whom struck off afoot up the river, and eventually reached some settlement. One of the passengers was a dentist, and the hostiles scattered his gripsack full of store teeth and tools of torture all over the ground.*

– John W. Redington (scout)

About four miles north of Laurel, as you crest a ridge you see the flat of Canyon Creek. It may have been from this vantage point that the troops saw the Nez Perce moving up Canyon Creek with the stagecoach about half a mile behind.

*Although the hostile trail led down the Yellowstone, we saw Indian scouts watching us from the bluffs to the north, and soon they charged down. But our outfit sent them to charging backward, and when they had driven them over the bluffs we caught sight of what was on the other side, and there was the whole hostile outfit right under us, strung along the benches and bottoms of Canyon creek.... Half a mile in their rear was a big stage coach with its four horses trotting along, and on the box was an Indian driver, with nearly half a dozen other Indians squatting on the roof, with their war horses hitched behind.*

*When these hostiles saw us they quickly unhitched the stage horses, mounted their cayuses, and dashed into skirmish line flanking their outfit, which had what looked like more than 2000 head of horses. The old stage was abandoned in the sagebrush.*

– John W. Redington (scout)

**F**or the rest of that day the Nez Perce warriors and military battled while the women, children and elders managed to get themselves and the herd of horses out of the canyon and headed north.

*Other soldiers horseback, like cavalry, were off to one side. Away ahead of the walking soldiers. They tried to get the women and children. But some warriors, not many, were too quick. Firing from a bluff, they killed and crippled a few of them, turning them back.*

– Yellow Wolf



Yellow Wolf (Hemene Moxmox)

*A Squad of Cavalry came up the gulch opposite where we were but did not stop long as the Indians opened a real hot fire on them and they retreated down the gulch. We still tried to hold the ground, but the reds got so thick in the rocks above us that we could not raise our head to shoot without a dozen shots being fired at us.*

– S.G. Fisher (scout), September 13, 1877

The battle had resulted in three dead and twelve wounded soldiers. The next day the Sturgis command hurried after the Nez Perce but failed to catch them and a couple of days later gave up the chase.

*Making our wounded as comfortable as possible and posting a strong guard, the idea of making night march in pursuit of our enemy having been abandoned...we rolled up in our blankets..., and we were soon sleeping soundly, but were awakened some time in the night by sharp challenges and loud talking near one of the outposts. Soon some two hundred young Crow warriors came dashing into camp, shouting and singing, and from that time on until early dawn sleep was an impossibility, as between the beating of their tom-toms, their shrill war whoops as they danced their war dances, pandemonium raged, but at the first peep of dawn they were off, vowing to overtake and annihilate the enemy.*

– Pvt. Theodore Goldin



Canyon Creek Monument site

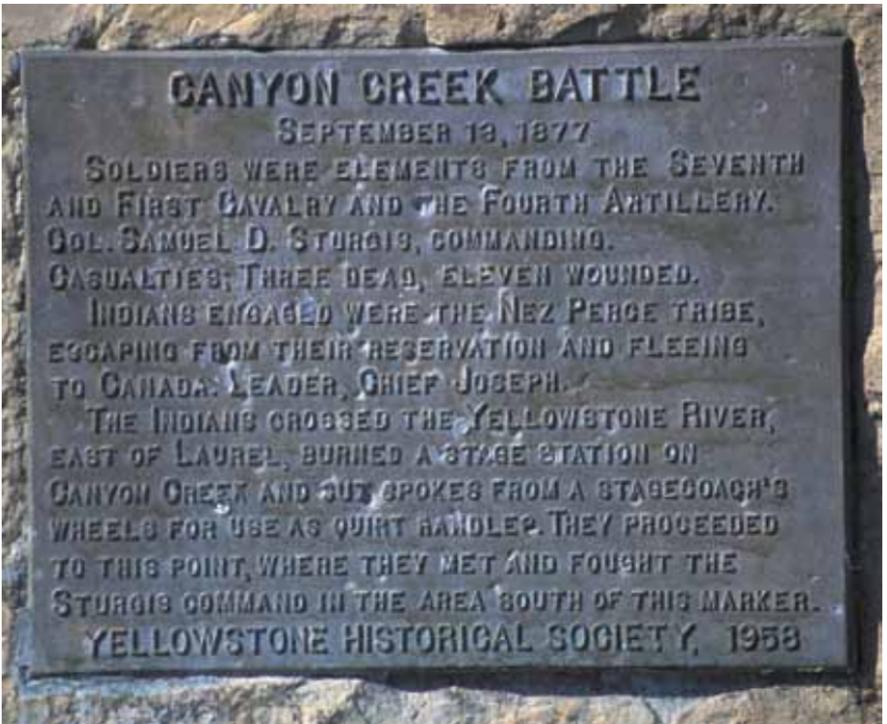
## 15

## Canyon Creek Monument to Broadview

From the end of the pavement at the Canyon Creek Monument proceed north on Buffalo Trail Road. In 7.9 miles you will cross Montana State Highway 302. Continue north for 16.8 miles to Broadview. Turn south on Montana State Highway 3 and return the 31.8 miles to Billings or Interstate Highway 90. Turn north to pick up the story in the next Autotour beginning at Broadview as the Nez Perce continue north toward Canada.

*Some of us stayed back to watch the enemies. I looked one way and saw strange Indians... I rode closer. Eeh! Crows! A new tribe fighting Chief Joseph. Many snows the Crows had been our friends. But now, like the Bitterroot Salish [Flatheads], turned enemies. My heart was just like fire.*

– Yellow Wolf



Canyon Creek Monument

# This Trail Is a Sacred Trust for All Americans.

*“We, the surviving Nez Perces, want to leave our hearts, memories, hallowed presence as a never-ending revelation to the story of the event of 1877. These trails will live in our hearts.*

*“We want to thank all who visit these sacred trails, that they will share our innermost feelings. Because their journey makes this an important time for the present, past and future.”*

*– Frank B. Andrews, Nez Perce descendant*

**For more information on the Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail visit on the web at [www.fs.fed.us/npnht](http://www.fs.fed.us/npnht) or contact:**

NPNHT Administrator  
12730 Highway 12  
Orofino, ID 83544  
208-476-8334  
[www.fs.fed.us/npnht](http://www.fs.fed.us/npnht)

Caribou-Targhee National Forest  
1405 Hollipark Drive  
Idaho Falls, ID 83401  
208 524-7500  
[www.fs.fed.us/r4/caribou-targhee](http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/caribou-targhee)

Nez Perce Trail Foundation  
(208) 940-0053  
[www.nezpercetrail.net](http://www.nezpercetrail.net)

Gallatin National Forest  
P.O. Box 130  
Boxeman, MT 59771  
(406) 587-6701  
[www.fs.fed.us/r1/gallatin](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/gallatin)

Nez Perce Tribe  
P.O. Box 365  
Lapwai, ID 83540  
208 843-2253  
[www.nezperce.org](http://www.nezperce.org)

Shoshone National Forest  
808 Meadowlane Ave  
Cody, WY 82414  
(307) 527-6241

Nez Perce National Historical Park  
P.O. Box 1000  
Lapwai, ID 83540  
(208) 843-7001  
[www.nps.gov/nepe/](http://www.nps.gov/nepe/)

[www.fs.fed.us/r2/shoshone](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/shoshone)

Yellowstone National Park  
P.O. Box 168  
Yellowstone National Park, WY  
82190-0168  
(307) 344-7381  
[www.nps.gov/yell/](http://www.nps.gov/yell/)

Island Park Historical Society  
P.O. Box 224  
Island Park, ID 83429  
208-558-7875  
[www.islandparkhistory.com](http://www.islandparkhistory.com)

West Yellowstone Historical Society  
P.O. Box 1225  
West Yellowstone, MT 59758  
406-646-9219  
[yellowstonehistoriccenter.org](http://yellowstonehistoriccenter.org)



U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Forest Service

U.S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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Bureau of Land Management

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Fish and Wildlife Service



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