## Native American Presence

The Nez Perce National Forest of central Idaho has been the traditional home of the Nez Perce Tribe for thousands of years. The earliest documented evidence of Native American occupation within the current boundary of the Forest comes from the Selway River Canyon. Here, artifacts have been found that date from 8,000-10,000 years ago. Artifacts from a Native American site in the Slate Creek drainage appear to be about 7,000 years old. There are many other locations within the Nez Perce Forest which possess Native American occupations representing the last 2,000-3,000 years.

**Early Cascade Phase Projectile Point, 9600 – 8600 B.P.**

The Nez Perce, also known as the Nee-Mee-Poo or the "real people" in their own language—seasonally migrated throughout the Nez Perce National Forest to take advantage of various animal and plant resources. These included salmon and other fish, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, bear, moose, elk, deer, small game, and birds. Food plants sought were camas bulbs, bitterroot, bark, pine nuts, sunflower seeds, wild carrots, wild onions, and several varieties of berries.

**Teepee located at the Bear Creek Salmon Hole, Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, 1926.**
Van Emerson photograph.

The Forest landscape was used for religious purposes as well. Numerous travel routes were created within the future Nez Perce Forest boundary. Some of these routes connected to other regions such as the plains of eastern Montana, the greater Columbia River system, and the Blue Mountains of Oregon. The Southern Nez Perce Trail, the oldest known of these routes, was used to access Montana's buffalo hunting grounds. Winter villages occupied the low elevation river canyons while spring, summer and fall found the Nee-Me-Poo utilizing higher elevations, following the availability of resources as the snow pack receded.

In ceding lands to the United States in 1855, the Nez Perce Tribe reserved, in part, the right to hunt, fish, and gather traditionally used plants on usual and accustomed places on lands now administered by the Nez Perce National Forest. As a result, the Forest, as an agency of the United States, has a trust responsibility to insure the availability and accessibility of those resources to the tribe. Today the Tribe continues their vibrant cultural traditions as an active partner of the Forest in fish and wildlife habitat management and restoration.