

DOE/BP-2946

**FEDERALLY-RECOGNIZED TRIBES  
OF THE  
COLUMBIA-SNAKE BASIN**

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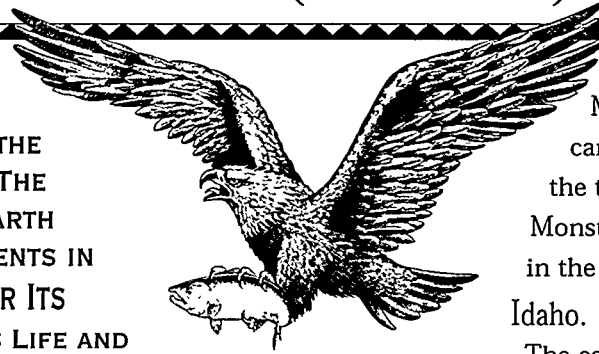
**MASTER**

**U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS  
U.S. BUREAU OF RECLAMATION  
BONNEVILLE POWER ADMINISTRATION**

# THE NIMIIPU (NEZ PERCE)

THE EARTH WAS THE MOTHER OF ALL LIFE AND THE MOTHER OF THE PEOPLE. THE NEZ PERCE VALUES THE EARTH NOT FOR WHAT IT REPRESENTS IN GOODS OR MONEY, BUT FOR ITS BEING THE SOURCE OF HIS LIFE AND PROVIDING ALL HIS NEEDS.

We, the Nimiipu people, believe in our own creation story that has been told from our ancestors in the early times until today. Our story tells of a new world before there were any men. A huge Monster lived in the Kamiah area, which is located in the Clearwater Valley. The Monster swallowed all of the animals for miles around and this angered Coyote. Coyote then decided that he would kill the Monster. Coyote allowed himself to be swallowed by the Monster. Coyote cut up the heart of the Monster, and with five agate knives he cut the Monster's body into small pieces. From the small pieces came the many different tribes; these tribes had their own strengths and identities along with a place where they could live. But Coyote had forgotten about the land where he was standing and his friend the Fox reminded him that the beautiful Kamiah valley was without people. Coyote did not despair; from a few drops of the



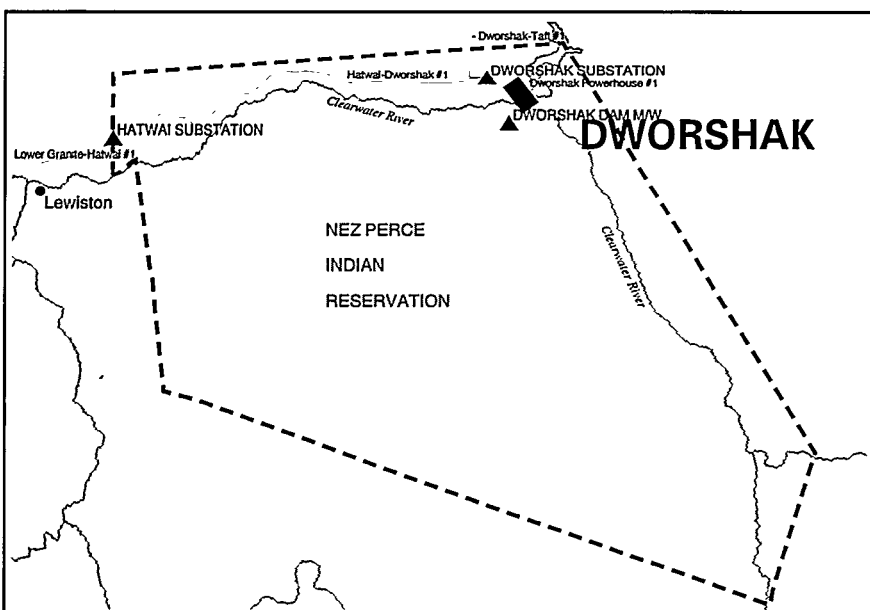
Monster's blood from the heart came the last and most noble of the tribes, the Nez Perce. The Monster's heart is still visible today in the Clearwater Valley at Kamiah, Idaho.

The earliest Indian people existed here for well over 8,000 years. Ancient artifacts have been found at the Weis Rockshelter near the town of Cottonwood, Idaho. Many of these artifacts prove that the Indians did hunt, fish and gather their food. The early Indians used crude tools, pots and other utensils during that time.

In the early days, the Nez Perce people were scattered over great distances and lived in small groups or bands along rivers, small streams and canyons. The areas occupied by the Nez Perce people usually had an Indian name, which is still in use today, such as Palouse, Asotin, Pataha, Wallowa, Kamiah, Lapwai and Tucannon. There are many other Indian homes sites, which are located outside the Nez Perce Reservation; they are included in the history of the Nez Perce Indian Tribe. In many of these early Indian home sites, there are rock carvings called "petroglyphs," which represent birds, elk, rivers, mountains or even man. These writings or carvings were early

forms of communication, storytelling, or a recording of events of the early Indian people who lived here.

Many years ago before the contact with the white man, the Nez Perce traveled great distances overland for buffalo hunting to the eastern plains toward what is now Montana. The Nez Perce searched for food in the vast territories known as Oregon, Washington and a great area in Idaho. The early groups or bands of the Nez Perce were dependent on the environment



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and the areas where they lived. The big game the Nez Perce hunted included the deer, elk, moose, bear and mountain sheep, which were usually found in the higher elevations. Large land areas were needed to support a family in their food gathering activities, which made it necessary to move with the growing seasons of certain roots, berries and herbs. A favorite and major food source for the Nez Perce was a bulb known as "camas," which was harvested in the upper elevations in the surrounding prairies. This food is still harvested today, and remains a favorite.

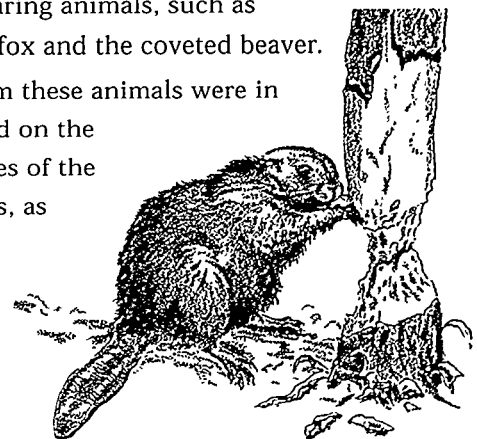
When Indian people moved from area to area, they traveled with their families and carried all their household goods with them. Before the horse was introduced to the Indian people, the moving was done primarily with the use of dogs and family members. However, with the introduction of the horse in Indian territory, the horse became an important factor in the lives of the Indian people. Moving from food gathering areas to hunting areas was usually a major family event that required the cooperation of all family members.

In the winter, the Nez Perce lived in teepees made from the hide of the buffalo and tule mats. The foundations of these winter quarters were usually dug two feet deep below the level of the ground to keep the heat in the teepee and the wind out. Indian families were usually large. Extended family groups consisted of all children, parents, aunts, uncles and the elderly members such as grandparents. Due to the size of the Indian families during the winter months, they lived in a "long house," which was usually over a hundred and fifty feet in length. These long houses helped conserve wood and offered protection for the family. During the winter months, women cooked, sewed and did their weaving of baskets or bags for their own use or to be used later for trading. The male members of a family usually made ropes from horsehair, or made nets for fishing, arrows for hunting, or trapped along

the streams for furs for use by the family. The elders of the Indian family held a place of prominence for they were the teachers, advisors, recorders of important events, instructors in living and caretakers of the young. They were also the family members who were responsible for carrying on and teaching the Nez Perce traditions from generation to generation.

It was not until President Thomas Jefferson obtained a grant from Congress in 1803 for the exploration of the northwest region to the Pacific coast that a large scale expedition through the Louisiana Territory became a reality. In 1804, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark led an expedition from St. Louis, Missouri to the Pacific coast that explored the Louisiana Territory. The explorers traveled by boat, on horseback and on foot until they reached the Bitterroot Mountains, where they encountered perilous conditions. It was after this crossing of the Lolo Pass that Lewis and Clark first met the Nez Perce people in September of 1805. The Nez Perce befriended them when they arrived in Nez Perce country in a starved and ragged condition. The explorers were greeted with warm hospitality, willing assistance and cooperation from the Nez Perce that enabled the expedition to continue to the Pacific coast.

This historical event opened the Northwest Territory for trading companies and their mountain men, who soon converged on the virgin wilderness that was home for the Nez Perce and other tribes. This vast wilderness contained ample furbearing animals, such as mink, otter, fox and the coveted beaver. The furs from these animals were in great demand on the eastern shores of the United States, as well as in England, France and Spain. As fur traders



and trappers penetrated the Rocky Mountains and explored the far west, others searched for precious metals, especially gold. Others wanted land to farm or raise cattle on. The Nez Perce did not usually trap furs for the fur companies, but did trap for their own use.

Many times fur trading companies became a threat to the established way of life for the Indian people by depleting many of the furbearing animals that provided food or clothing for them. The arrival of settlers and cattlemen in Indian country also proved to be detrimental, when they fenced prime grazing lands and natural springs, and allowed cattle or sheep to destroy native food sites. The westward movement began with the surge of people demanding land that was considered free in the new territory, giving little thought to the Indian people who had occupied the land from the earlier times. This demand by the settlers and others for free access to land, even land occupied by the Indians, gave cause for the first appointed governor of Washington territory, Isaac Ingalls Stevens, to make plans for meeting with the Indians in their home base areas. Governor Stevens' prime concern was to keep the Indians from uprising and impeding the westward movement of the settlers. Another consideration that made the meeting with the Indians imperative was the fact that, in 1853, four northern army expeditions had been outfitted for the purpose of determining possible route for a railroad to the Pacific coast. The governor realized that the steady influx of settlers, miners and others would only increase and eventually cause conflict with the Indians whose lands were being slowly eroded. Stevens' role as Superintendent of Indian Affairs offered him an opportunity to negotiate with the tribes, and segregate the Indian people by force if necessary to reserves of land, either within the Indian home base or within another area.

A great council was held in the Walla Walla valley during the month of May in 1855 for the purpose of inducing the Indian tribes, which



*Looking Glass, a Nez Perce chief, shown in a Crow camp, 1871. Looking Glass and his group of Nez Perce were firm friends of the Mountain Crow. He was killed at the Bear Paw Mountains in 1877.*

included the Nez Perce, Cayuse, Walla Wallas, Umatillas and the Yakamas. Each tribe wished to keep a portion of their own home land as part of its reserved land or reservation. Governor Stevens was forced to keep peace with the tribes by agreeing to their request, which allowed the Nez Perce people to remain in their own territory.

In an effort to obtain a mutual understanding and peace for the settlers and others who were rapidly populating the northwest, Governor Stevens proposed a large reservation for the Nez Perce people in return for yielding their right to land they had occupied for generations. But the Nez Perce did not give up their right to fish and hunt on land that was relinquished in the treaty of 1855, or in any later treaty. They also reserved the

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right to fish outside the reservation and use public lands for grazing their horses and cattle outside the reservation. As part of the treaty agreements, the government agreed to build, furnish, and operate two schools, two blacksmith shops, two mills, one tin shop and one hospital. The Nez Perce were promised \$200,000 for a period of twenty years for improvements on the reservation and the purchasing of merchandise for distribution to tribal members. The following years proved to be filled with delays, frustrations and anger for the Nez Perce people, who waited for the treaty stipulations to be enforced. For many of the tribal people the reality of the treaty stipulations were never to be realized; for others the promises were again just broken promises.

Again a change was on the horizon, for gold was discovered on the reservation at a location that was to be known as Pierce. Again there followed an invasion of gold miners on the reservation, which was contrary to the stipulations of the 1855 treaty. The growing conflict between the Nez Perce and the settlers, land developers and now the gold miners became an issue that caused a demand for a new treaty that would change the boundaries and release more land for the settlers and the many others who were finding their way into the land of the Nez Perce. A council was assembled in May 1863 and was held at Fort Lapwai where three hundred soldiers came to prevent conflict at the council. The second treaty of 1863 greatly reduced the original reserved land base of the Nez Perce people to a fraction of its former size, forcing a majority of the many bands that made up the Nez Perce people to give up their land, which was prime land that had been their home. The new treaty brought new dissension among the Nez Perce because of the changes in the size of the boundaries, but also because of the non-payment for improvements on the reservation for the 1855 treaty, and because of the agreement that all settlers were to be kept off the reservation, which had not happened.



Dissatisfaction and resentment of the new stipulations brought on vigorous resistance by the bands that lived in the Wallowa country, the people of Chief Joseph. During the years of 1870 and 1877, the cattlemen and settlers moved into the Wallowa territory, built homes, put up fences around springs and prime range land. No white encroachment was more bitterly resented than this blatant land takeover from the Chief Joseph band. The Wallowa Territory had been the homeland for the Joseph people for generations, for it was a valley with beautiful lakes and streams that were abundant with salmon, and forests with enough game to fill the needs of the families who occupied the land. It was the 1863 treaty that would change these circumstances by taking over the land of the Joseph people without their consent. The resistance of the non-treaty bands - who were being forced to leave their lands to a greatly reduced reservation - resulted in the famous Nez Perce War between Chief Joseph and Colonel O. Howard. The war resulted in the Chief Joseph people being sent into the Oklahoma

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territory where many died and others waited to be returned to the northwest. This marked the end of an era that forever restricted buffalo hunting expeditions to the east, traditional migratory movements for hunting, fishing and trapping throughout the territory, bringing an end to their tribal independence.

All western tribes soon suffered the same fate as the Indians of the east, for the northwest Indians who had been forced to accept reservation life became more and more dependent on the government for survival. Congress had passed laws that increased federal control over the Indian people with one of the main objectives being the assimilation of the Indian into white mainstream. Educating the Indian became a major goal, and by 1887 over two hundred Indian schools had been established. This major thrust for education was by force in many instances, for Indian families had to send their children to school. Usually these schools were located in different states and alien surroundings, and lasted for long periods of time with the hope that this would mark the end for Indian language and customs for those who would accept education and return to the reservation to teach others. Although Indians throughout the United States had become the subject of government pressure for great changes, acculturation and inducement to leave their homelands, the Nez Perce people were determined to retain their culture, language and many of the traditions of the tribe.

In 1887, the General Allotment Act, or the "Dawes Act," was passed by Congress in an effort to accelerate the assimilation process of the Indian people. This act allowed the government to divide communally held tribal lands into individual parcels that would require each individual tribal member an allotted number of acres to be held in trust in his or her name for a period of twenty-five years. The land that was not "allotted" to a tribal member was considered surplus and sold to white settlers for farms and cattle ranches. This policy

was detrimental to the economy of those tribes that were never given the opportunity of making their objections concerning future land use. The Dawes Act created many scattered Indian land holdings, but none large enough to build a sound land base. Due to the Dawes Act, many reservations were soon overrun with white people and by 1934, only 50 million acres belonged to the Indian tribes across the nation.

In 1924, citizenship was granted to the Indian people including the Nez Perce. However, this citizenship offered no solution to their extreme poverty, nor did it open job opportunities on the reservations.

On June 18, 1934, Congress passed another bill called the "Indian Reorganization Act," or the "Wheeler-Howard Act," with the express purpose of rehabilitating the Indian tribes' economic situation and helping them realize their own potential and initiative, which had almost been destroyed during a century of oppression, conflict and government interference. This bill also put an end to further allotment of Indian tribal lands to individual Indians, and also allowed the Secretary of the Interior the authority to create new reservations for landless tribes and to restore lands not sold to non-Indians to tribal ownership. Tribes were also encouraged to adopt their own governments and to conduct business for their reservations and people. These changes in policy during different administrations proved to be inadequate for any long range economic planning for the reservation.

The Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee, the authorized representatives of the Nez Perce Tribe, have assumed a vital role similar to state governments. This executive committee, from its inception in the 1930s, has inherited many diverse problems that impede the progress of tribes and their people. The complex relationship between the tribes and the United States under the treaties - assuming the role of sovereign nations as well as the role of citizens and voting members of the

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state in which they reside - has proven to be a learning experience for all those concerned. For the Indian people as with all citizens of this country, the responsibilities of government are not taken lightly, nor are the Indians allowed the opportunities to be complacent about any laws that affect them.