

AMERICAN INDIANS OF IDAHO,
THE PAYETTE NATIONAL FOREST AND THE
FRANK CHURCH — RIVER OF NO RETURN WILDERNESS

by
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The American Indian has an ancient history in what would become Idaho. Old campsites have been rediscovered by archaeologists; analyzed and dated, revealing hints of the lifeway of America's first people. Studies indicate an antiquity in Idaho that appears to have its beginnings at the close of the last ice age, the Pleistocene era, approximately 15,000 years ago.

In the misty pages of our past, people walked onto the Snake River Plain following the open, natural corridor adjacent to the Snake River. It was an easy travel route linking the eastern Plains, to western coastal regions. The Snake River valley was flanked by mountains where glaciers were melting, leaving behind a terrain awakening from the ice.

THE PALEOINDIAN PERIOD

Early travelers making their way through this landscape in search of food often picked campsites in caves or on the margins of bogs and lakes. Along the Snake River shallow bodies of water melting off mountain glaciers sheltered ducks and shore birds, while mammoth, bison, camel, and horse grazed nearby (Gruhn 1961:41).

Idaho's earliest known archaeological site, Wilson Butte Cave, is a lava dome located north of Twin Falls, Idaho. Excavator Ruth Gruhn considered, "There is some evidence that forest cover may have been present on the butte at this time. The plains around Wilson Butte were probably moist grassland or parkland..." (Gruhn 1961:41).

Five artifacts left behind at Wilson Butte Cave by the earliest travelers survived for approximately 14,500 years until found by Gruhn; three were stone, two were bone. None of the artifacts were diagnostic as to type.

The oldest diagnostic "fluted" projectile point type common to the United States is identified as "Clovis", and dates to approximately 12,000 B.P., or before present. Several Clovis points have been found in Idaho, many on the Snake River Plain.

By analyzing the technical knowledge and techniques used during the manufacturing of stone tools, it may be possible in the future to isolate single groups of people and determine the territory they covered during annual rounds or the area they considered home country (Young and Bonnicksen 1985:111).

On the Payette National Forest a Clovis fragment was recovered near Council, Idaho (10AM141). The maker used a buff colored agate to create the point. To the east, in Long Valley, an obsidian Clovis point was found on the shore of Cascade Reservoir (10VY563) (Petersen 1987:41).

These large, fluted, triangular points are distinctive and appear to be part of the Idaho Paleolithic hunter's tool kit. Clovis points, assumed to be spear points, were apparently fitted on wooden or bone shafts and used by Clovis hunters to kill large

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grass-eating animals like the mammoth and large bison. (Bison antiquus). Bones of these extinct animals have been recovered on the Snake River Plain. In 1994, the remains of a mammoth were discovered at Tolo Lake near Grangeville, Idaho; studies are on-going at this site.

The Simon Site, a famous Clovis cache containing several points, was uncovered north of the Snake River on the Camas Prairie near Fairfield, Idaho (Butler 1963).

Regional Clovis complexes have been discovered in south-central Oregon at the Dietz Site (Willig 1984), and at the Richey-Roberts site near Wenatchee, Washington (Mehring 1988:500-503). At the Dietz Site in Oregon, 90 Clovis points were found in discrete clusters, on or near the surface of a shallow lake. In Washington, 14 points were found during an excavation in an apple orchard.

Near Willsall, Montana, a Clovis cache was uncovered at the Anzick site. The discovery has been identified as a Clovis burial location. "The red ochre-covered grave goods that accompanied the remains of two subadults included six fluted points, three complete bone fore-shafts, an endscraper, and more than 60 bifaces" (Young and Bonnicksen 1985:113).

Another group of "stemmed" projectile points, contemporaneous with the post glacial period, are identified as belonging to the Windust phase and date between 11,000-8,500 B.P. Windust points have been found on the Payette National Forest, and along the Clearwater River to the north at an excavation identified as the Hatwai/Lenore Site (Ames et al., 1981).

The era of the big game hunters continued into what has been defined as the Folsom period, dating approximately to 9,000-8,600 B.C. (Butler 1986:128). This period is well represented by points found on the Snake River Plain, and finds in the Salmon River country near the confluence of the Pahsimeroi and Salmon Rivers (Butler 1980:10-13).

For the most part Folsom Points are found as isolates on open, surface sites. However, at the Wasden site (Owl Cave) in southeastern Idaho, three fragmentary, fluted, Folsom points were found in association with mammoth bone (Miller 1982). Hydration dating on the points and seven associated flakes provide an average age of 8,700 B.C.; the mammoth bone collagen dates ranged between 10,900-8,970 B.C. (Miller 1982; Holmer 1986:94).

Archaeologist Kevin Jones described the lives of these early people saying, "'Believe me, there was no romance in people's lives ten thousand years ago. They pretty much acted as we would-- assessing their situation and making decisions based on choices at hand'" (Williams 1992:179).

Hunting families become easier to visualize when a broad range of artifacts used in their daily lives are studied. It appears seasonal camp sites were commonly re-used, providing a layer-cake record for archaeological study.

By using the open north-south trending valleys, early travelers passed through the open meadows and valleys, onto mountain trails

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as they searched for food.

Stanley Basin provided access to the South Fork, the Middle Fork and the main Salmon River country to the north. According to archaeologist Joseph Gallagher, "The cultural material recovered from the Red Fish Overhang is a discontinuous record of the prehistory of the Stanley Basin during the past 10,000-11,000 years...The artifact inventory at Red Fish Overhang includes roughouts, blanks, preforms, cores, projectile points, scrapers, perforators, bifacial knives, retouched flakes, edge-battered cobbles, a pestle and pottery" (Gallagher 1979:55-56).

In many instances tools used by hunters, and those used to process and prepare food are found clustered around ancient fire hearths. Gallagher points out:

Two activity assemblages at the Red Fish Overhang were identified...One of these assemblages is related to hunting and tool manufacturing, the other to food processing. Components of the hunting/tool manufacturing activity assemblage can be found in all parts of the site, but the major portion is centered around two hearths which lie under the overhang... Elements of the second activity assemblage (which suggests food processing) are located, for the most part, in front of the boulder mass to the east of the overhang. The tools found at this activity focus are several sherds [pottery] and a small pestle [grinding stone] (Gallagher 1979:56).

By about 9,000 B.P., fluted-points began to evolve into a variety of lanceolate, leaf-shaped, parallel-flaked point types. An example is an obsidian Eden point found near Lake Fork Creek, near McCall, Idaho (Kingsbury 1994).

North of McCall an obsidian Haskett point mid-section was discovered in tailings gravels near Warren Creek at Warren, Idaho (Kingsbury 1989). Leaf-shaped Haskett points were recovered from the Red Fish Overhang excavation and radiocarbon dated at 8,150 and 7910 B.C. (Holmer 1986:95).

Jaguar Cave, located in the north-south trending Lemhi River Valley of southeastern Idaho that connects the Snake River Plain to the Wilderness areas, provides an additional clue about early lifestyles. The bones of domesticated dogs were found along with the butchered remains of 268 sheep, dating to 9580 B.C.-8320 B.C. (Butler 1986:128). It is speculated dogs were used by early hunters to hunt and herd game, for protection, and to carry a pack.

Capt. Bonneville made the following note of the Shoshoni's use of dogs in 1833:

These dogs, it must be allowed, were of more use than the beggarly curs of the cities. The Indian children used them in hunting the small game of the neighborhood, such as rabbits and prairie dogs... (Irving 1885:184).

In another instance, Bonneville was alerted to the presence of Indians nearby, "when a dog strayed into the camp with a small pack

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of moccasins tied upon his back; for dogs are made to carry burdens among the Indians" (Irving 1885:150).

THE ARCHAIC PERIOD

As the last of the ice melted in the mountains, regional warming trends dried marshes and shallow lakes along the Snake River corridor. Large animals like the mammoth, horse, camel, and giant bison became extinct. It is not known if they were exterminated by Paleolithic hunters, or were unable to adapt to changing environmental conditions.

These large grazing animals had been the major food source for Paleoindian families. When they were no longer a resource, new hunting methods and styles had to be created. A dramatic modification in projectile point styles reflects the environmental shift and the adaptations in hunting styles. Large spear points were replaced in the hunters tool kit by smaller notched and stemmed projectile points.

This new phase marks the beginning of the Archaic period (7,500-1,300 B.P.). Whether by necessity or as a refinement of technique, hunters began to use the atlatl, or spear (dart) thrower; an important marker for the early Archaic Period. Projectile points identified as Northern side-notched and stemmed-indent base points of the Pinto Series came into use (Reed et al. 1987:103).

B. Robert Butler discussed "the appearance of a new weapons system" saying:

The atlatl is inferred from the presence of the new types of points, particularly the stemmed-indent base and the larger side-notched, which are presumably dart rather than spear points. These may represent two different versions of the atlatl, one from the [Great] Basin represented by the stemmed-indent base points and one from the northwestern Plains represented by the large side notched points (Butler 1986:130).

Reed et al. points out, "The early Archaic may be imagined as a time of some cultural reorganization and mobility at the beginning of the Altithermal" [period of climatic warming] (1987:104).

MIDDLE AND LATE ARCHAIC

Reflections of ancient societies become more apparent in the Middle and Late Archaic. Several archaeological sites on the Payette National Forest and in the Frank Church--River of No Return Wilderness are of particular significance during this period.

The first is a burial location located in New Meadows, Idaho, named the DeMoss site (10AM193). The location was found during the excavation of a spring in 1985: Approximately seven feet below the ground surface the remains of a minimum of 60 disarticulated individuals and 460 stone tools were recovered. The assemblage included Cascade points, side and corner notched points, stemmed points, cache bifaces, awls, abraders, red ochre, and one turkey-tail point.

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Dating by radiocarbon and hydration indicates the site to be 6,000 years old. Max Pavesic, Boise State University professor points out, "the DeMoss site is the oldest directly dated burial locale in western Idaho" (Pavesic et al.:1993:3).

Pavesic has studied several known Idaho burial locations. He collected data from the Rosenberger Site at New Plymouth, Idaho; the Olds Ferry Dunes Site northwest of Weiser, Idaho on the Snake River; the Hoff Site at Middleton; the Galloway Street Site in downtown Weiser, Idaho; the Rocky Canyon Site near Boise, Idaho; the Emmett East Site near Emmett, Idaho; the Water-house Collection (believed to contain specimens from both the Braden and Galloway Sites); and the Inter-mountain Cultural Center Collection located in Weiser, Idaho. Pavesic noted, "The existing collections are primarily chipped stone artifacts; the human osteological material has often been lost or destroyed" (Pavesic 1985:58).

Professional sampling (1967-1979) at the Braden site, south of Weiser recovered:

turkey-tail and other large, bi-facially flaked cache blades; large side-notched projectile points; bipointed projectile points; chipped stone drills, scrapers; numerous obsidian blanks and projectile point pre-forms; abraders; an antler haft or socket; bone awls; red ochre concentrations; small tubular bone beads; hematite crystals; Olivella shell beads with lopped and ground spires; two canid [dog] skulls; a beaver incisor; and evidence of human cremation.

The Braden site has produced the only archaeologically recovered and analyzed human skeletal remains to date [1985]. Ten individuals identified as four children, four adult males, and two adult females were recovered during the 1967 field season... Also reported is a "mass" burial believed to be of a single archaeological age based on a composite bone sample submitted for radiocarbon dating. The sample consisted of 28 bone fragments...and produced a date of 5790 +-120 B.P....Most of the human skulls are found on the periphery of the post-cranial mass and have the highest concentration of associated chipped stone artifacts, apparently "carefully placed" (Pavesic 1985:64-65).

The Galloway Street site discoveries, uncovered in 1909-1913, were reported to have contained four skulls, placed in a circle (Pavesic 1985:63). A similar burial arrangement was noted by Lewis and Clark at Memaloose Island (place of the departed) on the Columbia River. Clark noted in his journal on Oct. 29, 1805:

...on the upper part of this Island we discovered an Indian Vault, our curiosity induced us to examine the methods those natives [sic] practiced in depos[it]ing the dead...on the East End 21 Scul [sic] bones [sic] forming a circle on Mats...when bones and robes rot, they are gathered in a heap & skulls placed in a circle (Thwaites 1959 v.3:139-140).

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Pavesic points out the importance of the artifacts found in the Idaho burials:

The lithic production technology exhibited in the western Idaho turkey-tail and cache blades has proved to be the most distinctive feature and is the means of specimen identification [for the sites]. The quality of workmanship, the careful selection of materials, and the size of individual specimens are unique in the regional archaeology (Pavesic 1985:68).

Quarry origins for lithic artifacts examined by Pavesic were identified as coming from regional, or resources closeby. Pavesic noted, "Obsidian and siliceous materials were selected for burial use" (ibid:75).

Local quarries where high quality stone could be collected to create all lithic implements and tools would have been of major importance to peoples who are technically dependant on stone. Examples of quarry sites in or adjacent to the Payette National Forest include: the Midvale and Mesa Hill quarries (basalt) near Midvale Idaho; Hubbard Ridge quarry (siliceous) east of Council, Idaho; and Timber Butte (obsidian) near Sweet, Idaho.

WILDERNESS SITES

In the Frank Church--River of No Return Wilderness area, test excavations at prehistoric campsites were made by the Forest Service in 1981 (Wylie et al.:1981). The project report notes two archaeological sites were tested:

One was a small dry cave, PY-147 (10VY167) [on the]... Payette National Forest; the other was an open "pit-house village", SL-267, [on the]... Salmon National Forest...These were the first excavations ever carried out within the River of No Return Wilderness (ibid:1).

Results: The cave yielded approximately 50 diagnostic projectile points, four scrapers, a drill and two knife blades, one with the remains of hafting mastic on the base. Also present were large quantities of freshwater mussel shell and large ungulate bones (elk/deer?) at all levels, and 10 large fish vertebra, probably salmon or steelhead. Of special interest were finds of plain brown/grey pottery and shell/bone beads, including two specimens of what may be Olivella shell beads from the Pacific coast. Typologically, the assemblage appears to be more Great Basin than [Columbia River] Plateau (ibid:3).

Work at the village site exposed a dual component house feature. The upper levels contained desert side-notched/small triangular late prehistoric projectile points while the house fill itself contained Middle to Late Archaic materials...No ceramics were found. Diagnostic tools included 13 projectile points, three scrapers and three drills...The structure itself was over one meter deep [3 feet] and approximately 7-8 meters [21-24 feet] in diameter... (Wylie et al. 1981:4)

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Dates for the cave site range from 3900-580 B.P. A single date of 750 B.P., is noted for the village site (Plew and Pavesic 1982:120).

Changes in the projectile points recovered, not only from the sites examined in the Frank Church--River of No Return Wilderness, but from other excavations points out another technical adaptation:

Throughout the American West the replacement of large corner-notched points by small-corner notched points...in the archaeological record signifies the adoption of the bow-and-arrow replacing the atlatl and dart as the principal hunting technology. This appears to have occurred in the Upper Snake River Basin between approximately 1500 to 1300 years ago (Reed et al. 1987:122).

The acquisition of the horse in A.D. 1700 marks another significant change for American Indian tribes, not only in Idaho, but across the country (Haines 1938:430). This new form of transporting people and goods opened passages to the eastern Plains. Elizabeth Grobsmith characterized the Eastern Indians who moved onto the Plains and adopted the nomadic lifestyle by saying:

These tribes had far more elaborate social structures and religions because of their legacy of once having been settled, farming villagers. While they may have shifted their lifestyle once they came out on the plains in pursuit of bison, their social complexity often was retained (Grobsmith 1990:178).

As western tribes traveled east to hunt buffalo, "a natural pattern of trade emerged and was well-established long before the coming of Europeans or their technology" (Grobsmith 1990:183). This direct exchange between the Eastern and Western tribes exposed Idaho's Nez Perce tribe and Northern Shoshoni tribe to new and unique items, differing customs, clothing, and religious ideas. Travelers returning from the Plains came home with information and ideas that would change their lifeway once again. A look at central and southern tribes adds pages and perspective to Idaho's history often ignored and forgotten.

THE NEZ PERCE

It appears the Nez Perce as a people have been in-place for thousands of years. When archaeologist/anthropologist Herbert Spinden studied the Nez Perce in 1907, he noted, "There are no traditions of migrations, and so far as can be determined, the tribe has dwelt within these boundaries from time beyond memory" (Spinden 1974:173).

Regions utilized by bands of the Nez Perce include those areas around the Clearwater River, the Salmon River, and the Snake River in Idaho, and the Imnaha, Wallowa, and Grande Ronde Rivers in northeastern Oregon. By living in a land for so long a time, the tribe had extensive knowledge of all its resources available. For example, obsidian samples recovered from the Hatwai/Lenore archaeological excavation on the Clearwater River near Lewiston, Idaho,

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were found to come from the quarry at Timber Butte, near Sweet, Idaho. The obsidian was radiocarbon dated to 3,400 and 3,100 B.P. (Pavesic 1985:82), indicating the Nez Perce were commonly utilizing this quarry source by that date.

Mountain men and trappers in Idaho recorded in their journals of seeing groups of Nez Perce either camped or traveling through the Snake River and the Yellowstone River country. On Sept. 26, 1832, Capt. Bonneville and his party of trappers established winter quarters five miles below the forks of the Salmon River. His camp was surrounded by bands of Nez Perce, Flathead, and Pends Oreilles (Irving 1885:71-85). The Indians had apparently been hunting buffalo on the headwaters of the Missouri and decided to spend the winter with Bonneville at his camp.

Nez Perce bands were familiar with the valleys along the Little Salmon River. Nez Perce Historian Allen Slickpoo Sr. recalled his mother telling him Meadows, Idaho, was a place where the Nez Perce raced horses, and she named the location (personal conversation 3/6/95).

A more focused look at a Nez Perce summer camp, can be helpful. Meadows and valleys where snow reached any depth would only be used in the summer months. More moderate winter camps were located along warmer rivers, like the Snake and Clearwater.

Before the acquisition of the horse, the people were walkers, carrying their possessions on their backs, or caching them at camp sites, to be used season after season. Alan Marshall noted:

...people [Nez Perce] consistently re-hunted the same areas from year to year. Knowledge about particular hunting areas was detailed. One informant, who is in his forties, said his uncles could direct a drive by describing the peculiar features of rocks and trees. Continued use of the same hunting areas occurred also because of a feeling of care for, and maintenance of campsites--/wi.se'wyenikes/. At these campsites people cached equipment that was difficult to carry through the heavily forested terrain; for example, tipi poles and sweathouse frames (Marshall 1977:69).

Caches of stone tools, like stone blanks to be made into projectile points, or those used for grinding and pounding seeds, and shredding dried meat or fish, are often found at prehistoric camp sites. The American Indian's use of dried meat or jerky was first recorded by early European explorer Castaneda in 1540-42:

They dry the flesh [of the bison] in the sun, cutting it thin like a leaf and, when dry they grind it like meal to keep it, and make a seasoup of it to eat. A handful thrown in the pot swells up so as to increase very much. They season it with fat, which they always try to secure when they kill a cow [bison] (Winship 1896:527-528).

Dried meat jerky was made easier to eat when it was dipped in fat, or when combined with pieces of fat while chewing. Another staple food was created when the jerky was pulverized and combined

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with fat or marrow in a pemmican. Wild cherries, or berries could be added for flavor, but pemmican made of fat and meat was a primary food. It could be poured into bags, the seams sewn shut and sealed with fat to exclude air. The mixture was often cached to be picked up on return to winter quarters. Studies indicate it contained 3200 calories per pound; three-quarters of a pound supplied a days ration (Wentworth 1956:567).

Before the horse, summer houses could have been constructed of poles covered with grass, reeds, willows, pine boughs or woven mats. After the horse, leather tipis or lodges, like those used by mounted Plains tribes, were adopted. In higher elevations, like Meadows Valley where even summer nights are cold, the tipi lodge covered with leather was probably the usual one set up while traveling. Woven and leather packbaskets carried household, personal, and hunting gear.

The interior of the tipi, as Spinden noted, "was thickly bedded with grass" (Spinden 1974:194-8), and could be covered with mats in setting and sleeping areas. The center would be left clear for a small, circular stone fireplace. Spinden goes on to note:

Blankets were of elk-hides dressed without removing the hair. Pillows were folded deer or bear skins...Storage baskets were piled at the heads of the beds...All the boiling was done in coiled willow baskets. Beside these cooking baskets there were no important cooking utensils, for all food not boiled was either steamed or roasted in ashes. Basket mortars were much used for pounding roots, but wooden mortars also were used... Food was eaten out of wooden bowls and bowl-shaped baskets. Spoons and ladles of buffalo and mountain-sheep horn were in common use (Spinden 1974:199-200).

The coiled boiling baskets mentioned by Spinden were heated when hot stones were dropped into the "soup." As they cooled, the stones were removed and hot stones added.

Spinden noted the Nez Perce language was soft and pleasing (ibid. 243) and, "Children were trained to be quiet and obedient, but were kindly treated and seldom had to be punished (ibid. 247).

Slickpoo agreed protection of the camp was the male role. He noted, Indian men followed the same vigilant stance adopted by the birds and animals around them. Males kept watch and were prepared to defend the camp in case of attack. Their alertness to danger was what kept the tribe alive (personal conversation 3/6/95).

The world around the camp was a spiritual place. The trees, the rocks, the rivers, the hills, and other natural objects possessed power and energy, and shared their essence of spirituality with the People.

Natural objects with special meaning were worn, however, "All the deeper qualities of the Nez Perce religion seem to have been based on the dream, which was a means of communication between the material world and the spiritual world" (Spinden 1974:260).

Around the night-fire, with the sounds of the earth and grazing

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horses nearby, tales were told about coyote and his tricks, about the ancestors, teaching and entertaining; tales of humor and valor.

THE NORTHERN SHOSHONI

The Shoshone of Idaho are Numic speakers, a division of the Uto-Aztecan language family, related to the Comanche in the south. "Linguistic and archaeological evidence suggests the Numic-speaking groups did not inhabit the Great Basin until after about A.D. 1000, and that they absorbed or replaced earlier occupants of the region" (Arkush 1990:305).

The path taken by the Shoshoni into Idaho has been lost in time, however, they brought with them the idea of pottery. In their travels they lost the old craftspeople with the knowledge to create anything but plain ceramic vessels; possibly indicating their journey was long, taking generations.

Whatever the route, bands of Shoshoni apparently found a homeland on the Snake River Plain and in the surrounding mountains. Within a reasonable time the newcomers learned the country, developing a system of seasonal rounds, extending from the Weiser River area east to the Yellowstone.

In late autumn, the hunters and gatherers returned from their traveling to pass winter beside major rivers where temperatures generally remained moderate. Semi-subterranean pit houses, brush and leather covered lodges were constructed at winter quarters. River terraces still retain shallow indentations amid a clutter of stone flakes, bone, grinding stones, and clam shell middens.

Capt. Bonneville, in 1833, noted a Shoshoni winter camp near Shoshone Falls:

The snow lay in a thin crust along the banks of the river... Occasionally, they [Bonneville and his men] met the inhabitants of this wild region; a timid race, and but scantily provided with the necessaries of life. Their dress consisted of a mantle about four feet square, formed of strips of rabbit skins sewed together; this they hung over their shoulders, in ordinary Indian mode of wearing a blanket. Their weapons were bows and arrows; the latter tipped with obsidian, which abounds in the neighborhood. Their huts were shaped like haystacks, and constructed of branches of willow covered with long grass, so as to be warm and comfortable. Occasionally, they were surrounded by small enclosures of wormwood [sagebrush], about three feet high, which gave them a cottage-like appearance. Three or four of these tenements were occasionally grouped together in some wild and striking situation, and had a picturesque effect. Sometimes they were in sufficient number to form a small hamlet. From these people Captain Bonneville's party frequently purchased salmon... (Irving 1885:180-181).

As winter deepened, the leafless stems of willow and dogwood were gathered for basketmaking. Grasses, roots, leaves, and the pliable fibers from nettle, clematis, dogbane and milkweed were gathered for constructing baskets, fishnets, twine, rope, and etc.

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During the cold season around the campfire, arrow points were refined from crude stone blanks that had been "roughed out" at stone quarries during summer rounds. Arrow shafts could be fashioned from rose, dogwood, and syringa stems. Bows were often constructed of juniper or mountain sheep horn (Dominick 1964:155).

Caches of dried meat, fish, fruits, seeds, and roots supplemented fresh meat hunters could hunt in the snowy landscape, or fish caught in the nearby river. Sagebrush and driftwood were gathered for firewood.

As the season turned, groups began to move into the warming countryside to harvest plants as they became ripe or mature. Gathering was a technical science. "...an efficient gatherer requires a vast fund of knowledge about the growth cycle of dozens of plant species, an understanding of the effect of weather on growth and knowledge of soils and growing conditions," noted James Downs. He goes on to point out, this knowledge must be learned. It was the older women in the tribe who were the most expert gatherers (Downs 1966:21).

A major root crop was camas, and although the camas bulb can be found growing in most wet meadows, the Camas Prairie near Fairfield, Idaho was a large, plentiful source for southern Idaho tribes until the historic period (Statham 1982).

By the late 1830's, trappers, traders, and Indians had scoured rivers and creeks, looking for game, particularly beaver. The fragile desert environment along the Snake River became the common east-west route used by white travelers, and soon was over-hunted and over-grazed. Indians living along this corridor, particularly those who were not mounted, were ill-equipped to compete with mounted Indian hunters and whites with guns and horses. The impact was devastating, reducing game animals and food resources to minimal levels, and the bands relying on them to poverty status.

A developing lack of game is a consistent element noted in journals of trappers and mountain men (i.e. Bonneville, Ross, Meek, etc.). Bonneville had recorded buffalo on the Snake River Plain in 1832-1833 (Irving 1885). According to Haines, after the Crow, Blackfeet and Plateau tribes secured the horse, they hunted in the Yellowstone Valley, pushing buffalo south across Bozeman Pass into Idaho,

replacing buffalo there as fast as they were being killed by the mounted Shoshoni and Bannocks. But after the smallpox epidemic of 1837 the Blackfeet stopped coming. The Crows could hunt more to the north. The new herds no longer came across Bozeman Pass...In a few years the buffalo had all been cleared from the country west of the [Continental] divide, and the Shoshoni and Bannocks had to travel far to hunt (Haines. 1970:157).

For those bands unable to travel to the Plains, life became desperate. Nez Perce Historian Allen Slickpoo Sr. noted tribal memories of the abandonment of Nez Perce village sites on the Snake

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River after repeated attacks by the Shoshoni. He speculated the Shoshoni were starving and had been forced north (personal conversation 1995). It is a probable response to the invasion of whites into their territory.

CONCLUSION

As the traffic along the Oregon Trail increased and gold was discovered in Idaho, southern and central Idaho tribes struggled to survive. It was an adaptation unlike any they had faced before. After several battles in the 1870's with white settlers, the tribes were restricted to a fraction of the land they had known in earlier times. The old ways became even more sacred, for in most instances they lived only in the heart until the time came when they could be revived for the People.

In 1910, Yellow Wolf, a Nez Perce warrior who fought in the war of 1877, posed in full tribal regalia for photographs to be used in a painting. He was asked to send to the artist a description of the clothes he wore in battle, and for the loan of the feather plumage he carried in battle. He sent the feathers along with this message:

The medicine that gave me strength during the war was in my feathers. These were wrapped in red flannel cloth. This bundle I carried on my back. I do not think I will get along well without my feathers. You must care well for my feathers (McWhorter 1983:303).

When asked to blow a war whistle used in the 1877 conflict, Yellow Wolf refused, saying:

This war whistle which helped me in dangerous places is made from the wingbone of the crane. Spirits guided me in its making...It is not to be used in sports and amusement...The flute hung under my left arm. There it was away from handling the rifle. These two small eagle-down feathers at the end of the thongs were plucked from over the bird's heart. The fluttering up in the wind was good. Always moving, you could not see that which does it. There was good prayer in the feathers movements. You must not let my flute be wrongly used (McWhorter 1983:302).

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The front cover illustration is a copy of a petroglyph in the Frank Church--River of No Return Wilderness.