

Native Americans  
of the  
Payette National Forest

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## NATIVE AMERICANS OF THE PAYETTE NATIONAL FOREST

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In 1805, when the men of the Lewis and Clark expedition became the first white explorers of the wilderness that later became Idaho, Native Americans were well established. The Native Americans in Idaho have been categorized into two cultural groups, the Plateau and Basin cultures. Their cultural boundaries changed and overlapped through time. The Plateau culture, which was found north and west of the Salmon River, had also spread into areas of west-central and southwestern Idaho, and is represented by the Nez Perce Indians. The Basin culture, found south and east of the Salmon River and along most of the Snake River, was represented by the Northern Shoshone and the Northern Paiute. These tribes had long-since migrated to Idaho from the deserts of the Great Basin.

Northern Shoshone, Northern Paiute, and Nez perce were the principal tribes to utilize areas of the present day, Payette National Forest. These tribes shared many subsistence activities, resources, and tribal boundaries. The Indians followed a seasonal subsistence cycle and planned to harvest plant and animal resources as they occurred and where they were found in abundance. The seasonal migrations of salmon once provided an abundant fish resource. The salmon would be eaten fresh and dried for winter supplies. They gathered berries, including chokecherries and serviceberries, which were dried for later use. Roots and bulbs, including those of the camas lily, were roasted, and grounded into flour, and baked into cakes. Small and large game provided meat. Hunting expeditions procured large game species such as: buffalo, deer, elk, antelope, big horn sheep and moose.

With the introduction of the European horse and the influence of the Plains culture, the lives of the Nez Perce and Northern Shoshone changed. The Shoshone were the first Idaho tribe to obtain horses. They became the first primary traders of horses to other northwestern tribes, including the Nez Perce. With the horse, mobility increased, and Idaho Indians could travel further, faster and gather more plant and animal food resources. Those Indians who traveled to the Great Plains to hunt buffalo were influenced by Plains Indian culture. New ideas included the use of the tipi, substituting skin containers for traditional baskets, using the horse pulled travois and wearing feathered headdresses. A political influence of the Plains culture was the organization of people into larger bands under the leadership of chieftains in order to safely reach the buffalo country of the plains (Liljebblad 1960:25).

Northern Shoshone, the name given to Shoshone living in Idaho (Murphy and Murphy 1986:284), occupied the valleys of the Boise, Weiser, Little Weiser and Payette Rivers. Northern Shoshone territory extended to the Snake River as it forms the border between Idaho and Oregon, and groups ranged as far north as the Seven Devils Mountains. The population was scattered in small, independent villages. Shoshone winter camps included the site of the present day city of Boise, the Payette River near Emmett, and the lower Weiser River near the mouth of Crane Creek (Chalfant 1974:79), (Murphy and Murphy 1960:318). In November of 1811, members of the Wilson-Hunt party encountered "Chochonis" as they traveled from Manns Creek, a tributary of the Weiser River, to the Snake (Murphy and Murphy 1960:316).

During the summer, the Shoshone benefited from the salmon runs and laid fish traps on the Payette River near Long Valley, and on the Boise and lower Weiser Rivers. In early summer Shoshone from the Boise-Weiser country, along with other Idaho tribes, traveled to the Camas Prairie to gather and dry roots and camas bulbs. Fish were taken in fall, and big game was hunted in the mountains surrounding the Boise and Payette valleys as far as the headwaters of the Salmon River (Murphy and Murphy 1960:319). Although the Shoshone were the first primary traders of horses to other northwestern tribes, not all Shoshone profited equally. Shoshone in western Idaho possessed fewer horses than the buffalo-hunting Shoshone in southeastern Idaho. However, Shoshone in the western part of the state did pasture small herds of horses in the valleys of the Boise, Payette, and Weiser Rivers (Murphy and Murphy 1960:319), (Liljeblad 1960:25).

The Northern Paiutes, whose range extended into south and eastern Oregon, often crossed the Snake River to fish for salmon in the Boise and Weiser Rivers. Relationships with the Shoshone were cordial, and there was a great deal of intermarriage between the two groups. Many Northern Paiute located winter camps along the Boise and Weiser Rivers (Murphy and Murphy 1960:318). Northern Paiutes of Oregon and western Idaho who obtained horses often joined and lived in alliance with the buffalo-hunting Shoshone of Idaho and Wyoming; they were called Bannocks (Stewart 1970:220).

A Shoshonean speaking people, the Tukudika, were commonly known as the Sheepeaters. The Tukudika lived in small independent bands who lived in isolated, mountainous areas, including the mountains of the Salmon River. The Tukudikas were primarily hunters of bighorn sheep and other big game, and their sheepskin clothing and bows were prized trade items. They also gathered seeds, roots, berries and fished for salmon. The Tukudika on occasion wintered with the Nez Perce and fished at the confluence of the Salmon and Snake Rivers (Arnold 1984:17). The Tukudika and some Northern Shoshone constructed shelters of conical timber lodges called wickiups (Kingsbury 1985: 3-4). Because of their hunting and gathering economy and because of the steep mountainous environment in which they survived in, the Tukudika had little use for the horse.

The territory of the Nez Perce spanned the Clearwater River and the northern portion of the Salmon River drainage basins. The Nez Perce owned many horses. One estimate is 5 to 7 horses per person. Some families owned up to several hundred horses (Walker 1978:70-71). Horses enabled the Nez Perce to travel easily between resource areas and to hunt buffalo on the Plains, fish salmon runs and to hunt big game in the mountains. Trails from winter camps to northern Idaho traversed the Payette National Forest, and were used by hunting and fishing parties in the summer and fall. One trail led from Whitebird south along the mountain ridges between the Snake and and lower Salmon Rivers, crossed the Seven Devils Mountains, turned eastward towards New Meadows on the Little Salmon River, then continued to Payette Lake. Temporary hunting and fishing sites were located throughout the area of the Payette National Forest. The Nez Perce hunted and fished at Johnson Creek and other areas adjoining the South Fork of the Salmon River. Other groups traveled south to the Weiser, Little Weiser, Payette, and Boise Rivers (Chalfant 1974:89-90).

The Whitebird band of the Nez Perce, which wintered near Riggins, used the Little Salmon and lower Salmon for their primary salmon fishing grounds (Chalfant 1974:106). Some bands hunted in the rugged terrain of the Seven Devils (Chalfant 1974:90). It is clear that the different tribes in the area of the Payette National Forest used some of the same areas of the forest for hunting, fishing and other food gathering activities. The upper drainages of the Little Salmon, Weiser, and the North Fork of the Payette were used by both Shoshone and Nez Perce tribes. Long Valley served as a summer range for a group of Tukudikas who wintered near Smith's Ferry. Shoshone and Paiute groups also hunted and gathered in Long Valley. The Nez Perce fished salmon in the North Fork of the Payette. They also hunted deer and gathered roots. The Nez Perce called the Long Valley area as "Two-e-new-he-ess-pah," which means, "Land of the Silver Tip Grizzlies." The Shoshone, Paiute and Nez Perce met at Payette Lake for fishing, trading and horse racing (Arnold 1984:17-19).

Council Valley was a well established meeting place for the Indians. Nez Perce, Cour d'Alene, Shoshone, Bannock, Umatilla, Paiute and other tribes gathered there to trade, council, race horses, gamble and socialize. Early fur traders observed great numbers of Indians with thousands of horses camped in the Council Valley. As Euro-American settlement continued in the 1870's Indian groups no longer met in the Council Valley (Swarts 1976:1).

With the continuing influx of gold miners and settlers into Idaho, conflict was inevitable. Although Euro-American settlers illegally occupied their original reservation, the Nez Perce were ordered to relocate to a smaller reservation in northern Idaho. Hostilities erupted on the lower Salmon River in 1877, leading to the Nez Perce War. The Bannock War of 1878 had several causes, including poor management of the Fort Hall reservation. Also, conflict between the Shoshone, Bannock and Euro-American settlers occurred when hogs were grazing the traditional camas gathering areas at Camas Prairie, Idaho.

A result of the Bannock War was that some Bannock refugees joined the previously peaceful Tukudika (Sheepeaters) in their mountain environment. Many conflicts were blamed upon the Tukudika, and the name Sheepeater, came to mean "renegade" to many white settlers. In 1878, Native Americans raided ranches in Indian Valley and stole about 60 horses. Jake Grosclouse, Three-Fingered Smith, Will Munday, and Tom Healy pursued the horse thieves. The men were ambushed in the southern end of Long Valley, and only Smith escaped with his life. The ambush was blamed upon the Sheepeaters. The Sheepeaters were also blamed for the murders of five Chinese miners at Loon Creek in 1878. There is no evidence that Indians were responsible. It is speculated that white miners killed the Chinese (Carrey 1980:161).

The Sheepeater War began in 1879. Under orders of General O.O. Howard, three separate detachments of cavalry were sent to the Salmon River Mountains to subdue and round up the Sheepeaters. The cavalry detachment under the command of Captain Bernard left Boise Barracks on May 31, 1879 with a command of 56 men. Another detachment of 48 men left Grangeville on June 4th under the command of Lieutenant Henry Catley. Lieutenant E.S. Farrow, left the Umatilla Agency in Oregon on July 7th with 7 soldiers and 20 Umatilla scouts (Brown 1926:32,37).

Lieutenant Catley's troops were the first to encounter the Sheepeaters in battle. After struggling in deep snow, his command reached the Rains Ranch on the South Fork of the Salmon River. Crossing the river on July 17th, Catley's command continued on to Chamberlain Creek. His command continued their march into the Big Creek country, where they were ambushed and had to make a retreat to safer ground. The soldiers were in a difficult position on a hilltop with casualties and nothing to drink but a keg of vinegar. They named the spot "Vinegar Hill." Catley's troops retreated out of the Big Creek country, arriving at Warm Springs, 12 miles west of Warren, Idaho, on August 5th. Conflict happened again when hungry Indians raided the Rains Ranch on August 16th where James Rains was killed (Brown 1926:32-36).

After joining forces at Warm Springs, near the falls of the North Fork of the Payette River, Captain Bernard and Lieutenant Farrow arrived at the South Fork of the Salmon River. Bernard, Catley and Farrow camped at the confluence of Elk Creek and the South Fork of the Salmon River, then proceeded up the Elk drainage to Big Creek. They went to the Big Creek area in hopes of another engagement with the Indians (Brown 1926:32,37).

The troops, under Bernard's command, reached the headwaters of Big Creek on August 15th. Scouts out in advance were fired upon by Sheepeaters near the scene of Catley's ambush of August 19th. There were no casualties this time. The troops camped at Soldier Bar. This is where Catley's command buried Harry Eagan. The next day, the troops turned south to follow the trail of the Indians (Brown 1926:32,37).

Minor skirmishes marked the rest of the summer's campaign. Supplies were low, and horses and livestock were exhausted. Captain Bernard and his troops returned to Boise Barracks on September 8th. He had marched 1168 miles over rough mountainous country and had lost 45 horses and mules (Brown 1926:40-43).

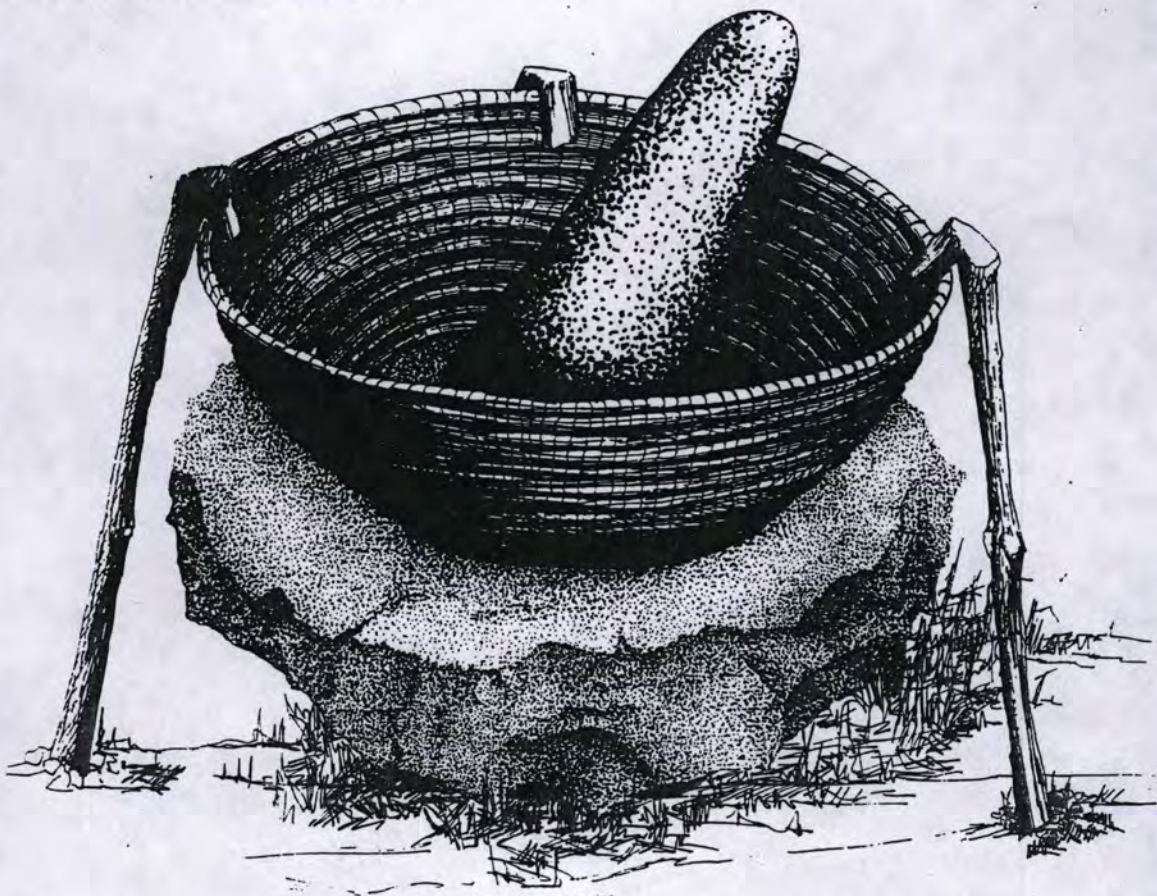
Lieutenant Farrow remained to pursue the Indians. He left Rains Ranch on September 17th and followed Catley's previous trail, then, headed for the area to the south of the Salmon River and west of the Middle Fork of the Salmon. Farrow's troops captured two Indian women, a baby and two boys. One of the boy's escaped. On September 23rd, Farrow and his soldiers followed the trail of a Sheepeater hunting party, taking along a Indian woman and baby. They camped at a gulch now known as Papoose Gulch (Brown 1926:45-46). Papoose Peak is also named from this event.

After encountering no Indians, Farrow and his troops returned to their base camp eight miles west of the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. A man named Tamanmo (War Jack) approached the camp. He explained that he was part Bannock and Nez Perce and a successor to the leader Eagle Eye. Tamanmo said that he was tired of fighting, and Farrow told him to go out and bring in his people. Soon, 51 people had surrendered to Farrow's command. Only 15 of those who surrendered were considered as warriors. The prisoners were taken to Vancouver Barracks, and were later sent to the Fort hall Reservation (Brown 1926:46-47). One Sheepeater group, led by Chief Eagle Eye, managed to avoid the fighting. They were able to live in the area of Dry Buck Valley, above the confluence of Dry Buck Creek and the North Fork of the Payette River (Carrey 1980:199).

Settlers in the area which later became the Payette National Forest, maintained friendly relations with the Shoshone and Nez Perce Indians. Grace Jewel Eckles, whose family was among the first to settle Salubria Valley (Cambridge, Idaho), recalled that Indians visited the surrounding valley every summer to fish, hunt, and trap. She remembered seeing "the valley up and down the Little Weiser to Indian Valley lined with wickiups and horses." When conflict between the settlers and the Nez Perce erupted in 1877, the settlers moved to a fort on Manns Creek. They later built a fort in Salubria, and would retreat to the fort when frightened by reports of hostilities (Martie 1984:3).

After the conflicts of the 1870's had ended, and Indians had been sent to reservations, groups of Nez Perce continued to visit the area of the Payette National Forest. Hugh Addington was born on his parent's homestead in 1894. As a boy, he recalled seeing many Indians camping at the hot springs at Starkey near Council, Idaho (Addington 1976:2). The Davis family, who settled in Long Valley in the 1890's traded butter and deer hides to the Nez Perce in return for beaded buckskin mocassins and gloves (Davis 1978:18). Neal Boydston, remembered Indians trading at his grandfather's store in Roseberry, Idaho. The Nez Perce were on their way to the South Fork of the Salmon River to go fishing for salmon. He recalled that the Nez Perce fished salmon on the North Fork of the Payette River, south of McCall, Idaho. They camped near the stockyards and the Sheep Bridge (Boydston n.d.:20).

The last one hundred years have brought many changes to Idaho. Most of us do not live as closely to the land as those who came before us. Technological advances, which replaced the horse with motorized vehicles, promote a faster style of life. Enjoying the comforts of the modern world, we sometimes feel removed from the adventures, hardships, and drama of earlier times. Native Americans, representing many different ethnic groups, continue to live, work and travel throughout the Payette National Forest. Look for them. History has a way of repeating itself.



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