

# **Project Completion Report Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (RM-CESU)**

**Project Title:** INVENTORY OF THE NEZ PERCE TRAIL (2008)

**Project Code:** UWY-88

**Type of Project:** Research

**Funding Agency:** National Park Service

**Partner University:** The University of Wyoming

**NPS Agreements Technical Representative:**

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**Start Date of Project:** May 15, 2008

**End Date of Project:** December 1, 2009

**Funding Amount:** \$100,000.99

**Number of Students Involved, and Type of Student (Undergraduate, Graduate, Post Doctorate):** 4 Undergraduate

**Project Summary, including descriptions of project deliverables, any changes made during the life of the project, work accomplished and/or major results. If the information is restricted (e.g. location of endangered species or cultural resources), indicate the title and location of the final report.** The final report is restricted and not available to the public but a copy is on file at the YNP Archeology Laboratory at the Heritage Resource Center in Yellowstone NP and with the Wyoming Historical Preservation Office. An electronic file (restricted) of the final report has been provided to the RM-CESU (Sanders, July 7, 2009)

During the last ten days of August 1877, a band of 700-800 Nez Perce men, women, and children, along with some 2000 horses and camp gear, traveled across YNP while being chased by the U.S. Army. Their journey began over two months earlier near White Bird, Idaho after their first battle with U.S. forces. It ended over a month later, just one day's march south of the Canadian border, after their final defeat at the Battle of the Bear's Paw Mountains. Today the Nez Perce War of 1877 is not only remembered as one of the final Indian wars in our country's history, but also a war that pitted the leadership skills of Nez Perce leaders Joseph, Looking Glass, and Yellow Wolf against the likes of General O.O. Howard, Colonel John Gibbon, Colonel Nelson A. Miles, and the combined military resources of the U.S. Government. In 1986 the National Park Service declared the 1200-mile long route followed by the Nez Perce during their epic fighting retreat the Nez Perce National Historic Trail.

2008 marked the first year of a three-year project to identify and investigate potential sites along the Nez Perce National Historic Trail within Yellowstone National Park (YNP). The project is funded through the National Park Service and Yellowstone Park Foundation, and fieldwork was conducted on behalf of the National Park Service by the Office of the Wyoming State Archaeologist Survey Section in partnership with the University of Wyoming, the Nez Perce tribe, and the Confederated tribes of the Umatilla and Colville Reservations.

Even though there were no major military engagements within YNP, a number of incidents did occur between the Nez Perce and civilian white groups as well as Bannock scouts employed by the army. These include attacks on two separate tourist parties, a skirmish between Nez Perce rear guard and Bannock scouts, an attack on the hotel at Mammoth, and a brief siege of Henderson's ranch, just north of the park boundary. An unknown number of Nez Perce campsites also exist along their route through the park and locating these sites is one of the stated goals of the study. Archaeological identification of all the sites is problematic given the historic circumstances, subsequent land use, and the fact that by 1877 the Nez Perce were in the terminal phase of their traditional culture.

The 2008 field season focused on three main goals: identification of the Helena Party site a short distance above the upper falls of the Yellowstone River, locating the Nez Perce campsite mentioned by Emma Cowan (one of the kidnapped "Radersburg" tourists) in the area between Highland Hot Springs and the western edge of the Hayden Valley, and locating another Nez Perce campsite believed located somewhere in the rugged and mountainous country near Hoodoo Peak. Unfortunately our efforts in the Highland Hot Springs area did not produce evidence of a Nez Perce camp. We did, however, find remains of a drift fence built in 1895 to prevent the few remaining bison in the park at that time from leaving the area and falling prey to poachers.

Fieldwork accommodations varied depending on location of the study area. During the 10-day investigation of the Helena Party site we camped at the Indian Creek campground. For the 10-day session near Highland Hot Springs the crew based out of the Mary Lake patrol cabin. During the 18-day session in the vicinity of Hoodoo Peak, the crew stayed at a backcountry campsite. All logistical support was provided by Yellowstone National Park. Crewmembers included Julie Eakin, Andrew Woodhouse, and two tribal representatives. Sean Steinmetz of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation participated in the Helena Party site investigation. Tim Pinkham of the Chief Joseph Band of the Nez Perce, Lapwai, Idaho, participated in the Mary Mountain and Hoodoo Peak sessions. Ray Kunselman, U.W. Department of Physics and Astronomy (retired) volunteered during the Mary Mountain session.

Planning for the 2009 field season is underway and several areas will be on the list to be explored. These include the identification of the Cowan Party campsite on Nez Perce Creek and follow-up investigations at the Helena Party site. The search for Nez Perce camps will continue in the vicinity of the Pelican Creek divide as well as on the main fork of the Lamar River.

## Helena Party Site Investigations

One of the successes of the 2008 fieldwork was identification of the Helena Party site. On August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1877, a party of ten men were camped in a concealed location to avoid the Nez Perce whom they observed fording the Yellowstone River the previous day. Two of the party departed camp around dawn to scout. Around noon, just as the party was about to have lunch, several Nez Perce warriors rushed the camp and opened fire at close range. All but two of the whites ran into the woods and escaped without returning fire. Charles Kenk and John Stewart may have run in the opposite direction as their companions. Kenk was chased down and killed, while Stewart, though shot twice, bought his life from the warriors for \$263. The Indians then proceeded to loot camp and burn, destroy or steal about 14 horses, camp equipment, and personal items abandoned by the whites. Among articles mentioned specifically in the archival records were two muzzle-loading shotguns that were beaten against trees and made unusable.



Photo showing in situ percussion lock set for a double-barreled muzzle-loading shotgun. This and several other gun parts were



Photo showing in situ Benet primed 45-70 cartridge case found at the Helena Party site. Three cartridge cases from three different guns were found in 2008 and probably represent Nez Perce firing positions. Information gathered in 2008 may allow a reconstruction of



A complete spur, probably belonging to one of the eight whites attacked while in camp, found at the Helena Party site. Other articles, including

## Hoodoo Peak/Lamar River headwaters

Another success of the 2008 field season involved investigation of a possible Nez Perce or other late 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian camp found near the headwaters of the Lamar River. Archival records from 1880 mention the presence of both standing and collapsed pole lodges. Remnants of these same lodges can still be seen on the ground in the area today. Our field reconnaissance revealed many stumps scattered over a large area where the lodge poles were evidently harvested. Within this area an additional site was found that yielded a mixed assemblage of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian and U.S. military items. The area may represent a Nez Perce camp although more research is necessary for an accurate age estimate.



One of many axe-cut stumps found in an area that probably functioned as a late 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian camp. The axe-cut stumps are probably the result of lodge-pole harvesting. Dendrochronologic dating may



Indian-made steel arrow point. Other objects of Indian manufacture were also found in close proximity to period food



Brass pommel shield and cantle guard plates from a U.S. Calvary McClellan saddle. These and other saddle parts indicate either an 1850 or 1872

