

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following report describes results of a pilot project undertaken to assess the feasibility of identifying 1877 Nez Perce War related archaeological sites along the Nez Perce National Historic Trail within Yellowstone National Park. Four study areas were chosen for this study: Lower Geyser Basin, Otter Creek, Nez Perce Ford, and Indian Pond. These areas were selected due to: 1) their linkage to the event by archival documents; 2) their potential to provide period cultural items representing the event; and 3) the premise that period artifacts found could serve as verification that similar artifacts may be present at other localities along the Nez Perce National Historic Trail within Yellowstone National Park.

Fieldwork included inspection of all available surface exposures with metal detectors, and visual assessment of all landforms in each study area. Fieldwork resulted in the identification of four previously unknown historic sites, documentation of historic components at three previously recorded sites, and reassessment of five other sites. Recovered artifacts included a wide array of historic metal objects from occupations ranging from the early 1800s to the late 1900s. Early forms of tin cans, camping equipment, and fishing gear were particularly abundant, in addition to equestrian related artifacts. Particular success was had in identification of the Cowan Party camp and 19th century firearm-related items. Attention was also given to a number of slashed and blazed trees which were found in association with early historic campsites.

Direct association of many recovered items with the Nez Perce War of 1877 remains uncertain. Nonetheless, this project has had great success in identifying sites and artifacts associated with the early historic use of Yellowstone National Park by Native American, military and tourist entities. The 2006 fieldwork accomplished its stated goal by revealing a broad spectrum of artifact types that may be expected to occur along the Nez Perce National Historic Trail corridor. This information will aid the 2008-2011 park-wide inventory of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail, and foster more refined investigative techniques for additional study in future years.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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