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Big Hole Battlefield



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Big Hole
from S. of Highway 43



Image removed



Chief Looking Glass, an experienced warrior familiar with the buffalo country of Montana, was chosen to lead the Nez Perce at the start of their flight. He was later killed at the Battle of the Bear's Paw.

In the summer of 1877 five bands of Nez Perce Indians consisting of 800 people, including 250 warriors, began a 1,170-mile journey from northeastern Oregon and central Idaho over the Bitterroot Mountains and through the Montana Territory. Though they were herding more than 2,000 horses and carrying whatever possessions they could manage, the Nez Perce made this long and difficult trek in less than four months. United States Army troops under Gen. Oliver O. Howard had orders to place the five non-treaty bands of Nez Perce on a small reservation in central Idaho. The Nez Perce had hoped to elude the soldiers, but they were forced to stop and face their pursuers several times. The battle with the highest number of casualties during this epic odyssey took place in the Big Hole Valley of southwestern Montana. The Battle of the Big Hole was a tragic turning point of what came to be called the Nez Perce War of 1877.

The Nez Perce arrived in the lush Big Hole Valley on the morning of August 7, and their trail leader, Chief Looking Glass, chose an old camp site at which to set up their tipis. Believing that they were far enough ahead of Howard's soldiers to be

out of danger, Looking Glass did not post guards. Unknown to the Nez Perce, a second military force—162 men of the 7th U.S. Infantry out of Fort Shaw and four other western Montana forts under the command of Col. John Gibbon—had joined the chase and was advancing toward them.

Gibbon's scouts spotted the Nez Perce tipis on the afternoon of August 8. Before dawn on the 9th most of the soldiers and 34 civilian volunteers were forming a skirmish line behind a screen of willow brush along the west bank of the North Fork of the Big Hole River, within 200 yards of the Nez Perce camp. Here they waited tensely for first light to attack. The attack started prematurely, however, when a Nez Perce named Nalatekin went out to check his horses and stumbled onto the concealed soldiers and volunteers, who shot and killed him. When the troops crossed the river and fired into the village, some of the Nez Perce scattered quickly while others were slow to awaken. In the confusion of the faint pre-dawn light, men,



Col. John Gibbon, a decorated Civil War veteran and commander of the 7th U.S. Infantry, suffered a leg wound in the battle. He applauded the Nez Perce's stand at the Big Hole, calling it "a gallant struggle."

women, and children were shot indiscriminately. The soldiers soon occupied the upper end of the camp, while the Nez Perce warriors, urged on by Chiefs Looking Glass and White Bird, quickly took defensive positions and prepared a counterattack. Their deadly shooting eventually forced Gibbon's men to retreat back across the river to a point of pines projecting from Battle Mountain. In the timber the troops dug in for a siege and were pinned down for the next 24 hours.

During the attack, some of Gibbon's men had been struggling to haul a 12-pounder mountain howitzer through the dense lodgepole pine forest. They managed to place it on the hillside above the siege area just as the soldiers were digging in. The crew fired two rounds before a group of Nez Perce horsemen, galloping forward, captured the gun, dismantled it, and scattered its parts.

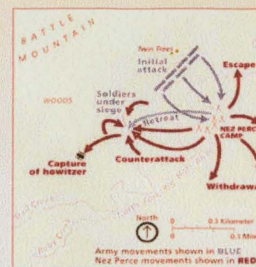
As the siege continued, some of the Nez Perce warriors began withdrawing to help Chief Joseph and others to care for the injured, bury the dead, gather their horses, and break camp. Others remained to keep the soldiers under fire while the Nez Perce families headed south, leaving much of their belongings and many of their dead behind. Finally, on August 10, in the early morning of the second day of fighting, the remaining warriors fired parting shots and left to join their people. The battle was over.

General Howard's troops arrived the next day and found Colonel Gibbon wounded and his command out of action. In a military sense the Nez Perce had won the battle, but the "victory" was a hollow one. Sixty to ninety members of the tribe had been killed. Only about thirty of these were warriors; the rest were women, children, and old people. The Nez Perce now realized the war was not over and they must flee for their lives.

The military's losses were also high, with 29 dead and 40 wounded, but the soldiers knew that they had greatly damaged the fighting ability and the morale of the Nez Perce people. Despite the tragic events that occurred on the battlefield, both sides demonstrated acts of heroism and human kindness. Seven enlisted men were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, and those officers who survived received brevet promotions. For many of the soldiers and volunteers the horrors of what they had seen at the Battle of the Big Hole would haunt them for the rest of their lives.



Above left: This colorful coat, given to 2d Lt. Lowell Jerome by Chief Joseph, is said to be one of the jackets worn by Chief Joseph at the Battle of the Bear's Paw. Above right: Army fatigue blouses of this 1872 pattern are believed to have been worn by some of the enlisted men of the 7th Infantry during the Battle of the Big Hole.



This buffalo drinking horn belonged to Wounded Head (Husit Oyuyen), a Nez Perce warrior who derived his name from the wound he received in the battle. Wounded Head carved a notch in the horn for each Nez Perce he found dead at the Big Hole. His figures were 10 women, 21 children, and 32 men for a total of 63.



T. C. Sherrill was one of the 34 civilian volunteers from the Bitterroot Valley who fought in the Battle of the Big Hole. He became the first caretaker of Big Hole battlefield, under the U.S. Forest Service, serving from 1914 through 1916.



Big Hole National Battlefield Today

Big Hole National Battlefield memorializes the Nez Perce men, women, and children, the soldiers of the 7th U.S. Infantry, and the Bitterroot Volunteers who clashed at the Battle of the Big Hole.

Stop first at the visitor center, which overlooks the battlefield. A 28-minute video program and a museum of photographs, quotations, and personal items belonging to some of the battle participants provide orientation to the park and its story. There is also a sales and information desk.

The visitor center is open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., with extended hours in the summer. It is closed January 1, Thanksgiving, and December 25.

Trails begin at the lower parking lot and lead to several points of interest:

Nez Perce Camp The battle began here when soldiers surprised the sleeping Nez Perce. Like other tribal places in Idaho, Washington, and Oregon, this area is Sacred Ground. It symbolizes the strength and spirit of the Nez Perce, and serves as a reminder of their heavy losses in their struggle for freedom. A guide booklet to the Nez Perce Camp is available along the trail.

Siege Area The soldiers were besieged here for nearly 24 hours. The trenches they dug still remain. They remind us of the desperate struggle the soldiers waged here to survive and of the Nez Perce efforts to pin down the soldiers while their families escaped. A guide booklet to the Siege Area is available along the trail.

- Restrooms
- Trailhead parking
- Picnic area
- Telephone
- Wheelchair-accessible
- To Wisdom 16km

Howitzer Capture Site The steep walk up to the site where Nez Perce warriors captured Gibbon's howitzer takes about 20 minutes and provides a spectacular view of the battlefield and the Big Hole Valley.

A Word of Caution Coyote, deer, elk, moose, and other animals native to the park are harmless at a distance, but can be dangerous if startled or approached too closely. Always keep a safe distance. Pets are not allowed on trails or in the visitor center, and must be under physical control at all times. The park is open to cross-country skiing, but be prepared for severe winter weather conditions.



Howitzer capture site.



Site of Nez Perce Camp.

About Your Visit

Big Hole National Battlefield is 10 miles west of Wisdom, Mont., on Mont. 43. From Butte, Mont., take I-15 south-west to Divide, then to Wisdom on Mont. 43; from the west, Mont. 43 intersects U.S. 93 at the State line between Salmon, Idaho, and Hamilton, Mont. From Dillon, take I-15 south three miles to the Wisdom exit, then to Wisdom on Highway 278, then west on Mont. 43.

There are picnic tables at the lower parking lot. Camping and overnight facilities are available in nearby campgrounds.

Fishing is permitted in the national battlefield and the adjacent national forest as provided by Montana law. No hunting is allowed within

the national battlefield. Montana laws apply in the national forest. Hunting and fishing on private land is by permission only.

Fuel, food, and lodging—although limited—can be found in nearby Wisdom. More complete services are available in Butte or Dillon, Mont., to the east, and Hamilton, Mont., or Salmon, Idaho, to the west.

For More Information Big Hole National Battlefield P.O. Box 237 Wisdom, MT 59761 406-689-3155 www.nps.gov/biho

Visit www.nps.gov to learn more about other parks in the National Park System.

From: carol doig <cddoig@comcast.net>
Subject: bits & pieces much appreciated
Date: September 23, 2014 10:23:01 AM PDT
To: Marcella Walter <mmsw922@aol.com>



Marcella, hi

Just real quick ahead of lunch here, to say thanks for the Rodney Crowell bit of info--one heckuva song, for sure, right up there in Tyson quality if not better,maybe?--although you maybe want to know the link didn't work but we had no trouble finding the audio on YouTube.

And I sent in to the publishing house 3 of your pics--2 of the Inn and the excellent one of Carol and me you took at the Teton visitor center--and my editor and publicist both seemed charmed down to their socks.

Which only adds to the great good work you've done for me and the Last Bus, most recently at the wheel of your own minibus. We had a grand time on the trip, and for the how manyeth time, thanks, thanks, thanks. Hope your return home and reunion with Mr. Noodle and schmoozing at the history conference(?) went well.

Best, Ivan

|
Carol and Ivan,

Here at my computer before going off to have coffee with Bob Swartout--as they head out for London and Italy.

Here's the link to that incomparable mercantile--Conovers--in Wisdom--now sedated-up:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/22866559@N00/3771424550/> Or this one just of the centerpiece:

<http://allenrussell.photoshelter.com/image/I0000T7z.u4Y30lA>

Rodney Crowell on Youtube singing "Long Journey Home" with Montana references: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYN2DkEWPH> Bad light - but OK sound. Rodney grew up desperately poor in Houston with family in Louisiana--hence some of the lyrics.

Take care!

Love,

Marcella



GUIDE TO THE TRAILS AT BIG HOLE NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD

Big Hole National Battlefield is a memorial to the people who fought and died here on August 9 and 10, 1877. About 750 non-treaty Nez Perce were fleeing from US Army troops charged with enforcing the US government's demands that all Nez Perce move to a reservation a fraction the size of their traditional homeland. In doing so, the Army was enforcing a national policy of placing all American Indians on reservations to make way for the westward expansion of the young United States. Here, just before daybreak on August 9, 1877, military forces attacked the non-treaty Nez Perce as they rested after six weeks of conflicts and flight from military forces.

Numbered paragraphs in this guide correspond to numbered posts along the trails.

Nez Perce
National Historical
Park



The Nez Perce Camp Trail (page 3) will help you visualize the opening of the Battle of the Big Hole, and provide insight into the Nez Perce perspective on the conflict.

The Siege Area Trail (page 10), beginning just northwest of the parking lot, follows the movements and views of the US Army officers, soldiers, and civilian volunteers in the middle and closing portions of the battle.

Please walk both trails and use this booklet to gain an understanding of the events of the Battle of the Big Hole, and the disparate worlds inhabited by the Nez Perce and the US Army soldiers.



Areas marked with this symbol are being revegetated. Please stay on the trails and permit these areas to recover.



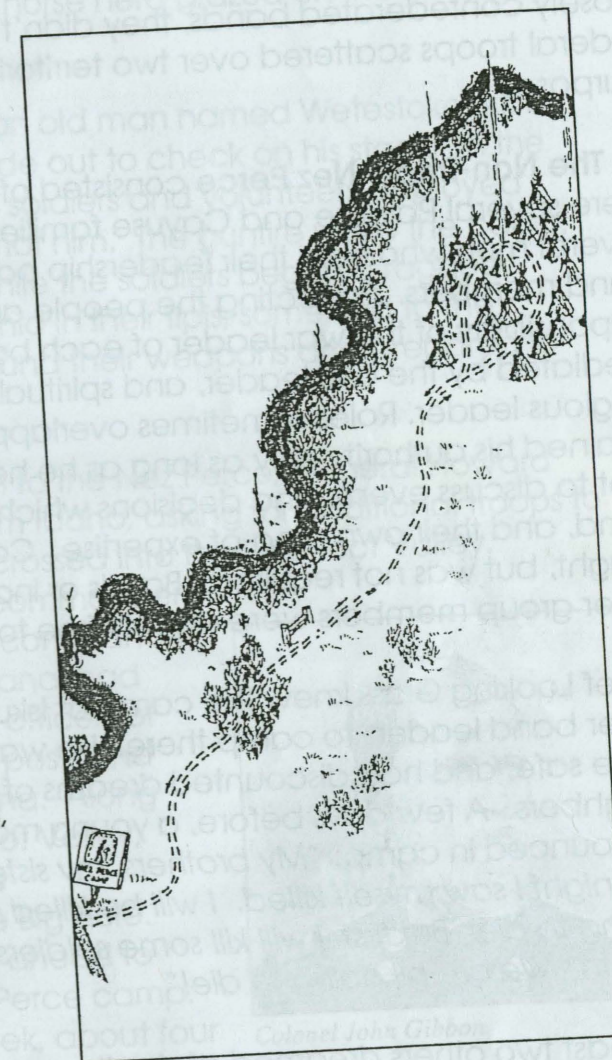
The Nez Perce Camp Trail is accessible to wheelchair users with help. The surface is packed earth and may be muddy in early summer. The Siege Area Trail is hilly and very uneven; wheelchair use is not recommended.

Wild animals live here. Watch for moose in the willows along the river. Do not approach them! Be especially careful when cow moose with calves are present.

THE NEZ PERCE CAMP TRAIL

Allow about 1 hour and 30 minutes for this 1.2 mile round-trip walk to the Nez Perce Camp. The numbered trail markers in the camp area correspond to the numbered paragraphs below.

1. *Iskumtselalik Pah* (its koom tsi LEH lik peh) "The Place of the Buffalo Calf" The Nez Perce knew this camping spot from previous buffalo hunts on the plains of eastern Montana. They knew abundant water would be available, that the grassy meadow would provide forage for their herd of horses, and that they could collect tipi poles in the nearby forest. Arriving on August 7, 1877, they must have looked forward to several days of needed rest. Chief Looking Glass, a respected headman who had been charged with responsibility for the group while they were traveling, directed the people to gather lodge poles, erect their tipis, and prepare food.



About 750 Nez Perce men, women, and children began the work of establishing camp here. The leaders knew they were far ahead of General Howard and his men, and some believed that, by crossing from Idaho Territory into Montana Territory, they had left conflict with the Army behind them. Accustomed to a tribal society built around autonomous, loosely confederated bands, they didn't realize the extent to which federal troops scattered over two territories could be united in common purpose.

2. The Non-Treaty Nez Perce consisted of 5 bands. Traveling with them were several Palouse and Cayuse families. Each group was led by several men who held their leadership positions through the respect of the band members. Protecting the people and their property was the responsibility of the war leader of each band, while civil disputes were mediated by the civil leader, and spiritual matters were deferred to the religious leader. Roles sometimes overlapped, and a particular leader retained his authority only as long as he held the trust of his band. Leaders met to discuss events and decisions which had bearing on their particular band, and their own area of expertise. Compromise and agreement was sought, but was not required. Bands or individuals who disagreed with other group members were entirely free to act as they believed best.

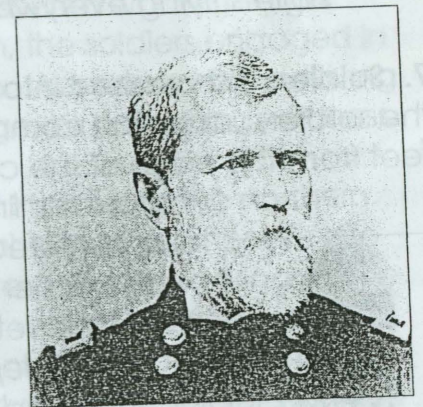
Chief Looking Glass knew the camp at Iskumtselalik Pah, and advised the other band leaders to camp there. He was confident that his people were safe, and had discounted dreams of disaster reported by his neighbors. A few days before, a young man named Wahlytits had announced in camp: *"My brothers, my sisters, I am telling you! In a dream last night I saw myself killed. I will be killed soon! I do not care. I am willing to die. But first, I will kill some soldiers. I shall not turn back from death. We are all going to die!"*

At least two others dreamed of death and soldiers, but Chief Looking Glass was adamant--he advised against scouting back the way they had come, and he opted not to set sentries for the night.

3. After establishing camp on August 7, the Nez Perce spent August 8 hunting and gathering food, cutting tipi poles, seeing to their horses, and relaxing from the grueling pace of the past weeks. Youngsters ran foot races and played in the willows and tall grass by the river. After dark, the camp quieted, while the most of the horse herd grazed on the hillside to the west.

Not long before dawn on August 9, an old man named Wetestokaykt, or Natalekin, mounted his horse and rode out to check on his stock. In the darkness he stumbled upon a line of soldiers and volunteers deployed along the river, and the volunteers shot him. The gunfire woke the camp, and the first response was panic. While the soldiers began a ragged attack on the village, some people hid in their tipis, some fled to the willows by the water, while others found their weapons and prepared to defend the camp.

4. What had happened? Unknown to the Nez Perce, General Howard had sent a message to Ft. Shaw from Idaho, asking for additional troops to intercept the Nez Perce after they crossed into the Bitterroot Valley. Colonel John Gibbon, regimental commander for the 7th Infantry at Ft. Shaw and commander of the Military Department of Montana, had gathered 146 enlisted men and 16 officers of the 7th Infantry from the scattered posts and forts in central and western Montana. Along with 34 volunteers from the Bitterroot Valley, Gibbon and the assembled troops began marching south toward the Big Hole. Gibbon had sent a scouting party ahead to ascertain the location of the Nez Perce camp. His men had camped on Trail Creek, about four miles west of the camp, on August 8. Leaving camp on foot just before midnight, the soldiers were within site of the camp about two hours later, on Thursday, August 9.



Colonel John Gibbon

5. Gibbon had arranged his troops in a long line along the base of the hill to the west, intending to make a unified charge. They expected to drive the Nez Perce onto the meadow east of the river and to encircle and capture them. Before everyone was in position, Wetestokaykt encountered the military men and volunteers, who fired prematurely and began the attack.

6. The Nez Perce camp included 89 tipis, arranged roughly north to south, with the greatest concentration of tipis near you here. The initial gun fire came from the volunteers and soldiers commanded by Lt. Bradley, about 150 yards northwest of this point and across the river. Chief White Bird was following Wetestokaykt to check on his horses and saw and heard the flashing guns. He roused the sleeping camp with his alarm. Red Elk, a young boy, later reported:

About early morning I was awakened. My father and Chief Yellow Bull were standing, talking low. They thought they saw soldiers across the creek. Next instant we heard shots from above the creek, across the canyon, maybe a quarter mile away. I heard the call, 'We are attacked'...After these two or three shots there broke a heavy fighting. Soldiers soon came rushing among the tepees. Bullets flying everywhere.

7. Soldiers first crashed into the village in this area. In their initial charge, the soldiers under the command of Captain Sanno stopped about 180 feet from the edge of the camp. The men fired two volleys into the camp

before rushing among the tipis. One of the first tipis they encountered was a maternity lodge occupied by a woman, her newly born baby, and her midwife. Yellow Wolf later returned to the Big Hole Valley and recalled:

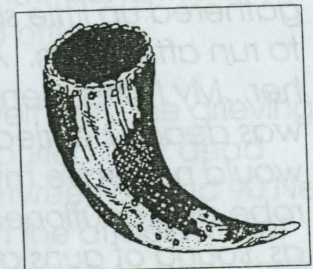
This tepee here was standing and silent. Inside we found the two women lying in their blankets dead. Both had been shot. The mother had her newborn baby in her arms. Its head was smashed, as by a gun breech or bootheel.



courtesy Montana Historical Society

Many women and children were present in the village.

8. In the first few minutes of the attack, confusion predominated among both Nez Perce and soldiers. As soldiers invaded the southern part of the village, women and crying children ran to the river and hid in the willows, or underwater. Some Nez Perce with rifles returned fire, while others ran with their families. Soon, Chief White Bird's voice was heard calling over the noise: "Why are we retreating? Since the world was made brave men fight for their women and children! Now is the time to fight!" Chief Looking Glass, at the other end of the village, also shouted at the men to fight. White Bird and Looking Glass were respected warriors, and their calls for resistance were obeyed. As the soldiers moved into the central part of the camp, armed and unarmed warriors met them in hand to hand combat. Heavy fighting in this area kept the soldiers from occupying the northern end of camp, and many women and children found escape routes there.



Wounded Head's drinking cup, on which he recorded the number of Nez Perce killed in this Battle.

9. Casualties on both sides were heaviest here, in the center of the camp. The soldiers had been instructed to try to burn and wreck the tipis in the attack, and the damp, smoking buffalo hides obscured what little light came with dawn. No longer fighting in formation, the soldiers engaged in individual battles with men, women and children. Accounts from surviving soldiers and Nez Perce relate situations of courage, brutality, and kindness.

10. Wahlytiits and his pregnant wife had erected their tipi at the northern end of the village. When he heard gunshots, Wahlytiits urged his wife into the willows, then took cover in a hollow near here and began firing on the soldiers. His wife quickly returned to his side, was wounded, and watched as her husband killed one of the first soldiers to enter this part of camp. Another soldier shot Wahlytiits, and his wife quickly shot the soldier with her husband's rifle. She was immediately killed by yet another soldier.

11. Josiah Red Wolf, then a 5 year old boy, later recounted:

...we were awakened by shots and the neighing of horses. My brothers ran from our tepee to take cover in the willows. My mother gathered up little sister and, taking me by the right hand, she started to run after them. A single shot passed through the baby and her...My father bent over her and, although I did not realize it, she was dead...He tried to take my hand and pull me with him, but I would not leave my mother...he covered me with our big buffalo robe and cautioned me to stay perfectly still...I was very frightened as sound of guns and screams of wounded increased...but I never moved. I tried not to cry, I must be brave.

12. Nine year old White Bird, Chief White Bird's nephew, recalled standing in the water and hiding behind a screen of willows when "Some soldiers leveled their guns at us. My mother threw up her hand and called, 'Only women! Only women!' as she jerked me entirely under water. An officer spoke to the soldiers, who let down their guns and went away."

13. Within about 20 minutes, Colonel Gibbon realized his men were unable to subdue the Nez Perce, and called for a retreat to the bench in the pine trees, about 400 yards southwest. Under intense fire from Nez Perce snipers along the river and on the hillside above them, the men began to push through the willows toward a more defensible position.

14. The retreating soldiers were followed by armed Nez Perce warriors, who collected weapons and ammunition from the dead. As the sounds of gunfire receded, Nez Perce emerged from the willows and river to help their wounded and find their dead. Colonel Gibbon later wrote:

Few of us will soon forget the wail of mingled grief, rage, and horror which came from the camp four or five hundred yards from us when the Indians returned to it and recognized their slaughtered warriors, women and children. Above this wail of horror we could hear the passionate appeal of the leaders urging their followers to fight, and the warwhoops in answer which boded us no good.

15. The battle continued in the Siege area, where Nez Perce warriors held the soldiers and volunteers pinned down among the trees. Continue reading on page 10 as you walk the Siege Trail to understand the events in that area, and the perspective of the soldiers and officers.



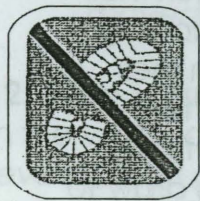
courtesy Smithsonian Institution
Chief Joseph about 1900

Throughout that long afternoon, the grieving people in camp hastily buried their dead relatives and friends. Between 60 and 90 Nez Perce had been killed in the attack. Chief Joseph encouraged everyone to pack their belongings and prepare to travel, knowing that the Army would never abandon their chase now. As quickly as possible, they prepared the sick and wounded for travel, then herded their horses up the long draw to the east, and turned southward.

TO UNDERSTAND THE EVENTS OF THE SIEGE AREA, THE CLOSING PORTIONS OF THE BATTLE, AND THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE MILITARY MEN, PLEASE RETURN TO THE PARKING LOT AND WALK THE SIEGE AREA TRAIL.

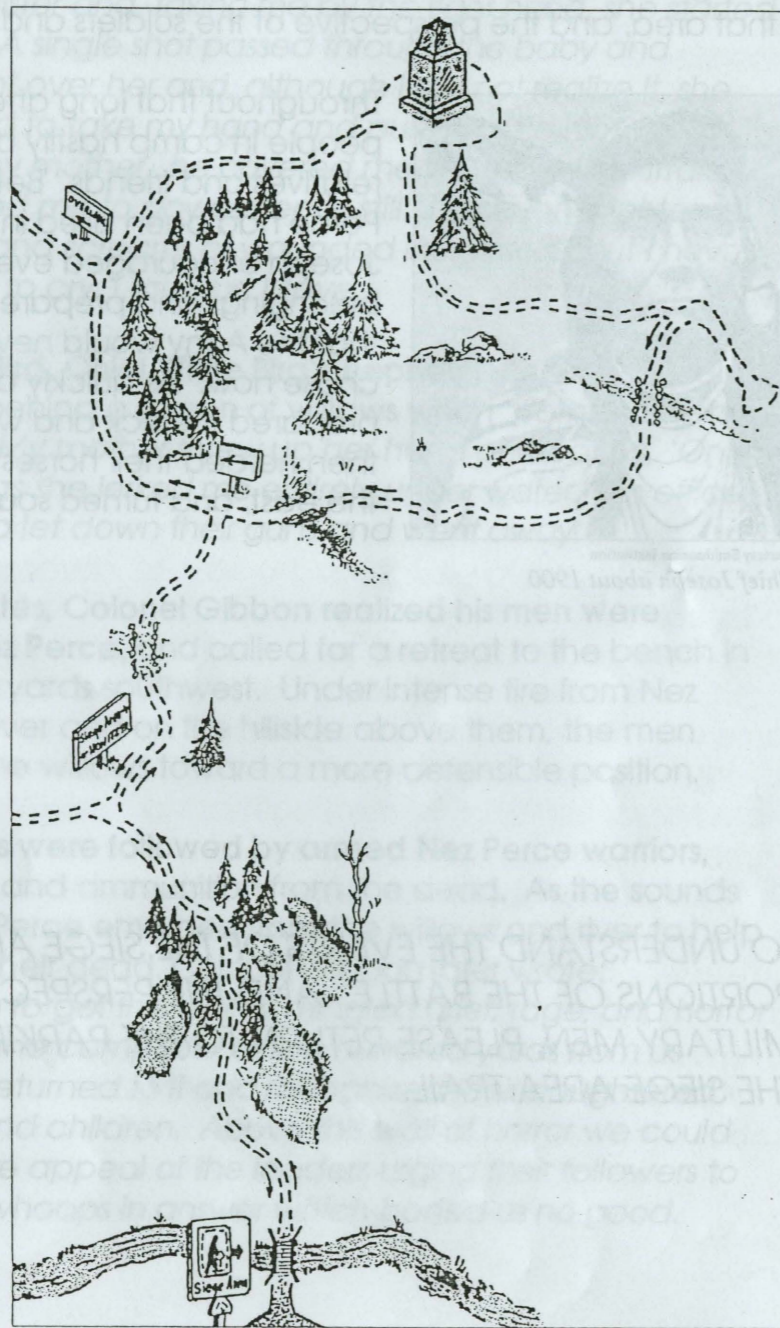
The **SIEGE AREA TRAIL** is .8 mile round trip. The trail climbs about 50 feet in elevation. Allow 45 minutes to walk the trail and read this guide.

Numbered paragraphs in this guide correspond to numbered posts along the trail.



Areas marked with this symbol are being revegetated. Please stay on the trails and permit these areas to recover.

Do not approach wildlife. Be very careful around cow moose with calves.



Brief summary of events in the Nez Perce Camp area. Just before dawn on the morning of August 9, 1877, 184 soldiers and volunteers under the command of Colonel John Gibbon attacked the sleeping Nez Perce camp, about 400 yards northeast of here. Although the military men expected to quickly subdue the surprised Nez Perce, they were instead forced out of the village under heavy fire, and retreated to the forested bench just ahead of you. Casualties were high on both sides. Nez Perce snipers held the soldiers on this hillside for the remainder of August 9 and part of August 10, before departing to join their fleeing families. Please walk the Nez Perce Camp Trail and read the first section of this booklet for greater details on the opening portions of the Battle, and the perspectives of the Nez Perce.

1. **Colonel John Gibbon** was one of the many very experienced officers in the post-Civil War army. Of his 16 commissioned officers, only two lacked Civil War experience. By contrast, the 132 enlisted men he commanded were not, for the most part, seasoned soldiers--13 had served in the Civil War, and one man had seen action in the Mexican War. However, Gibbon and some of his men had been among the first soldiers on the battlefield of the Little Bighorn, after Colonel George Armstrong Custer and his immediate command met their deaths just one year earlier.



courtesy Montana Historical Society
1st Lieutenant James Bradley was one of Gibbon's experienced and trusted officers. Bradley was killed in the opening moments of the battle, a loss keenly felt by the men and Colonel Gibbon.



General Oliver O. Howard was responsible for the Nez Perce campaign. He ordered Colonel Gibbon to intercept and hold the non-treaty Nez Perce until he arrived from Idaho.

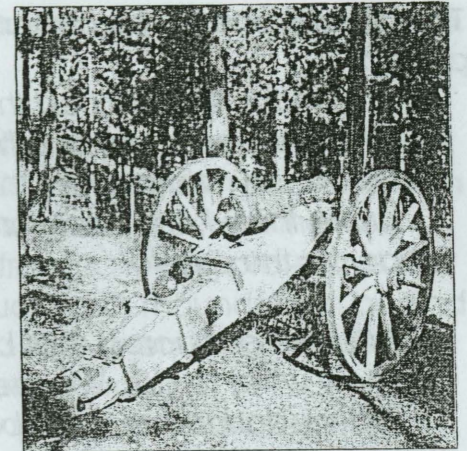
2. Colonel Gibbon and his officers expected the attack on the Nez Perce camp to be quick and effective. They intended to use a time-tested strategy, that of separating the enemy from their belongings and families in a quick and terrifying surprise attack. One group of soldiers was sent to drive the Nez Perce horse herd away, while the rest were to wait for a signal to attack. Then, before sunrise, they were to rush the camp, shooting low into the tipis and setting them on fire. The Nez Perce were expected to jump from their beds in confusion and fright, and seeing some of their people dead, their tipis afire, and their horses gone, become quickly demoralized and surrender.

Given this convincing scenario, the soldiers were ordered to leave their heavy wool overcoats, blankets, and extra food rations with their supply wagons, four miles away. Gibbon later wrote that on the night of Wednesday, August 8:

...all laid down to rest until eleven o'clock. At that hour, the command, now consisting of 17 officers, 132 men and 34 citizens, started down the trail on foot, each man being provided with 90 rounds of ammunition...The 34 citizens who volunteered to accompany us being joined to Lt. Bradley's command, the advance was given to him and the column moved in silence down the trail, the night being clear and starlight.

TRAIL JUNCTION: The spur trail to your left leads 1/4 mile up the hillside to the position of the 12 pound Mountain Howitzer. Allow 40 minutes to walk to the howitzer site and back and read paragraphs 3 and 4. Alternatively, read paragraphs 3 and 4 here before continuing on along the right hand trail to the Siege area.

3. Colonel Gibbon had directed six men to bring the Mountain Howitzer behind the main body of troops, when daylight would make it easier to haul the gun across Trail Creek, and silence would no longer be essential. Moving artillery through the rough country encountered in the Indian Wars was no easy feat. It took six mules to pull the "limber"--the ammunition wagon--and the cannon, which was hitched to the limber. Accurately firing the weapon was no easier; ideally seven men who had trained as a team were assigned to the cannon, and each man played a critical part in aligning, aiming, cleaning, priming, and firing it, while calming the mules nearby, and analyzing the previous shot for effect before shooting again. Unfortunately for the soldiers at the Big Hole, only five men plus a mule driver had been assigned to handle the howitzer. Of those, only one had combat experience with artillery.



courtesy Beaverhead National Forest
Model 1863 Mountain Howitzer

4. Arriving well after the initial attack on Thursday morning, August 9, the men assigned to the howitzer discovered their regiment in dire straits, already under sniper fire in the trees below them. The soldiers under siege reported hearing two booming cannon shots, and then silence. Although they didn't know it at the time, a group of about 30 mounted Nez Perce had observed the arrival of the cannon, and noted the few soldiers attending it. They rode up the hill or approached on foot, and shot three of the soldiers, killing Corporal Sale. The survivors fled for their lives, and the Nez Perce dismantled the howitzer. More importantly, they also confiscated 2000 rounds of rifle ammunition carried by a packmule, which they used in later clashes with the military.

Return to the main trail, turning left at the junction. Stop at post #5.

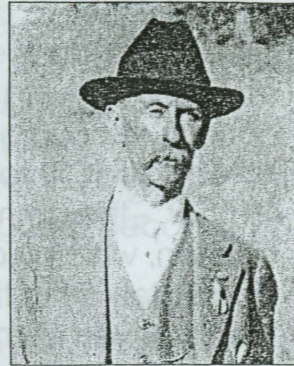
5. Tom Sherrill, one of the civilian volunteers from the Bitterroot Valley later reported:

...Gibbons (sic) noticed that the Indians had us almost surrounded, and he gave the order for us to retreat...By this time the Indians began to rally and drove the whites back through the camp and across the creek.

After we got across that blamed creek we did not know what to do. We seemed to be waiting for orders, and as we were bunched together an Indian behind the big tree was simply giving us hell. The fact is we were so close together he couldn't miss us and several were killed right there. I heard Gibbon give the command to scatter, then came the order to take the timbered point away from them and intrench. "Charge the point and rake the brush with your rifles," was the command.

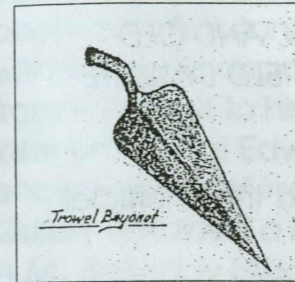
That was no easy place to take. It was a steep hill and the Indians were on top shooting down at us. I saw fellows fall over backward and fall to the bottom.

#6 The civilian volunteers played an important part in the battle. The entire Bitterroot Valley had been in an uproar of fear as the settlers anticipated the Nez Perce movements across Lolo Pass and south through the valley. When the Nez Perce moved through peacefully, purchasing supplies from the settlers and paying for them in gold, many people believed that the rumored threat from the Indians had been overblown. However, others disagreed, and about 70 volunteers caught up with Colonel Gibbon's command just south of Darby, Montana. John B. Catlin, captain of the Bitterroot Volunteers, wrote: "We overtook the soldiers the first day out, and there we were informed that the General (meaning Gibbon) did not care to be encumbered with citizens. But we stuck." Actually, only about half of the volunteers "stuck"--36 returned to their



courtesy Bertie Lord
Thomas C. Sherrill, later a caretaker of the Battlefield

homes in the Bitterroot Valley, leaving 34 to accompany the soldiers to the Big Hole.



Carried by some of the enlisted men and used to dig rifle trenches, Gibbon later credited the tool with saving the lives of his men.

#7 As you walk among the trees, look for shallow pits and trenches, now partially overgrown and filled with pine needles and cones. Under fire from the Nez Perce snipers, the men frantically dug protective rifle pits, and tried to construct earth mounds from behind which they could fire on their enemies. Volunteer Bunch Sherrill, Tom's brother wrote:

Several of us young fellows had taken from home, a butcher knife. We had them ground sharp and on the road over to the Big Hole, we would take our knives out of the scabbard and run a thumb over the edge to see if they were in good shape to raise a scalp with. Well the first work I had for my scalping-knife, was to dig a hole to get into. It looked like a saw blade the next morning.

Memorialization Memorial markers were placed in this area in the years after the battle. In 1883, the U.S. Army had the six ton granite monument placed at the Battlefield, as a memorial and grave marker for the men who are buried here.

In 1928, this sculpted bust of a Nez Perce warrior was placed nearby by the Nez Perce Tribe and the Chief Joseph Memorial Association. Its inscription reads:

"TO THE EVERLASTING MEMORY OF THE BRAVE WARRIORS OF CHIEF JOSEPH'S BAND WHO FOUGHT ON THESE GROUNDS IN THE NEZ PERCE WAR OF 1877."

On the anniversary of the Battle in 1951, a third memorial, sometimes called the "Unofficial Memorial", was smuggled onto the Battlefield and cemented in place



by local historian Thain White. White evidently believed that park management would not sanction its addition. It reads:

"IN MEMORY OF THE INDIANS, INFANTS, CHILDREN, WOMEN, AND OLD MEN WHO WERE WOUNDED AND KILLED NEAR THIS BATTLEFIELD BY WHITE SOLDIERS, AUGUST 9, 1877."

Weathering and vandalism endangered the sculpture and the unofficial memorial; both can now be seen in the visitor center.

8 In shallow rifle pits, or lying behind fallen logs, the wounded soldiers and volunteers suffered for lack of food, warm clothing, drinking water, and medical care. In late afternoon, the soldiers received a scare when Nez Perce warriors set fire to the long grass in the Siege area. Too green to burn well, the grass only smoldered and smoked. In addition, the soldiers could hear the Nez Perce chiefs encouraging the warriors to continue fighting, and, according to Corporal Loynes, their words *"...were interpreted to us, in a low voice, by a half breed, by the name of Pete Mat..."* Of that Thursday, August 9, Loynes later wrote: *"...the sun seemed to stand still, we wanted the night to come that we might get water."*

9 When darkness fell, three enlisted men volunteered to form a water detail. Private Homer Coon later wrote:

...it was not entirely because of the wounded that we volunteered-- we were so nearly famished ourselves for a drink that we were thinking of ourselves too and that beautiful stream we could see glistening down below...we collected about four canteens apiece and stated crawling down the slope. Although it was only about 100 yards it seemed more like 100 miles to me. We were fortunate in getting there without being seen by the Indians and then proceeded to fill our canteens. I never realized how much those canteens held; it seemed as though they never would fill up. The shots began to whistle around us and, thirsty as I was, would you believe that I actually forgot in my excitement to get a drink for myself.

10 Later in the night, civilian Billy Edwards volunteered to try to sneak away from the siege area and take news of the disaster and dispatches from Colonel Gibbon to Deer Lodge. He borrowed

boots from Adjutant Woodruff for the trek, and set out with Gibbon's dispatches as well as a personal note from Woodruff to his wife, waiting at Ft. Shaw. Woodruff later wrote that Edwards *"crawled through the encircling line of Indians, walked forty miles to French's Gulch, obtained a horse and rode forty more...at 10 A.M., Saturday (August 11) was in the telegraph office at Deer Lodge."* There Edwards sent the message to Mrs. Woodruff, and forwarded Gibbon's dispatches to Governor Potts. Gibbon tersely reported the situation to Potts and asked for any medical assistance that could possibly be provided to the wounded troops.



courtesy Mrs. Anna Edwards
Billy Edwards

11 Battle Gulch The draw to your right, leading down to the river bottoms, was particularly dangerous to the entrenched soldiers because it provided an access route to the fortified area. Snipers hid among the taller trees opposite the gulch and shot at the soldiers. At least one Nez Perce fired at them from a tree directly across the river from the mouth of the gulch. At a range of only 200 yards, his accuracy was deadly.

12 About 6:30 a.m. the following morning (Friday, August 10), a rider appeared in the fortified area. He was Nelse McGilliam, a civilian courier who was riding from General Howard's column with news of Howard's approach. He was met with a shout of joy on the part of the soldiers, who leapt up to greet him. They quickly leapt back into their rifle pits, for the Nez Perce fired at their movement. Although the soldiers didn't realize it, most of the Nez Perce had left the battlefield by this time, and only a few snipers held the soldiers on the hill.

13 **Yellow Wolf**, a Nez Perce survivor who later recounted his memories of the Battle, remembered:

It was almost dawn when we heard the sound of a running horse. Soon a white man came loping through the timber. He was headed for the trenches. We did not try to kill him...When that rider reached the trenches, the soldiers made loud cheering. We understood! Ammunition had arrived or more soldiers were coming...We gave those trenched soldiers two volleys as a "Good-bye"! Then we mounted and rode swiftly away.



courtesy Montana Historical Society
Yellow Wolf in 1908

14 **At last able to move freely without fear of sniper fire**, the unwounded soldiers tried to help their injured comrades. There was not a doctor among Gibbon's command, but 1st Lt. Charles Coolidge, who had some medical training, had provided what help he could until he himself was wounded. There was no other medical expertise or supplies, and the fact that most of the men had left their extra equipment and clothing at the wagon train meant there was little with which to improvise. With 29 men dead and 40 more wounded, Gibbon chose to remain camped here until reinforcements and medical care arrived.

15 **Colonel Gibbon**, writing in support of his men, issued "Regimental Orders # 27" from his temporary headquarters in the Siege area.

The regimental commander congratulates the regiment upon the result of the conflict here with hostile Nez Percés on the 9th and 10th inst. While mourning for the dead, Capt. William Logan and First Lieut. James H. Bradley and the twenty-one enlisted men, who fell gallantly doing a soldier's duty, we can not but congratulate ourselves that after a stern chase of over 250 miles, during which we twice crossed the rugged divide of the Rocky Mountains, we inflicted upon a more numerous enemy a heavier loss than our own, and held our ground until it gave up the field. In respect to the memory of the gallant dead, the officers of the regiment will wear the usual badge of mourning for thirty days.

Six enlisted men received the Congressional Medal of Honor for their role in the Battle of the Big Hole, and the Army placed the monument in 1883 in honor of the fallen soldiers and volunteers.

16 **Like most fields of death, Big Hole Battlefield elicited an emotional response from battle survivors on both sides, which continues today.** Not every soldier or volunteer who fought here was convinced that the Nez Perce were a deserving enemy, and some clearly disagreed with Gibbon's implications of a military victory.

Others, however, believed that the benefits of subduing or assimilating American Indian tribes was of primary importance to the expanding United States. For them, no individual person's or group's horror was too great a price to pay. Can you discover similar philosophical differences, and their consequences, in national and international events today?

Chief Joseph spent the rest of his life trying to return to the land of his fathers, the Wallowa Valley in Oregon. Although land was available there for purchase, he was not permitted to buy any. He died on the Colville Reservation in the state of Washington in 1904.

Chief White Bird remained in Canada, but was killed in 1882 by a neighbor who claimed White Bird, a shaman or healer, had failed to cure his sick children, and so been responsible for their deaths.

Colonel John Gibbon returned to his duties at Ft. Shaw after recovering from the injury received here. He retired in 1891 as a Brigadier General, and died in 1896.

Billy Edwards, the volunteer who made the long journey to Deer Lodge to obtain help for the wounded soldiers, died in 1890, apparently a murder victim.

The Nez Perce Tribe today includes about 3100 enrolled members. About 1800 Nez Perce people live within the reservation boundaries in Idaho, and approximately 300 live on the Colville Reservation in eastern Washington and the Umatilla Reservation in Oregon. About 100 people of Nez Perce descent live in Canada. The Nez Perce Tribe visits Big Hole National Battlefield every August to honor the memories of those people who were killed here on August 9 and 10, 1877.

To learn more, read:

An Elusive Victory: The Battle of the Big Hole, by Aubrey L. Haines,
Glacier Natural History Association, 1991.

Yellow Wolf: His Own Story, by L. V. McWhorter
The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1983

The Flight of the Nez Perce, by Mark H. Brown
University of Nebraska Press, 1967

Following the Nez Perce Trail: A Guide to the Nee-Me-Poo National Historic Trail with Eyewitness Accounts, by Cheryl Wilfong,
Oregon State University Press, 1990

Prepared by the staff of Big Hole National Battlefield and Nez Perce National Historical Park. Special thanks to the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Colville Confederated Tribes, Mr. Aubrey Haines, and Mr. Kermit Edmonds.

Published by the Glacier Natural History Association, 1997

Big Hole River

Coordinates: 45°33′41″N 112°20′27″W﻿ / ﻿45.56139°N 112.34083°W﻿ / 45.56139; -112.34083

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **Big Hole River** (Salish: *Sk^wumcné Sewtk^ws*, "waters of the pocket gopher"^[1]) is a tributary of the Jefferson River, approximately 153 miles (246 km) long, in southwestern Montana in the United States. Its source is Skinner Lake in the Beaverhead National Forest in the Beaverhead Mountains of the Bitterroot Range at the continental divide along the Montana-Idaho border in western Beaverhead County. It flows northwest and north, past Wisdom and between the Anaconda Range to the northwest and the Pioneer Mountains to the east. It flows around the north end of the Pioneers, then southeast, past the town of Wise River, Montana, where it is joined by the Wise River. Near Glen, Montana it turns northeast and joins the Beaverhead River near Twin Bridges to form the Jefferson.

The river is an historically popular destination for fly fishing, especially for trout. It is the last habitat in the contiguous United States for native Fluvial Arctic Grayling.^[2] Historic conflicts exist between ranchers in the valley who use the river for irrigation and recreationalists. The river is a Class I water from the Fishtrap fishing access site downstream from Wisdom to its confluence with the Jefferson River. This status affects the level of public access for recreational purposes.^[3]

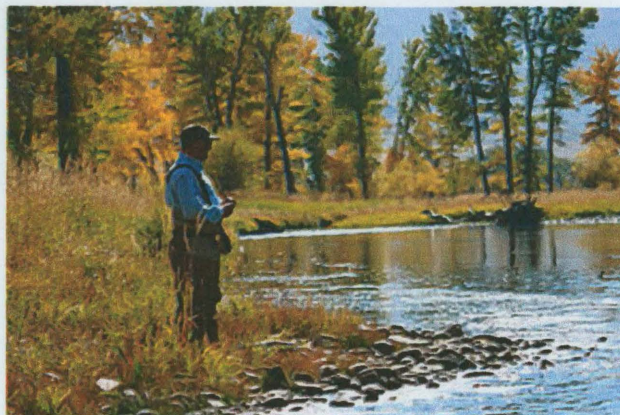
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- 2 Angling the Big Hole
- 3 Grayling
- 4 See also
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History

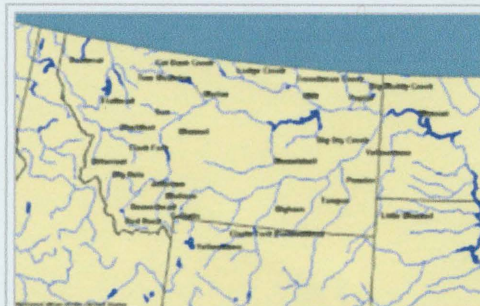
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Hole_River

Big Hole River (*Sk^wumcné Sewtk^ws*) River



Fly Fishing on the Big Hole River Fall of 2006

Country	United States
State	Montana
Source	
- location	Skinner Lake, Bitterroot Range, Montana, Beaverhead
- coordinates	45°10′22″N 113°30′42″W﻿ / ﻿45.17278°N 113.51167°W﻿ / 45.17278; -113.51167
Mouth	Jefferson River
- location	Twin Bridges, Montana
- coordinates	45°33′41″N 112°20′27″W﻿ / ﻿45.56139°N 112.34083°W﻿ / 45.56139; -112.34083
Length	153 mi (246 km)



Montana rivers with the Big Hole in the southwest

At the time Lewis & Clark "discovered" the Big Hole River watershed, it was a buffer zone between several rival Native American tribes including the Nez Percé, Shoshone, Coast Salish, and Blackfeet. Lewis & Clark considered navigating up the Big Hole River, but chose the slower-flowing Beaverhead River instead. Trappers from both the Hudson's Bay Company, the North West Company and the American Fur Company exploited the region from about 1810 to the 1840s. Miners and homesteaders settled the area between 1864 and the early 1900s.

In 1877 the U.S. troops under John Gibbon fought the Nez Percé Indians along the Big Hole River, during the Nez Perce War in the Battle of the Big Hole. The site of the battle along the North fork of the Big Hole is preserved as the Big Hole National Battlefield.

The establishment of Butte, Montana as a mining center and the coming of the Northern Railroad in 1871 assured Big Hole ranchers and farmers of a steady market for their beef, horses, mules, hay and dairy products.

Ranches grew along the river from railroad supply points such as Divide, Montana.^[4] As a great improvement for preserving the wild hay for winter feeding of cattle, Herbert S. Armitage and David J. Stephens filed for a "Hay-Stacker" patent in 1909, which was awarded in 1910. This device, commonly known as a "beaverslide" remained popular until the 1990s, when it was largely displaced by mechanized equipment for producing large round bales.^{[5][6][7]}

In the early 1960s, the US Bureau of Reclamation proposed building the Reichle Dam near the town of Glen along the Big Hole River. Conservationist George F. Grant, Trout Unlimited and local ranchers combined forces to oppose the dam, successfully defeating the proposal in 1967.

Today, fewer than 2500 people inhabit the 2,800 square mile (7,250 km²) Big Hole River watershed.

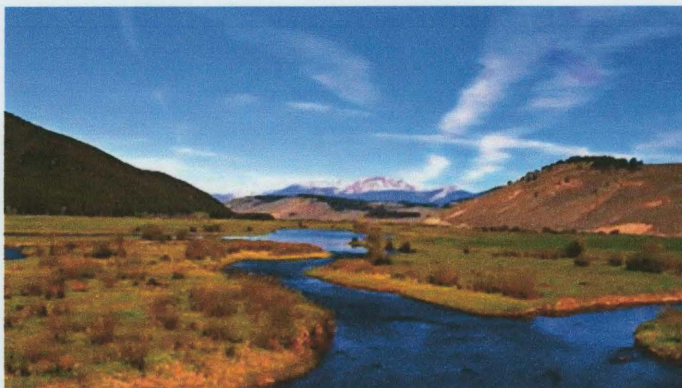
Angling the Big Hole

The Big Hole river has been a destination for serious trout fisherman since the late 1880s when *The Angler's Guide*, an Eastern angling journal advertised the Big Hole as a national destination fishery for grayling and trout while promising daily 40 lb (18 kg) catches.^[8] Although the river still holds some native westslope cutthroat trout, their populations are almost non-existent. Instead, the river holds healthy wild populations of brook, rainbow and brown trout which were first introduced into the Big Hole in late 1880s as hatchery operations began in Butte and Bozeman, Montana. Native Mountain Whitefish are also prevalent in the river. In the 1980s, the state of Montana began stopping general stocking of all Montana rivers. The last hatchery fish were stocked in the Big Hole in 1990.^[9] Dozens of guides, outfitters and fishing lodges offer guided fishing on the Big Hole and its tributaries.



Upper Big Hole River near Jackson, Montana
November 2008

in. And just because Lewis went west in 1803 doesn't mean he forgot about being a Mason. From some journal notations, it appears that Lewis began recruiting William Clark to join the Masons while the Expedition was still preparing to get underway at Camp River Dubois in the winter of 1803-04. He seems to have continued to reflect on Masonic ideas while in the wilderness.



(<http://franceshunter.files.wordpress.com/2010/02/bigholeriver.jpg>)

Meriwether Lewis's Wisdom River (now the Big Hole)

On August 6, 1805, while exploring the high country near present-day Three Forks, Montana, Lewis named the Jefferson River, then assigned Masonic names to three of its tributaries, dubbing them the Wisdom, Philanthropy, and Philosophy. Lewis noted that the names would commemorate Thomas Jefferson's "cardinal virtues, which have so eminently marked that deservedly selibrated character through life," but it should be noted that they may also correspond to the pillars of human virtue embodied in Freemasonry. The names didn't stick, and today the three tributaries are known as the Big Hole River, Ruby River, and Willow Creek.

A couple of weeks later, Lewis's penned one of his most famous journal passages. The birthday reflections of August 18, 1805, are often seen as a wilderness *cri de coeur*, a sad foreshadowing of Lewis's death just four years later. But some historians have suggested they might just as easily be Lewis's attempt to write his own Masonic "words to live by." Judge for yourself:

This day I completed my thirty first year, and conceived that I had in all human probability now existed about half the period which I am to remain in this Sublunary world. I reflected that I had as yet done but little, very little indeed, to further the hapiness of the human race, or to advance the information of the succeeding generation. I viewed with regret the many hours I have spent in indolence, and now soarly feel the want of that information which those hours would have given me had they been judiciously expended. but since they are past and cannot be recalled, I dash from me the gloomy thought and resolved in future, to redouble my exertions and at least indeavour to promote those two primary objects of human existance, by giving them the aid of that portion of talents which nature and fortune have bestoed on me; or in future, to live for *mankind*, as I have heretofore lived *for myself*.—

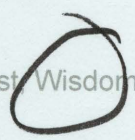
In any case, Lewis became involved again in the Masons at his earliest opportunity. After returning to civilization, he was appointed governor of the Louisiana Territory, with its seat of government in St.

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Photos by J. Stephen Conn
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J. Stephen Conn - Condovers Trading Post, Wisdom, Beaverhead County, Mo...



SEPARATION NOTICE

The following items have been removed from Box 39, Folder 8, Collection 2602, for oversize storage elsewhere.

Items Removed:

Photographs: # 3972-4031 were removed from Series 2- Books & other writings, subseries 7- Last Bus to wisdom (2015) [Working title: The Dog Bus; The Glory Bus]. Images were relocated to series 8- photographs, subseries 3- photographic prints.

X Material has been placed in Box 162, Folder 7-8, Collection 2602

_____ Location information is available from the Special Collections Staff.