

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Camas Meadows camp and battle sites

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number Section 20, T12N, R39E and 31, T13N, R40E not for publication

city, town Kilgore vicinity

state Idaho code ID county Clark code 033 zip code 84323

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u> 2 </u>	<u> </u> buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
<u> 2 </u>	<u> </u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

Nez Perce 1877 Campaign

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official _____

Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official _____

Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____

Date of Action _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DEFENSE - Battle site

AGRICULTURAL - Rangeland

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation _____

walls _____

roof _____

other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Two 40-acre sites about five miles apart make up this landmark. General Howard's camp, in Section 20, occupied a desert location adjacent to Spring Creek in Camas Meadows. Here a Nez Perce detachment rounded up 200 of his mules and some horses belonging to a force of Virginia City volunteers before dawn, August 20, and left for their own camp. They were pursued by Maj. George B. Sanford's battalion, spearheaded by Capt. Randolph Norwood's Company L, 2d U.S. Cavalry, out of Fort Ellis. The Nez Percés surrounded and besieged Norwood in a natural lava defensive position where Norwood's men occupied rifle-pits for four hours before Howard relieved them.

Howard's campsite remains unchanged aside from farms that have replaced camas fields on its western edge. Norwood's site in section 31 is unchanged, aside from an inconspicuous unimproved automobile track that runs through it. A few trees, some sagebush, and some defensive lava formations--unaltered since 1877--remain as interesting reminders of that clash. Norwood's rifle-pits are intact well over a century after they were thrown up. Bugler Bernard Brooks' grave still is marked at Howard's camp site. Both of these segments retain high integrity, and very few people know where to find them.

Site Description:

Col. Mark H. Brown, a former Army Air Force intelligence officer who investigated the Camas Meadows operations nine decades later, described General Howard's camp and Captain Norwood's siege from a military point of view:

A. Howard's Camp site:

This campsite was about seven miles south of the foot of the mountains, and beside Spring and Camas creeks. These two streams enter the northern edge of the Snake River Plain about five miles apart and flow southward in a shallow, fan-shaped depression, gradually converging toward each other. At the campsite, they occupy channels which are almost parallel and only about 500 yards apart. They are clear mountain streams, about eighteen feet wide, and twist along between banks fringed with thick clumps of willow. The shallow valley, now narrowed to approximately a mile width, was carpeted here with luxuriant grass--thus giving the locality the name of Camas Meadows.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D NHL Criteria #1

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G N/A

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

Native American
Military

1877

19-20 August

NHL: X-C-5 Westward Expansion of the
British Colonies and the U.S.
Military-Aboriginal Contact and
Conflict - The Western Mountains

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

Architect/Builder

N/A

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

II. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Nez Perce success at Camas Meadows is nationally significant for extending Maj. Gen. Oliver O. Howard's Nez Perce campaign for an additional six weeks. His column had caught up in pursuit of his Nez Perce adversaries when he camped there, August 19, 1877. Indian capture of most of his pack mules before dawn on August 20 forced a delay of several days while a new packtrain was brought in from Virginia City. An effort to recover their mules on August 20 failed when Capt. Randolph Norwood's cavalry was besieged by Nez Perce warriors. The Indians then continued into Yellowstone National Park and Montana unobstructed by military efforts to halt their expedition toward Canada.

Capt. James Jackson received a medal of honor for action in Norwood's engagement, but some 150 cavalry were unable to recover most of their horses and mules being rebuffed by the Nez Perce.

II. NARRATIVE -- Camas Meadows Fight, August 20, 1877

A. With The Nez Perces From the Battle of the Big Hole to Beaver Creek

The battle of the Big Hole, fought on August 9, 1877, cost both the Nez Perces and the Army dearly. Col. John Gibbon, compelled to abandon his attack on the Indian village, withdrew his soldiers and retreated into the timber on the slope from which the attackers had first charged. For the rest of the day and until dusk on the 10th, Indian sharpshooters kept the troops pinned down while their families packed and moved on. By nightfall the Nez Perces had vanished.

On the morning of August 11, as foot soldiers of the 7th U.S. Infantry buried their dead and succored their wounded, Maj. Gen. Oliver O. Howard and the vanguard of the mounted column that has been pursuing the Indians since their departure from the Clearwater rode into Gibbon's camp. The rest of Howard's column came up the next day. On the 13th Gibbon's badly mauled battalion started for Deer Lodge, and Howard again took up the pursuit. The Indian--although encumbered with their wounded, their families and baggage--had taken advantage of their 72-hour respite to travel almost 100 miles.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

Beal, Merrill D. "I Will Fight No More Forever": Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce War. New York, 1967.

Brown, Mark H. The Flight of the Nez Perce: A History of the Nez Perce War. New York, 1967.

Chandler, Melbourne C. Of Garryowen in Glory: The History of the 7th U.S. Cavalry. pp. 160.

Gulick, Bill. Chief Joseph Country: Land of the Nez Perce. Caldwell, Ida., 1981.

Joseph, Alvin M., Jr. The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest. New Haven, 1965.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

State historic preservation office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Specify repository:

Idaho State Historical Society

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 80 acres

UTM References Norwood's Site

A

1	2	4	3	6	9	4	0	4	9	1	8	1	8	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

1	2	4	3	6	9	5	0	4	9	1	7	7	8	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

1	2	4	3	6	5	4	0	4	9	1	7	7	9	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

1	2	4	3	6	5	4	0	4	9	1	8	1	9	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

SE 1/4 NW 1/4 T12N R39E (campsite) and W 1/4 NE 1/4 NW 1/4 and E 3/4 NW 1/4 NW 1/4 Section 31, T13N, R40E.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

Boundary of these two are defined to include areas of actual camp or siege occupation and military action. Howard's camp extended considerably beyond this 40-acre tract, but additional portions cannot be located precisely.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Merle W. Wells, Historian and Edwin C. Bearss, Chief Historian, NPS
organization Idaho State Historical Society date Rev., July, 1988
street & number 610 North Julia Davis Drive telephone (208) 334-3428
city or town Boise state Idaho zip code 83702

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Spring Creek lies on the eastern side of this depression and, at the point where the camp was pitched, a strip of meadow 300 yards wide intervenes between the channel and the remains of an ancient lava flow--a broad, rather flat-topped elevation lying some forty feet above the meadow. As Howard described the camp, his tent, which was pitched on this elevated area, was the "central position." The Virginia City volunteers and Norwood's cavalry camped on the meadow between the two creeks, with the soldiers covering all the "approaches" to the location of the headquarters tent. "Great pains" were taken by Maj. Edwin C. Mason "to cover the camp with pickets in every direction"; and before night, every animal was brought within the confines of the camp. Cavalry horses were tied to picket lines, draft horses were tied to the wagons, and the bell mares of the pack trains were hobbled. Apparently, many of the horses of the volunteers were picketed or hobbled. And all of the hobbled horses and the pack mules--which would stay close to the bell mares--were left free to graze at will on the meadow between the two creeks.

B. Norwood's Siege Site:

"With warriors swarming all around them, the troopers retreated toward the southwest--about a mile--until they came to a bit of terrain which offered possibilities for defense. This was two, low knolls or ridges, the tops and sides of which were covered with sagebush and studded with small blocks of lava. In length, they extended approximately 250 yards and were separated by a troughlike depression about thirty-feet deep and seventy-five to one hundred yards wide. Norwood ordered his men to tie their horses in a clamp of aspen in the low area; then, he and [Lt. Henry M.] Benson posted them on the elevations on either side. Here, protected by twenty-three circular rifle-pits made of chunks of rock piled high enough to cover a man lying flat on his belly--some large enough for one man, others large enough to shield three or four--the men of 'L' Company engaged in a sniping duel for a period of time estimated at two and a half to four hours."

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Significance: (con't)

About the time that Howard's horse soldiers were mounting up, the Nez Perces were crossing Horse Prairie where a scouting party led by Yellow Wolf closed in on the Montague-Winters ranch. Here seven white men were holed up, the women and children had been sent for their safety to Bannock City. Three men were killed at the ranch by the Indians, while five miles up the valley another white male was slain. Some 250 horses were also taken by the Indians. The Nez Perces then crossed the Continental Divide back into Idaho Territory, passing over Bannock Pass into the country of the Lemhis, a small band of Shoshones led by Tendoy. A man of peace, Tendoy had no sympathy for the Nez Perces, and he urged them not to tarry but to hasten onward.²

When they moved on, the Nez Perces traveled southeastward as they ascended the Lemhi Valley, remaining west of the Continental Divide. Inasmuch as the Indians were concerned, it was of little importance into which ocean a stream eventually discharged, as long as the terrain was passable, the grass lush, and game, roots, berries, firewood and buffalo droppings available. But in traveling first south, then east, and finally northeast toward Henry's Lake and Targhee Pass, near the western boundary of Yellowstone National Park, the Nez Perces were on the exterior arc of a semicircle. The soldiers by traveling across the chord could materially shorten the distance they must travel if they were to overtake the Indians.³

The Nez Perces, after ascending the Lemhi Valley, crossed Gilmore Divide, and headed down Birch Creek toward the eastern end of the Snake River plains. In Birch Creek Valley, the Indians encountered four wagons and a trailer hauling whiskey and merchandise to Salmon City. At first the meeting was cordial, as the freighters parked their wagons and prepared to eat their noon meal with some of the Indians. The chiefs trusted that no incidents would occur, but some of the warriors were arrogant and aggressive. A fight erupted, triggered by an attempt by the Indians to seize the freighters' goods or their horses and mules. Two Chinese passengers with the train were made to get down on their hands and knees and act like horses. The Indians tried to compel the whites to do likewise. The freighters refused, and the Indians, still angered by what had occurred at the Big Hole encampment, killed five white men, then discovered and opened the whiskey barrels. A drunken melee ensued during which one Nez Perce was mortally wounded by another warrior, the horses and mules unharnessed and herded off by the Indians, and the wagons and trailer torched. A sixth white man, who escaped being shot to death, and the two Chinese, whom the Indians turned loose, "made their way to safety, spreading new panic through the countryside with their story of the 'massacre.'"⁴

The chiefs, understandably dismayed and angered by these senseless killings, poured onto the ground what was left of the whiskey, and the Nez Perces pushed on. Striking eastward, the Indians rode toward Targhee Pass and Yellowstone Park. On August 17, beating the Army to the point where the troops planned to

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intercept them, the Indians reached the junction of the north-south road from Bannock City to Ogden. The stagekeeper and his helpers, fearing for their lives, hid in a nearby lava cave, and the Nez Perces camped for the night on Beaver Creek, north of present-day Dubois, Idaho.⁵

B. General Howard's Pursuit from the Big Hole to Camas Meadows

The evening of August 17 found General Howard's command camped in Montana Territory, just north of Monida Pass. Howard's column, accompanied by three officers and 50 enlisted men from Gibbon battalion, had left the Big Hole battlefield five days earlier. Not long after Howard's departure, volunteer companies from Deer Lodge, Helena, and Butte arrived at the Big Hole with doctors and ambulances. Sixty-two of the Montana volunteers set out after Howard late on the afternoon of the 13th, and overtook him on the 15th. Meanwhile, Howard had been apprised of the Horse Prairie killings and had been told that the Nez Perces were heading westward back toward Idaho, as if intent on returning to their homeland. Accompanying Howard, however, were two treaty Nez Perce horse herders--Captain John and Meopkowitz--both of whom had daughters with the fugitives, and they told Howard that the Nez Perces were not en route home, but they would head first south and then strike eastward, skirt the northern edge of the Snake River plains, cross Yellowstone National Park, en route to the buffalo country and the Bighorn Basin beyond. Satisfied that he had fathomed the Nez Perces' plan, Howard did not pursue the Indians across the Continental Divide. Instead, he matured a scheme to intercept them when they turned east.⁶

Howard, having made his decision, rode south on August 14, passing through Bannock City and, on the 15th, he camped in Horse Prairie Valley, where he was overtaken by the Montana volunteers. They crowded about Howard's tent and scolded him for his slowness and for his decision not to cross the Continental Divide and overtake and engage the Indians. The situation worsened when Horse Prairie citizens and Lemhi Valley couriers galloped into camp on sweat-lathered horses, and excitedly announced that the Nez Perces had appeared at Junction and were threatening the citizens there and at Salmon City. If Howard hastened westward, they argued, his troops would trap the Indians in front of the Junction stockade. Howard yielded to their pleas and orders were given to march westward at daybreak. Shortly after midnight, a messenger arrived from the Junction stockade to report the Indians departure and that they were heading southeastward. The agitation to strike west was stilled, and, on the morning of August 16, the Montana volunteers, recognizing that Howard's strategy was valid, marched with the regulars, striking out for Monida Pass in anticipation of intercepting and engaging the Indians on the east-west leg of their route to the Wyoming plains.⁷

By the evening of the 17th, the Montana volunteers, satisfied that General Howard was traveling too slow to overtake the Indians, had left the column to return to their homes and swell the criticism that was again being directed against the general by the press. That evening he was reinforced by 55 volunteers from Virginia City. The soldiers were now within one day's march of the Nez

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Perces. Howard, however, was concerned that the Indians might slip past him. Certain that the Indians were headed for the plains by way of Targhee Pass and Yellowstone Park, Howard saw an opportunity, by taking a shorter route by way of Red Rock River and Henry's Lake, to intercept them at Targhee Pass, gateway to the Madison River corridor into the park. Howard, having made a sound decision, now lost his nerve as ignorance of the terrain raised doubts and volunteer officers urged conflicting advice on him. The volunteers, swarming about the command in undisciplined confusion, caused more problems than they solved. A newspaper correspondent blasted the typical volunteer as "a undoubted fraud, having almost as little pluck as principle and as meager a conception of discipline as a backwoods schoolmaster." Heeding the pleas of stagemen and settlers whose communications to the south were threatened, Howard prepared to cross Monida Pass. Before leaving camp, Howard sent Lt. George Bacon and a 40-man detachment of regulars, accompanied by a few scouts, via the shorter Montana route to Targhee Pass. Bacon was to hold the Indians at the pass until such time as Howard could come up and strike them in the rear.⁸

Before moving out on August 18, Howard was reinforced by 50 men of the 2nd U.S. Cavalry under Capt. Randolph Norwood out of Fort Ellis, near Bozeman. Norwood's detachment had been rushed forward because of the intervention of Gen. William T. Sherman, the Army's commander. Sherman, who had stopped at Fort Ellis on an inspection trip, had reviewed with his aides the latest data on the flight of the Nez Perces. Howard's reports told that his pursuing troops were about to intercept the Indians, and Sherman had dispatched a fresh cavalry unit to insure success.

The cavalry took the lead and forged ahead of the infantry as Howard's column crossed Monida Pass. Nightfall found the soldiers at the Beaver Creek camp site which the Nez Perces had vacated. That evening Buffalo Horn and his Barnock scouts reported that the Nez Perces now, between 15 and 18 miles ahead of the Army, were camped in the Camas Meadows, west of present-day Island Park Reservoir. The meadows were an extensive, grassy area, crossed by two brushbordered streams--Spring and Camas creeks--and rising on the north to foothills that extended out in ridges and on the east by an area of jumbled lava knolls. On August 19, the Nez Perces having moved on, Howard occupied the Camas Meadows area, establishing his headquarters for the night on one of the knolls east of the two streams. Behind him, the Virginia City volunteers bedded down between the two creeks, while Norwood's company and 40 infantry men bivouacked west of them. Other cavalry companies camped nearby.⁹

C. The Indians Surprise the Army

The Indians camped for the night just beyond a rocky ridge southwest of Henry's Lake. A scout brought word to the Nez Perces that the soldiers were close upon them. Wottolen, one the Nez Perces recalled: The night before, at Camas Meadows, there came

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to Black Hair, who was wounded and could not sleep, ... a good vision. He saw the warriors go back over the trail in the darkness to where we were then camped and bring away the soldiers' horses. So, when one of our scouts brought word that General Howard had stopped at Camas Meadows, our old camp, Black Hair's vision was considered. We knew all that country, and in council it was determined to make an attack and try capturing all the horses and pack mules of the enemies just as Black Hair had seen and foretold.

It was about the middle of the forenoon that we started, riding slowly back over the trail. Towards morning, drawing near the soldiers camp, we halt to form plan of attack. We older men must decide in council how the approach is to be made.

We divide into three companies. Looking Glass and White Bull speak to attack on horseback; Moons and I argue to go on foot.... I said, "We will go among the soldiers afoot. Securing many of their guns, we will kill General Howard and his leading men. We can then whip back the soldiers and in the meantime drive off with all their horses and pack mules."

But some objected. They wanted their horses. An Indian does not like to be far from his horse in any fighting. Chief Looking Glass, who generally opposed plans not his own, spoke, "No, we must have our horses.... It will spoil everything to go afoot."

While thus talking, Ollocot rode up and said, "Breaking morning is coming, Let us go!" Young Chief Ollocot was a brave leader of the young men and delivering his short speech, he turned his horse and rode away. Teeweeyownah, myself, and others followed. Our company halts before drawing too near the enemy. The horses' feet must not be heard against the rocks. Active young men dismount and go forward among the enemies' horses, cutting them loose and removing bells from pack animals.

With Left Hand and Five Lightings I am set to guard a point not far from the nearest soldiers' tents. In this, we must lay close to the ground. Too soon the alarm is sprung! Not many cavalry horses are yet cut loose when a gun gives off a report. It is back of the front riders, back toward the rear.

"Who in hell do shooting?"

Our plans are now spoiled. The signal shot was not to come from that direction. When the gun sounded, fired by Otskai, as we learned later, the Indians gallop close, and shooting into the soldiers' camp. Yelling loudly, the horses are quickly stampeded out from there. Back over the trail they go, headed in the right direction by Indians stationed for that business.

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The stampeded horses gone, we do not stay to fight soldiers. We leave them firing like crazy people in the darkness. Nothing they can hit. We try driving the herd fast; but the speed is slow.¹⁰

Several minutes elapsed before Howard and his people appreciated what was happening. The pickets, the general learned, had heard the sounds of horsemen before one of the soldiers called out a challenge, but most had believed that the noise was made by Lieutenant Bacon's men returning from Targhee Pass. The Virginia City volunteers, experiencing their first combat, panicked and fled across one of the streams seeking the protection of the regulars. Horse soldiers struggled to get dressed in the dark, but experienced difficulty securing their arms and accouterments. Those horses and mules that were still picketed kicked and reared in fright, adding to the din and confusion. By the time General Howard had mounted and ordered Maj. George B. Sanford and three companies in pursuit the Indians had a good lead.

As day broke, the raiders discovered, much to their disgust, that instead of unseating Howard's cavalymen, the principal purpose of the raid, they had made off with about 200 of the general's mules and a few horses. Loss of the mules would have serious repercussions for the quartermasters in their struggle to keep the column supplied with ammunition, rations, and forge. A number of the volunteers' horses had been stampeded and some were traveling with the mules. Some eight miles from Howard's camp, the Indians bringing up the rear sighted Major Sanford's oncoming battalion. Several of the raiders hastened the drive, pushing the beasts more rapidly toward the Nez Perces' camp but losing in their haste 20 of the mules, which the horse soldiers later overtook and recovered. The rest of the warriors deployed behind a lava ridge and prepared to resist the soldiers. Other Nez Perces waited in a long line on the sagebrush flats, 500 yards beyond the ridge, while more hid along the flanks of the hill.¹¹

D. The Camas Meadows Fight

Major Sanford's three companies of cavalry pounded ahead in pursuit in parallel columns, but before they had gone more than three miles, they became so widely separated that they lost contact with each other. Captain Norwood's 50 men of Company L, 2d U.S. Cavalry, the middle column, got far out ahead of the two flank columns and were isolated when they gained the ridge. Men with the faster steeds on topping the hill saw Indians and reining up their horses recoiled. The troopers then dismounted, called numbers, and the horse-holders took the mounts to the rear. Deployed as skirmishers, the troopers cautiously worked their way up onto the ridge's topographic crest, where for the next 30 minutes they kept up an ineffective, long-range firefight with the Indians. On the flanks, meanwhile, Companies B and C, 1st Cavalry, encountered a well aimed fire from the warriors on the hill, thought they were ambushed, and retreated. Their retrograde was a signal for the Nez Perces to press ahead and intensify their attack, and the regulars of the left and right outside companies scattered and fled.

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Indian marksmen now subjected Norwood's people to a savage crossfire, and the company panicked. The dismounted troopers raced down the slope and across 500 yards of open ground to take cover in a cottonwood thicket and among jagged lava outcroppings, where the horse-holders were posted. There they grimly held fast, subjected to the fire of the hidden sharpshooters who encircled the soldiers. Fighting for four hours from rock-protected rifle-pits hastily thrown up, Norwood's desperate men clung to their positions, although some of the Indians crept to within 40 yards of the pits.

Elsewhere, Sanford's horse soldiers deserted the area and headed back toward Howard's camp. After traveling several miles, they encountered the general, who was hastening forward with reinforcements. Howard turned Sanford's people about, and the march to Norwood's relief was pressed. By the time Howard and his men, advancing in a skirmish line across the sagebush and lava outcroppings, found embattled Company L, the warriors had abandoned the fight and were returning to their camp, which had remained stationary throughout the day.¹²

No Indians were killed in the Camas Meadows fight, and only a few had suffered wounds. In addition to the stolen stock, Howard reported one killed and eight men wounded, two of whom subsequently died. Howard failed to press the fight --much to the disgust of Buffalo Horn and the Bannock scouts--and he allowed the Nez Perces to escape once again. Howard returned to his camp at Camas Meadows, stayed there the night of August 20, and the next morning sent his wounded under guard of most of the volunteers to Virginia City. His men then loaded their baggage on the available livestock and headed for Targhee Pass. Howard's hopes rested on Lieutenant Bacon and his detachment, presumed to be holding the pass.

E. The Nez Perces Outfox and Outdistance the Army

Bacon had reached the pass on the 20th, the day of the Camas Meadows fight, but, after scouting about looking for Indians, he decided that the Nez Perces had taken a more southerly route and had probably crossed Teton Pass into the Jackson Hole country. Abandoning his roadblock, Bacon started westward to rendezvous with Howard, but the luckless lieutenant strayed off the principal route and missed Howard as well as the Indians. On August 22 the Nez Perces crossed Targhee Pass, and the next day entered Yellowstone National Park.¹³

A discouraged Army camped on Henry's Lake, at the western approach to Targhee Pass. Unit commanders and medical officers agreed that the troops were unfit to continue the pursuit. They were exhausted, clad in rags, plagued with sickness, short on supplies, and above all discouraged over their continued failure to overtake the Nez Perces. Most of the officers wanted to call off the campaign. Howard, confronted with confessing failure and thereby confirming increasingly strident newspaper criticism or pressing a pursuit that seemed futile, agonized in indecision. As the Indians crossed Yellowstone Park, frightening and scattering tourists, the troops rested four days alongside Henry's Lake, and General Howard and several aides rode to Virginia City to purchase provisions and communicate by telegraph with his military superiors.¹⁴

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NOTES

1. Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars: The United States Army, 1866-1891. (New York, 1973), pp. 316-17
2. Alvin M. Josephy, Jr. The Nez Perces Indians and the Opening of the Northwest (New Haven, 1965), pp. 591-2; Bill Gulick, Chief Joseph Country: Land of the Nez Perce (Caldwell, 1981), pp. 242-244.
3. Gulick, Chief Joseph Country, pp. 244-45.
4. Ibid., 245-46; Josephy, Nez Perce Indians, p. 593.
5. Josephy, Nez Perce Indians, p. 593.
6. Ibid., 592; Gulick. Chief Joseph Country, p. 242.
7. Josephy, Nez Perce Indians, pp. 592-93.
8. Ibid., 594; Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 317.
9. Josephy, Nez Perce Indians, p. 594.
10. Gulick, Chief Joseph Country, p. 248; Lucullus V. McWhorter, Hear Me, My Chiefs! (Caldwell, 1952), pp. 417-19.
11. Josephy, Nez Perce Indians, pp. 595-96; Utley, Frontier Regulars, pp. 317.
12. Josephy, Nez Perce Indians p. 596; Utley, Frontier Regulars, pp. 317-18; Helena Daily Herald, Aug. 30, 1877.
13. Josephy, Nez Perce Indians, pp. 596-97; Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 318.
14. Utley, Frontier Regulars, p. 318; Josephy, Nez Perce Indians, p. 597.

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National Park Service**

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UTM's

Howard's Camp Site

- A 12/429740/4911680
- B 12/429730/4911290
- C 12/429310/4911300
- D 12/429320/4911690