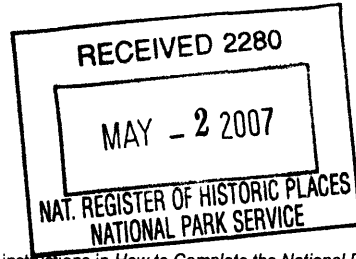


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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Elfers, Jurden Henry, Barn and Field

other names/site number IHSI #49-17934; SITS #10-IH-527

2. Location

street & number John Day Creek N/A not for publication

City or town Lucile X vicinity

state Idaho code ID county Idaho code 049 zip code 83530

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant X nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments)

*Kenneth C. Reid*

May 1, 2007

Signature of certifying official/Title KENNETH C. REID, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

4. 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

*[Signature]*

6/7/2007

### 5. Classification

**Ownership of Property**    **Category of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)      (Check only one box)  
X private                              X building(s)  
\_\_ public-local                        \_\_ district  
\_\_ public-State                        \_\_ site  
\_\_ public-Federal                      \_\_ structure  
    \_\_ object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing              Noncontributing  
  1                                  0   buildings  
  1   sites  
    structures  
    objects  
  2                                  0   Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

  N/A  

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

  0  

### 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

  AGRICULTURE/    
  SUBSISTENCE:    
  agricultural outbuilding    
  agricultural field    
\_\_\_\_\_

Current Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

  AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE:    
          agricultural outbuilding    
          agricultural field    
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 7. Description

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

  No Style    
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation   STONE; CONCRETE    
walls   WOOD    
roof   METAL    
other \_\_\_\_\_

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Elfers, Jurden Henry, Barn and Field  
Name of Property

Idaho County, Idaho  
County, and State

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" on one or more lines for the criteria

qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" on all that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

MILITARY

ETHNIC HERITAGE/

NATIVE AMERICAN

### Period of Significance

1877

### Significant Dates

1877

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Elfers, Jurden Henry

## Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 8

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

#### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested  Other State agency
- 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
- Federal agency
- Local government – Idaho County
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 9

Elfers, Jurden Henry, Barn and Field  
Name of Property

Idaho County, Idaho  
County, and State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreege of property** Approximately 53 acres

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

A 11	<u>5/5/5/1/6/0</u>	<u>5/0/4/7/7/4/0</u>	B 11	<u>5/5/5/4/6/0</u>	<u>5/0/4/7/7/4/0</u>	C 11	<u>5/5/5/4/6/0</u>	<u>5/0/4/7/7/6/0</u>
Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
D 11	<u>5/5/5/5/0/0</u>	<u>5/0/4/7/7/6/0</u>	E 11	<u>5/5/5/5/0/0</u>	<u>5/0/4/7/0/8/0</u>	F 11	<u>5/5/5/1/6/0</u>	<u>5/0/4/7/3/5/0</u>
Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property.)

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Suzanne Julin (and Suzi Neitzel – SHPO Historian)

organization Consultant date January, 2007

street & number 500 Hartman telephone 406-544-8606

city or town Missoula state MT zip code 59802

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Continuation Sheets

**Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

**A Sketch map** for historic districts and/or properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs:** Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

## Property Owner

Name David Cereghino

street & number HC 01 Box 11 telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Lucille state Idaho zip code 83542

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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The Jurden Henry Elfers barn and field are located about twenty-two miles south of Grangeville and about three miles north of Lucile in Idaho County, north-central Idaho. The site is on the south bank of John Day Creek, approximately one-third mile east of U. S. Highway 95. The field associated with the site is southwest of the barn on a plateau that rises approximately 200 feet above the barn. John Day Creek is lined with trees and shrubs; hills rise abruptly to the north. This site is the location where three young warriors from the Nez Perce Tribe killed two Euro-American settlers--a historic episode that ignited the Nez Perce War.

The Elfers barn is a two-story, 38 x 48 foot, rectangular structure facing east and sitting exactly parallel to the south bank of John Day Creek, which runs immediately beside it. The main section of the two-story barn rests on a stone foundation; a lean-to addition on the south side has a concrete foundation. The barn is constructed of rough-cut, weathered board and battens. Cut nails were used on the main section and round nails on the lean-to addition.

The north façade holds small, square window openings close to the foundation. The south side of the lean-to has no window openings, and some deterioration is evident at the southeast corner. The east façade has a sliding door on the ground level; a single door appears to the south of the sliding door, and the lean-to has a doorway opening with another opening above. The second level of the barn presents a hayloft opening that has been enlarged, and a small opening also appears in the gable. A beam extends from the ridgeline, indicating that a mechanism for lifting hay probably existed here. The west-facing façade is almost entirely open on both levels, although board and batten siding appears to the far north side. A slightly arched opening is in the gable end. The barn's original board and batten south wall is visible in the lean-to addition. The barn's steeply pitched gabled roof has recently been covered with silver-gray metal. The roof, which was installed to save the barn from further deterioration, is appropriate in scale and color and detracts only minimally from the structure's appearance.

The Elfers field is on a plateau that rises to the southwest of the barn. A farmyard road follows a very shallow draw around the north and west sides of the plateau. Another very shallow draw extends up the plateau's northern face. To the east, a deep draw parallels the east side of the plateau and leads to the rear of the plateau; this is the route that Elfers and the other victims traveled on the day they were killed. The eastern draw is fenced and pastures cattle. Another draw cuts through the plateau in a northwesterly-southeasterly direction. The plateau is also fenced; the front section is planted in corn, and the rear section is in stubble.

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Corrals extend from the area of the barn to the rise of the plateau; two modern outbuildings are located to the west of the barn, and a small shed and two larger sheds occupy the area to the east. A modern house is located on the hillside north of the barn and across John Day Creek and the access road. Except for the corrals, these elements do not intrude on the narrow corridor that leads from the barn to the draw and plateau.

The barn, the draw, and the field form a contiguous unit with good integrity. John Day Creek runs loudly beside the barn, as it did on the day when it muffled the sounds of the gunshots that killed Elfers and his men. The barn has seen relatively few modifications and exhibits the details of its original construction. The plateau is visible from the barn. In its entirety, the site represents the thriving ranch and way station that once stood here and evokes the setting of the events of July 14, 1877—events that sparked the beginning of the Nez Perce War.

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The Jurden Henry Elfers Barn and Field are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, at the national level, as a property associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. The barn and field represent one of the last remaining buildings and significant sites associated with the initial outbreak of the Nez Perce War in 1877. The field is the site of the deaths of Jurden Henry Elfers, Henry "Harry" Burn Beckrode, and Robert Bland--the third, fourth, and fifth settlers to be killed by Nez Perce in the raids that precipitated the war's first major battle, the Battle of White Bird Canyon. After defeating U.S. Army soldiers and volunteers in that battle, Chief Joseph, White Bird, Looking Glass, and other Nez Perce leaders fled with about 750 of their people across the Lolo Trail to Montana Territory. After a 1,700 mile trek with the military in pursuit, the Indians were stopped and forced to surrender a few miles short of the Canadian border. The Jurden Henry Elfers Barn and Field represent a catalyst of the Nez Perce War, one of the last and most dramatic of the nineteenth-century Indian wars.

**The Indian Wars**

Beginning in 1842, significant numbers of Euro-Americans began to move into the Pacific Northwest. Emigrants were in search of available lands for agriculture and settlement. Gold discoveries resulted in rushes of wealth-seekers to specific areas, followed by farmers and the merchants who would sell them goods. The Homestead Act (1862) drew countless more settlers to western lands, encouraged by the federal government's offer of free land. The construction of the first transcontinental railroad, completed in 1869, further increased the traffic to the region. Between 1842 and 1880, nearly four million emigrants pushed into the American West.<sup>1</sup>

As the new population grew, the pressures upon the region's original inhabitants—Native Americans—increased dramatically. Most western tribes were seasonally migratory, relying on a large territory to carry on their traditional lifeways; the waves of emigrants diminished the wild game and other resources upon which they depended. Conflict between the two populations escalated with each episode of cultural and physical trespass. Relations deteriorated rapidly within the densely settled Willamette Valley and along the well traveled emigrant roads of the interior Columbia Plateau and Snake River Plain. The 1847 Whitman massacre by a party of angry Cayuse Indians proved to be a watershed event in regional Indian-white relations. Protestant missionary Marcus Whitman, his wife Narcissa, and eleven other Euro-Americans were killed. The U.S. Army was called in to punish the perpetrators, fixing a military presence that would last for the next three decades.

To quell the aggressions, the federal government began negotiating treaties with the Northwest Tribes that eventually ceded large portions of their traditional territory and

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reserved the remainder for use as Indian reservations. In a short thirteen-month period from late 1854 through 1855, Washington Territorial Governor Isaac I. Stevens signed ten treaties with over 75 bands and tribes (including the Nez Perce) living in a vast area from Puget Sound to the Missouri River. But for the newcomers, that was not enough. Settlers, miners, and local officials, hungry for land and resources, pressed for modifications of treaties that continued to reduce tribal lands. Among tribal members, there was internal disagreement about acceptance of the treaties and their terms. The pressures of a rapidly changing society and the lack of solutions satisfactory to all parties continued to cause strife and aggressions that lasted through the 1880s.<sup>2</sup>

**The Nez Perce and Their Homeland**

Like other Native American groups in the American West, the Nez Perce were profoundly affected by the gold rushes, westward migration, missionary efforts, and U.S. policies. The group's first recorded contacts with non-Indians occurred early in the nineteenth century when explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark traversed their territory in 1805-1806. Subsequently, the Nez Perce established ties with fur traders who came into the region. In 1836, as Marcus Whitman established his Walla Walla mission, fellow missionary Henry Spalding established a Protestant mission among the Nez Perce. While some Nez Perce did adopt Christianity and farming, others continued to follow traditional lifeways.

During Stevens' 1855 treaty circuit, a large regional council was held near Fort Walla Walla in Washington Territory. Several thousand Indians representing at least 18 tribes and bands were present. At the Council, some leaders of the Nez Perce agreed to a treaty that relinquished rights to lands to the east and south in return for the reservation of other traditional lands encompassing approximately five thousand square miles in present day Idaho, Washington, and Oregon. Two other major treaties were signed there with confederations of Wallawalla, Cayuse, Palouse, Yakima, and Umatilla. The Council set into motion a series of conflicts fueled by an over-zealous military, and angry tribal factions embittered about the treaties. The Nez Perce, who had retained rights to their most valued lands, resisted participation in these hostilities; however, tensions continued to grow between Nez Perce bands that signed the treaty and the non-treaty bands who opposed it. Government delays in providing the benefits promised by the treaty provisions and confusion and discord about the issues of land relinquishment increased the anxieties.

In the 1860s, the discovery of gold on Nez Perce lands brought throngs of people to the territory. Some had success in finding gold; many more found subsistence and even prosperity by settling in the area and establishing farms, ranches and stores. As the demand for land intensified, so did the pressures on the government to free up more Nez Perce land for settlement. To complicate issues, the temporary capital of the newly



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established Idaho Territory, Lewiston, was illegally located within the Nez Perce Reservation. In 1863, to remedy this and other conflicts, the government obtained a modification of the 1855 Treaty that opened lands in Oregon and Idaho for white settlement. Although the treaty still retained a reservation for the Nez Perce, albeit greatly reduced, non-treaty bands continued to live off the reservation, as they did not consider the agreement binding on them. These bands included the Wallowa of northeastern Oregon and the Lamtamas, the Pikunans, the Palouse, and the Alpawai, who lived along the Salmon, Snake Rivers, Clearwater rivers. The refusal of these bands to abide by the treaty became the basis of strife in the 1870s.

During that period, pressure increased to open the Wallowa Valley in Oregon for non-Indian settlement, particularly for ranching. In 1873, President Ulysses S. Grant issued an executive order setting aside nearly 1,500 square miles of land for permanent use by the Nez Perce. However, the territory claimed by the Wallowa band was outside of the redefined reservation, and some government officials protested the choice of lands for the Nez Perce. To the chagrin of those clamoring to settle in the valley, the order was rescinded. In response to the rising tensions, settlers and a band of Wallowa headed by the Nez Perce leader Chief Joseph narrowly avoided a violent confrontation.

Consequently, the Department of Interior appointed a commission to study the issue; that commission recommended that the Nez Perce who opposed the treaty provisions should be placed on lands within the reservation, located at the Lapwai Agency along the lower Clearwater River in Idaho Territory. In January of 1877, those bands were told that they had to be on the reservation by April 1; they were, however, able to delay the action and arrange an early May meeting with Brigadier General Oliver Otis Howard, Commander of the Department of the Columbia.<sup>3</sup>

The meeting brought together many of the men who would play prominent roles in the Nez Perce War. General Howard was a veteran of the Civil War and a former commissioner of the Freedman's Bureau, established to serve freed slaves after the war. Intensely religious, Howard championed Indian rights and believed that the people should be dealt with peaceably and force used only as a last resort. After the death of Old Joseph, Chief Joseph succeeded his father as leader of the Wallowa band. The younger Joseph was viewed by his people as a civic rather than a military leader. His brother, Ollokot, who also attended the meeting, had more experience as a warrior. White Bird, chief of the Lamtamas also attended, as did Toohoolhoolzote, the chief of the Pikunans, whose fiery outbursts led Howard to jail him briefly. These leaders and others repeated their objections to losing their lands, noting that they had not agreed to the treaty and explaining their cultural attachment to their homelands. Howard, however, was adamant in his insistence that the bands had no choice but to move to the reservation.<sup>4</sup>

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**Prelude to the Nez Perce War**

After resigning themselves to the removal, the head chiefs of the bands traveled to the Lapwai Agency with Howard and decided on locations to settle their people. Howard informed the bands they had thirty days to move to their new homes, a deadline that caused particular hardship for the Wallowa band. Chief Joseph's band had cattle and horses scattered over a wide area, and moving east to the reservation meant fording spring-swollen rivers with the elderly, women, and children, all their stock, and all their possessions. Government officials were unsympathetic to their requests for yet another delay, noting that had the Indians moved to the reservation in April as originally ordered, they could have forded the rivers before the spring run-off. The Indians reluctantly rounded up as much stock as they could, packed up their villages, and forded the Snake River. Although no lives were lost, numbers of cattle and horses were swept away and some possessions destroyed in the crossings. The band decided to leave most of their cattle on the west bank of the Salmon and bring them across at a later date.<sup>5</sup>

Once across the Salmon, the Wallowa joined the other affected bands at a traditional campsite near Tolo Lake, about six miles west of the settlement of Mount Idaho. At this point, they were near the reservation with twelve days left before their required arrival. The bands settled in for one last open camp before their destined confinement. During the encampment, the pressures and tensions of the previous months, the frustration with the changes Euro-American settlement had brought to their society, and the pain the people felt at leaving their homeland emerged. The younger men, in particular, began to talk of resisting or exacting revenge. Chief Joseph and other leaders counseled patience and forbearance.<sup>6</sup>

Then, on June 12, one of the older men in the camp challenged Wahlitits (Shore Crossing), a young member of White Bird's Band, to demonstrate his bravery by killing the man who had shot Shore Crossing's father, Eagle Robe. The incident had occurred three years earlier, when Eagle Robe had accused settler Lawrence Ott of usurping some of his land; in the heat of the argument, Ott shot the Nez Perce. Before he died, Shore Crossing's father asked him not to seek revenge, and Ott was not called to account by the white man's legal system. Now, with tension and frustration mounting among the young men, and feeling ridiculed by his elder, Shore Crossing was determined to take action.<sup>7</sup>

Shore Crossing enlisted the help of his teenaged nephew, Swan Necklace, and another young man, Red Moccasin Top. The three proceeded south to the valley of White Bird Creek. They stopped briefly at settler J. J. Manuel's ranch and then at a store owned by Harry Mason, where they unsuccessfully tried to trade one of their horses for a rifle. After leaving Mason's store, the three men crossed the Salmon River in search of Ott's

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ranch but could not find it. With growing aggression, the youth decided to travel south to the home of Richard Devine, a settler believed to have killed a Nez Perce. On their way to the Devine place, the Indians stopped briefly at the Charles P. Cone ranch where they bought food, and at the ranch of Jurden Henry Elfers on the banks of John Day Creek.<sup>8</sup>

**Jurden Henry Elfers and the Initial Killings**

Jurden Henry Elfers was born in Germany in 1834. He came to the United States during the 1849 California gold rush to mine for gold. In 1862, the gold rushes in Idaho Territory drew Elfers to the Salmon River country. His success there resulted not from mining, but from establishing an enterprising ranch and way station that served the needs of settlers and travelers. He developed this enterprise on the banks of John Day Creek, near its confluence with the Salmon, in partnership with Henry Mason and John Wessell. The three men operated a general store and an inn, maintained a dairy herd, and ran a pack train to the mines. After Mason sold his interest and Wessell died, Elfers was the sole owner of the ranch. In 1870, he traveled to Germany where he met Catherine Beckroge. She returned to the United States with him, and they married in San Francisco in October 1871. The couple made their home at the ranch on John Day Creek, and by 1877 they had three children and were expecting a fourth.<sup>9</sup> Although the precise date of construction of the barn is unknown, it was presumably built c.1875, when the first local saw mill was established in the area.

Elfers was not particularly well-liked by the Nez Perce and had recently served on a council of arbitration that exonerated a local man accused of a crime against Indians. However, the young Indians did not appear vengeful when they arrived at the ranch on the evening of June 13, 1877. They told Mrs. Elfers that they were out hunting strayed horses and left the property when she indicated she had not seen any. It may have been Elfers' success and prosperity, rather than any enmity he had aroused, that finally doomed him.<sup>10</sup>

Late that night, the group reached Richard Devine's home, entered his cabin, and killed him with his own gun. Then they decided to return to Jurden Henry Elfers home, perhaps attracted by his fine horses. On the morning of June 14, 1877, the group, with Devine's gun, hid near the path leading to the pasture on the plateau, approximately two hundred yards southwest of Elfers' buildings. Elfers, in the meantime, dispatched his nephew Henry "Harry" Burn Beckroge and a hired hand, Robert Bland, to the grazing field on the plateau with the dairy herd. Shortly afterwards, Elfers, who had been working in the barn, followed, planning to cut some hay. One by one, as each man rode past the Indians' hiding place, he was shot. Precisely where the killings took place is unclear; sources from the period variously mention the path and the pasture. What is clear,

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however, is that the men were on their way to the pasture and each was killed in succession over the course of approximately a half an hour. After all three men were killed, the Nez Perce took some of Elfers' horses and stole a rifle and ammunition.<sup>11</sup> Catherine Elfers, busy churning milk in the milk house on the bank of the loudly rushing John Day Creek, heard no gunshots. She saw the Indians leaving the property but did not take note of the stolen horses or the weapon. A man named Whitfield who was hunting in the area reportedly noticed the smoke from the shots and went to investigate. When he found the bodies, and before seeking out Mrs. Elfers, he traveled two miles up John Day Creek to enlist the help of Norman Gould, who ran a sawmill for the Elfers. In the meantime, a prospector named Victor also saw the smoke and gathered some men to go to the site. After seeing the bodies, they went to the Elfers ranch to inform Mrs. Elfers, who refused to believe her husband had been killed until the bodies were produced. Once the grim truth was evident to her, the men took Mrs. Elfers and the children to stay with settlers on Slate Creek, to the north of the ranch.<sup>12</sup>

After leaving the Elfers ranch, the Nez Perce warriors traveled north toward Slate Creek, avoiding the small settlement. Encountering Charles Cone, they told him the Nez Perce were now at war with the settlers, and he, in turn, began warning people in the surrounding area. They next met Samuel Benedict who had had an altercation with Red Moccasin Top two years previously. The Indians shot and wounded Benedict and then returned to their camp. There, Swan Necklace, mounted on one of Elfers' horses, entered in advance of the others to spread word of the killings. Yellow Wolf, a young Nez Perce who later related his experiences during the war to Lucullus McWhorter, recalled that someone told the chiefs who were present that they could now stop discussing whether or not to resist the military, because war had started when the three young Nez Perce killed a man and rode his horse into camp. Other eager young men quickly joined the three original raiders, and the newly formed war party departed.<sup>13</sup>

Joseph and Ollokot were not in the camp when the young men arrived, but other leaders quickly converged, most of them arguing on the side of patience to see if matters could be settled peaceably. They did, however, decide to leave the camp. When Joseph and Ollokot returned, they tried to convince the people to stay in the camp and face the situation. However, except for the Wallowa band, of which no members were involved in the raids, all the Nez Perce made a hasty departure to Cottonwood Creek - what they hoped would be safer territory. The next day, Joseph and Ollokot, recognizing the threat created by the young warriors' actions, decided to join them at the a new campsite.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Nez Perce War**

The Nez Perce warriors quickly accelerated the raids on the settlers and intensified the level of violence. Several settlers were killed, at least two women were raped, and some

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children were injured. One woman and her baby disappeared and were never seen again. The warriors destroyed fields and structures and killed livestock as they swept through the countryside; survivors of the raids fled to Grangeville and Mount Idaho. News of the outbreak reached General Howard, who was at Fort Lapwai awaiting the arrival of the Nez Perce who were to take up residence on the reservation. Howard sent Captain David Perry with 103 soldiers to the aid of the settlers in Mount Idaho. When he arrived in Mount Idaho, Perry learned that a large group of Nez Perce had been seen moving toward White Bird Canyon. At the urging of the citizens, Perry and his troops, joined by eleven local volunteers, advanced to the canyon. There, on June 17, 1877, they engaged approximately 70 Indians in the first battle of the Nez Perce War and lost. Thirty-three soldiers were killed in the fight, but the Nez Perce suffered no casualties. As Perry's troops retreated, the Nez Perce chased them nearly back to Mount Idaho.<sup>15</sup>

The Battle of White Bird Canyon surprised and shocked the Army. Historian Robert M. Utley concluded that "the Nez Perces had demonstrated a leadership, discipline, and tactical skill that, added to the fighting qualities of the individual warriors, routed a superior force of regular soldiers."<sup>16</sup> The outcome of the fight helped build the reputation of the Nez Perce as superior warriors. Over the next three and one-half months, the Nez Perce bands, under Joseph and other leaders, continued to resist federal policy and their military pursuers. The military chased the Nez Perce across the Bitterroot Mountains, south through the Bitterroot Valley, west into Big Hole in eastern Idaho Territory and Wyoming Territory (what is now Yellowstone National Park), and north into Montana Territory, where the Indians made one last stand only a few miles from the Canadian border.

**The principal events of the Nez Perce War include:**

*Salmon River Conflicts*, June 14, 1877. Three Nez Perce warriors, Shore Crossing, Red Moccasin Top and Swan Necklace, attacked and killed Richard Devine, Henry Elfers, Henry Beckrode and Robert Bland, and shot and wounded Samuel Benedict. Upon returning to the Nez Perce camp they announced that war had begun. Other attacks on settlers followed.

*White Bird Battle*, June 17, 1877. Military troops engaged the Nez Perce in the first battle of the Nez Perce War. Captain David Perry and his troops, along with a few local volunteers, advanced into White Bird Canyon where they were soundly defeated. After the loss of 33 soldiers (and no Indian losses) Perry was forced to retreat back to Mount Idaho.

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*Looking Glass village attack*, July 1, 1877. Captain Stephen G. Whipple, with cavalry troops and volunteers, attacked and destroyed Looking Glass's village on the Clearwater River. Looking Glass had up to this time remained neutral, but joined the warring Nez Perce after the attack.

*Cottonwood fights*, July 2-5, 1877. The Nez Perce fought briefly against Whipple and some volunteers in the area of Cottonwood, and killed all ten soldiers in a detachment shortly before joining Looking Glass at the mouth of Cottonwood Creek.

*Clearwater Battle*, July 11-12, 1877. General Howard and his men attacked a camp on the east of the South Fork Clearwater River, but the Nez Perce were warned of his approach and met him in battle. On the second day, the Indians were forced to retreat to the north.

*Weippe Prairie*, July 17, 1877. The Nez Perce halted here to discuss how to proceed. After deciding to cross the Bitterroot Mountains into Montana Territory, where they might find refuge with friendly tribes, they began moving east on the rugged Lolo Trail.

*Escape along the Nez Perce Trail*, late July 1877. Over 750 Nez Perce, including women and children, with nearly 2000 horses travel along the Lolo Trail. The sizable group moved remarkably swiftly and evaded the military troops.

*Fort Fizzle*, July 25-28, 1877. Captain Charles C. Rawn, with troops and volunteers, built log fortifications at a site along the Lolo Trail to prevent the Nez Perce from entering the Bitterroot Valley. The Indians skirted the barricade and emerged into the Bitterroot Valley.

*Big Hole Battle*, August 9-10, 1877. Once in the Bitterroot Valley, the Nez Perce stopped to rest and recover from the arduous trek over the Lolo Trail. Colonel John Gibbon and parts of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry attacked them and quickly took the camp. The warriors forced the soldiers to retreat, however, and remained under siege while the main body of the Nez Perce moved to the south and east. About 90 Nez Perce were killed, many of them women and children.

*Camas Meadows*, August 20, 1877. As Howard pursued the Nez Perce toward Yellowstone National Park, warriors stole 150 mules from his camp at Camas Meadows near Henrys Lake. In an attempt to recover the mules, troops engaged the Indians and were forced to retreat.

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*Canyon Creek*, September 13, 1877. Colonel Samuel Sturgis and 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry troops attacked warriors at Canyon Creek near present-day Billings, Montana. Nez Perce held off the cavalry while the main body escaped northward.

*Bears Paw*, September 30, October 1-5, 1877. As the end of September approached, the Nez Perce drew close to the Canadian border; they hoped to escape into Canada where they could be safely beyond the jurisdiction of the U. S. military. Unknown to them, General Nelson A. Miles, with companies of infantry and cavalry, was approaching to intercept them. On September 29, the Nez Perce camped in a valley in the northern Bear Paw Mountains. The next day, Miles and his troops moved into the camp. Nez Perce warriors immediately took positions and killed many officers, but also suffered the loss of several leaders. Their prospects began to dim. On October 1, Chief Joseph met with General Miles under a flag of truce; Looking Glass and White Bird refused to participate, and Looking Glass was subsequently killed. After a five-day siege, during which Howard arrived with his troops, Joseph met again with Miles and Howard and was promised that he and his people could return to the Lapwai Agency in the spring. On October 5, Joseph and some four hundred of the people, including about one hundred warriors, surrendered. General Howard later reported that Joseph's message of surrender ended with a phrase that translated roughly to "From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever." Years later, Yellow Wolf insisted that the Nez Perce were not captured, and that the agreement made by Joseph and the others was intended to end a stalemate.<sup>17</sup>

About 300 Nez Perce, including White Bird's band and Yellow Wolf, fled to Canada during the siege or immediately after the surrender. The promise Miles and Howard made to Chief Joseph was not kept. Instead, the Nez Perce who surrendered were held briefly at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and then placed on reservations, first in Kansas and then in Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma. The miserable conditions there led the Nez Perce to name the place *Eeikish Pah* or the Hot Place. In 1884, Joseph was granted permission to return to the Northwest with his people. Of the approximately 420 Nez Perce that were taken to Indian Territory, only 268 survived the experience. One hundred and fifty of those, including Joseph and his band, were placed on the Colville Reservation in Washington; 118 others were allowed to move onto the Nez Perce Reservation at Lapwai. Joseph never stopped trying to convince officials to allow him to return to his homeland in northeastern Oregon, but he was unsuccessful. He died on the Colville Reservation in 1904.<sup>18</sup>

The 1877 Nez Perce War, one of the last major nineteenth-century Indian wars, deeply affected the American consciousness. The courage, resiliency, organization, and skills of the Nez Perce, recognized even by those who fought and eventually conquered them,

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made an impression on the American public, who, for the first time, were able to follow the daily course of the war in the newspapers through the use of telegraphed messages. By July 1877, urban newspapers, including the *Sacramento Union Record*, the *New York Herald*, and, particularly, the *New York Times*, were not only reporting the war but also criticizing the government policies that had fostered it and expressing admiration of Chief Joseph and his people. Some western newspapers that originally had been solidly on the side of the military began to express similar sentiments; historian Larry Cebula wrote, "This open admiration of Indians engaged in a war with the United States was unprecedented in the annals of frontier journalism."<sup>19</sup> The dramatic episode captured the imagination of American citizens and raised questions about the government's treatment of Native Americans, as well as in the military's ability to fight the war.

**Recognition of Nez Perce War Sites**

The history of the Nez Perce and the 1877 war are recognized by the Nez Perce National Historic Trail, established in 1986 under the 1968 National Trails System Act. The Trail extends from Wallowa Lake in Oregon to the Bear Paw Battlefield in northern Montana, tracing the route the Nez Perce used to flee their ancestral lands. The Nez Perce National Historical Park was created in 1965 and expanded in 1992. The Park now encompasses thirty eight sites in Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and Montana. Approximately a dozen of these sites are directly related to the Nez Perce War, including the site of Fort Lapwai, the White Bird Battlefield, the site of the Cottonwood fights, the Clearwater Battlefield, Weippe Prairie, the Lolo Trail, the Camas Meadows site, the Big Hole Battlefield, the Canyon Creek site and the Bear Paw Battlefield. In addition, the Bear Paw Battlefield, Camas Meadows, Weippe Prairie and the Lolo Trail are National Historic Landmarks. The Big Hole Battlefield is also National Battlefield.<sup>20</sup>

**Significance of the Elfers Barn and Field**

The Jurden Henry Elfers Barn and Field site is significant due to its representation of the settlement of the American West and the effect of that settlement on Native American policy and relations. More specifically, the barn and field mark the site of a spark that ignited the Nez Perce War of 1877.

Jurden Henry Elfers was typical of many settlers who moved into the American West. An immigrant, Elfers worked hard to establish a substantial ranch and businesses that made him financially successful, a goal to which most Americans in the post-Civil War West aspired. That goal, however, was at cross purposes with the traditions and lifeways



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of the area's native population, who did not see land as a commodity to be divided and profited from, but rather as a resource and a heritage integral to their culture. Inevitably, the two world views clashed. The dominant culture, however, nearly always prevailed and the presence of the Elfers barn and field represents the ability of the settlers to impose their values on the landscape.

More specifically, the Elfers barn and field mark a critical juncture in the events leading to the Nez Perce War of 1877. The killing of Elfers, Beckrode, and Bland marked a turning point in the prelude to the Nez Perce War. The young Nez Perce who shot them initially set out to seek retribution for direct acts of violence against their people. The killings in the Elfers field indicate a more general resentment against white settlers, as well as the desire to gather horses and weapons. The episode at Elfers' field formed a bridge of sorts between personal vengeance and general war against white settlers and the military. Further, upon returning to their camp after killing the Elfers and the others, the warriors announced that the Nez Perce were now at war, forcing the issue and making inevitable the resulting conflict that others had tried to avoid. The ensuing outbreak became one of the final and best-known episodes in the history of the nineteenth-century Indian wars.

The killings at Elfers' field are treated in major works of scholarship on the Nez Perce War. John D. McDermott, *Forlorn Hope: The Battle of White Bird Canyon and the Beginning of the Nez Perce War* (Boise, Idaho: Idaho State Historical Society, 1978) gives the most detailed description of the deaths of Elfers and his men. Merrill D. Beal, *"I Will Fight No More Forever,": Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce War* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), Mark H. Brown, *Flight of the Nez Perce* (New York: Putnam and Sons, 1967), Jerome A. Greene, *Nez Perce Summer, 1877: The U. S. Army and the Nee-Me-Poo Crisis* (Helena, Montana: Montana Historical Society Press), and Alvin M. Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997, originally published by Yale University Press, 1965), all note the Elfers incident in the onset of the Nez Perce War. In Lucullus Virgil McWhorter, *Yellow Wolf: His Own Story* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1940), the author relates the history of the war as told to him by a Nez Perce participant, Yellow Wolf, over the course of several years. Yellow Wolf refers to the killing of a man from who the three young Nez Perce stole a good horse as the final precipitating event in the onset of the war.

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**Endnotes**

1. Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1890* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1973), pp. 2-3. *Frontier Regulars* and Robert M. Utley, *Frontiersmen In Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848-1865* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1967) provide a complete discussion of the Indian Wars in the second half of the nineteenth century; John D. Unruh, *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigration and the Trans-Mississippi West* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 119-120.
2. Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, pp. 3-8, 9, 95-96; Robert H. Ruby and John A. Brown, *Indians of the Pacific Northwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), pp. 93-106, 131-164; Clifford Trafzer and Richard D. Scheuerman, *The Palouse Indians and the Invasion of the Inland Pacific Northwest* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1986), pp. 21-30, 46-92; Clifford Trafzer, "The Legacy of the Walla Walla Council," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 106 (Fall 2005), 398-402; Kent Richards, "The Stevens Treaties of 1854-1855," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 106 (Fall 2005), pp. 342-350; Kent Richards, "The Isaac I. Stevens and Joel Palmer Treaties of 1855-2005," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 106 (Fall 2005), pp. 351-357.
3. Greene, *Nez Perce Summer, 1877*, pp. 1-24; John D. McDermott, *Forlorn Hope: The Battle of White Bird Canyon and the Beginning of the Nez Perce War* (Boise, Idaho: Idaho State Historical Society, 1978), xiii; Utley, *Frontiersman in Blue*, pp. 179-180, 188, 198-199
4. Greene, *Nez Perce Summer 1877*, pp. 20-23, 29, McDermott, *Forlorn Hope*, p. xv; Lucullus Virgil McWhorter, *Yellow Wolf: His Own Story* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1940), pp. 34-41.
5. Greene, *Nez Perce Summer*, pp. 22-23; Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1965; 1997 edition), pp. 507-511; McWhorter, *Yellow Wolf*, pp. 41-42.
6. Greene, *Nez Perce Summer*, pp. 28-29..
7. Greene, *Nez Perce Summer*, p. 30; Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians*, pp. 512-513; McDermott, *Forlorn Hope*, pp. 3-4.
8. McDermott, *Forlorn Hope*, pp. 5-8.

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9. Henderson, John M., William S. Shiach, and Harry B. Averill, *An Illustrated History of North Idaho: Embracing Nez Perces, Idaho, Latah, Kootenai and Shoshone counties, State of Idaho* (Western Historical Publishing Company, 1903), p. 451; Donna Turnipseed, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Elfers, Jurden Henry, Barn, August 2, 2001, pp. 12-13.

10. McDermott, *Forlorn Hope*, pp. 6-7; Mark H. Brown, *Flight of the Nez Perce* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), pp. 59, 102-103.

11. McDermott, *Forlorn Hope*, pp. 8-9. In his account to Lucullus McWhorter, Yellow Wolf stated that the three young Nez Perce "now killed another man who had badly treated the Indians. They took a good horse belonging to him and returned home." McWhorter, *Yellow Wolf*, pp. 44-45. The reference to the horse suggests Yellow Wolf is referring to Jurden Henry Elfers; he does not mention the deaths of Devine, Beckroge, or Bland.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., pp. 10-11; McWhorter, *Yellow Wolf*, p. 45.

14. Ibid., pp. 11-12.

15. Ibid., pp. 15-24; Greene, *Nez Perce Summer 1877*, pp. 26, 33-43; McWhorter, *Yellow Wolf*, pp. 54-64.

16. Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, p. 301.

17. Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, pp. 296-319 summarizes the events of the Nez Perce War; Greene, *Nez Perce Summer*, offers a full treatment of the events of the war and map p. 9 traces the route of the Nez Perce flight. Yellow Wolf's account is recorded in McWhorter, *Yellow Wolf*, pp. 70-226. The quote attributed to Chief Joseph is repeated in Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, p. 314; Greene says Joseph's words translated to "From where the sun now stands, forever and ever, I will never fight again," Greene, *Nez Perce Summer*, p. 312.

18. Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, pp. 314-315; McWhorter, *Yellow Wolf*, 229-237.

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19. Larry Cebula, "Filthy Savages and Red Napoleons: Newspapers and the Nez Perce War," *Pacific Northwest Forum* 6, Summer/Fall 1993, p. 10. Cebula's article (pp. 3-13) describes press coverage of the war and its influence on American opinion.

20. "Nez Perce Nee-Me-Poo National Historic Trail," <http://www.fs.fed.us/npnht>;  
"Nez Perce National Historical Park," <http://www.nps.gov/nepe/>.

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundary begins immediately south of John Day Creek northwest of the corner of the Elfers Barn, proceeds east to the east side of the road leading into the property, then south to the point south of the northwesterly-southeasterly draw on the plateau. The boundary then extends west-northwest and parallels the draw to the farm road; then north and east to lines separating the modern outbuildings from the site, then north to the point of beginning.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes the only remaining structure associated with the Elfers ranch on John Day Creek (the Elfers Barn), the route taken by Elfers, his brother-in-law, and his hired hand on the day of their deaths, and the field near or upon which they were killed. The boundary encompasses the viewshed between the barn and the plateau upon which the field stands and excludes the modern outbuildings on the site.

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**Photographs**

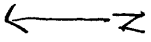
Elfers, Jurden Henry, Barn and Field  
Idaho County, Idaho

All photographs taken by Suzanne Julin  
August 17, 2005.

Negatives held by Idaho State Historic Preservation Office

- Photo #1 of 8: Barn, view looking northwest
- Photo #2 of 8: Barn, view looking southwest
- Photo #3 of 8: Barn, view looking east
- Photo #4 of 8: Field/Pasture on plateau above barn, view looking south-southwest
- Photo #5 of 8: Draw/trail leading to plateau/field from north, looking south
- Photo #6 of 8: Barn from plateau/field, looking north
- Photo #7 of 8: Across field to rear draw, looking south
- Photo #8 of 8: Field, looking north-northeast





← To Hwy 95

Access Road

JOHN DAN CREEK

OUT  
DIP

③ →

OUTBLDG

BARN  
LEAN TO

Corvaks

GATE

⑥ →

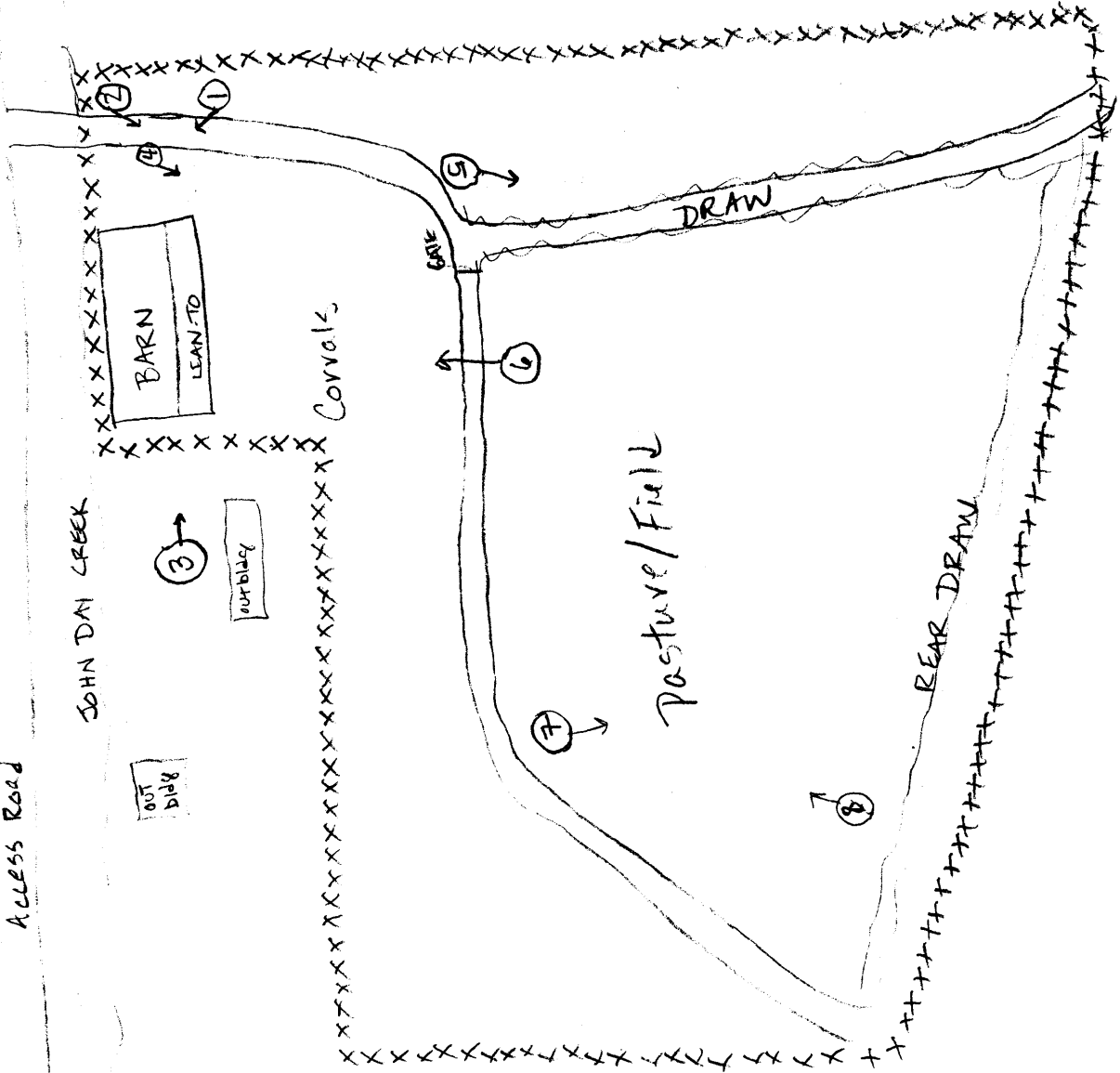
Pasture/Field

⑦ →

DRAW

REAR DRAW

⑧ →



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xxxx - nominated  
property boundary  
⊕ - photo numbers and  
direction

Notes