

NEWS RELEASE

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Leavenworth Honors Nez Perce Indians with Historic Trail Dedication and Symposium

Nov. 19 & 20

(Leavenworth, Kan.)— Nez Perce Indians from around the country are coming to Leavenworth Nov. 19 and 20 for the dedication of an historical marker that will certify Fort Leavenworth as a site on the Nez Perce Historic Trail. The Nez Perce are also holding a symposium at the University of Saint Mary in commemoration of the tribe's history in Leavenworth. This will be the largest gathering of Nez Perce in Leavenworth since the Nez Perce War (Flight) of 1877. The sign dedication will be held at 1:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 19 at the entrance to Fort Leavenworth's Sherman Army Airfield. The public is welcome. Speakers include direct descendants of the Nez Perce War (Flight), and representatives from the U.S. Army, U.S. Forest Service, and City of Leavenworth. Some Nez Perce will be in tribal regalia.

The U.S. Forest Service manages the National Nez Perce Historic Trail and is certifying Fort Leavenworth as the first site that is not on the present Trail. This first Off-Trail site certification serves as an example for several other Off-Trail certifications to close the loop on the Nez Perce Flight and Return to the Homeland. The Nez Perce were incarcerated at Fort Leavenworth from November 1877 to July 1878. Chief Joseph was their remaining leader at this time. Many Nez Perce died and were buried at Fort Leavenworth.

The Nez Perce Symposium will be held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 20 at University of Saint Mary's McGilley Field House, 4100 S. 4th Street, Leavenworth, Kan. The conference is free and open to the public. The symposium will open with a proclamation from the Leavenworth Mayor's office declaring Nov. 20, 2004 as Nez Perce Day in Leavenworth. Scheduled speakers are: three Nez Perce tribal elders, two military historians from Fort Leavenworth (Assistant Command Historian Kelvin Crow will speak on the Nez Perce Fort Leavenworth experience and Maj. Dave Christensen share the Army's point of view on the actual pursuit and the battles that made up the Nez Perce War of 1877), and University of Saint Mary historian Sister Mary Lenore Martin will talk about the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth hospital in Deerlodge, Mont., where the Nez Perce War wounded were treated. Guests will also see a new Forest Service video of the Nez Perce Country.

The Nez Perce Historic Trail Dedication and Symposium are sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service, the University of Saint Mary, The Nez Perce Trail Foundation and the Leavenworth Public Library. Call 913-684-8979 for more information.

NEZ PERCE HISTORY

The Nez Perce War (Flight) of 1877 was the last great Indian War and occurred one year after Custer's defeat by Sitting Bull. Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce were pursued by the U.S. army. The warriors, with many women and children, began a retreat to Canada of more than 1,000 miles. Thirty miles short of the Canadian border, they were trapped in a cul-de-sac by troops under Gen. Nelson A. Miles and forced to surrender. Chief Joseph's surrender speech is one of the best-known Native American statements. "Hear me my chiefs. I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever."

The name Nez Perce actually represents many distinct tribes with many cultural differences that all existed together peacefully, and for that reason they are usually thought of as being one tribe. The words Nez Perce mean those with pierced noses. It is a misnomer given to the band of Indians by Lewis and Clark during their travels across the country. The real tribal name is Nee-Me-Poo. These culturally diverse people have never practiced piercing in their ceremonies or in daily life. They were mistaken for another tribe that lived farther south and did practice piercing in their religious ceremonies.

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