

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

SITE REPORT - SELWAY-LOCHSA AREA

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Historic-site reports contain information designed to assist in two preservation functions. One is preservation planning at the local level. The other is the work of federal agencies in carrying out their responsibilities to comply with historic-preservation requirements prescribed by federal statutes and regulations. These reports summarize local archaeological, historical, and geographical contexts; existing surveys of historic sites; architectural, engineering, industrial; and other cultural resources; and available maps and literature concerning each area. Natural geographical, rather than governmental, boundaries have been used to identify seventy-two areas that vary greatly in size. Site reports reflect a broad cultural and geographical disparity characteristic of diverse regional components found in Idaho, but the areas are designed to incorporate cultural elements of immediate local significance that need to be taken into account for preservation planning.

1. Geographical context:

2. Prehistory and significant archaeological sites: after the last great Missoula-Spokane flood, which surged and splashed from Pasco up Snake River past Lewiston into Idaho some 12,000 years ago, people moved back into Snake and Clearwater canyons, where they have been active ever since. Traces of human occupation of higher canyon and prairie country also go back for eight thousand years or so, and lower Clearwater pit houses have been in use for five thousand years or more.

3. Cultural resource surveys and archaeological literature:

4. Historical summary:

1. Exploration and fur trade, 1805-1862

Old Indian trails followed high ridges that ran near Lochsa River's north divide (Lolo Trail) and cut across Upper Selway terrain (Nez Perce Trail), so early explorers and trappers had access to a vast Clearwater Mountain wilderness that Selway and Lochsa streams flow through. Most of them did not appreciate what they saw. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark had a frightful time getting across

that land in 1805 and 1806. According to their instructions for exploration, those mountains simply were not supposed to be there. Worse yet, they traveled across that rather rough country during a colder and snowier climate than gradually emerged after 1840: if they had waited another century or two to examine those ridges, they might have had a lot less hardship. What they found was a barrier rather than an avenue for trade. Worse yet, without Shoshoni and Nez Perce guides, they could not even find their Lolo Trail route over a series of steep ridges, even though they were expert explorers. Their careful detailed reports of that country did not encourage others to follow that part of their transcontinental route.

Because steep cliffs blocked travel down river canyons which did not abound in beaver resources anyway, fur hunters generally worked in other areas. John Work brought a Hudson's Bay Company trappers' brigade over much of Lewis and Clark's Lolo Trail route in 1832, but his investigation produced negative results. By that time, British explorers were searching for beaver in pretty remote places, and this was one that did not have too attractive a future. If any trapping party had even bothered to see if Upper Selway's Nez Perce Trail led to beaver streams before Samuel Parker-- a Congregational missionary--traveled that way in 1835, that activity has escaped notice.

2. Lolo and Nez Perce Trail traffic, 1863-1876

Clearwater Mountain mining enterprises commenced not too far west of this area at Pierce in 1860, and thousands of treasure hunters fanned out from bases like Elk City and Florence within a year or two. But extensive prospecting disclosed no gold or silver resources sufficient to expand mining into Selway-Lochsa ranges.

In 1862, an extension of what became Idaho's Clearwater and Salmon rivers mines into upper Missouri placer deposits of later Montana. Surplus supplies were packed from places like Lewiston across Nez Perce Trail ridges to East Bannack and Virginia City, and many prospectors joined that procession. At least a few bandits and road agents joined that rush, which produced a disaster for Lloyd Magruder and his party returning from East Bannack to Lewiston in 1863. By that time, Lewiston, Elk City, East Bannack, and Virginia City all were part of western Idaho, which lacked a criminal code and much opportunity for effective protection of anyone transporting gold in remote areas. Magruder's Upper Selway disaster site attracted more attention than any other event that occurred in that Selway area.

3. O. O. Howard's Nez Perce Campaign, 1877

When constant military pressure from general Oliver

Otis Howard's army unit led several Nez Perce bands to conclude they had no option but to leave North Idaho, White Bird, Joseph, Looking Glass, and their Palouse associates followed a Lolo Trail route to Montana in 1877. Howard's army pursued them with no success in this area. They used Sewall Traux's western Lolo Trail variant for access to this area, and a vast literature has arisen in relation to that episode.

4. Railway promotion, 1876-1897

Efforts in Lewiston to locate a superior low Bitterroot pass suitable for a railroad connection from Lewiston to Missoula also brought attention to upper Selway Mountain openings after Nez Perce Pass gained extensive use for Nez Perce Trail traffic. A natural blockage at Lochsa River's Black Canyon discouraged potential use of Lolo Pass, but Selway access seemed worth exploring. True optimists were needed to promote a Northern Pacific Railway survey there, but a number were around. Yet they attracted more attention than plausibility. Difficulties in obtaining rail transportation in this Clearwater Mountain area also inhibited practically any possibility for lumber production there. Most of that terrain simply remained a mountain wilderness.

5. Forest Service Operations, 1899-1934

When a Bitterroot forest reserve was established in 1897 (and renamed Bitterroot National Forest eight years later), upper Lochsa and upper Selway timber lands were included along with a strip in Montana. In 1899, a number of rangers were assigned to manage Idaho's share. Most Lochsa and Selway timber country was incorporated into national forests within a decade, and ranger stations, guard stations, trails, and lookouts gradually became prominent features of that country. Divided between Clearwater and Idaho national forests when they were created to replace Bitterroot National Forest July 1, 1908, this area gained significance for its excellent hunting and fishing resources. Alvin Renshaw's Bear Creek Dude Ranch (served eventually by a nearby airport) emerged as a hunting base that appealed to a wealthy national clientele that preferred a wilderness range with exceptional specimens. Forest Service responsibilities--particularly after a devastating season in 1910--included an increasing effort to suppress fire during summers that sometimes had long hot dry weather. Disasters in 1919 and 1934 had a major ecological impact that transformed forests into bare hills that helped elk herds but took many years to produce new timber. Five thousand Selway firefighters, however, could not retard a 1934 explosion that wiped out enough scattered campgrounds

in one area one afternoon to leave 1,400 of them with no place to stay or eat meals. Fire episodes mostly were less dramatic. But cumulative effects of smaller blazes also had an impact.

6. Civilian Conservation Corps Era, 1934-1940

Civilian Conservation Corps projects had a considerable impact in many parts of Idaho. This depression era program, designed to relieve national unemployment and to undertake useful public projects, brought young men from distant places to build roads that opened Lolo Trail and Nez Perce Trail routes to automobile and truck traffic by 1935 and 1936. Trail systems were expanded and bridges were built. A different kind of employment opportunity was offered in Black Canyon where construction of a Lochsa River highway gradually made headway through efforts of a prison camp. In a decade after 1935, more than 1,400 prisoners built seven critical miles of highway there. Unlike C.C.C. operations, this program continued with Japanese internment prisoners during wartime.

7. Postwar Highway Construction, 1946-1962

Completion of U.S. 12 as a paved highway to Lolo Pass was that area's major project until it was finished in 1962.

Promoted intensively in Lewiston for three decades after it had been accepted as a federal aid route in 1932, it became a practical postwar project by 1946.

8. Wilderness Protection, 1963-

After administrative creation of a Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness in 1963, congressional Wilderness legislation in 1964 and Wild and Scenic River legislation of 1968 provided for continued protection of Selway and Lochsa wilderness lands and streams that had been preserved by Forest Service actions prior to that time.

Aside from an unpaved Nez Perce Trail road past Salmon Mountain to Nez Perce Pass, all upper Selway terrain formed part of two large wilderness areas when statutory designation was completed in 1980. Upper Selway lands continue to have their primary access from Bitterroot Valley in Montana. Farther north and west, trails to lower Selway Wilderness connect to U.S. 12 in Lochsa Canyon. A road from Elk City via Iron Mountain to Meadow Creek and Selway Falls also dates back to C.C.C. era expansion prior to 1938. Descending through Selway Canyon to U.S. 12, it provides additional access to western boundary lands. Along with a C.C.C. era Coolwater Mountain road and another pre-1938 road from Green Mountain (with an Elk City-Nez Perce Trail connection) that follows a ridge between Meadow Creek and Running Creek into Selway drainage, that road completes

later penetration into Selway lands. A shift from access roads to planes and helicopters for fire suppression after 1946 did much to eliminate further demand for roads in Selway Wilderness territory.

5. Historical documentation and literature:

M. Alfreda Elsonsohn, *Pioneer Days in Idaho County* (Caldwell, Idaho, 1947, 1951), 2 vols., includes a great amount of local information concerning this area. Gary Moulton, *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1983-), has two volumes relating to this area. An excellent guide to appropriate literature is included. Francis Haines, *Red Eagles of the Northwest* (Portland, Oregon, 1939); Alvin M. Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest* (New Haven, Connecticut, 1965); Merrill D. Beal, *"I Will Fight No More Forever"* (Seattle, Washington, 1963); and Mark H. Brown, *The Flight of the Nez Perce* (New York, 1967), among a vast Nez Perce literature, provide Lolo Trail information. Howard K. Steen, *The U.S. Forest Service: A History* (Seattle, Washington, 1976), offers an appropriate national context. Le Roy Ashby and Rod Gramer, *Fighting the Odds: The Life of Senator Frank Church* (Pullman, Washington, 1994), deals with wilderness preservation and legislation.

6. Historic sites inventory:

Lolo Trail sites: Lewis and Clark campsites; Indian Postoffice; Lewis and Clark's Smoking Place; Howard's Camp; Sherman Peak;

Nez Perce Trail sites: Lloyd Magruder's campsite;

Lochsa Canyon sites: Whitehouse pond; Powell ranger station; Colgate disaster; Fenn ranger station; prison campgrounds; Bernard de Voto grove;

Recreational sites: Alvin Renshaw's ranch; hot springs;

Trails and campgrounds: C.C.C. camps

Forest Service sites: lookouts; administrative sites;

More sites need to be incorporated into this inventory.

7. Industrial archaeological and engineering sites summary:

Aside from United States Forest Service properties, this largely wilderness terrain contains relatively few nonhighway sites of engineering or industrial interest. Lookouts and other fire control facilities abound in remote

wilderness lands.

8. Architectural resources:

No cities or villages have grown up in this region above Lowell. Powell also has some tourist facilities, but most hunters and fishers have to utilize campgrounds or a resort ranch. So architectural resources, aside from Forest Service properties, are relatively rare. An adequate survey and inventory is needed.

9. United States Geological Survey Maps:

Anderson Butte 1966	McGruder Mountain
Bear Mountain 1955	Mink Peak 1966
Beaver Jack Mountain 1962	Moose Ridge 1966
Big Rock Mountain 1966	Mt. George 1966
Black Hawk Mountain 1966	Mt. Jerusalem 1964
Blodgett Mountain 1966	Mt. Paloma 1966
Blue Joint 1962	Musselshell 1966
Boundary Peak 1966	Nez Perce Peak 1962
Burnt Strip Mountain 1966	Pilot Knob 1962
Cayuse Junction 1966	Ranger Peak 1966
Cedar Ridge 1966	Rhodes Peak 1966
Chimney Peak 1966	Rocky Point 1964
Coolwater Mountain 1966	Roundtop 1964
Dick Creek 1964	Running Lake 1966
Dog Creek 1966	St. Joseph Peak 1964
El Capitan 1964	Sabe Mountain
Fenn Mountain 1966	Sable Hill 1966
Fish Lake 1966	Saddle Mountain 1966
Fog Mountain 1966	Savage Ridge 1966
Freeman Peak 1966	Selway Falls 1966
Gardiner Peak 1966	Shissler Peak 1966
Gash Point 1966	Snowy Summit 1966
Goddard Point 1966	Spot Mountain 1966
Granite Pass 1964	Square Top 1962
Grave Peak 1966	Stillman Point 1966
Green Mountain 1966	Stripe Mountain
Greenside Butte 1966	Syringa 1966
Greystone Butte 1966	Tenmile Lake 1964
Holly Creek 1966	Three Prong Mountain 1966
Horseshoe Lake 1965	Tin Cup Lake 1964
Hungry Rock 1966	Tom Beale Peak 1966
Hunter Peak 1966	Twin Butte 1966
Indian Postoffice 1966	Vermillion Peak 1966
Iron Mountain 1962	Wahoo Peak 1966
Jeanette Mountain 1966	Watchtower Peak 1966
Lick Point 1966	Waugh Mountain
Liz Butte 1966	Weitas Butte 1966
Lodge Point 1966	West Fork Butte 1964

Lolo Hot Springs 1964	White Sand Lake 1966
McConnel Mountain 1966	Wyllies Peak 1966
McLendon Butte 1966	

10. Cultural resource management recommendations:

(This information has not been edited.)