

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY REFERENCE SERIES

## KAMIAH MONSTER

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The Kamiah Valley, like that at Lapwai, is one of the few broad valleys along the usually narrow Clearwater River. Many Nez Perces lived here all year around. In the winter the population would be swelled by those coming down from higher country. The area is rich in Nez Perce and American history.

Centered within Nez Perce National Historic Park's boundaries on the west side of U.S. Highway 12 is the Heart of the Monster, a small volcanic outcrop having great significance in Nez Perce folklore. Like the other legends, several versions of the story exist. The following is a brief narrative of one of them:

Before people inhabited the earth, a great monster named ILTSWOWICH lived here. He ate the smaller animals for food. One day Coyote came by and could find no animals. Coyote thought the time had come to stop ILTSWOWICH before he ate all the animals up. So he journeyed over to the Wallowa Mountains (in northeastern Oregon) and tied himself to the tallest peak. He then challenged the monster to eat him. but the monster could not suck Coyote into his stomach because his rope held firm. The monster became frightened and invited Coyote to come back to Kamiah with him. Coyote wanted to see the animals in the monster's stomach and the monster let him go in and see. To Coyote's surprise, they were all alive. Coyote built a great fire of the monster's innards and cut down his heart from its place. The animals were all able to escape. Soon the monster died. Coyote then announced that he was going to create a new animal to be called a human. He cut up the dead monster and created tribes from the parts. After he finished, his friend Fox noticed that there was no tribe here. Coyote was sorry as he had used all the parts. He noticed he still had some blood on his hands from the monster's heart so he washed his hands and sprinkled that blood on the ground and said, "Here on this ground I make the Nez Perce, a tribe few in number but strong and pure."

The stone heart can still be seen along with the liver, which lies 150 yards to the southwest.

Prepared by Jack Williams

**(This information has not been edited.)**

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