

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

ROUTE OF JOSEPH'S NEZ PERCE WALLOWA BAND FROM SNAKE RIVER TO TOLO LAKE, 1877

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Under military pressure in May 1877 to leave their Wallowa homeland and settle in Idaho, Joseph's band rounded up their stock at Cow Creek crossing, Imnaha River, and moved past a high divide to Dug Bar where they forded Snake River. Ascending another canyon wall to upper Divide Creek, they set out for Tolo Lake on Camas Prairie. Except during spring flood season, they might have followed a traditional Boise trail route down Rice Creek where a Salmon River ford led to Grave Creek and Rocky Canyon. But that spring, their only suitable lower Salmon crossing was at Craig's Ferry, or Billie's Ferry. Their nearest alternative required a trip up to Salmon River's Horseshoe Bend, where a trail down Deer Creek gave them access from Doumecq Plain and Camp Howard Ridge. After their military engagement in Whitebird Canyon they used that ford to escape from General O. O. Howard's army, then they had to go northwest to Billie's Crossing, rather than Rice Creek, because of high water. This took them farther out of their way, but they still had no choice. When Howard followed them up past Camp Howard Ridge to Billie's Ferry, his army could not manage to cross there. Howard could not get through at Rice Creek to Rocky Canyon either, so he had to go clear back to his crossing above Whitebird. Because of exceptional problems during flood season, Rice Creek and Grave Creek generally were avoided as a route for travel in May and June of 1877.

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