

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### IDAHO'S INDIAN POPULATION IN 1800

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Just before white men began to come to Idaho, the Indian population amounted to some 6,000 to 10,000 inhabitants. Because Idaho's boundaries do not conform to the general patterns of Indian land use and migration, and because no one bothered to try to count the Indians at the time, any very exact estimate of Idaho Indian population in 1800 is impossible. Even if anyone had tried to make a count for the Idaho area, he hardly could have decided what parts of which roving bands or groups to assign to Idaho.

Because political organization into tribes or bands (in the white man's sense of the term, anyway) remained practically unknown to the Indians of Idaho until after 1800, any effort to identify precisely how many were Nez Perce, Coeur d'Alene, Shoshoni-Bannock, or Kutenai and other Salish Indians is likewise doomed to failure. Because of various dialects and other speech varieties, accurate classification of these Indians along linguistic lines is impossible. Although the various Shoshoni-Bannock Indians, taken as a whole, outnumbered the Nez Perce in 1800, the portions of the Shoshoni-Bannock and Nez Perce who might be regarded, in a general way, as Idaho Indians are about equal in number. (More of the Shoshoni-Bannock than the Nez Perce ranged beyond the limits of later Idaho.) Perhaps about 3,000 Shoshoni-Bannock, and about 3,000 Nez Perce might reasonably have been assigned to Idaho. In addition, some 1,000 Salish—mostly Coeur d'Alene, with possibly a few hundred Pend d'Oreille (or Kalispel, as they sometimes were called)—might have been counted as Idaho Indians. Farther north along Kootenai River in the Bonner's Ferry country, some 200 or so Kutenai Indians, very different in language and culture from the other Idaho Indians, often used to work south from present British Columbia into what now is Idaho. As was the case with all of the others, these Indians lived in and roamed over country which included parts of later Idaho along with a lot of other territory. These estimates, however, are intended to reflect only the Idaho portion of the lands of these various Indians.

[Information supplied by Sven Liljeblad.]

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