

Frederick Webb Hodge, Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico.
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Nez Perces (pierced noses) A term applied by the French to a number of tribes which practiced or were supposed to practice the custom of piercing the nose for the insertion of a piece of dentalium. This term is now used exclusively to designate the main tribe of the Shahaptian family, who have not, however, so far as is known, ever been given to the practice.

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The Nez Perces, or Sahaptin of later writers, the Chopunnish (corrupted from Tsutpeli) of Lewis and Clark, their discoverers were found in 1805 occupying a large area in what is now W. Idaho N.E. Oregon and S.E. Washington, on lower Snake r. and its tributaries. They roamed between the Blue mts. in Oregon and the Bitter Root mts. in Idaho, and according to Lewis and Clark sometimes crossed the range to the headwaters of the Missouri. By certain writers they have been classed under two geographic divisions, Upper Nez Perces and Lower Nez Perces. The latter were found by Bonneville in 1834 to the N. and W. of the Blue mts. on several of the branches of the Snake r. where they were neighbors of the Cayuse and Wallawalla. The Upper Nez Perces held the Salmon r. country in Idaho in 1834 and probably also at the same time the Grande Ronde valley in E. Oregon, but by treaty of 1855 they ceded a large part of this territory to the United States.

The reservation in which they were confined at that time included the Wallowa valley in Oregon, as well as a large district in Idaho. With the discovery of gold and the consequent influx of miners and settlers the Oregon districts were in demand, and a new treaty

was made by which the tribe was confined to the reservation at Lapwai, Idaho. The occupants of Wallowa valley refused to recognize the treaty, and finally, under their chief Joseph (q.v.) took active measures of resistance, and the Nez Perce war of 1877 resulted.

Several severe defeats were inflicted on the United States troops who were sent against the Indians, and finally, when forced to give way, Joseph conducted a masterful retreat across the Bitter Root mts. and into Montana in an attempt to reach Canadian territory, but he and his band were surrounded and captured when within a few miles of the boundary. Joseph and his followers to the number of 450 were removed to Indian Territory where their loss from disease was so great that in 1885 they were sent to the Colville res. in N. Washington where a remnant still resides.

Under the collective name Chopunnish, Lewis and Clark estimated the population to be 7,850. Deducting from this total 1,600 Pelloatpallah (Paloos) band now treated as distinct from the Nez Perces and 250 for the Yeletpo (Wailletpu i.e. Cayuse), now supposed to belong to a distinct stock, the total of the Nez Perces in 1805 according to those authors was about 6,000. Wilkes estimated the Chopunnish at about 3,000 in 1849, and Gibbs gave them a population of more than 1,700 in 1853. In 1885 they were estimated officially at 1,437. There are now (1906) somewhat more than 1,600, 1,524 being on the reservation in Idaho and 83 on the Colville res. in Washington.

In general habits of life the Nez Perces as well as the other Shahaptian tribes conform to the inland type of Indians and differ sharply in most respects from their western neighbors, the Chinook.

At the time of Lewis and Clark's visit they are reported as living in communal houses, said to contain about 50 families each. There is evidence, however, that the Nez Perces used the typical underground lodge, and that these seldom contained more than 3

or four families. ⁴ much larger dancing house was built in each permanent winter camp. Salmon constituted their most important food in early times, and with roots and berries made up their entire food supply until the introduction of horses (p 67 facilitated hunting expeditions to the neighboring mountains. The tribe seems to have been divided into a number of bands of villages, named according to the place where the permanent winter camp was made. Owing to the precarious nature of the food supply the greater portion of the inhabitants of any one of these villages would often be absent for a large part of the year, consequently it is impossible to determine with accuracy the location and population of these divisions in early times. There was no head chief of the tribe, but each band had several chiefs, of whom one was regarded as the leader, and these chiefs were succeeded by their sons as a rule. Expeditions for hunting or war were led by chiefs chosen for the occasion. There are no signs of a clan system in the social organization of the Nez Perces, and marriage is apparently permitted between any couple except in the case of recognized relationship.

The religious beliefs of the Nez Perces previous to the introduction of Christianity, were those characteristic of the Indians of the interior, the main feature being the belief in an indefinite number of spirits. ¹he individual might procure a personal protecting spirit in the usual way by rigorous training and fasting.

The Nez Perces have always borne a high reputation for independence and bravery, and have been particularly noted for their almost constant friendship to the whites. Practically the only rupture in these relations was the Nez Perce war of 1877, mentioned above.

The bands and divisions of the Nez Perces are known only approximately. The following are the best defined;

⁴Alpowna on a small branch of the Clearwater below Lewiston, Idaho;

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Lamtama, so called from a branch of Salmon r. Idaho; Lapwai, near the junction of Lapwai cr. and the Clearwater; Willewah, formerly occupying Wallowa valley, Oreg. and now for the greater part on the Colville res. Wash. (Joseph's band). In addition ~~to~~ a number of bands have been recorded by the names of their chiefs or their supposed places of residences.

(follows names used by various authorities, citations)