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# Nez Perce

Native Americans of Oregon

4th Grade Social Studies

## Climate & Environment

The Nez Perce lived in the Plateau region. The Plateau is a large area with different landscapes and climates. The Plateau has desert as well as forested uplands. Temperatures are extreme in the Plateau area. The Nez Perce lived in the northeast corner of present-day Oregon. This area had a lot of water and grass. There was little rain, however, and cold winds blew through the area.

The Nez Perce were unlike other tribes of Oregon because they traveled over the Rocky Mountains each year to hunt buffalo. They were able to travel long distances to hunt and trade because they had horses. The Nez Perce lived in permanent winter villages in the Wallowa Valley of Oregon. They also lived in parts of Idaho and Washington.



Marc Shandro, Wikipedia

Chief Joseph Canyon

### Special Points of Interest:

- The Plateau is the only culture area in Oregon where horses were common before white explorers introduced them.
- Once the tipi was introduced, the long house became less popular. A tipi was made of twelve wood poles that were covered with grass mats or bison skin.

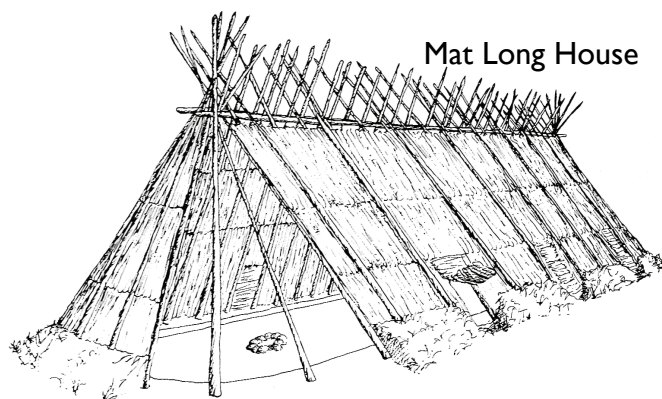


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Tepee

## Shelter

Nez Perce shelters were long mat houses in the shape of an upside down "V". An opening at the peak of the home allowed smoke to get out and light to get in. The framework was covered with woven grass or bark mats.



Mat Long House

These houses could be up to 150 feet long but most were between 20 and 70 feet long. Each house was occupied by several families.

Courtesy of Oregon Historical Society

Faun Rae Hosey, artist. From Jeff Zucker, Kay Hummel & Bob Hogfoss Oregon Indians: Culture, History & Current Affairs, An Atlas & Introduction (Portland: Western Imprints, The Press of the Oregon Historical Society, 1983).

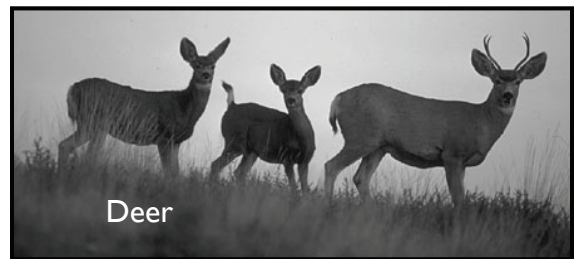
## Food

The Nez Perce traveled according to the seasons to gather, hunt, and prepare food. In the spring, women collected roots from the valleys. They used digging sticks to gather camas bulbs, bitterroot, wild carrots, wild onion, wild potatoes and kous (similar to a parsnip). Most of what they collected in the spring was dried and stored for winter.



Men traveled to rivers to fish for salmon and trout in the spring. They dipped nets into the water or used spears to fish. Fish was then dried for winter storage.

Early spring was also hunting time. Unlike other tribes in Oregon, the Nez Perce had horses. This meant they could rely more on hunting for food. Horses allowed them to travel over the Rocky Mountains to hunt bison. Hunting large game like deer, elk, moose, bear, mountain sheep, and goat was much easier with horses. Sometimes herds of elk or deer were herded into rivers then shot with bows and arrows from a canoe or on horseback.



## Clothing



**Chief Joseph**

make feathered bonnets. They also pierced the center cartilage of their nose and also pierced their ears.

Nez Perce men and women wore clothes made of deer, elk, and bison skin. They took pride in their clothes and spent time keeping them very clean. Clothes were often decorated with fringe, paint, beads, and porcupine quills. Men wore long buckskin shirts, leggings, belts, breech cloths, and moccasins. In cold weather, they wore bison-skin robes. Women wore long buckskin dresses, corn husk hats, and knee high moccasins. Men and women painted their faces for certain ceremonies.

Nez Perce men copied the style of the Plains Indians whom they had met while on bison hunts. They learned to

