

DREAMS BECOME A REALITY



Celeste (CeCe) Whitewolf, a descendant of the Wallowa Band, Nez Perce and board member of the Homeland Project, delights in the stories told by the displays at the new Wallowa Band Nez Perce Interpretive Center. EOMG Photo/Ellen Morris Bishop

AFTER YEARS OF PLANNING, WALLOWA BAND NEZ PERCE INTERPRETIVE CENTER OPENS

By ELLEN MORRIS BISHOP
EO Media Group

It's a dream that has taken years to come true. But on May 25, the long-planned Wallowa Band Nez Perce Visitor's Interpretive Center became an impressive reality. Its contents were developed and vetted by the Wallowa Band Nez Perce. The center's new exhibits were fabricated locally. The exhibit is part of the Wallowa Band Nez Perce Homeland Project in Wallowa.

"I'm just thrilled by everything that's here," said Wallowa Band descendent Celeste (CeCe) Whitewolf. "It's accurate. It's professional. It helps tell our whole story, and it's a way we can share our story as people who are living today with the community and with everyone."

The new, approximately 1,000-square-foot facility documents the people and culture of Chief Joseph's band, the Walwáama, who lived in the Wallowa Valley. It recounts the stories of their lives prior to their tragic 1877 flight toward Canada, their imprisonment in Kansas and Oklahoma, their return to the Northwest, and their lives today. Numerous maps and images show the path of their April-October trek from Wallowa County through Yellowstone to capture at Bear Paw Meadows in Montana. Names of many Nez Perce on the retreat, including a long list of women warriors, are posted alongside the map.

The exhibit also tells the story of Joseph, and his band's years of imprisonment and loss at the Quapaw Reservation in Kansas and Tonkawa Reservation in Oklahoma. It documents their return to the Northwest, and exile of Chief Joseph and most of his band to the Colville Reservation in northern Washington. Today, the Wallowa band's descendants are spread across the Lapwai, Umatilla and Colville reservations. At the new center, you can learn about their lives today as well as in the past.



Exhibit fabricator J.R. Rymut looks over the 3D map of the Wallowa Band Nez Perce territory that she fabricated while Ron Cameron traces the route on the Wallowa Band's flight toward refuge in Canada. The new center opened May 25. EOMG Photo/Ellen Morris Bishop

The center includes historical artifacts and reproductions, a teepee that kids delight in, and a "please touch me" collection of materials, from feathers and cured hides to roots, important to the Nez Perce. The seasonal cycle of foods, or "First Foods," is also featured in the exhibit. If you've ever wondered what time of year is traditional for eating Chinook salmon, or deer or Qwos, this is the place to find out!

For those who love maps and geography, there's a 3D relief map that shows the extent of the Walwáama band's lands, including Hells Canyon, the Imnaha, and the Wallows. It shows

MORE INFORMATION

For more information, call the center at 541 886-3101 or contact Angela Bombaci at angela@wallowanezperce.org.

major trails and the Nez Perce names for many places. J.R. Rymut fabricated the map and other exhibit pieces in her new studio in exhibit.

The Oregon Heritage Commission funded initial planning for the center. The generous support of many individ-

ual donors as well as grants from the Meyer Memorial Trust, Oregon Cultural Foundation and Wildhorse Foundation, supported remodeling and exhibit production.

The Wallowa Band Nez Perce Visitor's Interpretive Center is located at 209 E. Second St. in downtown Wallowa. A short walk from the center leads to a new bridge across the Wallowa River and into the Tamkaliks grounds. Summer hours at the new center are noon to 4 p.m. on weekdays. The center is looking for a few more dedicated volunteers who could help keep the facility open for visitors on weekends.