

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHIEF JOSEPH DAYS

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Wallowa County Chieftain

Chief Joseph Days began July 26-28, 1946. It was conceived by the Joseph Chamber of Commerce to celebrate the opening of the new Joseph Municipal Airport and dedicate it as a memorial to the veterans of World War II. In April, 1946, the Chieftain reported:

“The celebration will be known as Chief Joseph Days with a theme of the history and spirit of the Nez Perce Indians and their leader Chief Joseph and is being planned along lines which will bring out all the color of the old and new West. ... If the show is well-received, it is hoped that it can be made an annual event.”

The first Chief Joseph Days included a parade, carnival, horse sale, air show, baseball games, and a Nez Perce Indian band that played at a local dance hall. Importantly, local rodeo livestock contractor Harley Tucker organized a rodeo on Sunday, July 28, in the Lake Hill arena on Wallowa Lake’s east moraine. The rodeo included “bronc riding, roping, and bareback” according to the Wallowa County Chieftain. The “do-it-yourself” arena had been built two years earlier by community volunteers, and donations of materials by

local ranchers and merchants.

In a 2005 interview with Tucker’s friend, Les Masterson, the Chieftain noted: “The antecedent to Chief Joseph Days was a do-it-yourself rodeo that took place atop the moraine in 1944. At that point, “there was just no place to do it,” Masterson said. “Joseph wanted a rodeo and came to Harley. It wasn’t a one-man job, so the town pitched in. The whole community jumped in and dug post-holes,” Masterson remembered.... The arena, once completed — more or less a rail fence with some chutes and little else — had no access road. Stock couldn’t be trucked to the site, it had to be driven or led. Masterson remembers leading groups of six or eight bucking horses on horseback up to the arena. “And some of them didn’t lead very good,” he recalled.

The initial rodeo, which included calf-roping, also included a bit of creative acquisition.

“The arena was just pole fences and we went up on Sheep Creek road and, well, stole a bunch of snow fence from the state highway to keep the calves from crawling out,” Masterson said. Tucker and Masterson had to leave Joseph immediately after the rodeo to get stock ready for a rodeo in Weiser, Idaho, and the fence remained behind.”

The present rodeo arena and grounds in Joseph were built in 1947. The first logs to be milled for the new area were hauled to the present site in early June, and the arena was completed just in time for the rodeo. The Chieftain reported:

“The new rodeo arena, built under the direction of George Grandy, was dedicated to Chief Joseph by a grand nephew of that great Nez Perce warrior. The rodeo grounds, with a seating capacity of 5,000 have been completed after prodigious efforts by the men of Joseph who have turned out in a body for weeks to volunteer their services in helping out the regular working crew. Volunteer workers from Enterprise have also lent a hand. “

The first rodeo in the new Chief Joseph arena featured a cow-cutting contest, along with roping and bronc riding. Renowned contestants in the arena’s first few years included Rodeo Hall of Fame All-around Cowboy and Bronc Rider Ross Dollarhide. Harley Tucker continued to provide top-notch rough stock each year.

Attendance and events grew. In 1956 the Chieftain noted that the parade was 3 miles long and took more than an hour to pass the grandstand. The rodeo was sold out for the Saturday performance. An estimated 12,000 people attended the rodeo.

## SCHEDULE | 2019 Chief Joseph Days • Activities July 23-28, Rodeo performances July 24-27

### TUESDAY, JULY 23

1:30 p.m.  
Bucking Horse Stampede  
down Main Street,  
Joseph

### WEDNESDAY, JULY 24

9:00 a.m.  
CJD Little Buckaroo  
Rodeo for special needs  
children & adults  
2:00 p.m.  
Rodeo Slack at Harley  
Tucker Memorial Arena,  
Joseph  
7:00 p.m.  
Family Night Rodeo  
Performance, rodeo  
arena

9:00 p.m.  
Family Dance, Thunder  
Room, rodeo grounds

### THURSDAY, JULY 25

9:00 a.m.  
Miles for Mammogram  
Walk, starts at rodeo  
arena (register at 8 a.m.)  
2:00 p.m.  
Rodeo Slack, rodeo arena  
7:00 p.m.  
Rodeo Performance,  
Tough Enough to Wear  
Pink night, rodeo arena

### FRIDAY, JULY 26

5:30 a.m.  
American Legion  
Breakfast begins, Main

Street, Joseph  
7:00 a.m.  
Golf Tournament signup  
at Alpine Meadows Golf  
Course, Enterprise

10:00 a.m.  
CJD Junior Parade, Main  
Street, Joseph  
2:00 p.m.  
Rodeo Slack, rodeo arena  
7:00 p.m.  
Rodeo Performance,  
rodeo arena  
9:00 p.m.  
Adult Dance (after  
rodeo), Thunder Room  
9:00 p.m.  
Teen Dance, Joseph

Community Center

### SATURDAY, JULY 27

Early morning  
Shrine Breakfast, rodeo  
grounds  
10:00 a.m.  
CJD Grand Parade, Main  
Street, Joseph  
12:00 p.m.  
Friendship Feast,  
Encampment Pavilion  
2:30 p.m.  
Rodeo Slack, rodeo arena  
3:00 p.m.  
Traditional Dance,  
Encampment Pavilion  
7:00 p.m.  
Rodeo Performance (final

night), rodeo arena  
9:00 p.m.  
Adult Dance (after  
rodeo), Thunder Room  
9:00 p.m.  
Teen Dance, Joseph  
Community Center  
11:00 p.m.  
Cowboy Breakfast begins  
(continues through  
night)  
**SUNDAY, JULY 28**  
Morning  
Cowboy Breakfast  
continues  
9:00 a.m.  
Cowboy Church Service,  
rodeo arena