



*Chief Joseph*

oil on canvas, 1886, courtesy C.M. Russell Museum, Great Falls, Montana

## THE FLIGHT OF THE NEZ PERCE

A portion of the Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail passes through the Judith Basin near Lewistown. This trail extends 1,170 miles from Oregon to the Bears Paw Battlefield near Chinook, Montana. The non-treaty Nez Perce began a flight from Army troops in May of 1877. They intended to seek safety with their Crow Indian allies on the plains to the east. When this failed, Canada became their destination.

In the last weeks of the five-month flight the Nez Perce pushed north through the Judith Gap. The plains country between the Judith and the Snowy Mountains, a traditional hunting ground, provided good water, forage and wild game. They stopped briefly on September 21 at the Reed and Bowles Stockade (Lewistown) to trade before heading north into the Missouri River Breaks. In just 36 hours, the Indians covered 70 miles through the rough breaks country arriving at the Missouri River.

Fifteen miles south of present day Chinook the cavalry swept down, scattering the Indians. Chief Joseph surrendered October 5, 1877, with his famous speech which concluded, "I will fight no more forever."

