

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service



Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests

LEWIS & CLARK ON THE LOLO TRAIL



Panoramic views and primitive conditions
await Lolo Trail travelers.

Trails Across Time



Traveller's
Rest near
present-day
Lolo,
Montana,
September
11.

From
Traveller's
Rest they
traveled
westerly,

crossing the

Layers of History

The edges of time blur when you follow the Lolo Trail, a route traveled by the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1805 and 1806; the Nez Perce, Salish and other Indian tribes for centuries before the explorers arrived; miners, trappers and settlers for a century after their arrival. Most of the route is primitive, the landscape much the same as it was when Lewis and Clark traveled it.

Lewis and Clark reached the Bitterroot Valley in Montana mid-September 1805. The weather was beginning to change, with frost at night and snow on the surrounding mountains. To the west lay the mountains they knew they had to cross. They left

Bitterroot Divide and climbing to follow ridge tops, descending to traverse saddles. Clark and six hunters broke out of the mountains September 20 and found themselves at the edge of a prairie near what is now the small town of Weippe, Idaho.

Buffalo Road

For the Nimiipuu (the Nez Perce) the Lolo Trail was the "Road to Buffalo Country," a route families traveled each summer to hunt buffalo and trade with Plains tribes to the east.

For the Salish it was the "Trail to the Nimiipuu," a route to salmon fishing and trading with Plateau and Coastal tribes.

The Nimiipuu hunted and gathered food across their Plateau

homeland, from the Bitterroots to the Blue Mountains in present-day Oregon.

In the early 1700s horses spread north from Spanish colonies in New Mexico, eventually reaching the Nimiipuu homeland, becoming part of the Nimiipuu way of life and providing a means to travel the Lolo Trail and beyond faster and farther than ever before.

Nearly two centuries later, in 1877, five bands of Nimiipuu followed the Lolo Trail in their attempt to elude General O. O. Howard and the U.S. Army charged with moving them onto a reservation.

The journey across the 1170-mile route lasted nearly four months. It began near Wallowa, Oregon (the homeland of Chief Joseph's band), and ended at the Bear Paw Mountains near Chinook, Montana.

The route was designated the Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail in 1986.

Wagon Road

In May 1866, sixty years after Lewis and Clark journeyed east across the Lolo Trail,

an engineer by the name of Wellington Bird left Lewiston, Idaho, with construction workers, cooks, teamsters, blacksmiths, the surveyor Sewell Truax and others. The Secretary of the Interior had hired Bird to build a wagon road from Missoula, Montana, to Lewiston.

The road was to be a commerce route for mining traffic from Bannack and Virginia City, Montana, to Lewiston and beyond.

After scouting the area, Bird realized he could not build the road on the budget allowed him. Instead, he and his crew relocated and improved the most difficult sections of the Lolo Trail. They widened the trail into a road on the west end, from Weippe to an area called Musselshell. By the end of September 1866 they had finished their work.

For decades, the trail remained basically the way they left it, used by the Nimiipuu, prospectors, trappers and settlers. In 1893 the infamous Carlin hunting party ventured onto the trail. Deep snow nearly trapped the men. They got out alive but left their ill cook George Colgate behind to die. But that's another story.



Forest Service Road

In 1897 President Cleveland proclaimed the establishment of the Bitter Root Reserve, and the Lolo Trail fell within its boundaries.

The Bitter Root Reserve became the Clearwater and Lolo National Forests, and in 1907 crews cleared decades of brush and fallen trees from the Lolo Trail.

In 1909 Forest Service rangers set up stations at Powell and Elk Summit and began the business of overseeing the vast country for the United States government.

The Forest Service managing the Lolo Trail on the Idaho side of the Bitterroot Divide was headquartered at Kooskia.

Over the years crews built trails, constructed fire lookouts,

strung phone lines across the forest to join headquarters with lookouts and remote ranger stations. And, of course, they fought fires started from summer lightning storms.

Model Ts to SUVs

In 1925 road construction began near the Lolo Trail at Lolo Hot Springs in Montana. Construction was completed three years later in Idaho at Powell.

In 1930 the Forest Service appealed to Congress for money to build roads for fire fighting. They needed low standard “motor ways” or “truck trails.” They received permission and money to proceed.

The Civilian Conservation Corps worked in conjunction with the Forest Service. Construction was finished in 1934. The Lolo Motorway became a reality, following the general route of the Lolo Trail.

No one anticipated that the public would use the road much, but that’s exactly what happened.

In the ’30s it was Model Ts. Today it’s SUVs.

The Motorway Today

The Lolo Motorway, Forest Road 500, winds along ridges above the Lochsa River. Don't let



Clearwater National Forest file photo

the term "motorway" fool you. It's an old-fashioned term from the early days of automobile travel when people didn't take drives; they "motored."

You will find no gas stations, stores, developed water sources or other services along this high elevation, precipitous dirt road. You will find 100 miles of breathtaking scenery, set in a sea of mountains.

Mountain lakes and ridge-top vistas beckon travelers. Trails meander alongside and away from the motorway, offering paths for hiker explorers. Near Weitas Meadows, you can cross a rustic boardwalk constructed by volunteers dedicating their labor and time to protect the fragile meadow.

In the summer, wildflowers blaze in glorious colors across hillsides and meadows. In the autumn, foliage and underbrush put on their color, and berries hang on bushes, ripe for picking.

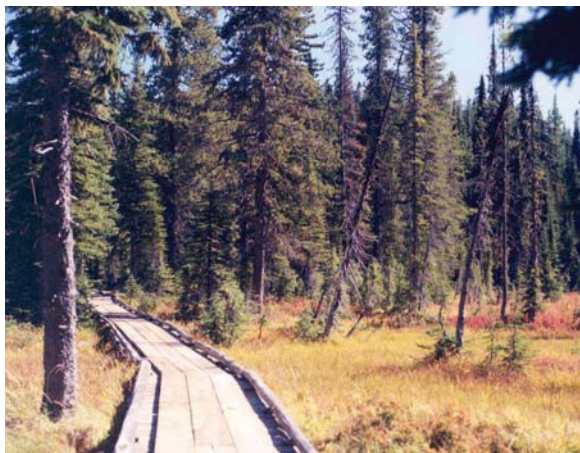
A few lookout towers loom above

A boardwalk across Weitas Meadows protects the fragile environment.

tree tops on remote ridges. Once used for fire detection, these days they're used for getting away from it all, rented by people seeking a quiet experience with inspiring views. (See page 19 for information about renting lookouts.)

The history of the motorway is rich. Many sites along the route are revered by

American Indians. Others are valued for their primitive state. All sites deserve our respect and protection. Enjoy them, but take only photographs and memories with you. Only take photographs of the American Indians with their permission.



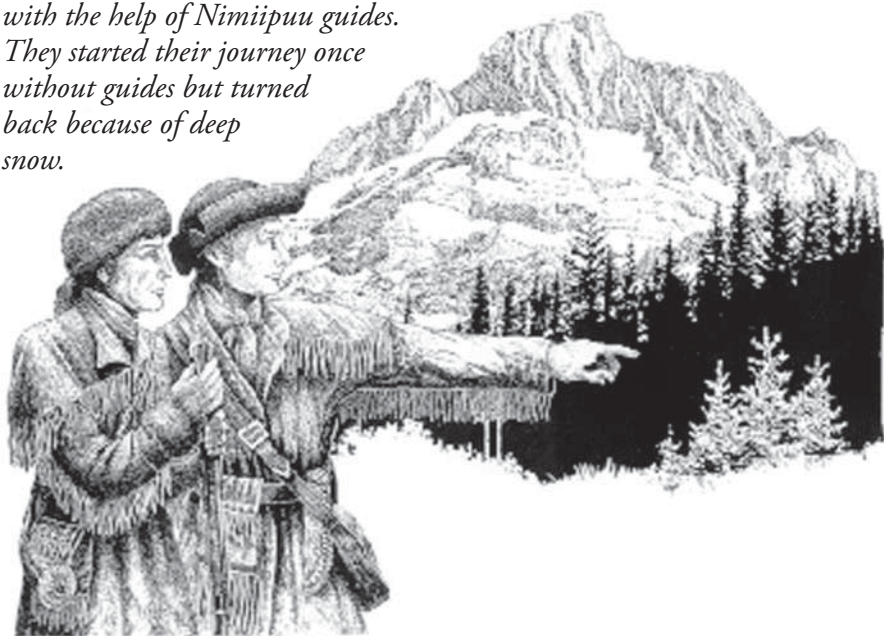
Historic Crossing

The Lewis and Clark Expedition traveled across the Lolo Trail in 1805 and 1806.

The following sites are listed and numbered east to west as you will find them on your travels across the Lolo Trail and the Lewis and Clark route along the Lolo Motorway. (Sites are numbered on the map on pages 10-11.)

On their westward journey in 1805 members of the expedition struggled to survive, often starving, cold and ill. They made the trip in nine days.

On their eastward journey in 1806 they made the trip in five days with the help of Nimiipuu guides. They started their journey once without guides but turned back because of deep snow.



1 • 13 Mile Camp – June 28, 1806

Lewis wrote, “we continued our rout along the dividing ridge passing one very deep hollow and at the distance of six miles passed our encampment of the [15th] of September [1805]. . . . about eleven O’clock we arrived at an untimbered side of a mountain with a

Southern aspect just above the fishery here we found an abundance of grass for our horses as the Indians had informed us. as our horses were very hungary and much fatiegued and from information no other place where we could obtain grass for them within the reach of this evening's travel we determined to remain at this place all night having come 13 miles only."



"I observed a range of high mountains

Covered with Snow . . . Their top bald or void of timber. . . . From this mountain I could observe high rugged mountains in every direction as far as I could See."

— Captain William Clark

2 • Wendover Ridge Rest Site – September 15, 1805

Stopping to wait two hours for those at the rear to catch up, Clark wrote in his journal:

"about 2 hours the rear of the party came up much fatigued & horses more So, Several horses Sliped and roled down Steep hills which hurt them verry much The one which Carried my desk & Small trunk Turned over & roled down a mountain for 40 yards & lodged against a tree, broke the Desk the horse escaped and appeared but little hurt."

Lewis and Clark and members of the Corps of Discovery made their way up Wendover Ridge on their 1805 trip. They saw the wide panoramas of the Lochsa River canyon you see today.

For information on current trail conditions and traveling the route contact any Clearwater National Forest office listed on the back of this brochure.

Please keep in mind that motorized and mechanized vehicles (including pedal bicycles) are not allowed on the trail.

3 • Snowbank Camp – September 15, 1805

Expedition members completed the difficult climb up Wendover Ridge and finally arrived back on the Lolo Trail. Clark described their situation: “[W]hen we arrived at the top As we Conceved, we could find no water and Concluded to Camp and make use of the Snow we found on the top to cook the remn. of our Colt & make our Supe, evening verry cold and cloudy.” They awoke to four inches of new snow the next morning.

4 • Bears Oil and Roots – June 27, 1806

Lewis wrote, “[We] arrived at our encampment of September [16, 1805]. . . and again ascended to the dividing ridge on which we continued nine miles when the ridge became lower and we arrived at a situation very similar to our encampment of the last evening tho’ the ridge was somewhat higher and the snow had not been so long desolved of course there was but little grass. here we encamped for the night having traveled 28 miles over these mountains without releiving the horses from their packs or their having any food. . . . our meat being exhausted we issued a pint of bears oil to a mess which with their boiled roots made an agreeable dish.”

5 • Lonesome Cove Camp – September 16, 1805

Private Whitehouse described this campsite: “towards evening we descended the mountain down in a lonesome cove on a creek where we Camped in a thicket of Spruce pine & bolsom fir timber. all being tired & hungry, obledged us to kill another colt and eat the half of it this evening. it has quit Snowing this evening, but continues chilley and cold.” Clark wrote, “I have been wet and as cold in every part as I ever was in my life, indeed I was at one time fearfull my feet would freeze in the thin mockersons which I wore. . . .”



6 • The Sinque Hole – September 17, 1805

Private Whitehouse noted: “Camped at a Small branch on the mountain near a round deep Sinque hole full of water. we being hungry obledged us to kill the other Sucking colt to eat.”

Please respect The Smoking Place, a site sacred to the Nimiipuu.

7 • The Smoking Place – June 27, 1806

Lewis wrote, “the road still continued on the heights of the same dividing ridge. . . to our encampment of the 17th of September last. about one mile short of this encampment on an elevated point we halted by the request of the Indians a few minutes and smoked the pipe.”



8 • Greensward Camp – June 26, 1806

Lewis wrote, “we ascended and decended severall lofty and steep highs. . . . late in the evening much to the satisfaction of ourselves and the comfort of our horses we arrived at the desired spot and encamped on the steep side of a mountain convenient to a good spring. here we found an abundance of fine grass for our horses. this situation was the side of an untimbered mountain with a fair southern aspect where the snows from appearance had been desolved about 10 days. the grass was young and tender of course and had much the appearance of the greensward.”

9 • Dry Camp – September 18, 1805

The expedition split this morning, Clark moving ahead with six hunters to look for game, Lewis following with the main party, equipment and supplies. Lewis wrote in his journal that evening, “[W]e marched 18 miles this day and encamped on the side of a steep mountain; we suffered for water this day passing one rivulet only; we wer fortunate in finding water in a steep ravine about ½ maile from our camp. this morning we finished the remainder of our last coult. we dined & suped on a skant proportion of portable soupe, a few canesters of which, a little bears oil and about 20 lbs. of candles form our stock of provision.”

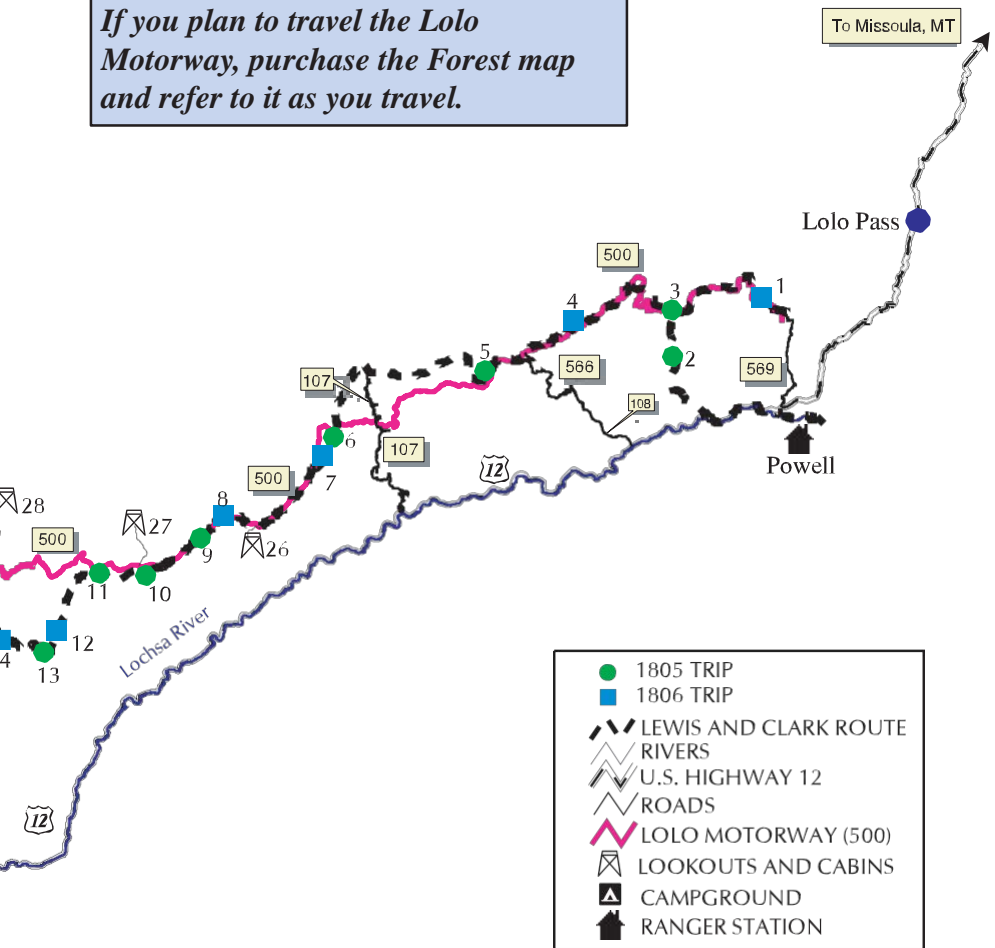
Archaeological and historic sites hold clues to America's past. If disturbed, a part of our heritage will be lost forever.

***Motorized and mechanized vehicles (including pedal bicycles) are not allowed on the historic trails.**



*This map is a simplification of the
Clearwater National Forest map.
Not all road junctions or landmarks
are shown here.*

*If you plan to travel the Lolo
Motorway, purchase the Forest map
and refer to it as you travel.*



10 • Spirit Revival Ridge – September 19, 1805

Clark and his party saw the Camas Prairie (north of present-day Grangeville, Idaho) for the first time from Sherman Peak. Lewis described their reactions: “[T]he ridge terminated and we to our inexpressible joy discovered a large tract of Prairie country lying to the S. W. and widening as it appeared to extend to the W. through that plain the Indian informed us that the Columbia river, in which we were in surch run. this plain appeared to be about 60 Miles distant, but our guide assured us that we should reach it’s borders tomorrow the appearance of this country, our only hope for subsistence greatly revived the sperits of the party already reduced and much weakened for the want of food.”

11 • Sherman Saddle – September 19, 1805

They left Sherman Peak and traveled through a pass now known as Sherman Saddle. Private Whitehouse described it: “[We] descended down the mountn, which was verry Steep descent, for about three miles. then assended another as bad as any we have ever been up before. it made the Sweat run off the horses & ourselves.”

12 • Cache Mountain – June 17, 1806

When the expedition reached Cache Mountain, they had to turn back. The snow was deep, and they feared they would not find enough food for themselves or their horses. They cached their equipment and returned to the Weippe Prairie. Clark wrote, “having come to this resolution, we ordered the party to make a deposit of all the baggage which we had not immediate use for, and also all the roots and bread of Cows which they had except an allowance for a fiew days to enable them to return to Some place at which we could Subsist by hunting untill we precured a guide.”

📌 *Note: The following seven sites lie along a section of trail hazardous to travel, thick with brush, with no visible trail tread and no signs posted.*

📌 13 • Hungry Creek – September 18, 1805

Clark wrote, “I proceded on in advance with Six hunters to try and find deer or Something to kill. . . . and Encamped on a bold

running Creek passing to the left which I call Hungry Creek as at that place we had nothing to eat.”

14 • Retreat Camp – June 17, 1806

After they cached their supplies and turned back to the Weippe Prairie, Lewis wrote, “the party were a good deal dejected. . . . this is the first time since we have been on this long tour that we have ever been compelled to retreat or make a retrograde march.”



15 • Portable Soup Camp – September 19, 1805

Even though revived by the sight of the Camas Prairie, Lewis and his party were weak from hunger. He wrote, “having traveled 18 miles over a very bad road. we took a small quantity of portable soup, and retired to rest much fatigued. Several of the men are unwell of the disentary. brakings out, or irruptions of the Skin, have also been common with us for some time.”

16 • Jerusalem Artichoke Camp – June 25, 1806

After several hours of travel, the expedition stopped for the day. At their campsite Lewis came upon “a parcel of roots of which the Shoshones Eat. it is a Small knob root a good deal in flavour and Consistency like the Jerusalem artichoke. . . . after dinner we continued our rout to hungary creek and encamped about one and a half miles below our Encampment of the 16th [of September 1805].”

17 • Horse Steak Meadow – June 16, 1806

The expedition set out early this morning, retracing their route of September 1805. Clark wrote, “We found much dificulty in finding the road, as it was So frequently covered with Snow. we arived early in the evening at the place I had killed and left the flesh of a horse for the party in my rear last Sept. here is a Small glade in which there is Some grass, not a Sufficiency of our horses, but we thought it adviseable to remain here all night as we apprehended if we proceeded further we should find less grass.”

18 • Hearty Meal Stop – September 20, 1805

Lewis and his party stopped here to eat their midday meal. Clark and his hunting party had gone ahead of the others and had left them meat for their sustenance. Lewis wrote, “at one oclock we halted and made a hearty meal on our horse beef much to the comfort of our hungry stomachs.”

19 • Gass Creek – September 1805 & June 1806

Gass Creek (named decades later for Sergeant Patrick Gass) is a tributary of Hungery Creek. Twelve miles of the expedition's route passed through the drainage in 1805. They returned to the area in June 1806. From the Gass Creek interpretive sign along the Lolo Motorway, you can look down into the Hungery Creek drainage.

20 • Full Stomach Camp – September 20, 1805

Lewis and his men bedded down this night with full stomachs following days of difficult travel with little food. Lewis wrote, “we encamped on a ridge where ther was but little grass for our horses, and at a distance from water. however we obtained as much as served our culinary purposes and suped on our beef.”

21 • *Salmon Trout Camp – June 18, 1806

The expedition camped and rested here for three days. Lewis wrote, “we proceeded on to Collin’s Creek [today called Eldorado Creek] and encamped in a pleasant situation at the upper part of the meadows about 2 ms. above our encampment of the 15th [of September 1805]. we sent out several hunters but they returned without having killed anything. they saw a number of salmon in the creek and shot at them several times without success. we directed Colter and Gibson to fix each of them a gigg in the morning and indeavour to take some of the salmon.” (*Salmon trout are steelhead.)

22 • Small Prairie Camp – June 15, 1806

The expedition set out from Weippe in a hard rain. Lewis wrote, “the road which was very Sliprey, and it was with great dificulty that the loaded horses Could assend the hills and Mountains. . . . incamped near a small prarie in the bottom land. the fallen timber in addition

to the slippery roads made our march slow and extremely laborious on our horses. the country is exceedingly thickly timbered with long leafed pine, some pitch pine, larch, white pine, white cedar or arborvita of large size, and a variety of firs.”

23 • Lewis and Clark Grove – September 19, 1805

Clark and six men camped after 22 miles of travel. He wrote, “passed over a mountain, and the heads of branch of hungary Creek, two high mountains, ridges and through much falling timber (which caused our road of to day to be double the derect distance on the Course) Struck a large Creek passing to our left which I Kept down for 4 miles and left it to our left & passed [down the] mountain bad falling timber to a Small Crek passing to our left and Encamped.”

24 • Pheasant Camp – September 21, 1805

Lewis and his men made their way west to Lolo Creek. Lewis wrote, “encamped in a small open bottom where there was tolerable food for our horses. I directed the horses to be hubbled to prevent delay in the morning being determined to make a forced march tomorrow in order to reach if possible the open country. we killed a few Pheasants, and I killd a prarie woolf which together with the balance of our horse beef and some crawfish which we obtained in the creek enabled us to make one more hearty meal, not knowing where the next was to be found.”

25 • Weippe Prairie – September 20, 1805



Clark wrote, “Set out early and proceeded on through a Country as rugged as usial. . . and at 12 miles decended the mountain to a leavel pine proceeded on through a butifull Country for three miles to a Small Plain in which I found maney Indian

lodges. . . a man Came out to meed me with great Caution. . . . proceeded on with a Chief to his Village 2 miles in the Same Plain, where we were treated kindly in their way and continued with them all night” Lewis and his men joined them two days later.

Roads to Reach the Lolo Trail System

Several roads lead to the Lolo Motorway. You're a long way from anywhere, so check with local Forest Service offices for current road conditions. Pack provisions, including a Clearwater National Forest map, spare tire, food, water and gas.

Your sight distance and opportunities to pass or pull over are often limited, and you need to travel slowly.

East to west, from U.S. Highway 12:

- Parachute Hill Road 569 – 11½ miles west of Lolo Pass, ½ mile east of turnoff to Powell. Gravel surface.
- Doe Creek Road 566 – 8 miles west of Powell to Fishing Creek Road 108 turnoff; ½ mile to Road 566. Narrow one-lane dirt road.
- Saddle Camp Road 107 – 22 miles west of Powell at milepost 140. Gravel surface.
- Smith Creek Road 101 – 1 mile west of Syringa. Gravel surface.

West to east:

- Beaver Dam Saddle – Follow Road 100 east out of Kamiah, turn north onto Road 103, turn south at the junction with Road 104 at Beaver Dam Saddle. Or follow Road 100 east out of Weippe to Road 103, then turn south at the junction with Road 104.
- Canyon Junction – Follow Road 100 east out of Kamiah to Road 500, or follow Road 100 east out of Weippe then south to connect with Road 500.

Getting There

From the east, take Parachute Hill Road 569. It leaves U.S. Highway 12 just east of the turnoff to Powell Ranger Station. Or take Saddle Camp Road 107, which leaves Highway 12 twenty-two miles west of Powell Ranger Station. (Caution! You may encounter logging traffic on these roads.)

From the west, follow the national forest access sign posted alongside Highway 12 by the bridge that crosses the Clearwater River at Kamiah. Turn onto Kamiah-Pierce Road 100. Follow Road 100 to Lolo Forks Campground.

You'll cross a bridge and turn right onto Forest Road 500. Fourteen miles and 45 minutes later, you'll come to Canyon Junction, a five-point intersection. Road 500 turns into a narrow, unsurfaced travel way at this junction and remains that way as you continue eastward along the route. It's 73 miles from Canyon Junction to Powell Junction where Road 569 meets Road 500. This segment is the historic Lolo Motorway. From Kamiah to Powell, you'll travel 119 miles.

Or, from the west, get to Road 100 by driving east from Weippe, off Idaho State Highway 11, which leaves Highway 12 at Greer.

Drive with Care!

The Lolo Motorway is narrow, a one-lane road with nothing more than what nature supplies as a surface. Some stretches hold big rocks that can scrape the underside of a low-clearance vehicle. It's best to drive a tough vehicle with high clearance and good tires. Towing trailers or driving RVs or motor homes on many stretches of the Motorway is not advised.

The high elevation route is open and free of snow generally from July through September, sometimes longer. Lightning storms are common in July and August, and snow can come early.



Clearwater National Forest file photo

Places to Camp or Stop

You'll find scattered campsites along the route and places to stop to stretch your legs or enjoy a picnic.

29 • Rocky Ridge Lake – 12 miles east of Canyon Junction along Road 500. Clearwater National Forest. 5 campsites, restroom, no drinking water.

23 • Lewis and Clark Grove – 20 miles east of Kamiah via Roads 100 and 500. Clearwater National Forest. No camping. Restroom, no drinking water. ½ mile hike.

31 • Lolo Campground – 23 miles east of Kamiah along Road 100. Clearwater National Forest. 5 campsites, restrooms, no drinking water.

Lewis and Clark Grove



There are a few retired fire lookouts and one historic cabin you can rent along the route across the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. You need to contact the Lochsa Ranger District for more information.

26 • Castle Butte Lookout – 85 miles east of Kooskia via U.S. Highway 12, Roads 107 and 500.

27 • Liz Butte Cabin – 26 miles east of Canyon Junction via Road 500.

28 • Weitas Butte Lookout – 52 miles east of Kamiah via U.S. Highway 12, Roads 100, 103, 104, 500 and 557.

30 • Austin Ridge Lookout – 32 miles east of Kamiah via Roads 100, 500, 520 and 523.

Selecting a Campsite



Pileated Woodpecker

- Look for established sites where others have already camped rather than start new sites.
- Please use a stove, or limit campfires to occasional small fires on pans that you can clean up completely.
- If you have a campfire, avoid building new rock rings, and collect only small deadwood from the ground. (Large logs and standing dead trees provide homes for wildlife like the pileated woodpecker.) Make sure to put out your fire completely, scatter charcoal, restore the site and pack out unburned items.
- High mountain lakes and surrounding areas are especially susceptible to damage, so avoid soft, wet soil, and camp a good distance from water sources.
- Keep all soap and food particles out of creeks, lakes and springs.
- Summer storms can bring lightning to high ridges. If you see storm clouds coming in, move to a lower elevation until the storm passes.
- Pack out all garbage. You'll find no garbage receptacles along the Lolo Motorway.
- Toilets are few and far between. Where bathroom facilities aren't provided, use a trowel or shovel and bury human waste at least 200 feet away from water, in a common latrine (for groups) or in individual "cat holes" 6-8 inches deep.
- Make sure pets are under your control at all times.

Leave No Trace!

The high elevation ground of the Lolo Trail Corridor is easily damaged by people, stock animals and vehicles. Respect road and trail restrictions. Travel and camp only where permitted. Make no new trails or campsites. Leave no trace of your visit, and take no mementos. Instead, take photographs, and recall your memories of time spent along the route.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests

Supervisor's Office

903 3rd Street
Kamiah, ID 83536
208-935-2513

North Fork Ranger District

12730 Highway 12
Orofino, ID 83544
208-476-4541

Lochsa/Powell Ranger District

502 Lowry Street
Kooskia, ID 83539
208-926-4274

Powell Ranger Station

21200 Highway 12
Lolo, MT 59847
208-942-3113

Or visit the Website:

www.fs.usda.gov/nezperceclearwater

Photos by Robert P. Tribble unless otherwise noted.

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