

## Gros Ventres Indians

The Gros Ventres, or Atsina, Indians, originated in Minnesota, but fled before the Cree and Sioux tribes. They got the name "Gros Ventres," which means Big Bellies, from French trappers who misunderstood their language. They allied with the Piegan Blackfeet and were hostile to whites.

The Gros Ventres signed the Stevens Treaty of 1855 as a part of the Blackfeet Tribe and received their annuities, or payments from the government, at Fort Benton with the Blackfeet. However, they began to be affected by white trade goods and liquor and began to fight with the Blackfeet.

In 1870, the Gros Ventres allied with the Assiniboine and began to receive their annuities further east at Fort Belknap. By 1878, they had all settled near Fort Belknap and depended almost entirely on federal distributions for food because the buffalo was almost all gone.

In 1887, the Gros Ventres and the Upper Assiniboine tribes sold the rights to most of their land to the U.S. Government in exchange for the 840,000 of the Ft. Belknap Indian Reservation. In 1895, they were forced to give up all but 600,000 acres of land when gold was discovered on the reservation.

## Nez Perce Indians

The Nez Perce Indian tribe was originally from Idaho and their reservation is in Idaho today. They are important to Montana because of their famous journey across Montana to escape the Army. Their name means "Pierced Nose" in French.

The Nez Perce first met the white man when Lewis and Clark needed their help while they went west to the Pacific. The Nez Perce helped them to build boats to go down the Columbia River and kept their horses for them during the winter. When Lewis and Clark returned in the spring of 1806, the Nez Perce gave them their horses and helped them get back over the Bitterroot Mountains.

The Nez Perce were always friendly to the white man. They came to Montana to hunt buffalo but mainly stayed in Idaho. They were struck by smallpox in 1852.

In 1877, there was an attempt to put the Nez Perce on a reservation. There were a few fights between the Nez Perce and the whites, and General Howard was told to force them to the reservation. The Nez Perce under Chief Joseph decided to run from the army to attempt to get to Canada. They fled over Lolo Pass and down the Bitterroot Valley. They rode around a

hastily constructed fort near Missoula which was then named Fort Fizzle. They went over the mountains to what is now Yellowstone Park where they captured and frightened some tourists. They crossed through Montana to the Missouri River, which they crossed at Cow Island and made it to the Bear Paw Mountains, where they rested, thinking they had time before the Army caught them. They were defeated by General Howard. Joseph gave his famous speech as he surrendered, " I will fight no more forever." The Nez Perce were taken to a reservation in Idaho.