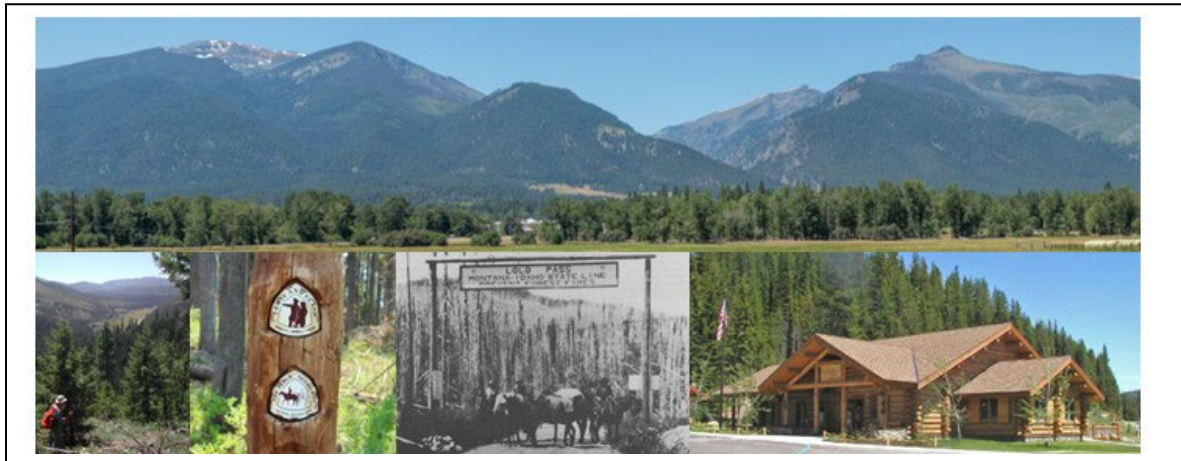


Passage Through Time: The Road to the Buffalo

The Bitterroot Mountain Range has been a serious barrier to Native Americans, explorers, early settlers, and developers travelling through the Northern Rocky Mountains. The Salish and Nez Perce Tribes used this route for hundreds of years to trade bison and salmon.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition almost starved to death here in 1805; railroad surveyors looking for a route to the Pacific in 1854 declared a passage via Lolo Pass not possible; in 1877 the non-treaty Nez Perce lead 800 men, women, and children and 2,000 horses on a tragic journey through these mountains to escape the military and from being forced onto a reservation; the Forest Service arrived in 1906 and 1908 to administer the Lolo and Clearwater National Forests; and the CCC built the Lolo Motorway following the “road to the buffalo” along the ridge tops, in 1930’s. It wasn’t until 1962 a paved highway was constructed up and over Lolo Pass.

The ruggedness of these mountains also influenced the history of Forest Service management here and contributes to its complexity today. Early timber sales captured mortality caused by spruce budworm; railroad sections alternate with National Forest lands burned over by the 1910 fire, and thousands of summer lightning strikes made it an ideal testing ground for the early Prescribed Natural Fire Program. Today, its headwater’s location on the Lochsa River makes it important for spawning salmon and it’s large scale landscape value includes being a corridor for Grizzly Bear recovery.



Tour Overview

We will drive Highway 12 following the Road to the Buffalo along the auto tour routes of the Lewis and Clark and Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trails to the Lolo Pass Visitor Center on the Idaho and Montana divide, between the Lolo and Nez Perce Clearwater National Forests.

Activities include guided tours to a Lewis and Clark campsite or to Packer Meadows where the Nez Perce camped during their annual camas harvest, and programs on the history of Forest Service management here. Exhibits, videos, and book sales are featured in the Visitor Center.

Fee includes interpretive programs, tour materials, bus transportation, and lunch)

When: date, from 10 am to 5 pm; we will drive 90 miles round trip.

Bring: Walking shoes, hat, sunscreen, water, and coat