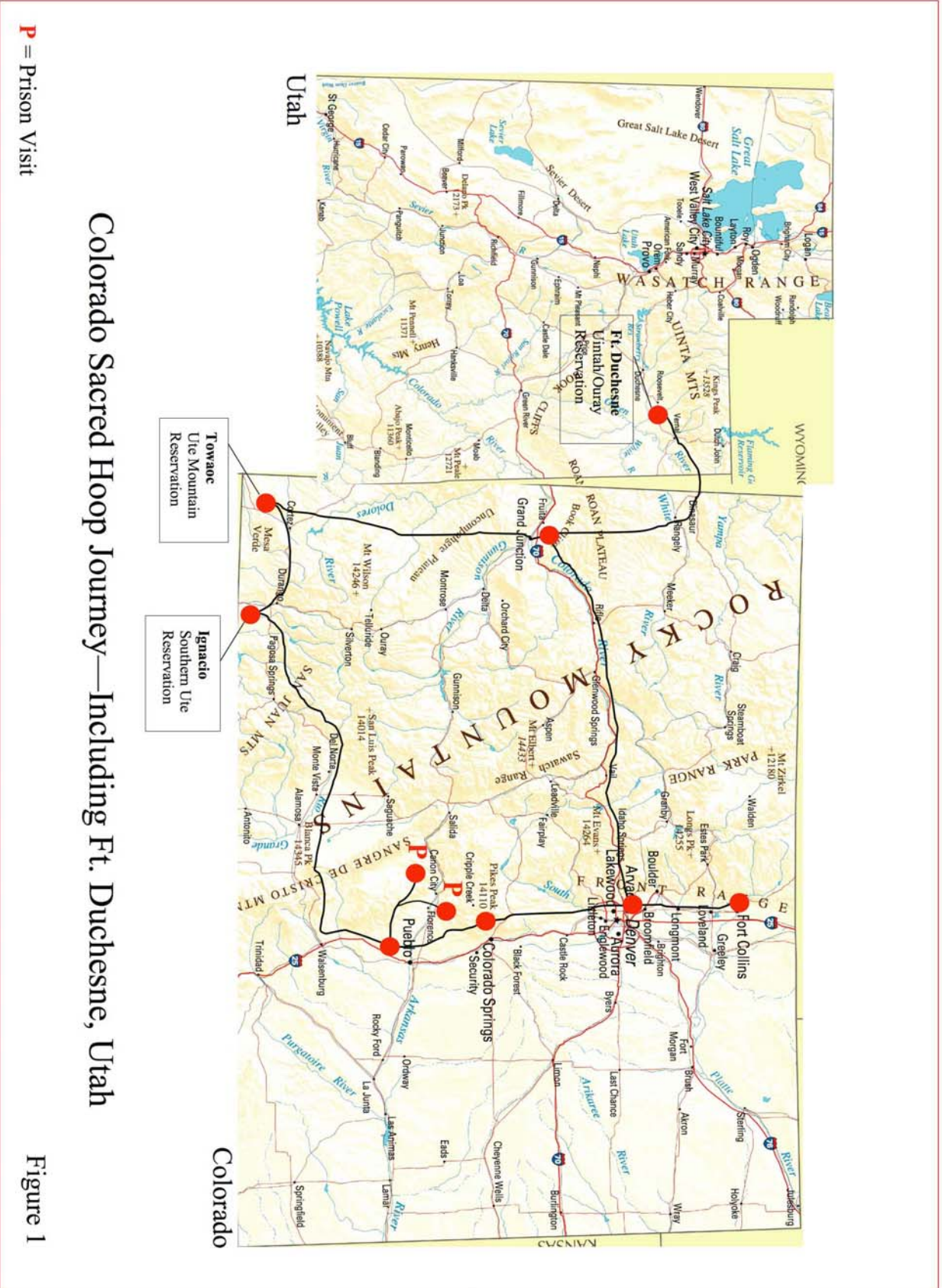


# A **Red Paper** on a Sacred Hoop Journey Through Colorado



The Sacred Hoop of 100 Eagle Feathers

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Colorado Sacred Hoop Journey—Including Ft. Duchesne, Utah

P = Prison Visit

Figure 1

## *A Red Paper on a Sacred Hoop Journey Through Colorado*

Local and regional Hoop Journeys have demonstrated their ability to reach Native communities with addictions recovery, community wellness and cultural healing resources since the Hoop Journeys began in 1999. The first four Journeys of the Sacred Hoop (1999, 2000, 2002, 2003) were either continental in scope or covered large regions in both the United States and Canada. In 2006 the Hoop was carried to Sitka, Alaska for installation of the Wellbriety Kooteeyaa Totem Pole. Most recently, a Journey throughout the State of Montana in August, 2007 visited some 12 communities. Some of these included prisons. The Montana Hoop Journey brought information about coalition building, seven interrelated training programs (the *Seven Trainings*), and the *Warrior Down* relapse prevention program. The *Warrior Down* program is designed for Native Americans leaving prison as well as for Native people reentering the community after a stay at a treatment center.

The Sacred Hoop of 100 Eagle Feathers came into being in late 1994 as the result of a community healing vision by White Bison, Inc. founder and president Don Coyhis. It has since become a rallying element for the Native American Wellbriety Movement, which began to take shape in the mid 1990's. Many thousands of Native Americans and non-Native people alike have prayed at the Hoop and have responded positively to its **Four Gifts** of 1) *Healing*, 2) *Hope*, 3) *Unity*, and the 4) *Power to Forgive the Unforgivable* when it was brought to their home communities on one of the many Hoop Journeys over the years.

A typical Hoop Journey visit offers a community either a half-day or an entire day consisting of ceremony, presentations by local speakers and those traveling with the Hoop Journey and an introduction to the world of sobriety, recovery and Wellbriety. *Wellbriety* is a term coined by a Passamaquoddy Elder in the mid-1990's. It means to be both sober and well. It includes individual recovery from misuse of alcohol and other drugs. And it goes much further by teaching both individual and community-wide wellness that includes mental health issues and other behaviors. For Native Americans, Wellbriety includes learning and living through the concept, *Our Culture is Prevention*. The springboard to well individuals, families, the

community and thriving Native Nations includes a return to the principles, laws and values of the local or regional indigenous culture as lived in contemporary life.

This Red Paper discusses the concept of a Sacred Hoop Journey for the State of Colorado. In presenting a concept for a Colorado Hoop Journey, our intent is that the model may be “exported,” modified and utilized by any other region or locality. This Red Paper is a broad brush or big picture presentation about a Journey of the Sacred Hoop. A more complete Hoop Journey plan in any community may take place later in the process. A Hoop Journey to any Native community will bring both awareness of community wellness for that community, as well as the practical tools to make it so.

### **Sacred Hoop Journey Concept**

The concept for a Colorado Hoop Journey is shown by a glance at Figure 1, the Colorado Sacred Hoop Journey Map. This map illustrates a number of different features. First, the Hoop Journey will travel to both urban and Reservation communities. One of the Reservation communities is Ft. Duchesne on the Uintah/Ouray Reservation in Utah. This community was included because it is located on a Ute Tribal Reservation, just as the communities of Towaoc and Ignacio are located on Ute Reservations in Colorado. One of the ideas to emerge here is that in planning Sacred Hoop Journeys anywhere, tribal lines or “Indian lines,” and not state lines, are more important in the inclusion of communities. So the “Colorado Hoop Journey” also includes a small portion of Utah.

A feature missing from this map at the time of this writing is the identification of possible prison or treatment center visits, except for possible prison visits at Florence and Canon City, which are shown. The recent Montana Hoop Journey included organized visits at four prison facilities under supervision of the Montana Department of Corrections. Part of the planning for the Colorado Hoop Journey will include inquiry into which Colorado prisons or treatment centers Hoop Journey presentations might find welcome.

At the present time, the communities of Denver; Colorado Springs; Pueblo; Ignacio (Southern Ute Reservation); Towaoc (Ute Mountain Reservation); Grand Junction; Ft. Duchesne, Utah (Uintah and Ouray Reservation); and Ft. Collins are included in the Journey.

### **Population Outreach**

It is helpful for the proposed Colorado Hoop Journey, as well as for Hoop Journeys in other areas, to estimate the Native American population making up the region of travel.

- a) The population estimate for the **Colorado Front Range communities** (greater Ft. Collins, Denver, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo) is **21,319** Native Americans.
- b) The population estimate for the **Southern Ute Reservation plus the Ute Mountain Ute Reservation combined** (Archuleta, La Plata, and Montezuma counties) is  $139+2539+2676=5354$  Native Americans.
- c) The Population estimate for the **greater Grand Junction area** (Mesa County) is **1059** Native Americans.
- d) The population estimate for **Ft. Duchesne** (the entire Uintah-Ouray Reservation, including Uintah and Duchesne counties) is  $2365$  (Uintah county) +  $769$  (Duchesne county) = **3134** Native Americans

The **total Native American population** within outreach on the proposed Colorado Hoop Journey is the combination of all these figures, or **30,866** Native Americans.

The figures for the State of Colorado are derived from the Colorado Directory of American Indian Resources published by the Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs, 2004-2005.

Figures for the Uintah-Ouray Reservation in Utah are derived from the U.S. Census Bureau American Fact Finder for Uintah and Ouray counties, Utah.

## Steps

The basic concept for an action plan to implement the Colorado Hoop Journey, or any local or regional Hoop Journey, includes a number of different steps. Here is one possible expression of the process that we, at White Bison, Inc. go through to make a Hoop Journey a reality.

### **1) Identify the region and communities to benefit from a Journey of the Sacred Hoop**

Where will a Hoop Journey take place? Choosing a location is the result of a working relationship with a local community or region. It might be that White Bison, Inc. has provided a number of training sessions at particular communities within a certain region stretching back over a number of years. It might also be that a regional community has participated in the *Coalitions as Clans* training program. In this case, a local group will have created their own *Vision Book*, identifying the strengths and needs of their area. This was the case with the Montana Hoop Journey in 2007. A member of the Ojibwe community from Minnesota traveled on the Montana Hoop Journey. A *Wellbriety Movement of the Ojibwe* has been taking place in that community since 2005. This has led to the desire in that Ojibwe community to host a Hoop Journey, which is currently planned for February, 2008. The relationship between individuals on a Wellbriety journey, and White Bison Inc., naturally leads to the selection of Hoop Journey locations.

### **2) Working with local people, set a date for the Hoop Journey. Begin to develop Hoop Journey coordinators in each of the local communities, including prisons and treatment centers.**

When a regional community decides to host a Hoop Journey, a tentative date is set. From this point on, the local community, working with White Bison, Inc., chooses those communities into which the Hoop will travel. It is the responsibility of the regional community to choose potential coordinators for each community. White Bison may assist in this. At this time, potential prison visits are proposed. Both the local community, and White Bison through its *Wellbriety for Prisons* program, know which prisons have been utilizing the Wellbriety training materials. Prison visits require a close working relationship with the state Department of Corrections, the Hoop Journey coordinators and White Bison, Inc. The success of a Hoop Journey depends on developing responsible and strong local community Hoop Journey coordinators.

### **3) Invite the Community–Relationship Building for the Hoop Journey**

The success of the Hoop Journey also depends on having the support of key people in the community for the events to take place on the day of the visit. Such people might include Tribal leadership, Elders, grassroots people, youth, Medicine people, other culture holders (for example, flute players, singers, drummers, storytellers, etc.), treatment center and health personnel, college presidents and others who should know of the plans beforehand. For example, members of Tribal government or traditional Elders might be excellent presenters during the visit. A local drum could provide the ceremonial background for the Grand Entry and Retreat of the Hoop. Certain community members could be chosen beforehand for the honor of carrying the Hoop in and out of the event. This kind of inclusiveness is both a courtesy and a valuable part of every Hoop Journey visit because the greatest healing resources lie within the community itself. Responsibility for this kind of invitation and relationship building belongs largely with the local communities because they know their own people best. But White Bison, Inc.'s role is to encourage it, support it and assist it in any way possible to make it happen.

### **4) Identify and carry out fund raising strategies to make the Hoop Journey possible**

Each community is responsible for hosting a half or full-day Hoop Journey visit. This requires a building in which to hold the gathering as well as food and hospitality arrangements. Some of these needs might be donated by the local tribal community, and others require cash funding. Part of a community's commitment to bring in the Hoop is to raise any funds necessary so that the visit might take place in a good way. Additionally, White Bison must raise funds for the Hoop Journey. The Sacred 100 Eagle Feather Hoop is held by Don Coyhis, Mohican Nation, Founder and president of White Bison, Inc. The White Bison organization incurs expenditures for each and every Hoop Journey that takes place. These include staff allotments, preparation of printed materials for participating communities, early planning travel expenses, actual Hoop Journey travel expenses and other diverse expenditures. White Bison must also raise its own dollar needs for each regional Hoop Journey.

**5) Identify the possibly unique local issue(s) that would be appropriate to emphasize on a particular Hoop Journey. Issue a Hoop Journey Agenda to take place in each community.**

Each local region might want to emphasize a particular healing and wellness issue that is pertinent to its own community. In addition, White Bison, Inc. focuses on different healing themes in different years. For example, the Montana Hoop Journey was focused on the *Warrior Down* program. A Hoop Journey visit coalesces in a very tangible way around the agenda. Here is the basic agenda used by each community on the Montana Hoop Journey.

*Proposed Agenda for Hoop Journey Events*

*8:30 AM to 12:30 PM*

- Opening Ceremony
- Overview of the Wellbriety Movement
- Montana Re-Entry Coalition Presentation
- Visioning Process
- Speakers
- Open Mic
- Closing Ceremony

**6) Identify the method for documenting the regional Hoop Journey**

Each regional Hoop Journey brings awareness of recovery and healing to every community. An excitement builds in a local community as the coordinators get the word out that the Hoop will visit the community on a particular day. The Hoop Journey presentation is both moving and informative. Many people will elect to participate in follow-up wellness training sessions at a later date as a result of the Hoop Journey visit. But it is also important to have documentation of what happened during the Hoop's visit so that those who come afterward may receive the healing message. Such documentation might include a DVD made from video, ordinary photographs of the day's events and print-based articles. It is the joint responsibility of White Bison, regional coordinators and local coordinators to decide ahead of the visit how a record of the visit will be preserved.

### **7) Begin media outreach throughout the region.**

Both regional and local media outlets must be notified once a firm date, locations and agenda for the Hoop Journey have been set. These local media outlets will help reach people who may not otherwise know that the Hoop is coming. Such outlets include, state-wide newspapers, community newspapers, radio stations, TV stations and internet possibilities. Notification should begin no sooner than three months out from the start of the Hoop Journey, and media releases should continue at one month out and two weeks before the start of the Hoop Journey. The Montana Hoop Journey was fortunate in having two major print and photo-based articles published in *The Missoulian*, and in the *Billings Gazette*. In addition, an entire edition of the Native American call-in Show, *Native America Calling* was devoted to the Hoop Journey. Responsibility for media outreach is held jointly between White Bison, Inc. and the local and regional Hoop Journey coordinators.

### **8) Carry out the Hoop Journey**

Every Hoop Journey has a life of its own. The Montana Hoop Journey began on the steps of the State Capitol at Helena, Montana with an address by Lieutenant Governor Bohlinger and White Bison's founder and president Don Coyhis. The Colorado Hoop Journey will begin in a similar manner on the steps of the State Capitol in Denver. Governor Bill Ritter will be invited to give an opening address, as will the Colorado Indian Commission. Many people along the route who need to hear the messages of addictions recovery, personal and family healing, and community well being will hear them and find new tools to live better lives. The physical presence of the Sacred Hoop and the Hoop Journey presentations will reach people who, for one reason or another, have not heard the messages of Healing, Hope, Unity and Forgiveness in any other way.

## **Outcome of the Sacred Hoop Journey**

The purpose or goal of a Sacred Hoop Journey in Colorado, or in any other region, is to reach as many Native people as possible about Wellbriety and the Healing Journey. The first step in individual and community wellness is to be free of drug and alcohol abuse and addiction. This is the "sobriety" part of Wellbriety. Our sovereign Nations need sober leaders in order to thrive and in order to function competitively in the wider North American society.

Over the years, we have seen so many people begin their own sobriety programs as a result of their experience and prayers at the Sacred Hoop. This sudden experience, coming at just the right time in a person's life, helps them enter a wellness road. This road may be a Wellbriety road or it may be one of the many traditional or non-traditional ways available to our people today. The Gifts of the Hoop may be shared with any tradition.

The typically half-day presentation of the Hoop Journey will inspire, inform, educate and connect participants with information and other sobriety, recovery and healing resources. Three of the most important Wellbriety Programs introduced during Hoop Journey visits include *The Medicine Wheel and the 12 Steps* (Firestarter training), *The Seven Trainings* and *The Coalitions as Clans* programs.

As a result of a regional Hoop Journey, a follow-up *Seven Trainings* program may be scheduled so that those who heard the message of Wellbriety may come together to go deeper into their own wellness. For example, the Montana Sacred Hoop Journey ended on August 31, 2007. In November of 2007, approximately 150 Native Americans from Montana participated in a *Seven Trainings* program held in Billings, Montana as a direct result of the Hoop Journey outreach.

In addition, those who participate in regional Hoop Journeys often attend the national White Bison Inc. Wellbriety Conferences. Further Wellbriety teachings are shared at these conferences and participants experience a great sense of Native healing fellowship. As a result of information provided when a Hoop Journey visits a community, individuals might begin to work the *Medicine Wheel and the 12 Steps* themselves. This is a Native culture-friendly approach to the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, which itself has been of such help to both Native and non-Native peoples alike. The *Medicine Wheel and the 12 Steps* is included in the *Seven Trainings*. Last, as a result of a Colorado Hoop Journey, either a Wellbriety Movement of Colorado or a Wellbriety Movement of the Ute Nation may be born. It's up to the vision and will of the grassroots communities themselves.

Please visit the White Bison website, [www.whitebison.org](http://www.whitebison.org), for a more complete listing of Wellbriety Movement training programs as well as other resources that will explain the Wellbriety Movement in greater depth.

## Summary

The Colorado Sacred Hoop Journey will reach grassroots Native Americans in at least six different types of communities. They are:

- 1) Reservation communities
- 2) Urban communities
- 3) Rural, non-Reservation communities
- 4) Educational (college) communities
- 5) Prison communities
- 6) Treatment center communities

When a local region, such as the State of Colorado, commits to host a Journey of the Sacred Hoop, the very act of commitment sensitizes, mobilizes and builds community. The organizational period leading up to the actual Hoop Journey may take a few months but sometimes between one and two years.

There is an intense interrelationship between community types 1-4, listed above, and the prison or treatment center communities. This is true because when Native Americans are released they re-enter the other communities. Can we offer them a chance to go deeper into recovery when they come home? Can we offer them hope that they will not relapse back into either substance abuse or a return to prison? Can we provide the break they need to continue on with a good life? The White Bison *Warrior Down* program offers that possibility. It can unite community types 1-4. Existence of *Warrior Down* is one of the presentations taking place at current Hoop Journey visits.

The programs mentioned in this Red Paper, including those on the TRAININGS page of the White Bison, Inc. website demonstrate that a Sacred Hoop Journey visit to a community can be just the beginning of an ongoing curriculum of recovery and healing programs for Native Americans. But we also want to say that heartfelt contact with the Sacred Hoop itself has started many on healing journeys using approaches of their own choice.

We were honored to receive some good words about the process this Red Paper discusses from a participant after a Seven Trainings event that took place recently. We offer this for the healing of our Native Nations, and especially for our youth, who will be the warriors of tomorrow:

*“I’ve wanted to attend one of the White Bison Trainings for a long time and it wasn’t an easy road to get there as my Tribal Council has not supported White Bison. But, I believe it is because they have not taken the time to explore the concept but listened to others who have said, “it’s not our way.” An open heart and open mind would immediately show them the program is very easy to adapt to any tribes culture and traditions. Our Tribe is in need of this type of program because the alcohol/drug problem continues to worsen and our people sink further into despair and depression and so use alcohol/drugs even more. However my prayers were answered, the Tribe paid my way, so I must believe we are on the path to begin a great healing time.”*

—Seven Trainings Participant