BIG FOOT RIDE

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ABSTRACT

Tradition and Technology: Using Waypoints, GPS, and GIS to retrace and document the historical Big Foot Ride.

The Big Foot Ride commemorates the route of the Minneconjou Lakota people who fled the Standing Rock Reservation in the 1890’s. The original memorial ride began in 1986. The ride was conducted in accordance with an Oglala Lakota medicine man’s vision to release the spirits and complete the grieving cycle for the victims of the Wounded Knee Massacre. Before the ride was retraced, it is said that a ceremony was held which revealed that a horse should be blindfolded. It was the blindfolded horse who led the riders through the original path that the fleeing Lakota took over 100 years ago.

The route of this past year has changed from the original path due to unforeseen circumstances. Further work is needed to map the original route and provide alternative routes to honor the traditional path as well land-ownership realities.

An experiment was conducted during the December 2005 Big Foot Ride. One of the riders, Brandon Ferguson, used a Global Positioning System, a Garmin 72 unit, to mark waypoints on the trail. The waypoints were then downloaded by a GIS student, Sandra Byrd. Geographic Information System, ArcGIS 9, was used to transform the waypoints into a route and these processes were combined to create a map of the trail. A poster was generated using Oglala Lakota College’s GIS Lab 44 inch plotter.