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Riders Coming, Back Roads to Red Water (2018)

In 1986 a group of Lakota men and women started an annual tradition, riding horseback across the South Dakota winter tracing the historic trail that led to the Wounded Knee Massacre.

Every year, riders still gather twenty miles from the North Dakota border, at the location where Sitting Bull was killed, to start a two-week journey to the site of the massacre. Known as the Oomaka Tokatakiya or Future Generations Ride, it is a community effort that empowers through a spiritual and physical remembrance of their ancestors' experience. Braving the brutal Dakota winters, children as young as seven ride up to thirty-five miles in a day, through snow and blizzard conditions and temperatures often reaching -20°F.

The massacre took place on December 29, 1890. It is credited as the final battle of the Indian Wars where hundreds of Lakota were disarmed and killed by the Seventh Cavalry of the United States Army. On the 100th anniversary of the massacre, after four years of the memorial ride, members of the Hunkpapa, the Minnicoujou, and the Oglala nations rode to the Wounded Knee site to perform a Wiping of the Tears Ceremony, signifying the end of mourning.

The ride continues as a beautiful and powerful spiritual experience, an expression of resilience that builds community within and beyond the tribe. I've had the honor to be part of it since 2004. Support and guidance from members of the Standing Rock, Cheyenne River, and Oglala Sioux Tribes is integral to the success of this project.