

Honoring the Legacy

The History and Purpose of the California 500 Mile American Indian Spiritual Marathon Relay

The First Native American Spiritual Marathon was started in **June, 1978 by Dennis Banks**, co-founder of the **American Indian Movement**. The run was held to commemorate the **Longest Walk**, in which over **500 North American tribes** agreed to walk from San Francisco to Washington, D.C., to show the dismal plight of Native people and lobby for the **Native American Freedom of Religious Act**. The U.S. Congress ratified the act that year, and the **Sundance Ceremony** was brought to **D.Q. University** in California.

In **1980**, Dennis Banks had to leave the state of California, and he entrusted the responsibility of the runs to **Bill “Mosco” Ramos**. The runs have been held annually ever since, following the tradition of early Native American runners who ran between villages and distant tribes. The main purpose is to carry the message of the **sacredness of all life**, our relationship to all living species, and the need to maintain the delicate balance that exists between humankind and **Mother Earth**.

The original teams

*American Indian Center of San Francisco, CA
Aztlán Track Club of Los Angeles, CA
Aztlán Track Club of San Jose, CA
Bay Area Roadrunners (Intertribal Friendship House) of Oakland, CA
Bridgeport Indian Reservation, CA
David Chief’s Runners, Winters, CA
DeOcampo Clan, Vallejo, CA
D.Q. University, Davis, CA
Four Winds Lodge Runners of San Jose, CA
Mosquitos Club of San Jose, CA
Paiute Runners of Oakland, CA
San Jose State University, CA
San Diego Hopkins Clan, CA
T.E.N.A. Council, Hollister, CA
Three Rivers Lodge, Manteca, CA*

We would like to **acknowledge** and keep alive the names of the original leaders of these spiritual clans who did what most would think impossible under harsh conditions. They taught generations to carry on the **rituals and ceremonies** to preserve **Mother Earth**.

We offer our **humble prayers of thanks** to:

Dennis Banks, Fred and Connie Short, Maggie DeOcampo, Bea DeOcampo and Wounded Knee, Linda DeOcampo, Jackie Blossom, David Chief, Elmira White, Darrell Standing Elk, Hank Lebeau, Glen Hing, Debbie Murrillo, Bill “Mosco” Ramos, Ralph Charlie, Alan Levanthal, Shirley Hopkins, Chemo Candelaria, Tom Phillips, Charlotte & Richard Baker, Mildred Hawkins, Grandpa Shorty Stone, Shorty & Carol Stone, Emma Stone, Jim Brown, Steve Searles, Bob Edwards, Sandra Jefferson, John Malloy, Arturo Rodriguez, Rudy Delgado, Danny and Nancy Romero, Monica Parra, Cesar & Helen Chavez,

Paul Chavez, Randy Klein, Pablo Viramontes, Scott Harger, Kermit Cuff, Carlos Castro, Jun Yasuda aka Junsan, Joey & Cecilia Silvas, Priscilla and Michael Hunter, Warren and Danita Quinn, Priest Martinez, Wayne Mitchum Jr, Amanda Mitchum, Ron, Bruce, Isidro and Tony Gali, Morning Star Gali, Corrina Gould, and Johnnella LaRose.

In the beginning, **Dennis Banks**, co-founder of the American Indian Movement, and **Cesar Chavez**, founder of the United Farm Workers, joined hands and agreed that **La Paz**, a peace compound outside of Bakersfield and now the resting place of Cesar, would host the 500-Mile Run along with the historical first Indian university west of the Mississippi River, **D.Q. University** in Davis, CA. Dennis was **D.Q.’s first president**.

From **1978 until 1984**, there were usually about **15 teams** participating as separate entries. Over time, it became difficult economically for separate teams to sponsor themselves, so it was agreed that different members could run under **one flag on one main team**. Members are divided into units of 10-12 runners, and each team carries a **sacred staff**.

After 1984, the 500 Mile team added **Three Rivers Recovery Lodge** in Manteca and the **Mosquito Club** in Ripon as ending destinations during different years. **La Paz** has always remained the starting honor spot to begin the **500 Mile Marathon Relay**.

For the last **twenty-one years**, there has been a **northern route** as the initial southern route continues. The northern route now starts at **Pitt River Nation** near Burney, CA, and completes the run at the **Rumsey Rancheria**.

Without our friends and **honor spots** along the way, we could not accomplish our mission. These sites and community treasures include:

*United Farm Workers, Keene, CA
Bishop Reservation
Big Pine Reservation
Lone Pine Reservation
Bridgeport Reservation
Tuolumne Rancheria
Mosquito Club, Ripon, CA
Three Rivers Lodge, Manteca, CA
Elem Reservation, Clearlake, CA
Pit River Reservation
Rumsey Rancheria
Coyote Valley Rancheria
Hilltop Recovery Center
Colusa Rancheria
Mendocino Consolidated Tribal Health Project Governing Board*