

TEP Report: The Black Line Journey, January 2010

by Rick Harlow



Mamo Seukukwi

The Elders Project (TEP), on behalf of Mamo Seukukwi and the delegation of mamos and apprentices who accompanied him, wishes to express deep gratitude to everyone who contributed to The Black Line Journey that took place in January 2010.

The Elders Project was born out of a series of meetings between the traditional authorities of the Koguis, Arhuacos and Wiwas of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (SNSM), Barbara Threecrow and Rick Harlow which took place during the nine days of the gathering of indigenous leaders from all over the Americas in Pasto, Colombia in August 2009. The elders expressed their desire to find funding for projects that would strengthen their traditions and support their spiritual work as “caretakers of the water and the life of the planet”. They asked for our help and we signed an agreement with them.

Signers of the agreement, Pasto, Colombia August 2009



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This journey was the first and most urgent of these projects. Mamo Seukukwi (Norberto Torres, a 90 year-old Arhuaco, known as the spiritual geographer of the SNSM) was grateful for the opportunity to pass along his vast knowledge to 2 generations of Kogui, Arhuaco and Wiwa mamos and apprentices. Among the delegation was one of Mamo Seukukwi's sons as well as a grandson. The fourth indigenous group of the SNSM, the Kankuamos were unable to send a delegation because of ongoing internal meetings within their community.



Mamo Seukukwi's son and grandson

The journey began on January 16, 2010 in Valledupar at the site known as Pozo Hurtado on the Guatapuri River and ended ten days later at the same site. The group of thirteen mamos and apprentices accompanied by TEP support staff made the journey around the black line, visiting a total of forty sacred sites or “points of payments” (puntos de pagamentos) where spiritual offerings were left in accordance with “The Law of Origin.”



Beginning of the journey, Guatapuri River

The list of participants:

Mamo Seukukwi (Norberto Torres)	Arhuaco
Mamo Vicente Torres	“
Mamo Javier Torres	“
Mamo Jose Vicente Zalabata	“
Mamo Jose Maria Perez	“
Mamo Nestor Torres	“
Bienvenido Arroyo, Excabildo Gobernador	“
Mamo Jose Gabriel Alimako	Kogui
Mamo Pedro Conchacala	“
Mamo Jose Maria Conchacala	“
Mamo Mayor Carmen Conchacala Daza	“
Catalina Daza Gil	“
Mamo Jose Ignacio Dingula	Wiwa

TEP Support staff:

Nora Diaz, Secretary

Jesús Ortiz, Coordinator for Mamos

Jan Willem Meurkens, TEP filmmaker

Rick Harlow, TEP coordinator, photographer,

Tragically, all is not well in the SNSM. The ancestral territorial boundary of the 4 indigenous pueblos, The Black Line or “La Linea Negra” as the mamos call it, is in great need of restoration. Many of the sacred sites have been severely degraded by abuse and misuse. Some sites have been paved over and are not accessible. Others are on private land being developed by government and private corporations. At Puerto Brisa the mamos were not allowed access to the sacred site and were unable to make their pagamentos. Frequently along the journey the mamos would point out the damage caused by development, mineral extraction, harmful agricultural practices, tourism, litter and graffiti. They insisted repeatedly that the Colombian Government return control of the sacred sites to them so they can properly care for and heal the damage.



Graffiti at one of the sacred sites.

To accompany this report, TEP has produced a twenty-eight minute film that shows the condition of many of the sacred sites and rivers along The Black line, with commentary from the Mamos.



Entrance to Puerto Brisa after being denied access to sacred site.



Power plant at the sacred site of Compañía.

The Black Line project

The mamos have reaffirmed their commitment to the spiritual work necessary to balance the damage to the cycle of water in the SNSM caused by widespread development. They have decided that a delegation of mamos representing the four pueblos should make at least two, preferably four, trips a year around the Black Line to make their “pagamentos” in keeping with “The Law of Origin.” TEP has been asked to sponsor the second journey to take place later this year, possibly in October or November.



Making pagamentos at Camarones

Checks payable to **“The Elders Project”** may be sent to:
EarthAction /The Elders Project
PO Box 63, Amherst, MA 01004