



Hualapai La Paz Trail of Tears 2016 Run

Every April, as the desert prepares for the blistering summer heat, several dozen Hualapai's wake up in Ehrenberg, Arizona, nearly two hundred miles away from the Hualapai Indian Reservation. They are participants in a commemorative four-day run that marks a traumatic turning point in the history of the Hualapai Indian Tribe. In 1874, several years after the United States waged a campaign of ethnic cleansing against Indigenous groups in the region, the military rounded up hundreds of Pais and forcibly relocated them to the Colorado River Indian Reservation in Parker, Arizona. Children, the elderly, and the sick died on the two-week march, but more died of disease and starvation during their yearlong internment in the place referred to as La Paz at the sweltering northern tip of the Sonoran Desert. Nearly one year later, in 1875, the surviving band members escaped imprisonment and returned home to northwestern Arizona. The annual La Paz Run memorializes these experiences by allowing Hualapai's to retrace the steps of their ancestors from the point of internment northward to the Hualapai Reservation.

The trauma of internment and the subsequent escape from La Paz are important turning points in Hualapai History. Akin to the Navajos' Long Walk to and return from Bosque Redondo in eastern New Mexico, the Hualapai's imprisonment and liberation from La Paz work as metaphors for their larger experience with American colonialism. Just as the march and concentration represent in microcosm the century and a half of violence committed against Hualapai's, the escape and return home represent their perseverance in the past and their hopes for the future. Moreover, the annual reenactments has become an important site of community commemoration and a key signifier of Hualapai historical identity. In preparation for the run runners and community members learn about La Paz through elders recounting stories about the difficult times in the nineteenth century after the arrival of Anglos. Such intergenerational storytelling helps Hualapai's retain their identity and traditions. Community members discuss the importance of family, band responsibilities, and their roles of men and women in the community. Hualapai Bird Dancers sing songs with members from neighboring tribes who join Hualapai's to celebrate their survival. At the end of the run community members meet the runners as they enter the reservation to engage in an act of remembrance that honors past, present, and future generations.

The La Paz Run and associated community events work as a counter narrative scripted by the descendants of Pais who were targets of American colonialism and ethnic cleansing. Although the run and related events invoke painful memories of violence, Hualapai's have a chance to recast the trauma of history and write their own stories of survival in the face of ongoing marginalization and oppression.

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We are an Indian Nation

A History of the Hualapai People

