

Indigenous-Led Event Honors Great Trading Path's World Monument Status

A day-long Indigenous-led journey celebrated the Great Trading Path's World Monument status while advancing efforts to protect it from further erasure

MEBANE, NC, UNITED STATES, January 20, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On Saturday, January 17, 2026, Indigenous leaders from [7 Directions of Service](#) hosted The Great Trading Path Journey: Caravan & Cultural Teach-Ins, a day-long community event that brought together participants from North and South Carolina to celebrate the Great Trading Path's designation as a [World Monument](#) by the World Monuments Fund, an international list recognizing sites of extraordinary cultural significance.



Group photo holding a banner that reads "Protect the Great Trading Path". Photo courtesy of Tia Hunt

The Great Trading Path—also known as the Occaneechi Path—is a historic trade route once used by Indigenous peoples of the Southeast for trade, migration, diplomacy, and cultural exchange.

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These paths carried trade, language, and responsibility. When we walk them today, we are called to remember that land holds memory—and that memory demands care.”

Dr. Crystal Cavalier-Keck

Over time, settler encroachment led to portions of the Path being transformed into modern infrastructure, including highways such as Interstate 85, and developed over entirely.

In 2024, tribal citizens, historians, and environmental organizations mobilized to protect a section of the Path threatened by a proposed Buc-ee's mega gas station in Alamance County. That advocacy effort resulted in the Path's selection by the World Monuments Fund, supporting Indigenous-led work to defend the site from further

destruction and erasure.

During Saturday's Journey, participants visited three locations along the Great Trading Path, all within the ancestral territory of the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation. At each stop, participants learned about the Path's connections to Occaneechi history, language, governance, and relationships with neighboring tribes.

The event opened at Ayr Mount in Hillsborough, North Carolina, where an untouched segment of the Trading Path remains visible on the landscape. There, Dr. Crystal Cavalier-Keck—Executive Director of 7 Directions of Service and a citizen of the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation—reflected on how mainstream narratives often misinterpret Indigenous pathways.

"These were not roads in the colonial sense," said Cavalier-Keck. "They were relationships—carefully maintained routes shaped by water, animal movement, seasonal cycles, kinship obligations, and governance."

Following the opening gathering, participants caravanned to the Occaneechi Indian [Replica Village](#), where Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation Councilwoman Beverly Payne shared teachings on traditional villages and historic migrations. The group also received a prayer from Jason Crazy Bear Campos-Keck, co-founder of 7 Directions of Service.

Councilwoman Payne, who maintains the replica village through volunteer workdays and community education, encouraged participants to think of villages as "a pit stop along the Trading Path"—places of rest, trade, relationship, and return for travelers and tribal members alike.

The final stop of the caravan took place in Mebane, North Carolina, at Hawfields Presbyterian Church, which sits directly alongside the historic Trading Path. From this location, participants could see the nearby Buc-ee's development. Since 2023, 7 Directions of Service has actively opposed the project due to its environmental impacts and its role in further degrading the Occaneechi Trading Path.

The day concluded with a closing circle, inviting participants to reflect on their personal relationship to the sacred pathway and to consider their responsibility in protecting it. Organizers also issued a call to action to join ongoing efforts to safeguard the Path. In October 2026, 7 Directions of Service will host a horseback Trail Ride for experienced riders to trace sections of the Trading Path and deepen public understanding of its living legacy.

About 7 Directions of Service

7 Directions of Service (7DS) is an Indigenous-led organization rooted in environmental justice, cultural revitalization, and grassroots power. Operating on the ancestral homelands of the Occaneechi-Saponi people in rural North Carolina, 7DS advances Indigenous leadership through land-based education, cultural programming, community projects, and civic engagement. The organization plays a vital role in coalition-building and in advancing Indigenous visions for a just

and sustainable future.

About the World Monuments Watch

The World Monuments Watch is a biennial initiative of the World Monuments Fund that highlights cultural heritage sites of global significance facing urgent challenges. Inclusion on the Watch brings international visibility and potential support for preservation efforts. The Great Trading Path's selection underscores its central role in Indigenous history and the importance of protecting this irreplaceable cultural landscape.

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