

# Aussie 'horse-whisperer' to lead Trail of Tears trek

By [Monique Ross](#)

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**"You are the one we have been waiting for - I can hear it in your voice."**

That is what a prominent Native American elder told Australian horse trainer Carlos Tabernaberry when she invited him to lead a group trek along the Trail of Tears.

The trail was named after the six-month journey undertaken by Native Americans when they were forced from their homelands in 1838 - a move that claimed the lives of thousands of people from a handful of tribes.

Mr Tabernaberry says he is honoured by the rare invitation to lead the ride, which he says will cover about 1,300 kilometres from Oklahoma to Montana.

"It's a huge honour but also I know that it comes with a lot of responsibility," he said.

"It is going to be an amazing spiritual journey - not only for them but for me."

Grandmother Margaret Behan, an elder of Arapaho and Cheyenne heritage who sits on the International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers, backed his involvement after a phone conversation.

She says it took her just minutes to realise the Victorian shares her tribe's "special connection" to horses.

"We felt like they were our brothers or our sisters, the horses. We became very close to them and they helped us," she said.

"Carlos is very intuitive with the horses, he can communicate with them. A horse whisperer, you know? They talk to them, can communicate and connect with them. They become very one with each other."

Mr Tabernaberry says at first, the invitation to lead the ride did not seem real.

"A lot of the tribes have been saying that the horse people are coming back," he said.

"Grandmother Margaret spoke to me for about three minutes she said 'you are the one we have been waiting for, I know it in your voice'.



**PHOTO:** "Horse-whisperer": Carlos Tabernaberry  
([www.whisperingacres.com.au](http://www.whisperingacres.com.au))

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**MAP:** [VIC](#)

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"It's kind of a bit unreal at the beginning when you are on the other side of the world and they say you are the one that is bringing the horse people back.

"One of the things I actually said to them at the time is 'well, look, hang on, there's hundreds of trainers in America'. And she said 'no we don't want them, you are the one, you are the one'.

"I was in the US years ago and the Lakota were saying the same thing - that they knew I was coming. So the Lakota and the Cherokee and the Cheyenne have been saying the same thing."



**PHOTO:** Grandmother Margaret Behan says her tribe shares a special connection to horses ([www.grandmotherscouncil.org](http://www.grandmotherscouncil.org))

## Vision quest

Mr Tabernaberi's involvement in the sacred journey did not begin with his phone conversation with Grandmother Behan.

Rather, it was sparked by a vision quest undertaken by Cherokee woman Noqah Elisi.

"Traditional native people have the tradition of going on the hill, and I've done it three times now. The second time I went up on the hill, this man came to me and he wore a black coat and a black hat," Ms Elisi said.

"He looked like a man and a horse all at the same time. I understood in my vision that he was a horse and a man. He was very kind and very fierce at the same time.

"And he said to me that I needed to follow the footsteps of my grandmothers and that I was going to go on a trip and that I was to do the trip with horses.

"And to not be afraid - he said there would be people that would come and help me."

Ms Elisi says she knew she was meant to trek the Trail of Tears.

"Native people carry with us generations of unshed tears. We carry that with us. And so we have to open our hearts and let that be healed. The ride for me is about healing," she said.

"I was just going to do it by myself. I was just going to quietly get me a horse and if I couldn't ride it I'd walk it, we'd walk the Trail of Tears."

That was until she found a DVD featuring Mr Tabernaberi in a box of used books at a garage sale.

She watched him train a horse without the use of a saddle, bit, bridle, or stirrups.



**PHOTO:** Noqah Elisi says she knew she was meant to trek the Trail of Tears (Facebook)

## Cherokee values

"I start watching it and I started to cry because it so reminded me of my mother. His way of working with the horse without using pain as a motivator just touched me so deeply," she said.

"Traditional native values all talk about respect. I don't care if you're a full blood, a chief, if you're wearing buckskin and covered in feathers. I don't care who you are, if you're not treating that animal with respect than you're not living traditional native values.

"I saw that balance of right relationship with Carlos - I haven't seen that with other trainers.

"He is reminding us of the traditional Cherokee values.

"So I emailed Carlos and I thanked him - I said 'what I see in you is a little piece of healing ... for a piece of very broken history and a very broken relationship between man and horse'."

The pair formed a close bond and Ms Elisi sought approval to ride under the banner of the International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers.

That approval was granted by Grandmother Behan after her phone call to Mr Tabernaberry.

The ride will take place on rescued Mustangs, which Mr Tabernaberry will work with before the group sets out.

"It's a major journey. They're beautiful people that I'm dealing with so in terms of matching horses, you've got to find a matching personality.

"They come with their own traits and personalities and different quirks, so I'm trying to match them in that sense. They might have three horses to pick from and find a connection with one horse - then I have to make sure the horse finds a connection with them as well."

Grandmother Behan believes Mr Tabernaberry is the first Australian to ever lead such a trek.

"Not that I know of, not in history [has another Australian taken part]. It's very auspicious," she said.

"We believe that our ancestors are always with us. So our ancestors that went through the genocide will be very active here on the ride with us."



**PHOTO:** Carlos Tabernaberry rests with a horse on his Victorian property ([www.whisperingacres.com.au](http://www.whisperingacres.com.au))

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