
History by horseback

By: **MATT COUGHLIN** (Sat, Sep/29/2007)

The sight of a rider and stallion trotting along the side of a major roadway like the Route 1 Superhighway can certainly turn heads. But that's part of what Miles J. Dean is hoping to do.

Dean, and the two horses he plans to ride from New York to Los Angeles, are attempting to raise awareness of African Americans' use of the horse between the 1500s and 1800s.

The elementary school teacher and horseman from Piscataway took a sabbatical this semester for the trip. It has already paid dividends for last year's students in his fifth-grade classes in Newark, N.J. They learned about African-American heritage while helping Dean prepare for the trip. When he returns to school for a 23rd year in the spring, he hopes to offer a little more insight for this year's fifth-graders.

According to a Web site dedicated to the trip, Dean has several prominent stops planned along the way.

He said his class and friends gave him a ceremonial send-off from the African-American Burial Grounds in New York. He plans to visit sites that depict African Americans and horses working together in Pennsylvania, abolitionist sites in Maryland, as well as spots in Washington, D.C., West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California.

It also gives Dean a chance to participate in a sport he enjoys — riding.

"As an athlete, a tennis player goes to Wimbledon, a football player goes to the NFL, [his horse Sankofa] and I plan to go all the way to Los Angeles," Dean said Friday afternoon as he paused on the shoulder of the busy road in Falls.

Dean has two horses for the trip, Sankofa — a 9-year-old Arabian-Saddlebred stallion — and Blaze, a 13-year-old Palomino Quarter horse. A friend is driving a trailer with the off-duty horse along Dean's path so he can switch horses as he goes.

"Sankofa's name means 'to return to the source' in Ghanaian," Dean said. "In a way that's what we're doing."

Dean said updates on his travels will soon be available at www.blackheritageriders.org. He plans to reach Los Angeles in February.

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