



# SACRED HOIOP

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO SHAMANIC LIVING



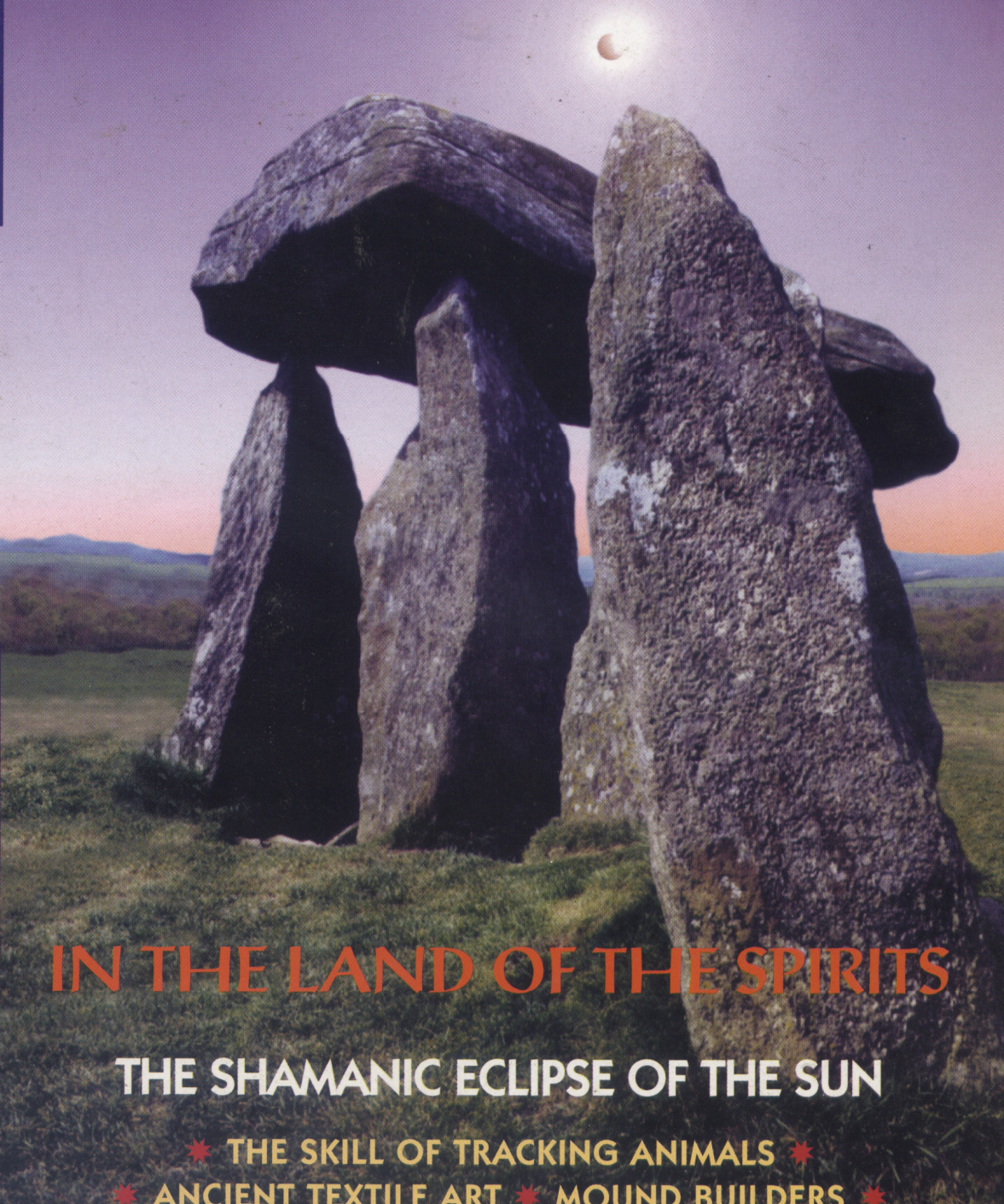
## SONG & DRUM

SHAMANISM  
IN THE ANCIENT  
LAND OF TUVA



## THE BUFFALO NATION SHALL LIVE

The Sacred Nature of the  
WHITE BUFFALO



## IN THE LAND OF THE SPIRITS

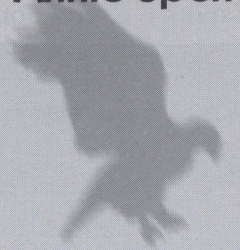
## THE SHAMANIC ECLIPSE OF THE SUN

- \* THE SKILL OF TRACKING ANIMALS \*
- \* ANCIENT TEXTILE ART \* MOUND BUILDERS \*

# dance of the Ghost Eagle

A true story of life, death  
and regeneration in Wisconsin

by Annie Spencer



Wisconsin, in the United States, is the birthplace of the White Buffalo Calf, *Miracle*, which brings renewed hope to many Native Americans. In the Medicine cards by Jamie Sams and David Carson, the appearance of the White Buffalo is seen as a sign that prayers are being heard, that the sacred pipe is being honoured, and that the promises of prophesy are being fulfilled. It also signals a time of abundance and plenty.

In the Lakota tradition, White Buffalo Calf Woman brought the Sacred Pipe to the people. Wonderful and extraordinary happenings surrounded that event.

We would describe this story as a myth, a sacred story, that serves to uphold a religious belief; yet the actual pipe that She brought is still in the safekeeping of a Lakota elder<sup>1</sup>. And a white buffalo calf was definitely born in Janesville, Wisconsin, on Saturday 20 August 1994 and has been viewed by thousands of people from all over the world.



The year the White Buffalo Calf was born in Wisconsin, a group of Native Americans regained an ancestral site containing the nation's largest collection of effigy mounds, in a set of circumstances so strange that they remind us of traditional mythology.

So how do we differentiate between a *fact* and a *myth*? How are myths built? Where are the distinguishing lines? I have a story to tell that perhaps illustrates how the two intertwine. How the interlocking strands of different lives can weave a meaningful whole. How inner and outer journeys fuse and blend and myths can be born.

The story is small and of no great significance to the world at large. It concerns a short period in a woman's life and her interaction with the land, with spirit, with a group of Native Americans. It tells how she was inspired and led, by what we might call a series of coincidences, to be the focaliser for the returning of some sacred land from a local farmer to the peoples who had lived on the land and worked with it for centuries before the farmers had arrived.

The woman was called Jan Beaver. The story is about her dance with the ancestors. About how they came to her with a task and how, without at first knowing what she was doing, Jan was soon immersed in that task. How it changed her direction, took over her life and was fulfilled by her.

Jan Beaver, a New York artist, went on a vision quest. She climbed a hill alone and stayed there for three days without food or protection; she cried and prayed to spirit to speak to her. The sky filled with hawks, ghost hawks, spirits of the ancestors come to call her on her journey: "Ghost Hawks - the sky was so thick with them. They were wingtip to wingtip ... our ancestors, ghost hawks waiting to help us in the sky" remembered Jan. They had a task for her.

Jan went on her vision quest in New York State on the East Coast. Some weeks later she unexpectedly found herself 1000 miles away in south western Wisconsin in the American Midwest. While there she dropped into a bar - *the Eagles Nest* - because it reminded her

partner of a house of the same name close to his home. There she heard that the bar had been named after some Native American Eagle mounds on a nearby farm. She was sent to visit the owner and the manifestation of her vision began.

Over the next three years Jan gathered as much information as she could about these mounds. She linked up with a local geologist and together they researched, found old field notes, did their own field surveys and measured and marked the mounds. She met with the local Native Americans, the Ho Chunk (formerly the Winnebago) and started to work for them and initiated negotiations with the farmer.

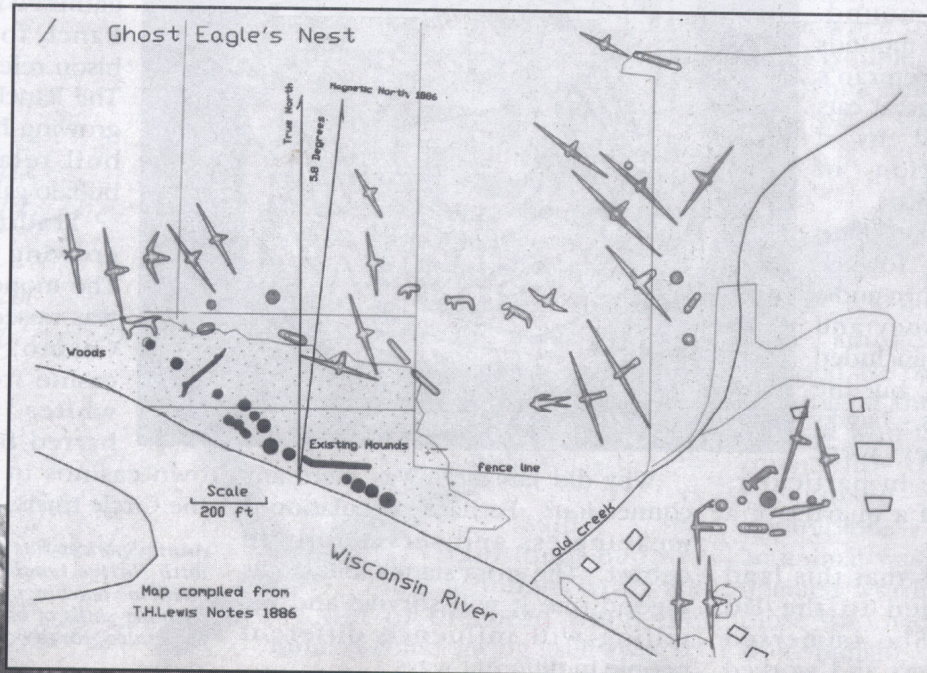
Eagle mounds are part of a system of Native American earthworks that covered the Midwest. Clustered around the Mississippi, for centuries a major

trade and communication route, they stretched from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico.

Wisconsin was at one time densely covered by them. The oral tradition of the native peoples and recent research by groups like the Ancient Earthworks society of Madison, suggests that these sites are aligned with celestial events, connections to subtle energies, containers for the geometry of natural growth patterns, as well as being sites of historical interest, places of ceremony, powerful works of art and repositories of the dead.

The Mounds culture was complex and spanned quite a period of time. In a small area mainly centred in southwest Wisconsin a unique collection of mounds developed. These were known as effigy mounds. They were built in the distinct and

recognisable form of animals and birds. Although not very high, originally probably five feet and now no more than three or four, they stretched to two hundred feet. The wingspan of an eagle is generally the length of a cricket pitch and the



largest has a wingspan a quarter of a mile in length. Most are small but distinct enough to be recognizable from the ground. Unlike many earthworks these are actually three dimensional sculptures set into the earth and made of soil imported from elsewhere. Although many of these mounds have been flattened and planted with corn, the half below the surface remains and is still clearly visible because of the different soil texture.

Some still remain complete and recognisable. There are bear mounds on a hill overlooking the Mississippi river and some to be found in more incongruous places. A roundabout in a suburb of the capital, Wisconsin, houses a distinctive bear mound. Nearby, two panther mounds can be found in a veteran's graveyard. The two great cats stand surrounded by a fluttering collection of miniature American flags.

It was a collection of these mounds that Jan found, hidden in fields of corn and a neighbouring spinney and hillside. The group included bears and a human, but the majority were birds - hawks and eagles. They were dominated by one in particular, with a wingspan of a quarter of a mile, a ghost eagle.

Jan's dream was that this land should be returned to the Ho Chunk Nation. She immersed herself in this project and worked over the years to bring it to reality. By early 1994 the sale was completed, the land handed over to the Ho Chunk nation. A few months later, Jan and her husband were driving home through the snow when their car skidded. The passenger door, by some strange fluke, flew open. Jan, who was asleep, half fell out and as the car skidded again, her head was hit and she died instantly.

We could speculate about this story and its' meaning. A quest for the eagle is a wild and dangerous journey. The eagle flies closest to the sun, and so, in Native American traditions, it flies closest to spirit. It

can take us to spirit: to an understanding of spirit. To achieve this, the ego and all desires get mercilessly stripped away. To realize spirit, ultimately, is to fuse with spirit as we do in death.



Why did Jan die? Was there any connection? Perhaps speculation is meaningless and serves only to detract. The story stands and if it is a good one it will survive and its' telling will influence different people in different ways.

A postscript of my own, to show how magical times can be: I visited Jan and her partner during this period. My first morning there, we heard the crows making a great commotion. We came out of the house to see what they were chattering about. Across the valley about forty feet away flew a great hawk, a long, dead snake hanging from his beak. Quetzalcoatl, the symbol of the union between masculine and feminine, between earth and spirit. And a forewarning, perhaps of what was to come.

Finally, let us not forget Jan's vision: "... 'restoration' does not constitute resurrection of the past, nor does it

seek to separate us from the living presence of the mounds under the guise of 'preservation' (eg fencing Stonehenge) so that its' teachings become inaccessible. Rather, it's seen as an activity which encourages a restoration of ourselves, reclamation of vision, and a recovery of memory. As we seek to awaken an Earth conscience and consciousness from which a sustainable society can grow, sacred - honoured places become a central focus of cultural values, meaning, and continuity - a spiritual - physical anchor."

And remember what was accomplished. The last I heard, the Ho Chunk were planning to hold ceremonies on the Ghost Eagle Ranch, as they have named the land. Some years ago, tribal elders gathered at the Ghost Eagle Ranch to see the first bull bison released onto the land. The Ranch is now home to a growing herd that includes a bull related to the white buffalo calf, Miracle.

Traditional corn is growing there once more. The money for the purchase was raised by the Ho Chunk Casino, a huge gaming casino frequented by many whites who are legally barred from building their own casinos in Wisconsin .... and the Circle turns.

*Annie Spencer has worked for many years with Native teachers, and integrates the Medicine teachings she has learnt from them with her skills of humanistic psychology. She facilitates groups both here and abroad.*

**NOTES:**  
1 : Arvol Looking Horse is the 19th generation keeper of the White Buffalo Calf Pipe. It is kept at Green Grass South Dakota. There is an interview with Arvol in Sacred Hoop issue 4.

**PHOTOS :**  
Page 21 - Top : drawing taken from notes made in 1886 showing the number shape and relative sizes of the mounds. Bottom : A large Serpent mound in Ohio. The mound is over 400 meters long and almost a metre high.  
Page 22 : Treasures from the Mound builders' culture. Top left : Sheet mica band. L 25cm. Top right : Stone pipe bowl depicting a warrior beheading his victim. H 25cm. Bottom : Carved shell disk. Dia approx 10cm. Small photo of Miracle the White Buffalo thanks to Brooke Schiavi.

