

TRIBAL PROGRAM NEWS

My Experience of the "Run to the Rogue"

by Jessica L. Werth

I marched into the pow-wow arena carrying the tribal staff, for my 57th mile, with sweat dripping from my fatigued body. Throughout the 247 miles, this was the most memorable mile of all. The final leg of our goal, marching back to the piece of land that had been taken from our ancestors.

On that glistening afternoon, one look between my grandmother and myself made me conscience of who I really was. It was this look that ignited an unbreakable bond between us. She was proud of me not only for my participation in this historical event, but for the grasp of knowledge I experienced throughout the three days of our re-enactment of our "Trail of Tears."

Looking at her, I could see the map of our ancestors' struggle for independence and recognition. Her eyes reflected her pride in me and her belief in my generation's clear understanding of what it means to be Native American. Until this moment, I had always known I was Native American, but my heritage was more than a mere "label." I now know just how special I am. I am a member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz. I am Shasta.

The "Run to the Rogue" had been advertised throughout the community that we, as a tribe, were going to re-enact the forceful removal of our ancestors. Reluctant at first, I at the last moment chose to participate. This decision was one of the most important ones I have ever made.

After the first day of running, I coated my sore muscles with mint-fresh Ben-Gay. Empty water bottles lay at my feet as I pondered how sweaty and smelly I was. With each mile I ran, the stories from my grandmother came back to me.

I finally understood what our people went through. I knew they didn't have Ben-Gay to relieve their tired and sore muscles and probably never had water on hand to quench their thirst. I understood that with each step they took, they left behind their homelands. From that moment on, I not only ran for myself, but also for the elders and family who were not able to make the journey.

Connecting with our past also brought me together with other tribal members. We now share a sacred bond of hardship and a renewed relationship we might never have had the chance to find.



Jessica Werth

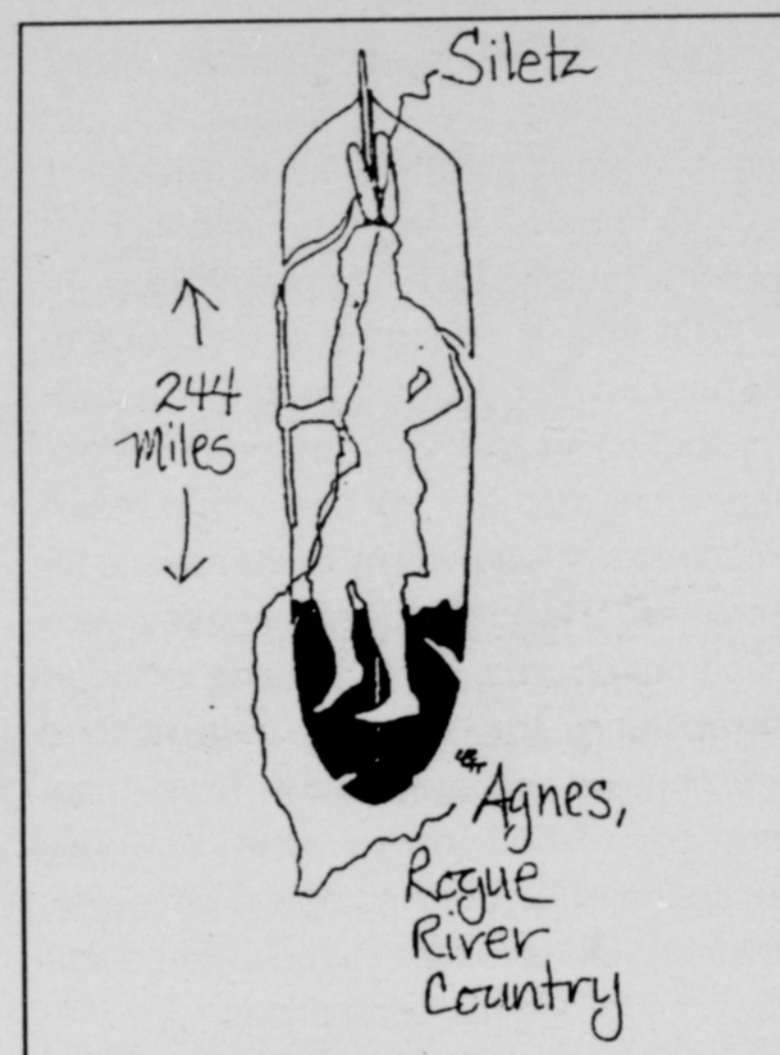
We found that although we were diverse, we had many similarities. We forgot about our problems and just enjoyed the time we shared with one another. We joked about the triple coating of analgesic[®] on our sore muscles and how we couldn't sit or stand for long without cramping. Those conversations will be with us forever.

Two impressions uppermost in my memory: The bond between my grandmother and her sisters, and the feeling of ancestors who fought for our survival. This run to the past didn't just shape my feelings toward fellow tribal members, but also linked me to the true, deeper meaning of what our ancestors endured through "The Trail of Tears."



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Run to the Rogue Set for Sept. 14-16

Run to the Rogue is an annual 234-mile relay run from Siletz, Ore., to a location near Agness, Ore. This event commemorates the forced removal of our Siletz Tribal ancestors from their homeland in the Rogue River country to Siletz in the mid-1800s. This is the closest we can come to our ancestors' experience on the journey from their homeland.

The run will begin at approximately 8:30 a.m. on Sept. 14 at the Siletz Tribal Community Center and end in the late afternoon or early evening near Agness on Sept. 16. All participants should attend an orientation session on Sept. 13 at 6:30 p.m. at the community center.

Transportation is provided along the route for runners, elders, and volunteers. Camping, meals, runners' support, and refreshments are provided.

If you would like to run, walk, or volunteer to help in other areas during this historical event, please call 1-800-922-1399 or 541-444-2532 for an application.

This is a wellbriety event – no alcohol or drugs.