

## Northwest Tribes Participate In The "Healing and Unity Journey"

### The Eyes Have It —

A young Tulalip Tribal member comes ashore after seeking and receiving permission from Tribal Elders at Hollywood Beach in Port Angeles, Washington on Monday, August 1. Members from many Northwest Tribes participated in the 200 plus mile "Healing and Unity Journey."



Photo by Rhiannon Wheeler

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Beginning in 1989, this annual event was originally coordinated to celebrate Washington's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. It is known to participants as the "Healing and Unity Journey," and is used to promote abstinence from drugs and alcohol. It is also used to familiarize Tribes with the trade routes used by their ancestors.

This year's journey attracted more than 70 canoes from Tribes as far north as St. Paul, Alaska and as far south as Grand Ronde, Oregon. Grand Ronde was the southernmost Tribe and the only Tribe from Oregon to attend.

"This event helps strengthen unity between the old Tribes," said Tribal member and Language Specialist Bobby Mercier. "Just getting the traditional feeling back was a

big thing for us."

Mercier, along with Tribal members Greg Leno, Lenny Logan, Travis Mercier, Mike Hostler, Hope Lafferty, Eric Saben, Will James, Tyrone Rock and Acey RunningBird, helped pull the canoes on the 200 plus mile journey.

Chinook Tribal members Tony Johnson, Gary Johnson and Scott Baker also pulled in the canoes. Two of the canoes were Chinook Tribal canoes and the other belonged to the Johnson family who all participated in its construction.

The names of the canoes are Skaqwel, (Lamprey Eel) Ulimits (Old Nose) and Okolum (Morning Fog). They are 24 feet long and can hold up to six people. In comparison, most of the other canoes were 35-40 feet long and could hold up to 18 people.

"We kept up with the others and sometimes in front of them," said

Mercier.

This being Grand Ronde's first canoe journey, it brought curiosity to the many participating Tribes.

"A lot of people were amazed that Grand Ronde was there," said Mercier. "They really wanted to talk to us and seemed very interested in our Tribe."

Squamish Tribal member Breanna Joseph, Athabaskan Tribal member Crystal Szczepanski, and Grand Ronde Tribal members Jackie Provost and Pam McDaniel served as the ground crew and broke-down/set-up camp at each day's destination. Social Services Manager Dave Fullerton ran a support boat in the case of an emergency.

"The ground crew was a big, big help," said Mercier. "We wouldn't have been able to do it without them."

For the Grand Ronde, the jour-

ney was a total of 12 days. They began at the Squaxin Island Tribe on Saturday, July 23. "After paddling for 10-12 hours each day, the canoes would gather at different Tribal Reservations along the Puget Sound. Before being allowed on shore, there was a protocol, in which all of the canoes would gather about one mile off shore and form a circle. The canoe that was furthest from shore would begin its paddle toward land, with each canoe following in-line. Then, a designated person from each canoe would introduce themselves, the Tribe they represented and the canoe that they were in. They would then speak to the Tribal Elders of the host Tribe and ask permission to come ashore. A representative from the host Tribe would welcome each canoe and its members to their reservation where they would all then eat, share songs and dances and then finally rest for the night. They would then begin their journey around 8 a.m. the next morning.

"The first few days were really hard," said Mercier. "But the teachings and hospitality, which was overwhelming, made it all worth while."

The Coast Guard shut the canoe journey down on the final day due to high winds and rough waters. Volunteers put the canoes on trailers and drove them to a more settled point, shortening the final destination.

About 4,000 people made their way to Elwha, Washington to celebrate the accomplishments of the people in the canoes as well as the people that have traveled the same paths before them.

Despite soar muscles and sunburns, members from Grand Ronde are already planning for next year's trip.

"A lot of traditional events happened over those 12 days," said Mercier. "It's very humbling, especially when I think about the reasons that I'm out there." ■



Photo by Dave Fullerton

**Representing Our People** — Tribal member and Language Specialist Bobby Mercier (center in red) waits for protocol in Port Angeles, Washington. During protocol, each canoe arrives at its final destination, they form a circle about one mile off shore and begin their journey to land. Once the canoes reach the shore, a spokesperson from each canoe introduces themselves, their Tribe and the canoe they are in and then asks permission to come ashore.