

Tribe has ongoing relationship with museum

TOMANOWOS continued from front page

the ceremony is not available for the public. But Tribal members and their family members all said how moved they were by this year's ceremony and the importance of reconnecting with Tomanowos and its cultural and spiritual tie to people of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.

Early the next morning, the Tribal delegation was hosted at a breakfast by museum staff. During the breakfast, Sheker and Tom spoke to the ongoing relationship between the Tribe and the museum and the opportunities it accords both sides for cultural and historic exchanges. Harrison also spoke of the relationship between the Tribe and museum staff.

Gifts of traditional parfleche bags and medicine bags were distributed to museum staff present. After breakfast, museum staff led Tribal members and staff on a behind-the-scenes tour of artifacts related to the Pacific Northwest. Tribal members donned gloves and handled and took photos of rare Native artifacts.

Museum staff also made a prayer area available for Tribal members at the end of the visit.

Tomanowos means "Heavenly Visitor" and it probably fell from the sky more than 10,000 years ago. It was transported to the Willamette

Valley by the Great Missoula Flood, depositing it at a spot near the falls of the Willamette River known today as the Oregon City Falls. The site became sacred for western Oregon Tribes, who believe the meteorite was sent to Earth by the Sky People.

For generations Native peoples, including the Clackamas Chinooks, in the homelands of the Grand Ronde visited Tomanowos in what is today West Linn. Natives often cleansed in the water stored in the meteorite's crevices and dipped their arrow and spear tips into the water for a successful hunt.

But since the early days of Oregon's history with settlers, the meteorite's possession has been in dispute. Ellis Hughes, a part-time miner, laid claim to it 1902 and moved it from land owned by Oregon Iron and Steel. A lawsuit ensued and Oregon courts recognized the company as the legal owner in 1905.

But Tomanowos continued to be viewed as a spiritual artifact by the Grand Ronde people.

Nonnative Oregonians continued to tussle over ownership of the mete-



Photos by Siobhan Taylor

Tribal member and Tribal Cultural Protection Coordinator Eirik Thorsgard prepares to lead the sacred ceremony for Tomanowos at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City on June 9.

orite. In 1906, a wealthy individual, Mrs. William E. Dodge, purchased it for \$20,600 and donated it to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, which is where it has been kept ever since.

In 2000, the Grand Ronde Tribe reached an agreement with the museum that requires Tomanowos be respectfully displayed with information about the Tribe and its religious importance. It can no longer be portioned out and sold or traded by the museum as had happened in the past.

Also, should the museum ever decide not to display Tomanowos in the future, the meteorite's ownership will transfer back to Grand Ronde. Each year, two to three Tribal youth travel to the museum for a special internship experience. Also, a Tribal delegation travels annually to the museum to hold a religious ceremony and meet with museum officials.

While Tomanowos may still be a long way from home, it is held close in the hearts of all who attended this year's ceremony. ■



The Grand Ronde Tribal delegation that visited Tomanowos at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City in early June included, from left, Tribal Elder Floriene Hoff, Tribal Elder June Bolden, Tribal Elder Kathryn Harrison, Tribal Elder David Lomboy, Tribal Elder Arlene Kautz, Tribal intern Joseph Ham, Tribal Elder Dolores Parmenter, Tribal Elder Leroy Good, Tribal member Travis Mercier, Tribal intern Jacob Tasa, Tribal Elder Joyce Ham, Tribal member and Cultural Protection Coordinator Eirik Thorsgard, Tribal Council member Kathleen Tom, Tribal intern James Hallicola and Tribal Council member Valorie Sheker.