



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

David Lewis, Tribal member and Cultural Resources Department manager, places obsidian blades flint knapped by Tribal Elder Don Day in a crater of Tomanowos to give them power before the private ceremony at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City on Monday, June 14.

## Tribal contingent reconnects with Tomanowos

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

The Delta Airlines 737 paused momentarily on the tarmac of Portland International Airport slightly after 6 a.m. Sunday, June 13, its cockpit crew awaiting final clearance to take off, as almost 20 Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde members and staff waited to fly to New York City.

As the engines roared and fuselage vibrated, the plane lifted off and banked over the Columbia River, heading east, the Columbia River Gorge spread out beneath and pointing the way for Tribal members to an old friend.

Tribal members were flying over the ancient passageway carved out of the Pacific Northwest landscape by the Missoula Floods that deposited Tomanowos — or the 15.5-ton Willamette meteorite — in the ancient homelands of the Clackamas Chinook Indians and commenced a centuries-old relationship that continues today.

Tomanowos is believed by scientists to be the iron core of a planetesimal that was shattered in a stellar collision. Captured by Earth's gravity some 13,000 years ago, it fell from the sky at more than 40,000 miles per hour and landed, most likely, in the southern Alberta region of Canada.

There, it lay encased in an iceberg in the great ancient Lake Missoula until the water pressure burst the ice dam that held the lake back and unleashed a flood hundreds of feet high on what is now southern Washington and northern Oregon.

The deluge of water, rocks and ice effortlessly carved out the Gorge like a child's finger creating a swath through a cake's icing.

Tomanowos traveled the hundreds of miles westward, jostled amid the rocks and ice, eventually coming to rest outside of what is now West Linn near the Willamette River falls.

Its highly cratered surface, pockmarked by tortuous journeys through outer space, the Earth's atmosphere and then down the Gorge, collected water that the ancient Clackamas Chinooks invested with divine qualities. The water combined with iron sulfide in Tomanowos to create sulfuric acid, which only served to deepen and create new craters on its surface.

The Clackamas Chinook dipped

their spearheads in the water and venerated the otherworldly object, believing it was sent to them by the Sky People and was a union of the sky, earth and water.

Susap, a Klickitat Indian, testified in the early 1900s that he knew Clackamas Chief Wachino and had visited Tomanowos with Wachino when he was a youth.

Susap repeated Wachino's story: "That rock standing there is iron and there is a hole in there and when it is raining and the water drops in there and fills that rock and the Indians go in there and wash their faces there and put their bow and arrow in that they have got for war."

Another Native American witness, 47-year-old Sol Clark (Wasco), testified that his mother talked

about Tomanowos, saying it possessed magical qualities.

Native Americans in the area knew that Tomanowos, no matter how it arrived in their homelands, was a gift from the Creator.

Tomanowos remained in its West Linn resting spot even after the Clackamas Chinook, like so many other western Oregon Tribes and Bands, dwindled in population and were eventually forced off their land by white settlers. The Clackamas were sent to the Grand Ronde Reservation in the 1850s, severing the longstanding tie between the Tribe and Tomanowos.

For almost 50 years, Tomanowos sat unheralded and ignored, partially submerged below ground level on land littered by fallen logs and tree stumps.

But for Tomanowos, five decades of solitude was but a blink of the eye considering it was created eons ago, perhaps even at the birth of our Solar System some 4 billion to 5 billion years ago.

It knew that sooner or later, its people would return.

### Kidnapped

In the fall of 1902, part-time miner Ellis Hughes "found" moss-covered Tomanowos sticking 18 inches out of the ground. Realizing its commercial potential, he camouflaged it with hazel brush.

It took Hughes more than a year to remove Tomanowos from ceded Tribal land that then belonged to the Oregon Iron and Steel Co., dragging it three-quarters of a mile



Tribal members Santiago Atanacio, left, and Travis Mercier, the Tribe's Youth Education culture specialist, sing an honor song to start the private ceremony with Tomanowos at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City on Monday, June 14.

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