



Contributed photos

The Grand Ronde Canoe Family paddles *Stankiya* from Comox, British Columbia, to Cape Mudge, B.C., while on the 2014 Tribal Canoe Journey to Bella Bella recently.

Canoe Family completes arduous journey

By Michelle Alaimo

Smoke Signals photographer

After a month away from home, the Grand Ronde Canoe Family returned Monday, July 21, from participating in the 2014 Tribal Canoe Journey to Bella Bella, located on remote Campbell Island in British Columbia, Canada.

Family members were supposed to paddle about 450 miles, but the route was cut short when they were delayed in Port Hardy on the northern tip of Vancouver Island due to bad weather conditions that made it unsafe for them to cross to Campbell Island in the canoe.

After a few days of not knowing if they were even going to be able to make it to Bella Bella for Landing Day on July 13, the Canoe Family secured a fishing vessel that took the Canoe Family; *Stankiya*, the family's canoe; and support boat the last 130 or so miles from Port Hardy to Bella Bella in time to participate in Landing Day.

The doubt forced some Tribal members and employees, including *Smoke Signals* staff, to cancel their plans to travel to Bella Bella to witness and record the event.

Canoe Family members per-

formed protocol in Bella Bella on July 18.

This year's Canoe Journey was the farthest the family has ever traveled and the most challenging paddle. Bobby Mercier, Canoe Family skipper and Tribal Cultural Outreach specialist, said every day included long, 30-mile pulls, and because of the distance and logistics of this year's journey fewer people were able to participate. About 30 Canoe Family members went on the journey instead of the more than 100 that usually go.

Every day every puller had to paddle, which made for a lot of wear and tear on the smaller crew members and definitely pushed people to their limits, Mercier said.

The water was different than what they are used to paddling in, he added. There were some hot days with smooth water and some days with wind, rain and four-foot swells that caused water to come into the canoe, which they had to remove by bailing.

Regardless of some of the challenges, it was the trip of a lifetime for Brian Krehbiel, Canoe Family member and Tribal Cultural Education specialist. He said this year's

Canoe Journey was a real humbling experience.

Krehbiel said there were a handful of stops on the way at which one family would feed them and additional homes were open for them to cook, take showers and camp in their yards. On previous journeys through Puget Sound, larger Tribes, usually with casinos, would host and put on a big feast.

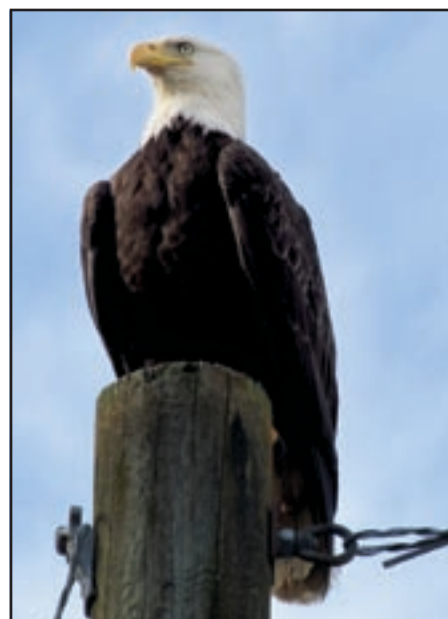
All the way up, Krehbiel said, they saw that no matter how little a community was, they saw community togetherness and how everyone comes together to help.

With this year's journey complete, Mercier said he is proud of everyone and all their effort and hard work.

Upon the Canoe Family's return, Tribal Council hosted a welcome back dinner on Wednesday, July 30. ■



Joseph Holmes Jr. stands with a paddle that was gifted to Canoe Family member Brian Krehbiel, as a skipper of the family, by Heiltsuk First Nations, the Tribe that lives in Bella Bella, during the Canoe Family's protocol of the 2014 Tribal Canoe Journey to Bella Bella.



At left, the Canoe Family saw many bald eagles while on the 2014 Tribal Canoe Journey to Bella Bella. According to Canoe Family member Brian Krehbiel, every tree had eagles in it and eagles flew over them while they were paddling.



Kaikanim Mercier blows into a shell that was a gift from guests of the Maori Tribe of New Zealand who joined the Canoe Family for part of the 2014 Tribal Canoe Journey to Bella Bella.