# Tomanowos originally was in Oregon

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"She used to tell us, 'Be careful or Tomanowos will get you.' We didn't even know what that meant, but we listened," she said.

The Tribe and museum have an agreement that keeps Tomanowos in New York City as long as the museum provides ceremonial access to Grand Ronde Tribal members, as well as acknowledgement of the meteorite's religious importance.

On Tuesday, June 19, a delegation of employees, Tribal members and family left Portland International Airport on Delta Airlines bound for New York City and Tomanowos. The flight was indicative of the trip with clear skies, a few wispy clouds and mild turbulence.

Photos by Michelle Alaimo

**Tribal Elder Leonette Galligher tosses a cedar bough into the Hudson River that was used to clean Tomanowos during the 18th private ceremony honoring the meteorite at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City on Wednesday, June 20. Tossing the bough into the river returns the energy from Tomanowos to the water.**

### Tomanowos history

Tomanowos is believed to be the iron core of a planetesimal that was shattered in a collision. Pulled in by Earth's gravity approximately 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.

After the Columbia River Gorge was carved in a flood of water, rocks and ice, Tomanowos traveled the hundreds of miles westward, eventually coming to rest outside of what is now West Linn near the Willamette River falls.

The meteorite collected water that the ancient Clackamas Chinooks believed was invested with divine qualities. It became a sacred site for western Oregon Tribes, particularly the Chinooks, who believed it was sent to Earth by the Sky People.

After the Chinooks, along with more than 25 other Tribes, were removed to the Grand Ronde Reservation in the 1850s, their connection to the sacred item was broken. Meanwhile, Tomanowos remained in that location for almost 50 years more, partially submerged below ground level.

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In 1902, Tomanowos was "found" by part-time miner Ellis Hughes, who removed it from ceded Tribal land that then belonged to Oregon Iron and Steel Co. The miner, realizing the economic potential of such a find, removed it without permission. It took more than a year to drag the huge meteorite three-quarters of a mile, where he built a shed to protect it. Then, Hughes charged 25 cents for people to view it.

In 1905, by juridical order, Tomanowos was returned to Oregon Iron and Steel and was subsequently purchased by New York philanthropist Mrs. William Dodge for $20,600 after she saw it at the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition in Portland. She donated the Willamette Meteorite, as it was rechristened, to the American Museum of Natural History.

For years it sat in the museum, a major tourist attraction but unbeknownst to the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, which was undergoing its own battles with poverty, prejudice, Termination and Restoration.

In 1999, the Tribe, citing the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, sought return of Tomanowos. The museum countersued, asking a judge to declare it the owner. In 2000, the two sides reached an amicable agreement. During Tribal visits, the museum closes early one day to allow for a Tribal ceremony. Additionally, the museum also established an internship program that allows young Tribal members to work at the museum every summer, learning about Tomanowos while living in New York City.

The Tribe has sent a delegation every year from 2001 through '08, but skipped 2009 because of the national recession. Starting in 2010, the Tribe has sent a delegation every other year.

The 15.5-ton meteorite, which was formed billions of years ago, casts an impressive figure in the museum's Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Hall of the Universe, which opened in February 2000. Due to the meteorite's weight, the center was constructed around Tomanowos.

It was Tribal Council member Brenda Tuomi's first visit to the meteorite and New York City.

After the ceremony, which involved singing, drumming, ceremonially washing the meteorite, burning sage and placing cedar boughs and personal effects in various crevices, Tuomi said the experience as "amazing."

"I was a little intimidated to touch it," she said. "I wondered what the water could do for it and if it could feel our presence."

**Kaleb Reid, second from right, talks during the 18th private ceremony honoring Tomanowos at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City on Wednesday, June 20. Reid, an intern at the museum this summer, helped lead the ceremony with, from left, Tribal Interpretive Coordinator Travis Stewart, Tribal Historic Preservation Program temporary employee Nicolas Atanacio and Tribal Cultural Protection Specialist Chris Bailey, and Payton Smith, right, also a museum intern this summer.**

### Ceremony day

Wednesday, June 20, was a hot, sticky New York City summer day. The Grand Ronde contingent quietly walked the five blocks from the NYLO hotel through the bustling streets to the museum's Hayden Planetarium entrance and were escorted in by security.

There, the delegation visited with museum officials and noshed on a buffet of cheeses, crackers, bread and fruit.

In recognition of the ceremony's importance, the museum closed early and brown paper was placed on the windows and elevators. Chairs were set up around Tomanowos and the meteorite also was cleaned by museum staff.

The private ceremony began with an honor song and drumming performed by Interpretative Coordinator Travis Stewart, Cultural Protection Specialists Chris Bailey and Historic Preservation Program temp Nicolas Atanacio, Tribal intern Kaleb Reid and Public Affairs Administrative Assistant Chelsea Clark.

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