

# Canoe Journey ended on July 28

CANOE JOURNEY  
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ter is when we tell jokes and ask random questions,” said 16-year-old Kailiyah Krehbiel, who has been on eight journeys. “It’s hard paddling for hours, but also fun.”

The Grand Ronde Canoe Family began paddling in Samish, Wash., on Monday, July 23, and ended in Puyallup, Wash., with landing day on Saturday, July 28.

Stops occurred at Swinomish, Tulalip, Suquamish and Muckleshoot. After landing day, participating Tribes set up camp in Puyallup and waited for their protocol time. Protocol lasted all day, from about 9 a.m. to midnight, at nearby Chief Leschi School.

Protocol is an opportunity for the canoe families to share songs and dances. The order of protocol is that the Tribe that travels the farthest to attend goes first. Grand Ronde began its protocol at 1:52 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 1.

“Protocol is the best part,” Krehbiel said. “I love listening to other Tribe’s songs and when we go up dancing to our songs.”

At protocol, the Tribe’s Cultural Advisor Bobby Mercier introduced himself in Chinuk Wawa and English.

“I’m very happy to be here in the land of Puyallup again and love all of the beautiful work you have done for our people,” he said. “I am happy to bring our family here.”

The Grand Ronde Canoe Family opened protocol by performing “Stankiya,” which is one of the oldest names the Tribe has for coyote, as well as it being the name of one of its canoes.

“When we put that name on our canoe, we knew it would make changes in our community,” Mercier said.

Other songs the Canoe Family performed included, “Traveling With Our Ancestors,” “Old Woman Song,” “Salmon Song,” “Thunderbird Song” and “New Beginnings.”

Mercier closed Grand Ronde protocol by gifting the Puyallup people with homemade salsa and jam from the Community Garden, other small gifts and a paddle from the journey. In turn, Puyallup gifted Grand Ronde with Tribal blankets.

The Canoe Family ended with “Ancestor Song.”

“We can come here and feed our Indian, and come feed our spirit,” Mercier said. “We will be taking this experience back with us and sharing with our families how well we have been treated.”

## The journey

During the journey itself, skippers are tasked with leading the canoes in more ways than one. They read the water and act as counselors, motivational speakers and supervisors, sometimes simultaneously.

“It is one of those experiences that will make or break a skipper,” Cultural Education Specialist Brian Krehbiel said. “Trying to deal with all of the dynamics of



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

From left, Grand Ronde Canoe Family members and Tribal youth Sedona Williams, Kaleigha Simi and Dakota Smith wash the dinner dishes at the Canoe Family’s camp at the 2018 Canoe Journey “Power Paddle to Puyallup” on Tuesday, July 31.

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12 different people is the biggest challenge. I can really say the canoe takes care of you.”

Krehbiel has served as skipper since 2011, a duty he shares with brother Bobby Mercier.

“The hardest part for me is continuing this throughout the year and getting on the water enough, trying to get more time together and ocean trips,” he said. “We also need a few more canoes.”

Despite the challenges, Krehbiel returns again and again.

“I want people to know that whoever you are, wherever you come from, everyone is equal on the water,” he said.

Grand Ronde’s Canoe Family first participated in the 2005 Canoe Journey, which landed on Hollywood Beach in Port Angeles, Wash. The following year, Grand Ronde built its first canoe, štankiya, still used today.

Joey Holmes, 26, recalls helping to build the canoe and how the journey has evolved in the past 12 years.

“That first year, we were drinking Red Bulls and eating Clif bars and rice crispy treats,” he says. “We were pretty wired.”

Holmes said that Canoe Journey changed his life forever.

“It gave me an identity for the first time in my life,” he said. “Helping build štankiya gave us a sense of ownership. ... I got to know a lot of people from surrounding Tribes and build on those relationships.”

Holmes said that most Native peoples outside of Oregon and southwest Washington have not heard of the Grand Ronde Tribe, so it was nice to get the name out there.

“It is cool showing them where we are from and how we do things a little differently,” he said. “Every year, we get new lessons and learn new things.”

Holmes described Canoe Journey as both a “physical and mental test.”

“It teaches us to be more communal and not single families as much and helps us be more dependent on each other,” he said.

The Canoe Journey began in 1989 with the “Paddle to Seattle,” that was held in conjunction with Washington’s 100th anniversary of statehood. The state and indigenous governments signed the Centennial Accord that year, recognizing indigenous sovereignty. Fifteen Tribes and First Nations participated in the “Paddle to Seattle.”

Today, upwards of 100 canoes representing as many as 90 U.S. Tribes and Canadian First Nations, and approximately 12,000 people participate in the annual journey, paddling canoes, operating support boats, acting as ground crew, singing, dancing and sharing Tribal cultures and traditions.

Canoe Journey was designed as a family-friendly event to familiarize northwest Tribes with the trade routes used by their ancestors and to promote a healthy lifestyle free of substance abuse.

Children and Family Support Service Specialist Zoey Holsclaw said that being in the canoe is her favorite part of journey.

“I love the experience of being out on the water,” she said. “A lot of paddling is mental, really 90 percent of it. ... You’re dealing with different personalities so it’s important to work as an efficient team.”

This year, she served as lead pull and also assisted with skipper duties.

“I keep on going even when I really want to rest because someone has got to do it,” Holsclaw said.

Teen Pregnancy Prevention Coordinator Valeria Atanacio has been on journey seven times. This year, she brought her daughters, 2-year-old Safia and 4-month-old Amira.

“I really love just being in a place where you feel good about your culture,” she said. “It’s a great feeling to be here, singing and dancing. You really get to know each other and become a family.”

Tribal Council Secretary Jon A. George and Tribal Council members Lisa Leno, Brenda Tuomi, Kathleen George and Denise Harvey participated during various times during Canoe Journey.

All spoke highly of the Puyallup Tribe’s welcoming nature, which included free breakfast and dinner all week, a separate tent stocked with food and drink for Elders,

and trailers of mobile showers and 50 sets of washers and dryers at the campground.

At camp on a sunny evening, Jon George looked around at everyone eating dinner, beading and talking, then said, “This is what it is all about.”

“Landing day is very exciting and emotional, but when it comes down to it, this is what gives these children the experience of being a part of a family,” he said. “That to me is the most important thing. For me, this camp is where it all comes together.”

## ‘The incredible effort’

During the Legislative Action Committee meeting on Tuesday, Aug. 7, Tribal Council members reflected more on the experience.

“It was a very positive and successful Canoe Journey,” Kathleen George said. “I want to recognize the incredible effort that goes into this experience. There is an incredible effort from our staff members to make this experience available to our youth. ... The Puyallup Tribe that hosted this, it is a monumental undertaking. You are managing thousands of people around the clock.”

Vice Chair Chris Mercier enjoyed watching the live feed that Puyallup provided.

“For those who can’t make it, this feels like the next best thing,” he said.

Jon George also noted this year had the most Tribal Council members in attendance that he could recall.

“It is a beautiful time in our history,” he said. “We see youth paddle in canoes alongside Elders. ... Canoe Journey originally started as a clean and sober activity, and many of those children who participated are still clean and sober adults today.”

The Lummi Nation of Bellingham, Wash., will host the next Tribal Canoe Journey in July 2019. ■