

Simpew marks 100th anniversary of forced march from Tete Jaune Cache to Chua Chua



On Aug. 12-14, 2016, at the Tete Jaune Community Hall, over 70 people gathered to mark the anniversary of an historic event.

The event was held to mark the 100th anniversary of the forced removal of between 60 and 70 band members to Chu Chua. Many of those taking part in the event were descended from those removed.

Only recently have documents been located to verify old family stories and clarify the sequence of communications between the railway, mines, local Indian Agent, Federal Government, RCMP, B.C. police and local authorities. According to the documents, this ceremonial walk was held during the exact dates in August, 100 years after the evacuation.

At that time the option to transport the people with their belongings on rail cars was prevented. The people had to walk the entire distance from Tete Jaune to Chu Chua Reservation with only what they could carry.

Food supplies gathered throughout the summer, their homes and belongings were destroyed by fire. Research of diaries, log books, and legal documents will continue to be collected in an attempt to bring knowledge of local history to the position of prominence it deserves.

Families from Chu Chua, Canim Lake and other areas camped on-site Friday and Saturday night. Meals were prepared by the youth program participants.

Chief Nathan Matthews welcomed the flag bearer, drummers, direct descendants, dignitaries and the public to enter the grounds.

“We have never really been gone,” said Chief Matthews as he introduced the day, “We have lived here since before they were building the pyramids!”

In a moving address, flag bearer and great-great-grand-daughter of survivors, Dancing Tree Woman (Jara Jules) shared her observations and feelings.

“I carried the flag home today with honour. By doing this, now I understand what it meant to bring all of us home. How long it took for us to come back! The journey today was a three-hour drive. It was so convenient for us to be driving along the smooth highway. For our great-grand-parents the journey was so different.

“I feel very emotional to bring home and to be walking with my father and my son.

“This is where we belong. I don’t feel fragmented and out of place. It is a powerful thing to realize these things, to share this day with all of you, to welcome everyone to participate, to feel the significance of this moment and the gravity of the history. It is quite overwhelming.

“100 years ago there was sorrow, suffering and hardship. Today we stand and joyously walk here. Today I look around at this beautiful location and I realize: This is what my people saw every day! I carry all of this in my heart! It gives me great joy!

“Coming home” after being forcibly removed is a very emotional experience. You don’t know until you actually do it.

“I am trying to imagine the days and days of walking, days and days and days. They had no where to go back to and were not sure where they were going. Perhaps there are graves along the way. We don’t know.

“One hundred years has passed. And now we can come home. I bring my own babies here. This is the future. This is their legacy.

“The song my father gave us with his drum as we walked is a spirit calling song. He called to our ancestors. They are witnesses of that day and of this day. We are connected to each other through our connection to this place.

“It is my hope that my great-great-grand-children will live and die here.”