



Simpchw First Nation Band Councilor Tina Donald is shown just after getting out of the Simpcw canoe on arrival at Mara Lake Provincial Park where they were welcomed to come ashore by the Splitsin Nation during the first leg of the 2022 Pulling Together Canoe Journey. (Photo by Kelly Sinowski /Black Press Media)

Pulling Together Canoe Journey returns after two-year hiatus

Pulling Together Canoe Journey has returned.

More than 400 participants, including Indigenous Peoples, youth, police, and public service personnel entered the water in 25 canoes in the Shuswap on Tuesday, July 12, to start their Pulling Together Canoe Journey.

The 20th journey, hosted by the Splitsin, Cstélnec (Adams Lake), Simpcw, and Tsq'escenemc (Canim Lake) First Nations, in cooperation with Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc, promotes healing, reconciliation, and respect for Indigenous host nations, as well as the sharing of Indigenous cultures.

The eight-day journey began on July 12 in Belvidere Park in Enderby, with stops at Grindrod Park, Mara Lake, Pierre's Point and Blind Bay on Shuswap Lake.

The journey will wrap up July 20 at Green Lake, a traditional summer gathering place for the Secwépemc People.

Rachael Bowser is a member of the Simpcw First Nation, and she is one of the organizers of the Pulling Together Canoe Journey.

Bowser was on the shore of Mara Lake last Tuesday when the canoes arrived, and says she was especially proud to see her mom Tina Donald (who is a Simpcw Band Councilor) paddling in the Simpcw First Nation canoe.

"My mom and five boys from Simpcw paddled all the way today," said Bowser, "Mom is the one who takes care of our canoe. She's the one who takes it out on the water, and she is the one who looks after it for the community."

Bowser says the paddlers will be spending the night camped at the Splantsin Community Center in Enderby, and will then head out first thing in the morning to paddle from Mara Lake to Sicamous.

"It's taken us almost three years to get to this point," said Bowser, "We started planning in 2019 for the 2020 journey which was going to be our 20th annual in 2020, and then obviously COVID happened. Then we planned something for last summer, but then everything happened when the 215 were found in Tk'emlúps, and our Nation was in mourning.

"2021 was also a really bad fire season, so we couldn't do anything last year either, now this is actually the third year that we have been planning."

Bowser says this years Pulling Together Canoe Journey event has her "super excited".

"The canoes are going to be on Green Lake July 20," explained Bowser, "Green Lake is a part of the shared territory that we have with Canim Lake, but more significantly Green Lake was known as a gathering place for the whole Secwepemc Nation.

"It's where we would gather in the summers to trade and arrange marriages. We're retracing our ancestors, part of us reclaiming our culture, reclaiming our ancestors and territory. We're going back to all these lands that we haven't been to before so we can be there and do what our ancestors did there, and it feels so good. Reconnecting feels amazing."
