

Native Americans walk the California Trail of Tears

by Christina Aanestad from KZYXZ Community News

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NATIVE AMERICANS FROM NORTHERN CALIFORNIA ENDED A WEEK LONG JOURNEY CALLED THE CALIFORNIA TRAIL OF TEARS THIS PAST WEEKEND. ROUND VALLEY INDIAN TRIBES WALKED THE NOME CULT TRAIL, THROUGH THE MENDOCINO NATIONAL FOREST FROM CHICO TO ROUND VALLEY TO COMMEMORATE THE 1863 FORCED RELOCATION OF SEVERAL NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES.

AN ESTIMATED 50 ROUND VALLEY INDIANS AND THEIR SUPPORTERS MADE THE 6 DAY JOURNEY WALKING OVER 100 MILES ON THE NOME CULT TRAIL, THROUGH THE MENDOCINO NATIONAL FOREST. INDIANS AND SUPPORTERS SAY THE JOURNEY IS TO HONOR HISTORY AND THEIR ANCESTORS.

"For my family, my ancestors. We're from here. My mother, my grandparents, my great-grandparents were all from here. They did that walk. So in their memory my sister and my daughter and I walked...I think your support is there to say what happened was wrong and to see what it felt like, whether your ancestors were the ones pushing or being the ones walking I think it's important to see that part of history and to know that happened."

THE WALK IS TO COMMEMORATE WHEN OVER 400 NATIVE AMERICANS WERE FORCIBLY RELOCATED FROM THE SACRAMENTO VALLEY IN 1863 TO ROUND VALLEY. THEY HAD TO WALK 100 MILES ALONG THE NOME CULT TRAIL WITH WITH LITTLE FOOD AND WATER. NEARLY HALF OF THOSE WHO WERE RELOCATED DIED ON THE JOURNEY. GEORGINA WRIGHT-PETE IS A 65 YEARS OLD CONCOW, NOMLAKI AND WAILAKI INDIAN. THIS WAS HER 11TH YEAR WALKING THE NOME CULT TRAIL.

"I would call it a healing process. I walk for my ancestors. I walk for my relatives who started walking with us in this walk and are no longer, and for our people in general."

AN ESTIMATED 7 DIFFERENT NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES WERE CORRALED AND DRIVEN TO AN AREA THAT IS NOW CALLED THE ROUND VALLEY RESERVATION. AFTER RELOCATING TO ROUND VALLEY, THE SURVIVORS EXPERIENCED A PROCESS OF CULTURAL EXTERMINATION THAT CONTINUED INTO THE 1940'S. ELDERS FROM

ROUND VALLEY STILL RECALL THE HARSH TREATMENT THEY SUFFERED AND FEW WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT. ELVIRA BILLY IS A 72 YEAR OLD NATIVE, WHO WAS denied her culture in the educational institutions at Round Valley, where learning mean forgetting. SHE POINTS AT THE VACANT BUILDING THAT WAS ONCE HER SCHOOL AND SHARES HER EXPEREINCE.

"We weren't allowed to speak our language in school. Therefore, I didn't retain it in my adulthood. Especially since I left and went to the mainstream of society."

THE GREY CONCRETE BUILDING STANDS VACANT AND DESLOATE, NEAR THE CEREMONY FOR THE NOME CULT TRAIL WALKERS. WRIGHT-PETE'S SON KENNETH WRIGHT IS A TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBER. HE SAYS THOUGH THE TRIBAL LANGUAGES ARE MOSTLY GONE, THE TRIBES HAVE WORKED TO PRESERVE THIER HERITAGE.

"The language is kind-of disapprearing. But we've tried to talk to our elders and before a lot of them have passed, recorded them and had them teach us."

WRIGHT SAYS THE SCHOOL IS A HERITAGE SITE, A PART OF THE ROUND VALLEY HISTORY. BUT BILLY SAYS IT'S A DARK PART OF HISTORY SHE'D RATHER SEE TORN DOWN.

"It has too many bad memories for me...tear it down. Build a museum or something. We have things people have made."

INSTEAD OF RECLAIMING A OLD BUILDING, THE ROUND VALLEY TRIBAL COUNCIL HAS FOCUSED ON BUILDING A NEW CASINO. WRIGHT SAYS AFTER THAT MAYBE THEN OFFICIALS WILL LOOK AT THE FUTURE OF THE OLD SCHOOL. UNTIL THEN IT STANDS AS ANOTHER REMINDER OF ROUND VALLEY TRIBE'S PLIGHT, LIKE THE NOME CULT TRAIL ANOTHER PILLAR IN HISTORY TO RECLAIM AND HONOR.