

Maiyoo Keyoh

NEWS RELEASE

May 16, 2017

BC First Nation People See Symbol of Their Ancestors' Jurisdiction



Drawing of Headdress by
Father AG Morice circa 1890

Earlier this week the descendants of a central British Columbia First Nation Chief had their first look at ceremonial regalia he wore nearly 140 years ago.

The headdress, inherited from his predecessors and now at least 200 years old, is in the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM).

“This is important to us” Petra Sam said afterwards. “It’s a physical connection to our ancestors and a physical symbol of the jurisdiction, authority and responsibility they had, as Keyohwhudachun, to look after our keyoh.

“Each Keyohwhudachun passes that jurisdiction, authority and responsibility for the keyoh down to the next. A long unbroken line of Maiyoo Keyoh Keyohwhudachun predates the arrival of Europeans in our area, and this succession of Keyohwhudachun is in place to this day”.

Petra Sam's mother, Sally Sam, is the current Keyohwhudachun and is the fifth-generation lineal

descendant of Keyohwhudachun Sidoman (also known as George A'Huille). She was unable to make the long trip to Toronto, but Petra Sam, her husband Jim, four of their children and a niece met ROM staff and examined the headdress Monday morning.

Petra Sam said Maiyoo Keyoh is about 17,000 hectares of land situated about 100 kilometers north west of Prince George. She said it's one of the scores of keyohs that divide the land from Prince George west to Fort St James and beyond.



From left to right Rolene Sam, Frankie Munroe, Seraphine Munroe, Charlotte Munroe, Petra Munroe, Anastazia Munroe, and Jim Munroe
Photo by David Carruthers

They are the First Nations landholdings in the area and existed long before the creation, by the provincial and federal governments, of Indian Bands, she said, “and we are preparing a Statement of Claim for the courts.”



Keyohwhudachun headdress on display at the Royal Ontario Museum
Photo by Jim Munroe

The headdress was given to a catholic priest, Father Adrien Morice, in the 1880s or 1890s, she said, "but we don't know which of our Keyohwhudachun gave the headdress to Father Morice", she said. "It was either Koomdiel or his father, the previous Keyohwhudachun."

Morice eventually gave the headdress to a museum in Toronto that in turn gave it to ROM.

It is made of dentalia (flute shaped seashells) strung on the hair of revered female ancestors.

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