

Cemetery Revitalization Efforts a Success



The summer of 2020 saw restoration work take place at the Lake Laberge Cemetery, “Natsèdeway Kennji”. This work resulted in a complete transformation of the historical Ta’an Kwach’an burial ground. Ta’an Kwach’an Council’s Culture and Heritage Committee oversaw the project which resulted in a thorough re-landscaping of the area, restoration work as well as the construction of a 900-plus linear foot fence.

Anne-Marie Miller, TKC’s Heritage Technician with the Lands, Resources and Heritage Department, who led the project, explains the crew had worked full-time since July 20th to get the project completed. Anne-Marie explained it was a project that she, as a Citizen, has been passionate about for many years and long before she became a Ta’an staff member.

“This has been very close and dear to my heart. The graveyard is a sacred place. It is a place where we honour and respect our loved ones. Our graveyard is irreplaceable and is a significant historical and valued resource for the Ta’an Kwäch’än people. For many years we have noticed that the graveyard was in dire need of a cleanup, repair and attention. This project is a good start to ensure we protect that part of our history and our heritage.”

To ensure restorative work was in keeping with Ta’an values, culture and tradition, Anne-Marie states that Elders from both the Wolf and Crow moieties were always at the cemetery to provide direction and support. At times, it was difficult for these Elders to sit all the time. They were eager to

provide “hands on” support and offer their expertise when needed.

“The Elders were very important in providing history and stories of the cemetery and other Ta’an cremation and burial sites. The cemetery is where our ancestors are buried, and it is very important that we have our Elder’s perspective and enhance their knowledge and teachings,” says Anne-Marie.

Work included clearing heavy overgrowth around many of the grave sites and throughout the cemetery grounds. Anne-Marie noted that all the work complemented the cultural landscape of the cemetery. This involved cutting old poplar trees and removing overgrown vegetation and dead trees that were a safety concern. All the natural shrubs, she notes, including bear roots, soap berry and strawberry bushes, rose bushes, sage and other low ground covering plants within the cemetery were preserved. As well, an inventory of graves and cremations were documented to add further details to maps that have been created as part of this project.

“It was a lot of work. We are very proud of what was accomplished and know this work will be appreciated by our families who have loved ones resting at the cemetery. We are very thankful to the Wolf Elders and Crow Elder for their wisdom, knowledge and teachings that they shared,” Anne-Marie says, adding “A lot of thought and care went into the work and we are pleased this project was accomplished. Each of the workers at the cemetery had a loved one resting at the cemetery. It meant a lot to us to do this work in a



TKC Elders Glenn Grady, Norman Adamson and Sam Broeren oversaw the project.



respectful and loving manner.”

The TKC Cultural and Heritage Committee has also planned for the installation of two washrooms and a storage shed so future landscaping can be maintained. This will also provide the necessary tools on hand to families when they need to bury their loved ones.

There will be an official commemoration of the work completed at a later date.

Ta’an Kwäch’än Council would like to say “Shàw Nithän” to the following individuals:

Wolf Elders: Glenn Grady and Norman Adamson

Crow Elder: Sam Broeren

Work Crew: Kevin Adamson (Wolf), Troy Pope (Crow), Angela Hare (Wolf), Ray Bob (Wolf)

Volunteers:

Council: Diane Graham and John Bunbury

Elders: Bev Miller and Betsy Jackson

TKC Culture & Heritage Committee Members:

Edythe Maloney – Chief Jim Boss

Hazel Bunbury/Bev Miller – Maggie Broeren

Betsy Jackson – Jenny Lebarge

Citizens:

Debbie Burns, Peter Borotsik, Shawna Tizya, Teresa Jacobs, Felicia Gordon, Lori Graham, Christine Genier, Jenna Duncan, Brooklyn Massie.

LRH staff including Scott Paszkiewicz, Natalie Leclerc, Nick Howitt, Hannah Gray, Kristina Beckmann, Testloa Smith, Andre Eckert-Maret as well as other staff members Elisha Sidoun, Brianna Bourassa and Janet Smellie.

Also, a huge Shàw Nithän to Ta’an Citizen, Daniel Adamson for his generous offering of tools, equipment, water and other work-related items. His support and kindness was deeply appreciated. Shàw Nithän to everyone who came to the cemetery to visit and offer their support.

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