



Aboriginal Education
School District No. 42 Maple Ridge – Pitt Meadows
22225 Brown Avenue, Maple Ridge, B.C. V2X 8N6
Phone: (604) 466-6265 Fax: (604)463-4138



Spirit of Adventure 2008

2008 Spirit Dancer British Isles Canoe Journey

A joint initiative by the Maple Ridge School District Residential Framing Program and the Aboriginal Education Department of District No. 42.

“Can you find a way to make 100 paddles by the end of February?” So began the challenge from Chris Cooper for students in School District No. 42 to provide participants paddles for the 2008 Spirit Dancer British Isles Canoe Journey.

In the first week on January, 2008, a small group of adults met to see what a small group of students might be able to accomplish. Chris Cooper (Spirit Dancer Founder), John Simpson (District No. 42 Superintendent), Michael Pollen (District No. 42 Director of International Education) and Doug Hoey (District No. 42 Principal of Aboriginal Education) discussed the potential for students of Maple Ridge – Pitt Meadows to provide 100 paddles for the first leg of the upcoming canoe circumnavigation of the British Isles.

Chris Cooper could provide kiln dried planks of yellow cedar if there was a way for students to turn them into functional paddles to be used in the Atlantic Ocean and eventually given to the participants who used them in this epic journey.

It took a week to figure out the potential logistics, which resulted in consultation with Steve Wiebe (Vice-Principal of Trades Programs), Phil Brekkaas (teacher of the Residential Framing Program) and Mike McKinnley (Special Education Assistant with the Residential Framing Program). Two weeks later, with financial support from the School District and the Trades Programs to buy specialized router bits and blades, and a negotiated addition of time and assembly line/team approach component to the framing program, the paddle production was set to begin. It was now the end of January.

The most important participants - the students, were now introduced to the project and trained in the tools and procedures to make it happen. A core of six students worked throughout the following four weeks, initially making 5 paddles a day, and progressing to a point where they were able to complete 30 paddles in the final two days.

The students perfected their skills under the guidance of master carpenter Phil Brekkaas resulting in the completion of the production of 100 paddles on Friday, February 29th, 2008 – a mere 8 weeks after the idea had first been presented. The nine students made enormous contributions to the project because of their strong work ethic and leadership abilities.

On March 4th, 2008, the Spirit Dancer canoe was officially ‘launched’ on its way to the British Isles - and 100 paddles made by the students of School District No. 42 were sent to accompany her. Plans are already underway for another group of students to continue the challenge and produce another 200 paddles for the remaining two years of the journey - the legacy has begun!