

Albany to New York City

By Hickory Edwards



It was a bright sunny day when I arrived at Russell Sage College in Troy, NY. The day's events were already under way. Paddlers and ground crew filled the registration booth filling out papers and getting their number tags and stickers fixed on their bags, tents and canoes/kayaks. Native and Dutch demonstrators and crafters filled the lawn. I pulled the dugout canoe on the lawn and set out all the tools used and pictures of the long process alongside of it. People from all over the great Turtle Island were there: Tadadaho Sid Hill; Hawk Clan, Chief Jake Edwards; Turtle Clan, Faithkeeper Oren Lyons, Congressman Paul Tonko, Rep. Dan Maffei, and many others from New York and around the world.

The Unity Riders came into town, through the streets and roads into the festival grounds. The crowd gathered along the streets taking pictures and cheering them on as they came in. All the horses and riders lined up on the lawn. Gus High Eagle stepped forwards to speak of the meaning behind their journey of healing for all nations and all living beings. After, they held a round dance where 30 to

40 people joined in.

After the festival was over, the paddlers and ground crew headed to the camp grounds, by the end of the night the perimeter of a soccer field was lined with tents. The middle of the field was a large open space for the first open meeting to get paddlers and land crew oriented for the long journey that was ahead of us.

The next morning the tents were packed up and loaded on the gear trucks and we headed out to Rensselaer boat launch. On the way to the boat launch it started to rain. Everyone was walking around with rain jackets and umbrellas. The trucks pulled in and people started to pull off the canoes and kayaks. The boat dock was soon filled, and getting to the water was near impossible. Sid Hill did the Opening and Jake Edwards burned tobacco. I got the paddlers ready for the trip with a brief summary of the days paddle and pointing out which side of the river the natives and non-native alias would be on. Soon the water was filled with paddlers and the cameras were rolling.

Each day the paddlers were joined by the Peace Walkers, organized by Jun-sun Yasuda. The Peace Walkers walked along side of the paddlers on land the whole distance of the paddle from Rensselaer to New York City.



The rows were starting to form. With Non-natives on the east side signifying that they came from the east to this land and the natives on the west signifying we were already here. The Albany skyline was in the back ground and

the clouds were dark, low and raining on our heads. The paddlers were on the river and were starting to make two

rows, one of natives and one of non-native allies. It was a great day to be indigenous. I made my way to the front of the two rows asking if everyone was ready for the days paddle. Once at the front I yelled, "paddles up" and the whole group of nearly two hundred lifted their paddles high. Then I yelled, "heads up paddles down" a yell was let out in one voice from the land crew and the paddlers on the water that rang through the town in Troy, south to Albany, down the Hudson, echoing through New York City, east through the Mohawk river to the Mohawk territory, down the wood creek to the Oneida territory, across the Oneida lake to the hills of Onondaga, through the woods to the land of the Cayuga's, across the great swamp the Seneca's home on the shores of the great Seneca lake, continuing west to our youngest brothers the Tuscarora's and never losing its strength as it traveled over the great turtle island we all call home. With later reports it was heard as far away as Australia, the Netherlands, England, Japan, Germany and Hawaii.

The paddle was on at full tilt as we paddled across the river to Albany. Rain was coming down in sheets as we paddled on in two rows down the Hudson River. We paddled past the battle ship, U.S.S. Slater, which was flying the Hiawatha belt and the Two Row flag, on our way to the lunch stop at Henry Hudson Park. There was a little mix up and people were not ready for the large number of paddlers so there wasn't enough food to go around. Paddlers put together food from all the snacks they had in their canoes and kayaks so everyone ended up having enough food and we paddled on to the camp spot at Schodack Island Park. All the canoes and kayaks were pulled out of the water and lined up along the driveway. All the vessels, lined up side by side, took up roughly around the length of a football field.

The food was being cooked, camp tents were being set up, and some of

the paddlers found the volley ball net. It was a small town traveling down the Hudson River. We had our children, nieces, nephews, fathers, mothers, and Huxley. This was what the two rows meant to live in parallel down the river of life as long as the grass grows green as long as the waters flow downhill as long as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west.

After dinner we had a social dance. I wondered how long it was since the land and the water heard these songs and felt the native people footsteps and it gave me a great feeling of pride to know that I had a big part in the people coming back to this part of the world with our songs and dances given to us by the creator.

Monday July 29th we packed up camp and headed out with the outgoing tide from Schodack Island Park. Heading south on the Hudson River to our lunch stop, four miles, on the point of the Schodack Island. It was lunch time as we got to the end of the island. The water was still high and I gave the signal to turn and land on the shore. The food crew had made us lunch for on the water and everyone pulled their lunches out as we found a spot along the beach to eat. By the time we got done eating the water level was a foot lower. I walked through the water and told people five minutes until we head out to the next camp spot at Cox-sackie River Front Park. All the paddlers were on the water as we headed for the bend in the river where we could see two small islands in the far distance. I told the crew just after the last island is the camp so we should get in two rows as we paddled in. There were people at the boat launch so we paddled to the beach and landed. The two rows where not too great but they could be made out as they paddled in.

All the 175 canoes and kayaks were on

the lawn and the ground crew had set up the kitchen and the media station. Paddlers gathered their camp gear from the back of the trucks and began to set up tents all over the grounds leaving a large open space in front of the pavilion. Dinner was ready and everyone brought there mess kits and ate. In the center of the small field a game of lacrosse was being played. Everyone around the outside of the field was eating on the ground and was cheering with full open mouths and forks in their hands. As the hot day went on people could be seen swimming in the river or playing basketball or just walking tent to tent visiting. In the evening speakers were scheduled for the pavilion. Andy manger introduced the speakers first to speak was Emily Bishop then Jake Edwards followed by Mike McDonald to finish it off. All talked about the Two Row, earth, and the seventh generation. The night was ended off with the Seneca kids holding a social.

The next morning, July 30th, camp was torn down; the gear trucks were loaded up and kitchen was packed away. The paddlers were getting ready for the water as I gave them a quick rundown of safety procedures and the days paddling itinerary. It was time to head out and two rows quickly formed and waited until all the paddlers were on the water. Then off we all went with the tide two

rows in peace and friendship down the river of life. Next stop was camp at Dutchman's Landing. As we came around the river bend was the Kingston Rhine Cliff Bridge just on the other side of the bridge was Dutchman's Landing. I yelled out for the paddlers to get into two rows, allies on the east and natives on the west side of the

river. There were people on the shores waving and cheering. As we got closer Orris Edwards got out his water drum and started to sing the ancient canoe dance songs to bring them in. There was a group of people led by Lena Duby on the boat launch to help get

the paddlers out and get their canoes and kayaks out of the water and lined up on the lawn. There where newspaper reporters and TV cameras there to get the landing for the local news. There were a few hundred people there to welcome us in. The amount of support was incredible. After

all the people were up out of the water and on the lawn, the gear truck pulled up and everyone pulled out there camping gear and began to set up their tents. A quick game of lacrosse was in progress as the unity riders came into the camp site and joined us for dinner.

After, there was an event held at the pavilion. There were a few people who spoke as well as a musician who played some songs about fracking. Everyone was heading to bed as a small group stayed up and held a small session just outside of the camping area.

On Wednesday, July 31st we headed out from Dutchman's Landing with the tide to our next camp at Ulster Landing \ Sojourner Truth Park. It was a great day to be on the water. We had the Dutch ship (the Onrust) sailing besides us as we paddled passed the Catskill Mountains which made for some great pictures. The paddle went great except for the waves from the Onrust almost knocking us over just before the landing. We got a little wet but we made it without any one falling in. There was a lot of people at the camp site. I did two interviews as people set out camp and headed to eat. There was a presentation but I couldn't make it because I was setting up my tent in the dark. But I heard it was a great talk.



On Thursday, August 1st it was a rough day to be on the water the wind was coming out of the south at about 10 to 15 miles and the tide was going out which means really big waves and tough paddling. So this was going to be a great day for me but the rest of the paddlers didn't like it as much. The waves were about two and a half feet high and coming at us strong. Everyone got to the lunch stop in Saugerties pretty easy, but there was not a good place to land. There was only a small dock so most of the paddlers would have to



go around and land in a small muddy beach. Everyone got on the land and got in line for sandwiches that the cooking crew had made up for everyone. It was a good day to sit in the grass and soak up the sun. One of the paddlers walked by with a whiffle ball and bat it was time for a game. I yelled out whiffle ball and all of the younger paddlers came running. We started to head to the small field when two guys and a woman in suits and ties. "Hi" they said to me "We were told to come to talk to you." I said OK and shook their hands. It was the mayor of the town a reporter and the woman was the past mayor. So there I stood in the sun telling them all about the Two Row journey the treaty and how the paddle came to be. I talked to them for about thirty minutes but the whiffle ball game is what I really wanted to do. I shook their hands and said bye to them and turned to the game ready to jump in on the fun but the game was over and every one was walking off the field. It was time to get on the water. All the paddlers got all the stuff they needed to paddle the rest of the day.

The tide had went out while we were eating so the water level was down at least a foot so we had to stomp through the mud with our canoes and kayaks. Although it was a good day on land it was still bad on the water and the waves were just as bad and the wind was just as strong. We paddled

towards the Hudson Maritime Museum. The waves were getting worse and the wind was stronger, the clouds were starting to get darker as they came in from the sea. It started to rain as we came around a bend I told the paddlers to keep on going while I

went back to make sure the paddlers in the back were ok. The wind was really strong at this time. The waves started to white cap it was dangerous to be out on the water. I radioed to the safety boats, safety paddlers and the coast guard axillary to start

having the paddlers head to land. The captain of the coast guard boat got on the radio and said Kinston Point Park was right there and we could make it. So off we went paddling through the storm racing towards the beach. We pulled up but this was not where we had planned to stop for lunch. I had to pick only the best paddlers to go on and make the next part of the journey to the lunch stop at the Maritime Museum.

This was going to be tough as it just started to rain and the wind and waves were as bad as ever. We set out with about thirty paddlers through the waves, wind and rain. Luckily we didn't have far to go. Up and down we paddled through the waves the bows (fronts) of the canoes and kayaks lifting up and slapping down in the rough waters. We could barely see though the driving rain as we came around the corner and started to head up the round out creek to the maritime museum. We got into two rows and headed up stream the museum was in site and there were lots of people on the docks waiting to welcome us in. We got near and people started to direct us into spots it would be easier to get us out and on land.

The rest of the paddlers were at the museum already and in the food line. The unity riders arrived and were getting in line to eat. There were western style singers singing around a drum outside of the doors. The people that set up the lunch stop gave us gifts as a token of their friendship and commitment to honoring the Two Row Wampum Treaty.

When it was time to head out to the camp site at the Margaret Norrie Park it was raining just as hard as ever. The paddlers and safety crew decided we couldn't paddle though. We had to stay the night. So it was decided that some people would stay at the museum some at a YMCA gymnasium and those who could afford it could stay in discounted hotels. Since we couldn't make it to the next camp spot that night a small group of experienced paddlers would start from the museum the next morning and paddle seven miles to the camp site that we couldn't make it too.

Friday August 1st, a small group of the strongest paddlers started out against the tide to make up the miles they couldn't paddle the day before. They made it to Margaret Norrie Park and had a quick rest as the rest of the paddlers arrived in trucks and cars.

After the daily safety talk and run down of safety procedures and itinerary the full group was off paddling with the tide to the next camp stop at Poughkeepsie Rowing Club. It was going to be an easy twelve mile day. The sun was shining the water was still and the wind was just a breeze coming out of the south. Every one quickly got into two rows



and was off paddling down the Hudson River. The paddlers were getting better and better at getting into two rows and staying in them. On the first day the rows were not too good and all the paddlers ended up in one row and

all over the place it was like herding cats for me and the other safety paddlers. We came into the rowing club in two perfect rows. I was leading them in but stopped just short to organize the paddlers as they got out of the water at the dock.

We all got out and lined our canoes and kayaks up on the lawn and drive way as the food crew cooked dinner the rest of us set up camp. It was a crowded camp site but we were used to being close to each other. It was the sixth day into the campaign and strong lifetime friendships were being made. There was a real feeling of peace and brotherhood that filled the camp at all the stops but really started to come out and everyone talked like they had been friends since childhood. I guess people get to know each other fast when they have to live, eat, and sleep together, as they work for the same goal and traveling long distances by self-propelled means. This was what the campaign was all about and what we were working towards a healing between our two peoples and as we paddle down the river of life respect the laws of nature.

In the kitchen we would compost all of the food scraps we used all biodegradable soap and cleaners. No paper or plastic cups or plates forks spoons. Everyone had to bring their own mess kits to reduce the amount of waste going in to landfills. We were walking the walk and talking the talk.

The full story will continue each month, a few sites at a time. For those who couldn't make it on the journey with us I hope you remember this story and pass it on as a part of history.