

Navajo Nation Council Office of the Speaker
Contact: Sararesa Begay, Public Information Officer
(928) 871-6384
sararesabegay@navajo.org
<http://www.navajonationcouncil.org>

July 15, 2007
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Navajo Nation Council Annual Horse Ride Relives History in an Enjoyable Manner

CASAMERO LAKE, N.M. - Navajo Nation Council Delegates Jerry Bodie (Sanostee), Johnny Naize (Tselani/Cottonwood/Nazlini) and their supporters started the 11th annual horse ride to the summer council session on Tuesday, July 10th, from Nageezi, New Mexico.

The 21st Navajo Nation Council Summer Session is scheduled for July 16-20 at the Navajo Council Chamber in Window Rock, Ariz., the capitol of the Navajo Nation.

They rode along U.S. Highway 550 heavy with semi-truck traffic. Despite the hot weather, they pressed on to Counselor, N.M., where they were greeted by community members with a lunch.

In the afternoon, they reached the Ojo Encino Chapter and spent their first night there. The next morning, they left at 6 a.m. and the breakfast caught up with them.

The group was later joined by Delegates Leonard Tsosie (Whitehorse Lake/Pueblo Pintado/Torreon) and Raymond Berchman (Oak Springs/St. Michaels). For Bodie and Naize, this is their ninth year on this ride. As the trail boss, Bodie prepares well in advance of the ride by scouting out and preparing the trail. Bodie said that he "enjoys reliving the Navajo tradition of leaders traveling by horse to a council session. As they went to the session, they would stay at Navajo homes along the way where they and their horses were welcomed."

"As these leaders proceeded to Window Rock, they learned about issues concerning the Navajo People," Bodie said. "On the way home, these leaders would go through the same route and tell Navajo families about the news from the session. This was one way that former Navajo leaders communicated with the Navajo People. I am proud to relive this tradition."

The annual horse ride has become a family event. Bodie and Naize's family members have been participating in the event for the last nine years. Naize started participating in the event with his grandson Pierson Tullie when he was approximately five years old and when his niece, Nicole Nez, and nephew, Ferguson Nez, were very young. The three are hardened veterans of this annual ride. Pierson says he enjoys it and has used the description of his experience for school studies. Nicole and her horse grew up together in the annual ride.

-more-

Page 2-2-2/Begay/Council Horse Ride Relives

Her family comes up from Mesa, Ariz. to participate in the ride every year and her mother, Nancy, is quite proud of her children riders.

The family of Ron Little also joined the group all the way from Page, Ariz. He respects the endurance of the ride and wanted to see the eastern part of Navajoland.

Bodie's wife, Zelma, enjoys taking pictures whenever she gets a chance to do so. She is part of the support group and drives ahead to check on gates, community reception and drives back to the group to make sure everyone is doing fine. In a way, she has fit into a motherly role taking care of everyone. When a rider is ailing from the heat (more than 90 degrees) or soreness, she offers a ride. The group takes care of each other by having a water-man and wranglers. They do not carry much food knowing that the Navajo people will open up their homes.

Like former leaders, Bodie and Naize take the lead to talk with community people. They describe the event and then talk to them about community issues. In Pueblo Pintado, they learned about the need to build a bridge on N47 route to Tse Yii Gaii High School. The two asked, "Why did you build across the wash on a hill?"

Chapter President Frank Chee Willetto explains the reason.

Along the ride, Tsosie explains to the other delegates that Eastern Navajo Agency lands were part of an addition to the main Navajo reservation in 1907; only to be taken away by non-Indian rancher protests the next year. Thus, the checkerboardedness of the land status. Checkered land status was very evident by the criss-crossing barb wires at every quarter mile. Lunch was provided at Pueblo Pintado Chapter. The group observes the many finely woven rugs on the chapterhouse walls. They heard the summer student workers' presentations. Although they were behind schedule, the group hears all of the students and then moved on to Whitehorse Lake Chapter—14 miles away.

At Whitehorse Lake, N.M., they ran into rain drizzles. As they ride into the chapter compound, some community members stated that they were bless with rain because their Navajo leaders have come to visit them. In a jovial setting, the riders and their support group were invited to a Navajo meal. Again, Bodie, Naize, Tsosie and Delegate Ray Berchman (Oak Springs/St. Michaels) explained the reason for the ride and talked to community members. In return, the delegates learned about the need for waterline development and the new proposed senior citizen center. The three delegates told the community members that they still want to initiate Delegate Tsosie. The community members laugh at the description of the to-be initiation rite. After another long hard day of riding, the group takes out their bedrolls. They had been riding for approximately 80 miles now. Then, the rain came. Some sought shelter inside the chapterhouse while others enjoyed the blessing of the rain alongside their horses just like how former Navajo leaders did. The riders get up at 5 am, feed, brush and examine their horses.

They have breakfast at 6 am, the riders mount up and head south on NM Highway 509 with the youngest rider, Kayllen Yazzie,9.

-more-

Page 3-3-3/Begay/Council Horse Ride Relives

Kayllen's grandfather is Delegate Berchman and he said the ride is fun, Delegate Bodie gives him a name, "Big Man," because he handles his horse like a seasoned veteran.

The riders reverently pass a Navajo ceremony south of Whitehorse and proceed to cross the Continental Divide at a higher elevation.

As they proceed to Borrego Pass, the riders see the Navajo sacred mountain (Tsoodzil) to the south and can see as far north to other sacred mountain, Mt. Hesperus. The group is awed by the beauty of Navajoland while observing the condition of land, forage, roads and how the people are living. Then, they run into a rail crossing that was recently built with gates that were locked.

The riders dismounted, loaded their horses into trailers and crossed the cattleguards. After remounting, the riders head to the family home of Bodie's sister, Nellie Chaves. Although Bodie represents the Sanostee Chapter in New Mexico is originally from Borrego Pass, N.M.-area. Before they got Chaves's residence, a non-Indian rancher suspiciously drives up to the group wanting to know why a group of people are riding their horses near his ranch, which used to be part of Navajoland. After an explanation, the riders move on. Then, the riders go down a canyon which Berchman describes as one of the beautiful areas of Navajoland.

Tailgate lunch was provided by Crownpoint's Navajo Technical College students and staff. Dr. Elmer Guy, the college president, has new appreciation for the harshness of the ride and wants to make the college's lunch reception for the ride an annual effort. The group then goes through Borrego Pass to Casamero Lake.

Like at each stop before, the community leaders and people welcome the group by waiting outside for them--many with cameras. The riders dismounted, congratulated and thanked their horses. Each horse has a name and is a member of the horse-ride family--some for nine years. While waiting, Bodie takes his boots off, sits in the shade talking and joking with his new extended family. The Casamero Lake community members and leaders provide another meal, hear from the Delegates and they, in turn, tell the Delegates of their issues, the need for a new senior center and to pave the county road. The Delegates promise to look into these issues and write supporting letters to appropriate persons on the community's behalf. Tsosie describes his new-found respect for the annual horse-ride after participating in the ride and seeing how other delegates communicate with the Navajo people. He calls Bodie and Naize, "Naat'aanii Ditsi'dii"(Resilient Leaders) because they have been doing the horse-ride for more than nine years and have been working on behalf of the Navajo People even longer. Tsosie and his family then go off to help at a Navajo ceremony and the others prepare for a good night's rest. The next morning, Casamero Lake chapter butchers a sheep for the group and have a festive breakfast. After extending their gratitude, the riders turn west to go to Smith Lake, N.M., Mariano Lake, N.M. Pinedale, N.M. Mexican Springs, N.M. and finally into Window Rock, Ariz.

The riders and their support group are serious about "riding" Navajo leadership tradition forward despite aches, pains and setbacks. And, they enjoy it, according to Tsosie.