

GOOD TURNOUT AT SPRING GATHERING AT NAT'L GROUNDS

Up to 40 people were on the National Tribal Grounds of the Southeastern Cherokee Council to help usher in the new ceremonial season. Located on highway 19 just outside the town of Ochlocknee, the National Tribal Grounds had been in a "state of rest" during the Cold moons. As is customary, the grounds and especially the ceremonial areas such as the Council House and the Medicine Wheel were "awakened" and cleansed by ceremony by several of the members using Cedar boughs, water, tobacco and sage.

The Ceremonies began in earnest on Saturday morning, March 16th with the morning "sunrise prayer ceremony". As several persons were in a state of mourning due to recent loss of loved ones, a place was provided outside the Council House by the "Western Gate" so that they could observe and hear the ceremonies being conducted inside. Rick Runningbear led out in the morning ceremony explaining the role of the various traditional clans of the Cherokee and alluding to the fact that each of us has or own medicine to use for the good or detriment of others. Bryan Barns, associate fire keeper, tended the fire during Saturday's ceremonies. All were given the opportunity to approach the Sacred Fire with an offering and prayer. Thus the ceremonial day had a good strong start.



Above: Dannon Gentle Owl, a member of the Ceremonial Team.

Shortly after a good breakfast the Spring meeting of the Council was conducted and called to order by Principal Chief Vivian Panther. The business conducted in that meeting will be reported in another section of this paper.

There was time for socialization of the people as well as the performing of handcrafts and the display of handmade items for sale.

The main ceremony for the day occurred in the afternoon in which Rick Runningbear conducted the First New Moon Of Spring. He explained that this time of year should be a joyful and hopeful time for the people as we put behind us any negativity of the past and start out with a clean slate for the new year, at a time when all Nature seems to be waking up and coming to life. As an adjunct to this ceremony, Pipe Carrier James Blackwolf Barfield, led all the people through our traditional Pipe Ceremony, which helps bind us all together and connects us to Creator.



Above: Chief Vivian Panther Lawson standing with children attending Ceremonies on National Grounds.

The remains (ashes) of three tribal members underwent a "Re-Matriation" ceremony in the late afternoon of Saturday. This somber ceremony began with a procession to the sound of a drum from the Elder's Table, through the Western Gate of the Council House, across the covered bridge and finally to the Memorial Bridge that spans the water where many former members' remains have already been re-matriated. All present

had the opportunity to participate in the scattering of these ashes onto the hallowed waters that have for many years received ashes from those who loved these grounds and the tribe but who have left this earthly life and crossed over through the "western gate" of the circle of life into the "Shadow Land" according to the traditional beliefs of the Cherokee.



Above: Stone Bear and Medicine Crow

At the conclusion of the ceremonies and meetings several comments were made that a "good spirit" seemed to preside over all the activities of the weekend and that blessings had been received by those present.

The next major gathering on these grounds will be in October when, among other ceremonies, the Atahoono or "Friends Made" Ceremony will be performed. All members who can see their way clear to do so, are urged to come to these National Tribal Grounds to participate in ceremony and learn more about the traditions and meet new and interesting people.



Above: Jack White Eagle with wife Phylis Usdi Wohali