

[education]

Horses trigger a life memory in students

By Kristen Enevold
Windspeaker Contributor

MORLEY, Alta.

With thundering hooves, majestic, strong bodies and tails whipping in the wind, it's easy to see why Alberta's wild horses would capture anyone's imagination.

But for students living on the Stoney Nation, west of Calgary, it goes deeper than that. They're discovering more about the spiritual significance of wild horses, while working to preserve and honor their habitat.

"There's always that underlying spiritual connection between our people and the horse," said Sykes Powderface, a Chiniki member of the Elders Traditional Knowledge Advisory Committee of the Stoney Nation.

"And when I say spiritual connection, I'm talking simply about understanding nature, understanding the natural senses we rely on. Horses help maintain the balance in the environment."

Powderface is one of many members of the Stoney community working with students on Wild and Free, a project that will see artwork, stories, animations and drawings of wild horses posted on a Web site to be launched in February, 2010.

The site will feature rarely-seen video footage of some of the estimated 50 or-so wild horses in the Ghost Forest area, near the Stoney Nation's Morley townsite. Corleigh Belton, a Stoney Education Authority committee member, said her own experience earlier this year when she saw a wild horse roaming in northwest Alberta, was a gift.

"He had a full mane, a full tail, and his muscular features were just unbelievable. It was a treat. I just stopped and said 'Wow, that is amazing.' And spiritually, I said 'Thank you, grandfather, for giving me this special gift.'"

The experience was in Belton's mind when she became involved in the Wild and Free project. She also feels the link between horses and the environment is an important one.

"In regards to the wild horse, I think this project is the first stepping stone to make the public aware that yes, we do have beautiful, majestic wild horses, and we need to take care of them. Because not only are they beautiful and majestic to look at, they're also great planters and pollinators. Whatever plant they eat, they eat the seeds as well. And whatever burrs are stuck on their mane or tail, they transfer to the next plant, and that starts the whole process of ecology."

Belton, who owns a 1,100-acre horse ranch on Scott Lake Hill, near Morley, said the students she's spoken with have been very interested in the project.

"There's lots of questions they're asking. I told the children about

horses, and the need for us to live side by side together. You have to respect the horse, because if you mistreat it, it's not going to respect you."

Also rewarding to see is the students from Morley Community School and Chief Jacob Bearsaw School having the chance to work with others from Senator Riley High School in High River, and Oilfields High School in Black Diamond on the project.

The students have also been able to ask questions of Stoney Elders and other members of the community, who are working with the Stoney Education Authority and a number of partners, which include the Galileo Educational Network, the Calgary Stampede School, and area ranchers, artists and conservationists. The project itself is funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage's Canada Culture Online initiative.

Duane Mark, a cultural advisor at Morley Community School, agrees students were pleased to share their work recently with a wider audience, including Elders, students and teachers from other schools.

"They were tickled to share their voices, both in the drum songs they've done and in the computer animation pieces they have shared," he said.

Mark believes the project will not only develop deeper knowledge and appreciation for the wild horse, and for horses in general, but it will re-ignite a passion for the animals that has waned over the generations.

"Riding horses and connecting with horses has a true healing effect. Maybe it's a spiritual connection, or perhaps it triggers a life memory that they were part of the horse culture hundreds of years ago. It triggers a memory of a time when it was good. And this horse is much like a messenger, a spirit connecting them with their past and that's why they truly love to ride the horse."

"From a teaching point-of-view, this project is a great way for our students to achieve self-esteem, self confidence and identity in their culture."

Keeping that identity strong goes hand-in hand with protection of the local wild horse population, said Powderface.

"Right now, we have coyotes in the cities, and cougars on the outskirts of town because they've all been driven out of their habitat in the west and out in the mountains, because of the all-terrain vehicle activity. There's so much activity out there, they are driven out, and it's not their natural way. What they feed on is all disturbed too," he said.

"This is what we're trying to bring back for the wild horses, and protecting the wild horses. They're very much a part of the environment. That is what we need to bring to the young people today, how critical the environment is."



PHOTO COURTESY: MAUREEN ENNS STUDIO LTD

Artist and conservationist Maureen Enns has spent the past three years studying wild horses and their habitat in the Ghost Forest, west of Calgary.



PHOTO COURTESY: MAUREEN ENNS STUDIO LTD

There are about 30 wild horses living in the Ghost Forest area. Students from rural areas around Calgary, including those living on the Stoney Nation, are studying wild horses and their habitat. Their research will be included in a Web site to be launched in February, 2010.



Find more of everything online:
www.ammsa.com



AU student
Leigh-anne in
Northern Alberta,
Canada

Take post-secondary courses in your community with Athabasca University.

▪ At Athabasca University, our large selection of courses and programs can be accessed online from almost anywhere in the world. ▪ We're distance education specialists, so we make sure that all our courses have built in flexibility, so you can fit them into your busy life. For AU student Leigh-anne, AU proved to be an ideal solution. ▪ Leigh-anne took some university transfer courses at her home college, and went on to complete her BA in psychology at AU. She's now working towards her master's in psychology at a university in Edmonton. ▪ AU offers over 700 courses and 90 undergraduate and graduate degree, diploma and certificate programs to select from. If you're 16 or older, and are eager to learn, you can study at AU. ▪ Academic choice. Another reason why AU stands out as a global leader in distance learning excellence.

standout • www.athabascau.ca
1-800-768-9041

Athabasca University

THE SILVER MOCCASIN



Original Art by Frank Polson
The Silver Moccasin
NATIVE ARTS & CRAFTS
36 Silver Street • Cobalt, Ontario
705-679-5353
Shop online! www.silvermoccasin.com

ALBERTA MASSAGE TRAINING

STUDY WHILE YOU WORK

30 weeks - 9 weekends of attendance

Classes held at campuses in:
Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray,
Grande Prairie and Lloydminster

Toll Free 1-877-768-8400
www.albertamassagetraining.com
Classes start in January, 2010

Give a gift to remember ...

FISH AND HUNT THE FINEST
WATSON'S
PINE PORTAGE LODGE
"Serving Those Who Love
The Great Outdoors" Since 1946
Toll Free 1-800-363-4443
www.fishthefinest.com

**Aboriginal Student
Access Program (ASAP)**



Are you interested in attending the University of Calgary?

The U of C is offering a new full-time transition year program for Aboriginal students. This program offers additional support services and qualifies for funding from various sources...

We are still accepting applications for the winter 2010. The winter semester starts on January 11, 2010.

For more information, please call Cate Hanington at 403-220-5975 or e-mail chaningt@ucalgary.ca

ucalgary.ca/nativecr

UOEC • THIS IS NOW



**SUCCESSFUL
CAREERS
START IN YOUR
COMMUNITY**

Did you know that NAIT has successfully delivered programs to aboriginal communities in Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories, Nunavut and all parts of Alberta?

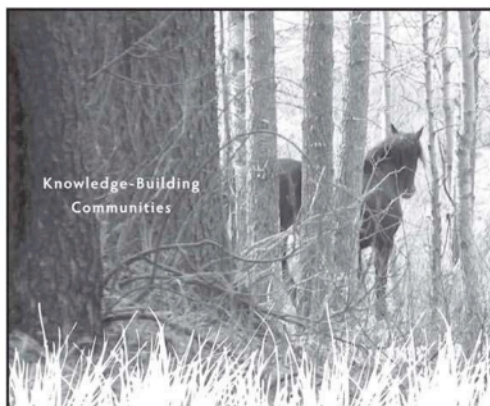
Programs currently being offered in aboriginal communities include:

- Introduction to Trades
- Pre-Technology/Upgrading
- Business/Accounting
- Apprenticeship programs
- Project Management
- Accounting Certificate
- Aboriginal Entrepreneurship
- Computer programs
- And more

For more information contact
PH 780.378.1230
VISIT www.nait.ca/cit



CORPORATE AND
INTERNATIONAL TRAINING



Knowledge-Building
Communities

Galileo Educational Network is a professional learning and research organization based at the University of Calgary. Galileo has collaborated with several First Nation and Metis groups to create 21st Century Aboriginal online resources found at www.galileo.org Look for Wild and Free, Mokaiyoyis, Meyopimatisiwin, Nitsitapiisinni: Exploring Kainai Plants and Culture...



Canadian Patrimoine