

## **"Mary still protects the land."**

Friends and family of the late Dr. Mary Thomas travelled to Wap Creek to visit a memorial that marks where the Ministry of Forests has designated a provincial protected area in her memory.

This area is in the shape of a circle and it's a three kilometre walk all the way around. The area itself is located approximately 23 kilometres in from Highway One.

Sharon Jules led us down the path to where the rocks were positioned. We were soon surrounded by young and old who were there to celebrate Dr. Thomas's memory.

Nils Christiansen was a friend of Dr. Thomas. He met her shortly after he arrived from Oregon in 1992. "Mary was a quiet lady with dancing eyes," he said. "And what astounds me is how, having been taken away from age of five to go to the Residential schools, she became this mixture of love, wisdom, patience, understanding and perseverance," he added.

He feels that she had an impact on those who met her because "she had a vision that was two-fold: that native people could regain their culture and traditions, but, at the same time not have to be in conflict with the whites."

During the formal ceremony, Kukpi7 Wayne Christian echoed those sentiments, saying "Mary was important to the world because she had a great way of talking to people, to influence how they see."

He said that the area where Dr. Thomas' ashes are spread would be a place to come to "in times of sorrow, or feeling alone, or to connect with Mary." Kukpi7 Wayne pledged that in the spring there would be a ceremony to mark this as "sacred ground."

Dr. Thomas' daughter Sharon Jules said that she "didn't expect so much land. It's greatly appreciated." Sharon expressed her happiness that "there are so many things to see when you walk the circle. There are lots of red huckleberries out there."

Though we were deep in the valley, Tammy Thomas received a text message to Sharon from her sister that read: "Mom would be so proud of you. I know I am."

After a visit to the creek, there was lunch and a good fire going.

Driving back to the main road Kukpi7 Judy Wilson reflected back on the "tremendous amount of work that Mary did." And, as Dawn Morrison said, "Mary still protects the land."

