

Norway experience acquainted youth with fellows

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A summer study trip to Norway is the thing that happy memories are made of for many students but for two Alaska Native Students who are attending the Anchorage Community College, their trip last summer was a chance to learn more about other indigenous people of the world - the Samis.

Judith Ramos, 22, and Tom Jimmie, 29, two Tlingit students at ACC were part of a nine-member group of American Native students who travelled to Norway to study at the University of Oslo and to meet and talk with the Sami people - also known as Laplanders.

Their trip is part of an ongoing cultural exchange program conducted each summer for Native American and Native Norwegian students. Last year, a 10-member group of Native Norwegian students visited America and the plans call for another group to visit here next summer.

The annual study excursion is organized by Pat Morris, a teacher at Montana State University and sponsored through a grant in conjunction with the American embassy in Norway.

The students have to pay for their own tickets, but all room and board is paid for by the grant.

Jimmie was selected as part of an original group of eight students and Ramos was added at the last minute when Morris found some extra grant money. Ramos paid for her ticket, however.

"The idea is to promote racial relations with the

Sami," said Jimmie. "We develop communication between the indigenous people. We get together with the Samis to exchange similarities and differences between us."

While in Norway, the exchange students studied what they wanted at the University. Ramos took general courses that will apply to her major area of study, anthropology, and Jimmie studied education, his major area.

In addition to their studies and their visit to the Sami people, the group also helped open the Norweu, a cultural exchange center in Oslo.

The group performed in the center on its opening night and presented samples of Tlingit, Navajo and other Native American dances for the group assembled.

Ramos and Jimmie each had brought a piece of traditional Tlingit attire with them and the other American students made costumes for the event.

Both said their studies were more than supplemented by their contact with the citizens of Norway and their contacts with the Sami people.

Ramos said that none of the nine students was particularly fond of the food given them at the University cafeteria and when they told their Sami friends, they found themselves being invited to private homes for reindeer meat and other food, and discussions of importance to their cultures.

Jimmie said that he spent a great deal of time just wandering and meeting the Sami and discussing their culture with them.

Among topics both students



Judith Ramos and Tom Jimmie perform traditional Tlingit dances for the opening of a Cultural Exchange Center in Oslo, Norway, during their summer stay there.

discussed at great length is the Sami's fight to stop construction of a hydroelectric dam near Alta which, if completed, will flood great areas around a reindeer watering lake and greatly reduce the Sami's traditional reindeer herding routes, said Jimmie.

When work first started on the project, 2,000 Samis blocked the one road to the project and chained themselves together to stop work, said Jimmie.

They are now proceeding through the courts to stop the project on the grounds it will cover the land which is first to thaw in the spring and which provides the first grazing area in the spring to the Sami's herds.

Expansion of the lake also will cut down the migration routes to one small path and will cause the herds to become mixed together as they travel.

The case is to be heard in the Norwegian Supreme Court this fall.

Both students feel their experiences were valuable and both want to visit Norway again.

Jimmie said he feels the most important thing about the trip "was just being in that type of environment. It made us that much more aware of their heritage. But we saw a lot of things in Samiland lacking. A lot of

the relation to the land is being lost. A lot of people don't have the same respect to the land. It opened my eyes to the fact that in Alaska that can be lost too.

"They have their language. It's really strong but here, our people have a strong understanding of the process...of our (traditional) government and laws. Our people are aware of those. It's how we express ourselves, how we talk. We govern by the land. Our language is based on the land. We survive because of the harmony with the land."

Jimmie said the Samis don't have the any special or unique rights with the government as Alaska Natives have. They have no aboriginal standing. They are classed as another group of people but they are governed by four nations - Norway, Finland, Sweden and Russia.