

Members of two Indian bands are occupying disputed land

OWEN SOUND, Ont. (CP) — Members of two local Indian bands have occupied a seven-hectare property in this Bruce Peninsula city to back their claims to the historic land.

The property, known as the South Ordnance Reserve, sits atop cliffs overlooking Owen Sound harbor at the northeast end of the city. It was once intended as the site to guard against attacks by American fleet during the war of 1812.

But the seven-hectare property is now the proposed location for a non-profit housing project and this has spurred the Cape Croker and Saugeen Indian reserves into action, Cape Croker Chief Ralph Akiwenzie said Monday.

Akiwenzie said there are firm indications the housing project is going through and a real estate deal between the federal government and the local housing corporation is imminent.

The two bands met in joint council late last week and decided to authorize an occupation of the disputed territory by band members, he said. A group of members from the Cape Croker reserve arrived in a van Sunday morning and set up a

campsite near the edge of the cliff.

They intend to maintain a fast, and pray until sunset today when they plan to break camp, he said. A drum is inside a traditional lodge the band members built under an apple tree.

As the spirit moves them they beat the drum and sing, another spokesman said.

Frustration over the lack of progress in a long-standing land claim is at the root of the bands' action.

The purpose of the occupation of the land is to draw public attention to the claims and re-assert, both "historically and spiritually" Indian rights of ownership, Akiwenzie said.

The land claim, first launched by the bands about 10 years ago, relates to a treaty drawn up in 1836 which gave the Crown 600,000 hectares of land, roughly corresponding to most of the present territory of Grey and Bruce Counties and extending as far south as Goderich.

The bands claim the treaty is invalid. They say it was not signed by key chiefs.