

# Another Oka crisis brewing if company defiles burial grounds

EDMONTON - Aboriginal leaders warned officials of the planned Cheviot coal mine Thursday they could have another Oka on their hands if the site cuts across ancient burial grounds. "It's a sacred area for our people," said Jean Aquash, wife of Peter O'Chiese, leader of the O'Chiese First Nation. But they don't want to hear anything about the Indians."

An access road to the 23-kilometre, \$250-million mine would cut across the Grave Flats region east of Jasper Park and south of Hinton, connecting the mine site to Highway 40.

Duane Goodstriker, director of the Alberta Treaty Nations Environmental Secretariat, sees parallels between the Grave Flats situation and the events that triggered the 78-day armed standoff at Oka, Que., in 1990. That crisis centered on the town's decision to expand a golf course onto Mohawk burial grounds.

Jean Aquash said the way of life of the O'Chiese people would be

seriously disrupted by the mining project since various ceremonial sites and campgrounds are also located in the Grave Flats area.

An official for Cardinal River, the company that's developing the Cheviot mine, said the burial grounds issue was just the latest attempt by the mine's opponents to throw a roadblock in front of the project. Fred Munn said Cardinal River had gone to great lengths to address aboriginal concerns.

We have walked through the area thoroughly with various native groups - including the O'Chiese band - and they've told us there are no burial grounds either at the mine site or where the access road would be. Burial grounds were not raised as an issue during five weeks of hearings on the mine project conducted by a joint federal-provincial review panel.

The Rocky Mountain Cree at Smallboy Camp and several environmental groups are also taking the company to court, hoping to block the mine project.