

Mishaps, oversights and gaffes sprinkle whistlestop tour

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SASKATOON — Red carpet treatment isn't what it used to be.

Gaffes, mishaps and oversights were sprinkled like Prairie lilies through the Royal Family's weekend tour in Saskatchewan which covered seven communities by whistlestop train, car and airplane.

Often the probocol lapses drew chuckles from the Royal couple themselves, like a last-minute trimming of their red

carpet in Yorkton.

These assured informality in a tour which was a kaleidoscope of prairie colors; blue fields of flak, brilliant green grain elevators, and yellow rape-seed, all unrolling before the Royal couple during 150 miles of train travel.

But Queen Elizabeth seemed definitely not amused by one or two shortcomings, scowling at crowds of well-wishers or staring pointedly into space.

Indians gave the tour organizers their most persistent

headache, both by their presence and their absence.

Good to their word, bands boycotted welcoming ceremonies at Yorkton and the farming community of Balcarres. In Melville, chief Noel Joe Williams of the Sakimay band complained in a written address to the Queen that treaty obligations to provide each chief with a bronze medal of office weren't being met.

"She didn't recognize me as a chief at first because we don't get the badges. And we're supposed to get a new blue suit every three years as well," Williams said later.

Song also rang loud in the weekend events, ranging from boisterous psalms at the congregation of St. John the Baptist Anglican church here to a "silent movie" rendition of 'O Canada' at the Regina city hall Saturday.

Perhaps taking their cue from the mute Transport Minister, Otto Lang, silent Regina Mayor, Henry Baker and quiet premier Allan Blakeney, on the dais, the Regina crowd failed to sing 'O Canada' and only croaked a dispirited version of 'God Save the Queen'.

Later, a state concert closed with a song medley including the 'On Roughriders' ditty for the local football team.

In Yorkton, however, a Minneapolis crooner Frankie Bush, filled time before the Queen's delayed arrival with an amplified 'The Impossible Dream' and jokes about being shot by RCMP security if he

didn't vacate the stage in time.

Instead, the security forces held up a bus carrying civic officials and the brand new red ceremonial carpet. City workers Bill Ramonyshyn and Mel Burrill had to roll out the carpet under the twinkling eyes of the Royal Couple and hack off a twelve foot overlap with a knife.

Although not oppressive, security was everywhere evident, with plainclothes mounties spotted throughout crowds and atop overlooking roofs. Two armed RCMP officers stood at the open box-car door on the moving Royal train and a special Canadian National truck on steel wheels ran over each section of railway track an hour before the Royal train.

CN's attentiveness didn't extend, unfortunately, to the portable steps for the rear of the Royal car which Prince Philip moved into place himself once.

But the Mounties didn't have many worries about protestors. A solitary placard bearer at the airport here Sunday demanded "Abolish The Monarchy" on a banner, counterbalancing the flash card "Monarchy Unites Us" display when the Queen departed from Regina's train station Saturday.

Such subdued affection was the hallmark of the Queen's reception in the Saskatchewan communities, most using her visit to highlight their anniversaries.