

## THE AMANDA TRAIL STORY

By Joanne Kittel

The Amanda Trail is a 25-year endeavor that created ripples throughout the Yachats Community. The Trail built greater awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the history of the local Original People and led to a commitment to preserve that history, including archaeological site preservation.

In 1984, Loyd Collett was a Siuslaw National Forest (SNF) employee and in charge of the Cape Perpetua Scenic Area. A builder of a number of miles of trail in Cape Perpetua, Amanda was the last trail he had planned for the Scenic Area. Loyd placed it on their 5-year trail construction plan and continued on to do a feasibility check and preliminary route location. He had first completed several other trails in the scenic area including the leg of the Oregon Coast Trail going south from the Visitor Center, through a portion of Neptune State Park and on to Cummings Creek. He needed a trail down the north face of Cape Perpetua to complete the Oregon State Trail route all the way through the Scenic Area; that was SNF's agreement with Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD). The OPRD trails coordinator, Pete Bond, walked and approved his proposed location, which was a change from the original state plan, and Loyd agreed to make it happen. Several months later, he attended a workshop conducted by renowned historian Stephen Dow Beckham. That prompted him to read the book, *Indians of Western Oregon: This land Was theirs* (1977) by Beckham. He learned of the Amanda Story. He was so deeply moved by it that he named the proposed trail Amanda.

However, the trail was not built. Constructing a trail down the north side of Cape Perpetua was put on the shelf because the north termination of the trail would lead hikers down to Highway 101 at a dangerous curve without a safety lane.

In 1986, Joanne and Norman Kittel bought the 27+ acres adjacent to the north side of the Cape. Part of their stewardship was to embark on three projects: build the Oregon Coast Trail through their property; learn local Indigenous history; and create a conservation easement. They never imagined these three projects becoming intertwined and having the impact that their completion created.

While still living in Minnesota, the Kittels began their journey through the bureaucratic maze regarding having the trail built. It took a number of phone calls and visits to find out that the contact would be OPRD. By that time, SNF,

strapped for funds and understaffed (and they still are), was no longer interested in building that trail. Barriers abounded despite the Kittels' willingness to donate a permanent easement; that meant that no OPRD funds and staff were needed to build the trail. One by one, the Kittels figured out alternatives and convinced the SNF of the project's worthiness.

The Kittels were curious about the name Amanda. Was it a staff member's name or relative? While visiting Yachats in 1987, Joanne found Beckham's book in the Yachats library and read it. She too found the Amanda story and wondered...is this proposed trail named after her and in remembrance of the atrocities that occurred at the Alsea Sub-agency located in this area from 1860-1875 and beyond? The following year, Joanne's suspicion was confirmed, but no one presently working at the Cape remembered who named it. On the same trip, Joanne discovered an information sign at the Yachats Cemetery about the Alsea Sub-agency that gave an entirely different story; literally that the Alsea Sub-agency was an idyllic community. Not until the Kittels built their home and moved to Yachats in 1993 did Joanne and a new friend, Suzanne Curtis, embark on a research quest to discover the truth.

The Amanda trail project was restarted in 1987, but it took until 1997 to complete the 2.6 mile trail from the top of Cape Perpetua through the Kittel property. Angell Job Corps students built the trail down Cape Perpetua land. When Pete Bond could not find volunteers to build the half mile across the Kittel property, Joanne found volunteers from Yachats to join her; together they built the trail over the next several months. The original Amanda Bridge was built on Labor Day weekend with OPRD staff, including Pete, SNF staff, Job Corps students, Kittels and friends, all volunteering. They built the bridge in three days and with zero dollars. Dedication occurred in April 1998. Over 120 people attended; it was the largest attendance in OPRD history.

From 1993-1996, Joanne and Suzanne gathered information from prior research that has been done from the late 1800's to the near present on the local Indigenous people who lived in the area for thousands of years and what has come to be known at the prison camp years. Through the information-gathering process, they discovered the probable origins of the Yachats name. This was no longer a personal journey but one that became a very carefully conducted project under the supervision of Robert Kentta, Cultural Resources Director and Tribal Council member with the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Don Whereat, the first Historian for the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw

Indians, and Phyllis Steeves, an Archaeologist and Tribal Liaison with SNF. They all generously gave of their time; and Joanne and Suzanne went on to write an article that spoke the historical truth. The article was distributed throughout Yachats in 1996. Their promise to both Tribes was that copies would be given away or sold at cost. (That promise has been kept to present.) The article was met with mixed reactions from locals. Most were positive. Locals were thankful for this important information. Some were critical since it challenged some of their beliefs, values, and sense of entitlement.

Instead of the article and its information going away, upon the opening of the Amanda Trail and the telling of the story at the dedication, distribution of the article grew. In 2005, it was placed on a website. Hundreds of people have read it. The article was revised in 2010, adding more relevant information that had been gathered. The same three supervisors stepped forward to again help and assure that the new information was accurate. Additionally, Patti Whereat Phillips, Linguist with the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, helped and contributed greatly to the article.

One of the attendees at the '98 dedication was George Copage. He was deeply moved by the Amanda story and the genocide committed against the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Alsea Indians during their imprisonment. A few years later he was gifted with a magnificent statue created by a local artist, Sy Meadow. George called the statue Amanda. He thought the statue belonged to the trail and donated it in 2003. When that statue was discovered, the population of hikers on the Amanda Trail exploded and more people were drawn to read the article.

As the trail was being built on the Kittel property, archaeological sites were discovered, prompting the Kittels to contact Phyllis Steeves and the State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO). Those sites are now numbered. But that is not good enough. Yes, there are state and federal laws protecting sites, but enforcement is almost impossible, and the fines are minor when violations are discovered and prosecuted. The Kittels wanted to create a conservation easement to protect not only the green space and wildlife (preventing clear-cutting, hunting, and subdivision), but also to add another layer of protection for the archaeological sites. Even that proved difficult. Oregon was one of the last States to have a conservation easement statute. When the original statute was instituted, creating a conservation easement on land that was previously used for tree farming, as was the Kittels, meant that property taxes would go up substantially because the taxes had been collected when the trees were

harvested (severance tax). An additional statute was finally created that allowed forest lands and agricultural farms to roll part or all of their property into conservation easements without tax penalties and increases. The Kittels got their conservation easement. As far as SHPO knows, the Kittels are the first to have archaeological site protection included in a conservation easement in the State of Oregon.

But the Amanda Trail was not done. Its north termination was at the end of the Kittel property and right back on highway for hikers to traverse at their own risk. Despite Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and OPRD wanting the connection to the town of Yachats, they thought it could not be done. Most of the property owners along that route were unwilling to give easements. After Joanne witnessed a woman almost killed by a vehicle while trying to access the Amanda Trail, she pleaded with the newly formed Yachats Trails Committee to help problem-solve this safety risk. New residents of Yachats, Jerry Sand, landscape architect, and Kathleen Sand, school teacher, and both avid environmentalists, took a look at the ODOT easement. Jerry found a solution. OPRD and ODOT listened and agreed. The City of Yachats and its business community began to acknowledge the value of trails not only for recreational and aesthetic purposes but for economic development as well. For the first time, the City of Yachats wrote a grant application and gave the matching funds for a project that existed mostly outside of city limits.

While researching and writing an application to nominate the Giant Spruce Tree of Cape Perpetua to become an Oregon Heritage Tree in 2006, Joanne and Sally Lockyear interviewed retired SNF staff who worked at Cape Perpetua. One of them was Loyd Collet. During the course of the interview, Loyd told Joanne and Sally about his naming the Amanda Trail. The mystery of who named the Trail was solved.<sup>1</sup>

The Amanda Trail, conceived of 25 years earlier, was completed in 2009. A second dedication took place in July of that year. Close to 200 local people and at least 30 Tribal members came. It was an emotional event as the public greeted Tribal

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<sup>1</sup> In the course of the research, a significant archaeological site was rediscovered near the Amanda Trail – a site thought to been destroyed. It is now re-numbered and protected by neighbors. The Giant Spruce was awarded the distinction of Oregon Heritage Tree in 2006. A celebration attended by over 150 occurred in Yachats in 2007 in conjunction with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Siuslaw National Forest.

members and told them how sorry they were for the genocide of their People at the Alsea Sub-agency. There was lovely Native American flute music and moving speeches.

The original Amanda Bridge was failing. Built with zero dollars, it was meant to only last for ten years. By its fourteenth season, it was seriously faltering and needed to be replaced. In partnership with a local conservation non-profit, View the Future, a grant application was written and granted. In 2011, a 62 foot continuous span fiberglass bridge was built. Matching money came from View the Future, City of Yachats, private individuals, and the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Tribes. State Park staff, Angell Job Corps students, and Tribal members worked alongside local Yachadians, all volunteers, dismantling the old bridge and building the new. A dedication occurred with Tribal participation. The song, *Amanda*, composed by the Tribes' flutist, Doc Slyter, was introduced.

Initiated by Lauralee Svendsgaard, a previous Yachats Trails Chair, Yachats hosts the Peace Hike on New Years' Day. It is a 5.5 mile round-trip hike from the Yachats Commons to the Amanda Bridge and statue where Native American flute music is played and the Amanda Story is told. The ceremony takes place in the grotto on the Amanda Creek in front of the Amanda statue. Many Tribal members attend.

The relationship between Yachats and the Tribes has grown since. Amanda is a testament to helping First Nations Peoples transcend historical trauma.<sup>2</sup> It has inspired and united the Yachats community. Knowing, understanding, and appreciating our local First Nations' history by our local community and the public at large have helped heal the wounds bringing reconciliation and collaboration to a previously divided people.

And the truth about the history of the Original People of this area endures. The Amanda Trail is a solemn and spiritual path that remembers in perpetuity.

On December 19, 2015, a massive mudslide, estimated to be between 45-50 million tons and traveling at about 30-40 miles an hour, obliterated the Amanda Creek, the new Amanda Bridge, over 400 conifers, and our beloved Amanda

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Braveheart, PhD. "Historical Trauma is the cumulative and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group genocide." [www.historicaltrauma.com](http://www.historicaltrauma.com)

Statue, finally stopping at Highway 101. The mudslide originated from a 2003 clear cut 1.5 miles to the east and 800 feet above the bridge's location. Horrible. The Amanda Trail was closed immediately for an indeterminate time.

A miracle was about to reveal itself only two weeks later. The New Year's Day Peace Hike described above needed to be rerouted to the Ya'Xaik Trail to the north (named after the only known name of a southern Alsea Village that existed in the Yachats for thousands of years). During the Peace Hike, four massive conifer trees fell on the Kittel driveway, at the exact time when hikers would have been on that driveway waiting for the Peace Hike ceremony to begin if the slide had not closed the Amanda Trail grotto. Joanne and others know that Amanda sacrificed her new bridge that symbolized bridging cultures and all the many trees to save our lives.

And again, they came. Seventy-eight people rebuilt that section of the trail in five weeks after it was safe to reenter the area. Our collaborative friends with State Parks, Federal Forest Service, Yachats Trails, Urban Forestry Program of the Angell Job Corps, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, County Jail Crew, and more worked many hours to re-open the Amanda by Memorial Day weekend. We created a new gathering area. Joanne knew there were three Amanda statues created in 1999. She contacted the owners, Beth Cook and Joan Wikler to ask if they would consider selling one to her. No, they refused to sell her one because those generous souls chose to donate one of theirs for the Amanda Trail. So Amanda stands again and, this time, facing her homeland.

The Amanda Trail and, more recently, the Ya'Xaik Trail were built on a foundation of truth, building trust across cultures. As such, no person-made or natural disaster will ever obliterate them. They will endure, bringing joy and grace to all who walk their paths.