

## THE STORY OF THE YA'XAIK TRAIL - TRAIL OF DREAMS

*By Joanne Kittel*

The story of the Ya'Xaik (YAH-khik, gargled H) Trail began many years ago as a vision of Jim and Janice Gerdemann who owned and developed the Gerdemann Botanical Preserve (GBP), a spectacular 3.5-acre garden, even before I met Jim and Janice in 1990. The Kittels and Gerdemanns were bound by mutual dreams, creating public trails through their respective properties. At that time, my husband, Norman, and I were working with Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) and the Siuslaw National Forest (SNF) on building the Amanda Trail through their property and down the north face Cape Perpetua, a thought-to-be impossible project put on the back-burner years before. The Gerdemanns had been part of what is known as the *804 Ten* (ten local residents) who initiated the fight to save that section of old county road for a public trail. It took a 10-year fight to the Oregon State Supreme Court, but they won in 1990 with the help of Lincoln County and the Thousand Friends of Oregon; hence exists the 804 N Trail today that countless people enjoy.

Jim and Janice's dream was to have a public trail through their garden; a one-of-a-kind pristine garden filled with native, exotic, and Jim's own creations of flora that excelled anything on the coast or in the northwest. That garden grew to 3.5 acres as the Gerdemanns bought adjoining lots. But it had no known trail access to the west except county roads and many private landowners, and no access to the east and south since that was SNF land. In 1990, Joanne had the privilege of meeting the Gerdemanns and had her first of countless tours of their magnificent garden. Over tea and cookies, we toasted our mutual commitment to help each other build our respective trails of dreams.

In 2007, the new Yachats Trails Committee under the direction of Andrea Scharf organized a subcommittee to make the GBP trail and its connections a reality. Additional members then were Don Niskanen, Greg Scott, Elk Mountain Properties, LLC (Layne Morrill and Mark Doyle, who already gave permission for their property, called *Fisterra*, to have a public trail built through it,) and me. This subcommittee formally asked the SNF to consider a placement of 422 yards of trail through SNF property to connect between the GBP and the proposed *Fisterra* development, total of 740 yards of new trail. After careful consideration, SNF said no citing a number of reasons.

Janice and Jim never gave up, even trying to get the support of OPRD who cited the barriers of where and how the trail would safely connect. As Jim's health grew fragile, friends worried what would happen to the GBP.

Jerry and Kathleen Sand were introduced to the GBP in 2007. They helped Jim and Janice with various projects like mapping the garden. With the extraordinary help of two more dedicated Yachadians, Nan and Greg Scott, and with the Gerdemann's blessing, Jerry and Kathleen bought the GBP in 2008, and began working on keeping the garden vibrant and beautiful.

Jim died, but not his trail of dreams. Janice and the Sands saw to that as did the Yachats Trails Committee and View the Future.

View the Future, a local nonprofit committed to preservation of natural and scenic areas and supporting recreational value, stepped in and helped the Sands with obtaining a conservation easement and became the legal holder of the conservation and the proposed public trail on the GBP. The Lincoln County Land Legacy Program provided the funds to pay the costs to secure the conservation easement and public trail in perpetuity.

Sands, with volunteer help, built the public trail across the entire length of their property anyway. *You build it, they will come.* And by golly they did! The local and bordering property owners to the west were absolutely amazing. Drew Roslund, owner of the Overleaf Resort, said, absolutely. He would bequeath

a public trail from 804 N Trail that the Overleaf borders to the west through the Overleaf property and east to Highway 101. He built it at his own expense. The owner Steve Dennis of Earthworks Gallery on the east side of Highway 101 was approached and loved the idea. He along with Robin Mathews, who at the time owned Touchstone Gallery to the immediate south and had a small residential lot/home behind Earthworks and bordering the west end of the GBP and the proposed trail, created an irrevocable trail easement at their own expense connecting their properties to the west end of the GBP. And all those segments were built except for the 422 yards of federal forest service property!

Yachats Trails Committee now under the direction of the very experienced Lauralee Svendsgaard, member of the Yachats Parks and Commons Commission, along with the City Council and Mayor Ron Brean, endorsed resurrecting this project and re-constituted the original sub-committee. The subcommittee met again, in fall, 2010, including all the original committee members and new ones. That included Sands, Svendsgaard, Brean, and Phyllis Steeves, recently retired Archaeologist and Tribal Liaison with the SNF. This sub-committee met with the SNF again in January 2011. City of Yachats, knowing how important the proposed trail was to the City's recreational value and economic development, committed \$10,000 to the project and was willing to hold the liability on the trail. View the Future submitted and was awarded a \$3000 grant from the Oregon Parks Foundation Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation for its construction.

With SNF's renewed interest and requirements, permit application to the SNF was submitted in April 2011. In September of 2012 the permit was given. Construction of 740 yards of trail began on the SNF and Fistera properties on September 27, 2012. Angell Job Corps' Urban Forestry Program students and instructors came out 9 times to conduct trail building as did the all-volunteer Yachats Trails Crew. The Urban Forestry students and Trails Crew worked in excess of over 670 hours to build the new trail.

The Ya'Xaik Trail is spectacular – 1.15-mile loop that goes from the 804 N Trail on the Pacific Ocean through pristine garden, magnificent forest, and back to the ocean. (The Yachats Comprehensive Trails Plan calls for the SNF portion of this trail to continue south on the east ridge to downtown and connect to the 804 S along the Yachats River and Bay. Yachats Trails Committee is working on the plan and access options.)

*Ya'Xaik* is in the Alsea language. The Alsea People were a band of coastal Indians who called this area their home for thousands of years. *Ya'Xaik* is the only recorded name of an Alsea Village located in the Yachats area. Robert Kentta, Cultural Resources Director and Tribal Council member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians gave permission to use the name for this trail.

None of this would have been possible without the SNF. SNF is strapped for staff time and money but saw the value in this trail for so many, forever. Additionally, 5 private property owners (Drew Roslund, Steve Dennis, Robin Mathews, Layne and Liz Morrill, and Jerry and Kathleen Sand) came forward from the get-go and donated irrevocable trail easements to make this trail a reality.

The Ya'Xaik Trail dedication occurred on National Trails Day, 2013, 23 years after Janice, Jim and I toasted to our commitment to help each other build our public trails through our respective properties; and 6 years, 2 weeks, and 2 days after we started a concerted effort to make the Ya'Xaik and Gerdemann Public Trail a reality. Over 150 people attended the dedication, including both our State Senator and Representative, County Commissioner, OPRD and SNF officials. All The all the landowners who generously gave easements were present. Even though Jim Gerdemann had passed away, Janice was there. Despite her fragile health, she walked the trail. The special guest speaker was Robert Kentta, who stated that with the recognition of his ancestors by the naming of two significant trails, namely Amanda and Ya'Xaik, he and his fellow tribal members feel welcome in Yachats. Since then, and under tribal supervision, seven interpretive signs have been erected on these two trails depicting our local First

Nation history. Janice visited her beloved garden and trail a number of times till her passing away in August 2020 at the age of 95.

Jim and Janice, wherever you are, your trail of dreams has come true. The 804 N you both saved is now connected to your lovely garden and beyond. Bless you both for your vision on behalf of all of us and for our future generations!