

THE STORY OF THE YA'XAIK TRAIL

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, the couple who purchased and developed the spectacular 3.5 acre Gerdemann Botanical Preserve (GBP) in 1981. The Kittels, Norman and Joanne, met the Gerdemanns in 1990. The two couples were bound by their mutual dreams of creating public trails through their respective properties. At the time, Norman and Joanne were working with Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) and the Siuslaw National Forest (SNF) on building the Amanda Trail through their property and continuing on down the north face of Cape Perpetua. It was thought to be an impossible project that had been 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 a section of old OPRD county road for a public trail. It took a 10-year fight in 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 North Trail today that countless people enjoy.*

Jim and Janice's dream was to have a public trail through their preserve; GBP is a one of a kind pristine garden filled with native and exotic plants as well as Jim's own flora creations. It exceeds anything else on the coast or in the northwest. But the preserve had no trail access to the west except on county roads and across privately-owned land, and it had no access to the east and south since that was land owned by SNF.

In 2007, the new Yachats Trails Committee, under the leadership of Andrea Scharf, organized a subcommittee to make the GBP trail and its connections a reality. Additional members were Don Niskanen, Greg Scott, Elk Mountain Properties, LLC (Layne Morrill and Mark Doyle, who had already given permission for their property, Fisterra, to have a

public trail built through it), and Joanne Kittel. 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, for a 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 deteriorated, friends were concerned about what would happen to the GBP if he were no longer around.

Jerry and Kathleen Sand were introduced to the GBP in 2007. They helped Jim and Janice with various projects. Jerry, a professional landscape architect, also created a detailed map of 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 in 2008, but not his dream. His widow Janice and the Sands saw to that as did the Yachats Trails Committee and View the Future.

View the Future is a local nonprofit organization committed to the preservation of natural and scenic areas and to supporting the recreational use of these areas. They stepped in to help the Sands obtain a conservation easement for GBP. View the Future became the legal holder of both 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.

The Sands, with volunteer help, built the public trail across the entire length of their property. *You build it, they will come.* And by golly they did! The property owners bordering the west side were amazingly helpful. Drew Roslund, owner of the Overleaf Resort, said, absolutely,

he would bequeath a public trail from the 804 N. Trail through the Overleaf property and east to Highway 101. He proceeded to build the trail at his own expense. Owner Steve Dennis of Earthworks Gallery on the east side of Highway 101 was approached and loved the idea. He and Robin Mathews, owner of Touchstone Gallery at the time, a property immediately south of Earthworks, had a small residential lot/home behind Earthworks. Together, they created an irrevocable trail easement at their own expense that connected their properties to the west end of the GBP. And all those segments were built!

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

With SNF's renewed interest and requirements, a permit application was submitted to the SNF in April 2011. In September 2012, the permit was granted. Construction of 740 yards of trail began on the SNF and Fisterra properties on September 27, 2012. Angell Job Corps' Urban Forestry Program students and instructors came out nine times to conduct the trail building as did the all-volunteer Yachats Trails Crew. The Urban Forestry students and Trails Crew have worked in excess of 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 gardens, 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 804 S. along the Yachats River and Bay. Yachats Trails Committee is currently 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 has limited staff time and money, but they saw the value in this trail for so many, forever. Additionally, five private property owners came forward from the get-go and donated trail easements to make this trail a reality.

Jim, wherever you are, and Janice, your dream has come true. The 804 N. you have 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!