

## YACHATS TRAILS HISTORY

May 2020

In the last decade, Yachats has had a growing reputation of being one of the top trail towns in the State of Oregon and beyond. Written up in local, national and now, international publications, our trails are attracting visitors from far and wide and are a primary attraction for people wanting to make Yachats their home. This is the first documentation of the history of the Yachats trails and some of the key people involved. Before 1990, there were no trails in Yachats, nor was there an impetus to have them. The City of Yachats at that time saw no value in trails. If people wanted to find trails, they would go to Cape Perpetua Regional Scenic Area, part of the Siuslaw National Forest (SNF), or one of the State Parks.

### **The 804 North Trail**

All of that changed when the 804 North opened up in 1990. A small group of retirees led a battle to build a trail in the location of pioneer county road 804 that was never legally vacated following the construction of highway 101. This resulted in a many-year endeavor to reestablish the road as a public trail resulting in a conflict that ultimately was resolved by the Oregon Supreme Court. Only one of those initial ten retirees, Janice Gerdemann, is still alive at the time this document is written. (See details in a chapter of Connie Soper's book, *Exploring the Oregon Coast Trail* (2019), reprinted with her permission; and/or under the 804 Trail in the Yachats City website <https://www.yachatsoregon.org/289/804-Trail> ).

### **The Amanda Trail**

In 1988 just prior to the 804 Trail opening, Norman and Joanne Kittel had bought a piece of property on Highway 101 just south of Yachats and thought it would be great to have the Oregon Coast Trail pass through it to connect Cape Perpetua to the town. At that time the city was not interested in trails, not comprehending how that could support tourism. So, with no city support forthcoming, Oregon Parks and Recreation Dept (OPRD) took the lead with the Kittels to work with the Siuslaw National Forest to build a 2.7-mile trail from the top of Cape Perpetua to the north end of the Kittel property. Completion of the trail took 10 years, and the hard work of a large group of mostly dedicated volunteers and Angell Job Corps who built it with zero dollars. That 2.7-mile section was opened in 1998 with the biggest dedication in OPRD history. The Kittels insisted that the trail kept the name "Amanda" that was originally proposed by a federal forest employee, to depict the true and very sad story about our local First Nation history. (See details as how the Amanda Trail was built including another 15 years to get it connected to the City under "Amanda Trail" in the Yachats City website under "Trails" <https://www.yachatsoregon.org/290/Amanda-Trail> . Also included is an article about our local First Nation history written under Tribal supervision.)

The interest in trails including the Amanda trail waned for years, with not much use. OPRD kept up the 804 North Trail. Joanne Kittel kept up 2.7 miles of the Amanda Trail with occasional help from volunteers. Around 2003, a statue depicting Amanda was dedicated along the Amanda Trail, and by word of mouth people started to come. By 2005, new personnel at the SNF did

their part to maintain the federal side of the Amanda Trail as the public interest was growing and demanded its use.

By the mid-2000's there were several individuals who were extremely supportive to the early development of trails in Yachats. One was Lee Corbin, who became the Mayor of Yachats, and two businesspeople, Linda Hetzler who bought and developed the Drift Inn and Drew Roslund of the Fireside and Overleaf Resorts. The Chamber of Commerce also began to recognize the value of trails to tourism and got on board. Mayor Corbin was instrumental in the mediation to get the 804 South Trail dispute resolved and trail built. He also was also responsible for having the Oregon Dept. of Transportation (ODOT) move Highway 101 over by about 6 feet to allow safer walking and bike passage between Ocean View Drive and the bridge over the Yachats River. When his four-year term was up, the Yachats City Council created a position called, "Trails Czar" which Lee was appointed to continue his trail development. In 2006, he created a small ad-hoc group of individuals who were going to develop more trails in and around Yachats. Jerry and Kathleen Sand, Andrea Scharf, and eventually a newcomer (and future Mayor) by the name of Ron Brean joined. Their next project was the Prospect Trail that traversed from East 2<sup>nd</sup> St. to Radar Road; not an easy task given the bottom section was an old road that was overgrown and covered up and the middle section was a numbered shell midden. But again, with careful ingenuity it was completed. Despite its demise caused by a blow out with a city water pipe, it was rebuilt. Prospect Park is now a sight to behold, thanks to the leadership and generous efforts of Craig Berdie and Sharon Christensen and continued support of the Yachats Trail Crew. (See details as to how the Prospect came into being, elsewhere in this document and also in the City website under Trails <https://www.yachatsoregon.org/294/Prospect-Trail-Garden> .)

This little informal group took on some remarkable trail projects in addition to the Prospect Trail. That will be covered a bit later, but first more on a parallel endeavor.

In 2005, when Yachats resident Leslie Carter found out Joanne Kittel was taking care of the Amanda Trail for years by herself, she was incensed. Leslie created the first Trails crew to help maintain the Amanda trail. That little crew was made up of Leslie, Joanne, Nancy McCarty, Greg and Nan Scott, Jerry and Kathleen Sand, and Don Niskanen. Betty Bahn provided botanical advice as she had done during the construction of the Amanda and Prospect Trails. Several times a year this group would maintain the portion of the Amanda Trail on the Kittel property. OPRD was grateful and provided materials. That little group morphed into a larger group which took on building the Prospect Trail.

### **The Yachats Trail Committee**

In 2009, Greg Scott, then City Council member, realized how important these trails were to the welfare of our little community, and to the town's economic development. He convinced the Council to include trails officially under the auspices of the City of Yachats and its Parks & Commons Commission with the formation of a Trails Committee with a small budget. A Trails Committee chairperson, Lauralee Svensgaard was appointed, whose had a wealth of trail building experience. Lauralee helped the Committee develop a mission statement, a trails logo,

assigned trail leaders, and eventually bought tools and vests, etc. (Interesting aside: The Trails Committee logo ultimately became the official city logo.) Inter-governmental agreements were formed with the SNF, ODOT and SNF to maintain trails in and around Yachats on their properties. Linda Hetzler, always true to her word, supported all the trail crew members with free appetizers and drinks at the Drift Inn after each work session. An invasive weed focus was incorporated into the Trails Committee. Events were developed in collaboration with SNF, OPRD and the local Tribes including annual National Trails Days, New Year Day Peace Hikes; 804 North Ivy Pulls, the latter sponsored by the Overleaf / Fireside Resorts. Additionally, the Trails crew has picnics and holiday parties. Twice a month then and now, and sometimes more often, the Trails crew is out building, rehabbing and maintaining our trail system.

### **The Prospect Garden and Trail**

In 2006, residents of Yachats initiated a plan to develop a trail through city property, an area overrun by blackberry, English ivy, morning glory and every weed known to Yachats. Armed with a trail plan drawn by local landscape architect, Jerry Sands, then owner of Gerdemann Botanical Preserve and with an archeological assessment, approval was given by the City.

In 2007, an intrepid group of Yachats' volunteers and youth from Angel Job Corps attacked and cleared a few feet on either side of an ad-hoc path through an eyesore of a road easement to establish a Yachats trail. Native plants were introduced. In 2009 a broken water main, broke and washed out the trail and garden between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets.

In 2010, Leslie Carter, a long-term resident, tireless community volunteer and frequent walker of this Yachats trail passed away. Her neighbors organized the placement a memorial bench, the delightful structure that residents and visitors alike, enjoy as they look out toward our amazing landscape. Further memorials have followed a way to remember and celebrate our community of Yachatians.

In 2010-12, a group led by Yachats Trails Committee leader, Lauralee Svendsgaard worked to create a demonstration garden of native plants. Thanks to the dedication of many Yachats citizens, this area became a garden. However, it takes persistence and constant care to maintain a garden in our luscious climate. By 2014, despite efforts of the Yachats Trails crew, the garden was overrun by weeds. In a third iteration, the Trails team again cleared the area and replaced a few plants. About this time, the trail became part of the Yachats tsunami evacuation system.

Without constant maintenance, though, the garden was again totally overrun. In 2016, Craig Berdie and Sharon Christensen volunteered to provide the required on-going weeding. Once again, the trails crew came in and did a macro-clearing. The couple expanded the garden on both the south and east ends to encompass the whole lot.

The focus was still to use primarily native plants as the non-native plantings often did not flourish or in some cases became invasive. More importantly, native plantings provide an opportunity to help restore the area to the original habitat known to the Indigenous peoples.

Native plants are adapted to our wet winters and very dry summers. Native plants also provide habitat for the native bees and mammals.

Over 300 native plants have been installed since 2016. Most were donated by Yachatsians and the Trails Committee. The volunteer efforts of the locals keep the garden weed free (almost). The Yachats Trails crew regularly has work sessions to maintain the path, install wood chips and help with weeding. It truly takes the village to create and maintain this place. A place to take a deep breath and enjoy some peace.

### **The YaXaik Trail**

Jim and Janice Gerdemann who developed the Gerdemann Botanical Preserve <https://www.yachatsoregon.org/292/Gerdemann-Botanic-Preserve-Public-Footpath> had a dream of having a public trail that would traverse their Preserve. The Gerdemanns were part of the original 10 retirees that developed the 804 North Trail. The task of a trail traversing the Preserve seemed impossible due to the area being land-locked between private properties and the SNF. In 2006, Lee Corbin's ad-hoc trails group now under the auspices of Andrea Scharf figured out how this might happen. Unfortunately, even with support of several staff of SNF and permission from all 5 property owners to have that trail come through their respective properties, one high ranking SNF staff nixed the project. The group continued to work toward their goal and eventually the SNF agreed, and the trail was built and completed in 2013 with a huge celebration. This Trail, the "Ya'Xaik," is named after the only known name of a southern Alesia village in our area that existed for 6000 years or more. (See details about creation of the Ya'Xaik Trail in the City website under Ya'Xaik Trail <https://www.yachatsoregon.org/298/YaXaik-Trail> .)

### **Connecting the Amanda Trail**

The Amanda Trail south of town was not connected to the city despite efforts to convince ODOT that it could be done. Joanne Kittel asked for help from the ad-hoc trails group. Jerry Sand, landscape architect, conducted a survey and drew an accurate plan that convinced ODOT to go ahead with the 1/3 mile of new trail. The City with a much more supportive and appreciative City Council approved writing a grant and funding the matching money to construct this trail section. In 2009, 175 people came to the dedication. It was the first time Tribal members came to honor Amanda, the Trail, and acknowledge the community's awareness and appreciation of our local First Nation history. They have returned for the dedication of the Ya'Xaik Trail and have come many times after for local events.

### **Yachats Wetlands and Boardwalk**

The trails and boardwalk in the Yachats Commons are recent too. If you were here 20 years ago, that area was a mud pit full of garbage and dominated by ivy and blackberry. Practically, impenetrable, the only path was made by animals and used by the homeless for a temporary shelter and for drug deals to take place. It was a dream of Jerry Kraft, former City Council member and retired entomologist, to restore the wetlands to its glorious former self. (It had been filled in many years before when the Commons was a grammar school because of the fear children would drown in it.) Jerry also was one of the small volunteer group who did a 10-year

study on the water quality of the Yachats River. Jerry did not live to see his dream come true. In his honor, in 2001 his wife, Cheryl, and close friends, Betty Bahn, David Schlesinger, and Don Niskanen took up the cause with the help of Lee and Laila Corbin, Larry Lewis, city planner and others to restore the wetlands. Years of writing grant applications and getting permits were needed before construction could even begin in 2003. By 2006 after planting with native vegetation, there was a grand celebration. More has been constructed and restored since that time from the playground, tree house, and pavilion to the skate park. Wetlands will always be our gem in the middle of the City! (See details about the rehabilitation of the Wetlands in the City Website under Trails <https://www.yachatsoregon.org/296/Yachats-Community-Park-Wetlands> ).

View the Future (VtF) became another partner organization to our local trails. VtF is a local 501©(3) with an all-volunteer board; its mission is land and cultural preservation and promoting nonmotorized recreation in the greater Yachats area. It has raised over \$110,000 via grants and donations for our local trails and trail signage since 2006.

### **The 804 South Trail and future goals**

And there is more..... the 804 South trail from Aquavista Loop through the Yachats State Park to Highway 101 is in the process of a major rehabilitation and will be transferred from the County ownership to the City. Another future dream is to one day have a ridge trail above Horizon Hill to connect King Street to the Ya'Xaik Trail and the Starr Creek Trail system. In the coming year plans are in place for construction of a 145-foot long suspension bridge built over the Amanda Creek.

The Yachats Trails crew of 50 or more enthusiastically grows with continued financial support from the City of Yachats. Our collaboration with SNF and OPRD is enduring as is the support of the local business community. View the Future remains a financial arm always willing to help.

The common denominator in all of these local trail stories are the wonderful collaborations among so many governmental and tribal agencies, organizations, and the hundreds of generous citizens who have volunteered their time and competent efforts to make these trails possible.

This story of our local trails is incomplete as it should be. It will be added to as years go on by new trail leaders with new visions.

Written by Joanne Kittel