

Amanda's Trail of Sorrow

Indians ran away from the Coast Reservation on a regular basis, longing for their home and fleeing starvation and abuse by Indian Agents. The military was called upon to round up these run-away Indians and return them to the reservation. Lieutenant Louis Herzer of Company D, Fourth California Infantry, led a detachment to Coos Bay in the spring of 1864 to retrieve runaways.

Sub-Agent Amos Harvey accompanied the Lieutenant and his men in order to “arrest the Indians” that for a long time had been “infesting the settlement of Coos Bay.” Stealth was a required element for successfully catching their “game—squaws, bucks, and half breeds born out of wedlock.”

Corporal Royal Bensell was on that mission. He kept a detailed journal relating the story of Amanda De-Cuys, a blind Coos woman living with a white settler. Excerpts from his journal tell a compelling story.

May 1, 1864

... Up Coos River 25 miles to-day after some Indians. Find at the head of tide water a small ranch owned by one De-Cuys. He had a pretty little girl, some 8 years old. We got two Squaws and a Buck. After getting in the boat I was surprised to hear one of the Squaws (old and blind) ask me, “Nika ika nanage nika tenas Julia [Let me see my little Julia].” I complied with this parental demand and was shocked to see this little girl throw her arms about old Amanda De-Cuys neck and cry “clihime Ma Ma [dear mama].” De-Cuys refused to marry Amanda, which would have saved her from internment. He promised Bensell to school Julia.

May 3, 1864

We have taken among the rest several infirm Squaws which the Agent proposes leaving behind to die because he says, “it will cost so far to transportation.” Lieutenant Herzer informed the Agent if the Squaws were left he [Herzer] would report him.



Lower Umpqua Artist Pam Stoehsler's portrayal of Amanda and other Indians being forcibly marched back to the sub-reservation north of Yachats

May 5, 1864

Break camp and strike directly across the sand hills. One Squaw, (Polly) carries all her “icktus [belongings]” and two children. Harvey furnishes one horse when we need four. This horse packs t[w]o old Squaws. By 4 o'clock the advance reached Winchester Bay and from that time 'till dark they came in by twos & threes, the rear guard bringing in Old Fatty and Amanda.

May 7, 1864

Only made ten miles today. The whole days travel reminded me of a funeral procession, so slow and solemn did we go. First one old “Lama [old woman]” would curl up in the sand, then another, then a general halt, during which

the mothers would suckle their children . . . Finally out of patience, I would cry “Hyac, clatwa [hurry, go].” It generally took twenty minutes to get started. Some of the Guard, more irritable than me, swore terrifically.

May 10, 1864

This coast along our route today seems volcanic, rough ragged, burnt rock, here and there a light rock which I called pumice-stone. Amanda, who is blind, tore her feet horribly over these ragged rock, leaving blood sufficient to track her by. One of the Boys led her around the dangerous places. I cursed Indian Agents generally, Harvey particularly. By 12 we reached the Agency. The great gate swung open, and I counted the Indians as they filed in, turned them over to the Agent, and, God Knows, we all left relieved.

During the first twelve years of the fifteen years of the Alsea Sub-Agency's existence half of the native population died of starvation, exposure, disease, and abuse. The Alsea Sub-Agency was closed in 1875.

No further information is known about Amanda or if she ever was able to be with her daughter, Julia, again.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
www.yachatstrails.org



The first statue at the grotto was washed away in a landslide. The current statue, created at the same time by artist Sy Meadow, was generously donated