

THE AMANDA TRAIL STORY

by Joanne Kittel

Part I

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 ranger (SNF) in charge of the Cape Perpetua Scenic Area. A builder of many miles of trail at Cape Perpetua, he completed several 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 Cummins Creek. Loyd planned the Amanda Trail as the final one for the Scenic Area. Loyd placed it on the SNF trail construction plan and continued with a feasibility check and preliminary route location that would complete the Oregon Coast Trail route all the way through the Scenic Area; that was SNF's agreement with Oregon and Recreation Department (OPRD). The OPRD trails coordinator, Pete Bond, walked and approved his proposed route, 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 Beckham's book, *Indians of Western Oregon: This land Was Theirs* (1977). He learned of the Amanda Story. Deeply moved, he proposed *Amanda* as the name for the trail. 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+ acre property adjacent to the north side of the Cape. Part of their stewardship plan 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 that these three projects would become intertwined and have the impact that their completion created.

Still based in Minnesota, the Kittels began their journey through the bureaucratic maze before the trail could be built. It took several phone calls and visits to establish that the contact would be OPRD. By that time SNF, strapped for funds and understaffed (as they still are), was no longer interested in building the trail. While the Kittels were willing to donate a permanent easement, OPRD lacked the funding and staff to build the trail. Gradually, the Kittels figured out ways to move forward, and they convinced the SNF that it was a worthwhile project.

The Kittels were curious about the name Amanda. Was it a staff member's name or relative? While visiting Yachats in 1987, Joanne Kittel found Beckham's book in the Yachats library and read it. She too found the Amanda story and wondered whether the proposed trail was named after her and in remembrance of the atrocities that occurred at the Alsea Sub-agency located in this area from 1860-1875. The following year her 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 to the one in Beckham's book; 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 quest to find the truth.

Despite re-initiating this project in 1987, it took until 1997 to complete the trail from the top of Cape Perpetua through the Kittel property, a length of 2.6 miles. Angell Job Corps students built the trail down Cape Perpetua. When Pete Bond could not find helpers to build the half mile across the Kittel property, Joanne found volunteers from Yachats to join her, and built the trail in the next several months. The original Amanda Bridge was built on Labor Day weekend, 1997, with Pete and other OPRD staff, SNF

staff, Job Corps students, the Kittels and friends, all volunteering. They built it in three days and with zero dollars. Dedication of the bridge and the trail occurred in April 1998. Over 120 people attended, at that time the largest attendance in history at an OPRD trail dedication.

From 1993 to 1996, Joanne and Suzanne gathered information on the history of the local Indigenous People who had lived here for thousands of years. This was no longer simply 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 (CTSI), Don Whereat, then the first Historian for the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians (CTCLUSI), and Phyllis Steeves (SNF), Archaeologist and Tribal Liaison. They gave generously of their time; Joanne and Suzanne went on to write the article, "*The Yachats Indians and the Prison Camp Years*", that spoke the historical truth. Their promise to both Tribes was that copies would be given away or sold at cost. That promise has been kept up to the present. The article was distributed throughout Yachats in 1996 and was met with mixed reviews 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 come to light. The same three supervisors stepped forward again to ensure that the new information was accurate. Additionally, Patti Whereat Phillips, Linguist with CTCLUSI, made important contributions.

One of the attendees at the trail 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. It was installed immediately below the bridge and became a great attraction, with many more people hiking the trail to view it, and more people drawn to read the article.

While the trail was being built on the Kittel property, archaeological sites were discovered, prompting Kittels to contact Phyllis Steeves and the State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO). Those sites are now numbered. Although there are state and federal laws protecting such sites, enforcement is almost impossible and the fines for violations are minimal. The Kittels wanted to create a conservation easement to protect not only the green space and wildlife (preventing clear-cutting, hunting, and sub-division), 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 one was instituted, it still meant that if the Kittels created a conservation easement, their property taxes would go up substantially, because the property was supposed to be used for tree farming and the taxes applied 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. 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 did not want to give easements. After Joanne Kittel witnessed a woman almost killed by a vehicle trying to access the Amanda Trail, she pleaded with the newly formed Yachats Trails Committee to help eliminate this safety risk. Jerry Sand, a local landscape architect and Kathleen Sand, a schoolteacher, both avid environmentalists, took a look at the ODOT

easement. Jerry proposed a solution that both OPRD and ODOT agreed to. The City of Yachats and its business community began to acknowledge the value of trails, not only for recreational and aesthetic purposes, but also for economic development. For the first time, the City of Yachats wrote a grant application and provided 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 Kittel and Sally Lockyear interviewed retired SNF staff who worked at Cape Perpetua. One of them was Loyd Collet. During the interview, Loyd told Joanne and Sally about his naming the Amanda Trail. The mystery as to who named the trail was solved.

The Amanda Trail, first conceived in 1984, was completed in 2009. A second dedication took place in July of that year. Close to 200 people came, including at least 30 tribal members. It was an emotional event as the public greeted tribal members and apologized for the genocide of their people at the Alsea Sub-agency. There were moving speeches and lovely Native American flute music.

The original Amanda Bridge was failing. Built with zero dollars, it was meant to last for only 10 years. In its 14th season it was faltering seriously and needed to be replaced. In partnership with a local non-profit, View the Future, a successful grant application was written. Matching money came from View the Future, City of Yachats, private individuals, and the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians. State Park staff, Angel Job Corps students, and Tribal members worked alongside local Yachatsians, all volunteers, dismantling the old bridge and building the new. The 62-foot, continuous span fiberglass bridge was completed in 2011. A dedication occurred with tribal participation. The song, *Amanda*, composed by the tribes' flutist, Doc Slyter, was introduced.

The annual New Year's Day Peace Hike, conceived and initiated by Lauralee Svendsgaard, the Yachats Trails Chair, was first held in 2012. It involved a 4.5-mile round-trip hike from the Yachats Commons (community center) to the Amanda Bridge and statue. The Amanda Story Ceremony took place in the grotto on Amanda Creek in front of the statue. A reception followed. Many Tribal members attended.

The relationship between Yachats and the tribes has continued to grow. Amanda is a testament to helping First Nations Peoples transcend historical trauma¹. It has inspired and united the Yachats community. Recognition of the local First Nations' history by our 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 acts as a reminder in perpetuity.

Part II

The story continues

On December 19, 2015, originating from a 2003 clear-cut 1.5 miles to the east and 800 feet above, a massive mudslide estimated at 45-50 million tons, traveling at 30-40 miles an hour, obliterated the Amanda Creek, the new Amanda Bridge, 400+ conifers and our beloved Amanda Statue, stopping at Highway 101. The trail was shut down immediately and for an undetermined time.

A miracle was about to reveal itself only two weeks later. Due to the mudslide, the New Year's Day Peace Hike was rerouted, to the Ya'Xaik Trail to the north. During the hike, four massive conifers 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. Joanne and others know that Amanda sacrificed her symbol, the new bridge that represented bridging cultures, and all the trees, to save our lives.

And again, they came. Seventy-eight people rebuilt that section trail in 5 weeks, once it was safe to re-enter the area. Our collaborative friends with OPRD, SNF, Yachats Trails, Angell Job Corps, CTSI, CTCLUSI, County Jail Crew, and more worked many hours to re-open the Amanda Trail by Memorial Day weekend. We opened a new gathering area. Joanne knew there had been three Amanda statues created in 1999. She contacted the owners of the other two, Beth Cook and Joan Wikler, to see if they would sell one to her. They refused to sell; instead, those generous souls donated one. Amanda stands again, and this time as Robert Kentta, Cultural Resources Manager and Tribal Council Member, CTSI said, “Amanda is now facing her homeland.”

Immediately, planning began to replace the destroyed bridge. OPRD, Joanne and others considered all options. With the documented history of mudslides in the Amanda canyon, a suspension bridge was chosen and eventually approved by FEMA, who partially funded the project. With additional funds raised by View the Future, securing grants from CTSI, CTCLUSI, Cape Perpetua Trails Fund, Lincoln County and City of Yachats, and with the property cleared by Angell Job Corps and the Yachats Trails Committee, the bridge was scheduled to be constructed in the fall of 2020. Then the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, leading to layoffs at OPRD. The project was put on hold.

Part III

OPRD Director Lisa Sumption and Coastal Region Manager Dennis Comfort decided that the suspension bridge project was too important to delay. So, within 5 weeks of being put on hold, the project was restarted. With a skeleton staff, OPRD did just that, along with the support of all the previous partners.

Joanne Kittel donated an additional irrevocable easement to OPRD for 2.25 acres of property to ensure easy access for maintenance of the bridge, and that the Amanda Gathering Area remains open to the public in perpetuity.

Cascade Civil Corps, a Redmond Oregon company experienced in building infrastructure while preserving and protecting wild places, was awarded the construction contract. Work began in October 2021. Despite challenging weather and some necessary re-engineering, the bridge was completed on February 22, 2022, a week before the deadline. OPRD, Yachats trails crew and board members of View the Future worked continuously, rehabilitating the site around the bridge, planting natives donated by Midcoast Watersheds Council, building new stairs, widening and repairing the trail, and creating new seating at the Amanda Gathering Area in time for the formal dedication on May 21st, 2022. It was heartbreaking to have to cut a 175-year-old spruce in this process. But we saved the trunk, and Angell Job Corps made it into 24 benches. View the Future also obtained a grant from the Economic Council of Lincoln County to build two portals that serve as entrances.

This bridge project has been a 6-year endeavor so far, with thousands of hours of planning, engineering, strategizing, constructing, and rehabilitating. The bridge construction cost was about \$440,000. The soil survey, design and engineering, surveys, OPRD staff and volunteer time brought the total cost close to \$750,000.

Planning for the bridge dedication began in March 2021, coordinated and led by View the Future board members with partnerships from the City of Yachats, OPRD, Polly Plumb Productions and others including the CTSI, CTCLUSI, Yachats Ladies Club, Yachats Chamber of Commerce, and Oregon Coast Visitor’s Association. The theme for the dedication was “Bridging Cultures, Healing Hearts.” The dedication took place with a weekend of events on May 21-22. Nearly two hundred people attended with many being bused in. Emceed by Lisa Sumption, OPRD Director, there were several speakers and beautiful prayer songs gifted by the CTSI and CTCLUSI.

A reception with delicious food and appetizers was provided that evening. This was followed by the play, *Amanda Transcending*, written by Connie Bennett and directed by Milo Graamans, featuring an array of very talented actors. An encore was performed on Sunday afternoon. Between events, a slide show of the entire planning and construction process was on display.

Later that summer, The Midcoast Watersheds Council returned to dismantle the temporary bridge. It has been repurposed in the Beaver Creek area to the north.

Since the dedication, the number of visitors to the trail, from all over this country and beyond, has grown exponentially. With those visits they learn the truth about local Indigenous history through the interpretive signage, created by View the Future under tribal supervision.

“Amanda Trail and the Ya’Xaik Trail were built on a foundation of the truth, building trust between cultures. As such, no person-made or natural disaster, or pandemic, will ever obliterate them. They will endure, bringing joy and grace to all who walk their paths.” Joanne Kittel

