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Yachats

Yachats is south of Newport, where the Coast Range presses closer to the sea, and commercial hustle gives way to tide pools, seal lions, and whales. Known as the "Gem of the Oregon Coast," Yachats may be the perfect coast town. This tiny resort community of 600-some people nestled in the shadow of [Cape Perpetua](#) is down close to the water, nearly buried in salal and huckleberry. Yachats Bay gravels yield and abundance of agates, flowered jasper, blood stones and petrified woods Yachats is a corruption of the Alsi word, yahuts, meaning "dark waters at the foot of the mountain," which is certainly descriptive of this area where the Coast Range abuts the ocean in an unyielding tumult of relentless surf against basalt bastions. On a calm day it can be an exciting contest to witness; in stormy weather it is awesome. Consequently, this is a favorite stretch of coastline for watching winter storms.

Other spelling and pronunciations for **Yachats** have included Youitts (Lewis and Clark Expedition); Youitz (Samuel Drake's Book of Indians of North America); Yawhick, and Yahauts (from various Indian Affairs reports); and Yahuts, Yahatc, Yahats, Yahach, and Yaqa' yik (from various history books). The current spelling and pronunciation (Yah-hots) is presumed to come from the German settlers.

Many people have lived here for the past 8,000 years; the remnant was removed to Siletz Reservation and is virtually extinct. The Alsi and Yahute tribes gathered, hunted, and fished the Yachats area. Shell middens, such as the ones by [Devil's Churn](#) or the Adobe Motel, are a reminder of the bounty the natives found in the Yachats area. Middens, or piles of clam, oyster, crab, and mussel shells, formed when, after a seafood feast, diners threw sand over the shells to lessen the odor. After many shellfish meals, the middens resembled small dunes. They also caught salmon and flounder with sharp sticks. Smelt was caught in dip-nets. The fish and shell fish, together with venison and elk from nearby hills, were smoked or dried for the winter. Local plants were gathered and dried or ground for flour. The local vegetation also provided medicines and materials for clothing and shelters.

The natives regularly burned the hillside to ensure good hunting, a practice that was continued when non-indians settled the area so they could have more grazing land for their livestock. While Indian campfires are gone now, the legacy of the Alsi will live on forever as long as people come here to gaze in wonder at sunsets and at the fury of winter storms.

Alsea Sub-Agency Established 1855

On August 11, 1855, an unratified treaty created the Coast Range Reservation, and the Alsea sub-agency was established at Yachats. This was home to natives from many different tribes and bands from throughout Oregon and Northern California.

Board houses, cattle sheds, a blacksmith shop, storage buildings for far tools, and fields for crops all occupied the area at Agency Creek, near the present-day Adobe Motel. Some of the Indians also made a trail up Yachats River and cleared land for farming.

Ida L. Case Ingalls (1871-1960) was born at the sub-agency in 1871. The first non-indian child born in the Yachats area, she was the daughter of Mary Craigie (1848-1933) and Sam Case (1831-1904), then the current agent. Case served as agent from 1870 to February 1872, then again from March 23, 1873 to June 7, 1873. He later moved to Newport and became very involved with the development of the town and education. One of Newport's schools, Sam Case Elementary, is named after him.

During the 20 years following the establishment of the Coast Reservation many changes took place. The reservation was divided when the center section, near Yaquina Bay, was opened to white

settlement in 1866. In March 1875 the US Senate passed a bill that removed the sub-agency and granted land to all the indigenous peoples that wanted to homestead. Some chose to remain in the Yachats area, and they were "allowed" to as long as they were able to support themselves. In 1877 US Indian Agent William Bagley wrote the following letter to the hon. E. A. Hayt, Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington DC:

I desire to again respectfully call your attention to the condition of the Alsea Indians who are here, as well as those who are now at Alsea on leave of absence. We have found it impossible to feed any of them, except such as we can give employment or furnish with lumber for houses, and were left with the only alternative of allowing them leave of absence to fish in the waters of Alsea where they are acquainted with the fishing ground and can more easily obtain their subsistence than here. Besides this many of them still own their own comparatively comfortable houses at Alsea into which they can go and find shelter from the storms which for a few weeks past have been very severe.

While I deeply regret the necessity of this course it could not be avoided unless by allowing them to suffer with hunger and cold. They should by all means be provided by government and houses, food and clothing this winter, and with some teams, seed and farming implements in the early spring so that they could during the coming year provide their own food for themselves. They do not give up their desire to remain here so as soon as they shall be assured that government is acting in good faith with them in the matter of allotment of land and assistance to cultivate the same, I respectfully ask that you will at an early day make such provisions as is possible for their maintenance and so forth. Unless this can be done it will not be possible to keep them on the reserve, except by force of arms. They could be overpowered and starved to death on the reserve but such a course would not be wise. I herewith send you a statement of the number of Alseas who have voluntarily given up their claims to the Alsea Country and desire to find homes on this reserve with the amount required to furnish them with rations during the winter. Could we obtain one half the amount they are justly entitled to and in the spring provide them such teams, tools, seed, etc., as would enable them to provide for themselves, they would be comfortable and contented. Or could they be returned to their former houses and secured in the possession of them they would provide for themselves. What can I do for them? Estimates have been sent to your office, from which I have no reply. Can you do anything to help us place the Indians of this reserve in a condition to support themselves and this soon bring them out of the slough of dispassion? Would that our government might deal justly with the Indians and thus save millions expended for the prosecuting wars against them,. As there are no treaty funds for this agency we are dependent entirely upon the general incidental fund, and hence plead earnestly to you.

On September 13, 1879, "Boston" wrote to the editor of the Gazette:

Some time since the citizens of Lower Alsea sent to **Agent Swan**, at Siletz, a numerously signed petition requesting him to visit the bay and confer with them in regard to removing straggling Indians to the agency. In response to the petition, Mr. Swan came and held a pow-wow with his dusky wards, but was careful to avoid giving a definite answer as to what he intended to do in the premises. Several of these Indians are holding valuable land claims, which they are not entitled to, as they have not, and can not comply with the law. If they were removed to the agency, where they belong, the land would be taken by white settlers, who would assist in building roads, establishing schools, and otherwise contribute to the prosperity of the country. The residents of the Alsea think that as the government has generously provided for the keeping of these Indians, they should be taken to the reservation, and we shall anxiously await agent Swan's decision.

From Ocean View to Yachats

Formerly known as Ocean View, Yachats is located at the mouth of the Yachats, eight miles south of Waldport. Ocean View post office was established November 5, 1887, with George M. Starr first postmaster. The office was discontinued September 27, 1893, and reestablished April 27, 1904. This early office was located about a mile north of the City of Yachats, near the old reservation. Jenneta Kindred also served as postmaster, and in 1912 the Ocean View office was moved to the Hosford residence, which was near the mouth of Yachats River.

The new post office was established October 13, 1916, with Donna Berry first postmaster. On February 18, 1917, the name of office was changed from Ocean View to Yachats at the suggestion of J. Kenneth Berry (1905-1931) because it was at the mouth of **Yachats River**. It was decided that since there were already too many towns on the coast with "ocean" monikers, the name really should be changed.

Getting mail to and from Yachats was never easy, and until the road was rocked in 1931, rains made it impossible for the mail to be carried by car.

The Reverend Virgil Howell Remembers Yachats

The following account of Yachats was probably penned around 1930 by Rev. Virgil Howell (1880-1943):

It began to be settled by the whites in... Some of the early settlers was Ingram on the present Carson place, Robert Mann (1877-1945), Austin Howell, Bill Reeves, Harmon Buoy (1838-1903).

Ms. Buoy was the first school teacher. The writer was one of her pupils. There was plenty of game then such as bear, deer, elk. One day Will Buoy left the room and on his return let the entire school go out to see the bear go over the mountain. You know the song.

Well, the land wasn't surveyed yet, so the settlers took what they called a squatters claim. And this meant that his family must be there continually for if they left for 24 hours the next fellow that came along could move right in and take possession. Well, this was what happened to the writer's father. He, with his cousin Milt Howell, went out to Waldport to fish for the market one year. And on his return found another man in his house. So he, with his family had to seek shelter elsewhere: there was just a horse trail up the river, so the only means of transportation was on horseback.

The road wasn't built till in the 1890s. Well, for all the handicaps the settlers visited more as the telephone hadn't come yet. There was more harmony as the settlers exchanged work more, had things in common.

Nearly everyone went to church. Well now we have roads and have exchanged the old log schoolhouse for more modern ones. And with the coming of the Coast Highway there is a town springing up at the mouth of the river, with two churches, the Evangelical and Free Methodist, three grocery stores, two hotels, one bakery. We are much in need of a garage, a doctor, a dentist.

We also have a good school. The climate is fine, we have a fine bathing beach with fresh water in the river. So one can choose between the salt water and the fresh. Plenty of rocky coast for fishing.

Mountain climbing near at hand. There is opportunity here for dairymen and chicken raisers. Berry growers as well as professional men. There is a pool hall and a large community hall.

But the greatest sport of all is casting for the royal Chinook at the rocks right in the surf. You get a thrill you will never forget. We have rock oysters, mussels, crabs, clams, and plenty of game in the hills.

The Yachats is growing by leaps and bounds. There is a \$50,000 hotel to be under construction soon and a golf course.

Vacationers started coming to the Yachats area in the early 1900s. While some camped near the mouth of the river, others owned summer cabins. They came down the beach from Waldport, or came over the Yachats Mountain Road.

In 1905 a chittem bark warehouse was converted to the Yachats Motel, and the tourist industry really began. In 1920 the first cabins were built and others followed.

Little Log Church by the Sea

The rustic building at the corner of Third and Pontiac streets in Yachats has been a part of this coastal community for generations. When R. J. Phelps came to Yachats in 1926, he organized the construction of the first real church in the area. Built in the shape of a cross, the **Little Log Church** was a community effort completed and dedicated in 1930. Sir Robert Perks, who owned most of Yachats at the time, donated the property. Local people cut and hauled most of the shakes, and the logs were donated. The pews, window panes, and Bible came from a church in **Philomath**. They were hauled over the Alsea Road and down the beach to Yachats.

The church was served by ministers through the **Evangelical United Brethren Church Missions**, and later by pastors from the Presbyterian church. In 1969, when the congregation grew too large for the building, members built a new church a few blocks away, and the Little Log Church and property were sold to the **Oregon Historical Society**. It became a museum in 1970, and the site was deeded to the City of Yachats in 1896.

The church underwent complete restoration in 1993, made possible by community support and volunteer laborers. Some of the original logs were saved and can be seen at the top of the church. Also saved were the bell and belfry, windows and sashes, flooring, pulpit, pews (some additional pews have been added to the west wing of the church sanctuary, chairs, wood stove, choir-rail, a painting of the three wise men, and a harmonium. The church is used for weddings and special events.

In 1997, the 400-square-foot museum annex was built with the help of the Friends of the Little Log Church to house exhibits not connected with the original building. It sits in the "footprints" of the old church manse, later a Sunday school, which was torn down in 1976. Today, the museum houses local historical artifacts, local art and literature. Clothing and tools from pioneer days are on display at the museum along with period furnishings.

In 1971, Alma Phelps Plunkett, who operated the Burnt Woods general store and post office for many

years, recalled,

My father, Rev. Rolla J. Phelps, moved to Waldport. He didn't have any kind of religious service at Yachats at all, so he got to thinking that he really ought to have a church down there. He and his brother got busy and started cutting logs. Roland Dawson in Upper Yachats helped them, as did a lot of other people. In 1927, they built the little log church which now belongs to the Lincoln County Historical Society.

Dunk Dunkelberger: Blacksmith Extraordinar

For many years "Dunk" Dunkelberger was a blacksmith at Yachats for several gypo logging outfits. One day a hobo entered the shop and asked for a job. Business was slack and Dunk wanted to get rid of the "bo" as quickly as possible so he told him that the job was his if he could make a three-way weld, a task that was considered impossible. Then Dunk went out to lunch chuckling to himself and expecting the tramp to be gone when he got back. The hobo was gone when he returned, but he left behind Dunk's duckbilled tongs neatly welded together about the horn of the anvil in a perfect three-way weld. It took almost tow days to saw and file the tongs from the anvil and retemper the horn.

Smelt Sands State Recreation Area

Smelt Sands State Recreation Area is located at the north edge of Yachats, one of the few places in the world blessed with a run of oceangoing smelt that come ashore to spawn. From April to October, sea-run smelt hurl themselves up Yachats River, aiming straight towards locals with clever triangular smelt nets and oily diets.

During the Yachats smelt fry held in July, up to 700 pounds of this silver sardine-like fish are served on the grounds of Yachats School.

This is also the location of the well-known sculpture by local artist Jim Adler that has become a symbol of the Moon Fish arts program in Yachats.

Spruce Pacific Railroad 1918

Off Camp One Road north of Yachats, a "Cullen-Friedstedt" Burro railroad track-laying crane sits on a small section of railroad track that was laid by an all volunteer track crew on the morning of July 1.

These new tracks, which came from Toledo, sit on the ground where in 1918, the US Army Corps of Engineers constructed a railroad. Members of the **Yaquina Pacific Railroad Historical Society**, an enthusiastic group of Lincoln County rail fans interested in exploring and preserving the area's railroad and timber history, placed the latest set of tracks.

President Larry Reisch and treasurer Richard Cullison, both of Yachats, described the history of the railroad in the area. "In 1918, the Army Corps of Engineers built what they called the Spruce Pacific Railroad from Camp One north to South Beach," Cullison said. "The plan was to haul out the spruce wood they cut here and use it to build the planes for WWI. The train was the only way out. It crossed over a trestle in Waldport on the way to South Beach, since there weren't really any usable roads. But just as they got it going, the war ended, and the tracks sat idle until 1922. Then Gordon Manary bought them, turned Camp One into a logging camp, logged the spruce, took it to South Beach via the train, and floated it upriver to Toledo to C. D. Johnson's sawmill.

"They ran the operation from 1922 to 1937, and at one time, 400 people lived here in Camp One," he continued. "They had their own school and commissaryóManary's old house is still standing. They used a big engine to haul the timber to South Beach and smaller, sidewinder engines worked the spur tracks all over these hills, bringing the logs into the main camp. There were miles of tracks everywhere. Camp One was one of 12 logging camps scattered all over the area. The 12th one was in Siletz." "It's fascinating to look at the connection between the railroad and the timber industry in this area," said Reisch. "Our goal as the historical society is to bring knowledge to the public of the major impact the railroad had."

Reisch said the historical society hopes to build an interpretive center in Toledo.

"We were taken by surprise with an awesome gesture by Bob Melob of **Willamette & Pacific Railroad**, who donated the railroad post office car that has been sitting next to the platform since the opening party (of the new Toledo post office) to us," he said. "He feels that with appropriate interior renovation, this car could be 'good to go,' on a variety of assignments, including public awareness of track safety issues through Operation Lifesaver."

Cape Perpetua an Observation Site During World War II

Sea-going ships passed by the Oregon coast as early as 1543 when **Bartolome Ferrelo** came this way. Sir Frances Drake (in 1575) and Martin de Aguilar (in 1605) also are known to have passed by. But Capt. Cook was the first non-indian to really get credit for being in the Yachats area, although he was not able to land due to the rocky shore. He named Cape Perpetua on March 7, 1787. Some day he

name the 800-foot high cape after a saint whose birthday fell on that date, while others think it was because a storm and high winds kept them in the area for several days, with that particular headland in sight the whole time, perpetually.

Although there were native trails interlaced through Cape Perpetua, and a crude trail cut by early homesteaders for carrying mail to and from Florence, the Yachats area was very isolated. Then in 1914 the US Forest Service blasted a narrow road around the cape and a wooden bridge was built across the Yachats River, making travel between the Yachats area and Florence easier. The wooden bridge was replaced in 1926 with a steel structure built by Montage and Sons, at a cost of \$23,034.

As part of an effort to give men jobs during the Depression, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was established here. A camp was built near the site of the current Cape Perpetua Visitor's Center and the men living there worked on many different projects throughout the area. Rockwork was one of the main skills they concentrated on; and, the rock walls around the cape, as well as the shelter built at the top of the cape were projects completed by the residents of the camp.

During the early days of the war the shelter built by the CCCs at the top of Cape Perpetua was used as an observation site and radar station. A large gun was installed, and personnel looking for submarines and aircraft manned it.

Foxholes and gun emplacements along the ocean drive on the hill really brought the war close to home for the locals. Military personnel outnumbered the civilians, and it was rumored the government had spent a million dollars in Yachats installations. The military personnel were housed in the skating rink on West Fourth and the Ladies Club was rented for recreation.

US Navy blimps from the [Tillamook Air Base](#) patrolled the coast as well, looking for Japanese submarines.

After the war quite a few Japanese mines floated upon the beaches. The Coast Guard pulled them out to sea and blew them up.

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

Contact the Site Manager at 541-547-5470

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