



Courtesy photos by Kathy Kentta

Matt Garrett: “Tribal ceremony stuff was special to me because I never knew that stuff was still done today and I never got to experience it until I went on this trip.”

Apolinar Howell: “We learned a lot about our people’s traditional practices. It was an honor to connect with the land, the opportunity was nothing less than immersive. I enjoyed connecting with other youth in addition to getting to hold interesting dialogue with an important elder. All around it was fun and educational.”



Courtesy photos by Jeanine Moy

Above: Joshley Howell, Sharla Strong and Corey Strong in a field of yampah

Below: Yampah root



Youth help protect traditional foods through Healthy Traditions leadership camp

By Sharla Strong, Healthy Traditions Program Volunteer

I held my breath and watched, knowing what an honor it was to be a witness. I knew I should be taking pictures, but if I looked away for a moment, I would miss it. To some, it was a moment that may appear small, but for me, it was like watching history.

He smiled at us with shy eyes and said it tasted like a carrot. It could be that this was the first time in more than 150 years a Siletz youth had tasted this traditional food, commonly called yampah.

The July heat radiated from the dry cracked earth as the youth circled around to combine the seed they had gathered from the field and we thanked them for their hard work. This is important work. They may not quite understand it now at their young age, but they are healing the land and protecting our traditional foods for future generations and I am proud of them.

Healthy Traditions Project Coordinator Kathy Kentta worked for a year to plan and fund the Youth Leadership Camp where youth collected seeds of traditional foods, learned about environmental pro-

tection from a Siletz elder and learned about the Jordan Cove LNG Export Terminal and Pipeline proposal that would impact our cultural resources.

The Youth Leadership Camp started at Vesper Meadow, located east of Ashland, Ore. Jeanine Moy, director of the Vesper Meadow Restoration and Education Program, took the youth on a tour of the Vesper Meadow property where youth saw wildlife and learned about different restoration projects being done throughout the area.

Vesper Meadow is located near the headwaters of Dead Indian Creek and also the headwaters for two major northwest Pacific Coast watersheds: the Rogue River and Klamath River basins. Shasta, Takelma, Molala and Latgawa ancestors likely could have visited and gathered foods within this area.

In testimony from elder Molly Orton documented in 1933 by ethnographer John Peabody Harrington, she describes a favorite camas gathering place that has a likeness to Vesper Meadows. Youth assisted with camas seed collection, which is an important aspect of restoring our traditional food population and the youth learned about protecting plant

diversity by planting seed near where it was collected.

Camas is a common food for Tribes of the Pacific Northwest and has many different names from different Tribal languages. The Siletz Dee-ni language name is gus, pronounced like “goose.”

For thousands of years, camas meadows were managed by local Tribes and grew in great abundance. Caucasian explorers Lewis and Clark made notes on many plants in their travels and the distinct blue/violet flower color of camas was noted by Lewis:

“The quawmash (Chopunnish word for camas) is now in blume and from the colour ... at a short distance it resembles lakes of fine clear water, so complete is this despection that on first sight I could have sworn it was water.” Meriwether Lewis, June 12, 1806

On one of the afternoons, Siletz Tribal elder Grandma Agnes Baker Pilgrim, and her daughter, Nadine Martin, joined the youth for lunch. Grandma Aggie just celebrated her 95th birthday and also recently received the President’s Award from

Southern Oregon University’s president, Dr. Linda Schott.

The youth introduced themselves to Grandma Aggie and they enjoyed hearing how she knew their families and grandparents. Jon Duarte shared that, “She reminded me of my grandma.”

Grandma Aggie’s visit added a richness to the educational experience by sharing about her work on environmental protection and especially about the need to take care of our water. It is especially inspiring for youth to see an elder doing work to improve the world and she called on the youth to take care of each other and to speak kind words.

Many of the youth had great things to say about what they learned from Grandma Aggie. Nevaeh Jackson said, “Grandma Aggie taught us that we are all born water babies.”

Grandma Aggie spoke about the importance of water and how we are all born “water babies” in our mother’s belly and it is from water that we are born and how all life is sustained. She said we need to be thankful to water, even when we are using small amounts of water for washing.

Courtesy photos by Kathy Kentta

Tre Jackson: "I learned a lot about my culture and the past and I am thankful I was able to go."



Yampah seeds



Courtesy photo by Jeanine Moy

Front row: Kathy Kentta, Agnes Pilgrim and Nadine Martin

Middle row: Brandon Larrabee, Felisha Howell, Nevaeh Jackson, and Maranda Garrett

Back row: Corey Strong, Jacob Reid, Luke Garrett, Tre Jackson, Jon Duarte, Sharla Strong, Matt Garrett, Apolinar Howell, Shadow Jackson and Joshley Howell



Joshley Howell: "Our people are strong and so are we."

Grandma Aggie is one of the International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers and travels the world promoting environmental causes. As a gift, the youth dug Yampah roots to give to Grandma Aggie and Nadine and gave them necklaces.

The group received a visit from Rogue Climate representatives and learned about local community organizing efforts to stop a potential LNG pipeline project. The Siletz Tribal Council passed a resolution in March in opposition to the proposed 229-mile liquefied natural gas pipeline and the Jordan Cove LNG export facility in Coos Bay, Ore.

Hannah Sohl, director of Rogue Climate, and Isabella Tibbetts, No Pipeline Fellow of Rogue Climate and Honor the Earth, did a presentation on the long fight to stop the Jordan Cove LNG pipeline and terminal. The youth assisted with writing statements to be submitted in support of protecting ancestral waters.

Many traditional Tribal territories, cultural resources and burial grounds are threatened by the pipeline. The Siletz, Klamath, Karuk and Yurok Tribes

have all come out in strong opposition to the pipeline.

The youth also collected seed near Lower Table Rock, located north of Medford, Ore. Much of the land around Table Rock has been managed as agricultural property and some wild plants are being protected through conservation on slopes.

The youth group joined Molly Morison with The Nature Conservancy and a few local volunteers to collect seed that will be processed, saved and stored through the Siletz Tribes' participation in the Rogue Native Plant Partnership. This partnership is successfully rescuing native plants in the region from disappearing from the landscape.

Our purpose in visiting the site was to salvage seeds for relocation to another local site due to upcoming construction of a power substation by Pacific Power on that property. The youth joined volunteers from the Rogue Native Plant Partnership to collect seed that will be saved for future planting at another site protected from construction.

Lower Table Rock is the location of one of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz's

treaty signings in 1853. Felisha Howell shared that, "Being able to come home and experience the beautiful land our people once lived on was an unforgettable moment. We finally got to come home, something our ancestors never had the chance to do."

The dry climate of our Southern Oregon ancestral homelands is dramatically different from the cold and foggy Oregon Coast climate. When our ancestors were removed to the Siletz Reservation, they could no longer access some foods because they did not naturally occur within the reservation boundary, such as yampah root. It is only in recent times that our Tribal families have been able to return to our homelands and reunite with these foods.

When asked why educational trips like this are important, Shadow Jackson said, "Because if the youth don't learn now everyone will forget and won't be able to learn."

In our Nee-dash ceremony, our families pray for our traditional foods and it fills my heart to see our youth finally able to know these foods and nourish their

bodies like our ancestors. Apolinar Howell shared that, "It was an experience that transcends just our physical senses. It was healing on a spiritual level. I felt like our ancestors were watching over us."

Our ancestors ate these foods for thousands of years and were incredibly healthy. It gives me hope that someday we will be able to protect gathering places so more of our Tribal people and families will have access to these foods.

The Healthy Traditions Youth Leadership Camp was coordinated in conjunction with the Native STAND Youth Group. Native STAND (Students Together Against Negative Decisions) is a prevention curriculum that has been hosted by the Siletz Community Health Clinic for nearly a year and will finish in October.

Native STAND is coordinated by the Siletz Prevention, Tobacco Prevention, Youth Development, Community Health and CARE programs. We would like to thank the youth and staff who supported the mission of Healthy Traditions to restore our traditional foods culture.