

# Azalea Park

In 1937 the site of the Azalea State Park was overgrown with small trees and berry vines, used only as a mule pasture by the U. S. Forest Service. Amongst the tangled vegetation were growing scores of wild azaleas of five different varieties, some of them believed to be over 200 years old.

"What a place for a park!" thought William and Milly Crissey. Crissey was president of the local Chamber of Commerce at the time and a civic-minded man with state-wide connections. He had come from Portland by way of the coast in 1928 and planted bulbs and other flowering plants on the Harbor side of the Chetco River. With the active help of Elmer Bankus, Art Sanders, Secretary of the Oregon Coast Association, and other farsighted citizens, Crissey urged state officials to preserve the natural beauty of that place forever. He elicited the help of Marshall Dana, a powerful state figure and publisher of the Oregon Journal in Portland.

Their efforts were successful. A 24-acre property, owned by the Brookings Land and Townsite Company, was purchased by the State in 1937 at a price of \$2,466. To secure an entrance road, the Company donated 1½ acres and Bankus gave ½ acre, making a park of 26 acres. The approach road was originally the pack trail of the miners in the 1850s and later part of the torturous coastal wagon route from California to the Umpqua and Willamette valley settlements. Two years later there was a dedication ceremony for Azalea Park. In later years, 11 acres were added to the park. The park today is comprised of 37 acres.

Unfortunately, over the ensuing years, the park received minimal attention and once more reverted to its "natural" state, overgrown with invasive berry vines and underbrush. Considering the maintenance of the park a burden, the State of Oregon finally turned it over to the City of Brookings in 1993. A group of dedicated citizens, mostly seniors, began clearing away the years of accumulated debris, freeing the native azaleas from the stranglehold of berry vines and invasive brush. Years of accumulated trash like old tires, batteries, cans and bottles were hauled out and removed. The trees and shrubs were pruned and the ancient native Azaleas were freed from the vines and undergrowth that was smothering them. Berry vines, salal and weeds were hauled out and burned in huge bonfires. From this grassroots effort, in November of 1994, came the idea of forming the Azalea Park Foundation in order to raise the funds necessary to create a three-acre garden for the benefit of the community and all the many visitors to the area.

Since that time, an 8,800 square foot sod lawn with an automatic watering system was installed in the upper garden area. 1,420 linear feet of five-foot wide, wheelchair accessible cement walks were installed. 47 ornamental trees, including flowering cherry, flowering apple, liquid amber, golden chain, dogwood, and a variety of Japanese maples were planted. 260 rhododendrons, selected for various blooming times and differing heights at maturity have been planted. 2,800 bulbs including daffodils, iris, tulips, dahlias, and gladiolas were scattered throughout the garden. There are now many other shrubs and perennials to numerous to count.