

# Footprints Through the Sands of Time

## The Missing Link

Byline: Kelly Calhoun, Executive Director/Curator of Museum of the North Beach

As far back as 1912, there have been numerous attempts and requests to have a road constructed from Taholah to Queets. An article published in the December 29, 1912, edition of the Daily Washingtonian titled, "Queets Ranchers ask for Road from Taholah," was an appeal from twenty families living in the Queets and Clearwater valleys. The combined valleys formed the largest agricultural areas on the Olympic Peninsula. For years, these ranchers paid anywhere from \$25.00 to \$50.00 per ton for goods brought in by steamers from Hoquiam. Two organizations were formed to bring attention to the need for a road: Queets Good Road Association and Clearwater Good Road Association.

In March 1942 with still no road between Taholah and Queets, a recommendation for federal funding was forwarded to Washington D.C. by the district engineer for the Federal Highway Agency saying road construction is favored by the department but state funds cannot be spent on it.

Nine years later, in March 1951, the "missing link" was officially put in place as a Senate bill to be an extension of Secondary State Highway 9-C that included Ocean City, Copalis Beach, Pacific Beach, Moclips, Taholah, and today's Ocean Beach Road extending from Hoquiam to Pacific Beach. The proposed road would be 21-22 miles in length and construction would include a bridge over the Quinault River and several streams.

Minutes from the March 19, 1957 meeting of the Olympic Beaches Division of the Hoquiam Chamber of Commerce, included a resolution in favor of the road that was moved by Fred Menath (Menath's Cabins, Copalis Beach) and seconded by Norm Cornish (Ocean Crest Resort, Moclips) and was passed. At the Chamber meeting on April 9, 1957, manager Ken Hodge reported that he received letters from Senator Warren Magnuson and two Representatives indicating they would contact the Bureau of Indian Affairs to see what could be done about construction. From the Chamber minutes dated May 21, 1957, Hodge reported that he had received additional correspondence from Senator Henry Jackson and W.A. Bugge, Director of Highways. Hodge stated that it was a possibility that the new road would be eligible for 100% federal aid.

In late 1958, a newly formed Taholah-Queets Highway Association was formed with Jess Curtwright (Ocean Crest Resort, Moclips) as chairman. He reported on the meeting with the State Highway Commission held on January 21, 1959 that in order to convince the federal government to provide the \$600,000 needed for construction of the bridge over the Quinault River, that it was necessary to have more public pressure.

In an article dated May 12, 1961, Quinault Tribal Council chairman Horton Capoeman stated in an interview that there would be no bridge over the Quinault River adding they intend to "prevent any road improvement through the reservation." At a meeting on May 24, of the Ocean Beaches Chamber Division, Sam Larango (Larango's Motor Village, Pacific Beach) said that he believed all the "difficulties" with the Quinaults would be resolved. Congresswoman Julia Butler Hansen and Governor Roseellini met with Quinault council members and efforts were being made to resolve their issues. A letter dated July 21, 1961 was sent from Grays Harbor County Commissioner Leighton Powell to Representative Hansen congratulating her on her time and energy in securing the Quinault River bridge at Taholah.

On July 14, 1962, an agreement was signed by the Quinault Tribal Business Committee and the State Highway Department to proceed with the Taholah-Queets road construction. By early 1963, clearing of the new roadway on 9C (SR 109) from south of Taholah to the new bridge site had been made and the bridge was under construction.

The Quinault River bridge was completed in 1964 and four miles of roadway was cleared and graded north from Taholah to Camp Creek. There was no further progress on extending the road to Queets and in December 1970, state highway director George Andrews told the State Highway Commission that the \$3 million route was forced to stop due to opposition by the Quinaults. They believed the highway and flood of tourists could result in uncontrolled development along the right-of-way, pollution and easy access to the beach which the Quinaults zoned as a wilderness area. But the demand for the Taholah-Queets connection was not over.

In March 1975, at a meeting of the Taholah-Queets Highway Association, a motion was passed to ask everyone to write to the Secretary of Commerce in Washington D.C. and State Highway Commission in Olympia to persuade the completion of the Taholah-Queets Missing Link. At a meeting of the Olympic North Beach Chamber in September, guest speaker Don Ernst from the Department of Highways spoke briefly on the history of negotiations between the Tribal Council and highway department about the proposed highway to Queets. He said that if the current differences could be resolved, and if federal money were again available, it would take another six years to complete the project.

Fast forward to March 1984. There was revived interest in the new coastal highway section that would complete the scenic route from Mexico, through California and Oregon. This came at a

time when razor clam digging had been cut short and the downturn in the logging industry. As a result, local North Beach businesses needed an extra push for tourists. Although the Quinaults had voted to kill the project and charged that agreements to restrict access to the reservation from the new road had been disregarded, they were willing to renegotiate. But only if they were given control of the planning and administration of the road. Quinault Tribal Chairman Joe DeLaCruz said they may even finance the project with funds allocated to Indian roads through the federal gasoline tax. He said, "But any agreement to complete this highway must be approved at a general council of the Quinault Tribe." DeLaCruz said the chances of completion were much better if the state offered the Tribe the respect it deserves as a sovereign nation.

On February 9, 1985, the Senate Transportation Committee held a public meeting on Senate Bill 3125 for the completion of SR 109 through the Quinault Reservation. The price tag was now a conservative \$25 million. Although most comments were in favor, it was decided to postpone for further testimony. It went to the Senate Transportation Committee on February 13 for a vote but opposition required another 45 minutes of testimony that didn't go well. The complaints were from landowners whose property was along the proposed highway but the agreement provided no guarantee they would have access to their land. It was suggested that a substitute bill be drafted, however, there was concern about changing the bill that would negate the agreement with the Quinaults and stop progress. Grays Harbor commissioner Vogler said, "It's in the interest of 65,000 Grays Harbor residents to resolve this issue. Without an agreement, we'll wait another 20 years."

In March 1985, the bill moved from the Senate to the House. It was discovered during an investigation that the landowners who opposed the bill did not live on the Reservation but were vacationers and weekenders. The session in the House on April 11 was a heated debate with name calling and accusations. The Quinaults stated that they would never sign the bill passed by the Senate on March 15. The Senate rewrote the bill giving access control back to the Quinaults. The amendment's final vote count was 52 to 45. The House sent it back to the Senate for an agreement and was passed on April 23, 1985. The approved bill was sent to Governor Gardner for his signature and at 4:00 PM on May 8, he signed SB 3125. The next step was for the Washington State Department of Transportation and the Quinault Indian Nation to secure federal funding. However, in an article written by Tom Shirilla titled, "Quinault Tribal Highway, Problems and Opportunities" in the spring 1987 edition of Quinault Natural Resources magazine, there were still concerns regarding poaching of fish and game, removal of shake material and fire danger on Quinault forested lands. He reported that plans for the Quinault Tribal Highway were in limbo.

According to an article written in the *Aberdeen Daily World* dated July 25, 1998, Quinault President Pearl Capoman-Baller said, "Our General Council approved beginning negotiations

with the Department of Transportation (WSDOT) several years ago. A letter was sent to the state expressing our concerns. We never did hear back from them." In response, Ann Briggs, public information officer with WSDOT said, "I'm not aware of any recent actions our department has taken on this issue. I know that it has been talked about several times over the past many years."

In recent years, some Quinault Tribal members favored having the "road to nowhere" completed. They say that their relatives at Queets would have the time cut nearly in half if they ever had to go to the emergency room in Aberdeen. It is now a 60-mile detour. In 100 years, there is still no road connection between Taholah and Queets to complete "The Missing Link" or "The Road to Nowhere."

**(one photo ahead)**



**The first step to complete the highway was the construction of this bridge across the Quinault River, June 11, 1963.**