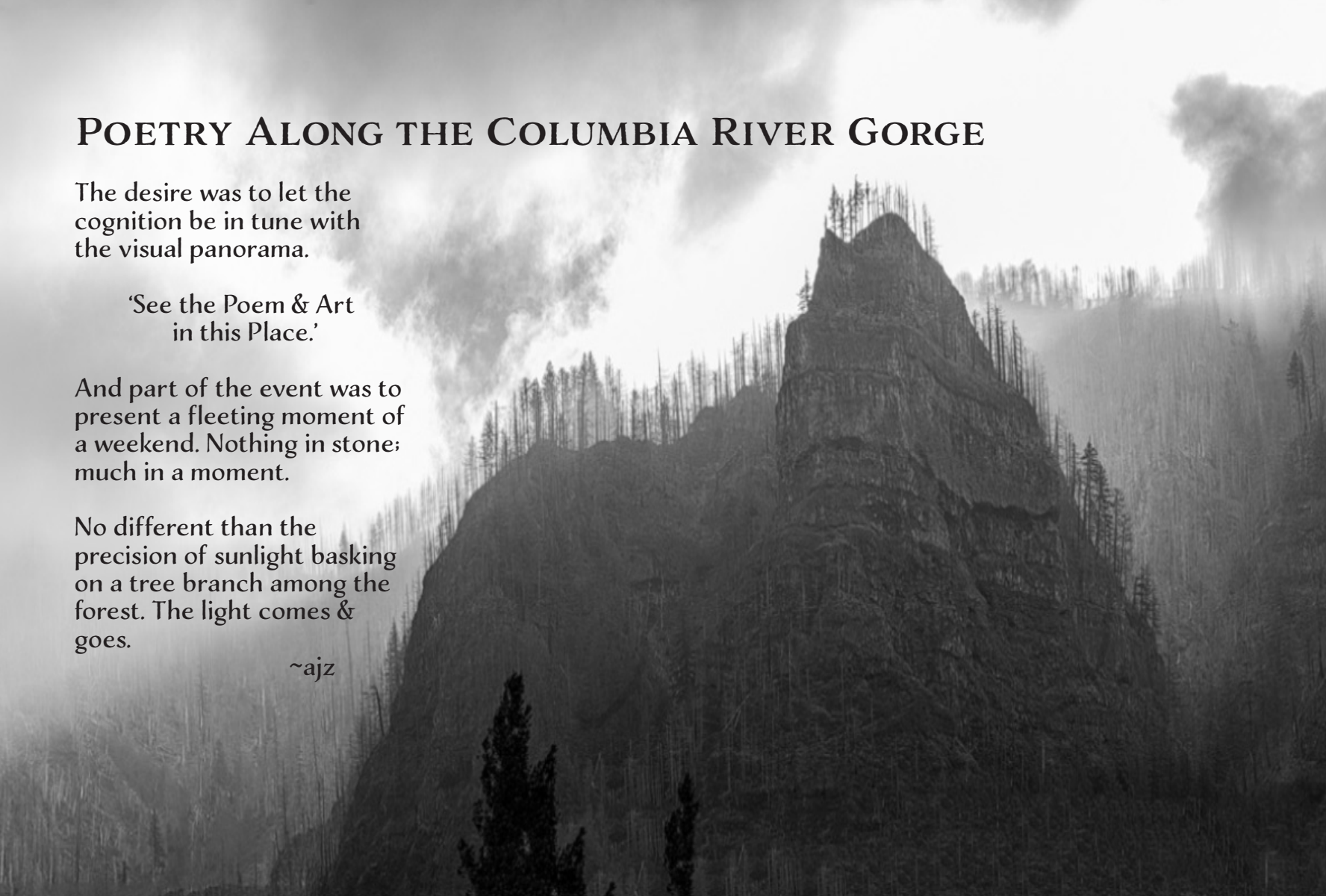


POETRY
ALONG THE
COLUMBIA
RIVER GORGE

A J ZELADA



POETRY ALONG THE COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE

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~ajz

POETRY ALONG THE COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE

A J ZELADA
2026

Poetry Along the Columbia River Gorge

A Pop-Up word and art installation
along the Historic Columbia River Highway Trail
overlooking the Columbia River Gorge

Celebration of National Poetry Month
April 11 & 12th, 2026

Event & Images were created by
A. J. Zelada

Why Poetry Along the Columbia River Gorge?

This Pop-Up event was born from the desire to attract a greater audience to experience the Columbia River Gorge.

My familiar cohort has been cycling and hiking partners.
I wanted to expand an invitation to many others; Welcoming and making the
Gorge accessible to All who bike, walk and roll was important.
In essence, partaking of the Gorge world is not restricted to the Bike or the Hiking Shoe.

Being in Gorge is an encompassing sensual engagement of the mind and heart. It can clear
the daily worries, it can delight the eyes with miniature flower details, it can give you a
'stand back and look' frame to see its panoramas of historical geology. And the answer to
how to have more people experience these sensations was to
marry the word & art for people to an encounter in situ.

A J Zelada

April 2026

The Place: The Columbia River Gorge

These floods as described in the Panther, Coyote, & Whale's Daughter stories of the Kalapuya people recognized catastrophic floods carving the Columbia River westward. Ice dams broke causing the Missoula floods which sculpted the Columbia River Gorge deeper over some 12

to 15,000 years ago. Harlen Bretz challenged disbelieving geologists in the 1920s that the Gorge was indeed created by repeated floods from western Montana bringing water and tumbling stones into Oregon.



The Trail to Poetry: The Historic Columbia River Highway

The nearly 80 mile Historic Columbia River Highway (HCRH), was built from 1915 to 1922. The HCRH was replaced by the Interstate I-84 in the 1950s. Reconstruction of the original HCRH & creation of the car free trail sections began in 1986. Poetry Along the Columbia River Gorge used these car free trail sections to allow cyclists, hikers, & people with mobility devices to see art in the context of the Gorge panoramas.

Poetry and Artwork Within the Columbia River Gorge

There are discreet ecosystems along the HCRH. From the west, different Hemlock-Fir-Pine trees transition to shrub grasslands in the eastern high desert. The 4 artist works were placed under a canopy of woodlands, near intimate waterfalls, adjacent to a bidirectional river view, & rockfall slides. Two sites were near handicapped parking entrances & two places were deeper within the HCRH trail, a 1.5 miles from the trail start.

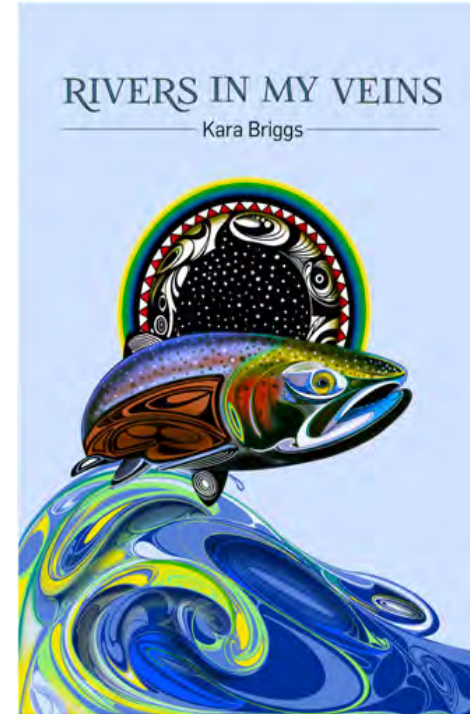


Kara Briggs, Poet

Kara Briggs

“Kara Briggs was a career journalist for two decades telling the stories of Western United States from two leading regional newspapers before launching a popular column in ICT about cancer in tribal communities while she battled cancer and survived. She has worked with tribes from Arizona to Alaska in various professional roles and now serves as Vice President of Tribal Lands and Waters Stewardship at Ecotrust, a non-profit for which she works with tribes across the West Coast. This is her first collection of poetry.”

Website: <https://www.karabriggs.com/>

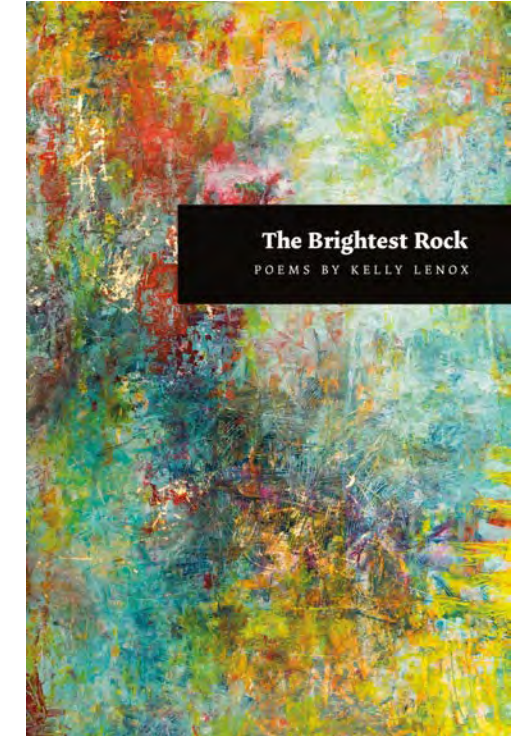


Kelly Lennox, Poet

Kelly Lennox

“Kelly Lennox’s poetry and essays are inspired by our Earth and cosmos. Her first collection of poetry is *The Brightest Rock*, and she publishes a new essay each month at Mama Ephemera’s Muddy Feet, on Substack. Other writing has been published in the US and abroad. Most recently, Kelly served as a science editor and writer for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. She’s also worked at Oxford University Press, Powell’s Books, the Environmental Protection Agency, and as a poet in the schools in the Portland area, where she lives.”

Website: <https://kellylennox.com/>

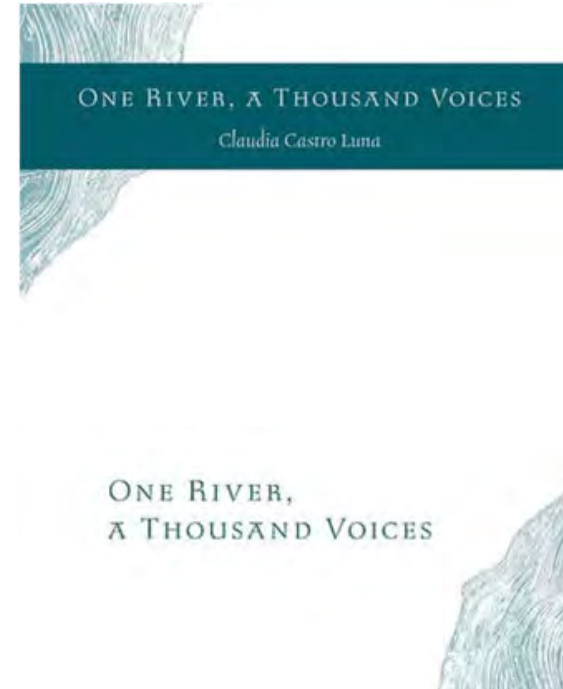


Claudia Castro Luna, Poet

Claudia Castro Luna

“Claudia Castro Luna is an Academy of American Poets Poet Laureate fellow (2019), WA State Poet Laureate (2018 – 2021) and Seattle’s inaugural Civic Poet (2015-2018). She is the author of Cipota Under the Moon (Tia Chucha Press, 2022) and Killing Marías (Two Sylvias Press, 2017) both shortlisted for the WA State Book Award in poetry, 2023 and 2018 respectively. She is also the author of One River, A Thousand Voices (Chin Music Press, 2020) and the chapbook This City (Floating Bridge Press, 2016). Her most recent non-fiction is in There’s a Revolution Outside, My Love: Letters from a Crisis (Vintage) and in Memory’s Vault: The Poetic Heart of Fort Worden (Empty Bowl). Born in El Salvador, Castro Luna lives in English and Spanish, and she writes and teaches in Seattle on unceded Duwamish lands.”

Website: <https://www.claudiacastraluna.com/books>



Speakthunder Berry, Visual Artist

Speakthunder Berry

“Master Salish Artist · Drum Maker · Cultural Educator Native American artist with 26+ years of experience specializing in Coastal Salish formline design. As a multi-generational horseman, my resilience was forged in the traditions of the Nakota Sioux, the Columbia River people, and the Aztec, with the Puyallup tribe serving as the foundation of my inter-tribal style. The grit of the rodeo—of broncs and bulls—taught me the humility required to serve. Today, I use my inheritance as a multi-generational drum maker and artist to advocate for those transitioning out of treatment and seeking a new path.”



Website: <https://speakthunderart.app/>

Women at Day's End

women weary
after a day putting up
salmon in jars
stacked to the night sky

women ready
to put down-
some coin
on the bone games

willing to dance
in the moonlight
remembering

what it was to dance
with the star man
his hands glittering
silver dust

to even take a moonlight turn
with him but remember
never to go back with him to the stars



Kara Briggs

remember the safety of the tree roots
remember even salmon sheltering
rely on gravity to keep earth bound

grind sneakers in the dirt
so the feet remember
this is where you belong

the forty-nine wafting
through the firs
love calling to owl dance

in the meadow in the forest
their love, the two of them
earth and water born

remembering here she belongs
with this one from a neighboring tribe
their home in the tall cedar wood

hearth fire always burning

Etymology /in·dig·e·nous/in-di-j -n s/

Kara Briggs



to indu
to endow
to beget, begotten
forgotten, birthed

dug up anyway
to dig it up
without permission

to be within
to spring out of the land
and/or sky

to originate
originally before everyone else
to belong but not belong

to be born from within
and conquered from without
to be indigent in your homelands

to be indignant about that
to have indigestion when
people call me Indigenous

when I just want to be
Yakama Nation, Warm Springs
Umatilla, Nez Perce

Kelly Knox

Missoula Floods

Loosenings, fractures
in the ice dams,

an inland sea
crashing oceanward
for years.

Gorge-blasting torrents
that must have roared

louder than
every jet engine at once.



Revelator

Watching mist climb
mountainsides

or stepping into the shade
of old oaks,

eyes settle on
the deeper structures:

branching trunk,
spine of the world.

One River, A Thousand Voices,

Two selections from One River, A Thousand Voices

Afore sage woman
etched into stone
stories of her people
and sat beside a quiet pool
along Rocky Shores
hearing something of herself
in the music and the gurgle of our waters,
before human tongues called a place
of roaring sizzling Falls Shonitkwu
and your majestic self, names of reverence
even before brave men perched

on wooden planks ensnared leaping salmon
on their improbable journey
to spawning sites



Claudia Cortez Luna

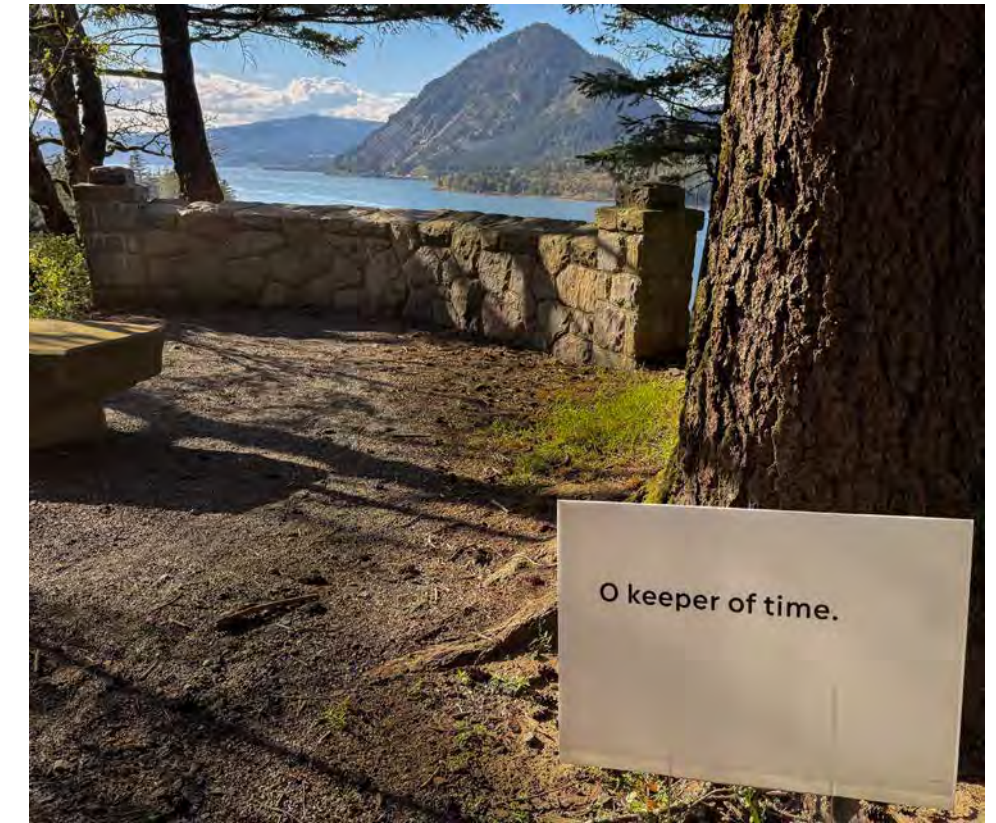


One River, A Thousand Voices, continued



For it is hubris to grant faith and dominion
only to alphabet and sword
it is hubris not to consider
that you who for millennia have run and pumped
don't also have manner and fashion of your own
just because your course was marked
on a map as territory
and a four syllable name on you imposed
does not make your riveriness conquerable
for all we know, and think we know,
human experience is pinhead
to the universe of your waters

Claudia Cortez Luna



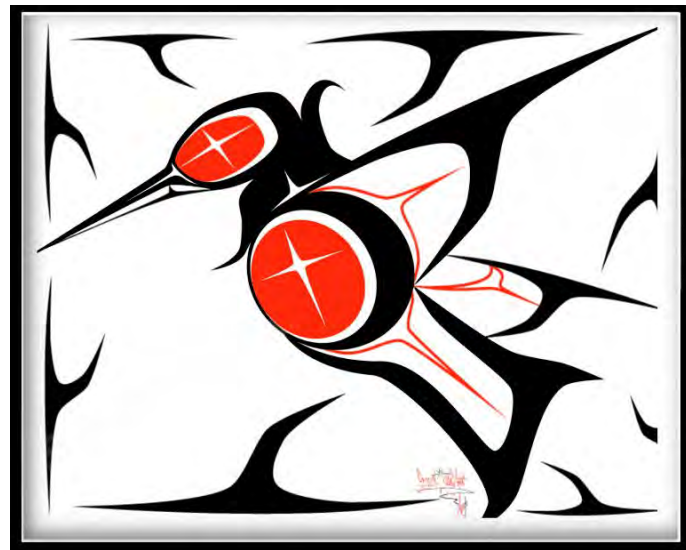
as mist from mountains rise at dawn
and to dusk belong the spirits
who tease lush lavender skies
yours in the thingness and the
riveriness of you

O great River
O great River
O keeper of time.



Speakthunder Berry



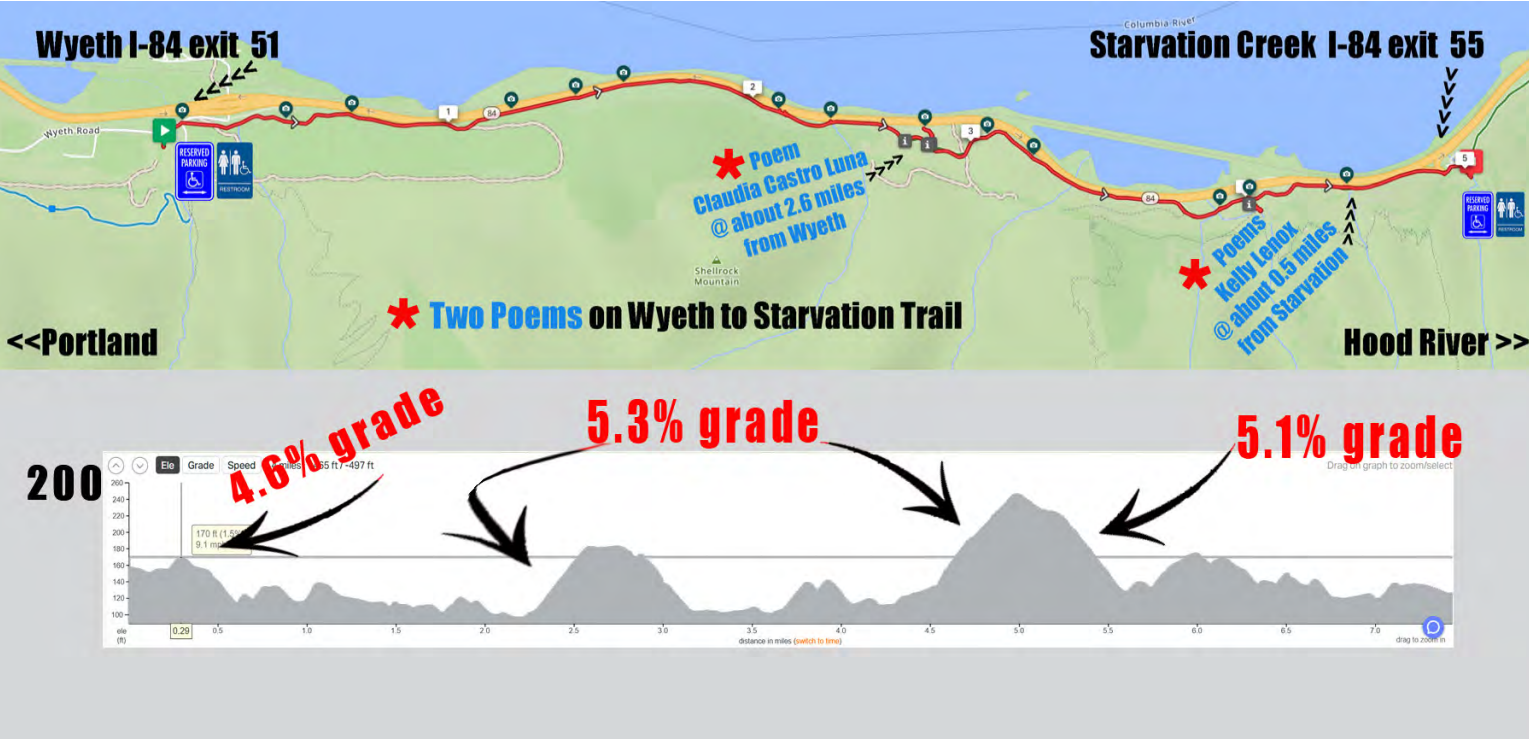


Speakthunder Berry

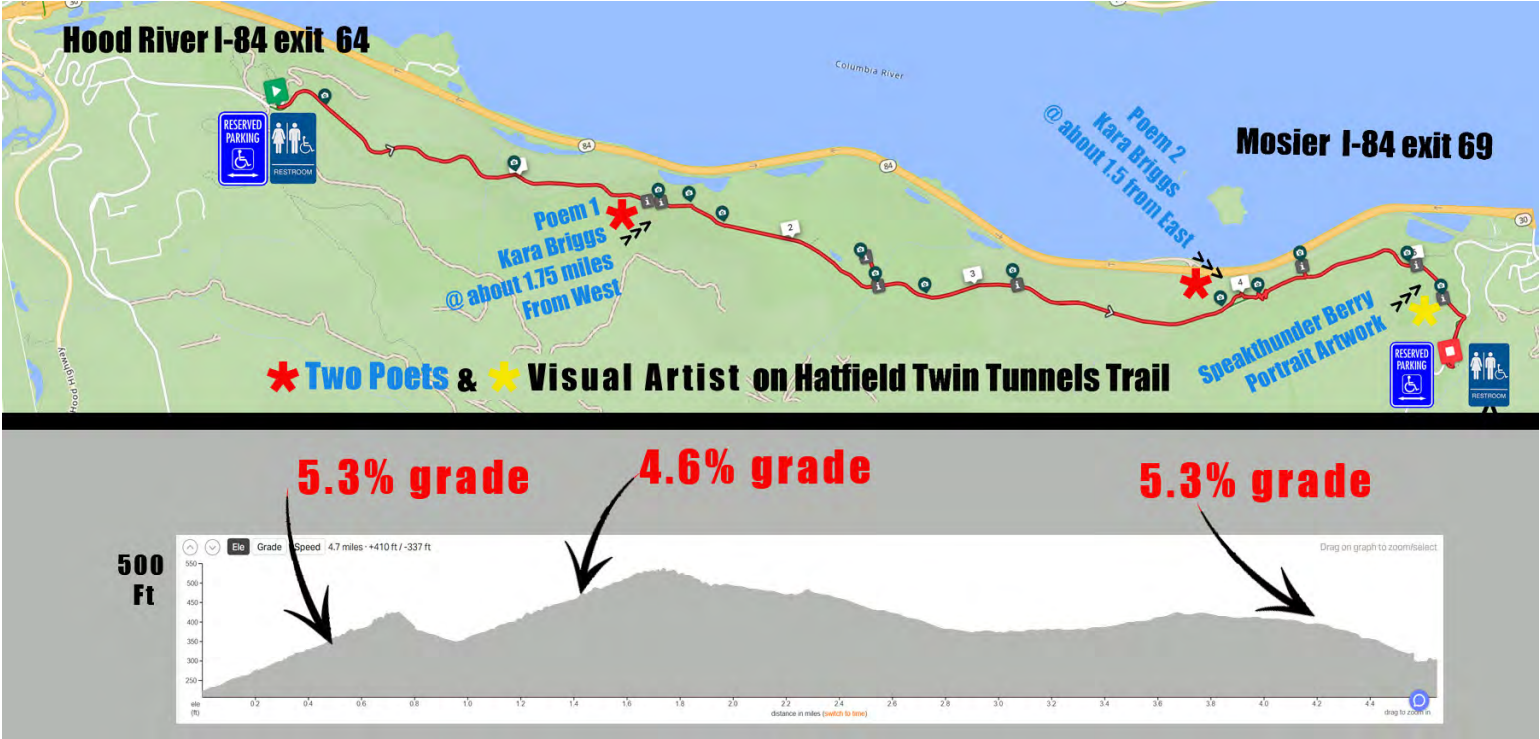


Poems & Artwork Maps

Wyeth to Starvation Creek Falls Trail



Hatfield Twin Tunnels Trail



Production Details for Poems & Accessibility

Searching for poetry and art took several months and much looking & reading. Requesting participation was a smooth 'yes,~you can use my work.' Finding places for words & art within the Gorge took multiple visits.

Accessibility and limiting barriers were important. There is a wonderful serendipity that the original slope/elevation for the 1915 road/trail was only 5% grade for those automobiles: this matches the 1990 American with Disabilities Act grade requirements for accessible mobility.

Poems and Artwork were printed on archival paper using

pigments intended to survive elements. Printed poem stanzas and images were placed on 'lawn signs' to be viewed by the individual cadences of cyclists, walkers, runners, people with mobility devices at their chosen pace.

The desire was to let the cognition be in tune with the visual panorama.

'See the Poem & Art in this landscape.'



And part of the event was to present an immediate moment of a weekend.

*Nothing in stone;
much in the moment.*

No different than the fleeting sunlight basking on a tree branch among the forest. The light comes and goes.

A bike was used to place the art. We thank Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation for their permit.

And a bigThank you to Melanie Green and Martine Sacks who made this production happen.



Poetry Along the Columbia River Gorge
A. J. Zelada
April 2026