



**Tales from a Sisters Naturalist**  
by Jim Anderson

**An eventful journey**

Back in 1958, I was looking for something to really sink my teeth into. I tried out being a buckaroo, a logger and a powder monkey. I was living with Dean and Lily Hollinshead on George A. Jones Road, in the house George A. Jones occupied when he had the grand idea of making that property into a model Central Oregon fruit farm...which failed because of freezing frost that hit him every spring in that micro-weather zone.

To keep the Hollinsheads from tossing me out among the frost-killed fruit trees I was employed by Bill Miller as a powder monkey/mechanic in the business of harvesting pumice west of Bend — where the William E. Miller Elementary School stands today.

At the same time, because I was so involved with the volcanic geology of the region, I became first a pest — then a pal — to Phil Brogan, who was a writer for *The Bend Bulletin* and *The Oregonian*, and subsequently the author of “East of the Cascades,” a wonderful book about where we live.

Every time I ran into a strange volcanic mystery I’d ask Phil about it and he would either know what it was right off the top of his head, or he’d look it up in his

geological text books from the U of O — from which he graduated with a degree in geology — or he’d send me searching on my own. There was no such thing as Google or Wikipedia in those long-ago days, so I became a regular fixture in the Deschutes Public Library, which I still am today.

Phil became my mentor in the late 1950s when I expressed the desire to become a writer for *The Bulletin*. My first attempt to write a news piece was when Phil sent me to write up the latest police beat news.

As I sat in front of that trusty Royal pounding out the words (me, a guy who couldn’t spell “cat” — even to this day), Phil came up behind me, stood there without saying a word, and then reached over my shoulder, pulled the paper from the typewriter and said, “A naturalist you are, my boy, but a writer you ain’t” and I threw in the towel.

But our friendship never cooled; he and I got the editor of *The Bulletin* to publish “picture pages” we’d cook up. I’d shoot photos of natural history subjects, Phil would do the writing, and they were hits.

One Sunday he asked me if I would like to accompany him to Camp Hancock where he was asked to give a geology lecture on Red Hill (an ancient cinder cone on the edge of camp). The camp is named for one of Oregon’s early geologists, Lon Hancock, who discovered many types of Miocene fossils in the area just east of the John Day River near the Clarno crossing. In time he was recognized throughout western U.S. as a new and outstanding geologist with his discovery of fossil rhino teeth and several sites of fossil nut trees adjacent to the camp.

These discoveries eventually led the Oregon Museum of Science & Industry (OMSI) to create a science camp near Clarno which they named Camp Hancock. That camp became the main stay of the museum and the facility that led hundreds of high school-age young people into careers in geology. On our way from Bend to Hancock Phil shared these details, so when we arrived I was ready to soak it all in.

I not only soaked in Lon Hancock’s life and work (he had gone out among the stars earlier), but I met his wife, Berrie, who was the cook in the camp kitchen. But it was the kids who really got me. They already had a distinct purpose in life and knew where they were going — and I wanted to be a part of that life.

Phil and I lined up a picture page story about Hancock. It was a hit and when the director of the museum, Loren McKinley (a retired newspaper publisher) saw it, he asked Phil and me if we would do the same for the museum’s new Camp Arago on the coast, which we did, and I used this experience to work my way into a position as OMSI’s staff naturalist and science camp teacher.



PHOTO BY VICTOR BERTHELSDORF

Pale snaketail dragonfly.

In that role I drove the bus, taught high school students from freshmen to seniors and science teachers for that part of the museum’s activities. I also met and worked with hundreds of kids from kindergarten to high school who wanted science to become part of their lives (this was in the Sputnik era, and everyone was hot for science).

The OMSI kids grew up to become adults and never lost their natural curiosity or love for the world around them. I’ve kept close to several of those magnificent young people and

one, Victor Berthelsdorf — who lives on his parents’ old farm near McMinnville — is a marvel. I try to get to his place each spring as he has nesting boxes up for kestrels and I band the nestlings. He also sends me photos of his other natural history discoveries almost daily.

The remarkable photo at the beginning of this story is his; he sends me photos on a regular basis and has enriched both our lives. These dragonflies patrol his property and caught his photographic eye.

Thanks Victor...

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