



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

## The Rock Wall of the Peninsula

If you look for it, in time you'll discover a mystery that will keep you awake nights as you try to unravel what you have stumbled across. That's where Mary Webster is at this moment.

Mary will take off on a trip at the drop of a hat to satisfy that overwhelming curiosity. Thankfully, when she goes off she keeps several of her friends in the loop and we receive photographs of her adventures. Many of her photos will be of birds and other subjects that have poked her curiosity and are a genuine thrill to her fans, especially me.

A decade-old example of Mary's trips arrived in my email a couple of weeks ago. In 2009 she and Jim Lough were exploring the

wild places of a peninsula between the Crooked and Deschutes Rivers and came upon a rock wall about four feet tall, four feet wide, and approximately one mile long. When Mary detailed that trip, she wondered, who built it? How did whoever built it do such a fine job? Why was it built? What was its purpose?

Looking at Mary's photographs, one can see the workmanship and the large size of the rocks. A man-made wall of that magnitude must have had a well-thought-out plan to be so well built. Lough thinks it may have been a wall to contain grazing sheep from falling into the Deschutes and Crooked Rivers.

From its geographical location it's not far from the fabled site of Grandview, now a ghost town. There are remarkable examples of stone walls throughout the old historic site. The people who came there for the promised irrigation water didn't have the money to purchase the materials for wire fencing and were forced to use native materials instead.

The surface was covered with the remains of lava rock broken up into small pieces by the flooding of the Deschutes and Crooked

rivers during the breakup of the last Ice Age. So there was no shortage of native materials.

Grandview was one of those many communities in the West that was promised water for irrigation — water that would bring people, schools, businesses and money. Water that would make the pioneers rich. All the promises that brought people to the Grandview area were based on the Big Dream, but as it turned out, no water ever came. Could that have been what the people who built the rock wall were waiting for — water — and the lack of it the reason people left?

Well, so far we have been able to glean some information from old General Land Office (GLO) records. The GLO regulated land allotments and their purchase. It also regulated Donation Land Claims (DLC), which gave settlers free land (the amount varied, but up to 640 acres) that they had to improve within a certain amount of time to earn title to the land.

The rock wall lands were not DLC claims, however.

The original landowners, John Swanson, Robert Skoglund, and Niels Christensen, all Swedish, arrived in 1916, and filed



PHOTO BY MARY WEBSTER

The historical, but seldom seen, Rock Wall of the Peninsula.

their claims with the General Land Office. Their lands were adjacent to various portions of the wall. Local tradition has it that the rock wall was called "The Seven Sisters Wall" because one family had seven daughters when the wall was erected.

Seven Sisters could also refer to the number of mountains that can be seen from these homesteads. Skoglund bought more adjacent land in 1926, and Swanson in 1930, so they did well for a while, at least. The three Swedish settlers would have had a rough time trying to make a go of it out there with no water for crops or livestock, per Jim Lough, but maybe those were good water years, or they found some method

of using the Deschutes or Crooked Rivers for irrigation.

Why these settlers abandoned their claims is unknown. How they survived on the claims for up to 20 years is unknown. It would be fascinating to find a descendant of these settlers, especially if they had the answers to these questions.

The rock wall is currently on National Forest lands and is protected as a historical archaeological site on the National Register of Historic Places.

Who knows what Mary (or you) may discover the next time she goes out and explores that next mysterious crack in the lava.

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