

# SCREENINGS

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## Gaston Rock Art Site (35-34-G) Revisited

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There are very few rock art sites west of the Cascades in Oregon. Most of those are well known and documented, such as the Cascadia Cave in Linn County and a couple of sites in Douglas County. A few, such as those near the falls in Oregon City, are obscured by water in all but the most ideal of circumstances. And the one near Cannon Beach is often searched for but I know of no one who has actually seen it.

Luther Cressman began his seminal inventory in 1937 with a site near Gaston in Washington County. Malcolm and Louise Loring list it as site number four in their monograph, *Pictographs and Petroglyphs of the Oregon Country* and it was reported on in the *Screenings* by Schuck in 1957. Should be easy to find, right? Well, we finally found it, but only after about five years of trying!

The site was first reported in 1878 according to the Lorings by Albert Gatshet who described the site as “six soft sandstone rocks with 'etchings' in an area about 1/8 mile wide.” The Lorings elaborate and say “The first rock has many initials and dates before 1917. The main

group of petroglyphs is in a wooded area. Green moss and shade make it difficult to get clear pictures of all the markings.”

The wooded area turned out to also be a chest- high blackberry thicket and the green moss was a virtual thick ubiquitous cap on the entire surface. Shade wasn't a huge problem as our visit took place in January and the young man who led us to the site had been there before and knew a path of somewhat less resistance than we might have been able to discover for ourselves on first attempt. But I'm ahead of the story here.

About five years ago a gentleman who said he lived in the general area contacted me via our website <http://www.oregonrockart.com> and told me that he had run across some old information about the site and was wondering what we might know about it so that he might be able to visit it. I screened his intentions quite thoroughly before sharing the Lorings' information from the monograph with him. He thanked me and indicated that he had some vague contacts that might be able to help him locate the site. I contacted him a few months later and he seemed to have made no further progress and I received no more follow up after that.



Details of each stick figure varies. Photo by LeeAnn Johnston.

Several years passed and in the late summer of 2011 I was contacted by a woman from the same area who said she had seen a small article in a local shopping newspaper about the site and wondered what we knew. I shared the Lorings information again and a few weeks later she got back to me and told me she had been in touch with the fellow who wrote the news article and that he could lead us to the site. Well, I was very excited of course and contacted him. He agreed to lead us to the site when I was in the Portland area in January 2012. He had to work late but was going to lead me close to the site so we could visit it when it was light the next day. I called him when I got to Portland and got bad news that he had to work even later and was not going to be able to follow through. My heart sank. But he quickly told me that he could give me the number of the older gentleman who had shown the site to him. I called and got him on the first try. After introducing myself and explaining how I got his number, he very generously gave me directions. I assured you I listened very closely, verified I had understood and made good notes. He told me the approach was from a driveway near a mobile home and seemed confident we'd have no problem.

So the next morning off we went and without much problem drove into the driveway. We were greeted there by an eager acting young man who told us that he would show us the site but that we must be very careful to whom we revealed the location as the owner didn't want the land taken away from him if people knew the site was there. I assured him of our ability and concern like

his for the preservation of the site and he led us up the hill. Over logs and blackberry vines about a hundred yards up the hill, with difficulty we got to an out crop of rock about thirty feet long and fifteen feet high. He was there a few minutes before we managed to join him and had begun to scrape away the thick layer of moss over the glyphs with his hands. He said there used to be a school group that kept them cleared off but that they hadn't been there for many years. From the thickness of the moss layer, that was not hard to believe.

Using the drawing the Lorings had made, we were able to locate the three major anthropomorphs and many of the surrounding "tally" lines including one hole about an inch around and half a dozen deep. Someone had told our guide that this was used to hold a flag to mark the site and that the site was located where the Indians from the coast used to come over into the valley. The valley floor to which he referred was only a couple of hundred yards down the hill and had much water in it which lead us to suspect that it would have been a prime root gathering area.

The anthropomorphs had many short lines sticking straight out from their heads, presumably representing hair or feathers. Two had dots for eyes and a mouth line, while the other had eyes but not a mouth line. They were "stick figure in form, one with three lines obviously intended to be fingers. The largest was about two feet tall, the others shorter.



*Thick moss threatens to obscure petroglyphs. Photo by Russel Michimer.*

We could make out several initials and parts of the dates from the second decade of the last century that the Lorings recorded. We made no effort to fully clean the moss from the site as that would have been an extensive undertaking beyond our means, expertise, and time capabilities. We were extremely careful to use only our bare hands to clear the small areas that we did. Getting good photographs, as the Lorings had mentioned, even without the shade from trees was extremely challenging due to the moss and the mud left even after the moss had been cleared.

The site did not seem as large as was originally described, but we are confident that what we saw was the site of all the drawings presented by the Lorings. We suspect that the Lorings did not find all of the glyphs initially reported. That report said the site was about an eighth of a mile wide and on six rocks. The rock out crop on which we found the glyphs was only about thirty feet wide and fifteen feet high which would lead one to believe that more glyphs might now lay hidden beneath the overgrowth and moss on rock surfaces that are now hidden as well. It would be very tough going just to try and find more rock out crops in the area. Makes one wonder how many more sites lie hidden beneath similar intensive flora overlays on the rainy side of the mountains.

## Fort Vancouver National Historic Site Upcoming Events

### At Fort Vancouver, Vancouver, Washington:

- Barracks Walk, a 45-minute, Ranger-led, tour highlighting the evolution of Vancouver Barracks. Saturdays and Mondays July 7- Sept 3, 11:00 am. Meet at Visitor Center. \$3 per person 16 years and older.

Historic Weapons Demonstrations, 1-1:30 pm, Saturdays focus on the US Army at the Parade Ground, Sundays focus on fur trade weapons at the Fort site. \$3 per person 16 years and older. July 7 – Sept 2.

Flora, fauna and future. 1.5 hour walk from Fort to waterfront. Every Saturday from July 7 to September 1, 2012. 3:00-4:30 p.m. \$3 per person 16 years and older.

Kids Digs. Saturdays, 11-12:00 noon. For kids under 12 years old.

For Additional information, contact the Fort at 360-816-6230 or visit their website at:

<http://www.nps.gov/fova/index.htm>.

### At McLoughlin House, Oregon City, Oregon:

National Park Service volunteers and staff at the McLoughlin House have scheduled a demonstration series featuring crafts that were popular in the early to middle years of Queen Victoria's reign. Upcoming demonstrations include:

**Penny Rugs Saturday, August 11**, 12:00-4:00 p.m.  
When is a rug not a rug? When it's a Penny Rug!  
These layered and stitched table mats are made of concentric circles of wool felt.

**Knitting Saturday, September 8**, 12:00-4:00 p.m.  
Want to learn to knit? We'll teach you! Already a knitter? Expand your skills with lace patterns from the 1800s.

**Coral & Pearl Brooch Saturday, October 13**, 12:00-4:00 p.m.  
Learn to craft a period-style brooch using imitation coral and pearls.

**From the Inside Out Saturday**, November 10, 12:00-4:00 p.m.  
Ever wondered what Victorian ladies wore underneath those fancy clothes? Listen to a fascinating lecture about undergarments of the 1800s!

The McLoughlin House is a unit of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, and is located at 713 Center Street, Oregon City, OR 97045. Call (503) 656-5146 for more information.

## Screenings Urgently Needs Your Help!

We need someone to take the paper version of *Screenings* to the main post office in Portland for mailing each month beginning in October 2012. The newsletters will be delivered to your door sometime during the third week of each month. They will be preaddressed, so all you need to do is take them to the post office and use the OAS non-profit postage meter for postage. If you are willing to take on this very important task or would like additional information, please contact Glenda Satterthwaite, [sattertg@hotmail.com](mailto:sattertg@hotmail.com), or Nancy Brown, (503) 255-6875, [brownab@gmail.com](mailto:brownab@gmail.com).