

CASE OF THE HIDDEN SURVEY CORNERS

One of the most unusual jobs at Multnomah County involves measuring the land beneath our feet. When Oregon became a state, county surveyors took responsibility for maintaining public land survey corners. These corners are marked by physical monuments, often inscribed metal disks. The corners form a grid that is used to survey and identify land parcels, especially in rural and undeveloped areas.

There are about 2000 of these survey corners in Multnomah County. Employees in the County Surveyor's Office periodically visit corner monuments, check their condition and take measurements to confirm their location has not changed. Considering the county's diverse geography, it is not surprising that some monuments are very hard to find. Not long ago surveyors used new technology and a detective's skill to locate two of the county's most hidden corners.

The crew was searching for several corners in the Columbia River Gorge that had not been visited since being marked in 1891. The original surveyor, Mr. H. Hurlburt, had carved corner markings into several trees, noting the location of each in his field manual.

County surveyors recently used a handheld GPS (global positioning system) device to locate the general area where the corners were located. The area is a dense forest. Tree bark had long ago grown over the century-old markings carved by Hurlburt.

The modern surveyors noted scars on several trees, removed small plugs of the tree and found Hurlburt's original carvings inside. After verifying that the monuments were in their correct location, the crews replaced them with more durable metal monuments. Using an inexpensive handheld GPS device and a keen eye saved the crew many hours of work, allowing them to check more corners in less time. Which should make finding these two corners next time a lot easier.

