

Skull found on Mount Hood in '86 was missing 19-year-old woman, DNA reveals; cold case reopened

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Wanda Herr pictured at age 12. At age 19, Herr went missing from a Gresham-area group home in 1976 and 10 years later her remains were discovered on Mount Hood.

By [Kale Williams | The Oregonian/OregonLive](#)

New DNA analysis has definitively matched a skull found on Mount Hood in the mid-1980s to a young woman reported missing a decade earlier, officials said Thursday.

Now, nearly 50 years after her disappearance, investigators are hoping the information will help them determine what led to the death of 19-year-old Wanda Ann Herr.

The mystery began in 1986 when two Forest Service workers happened upon the partial skull, some bone fragments and a tooth near Government Camp off U.S. 26, said the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office, which is overseeing the investigation and issued a news release Thursday.

More than a week after the discovery, a forensic examiner with the Oregon State Police determined the remains belonged to a young woman or a small man and the bones had likely been in the forest for 10 years or more.

Then the remains sat in evidence for more than two decades until in 2008 a state forensic anthropologist re-examined them and developed a better victim description: the bones belonged to a woman in her late teens to early 20s.

With that new information, an imaging specialist created a facial reconstruction using clay. The reconstruction generated leads, officials said, but ultimately resulted in no forward momentum.

Another decade passed and, in 2019, the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office received a grant to begin DNA analysis on more than 100 sets of unidentified remains, the Mount Hood skull among them.

"The intensive genetic analysis revealed far more detail about the subject: The skull belonged to a female of Northern European descent with fair skin, hazel/brown eyes, brown hair, and some freckles," the sheriff's office said in a statement. "This new info, combined with extensive genealogical research, soon revealed a likely name for the young woman: Wanda Ann Herr, born in 1957."

Investigators were able to track down Herr's surviving sisters, who told officials that she had disappeared sometime after June 1976 while possibly living in a group home near Gresham.

Little other information about Herr was known. She was raised in a different home from her sisters, officials said, and though she was believed to be a chronic runaway, no missing persons reports were filed using her name. She had no bank account or DMV records, and no police records were filed that included her name.

The only lead investigators have is a photograph of Herr taken when she was 12 years old, seven years before her disappearance.

The sheriff's office asked anyone who knew Herr or who has any information about her disappearance to contact deputies at 503-723-4949 or by using the [online email form](#).