

Skeletal remains found in Oregon nearly 50 years ago confirmed to be missing woman

by KATU Staff

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Forensic approximation of Marion McWhorter, whose skeletal remains were found on July 24, 1976 - Image courtesy Oregon State Police

LINN COUNTY, Ore. — The family of a woman who has been missing for more than 50 years is getting some closure after Oregon State Police says investigative genetic genealogy helped identify her remains found in Linn County.

A moss hunter initially found the skeletal remains on July 24, 1976 in the Wolf Creek area near Swamp Mountain. However, it would be nearly half a century years before a team of detectives, medical examiner staff, and forensic genetic genealogists would confirm they belonged to **Marion Vinetta Nagle McWhorter**.

“This case was cold for 49 years. That means that family members lived and died without ever knowing what happened to their missing loved one,” State Forensic Anthropologist Hailey Collord-Stalder said.

Along with the remains, Linn County Sheriff's Office investigators found a clog-style shoe, a fraying fringed leather coat, a leather belt with Native American-style beadwork, two metal rings, and a pair of degraded Levi's jeans.

The Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office examined the evidence back in 1976, and while a dental examination noted several restorations, they were unable to

Decades later in 2010, the Oregon Museum of Natural and Cultural History made an anthropology report and estimated that the remains were of a white woman under 35 years old at the time of her death. Later that year, a bone sample was submitted to establish a DNA profile.

The following year a forensic artist with the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office created a possible rendering of her face.

Another decade passed, and thanks to a National Institute of Justice grant, researchers used advanced DNA techniques to get a new profile analyzed.

There was a breakthrough in the case in April of 2025, when someone uploaded their genetic profile to the Family Tree DNA database, opening up a connection to the unidentified woman.

After following some leads, they determined the remains were likely those of McWhorter.

"Forensic genetic genealogy allowed us not only to assist Oregon law enforcement and medicolegal personnel in identifying a woman who likely did not go missing voluntarily, but it also helped provide her family with answers and help relieve the uncertainty of what happened to Marion McWhorter," Collord-Stalder said.

Investigators say McWhorter, who was born January 7, 1953, had one surviving younger sister who lived in the Seattle area. She provided a DNA sample, confirming that it was her long-lost sister found all those years ago.