

The cairns of Overlook

Rock structures may contain links to the ancients

by Violet Snow

On the side of Overlook Mountain is an 80-foot-long serpentine stone wall that ends at a boulder with a triangular shape that Woodstocker Glenn Kreisberg finds suggestive of a snake's head. A few

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hundred feet away, an almost identical — but crumbling — stone wall ends at a similar boulder, forming a mirror image, the two "snakes" arranged tail to tail.

Kreisberg and archeological researcher David Johnson believe the walls were built by Native Americans for spiritual purposes. They regard the site as sacred

land and want it preserved, although it's located on private property that is currently for sale.

The land sloping down from the serpentine walls is dotted with small cairns of meticulously stacked rocks, as well as six long, large piles of rock with retaining walls on the downhill sides. Mapping the locations of the walls and the large piles, Kreisberg came up with a pattern resembling the constellation Draco, believed to be reflected in ancient structures around the world,

from Angkor Wat to the Ohio serpent mound.

Kreisberg, a radio frequency engineer, first came across the structures when he was asked to join a committee to study the siting of a cell tower in nearby California Quarry. Neighbors pointed out the rock formations, and Kreisberg became so fascinated by them that he joined the New England Antiquities Research Association, of which he is now vice president.

On a sunny Saturday, he surveyed the site with Johnson, a Dutchess County educator, photographer, and water consultant who has researched rock formations in Peru, Chile, and the southwestern U.S.

"We've found the same pattern here that we found in South America and in Anasazi sites in Arizona and New Mexico," said Johnson, who has mapped under-



Curving stone wall that ends at the boulder in the background. Note the wall's pyramid shape that adds stability to the structure.

ground aquifers in all three regions and found that mysterious structures made

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by human hands appear to mark the boundaries of subterranean watercourses.

"These structures relate to the three worlds of the Native Americans," he explained. "The solar system and the constellations and planets are the gods above. The stones are part of the world we walk in. And the ancestors are associated with the underworld — their spirits travel through the earth along the water pathways."

In addition, he said, water provided a means of communication between the people of this world and the ancestors, and the cairns and walls were probably settings for conducting rituals and honoring the dead.

A Tribal Preservation Officer of the Stockbridge Munsee band of Mohicans visited Overlook and said she thought the six large, rectangular cairns were burial sites. Kreisberg hopes to interest the tribe in studying the large cairns with underground radar technology, which would not detect bones but would reveal space or disturbance of soil underground.

At one of the smaller cairns, Kreisberg pointed out two rocks, one of white quartzite and another of reddish hematite, that were unlike all the other rocks in the assemblage, neatly stacked on a small boulder. "These kinds of non-local stones were used as offerings by the Native Americans," he said, demonstrating how the reddish rock can slide in and out of a niche built into the side of the cairn.

I asked about books that claim the rock stacks of the Catskills are not ancient structures but were simply piled up by farmers wanting to clear the stones out of their fields.

"As a farmer, would you take so much care to build such a perfect structure?" observed Kreisberg. "Also, when you look at the deeds of the original patents for the land, they mention ancient stone monuments that were referenced to as boundary markers at the corners of lots. They were already here before the farmers arrived."

The lines of Nasca

There are 46 small cairns on the mountainside. Johnson believes they correspond to aquifer boundaries, as do the two serpentine walls. His methods of determining the location of underground water

include studies of the area's geology and hydrology, determination of the locations and rates of flow of wells and springs, and one technology that is controversial in the field of archeology: dowsing.

"A lot of the scientific community hollers at me for doing it," he said, swinging the two L-shaped metal dowsing rods he uses for finding underground water. "They say it doesn't work. But it works for me."

His study of the Nasca geoglyphs, geometric shapes etched onto the desert in the Nasca Valley of Peru and Chile, began when he was involved in a project to locate water sources in the region. Wells were successfully tapped based on his dowsing for water using the rods, which swing in response to passage over boundaries of underground watercourses. He knew about the Nasca lines, which had puzzled archeologists for decades.

"While mapping the aquifers and areas of higher permeability materials under the desert," Johnson said. "I realized they had already been mapped by the lines of Nasca."

Donald A. Proulx, Professor of Anthropology Emeritus at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, describes, on his website, his participation in Johnson's research in South America from 1996 to 2003. Johnson taught social studies at Arlington High School in Poughkeepsie for 27 years until he retired to devote himself to the Nasca project. His unorthodox methods have been questioned by scientists, but he has convinced archeologists and geologists, with funding from the National Geographic Society, to help him try to verify his theories through rigorous research.

Proulx says the results of the studies were mixed. Whereas some of the geometric figures were shown to correspond to water-conducting faults and alluvial gravels, others did not. Johnson argued that some of the methodology failed to consider all the relevant factors.

Proulx notes that Johnson has been hired as a consultant by agencies in Peru and Chile and as "successfully located water sources that are now being used by local communities." He also gives Johnson credit for "his tenacious research on the geoglyphs, wells...and other water sources in the Nasca drainage. The hydrological data he collected and the many new geoglyphs he discovered in the Nasca drainage are of great importance to the



Glenn Kreisberg stands beside a small cairn on Overlook Mountain. The two protruding rocks at center may be ritual offering stones.

archaeological and geological communities."

A connection to the land

On Overlook, said Johnson, his dowsing rods identified underground water flows that descend the mountain from the cliffs overlooking the serpentine walls and are almost precisely the width of the walls. As Kreisberg and I reached the boulder marking the head of one of the "snakes," he reached down and picked up a half-consumed bundle of dried sage, commonly burned in rituals of Native American and other spiritual practices. Apparently someone else considers the site a sacred place.

"I have great respect for the Native American culture and belief system," said Kreisberg. Although he was raised in the Jewish tradition, he finds his beliefs increasingly aligned with Native understandings. He recently edited an anthology, *Lost Knowledge of the Ancients* (Bear & Company, 2010), describing recent research and theories on the origins of civilization, technology, and consciousness. He is working on a book about the Overlook rock structures.

"I think this site is an important link to our past, a link we're all missing today, a connection to the land," he said. "The Native Americans' relationship with the natural world was intimate and profound, in ways we are only beginning to understand today. The lessons we learn from that relationship may turn out to be what sustains us in the end, when science and technology fail to find the answers of what's missing in our society."

Kreisberg added that archeologists tend to ignore the many Catskill stone monuments because the land has been substantially altered by later settlement, but he feels it's important to study and protect the sites.

The structures are on a 37-acre parcel that was purchased years ago by his cousin and two other buyers who hunted on the land. When they decided to sell the property, efforts were made to convey it to the Open Space Institute or the Woodstock Land Conservancy, which have, in the past, acquired big chunks of Overlook Mountain to protect it from development. That deal apparently is not progressing, as the parcel is currently on the market, listed at \$340,000.

In a statement, the Land Conservancy called the parcel "a valuable conservation asset to Woodstock and would make an excellent candidate for permanent protection. We applaud the landowner for preserving it over the past decades. Any dialogue we have with landowners regarding their wishes for the future of their land is kept confidential..."

Kreisberg is concerned that someone will buy the property and decide to build a home without regard to the cairns and walls that he considers precious and irreplaceable.

"People buying it should know that this is on the land," said Kreisberg. "If they try to bulldoze it, there are many people who will get together to try to fight it. We may not succeed, but we'll sure make things difficult."++



A small cairn perched atop a cliff.

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