Vandals ruin fence, break tombstones

By PHIL WRIGHT East Oregonian
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Left, a vandalized headstone at Blue Mountain Kees Cemetery.

Vandals ripped apart a locked gate and broke a dozen headstones at the Blue Mountain Kees Cemetery near Weston. And the cemetery's board of trustees doesn't have the money to repair the damage.

Kathleen McCullough is one of those trustees. She said the vandalism happened around the weekend of Nov. 13. Locals jogging by the 135-year-old cemetery a mile south of Weston saw the vandalism and reported it. McCullough and her husband, Chuck McCullough, checked it out for themselves and took photos to record the damages.

Someone used a vehicle to rip open the fence, the McCulloughs said, and then went on a tear through the cemetery, toppling and breaking tombstones.

Kathleen McCullough said she got an estimate from an local business that would set up the tombstones for $800, but full repairs to the site would increase into the thousands of dollars.

Volunteers handle the upkeep and maintenance of the cemetery. She said the board doesn   t have the $800, let alone more.

The Blue Mountain Kees Cemetery is on Oregon's registry of historic cemeteries, she said. Farmer Andrew Kees established the cemetery in 1875. His wife, Nancy Osborn Kees, was a survivor of the Whitman Massacre of 1847.

Chuck McCullough said the cemetery's isolation makes it an easy target. He and his wife live about a half-mile from it, he said, and they are among the graveyard's nearest neighbors.

Kathleen McCullough said it's been years since vandals hit the cemetery this hard. The last time was in 1987, when hooligans ripped out trees and knocked over tombstones.

The McCulloughs said law enforcement doesn't yet know who committed these latest acts of destruction and disrespect. Kathleen McCullough said there's been some talk around the small town of pooling funds for a reward to catch the criminals who did this.

Until then, she said, the focus is on getting the cemetery looking better again.