Wild Wednesday. 10 November 2021. Autumn, Boulder Creek by Walt Anderson

Even as we celebrate the negotiation that resulted in the protection of 475 acres of natural open space in the Granite Dells, we are thrilled to hear that a letter of intent has been reached for the acquisition of about 300 more acres contiguous with the new open space and another parcel the City had already purchased. When this is consummated, it will get us closer to our dream of a major regional park and preserve in the Dells. To celebrate this good news, I took a late-day walk in existing preserve lands along Granite Creek. Please hike along with me as I feature some of the beauty that caught my eye.

#granitedells #savethedells #bouldercreek #velvetash #openspace #liesegangrings #granite #overthehillgang #trails #flashfloods #hailstorm #coralbells #goldenrod #claretcup #manzanita #ponderosapine #ageratina #prescott #peavinetrail #reciprocity

Boulder Creek starts on the basaltic slopes of Glassford Hill, and along its course, you can find the rounded, dark volcanic boulders for which it is named. Flash floods carrying the basaltic rocks and gravels have scoured the bedrock granite along its course, resulting in the smoothed contours we see in this exposed granite, which displays intricate hydroglyphic patterns of liesegang rings. Never heard of hydroglyphics? Well, I just made it up, but it really seems to fit.

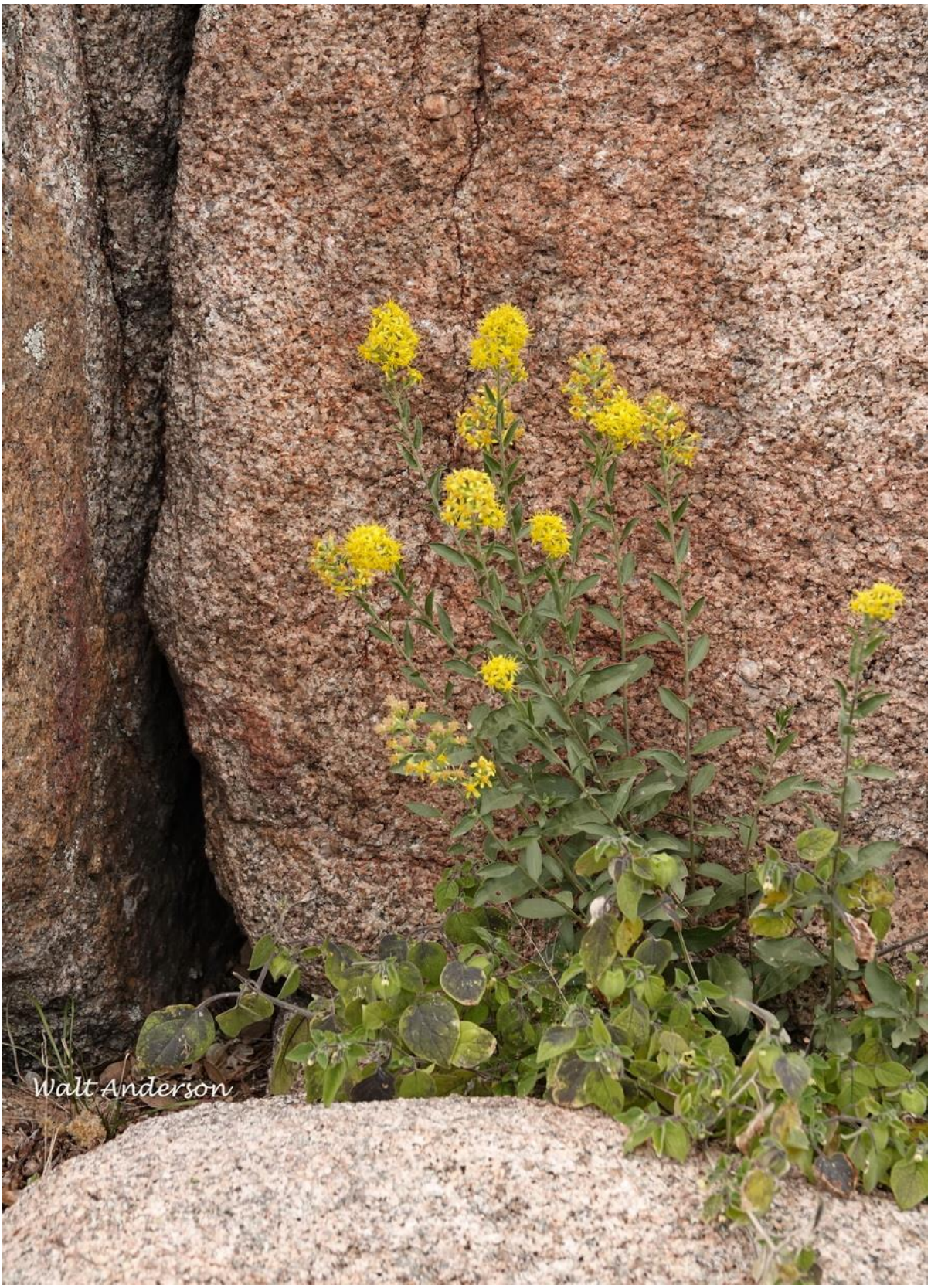
Warm fall colors along Boulder Creek in Granite Dells. This is part of the City of Prescott open space, a treasure benefiting people and wildlife in many ways. Though it is close to the city, it retains both peace and wildness. It took a lot of dedication and public engagement to make this sanctuary a reality. Note the black basalt boulders in the foreground. They represent thousands of years of erosion and rock movement from Glassford Hill down the canyon toward Granite Creek, a process that continues today.

Velvet Ash provides some of the most pleasing fall colors in riparian areas in the Dells.

The Dino Trail passes through a tight canyon that is a tributary of Boulder Creek. You can see how flash floods from the wet monsoon season this year scoured the canyon, exposing tree roots and wiping out any herbaceous plants unfortunate enough to have been growing in the channel. The drifts of silt, however, will receive seeds over time and begin to support a new herbaceous community until a future flood resets the clock.

I marvel at the tenacity of plants that can not only successfully colonize but also persist over long periods of time in minor cracks in the granite. This Emory Oak is one such amazing survivor.

Another is this cascading spray of Coral Bells, able to hang on for many years in its specific niche of a rock crack that rarely if ever sees direct sunlight.



Here a lovely goldenrod has found its niche, much less extreme than that of the Coral Bells.

Claret Cup cactus is another species that takes advantage of rock crevices that harbor just the tiniest amounts of soil. I was attracted to the composition here, where a weathered log seems to shelter the cactus clump. Can you find the raven feather in this scene? Its evidence of the animal life that also persists in these rocky environments.

A challenging environment creates stresses that lead to physical contortions reflecting struggle. Upon a tree's death, the weathered remnant can remind us of those struggles that create "character" and a particular kind of patterned beauty.

The beauty of this manzanita also demonstrates the challenges of living in a harsh environment. Soil is minimal, and the plant is exposed to the full force of wind, sun, hail, and other elemental furies. It reminds me to be more accepting of the challenges of aging that we all face; our own persistence can lead to development of interesting character if we look at it with that lens.

Four months after the exceptional hailstorm that raged through parts of the Dells, these Ponderosa Pines are just barely hanging on. Despite the good summer rains that followed the hailaceous storm, they were unable to produce a new crop of essential needles. I hope they survive, but if they don't, their snags will support other life for a few decades. Change is the only constant in any dynamic ecosystem.

On my short hike, I made a loop from the Boulder Creek Trail to Dino Trail, then Blaster Trail (seen here), then Northwest Passage and back to the Peavine. I really must commend Parks & Rec's Joe Baynes, Chris Hosking, the Over the Hill Gang, and others who have developed an incredible trail system in the open space portfolio of the City of Prescott.

Ageratina and weathered wood along the Blaster Trail. What a lush contrast to the rugged granite cliffs all around me on the hike!

I so much enjoyed the cloudy afternoon, which was ideal for plant photography, as it eliminated harsh shadow. Right as the sun was setting, its warm rays illuminated briefly this outcrop and the luxuriant garden of Ageratina at its base. I was struck again how wonderful it is that this land is being preserved for posterity, even as human populations continue to grow around the protected oasis. I am glad that I have been able to be an active voice for the conservation of this area for well over the past two decades. I have gained tremendous respect for the many people with the vision and dedication to help protect this landscape, and I will never take it for granted. This is a model that other communities could follow, so I hope the word spreads far and wide. Fight for what you believe in!

The sun sets early on these November days, and I was glad I was out there when it did, as the evening clouds above the Peavine Trail put on a fiery display.

It is so important that we take time to get away from the incessant demands of human life and reconnect often with nature. Wherever you may be, please heed this advice. Your health and happiness will make it well worth your effort. And along with that advice, I urge you to be active in protecting the open spaces that give us these amazing benefits. It's called reciprocity.