

# restore restory

A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE CACHE CREEK NATURE PRESERVE

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT OF



CREATED & DIRECTED BY  
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AUDIO TOUR INTERVIEW WITH

*Ben Adamo*

STOP 4:

*Oak Savannah*





## Stop 4: Oak Savannah

### **So where are we now?**

We're on the east side of the nature preserve just downstream from the Salisbury spill.

### **And what do you appreciate most about this place?**

Well, it's easy to appreciate this because right now we're sitting on a comfortable bench in the shade with a nice little breeze blowing and this area has been re-vegetated by the efforts of the nature preserve conservancy and it's really looking pretty nice. There's been a number of different projects in this area by the SLEWS groups and some of the school programs and it's nice to sit here and enjoy the fact that they've been very productive and they can come here and see the efforts of what they've done through the years.

### **Can you just describe what's immediately in front of you and then maybe in the middle ground and then in the background out there?**

Well, the view from this bench looking to the north is, in the foreground we've got some deer grass and some willows and some redbuds and then in the further landscape down in that Gordon Slough discharge area, there's cottonwoods and a few black walnut and in the background we'll looking at some valley oaks. So it's a really good mixed landscape here. I see some elderberries down on the east end as well so it's a real diverse landscape from a vegetation standpoint and I know that this little corridor in here gets a lot of traffic up and down of wildlife especially early and late.

### **Of all the different vegetation and trees and all that that you just named, which one is your personal favorite and why?**

Well, personal favorite as far as the vegetation goes has probably got to be, and it's probably a common one for a lot of folks is the valley oaks and I think it's just – they're such an impressive tree and through the whole season, especially in the wintertime when you see these valley oaks in the fog or in the sunset or the sunrise, they're such a majestic tree and you have to appreciate the age and just the way the different limbs are formed and the canopy is just really something that's impressive.

### **How was this area used by the mining company when you worked this parcel?**

This particular area wasn't used by the mining companies to my knowledge. East of here, very close to 94-B, there was a small portable plant set up in there for a very brief period of time and they did a little bit of processing there, but this upper bench that we're on today was never used by any of the companies that I'm aware of.

### **So did you all, even though it wasn't used in terms of the mining operation, did you all come out here and hang out or was it used in any other way by miners?**

This particular area, when I was here was not used at all by the mining company. Our lease was basically west of the little ranch complex that's now part of the conservancy managed property. There was a small farmhouse still on site at that time and this area behind here was basically an area that they used just – and I don't know if they actually actively used it, but it was part of the ranch complex.

*Oak Savannah, continued (p.2 of 4)*

**Well, let's go in that direction. Before mining, this whole area was Ag. What impact do you think mining had on agriculture on farms up and down the creek?**

Well, I think that mining had impacts on agriculture based upon the different sites. This particular site I had extended conversations with a farmer who his family had been here for a number of years and the place where we sited our plant. As I spoke to you earlier, just an area that they used as a corral for sheep, so it didn't have a major impact on any agricultural production.

Certainly there are other areas either upstream or downstream that are currently being mined in the off channel areas that at one time were agricultural parcels and some of those are being reclaimed to agriculture, some of them are going into lakes and so the impacts would vary based on the site.

**Does it create any kind of problem for Ag land when the gravel is taken out of the creek?**

If we're talking about the creek mining and its effect on agriculture, that was an issue that was debated quite a bit in the late '80s and there were different theories that were argued at the time and some said that by lowering the creek bed it was actually removing the shallow aquifer and draining some of the wells in the area.

There were a number of studies that were done and I think some of the early studies were in fact blaming mining on a certain amount of what they call dewatering of the aquifer, but those studies were also performed during a period of drought and as it turned out, once we got back into a more normal rainfall period, the well levels recovered to historic highs. So some of those earlier studies were ultimately refuted, but that being said, there is some local effect on lowering of the creek channel adjacent to agricultural wells that are in very close proximity to the creek.

**Did miners and farmers on the creek mostly get along?**

Yes, as far as overall, I believe that the mining and farmers did get along. Primarily it was an issue of – certainly the mining community got along with farmers who had gravel on their property and wanted to lease it and I often had conversations with a variety of different farming interests and as one of them put it to me, it was the haves and the have not's; those that had gravel that they wanted to sell to the industry were very happy with the industry and those that didn't have gravel to sell the industry weren't so happy with them. So again, it was a matter of economics I think for the various farmers.

**Did you know the farmer? You said you had some conversations with the farmer. Can you talk about or maybe you can tell me a story about a particular conversation you had or what he was like?**

I had many conversations with Jack Combs who used to be the farmer that was basically the caretaker of this property even when Cache Creek Aggregates was leasing it and Jack had his own views on a lot of the different issues that were being debated back at that time and he really wasn't anti-mining. He was what I would refer to as a crotchety old guy, but he had a great sense of humor and he had pretty good vision I think.

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A lot of what went on at that time in the '60s was a lot of land leveling in the area and that land leveling was obviously a boom to agriculture because it allowed them to farm areas more intensively than they had in the past.

But in his opinion, it did something else that was a side effect and that was areas in the past had puddle up water or had small lakes in them and would drown out grain crops, were now leveled and they would drain. But the issue was once they got saturated, they would drain very quickly and where did that water go? Instead of staying on the land it was going to the creek. And so it increased, in his mind, the volume of water that was coming into the creek and created some of the issues that everybody was dealing with in the mid to late '80s and '90s; high flows of water in the creek. He believed in his mind that some of the land leveling that had gone on had contributed to that.

So it was an interesting conversation. I don't know that everybody shared his views, but it was an interesting perspective as far as how some of the agricultural activities might have contributed to some of the flooding issues.

**That is interesting. I heard there were other things in this area like a brick factory and a sulfur well and some other stuff. Do you recall any of those while you were here or do you know anything about them?**

No, I don't know anything about any brick activities or sulfur activities anywhere around this site. That might have been before my time or certainly I think any brick manufacturing here would have been before my time. It doesn't seem like a site that would lend itself to that because the materials here are not very clay, they're very silty so I would think they would have had to import a clay type material for processing here, but again, because it drains so well because of the aggregate under it, the site lends itself to, just as it did for a corral, it would be a good year-round site because the ground drains and it's very porous.

**So is there aggregate under us right now?**

There is definitely aggregate under us where we sit, yes.

**Why wasn't it mined?**

Well, there's a variety of reasons why this particular area wouldn't have been mined and again, there's a lot of vegetation here and so it's not just a matter of not destroying the vegetation but even a long time ago when perhaps there was not as much concern about that. The fact that there's this much vegetation made the economics of mining here not as good as they would be in an area that was less vegetated.

**When is the last time you came and sat on this bench and spent time in this part of the preserve?**

Well it's been a while since I've been on a bench and set in this particular area of the preserve. Generally when I come here it's in the evening and I don't get quite this far out. The last time I was here we actually had an observation deck a little bit to the right of where we're sitting today and it was destroyed in a wildfire that

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came through the site about four or five years ago and you can't – now looking here, you can't even see any signs of that wildfire coming through. There's a dead tree on the other side that might have been the result of that fire coming through, but the natural landscape recovers pretty quickly and this particular area has come back even more lush and beautiful than it was before I think.

**Okay. So tell me about this fire that raced through here. Where did it start and what stopped it?**

Well, there was a high wind condition a few years back and I want to say it's probably been about five years ago now and some wires blew a transformer up by Zamora which is oh probably at least three miles north of here and that wildfire caught in the grasslands and just ran ahead of that north wind and there was no stopping it. It came through all the properties to the north of us here and burned a couple of structures on the other side of the road, on the other side of 20 here as part of the Woodland station and then raged across this eastern side of the nature preserve area and probably the only thing that stopped it was Cache Creek, the greenery here, but it did burn some of the cotton woods and willows but you can see a natural area like this comes back. The natives respond very well. In fact it helped in getting some of the invasives out of this area on the east side of the property.