

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT OF

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A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE CACHE CREEK NATURE PRESERVE

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AUDIO TOUR INTERVIEW WITH

Ann Brice

STOP 6:

The Barn



Stop 6: The Barn

As an environmentalist, what lessons do you take away from the gravel wars?

Well I believe that compromise is possible and can be positive and if you're in it for the long haul when your community's involved and you're not just blowing through, I think that eventually you work with the local people, stakeholders is the term everyone uses now, when you get the stakeholders involved that – and you're willing to keep at it, because the whole idea of involving the community or stakeholders when people don't fundamentally agree can be very messy and it's hard, but it's well worth it and I think that that was the good thing that we did; we just kept talking and working on it and trying to involve other people and trying to move forward with improving the creek and a lot of good has been done and I think that most people would admit that today.

Since you're connected to a lot of the environmental community, what do you think the environmental community at large has learned from the gravel wars and the experience here at Cache Creek? What lessons do you think they walked away with?

I think that other environmental groups in the area and people I know, I think everybody appreciates during the gravel wars that – and I guess I won't be naming names today, but some of the people that still have very strong feelings about it did a real service of getting the movement going and getting changes made and enforcing those changes, but I think that virtually all the environmental movements, environmental organizations would agree that a lot of good has come out of the development of the conservancy and getting the miners out of the creek and moving forward.

Do you see this in some ways as a model for the rest of California in terms of how people can work it out? If so, how is this a model?

I think that Cache Creek Conservancy in the years since I've been gone from it has really focused its attention on this spot where we are; the Cache Creek Nature Preserve and it's been a wonderful thing that's been done and it's taken the attention of the next two executive directors to build and maintain this place and turn it into what it is today.

I personally would like to see now that that's been done. A little more attention paid to the rest of the lower part of the creek because our mandate was to protect the lower 15 miles of the creek and I think the conservancy has done a really good job with the tamarisk and arundo removal and they've done a fabulous job with the nature preserve, but I would hope as time goes on that the conservancy will reach back out and work in some other areas beyond the nature preserve because they need their help.

How about in terms of history? This is a history project so I'm wondering what lessons you feel we residents here in Yolo County can draw from the history of the battle over this place.

I think what Cache Creek Conservancy has done has been amazing and in terms of the development of the nature preserve and in terms of drawing in the community and work with stakeholders and especially the

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I think it feels very favorably disposed towards the conservancy and the nature preserve and they were a little skeptical at first. Some of the old grizzled farmers didn't think much of the idea and I think they've really come along and Lynell Pollock especially with her farming background has encouraged that and I think that that has been really useful.

I think that you don't develop something like this without a lot of partnerships and you know, the partnerships with the various gravel companies, four or five, with the irrigation district, with agriculture.

The conservancy has also been, especially their whole Tending and Gathering Garden and their partnerships with the Native American community, has been terrific.

So all these different partnerships that are an outgrowth of the formation of the conservancy I just feel very strongly and I see it in my own work that partnerships are what it's all about. You can't go off on one extreme and expect to bring everybody along and with some compromise from different points of view, you end up with something like the nature preserve.

Do you think other California communities could benefit from looking at what's happening here?

I believe that other California communities could definitely benefit from the history of the property and how it's evolved over the years from the various private ownerships and degradation of the property and degradation from the mining and then reclamation by the mining and then the development of the nature preserve with its emphasis on, you know, bringing back the habitats to new levels and protecting them.

I think that it is a good model and all the while I forgot to mention the role of the county. The county has been very involved in all of this and without the county's support, none of this would have happened. Some people may think the county moved too slowly, but that's what government does, it moves slowly.

And I think that all these various partnerships are definitely important for other communities starting similar things. The issues may be different but the idea of working together, of public/private partnerships is essential.

What advice would you give to other environmental groups in the middle of a big fight in terms of sticking it out and building those partnerships?

Well, when asked about how – advice to other environmentalists who might be in the middle of some hot button issue, you sort of pick your role. You may be an environmentalist who wants to move the issues along and who is not willing to compromise and wants to stay pure and all this and you have a role, but at the end of the day when everyone's sitting down at the table, you may not be there and you may not want to be there, but those who do are going to be the ones who really set the agenda for the next number of years and help a project grow and hopefully flourish.

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In an environmental struggle, can you talk about the different environmentalists and their roles?

I think there are often at least two sets of environmentalists in any environmental struggle. They're the ones who start the issue and get the ball rolling and those tend to be the people who are not very interested in compromising. They feel very passionately about something like the creek and preserving it and they don't want to work with the perceived enemy.

But later on, as time goes on, there has to be some compromise and everybody has to start talking and that may be an entirely different set of environmentalists who do that sort of talking. They're almost a different breed of environmentalists and they each have their role and I think they're each essential to the process.

How did people stop fighting over the creek? There were the gravel wars and now there's not.

Finally in terms of the gravel wars, the regulations were set into motion. The Cache Creek Resource Management Plan was finalized and the various regulations for the miners were put into place and they had to submit 30 and 50 year plans for what was going to happen and the conservancy began and life sort of went on and I think that the people who were so opposed to it, to any sort of mining, had won a lot of concessions that were built into the subsequent regulations that the county had.

And you know, some people just don't trust government at all or trust people in government to do the right thing, but I think that Yolo County has done a good job and its board of supervisors had attempted then to listen to all sides and come up with a solution and I suspect that those who had been most ardently involved and least wanted any compromise finally sort of threw up their hands in disgust and didn't want anything to do with any of us and life sort of settled on, settled in and we moved along starting to try to do good things for the creek.

People talk a lot about how this place has gone from a site of intense conflict to a place of common ground. What do you think they're referring to?

Well I think that as time went and the gravel miners really were – realized they had to deal with the local people and they made sincere efforts and we had different stakeholders groups and we all got together and everybody did some yelling and screaming, but not many, if any, people walked out. I guess a few did and everybody kind of slogged it out together and I think that that – you know, there was some level of trust. At least you knew where everybody stood and people would still be talking to each other even after the meetings were over and I think that that was progress of a sort. I know it was.

There's an owl flying in here.

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How does what happened here impact the larger watershed?

What's been done here on the lower part of the creek certainly impacts the larger watershed, but it, in a sense – and we did a lot of discussing of this when I was working here and especially regarding for instance tamarisk and arundo removal, the non-native species that they've worked on removing here in the lower part of the creek, that there was the thought that everything needed to start at the top of the creek to make a difference and I think that that's true. For me as an ecologist, you certainly understand you start at the top and work your way down, but the reality was, at that time when I was involved and specifically talking about tamarisk and arundo, we couldn't get anything going at the upper part of the watershed then politically for a number of different reasons and I felt and feel that it was important to get moving and do what we could to get rid of some of these things and allow the native species to come back in and then hopefully the impact to the upper part of the watershed and the greater watershed will come with seeing good things happening here and understanding how much better it would be if we started it farther up the creek.

And I think in different parts of the county and even with Cache Creek goes beyond the county line, you know, there are different greater or lesser, mainly lesser environmental involvement and concern and so you have to bring people along at all the different stages. We're only talking about the very lower part of the creek. There's a lot more of it up above.

Yeah, a whole lot more. Is there anything that you think we can learn about the history of land use on this parcel from an ecological perspective?

I think from an ecological perspective there's a lot to be learned on this little 130 acres because we've seen it go through an amazing transformation. You know, presumably it was in some pristine state at some point that we don't really know about, but that we can guess and then we saw it for hundreds of years be more and more degraded and now we see it coming back again and coming back to something maybe completely new, but we see the land being protected and nurtured and valued and it's a wonderful thing.

Why is that good for Yolo County or other parts of California?

I think it's particularly good to see this happening on Cache Creek just because if there are stereotypes in the county, it's that this side of the county with Woodland tends to be the crusty farmers and people who don't really care about the environment. All they want to do is kill animals and mine the creek and all these things and the Davis part of the county, everybody's into protecting everything and now this side of the county has a wonderful place that people come from Davis to see and I think that's important.

But I also think that it's really important that this, especially the nature preserve, be looked at more than just Woodlands park because it's not really a park to begin with, but it's more than Woodlands open space. It's wonderful. It really will become a regional treasure as more and more people learn about it.

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And what does this preserve represent to you?

The Cache Creek Nature Preserve was really developed after I was done working here, so to me it represents sort of a miracle really to look at all the change that's gone on and the different things that have been done. It's been really fun for me as someone who saw it when the property was just barely an idea to continuing to see how it's grown and changed and moved forward. I mean frankly there are things that have been done in ways that I might not have done it completely, but it's been done with a lot of concern for protecting the land and fitting in with the environment and I think it's terrific.

What do you miss the most about spending your days here?

Yeah. What I miss the most of not being here at the nature preserve is just the ability – when I first started it, it was on a little building in my yard and then everything got moved out to the nature preserve and now the current inhabitants and employees of the Cache Creek Conservancy get to walk outside their door and they're in this incredible environment just steps away and that would be a dream job for most people.

Thinking back over all we've talked about, which is a lot, what do you appreciate most about the Cache Creek Nature Preserve? What stands out to you?

What I think is most important about the Cache Creek Nature Preserve and what I think that we all need to remember is that it's the creek that we're here for and the reason that the Cache Creek Conservancy was established and the nature preserve is a wonderful way to highlight the creek and I think that that has to be kept in the forefront.

Sitting here in this wonderful historic barn and being away from the water, I don't want us to forget that the creek is what it's all about and that it needs protecting up and down this lower 15 miles.

Great. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you want to talk about?

I don't think so, no.

Alright.