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A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE CACHE CREEK NATURE PRESERVE

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CREATED & DIRECTED BY
jesikah maria ross
jmross@ucdavis.edu

AUDIO TOUR INTERVIEW WITH

Wyatt Cline

STOP 1:

The Overlook



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Let's start with something fun and simple. Describe where we are and what you see and feel and smell and even hear around you.

Well I think we are at an overlook at Cache Creek Nature Preserve and there's islands and tules and the wind's blowing and there's birds and there's ripples in the water and you can smell the different bushes and you can hear the equipment in the background also working. It's a gravel plant around us.

Thanks. I want you to think back to the first time you came to this parcel of land, the first time you came to the Cache Creek Nature Preserve and tell me about that first time you came to the Cache Creek Nature preserve. What were you doing? Why did you come?

The first time I came to the Cache Creek Nature Preserve I believe they were working on it. It wasn't in this state yet, this mature state, and I just wanted to see actually what was going on because I knew it was a gravel pit that had been mined.

Who were you with when you came here and what was it like?

You know, I was with a couple friends and it was kind of a little bit of a project kind of in the beginning.

How would you describe this preserve today? When was it that you came out? What year was it?

You know, I don't remember but it was many years ago and I came out also when I was on a resource conservation district board for Yolo County and it was a little further along then, certainly not like it is today and there was a few events. You could see then that it was born and what it might be.

How would you describe this preserve to a friend today?

I think I would describe it as – I wouldn't call it a park, but I would call it a park in the sense that it's a special place because it's unique. It's pretty much a natural setting. It is planned obviously and set out, but it's been a cycle. It's been farmed and taken advantage of through millennium and now it's come back to its kind of original state.

Let me ask you a few things about yourself. Can you tell me your name and your occupation?

My name is Wyatt Cline. I am retired fire battalion chief. I spent 31 years in the fire service. Also along that way I come from a family of farmers and ranchers and I ranch in the Capay Valley and I rent my ranch out to cattle people and I do the habitat and water management.

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You have spoken to me about being of two worlds and I wonder if you can give an outline of where your father's people are from and how they came to this area and where your mother's people are from and how they came here.

My father was a Scotch-Irish Wintun Indian. His grandfather was Northern Wintun and they came to the Capay Valley in the 1860s to escape some issues that were going on at that time with people, with Native peoples, and actually they were Indian cowboys and worked in the cattle industry at the time. And his grandmother, my grandfather's mother was from Winters and they were Irish people. So it was a blend of two worlds.

My mother's family, my mother's mother is an original Californio from the Californio families; today have been under four flags. That would be the Spanish flag, the Mexican flag, California flag and now the flag of the United States of America. Came over here in the 1700s to help on the El Camino Real and I think the official name is Royal Guard, but basically they were kind of security and you bought your way out once you got here. And my mother's father was half Basque and half Comanche Indian born at Fort Hancock, Texas. So when I say from two worlds, obviously from a Eurocentric or European American influenced people and also from Native roots from my grandfathers.

You said your grandfather was escaping some issues at the time. What part of California was he coming from?

Actually it was my great-grandfather that escaped the issues and some of his family were killed in the Shasta County area gold mining and gambling. One was killed actually gambling and the other was killed at a trap line and those were his brothers and it wasn't uncommon in those days and unique because they were half-breeds. So some chose to stay in the Rancheria life I guess you could call it and some melded into the European-American life.

Do you have a tribal affiliation?

I've got to think of what it's called. We were part of the Assimilation Act or era in the 50s so basically the tribe that they belonged to was bought out at a vote in Sacramento. They called everybody together so it was basically disbanded, recognized as a people, but not a tribe and it's not unusual. The government wanted to basically get the Indian people kind of worked in to society or assimilated and many did and some didn't.

When you say the folks disbanded, was that your great-grandfather's people?

Actually my grandfather and his brothers were voted actually part of the vote in Sacramento in the 50s, 1950s. My father actually drove them over and they all got what seemed like a small sum of money to me when I found out, but at the time I guess it was considered a fairly decent amount of money. They came from places like Montgomery Creek and along the Pit River and other places up there.

When you say they were disbanded as tribe but they were called a people, was there a name given to their people?

Well they're Northern Wintun. That's what is says on the paperwork. The only affiliation I had was through my grandfather and my great-uncles because my father passed when I was young so that's the only affiliation. I have the stories and a few baskets left.

The Overlook, continued (p.3 of 4)

Do you identify as being Native American?

I actually identify with everything that I am, but I do practice a combination of ways.

Are you accepted by the Native American community as Native American?

Yeah I would say that I would be accepted in the Native American community. I have many Native American friends, some relatives. It's a very dynamic and diverse group of people when you say Native American and mixed with many different beliefs. It's just like if a German person went to Russia; they might look the same, but they're very different, different nations actually, but I would say in general yes.

Okay. I'm going to keep going even though we have all this sound in the background. You mentioned that you have worked with kids in schools and have done some history stuff around Native American history, so I'm wondering, do you have a sense of the geographic area that the Wintun people inhabited?

Yes, the Wintun people inhabited a very large area up above Shasta County I believe and all the way to the Suisun Bay and the Patwin people going down that way and here, so it was a large nation of many different people.

You mentioned the Patwin people. I understand that there are a couple of different major groups within the Wintun.

Right.

What are the different groups within the Wintun?

You know, there's Wintu, Wintun and Patwin people and that's all I can think of right now.

I'm trying to figure it out too. I've heard bay Nomlaki as well.

Nomlaki, actually that is another one too. You know if you look at the map it has them all on there.

Yeah, if I get the right map. You mentioned to me also when we were hanging out at your ranch that you spent a bunch of time with your grandfather.

Yes.

My understanding is that there's the Wintun people from Shasta on down to Suisun and within that there are many groups like the Wintu. You're Wintu, right?

Wintun.

The Overlook, continued (p.4 of 4)

Wintun? Interesting.

Yeah, Northern Wintun. That's what the federal government tells us anyway.

I'm wondering if you happen to have a creation story that was passed on to you about how your people or that part of your people came into this area.

You know, my grandfather didn't talk about that. What he would talk about mainly was nature and natural things and how we need to walk gentle on the earth and beliefs as you can talk all you want, but you have to give back as much and then some and whenever you're outside like this we're in God's country and I'm sure that's a combination of two worlds.

I know that you were born and in part raised in this area. Do you have a sense of about how many Native Americans were in this area before Europeans arrived?

I believe before the European invasion or visit, the numbers of Native American people were in the thousands. Now that changed of course when things happened like catching colds, the common cold or the flu. They died fast. But 12,000 is the number that's used often. I tend to think it could be more because it's such a vast area rich.

Do you have any sense of how many Native American folks are in this county today?

Today when you say Native American folks, California has one of the biggest Native American populations because it's a mix of people and everybody comes to California so I don't know, but in this county, I'm not sure but there's probably – could be 1,000. I don't know because it's such a mix and they're going to be from all over whether they're people from Alaska or the Dakota's or California.

My last question that I want to ask you at this spot is what do you think that most people don't know about Native American history in this county of the people that were in this area?

The thing I think that most people do not realize or understand about the Native American people that were in this county was that they were farmers and they farmed for eons and reproducing and thinning and cultivating crops whether it was seeds or tubers or animals or grasses. They did every year and it was planned cultivation and I don't think they realize that.