

restore

A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE CACHE CREEK NATURE PRESERVE

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A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT OF



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AUDIO TOUR INTERVIEW WITH

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STOP 3:

The Creek



Stop 3: The Creek

Tell me where you are and describe in lots of detail what you see and what you think about it.

We are at the creek's edge and as I look around I see huckleberry plants which were terrible when you walked and got them in between your foot and the bottom of your shoe. I see tulles, wormwood, Bermuda grasses, creek grasses and I see a very clear stream; Cache Creek.

But it reminds me of when I was a little kid fishing with my grandfather or my dad and they would clear out a place in the tulles and sit me there, cut a sapling off a willow and just put a line on it and a hook with a worm and that's where I'd sit and they'd go fishing up and down the bank. In those days I'm not sure if we paid attention to the fish limits, but when we had a half a gunnysack, burlap sack of fish then we stopped fishing for the day and we ate it fresh and frozen. It was a major part of our food and storage foods for the wintertime; the bounty of Cache Creek. I can still – when I got older I can remember having to carry the burlap sack and smelling like fish but loving it because my back was wet and it would be 100 degrees in August.

What kind of fish did you catch in this creek?

We caught mostly – what we would keep would be catfish and bass and bass would be this time of the year in the fall and of course there would be different perches and blue gill and pike and we even had the sucker fish then and the fish that we would not throw back because they weren't supposed to be in the creek we'd throw on the bank and let the raccoons have it and that would be your carp, etc.

Are all those fish still here in this creek?

Yeah, all those fish are still here. The trash fish, as they were called before, they're probably more prevalent now than before, but actually, up towards the Capay Dam you had salmon coming at certain times. I have pictures, old family pictures with salmon across a pole and the guy is holding them for the pictures you know. Steelhead; I remember my cousin caught a steelhead in Cache Creek actually by the dam. So it just depends on the time of the year.

Right on. What's it feel like for you to be out here today?

To be out here today at 55 years old, it brings back a lot of memories. It takes you back to being a little boy again and realizing what a wonderful place Cache Creek is and can be if it's taken care of and the folks around here are taking care of it and it's a great collaboration between the gravel companies and the farmers and the conservancy people. It's a nature preserve here. It just takes you back and makes you happy to see that it's something that you remember that isn't gone. It's alive and well.

Yeah. Going back to before Europeans arrived, how do you imagine the local Native people used this creek?

Before the introduction or the first visits of the European people, I think the Native people used it for farming; farmed the fish and the plants, the wildlife. They used it to bathe and wash. Water is lifeblood as it is today. There is nothing more important than water. They set their fish traps. They maybe had their water diverted into smaller ponds and when the fish were in there, they might take some turnkey mullein and smash it up and

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stupefy the fish and when they floated up, pick the good ones they wanted and let the other ones go. I mean it was a life industry I guess you would call it. It's how they made their living and their livelihood.

You mentioned that there are other people that used this creek.

You know we've talked about the Native people using this creek and obviously they did. They were the first peoples and unfortunately misunderstood because I think that we all could have learned a lot from them as far as we would have saved 150 years of destruction and could have kept the ecosystem intact to where we are now; we're catching up.

But the Native people, the local Native peoples weren't the only ones to come here. You had the Europeans. You had the Spaniards. It was all cattle raising. They needed the forage along the creek. They needed the water. Water is like gold. It still is today. You had the Hudson Bay trappers and other trapping companies that trapped and harvested the pelts off of this creek. That's where they say the name Cache Creek came from because they cashed their pelts. The Chinese, all different kinds of people came here. The people that tried to work in the gold fields and it didn't work out so they came here to farm and to settle. Today you have people that live in the local bedroom communities and commute to the capital. They use it.

So it's a mix of people and I'd have to say it's a mix of who we are as Americans here. It's who I am; a mix of Spanish and Portuguese and French and Scotch-Irish and Wintun and Comanche Indian. The reality is that everybody has used this creek. Some people have abused it, but I think we're in a different space now.

How do local Native people use this creek now? Why is it important for them?

I think talking about local Native people, I think that they use the creek to preserve culture, to teach culture to the children to carry it on, to respect and show the respect for Mother Earth and what the Creator has given them. I've seen them, the Yocha Dehe folks and they're very proud of this creek and part of where they came from and they're passing it on and they're making a very conscious effort and as they pass it on, it's passed on to everybody.

When you say they pass it on, do you mean passing on the cultures and traditions around using the creek?

I think that the local Native people, and I don't speak for them, but I've seen it and I believe they're passing on traditions, their cultural traditions, their language, old tending practices, tending the wilds as we call it now, to their youth so they can pass it on and instead of dying it's alive and well and they do a good job and they work hard at it and consequently that's going to be a healthier creek and a healthy environment for us all.

And how are other people in the area using the creek? You talked about Native folks, but you mentioned a whole lot of other people that are here.

Well you know, recreation is a big thing. We forget about recreation, but you know, people still fish and swim and frolic in this beautiful creek like they have for thousands and hundreds of years and they come here and visit and they raft. It's mined heavily for gravel. It's farmed right next to the creek and on the creek beds.

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It's used. It's very diverse and I think as long as we don't overuse it and we give back, it will be healthy. I think it's healthier today than it's been in a long time. Certainly healthier than when I was a child.

You talked about fishing. When you were a kid did you also do any kind of trapping or swimming or any of that on the creek?

When I was a child we used what I would call the modern traditional fishing methods with a fishing pole and worms, etc. We would also go out into the riffles in the gravel bar areas and pick and go overturn rocks and get hellgrammites which look kind of like a mayfly larvae. A little scary, but hellgrammites are great bass bait. I learned that from my grandfather and we would do that.

But we would also trap fish which might not exactly be part of the Fish and Game rules, but this was a long time ago and the people that did it are passed. Instead of a traditional Indian trap or seined it would be made kind of conical or look like a cornucopia basket out of native materials. My grandfather had his which would just be a copy of it but made out of hog netting and chicken wire and he would shoot a jackrabbit and put it in there for the bait after it stayed out for a while and fermented and then he would leave it out depending on how long, you know, whatever he thought, check the weight and come back and it would be full of fish.

One time actually, one of his favorite stories is they were going away for a couple weeks so he made a great big one and when he came back to pull it up, he couldn't pull it up it was so big. So he hooked his tractor onto it because it was so heavy and when he pulled it up on the bank it was full of everything including turtles. He had to cut a hole in the bottom to let most of them out. He did too well. So it was a modern old fashioned Native trap.

Are there other materials here that you see around you that maybe your grandfather taught you to use or local Native people use?

You know I don't see a lot here. I see the cattails where I know that the pollen was taken off to put into breads and we actually put them into biscuits because we didn't make cornmeal bread or acorn meal bread, but it gives it a little bit of a sweet flavor and that's basically what I see here because we didn't make baskets and we were really hill people. We were hill folks so what we used up there wouldn't be down in this area generally, but it would be traded amongst the people.

When you think about this creek that you've been connected to since you were a kid and that you're still intimately connected with now as a farmer, what do you love the most about this creek?

I think what I love most about this creek, and it's more of a question than a statement and it's a tough one, is I think it is the diversity. Not the diversity of the people that use it, but the diversity of the wildlife. You have beavers, you have king fisher's, you have an amazing amount of fish actually and deer. It's alive and well and you could actually, if you take care of it, live on this creek and you can't say that everywhere. You can't say that in Southern California where the creeks are all cement now. We were lucky enough to be in a place that wasn't popular enough to be overdeveloped and lucky enough to be in a place where we were able to save it and that is what I love about this creek.

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I'm going to ask you to start that first part again coming out of the gate of what you love most about the creek.

I think what I love most about the creek, which is – I don't even know if it's possible to say the one thing, but it's the diversity and it's not the diversity of the people that used it, but the diversity of what's here; the ecosystem, the circle here, the food chain. I mean it's amazing. You could actually live on this creek if you wanted to. There's fish, there's grasses to eat, there's clovers, there's deer. You can watch the beaver. There's everything. It's alive and well.

Are there any sayings that you grew up with in your family about the creek; any kind of jokes or refrains or any tall tales or bits of wisdom?

You know, I can't think of any stories, but I know that I'm sure that there were some stories about this creek, but I think a bit of wisdom that we were taught often whether it relates to the hills and the watershed which ultimately comes to this creek and that is you can take and use, but you have to give back to make a balance or it will disappear and I think today what we've learned is you can take, but you have to give back, but it's best to leave a little bit more than you take so it remains for other people and that's the main thing that I remember.

When you say "take" are you thinking of materials and resources and things like that?

Resources, food, water which is the most important thing. You know, you don't want to take too much water from this creek. That one of the most beautiful things was that inflatable dam and I don't think the inflatable dam in Capay is beautiful but what it does. You can be there and it will go down and release water so it stays in this area, in this creek because the reality is this creek really dried up in spots before that dam, but now we actually can keep water in it up and down it.