

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

Wyatt Cline

STOP 4:

Oak Savannah



Stop 4: Oak Savannah

Describe what you see here and smell at this spot.

I would describe this place where we are right now as – well I'm looking through a garden of different native plants, but I'm looking off upon an oak woodland I would call it which catches my eye. The difference between oak woodland and the hills where I am most of the time and this one, I looked at Oak trees, but right away I noticed the cottonwoods. When I see cottonwoods that tells me there's water and these are big cottonwood trees and healthy so obviously we're right here near the creek and that's part of the area and there's water so it's a lucky place to be. I also noticed native walnut trees; California Black Walnuts and that's a good food source. Yeah, it's a health place. You get oaks and you get water and you get a lot of other stuff.

And you know that's not actually the creek, that's the slough, that's the canal.

Well that's what I meant, next to the creek because that's sucking a lot of water.

Do you think those cottonwoods are sucking from this creek or from the canal right there?

Your water table is probably like 12 feet here because where that creek is, that's where the water is.

Got it. Where are the walnuts?

Right here is one black walnut tree.

Alright.

And it's right here in with the cottonwoods.

Yeah, there's a lot of vegetation right around this spot, huh?

Yeah, see that's a little walnut tree and there's a big walnut tree right there, a big black walnut tree right there.

So why do you think it's so healthy around here?

You know someone asked me why I think it's so healthy around here. You just have to smell and you smell the cottonwoods and some of the other plants which means there's a lot of them and to have a lot of anything it has to be healthy unless we're talking about weeds and I guess they're healthy too.

But no, there's just a diverse abundance of trees and plant systems here and it's doing well and I see a lot of little trees. We're sitting right here next to a little black walnut tree and a few yards away is a big tree. I look across the irrigation slew there and you see a couple, what we would call, grandfather oaks; large oak trees. And under those oaks you can see a lot of little oak trees and those little oak trees are going to stay like that until one of those big ones topples over and then the heartiest one will come and take its place.

Oak Savannah, continued (p.2 of 3)

Of all the trees you're looking out on, which one is your favorite and why?

My favorite tree out here as we look out here in the oak woodlands would be the oak tree because I identify with the oaks coming from the hill country and being hill folk in the water shed up there and as I look out here, look upon this woodland I see a grandfather oak and under that grandfather oak I see little oak coming up and they'll probably stay that way until that big oak cracks a branch off or dies and then the heartiest one will take its place.

And acorns you know are a great food source for deer and birds and even the woodpeckers will take them and put them in the pine tree bark in the holes that they make and then when they get "buggy" as we call it or wormy, they'll come back and eat the worms and the bugs. They're great farmers. And woodpeckers love to hide them under things as blue jays do. In fact, they love to hide them in these modern times under roof shingles and they can wreak havoc on a roof if it's a place not being taken care of.

But I look at the oaks; they provide shade, food source and in these days they provide fire wood, warmth for people. It's a very giving tree, but you have to take care of it because it takes a long time to grow.

Did oaks play a particular role that you know of in the local Native culture?

Of course oaks played a significant role I would say in the local Native and the non-local Native culture in this part of California because of the food source. It was the number one food source. They built granaries to hold and store the acorns, acorn bread made from the meal, soup. It was a main source of food.

Tell me more. What kinds of things do you make from oak acorns?

Well an acorn you make the – which I guess nowadays we would call it flour or meal and it would be pounded and sifted and then it could be stored or the acorns would be stored in the granary and then basically you would make bread or soup, different things like that. I've never done it but I've seen it done and people still do it today.

Yeah. What role do oaks play that you know of in the habitat?

You know these oak trees in the habitat, certain other trees will grow under them in the shade and of course the birds nest and the deer eat and live under them and different oaks grow in different areas whether it's a shaded area or a riparian area, what we call mush oaks or you have black oaks and white oaks in the hills and they need less water. It just depends.

What's your favorite thing about this part of the preserve? We've been in a whole bunch of different areas, but this has really got a very different vibe. What do you like most about the oak woodlands part of the preserve?

To me it's kind of the transition area. You're a little farther away from the creek and you're transitioning onto a plane and a plateau and eventually you would be in the hills and everything would change as you go from the riparian area and I identify with the hill area.

Oak Savannah, continued (p.3 of 3)

My understanding is that this is the area where there was an encampment of Patwins and I'm wondering why you think they would pick this particular area. What makes this area particularly attractive for a camp for local Native people?

It was suggested to me that this area that we're looking upon was possibly a Patwin people camp at one time and if I looked at it that way, it looks like a great place. You obviously get a breeze like we are right now. You can harvest the acorns. You're not right next to the creek but you're not far away so you can take advantage of what the creek gives you, but be away a little bit. It's a little less buggy. You have areas to farm and tend the gardens. You have shade. It's a nice place to live; basically a good village site.

Yeah, I sure wouldn't mind. Are there other foods or materials that you see around you that either you were taught about in terms of foraging or cultivating or that you know about from other experience?

Another thing I notice when I look out at this woodland and the kind of in between part from where we sit and where we see the oaks are the wild grape vines and the elderberry and you know, certain times of the year, about now, if the birds haven't eaten them all, you'll have little bunches of grapes. My great-grandmother Mary Emery, Mary Cline, she was called Ma Cline, Irish woman, made the best wild grape jelly and it was awesome. And the elderberries also make a great jelly and some of the guys used to make a great elderberry wine also. You have to remember there was a lot of sugar put in this stuff, but it was great. It was great on a biscuit in the morning.

You've actually commented on smells and you said earlier that you smelled the cottonwoods and I'm wondering if you can describe what it looks like and the smell.

As I sit here and we gaze upon many cottonwoods with one just right in front of us with the kind of round or heart-shaped leaves, they make kind of a clacking clattering sound when the wind hits them; very, very unique to that tree. And they have a certain smell and it's not a musky smell. It's actually very sharp and fresh and you can smell it right now.

There's stories of people at night riding horses or riding into a place and they can smell the cottonwoods. It's just something that comes to me. And it's a mix of other things in here in the oaks and stuff, but you can smell them.