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restore restory

A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE CACHE CREEK NATURE PRESERVE

AUDIO TOUR INTERVIEW WITH

Marshall McKay

STOP 2:

The Wetlands



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Let's start here at the Tending and Gathering Garden at the wetlands. Can you look out and describe where we are and what you see around you?

The Tending Gardens are very special to me because my mother was a basket maker and we used to frequent these types of settings collecting materials for baskets so the water and the rushes and tulles bring back some very fond memories.

Is there a story that stands out to you? You mentioned this reminds you of times with your mom. Is there something being here that reminds you of a particular moment collecting or doing that kind of work?

Well I think it's just this kind of setting. When the sun is low in the horizon and it's a little cooler those were always good times because that meant the collection day was almost over and either we had a good day collecting nice long roots or we had a bad day collecting short roots. So we would always kind of evaluate at this time of the day what our bounty was and how we can turn it into a good trip home.

That's so nice. On these kinds of collection days, what kinds of materials and resources were you collecting?

We were collecting not only willow but sedge grass roots. At these kinds of points some deer grass. There was quite a few things that we used in the construction of the baskets; red bud at certain points of the year, normally in the springtime, but when we were out collecting it seemed like a bounty for all the materials that were available so we all had different jobs in securing those materials.

What was your favorite job when you would be working at that?

I liked digging the sedge roots in the sandbars. It was a challenge because I was always tasked to get the longest ones because those were the ones that were the most valuable. You can make a beautiful pattern without breaking the root configuration so it was always warranted that we had long ones, but we took the short ones too when we could.

Can you tell me some of the things you used these materials for?

We used these materials for ornamental and functional baskets; gift baskets, baby baskets, burden baskets, the things that were everyday tools and also the very special gift baskets.

Being out here today in a different context, what do you appreciate about just being on this preserve right now?

I appreciate that it's here. You know, these kinds of preserves are actually a great asset to not only the conservation project, but it's also a great asset to people that are not connected with the conservation projects. It's a way to see what was here before we had any kind of destruction to the territory and even though it's a replication, it's still a good representation of what was here before.

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Let's talk a little bit about what was here before. Can you imagine and tell me how you imagined this place would have looked before Europeans arrived?

I think before Europeans arrived, we would have had a very similar look in this location. This is a very authentic reproduction of the area; shallow waters, a lot of reeds and a lot of sandy shoreline along with the valley oaks in the background and the willows. So I think this is a really good representation of what would have been here before contact.

Is it best to refer to your tribe as Wintun, Southern Wintun or Patwin? How should I ask about this group?

All of those are actually correct. Patwin means people.

Can you tell me the different names that have been given to your tribe and what they mean?

The names that have been given to the group here, my tribe, have three different variations. One is an overall general term called Patwin which, in our language, translates to the people. So we would call each other "The People" when we met each other in settings like this. We are also the Southern Wintun because we are at the southern end of the Wintun grouping which runs all the way up to Susanville in a very narrow band between the coast and the Great Valley. Then also it certainly isn't a bad thing to be called the Wintun Tribe.

So maybe then I would ask this question this way; how do you think the Wintun people used this area before Europeans came here?

I think this area was used by the Wintun people for a great deal of things; sustenance for one. When this creek was in its heyday, I'm sure that there were salmon running through here as well as other varieties of fish which brought other birds which brought other animals which brought other people. So the commerce as well as the natural resources here were very plentiful.

How do you see Wintun people and other tribes using this very area today?

Well my tribe is very much trying to preserve what we have left of the creek. Of course we're kind of clawing up a steep slope with other businesses in Yolo County using the creek too. We would like to see it preserved because the natural selection of living near the creek here in pre-contact times were very prevalent and there were a lot of people around this creek. So the villages are quite significant. We want to – we would like to be able to preserve those village sites, but we're realistic about it too that probably a lot of them are destroyed and we'll have a very hard time reclaiming some of those sites. We're happy to have the sites that we know about now upriver and we're watching those very carefully.

Why did the Wintun people stop inhabiting the land that is now the preserve?

I believe the Wintun people stopped inhabiting this land that's now the preserve simply because it was – the ideal places were upstream into the Capay Valley and I believe this area was used for collection of food and

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materials for daily life because of its openness. It's not that protected from the winds and the inclement weather as well as the hot weather. So it made it more ideal to move into the valley where there's more oak trees for shade and different little canyons to be in during the hot weather as well as the cold.

And all those springs.

Lots of springs. So we had fresh water that wasn't inundated with salt and I believe this creek at one point probably had a very high salt content.

Yeah, I imagine you're right. You've touched on this, but I'm going to ask again. How has your tribe been involved in the restoration efforts right here at the preserve?

Our tribe has been involved with the preservation of this preserve directly through financing, directly through advising and actually some implementation of replanting in the early days. So we've had a very good relationship with this particular piece of land in wanting to bring it back.

My aunts and other family members have been involved with the idea of placement of material replanting and they have a very good idea of where things should be placed for authenticity and the best placement of plant product for the preserve to have its authentic flavor.

I think that also your tribe has been pretty intimately related with this Tending and Gathering Garden.

The Tending and Gathering Garden was conceived to actually be a place to collect materials for basket weaving and other textile creations and that was a very, very important portion of this preserve to have that available to the tribal members. It was a significant move forward I think with a bond between the tribe and the community.

That's what I thought. I always imagined that and so thinking in that way, what would you say on a personal level, what does restoration (which is something they talk about here a lot) mean to you?

Restoration means to me directly a representation of a time before destruction and I mean by that not so much an absolute destruction, but whenever something is disturbed in a fundamental way with mining or farming even or even over-cultivation of plant material or basket making material, it becomes an unnatural setting and the restoration I think means that we're trying to restore it to a natural point in time where the material is happy, the plants are happy where they're at.

So how do you think place is being restored both ecologically and culturally?

I believe the preserve has a very good handle on the ecological condition of the land prior to mining and/or farming. Culturally I believe this land is being preserved in a very upstanding way that I believe our ancestors, my ancestors would be very happy to see it being done again.

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Speaking of your ancestors, when you look around (one last question here) from the far west with the ramada and the different parts of the wetlands on down to all the materials you've mentioned, what would have been some activities that you imagine your ancestors, in addition to collecting materials as you mentioned, would have been engaged in right here?

I think my ancestors would have been engaged in a very simple, high-quality life here. Not only would there have been attention to harvesting plant material and also probably some food material, but it's a wonderful place to bring your children and come with your parents and to be here to live here while you're collecting your materials, either food or plant material. The life would be over a few months so there would be fires and there would be people talking. You'd hear laughter, you'd hear children crying, you'd hear children playing and also hear a myriad of wildlife in this peaceful spot. So it would be a symphony of sounds and activity that you would hear. You might not see it all because we're kind of camouflaged with the trees and the rushes and whatnot, but you'd hear things and that would be a sign of life too.

It's so lovely. Thank you. It's so great for an audio listener to actually hear a portrait described that way.