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# restore restory

A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE CACHE CREEK NATURE PRESERVE

AUDIO TOUR INTERVIEW WITH

*Marshall McKay*

STOP 5:

*Memorial Grove*





## Stop 5: Memorial Grove

### **What happened to the Wintun way of life when Europeans settled in this area?**

When Europeans settled in this area, the Wintun way of life changed dramatically. We went from a very prosperous, cooperative way of life to a very paranoid way of life; one where we feared for our lives, one where we lost a lot of people. Probably 60% to 70% of the population was eradicated and so it made for a very stressful time. It made for a very – a time where people did not know what to expect coming from a very cultured area where, for generations, we did know what to expect and we relied on that expectation to survive in the future. And with the advent of European intruders, we were relieved of that stress-less life and we were forced to fear for our lives and also run for our lives.

### **Can you tell me about the different waves of people who came to this area and their impact on Wintun's from the Spanish to the Mexican to the U.S. Army and gold-seekers?**

The waves of people that came through that affected Wintun life were the Spanish. They came to California and discovered this land and took this land and basically enslaved all of the indigenous people that they found. They enslaved all the ones that were captured. It forced families to break up and send some to the mountains and obviously the people that couldn't escape were taken to the missions and other ranchos that the Spanish owned.

And then there were also the – the U.S. Army came through and they were basically aggressive police force that [airplane noise]

### **So let's just take it from the top. What happened to the Wintun way of life when Europeans settled in this area?**

The Wintun way of life changed dramatically when the Europeans settled in this area. The U.S. Army was basically an aggressive police force that came through in the guise of protecting U.S. citizens would eradicate the Wintun people for bounty and/or for status. The Wintun people were affected very greatly as were Pomo's as were the people, the Ohlone and the people down around the Bay Area, but the Wintun people I think lost the most because we had commerce here, we had villages, we had sacred sites; all of that was destroyed when the Army came through.

### **So how was the Wintun way of life impacted by the Gold Rush?**

The Gold Rush was a very peculiar type of impact to the Wintun people because they were as merciless as the U.S. Army or the Spanish invasion simply because they were trying to hide their gold and their prospecting treasures in this area so that they could load them onto trains or boats bound for other parts of the world and in doing that, they had invaded our space, our villages, our sacred sites and any place to hide their gold was utilized and the people that were around those areas were killed or run off because the gold prospectors thought that they were entitled to the land.

*Memorial Grove, continued (p.2 of 4)*

**And just so I have it without a lot of bad sound, could you summarize again how the Europeans, the Spanish impact on Wintun way of life?**

The Spanish impacted Wintun life with slavery and eradication because they needed workers on their ranchos and they needed workers at the missions and they wanted to also Christianize the Wintun people and so they utilized the people that lived around here for those purposes.

**I know this land was part of Mexico before it became part of California. Do you have a sense of how the Mexicans treated the Native people? Did they treat them any differently or impact them any differently?**

Again, the Mexicans treated us, the Wintun people in the same fashion the Spanish did. They used us for a workforce. They used us as basically indentured slaves and the people that resisted were executed or run off to starve to death.

**The booklet that Linda Spencer had had a really great line. It talked about the Wintun people having generations of struggle and deprivation. Can you speak to, in detail, what that looked like for local Native people?**

The deprivation that local people encountered were actually generational. Certainly the impact at the first encounter was detrimental and it was stressful, it was something that one could not stop and it was enslavement, it was execution, it was starvation, but those tragedies carried on for the next generation too simply because the next generation had those memories, they were told those stories, they weren't allowed to forget it and that kind of genocide carries on and actually it carries on even today because we're still not that far away from that point in time and those stories are still remembered by a lot of people my age and older.

**When you were growing up, what did people say to you about it? What did your mom or your aunts or uncles say to you about the genocide? How did they describe it to you?**

The description of the genocide was fairly graphic in people's memories and when I was told about it, it was as graphic I remember and terrifying as I ever thought anything could be. And then it was confirmed as I studied California history that those stories were not just stories, they were truths, but they were tales of forces taking over villages and literally killing men, women and children to eradicate people and the fortunate ones were able to escape and the unfortunate ones are now gone.

**How has your tribe regained its courage and health in the face of that genocide?**

Our tribe has regained its strength through sheer perseverance. Existence in itself has brought about the courage to fight this off and having the memories I think help, in a sense, put perspective into it, but we still have problems that are associated with those atrocities that account to alcoholism and drug use and an abusive system internally that is detrimental to our society today even and those are things we're still working through. We're not done processing that trauma yet and I don't know how long it will take for our children to see the complete and overall damage this has done to the people just a mere 150 years ago.

*Memorial Grove, continued (p.3 of 4)*

Yeah, 150 years is not very long.

No.

**How do you feel this preserve helps renew Wintun strength and culture?**

I feel this preserve goes to a great deal to preserve culture and it goes to healing the culture also because we see cooperation between forces that may have been detrimental in just the near past.

It's also good to see the cultural flora coming back and being respected and it's a start. When you see something that's valuable to us, we then can feel like it's valuable to somebody else and that value then takes on a broader perspective of valuing life and valuing people and we're hoping that that makes a difference for a cultural bridge so we can start to tell our story truthfully and the people that are listening can understand it with the knowledge and the intent that we're not trying to pass something on that's not true. We're trying to relate history in a truthful manner and we don't want to forget that. We don't want to forget the atrocity that happened so it doesn't happen again.

**How would you say Wintun life and culture are practiced here at the preserve today?**

Wintun life and culture are preserved here by having the ability to express to the outside community not only a little piece of restored landscape, but also the ability to demonstrate how the materials are being used and also to demonstrate how Wintun life is carried on in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Since I think I have a moment without air traffic, (I'm just so concerned I don't have this without good sound) can you say one more time in a nutshell how Wintun life and culture was fundamentally and irrevocably changed with European and later American contact?**

Wintun life was changed fundamentally by European contact in a very dramatic way. Spanish, Mexican, U.S. Army, gold prospectors; they all came through and with the same outcome it seems. There was enslavement. There was incarceration. There was eradication. There were new diseases. There were food shortages. There was actual extermination. All of these forces had their own particular traits and techniques, but they all came to the same outcome; almost an entire race was wiped out of Wintun people here.

**How do you think people heal from that kind of trauma?**

The Wintun people are healing from this kind of trauma simply because we're able to tell our story now. We're able to talk about it. We're able to explain what happened and we're finding the courage to do that. We're finding the resources to tell the story. This will eventually heal us from those atrocities, but it's going to take its time. It's going to take a process to do this and it's going to take people listening to the Wintun people. It's going to take people telling the story. It's going to take preserves like this to show what it was like before. It's going to take an intricate network of information to tell the whole story and be able to then process that pain and damage and move forward.

*Memorial Grove, continued (p.4 of 4)*

**One follow-up and then we have our last set of questions. Why do you think it's important for the non-Native people in Yolo County to understand this story?**

I think it's important for non-Native people in Yolo County to understand what happened to the Wintun people so that there's a truthful exchange of information. I want to bring out the facts rather than the fantasy and I think that's necessary in order to get an understanding between cultures and I think it's important for historical value that these incidents become part of our history here in Yolo County.

**Do you think it will help young people develop a greater understanding of their own history and their connection to this place?**

I do believe it will help the younger generation understand their sense of place. I think it will help them create a greater appreciation for other cultures. I think it will enhance the lifestyle in Yolo County. I think it will help increase the appreciation of neighbors in Yolo County.