

restore restory

A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE CACHE CREEK NATURE PRESERVE

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT OF



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AUDIO TOUR INTERVIEW WITH

Lynnel Pollock

STOP 2:

The Wetlands



Stop 2: The Wetlands

So where are we now and what's it like?

We are sitting at the south side of the wetlands now down next to the water and looking out over the beautiful array of plants. We are in what we call the Tending and Gathering Garden which is a very special place on the preserve. It's about two acres dedicated to native plants that are used in Native American cultural activities and this started as a project by a graduate student at UC Davis and has flourished and continued to this day and we still maintain it.

There goes a plane.

Okay, let's try it again. Can you tell us where we are and what it feels like for you to be here right now?

We are sitting at the south side of the wetlands now. We are in the Tending and Gathering Garden which is a very special place here on the nature preserve. This garden contains native plants used in Native American cultural practices. This was a project by a graduate student at UCD some years ago and we still maintain and the garden is flourishing and is used by cultural practitioners.

And can you say a little bit about the different senses like what do you feel, what do you smell, what do you see, what the light is like where we are at right now?

We are sitting here as the sun is beginning to set in the west so we are shaded. It's beautiful. The trees and bushes are swaying in the soft breeze. It's still fairly warm because this is August and it's summertime in the Sacramento Valley but many of the plants and the trees are still a beautiful green which contrasts with our golden landscape here as the grasses begin to dry.

Okay. So can you tell me; what was this landscape around here like originally, pre-farming?

Pre-farming this land probably would have a lot more trees, particularly the valley oaks that we see along the riparian areas, cottonwoods, willows, many of the native shrubs that we still have here today, but I think it would be much more heavily treed and much more native grasses. There would also be open areas because pre-farming, much of this land was burned at various times either by the Native Americans or by the fires that were set through lightning and thunderstorms, but fields would burn, grasses would burn and then they would rejuvenate again, but it would keep some of the areas open which provided grazing for wildlife.

And how about the water? Would this area have had water from the creek or be like a wetlands or a marsh or would it be just kind of open space?

The water in this area has probably always been very similar to what we see today because Cache Creek is not leveed or channelized in this area but it is the natural stream. Over time the direction and the course of the stream has changed; it meanders, but it would always have been very similar I think to what it is now.

The Wetlands, continued (p.2 of 7)

Okay. So who were the first people to use this area where we're at for agriculture and how did they use it?

The first people that used this area for agriculture most likely used it primarily for livestock grazing. Eventually they also planted grain crops such as corn and wheat and barley to help feed the animals and feed for humans also, but grazing was probably the most important use early on which probably started around the 1840s with the first homesteaders in the area.

Out of curiosity, in the world of farming, would Native American gathering be considered farming and if so, would they have been the first people to farm this land?

The Native Americans of course lived here along the banks of Cache Creek all up and down the creek and into the areas that border the Sacramento River and they did utilize many of the naturally produced products from plants and animals along the creek.

That's a kind of agriculture I suppose.

Yeah. Agriculture is usually more manmade.

Let's form that into a whole sentence because I think it acknowledges that they were there using the space but not what would be considered farming.

Right. The Native Americans used this land and they would work the soil in a way that would be more productive to the plants that they wanted to utilize to harvest either the roots or the shoots or acorns from the oak trees. So they would use certain cultural practices to enhance the production that they gained from the native plants.

How is that different from farming?

Modern day agriculture utilizes seed or other plant stock that is actually planted for production whereas with the Native Americans, they utilized what nature was already providing for them; the native plants and yes they might burn or coppice which means a certain kind of pruning of the plant. They would use techniques on the native plants, but they did not have the kind of seeds and production that we use in modern agriculture today. It was a different type of agriculture in that primarily because they utilize native growing plants.

Who were the first people who used this land for food production and how did they use it?

I think the first people that really used this land for food production were the Native Americans that lived along the banks of Cache Creek long before any other people came into this area and they utilized the native plants that were growing here and they used certain cultural techniques to enhance the production value of these native plants that supplied food for them and materials for their baskets or that provided medicine for them. The native plants really provided a lot of the needs of the Native Americans living here and they knew how to take care of those native plants to create the products that they needed.

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Who then came after the Native people in terms of using this land for food production and what did they do?

After the Native Americans, prior to the white settlers coming into this area particularly around the gold rush time, there was a period in the early 1800s of a great deal of fur trapping along Cache Creek and of course the fur-bearing animals provided mainly the fur for human use, not so much food production but again a need that was for humans from the native animals that were living here along the creek.

And after the Native people, who was on this land and how did they use it for food production?

After the Native people, and while they were still living here in fact, both the Spaniards and the Mexicans were in charge of the land here in California that we know today as part of the United States and they probably did not utilize it for a great deal of agricultural production, but they all had their horses and cattle with them so they would graze the native grasses just to provide sustenance for their animals.

Great.

So we want to go back to the fur trapping or not?

Why not? Maybe what you can do is give it to me in a succession. So there were Spaniards and then it became part of Mexico and then there was some fur trapping.

Okay, after the Native Americans, the Spaniards gained control of this land. It was part of Spain and they came through here probably on horseback and the horses would graze the native grasses, but they really did not use this land for agricultural production that we think of as actually producing food. Following Spain, Mexico gained control of this land for a period of time, but again there weren't the settlers coming in at that time that actually lived on the land. They passed through it but did not stay and farm.

So then who did finally come here and stay and farm and what did they farm?

The actual farming as we think of farming today probably started with the Mexican land grants that were granted to various people who applied for them and one of those people was William Gordon who was actually a white man from Ohio that had become a Mexican citizen, he had a Mexican wife and a family. He was granted the Gordon Rancho and he settled here and actually began farming, starting first with livestock grazing on the land and eventually moving into the agricultural crops such as corn and wheat and barley for production.

Beautiful and do know the outlines of the Gordon Land Grant? Can you describe roughly where they are?

The Gordon Land Grant was one of the smaller land grants that the Mexican government gave out and the land was actually here, the site of the nature preserve, on both sides of the creek, upstream and downstream of the nature preserve. And I have no idea how big it was, but I know it was smaller than the others.

The Wetlands, continued (p.4 of 7)

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You talked about the Mexican Land Grant and Gordon and what he grew and did. Take us from the Mexican Land Grant into today. What were some of the next types of ways, it doesn't matter what families, but the successive families that have lived on this parcel. What types of food production have they been involved in?

This land here has probably been involved in many different crops that can be grown in this area. Grain crops were predominant in the late 1800s along with still grazing sheep and cattle, both on this land, but grain crops such as corn, wheat, barley, oats were grown extensively in this area and then as irrigation came into being and water was diverted from Cache Creek through a series of ditches, other crops could be grown so it increased the value of the land, it increased the options for crop production. I know that tomatoes were grown here in the early 1900s. Probably other kinds of irrigated crops; alfalfa hay so that there was a great diversity that could be grown here along with some of our tree crops; the orchards, some grape vines for production.

Wow, that's a lot. I didn't realize it was quite so many. So you've kind of covered this but let me ask you one more time. When you look out on the land in front of you, what would it have looked like back when it was in farming?

When this land was in farming, say in the late 1800s, it was flat, it probably did not have as many trees as we're seeing now except along the waterways because the land was open so it could be tilled or it was grazed so they wanted the grasslands and so we did not probably see as many trees and shrubbery as we do today.

Why did this place stop being a farm?

This site stopped being a farm because of the need for high quality gravel and there's lots of gravel underground in this area so it was mined for gravel in the 1970s and '80s both in the creek and in pits along the creek which is what created the wetlands here.

Can you describe how this place is different now from when it would have been in ag? Maybe you could say something like, when it was in ag it would have looked like this and now it looks like this.

When this place was in agriculture and active production it would have been cleared. We would not see as many trees here or the shrubbery. It would be laid out in fields, probably straight lines of field borders and the fields would be tilled so there would be bare dirt at certain times of the year. And then after planting, as the crops grew, they would become green and then dry and be harvested. So the landscape would change within a period of a year from bare dirt to producing a crop that could be harvested.

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How is it different now?

Now we see the land restored more to what it was prior to any kind of active farming on this site. It is restored to more of a natural area. We have a lot of native trees and grasses and shrubs, the wetlands with the islands, all of this is a restoration project to bring this land back to how it looked, not at any specific time, but how it would be more natural without as much human intrusion.

Actually let's go back. Why did it stop being in farming and how did it get to what it is today?

Agricultural production on the land ceased when gravel mining came in and this site was used as a gravel mining site and also as a stockpiling area for the gravel that was mined so it took the land out of production. It was used for another type of item; gravel was mined here.

And is it still being mined now?

Following mining, the land laid idle for a number of years without much care or anything being done to it. Teichert acquired ownership of it and determined that they would not be mining this site anymore. Many options were looked at perhaps, but they decided that the best use was to restore it to a natural area and so this land was donated to Yolo County and the Cache Creek Conservancy was chosen as the land manager and to do the restoration here.

Could you just say in one sentence who Teichert is?

Teichert is one of the gravel mining companies that has worked on Cache Creek for a number of years. They are one of the four permitted mining operations today that still operate along Cache Creek.

Great. So I guess I want to go back a little bit. Why didn't this go back into farming?

This land did not go back into farming in any kind of a great production area because it was lowered. They did try farming in the wetland area and the drainage was terrible so it did not work out well. After one year the farmer decided it wasn't worth trying to farm the wetland area. The other areas were pretty compacted from the gravel mining operation so it was determined that probably the best thing to do was to create these beautiful wetlands.

Great. Let's do that again. There was a couple of pieces of information we just need to say which is after it stopped being a mine they tried to go into farming. Let's try that. Why didn't it go back to farming?

After this area was mined, they did try farming the wetlands area and it just didn't work out. After one year they determined that the drainage was very poor and the crops failed actually because of the standing water. So the best use was to create wetlands here.

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And was the standing water a result of the mining? Had the mining changed the landscape?

The landscape had changed because of mining. The level of the ground was lower than the surrounding areas so it collected all of the drainage off of the other area and drowned out the crop that was in the bottom of the wetlands.

That makes sense. It's interesting, as a farmer, this has been restored but not back to farming. I'd be interested to hear what does "restoration" mean to you?

Restoration can mean many things and it means restoring the land back to something that it was before and this land here on the nature preserve site was restored back to a natural area. Now some of the surrounding lands that have been mined or will be mined will be restored back to agriculture. So it just depends on a lot of the characteristics of the area, what the permit requires, what the landowner may want to do and it all gets worked out as part of a reclamation plan now with the mining permit. But this land here was not part of any reclamation from an earlier scenario. It was dedicated by Teichert, a mining company, to Yolo County with the idea that it would be restored back to a natural area.

You know I don't really know the difference. If you know, what is the difference between reclamation and restoration?

I think restoration is a much broader term as to what you do with the land. Reclamation is very specific as to reclaiming land following some intensive use that changes the land from its previous mode.

That makes sense.

That was a guess. No, but I mean we do use the two terms but there is a difference.

Yeah. I have heard your voice light up when you talk about restoration and when you talk about this place being restored. So what does it mean to you as a farmer and a Yolo County resident that this place has been restored to this natural area?

It means a lot to have this land restored to a natural area. First and foremost it probably wasn't going to be the best agricultural land anymore following the mining operation without a lot of expense and heavy intense reuse of the way the land is. It made more sense to restore it to a natural area. Part of it is its location. It's right here nestled between Gordon Slough and Cache Creek, has a water source. This area made sense to restore it back to a natural area and it shows that agriculture and natural areas can be compatible and can lie next to each other. We have agriculture around us. We get along. There are not problems between the agricultural use and this area being used as a natural area.

JESIKAH MARIA ROSS INTERVIEWS LYNNEL POLLOCK

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Do you ever come down here and take a break and just hang out? Do you ever just like sit down here just to take a rest?

The nature preserve does provide a beautiful area for even the staff people here just to go out, take a break, get rejuvenated by seeing the beauty that is around us here and we are so pleased that we can provide this to the general public so they can get out and experience nature in its most beautiful form here along Cache Creek.