

restore

A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE CACHE CREEK NATURE PRESERVE

restory

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT OF



CREATED & DIRECTED BY
jesikah maria ross
jmross@ucdavis.edu

AUDIO TOUR INTERVIEW WITH

Lynnel Pollock

STOP 3:

The Creek



Stop 3: The Creek

If you could tell us where we are now and what you hear and see.

We are on the banks of Cache Creek where we can actually see the water flowing by us now. This is one of the few access points at the nature preserve site where people can get close down to the water, actually see it flowing by and see the flora that's all around us and we hear, of course again, it's a nice breezy time of day, the leaves rustling, but also at the southeastern edge of nature preserve is the Stephens Bridge which crosses Cache Creek. So periodically we hear a few thunk, thunks as cars go across the bridge and the sound carries upstream a little ways, but it is just downstream of us here.

Great. What do you appreciate most about this part of the preserve?

I think this part of the preserve really epitomizes what the preserve is all about. It's the connection to the creek and to the water itself flowing by, nourishing the plants, providing water for agriculture, providing groundwater recharge and so many other beneficial things for the habitat.

What memories come to you just standing here?

I think here I remember most about first starting the work at the Cache Creek Nature Preserve and all the work that needed to be done with the restoration and how beautiful it is now and what a change it is from when we first started.

Let's go back in time. How was this area used back when it was in agriculture?

This area has a very important use for agriculture and of course it provides the water to grow crops and once channels were made, creek water was diverted, it just opened up the realm of agriculture as to what could be produced and over a longer period of time that farmers could actually grow crops because now they had water to water their production.

Being a farmer yourself and not too far downstream, what do you think it would have been like back in the day to farm this piece of land?

Farming this land many, many years ago of course was very difficult. Nowadays we have much more modern machinery that does a very efficient job, but when they first started farming, they used horses and mules to pull farm equipment so it was difficult. It was very hot hard work. But again, the water is kind of the lifeblood. It provided water for the livestock. It provided water for the crops and they could divert water from the creek to water the crops.

Is this the same creek that runs by your land?

Yes, Cache Creek runs by the nature preserve and travels on downstream and in a few miles it will be going by our own farm and this water actually starts way back up in the Coast Range Mountains and Clear Lake in Lake County, so it comes from a distance.

The Creek, continued (p.2 of 4)

How important is this very creek water to your farming operation?

The creek water is very important to all of the farming operations in a large part of our county mainly because this water is also diverted further upstream and provides irrigation for thousands of acres of Yolo County farmland.

Wow! Tell me more about that.

Over time there were many irrigation companies and ditch companies and water companies that diverted water from Cache Creek to provide water for agriculture, but over time it became consolidated and eventually the Yolo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District became the owner of the irrigation systems and now is the provider of water to a great deal of Yolo County through their ditch system and their diversions.

You know I didn't realize that it was diverted and used for so many operations. What kind of impact does all of the agriculture water diversions have on the actual creek here at the preserve?

The fact that the flood control district now manages the water on Cache Creek and has two dams upstream that provide releases over a period of time during the hot summer months really means that we have more water downstream for the habitat because they are releasing water for their irrigation system and that water, a lot of it, is diverted at the Capay Dam which is upstream of us by about seven miles and that water is diverted to both the north and south sides of the creek and goes through a ditch system to provide water to many, many fields. But some of that water also spills over the dam and provides water downstream for us almost year-round. Prior to the Capay Dam and the whole irrigation system being developed, Cache Creek would dry up during the summer. The creek is what we call an ephemeral stream which means it does not run year-round.

And is it really a creek or is it more of river?

It's always been called a creek. At least Cache Creek has always been called a creek at least in my timeframe. Ask me about the name "Cache Creek."

Alright, I will. How did Cache Creek get its name?

Cache Creek actually was named many, many years ago and it started being called Cache Creek from the fur trappers that were along here and they would store or hide their traps and furs along the creek and in French that meant "to cache them," so it started being called Cache Creek by the fur trappers and that name has held to this day. Prior to it being called Cache Creek, the Spaniards called it Rio de Jesus Maria.

That's right, I've seen that. Is there something over there?

Maybe an otter.

The Creek, continued (p.3 of 4)

Go ahead and tell me what you see.

Well I can see something moving in the creek right now and it could be an otter because we do have otters all along the creek, river otters. We also see beavers and muskrats. So those are some of the animals that the fur trappers came for in the early 1800s and we still have a huge population here today. So they have survived.

So when this parcel was in agriculture, how would this creek have been used?

When this site of the Cache Creek Nature Preserve was being farmed, the creek probably provided irrigation water for many of the crops. It could be diverted further upstream and it would come down through what we call Gordon Slough named for Mr. Gordon who had the first land grant here, but that provided water for the fields here and for the livestock.

Nice. What kinds of challenges did this creek present to farmers?

The creek has always presented challenges to farmers farming along its banks because it is a natural stream and so it meanders and so some years during high flows it will cut into a bank and eat up some of the land. It will erode and farmers will lose acres of land. It will deposit land or the sediment on other sides of the stream and so it's constantly changing and today it is more channelized but it's been more of a natural channelization with the vegetation rather than levees in this section.

What does channelized mean?

Channelized means that the creek flows in a very strict form and does not meander at all or go out of bank. It's held within usually levees that are made of either concrete or packed dirt to hold the creek within certain bounds.

How about flooding? I read all these things about flooding. It seems like that was a big deal. Was the creek flooding a big problem for farmers in the past along here?

Creek flooding has always occurred in the past and yes, it was a problem for farmers but it was a problem that they anticipated. They knew when the waters got high that it would come over bank and flood fields and so they were prepared for it for the most part. If you look around and look at where the old homes are built, the homes and barns and the farmsteads, they are always on higher ground because the lower ground flooded as the creek went over bank once there was heavy rainfall.

That makes sense.

Maybe I could add that this site here at the nature preserve too, the farmstead itself was built on the higher ground back a ways from the actual creek bank because that was a more protected area and it would not flood.

The Creek, continued (p.4 of 4)

Now that the parcel, the Cache Creek Nature Preserve isn't in agriculture, what's the function of this creek?

This creek serves many functions and right now for the nature preserve site, one of its most important functions is again providing water for the habitat here, both the plants that grow close to the creek, their roots are in the water and for all of the animals and birds and so forth that live here. They can get water from the creek. In fact it's the habitat for many of our animals such as the beavers and the otters and of course the fish populations, turtles, frogs, all kinds of animals actually live within or very close to the water.

What kinds of fish are in this creek?

There's a variety of fish in this creek. This area right here is not a very good fishing site for fishermen because it does dry up at times, pools form, but there are catfish and perch and mostly smaller fish and carp.

Oh right, carp. Is this creek the main source of water for agriculture in Yolo County?

Cache Creek is probably not the main source of water for all of agriculture in Yolo County, but it certainly provides irrigation water for a large number of acres and farms within the central part of the county. Of course Cache Creek is a tributary to the Sacramento River and the Sacramento River system probably provides the majority of water used within the county.

The last thing I'll ask is if you can describe, actually give some details of what the creek looks like right now.

Right now Cache Creek looks very beautiful. It's calm and peaceful, almost green looking as the sun is going down and the shadows from the vegetation on the banks darken certain areas of the water. The breeze is causing ripples to occur in the stream way. The vegetation is nice and green. It's mostly all native vegetation in this area. We have worked for years to rid this area of invasive species, invasive plant species, so the trees and all of the flora that you see here is native and quite beautiful. It's not like this all times of the year though. In the wintertime, floodwaters rush down this area and in fact, where we're standing right now would be underwater. The water gets very high. It's a very flashy creek. The water rises rapidly and then it recedes rapidly. But we do have some interesting periods of rushing flood waters coming down Cache Creek.

What do you love most about the creek?

I think I love the beauty of the creek the best. It changes throughout the day, throughout the seasons. It's always changing, but it's always beautiful.

Great. Alright. I'm going to stop.