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# restore restory

A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE CACHE CREEK NATURE PRESERVE

AUDIO TOUR INTERVIEW WITH

*Lynnel Pollock*

STOP 5:

*Memorial Grove*



## Stop 5: Memorial Grove

**You mentioned back at the wetlands that the first people on this land were Native Americans. Why did they leave this place?**

I'm not really sure why the Native Americans left this particular place, but I know at the time when the Spanish and Mexican people came into this area, they brought with them diseases and so many of the Native Americans perished due to disease brought by other cultures and so that may be one reason why they kind of left this particular spot and moved to other areas or there just weren't as many of them for a period of time.

**Could you just walk me through and give a summary of the different people who were here and why you think they may have left or how the change happened?**

I think that the people on the land changed over time. Of course the Native Americans, many of them perished from disease. Spain took over this land although they did not bring in a lot of settlers of Spanish ancestry. Then Spain lost this territory to Mexico. Mexico granted the deeds, the ranchos, to various people who actually then settled on the land and so those people ended up staying and many of those were actually white people, American background, but became either Mexican citizens or for whatever reason obtained land grant deeds from the Mexican government and so they were here and ultimately this land for a short period was California and then became part of the United States.

**So were all those transitions pretty peaceable?**

Those transitions probably had a lot of bloodshed with them over time as various changes occurred.

**Was there anything about this particular parcel from an agricultural point of view that would make it something people would want to fight over?**

From an agricultural perspective, this was probably good farmland, good grazing land as was much of the land along here. So early on there was plenty of land available at decent prices for people to settle on and to acquire.

**Can you give me a summary sentence that talks about how this land has changed hands and what those shifts were like?**

The land has shifted over times brought on by man's need to acquire property and I think that's why we saw the change from the Native Americans to the Spanish and then to the Mexicans and ultimately to this land becoming California and part of the United States is because of man's need to acquire and the conflicts over the land ownership and acquisition historically and we see this worldwide over long periods of history that there are conflicts for acquiring land.

*Memorial Grove, continued (p.2 of 7)*

**So talk about where we are now and what this place symbolizes to you.**

Right now we are in the Memorial Grove, the Jan T. Lowrey Memorial Grove at the Nature Preserve and this is a very special site here on the nature preserve. It's dedicated to Jan who was the executive director of the Cache Creek Conservancy when this place came into being as the nature preserve and Jan was working here for approximately seven years and passed away suddenly from a heart attack and the board of directors decided to create this memorial to him and to recognize the work that he did in bringing this all together.

**You were around during what was called the gravel wars and so can you talk about what the gravel wars conflict was about?**

People fondly now remember the gravel wars, but this was a period of time in Yolo County of about 20 years from about 1975 to 1995 in trying to forge forward and do appropriate permitting and land use applications that would still allow gravel mining, because gravel was a needed product, but also that would respect the land where it was being mined.

And of course at that period of time more regulations were coming forward and the state had adopted reclamation laws that had not been in place before. So early mining, people mined and then just walked away from a site without any reclamation or restoration. Restoring the land back to its previous use or the way it looked as far as restoring habitat or agriculture and so with that and also with the land use authority which in this case is Yolo County, requiring more responsible operations of the land throughout the county whether it be used for some other industrial use, for agriculture, for residential or whatever, there was more oversight now as to how land was being used.

So the gravel mining operations were caught up in this change from the government, but also a great recognition from the people that further steps needed to be taken following the mining operation.

**It's funny that you said that people remember it fondly. I get the impression it was a total political nightmare.**

It was. Maybe that wasn't the best – I shouldn't maybe use fondly, but we joke about it now that we went through the gravel wars, but no, it was, it was a political nightmare.

**What made it such a political nightmare?**

There were many competing interests. There weren't just two sides. There were many sides that started out with their own ideas of what should be done or what shouldn't be done and how it should be done and so it just took a long time to work through all of that and to create a plan that represented the viewpoints of many people.

*Memorial Grove, continued (p.3 of 7)*

**So who were the different sides and what did they want?**

In this conflict there was of course the mining companies themselves who needed a supply of aggregate and they were willing to go through the environmental documentation and fund all of the technical studies that needed to be done to issue new permits. The gravel in the creek was being depleted. They needed a new source of area to mine and so they were willing to look at various options which ultimately resulted in mining being taken out of the active creek channel totally and moving off stream into mining in pits off channel and then would go through a reclamation process.

**So that's one. Maybe you can just line them up. Maybe you could say like there was this side and they wanted this and this side because I think that's interesting that there wasn't just two sides.**

No. There were other viewpoints. One viewpoint was the landowners along the creek and they were not unanimous in what they wanted. Landowners that had gravel on their property wanted to perhaps work with the mining companies to extract that resource on their property. It was an income stream for them and they could see some benefit in that particularly because the land would be reclaimed afterwards and for agriculture that was important that it be reclaimed to agriculture. Other landowners just didn't want to see any mining at all and there was more of an environmental community that was opposed to mining in the creek and some felt that mining off stream was okay, others felt it wasn't proven that it could be entirely safe; did it harm the water quality and that was one of the big issues. So there were many viewpoints. And then there were those that just wanted to see a better plan for the whole area that included mining and protection of agriculture.

**How about the county? The county must have had some point of view or stake as well.**

The county wanted to see mining continue in that it was an important industry in this county and particularly this area along Cache Creek. It brings revenue to the county, it provides jobs for people and it provides a resource for building, for roads and so forth through the gravel itself.

But the county also had to comply with state law which required much more oversight and reclamation and they needed to write a plan that could be acceptable to the people of the county overall represented by the planning commission and ultimately the board of supervisors.

**Now that you've laid it out, can you walk me through it one more time in a summary way – who were the different sides and what are the different perspectives they had.**

There were many perspectives that came forward as the gravel wars raged in Yolo County. First of all we had the gravel companies themselves that wanted to continue their industry and were willing to work with others to find an acceptable means of doing it, of mining aggregate along Cache Creek.

*Memorial Grove, continued (p.4 of 7)*

There were landowners who were divided. Some wanted to see an aggregate industry. Their own lands perhaps had deposits of gravel and it was an economic boom to them.

Other just didn't want to have anything more to do with any mining. There was the environmental community; some wanted no mining at all, some wanted to see mining off channel but with a lot of protections, a lot of restoration.

And one of the outcomes of all of this was a net gain principle and that, once that was put forward, it became easier for the county to move forward.

**So tell me about one of the main outcomes of the net gain.**

One of the main principles that came forward and became acceptable to many as a starting point to finalize this plan was what we call the net gain principle and this net gain meant that the people of Yolo County would gain something from the mining that was over and above any reclamation that was required, any regulations or requirements put on the companies by the government for their permit. It was something over and above that would benefit the people of the county and it could be a land acquisition that the county would obtain for a park site or other lands for habitat. So it was those kinds of things that would become part of the whole package that helped move this process forward.

**It's kind of like mitigation isn't it?**

It was even more than mitigation because it was something that wasn't required. It was something that companies worked with the county to offer the county that was a benefit to the public in general. Like one company did a demonstration recharge area and donated it to the county. It demonstrated how groundwater could be recharged along Cache Creek. Another company will donate land to the county that will become public use area that will be developed for habitat and a natural area.

So those were the kinds of things that were looked at that would benefit not just country government but the people of the county.

**Oh, that totally makes sense. No, I hadn't heard it in that regard. Let me go back a little bit. Again, put on your farmer hat. How was mining impacting Ag in the area if at all?**

Mining did impact agriculture to some extent primarily because at the time there would be lots of gravel trucks on the roads and particularly some of the county roads and farmers were competing for that road space because they were moving product to market or moving farm machinery and everybody hated all those gravel trucks.

*Memorial Grove, continued (p.5 of 7)*

**I can so imagine that. You kind of mentioned this, but let's just say again. As someone who's a farmer in the farming community, where did the farmers come down in the gravel wars? What was their perspective on it?**

I think one of the major perspectives from agriculture was that whether the mining occurred in channel or off channel that it did not affect the water, both quality and quantity of water that was being used by agriculture. So in other words, if mining occurred off channel in pits, there needed to be protections for water quality to make sure the water was not contaminated or that the aquifer, the underground storage area of water would be contaminated by anything the mining operation was doing.

**And were they able to get assured of that in the outcome?**

There were assurances in the final outcome of the plan and to this day there are many monitoring occurrences both in the creek and at the wells around the mining operations to monitor both water quantity and quality to make sure that it's not being contaminated. But yes, there were safeguards put in the plan and in the permits that we hoped would protect the water.

**So it sounds like the farmers and ranchers concerns in the gravel wars were addressed.**

For the most part I believe the major concerns were addressed and as I said, one of them was water, one of them was the use of roads and the companies are restricted to certain roads for hauling and they do some road repair as part of their permits so that there were allowances made for the transportation and I think those were probably two of the major points. And again, taking land out of agricultural production from mining, there are requirements for many of the lands to be reclaimed back to agriculture so the land will be available for crop production.

**And will that work because it doesn't work here on this parcel.**

It does work. It's not that all the land would be reclaimed to agriculture but the net loss was minimized because some lands will be reclaimed to agriculture and those lands will actually result in better production because they will be leveler, leveled, and they will be better soil quality.

Because right now the lands that are not mined have gravel streaks through them and so the soil quality is uneven and it makes it difficult to irrigate and where there are a lot of gravel stratas close to the surface, crops do not grow as well because it's kind of a rocky sandy soil. So by removing that gravel and of course the top soil is saved when they start mining and then that top soil is put back and the field is leveled and so it actually results in better production.

**Who would have thunk?**

Yeah. It really does result in better production.

*Memorial Grove, continued (p.6 of 7)*

**That's pretty wild. Was there a common cause then between the farmers and the environmental community in terms of water quality, etc.?**

During the gravel wars I think often times different groups really were promoting the same idea and that would be, particularly with the water, the farmers and the environmental community both wanted to see that the water quality was protected.

**Great. So did you have any particular role during the gravel wars and if so, what was it?**

Yes, I was involved in the gravel wars and started out really as my role with Yolo County Farm Bureau and putting forward what agriculture would like to see as an outcome because I served as Farm Bureau president during part of that time period. Following that I was appointed to the Yolo County Planning Commission so I served on the Planning Commission for many of the instances when this item came before the Planning Commission as we worked through the plan and the off channel mining plan and the Cache Creek Resources Management Plan that did the restoration work so yes, I was involved with that and with the individual mining permits.

**Then I think you were a supervisor when it all went through, right?**

Actually I went on the Board of Supervisors just as the plan was finalized so most of the work had been done prior to my becoming a supervisor, but certainly in my role as supervisor, we did annual reports from the mining companies as to what was happening and oversaw much of the beginnings of those operations.

**Wow, so in a lot of ways the birth of this place parallels your political career.**

Yes, the development of the Cache Creek Conservancy and the Nature Preserve and my role in various functions as a member of the broader Yolo County community were parallel and actually the conservancy was formed as a result of the gravel wars also because it served as an organization that tried to bridge the differences between the landowners, the mining community, county government and those who were concerned about restoring Cache Creek. So we were that organization that tried to bring the parties together on neutral ground, doing good things, helping the environment and being an area where everybody could come together and work for something positive.

**Are people still fighting over this land?**

Right now I think things are fairly calm out on the creek. We certainly see it. The Cache Creek Conservancy has a good rapport with all of the landowners along the creek as we've worked on restoring and doing good things for the environment, but I think the plan that was developed ultimately with so much input and so much technical study and so many meetings, input from so many different people, different viewpoints considered, I think ultimately that plan which was a consensus plan, it isn't perfect, but we can all work towards implementing it and it has proven over time, which has been almost 15 years now, that it's been in effect, that it is working.

*Memorial Grove, continued (p.7 of 7)*

**And what's the name of that plan?**

The name of the plan is the Cache Creek Area Plan. It's pretty simple, but it has multiple parts and one part of the plan is the off channel mining plan and the ordinances associated with that and the other side of the plan is the restoration part, the Cache Creek Resources Management Plan which implements restoration and habitat improvements along the creek.

**So how did the gravel wars finally stop? Why did they finally stop? What brought the gravel wars to an end?**

The gravel wars basically ended once the plan, the Cache Creek Area Plan was adopted and it did go to a referendum of the voters of Yolo County and it was overwhelmingly approved by the voters countywide to adopt this plan and there were still people who were unhappy with it and would come forth and speak at the Board of Supervisors and express their opinion, but from a broad view, the plan certainly has worked well. Mining has continued. Aggregate production continues and yet much of the habitat along the creek has been restored and continues to be so today.

**And has mining continued to be a main source of economics? Does it still provide a lot of resources for the county?**

The mining plan does provide resources for the county. The county does receive some monetary funding from the mining permits in addition to the things that they will receive through the net gain concept, but on an annual basis the county does receive funding from the companies that goes back into the creek.