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A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE CACHE CREEK NATURE PRESERVE

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AUDIO TOUR INTERVIEW WITH

Ben Adamo

STOP 1:

The Overlook



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The first thing, just to get us warmed up and to connect us to where we're at, is if you could just look around and just describe the different things that you see and hear and feel. Where are we and what's it like?

Well, we're at the Cache Creek Nature Preserve and it couldn't be a better late summer day because it's getting close to evening, it's still warm, but we're in a good spot with shade, a little breeze coming out of the South and the wetland in front of us. The trees are all greened up and the water fowl in the water. It just really couldn't be any nicer and it's quiet out here right now and just a great place to be.

I know, I love it this time. Do you remember the first time that you came to this parcel?

Yeah, I certainly remember the first time I came to this parcel. It was back in 1974, March 7th. That was the date that I started work for Cache Creek Aggregates at this site as a welder, fabricator to construct an aggregate plant here.

Wow. When you think back to that March date in the '70s, what do you remember most about your first day here? What was it like?

Well, when I think back to my first impression of this site on that day it was, gee, it's just gravel, flat, there was no machinery here yet. There was just mobile equipment so there was no plant equipment on site and it really wasn't much to look at. It was just a flat expansive gravel and they told me that ultimately we were going to be constructing an aggregate plant here and that was part of the work that I would be doing.

Can you tell me your name and the first time you came to this place?

Well, my name is Ben Adamo and the first time I came to this place was March 7, 1974. I had just been hired by Cache Creek Aggregates as a plant welder mechanic.

How did you get into mining?

Well, I got into mining because I knew a fellow that was a mechanic here at the gravel operation who I had worked with as a mechanic at Fruehauf Truck Bodies in West Sacramento and he had been a foreman there and he was working here and they were looking for more help and he remembered me from prior work experience and said hey, I'll give this guy a call. And so he called and said would you rather work out here in construction rather than working in the shop? I was an interesting proposal because you're working in the shop, you're protected from the weather, but the pay is higher when you're working construction outside and I looked at it as an opportunity and so I decided to come out and at least talk to him and they made me an offer I couldn't refuse.

How old were you about then?

I was 23.

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Young.

Yeah, yeah. Obviously for me it turned into more than just a job. It turned into a career and I was successful in moving up through mechanic to plant operator to equipment operator to site foreman, plant superintendent and ultimately I did permitting for various companies.

Did your whole entire career in mining happen at this particular parcel?

No, my career started here at this parcel developed with the same company pretty much in the watershed, both here at the Cache Creek Aggregates site and then another site that Cache Creek Aggregates developed and permitted up at Capay and R.C. Collet, Inc. or Cache Creek Aggregates also had facilities in Rocklin at the same time so I had some experience up there as well.

So what do you like the most about mining?

Well I think any job is somewhat about the people that you work with. For me, both the production of the materials, producing a quality product in what it ever is you're doing, whether it's constructing the plans to process the material or the actual production of the material itself is a challenge and the people you work with, the customers that you have, the people you meet in the community, it's all been a pretty good experience for me. I think I've enjoyed most of it.

Are you still working in mining?

I'm still working part time. I work three days a week now for Granite Construction and primarily I'm not on the operation side anymore although I do at times help them when they're troubleshooting things, but primarily in permitting.

Is there anything you miss about working in mining at this particular parcel?

As far as missing working at this particular site, certainly the first place that you work in an industry I think that is one that you have worked at for a long time has a special place in your heart. There were a lot of things about this particular site that were fun for me as a young employee that was learning the trade. There were a lot of opportunities at this site that I recall, again, going back to the people that I was working with, the older operators back in the day as they say now. Some operators tend not to share their knowledge and then others do. And you have to appreciate those that are willing to share with the younger guys that might risk some of their employment opportunities because these younger guys might displace them over time and I always appreciated that in some of the older hands that helped me along and I tried to give back in that same way with the younger guys coming up. That's one thing that I've always tried to do even through today is just share what I do know about how to go about the work and get the job done in the best way.

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So that I have it again, can you tell me again the job you had when you started in mining and then the different jobs that you had in mining throughout your career?

Sure. When I first started in the mining industry I hired on as a welder mechanic and then we'll call it graduated to running equipment although the mechanic sometimes got paid better than the operator, but operating equipment was again, fun. Ran the plant some and then became the plant foreman and after a number of years as plant foreman the operations spread to more than one operation and they asked me to be the plant superintendent and then ultimately as I developed more experience in that plant superintendent role, Collet was doing permitting of new sites and I became involved with the consultants on the permitting side developing permit plans and ultimately that's what I do today is develop plant permits.

When you talk about operating equipment, you're talking about big machines like backhoes and monster cranes and stuff like that, right?

Again, when you talk of operating equipment around a gravel mining operation, you're talking about all of it and that's primarily what you want in an operator is somebody that's capable of running all the equipment on the site. So it would be things from motor graders to paddle wheel scrapers, ~~just~~ front end loaders so you load the trucks and you have a certain amount of pride in being able to run all that equipment to the best of your ability. But I'm one of those guys that probably is what you call a jack of all trades and you always have to recognize that there are better operators on each individual piece of equipment than I'll ever be and ever hope to be. But I was really, I think, privileged to have some of those really top notch operators work for me through the years.

What do you think most people don't know about this place, this parcel when it comes to its mining history?

Well I think that most folks that come out to the nature preserve, unless they ask the question or really carefully read the literature, don't understand that there was actually a processing plant on the site. A lot of them know that it's a former mining site and they look at it as a pit, but they don't recognize the fact that there actually was processing equipment here; conveyors, crushers, the whole operation was actually sited right in the middle of what's now the wetland area.

How would you describe the nature preserve to a friend?

The Cache Creek Nature Preserve is a site that was formerly mined that's been sculpted by Teichert, managed by the county and the Conservancy to provide a beautiful, natural wetland facility that people can come to and enjoy and students can come here and learn about the linkage between the environment here, the mining and agriculture around us. So it's just a perfect place for people to learn about the environment and it's a great setting.