

restore

A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE CACHE CREEK NATURE PRESERVE

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A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT OF



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AUDIO TOUR INTERVIEW WITH

Marshall McKay

STOP 3:

The Creek



Stop 3: The Creek

So can you describe where we're at and what you see and what it's like?

I can see at this point a very familiar setting, one that reminds me of a more tranquil time, but also a more hectic time. It reminds me of a time when there wasn't so much development in the area. It reminds me of a time where it was appropriate to come to the riverbank and collect material or even just be here to relax, to meditate, to find one's self in a natural setting.

Those kinds of sites one must look for and I think they're diminishing around Yolo County. They're diminishing around the Wintun Nation so we have to relish and preserve and understand how important places like this are; someplace where there's a bit of tranquility in the 21st century.

Can you describe what the creek looks like right now and some of the aspects of the creek that you can see?

The way the creek looks right now, it's very still and it gives the impression of depth; the water. But it also is very – the shoreline is very full and green with rushes and grasses and shrubs and that gives me the impression that it's not only deep, but nourishing and then mixing in the birds and the wildlife that are here gives me the impression that it's safe. So I find that that attitude next to the creek gives me a bit of a safe feeling myself.

And what kind of family memories come back to you when you stand here and look out at Cache Creek?

Initially I remember fishing in the creek and it's a different style of fishing than you're probably used to. It's wading in the water and sort of picking the fish up and throwing them onto the shore. Now this takes an interesting kind of migration of the fish because there have to be a lot of them, but during the height of the season we would do that. We would take a basket into the creek and scoop them out or catch them if we were adept enough with our hands, but that whole energetic kind of collection of food and preparation for the season, be it fall, be it summer or spring, those kinds of memories come back to the creek side.

Did you often go fishing?

I often fished with my family in the creek and that was exciting because there was a bit of camaraderie, there was a bit of excitement, there was – and I still enjoy fishing, but it's different now. It's different with a rod and a reel. It's less exciting, a little bit more passive. So I really remember coming to the creek side with my family and having this sort of afternoon affair in the water sort of floundering about and then having to carry all of these fish home and clean them and prepare them for various types of consumption, either drying them or cooking them or some other way of preserving the flesh.

What kind of fish were you catching in this creek back whenever that was?

There were catfish. I remember catfish in the creek. There was a boney black fish that I think we have a creation story about. It was very dangerous to eat, but it was great in the middle of the winter when you had some that was jerked and it was provided for you. There were some – early on there were some bass, but they have now since disappeared from the creek.

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Okay, I'll talk to you about that later.

Yeah.

So since you mentioned it, do you have a story, a creation story or is there any kind of story that comes to you that was passed down to you about the creek?

No.

The scary boney black fish one sounded good!

I know. It is good, but I don't remember it in entirety. I just remember that he got his – he was greedy and he wanted all the bones and so he would eat these other fish and then so eventually he got all the bones. He was all the bones.

Yuck.

But you need more detail.

Okay. So let's go back to pre-contact. Before Europeans arrived, how was this creek used by the Wintun people?

Before European contact, this creek was used in various manners, but all for sustenance, all for sustainability. It was used for fresh water. It was used for food. It was used for gathering material to construct baskets both for art and for function.

Was there a lot of trapping and hunting that happened down here at the creek?

Before contact, the creek provided a great deal of game, both because of the fresh water, of course the deer and the bigger game would come for that, but there was fish in the creek, there were game birds that would come here, pheasants, turkeys, quail, all the various types of birds and the small animals; the rabbits, the foxes, all had a place here.

Would all of those animals have been animals that the tribe would have used in terms of food or materials for houses or clothes?

Absolutely. All of those animals were used for clothing, for food, for ornamentation; to decorate one's lodge. A beautiful fox fur was gorgeous and still is even today, but then I think you would see a much different arrangement of furs and material that were used for cold weather or just to show off.

That makes sense. So how important is this creek to the tribe today?

This creek is of utmost importance to the tribe today because there are still sacred sites along this creek. There are villages that are still along this creek that we have a duty to maintain, the tribe has a duty to maintain.

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There are stories that go along with those village sites that the tribe has a duty to maintain and recapture and talk about again. This creek has been a source of life for the tribe and the current tribe has a duty to make sure that that life doesn't go unattended and unexplained.

Can you describe some of the ways that the tribe is using the creek today, whether it's water for the olive orchard (which I'm excited about).

Yes! Fresh oil!

You know, is it water, recreation? I don't know if it's appropriate to say it but cultural renewal activities at these sites. Whatever is appropriate to share. If you described how the place was used before contact, what are some of the actual activities or uses that this creek has for you today?

The creek has several uses for the Wintun Nation today. It obviously will supply irrigation water for our farms and our herds, but it also gives us the ability to use it recreationally during summertime.

It also gives us an idea of the levels of pollution that we're dealing with so we, the tribe, can monitor the pollution in the creek to mitigate that pollution, to understand where it's coming from. Is it coming from the soils of past fertilization? Is it coming from factories or communities upstream? We want to be able to mitigate that danger because we'd like to see fish come back to this river, this creek, but they won't be able – even if the water is flowing, they won't be able to come and live if it's poisoned. So we're using it as a research tool also to find out what we're dealing with in our own community so it serves a vibrant and vital purpose today.

It's great that you have the resources to do that kind of monitoring and attend to it in that kind of way. I don't know that many tribes actually have those resources.

Well our tribe is very fortunate to have resources to assure that we can attain what we project we want to do. Some tribes don't, but we are sharing our information with other tribes. We're sharing our information with educational institutions so that information is not just for our purpose and our knowledge, it's to share the entire content of what we find and what we use the creek for with the entire community at large.

From what I've seen, you're also generous about helping people make projects happen.

Yeah.

You've done this a little bit, but just so that I have it, can you look around and list off some of the materials that Wintun people in the past or today collect and use and what they collect and use if for on this creek?

As I look around right now, I see tules. Tules were used for basket making. They were used for some clothing. They're also great pollution stoppers. They have an ability to pull in a lot of carbon. I don't know if in ancient times that was of value, but it is now. So I see tules. I see some sedge on the sandy banks and

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those were mainly for basket making material. There's willow, which was for baskets and also for a rope type construction. The thistles were used, when they're young, they have some medicinal purposes so they were harvested when they were green shoots and not when they were seeded. Of course we have the river oaks also for food. You know, the acorns were a very, very prominent protein source.

Is there any kind of saying or refrain or story that you remember growing up that people had about the creek; the dangers of it, the pleasures of it, the lore or anything like that?

I don't recall any kind of cultural story. I do recall being told of the dangers of the swift water and that has always reminded me that Cache Creek at certain times of the year can be very dangerous and I just remember that there was always a caution when I was going to the creek because of the animals, the reptiles, the swift water, the erosion. There were so many dangers associated with the creek that it wasn't a place to be taken lightly. It wasn't really a place to play. It was a place to gather food. It was a place to gather material and usually that was done in a group setting so no one really came or was encouraged to come to the creek alone. We would always have somebody there. We would always tell our parents. We would always tell somebody at the village we were going to the creek because again, there could be a myriad of animals in this kind of foliage where we don't know if there's a mountain lion laying in wait, we don't know if there's a bear in there, we don't know if there are rattlesnakes. There's a tremendous amount of things, even deer in their rutting season can be very dangerous. They're big, they're mean and they're aggressive. So we really didn't take the creek lightly. It was a live entity and it was something to be revered.

What is your favorite thing about this creek?

My favorite thing about this creek is that it's still here and I get so excited in the high water season when the water is flowing. There's a sound to the water and it almost has a song-like tone to it where the water is singing and it makes me very peaceful and I like that about the creek. Even when it's quiet then it becomes a form of meditation and a form of thought that it isn't singing, it's thinking. So I feel very comfortable near the creek and around it.