Merging the Merced

Fostering a holistic connection with the land and community, framing history and experientially telling stories of cultures and their relationship with the land through time.

Site Analysis

Project Introduction

This project began with an on-site visit. As a team, places of interest, opportunities, and constraints were documented, and stakeholders expressed what they want accomplished with the completion of the Merced River Trail. This mapped information, along with the expertise and ideas from the involved partners, made space for a design that is both original and reflective of the needs of community members and actual trail users.

Stakeholder Concerns

After meeting with a handful of stakeholders, we categorized expressed concerns in a matrix to help us orient our project goals and program for the Merced River Trail.

Mariposa County Demographic Statistics

Through our site visit and project research, we found that Mariposa County has some unique demographics that should be accounted for in our design. With higher obesity rates and elderly populations, the trail must be accessible and inviting. Appealing to wider county demographics will also make the trail more inviting for groups that are normally overlooked in the outdoor recreation realm.

Mariposa County Poverty Rate

National Poverty Rate

Veteran Population

Obesity Rate

Population 65+

Race, Ethnicity and Population of Mariposa County

Age Breakdown of Mariposa County

Race and Population

Age Distribution

Sense of Place Collage

The sense of place collage uses images gathered by our group during the site visit. We were entranced by the beauty of the river corridor, the rock formations, flowers, trees and the historic structures found throughout Mariposa County.

We also looked at demographics from cities outside the county along highways that lead to the trail. Fresno and Merced are in close proximity and likely many people will come to use the trail from those areas.

Plant Palette Matrix

Plant to Remove

Proposed Plant palette

Incline

Maintenance

Placemaking

Appreciation

for the Land

Public Health

Cooperation

Economic Growth

Functionality

Creative Placemaking

Increased Maintenance

Gateway/Community Planning

NPS segment

USFS segment

BLM segment

Trailhead/change

Historic feature

Natural feature

Bridge

Camping/lodging

Crosswalk

Yes

Semi

No
Cultural Landscapes

Cultural landscapes are a byproduct of the give and take relationship between humans and land. These impressions define and reflect human values and tell the unique histories of those who have been shaped by the land.

History and Connection

Throughout time, land use and cultural connection to the areas in and around Yosemite Valley have varied with the communities that have inhabited the landscape. With the Southern Sierra Miwok, a strong connection between the native american communities and the land was embedded within the philosophies and beliefs of their culture. When this land and its resources were discovered by new settlers, opportunities for economic gain drew in a community that made little to no cultural connection to the area. While the establishment of Yosemite National Forest constituted the preservation of the land in its natural beauty, the area became an art piece and a tourist attraction. Today, local communities must live with the limitations of being a part of a place held with such high regard.

Railroad

- Trail was old rail grade
- Connectivity from Merced to Yosemite

Lumber & Mining

- Utilitarian relationship with land
- Industrial development

Miwok

- Connection to the land
- Appreciation and observational

National Forest

- Establishment of Yosemite
- Preservation of the land

Access and Community

Provide access and convenience for people of all backgrounds and abilities
- Logical system of wayfinding signage
- Well-placed and regular amenities: bathrooms, water, waste bins
- Safety beacons in isolated sections of the trail
- Lighting at sites with night usage

Encourage various types of recreation
- Provide signs identifying all recreation opportunities (swimming areas, rafting inputs, etc).
- Provide information about mileage, trail condition, difficulty for users.
- Place buffer between hiking/bike trail and road
- Provide bike racks and bike rental
- Amenities at swimming areas
- Bike lanes when applicable
- Widening of paths when necessary for pedestrian safety
- Picnic and interesting rest areas
- Rafting inputs and outputs

Design for seasonal usage
- Provide shade structures
- Visual interest for deciduous season

Connect Bagby to Yosemite Valley
- Provide through access across the 34 mile span of trail

Educational

- Information about trail etiquette (LNT)
- Signs on local ecology and wildlife
- Plant identification and application signs
- Signs on local ecology and wildlife
- Education signs providing information

Recreation

- Separate hiking/bike trail
- Destination day use areas
- Bike rental
- Swimming areas
- Rafting inputs and outputs

Art

- Mile art, small scale
- Long term medium scale art installations

Ecological

Create opportunities for the community to celebrate together
- Design open space(s) for community gathering
- Use public art to create a sense of place
- Encourage artists to draw inspiration from historical narratives for installations
- Use narratives to inspire aesthetic of trail amenities and signage
- Provide information at the historical artifacts/sites along the trail
- Place amenities and/or modifications at historical sites to encourage activity there
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- Provide signage on the unique and relevant aesthetic

Economic

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Program

Access
- Shuttle stops
- Trailheads
- Mile markers
- Wayfinding signs
- Rest stops
- Safety beacons
- Gathering spaces

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- Cultural site historic information

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Design Development

### LEGEND
- Mile marker
- Campground
- Shuttle stop
- Art installation opportunity
- Safety callbox
- Swimming area
- Bike rental
- Small Rest Stop
- Large Rest Stop
- Small Trailhead
- Large Trailhead
- Bike rack
- Benches
- Table
- Shade structure
- Welcome sign
- Information posts
- Wayfinding signs
- Ecological educational posts
- Waste receptacles
- Railboad Track, accent plant species
- Art installation
- Meandering trails
- Boulder, rock stack retaining wall
- Gathering space

### Large Trailhead
- Amenities: Welcome sign, Information posts, wayfinding signs, ecological educational posts, waste receptacles, bathrooms, bike rack, benches, table
- Design attributes: Railroad Tracks, accent plant species, art installation, meandering trails, boulders
- Functional attributes: Parking lots, gathering space

### Large Rest Stop
- Amenities: Wayfinding signs, small art installation, natural bench, mile marker
- Design attributes: Accent plant species
- Functional attributes: Tree shade

### Small Trailhead
- Amenities: Wayfinding signs, Information post, ecological environmental posts, waste receptacles, bench, swing
- Design attributes: Railroad track, elevated path
- Functional attributes: Tree shade

### Small Rest Stop
- Amenities: Information posts, wayfinding signs, ecological educational posts, waste receptacles, bathrooms, bike rack, benches, table, shade structure
- Design attributes: Accent plant species, art installation, meandering trails, boulders
- Functional attributes: Gathering space
Briceburg Mortar
Bricburg, CA

The Briceburg Mortar enlivens the Southern Sierra Miwok narrative of Mariposa County while providing an accessible event center and trail access point for both local and regional residents of the community.

The Briceburg Mortar is a flexible gathering space that offers recreational and educational activities to the community year-round. The canopy-shaded stage and open space welcomes art festivals, concerts, educational classes, and more. The design also incorporates bus stops and a parking lot for increased accessibility, new bathrooms, a flexible overflow parking area adjacent to the event center, and a historically contextual kids play area. The trail access point includes a shaded rest area, bathrooms, a bike rental station, bike racks, and a new trail head.

In Miwok tradition, mortars and pestle grinding holes were daily practice in preparation of food and medicine. The sunken and circular gathering space, capturing the form of a mortar, brings to life what was once a familiar form in the Miwok community. Rather than grinding vegetation for survival, the Briceburg Mortar fosters a space for the community to build their relationship with the land and each other through events and activities.

A naturalistic vibe is provided through naturalistic planters and seating in order to start a conversation with nature as users begin their trek along the Merced River.

Portland Factorium
Incline, CA

The Old Portland Cement Factory has been transformed into a historic and explorative space for trail users.

While functioning as a rest area for hikers/bikers, the factorium also sparks curiosity and exploration by weaving history and play together. Structures historically used on-site are referenced in the site's structures and the path weaves through historic sites. The slide on the west side of the factorium allows for a unique vantage point of the Merced river and site. Naturalistic planting is meant to complement the existing vegetation and frame historic structures.

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El Portal Trailyard showcases the railroad narrative of El Portal and creates a beneficial and functional community space for the modern day community.

Programs are oriented around community and trail amenities. The trail information center features bike rentals, trail information and other educational exhibits as well as public restrooms. For transportation and access, there is additional parking for community events and trail users. Two bus stops take people up to Yosemite with improved bike capacity and down towards Briceburg through El Portal and the National Park Service Center. Traffic calming measures and pedestrian safety have also been improved drastically. The train artifact area has been restructured to house community events and art, as well as provide an open space for visitors and residents to enjoy. Train artifacts have been dispersed throughout the site to allow for more interaction with the narrative of El Portal’s railroad history.

The El Portal trailhead design evokes the railroad narrative and creates community space for tourists and residents to enjoy throughout the year. There are spaces for community events and art displays. The remaining train artifacts have been dispersed throughout the site and are now showcased in a more interactive way. This allows people to see the narrative in a new light. The railroad inspired forms help to showcase the railroad’s influence on the community of El Portal and the town’s history. When you arrive at the visitor center, you are greeted with the Bagby Turntable and instantly reminded of El Portal’s railroad history. The rest of the site is set up to be functional and showcase history in a similar way.