

Interviewee: Robert “Bob” Cornelius (BC)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Working as a Park Ranger at Phantom Ranch in the Grand Canyon in the early 1970’s.

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TM: Good morning. This is Part 6 of a Grand Canyon Oral History with Robert “Bob” Cornelius. C-O-R-N-E-L-I-U-S. My name is Tom Martin. Today is June 8, 2018. Good morning, Bob. How are you?

BC: Good morning.

TM: Do I have your permission to record this telephone conversation as part of this oral history interview?

BC: Yes, you do.

TM: Thank you very much. At the end of Part 5 we’d started talking about Ken Hulick, the previous Phantom Ranch ranger and we’d also talked about Ed Carlson. End of the interview we talked some about the sheer volume of people at Phantom Ranch, the initiation of a permit system with Warren Hill, your communications with Warren, but then there were... You talked about going down to Phantom with some food but then dealing with several emergencies along the way. There were water issues through the pipeline, as well. So we’re starting to get into a whole bunch of different things and I’m going to say, “Take it away, Bob.”

BC: Okay, well I guess... You did mention about the food. I don’t think I finished my full thought on that. I found out that there were certain things that couldn’t take down to Phantom Ranch on the horse and one of them was milk. You couldn’t take... I had a gallon of milk that I was taking and by the time I got to Phantom Ranch, in the heat and all the juggling, I practically had butter.

TM: Wow.

BC: It had turned at least into buttermilk and I don’t like buttermilk so it was pretty much useless to me. What I started doing then was... You’d go and talk to the... “How do you get milk down here?” The trail crew guy says, “Well, you put it in the freezer and you freeze it and then you bring it down.” So I started doing that. I never could bring ice cream down. That was one thing I missed down there. I had to leave that on the rim. Anything that would melt you really couldn’t bring down unless you could freeze it. You can even freeze butter and bring that down if you wanted. We lived fairly luxurious compared to campers but still as you live in a place day-after-day, week-after-week, year-after-year, you start to crave those little luxuries that you might be missing otherwise.

Other things that happened down there that we were talking about earlier were sort of one man's trash is another man's treasure, I was thinking in between our interviews here. One of the things I used to do was... People would abandon everything, particularly when it got really, really hot down there. Or, you would go up in the campground in the evening and the people would say, "I don't want to carry this can of beans out," and this and that. They would ask me if I wanted them, so I would take the food. I had two sets of cupboards in the ranger station. In one side I put camper food in there and the other portion I put my own food in. When people showed up at Phantom without any food, without any water, with boots that were blistering their feet, then I had a supply of things I could give them.

TM: Nice.

BC: The same thing with water. I saved any jugs that we used for chlorination, I would save those, or any that could be sanitized. I had little a shed in the back so I put all of the jugs in there and then I put... The river runners liked to abandon their tennis shoes. People would come off of the river at Phantom and then they would hike out. Also people would hike in and so there was... They didn't want to carry their tennis shoes out [chuckle], so they would abandon them. So I had a whole supply of tennis shoes and socks [chuckle], and sleeping bags and blankets. All this stuff that was being thrown away I was hoarding. Then when someone would come down that was basically [chuckle] destitute, you could supply them. The water was really the... In retrospect it would've been good to have had even a bigger supply of water jugs down there, empty water jugs, because it was amazing that people would show up down there with not one container. No container to even put water in.

TM: Yeah. Huh.

BC: At one period of time they had a Coke machine up at Phantom Ranch. People would go up to the Ranch... In fact when you went up there during the day, you kept hearing this clunk, clunk, clunk as these Cokes are falling out. They would drink the Coke between Phantom Ranch, because the ranch is about a half-mile up Bright Angel Creek. The little ranger station was down on the river at that time. So they would drink their Coke on the way down to the ranger station. Then they would fill the Coke can up full of water and then they would take off up the Bright Angel Trail or up the Kaibab Trail. Then, of course, you would find their Coke can [chuckle] abandoned along the trail. Stuck behind some rocks or whatever people did with it because they didn't want to carry the Coke can out. So they would dispose of it along the trail. That was one of my constant jobs, especially if I had the horse. I would go jump on and off the horse and put stuff in the saddlebags and then carry it back as trash. I always had tons of trash to go with. [chuckle]

You wanted to talk a little bit about Ken Hulick. I don't know if I know a lot more about him other than he was a permanent ranger down at Phantom Ranch and of course I was a seasonal park technician. Maybe I'll talk just briefly about what a park technician was.

TM: Yes, please.

BC: We had a guy on the staff at Grand Canyon and his name was Dave Ochner. O-C-H-N-E-R, I believe, is the way it's spelled. He was one of the people who developed the Park Technician series as they call it. You had Park Ranger Series, Park Technician Series, Park Aides, so on and so forth. Titles to position descriptions.

TM: Okay.

BC: The Park Technician was supposed to be someone who was in the area who maybe didn't feel like they wanted to move on. They liked where they were, they knew a lot about the area. The theory was you would use this cadre of people and they would then train up the park ranger, who was going to be the park manager, who was going to manage park operations. They would...

[BEEP]

BC: ...tell him or her all of the ins and outs of the area. Where this is, where that is, how we've done things in the...

[BEEP]

BC: ...past. Who some of the important players are in the community. Those types of things. So it'd be kind of a little base of knowledge, and would do all the grunt work. They even had a rule where you couldn't transfer. If you were a Park Technician, you couldn't transfer between regions and that was kind of to my detriment for a long time because I applied for some jobs and they said well you can't do that. It's in the Western Region or it's in the Rocky Mountain Region.

TM: Wow. Okay.

BC: So that was an issue, but they finally kind of did away with that. Eventually they did away with the Park Technician Series because it wasn't... What it ended up being, is like with myself, it was a backdoor to the park service. There's always a backdoor. I had a guy work for me at Black Canyon and he went to Yosemite as a jailer. That was the backdoor into the park service there. That type of thing. I eventually transferred to Dinosaur and I was a Park Technician up there also. That was a different region but they kind of overlooked that.

TM: The idea was to keep the institutional memory either at park, at that service unit, or within the region of that service area. I guess that would be...

BC: Apparently, yeah.

TM: That would kind of make sense, except...

BC: It was a nice theory, but didn't take in the desires of people and how people would use this Park Technician Series to be a stepping stone to get to their ultimate goal which was to be a park ranger.

TM: Got it.

BC: I remember I went down to NAU one time and took the Federal Service Entrance Exam. That was how you got to be a park ranger, you scored high on the Federal Service Entrance Exam. That was one of the factors they looked at when they hired people as park rangers. I did pretty well on it, I thought. [chuckle] I scored in the high 80s, I think, or something on it. Of course, they were looking at people in the high 90s, so...

TM: Oh wow.

BC: ...that was one reason I probably ended up as a Park Technician, I guess, for a while. But anyway, that was just a little bit of the history of being a Park Technician. The park had changed its management plan. So Hulick went from Inner Canyon to North Rim and then, like I mentioned previously, ended up in Everglades. I don't know where he went after that. He left Ron Lucas down there and Ron Lucas helped, he was a seasonal, and he kind of helped train me up that first summer that we were down there.

You wanted to talk a little bit about the river and...

TM: Yeah.

BC: ...what went on there. I did mention that I had a conversation with Warren Hill, who had become the river manager. I think this was in '71, I believe. I told Warren... Let's see, was it '71 or '70? It was 1970 because it was that first summer that I was down there. I told Warren we were up to our armpits in maggots out there at the beach having to re-sack trash and we just didn't want to do that anymore. It was disgusting. It was unhealthy. It was really dangerous to your health, you'd get cut and stuff like that. So we wanted to get rid of that giant pile of trash and make the river runners dispose of their trash the way they were supposed to in gunny sacks there on the beach. That was the way it was done then. I'd mentioned Warren was extremely reluctant and discouraging. He didn't want me to write any tickets or anything like that. I said, "Well, we're just not going to do this anymore." Part of the problem was that the people that were going down the river at that time were by and large commercial operations. There were some big names involved in that as far as their pull with Congress and that sort of thing. They could have a lot of influence on the park if they didn't agree with the way the park was managing the area. Certainly, this was a little... The trash was kind of controversial. I remember one of the boaters, this one boater that I told... The first boater that walked up the beach the morning that we decided to change our little policy, I wrote him a ticket. The second person that walked up the beach and started to dump their trash, I just went up to him and I warned him and I talked to him. He says, "Well," he says, "but our boss says these sacks cost 15 cents," he said. It was like there was a huge amount of investment in these gunny sacks and they didn't want to leave them on the beach. They wanted to take them with them on the river. So these people just had a lot of influence.

I had another incident years later where a commercial group wanted to camp on the beach at Phantom and we said no you can't. There was a no camping area. That whole area like from Pipe Creek up to Phantom, I believe, people had to have permission to camp there overnight. The guide came up to me and he asked if they could camp there. There was some issue, I don't know what it was and I said "Well, okay, no problem." I said, "But you can't have a fire, because people in the campground can't have fires." There was a huge brouhaha over that amongst the paying customers. One of them... I happened to pick up the phone to make a phone call and one of these passengers had gone up to Phantom Ranch and was on the phone with someone. They were talking about contacting Senator Bible in Nevada and having him jump on the park service and make me allow them to [chuckle] have a campfire on the beach.

TM: Wow.

BC: I was listening to all this. Well, I shouldn't have done it, but I knew that if I threw a copper wire over the 4 phone lines that it would disable the phone system. So right in the middle of his conversation I tossed a copper wire over the phone line and it [chuckle]...

TM: Was shorted out.

BC: It shorted out the phone system! I left it that way for a few minutes. Of course, I felt terribly guilty about this because I knew... What if somebody has a real emergency someplace on the phone line? So I pulled it back off. I actually did get a phone call. Apparently they got their message through and I got a phone call from the South Rim from one of the park managers up there. I don't remember who called me. We talked about it for a while and I said, "Why should we give these guys special privilege? The campers are going to know that someone's got a campfire and they're going to want to have campfires. So we need to be fair across the board on this." [laughter]

TM: Right, right.

BC: It was pretty crazy. One thing that happened one year. I'm trying to think...this was probably '72 or early '73. There was a terrible outbreak of, I think it was...they called it Shigella or something.

TM: That's right. That's right. Yeah, Shigella.

BC: Yeah. People were sick...getting really sick on the river trips. The U.S. Public Health Service sent a guy down. He went along on some raft trips and his job was to watch these boaters. We didn't know what this was and I was nearly afraid to even talk to boaters because I thought I was going to get some kind of illness. They would come to the house there, the ranger station, and use the phone and call their office and report in. If they needed any supplies that needed to be rushed down from the South Rim they could get that. Or any other issues, they could talk to their company about it and vice versa. Was always almost reluctant to let people come into the ranger station to use the phone because I didn't know what in the world was going on here. But apparently it was just poor sanitation on the part of the people that were cooking food, preparing food, that type of thing. They suggested or went to a system where they tried to sanitize cookware and eating utensils and all these different things, and washing their hands on a regular basis. The solution was fairly simple, I guess, but what was actually causing it, nobody knew at the time. I recall that. The park service boat... Glade Ross, the first summer I was there, and then Tom Doerr in previous summers, they would stop at Phantom, but they never stayed at Phantom. They would just make a stop, call in, talk to their supervisors or their wives or husbands, those types of things and then head on downriver and campout someplace further down the river.

TM: Hey Bob?

BC: I never...

TM: Hey Bob?

BC: Yes.

TM: Gene Sopko was on some of those early trips, '68-'69, he had mentioned that they were on this 10/4 schedule. They would kind of gear up and get ready and then they would launch the trip and get to Phantom and hike out. Leave the boat tied up for a number of days and then come back in with frozen food and actually use the helicopter some for re-supplying their food. Then they would take off on another 10-day tour. Do you remember that happening at all or had they changed that by then?

BC: No, that never happened when I was there. No, they would...

TM: Thank you, just checking.

BC: Yeah, it was straight on through basically and the 10 days were spent on the river... Preparation, drive to Lees Ferry...

TM: Run the trip.

BC: ...shuttle down to wherever they were taking out, Diamond Creek or Pearce Ferry, and then the river trip and then the shuttle back to the South Rim. I think that was... And maybe a few days to work on equipment or other things that they might need to do.

TM: Right, which made more sense. So they had figured that out within a year or two. Okay great.

BC: Well, if you spent your 4... If you hiked out and spent your 4 days up there, you got one day you're missing by the hike out I assume. So maybe...

TM: Not only that, but if the boat has a slight leak or somebody else can go down and mess with the boat. There's a number of reasons why you might not want to abandon a boat at such a popular spot for a number of days.

BC: Sure, or the river wash it away. [laughter]

TM: Sure! Yeah, yeah.

BC: Wash it downstream. That does happen. That was basically the way they were doing it. Then the park service trips were used as...what should we say...I don't want to use "propaganda" – that's not the right word – information for people who might be making decisions about river management. So they would bring anywhere from congressmen to big wigs with Interior and Park Service, regional directors, and all these different types of people. My boss, Ed Carlson, he was always promising I was going to get a river trip in. I never did because I always got bumped by somebody.

TM: Oh, yeah.

BC: There was this one guy I remember that came down. He hiked in to Phantom Ranch from the South Rim, his name was Bill Monroe. The reason I remember his name is that there were about three of us in the ranger station and there was a knock on the door. I think it was Tom Doerr and myself and there was one other guy. There was a knock on the door, opened the door and this guy... Invited this man in and he says... puts his hand out and says, "Bill Monroe, Department of the Interior," and he shakes my hand. Then he shakes Tom Doerr's hand, "Bill Monroe, Department of the Interior." I mean this guy was like super stuffy. [chuckle] About that time the phone rings. I answer the phone and there's a woman on the phone. She says, "This is Mr. Monroe's secretary. Is Mr. Monroe there?" I said, "Yes, he's right here." So he gets on the phone and he talks to Washington, DC about a bunch of stuff and then hangs up and he and the others I think they went outside. They're kind of hanging around outside and I get another call from Mr. Monroe's secretary. So he comes back in and he talks to her again. He goes back out. Eventually they go down to the boat beach, they get on the boat, and I watch him go down the little rapid there at the mouth of Bright Angel and on downstream. Pretty soon the phone rings again. It's Mr. Monroe's secretary and she says, "Is Mr. Monroe there?" and I said, "No, he's not." I said, "He's on the river." She says, "Well, what phone number could he be reached at tonight?" I said, "Well, he can't be

reached at any phone number for about 2 or 3 days.” There was a long silence on the phone and she said, “Oh, okay.” [chuckle] I said, “He’s at the bottom of the Grand Canyon.” I said, “This is wilderness down here and this is the only phone for about 200 miles.” [laughter] So there was kind of, at least on the secretarial end of it, there was kind of a lack of knowledge as to where this guy had ended up. I asked Tom Doerr later on, I said, “How was the trip with Mr. Monroe?” He said, “After a day or so, he kind of loosened up and ended up being a really nice guy.” [chuckle]

TM: Cool.

BC: But we had a lot of... When you were dealing with river runners, you usually didn’t know their name. They had a handle, they would go by something other than their real name. Now that wasn’t universally, but it was with a lot of them. Glade Ross, of course, was the National Park Service boater and his handle was “Hardtack.” Apparently the way he got this name of “Hardtack” was he and Ted Hatch were up at the little bar restaurant there at Marble Canyon, Cliff Dweller’s Lodge I guess is probably where they were. They went into the restaurant there and Glade, or I guess Ted Hatch, ordered a beer for everybody. The waitress or waiter did not want to serve Glade because he was underage. He was like 15 or something, I guess, at the time. So Ted Hatch says to the waiter or the waitress says, “Oh, give ol’ Hardtack a beer.” So that’s how he ended up getting his handle. The Hatch brothers were really... That’s who Glade worked for a lot because he was from the Vernal, Utah area. That’s where Hatch had their offices.

When I moved to Dinosaur, I got to know Ted and Don Hatch quite well, particularly Don. They had an office down in the basement of this house in Vernal and it was pretty...fairly large. The whole bottom of the house, the basement, that was their office. I went over one time. I used to do historical interviews myself, I went over and I did a historical interview with Don Hatch. When I walked down to the office... I walked in the door, walked down the stairs to the basement office, there was this man in there. He was talking to Don and Ted. This guy was like enormous. I mean, he was just huge, must have been about 6’9” and weighed about 400 lbs. He was huge. Don’s having quite this animated conversation with him. Don says to me, says, “Bob, I’ll be up in a while. I’ve got some business here.” I said, “Okay.” So I went up and I waited in the dining room upstairs. After a while Don Hatch comes up and we started our interview. I said, “Who was that guy down there, Don?” He said, “Well, he was a US Marshall and he was serving some papers on us.” There had been some kind of accident or something involving a Hatch boat and someone was suing them and all this kind of stuff. They were having to deal with that.

But Ted Hatch was really, really funny. When I moved to Dinosaur... I’m kind of getting away from the Grand Canyon here but I’m still talking about rivers. One of my first assignments when I got to Dinosaur was to take a pick-up truck and a boat trailer and go down to Echo Park, which is in the middle of the monument there, and pick up Glade Ross’s dory. He and Don and Ted were running down the Yampa River with their dories and they were following a Hatch River Expedition boat down through the canyon there. They showed up at Echo Park. Apparently there was an Adventure Bound boat. I still remember Glade telling me that they pulled in at Warm Spring Rapid, which is a really huge rapid at Dinosaur, and at the bottom of the rapid is this giant hole. I used to call it a Maytag, the Maytag. Glade didn’t like that terminology. He says, “Oh, don’t call it that.” [chuckle] He was always a little squeamish on the river. He didn’t want to tip over. He was a very cautious boater. So he and Ted and Glade are walking down the portage. They’re going to go down and look at the big hole and see how to run it under the water conditions in the spring there. It was in late May, so a lot of water coming down the Yampa River. Here comes the Adventure Bound boat. He let off his passengers there at the portage, I guess. I think he did

that. They asked him, they said, "Aren't you going to go down and look at the rapid?" and he said, "Oh no, it's a piece of cake." So as he runs down through...

[BEEP]

...the rapid, he goes right in the big hole and of course the boat flips. Ted Hatch turns to Glade and to Don...

[BEEP]

...and says, "Yeah, piece of upside down cake."

TM: [Laughter]

BC: When the Adventure Bound boat came through Echo Park a while later, we were standing there and they had kind of pulled up the front of the boat, the rubber of the boat, and they had a guy up there [chuckle] with a pump...

TM: Oh my gosh.

BC: ...trying to keep some air in the deflated tube. It was unbelievable. There were a lot of...

TM: Let's, let's...

BC: Go ahead.

TM: I'm just thinking. Let's go back to Grand Canyon for a bit, because I have a ton of questions for you about Dinosaur, but maybe we should take it park by park by park here.

BC: Oh, I'm sorry. Yeah.

TM: No, no worries. I'm just trying to think about how to coordinate this. We'll definitely get back to Dinosaur and Ted and Don and who the superintendent was. But was thinking about Glade and you mentioned he was called "Hardtack," and that the river runners did have nicknames. There was a river runner named Hawk. There was a... Oh, there was another river runner, what was his name? Massey(?). Yeah, they had nicknames. Not all of them. Some did. Did Glade talk to you about his first Grand Canyon River trip? I believe it would've been in 1959 with Bus Hatch?

BC: No, The only person... I talked to Don Hatch about Bus Hatch some and he told me a few stories about him that I really can't remember now. Yeah, I knew Glade had run for years, with the... I don't know how old he was when he started but, like I said, he was fairly young. That's interesting that he was doing that.

TM: Yeah, it is very interesting that he was in there and of course Buzz – Bus – was in Grand Canyon in the '50s

BC: That's right.

TM: That's an interesting journey in how that kind of all worked out.

BC: Very wild, wilderness place at that time.

TM: Yeah. So the big wigs were coming and getting on the park trips as VIP positions there on the park patrols. Were they bringing trash? Was Glade bringing trash out to you, as well?

BC: No. Glade...they carried it through as I recall because they didn't want to add to the problem that we obviously had there as I recall.

TM: Okay, that makes sense.

BC: Yeah.

TM: Because this was... Still in 1971, the river runners were still burning fires on the beaches and the beaches were really getting despoiled. Nobody was carrying out solid waste at the time. There was toilet paper. Here's a roll of toilet paper, go upstream, go downstream, men and women. So that was happening at the time, but the use numbers had gone sky high. Just like the problems at Phantom Ranch, with the backpackers hiking in.

BC: That's right.

TM: So it is kind of an interesting thing, interesting time for that. Right about that time, the park was starting to put in pit privies at some river camps. Did you get in on that at all? Were you aware of that happening?

BC: No. I don't recall any of that.

TM: Okay.

BC: Since I wasn't on the river, you really don't know about what's going on a lot of times.

TM: Right, right. So what other interactions did you have then at Phantom with the river crews, with river runners?

BC: Well, most of the guys were really pretty good to you, the river runners. They would come to us with emergencies that that happened. We had a lot of helicopter flights out. Boat would come in to Phantom Ranch, someone would come racing up to the ranger station and tell you that someone was injured. One I remember was a little boy that had been struck by a rattlesnake. There were actually two. I had two rattlesnake bites on the river when I was there. This one I remember, though, more than the other, because the kid was maybe 12 years old or less. He'd sat down on a rock apparently at the river camp and there was a... The rock was undercut. There was a snake underneath the rock. It reached out and bit him on his foot or ankle area. The thing I remember about it was here's a little kid and his foot is just swollen up as big as a football and its all black and blue and purple and the skin is splitting. There were two doctors on the trip and the doctors had had quite a disagreement apparently on how to treat this kid. One wanted to do it one way, one wanted to do it another. I think they finally agreed to just keep his foot cold. Eventually we got a helicopter down there and they flew him out to either Phoenix or

Tucson eventually, to a center that dealt with snakebites and that sort of thing. They were able to save the kid's foot, I'd heard year's later or months later.

TM: Good. Great.

BC: It was a good thing. The guy that was up at Roaring Springs, I can't remember his name, he was a... He worked for the Utah Parks company, I think, actually. Provided the water for the North Rim and worked the pumps there, but I can't remember his name. He had been bitten at the campground there at Roaring Springs by a rattlesnake and he had these two fang marks in his bicep. He was pretty proud of them [chuckle]. He said he just laid down and just rested, relaxed and somehow... He never got any medical treatment for it. Maybe he got a snake that wasn't too potent. [laughing]

TM: Well, there's always a warning strike or an actual envenomation strike and they're different so...

BC: Yeah. I guess, that's probably right. We had all different kinds of evacuations from the river. I remember one woman had a broken femur. She came in there and we put a... I had this device, I think they probably still use them, where you can reduce the fracture. We got that on her, we got her in a Stokes litter. She had been playing like tag football on the beach or something and fell down and hit a rock or something and went out.

I wasn't the best or the worst park ranger in the world, but a couple times I made some decisions that I probably would go back on. One of them... I remember this woman that was injured and we're going to fly her out to the South Rim. Made all the arrangements, the helicopter came down. In the interim we had the park engineer, guy named Waldo Wilcox, he was wanting to fly back out of the canyon. I said, "Well, this helicopter's coming down, we're going to airlift this woman out. She's going to go to the hospital and you can just get on the helicopter and go out with her. We'll split the cost or whatever with them." So the helicopter is all ready to go, the woman's on board, Waldo Wilcox is on board, the pilot. That's all they could take was 3 people total. Here comes the boatman up to me and they want to send a friend or sister or someone of this woman along with her, which makes sense...

TM: Yeah.

BC: ...to have someone with you in the hospital. Well, I said, "The helicopter's ready to go and they're all loaded up." So I went ahead and let them go that way. I always regretted that. I always thought that would've been an opportunity to get some points for the park service and get Waldo Wilcox off of the helicopter and put the other woman on there. But you make decisions and that's just the way it is.

TM: That's right.

BC: Nobody lost a life or anything over it so I guess...

TM: Fortunate to have a helicopter at all to be there.

BC: Well, yeah.

TM: What other, I'm assuming burns, broken fingers, what other things were coming off the river that would have required a helicopter out? I don't know if you remember.

BC: Well, once in a while we would have someone who was psychologically unfit for a wilderness trip. [chuckle] We did helicopter out a number of people that were jusy...who had just kind of gone crazy down there, I guess, in the heat. That can make a person nutso anyway when it's 110 and it's June. I had boatmen, I remember, come up to me and say, "You got to get this person off the river. You got to helicopter them out of here because this just isn't working out." We did that a number of times. Broken limbs were pretty...happened, I won't say commonly, but they did occur down there on the river. Probably more than anything else is people being injured that way. Dehydration, even though they're in the river, they still didn't drink enough so we did have dehydration issues. Trying to think of others that... Probably any medical condition. That would be another one, someone is not taking/brought their pills and stuff like that.

TM: Yeah.

BC: Diabetics... Actually quite a few diabetics went out. I don't remember if they were off the river or people that had hiked in. Just a lot of things went on. The boatmen, I remember we had... One time Cross Tours came in there and they needed an outboard engine. Something had gone wrong with one of the outboard engines, so they asked if they could spend the night. One of the boatmen hiked out and then hiked back down and carried [chuckle] an outboard engine back down from the South Rim. Someone brought one to him, carried it on his back, put it on a backpack, and came down to the canyon with an outboard engine on his back.

TM: Wow.

BC: [laughter] Probably got minimum wage for that.

TM & BC: [Laughter]

TM: I hope they got a little bonus at the end of the trip. Oh my gosh.

BC: Yeah! Well they were always... Of course boatmen... One reason boatmen are so nice, is they're working for that tip at the end of the trip. [chuckle] I remember boat... I think it was like \$500 to go through the canyon at that time. Of course, that was in 1970 dollars. I have no idea what it is now, but I'm sure it's in the many thousands.

TM: It's \$500 a day or a night.

BC: Is that right?

TM: Yeah.

BC: That's crazy. Then as far as private boaters, we did mention that there weren't very many and there weren't. It was an oddity to have a private group show up.

TM: Do you remember any of those at all?

BC: Not really. Boaters were boaters kind of. But I do remember most of them were commercials or commercial trips.

TM: Sure.

BC: One interesting thing that would happen is that when a boat would arrive, people would come down and when the river was super muddy, like in the monsoon season, people would show up and they were just coated in mud. You could tell one of the things they really liked was when they were able to get down in Bright Angel Creek and clean all of this mud off them for a few minutes.

TM: [Chuckle] Yeah, yeah, and then get back on the boat and go into Horn Creek and get all covered in muck again. Yeah.

BC: Yeah.

TM: Fun.

BC: As soon as you go through Horn Creek rapid you're all muddy again. When I moved down to Phantom, this was in '69, I mentioned Ron Lucas was there. We worked together for a few days. Then he took off and then I was there by myself. My first day at Phantom by myself I got a phone call and it was from Dick McLaren. I thought, oh, this is great, the chief ranger's calling me here to see how I'm doing down at Phantom Ranch. Well, that really wasn't what he was doing. [chuckle] He called me and he said, "Bob, we found the body of a person who had drowned in the river a few weeks prior." They found him down floating in the river and a couple of boatmen pulled him up on a beach near Turquoise rapid. He says, "I'd like you to see if you can talk one of the river runners into taking you down the river with a body bag." He said, "You have a body bag?" I said, "Yeah, I have one." "And pick up this corpse and then take it to a place where we can fly it out." I said, "Okay." So I went down to the boat beach and I found a Hatch River Expedition had come in there. There were two boats in the group. I talked to the boatman and he very, very, very reluctantly said, "Okay, I'll help you out with this." I had an old orange tube tent. I took that with me and I took the body bag. Body bags are real heavy rubberized things with a big zipper on them and they're pretty watertight. So away on the boat we go. That was really the only river trip I took and of course I had to kind of compartmentalize my thoughts and enjoy the canyon knowing that I was going to have to deal with this issue a little later on down the way. I remember Horn Creek. One thing that impressed me was the stillness of the water above a rapid. That's something that... You think it's all racing water, but it's very placid almost when you come into that particular rapid. Then this huge tongue of water, I remember, we down and into the tail race there. Then we got to go through Granite rapid. Crystal was unbelievable. We all walked around Crystal and the boatman took the boats through it. But eventually ended down near Turquoise rapid and we're looking. I think the boatman spotted the body on the right bank. We might of gone right by it, that would've been really bad [chuckle]. But we got to the beach and then went up. He and I went up and inspected the corpse up there. Of course, it was horrible looking and smelling.

TM: Yeah.

BC: I took this tube tent and I cut it in half and wrapped the body in that and then put it in the body bag. Of course, we got people from the raft trip coming up and trying to take pictures and all kinds of stuff. That was kind of obnoxious. Then we decide, well, how are we going to transport the corpse? I wanted to put it in the boat and the boatman would have none of that. He said, "No." He said, "The body will float so let's just put it behind the raft and we'll tow it." So that's what we did. We put all of the passengers in the other boat and then just he and I were in the boat with the body. We went down to Shinumo Creek. There was a big beach there. Pulled off and he helped me take the...pull the...take the

corpse up on the beach there. I sat next to a tree there and started calling on my park radio. Of course, we're a long ways from the South Rim now.

TM: Right.

BC: Trying to... I would call and then I thought I could hear some static on the other end but I wasn't sure if they were going to, it was late in the day, whether they were going to be able to tell what I was saying. What Dick McLaren did is he told the helicopter pilot to just get down at river level and just fly until he saw a boat party. Then if we're waving and all this sort of thing, then he could land. That's what the pilot did and it was right at dusk. Probably didn't have very many more minutes of daylight left. I was kind of happy he showed up so I didn't have to spend the night lying next to this corpse. The guy that had drowned was... What he had done is he went down to the Colorado River there near Silver Bridge.

TM: Yep.

BC: He decided he could swim across the river. There were some kids from Grand Canyon High School that were down there on their spring break. They said that the guy was in the river and they kind of waved at him they thought and then that's the last they saw of him. I don't know anything more about the victim: who he was, where he was from, that type of thing. But the swimming of the Colorado River seems to be one of those challenges that certain people decide they want to do. There were a number of issues [chuckle] obviously with that. One was the temperature of the water.

TM: Right.

BC: Particularly in those days. I think they've probably maybe raised the place where the intake is now, but at that time it was deep down in Lake Powell and it would be like 40 degrees. I mean, it was just...it would just numb your feet if you stepped in the water say at the boat beach or something to cool your feet. It was really, really cold. And then of course it's swift. Then if there's any mud and debris in the river, then that saturates your clothing and makes it even harder to swim. We had a number of people that drowned in the river trying to swim or other things. I remember my first summer when I was dispatching on the South Rim, we had this woman that was down at Pipe Creek beach and they had camped overnight. She got up to probably go to the bathroom or something and she fell in the river there at Pipe Creek and was washed down through the rapid there. They got word fairly quickly that this had happened in the morning, early in the morning, because she was missing. Somebody in her party went up and used the emergency phone at the little river house there.

TM: Okay. Yeah, the rock house. Yeah.

BC: Yeah. So they sent a helicopter down and she had somehow survived. They found her way downriver on a beach or in some rocks or something, were able to get her in a helicopter.

TM: Wow.

BC: I used to always say when we saw her though, she looked like 40 miles of rough road. I mean, she was...

TM: Wow. She's lucky to be alive.

BC: ...banged up terribly bad, but she was lucky to be alive.

TM: Yeah.

BC: I had another one at Pipe Creek one time. I got this call at Phantom that there was a guy who had tried to swim the river and he was stranded on the north shore.

TM: So he'd made it. He'd made it, but then he couldn't get out from there.

BC: You're right. No way to get out easily. So I went down to Pipe Creek and looked across the river and here was this guy kind of in a fetal position, sitting up. He didn't have any clothes on. So here's... I looked over on the beach on my side of the river, Pipe Creek beach there, and here was a little pile of clothes and a bottle of Twister, which was a real cheap wine, and some other personal belongings. I interviewed this one fellow there and he said this guy went out and he got on the... There's a big rock at the upper end of the Pipe Creek beach, he climbed up on that rock and he did this big swan dive into the river. Then of course, got sucked right down through the rapid. Fortunately for this guy, the river volume was really low. He did go down through the rapid a ways, but the volume wasn't so great it took him on further down the river where he would get hypothermia and all that stuff and drowned. He had gotten out on the other side, then he walked up...probably walked up to where he was located, which was right across from the beach. So I called and a helicopter came down. I talked to the... Pilot landed, we talked for a little bit. We put all this guy's personal gear on and then the pilot just hopped across the river and picked this guy up and gave him his clothes so he could put something back on [chuckle] and he flew him out to the South Rim. It was some kid that worked up at the Bright Angel Lodge, was a busboy or something, and had hiked down into the canyon and did something really stupid. I guess he spent the rest of the summer paying off his helicopter flight out of the canyon.

TM: Yeah, gosh. Again lucky to be alive.

BC: He was lucky to be alive, but there were others that weren't as lucky. I had one guy... I went down to the boat beach one afternoon and I saw this guy down. It was like he was talking to the rocks. He was eating sand and doing all kinds of weird behaviors. I went up to him and I started talking with him. I said... He says to me, he says, "Did you see all the cop cars down here last night?" I said, "Oh yeah, I saw all the cop cars," and we kept talking. Well this kid had either taken LSD or was using sacred datura or something like that. He was pretty much out of his mind. He was with a group there. Of course they were getting ready to illegally camp on the beach down there, so I said, "You've got to go up into the campground." I told his friends, I said, "Listen, you guys need to cut out whatever you're using down here and you need to really watch this guy here." I said, "Particularly keep him away from the river." So we got him up into the Bright Angel campground and everything seemed to be copasetic. Well, the next morning this guy was missing. So then we started searching and I think they sent a helicopter down, I believe, and we flew all over the place, I mean, looking. Even looked up and down the trails for this guy. But mostly concentrated on the river and of course, didn't find him. He showed up about a month later down at Hermit Rapid. He had... There were some hikers hiked down the Hermit Trail, hiked down to the beach and found this body on the beach down there. So, again, I got to go down and pick up another body. Well, I had learned from the first incident to take some kind of... I used Lysol and sprayed the body with Lysol because the odor was something horrendous. I mean, it just was awful. I don't know if the coroner appreciated that [chuckle] but I had to do something.

TM: Yeah. Did you fly down with the helicopter that time or did you again ask another boat for...?

BC: We did. Yeah. Yeah, this was with a helicopter. We flew the helicopter in and then the pilot in this case got to come down and help me. We loaded the body of this unfortunate guy in there and then put it in a Stokes litter and flew back again, back up to the South Rim. It's unfortunate. I think most of the drownings on the river are not commercial boaters by any means. They have a pretty good safety record. Its people going down and thinking they're tougher than the river and trying to swim. At least that was my experience there.

TM: Yeah, that's been my experience looking at the historical records. Certainly up to the early 70's was a number of river fatalities were people trying to swim the river.

BC: Right.

TM: They weren't river people. Because they died/drowned in the river they were equated with the river runners.

BC: Yeah. Now there's kind of a group of people that it appears that are using the river as transportation where they... What do they call it? Catpacking or...?

TM: Packrafting. Yeah.

BC: Packrafting. Where they put in and hope they can [chuckle] make the beach on the other side, so...

TM: It's amazing, they actually... They'll walk around the big rapids, they'll run the littler rapids, but they can use the... It's flotation-assisted backpacking to actually increase the journey expedition that they go out and wander. It's pretty amazing.

BC: It sounds pretty amazing to me.

TM: A little life jacket and little paddles. Yeah.

BC: [chuckle]

TM: It's amazing.

BC: Because I know how cold the river is and how... That's the thing that to me is so dangerous about that. I guess if you have some kind of insulated clothing or a little wetsuit or something...

TM: That's right.

BC: ...like that. That would probably...you could probably do it. But if you tried to do it without any insulated protection, you'd be really foolish.

TM: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

BC: We had another... We did have one incident with a boater...for a boater around there at the canyon. Was a guy in a kayak. They had a regular boat that was kind of their support craft and then they had these kayaks. There were a couple guys with kayaks. This one fellow tipped over and I believe it was

Grapevine rapid where they were kind of playing, the two kayaks. They got way ahead of their raft and tipped over and he couldn't get back in the kayak. He had a wetsuit it seems like that was a little bit too large for him as I recall. I was not down there. Stan Stockton, he might be an interesting guy to talk to. Stan Stockton is his name and he lives...I think he lives in Hotchkiss or Crawford. He was a Fred Harvey cowboy that became a park service employee. He was involved a lot in the Burro Reduction Program...

TM: Yeah.

BC: ...that they had, round up. He came down to Phantom when I was there, but I don't know exactly where he lives. I haven't kept in contact with him but a friend of a friend kind of told me that he lives in this area.

TM: Okay.

BC: Might be somebody to talk to. It was like his first or second day down there. I told him as I left to go out on my 4 days off, "If anything happens," I said, "get on the radio, call for help and if you need..." or, "Get on the phone and call for help if you need some help or you have any questions about the way things are handled or any emergencies." So, about the second day down there, he gets this boater pounding on the ranger station door and wants to let him know there's somebody in the river. So he goes down to the Silver Bridge. He ran down to the corral and he got a lariat out of there. I know we had life jackets there at the ranger station, but he was living in the quarters next door so he may not have known that. But anyway, he went down to the river on the far side, the south side of the Silver Bridge, and just upstream there's an eddy, a great big eddy. This guy was in this eddy going around and around in the eddy. He took this rope and the guy made his spin back toward the bank. He threw the lariat out, I was told, and he struck the guy with the lariat. The guy kind of pawed, started pawing at it, but was too far gone to really hang on to the rope. He just kind of clawed his way along the cliff there back out into the current and down the river he went on the river left. By this time, they got a helicopter down there and were searching downriver for the guy. Of course they found his corpse, but he was dead. A really sad case.

TM: Yeah. Gosh.

BC: So there was a lot of stuff came off the river, particularly emergencies. Everything was pretty routine until somebody was injured, [chuckle] then you had to get all the troops involved to get them out of there. One guy you might want to talk about a minute is Joe Alston. Joe was the superintendent at Grand Canyon...

TM: That's right.

BC: ...in his... I think it was his last assignment.

TM: Right.

BC: Joe and I worked together at Phantom Ranch in 1972. Joe had been a Fire Control Aide on the North Rim. Then in the fall they decided they would get a little extra help down in the canyon and so they kept him on, extended his season, and he came down as a worker at Phantom. I wrote this letter to him when he retired in '07. I don't know if you want me to read it or not.

TM: Sure!

BC: It's a little bit humorous. This sort of tells what our relationship was over the years. [chuckle] It says, "Dear Joe. I hope you enjoy retirement. As you may know, I retired in 2002 and except for a misty moment at my retirement party, I've not regretted one moment.

I work part-time at the Montrose Animal Shelter. My retirement officially lasted 14 hours before I became King of the Canines. I hope you and Judy will take a little more time off. I had to get back on the treadmill to put my two girls through college and to pay off the lingering debt from my honeymoon.

I remember a lot of things about our early years. I can still see you heading out for the South Rim atop one of the horses in that big blue parka with a cigarette clenched between your teeth. You looked like a big blue volcano galloping up the trail. Who could forget my project lists at Phantom, in particular, a suggestion that you muck out the corral on my days off.

You disappeared from the Grand Canyon only to reappear on my front lawn at Dinosaur begging for a job. I decided to help out a sad-looking Xerox executive desperate for a return to the wilds of the west. Anyway, I needed a boatman that was strong enough to lift the indestructible solid oak oars I had purchased from Keith Kouns(?). It was in the good ol' days that we had about 3,000 applications for jobs at Dino. I begged the administrative officer, Chuck Rutherford, for 2 days to let me cut a few corners to hire you. I had to promise him that I would not let my Bassett Hound, Muggins, fertilize his lawn anymore.

I left Dinosaur for the red rocks of Lake Powell. You stayed behind running the Green and Yampa and counting the peregrine falcons. You told me once that the Dinosaur job was the best you ever had. With all the contacts you made with folks from region and Washington, it accelerated your career.

I called up Steve Petersburg one day and asked how Joe was doing. He said you were off to Yellowstone. He told me, 'One day one of us is going to work for that boy.' I told him, 'Always be nice to your seasonals, they may pass you by on their way up the ladder.' That's exactly what happened. You called me one afternoon and told me you were coming to Curecanti as my superintendent. After hanging up, I called Steve and said, 'Guess what? You were right!' Steve said, 'Bob, it ain't over, till it's over.'

I enjoyed working with you at Cure, except when you called me in and asked me if I'd be interim chair of the Park Equal Opportunity Committee. Eight years and a couple of superintendents later, I was still cranking out annual EO reports and begging to not go on anymore recruitment trips.

I'm sorry I couldn't make it to the canyon for your party. Hope to cross paths in the future. If you need a dog or cat, give me a holler. Best wishes to you and Judy."

TM: That's wonderful.

BC: Yeah, we had quite an experience together. [chuckle] Of course, Joe was an extraordinarily intelligent guy and a hard driver. A very, very personable guy. He used his personality to schmooze [chuckle] people from region and Washington and they didn't forget him. He was able to advance. One thing I always remember about him is that he had an uncanny way of remembering things about people and being complimentary.

[BEEP]

For example he might say to somebody, "How's your wife and your two kids...?"

[BEEP]

...and name them by name and those types of things. He ran some good river trips at Dinosaur, I know. I went on a couple of them with him and other people. He was a good cook and all that kind of stuff. [chuckle] He was really a good employee. When I left Dinosaur, he was involved with the river operation in the summers and then he would do something else in the winter. I think he worked for the Division of Wildlife. That's why I talked about the peregrines, because they were doing peregrine falcon search at Dinosaur and he was heavily involved with that.

Another thing that happened there, and this was kind of unbelievable, is one day he goes out to a place called Haystack Rock. Haystack Rock is a big buttress of rock that... You come off what's called the Yampa Bench Road which is a real rough dirt road that goes the length of the canyon above the canyon on the Yampa Bench, on the Yampa River...

TM: That's right.

BC: ...from Echo Park over to Deer Lodge Park area. One of the offshoot little roads goes out to Haystack Rock. So Joe's driving along and he sees this kind of smoke coming from the canyon. So he drives out to Haystack Rock and there's this guy out there. This guy is throwing burning tires off of the viewpoint apparently. Joe calls for some assistance and a deputy from Moffat County comes out there. They realize that what this guy is doing is he's throwing these tires down, trying to start a fire to burn up a body that's down there.

TM: Wow.

BC: What had happened is, they were having these groups of people come out to that Haystack Rock area from who knows where. They were camping out during spring break and having these wild orgies or something out there. One of these women that was in this group, apparently someone murdered her, and they threw her. It was this guy. He threw her/they threw her body off of the viewpoint with the thought that it would get in the river. Well it didn't make it to the river so he had come back and tried to dispose of the evidence.

TM: Yeah, wow.

BC: Joe just happened along and they ended up being able to arrest this guy. I guess he went away to prison.

Another time [chuckle], when we were at Phantom Ranch, Joe... I've always liked birdwatching. I kind of turned Joe onto birdwatching and it became an interest of his, too, I believe. When he was at Curecanti, he goes out birdwatching out by what's called the Lake City Bridge, which is on the east end of Blue Mesa Lake. It's a large reservoir there in Colorado. He's watching for birds and what does Joe find? He finds a body out in the mud flats near the bridge. So [chuckle] he sort of has this uncanny ability of locating these things. Eventually that was thought to also be another homicide, but I don't know all the details of that. If they were ever able to prove who may have done that.

Another time we went out on the Christmas bird count. We decided to do that. It was a year when the [chuckle] Blue Mesa Lake wasn't completely frozen so we got... I brought this little aluminum 14-foot boat up to Elk Creek, which is on Blue Mesa Lake. Joe and I headed out on the lake and we went down to what's called the Lake Fork Arm. Went up the Lake Fork Arm and we're looking at birds and chatting and having lunch and but when we came back out – this is in December – on the main lake, oh man, you should've seen the waves and the spray.

TM: Oh wow.

BC: I got Joe in the bow of the boat [chuckle] and then I kind of hid behind him as we splashed and let him take the brunt of the spray as we headed back for Elk Creek. I've really lost contact with Joe though. I don't know what he's up to now. I know he's retired. I think he lives in southern Arizona or something like that.

TM: Yeah, he's here in Arizona. He's retired. That's right.

BC: Yeah. But really, really interesting character and a real success story.

TM: Yeah.

BC: Someone that started at the bottom of the canyon and ended up the head guy. [chuckle]

TM: That's right and Steve Martin came in just...well, he was a little later, probably about the time you were leaving I think he was showing up. Same thing, had the superintendentcy as well. It can happen.

BC: Yep. That's for sure.

TM: Let's see where are we at timewise here? I'm just looking at this going...

BC: We've been about an hour and a half now.

TM: We have. Maybe this is a good place to wrap up Part 6. What were you thinking?

BC: Yeah, that would be fine.

TM: Okay, well let's do that. Hold the line for a minute. This is the end of Part 6 interview with Bob Cornelius. Today is June 8, 2018. My name is Tom Martin. Bob, thank you very much. Please hold the line.