

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Steve Storck (SS)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Steve Storck recalls his 19 day trip to the Grand Canyon with his family, friends, and peers and discusses the outcome and legacy of his trip

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Method of Interview: Phone interview between Tom Martin and Steve Storck, Part 2

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Transcription Reviewers: Sue Priest

KEYS: Steve Storck, trip to Grand Canyon, white water rafting

TM: Okay are you there?

SS: I'm still here.

TM: Well that was easy. Okay so, this is a Grand Canyon Historical Society oral history program recording. Today is the 13th of August, 2017. This is a interview, the second in a two-part interview with Steve Storck (S-T-O-R-C-K) and Tom Martin and we're doing this by phone today. In our first interview, we talked about your growing up outside of Washington in a very rural environment and going through multiple universities and ending up with a PhD, certainly looking at recreational management and now working for West Virginia University Tech. Steve, you just completed a Grand Canyon river trip, rowing a boat through Grand Canyon. I wanted to backup a little bit as we start this. Can you tell me when Grand Canyon first got into your consciousness as a place?

SS: I think I shared earlier, when I was in elementary school a member of the Canoe Crews Association, for some reason was invited to my elementary school, I think I was in second grade, I was probably seven at the time, and showed a homemade movie of their trip through the Grand Canyon. A group trip, and I guess it was an early trip in the late 60s/early 70s. It was a humorous trip. It had some logistics beforehand, but I just remember the whitewater and the feeder streams, particularly Havasu and Little Colorado of them riding in flight paths down and meeting some folks at Phantom Ranch and just the grandeur of it. And for some reason in my mind, early on, I was like that's what I wanted to do. I talked with my father about going there some time and backpacking. That never transpired. Early in my marriage, in the early-mid 80s, I had the pleasure of backpacking there. Skipped one, in 1977 my family did a driving tour across the United States and we stopped at the South Rim. Again, it just fed my fascination and wonder of what was down there in that river that was calling, even then, and whether I would ever get on there. Then, hiking down in the 80's, again, seeing the river. Wishing I wasn't on my feet, I was in a boat, but still enjoying it and the fascinating place it was. Then in my early career with colleges and running outdoor programs, I started doing some oar rigging. The Grand Canyon is always that sort of the ultimate, for me anyway, of where you might go. I always dreamt of it, but probably never thought it would happen until my friend Kirk asked me one day. He goes, "Hey what about applying to the Grand Canyon?" I was like, well, it's the last thing on my bucket list that I created when I was fourteen. I'd be a fool not to want to try. I figured it would be a few years, but we were lucky enough to get a permit in two.

TM: How do you know Kirk?

SS: I needed a break from outdoor rec for a while and I needed to put some kids through college so I worked for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as an environmental educator. Kirk was there as a fellow. They had a program where science teachers could come to NOAA and help train other teachers in NOAA sciences. We just happened to land in the same office and hit it off by our common interests not only in environmental education but in paddling. We've had a friendship ever since.

TM: Had you kayaked with him on rivers before?

SS: Oddly enough, we talked for years about it and while we worked together, which was only for a couple of years, we never paddled together. Afterwards we did get together and we paddled once. Then once we went together on this trip, we knew we had similar interests and similar perspectives on safety and difficulty of river and river running. Once we got this permit, we've paddled together about five or six times on some different rivers just in getting ready. Again, brought our relationship even closer.

TM: Nice. Then, did you apply to the waiting list or did you apply to the lottery?

SS: You know, over the years I'd looked at the waiting list and always thought it was out of reach so I never applied, so we applied to the lottery. Kirk, the first time, probably in '13, he was going to be the trip leader and that I was the PATL. So we both had the five points and then we didn't get it that year. Then we got a sixth point and we applied two years later. I paid the fee, it kind of flip flopped and I was the trip leader and he was the assistant. That's when we got it.

TM: I'll point out for the transcriptionist that P-A-T-L stands for Potential Alternate Trip Leader.

SS: Yes. I was under the impression that our points were pooled together but later had read and in our discussions as well, found that it was whoever had the lowest number of points would be the number of points that were entered in the lottery. We had the same number of points as neither of us had ever been before. We both had six points.

TM: Did you win your first choice or your second, third, fourth, or fifth choice in the lottery for a date to launch?

SS: I should have looked that up. I don't know. What I did was I looked through materials they had sent and I looked for odd days because I had more flexibility than I thought most people might. So I looked for odd days that had low application. A Monday or some point in time that would carry you over a couple of weekends where people might not want to do on their vacations. I'm pretty sure it was my third date that I had put in there, but I'd to confirm that.

TM: Okay, and then what happened?

SS: And then we're like, "Oh boy, we don't know anything about the Grand Canyon. We better get some people on board that know this river." Kirk was originally from Texas and knew a bunch of people in Austin who he had paddled with and knew that they had paddled the Grand Canyon before. So he had contacted a couple of his friends. One couldn't go because he had just led a trip the last year. The other hadn't been in about 15 years and he says, "Absolutely, I want to go." We had decided already we wanted it to be a family style trip. Not a party trip and not just a bunch of adults. We wanted to have multi generations because we're all getting older and we wanted to pass that experience on to our kids. David Abel wanted to go with his sons who were just finishing college and he may not get to do this trip

again. He knew Dwayne White. I not sure if you and he were familiar with one another. He asked, "What do you think if we invited Dwayne and Tom to go with us?" I had no hesitation, to be honest, it was like, well, these are the folks that know this river probably better than anybody and who are we to invite them. I said, please do. We were fortunate enough to get yourself and Dwayne to join the trip. Although, I had planned a trip to Austin to purchase a raft for the trip but also to meet Dwayne. I think he wanted to kind of check me out to see what kind of person I was and what kind of trip it might be and who I was inviting. David was there and Sam, who had also gone with us, was at the meeting and Dwayne's wife Barb. It was about an hour long at a restaurant where David Abel worked. At the end somebody kind of whispered to me, "I think you passed the test".

TM: Well, the question I have for you is, did they pass the test? Which is a sideways way of asking besides the family, what do you think composes a good group of people to boat with for essentially almost three weeks in the heat, in the desert, in what could be considered very trying situations?

SS: I've worked in the adventure industry for a long time and oddly enough I'm not a big risk taker. Maybe that's why I've survived in this industry. For me a common philosophy on risk management was probably highest in my experience level, comfort, knowledge of the river, that kind of came first. I think if you have that, hopefully I'd still have a successful trip. Personality and interaction is next. Are people easygoing? What are their philosophies of life? Are they heavy partiers? Are they looking for that natural experience and appreciation the resource itself? That's what I found with that group. At least at the core of what everyone agreed to was it was about the river, about a safe trip through the river and about keeping us together as a group and keeping that as an ongoing piece to have success. I was very comfortable with that. Particularly I was inviting family members to go on the trip that didn't paddle and I was a little concerned about that for their safety but also on how they would interact with others. The group was very welcoming to that concept, to introduce new people to the river and to the Canyon. So it all seemed to be going okay.

TM: What did you think about the pre-planning? Had you guys thought it through a little bit before you joined the lottery? Okay, we're going to need food and boats and shuttles and all this stuff. Or was it let's just go for the permit and if we get the permit we'll sort it out downstream from there?

SS: Yeah, it really was. I've planned trips for thirty years so I kind of know what it takes to plan trips. I've planned five and six day extended river trips. I kind of knew that part of it. But for this one, just because I figured it would be four or five years until we got a permit I didn't think much about it. I didn't really think... I thought a little bit about the only time I had was a summer trip. I was certainly concerned about hot weather and monsoons and higher water, but it was the only time that we had to do it. So once the permit came in, those concerns jumped even higher on my list of okay, how are we going to pull this off now that we have this? I had just started a new job as well, so I was balancing quite a few things. I didn't know how much, particularly with folks like yourself and Dwayne and others that we had on the trip who had done this many times... I was the designated trip leader from the Park Service's standpoint but it was a bit of a dance with I didn't really have the experience to be a trip leader on this particular trip, but I was designated that. How would that dance work out with folks who had done this before and how to incorporate their ideas and planning with also my need of a little OCD to have the kind of detail that I like in a plan. I'm a collaborative person and I understood my limitations in doing this trip. It was really nice to be able to have folks that were open about sharing what they had without too much ownership of it, that it became group ownership which really worked out well and I was really happy that that happened.

TM: What else worked well on the front end planning and you know I'm going to then ask what didn't work on the front end planning?

SS: Kirk and I had actually met kind of on a monthly basis the first few months. Just kind of talking about the group, talking about who's involved and building the whole sixteen. We had some gaps there. Then we just decided to try this sort of online skype session. We had some issues with the voice part of it but it was really kind of a neat opportunity. That plus my trip down there. I think that trip down there to meet folks in person really created some quick bonds. Those two things together, I think really helped solidify that this was a group that could work together. We had questions, we had some humor, really different ideas but they blended and I started feeling a bit more comfortable about that. Having communications with folks individually so I could ask questions and get the wisdom. Nobody said any of my questions were stupid or why are you asking that, we already know how to do that. It was very open communications. I think that was really key to bringing a lot of things together and it just continued. I think we were just fortunate. You never know what the chemistry of a group will be. I think we were just fortunate that that continued to grow and be functional and supportive. Very unique.

TM: Right. Certainly chemistry, logistics, sorting out boats and people, lot's of moving parts to that. What didn't work as you tried to put that together?

SS: Had a couple bumps with one or two individual personalities. We had a couple people drop out which we had to fill those spaces and that worked surprisingly easily. I had heard some horror stories of other trips that had major conflict within people. We just didn't have that. We lucked into other members of the trip having friends. Mike Smith ended up being able to come on the trip, he was one of our original invitees. I did feel... We had some folks get injured over the course of two years and I really wanted to have a stronger kayaking group as support. That sort of trickled away towards the end. Although we did fine, it didn't have the safety support that I would have liked, per say, in terms of the experience base. Little tweaks with the shuttle and I appreciate your work on the shuttle. Some folks who we thought were included in the conversation on the shuttle sort of jumped in towards the end and said, "Hey wait a minute, I want a shuttle driver." I was like, oh, we'd already talked about that. So there were some asynchronous parts to the conversation where we thought we included people or tried to include people and then they sort of jumped back in late in the game. I'm not a pushover but I'm a pretty adaptive person and try to incorporate people so they can meet their own goals. I maybe gave up a few of mine. I think food planning was another one. Food to me is a make-or-break on a trip. I certainly appreciated the experience that went into that. I tried to hold some veto power over some of the food. Hopefully made a little influence because I wanted to make sure everybody that I knew could be full at the end of the day. Not looking forward to it. So those are some things. But I think as a coordinator, I don't really think of myself as a trip leader, but as a coordinator of a community, there's compromise that needs to occur. At some points I just had to say to myself, "Well, is that worth a battle?" and potentially dividing some people in the group, or is that something that you can live with. As long as you can have some influence in it, it will make people feel that they are contributing to the community and taking an ownership of part of it that you don't necessarily need. So that was a little challenge for myself in terms of how to facilitate a process, which is what I felt like I was doing, not sure if that's what I was doing. I did feel like I kind of had to massage the crowd a little bit to get what I want out of it but also allow them to get what they wanted out of it. I think we did okay there.

TM: You had mentioned when we talked in the first interview about two different styles of trip leading. One was the communal style and then the other was, if I remember right, an individual style. Is that right?

SS: Yeah, they're some terms for it. It primarily comes from my work in designing and building student activity outdoor programs. There's a leader-led model where there's a central person who coordinates and organizes and makes the primary decisions for an activity. Then there is... I forget the term for the other, sorry.

TM: The communal based?

SS: Yeah. Where decisions are more centralized. Not laissez faire. The leader, if there is a named leader, is more of a facilitator who just raises the questions of what decisions need to be made or things having more authority. I've never been very comfortable in that second format because... I'm not a control freak, I don't think, but I know my own approaches to risk and my comfort zone is fairly small. I've done a lot of academic work but also personal work in thinking about risk thresholds, which is the term that I use for what are individual and group thresholds to risk taking. In a leader-led format, the leader establishes those. You never take risks out of adventure activities, they wouldn't be adventure activities, but you don't want to because that's part of the draw and that's part of the growth that people get during an activity and they're inherit in the environments that you go. So you never do that, but there are ways to manage that. In the more community type of programs, people are more free to take their own level of risk and the only thing you can do as a facilitator is to try and make people aware that, hey, you still are part of this group, please don't take risks that put the group at risk. You don't want to be bored yourself and you're here on vacation and this is your trip, but please remember that the group safety, you're part of that formula. If you take excessive risks or lead the group into excessive risks, we all pay the penalties and potentially you lead us all into a negative situation. The other thing with yourself and Dwayne writing the guidebooks and myself having a professional career in this, you also potentially put our reputations at risk if you are injured or worse than that and things that relate to alcohol or drugs or just plain uninformed decision-making and heavy risk taking. So that weighed heavily on my mind as going into it. I tried to put some things in our user manual/our community manual and tried to set the tone with some letters upfront about that in emails. It still came to... A couple times during the trip there were some things that were riskier than I would have liked to have seen. There was a particular hike where we were doing some free bouldering, a pretty risky situation from my perspective. But it worked out. There was a little conflict there where somebody said, "Well you know, the whole objective of this is for people to challenge themselves." I don't remember talking about that.

TM: How did you deal with that?

SS: When I get stressed, and I was stressed in that situation, if I'm the leader I would change the situation and change the factors. I probably wouldn't have put myself or the group in that situation to start with. I really struggled because on paper I was trip leader but it was a common adventure, we were all there as adults making our own decisions. So I said my peace. I said that I didn't have to do those things. I didn't have to do anything other than that. At least tried to make my point that what was going on was riskier than I was comfortable with. I really had to fight the feeling to either walk away because I didn't really want to see it or to be there to help if something did occur. It was a real challenge for me. I expressed it individually, maybe a little bit in groups afterwards as we went on, and I don't know if people backed off. There was one incidence with yourself where we were hiking up Stone Creek where you'd asked me if I was comfortable with continuing. I said no, not for me. But you guys, that was your choice. You guys stopped and I actually felt bad because, you know again, you curtailed what you were doing based on my risk threshold. It seemed to work out but it was a dance. The term is common adventure where we're all coming into a common activity. It was a challenge for me and it reminded me of a lot of research that I had done and some things I wanted to write on about risk thresholds and

individuals and groups and different leadership styles. Those are the things that I teach so it was a good reminder and refreshed some things for me. Sometimes you get stale as an educator.

TM: It's interesting, hindsight looking back, I think, what were some of the risky things that I did. I went for a hike. I wanted to walk up to the end of the camp and having done that, I suddenly saw gee there's a little route here, I can hike right to that little cliff there. And then didn't go back and tell anyone where I was going or what I was doing. I was very aware, as I proceeded, that this was a stupid thing to do. Then there was another time at Lava Falls. We had run into another party, one of the people in that party had expressed interest in riding in my little boat through the rapid. I had done that before with other groups. I went ahead and did that. So I was aware of thinking about risk. What surprised me...you mentioned injuries...we scouted Lava and I talked with one of the individuals who was going to go through that rapid about where to go and how that run would work. That run didn't work out so well for that individual who ended up getting ejected out of their boat and then hit a rock underwater and was pretty severely bruised. So it was funny thinking about risk. In a way, we do risky things at times within the scope of our prior experience and yet sometimes the things that happen are almost beyond our control. When a person gets knocked out of a boat, okay, they sort of messed up their entrance and ended up going in sideways in some big stuff and get knocked out as you expect or the boat would flip and in that case that didn't happen.

SS: A couple of things. If you're experience based and you're hiking in the Canyon and your past experiences of solo hiking, your ability to manage risk in that situation...your hike is much greater than my daughter or my son doing the same experience. That's something that I've always thought of conscious competence in terms of been in those things and know the place. It doesn't mean that the risks are less, but your ability to manage the risks and understand the risks and plan the risks. But letting people know you're hiking is something that would have been nice. I had that with Kirk. Kirk did the same thing. He went on a hike and he just kind of disappeared. I continually counted numbers. I'm like, "Okay, who's not here. Why aren't they here? Where are they?" But Lava, we all as a group had to accept... I guess someone who wasn't rowing a boat could have walked. Somebody could have walked back up and run their boat, we didn't discuss that. I looked at Lava, there wasn't a 'sneak route'. Maybe Kirk could have run the kayak one.

TM: He did great.

SS: You had to accept the risk of whatever run you were going to do and those are the risks that are inherent in that rapid. I think if somebody was really uncomfortable... Mike looked uncomfortable/the fella who had the incident. I tried to stay close to him cause he and I ran together. He followed my line which... He's run the Grand Canyon six times, he's trip led on the Grand Canyon without the benefit of more experienced people. He should have had, I say should of... If you assess that externally, he would have had the skills to competently run that rapid. But he really looked uncomfortable and I never asked him beyond then and he didn't volunteer it. At that point I think we... Groups make riskier decisions than individuals and there's the fact that we're sort of all running that rapid. We're all accepting that risk, we're all running that left line except for one person. I think there may have been a little peer pressure there to, okay, it's your turn. I felt uncomfortable with my future daughter-in-law in the back of the boat, but we had come through everything else. We had an experience base of twelve previous days and it looked reasonable. I think Mike in our group realized the risks of Lava by his injury. But those were risks that he had accepted and we as a group had accepted. And we had the tools to address the issues. It could have been much worse but we knew what to do afterwards to address the issues of that realized risk/the injury. I still go back and forth a little bit on... I think the decisions were good after that,

it's just I still wonder about evacuating him. But, that was a group decision and he was definitely involved in that decision. I'm glad that it worked out.

TM: It's interesting. Even a leader-led situation versus, again, the common adventurer, it seems like things can happen. People can fall out of boats. There's a control for risk which eventually is not doable. I guess you could say, alright we're all going to portage this rapid and then someone's going to sprain their ankle or break their leg trying to portage the boats slipping on a rock. Yeah, so there's a fascinating line of adventure and risk and what happens there. Of course you could probably make the same argument for driving a car. I'm playing with my phone and I run a stop sign and boom there we go. We don't call that adventure, we call that driving and we don't think its risk taking.

SS: Right, it's tough. They're calculated risks. Like I said, we had the equipment, we had an experience base, we had twelve days of experience with positive results. I think the inherent risk of Lava Falls, in all its reputation and in all its glory, that inherent risk, you don't want to take that out. You can't take it out. You could avoid it. That's one way to manage it, but we wanted to accept that inherent risk. It's unfortunate that at least one person in our group realized the negative aspect of that, but that was a conscious decision, it wasn't an unconscious... He didn't float into Lava Falls thinking, "Oh, this is an amusement ride, we're just going to come through the other side." He knew from years of experience paddling what the potential consequence was. Unfortunately, it ended up going on the negative side versus the positive side. But that was a conscious competence decision. That's what you do as adventurers. If my son had been in the driver's seat, that would have been the wrong thing to do. It would have been negligent, really. But I think the way we did it, there wouldn't have been any liability because Mike had the experience base to do that. He was in a craft that he wasn't familiar with but he could have spoken up.

Yeah, that's the game right? That's the industry. That's why I have a job. [laughter] I've talked to you about maybe taking students down the river at some point. I've seen it and I know it. I always feel very... The guy I guide with/teach with doesn't feel compelled to necessarily go on every trip before he takes a group there. I feel very strongly that's important to fully assess what the scope of risk is. I've always done that which limits. I can't go places because I haven't been there before. In terms of preparing students, it would be a very select group of students that could go there and there'd be quite a bit of preparation on comparable difficulty before they were there. We might shift a few guides to the boat in that situation to manage that risk, but that's not what everybody does.

TM: You know it's interesting, in my experience of doing river trips in Grand Canyon with people rowing boats who have never rowed a boat before and who've never been on multi-week adventures outside before, the simple maxum of 'hit it straight'... It's interesting, I kind of wonder at what point does familiarity breed complacency? I don't think Mike was that familiar that he was running complacently at all. These things happen. He's looking at the videos, of course, and these days everybody's taking film of everything, the YouTubes and all that stuff. I'm sorry the GoPro little movies. We can armchair quarterback and clearly see, oh, he is sideways, he is not keeping this boat straight. Okay, why is that? This is a new boat to him. It's a big, heavy boat and it got turned sideways. He might have thought that that was okay and he could just plow through that stuff sideways.

SS: If you watch my line, he followed my line, we were talking about lemmings with the other group. He followed my line and caught his bow in the same eddy I caught my bow in.

TM: Very interesting point.

SS: At that point, I was at the mercy of the river. I could not straighten the boat out and I don't think he could either. You just had to prepare yourself for the hit.

TM: Yeah, that's an incredibly good point.

SS: Yeah, I ended up staying in the boat and he ended up not. I always... This adage that 'Mother Nature takes care of the fools', [laughter] I guess I'm not a fool. Mother Nature still took care of me and didn't take care of Mike. People that have never rowed before... It says a lot about the equipment, too. Very forgiving, my boat. The only reason I wasn't in the water like Mike is that I had a very forgiving boat. I was just fortunate.

TM: What else happened on the trip that surprised you?

SS: Well, the joyous surprise of the river itself. I would just say around every corner I was blown away by the diversity of landscape, the diversity of ecosystems and just around every corner something unique and different. You know, hiking the Canyon through Phantom Ranch you get fairly isolated and you miss the grandeur of the Grand Canyon when you're in this little, narrow canyon. To be able to come in that and then out of that into these large, open canyon areas was just phenomenal to me. Those were surprises. I guess our discussions about wilderness and the Grand Canyon being a wilderness and knowing that motorized craft go down the river and my different view of what wilderness is, I guess it was a surprise that there was so much interference in a wilderness experience from airplanes, helicopters, motor rigs. Coming to a popular trail or trailhead in the Little Colorado and being there with fifty other people. That was kind of a... Took away from my experience I would say. That was a surprise. I knew that we talked about competition for campsites down there and we would see other people. On the flip side of that we didn't really see that many people. It was just these certain flexion points, these certain popular areas that all of a sudden it was like you're at Disney World or Kings Canyon. There were all these people sharing the same wild location, which was not. It detracted from the overall experience but there was so much of it that was a unique experience for us as a group of sixteen that I guess it balances out a little bit. Depends on what their managing for and what people's expectations are.

TM: Right, and that goes back to a subjective journey and I'm sure that some people on some trips say, "I come from New York City and I didn't see anybody my entire trip even when I was at Havasu or Deer Creek with a hundred and twenty other of my closest or certainly distant friends." So that perception of crowding can be taken differently by different people. I certainly know it.

SS: Extremely subjective.

TM: But as you pointed out, a lot of studies have been done on wilderness and what crowding in wilderness is. Looking at group sizes, no more than eleven as a big group in wilderness. Average group size six or seven as a more tolerable group size. Our group size was sixteen. We encountered other group sizes with a group size maximum of thirty two.

SS: I was thinking about this this morning, but normally when you look at a recreation opportunity spectrum and you look at zones of experience expectations. The zones are generally exclusive. Folks with a front country type experience, I think a lot of those high volume sites were front country experiences, are on the fringe/on the outside of the... The core would be a wilderness experience, a very individual experience where few people are and primitive trails and primitive campsites. Then, as you get closer to roads, people have less of a wilderness experience. More of a front country experience all the way to an urban experience. The river does not allow that kind of zoning because everyone... It's a

roadway through all of that. So everyone is on the same pathway. The interaction and potential for conflicts, different objectives, different goals within a resource experience, they're all right on top of each other and you cannot separate those out into an opportunity spectrum. I think it would be difficult to do that with the Grand Canyon. You can say from a hiking perspective, Phantom Ranch and go out from there in sort of zones. But from a river perspective... I had it on the Main Salmon. I wanted a non-motorized experience. The guy running his raft with a motor on it is going to go past me at some point and that's going to deter from my wilderness experience/my non-motorized experience and there's no way around it.

TM: Yes, and at Grand Canyon it's more complicated because the backpacker's destination, vast majority of people, is the river. When they hike in to an attraction site that has a hundred people there, what does that do for their wilderness experience? It's definitely complicated.

SS: The only way you can do it, and I think they've done this on the Salmon with the Middle Fork and Main, is if there was a takeout, and I guess Diamond Creek's the only one, this would never fly, is everything from Diamond to Lees is non-motorized. That's the zone. And everything from Lees down is motorized.

TM: From Diamond down?

SS: Excuse me, from Diamond down. And the two shall not meet. That would be a way to zone that but that won't happen. As we've talked about, the commercial interests are too heavy and the historical use is too heavy, but that would be the only way. Or to create some other type of a midpoint put-in. Even with that, you still have the fly-over issues. That was probably the most disturbing. I'm trying to think of the name, Cardenas? The Cardenas experience, in a beautiful open valley with planes flying over until sunset and then first thing in the morning. That was very disturbing because that was a place where I felt like I had achieved kind of a wilderness setting. I didn't see it on the river but overhead, nonstop. [makes plane noises]

TM: Let's back up a bit because you were talking about zoning from Lees to Diamond Creek for no motors and then from Diamond down to Lake Mead as a motorized area. I think one of the ways the Park has tried to head in this direction is certainly with seasonality. After September 15th and before April 1st, there are no motors allowed on the Colorado River in Grand Canyon. They tried to look at that as a way of saying, okay, well at least in the winter that it's going to be wilderness. And then for the helicopters, and I'm laughing at that because that means the rest of the year it's not supposed to be managed as wilderness and those motors are okay. It goes back to the commercialization of a resource and the power of the commercial/industrial tourism industry to manage the Park Service with lobbying pressure. The helicopters, let's go back and talk about that, because there are helicopter flights over what's called The Heart of the Park, that Cardenas area just below the Little Colorado River. But then in Western Grand Canyon below Diamond Creek, that has gone onto steroids. At that point there is hardly any time when you're free of the noise of a helicopter either coming in or going out. Hours at a time. Were you actually referring to the Cardenas area, The Heart of the Park area by the Little Colorado River? Is that where you first experienced a lot of aircraft noise?

SS: After Diamond Creek, I guess I sort of expected it. I knew there was going to be more motorized traffic with the Indian Reservation and I knew there were going to be helicopters down there. I expected it so my expectations were low. It did bother me, particularly the volume of it bothered me and it was a surprise, but I understood that I was in their region. That that was something that was going to occur at

some level. But up higher, after two or three days into the Canyon, I did not expect it up in that area. Particularly when we pull over to camp at the end of the day and I'm thinking I'm going to be hearing the river and the natural sounds and for four or five more hours I heard planes and helicopters. It was more disturbing there, to me, because it wasn't expected than it was below Diamond where I was sort of expecting a different experience down there. Even though it wasn't a pleasant one for me, it wasn't what I was looking for, I realized that I was in an area that was being managed for other types of recreation. I was more of a visitor, I guess, to their experience than them being an intruder on my experience up in the upper part of the Canyon.

TM: Interesting.

SS: I'm very glad that I saw and experienced both. Maybe not so much in the upper part, but in the lower because it certainly tells the whole story and the volume. I really think its being exploited. I don't know how you deal with it. I don't think it destroyed my experience in Grand Canyon but it gave me a fuller version. From my background and what I do for a living in terms of teaching recreation management both from a program side and a resource side, it really was instructive to me in terms of competing interests and management practices and a lot of the uniqueness about the Grand Canyon with public/private inholdings and the reservations. I was glad folks pushed to do the entire Canyon.

TM: How so? What will you take back to the classroom now based on what you saw above and below Diamond Creek?

SS: I believe strongly in the recreation opportunity spectrum. There's a water based one that Glenn Haas at Colorado State has put forth based on his work at some of the large reservoirs out west. I always have sort of this mantra 'adventure is in the eyes of the beholder'. The folks that are on those helicopters think they're on an adventure. And they are, for them. It's all based on your background, your point of reference, your experiences, your social group, what your comfort zone is. Those folks are on an adventure just as I was on an adventure, but they didn't match necessarily. It just deepens my ability to share stories and share experiences that sort of exemplify that to people. For me, students in a college setting, are pushing the limits. They're stepping out of their comfort zone, pushing limits and questioning things. That's how science grows, that's how society grows in terms of you don't want to be stagnant. If I can help them understand that each person comes to that conversation with their own background and their own expectations and their own likes and dislikes. Just like me being in the upper Canyon and having those quiet experiences on side canyons that I don't see anybody else other than the two or three people I might have chosen to come there with versus those people who are flying out from the city of Las Vegas, the hideous strip, that share a little bit of nature whichever way they can with their helicopter ride and their step out for lunch or their little step in the boat. They think, and they are, pushing their limits a little bit in terms of what's possible. They are engaging with the environment a little bit. Not the way I would like them to do it, but there is some engagement. What I would want to guarantee or want to see and maybe encourage the Park Service, is to make sure that there is an educational component that at least tries to tie to the protection of the public lands and public access to public lands even though it's certainly not a Leave no Trace ethic of any kind. Just to try to bridge a little bit of that gap and meet them where they are, if they are taking that motorized experience. I'm not sure if that was very cohesive, but I think having both those stories and seeing it...

There are only a couple places that I have had that kind of motorized... In West Virginia we have the Hatfield & McCoy Trail. It's the largest ATV network in the country. You see hordes of people coming down on holiday weekends with four wheelers and ATVs and UTVs on the back of their vehicle and

leaving at the end of the weekend with mud all over them. It's the same type of experience that I think you have from Diamond down is the Hatfield-McCoy system of West Virginia. That motorized/non-motorized conversation about perspectives and trying to understand a little bit more about that it is recreation and how can you make that a positive thing in some way. I don't know how. I come from a very non-motorized background and am pretty adamant about non-motorized recreation, but I have to say it is recreation, it is tourism, its mass tourism. Is there a way for the resource to benefit from both? I don't know.

TM: You mentioned an educational component that you had hoped to see from the agencies about protecting public lands. Did you get a sense that Grand Canyon National Park was even approaching do-it-yourself river runners above Diamond Creek with that message?

SS: I do. I took pretty seriously materials that they had out there and messages they had. The videos, I thought, were very good. I thought they really did make an effort to help people have that experience. I don't think I'm unique, but I come with a fair amount of background to that and I've taught it before, but I think even someone who had never been before, like my children and relatives and folks who had gone on the trip who weren't that familiar, I think if they took it somewhat seriously, it was there offered and they reinforced it. Even the ranger talk. I think that there were some things about the ranger talk that weren't very good, particularly the first interaction was somewhat negative. A person came in, kind of stormed in in this uniform and I felt if I said something wrong I'd be thrown in jail after I'd been tasered. But she softened up into more of that interpretive role. I've taught interpreters, have taken interpretive classes, I've worked with the Federal Interpretive program managers in DC. I know there's a struggle between law enforcement and interpretation, but I think if they would take that interpretive approach throughout, like they really have that interpretive approach in their video materials that are produced at their National Interpretation Center in Harper's Ferry that I've been to, I know people who have worked there. It was very high quality, but there was a gap between that and what we got at the put-in. I think there was an effort there. I think there are some internal things going on and the internal conflicts between law enforcement and interpretation. I think the Park Service did a good job trying to get us that information. I doubt they do anything... I've been to other concessionaire instances, Okefenokee, Cumberland Island, Everglades, where there's a staff-aboard program. Where a National Park Service interpreter steps aboard the craft and provides an interpretive message or there's a required interpretive training for the river guides or the tour guides on boats. I don't know if that exists for those concessions, I'm not sure how it could, but I would hope that they could do something like that. Is there a kiosk? Is there an interpretive display at each of the Hualapai helicopter landing zones before they get on their boat that could share some of the information about the fragile nature of the environment and some of the conflict about motorized and why they do motorized. I don't know if they've done that, I don't know if people would be receptive to that or not.

TM: I don't know either, having not taken the tour.

SS: Yeah, how can you say it's all bad if you've never done it? Granted in my gut, I can't do it. I go on commercial trips just to see what they say and to see how they interact with the environment. See how they badmouth or don't badmouth the local population. My job is to try to create the next generation that doesn't do those things, really does value resources and builds those connections to resources. That's just how I am and that's the programs I run. Hopefully I can be a part of the solution in the future.

TM: Now that the trip is over... I think you're launch date was on the sixteenth of July and the takeout date was August 3 of this year. You've been home now five days, no seven days, maybe a little more

than that, any sudden reflections where you caught yourself in the last week or ten days going, “Oh, hmm, I didn’t think about that.”

SS: It took me, I don’t know, I think it was just physical probably, for the first five days every time I got up in the middle of the night I thought I was getting up on the beach and walking down to the water. It was quite difficult to shake the lifestyle. In fact, I ran back to the field with my students this week and spent two nights in my tent and went white water rafting on the New [The New is a river in Miane] just to ease my transition back into life. I guess the thing for me, I’m not a very social person. I guess I’m most amazed that for nineteen days with sixteen people who were mostly strangers, I can’t help but think it’s unique. I know a lot of people do that but I can’t help but think it’s unique that the chemistry of that group and people’s willingness to accept others or at least be tight lipped. I’m a day trip person. I’ve always said I’m a day trip person because at the end of the day I can send people home and I don’t need to deal with their personalities so much. I was really concerned about how that would work out. I think for the most part, even in nineteen days you can avoid conflict if you really want to. I think people wanted to so that we had a positive experience. People who do thirty day trips or semester-long trips, I applaud them. I’m not sure how they do it. It makes me think more internally about how better to work with groups and to manage groups. That’s a skill set that I’m not very strong in. I just think it was pretty remarkable that we were able to get along so well. I also noticed during the trip, and from the pictures, too, people recognized others needing their personal space. For folks to be able to wander off on their boat, wander on their own hike, or just have a quiet moment to themselves is pretty important to other people, too, as well as me. And people respecting that. Again, I think it was, I don’t know, I think it’s unique. I’m having always to introduce people to the outdoors, mainly beginners, for twenty-five plus years. The last two years...was the San Juan trip last year and the Grand Canyon trip this year...to interact with people who are so comfortable throwing a sleeping bag on the ground and sleeping, being wet, being dirty and having a smile on their face and going, “Yeah, give me more.” I think it’s a very unique community or just I’ve somehow missed an opportunity in my life to connect to those folks because I haven’t had that before these last couple years. Sometimes with staff, but never with a community of strangers who just kind of convene at a river head and just naturally take to it. That’s probably the biggest positive that I’ve had, other than seeing two amazing rivers. Just knowing there’s community out there that loves being outdoors and loves the resource as much as I do is reaffirming that there’s hopefully hope for these places and these activities.

TM: I’m interested, too, in one other topic which is the concept of connectivity. Today with Facebook and with our smartphones and instant text messaging and voice recognition, I can talk to my message and I can make fairly simple communication. To bundle that all up and pull the plug on that for weeks, I think you might have been the person most connected to the outside with the spot device going out. We had a satellite phone but I don’t believe anybody used it. Do you have any thoughts on communication and walking away from that?

SS: I was very reluctant to bring that InReach device. I realized that second day I was very much ready to disconnect and I disconnect often as I can. But I also am a heavy internet user and I’ve been a web publisher. It was that second day where you just gave in and said I’m committing to... We had the young fellow Clay who was continually trying to see if he could get that text connection to the world. I almost wanted to hide the InReach because I didn’t want anybody... A couple people asked, has anybody sent me a note? My wife accidentally sent me a note. She sent a note that didn’t have any meaning. It was an accident. I didn’t really want to send people’s messages out. I wanted to kind of protect it.

TM: I asked you to send a message out to my wife for celebrating the first of the month. I kind of caught myself and went gee, that's curious why am I doing this? So what did it mean to have the tools available and what does it mean to be able to walk away from those tools?

SS: Yeah. It's why I stay in this field. It's what keeps me alive. I lived in the city of Richmond, I always say the river was the saving grace. I could turn off the electronics, I could engage directly with the environment. It's what's been the pleasure of my life since I was a young kid. To be able to walk out of the house into the wild and into nature. I wanted that, I need that to rejuvenate. That's one thing I wanted for my family. I'd taken my kids to Alaska to see wide open places, not be connected and to see the wild. I wanted them to be able to experience that in the Grand Canyon where they were disconnected from modern society and get back to a connection to the land and places. That's why I continue to do what I do. We do a week long, six day program with students and we tell them they can't bring their cell phones. Parents call us, "What do you mean they can't bring their cell phones?" The only thing that I feel badly about is that they don't have their camera to record some of their experiences. I'm a big believer in storytelling and to have stories that you can share and bring back. Reach into your mind and bring back those visceral experiences of rain and whitewater and new experiences. Richard Louv has written his book on nature deficit disorder. I just think, as a society we need to keep those connections to the land. It was a welcomed experience for me and I think a valued experience to my family and I hope to everybody there.

TM: Nice, is there anything else you're thinking of that you want to include in this discussion that we've had as we start thinking about wrapping this up? I'm sort of thinking in twenty/thirty years from now someone's going to listen to this interview. What would you like them to hear?

SS: Well, I hope they do. I don't know how this will get used but the first thing people ask me is, "How was it?" It was probably one of the most amazing experiences of my life and I've been to a lot of amazing places. I've heard other people who've done some incredible things say the same thing about the Grand Canyon and I know why now. I hope it's there for people to continue to experience it because it's such a unique thing. It's a unique blend of excitement, of human interaction, of human natural area interactions, the power of nature, the incredible power of nature, and feeling insignificant. I don't have much tolerance for large egos. Maybe my ego could be bigger because I survived Lava Falls. It's not that its, wow I was graced with the opportunity to paddle through some of the most power, environmental power and natural power, and to be allowed out the other end to reflect on it. We'd be a lesser species, a lesser human race, if that opportunity wasn't even there. Even if not everybody gets to experience it but that the magic is still possible. I guess that's what sadly it's most about. Where our society is today and moving to more urban settings and not valuing public lands and not valuing outdoor experiences. They don't even imagine that those things can exist, they just ignore other things. It's been such a rich part of my life. I hope that I can share with other people and encourage and help in some way that that experience would be available in the future.

TM: Nice. It made me think about some of the writings of the supporters of the Wilderness Act back in the 40s and 50s, talking about traveling through large landscapes with a sense of humility. I have nothing on Lava Falls, it let me through yet again, I was very fortunate, very thankful for that as a journey.

SS: I think we've rewarded large egos too much in society. I think that Teddy Roosevelt, he was a big personality and maybe he had a big ego, but I think he liked being in the natural world because it made him realize the place of humans in the bigger picture of things. Right now, we're talking about dropping

nuclear bombs. We could destroy this planet in a matter of seconds. It's because people have egos. I don't want to be too political here, but I think egos are too valued in society. Anyway, great experience. I hope people get to experience it for a long time to come.

TM: Nice. Steven Storck thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this Grand Canyon Historical Society oral history interview. Part of Grand Canyon National Park museum collection. Thank you again. I'm going to go ahead and stop this call now so that we can stop this recording on the other end but then I'm going to call you back.

SS: Thanks Tom.