

Interviewee: Robert “Bob” Cornelius (BC) Part 13

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Working as a Park Ranger at Glen Canyon National Recreation Area in the 1970s

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TM: Today is Wednesday, December 19, 2018. This is Part 13 of a Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Robert “Bob” Cornelius. My name is Tom Martin. This is an oral interview over the telephone. Bob, may we have your permission to conduct and record this interview over the phone?

BC: Certainly.

TM: Thank you very much. Good morning, how are you?

BC: I’m doing well thank you.

TM: Great. When we wrapped up Part 12, we kicked around what to talk about in Part 13. You’re still at Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and this is still, I believe, the 1970s. Is that right?

BC: Right. This was the period, let’s see, 1976 through ’78 pretty much I was there.

TM: Okay. And then we had talked about other accidents that were happening at the time, certainly boat or non-boat related, and a couple days at Lees Ferry and a little bit at Glen Canyon Dam security stuff. So we should probably pick up with the day-to-day, guess I want to say boat accidents or injuries that might happen. What do you recall about that?

BC: They happened all over the lake, obviously. There were lots of boat fires. There were a number of accidents where people ran boats into cliffs. I don’t remember if we talked about this, the first week I was at Glen Canyon, I went up on a boat with one of the seasonals that had been there for a while and our job was to drag the bottom of the lake, so to speak, up in Padre Bay. One of the things that people do there is they take their boats into these alcoves that are large sort of like arches. Places similar to where the Pueblo Anasazi built their homes, those same types of geographical features. But with the lake level going up and down affecting that, there is rock fall that sometimes comes off of those. That’s what had happened to this one boat. They had gone in there, they had a cabin cruiser. I think there were three people in it. They went in under this alcove and the roof of the alcove collapsed onto the boat. It sunk the boat. There was a woman who was able to swim up through all these cascading boulders somehow and got to the surface. Some other boaters came over and picked her up. She was really beaten to a pulp, but she was alive. The other person or persons, I can’t remember, on the boat were probably trapped and died. We tried with grappling equipment to see if we could get something. About the only thing we brought up was oil and that was probably... We would disturb maybe a rock or something and it would cause gas or oil from the boat to come up. We never did have any luck at finding

anybody. It was too deep for divers at that time, so we weren't able to do a recovery. But that was kind of a remarkable one.

Accidents varied in their complexity and also just the nature. I recall one time I went up to the San Juan arm of the lake, actually the junction, what would have been the junction of the Colorado River and the San Juan River at one time, in this bay. The lake was just like a mill pond. I went up and there were these guys in this boat right out in the middle of the lake. Kind of an odd place for somebody to stop, so I cruised on over to them. They had had some boat troubles and they had taken the manifold...they had an inboard/outboard engine on the boat and they had taken the manifold off. They had set it on the transom or gunnel, I guess the gunnel of the boat, and then when they were moving around they kicked it into the water. I remember the guy asking me, he said, "How deep's the water here?" I said, "Well, about 200 feet." [laughter] He said, "Oh." What you often did with something like that is you called the concession and they would come up from Wahweap with a tow boat and they'd tow them either to Rainbow Bridge Marina or they'd tow them all the way down to Wahweap. That was probably more common. Just get them off the lake and then they would repair their boat and send them back out or put the boat on a trailer and the people would take it home. That was commonly done.

TM: I've got a question for you, because you reminded me about the San Juan arm. Did you ever go up the San Juan arm far enough to get to the San Juan Marina?

BC: There was no San Juan Marina at that time. I know I went up far enough to the location of where it would be built, but that was just somebody's dream at that time. The San Juan was kind of fun to go up because it meandered back and forth, this meandering river. There wasn't a lot of activity up there so you could just cruise and enjoy the scenery as much as anybody. Had a few accidents up there, or you'd have people that were stalled. I towed a lot of people with my patrol boat to different locations on the lake. I might tow them back to their campsite or something like that. We would run the lake at night sometimes. The way we did that is there were lighted buoys on the lake. They had different flashes depending on where they were so you could tell, well, I know I'm at such and such place because that light's blinking three times or something like that or with some sort of certain pattern. You would go from light to light and you could go all the way to Rainbow Bridge. We also tried to do it with compass. You'd go up-lake with a certain compass bearing and then try to come back with the opposite bearing. That didn't work very well we found. We were having trouble with that.

TM: Why was that?

BC: The lights were really the best thing.

TM: Well it seems like if you were on a compass bearing you'd have to calculate your speed very carefully, because eventually that compass bearing is going to put you in a wall.

BC: Yeah, it just wasn't fine-tuned enough for us to do that. Then the other thing I recall, going up at night you would have problems because some people would not have their running lights on. You'd be cruising along and all of a sudden zoom, you'd go past this boat that's just nearly creamed. One night, I recall, I was south of where you turn to go into the Rainbow Marina there on the main lake. I don't remember which arm I was on or near, but I saw way off in the distance, I saw this light and it was in an odd location. Even at night you kind of knew where things were a little bit after you got used to the lake. It was intimidating when you first went out on Lake Powell because everything looked so similar, the red rock cliffs, to me they did. I didn't know where in the world I was at first. But after being there for a few

months, or whatever, you got familiar with things say even at night. So I saw this light over there and I cruised over to it. It was probably a mile I went over. Here are these guys in this boat. There's three guys and they're standing up and they're all drunk and they're holding a tarp up. I said, "What are you guys doing?" "Well, we ran out of gas." So they're out in the boat, they'd run out of gas, and they're trying to use this tarp as a sail to get back to their camp. Of course, I just hooked onto them and took them back to their camp and told them to watch drinking while they're driving [chuckle]. We had one accident involving the kids at the concession there at Rainbow Marina. There wasn't a lot for them to do. They had a party boat basically they could take out at night, or had a couple of them, and the management would let them go out and recreate. I got this report one night of a boat that had crashed over there. So I go over to Oak Canyon, which is just north of the Rainbow Marina. A major bay, a lot of camping is done there and stuff, waterskiing and things. Here's this boat way up on this little island out in the middle of the bay there. It's up about 10 or 12 feet up off of the lake surface. These kids had been cruising back and they were going full blast at night. The one guy thought he could navigate by seeing the silhouettes of certain buttes or features. He thought he knew where he was and he went right over this... they hit this island and just ended up with the boat up on top of the island. I don't know how anybody didn't get killed. They were cut and bruised, but nobody was killed. Stuff like this went on all the time. It was, like I say, I would write maybe 5 to 10 boating accident reports. Everything from just a couple of boats smacking into each other and getting their gel coat creased to major damage or sinking.

TM: Five to ten accident reports for a 10-day shift?

BC: In the summer, yeah. Easily. I'd have to do them at night, go down to the little ranger office, because there just wasn't any time during the day. You would get way behind in your reports. Usually your report consisted of getting back in your notebook and looking at all the notes you'd taken about the accident and then writing up your report. It was kind of rare really to... We did write tickets, but we had to use state law there up there. I think we've talked about that. Same thing at Dinosaur, you'd have to use state law. So you probably wrote fewer tickets up there than you would have if you'd had a federal magistrate or someone easily accessible. At that time there was...

TM: Is that how you would do it? You would have a notebook and you would just take down some simple notes. Then later use the notes to kind of refresh your memory to write up a more complete report?

BC: Yeah. That's the way I did it, because you knew what information was in the report form and that way if you took detailed enough notes you could write a report pretty easily. People would need that for insurance purposes or something like that as much as anything.

TM: Okay. What sort of report? What can you tell me about the paperwork involved? How did that work?

BC: Well, let me think. We had a Park Service Boating Accident Report that we filled out. It had basic information about parties involved, just like you would for a motor vehicle accident. Who was the operator of the boat; how many passengers were they; what were their names, addresses, phone numbers; the description of the boat; any numbers that it might have on it, Arizona blah, blah, blah or whatever, sort of the boat license plate; the brand of the boat; the style of the boat. All those different things would go on there. Then you'd answer the who, what, when, where, how, and why questions that you ask in any kind of investigation and try to come up with a conclusion as to what happened, what

caused the accident, that type of thing. Any mitigating things like was the person drunk, that type of thing.

We did a lot of boat inspections. That was one of our big jobs, especially at the marina. Part of that was to not necessarily prevent accidents, but if someone actually got into an accident that at least they might be able to find a lifejacket in order to save their lives. Cause very often you would inspect a boat and everybody is supposed to have, for example, at least one adult lifejacket for each adult on board, and then lifejackets for children. In Utah they had to wear them. The lifejackets would inevitably be underneath the bow of the boat or laying in the bilge...

TM: Someplace hard to get to.

BC: Someplace hard to get to. So part of your message would be, you've got these, get them out. You don't have to wear them but they should be accessible and you want to be able to get them on. I'd actually have people put them on, show them how to put them on. Especially the horse collar type lifejackets, people have a hard time putting those on. If you could convince them to wear a vest with a zipper, Type III device, that was the best. I had a Type V, like the river runners would use, and it had a collar on it. I wore that all the time because it wasn't as hot and you still had a lifejacket on pretty much all the time when you're out boating. It was a lot more comfortable. If you went in the water it would keep your head...if you were unconscious, it'd keep your head up out of the water, the lifejacket could.

TM: Absolutely understand that. Then you mentioned going down to Lees Ferry a couple times. What do you remember about that?

BC: Right. I didn't go there very much. I went to Rainbow Bridge a lot, I can describe that a bit later. Lees Ferry, usually went down there whenever the Lees Ferry ranger was on leave or something. I never stayed down there. I would just go down there, cruise through the area, spend a few hours. Maybe hike around, look at things, talk to any people that were down there. It was usually pretty quiet. Check the campground, clean the campground restrooms, if any trash on the ground you'd pick that up, stuff like that. It was pretty much just a "go down and see what was going on" type of thing. Very little happened down at Lees Ferry. Mostly, more than anything, it was just a put on point for the Colorado River through the Canyon. There was a modest amount of camping and a modest amount of visitors, but in those days it wasn't super busy at least when I'd go down there. Usually I'd always go down there in the winter time, that's the slow time anyway for down there.

We did have a few incidents down there where we responded because of reports of something going on. I remember, I wasn't involved in it, but they had some guys, the ranger that was at Lees Ferry went up to them and had a really bad feeling about these guys. I guess he got some information from them as to who they were and whatnot or he saw something that he didn't like. So the guys from Wahweap, I think there were three guys, went back down there. They'd found out that these guys were wanted. They'd illegally camped, I think, someplace up one of the little side roads there. So the rangers got down in the bed of the pickup truck, at least two of them, and then one guy drove and they went back out to where these guys were so they weren't really suspicious of anything, that the ranger was just coming back. Of course, the guys jumped out of the back of the truck with their guns and took these guys to jail. But, really, not a lot went on down there. It's a beautiful place, you know, it's really unusual. All the balanced rocks and just being down along the semi free-flowing Colorado River and the Paria River is really fun. A number of times went out in the jet boat they had there with the ranger down there and

went through the Paria Rapid and up to the dam and stuff like that. One time, my wife and I, we took our canoe and went down the Colorado.

TM: Oh nice!

BC: We went down through the tunnel. They let us do that and then put on and canoed all the way down to the Lees Ferry. That was really fun. But to get back to Rainbow Bridge, we alternated. You were up there for 10 days and then you were off for 4 days. Your first day and your last day were commute days, you'd come back. So you were there a total of 8 full days and then partial the others. People didn't like going up there. I think I might have mentioned in an earlier talk, had a maintenance man named Dick Hunter, he used to go up there. We'd commute together to save fuel in the winter sometimes, we'd just take one boat. We'd step out on the dock and he'd look around and he'd say, "These walls look like bars," he'd say. When we were down at Wahweap he'd always say, "We're going to jail. I'm going to jail." [chuckle] There was a lot of drama between the maintenance men up there. There was one guy, I guess I won't name him, but he was a problem employee. All the other maintenance men didn't like him because he would kind of shortcut on doing things like properly managing the waste. They had to put it in...I don't understand all of the procedures...but they had this floating sewage treatment plant there and you had to operate it for a certain amount of time to get all the sewage to digest properly. He was eventually caught. They had a ranger that was a diver and he went down and they found out he was putting raw sewage in the lake, because the point of disposal was underwater quite a ways. They finally fired this guy, which was kind of amazing, fire a Federal employee. He was a permanent employee that had been there for a long time. But he had other issues with people. I had a couple of run-ins with him. I had one memorable night where I went out to this houseboat with one of the maintenance men, a guy named Steve Carlson. We got invited to go out to this houseboat and have dinner, so we went out there. In the midst of dinner, this one woman got sick, an older woman. She was really in a bad way and I said I better take her to Page because she was really having all kinds of gastrointestinal pains and stuff. Something was really wrong. So I put her in my boat and I took one of her...I forget who went with her, I think her niece or her daughter went along. We went all the way down-lake. She ended up having diverticulitis, where there was a blockage in her intestines. They had to operate on her there in Page. What happened was... The problem with the other maintenance man is I told Steve Carlson, I said, "Go..." Oh, wait a minute. I got ahead of myself. Steve Carlson was at the marina. I was out there by myself. I take that back. I told one of the guys in the party, I said, "Go to the Rainbow Marina and tell the maintenance men that I'm going down to Wahweap and taking your grandmother," or whoever it was. So this person went back to the marina and he went to Steve Carlson's houseboat and he told Steve. Well, Steve failed to tell the other maintenance man. The next morning, it was about 6:00 or 6:30, I had stayed in my house at Wahweap during the night and I heard radio traffic. It sounded like this other maintenance man was coming down-lake with somebody. Apparently somebody had been injured and they'd come to the marina. He put him in his boat, he couldn't find me and he was all mad about that, so he put him in his boat and came down-lake. The first thing I did when I heard all this is I got on the radio and I tried to call the seasonal ranger at Wahweap that was supposed to be on patrol. He wouldn't answer, so I went up to his trailer and he was still asleep [chuckle]. Because he'd had a really...spent extra hours at night. So I went down to the marina and I met the maintenance guy down there. He was all mad because I hadn't told him I had left the marina. I said, "Well, I did tell you I left the marina, because I told Steve." Eventually we found out that he'd talked to Steve Carlson and Steve hadn't passed the word on. Another thing that happened with this guy and myself, is they had garbage barges up there. There were three garbage barges. People would come into the Rainbow Marina and they'd take their trash, they'd walk down the marina and they'd throw it in these garbage barges. Well, the first one in line would always get full and then the others would be semi full. So one of the things that we would

do is we would move the barge at the front to the rear and reposition them. One of the maintenance men talked to me and I told him this is what we do. He said if you wanted to help out sometime you could move those barges. So I did, I would move the barges. Then I got accused of doing this other maintenance man's work, so he got all mad about this. We got into quite a shouting match one time inside of the mechanical room that was adjacent to the ranger station. We were probably calling each other some kind of bad names and everything. All of a sudden I heard this tapping on the window. I looked over and this visitor was trying to get our attention because he had a question [chuckle] about how to get to Rainbow Bridge/where's Halls Crossing or something. It was typical ranger where you went from being furious at another employee to being the happy, smiling ranger and answering all the questions while this guy was at the window. It was kind of a nice break. Once we had gotten the visitor to intervene in our argument, so to speak, we kind of went opposite directions. I finally said we're going to have to agree to disagree on this. [chuckle] I recall, too, with Rainbow Bridge...at one point my supervisor told me, "Well, Bob," he says, "you've been going up to Rainbow for a couple of years now so we're going to give you a break and we're going to send Dave Pape up there." He was a new permanent ranger that we had. Dave lived in the trailer park up the hill above... He and his wife lived up there. I thought this was great, so I didn't have to go up to Rainbow Bridge for a while or maybe never again on the 10-day tour. So I packed all my stuff up. We had little cubby holes where we kept some of our own personal gear and stuff there on this houseboat, our particular drawer or whatever. They had kind of a bunk that had drawers that came out to save space, and individual rangers had their own drawer. I took everything out and I thought this is terrific. I went down-lake and first thing I know I'm back on the schedule to go back up-lake after about a couple of months. Dave Pape's wife had gone and complained to the superintendent that he was having to go up there all the time so they made us go back on the old tour again. Ended up nobody was happy. [chuckle]. That's the way it goes I guess.

TM: Yeah, without being up there with your family, your significant other, your wife, your kids, it is sort of a hardship.

BC: Oh yeah. This Steve Carlson and I one time, we were going to listen to the "Thrilla in Manilla." That was the Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali fight. We thought, wow this is going to be fun. We were going to listen to it on the radio. There was kind of a covered cabana type area there or something and Steve had... Well it was kind of funny. His wife was a vegetarian so when he was down at Wahweap he had to eat vegetarian but then when he would come up to Rainbow Bridge he would sneak into Page and buy these gigantic steaks or pork chops or something, you know. He ate nothing but meat while he was up at Rainbow Bridge [chuckle]. So we were going to have this big barbecue that night. He and I were the only ones with the Park Service there on the marina at the time. The radio transmissions up there were real good right at first and we listened to like Round 1 and Round 2. Then the radio transmissions went away so we never did get to hear who won the fight much less hear the fight. Those were the things that happened up there as far as things not working very well communications-wise.

TM: Yeah. Especially, you're working off the AM radio at night, those signals come and go.

BC: Yeah, doesn't work very well.

TM: And no television up there I'm sure.

BC: You might get something way far away, but not the ones you want to listen to.

TM: Yeah, yeah. And then, you got sent at one point to the dam.

BC: The Bureau of Reclamation monitored the activities at the Carl Hayden Visitor Center and the dam itself. They had sensors and things. Like they had sensors on the gates that went down the road that cut through the cliff to the bottom of the dam. They had sensors on that gate and on real windy nights sometimes that gate would rattle and they would think someone had climbed over the gate and was going down to fish or whatever they were going to do. That was always really spooky. We'd have to drive out there. What we would normally do is one guy would drive the car down the tunnel and the other guy would walk behind the vehicle cause there were all these tunnels that went off... From the main tunnel that went down, there were like air vents that were tunnels in their own right that went out to the edge of the cliff. They had different things stored in those, so you had to check them as you went down. I never did find anybody. I probably did that a half dozen times and there was never anybody there. The problem at the Carl Hayden Visitor Center was generally that one of the Park employees at night when they were closing up they didn't secure an exterior door properly so someone would go in and trip the alarm. This might happen at 2:00 in the morning so we would have to go out there and check the building. You had a big rotunda. It's a big kind of round rotunda type of building where the displays are and then there's a long hallway that goes down to a little concession area down there. Then there's a bank of elevators that take you down into lower levels and then eventually down to the dam itself. They have a tour route and so we would have to search this whole building. Usually a couple of us would go out there. We'd check the exterior and you'd look to see if there were any cars in the parking lot, obviously, and stuff like that. Then we would go in and check the lobby and check the restrooms. Then you'd go down in the elevators. There was this tile tunnel that went from the base of the elevators out to the dam. That was always spooky because it had a curve in it so you couldn't see the end of the tunnel and every footstep you made echoed. It just reverberated inside this thing. I always thought, gee, if you ever shot a gun off in here, the tile would just ricochet all over the place off the concrete and what. The one thing that would happen, especially the lower levels of the storage areas and stuff below the visitor center but above the dam itself, you'd go in some of these rooms in there and every once in a while you'd be walking down the corridor and a door would open. [chuckle] It was really scary. What it was, I finally figured out, it was the air conditioning or the heating system. It would kick on and if someone hadn't latched the door, the door would be blown open by the change in the air current.

TM: That's got to be terribly frightening if you have a weapon drawn and you're trying to clear a building and a door is opening and closing. Wow.

BC: Yeah, it really was. Another thing that happened there is you'd go up to the windows and you'd see fingerprints on the windows of the rotunda area. It's all glass and then it's just cliff and we'd see fingerprints. We realized those fingerprints aren't on the inside of the glass, they're on the outside of the glass. One of the things the kids from Page would do is they would come out there and that was the big thrill. They would walk around the outside of the visitor center building there. Yeah, that was one of the... You haven't gone to Page High School if you haven't done this type of thing. So that was kind of crazy. We had some bizarre stuff out there. The FBI called us at one point because this was about the time Edward Abbey's *Monkey Wrench Gang* had been written. The Feds were worried about vandalism to the dam and stuff like that. Every once in a while we would get an alert that there's credible intelligence that a group of people are going to come out and try to vandalize the dam or the electrical systems or something so we'd be on kind of higher alert. We had this one guy [chuckle] out there, he was a janitor, his name was Phil, I don't remember the rest of his name. Phil was the night janitor at the visitor center. He was kind of an oddball. He'd been working this for years out there and he was just a little different than most of us. [chuckle] Eldon Kohlman was the Acting District Ranger and he wasn't sure he wanted to tell Phil about this alert even though Phil was the first line of defense. Finally he

decided, well, he'd tell Phil that there was this threat against the Glen Canyon Dam and that he should take a little extra caution and stuff like that. Of course that night we're at our residences at Wahweap down the Lake Shore Drive there, it's about 4 or 5 miles from the dam, and all of a sudden we get this radio call from Phil, "Someone's in the building! I'm going to get out of here!" I still remember... Eldon Kohlman was a little bit portly. He was from Texas and he was my next door neighbor. He was the supervisor. I remember we both heard this radio call at the same time and we ran out of our houses. I could get dressed in just a minute or two. I practiced it over and over. [chuckle] I remember Eldon trying to get to the car and trying to get his gun belt hooked up at the same time, he was having a heck of a time. We got in the patrol car and there were three of us. There was Eldon Kohlman, John Mueller, and myself and we all went out to the dam. Of course, there was nothing there. We searched the whole building and told Phil nothing's happened.

A few weeks later, I don't know the time frame, we had another janitor out there. The same alert was in the wind. One night we get a call from him and he claims that he walked out of the building, shut the door behind himself, he had a set of keys on his belt, and someone hit him in the head with some object and knocked him unconscious. He fell on the lawn and he fell on his keys. When we got out there nobody, of course again, was in the building at all that we could find. We gave him a little bit of first aid. I don't remember if he went to the hospital or not. In the back of our minds, we were always wondering if he was doing this for drama or if it really happened. But he had a knot on his head so something happened.

The third incident that I remember out there that was crazy was we got a call, it was about 1:00 in the morning or 1:30. Again, the three of us went out there: Mueller, Kohlman and myself. We went in the building and Eldon and I... John was in a separate patrol car and he got out there about the same time we did. We told him to stay outside the building and that Eldon and I would go in and search the building. Eldon and I searched the lobby and then we started down the hallway and we went and searched the two restrooms, the men's and the women's restroom. When we came out of the men's...I think it was the men's room, or the one closest to the lobby, Eldon peaked around the corner... We could see John outside the glass. He'd come around the backside of the visitor center and he was standing on the lake side of the visitor center. Eldon says, "There's somebody in the lobby." I said, "No, that's John, that's John Mueller. He's out there." He said, "No, someone's in the lobby." I looked around and sure enough there was a guy standing in the middle of the lobby. Eldon approached him and started talking with him. I had a shotgun. They were talking back and forth and I finally in some cop language [chuckle] told this guy to get up against the wall. So he did. Eldon searched him and he didn't have anything on him. As the story started to unfold, this guy was a political science professor from one of the universities in southern Arizona. He had stopped to use the bathroom. When we went into the building we, of course, had told John to stay outside and now we have an unsecure door, see, and John's gone around to the backside of the building. So this guy just drove up, walked in.

TM: But this is like 1:00 in the morning, isn't it?

BC: Yeah, yeah. He was a very lucky, lucky guy that I didn't fill him full of buckshot.

TM: No kidding.

BC: But also I always think back, being a Political Science professor, he's probably told that story about the jackbooted park rangers up at Glen Canyon many times in his classroom. [chuckle] Who knows? Just a lot of stuff went on at Glen Canyon. It was constant. As you know, I'd gone down the river when I was

about 15 or something like that and had seen what a beautiful place it was. So it was kind of hard to go back to, but I did for an advancement, as I mentioned earlier. I did appreciate all of the action, so to speak, because I got a lot of medical cases there, I got a lot of law enforcement incidents, and whatnot over there.

TM: So the training was good?

BC: The training was excellent. Yeah, it was on-the-job training a lot of it. You learned how to do stuff.

TM: Hey, Bob, I think maybe this is a good time to ask you this. I am really interested in your observations and we've talked about this once already, but I just wondered if there was anything more that you had to add to that about being there as a 15-year-old with David Brower, looking at Glen Canyon as it was before the dam, and then being there certainly as a law enforcement ranger, dealing with the ranger activities and medicals and that sort of thing. You'd mentioned about people got to see it when the reservoir was there because more people could put boats on and go take a look. But the scale and scope of what the place was before the dam. Is there anything else you'd like to add about that as a compare and contrast, because very few people would have seen it from your vantage, where you were there before the dam and then you were there as an employee afterwards.

BC: Right, right. It just wasn't the same place. It was a different place. I always just kind of I guess philosophically thought, "Well, we have what we have now." The decisions were made, the beautifully spectacular canyon was flooded, that was all lost. We still have a wonderful resource. It is still beautiful. People still love it. There are a lot of issues with the reservoir though. When the reservoir was coming up, it opened up a lot of areas for people to boat up to. You could boat up, get out of your boat, walk up some side canyon, and see some remarkable places. Even places you couldn't have seen from the river, I'm sure. However, with the massive amounts of driftwood and mud and all those types of things, some of those areas are probably not as accessible now as they were in the interim period. I don't know. I don't think people can see nearly what they could see previously when it was a free flowing river and not a lake. It really just isn't the same. Maybe it's even unfair to try to contrast the two. It's still, of course, a very beautiful place and all. To me, it's always kind of melancholy to have seen it as a 15-year-old going down the river and then going back years later and knowing what was lost. Places like Music Temple, you go up to Music Temple and it's just basically a wall there now. That was an unbelievable alcove that was drowned. Hidden Passage, some of those other places that I remember going up in, Moqui Canyon. It's just not the same. It's much different to step off a riverboat onto a sandy beach and hike up a canyon then to be cruising along a cliff [chuckle]. Then the camping areas, they varied with the lake a lot. You might have a very nice camping area and if the water level comes up, you have no camping area. If it goes down, the camping area may have returned if all the sand and whatnot hasn't washed away. That type of thing. I'm not sure how much we covered about the river trip down through Glen Canyon. I guess we did talk about that quite a bit.

TM: We did some. Yeah. What were you thinking though?

BC: Nothing in particular [laughter].

TM: Okay, okay. I was thinking about camping on the river on the sandbars. Again, that would depend whether the river was in flood or not. And then camping on the reservoir, at the different reservoir levels, as you mentioned campsites would come and go. So there was some similar variability there. I just recently spoke with Alan...

BC: I remember camping at White Canyon I think our first night out. I remember dunes, there were a lot of dunes there. Then Music Temple was the same way. There were dunes in kind of an elevated shelf above the Music Temple area. You had to walk from the river into Music Temple. It wasn't a long walk. Maybe a quarter of a mile or thereabouts.

TM: So the winds that you would experience on the reservoir that would just terrorize watercraft, clearly those winds were happening before the reservoir was there, in the days of free flowing Glen Canyon and that would make those dunes.

BC: Yeah. I remember one day was kind of rainy and very windy on the river. We were hardly making any headway. They, of course, had motors on these rafts we were on. Just hardly any headway at all. I have this film of Glen Canyon, I still can't find it. I got that. I've also got a film of Phantom Ranch and I can't find that either. So I've got some work to do on locating my motion pictures. When you speak of wind I recall a couple of incidents. I don't know if we talked about the Boy Scout group that went out in the houseboat during the windstorm.

TM: Remind me again. Maybe we didn't.

BC: I don't think we did. They had this tremendous windstorm at Lake Powell one spring, it was probably in April. There were sustained winds of 40 and 50 miles an hour. It was continuous for at least 2 to 3 days. Wahweap Marina, what they did with the marina, it was all blowing from one direction. It seems like it was coming from maybe the west or northwest. They took all these houseboats that they had and they hooked them onto the marina in the opposite direction of the wind and started the engines up. They hooked them on to the marina and that's how they kept the marina from breaking up, is they used the power of their fleet [chuckle] to stabilize the marina. It was a pretty scary time. Nobody was on the lake. Right in the midst of this, this group from Salt Lake comes down, this Boy Scout Troop, and they have been loaned this houseboat. They all climb on the houseboat and even though everybody said, "Not a good idea to go out there," they went up-lake to camp. They took this houseboat, it must have been a 35-footer or 40-footer, and they went across Wahweap Bay. It goes through the cut there right directly into Padre Bay at that time, you didn't have to go around the island. They went up, I think in the Padre Bay area, maybe Last Chance Bay, and they camped out for a couple of nights. Then they came back down-lake. This Dave Pape I was talking about earlier, he had a house up in the trailer village up above and he could see everything that was going on on Wahweap Bay. He also monitored the marine band radio. He just did that. He got a call from this houseboat that they were kind of afraid, I guess, to come across Wahweap Bay. They had taken this houseboat and anchored it in a little shallow cove on Antelope Island right directly across from the Wahweap Marina. They needed gas I think is what it was. So Eldon Kohlman, again who was the Assistant District Ranger, and I think there were like four of us, we had this big boat there. It was a cabin cruiser. It was called the Cass Hite. It was about a 35-foot Bertram, as I recall. It was a big boat. It may not have been that big. I think it was. I think it was 35-foot. [chuckle] It was a big boat. Anyhow, maybe it was 28. It was a big boat [chuckle]. We took that and he said, "Well, I'm going to cut wake in the Cass Hite and you follow in the little patrol boat." We had these little...we called them moppies. They were Bertrams, 20-foot Bertram boats, and that's what we patrolled the lake in. So I got behind him and we went on out to Antelope Island. He laid offshore and gave me fuel cans and I took the fuel cans in to the houseboat so they could fill their boat up. We told these guys...

TM: So Bob? Hang on a second. When you went out across Wahweap, you're in the Bertram and you're following the Cass Hite, what kind of waves were out there?

BC: It was huge. You had 3- and 4-foot waves. They were really big. That's why we took the bigger boat to try to make a calm area behind the boat so it wasn't as hard on the 20-footer. The 20-foot Bertrams, if you got in a really bad storm, sometimes you'd get water in the distributor and the boat would quit. I had that happen a couple times on me. So we had to have some way to try to avoid that. So we got out there. I went over to the boat and gave the guy the gas and he tells me, "Well, once we get gassed up, we're going to come on in." I said, "That's sort of insane," because there were such huge waves. He had probably a dozen Boy Scouts, little kids, 12 years old/13 years old, on the boat. I said, "It would be kind of foolish to do that." "Well, we're going to do that." "Okay." So we went ahead and decided to follow them. The Cass Hite went on back in and we decided to follow them in our little patrol boat. Dave Pape, he's up on the trailer village, and he'd been talking to these guys. That's how we found out originally they were in trouble, obviously. He could talk to them and then he can use the park radio to talk to us. We didn't have a marine band radio on the patrol boat. So we had this relay going on. Well, about halfway across Wahweap Bay, this guy in the houseboat calls Dave and said, "This boat is.... I can't handle it. Is there any way one of the rangers could get on board and pilot this into the marina?" He was scared. It was like James Bond. I got the other guy to drive and we brought the Bertram right alongside of this houseboat. On one of the up-swells, I jumped off onto the railing and got onto the houseboat. Then got up on the bridge. The first thing I said is, "Get lifejackets on all these Boy Scouts!" So they all got their lifejackets on. I took control of this boat and it was just, I guess it's yawing. It was just going from one side to the other and I thought something is really wrong with this boat. Somehow I managed to get it to the Wahweap ramp. It was fairly calm there because of the direction of the wind and getting in the lee of the dock there. But there were a couple boats that were tied between the ramp and where we were. I took the houseboat and I docked it on this courtesy dock that they had. We tied it up. It seemed like it was taking on water. We had a bilge pump going. I think myself and one other guy, one of the guys had brought a patrol car down, we drove over to the marina and we said, "Do you guys have a pump that we can pump this boat out?" Because it's sinking there at the dock. They brought this pump over and about the time we got there, the water had come up enough where it came over the transom and the gunnel of the stern of this houseboat. I remember watching the water just going just right into the engine compartment of the lake and the boat just went right to the bottom there. In retrospect, I wish I had put it up on the ramp, just crunched it up on the ramp. That's Monday morning quarterbacking. So anyway, it sunk right there at the Wahweap boat ramp. You could see the railings were still above the water, but the main body of the boat was underwater. It took several days, had to bring a big crane out there and stuff to get it out of there. What had happened is either... Probably when they were coming across Wahweap Bay, these waves were so big that the boat, or maybe earlier, the keel had cracked on this houseboat. It opened up about an inch or maybe inch and a half and water just started flooding in and they only had a bilge pump. They had a wall or a bulkhead between the engine and the forward part of the boat, so that whole forward section filled up full of water. That's why the boat was not handling properly. The only bilge pump was in the engine compartment, so that was staying dry. But once that crack got wide enough, the water came in fast enough and there was no bilge pump or anything in there to get water out, so that contributed to the sinking, obviously.

TM: Wow, yeah, yeah. There were some lucky, lucky, lucky...

BC: That was a pretty exciting deal.

TM: ...kids there. Gee whiz.

BC: What was that?

TM: Lucky kids.

BC: Yeah, lucky kids, right. I wouldn't want to do it at my age now [laughter].

TM: Yeah, well, you would've been smart enough now to say, "Sir, we're not going anywhere. We're staying right put right here. We'll just have people bring us food until this calms down and then we can go across."

BC: Well, Park Service has gotten so they don't want to tell people what to do. Like I was saying, at Grand Canyon we used to write permits and we would just tell people, "You don't have enough experience. You have to go down the Kaibab Trail or the Bright Angel Trail. You can't go down the Tanner or the Boucher or wherever else you want to go."

TM: Very good point.

BC: I don't know if they've done maintenance on those trails or not, but at that time they certainly hadn't. You had to be able to kind of know where you were, or where the trail might go, or the route might go or you could get in trouble. We would tell people we wouldn't give them a permit. "Well, what happens if I don't get a permit?" "Well, you get a ticket." You'd try to scare them. At some point, even when I was there, I think we finally said, well, if they want to go, let them go. We'll tell them what they need as far as safety equipment and what the hazards are and then let them have at. That was the same thing I did with this fellow on the boat. I told him how treacherous it was. He had all these kids and he wanted to get them back to Salt Lake so they could go to school on Monday, probably.

TM: Right, right, right. That's a very interesting, interesting point.

BC: Yeah. And there's been a lot of changes since I was there. Antelope Canyon and Clay Hills Crossing, I guess, and that all area, as far as marinas and the tribe has developed some things. I have no clue as to what they've done. I've never seen it. I know they were in the sort of discovery stage at that time. In fact one night we had the chief of the Navajo police came out there with a couple other Navajo. They got a little boat. I don't know if they rented a boat or whether they had their own boat. They took off and went around Antelope Island looking for areas maybe for development or something like that. They broke down and we ended up having to have them towed back to Wahweap. It was the middle of the night when we finally figured out that they were not coming back. [chuckle] So that's when the search started. Any time human life was in danger at Lake Powell or Grand Canyon, or anywhere else, that becomes the priority. If there's a kid lost, that really goes to the top of the heap as far as your priorities in a park. All the park resources can go pretty quick to one incident just in a heartbeat. And if you have two or three, then you really have a problem. I don't remember too many multiple incidents like that, but we did have a few.

TM: Yeah, when you get spread thin because your resources are being pulled in many different directions.

BC: Yeah, yeah. There were a lot of things that went on there that you were kind of suspicious of, too. We had one incident I recall a where a music teacher from Page took his wife and his two little kids, they went over to Castle Rock over there, I was trying to think of the name of it. They're little bays that go in there. Camped out overnight and in the morning we got a report that the man's wife was missing. Went

over looking for them. Well it turned out, we think... They talked to, these are just little kids, you know, "mommy and daddy were fighting" type of things. It really appears that there was a homicide where [BEEP] the husband drowned the wife in this little embayment there [BEEP] because he had kind of like a girlfriend, so to speak, with a high school girl. They were seen later on like on band trips and stuff kind of cozying up to one another. So we kind of think that was really a homicide, but almost impossible to prove. I don't remember if they recovered the body or not. And there were always rumors of people fall overboard...well, did they really?

TM: Right, right.

BC: It's a big place. It's what, 180 miles long or something like that.

TM: Or more, yep.

BC: It's a big lake and a lot of stuff can happen there that can go undetected. Of course, you can't accuse somebody of something unless you have evidence. It was an interesting place to work, it really was. But I was glad to get out of there. One of the interesting, have I told you how I ended up going to Curecanti? Maybe this will be our last story. I had gotten married, been married about two months. Earlier I had gotten a call. I got a call from the chief ranger at Curecanti, his name was Jim Riggs. Jim wanted me to be what was called the Morrow Point District Ranger. He talked about it and told me about the job and what it entailed. I was talking to him for a while and I thought, well, I don't know if I really want to go up there because I know Gunnison, Colorado was very cold and I had this Bassett hound. Had this huge Bassett hound named Muggins. I didn't know if I wanted to give up my dog because they told me I had to live in a little trailer. I thought about it overnight and I called him up the next day and I had just gotten married and everything, so I said, "Well, I don't think I want to go up there." End of story. Martha, my wife, had worked up at Purgatory ski area, had been like a nursing assistant in the Durango area. She convinced me we should take a little trip and go up to Durango. She wanted to show me where she used to live and work and all these things. So we drove up there and I got up to the Mesa Verde area and all and I told Martha, I said, "I must've been crazy to turn that job down. It's so beautiful up here." I was getting tired of the desert and the red rocks and no trees [chuckle]. So when I returned to Page after a couple of nights, I called a friend of mine, his name's Steve Petersburg, he was the Resource Management Specialist at Dinosaur. He and I had been neighbors. I said, "Steve, I turned this job down at Curecanti." He says...

Well, let me back up. There was a guy up there at Dinosaur, he had taken over my job when I'd left Dinosaur. We called him Giggles for his handle. He was rumored to be going down to Curecanti. They were going to do a swap where he was going to go to Curecanti, somebody from Curecanti was going to come up to Dinosaur, stuff like that. Sort of like change positions. I said, "What's this job?" He didn't know much about it. I said, "That kind of sounds like the job I turned down." This is two months later almost, so I hung up the phone and I called the Chief Ranger at Dinosaur right away. It's like 8:00 at night. I said, "Jim, I hear the Morrow Point District Ranger hadn't been filled." He said, "That's right. We filled it for a while, but the guy that took it, he was with the Forest Service and he didn't like the housing situation and a few other things. We put him through a bunch of training and everything, but he decided not to take the job." Or he quit after a week or two. I said, "Well, I've reconsidered. If the job's still available, I've changed my mind. I'd be willing to come up there." He said, "Well, I check with the superintendent and see what he says, call you back tomorrow." Bernie Packard was the superintendent. They talked and the next day he called me back and said, "Well, if you want to come up to Curecanti, the job's is yours." I said okay and spent the next 25 years there [chuckle]. Another aspect of it is, I went on

a special assignment...this was years later, this is like 20 years later...I went on a special assignment. I went down to White Sands National Monument in southern New Mexico. What was happening is they'd some real problems down there with alcohol consumption during spring break. They had had assaults and they had a car torched and had a whole bunch of injuries. It was just out of control down there. So they decided to have a alcohol prohibition in the park during a set period of time. You could not possess alcohol in the park. Couldn't be in your vehicle, couldn't be on your person, you couldn't be drinking it, nothing like that. So they needed people to come down and enforce this closure because it went on 24 hours a day basically. Well, I guess they did close the gate at night, but it went on all during the day. So I went down there and about the second or third day, this Forest Service officer shows up to see what's going on out at the dunes there. His name was Hoot Murray, H-O-O-T, Hoot Murray. We got to talking. He found out where I was from and he said, "You know, one time I accepted a job there at that park." I said, "You did?" We got to talking and he had been the guy who had taken the job and then he had decided he didn't like the job and he had gone back to the Forest Service. Here all these years later I run into him in the middle of New Mexico. It's a small world [laughter]. So I said, well, thank you, cause I liked where I was. Yeah. That was a bizarre assignment going down to White Sands. I know the first day we were there, some lady ran down a dune. I don't know if you've ever been there, but it's gypsum and the floor that the dunes sit on, I guess if you were to call it that, is just hard as concrete. People run down those dunes and then it goes to a flat surface and they fall and smash on the floor of the dunes. This woman had broken her leg, so we weren't there five minutes we're doing EMT stuff. Then the rest of the week it was mostly band-aids and stuff like that. But we had a lot of issues with alcohol. Still, people would hide it in the trunks of their cars and then they would poke a hole in the bottom of the beer can and shotgun the beer. We had one guy on a motorcycle and he was in disguise. He would go down and find the problems and then the rangers would go and take care of the problem. People kept wondering, how in the world did they know I had a 12-pack in the rear of my car? [chuckle] It was crazy. Then we had all these low-rider vehicles that came in from Las Cruces and they would have parades. They would get in these big, long parades and go around the dunes in their cars. After everybody left we found a lot of evidence of alcohol consumption and drugs and stuff. People would abandon things in the dunes there and whatnot. It was a different experience than I was kind of used to. The dunes themselves reminded me of the Rainbow Marina because they were just brilliant white. If you didn't have sunglasses, you were in a world of hurt down there.

TM: I bet. Maybe this is a good place to end this Part 13 and we will pick up 14 to talk about Curecanti.

BC: Sure, that sounds good. It'll probably have to be after the first of the year.

TM: Okay, well I tell you what, hang on for a second, let's wrap up this interview and then hold the line there. This is going to complete Part 13 of Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Bob Cornelius. Today is Wednesday, December 19, 2018. My name is Tom Martin and this will end our phone interview.