

Interviewee: Robert "Bob" Cornelius (BC)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Growing up in the Bay Area during the 1950-60s, and the influences that drove Bob toward his career as a Park Ranger

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This interview is Part 1 of a multipart interview series with Bob.

Keys: Eagle Scout, Sierra Club, Glen Canyon river trip, Lew Elliot, David Brower, Elliot Porter

TM: Good morning. This is a Grand Canyon Oral History Interview with Robert Cornelius. That's spelled C-O-R-N-E-L-I-U-S, and Robert goes by Bob. My name is Tom Martin. Today is Tuesday, May 29, 2018. And Bob can you tell me how old you are?

BC: I'm 70 years old.

TM: Where were you born?

BC: I was born in Oakland, California.

TM: What were your parents doing in Oakland?

BC: My parents actually lived in Richmond at the time. My mom and dad were both from Oklahoma. My dad had... When he was about 17 or maybe younger, he hopped a freight like so many people did during the depression and headed for California. He had some relatives in the Antioch area which is in Contra Costa County and is kind of along the extension of the bay there where it goes into the delta, kind of an industrial area. So he had some contacts there and of course he was looking for work.

My mom... My grandfather was a tunneler and he came to California to build the...help with the Los Angeles Aqueduct. Then later they moved to the Bay Area and he was a worker on what at that time was called the Broadway Low Level Tunnel, now called the Caldecott Tunnel, that goes between Contra Costa County/Walnut Creek Area, where I grew up, and the Oakland/Berkeley area. Goes through the hills there. My mom, along with my granddad and grandma lived in...and her sisters, lived in Lafayette, California, which is east of where the tunnel was being built. So that's where my mom lived. My grandparents then moved to Berkeley and lived on Telegraph Avenue just a few blocks from the University of California for many, many, many years.

TM: Really?

BC: Forty years. My mom lived with them there. She went to the University of California for a couple of years and she dropped out. She had been introduced to my dad. They lived in Antioch for a while and then my dad got a job working in the shipyards in Richmond. Eventually that turned into the Liberty Ship Program. My mom was a Rosie the Riveter. She went and worked in the shipyards there also, and my brother had been born by that time.

I have one older brother. He's named Jerry. My mom's name is Marjorie, or was Marjorie, and my dad's name was Earl. My brother and my parents lived there in Richmond. I think after he was born, I think she didn't do as much. Or no, I guess when my dad went to the war. He finally got drafted into WWII, served on Okinawa. When he left, I think she did not work in the shipyards as much as she had previously.

Then after the war, I was born. We lived in Richmond until I was about 2-2½ years old. My mom, one of the things she did... The government housing they were living in in Richmond, they were starting to close that. So they were finding themselves without any place to go to live and housing was pretty tight in the Bay Area. There was a lot of construction and stuff starting. My mom went over to a radio station in San Francisco and she got on the air. They had this program, sort of like nowadays occasionally they have a program where people are advertising things on the radio, "I want to buy a car," or "I got this tractor for sale," or something. She went over there and asked about finding a place to live.

TM: Oh, neat!

BC: Her and my dad and my brother needed a place to live, and myself at that time. The on-air ad was answered by a... I'm forgetting the name of the person that answered the ad in Walnut Creek. But anyway, they were able to move out to Walnut Creek. They came up with some sort of a rental arrangement. In fact, I think my dad had a thing where the landlord forgave part of the rent if we would pick all the walnuts off the walnut trees. There were 10, actually there were 20 walnut trees around this property. So my brother, I'm sure, and my parents would pick these walnuts every year for this guy. Mr. Taylor was his name.

TM: Hey Bob? Hang on a second. I've got some questions.

BC: Yes, sir.

TM: Your grandfather was out in California working on a tunnel that ended up coming through the mountains there toward Oakland and Berkeley. Was that a tunnel for water?

BC: No, no, no. This was a traffic tunnel.

TM: Traffic tunnel, okay.

BC: There's several... There had been several tunnels built at higher elevation in the mountain and this one...the reason it was called Broadway Low Level Tunnel, is it was down pretty much at the level that the valley came up from Orinda to then go up...

TM: Got it.

BC: ...to where it came out in Oakland.

TM: That was a huge amount of work to do that...

BC: It was.

TM: ...and I'm kind of going into some detail. Orinda, Orinda is of course east of Berkeley. There's some fairly substantial hills there, so the concept was just a simple horizontal grade through the mountain?

BC: That's correct, yeah.

TM: Wow. Hmmm.

BC: His name was Edgar Baugh. He was from Chouteau, Oklahoma. That's where my mom was born.

TM: How do you spell Baugh?

BC: B-A-U-G-H.

TM: Thank you.

BC: And E-D-G-A-R. He didn't have a middle name. Just Edgar Baugh. He was actually the first... He started work the first day of the tunnel and he ended the last day of the tunnel. He was the only man that did that. There were other people came and went. He was like a night...I don't want to say supervisor, that's not what I'm...crew boss, I guess. Night crew boss. So he was there at night. I guess it didn't make any difference, because you're underground anyway. But they worked on that for several years before they got through. They had a lot of problems with different types of geologic issues.

TM: Right! Faults...

BC: With hard rock, soft rock, water infiltration. I don't know if they had any hot water problems, but they had a lot of issues. He used to talk about...one time he got... They had a trench and he got buried in the trench right up to his neck. My grandfather was really a sharp guy. He was able to stay composed and he instructed his men how to get him out. I think he probably had health problems as a result of that burial throughout the later part of his life.

He later he worked for an outfit called Duncan Harrelson. They were a pile-driving outfit. He drove piles in the Bay, all over the Bay, and repaired and built wharfs. He used to tell a story about going out to Alcatraz Island. They had to repair the wharf where the boat came in with the prisoners and the guards and the food stuffs, and everything else. He said it was kind of unnerving all day as they worked, for the guards stood around with machine guns, you know. [laughter]

TM: Wow, yeah. So what did your dad do after the war? After he came back from service?

BC: My dad originally was looking for different types of jobs, but he eventually became a welder, a boiler-maker welder. He was in the union. That was his career the rest of his life. One of the things, I think, that was a real positive influence was that he was home every night. He told my mom one time he said... There were these guys that go off, boiler-maker welders, off all over the country doing different jobs. My dad never left the Bay Area. I think the farthest he ever went was probably Stockton, which was about an hours drive. There were a couple times he took jobs elsewhere. He went down to Morro Bay one time for an extended period of time. Then he had a few other jobs. I think, he might have done something in the Pacific Northwest for a short period of time. But most of the time, he was at home and he was at home every night. I think that was really a positive influence.

TM: Alright, let's go back a little bit to Walnut Creek where your mom's been on the radio and you guys basically were able to get a place to rent. In exchange for rent you were picking walnuts. Do walnuts fall to the ground or do you have to get on high ladders to get up to them?

BC: No, what you do is you use a...what we did...there are two ways. If it's done... The easy way is to bring a dozer in or a small tractor in. They hook cable around the tree and they hook the cable to the front of the tractor. It has a shaker on it and they literally shake the tree. That's how they do it sort of in an industrial way, you know, or a commercial way. What we would do is we had cane poles. The walnuts do naturally fall at some point, but to speed the process up you'd have these cane poles. Big long ones. They might be 16 feet tall or something, or even 20 foot, and you hit the walnuts on the tree. The walnuts fall to the ground. They have husks on them. These were English walnuts that we had. They were big trees. The husks have this oil. If you don't wear gloves, your hands turn black. I went to school all the time. I'd get lazy when I was helping them in later years and I'd have this blackish, purplish stain all over my hands. That was just... There were other kids... If you looked around the classroom, there'd be other kids there with black/purple hands, too.

TM: And so you've got this long pole and you're looking up you better to be careful the walnuts didn't hit you on the head as they came down.

BC: Well, maybe/maybe not. I think we were good enough to get out of the way of that one. It was a lot of work. I mean, you had to... We would get sometimes maybe up to 50 sacks or so off these trees. We ended up with 10 trees. They ended up selling...my parents ended up selling off part of the property. They came into an agreement with this Mr. Taylor to eventually buy the property. I think my dad and mom bought almost 2 acres for about \$5000 or something like that.

TM: Back in the day!

BC: Back in 1949. When they retired in the 90's they sold it for, the $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre they still had, they sold it for almost a million dollars. That just shows you how the price of property has gone up, but also the area has totally changed. When I was a kid, Walnut Creek was only a few thousand people, maybe 5-6 thousand people in the city proper. The surrounding areas were all truck farms, fruit and walnut orchards. It was really a great place to grow up because you could just run wild. There weren't any fences, there were few neighbors. I used to go out and just graze on fruit all summer long because we had apricots, cherries, plums, peaches, pears, persimmons, if you could stand those. Just a whole variety – pomegranates – variety of fruit. And then grape arbors, there were several grape arbors in the area. It was a fun place to grow up.

TM: I'm trying to put this in perspective. Walnut Creek, is just...is that just east of Berkeley?

BC: Its east of Berkeley. It crosses this hill, these ranges of hills that we were talking about earlier about the tunnel going through. It's in a valley called the Ignacio Valley. The other surrounding towns are San Ramon, Alamo, and into the north you have Martinez, which was the county seat. Where the John Muir National Historic Site is if you've ever been there.

TM: You know, what I was thinking of was I believe...

BC: And then Pleasant Hill. What was that?

TM: I believe it was 1923, the great Berkeley fire. It started in Walnut Creek and whipped up over the hill and down the other side, down into Berkeley.

BC: Yeah, I know the Berkeley fire was on the north end of Berkeley. I went to the University of California. I took a class one time on I guess it was California history. We actually went out and looked at where the fire had come. You could still see where the fire was because the architecture of the city changed. It changed from 1920s architecture to a little more modern. Or excuse me, the other way around, it turned into 1920s architecture as opposed to even earlier architecture.

TM: Yeah, one thing they got rid of was wood-clap siding and shake shingles. Got rid of all that to slate and stucco. Okay, we'll take care of this.

BC: Yeah, that's right.

TM: I digress, I'm sorry. So it sounds like your upbringing in Walnut Creek, like you say, you could free range all summer. There were no fences. Did you camp out?

BC: We would... These walnut trees... You know, it get's hot in Walnut Creek. It would get up to a hundred degrees sometimes in the summer. What we would do in the early years that we lived there is during the summer my parents had these box springs. We would put big mattresses on them and we'd put them out under the walnut trees and then we would sleep out under the trees all night, especially on the really hot nights. I did that forever, I mean, until I went away to college I was still sleeping out under the trees at night in the summer. As far as other types of camping in the area, there were a couple times, I think, we went down to the Walnut Creek maybe and spent the night but mostly our camping adventures were in Yosemite. My dad loved it, he really loved Yosemite. He called it the Valley, "We're going up to the Valley." We had this '49 Ford and he hooked it up where he could put a little trailer, a utility trailer, on the back and we would camp in style. We'd go to near where Curry Meadow is there and string ropes between the trees and put tarps over the ropes. He had this big umbrella tent. He'd put that thing up and we'd have cots around. That really was an influential thing for me, to go to Yosemite. We went almost every summer for a couple of weeks or so and just had a lot of fun.

TM: So this would've been the late 1950s?

BC: Yeah, this would've been '50s, and into the, maybe the early 60's. I think the last time I was in Yosemite was probably right after I graduated college, which was in 1969. '68 I think I went up there. It had changed a lot. You always go back to a place, just like the Grand Canyon, that we're going to discuss later, you go back to a place thinking it's going to be the same and things have changed as far as the development, the number of visitors, and those types of things.

TM: Sure. Did you get a sense then as a boy, I'm assuming around 10-12-13, of the National Park Service, the presence of the Park Service or was it for you more of this is an extension of my Walnut Creek backyard and this is a great place to explore around or both?

BC: Well, maybe a combination. I mean, we loved to go there and hike and swim and take innertubes down the river and all those various things. Hike up to the falls, that was all great. I remember when I was 8 or 9 years old, my mom took me on a... We went on a naturalist's walk in a meadow near El Capitan. I can remember right then starting to think boy, wouldn't this be wonderful to wear that uniform and work in the National...in these Parks that are so beautiful. So I had thought about becoming

a Park Ranger. In fact, I actually wanted to be a Park Naturalist was my original goal, but when I got to Grand Canyon, I remember, I looked at what the so-called naturalists or interpreters, as we call them now, were doing. They were spending time at the Visitor Center desk. Yeah, they were giving a few walks and they were giving evening programs, but it looked like the Park Rangers were the ones having all the fun, you know. Getting to actually get out in the Park and see it without having to be so much behind a desk. So as my thoughts evolved after I'd moved to Grand Canyon, that first summer I thought, well, I think, I'm going to pursue the Park Ranger aspect of the Service if I can, rather than the interpretive aspect. But I've never lost interest in that sort of thing.

But Yosemite was a very influential place on me. I know I used to go... My parents would let me go to the evening programs. In those days it was called Camp 14. I think, it's probably Spellman Camp. I'm not sure what the name of the camp is now. It's right across from what used to be Camp Curry.

TM: Okay. Yeah, I wouldn't know that.

BC: But that was really an important part of my life. I remember, my dad...I had to... My dad passed away about 1996 and he and my mom had sold their property. Like I told you, they got a lot of money for their property in Walnut Creek. They retired in Honolulu, Hawaii. They were over there for a couple of years and my dad got very sick. I went over to see him and I remember talking to him. I can't remember the exact conversation, but it was something to the effect that I mentioned, "Gee, I wish we'd gone a few other places" and he said, "Well, maybe we went to Yosemite too many times." And I said, "Oh no," I said, "That's not the case. You can't go to Yosemite too many times." Really all those trips to the valley really helped kind of mold who I am today. It's what I ended up doing. It was just a really influential thing. There were some other people and some other things that kind of influenced my wanting to be a Park Ranger or just be in the outdoors.

TM: Like what?

BC: We had a next door neighbor and her name was Norma Warner. Norma was an older woman, in fact, she had a mother that was even older than her in those days. They were "my age" [chuckle]. Anyway, Norma took care of her mother. Her father had died and she took care of her mother. Norma worked for one of the big publishing companies in San Francisco. She'd get on the train every day, in the old days the Sacramento-Northern, and would go to the city every day. Work at the publishing house and come home. Of course, later on she got a car after the train was defunct. I think in the 1940s, they probably did away with going to the city, but I'm not sure. Anyhow, Norma was a member of the local National Audubon Society. She had a yard that had huge bushes around and fountains, bird fountains, and little ponds. It was really a real haven for a lot of bird life and stuff. I'm not sure how I got interested in going over and chatting with her, but eventually she took an interest in myself and some of the other kids in the neighborhood. We would do things like collect butterflies. She gave us bird books and stuff so we... She was very interested in birds. Then I started going on trips with her around the Bay Area with the local Audubon Society. We went to places like Bay Farm Island which is now the Oakland International Airport, and we went to Mount Diablo and Mount Tamalpais and some of these various places around the Bay Area.

TM: And you would've been 12-13-14?

BC: I was fairly young then it was...

TM: 9-10?

BC: Yeah...I, boy, that's [laughter] hard to remember back then. I'm guessing that was probably fairly close. Maybe 8 to 13-14 years old maybe. So I got my first... We were hiking in some very cool areas, Tilden Park, Redwood Regional Park, like I said Mount Diablo. Then out in the delta of California, the San Joaquin/Sacramento Delta. We would go on the winter bird counts and those types of things. I met a lot of other interesting people on these trips. I remember one guy named Harry Couden. I'm not sure how to spell that. C-O-U-D-E-N, I guess. He was kind of the bird whistler in the group. He could imitate all these bird calls. Of course, I was fairly young and wild, so being with this group I was seeing some really cool stuff outdoors for a young kid, but I was also making a lot of noise and scaring the birds away. So I don't know if I was always wanted on the trips but it was a lot of fun. One time I know we had a meeting in Walnut Creek. She had me bring a report I had written about hawks and how hawks behaved, what they eat, all these things. I read it in front of the group there, which was kind of scary for a young kid. But that was an opportunity to speak in public as a young kid. That was probably helpful to me.

TM: Who else was instrumental in helping you at that time, your formative...?

BC: I'd say of course my mom, my dad, my brother. My brother, he was 8 years older than me. I was always... I know he had to babysit me when I was young. So as some older/most older brothers are I suppose, he was a little rough on me at times. He got in a lot... My brother got in trouble occasionally. I guess he was the best negative/positive influence in my life, if that makes sense. He would always do something...

TM: He taught you...

BC: ...and I'd learn from it in a positive way...

TM: What not to do...

BC: ...from what his negative behavior had been, yeah.

TM: Well he would've been...Jerry would've been 16 when you were 8. I mean, just putting the numbers together, so...

BC: That's right and as time went on, I saw less and less of him, so I guess I was almost like an only child at least part of the time. I recall one time he came home, it was a Saturday morning and he'd been out partying on Friday night. I was in the kitchen sitting in the...we had a little rocking chair there...I was sitting in there watching cartoons or something. He walked in [laughter] and his eye was almost closed and he had a big cut under his eye on his cheek and his lip was split open. I said, "What in the world happened to you?" and he said, "Well, I got in a little fight." He said, "But..." you know, the old line, "...you should see the other guy." I said, "Well, boy, he must really look horrible. You're a mess!" I never really liked to fight much after that [laughter].

TM: Yeah. Good!

BC: But he was a great guy. We still get some real good laughs about our childhood times together when I call him and talk.

TM: So as you were heading off into high school, were you thinking about going to college? Was that... 'cause it doesn't sound like college was something that your... Well your mom had been in some college.

BC: My mom was a school teacher. I don't think I mentioned that. She taught fourth grade most of her career. That was another kind of interesting thing. My mom used to take me and we went around...we did some cool things. We went to a lot of the 21 California missions and other historical areas. I know she took me to Sonoma and we went over to Mission Dolores of course, in San Francisco. Carmel was our favorite down in Monterey. Went down there several times and saw that. She also took me one time when I was a little bit older... She was going to San Francisco State College taking a geography class. We got on a DC-3 aircraft out at the old San Francisco airport. Her professor was on the flight with all his students and we flew all over northern California. We flew from San Francisco, of course, across where we lived, I even saw my house when we flew over it.

TM: Wow. Cool.

BC: We saw the whole Bay Area. We made a beeline for Yosemite and we flew around Half Dome and the valley. We went then north up to Lake Tahoe and I think we landed in Chico. Then we took off and went across the Central Valley, across Clear Lake out to the Pacific Ocean and came right down along where Port Reyes is and over the Golden Gate and landed again in San Francisco. But the whole time we were on this flight, it was all day, this geography professor was showing students what we were seeing as far as landforms and the cultural geography of the area and everything. It was really a wonderful trip.

But my mom and dad both...one thing I'd say about both of them is that they were always so encouraging. When you would get despondent about something, they would encourage you of if you did something, it was like the greatest thing anybody'd ever done. Whether it was artwork or something you'd written or something.

There was another thing that happened when I was like about 12 or so, that was I joined the Boy Scouts of America. I had a scout master named Charles Piper, or Charlie Piper. He was really a wonderful guy. He cared so much about all of the boys. We were like family to him. I learned a lot in Boy Scouts. We went on a lot of campouts. Some of them were [laughter] a little bit rough as far as weather; and everything else and how Boy Scouts tend to make mistakes around the fireplace, cooking and all those kinds of things. I learned a lot of outdoor skills with the Boy Scouts. My dad went along on several trips. We went down to Pinnacles National Monument, I remember, and dad went along. There was one Scout camp we went to a couple times that was right above the city of Kensington in the hills. When you were in the camp you wouldn't know there was this gigantic metropolitan area on the other side of the hill. You just walked up a little ways up from where the campsites were up on the hill you could look over the entire San Francisco Bay, but down on the other side was pretty wooded. Not any wilderness by any means, but that was a fun place to go. I learned a lot and I think I as far as character-building also, the Scouts were really instrumental in helping keep me on the straight and narrow. Then also this next door neighbor, Mrs. Warner, Norma Warner, she used to give me Christmas gifts like a book or something. She worked with this, I think it was McMillan, McMillan Publishing in San Francisco.

TM: Okay. That makes sense.

BC: She one time said, "Well I've retired now and I don't have as much money. So I don't think I'm... This is going to be the last year I'm going to give you a Christmas gift." I thought, okay, that's fine. She said, "I'm going to give you a membership to the Sierra Club." So that's what she did is gave me a one-

year membership to the Sierra Club. That opened up a lot of outdoor opportunities and also opened up thinking about environmental things.

TM: Okay, Bob, hang on a second. I'm going to jump in and go back to the Scouts for a minute. Did you get an Eagle...an Eagle Scout?

BC: Yes, I advanced through the ranks and eventually became Eagle. My dad... I always remember, I think it was when I was trying to get my First Class badge, I got so upset because I didn't quite understand all this first-aid stuff. I said, "I don't want to be in the Boy Scouts. I want to drop out of the Boy Scouts!" My dad set me down in the living room and talked and talked and talked and convinced me that this is just a bump in the road. "You'll understand it. Mr. Piper will help you understand it and you'll do fine." So he encouraged me in that way to remain with the Boy Scouts.

TM: So in those days, I think the Scouts required a lot of projects. You had to do first-aid and a number of other things, but there was also a service component/a project component. What did you do for that? Do you remember?

BC: I think... You know it's been so long ago, you'd think it would be...

TM: Well, it was only 50 years ago! [laughter] No, 55 something like that.

BC: I think I did stuff with the American Cancer Association. I don't know if it was so much a works project as a volunteer help project with them. Everything from stuffing envelopes to...that type of thing. I don't remember anything more specific than that.

TM: A community service project, in a way.

BC: It was more a community service type thing that I did, yes, that is correct.

TM: Nice. Okay so now let's jump back again to the Sierra Club when Mrs. Warner gave you that 1-year Sierra Club membership. Do you remember how old you were? Roughly would you have been 15-16?

BC: Yeah, I'm gonna say around 15...14-15, probably 15. Because later on...then I started doing activities with the Sierra Club. What I did was... Of course, you get the monthly magazine and that was very influential on me because there were a lot of things going on at that time in the 60s. There were the Redwood trees, they were worried about them being clearcut in northern California; there was the flooding of Glen Canyon; there was the potential flooding of Dinosaur; so on and so forth. All of these things going on.

TM: Certainly, Marble Canyon would've been the dam at the time.

BC: Marble Canyon and all of that, all those different types of dams. That was all on the forefront so I became very active in that sort of thing. I even wrote letters and things when I was a kid. I know I supported very strongly the East Bay Regional Park District when they tried to get a bond, I guess it would be bonds or something, to develop these areas. Not develop them, but to preserve these areas around for the people in the Bay Area, for their regional park systems.

TM: And did you go on outings?

BC: Yes, I went on a lot of outings with them. I started hiking. Right at first I'd go on the 5-mile hikes. Pretty soon that just wasn't enough, I had to go on longer and longer hikes. Five miles didn't seem like enough but I went all over the place. I went all over Mount Tamalpais, the Dipsea Trail over in Marin County. Used to go from Mill Valley to Muir Woods then out to the ocean and back. That was a pretty common hike. Went down to Big Basin several times in Santa Cruz County. Mount Diablo, went on Mount Diablo a of couple times. Went up to a place, I can't remember exactly where it was. It was either in Sonoma or Napa County that was very cool called Devil's Hole Falls. It was in a lava area so it must have been around Mount Saint Helena or something like that.

TM: I'm going to just lob a far one to you to see if you catch this. Vicky Hoover? Does that ring a bell?

BC: No.

TM: Still in the Sierra Club today, in her 70s. She would've been in the Club at that time. She just took this long history with the Club so I just wanted to throw that out there.

BC: No, I don't recognize that name.

TM: Okay. No worries.

BC: Then I took an overnight. There was a guy named Denny Reeves. R-E-E-V-E-S. He lived in Lafayette and I just happened to meet him on one of these outings. I asked him if he would be willing to drive me around to these various places. So we would coordinate. He was quite a bit...he had kids and everything, young kids. He was my transportation to a lot of these things rather than my parents because I was too young to drive at the time.

TM: Oh great. And he lived in Walnut Creek? He lived nearby?

BC: He lived in Lafayette which is just adjacent to Walnut Creek. So my mom would drive me over to his place and then he would go from there. One of the trips we took was up to Yosemite. We went to Illilouette Falls. We came off of Glacier Point down to Illilouette Falls, went up Illilouette Creek and back. That was at least an overnight, might have been 3 nights. That was a lot of fun and I remember experiencing creek levels coming up. During the day you don't expect that, you know. On the way back the creeks were higher than when we had...with spring run-off...gone in with.

TM: Was that your first time backpacking or had you done some actual backpacking where you had to load up a pack and carry it on your back? Had you done that with the Boy Scouts?

BC: Did that with the Boy Scouts a little bit, yeah. But most of it was... I don't remember any long backpacks. They were pretty short duration with the Boy Scouts. Probably the biggest adventure I had was about 15/15½. I begged my mom to go through Glen Canyon before the dam was...before they closed the gates of the dam.

TM: Which was 1963.

BC: Yeah, this was 63. She didn't want to... That was the year of the trip, was 1963, so that made me 15. She didn't really want me to go because we'd seen... I searched for adventure and all these TV shows

and people crashing in rafts and going up the Salmon River and all these huge rapids and stuff. But she agreed to go over to Berkeley where there was a guy named I think it was Lou Elliot. He was the owner of American River Tours. They were the ones that were offering this trip.

TM: Yeah! Lou actually was the outings director for the Sierra Club before he started American...

BC: Okay, that's what the connection is then. So we went over to Lou's office in Berkeley. He settled my mom's nerves and told her that there really weren't any rapids in Glen Canyon.

TM: Cool.

BC: That basically it was a quiet float but there were all these beautiful things to see obviously. So I sort of went along as a swamper. What I did was we found another family friend, actually one of my mom's teacher acquaintances. Her son went along with me. I guess that was what my mom decided. I could go if she could have somebody else go along with me [laughter]. So anyway we... I'm trying to think of his name now, I'll probably think of it later in the conversation here.

TM: So hang on a second. Let's back up a minute. You went to visit Lou, but at that time Lou Elliot, was he in capacity with outings with the Club or was he by then doing American Touring or was American Touring providing the trip for the Club? Do you remember those details?

BC: I don't know his association with the Sierra Club. I know that his American River Tours were providing the trip through the Canyon. I don't know if he was still associated with the Sierra Club or not. I really don't know that.

TM: No worries.

BC: What we did is they had this old stake-bed 1940 vintage truck and we met him over in Berkeley. I had all my personal gear and... Chuck Watson was the kid's name. His mom's name was Joan and he was going along with me. We got in this old truck and we headed for Sacramento. It was really a great adventure. We had dinner there in Sacramento and then we went over to... I guess, we hit Davis before we went there because we to pick up somebody else that was going along as a boatman. And then when we headed... You know, it was kind of like a marathon, I mean they never stopped. The only time they stopped was to change drivers. We drove...

TM: Through the night?

BC: ...down through the...trying to think, the San Rafael Swell there and down. I mean, it was just a terrible rough, rough road past Capital Reef and we ended up at Hite.

TM: Right, so you guys would've come in off the north. From San Francisco, you went to Sacramento, you would've gone up over the...

BC: Went through Richfield, that way. Richfield, Utah.

TM: Yeah, but before you got to Richfield you would've gone up over the Donner Pass, is that right?

BC: Uh huh.

TM: And then down to Reno and then further off toward Utah, Salt Lake, and then down that way? How'd that quite work?

BC: Yeah, you got me. I don't know [laughter].

TM: Okay, well we're not going to stress that [laughter].

BC: It was probably Highway 50 or 40, I don't know which one we were on.

TM: Okay, okay. Then this must've been...let's back up a minute. Was this your first time east of the Sierras? Had you traveled off into the deserts at all? It sounds like there's a lot of traveling in California with the Audubon, in sort of local areas with the Sierra Club. Then up into the Sierras some. But was this your first time east?

BC: Yeah, it pretty much was. My parents having grown up in Oklahoma, we made a couple of trips to Oklahoma across Arizona and New Mexico that way and looping back through Utah. So I been through Utah on the main roads and everything. The salt flats and all that stuff but this was the first big adventure. Probably the first time I really was away from home for any real length of time. We were gone like a week. This trip was probably life changing. There were a lot of people on the trip that were... There was Edgar Wayburn, who was the...I think he was president of the Sierra Club. David Brower was on the trip, the Executive Director of the Sierra Club, and a whole bunch of other people that I'm sure were well-known in environmental circles and others, but I don't really remember any of their names besides those two people.

TM: Did you have a camera?

BC: I had a camera. I had an 8-millimeter Kodak Brownie camera. I also had a 35-millimeter camera. I don't know, I didn't take that many pictures with my 35-millimeter for some reason. Or maybe I didn't have one at all. I'm trying to remember now. Let me see...I'm wondering if we...because I know I had some pictures, some still pictures that I took of some canyon walls and some redbud trees and things like that. But I don't have a lot of pictures. I'm wondering if I didn't have a print made from the 8-millimeter film.

TM: Do you still have those films?

BC: I do. I don't know where they're at. I've been looking for them [laughter] for a couple of years. I cannot find...I know I've got it. I know I haven't thrown it away. Somewhere I've got this film of Glen Canyon. It's pretty interesting.

TM: Keep looking [laughter].

BC: You didn't have the...yeah...you didn't have the automatic focusing that you have now and light adaption to the camera. So some of the pictures are kind of dark, some of them are too light, some of them are perfect. You know how that goes. We got to Hite really early in the morning. I mean, it must've been 1 or 2 o'clock. There was some kind of little structure there, a little house that was abandoned. Had a concrete floor. I remember laying on that...sleeping on that concrete floor. Then in the morning we got up and we had to pump the boats up, and we pumped and pumped and pumped. I think we

pumped them up the night before...no, we hadn't, it was too late. We pumped them up in the morning. But then by the time the rest of the group was coming, they were coming across the ferry at Hite, the cable ferry there, we had to pump them up again because they had lost air. We had to patch the boats and all that stuff. So by late afternoon we took off. We went down as far as White Canyon, so we didn't go very far, and set up camp. I remember the first night out I was running around on the sand dunes barefoot and I got a stick stuck in my foot.

TM: Yeah, ouch.

BC: There we go, I've got my first injury of the trip. I was able to dig it out with my knife and everything, but it kind of bothered me the rest of the trip. We went from there down the next morning downriver, and I'm not quite sure where we stayed the second night. I think it was Music Temple. We went down... That's quite a ways downriver though, so that's probably too far. There was probably a stop in between there and Music Temple because you got the San Juan River and the Escalante and all that.

TM: Do you remember Tapestry Wall or Klondike Bar? There would've been some...like a wooden structure on river left. The Stanton Dredge, big metal buckets...

BC: Yeah, I don't remember all that. Moqui Canyon, yeah, that's where we stayed at Moqui Canyon the next night, I think. 'Cause a lot of people walked up to the...

TM: To the ruins up there?

BC: ...walked up and saw Indian ruins. Then we went down. The next day was Music Temple and we went to... There was another place across and upstream from that. Hidden Passage, I think it was called.

TM: Yep, sure.

BC: Okay, Hidden Passage. I remember going up there and hiking a ways up into Hidden Passage. Then a group of people went further up and I turned around and went back over... They took us back over across the river to Music Temple. That was really an amazing place. I remember going in and seeing what I thought was graffiti on the wall there.

TM: [laughter]

BC: It actually says "JW Powell, 1869" or something like that.

TM: Dellenbaugh, yeah!

BC: All these names. We spent the evening in there. People singing, just an amazing, absolutely amazing place. A few people sounded like a choir in some European chapel, you know. It just was unbelievable. Then we went from there downriver. Kind of vague as to where we...if we had two more nights or just one more night.

TM: Did you hike up to Rainbow Bridge?

BC: Okay, that's where we stayed [laughter]. Yeah, you reminded me. We did hike the Rainbow Bridge.

TM: You with you stick in your foot, hobbling along?

BC: Oh, yeah, I wasn't that bad.

TM: Okay good.

BC: It was quite a ways.

TM: Yeah, yeah.

BC: It was like 7 miles up there and back. We hiked up there and I remember when you came around that corner and you saw that bridge and you were down below. You weren't up at what is now lake level of Lake Powell. You're down below looking up at the bridge. It was just breathtaking to see that for the first time. Spent time under the bridge.

TM: Did you hike up to the top of the bridge?

BC: No we didn't have time to do anything like that. But we did hike back. Oh, I know another guy that was on this trip. Elliot Porter was his name. He was a famous photographer and contributor to their format book series. *The Place That No One Knew* is all his photographs. I remember on the way to the bridge, walking by and he's got this tripod and a camera set up and he's just waiting there, waiting for just the right light to take these pictures. It was amazing. I have that book here in my collection in Montrose where I live. I sure wish I could've had him sign it.

TM: Yeah, do you remember at the bottom of the bridge there was a register. A fairly large register book. Now that all... By 1960 or 61, the register was becoming a place for people to express their anger about the construction of Glen Canyon Dam and so the whole register was taken away. But I just wondered did you guys sign...do you remember signing a register at all there?

BC: No, I don't remember doing that. But probably did, you know, but I don't remember.

TM: All right.

BC: You know, later on in my career, after I left Grand Canyon, I went to Dinosaur and then from Dinosaur I went to Glen Canyon. Then from Glen Canyon I moved up here to the Curecanti/Black Canyon area where I ended my career. I sort of didn't want to go back to Glen Canyon because I knew what had been lost, but I did it for – like so many Park Rangers – for career enhancements and needs, you know. We still had a register of sorts up there at Rainbow Bridge at that time. I can't remember if it was...what its location was. I think maybe it was up on the boundary where you came in to the Park from the other side, from the Navajo Mountain side. But I do recall all of these notes on there. "Flood the bridge," "Don't flood the bridge," "Knock the bridge down." All this back-and-forth political garbage that people were still expressing themselves even in the 1970s there.

TM: Yeah, okay, okay. Let's go back to that trip. Elliot Porter's there, David Brower's there. I'm assuming that the campfire talk would have been talking about the environmental issues of the day. Do you remember those discussions at all? Do you remember... I mean, listen as a 16-year-old kid there's a lot of stuff happening. It's a gorgeous country, it's a fun river, there's water, there's mud, there's sand, there's hiking. I'm just trying to wonder...

BC: Yeah, I think I probably didn't get as involved in that stuff, but I do remember some of the issues that they talked about. One of them was that there was alternative means of power generation other than putting Glen Canyon Dam online. At that time David Brower was talking about the potential of coal and other types of energy sources. Of course, it's kind of ironic that they would talk about that I guess now 'cause they supported it one time and then opposed it the next. But that said, they were looking for other alternative energy supplies. I remember those discussions. They were talking about that a lot on the trip.

TM: That actually came to pass with the construction of the Navajo Generating Station at Page...

BC: That's right.

TM:...in lieu of Marble Canyon Dam.

BC: That's right.

TM: Those are definitely... And of course the generating plant, the coal fired plant, generates way more electricity than the dam does. Neat, so they were talking about that.

BC: Yeah, they were definitely talking about that sort of thing and they had won the battle at Dinosaur. Saved Dinosaur. I remember they talked about that some. They held out hope that they might be able to keep them from closing the gates of the dam because it was just literally weeks away or days away that they were getting ready to... There was a little bit of impoundment taking place as we got in the lower stretches there as we reached toward Wahweap and that area.

TM: So at that point they were taking river trips out at a place called Cane Creek, do you remember that at all?

BC: Yes, uh huh. It was some place other than Wahweap and all that. I remember we had a long dusty drive back to Page...

TM: Yep, yep.

BC: ...where I got the bus and went home.

TM: Do you remember the names of anybody else on the trip? Do you remember who the boatmen were or any of the passengers besides who've you already told me?

BC: One of the boatmen was Lou Elliot's son. I think it was Bob Elliot, I think his name was. But I'm not a hundred percent sure on that but I think his name... He was the one who was actually... Lou Elliot wasn't on the trip, but I think his son Bob was. And then there was another boatman that I just can't remember...I do not remember his name. I was more into the scenery and the hiking and having fun than the social aspect of it and learning everybody's name.

TM: Okay.

BC: We later, after the trip was over I guess it was a month or two later, we got invited to David Brower's house in Berkeley. Everybody from the trip went to his home and showed pictures. I showed my movie and everything. It was a really fun time. My parents got to go with me, they enjoyed doing that.

TM: Nice, so they had a chance to see the adventure they sent you out on.

BC: That's right. That's right, yeah. And the people that I was with.

TM: Were you thinking about college at this time?

BC: Yes, I had thought about... I guess you think about college, but I was really... I'm not sure if it was in my plans where I absolutely, positively had to do it. Certainly my mom, who was a graduate of the... She eventually got a master's degree from the University of California and had all of her work done to get her PhD but she decided to not pursue that. One of the reasons that she got so discouraged in the public school system at the time, the glass ceiling and all, she just could not... Here she had a higher...was more educated than the principals and some of the other teachers and yet she couldn't get a principalship, which she probably wanted at the schools or anything. So she had decided not to do that.

TM: Wow. Interesting. Think about that. You do think about women being teachers but you don't think about them not being allowed to be principals. As you say glass ceiling. Do you think she saw that even if she'd gotten her PhD it wouldn't have helped her?

BC: That's what she felt. Why do it. Why hit my head against the wall? But she really encouraged me, and my dad, too, to go to college. My dad said he used to...all through life... My dad was not totally illiterate, but he could not read well. I don't know if he had maybe dyslexia or something or whether he just could not read. But he always would say, "With my drive, if I just had an education I could do anything." So he encouraged both myself and my brother to get a good education. Because he wasn't...my dad was not stupid by any means. He was a very smart guy. He was sort of a... This I learned from him, he was sort of a jack of all trades. It always seemed, like me when I was a kid, that he could fix anything. Mechanically he was really adept but he had trouble both reading and writing. He would pull little tricks like forget to bring his glasses to the dinner and have my mom read the menu to him and stuff like that. But both of them encouraged me to go to college. I applied...

During my senior year in high school, I did a project on Coulter pine trees. Coulter pine looks a lot like a Ponderosa, has real dark green, long leaves and has the heaviest of all pine cones. In fact, I've still got two of them in my bedroom here that I got 50 years ago from this little grove of Coulter pines I worked on. I worked on Mount Diablo. On the northeast side of Mount Diablo is this little grove. It's the most northern grove of Coulter pines. They're not rare, but they're not real common. They extend down the coast mountains of California into Southern California and I think into Upper Baja and that area. So I did this study and I went to... I got like a science award and went down to... They had a science fair at Stanford University and I went down there. I didn't win any of their awards, but I did get to participate and present my project and stuff. Basically I was trying to determine... I was taking core samples. I borrowed a corer from the University of California, their forestry department. I cored a lot of these trees to see how old they were. I was comparing them to the bigger pine that they were associated with trying to see if maybe there was any evidence that they were being replaced or in stress or distress or those types of things. It was a fun project. I had a lot of trouble getting people to go out and help me. I'd get my high school buddies to try to go out. It was like pulling teeth but I got some help to go out and do

this project. So when it got time to apply to college I applied at two places. One was Stanford University and the other was the University of California-Berkeley. I got accepted at Berkeley. I did not get accepted at Stanford, but I did get accepted at Berkeley. I remember going over and having to... You had to write an essay. They had you come over to Wheeler Auditorium there and write this essay. If you did a good job on your essay then you could go right into an English class or whatever. If you didn't then you had to take what they called "boneheading" or Subject A. Well, I had to take Subject A and ended up having to have this remedial English course before I could take any other speech or English classes at Cal.

TM: What were you thinking at that time you wanted to major in? Or were you just thinking let me just take some courses and see where this goes.

BC: I was majoring in Forestry. I wanted to major in Forestry. So I took all these classes for Forestry and then in the... Between my sophomore and junior year you were required to go up to a summer camp in Quincey, California, northeast California. That was kind of pre-requisite. The things that you learned and studied up there were pre-requisite to what you were going to do in your junior/senior year. So I went up there and I got ill, the first...about the second week I was there. I've always had bad allergies. I tell people anything with fur or pollen I'm allergic to.

TM: That's a hard road for a Forester.

BC: [laughter] It was. I got pretty sick and I had to leave the camp. I was devastated so I didn't know what to do. I got back to Cal and I got to looking at all the different majors and what I'd taken for my first two years. I settled on geography and then also biology. Those were the two. That's what I worked on. It was really a pretty good major to get into. I took, because the department was pretty small, a lot of graduate classes and stuff. A lot of graduate students in classes with me. So from that standpoint it ended up being a pretty good education. I graduated on... I had to go one extra quarter. In fact, I worked at Grand Canyon my first season and then I had to go back to Cal. My last quarter was the fall of '69 so then I graduated. I infamously graduated with the class of '70, would have been the class of '70 in the fall, but they had riots at Cal. It was the only graduation ceremony in the University's history they cancelled. So I've never actually walked with my class 'cause the same thing happened with me in high school. Not the same thing but something similar. I graduated from Pleasant Hill high school in 1965. I had put in for a National Science Foundation scholarship. I had a really good biology teacher named Enid Larsen, E-N-I-D Larsen with an E, I think. She encouraged me, based on this project I did with the Coulter pines and other things I had done in her biology class, to apply for this scholarship. So I did. At first I didn't I hear from them, so I wrote them a second letter. They did respond to the second letter and I got this little scholarship. It was for a summer near Ward, Colorado which is with the University of Colorado. It's about 30 miles from Boulder.

TM: Yeah! Ward is about 9,000-8,000 feet.

BC: Yeah, pretty high.

TM: On the east slope facing basically west of Boulder.

BC: North of Nederland and west of Boulder.

TM: Yeah. South of Rocky Mountain National Park.

BC: This is at the...it was called the Institute of Alpine and Arctic Research. So this was a really interesting summer. We had glaciologists and botanists. All kinds of people came and gave different programs and stuff and we went on field trips. We went to Mesa Verde and went all over the Park there. That was really fascinating. We took two days. Went out on the Ute Reservation. Saw a lot of their ruins out there. We had another fieldtrip, we went down to the Great Sand Dunes and then [beep] we made little local trips. Went up Mount Evans and a few other places like that.

TM: I was going to say did you climb up Long's Peak? Some of the other... Brainard Lake is up there. There's a [beep] bunch of interesting stuff up there above treeline to walk around.

BC: No I didn't. I hiked... I took I know one big backpack trip where we went down and over to the headwaters of the South St. Vrain River. Most of my other... They had these little they were insulated like trailers. Insulated from the lightening. They had these at different locations. So several times I got permission, went up and sort of camped out the night up in these things. One was at 11,300, one was at 10,300 and one was at 9700 feet I think. One reason you don't do things is you don't have much money [laughter].

TM: Yeah.

BC: So that was one reason I didn't do a lot of backpacking out and away from the lodge area. Plus getting transportation, I didn't have a car. In fact, that created a real interesting scenario. I had an aunt, great aunt, that lived in Longmont, Colorado, which is north of Boulder, north and east of Boulder. I decided I was going to go see this great aunt. Her name was Aunt Maude, M-A-U-D-E, and she was my grandmother's sister. My grandmother was...

TM: On your father's side or on your mother's side?

BC: My mother's side. ...was of Cherokee heritage. She was half Cherokee. So this was her sister. Her maiden name was Maude Sixkiller. My grandmother was Mary Ann Sixkiller. So I decided I was going to go see her. I asked around camp on Friday and no one was going in. There was one professor there that I really liked and I thought he... His name was Harold Lutz. L-U-T-Z, he was from Yale University. He was a forester. I went to him and I was hoping he would give me a ride into Boulder but he wouldn't. He couldn't, not wouldn't but couldn't. Then there was this group of maintenance guys. Well, I had driven up the mountain with them and they drove like maniacs so I was not going to get back in the car with them and go down to Boulder. So I decided to walk. They had me in a little a cabin in the woods with this guy and I didn't tell him what I was doing. I just said, "Well, I'm going to take off for a couple days," and out the door I went. I walked all night. Took me all night to walk from the lodge to Boulder. I got in there. As I was just...

TM: Wow. Down 9-mile Canyon or something like that. It's a long walk.

BC: [laughter] ...getting in to Boulder... It is. I got down near the bus station and I saw the silhouette of the mountains. It was starting to get daylight and I thought, "I'm not going to make it to the bus in time." I just kept walking and I got there about 15 minutes before the bus left at 7 o'clock in the morning. Got on the bus, of course was exhausted, got up to Longmont. My aunt picked me up, I guess I walked to her house. Spent the weekend with her and got to know her a little bit. Then my cousins, I had some cousins in Denver, they drove up and drove me back up to the lodge.

TM: Thank heavens!

BC: Yeah, it was quite an adventure for me. Especially at night, you know, you'd be going along and dogs would be barking and stuff and people would be switching their porchlights on wondering who's out there on the highway. But yeah, I did some pretty crazy stuff when I was younger.

TM: Nice, very nice. So looking at the clock here we've been yik-yaking for about an hour and twenty minutes. Maybe this is a good place to wrap up a Part 1 interview.

BC: Sure.

TM: And then in Part 2 we can pick up more with your schooling and then head off from there. Do you have anything you want to add to this before we wrap this interview up?

BC: Well, not that comes to mind that's that important.

TM: Okay.

BC: [laughter] Appreciate you calling. It's an honor to be able to talk to you.

TM: No worries! Hold the line for a minute. I'm just going to voice this out. This is the first part of a Grand Canyon Oral History Interview with Bob Wheeler. Today is Monday, it's May 28, 2018. Hold the line for a minute, Bob.