

Transcription Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: David Huizingh (DH)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: David recollects his trips on the Salt River, Verde River, and the Grand Canyon in the early 1980s, followed by his experiences with the Salt, Grand Canyon, Dolores, and San Juan Rivers, as well as the formation of the Central Arizona Paddlers Club, in the late 1980s.

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TM: Today is Friday, March 27, 2020. This is Part Three of a Grand Canyon Oral History interview with David Huizingh (DH). My name is Tom Martin (TM). Good afternoon, Dave. How are you today?

DH: Good, Tom. How are you?

TM: Good. Thank you so very much for continuing on this interview. May we have your permission to record this interview over the phone?

DH: You may.

TM: Thank you. At the end of Part Two, you had started to outline your river running in the first half of the 1980s, sort of '81 to '86. Can you pick that thread up—I think 1981?

DH: Yeah. Yeah. I'm going to segue from the tail-end of last previous, in terms of circumstances, which involved our having been out of the country on a lengthy business trip that caused me to miss the entire river running season of 1980. So [laughs] I was antsy to get into it and start making some new friends and running some rivers. So 1981 was really the first year that I had—where I had pretty much a free and an open calendar, and I was able to do a couple of Salt trips and also my first trip rowing the Grand Canyon.

TM: So the '81 Salt trip, was that the first time you rowed the Salt yourself, then? Or were you a passenger then, as well?

DH: No, I would have rowed it. I had bought the used Miwok from a fellow named Tom Scott who was a participant in a trip earlier in 1978, my first time down.

TM: Okay.

DH: And that was the one that I outfitted with the help of my friend Pat McCormick with a wooden rowing frame and some oars and what the one I—it was basically my starter boat for all trips that I did initially, including, first, the trips down the Salt.

TM: And, now that I look back, had a look at my notes, I think you discussed that Salt trip with Pat and Randy. Randy was on that trip.

DH: He was. He was the trip leader. He was the one who invited me. I had—he had—it was my first entrée to world of private boating and running rivers, having done a couple commercial trips but not really had an opportunity to do any private trips, and Randy provided that entrée and gave me the invitation on that very first trip that got me started.

TM: Okay. And we also talked about that 1981 Grand Canyon trip with Dan Dierker and Pete Bolton.

DH: Actually, that was the Salt trip in '78 and the Middle Fork trip, also in '78—

TM: Okay.

DH: —that those guys were both on.

TM: Okay.

DH: And, actually, I don't remember if Pete was on that first Salt trip. He was definitely on the first Middle Fork trip, though. But, yeah, he would have come along on the Colorado. I'm not absolutely certain whether Dan Dierker was on that 1981 Colorado trip. Pete Bolton would have been, but not—I don't—Dan may not have been on that one.

TM: Okay. Well, let's talk about that 1981 Grand Canyon trip. No, I think we—I think we talked about that. Didn't we? Did we already cover that? I don't remember.

DH: You may have. It was my first opportunity to row a boat all the way through, and what I had was—Randy had organized that trip as well, and he offered me the use of his large Avon. It was an Avon Pro.

TM: That's right, 18-foot. Yeah.

DH: Yeah. Exactly. And, so—and it was kind of a quasi-gear boat and passenger boat, so [laughs] it was a learning experience, because—I was glad I had the extra size and weight, as it turns out.

TM: You guys were making long days, then, wasn't it?

DH: We did two long days. We did one day of 28 miles and another of—I think it was 31.

TM: Right.

DH: So, yeah, we didn't—the whole trip was done in about 13 days. Several other people involved in the trip for business-related reasons couldn't take more time off than that, so the commitment upfront was to make it a 13-day trip to accommodate those folks, and it turned out to be a challenge to catch up and stay on pace.

TM: Right. And I think we covered that ground.

DH: Okay.

TM: So I think we—from there, when was your first Verde trip?

DH: You know, I was going back through some notes and some old desk calendars that I have, looking for dates on some of those, and I still haven't come up with those. But, the Verde trips, there was one, for sure, in '82, and I think that was my first time on the Verde. And then there was another in '84. I haven't done a lot of trips on the Verde.

TM: Okay.

DH: I've only done one where we went all the way down to the Sheep Bridge takeout. The others were all launching at Beasley Flats and taking out at Childs.

TM: So was that—your '82—your first time was Beasley to Childs?

DH: No, it was all the way down to Sheep Bridge.

TM: Oh.

DH: Yeah [laughs].

TM: What do you remember about that trip?

DH: Oh, wow. Weather—it was, you know, pretty rainy and cold. It was the first time my trip—a trip—I think the first one I took where the lead boatman was—an organizer of the trip was a fellow named Jerry Van Gasse. Jerry was pretty helpful in my early days with making associations with friends that were involved in boating. He frequently had parties at his house for river runners and lived only about a mile and a half from me in Tempe at the time.

TM: Okay.

DH: So he was great in that respect. He, at the time, was involved with a fellow named Jerry Baldwin, the two Jerrys, and offering some kind of quasi-commercial trips on the Salt. And, anyway, he had organized this trip on the Verde as well and invited me to come along. So that was my first chance to run the Verde, and it was all the way through to Sheep Ridge.

TM: And did you row on that trip? Or were you a passenger? Do you remember?

DH: Really good question. Honestly, I'm not sure. I think I must have rowed—yeah, I'm sure I rowed it. Yeah, because I remember particular rapids. I remember the falls, first time I ran that. And there's another chute that comes around a bend into a drop. I forget the name of it. But, anyway, yeah, I would have rowed it for sure.

TM: And what kind of boat were you in? Do you remember?

DH: It would have been my first Miwok.

TM: Okay.

DH: Yeah, the old Miwok. It was a—oh, geez. I think it was a 1974-75 production year boat, so it was a fairly old boat already at that point.

TM: And 16, 15 feet long? Something like that?

DH: Fourteen.

TM: Okay.

DH: Not a self-bailer, of course, at that point.

TM: Okay.

DH: So, anyway. But, yeah, that was really interesting. I did more trips on the Salt. In fact, I was looking for multiple documented entries of trip dates and whatnot in my desk logs, but they only began at 1985. So the earlier ones on the Salt, I don't have dates for right offhand. But there would have been two or three per year, probably, those first several years.

TM: What do you remember about those early Salt trips?

DH: Say again?

TM: What do you remember about those early Salt trips in the early '80s?

DH: Oh, just—I don't know, just that it was mind-boggling, and it was such a spectacular getaway and such a scenic variety as you traverse the Canyon and, of course, the excitement of dealing with the gut-churning Quartzite Falls when you got to that point—

TM: Right.

DH: —which was something that I hadn't really experienced in the same way on other trips up until that point, the potential lethality of it. I mean, even as compared to the rapids in the Grand Canyon, with all due respect, that one always kind of worked on your mind a little bit in the day or so until you came up to it and then, once you were committed to trying to make the eddy on the side and hoping, you know, you were able to do that. There weren't too many other folks there.

TM: Right. Right.

DH: So, yeah, that was the early days of dealing with Quartzite in a less forgiving way than is possible now.

TM: So you mentioned the first trip you did on the Salt, the weather was bad, didn't sound like you saw anyone else. On your subsequent trips through the Salt in the early 1980s, did you begin to see more people there?

DH: You know, I don't recall seeing many other groups. I would think we would—we would see groups at the launch sometimes.

TM: Okay.

DH: But we kept pretty good distance between ourselves and, you know, didn't have—there were so few groups running early on in my experience there that it wasn't usually much of an issue to be able to, you know, find a campsite separate from others. There were minimal conflicts in that respect—pretty good separation between groups. So, even though you might see other groups at launch, it wasn't all that often that you'd see other groups as you went downriver.

TM: Okay.

DH: Except at Quartzite [laughs]. And there, you were pretty much guaranteed to see other groups.

TM: [laughs] Just because it would take you so long to de-rig the boats and get the boats assembled past the falls?

DH: Yeah. The early trips, we portaged and then, later on, we got better at lining the boats. And, when the line on the right was open, there weren't other groups there, we would typically line our boats down on the right side, except for one memorable trip when we tried to line it on the left with an unhappy ending—for my boat, anyway.

TM: Yes, that's right. You've covered that. But it's really fascinating because portaging or lining was a tool that was used a lot in the early days of river running.

DH: Right.

TM: Did you think that that was a viable tool in your toolbox in the early '80s?

DH: Yeah, lining much more so. I mean, it was a challenge to do the portaging. In fact, sometimes we would time our trips where we knew we were going to portage so that we would just camp. I've camped in that sandy-floored slot in the cliff there on the left side, adjacent to Quartzite.

TM: Okay.

DH: On a couple of occasions, we would de-rig, take—carry some of the gear through, set up camp, and just spend the night right there, and finish up, get a start in the morning, and go on downriver.

TM: What a good idea.

DH: And it was nice because—this goes along with there not having been as many people coming through at that point. We would, you know, tend to arrive late enough in the day that we were pretty confident that any other groups that were going past Quartzite that day will have already be gone. And that worked out on a couple of occasions when we did that so that we pretty much had that space to ourselves on those times.

TM: Nice. And you weren't worried about the river coming up and catching you?

DH: No, not really. I mean, it would have had to have been really pretty high to—

TM: Okay.

DH: —to have gotten up into that little gully there, that sandy area that you had to traverse to—because, in the process of carrying the gear up to that slot, you know, you had to do a bit of a climb. You were well above river level when you were up in there.

TM: Got it.

DH: And, of course, I had to lug the gear back down on the other side, which was a little trickier.

TM: Yes.

DH: Yeah. So, yeah, indeed.

TM: Okay. Fun.

DH: It was all good. It was a great time. Nothing like being lulled to sleep by the sound of river rapids.

TM: [laughs] Of Quartzite Falls.

DH: Yeah. Totally.

TM: Yeah.

DH: It was pretty amazing.

TM: Okay. You mentioned, in 1984, you went up and ran the Middle Fork.

DH: We did.

TM: What was that like?

DH: Oh, spectacular. That was my second Middle Fork trip. The first one was in '78, that same first year that I did the Salt with Randy. And it was spectacular. It was—you know, I had good memories of it from the 1978 trip, which did include Dan Dierker. And, so, we were really looking forward to going back. The people in the '84 trip were many of the same that had been on the '78 trip, but it included a few new folks. And, by then, I think I was still using—no, you know what? I think I had traded up to a different boat at that point, for that trip. I subsequently had bought another Miwok, a little newer one from another fellow that I had met, and I believe I was using that by that point. But it was also not a self-bailer.

TM: Okay.

DH: No, it was spectacular. It's—you know, it's just one of my favorite places to boat. It's so beautiful up there.

TM: Was it high water? Was it low water? Do you remember what time of year?

DH: It was—I recall it being middling. It was—I—it was definitely not really low. It was also not extremely pushy and high.

TM: Okay.

DH: It was pretty ideal. I don't remember where it was on the gauge on that trip, but it was kind of a medium level, as I recall it.

TM: Nice.

DH: Yeah. It was a good time.

TM: Do you remember anything specifically about that trip that still reminds you today about it?

DH: Oh, yeah. It was my first time rowing it.

TM: Okay.

DH: On that earlier trip in '78, 6 years prior, I was along as the—well, let's—what would it be? The boat boy [laughs], cabin boy for a fellow who had brought his boat and an older fellow named Jim Calvert, who was a salesman for IBM and had had some issues with his back in the early days, fused spine. So he

had a hard time moving the boat, but I was not always invited to row his boat, and in fact, I had few opportunities. So hadn't had a lot of experience rowing the Middle Fork. So in '84, when I had my own boat and went back up with that group, it was really my first time to row the whole thing.

TM: And did you have your boat pretty heavily laden? Were you—

DH: No.

TM: Did you have passengers? Or was it just you and some gear and...?

DH: No, no. It was kind of a typical gear load. You know, there were—there would have been probably two passengers. And the frames themselves were pretty heavy because—I think I may have mentioned I worked with a fellow named Pat McCormick, who I boated with a lot early days, who had a cabinet shop, and we put together some wood frames in his shop that were using some hardwoods like some mahogany and... I forget what the cross-members were, but it was pretty heavy frames.

TM: Okay.

DH: So there was that plus just the normal gear load, a poop deck in back with the soft gear and some animal boxes on the floor—usual arrangement would have been two passengers up front.

TM: So that's a heavy load. It wasn't a sport boat you were driving. It was a—

DH: Oh, no. No.

TM: It was a heavier—

DH: No, it was just most of my—a large proportion of my experiences are the oar boats, carrying that tippie kind of a load.

TM: Okay. Okay. And Rainie Falls—I'm just trying to remember sort of what some of the—no, not Rainie, I'm sorry. That's on the Rogue.

DH: Yep.

TM: I'm trying to remember some of the rapids on the Middle Fork.

DH: Clavey—not—it's not—Rainie's on the Rogue. Clavey's on the Tuolumne. [laughs] Have to check by elimination here.

TM: [laughs] What are we—gee whiz!

DH: Oh, man. We're talking about the same one. I know we are. But the name is seriously—

TM: Yeah, it's the first rapid right up at—it looks like nothing. It's a horizon line. You got to take it right down the middle—

DH: Right. Right.

TM: —or you can kind of get level with either side and...

DH: Yeah, it's just—I think it's just after it starts to canyon up again, after you're past an area where there's like a ranch and airstrip and whatnot. And you come under across a pedestrian bridge-type thing,

and then a little ways down below that is where, as I recall it, is where this rapid comes up. Oh, this is bugging me.

TM: [laughs] Yeah, me too. I'm like, "Oh, what's the name of that rapid?" Well...

DH: Okay. But, yeah, no, I—and I—I don't recall—I'm trying to remember having had any difficulties with any of the runs. And, you know, with the experience I did have by then, I don't recall any problems on any of the runs all the way down. So it was just, all in all, a great trip—good experience, no problems anywhere along the way.

TM: Nice.

DH: Yeah, you can see why it's so popular too and why there's such high demand and a tough permit to get.

TM: Yeah. It's gorgeous, gorgeous river and just a gorgeous, you know, pine tree-covered country.

DH: Yup. And, you know, the hot springs were a little highlight too for me, because I don't—I think the only time I experienced—had prior experience with riverside hot springs was on the Verde across from Childs.

TM: Okay.

DH: And, so, that was kind of a really cool feature of the Middle Fork as well, of course.

TM: And... Just, just clear, clear water.

DH: Yeah. The beauty part, being able to look down and watch the floor of the channel just fly by underneath you, all the rocks.

TM: Right.

DH: Yeah, it really gave you a sense of speed and movement, and especially—the interesting thing too was the type of rapids and the average gradient of the river were not that different from the Salt, in my experience, is kind of the comparison I made.

TM: Oh, interesting.

DH: So the Salt was the ideal river on which to get some experience and train to prepare for something like the Middle Fork because of that similarity, I think.

TM: That makes sense.

DH: Yeah, it was good stuff—27 feet a mile. I think it's really close to that on average for the entire run on both.

TM: That makes sense. Did you see any river otters?

DH: No. You know, the only time I've seen an otter on the river was on the Verde, actually.

TM: Really? Nice.

DH: Yeah. That's my one and only time seeing an otter on the river. It was unexpected, but that was cool.

TM: Fun.

DH: Yep. Not really. Saw bighorns on the Middle Fork, but not too much else.

TM: Okay.

DH: Good stuff.

TM: And then—I mean, is this—are we rolling along—are there other Salt trips or Verde trips? Because I'm thinking of Grand Canyon trip in 1986.

DH: Yeah. There were numerous Salt trips, which—I don't have individual dates for them, but I would say that, in that 5-year span from '81 to '86, including the ones I did both of those years, I probably did 10 or 12 Salt trips.

TM: Okay.

DH: Yeah. I mean, it was—back in the day, when, you know, the beauty part was if the flow was there and the weather was decent and a few folks were free, you did it.

TM: Okay.

DH: It took minimal prep time, you know. Most of our gear was stored in common at one or another's places, and the people I knew who boated had a certain amount of flexibility. My friend Pat McCormick was self-employed.

TM: Okay.

DH: He was usually able to take off on short notice. Same was true of the other friends, so...

TM: And these were two-night trips, something like that?

DH: Two or three, yeah, just depending. But, yeah, yeah. And we would—I mean, it was all the way through too, from the highway bridge, just below the highway bridge all the way through to—well, actually, in the early days, we would pull out all the way around just above the top of the Diversion Dam—

TM: Okay.

DH: —below the 288 bridge and take out on river right at the base of the slope that took you up to the highway, the highway that would take you up into the Sierra Anchas, the Young highway. But then, subsequently, we more often took off on—took off the river on the left, just below the 288 bridge. And that area, of course, was subsequently developed with a ramp and a parking area, and that's now the main takeout for folks getting off the river there.

TM: Why did you make that change? Was it just too hairy to come up on the Diversion Dam and try to make the cut to get to shore there? Or was it—did it just make sense that there was a—it was a much better takeout?

DH: It was somewhat of a better takeout because the slope to carry the gear up was not as challenging as at the base of that slope leading up to the edge of the highway on river right, over on the Young highway there—

TM: Okay.

DH: —as I recall it. It was a little bit unnerving to [laughs] be floating around on slack current right above a horizon line, which you knew was a bad place to go take out.

TM: Yeah. Yeah.

DH: But, you know, it would—the reality of it was—I mean, unless it were really high flow, which we hadn't experienced at that takeout, it wasn't really pushy. I mean, it was easy enough to, you know, control the boat and get around that. It was more mettle than anything else.

TM: Sure. Yeah, that would make sense. So, as you did these trips, I mean you're getting into a dozen Salt trips. Did you start seeing the Salt in a different way than you had seen it on your first couple of trips?

DH: Oh, well, sure. I mean, at least in a couple of ways. One is, you know, just growing familiarity with it and therefore comfort in doing it, you know, tempered by the surprises that can always happen along with the variability from one flow level to another. It's always a learning experience, and you never want to take it for granted.

TM: Right.

DH: But, in spite of that, you know, over a period of time, you do—it becomes something—for me, it was something that I would look forward to, I think, more as a result of the acquired experience and feeling a little more comfortable about what to expect and how to deal it and that I would be able to. And, you know, confidence in myself as I got a little better at what I was doing, as well as familiarity with the river, so...

TM: Nice.

DH: It was a good synergy, and it really made that our go-to trip. I mean, every year, we always tried to get at least one in there.

TM: Nice. Okay. Did you—from '81 to '86, during that 5-year period, again, did you see more people? Was it becoming more popular?

DH: Oh, yeah.

TM: Okay.

DH: Yeah. And I think that was quite notable. And I think that... It's—you know, 6 years inclusive, '81 to '86, and I would say the last couple of years, at least, or maybe the last 3 years of those 6, it got progressively more noticeable that you were seeing folks come from out of state—

TM: Oh, okay.

DH: —to boat, as well as maybe more locals, and it was more likely that you would encounter folks. And that kind of goes along with—I think the Forest Service at that point was beginning to get more serious about developing their management plan for the river.

TM: Okay.

DH: And, so, that in turn led to—the awareness of that led to the interest in having private boaters represented in the process. And that all leads up to Roger Saba convening a group of boaters, which led to forming of the Central Arizona Paddlers Club and its role along with some other groups and people and participation and development of the management plan for the Salt and the implementation plan up there.

TM: Okay. And I definitely want to hear that story. I'm wondering if maybe we should talk about your 1986 Grand Canyon trip—

DH: Yeah. Sure. That's fine.

TM: —and your 1986 trip on the Salt with a bunch of kids.

DH: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

TM: So let's talk about those two trips, and then let's bring in Roger and the club.

DH: Sure. Sure. So '86, '86 was really kind of a pretty big year for me. I believe that—

TM: Hey, Dave.

DH: Yeah.

TM: I'm sorry. I'm going to jump right in here. I forgot. 1983—

DH: Oh, '83.

TM: —was a big-water year all across the west, not a record-breaking year, but just a good, solid, big-water year.

DH: Okay.

TM: Were you on the water in '83, and if so, where, and what do you remember about that?

DH: You know, I don't have a lot of notes about 1983. I'm sure I probably did at least one or two Salt trips that year. I have a note to myself that I did a Verde trip that year as well.

TM: Okay.

DH: Oh, I do remember running the Verde, the upper Verde, at about 7,000, so that was probably the 1983 Verde trip.

TM: Okay.

DH: And the falls were all but washed out. It was pretty incredible.

TM: Wow. Nice. Yeah.

DH: Yeah. Yeah. It was just—it was amazing. It was extremely pushy. We made that run from Beasley Flats to Childs in one day rather than doing an overnight, as we like to try to incorporate otherwise. That's about an 18-mile run, and we were off the river in, I think, 2 or 3 hours.

TM: Yes. That would make sense.

DH: Yeah. It was quite the run. I don't remember a high-water trip on the Salt that year offhand.

TM: Okay.

DH: It probably happened. But, at this point, I'd have to try to dredge around and see if I could come with some notes or...yeah. I don't have anything specific to offer on that for the Salt.

TM: Okay. I just wanted to jump back for a minute and capture that. All right. Sorry about that.

DH: Yeah. Yeah.

TM: Now we're going to move forward to '86.

DH: No, that's fine. So '86 was a pretty seminal year in a lot of ways. It was the year that, as I recall it, that Central Arizona Paddlers Club was founded, and I got involved in that and some issues related to river management on behalf of that group and, you know, new friendships and associations with other boating interests, including some budding commercial enterprises, some conservation groups, the folks up on Tonto National Forest Globe office. And it was just a really kind of a opportunity to really branch out and get involved in some other things than just straight boating.

TM: Okay. I'm sorry. Before we go into the paddling club—

DH: Oh, yeah.

TM: —which was a great introduction, let's finish off with the 1986 boating—

DH: Oh, yeah. Sure.

TM: —which was Grand Canyon and the kids, then.

DH: Yeah, you know—and I was looking back at my notes. I'm sure I had a Salt trip or two in that year, but I also did—I think this was in early May—I did a trip on the Dolores, which was pretty cool.

TM: Oh.

DH: It was the only time I've ever run the Dolores.

TM: In 1986?

DH: Yup.

TM: That's early on for the Dolores. That's great.

DH: Yeah, it was great. It was—that one I remember as being also really a cool trip, because there was the contrast of the Ponderosa's riverside and the grassy, you know, meadows and whatnot in a—basically, in a sandstone canyon, which was kind of new to my experience. So it was kind of like a hybrid

between, you know, the piney environment of the Middle Fork and a southwestern canyon with sandstone formations and whatnot, as I recall it, anyway. That was really enjoyable.

TM: And where did you put in on the Dolores? Where'd you take out? How'd you run that?

DH: There's a ranch. What's the name of it? It's—I think it's the place where most folks launch. It's... I forget the name of it.

TM: Down below the dam—below McPhee Dam there?

DH: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, definitely.

TM: Okay.

DH: Well, it was—let's see. It was... When did they build that dam? I think it might have been before that.

TM: Yeah, not long before that.

DH: Yeah. No, I think—I think—I can't remember if the dam was already in place at that point or not or when they completed that. It might have been. We might have been running on just runoff rather than dam release, but I don't recall for sure. But, anyway, yeah, no, that was a great trip. We took out—and there's always two that I confuse, Bedrock and Slick Rock—the upstream of those two [laughs]—

TM: Okay.

DH: —which is about—makes it about a 42- or 43-mile trip, I think.

TM: All right.

DH: And then there's—you can continue on down, and there's more of a sandstone canyon—

TM: Right.

DH: —with a takeout ultimately at...

TM: Dewey.

DH: Is that it?

TM: Yeah, on the Colorado.

DH: Yeah. I've not done—I've not done—well, there's a takeout before you get to the Colorado, I think, as well, before you get to state line.

TM: Okay.

DH: And—but, no, I hadn't gone below that first portion. Anyway, that was my one and only trip.

TM: All right.

DH: And we took out at—I'd have to look at the map. It's either Bedrock or Slick Rock, but—anyway.

TM: Who did you boat with? Do you remember?

DH: A group of friends from here, some of the usual suspects that I ran the Salt with. I don't recall that there was anybody from out there involved. It was—there was—I think there was one guy in the group who had been on it before, you know, gave us a little heads-up to be a little careful about Snaggletooth [laughs]—

TM: Good.

DH: —and then the rapid below that undercuts the cliff. I forget the name of that. But, yeah, it was fun. It was—you know. We scouted it, of course, and it was a good run. It was—I don't remember what the flow was, but it was not real low.

TM: Yeah, for May, would have been getting close to peak runoff somewhere.

DH: Yeah. Yeah. It was good. We had a great time.

TM: Nice.

DH: I've always wanted to go back up there, and I've often looked at availability of, you know, permits and flow and releases and all that, and it's just—when you consider the number of people that are all trying to get on the river at once when there's a small window of flow release, it just becomes a lot less interesting.

TM: Yeah. Yeah. Different.

DH: Anyway, so I never—

TM: And then you did Grand Canyon that year?

DH: I did, and that was a trip where I hiked in at Phantom Ranch and ran it from there on down, using the boat that another fellow had brought along. The guy whose boat I was using—what was it? It was a 15-foot boat, not a self-bailer. It was a prototype for one of the models that his company was going to be offering. The guy's name was Dick Dechant. And I'm trying to remember the name of his company. It was located in California. You know, it shouldn't be that hard to come up with that. But, yeah, hang on just a sec.

TM: Okay.

DH: Hyside.

TM: Okay.

DH: That was the name of his company, and he marketed a line of boats that were—I think they were made in Taiwan. But he had a new one that he was considering making one of his models and adding it to the line and—I'd like to say 15-foot, kind of typical configuration, typical tube diameter and kick in the front and back and material was pretty heavy-duty material. Actually, it was a heavy boat. It was not a self-bailer. So, anyway, I had that boat of his to jump on and take from Phantom Ranch on down.

TM: Okay. So, for the folks who don't know, when you join a trip at Phantom Ranch, the first third of the way through the Grand Canyon, within a mile and a half is a fairly energetic rapid called Horn Creek.

DH: Oh, yes.

TM: And, so, your warm-up is about a mile and a half long.

DH: [laughs] Yeah.

TM: [laughs] How'd that go?

DH: Yeah. And not long—and, of course, not far below that is Granite, so...

TM: Yeah, it just—it just gets—Granite and Hermit and Crystal, and then they're all just waiting down there, going, "Oh, somebody new at the oars."

DH: Yeah. Well, this was interesting, because this was a trip that had been organized by Jerry Van Gasse on behalf of Dick, who—he was friends with Dick, and I think he might have—I don't remember whose permit it actually was. But there were—this kind of goes along with the mode in which Jerry had operated some of his trips on the Salt in the past, where folks weren't—I mean, he wasn't making any money off of it, but he offered folks an opportunity to come along for the sake of participating and helping diffuse the trip cost in a way that wasn't always precisely proportionate to the number of people on the trip.

TM: Okay.

DH: So to speak. Anyway, there were—so there was this couple [laughs] that rode with me, who hopped on the boat with me after I got there. And they had been, of course, with Dick Dechant up until then. Dick's a very experienced boater. And, you know, I was getting better at it by that point. And I was doing fine all up until Hermit. That's where I experienced my very first flip ever, anywhere.

TM: Wow.

DH: Yeah. So it was good stuff. It was an exciting moment.

TM: That's a good rapid to flip in—

DH: Yeah [laughs].

TM: —if you're going to flip in a rapid.

DH: Absolutely.

TM: But I'm really impressed. By this time, you've got a good couple thousand solid miles of boating.

DH: I don't know about that many, but, you know, the variety of experience I was able to have, was privileged to have, was...

TM: Middle Fork, Grand Canyon, the Dolores, the Salt, the Verde.

DH: Yep.

TM: You know, that's a lot of river miles there, and no flips.

DH: Right.

TM: So, how embarrassing.

DH: Oh, no, no, all part of the fun.

TM: Okay.

DH: It was—I—you know, I just had no—I didn't feel like I could or should or would have done anything different. And, so, it just felt like it was a matter of, "Well, you know, this is my turn." Two kinds of boatmen, right?

TM: Right.

DH: So—and I'm sitting here, looking at a photo. There was a fellow on the trip who was a photographer, official photographer for the city of Phoenix. He happened to be along in that group. And he had that really nice single-lens reflex camera with a motor drive, and so he made sure to get some really good shots of everybody going through.

TM: Was that Bob Rink?

DH: It's absolutely Bob Rink.

TM: Okay.

DH: And I've got a photo that Bob took and shared with me on my wall right here that shows me in that boat, shall we say 90 degrees out of the alignment I'd rather be in, sideways [laughs], with the bottom of the boat facing downstream. No, I just—I came up on the last big—I was going peak to peak on the waves in that wave train there and all lined up there and really enjoying it, you know, as they say in the trade, going for the gusto, right? And rode up on that last big wave, and it just crested and broke back and stalled me out completely.

TM: Wow.

DH: And I could feel the back side of the boat just kind of slipping around. It was still breaking when it was sideways and enough to just roll me right over. And there we were. So that was, you know, about as painless and safe a way to experience something like that as one could have, given the amount of slack water just below that rapid.

TM: Did your passengers agree?

DH: No [laughs]. No. No, they were not—they were not happy. They were not. That was their first experience as well, having had that happen to them. So it was interesting because—it was interesting because, from that point on, they still rode with me, which was nice, you know, a gesture of faith and whatnot. And we had good runs all the way on down. But when we got to Crystal [laughs]—well, actually, wait a minute. It was soon after—right. It was—right, right, right. The flip was in Hermit, and they were riding with me. And, when we got to Crystal and were scouting that, they told the guy who was the trip leader that maybe they would hike around this time. So they did. So I recruited—oh, god, who was it? There was a fellow, a friend of Bob Rink's, who was along on the trip, and he volunteered to ride with me. I was looking at otherwise rowing it without anybody upfront.

TM: Without a bailer.

DH: Yeah.

TM: That's not—I mean, that's what you really need, is—yeah.

DH: Yeah, not cool, not cool at all. So he agreed to ride with me. He volunteered to ride with me, which was cool. And I just—backtrack to Dolores, Snaggletooth. I had a similar experience there, where—it didn't involve a flip or any reason anybody wouldn't want to ride, but there were fewer people in the number of boats—well, disproportionately fewer. I'm digressing. Anyway, so, yeah, we got to Crystal. This guy rowed with me. They hiked around. I had probably my best run of the trip.

TM: Oh, great.

DH: Yeah.

TM: That's helpful for your confidence after your flip.

DH: Yeah, yeah. And then they rode with me the rest of the way.

TM: Okay.

DH: So they didn't feel like they wanted to hike anymore, and all the rest of the trip was fine.

TM: Good.

DH: So, yeah. It was great.

TM: So 1986, Grand Canyon—what was the month? Do you remember?

DH: I don't, honestly. It would have been—I think it was actually late spring.

TM: Okay.

DH: It was either the late spring or early fall. It wasn't a real hot time of year, as I recall it. I'd have to go back and look to see if I could track that down. But, no, it was—it was one of the shoulder seasons, but a good time.

TM: And, so, you'd already rode Lava with Randy.

DH: Yeah. Of course, in that 18-foot overloaded boat, it was basically a barge plowing through.

TM: Right.

DH: I mean, I had a decent run anyway. My lines were good, but it was a more forgiving situation than—you know, evidently, than that 15-foot boat from Dick Dechant that was more lightly loaded anyway.

TM: Right.

DH: Yeah. But lesson learned on Hermit. I was a little more conservative, I think, on most of my—the rest of my lines the rest of that trip.

TM: Okay. Anything else about that Grand Canyon trip that you remember?

DH: Oh, wow. You know, there isn't too much else that stands out. Oh... Yeah. That was one where there was a fellow who—Jerry Van Gasse had organized it, but his—he hiked out at—he had to hike out at Phantom. So the fellow who took over trip leader was his uncle, which was—god, if I could remember his last name—great guy. Dick—he worked for Salt River Project for many years as a manager. And he was—I was really impressed by him because he was—I think, at the time, he was 51. And he was just

getting started in kayaking. You know, and he had an older Perception kayak. And he didn't run everything in it, but he was pretty gutsy and got out there and, you know, put himself in harm's way and—

TM: Oh. Good for him.

DH: I was just impressed that, at his age, that he was willing to, you know, go out there and do that. I was also—he was also on a main Salmon trip with me one time. Oh, got to remember his last name. Nuts. Anyway, Jerry Van Gasse's uncle. I should—I could come up with that if I dredge around a little, if you need that name, but I don't recall it at the moment.

TM: Okay. No worries.

DH: Yeah. He was a good contact back in the day, early days running the Salt, because he was the one who would help us get flow information sometimes and give us some pointers or suggestions on when might or might not be a really good time to go on the Salt.

TM: Okay. That's always helpful.

DH: [laughs] Yeah. Yeah. Well, there was always a phone line. I was looking back through some of my desk calendars from the early '80s—or sorry, late '80s—and I have numerous notes. The Salt, Verde, Tonto Creek—every day, I've got notations on what the flows were all through the spring, because I would call the phone lines every day and then transcribe those numbers, write them down in my journal.

TM: Okay. You mentioned the trip with Randy was fast, was like 13 days, and you guys were making long miles.

DH: Yeah.

TM: Was this a fast trip as well?

DH: No. I think the pace on the one in '86 was more typical. I think—I don't remember exactly how long, but I'm thinking it was probably on the order of 16 days, 15 or 16 days.

TM: Okay.

DH: Which goes along with the fact that both Jerry Van Gasse and Dick Dechant had to leave the trip at Phantom—

TM: Right.

DH: —because of the length. I think that those were business-related reasons why they both needed not to be able to do the whole thing.

TM: Okay.

DH: So, yeah, no, I recall it as being a really more normal pace.

TM: Good. Makes it more enjoyable.

DH: Yeah. Yeah. That was great.

TM: You also mentioned the amount that people paid varied, even though no one was making money off the trip, and that precedent had been set 40 years earlier by earlier river runners who would use that exact technique. If someone brought a skill in, they paid less than someone who was simply a passenger.

DH: Absolutely, skills and equipment. You know, I mean, there was a pretty—I always thought that the groups that I was part of, when they were figuring the costs on the trips and how to proportion, you know, what folks needed to pay, were done in a really fair way that took into account, I mean, really decent estimates on equipment depreciation and cost and, you know, transport costs, who's—you know, taking an account of whose vehicles were used, all the rest of that, tried to take into account as many strict factors as possible and actual trip cost and then, you know, break it out into a fair share contribution, which never resulted in anybody having any leftover money.

TM: Right.

DH: With one exception—truth in storytelling here. One thing we did do that was sort of along the same lines, but not exactly, there were a couple of trips where we wanted a certain piece of gear to have available on the trip that none of us owned, and it was a little pricey. So we just agreed upfront that we would share costs on that, and then it basically became, like, community property, and we would share amongst—whoever had a trip going could request it and take it out of whoever had—from whoever had it at the time and use it. In particular, I'm thinking about Katadyn water filter, one of the big expedition filters, which, back in the day, cost a whopping 400 dollars.

TM: Which was a lot of money.

DH: It was a lot of money at the time. I just looked online last week, though, and I saw one being sold on Amazon for 1500.

TM: Wow.

DH: Yeah. So I think that may be partly a function—I mean, part of the reason why I was looking at it was, you know, interest in—I'm digressing here, but, you know, the times we live in, you know, people looking for, stocking up on, oh, I don't know, survival gear and, you know, different things. And things like that, I think, have an added interest and value to people now.

TM: Yeah.

DH: So that may explain part of the difference in price. But it was something that we bought and shared together. And, once in a while, we would do that for a piece of gear that we wanted to have available.

TM: That makes sense. Did you do any hiking on that trip?

DH: '86... I don't remember specifically on that trip if we did or not.

TM: Okay.

DH: Honestly, not sure.

TM: And was that out to the reservoir, or did you take out at Diamond Creek?

DH: Diamond Creek.

TM: Okay.

DH: Yeah. We would have gotten out on Diamond Creek on that one.

TM: Okay.

DH: Which, therefore, would have been my first time taking out at Diamond Creek, come to think of it, because that earlier trip in '81, we went all the way up to Pierce Ferry.

TM: Okay. And, then, the kids' trip on the Salt.

DH: Oh, yeah.

TM: What was that all about?

DH: That was... That was... The rationale, part of the rationale for me getting involved in the boating activity and acquiring some equipment and skills and whatnot, circle of friends with whom to do it, was the rationale that this was something we could develop as a family activity and that we could all boat together later.

TM: Okay.

DH: Once we started boating, my two sons—one was born in '77 and the other in '79, so my first Salt trip fell right in between those. In fact, it was in April of '78, which was—my older son, at that point, was one year old, so [laughs]... My first attempt to get them on a river, which—that was the trip we did together in—I think it was '86, that same year as well—pretty sure it was—and we did a trip involving the two of them and a couple of my friends, two boats. We just—this was back when you could drive in your gear all the way down to the riverside at Horseshoe Bend, and rig up boats and launch from there. So that's what we did. We just took out on the Salt at Horseshoe Bend and did an overnight trip from there on out to the takeout by the 288 bridge. It's about 13 miles and, you know, minimal rapids and scenic and fun, a nice getaway. It takes you by Coon Creek and a few other nice spots. We camped just downstream from Coon Creek on the right amidst a bunch of big tamarisk trees—actually, it may have been cottonwoods. No, they were cottonwoods. Yeah, cottonwoods, for sure. Anyway, beautiful area and a really nice way to get their feet wet, so to speak. I remember [laughs] carrying them out, separately out into the river to scrub them down that night before they went to bed, and it was a really nice moment. They were little brats—no, they weren't brats. They were great. But carried them out there and scrubbing them up in the river and baptizing them to rinse them off.

TM: Nice.

DH: Good stuff. Yeah, and then sitting around the campfire with their friends, and that was a really nice memory. Yeah, that was their first trip, and it was—looking back after that, they wanted to go on every trip.

TM: Did your wife go with you?

DH: She didn't go on that trip. We had—I think—trying to remember the first trip that the four of us did together on the Salt. It would have been a year or two after that, probably.

TM: Okay.

DH: She—I can't remember. I think she probably went with me on the Salt one time before that. I'm near-certain she was on at least one Salt trip prior to that one where I took the boys down.

TM: And what were the names of your sons, again?

DH: Brian and Erin.

TM: And your wife's name, again?

DH: Patricia—Patty.

TM: And, so, did you do more than one trip? Were they just like, "Dad, we want to do this again"?

DH: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, they wanted to do it again immediately.

TM: Great.

DH: It would have been—let's see, trying to remember the next trip after that, but—oh, you know what? I think... Let me back up one. I think it may have been... Bear with me here... Yeah, '85 or '86 that I took them down. It was possible it was 1985, because we had done—I forgot to mention this one. I don't think I mentioned this before. The year before, in '85, I think that is the year I first took them down. And, later that year, we invited some friends of ours, people we had met through school here, where my kids went, to go with us on the San Juan. And we did a trip together with them.

TM: Ah.

DH: And that was very memorable because the couple that we met—my wife and this other fellow's wife were both on the PTA together. And, so, we got to be friends with them as a couple, and they had never done any boating and were interested in trying to find an opportunity to go rafting. So—and they had two daughters that were about the same ages as our sons.

TM: Okay.

DH: So we ended up putting together a San Juan trip, and we actually floated with them from—is it Sand Island, just below Bluff there that—

TM: That's right. That's right.

DH: From there, all the way through past Mexican Hat, past—what's the cliff, something or other takeout?

TM: Well, Piute Farms, back in 1985, would have been...

DH: We went all the way down to the top of the lake and took out on the other side.

TM: Right. That's Piute Farms. Well done.

DH: Yeah [laughs]. Yeah, and it was—it was interesting because this was—we had no idea—this must have been—because nobody had told us about the falls that was forming up from—was it Clay Hills Crossing? Isn't that the takeout that other folks use?

TM: That's right.

DH: Yeah. We—

TM: So between Clay Hills and Piute Farms, a waterfall developed.

DH: Exactly. And we ran that blind, not knowing it was there when it was early on, just forming up. It was about a—

TM: Oh, did you?

DH: It was about a three- or four-foot drop that just came up on us suddenly [laughs].

TM: Wow.

DH: It was pretty crazy. The couple that was with us is Mike Opinsky and his wife, Rachel, and their daughters, Bridget and Natalie. And we did—subsequently, we did numerous other trips with them, our families together along with some other folks. Great folks. Mike works for the railroad. He just retired recently. He's a great guy.

TM: Okay.

DH: Anyway, so we had two boats, and Patty was rowing one, and I was rowing the other. And Mike and I were up front in the one I was rowing, and we came up to that drop there. And, you know, we were looking ahead and something, you know, brushy fields on either side, and it looked like there was just this horizon line. I'm going, "What?" You know, nobody had said anything about there being any kind of a drop. And, so, we saw that, and, you know, as we got up to the top of it, there was still enough water that we could, you know, look past and see it wasn't a huge drop. But then, behind us, a little ways upstream, were Patty and Rachel and—actually, at that point, all four kids were on the other boat, dancing around, singing songs, having a good time. So Mike and I ran that drop and pulled over right below it, and we were, you know, frantically trying to get their attention, yelling, waving our arms, and whatnot. And, fortunately, we caught Patty's eye, and she realized what was happening and had everybody sit down and hang on, and they got through it okay. But it was a good lesson in not ever taking for granted that you know what to expect from the river.

TM: No kidding. This is interesting. I've never heard of anyone actually running these falls. I knew that these falls got very impressive.

DH: Yeah.

TM: But then the reservoir came back up again and buried the whole deal.

DH: Yup. I saw a photo of a powerboat right at the base of the fall for scale.

TM: Yeah.

DH: And the top of the falls is well above the highest part of that boat. I mean, it's like—it looked like about a—at least a 10 to 12-foot drop—

TM: That's right. That's right.

DH: —at that point. So, yeah, really interesting.

TM: And then another formed again later and is still in place today.

DH: Really? In about the same area?

TM: It's probably a third of a mile away, but, yes, more or less in the same area.

DH: Wow.

TM: And it's been there for quite some time, and you just—you do not want to run it.

DH: Yeah. Yeah. So, after we came back from that, I did do a little more research into that and called around and found out that there were a few people that did know about it. We just happened not to have been privy to that.

TM: Okay.

DH: But, yeah, and then followed its development a bit over time and realized how, you know, abrupt of a drop and how high it was getting to be, and that pretty much ruled us out, you know, doing that same trip again at that point. So, anyway—good time, though. We had a—it was a great trip.

TM: Okay. So, by this time, your wife has her own boat.

DH: Well, we had borrowed a boat at that point.

TM: Okay.

DH: Yeah. So, you know, she was—I was running a borrowed boat, and she was running ours.

TM: And she was happy with that?

DH: Yeah. You know, I mean, actually, it's possible—let me think about this. Actually, I think I still had my first Miwok at that point. It's very possible that we still had—we had both Miwoks on the water at that point.

TM: Okay.

DH: That's probably what the scenario was. Yeah, I—honestly, I'm not absolutely sure, but I'm pretty certain that at that point I still did have both boats and figured that the older boat would be up to it for the San Juan, from what I knew about that trip.

TM: Yeah. Yeah. Nice.

DH: Yeah.

TM: That's absolutely a wonderful kids' river.

DH: Oh, yeah, it was a great time all the way down. I mean, it was—and this is another one of those situations where, after our first experience, folks just wanted to do it more and more and more. And that family got really active with boating, and Mike bought a boat and a bunch of gear and, you know, was always looking for opportunities to run rivers. So, yeah, good stuff. We did a lot of subsequent trips together, including in the Grand Canyon and on the Middle Fork and on the Salt, of course, and on the Verde [laughs] and on the Green. Yeah. Yeah. Right.

TM: Excellent.

DH: So, yeah, we did a lot of trips together.

TM: Nice, lots. Yeah. Okay. And, then, meanwhile, in '86, now let's sort of segue off into the Central Arizona Paddlers Club.

DH: Right.

TM: And what do you think was the catalyst to start that?

DH: I think the catalyst was Roger Saba's past experience running the Salt, which, by that point, amounted to 15 to 20 years altogether span of time by then. I think his first runs on the Salt were in '68.

TM: Wow.

DH: Yeah. And he had been doing it off and on since he was a young guy, since he was, I think, in high school, actually, and, you know, knew a lot of the people that were involved, knew—oh, boy... Shoot. Trying to come up with the name of the guy for the Forest Service who wrote the first—put together the first map on the Salt... Pete Weinel.

TM: Okay.

DH: Roger knew Pete pretty well, I think, and I think Pete may have—I'm trying to remember the details now. You could get it more—if you're able to get—set up an interview with Roger, that would be ideal.

TM: Absolutely.

DH: Pete died a few years ago. He was—man, if he were available for a talk on the history of boating on the Salt, that would be invaluable. But you have some of his notes on the early copies of the river map that he put together using sections of the topo map and a few annotations he added.

TM: Nice.

DH: That was kind of the go-to map and the only one that existed on the Salt for years.

TM: Okay.

DH: But, yeah, I think—

TM: So Roger had been boating for 20 years there.

DH: He'd been boating on the Salt for at least 15 years—

TM: Okay.

DH: —and knew Pete and some of what was going on and what was—you know, I guess they had a heads-up on the fact that they were developing a management plan that would, you know, affect the boating on the Salt. And I'm assuming that Pete solicited from Roger some involvement on behalf of private boaters.

TM: Okay.

DH: And then that, in turn, I believe, led Roger to—that's right, come to think of it. I think he—he had—there had to have been a registration system of some sort involving folks going on the Salt. I don't remember the details on that, but somehow, Pete Weinel had come up with a list of names and contact information for people who boated the Salt.

TM: Okay.

DH: And I assume that had to have been through the—under the auspices of the Forest Service and they were in the process of having folks do a sign-in. I don't remember the details at the moment, but he had a list. He gave it to Roger, and Roger contacted everybody and invited them to a meeting in a room that he had arranged, a meeting room at the Holiday Inn on Highway 60 and Country Club right there. And... So we all showed up, and he, you know, introduced himself and talked about shared experiences and what was coming up and how, ultimately, at some point in the future, we might be forced to deal with the permit system, but in the meantime, we wanted to have a voice on how the river was managed and, ultimately, whether commercials were allowed and what the proportionate usage might end up being and all the rest. And I'm kind of winging it here in terms of—that may not all have been stuff that he mentioned in the meeting, but it was partly inviting folks to get together just in an organized way to be able to share experience and information about boating and do trips together and, you know, represent the private boating community.

TM: Do you remember the month and possibly the day of that meeting?

DH: Wow. I'm not sure. I could probably come up with it. I can't tell you off the top of my head, though. I don't have it in front of me.

TM: Yeah, that'd be a good note. And do you remember who attended?

DH: You know, I don't have that list. I'm sure that a lot of the folks who subsequently founded the Paddlers Club were in attendance at that meeting, since that was kind of, you know, the starting point for that. It's—I—yeah, it's really interesting. I wonder if he—Roger—might have some minutes from that or notes about it, because, probably, we came away from that meeting with the agreement that we would meet again subsequently. And, the progression from that to where the club was formed, I don't remember the details at the moment.

TM: Okay.

DH: But... I might be able to come up with that, but, again, Roger would be a better source.

TM: That would be very helpful, to kind of track down that information and just what you remember about that first meeting, who was there and, yeah, what you talked about. But it makes sense, if the Forest Service was looking at permitting the river in 1986, that you all would want to come together and represent the do-it-yourself paddlers.

DH: Right.

TM: Were there any commercial trips on the Salt in 1986?

DH: As I recall, in '86, there were still no licensed or authorized outfitters operating on the Salt at that point. I'm not absolutely sure, but I don't think there were any permittees. There may have been. Wow. Good question. I don't remember what year the first Forest Service-licensed permittees started operating. If not then, it would have been probably not long after that.

TM: Yeah, because certainly by 1989, there were. But when did that start?

DH: Yeah, I'm not sure. Again, that's probably something I could come up with, but I don't have it right in front of me.

TM: Okay. All right. Well, I'm wondering if this might be a good time to wrap up this Part Three.

DH: I think so, because if we want to go from here forward, including more information about the development of the Paddlers Club and more information, more detail on how it originated and how things developed, that would be useful to refresh my memory about and research a little bit—

TM: Okay.

DH: —and/or to have information from Roger as well on the same topic to have more complete and accurate coverage on what happened.

TM: You know what? Well, I'll—let's wrap up this interview, and then we'll talk about some planning here, because I've got a couple ideas.

DH: Sure. Sure.

TM: All right. Well, in that case, let's conclude this Part Three of a Grand Canyon Oral History with David Huizingh. My name is Tom Martin. Today is March 27, 2020. And, David, thank you so very much.

DH: My pleasure. Thank you.