

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewees: Pat Grediagin (PG)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Pat recounts a 1989 break in her Park Service career to travel the world, then coming back in 1990 to work at Death Valley followed by Denali and Big Bend

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TM: Today is Thursday, November 26, 2020. This is a Part 6 Grand Canyon oral history interview with Pat Grediagin. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon Pat, how are you?

PG: I'm full from Thanksgiving dinner, but otherwise just great. Thank you.

TM: Oh, good. Glad to hear it. Pat, may we have your permission to record this oral history over the telephone?

PG: Yes, you have my permission.

TM: Thank you. At the end of Part 5, you had started to take us on a year's journey around the world, and had spent some time telling us about a trek in the Himalayas out and looping back to Katmandu in the late fall of 1989. And then what happened?

PG: Well, actually, my trip around the world was only 10 months long. I was off of work for a month, or I mean for a year, as it turns out. The first month I was getting ready and stashing stuff, and the last month I was back and looking for jobs. So the travel time itself was about 10 months. I always just called it a year because it was close enough, but I'll clarify that it was 10 months. So what happened next was...the whole idea was that I wanted to get to some places while I was still on the younger side of things than after I waited and retired and was "older", which of course now I'm older and doesn't feel like I'm really old, but... I wanted to travel when I was still young, which is why I decided to quit and do this traveling with the idea that I probably could get back into the Park Service, and I had mapped out in my mind some places that I wanted to see. The Nepal trip had been kind of an add on at the beginning because I had encountered Ginger Harmon on this work trip in the Grand Canyon and had been in touch enough, I guess, to join in with the trip that she was organizing. So I had thrown that in at the front of my travels, but then I picked up on what my original itinerary was which was to start in New Zealand and work my way basically westward from there. So I flew from Nepal to, well, I think technically I went to Thailand and then got a flight from there to New Zealand.

I have two sisters. I'm the oldest, Sue is the next, and Ann is the youngest of the three of us. I have no brothers. Sue is the one that had gone down on the Grand Canyon river trip with me in 1988. Ann decided she'd like to join me in New Zealand. So when I got there we joined up in Churchill, on the South Island. We traveled together on the South Island about two weeks. We rented a car and drove around, and it was December. I remember we hiked... We did a couple of backpacks there. Now, of course, I

can't remember the main one that is on the south end of the island there. But it classically has clouds and fogs and rain because it's a wet environment sort of like the Pacific Northwest, which it reminded me of a bit. But we had great weather on this hike, which maybe I'll remember by the end of the interview what the name of it was. We just went camping and hiking, and toured the island, and enjoyed seeing it. Then she flew out and within a few days my friend Marilyn Friley joined me. By then I had gone up to the North Island, so we spent... I think we spent about 10 days on the North Island just touring around again with a rental or buses or whatever and then we went to the South Island. There was a park named Abel Tasman. We decided we were going to hike in there. It happened to be over Christmas and we hiked up into this area where there's... I think we were hiking from a hut, kind of a big hut, hut-to-hut sort of thing. We got to the first one and it snowed on us and there was this whiteout so we ended up turning around the next morning and going out because we felt like we might not be able to follow the trail very well. There was probably only a couple inches of snow on the ground at the hut, and it decreased as we went out. But I recollect recognizing the fact that even though I was in the southern hemisphere, I was having a white Christmas. It just didn't seem like...well, it seemed right for a northerner, but it didn't seem like what I expected I'd be encountering in the southern hemisphere. So that was interesting.

TM: Do you think it was because you were basically so far south?

PG: I don't know. It would have been, like, their June, I guess. And I guess...

TM: Yeah, but latitude-wise, you're getting kind of closer to the South Pole so maybe... Does it was it snow in June in Alaska?

PG: I don't know.

TM: I bet it does, on occasion.

PG: You know, at a certain elevation, right?

TM: Yeah. Or at least more than it might in Flagstaff or someplace, you know, like that.

PG: Yeah. I don't think that this was the weather event of the century at all but it was a surprise to me to get snowed on. So, that was another two weeks there, so about a month in New Zealand, and then Marilyn joined me flying to Australia and we camped. I think we just went by public transport out of Sydney into the Blue Mountains and then on to the coast a little bit. She stuck around for another week or so and then she flew home, and I continued to just explore without a car. Eventually I took the train across the Nullarbor Desert, in the southern part of Australia, to the west coast of Australia to Perth and stayed in hostels. Just kind of poked around a lot. I was in Australia for all of two months, I think. I think so, I think two months. I was on the west coast and this young Canadian woman, who had bought a car and was traveling around, was looking for people to go back towards the east with her and share with gas expenses and stuff. I volunteered and some fellow from Germany or something, I don't know what, volunteered and the three of us drove back to Melbourne and to the southeast part of Australia. I remember she was a really interesting woman. She was probably in her 20s and she was a veterinarian, and she also knew how to fly helicopters. I was like, wow, but I never kept up with her or anything like that.

So I think I spent, like I said, a total of two months in Australia. From there, I went to, let me think about this, Kenya because I had wanted to go and see wildlife in Africa before it, you know, diminished and disappeared. So I went to Kenya for, oh, boy... I think I was in Africa for all of two months total. That was mostly Kenya and then a little bit in Tanzania. And again, I just stayed in hostels or YMCAs or a cheap motel, and traveled by public transport, which was mostly buses, and went to different... If you went into parks, most of the parks you had to be on a safari. You couldn't just walk around and hike there as you do in our parks because you would probably get eaten by a lion or something. So, the access to the wild parks and wildlife was not as readily available just to rent a car and drive into it. So I ended up getting a safari. There was a German fella that was on the safari. It's interesting when you travel, you sort of bump up against people and exchange addresses. Later, when I was in Germany, I went and visited him. Yeah, so it's just this random mix of people that are traveling around. So I went on a safari. I think I went on a couple of them. I went on one in Kenya and then in Tanzania. I took a bus in Kenya or Tanzania, one of them, to Olduvai Gorge, I think it's called, where some of the first footprints of *Homo sapiens*, I think, were found.

TM: And first bone fragments, etc. Yeah, Louis Leakey.

PG: Yes. I think his wife actually is the one that found these footprints down there. So I was interested in that and wildlife. The last month, maybe the last 10 days that I was in Africa, which was in Tanzania, another friend, actually a Park Service fellow—and, boy, I wish I could remember his last name, Brad. I knew him pretty well at the time, but his last name slips my mind right now—he joined me and we traveled around Tanzania together a little bit and went out to Zanzibar Island on some little sort of cheap putt-putt boat. Then ended up probably back in Nairobi, or... I don't remember where we flew out of, but went to Egypt for a little bit. The idea was to go down the Nile and to Luxor and see that little section, because we'd only allocated maybe seven days or 10 days for there. But he ended up coming down with either typhoid fever or typhus, I think they're slightly different things, but it was one of those and he got pretty ill. Went to a doctor there and basically just had to stay around Cairo, so I just stuck around Cairo as well and went off and did some touring of the pyramids and stuff on my own. But he was not really in good shape to do much tourist stuff while we were there. Then he flew home, and I went next to... Where did I go next to? I guess I went next to Greece. I traveled around Greece a little bit, like maybe a couple weeks in Greece. Then I got a boat, or took a ferry, up to Yugoslavia which was still Yugoslavia at the time. I remember I could not go overland through Albania, because Albania wouldn't let people into their borders much at all. So I went to Yugoslavia, and it was just starting to break up, but I went to where my grandmother was born in what is now Serbia. It was a little village called Mrkoplj, really small little village. I got a bus, went there, and there was no kind of place to stay or anything like that. So I got off the bus with my backpack, because I knew there was a bus out of town like two hours later. I went into some building, or facility, or a store, I think, and sort of mimed can I leave my pack there because I didn't want to carry my pack all around town with me. And then I just walked around this little village and went into a cemetery to see if I could recognize any names that I might have heard from my grandma. But I didn't. I didn't see people at all. It was, I think, a Sunday. Maybe people were home. So I didn't really have any interaction with people. It was just kind of a vacant, small little village. Then I got back on the bus and left.

TM: What was its name again, the village? How do you spell it?

PG: Mrkoplj, M-Y-R-K-P-O-I [M-R-K-O-P-L-J], I think. Oh, I might've said Serbia, but it was in Croatia. Yeah, it was in Croatia. And from there I went into... Oh, boy, I gotta think about this. There's a northern part of Yugoslavia that has capital named Ljubljana, which I love to say. Slovenia, might have been

Slovenia. Now I can't remember what the country name is, but it was real pretty. It felt like I was in Austria, and indeed, I was near Austria. I think it shares a border with Austria. So I went into Austria, which is where I think my Eurorail, my three-month Eurorail pass, was valid. I had a three-month Eurorail and I started it in Austria, and then I traveled through Western Europe: Italy, I didn't spend much time in France, some time in Spain and Portugal, and then kind of went north through Belgium and into Scandinavia. Went to Sweden and way up north and back down, and Finland, and down through Norway. Then I guess I ended up in Paris. I think I ended up in Paris, and this is three months later. That trip was mostly going from urban center to urban center, because that's where the trains and the transportation took me. I had decided to do a self-study. I never had much of an art background, but there was a great Rick Steves (who's the travel author) book called, I think, *Art 101* or *European Art History 101*. I had taken that with me and he would talk about the evolution of art through the last 1000 or 2000 years. I would go to different museums and kind of reference his book, and look and see what I was seeing. That was really fun. I did come away with much greater understanding of art and the classics. Then I went to England for just four or five days. It was real short because by then I had decided I was really kind of looking forward to going home. I flew back to Oregon, which was where my family was based. I think I had stashed my stuff there in Oregon. So I went back there and...

TM: So, Pat?

PG: Yes?

TM: Looking back today at that 10-month journey, was there anything that really hit you or impressed you that you still carry with you today?

PG: Well, one of the things... I didn't set out with the idea of coming away with this feeling but when I was done, I did feel like I had felt very comfortable, as far as I remember, the whole time traveling as a solo female with specific things that I wanted to see. So I had sort of a sense of accomplishment. In retrospect, I would say that that's probably something I came away with that it wasn't that hard. You know, you can scare yourself, like I don't speak the language or I feel vulnerable or something like that, but I had just sort of set my intentions. I wanted to go see stuff. I went and did it. It worked out beautifully and I felt a sense of satisfaction that I had gone out and seen this bigger world and not just waited or put it off or never done it. That was a feeling I had. As far as any specific... I do remember feeling really good about my understanding of art that I came away with in the Europe part; and that I had seen that wildlife in Africa, gone and seen some of the wildlife. Mostly I just get curious about places. I just have a curiosity about what they look like, and it's really more landscape based than cultural. So, I satisfy that curiosity when I travel. That was kind of what I did was I satisfied a curiosity and then I was ready to be back here for a while and kind of resume life that the trajectory was on here with the Park Service.

TM: Very cool. I just can't imagine one could travel for 10 months around the world and not come back transformed a little bit.

PG: Right. I'm sure I was. I'm not sure I can express what the difference was, but I was definitely a different person for having been exposed to all I had been exposed to in the course of traveling, versus if I had never done that. It broadens you, it broadens a person.

TM: Cool. So back to the Pacific Northwest.

PG: Yeah, so my idea had been that I would apply for permanent jobs that would come up that were GS-7 or better, because by now I was a GS-7 so that was my standard and I wanted to get a GS-7 or better job. I would watch the... Announcements would come out I think once a week with what jobs were open in the Park Service that were permanent jobs.

TM: Was that like in the newspaper or how did you find those...?

PG: Well, that was called the pink sheet and I don't know how I found those, maybe... In fact I'm not sure exactly where I was for that period of time.

TM: Is that something you would see in a personnel office in a park somewhere?

PG: Yes, you would, right. Well one of the things was that I... Maybe I hadn't started applying for the permanent jobs yet because I applied for some seasonal jobs just as a fill-in. I was offered a seasonal position at Death Valley during the winter; I think it started in October or something. They were hiring people to work at Scotty's Castle and give tours. Because I had permanent status, they could just offer me a job without going through the rating and ranking of all the candidates that applied that didn't have status. So they offered me a job because I apparently was good enough to hire as a permanent employee somewhere, so they figured I must have some kind of ability to do a job.

TM: And was that a GS-7 position?

PG: No, that one wasn't. As a seasonal, I was having to just take whatever I got offered. It probably was a GS-5, is what I think. Was probably a -5 again. It could have been a... No, I think it was a -5.

TM: I was gonna say, it coulda been a -3, or something. I mean...

PG: Yeah, it could have been a -4, but I think it might have been a -5. One of those two, probably. What they had started doing just the year before, or that year, at Scotty's Castle was to do a living history program so that instead of a park ranger giving you a tour through this building that was built by a rich man and his wife, the Johnsons, who came to the desert and built this big mansion, then they stumbled across this guy, Scotty, that was a character and had sort of been a miner. I don't know if he really had much in the way of a mine but he was a miner, basically. But he palled up with the Johnsons. They liked him and he liked hanging out with them and pretty soon, because of his oversized character, he became the person that people associated with this building and it became known as Scotty's Castle because he was just a big colorful guy, colorful character. So, instead of park rangers giving the tour through there, they wanted us to dress in period as if we were somebody that would've...like they had stepped back in time, like...

TM: Oh, interesting. Okay.

PG: Right. There were some volunteers in the park that would sew costumes from old patterns from that period. My character was the housekeeper so I had kind of a—from, I think, the 1930s is when we were supposed to be set—so I had a 1930 sort of style dress. And, you know, you wouldn't wear your normal wristwatch on your wrist, you would probably hide it in your pocket or something like that. We tried as much as possible to look like they were back in the 1930s. So I gave tours. My college education had been in how to be a park naturalist, basically, or a park interpreter is the formal name of the option I had gotten a degree in, and that was how to give tours to people. I leaned towards the idea of giving

tours of nature, but here I was giving tours of a building. I really enjoyed just doing that for a change because I'd never really put that giving a tour to use, and the idea of provoking people's thought processes to be curious about this or that.

TM: Wow, that's neat because it's something very different than law enforcement, where you're provoking people to show you their driver's license.

PG: Yeah, exactly. And so again, I was back into that level of... So I would go home at night, I wouldn't have to worry about a callout or anything like that. And there was a bunch of seasonals that were... I lived down at Furnace Creek, actually, because they didn't have enough housing for everyone, and then a van would haul us up to Scotty's Castle each day and then we'd go back down to Furnace Creek. There was a volleyball net there and two days a week there'd be volleyball games. It was fun! There's a swimming pool there that they have. Really it's called their fire water reservoir so if there was a fire in the park there's a big reservoir of water but it's really a swimming pool. I mean, its dual function. Of course, it was cold in the winter months but by March it was warm enough to go swimming and enjoy it. I had a grand time exploring. I didn't have a truck so my exploring of the park was limited to whoever I could...that might have a truck that I could talk into going out and poking around somewhere on some of the dirt roads, or just tooling around on...

TM: Did you still have your VW?

PG: Well, let me think, what did I have there? No, I don't think I had the VW anymore. I think I mighta had a... I had a little Toyota for a while. I probably had that Toyota Corolla wagon. Yeah. So, I enjoyed being in the park, and kind of having that climate through the winter, and poking around into the park as much as I could on my days off. It was fun. And doing this interpretive job. So I did that for about six months and then that's... I'm sure at that point, I would have been watching for those vacancy announcements to see what permanent jobs were open.

TM: Sorry, I'm just going to jump in. Did you think about tracking down the chief ranger and introducing yourself and saying, Hi, I'm here. This is my story. Just want you to know... Or was Death Valley a place that you were like, well, I only want to do this for a couple months and I don't want this to be my next park.

PG: I don't think that I... Well, that was a good idea. I think I would have taken a job at Death Valley if there had been an opening. I don't think there was an opening. Now that you mention that, I do remember that I went to their law enforcement refresher. I talked my way with my boss. So every year you have to have 40-hour refresher. I thought, well... I'm pretty sure I went through their refresher because I thought, well, maybe I'll get a job in three weeks somewhere and I will have needed to have had this refresher in the last period of a year, which I wouldn't of had if I didn't get it at Death Valley. And usually parks offer those refreshers once a year when they're bringing all their seasonals on. So if I got a job in Timbuktu or Tuzigoot in December, I might not have been able to get a refresher course very soon. So I think I took a refresher course at Death Valley. The chief ranger there, who I can't remember who that was at this point, would have known who I was. I don't think there was any jobs open. So it never became a point of "let's maybe hire her." But I watched the vacancy announcements. I don't remember any jobs that I particularly applied for, but I'm guessing I applied for a job or two, you know. I wouldn't have been too picky. I wanted to stay in the West. It would have been law enforcement, or backcountry was really my preference, or river. So I don't remember what I may have applied for during that period, but I know I would have been watching. I did not get any kind of job during that period so I

had applied to work in Denali, in Alaska, for their summer season as a seasonal. And again, they could hire me without me having to go through the normal course of applying as a seasonal. My logic for that was I wanted to see Alaska on the government dime, basically, without being committed to being up there for a long time if I got a permanent job. So, I did get a job there and I went to Alaska in the spring of...that woulda been '90, right? No, you know what? I'm a year behind. Because it was '91.

TM: No, that's right. Your year of travel was 1990 so now we're in 1991.

PG: It was '89-'90. Right. And then the winter of '90-'91, I was at Death Valley. In the spring of '91, I think it was May, because Denali didn't start their season... They had short seasons because things didn't thaw out until later. So I went up to Alaska and I think I rode the ferry up there. I know I was on the ferry a time or two. But my sister Anne...

TM: Like the Inland Passage?

PG: Yes. My sister Anne had ended up working in the Army. She was an officer in the Army and she had been assigned to Fort Wainwright which is outside of Fairbanks. I had traveled up there with her, I think in 1986 or so, and just spent a week up there with her when she was first going there. We were on a ferry a little bit but I think that I also took the ferry on my own up to Alaska with my car, I guess. I don't remember driving up. I remember driving out. So...

TM: Hey, Pat? Before we go to Alaska, what was the coolest thing you saw at Scotty's Castle?

PG: Hmm. I don't know what was the coolest thing I... Well, maybe only because it was a rarity, there's an organ there that was part of the original furnishings that I think is seldom played, but was played... It plays by itself like those old pianos they used to have where you put in the scroll and it played from that. I think that they played it once or twice when I was there, and I can't remember if they had someone tune it up or why it got played, but I know that that wasn't very common to play that, and it was played. So I think I'd have to say that probably was pretty cool. And also they had Tiffany lamps. I started becoming aware of what a Tiffany product was. They had some Tiffany lamps in there, and I was like, cool, this is Tiffany stuff. Wow! Then I liked all the iron handiwork that they had, like hinges. The craftsmanship was cool. I really enjoyed the craftsmanship of that.

Ooh, I'll tell you a side story, though, real quick about Scotty's Castle. Coolest thing I had at Scotty's Castle was actually in 1979 when... Tom Cox and I had gone to Santa Rosa to get our law enforcement training and we met a fellow there in that class that was working at Scotty's Castle. So when Tom and I were driving back from Santa Rosa to Utah, we decided to stop in Scotty's Castle. I think the guy's name was Dan Brown, something like that. They let people sleep in the clock tower there. So instead of camping out, he said, "Well, you know, we just use this as kind of a guest quarters when people come through." So we got to sleep... In the bottom of the clock tower there's a little apartment. Small, I don't think was very big at all. But, we just... Anyway, so that was kind of cool to be able to sleep in the clock tower. I didn't do that when I worked there in 1991. I think the handcrafted items and the organ playing were the coolest things that I enjoyed.

TM: Cool, all right. Thank you. So, at Alaska, your sister, did she come out to greet you or did you come up the Inland Passage with her?

PG: Well, she was assigned up there before, like a few years before, and I think she must have been gone because when I was up there in 1991, I don't remember...she wasn't there anymore. She had transferred on. So, no, she didn't. So I went into the park in May, and I can remember just there being such tall... Everything was green and growing about half a foot a day. It just burst out and grew fast. It had to grow fast because it was going to be, you know, cold and practically heading on winter by early September. I remember being impressed with that. It was kind of moist, kind of a little bit rainy in May, and mosquitoes. But the mosquitoes were kind of here and not there, and not there and here. So it was kind of patchy and I don't remember being plagued every moment of every day by mosquitoes. If you got in certain spots, you would be like, oh, this is not the spot I want to hang out. I did road patrol there on the east end of the park. There's the road that goes... The east end is where there's, gosh, I forgot the name of the town outside, but it's near the little town that's the entrance town. The headquarters is there, and the visitor center is there, and most people live there. Then there's a road that goes to the west, and they use buses to take people... People can't drive it unless they've got some special permit for something really special. But you take a bus out if you're a visitor and go out towards Eielson Visitor Center which is out in the interior of the park, or Wonder Lake which is at the end. I was working on that east end where most of the people, and the offices, and the... They had a sled team there, a dog sled team, so the dog sled team was kept there, the kennels were there. I did road patrol and was restricted to that east end where the campground was and everything else. The main thing I can remember is that I had some night patrols, and I'm like, oh, this is gonna be terrible because I'm not really a night person. But it was light until like 12:30, and then it was kind of gray, and then it was light again at 3:00. You know, it was just light so long that my body responded to it being light, and I stayed awake more readily because of the light. It's when it gets dark early that I just kind of go, ugh, I can't... You know, my body goes to sleep when it gets dark. But, so I had some late patrols. I did not get to see the aurora borealis and to this day have never seen them. So either they weren't firing, or... I think they were firing but it's light so late that it's hard to see 'em even if they were because of the lightness. So I was there for just a couple months because the next job came up, which I'll tell you about. I'm trying to, though, remember if there's anything... I made a couple friends that are still friends, there, during that summer. Jim Unruh was the pilot in the... No, he was head of dispatch there, but he later became a pilot in a park I worked at in Big Bend.

TM: How do you spell his last name?

PG: U-N-R-U-H, Unruh. And Darla Sidles was working dispatch for Jim. And her last name is S-I-D-L-E-S. She then shows up in Big Bend, where I went to next, and was trail crew there. So all three of us show up in Big Bend down the road another few months. They both became people that I consider lifetime friends. I actually haven't been in touch for a while, but you know how that goes. Darla is now the superintendent at Rocky Mountain. She did really well. Jim's retired. But I don't remember much other than driving around and telling people that they couldn't camp where they were pulled over. The campground would be full and they'd think about sleeping in a parking lot in the park, and I'd have to kick them out. I don't know where they went to, maybe there was some other place there where they could camp. I don't have any vivid memories of any particular...

Oh, yes I do. A guy was missing, one of the concessions employees, out in the park. He'd gone out for like a backpack or something like that, and he wasn't found. So, you usually send a hasty team out to try and check the spot where they were last known. He wasn't located, so it geared up. We ended up doing a grid search, which is super labor intensive and usually kind of a last resort because it just takes so many people. But you spread out 6 feet apart/10 feet apart/20 feet apart, depends upon how much vegetation there is and how easily you could see. Maybe we were 10 or 15 feet apart, maybe, in the

park, I can't remember. And then you just try and walk parallel to each other and cover a swath of ground with a bunch of people. So we did this grid search, and my group found the guy and he was dead. I don't know if they ever determined... He had some like scratches on him, but he didn't look like he'd been mauled. I'm not sure what his cause of death was. I can't remember any more whether it was speculated that maybe he'd fallen and hurt himself. But he had scrapes, or something like that. But I remember that search and finding the guy, and, you know, he was deceased.

Other than that, I went on a backpack... There was a fellow who had been a seasonal at the Grand Canyon that was a seasonal interpreter up there that liked to backpack. So I remember we went out with another third person and did a night or two backpack, which was so different than anything I'd ever done before because you're fording streams with your shoes on. That's when I figured out if you wore gaiters, it kept water from going down into your shoes. Tall gaiters worked pretty well to keep the water from flooding into the top of your shoes. And we had some tussocks, they call it. They're like tall clumps of grass that might be about a foot, maybe 16 inches, around in a circle, but then there's a void of nothing between that and the next tussock, which is a foot to the side. You either walked from tussock to tussock, and they wobble a little, or you're kind of stepping down, a foot down in between the tussocks which gets real cumbersome to try and walk through. So the tussock was a beast to try and get through. 'Course we had to take precautions for bears. Keep our food preparation well away from where our tents were, and all the food odors separated from where we were going to be sleeping. So that was kind fun. It was kind of fun but it was kind of work, too. Maybe there was sprinkles on us or something like that because I remember thinking like, well, I'm glad I had this experience, but I'm not really going to be looking for lots of opportunity to go backpacking in Alaska. It's a lot of work and it was kind of wet. It was good to get to do it and have that experience but I wasn't really sold on it.

TM: And climbing Denali wasn't on your radar screen.

PG: Yeah, it wasn't on my radar screen at all. So I had my little couple months experience there and in July I was offered a job I had applied for. And again, I can't remember how many I applied for and didn't get, but I applied for and did get the river district ranger job in Big Bend. In Canyonlands, I was just the ranger and now I am the district ranger that supervised the district operation in Big Bend. There was only like three of us on the team so it wasn't like it was a big staff but it was a step up, and I think I was a GS-9 there.

TM: Wow. Okay, so that's a ladder rung up.

PG: Right, a ladder rung up. I was a little bit nervous about going and working on the border and, of course, the river is the border so you're not just sort of close to the border, you are patrolling "the border" when you're doing a river patrol. I think I might have mentioned... Oh, I can't remember if I mentioned Steve Swanke before. He was one of the district rangers in Canyonlands after I worked there. Well, Steve Swanke was a Park Service guy that worked in Arches when I first was a seasonal in Canyonlands. I don't remember where he got his permanent job, but he ended up being the river district ranger in Canyonlands. Let's see, I'm trying to think how the timing went. It probably was in the, maybe '89/'90, something like that; or maybe a little bit after... But he had been the district ranger at Big Bend before I got there in '91. So, he was definitely in Big Bend. Maybe he went to Canyonlands from there. But he had been working down there, and I knew him pretty well. We'd done river trips together and, you know, part of that gang of young people that hangs out together. He's the one that had recommended me to the guy that was doing the hiring there; I guess it was the assistant chief ranger. He had contacted me and said, "Pat, you might be interested in this job. I think you'd be perfect for it.

They're looking for a river ranger." And I was like, "Yeah, okay." But then I was like, "Well, but Steve, it's right on the border. What kind of border incidents and problems and drug runners and smugglers, you know... What's going on there?" I don't want to get into a place where I have to wear body armor down the river or something like that. He said, "Well, it's really not that bad." There were a few incidents there. In the 80s there actually was a shooting. I don't remember the particulars now, but, it'd been a few years before. So there had been some random, not good stuff a couple times. He said, "Yeah, there's some random, not good stuff, but day to day to day it's really not a problem or an issue and I think you'll find that it's okay." So I said, "Okay." So I had applied and I got offered the job. So I talked to my boss in Denali, who completely understood that even though he had hired me with the expectation that I would be there until September when the season ended, that here I was getting a good job, that was a permanent job, and that, of course, I was going to accept it, and too bad for Denali that I vacated that seasonal job. But he understood so I went on down the road in July and drove. It took me like seven days, probably, to drive from Alaska to Big Bend. Might have taken me...

TM: Did you take the ALCAN? You drive the ALCAN down?

PG: I did drive the ALCAN and I took the time to swing by Banff and Jasper for a quick visit. Mostly I just kept driving down. I should say, actually, I should say another thing I didn't mention earlier, but when I was nine years old and my family was moving from California to Oregon, we went via Alaska because my dad's brother had moved to Alaska sometime earlier in the 60s. So in 1964, my dad and mom decided that Alaska was the land of opportunity and that we should go up there and move up there. They had sold the house and gotten rid of most of the stuff, and packed up some household stuff into a cargo trailer that my dad had made. Had this truck and we drove up to Alaska on the ALCAN. My two sisters and I were in the back of the truck bored to tears. We stayed in Alaska all of about nine days, got chewed up by mosquitoes. My dad and mom looked for work and realized that there was not a lot of openings for any kind of work—they just went up there cold. They decided that it didn't look good, and so we turned around and drove back down the ALCAN Highway to Oregon where my mom got a teaching job and my dad started building houses. So, it wasn't my first trip on the ALCAN, but it'd been many years. So, there I was driving down the ALCAN again forty years later, or whatever it was, thirty years later. Went to Big Bend and started my job as a river district ranger there in 1991.

TM: Did you get an orientation to the river and how it works? I mean, I would be kind of intimidated to be a boss over some people that are, you know, over a river of which I haven't run before and I don't know anything about. I would imagine there's a little bit of trepidation with that. And that I would be kind of calmed down if somebody said hey, we're gonna give you a two-week tour of, you know, this and that and here's...

PG: Yeah. I can't remember... I remember the... I'm sure that I was like, okay, what's the lay of the land here? How does this all work? Who's who? What's the river like? How bad is it? What's going on? There was a... Let me make sure I've got all this timing right. There was a fellow named Marcos Parades who was the river ranger. And he really...

TM: How do you spell his last name?

PG: Parades: P-A-R-A-D-E-S.

TM: Sorry, and he was, really?

PG: And his first name was Marcos, M-A-R-C-O-S. And he was the river ranger, he was the permanent that wasn't the district ranger. Terlingua is near Big Bend, on the west side, and there are commercial river runners in Terlingua that run through the canyons in the park. He had worked for them for a bit and somehow got... He was Hispanic, he spoke Spanish wonderfully. He was a great liaison with people who were on the south side of the river, on the border. So he was both very skilled with running that river and knowledgeable of that river, but he also kind of knew the people. He was a local, more or less. He's still there, so he's very local, long term local. I'm sure he was the person that gave me the most information. And I don't remember my first patrol. I don't remember where it was or what it looked like; but Marcus almost certainly was on it, because he would have been the guy that knew the stuff.

TM: Had he applied for the job, the district ranger job?

PG: He might have, he might have. I can't remember if he applied or not. He probably did, because why wouldn't you? But I don't remember that there was any kind of... If he had applied, I don't remember any kind of undercurrents of bitterness or resentment, or anything like that. He was a good guy and we got along, we got along pretty well. He had a different way of... My brain is very linear and he was kind of really about big ideas sometimes. Sometimes I'd say, "Marcos, I don't think that's real realistic here." Which was probably a good combo. I've always heard that when you have people who are different, you get the best production out of that because you don't have the same thought processes going on in two different heads. But we were different kinds of thinkers and so sometimes it's like, "What! What're you talking about?" But all in all, we got along fine. There was a seasonal, they had a seasonal that summer that was working. Oh, I can't remember his name. I remember doing a patrol through Santa Elena with him, so maybe he was the one that oriented me to Santa Elena.

Big Bend, maybe I'll describe it real quick. The Rio Grande River—Rio "Grande" I think that's how I mostly said it—is the southern border of the US, and it's also the southern border of Big Bend National Park. Most of the water in that stretch of the Rio Grande comes out of Mexico, because downstream of El Paso, it pretty much soaks into all of the riverbed and there's a massive amount of tamarisk that live in there and transpire off the moisture. There's certainly no surface water and probably not much subterranean water that trickles down to the Rio Grande in the park area. So most of the water is released out of a dam in Mexico, pursuant to some water treaty agreements. Just as we deliver Colorado River water to Mexico, they deliver some water into the Rio Grande that comes from a major fork in Mexico, upstream of Big Bend.

TM: So same watershed, just a side tributary that's got a dam on it.

PG: Right, that's operated by Mexico. The water levels in Big Bend are dependent upon that water mostly, or else local rainfall. Sometimes there's monsoons there in the summer that really kick up the water, but not a lot comes out of like Colorado and down through the Rio Grande drainage into Big Bend from the US. So when I first got there, the water was reasonably high, but within a year it had dropped down to where we mostly were canoeing all these runs. Oh, I was going to describe it first. Right on the west end of where the river enters the park, is Santa Elena Canyon, which is usually an overnight trip. I can't remember how many miles it is from the put-in to the take-out, but it's an overnight trip. And this goes through a tall, a high, narrow canyon, pretty narrow canyon. It's really pretty grand, actually, and very great. Oh, I don't know, it's a beautiful area.

TM: And it's got big rocks down there in the river channel at one point.

PG: Yes, right. There's a rapid called the Rock Slide, which is like, yeah, they kind of clog up the channel and you have to pick your way through them. When it's real high water, the water goes over 'em, but I only saw that once out of six and a half years of being there. Then there's a stretch of river that's pretty open. You can drive cars, I mean, they smuggle sometimes across it. It's just open without any kind of cliffs or canyons. It's basically the low desert that goes for the next, I don't know, 80 miles maybe, 60 miles of the park boundary. Then, in the middle of this stretch of river that's along the southern boundary is Mariscal Canyon. So that's another canyon, where the river goes through a canyon upland area. There is a rapid in there called the Tight Squeeze, which really isn't that much of anything. That's usually run as another overnight trip; I think you could do it as a day trip if you were out there to start with. And then there's another section of open canyon that might be 40 miles, I can't remember. And then there's Boquillas Canyon at the downstream end of the park, that you would start your trip across... Well, there's a little town of Boquillas across from it and you start your trip there. So, there were three separate canyons, or canyons separated by big open water, and we would just patrol the canyon section. We really didn't patrol that open water section because there was no recreational boating going on there.

TM: Did anybody run the whole thing just for fun? Let's run the whole Rio Grande through the park, flat water or canyons?

PG: People probably did, but it was pretty unusual. It really wasn't... I did that section from Santa Elena Canyon through Mariscal once, in that open water section, and it's just kind of...it's not too exciting. But you know, it's not bad in the sense that you're on a river and you're floating down, you're seeing what's going on.

TM: I think there'd be birds, and maybe, you know, I don't know.

PG: Yeah, right, right. But no, it's not done very often. So there's a fourth section of canyon that we were responsible for. It's outside of the park on the downstream end. It's referred to as the Lower Canyons of the Rio Grande, or Lower Canyons. It is not in Big Bend, but it was designated a Wild and Scenic River and it is administered by Big Bend. We would require permits to go down it and we patrolled it. That's an 80-mile section of really a great river trip through some canyons, not quite as sheer walled as Santa Elena, but canyons, and then more open, and then canyons and narrows. A lot of different topography down there. Not just kind of flat desert. I think they claim, maybe three Class III rapids. They're not really that bad. So we patrolled that as well. It's a great stretch of river. One thing that happened was that when I went there I was a rafter but I was not a canoer. The water levels fell, like I said, I think. I did a patrol through the Lower Canyons that had enough water to take a raft. I did a patrol through Santa Elena with a raft, I can remember, when the water was high enough that we went over all the rocks in the Rock Slide. But, pretty soon the water dropped and canoes were the way to go. I don't remember past that first year that I ever got back in a raft, because there just wasn't enough water. So I had to learn how to canoe! I did fine because the water is not that...especially with lower volumes it wasn't that challenging. Although in the Lower Canyons, there's some spots where somebody was snapping pictures, you know, and I can... There's a picture of me, so this is how I can remember it. I got into some tippiness, and I just grabbed the gunnels of the canoe, which is not what you want to do, you want to be paddling. So that was the skill level I was at. I was like, "Oh, no, I'm gonna tip! Grab this side of the canoe and try and stabilize yourself." But, you know, I got better with doing it time after time. So we did our patrols in the canoes.

TM: Were you using canoes because the concept of inflatable kayaks hadn't kind of come online yet?

PG: I think so. I think that's a good piece of it. But I will also say that you can carry a lot more stuff in a canoe. We had solo canoes and we could carry a lot more than you can in an IK. We put little coolers in there, we had toilet systems. You had more volume that you could fill with stuff.

TM: Yeah, absolutely carry more, hands down.

PG: Yeah. So we used canoes. I lived in the center of the park. Most of the park staff lives in the center where the visitor center is, it's called Panther Junction. And then on the west end of park near the river, there was a ranger that was stationed there, a couple of them, at Castolon. That's where Santa Elena Canyon kind of ends and it opens up. There was a little campground there and a ranger/a couple ranger staff that were assigned down there. On the east end there's some staff that's assigned. And then in the high country, a place called the Chisos, there's more staff assigned there. Panther Junction, where I lived, was kind of the hub of everything, both people coming into the park would hit there first, the visitor center, and then go off to these other locations. Maintenance came out of there, the headquarters, the superintendent was there, and the river crew based itself out of the shop area there. We had about...let's see...Marcos worked there. I don't think there was very many of us, as a matter of fact. There was a fella named Steve McAllister who volunteered. He wasn't there when I first got there, but he started volunteering a year/maybe two years later, and then he stuck with us and just became one of the crew year round. He lived in his little camper in a parking spot, an RV spot type thing, and just worked with us. He was a real asset. He was our third person, that we kind of... Between the three of us, we held everything together.

TM: So would he get per diem? Sort of a food...?

PG: Yep, yep. He got a per diem of some...yeah, he got per diem. I think he probably got his site for free, so I don't think he was spending much money but he wasn't making any. Yeah, so he was a real asset to us. We also had some people who volunteered to run our shuttles for us. I remember a couple that would come a few years in a row for a good chunk of the fall, I guess, and run shuttles for us, because the shuttle for the Lower Canyon took a while to drive there and get people and come back.

TM: When you were doing your patrol trips, I'm thinking about places like Santa Elena Canyon, did your radios work in there?

PG: Not in the canyon, no. Yeah, I don't think that they worked in the canyon. They didn't even work very well at the mouth of the canyon, I can remember that. It was spotty in the Lower Canyons, as well. I don't remember the particulars, but just in general, I have to think that it was kind of spotty. I don't even know that we got much in the Lower Canyons. We might have had to hike out if we had a situation. We mostly didn't have situations, so I don't remember it being a big deal.

TM: And how did the river permit system work?

PG: You just would come in and get issued a permit. So there's no restrictions on the number of people that were to launch.

TM: Okay, so no allocations, none of that stuff.

PG: Right, no allocations. You had to have a fire pan and a toilet, or a way of carrying out... Yeah, some sort of a toilet, human waste disposal system.

TM: Did you have to have prior experience or just didn't even ask?

PG: No, no. Nope, didn't even ask. Pretty easy, pretty easygoing. Thinking about the season for the river there was fall and spring, I'm pretty sure, as I remember, because it was really hot in the summer and not too many people would come there to run the river in the summer. In the winter, some people would come down in the winter, but the bulk of the people were either spring, spring break, Easter Break, spring, or in the fall, which is really a great time of year.

TM: Would it freeze in the winter?

PG: Yeah. It would occasionally get below freezing as far as the air temperature would go in the winter. The river never froze, of course, but the air could get below freezing overnight. It didn't always. I would say maybe one out of 10 nights maybe, or, you know, maybe there was two consecutive nights that it got cold, and then it didn't get cold again for another 20 nights.

TM: That's got to be, what, 1000 foot above sea level or so? Less?

PG: Yeah, I'm gonna, probably... I can't remember.

TM: 'Cause it's just going down to the Gulf of Mexico so it can't be that high. So it should be warm enough in the winter. But again, it sounds like it depends on what the Mexicans are doing with their dam and their water release.

PG: Right, right. I think there's almost always a minimal trickle that just comes from, I don't know where -- the ground. Maybe there's leakages out of the dam, maybe there's subterranean stuff coming out of El Paso, down the channel there. But it seems like... Well, actually, I was talking to people recently, because I'm going to try and do a Lower Canyons trip in February so I have been recently in touch with people there, to say, you know, is there going to be enough water for... And we're going to take IKs. So I was asking them, "I can't remember that we ever had trouble with water levels, in terms of us taking canoes, but what's it like now?" The guy that now has the job I had, said, "No, you know, we always seem to be fine to get canoes down. Every now and then, maybe you have to drag the upper part above Santa Elena Canyon." It sounded like there's only 150 CFS sometimes, but it just kind of channels, I guess, and you can get canoes down. I had no memory of not doing trips because the water was too low. But then I thought, maybe it's worse or maybe I misremembered, and I had contacted the current district ranger and he said, "No, it seems like we just, you know, if we want to go, we're gonna go." I remember a real cold patrol once though. Back to the temperatures, I can remember being in the Lower Canyons, and it might have been October, November—probably November, maybe December. We didn't do a lot of patrols in December or January, because it just wasn't a volume of people down there. But, I can remember being down when it was like 27 degrees when we woke up in the morning. It felt cold for when your body's adapted to the temperatures in Big Bend which were generally warmer.

TM: Yeah, and if there's a little humidity it's double cold.

PG: Yeah. I really enjoyed working in Big Bend. I haven't been watching time, are we getting short on time?

TM: No, this would be a good place. We've been going about an hour and 10, hour and 8 minutes. I would like to know more about Big Bend, and sort of any issues that you dealt with there. So if this is a good place to put a comma, let's do that.

PG: Yeah, that sounds good.

TM: Great. Okay, well, this will then conclude Part 6 oral history interview with Pat Grediagin. Today is Thursday, November 26, 2020. Pat, thank you so very much.

PG: Yeah, you're very welcome.