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Don Corrick
July 01, 2020

Interview conducted by Vincent Santucci
Transcribed by Teresa Bergen
Edited by Molly Williams

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Date: July 1, 2020
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Transcript

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Santucci: —okay to you?

Corrick: That sounds great.

Santucci: Okay. I'm going to just give a real brief introduction, and then we'll jump in. So today is Wednesday, July 1, 2020. And my name is Vincent Santucci. I'm the senior paleontologist for the National Park Service Paleontology Program. Today I am speaking with Don Corrick, geologist at Big Bend National Park. The interview is being conducted by telephone from Don's home in Austin, Texas. And I am at my home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. So welcome, Don.

Corrick: Thanks, Vince. It's good to talk with you.

Santucci: Likewise. So, probably the easiest question that I'll ask you is can you provide me some information about when and where you were born, and what it was like growing up?

Corrick: Sure. I was born in Germany. My dad was in the Air Force, so we were a military family. He was a pilot and an officer. And so he was stationed in Germany when I was born. So that's where I was born. Being an air force family, we moved around a lot. Every year or two we were in a different spot. Places, my dad and my mom were from the Washington D.C. area. Dad's buried at Arlington National Cemetery. And so that really was sort of home. That's where I have a lot of family and where we would go to see family. But where we lived included Virginia, Tennessee, the Philippines when I was a teenager, back to Virginia, then Louisiana, Texas.

And so I wound up in Texas. My folks got divorced and my mom remarried and we wound up in Texas. And eventually down on the coast of Texas for my high school years. So that's sort of my hometown now. And I went to high school there, the Fighting Sandcrabs, in Port Lavaca. And then to my undergraduate college at Baylor University in Waco, where I started in biology but shifted over to geology. Because I loved all of the sciences, and geology rolls all the sciences into one.

Is that enough of my – do you want me to just continue from there, Vince?

Santucci: Yeah. So that's good. Just before we get too much detail about your college education, when you were growing up did you ever have any opportunities to go out and find fossils? Did you have any interest in fossils as a young boy?

Corrick: I remember definitely being interested in dinosaurs, like I think almost everybody is. And drawing pictures of triceratops and so forth. And stegosaurus. I do not remember doing fossil hunting until I was a Boy Scout. And on one of the camping trips we went to, there was somebody's private land, to let the Boy Scout troops come and camp on his land. I'm trying to remember where it was. I guess it was Texas. Perhaps up in the Wichita Falls area. But he showed us something that he called popping rocks. And if you collected these things and threw them in the fire—they were made of limestone and the moisture in them kind of made them pop. And later, when I recognized what crinoid stems were, I realized that's what we'd been collecting and throwing in the campfire. (Santucci laughs) To amuse ourselves. So I guess that was, Wichita Falls area probably has the right age rocks for that.

And so then as a family, we didn't really go camping or do that sort of thing. But the Boy Scouts got me very interested in the outdoors. I did one family fieldtrip from; I remember kind of loading everybody in the station wagon to drive across country. We would have been leaving from the Wichita Falls area, where my stepdad was stationed in the air force. And driving and crossing the Painted Desert, Petrified Forest, on our way to California. And so we saw a few national parks at that point. But as a child, I was really not made aware of national parks in my family. And I think they still are kind of amazed that I wound up doing what I'm doing now.

00:05:21

Santucci: When you were accepted at Baylor, did you know right away that you were going to major in geology? Or did that come after a period of time?

Corrick: I had always dreamed of being an oceanographer, a marine biologist. In the footsteps of Jacques Cousteau. It was that time period in the '70s when he was so popular, and I'm growing up in that time. Maybe even late '60s. And learned to scuba dive as a sixteen-year-old. So that sort of as a young person, that was sort of my career track.

And then when I got into Baylor, my major was biology. But they had a ton of premed students that filled up all the introductory biology classes. And actually my stepdad suggested a geology career. So that was 1974 that I took college.

Santucci: Very good. So you wound up becoming a paleo-oceanographer for Cretaceous seaway at Big Bend.

Corrick: (laughs) Exactly. Exactly. And Paleozoic, too, because I ended up in the oil business after I got out of college. In the Permian Basin.

Santucci: Great.

Corrick: So, definitely. Yeah. I did come full circle to sort of oceanography.

Santucci: Excellent.

Corrick: But then I enjoyed the geology. And when I got into those introductory classes, I kind of realized hey, this is all the science. And they go on camping trips, which I liked. And at

Baylor, they were also beer drinkers, which I also liked. (Santucci laughs) That was my tribe I found pretty quickly, so I just shifted over into that.

Santucci: So when you graduated, what was the next venture for you?

Corrick: So I graduated in 1978 with my BS. And that was during the time of the oil boom. And several of my friends that had gotten jobs out in Midland, Texas. And I was at loose ends. I think like a lot of people when you've been going to school for sixteen years, what am I going to do now?

And so one of them wrote to me and said, "Hey, there's lots of jobs out here. Come on out." So I did it. I went out that fall and slept on friends' couches and interviewed for jobs. And got a geology technician job with Hunt Energy. And they were the company of Nelson Bunker Hunt and his brother Herbert Hunt, who were heirs to the great Hunt oil fortune. And fairly, kind of famous dudes. They became notorious for trying to corner the silver market. And that kind of led to them sort of going bust with it. So I – then I'm a petroleum geologist.

Santucci: And how long did you do that for?

00:08:49

Corrick: A total of eight years. Started, so I lived in Midland for about eight years. And started with the Hunts. And then was, during that time, one of my friends had gone to work for George W. Bush, with his small oil company. And then he hired me to work for George. I worked for George for about a year on the tiny little three-man offices. George Bush, me, and then my geologist friend. And of course his secretary. And tried to work up prospects to sell. The name of the company was Arbusto, which is bush in Spanish. Because at that time, his dad was vice president and he was trying not to trade on the Bush name. But then later, I think, did. (laughs) So I did that for about a year.

And then my mentor in the oil boom business had been the office manager for Hunt. And he in the meantime had started his own small company [unclear] 10:00 company. That was, by then that was about 1979 to '80, when things were going great guns. So then he hired me away from Bush. And so then I worked for him until the crash of the oil business in the mid '80s.

And then I bartended for a while. And eventually then about in '88 or thereabouts, back to college to grad school at Texas A&M studying archeology. Which led me into the Park Service. Because while I was in Midland, I'd fallen in love with Big Bend. And we would come down, the geologists would come down and go on rafting trips through Santa Elena Canyon. Often funded by a couple of oil field service people who were trying to sell us their services. So they'd take you on a fun trip and feed you steaks. So a group of us got in the habit of going through Santa Elena Canyon.

But my first exposure to Big Bend was the very first year I got that job at, that first job at Hunt Energy. And I'd never really even heard of Big Bend. So I'm a wet behind the ears greenhorn. But the West Texas Geological Society that fall was, or maybe spring, was running a field trip to Big Bend. So my new bosses at Hunt Energy said, "Hey, come out here and take this field trip with the WTGS." And Ross Maxwell, who's a famous name in Big Bend because he

was our first superintendent, he was a geologist, he did the first geological map of the park, which is still a solid piece of excellent science. He did all the early sedimental studies for the park. So he was the honorary leader of the trip. He was on the trip. Signed my guidebook for me. So that was my first time in Big Bend, my first exposure to the park. And then subsequently, we would do these kind of debauchery trips floating the rafts down the Rio Grande through the spectacular canyon of Santa Elena.

Santucci: Great. So a couple of questions before we go further. So, did you actually have the opportunity to work with George Bush and meet his family?

Corrick: Yes. He was just, my office was on one side of the secretary. His office was on the other. So I saw him on a daily basis.

Santucci: Wow.

Corrick: We were in the same building. I met his wife a couple of times, his girls, the twins, were toddlers at that time. That would have been, that was about 1980 that I worked for George. And we went out for drinks a few times. That was before he swore off alcohol and still a lot of fun. So yeah, we had a daily relationship, working relationship.

Santucci: That's pretty exciting.

Corrick: Yeah. I enjoyed that time.

Santucci: I had a chance to meet him at the White House. And you know, he's extremely personable when you get a chance to talk to him. And I was very impressed.

Corrick: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. And that's one of the strengths of the features that makes him so potent a personality. And one of the things about him was that he was kind of famous for having nicknames for people. And I think it was just a memory trick, to help him remember names. (Santucci laughs) And for me, my nickname was Core Lab Corrick. And Core Lab was a company that did drilling cores. You know, would bring up rock cores. The specialized when you needed a good core sample from a well, then Core Lab was the go-to company. And so that was his little memory trick for me, I guess.

00:14:45

Santucci: That's funny.

Corrick: My friend stayed in good touch with him over the years, but I didn't.

Santucci: Yeah. I was going to ask you if you've corresponded with him at all since he's ended his presidency.

Corrick: No. No, I haven't.

Santucci: Well, very good. That was really interesting. Did you ever get a photograph of Ross Maxwell?

Corrick: Huh. I don't think I did. I don't think so. I don't remember taking any photos of him. You know, those photos would be on slides probably somewhere.

Santucci: Well that's another nice opportunity that you had to meet him, given your role later on.

Corrick: Absolutely. Yeah. You know, at the time, I really didn't realize what an important person he was. But, yeah, I feel privileged to have been able to meet him, because he was getting up there in years by that point.

Santucci: Yes, definitely. So, let's see. So you went on to get, did you complete a master's in archeology?

Corrick: Well, I started in the master's program. And then I'm really good at taking tests, and I aced the GRE. And when they saw my scores, they offered me a regent's fellowship if I would go for a PhD. And to get free money, of course I took that. Which probably was not wise. Because I didn't really want to go into academia and didn't realize how much work it would be. So I basically took my coursework but did not finish my dissertation. So I did not get either a master's or a PhD out of that. I did get a job. (laughs) I got a job at Big Bend.

Santucci: Yeah. Very good. And maybe to stay with the theme of education, then you later on went to Sul Ross?

Corrick: Yes. Yes. Then while working at Big Bend, I enrolled at Sul Ross with the help of wonderful supervisors who were supportive of the idea. And got to commute up there for a couple of days a week to take my classes. And got my master's there from Sul Ross in geology.

Santucci: And who was your primary advisor?

Corrick: It was—

Santucci: Was it Dave Rohr?

Corrick: No. I can't believe I'm going blank on this because I consider him a friend. It will come to me.

Santucci: That's okay. What was your, did you do a master's thesis?

00:17:56

Corrick: Yes, I did.

Santucci: And the topic?

Corrick: I did it on volcanics of the Chisos Mountains. Now I'm still trying to think of my friend's name. (laughter) It's on volcanics of Pine Canyon, the Pine Canyon Caldera.

Santucci: Okay. Okay, great.

Corrick: What I did was, because I'd done so much sedimentary geology, I thought oh, I'm going back to school. Let's learn about something new and different. Especially since so many geology parks in the NPS are volcanic parks. So, let's try igneous geology. And of course naïve me, it is like starting from scratch. It is so completely different than sedimentary geology. And lots of geochemistry, which is not a strength of mine. It was challenging but fun and important to kind of round out my geological knowledge. So that's why I went in that direction, instead of like paleontology or something like that.

Santucci: Okay. So then how did you come to be employed by the National Park Service at Big Bend?

Corrick: My advisor at Texas A&M in archeology had done some work for the park in analysis of prehistoric lithic material. The chips and the flakes and the artifacts of stone. And so he then hired me to do, they then had another contract, I guess, for the park to do analysis on another set of lithics. And then so I, being a teaching assistant, did that report. And he also then passed on word of a summer job at Big Bend doing a road survey prior to reconstruction of hey, Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive. That name pops up again. One of our really beautiful scenic roads that goes down in the western part of the park, leads down to Santa Elena Canyon, is named after Ross Maxwell in honor of him as the park's first geologist and first superintendent. And Ross had laid out that road when he was superintendent and developing the park. The route that that road took. And he did it in such a way that showcased the scenery, which is geology, and the important geology in that part of the park. That part of the park is full of really important and impressive and well-exposed igneous features. The west side of the Chisos and Tuff Canyon and extinct volcanoes are just littered throughout that part of the park. And so, the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive winds down through this. So it had been built in the early years of the park, probably in the 19, I think it was originally surveyed and built in the 1960s. And they were beginning to resurface it.

And so the park archeologist, Tom Alex, who ends up hiring me, had gotten some money from federal highways. It's earmarked for archeological survey. And hired a crew of three guys to come down during the summer and walk both sides of that road. I think we did about twenty miles, a little over twenty miles of the road. And surveying out about thirty meters on either side of the road. The idea being you don't want the big trucks and construction camps set up on archeological sites. So we went down and found all the sites along the road and mapped them and collected artifacts. I think we found about twenty-eight sites during that project, during that summer. So that was my first summer job working in the park. And just loved it.

And to back up a little bit, I'd already fallen in love with the park. Because when the oil business crashed and I was on unemployment and bartending and so forth in Midlands, so this would be the mid and late '80s, I would, I had fallen in love on the rafting trips. And so then I would cash my unemployment check and buy groceries and drive down to Big Bend and go camping for a couple of weeks. And explore the park. So, I really fell in love with it then. Kind of recognized, oh, this is more than just Saint Elena Canyon. This is a whole otherworldly kind of thousand acres of fantastic geology and natural history and just cool stuff every place you look.

So then to get a summer job was like a dream come true. And so after that summer as an archeology technician, then I came back the following summer to help write the report on what we found the previous summer. And then it just, like a lot of people I think with Park Service careers, the seasonal jobs turned into term jobs. Which eventually turned into subject to furlough permanent job. And then just sort of wormed your way in. That was all as an archeologist.

Santucci: Okay. So what year was it, again, that you started your first season at Big Bend?

00:24:25

Corrick: It would have been 1990, my first season.

Santucci: Nineteen ninety. Okay. And so, between 1990 and today, let's see, is that thirty years?

Corrick: Going on. Yeah.

Santucci: So you probably worked under lots of different supervisors and superintendents.

Corrick: Yes.

Santucci: Do any of those stand out for you as a big supporter of geology and paleontology that helped you?

Corrick: Yes. I think so. So as I worked as an archeology technician for about thirteen years. But during that time, I was craving the geology duties, because I was a geologist. So they would just kind of hand that stuff over to me. Until finally they changed my title. And so I remember Bill Wellman was a big supporter. John King was also supportive. There's one whose name escapes me that I'll dredge up for you. Cindy Ott-Jones during the fossil discovery exhibit was very supportive. And I don't think the exhibit would have happened without her and Bill Wellman's support. They were crucial to it. So those are the main ones that kind of later in the career, when I was shifting over to geology, that were the most support.

Santucci: And so when did you officially move into the geologist position at Big Bend?

Corrick: I would have to look back in my paperwork. But it's about 2003, 2004.

Santucci: Okay. So—

Corrick: It's been part of the problem with teleworking, Vince. I kind of tried to refresh my memory. But so many of those files are back in the park.

Santucci: Oh, yeah. When you're thirty years at a park, I mean, it's hard to remember exact dates.

Corrick: (laughs) It all blurs together.

Santucci: Yeah. But I can share a date with you. September 24, 2002 is the day that we met, when I visited Big Bend National Park. And I was there for I think three days. And during that trip, you took me out to several localities, fossil localities in the park and areas of geologic

interest, including the old fossil exhibit. And at that time, you shared with me your thoughts and dreams about that particular exhibit. Do you recall that meeting? And your vision?

Corrick: I do. I remember that. (laughs) But I've done that with several people. When the regional director made a visit to the park, I took them out there and did the same thing. But I do remember that visit with you. It's beginning of what I consider a good friendship. But having the date is pretty shocking, to think that it's that long ago that we met. Man.

Santucci: (laughs) So what was your vision at that time regarding that exhibit? Because I want to talk about how that evolved over time.

00:28:27

Corrick: Sure. Well, you know, as soon as you become aware of the resources that the park has produced for science and you go to the Smithsonian and see *Quetzalcoatlus* is hanging from the ceiling and realize, that's from Big Bend. And then realize, the park does not display this to its visitors, the place that it was found. That's bothersome. And then if you remember the old (laughs) the old fossil bone exhibit, they call it. You know, I had seen that, I don't know if it evolved or devolved over the years. Because originally it was an in-situ display, which was pretty cool. Kind of up on the hill. So my first visit to the park is probably '88. No, '78, '79. And so during the '80s, the early '80s, I had seen the original fossil bone exhibit. Where they had an outcrop of mammal fossils, Cenozoic mammals. And I think they're Eocene. I forget right now. And they built a little—Jack Wilson, who has collaborated with Ross Maxwell on the original geologic report of Big Bend National Park and the original map, had found this bone bed—and they had made a great little in situ fossil exhibit out of it. Built a parking lot there. And you walked up a little trail to this little shelter and you looked at the Plexiglas and there is the real thing. Real fossils in the wild, the way you find them. And visitors loved that.

And then shortly before I started working there, we got a new superintendent in the late '80s, Jim Carrico, who I love. Great guy. But like new superintendents do, they look around for what needs to, they bring fresh eyes to the park. And they're looking around for things that need to be fixed. And over the years from the '60s to the '80s, that place had gotten kind of shabby and rundown. Plexiglas was scratched. And it had been broken into and vandalized. And one or two of the bones, I think, might have been pilfered.

And so Jim Carrico and his team decided well, let's fix this up. And so they did not have a geologist on staff—and I'm not going to take any blame for this because I wasn't there yet—but he had a young intern, I think he was a landscape architect, and his name is Sean Bengé. Does that name ring a bell?

Santucci: Yes. Mm hmm.

Corrick: Okay. Because Sean has moved way up in the Park Service in the meantime. But he was just getting started at Big Bend at that time. And so he, I believe this story is correct. He drew up some plans for a new exhibit. And so they went out and they built this lovely exhibit out of really colorful native rock, from the Boquillas Formation, which is one of our marine formations. And one part of it has really pretty colors. So they built this new shelter. And then they sent an interpreter up to move the exhibit down into the new shelter after it was built. And

lo and behold, that's when they figured out what they really had. That those are not replicas on display up there; that's the real thing, and they're embedded in the rock. And that's kind of an oh, crap moment. What do we do now? Because the new shelter had been built down the hill to make it handicapped accessible so you didn't have to climb up onto the hill for handicapped people.

And so, their solution was to get, I think they got Jack Wilson back out there to excavate them. They made replicas of them and they set them on a bed of sand in the new shelter. Which I thought was really lame. There was no wow factor. You know, a dinosaur fossil, just by virtue of its size, wows the public. These were mammal fossils, so they were not that impressive, not that recognizable, although there were some skull parts in the collection. They weren't the real thing. They're probably labeled "replica." They weren't like you'd find them, because they were just sort of laying there on the surface of the sand, not embedded in the rock. So I've always described that as a really lame exhibit. And I would watch people kind of come up to it. They'd pull into this empty parking lot and get out of their cars and kind of go over and look through the glass and kind of go, huh. And turn around and leave.

And then, to know that we had these like Quetzalcoatlus of a giant pterosaur, the largest known flying creature of all time. And all the other great dinosaurs, and giant crocodiles, and mosasaurs, and all the other fantastic stuff that we're not sharing with the public, drove me nuts. And so from early on, you know, for at least the last twenty years, I'd been dreaming of how can we fix this problem. And the park had done some innovative things. Like for Quetzalcoatlus, the giant pterosaur, giant flying reptile, in the visitor center they had done a life-size silhouette on the ceiling of the visitor center to kind of show the size of this thing, the 35-foot wingspan. But a lot of the visitors just kind of came and never looked up and noticed it unless it was pointed out to them.

And about that time that I met you, the University of Texas, which had originally collected that famous paleontologist Wann Langston, at least for Big Bend record, had done the – created the replica that you see in the Smithsonian and at museums throughout the world. And he offered up to the park for free the wing, the big wing, that was the major find of the giant pterosaur. So we go that, and now had that on the wall. But again, it's just the wing. And they have, the entire skeleton was available.

So that was sort of the, that was really kind of the thing, the itch that needed to be scratched was we really need Quetzalcoatlus. All these other things would be great if we could, but the travesty is not having Quetzalcoatlus on display. So I started scheming ways to do that.

And then about 2004, they redid that Panther Junction Visitor Center where we had some fossils on display. And kind of a classic glass case with a few bones behind it. A tibia, the horn of a ceratopsian and the few mammals and a tortoise and some kind of cartoonish graphic panels which were, had some errors in them. So these are like 1980s, circa graphics. So the dinosaurs are dragging their tails. And not really doing the nice paleo art like we can do nowadays. So they were revamping all of that and planning to do away with the fossil exhibits. I ended up convincing them to keep some fossil exhibits in the visitors center. Kind of as an adjunct, they were just such an impressive resource that's an easy sell. And even though it didn't really fit into the other theme they were carrying through, they felt like they had to have some of that just for

the, it's such a crowd pleaser. And so we do have some items there, including the big wing replica.

But as I went back through my digital files, I found so about that time in 2004, I wrote a letter to our paleontological researchers asking for ideas. We're planning a new display. And by this time I'd gone to, I think I went to five different superintendents of pitching this idea of something better out of the fossil bone exhibit. And all of them loved the idea. There was never any funding for it. But I'm working on the idea during this time.

And so this letter to the paleontologists, they're the experts. I'm a generalist geologist. I don't have the expertise in paleontology. So I'm asking the experts. And I say, what do you think? What are the specimens you think that we really need to share with the visitors? What's your advice? And one person in particular, Tom Lehman from Texas Tech, just fantastic paleontologist. His legacy is second to none in the park's paleontology. And his willingness to help us in the Park Service is also unparalleled. So his letter was crucial to the vision, if you will. Because what he said was, he had a couple of suggestions. First, you do not want to have just a trophy room with a bunch of heads of lions and tigers on the wall of the big game hunter. You don't want to have a trophy room. You want to tell the story. And his suggestion for telling the story was telling it in four parts. Of the marine environment, which is the thousands of feet of limestone that we have. Then the coastal environment, which is pretty much the Aguja Formation in the Cretaceous. And then of the inland Cretaceous environment, which is pretty much the Javelina and a few others, formations. And then finish up with the age of mammals. And I loved the idea. I thought, that was it. And so that concept is Tom Lehman's. And then we carried it through in our envisioning of the exhibit from that point forward.

And not everybody agreed with that. Some of the people that worked in the Cenozoic wanted oh, no, you need to break it out a little bit. But when you're dealing with a non-geologist public, this was the perfect, I think the perfect way of telling the park story. And that is really, the importance of the park geologic record is that we have that almost complete 130 million years of changes over time. We're not just that snapshot in time that, say, Bryce Canyon or Florissant Fossil Beds is, or at least the way I think of them is just exquisite fossils but in a short geologic time period. Here we have deep, fairly deep geologic time, but a complete record of a long period of time that shows these changes, this retreat of the Western Interior Seaway. So there's an entire story to that. That's a pretty easy concept for a non-geologist to understand. Well, okay, there's this seaway that stretches across North America a hundred million years ago. And first we're underwater. And then the seaway's not here anymore. So then the coastline is sitting here in Big Bend. And then it retreats even farther. And we have a coastal floodplain. And so all of that just made for a great story that we carried through.

The challenge was in kind of how we told that story. And that's what took the five years from the friends group accepting the project to fundraise for it to kind of what we can see on the ground out there today.

00:42:38

Santucci: Do you maintain all of that correspondence with the paleontologist where you were seeking their opinion as a dedicated archive?

Corrick: It's in my files. But it's not in our archives yet. You're right, I do need to move that in there.

Santucci: It seems like a particularly valuable piece to preserve forever.

Corrick: Yes. Yes. Absolutely. So, do you want to continue with talking about the fossil exhibit? Kind of how it came to be?

Santucci: Yeah, this is perfect. And I guess leading up to that January 2017 event, that's the ultimate goal, to hear about that event, your feelings about that whole moment in time and what it meant to you personally.

Corrick: Okay. So now I've sort of, you know, through Tom Lehman who's really opened my eyes to how to tell the story, I'm really gung ho. And so the problem all along was everybody thinks well this is a lovely idea, but there's no money for it. Park Service doesn't have the money for a new exhibit. We don't have room in our existing visitor center. So, nice by nothing we can do about it.

So then, during this time, the park develops a friends group. You know, a cooperating, non-government organization that can go out and raise money and can tackle these kinds of things. So I got some money for some paleontological survey from them. I think that was when first hired Steve Wick into the job. And he's a very important person in this as well. So, Steve was a local Terlingua resident who had education and training in paleontology. He eventually got his master's from Sul Ross on a paleontological topic, a new dinosaur species. He discovered bravoceratops, which is a new dinosaur species that we have in the exhibit, a ceratopsian dinosaur from the Javelina Formation.

So, Steve and I start to talk about this and collaborate on it. And the friends group is getting stronger and stronger, taking on bigger and bigger projects. Eventually they are able to raise \$200,000 to fund the park's film that we show to our visitors. The park didn't have a film. And up until that time, that was their biggest project. And they managed to raise that money, get a very nice film made. And then they start looking around for their next project.

And I went and pitched my fossil exhibit idea to them at that time. And Bill Wellman was superintendent by now. And he and they loved it. And Bill Wellman agreed to commit to a \$350,000 project, first off. He was concerned about their ability to raise any more than that. So that was the beginning. And so that would have been probably in late 2011 that the board accepted this project.

And then in early, February seventh and eighth, I looked it up earlier today, of 2012, we had the first design charrette meeting of the players that are going to become part of the design. So five years before that grand opening, we meet to talk about it. So Steve is working for me at that time as a paleontology technician, Steve Wick. And he and I have done lots of brainstorming on it. And we work up a big PowerPoint presentation that kind of explained the importance of the geology, the things that we think need to be included, the four-chapter story that we want to tell. And the group is, a representative from the friends group, the money. A design, exhibit design firm that is now called EDX that the park still works with on exhibit design. The architects, who is a firm called Lake Flato out of San Antonio. A very prestigious architectural

firm that is brought into it because a member of their board was a member, was one of the partners in Lake Flato. And they said, we'll do this for free. We'll draw up the plans for you as a contribution to the park and to this effort. The whole thing starts out being a pretty modest idea that snowballs over time into what we have now. And then, the park. We have people from the interpretive division. We have Steve Wick and me with the geology expertise.

So we tell the story. And then in our naiveté we show them what we think would be a good way to do this exhibit. Hey, we've already thought it out, we think you should do it this way. Which was sort of a shaded pavilion with some of these things kind of behind glass. And what I learned was that no, the artistic people do not want you to solve their problems. They want to go up to the hotel room with a six-pack and brainstorm their ideas. And so we met the next day to hear what they thought we should do. And it was not anything like what we thought we should do.

So the challenges are, we felt like we really wanted to use that place where the original fossil exhibit was for the exhibit. Because it has a parking lot. It is not in the wilderness. It is a fossil site. But fossils are not at risk, not weathering out all over the place like they do in Badlands. They've all been collected and we're not worried about people stealing fossils. But it is a fossil site. And off in the distance, you can see all the rock outcrops, all of the four chapters we're telling the story of. And that really grabbed the artsy guys, and the architects, that concept of being able to see those outcrops from this site. And tying, it's all about tying the resources back to the exhibit.

And so the first concept that they came back with was a trail. A little trail that would kind of wander through. Vince, you'll remember there's kind of a, not really badlands, but sort of an outcrop of sandstone and clay, and sort of elevated, maybe twenty or thirty feet, above the surrounding desert floor. But it's all pretty weak. It's not very indurated. It's not very solid rock. But their idea was we would have four or five, I don't remember exactly how many chapters we were going with. But having several of these displays along the fossil discovery trail. And you walk out to the first one, it would be the marine section. And there would be something that makes you look off into the skyline, where the limestone is outcropping. And then you would have a small display there that talks about it. And then you would walk on out a little farther, the idea is kind of going back in time, or proceeding through geologic time, and then you would have the coastal environment. And so forth and so on, and wander through these hills with a – little displays along the way.

And so the park and the superintendent bought into that idea. You know, it had some advantages. It gets people out of their cars. They're walking out through the landscape. They're exploiting the scenery where you can see all of these outcrops at a distance. You finish up on the actual outcrop of the rocks that produced the mammal fossils of the original fossil bone exhibit. And then you go back to your car.

So then we start doing compliance on that idea. And there's a lot of problems. We take the trails foreman out there, he says there's no way to build a trail on this because the rock is so weak. It's not really rock. It's more clay and sand than like the sandstone and shale. It's young and Cenozoics. So that's a problem. Tromping around on those, they're very—those sandstone units are really neat looking because they're all cross-bedded and really pretty—but if people

start walking on it, you're going to beat them to death really quick. And the original idea had you going out into that stuff. And then I knew people, instead of following the trail out were going to, from there they would be able to see their car and they're going to shortcut across it and continue to beat it to death. And off-trail walking was going to be a real problem. And part of it was going to be visible from the paved road. One of the real advantages to what we finally ended up with was we were able to hide this development behind a ridge. So people that were driving that road that comes in from the north side of the park, what we call Route 11, don't even see the exhibit until they're right there at the turnoff, where we've hidden it and preserved the scenery. The scenic values of a very scenic part of the park to most of our visitors.

So all those things it's like okay, back to the drawing board. So then we thought well can we do a short loop that doesn't go through the hills. And same problem of people shortcutting. And then can we – and we're also kind of fighting the problem of only having \$350,000. But the friends group is gradually raising money, getting grants, and we're kind of moving, you know, kind of moving the bar higher and higher. And the park is agreeing to that as we go along. You know, it's getting more expensive, but they're raising the money, so we're okay with it.

And finally had another meeting where we've abandoned the trail idea. And the design group, the architects, I guess the best way to describe it is like okay, so they present this thing to, would be sort of like a shipping container with the end cut out oriented, and I'm not being fair to them. I mean, they aren't really going to use a real shipping container. But it would be the shape of a shipping container. A long kind of box. Where looking through the container, it would be pointed right at the outcrop. So you would look out this window of the end of the box, at the outcrop. And then you would kind of have a railing. And part of the problem of having an exhibit that's unstaffed and is open to the public is preserving the exhibit from the vandals. And so this is the way, so the exhibits would be out of reach there on the other side of this area. We would have like four of these. And you would go into the first box and look at the specimens and then look out the window to see the outcrop. And you'd leave that and go to the next one. And I hated that idea.

And so we kind of then finally came back full circle of having a shelter that you go through, like many geology exhibits do. You go through time. Starting in the old and going through each phase of time. They wander through. And then, so which was very similar to what Steve and I had originally proposed back in February of 2012. And then just kind of work that out.

One of the issues that came to be, so that covered our four chapters. But what about Quetzalcoatlus? We still didn't have a place to put it. And that being the park's most famous fossil, and the world's largest flying creature that we know of so far, we really wanted to have it. And as the friends group raised enough money to have it, we sort of added that central plaza area, the Hall of Giants, if you will, that to me is my favorite part of the exhibit now. Steve had the idea for the bronzes, of doing those. Because we wanted to bring as much as we could out from behind the class. And so having a bronze is perfect for that. People can touch it. Stick their head into the mouth of T Rex and Deinonychus, which is the giant crocodile, the big forty-foot-long crocodile of the Big Bend Cretaceous. And so the friends had a donor who loved that idea so much that he paid for both of those bronzes himself. And those are a real high point of the exhibit. That hanging overhead you have Quetzalcoatlus. And then that whole eastern side is

open and you have the view out to those multi outcrops we talked about earlier. We interpret where we did the big dino lift, helicoptering out alamosaurus bones, which was a big sauropod. Where we interpret the marine rocks off in the distance. Where we talk about the K-Pg boundary that is visible from the site, which is another great bonus, that big extension episode that closes out the Cretaceous. And to me, these are all things that can thrill a non-geologist. And it's a big space where you can have a ranger talk. It's shady and breezy. So even in the Big Bend summers, you can go in there and be comfortable. Eat lunch or have a group of students take notes or make sketches or whatever. So that just worked out perfectly.

And the size of the exhibit worked out well, too. That's one of those things when you're designing something like this, you don't really know how big to make stuff. We knew we didn't want it to feel like a big empty room when there's just a couple of people out there, or just one person. But we wanted it to be big enough that you could have a class group, or a group of thirty. And so Steve and I would lay out stuff on the floor at our office building and say, okay, if we have it this big, does that feel right? So we played with those ideas and eventually came up with what I think works really well. Because I've taken groups of thirty through, and there's room for us in there.

And I've seen family groups come through and not have issues. And one of our explicit goals was to get kids excited about science. Kind of using fossils and dinosaurs to do that. And based on what I've seen, and what other park people have reported back to me, that's worked like a champ. The trail crew is working on the steps that lead up to kind of a little knoll that makes a great little viewpoint back to the Chisos Mountains and to see some other sites.

And while they were outside the exhibit working on the steps, they said, we could watch a family drive up and the kids would go in. And suddenly hear them go, "Wow, this is cool!" And laughing. The excitement. They could hear it from outside the exhibit. So that really for me is extremely satisfying. And warms, as a dad, warms my heart.

Santucci: As you know as well as anybody, if you hadn't stayed at Big Bend for the many, many years that you had, that particular exhibit would have never happened. It really needed the energy, the vision that you contributed to make it happen.

01:02:28

Corrick: I think so, too. I think if I had done the typical Park Service career, bouncing from park to park, it just would have remained a nice idea. But by virtue of the fact that I really joined the Park Service to be at Big Bend, I've done details at other parks. I've gone out and I've enjoyed that. But I wanted to be in that place. And because I was content to do that, and maybe you know, not get up to beyond GS11, but being okay with that, allowed me to stay in Big Bend and see this kind of a project through the ten years, at least, of leading up to somebody saying yes. And then the five years of blood, sweat and tears to kind of work through all the problems and design issues and changes that you see to make it happen.

And you know, kind of one of the caveats I guess I would give other people tackling something like this is beware of those prestigious architects. They ended up doing a great job.

But Steve and I were worried about how the building functioned. How people flowed through it. And the architects didn't seem to see that. They were on the form of it, it's got a distinctive roofline which works for a lot of reasons, but also created problems and issues. We had to kind of on the fly during construction fix the things where they were draining all the water off the roof onto the uphill side, the upslope side of the site. So we had to figure out how to – instead we made a change during construction where the roof now drains onto the downslope side, so that you don't have all your rainwater then trying to run past your building.

They had great ideas, too. Like I said, the roofline I think was originally designed just to be distinctive. But to me, it reflects the geology, the dip of the beds. The rusty – another idea I loved of theirs was using the Corten steel that we don't have to paint, you don't have to do any maintenance on. It rusts and creates a patina that protects the underlying steel. That rusty color is a geological color. So, a color you find in your rocks. You know, weathered pyrite, or the rusty reds of the desert. So it helps blend the structure in when you're viewing it from afar.

But probably the best idea they had that really, to me, makes the exhibit distinctive is those perforated steel panel walls. They used perforated steel with lots of little holes in it that basically when you look at the wall, you see through the wall. So again, that idea of linking the exhibit to the resource. When you step into this structure, this shelter, you're never really leaving the park, because you can still see the park through the walls. You can still look out there and see the rocks and the outcrops all around you. It allows some light in. it allows some airflow in. To me, one of my concerns was people, like especially maybe single women traveling alone, or just a couple of ladies traveling alone, being afraid of going into a building when they don't know who might be lurking in there. You can kind of see through this wall and see who might be in there. So it makes it more welcoming and more inviting. So those kinds of things, to me, really, really made it a distinctive exhibit.

And again, we had the challenges of we don't have people to staff this. So we had to create it in a way that these items are protected. We had – we did a lot of research on the roofline. Steve and I went out to the job site and raised a big flag on a surveyor's rod, put an orange safety vest on it and then drove the road to see how high could the roof be before you started to see it. Where should it be sited so that on the outcrop, there's that little ridge there that really hides it from the road. And so we agonized over that and were successful, I think. You don't really ever see that structure until you're right there at the turnoff to go down to it.

And it turned something that was a very meh, you know, never go back to that again kind of exhibit into something that has become one of our most memorable exhibits. I was always kind of hoping that the kids would, on the family's trip to Big Bend that sticking their head in the crocodile's mouth would be something that would stick with them and they'd go back and say, "You remember the time that we went back and saw that giant crocodile skull. And I have the pictures to prove that." And sure enough, you know, you see pictures of adults, too, on Facebook and Instagram with their heads in the mouth of that crocodile.

And then later we did the—Vince, I don't know if you've seen the big deinosaurs cutout that we did over at the picnic area. Because again, do you remember that? It's a cutout of steel of a life-size, the whole deinosaurs body. The forty-foot-long crocodile cutout is over there. Because we have the skull as a cast fossil there in the exhibit. But then we wanted to kind of

show how big this animal really was that was eating dinosaurs, that shows its full forty-foot-long body. So over at the picnic area, there's plates of steel that stand vertically. It's really an art piece, is what it is. And we have a stylized skeleton cut out there. Cut out of the steel. And then over as well to entertain the kids and maybe burn off some energy, around the picnic area we have fossil-themed climbing structures. We have something that looks like an outcrop with a Quetzalcoatlus wing that is in the outcrop. We have a big crocodile skull like you might find it in the wild. We've kind of puffed it up and different parts turned upside down. We have a big rib bone from an alamosaurus sauropod and a petrified log and those kinds of things. So, again, tying everything together.

And for those who haven't been to the exhibit, we also have people that [unclear] there. That's obviously important for visitor services.

1:10:19

Santucci: Sure.

Corrick: We also, Vince, maybe since you've been there, have been working on a few more wayside exhibits. So, in addition to the main exhibit structure, there's a little trail that's maybe a couple hundred yards long at the most that leads up to a little knoll viewpoint. There's an exhibit there that looks back at the Chisos. Mentions that it was a volcano, of volcanic origin. And then along that trail we interpret things like crossbedding. And you pass by the original exhibit. So we interpret that. At this very spot, mammal bones were found. And the park had an exhibit here dating back to the 1960s.

Santucci: Very good. So I'm trying to remember, was it January fourteenth or January fifteenth, 2017, that you dedicated the exhibit?

Corrick: Oh, I can probably look it up real quick. I don't remember exactly. But yes, it was January of 2017.

Santucci: So there were several speakers there. Primarily yourself, that was able to proudly speak about the exhibit before those visitors that came to join that celebration. So do you have any fond memories of that day? And what did that day mean to you?

01:11:53

Corrick: Well, it was, golly, you know. You've been working for something for five long years with various frustrations. And it makes me tired just thinking about all the work that went into this. But here we are. Your adrenaline's full. You're kind of running it under incident commands. Because you remember our parking is pretty limited out there. We have maybe twenty, maybe two dozen parking places. And we had hundreds of people showing up. So we had to figure out how to transport the park people and get them transported to the site of the celebration. So I had to have a lot of planning leading up to that. Then we, our superintendent had just retired. Cindy Ott-Jones had just retired the previous December and she was not coming back. So we had an acting superintendent. So I had to write his remarks. We had invited some dignitaries from various places. We had the president of the friends group. At the time, they were called Friends of Big Bend National Park. They're now called the big Bend Conservancy. So she

had her remarks. And then I had mine. We had to do a ribbon cutting. Schmoozing with various people. But for me, especially—sorry—I was really, really proud to have my family there. My mom came out. My wife and kids were there. This was the biggest thing I'd done. And to kind of show it off to them, that was, that's what has the strongest emotional feeling for me. To have those folks there to share that time with me. To see this thing that was there because of the work I'd done and the effort I'd put into it.

We had, as you'll recall, we had a lot of paleontologists that had worked in the park, researchers that often had worked in the park as grad students, coming to cut their teeth on park paleontology, who were now professors, and are now retiring from their professorships. And so they showed up to see this. And were complimentary about telling the story and the scientific accuracy of it.

Of which, again, I really have to give lots and lots of credit to Steve Wick, who worked up most of the text of our exhibits. And then Tom Lehman, who fact checked for us to make sure things were accurate in the exhibit.

And as you know, it's a struggle because you want to, they give you 35 words to say something. And so the back and forth, over and over again with the exhibit designers during the finalization of the text was really tough. Because you want to tell your stuff. So then they whittle it down. But oh, that changes the meaning. So then you have to go back and rewrite it some more. So again, Steve for his ideas that went into this, and his hard work. And then Tom for also the original concept and the fact checking. They both deserve tons of credit for it.

I've been getting lots of kudos for it because Steve left the park a few years ago. Actually, I don't think, he wasn't even at the grand opening. He had left before that. So all the compliments and kudos have been coming to me. But lots of people worked on this. So I feel obligated to mention them whenever I can.

And then Courtney Lyons-Garcia, who was kind of the person with the friends group who was there during this long time. The board had turnover. The board of directors had turnover. But because Courtney, their executive director, had stayed, and was determined to see this through, she was vital to keeping the board on track for it.

And then, so they raised about a million dollars. The total cost was about 1.3 million. So luckily for us, there were centennial grants. And so we got a centennial grant in 2016 for that last \$300,000. Because it was a little dicey there at the end. Because there were deadlines on spending Courtney's grant money. And the cost had gone up as our ambitions went up. And so it all worked out. Thankfully. But there was a lot of tense moments there at the very end.

And then you know, to finally then go through the construction. I kind of oversaw that. And had a fantastic construction company that really fixed problems on the fly for us. And saw problems before they developed. You know, little problems in the design. Little things like the architect had drawn up these cases so for the exhibits that are behind glass, there are big steel cases. And on the back of them, they've been designed with a steel plate that's held on with bolts. And then a glass on the other side. And to get into my exhibit cases, I was going to have to

take off a steel plate that weighed four hundred pounds. And they were built in a shop to the architect's specs, delivered to the job site for the construction company to install.

And the contractor called me and said, "Don, you've got a problem. Come out here and look at this." And so, he solved it for us. He said, he had a welder. It was actually his son, but he was on the crew. He was a welder. And said, "We can put hinges on these plates for you so you can, it will create a door out of it. And on the really long ones, we'll split them in half and put hinges on both sides so that you can swing these doors open and get into the case." So things like that that because of the plans were kind of delivered at the last second and not really thought through, those problems had to be solved on site. That should have been done in the shop. But you work through those things. And you figure them out.

So, all those kinds of things behind the scenes that go into a big project. What it takes.

1:20:09

Santucci: So you know, I love the history of our agency, of the National Park Service. And particularly science and paleontology. And to me, this is a really, really cool story, the history of paleontology for the National Park Service. And to have had the privilege of standing there in 2002 and hearing your dream, and then to be there in 2017 with your family to hear you speak, to see the beautifully designed exhibit that captured unbelievably good science, that provided it so positively from a public education standpoint. How it beautifully blended into the landscape. To see all that come together, I just, I felt very lucky to be there. And I told myself that day, I said Don Corrick is our modern-day Ross Maxwell. And he's left a mark that many, many people are going to benefit from in the future. So I can't tell you enough how proud I am of you and to see a dream like that come true. Because it's very rare.

Corrick: Well, thanks so much, Vince. It means a lot, especially coming from you. Because you've been so helpful to us over the years. You're somebody that I admire in the Park Service. I don't know if want to listen to a love fest but – a compliment coming from you means a whole lot to me. So, thank you. I appreciate that.

Santucci: So we've been on the phone for an hour and 20 minutes. I don't want to over-impose. There were a few other questions I had. I'll give you the option to say we can continue on a little longer, or, if you wanted to break, and if you promise to come back for another day, we can do that as well. Do you have a thought about that?

Corrick: I'm happy to keep talking. I feel like I'm kind of on a roll.

Santucci: Okay.

Corrick: I don't really have anything else. Let me just look at my email real quick and make sure the superintendent—you know, with all this, we're in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. And so I've been helping write these kind of releases to all the employees sharing information. So I just want to make sure—okay. Okay. No, nothing's come up. So let's keep talking.

01:22:44

Santucci: A couple more fun topics, then. During your tenure at Big Bend, you had the opportunity to work with some really incredible paleontologists. Tom Lehman and his students, Tony Fiorillo, Homer Montgomery, Wann Langston, the teams from UT Austin that would come there. And then the folks that were involved in looking at some of the early Cenozoic mammal localities. Judith Schiebout, Stevens, and others. Did you have a couple of thoughts about working side by side with these paleontologists and how you facilitated their research?

Corrick: Sure. Kind of one of the big projects was the, what I guess we used for shorthand, we'd call them a dino list project. I think that was in the early 2000s. I want to say 2002. I could be off by a couple of years. And the story of that is, so a couple of names you mentioned, Homer Montgomery and Tony Fiorillo were part of that story. And maybe you helped me sort out that. That was a problem. Started out as a problem and it turned into a happy ending, I think. So the story goes, Homer Montgomery of the University of Texas at Dallas had brought geology students to the park. And they had a permit to go out and do some research out in Tornillo Flats, which is about two miles from the fossil exhibit. It's one of the things we point towards. It was part of that big U from that central room when you're sitting there in the exhibit.

And so they were out there one day in the hills on the other side of the flat. And were finding things like petrified wood and maybe some little scraps of dinosaur bone. And they were having that and doing a school project. And during lunch one day, a young woman named Dana Biasetti went around the – instead of sitting there having lunch, she went for a walk. And she had very sharp eyes. Because as she walked around the hill, she came upon a dinosaur bone embedded in the rock. And to cut to the chase, it turns out that that was the end of a string of cervical vertebrae of alamosaurus. And a section of that animal, I think, was poorly represented and wouldn't have been collected so far from alamosaurus. Which is of course the big ninety-foot-long sauropod of the lattermost Cretaceous. The very end of the Cretaceous. A very interesting animal, because he kind of reappears in the fossil record after the great sauropod gap of 35 million years.

So this UT Dallas group then comes to us and gets a permit to collect this fossil, to excavate and collect it. And unlike most of my other paleontological researchers who keep things under wraps and are not big publicity hounds, these guys were kind of the opposite. They were very excited about their find, and they promoted it. And suddenly we've got all these news stories coming out about it.

And Homer Montgomery and another one of the professors involved in this, his name escapes me right at the moment, I could probably fill it in for you later, became, got crossways about who was in charge of this. And there was a big personality conflict that was a large problem on the excavation site. And back at their university. And got me involved in it. Did I get you involved in that, Vince?

Santucci: Yes. Uh huh. We went to Dallas together.

1:27:22

Corrick: Okay. Okay. That's what I thought. Yeah. So you probably can fill in some of this stuff. But then you found, I believe it was you that found, Tony Fiorillo, to bring him in as a real paleontologist. And so he was at the Dallas Museum of Nature and Science, wasn't he?

Santucci: Yes.

Corrick: Confirm for me. And he's a PhD paleontologist that's worked in other park units. So he was brought in to really take charge, make sure science was being done correctly, and also then curate these fossils for the Park Service after they were excavated. Part of the problem was, this is proposed wilderness. And getting these big couple of thousand-pound fossils out of the back country became a problem.

And so one of the fun things in the project after it kind of got back on track was Dino Lift, which was bringing a helicopter in to carry these out. So because it was UT Dallas, and Bell Helicopter's company headquarters are in Dallas, the university guys had gone to Bell to see if they would donate the helicopter time. And sure enough, they did.

And to do it, so they have, a lot of people are familiar with the Huey helicopter. It's that Vietnam-era helicopter. Still in service. And so they have one called the Super Huey, which has a souped up engine on it. And then they have one called the Super Duper Huey, which has the biggest engine on it. I think there's only two Super Duper Hueys, according to what they told us.

And their chief pilot came out with a Super Duper Huey to lift these things out. And they used the Super Duper Huey to lift the steeples on churches or to lift big air conditioning units up onto the tops of skyscrapers, and that kind of thing. And their art department had made a decal, that's where the Dino Lift name comes from. It was a picture of a dinosaur. And they stuck the decal on the side of the helicopter.

And so I flew out the day before with the helicopter, to show him where the site was. Which was a good thing, because I think Homer had given him a GPS coordinate that was off. But I knew. I'd been out to the site. So I said no, it's over here. So I got to fly with him, and that was fun. And see the site from the air, which is always enlightening.

And then the next morning, I hiked out to the site at daybreak to be on the ground when they were flying down the sling ropes. And helped Homer kind of put the ropes on the last couple of fossils in preparation for their ground crew to do the longline hookup.

And they flew it up to kind of a dirt road to the north of the site, the Dagger Flat Road. Dropped him onto a truck. That's where Tony Fiorillo was there kind of catching them. And then Tony had, I think, a pretty harrowing drive back to Dallas with this incredibly heavy load of fossils. Praying that nothing would go wrong. And sure enough, nothing did go wrong. Then they spent the next many years prepping those fossils. And so now Dallas, it's now called the Perot Museum of Nature and Science, named after Ross Perot. And they have the only alamosaurus replica on display anywhere, as far as I know. And it is the kind of centerpiece of their museum. It's the most popular exhibit. I will say they invited me to come to their museum grand opening because of that. They had the real fossils kind of on display next to it. And of course they're too heavy to mount. But then they have a balcony to see the face of this thing you

have to kind of go onto the second story balcony. They have a T Rex replica standing next to it, as this alamosaurus just dwarfs the T Rex.

But they, you know, it's an impressive museum. But I'll brag a little bit. I don't think they tell the story as well as our little exhibit out of Big Bend does. It is more of a trophy room. And so that, I think that, again, Tom Lehman was spot on in his advice to us way back in the day.

Santucci: Absolutely.

01:32:35

Corrick: Let's see. Then Tony's continued to do a little research. He's sort of gotten off to do Alaska stuff. But he came out and found a sauropod bone, a tyrannosaur bone, leg bone, that he collected. One of the fun things that Steve Wick and I did was going back to some of the Barnum Brown sites in the park. To me, that was really highlight to actually find spots and go to them where Barnum Brown worked and find his campsites. There is one out in the western part of Tornillo Flats where there's still a big alamosaurus femur on the surface that's still out there. And then there's a, there are photographs that Brown and Hill took, or Bird, I'm sorry, not Hill. His cohort was Bird. So there's photos they took of their excavating I'm thinking a sacrum and that femur is lying on the ground next to their excavation site. And they didn't collect it. They didn't have room for it, didn't want it. So it was left behind. It's still out there. And then nearby is a, you can still see, it's a windbreak. It's kind of a little small rock wall is what it is. And it's still there. And it's in the photograph of their camp. And they cooked behind that. And then if you, with an archeologist's eye, you look at that site, you can also then find their trash pile, their bean cans, their shaving cream tube that was made out of lead or whatever back in 1940 when they went there.

And then Nick and I also went to a place over near Banta Shut-In. We got – I don't know why we had a helicopter but we got a helicopter ride out there. And then hiked over. And Steve had done a lot of studying on a bunch of the old Barnum Brown photographs. And then using Google Earth, studying and trying to figure out where it might be. So he had some ideas. And we went out and surveyed that area until we found a place where they'd excavated a hadrosaur, I believe. And there are pictures of them kind of, again, they took great photos. And they had kind of a jury-rigged wheelbarrow if you will. Kind of a thing with a makeshift wheel on it to help these old men, by that time, get these heavy bones down from the excavation site to their old delivery wagon, Model A truck. And so there's a photo of them kind of on this path. And the background is the ridge. So that path is still kind of there from 1940. This is the beauty of the desert climate. And then their excavation site. And Steve looks down and lo and behold, there's one of a broken chisel, is a makeshift chisel that they obviously broke during and discarded during the excavation. So we collected that for the park collection. And Steve collected one of the shaving cream tubes. I think that's in the park collection.

And then there's a story of Tom Lehman that, let me get this straight. So I think it's a Wann Langston/Tom Lehman story. I think, so Tom, so Wann Langston was the UT professor for years and years and years. And so he trained the next crop of paleontologists. Among them is Tom Lehman. And so they did a lot of field work. So over in the Cowhead and anticline area—this is me retelling the story as I best can remember it being told to me—they came across a

curious thing: a circle of dinosaur bones and a geology pick with a broken handle in the center of it. And this is near some of the Barnum Brown excavations, or some of their discoveries. So the thinking here is that this is a Barnum Brown pick that he broke in the field and kind of made a little shrine to with some dinosaur bones that were nearby and left it behind. And so that ended up in Wann Langston's collection. And then when Wann died, we contacted the family and they then donated it to the park. So we have that in our collections, too. And I hope I'm not getting that story mixed up. I think that's the case.

Santucci: No. That was one of the questions I was going to ask you about, because that's a really interesting story. And I'm going to go ahead and forward you a little news clip, an article regarding Barnum Brown and his famous picks. They called them Marsh picks, after O.C. Marsh. But that's a short article in *Science Monthly* back from the 1930s about Brown, showing him with a pick.

01:38:54

Corrick: Oh, great! Great!

Santucci: Thanks for covering that, because that was one of my remaining questions to ask you about.

Corrick: Yeah. That's really a high point. You know, especially with my background as an archeologist. So here you've got a paleontological site. And superimposed on it, you have a super important historic site. Of, you know, a really famous, important paleontologist that worked there, camped there. And Steve and I at the Black Cap site, we scouted around looking for historic trash piles, thinking maybe we could find their campsite there. We don't have a photo of that campsite. So it was the excavation site that they photographed there. But that Barnum Brown, the Brown story is just, I think, a really romantic and interesting. That's, I think I'm correct in saying, that their last trip to the field was to Big Bend, was that Big Bend trip.

Santucci: Yes.

Corrick: They were getting old by that point. And went places that you would not want to drive a four-wheel drive nowadays. It's really impressive.

Santucci: So in 2000, you and I helped to coordinate a paleo meeting at Big Bend where Wann Langston was there, Gordon Bell, Tony Fiorillo, Tom Lehman. There was a few others, with you and myself. That was a great little field trip to listen to, mostly Wann Langston tell stories about the olden days.

Corrick: Oh, yeah. And didn't we go out into the field to where they found the [tasmasaur?] skull in South Dakota?

Santucci: Yes.

Corrick: That's right. That's what that was. Because I remember being in the field with Wann, but I'd forgotten that that was the occasion of that. We met down in [Castle Rock?] 1:41:00 in the officers' quarters. But yeah, those just, golly. What a rich memory of experience that fellow had. He kind of, you know, he got frustrated with the Park Service. Because he had free rein for so long. He predated the park and had free rein. And then the park came in and he was [unclear] buddies with Ross Maxwell. And then we were so loosey goosey for so long until probably the '80s and '90s we started making people get permits and reports. And then the turnover in the Park Service, one person would ask for a catalog of all the specimens that UT was holding from the park. And he'd send it. And then that person would leave and that list would get lost. And the next person said, "We need a list of all the specimens you're holding."

"Damn, I've sent that to the park!" And get really frustrated.

I think the last fieldwork he did was on deinosuchus, which is the giant crocodile. And a dentist, I think from the Austin area, used to come out and would prospect, basically. He would look for fossils. And he kind of had an eye for it and [had enough?]. And then he would do the right thing. He didn't have a permit, which is not the right thing. But then he would report his finds to, I guess, the UT folks, to the scientists. [unclear] And so he found a couple of the important deinosuchus skulls.

And Wann worked on one down along the river road with Phil Koepp. And now Phil was retired by this point. And so but lived in Austin and volunteered at the Texas Memorial Museum in the paleontology lab for Wann. And gotten to know him. Because Phil had been chief ranger in the park and was chief ranger when my start in the park. And at that time, resource management worked in the ranger division. They were visitor protection, or resource protection? No. Resource management and visitor protection. Some combination of those two. We later split off. And Phil became the resource chief at that time.

But at the time I'm talking about, with Wann working in the park on these deinosuchus skulls, Phil Koepp was in the field with him at that time. And I went out a couple of times and checked it out.

But then, one of the LE rangers kind of spotted him out there and got crossways. Hey, you're making tracks in the desert and being kind of huffy with them. And Wann wasn't having it. He was tired of dealing with park people questioning him and making him repeat himself and all this. And he was old by that time. I think the heat of that excavation, they had realized that he was not fit for desert work anymore. At least not in the summer, not in the hot period. But I don't know if that closes out that thought or not.

Santucci: Yeah. Definitely. So what I'll do is I have a collection of photographs from that 2000 paleontology meeting we had.

Corrick: Oh!

Santucci: And I'll send those all to you.

Corrick: Oh, thank you so much.

Santucci: There's a really nice picture of Wann Langston in there as well. So I'll send those all to you.

1:45:04

Corrick: Okay. Well, just walking around the field with him, I still use knowledge, I specifically remember him showing me the deinosuchus ligaments. Fossilized ligaments. They looked kind of like a cigarette filter with the paper removed. And him holding one up and showing it to us. And so, that's how you learn stuff is being out in the field with the guys who know stuff—

Santucci: Oh, absolutely.

Corrick: —and have spent their careers out there. You know, Tom Lehman's that way. And I know that Steve Wick got a lot of his knowledge secondhand from Tom. And passed it on to me. So it's that snowball effect of literally standing on the shoulders of giants. And Steve pretty much single-handedly wrote the paleontological inventory for the park using that knowledge of his experience with these great, great folks.

Santucci: Well, because you've done such a good job in covering many of the topics that I hoped to ask you about, I'm down to my last five questions. Are you ready for them?

Corrick: Sure.

Santucci: Some of them are going to be the most difficult because I'm going to ask you to just be very concise. So there's a lot of things you can say about Big Bend's geology. But in 25 words or less, if you were reaching out to a group and telling them what is important about the geology of Big Bend, what would you say concisely?

Corrick: Okay. I would say that what's important about Big Bend's geology is its diversity. And that is a reflection of the diversity of the other resources in the park. I would add that the geology is the foundation that the other diversity forces are built on. It provides the different rock types, it provides different soil types which support different vegetation communities, which support different animal communities, which affect human history. It affects the location of springs and mineral deposits. It affects everything. And it is tremendously diverse. And that's why Big Bend is such a diverse place.

Santucci: Good answer.

Corrick: Thanks.

Santucci: Same challenge, what is, in 25 words or less, what is the paleontological significance of Big Bend National Park?

Corrick: The paleontological significance, it's also the diversity of fossils. Reflected, or preserved over a long time period of changing environments. And I would also throw in the K-

Pg boundary at that location being continental deposits relatively close to the Chicxulub impact site and on public land, where they can be studied.

Santucci: Very good. So that was exactly, that was my next question is can you tell me about the Cretaceous Paleogene or the Cretaceous Tertiary boundary in Big Bend National Park? Has there been research on it? And what is significant about that at Big Bend?

Corrick: Again, this is coming back, I lean on Tom Lehman so much. But yes, it's exposed to the park in multiple places. I can think of a handful of them. The boundary, it's hard to really pinpoint it, as Tom Lehman's told me, because there's a scarcity of fossils right there at the lowermost Paleogene. There was some hope for recent research, Tom had a grad student who was working in Rough Run, which is a big, deep drainage on the western side of the park. And he thought he found perhaps the tsunami deposits from the actual event. It was an anomalous deposit in mostly fine grains flood plain deposits. And then there's suddenly there was some channel deposits with large, I guess cobbles or at least gravel. And then it goes back to fine-grained stuff. He thought he'd found some spherules, perhaps some carbonized items. And we had hoped that maybe this was actual, hey, the day of. And he sort of built a case for that. But, sadly, Tom has just told me informally that the dates came back wrong on, like I say, he found some datable material. Maybe, I'm sure, zircons. And it was not possible for that to be the K-Pg boundary. But there are in these other places where it's exposed, there's hope that a future researchers will be able to really pinpoint it. We've got, you know, Cretaceous beds and Paleocene beds nearby. But as far as having a place where you can actually put your finger on the contact, I don't think you can. And that's because, you know, the environment deposition doesn't really change that dramatically just because that's an important change in time for us. But the environment continues to be a similar environment deposition in this part of the world. At least, that's what we think so far. Perhaps there's some kind of an unconformity and the actual day of disaster got erased. But it's something for future folks to work on.

And you know, Tom Lehman has, one of his protégées, Thomas Shiller is up at Sul Ross now, working in the park, training students and just beginning his career as a college professor. He's a bright guy. I've been to the field with him a couple of times. And he's very interested in Big Bend. So the torch keeps getting passed from person to person. And luckily, that's how science works. You build on everybody's work.

Santucci: Absolutely. And so you can't take anything away from the fact that you have important fossils pre-K-T boundary, and you've got important fossils just after. And the important part of the Cretaceous section is that it produces an inter-fingering of both marine and terrestrial geology and paleontology that is remarkably significant and valuable for research.

Corrick: That's right. And the environments in the western part of the park, you know, we haven't found it there. But that doesn't mean that in the eastern part, where it's perhaps more closer to the coastline and coastal deposits, that it's not preserved. It's just in a different section. Because the actual formations where that time period changes, shifts, just due to the differences in environmental deposition over, you know, you've got sixty miles from the east to the west side of the park.

Santucci: Right. Mm hmm. So we're down to our last two questions. One is that during your career, any opportunities to look at paleontology on both sides of the US/Mexican border. Presumably what's occurring on the opposite side in Mexico has some paleontological significance. Has that ever been a discussion for you in your career?

Corrick: It has. It's been something I've been very interested in. And luckily for us, Thomas Shiller is the perfect person to carry that forward. He has done work on the Mexican side. I think his wife is from Mexico or is related to people from Mexico. I think he's fluent in Spanish. He has academic contacts over there. And he has started to do work there.

I did some outreach to some paleontologists. It didn't really go anyplace. But it was a result of following up on a report of dinosaur footprints—and maybe this is your next question—down in – so, Big Bend manages two parks. Both Big Bend National Park and the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River. And river runners have reported to me over the years what they thought were dinosaur tracks down in the lower canyons, which is the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic, and one of my favorite places. This is a place, you would not believe that you could go into a place that is so remote, and such a wilderness experience, in Texas. But it is, to make this river trip, it's usually a five to seven-day trip, fifty to seventy miles. And when I started doing it, I never saw, other than my paddling partner, I never saw another person the whole week we were on the river. There was no little farmhouse to hike up to if you had a problem, to call for help. You just basically had to finish your trip. If you broke your arm, you put a splint on it and you continued downstream until you got out. Of course nowadays, we have sat phones and we call a helicopter if you get snakebit or break your back or whatever. But it's still very remote. And just a wonderful trip.

So, to go see, to check this out, I had to go to my favorite place and go on a river trip, which was no, I wasn't too sad about that. And sure enough, at one of the, there at Upper Madison Falls, on the Mexican side of the river, and this is for reference, this is below the rapids. This is one of the places people have to portage for minor boats, usually. And so, at the downstream end of the rapids on the Mexican side, there's a place that's often used as a camp. It has a big, flat, I call it a dancefloor slab of outcrop. And I think it is Glen Rose Formation. And we found three-toed, probably sauropod tracks. They're about a foot long and they're about a meter apart. And there were a couple of really well-preserved, not really well but well-preserved, obvious ones, and a couple more faint ones marching across the slab. And then based on, so I took photos of it and reported that to the Mexican paleontologists. They were interested. But the remoteness of this, there's no way to drive to this place. You basically have to make this river trip to get there.

But based on reports from the river runners, this area, it will flash flood. Not from the river, so much, but from the gullies. And then it deposits alluvium on that slab. So I think these tracks get covered up, and then exposed, get covered up, and exposed. So I think sometimes when you go to see them, they're just hidden under gravel. And I think sometimes when that gravel gets washed away, then people can see them again. So I think, I probably need to go back repeatedly to see if there maybe are more tracks. If more of that slab gets exposed, there would be more tracks. And unfortunately it's on the Mexican side. So I guess technically it's not in the park. It's not in an area that we at NPS manage. But I think [unclear] 1:59:35 probably outcrops

on the Texas side. So I'm interested in doing some prospecting over there. The challenge is finding these nice big, exposed slabs. And those are not common.

Santucci: So I'm smiling because you got my last question. (laughter)

Corrick: Oh, great minds think alike.

Santucci: Yeah. That's a perfect way to end it. So I just wanted to ask you, is there anything you want to share that we haven't covered that you feel is important? And what's next for Don Corrick?

02:00:10

Corrick: I'm thinking about what's next. I would like to see us, you know, in my career we've kind of gone from low tech to high tech. From typing up our memos to word processing. And now everything is GIS and GPS and so forth. And trying to leave the geologic records in a pretty good digital format. Getting some of these great historic photos digitized. Getting the location data digitized. Making it part of the GIS. Because that just gives you such great power analytically when you've got your geologic map digitized and you've got your fossil sites digitized. Those things really need to be done, and probably done by maybe geoscientists in the parks people, or seasonals or those sorts of things. We're currently waiting on a new division chief. So I'll have to kind of see where that person, how much support they're going to be able to give for those kinds of things.

But I'm, you know, kind of looking at the end of my career. I think I'll probably hang around for another five years, at least. Maybe a little more. So kind of start thinking about getting those things lined up before I call it quits.

Then, I had another thought about what I was interested in doing. I'd also like to pursue some of these Barnum Brown things that kind of Steve got us started on. See if there are any more campsites or places, or excavation places in the park that we could preserve as historic, for their historic value. Getting good, reproducing photo points, I think, is something worth doing. When I was digging back through some things that Lehman had sent me, he included a photo that Barnum Brown took that Wann Langston had shared with him. But it was of where Tornillo Creek meets the Rio Grande, near Boquillas. And the value of that photo is really in our river restoration. Knowing what the river looked like then before invasive species came in. So that, the value of that, of kind of figuring out where that spot was and then getting a modern photo that duplicates it so that you can document the changes over an 80-year period. And we know that it's very, very different. But there's a real scarcity of early photos that help us document that early status of the river, which we kind of want to use as our desired feature [condition?] 2:03:52, to kind of get the river back towards that. So the scientific value is really important. So trying to get that stuff in a format where the people that come next can find it and know that it exists and then use it in their work is important.

And I've always sort of been kind of very interdisciplinary, you know? That's obvious from studying geology and then archeology and then doing the interpretive side. And I love the interpretive side. I would love to keep doing that, keep incorporating geologic themes and fossil, paleontological themes, into the various exhibits. Because they all play a role. And living and

working in a place for this long kind of makes those things apparent. As well as having people point stuff out to me and remembering and having been in such a place. And things like the people that mapped the plants in the park, up in the northern part of the park. If you look at the plant map, it's kind of a broad, gently sloping valley where slopes intersect in the center. And one slope has one plant community coming from the west. And the slope coming from the east has a completely different plant community. And why is that? That's weird. Well, the reason is, the west side is igneous and the east side is limestone. And they produce different soils, they produce different plant types. And so those kinds of interdisciplinary revelations are the things that are, to me, are interesting and fun to share and interesting to non-scientists. That's cool, that's what I'd like to share, is the science that makes a non-scientist say, "That's cool." And so continuing to participate with interpreters, that's something that I plan to continue to do.

And getting them excited that, you know, up before Covid, we used to do trainings for every year for all of the parks, with incoming seasonals and volunteers, to orient them to the park. And you know, I'm bragging, but it's reported that my day is the favorite day for most of the folks that go through that training, that two-week training. I take them out. I give them about an hour, hour and a half geology lecture, kind of a snapshot of the geologic history of the park. Then we go out in the field and we drive down the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive. And we stop along the way and we see examples of this. We see fossil sites and look at the extinct volcanoes. View all of that. And they come back and they're all, they're fired up. And then the interpreters, if I'm lucky, a couple of them will start doing geology talks and walks. And so, kind of keeping the legacy going that way is really important. So, I hope to keep doing it, and I hope we get back to being able to do those things and meet in person.

I've been missing the park. We got off the river March twelfth, I think. The previous week of March ninth, we put in, we were going to do Boquillas Canyon. That's about a thirty mile-long river float on the eastern edge of Big Bend National Park. It's the beginning of the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic, sort of. And our job was to kill tamarisk trees. A non-native plant, salt cedar, was another one. So I was there as, I've done that, again, interdisciplinary. It's fun to work with different resources. We had been down previously where I'd been a sawyer, cutting down these big tamarisk trees and then working as a team. One team member poisons the stump. One team member maps it. And then I was a sawyer, [unclear] 2:08:26 chain saw.

And so then this trip was a follow-up trip. We did that last fall, then this spring, we're following up. In spring, the ones that are resprouting. So this time, we're treating hundreds and hundreds of trees that we missed on the first round, or that we didn't quite kill off. And so, marvelous time. Close-knit group of resource management folks canoeing. Four nights on the river. Just spectacular.

So we get off the river. The people who are picking us up are telling us all these tales. "Oh, man, stuff is going crazy! This virus is spreading. And all these people have it. And things are going nuts." And so the next day, I drove to my family here in Kyle, Texas, which is just south of Austin. And I've been here ever since. I did make one trip back to pick up reference materials that I could use in my telework. And like my desktop monitor so that, because working on a laptop is a pain. But apart from that just like blaze in and blaze out trip, I'm away from my park. I miss it. There's stuff that I'd like to be doing. I'd like to be, you know, maybe collect a nice slab of rudists that they're going to use. I've eyeballed it. I know exactly where it is.

They're going to use it in the new visitor center display up at Persimmon Gap. Because they really wanted something where people could see the fossils. And on a fence removal project in, gosh, going way back. We were taking out old ranch fences. I came across an outcrop with a rudist, they looked like beautiful little ice cream cones. And they are, the matrix is kind of a pale gray, but the rudist, it's a rusty red. And they just pop. And anybody can see the fossils in this. And they really look like fossils, very exposed. And I've eyeballed a slab that they're going to use in this exhibit that supposedly they're going to build this winter. And I need to go get it. So, it's frustrating.

But I'm here with my family, and that's been great. Because prior to this, in order—and this is getting back to kind of my personal history, for my, I have two daughters. They're currently, they're about to have birthdays. But they're thirteen and sixteen. And when they got up to a certain point in their schooling, they were not able to get good school opportunities out in Big Bend. It's too remote. So that was when I tried to find another job in another park. But we were not doing a lot of hiring. There's sort of a hiring freeze going on. So our Plan B was to move the family here. And for me to work out a telework deal. And so what we actually worked out was I would work six long days in the park. And then I would catch Amtrak in Alpine at about eight o'clock in the evening, usually Saturday night. And then sleep on the train. And then Saturday morning, I'd wake up, step off the train here. And spend the next week with the family. I could telework about three days, working remotely on, because I'm also the compliance coordinator for the park. So there's plenty of paperwork to be done for NEPA compliance.

But it's a hardship. You know, people in the Park Service, hardship is not a stranger to people in the Park Service. We work in remote places and don't have grocery stores or doctors nearby. And Big Bend is a great example of that. So, that was what we'd worked out. But being away from the family was a hardship. And the silver lining in all this Covid-19 stuff and having to telework fulltime and missing my park, is that I'm with my family. And that's what's important, especially at this time of our lives. And so it's a blessing in disguise. Of course, none of us know what's going on. Right now, Texas is blowing up bigtime with it. But we're staying safe and we're able to do it, and so we're very fortunate in that way. I still have a job. And I'm able to do my work here. And so, I'm with my family, and that's good.

2:13:28

Santucci: I'm happy for you and your family that this has all worked out as well as it has. And you know, you really have a wonderful family. I hope both your daughters have a wonderful birthday; all their wishes come true.

Corrick: Thanks.

Santucci: Tell them they need to wear their National Fossil Day ball caps on their birthday.

Corrick: They do. Those are cherished, by the way. We all, I think you gave each of us one. And we keep them for ourselves and they're a very popular item.

Santucci: (laughs) Good to hear.

Corrick: Yeah.

Santucci: So, final, so, go ahead.

Corrick: I was just going to say thanks for sharing those with us.

Santucci: So, just a final note. So, let's see, 2025. You talked about five-year retirement. We need to plan on our calendars sometime in 2025 your retirement party. And Justin Tweet, my colleague, paleontologist colleague and myself will come down for your retirement party at Big Bend.

Corrick: Well, thanks. We'll do that. And we also need to get on the river. I need somebody with experience with fossil tracks to do that lower canyon trip and check out those fossil tracks, too. I need to do that before retirement.

Santucci: Absolutely.

Corrick: When things get back to normal.

Santucci: We'll get those both on the calendar.

Corrick: That's right. That's right.

Santucci: Hey, I can't thank you enough for your time on this interview. I think we captured a lot of great stuff. I'll make sure I get a copy to you to review before we finalize it. And yeah, I look forward to seeing what's next for you. I truly value you as a Park Service employee and you as a dad and a husband and you as a friend. And thank you for everything.

Corrick: Well, thank you, Vince. And you know, I feel the same way about you. So I'm hoping that we can start going to meetings again and start traveling again to further the purpose of the NPS and get a chance to spend some time together.

Santucci: Absolutely. Well, regards to your family, happy birthdays to your daughter, and I'll look forward to our next conversation.

Corrick: You, too. Please give my regards to your family. And stay safe.

Santucci: Thanks. You, too.

Corrick: Take care.

Santucci: Bye-bye.

02:16:11

[END OF INTERVIEW]