



## National Park Service Paleontology Program

### *Oral History Interview – Jon Burpee – 2020 interview – Part Two*

Natural Resource Report NPS/PALEONTOLOGY PROGRAM/OHI—2020/005



**ON THE COVER**

TUSK Superintendent Jon Burpee.

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Natural Resource Report NPS/PALEONTOLOGY PROGRAM/OHI—2020/005

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The National Park Service, Paleontology Program publishes a range of reports, plans, oral histories and other documents that address a range of paleontological resource topics. These reports are of interest and applicability to a broad audience in the National Park Service and others in natural resource management, including scientists, conservation and environmental constituencies, and the public.

The NPS Paleontology Program disseminates comprehensive information and analysis about paleontological resources and related topics concerning lands managed by the National Park Service. Given the sensitive nature of some paleontological resource information, such as the specific location of fossil sites, some publications are intended for specific audiences and are maintained as restricted access. When appropriate, sensitive information is redacted from reports in order to allow greater access to these reports by NPS staff, partners and the public. This work supports the advancement of science, informed decision-making, and the achievement of the National Park Service mission.

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## **Background**

[Interview with Jon Burpee (Part Two): This telephone interview was conducted Thursday, July 2, 2020. The primary speakers are interviewee Jon Burpee (JB), who is the former Superintendent of Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument, and Vincent Santucci (VS), interviewer and senior paleontologist for the National Park Service, Paleontology Program, Erin Eichenberg (EE), Integrated Resources Program Manager at Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument, and Jill DeStefano (JD), President and one of the founders of the Protectors of Tule Springs were also on the telephone call.]

The interview was recorded on a digital audio recorder and a mp3 file was created. A written transcription of the interview was produced from the digital audio recording and this document contains the discussion during the interview. Jon Burpee signed a release form for the National Park Service for the preservation and use of the interview in the future. PII has been omitted.

## Transcript

**1:22:07 length of interview**

[START OF INTERVIEW]

VS: So, are you ready to go?

JB: Good to go.

VS: Ok, thank you. Today is Thursday, July 2, 2020. My name is Vincent Santucci, Senior Paleontologist for the National Park Service, Paleontology Program. Today we are conducting a second interview with Jon Burpee, former Superintendent at Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument. The interview is being conducted by telephone from Jon's home in Oregon, where he is currently the Superintendent at Lewis and Clark National Historical Park. We are joined today by Erin Eichenberg, the Integrated Resources Program Manager at Tule Springs Fossil Beds [National Monument] and Jill DeStefano, the President and one of the founders of the Protectors of Tule Springs. So, welcome back, Jon.

JB: Thank you and just a brief correction. Technically I am in my office today, so it is kind of nice being in the park.

VS: Ok. Thanks for that clarification. So, you had a couple of days to do homework. To be prepared for all these questions we are going to throw at you.

JB: Yes, I hope so. See how well my memory holds up. It was a very busy time I will say that.

VS: Sure. You did really well on the first part of this interview. So, thanks for all that.

VS: Ok. So, you and your family have arrived in Las Vegas. Your family had not seen the Monument yet, I assume.

JB: That's right.

VS: And so, what were some of your first priorities before you met with the Acting Superintendent [of Lake Mead National Recreation Area] Patrick Gubbins and other individuals? What were some of the first things you did when you arrived with your family in Las Vegas?

JB: I arrived kind of mid-day so my wife and kids were in the midst of—actually in school that day. So, my first thing was, I drove out—that sense of something tangible—so I drove out to the end of Durango and took a selfie with the little Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument sign. And that was like my first thing (laughter) getting settled in there. We'd already found a place to live in south Summerlin. I think, almost day two, we were out in the Monument as a family hiking around. My kids sure loved that aspect of the place. It was pretty darn cool. When I first got there one of the big questions was just questions of where I was going to have my office space. And all of those were actually fairly heavy decisions cause knowing already the breadth of partners there, what it means if my office is in one place or another. So, one of the first things I did was met with Russ Dapsauski, I'm probably mispronouncing it, the Southern Nevada State Parks regional person. My predecessor, the interim Superintendent, Vince Santucci, largely had office space within the state parks. One of the challenges with that was that

it wasn't on the network. Had an early offer, within the first couple of days, to potentially go to the Interagency Office, off from Torrey Pines in the northern part of the city in Las Vegas. Now, that was kind of interesting to see. I had a little bit of push from people at Lake Mead to also have an office at Lake Mead. People wanting me to make that my primary office out there, but I wanted to establish a bit of, "hey the Superintendent needs to be close to the monument" type of thought. Torrey Pines location was actually the best option for me to be able to get out to the monument quickly. Pretty early on we had POTS and Helen Mortenson threw me a welcome meeting. Kind a get together at Helen Mortenson's house and that was a really good introduction to a lot of folks as well.

VS: Excellent. Did you have the opportunity to take your family out to see the monument in those first few days?

JB: Yeah, that was one of the first things we did. And went to a couple of different places. Went out to Corn Creek and drove across, what was then the brand new [paved] road that crossed the monument out to the Corn Creek Visitor Center. Did some hiking off from Durango and also off from Grand Teton. The impressions were really fascinating to watch. The kids absolutely loved the small hills, the softened hills from the erosion within the wash. Kind of running around and seeing that. I think my wife saw a lot of the challenges that were going to be there more than anything else. Pretty early on as well I got a chance to go out on a hike with Jill and so the Protectors showed me some of the real treasures of the site, including Tule, the baby mammoth exposed. That was one of the real eye openers. Also, early on had a chance to get out with Kathleen Springer [US Geological Survey Research Geologist] and again, eye opener in terms of, you know I'd been walking past features that I wasn't even recognizing them as. Pretty fun way to explore a new park site. One of the best parts is they had already worked to put together a geo-reference map that I was able to use an app on my phone to figure out am I in the park or am I out of the park? That was kind of a fun challenge figuring out exactly where the park was in those early days.

VS: Great. So, do you recall your first meetings with the Acting Superintendent at Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Patrick Gubbins? And was there some important first discussions that you had with Patrick?

JB: That was one of the great things and really one of the reasons I was intrigued into applying for the job anyways was getting to work with Patrick. I could not find a more optimistic, cheery person in this world in many ways. I had met Patrick at the National Leadership Council meeting in Washington D.C. and he'd actually told me, "We're gonna have this job open up." So, my early meetings with him were similar to some of my discussions with the Deputy Regional Director Martha Lee. One, being very much open to opportunities as they arose. But also being really pragmatic and realistic about how fast things were going to go and how to work with folks. I think in the last segment I mentioned I'd heard some folks who were somewhat cautious of the Protectors of Tule Springs. From the very get go Patrick was a big believer in the Protectors of Tule Springs. Really advised me to make sure that was a key relationship for the park and really pursue working closely with POTS.

VS: Your orientation to the park on the ground. Was there anybody that helped lead you out there from the Park Service side first?

JB: So, I think it was about mid-September when I first met with – I think I started technically like on the 11<sup>th</sup> because Ariana Roles came on the 11<sup>th</sup>. It was a really fascinating thing, on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> most of the family went out. I didn't really have a chance to get out there with anybody from the NPS. Ironically, I think it was the 15<sup>th</sup>, so it was just a couple of days after I started, had a visit to the park from the person who was the Deputy Director of the Park Service at the time and that was absolutely interesting to – I essentially started in the park three days earlier. And now you've got someone from senior leadership from D.C. out in the park. Really glad I'd come from being a Bevinetto and sit in meetings daily with Peggy [O'Dell]. So, I was getting a chance to show around somebody I knew. But having said that, boy, I did not know the park well. So, I reached out with a couple folks join us on that. We had Gordo who had already been doing law enforcement work out there, came with us, particularly when we went to take a look at the shooting area. Peggy's remarks were, "Well, Jon you've got a lot of work cut out in front of you." And then also was able to arrange for Dr. Steve Rowland from UNLV and he helped lead a bit of that tour. Particularly through the areas he was really familiar with in terms of off of Durango and what ultimately is a state park site. It was a really, kind of interesting way to be introduced to the park. I'm trying to think if – I don't know that I had that many more walk, through with anybody after that moment that really were from the NPS. Actually, I did have the chance, I think on that trip with Peggy O'Dell was our geo-core interns, who helped out as well – Aubrey and Fabian. I don't think I ever had anyone from Lake Mead who kind of walked me through where the boundaries were or anything like that. That was something that I learned largely from Jill and getting out there with that geo-reference map.

VS: And so, I just wanted to back up for a minute. You mentioned the name Gordo. Can you give me the full name and title of who Gordo is?

JB: Yeah, here's another funny moment of my memory. I cannot think of Gordo's last name. Jill, you can help me out there I'm sure.

JD: Sorry, I don't know his last name either. It was always Gordo. Gordon, I don't know.

JB: That's so funny. I always get him mixed up with another person I knew from Castillo de San Marcos, Gordon Horton. Anyway, I'm going to make a quick note to that and make sure that it got in. Unless you remember Gordon's last name.

JD: Erin should.

VS: So, it's Gordo [Gordon] Gilbert is his last name.

JD: Gilbert. Thank you. Of course.

VS: So, you eventually did, I just want to go back and get the full name of the Deputy National Park Service Director.

JB: Peggy O'Dell

VS: Thank you. So, moving forward then – it was my impression during my short time at Tule Springs that a lot of the staff or most of the staff, including the senior leadership at Lake Mead National Recreation Area were so busy with managing that very big park that they really hadn't



gotten out on the ground and were not all that familiar to provide that sort of orientation to the Monument.

JB: Yeah, I would say that's pretty accurate. When Lizette Richardson showed up, about a month after I got hired, they got their permanent person out at Lake Mead. And then we had a few more folks. We had Erin Eichenberg who was working for the Great Basin Institute. She'd been on the ground more. There really wasn't many folks at Lake Mead that were truly kind of aware of the place. It was something that I tried to do was just drag as many people out for field trips to be able to get them to see not only the challenges that TUSK was facing. But also the opportunities that were there. One of the things that just really pleased me in terms of recognition later on is Patrick talking about how bringing quite a few people out that it really kind of energized some of the folks at Lake Mead. Many of the Lake Mead folks had worked there for so long – that's such a challenging place. And people were kind of excited to help out Tule Springs because it meant they weren't necessarily pulling bodies out of the lake or dealing with marina issues or the lake water decline within the park. That was kind of fun. So, anytime anybody wanted to get out into the park I definitely led a lot of field trips of folks out there.

VS: So, one of the things I did want to point out was that Erin Eichenberg, who is now the Integrated Resource Management Specialist for Tule Springs, was actually working as curator for Lake Mead at the time and so we were able to get permission to have her assist me on a fairly regular basis. I really appreciated having her to be able to tag team on a variety of issues. As you know, she is extremely well organized and that we did our best effort to try to organize any documents that we were getting from the BLM or from the researchers. And organized those into an archive for Tule Springs so that whomever was going to come in as the new Superintendent would have those resources available and easy to find. And so, we had a lot of early momentum on many, many fronts. And so, we thought it was really important that we document that. All of those things that were going on as we handed them off to the new incoming Superintendent.

VS: Did you have a sense that, when coming in, what we had done was support for you at all in your transition to the park?

JB: Yeah, absolutely. It was funny, on my way out there were things that driving across the country that gives you a lot of time to think as you drive from Maryland to Nevada. And one of the things that was really pleasantly surprising—even though I think Vincent, you had already mentioned some of the work you had been doing particularly on that front—when I got there, it was so quick and easy to turn to with some really helpful documents, particularly with the BLM history on the landscape. There were other kind of pleasant surprises. When I arrived there was a Compendium already done. I was very happy to have a Superintendent's Compendium; kind of collection of special rules upon a National Park Service site. That was great. There was so much that had been done that kind of prepared the way. It really made those first couple of weeks easier. It really allowed me to focus on meeting as many people as possible. I think I started on the 11<sup>th</sup> and then had those fun moments the first couple of days of trying to establish an office. Meeting with the Deputy Director and within that first week I think it was Thursday the 17<sup>th</sup> that I first truly got a chance to sit down and meet with Jill DeStefano and talk about the Protectors of Tule Springs. That was another one of those really pleasant moments of realizing that something very special could happen in this park.

VS: Absolutely. And thanks for that. So, a shared experience that we both have is that before we ever met her we heard the name Jill DeStefano many times. And so, for me when I finally got to meet Jill and she took us out onto the monument. That was a very special experience from a number of perspectives. And it really framed a new perspective on the monument that I had not had prior to that point. And seeing the monument through Jill's eyes and through her words and excitement is something I carry with me today. And so I wanted to let you, since you experienced the same thing, do you have some comments about the first time you got onto the monument with Jill?

JB: I think the first meeting—and I may have the order mixed up, whether we got out onto the monument first or sat down at Aliante to talk first but—one of the things that became so incredibly apparent just within the first five minutes of conversation was, I figured already that the people who had advocated for the place was very passionate. One of the first things that came through was my first discussion with Jill was multiplied when I met some of the other Board members of the Protectors as well as some of the membership was how it was not a passing fancy by any stretch of the imagination. The amount of work that had gone into, the careful, thoughtful work of building the groups that would support it really struck. Like I said, there were people who said, “You are really going to have to take control of POTS,” from some of the staff at Lake Mead. One of the first things I realized was that would be a dumb approach because that's not true partnership. But, then the other thing was I'm just going to ride this enthusiasm train because this is what is gonna allow us to get some things done during this period that we're waiting for the planning process and all these things to kick in. Now, Jill's enthusiasm for the place and sharing it was really infectious. I don't know about you Vince, but for me when I would get tired I would think about how incredibly hard Jill and others were working. And that inspired me to work a little longer or try a little harder. Even in those moments where, and this may sound like I am laying it on. But in those moments when I was most doubtful about how well this park in the first couple of years, was going to perform, it was just inspiring to think about anything I need my friends from POTS were there and would do everything they could to make it happen. Just very inspiring; the type of Friends organization that any park would be lucky to have.

VS: And I would say again that this was probably a shared experience but, I felt that Jill was as helpful to me as anybody else in making sure that I was inclusive and reached out to a whole variety of individuals that were key. She set up meetings and appointments with Mayors, members of the Council. All sorts of important people that are part of the history of how that site came to be. And so, I don't think that anybody at Lake Mead had that capacity. And so Jill providing that support made things much smoothly during those early days.

JB: Absolutely. One of the things Lizette [Richardson] later talked about was how connected Tule Springs was to the local structure in Las Vegas. And that Lake Mead that had been there for decades upon decades really was not connected in. Partly that came down to it was the bright, shiny new thing. Tule Springs was a brand-new National Park Service site. But at those meetings – meeting with Mayor Goodman and Mayor Lee with a lot of the UNLV folks. It was really POTS and Jill that kind of served that role that would often happen at a higher authority in the Park Service. Making sure that you're making those right connections. There were some interesting meetings for sure. Meeting with Mayor Lee and at that point I believe they still really wanted Grand Teton to be built and they really wanted the project around the Reserve to really

get going. It was about that development that making those connections early on was really helpful. So, Yeah, I totally agree on that.

VS: Did you get one of Mayor Lee's T-Shirts?

JB: So, I don't think I did actually, one of Mayor Lee's T-Shirts. But, later on of course I did get the awesome thing of having December 19, the year I left, essentially last day in the park, is North Las Vegas' Jon Burpee Day. (Laughter) So, I do try to remind people it's not only the Anniversary of the founding of TUSK, but the Anniversary of Jon Burpee Day. (Laughter)

VS: That's funny. Go ahead, please.

JD: Can I interject? This is Jill. I just wanted to – since we're talking about public official's business visits. Jon, do you want to talk about the Harry Reid visit we did? And some of the repercussions from that.

JB: So, that was fascinating. My first meeting with Harry Reid was fascinating. I had just a year before had been working in the Senate. So, the Majority Leader of the Senate was a pretty good friend to have for the park. There were two meetings that really stand out and unfortunately in my mind I can't remember if the first or second where Senator Reid had just had an accident at home. Had really severely blinded one of his eyes. It was really tough. But, when we met with him it was so amazing to recognize how much control of the idea of what this monument was and also his vision for it. I'm not thinking of any particular repercussions because early on I was just helping to point out the fact that the legislation had some challenges to it. The legislation, one of the challenges is it had made Tule Springs eligible for SNPLMA funds. But had not made Tule Springs eligible for SNPLMA funds for capital improvements. And that was one of the huge challenges. You know, when you look at the visitor infrastructure in the public lands around Las Vegas, in Southern Nevada, most of those were actually paid for with SNPLMA funds. I believe that was an early thing. I can't think of any repercussions. There's the somewhat funny, at least to me, concept was the first that Senator Reid talked about how these Latter-Day Saints, within the Book of Mormon, talked about, at the time of Jesus arrival in North America. That there were horses and that the fossils, the fossil remains of horses, within Tule Springs helped prove the Book of Mormon. He said that could be a key part of your exhibits at your Visitor Center. I had to just, kind of ok, planning will take us where we need to go. (Laugh). I know this isn't the normal forum for an oral history interview, but which repercussions were you thinking about Jill?

JD: Oh, I was just thinking about – I did not know that I wasn't supposed to set up an appointment like that with you, without you having to Lake Mead first.

JB: Nope.

JD: And you kind of got told about that later.

JB: Yeah, yeah, that became a thing later on. At the time there were multiple moments of me meeting, like when we met with Deana Titus as well. I think that was Lynn that arranged that. There was such a familiarity with any of the people that worked in Harry Reid's office as well as within some of the other folks, that I never, to be honest, never really worried about giving early notification to Lake Mead. I did report up heavily through our Pacific West Region to talk about

that but I think that was a little of that challenge that Tule Springs had more connection at times than the much more visited Lake Mead. It had just had much more of a connection into the local community and the political establishment of the area. Funny, I hadn't thought of that Jill for a long while.

JD: Thank you.

VS: Jill, while we have you here. I think you did a tremendous job in mentoring both Jon and myself. And I think some or much of the success can be tied to the way you helped us to understand issues. So, we're always indebted.

JD: Thank you. I guess, and this is just an aside, I was thinking more of that particular situation because the new Superintendent now has come on. Derek Carter. He wanted to meet with some of these people and I said, "Well, I can set up the appointments but you got to let Lake Mead know ahead of time". It was on my brain.

JB: That's wise. And to be honest I probably should have. This was still in that period before Lizette [Richardson] showed up and that was an interesting time for sure.

VS: Thank you. I am going to try to move around in a circle now. And start with federal agencies. So, your working relationship, your introduction to Fish and Wildlife Service at Corn Creek. Were there any early meetings of significance with Fish and Wildlife Service?

JB: Yeah, I had somewhat impromptu meeting with Amy Sprunger, S-P-R-U-N-G-E-R, who was the Manager of Desert National Wildlife Refuge. It was kind of interesting. That was within the first two weeks I believe. She was taking me through that really beautiful Visitor Center they have there at Corn Creek for the Desert National Wildlife Refuge. And she said, "Well, we only have it open two days a week". You know, part of the challenge a lot of these groups could fund their Visitor Centers and other types of improvements with SNPLMA. But they still have the challenge of still having a source of funding for staffing. And so she talked about at that point being able to keep the Visitor Center open two days a week. And I pretty much knew. One of the things that had already happened was during Vince's time was I think Christie Vanover, from Lake Mead, had worked pretty heavily on a SNPLMA fund request to provide two employees to Tule Springs. That would be term employees. And I knew there wasn't room within my newly adopted main office, which was there at the Interagency Office. And when she said that and I looked at the empty desk and where I kind of latched onto the idea of possibly developing a Service First Agreement with Fish and Wildlife Service. My recollection of it, and just may be my recollection, that Amy wasn't real thrilled. In fact, when I mentioned it her take was, "Oh, people are going to throng to the flat hats and not go to the brown ball caps." And it was just—what I think is a natural challenge between Fish and Wildlife Service and Park Service—that Fish and Wildlife Service has more refugees than National Park Service has National Parks, but when people think of federal land management they think of National Parks first. I think there was a little concern with that. It led to – I think the second week I was there, toward the end of the second week if I remember right, I met with Christy Smith who is the Project Manager who oversaw supervision of the managers for the four National Wildlife Refuges around Southern Nevada including Desert National Wildlife Refuge. I mentioned I was interested in this possibility of housing my staff out there. So I actually have people essentially at the edge of the Monument. And in exchange we could potentially work the front desk of the Visitor Center and

provide a little more accessibility to the building. Christy Smith could not have been a bigger supporter. In fact, other than Jill, Christy Smith was one of my biggest mentors in navigating Southern Nevada and Southern Nevada interests. She was really pretty cool and great to work with. Fish and Wildlife Service, biggest neighbor in terms of on our boundary, they were key. Also, led to developing a good relationship with their law enforcement folks that were out there. They had two law enforcement for those four refuges. Two law enforcement officers. I was able to get them to respond to the incidents much quicker than I could get someone from Lake Mead because of the distance.

VS: Great. So, let's move on to BLM next. There was lots of communication with BLM during those early years as it relates to the actual transfer of the property, the cadastral boundary survey, the right of way permits, transmission lines, etc. How was your communication with BLM during the first year of your tenure?

JB: Within the first year, one of my major BLM interactions was meeting Gayle Marrs-Smith, one of the senior leaders for BLM in Southern Nevada at the time. And somebody who really dug in. Couldn't have been a more helpful person to me. Kind of challenging. I myself was full of – just wondering every person who's kind of upset that this land that had been their land. That initially was proposed to possibly be a BLM monument and then maybe a joint BLM-National Park Service monument, and then ultimately a National Park Service monument. Had a pretty open discussion with Gayle about that. Just being cognizant of that. The BLM's a very proud agency just as the Park Service is and they had done an amazing amount of work in terms of understanding the paleontological record there through their contracts with San Bernardino. And I'm really glad to have that conversation on that first meeting with her. Gayle really helped grease the skids to better understand some of the challenges that were on the land with the rights-of-way. In fact, she, early on orchestrated the transfer of documents from BLM to me. In fact, six banker boxes of rights of way documents were delivered into my office. My office space was actually within the Fish and Wildlife Service wing of that building. And here come these BLM folks with six large size banker boxes with records who delivered them to me. And I was forever grateful for that because I was fairly blind to the sheer number of agreements and rights-of-way that were on that land and that really helped. It also led to a little bit of confusion because one of the documents that wasn't fully there was the information on the right-of-way for Grand Teton Road that later proved to be instrumental in understanding. That really helped. And then we began to get an understanding of what all the Park Service had inherited from BLM partnership before.

VS: Great. Did you have much interaction, outside the Advisory Council, with the Department of Defense?

JB: A little bit. Again, mostly through Jill's help with that. One of the Colonel's that I spoke with fairly regularly and his name absolutely escapes me, and I've gone through my notes and often says "meet with Air Force Colonel". I really hate that I don't have his – and I think he was just an accidental meet. One day he was hiking on the monument, but beyond that not heavily. The Air Force was so involved in the early stand up of their efforts to reserve more of Desert National Wildlife Refuge for additional Air Force use that kind of log my efforts to reach out to Air Force at the time was – they were pretty busy with their eyes elsewhere. Mostly, one of the things—with the base commander later on who I spoke about—they were just happy that within the legislation it created essentially a fly way between Nellis Air Force Base and Creech Air

Force Base. They wouldn't have to worry about having houses underneath. And that was their big thing. This Colonel was involved though in the drone program and he had funny moments of asking me, "Hey, you know, we fly drones over there all the time. Would you like us to let you know when there's people in the shooting area?". Just funny little things like that that I never fully took up because just didn't really have the time to invest in it. Also, a little curious whether it's ok for the U.S. Air Force to use their resources that way.

VS: Great. And then I think Bennie Tso and the Paiutes were there during the transition. Your interaction with the Paiutes.

JB: It was kind of a fascinating time period for the Paiute because they were operating their golf course out there within their lands but bordered the park. And also in the process of setting up a medical marijuana grow facility. My interactions with Bennie largely were to talk a little bit about the effects of the golf course. Russian star thistle, and other things that washed down from the golf course and out into the monument. We enjoyed working with Bennie. Really enjoyed getting a much broader perspective on the history out there. One of the kind of an important spot for the Paiute on the Salt Song Trail essentially. He really wanted to be involved. It was difficult though because Bennie often didn't show up to the Advisory Council meetings and things like that. I tried to check in with him a lot and he just had so much going on trying to run tribal affairs. I think it was always a challenge for him. But Bennie was definitely a supporter of preserving the land within the Monument. One of the most striking conversations I had with him was him explaining that he would really like us as an agency, if we are going to do much digging, to talk to him first. But, under the National Historic Preservation Act it was something we would want to do anyways. He did explain we will find burials out there of Paiute and he wants to make sure they protect those they know of.

VS: Very good. Shifting towards the scientific collaboration. So, San Bernardino County Museum, Kathleen Springer, Eric Scott had a very long history and relationship with Tule Springs Fossil Beds, particularly under BLM management. How did you interact with Kathleen and Eric?

JB: Incredibly enthusiastic both of them, of course. And very, very happy that it had become part of the national park system. They were quite happy, although at the time they probably wouldn't say it out loud, but they were quite happy that it hadn't gone to the BLM. Particularly Kathleen was incredibly generous with her time. She had transitioned, I think it was about this time to the U.S. Geological Survey, and was still doing geologic work in the area. So she was in the park a lot. Took me on a lot of excursions in the park to show me aspects of it. And really was a good advocate for making sure that when we planned for visitor facilities we're taking the geology into consideration. Similar with Eric of course he was not there as much but would have him come over for key events including the Advisory Committee meetings. So generous with his time. Really, really cared about the place. The biggest challenge we had; you know he had left the San Bernardino Museum as well. They'd had quite of bit of change there in that time. My hope really was that NPS would be able to get those objects that had been dug, all the objects, not just the first group that we were able to get. And that was a frustrating situation for me because ultimately they did not go to the Park Service. But ultimately they did come back to the Las Vegas valley with the Natural History Museum.

VS: So, there were other paleontologists in the Las Vegas area, Steve Rowland. You had the opportunity to interact with Steve?

JB: Yes, Steve, again, even at the last minute if I really had someone I really wanted to impress with the scientific history of the place or the scientific possibilities, Steve Rowland was the guy I would turn to. And he would drop just about anything to be able to come out and help tour folks around. Steve was really generous with his time. And being an elephant guy, loved mammoths and just loved the site, and did a good job to make sure, not only his co-worker Dr. Bonde but also his students were still getting out on site. They were one of the first folks to get an NPS permit for digging. He was great. I can't say enough nice things about Dr. Rowland.

VS: Great. And then Las Vegas Natural History Museum and Josh Bonde; interactions with Josh?

JB: So Josh, again, very passionate about paleontology. During this time, it was a little more challenging because I was trying to figure out the best thing for the long-term of the park. Josh ultimately left UNLV and went to work for Las Vegas Natural History Museum, who he was already closely tied to and he was definitely an advocate for the Museum as his job there was. It was definitely more of a challenge and there was a pretty strong animosity that developed between particularly Josh and the folks who had been out there with San Bernardino Museum. So, I constantly had to work through that. Josh was somebody, if I needed something, some help out there—in fact early on they were out digging on the site and he made sure he invited me out there to see the process. I was really thankful for that. One of Josh's students was Dawn Reynoso, who since then has gone to work for Nevada State Parks at Tule Springs. Again, someone else I could immediately call upon for assistance. Another one of his students, at the time. That natural connection between UNLV and the park was great. Another one of his students at the time, Loren Perry, also somebody who would just jump in. I spoke to a lot of school groups, a lot of folks and particularly early on I tried to grab the experts to help me out with it. Sometimes it was kind of a challenge because it's that whole challenge of scientists have of being educators to lay people. There were a few moments of me having to step in and go "ok, what that really means". (laughter) Particularly with Kathleen. She was just such a smart geologist and many people didn't necessarily think along those lines.

VS: Very good. So, a couple other things I want to chat about. This is a logical progression to talk about the Advisory Council because it ties all of these entities together. So, lots of ways to look at this. Your facilitation in trying to get the Advisory Council to move forward. These professionals with different backgrounds coming together for a common cause. How did that process go forward? Do you think there were successes? Were there limitations?

JB: Yeah, absolutely. So, the Advisory Council was created via the legislation and had very specific membership designed into it. One of the things that was interesting—it was well underway, I think the nominations all had been made and the slow, incredibly slow process of getting the Advisory Council approved by the Secretary of the Interior created challenges early on. The legislation, so the language of the legislation actually also—ok, you have to meet multiple times a year. I can't remember if it was two or three times a year. And the express purpose of the Advisory Council was to advise on the development - the General Management Plan. Which in Park Service speak for some folks has a very specific meaning. The General Management Plan was going to be many years in advance before we could actually get on it. So,

early on I tried to make sure to keep the interest up and also to meet the spirit of the law with the early decisions that were being made within the park to seek the advice of the Council to get their take on it as well. That, in hindsight, was a challenge because I don't know if everybody fully understood the concept of what the Advisory Council was for. I know I needed to utilize it in a very specific way. I think that was one of my failures. I don't think I used the Advisory Council to the best of their abilities. Incredibly gifted people – some of whom were really handling specific desires from other organizations. Again, that challenge with the Natural History Museum and having Eric Scott and Josh Bonde on it. At times I was a little concerned about that having—the City of Las Vegas had put one of their City Council members, Steve Ross, on it and then City of North Las Vegas had put Jill, which was perfect, on it. But there were moments where interacting with the City, I think they were wanting somebody who, at times, would be more of an advocate specifically for City of North Las Vegas. The Advisory Council was definitely one of the bigger challenges for me.

VS: Very good. Before I start wrapping up on some miscellaneous topics I wanted to check with Jill to check and see if she has anything to ask at this point?

JD: No, I think I am good. Thank you.

VS: Ok. And Erin Eichenberg may or may not be with us at this point. Erin, do you have any questions if you are out there?

EE: No, I don't.

VS: Ok, thanks. Just little loose ends. The firing range and the illegal dumping. Any general comments about those activities?

JB: So, by firing range do you mean the official Clark County firing range or the 40 years of, kind of shooting, particularly in the north portion of the park?

VS: Yes, the North Unit issue of the firing range there.

JB: Yeah, absolutely. I'll just say on the Clark County Shooting Range. Again, within the first month I met with so many people within the first month. I met with their person who is kind of their manager out there. That facility, first of all an incredible facility. It essentially had an RV campground associated with it. And I just had a fun moment where this kind, who definitely enjoyed running the shooting range, but not the RV campground. Within two minutes he's going, "You know we can just hand that over to the National Park Service if you want." So, that was kind of interesting to jump right into that. The North Unit shooting area was much more problematic. The difficulty of going from BLM land, with BLM, what can happen on the land as BLM, to NPS site. That was actually one of the challenges I knew going in was gonna be really difficult to tackle. Particularly without having some way of closing that off. There's multiple entrances into that area. It's a section of wash where you have these rolling little small canyons that people would go out and shoot all kinds of things beyond just normal target practice. The stuff that was dumped out there to be shot up – TV, these are cathode-grade tube TV's, you have mercury issues. Out there, there were multiple vehicles that people had used tannerite. Thing you can mix up and then as you shoot it creates this massive explosion. So, that to me was always one of the biggest problems. Early on, Marcie Hinson, with the County's Endangered Species Group were first and foremost there dealing with Desert Tortoise issues. When I met with her



and realized that they had funding through SNPLMA to take care of resource issues. That was one of the big things we worked on with the idea of getting the compliance in so they could potentially do fencing. Similar to the fencing BLM had done on the southern section of the Northern Unit, as well as parts of the northern section of the Southern Unit. And we met quite a bit there. In the meantime, a long-term project unfortunately.

JB: In the meantime, utilizing Gordon Gilbert, good ole Gordo, out there to make contacts on the main entrance into it. As the Superintendent, I have to admit, I was really quite nervous about that. There was a lot of people who were definitely opposed to the idea of that being closed off. We worked a little bit with BLM. They weren't entirely happy. But to identify and Gordon would hand out maps to BLM land that could still be legally shot upon. That was really thankless duty out there for Gordo. He made tons of contacts with folks in a really professional manner. There had been some online things. One I had never actually seen but had referred to, somebody said, "The last bullet they ever fire will be through the head of the ranger that shuts down that shooting area". I came out of the park one day—this is on the southern section—to find four AK 47 rounds lined up on the hood of my vehicle. That was a little unsettling. I have to admit that shook me pretty good because I looked at those four. My first thought was oh, somebody said, "The park ranger will take care of these rounds that I found." But they were just lined up so perfectly and all I could think of was my family; the four of us. That freaked me out a little bit. The shooting area is going to leave a legacy on that park for a long time for sure. The clean-up of it is going to be truly massive. And working with Region, we never got a full estimate as to what type of clean up during my time there. Tried to leave good notes about that. Shooting area also created for me a recognition that I had one ranger out there, several days a week at that time, making contacts. He didn't have really great back-up. Generally, we didn't go down into the shooting area because it is a really complex series of side washes off of the main wash. That, if he got in trouble, just calling in for support would be difficult. And Gordo and I talked about that. How do you say, "Ok, it is the third side wash off the main wash?" Just really challenging. And not having more law enforcement resources there was difficult. I did have a great moment when I realized that Gordo was the absolute right person to be there. One day I was filling up one of the government, the Dodge Durango I drove. It had government plates on it. Pretty obvious government rig. And I heard a guy kind of approaching me from behind me and said something to the effect, "Are you that Superintendent out there at the park?". And it was gruff enough that I decided I will go ahead and step over the gas hose just to put a little distance between me and where he was approaching. And he lit into me about, "You're taking away our heritage. That's where I learned to shoot. That's where I'm teaching my grandson to shoot". Really mad, really, really angry. And I just listened to him and tried to say, "Well, there's the Clark County Shooting Range and there's also BLM land further up". He wasn't having any of it but it did defuse him a little bit. And then it was almost like a light switch. "But boy that ranger up there. He is just about the nicest guy I ever met". And that made me feel really good that Gordo was handling himself really well out there with some challenging folks. We had shooters out there that were shooting all kinds of things. Doing all kinds of crazy things. But I did something that was a little scary. I started visiting, out of uniform, some of the gun shops in the area. Just talking to the clerks and owners. Explaining, "Hi, I'm with the National Park Service. They've got this amazing area out there". Offered if you guys want to go out, I'll show you why it's so important. Talked about the fossils, talked about those types of things. Distributed maps to the BLM area. Left my card if anyone had any questions. One of the things that gave me a bit of hope was the number of people who said, "Oh, yeah, I used to go shooting out there. I don't go out there.

That's dangerous." People telling stories of errant rounds flying over their heads. Because it was just truly a lawless land out there. The little bit we were able to work towards moving forward with some fencing. A lot of education. Spoke to a lot of Homeowner Associations. As I would do the slide show I spent a lot of time being quiet. And just showing pictures of the types of impact was having out there and the wash. And that seemed to be fairly powerful for a lot of folks. It's going to take decades to recover that area though, truly. And ironically it is some of the best areas in terms of wash that potentially has just a wealth of paleontological information. And there really hadn't been that much – San Bernardino hadn't dug up that section nearly as much as in the south end. As much of a challenge the North Unit is I think in many ways it's the future of a lot of the scientific work that will happen there.

VS: I'm down to my last three questions. Before I jump into them I'm going to give Jill one last chance for a question.

JD: No, I think I'm good. You're such a good interviewer. I'm learning how to do this. (Laughter) I think Jon has captured it and I've actually learned a lot. A lot of things Jon never told me with these stories of bullets on his car, etc.

JB: Yeah, I kept that kind of quiet and just talked to some law enforcement folks on that.

JD: Oh, I remember one thing. I did recall one thing. Jon, when we first went out to, what I call the Ex Site Stewardship site, [west] of Decatur and North of Jones, and you and I took a hike out there. It was the end of the year, December 30<sup>th</sup>, or something, and then a few days later I reported to you that it had been ransacked. I think that would be important to talk about.

JB: Yeah, absolutely. That was the constant challenge of trying to educate people about why it's important but without enough of a staff presence to fully protect the site. That site that got ransacked had been a San Bernardino site – earlier than that the Tule Springs Expedition folks had dug on that site. It served an incredible purpose and function. It was an amazing little site. Yet, somebody, somebody just absolutely destroyed the site. Of course, I brought in law enforcement right away. Special Investigator for the Park Service. We set up camera traps to see if we could capture anything. The Special Investigator visited rock shops in the area to see if there was anything that was showing up as a Tule Springs fossil. It was so obvious that whoever did it, didn't have a clue what they were doing because they just exposed tusk. When they exposed that tusk it absolutely shattered without being properly prepared. That was really a dispiriting moment for me. I think a few days later – I guess it was about a month later we had another incident out there where someone had driven a road grader into the park. Had stolen it and I got the call during the Super Bowl of all things. I was sitting there watching the Super Bowl and dispatch from Lake Mead called me and said, "Hey, there's this incident out there." I went out and fortunately they evidently didn't know how to really operate the grader blade. But they drove all over and got it stuck and just created all kinds of problems. People dumping stuff out there was a constant but we also had somebody that stole a John Deere Gator from the City of Las Vegas and had driven it all over. Had two fatalities during my time there. One on the road, one where a guy busted through the fence and was driving around the park and died from a heart attack. There were definitely some challenges that I'm not sure I was entirely, fully ready to take on. That site being just ransacked. I think that's a good word for it Jill because it was just senseless. That was pretty saddening to me.

JD: Yes, especially just after we had been there. It was like three days later.

JB: I went out there quite a bit after that to check on the site. And just the sheer number of times I'd see motorcycles that would go right through a site out there. Not knowing the damage that they were potentially doing. That was tough because without a law enforcement ranger on a motorcycle potentially doing damage of their own we just – it was a challenge. Spoke to so many motorcyclists and chased them around a little bit. There were as many wonderful things as there were a lot of things that were incredibly challenging being the only person. Being one of a few people there. That was definitely a challenge. You're on the edge of a city with 2.5 million people and 40 million visitors coming and there we were with 22,650 acres with one employee and the amazing POTS. But that was rough.

JD: Yep, thank you.

JB: You bet.

VS: Thanks Jill. Erin, anything from you?

EE: No, I don't have anything else.

VS: Ok. You're down to your final three. They're all going to be the most difficult questions, so far.

JB: Ok. Bring them on. I'm up for a challenge.

VS: So, what do you think your one accomplishment at Tule Springs is the one you're most proud of?

JB: That's interesting, because coming from an interpretive background, my gosh, the sheer number of talks and programs I did. Sometimes, in conjunction with POTS. Often not. I think really was a way to really start to get people to understand why the place was special. So, as an interpreter I think about that. Really probably the smartest thing and the best accomplishment was riding the wave of the enthusiasm and passion of POTS. Doing everything I could to keep that excitement there as we were slowly going through the slow bureaucratic process that we were going through. So much of my last nine months there was tied into rights of way issues and the idea of Eglinton surrounding that section of land that BLM had sold to developers. And that moment of finding that – I was ready to do everything I could to make sure houses weren't built there. And that moment of finding that wayward right of way that actually touched Grand Teton to that ownership of land there. I'm very proud that working with Region we were able to come up with the best of the cruddy solutions to that in terms of getting rid of that right of way in exchange for allowing different access to that land. It's going to fundamentally change that section. B but I also knew that a road cutting off the wash that was going to fundamentally change that section down there as well. I don't know. It's tough to reflect cause there was so much I wanted to get done while I was there and so much I was never able to accomplish there. It's tough to reflect on that one.

VS: You're right. That is a very difficult question.

JB: Also, knowing the challenge that came in terms of I was a difficult person to follow behind because I was so enthusiastic. Willing to jump about on my weekends or whatever. I have always felt a sadness that, from my perspective and this isn't meant to be a dig, the site lost a couple years of what could have been a lot of enthusiasm and excitement after I left.

VS: So, they get harder as we count down here. So, as best you can remember, either your best day or your best moment at Tule Springs?

JB: Golly, that right there. If I had to put the best one – that is so incredibly hard cause every day that I walked out there I may be faced with, “oh look”, yet another cut up hot tub or look some more asbestos tile. Every single day I went out there, even on days when I was discouraged, I was so incredibly blown away by the beauty of the place. There on the edge of Las Vegas, with those mountains towering up over to the north and you could step down into the wash and you felt like you were a thousand miles away from some of the craziness of Las Vegas. That is really hard to put that into perspective. Some of those great moments, there's so many, of just seeing the fruition of all the work of the Protectors of Tule Springs and the Clark County School District with the Mammoth Money Drive or the Penny Push. Having those moments of joy at the Las Vegas Science Festival. Other moments that made me incredibly happy were the mini museum that I put together within the Fish and Wildlife Service office there. The wonderful task of all these fossils, all from different places. We didn't have any great casts of fossils from there but putting up a little display on the front side of my little cubicle there. And hearing Fish and Wildlife Service people stop and read the little sign and go, “Oh, I didn't know that” and just having those moments were pretty great. It's so tough to really say one. Seeing the joy of my family out there. The friendship of Jill and other members of POTS and partners. I return to those moments a lot in my mind.

VS: Thanks, Good answer. Ok, the toughest one. So, three of us on the phone here were in great mourning when we heard that Superintendent Burpee was leaving Tule Springs. I think all of us, our hearts stopped and we certainly understand all the circumstances. But my final question to you: how did you say goodbye to Tule Springs?

JB: We had such an interesting moment there. You know, the signing of some of the paperwork that would move along the rights of way transfer and all that. That last couple of weeks trying to put together some very simple signs on the Eglinton Preserve and that's where we were holding the ceremony. Having the wonderful thing over at Aliante, the going away. So, I was going through a bit of mourning as well. I'll just say that before I went over to the celebration they were holding—the amazing going away—I took a moment. I had to run down – think I said I had to run down to the gate at Grand Teton just one more time to make sure everything was set up. So, it actually made me late to my own party. I actually drove up into the shooting area. The Shooting Range, the Clark County Shooting Range, and from up there you have, I think, one of the most interesting views of the entire monument. Off to the right you can see, if you are looking to the south off to the west off to the right, you can see the beginnings of the lower section of the northern – you see that crazy power line that cuts the park in half. But you can see miles upon miles, acres upon acres of wash. Each of which are full of paleontological potential for discovery. I spent about five minutes there. Wishing I could have both my great desire to stay in that location for a long time but also do what was good for career. Really boiled down to family considerations more than anything else. And that was a moment of reflection and – said a little prayer for the place and for the people. (Pause) And then I headed off to the party.

JD: That was a hard day.

JB: It really was. And knowing the challenges of the next couple years. Being able to in retrospect – I don't know. That place has an incredible future in front of it. I'm just really proud to have had that moment.

VS: Thank you, Jon. Not only for your time for this interview but for all you have done for Tule Springs. The people that are benefiting from it, that care about it. We'll always be proud of you and you'll always be part of the history of that Monument. So, thank you.

JB: You bet. I appreciate that. It's been fun to reflect on some of that. You get so busy in the current job that – it was very fun. Exceedingly happy time of my life.

VS: So, I am going to shut off because I want to chat with you about one thing off the record here if that's ok.

JD: Well, I want to say something, but I don't want it on the record either.

VS: Ok, I am going to go ahead and shut this off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]



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