



# National Park Service Paleontology Program

## *Oral History Interview – Philip Stoffer*

Natural Resource Report NPS/PALEONTOLOGY PROGRAM/OHI—2020/013



**ON THE COVER**

Phil Stoffer in front of a pictograph panel known as “The Great Gallery” located in the Horseshoe unit of Canyonlands National Park, Utah.

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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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This oral history transcript is available in digital format and is maintained within the NPS Paleontology Program Archives and Library through the NPS Geologic Resources Division. If you have any questions regarding this transcript, please email [vincent\\_santucci@nps.gov](mailto:vincent_santucci@nps.gov).

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## Background

Interview with Philip Stoffer: This interview was conducted on Friday, June 26, 2020. The primary speakers are interviewee Phil Stoffer (PS), Vincent L. Santucci (VS) as interviewer and Tim Connors (TC). Phil is a retired geologist / librarian with the U.S. Geological Survey.

This interview was conducted over the telephone from Phil's home in San Diego, California. Vince was at his home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and Tim Connors was at his home in Denver, Colorado. At the time of the interview, Vince was the NPS Senior Paleontologist and Paleontology Program Coordinator and Tim Connors is a Geologist with the NPS Geologic Resources Division. 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. Phil signed a release form for the National Park Service for the preservation and use of the interview in the future. Birth date PII has been omitted.

## Transcript

PS = Phil Stoffer

VS = Vincent Santucci

TC = Tim Connors

[START OF INTERVIEW]

VS: I'll just give a quick introduction and we'll jump into the questions. So today is Friday June 26, 2020 and my name is Vincent Santucci and I'm the senior paleontologist for the national park service paleontology program. We will be speaking today with Phil Stoffer, a retired geologist with the US Geological Survey. Phil has an extensive history working on projects in national park service areas and we will be discussing those today. The interview will be conducted by telephone from Phil's home in San Diego, California, and I am at my home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. We are joined today by Tim Connors, geologist for the National Park Service Geologic Resources Division from his home in Denver, Colorado. So, are you ready Phil?

PS: Yes, just to correct, my last name is STOW-FER: S-T-O-F-F-E-R

VS: STOW-FER. Sorry about that.

PS. No problem.

**1:07**

VS: So, probably the easiest question that you will get is: can you give us a little bit of background when and where you were born and where you grew up?

PS: I was born in Ohio and I grew up in Cincinnati. I lived on a farm in the southwest part of the state a few miles from the Indiana border along the Great Miami River valley, a very beautiful rural part of the state there. I spent a lot of time as a kid going out an hunting for artifacts in the creek beds; my parents took me caving a lot down in Kentucky. Probably the most important thing they did to me was take me to Yellowstone when I was 5 years old. I got hooked!

VS: Yeah, I can hear you on that; I went when I was 12 and it was a life changing experience.

PS: Yeah, yeah actually produced my first field guide when I was 6 years old with my twin brother about that experience.

VS. Oh wow, and it's tied to Yellowstone?

PS. Yeah, and Badlands National Park.

VS: We need to get copies of that!

PS: You know what I'll put it online today and I'll give you the URL.

VS: Oh, that's great. it will become part of your official archive.

PS: That will be cool!

**2:56**

VS: So, you went on to college or university; where did you go to school?

PS: I went to Miami University in Ohio and one of the reasons why I went there is because Miami University offered a geology program and what really intrigued me is that they had a field camp near Yellowstone up in the Wind River Basin and so in the geology program we did lots of field trips all over the Smoky Mountains and parks in Kentucky and the whole region but it was the field camp in Wyoming that was the best experience. I went on and actually went back to that field camp when I finished my bachelor's degree and did my Master's thesis on the stratigraphy of the Paleozoic stratigraphy of the Wind River mountains near Dubois, Wyoming, but as a result of that experience they actually hired me to come back and teach field camp there for quite a number of years; I think it was four years. Every field camp we'd always go up to the Tetons and Yellowstone and so it got me thoroughly immersed in that region. It was crazy back in 1980. I got my first job between my bachelors and my masters in Denver and I moved to Boulder, Colorado so I got to spend a lot of time in Rocky Mountain National Park. But when I finished my masters in 1983, the oil industry had died and so did the mineral industry and I actually decided to change careers; I actually went back and got a master's degree in library science and started a good career as a science librarian. I took a job in Tulsa and worked there for a couple years and realized I didn't like corporate America and wanted to spend more time outside and so I first moved back to Miami University where they hired me to be their science librarian but then I took a better paying job at the University of Kentucky and lived there for three years working for the Kentucky Geological Survey and the University of Kentucky geology program as their librarian and I was teaching field camp again out in Wyoming and that's where I met Paula Messina and we hit it off, but she lived in New York City so I thought, "*Well I'll try the big city*" so I lived in New York City and ended up getting a job teaching in a high school there—Lafayette High School in Brooklyn—and wow, that was a tough job but I got hired as their librarian. And what was amazing is I got off work every day at 2 o'clock and I had 13 weeks of vacation paid every year and I didn't have to grade papers. So I had a lot of free time and started off every summer driving all over the United States in my pickup truck with Paula and we visited over a hundred national parks and monuments while I was a teacher there. And we did photography all the time whenever we went anywhere and we came back and used them in our classes. I started teaching at Brooklyn College; the Geology of National Parks class. I actually got hired—I met a man who turned out to be my department chair and I started grad school for my PhD there but we worked on paleontology of basically the Cretaceous ammonite fossils from the whole region of South Dakota over into Wyoming—the western interior seaway—and one of my other advisors was the head of paleontology division at the American Museum of Natural History. That was a guy named Landon and we did a lot of field trips collecting fossils for the American Museum and the national park and I ended up requesting and got a permit from Badlands National Park to actually go study the paleontology in the parks. And I thought, "*This will be quite useful*" and it will link my career there and I got and went what is called an EDMAP grant from the USGS. EDMAP was a funding for geologic mapping and so I got some other students, Paula and a fellow from the University of Nebraska—I can't remember his name right now—we spent a summer pretty much just mapping the stratigraphy in Badlands National Park.

The other guy was mapping the White River Group and I was working on the Cretaceous and we were trying to figure out where the K-T Boundary was, and wow we got in a lot of arguments but we think we figured it out; there's always a lot of controversy over something like that. But I finished my degree; Paula got an offer from the San Jose State University and I thought, "*Well it will get me out of New York*" and so we moved to California and we both had finished our PhDs at that point and that's when I applied and got a job at the USGS. There were a lot of other things that were going on in there – we were still going to all of the national parks – I did my PhD on the late Campanian-Maastrichtian strata, the fossils in Badlands National Park area and over on the west side of the Black Hills and Paula did her PhD research, we went with a high school teacher from here in San Diego out to Death Valley on a field trip and drove up to the racetrack playa and Paula said, "Boy I really like this" and the principal said, "Why don't you do your PhD topic on it?" and she said, "Alright". It was right at that time that the government made GPS publicly available to anybody and so we grabbed one of the earliest versions of high precision GPS mapping equipment and flew out to California, rented it in Sacramento, got a one hour training course on how to use it and then went up and started mapping all of the sliding rock trails. We had a permit from the national park at that point to do that and it was quite a remarkable experience. We walked almost 200 kilometers worth of sliding rock trails by the time we had finished and it was in summer when we were doing it and there were plenty of days when the temperature was in the hundred and teens but we had learned how to do desert survival and it was quite a remarkable experience. We had some rangers come out and pull guns on us and say, "What are you doing out here, you must be crazy". And then we'd show them the permit we had from the park and they'd laugh and we all became good friends. It was a great experience – but it was even worse doing research in the summer in South Dakota because of the humidity and the danger of lightning because we were carrying metal objects all over the place out and about the Badlands country and it was actually just as hot as Death Valley – anyway, I think that period of my life I can't really think of anything outstanding other than it was a great journey – 10 weeks every summer driving from New York City all the way to Alaska and going down to Anchorage and visiting all the parks that we could get to by car in Alaska and then driving down to Arizona – and what's interesting – I gave my old pickup truck to a guy who needed some cash and he got rich a few months later and he turned around and bought us a raft trip down the Grand Canyon for a wedding gift and so we got to do a raft trip down the Grand Canyon. And it's quite remarkable that we did the same raft trip 20 years later and halfway through the float trip we realized we had the same boat man and the boat man—I can't remember his name—he had just taken Hilary Clinton down the river on the previous trip. He was much better when he was older. It was a great experience but it was on that trip that I did all the 3D photography of the Grand Canyon. The other thing about mentioning 3D photography, the house I grew up in, we had one of those stereo-optician viewers and my great-great grandmother left her husband in 1917; left the farm in Ohio and took her horse and got on a train and took it out to Wyoming and then did a horse tour up through Yellowstone National Park. And when she came home she had brought a big stack of those stereo cards with the stereo viewer. I had that in my house and would look at it all the time and we learned how to make our own stereo photography. So that was one of the first websites I put up was converting all those stereo photos from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onto – making them so you could look at them on the computer screen with the red and blue glasses and that is what got me started with that whole geology of national parks website.

14:58



VS: Excellent; very good. So you defended your dissertation in 1998 and then immediately were hired by the US Geological Survey at Menlo Park; can you tell us about your position there and anything of interest related there?

PS: They hired me to be the head of their library. At the time it was the largest natural sciences library on the west coast. If you wanted to be a science librarian for the natural sciences it was kind of like the pinnacle of anybody's career. And it started off really nice but even within a year the director of the survey came in and there was a lot of politics going on within the USGS about the library and the people within the big USGS library in Reston, Virginia actually tried to unionize but George Bush Jr. killed that and so basically anybody who had common sense applied for jobs to get out of the library at that point. I applied and got a job with the western earth surface processes team and had a really good friend who was the head of the IT program over there and he really liked some of the websites I was working on and so they hired me to build websites for all of their different team projects and so that was in about 2002 when I left the library and sure enough it was just a matter of time that they just shut down the entire library. I don't know whatever happened to it; some of the collection went to Stanford; some of it went back to Reston, but most of it including the largest map collection in the western United States (paper map) I assume is all down in the national archives hole somewhere now at this point probably never to be seen again along with who knows what else. It was too expensive to maintain really and they couldn't pay library employees enough to live realistically in the Bay Area because of the cost of living so I'm not surprised they shut it down. In fact, from what I can tell they shut down the entire Menlo Park office. When I started working there, there were 2,800 employees and only a few of them are still employed and they've all been moved other places.

**18:07**

VS: I was going to ask a specific question regarding USGS library's but if you have something else to add please do.

PS: Well, I was going to talk about the western earth surface processes team, but go ahead and ask your library question.

VS: So since you were part of the library system for USGS, do you know how the organization was setup for the libraries? was there a scope of collections for each of the centers – the libraries at each of the centers that sort of divided up the responsibilities of the collections at each site?

PS: Basically, the USGS library in Reston got a copy of almost everything. That still is – I don't know what happened to the library in Reston, Virginia. But there was a huge USGS Library in Denver for the central region – the Reston region was focused on the eastern states and then the Menlo Park library was basically everything from Utah westward; so California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, Hawaii, and we had special collections; we had lots of amazing guidebooks from the whole regions and we also had hard copies of all of the USGS open-file reports and every other thing/map that the USGS had ever produced for the western region. Whether it was duplicated back there in Reston I don't know – a lot of it was but we had to do interlibrary loan all the time from the different regions and we had a lot of unique materials they didn't have in Reston or in Denver. But there were other little branch libraries associated with offices, a tiny collection in Flagstaff, tiny one in Oregon, Idaho, a few others scattered around but we never borrowed from them they always borrowed from us.

**20:40**

VS. Ok great. Then the archives, the historic archives, that are sort of segregated from the main library, did you have anything to do with the archives?

PS. You know what, all the USGS archives are in the Reston office. We did not have an archive in the Menlo Park library, which was too bad because you go through there and find the original documents by the early USGS explorers and everything just free and loose on the shelf but sadly we were open to the public and a lot of it was stolen! Of good quality and it was lost and who knows where it is now and had I known I would have tried to grab it and do something about it but we just didn't have the political will to do anything at that point.

VS: Ok; very good. So, you were going to go on and tell us some more about your new program you were involved with.

PS: Oh yeah, so I was hired by the director of the USGS office in Tucson, Arizona. I almost moved down to Tucson, but most of the researchers for that team were in Menlo Park and the people in Menlo Park did NOT want to move to Tucson, they were already well established and so there was a huge political battle and he resigned and then other people took over our team which caused a lot – there was so much politics. We had a lot of great projects – I was assigned to several of the projects over time. There was a Bay Area project, we'd get like 10 hours a week of our time for one project and for another it was just all on paper but everybody basically worked on what was there most important project obviously and that's just how the money was distributed. I was hired both as a geologic mapper and as a web person, public outreach, the reason they wanted me on the team was because they wanted me to take over a position for public outreach and so I was kind of the front door person for anybody making inquiries about what we did and one of the things I did that got me that job was that I volunteered to take on the big USGS Open Houses there in Menlo Park. I went to one – I think it was 1998 when I first got there and I was very impressed. We had 15,000 people or more show up to these open houses. We had big displays and so I—this is a great story—I was put in charge of the open house that was in 2001 but 9/11 happened so they had shut down all of the other campuses, they shut down everything in the government basically. Nobody was allowed to have gatherings on government campuses. But this open house in the Bay Area, we'd get 15-20,000, even more people maybe more coming and they had a big fight about. Everybody wanted to – a lot of people didn't want to do the USGS open house and I was in charge of it. It was getting close to the point where we had to make a call as to whether or not we were cancelling it. I'm really going to get the facts right so I called up the FBI and I said I'm trying to make a decision here at the USGS and I need your guys help. Do we really need to cancel the USGS open house – there was this long silence on the other end of the phone and finally this person who I talked to said, "We'll get back to you" and literally about a week and a half later there was a knock on my door and two FBI agents showed up and they said, "follow me". So it was lunch time and I walked across campus with these two FBI guys and everybody was looking at me and we got into the director's office on the campus and there were eight other guys in there ...the head of the USGS Menlo Park office was there with his eyes wide open and there was this other woman who I was working with the earthquake hazards team and this guy came and pointed at me and says, "What are you trying to do here?" And so between her and me we laid out our entire plan for this open house and the guy said after we were done, he started shaking and he said, "This is just far too important, far too important" and he turned around and pointed at us and he said, "You go on

with your open house; I'm the head of the western region office of homeland security – you go on with your open house". And on the morning of the open house at 9 o'clock in the morning Zoe Lofgren from Congress, the head of the Finance and Technology Committee, stood up at the microphone and they flipped the switch for the whole country at 9 o'clock on that morning from code orange to code yellow and whenever we walked around on campus after that for months people would cheer for us because we had slayed the dragon it seems.

**27:14**

TC: That's a good story Phil!

PS: So, who knows it was probably for many other reasons that they did it but it was interesting that it happened then but anyway I did that first open house and then I was in charge of the next one as well and actually that's when I started working with the earthquake hazards team as well doing regional, basically documenting – trying to get people to understand earthquake hazards – and I'll do it by making field guides about the San Andreas Fault where you don't see it and that got me into the parks in the bay area from Point Reyes all the way down to Pinnacles and I was working part time with the Navajo-Hopi Nation project so I got to go out to that region quite a bit and document what all the scientists were doing there and then I was also on the southern California mapping project—it is called "SCAMP": Southern California Area Mapping Project – that included mapping the whole region of southern California so I got to spend a lot of time over in the Mojave, Joshua Tree, and all along the coast ranges here in southern California. So that's when I did all my photography for the Mojave and Death Valley and Joshua Tree. Then I was on the national park project collaboration. I had a boss who will remain nameless who was pretty much was on the other side of the fence of everything I was doing – I didn't get any funding to go anywhere so I basically paid out of my own pocket for all my trips and all my vacation time to go photograph the national parks but I could work on those websites when I was at the USGS some of the time but it was really my personal interest and hobby that got that all done. And unfortunately, I came down with lymphoma and a lot of it was because of the stress that was going on at the USGS at the time, especially around 2004 with that open house. It was a pretty severe kind of lymphoma. I ended up going for treatment at Stanford. I was in the hospital there for a couple of weeks—more like a month—basically the treatments they were giving me didn't work so they said I needed to go up to Seattle, there was an experimental treatment I got at the time, a stem cell implant. They put me in the hospital; I was up there for four months getting treatment and then a stem cell implant. Between all the treatments I had about three weeks to recover – I actually felt pretty good for about a week or so and each of those weeks I felt good I went and photographed all the parks in Oregon and Washington that I could visit in that period of time so I got to cover a lot of the western United States in that way and when I came back basically I continued on all of those different kind of projects until basically they announced they were pretty much laying off everybody in Menlo Park. But I got lucky, the head of the HR person said we've basically laid almost everybody off or given packages to get everybody out who volunteered, now we're going to do the involuntary stuff and we're going to either offer you an early retirement or you can see if you survive and I said, "Give me an early retirement". And so 2010 I left the USGS and at that point I knew—it took a long time for that, so I've got to find myself a place where I can live on my retirement salary so I ended up buying a house in San Juan Bautista, California and the reason why I chose that location because I had some good friends that owned a rock shop down there and I thought, "*Well, I'll try to re-create my life down in that*

*town*” because there’s a state park there for the old mission San Juan Bautista which happens to be right on the San Andreas Fault! The mission they built there was the first earthquake engineered building in the United States but because of its risk of earthquakes and all the bad things had happened in that town and the way they built the highways to avoid the populations there, it remained a pretty much historic looking town. It looked pretty much like it did in the 1920s but it’s also on the Anza Trail which is a national park trail. So, I built a small museum associated with the rock shop and I started doing tours. It was interesting doing wine tours of San Benito County which is basically, we’d go the wineries that were all along the San Andreas fault and the Calaveras fault and while people were drinking wine and I’d talk about the faults – a classic area; a sequence of field guides down there and I was down there I got introduced to the woman, Holly Grates, who was head of the Pinnacles Partnership and we started doing big outreach projects for Pinnacles National Monument—the Friends of—and they were of the mission to try to convert Pinnacles from a national monument to a national park and I guess that eventually happened. But before that, I came to the conclusion that San Juan Bautista was a town of trouble; there was a lot of gang activity, the economy was bad there, they shut down the police department, and the banks got robbed immediately, and they shut down the fire department, and I decided well I’m going to try. And I sold my house and I shut down my little museum there and moved down here to San Diego. Oh, forgot to mention when I left the USGS, I actually started working part-time for a couple different colleges: Hartnell College in Salinas and Gavilan College there in Gilroy. I got myself in the Cal-State system and when I moved down here I got hired by MiraCosta College; that’s where I’m currently at teaching. Anyway that’s kind of a summary of my life I guess.

### 35:30

VS: Thank you for that. So, there was a specific question that I had in regard to what is listed as the 3D Yellowstone project: Historic stereo photography of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Can you give some details about that?

PS: There was the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the US Geological Survey and of course the USGS was started by John Wesley Powell so because of all of my educational outreach stuff and the library and then on the surficial processes team, I got to know a fellow named Bob Ridke who was the head of the educational program at the USGS. He was one person trying to do something for the whole country so he relied on people like me to contribute and I had been looking at all the old national archives; I was always looking at old stereo photography. I found that the National Archives had basically scanned almost all the imagery that they could get their hands on of the Powell survey. The stereo photography, not from his first trip down but the second one between 1880 and 1881, and so I took all that photography and converted them to anaglyphs and built a 3D tour for the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the USGS of the Powell survey photography from where he started in Green River to where he got out down near the Virgin River. I also supplemented that at the time as the USGS had an archive of photography in Denver and I don’t know what happened to that archive of photography. I hope it didn’t disappear. It had some more 3D images—I actually went there and scanned them and added some of those pictures to the website. They were probably hidden somewhere on an archive for the USGS but I grabbed them all and now I have it currently on the MiraCosta website; it’s all public domain so I went ahead and took that whole website material and added it now. It’s still active; you can still get to it on the MiraCosta College website. I’d love to take that whole collection and put it on a public server

somewhere at some point when I decide to quit teaching at MiraCosta College. If the National Park Service wants it all I'll be happy to give you guys the whole collection but we can talk about that some other time

TC: I'd say we'd definitely be interested. Yes, for sure.

**38:50**

PS: Ok, great!

VS: I guess there were 2 similar projects: one for Grand Canyon and one for Yellowstone. Is that correct?

PS: They were lumped together – was it funded directly? I was still on the USGS-National Parks project. I paid for my trip down, the USGS didn't pay for any of my photography trips, I did it on my own time. I couldn't stop from going back up to Yellowstone. I took all of the old Yellowstone photography and put that on the 3D parks "WR" server .usgs.gov. WR was for "Western Region" and my boss at the USGS was the one who was promoting me to build these websites and he was extremely supportive about it and basically I was working away when I wasn't working on other projects, just building those sites.

VS: And so, the 3D Yellowstone project, is that still posted online? Is there someplace to view that?

PS: Well actually, it's still on the Geology of National Parks website that I'd migrated over to MiraCosta College. What happened at the USGS was, that I have no direct knowledge of, that I heard of a little bit, was that there was a change in the policy up top about websites produced by the USGS. They wanted certain kinds of new standards to do it and basically I don't understand – I actually started a website when I was in the library, it was education.usgs.gov before that – they had some other little websites, but since I had been a teacher and I worked in the library and I had time, I created that domain and it was quite active until basically when I left and Bob Ridke retired and they basically shut down that whole website and now they have something else replacing it and basically they took down the Geology of National Parks website the way that I had it but you can still see a lot of the photography and maps and things that I had on their new version of their website which they're calling Geology AND Ecology of the National Parks. And so, I don't know who is in charge of that but I'm glad that I managed to salvage and still have all of the original website material. I've removed basically the USGS from the content because it's not under the USGS website anymore, but it's still available and I still get calls about it from people at the USGS asking for information or copies from the original photography and stuff. There's no hard feelings there, it's just kind of strange how time changes things. I'm sure the main thing that's happening with other government agencies, especially there at the National Park Service.

**42:38**

VS: I'm looking at the website right now and lots of great resources on here. We should talk with one of our staff [Jim Wood] about at least linking to your webpage at MiraCosta.

PS: You can do that; and I'll certainly let you know when it's no longer going to be there if we decide to migrate it somewhere else. But it will probably stay there indefinitely.

TC: I had mentioned it to Jim Wood already so he has taken a look at it and was very impressed, as was I.

PS: I'd love to add a whole bunch more national parks, but my days of traveling are not what they used to be.

TC: I understand.

VS: So, we should have a follow-up conversation about this. The national park service geology website might be a good place to give this a permanent legacy and home.

PS: I'd be delighted. There'd be a huge amount of data that we'd have to figure out a way to transfer it all over there – I'd also have to do some global changes to URL's; that wouldn't be hard to do.

VS: Before we go into too much more detail, I wanted to ask, do you recall with any of your national park projects did it involve paleontological resources?

**44:20**

PS: Basically, I went and photographed at the museum at Dinosaur National Park [Monument]. Let me think here, wherever I saw something that was interesting I would mention the paleontology aspects of it there. And the Paleozoic rocks are just chock full of fossils in parts of Death Valley. I kind of came to the conclusion I don't want to make national parks places where people want to come and collect fossils. If it was a topic that was important to the national park—Petrified Forest—put pictures of fossil wood along the trails that they have on display there. If there was a dinosaur or something on display I would take a picture of that and put it online. I'm just trying to think through the regions [USGS]. Basically, one of the projects that I did that's linked on that national parks site was I built a website that's all about all the stratigraphy of the Colorado Plateau region and basically all of the rock formations are described. I used the lexicon [USGS Lexicon] of geologic names and got all the names of all the rock formations and all the references of the articles that were published on each of the rock formations and a lot of those are definitely paleontology—the references—and again, the USGS decided to take down that site, but I kept a version of it preserved on – linked in on the Geology of the National Parks website that I have. In terms of – if it didn't show up in a picture, I didn't really include anything about paleontology other than basically the general descriptions and ages of the rocks, whether or not they were reef deposits like in Guadalupe National Park – certainly going to have a discussion about the fossils there. Big Bend, one of my favorite parks – I've been there about six times and photographed that. It was really great before 9/11 you could just go across the border into Mexico no problem. Some of the areas up there in Washington I saw a whole bunch of fossil forests up in that area – I can't really think of anything that I would say is directly, specifically about the paleontology of parks other than in just a general discussion.

VS: So, between 2003 and when you retired in 2010, you largely worked on these 3D projects in national parks?

PS: Yeah, I'm a hyperactive child – I would work on it at work, and then I'd come home and work on it at home. On the weekends I was pretty much recovering from lymphoma a lot so I didn't really go out a lot as much as I used to. I just wanted to get it all done because I didn't know how long I was going to be around after finding out I had lymphoma so I just thought here's my chance to create a legacy – I'll just put all as much of this stuff while I'm still around. But I ain't dead yet!

VS: Well it's a tremendous life contribution and very impressed with all you've done

TC: And I'm certainly glad you're still around !

**48:47**

PS. Yeah, I ain't dead yet. Boy, I do want to go visit some national parks. It's interesting; I got married to my elementary school girlfriend [Tina]. We hooked up about a year and a half ago—she was in Desert Storm—she was an army nurse for many, many years and we lost contact with each other, but she found me on Facebook and now she's living with me and our goal is when we can get our lives in a new order and get this coronavirus behind us, we want to go back and hit some more national parks. I'm certainly looking forward to getting back out on the road.

VS: Well, very good. Tim do you have any questions for Phil?

TC: I don't think I have questions, just positive comments. I was very fortunate back in 2006 to be invited by Phil to go do the 3D photography of Grand Canyon and so Phil and I met over spring break time and had the time of our lives hiking down the South Kaibab and up the Bright Angel and we spent a day or two down at the bottom and just did 3D photography in March – it was fantastic; I was so glad to be able to partake of that process with Phil and I look forward to seeing those photos re-posted some time where everybody can get to them again because that was one fantastic trip. I think I was your scale for many photos wasn't I?

PS: Yes, you were. You're on that website definitely. The other thing that was really great though was our trip to Chaco Canyon. We went out there in the snow and I had the 3D photography—I did all that, those shots are amazing—then we did that great trip down Canyon de Chelly.

TC: Yes, Canyon de Chelly. Those were the days. We need to do that again.

PS: We may have gone one other place as well, but that was the focus at that time.

TC: Did we do Aztec Ruins?

PS: I made a 3D website of Aztec Ruins but I'm not sure if it was with that trip. It may have been. I went back out there again and Chaco in the summer and then I went up to Mesa Verde and did that one. I'd like to go back to Mesa Verde, all those wonderful parks out there. Hovenweep. Gosh, yeah.

TC: I always enjoyed traveling with you and you've been a great friend of the Park Service and you have poured your heart into a lot of things, and through your health crises and everything else and your assistance to promoting Park Service geology has been fantastic. And I give lots of kudos to you and I have a lot of respect for you!

PS: Well I appreciate that Tim! And I agree with you, your geology websites—I probably need to go back through and make sure I have all of the good hot links made when I do the geology of the parks with all of my photography. I’ve tried to put links to your stuff from your program there so that people say, “Hey, let’s go look at that site”, promoting everybody else as well also. I wish all of the national parks had the freedom to build their own websites, again the standard practice is good but they miss so much about all of the parks when I go look at them – wildlife.

VS: One final thing I wanted to share with you is that in 2022 Yellowstone will celebrate its sesquicentennial, its’ 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Starting next year we’re putting together a team to undertake a comprehensive paleontological resource inventory for Yellowstone and so one of the sections that I’ll be working on is the history of paleontological history at the park; so anyways I might check in with you and from the historical perspectives that you’ve been engaged in and see how we can collaborate.

PS: Yeah, well you know I did my master’s thesis on the Paleozoic stratigraphy, which was everything about fossils but that was in the Wind River Mountains. I didn’t do it in Yellowstone but it’s basically the same stratigraphy packaged and the Absaroka Mountains and all that – great fossil wood in the Absarokas.

**54:08**

VS: Oh absolutely, so do you have copies of your master’s thesis and your PhD dissertation scanned as a PDF?

PS: I do not, but I’d be happy to send the National Park Service my copies.

VS: We don’t want to take your original but we’d be happy to make a copy and get it back to you.

PS: You know what I’d be happy to go ahead and give you guys the originals because they’re just sitting on a dusty shelf here and it wouldn’t bother me to give them up.

VS: If you want we can scan them and send the original back but if you want to donate them we’ll put them into our archives and make sure that they’re preserved forever.

PS: Yeah, ok. If you send me an address I’ll ship them to you.

VS: That’s really kind of you. I’ll go ahead and email you my address and then we’ll go from there.

PS: Ok, great!

VS: Super. Any last thoughts, Tim?

**55:26**

TC: No, just great interview Phil. Your collective experience in parks over the years and the different places you’ve been and things you’ve seen are just great indicators of your enthusiasm for park service geology and that’s why you have made a great candidate to interview today and I certainly enjoyed listening to you.



PS: Yeah well, I still haven't finished all the parks here in California and that's kind of my priority right now. One of my friends just emailed me – he was just up in Sequoia a couple days ago when that big earthquake hit and huge rockfall. Amazing – don't know if you've seen it on the news, do: “earthquake Lone Pine” and huge boulders now in the middle of campsites and it was pretty impressive so that's kind of something you might want to look at.

VS: Fantastic, well—

TC: I spent 2 weeks in Lone Pine when I was working in Death Valley in 1998 so I'll be curious to see where those were and the effects for sure.

PS: It was a 5.8. So, I've got nothing to add. If I think of anything I'll let you know.

VS. Well that was my last question: is there anything else you'd like to share that we haven't asked you?

PS: No. If you look at the guidebooks at the [miracosta.edu](http://miracosta.edu) website the things I've been working on are building these textbooks for online education because I feel like that's one of the big things that students have so many problems with; they have to pay money for textbooks that actually cost more than the class. So I know from usage that there's a lot of Geology of National Parks classes out there in the different colleges and it's probably going to increase and I'm really keen on actually building a textbook next on the geology of national parks and that would be fun to certainly collaborate with you guys on down the road as well.

VS: That sounds like a great project and you're the perfect person to do that.

PS: Well, I think so! Anyway that's about it.

VS. Well thanks very, very much for your time. Really, it was a pleasure to talk to you and to hear about your experiences and your work and we're going to be following up on a whole bunch of things and hopefully this is the beginning of a new chapter.

PS. Ok great. And Tim, I hope I cross paths with you when I come through Denver and I'll let you know. My family lives in Wisconsin so between here and there I'd be going through Denver so I'll check in with you.

TC: Please do! I'd love to see you and reconnect for sure.

VS: Alright, have a great day.

PS: Ok, you too. Thanks for calling!

TC: Take care Phil!

**59:11**

PS: Bye-bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]



The Department of the Interior protects and manages the nation's natural resources and cultural heritage; provides scientific and other information about those resources; and honors its special responsibilities to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and affiliated Island Communities.

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