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NPS Paleontology Program Records (HFCA 2465)
Vincent Santucci's NPS Oral History Project, 2016-2024

Vincent Santucci
November 2, 2023

Interview conducted by Nancy Russell, Molly Williams, and Emma Squire
Transcribed by Rev.com
Edited by Molly Williams

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NPS History Collection
Harpers Ferry Center
P.O. Box 50
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425
HFC_Archivist@nps.gov

Narrator: Vincent Santucci
Interviewers: Molly Williams, Nancy Russell, Emma Squire, and Katherine Hayes
Date: November 2, 2023
Signed release form: Yes
Transcript reviewed by narrator: Yes
Transcribed by: Rev.com

Transcript

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Molly Williams:	00:00:01	Today is November 2nd, 2023. My name is Molly Williams interviewing Vincent Santucci, and if we could introduce ourselves for the transcriptionist.
Vincent Santucci:	00:00:11	Yes. Hi, my name is Vincent Santucci. Last name is spelled S-A-N-T-U-C-C-I. I'm the senior paleontologist and paleontology program coordinator for the National Park Service.
Nancy Russell:	00:00:23	I'm Nancy Russell, the archivist for the NPS History Collection.
Katherine Hayes:	00:00:27	Katherine Hayes, intern.
Emma Squire:	00:00:29	Emma Squire, intern.
Molly Williams:	00:00:32	All right. Do we have your permission to record this?
Vincent Santucci:	00:00:34	Yes.
Molly Williams:	00:00:35	Awesome. This is part two. We left off part one discussing Petrified Forest and the Black Hills Institute. We are wrapping up our final discussion on Petrified Forest. One of the topics that we want to discuss is your detail to ranger activities if you would like to start off with that.
Vincent Santucci:	00:00:58	Sure. So, when I was still at Petrified Forest National Park between 2001 and 2003, I was contacted by the Washington Office, Chief Rangers' Office. At the time, it was called Ranger Activities Division. And so, they wanted to prepare a budget request to Congress, looking for funding to support resource crime investigations. So, they had been doing this for archeological resources. They've been doing it for wildlife poaching and other kinds of issues. And so, they said, "We've got enough reporting of

fossil-related crimes that maybe they can get some funding from Congress." So, they had contacted my superintendent, requesting me to come back [to D.C. to help coordinate this information]. And so, I went on a short detail to the Washington Office, which was in Main Interior, and had the opportunity to work with folks there.

00:01:57 But I essentially reached out to all the national parks, and this was before we had the advent of easy communication through the internet, it was a lot of calls trying to solicit information, for the parks to come back and provide any information they might be able to give us through a little survey form, reporting on numbers of incidents of paleontological resource crime, things like theft or vandalism. And so essentially, they wanted to get a general understanding across the entire agency of how frequently these kinds of crimes were occurring so that they could then report that to Congress when they submit their budget request.

00:02:44 And so just a couple of notable things about that. That was the first time that that inventory for fossils ever had occurred. I think our tally was that there were about 35 parks that reported that they did have documented incidents of fossil-related crimes. But one of the things that jumped out to us is that parks—I'll leave the name of the park anonymous particularly—We knew of a very, very important case that was going on there [in one big park], that when they reported back to us, they reported zero crimes.

00:03:21 And so we looked into that a bit. We had learned that part of why they didn't want to report it is because the park was very embarrassed about the circumstances related to that crime. But with that said, we found that there were a number of parks that were not reporting incidents, and so it skewed our numbers in a way that didn't represent really what needed to be reported to Congress. One of the decisions at that time was that we need to do some training with our LE rangers so they can better understand why it's important to do this reporting. We also had observed that there was a common practice of law enforcement rangers reporting fossil crimes as archeological crimes, or archeological crimes as fossil crimes. And so there needed to be some education for that as well. And so, we got all the numbers, we got all the data and the statistics, and the recommendation was, "Let's train rangers for a few years

and come back and do that survey." And so, we, in fact, did that.

00:04:36 And in 1999, we did an almost identical survey asking the same questions, reporting out to the parks, and [through this survey] we more than tripled the number of documented cases. And we thought, "Well, that's good from one perspective, that maybe we've got better reporting, but my goodness, what's causing the increase in this activity?" We didn't have the ability, because we didn't think this out as well as we could have, to differentiate whether that was a true increase in the number of crimes, there's more bad things happening, or it was just the better reporting. So that was inconclusive just based on the fact that we didn't handle those two surveys in the way that we could have enriched that data. But I think everybody agreed, and the reporting parties in the park agreed that the increased training really was helpful to the parks.

00:05:35 We had the opportunity to not only assist parks with providing training at the park level--So law enforcement rangers, one of their requirements is to have an annual refresher. It's a 40-hour law enforcement refresher where they get updates on changes in regulations or topical areas that are hot topics, whether it's drug interdiction or crimes along boundaries and things like that. And so, we got on the agenda for a lot of parks, and I think that first 10 years, we trained about 1,200 LE rangers across the country on paleontological resource protection. We also were invited to come to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center to help to provide this training to the new incoming law enforcement rangers that were becoming commissioned law enforcement rangers, as part of their certification training. And so that was a really great opportunity that we were provided, to be able to get that message out.

00:06:43 We continue to sustain that support to the parks. It's hard to get that word out to a lot of parks, because as you know, we have 286 parks that have fossils. Some of those have crimes associated with them, but we try to strategically rotate getting out to parks and having those one-on-one experiences and training opportunities. So, we usually have four to five law enforcement training sessions per year to provide that information.

00:07:18 I think it's probably worth adding now, although chronologically it didn't occur until 1999, that based on the

second survey that we did, there was unanimous interest and support to say, "We need to standardize this training." And so, at the time when I was at Fossil Butte, I applied for what is called an Albright-Wirth grant. It's a small funding source to be able to support activities or training opportunities for NPS employees, and I received the grant to develop a series of National Park Service paleontological resource protection training modules.

00:08:03 And so we developed a two-hour module, a four-hour module, both were classroom, and we also developed an eight-hour module. And the eight-hour module had the four hours of classroom, and it had a field component. So, we had a four-hour section where we can get out into the field, we can look at rocks and show fossils in the field to rangers, and we developed a mock crime scene so that they could step through what would be the criminalistic procedures that they would need to employ whenever they're looking at a fossil-related crime.

Nancy Russell: 00:08:39 Are you still doing that training?

Vincent Santucci: 00:08:40 Yes.

Molly Williams: 00:08:45 Is that training primarily focused on that four hours of classroom and four hours of field work, or is it usually more just classroom based?

Vincent Santucci: 00:08:54 Because of scheduling, I most frequently do the two-hour session, try to get it in, because the rangers have a lot of things they have to cover. And so, we're appreciative that they schedule even the two-hour session because we can get a lot of information across during that time period. And it usually generates a lot of interest. We usually get one or two LE rangers at the end coming up and saying, "Hey, I'm really interested in this," and they'll follow up for additional information.

Molly Williams: 00:09:23 Wonderful. Another point that we want to discuss is the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show.

Vincent Santucci: 00:09:31 Sure.

Molly Williams: 00:09:31 Okay.

Vincent Santucci: 00:09:32 So when I was at Petrified Forest, I was in proximity to Tucson. It was just a couple hours to the south. And every February for decades, there's the largest fossil, mineral, and

gem show that commercial folks host in Tucson. And I remember looking at the front page of the Tucson newspaper in February of 1991. Big front-page headlines, how they anticipate $35 million of revenue coming into the city of Tucson by people coming from around the world and staying in hotels and buying souvenirs and eating in restaurants. And so that was intimidating to think, wow, how positive this whole commercial fossil thing is in the minds of the people that live and have businesses in Tucson. So, from a perception standpoint, commercial fossil dealing is a very positive thing to that segment of society.

00:10:46 But we took advantage of the proximity because we began to do undercover work, and that's with some of our criminal investigators in the National Park Service to try to understand and see what intelligence we can gather by just going in anonymously in plain clothes and listening and observing, and when opportunity presents itself, take photographs. Prior to the seizure of the T-rex named Sue in 1991, going to the Tucson show was a different experience than it was after the seizure of Sue. Prior, part of the business practices of commercial fossil dealers is to have a big story associated with the fossil because it might increase the value, the willingness of how much somebody might be willing to pay for a specimen. So, if you would walk around in some of the rooms at the Tucson Gem, Mineral, and Fossil Show, you'd hear some really interesting things.

00:11:56 And so the scenario is, there's a group of hotels that basically closed down as a hotel serving guests that need overnight accommodations. They take the beds out, they clear them out, and these fossil, gem, and mineral dealers take over the rooms and they set up their shelving and they put up their displays and they make a lot of money. I have lots of photographs of all this sort of stuff. And so that pre-Sue scenario was that you would go there, and you'd see not only an abundance of things from around the world, but you'd see the highest price tags on those rare, more scientifically important, more complete specimens, things that probably should go into a museum so they're available for study and public education, but they were being sold to the highest bidder.

00:12:51 And from all the intelligence gathering that we were doing, is that there was a fair amount of people that were buying

fossils in a black market. Black market, because where the source of some of these fossils are from are not places where people should be collecting fossils, whether it's a national park or US Forest Service land, or in China, or Mongolia that have very restrictive cultural resource laws that prohibit the export and sale of these items. There was a lot of bad stuff that was going on there, it was very evident. And in fact, we learned that there was a "by invitation only" preview prior to the public being able to see things so that they could do things behind closed door with people that they know and trust, and who knows what escaped.

00:13:47 So this is the United States, this is America. It's a society where we look at personal property as something that you have rights to own, and you have title to. And so, if fossils are collected off of your private property, you're certainly allowed to sell those. But when they come off public lands or brought in from countries that have very restrictive laws and regulations, there's a problem. And until about 1991, no one in a law enforcement capacity in the United States even treaded upon dealing with those issues.

00:14:36 And so here we are, the Park Service, with our very limited jurisdiction relating to resources that come from lands that are administered by the National Park Service, are seeing this wealth of illegal activities going on and documenting and sharing information appropriately with the right jurisdictions. So, we would go through, and we would note specimens, we would take photographs of things very discreetly, and we would listen to the conversations. Get the business cards to put in our field notes so we can remember who had what from where.

00:15:18 And so there had been reported, during that time period in one of the scientific publications that publishes on paleontology, about some fossils that were stolen from a Russian museum. And they turned out to be [a] holotype specimen stolen out of a display case in a museum. We found it at the Tucson Gem & Mineral Show.

Nancy Russell: 00:15:45 Holy smokes.

Vincent Santucci: 00:15:46 Yeah. So of course, you could imagine we were motivated.

00:15:53 Among the many things that we saw at Tucson were fossils that had museum numbers on them. That stopped our heart. It's one thing to pick up a piece of petrified wood from the

geologic context, but it's a whole another level of badness when somebody's taken specimens that are curated and cataloged into museum collections. So that was one of the big eye-opening discoveries that enabled us to begin networking more broadly to say, "How do we prevent this from happening?" And of course, you know, being in the profession that you are dealing with collections, how important security is to protect these valuable resources that were worth cataloging in the first place.

00:16:44 So our focus was paleontology. We were able to train a lot of criminal investigators and LE rangers that are working in fossil parks by inviting them to Tucson, plain clothes, nobody wears their weapons, we just walk around like we want to pull our credit cards out and buy things. And we ask a lot of questions and got a lot of information. Again, the information that we got pre-Sue, pre-seizure of the dinosaur, very braggadocious information. It was a business practice that was widely exercised by those people that were trying to get as much money as they can through the sell of these specimens.

00:17:27 I will never forget, it's like I was there moments ago, that there was a very big double room where somebody had set up all of these Chinese fossils, dinosaur eggshells, these Mesozoic birds, *Confuciusornis*, and other really, really cool and important items. And I just listened to the guy, and he had some customers that were very interested in a small complete dinosaur skeleton that he had prominently hanging on the wall, and just listened to the guy. He had admitted that--He said, "Well, although we know that we can't take these things out of China, if you pay the right person, you'll be able to get it out." And it's like, "What am I hearing here? This is important stuff. Other people in law enforcement should hear this and see how they react."

00:18:27 And so just listening to his conversation, it was just so absurd. He was using the marketing ploy to say, "Hey, if you buy this dinosaur specimen, which is new to science, it's never been described before, you can name it after yourself." Now we know that you can't do that based upon the rules of taxonomic nomenclature for naming things, but he was using that as a marketing ploy to people. It's like, "I think I'll buy it then, if I can do that."

00:18:58 So other things that we saw, and over time, after Sue was seized, there was a great impact in what we were observing

by the salespeople at the Tucson show. Pretty much, there was a paranoia, that they believed that anybody that they didn't recognize was recognized is probably an FBI agent that's spying on them. And so that open dialogue, that braggadocious nature disappeared immediately. And there was this conservativeness that really changed the ability to gather intelligence information because you weren't able to get it as easily.

00:19:50 The one thing that we noticed over the next five years is there was a decline in North American dinosaur material. I guess Sue scared them, but there were other things then that filled in the market. So for example, we began to see a huge influx of European cave bear fossils. I could show you photographs of a sea of cave bear skeletons in the areas that, in previous years, would be filled with dinosaur skeletons. Unfortunately, this has had a tremendously adverse impact on European paleontologists that study cave deposits and these cave bears. And they've been trying to protect them, but they've been looted fairly heavily. Cave bears, they're like sharks and tyrannosaurs. They're iconic in a way that they have an identity or an image about them that make them attractive in the market, just like a saber-toothed cat skull.

00:20:56 So again, another moment I'll never forget is looking down in a little display case where somebody had a fetus, a fetal cave bear. I had never heard that there was a fetus. This was a before birth skeleton of a late-term cave bear fetus. Complete skeleton, very fragile, delicate bones. And I made sure I got photographs of that. But when I came back to check on it, it was gone. It was already sold. Nobody knows where it went. We may not ever see it again. It may not be seen for a long time. Who knows? Lost to science, lost to the third graders that are going to care about those kind of really cool rare fossils.

00:21:50 That's the problem that members of the professional paleontological community, particularly vertebrate community, was concerned about when they advocated for the need for paleontological resource protection legislation so that they could slow down this trafficking, this international illegal trafficking black market involving these very rare fossils. Because unfortunately, the law of supply and demand can be applied to the fossil market, where it's those rare and more complete specimens that are demanding the highest dollar values. And so, the dealers

are willing to take much more risk if they're going to get a high return on their investment or their illegal collecting activities.

00:22:42 Again, things that should be in museums available for study, etc., are lost. And sometimes they're lost forever. They may go to a mall in Japan, they may go to a castle in Germany, but once they're gone, oftentimes, you lose the scientific provenience associated with them, things that are scientifically important. Because some people view these as art objects, or because they're rare, there's affluent people that like to buy these kinds of things.

Nancy Russell: 00:23:15 Cabinets of curiosity.

Vincent Santucci: 00:23:16 Exactly. Exactly. And there's some well-named individuals, wealthy, that collect fossils. Like, Bill Gates is a fossil collector, and Nicholas Cage is a fossil collector. Let's see.

Vincent Santucci: 00:23:32 [Leonardo DiCaprio is a] fossil collector. So, there's a number of wealthy people, because average middle-class people can't afford these things. They're priced out of it. But unfortunately, museums don't have that kind of money to buy fossils as well, and university scientists, so they're often lost. And if they're coming off of federal and public lands, there's a greater atrocity there because these are resources that belong to the public and should be managed and accounted for based on those values that they possess.

Nancy Russell: 00:24:12 So after 1991, and it shifts the public face to more European or Chinese fossils, what in essence has happened is the American fossils have gone underground? That network of sellers and collectors are known to each other, and they're able to just do it without the public face.

Vincent Santucci: 00:24:33 Exactly. And that's why I mentioned to you in the previous interview that when I joined the FBI grand jury investigation of the Black Hills Institute, one of their first comments was that, based on the evidence that they had found up to that time, they thought that this constituted a potential RICO case, racketeering, influence, corruption, organized crime, that because they were the world's largest international dealer in fossils, that they serve the role as the Godfather. And you needed to get along with the Godfather to be able to make it in the commercial world of dealing with fossils.

Nancy Russell: 00:25:14 So when you were undercover at the Tucson Gem, Mineral, & Fossil Show, did you all find specimens that came from Park Service or federal land?

Vincent Santucci: 00:25:26 Very difficult thing to prove, but we saw a lot of potential fossils that we believed probably came from federal land. It would be very difficult because of how some of these commercial dealers that are illegally collecting, how they forge their records, how they changed their records.

Nancy Russell: 00:25:48 They knew enough, even when there was a public facing, they knew enough not to say it came from federal land.

Vincent Santucci: 00:25:54 Exactly, yes. Absolutely.

00:25:57 So there was this corresponding interest by the scientific community, particularly the vertebrate paleontologists, for there to be a need for greater protective legislation. And here I was working as a graduate student based on the traumas that I had experienced and observations at Badlands National Park. I came back to finish my thesis and I started publishing Park Paleontology Newsletter as a means to increase awareness and advocate for the need for greater protective legislation.

00:26:28 So just a few years before that, 1979, Congress passed the Archeological Resources Protection Act, which was to help stop the illegal activities associated with archeological resources. And we had something in place that we needed an equivalent for because of this rapidly escalating commercial market for fossils that was the impetus to drive people from their normal white and blue-collar jobs to go out west and find their million-dollar dinosaur. So, when Sue finally actually sold for eight and a half million dollars, what message do you think that sent? That was the highest amount that was paid in human history for a fossil. And so, when we were doing tracking of the internet communication amongst people that deal in these resources, I don't know how many times we encountered somebody saying, "Hey, I'm going to give up my job in the mill and go out and find my million-dollar dinosaur." So that was scary because what could have been the result impacting federal land? Congress isn't going to give us more money to hire more rangers to protect, so we had to figure out how to handle that.

Nancy Russell: 00:27:52 So you talk about the scientific community recognizing that greater need for better legislation. What legislative protection was there up until that point?

Vincent Santucci: 00:28:07 So outside of the NPS Organic Act, which the Organic Act itself isn't a law enforcement legislation, it's a land managing, that all resources are treated the same on Park Service land, that it would be one level of authority because of our agency's mission to protect those resources. But it really wasn't developed to be used as a law enforcement legislation as, say, the Archeological Resource Protection Act or the Endangered Species Act, et cetera.

00:28:38 And so, when we were working with the US Attorney's office, trying to determine, how do we go forward? Kevin Schieffer, who was the US attorney in South Dakota for the Sioux investigation, he kept saying, "Oh, let's go use the Antiquities Act, 1906." And we just said, "No, no, we don't want to go there." And we don't want to open up the visibility of the vulnerability that this is not a law enforcement legislation.

00:29:11 So we had to use other kinds of legal authorities for prosecution. And at the time, before the Paleontological Resource Preservation Act (PRPA), we had to look at theft of government property. PRPA changed all that, fortunately. And the US attorneys that I spoke with in Salt Lake City yesterday are very happy that we have that legislation.

Nancy Russell: 00:29:44 It's kind of like how the first prosecutions for child abuse were done under animal protection acts, pet cruelty thing, because there wasn't anything to protect children. And so, you kind of had to look at just general theft of government property to protect what really is a vital resource.

Vincent Santucci: 00:30:04 Yeah, so I feel fortunate that I lived during this period, where we saw all of this so visibly happen, all the way through enactment of the law, which was a very unlikely thing to occur. And also, now, being able to implement the new regulations, and seeing how effective it is to protect our resources, at least in national parks.

Molly Williams: 00:30:36 Well, I believe that sums up our discussion on the Petrified Forest.

Vincent Santucci: 00:30:38 You've had enough of that conversation.

Molly Williams: 00:30:44 But we have covered everything, correct, that you can think of?

Vincent Santucci: 00:30:46 Yes. Not everything, but I think the important things.

Molly Williams: 00:30:48 The highlights.

Vincent Santucci: 00:30:49 Yeah.

Molly Williams: 00:30:49 Okay. So, moving on. You transitioned to Grand Canyon as a resource management planner in 1994, correct?

Vincent Santucci: 00:30:59 Yes. So, I hadn't talked to you in the interview about it, but I had mentioned to you earlier today in our conversation, there was a video production that was produced by NOVA about 1996-97 that I participated in, and it's called the Curse of T. Rex. And I can't tell you how chilling, just hearing that name to me is now, because it really seems as though the key players that were involved in the criminal and civil side of the Sue investigation wound up having some bad things happen to them. So, my colleague, the chief ranger at Badlands National Park, Stan Robbins and myself were the two principal National Park service investigators supporting the grand jury investigation.

00:31:55 Stan is a hero of mine. He's a ranger's ranger, and he did everything at high professional standards, knowing he's wearing that green and gray uniform, that he had a reputation to stand behind. And I really, really have a lot of respect and affection for him. So, we're working every day, coming in. We were the first ones in the office in the FBI office in Pierre, and we're the last one to leave at the end of the day. And of course, the FBI special agent in charge, he didn't like us because--he's the one we're supposed to be working for--the assistant US attorney would always go around him and come to us, and he didn't like that, the chain of command.

00:32:45 He always called us FBI wannabes, and I said, "I think we like being National Park rangers, so you're wrong." Anyways, during the course of this time, I mean, we were driven. Stan and myself were driven because we had, for years, been contacting the FBI, asking their support, to look at the fossil theft involving the Black Hills Institute at Badlands National Park starting in 1985. And the FBI put up their hand and said, "Come on, we don't have time for this nonsense. We deal with homicides, kidnapping,

wounding incidents. We really don't think the dinosaurs are all that important." It wasn't until they needed our help, when they got news from one of the tribes in South Dakota that they had a T-Rex stolen off of Indian land, and the name that we'd been raising, the dealer in the Black Hills was part of that conversation. And so, they contacted us, and they said, "We'll make you an offer. You help us, we'll help you." And so, that led to Stan and my involvement. I was there with Stan the moments after he got off the phone, because he had been seeing a doctor because of some complaints that he had, and I was the first person he told that he was diagnosed with a very, very serious type of cancer. And so, it progressed very, very rapidly.

00:34:18 And unfortunately, Stan didn't get to see the outcome of the trial, but I talked to him just a couple days before his passing, through his wife on the phone, where we dedicated our up to that day, that our most important paleontology volume was dedicated to the Stan Robbins. And I need to make sure I give you a copy of that, because there's a picture of Stan in there. Anyhow, so Stan was the first one to succumb. And many other people, if you get a chance to watch that film, you'll see, that there was definitely something out there.

00:35:02 For me, so I was the oldest of two children. My mother and father separated when I was five, and my mother depended on me, as the oldest child, to help do things around the house, to help get the toilet unplugged and those kinds of things. So, I was very, very close to my mother, and that's why I cry at some movies because I picked up her sensitive side. But anyhow, so I had moved away. I'd gone to Petrified Forest in '91, and life got really busy. I had my children, my wife, we were all out there. And we spoke two or three times a week, sometimes every day. And so, anyways, during the investigation, I got a call from her where she told me she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, which was ultimately going to be terminal. And it's like there was the Curse of T. rex for me. I wound up moving my family home to Pittsburgh to be with her and care for her while I flew between Pittsburgh, Arizona, and South Dakota. Very busy time. And then, she wound up passing away.

00:36:24 Towards the end, things got very, very challenging, that I decided that I needed to be back in Pittsburgh. And so, the federal government wasn't as friendly at the time about

those things. And so, I had requested a leave of absence, but it wasn't working out. So, my boss at Petrified Forest, Gary Cummins, had just left to go to Grand Canyon. And I called Gary and say, "Hey, Gary, I got a hard decision I've got to make here." And he said, "Stay tuned. I'll get back with you." And so, it wasn't but a short time later that Gary called me and said, "Vince, I'm going to have you talk to our administrative officer. I have an opportunity for you. We need to have our resource management plan updated at Grand Canyon. If you're willing to do it, I'll put you on a one-year term. You can work on it remotely from Pennsylvania to be able to take care of your mother."

00:37:21 And so, Gary's a hero of mine too. We named a fossil after Gary for those kind of human things that a supervisor can do for you. So, I wound up leaving Petrified Forest, but the investigation went on. And it was probably the most important decision in my life because it helped with our grieving after the loss of my mother, to know that we did as much as we possibly could, to try to be there for her during her final days. So that was that transaction during that tumultuous time. I definitely feel impacted by the Curse of T. rex, and again, that that'll probably be more meaningful if you get a chance to watch the video.

Nancy Russell: 00:38:10 So is that film, the Curse of T. rex, looking at these personal stories of people who were involved with it?

Vincent Santucci: 00:38:18 Yeah. So, Mark Davis, the producer of that, he wanted to do two things. He wanted to, now that it was coming to the end of the adjudication of the law enforcement case, and the dinosaur was being auctioned, he felt it was a timely opportunity to tell the story, but he wanted to also weave in these stories because Peter Larson's kind of an interesting person. And so, Peter Larson had his bad luck, and he had his Curse of T. rex through all that ultimately as well.

Molly Williams: 00:38:58 When were you teaching at Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania?

Vincent Santucci: 00:39:03 So I was also provided the opportunity, when I needed to get back home, friends come from beyond to try to help. And so, the department chair at Slippery Rock University, Bill Shiner, super human being. I studied under him when I took my law enforcement training, and I couldn't have had a better teacher. I mean, this guy was passionate. He built his entire department. He was recognized by the National

Park Service as one of the leading, if not the top seasonal law enforcement training program in the country for the National Park Service. And being a student of his class, I tell you, he did an incredible job in preparing his students for very difficult jobs.

00:39:56 And so, Dr. Shiner contacted me. He found out about my mother, and he said, "Vince, I'm eligible for my sabbatical." He said that "The schedule is such that the LE training is going to go on when I'm on sabbatical." He said, "There's nobody I trust more than you to come in and backfill me." And it's like, wow. And so, I grabbed that opportunity. I joined the faculty for a year and a half, was able to apply myself to that class. I tell you; I learned a lot because it's one thing sitting in a class as a student, and it's another thing being prepared to answer questions. And so, I threw my heart and soul into making sure that I could fill in behind Dr. Shiner at the level that he would want. And so, it was a really valuable experience for me. And I still keep in contact with the LE rangers that now work for the Park Service that were part of that class.

Molly Williams: 00:41:10 Do you still do any kind of teaching?

Vincent Santucci: 00:41:13 Oh, yes, all the time. Any opportunity I get. And my business practice on teaching and lecturing, my goal is when I come into that to present, I want to be the person that learns more than anybody that day, through listening to the questions, by seeing the reactions and the feedback.

Molly Williams: 00:41:36 So transitioning to Yellowstone now, you spent six months working there as a protection ranger. It seems more like a LE ranger job more so than a paleontology gig, is that correct?

Vincent Santucci: 00:41:50 Yeah.

Molly Williams: 00:41:51 So how did this fit in?

Vincent Santucci: 00:41:53 Yeah, so in addition to OCD, that I have multiple personality syndrome because of how I multitask on everything I do. And so, my game plan was I just didn't put in an application, say I want to go to Yellowstone to be an LE ranger. But I took that as an opportunity to get into the park. My plan was that I wanted to get into Yellowstone, my favorite park at the time and now, and say, "There hasn't been much done paleontologically in this park since

the late 1800s outside of the petrified wood." And I said, "This is such a ripe park to come into." It's such a beautiful place to say, "I'm going to invest," that I started developing, when I was on the faculty at Slippery Rock--in fact, I think in the archives you'll see letters with Slippery Rock letterhead requesting a permit to do a paleontological inventory at Yellowstone.

00:42:53 And so, figured out, "How can I do this?" Okay, I'm going to apply and see if they'll select me at Yellowstone. And I got selected to work at Madison as a law enforcement ranger, full-time job. But I was able to negotiate with park leadership to get a permit so that on my days off, that I could undertake this inventory. And I had a game plan and a strategy. I had no funding. It needed to be done. The Park Service needed this. And as we know later, that was the catalyst that got the whole paleo inventory concept moving forward, the investment in what we did at Yellowstone, because others looked at it and said, "Hey, we like this. Can you do this for our park?" And so, it really, really paid off.

00:43:49 So when I first met with the leadership at the park, big names there, Dan Sholly, Chief of Law Enforcement, and John Varley, the head of the Yellowstone Center for Resources. They all kind of looked at me, smiled and said, "Santucci, why are you coming to Yellowstone to look for fossils? Why aren't you going to Petrified Forest? Or why aren't you going to Badlands? Our park is covered mostly by volcanic rocks and glacial sediments. Other than petrified trees, why here?"

00:44:24 And so, that's when I opened up the map, the topographic map, and I said, "Well, take a look at this point on Mount Holmes. What is the name of this point? Trilobite Point? Why do you think that's named that?" And so, they would all say, "Okay, we're going to approve this permit. Come back and tell us what you find." And when we came back after discovering 27 different stratigraphic layers that had fossils, we were excited to say that we've got a lot of stuff to report, some things forgotten because they were previously, and some new discoveries. And so, we were rewarded, as we had been throughout most of our career, to say, "This worked." And it led us on another lifelong adventure to get where we are today.

00:45:19 But I can tell you a lot of law enforcement stories there. The person who only got into law enforcement to try to

protect fossils had the record for citations for Madison Junction, for DUIs and other things, and drug busts. And we had people that were nude bathing in the Firehole River. It's an awkward situation when you're a law enforcement ranger, and you got to come up to people that don't have any clothes on, and you ask them for their ID.

00:45:55 But one thing I will share, it's just a funny story, and it has to do with visitor perceptions. And I think we've heard stories throughout our careers in the Park Service about this. Some people just don't get it that these are wild places. There's wild animals. We don't put our child on the buffalo to get a photograph. We don't get too close to grizzly bears. We don't walk on geothermal features. But people still do it. And at Yellowstone, working in the Madison subdistrict, it was an interesting location because, one, we didn't have to deal with all the concessions employees like they did at Old Faithful that cleaned the hotels and stuff like that. A lot of those young people, first time away from home, they get themselves into a lot of trouble. We didn't have to deal with that. We just had a campground.

00:46:52 But we had an intersection that was between West Yellowstone and Old Faithful, where people would go into West Yellowstone, get tanked up, and then they'd drive back, and hit a bison or they--we had a lot of DUIs at that intersection that we had to deal with. But one of the things that happened the year that I was there is Federal Highways threw some money at the Park Service and said, "Look, we want your help in doing exotic weed control, because we've got these noxious, non-native weeds that are growing up all over the place, coming in on the tires of your visitors." And so, we each had our own assigned two miles section of road where we would go in one morning each week and pull weeds. And thought, we first heard this, we said, "You want us to do what?" But it actually became a lot of fun. We turned it into a competition. But one morning that I got out there early, and I was just about finishing up, I had two big bags of weeds, that I noticed that the bison that were on the south side of the Madison River looked like they were about to make their very dramatic crossing of the Madison River. And I said, "Oh, when that happens, there's going to be a bison jam with traffic."

00:48:13 So I started wrapping up, try to get in position to mitigate things as quickly as I can, and a little car, white rental car stopped four, doors open, four young Japanese tourists

jumped out. There was at least four cameras amongst them. And they ran up to me, very excited, and I thought, "Oh, is there a problem here?" And the littlest of the four looked at me, looked at the bags, looked at the bison, looked back at the bags, and she said, "Is it almost time to feed the buffalo?" Well, I could have said, "Well, go ahead, have a field day." But I was able to finish that conversation respectfully, get back to my vehicle. And of course, by the time I got back there, the bison jammed had already occurred.

00:49:10 But I will admit to you, one of the most fun things to do is playing cowboy in Yellowstone, to try to herd the bison off the road. Oh my gosh. Growing up in Pittsburgh, it's the most cowboy thing you can do. And so, most rangers hate the bison jams, but I love them, because it was a moment to really have fun. And so, I remember responding to a really, really long traffic jam, because the Madison to West Yellowstone Road is narrow. And if the bison get on there, they block both ways.

00:49:51 And so, I got called by dispatch to go down and try to see what I can do. And so, I didn't see any cars coming from the opposite side, indicating that it's probably blocked both directions. So that allows me to then start the cowboy role, turn on my lights, get into the other lane, and carefully head towards where the congestion is. And part of the role is you got to make sure you pull up very dramatically, because you know that there are lots of cameras, and people watching closely, thinking, "What is this guy going to do with these bison?" And so, there's a very fine line between being able to not invade the personal space of a bison who's leading this group, and either getting them to ram into your vehicle with their head, and damage your vehicle, where there's a lot of paperwork, or raising their tail and dropping a lot of fecal material that takes some time to wash off. So, I didn't want to either of those to happen. It had happened, and I learned that.

00:50:58 So what you do, and again, people are watching you, that you got to carefully move your vehicle to prevent the bad things from happening, but at the same time, to get the attention of the bison so that they begin to move off the road. If you are able to do that, you are a hero, because these people, they're on their very finite time in the park, and they got 11 things they got to check off and do, and they want to get going. And so, if it works, and I was able

to get it to work quite a few times, the next step is that when the road is clear, you need to move your vehicle very dramatically, gracefully off the road, park on the side of the road and wave. People are cheering.

00:51:53 Playing cowboy in Yellowstone is the most fun thing that I can imagine. I hope that if I go to heaven, that's what I get to do for eternity. Because if I go to the other place, I know what it's going to be. For me, my biggest fear is eternal riding on a bull. I don't know why people do that. Anyhow, sorry to digress.

Nancy Russell: 00:52:18 No, that was great.

Molly Williams: 00:52:18 No, it was wonderful. So, after you left Yellowstone, you left the NPS for a little bit?

Vincent Santucci: 00:52:27 Yeah. And just a couple of other things, so regarding the paleontological inventory there, what's nice is that when you have friends in paleontology and say, "I'm going to make you an offer you can't refuse. How would you like to do some field work in Yellowstone? We don't have any money, but it's Yellowstone." I mean, a lot of people say, "Yeah, we want to help. That's an important thing." And so, we got a lot of pro bono work in our projects because we work in national parks.

Molly Williams: 00:52:58 So were you teaching in that absence there from Yellowstone, before you transitioned to, I believe it's Fossil Butte?

Vincent Santucci: 00:53:09 Yes.

Molly Williams: 00:53:10 Yes.

Vincent Santucci: 00:53:10 So when I came back into the service, even though I had worked permanently before, I took the seasonal position because I really wanted to get this paleo inventory. So, I accepted the six-month seasonal position as an LE ranger. It was also good experience for me because the rangers at Yellowstone, they're some of the best in the service. That's why they're there. And so, when you're there, probably got the best search and rescue people there that teach it across the agency, the best fire people. And so, you're able to work side by side with these people. And they also offer a lot of training. So, my first firefighting was in Yellowstone, coming in on helicopter, helitack, and things like that.

00:53:58 So I went back, and I was writing up the Yellowstone survey when I returned home, and I was planning to go back to Yellowstone a second season. In fact, they already offered me to come back, when I had seen on the equivalent to USAJobs at the time, that there was a position at Fossil Butte, that they were looking for a chief ranger there. And I had applied and accepted and had to tell Yellowstone that I won't be coming back that year. But it was not far from Yellowstone, so I could continue to work on the paleo survey fairly regularly because Kemmerer, Wyoming is just a couple of hours south of Yellowstone.

00:54:41 So I moved in as the chief ranger at Fossil Butte National Monument. Fossil Butte, it was established as a National Park Service to preserve these Eocene, approximately 50-million-year-old lake beds that are extremely rich in fossils of animals that lived within and around these ancient lake settings. And because of the conditions that existed during that time, during the Eocene, these lakes were very quiet water. They weren't high energy; they were low energy. They had a very fine grain silt material that, as skeletons died, they would be buried rapidly in this fine grain sediment, preserving extraordinary detail. And because it was low energy, the skeletons weren't disarticulated, that we have complete skeletons. Very rare on the fossil record. So, we go to Dinosaur National Monument, we look at that wall, and there's a couple of articulated bones there, but largely it's a mash of bones that were washed down a very high energy river and deposited on a sandbar. And it's a death assemblage, it's an accumulation. It's really cool and there's a lot to be learned.

00:56:00 A deposit like Fossil Butte is rare. In fact, there's a term for it. It's called lagerstatten. It's a preservation under those conditions where you have extraordinary detail of preservation. Again, complete skeletons. You have leaves that are completely intact. You have insect wings from moths that preserve coloration of the original patterns on them. So, it's just a really extraordinary--You have complete bat skeletons, very fragile bones. The fossil record of bats almost doesn't exist prior to the Ice Age in fossil bats found in caves. But here, the environmental conditions allowed us to get that peek back in time, 50 million years ago, of what bats looked like in the past. So, Fossil Butte preserves that really rich lagerstatten deposit with complete skeletons, with vertebrates, invertebrates, plants, and even trace fossils. The park only gets about

27,000 visitors a year, but those visitors are pretty dedicated because they're driving a long way out of their way that come see the place, and when they come there, they're there for the day and they engage in all the activities.

00:57:21 It's an extraordinary opportunity. Having worked in big parks like Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Petrified Forest, this was a whole different experience because when you're a ranger in a small park, you've got to wear a lot of hats. And to me, that was the reward. I liked doing those full responsibilities of the traditional ranger who does law enforcement and firefighting and search and rescue, interpretation and resource management, science, on and on. And the position afforded that. We were a very small staff and I think we received a lot of recognition for the accomplishments that we did during that time. We had concerns about poaching because we had elk populations come in at the winter. We had mountain lions. We had an incident where we had at least one Yellowstone wolf on our property that led to a very, very difficult situation for us when I was there. So, it's sort of outside the scope of the paleontology. I don't know if you--

Nancy Russell: 00:58:28 Yeah.

Vincent Santucci: 00:58:31 Okay. So, we worked a lot with the Wyoming Game and Fish, and I received a call from somebody I could barely hear, but he was in an airplane. It was one of the wildlife officers he said, "Vince, are you in the office today? I just observed two people on snowmobiles knock your fence down, the monument fence, and they're carrying firearms and they're riding across the monument." Which, there's three violations right there. I said, "Okay." He said, "I will be there in an hour and a half, and I'll meet you out there." So here I am, I'm going out there to make contact with these people, not knowing who they are. It turned out to be APHIS.

Nancy Russell: 00:59:21 USDA?

Vincent Santucci: 00:59:23 Yeah, USDA. They were out going to try to take out a Yellowstone Wolf on Park Service property. I mean, APHIS, they eradicate predators. They do predator control, and they wanted to bag a Yellowstone wolf. Now, what I didn't know at the moment that I contacted them and before they identified themselves as federal employees, is that this

was going to likely be at minimum a citation, potentially an arrest based on what they were doing. And so, I was hoping that the Wyoming Game and Fish person was going to get there soon, because you never know. These are armed people. You never know who you're going to see out there.

01:00:13 So they basically said, "Well, there's nothing you can do about it because of the new Farm Bill." And so, under George Bush, the second George Bush, one of the first pieces of legislation that he had passed through was the farm legislation. And it was a big omnibus kind of legislation that had all sorts of things, how much money was going to be provided to farmers for subsidies and all that sort of thing. But there was a section in there that the vice president was very interested in. The vice president was from Wyoming.

Nancy Russell: 01:00:50 Cheney?

Vincent Santucci: 01:00:51 Yeah. And it had to do with predator control. The language was written such that it violated other federal laws. But it basically said that the US Department of Agriculture, the Secretary of Agriculture, had authority over all federal lands for predator control, including the National Park Service. It's like, what does this mean? They can go in and they can take what is listed as an endangered species because they feel that they have the authority to do so under this law? It led to one of the most frustrating things that I've had to deal with in my career, and that was talking to the US Attorney's office, talking to our law enforcement specialist. How do we deal with this violation? Regardless of how we interpret the law, they didn't have the authority to knock our fence over. They didn't have authority to carry firearms on Park Service property, and they didn't have the authority to drive snowmobiles over.

01:01:52 And so these are all violations. So, do we ignore those based on figuring out what this new law is supposed to mean? At Fossil Butte level, we're not going to make the argument. It probably needs to go to the Supreme Court to determine who has the authority over predator control. But it was a big issue because contemporaneous with all of it, and obviously there was some coordination between the federal government and state government, is that there were all these county proclamations that were made to kill all predators in Wyoming because of their impacts on domestic populations of herds of sheep particularly. That

whole reintroduction of wolves in Yellowstone, the minority view that didn't support that. Extremely vocal. And the more vocal they were, the more payoffs they received, the more subsidies they received. And so, it was to their incentive to be vocal about these things. And they certainly were. But APHIS was smart. They knew what they were doing. They didn't go into Yellowstone's boundary to take a wolf. They came into little known Fossil Butte to get one of the wolves on our property.

01:03:13 So anyways, uncomfortable four-month period trying to resolve this issue. I would say that the only gain that we had is that where we weren't going to draw the line is that you will never, ever do this again on our property. And so that's the only concession we got out of them for it. No apology or anything. But APHIS was not permitted to come onto our property without notifying us prior to that occurring. Our hands were tied. We were told by US Attorney solicitors, "You don't want to do this. And you don't want the media know about this because this would be an embarrassment to the administration." And of course, federal employees will pay with their job if it blows up on the administration. So, I don't think anybody really cared about little Fossil Butte but us. Anyways, that's what paleontologists do in their spare time.

Nancy Russell: 01:04:18 Pistol packing paleontologists anyway.

Molly Williams: 01:04:20 Yes.

Vincent Santucci: 01:04:21 So the superintendent who was there, Dave McGinnis, who hired me, shortly after he left. He accepted an acting superintendency at Padre Island. And so, he left me there with a lot of things unknown that he didn't tell me, including the fact that we had just hired somebody, or he had just hired somebody that came on about the same time I did that turned out to be a convicted felon who was harassing our employees. I inherited this situation, and when I talked to the chief of Maintenance about it, I said, "What do you know about this person?" He said, "Oh, I was so anxious to hire somebody I just offered him the position." He didn't do a background check. He disclosed on his application that he was a convicted felon. I said, "You didn't even ask about this?"

01:05:19 Lo and behold, this person wanted to get fire training, so he went to Teton to get fire training. Very good fire training at

Teton, by the way. And so, while I'm sitting there, while this individual's at the fire training, I get a call from a criminal investigator at Teton saying, "Vince, I understand you're acting superintendent. Do you know this name, X, who's participating in fire training here?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Are you on a secure phone?" I said, "No, but I'll call you back." And when I called him back, he said, "Vince, I want to let you know that not only has this employee been convicted of a felony, but if you're not sitting down, I want you sit down, he was convicted for homicide by arson."

Nancy Russell: 01:06:16 He's at fire training.

Vincent Santucci: 01:06:17 He's at fire training, and this is the guy that's harassing our two employees.

Nancy Russell: 01:06:21 Lovely.

Vincent Santucci: 01:06:24 Too sensitive to talk about the rest of it after this, but it made for a very interesting time at Fossil Butte outside of the wonderful fossils that were there.

Nancy Russell: 01:06:34 But something like that, as a manager, that eats up so much of the oxygen in the room, it takes so much time to resolve, even for something that you think should just be an easy, from an outside, you can look at it and think, "Well, you just fire him and then you're done with it." It's never that easy. And it takes up so much of your time. And as the acting superintendent, even at a small park, there's other stuff you need to be working on. That must've taken up quite a lot of time.

Vincent Santucci: 01:07:01 Yeah, it did. And I was very thankful when Dave, the superintendent, came back.

01:07:10 So within the first year of coming to Fossil Butte and serving as the chief ranger and learning all the things I needed to know to successfully work there, and then having this acting superintendency, which accelerated the learning curve that my superintendent in the regional office contacted--Dave, I guess, the superintendent, saying, "Hey, your guy Vince, he's the guy who cares about fossils across the agency. We want to make you an offer here. Would you be willing to enter into a job share where Vince could work 50% of the time, that you would fund that 50% on chief ranger activities at Fossil Butte, and the other 50% would be to help us develop our service-wide program for

paleontology?" And of course, I'm thinking, "Oh boy, this would be great." And so, Dave agreed to it, and we entered into that agreement in 1998. Again, it's another new open door to allow us to then move further on with our wishes and dreams for NPS Paleo.

Nancy Russell: 01:08:26 Okay. But it's a really great opportunity to have a job share like that, but both of those are full-time jobs. So, I'm going to guess you weren't working 40 hours a week.

Vincent Santucci: 01:08:37 I never have.

Nancy Russell: 01:08:37 I know. I just want that on the record.

Vincent Santucci: 01:08:46 I'm going to admit this to you, and I am a little embarrassed about it, but I'm also proud of it. I became a father at 19 years old and I had four children with my first wife, and it's the best thing that ever happened to me. Life is busy when you have four kids and you're trying to go through finishing an undergraduate degree, and a graduate degree, and working full time.

01:09:09 And just so you know, to fill in the rest of the story, since 19, I have had children in my life all the way through, including now my granddaughter, which we have full legal and physical custody for. So, I think since I was 19, I'll probably end this world having little kids around me, absolute reward, the best reward I've had in life. I would not change it for a minute. But it makes for a very busy life. It makes you think as a planner to figure out things before they happen. I've inherited my dad's real high energy for work and that sort of thing. And again, it's part of who I am one way or the other. There's a lot to do. There's a lot we want to achieve. And I don't waste a lot of time. I'm not for sitting on the beach.

Nancy Russell: 01:10:12 No, no. But I think there's a lot of, in your case wives in the Park Service, spouses in the Park Service, that don't get credit. They don't work for the Park Service, but the reality is the work that their spouse is doing that contributes to the Park Service has, as much as you try to be for the family, there's implications where there's things where you're not able to do everything all the time where there's an emergency that comes up. And I think oftentimes the contributions that the families make behind the scenes to allow Park Service people to do their jobs don't always get the credit.

Vincent Santucci: 01:10:52 Yeah. So, I shared with you in a previous conversation, my grandfather's advice, never give up your childhood enthusiasm about life and learning. Another friend of mine back in the, let's see, I guess the early '90s when I was trying to finish up my thesis, I had a full-time job. I was working. I've got all these kids, that I had this dilemma that my son Luke, he loved baseball. And of course, that's a weakness of mine as well. He always, he constantly, let's catch baseball. Let's play baseball.

01:11:32 Of course, they had to have the Field of Dreams movie come out at the same time to make it more difficult. And I'm talking about divided attention in as many directions as I possibly could be pulled. Then I talked to my friend about it, and he said, "Look, someday you're going to regret, thinking about the day you didn't go out and catch with your son when he doesn't want to catch with you anymore." And so, I made it a priority to go catch with him so much that I wound up volunteering as an assistant coach on the T-ball team. And then of course, as luck would have it, the manager of the team said, "Oh, by the way, I'm relocating. You mind taking over?" Do you know how dangerous T-ball is? That year, that team, I will promise to bring in a picture because it's such an important photograph for me.

01:12:37 My mother brings the tears out in me. We came in second place that year, and those kids, every one of them I made a really great connection with. And at the end, sorry, at the end, after the second place, they pulled out a little trophy they gave me that had a baseball that they all signed.

Nancy Russell: 01:13:05 That's nice.

Vincent Santucci: 01:13:06 Yeah. I think I may have mentioned to you I lost my son Luke tragically, and that is my greatest moment, being able to embrace him on that day.

01:13:22 So, busy life. I'll sleep when I'm dead. But there's too many good opportunities and too many important things that I need to apply myself. And I'm not necessarily doing it for my supervisors, a reward that'll never come.

Nancy Russell: 01:13:43 Right.

Vincent Santucci: 01:13:45 A lot of thankless things, but I'm not doing it for that reason. I'm doing for my absolute commitment to this agency, respect for myself, and wanting to leave the legacy

so that things will be in a little better shape when we hand it off to the next people. Because the resource deserves it. It's been neglected for a long time, and I think that just from what we've learned in our discussions, it's an incredibly important resource, going to rewrite textbooks about human antiquity in the new world. And it happened under our tenure. A lot to be proud of. A lot to get up early, 5:00 in the morning, to start going with the next adventure and falling asleep at 1:00 in the morning trying to get something done. But I played baseball with Luke.

Molly Williams: 01:14:44 Good.

Vincent Santucci: 01:14:44 I made that a priority.

Nancy Russell: 01:14:46 Good.

Vincent Santucci: 01:14:48 Thanks for listening.

Molly Williams: 01:14:52 So the NPS Paleo program with the inventories, would you like to briefly discuss, I mean, we've had this conversation, not recorded, but briefly discuss what they are and how they started. So, we could start with the I&M network inventories and when that started.

Vincent Santucci: 01:15:17 So we have talked about it, but I don't know how much we've talked about it as part of the interview, is that in the 1990s was a really important time that we wanted to plug into, and that is during the 90s, under our Associate Director for Natural Resources, Mike Soukup, they had put forth what is called the Natural Resource Challenge. And that was an effort to tell Congress and tell the American people that we need to clean up our act in managing these world-renowned natural resources and national parks, places like Yellowstone and Mammoth, Cave, etc. And you're not giving us enough money to do it. Here's our strategy. We feel that we need to capture good baseline data. If you want us to manage these resources, you need to give us the tools and the ability to do so through funding so that we can inventory, have the baseline data, know the species that are existing out there, and also to be able to monitor them to know the health and condition of those resources.

01:16:23 So if we start seeing our herps, our frogs dying off, it might be a vital sign to environmental changes, maybe climate

changes that are adverse to the conditions that we're trying to sustain in national parks.

01:16:38 I grew up in that generation. I had the opportunity to be involved in discussions and see how this was coming together. One of the brilliant things that the Soukup team did is that they brought in National Park Service historian Dick Sellars, who had worked on all sorts of really interesting historic studies, but he was a really rigorous scholar in terms of researching things. So, he was asked to write a history of natural resource management in the National Park Service. His book is "Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History." And if you haven't read it, I highly recommend it. I read it several times and who has time to read one book more than once?

01:17:22 But it goes through and talks about mistakes we've made, like feeding grizzlies in Yellowstone, suppressing fires leading to the 1988 disaster. It wasn't a braggadocious book. It was like a tell-all book of all the mistakes we made. And it really influenced members of the right committees in Congress who embraced that book. Maybe it was their congressional aides that read it, but they understood it and they understood that Congress was not providing the kind of funding support to the National Park Service to preserve these global treasures that we call national parks in ways that are based on science and good data. And so, it culminated in the 1998 National Park Service Omnibus Management Act, very important piece of legislation. It did a couple things. It specifically put into language that superintendents need to be evaluated based on how they incorporate science into their decision making.

01:18:31 So we have superintendents that come up as law enforcement rangers, as maintenance folks, as administrative, sometimes resources. And so obviously they're going to have some bias in their decision making. They may have less of an understanding of why we need to fund science. If they're a law enforcement ranger, they might say, "We need shiny new vehicles and we need the best weapons and all that." And so, as a result, we haven't always made the right decisions. That was turned around in 1998 based on the collection of language that was incorporated into that law. And so, in addition to a mandate for superintendents being evaluated on how they utilize and incorporate science into informing their decision making, but it also said that there is going to be funding to support

baseline resource inventories leading to the inventory and monitoring program. It was given birth in that generation with the mission to say, "You're getting the money. Come up with a game plan to be able to better assess the resources you have in your park so that you can understand the health of those resources and apply management in an informed way."

01:19:49 It completely changed the culture of at least the natural resource community in the Park Service. They established these 32 inventory and monitoring networks, these geospatial clusters of parks that are within the unique eco-regions that have been defined by ecologists, etc., where you have clusters of parks that are within the same geographic area that maybe have the same climate, that have underlying geology, that have the same assemblages of flora and fauna. So, what occurs in the Arctic network is obviously quite different than the flora and fauna on the Mojave Desert network. So, you get specialists who are experts in these localized phenomena to be able to do the best job to help managers and help superintendents to manage these resources at the highest level of science available at the time.

01:20:49 So I'm sitting there watching all this, and of course the way that Santucci thinks is, "How do we apply this to paleontology? It seems like this would be a win-win." And so, prior to that, we got out in front by doing the Yellowstone Paleontological Inventory that defined a protocol on how to do a park-based inventory that we were listening very closely because we thought, "Oh wow, we can get some funding to do this, and the rest will be history." And so, we participated in one component of how the Park Service implemented the Natural Resource Challenge and that was that with, in addition to defining the 32 I&M networks, those eco-regions, they also looked at 12 basic natural resource themes that they would focus on. So, they wanted to have inventories for all of the 270 parks.

01:21:50 They said, "We don't need this in every park. We don't necessarily need this in park X, like Thaddeus Kosciuszko's, but we do need it in Yellowstone and Mammoth Cave and Grand Canyon." And so, they had a list of 270 parks that they wanted to complete 12 basic natural resource inventories. We want to know the mammals is one. We want to know the birds, we want to know the herps, we want to know the fish. We want to

know the vascular plants. We want basic information about water rates, water quality. And for geology, they said we need to have good baseline geologic maps because it's fundamental to other disciplines. And so, the Geologic Resource Division was then funded for this GRI program, the Geologic Resource Inventory program, that would have a geologic map component and it would have a geologic report component, which you are now familiar with.

01:22:49 And so the planning for that began in 1999. I got myself invited to attend those. We did some scoping in Colorado and Utah, and they were defining because they defined how we were going to do business. And so, we would have a meeting, say a meeting at Zion National Park, where we would bring in all the geologists who've ever done mapping in that place, and the Utah Geological Survey and the academic geologists and the US Geological Survey. And we sat down with this brain trust of famous people from a geologic perspective. And we worked with the park staff, and we mapped out all the objectives and goals and where we needed maps to fill in the gaps. And then went through all the resources. So, are there caves? Are there paleontology? What kind of minerals do you have? Do you have geologic processes? Of course, Zion is a park where they have rock falls all the time, size of a house. So laid all that out and developed this system that they're continuing to work on. They have about 212 reports done, and they're working on about a dozen more of those reports.

01:24:03 I'm sitting in the background saying, we're going to definitely try to get paleontology information into the GRI reports, but that's not enough. We need something on its own. Well, the people that were running that program, Steve Fancy and others, they were tenacious. They would say, "Yeah, there's a lot of other things we want to inventory from natural resource perspective." And I get 10 calls a day that we need to inventory coral reefs. We need the inventory, fungi and all these other things.

Nancy Russell: 01:24:42 Insects and all the other things that were left off the list.

Vincent Santucci: 01:24:46 And you probably know the story well. And Steve was just told, "Your evaluation in the end of the year will be dependent upon the fact that you say no to all of us." So here we are working independently, no money. I became part of the Northern Colorado Plateau Network committee. I was on the committee. It was a prototype network. It was

one of the first ones that helped to define what a network would do, how they would be staffed. And so Fossil Butte was one of the parks in there. And so, I had a seat at the table on the technical committee defining things for our network. And so, I've raised my hand and said one day, "Hey, because we have a little bit of autonomy right now to use the little bit of funding we have, would you be interested in having a paleontological inventory?"

01:25:40 It was an easy sell. We got $2,000 to do the entire network, and it was a big network. There's 18 parks in that network. We gave them, for $2,000, a report that was characterized by the reviewers of this report saying, "This is more robust than the mammal reports that we're paying $80,000 for. This is good stuff." And so, then the other network started knocking on our door and said, "Hey, we got a copy of your report. Can you do one for the Mediterranean Coast [network]?" And so little by little we were able to get them done. Usually, it was with very little to no money. We would hire an intern to help do some baseline information, to compile it, and we would go forward. By the time we had about 10 of them done, there was quite a story to show here. Our list of parks that we've identified had grown significantly.

01:26:42 So what I did, Lindsay McClelland was our Washington liaison for the Geologic Resource Division, and Lindsay was very excited about what we were doing, and we kept him informed. He was the one guy we'd email every day and say, "Hey, guess what?" And he was receptive, and so I said, "Lindsay, what's the chance of raising this top-secret 13th inventory, natural resource inventory theme to Bert Frost?" Bert Frost was the deputy under Mike Soukup at the time. And so, we had a meeting where we brought in 10 little spiral bound reports you might be familiar with, and we put them on Bert's desk and told him the story. And despite the fact that Steve Fancy was going to not fund anything else, we were told that we would be funded to do the rest of the 32 networks, top-secret. The secret 13th Natural Resource Inventory, and that's the reports that you're looking at.

01:27:48 So we had to keep quiet about how it was funded. It wasn't a lot of money, but it was enough to hire really great interns, people that we now look at as professors or other key positions who valued their experiences working on those projects. But we got it done. It took us 10 years

between 2002 and 2012. Now they take up shelf space. But one of the key aspects to that in terms of best management practices is that we didn't just write these reports with all the scientific information, all the paleontological detail. We knew that enough is enough. We got to make sure that we put the most important information in here, integrated fully with park management information. Otherwise, these reports are going to go on a shelf and the park staff aren't going to read them. But if we develop the interpretation, the law enforcement protection, the resource management, the curatorial information, these are things where people in the park staff are probably going to be interested at least in that little segment.

01:29:03 And the feedback we got along the way is that this is the best part of the report to them. They don't really care about all the science as much as the fact that we help them to understand their resource better through these reports. And so, we benefited from each of those communications. Each time we started a new park, we're talking about a new group of people that we're bringing into the fold that we're making them become our advocates for us. And as they move around in their career, they move to other parks. They head to say, "We need that here in this park that hasn't had this work done before." But we learned, again, the same idea is I want to be the person who learns the most when I come into this discussion. And we've listened very closely. And so, we wanted to be responsive to the parks.

01:29:58 We got a lot of good ideas that we hadn't incorporated into the early reports that people brought them up and said, "What about this? How about a sensitive version and a public version?" And so, the reports got bigger, they got better, they got more useful, they got more interesting. And so, they became part of our protocols moving forward. That's why we went back and did the early reports again. The first six reports, we did a version two because they were anemic by comparison to these later reports that now incorporate a much broader methodology.

Molly Williams: 01:30:37 There's also inventories for NNLs and NHLs, correct?

Vincent Santucci: 01:30:43 So yes and no. The NNL program are programs that operate by themselves. The NNL National Natural Landmark program is within the Natural Resource Directorate, and the NHL is within the Cultural Resource Directorate. And so, we've spent a lot more time with the

NNL programs. We haven't been doing the inventories per se that we've done for national parks yet. We have just partnered with the NNL over the past year to help them do an assessment of all of their existing NNLs and their paleo resources as well as they ask us to review a list of potential 10 new NNLs that have paleo resource significance.

01:31:29 And so what a great experience, opportunity. We all learned through that collaboration. And so, we just did our first site visit to an NNL that was specifically based upon this new partnership idea. We went to the Ashfall Fossil Beds NNL in Nebraska, had a great experience, learned a lot during that. Everybody learned a lot. And so, we're sort of mapping out where we go from here. We are cautious though that our first priority are the NPS areas. These are jurisdictional responsibilities. And so, we still have a big backlog of park projects before we can take on an additional workload with the NNL. We might get an intern to start applying to those specifically, but for now, we're proceeding cautiously but optimistically.

Nancy Russell: 01:32:31 How many Park service fossil-related NNLs are there?

Vincent Santucci: 01:32:36 Just over 70.

Nancy Russell: 01:32:36 70.

Vincent Santucci: 01:32:39 Yeah. And there's about 20, just over 20 NHLs. Some really cool sites. So, for example, Hadrosaurus Foulkii [based on the dinosaur H*adrosaurus foulkii*] NHL in New Jersey, that's where the first dinosaur skeleton was excavated in North America. And so, it's a national historic landmark from that standpoint.

Nancy Russell: 01:33:04 Great.

Vincent Santucci: 01:33:05 Thanks.

Speaker 2: 01:33:06 Does anyone need a break or anything? Are we still doing okay?

Nancy Russell: 01:33:09 A break might be good.

Vincent Santucci: 01:33:12 Okay.

Molly Williams: 01:33:12 I will.

Nancy Russell: 01:33:13 Go ahead. I'm just making sure.

Molly Williams: 01:33:14 All right. Were there any challenges with the inventory program, whether it's the INM or GRI or all of them combined?

Vincent Santucci: 01:33:32 Well, we were less in control of GRI. That had a momentum under itself, it had a leadership, had funding, so I was just a piece of that project. I wasn't the leader on that. But we adopted many of the lessons learned by being part of that into our paleontological inventory work. 32 networks. That's a lot of work, and particularly when you're doing it when you're the chief ranger at George Washington Memorial Parkway worrying about terrorists and 4th of July events and all that sort of thing. That's one thing that you've probably picked up. A lot of the work that I did for NPS paleontology is when I was in other jobs. The entire time at George Washington Memorial Parkway, I was mentoring GIPs and interns and colleagues, et cetera, to get these reports developed. And that's a full-time job unto itself, outside of the fact that I was in the busiest job I ever was, the most complicated job in my career as the chief ranger of GWMP.

01:34:50 So you'll see that continuing trend that regardless of where I was in my career, I didn't lose sight of the need to help to foster along where there were huge needs for the agency, whether they were legislative, whether they were data needs, whether to do so appropriately by being disciplined enough to know how a curator or a law enforcement ranger would view those resources.

01:35:25 We had multiple network-specific inventories going on at one time, and it was part not burning out the people that were helping to coordinate them and to keep track of all the moving pieces because you want to keep the parks informed and updated and engaged, and if they have time to review it so we can give them something that will be useful to them. There was always a number of networks that were being finalized, a number that were in the process of work, and then a number that we were beginning the communication with the new networks to explain what we're doing. There was a cycle that we got into this rhythm that really worked. There were a couple of park networks that didn't really have any interest, and so they didn't get done until last, but they were all done and now they're taking up space in your shelves.

Nancy Russell: 01:36:26 So just to clarify, when you first started these and you were getting reports out for $2,000, you were largely doing that in-house when all the money came through for the secret 13th inventory, were you then contracting all of those?

Vincent Santucci: 01:36:43 Yes. Yeah. So, we were doing it through contracts. We were doing it through GIPs, which are now called SIPs, Scientists in Parks. And through partnerships with academic folks that really wanted to help. So, we had Maggie Toscano from the USGS help us with the South Florida Caribbean because she was knowledgeable. And so, we gave her lead authorship on that, and she ran with it. We wanted to get it done any way we could. To complete the last 20 reports, Bert gave us $180,000. It might as well have been a million dollars because we were used to working on things without any money. I grew up somewhat poor when I was little. And so, you learn how to find happiness in life by figuring out ways to get things done, and money's not always the answer. That's how we've approached it. We're not going to say, "We're going to abandon that really great idea just because somebody didn't throw money our way."

01:37:52 No, we figured out ways to get them done. And one of the things that's part of our business model that we really feel is important is that if we invest the students to be involved in it, we give them a leadership role. We don't give them the busy work. They are the principal investigator. They will be the lead author; they will be the decision maker. And that reward to them, it's worth its weight in gold, more than the stipend that they would've received. And so, we challenged them, and most people, not everybody, but most people, if they don't give their responsibility to do something profound for the first time for the Park Service, that's going to be part of their resume, part of their legacy, that's a motivation.

Nancy Russell: 01:38:39 They'll rise to the challenge.

Vincent Santucci: 01:38:40 And they did. And they really did. And some of them contributed in ways that we added new protocols to how we did business based upon their contributions.

Nancy Russell: 01:38:51 So then does that put you as the contracting officer or agreements officer, the agreement rep for all those projects?

Vincent Santucci: 01:38:58 So fortunately we had one person in the Geologic Resource Division that was willing to take that role because I just clearly-

Nancy Russell: 01:39:06 I was wondering where you could get them done too. Some people think that if you just contract it out, that means it's not a workload, but it's a big workload still for the government.

Vincent Santucci: 01:39:15 I had to manage our $4 million budget for my division at GWMP that I just couldn't take on that additional responsibility. So, it's figuring out all these things that must be figured out when you work for the federal government. And so, we've had a lot of people contribute to make things work for us.

Nancy Russell: 01:39:38 Great.

Molly Williams: 01:39:39 About how long, I know there's different amounts of parks in each network, but how long did it usually take to develop these inventories?

Vincent Santucci: 01:39:50 It varied.

Molly Williams: 01:39:51 Yeah.

Vincent Santucci: 01:39:51 So there's a lot of considerations in terms of what network we would target next. And it might be because somebody that came along and wants to help us has worked in those parks and that helped. Part of it was that the network or the park said, "Hey, we really want this." And so, we wanted to make sure that we were responsive in a timely manner and not put them off so that now they're gone and somebody else is in their shoes that doesn't care. We wanted to take advantage of the momentum that we could generate through the process.

Molly Williams: 01:40:30 I think that wraps up our inventory questions. And I know you had mentioned off-record that we'd like to circle back to Yellowstone and talk about your encounter with Clinton.

Vincent Santucci: 01:40:42 Okay. Have I told you this story yet?

Molly Williams: 01:40:45 No.

Vincent Santucci: 01:40:45 I told you. Okay. My real job, when I wasn't playing paleontologist on my days off, my real job, there was a commissioned law enforcement officer in Yellowstone.

And again, you're wearing a uniform, you're carrying the firearm, you have the authority to do things that you don't really want to have to do sometimes. And so, I took that part of my job very seriously and wanted to show that same level of professionalism in that role as well as other things. But because we were understaffed in our sub-district in Madison, my family was burning out by the fact that I was always being called out after hours, on my days off. And they don't want to just sit there in a little apartment, and they needed to get to the grocery store once in a while and get out of the park and do some things.

01:41:51 So when they announced a call for rangers to work the detail of Bill and Hillary Clinton coming to Yellowstone in '96, they were coming to make a public announcement about the New World Mine, this gold mine that was on Forest Service land, adjacent to the park. The environmental concerns were that the techniques that they were using at the gold mine potentially could affect hydrology, which could potentially affect the geothermal features in the park. It was huge. It was many, many years into the making, a very complicated legal discussion, et cetera. Anyways, when they were looking for volunteers to work the detail, I hid. I made myself unavailable. I go and pick weeds.

01:42:48 And so on my last day, workday that I was hoping to get through because our car was idled up, ready to drive out of that park as soon as I got off that day to go to Idaho Springs or Bozeman or something. And so, at the end of the shift supervisor called myself and another ranger Theo into his office, and he closed the door. And of course, you knew that wasn't good. And he handed us a fax memo from the LEO office, that's the Chief Ranger's office, Dan Sholly. And basically, it was the Clinton--It was an abbreviated version of the event action plan, the incident action plan for Bill Clinton. And he said, "By the way, the LEO office has requested that you work tomorrow." So, it wasn't a question, do you want to. Just so you know, you'll need to be wearing your uniform tomorrow. And so, we looked at it. And so, when I was reading through it though, they have the chart list with all the personnel and various information, so what your assignment is. And so, I saw the bottom Vince Santucci and Theo Wilhelm, asterisks, motorcade, ambulance. So, we were both park medics. We do everything. And so, we were the park medics to be in the motorcade. And so, we had to drive the ambulance up in

the morning and be up there 0600 hours, Mammoth to prepare for the briefing for that day. But the asterisk, what was that? So, I looked down at the bottom and the asterisk said, "Requested by Secret Service." How does the Secret Service even know who we are? What is up with that? And of course, Dennis couldn't answer that. And so, Theo and myself drove up, all morning saying, "We're going to get to the bottom of this. Why does the Secret Service want us?"

01:45:05 And so we went into the briefing, and they give out this full event action plan, top secret document that tells where the president's going to be every second of the day and what LEs are going to be positioned here and all that stuff. And same thing, asterisks, requested by Secret Service. So, as we began to co-mingle with the Secret Service, we would ask them, " Hey, what does this asterisk mean?" And of course, they were kidding us, but they would look at us and they'd shake their head and say, "Oh no, you have an asterisk. I can't tell you what it means but it's not good." And so, the whole day long, we were positioned right next to the satellite communications truck, and they were really friendly with us, but they even let us peek in because they're in communication with the AWACS planes that are overhead. And so, they just wouldn't tell us. This is a document, they tell you, "Okay, this is really important document. Don't lose it. Once you memorize all this information, you've got to eat it." That sort of thing.

01:46:12 So in the early afternoon, we were given the message that the Clintons have requested that the family members of the rangers that work the detail get an opportunity to come up and meet them at Mammoth, at the Mammoth Elementary School. So, time I called Bianca and my two sons, and they were excited to hear it and said, "Okay, we'll come up. We will meet, and then we will take our car and we'll go to Bozeman afterwards and get out of the park." And so, they came up and they were early. The Clintons were late, and whatever they were doing, they were hiking Mount Washburn or something. And I had a chance to meet with them. They brought me some drinks and things like that. And so off they went. I said, "I'll be able to communicate with you again after 14:00 hours," or something like that.

01:47:04 And so when I saw them again that day after the debriefing, when the Clintons left, they were excited to see me. High energy. They said, "Yeah, we met the Clintons. We shook hands with Bill Clinton. We got a photograph with him,"

and it showed me a photograph of them with Bill Clinton, "And we got his autograph. Look." He had autographed this top-secret event action plan. I said, "How did you get that? More importantly, how did you get that autographed because you can't just hand anything to the president. It's got to go to the Secret Service. And they give it to the president, and they give it back." But they didn't even screen that. So, I told them, "I'm not eating this now, I'm keeping this."

Nancy Russell: 01:47:54 Well, at that point, he's already been and gone. Pretty much.

Vincent Santucci: 01:47:58 But I'd be happy to give you a copy of that. So anyways, that's the story.

Nancy Russell: 01:48:06 But so you never found out why you in particular were requested?

Vincent Santucci: 01:48:10 No. But if you have the answer somewhere in these archives-

Molly Williams: 01:48:23 That concludes part two. Thank you.

Nancy Russell: 01:48:25 Thank you.

Vincent Santucci: 01:48:25 Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]