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Natural Resource Stewardship and Science

National Park Service Paleontology Program

Oral History Interview – Dave McGinnis

Natural Resource Report NPS/PALEONTOLOGY PROGRAM/OHI—2020/008

ON THE COVER
Dave McGinnis, Superintendent – Fossil Butte National Monument, on a snowy day at the monument. (V. Santucci Photo)

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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.

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_santucc@nps.gov.

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Background

This is the transcript of two interviews with Dave McGinnis, retired National Park Service ranger / superintendent. The interviews were conducted by telephone on November 13 and 16, 2020. Dave began his career with the NPS in 1972 at Mammoth Cave National Park and retired in 2010 at Fossil Butte National Monument. This interview covers Dave's career, parks that he worked and people that he worked with. Dave was intimately involved with the management and interpretation of NPS fossils, especially during his tenure at Badlands National Park and Fossil Butte National Monument.

These interviews were conducted over the telephone from Dave's home in Kentucky and Vince was at his home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. At the time of the interview, Vince was the NPS Senior Paleontologist and Paleontology Program Coordinator. 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. Dave reviewed the draft transcript and signed a release form for the National Park Service for the preservation and use of the interview in the future. If present, PII has been omitted.

McGinnis = Dave McGinnis

Santucci = Vincent Santucci

Narrator: Dave McGinnis
Interviewer: Vincent Santucci
Dates: November 13 and 16, 2020
Signed release form: Yes
Transcribed by: Teresa Bergen

Transcript

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Santucci: Okay. Today is Friday, November 13, 2020. And my name is Vincent Santucci. I'm the senior paleontologist for the National Park Service Paleontology Program. Today we are interviewing retired National Park Service employee Dave McGinnis. Dave's career with the National Park Service includes positions at two important fossil parks, Badlands National Park and Fossil Butte National Monument. Dave also did an acting assignment at Dinosaur National Monument that we hope to talk about as well. Today's interview is being conducted over the telephone from Dave's home in Kentucky. And I am participating from my home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. So, thank you, Dave.

McGinnis: Okay.

Santucci: So here's some real easy questions. When and where were you born?

McGinnis: Born in Colorado which is on the western slope of the Rocky Mountains there in Colorado.

Santucci: Excellent. Post-World War II baby boomer.

McGinnis: Yes.

Santucci: And so just very briefly, growing up as a young boy, where did you go to school? And during that time, were there any significant experiences that you had that drew you towards either the National Park Service or natural history?

McGinnis: Sure. Near Montrose, Colorado is Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and Curecanti National Recreation Area. When I was probably five years old, my dad would go out there occasionally and take the family. He served in the CCC there and work in both of those places during the '30s, I guess it was. So those are the two parks that I remember seeing and my father talking about what he did there and what was unique about the places.

And then about the age of twelve, I think, was our first family visit to a national park area, which was Mesa Verde. And I don't remember taking any tours there. But I remember being there and driving around and absorbing what the place was about.

And then about the age fourteen, fifteen and sixteen, my parents were building a cabin outside of Rocky Mountain National Park near Grand Lake, Colorado. My dad had been working at the Minuteman missile sites and was hauling away scrap lumber from the crates that had the machinery in it. He was a millwright at the time. And we were recycling that lumber to build a

cabin. He'd line us up, my brother and I, who was a little bit older than me, a week's worth of work. We'd get it done in about half a week. And then we'd go up in the Rocky Mountain National Park. Just two young kids turned loose. And explored the east inlet and the north inlet of Grand Lake and various other places. And get back on the weekend, because the family would come up and restock some groceries. My dad would work on the weekend with us, kind of going to the next phase. That's when I fell in love with national parks. Actually, that's where I met my first park ranger, had an interaction with him, that lasted a long time.

Santucci: Wow. That's great.

McGinnis: And then at the age of seventeen, I took a western history class in my high school. And on spring break, they took a trip through the Southwest, include Bandelier, Chaco, Pecos, Hubbell Trading Post, Glorieta Pass, which wasn't a Park Service area then, and several other places. And that really kind of sparked me.

I was off to college from 1965 through '69. I majored in Anthropology but I took quite a few geology classes. I liked both areas, but I felt I could succeed in anthropology and probably would have a tougher time with geology. So I had a strong interest in geology, but I didn't get a degree in it. After I graduated from college in December of 1969, I joined the Army on February 6th. I went in as a regular army, not a draftee. I spent two years 1970-1971 in the Army. And then ended up at Fort Knox as my last assignment. And from there I found a job with Mammoth Cave National Park as a park guide first, and then later as a park technician.

Santucci: Very good. So let me just go back and capture some information. What year did you graduate?

McGinnis: Nineteen-sixty-nine. December.

Santucci: Nineteen-sixty-nine. And that was the same year that you enlisted in the army.

McGinnis: No, actually it was February 6th 1970 that I enlisted.

Santucci: Nineteen-seventy. So it was still Vietnam War period.

McGinnis: Yes.

Santucci: Okay. So, and your major was anthropology as an undergraduate?

McGinnis: Yes.

Santucci: Excellent. So how did you wind up getting a position at Mammoth Cave, and what was the position?

McGinnis: It was a park guide, thirty-two hours a week, GS4. And I went through GS4, 5 and 6 there. I was primarily a cave guide, but gave surface walks, evening programs, and was detailed to cultural resource management projects. I entered on duty with the NPS on March 16th, 1972. My first training there at Mammoth Cave, looking back on it. The first training was from Freeman Tilden. And Ray Nelson. They were on tour through many units of the NPS that year.

Santucci: Wow.

McGinnis: That's when they were traveling around the Park Service in 1972, I think it was. And I had no idea who the guy was. (laughs) But it was a pretty good training class, and probably a really good one to start a career with.

And then looking back over the first year at Mammoth Cave, I remember I was commuting from a different time zone in Elizabethtown down to the cave. And the assistant superintendent said, "Hey, you want to live in the park, McGinnis?" And I said, yeah! So it was worked out to where I got to live at the Collins House at Crystal Cave. Floyd Collins was buried down in the cave in a coffin. As you went in the entrance, the coffin was part of the show cave that the Park Service had bought from private interests there. And actually as I had the keys I served as a guard for that remote cave and property too. On occasions I was asked to take people into Crystal Cave for the Superintendent. That was an interesting time there. It was a mile down from a locked gate to get to the house. It was the first house I ever lived in with the Park Service, that had an outhouse. You could order water for a cistern to shower with. And also, on three-day weekends, the Cave Research Foundation came in for an expedition every holiday. I was to make sure the cistern was full of water and to kind of get out of the way if I wasn't going to be involved with them.

I remember going in the cave two or three times on one of their expeditions. They would occasionally try to bring Park Service people into what they were doing. And that was an interesting experience. And when they started the wild cave trips at Mammoth Cave, I was one of the first guides to do that. I think there were four others that were regularly on that trip. They still do a version of the wild cave trip with the headlamps. I don't think they use carbide lights anymore at all.

Also, I remember that Lost John, the mummified Indian, that is no longer on display. There were four individuals that got to go down and move him into a passageway that's kept secret. And I was one of them. And that was due to a new Policy. But no more bodies would be on NPS display or bones. They'd try to repatriate them. But Lost John was an Adena Indian. I don't think there was any tribe that claimed him. So, the idea was to take him back not far from where he was found decades earlier. And he's still in the glass case that he was originally put in. He was simply taken off view.

And then there was Floyd Collins who was in a casket in the cave. Finally a retired NPS employee and past cave guide, Gary Tally who also was a minister, worked something out with, the Park Service and with the Collins family and Floyd was reburied in the Mammoth Cave Church Cemetery. I believe that congregation still comes to worship in the park. There are four other pre-park churches in the park likely still getting used. We visited that grave site just a couple of weeks ago. And he's out of the cave now and he's repatriated to near where his family attended church.

Let's see. I was there when they stopped the torch throwing. I remember on the lantern tour and some of the other trips, there was this old tradition of rolling these little cloth torches soaked in kerosene flipping them into certain spots that would light the cave better. And it wasn't long after I left that they stopped doing that, for good reason. And although they had stopped using the shaft to bring cave air up to ventilate the visitors' center, they hadn't dealt with radon yet. But they knew there was radon in the cave and they didn't want to ventilate with it. It had been an inexpensive way to air condition just a big fan to pull out the 54 degree cave air.

And at that time, when I was working there, nobody counted your time in the cave because of radon. And we spent a lot of time in the cave. If you were a permanent cave guide, you had a key and you could take seasonals in at night and show them parts of the cave. You let the management know and it was considered the same as if it was done on the surface on your own time and initiative. I don't know if they still do that. I doubt that they do. But I think one of my best experiences was one summer, I think it was my second year there, I got to take a group at night into a part of the cave called New Discovery. It was the most pristine, fragile, stunning piece of the cave one could imagine. And I thought it would never be open to the public or shown, because it was just too fragile to take people into it. I heard that that might change. I'm hoping that if they do, that it will be maybe somebody in the cave electronically transmitting out and answering questions to people. But that just blew me away when I first saw that section of cave. And I don't know if I took pictures or not. I've got them somewhere, in a carousel, I suppose. But those are some memories about Mammoth Cave.

There's one other thing. They used a romantic interpretation to tell the story about the cave. Most of the guides were World War II vets when I came in. And they had their twenty-year pins. And it was a style of interpretation, I think, that's been recognized as a legitimate style. But there was a lot of names for places in the cave like the Bridal Altar. And I remember there were some stories about that. And come to find out, moving back to Kentucky here about a year ago, I ran into a guy named Tom Moody. And it was his grandmother in the mid-1800s who was married in the cave. He has an old newspaper article about it. And the story was that she would never marry a man on the face of the earth, for some reason. .But anyhow, it's kind of an interesting story and you never knew if it was true or not. Although there were some pictures in the park of a wedding going on pretty far back in time. But ran into the guy that's the grandson of that lady that got married in the cave. So it took me a long time to find that one out. Fifty years later, I guess, after telling the stories in the cave, met the guy that's the grandson of the lady that got married there. So.

Santucci: And talk about romantic interpretation. Did you ever make any acquaintances or friends that remain friends throughout your life at Mammoth Cave?

McGinnis: Yes, I met my wife there while down with a group of seasonals one night at Echo River. And everybody kept asking her to sing. And so she did. And we got married about a year later, I think. She worked at several parks. She worked at Andersonville, with YCC. She worked the Badlands National as a superintendent's secretary. And then after that, she developed a career in library sciences and became a county librarian for libraries in Lincoln County, Wyoming.

Santucci: And her name is Brenda. And what as her maiden name?

McGinnis: Brasell.

Santucci: Okay. And so do you remember what year you met and what year you got married?

McGinnis: It was, March 5th of 1975 while she was on furlough from work

Santucci: (laughs) Okay. So recently we've been involved in a paleontological inventory at Mammoth Cave. I don't know if you've seen any of the media about all the fossil sharks that have been discovered.

McGinnis: Yes, a little bit.

Santucci: Were you aware of any fossils from Mammoth Cave during the time that you worked there?

McGinnis: Yes. I think there were some fossil sponges on the wild cave trip. I don't remember anything about sharks. I think they were aware of some places like that. But not where I was guiding people in the cave. Not in what was then the historic trip route or the frozen Niagara trip route or the scenic cave trip route. They didn't have the Echo River trip when I was there. I think they restored it from time to time over the years. There are some other passageways that we were all kind of familiar with. But I don't recall any of them that had fossils except for the one that had some sponges in it.

Santucci: Were you aware of any Ice Age fossils?

McGinnis: No.

Santucci: No. Okay. So, when did you finish your position at Mammoth Cave and where did you go from there?

McGinnis: Let's see. I transferred in 1976 to Andersonville National Historic Site. It was a fairly new park. I believe it was authorized in 1970. That was an interesting park. I think I was there for less than three years. And I was the second person considered the historian there, or the chief ranger. It had an active national cemetery, with lots of burials at the end of the Viet Nam War. The cemetery had been established by Clara Barton. And the trees had begun to mature out and there had been maybe ten or eleven monuments by various states who had soldiers interned there or who survived from there. I remember when I got there, Governor Jimmy Carter had a statue built. It was the Georgia memorial to all prisoners of war. I believe he was governor when it became a park. The statue was dedicated shortly after I arrived to memorialize all Americans that had been POWs throughout history. And I remember the day when Miss Lillian Carter and Amy Carter, the daughter who unveiled the monument. And it was between the cemetery and the prison park, on the edge of the cemetery. That was quite an event.

Shortly after Carter was elected president his home was only nineteen miles away. Visitation at Andersonville doubled and almost tripled. And it was kind of an awkward situation with only minimal facilities established there. The old superintendent's house had become a visitors' center. And the NPS hadn't really figured out what to do next. And there weren't many plans done by that time. I mean, just some basic shuffling had occurred the first few years. I think it was the sixth year that it had been a park.

And so we started writing management plans—cultural resource management plans, natural resource management plans. I was pretty young and inexperienced for doing some of that stuff. There wasn't a whole lot of help, except a little bit from the regional office. But we got some of the early documentation done. With the old wells and escape tunnels and things that still existed there were few plans. The maintenance guys historically had throw leaves in the wells

and tunnels and burn them to not start a grass fires. It was interesting trying to figure out how to manage some of those things.

After that, it was Whitman Mission National Historic Site, a well-established park. I mean, it was established in the '30s. And its legislation reflected that. Everything was about the Whitmans, how great they were with little reflection on the broader context. There was little in the enabling legislation, about the Cayuse, Walla Walla or Umatilla Indians that were part of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla that were down in Pendleton Oregon, not far away. And the site of their mission was Waiilatpu, which in Cayuse is people of the place where the rye grass grows. And there wasn't much being said or done about the Native American side of the story.

And so, I remember going down and talking with the tribal chairman. His name was Roonie Williams. And I said, "Can you help me find some traditionalists to talk about Cayuse ways and tradition." We had some cultural demonstrations singularly focused only on how it was on the Oregon Trail. So he said, "Yeah. I got a couple of them. Really good ones."

And so Marjorie Williams, a relative of his now married as Marjorie Menthorn, but she now uses her Indian given name Wanhenaka, and her cousin, Maynard Labador started doing cultural demonstrations and interpreting the story for us as seasonals and then permanents. One of the things that was really successful was Marjorie's art of tule mat making. Cayuse Indians covered their teepees with tule mats historically. And Marjorie's grandmother, Susie Williams, was noted for probably making many of the teepees used in the Pendleton Roundup. She was really good with her Singer sewing machine. And she had taught Marjorie how to make old traditional tule mats like they did in the old days. So, we would let Marjorie go down and cut tules and sew them together in the traditional way with a native hemp-like threading material to wind around them like they did. So, the question came: what do we do with these things? I mean, who do they belong to now?

And I remember there was a funeral. It was a Cayuse man who had been an elder in the tribe. And they were looking for some tule mats for the funeral in the long house where they had these traditional funerals. And it was kind of a funeral that was a cross between a Native American funeral and a Christian funeral, with a lot of drumming and singing and native languages. And Marjorie got popular with funeral mats that were traditionally buried with the deceased. And every time somebody died, they wanted a tule mat. Marjorie revived that tradition. And Whitman Mission had a role in reviving that tradition.

Maynard Labador was exceptional as a beading artist. And, he was really good at smoking brain tanned hides and at many other cultural technologies. His skills at cooking salmon and Eels on a plank was popular with park visitors. And so, he too started doing some things that brought natives traditions back to the story there.

The real story, as I saw it, was a clash between cultures. And that's why the Whitmans were killed. A "tewonot" or doctor was responsible for people that he tried to do anything for. A lot of the emigrants the Whitmans hosted were bringing in pox, measles, and other diseases. Narcisa Whitman would not allow Cayuse into her house because of lice and fleas they might bring. Cayuse saw that as an insult. Every time a wave of emigrants passed through more of the native people died. That's what happened. That's why they were killed. Then the Oregon volunteers came and hanged eight of them for what had happened there at Whitman Mission.

Whitman had been killed, his wife was killed, and other people were killed there. So it was a tough story. But I wish the Park Service would occasionally look back at some of those and think in today's way of looking at the world. Was that the best theme to tell there, about their martyrdom? So that was an interesting place.

That park assignment led to going to Badlands National Park, because Badlands NM had recently become a National Park in 1978. With park status the Lakota Sioux tribe allowed management of tribal lands in a south unit of the park. In return half of entrance receipts and half of any excess bison were turned over to the tribal parks board along with first rig hts to manage concessions in the park. The superintendent there wanted people who would try to bridge the cultures.

And then there was the big fossil story there, that I had never worked with before. And it wasn't the easiest thing. Dr. Phil Bjork of the South Dakota School of Mines would help out with seasonal training along with others like Jim Martin in the geology department. Visitors wanted to see the fossils. I remember there was a trail there. Do you remember the name of it, Vince?

Santucci: Yeah. Fossil Exhibit Trail.

McGinnis: Yes. And I remember the first time one of the plexiglass domes was broken. It made us sick to our stomachs. Then it was realized they weren't real. Maybe years earlier, but they had a series of casts with replacements ready. They had lost them earlier from vandalism. And over the years while I was there, I think there were three or four replacements installed where somebody would smashed one and take the plaster cast out. That was a struggle, trying to figure out what to do there. I remember John Clark, Dr. Clark,"Clarky", as the seasonals would call him. I think he was about eighty years old. He'd had worked at the Field Museum and collected in the place before it was a park. His answer, as I recall, was to develop another site he knew about that would be easier to monitor. And that didn't happen. But having him on staff was valuable because he connected with what historically had happened there, and all the things that had been taken from there to the Field Museum in pre-park times. I think there's a pretty big collection there from Badlands. But the story was also a short grass prairie grasslands story, a Native American story, eroded landscapes story and a major Golden Age of Mammals fossil story. And I remember trying to find out more about the erosional processes there and what could be said or interpreted about that was difficult. Didn't find anybody to help do that. There had never been any park directed resource management focused on the geologic story there. My job was interpretation and cultural resources. And we did start doing some planning there on cultural resources, I recall. The chief ranger was responsible for natural resources including bison and the reintroduced big horned sheep, prairie dogs to mention a few resource issues.

So, I think I was there four and a half years. Maybe five. And we sure had some high-quality seasonals. Trying to get people interested in paleontology, I remember one of our seasonals came up with the idea of an internship, funded internship, to get somebody interested in paleontology there. And I remember one guy, Kurt Pfaff, which I think you were involved with, ended up being the geologist for Great Basin National Park for a while. I don't know where he is now, but I think BADL was his first experience in the Park Service, with paleontological resources. Some seeds were planted that began to grow there about doing more with the paleo resources.

But it wasn't until Rachel Benton came to work there that there was a paleontologist who had worked on her master's degree, came back and worked there for a while. And then transferred to Fossil Butte where we worked out a deal where she, after I moved to Fossil Butte, where she could work part time and then go to school part time until she got her PhD. And keep her health insurance and everything. But we were able to work something out where she got her PhD. And then after that, she went back and became the first professional PHD paleontologist at FOBU and BADL. And then when they went through development there, I think she came up with a prep lab and some other things that made it a better story for the visitor.

Santucci: Very good. So I wanted to just go back for a moment. Do you remember the dates, roughly, just years, that you were at Whitman Mission? When you started and when you finished?

McGinnis: Sure. Yeah. Thanks to my last administrative officer, she wrote some of these things down. But it was Mammoth Cave, '72 to '75.

Santucci: Okay.

McGinnis: Andersonville, '76 to '78. Whitman Mission, '78 to '82. Badlands, '82 to '86. And then Fossil Butte, superintendent '87 through 2010.

Santucci: Okay. And do you remember what year you did the detail at Dinosaur?

McGinnis: Maybe late in 2000? I don't remember. Something like that. And then I did a detail at Padre Island National Seashore for ten months in the late 90s. The one at Dinosaur was about three and a half, four months at the end of the year. And it was around the holiday period.

Santucci: So, let's see. Badlands National Park is an important one. You were hired as the chief naturalist at Badlands National Park?

McGinnis: That's what they called it. It was the chief interpreter, and it had some oversight for cultural resources. If somebody wanted to do something with cultural resources, you were the one that got called.

Santucci: Okay. And that included the museum collections.

McGinnis: Yes.

Santucci: And so what were the responsibilities of the chief naturalist at Badlands? And did you supervise any other staff?

McGinnis: Let me tell you. It was pretty tough. There were one and a quarter million visitors in the summer, starting in the spring through fall. And then it dropped off with minimal help and it got really quiet. And there was just the chief and the assistant chief, and a history association person. And you covered everything after that through the winter. I mean, the trickle of visitors that you dealt with and a few other things. It was a busy, hard place to work in without other staff. Without any specialists, like a paleontologist or somebody that was dedicated to cultural resources. Or to take care of any collections that were there. There wasn't very good storage, I remember. I think they'd have it now with the development that they went through. I forgot what year that was. But Badlands had kind of grown out of its structural shell and it was busted in

some ways. And I think the collection was in two or three different places. And hopefully that's changed. I'm sure it has.

Santucci: So, having the opportunity to work at Badlands as a seasonal ranger in 1985 and 1986, one of the things that really stood out for me that remains the best experience I ever had for training, was the two-week seasonal interpretive training that you coordinated at Badlands. It included a week at Camp Bob Marshall in the Black Hills. Can you tell us about how you designed and pulled that together, the seasonal training for rangers?

36:50

McGinnis: Yes. That wasn't easy to make it a full two weeks. But I think people needed it. I mean, there are several themes there that people had to be somewhat familiar with. And I remember trying to pick seasonals and volunteers and interns that had a range of experiences. You know, somebody who was really good with botany because of the short grass prairie there. I always tried to get somebody interested in geology. Somebody that was a good birder. Somebody that loved the Native American stories. Somebody that had zoology it was tough to get seasonals, but we always had one or two or sometimes three Native American seasonals there, so that the other staff could ask questions and help each other. And we had some really good, bright people come through as seasonals in that park. And I think it took a while to kind of set that training up. I mean, we had the sectary of agriculture for the state come and talk about what was going on in the Buffalo Gap Grasslands and elsewhere in the state. I remember Tim Giago, Editor of the *Lakota Times,* the Lakota newspaper. I remember getting him or somebody from his staff to come and speak. He was an interesting guy. It was tough to line that up. And actually, that took a couple of months to get that all lined up and ready to go when the staff got there. And we had SCAs there, maybe six or seven of them. I forgot how many seasonals. Then we got the internship going there, that tried to get some specialized people with fossils.

Occasionally we got an odd duck. I remember, I think it was the last year I was there, we had a guy that was going to get his master's in paleontology at an unstated school. And his last day before he moved out of his apartment, one of the other seasonals said, "Hey, this guy's got a saber tooth cat." And we're pretty sure it came out of the Buffalo Gap Grasslands. He claimed that he found it somewhere else, on private land. I remember turning that over to the chief ranger. And I'm not sure exactly what happened legally. But never heard from the guy again. I think you may have heard about that story.

Santucci: Yes.

McGinnis: And so I remember it was really important to make it clear to seasonal staff at Badlands and at Fossil Butte that it's great to love fossils and be excited about them, but you don't want to have them while you're working at a park.

I remember at Fossil Butte, it was sort of like if you have fossils, describe what you've got. We'll put it in this letter, tape it and we'll sign it. And if there's ever a question that comes up. Because I remember hearing at Fossil Butte before I got there, somebody was challenged as to being involved in the fossil market while working there at the park. And I didn't want that to happen to anybody. And I don't think it did except once in the early 90s with one seasonal at a private commercial quarry over a weekend. I don't think it ever did there at Fossil Butte but once.

And it created a better relationship, I'm sure, with the commercial people that were outside the park. That the park needed a relationship with them because they took the pressure off the park from people who wanted fossils. You could buy them at a reasonable price that came off of private or state-leased lands. And the park needed a relationship with those people to find good specimens that would tell the story, and to help science over the long term. Donations happened many times. 41:15. The park was given a cast of one of the early crocodiles, one of the first crocodiles that was found. Right when the park VC was dedicated. A guy named Ron Muse and his partner Cliff Miles, They brought it in and I couldn't tell if it was original or not. I mean, they were really good at casting. And the commercial quarry people I think respected the relationship with science that the park had. And they would bring things in they found to get the paleontologist at the park, help figure out what it was. And I think the park picked up on some things, like these tail swishes in the sediments that are great trace fossil with the imprint of the tail motion.

Santucci: Yes. Mm hmm.

42:12

McGinnis: And we have a whole exhibit on them now with Arvid recognizing what they represented and building an exhibit on these fish and their tail motion fossilized motion in the sediments.

Santucci: Sure.

McGinnis: So, and the leaf collection also grew even with there always being a major focus on the fish. But the leaves, it was a good time during the '90s to build a collection of leaves to tell the story how we can for instance tell the temperature and rainfall from those leaves.

Santucci: Sure.

McGinnis: So there's a whole display of those beautiful, wonderful things that the legislation said, you know, the delicacy of these specimens is one of the important things making it a national monument.

Santucci: Sure.

McGinnis: So we've got the scientific story, the beautiful art of nature story. And a lot of it was possible because of cooperation with the state and thought private quarries and the commercial people there in the basin. And of course, sometimes if you got some good stuff that you're putting together, other people want it. And I think you probably heard about the attempted theft story at Fossil Butte.

Santucci: Hey, Dave? Dave? I still wanted to ask some questions about Badlands, to keep it chronologic.

McGinnis: Sure.

Santucci: Can we go back to Badlands, and then we'll jump forward to Fossil Butte?

McGinnis: You got it.

Santucci: Okay. Thanks. So the training, we were talking about the training. How were you able to get the parks in the Black Hills to come together at Camp Bob Marshall for the weeklong interpretive training there?

McGinnis: Well, I think that might have been a byproduct of the Black Hills Badlands and Lakes Association. There was this big swapping of promotional material for tourism, for the welcome centers across the state. And we would have these meetings every once in a while and share what was new at Mount Rushmore, what was new at Wind Cave, what was new at some of the state places. And the idea came up about trying to do some cooperative training. And I think somebody at Mount Rushmore said, at Camp Bob Marshall, "When you guys are doing your training and we're doing our training, we could get together to do some specialized training there, and bring some people in." And it worked. I think it was done a couple of times while I was there. I don't know if it continued. But it made a bigger group. I forgot how many interpreters there were, but quite a few there. And it focused on interpretive skills, as I recall.

Santucci: Yeah, that was a great experience.

McGinnis: Yeah.

Santucci: Really was. Thank you for that. So, let's see. Some people that you worked with Bob Valen.

McGinnis: Mm hmm.

Santucci: Can you tell us about Bob?

McGinnis: Yes, Bob came from Cabrillo National Monument to Badlands. I think we were there together maybe for one year. Where did Bob move to? He went down to Big Thicket. I'm not sure after—

Santucci: Guadalupe?

McGinnis: Where?

Santucci: Guadalupe Mountains?

McGinnis: I don't know if he was there or not. I keep up with Bob on Facebook. I think he's in Spokane now. His wife, they had a dual career and she was in fire. And she was, what's that recreational? Coulee Dam NRA, that's where they were. And that's where he is in retirement.

Santucci: Okay. And then Jay Schuller.

McGinnis: Yes, Jay. What an interpreter. I remember when Jay was hired, he was worried that people would think he was too old. I forgot what his age was. But he was a really good interpreter. He was a good writer. He was really good with wayside exhibitry. As a matter of fact, he became the chief naturalist at Badlands after I left. And I asked him to come up and help develop some of the first wayside exhibits at Fossil Butte. And he could write trail brochures really well. He was a little bit of an artist. He was a bird expert, along with a lot of other things. And just really a prince of a guy. And I think he did some great things there. And a couple of other people did, too. You know, down through the years. I didn't get back to Badlands once I

got to Fossil Butte. It wasn't till just after I retired that I've been able to go back and visit some of these places. And it's really great to see what's happened in the meantime. I think I visited Andersonville once since I've retired, and Whitman Mission twice. And Badlands, I think I went back for their dedication.

Santucci: So during your time, you worked under two superintendents. I think Gil Blinn and Don Falvy?

48:16

McGinnis: Gill Blinn and Don Falvey. Yes

Santucci: Let's see. And then some of the people that worked under you as seasonals. Alan Scott, Dave Leiboff, Joe Meehan, Chris Leahy, Ben Fullon, Deb Bottoms. There were a lot of good ones

McGinnis: Yes. Alan's the chief, I think he may still be chief interpreter at Everglades. Dave Leiboff became the administrative officer at Statue of Liberty. And then I think he left the Park Service to work for some other government agency. I remember one of our seasonals left to go work at Yellowstone. Got bear mauled. And after that, I think didn't work for the Park Service. Maybe she went back for one more season there at Yellowstone. But she was really great interpreting bison. And of course she had her stories down pretty good when she went to Yellowstone and would interpret bison up there.

Santucci: And so you brought up the internship, the paleontology internship. We wrote that up together. We called it the Ferdinand Hayden Paleontological Internship at Badlands.

McGinnis: Yes. Yes.

Santucci: And Kirk Pfaff was hired in 1986 to fill that position.

McGinnis: Yeah.

Santucci: So that was forward thinking by you. The internship program for the Park Service has been very rich in terms of creating opportunities for students and getting good work done.

McGinnis: Yes.

Santucci: So when I was there in '85 and '86, some of the interpretive programming included working in the visitors' center, evening program, hikes in the morning and in the afternoon. There was the canyon climb. There was the Fossil Exhibit Trail as well. And then there was the night sky program. And that was extremely popular.

McGinnis: Yes.

Santucci: And then there was the night prowl. So were any of those—

McGinnis: Oh, there was, with the great night sky there, we had three Celestron telescopes. And it was a great night sky program there. We got trained by a professional astronomer, I forgot where they came in from. But they were really good at training the staff there to use the scopes and also read the sky.

Santucci: Yeah. Visitors under your tenure there were able to really experience a broad range of interpretive activities. So were some of those did you bring those to Badlands with you to get them going? Or did they pre-exist?

McGinnis: I think a lot of them pre-existed. But you can't be there without changing some things. But some of the seasonals really liked the canyon climb. And I think they stopped it. After I left, I think a couple of years, a year or two years later, they stopped it. They thought it was too risky. But boy, it got people down close to the resource. One of the seasonals took people up Telephone Pole Canyon. And you could find these little water pockets where you'd have the floating mud cracks and you could find armored mud balls and all those wonderful things that unless you go on a hike like that, you're not going to see them. And actually, it was Joe Meehan that I remember most for doing a great canyon climb hike.

52:04

Santucci: Tim Meehan? Tim Meehan?

McGinnis: On one canyon climb they ended up swimming. (laughs) Joe Meehan went off and worked in Alaska for some parks after a season or two.

Santucci: Yeah, that was Tim Meehan.

McGinnis: I remember he brought a radio back that had a lot of mud in it. And it was like, what happened here? (laughter) So he had it in a plastic bag and it leaked, I guess. But he was forgiven because he had a wonderful experience and the people did, too, that went with him. And he had a pretty big group. Joe had good safe habits and he was well trusted with visitors. The radio was on its last leg and had been replaced and was ready to be excessed property after that season.

I remember one thing out the Doors and Windows Trail, trying to make that safer for people. And I remember saying how do we mark this trail? And what we did is we came up with this little post system. It was correlated with a guide. And you'd walk from a post with one ring around it to a post with two rings and so forth. With the fifth being a fat ring, and these posts were like six inches above the ground that had been, there'd been a drill hole and then a two-inch pipe that was six inches tall that had these stripes on it that indicated where you were. And from each one, you could see the next one. So you could navigate. All you had to do is just search and you'd find it just standing there looking for it. And people could work their way out and find their way back through the maze, so to speak, of where that arid landscape was beginning to start. We had a little interpretive guide that followed those little ringed post symbols.

And I remember doing that and that got that trail a lot more used and it made it safer. The canyon climb that I started kind of went out in that area and jumped off of it. And I took my grandkids there a couple of years ago. And they had a cable ladder in one of the places now. And you know, it went back and behind and up above the, when you come down, drop down to the visitors' center, what was that area called? The big slump area there know as Cedar Pass Slump. Anyhow—

Santucci: Cedar Pass?

McGinnis: Yeah, Cedar Pass. But the little slumped area that was always wet. There was a trail in there. Oh, gosh.

Santucci: Cliff Shelf Nature Trail.

McGinnis: Yes. That's it. Yes. And the canyon climb that I took people on was kind of back behind that. I think Jay may have stopped the canyon climb. But I don't recall ever having people have accidents in there. I mean, occasionally you'd get somebody that just didn't like to be there, they wanted an easy walk and they got into it and this was too much for them. And you could easily get them back out and make the trip and then come back where they were.

We started a new trail where you went from the Doors and Windows Trail. It was a grasslands trail. You went back and connected back by Telephone Pole Canyon somewhere there. And we built a boardwalk over another grasslands that I think got people into the grass prairie a lot more. It was near where one of the prairie dog colonies. We kind of skirted around the edge of it where there was a lot of native grasses. And you could see the prairie dogs, too.

Santucci: A couple of other names of people that worked there. [Vseverl Vicki Visher, Diane Sontag?] Let's see. Andy Banta.

McGinnis: Yes. I hired Andy for Fossil Butte. He was one of the LE rangers and firefighters there at Badlands. And he did a good job coming in as the chief ranger. Andy after a few years, and doing a great job with resource management, he started working on the erosional issues in the park, stopping it where it had been overgrazed, and where all these stock dams had allowed erosion after failing. Andy went on to be superintendent of Fort Union, in North Dakota.

Santucci: Fort Union.

McGinnis: Yes. And he just retired recently.

Santucci: Yes. So, some of the relationships with the community and locals, so I remember you bringing the Hustead family from Wall Drug to the park for a potluck. Any recollections of communication or relationship with the families at Wall Drug? Ted Hustead and others?

McGinnis: Ted was quite a remarkable guy. He was the South Dakota host to the world. And he started serving on the Badlands Natural History Association Board when it first started. And because he saw the need for books, he also started his own bookstore there at Wall Drug, which became an incredible bookstore for cowboy culture and everything that is in South Dakota. He was long-lived. And he did great things for the park with the history association. And he loved being on that history association.

And then his son started running Wall Drug, and then his grandson ran it. I don't know who's running it now. But there was a good park relationship with him. There was a good relationship with Keith Crew, who ran the prairie homestead outside the edge of the park. Now, of course, there's Minuteman Missile National Historic Site. When we worked there, we knew that we were the most heavily defended national park in the world because there were two or three nuclear missile siloes outside the park just on the boundary. And the Wall Drug sign said, you know, "Free coffee for missileers" that stop at the drugstore on their way back to the air force base that would serve out there. That was an interesting aspect of that park. Minuteman

Missile National Historic Site came later, it has a separate superintendent, but it shares a lot with Badlands, I know now.

And I helped secure an International VIP interns from Russia for them, I got him to work there for two seasons. And they loved it, and he loved it, too. I remember he'd fly into Salt Lake with funding from Rotary Clubs and I took him over there to Badlands, introduced him to everybody. He lived with seasonals at Badlands and worked at the missile sites giving tours. And he helped them do all this research on things in Russia about the SALT Treaty. The treaty called for us making a national historic site out of one of these missile sites, siloes. Or actually two of them. Russia didn't sign up to do the same. But it was really great for some of the retired missileers who volunteered out there to work with Igor Prokofyev, who was the guy that I brought in as a, Rotaractor from Saratov, Russia. And for two summers, and we got him an international visa and Rotary travel funding grants to come and do that. We never could get two seasons for anybody else. It was one seasonal on those visas to come over. And sometimes just for whatever reasons, they wouldn't do it. But that's another whole story. I'm getting off track here.

Santucci: Okay. So thank you for that. I wanted to talk about your recollections and the relationship with Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and the tribe. You had a couple of seasonal staff. Tony Wounded Head. You had Carmen American Horse and I think it was Cindy Whirlwind Horse, who worked for you.

McGinnis: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Tony Apple too.

Santucci: And you managed the visitor centers at Cedar Pass and White River.

McGinnis: Right.

Santucci: Can you talk a little bit about the relationship between the tribe and Badlands National Park during your tenure?

1:01:47

McGinnis: I think it was a pretty good relationship. Occasionally some things kind of didn't go well with concessions managers and the tribe. But it was a good deal for all. I'm not sure how long the deal had been going on, maybe four, five, six years. I forgot what the date was on when that relationship started. And when it changed from national monument to national park with the addition of tribal lands. But we had some good people. Bill Lone Hill South Unit Manager/Ranger, Tony Apple. Tony was one of the Wounded Knee survivor grandkids. And he could really tell some stories. And I'm sure he did tell at the White River Visitors Center, just knowing what he knew.

There was one lady that worked for us that had also worked at Mount Rushmore, because she was a sculptress. And I think that was Maryland Wounded Head. She had a brother Tony that also worked there.

Santucci: Right. Tony Wounded Head.

McGinnis: Yeah. And I don't know how that relationship is still going. But there was a big effort to get the South Unit staffed and get them up to work occasionally at the busier Cedar Pass, too. And to get them engaged in the seasonal training and give part of the seasonal training. I remember there was a trip that took the new seasonal staff up to Coony Table for lunch and talk to native people that were up there. Red Shirt Table was an adventure to go up to as was Palmer Table. And I'm not sure how easily accessible some of those places are now in the south unit, on some of those two-track roads. I'm not sure if any of them have ever been improved or not. But you know, half the bison, each year when they were rounded up, or whenever they were rounded up were transferred to the tribal park's board. And they had their own park where they would stock bison for hunts. And some of them were just killed and eaten and passed out to tribal members. It was a good relationship. And the preference for being the concessioner in the park, that was a good deal.

I remember this effort one year for the tribe to take over the park's management. Under a particular law that had to do with them having their own school system instead of BIA schools. And they did have some of their own school systems. That was probably a better deal for them. The kids probably did better. And they were going to try to do that with the park. And I remember there was some assessments and some review teams from the tribe that came around. It never worked out. But I remember the rest of us were thinking, (laughs) well, do we get moved on and somebody take our job? But it was an interesting experience with the tribe and the park trying to work things out over the years. And I think it's been a good experience for them and the Park Service. I think it's still status quo, a good relationship.

Santucci: Very good. A couple more names came to mind. Greg Ridley. Do you remember Greg?

McGinnis: Yeah. He was our first handicapped SCA we hosted. He was in a chair. And he was, I forgot where he was injured in his spine. He was shot in Chicago. And the guy really loved being in the park. And I think we learned a lot about how the visitors center could be adapted when the new visitors center was built later on. And that was kind of an eye opener for a lot of us about what we could do around the park. You know, little things. He was there for one season. I'm sure it was a great experience for him. I'm not sure what he's doing now. But I think he worked out well for all. He talked to a lot of visitors. And he was decent in his skills the way he was able to do things.

Santucci: Great. Tom Caulfield, Do you remember Tom?

McGinnis: Yes. And I hope Tom got his job in a zoo somewhere. He loved large mammals. And he was a good interpreter on mammals in the park. But I think his ultimate goal was to either work for the Park Service or get a job in a zoo. And I lost track of him.

Santucci: Yeah. I'm trying to get a hold of him as well. The last I communicated with him is when he had an incident when he was hired at Agate Fossil Beds where—

McGinnis: Oh, yeah.

Santucci: Liberty Baptist College came in to collect from the stenomatolis quarry and it was very troubling, that whole incident. Anyway, just wanted to go back one more time, focused on some paleontology and things that you may recall with either John Clark or Phil Bjork, Jim

Martin from the School of Mines. Any other researchers, like Don [Prothero?] or anybody else. Do you recall anything that stands out from a paleontological perspective?

McGinnis: None other than the issue about paleo soils. I remember Dr. Clark, he knew they were there. "I don't know why I didn't write a paper on it or something on it." Clark said (laughs) But it was one of those things, yeah, it's there and we all should have been able to figure this out. But there are paleo soils there, and that's what we're looking at, you know? Yes I remember one summer when Prothero did come out, I think the ranger staff maybe got him around. I don't know exactly where he worked, but it was either him or somebody from the School of Mines that went through some pretty interesting weather experiences out in the field there in Badlands. Somebody went through a microburst that got blown down a canyon area. And I think Rachel Benton was telling me about that. But that was after I was there.

Santucci: Okay. Another really important topic from Badlands are the incidents of fossil theft that occurred at the park. Can you share any recollections about that?

McGinnis: At Badlands?

Santucci: Yes.

McGinnis: Well, it was anytime you went to the town of Scenic, and everybody would stop there because they always had something interesting there. Either a box of baby badgers or a new fossil or a titanothere head. Or a really nice looking oreodont skeleton. And they wouldn't say much. And hard to know what was going on there. I remember there was at one point in time somebody was talking about issuing fossil licenses from the tribal office. But it's sort of like the best thing was just to kind of stay out of tribal park stuff as long as it wasn't on the land inside the National Park Service area. But there was surely stuff going on there that probably wasn't good. Hard to know. I mean, there's a lot of square mileage in that national park area.

Santucci: Yup.

McGinnis: Especially the south unit. It's really hard to know.

Santucci: Did you ever, do you recall the name Dr. Boyce?

McGinnis: That sounds familiar.

Santucci: Yeah, he was a physician who had a large collection of fossils from the White River Badlands. And his son is a very well-established commercial fossil dealer that specializes in White River fossils.

McGinnis: Mm hmm. Yeah.

Santucci: Do you recall the day that I came back from visiting the titanothere graveyard reporting on an elderly gentleman collecting fossils from there?

McGinnis: Yes.

Santucci: And reporting that to Lloyd Kortge

McGinnis: Yes.

Santucci: What do you recall about that?

McGinnis: I just remember that you were kind of surprised that the guy was out there and that he was pretty clear about what he was doing, as I recall. I don't remember the discussion, but it was sort of like whoa, what's this all about? And it's like I think he'd been doing it a long time. He said that he'd been doing it a long time, right?

Santucci: Yes. Uh huh. He admitted.

McGinnis: And nobody had bothered him before.

Santucci: And he had collected a large turtle, an Archelon turtle, with the assistance of the Black Hills Institute. And we made a connection between this older gentleman, by the name of Frank Watson, and the Black Hills Institute. At the time, we didn't really know who the Black Hills Institute were. But we learned quickly that they were involved in illegal collecting in the Badlands.

McGinnis: Yeah, I remember Dr. Phil Bjork, I think maybe the first time that we talked before he helped with some seasonal training. He talked about the Black Hills Institute. And one of the individuals that was one of the owners. And that they, he'd tried to get a degree from the South Dakota School of Mines. And I don't know that he ever finished his MS degree. But there was some bad blood between them. And it was a sort of a warning or cautionary comment. Yes.

Santucci: One more final topic from Badlands, and then we can talk about whether you want to move on to Fossil Butte today or schedule that for another day. So the final question is that you had offered me the opportunity to work late into the season in September, October, and November of 1985.

McGinnis: Right.

Santucci: And one of the things you had me to do was to help prepare a white paper related to management of fossils on public lands—

McGinnis: Right.

Santucci: —that you presented at the first federal fossil conference at Dinosaur National Monument. Can you talk a little bit about that and about that conference?

McGinnis: Yeah. It was the first fossil resource conference held by the NPS at Dinosaur. And I don't remember too much about it, Vince. I remember trying to talk about some of the approaches that we took to interpreting there. But I don't remember much about the white paper.

Santucci: I can send you a copy of it.

McGinnis: Yeah, yeah. I know that there was one and that you had worked on that. And you kind of got stuck there in the Badlands because of weather, didn't you?

Santucci: Yes. Uh huh.

McGinnis: (laughs) It was. I'm hearing now, "how the heck did I get out of this place?" The weather there was tough.

Santucci: Yeah. Lloyd Kortge rescued me. Lloyd Kortge rescued us from a big snow drift.

McGinnis: I got stuck going back my last time there in the spring outside of Kyle. And I couldn't go forward and I couldn't go back. And there was this Indian guy, he was stuck pretty close to my vehicle, my truck. And I said, "What do we do?"

He said, "There's only one thing to do." He said, "Father Eagle Sour in Kyle will take us in for the night." We got mine unstuck and we went there. And there was this Jesuit priest, a really nice guy. We pretty much spent the whole night talking about things, about Native American things. And he was the parish priest for just the Kyle district of the reservation. And he served us some wonderful commodity food. And it was just – it was an interesting experience being there that night, snowed in. It was late afternoon before we could even get out of there, and before trucks had cleared these six-foot drifts that blocked the way to get back to the park.

Of course, my youngest son was born there one bad winter, on January15th. We had to drive 80 miles into Rapid City for him to be born. I remember the rangers were reading up on childbirth. (laughter) They ordered some things to make sure that they could, as the local EMTs, that they could give a hand if needed. (laughs) I remember we made three trips that winter to get into Rapid City ahead of snowstorms, just in case. Everything did work out finally. It was decent weather when he was born. But it was cold weather. I mean, it had dropped to 35 below zero that winter.

Santucci: Excellent. Well, we've gone a little bit more than an hour. And I wanted to make sure that you're still good with continuing.

1:17:20

[END OF RECORDING 1]

[END OF NOVEMBER 13, 2020 SESSION]

[START OF RECORDING 2]

[START OF NOVEMBER 16, 2020 SESSION]

00:00

Santucci: Okay. Today is Monday, November 16, 2020. And my name is Vincent Santucci, the senior paleontologist for the National Park Service Paleontology Program. Today we are continuing our second interview with retired National Park Service employee Dave McGinnis. Dave's career with the National Park Service includes positions at two important fossil parks, including Badlands National Park and Fossil Butte National Monument. Today's interview is being conducted over the telephone from Dave's home in Kentucky, and I am participating from my home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. So, welcome back, Dave, and thanks.

McGinnis: Well, thank you.

Santucci: First question, Dave, is that we were able to get through most of your career and all the way through Badlands National Park. So we're going to focus today a lot on Fossil Butte National Monument and also your tenure as an acting superintendent at Dinosaur National Monument. Is there anything that has occurred to you since we last spoke that you might want to speak about relative to Badlands or other Park Service assignments?

McGinnis: No, I think we've pretty well covered Badlands. I haven't recalled anything that seemed like it was an important thing that we left out. But I could be wrong. Something might get triggered today here in our conversation.

Santucci: Okay. I think more of just a general philosophical view. So why do you think that Badlands National Park is a crown jewel for the national park system?

01:42

McGinnis: It's got some incredible resources there. Theodore Roosevelt has some eroded landscape, and it's got fossils, too. But the Lakota Sioux theme as well as the geologic themes make it's a wonderful place. And so many people come through there. When I was there, it was about one and a quarter million visitors each summer. And I don't know if it's more or less than that now, but that's what I remember about it. It's a busy place.

Santucci: Yes.

McGinnis: Probably busier than a lot of other fossil parks. So it's exposing a lot of people to earth themes.

Santucci: Almost as busy as Wall Drug. (laughter) Okay. So, how did you wind up going to Fossil Butte in Wyoming? What transpired for that to occur?

McGinnis: Well, I think I was close to the end of my fourth or fifth year at Badlands. And Badlands was a cycle. I mean, you'd spend time in the Spring picking staff and setting up the training. You'd train seasonals. You'd go through summer programs that were from six in the morning for the canyon climb until ten o'clock at night. And then in the wintertime, everybody was gone. And you had to run the visitors center and deal with questions and everything else that the park superintendent wanted you to do. Cultural resource planning began to take more and more time. And then the whole cycle started over again each season.

There were a few challenging things there that were different each year. But I think I was anxious to try managing someplace by myself. Fossil Butte, when I went there as the acting opportunity in 1986, I think it was in October, there were three people there. There was the superintendent, an admin tech. And then there was a permanent ranger. And then you had funding for a couple of seasonals, somebody to do something in maintenance, and somebody to kind of carry the load in the temporary visitors center trailer that was out below the face of Fossil Butte, that had a trail going up through it. And there wasn't much there other than a few specimens, a few handmade exhibits and quarried terraces. It was a challenge. But things really changed about the end of 1987. And so I was there for about a year. Became familiar with the story. And all of a sudden some things began to happen.

Santucci: Hey Dave. Dave, before you get into that. How did you go from the acting superintendent to the permanent superintendent?

McGinnis: Well, there were two or three positions open. There was Ben's Old Fort, Fossil Butte and I think another small park. And Lorraine Mintzmeyer, the first female regional director in the Park Service, she wanted to put some people in there and give them a chance to see if they liked the change working in a small park superintendency. So I offered to do one of those details. And I was eager to try that. There was the understanding that if you did the acting, you could apply for it, because it would be leaving one position for another at the same grade GS-11. So, it's not always that way. Of course, Dinosaur wasn't that way. And my detail to Padre Island National Seashore was not that way. They were higher graded and just offered as developmental details after hiring registers were developed..

Santucci: Okay. Very good. And so your detail, was it 120 days?

McGinnis: Yes. I think they added a few days onto it, just like a lot of them. I had days added onto the Dinosaur. And I think months added on to the Padre Island. Padre Island was ten months, between Superintendents.

Santucci: Okay. Did you transition then directly from the acting into the permanent superintendent? Or was there a hiatus?

McGinnis: No. Directly. I remember getting the call. It was like, "Do you want to stay there for good?" It was like, sure. (laughter) It was a GS11 at the time. And I was a GS11 at Badlands. So it was same grade. But it eventually of course went to a GS-13.

Santucci: So, just to keep it sort of in a chronologic context, that when you arrived there at the beginning during your detail, who had been the previous superintendent? And can you speak a little bit about the history of Fossil Butte prior to your arrival?

McGinnis: Sure, Fossil Butte was established October 23rd of 1972 And it was the same time that Cumberland Island came into the system. But the first person to be there at Fossil Butte was a detailed ranger in charge from Teton NP. There were all these handmade signs from the Teton sign shop…he was busy. You know, the heavy dark brown routed wood signs. And I don't know if the ranger, who he got to do the temporary exhibits, but he was there for a while. That guy ended up at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, he was a trainer there. I can't remember his name right now.

But then there were three others, before Paul Geraudy, who's the one that was there right before me. So, between 1972 and 1986, there were four superintendents and two Acting (Dan Davis being one during 1985). Close to the time that Paul left the massive slump occurred that buried a large section of Union Pacific track. It was a million dollar plus project for them to reroute their tracks. The park was protected and some type of interpretation occurred in a trailer visitor center at the base of Fossil Butte Historic Quarry Trail each of those years. Each superintendent averaged 3.5 years each. And then from 1987 to 2010 was Dave McGinnis.

Santucci: (laughs) A record that will be hard to beat.

McGinnis: Well, you know, I thought about that. Because you had some questions about that. And it's like, for me, the fun thing about being there is that what kept me there, the first ten years or so, was that the idea of development started percolating about '87, '88. And then things began to happen. There was a, the road was built by the state, the first part of development in '87, '88. That took a year. Eight-eight to '89, the visitors center, the DCP was finished off. A new GMP came about. And it was sort of figured out what would happen where. There had been three alternatives for the site of the park. But there was a lot of interplay with the community before that. The Ulrichs had asked the Park Service to buy their house, their house, that big building that they had as a gallery. And their question was, why should the government build something brand new when there's something already built accommodating visitors that come out in this area.

And so the Denver Service Center had to spend a big chunk of money, I'm not sure what it was, I remember hearing it a couple of times, to look at their place, evaluate it from an engineering point of view and tell them why it wasn't suitable. And they didn't like the answers. They were unhappy with the Denver Service Center. I remember hearing that from people that worked at the Denver Service Center, and I remember hearing it from Carl and Shirley Ulrich.

Then there was this idea to build it in town, do something in town. Spend some money in the town of Kemmerer. And Nancy Peternal, who was a county commissioner, great lady, loved her. She wanted to see something done. But her idea was to put it in the town. And there was the old LDS church building on Main Street, a big, cavernous building. And she knew that was coming open. And the Farm Loan Board potentially could get a grant for that for $70K. And then the Park Service could have this free building in town on the Main Street.

And eventually what happened with that, because the cooperation between the state and the Park Service, and the state was willing to build some roads to get this started. Malcom Wallop, the senator, said, well, this is really tough, the pork barrel is – he didn't like using the pork barrel. I mean, that was part of his whole thing. It was to not ask for anything more than anybody else. But when the state wanted to do a lasting legacy project around the state, and they saw this as a prime example of something that would be just ideal to partner on, Wallop said, "Well, this is a good deal for me, too. Because if you put up a third of the development cost, I can sell this to the other senators. And they'll go along with it because I've got the thing partially funded and they don't for their projects."

And so the idea of doing it with the state putting up the road was going to be about a third of the cost. And I think it was 6.3 million the Park Service had to do everything else.

12:14

And so it quickly shifted from we're not going to buy something from somebody else, or we're not going to put it in town. The Park Service traditionally has traditionally done something in the park because, to put your people out there at the scene of everything, it's a lot easier to tell the story, to protect the resource, and to get people out there where people were going to visit.

And so that started moving along. But there weas a lot of internal discussion. There'd been this paper called "The Fossil Butte Futures Project." And Nancy Pedernal, the lead politician in the county, and the Ulrich family wanted to see something done differently. Which

was tough. I remember dealing with it over the course of probably a year. Trying to figure how do we make everybody happy here?

Then we also had to, at the same time, deal with what we really wanted to do. The DCP had a few interpretive ideas, but not much. So we had to amend the development concept plan and come up with a new general management plan once it was figured out which of the three DCP alternatives would be done.

And one of the things that kind of got that Fossil Butte Futures thing started was there was sixty thousand dollars in planning money to figure out what to do before I got there. I think Paul Geraudy was trying to deal with that. And it was kind of a muddled situation, I think, for a while. But once the idea that Wyoming was going to have a centennial in 1990, and these projects around the state were going to be dedicated, that's what allowed this thing to move. And it moved pretty quick. So, it was like a year or two to get everything kind of planned out. And then the first thing that was done was the state spent its money to build the road from the old county highway up through the north to where a spring and picnic area could be established. And that was the main two-track road that had been graveled two superintendents prior. And there had been some historic buildings torn down, too. There was a ranch with a log home on it. And there was another site that there. The park had feral or wild horses running loose, eleven of them, that disappeared out of the park. And they had been feral in the park for a number of years.

I heard a story that one of the ranchers said, "I'll take care of that for you, if you want." And somebody had told him, "Well, that would be nice." So, I think there was a glue factory that accepted the horses, apparently. Or something happened. Anyhow, there were a lot of things that happened in hopes that the park would be cleaned and issues cleared up. There was some fencing that went on for a number of years. Ruby Point, do you remember that little finger of land at the north end of the park?

Santucci: Yes, uh huh.

McGinnis: That was unfenced when I got there. I think that was like three or four miles, maybe five or six miles. But anyhow to protect the park and keep cows out and not have to not deal with hunting and grazing trespass there anymore, that had to be dealt with. And I remember when development got going, a guy named Dan Glatter, do you remember that name?

Santucci: Yes, uh huh.

McGinnis: Dan said, "Dave, you guys are developing that park. Is there anything I can do?"

And I said, "It costs money to do most of these things out here."

He said, "Well, if you had ten thousand dollars, what would you do with it?"

I said, "Well, I'd fence Ruby Point." And I don't know that Dan had even been out there yet when he first visited Fossil Butte.

And so with that ten thousand dollars, we found a few other dollars in the regional pot of money. And we fenced the rest of the park, which completed the boundary fencing and the ability to kind of protect it. And before that happened, we had a moose shot out there and some

other things. People were looking for places to filch fossils. That was an easy place to drive back into. And if there's no fence, you know, it was hard to deal with it.

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So, the road went in. It took about a year, half a year to plan it and it took a year to get the contract up for the gravel and the asphalt and everything. And they'd built a really darn good road up there. And the county did it. And I think they had kind of a blank check from the state to do that. And looking back on it, I'm not sure how they were able to spend county and state money on federal property like that. But they did. And I didn't see any negative parts of it. The deputy regional director and the land commissioner kind of worked it out.

And the land commissioner, Howard Schriner said, "We can make this happen, boys." So that was the trick. Once they figured out they could help by building this road, which they're good at, things rolled quickly. And they had good funding sources for doing it. That opened things up. And then the Denver Service Center started working with us, and the Harpers Ferry Center. And the water resource people started working with us because there had to be water to survive out there. And that was a really big question. I mean, the legislation had talked about water that was not needed for administrative purposes could be made available to people that grazed on the monument at the time and people who would trail through the park.

And there was one source that was horizontally drilled by the BLM for the Park Service way back in the late 1970s probably—I forgot the guy's name. I can't remember these previous superintendents' names very well. He'd gone off to work at Little Bighorn. And I think he retired there in Montana, than part of it I think he got it drilled and piped outside of the park to these stock troughs. [The BLMs District Office did the work]. But there was always trouble with it [leaking after each winter]. So that part of the legislation had been fulfilled.

We had to deal with the grazing for a while. But the legislation said there would be grazing for ten years and then it could be extended up to ten more years. So, '72 to '82, '82 to '92. They had been into it, past the ten years, and into it maybe four or five more years. So they saw it coming. And letters had gone in, "Oh, we've got to have these 700 AUMs (animal unit months) on the Butte. That's going to hurt us." But the BLM had been doing some things to improve their capacity on some of the grazing allotments. (laughs) Reading how they had talked about they had improved it so that they could handle more AUMs or be able to manage in such a way that it wasn't taking a beating anymore.

And so the secretary of the Interior saw that, too. And said, "Well, since the BLM has done such a good job here, you won't have to lose any AUMs. You can get it off BLM land on the Rock Creek Allotment and we can take them off the Butte." And I don't think the BLM liked it very well. (laughs) But that solved that. And so then it was just stock trailing that was going to continue. And that's going to be there forever. The legislation said in perpetuity. That means forever.

And so when you read about the delicate fins and fossils and everything that the legislation says about fossils, you've got this stock trailing that's equally as important in the legislation. I mean, probably even more words are used in the legislation about grazing and stock

drives than they said about fossils. So, that was a tough deal. But I think over time, we were able to deal with it pretty well.

Santucci: In reference to the legislation for Fossil Butte, can you just speak briefly on how Fossil Butte was established, and the requirement for the governor of the state of Wyoming to support any monument?

McGinnis: It was, the superintendent at Dinosaur, the idea of a park had been there since the 1950s. And one of the stories is that the Ulrichs, when they got booted off of Fossil Butte when it was BLM land Carl said, "Well, you ought to make a monument out of it if it's that important." And so somebody started thinking about that. And there was legislation that Nixon signed that said it would be a national monument. It wasn't a presidential proclamation. I'm trying to think of the congressman's name. Teno Roncalio was the Democratic congressman. He's dead and gone now. I remember talking to him a couple of times. He lived in Cheyenne. He was the Democratic congressman that proposed it. and a lot of people locally were for it. And there was supposedly a dairy cattleman, I'm assuming that it was from the northern end of the county, was kind of a leader in that. And I've never been able to find out who that was. I asked local people. And I'm not sure who that was. So it's somebody that had some interest in it. I know there was one county commissioner that had worked seasonally for the Park Service. But I don't think their family was in the dairy cattle business. So, I don't know how, whose idea it was and how it got started.

Dinosaur did do the first Park Service report on the potential for a National Park Service unit. There was that and then down the road, after it got established, there was a pretty modest development concept plan and general management plan that was about eight pages each.

Santucci: So you're saying that there is a report that Dinosaur produced?

McGinnis: Yes.

Santucci: Pre-monument. Did you ever see a copy of that? Does Fossil Butte have a—

McGinnis: The park has one, yes. Arvid has done a really great job of getting everything like that catalog. Yeah.

Santucci: I'll follow up with Arvid on that. That's interesting.

McGinnis: Yeah.

Santucci: So when you arrived, was there any sort of visitor contact station, per se?

McGinnis: Yes. There was a small trailer that I'm sure Grand Teton had brought down there, parked it there. It was used probably three to four, maybe at the most five months out of the year. The earliest they could have been doing anything there was late May through the end of September. Because the rest of the time, nobody could have gone off the road. They would have gone off on this county road, stopped in a trailer for ten minutes and seen some fossils and then move on. And there wasn't money for staffing there more than three or four months out of the year. As I remember, there were like three or four good-sized fossils in there. And I can't

remember which ones they were. There was a diplomystus and a couple of other things. There was and a piece of oil shell rock that you could scratch, and sniff.

Santucci: Where was this trailer located?

McGinnis: It was located at the Historic Quarry Trailhead. There had been kind of an area plowed in there to make a small parking area that was gravel. And there was an outhouse there. That was one of my first projects, was to get the outhouse changed into a vault toilet. Which is still there.

Santucci: And so it was a relatively small trailer. There was a little bit of exhibitry there in addition to the specimens.

McGinnis: Right. Right.

Santucci: Okay. And what ever happened to that?

McGinnis: We had to get rid of the VC trailer to pave the parking area when development started. And we were looking for a home for it. We hooked it up to the backhoe and took it to the city. And the city was looking for places to store materials. They had a wareyard that was before you got into the town of Kemmerer. It was probably nine miles that we had to move it. And it started falling apart before we got there. (laughs) But then it did all fall apart by the time that they took it over. (laughter) And they said, oh, well. And I was so glad that it didn't fall apart in the middle of the road and take a couple of days to tear it apart. It had a roof built over it and a porch put on the front. The roof was attached in such a way that it created a lot more weight than such an old trailer could handle. But it was needed to keep the roof from caving in from the snowfall.

Santucci: So one of the real gems of Fossil Butte is the new visitor center.

McGinnis: Right.

Santucci: So can you tell us about the pre-construction planning and thought that went into that visitors' center? And then the construction itself.

McGinnis: Sure.

Santucci: And then some highlights about the visitors' center. The film, the prep lab, the office space, that sort of thing.

McGinnis: Sure. Yeah. Andy Beck was the architect. And when the first initial planning money came, and he was part of the team that had to come down and tell the Ulrichs that their building, the water wasn't acceptable there. The septic system wasn't acceptable. The building couldn't sustain the weight of people being in there. So he was coming up with some ideas, too. And *Architect Magazine,* I think it was the December issue of '89 or '90. The visitors' center design had won a presidential award. And *Architect Magazine* had a little write-up about the thing. And I had a copy of it that Andy gave me, and I gave it to Arvid to put in the archives, the park archives.

But the Butte was to be an architectural reflection of Fossil Butte. It was bermed into the ground. It had stone buttresses that were symbolic of the angle around Fossil Butte. The copper roof was supposed to color up to look like sagebrush. And selection of the site, I remember everybody talking about having the peekaboo effect. You know, where you came around the road, up the road, and all of a sudden it was there. It worked well. If you looked for it, you could see it as you began to drive up. But then there it was, when you came around the corner you were looking at the visitors' center and you were looking at the Butte. And you could kind of see some similarities between the two features of each. So that was the idea there.

And then it was going to be divided into a pie where there was some office space in one piece of the pie. There would be restrooms and utilities in the other. And, then there was office space for the staff. And the administrative office had another piece of the pie. And then there was audiovisual space. And the museum space. And part of it was the entrance space.

And the idea was that if the park ever needed to expand, the idea would be a second pod connected with the visitors' center first pod. And that was Andy Beck's idea. And I think it makes good sense. I tried to get a full basement when the Spindler Construction Company was building it, they were digging way down, trying to avoid bentonitic soils. And I think they did. And the engineers' design was, you know, you dig way down and you start way down with these buttresses and then come up. And I remember one of the project managers from Spindler Construction said, "you know, that's a shame to fill up this space with dirt again."

And so I remember driving around Thanksgiving time all the way down to Denver to talk with somebody in the Denver Service Center office and somebody in the Park Service. I think Homer Rouse Associate Regional Director for Operations, he was the only guy there. Everybody else was gone. (laughs) I remember Homer just sort of said, "Well, forget it. You're going to get what you're going to get there." And he said, "That would take a lot of engineering to kind of figure out if that could even be possible."

Arvid called me back a couple of months ago and he's thinking for curatorial expansion that would be a good answer. And it probably would be. And we tried really hard to get it in the first place. You know, once it was kind of realized, and I remember Nancy Cocroft the NPS architect there, as it was being built, she was the project manager on the actual building end of it. She said, "Yeah, I think it would work. But yeah, he's probably right about the engineering, whether that would work for sure." So the idea was, you could double your space for the concrete floor. So I got called off of it and told not to go back to it and just build the damn thing. So, that's what I did. (Santucci laughs)

And I remember there were like three or four times where for some reason I had to drive all the way to Denver. I had to leave early, do something in the afternoon and then head back up. That was a hellacious drive, looking back on it now. Eight hours down, four, five, six hours there. Get something to eat a time or two. And then drive eight hours back, and hope the weather wasn't going to get you. So, that was a busy time when that was all happening with the building of the visitors center over two years.

I think we had a good contractor. We had good stone masons, the Bastion brothers. They were really proud of that project. They did a test wall for the architect. And then we took the test wall up and used it for the sign at the Chicken Creek picnic area later on. We had this big thing,

it looked about the size a sign could fit on. And it was like, what do we do with this? So we took it back up there. And they built it in, Spindler Construction gave us some spare parts, you know, with the teak wood windows. And I think there's some copper even stashed somewhere. A lot of the stone from different cuts of stone from, I think it was Lyons, Colorado, where the stone came from. I think that was really smart, because they've had a few damaged pieces that they had to replace over time. But the building's been through maybe two shakedowns and some problems were solved. I think it's one of the most beautiful buildings in the Park Service, in my opinion. Of course, I'm biased. But I think it's stood the stand of time and it's done well.

Santucci: And, let's see. Some of the interior layout and design—office space, restrooms, visitors' center desk, the prep room, the film. Can you share some information about that?

McGinnis: Well, the fossil prep room, I had some ideas about what we wanted to do there. And I remember talking with different folks. "Well, yeah, you could prepare fossils in there." And Lance Grande said, "Let me get you a grant. and you and Ann Elder can come up. Ann was going to prepare one of the fossil fishes for the movie. It was going to have a time lapse of the *Diplomystus* being prepared. So she was going to time lapse photograph the preparation of this, which she did. So we both went back there for a week. We had a grant to go back and look at things. And my job was to figure out what equipment and how much space and how to go about putting a fossil prep lab into the building.

35:57

Lance's main preparator is who I spent the most time with. And we got it figured out. We had one of these glass fronts, sort of like that front part at the Wendy's store where you can look in. So we determined what was needed. A microscope with a video on it that could show the microscopic view of it. So we got that all figured out, which model micron microscope to order. How much pressure was needed with the air compressor to feed the system and where to put it underneath the building. We put in a fume hood, that I don't think has really been needed all that much. It's been used maybe a few times. But that was an expensive thing to put in. And we had to vent a second time outside the building so it meant boring a foot and a half wide hole through the thick wall underneath the building. We also put an air valve on the outside of the building so we could work outdoors if we ever needed to work on a big piece.

We worked with Harpers Ferry doing a video, which has stood the test of time. Dr. Paul Buchheim dealt with telling the story of the lake. And Lance told the story of the fossil fish and the ecosystem. And they did a good collaborative job. It's still being used. And then there was a second one on a fossil being prepared in case there wasn't somebody there to actually do preparation work. And at the time I remember we had the biggest TV that you could buy. Which, I think was a 48 inch. And we had to get these panel dollies to be able to move the dang thing because it was so heavy. I forgot what it weighed. Of course we've got one now that one person can pick up in the A/V room.

The round desk was one of few in the NPS at the time. I think there's more of those in the Park Service now. But I remember asking around. I did a query, I forget how I did it, asking different parks what kind of a desk worked best for them. And I remember sending out to all the geologic parks a question about timelines. Because the original DCP said add a timeline. But we

were trying to figure out if people really used timelines, and what kind of reaction parks had from different kind of timelines.

So we came up with a real basic little timeline that we knew was going to be replaced someday. It just filled a piece of space that we knew we were going to use for leaves and plants and maybe insects. We had an artist contracted in West Virginia do a mural of the lake. The idea was to do a mural of what the living lake looked like. And then some fossils of what was once live in the lake mural. we had these little cases that were lit up that you could see specimens of Eocene life. And there were some juvenile fish, for instance, and then there was a series of little juvenile fish fossils showing different sizes of the little *Knightia*. And different sizes of *Priscacara*.

And I remember the cases, since actually the room in there wasn't all that large. The cases had a little magic lever underneath where you flip them up for people with wheelchairs and for seated small school kids. It was a lot easier to flip them up, have them sit down in front of it. And the teacher or the park ranger could talk about them. So that was some innovative stuff back at that time.

The specimens that Harpers Ferry put in there had been on display in the trailer. Nobody had ever actually collected much of what was out there. There were no casts. So we got the Field Museum to make a cast of their crocodile. I forgot what we paid for that. But I remember Lance Grande said, "You guys got a gift." That would be five times the cost to do that if we'd really thought about it.

But I remember there were five or six things that we needed to show to display the range of the fish that were in the lake. We needed an Amia, we needed a Gar, we needed a Paddlefish, we wanted a Stingray and we needed a Palm Frond. So how do we buy this stuff? How did we get it? How did we get it given to us?

So we put out letters. I remember writing the letter to everybody that was involved in the commercial fossil business and institutional museums with Green River fossil collections. And even some collectors that had been that weren't anymore. And said, we're looking for some of these things to put in our visitors' center to tell the story here. And we're looking for casts, we're looking for original specimens, we're looking for whatever you might have that we needed.

And we did get a cast sent to us by Ron Muse and Cliff Miles past quarry operators. They had quarried on a state [sic private] lease at one time. And he just surprised us. It was actually right before the dedication he came in and said, "here's this little three-foot crocodile. It's a cast of it. And we made it for you guys." It's like, well, the exhibits were already planned out. But that thing's on display now.

But we did have to buy some of these things. And we asked Harpers Ferry how do we do this? How do you guys do this if you have art? And he said, "Well, we jury it. And we get an expert." And it's like, well we had Lance Grande, he might help us with this. And we paid Lance to do this, to help us find out where the right ones might be, that the specimens could be verified as to where they came from. And how much of it was fake and how much of it was real. I remember the palm I'm pretty sure had a lot of fake on it under the blacklight but it was the only one out there that was at a reasonable price. And we had this amount of money for getting things

for the exhibits that had been set aside. So they did a jurying process to get these things with Lance's help. And I think Lance was the only subject matter expert.

Maybe Ann Elder helped with it. I'm not sure. And Ann had an interest in preparing smaller things than dinosaurs. And that's why she was allowed to come up and help us. When we opened the visitors' center, we didn't have a paleontologist at the time. And so Ann staffed the prep lab and actually was doing preparation work on fossil fish when the governor and the director of the Park Service and everybody was wandering through the building. And we made it come alive with her doing some work in there. And she was a great help. Anne and Rachel Benton, of course, collaborated to pull off the first fossil conference. I think it was one or two years after the visitors' center was dedicated.

Santucci: Okay, good. We'll come back to that. What I wanted to do is, if you could just briefly tell us who some of the people that you've mentioned. So you've mentioned Ann Elder, Lance Grande, Paul Buchheim. Can you just tell us briefly who they were?

McGinnis: Yes. Ann Elder was one of the preparators under Dan Chure at Dinosaur National Monument. Ann was a career Park Service person. She's no longer with us. Then Lance Grande was a curator at the Field Museum of Natural History. Most recently he's been vice president. And Lance for thirty years now has been taking, for college credit, groups up to one of the Tynsky quarries for a week-long training and then they had two weeks in Chicago at the Field Museum of training before they went to the Fossil Basin to actually quarry.

It's a college credit field class, it's a wonderful experience for somebody that's a second year in geology. And they come from all over the world to do that. And they camp up on the ridge above the Lewis Ranch. So there's Ann, there's Dr. Buchheim, Dr. Paul Buchheim was a limnologist from Loma Linda University. And Paul had got his PhD from the University of Wyoming. And pretty much spent his career studying these ancient lakes out here. And he had surveyed and sampled all over Fossil Lake Basin. I think he's done some work in Lake Gosiute and Lake Uinta too. But he typically would bring grad students out to assist with his long-term work every summer. And actually, he camped just outside the park every year. And the park had a good relationship with him. He was always there each summer if we had questions about something, to get answers from him. And he was a natural to help tell the story of Fossil lake with Lance in the video that we have at Fossil Butte.

Santucci: Great. So, continuing with the visitors' center and the exhibits, so during your tenure at Fossil Butte, you were able to acquire additional specimens, particularly through the assistance of paleontologists/museum specialist Arvid Aase. And there was a question that came up about purchasing fossils that wound up influencing National Park Service management policies. Can you share a little bit of information about that issue?

McGinnis: I remember when the policies were being bounced around. I think Dan Chure had chimed in and some other people. And we were thinking the that situation might be a little bit different out here in Fossil Basin. Because the state had formally for a long time allowed quarrying on state leased lands. That had been happening everywhere out in the basin for over a hundred years, starting in the 1800s. I mean, people were getting off the railroad there at Fossil and hearing about these fossils and getting various people to pick them up and get fossils. So they were all coming out of the same lake, And so fossils, any kind of fossil that comes out of

fossil lake deposits has importance to Fossil Butte even though it doesn't come off of Fossil Butte. Now that might be a different story, say, in like Dinosaur National Monument or somewhere else if they come from somewhere else. But the estimated number of fossils and what has come out within small pockets around the basin, there's not going to be any stopping of this quarrying external to us. I mean, it's not happening on BLM land. Although BLM had public meetings kind of reviewing whether they should allow something similar to what the state was doing. And it never went anywhere, thank goodness.

The monument size was pared down because all the other fossils in the basin and the really good locations were protected by BLM ownership. We don't need to worry about it. That's the story I heard about Fossil Butte early on before I got there.

And so they're important to us because they tell the story that's on us. And as that policy was being developed, we had concerns that it would not allow us to work with people in the basin. Because the way this resource works is you have to tear into it quite a little bit to find certain things. And you know, a hundred and fifty years of quarrying and only one pikefish has been found. It was predicted by Lance Grande that the pikefish would be found. But only one's been found. And it wasn't found on the Butte. It was found in a quarry that had been worked for a long, long time.

And there's other things that you find in these quarry floors and sediments that you couldn't find it unless you had a fulltime quarry on the Butte. And of course the Park Service isn't going to do that. Because everything that comes out has to be protected forever. And so the relationship of these quarries outside the park, I think, have been really important. It has sort of helped the outside quarry people realize that if they get the good stuff displayed and interpreted by the Park Service, everybody's doing better.

And almost all these quarry operators have cooperated over the years, they liked the idea of some of their things being in the Butte's collection. It's nearby. They can tell people about it. "Did you see that one down at the Butte? That came out of my quarry."

And I think the paleontologists that we've had over the years all four paleontologists. Rachel Benton, Peter Ambrose, you and Arvid Aase all agree that close working relationships with the commercial quarry operators have been more positive than negative for understanding the resource.

Santucci: Peter Ambrose.

McGinnis: Peter Ambrose and most of them were able to develop positive relationships with the local quarry operators. But I think Arvid, who's been there the longest has done a really great job. And the good stuff goes to science. I mean, Arvid's called different people about things. When the first bats started coming out of the resource, there was Mike Novachek at the American Museum 52:49 that he was calling and telling about it and making sure he heard everything about, anything important coming from any of these quarries, he lets Lance hears about it. Lance at the FMNS has of course amassed the largest collection of Green River Formation fossils of any museum in the world. I forgot what the number is. It's like thirty thousand or something like that. And I mean, after thirty years, the FMNH has got a nice collection.

And the Butte, although it has its own little scientific exploratory quarry, which a really beautiful split palm frond came out of that's on display now, it just can't go through and prepare stuff like the Field Museum can with three or four preparators.

So I think we've followed the policy that was developed as to how to collect properly servicewide. You have to know where it came from. It has to be a situation where, I mean, a cast would be better because you don't have to pay as much for it. And we've got quite a few casts, too. The horse. We don't know what it sold for, but the Smithsonian has it now. The first horse that came out of the basin but others partials and pieces are now showing up.

Santucci: One million dollars.

McGinnis: Is that what it sold for?

Santucci: Yep. One million dollars.

McGinnis: I've heard the Field Museum had offered around a million dollars at one time. And the Lewis Ranch, who was to get a portion of that, didn't think it was enough. But I'm happy for Jim. And we got one or two casts of the horse. (laughs) The first one, there was something about the cast that Arvid didn't like. And the one that we got next, that was given to us. I think there were three casts made. We got two of them. One was used by Jimmy to kind of promote the thing when he went to Tucson shows. We received a large turtle cast from Tom Lindgren and his three sons that work in the basin. We've got a varanid lizard cast I think, that's a cast that's an incredible specimen. And if you look at the original, just like if you look at the original crocodile from the Field Museum, it's hard to tell them apart. So we've displayed a lot of casts. And the specimens that we picked up, we knew exactly where they came from. Which quarry, which point in time, where in the quarry, sometimes. But there's a really good record of that with everything that's in the collection now.

And by working with these cooperators, I know when I retired at the end of 2010, Arvid I believe had tripled the number of fossils on display in the visitors' center by building the collection before we told the story. And there's this wonderful wall of leaves now right where the timeline used to be that is just a dazzling collection of the varieties of leaves that were in this hardwood environment around the edge of the lake.

And the same with insects, which weren't all that popular. I mean, Arvid recognized that those were equally as important as the fish. The fish were always the money makers that the quarry operators worked on. But the insects and the plants and other things, he's done a really good job of getting those collected and with the idea of using them in the story. And we do.

Arvid has rotated a lot of specimens through the collection. And there was an issue about having a regional collection storage place. And maybe Dinosaur was going to be the place. And there's been a couple of little white papers written about how to store these things and have it not be a lot of cost to the service. But we think and everybody that's been a paleontologist at Fossil Butte has pretty much figured that it's good to keep them there close at hand, to rotate them through and maybe tell another aspect of the story that hasn't been told yet, as the idea comes up.

The burglary? You want to hear about that?

Santucci: That's the next question I was going to ask you.

McGinnis: (laughs) Okay. The visitors' center was built. And we had some nice things in there. The original ideas, the basic ideas of how to tell the story. And we had an alarm system put in. It was a pretty darn good alarm system. The system would call whoever was in charge of law enforcement first. It would call the superintendent second. We had another, somebody in maintenance it would call third. Because we had an alarm that would tell us if the heat was off and we were going to lose our water. You know, if the water lines might freeze up. So he was on there, too. And I think, at one time we may have had the county on there. And the alarm would say, "Fossil Butte Visitors' Center. Alarm. Alarm. Alarm. Breach section three." Or whatever it was.

So anyhow, late one night around two o'clock—and this was after several false alarms—we found out that spiders in the fall would get in these alarm systems. And even the small spiders, if they got in the right place, could set off some of these sensors that had an eye that was hanging down, something if the eye was interrupted, it would trigger it. And we talked with the alarm company and others. It took us maybe a year and a half to figure this out.

So, at two o'clock one night, I think it was, we got this call in the fall. Which is when the spiders screw up your alarm system. So we all rolled out there. I called the county and had them go out with us, too. It was spooky. We at that time didn't have any lights on out three. We figured it was better to have it completely dark at that point in time.

But we went out there and unlocked the building door and realized that there was cold air coming in from somewhere. Everybody's hair on their neck kind of stood up. We figured out where it was coming from. It was coming from the office space, one of the windows. A rock had been put through it.

And then all of a sudden we heard the park radio chattering. We had a park radio system that had an automated recorder on it. And it was turned up in the office so you could hear it. And we heard these people talking. And come to find out, we had been staffed pretty low and we had one ranger work in the visitors' center on weekends in the fall when visitation had pretty well stopped. And somebody had gone in and stolen two radios from one of the desk areas where there wasn't a person working that week. And so we figured out wait a minute, they used this in this robbery. And so we were able to play the thing back. And after they broke the window, they had left. And they were using numbers to describe each other. And we wondered if it was like some high school student's uniform number, Number 10 or number 47 or something like that. But when it was all said and done, it was their birthdates. The perpetrators had used their birthdates as their call numbers. (laughs) For whatever reason. And we had it all recorded. The guy had put a rock through the window. The alarm had delayed for a little bit and then went off. The enunciator had gone off beeping loud and the strobe light had gone off. And the guy said, "fire in the hole! Fire in the hole! I'm out of here!" So he had been dropped off by somebody. And then he was – while we were there, when we heard the radio, when we came to check this out, we heard him say, "I'm ready for my pickup." So somebody had dropped him off. Somebody had been in a car. He's out there somewhere. We had no idea where he was. We had passed two or three cars on the way out there. It was a cold dark October night. Or November night.

But anyhow, the county helped us resolve this. And they figured out who it was. The FBI helped us, too, on this. And the guys had worked for one of the quarry operators somewhere for a brief week or two. And they saw it as a way to get rich. They had been working, I think, with some oil drillers. They had been working in the oil and gas industry out there somewhere. And then when that stopped, they had found a job working for one of the quarry operators. And they apparently had orders. They knew where they could sell these things. And later we found out it was the amia and the gar that they were after. They knew they couldn't get the crocodile. But they never noticed the alarm system. It worked so well with the enunciator buzzing the hell out of them and the strobe light. It kind of disables your ability to see anything. In the end we figured out what happened to our radios. They got thrown in Flaming Gorge Lake, never to be found again. But I think they served some jail time, got out, and they were paying restitution for the radios.

And then we got a call from one of the county attorneys, saying, "Well, you're not going to get any more check from so and so." I asked " well, why not?" Well, he was on his way back to Denver and pulled over in a snowstorm and couldn't go any further and asphyxiated himself with the exhaust of the car. And I don't know what happened to the other one. But I think he paid off his part of it that the judge had asked for.

And we didn't lose any fossils out of the deal. And it goes to show that if you have a good alarm system, even though it's thirteen miles away from town and you go out there you might get issues resolved. That's the only thing that had ever happened out there other than somebody getting out there and digging where erosion has opened up a spot or two. I think that doesn't happen very much unless you have an active site that we are working. And we worked with—I don't know if you started this, Vince. But we had a sociologist that was trying to help us figure out how different signs would work to keep people from going up into a place that you had closed down.

Santucci: Yeah. That's on my list of questions. So let's save that just for a moment.

McGinnis: I think Arvid would know because there was a study that was done—

Santucci: Yes.

McGinnis: And it's there in the park somewhere. And there was a study done about how people like to work their way through fossil displays, too.

Santucci: Sure.

McGinnis: There's a master's study done by a guy named Rizall from Utah State University.

Santucci: Okay. I wanted to ask you, do you recall what year the break in was?

McGinnis: I don't know. It's in the law enforcement record there.

Santucci: Okay. All right. I can ask Arvid.

McGinnis: Yeah. He might know. It's been ten years since I left the place, and that was ten years maybe before?

Santucci: Okay. I have four main groups of topics left. Are you okay to go on a little longer?

McGinnis: Can you give me like a two-minute break, and let me take a break here for a second?

Santucci: Sure.

McGinnis: I'll be right back.

Santucci: Thanks. [pause] Okay. I turned back the recorder.

McGinnis: Okay.

Santucci: I have a couple of loose end questions. So, Ted Fremd was there prior to your coming to Fossil Butte?

1:07:01

McGinnis: Yes. I don't know if he was permanent or seasonal at Fossil Butte.

Santucci: I wanted to find out, did Ted purchase fossils for use at his exhibits or to put in the collections during his tenure?

McGinnis: I'm guessing he probably did, because he was the only other paleontologist that was there other than Anne Elder. I think Ted was the one that described exhibit specimen needs in the first stab at the development concept plan. He kind of listed some ideas about what could be done to tell the story through fossils. And actually, I think he's the one who listed some of the primary specimens that would be really good to have.

Santucci: Okay. Let's see. A couple of other specimen-related questions. So we had the opportunity to bring a bat specimen from the museum of geology that the state had and put it on display and exhibit at Fossil Butte for several years. Do you recall that?

McGinnis: Yeah. Mm hmm.

Santucci: Why I bring it up, I thought that was a remarkable opportunity to have a very rare fossil specimen like that to reward the visitors that came to Fossil Butte. Many of them came way out of their way to visit the monument. To have the opportunity to not only see a very rare specimen, but to be able to go out and look at the beds from which it was collected. You know, if people go to the Smithsonian, they get to see great fossils, but they don't necessarily have that relationship between the fossil and the rocks it was collected. And I thought having that very rare, well-preserved bat from the Eocene on display at Fossil Butte provided a wonderful opportunity for visitors to make that connection between an important fossil and the rock units that was preserved. So I don't know if you have any thoughts about that.

McGinnis: Well you know, I do. Since I've left, Arvid came up with another exhibit that's sort of a thank you book. And it listed from whom and where some of the exhibited fossils came from. What quarry and who it was donated by, I think in most cases it's for donations. I don't think it's for anything that was purchased from somebody. But I think in some of the cases, it may even show the thing in-situ occasionally, which I think is really nice.

And there's another exhibit that's gone up since I've left that shows all the different types of fish in the basin. Then it has like little repetitive numbers of them kind of showing in the hundreds or the thousands what the relationship is between them and the other species, the other specimens. I know Grandy in his first book had one short page that dealt with that. But then the quarry operators never wanted to go there to show how many priscacara or how many this or how many of that have come out of their quarry in a particular year. And I don't know, I'm sure there's lots of reasons why they wouldn't let that be public information. But that helps people realize that in most parts of the lake when these things come out, this is how many of the other ones that you're going to find before you find one of these, for instance. And it's pretty dramatic when you see the little solitary pike fish and the number of *knightia* that come out. He may even have comparisons of aspirations number, that there's one of these for every some that are found. But it's a nice thing that kind of talks about what comes out of these areas in relationship to the other things that they see there.

And I don't think it's been done with any of the lizards, turtles, or insects. There is a new exhibit where finally representatives all of the different turtles on display in one exhibit. And you don't get that unless you've got continuity over time with paleontologists working with the community in an area like Fossil Butte is. And that's something that I'm really proud of, that Fossil Butte paleontologists mainly Arvid Aase stayed with it. And haven't given up on the story. And have made it so exciting to look at it in the way that you can in a museum. And I, well, I'm biased. I shouldn't say this. I think the museum there is one of the best displays of fossils anywhere in the Park Service.

Santucci: I agree with you.

McGinnis: Tell me where there's a better one.

Santucci: No, I agree with you. I think it's top notch. Absolutely.

McGinnis: And you know, the timeline, we didn't give up on that, either. I know Grand Canyon has a trail with a timeline on it. And now Fossil Butte has a timeline that starts halfway down the road. And it's every so many inches a million years. And then you get to the walkway down to the visitors center. And then on top of the railing is a series of things; geologic events and things that show up on the geologic record. And then you get around the back door and there's this thing that says, "Two million years ago: Hominids". And that one gets vandalized all the time. (laughter)

But when people started coming in the door after that timeline went up, that got them thinking before they even got to the parking lot, or even before they came into the VC—they started coming in the back door after that, too, which was kind of interesting. Some of them did. But people would ask different questions than they had before. They were thinking about deep time and more recent time and about humans. There weren't any cartoon guys walking around the earth when the dinosaurs were here. They came well after this lake was here. It was, I think it's a really good timeline now. It's huge. I remember telling Arvid, "If somebody doesn't like this, blame it on the superintendent. Because I'll be gone. (laughter) You run with this idea and we'll put money behind it. And I think it's a winner idea." And I think it has been.

And he's kept it up, too. I mean, when new things come out, he's changed some things out there. And he's got one of those little engravers for the plastic. You know, the outdoor labels that are on this thing that are riveted. And he's been able to maintain that thing, too. Not many exhibits in the Park Service do you have staff that knows how to update or maintain it themselves in a professional way. So that's something that I think has really been exceptional there at Fossil Butte.

Santucci: Very good. One last thing regarding collection. So Arvid and myself were friends with a paleobotanist by the name of Bill Tidwell at Brigham Young University. And when we had lunch with Bill one day, he was talking about his retirement. And during that discussion, he brought up his lifelong collection of Green River plants. So he was offering to donate part of his collection to Fossil Butte. And do you remember us coming back and bringing that up to you? And any thoughts about that?

McGinnis: I sort of remember that, Vince. Is he still living?

Santucci: No, he passed away.

McGinnis: Okay. Do you remember when that was?

Santucci: So that was during my tenure there. It's about 2000 perhaps.

McGinnis: Okay.

Santucci: They were undescribed flowers and lots of really beautiful specimens. And that was the catalyst that got that big exhibit case with all the fossil plants of the Green River Formation installed.

McGinnis: Right. Yeah. Yeah. That's probably where some of that came from.

Santucci: Yes.

McGinnis: Yeah.

Santucci: Excellent. The donation pins at Fossil Butte and the annual pins depicting a different fossil from Fossil Butte. Can you talk a little bit about the genesis of that and how it was sustained?

McGinnis: Sure. When I got to Fossil Butte and was getting ready for the dedication on June 2, 1990, I remember somebody said, "Yeah, I remember going to a dedication out there when it became a park." And he said, "Yeah, they had a big picnic, Commissary Commandos had a big picnic for the public up on the top," before you go out to the little Wasatch Saddle, as they call it, between Fossil Butte and Cundick Ridge." He said, "Yeah, and they had a pin, too. And I think the Lion's Club, yeah, it was the Lion's Club. They came out with two pins. And they're really nice pins." Somebody gave me one of them and I saw the other one. But for the eye of the fish, the fossil fish on this pin, which was about two and a half inches long by an inch high, they had the Lion's little symbol as the eye. (laughs) And I got one and I gave it to Arvid. He's got it in the collection. But that made me think gee, we need a pin to give away to people to celebrate this lasting legacy project that the state has partnered with.

So I had Nancy Cocroft help me design the *Priscacara*, the first one. Red, white and blue. And the history association, of course, helped fund that. And I forgot how many we got But we gave them away at the dedication to everybody that came. I mean to all, Congressman Thomas got one, Senator Wallop got one, Senator Simpson got one. Director Ridenour got one, Lorraine Mingtzmyer the RD got one. Everybody else got them, too.

But after that we thought well, it would be kind of neat to do one every year. And we did a special one for like the twenty-fifth anniversary, I think it was. And it was more of the Butte than it was of a fossil. Then we figured well, at the time I think there were twenty-six genera of fish. So we were going to do one every year until we got the group done. And it was helpful for the History Association to do that because it got donations that we wouldn't have got otherwise. It's like, if you donate five dollars, you can get a pin or patch. It was a great donation box incentive. But it was also a way of noting the specimens that we had.

And Arvid's still doing it. He's carrying it forward. And I had a collection of pins, but I gave them to my grandson, David, on my retirement night, and suggested that he give it to Arvid for the collection. And he did.

Santucci: Excellent. Very good.

McGinnis: So, I don't have them anymore.

Santucci: Very good. You've talked a little bit already about the Park Service and your relationship with the various commercial collectors in the basin, and how Arvid has nurtured a positive relationship. You know, you were superintendent at Fossil Butte during the big controversies associated with commercial collecting versus scientific collecting. You know, the seizure of the *T. rex* named Sue and all of that. Do you have any general comments about being a fossil park superintendent during a time when there's great media and public discussion about these issues? Which eventually led to a law in 2009.

McGinnis: Well, I think Badlands National Park has been, probably still is, a real vulnerable resource, just like Petrified Forest. And there's probably a more limited number of specimens that are going to show up over the years by eroding out. And it is a terrible loss each time one of those is filched by somebody. You know, taken and either put in a box somewhere illegally in somebody's collection. But when you look at Fossil Lake Basin and you look at the limited number of sites, I mean, the state used to give them an acre or less. And usually like the Lewis Range and the Thompson Ranch Quarry, it's limited to maybe six or seven acres. And then you look at the extant beds that are on BLM land and other private lands where people aren't allowed to go. And you look at the number of things that are coming out of there that are available if somebody's bound and determined to get something. It's a whole lot less of a problem, I think, at Fossil Butte National Monument than it is, say, for Badlands or Petrified Forest or Dinosaur National Monument or anywhere else. And I think being able, I just think it's sort of a different situation. But we're living under the same policy and doing okay with these other parks. So I think it is a non-issue. And I think that new law that came out probably really helped things. But I do know this. if you look in Grandy's book *The Curators,* you've read that, right, Vince?

Santucci: Yes. Uh huh.

McGinnis: Lance talks about one scrappy knightia fossil that a friend gave him when he was entering as a student at the University of Chicago. And look what that fossil did. He's the expert on amia, paddlefish, gar. He wrote the book on those species. Fossils in the hand can inspire people in many good ways.

Santucci: Yes.

McGinnis: University of Chicago Museum. Field Museum this guy is a world authority on these fish. And he was going to study and be something else. And this friend gave him this fossil. He went to this professor and said, "Can you tell me what this is?"

And he said, "Take my class and I'll tell you what it is." (Santucci laughs) And that's what that fossil did.

Santucci: Yeah. It's a good story. And just so you know, the fossil catfish, the ones that were collected from Badlands National Park that were—

McGinnis: Right.

Santucci: —part of the seizure of Sue and part of that criminal case, those were the first fossils that were involved in, involved in the first felony conviction for fossil theft in US history. Lance Grande is working on the description of those right now.

McGinnis: Wonderful!

Santucci: Yeah. Serendipitous, sort of.

McGinnis: Yeah. It is.

Santucci: Just briefly, it's outside of the scope of Fossil Butte, but certainly you experienced it during your tenure, there was something called Operation Rockfish in southwestern Wyoming during your tenure. Do you remember what that was about?

McGinnis: Oh, yeah. It was about an overzealous county deputy sheriff. He perhaps thought that he thought he could make a big case. He was good friends of a family out in the basin that worked on fossils. And he went to Tucson and went undercover. And he arrested somebody that I'm convinced had a legitimate fossil that had been sold to him, probably by a person working out there on a Thompson Ranch quarry lease. That caused a real stir. And Bill Mason, of the paleo bond glue fame was president of the commercial fossil association, what do they call their group? I don't know if it's still an active group. But at the time, it was. They actually hired a lawyer to kind of deal with that whole thing that occurred. And I'm not sure how it ended. I remember spending some time getting questioned by him. But yeah, I think it was a case of overzealousness. And he didn't know that much about the resource or the issues. And I felt like he was just trying to do something that got him some notoriety. I'm not sure why. But that's my reflection on that.

Santucci: Okay. So when I had come onboard as the chief ranger at Fossil Butte, we had talked about a social science study that we undertook at Petrified Forest National Park back in the early 1990s related to the souvenir collecting of petrified wood.

McGinnis: Right.

Santucci: And so we had reached out to that same investigator, Dr. Joseph Roggenbuck from Virginia Tech.

McGinnis: Roggenbuck. Yes, okay.

Santucci: Yes. And so can you share with me any recollections regarding that social science study and what resulted?

McGinnis: You know, I don't remember too much about it, Vince. But I think it was good, there's been several things over the years that have all helped the Park Service look at this stuff a little bit better. And I don't know when all the ills will get cured. But every time the Park Service tries to understand things like that, the better off we are.

Santucci: Definitely.

McGinnis: I remember when we were experimenting with the signs. And having somebody—the researcher was actually sort of off in the distance, kind of watching to see what people would do. And word got out about that in the Kemmerer community and the idea of oh, so you got people, what was the word they used? "Eyeballing people." You know, they didn't like it. They didn't care that there was a problem and we were trying to deal with it and to help people respond to, the best ways to respond out there. They just didn't like it. And it's tricky when you get into some of that stuff. It really is. People are all over the map on it.

Santucci: Sure. So, a really important thing that occurred during your tenure. In fact, it's occurred twice at Fossil Butte, is hosting the federal fossil conferences.

McGinnis: Right.

Santucci: And the first one was when Rachel Benton and Ann Elder helped to coordinate one back in the '90s.

McGinnis: Right.

Santucci: Can you share any perspectives you have in regards to the first federal conference that was hosted by Fossil Butte?

McGinnis: I remember that there wasn't a decent place to put that thing on. It was a smoke-ridden hall that was at the end of a bar. The Eagles' Aerie. It was actually a bar and a big eating hall used for Bingo sometimes. And that was the only place to do it. But I think there were really good presentations there, equal to previous years. And it did get published. I think all of them have been published, haven't they?

Santucci: Yes.

McGinnis: We had pretty decent participation in it. But I think the next one that Arvid coordinated, and that was what, 2011?

Santucci: Yes.

McGinnis: I had just retired. And he had put a lot of time into planning that. And actually, he planned it so it was right after the SVP conference, which was in Salt Lake, I think. So that people could tag onto both in one trip. I remember I helped out by building all of these boxes with the glass top for air scribe use. Dust collection boxes. Keeps the dust from getting around. And I remember I spent like two or three weeks building those things. Which I guess through the history association, they got sold. Arvid bought all the materials through a grant. And he got a lot of equipment into the hands of people that might do micro-fossil preparation in the future. And I think I attended a few of the sessions, because I wasn't a paying member at that time to attend most sessions. And I thought that conference was exceptionally good. And I think there was good attendance. Kemmerer's hard to get to. And there's not too much lodging there. But still, I think people were curious enough to come and see the resource and see the museum and do it in that corner of Wyoming.

Santucci: Just a personal note regarding the 1991 federal fossil conference in Kemmerer is that I had just come onboard at Petrified Forest that year. And I attended the conference. And J.T. Reynolds came from Denver. He participated in the meeting.

McGinnis: Chief ranger, yeah.

Santucci: Yeah. He was the regional chief ranger. And lo and behold, he asked for a meeting with me. I can't remember if you attended that or not. But that's when he wanted to know if I would be interested in joining the multi-agency investigation supporting the grand jury investigation against Black Hills Institute tied with Sue.

McGinnis: Oh, wow. No, I wasn't involved in that. And J.T. asked you to do that. Wow.

Santucci: Yes.

McGinnis: That's great. I'll ask you off the record sometime something more about that, how it all got started.

Santucci: Sure. So, we probably should have done this at the beginning, but we'll do it now. Can you just briefly, if we go through the staff at Fossil Butte that worked with you, can you just say one or two things about them?

McGinnis: Well, uh—

Santucci: I can just list the names. Marcia Fagnant?

McGinnis: Yes. Very good environmental education specialist. Somebody that knew the story and loved the story. Loved all the resources at Fossil Butte National Monument and did a great job.

Santucci: Excellent. And then, let's see. Clay Kyte.

McGinnis: Clay. He helped us do something that I wanted to do. My first experience at Fossil Butte was man, this place is really ragged. It's been overgrazed. It's got a lot of erosional issues. And Clay over time, and thanks to the help of the dam reclamation funding in Washington, we were able to take out, I think, five or six stock dams and repair a lot of riparian area. And Clay wasn't an engineer, he was a biologist and a botanist. But he did a wonderful job of managing

that. He worked with you and I think he worked with Andy Banta. And over time, the Butte looks a whole lot better than it would had that not been done early on.

Santucci: And he also was involved in the exotic weed control.

McGinnis: Yes. And I think he may still be to a degree occasionally. I don't think the park has had money to hire somebody to deal with that like they should. And I don't know if they ever will. I hope Fossil Butte long-term stays with a paleontological focus. It's a lot easier to come in and maybe look at a lot of other things. And we did. I mean, we did a study on the elk. It was a million-dollar study, I think. Yellowstone had failed because they had a death of bison. And so they took that money and were able to do the elk study that I think Clay helped write up the need for that, to see what kind of browsing was happening in relationship to stock drives, elk migration, and other things. And there's a lot of things that could be done at Fossil Butte. But the one that you don't want to let up on is the fossil story. Because it's an incredible fossil story there. And unless, down through the years somebody stays up with it, it's going to be a lesser place.

And there's so many Park Service places that you can probably still today find Mission 66 museums. And Fossil Butte is one where the paleontological/geological story has been consistently revived and told. Fresh every year. It's a good interpretive program. You get it well-oiled and you can deliver it and not miss a beat. And the smart thing to do is to stop, switch and do it a different way. And it keeps the whole thing fresh. And I hope that continues to happen at Fossil Butte and other paleontological parks. The better understanding you can gain, the better off you are.

I remember there was a long-term quarry guy who's now passed away. And he said, "I don't know why you want to do any studies over there." He said, "We know all the fish that were in here and pretty much everything about them." And that was, I think, before Grandy came out with his first monograph, and I forgot which one it was. And then he came out with a second one and a third one. It's like a lot of people think that the story's pretty much there. It's in the dirt to look at and it's pretty simple. But it's not. It's a rich, wonderful story. And the more people dig into it and combine it with biology, the better everything is going to be. They're going to be fulfilled when they come to a park and see that it's kept up with science. And that somebody has taken the time to illustrate the science by putting some of these things together in displays and exhibits. And I think Fossil Butte has done a good job of that over the years.

Santucci: Very good. How about Rachel Benton?

McGinnis: Rachel. Yes. Rachel had a lot of enthusiasm. And I think she did a great job there at Fossil Butte. Rachel wanted to get a PhD, which I thought was great. And she eventually did, I think she had a greater love for oreodonts and giant pigs and other things (laughs) that come out of Badlands National Park. And we were able to get her furloughed so that she could keep her insurance and get her PhD at the University of Iowa. I think it was University of Iowa. Or was it Iowa State University? But anyhow, we got her through that. And then she transferred to Badlands. Which I think was really good. It was easier for her to make that transition while working at Fossil Butte than it was to make that transition, you know, there at Badlands.

Santucci: Peter Ambrose?

McGinnis: I think Peter went on to a Forest Service dinosaur resource in the Delta Colorado area near Grand Junction Colorado. And I think Peter was able to update some of our publications. He was pretty gifted with writing and keeping it in the popular form. I think he revised one of our books and maybe revised some of our exhibits while he was there. And I think he may have done some work with the cataloging of collections. I think we had some backlog issues and I think he worked on that for a while.

Santucci: Andy Banta?

McGinnis: Andy Banta. Generalist ranger. He liked Fossil Butte. He liked all aspects of it, sort of like I did. He was a firefighter, he was a law enforcement ranger and resource manager. He became a bit of an interpreter when at FOBU. And he worked well with the community. People liked Andy. That's an important thing for park staff to always remember is you've got to develop a relationship with your community. Like a checking account. You've got to keep up. You've got to put things into it to be able to draw things out of it occasionally. And I think he was really good at that. Working with other agencies, too.

Santucci: Vince Santucci?

McGinnis: I think Vince—

Santucci: (laughs) You can pass.

McGinnis: He had a big vision. And I think he looked at the whole Park Service. And I think he saw things at Fossil Butte that he could accomplish. And you've got to keep people stimulated. If they want to dabble in other things, you have to encourage that. Because sometimes you've got to help them get to the next place. And I think you're in a really good place managing paleontological resources from a perspective around the country. And I kind of recognize that you had this thing with the GRD that you really loved doing. And I think that really helped Fossil Butte to have that relationship with the Geologic Resource Division. And I think that was a good experience for you and that was a great experience for the park to have somebody at your level come in and keep things moving. The thing I liked most about you at Fossil Butte was the young interns and people that were interested in geology that you could attract. If there was somebody that had the kind of enthusiasm you had for the resource. And I just remember, man, where did all these good seasonals come from?! (laughter) And we probably had bigger batches of great seasonals that you picked than in the whole history of the Butte there. That's one thing that I really admired about you. I think it was a skill to do that. It was a skill for you to see things and document them about how they could be done better. And you were a good guy to work with, Vince. Some people maybe didn't understand you all that well. (laughter) We can talk about that off the record. But you did good things for the Butte. And I'm very proud of that effort that you gave during the years. You were there, what? Five years?

Santucci: Seven.

McGinnis: Seven and it went fast pace.

Santucci: Yeah.

McGinnis: Well, half of that time was for the GRD though, right?

Santucci: Yeah. That's right. Starting in 1999, I went on a half-time job share between Fossil Butte and GRD. Yeah.

McGinnis: Right. I would have given anything if we had the funds. We just couldn't get the funds to have the kind of staff that we needed then. We were kind of down, they had starved us down badly. And working with the GRD was wonderful, because we got somebody at a high level of skills that was working out of a small amount of change for the park and a larger amount of change from the GRD. But that was one of the most interesting arrangements we made happen. And I learned a lot from that, too. I learned a lot from the agreements we signed with Rachel to get somebody, you know, a higher degree and keep them involved in the Park Service so they didn't have to take a break and then try to reenter. And that's a tough deal for people. Because there are people in the Park Service that say, "If you leave the Park Service, I'm not going to give you a back door in." And I've had people say that about whether I should hire somebody or not. You know, "Oh, they worked somewhere else. Are you sure you want them? They work for the BLM." Or, "They work for the Forest Service. Can they make the transition?" So you've got to give people room to explore things.

I remember hearing from a Deputy NPS Director that you've got to just go out and do some of these things. And make a way to make it happen. And I think we were able to make something happen for Fossil Butte for that length of time. Thanks to the GRD and thanks for your ability to bridge both worlds there, a regional world and a service-wide world and a park world.

Santucci: Well, I just want to say that without question in my mind, I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for Dave McGinnis, that's for sure.

McGinnis: Well, you and Arvid and a lot of these guys, you found your ways and you did good at what you did. And it's more what you have done and your love for doing what you do that has made you successful. And I hope Arvid someday—that guy is such a genius with exhibits, and it's like—but I don't think he wants to leave Fossil Butte. I think he's fallen in love with the park and he knows he's good at it and he hates to leave it and turn it over to somebody else who may not have the same level of interest in it. Even if they are a paleontologist.

Santucci: So my only—go ahead.

McGinnis: The Butte's been lucky, I think. Down through the years.

Santucci: So my only complaint about my time at Fossil Butte was when you went, shortly after I arrived there, and you went to, I think you went to Padre Island.

McGinnis: Right.

Santucci: So, final thing for Fossil Butte. One of the biggest challenges that we faced had to do with the beginning of the George Bush administration and the enactment of the farm bill. And the day that we received a call regarding two individuals that had knocked over fence on the monument. They were on snowmobiles moving onto the monument carrying rifles. Do you remember that?

McGinnis: Oh, yeah. And we were told by a state game warden.

Santucci: Yes.

McGinnis: Then we went out and investigated it. We borrowed some snow machines from the BLM and investigated it.

Santucci: Yeah. That was a really tough one. So my understanding from that time period is that they were going after some Yellowstone wolves that made their way down to Fossil Butte.

McGinnis: Well, I don't know. I never heard about wolves from other sources. But I do know that certain times of the year they would go out after coyotes. And they knew they were on the boundary. I did work with you and we did cause a stir. Actually there was a congressional aide that called me up and said that she wanted to talk with me and one of the sheep ranchers. And the guy that I think might have been involved in that, he wasn't there. But I remember that meeting very well. And I remember it was in the basement of the library, kind of neutral ground. And I remember she limply shook my hand and then embraced, like with a hug, the sheep rancher. (laughs) And I said to myself, I think I know where this is going. (laughs) So what I got out of that was anytime that the Department of Interior hunters, the predator control guys—

Santucci: APHIS: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service for the Department of Agriculture. They are sometimes referred to as Wildlife Services.

McGinnis: Yeah, that's what they are, APHIS. Anytime they're going to do work on the, near the boundary of the monument, let me know. And share a radio frequency with us. So we know your there, that we're aware of it. And either loan us one of their radios or we'll loan them one of our radios. And there were two or three other things. And I remember writing that up, it's probably in the files somewhere, and sending it to Senator Thompson's aide. And I remember, I think, Truman Julian, who was president of the Wyoming Wool Growers Association at the time, I think he sort of got the message. I think they wanted to take the bullet for the other sheep rancher and a USDI APHIS employee that was involved in it. Truman wasn't. The rancher wanted to take the bullet for the APHIS guy so he wouldn't be fired. I was told, I mean, I was accused of interfering with a federal officer's operation in that meeting. (laughs) That's what they president of the Wool Growers Association said; that I had no business questioning or "interfering" with the APHIS guy, doing his mission.

And I said, "Well, I do if he's inside the Butte where he's not supposed to be." And they sort of attributed it to a mistake. And they had a plan for that. And I said, okay. You know, I was thinking to myself, the best thing we can do here is to figure out what we're going to do in the future, and get an edge on this. And getting notified, which we weren't previously to that, that was helpful.

And then later, what came about with that is one of the APHIS guys, a different one, was going to be using his dog on the outside of the park to track coyotes. And I remember him telling me that. And I said, "I don't see how you can do that. How can you get your dog back if he's on the track of the coyote way up on our boundary—"

He said, "Well, come on out with me and I'll show you." And sure enough, he had this blue heeler and a red cur dog. And what the dogs would do if got close to the boundary, he had this whistle. I mean, he whistled himself. He didn't have an instrument to whistle with. And the dog would get the message and sort of go where this guy wanted them to, like a sheepdog. And it

took the coyote's attention off of any hunters onto this dog that was intruding on his territory, which was the big thing. I gave that guy permission that nobody else had gotten because he was so willing to work with me, permission to take his weapons through the park—this is before all that changed, of course—so that he, when he got outside the park he didn't have to reload or do anything else. And I thought you know we can work with this guys. If they trust us and we understand how they're working.

And about two months later, the guy was gone. And I remember calling him and asking him. They moved him over to the Eastern part of the state, they said the work was done here. They moved him over to Torrington or somewhere. And I think it's because he was too friendly with the Butte, too cooperative. Not secretive enough.

Santucci: Yes. Go ahead.

McGinnis: Oh, okay. So, that's my side of that story, I guess. Pretty much they cooperated after that. Are they doing it now? I don't know. Probably not.

Santucci: Sure. Okay. So, any final thoughts about Fossil Butte?

McGinnis: Oh, let me see here. Let me look at some notes here I made. Oh. Yeah. I was thinking about development and a small park. And the question about why did Dave McGinnis stay there so long? A lot of people stay somewhere, and most of my career was like four to five years in one place and then moving on. But I was there for maybe two years before things started to happen. And there was some activity there, you know, getting the new plans in place. Revising the DCP and working with the community. But then the road took a year. The visitors' center took the next year. The water system took the third year. The maintenance facility took the fourth year. The housing for the seasonals took a fifth year. By that time the water system was starting to have some problems and we had to fix all these relief valves. But the water system would fail and then we'd have to bring in toilets and everything, outhouses. So we got that all solved and there's never been an issue since. Except when the spring system, we had a real wet spring and it flooded it and put all these silts in it. And we had to rebuild that. And that was pretty much another whole season dealing with that crisis.

And then there was a second wave of dealing with the exhibits lights generating too much heat which required an air conditioning installation to keep people healthy. And then there was another year that was almost an entire year trying to deal with the idea of a cooperative quarry with the state. And that got nurtured for a long time. And the five top elected officials on the state farm loan board were the governor, the secretary of state, all the people that made the decisions about money and big land issues, they signed off on working with the Park Service on a piece of state land to develop a quarry site. And that quarry site, are you familiar with this?

Santucci: A little bit. I don't know all the details. But I'm aware of it.

McGinnis: It would have solved a lot of issues. You could stand on the patio of the visitors' center and see that site. The Lewis family had said, yes, you could drive on their dirt roaad and actually there's a flat area that you could make into a parking area if you wanted to. And it would have solved all the issues with taking things out of an NPS quarry you have to keep, but they would have been property of the state. And it could have allowed loans to our collection and enriched the University of Wyoming's geologic museum. It could have gone as a lease just like

all state land is supposed to go, to support the educational system in the state. And there could have been students each summer that could have been supported through the sale of specimens that could have been handled through the state geologic office. I could have solved a lot of issues about trying to deal with the resource.

There has been a very small scientific study quarry on the Butte but very few things come out of it. And it's a problem to protect in the park. But it's been managed and visitors like it and the staff likes doing it. But it would have been better to do it outside the park, I think. And it would have been state land instead of Park Service land. And it could have been a money-generating for the state and an educational partnership opportunity. There could have been a fee that was managed through the history association.

And that didn't fly because one family didn't want it to fly. But, it could be tried again. And I figured that was the case. And I've got a four-inch book that documents that whole thing in case somebody wants to revisit it once the scene changes out there. And we had other quarriers on state-leased property, we had all the private quarriers saying yeah, that would work, yeah, yeah, that's a little different than we are. I mean, there could have been, it could have been a good thing and really the best of both worlds for everybody. But it didn't fly. And that was a real disappointment, because I invested a lot of time in it. And I made a really good record of it, though, in case somebody works out all the details and wants to make it fly someday. I don't know if it ever will. It's probably got problems.

We tried, one other thing we tried to work with the county commissioners to get a backcountry byway from the north end of the park that looped out onto the BLM where you could see more of the geography of the basin there. And south of the park on BLM land, there could have been a backcountry byway that would have taken people to some of the delta sites on Fossil Lake and some really incredible places. The BLM liked it. The county was for it, then they were against it. Then another set of county commissioners were for it again. And then again, they were against it. And if they ever get to a point where they feel like they've got some road money, they might do it. Or if somebody sees that it can keep people in the county longer, if there is a nice backcountry byway that's maybe thirty miles long or forty miles long, it could be to the benefit of everybody. I think all the quarry operators like the idea, because there are for crap roads where they are. They would have liked somebody peeling off a backcountry byway to come visit their quarry.

That's one thing that could be done someday that could really help tell a better side of the story about the lake. I mean, the fossils are one thing, but to understand the lake and the delta features and other places where the highlands were and use a series of wayside exhibitry, it could really be great for the park and the BLM.

Lastly working with the community is very important in Wyoming. The county ended up building an event center, the South Lincoln Event Center, where the second NPS fossil conference was held. the Butte worked with the city to give them ideas about how to develop the fossil theme in there new facility. And a lot of community fossils from the various quarry operators and the NPS ended up being in there as loans. There are some nicely themed display. All the rooms were named after a particular fossils.

Santucci: Sure.

McGinnis: And there's a lot of these little event centers in different counties around the state. And this is one of the few that has a theme in it. And people that come there, they're kind of awed by that. And it gets back to helping the city finally, if they didn't get a visitors' center built in their town and it has to be out at the Butte, we were able to display fossils in there. And there was an agreement with them that when the plans were developed, on the backside there could be curatorial storage where federal agencies would be able to have storage if needed for growing collections. And that still could be done. Arvid helped with that idea a lot. Sometimes if you were able to work with a city or a county and get something started, maybe later on it would pay off. My advice to people in the future is that if you work with the community, you can set things up for the future.

So, I don't know, Vince. Have we covered it all, do you think?

Santucci: Yeah, I think that's good. I just, one final question, it doesn't have to be detailed. Do you remember the dates of your detail at Dinosaur National Monument?

McGinnis: No. But it was after Dennis Ditmanson left. And that may help a little bit. It was before I went to Padre Island, I'm pretty sure. And it must have been after you left?

Santucci: I don't recall. I'll try to look in my notes and see if I can find it. But I can't remember, either.

McGinnis: What I remember about that was the state was building the new state field museum there. And there was talk about doing something together with the park. And there was talk about them taking some of the collection into that new facility. And there was somebody willing to give Park Service land there next to it. And I remember we had to, we paid for some soil sampling and some other things to see if it was suitable. And I can't recall if it was. I think it might not have been suitable. But I remember dealing with that issue when I was there. I remember dealing with the paleontologist who wanted to keep his status as a park scientist, as opposed to a park paleontologist. And I was told that that probably wasn't a good thing to deal with, and let the new superintendent deal with that, who was Chas Cartwright. I stayed in the town of Vernal and then drove to the headquarters area. And then on Friday night I would leave and go home and spend the weekend. And I was lucky because the weather that winter was really mild and I could go over the pass. And there's a series of thirty-three little hairpin turns going down into Vernal and the Uinta basin.

There were some issue with the county. The county was going to let people hunt on this privately held land inside the park. And the park was in a real bind with one of these owners. He wanted to take people in to hunt elk on his inholding. So I had to get the chief ranger back. And there was some other issue where I had to have another staff member give up leave.

Santucci: Was there any other issue related to paleontology during your time at Dinosaur that's worth discussing?

McGinnis: No. I just don't remember anything that had to do with the paleo resources there. Other than a long-term thing that had to be dealt with then, looking at this site that somebody was willing to give to the Park Service. I'm sure there were some underlying things that I wasn't seeing there. And I don't know what they eventually ended up doing, relevant to working with

the museum, other than maybe curatorial storage. They may be having some stuff stored there by Park Service in the new State museum.

Santucci: Excellent. Well I think this is really good. As I mentioned before, we'll get a transcript of this. And if you're willing to review it to make sure that—

McGinnis: You bet. Be glad to, Vince.

Santucci: I'll send that to you. And then we'll finalize it. And I'll make sure you get a copy and Arvid gets a copy and Badlands gets a copy as well.

McGinnis: Yeah. And remember, Arvid's been there almost as long as I was there. Because he's had another ten years. So I think he's got the real story on all this.

Santucci: And just remind me, what was your date of retirement, approximately?

McGinnis: It was January 1, 2011. 1/1/11.

Santucci: Okay. Do you miss the monument? Or are you happy that you stepped into retirement?

McGinnis: You know, it was time to retire. I was enjoying that place. I mean, one of the things we didn't talk about is I had several international volunteers. One from the Turkish National Park Service Erdo Erdogane, South Korea National Park Service. Yuri Ginn was a resource manager and planner, that had managed the Moon Bears in Juristan National Park. I had several summer interns from Saratov, Russia, that helped me develop an electronic ranger for Khvalynsky National Park in Russia. And they would work with the park superintendent over there. He would send pictures and information. And I would get it to a geologist in Grand Junction who had done an electronic ranger for us as a volunteer. Dusty Perkins was involved in a project with them when I went back over there my last time.

We had an electronic ranger exhibit that was new to them. No other park had had one in Russia. I think there's like forty national parks in Russia and 99 Zapavadnicks (monuments and historic sites) rolled into one category. But Khvalynsky National Park on the Volga had more biology specimens in the Red Book than any other park in Russia. And that's their endangered species list, the Red Book, in Russia.

And I made one visit there. I went over on a Rotary project. Somebody said, "You work in the Park Service." Yeah. "How'd you like to visit one of our Russian national parks?" And I jumped at it. And it was like a half a day ride from Saratov out there. Neat park. Neat park staff.

I really liked the guy that was superintendent. I brought him over. I got an international office grant and a Rotary grant to bring him over. I think it was three times, maybe. He visited all the national parks in Wyoming and all the state parks in Wyoming on one trip. And I had one of my interns be the translator for him and he was hosted by several rotary clubs as he was taken across the state.

Then we took a team with our Colorado Plateau I&M coordinator, Dusty Perkins. I had K.C. Van Duven of Story behind the Scenery books with me. And then I had the geologist and his wife that went. And he had done these electronic rangers for several parks. I don't know if

Dinosaur was one of them. But Colorado National Monument was one. He worked with us over two years dealing with pictures and things about the plants and about the chalk beds there and about the wildlife. And they were really happy with it. It was in English and Russian. That was a neat experience. I think I had three of the interns work on that over tree summers. And they were all certified translators. These were sharp kids. I think it was a total of seven times over seven years. Rotary paid for most of their travel and some other expenses. They would bring them because they were Rotaractors in Russia. Effort by Rotary District 5440 had started Rotary in Russia after glasnost. Working with these college graduates as I VIPs was a great experience.

So I think we had, all in all, International Volunteers from: England, Scotland, Turkey, Russian, South Korea. I can't think what one of them was. But over my last ten years that was great helping those people understand National Park Service policies and to see how we did things in our country.

At Khvalynsky National Park, they had a little ski area that was operated by a club that had been taken over by a developer. He started making it into a major ski area. And the superintendent was really worried. He was worried about his job. and I remember talking with him and having a translator kind of help me understand all this. So when his staff came over, I found information about how Badger Pass was stopped in Yosemite. And how the one in Rocky Mountain NP Hidden Valley was terminated.

And in Lincoln County, there is a ski area that was privately run. Land was on the BLM and the county was involved in it. It was like three or four partners. And the BLM had done a best practices paper on how they were going to cooperate and not let it expand or do things that were detrimental to anything else. I got him a copy of that and had somebody translate it for him. I still, I wish I could have kept that going. But that was kind of hard once I was out of the park. So, that was one of the joys that ended when I retired.

Santucci: Very good. Well, I think that's good. Again, I really appreciate your time and your help in getting this information preserved.

McGinnis: Well, got to do it before Covid hits, right? (laughter)

Santucci: That's right.

McGinnis: We're being really careful. But you know, Park Service might be losing people here. If they haven't already.

Santucci: Yeah. I hope not.

McGinnis: Yeah. Well, you take care, Vince. Good talking with you.

Santucci: Yeah. Thanks so much, Dave.

McGinnis: Okay.

Santucci: And look forward to talking to you again.

McGinnis: Okay. Bye.

Santucci: Bye-bye.

1:40:13

[END OF RECORDING 2]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Total time = 219 minutes

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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