

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Chris Clark (CC)

Interviewer: Jillian Staurowsky (JS) and Audience Members (AM)

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JS: My name is Jillian Staurowsky; I am a park ranger here in the interpretation division. I also co-manage our park service horse patrol program, and that is what has brought me into very close contact with Mr. Chris Clark, who is the lead mule packer for the National Park Service. So, this afternoon, Friday, February 22nd, I believe, here at Grand Canyon we'll be having an interview with Mr. Chris Clark. Alright. Chris, we'd like to get a feel for your personal background. Would you start by telling us about your family, and where you grew up?

CC: Well, I grew up in Williams, Arizona. I was born and raised there. I got into dealing with livestock through my uncle Pat. He had a couple horses, and he kind of put that in me. I rode them and just fell in love with it. Worked at a couple ranches up around Williams and did construction and odd things like that. Got married young. Got three beautiful daughters, two grandkids, one on the way. And then I come up here and work for an outfit called Apache Stables out in Tusayan doing dude rides, and that was kind of the start of my, I guess you want to call career, or whatever. I took and worked there for a long time. That was the first place I ever rode a mule. It's a pretty good story. My boss – you know, I was pretty green, and I said: "What am I going to ride?" And he pointed over off in the direction, and here's this big old Appaloosa horse. Big old spotted booger. Good looking. Big butt on him. And I was like: "Wow, he's pretty flashy!" And he goes: "You're not riding that; you're riding the mule!" I said: "I ain't riding no damn mule!" He said: "Well, you can either do that or you can walk." Well, you can tell I don't like to walk much, so I rode the mule. Her name was Patty, and she would greet me at the gate every morning, and she was just super solid and gentle, and that started my love affair with mules. And then I run a place up in Williams, two stables, for John Moore up there. We were running around 60, 80 head of horses. I did that for a long time, but I knew it would dry up during the winter. He said: "Well, come up to the mule barn for Xanterra." So that's where I met Ron Clayton. He's a good friend of mine. He's my mentor, really. I still talk to him every week. If I have a problem with a mule, he's the one I call. And I started with him doing the dude string and taking people down, and really enjoyed that. But after a while, it got old. Same questions every day. But I had a chance to go to the pack barn for Xanterra. I had never packed in my life. I'd been out on camping trips, but I never packed any animals. And started over there green, and my first trip down – the packer over there, he always initiated his guys running down there. It was pitch black. I couldn't see my hand in front of my face. And we

rolled off in the chimney. Yah, it made my ass pucker. We rolled off in there, and I said: "I can't see nothing!" I said: "What do I do if we get in a wreck?" He goes: "Aw, just listen!" "Alright." Well, we rolled off in there, and I loved it. And I worked for them for a long time packing. I left, and then I come back, and then the gal who really taught me how to pack, her name was Melissa Williams. She's the one that got me a job with the park service. She's a hell of a packer. Treated her mules good. Learned a lot from her. She left, and then I got offered a permanent job. You know, if someone told me I was going to be the lead packer of Grand Canyon National Park, I'd have told them they were full of shit. There's no way. Excuse my mouth! I am a packer. I deal with mules. And that's where it started. I mean, I never thought I'd have a career, and I dang sure didn't think I'd be up here at the park. I kind of got the brass ring. I'm truly blessed and grateful for everything I have. My wife down here videotaping me, her name's Marissa. She's the love of my life. We live up here. I mean, I'm just blessed.

JS: So, you mentioned Melissa Williams is really the first person who taught you how to pack, and from the little bit that you've talked to me about packing, it's beyond a skill. I would call it an art form. So, could you describe what it was like learning that skill, and how it might be different here at Grand Canyon versus packing somewhere else?

CC: Sure. You know, learning from her... She was super fast. She'd kick my ass every morning. She'd have her string packed up, and I was still tying hitches. I don't know how you do that. And I started watching her, and I picked up little tricks and tips, and I got to be as fast as she was. You know, in packing in the canyon, I always say: "If you can pack in the canyon, you can pack anywhere." We set our saddles and everything different on our mules, because we start off going downhill. You know, they set further back on them. Your britchens are tight, instead of having just a hand width in between them. A britchen is what goes around the ass of the mule and holds the saddle back. There's just a lot of different things that you have to do, because if you set it wrong on your mules, you'll sore them up. And the most important thing, you know, for me, being a boss at the pack barn, my guys and my mules come first. And that's how Ron taught me. He took good care of me, and that's what he taught. You know, if you got sored up mules, you ain't making money. And it's mean to them, you know? And I don't dare – I love them. They're like my kids. So, you set your saddles up different, and your hitches. My mules, the most I'll put on them is 160 pounds of product, and then when you add the saddle and the bags and lash up and manny, it comes out just under 200 pounds. And I won't pack them over 160. There's no reason to. You know, if you're up on flat country, you can pack on a little heavier, but going in the canyon there's no reason to.

JS: So, Melissa got you that position with the park service, and now you're just packing with the park service. Could you tell us the work that you do to support the trail crew? Because the mules are part of the trail crew of Grand Canyon National Park.

CC: You bet! So, anybody who works for park service – right now we're shut down. With all the term stuff that happened, I'm the only packer left. When I first started on here, there was eight of us, and I'm the only one now. And so, we're hoping we get some more positions hired on. I had some really good guys, and I hope they come back. Anybody who goes down in the canyon,

we pack their clothes, food, whatever they need to use for the rangers, water department, anybody who goes down in there, we take their stuff for them. And we also, as being part of the trail crew, we pack in food and tools for the trail crew, and we – just this last week, I was down trying to bust up a big rock a couple days ago. So, we haul dirt in the canyon. You know, I mean, I tell people that we haul dirt, and they kind of laugh. You're at the bottom, but there's just rock down there, so we have dirt pits that are set up that we go in and we haul dirt and put dirt on the trail to make it nice for the mules and the hikers.

JS: Thank you. In doing this type of work with trail crew, what have been some of your most memorable experiences?

CC: Like scary ones? There have been a lot of them. Packing in the Grand Canyon, somebody told me one time: "It's hours and hours of sheer boredom with seconds of sheer terror." And that's the truth. Usually if you get in a bad wreck down there, something dies. Knock on wood, the whole time I've been here I've never lost a mule. This is where I packed for Xanterra. I know down there at the bottom of the canyon you come through a tunnel and you go across the black bridge. Well, I had a mule that hung up on the black bridge. Some of those mules were a little ornery, and you didn't want to go underneath the packs on the bridge, so I was up on the rails looking down at the river, going by my mules to cut one of my mules loose. So that was a pretty fun time. Most of the time, everything goes really good. You do everything you can to mitigate. Your stock has to be good in the canyon. And you got to trust them, and you got to trust who you're packing with. Because you never know when you're going to be hanging off the edge and you're going to need help. Another fun time is this time of the year when you're riding down on ice. I was up at the top of the BA coming out one day. I was riding this mule named Joe. She had lost a shoe, and that was one of the scariest rides I ever had coming out of the canyon. It was a front shoe, off side. We got near the top... She didn't do it when we were lower. When you go in the canyon, it's scary as hell at the top and it's scary when you're coming out. She kept going down on her front end, and, you know, the safest place you can be is in the middle of them. Not on the ground. So that was pretty scary, you know. But, I mean, I love riding in the canyon. It's always changing. People ask me, do you get tired of the trail? And there's something always different down there. It's like a new adventure every time you go down.

JS: You talked about mitigating those risks, and those wrecks that you could have. How do you do that in the way that you pack the weight on, and how do you do that in how you pick what mule is your hand mule, who's your whip mule? How do you decide the order of your mules?

CC: Well, you know, first off, we buy our mules from Neil Grover up in Beatty, Oregon. He's the one that gets the contract, and he guarantees them for a year. If I don't like the color on them, I can call him and send them back. We go up there, he'll have 20 head. He kind of has got an idea what I like, and he'll have 20 head, and we'll ride through them, and we'll whittle it down to the ones that we want. When you first start a mule in the canyon, you have five mules in your hand. So, you have your hand mule, your second, third, fourth, and your whip mule. Your hand mule, you put a new mule there, so you got control over them. But after you get them going, you want your most steady mule in your hand. That way, if you get into a wreck and you got to go

back and take care of something – the other mules, they break off. We have breakaways that we put on, so if a mule does go off, it doesn't drag the whole string. You don't tie them hard and fast. And you want your faster mule in the back. That's why they call them a whip, because they whip them around switchbacks. So, you want something that ain't going to – a lot of mules are really smart, and when they're too smart, they get in trouble, because they get to playing around. I've got one in my string, his name is Poncho. He runs third or fourth, and if I can keep him back there, he's got to keep going, so he don't get in no trouble. He'll go up and start biting the mule's hocks in front of him, just playing! He's just dumb. I've cussed at him a lot! I try to keep it down on the trail, because I work for park service, but I've cussed that mule a bunch. Your second mule is one that, if he's kind of iffy, so he's right there if you've got to get a hold of him. And then your third, fourth, and fifth mule are the ones you want to put a little trust in. You don't want one if he breaks away he's going to head home. I had mules that worked for Xanterra that did that. And I don't like to hike. So, you want to put some pretty solid mules back there, further back in the string.

JS: I have to ask. You mentioned Poncho. Do you have any funny or silly stories about Poncho?

CC: Yah, well, we were hauling dirt down at the bottom of the canyon. We were fixing up campsites down there at Phantom Ranch, and I took six head of mules, and I was going to leave one in the corral. And Poncho's pretty good. I left some feed for him and stuff. So, we took off for our day to go haul dirt. Well, we were at the dirt pit, and here comes this lady squalling there was a crazy mule loose. Well, it was Poncho. He didn't like being left there. Usually he was alright, but that day he wasn't. Our round corral down there is rock and it's got bars that go across, and there's about that much room in between the bars. Well, there was a lady that watched Poncho. And he'd watched us, I guess, climb over the rail, because there was a big rock. He stepped on that rock, got in there, and he got wedged in between the bar and the deal. I didn't see none of this. This lady was, like, hysterical about it. She said he was biting and crazy, and, you know, he was just Poncho. Well, that sorry booger. He got through there all the way. He broke the concrete and lifted the pipe and got through and come running up. So, I took off, and here I'm at a high lope coming down through Phantom Ranch telling people excuse me in the politest way I can, and here comes Poncho. So, I had to tie him on, and he went with us, and he was happy. I was just trying to give him a break, but yah, that's Poncho. That's why he's in my string. I don't put him with nobody else. If he gets away from me, he'll run away. He'll get just far – oh, son of a – he'll get just far enough where you can almost catch him, and then he'll run off. And it's just a mule game to him. He runs off doing a mule laugh. But he's a good mule. I wouldn't trade him for nothing in the world. He's for sure entertaining!

JS: I wanted to talk a little more about packing and now, in your role as the lead packer, you will have, kind of, staff come in and out. You've been here for...

CC: ...six years.

JS: Six years. Do you have certain skills that you like to teach those who come here to Grand Canyon that you've picked up over the years that – this has to be done a certain way?

CC: Yah. When we saddle, everything is the same. Everybody ties the same knots. Everybody does the same thing. And it's the same with tying our hitches. That way, if you get in a wreck down in the canyon, you know exactly where to go. A lot of times, you'll have a mule, if they go on their side, you got to be able to jerk their saddle off and get everything. This guy that's tying this knot this way, and this guy is doing it this way, you just might as well get out your knife and start cutting rope. That's one of the big things. And another thing with nobody be beating on my mules. For sure, every once in a while, one needs a kick in the belly. If you guys ever come over to the corral and watch them stand around and kick each other with metal shoes on with tungsten on them and they're not putting holes, me kicking them with the toe of my boot ain't hurting them. A lot of folks that don't hang around stock don't understand that. They think that's cruel, but I've been around it enough I know I ain't going to hurt them. They just straighten up for you. But that's another big thing is those mules have got to trust you, too, down in the canyon. I had a guy that was here – he didn't work for me. I worked with him, though, and he was bad about beating a mule on the head. And I didn't find out until after he was gone, because if I'd have found out, I'd have whooped his ass, park service or not. We just don't be mean to mules. But, you get down there, if you've got to get a hold of one, and if they're scared of you, they're going to turn away and they can knock you off over the edge and there's a lot of times, it seems like it always happens when you have something going on, it's aside a 1000-foot cliff, and you're looking over the edge, and you're going: "Be good!" So, you want to make sure that – that's another big thing, is you got to treat them mules right.

JS: Could you tell us a little bit about the mules in your string now? Your riding mule and the five that you like to take down into the canyon?

CC: Yah. My riding mule is Eby. She's one of the only mules that I got that I thought I was going to have to send back. She was really hot. Scared of the rocks. Well, the canyon's full of rocks. But I really cared for this mule. I just rode her up in Oregon, and I said: "She'd going to make a riding mule." And I kept her, and she sure has. I took her to the Rose Bowl! I was in the Rose Bowl parade. That was a memorable experience. That was fun. And then my hand mule – I got this new hand mule that I've been working in. Her name is Sadie. I like black mules. I guess that comes from when I worked for Xanterra. My first riding mule that I rode, she was four years old and nobody had rode her, and I got to ride her and get her used to the canyon, and I've just loved black mules since. Sadie is six, and she's going to make a hand mule. She's super gentle. She's super brave. Not a lot fazes her. Then I got Notch. He's my other riding mule, and he runs second in my string. He's a super good mule, too. Then I got Naco. He's a big old yellow mule, and he's like Poncho a little. He bites the mule in front of him and plays and walks on the edge and scares the hell out of you. I wanted to ride him, because he's a big mule, but, god, that booger will beat your guys out of you. He's got such a hip sweep to him, it just throws my damn back out. Then I got Poncho – old black and white mule. And then I got Junior. And Junior is – if I got to go down in the canyon – well, I went down the other day, and since it was just me, I had somebody hiking with me, but I took him and this other mule named Chester. I mean, they're just that solid where they'll stand. They stood all day while we were busting on that rock. So did Eby. I love my mules. I mean, I just – they're amazing.

JS: And I can attest to Naco's goofiness. I've seen that, and he scared the crap out of me. So, we talked about the mules extensively. We've talked about packing. I'm sure everyone wants to know why mules. In the past, we have used burros and horses in the canyon historically since the 1890s, but why mules? What's so special about them, to use them here in the park?

CC: Well, the miners used to use burros. They were smaller, because a lot of the trails were narrower. They're hearty. Burros are tough. That's where you get a mule, is from a horse and a donkey. And they're a desert animal. I mean, a donkey can get fat on air. That's what – them mules, it makes them tough. Their bone structure's a lot stronger. Their feet are tough. They can handle the elevation change. I mean, we'll go from being up here on the rim – when we go down to Phantom, and sometimes we get down there, it's 120 degrees in the shade. You know, if you get that with a horse a ton, you're going to kill them. I'm sure there's horses – I don't want to offend any of my horse people. I'm sure there's horses that could do it, but it'd sure be hard on them. We can get down there, and we let our mules cool off a little bit. You can just kick them out and feed them and they go to water. Horse did that, they're going to colic up on you and die. They're just amazing animals. You know, everybody always hears they're stubborn. A mule's not stubborn. They're very smart. They're smarter than a horse. They won't do something if they think it's going to hurt them. You could beat that mule to death, you're not going to push him over that edge. I could whoop a horse over an edge. That mule, he's not going to do it. Not usually.

JS: Roanie.

CC: Yah, Roanie, he's not scared of the edge. A lot of times, to get a mule to do something, you have to make it their idea. If you push on them, and push them, it just ain't going to work. You got to outsmart the mule. And they're pretty smart, so that's why we use the mules.

JS: These traits you're talking about, their wit, their intelligence, is that something you pick up on when you go ride them in Oregon? You had mentioned you ride 20 of them, and you pick five or six. What about those five or six makes you want to take them back to the canyon?

CC: Well, you know, the first thing I look at on a mule or a horse is their eye. You know that saying, what: "Eyes are the window to the soul?" That's true in a mule. You want something that's got a real kind, gentle eye. You don't want what I call a pig eye, where their eyes are huge when you walk up to them. You got white, you want to steer clear of them, because they'll kill you. And I like to put – they guy that we get our mules from, he sets up these obstacle courses, because he knows what we have to do. You can't replicate the canyon, but he tries his best. He's got a bridge he built at his house over a creek and makes the thing get across and stuff. And you want something that's kind of curious, like if you throw stuff out, if you get one that runs over in the corner away from it, you don't want them, it's going to take too much time. But if they're coming up sniffing different things in the corral that you throw in, that's the kind that you want, because they're a little braver, a little bit more sure of themselves. I've had mules that I thought were just going to be great, and they see that hole and they're like: "Holy shit!

We're not going in there! That's scary!" Those take a little bit more time. But that's what I mainly look for. And then, of course, conformation in how they look. Mules are different from horses. They don't have withers. That's right up above their shoulders in the front. That's where your saddle sits good, where it comes like this. Most mules are real flat backed, and it's hard to get a saddle. That's why you have to use a britching on them, so the saddle doesn't slide up on their neck. I try to buy that has more prominent withers to them, more of a horse back to them. I try to get that, because if you get a real – I've had a few flat-backed mules in the canyon. It's just hard on them. It rubs their butt and takes the hair off and stuff. So, if you can get their conformation more to hold the saddle, the better off the mule is.

JS: What, in your experience, has been the scariest part of the canyon for your new mules?

CC: The top.

JS: Just the top?

CC: For going in there! Yah. When I worked for Xanterra, Ron put me on this big old – I was kind of, well, I was full of myself, thought I was it, and I wasn't. I've learned a lot since then. I was riding this big red mule named Rastus. And I had been riding him and following the dude strings in, and a big old young mule. He was four, and raw, too. He goes: "I want you to lead out on that mule down to Phantom today." And I said: "Alright." Hell, I'm young and strong, I can do it. I ain't scared. That booger scared the hell out of me. We started in, and I had two little girls behind me and a mom. I'll never forget it. We were right at the top of the BA, and we were rolling in, and it was like that first time that booger had ever seen the hole. And he sucked his ass and went backwards. Well, you take and if you – the mule's running backwards when you spur him, he goes backwards faster. He's not like a horse where you can get him to go forward. Well, he spun around. He dropped his two hind legs off the top of the BA. And I'm sitting there and, trust me, the only reason I was still there was because I was scared to death. And I was whooping that mule and spurring him. And that was another time that I knew how strong a mule was. He pulled himself back up on that canyon. I mean, his feet was purchased, but if he'd have went off there, you know, we were going to die. And he sucked back through and got in behind these two little girls that was behind me. And was off, and then he jumped back on the trail. Well, Ron saw what happened and he turned around and took us back up. And I was white as that paper right there. He goes: "What's wrong?" And I said: "Well, I almost died!" He goes: "Aw, you're fine!" And I said: "No! I almost died!" He goes: "Aw, I saw it. You were fine. You were a long ways from dying." So, I said: "Well, I ain't riding." And this is what I told him. I said: "I ain't riding that son bitch down lead. I ain't doing it." And he goes: "Well, yah, just follow Dragon." I didn't want to do that! But we did, and he was alright. He ended up making a mule, but, you know. Yee haw!

JS: That sounds terribly exciting! What, for you, is the most exciting thing about working at Grand Canyon as a mule packer? What excited you about your job?

CC: I mean, I'm doing something that I love to do. It's, don't tell nobody, but... I mean, I do work my ass off, don't get me wrong, but I'm on vacation every day. I just get to take care of my mules, and I live at the Grand Canyon. That's amazing. That's where I mean I'm just blessed. I get to do a job that I love to do. I love to come to work. And, I'll tell you, the longest job I ever did was two-and-a-half years. I got bored with it, and I'd pick it apart and get pissed and I'd quit. I've been here for six, and I love to get up and come to work every day.

AM: [unintelligible]

JS: So, not a cold weather fan?

CC: Yah. I should have been in the desert, like a donkey. Just riding in that canyon's amazing. And don't get me wrong, it's an adrenaline rush, too. And I love that part of it, too. If I didn't, I wouldn't do it. Anybody who says they ride in that canyon and don't get scared, they're full of shit. I don't care how handy you are. That booger's scary! It's just a wonderful place to live. Me and my wife, we've got our own business and she's able to work from home. I couldn't ask for anything better. I'll be here until I can't toe a stirrup.

JS: You mentioned a few times you're not a big hiker. Have you ever done any hiking in the canyon?

CC: Once.

JS: Once.

CC: It's on that top ten dumbest thing I ever did list. It's like third. When I was in high school, I played ball, football and baseball, and I was in pretty good shape. Well, we decided that we were – our teachers took us into the canyon. Well, I was with a bunch of buddies, and we hiked down to the river and back. And I thought I was going to die. Every time I looked up, it just got further away. And I have hiked in the canyon when we're hauling dirt and stuff like that, but it's short hikes. It burnt me. I really did. I didn't think I was ever going to get out of here. I thought I could – we left at dark and got out at dark. Yah, so. Yah. You guys have all the fun in the world hiking. That's why I can ride every one of my mules in my string. I ain't hiking out.

JS: You have a whole messaging about how you're not supposed to do that! How does that change your perspective? Because, most of us, I'm sure – I've had the privilege of riding down on a mule to the bottom, and it was drastically different from hiking. Could you kind of explain, what is that like to experience the canyon from the back of a mule?

CC: You know, I think it's better. I mean, to me, that's the only way to see the canyon. I see people hiking on that trail all the time, and they just – they look pissed off. They come out, and – going down, they're all happy and: "Yee haw! We're at the Grand Canyon!" Coming out, me and my mules are sons of bitches when they have to stop. Seriously! I've been called that! When you're riding a mule in the canyon, you don't have to look at your feet. You get to look around

and actually take in the beauty of the canyon. I've seen some fit people coming out that it's no problem, but I've seen people that are coming out – they're not enjoying themselves. They're probably thinking it was the dumbest thing they ever did, just like I did when I was hiking it! To me, that's the only way to see the canyon, because you can really take it in and see the beauty in it where you're not just beat down tired and hating life. You'll be sore! If you don't ride, you better have some Bengay and get ready. I take a lot of folks down there in Xanterra, and they come out and they was – they had the best trip they ever had, but they were sore.

JS: What parts of the canyon do you and your crew cover with the mules? What trails, and what type of work do you do on the trails?

CC: We do the North Kaibab, South Kaibab, Bright Angel. We've got a project in that year to go from Indian Garden over to Hermit to supply that bathroom, so that'll be an overnight trip. I mean, if I can get a mule on it, I'll go. You bet! If I can get them down there, by golly, I'm going. Here pretty quick, when they North Rim opens up, we always go over to the North Rim opener, and we haul tools down to clear rock slides on there, on the north side. We try to do – well, when I have a crew, we try to do at least four trips rim to rim. I've done that. The north side is way more scary than the BA or the South Kaibab. There's some tight stuff over there. But it's fun. We'll cover wherever they want us to go.

JS: And after experiencing all that, do you have a favorite place in Grand Canyon?

CC: I do – the narrows down just past Indian Garden. There's a lot of Indian history down there, and, to me, it's one of the – you got the creek running through there, and you're looking down – it's just one of the prettiest places I've seen in the canyon. Yah. That's my favorite place to go, is down through the narrows. You've got the creek crossing, and then you hit the corkscrew, and then you go into hell.

JS: So, we're at the centennial year. You've done some really exciting things with the Rose Parade. What do you look forward to most about continuing to work with the park service and trail crew?

CC: Just continuing to keep a safe program going. Get some really – I'd love to get my guys back. I had four guys that worked for me – Max, Ed, and Sherwin. I had back surgery, I think it was a couple of years ago. They replaced a disc in my back, and so I was down. I was still coming to work, but I wasn't getting a pack, and those guys took good care of my mules. I didn't have to worry about them. Just build a good pack program back up, and doing that stuff, and packing. Right now, I do my best to try to keep the mules legged up as best I can. Right now, it's just me. So, I do a lot of riding on the rim and stuff. I can't believe that I get paid to ride mules on the rim. That's pretty awesome. But yah – get the program built back up. I mean, the whole trail crew. When I started, we had fifty people. I'll tell you this – I'm proud to wear the park service uniform. When I worked for Xanterra, they cussed park service horrible. Said: "Oh, you're going to the dark side." You know – whatever. This is the best job I have ever had in my life. It's like Disney Land. I wish I had got on here when I was 19 or 20 years old. It's amazing. When I

started with trail crew, we had 50 people just on trail crew. We had ten people on compost. And then we had eight packers. Well, we're down to five of us, because of these term jobs and hiring and stuff like that, and I want to see that get built back up. I'm fortunate I get to be a part of that, and see it built back up to the way it should be. I mean, they – well, they're finding out now, there's rock slides everywhere, and it's hard to do with just two people. So, that's what I'd like to see, is it get built back up like it should be, and then be proud to work for it.

JS: I want to thank you personally for all the work that trail crew does, and that you and your mules do, because we wouldn't have these trails to hike on, our staff down in the canyon wouldn't have their supplies – I mean, the inner canyon runs on trail crew.

CC: Thank you.

JS: So, what you guys do is incredible, and I really hope that you get your team back together again.

CC: Appreciate it.

JS: That would be excellent.

CC: Yes.

JS: Chris, I was curious, would you be willing to take any questions from the audience?

CC: Sure!

JS: Yah.

AM: Chris, I'm with you. If I'm going on a trail, well, in the days when I could ride, it was a mule.

CC: Yes sir.

AM: But one of the things that I've enjoyed around here from time to time, it's been awhile, I used to love to listen to Ron brief the dudes going down.

CC: Yes sir!

AM: I'd watch that, watch the look on their faces. "My god, what am I doing here!"

CC: You bet.

AM: OK. I'd like to hear you brief – I think these folks would like to hear you brief the dudes! Can you do that?

CC: I did! You know, when Ron – he would do his speech, and I always did my own little thing when I got them in, just to get kind of personal with them. I used to make people stand on one foot and hop, and I told them, if you can't do that, there is no reason in the world for you to be going in the canyon. If you aren't athletic enough to stand there and hop on one foot, you shouldn't be going. And I would – I was kind of ornery with them! And it wasn't because I wanted to be mean to them, it was just because I wanted them to know what they were getting into. It wasn't just a dude ride up on the rim, you're going into hell. You're going to – and I'd tell them: "I'm not here for your entertainment. I'm not a clown. I'm here to get you in and out of the Grand Canyon safe and alive." And I said: "Hopefully we can have a good time along the way." Yah, I guess I was kind of mean to them.

JS: Tough love!

CC: It was. It was. I'd start off with that, and I'd tell them what we were going to do. Ron, bless his heart. God, that booger. It was July, and he sent me down. I had some folks with me. Not one of them was under 75. And it was mid summer. Hot. It was running 120, 125 down at the canyon. And I asked him, I said: "I don't want to take them. I don't want to kill them." And he goes: "You'll be alright." Alright! I tried to get him not to go. By god, they made it. They were all hanging over the saddle horn when we rolled into Phantom. I called in in that last mile – I said: "We're coming in hot." We got to Indian Garden and we'd always stop for lunch. I didn't even get them off their mules. I fed them lunch on their mule, wet them down, and we rolled. They made it! And they had a great time. That was the biggest thing with me, when I was taking people, was that I really wanted them to know what they were getting into, because once you get down there, that's a hell of a hike out, and I ain't going to turn you around and give you one of my mules to hike out. So that's what I would tell them – that they were riding off into hell.

AM: It's been a great talk – great experience.

CC: Thank you, sir!

AM: You're welcome. Can you tell us a little bit about the age of the mules when you acquire them, and how long they serve, and then what becomes of them after their days are over?

CC: You bet! We try to get our mules between six and eight years old. We already want them broke. You know, to try to break a mule in the canyon ain't the best time to do that. I run my mules until they're 17. I'm sure I could get some more years out of them, but by god, I get a retirement after park service, so should they. I won't run my mules until they're broke down. I want them to go to a good home where they get used a little lightly. A lot of times, we'll send them to other parks, where it's not as hard as packing in the canyon. We do adopt them out to rescues. I'll line people up ahead of time that I know that I can look at and know that they're good folks, and tell them that I'm sending these mules to rescue, and then they'll come in and donate how much ever to take the mules.

AM: Hi Chris!

CC: Hi ma'am.

AM: I'm Helen, and I'm a park service volunteer in the inner canyon, so I'm very appreciative of your hard work so I don't have to carry all my stuff down when I'm volunteering.

CC: Thank you.

AM: Just the timeline – I didn't get to. You've been working for the park service for six years, but Ron Clayton left about 2005, so you've been at Grand Canyon for quite a long time and with the Apache Stables. Can you – I don't think people realize how long you've actually been working at Grand Canyon.

CC: It's funny. The canyon draws me back. I'd leave. I worked construction. I helped remodel and do plumbing on the Red Feather Lodge. Worked at Apache Stables. So, I've probably been off and on up here at the canyon over 20 years. I just – I love it. Like I said, I did that remodel at Red Feather, and then when they built the new building, I helped plumb that. And then I got on with Apache Stables after that. And then I got on with Xanterra, and I worked for Xanterra twice, I think two or three years each time, something like that. Yes ma'am.

AM: Hi. I'm an old walker. And we all know in the hiker community, there are some people who would like to see mules off the trails. I'm not one of those.

CC: Good!

AM: I'd like to hear what you have to say about the coexistence between walkers and riders and mules.

AM: And runners!

CC: You know, most folks that are in the canyon are pretty nice to deal with. They understand. A lot of times I tell – I don't know how many times I say in a day: "You need to go to the inside." And I'd rather have somebody squished against the wall over fall 1000 foot to their death. Most folks are pretty nice. You get your jerks. Don't get me wrong, I've had people. As I've gotten older – before, I'd just get pissed off. As I've gotten older, I see – usually when they're hiking out is when they're rude. They're hot and they're tired and they're mad. Like I said, most hikers are pretty good. I think since I work for the park service, since I put on that patch, you have to be a little bit more friendly and kind than when you worked at Xanterra! I think I've only had to yell at two or three people the whole time I've been here, and that was because they were just being stupid, where they were endangering me or my stock. You tell people not to touch them. Our mules are gentle, but if they ain't used to somebody reaching out to touch them and they try to touch them, you ask them once nice and maybe twice. After that I'll sure enough raise my voice with them. But for the most part, most folks are pretty good. I got to admit... For

anybody that hikes, this is a terrible story. It's when I worked for Xanterra, though – back when I was younger. I had an old hand mule. His name was Zeke. He was a little fat, black mule. He did not like hikers. So, I was coming in to Phantom, and I was hauling hay. We used to haul bales of hay down there to feed the mules. And there was this lady. She's in her little running outfit and everything, and she's standing on the liner rocks. And I told her – I said: "Ma'am, please step off that rocks." And she's standing there running in place, and she says: "I do this all the time, and I know what I'm doing." And I said: "Ma'am, please step off the rocks. My mules are pretty wide, and they'll knock you down in the ditch." And she goes: "You just need to go on." So, I said: "Alright." So, I whistled my mules up. Well, old Zeke put her in the ditch. And, so, I whistled my mules and rolled up and told her: "Have a good day!" You know. I mean, that's a – you know, stuff like that happens. For the most part, that's probably one of the most danger parts of our job. Because you are hiking past 1000 people on the trail, and that's 1000 different personalities. I don't think anybody's ever tried to hurt you. There was a guy – Chaz, this kid that worked for Xanterra. He was their lead packer. They had their mules going through, and a guy had an umbrella and started opening it right in the middle of a string, trying to scare his mules. Stuff like that, you don't tolerate. For the most part, I think we all get along. I hear a lot of complaining about the mule poop on the trail and everything else. Well, during winter it's traction. And I'm sure those people that are sitting there going in those toilets – because we haul the trash out and we haul the toilet paper, and I'm sure they're thankful for when they're in there wiping their ass that the mules are in there. But for the most part, I think most folks are pretty good.

JS: Well, thank you so much, Chris. We're going to wrap up.

CC: You bet! Thank you, guys.

JS: We're going to wrap up. Thank you also for the excellent questions.

CC: Thank you folks! Have a great day.