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TM: Today is Saturday, December 4, 2021 This is a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Jake DAYLEY. My name is Tom Martin, this interview is conducted at our house in Flagstaff, Arizona. Jake, thank you so very much for your willingness to visit us here today. What year were you born?

JD: I was born in 1981.

TM: Where?

JD: Bismarck, North Dakota.

TM: What did your folks do in Bismarck?

JD: Well my dad was an adjunct psychology professor and he took jobs all over the west just prior, they were living in Missoula, and he got a job in Dickinson, which is west of Bismarck so we had just moved there let in my mother's pregnancy, and for the birth, we visited Bismarck hospital because it was bigger.

TM: did you grow up in North Dakota, or did your father keep moving?

JD: My parents divorced when I was 4. My father stayed. He had a lot of wanderlust so he

continued to move about, my mother and I moved to Phoenix, Arizona, where my grandparents were living. Actually, they had both just died. So, they didn't live there currently so we occupied their house.

TM: Ok. Is that where you grew up then, Phoenix?

JD: Yes

TM: So, introduced to the desert an at early age.

JD: Yes. Every summer my dad had custody so for 9 to 10 weeks, I would go up mostly to northern Utah and my dad is very outdoorsy, so we would spend much of that summer he had the summer off because he was a professor, we'd spend much of every summer hiking and backpacking, mostly in northern Utah but throughout Idaho, Montana, Colorado, a bit of Nevada.

TM: What did your father do to help you as a child, start enjoying that?

JD: I think it was strictly just exposure to it. He instilled in me a lot of a lot of values and we just did it so much I enjoyed it from the get-go. I always wanted to go. I had brothers who did not want to go and they were towed along during some trips and other times it was just dad and I. I was just always outside.

TM: Were your brothers older or younger?

JD: They were stepbrothers and they're both younger, 2 and 4 years younger. So my dad remarried when I was seven. And the step brothers at the time were five and three. They were not outdoorsy folks so, they got dragged along a lot till they were old enough to stay home and then they preferred to do that.

TM: When did you start heading out on your own maybe in Phoenix, or even up with your dad in the summers, start doing your own exploring?

JD: Early. My dad let me go out by myself from an early age, I'd say early teens for day hikes. Not sure how old I was my first solo backpack trip but maybe later teens.

TM: Did you develop friends in Phoenix that were into this kind of stuff?

JD: Not until the end of high school when I came into with contact with a guy, his name is

Paul Klink, and I've since lost contact with. In the last couple years of high school we did a handful of backpacking around Phoenix, in the Bradshaw's and the Superstition areas, like that.

TM: When was your first visit to Grand Canyon, do you remember that?

JD: My first time into the canyon is 1996 during high school, my mother and I actually did several consecutive years of Havasupai trips. Prior to that I've been on the South rim and North rim but I had not ventured down. I've had wanted to, but I was not able to at the time.

TM: With your mom or your dad?

JD: Mom.

TM: So, she was kind of outdoorsy as well.

JD: A bit yeah. She enjoys the outdoors. She doesn't get after it to the same extent my dad does but she enjoys camping and sightseeing. In the past 20 years we've done a lot of trips to the South rim, North rim or looking down at the canyon so I can point things out.

TM: Cool. Cool. When was your first solo backpack that you remember.

JD: I remember clearly it would be shortly after I moved to Flagstaff in the summer 2000. I just hiked out around Walnut Canyon. I think I spent the night at Fisher Point and walked out further east kind of the area that now the Arizona trail, and spent a few nights out. I guess I went once prior up to Utah, above the city of Ogden, just for one night. I might have been 16 or something then.

TM: The reason I ask is it shows a level of confidence in your skills, you've got camping down, you've got backpacking down. Typically, in quotes, that's a journey taken with others.

JD: Right.

TM: When you go by yourself, then it's a new door that you open there.

JD: That's primarily these days the trips that I do are solo trips.

TM: When was your first hike in Grand Canyon?

JD: It would be those Havasupai trips. In the eastern part of Grand Canyon not until 2000 when I moved here

Tm: OK, let's back up a but here. Havasu was in '96. Did you guys hike in, did you use the mules for your backpacks?

JD: The first year I believe, well, we hiked in all 3 years. I think the first year we used the mules and the next two years we did not and they were family trips it was my mom and I and then I could bring a friend which I did every year and I would typically have a cousin or an aunt or an uncle go and the young folks would take a day and venture down to Beaver Falls or to the River. I think we'd be there 3 days and then hike back out.

TM: So it was crowded, but it wasn't crazy crowded like it would become in the next 15 years or so.

JD: Yeah right. I actually have not been to Supai itself since then. I was on a river trip and hiked a ways up into Havasu Canyon but I've never seen the main waterfall since 1998. I hear it's much more crowded.

TM: Was it assumed in your family that you would go to college?

JD: Yes.

TM: And, what were your interests in high school that would direct you to college?

JD: I don't know that I had a specific career path. I didn't have any of that established in my head. I think I went to college more because it was the thing to do and my parents had gone, so I was second generation. My grandparents did not, it was just the expected path to take after high school. And so, I wasn't gung ho on college I had saved up a lot of money and after high school I took a 2 1/2 month road trip where my friend and I slept in the back of the truck and toured the US in Canada. At the end of that I was not at all sure I was even going to college. I found myself in Northern Arizona University (NAU) and it was a good fit and I quickly fell in with the parks and recreation management folks, who I found were very like-minded, kindred spirits all around. Both professors and students and I really sank my teeth into that.

TM: Did you actually get a parks and rec degree then?

JD: Yes.

TM: What's it actually called, in outdoor management, there's a word for that...

JD: It was just called Parks and Recreation Management. My emphasis was Outdoor Leadership.

TM: OK when did you graduate?

JD: In 2003

TM: When did you start climbing?

JD: I usually pinpoint 1999 as the year that I started climbing. I had tinkered around prior to that, mostly bouldering. But I really began rope climbing and using advanced techniques in 1999. I learned many of them from... my mother got tired of me taking horrendous risks and so she hired a guide, I don't recall his name, but he was through the Arizona mountaineering club. And that guy took me out for a couple days into the McDowell Mountains, north of Phoenix, and from there I learned how to belay and do general ropework involved in climbing and climbing gear.

TM: Start buying your own gears.

JD: Yeah Yeah

TM: OK

JD: Prior to that I had climbing shoes and chalk bag.

TM: Can you tell me one or two of your first major climbs?

JD: The Praying Monk on Camelback Mountain was early on. And then, boy, you know a lot of my early ones were top roping in the Queen Creek area or Camelback Mountain, some of that the very easy little multi pitch climbs on the head. There's Padrick's chimney, a 1950s era 5.1 and I don't recall the names of the other really easy routes. A few rounds in the 5.0 to 5.6 range that ascend the head of Camelback mountain. So, I tinkered around there and I tinkered around a spot in Phoenix in a place no one should ever climb called Papago Park.

TM: Why not?

JD: All the rocks are about as bad as Gray Castle. (Both laugh)

TM: So, you had some good experience?

JD: Yeah.

TM: So, living at Flagstaff, this is a bachelor's degree that you were working on...

JD: That's right.

TM: ... giving you close proximity to Grand Canyon. Did that then increase your hiking and climbing in the Grand Canyon?

JD: Initially no. It increased my hiking. In the first many years that I lived in Flagstaff, I frequented Grand Canyon maybe once a year, maybe twice. The hook was not set until quite some time later. So I had done 1 to 2 backpacking trips per year from maybe 2000 until 2011. I enjoyed it but I was not obsessed by any means, and I did not climb in the Grand Canyon at all during those years

TM: OK. Did you climb anywhere else near Flag?

JD: Yeah. I climbed very extensively around Flag. I started sport climbing and traditional climbing with the Pit and Overlook and Paradise Forks and then really in 2001, I got heavily into Sedona climbing and that was my primary focus and still is. At this point, its secondary to the Grand Canyon. I climb most frequently in Sedona and have, for 20 years now, established a lot of new climbs down there and that's where I love to climb the most up here.

TM: So tell me about the rock similarities between Sedona and Grand Canyon.

JD: Well, clearly there is the Coconino Sandstone, which occupies both places. In Sedona, many of the climbs are in the Coc, as we call it. Some of them are in some lower Supai layers. They call it the Schnebly Hill Formation down there and in the Canyon it's Supai but I think they're one of the same, if I'm not mistaken.

TM: Correct. So you spent a lot of time climbing in Sedona, which is equivalent to spending time climbing the same rock in the Grand Canyon. In the Coconino Sandstone, there is a really good hand hold, here let me give it to you. It doesn't anchor to anything.

JD: Often times that is very accurate, yeah, it can be quite soft and then in other places it

can be bullet hard. My partner in climbing Gray Castle was a fella named Zach Harrison. And at this point I think between the two of us he has more extensively climbed in Sedona. He came to that game later than I did, but he is extremely prolific. I would guess he's put up over 100 new routes. So, he is quite experienced in that soft sandstone as well.

TM: So, thank you for this introduction, I should mention that topic for this interview is the first ascent of Gray Castle, a named butte in Grand Canyon National Park. Can you tell me a little bit more about Zach, how you met him and how you two decided to climb Gray.

JD: I'll try to put it as short as possible but it's a long answer I think I met Zach maybe in 2011. I had moved back to town. I was living in Lake Tahoe briefly and moved back to Flagstaff. In the interim, when I was absent to town, he moved in and established himself as a Sedona Climber. And then I came back and we met because we both loved to climb in Sedona. And largely we have not climbed together, we've had different partners and or pursued different things in Sedona. He, more of the big routes back in the Coconino on the good rock and me chawsee little unclean spires. And so, our paths didn't cross too frequently. we did climb together on occasion but not too frequently and I knew of Gray Castle. I'm not sure when I first came to know of it. I probably heard of it from Mathieu Brown in about 2015 and became really interested because I learned it was the only unclimbed named summit within the Grand Canyon. In short order I organized a trip out there with my friend Everett, which was unsuccessful.

TM: Can you explain exactly where Gray Castle is and what it is?

JD: Gray Castle is a small tower on river left at River mile 55.4 which is about 1 mile upstream of Kwagunt Rapid. And it is a tower composed almost entirely of Bright Angel Shale. The Capstone is the Muav Limestone, which is why the tower exists.

TM: So the Muav capstone is harder to erode, is tougher than the shale below it. When I think of shale, I think of slate roofs, it's been cooked a little bit, but shale can be sort of like dirt.

JD: Shale is hard to even define as rock. It hasn't been metamorphosed. As you might imagine it's quite soft and in places you can literally dig your finger into it. It doesn't inspire confidence in the rock climber.

TM: So, where – how would one get to this place. It's on the banks of the Colorado River, so rivers can easily get there, but how are you gonna get there as a climber with your climbing gear?

JD: Well, the first time I went in we began on the Nankoweap Trail number 57, the one that begins in the House Rock Valley. We descended it to the river with ridiculously heavy packs.

TM: When was this?

JD: That was the winter of 2016. That was with Everett Carol III and I think his pack, he's a big strong guy, his pack was something like 68 pounds. And I'm a little guy - my pack was 55 pounds but we had way too much gear. We didn't know what we were getting into so we brought everything from double 60 meter ropes to a triple set of cams to a number of pins of different sizes, hammer, some bolts, a hand drill, quick links we had –

TM: So, before you get into the gear here, I'm thinking – you got these heavy packs. And your hiking along the Nankoweap Trial, which is on one side of the river, and Grey Castle is on the other side of the river. How did you get across and get back again?

JD: Pack Rafts. There are many different types and they have evolved quite a lot in the past 20 years, especially - you have folks like Harvey Butchart who had an air mattress that he used to navigate the river quite successfully. Now a days, there are Pack Rafts which are small inflatable rafts made out of material that varies from slightly tougher than a pool toy to actual rafting material. In our case, because we were simply crossing the river and floating a very flat section, we used SUP! Pack Rafts, the smallest of those is only a pound and a half. The paddle that goes with them is also similarly light, maybe 1 pound or something like that so it's very minimal. They pack down to smaller than the size of a sleeping bag in its stuff sack. And you blow them up with your own lung power generally in the case of the SUP!'s and put yourself and your pack inside them and cross the river. In the case of Nankoweap, there is one small riffle. It's unnamed and it's maybe a quarter-mile below the Nankoweap Rapid. And if you get in the tail waves of that you can float all the way to Grey Castle with no issues at all. So that's what we did both times that I went out there.

TM: So you would go from the Rim down to Nankoweap, walk down along the river, blow up your pack raft, hop in the water right there and exit at the base of the Castle?

JD: Correct yeah.

TM: So, your retreat is going to be back across the river and you're gonna have to hike back out the Nankoweap Trail because your vehicles are there. Alright, so now you got in. So, what happened on that first ascent attempt with Everett?

JD: I got up about 20 feet and Everett kind of said "I'm not doing this." A lot of rock had

already fallen onto Everett and I I couldn't help it. The nature of the shale, it just comes off in your hand.

TM: How do you set protection? I'm sorry to interrupt here but wait a minute. So, you've got cams, which are devices that can expand into cracks. I'm assuming you had a bolt kit. You might have left that at home, I don't know.

JD: No we had a bolt kit.

TM: And petons and various sizes of chalks which basically like glorified walnuts that you can hook into little cracks. Was there anything else to hang on off this things? Any other climbing gear that you had which you can describe for us in your tool box?

JD: No, that pretty well covers it. The second time I went I had these special pitons made for me by a friend in Phoenix, Art Christiansen. And they are 9 inch long hardened aluminum pitons that Art thought might better fit the nature of the cracks there and be more secure in the crack and so we had those but we never used them.

TM: Let's go back to 2016, with you and Everett. So this tower is sitting on a little hillside. The west side of it drops right down next to the river. The east side is kinda of on this ridge. So, Im assuming you guys went around to the East Side because of that ridge coming in. What is it, a 140-150 ft to climb?

JD: That's right.

TM: So. How did it come to pass that Everett is sitting right under you? There would've been a lot of stuff coming down, I would imagine. It's a girk pile.

JD: Yes, very much so yeah. So the Riverside is un -climbable because there is no continuous crack system that reaches the summit. On the other side, the short side, the saddle side, is climbable because it has a few crack systems to choose from. They are generally discontinuous but you can link them together with ledges and link your way up crack systems all the way to the top or so it seemed to us. We chose that side. I started up what I thought to be the best line and at about 20 feet up having put in... Generally climbers will put in a piece of protection, assuming the rock is good, roughly every 8 to 10 feet, and in this case, the rock hold is so poor that the quality the gear is then poor or it may rip out and the rock would just blow out around it and so your are putting in sometimes double pieces that are equalized together with a sling meaning that should the climber fall an equal amount of force would be placed on both of the pieces, so that the pieces

themselves would be less likely to blow out the rock than a single piece alone and many pieces are placed and by many I made every 2-3 feet just to prevent anything catastrophic from happening. If one or two fail and blow out the rock you're still gonna be off the ground in the event of a fall and nothing catastrophic would happen. Part of our reasoning in bringing so much gear is we were going to sew this thing up with gear to minimize any actual danger.

TM: Tell me about the cracks, what sort of cracks are we talking about? Are they wide, tiny, deep? The Bright Angel Shale is like trying to climb the side of a ream of paper for an ant, with all these very crumbly little horizontal layers.

JD: Yeah the cracks in the Bright Angel Shale are rotten. That is the best adjective I can think of to describe them. They exfoliate, so the surface 1 to 2 inches generally rips out and so the cracks that we were following are both wide and narrow, they vary a lot but in general any type of gear that you're placing have to be placed deep. The trigger of a cam has to be buried in there. The external one to two inches is rotten which makes the cracks for the most part impossible to free climb because you have nothing substantial to grab. It will all just break and so much of the climbing on Gray Castle ended up being aid-climbing, meaning we placed gear, attached aiders to it, which are similar to rope ladders, stood up in the aiders, placed another piece, attached more aiders, and kind of mechanically ascended the cracks so as not to have to pull on this rotten rock.

TM: Did you do that in 2016?

JD: Yes

TM: Ok, so you guys are doing that right from the start in 2016. In 2016, did you see any signs of anyone else having attempted to climb the Castle?

JD: No signs but I know of prior attempts. I think the signs would've vanished because the rock is so soft in other types of rock you can see things like pin scars, which are scars from pitons and other things being banged into cracks. Those are long since gone if they were ever there but I do know of at least two prior attempts on Gray Castle in the past 20 or 30 years. Maybe more than two.

TM: Yeah it has been looked at by a number of people over the years, there hasn't been one successfully, or at least, you guys were the first documented success. So, 2016 taught you what?

JD: That I need a very experienced partner both in soft rock and aid climbing techniques,

someone equal to, if not more competent, than myself.

TM: Typically aid climbing is where you have an anchor, but maybe you're are climbing a ceiling and there's nothing under you, so you put your feet in loops, like a rope ladder basically, and you go from protection to protection to protection. When I think of other aid climbing where bolting is allowed, you take a drill, and set a rock anchor and then put your aid device on the anchor. So without bolting, you are relying on chalks or cams in cracks, every foot?

JD: Not that often. The crack that Zach and I chose to take on the more recent attempt was a little bit better. Protection was placed more like every 3 feet, on average.

TM: So a big step between pro to pro.

JD: Yeah, if the rock were excellent and you could do what's called top stepping, climbing to the highest step of the rope ladder so to speak, then, pro could be 5 feet apart but in this case I would say on average it was 3 and there were spots where the cracks end and there are mandatory free climbing moves in which case we would place bolts. We did have bolts and we hand drilled them though there are very few and about half the cases we set drilled angles. So we would drill a hole because there's nothing else there and pound a piton basically although 90+ percent of the climb is clean aid meaning not bolts or pins, things to come back out of the rock.

TM: So, you actually left some pitons in the rock because you could not beat them out?

JD: Right. In the case of the anchors on the top of both pitches it was not really possible to build a safe anchor with gear, so in those cases, there is permanent protection there.

TM: So, 20 feet in 2016 and then a retreat. With huge packs. What did that climb do for you, did that inspire you to try it again, or say we're done with this.

JD: Oh no, it let the fire under me. I instantly wanted to come back. I felt like we could've gone farther, felt like it could be climbed. Felt not only like I could climb it but that other people could too which made me want to get back even quicker. I had five other permits to go back all of which failed for one reason or another. It's almost unbelievable at this point. The one the next year with an extremely talented climber named Jake Tipton, the most talented climber I've climbed in 27 years of climbing. And we got all the way down to the river and typical of Grand Canyon the storm that was supposed to come in the next day came in that day and you absolutely cannot climb on Bright Angel Shale when it is wet, so we hiked

down, didn't even cross the river, then came back out. Then I had a trip the next year with a Mathieu Brown and the same fella, Zach Harrison.

TM: 2018?

JD: Probably 2018 yeah and I think that was also rained out and then I had another one with with the two of them and in this case Matthew had been on a prior trip earlier in the year so was he was on a private river trip in February 2019 and we filled two hall bags pu with gear and he eddied out at Grey Castle and hiked those haul bags up and left them there. Because we had a permit only six weeks later. I do not recall how that one failed but it could have been weather. There was one that failed because Matthew bailed and then Zach and my vehicles were not reliable enough to make the trip out there at that time. Matthew was our ride and there was a final trip earlier this year in the spring of 2021, so now the haul bags have been there for over a year and that failed because Matthew and Zach both got their Covid vaccines just prior to the trip and weree suffering the side effects from the vaccine and couldn't fathom that long of a hike with a heavy pack so I got another permit that ended up being a successful one which was this October and all in all it was either the sixth or seventh permit I've had to climb Gray Castle, all of which failed in the past.

TM: That's amazing. King Bruce, you know that story? He's getting trounced in battle and is watching a spider trying to climb his tent pole and the spider is falling and falling. Eventually the spider gets to the top. Bruce rallies his troops and they win the battle. So I'm going to start calling you King Bruce now!

JD: King Bruce! (Laughs) I had certain friends and significant others who said "Jake, maybe this is a sign you shouldn't mess around with this one." (Laughs)

TM: So, when did you start? Do you remember the date you guys went for the trail head?

JD: Yeah. Lets see, we climbed it on October 24, 2021, so I think our permit was October 23 through October 26. We had four days.

TM: Ok, so 4 climbing days. One day to get there. Now, you were relying on the gear Mathieu had placed back in 2019, right?

JD: Yes, although I'm lucky enough to have friends in the river guiding community and those friends had intermittently checked on the bags to ensure their integrity every season. So I had had a friend who works for Azra check within a month before our trip and he said everything's fine.

TM: So the gear was there. So your packs wouldn't have been super heavy, but you still need a light jacket, pack raft, food...

JD: Right. We brought some extra cams. I think they were both under 40 pounds for the trip down.

TM: Great. But then you have to remove that stuff, planning for a river trip to come in and get that stuff.

JD: Yeah, which has already happened.

TM: Great. Did you actually get to Gray's on the 23rd.

JD: Yes. I think it was something like 11 hours, 10 or 11 hours from the car all the way to Gray Castle. We camped in a nice sandy spot right off the river

TM: Nice, you got water there, and some shelter. OK so then what happened on the 24th?

JD: Bright and early we hiked up there. Like you say it's right above the river and so it's literally a 15 minute approach. Only 15 minutes because the terrain is very steep and we stood around for about a half hour deciding on which route to take, whether to take the one I tried five years prior or whether to take the only other logical line which I also considered five years prior. Zach Harrison and I this time decided to take the other line which is more direct but looks from the ground to be more difficult. And Zach volunteered to take the first pitch and so he wrapped up and started up that 95% aid climbing. Like I said there is the occasional spot that requires a free move so that involves clearing off as much loose rock as you can so you have a handhold that will stay in place and then doing one or two moves to reach another crack system and place gear in. And so he took the first pitch and did marvelous on it. There was a ton of rock fall and I was constantly moving the belay strategically to be out of the rockfall zone and was lucky enough to not get hit with anything big. I did get hit with dozens of small rock but wasn't phased by that. And then Zach got up to the first belay ledge which as I say would not except adequate natural protection, so some bolts were hand-drilled there - which is a very tedious process. The rock, although it's brittle the sections of it that are adequate for bolts are extremely dense and so both Zach and I have placed many bolts in Sedona and the amount of time it takes to place a bolt in that Bright Angel Shale in Gray Castle is 3 to 4 times what it takes to place a bolt in the Sedona sandstone. Although it breaks, the sections that are good, it's kind of like a matrix held together by lots of chunks and if you can find a significant portion of that matrix it's actually very hard and very dense and so it takes a very long time to pound in a bolt. That's

another reason we try to not place any – it's an absolute waste of time.

TM: Yeah. How high up was Zach at the top of the first pitch where he was able to set a decent anchor and have you climb up to him?

JD: I think the first pitch is about 70 feet. And it ends on a sloping ledge which is why we chose that to end the first pitch.

TM: Sloping away from the castle, or sloping to the castle, so it's like a park bench, a nice little place to sit.

JD: Sloping away from the castle.

TM: So its off into air...

JD: Yeah.

TM: As you came up, did you clean up the line? Did you pull all the hardware?

JD: Yes.

TM: OK. So, you're assuming you guys are going to set anchor and rap off the top, not needing all the jump you set on the way up.

JD: Yeah. If it had come to it we could've wrapped off the belay bolts that Zach had placed.

TM: And what time was it that you got up to him?

JD: What time of day?

TM: yeah. I'm assuming you started at first light.

JD: I would say, we were probably climbing by 8 AM. It might have been 10 AM when I got up to him.

TM: Ok, so he is making pretty good time.

JD: Yeah he's fast. I had been dreading the second pitch because from the ground it looks like the most horrendous pitch of all. It has this off-width crack meaning a crack that is 4 to 6 inches wide and it goes into a chimney meaning a wider crack wide enough for a human body to fit in and it overhangs and it's just full of junk so I was not looking forward to leading the second pitch. In fact the whole time Zach is leading the first pitch, I had this sickening feeling in my stomach about what I might encounter on the second pitch.

TM: I wonder if that's exactly what Everett was thinking back in 2015.
(Both laugh)

JD: Probably so.

TM: When you are in it and you are on it, it's one thing... when you are looking at it, it's something else. The climb that Zach did, was it a vertical climb, or did he ever stray off the crack?

JD: More or less vertical, it deviates to the left at about the halfway point of the pitch but not too much so I'd say from bottom to top he is maybe 5 feet to the left of where I'm standing at the base of the route 70 feet higher and maybe 5 feet to the left.

TM: Ok, so still dropping rocks on you, but big stuff can land to the side of you.

JD: Yeah

TM: Now, you are going to have to – whoever is going to belay is going to have to use the ledge with the climber right above them dropping rocks down on them till they get out of the way.

JD: Yes he had the worst belay duty, for sure. He couldn't move, he got nailed not, with nothing terribly big but some good size chunks. He got nailed pretty good.

TM: OK, so even though you are not really thrilled about this second pitch, you're still willing to go ahead and lead it?

JD: Yeah. Zach improved my confidence a lot. He got to the belay and I said "How does that second pitch look?" from the ground and he said something like "It doesn't look as bad as it did from the ground. It looks like there is a section of good rock where you can get some good pieces out there and that made me feel significantly better. And then, when I reach the belay ledge with Zach I looked up and thought he was right, it looks

worse than it is from the ground. Although there is a lot of junk in it there's also some clean looking cracks where I could get some reliable protection and part of my fear was I'm not gonna find any good protection and I'm gonna be in a really dangerous situation. Ultimately we're continuing upward as long as we can mitigate objective danger to a certain extent. If things are looking too dangerous, it's time to bail. At least, that's how my mind was working.

TM: And neither one of you had fallen or taken a fall by yourself, right?

JD: Yeah, no falls.

TM: So, Zach says "I'll anchor in, you on belay, climb on."

JD: Yeah that's the gist of it so I started up and there's a blank section of rock for about 15 feet. I very tediously put a bolt in that, did not want to place another one after that so it meant mandatory free climbing up into this hole. If you see Gray Castle from the river it has this feature on the upstream side that is kind of like a turret on an actual castle and that turret is separated from the main castle near the top by a hole and a subsequent chimney. And so I got up above this bolt and knowing that any fall I might take would be caught by the bolt I committed to some free climbing because I just did not want to place another bolt and there were no cans available. So, I committed to the free climbing, ripped some stuff out which hit Zach, but kinda clawed my way into this hole. In the hole you're safe. It's like a ledge inside the castle you can see through to the other side and in the top of the hole is a nice clean crack.

TM: Back up a second. See through to the other side - not all the way through the castle, but in this kinda tower right?

JD: all the way through the castle yeah.

TM: All the way through the castle! Wow!

JD: Well where the turret is attached to the Castle.

TM: Right, so I'm thinking so the castle is a cup, and the turret is a pen next to the cup. You can see daylight between the pen and the cup, not all the way through the cup.

JD: Yeah OK, right, I get what you are saying.

TM: OK so how are you going to set protection in there?

JD: So first I spent a lot of time just moving rocks out the other side so they fell probably 250 feet down to the ground because there was literally nothing secured to even stand on. Then standing on relatively secure things you could get up into the top of this kind of window/hole and there's a crack up there that took excellent protection - and I'd say probably the best protection on all of Gray Castle.

TM: How much higher are you on Grey Castle?

JD: oh not too much only maybe 15 to 20 feet

TM: OK

JD: So I placed I think three cans in this little section of excellent rock and then it was time to kind of commit to more free climbing

TM: Like up between the pencil and the cup in this chimney?

JD: Yeah it's overhanging it's kind of it's climbing out a roof of sorts because you're climbing out of this hole back onto the face and around and so I did kind of a combination of aid and free climbing. Poor Zach, there was nothing I could do, there's so much trouble in there in order to have any upward progress at all, that rubble just fell and he got nailed. Then I scratched my way up onto the ledge between the turret and the castle and there was a lot of debris in there which I cleared out on the opposite side of the castle. Kind of got my bearings and looked up at the remaining part of the castle and my heart sank. I thought that is not climbable it's not free climbable, it's not aid climbable I think we're gonna have to call this the high point. So I yelled down to Zach "I got some bad news man. I don't see us summiting. I don't think we can continue beyond this point." The rock offered no protection. It was just all epic choss and wouldn't take a bolt even if we had the bolts to put in which we didn't. Everything was hollow and exfoliating and it was unclimbable. I said "So as I see it, there are two options now. I can try to find some good rock here and place one bolt and then I'll lower off the one bolt and we can bail to the ground or I can still place the bolt and I can belay you up to me just so you can be here and have a look also. He said "I want to come out to where you are." The only rock that would except a bolt was down at ankle level and so I had this horrendous time with hand drilling down an ankle level between my legs pounding with this hammer for a long time in an awkward position and also feeling kind of discouraged at that point. I was fairly sure we were not going to summit. Long story short. I get the bolt in, Zach gets up there and kind of agrees with my assessment and then he said, and this is what changed everything, he said "Let me climb up on the turret itself because I

think from the vantage point it offers us we can see more of the summit and kind of see around this corner and it just might be that from that vantage point there might be some options around the corner.

TM: Ok, so as I understand it, you are between the pencil in the cup –

JD: Right.

TM: And I paraphrase, but he's saying "If I climb up on top of the pencil, I'll get a better view of the cup."

JD: That's right. And the top of the pencil is only maybe 10 feet higher than where I am and it's just a scramble.

TM: And the summit is still how many feet up?

JD: Oh, probably 50 or 60 ft directly above us is just overhanging garbage rotten rocks.

TM: And I kinda have a sense that the cup, if you will, of this tower is a golf tee, it expands as it goes up. So, you can look up and there is this junk hanging over you.

JD: At this point it does yeah, yeah, but beyond that junk it turns to low angle terrain all the way up to the Muav limestone layer. I think on a lot of spiers that have hard layers on top, it is very much like a golf tee with the soft rock eroding away under the harder layer and that is the case with Gray Castle but it's not like a golf tee it's kind of a small island of Muav that remains.

TM: Is sort of like the golf ball that remains. So, to climb the pencil, this little tower, your in the chimney, right?

JD: At that point its probably wider - 6ft wide – we are in a notch.

TM: OK, so he wants to look up there, so then what happens?

JD: So I keep him on belay but it's just a scramble up on top of the turret and he goes to the far side of the turret and kind of leans out and looked around the corner of the castle or the cup and he says I think there might be a way. It doesn't look like it from where you are but it looks like if you can get around the corner there's a ledge that gets wider and if you can get out along that it looks like it might even have occasional protection and then you'd have to diagonal up toward that summit cap of Muav and go through some pretty nasty looking stuff

and I said "OK." So he comes back down and I said "Zach I got a tell ya - I'm not gonna lead this next pitch. I think it's beyond the level of climbing that I'm willing to commit to. It's too bold - I think the objective danger is too high and I think by committing to this pitch whoever does it they're really putting themselves at great risk – it could be putting your life at risk. And I think that should be stated out loud before you proceed, if that's what you want to do." And I don't know if Zach agrees with that but regardless he said "I'm gonna go for it." I said "OK, I'm gonna belay you as best I can." So he inched his way out around the corner and he did get occasional protection in and continued traversing maybe 20 more feet and then at a certain point he got some protection in and he said "OK, I'm gonna have to start climbing kind of up and diagonally left and there's a couple little vertical spots it's impossible to aid climb here, it's got to be free climbing and the rock is real bad. So you know, just watch me." In my head I was thinking there's not much I can do other than belay. I mean in my mind a fall from a leader on the third pitch of Gray Castle might result in the rope being severed and would certainly result in a lot of loose rock being ripped off which would probably impact the lead climber. So in my mind, it's an X-rated pitch. Climbers apply movie ratings oddly enough, to bolt climbs, so an R rated climb would be one where you can't fall but you would be injured or you take a huge fall. An X-rated climb is also where you can't fall but there's death potential and I would consider this an X-rated pitch. The climbing never exceeds about 5.6 in difficulty but when I was following it, it seemed nearly impossible to me to grab anything with any certainty that it would not rip off. To me everything was, you know, a 50-50 chance. This could break off, and if it did, I would come flying off the wall and take a horrendous pendulum which could sever the rope. All those things are at least going through my mind, I can't speak for Zach. he has amazing presence of mind and ability to remain calm in extraordinarily stressful situations and I never noted him to be anything other than calm. So he, without ever sounding ruffled in any way, just continued to the top and communicated with me the whole way and then he said "I'm at the Muav capstone - it's a simple thing to get on top. I wanna stop here and build an anchor, you know the anchor's going to be super solid rock because the Muav is good rock, and I'll bring you up." And at that point my spirit's lifted and I thought – "Huh, Man! We are actually going to summit Gray Castle!" And so I start across the traverse and the other thing we had that was quite the encumbrance was a small haul bag that we had food and water in and some extra gear. And, hauling a haul bag up pitches that are vertical is easy. But when there is a traverse, it becomes a nightmare. So, typically the way the haul bag works, the leader trails a line that's connected to the haul bag and when the leader gets to the next belay, he pulls on that line. Its called a tagline, and that pulls the haul bag up. But, in the case of a traverse, its not possible because the haul bag will snag on everything. In that case, it's more or less up to the second or the follower to get the haul bag up and so we initially tried to cut the haul bag loose because I really did not wanna climb with a haul bag on my back knowing that I was barely going to get to climb this anyway and I didn't want extra weight throwing off my balance if I'm climbing on this rotten rock. And also even a fall from the follower would be bad because you would still take a pretty significant pendulum and you

would absolutely be injured. So I didn't want the encumbrance of the bag so we initially tried cutting it loose and I tried pushing it out into space around this corner thinking maybe it'll go all the way to a point directly below Zach and then he can haul and it almost worked but it got hung up on one of those shelves up above so as I'm following I get through the traverse and I'm climbing up and the haul bag is stuck on one of these junky shelves and every time Zach tries to pull on it, its knocking rocks down on me and that's the time I was probably the most scared because it knocked some good size chunks off that narrowly missed me. I was hit on the helmet multiple times by baseball sized chunks, similar to what Zach was getting hit with on his belay. So finally I said just stop trying to pull it up, I'll have to climb up there and unstuck it. And I did that but then even up above he couldn't continue to pull it up because it was just knocking too much on me. So then I had to do the moves and manually moving the bag to a certain extent and then I reached him and we both summited Grey Castle and celebrated on top. He surprised me and pulled out a flask of whiskey out of the haul bag. So we took some swigs and enjoyed the view.

TM: What's the view like up there?

JD: Well, it's one that no one has ever seen before and it's the opposite of the Nankweap granary view. You're looking directly upstream with all those meanders right up you can even just make out the boater trail up to the granaries. And then you can also see downstream probably 2 miles or so. It's on a kind of big bend in the canyon and you can see both directions. It's uniquely situated with this excellent Riverview. We just sat there. It was still early enough in the day that we just had the time to sit on top which is this beautiful flat area. It's completely flat and there's three or four little Beavertail cactus poking out of it and that's only thing growing up there. It's maybe 25 feet long by maybe 10-15 wide. Yeah I did not expect a totally flat summit. I expected some chaos of boulders.

TM: Interesting.

JD: Yeah, we spent a while up there and then Zach said you know "You just sit here and enjoy this view. It's been a long time coming for you and I'll go down and build a rappel anchor and when its done, we'll get off this thing." And so I really have to give Zach all the credit on the ascent of Grey Castle. I absolutely would have rappelled down at the top of the second pitch. Had he not persevered there. Even if I had climbed to the top of the turret and seen what he saw, I would not have led it. It was him that got us up there. He's just a phenomenally good climber. And then he built an anchor there and we rappelled down right about dusk and the rappel, as is often the case, was maybe the most dangerous part - it was impossible to avoid the rock fall. It is not a free hanging repel so the rope traveled across a lot of Bright Angel Shale that we could not avoid and we were trying to repel as gingerly as possible. Not bouncing much, but just a nice glide but the rope would just knock

stuff off and dangling below in semi darkness it was impossible to get out the way and I think we both got nailed with pretty sizable pieces on rappel.

TM: You are rappelling off to the side to the saddle.

JD: To the saddle, yeah. As I recall, the rappel it was about 140 feet and we were 5 feet below the summit so it's roughly 140 or 150 from the saddle to the summit, which is a little taller than I suspected it was. And then we got down about dark and pulled the rope and got the hell out of there. We were both so ready to be back on the ground if the ground hadn't been all sand, I would have kissed it. And then because it was dark we didn't get any pictures of Grey Castle itself and so the next morning we woke up and hiked back up just to take some picture. We had none from the approach up.

TM: And you had 3 days on your permit, so you had tons of time.

JD: Yeah. And then Zach wanted to go back to the Nankoweap way and I wanted to make a loop out of it so I floated to Kwagunt and hiked up Kwagunt to the Butte Fault and did the up and over to summit Nankoweap Butte which is the same thing I did five years prior with Everett. And I had jotted down a note 5 years prior in the Nankoweap Butte Summit register about our attempt on Gray Castle so I thought it would be fitting to do the same thing, now that we succeed.

TM: What did you write?

JD: You know I don't recall exactly but it was the first time it was just something generic about that attempt of Gray Castle and then failing and then coming back over to do Nankoweap Butte. The next time it was something about Zach and I succeed, really happy to still be alive. Would not recommend the climb to anyone, or something like that. And then we met back down in Nankoweap Creek and all this time Mathieu Brown was supposed to be our third climber. He bailed prior to the trip so we weren't expecting to see him and that night we were camped in Nankoweap Creek right where the trail meets the creek, and we're just up late talking and this is the day after we climb Gray Castle.

TM: So, this would be the 25th.

JD: This would be the night of the 25th, and we see this headlamp coming down the trail, and both of us make the comment – "Man, that person is getting in late" and "Man, that person is really moving fast!" The headlamp heads right across the creek right over to us and it says – "Hey guys it's Mathieu and I brought beer!" so he comes in and that guy is so fast I think he had gone car to Nankoweap Creek in two hours

running just running the whole way. I mean, he had no weight with him but still, remarkably fast and so he brought in these beers. And he asks us, "Did you do it?" so we share the story with him and celebrated. Then the next morning he said give me all the heavy stuff, you know you guys have been at it for a couple days now, you should be able to walk out light, so he took the heavy stuff and I think our exit packs were probably 25 pounds and that was awesome! So that was it. That was the trip.

TM: What are your thoughts on this, if indeed this is the last named summit to be climbed in the state of Arizona, possibly in the United States. Any thoughts on that?

JD: Oh, it adds significance to it I guess that's one way to think about it. Honestly a lot of my thoughts go to why in the hell was this thing ever named. I would still like to know the story of that and I've looked in some of those Grand Canyon Place Names books and at least the two I've looked at it does not appear in there and I have yet to figure it out - I'm assuming it's named after someone although the castle is gray and does look like a castle, so it could easily be just called that because of its color and shape but most things are named after someone. And it's just you know in comparison to other named temples and buttes within the Grand Canyon it is pretty insignificant so it just boggles my mind as to why it was named in the first place. But yes, it is quite significant if it's the last. Increasingly in this world, it is very difficult to do firsts. You know 100 years ago there were thousands of unclimbed things in the world including all the highest peaks and 50 years ago that number was cut significantly. As we progress it is much harder to stand at a place where no one has ever stood and claim a first ascent, especially something named. In my mind, that's something pretty significant, to see what no one has seen before. So – and within the Grand Canyon there are very few of those in my mind the Anasazi the first nation people's likely stood on almost all of the summits. Except the more extremely difficult ones and so yeah it's a difficult thing to achieve and its more rewarding because of that. For me, it was a profound experience just standing up there and looking about. It's hard to put that very profound experience into words.

TM: Where did you go next? Have you been back to the Canyon since?

JD: Yeah, I climbed Zoroaster. I had had two prior attempts on Zoroaster, of both of which were rained out and I had another permit and we climbed what's called the Screaming Sky Crack on Zoroaster. I climbed it with some good friends and then I went out and climbed Excalibur and hiked out and climbed Scorpion Ridge, which is an obscurity. I don't think too many people have done.

TM: No, from which arm.

JD: We climbed it from Point Sublime. And came down to the Flint-Tuna Saddle. And then

traversed the Supai and then the Redwall all the way out there to the summit. We didn't have time to go onto the arms of the Scorpion.

TM: Yeah, cause I keep wondering, along with Jim Haggart, if there is a route through one of those arms. I've looked at the west arm, but not the east.

JD: I suspect there is a route up the notch between Sagittarius ridge and Scorpion. I stood in the notch looking down both sides of the one side appears, you can't see all of it but I think you could get up the Redwall there.

TM: Interesting. What other hikes are you looking forward to doing in Grand Canyon?

JD: I'm nearing completion of the named summits. Two significant ones that I have yet to do are Sinyella and Akaba. And I have a permit next week to descent 150 Mile, cross over to MatKat and go up Matkat using your beta to do Akaba and then heading out the Sinyella Fault in the other direction and climbing Sinyella and returning the same way. That's the next thing on the agenda.

TM: Wow! Very Cool. OK, I think we have about covered it, is there anything else I have not asked you that you want to add?

JD: Don't go climb Gray Castle, its not worth it. No. No. I think that was very thorough. I appreciate the opportunity.

TM: Thank you so much. This has just been a really wonderful opportunity to get a chance to record a discussion of someone who has just done a first ascent of a named butte in the Grand Canyon. We get to hear it first hand from you, so thank you very much.

JD: You are welcome, my pleasure.

TM: This will conclude a Grand Canyon Oral History Interview with Jake Dayley, today is Saturday, December 4, 2021, my name is Tom Martin and Jake, thank you so very much.

JD: Thank you.