

Transcription Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Michael St. Clair (MSC)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Michael recounts growing up, his time at Prescott College, introduction to kayaking and Grand Canyon, law school, and then getting interested in river issues in the mid-1970s

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TM: Today is Friday. It's January 12th, 2018. This is a Grand Canyon Oral History with Michael St. Clair. My name is Tom Martin. Michael, thank you so very much for being willing to speak with us today. Since we're doing this over the phone, are you willing to let us record this call?

MSC: Of course.

TM: Thank you. What year were you born?

MSC: 1953.

TM: And where were you born?

MSC: Fort Monroe, Virginia. I'm an army brat.

TM: Okay. Did you grow up there in Virginia, or did you travel a lot when you were growing up?

MSC: Traveled all my life. My dad was stationed in Fort Monroe when I was born; and then moved to Fort Riley, Kansas, and lived in George Armstrong Custer's old house.

TM: Wow.

MSC: We then went to France when I was five years old. Lived in France and Germany for four years. Came back to Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1962. Kind of momentous times, and my dad got sent off to Vietnam twice, during which I got into horses. He bought me a horse when he went to Vietnam to keep me out of trouble.

TM: Wow.

MSC: That didn't work very well [laughs]. By the time he got back, I had three of them.

TM: Oh my gosh.

MSC: I was definitely into horses when I was a kid. As I got to be an adolescent, I noticed there were a lot more girls into horses than boys, and that was an attraction as well. And then in 1968, I went to

Jesuit High School because I had skipped some grades in school moving around. The Jesuits and I didn't get along too well, though I was grateful for the education, but I got early admission to Prescott College.

TM: What year was that?

MSC: '69. I drove from Florida. My dad's last post was MacDill Air Force Base, which is just outside Tampa. I drove from Tampa to Prescott in August of '69. I was 16 years old and had a Ford Ranchero. I had never been west of the Mississippi before.

TM: Wow.

MSC: Soon as I got out into Texas, I started licking my lips. And, by the time I got to Albuquerque, I knew I was never going back [laughs]. I've lived in the West ever since—or maintained my home in the West ever since, let's put it that way—and have no desire to go east of the Rockies.

TM: Did you have brothers and sisters growing up?

MSC: I did. I've got a younger brother who's a doctor. My oldest sister, my mom's daughter, died a few years back, in London. I have another sister who's my dad's sister [sic; daughter]—they each brought a daughter to the marriage—is in Silver Spring, Maryland, and we're in touch.

TM: Did you camp out as kids? I mean, you had horses, so you would have been outside with them quite a bit.

MSC: My dad hated camping out. He was sent all the way up to Incheon during the Korean War. He was one of the very point—by then, he was a battalion commander and he spent enough time on the ground in that campaign that he hated sleeping on the ground. He loved being outdoors, and we did a lot of stuff, but he hated camping [laughs].

TM: All right. Did you, as a child, do a lot of weekend camping, weekend canoeing or were you always, you know, back to the house by the end of the day kind of thing?

MSC: No, I was pretty much back to the house or cabin or something. I had a lot of opportunities from the time... Well, when my dad started being sent out to Vietnam and a lot of other stuff that I won't bore you with, but I kind of... I moved out of the house when I was 13 to live with the family where I kept my horses. They lived about 50 yards from the Hillsborough River in Temple Terrace in Tampa. And, mostly, I got into fishing. They were big into fishing and hunting. They also had 640 acres up in Gainesville, out in the boonies. So we would go up there and catch fish and shoot rabbits and all kinds of stuff. I got over the shooting part. I still like to fish, but only saltwater. But, yeah, mostly when I was growing up, it was, you know, home by dark or... You know, occasionally we'd have a fire in the backyard and fall asleep in the lawn chair or something like that. But serious camping, not so much.

TM: So, if I get this right, Prescott College in the late 60s, one of the first things they did with their freshmen classes was a sort of multi-week backpacking journey?

MSC: Yep. Outdoor orientation, yeah. It was run by a fellow named Ron Smith, a Brit who was a climber. It was basically a knockoff of Outward Bound. So, yeah, the first four or five days at the college was sort of basic introduction to ropes and knots. We started every morning at like 6:30 with a mile-and-a-half run around the campus and then dove into the swimming pool which was not a lot of fun. Then after that week on campus, or four or five days on campus, they loaded us up and took us in a Greyhound bus up to—and I just went back last year—to basically the entrance to Paria Canyon off of Highway 89.

TM: Oh, up there at Lees Ferry at Lonely Dell?

MSC: No. That's the end of Paria Canyon.

TM: Oh.

MSC: The entrance is up between—

TM: I'm sorry. Up off the Kanab, between Kanab and Page?

MSC: Right. I was interested to drive back in... There's a campground there now because it's sort of where the permitted hike in the Paria starts.

TM: Right.

MSC: And then you go on down to Buckskin Gulch. It's about 10 or 11 miles to Buckskin Gulch. Anyway, we went in there and promptly stuck the Greyhound bus with 55 new freshmen on it. They got out climbing ropes and tried to pull the Greyhound bus out, and I just... You know, I did what I was told, but I sort of shook my head, thinking you ain't going to move a Greyhound bus with a climbing rope. So that was the end of the bus and the beginning of the camping [laughs]. And, so, we...

TM: And there were 55 of you. Did you break into groups, or were you all just a big group of 55?

MSC: No, no. No, no. There was six groups of about eight or nine each, or maybe seven or eight each, with an instructor. No, we were in smaller groups so we dispersed, even then, in terms of... Some of the stronger, more experienced people went on ahead, so they were in camps that might be a mile ahead of the rest of the groups. And we would leapfrog and whatever. I went back to look again last year, last March, but my wife chickened out because it was temperatures in the 30s and a little bit wet. So we just drove around. We hiked into Buckskin and did some stuff like that, but we didn't actually recreate the hike.

TM: So, in 1969, when the bus got stuck there at the mouth of the Paria, do you remember roughly the month or the day?

MSC: Oh, it was in September.

TM: September?

MSC: Yeah, beginning of September, maybe.

TM: Okay. So monsoons were over...

MSC: Right.

TM: ...but still wet enough down there in the Paria, in the narrows down there.

MSC: It was beautiful. I remember quicksand. I mean, that was my first experience with quicksand. It wasn't particularly strenuous. The last day—and I don't know what genius decided this, but they... It's about 60-something miles so we started off slow, just doing 8 or 10 miles a day. And I guess after four days, we'd done about half of it and the last day we had to walk—and I distinctly remember this—it was 27 miles to the mouth of the Paria. The nice thing was, once we got to the mouth of the Paria, there was

the Greyhound bus again, and, also, they had all this food that we hadn't had for five days, which was kind of cool [laughs].

TM: Who was in that introductory class? Because Prescott College has a reputation for graduating through a number of people that are still active in the West, still doing scientific research or still river guiding or other things. So I'm just curious to know who was in your graduating class then.

MSC: You know, nobody that... It's surprising, I've kept track with a bunch of people, and there's not really any name I can give you that has been active in Grand Canyon or Western issues and stuff.

TM: In your class? Okay.

MSC: In my class, yeah. There's one guy, Jeff Salz, and if you look him up, he's now a motivational speaker. But he [laughs], he was a 'Sahara' clubber and definitely had the most camping experience of all of us, probably. He went on to form an outfit called Boojum Expeditions down in Baja with a guy named Kent Madden. And the two of them partnered. Jeff later went on to lead some of the first horseback trips in Tibet and kind of was the founder of that ecotourist industry now. I looked him up a few years back, at least I just Googled his name, and it came up that he was now giving inspirational speeches about...who knows. The power of the outdoors, I'm sure.

TM: Sure. Interesting. Okay. So that Paria journey, again, it sounded like you were eating up just the simple drive to Prescott, coming out of Florida. What was that first week's immersion like for you?

MSC: I mean, it was great. The weather was not bad. I think we had one night where it rained a little bit. But, I mean, it's not that I had never slept on the ground before, it's just that if there was a bed around, then, you know...

TM: Yeah. Take advantage of it.

MSC: No, it was a lot better than what followed, which was once we had our big food fest at the mouth of the Paria. By the way, I distinctly remember I used to have a picture, but it finally faded out, of a raft party that came by. They had launched just upstream. In those days, the boat ramp wasn't the boat ramp. So, when you drove in it was dirt road from the highway. A lot of river trips launched at the Paria, and a lot went on up to where the boat ramp is today, which was sort of a beach. Anyway, I remember when we were eating, a group of people coming along. They were all the way across the river, the currents over there against the wall. But we were basically where the fishing/the parking lot is now. I took some pictures, but they've all... The colors on the pictures just faded out so I threw them away not too long ago.

Anyway, after that, we spent the night and then got back in the Greyhound buses and drove around to Bullfrog. No—yeah, Bullfrog, drove to Bullfrog. And then we spent five days out on the lake, three of which were on solo, which was where you got dropped off in a patch of nothingness with three matches and whatever clothes you had on, and you spent three days out there. I learned the trick of building a fire in a creek bed and scooping sand over it and lying down to stay warm at night. But I also distinctly remember the guy that was... And you weren't supposed to see anybody for those three days. The instructors came by once a day to check on you, and you built a cairn if you were okay. So, if they saw the cairn, they wouldn't even come to where your part was. I was in an arm of the lake called Moki Canyon. I don't know if you know where that is, but it's up above Halls Crossing.

TM: Yes.

MSC: I spent three days in Moki with my group. There was a guy from France. He was the only guy I saw in those three days. And I remember, like, the second day, when I was feeling pretty miserable and kind of, "This is dumb," I spotted him. He had on this turtleneck sweater and he was sauntering down the creek looking around like he was strolling down the Champs-Élysées or something. It was pretty funny. The protocol was you weren't supposed to interact, so I didn't, but I did sort of laugh to myself, you know. And then after three days they came and collected us and we went back to the mouth of Moki and had our first meal, which a lot of people ate too much of. Just as we were getting in... We used these Klepper two-man folding kayaks and also some sailing boats, little Sunfish kind of deals. As we were getting in all those to start our way back to Halls Crossing, the heavens just opened up, and there was no going anywhere out on the lake. I mean, it was blowing probably 40 miles an hour and raining sideways. So we pulled over into a little alcove and built a great big fire and basically were mired for that whole afternoon and night because we couldn't go anywhere. And then at, like, dawn, it quieted down a little bit, and the instructor said, "Okay. Let's go." So we jumped in the boats and paddled to Halls Crossing. I was given one of the weaker members of the group that was from Chicago and had never done anything even remotely this exciting or fun. He was a great guy, but he wasn't very strong, and he wasn't very athletic. So I put him in the front of the Klepper, and I got in the back. And, then, after a while, I realized I could actually paddle faster if I was in the front [laughs] and he was in the back. We made it, but it was an arduous undertaking. When we got back to the Greyhound bus, we drove down—well, we drove back up to what's now Highway 95 and then down the Moki Dugway into Valley of the Gods.

TM: Oh, that's exciting in a Greyhound bus.

MSC: In a Greyhound bus. And that was really cool, because it was about—oh, I'd say it was 11:00 or even midnight and we had to stop the bus and get out and walk and signal the bus driver. A different bus driver than the one that got us stuck, by the way [laughs]. But we made it down to the bottom, and when we went into Mexican Hat, everybody piled out to go buy Cokes and candy bars and all the stuff we hadn't had for five days, whatever. We got back to Prescott at like 5:00 in the morning or 6:00 in the morning, something like that. It served its intended purpose. It got my attention. So it was a good orientation.

TM: What did you focus on in Prescott College?

MSC: Girls, beer, and [laughs]... I mean, I was 16 years old, and the curriculum at Prescott in those days was a lot different than what's traditional in terms of majors and stuff. They had these centers, they called them. One of them was—which we used to make fun of—For the Person, which was like, basically, psychology and sociology, that kind of stuff. They also had a pretty active anthropology department run by Euler and his assistant, George Gumerman.

TM: Okay, so hang on right there.

MSC: Sure.

TM: This is Bob Euler?

MSC: Yep.

TM: Euler had been the chief archaeologist at Grand Canyon National Park and then had left the park service to come to Prescott. Is that correct?

MSC: No, I think... He was still, at that time, I think, in his late 40s and he had been hired to do the surveys for Black Mesa. When Peabody Coal came in and ripped up Black Mesa, Euler was the lead archaeologist who conducted the surveys of what was about to be destroyed. When he got to Prescott, he had lots of connections in the park, but I'm not sure he had actually joined the staff yet. That happened right around the time when I was at Prescott. My first sort of serious girlfriend, her best friend is a lady named Carol Weed. Carol has gone on to a pretty distinguished career as an anthropologist/archaeologist, written a lot of papers and stuff specializing in the Southwest.

TM: What do you remember about Bob? What was he like?

MSC: [laughs] He was kind of an asshole, to tell you the truth. Had an eye for the coeds. I think he was in-between marriages at the time I sort of knew him. Liked to have a sip of adult beverages around a fire. Was very taken with himself. But he was a character, there's no question about it. And he had fantastic stories.

TM: Do you remember any?

MSC: Most of them were discovery stories. Being in a helicopter and coming around a bend and seeing something that nobody had seen, you know. I wasn't close with either Euler or Gumerman, who was his shadow protégé. They sort of ran the anthropology wing. There was another guy there that I did get close to, the geology professor Vern Taylor.

TM: Oh, hang on a second. Now, Vern Taylor, wouldn't he go on to do a bunch of studies in the Grand Canyon off the river?

MSC: Yes.

TM: Okay. Did Vern actually work for the Park Service, or was he working for Prescott?

MSC: No, he was the adjunct professor of geology. The story was—now, I got to Prescott in the fall of '69—and the story was that in '68, or maybe it was '67, he and one of his students, a guy named Mike Acebo, had been on a river trip, and they stumbled upon the Hopi Salt Mines. The story was... Now again over, you know, Jesus, this is almost 50 years now [laughs].

TM: Yeah, sure.

MSC: But, you know, I've talked about this with a bunch of different people. Some just scoff and say, "No" and, "This is all bullshit." But the story I was told—and not by Vern and not by Mike, but by others—was that they were on a river trip, and they pulled over somewhere on the left below the Little Colorado; scampered up some little thing and found *the* Hopi Salt Mine with prayer feathers that the Hopi no longer could find. The story was that the elders of the Hopi who knew where the salt mine was were too old and decrepit to make the journey, and the young guys didn't know where it was. So, for a few years previous to Mike and Vern's rediscovery—for a few years previous, they had sent runners, because it's part of their religion, they had sent runners out to try to leave prayer feathers at the salt mine, but they came back empty-handed with no salt. And, so, since Vern and Mike knew where it was, and Vern... I later went up... Well, that Christmas... Okay, so the Christmas of '69, my mom and my dad were divorcing, and there wasn't any money around anyway, so I didn't go back to Florida for the holidays. I went out to the Hopi Mesas with Vern Taylor.

TM: Wow.

MSC: The only reason I think Vern took me to the Hopi mesas was I was 16 years old and used to tossing around 80-pound sacks of oats. Right before everybody left for the Christmas holidays, he saw me on campus, and he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I don't really know what I'm doing." He said, "Well, do you want to go to the Hopi Mesas?" and I said, "Sure." So we drove around Prescott—he had this old pickup truck—we drove around Prescott and loaded the back of the pickup truck with sacks of sugar, sacks of flour, sacks of cornmeal, all kinds of stuff, but a lot of sacks [laughs]. I think it was a three-quarter-ton pickup. The thing was almost down on the springs when we finally took off and we drove up to Flagstaff. This would have been like the 21st or 22nd of December in 1969. We drove up to Flagstaff, and Vern was good friends with the director of the museum.

TM: Would have been Ed Danson?

MSC: I think so. The director lived kind of across the street from where the museum is now, in this big old log cabin thing, which I don't even know if it's still there. But, anyway, I remember that Vern and Ed—if it was Ed—and Ed's wife, we all had dinner and then Vern sort of said, "Well, you can sleep on the porch." I said, "Okay." They sat around inside drinking whiskey and telling lies, and I went on the porch and went to bed. When I woke up about 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, I was shivering in my dad's old Korean War sleeping bag but the door was locked [laughs]. So, I wasn't getting in to any heat. So I just lay there and shivered for a while until I... But, anyway, the next day we drove on up to Shongopovi. I think it's Third Mesa, but it might be Second Mesa.

TM: Okay.

MSC: And that drive—because Vern wasn't much of a conversationalist if he didn't want to be, so I'd just sit in the cab with him, and he'd drive—that drive honestly changed my life because when we turned off the pavement and started heading into Shongopovi, it was a different world. It was like being on another planet. We drove into Shongopovi. First, I noticed there was still some dead corn plants out where no corn plants should be. Then we drove into this place that looks like it's... I mean, it still looks the same today, I'm sure, but to me it looked like nothing I'd ever seen. A true pueblo [laughs] with about the only distinguishing feature some of the doors were painted different colors, which is a trick they might have learned from the Irish. But it was another world. We pulled up in front of one of these doors. Vern got out and he said, "Listen, don't talk until I talk." I said, "Okay." The family that was inside opened the door, and we went in, and we sat down at a table. When you're 16 years old, 10 minutes is a long time to be quiet [laughs]. I mean, shit, when you're 65 years old, 10 minutes is a long time to be quiet [laughs]. We sat at this little table and the wife made some coffee, and we had a cup of coffee. And we sat there, and we sat there, and I swear to God, 15/20 minutes went by, and not one word was spoken. We just sat there and looked at each other. And, then, as if on some kind of prearranged signal, the husband said, basically, "Welcome, how's things going?" And Vern said, "Well, I've got something for you." We went out to the truck, and then I got put to work unloading some sugar and flour and stuff that Vern had brought up there. We repeated that same ritual at three or four different places in the village over the next couple hours. And it was always the dead same thing: not a word [laughs]. You just sat there and looked at each other. And, then, after a certain amount of time, it was okay to talk, and you did. So, anyway, it convinced me that a) Vern was held in high regard by these folks, and b) it was a culture I had never, you know, it was not even in my experience. And I really, to this day, remain affected by what I saw and a whole new world opening up for me of nonverbal communication and just kind of, you know... It's not easy to talk about. It did profoundly change me [laughs].

TM: Can you describe Shongopovi as you saw it there in December of 1969? As you said, the doors were painted...

MSC: It was, I don't want to say typical pueblo village, but it was... I mean, I think Hotevilla is the oldest continually inhabited settlement in the United States, and that dates back to, I think, the 1300s or maybe 1100s, even. Shongopovi was... It's stone and mortar construction and what wood they could find. By the time I got there, they had actual lumber for window frames and doors and stuff, you know. But it wasn't much to look at from the outside. Inside, the rooms were tiny and communal, and there was usually a fireplace that was kind of the center of the structure. The coolest thing was, that night I asked Vern, "Well, where can I throw my sleeping bag?" and he said, "Well, in the back of the truck." So I said, "Okay," and pushed some of the bags aside and made a little nest and got in there. About an hour after dark, which would have been relatively early in December, all of a sudden there comes this language. It's the town crier, and he's giving the news in Hopi of "such and such went to Flagstaff" and "such and such is in the hospital" and blah, blah, blah. I couldn't understand anything, it sounded Chinese to me—not that I knew what Chinese sounded like, but [laughs] it sounded like an Oriental language. And it went on for, oh, I don't know, five minutes, you know, clear and distinct. The guy who was giving the news couldn't have been too far away from me because I could hear every word/every intonation but I had no idea what it was. So in the morning I asked Vern and he said, "Yeah, that's the news" [laughs].

TM: Interesting.

MSC: That was pretty cool. It was definitely cool.

TM: How many days did you guys spend out there, then?

MSC: Probably a week, maybe. I remember we were at one of the villages for New Year's, not that the Hopi thought that was anything especially to celebrate, but, you know—and then we went back to Prescott pretty quick after that. Vern was never a mentor or a big buddy of mine, but I was definitely impressed with him. He was really knowledgeable, and kind of quiet and not given to sort of making a big deal of what he knew or his accomplishments. You had to kind of get to know him. The other interesting sidebar to this was that his student that was along on the trip where they allegedly rediscovered the salt mines, Mike Acebo—Acebo is Spanish, the surname. The Hopi have no great love for Spaniards [laughs]. So they always, whenever Mike was going up there or when he had any interactions, Acebo would kind of gloss over the fact that he was actually Hispanic, and that was kind of cool. But, anyway, I managed to last a couple of years at Prescott doing lots of different stuff. I kind of dabbled into some biology. But I didn't really have a clue. I mean, you're 17/18 years old. How the heck do you know what you want to do with the rest of your life? [laughs]

TM: Sure. Sure. Fair enough. I'll go back to Euler for a minute. He was doing an excavation in Stanton's Cave in Marble Canyon with Prescott, but that would have been just before you arrived. Is that right?

MSC: Yeah, I think so. The bat caves, yeah, I think that was...

TM: '67 or '68.

MSC: '67 or '68, yeah.

TM: Somewhere in there. Okay.

MSC: I mean, that's, you know, the figurines and stuff. Later on, in '84—and I'm skipping over some stuff, but just as a sidebar—in '84, I was desperate for a trip, and I foolishly accepted an invite to take these neophytes down and I ran into the team that was sealing the cave off.

TM: Okay. Putting in the bat gate?

MSC: Yeah, exactly. They actually stopped my boat, which was actually P. J. Conley's boat, but, anyway, that's another story.

TM: I want to hear that story, but that'll be later. Yeah.

MSC: [laughs] Anyway, Prescott was an experience. It definitely was sort of an eye-opener 'cause I already knew.... I knew the first time I drove out there. I knew when I got to Texas that I didn't want to have anything to do with the swamps and the humidity. It was mainly the humidity. It used to kick my ass. I can be active out here and I'm okay. But, to this day, you take me back to Florida and put me on a bicycle or put me in a canoe, as soon as I start sweating, I don't like it [laughs].

TM: Yeah. It's different. So Prescott College, anything else you remember about the couple years you spent there? It sounds like... Again, as you say, it's sort of an alternative framework structure. It's not like you come in wanting to be a mining engineer or a lawyer because they don't offer those degrees.

MSC: Right. It's very similar to what's still there today.

TM: Okay.

MSC: And it was not very well-run and not very focused in terms of knowing, you know, what they really wanted to do with it. It was a great place to run around and chase girls and drink beer when you're 16/17 years old. In order to get a little spending money, I needed to work 15 hours a week on some kind of student program. So my 15 hours were always running the stables. I did that. I got hired as a stunt double for the first *Billy Jack* movie. They wanted me to fall off a horse, so I did. The deal was they were going to pay me \$15 to fall off the horse, which I did. I got up and they said, "Well, you need to do it again. We didn't get the camera angle right or the light right" or something like that. I said, "Okay, well, another \$15." And they go, "Oh, no, no, no, you've got to do it," and I go, "No, no, no. [laughs] This is not fun." So my movie career was short-lived, that's for sure. That was the *Billy Jack* episode, and then I got hired later on for—actually to be the double for Steve McQueen because I kind of resemble him in some weird sense, at least physically. That's a movie called *Junior Bonner* that was filmed in Prescott. That was mostly filmed out at the old fairgrounds downtown, which isn't used anymore. But, mostly, it just consisted of sitting on the horse in the shoots and waiting until they were rolling and got the light right and got the camera angle, and then Steve McQueen would come in and take my place. That was kind of cool.

TM: Yeah.

MSC: You know, it was different times.

TM: So this would have been '71-ish?

MSC: '70.

TM: '70/'71?

MSC: Yeah, 1970/'71. I think Prescott invited me to leave in the spring of '71 for the last time. So that was all right.

TM: And then where did you go?

MSC: I went all around, just trying to find work and stay out of trouble. Eventually ended up back in Florida—my mother was living in Sarasota—and got hornswoggled into getting married in 1973. I don't know what I was thinking. She wanted to go to Antioch College up in Baltimore. So we went up there for a while, but it was pretty evident that marriage wasn't a good idea for either one of us. And I ended up completely away from the river. The only river trip I had done was in February of 1970. Vern took us down from Diamond Creek to the lake in those days. It was miserable, I didn't like it.

TM: Okay, hang on a second, because that's a big jump. We ran back to Florida without talking about that 1970 Diamond Creek trip. So was that a Prescott College trip?

MSC: Yep, that was a Prescott College trip. They ran lots and lots of Diamond Down trips in those days. If the weather was good, I would say twice a month. Again, it was part of the Outdoor Action program with Ron Smith, and it was basically to teach people to kayak.

TM: Is this the Ron Smith that was running Grand Canyon Expeditions? I think that's a different Ron Smith. Okay.

MSC: Yeah, it's a different Ron Smith. The Ron Smith of Prescott College days was a British mountaineer who had been on Everest. Hadn't gotten to the top, but he was a good climber, excellent climber. He was kind of an Outward Bound product, so he came and ran the Outdoor Action program. But, anyway, he liked to kayak. And it was before plastic boats, in the days of fiberglass boats. So, if you got into a Klepper and had a feel for it or liked it, you could graduate to one of their fiberglass boats, which had the advantage of being a real kayak, mostly slalom kayaks.

TM: And these were four-meter boats, weren't they?

MSC: They were. 13.2 feet.

TM: All right.

MSC: The problem was a lot of people thought they liked kayaking in the pool, but when you got them up to 232 and they swam, all of a sudden it wasn't so much fun. [laughs] But the advantage of the Diamond Down trips was it was just one night on the river. You could drive up there on Friday after school, Friday afternoon, and camp at Diamond Creek. And then the next day, you could do most all the rapids down to Separation and camp. And then the next day you could paddle out and be back Sunday night late at Prescott. It worked out well for the program. But I did it, and Vern was staffing out a Grand Canyon trip, so he wanted to take... Prescott College had these old...they're called Selways. I think they were a rubber fabricator's design. But they're seven-man boats. They were pigged. They were slightly lighter than the navy 10-mans and a little more maneuverable, but they were still pigged. So he sort of to interview people for the Grand Canyon trip, he would take a Selway and throw people in it and see how we could make it work as a paddle rig. It wasn't hard to make it work as a paddle rig. The problem was everything else in those days was wool and [laughs]... Just you couldn't keep anything dry.

TM: Right. And this is January, so it's...

MSC: Yeah, February.

TM: Okay. So it's cold.

MSC: It was cold. I just remember two miserable nights and then being asked, "Well, you think you'd be interested in the Grand?" and I said, "Are you kidding? [laughs] Twenty nights of this?" So they left me

alone. But, yeah, Vern would always run an annual Grand Canyon trip, and it was usually in the wintertime. I don't know why. But that's what he did.

TM: Let's go back for a minute. So you camped at Diamond...

MSC: Yep.

TM: ...which is river mile 226, and the next day ran through all the rapids. 232 mile and down to Separation at 240.

MSC: Right.

TM: And then the next day would have paddled out to Pearce Ferry at river mile 300. So that's a 60-mile day.

MSC: Pearce is actually 279. Yeah, it was a long day, but for the entire...

TM: Well, yeah, yeah. It's not 300. It's south. I'm sorry. So, yeah. Yeah.

MSC: I mean, 40 miles in a kayak is a test of character, but as long as the wind doesn't blow too hard, it's not all that difficult. Sometimes you could get to Spencer or sometimes you could get to some mud bar. In those days, the lake was a lot higher and Separation was actually just, you know, dead still. I mean, there was no current there or anything like there is today.

TM: Got it. And, then, there were no helicopters in there as well at the time. Is that correct?

MSC: Nope. Nope. No helicopters, no nothing.

TM: What was it like paddling through that area down around Quartermaster, from Quartermaster down to the bat caves without the helicopter activity?

MSC: A lot different than it is today. I remember Columbine Falls, which is pretty close to the Ferry, you could paddle within half a mile, maybe, of Columbine Falls. Today, it's like two miles' walk [laughs] or mud crawling. And I'm not even sure the falls runs anymore.

TM: Yeah, they do. It's actually—there's a solid river channel there, and there's a trail that goes still right along the east side of the drainage, right to the falls. Did you guys camp at Columbine Falls at this time at all? Or did you just schlep in there to look at it?

MSC: No.

TM: No. Okay.

MSC: Yeah. If we had time, you'd go there and look. Sometimes, even back then, there was—I'm not sure if Norm Montgomery was running yet or not. I think he was, actually—but there were motorboats and motorboat traffic. You could go down to South Cove and rent a motorboat even back then; I mean a fishing boat. But, yeah, there was still activity out there, but it was rare to see anybody. And, if you did, it was usually somebody who was fishing.

TM: Did you know Norm? Did you spend any time with him?

MSC: No. I mean, later on, I met him a few times just because I had to do shuttles and pickups. But, no, I didn't know him really. I mean, I knew he lived in Meadview and he was an old-timer even then.

TM: Yeah.

MSC: I guess Greg is running the show now.

TM: That's right. So that was your first experience in Grand Canyon, then. Had you seen Grand Canyon before that Diamond Down in February?

MSC: Yeah. I had been up to the South Rim with Prescott College for different things. Between Williams, kind of like along the line that the railroad runs now, for some reason, Euler and Gumerman were doing site surveys of that whole area. The railroad wasn't working in those days, but... We would drive along because you could get a pickup truck along the tracks that's now the Grand Canyon Scenic Railroad. There were various places where you could drive in and there was a lot of old ruins/one-room structures that were basically fallen down. But he was mapping all those for some reason. I don't know whether it was under any kind of a contract or whether the park wanted it done or who wanted it done. But I do remember in the spring of '70, and then again in '71, spending probably 5 or 6 weekends up there messing around. One of the more senior Prescott College folks was my roommate the first year. His name was Bob Page, and he got a degree in anthro. But he and I would jump in his truck and drive up there on Friday night and be back Sunday night, just poking around and mapping stuff.

TM: Okay, so you had seen the South Rim, and then... So that's right about that same time isn't it? The spring of '70.

MSC: Yeah. I remember walking down the Monument drainage but not all the way to the river. I think there's a spring down there maybe a couple miles from the river.

TM: Yeah. That's right.

MSC: Yeah. We went down there and spent a night and came out just for fun, not for any good reason.

TM: So this would have been down the Bright Angel, hang a left there at Indian Gardens, and walk out across the Tonto? Or did you come down the Hermit Trail?

MSC: No, we came down the Hermit Trail. I remember that. We drove all the way to Hermits Rest and then down. But, I mean, in those days, if there wasn't anything else to do and there were enough likeminded Prescott College students, we'd just all, "Who's got gas money? Who can buy a beer?" You know, "Let's throw some food in the truck and go camp out." And that's what we did. It may sound, today, kind of quaint but [laughs] compared to the recreation that 18-/19-year-olds are pursuing today, yeah. We had reality. We didn't need any virtual about it.

TM: Right. That's right. That's right. So the February 1970 Diamond Down was your first river trip?

MSC: My first real river trip, yeah. I had paddled kayaks and stuff like that.

TM: Up on Lake Powell with that introductory experience over at Halls Crossing.

MSC: Right. And around Prescott on Lynx Lake. There's some little drainages around Prescott and stuff we messed around.

TM: Did you like to kayak? Was that your boat of choice or were you a more of a rubber raft, “I’m going to get on a raft” kind of thing?

MSC: No. I definitely liked kayaking. Later on... Well, so, from ‘71/’72 when I left Prescott and kind of bummed around in the West for a few years, and then I didn’t get back until ‘76. So there was a four-year period where romance and all kinds of stuff got in the way. I did eventually get a degree from Antioch in pre-law, and I went to University of Baltimore law school for a couple of semesters, the same law school that Spiro Agnew went to. But I moved back to Phoenix in ‘75, end of ‘75. Fall of ‘75, I moved back to Phoenix and worked at a lumberyard that was just down the street from where I was staying, Payless Cashways. They’re out of business now. And, then, I remember after about two or three months of bringing home paychecks from Payless Cashways, I said, “You know, I can make in a week what I’m making in a month.” So I went to a law firm downtown that was interviewing for paralegals called Streich, Lang, Weeks, Cardon & French—they were the attorneys for First National Bank—and they hired me. My income quadrupled, but my time off got cut quite a bit. So I worked for them for about a year and a half and decided I didn’t want to be a lawyer, and I wanted to work outdoors but I didn’t know at what [laughs].

TM: Okay. I’m just trying to work on a timeline here. This is sort of ‘76 to ‘78. Did you go out on the weekends, then, or were you pretty much in Phoenix?

MSC: Yep. Then I was camping. By then, I liked to go camping. And I had a steady girlfriend. She liked it too. So we went all around wherever you can get in two or three days from Phoenix and did camping trips. I also reestablished connections with some of my old Prescott College buddies. And, so, they had different things going on. Did a Verde River trip, which I liked, down to Horseshoe, all the way. And did a couple of day trips on the Verde. We’d basically just throw stuff in the car and take off for the weekend and see what we could see. Always had a dog. But, anyway, end of ‘77, I decided this isn’t getting me anywhere in terms of what I really want to do with the legal stuff. But I had made the connections. I had met Eiseman. I had met Fred and Maggie.

TM: How?

MSC: I had met a bunch of Flagstaff boaters that later went on to be fairly influential. I had met the other Ron Smith, the one you’re familiar with, from Grand Canyon Expedition; and Vladimir Kovalik.

TM: So let’s back up a minute. Fred and Maggie Eiseman. How did you meet Fred and Maggie?

MSC: You know, I really don’t remember how I met them other than... They were living out in Scottsdale.

TM: Right.

MSC: Off of Bell Road in Scottsdale.

TM: They were out there...In the 50s they built that place, and it was out in the middle of nowhere and the entire city kind of ‘croached out and grew around them.

MSC: That’s exactly what I was going to say. Yeah. Actually, I do remember the first time I met Fred. We drove out there. I can’t remember why. It had to be Grand Canyon related, but I don’t know that we were really thinking then about the lawsuit or having things... Anyway, I remember distinctly knocking on the door. Maggie opened the door and had me in. “Glass of iced tea? What do you want?” I said, “No, I’m fine,” blah, blah, blah. Then she says, “Well, Fred’s out back, go say hello.” So I walk out into the backyard, and here’s this guy totally bald—he was shaving his head in those days—and he was working

out on a weight bench [laughs]. I'm looking at this guy, going, "Geez," [laughs] because that was a little bit of an unnerving sight in the 70s. I mean, today, anything goes, but you didn't have a lot of people shaving their heads back then. Yeah, he was just doing his workout, and when he finished we shook hands and went in and had a drink and talked. I mean, the common thread was that he knew Goldwater well. And it was right at the time when all the hearings were going on, which I attended some of in Phoenix and in Flagstaff, about wilderness designation for the river corridor. Even when I was back East, and especially when I was at the law firm in Phoenix, I had kept pretty well up on what was going on in terms of river issues because I had put in for a permit and been refused.

TM: Do you remember when you put in for that permit?

MSC: '75, I think. '75 or '74. I used to have the letter that they sent me back. The specific grounds for the refusal weren't just that I'd never been before, but that they were studying the whole situation and everything was frozen.

TM: Right. At that point, things were much different from 1956. By the mid-70s, there was a lottery in place and if you lost the lottery, well, you got a denial letter.

MSC: Right.

TM: And, of course, there were a lot of studies happening. The park had already realized there were too many people in the river corridor and had frozen use back in the 1970-72 area.

MSC: Yeah. I think they froze the use... In early '73 they announced it and they pegged it to the level for '72. So it ended up being 92-8, I remember that, 92 percent commercial and 8 percent private.

TM: Right.

MSC: Yeah. I think I had lost the lottery several times, and they were in the process of drafting the first CRMP about the time that I started getting back into river issues. I honestly don't remember how I ended up going out to see Fred and Maggie the first time. But I do remember Fred being interested in the fact that I had some connections in the legal community. So we talked, and he invited me back out and had dinner. Oh, I know what it was. It was in the papers that there was this outfit called Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest and they had just sued the Salt River Project and APS on what would today be called the first, kind of, consumer rights lawsuits. This was back when Ralph Nader was still active. So anyway, the guy who was the head of the Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest was an attorney named Bruce Myerson. I had met him at some point. So I called him up and said, "I'd like to talk to you about this whole access to the river thing." And he was receptive, at least he listened. Then, when I would talk with Fred, Fred said, "Well, let's get together with Bruce and see if we have any grounds for challenging what the park is doing."

The third player in all of this, who I haven't mentioned up until now, is another Prescott College alumnus, also a non-graduate—he basically went to Prescott to avoid the draft, which a lot of us were doing—Dick Hertzler. Dick is still living over in Durango. Today he's 70/71, not active in much of anything. He's kind of stove-up but I keep in touch with him. Last May, I went down on his permit, which we transferred to somebody else because he couldn't do it. He was one of the last of the 2006 waiting-list people. Anyway, Hertzler was a kayaker in Prescott. He had been, like, maybe number three or four in the kayaking program at the college under Ron Smith, but was always pretty much of a free spirit. In 1971 he worked as one of the first river rangers up on the Middle Fork in a kayak. Anyway, he was a good boater, and he taught me a lot about kayaking. In those days you did not go splatting onto rocks

because then you spent the rest of the day inhaling fiberglass fumes. So it was a different game. But he definitely was sort of a mentor in the kayaking sense for me. And Hertzler knew a lot of people. He's the one that introduced me to Wilderness World and those folks. He would go on trips. I hesitate to use the word "safety kayaker" [laughs] cause there wasn't much safe about Hertzler, but he was a good guy to have around, in camp and sort of to keep you entertained. He didn't do very much work, but he was... Anyway, he knew a lot of people, and he'd been boating for a long time. In those days, I mean, if you had a kayak on your roof rack and you were driving down the road and somebody came by going the other way with a kayak on the roof rack, you both pulled over. I mean, it was rare.

TM: Yeah.

MSC: So I had been flailing around teaching myself when I sort of ran back into Dick when I came back to Phoenix and stuff. There were quite a number of Prescott College students who didn't get far from Prescott for one reason or another. It was a tough town to earn a living in as I later discovered when I moved back there in '77. But, anyway, Fred and I and Hertzler were the three plaintiffs in our lawsuit. Dick was in Prescott, so he wasn't around too much for the meetings with the attorneys and trying to decide on a strategy, trying to see what grounds we could challenge the allocation. It was mostly Fred and me. Fred took me up to meet Goldwater at his place, which was kind of cool. I couldn't be any further from Goldwater politically, but I remember he was very gracious and we had a good talk. He knew exactly what was going on on the river issues.

TM: Wow. That's really great, that you guys... And this was...

MSC: This was '77, probably.

TM: '77. So was Barry still a senator?

MSC: Yep.

TM: Okay.

MSC: Yep. Yep. He was still a senator. I remember he had a...

TM: What do you remember of him?

MSC: Well, I mean [laughs], in my family, which was mostly from West Virginia and coal miners, we're small-d democrats, and when Goldwater ran for the presidency, the saying was, "In your heart, you know, he's right," and we used to say, "In your gut, you know he's not" [laughs] because he was. But, in person, he was very personable. I hesitate to use this about any Republican, but a nice guy and, like I said, surprisingly informed on river issues. Fred and he were mostly talking about whether or not the wilderness designation was going to happen and what fallout Goldwater was getting from the outfitters. Fred Burke was around. He was about the only constituent that Barry had. No, Gaylord Staveley, sorry, who I did not get along with. But [laughs], yeah, Fred had connections with some of the crowd. Fred had broken in in the 50s working for Georgie. He was trying to keep a pulse on outfitter opposition by virtue of his position. The same thing happened to me later on, you know, "Oh, you're St. Clair. You're the guy that sued for... [laughs] Trying to take bread from my mouth." I'm like, "Well, no, but..." So, anyway, yeah, we went up, I think, twice. I remember twice meeting with Barry, and he was basically kind of giving us a heads-up on what he thought would fly in Washington in terms of what the park could get away with; how far they could go. And, then, as you know, the park ultimately recommended wilderness for the entire corridor.

TM: Right.

MSC: Well, that was later on, but this was while the whole thing was gelling. Anyway, we decided... Joe Monroe over in California who I had met once in Flagstaff at one of the meetings, one of the scoping meetings, Joe got into court first, and then we filed, maybe, I don't know, two or three months after he did. The suits kind of got consolidated in the appeal process. We argued... Well, I knew we were...

TM: Hey, Mike, hang on a second. Go back to Joe for a minute. Can you describe him? What was he like? What are your thoughts on him?

MSC: I met him for five minutes after one of the park meetings in Flagstaff. I remember that. No, I mean, I never knew him. I mean, in those days, it wasn't just motors. It was the whole experience that was going to be changed. I mean, I think you know more about it than I do, for sure, in terms of the numbers and how that would affect trip length and total people down there. But, with the exception of Martin Litton and Ron Smith, to a certain extent, there wasn't an outfitter who didn't feel personally threatened by the proposal to get rid of motors. Maybe some of the OARS folks, but I don't know. It was a big deal. It was, "you're depriving me of my livelihood" and there wasn't a lot of common ground. Let's put it that way.

TM: Sure. I'm going to go back. I want to touch on something. We talked about this the other day briefly, that in 1956, Grand Canyon National Park superintendent John McLaughlin instituted a permit program that would basically give the commercial operators permits if they wanted them, as many as they wanted, and do-it-yourself river runners could not get a permit if they hadn't been through the Grand Canyon before. And this was in 1956.

MSC: Right. Well, somebody on your party had to have been before.

TM: Yeah, somebody on your party had to have been before. And it could have been a 12-year-old boy who'd gone on a commercial operator's trip. That was good enough. But, if you didn't have anyone who'd been down the Canyon before, regardless of the experience you had, you were not going to get a permit.

MSC: Right.

TM: And there were people like Kirschbaum who fought that in 1960 and was able to get a permit with legal help from Tyson Dines. So there were the occasional rare exceptions. Were you aware in the late 70s working with Fred and, of course, the Monroe team coming in on their side, was anybody aware of that implementation of that in the 1950s that allowed the commercial operators to greatly expand and then to feel as though they owned the place, if you will, you know, "you're taking bread out of my mouth," those sorts of things? Did anyone go back and say, "Well, wait a minute. This was really out of line in 1956"? Had anybody discovered that?

MSC: Not to my knowledge. We knew that the concessionaires had concessions. I mean, the permit under which they operate had a fixed timeframe. They renew them every 5 years, every 10 years, whatever. But we didn't know that that had been... I mean, at least I don't remember it being discussed that it had been implemented in the 50s.

TM: Right. The concessions happened in 1970-ish timeframe, '70/'72. Those are 10-year contracts. I think the first time actually was maybe 5 years. You're right. There was a jump in there. But this is a point I really wanted to try to get clear was did anybody anchor back that far?

MSC: No. I mean, Fred did. Fred was working for Georgie in '57 when the highest water that's come down the drainage in our lifetime came down. He ran a trip with her I think it was June of '57. I think the figure I heard was 257,000 cusecs.

TM: Yeah, 126,000, but still mighty high. The interesting thing, of course, is Fred worked for Georgie. Then he worked for Gaylord, and he didn't get into do-it-yourself river running until, I believe, 1970, '70-ish? Is that right?

MSC: Late 60s.

TM: Late 60s? Okay.

MSC: He commissioned a guy up in Oregon. His last name is Steele, I think.

TM: Yeah, Keith Steele.

MSC: Keith, that's it, who built the dories for Martin. Fred piggybacked on that and got his dories. I think it was '68 or '69 that he told me he got dories. Because I remember once he said, "Well, at the same time you were at Prescott College, I was just getting my dories." But he had plenty of experience.

TM: Right.

MSC: What tore it for Fred was when they started imposing limits on the trip length because he and Maggie would just go down there. I think Fred was teaching chemistry at the Orme School, more or less as a hobby. He would pick out a few of the heartier seniors and other friends and stuff, and they would go down there after school was out in the summertime and stay [laughs]. I mean, they wouldn't come out. They'd just stay there [laughs] for five, six, seven weeks, and hike up to the rim to get food or hike up Havasu and get food. I mean, besides yourself, and I've followed your guidebooks and river guides and hats off to you. You did a good job on everything.

TM: Oh, you're very kind.

MSC: But Fred... And I met Butchart at NAU.

TM: Harvey.

MSC: Yeah, Harvey. Harvey had the most encyclopedic knowledge of the park ever, there's no question. But Fred also knew little trinkets of stuff from hiking up side canyons. He was great if you could get him to talk about it. He didn't like to because he didn't want to reveal [laughs] where things were. There's a hike up to Owl Eyes...

TM: Why do you think that might have been?

MSC: Well, I was of the same opinion, because you tell somebody how to get to somewhere and then you come back a year later and the place is trashed. I mean, maybe not trashed but overrun. That was basically it. It wasn't by nature secretive or conspiratorial or anything like that. It was a hard-won experience, hey, let's not be publicizing too much. So Fred was pretty closed-mouthed about his Canyon experiences other than access issues. He was pretty adamant about those. I remember...because we were trying to do some other stuff besides just the lawsuit. We went around and talked to the Outdoor Action people at ASU. We were invited to talk to different groups. Of course, the Sierra Club; Jeff Ingram was real active down in Tucson. One of the arguments that Fred was hard-over on was... This was also

the time that I think the slogan came out about putting handrails in the national parks to keep people from falling off of exposed...

TM: Yeah.

MSC: [laughs] That just set Fred off to no end [laughs]. We used to say, "Not everybody can climb Everest," not anticipating what Everest has become today. But the point was, if you were capable of going down there, you should be able to do it and you should have primacy over somebody who's making a buck by taking people. That was the driver of our whole argument. But the park had what I've come to regard as a fairly well-founded skepticism about private trips. And I'm not trying to be elitist or... The park would rather deal with the same 17 or 21 or 14 outfitters who they know than every Tom, Dick, and Harry who shows up with a boat at the ferry and says, "I want to go." They just didn't have the staffing. They didn't have... Well, anyway.

TM: No, this is a real interesting point that Otis Marston was writing to the superintendent about—Superintendent Bryant in the 1950s—what would happen if John Wesley Powell showed up at Lees Ferry today?

MSC: Right. Yep. Yep.

TM: Would you let him go? Would you let him launch down the river, down the great unknown? You're exactly right. There were a lot of known faces that would come around again and again and again. They had the trip together. They were easy to work with. And then there were the great unwashed. I wonder if this is a good place to wrap this interview up for today, and we would bring this back up again down the road?

MSC: Sure. That's fine. I'll try to be a little more organized in terms of chronology here.

TM: Oh, I think you've been great.

MSC: Well, yeah. [laughs] Just talking about it kind of unlocks a bunch of memories that I hadn't really thought about for a long time, so...

TM: Nice. So what I'd like to do is hold the line here, and I'm just going to sort of de-introduce this [laughs], if you will. Today is Friday, January 12th, 2018. This is a Grand Canyon Oral History with Michael St. Clair. My name is Tom Martin. And, Michael, thank you very much.

MSC: Thank you, Tom. We'll be in touch.