

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewees: Pat Grediagin (PG)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Pat recounts three years as district ranger at Sequoia National Park starting in 2001

Date of Interview: March 5, 2021

Method of Interview: By telephone, Part 9

Transcriber: Stacy Birk

Date of Transcription: May 2021

Transcription Reviewers: Sue Priest, Pat Grediagin

Keys: Sequoia National Park, Kings Canyon National Park, district ranger, Mount Whitney, Debbie Bird, horses in the backcountry, mule death, trails crew, Sierra Nevada's, backpacking, missing ranger, marijuana growers, Lemoore Air Force base, Dick Martin

TM: Today is Friday, March 5, 2021. This is Part 9 of a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Pat Grediagin. My name is Tom Martin. Good evening, Pat. How are you today?

PG: I'm doing quite well, thanks.

TM: Great. Pat, we concluded Part 8...around 2001 you were the river district ranger at Dinosaur National Monument and you applied out for a job at Sequoia-Kings Canyon. Can you pick that back up again?

PG: Yeah. Well, I'm going to describe the structure of that park area a little bit, and then I'll tell you what job I applied for and got. Sequoia and Kings Canyon are two separate National Park units, but they are adjacent to each other, they have a shared boundary, and they are administered by the Park Service as one single area. So there's one superintendent that is in charge of both parks and there's one chief ranger that's in charge of both parks, as well as some other programs, and there's one chief of maintenance who's over stuff in both parks. Then it starts breaking down from there in terms of who's responsible for what. The district ranger job that I applied for and got, which was Sequoia district ranger, is of a different magnitude than the district ranger jobs that we've been talking about so far because in the past interviews, the district was a sub-unit of one single park, so maybe there was three or four sub-units in the district and I was involved with one of those. In Sequoia-Kings Canyon, each park was called a different district. So there was only two district rangers. There's a district ranger in charge of law enforcement, backcountry, and fee collection operations in Sequoia, and one who had that same responsibilities in Kings Canyon. Then each park had further subdivisions to carry that out. The job I had was the Sequoia district ranger, meaning that I oversaw the operations I just described in all of Sequoia National Park. Originally there were four sub-districts, with a sub-district ranger heading up each operation in Sequoia. Three of them are more or less front-country ones—mountains, park front-country—but the fourth one was totally backcountry where the rangers hiked in and spent the summer in a cabin in the backcountry. I had responsibility for managing, essentially, those operations. It was a big shift both in terms of the largeness of the job, the magnitude of the job, but also that I wasn't a field ranger at that point, I was an office ranger. When I got the job and people said, "Oh, aren't you gonna miss being a river ranger?" I very clearly remember, "No, not." I love rivers, but I wanted something that had a little more challenge to it and I knew that this new job was going to be more challenge. I'd learn new things and I'd be involved with different kinds of aspects of working for a national park. I was really eager to do that. The fact that I went to essentially a desk job had trade-offs that made it all the worthwhile. So that was what I did in, oh, I think it was July or something, but sometime in 2001 I took on that job and stayed there for about three years doing that work.

TM: So, let's step back for a minute. Do you have a rough idea of how many acres are in Sequoia?

PG: I could not even begin to tell you. I never was good at those kinds of things.

TM: Was it like a million, I mean, is it like Grand Canyon size or Dinosaur size?

PG: Oh, it's much bigger than Dinosaur. Big Bend might be kind of close because Big Bend's pretty big. It's smaller than the Grand Canyon, I think. It's pretty good sized but much of it is backcountry. The margin of use is along a road on the west side of the park. The east side of the park is the crest of the Sierra mountains and on the east side of that crest—and that crest does include Mount Whitney—and the east side of that is Forest Service. So from Mount Whitney and that crest towards the west is where Sequoia National Park is and it's right along that western edge that it's accessible by road. So there was points of congregation of easily accessible areas that got the bulk of the visitation, but there was a massive backcountry area that still needed managing, but it was much less densely visited and not so many rangers, but there were rangers back in there. It's like the Grand Canyon in that way, too, you know, South Rim, North Rim and then just lots of acres of light use in much of the rest of the park.

TM: When I think of the Sierra, I think of steep escarpments on the east and long, gradual drop on the west.

PG: Right.

TM: And with Yosemite kind of off to the north and I guess Kings Canyon would be to the south?

PG: Yeah. Between Yosemite and Kings Canyon is Forest Service land so Kings Canyon... I don't know how many miles... Well, the John Muir Trail runs from Yosemite and curves around a little bit there, it actually becomes part of the Pacific Crest Trail, and it ends at Mount Whitney 210 miles or 220 miles later.

TM: South?

PG: Yes, south. Of course, it wouldn't be as a direct arrow south. But it's probably at least, I'm gonna guess, 100 miles of Forest Service land in between Yosemite, then Kings Canyon, and then adjacent to Kings Canyon is Sequoia. You're right that it's a sloping elevation on the west side, which is where the giant Sequoias live, at about 6000 feet elevation. There's just a lot more moisture on the west side. The habitat of the park goes from about 2000 feet up to 14,000 at Mount Whitney. So you have all these different ecological niches there, and about 6000 [feet] is where the Sequoias are. There are roads up into that part, but beyond that it's all hiking.

TM: Was Sequoia handling the permits to hike up to Mount Whitney or was that the Forest Service on the other side, Inyo people?

PG: Well, the Forest Service on the other side did the bulk of that because by far the most popular way to get to Mount Whitney is to go up from Whitney Portal on the east side, and go up to Mount Whitney, and then back down that east side because it's, I don't know, it's like 11 or 14 miles, or something like that. From the west side you can hike there, but you've got a few days of hiking before you get close enough to go up. There was a Park Service ranger that was stationed on the... It's kind of a little extra

“unfh” right there where the crest is, so you drop down to 11,000 feet and there was a ranger station, maybe at 10,500, I think it was about 11,000 feet, on the west side that the Park Service staffed. That ranger would, with some regularity, go up to the top of Mount Whitney. The Park Service took the... There was a toilet there, in the form of a barrel that was maybe hidden behind some rocks, just so that if somebody needed to defecate there’d be a place to do it that it could be hauled off, a helicopter would come in once or twice a year. That ranger would go up there. They’d hook it up while the helicopter was hovering and then they fly it off to a sewage treatment plant somewhere. So that became... For some reason, that was the Park Service’s. I think the actual little crest was like 40 feet to the east and so everything on the top is mostly on the Park Service side, so we inherited that toilet responsibility.

I tried to make sure I got out into all these sub-districts—Mineral King being one; Lodgepole, where the Sequoias were, being one; and then a lower, front-country district—and knew what was going on in them. But I loved having to go into the High Sierra for work purposes. I mean, I just found a lot of pleasure in being paid to go hike in the backcountry and see what’s going on back there. I took, you know, advantage of that to make sure I knew what was going on and meet the rangers back there. That was the real benefit out of that job, was being able to say, “I’m gonna go on a patrol and check things out,” once or twice a year, maybe. It had to be all pretty legitimate. I really enjoyed that job, in part, because it was a magnificent park, particularly the high country which caught my attention just because of the grandeur back there, but also because I did get involved with a lot more management of park issues. It just intrigued my mental capacities to try and... I just learned stuff that I didn’t realize was going on at different levels above me. It’s more complex in Sequoia than it was in some other parks. There’s wilderness issues that... Oh, there was committees to review whether certain mechanized use was okay in the backcountry for administrative purposes. For instance, the Park Service tended to use helicopters to take food into remote cabins high in the Sequoias before stock animals could get in there, so that the rangers could go back there and start doing their patrol work. Other agencies, like the Forest Service, tends to not use helicopters in anything that’s wilderness. So it was interesting to me just to become more familiar with not only the Wilderness Act but how it is applied by different agencies and the reviews that it gets for different uses. Basically have to make your case why you need to use this to do your job in the backcountry. So I really enjoyed learning the stuff.

And then I worked with a good staff. The people I worked with I really enjoyed, both my boss and the people that were working for me. Debbie Bird was the Chief Ranger, and I give her a lot of acknowledgement and credit, because... She was actively looking for people with potential to fill the job that I got when she was recruiting for them and not simply somebody who had checked all the boxes and already had a career path that they were working on. I think because I was female and because she wanted to make sure that other females got chances to lead in the Park Service, I think she kind of made a point of hiring me. I don’t know who the other candidates were that she considered, but I feel very fortunate that she was the person doing the selecting because I think that I might not have been hired if it had been someone else. She gave me a break, and I really was grateful to her for that.

TM: Did Debbie give you your orientation and sort of fill you in? I mean, who handed you the institutional memory from the person you replaced?

PG: You know, I really don’t remember. Debbie would have told me some, but Debbie was very busy. She oversaw the fire program, which was a big operation in Sequoia; the wilderness program, which they had a lead wilderness person who did a wilderness plan; two district rangers; a law enforcement specialist; and then she was always working with the superintendent on issues. So, I’m sure she gave me some kind of orientation, but I think she might have passed it off to the fire... I don’t remember what his

title was. But anyway, the guy in the head of fire operations, he probably filled me in on that. And the guy in charge of the wilderness, he would have filled me in on those components. So I probably picked up a lot from people who had been there and were really knowledgeable about that specific arena. So I don't remember particularly, but I do remember Debbie being very busy and so I'm not sure she spent a lot of time with me. And I don't say that negatively, I just acknowledge she had a lot on her plate.

TM: Right, right. Did you know anyone else at Sequoia when you showed up there from your prior Park Service career?

PG: I did not. But there were three of us that were actually hired at the same time, so we were all... The Kings Canyon district ranger, as well as my job as Sequoia district ranger, as well as, actually, the wilderness coordinator, were all hired at the same time, so we all came in new and were kind of friends because we were all new together. Also, we also just naturally worked together a lot. I worked with the wilderness coordinator a lot because a lot of the land that we were responsible for patrolling was wilderness. Actually, it was his office that issued the permits for the backcountry, backpacking hikes into wilderness. That was his responsibility. Then the Kings Canyon district ranger and I would just collaborate a lot because we had more issues, you know, maybe loan staff to each other now and then for different things. It was easy to integrate into that park. It was people who were knowledgeable and could tell me what was going on and were willing to do so in a friendly manner. I don't remember how I learned everything, but I remember it just kind of happened and was not a big deal. I didn't know people, but I found it very easy to integrate so that was good. I really enjoyed that job because it was, like I said, it was a great park, and then good people, and then I learned new stuff.

TM: I was just kind of thinking about Dinosaur National Monument compared to Sequoia. Sequoia's close to Los Angeles and San Francisco, giant urban centers and, gosh, I can imagine the backcountry visitation was so much higher.

PG: Yeah, it's just a different scale. A completely different scale thing.

TM: Yeah, wow. So, tell me how did your day go? What did you do? What were some of the fun things you got involved in? What were some of the not so fun things you got involved in?

PG: I think on a day-to-day basis, I was spending a lot of time looking over reports of what was going on in the different sub-districts. I had budget responsibilities so I had to allocate that all out, and then kind of keep track of how the budget was going. I worked with the chief ranger's secretary, also, on that, but basically had to be on that. So there were administrative tasks, meetings on this wilderness, how we would use wilderness on grazing. There was a horse-use component for people who liked to take their horses in the backcountry, which was fine, but we had meadows closed until they dried up enough in the spring, or in the summer, really, to withstand horses grazing on them. So we would not issue permits to recreational horse use in the high country until it was deemed that those meadows were ready for that impact. So I would meet with resource management people about the status of that, when we were going to allow that use back there.

TM: Did you have private tour companies leading guided stock trips?

PG: Let me think about that. Yes, we did have stock people who would go into the park. It was really a very low percentage of the backcountry use. There were people from the east side that would bring people up that escarpment, up to the high country, on a trail or two. And I think from the south, they

would come up through the Golden... Yeah, there was actually... There was day use horse use on the west side, too, but I think most of the high country horse use came out of the east side. And they did have some kind of permit. I can't remember if it was a visitor's use permit or... I think that was probably it that would have authorized them to conduct that business. I didn't get involved too much with those particular individuals that were running that. It wasn't a very big part of the whole operation. The sub-district ranger that was in charge of the backcountry, she would have been the lead person that would be in touch with them, and just making sure that they knew what the rules were and kind of keeping an eye out on how things were going. It was never a big component of the use in Sequoia, nonetheless, it was a use and they were a vocal set of users because the traditional horse users felt that they were getting squeezed out a little bit by modern park management, or the management of parks. In the old days, there was a lot more horse use than there is now, in part because that was how people would get back there with heavier gear. But now a lot more of it's lighter and people backpack. The park has recognized... I think the Park Service as a whole has recognized that horses have a bigger impact on the natural resources of the backcountry, or the front country, but the backcountry in particular than foot traffic does. It comes in the form of their hooves chewing up trails at a higher rate of erosion than people feet. It comes with if they're not using a weed-free hay that they then spread nonnative species of grasses in the backcountry. There was one other thing I was remembering that was... Oh, and it comes with them grazing on the park meadows. If that's not done properly, then they can cause a lot of damage when they're wet still. So, horses have the potential to do a lot more damage. Ten people on horses have the potential to do a lot more damage than ten people backpacking in. The horse users knew that the parks were thinking like that and they didn't like being kind of being on the margins of things, or having concerns about damage that their chosen way of recreation was possibly going to produce, and what the park might do to regulate that. So they were kind of vocal in making sure that their interests were watched or were allowed/granted.

Not being a big horse user, but being a big backpacker, I thought that it would be appropriate for me to learn and get a little bit of insight into what it's like to be on a horse trip. My sister, who lives in Oregon, is a farrier and has had horses her whole life and she takes her horses to the backcountry all the time. I said, "Sue, why don't you come on down and I'll sign you up as a volunteer, or you just go and I'll go out with you somehow and I'll do it on work time. We'll go do a horse trip in the backcountry for five days and you can teach me about what it's like on your end to be a horse user, and what things you like and what things are difficult." Oh, another area of potential damage to parks is when horses are just tied improperly to trees. They can rub the bark off of trees, so you're supposed to put a highline up and tether your horses in a place that's fairly durable under the highline so that their standing in one spot all night long isn't going to gouge out big chunks of meadows, or something like that. So there's all these little nuances that I knew my sister would know. We got a park mule; she's a very good packer, as well. The park loaned us a mule and we took her two horses because she felt more comfortable with using her horses. We did this tour and it was great but like on the third day, the mule got really sick. We are in the backcountry and the mule just started not being right and started going downhill real fast. He had on this vacant stare. He kept moving with us but he went to water, he couldn't drink. We thought, oh, this is not good. There's something wrong, something real wrong with this mule. So I radioed out, "Something's wrong with Timmy the mule." I'll always remember Timmy the mule. A horse ranger that was assigned to the backcountry and had horse stuff came up and gave the mule a shot of something to hopefully get it cured of whatever might be ailing it. Then we were going to try and go out the next day and shorten our trip and get out, get the mule to a vet. The mule died the next morning in the backcountry, so my sister and I loaded up everything on her two horses. Both saddles went on one horse, and then the mule's load went on the other horse and we walked out, which was no big deal because we liked to walk. We walked out, but meanwhile, we called out that the mule had died. It died

right at the edge of a stream that was in a very popular...not popular meaning lots of people, but it was a destination where people would go to camp, and we didn't want a dead mule to pollute the water. So the trail crew helicoptered in and landed, and set a few sticks of dynamite in strategic places, and vaporized the mule so that it would deteriorate more quickly and it wouldn't just be rotting there all summer long. And then we hiked out. Oh, but they wanted to make sure that the mule hadn't had rabies, because nobody could figure out what it died from. We had been trying to cup our hand and give it water with our hands when it was on its last legs, like, "Come on drink, Timmy, drink," so they were concerned that we could have come in contact with rabies if it happened to have rabies. There was no real indication it did, but they just thought to be safe they should have it checked. So they cut the head off of Timmy and flew it out in the helicopter and it was awaiting me in the freezer at the mule barn. One of the staff that was working in fee collection and didn't have much to do that day, he got the assignment of taking the mule head to the lab somewhere down in Bakersfield, not Bakersfield, Visalia area. It was not rabid. So that was a very memorable trip. It was very sad; but it was very memorable. It was good, also, because my sister went with me on that trip. So that was a great trip. That was one of those unusual kind of not your ordinary day-at-the-office days.

TM: Yeah, it's really interesting, because I think about mules at Grand Canyon, that everyday go up and down the Bright Angel or the Kaibab Trails, and, gosh, the poor trails crew are constantly working on trying to stabilize those trails because of the wear and tear of these large animals. So I kind of never equate it to Sequoia, where the same thing can happen.

PG: Yeah, not to the degree as Grand Canyon because that gets such specific use all the time, but...

TM: It's year-round, almost, so – yeah.

PG: Yeah. Livestock is hard on trails, that's just a fact of life. You've got them focused on certain trails and they're going to do more damage there. So I got a little education about livestock and could speak more knowledgeably when I was at some meeting where we were talking about whatever. But it was largely desk. I would travel once a week an hour up the hill to the Lodgepole District and meet with them up there, which is where the Sequoias were. I would go to the different districts and meet with staff and make sure things were...or just kind of get an update on what's going on and how things were going. Actually went out with a bear crew one time because we had a black bear problem in a campground. It wasn't that we had a problem, it was that the bears had a problem with the Park Service putting the campground in their habitual roaming zones. They were there first and we put a campground there and they just kept coming through the area. When dumb people would leave their food out, they were like, "Well, sure, I'll eat that." We had to work diligently to train the people to keep their food away from the bears. There was a mother bear that was in the campground, and she had two cubs. I was there when they decided to try and catch her and move her out because she was teaching her cubs bad things. The cubs were up a tree—they were so dang cute. So I did go out and, you know, tried to make sure I knew what was going on out in the field. And that I was kind of the liaison between the people who are working in the field with these different areas and different activities, and what was going on at headquarters; and the policymakers and the budget people knew what we needed and how things were going. That was probably a pretty good description, actually, of what I was doing. I was that interface between what was going on in the field and people who were never in the field because they were higher grade than I was.

TM: Right. Right. Gosh, I just can't... I mean, I have a lot of respect for you going into that position and basically just trying to learn by getting your boots on the ground. But I'm learning that that's gotta

happen a lot in the Park Service when new people take in positions. You've got to get out there in the field and try to figure out what's going on, and talk to people, yeah.

PG: To me that's very exciting, traveling to a new place and checking it out. I just kind of figured that everybody's new somewhere, you know, at some point and it's my turn to be new here. I'll just figure it out and learn as best I can and ask people who know better than me to help me and...

TM: Yeah. So I'm assuming there must have been a trails crew?

PG: There was a real good trails crew. And when I say real good, I mean that they were interested in rock craftsmanship. I'm trying to think if some of them ended up in the Grand Canyon? I think, yeah. I can't remember Grand Canyon folks as much, but these guys prided themselves on working with granite rock, building crafted rock trails where they needed to do rock work for one reason or another. Really excellent rockmanship. They took pride in their work and they were really good.

TM: Yeah, yeah. Fun. It can be really amazing works of art there.

PG: Yeah, they are.

TM: But subtle, so it doesn't really pop out at you.

PG: Right. And it's only because I kind of knew...had been around these trail crew people in Big Bend. Some of them worked in Big Bend and I knew that ethic came from the Sierras. I think that might be where it had started and spread. I had run across it before so when I was in the backcountry in the Sierra, I would notice those trails and know that those guys were working hard and really proud of the work they were doing. So yeah, they were good. They'd go out for weeks on end in the backcountry, just be back there.

TM: Yeah, spike camps.

PG: Yeah, it's a whole subculture back there, just as you probably recognize that the river runners are a subculture of Grand Canyon users, both commercial river runners and then private, or non-commercial, whatever. The people who hung out in the backcountry as rangers were a total different sub-group that I really had an affinity for because they were into it because they loved being out in the backcountry. They were really knowledgeable about the area and they were really good at what they did. They were back there for three months at a time, almost never came out. Trail crew was the same kind of mentality, they loved being back there. They liked doing a good job and doing good work. I really was very impressed with all the backcountry staff in Sequoia and Kings Canyon, I'm sure, I just didn't get to know the Kings Canyon staff the way I got to know the Sequoia staff.

TM: Which makes sense because that was your job.

PG: Right, right. They're just the best.

TM: Did you get up Whitney during that time?

PG: I did!

TM: Oh, good.

PG Yeah. Right. Yeah, got up there. Actually, I think I did that on a... I did a backpack with a different sister and a girlfriend and we went up Whitney at that time. I probably had myself on the clock at that point, too, just because I needed to see what Whitney was like. We started on the west side and hiked for five days or so, or six days. There's something called the High... There's two confusing names and one's the... Well, I'm not gonna even say the name of the trail because I'll confuse it, but there's a trail that goes from the west side up to Whitney, and then we dropped down and went out Whitney Portal. So we did a west to east traverse that took probably six days, as I'm remembering now. So that was great to see that whole... As you gained elevation, you saw a different landscape starting at 6000 feet up to 14,000 feet. It was real interesting to see the changes and to see that backcountry. So yeah, I got up Whitney. Yeah, I got around back there, it was fun. Since then... So that was... I had not done any kind of recreation in the Sierra before I got the Sequoia job. I got hooked and I have been doing backpacking trips in the Sierra in the fall, pretty much most of the last 10 years, every fall. I'm just sure I missed some here and there but, yeah, definitely one of my very favorite places to go backpacking, still. That was another chance that I got to see this great country and learn to love it and now I've incorporated that into my own life because I was exposed to it through the Park Service. So, yeah, great.

TM: Cool; very cool. What were some of the real challenges that you had there? What were some of the difficult things you were dealing with?

PG: You know, I don't guess I remember bad stuff as much, I remember fun stuff. Um, let me think. Well, there was a few personnel challenges. Not that there was anybody that was awful but there was... You know, some people were better employees, and some people were good but not as good. And so...

TM: Well, that's gotta be normal for every park.

PG: Yeah, it is. And so you just have to... It's not really fun to be telling people during the annual review, that here's some areas you can improve in. "You're doing great, but let's, you know, this is something you might think about." So that was never fun but it was part of the job. And everybody has places that they can improve, really. There was one fella that needed a little bit more improvement than some others. So that was just kind of awkward, or hard, to give him a fair shake but still try and make sure that he was improving. So that would be one thing. Really, I don't remember. You know, probably if I was to flashback, being sitting in front of my computer, I'd be like, "Oh, I'm sitting in front of a computer." That was something that got to me at certain times. I just don't remember that many downsides to it. It was hot in the summer. I was living down at Three Rivers outside the main entrance into the park, and it got stinking hot there in the summer. So that was something you just had to contend with.

TM: Yeah, yeah, and I'm also thinking that you probably weren't doing a whole lot of road patrol?

PG: No, I was not doing road patrol. You know, I didn't really want to do road patrol. That could be said to be a demerit on my part that I so eagerly embraced doing all this backcountry trips, but did I embrace going out and grabbing a car and doing road patrol? No. I didn't really have an interest in doing that. I just thought, that's not what I'm strong at anyway. I was never, like, the best road patroller on earth. I had some road patrol people that worked in the sub-districts that were really good. They knew what they were doing and they did a good job and I'm like, I'm just letting them go because they're good at it. So no, I didn't do road patrol. I don't think I ever had a response... Oh, you know, I did help with a transport or two of someone that was arrested who was a female, and the road patrol fellow wanted

me to go along to be a female in the car with him while we were transporting. It's usually good to have two officers transport, anyway, into the jail in Visalia, I guess. I did that a couple times...

TM: How far was that distance?

PG: Well, I think it was 40 minutes or so. Not a long, long...

TM: Not that long.

PG: Right. I'm trying to remember if I got involved with any kind of medical stuff. I did get involved with something... Another thing that was kind of interesting, and I don't feel like it was a bad thing except it was kind of a sad occasion. There's a book out called *The Last Season*, which is a story, that's very well written by the way, about a ranger in Sequoia, a backcountry ranger, who, around the 90s, I think it was like 1997 or -8, went missing. And they never... They searched for him, and Debbie Bird, my boss, was there when they were searching for him. They didn't find him and they had no idea what happened to him. He just disappeared from his patrol cabin and was not seen. So, while I was working at Sequoia, maybe a couple years, maybe like the second year I was there, his body was found. I think that was five years after he had disappeared. His body was found up in the high country. He had gone hiking cross-country in early spring. I remember he fell in an area where snow was covering a creek, and I think he got underneath the snow and could not get out; something along those lines. He wasn't right on the main trail; he was off-trail. Somebody found part of him; a boot with a bone in it or something like that. So park staff went back there. I don't remember who did gather those up, but they found a shirt with his name on it so they figured out that this is what happened with the ranger. And Debbie was real...she wanted to handle it in an appropriate and personal manner.

Backcountry rangers that live back in Sequoia and Kings Canyon, some of them have been doing that job for up in the 20s/25 years and they knew each other. Sometimes they would walk to each other's cabin and visit on a day off or part of a patrol. So they got to be a very close group of people in the backcountry that watched out for each other and had a lot of longevity with working in that area. Sure there was new people now and then, but they all cared about...a good portion of them cared about this fellow who had gone missing and was one of them and now his body has been found. So Debbie Bird wanted to gather them up. She called into the backcountry and said, "Everybody, let's hike to Crabtree..." which is on the west side of Mount Whitney, is more central..."on this date, and be there. We're going to get together and I'm going to give you the news about so-and-so and tell you everything I can. We'll all be together when we discuss what's been found out." So I flew back with her. I hadn't been there when he went missing, but it was my district. So we both flew into Crabtree and she had this meeting with the rangers that were there and told them everything she knew about the finding of the body and what they felt it signified. So that was not a joyous occasion. It was probably more painful for Debbie because she had been involved with the original search and everything. But I thought she handled it really well to do this notification in person to the rangers and talk to them about it. I was happy to be just... I was kind of along for the ride because I hadn't been involved with it that much to that date. So that's not really a bad thing, but it was... Well, it is a bad thing, but it was not something that was painful to me personally.

TM: Well, it's a bad thing that was handled well and I'm assuming that there was quite a service?

PG: You know, I imagine there was, but I can't remember anymore. I just remember that we gathered as a group. Everybody was there for everybody to say, Oh, okay, this is what happened. I can't remember if

there was a service or whether that was kind of the service, which would have been what he would have wanted, something in the backcountry.

TM: Yeah, with his peers.

PG: Right, right. Maybe there was an aspect of that afternoon, that gathering, that was a service. I'm sure there were elements of mourning and respect given there but I don't remember anything else.

Yeah, we also had marijuana growers in the park that the staff would go out on and take down. It was very dangerous because it could have been booby-trapped, or people could have been there. One time I went out with the rangers that were going out more regularly, so I was all paramilitary with them. We snuck in and gave the little hand signals about look to your left and be quiet and hunker down and all that kind of stuff. Fortunately, there was nobody that was in the marijuana garden in the national park when we arrived, so the crews harvested all the marijuana, it got all helicoptered out or got all burned up. There was irrigation lines around. It was really an eye opener as to the extent and degree of alteration to the park. They would trim the... They had a tree that would be over the marijuana, but not as thickly over -- oak trees, they would take out half the branches so that they were still screened but sunlight could get through. It was on super steep hills and we would have little... What is it called when you build... Terraces. ...little kind of terraces that were for each plant on the hill. And they strung black irrigation hose from a spring that was a quarter a mile away and brought water down into it. And then they had fertilizers and all kinds of stuff there that they would apply. And they would have people who were living out there, apparently, maybe, I don't know, a mile off the road. So screened in and so steep a terrain that you just would never expect it. It just looks like wildland. There was a lot of marijuana being grown in the Sierra foothills on the west side. The Forest Service, there was a huge task force that were multiagency that were working together to try and maintain control or eradicate it.

TM: I imagine the DEA would be in on that?

PG: Yeah, DEA was in on that. We had a law enforcement specialist and he was the point-person on dealing with the other agencies on that issue. Some of the road patrol and law enforcement rangers that were in the park, in the different sub-districts, would get recruited to go out with him and raid these gardens. I was usually never a participant but I did want to go out and see what it was about. So I did go out with them that one time so I could understand it. A lot of poison oak out there, which didn't make life any better, going along through the bushes. One of the sub-district rangers was just totally allergic to poison oak, and yet he was one of the best guys to be going out there. He just had great skills. He always would go, and then he'd come home and strip off, and wash his whole body in Tecnu, and put all his clothes real carefully into a plastic bag. He'd still break out in poison oak. All kinds of different challenges to that.

TM: Did Kings Canyon and Sequoia, did they share a helicopter?

PG: Yeah. It was really a wildland fire helicopter that was used by... The fire staff contracted it. It was for their use but when they didn't need it, which was oftentimes, the ranger staff or whoever needed it could use it for whatever they needed it for. But they were the lead people on the contracting. I think it was not owned by parks. All the government vehicles and planes are owned by OAS, Office of Aircraft Safety, and they lease it to parks. So yeah, but we had one that was assigned to the fire chief with a little heliport. There was a lot of activity for that helicopter because it would take the food out to the backcountry rangers; it got involved in rescues in the backcountry; it got involved with monitoring after

thunderstorms for wildland fire; it got involved with fighting wildland fire; it got involved with taking marijuana out of a lot of different rural places. So, yeah, it was widely utilized.

TM: You know, I was thinking about Grand Canyon. The park has a helicopter, but they also have two helicopters, one of which they lease from the commercial helicopter tour companies. I think there's an arrangement there for the park ship as well. But I'm thinking, you know, I don't know about Kings Canyon-Sequoia. Did they have commercial helicopter tours going on there?

PG: No, I don't think so, I'm trying to remember. I don't remember that we did have them. The problem up in the air was the nearby, on the east side, Air Force base and the pilots that would like to fly low down some canyon coming off the Sierra to practice flying low down some canyon. It was not in keeping with what the purpose of the park was and yet, the Park Service did not have authority to say, "You can't do that. You're below a certain threshold." Because we don't control airspace over the park.

TM: Yeah, the FAA does that.

PG: Yeah. The park had a big outreach to the generals at the Air Force base and would invite them on backcountry trips into the backcountry for a couple days, all park sponsored. The park would have horses for them and wranglers who could bring in the stock mules that would bring all the food in, and try to let the Air Force staff higher-ups experience what being in the park backcountry was all about. If we were lucky, then an airplane would fly low over and they would get to hear what an intrusion that was into backcountry. It was successful. They negotiated with the Air Force to limit where the planes were going and how low they came down over the park. It worked out well. But I don't remember that there were air helicopter tours.

TM: Okay. Yeah, that low-flying military aircraft, 'course those men and women flying those machines need to train somewhere, but the parks are trying to preserve ecologically intact large swaths of land. So it's quite a balancing act there.

PG: And, you know, one of the things that the Park Service has started acknowledging is some resources that they want to protect that are not what comes to mind right off the bat. Resources like the Sequoia trees, or a certain geology, or things that parks are known for. In Big Bend I first came aware of this and my visit recently to Big Bend brought it back. Big Bend specifically states that they manage the park, kind of manage the park, for dark skies but also for natural soundscapes. When you're in Big Bend, there's no plane overflights there. You don't hear a thing if you are away from any kind of a road. It's just all natural sounds. People don't understand, or recognize, sometimes how few of the places are that you can go and only hear natural sounds in a 24-hour period. There's almost always planes flying overhead somewhere.

TM: That's right; yeah. That's a good point. Who was your superintendent?

PG: Dick Martin, and yeah, I enjoyed working for Dick.

TM: What do you remember about him?

PG: Well, he loved being in the backcountry himself so he totally got protecting. He understood my interest in going in the backcountry, not that he ever really inquired about it, but I know he was the same kind of ranger before he was a superintendent. He would have wheedled his way into backcountry

trips as much as he could. And he still did as superintendent. He took staff trips into the backcountry probably once a year. He would go on those trips with the military. He liked the backcountry a lot. He had been a ranger, I think, in Sequoia or Kings Canyon out of Bishop when he was a younger ranger and loved to ski back there. Was a big hiker, he didn't use stock as much. But yeah, he totally supported the backcountry operations. He looked for money to replace some aging backcountry ranger stations and got that into a funding cycle, and they finally got funded. So he liked to watch out for the backcountry. I think he was real resource oriented. You know, I knew him; he knew me. We're still on friendly terms. He and his wife have come to Bend to visit and to ski before and stayed at my house. So, yeah, we're on good terms. I didn't do much directly with him when I was working there because he had his own issues he was working on. We'd be, sometimes, in meetings at the same time. I could see him get a little exasperated over one thing or another but mostly he was... I think his values were good for a Park Service superintendent.

TM: Nice, good.

PG: I don't think there was anybody from Grand Canyon or other places that I knew in Sequoia. It's kind of funny how certain groups of people will... The Sierra people, people who work in the Sierras, seemed to kind of mix up in the Sierras a lot. Maybe Yosemite goes to Sequoia, Sequoia goes to Yosemite or Kings Canyon. Not that it's totally exclusive, but people seem to sometimes circulate in those kind of circles. The Northern Rockies, Glacier, Yellowstone. There's rangers that sort of seem to be there. Rangers that circulate around Alaska; rangers that circulate around desert parks a little bit. It certainly isn't totally a closed bowl there; but I didn't know people in Yosemite or Sequoia or Kings Canyon when I went there. I can't remember knowing anybody.

TM: Right. Doing these oral history interviews, it seems like it sort of ebbs and flows. You come in in 2001, well, that meant you missed, seven years earlier/eight years earlier, Nancy Muleady-Mecham who had been doing a ton of work in Death Valley and was doing EMS and law enforcement interpretation. But Sequoia was her go to seasonal park, then she ended up at Grand Canyon. And so, people do move around and either you're there when they're there or you're there when they're not.

PG: It's interesting because I did know her name, probably more from Grand Canyon. I'm not sure I ever met her, but I knew of her. Part of it might have been maybe I heard her name also at Sequoia. So it's that people have gone before you, you pick up on those names sometimes but you never know who comes after you that goes, Oh, Pat Grediagin, I remember I knew her somewhere.

TM: We were at FLETC together, or something like that. Yeah, yeah.

PG: Right, something like that. You move on and you just kind of are in your new space and you don't really know who's following you there. Yeah, when I got there, I don't remember knowing people there.

TM: Yeah. Nice. And you were there for how long, at Sequoia?

PG: I was there for just about three years. So, at the age of 50... I think I was there when I was 46 to 49, maybe and at the age of 50 I was eligible to retire with a law enforcement 20-year retirement. I was kind of interested in retiring because... Not that I didn't really enjoy my work with the Park Service, but there were so many other things I wanted to be doing. I wanted to be able to allocate my time towards other things besides just work. I had kind of geared myself to retire when I was 50, but when I was 48 or 49, late 48 maybe, this chief ranger job at Redwood National Park came open. I remember seeing it and

“Huh!” And it was a grade higher. I could get one more grade, which is what your retirement’s all based out of and I would get to be a chief ranger. It was like, “Huh, that sounds kind of interesting. Well, what the heck, I’ll just throw my name in that hat and see what comes of that.” So I did apply for it and I did get selected for that job. So I was at Sequoia three years, with contemplating maybe just retiring from there, but I was offered the job at Redwood, I think when I was 49, and I said, “Okay, well, I guess I’ll work a little past 50.”

TM: How does this work? If you've put in 20 years in law enforcement, is it you have to retire or you can retire?

PG: When you’ve put in 20 years, you're eligible to retire at the age of 50. You must retire out of law enforcement at the age of 57. They don't want old farts running around with guns and stumbling and shooting somebody. That's the basic mentality.

TM: Sure. And there's, you know, it's a lot of training and you have to, you know, agility and run. It's physically demanding. And all the stuff you have to carry when you have to put your duty belt on with your bulletproof vest and all that stuff.

PG: Yeah. But some people who are law enforcement rangers, as they approach their mid-50s, if they don't really want to retire yet because they like working in the Park Service and they want to keep working, they will just get out of a law enforcement job. Someone might go from being a chief ranger to a superintendent and they're no longer a law enforcement ranger. So they are out of law enforcement by the time they're 57, but they're still working for the Park Service.

TM: Right. So they’ll lose their commission.

PG: Yeah, they lose their commission, but they always have those 20 years of credit towards their retirement. Yes. But they lose their commission.

TM: So you don't want to become a law enforcement ranger when you're 38.

PG: Right. As a matter of fact, you can’t.

TM: Okay, okay. Work out the math and go, hmmm, it’s not going to work. Okay.

PG: Yeah. And like I said, I had just determined somewhere along the line that I wasn't that interested in being a superintendent because, honestly, I thought superintendents working long hours, and going to Elks Club meetings on Saturdays... I always liked my free time. I always liked taking vacations and going to interesting places. I didn't want to become wed to the Park Service so much that I no longer had my own personal life. So I identified that, yeah, I did want to retire young and go do the other things I wanted to do. So that was my basic plan and I did retire when I was 52, so I was still on the young side when I retired but I overshot my goal of 50 by a couple of years.

TM: Not bad, not bad. Well, maybe this is a good time to put a comma in this interview series here and in Part 10 we will see how the transition went from Sequoia to Redwood.

PG: Yeah, sounds great.

TM: Okay. Is there anything else you want to add into this section before I wrap things up?

PG: I can't think of... No, I can't think of anything.

TM: Okay. All right, well with that, this will conclude Part 9 of a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Pat Grediagin. Today is Friday, it's March 5, 2020. My name is Tom Martin and Pat, thank you so very much.

PG: Yeah, you're welcome.