

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society Oral History

Interviewee: Patricia "Patch" McCairen (PM)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: In Part 2 Patch recounts her commercial and private Grand Canyon river trips from 1975 to 1994, including her 1982 first woman solo rafting trip

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TM: Good morning. Today is Wednesday, March 6th, 2019. We are in Tucson, Arizona with Patricia "Patch" McCairen, and my name is Tom Martin. This is Part 2 of an oral history with Patch. Thank you so much for coming on back.

PM: Yes, good to be here.

TM: Last time we had learned of your upbringing, and your job working for Air France, and your discovery of the Grand Canyon, and your first river trip in 1975. And then your next river trip's a do-it-yourself river trip in '76, again in '78. You also mentioned that you did a solo river trip in 1982, so we're heading in that direction.

PM: Yes.

TM: One of the things I forgot to ask you yesterday was that first river trip back in 1975 was a time of transition as commercial use. The Grand Canyon had grown considerably in the 60s and there were problems with human waste, there were problems with cooking right on the beach. So, Patch, I'm wondering if you can remember that first river trip in '75, where did your drinking water come from, where was the cooking happening, how did the bathroom work? Do you remember those things?

PM: I remember some of it. I believe I remember that they had a big fire pan made out of an oil drum with a grate on top of it and cooked over that. I do not remember any stoves. They did have tables that they put up on the beach, I do remember, and those were... This was a snout trip and the tables were made from one of the platforms on the boat and they screwed in legs to it. I do remember that because I remember the first lunch when we all dived in and ate. (laughs) It was a scrumptious lunch. I'm not positive about the porta-potty. I think I became so accustomed to having one later on that I just kind of have included that in my memory there. I don't recall them telling us just to go off into the bushes and do our thing cause I can't imagine that they did that. You know, we had four boats, four boatmen, and an AB, and probably 20 passengers. Six times four is 24, so somewhere in there, 20/24 passengers. So you'd have close to 30 people. I just don't remember us being told to... I'm pretty sure that we had a porta-potty. So that's first week in June, 1975. And then, what was the other one? I've forgotten.

TM: The drinking water?

PM: Drinking water. I think we just drank the river. Yeah. We had a green river on that trip, we didn't have a muddy river. That I remember.

TM: In June?

PM: In June. Yeah, because before the monsoons. I didn't even know about the monsoons, of course, until later. But, yeah, June had a green river and then I believe they just pulled the water out of the river. Water jugs and stuff so make it easy for people when you're eating, that kind of thing.

TM: So then you got your own permit to run the Grand Canyon in '78, I'm sorry, '76.

PM: No, no. '76, if I may interrupt...

TM: Please. Please. Yeah, sure.

PM: ...if that's okay. '76 was someone else's permit and I was invited on the trip.

TM: Okay. Great. Okay.

PM: Yes. I forget whose permit it was but it was a bunch of ARTA boatmen from California and I. So '78 I got my own permit.

TM: Okay. In '78 with your own permit, that's when you rowed your own Avon Pro through the Canyon?

PM: Yes.

TM: Then your next trip was in 1979?

PM: Someone else's permit and I was on it.

TM: Okay. I don't think you've told us about that trip yet.

PM: That was a trip with a lot of animosity between people and it was not harmonious. What's so ironic is on the '78 trip, which was just everybody just got along so famously, but none of us really knew each other before the trip. On the '79 trip almost all of us knew each other, we had worked together in California on rivers, but when we got down on the Canyon it just, oh, it was like everyone thought that they were the expert and was the head guide. So there was a lot of clashes in that trip.

TM: Too many chiefs.

PM: Yes, everybody was a chief. "Don't tell me, I know what I'm doing" kind of thing. Oh, geez. (laughs)

TM: Well, it's good learning experience. (PM laughs) Where was your next trip after the 1979 trip?

PM: I believe in '81 I did an AB for AZRA.

TM: I'm sorry, I'm just thinking, what does AB stand for?

PM: Oh, yes, assistant boatman.

TM: Okay, thank you.

PM: That's it, yes.

TM: So what are the roles and duties of an assistant boatman versus a regular boatman?

PM: Well, the regular boatmen get paid (laughs) and they have responsibility for the whole thing. For the tying down, for rowing the raft and for the cooking and so forth, and food and the passenger safety. The assistant is essentially a learning position. You do get to row some. On a couple of those trips, maybe not that one, they often have a little paddleboat. This is a snout trip again, so you got room to carry a small, say, 10-foot/12-foot paddleboat and at certain times on the river they put that in and then the AB will captain that with some of the passengers. It gives the passengers something else and it's a win-win all around. And then you help the boatmen out with cooking. You're on a cook crew and you help with the tying down and that kind of thing. You're usually with one particular boatman so you're helping one rather than all of them. However they want to work it.

TM: Were you working in California at that time as well?

PM: Yes. Yeah, with ARTA in California.

TM: Okay. Where was home base for you at that time?

PM: Vallecito, California. Yeah, little town.

TM: What were you doing in the winter?

PM: Just hanging out. (laughs) Did some waitressing, I think.

TM: What else do you remember about that 1981 trip?

PM: It was a really nice trip. Wesley Smith, you know Wesley Smith? He was the HB, head boatman.

TM: What do you remember about Wesley?

PM: I remember that Wesley was a very special but very troubled man. I'm fairly sure he had an alcohol problem which, you know, I feel bad about. But he was really good. He was wild in some ways and he would say and do things with the passengers that no one else could have gotten away with. Oh boy, an example... I know I'm generalizing here but I can't think of something in particular. But you look at Wesley, you think, oh, no, Wesley but the people would just be eating it up. They just loved him. He just had this way of relating to people that was really good, but he was himself at the same time. Even though he had the alcohol problem, there was a spirituality about Wesley that I saw anyway. I'm not sure other people did, but I saw that about him. So, yeah, he was a nice guy. And he was good at what he did. He was good with everything and leading the trip. He was a good leader. Also Dwight Morgan was on that. I mentioned him. He was with AZRA. I forget how many, he did something like 60 or 70 trips with AZRA in the early, I guess late 70s/early 80s. He's the man who actually did my shuttle for my solo

trip. Oh, no, I'm jumping ahead. So he was on that. Who else was on that? Chris Brown might have been on that one. I'm not positive. You know Chris?

TM: Chris Brown out of Boulder, Colorado, the photographer?

PM: Yes, that's right. Yes. Yes. Who else? (pause) Oh, Russell Agee. Do you know Russell Agee? I don't think he worked for AZRA a long time. He got very involved in... He lived in California in the Palo Alto area of California, one of those towns in there. I don't know how much he worked for AZRA but he was friends with Rob and he was very nice. I mean, he was another nice guy. So he was on that trip. Maybe Chris wasn't on that. I'm trying to remember who. There would be four. Was it Wesley, Dwight... I'm getting my trips mixed up.

TM: No worries.

PM: I know Dwight was on it and I'm pretty sure Wesley was on that trip, at least those two. (laughs) And Russell. Yes.

TM: Okay. So on that trip in '81 did you spend some time in a paddleboat, captain that?

PM: I think so. (pause) Again, I can't remember. I get my trips mixed up. I may have. I don't remember. '81? Yes, because '81 was the trip where one of the passengers who had been a regular in the paddleboat got bitten by a rattlesnake and we had to helicopter him out. We were at a camp, I'd have to see the map, a big, big camp. It happened at night. He had been in the porta-potty and he reached for the toilet paper and got the end of his middle finger bitten. He was fortunately a really sensible young man. Dwight was going up toward the porta-potty and this guy started back and he told Dwight what had happened. He said, "I know how to meditate and slow my heartbeat." So he was a fantastic patient and helped himself. Then Wesley, who had gotten a step above first aid... You've got a few steps and he was maybe an EMS, I don't know, something, I forget the initials. But he had more of an advanced first aid training so he took charge of the situation. Put the guy on the beach lying down and that kind of thing and monitoring him. He stayed with him all night. It was one of the open areas before Phantom Ranch and before you go into the inner gorge but I'm not sure exactly what beach it was. And this, you know, real high planes and they didn't have radios. AZRA didn't carry... The motor companies did.

TM: The surface to air radios to talk to the planes?

PM: Right, to talk to the plane. I remember, I think Russell and someone else went downriver a little bit to contact Hermit's Rest. We had a site view of Hermit's Rest, of the tower there, so they were able to get the signal over. Then, of course, the plane saw the flashing mirror and they do whatever they do and contact. Then we laid out the pattern for the helicopter so that they could come down and take this guy away. But what was amazing on that is he was bitten say after dark. This is summer, so say at 9:00/10:00 at night, when it's really dark. The next morning his whole arm was just a balloon and he was in a lot of pain. I'm not sure, you know there's always that question of whether you should give anybody something cause if they have to go into surgery or whatever. Anyway, I'm not sure what they did on that. So he was helicoptered out that morning. We saw him when the trip ended, say 8/10 days later, I don't remember, when you have the group dinner in Flagstaff. He attended it but he was still swollen. He was in the hospital for a week, so the poor guy. I remember after that we put the paddleboat away cause nobody else really wanted to go in it. He was part of a group of four guys who were absolute pigs, except for him, who were chauvinist pigs and were just telling the most horrible... I mean, I'm not a

prude, but they were telling these most disgusting anti-women, sexual, gross jokes. I'm the captain of the paddleboat so I wasn't unhappy about having the boat put away for that. But anyway, that's an aside on all of this. I don't know whether it's important.

TM: It interesting because of this crew, an all-man crew, you're the baggage boatman if you will, the assistant boatman, and you're a female. Can you talk a little bit about the difficulties females had in sort of getting a job or a guides job?

PM: Yeah. You know, that's interesting. They did have a much harder time. I think it was more with the owners. All of the AZRA boatmen and let me digress a little bit here. ARTA in California, they started in California and I don't know when they first got their Grand permit to do it, but ARTA was the company who was first in hiring women in California and the other rivers. They did Idaho and Utah. They were the best one about that. I may have had some difficulties with Rob but the actual AZRA boatmen that I worked with anytime I went on a trip, I found to be totally encouraging. So I never had a problem with them. And even though I was the only woman on that crew, I didn't feel any sexism at all. I really didn't. They knew that I wanted to do this and they were encouraging. So I didn't feel... Now, maybe I didn't work with some that might have been, but the ones I worked with were always very, very nice. I have to say that.

TM: How many other women were working in the Grand Canyon for ARTA at the time?

PM: I remember Suzanne Jordan. She would have been with AZRA at that time. I don't remember when ARTA and AZRA, I'm gonna use the name AZRA. And Martha, Martha something. Red-headed Martha. Both of the women were redheads come to think of it. (laughs) I can't remember Martha's last name. (pause) I don't recall. And Louise [Teal], but Louise had sort of stopped. Oh, and then Lorna, Lorna something. She's on the cover of Louise's book. Lorna, I can't remember her last name [Corson]. Anyway, they were working for AZRA at the time. So it was just those few. I don't know when Sharon Hester started. She was a little bit later. She probably has done the first woman solo kayak trip a couple of years/a few years after me. She works for AZRA now in the office.

TM: Yeah.

PM: You know Sharon?

TM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

PM: Okay. So those women worked. So it was still hard for women to get hired but I think that was more management's problem than the boatmen's problem. At least the ones...yeah.

TM: Then after the '81 trip you were back in '82 again as an assistant boatman.

PM: I got the assistant boatman again, and it was again Dwight Morgan. It was a really small trip. Oh, I know, on that trip we had Dwight and Jeffe Aronson. And that was the one that Chris...I don't know whether Chris was on that or not. (laughs) That's funny. And who else was on? It was not a big trip, might have had only had two or three boats. It was in late August, I think. That's the trip, let's see, it's just a couple months before my solo trip.

TM: So let's back up a little bit.

PM: Okay. Yes.

TM: When did you get the idea that you were thinking, I should do a solo trip? How did that all happen?

PM: Well, let me work on the '82 AB in say August. That was another good trip. I remember Dwight let me row Lava in the snout. What he did is the passengers went in other boats (laughs), which was a smart move, but he let me do that. I remember, and it's funny, I just recalled this memory recently, by doing that that gave me the courage to consider doing a solo trip. The solo trip was never planned. I was trying to get people to go. It was an October, 19th put-in and no one... I mean, I asked, oh, I must have asked 20 people or more. Course I'm very fussy. Even at the last minute I didn't think about doing a solo trip. At that time you had to get permission to do a solo trip. I think nowadays you don't, from what I can gather. I called the superintendent's office. I do not remember his name but he was a very nice man.

TM: That would have been Richard Marks, Dick Marks.

PM: That doesn't ring a bell.

TM: Okay. It could have been the head of the river unit that you might have talked to. I'm not sure.

PM: I should have brought my copy of the book around cause I probably could find it in there.

TM: No worries. No worries. You talked to somebody at the park and they were...

PM: Yeah. I talked to whoever would grant this. We chatted and he just chatted. I said, "I'm calling to see if you'd let me do a solo trip." I expected him to say no. He said, "Well, tell me about your experience." I said I've done six Grand trips and I have a good sense of the river and I know what I'm getting into and that kind of thing. I still expected him to say no. Then when he said yes I thought, oh, my God. (both laugh) You're not supposed to say yes. I said, "Well, let me just think about it a little more." I called him like two days later and I said, "Okay, I'll do it." I was scared, but anyway, that's how it came about. It came about quite by accident. It's just cause I wanted to be in the Grand Canyon. (laughs)

TM: So when did you get the permit for the 1980 trip?

PM: '82. Oh, I don't remember. I had the permit a long time. I learned about it, say, early in the year and I knew about it on that AB I did. You know, I was asking people around, different people that I knew, but everybody was busy or they had finished up their river season and they didn't want to do another trip and that kind of thing. So that's why I was left alone. I thought if I let this permit go I may not get another one again cause they were changing something at that time and it was really more difficult to get them. So that was the thing. I thought, man, if I don't do it...and I just couldn't bear that thought of not being able to go down there.

TM: Yeah. So you had the Avon Pro...

PM: Yes.

TM ...and was that your boat of choice then?

PM: Oh, yes. I loved my Avon Pro. Yeah.

TM: Okay. Now the boat's only so big and you have to have food for so many days.

PM: I've recently visited Dwight. When I come this way, going back and forth, I'll stop by and visit him. We were talking about that and he said he remembered, he saw the food that I had and he said, "She's gonna run out of food before she...on the trip." I ended up actually having too much food. But, of course, you see, he's a man your size. He's a tall man, he's not a big, big man, you know, he's not a hefty person, he's a thin man but he's very strong. So he would eat a great deal more than I do even when I'm expending a lot of energy. I planned the menus, I was good at that. Actually, I had ended up with a little side business of planning menus for private trips, but that's another thing. So, of course, a lot of canned goods. Then I knew the fresh foods that don't spoil as long as you keep them dry and cool. And, of course, at that time of year it was not a problem with the sun or a problem with the heat, I should say. I had no cooler cause the ice, of course, would have been gone in no time. I just used ammo boxes.

TM: So did your boat have a cooler as a seat or what was the seat arrangement on the boat?

PM: No. I had one of those slant seats. The first ARTA frames had that and that's what I learned on. For someone my size that gives you a lot more power. That's a really good setup. I know in more recent boats they have the tractor seat. That, I think, would have been more difficult for me as a small person to row. I had the slant board seat. Then what I did was I took the front thwart out and I put a second frame, a paddle frame, in there. So I had my rowing frame, which also had a deck that I could put boxes on and then I had this paddle frame which had a deck that I could put boxes on. So the weight was forward, which is important in the Grand Canyon and then I had tons of stuff with me. I had plenty of food.

TM: So the thwart is a tube that goes from the right side of the boat to the left side of the boat. It's an air chamber.

PM: Yes.

TM: When you remove that and you put the frame in did that allow you to put in boxes under a deck where that thwart was or was it simply a deck on top of an empty space there?

PM: The frame was curved so that the sides would be on the tubes and then it would curve down in place of where the thwart was.

TM: And then the cans would fit in there and...

PM: And then the boxes, you know, then I'd have boxes and...

TM: Did you put a deck over the top of that or was it just a bunch of boxes?

PM: No, no, no, cause they were all ammo boxes. Then any soft stuff, the black bags, I put on top of that, on top of the cans or whatever. You know, my tent and sleeping bag and clothes. I had probably, I don't know, maybe four or five black bags. I still had black bags then, not the new modern stuff. (laughs)

TM: So the black bags were the size of a large pillow...

PM: Yes.

TM: ...and they were rubberized canvas that you rolled down and used little straps to get on buckles and hoped it didn't leak.

PM: Yes. And they were good. They're Army surplus. Yes. And, of course, the ammo boxes... When I started rafting everything was Army surplus. We'd go to the surplus stores and you could still get a lot of that stuff. Any surplus store I've been in more recently you don't see any of that anymore. So I got the black bags. And then I used to wear wool. That was really before, is it the polypropylene?

TM: Yeah.

PM: When Patagonia came out with all of the nice stuff. This is before that. One of my favorite outfits was I got a sailor's uniform. The 13-button wool pants and the shirt/the jacket or whatever they call their top. Yeah, I wore wool and wool underwear. I fortunately don't have an allergy to wool so I don't have itchiness from it which some people suffer from. Wool, of course, will keep you warm. Actually wool is much warmer than any of the synthetic. As good as they are, wool is much better, yeah.

TM: It just takes a long time to dry out.

PM: It just takes a long, and it can get heavy when it gets wet. Yes, that's right, that's right, yeah.

TM: So an Avon, as you mentioned yesterday, it's not a self-bailing boat. That means when water comes in it doesn't go out the bottom, it stays in the boat. Typically the person rowing the boat relies on someone else in the boat with a bucket to bucket the water out of the boat. Now you didn't have that person on your solo trip.

PM Yeah, that's right.

TM: What did you do then?

PM: I just would go through a rapid and then I'd bail it myself. The way my setup was between the seat, cause the seat board didn't go all the way down, so there was a space there and I could just stand there and bail right where my feet... I could just stand from the seat and inbetween the seat and where the baggage or luggage or whatever you call it was. I just kept a bucket probably tied right behind my seat so I could grab it.

TM: Did you have a wooden floor in your boat?

PM: No. No.

TM: So when you stood up in front of the seat you went down.

PM: I went down, yes. I was standing on the rubber.

TM: Pushing down on the bottom. There's a rubber fabric in the bottom of the boat which would then bring all the water in towards your feet and then you could bucket that out.

PM: Yeah, and then I could bucket it out, right.

TM: Did you brace your feet forward on a bar or something on that front frame?

PM: Yes. When I was rowing I'd sit on the slant board seat and then I had my feet braced on the frame because the frame is curved down and it was spaced for my height, naturally, so I had something to brace against.

TM: Okay. So at Lees Ferry, Dwight's running your shuttle, you load up the boat and the boxes and the frames and the oars and your life jacket and your tent and your personal gear and all that other stuff and head up to Lees Ferry. Do you remember who the Lees Ferry ranger was at the time?

PM: You know, I don't. It wasn't Tom Workman who had been there for so many years.

TM: He was having a day off. (laughs)

PM: Someone else was up there. It was a man, nice man, but I don't remember who it was. The funny story, though, was I'm loading up the boat and there were two fishermen there at Lees Ferry. At that time of year there really wasn't anybody else. These two fishermen just kind of watching things go. They finally asked Dwight, "Oh, you going down the river?" Dwight says, "No, she is." They look at him and they say with a shocked voice, "You're going to let her go down the river alone?" Dwight just smiled and said, "Yep." (laughs)

TM: What were you thinking?

PM: I just shook my head, oh, geez, you know. (laughs)

TM: Well, what were you thinking about going down the river alone?

PM: By that time I was committed to it. I kind of have a philosophy, I think, with a lot of things—well, you know, this will either work out or it won't.

TM: You were a good swimmer and you had excellent...

PM: Yeah, I'm not afraid of the water. Yeah.

TM: ...waterproof boxes and a life jacket and a boat that floated very well.

PM: Yeah. Yeah. The big issue would have been had I gone into a rapid and the boat turned over and I'd gotten separated from it and if I had gotten stranded in a place where there was no way to walk anywhere which, of course, is numerous in the Canyon, then I could have been in trouble. But the other dangers, I looked at them and I thought, you know, it's really not as dangerous as it seems. I don't think I can claim credit for this statement but I agree with it is that whitewater rafting gives you the greatest amount of adrenalin rush for the least amount of actual danger. (TM laughs) And isn't that the truth? You get there and you're (sound effect) with the rapid, you're scouting the rapids (sound effect) but, you know, mostly even if you flip, because it's a deep water river... You could get banged up but mostly you just get very wet and cold (laughs) cause the river's so cold.

TM: That's right.

PM: I suppose we could put in the river comes out of the dam at 45 degrees is it, 47 degrees?

TM: A little higher than that but...

PM: But below 50. More than 50?

TM: It's a little above 50.

PM: Oh, is that right? Oh, okay.

TM: Now, back in the day in 1982, it might not have been that warm because the reservoir would have been full, or certainly way more water than it has now, and as the water level drops the temperature of the whole system warms up.

PM: Oh, sure, of course.

TM: But in October everything's as warm as it can be, September/October, the rocks are peeling off from summer.

PM: Right, right.

TM: So, but it's cold enough.

PM: Oh, it's cold enough, yeah. You don't want to be in that kind of water for any length of time.

TM: But Patch, you taught me yesterday as a blue fingered, blue lipped child you loved that. (both laugh)

PM: I know. And you know, I did have a wetsuit. I did wear the Farmer John one with no sleeves. I did wear the wetsuit whenever I was going into big rapids just in case I got in the water so I wouldn't get hypothermic too quickly.

TM: Let's talk for a minute about the planning that you did. I'm assuming that by this time... Well, you told me yesterday you had seen a boat turn over and had been part of turning that boat back right side up with the three people and the ropes and things.

PM: Right.

TM: Now, you're by yourself and your boat's fairly heavy, it's loaded up with all this stuff. Had you taken any precautions to work out some rope work somewhere?

PM: I had the flip line on the boat, the line that goes underneath the boat, tight enough so that it would never catch on anything. I think I would have tried to use what do you call, balance and...

TM: Uh huh. Do you think you, at 115 pounds...

PM: (laughs) Could have done that, yeah?

TM: ...would have been strong enough to flip that boat over?

PM: I have no, yeah, I don't know.

TM: Okay. Had the concept of Z-drags, the pulley system with the ropes, did you have that figured out?

PM: I knew about that because I believe before that trip I had helped unwrap a boat from a rocky river, a different river where wraps are much more common. So I knew about the Z and I think in whitewater school they taught us that, too, the pulley system. And yes, that would have been an option, too. Had it happened I'm sure I would have tried a number of things. I don't know whether you could untie things and then you might lose them, I don't know. Yeah. It was a thing that, well, I'll figure that out if it happens and use whatever knowledge I had. So I just did that. That was my philosophy on it.

TM: The first big rapid to show up on the horizon heading downstream would be Badger and then Soap, but they're not that...

PM: They're not that bad.

TM: ...big. House Rock is the first rapid where you actually need to do something besides just try to stay in the middle or go down the center line...

PM: Yeah. Right. Yeah.

TM: ...of these other rapids. Did you notice that your perspective of the water had changed because you were alone?

PM: Yes, in that I was really super careful about scouting a rapid. I scouted House Rock from the river-left because you can get up enough to kind of see it and then you could see the line where you had to pull across to keep out of that big hole. I used to use a downstream ferry a lot. I don't know how many people did that but it's a good thing for a small person because you're using the river's flow and you don't need as much strength. But of course, I did have people, generally private boaters, who would make fun, "Oh, you're rowing rapids backwards." No, I wasn't. I was rowing across the current but using the river's momentum for my benefit. And it worked. Then you'd go down and you'd let the front of the boat catch something and then you could turn. You didn't have to do anything, you know.

TM: That's right.

PM: That's what I did with House Rock. I just used that and I didn't get too far over right because then I would have been in all those rocks. I didn't come close to that hole. I had a really nice clean run. I didn't camp there. I camped a little further down in the 20s, before the Roaring 20s.

TM: Which brings us to the Roaring 20s...

PM: Yes, right.

TM: ...a series of mile by mile, or sometimes every half mile, very short, sharp little rapids. And yet, compared to California stuff, high volume, a couple of hazards to miss.

PM: I scouted...I remember camping... It was a case where I was thinking, oh, I'll just go a little further and then all of a sudden beaches seemed to disappear and then something like... The first Roaring 20 is what, at 23?

TM: Well, 21-mile is Indian Dick, and 21½-, I think, or is it 20, and then there's 24-, 24½-, 25-mile.

PM: Yes, those are the three big ones.

TM: Those three big ones down there, but there's Tiger Wash and there's some other...

PM: Yeah. Okay. Course North Canyon is at mile 20, right?

TM: That's right, roughly.

PM: So it was somewhere between the first of the Roaring 20s and North Canyon I found a beach and I camped there. That was the next morning when I woke up the boat was perched on two rocks cause the river had dropped overnight. The water release had been cut back. I thought, oh, no, how am I gonna do this. But it turned out that the rocks were kind of slimy and so I was able just to ease the boat off without doing any damage. It didn't get caught or whatever.

TM: Were you more aware... I mean, that's a simple thing to do cause in that reach near the dam, which is up during the day and down during the night that lower water drops in the night when we're all sound asleep and you wake up in the morning and your boat is high and dry.

PM: Right.

TM: Oh, well. Again, in the 70s and 80s that swing was more than it is today.

PM: Oh, is that right? Okay.

TM: There's some checks and balances.

PM: It was a big swing, very big swing at that time.

TM: Yeah. Were you on a time constraint here or did you realize, oh, well, the water's gonna come back up today later, I'll go for a walk or I'll...

PM: On this one, no. Because when I just touched the boat I didn't hardly even have to push it, it just slid right back into...

TM: It took off. Yeah. Great. Great.

PM: So then I just kept on. Now, down in Nautiloid which is what, mile 34?

TM: Roughly.

PM: It's right after Redwall. That's where I got stranded overnight. There's not a lot you can do at Nautiloid but there was no way I could move that boat. It was a good, oh, the boat is 15 feet long, it was a whole boat length out. It was that much sand between the bow of the boat and the river, or the end, whatever. So I looked and I thought, well, I think I'll have a layover day here. At night I was keeping track of the water. I'd get up every so often to see if the boat was floating and then I would get it back in and make sure that it didn't get hung up again, but that didn't happen. It stayed, they must have had a real big cutback and then they didn't release more, I don't know.

TM: Well, on the weekends...

PM: It might have been a weekend, I don't remember.

TM: ...the water did not come back up. (laughs)

PM: Well, so the second day, that morning, I thought, oh no. So I had to unload the entire boat and drag it. Then it wouldn't drag cause the suction on the sand, but I figured that out quickly enough, and I had to lift it a bit and get it in the water. Then I had to reload it and retie it. So that took quite some time. That was quite frustrating.

TM: Well, you got good at rigging and de-rigging the boat.

PM: That's right. (laughs)

TM: Good skills there.

PM: Exactly. I remember also on that trip I thought, you know, I'm the only person here. Why don't I camp at Redwall? (TM laughs) I know it was illegal. And just then as I'm thinking about it—I had stopped at Redwall and I was thinking about it and making plans, maybe, for not moving on—this little plane comes by. I thought, oh, I guess I better move on. (both laugh) I didn't know who they were but they were flying down below the rim.

TM: Very well could have been the Park Service.

PM: It could have been, yeah. I don't know whether they did that to check up on me and see cause if I was the first... There weren't that many people, even men, doing solo trips so they may have sent... Cause I did see that plane, or a plane like it, occasionally on the trip.

TM: Then late October there were very few river runners typically in the 80s October, November, December, January, February. It was a quiet time of year.

PM: Right. Exactly.

TM: Did you see any other trips go by?

PM: Yes. The sixth day I got to Nautiloid, no, Nankoweap, sorry, Nankoweap, and I camped there. I can't remember if I did a layover day because I know I hiked up to the granaries there. I took a picture of myself at the granaries, believe it or not. So I must have done because that's, you know, a good hike and

I didn't see anyone. Then the morning I was packing up leaving, this group came by. They were commercial but maybe they were deadheading to Phantom, picking people up at Phantom or something like that. That was where the woman was on it and she and I talked and she was saying how she was trying to get on commercially and they had let her along and were letting her row some of the rapids and that kind of thing. One time when I posted in the Grand Canyon on Facebook, I think on an anniversary of my trip, she saw that and said, "Oh, I'm the woman, remember we met at..."

TM: Oh, that's neat.

PM: Yes. And she evidently worked for years. So she did get on. I don't remember what company that was but it was oar powered boats. Anyway, they stopped. I did run with them through... I did Hance with them. Well, sort of. They were ahead of me and I camped with them at Nevills. That's before Hance, isn't it?

TM: 75-mile. Yep.

PM: Yeah. So I camped with them there and then we went through the Inner Gorge. They were a good bit ahead of me but, you know, I suppose if I had flipped or had a problem they could have picked up the pieces midway (laughs). Then they went on to Phantom and I guess that they got their passengers in and I camped...is it Cremation? There's a camp on the other side of the river from Phantom. It was a little camp and I camped there.

TM: It's across and upstream just a bit?

PM: Yes, yes. Right.

TM: Yeah. And where did they camp? Had they already exchanged and moved out?

PM: I think so cause I didn't see them much after Hance.

TM: That would make sense.

PM: We scouted Hance together and then they went on and I was pretty much alone through that, so, the Inner Gorge.

TM: So you made it to Phantom Ranch, a third of the trip is done. There's a phone there, there's people there. What were you thinking?

PM: I think I was checking mail. Yeah, I got some mail there.

TM: Did you send out some postcards?

PM: I think I sent out postcards, yeah. That was one of the things, and I wrote this in the book. I hiked into the ranch and may have gotten something to eat or whatever. I went into the woman's bathroom and it's dim, the lighting isn't bright. It had been a cloudy and rainy day so it wasn't really bright outside. But anyway, I walked in and I come face to face with this woman. I thought, well, who are you? Well, turns out it was a mirror. It was me and I didn't recognize myself. That was such a funny thing.

TM: Who did you see in the mirror?

PM: I saw this really (laughs) wild woman who was... I hadn't, actually, been on the river for a week and it was too cold to bathe or that kind of thing so just... I had this wonderful light and peacefulness in my face. It was really good. It was a nice feeling.

TM: So from Phantom, the other two thirds of the Canyon awaits with very few people out that a way.

PM: Yeah. Right.

TM: And the next up right after Phantom are a series of fairly large rapids.

PM: Right. Horn Creek.

TM: Horn Creek and Granite and Hermit and Crystal.

PM: That's right, yeah.

TM: Just a whole series of...

PM: I camped at Granite. I must have left Phantom. I did Horn. I had a little bit of difficulty, I guess. When I got through Horn I was so delighted going through really well and I wasn't watching. There's an eddy on river left just below the rapid, really strong one. I got caught in that up against the wall. I had to realize, whoa, and bubbles and holding the raft, and doing this. And I was busy trying to keep it balanced and also get out of there. One oar I couldn't use cause there's a wall. That was tricky but I did manage to get out of there fine, yes. So then I camped at Granite that night, yeah, Granite Beach did they call it?

TM: Umm hmm.

PM: Yeah. And, of course, that's a lovely big camp. I was walking around the camp that evening, it was still light, and I met this lovely couple. Wait, let me back up something. When you've been alone on the river like this, and this is even back at Nankoweap, you see people come along and you look at it and you say, "What are you doing in my river, in my canyon?" because you get so used to being alone there. Well, at Granite I was walking around and there were no other boating parties, I come around a corner and there's this couple in a tent, you know, tent camping there and I had the same reaction. But then, I don't know, we got talking and they were a couple from Australia. They were just really, really nice and we got talking. Then actually, after the trip, when I was back in California, they visited. We just had a brief visit afterwards. That was another one of those things, though, oh, my, other people in my canyon? (laughs)

TM: I wonder if they thought the same thing.

PM: Yeah, that's right. (laughs) They might have. They were hikers, of course. They'd hiked down. And then, of course, I did Granite and Hermit. Boucher?

TM: Crystal? Well, Boucher, Crystal.

PM: That's not that big. Then Crystal, of course, is the biggie. I had a good... I played it very, very safe in Crystal. I went pretty far right. In fact, I was bouncing around a bit on the rocks on the right cause I just did not want to take a chance there.

TM: Great. Yeah. Good.

PM: So I got through Crystal fine, and then you have the Jewels after that. I think I went all the way down to Bass Camp. 108- right? So I had that long day. On the '78 trip I did run Crystal hole quite by accident and had this amazing run through it. The boat shuddered, didn't even come close to flipping. My passenger and I, after we got through, were stunned for a minute and then the two of us says, "We ran Crystal!" (both laugh) She's bailing and, you know, I'm, "bail, bail." It was quite an experience. And that was before the change. It's different now, but that was the old Crystal hole. Yeah. But I played it very safe on the solo trip.

TM: Did you find that almost all your runs... Well, I'd assume all your runs on that trip were a little different.

PM: Yeah. I was very careful because I didn't want to flip. So I was very conservative on everything, yes, which is okay with me. I tend to be that way anyway.

TM: So by the time you get to Bass Camp, 104, almost all of the big rapids are behind you. There's a lot of flatwater in front of you. Did your perception of the place and your place in it change at this point? Concern at Lees Ferry to just being settled in and happy and content and cozy and...

PM: Right. Yes. You get all of that behind and really the next big rapid is Lava, isn't it? I mean, there's some smaller ones, yeah.

TM: Upset maybe, 150-mile, Deubendorff, Bedrock...

PM: Yes, and Upset.

TM: Yep.

PM: So you have those, that's true. Then you have that nice long... It was nice, you know, you could relax. I could relax and just really enjoy being in the Canyon, alone in the Canyon, stopping at side canyons and hiking up them.

TM: Did you hike some places you hadn't been to before?

PM: No, I don't think so. No. I pretty much stopped at the standard ones. Blacktail and Elves Chasm.

TM: Stone Creek and Deer Creek and...

PM: Stone Creek, yeah. I did spend a layover day at Stone Creek and actually got stranded again when the... You know what I mean.

TM: The water dropped... (laughs)

PM: The water dropped, yeah.

TM: ...in the night and the boat was high and dry in the morning.

PM: Right. Right.

TM: That still happens today. (laughs)

PM: Oh, sure. Yeah. In fact, on that very first trip in '75 I have a picture of all of the passengers helping to push the snouts in because they had become high and dry so, yeah, it's part of running the Colorado.

TM: Yeah. Yeah, the tides.

PM: The tides (laughs). That's right, tides on the river. Yeah. So it was nice. I don't recall anything in particular in that area but it was enjoyable. It was nice to be able to not worry or think about rapids coming up. I certainly enjoy rowing rapids and that whole... You know, you get addicted to the adrenalin rush but I like the flatwater as well, yes.

TM: Did you see anyone else, any other river trips pass you?

PM: After that... Deer Creek is after Stone Creek.

TM: Umm hmm.

PM: Deubendorff and then you can camp at Stone Creek.

TM: Stone Creek, yep.

PM: I think I did a layover day there. Yes, I did cause I did do a hike up Stone Creek. So then Deer Creek, I got into the camp right opposite Deer Creek Falls. I was late in leaving cause I had to unload and load my boat again.

TM: At Stone Creek?

PM: At Stone Creek. So I just went the real short distance and went to that camp opposite Deer Creek. While I was there I remember sitting in camp or down by the boat or something and this commercial trip came through. I think it was commercial. There were a lot of kayakers so maybe not, I don't know exactly, but I remember watching them. They didn't see me.

TM: Oh, interesting.

PM: I just sat there and watched them. One of the things that was interesting, I don't know whether this is important or not, is that a kayaker came in. And, of course, kayakers, whether you're male or female, you're wearing the same gear. I watched this person and I was trying to decide whether it was a man or a woman. I just kept watching them. I don't think they took the helmet off cause that's usually a giveaway there, and there was no beard. Finally I decided it was a woman because I realized women move differently than men, or men move, you know, either way. Sure enough it was a woman and then she went and joined... The group hiked up either part way up to Deer Creek or they stopped for a little

while. Then shortly after that they left, they were gone, and maybe the next day I was on the river and there's that rapid called Doris.

TM: Umm hmm.

PM: That can be tricky. And it's a surprise tricky, you don't expect it but I knew about it. Right after that this motor rig came along and he had a bottle of brandy. It was a cold day cause now we're getting late October. So I pulled up next to him and he held onto my boat or whatever. I remember him handing me the brandy and taking a swallow of it. Again, when I posted in Facebook on the Grand Canyon pages he said, "I remember you. I'm the boatman who gave you the brandy." That was kind of fun. I don't remember his name. I remember he had very blue eyes (laughs). Then after that I was almost to Lava when I met the next group. This might be of interest to you because this group was... And I stopped at different places. I hiked up Fern Glen. I hiked up the different canyons before Lava. I stopped at Havasu. Didn't hike way up or anything but I stopped there. Maybe I was camped or something and this group of, oh, four or five boats passed me. I just waved and they went on. Then somehow I passed them, I guess that was it. Then the next day I'm heading toward Lava, I'm really close to Lava. I had stopped on a beach and the group comes along again. I have to admit I was relieved. We all pull over to scout. One boat from their group pulled over left to scout Lava on the left cause the water was higher now. I don't know what the CFS was but it was higher than I had ever seen it before. So it was a good size river. Anyway, the group of us were on the right. Well, it turns out this boat, now Brian Dierker, Brad, not Dimock, Brad Henderson, do I have that...?

TM: Could have been.

PM: There was three. Oh, I'd have to think of the name. Anyway, what they were doing was they were doing a re-creation of Powell's journey. They had started up in Wyoming and they were doing the whole Green River and, of course, they would portage around Lake Mead, no not Lake Mead, Lake Powell, and then put-in on the Grand. I mean, it was like a 60-day trip.

TM: Right.

PM: So they were nearing the end of it. Brian was really nice. I remember him saying to me, he said, "You know, I think what you're doing is really wonderful, but I'm glad we came along because Lava is much tougher today than it has been and it's good..." And I agreed. Again, he was a man, a big man, I'm sure you probably know Brian, but he was just very supportive of what I was doing. So that was nice. So we watched Henderson, does that name ring a bell?

TM: It does. I'm blanking on his first name, though.

PM: I have it written down on my pictures. He was on the left side and so he went and ran. We saw the run so Brian said, "Okay," and whoever the other boatmen were that were on it, we all rowed to the left side and we did a left run.

TM: Yeah. It's a good run.

PM: Yeah. I'd never done it before and I didn't even know about it.

TM: Oh, really?

PM: Yes. So this was really good that they came along. I mean, I might have had a disaster otherwise. So then I camped with them that night, that 180- something. There's a big, big camp on river-left. There's probably a couple of them. We camped together and had a party, the after Lava party, that kind of thing, and it was nice. They took off early the next morning and then I left somewhat after them.

TM: Cool. So now where are you at in your mindset? Because Lava's...

PM: Now Lava's behind me and there's a few...well, I forget, is that 216- or something?

TM: Well, there's Killer Fang Falls at 232, which if the water's high is not a big deal.

PM: Okay, wait, but that's below...

TM: That's below Diamond.

PM: That's the Lower Granite Gorge.

TM: Yeah.

PM: Okay. I'm talking about before then. There's a couple of rapids before then but I don't remember now.

TM: 205, 217.

PM: Something like that, yeah, something like that. Not super...

TM: Not significant, but I mean...

PM: ...but, yeah, you have to be careful.

TM: ...if you've done Badger and you've done Soap Creek...

PM: Yeah, right, you've done all the others. Yeah. What did happen, though, and this may be the significance with the people, is that's when I left the camp that morning after the Brian Dierker group, the Powell re-creation group, and as I'm just going down the river maybe a short ways after that camp there's a group of hikers on river-right and that is Robert Benson and the other names, and Sarah...

TM: Sarah Steck?

PM: I don't remember the names, yeah, and her father and...

TM: George Steck?

PM: George Steck. Okay, thank you.

TM: So it would have been Robert Bensen but I think his last name is...

PM: He had a German name.

TM: It's a German name, Eschka, and I can't spell it.

PM: You know what, I have it on my phone because Bob sent me an email. Okay, they are George Steck, his brother Allen Steck, Allen with an e, and Allen's daughter, Sarah Steck, and Robert Bensen. So those were the... And then he goes on to say what George Steck did. Are you interested in that?

TM: Yeah. So Patch is now reading from an email that she's received from Bob Packard, and we've interviewed Bob on another oral history interview. Yes, what does Bob say?

PM: Okay. "George Steck was a researcher at Sandia Labs in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He wrote *Grand Canyon Loop Hikes 1* and *Grand Canyon Loop Hikes 2...*" which I don't know anything about. And Bob says, "...which Ken [would be Ken Walters] and I referred to sometimes when planning our own hikes." And then he says, "In 1977 he with several others, including Sarah, hiked from Lees Ferry to Lava Falls below the rim on river-right."

TM: Yeah. Yeah. Do you remember where you were when you ran into the Stecks and Benson?

PM: Okay. They were hiking. It was just these hikers that I didn't know who they were.

TM: Were you rowing on the river and you said, oh, there's some hikers over there, and kept going?

PM: They called out, "Oh, hi, Patch," and I'm thinking how do they know that? (laughs) But I kept going, naturally I'm flowing down with the river and I camped at Parashant Wash. In any case, so I camped at Parashant. I was the only one there and by this time the weather... I'm in November now and the weather wasn't particularly nice. It was cool and lots of clouds and a fair amount of rain, or at least, yeah, I had some rain down there at that time. At least cool and cloudy and that kind of thing. So I wasn't in any hurry to leave camp but I was busy packing up. When I had arrived at Parashant I found this whole stash, I think of Coors beer. Some of the cans were punctured but I just kind of took them out of the hiding place that they were. I guess I brought them over to my camp and if I had I would have only had one, if I did take any. I can't remember. But then that morning this group of hikers comes in to camp. First they were accusing me of stealing their beer. I said, "Wait a minute," or apologized and said, "No, here, I found it. Animals got into it and punctured it." But they still had quite a few cans and maybe then they offered me one. I don't remember the details of that, but they were a nice group of people. I do remember that there were the three men and a woman. I remember Robert being... I'm not sure we ever introduced ourselves with names, you know. We might have but I'm not positive. Robert was really nice. He was a nice man. They were all nice but I thought he was particularly nice. It would be wonderful to find out the mystery about him.

TM: Did you all share stories of where they were going and where they were from?

PM: Yeah, a bit of that, yes, and they knew that I was, naturally, traveling alone. I'm not sure whether they... Sometimes where I met people they'd say, "Oh, where's the rest of your party?" And I said, "This is it." (laughs) I don't recall if they did. I probably visited with them a couple of hours before then I finally said, you know, I guess I should go. And they were gonna camp there.

TM: Oh, okay. Okay.

PM: Yeah. Although it was still early in the day, well, probably early afternoon, so I think they were gonna stay there that night. They had stayed, naturally, upstream somewhere.

TM: They were walking the length of the Canyon on that trip, is that right, from Lees Ferry to Pearce Ferry?

PM: Let's see something. This is here, also in the email. Do you mind me reading everything? Some of it might not be...

TM: Of course, go ahead.

PM: Okay. Bob is really good with all the statistics; he likes that kind of thing. "In 1977 he [meaning George Steck] with several others including Sarah hiked from Lees Ferry to Lava Falls below the rim river-right. Then in early September 1982 [which of course would coincide with my trip] he left Lees Ferry again, this time with Allen, cofounder of Mountain Travel, and Bensen, again hiking below the rim river-right. They were met at Lava Falls by Sarah who proceeded with them to become the second, third, fourth and fifth to complete a river-right thru-hike of the Grand Canyon when they arrived at Lake Mead near Thanksgiving Day."

TM: I didn't realize that Sarah was...

PM: Okay, here, excuse me a minute. "Sarah became the first woman to complete either side. So first woman to thru-hike the Grand Canyon, Mead's first woman to solo raft the Grand Canyon while both are in the process."

TM: Nice. So when you met Sarah there at Parashant both of you were doing Grand Canyon firsts.

PM: Yeah. I didn't know it, and she, I'm not sure, she may have because hikers tend to have that kind of information more than..., possibly.

TM: Chances are, yeah. Certainly think about the first to hike the length of the Grand Canyon but for me I thought Sarah was on a continuous hike through the Canyon. I didn't realize that she had broken her journey. And it was back in '77 that she had started, is that right?

PM: Let's just see. Yes, in 1977. That's when she hiked with them, with her father and uncle, I guess.

TM: Right.

PM: Lees Ferry to Lava Falls on river-right below the rim. Then Bob goes on, "It was not until 1983 that Bensen, born Robert Eschka, in Germany in 1956 thru-hiked the Grand Canyon river-left, becoming the first to thru-hike both sides. He took his own life in 1984."

TM: So he thru-hiked river left in 1983, is that right?

PM: Let's go back here. Yes, it was '83 that he thru-hiked on the left, yes, becoming the first to hike both sides.

TM: Okay. Right.

PM: Rumor has it that he had gotten into trouble in Germany and was gonna be deported cause he was in the U.S. illegally. I'd like to know. He was such a nice man. I guess you can be, whatever. Now Bob asks, "Have you read Bensen's notes?" Yes. Okay.

TM: He's asking you, though?

PM: No, he said, "I'd be interested in several things," and one of them is, "has Tom read Bensen's notes?" I would imagine, yeah. Okay. There was some other mention of another person. We're just really digressing here. (pause)

TM: No worries. Let's tie it back in. Were they the last people then that you saw on your trip or did you run into others?

PM: No, that was the last people until I got to Pearce's Ferry. It was nice until you get to the Lower Granite Gorge. I think the permit was for 24 days to Hualapai.

TM: To Diamond Creek?

PM: Thank you, Diamond Creek. I was a day late...or it was 21 days, whatever...I was a day late. I remember camping at Silver, no, wait. There's Travertine Falls and there's Travertine Canyon. I camped somewhere on a tiny, tiny beach in there before, and then you go into the Lower Granite Gorge with all the rapids. I don't remember having a problem. I remember being concerned cause they're big rapids. I had done them before so this wasn't a first time. I scouted when I could. The runs were good, they were okay. So I got through there and then you come into Separation and...

TM: The reservoir.

PM: ...the reservoir.

TM: And the river gets quiet.

PM: The river gets quiet but you still have current. I was afraid to just do a float-out by myself, you know. I thought, oh, I could really get lost or, I don't know. So I ended up rowing until almost dark, going along with the flow and rowing to keep going. I pulled into some place... You know, you have to pull in through the weeds. I did find a beach to pull into and it was raining. I had wet wood but I managed to start a fire, you know, stay the night. I had a tent, of course.

TM: You must have had a fire pan then for doing your fires all that time?

PM: Yes, I had a fire pan, yeah.

TM: Yeah, okay.

PM: Mine was a big metal wash tub that I had a hole cut out of on the side so you could put things in that way, too.

TM: Oh, nice, uh huh.

PM: Yeah. And then I had a grate on top, yeah.

TM: Were you cooking that way?

PM: I think I did cook all... I don't think I had a stove, come to think of it. I did all my cooking on that. That was when you could collect firewood. I think you had to have a stove as a backup. So maybe I did have a stove, but I don't think a regular Coleman type camp stove. But I know I used the fire pan mostly.

TM: So Dwight is running your shuttle...

PM: Yes.

TM: ...and you're a day behind. Did you catch that day up then?

PM: I caught it up somehow. He was there on the right day, and he had...

TM: Okay, and you were there on the right day. (laughs)

PM: I was there on the right day. He was really... Those last three miles... Of course, the Canyon is technically 277 miles and Pearce's Ferry is 280, so those last three miles are the dead water.

TM: It's big, it's wide, it's open, there's a skyline, and its mountains in the distance. What were you thinking?

PM: I was just plugging away rowing. Dwight said, "You know...", there was somebody there with a motorboat, he said, "I could have come out and helped you but I knew you'd want to finish it on your own."

TM: Nice.

PM: Yeah. And he was right. So I got there and then he helped me unload. We put everything in my little truck and went back to Flagstaff.

TM: What did that trip do to you?

PM: It just gave me this real sense of accomplishment and almost empowerment and that I could do more than I ever realized. It was really a wonderful trip. And I didn't have to put up with other people, oops. (laughs) I'm sorry, scratch that. (laughs)

TM: No, that's fine. I was thinking this is over 30 years ago, '82, '92, 2000, 2012, 2019, so 35/36/37 years ago.

PM: 37 years ago this October.

TM: You mentioned a sense of empowerment and accomplishment. Are there things that you could point to in the last 37 years that this trip made easier?

PM: Hmm, I hadn't thought of that. I don't know, boy. Maybe the traveling alone, although I've always been fine with traveling alone. I started doing that in my 20s when I couldn't get people to go with me on things I wanted to do, like even go for a weekend skiing or something out of New York. Might have been taking risks, you know, calculated risks. There's foolishly taking risks and often people who do that don't end up very well unless they're very lucky. Just being able to analyze a risk and say, oh, okay, there's a risk to it but the percentages are not that great for a disaster.

TM: Right, right.

PM: Yeah. So I think possibly that makes me even more independent than I already was. That can be good and bad. I don't know. It was mostly bad in trying to get jobs, regular jobs, because they kind of want the cookie mold kind of person. It's only been when I've had to get a job where having a different type of background is a plus, not a minus. That helped.

TM: Yeah, yeah. After 1982 when was your next Grand Canyon trip?

PM: The following year, '83, I did an AB with AZRA.

TM: Okay, 1983 was a high water year.

PM: Yes. I saw Lava at 77,000. I have a picture of it.

TM: Let's talk about that.

PM: They wouldn't let me run the paddleboat through. (laughs)

TM: Dang.

PM: I wanted to run the paddleboat. You know, it was just a big tongue. Did you see it?

TM: Yeah. It was all washed out.

PM: It was powerful, of course.

TM: Go a little left and life is good. Yeah.

PM: It was powerful and if you flipped you'd have a very long swim because that water was going...

TM: You'd go miles and miles and miles (laughs).

PM: Yeah. Exactly. You'd get to takeout pretty quickly. But anyway, that was interesting. I was running a paddleboat on that one. Dwight wasn't on that one but Wesley was. I think Wesley was the head boatman on that. Oh, I have a picture of us. And it was Dave Lowry. I'm trying to picture the people. There was a woman named Rebbly. I don't know if you knew Rebbly? She was a doctor, actually. I don't know if she was another AB or... Anyway, it was the high water trip. It was a real...it was exciting. What I did, I was running a paddleboat. I think there were snouts. Yeah, it was a snout boat trip with the extra small paddleboat. What I learned to do on that is...you know how strong the eddies were. They were

just really strong and they'd be whirlpools. You didn't want weight on the tubes so what I would do is I'd have my paddle crew...I'd say "Inside," and we'd all jump into the center of the boat, bring the tubes up, and then with the paddles you could get out of it cause it wouldn't flip.

TM: Oh, interesting.

PM: It wouldn't tilt it at all cause you had the weight in the center of the boat, and it worked.

TM: Neat.

PM: Yeah. I think it was that trip... I know, they took the paddleboat out just before the Roaring 20s and so I'm asking for people, you know, who wants to paddle? This man who was this frail little man who was in his upper 70s, of course he seemed old then, he was probably about my age (laughs), anyway, he said, "Oh, yes," and I thought, oh, my God, no, because I knew it was gonna be kind of high. So what I did is I put him in the back of the boat next to me. There were a bunch of young guys in the front so I had good strong paddlers. They were good, they weren't that bad group from that other trip. We go through 24½ just fine. We get to 25 and we hit that big wave wrong and the boat tilts up. The three strong guys fall out. The I'll say old man, I shouldn't but, he sat next to me. I reach like this, grab the back of his collar and jacket and hold him in the boat. I thought, you are not falling out of this boat (laughs). He and I went through the rapid and then picked up the other guys. (laughs)

TM: Oh, good.

PM: We stayed upright but it washed them out. I just didn't want him to...you know...he was so thin. But he was doing the trip. I suppose people would look at me now if I were on a trip saying, "Oh, this little old woman, you know, frail woman." They might see me as that and I suppose there's accuracy to it.

TM: Yet they won't know what you've done and what had that old man done?

PM: (laughs) No. Of course, yes, exactly. Cause he was going on the hikes and climbing over rocks and stuff, so it's just the vision of him. And the water's cold, you know, and I didn't want him to...

TM: I do find it a little surprising that as the first woman to solo Grand Canyon, that didn't count for anything and you were still an assistant boatman the next year.

PM: Yeah. No, I never got on as a... I might have done one trip because then AZRA started doing... They had the snout division and then they had the 16 foot oar boats and paddleboats. I do remember doing one of those, a paddleboat. See, paddleboating you don't need as much strength. You need to know the river and be able to call your crew. And I like the teamwork of it. So I did quite well with the paddleboating. I do remember doing one trip, at least, that way. I'm not sure, I may have gotten paid. I moved to Flagstaff in '83 so I think like sometime in '84 the woman who had been in the office quit and I got her job. It broke my heart to not be on the river but I thought I needed to have some work.

TM: But you kept boating?

PM: Oh, yeah. I did have some private trips in there but I would have to go over notes or slides to remember the dates. There was a couple of years there that I did two trips in a year, maybe one AZRA and one private.

TM: Okay.

PM: Yeah.

TM: And then you met Bob Packard in there. How did you meet Bob?

PM: I met him in 1987, yeah.

TM: Okay. And you guys took a river trip together? How'd that work?

PM: Not till '89. That's when I did a lot more hiking. Of course, that's Bob's big thing. So we did a lot of hiking together and camping and stuff like that.

TM: And on the river with him in '89?

PM: In '89 I had a permit so I was putting my own trip together. I had enough boat people that could bring rafts and knew how to row the Canyon. I invited Bob and Ken Walters, and Kathy. What is Kathy's last name? Anyway, that's where Ken and Kathy met was on that trip. Ken evidently has Alzheimer's, that's what Bob has told me. Sad. Anyway, and there were other people. There's somebody named Allen, can't remember Allen's name. I didn't know him real well. He lives in Flagstaff. I don't think he was with any of the companies. So it was a nice enough trip. We did a lot of hiking. In fact, we did some new canyons like Little Nankoweap and some of the others that I hadn't been because Bob and Ken were so knowledgeable. They were thrilled to see some of these canyons from the river level. Naturally they'd done everything from the rim down.

TM: Correct. That's right.

PM: So now they were seeing canyons from the river going up. It was quite a nice trip. It was harmonious enough and that kind of thing.

TM: 1989 there had been a new river management plan come through. There were more river runners on the river then as well but now it was all solid waste packing out, no more fire, there was a lot more stoves and...

PM: Right. I don't think we even had a fire pan in '89.

TM: If it was outside the fire season, now there's a fire season in place.

PM: It would have been a...

TM: Do you remember what time of year roughly?

PM: Again, what time of year was that? Again, I have to look at notes, yeah.

TM: No worries. No worries.

PM: I'll do that. I'll get on and give you some dates. Cause I've done a total of 17 trips.

TM: Okay. And one, two, three, four, five, six, seven by the time you did your '82 solo.

PM: Solo was number seven.

TM: Eight would have been in '83, high water, and then...

PM: And then I did some more AZRA trips. I did one motor trip with AZRA as a familiarization with Cam.

TM: Umm hmm. Cam Staveley?

PM: Thank you. (laughs) Yes, Cam Staveley. Nice guy.

TM: Yep.

PM: Course he goes back. I guess, his grandfather or something was one of the early river runners. So I've done the one motor trip, which was certainly different. I enjoyed it. The AZRA motor rig is smaller than a lot of the motor rigs. It was interesting to see how they ran the rapids as opposed to a smaller oar boat. It was quite nice. Of course, you go through the Canyon so quickly. I think it was an eight-day trip. Yeah. I did other trips with AZRA and then some other private trips to make up the 17. The last trip I did was in 19-, I think '94. I think that's my last trip down the Canyon.

TM: So 25 years ago.

PM: Oh, my.

TM: Yeah, how time flies.

PM: Yeah. It's the one thing... I've done a lot of things, as you know from the earlier thing, with my life. Done a lot of different things and a lot of things that I loved, but the only thing I really miss is rafting. I loved rafting.

TM: What a wonderful interview. Thank you very much.

PM: Thank you.

TM: As we wrap this up is there anything else you want to add to this?

PM: I can't think of anything offhand and if I do I can send you a note if that's okay.

TM: That would be great. Well, with that let's conclude this interview with Patricia "Patch" McCairen. Today is Wednesday, March 6th, 2019, and this concludes Part 2. Thank you.

PM: Okay.