

NATHAN C. CLARK

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SIERRA CLUB LEADER, OUTDOORSMAN, & ENGINEER

An Interview Conducted by  
Richard Searle

Sierra Club  
History Committee

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SIERRA CLUB ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## PREFACE

In this preface to a biographical interview I am privileged to pay tribute to the club's twenty-fourth president--and to my dear fraternal friend.

I have known Nathan all his life. After his birth in San Rafael he returned to Mill Valley where our family lived. A few years later we moved to the house in Alameda which our father designed. In 1912 Father became the first division engineer for Division VII of the California Highway Commission, and so we lived in Los Angeles for several years. Then we moved back to the home in Alameda, where Nate grew up. From his high school days Nate was deeply interested in electricity and engineering. After his graduation with honors from the University of California at Berkeley he began teaching at the University of Southern California. This was followed by responsible supervisory positions in the City of Los Angeles's frequency change project. He began working for Lockheed in Burbank just before the beginning of World War II. His career at Lockheed was marked by highly technical as well as supervisory and managerial responsibilities. Nate and Joan Dyer were married on top of Sentinel Dome in Yosemite National Park and spent their honeymoon in the back country of the Park. Nate has lived in Los Angeles ever since his teaching at USC, eventually in his own unusually equipped home which he designed and which is a base for him and his wife and children.

The six years difference between Nate and me loomed bigger when we were young, and so we had different social interests and circles of friends. However, we two have always been very close friends and have often visited each other in our respective homes in Los Angeles and Alameda. As a boy Nate enjoyed hiking and camping with our family and later with his own groups of friends. During the thirties and forties Nate and I went on numerous backpacking trips together with companions in the High Sierra from Yosemite to Sequoia National Parks and on various outings in other directions. We took up skiing together in the late twenties on a trip

to Norden before Highway 40 was plowed. When the Sierra Club began building the ski hut--which was to be dedicated as the Clair Tappaan Lodge--Nate put in his licks on several work parties. Later, in southern California he served as chairman of the chapter's Ski Mountaineers Section.

I have always been impressed with Nate's extraordinary ability to analyze problems and his well disciplined approach to potential solutions. Blessed with an active imagination he also possesses the insights, energy and perseverance to accomplish many of his goals. His terms as president and vice-president of the Sierra Club and as current vice-president of the Sierra Club Foundation are evidence of his dedicated leadership in the causes to which Sierra Clubbers are devoted.

Lewis F. Clark  
Alameda, CA

12 April 1977

## INTRODUCTION

The following interview is with Nathan C. Clark at his home in Los Angeles, California. Nathan has been a member of the Sierra Club since 1929. He participated in many activities of the club, including club High Sierra trips of the 1930s and early 1940s. In addition to being chairman of several club committees, he was a member of the Sierra Club Board of Directors for sixteen years, serving as vice-president from 1958 to 1959 and as president from 1959 to 1961. Nathan has participated in numerous conservation campaigns. His efforts were most prominent in the campaign to preserve the San Geronio and San Jacinto wild areas in southern California. The interview was conducted during four sessions, lasting from January 5th to January 19th, 1976. With Nathan during the interview was his wife, Joan Clark. The interviewer was Richard Searle, for the Sierra Club History Committee.

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## FORGING A CONSERVATIONIST: CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

### A Sierra Club Family

Richard Searle: Nate, to start this interview, I'd appreciate if you could give us some of your personal background, when and where you were born, your family, other related information.

Nathan Clark: Well, that's easy. I was born in San Rafael, California, on July 9, 1906. My activity in the Sierra Club has been over a long period, but actually it was started by the people in the family that came before me; I didn't think it up by myself. My father, W. Lewis Clark, was born in Arlington, Massachusetts and was a graduate mechanical engineer from Tufts College in Somerville. My mother, Mary Cheney Clark, was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts and was brought up with her sister. My grandfather on her side died young. I had one other relative, my brother, who was born in Boston, Massachusetts.

My father came to California in 1903 and established himself as a civil engineer in Marin County. Then my mother and brother came west in October, 1904. One of my father's first big jobs was in connection with what was then called "the crookedest railroad in the world." He engineered the extension of it from the double-bow knot to Muir Woods--now a state park. Then came the auto road to the top of Mt. Tamalpais, and then the upper part of the railroad went out of business. The lower part went out of use later, but the grade is still there and is used as a hiking trail.

As a young man I used this trail on Sierra Club hikes near Mt. Tamalpais. You see, the original railroad went from Mill Valley to the top of the mountain, before 1900. My father built the extension spur to Muir Woods. The William Kent estate owned the redwood forest now called Muir Woods. They gave it--or sold at a low price--to the government to preserve the trees and wilderness.



RS: Was it a cog railway, or--

NC: No, it was a regular railroad, but because of the grade the engine's boiler was set at an angle--not parallel to the track, and it had vertical cylinders. Gravity cars were popular for descents from the mountain.

The family moved to a home we were trying to build in Alameda in 1908. We got the home fairly well along and suddenly the bank where Father had all his money failed due to gross misuse of funds by the officers. For a few years construction was at a standstill while Father worked and saved, and as he rode across the Golden Gate ferry, he could look up on Tiburon Island and see the beautiful house built by the money swindled from the bank where he'd had his savings.

Ever since the beginning of our family, that is, my parents' generation, there was a great admiration for the outdoors. My mother and father met on walking trips. Early in his career, my father was an inspector of little earth-filled dams in New England. That's where he met Mary Cheney, and he courted her taking her on these trips. So of course when I came along, with both parents interested in the out-of-doors, there was a great deal of discussion at home and much reading of articles and newspapers about the out-of-doors.

My father was the city engineer of Mill Valley and built some of the streets there. That led to his work with the California Highway Commission. In 1912, my father became one of the ten engineers that started the California highway system. Up to January 1, 1912, the state had no such system. He was put in charge of Division Seven, which was all southern California south of the Tehachapi Mountains. He had the responsibility of building up a staff and, with the other original engineers, of developing the standards of California highway design.

He started out in a large area, from Fresno County to the Mexican border and from the Pacific Ocean to Arizona, where there were no roads, except dirt roads. This gave him a wonderful chance to take the family, and that of course included me, on many trips over the wilderness areas of southern California. Wilderness in this case doesn't mean the same as it does now; it just meant wild places. I could mention a whole lot of names of wild places we went to, but it wouldn't do any good because they're all built up now. So, I acquired a love of the out-of-doors and of wilderness and of being out of the city probably by the time I was six years old.

- RS: Did your dad express concerns about the way things were being developed in those days?
- NC: Yes; but now I should interject something I forgot to say: that is that during those first twelve years, when we lived either in Mill Valley or Alameda, my father knew John Muir and went on hikes with him. Father joined the Sierra Club in about 1903.
- RS: Oh really?
- NC: Yes, I can remember way back, father's mentioning Muir; of course he was just a name to me. I was in my low teens, and I know he did talk about John Muir. Many years later my mother mentioned Muir occasionally.
- RS: Your family lived in the Bay Area then for how long before you were born?
- NC: About two years.
- RS: So about 1904, then, is when they moved there.
- NC: Yes, they came to California in 1904, and I was born in 1906.
- RS: And of course Muir died in 1914, so they probably knew him for about ten years.
- NC: I don't know how long but probably more like two or four years. Father was a member of the Sierra Club back in those days, and he dropped out of the Sierra Club when he moved to Alameda, I think, probably about 1910.

In 1916 the state highway system was reorganized and he was, mainly at his request so as to be able to live in the house he had started in Alameda, moved to Division Four, which was the area that was centered on San Francisco, and that went, I think, from San Benito County to Mendocino County, and from the ocean to the San Joaquin Valley. So again he was involved in the initial laying out and building of highways in areas that otherwise were undeveloped and many of them pretty wild. For instance, the roads up along the west coast of Marin County, like Inverness and Point Reyes--

- RS: You mean Highway 1, and that area there?
- NC: No. That area hadn't been developed yet. When I was in my teens, Father would take me in the summer when I was not in school. I would ride with him on his business trips looking at possible or proposed routes for highways. We'd ride over the roadless hills, and sometimes, when I was as young as fourteen years, I'm sure,

NC: I would drive his state car right over the cow fields and crop fields while he would be studying the maps. Then he would leave me in the car, and he'd walk around with a clinometer and a barometer and maybe some other engineers, picking the route.

Every time I possibly could, I'd go with my father on these trips. We continued to have evening discussions and readings about the wilderness and the mountains and particularly about keeping them clean. My folks were always very much opposed to leaving trash and rubbish around or destruction of fine old trees.

RS: These were some of the factors that affected you. Your brother-- when was he born?

NC: He was born in 1900. So he was older than I of course, and he started taking me on hikes in the Oakland hills probably when I was about ten, and even the Oakland hills were pretty much wilderness at that time. My brother has always been extremely good to me. He was a good brother.

RS: That is Lewis Clark\* we're speaking of, right?

NC: That's right. He gave me a lot of inspiration that has lasted ever since, and instead of being a big brute that would bully his little brother, he was always very kind to me. I wouldn't say he was soft, but he was kind and took an interest in what I was doing, and he taught me a lot of things. So he was the one who introduced me to hiking, about 1916.

RS: Now, when you say hiking, was this day hikes, or back packing, or--

NC: Day hikes. He had joined the Boy Scouts as a boy in 1916. Then he became assistant scoutmaster and later a scoutmaster.

It was about 1919 that I entered high school. I was about a year and a half ahead of where I should be for my age. Anyway, in 1924, about a year after I got through high school, Lewis and I started making auto trips together in the summer, because somehow we had a bond of friendship and common interests. These were trips in the family car, the two of us. We traveled all around; we went up to northern California and as near as we could to Mt. Lassen, and into the area around Weaverville, between Yreka and the coast, which was quite remote and wild in those days.

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\*Lewis Clark, oral history in process.

RS: That's Route 299 or something, goes from Redding over to Eureka--

NC: It does now, but there was nothing then. We went other directions, too. One of the early impressions I got that has lasted ever since, was an evening we spent at some building in Yosemite Valley. A ranger gave us a talk about something natural. This was about fifty years ago, and I don't remember what the subject was, but I was very impressed by the beauty of the pictures he showed, and by his remarks about wilderness. That evening, after the show was over, Lewis and I talked with the ranger, and for the first time I found out that there was even an agency of the government that was protecting wilderness. I had never even heard of the term before.

RS: Who was administering it then? Was it the National Park Service by that time?

NC: I guess it was, because this was a talk presented in a national park. But I had never seen photographs of the kind of wilderness that you have to pack into; for instance, the country south of Tuolumne Meadows, the Kings Canyon region and the glaciated country where there are erratics and even with the glaciers themselves. This was another experience that built up my interest in the wilderness.

RS: What year was it, 1916 or 1918, that you were in Yosemite?

NC: No, it was later, I guess in the early 1920s.

RS: I was thinking of Hetch Hetchy. That was a big issue in those days, and I wonder whether that issue came to your attention.

NC: No, I didn't know anything about Hetch Hetchy until I became active in the Sierra Club, which was 1929.

RS: I was wondering whether being in the park that the issue would have come up.

NC: No. I suppose my father had talked about it, but as a kid, engineering things didn't stay with me. I was thinking about skates and roller coasters and games, and in the back yard I had an enormous mountain range I'd built out of the sandy dirt of our yard, and I put roads all over it, bridges, and excavations, and made models of autos; but I wasn't interested in his serious adult concerns.

RS: I see what you're leading up to: the things that did develop an interest in conservation.

NC: My parents, their outdoor experiences, family readings, the discussion at mealtimes, particularly dinnertimes, my brother taking me on hikes--

RS: Did you have any relatives outside the immediate family?

NC: No, just those three: mother, father, and brother.

RS: What about Joan--did she come into the picture very soon?

NC: Not very soon. This account is now up to, say, 1925. I didn't meet Joan until about 1940.

### Early Roads Through the Redwoods

RS: When did you become a member?

NC: Well, there are some intervening things that have a bearing on that. From about 1919 until 1922, my father had some kind of a responsibility which took him all over the northern part of the state, and the thrilling thing about that was riding through the country which later on received the Redwood Highway. He and I drove up through the redwoods to Humboldt and Del Norte and Mendocino Counties.

RS: These were all dirt roads?

NC: Yes. There were just the bare ruts, and we had to drive through the rivers. In one place there was a bridge made of two big logs about two feet in diameter flattened on the top sides, and nothing in between, and no railing; we had to center the car on those two logs. I suppose it was about fifty feet across, and we had quite a time getting up onto this bridge. I think it was probably the Eel River.

RS: That's a big river up there.

NC: When it was time to stop for the night we would camp among the redwoods. This was back in the days of two-wheel brakes and high clearance and a cloth top; no hotels there, and motels hadn't been invented.

RS: That's the day when you could drive your car over the stumps, and you'd still have your clearance.

NC: Right. We had a big white tent, and we'd put it up with all the stakes and fasten it down to the ground, and set up cots and blankets. We have pictures in the family home in Alameda of our 1918 Buick with enormous ferns hanging over the car. In many places the road would go between two giant redwoods that were so close together

- NC: that the road had to go up over a hump maybe three feet high to get between them and go on.
- RS: I suppose the redwoods were much more extensive then, because I presume there had not been as much logging in those days as there has been--
- NC: Right--there'd been practically no logging in those areas.
- RS: Anything along the Eel River?
- NC: That was all original wilderness at that time. Then it was cut over in the 1920s. If you go up there now you see redwood forests, but that's all second growth.
- RS: Except for some of these local groves, some of the state parks.
- NC: Some of those, yes. There are the groves that have the big trees, but I mean the areas that were cut in the 1920s and 1930s now have redwood trees, but they're not big ones, not giant trees.

So this next influence on me, which is a lifelong one, was the trips with my father through the redwoods. He was a high engineer in the state highway department--it was called the California Department of Highways, or something like that--and one of his big concerns was to get the roads in, in such a way as to cut as few trees as possible. That's hard to believe these days.

- RS: I was going to say that Senator Collier and the Highway Division that we've had in the last several years haven't developed that particular approach.
- NC: Well, Father was always very careful about not wanting to cut trees or destroy the riverbank or have big cuts. He also was responsible for reducing the maximum grade of California highways at that time from seven percent to six percent and for super-elevating--or banking--the curves.
- RS: Did he in essence then lay out the original Redwood Highway?
- NC: Another engineer did the original layout of the old Redwood Highway. That was while my father was working on other original layouts, such as the Skyline Highway south from San Francisco, the start of the first all-year road to Yosemite up the Merced River, and the so-called Ridge Route between Los Angeles and Bakersfield. He laid out a low-cost route along the ridge east of the modern route, and it was very crooked because of limitations on cuts and fills that could be afforded. It was there and useable just a few years ago.

RS: I remember twenty years ago driving thru the redwoods. The road literally meandered among the trees rather than cutting ruthlessly in wide straight lines.

NC: Well, the path that we went on in, say, 1918 was just a pair of ruts. It wasn't always depressed ruts, it was just a pair of trails. Then came the first macadam road, not concrete.

RS: You would call that asphalt?

NC: Yes. It was slippery, and it was not a very good road bed, and it was kind of bumpy. Then, maybe in the thirties, they started putting in concrete pavement, section by section. In the forties, they got the freeway concept, and the idea of the big heavy cuts, enormous width, wide shoulders, alignment straight as a die, and never mind what it does to the hillside or the trees.

That's when the Sierra Club got interested. By that time my father had been out of the picture for many years. But the impressions that he gave me and particularly the message about keeping the out-of-doors clean and not destroying it, I got very early. I don't know whether he got them before he came to California or as a result of his association with John Muir; I was too young.

RS: I was wondering, just as a matter of interest and contrast, do you recall any public attitude relative to keeping the outdoors clean, or the environment? My impression is that people were much more "pioneer"-spirited and tending to think of the outdoors as to be used more in those days than maybe they are today, that they are more conservation-oriented today. Did your father for instance meet much opposition to his ideas in this area, or was that an issue?

NC: I don't remember it as being an issue. Of course I wasn't thrown with him when he was talking business with other men. I was just a kid. I do remember that most of the families of the other boys that I played with, or the other young fellows that I went with, knew very little about the redwoods or Yosemite or the places that our family went. My best friends, Jack and Lewis Dufour, who lived down the block, would always go to Martinez and spend the summer; well, that's a little town, about thirty miles from Oakland, and that was an excursion. That's where John Muir had lived years before.

RS: Martinez, what a place to go today!

NC: Somebody else would go to Lafayette for the summer. And they never heard of all these places I went. You know how kids are, they always think they are underprivileged if they haven't gone where somebody else has gone, so I envied them going to Martinez to spend the summer.

RS: So hiking and these other things were not the in thing, for kids in those days.

NC: Not a bit--for my associates anyway.

RS: After the highways?

NC: My father retired from the highway system in 1922, and left the state employment, and for a number of years my interests turned to other things.

RS: Now let's see, you were up in the Bay Area still at that time, right?

NC: Yes, I was in the Bay Area and entered the University of California in 1923.

RS: You had not moved south?

NC: No, not yet. I lived in Alameda from the time I was two years old, in 1908, when we left the house in San Rafael and moved to the home we were trying to build in Alameda. I lived in Alameda from 1908 to 1912. Then I lived in Los Angeles near Exposition Park from 1912 to 1915, and then I lived in Alameda again from 1915 until when I was partly through college, in the twenties. My association with education and with the outdoors is all mixed up; that's the reason my story is kind of mixed up.

RS: That's all right; keep telling it.

NC: During the school year, 1918, I can remember the ending of World War I. I came across it in my diary recently. I have all my old diaries, and it said, "Extra! Extra! Extra! The Great War ended today!" on the page for Nov. 11, 1918. They rang bells all day and the whistles blew. Schools closed, businesses shut their doors, people celebrated . . .

RS: And at that time you were about ten or twelve years old?

NC: Twelve years old, and was in the sixth or seventh grade.

Joan Clark: Didn't you graduate from high school when you were fifteen?

NC: No, I think I was sixteen. I graduated from college at twenty--almost twenty-one. My brother had graduated from the University of California in 1922, in electrical engineering, and went off to Massachusetts to become a graduate student and an instructor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology--Boston Tech. So he was away from home during my college time.



- NC: At that time I developed quite an interest in hiking in the Oakland hills with other boys in college, but I still hadn't gotten the conservation message except by the insistence of my father of not damaging the landscape in locating the highway and the insistence of my mother and father in keeping the out-of-doors clean. So that was the period, say from about 1923 to 1927, when I was fully engaged in college. I took a very heavy course and I got good grades.
- RS: Did you meet any Sierra Club people, by virtue of their visiting in your home, or any people--
- NC: No.
- RS: So I gather your father was a member but not necessarily an active member in the sense of holding an officer's position or--
- NC: No, I think my father had no further association with the Sierra Club after the family moved to Los Angeles in 1912. I think his association was during those first few years in California, after 1903.

#### Engineering and The Out-of-Doors at The University of California

- RS: Well now, anyway, you're back in college.
- NC: I'm back in college, it's the mid-twenties. We guys in electrical engineering had to take at least twenty-one units in order to get through, but the maximum they'd let anybody else in the university take in those years was nineteen. We had a heavy course, and I took a lot of electives; amongst other things at the time I took it, I was the only student in the university's history in engineering that took the medical course in human anatomy.
- RS: Well, you may still be the only one, I don't know.
- NC: I thought the human body was a wonderful thing and wanted to know how it was built and how it works.
- RS: It's well-engineered, anyway; that's for sure.
- NC: And I took a lot of other things like astronomy and geology and things that lots of people take.
- RS: You did this in four years total, actually, plus your master's, which would be two years more?

NC: The master's came along much slower, because I did other things that got in the way. I got my bachelor's degree, graduated cum laude, in 1927. I was a member of Eta Kappa Nu, the electrical engineering honor fraternity, and Eta Tau Beta Pi, the engineering honor fraternity, and Sigma Psi, the science honor fraternity.

When I was in college, one summer we had to take machine shop. This was designed by the people that lay out the curriculum to be sure that engineers had some idea what shop work was like--what can you do with a lathe, a milling machine, shaper and so on?--because most of the emphasis in those days was on civil engineering, structural engineering, mechanical engineering and mining engineering. Electrical was a well-established course, but people weren't as much interested in electricity as they were in the physical things.

RS: Power transmission, electronics, and all of those things were just beginning.

NC: Just beginning. Vacuum-tube radios were the only thing. One of the first jobs I ever worked on in the machine shop was to take a block of cast iron  $3 \times 3 \times 6$  and chip off two surfaces with a cold chisel and a hammer and then file them down until they were absolutely smooth and flat and at right angles to each other, and I developed a true respect for a milling machine.

RS: [Laughter.] That's a rough way to get indoctrinated.

NC: Another course I took was in psychology. Near the beginning of the term they were telling us of the reliability of what they called mental ability tests. So in this class, that I took in the mornings before it was time to go to the machine shop, they gave us all a test to determine our mental ability. The idea was that they were going to give us another three weeks later and prove that even though they asked different questions, we would come out about the same grade. This was to prove the reliability of the tests. Well, of the 160 students I was third from the top in the first test, and the tenth from the bottom in the other test.

I've never thought much of those tests since. [Laughter.] Anyway, in those summers I didn't do much outdoor activity that I can remember. That's a kind of a blank period. In 1928, I had graduated, and I started teaching electrical engineering at the university as a teaching fellow.

RS: This would be at Berkeley while you were getting your master's degree?

NC: Yes. In the process, I met two other young teaching fellows about my age. One was Edward W. Kimbark, and the other was Antone H.

NC: Schafer. Kimbark became a professor at Northwestern University, and Schafer dropped out of the scene. But Kimbark was a member of the Sierra Club, and so I began to hear a little bit about that. Now, you see, I was in this wonderful position: I was young, I had a nice standing in the university, with scholarships and doing things I just loved to do, and Kimbark and I had a lot of similar interests. We both liked to swim, and both liked to hike, and both liked the out-of-doors, and both liked electrical engineering, and we were both teaching fellows. So his association brought to my mind, in kind of a feeble way, but every so often, some kind of reference to the Sierra Club.

So in the spring of 1928, he said, "Hey, Nate, there's a trip up in the mountains this summer. Maybe you'd like to take a look at the outline and see if you'd like to go." He handed me a dittoed outline, and I took it home and talked it over with my brother. We thought this was just fantastic. I didn't know there were mountains as high as 12,000 feet, because I was accustomed to Mt. Tamalpais at 2,500, and Mt. Diablo at 4,000, but here was a proposal to go up in the High Sierra and climb these mountains that were well over 10,000 feet. So Lewis and I signed up for the party, and our parents gave us their blessing, and probably gave us some money too. That was my first experience in the High Sierra.

One interesting thing is that it was called the Little Sierra Club--that was the slang term. Actually, a Sierra Club member by the name of Stuart Ward, who was the secretary of the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco, and I guess a wealthy attorney, a young man, probably thirty, had just gotten married, and he was going to take his honeymoon with his new wife up in the High Sierra. But some friends thought that they'd like to go along too, so the party got bigger and bigger, and by the time we started off into the mountains it was eighty people! [Both laugh.] We had a pack train, and we had professional cooks; it was just like a Sierra Club High Trip.

RS: Let's get this straight--he started out to go on a honeymoon with his wife?

NC: He planned it that way. He planned to take along, I don't know which ones, but some old-time friends, a pack trip up in the Sierra for two or three weeks.

RS: And it grew and grew. This was Stuart Ward, now?

NC: Stuart Ward, yes. And on that trip I met Allie Robinson, the packer of the Sierra Club, who had packed the Sierra Club for years, with his headquarters in Owens Valley, and I met Jimmie James, who was an old-time member of the Sierra Club (incidentally, she bequeathed her large estate to the Sierra Club Foundation, which we are selling

NC: and using as funds for the Sierra Club, this year, 1976), and I met Elsie Bell Earnshaw, the famous Elsie Bell, and her lady friend Mary Adams, and the Wyckoff family, and a lot of other old-time members of the Sierra Club. So here was a trip in the High Sierra; it wasn't a Sierra Club trip, but it was all Sierra Club people, and of course I got the indoctrination.

RS: This was 1928 still?

NC: 1928. In connection with high mountain experience, that was my beginning. That's when I first actually got out and packed into the mountains and slept out there night after night and camped at high elevations, walked on summer snow, and glissaded down glaciers and climbed high peaks.

RS: I maybe missed a point now, had you joined the club?

NC: No. I'm working up to that. I met Olcott Haskell and Fred Crofts, the famous weighmasters of the Sierra Club for many years. They were a couple of older men. They were pleasant, but they were very strict, and every day you'd have to bring your dunnage bag and have it weighed, and if it was one pound over you'd have to take something out.

RS: I hate to think if you were halfway through the trip--

NC: Well, it was tough because your bags got heavier. Things got dirtier, and particularly in the mornings there was always moisture in things. Well, anyway, 1928 came and went. Meantime, my mother had been very active in the Unitarian Church in Oakland, and she had developed a friendship with a Mrs. Holmes, who apparently was a member of the Sierra Club. Mrs. Holmes decided that I ought to be a member too. Mrs. Holmes was wealthy, and she spent many years traveling over the world to find the wonderful place to live. She went all over Europe and Asia and Africa, and even to Russia, which was to me an awful place to go in the 1920s, and she finally came home and decided that California was better than any of the others. Mrs. Holmes was in the house one day when I came home from college and said, "Nathan, I'll pay for your membership if you'll join the Sierra Club." I thought, "What do I want to join an old people's club for?" But I had been on this trip, and the idea began to appeal to me.

Now I must go back about five years to 1923. During my freshman year I had to take chemistry; it was a huge class with an extremely good prof, and that was Joel Hildebrand.\*

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\*Joel Hildebrand, Sierra Club Leader and Ski Mountaineer, Ann, Ray Lage, interviewers, Sierra Club Oral History Project (Sierra Club, San Francisco, 1974).

RS: Really?

NC: I didn't know anything about him except that he was a very good prof and I liked his lectures.

RS: This was in the old Chem 1A class?

NC: Yes.

RS: He's been around a long time, because I had him after the Second World War.

NC: Did you?

RS: Yes, he was my Chem 1A lecturer in 1949, and your course was 1923. Wow. A generation apart.

RS: My brother had talked a lot about Professor Hildebrand as his professor. It had nothing to do with the Sierra Club or the outdoors. So when I finally took Professor Hildebrand's course I thought it was a great treat. I always liked school--almost always, not always [laughter].

Then in the third year in engineering, I took mechanical engineering from Professor Joseph N. LeConte. It was a lecture course on mechanics, dynamics, and mechanisms, an upper division course. I was impressed by Professor LeConte because he obviously had a great facile mind. He could handle the subject so easily; he just absolutely knew it, and he had a very nice, unpretentious way. He was very patient about explaining things, and yet he expected people to pay attention--there was never any fooling in his classes--so I developed quite an admiration for him. That was Little Joe, Joseph N. LeConte, the son of the Joe LeConte who was one of the founders of the university and of the Sierra Club.

RS: Let's see, the elder LeConte was the one who wrote Ramblings in the High Sierra, and this was actually his son who was subsequently a professor in the school.

NC: Yes, and who himself was probably fifty years old by the time I met him. He was a mature man; I was just a teenager. So I developed quite an admiration for Joe LeConte, and then somewhere along in that period, in the third year of college, I discovered that Joe LeConte was a great outdoorsman, but I didn't know how much. But by the time I was finished with my senior year, which was the spring of 1927, I had learned that he and one or two other friends had carried a plane table and an alidade all through the Sierra and produced the first maps of the Sierra.

- NC: He probably didn't make topographic maps. I think he made route maps and trail maps and located the general lines of the mountain crests and so forth. I saw his maps at his house, because later on I got to be quite a friend of the family. I used to go to the LeConte house in Berkeley.
- RS: I see, it was not just as a member of a survey party, it was a personal activity or hobby that he had.
- NC: Yes, he was a technical man, and he knew how to do it, and he was interested. He was small and wiry, maybe 5'4", kind of thin, kind of stooped over, and almost bald. I remember in school, in mechanical engineering class lecture, some of these big husky football-type students would whisper to each other about that scrawny little guy up there trying to tell us things. [Both laugh.] He'd been places they never would go.

#### Joining The Sierra Club, 1929

- NC: Now we've developed that Mrs. Holmes offered to have me join the Sierra Club, and I'd been on the Ward party, which was all Sierra Club people, and so I went to Joe LeConte, and said, "Would you sponsor me for the Sierra Club?" and he did.
- RS: This was about 1929 or so?
- NC: Yes--my father's fifty-eighth birthday--February 8, 1929. Mrs. Holmes paid the fee, and Joe LeConte sponsored me, and I've been a member ever since. Of course I wasn't a life member until some time in the mid-1930s. I think it was only \$50 to become a life member. It's \$750 now!
- RS: You've gotten your mileage.
- NC: Now we've gotten as far as 1929, when I finally joined the Sierra Club. I haven't told you the reason that I joined but I've given you the background. It was a kind of a long, gradual buildup of interest, keeping the mountains clean, not destroying them with unnecessarily wide or overbuilt roads, going on hikes, going on auto trips, hearing the National Park ranger, and so on.

Another thing I did in college somewhere along the line: I took a course in geology 1A from Professor Andy Lawson, who was quite a famous person in the university. He gave very good lectures and showed 3 x 4 lantern slides. They were projected down to a big screen at the front of the room. Those impressed me terrifically. They were scenery to me; but to him they showed granite, or gneiss,

NC: or a glacier. He was trying to get across the story of the geology; the historical phase of the geology interested me, the chemical part of it didn't. I mean I didn't care if it was basalt or what it was. I didn't have any contempt for it, but I was working hard in electrical engineering, and I couldn't be bothered trying to remember all those terms. However, I was very much impressed by the scenery. That was about the time that I first got into Joe LeConte's classes.

RS: I would get the feeling that you became involved, so to speak, with many people of a common interest, and Mrs. Holmes was sort of the final--

NC: She just gave me the money. It wasn't very much in those days, four dollars I think. You see, I didn't just suddenly fall into the Sierra Club like some people do. Technically, I suddenly entered at one time, but I had all the feeling and interest way back from the very beginning. I think that it's worth emphasizing that the most influential things that made me join were exposures to natural beauty, meeting the old-time members, that ranger talk in Yosemite, my parents' conversations, and similar contacts. None of them railed at me about how bad everything is. I bring this up because I think that the club makes a mistake of devoting all of its printed matter to the story of doom. The Sierra Club Bulletin is sometimes tiresome and frustrating to a long-time member who has done his utmost for years.

RS: Am I correct that this was sort of a positive type of approach as opposed to maybe a negativistic?

NC: Yes. How good it is, how good it would be to preserve it; not how bad it is, and the world is going to pot. Now maybe the world is going to pot, and I'm sure that the Sierra Club has to say so, but they don't have to say only that. I think the Sierra Club Bulletin, for instance, could be written in a much more interesting style. The most recent little pamphlet that was put out by the Save-the-Redwoods League is the kind I'm thinking of. I don't know whether you've seen it or not.

RS: I don't think I've seen a recent one, although I do receive some of their mailings.

NC: It just came out; I'll show it to you. It's the one in which they announce Dick Leonard as president. He was active as an officer for many years, and finally he allowed himself to get elected as president.

RS: Roped in again.

NC: Yes, roped in. It tells you what some of the problems are, but it doesn't try to give you indigestion and make you feel that things are absolutely hopeless.

## SIERRA CLUB ACTIVITIES AND ASSOCIATES IN THE THIRTIES

## A Social Mix

Richard Searle: I was just looking here at the notes on your reasons for joining the club; it sounds to me that it was an equal mixture of social and esthetic reasons.

Nathan Clark: There was a social mix, after I joined the Sierra Club, and perhaps during the year before I joined. Lewis had already become a member; and he and I went on a lot of Sierra Club local walks around the San Francisco area. We climbed Mt. Diablo and Mission Peak, and we went to the Butano forest before it was ever talked of in conservation. We hiked around Muir Woods and Mt. Tamalpais and Governor's Camp down at the redwood park in Big Basin, and hikes over to Inverness. I got to know a lot of the Sierra Club people. Many of them were people around my age; of course there were older ones too. This included lots of fun. For instance, I can remember one party at somebody's country house over in Marin County somewhere. We had a long hike all day and then went to this house and put our sleeping bags out on the ground and went into their big barn and we played charades all evening. [Both laugh.] Lots of fun.

Then one time we hiked along the coast south of San Francisco quite a ways. We hiked into Butano Falls, which has since become a state park. We were all young people, and Virginia Ferguson, who was the only employee of the Sierra Club--she'd been hired by Will Colby many years before, now retired of course--was in the group. We decided, a whole bunch of us, that we would have a bad manners party. We were sitting on the rocks around the base of Butano Falls, and since we all knew each other and were on good terms, we tried to be just as rude as we could and say awful things to each other. Well, I reached over to Virginia and said, "Here, you want some of my wormy dates?" and it turned out they were! [Both laugh.]



- RS: I think she was having a couple of second thoughts when she discovered they were wormy.
- NC: That was one of those good times that we had in the Sierra Club. It was a combination of a social event and a hike.
- RS: What kind of people were in the Sierra Club? When I ask this question, the mix you had, you mention people that were in college or professional types, and of course I realize that you were a professional by virtue of training. Was the mixture of the types of people who belonged to the club similar in terms of the various walks of life as it is today?
- NC: I don't know what it is today. You know, I'm not very active in the club now. But I would think that a pretty large fraction of the men were professional or students, and most of the women were professional, including predominantly teachers, but there were doctors and nurses.
- RS: As far as women's participation, was it very extensive in those days as compared, say, to more recent times, or was that even something to be noticed particularly?
- NC: Oh no, one of my earliest impressions was that men and women were equal on the trips; they slept in different parts of the camp, but the women climbed the mountains, and the women would go swimming. They participated in the campfire shows.
- RS: That's a very good thing to mention. I was thinking more in terms of the percentage of women members. I don't know if you ever took statistics.
- NC: I have a feeling that it was, as far as I know, a roughly equal percentage. I don't think there was ever any tendency for it to become either a men's club or boys' club. It was just a club of people who liked the out-of-doors.

#### First Summers in The High Sierra, 1929 and 1930

- NC: I joined the Sierra Club in the spring of 1929, and by that time I was a graduate student at the university, and I was doing a great deal of reading of the third and fourth year students' papers; I was reading laboratory reports and examinations and so on. I took it seriously. But I developed quite an interest in swimming, so I used to go to the college swimming pool up in the canyon, Strawberry Canyon. Do they still have that?

- RS: Yes, they do. It's near the botanical gardens as I recall.
- NC: In those days it was an absolute wilderness around there. It was just wild bushes and plants and trees, and there was this beautiful swimming pool. We didn't have to wear any trunks, and I always liked that, so I'd take a big stack of reports, maybe six inches thick or maybe more. I'd haul them up there all the way up from by the mining building, where I parked my car.
- RS: That's right. They didn't have a stadium then even, as far as I know.
- NC: No. I would go up to the swimming pool, and sunbathe and swim, and then got out and dry off and read reports. It took an awful lot of concentration to do that when I would much rather be out talking to the other guys, but I did it. And gradually I made friends with people. One was a young fellow that I got along very well with--Frank Coit--did you ever hear of him?
- RS: I've heard the name. Of course, Coit Tower comes to mind; I don't know whether he was related.
- NC: Coit Tower was named for somebody in the family, and Hotel Coit down in Oakland was owned by his father. They were a wealthy family; they had a beautiful country estate over at Inverness. Anyway, Frank and I got to be very good friends. I sponsored him into Eta Kappa Nu, the electrical engineering honor fraternity.

As we talked at the swimming pool I mentioned the Ward Party trip I'd made in 1928. Frank told of a backpack trip he'd made with older men, also in 1928, to Jack Main Canyon in Yosemite National Park about ten miles north of Hetch-Hetchy Valley. This led to our decision to go on a backpack hike together early in the summer of 1929. The third member of the party was Abe Tilles, another E.E. student and an honor student. In later years he became a professor of electrical engineering at U.C. Berkeley.

So the three of us hiked out from Yosemite Valley early in June, 1929, up the Yosemite Falls trail, past Lukens Lake and White Wolf, down into the grand canyon of the Tuolumne, up the Tuolumne River to Tuolumne Meadows, across Tenaya Creek, and down to Happy Isles. It was a tough trip of about ten days. Much of the terrain was covered with snow. Days were cool, nights frigid. We met no one, but returned home about a week before my first real Sierra Club High Trip.

- RS: All right, so this was the regular High Trip.
- NC: Yes, the 1929 High Trip, and that was significant for several reasons. First, it was my first real full-fledged Sierra Club High Trip, and, second, it was Will Colby's last trip as leader. He was our manager, and we walked the miles as Colby walked them.

RS: Now you said Will Colby's last trip as a leader. He did go on other trips later on?

NC: No, I think after that he would come and meet the High Trip group if he could drive to it. For instance, if we were going through Tuolumne Meadows, he would meet us there, but I don't think that he went on any more High Trips.

That trip started from somewhere down near the power plants of the Southern California Edison Company, wherever that was.

RS: There's the Shaver Lake, Huntington Lake, and the Florence Lake area, and on to the Hot Springs area.

NC: Yes, somewhere right around in there. Of course, you remember they had only one High Trip in those days--

RS: That was the Sierra Club trip.

NC: That was it. No base camp trips, no backpacking trips, no high horse trips, just the High Trip--And during the four weeks we ambled around over the mountains, I climbed a lot of mountains, Mt. Abbott, Mt. Gabb, Mt. Dade, Bear Creek Spire--

RS: That's right, you went up in Bear Creek area, and that would be near Lake Italy and that area too, probably.

NC: The Sierra Club went around the west end of Lake Italy. I was with a group of five other men. I was by far the youngest: they were all real mature, but I was young and active, and twenty-three, and all full of fire. That was good. We made our own private route along the crest of the mountains from south of French Creek Canyon. We went over an extremely dangerous pass: we all got indigestion from the nervousness of it, getting into Lake Italy, the headwaters of Lake Italy basin--

RS: That pass would be one that goes in, another one is by Bear Creek Spire--

NC: That's the one we went out. I remember we had a wonderful time. It was five days separated from the main trip. They supplied us with food, and we made our own way without any trail or even ducks. Oh my, that was a good trip. Among other things, there was one member of the party who was a kind of old and somewhat overweight but good-natured man, but he didn't know how to do anything. I was young, and I'd just been on another trip, and I knew how to do everything--cooking, and all the short cuts. So this poor old guy got the job of cleaning up all the pots and pans and hauling water and cleaning up the burnt-out campfires. And who was that? I

NC: didn't know until way later in the fall that year that he was Llewellyn Bixby, the Long Beach millionaire, who owned half of Long Beach! [Laughter.] He didn't bring up his influence and importance. It was never mentioned.

RS: Did you get to know him later on?

NC: Oh, I did for a while, and then we just didn't see each other very much. He was much older than I, and he didn't go on the kind of trips I did. So anyway, then we went through Tuolumne Meadows and--

RS: That was another year?

NC: No, that was the same year, I think that's where we ended.

RS: That was a long trip then. You went up probably past the Minarets area, or over in--

NC: We camped at Thousand Island Lake and at Isberg Lake and went over Donahue Pass, and, I think, Koip Pass.

RS: Then there's Parker Pass, I know where you mean.

NC: You know better than I do now, but I was there before you were. [Both laugh.] One of the people that showed up at Tuolumne Meadows to meet us when the club got to Tuolumne Meadows was Judge Clair Tappaan, the one for whom Tappaan Lodge was named. And down in my album I have a picture of him standing there next to Colby. Another one that showed up was my good friend Joe LeConte and his daughter Helen, and Dan Tachet, of course; he was our cook on that trip. He was a professional cook in a hotel or some elegant place most of the year and then he would go with the Sierra Club as the cook during the summer.

Then came 1930. Frank Coit and I decided to make a long trip in the High Sierra--packing all we could carry and also using three donkeys, which we bought from a packer down in the San Joaquin Valley. We drove Frank's new Chevrolet touring car, loaded with hundreds of pounds of food, mainly canned goods, to Giant Forest, and took turns walking the donkeys up there from the valley. That was near the end of June, and all the meadows were running with water. The higher elevations were deep with snow, the lakes were covered with ice, and nights were below freezing.

After four days of driving the donkeys, and by this time we were two days out on the trail, the crazy donkeys got loose at night and ran all the way back to Dinuba in the valley. In our youthful way we simply went back and got them and started over. The next three weeks took us over Blackrock Pass, past Moraine Lake,

NC: the Kern River, South Fork of the Kings, Granite Basin, Simpson Meadow in the Middle Fork of the Kings, and to meet with the Sierra Club in Palisade Basin on July 21st.

We stayed with the High Trip about eight or ten days and set out on our own again. During that stay I did a lot of climbing with Sierra Club people. This included Mt. Sill, North and South Palisades, and other summits I don't remember now. Then for about two weeks Frank and the donkeys and I visited Evolution Basin, Mount Goddard, Marion Lake, Woods Lake, Kings Canyon, Summit Meadow, and came out at Giant Forest just in time for me to get home and start my next adventure.

#### The Move to Southern California

NC: Before I tell you about that, I must back up three years to my senior year at U.C. I had taken on a technical investigation for the thesis for BSEE degree--to investigate the performance characteristics of the Fynn-Weichsel motor. This novel motor is a multi-horsepower, adjustable-speed, a-c motor, which is a thing that almost didn't exist. It was very challenging and extremely interesting. I had about half of the electrical engineering laboratory wired up for my one experiment for many months.

In the spring of 1928 the AIEE (the American Institute of Electrical Engineers) decided to have its summer convention in Spokane, Washington. They included on the program a student session at which engineering students from anywhere could give papers. So Professor McFarland, who was my advisor, said, "Nathan, why don't you write a paper on this work you've been doing?" So I did. I wrote a discourse on it, and I had many photographs. I built a darkroom in my home and I had many oscillograms, and photos and diagrams and charts on glass slides made at home. It was very interesting.

I went to Spokane, drove up there with Professor McFarland and two or three other students. When the time came, I presented my paper. There were a lot of senior men there, you know, established engineers and professors and so on. Then we drove home and visited national parks and other beautiful places. I didn't give a very good paper but I had a good trip.

Nothing more was said about my paper for about a year. In the fall of 1929 I got a letter from the University of Southern California. The Dean of the College of Engineering had been to the Spokane meeting and seen my presentation. This was a major

NC: turning point in my life, though I didn't know it. He wrote a letter saying, "We would like to have you join our staff at the university; we are starting an engineering college." I thought, I don't want to go to that hot place, southern California; I don't know anybody there. But that money--\$180 a month was awfully good pay in those days, and there were no taxes--when the end of the month came you got your \$180 just like that.

I thought about it and talked it over with people and they said, "Yes, why don't you try it? You can quit if you have to; you can just teach one year." So I came down here and joined the new college of engineering, which had been going two or three years, at USC in the Old College Building. This was August, 1930, right after the long trip with Frank Coit and the three donkeys.

RS: UCLA didn't really exist in those days, I suppose?

NC: Yes, it existed, but they weren't the ones that gave me the offer. They didn't do much in engineering back in those years.

RS: Yes, I know. I believe that after two years they sent their engineering students to the University of California at Berkeley, so USC and maybe Cal Tech were the engineering schools down here.

NC: Well, of course USC was a big football enemy of UC. In those days I didn't have a wristwatch; I had a pocket watch, and a watch fob that hung out with the letters UC on it. It was just a thing that all the students had.

RS: That must have been heresy.

NC: Oh boy, I sure got it. Anyway, I came down here and became an instructor in electrical engineering at age twenty-three. And being young and having no defense, I was given a very heavy teaching load. I think I taught sixteen units. You can imagine.

RS: Wow. Did you have any assistance as far as grading?

NC: Nothing. I did everything. I wrote my own syllabuses, I typed them myself, I developed my own lectures, I did the whole thing.

RS: Well, you were starting an engineering school; that's what they were doing.

NC: I guess there were about eight or nine in the whole engineering faculty, and I was one of them. Philip S. Biegler was the dean. He had started this whole thing. He had influenced Doctor Rufus Bernard von Kleinsmidt, who was president of the university, to set things up. We had our offices in Bridge Hall down at one end

NC: of the campus and the laboratories up in an old wooden--Old College Building--at the other end. The first year after that I offered to take Dean Biegler and one of the other young profs on a trip to the High Sierra. Oh, was I brave! Or stupid. These people had never been at high altitude before, had never hiked before, and Dean Biegler had a heart condition.

RS: Did you know that?

NC: Yes, but it didn't seem to faze me at all. We took him over Bishop Pass, hiking--this man fifty years old with a heart condition. We hiked all around, we went up and climbed Pilot Knob, we--I've forgotten the names of all the things there. We did not climb Mt. Florence, because I was the only one that had been in the mountains before, and I didn't want to take that responsibility. Years later Dean Biegler died of heart failure, but why on earth he didn't when he was with us I'll never know.

RS: Well, maybe if you introduced him gradually to the rigors there, he'd be somewhat improved. I hope he enjoyed it immensely though.

NC: He said he did. So that was the 1931 effort in the mountains. The year 1930-1931 had really been the beginning of my professional career--going to USC and joining the faculty, being awfully busy and doing all my grading. That was also a year that I got very interested in the Sierra Club down here, because it was my first year. In those days I had the idea that local walks anywhere were nowhere near as good as going to the High Sierra. The High Sierra was the place to go. Walking around Mt. Tamalpais and Mt. Diablo or any of those places, well, that was all right for the weekend, but it wouldn't be the big thing to do. And of course I didn't know that the mountains in southern California were as great as I later found out. In fact, it's only been in about the last ten years I've found out how good they are.

So I didn't go on any trips with the local Sierra Club very much. But I went on one in the fall of 1930, and this had a great influence on me. I joined about a three-day trip, maybe Labor Day, about that time of year. I didn't know where they were going--the place didn't have a name--but I found it extremely interesting. The leader was an old man, I guess about eighty years old, and he drove an old car. We rambled for miles and miles and miles through beautiful desert country, big rocks, and Joshua trees. The road was terrible. It was bumpy and over rocks and out through sand and down the sandy washes, but it was a wonderful trip. Well, that man was Ernest Dawson's father, Glen Dawson's grandfather, and the place, years later, became Joshua Tree National Monument. Our trip was in the fall of 1930, and the monument was declared, I think, in 1934 or 1935, wasn't it?

NC: That was the first time as a young adult that I had seen beautiful desert country. It so impressed me that, though I forgot where the place was and I didn't go near it for another fourteen or fifteen years, when the first threats to Joshua Tree National Monument came up, of course I was very interested in getting right in on the fight, and that was one of the early conservation things I did in the Sierra Club. It was one of the first threats. I've forgotten what the threat was--

RS: I think one of the problems, at least, was that the railroad owned alternate sections in the monument. That's still somewhat of a problem in certain areas. And there was mineral entry probably.

NC: I think it was mineral entry, and I think it had something to do with changing the boundaries, but I'm not sure. However, that was about 1943, when we got interested with Don McLain--then an old-timer who knew the area in detail.

We're building this up kind of slowly, but all these things tie together. The teaching jobs and the university and the Sierra Club keep weaving together.

RS: Well, it is interesting, and one thing I can visualize it as, is the first experience you had in southern California where there was something esthetically beautiful. On the contrary, prior to your coming down here you said, "Why do I want to go to that hot place?" You might say maybe it softened your feelings a little bit about there being something in this area.

NC: Now I might say, "Why do I want to live in that smoggy place?"

RS: Well, that's a later technological problem; certainly there was no smog down here then, I presume.

NC: No. It was really nice. That's why I liked it. Even as late as 1938, when I built this house, one of the reasons I built it here was that I could stand and look out this window and see Mt. San Geronimo and San Jacinto of course and Sugar Loaf. Every day, day after day, they'd be out there; and of course now--

RS: Fontana's got in between.

#### Club Friends and High Trip Memories, 1929-1935

NC: I didn't mention, but I wrote it in my notes here, about some of the famous people I met that first year with the Sierra Club, 1929, and I could just mention them.



NC: One was Bill Colby, who was the leader; Joseph N. LeConte, who had been my teacher at UC and who met us at Tuolumne Meadows; Francis Farquhar,\* a great inspiration to me because he was a cultivated, educated person. I can't remember the next one's first name, it was either Philip or Herbert Rankin, a southern California man who was a very fine photographer; Francis Tappaan; and Judge Clair Tappaan, who had been president of the club; Walter Huber, who got me one of my jobs--oh, there's a job I forgot to mention--two jobs I forgot to mention.

Walter Huber was a civil engineer. He was once the chairman of the Federal Power Commission, and I remember his telling us that at one time he had to receive an application from some big corporation to dynamite or dam Rainbow Falls and put a power plant at the bottom in order to develop electric power. By law he had to receive this, and unless he could deny it on some basis within sixty days or ninety days, or something like that he would have had to grant permission. But as president of the Sierra Club he worked through officials in Washington, and it was declared a national monument a very short time before he would have had to give permission.

RS: This is by the national monument, Devil's Postpile?

NC: Devil's Postpile and Rainbow Falls. I haven't mentioned a certain job I had with the Forest Service. In the fall of 1929 I wanted to leave the university and get a real job, because the scholarships and fellowships I'd received from the university weren't really enough to live on, and my parents couldn't afford to support me. So I went to Walter Huber, a long-time director and former president of the Sierra Club, with whom I'd become acquainted on that year's High Trip. He gave me a recommendation to the U.S. Forest Service, which got me a three-month job. I was either a topographic draftsman or an automotive engineer--I don't remember which, because I did both kinds of work. This gave me a wonderful access to maps of the High Sierra and even to the experienced draftsman then making the topographic maps.

When that non-civil service temporary appointment expired, I got a job as a radio engineer with Philo T. Farnsworth in the very early development of electrically-scanned T.V. Many famous and wealthy people came to see our work. One of our developments was the accidental discovery of thyratron tubes--vacuum tubes with a little liquid mercury inside. I left this job to go to Los Angeles

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\*Francis Farquhar, Sierra Club Mountaineer and Editor, Ann, Ray Lage, interviewers, Sierra Club Oral History Project (Sierra Club, San Francisco, 1974).

NC: in 1930, to join the USC engineering faculty, which we talked about a while ago.

Getting back to the 1929 High Trip, I met Ansel Adams, of course, a young fellow in his upper twenties; Duncan McDuffie, who was the president of the club later; Cedric Wright, a photographer, artist, and violinist, who went on many of the outings and was a very good friend of Ansel's; Frank Lewis, a very active member who later helped establish the Loma Prieta chapter; Elsie Bell Earnshaw, and I guess she doesn't need any introduction; Jimmie James I've spoken of; Dan Tachet, the cook; Allie Robinson, the packer; Ernest Dawson, that's Glen's father, and of course I met Glen; and an interesting pair was Jules Eichorn, of San Francisco, and his father, who was the conductor of the symphony choir there. Well, Jules, Glen Dawson, and a couple of others and I formed quite a friendship in that 1929 outing and we went around bagging peaks, a thing I don't do anymore, but we did then. I suppose Papa has long since gone his way, and I suppose Jules is a middle-aged man.

In 1931 I was also with the Sierra Club for four weeks of its High Trip in northern Yosemite, and that was the year of making important friendships, not politically important, but important in terms of pleasure and pleasant memories.

RS: You had your circle of friends within the organization, and this is what you're describing.

NC: The little group Lewis and I traveled with included Virginia Adams --that's Ansel's wife--and Virginia Ferguson. Virginia Ferguson, as I've mentioned before, was, so far as I know, the first full-time employee of the club. She was hired by Will Colby many years ago. Some interviews with other old-timers may give a better record of how she got into the club. I think she was the first one, hired originally to work in Colby's office for the club--perhaps in the 1920s. The club eventually took a room in Mills Tower, and of course she was moved to Mills Tower. In fact she held that position until as president of the club I insisted that we hire a full-time office manager. She simply couldn't do everything. She was just about killing herself off by 1960 when we got our first professional manager.

Anyway, Virginia Adams, Virginia Ferguson, my brother, and then there was a curly-haired young fellow in his early twenties who was a freshman with the club and a freshman in the mountains that year, and he was the fourth one. I have some pictures downstairs of the four of us splashing around in waterfalls and hiking and so on. This young fellow used to hang right close to me because I talked a lot in those days. Well, lo and behold, that's Stu Kimball, who became chairman of the outings committee for years and years and years and lost all his hair, but he still went to

NC: the outings. He was a director for quite a while, but he quit being a director about 1960, and recently he has relinquished his position as chairman of the outing committee. At his request, however, he was appointed as chairman of the foreign trips, which he still enjoys. In 1931 he was a brand new freshman that year.

RS: And, of course, he was active in the outing; that's the way he was introduced and that was what he became most interested in.

NC: I think he was never terribly interested in conservation, because I know things he said at the board meetings. He wasn't opposed to it; no, certainly not, but it wasn't his main interest.

RS: Well, some people have an interest in organizing and providing an environment for the organization to function in, and I gather that that was maybe closer to his interest.

NC: I think he liked to go on trips too [laughter].

Nineteen thirty-two was a wonderful year. It was a year of very heavy spring snow, and I joined the Sierra Club for their four-week High Trip. All the passes had snow all the way down, and we had difficulty on some of them. I guess it was the first time any large group had gone over Foresters Pass, which connects from the headwaters of Bubbs Creek over to the headwaters of the Kern River.

RS: Foresters Pass was sort of the last major section of the Muir Trail, before they went over Junction and over Shepherd Pass. It was completed just about 1932, actually.

NC: That is the year it was completed. As a matter of fact I think they worked extra hard to get it done so the Sierra Club party could get over it.

RS: That's a very spectacular pass too.

NC: It is. I have very good photographs of that in black and white, showing all the people, the mules, the snow, and the magnificent grand scenery. I also took 16-millimeter movies, black and white film of course; they didn't have color film that was any good. I mention it because 16-millimeter movies has been one of my principal hobbies for many years.

RS: You've taken quite a few movies on Sierra Club trips then, I presume?

NC: Yes, and that's coming up in the near future. I'm not sure what I did in 1933. It was not with the Sierra Club anyway. In 1934 I went with the Sierra Club on the High Trip. That was a bad year,

NC: you remember, the third or fourth year of the depression, and my financial condition was not good.

RS: Were you working still at USC?

NC: I was still teaching, but they had given us a fifty-five percent cut in pay from \$180 a month--so I was living on \$80 a month plus whatever I could get from teaching night classes. That was pretty tough even in those days.

My good friend and supporter, Francis Farquhar, managed a deal whereby I could go on the High Trip free if I would act as a guardian for a couple of young teenage brothers, whose parents were not going. On Francis's recommendation I met the boys--Peter and Ted Grubb.

Peter Grubb died on a trip to Europe a couple of years later and the Peter Grubb Hut was named for him. And Ted Grubb, the other young fellow, is now a gray haired, very mature man, and a stalwart member of the San Francisco Chapter. I met him last year and was quite surprised--he didn't look like that little kid anymore. I don't think he remembered me at all. So that was 1934, a depression year, and I got on to the club outing only because I could act as a guardian. I didn't take any movies that year; I took little vest-pocket-size still pictures, little tiny negatives, black and white. They were good pictures, but that's all I have from that year.

Then I didn't go on any more High Trips for quite a long time. From 1935 through 1941 I went on my own trips, mainly with Sierra Club people, most of them with my brother, but with our own backpacking, and we backpacked all over the High Sierra. We'd go out for eight or ten days at a time because we didn't want to carry more weight than that. We backpacked into the coast mountains, and the Trinity Alps one year. People thought we were fools to go up there, but we had a good time. And of course we went up Mt. Lassen and Mt. Shasta, but we were always in California.

Meanwhile, in the midst of all this, Lewis had progressed to becoming chairman of the San Francisco Bay Chapter, and he had many official connections in the club. He was one of the founders of the Clair Tappaan Lodge. And he was chairman of the Huts and Lodges Committee and chairman of this, that, and the other thing, and wrote articles for the Bulletin. He was a very active and productive person--still is.

## Early Ski Mountaineering and Photography

NC: Now, getting on to skiing, I should have mentioned that in sequence, but it wasn't in my notes in sequence. In the winter of 1928-29 Lewis and I began to get interested in skiing. Lewis had a friend, Glen Weber, who also worked with the telephone company where Lewis did. They were both active in the Boy Scouts in Alameda. Glen proposed a snow trip in the Norden area, using a telephone company cabin and Glen's big toboggan. Lewis and I accepted this, and so the three of us started out on a Friday night early in 1929--to our first winter snow wilderness adventure.

RS: Had you been doing much skiing before?

NC: We'd never been on skis. We didn't know anything about them at all.

RS: That sounds familiar in some respects. I got inveigled into a similar thing by a kid named Larry Williams.

NC: I was twenty-one and Lewis was twenty-seven.

RS: Well you know, your big brother will take you anyplace.

NC: We always got along very well, and my association with him has been a great help to me in my life, I must say, in many ways. We had our brotherly fights, but we got along very well.

We got this big toboggan and borrowed some skis from somebody, three pairs of them, and we put a whole lot of stuff on the toboggan and lashed it down with rope and took the train from Oakland up to Norden station, near Soda Springs. Norden was just a very unimportant stop along the railroad. We went up there during the night and got out of the train in a terrific blizzard in the middle of the morning.

We didn't know where we were; we didn't know where anything was; it was terribly cold; and the wind was blowing, and the snow was flying. We bravely took the toboggan off the train and lowered it down onto the tracks, and the train went away. Then we pulled it along the ties inside the snowshed for quite a long way.

RS: Sounds like a little bit of a risky venture.

NC: It was. We didn't realize that trains coming down the track don't make any noise. We found an opening in the sheds about three or four boards wide, where we could laboriously lift this toboggan

NC: around and take it out through the opening. Just as it cleared the tracks a train came by! [Laughter.] Coasting downhill.

RS: You didn't know the train was coming?

NC: We didn't know it was coming. It was a different train, and we didn't hear it. Oh, that was a thrill and a scare. Now that was almost fifty years ago, and it still gives me goose pimples to think about it.

RS: That might have been the termination of your life.

NC: It could have been. So we hauled this big old toboggan out. We struggled thru deep snow and reached a well-made little lodge and knocked on the door. A rather stern and grumpy man opened it and said we couldn't stay there--it was private. He let us in for a while, and we thawed out and behaved very respectfully.

This place was the Sierra Ski Club, owned by a group of U.S. profs. The man at the door was Lincoln Hutchinson, a respected long-time member and director of the Sierra Club. Joe LeConte was a member too, but not present at that time. Joel Hildebrand was a member. Young Bob Ratcliffe, who later designed the Sierra Club's Clair Tappaan Lodge, built nearby five years later, was a member.

Incidentally, the Sierra Club later acquired this property, and it is now known as the Hutchinson Lodge. Doubtless the historical matter by Lewis Clark, Dick Leonard, Bestor Robinson, and others will give much more detail on this place.

After a while we left this lodge, put on our skis, and started out eastward in search of the telephone cabin. We returned to the toboggan, which I think we'd left near the snowsheds, and went along the tracks. We found a cabin--roofed but too open--it was no good. It had a stove and wood, but one side was missing, and we left. We found another building, which was not the telephone cabin, but it was at least complete. We were too cold and lost to go farther, so we dug down thru the snow, went in, removed the tin can from the top of the chimney, struggled with the toboggan, fixed our meals, spent a couple of nights there, and did so-called skiing during the day. This was Washington's Birthday weekend, 1929--Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

RS: One question. In those days they didn't have ski lifts much.

NC: No, there was nothing; at least there were none in the west.

RS: It was all cross-country or climb the hill and come on down.

- NC: There were no developments at Norden at all, just the railroad station.
- RS: And the skis were those long Nordic skis, I suppose. Any edges on them, to speak of?
- NC: No, just wood. Yes, we had toe straps, and I think we had bindings.
- RS: Did you have a tent or anything with you on that toboggan?
- NC: I don't know. I know it was awfully heavy.
- RS: But obviously it impressed you, and in spite of the experience you wanted to continue skiing.
- NC: Those high twenties I was interested in a girl who was the soprano singer in the Unitarian church choir. Lewis was a bass, and I was a tenor. Of course I never had much of a voice, but I liked the minister, Dr. Clarence Reed, and I liked the Unitarian ideas. My family, way back from the very beginning of the Unitarian church were members of the church in New England. I joined the choir, and I met this woman whose voice I liked because I liked what I would call a selfless way she sang. She wouldn't try to make it her music; she was perfectly willing to sing the composer's music. I don't know whether I expressed that right or not, but some artists--
- RS: Inject their own personality?
- NC: Inject it too much. She didn't at all, and the organist was Miss Virginie de Fremery, whose father had been the Dutch consul to the United States at some time and had a big home in Oakland. Well anyway, during the early thirties every winter I would go to Yosemite with this soprano singer, Omo Grimwood. She is retired and well; Lewis and I visited her within the last two months. She lives at Montara, near San Francisco. We had the most absolutely--what's the right word?--pure friendship. It was interests in common. We both loved the mountains; we both loved music of the same kind and were both interested in photography and education.

On at least one of those trips to Yosemite Lewis was along, and some others. I remember we hiked to Glacier Point in snow about three feet deep up the Four-Mile Trail one year, and we skied up another year, and that was quite a trail because that trail had some pretty steep sharp turns.

I spent all the time I possibly could at Glacier Point. On January 2, same year, we hiked up before daylight and saw the New Year's sunrise from Sentinel Dome. Many years later Joan and I were married at that very same place.

Joan Clark: But not in winter.

RS: That's a cold hike up there, I'm sure. Did you go up on skis or just across the snow, when you talk about going up that route on the old Four-Mile Trail?

NC: Well, that's a little confused in my mind because actually I went to Yosemite at Christmastime for quite a good many years, and I went with different people. I remember Einar and Annie Nilsson were along one time, and Rolf Pundt was along one time, and Dave Brower once, and others. I skied up and skied down from Glacier Point, and I have movies of that in the TV room there. Oh, those were good days.

Now let's see, I guess I've caught up with education, summer trips, joining the Sierra Club and early skiing, and then my interest in making motion pictures. So then came the mid-thirties, and the last High Trip I went on with the Sierra Club in the thirties was as guardian of the Grubb brothers, and I guess that really began my official positions in the Sierra Club. At least I was guardian of somebody.

RS: And this was the one that Francis Farquhar recommended?

NC: Apparently Francis liked me better than I knew. I never thought that he thought much of me, because I always felt kind of unimportant. I always looked--not now, but for years--about ten years younger than I was, and I've never been a big guy, you know. I'm not fat and I'm not tall, I'm just ordinary-sized, and so I felt ordinary. I never felt very important, but Francis Farquhar apparently liked me. He not only arranged the High Trip job for me, but after I took the movies of the 1932 High Trip, as soon as he was elected president, he appointed me as the chairman of the Sierra Club's first visual education committee. This was in 1934.

RS: This is the national club visual education committee?

NC: Well, yes. The Sierra Club, that's all there was, what we now call the national club. The chapter organizations were very weak and very small, and I think in 1934 there was only the Los Angeles Chapter, then called the Southern California Chapter.

RS: That's right. I guess it was the Southern Cal chapter at that time. All of southern California, wasn't it? So really your association as far as holding a position of responsibility initially emanated out of the Bay Area.

NC: Oh yes. Practically everything for many years was out of the Bay Area.



RS: Now you did go on some local trips, as you mention your Joshua Tree trip?

NC: Right. That was the very first thing I did when I came down here. I was already a member of the club, and I wanted to go out in the outdoors, and so I got the local walks schedule and took this trip. I took one or two other trips, but in those days most of the trips that I happened to get connected with were attended by much older people than I, and most of the activity was either in automobiles or very passive.

It wasn't physical. We didn't do very much; we didn't hike very fast and didn't hike very far and didn't go very high. I don't mean to say the chapter people didn't; it's simply the ones that I met didn't. So very quickly I decided that I was going to go on my own trips. Again, ignorance is bliss. I had no idea what I was getting into, so, since I was teaching and I had young people as my associates (they were all men in those days; girls didn't take engineering), I just more or less announced to my classes, "I'm going to go up and climb Mt. Baldy next week, does anybody want to go?" So I got a whole array, six or eight of the nice young guys that were my students at the university. Different groups of us would go on different hikes. We did all kinds of crazy things, for instance we went up stupidly and climbed Mt. San Gorgonio right in the dead of winter.

RS: I don't know which route you took, but on a couple you can slide right down that mountain and get killed pretty easily.

NC: Well, it was a darn big thrill. It seems to me that we went up from the Forest Home side, Vivian Creek trail.

RS: That would be the south side, which would probably have less snow on it.

NC: Yes, probably. This was February 1, 1931; I'll never forget it. We hiked and hiked and hiked, and I was young and eager, so we struggled to the top. Maybe you know that before you get to the top of San Gorgonio you are going east along that ridge, about eleven thousand feet, and down on both sides--

RS: Along that ridge it gets quite windy.

NC: And you finally get to the top. But when we passed this place the wind was blowing so hard I was leaning about forty-five degrees into the wind. It picked me up and blew me far enough southward down the slope that I got out of the strength of it. I bet I moved about ten feet. Ooh, that was a scare.

NC: Later on after we finished the top--we didn't get to the top till around sunset, probably four o'clock in the afternoon--and we had to come back down, of course. We had to follow the route we had gone up, or we would have gotten lost. We were tired as we could be, and the snow was up to our hips and I don't know how much deeper, but we sank in that far.

We were going down one place and Joe Harker, one of the members of the party, thought he was stepping in a footprint in the snow. Well actually he stepped on a piece of loose snow right next to it, and of course by this time the surface was iced over and he went scooting down. I think he went down about 300 or 400 feet of altitude and fortunately was stopped by the springy top of a little tree. That's the first time I realized how dangerous it can be. We recovered ourselves and went on down the mountain. We were going down one place where there was swale off to the west of us of about a forty degree slope. It was very steep. I looked over in the forest and saw a couple of what looked like eyes glimmering at me, and I thought, now what on earth is that? We went on down and pretty soon it was looking at us again.

RS: Were you being stalked?

NC: Well, I thought I was being stalked by a mountain lion or some kind of horrible thing, but there was nothing to do but keep going. After a while this slope kind of flattened out, and we got out beyond the side slope that had the forest in it and I saw two little farmhouses down by Redlands, thirty miles away.

RS: That's right, you had no concept of depth. They were the eyes?

NC: Couldn't tell, it was so dark.

RS: That's very disturbing, when it's so dark and you have no depth perception, and you're stepping on a slope too. You really have no idea.

NC: We had to be so careful, because it was icy. Well, that trip was written up at Francis Farquhar's request and published in the Bulletin one of those years. Even some pictures of it were in the Bulletin.

Then we climbed Mt. San Gorgonio a couple of more times in the winter, and we climbed San Jacinto in the middle of winter, and climbed Mt. Baldy, San Antonio, in the middle of winter, and a lot of those pictures were published in the Bulletin in those days. They're still good pictures. I was carrying a 9 x 12 centimeter film pack camera and tripod. This was the early thirties--1930 to 1933.

RS: No color film by that time yet?

NC: No. Later I experimented with the first Kodacolor, which was a different principle--banded filters and film surface a fine mesh of cylindrical lenses. Now we're up through 1934 and being chairman of the Sierra Club Visual Education Committee. That was the first one they ever had, 1934, and the other members of the committee were Don de Fremery, who was the brother of this Virginie de Fremery, who was the organist at the church, where I knew Omo, whom I went with to Yosemite; and someone in a distant city whom I forget now.

Don de Fremery was the chief engineer of the Union Ice Company and a long time member of the Sierra Club and a very, very nice guy. He was big and pleasant and extremely experienced and had very good judgment, but we didn't have any money. I was living on a shoestring, and I don't know whether he was, and the club had no money to spare, so the visual education committee simply met about once a month. We'd meet at his house or my house, and we'd talk, we'd look at each other's pictures, and we'd criticize them, and then we'd say how nice it would be if the club could make some pictures, but nothing ever happened. The club's efforts at visual education ceased when 1938 came. I guess they decided there was no use having a committee that couldn't do anything because it didn't have any money. You can't do much without money.

RS: Did the visual education committee imply that you would have films you could loan out, or was the idea to make films on club activities? Was the intent a film-making organization, motion pictures, or stills, or what was the charter?

NC: I can't remember what Francis told me, but I'm sure that the idea was that we were supposed to develop what the visual education should be for the club. Nobody knew.

RS: Was there a conservation orientation to this at this time?

NC: I suppose that is what we would have developed if we had developed it. There were already 35-millimeter cameras, the Leica and I can't remember all of them, that type of film, but it was all black and white. There was a possibility of lantern slides, as you might call them, and motion picture film, and we didn't know what else. And there was also the question of whether we should make films to interest prospective people in joining the club, or should we make them to show what good the club had done? I suppose we could have worked on conservation, but anyway we didn't do very much except talk to each other and eat crackers.

RS: I see what you mean. You didn't have the resources.

NC: We had nothing to work with and no prospect of anything. The thing dissolved, and then the next person to pick up visual education was Dave Brower, and that's in the handbook, probably about 1940 or 1941. Remember, the big depression began in November, 1929, and then it was intensive and terrific until about 1937, that's when the recovery started. By the way, I passed the second-class ski test about this time, about 1936. Joel Hildebrand and Bestor Robinson were the judges.

#### More Old Times and Old-Timers

NC: In 1937, I started to build this house. It was a good time to build it, because it turned out that prices were low, and my wages were good by that time, because I'd changed jobs. Anyway, visual education came to an end, and then all during those summers I backpacked with my brother Lewis, Dick Burnley, and some boys I knew at the YMCA--Milner Clary and Viles Fremstad, who are no longer around.

I met a young Mexican fellow at the beach one time many years ago and adopted him as a friend, and he started hiking with us. He went on a lot of these trips. I think you've met him--Jonnie Serna. He knew nothing about the out-of-doors when I met him, but he took to it right away, and I took him on ski trips and then took him on High Sierra trips, and he and Lewis and I went on many backpack trips in the High Sierra. The three of us had a real good time. And then eventually of course, he introduced me to Mexico, which was a big opening in my life.

Jonnie made quite a difference in things because of the fact that I had a chance to indoctrinate somebody else into both appreciation of the mountains and the cause of conservation. Also, because of the fact that he was Mexican, he was able to get me onto a lot of interesting trips in Mexico. With his facility with the language and also his unusual personality, he can make friends with anybody, anywhere, under any conditions--something I'm not able to do. So during the next few years he and I together were responsible, for example, for about 150 letters going to Congress urging the creation of John Muir-Kings Canyon National Park. At that time Congress was not of a mind to put the name of any person on a national park--that is, any white man--so it became the Kings Canyon National Park, but I think Jonnie probably got seventy-five or so letters. He wrote some, and he got all his Mexican relatives, of which there are many, to write letters.

RS: What year was this roughly then?

NC: That was 1939. I guess the park was created that year, either that year or 1940.

I'm trying to think of the next thing about Jonnie I wanted to mention. Since this is basically a story about one of the old-timers and although Jonnie isn't a recent member he's not a real old-timer, I think I can wind up by saying he joined the Sierra Club probably about 1940, and then he became a life member when I was president of the club in 1959. He writes letters for us and he gets his relatives to occasionally.

An interesting event occurred in connection with him back about 1945--I know I'm jumping around but I can finish up on this--Jonnie is quite a bit younger than I am and he has relatives younger than he is. During the few years right after World War II, he and I were taking a lot of his young Mexican relatives and their friends on trips to Yosemite and the Kings Canyon, Palm Canyon, the beaches all around. On one of these trips his nephew, who at that time was about eleven years old, was sitting in the back seat of my car with the other kids, and Jonnie was up front. In the mirror I noticed that he had thrown a gum wrapper out the window, and I quickly stopped the car and backed up and made him go and pick it up. Well, that man is now fifty years old, and he still remembers that event, and he's made his kids pick up all the trash too!

RS: It is sort of funny how little events in your life that aren't really important in an overall sense really impress you. Nate, I've listened to the previous session on tape, and there are a couple of questions I have. One of these is you referred to Elsie Bell Earnshaw and thought that everybody might have heard about her, but I personally haven't heard of her, at least very much. Could you add a little bit about her?

NC: Yes. I imagine that most of the members who have joined since 1955 or 1960 don't know who she was. She was never an official in the club, but she was important because of her social connections with important people in the club. As a young woman she married a man by the name of Earnshaw but soon decided he was not for her, so she divorced him and then she went back to her previous name of Elsie Bell, but of course she was also called Elsie Bell Earnshaw.

Elsie Bell was a very, very social person. She liked people; she liked social events; she had a good, resonant, loud voice; and she could break into any conversation and get attention. She always had something to say. She was also quite a social climber, and she cultivated all the important people in the club, everybody who was a director or president was her friend. So when Lewis and I were the wonderful new young people that had just joined the club and everybody was making a lot of us, Elsie Bell did too. She invited

NC: us to dinners and parties in her apartment. Then when I became inactive I didn't hear from her. Then I became active in conservation so I heard from her some more. And then I became the president of the club and my, that was really something! She even came up here on the hill walking on her own feet to come to our house to visit us. She finally quit going on High Trips and retired in southern California.

She was a saleslady or buyer at I. Magnin Co. A friend in the investment business managed her financial affairs so that by the time she retired she was comfortably fixed. She travelled extensively and finally went to Majorca off the coast of Spain where she died about a year ago. But it's because she was so well known among the old-timers that I mention her. And she really was an interesting person.

RS: Did she live in the Bay Area and then move down here?

NC: No, she lived in the Los Angeles area all the time.

RS: You also mentioned Francis Tappaan. Did you have any close contact with him in the affairs of the club, or was he a person you knew on the High Trips?

NC: I knew his father a little bit, because I met him in 1929 at the end of the High Trip, but Francis was the son of course, and he was of college age. He was a big, well-built, husky, strong-minded young man on the USC football team, studying law. He was on the commissary team for 1929, so I got to know him. Also we had a couple of accidents in the mountains. Nobody was killed, but some people were injured and I was on the rescue teams, along with Francis. Then after that outing I didn't see him anymore, and during the time he was a director of the club and even president, was a period of relative inactivity on my part in the club, because I was so busy at USC taking my own crowd of students around that I didn't have much to do with the directors, although I knew most of them. So then by the time I became active again, which was in the mid-1940s, he had left the scene, and I have neither seen nor heard from him since.

RS: It's rather interesting--partly the reason I ask this is because during the Brower controversy a few years ago there was a brochure that said every past living president had gone in favor of a particular issue, which was against Brower in this case, and we found out that we had forgotten to contact Mr. Tappaan. It turns out that at least as of two or three years ago he was working as some sort of a publicity director for Rockwell International in southern California, so as of two years ago he was still active and alive.

RS: Well now, I believe that you also had some notes on the last interview--corrections or modifications. Do you want to cover those at this moment, before we go on to additional things?

NC: Yes, I think probably I should, because they refer to some of the years that we've otherwise gone by. I mentioned a long time ago about knowing Joe LeConte, but in working up to mention Joseph N. LeConte, my professor of mechanical engineering, I mentioned Joel Hildebrand as my professor of chemistry. I failed to follow through with that, and I think I should now because it was in the 1940s, roughly twenty years after I was in Hildebrand's classes, that through skiing, I got to know the whole Hildebrand family. First I met Alex Hildebrand, whom I'd only heard of before. He later became president, you know.

Then I met Joel Hildebrand in a social sense. Once, I was hiking up and he was hiking down at Vernal Falls in the terrific mist, and we passed some pleasant words together. Then I met his wife and his daughter and Milton Hildebrand, and so during the 1930s, particularly the late 1930s, I formed a very close friendship with the whole Hildebrand family. This turned out to be nice later, because when we get up to the post-1945 era it will turn out that my acquaintance with Hildebrand was a great advantage, and I think I helped him too; at that time he was a director.

In addition, I think the social connection, neither as a professor nor as a director but as a friend--skiing was a very important thing in my life, and it turned out to be important in the Sierra Club connection.

RS: He was quite a dynamic individual in many ways. As I mentioned, I had him in chemistry, and it turns out my daughter, who is at Berkeley, attended a memorial lecture on chemistry he gave two years ago, I believe it was, so he has had a long period of activity and contact. But go ahead. What else do you have?

NC: Then another thing I thought might be worth mentioning, because I forgot it completely, and that is that during the late 1930s the rock climbing activity of the Sierra Club as a technical activity started up. I think that the one who really started it was a young lawyer from Berkeley by the name of Richard M. Leonard.\* He studied rock climbing in a technical way. For example, he made a study of the coefficient of friction between granite and different kinds of shoe material and the maximum angles at which the different soles

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\*Richard M. Leonard, Mountaineer, Lawyer, Environmentalist, Susan R. Schrepfer, interviewer (Regional Oral History Office, U.C. Berkeley, 1976).

NC: would resist sliding. Then he made a catalog of the slopes of important climbs like Mt. Starr King and the south side of Half Dome and the east side of Half Dome and many peaks.

Another person who joined in and became interested in rock climbing at that time was Bestor Robinson,\* who later became president. Dick Leonard also became president and was secretary for twenty years or so; he's now the president of the Save-the-Redwoods League, and he's been president or director of many other conservation organizations. It was in connection with rock climbing that I became acquainted with Dick and Bestor, with whom I worked quite seriously in later years.

In June 1932, a group of Sierra Club people who later became real good friends for a long period went down into Baja California and made what was either the first or second ascent of its highest peak, to which we gave the name, La Providencia or El Picacho del Diablo, and we didn't say which. It was high and beautiful, so we called it La Providencia, but it was a heck of a thing to climb, so we called it the Peak of the Devil. Don McLain, an old-time explorer, had been on the mountain previously. Later I worked with him on conservation.

RS: Well now, was it actually named already at that time or did the names that you mentioned get attached to it subsequently?

NC: I believe that the names were attached later, because in all the literature I have been able to read on the subject no name had been given to it, and we didn't know of any name. Well, that party included Bestor Robinson, whom I've mentioned; Norman Clyde, quite a famous mountaineer; Glen Dawson, who later was a director for many years and the son of Ernest Dawson, whose father took me on my first trip to Joshua Tree National Monument, only it wasn't a monument then; and Dick Jones, who is retired and lives at Laguna Niguel, right down the coast now; and Walter "Bubs" Brem. There again was a welding together of education and trips in the Sierra Club. So my association built up from three or four angles continuously.

About two years after this trip, I quit doing serious climbing. The reason was that I was also doing a lot of tumbling in the gym at the YMCA. One day I was going along doing a whole series of front flips, which is an exercise in which you toss your body end over end--first you land on your hands and then your feet and your hands and your feet and you do five or six of these and presumably finish standing up if you're lucky.

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\*Bestor Robinson, Thoughts on Conservation and The Sierra Club, Susan R. Schrepfer, interviewer, Sierra Club Oral History Project (Sierra Club, San Francisco, 1974).



NC: The place where I was doing this was right across a big opening into another gym and in one of these, just as I was coming down kind of fast, you know--to put my hands down and continue my turning, somebody from the other room yanked the mat out from under me, so my two hands separated and I hit the floor with my good solid head. It didn't hurt my head, but it dislocated two vertebrae, back here in my neck, right under my skull. It produced a permanent injury which is still there; these bones are out of place. For over a year I couldn't even walk without leaning against something because it turns out that the nerves of equilibrium from the semi-circular canals go right through that channel.

RS: So you had vertigo--

NC: I had terrible vertigo, and I have never since had a good sense of balance. It was June, 1934, that this happened, and I've never been any good at rock climbing since then. I just can't trust my balance.

RS: You still have a little equilibrium problem, then.

NC: Enough so that if I were to climb, say where there's a friction climb on a steep slope that there's just barely enough friction to hold you, I wouldn't be sure that I was quite vertical and I wouldn't be quite sure that I would make it. And I wouldn't dare climb on a cliff where I don't have direct aid, which I don't like anyway, but without direct aid I would have to hold on with my fingertips as well as my toes. I wouldn't be sure what position I'm in. I can't tell straight up and down. I can with my eyes but I can't with my sense of balance.

RS: But you did continue to enjoy third class climbs and scrambling?

NC: Oh, sure. I still do. In fact, two other old-timers of my age and I are going to go up and make a traverse from Blue Ridge over to San Antonio Canyon this coming summer. That's quite a long hike and involves about 3,500 feet up and about 5,000 feet down. In fact, I've been working it out on the map and studying all the altitudes and distances with a magnifying glass. Well, let's see, that takes care of that business about my climbing.

There are a couple of other things which are connected with my early experience with Sierra Club people. One was in the spring of 1933. I went on a ski trip on the east side of the Sierra, up Owens Valley, before there were any developments up there. The ski developments, ski roads and so on had not come in yet. I don't remember where we went, probably up around Mammoth Mountain somewhere, but the interesting thing is that the two people I went with were Lester Lavelle, who was a famous old Sierra Club member and

NC: an early member of the winter sports committee of the Sierra Club, and Leland Curtis. Leland is an artist, a painter. He was the official artist on the Byrd expeditions to Antarctica and made all the original oil paintings of the scenery down there in the southern part of the world. He was also a director of the Sierra Club, and he was also a pretty good skier. I don't know how I got to know him, probably I met him on one of the High Trips. So anyhow, Lester Lavelle and Leland Curtis and I had a very good ski trip and developed quite a friendship. Leland Curtis later on, maybe in 1950, moved away from southern California and I've lost track of him. Lester Lavelle and I went on other trips. He got into his eighties and recently died.

Another interesting trip, though this is not really Sierra Club, was in April, 1934. I climbed Mt. San Jacinto with a couple of students and Ellsworth Kolb. Ellsworth Kolb was one of the two Kolb brothers who set up the studio at the head of the Bright Angel trail at the Grand Canyon. He had never gone on a trip in which you started up in the morning and went downhill in the afternoon.

I want to touch briefly on an interesting trip I made in the spring of 1941. The war in Europe was not yet very active. United States was getting prepared, and mountain troops were being organized and equipment for them was being developed. Through Bestor Robinson's connections, a group of Sierra Club skiers were given the job to test out several styles of sleeping bags, tents, stoves and maybe other newly developed things, including the first mummy case sleeping bags.

The group included Bestor Robinson, Alex and Milton Hildebrand, Charlotte Mauk, Lewis Clark, Einar Nilsson, Dave Brower and me. We went up Pine Creek as far as possible by truck, then put on our skis and packs and trudged over Morgan Pass to a lake in the basin below the Bear Creek Spire. This was in April, 1941, and the entire landscape, except the cliffs, was deep with snow.

We skied around about five days, climbed the Bear Creek Spire along its north ridge, and enjoyed a wonderful wintry wilderness, as well as testing the equipment. From our camp at about 10,000 feet altitude we had a panoramic view of the Bear Creek Spire, Mount Dade, Mount Abbot, Mount Mills, Mount Morgan and many nameless crags. As I remember it, both the trip and the tests were successes, but I don't remember what exact conclusions and recommendations came out of the tests.

Well, I think that about takes care of those old matters. I probably could sum up my Sierra Club activities very briefly by saying that I was interested and active in the outdoor life with the club from about 1929 to 1934. And then I did other things

NC: until generally near the end of World War II, about 1944, when the big conservation fights started here in southern California. Then I was active in the club in various ways until I quit being a director, which I think was 1968. In the meantime we former presidents of the Sierra Club had created the Sierra Club Foundation. I became active in the foundation in 1960, when it was organized, and for the next eight years I was in both organizations. Since then I've limited myself to the foundation, and I'm the vice president of it now. I think that's about as much as I want to do. I think other people can carry on. No one person should try to do it forever.

## SIERRA CLUB COURTSHIP AND MOUNTAIN MARRIAGE

## Joan Dyar and The Southern California "Base Camp"

Richard Searle: We might get into the affairs of the Sierra Club in terms of conservation. I noticed in your information that you sent in to the history committee that you mentioned such things as the Olympic Peninsula, San Geronio, San Jacinto, Grand Canyon; you mentioned Joshue Tree also, and I guess Joan was involved in San Jacinto.

Nathan Clark: She was involved in all of those. Maybe I'd better tell how Joan came into this picture.

RS: All right, go ahead, Nate. We'll see if your version jibes with Joan's.

NC: Well, I'll tell you, she and I decided what the story would be, so it should jibe.

In 1940 or 1941 I was taking a lot of backpacking trips with young fellows. World War II had not started yet, but was sort of thundering its way along over in Europe. Incidentally, I was on Mt. Whitney the day that the war started in Europe, 1939; I was also on the top of Mt. Whitney the day it ended.

Anyway, Joan, why don't you tell how we first met?

Joan Clark: Yes. I had been a music major at the University of Washington, graduating in 1937. For the next year I lived at home in Spokane and had a few small jobs, nothing challenging. In September, 1938, at the urging of my sister Ruth (she and John Mendenhall were married just a year later), who was living here and had joined the Sierra Club, I came to California. I fully expected to return to Spokane in a few months, but never went back to stay. Ruth and I had many friends among the skiers and rock climbers, and shared an apartment

JC: that was the first real home of The Mugelnoos, which at that time, with Ruth as editor, came out twice a month.

I had heard about Nate, but didn't meet him for a couple of more years. The way I seem to remember how we met was that we were both walking around the Illilouette Falls Trail in Yosemite, in opposite directions. I was with Merlin Thayer of the Sierra Club, and you were with some boys from the YMCA. You and Merlin knew each other, and we stopped and chatted when we got to Illilouette Creek, and Merlin introduced us.

NC: I remember one thing you said to me--this I do remember: "Oh, you're Nathan Clark. I thought he was a much older man." [Laughter.]

JC: I don't remember. Anyhow, we were both famous in our own minor ways. It just happened that we lived within a mile of each other. You were on top of the Montecito hills, and I, at that time, lived down on Griffin Avenue with a group of Sierra Club people in the famous "Base Camp," which friends twit us with nowadays as having been the first southern California commune.

RS: [Laugh] We'll explore that situation later.

NC: It has a lot of Sierra Club significance too.

JC: It does. That's where The Mugelnoos was then published. We were a group of young adults and we are still close friends after more than thirty-five years.

RS: Oh, in referring to Base Camp you're not talking about Arroyo Seco playground, where I believe the meetings were held later on.

JC: No, this was a home. We had a wonderful seven room house and yard and everything furnished--linens, dishes, furniture, piano, everything, for \$75 a month. Those were the olden days.

RS: Were you working at that time?

JC: Oh yes, we were all working more or less on shoestrings, and we found this place because all of us had lived with large families, and we missed our families. We all shared equally in the house-keeping chores at Base Camp, and it was a very satisfactory set-up. I was working for the Sierra Club half-days for forty dollars a month and getting along.

NC: You should mention right there that you were the Sierra Club office here.

JC: Well, come to think about it, I was.

NC: Joan was the only person working in the Sierra Club office in Los Angeles.

RS: What about Anita Savage?

JC: She came quite a bit later. Cecelia Carney succeeded me. Anyway, a small group including my sister and me in 1939 about the 5th of May moved into this house, and it was our friends who began calling it Base Camp. People would come to Mugelnoos meetings, and they would think this was a public place, like the Arroyo Seco city playground. Actually Base Camp was a very nice home. The landlady and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Shults, lived with us for the first few months. Mrs. Shults was a cousin of Aurelia Harwood, the first and only woman president of the Sierra Club, so it made a nice tie-in. Grace Shults was very fond of her Sierra Club people, and in fact she kept in touch with us until she died in her mid-eighties a year or so ago.

I was living there at the time that I met Nate, and--

NC: And I was living here in this house.

JC: He had just really gotten this house well under way, and I guess he wanted to call me up after our introduction in Yosemite, but he wasn't used to this kind of thing, so he had to think up a good excuse. Finally he did call Capitol 6070--that was our number--and he wanted to know whether I had directions for making a sleeping bag. Cleverly, I did--also a sewing machine.

RS: Well! That's pretty original.

JC: By this time I was working for the California Dairy Council, and I had a little part-time job for the publisher of Importer's Guide, who was on a trip out here from New York City. Somebody I knew in the Junior Chamber of Commerce got me this job on a Sunday, going out to Glendale to take dictation. I recall that he advised me, "Charge him plenty! Charge him \$1.25 an hour," so I did and felt quite guilty. Well, the New Yorker wanted to know something about the Sierra Club, and he said, "I bet the people you know in the Sierra Club are either Sunday school leaders or do things with their hands and deliver me from both." So I told him about my friend who was making a sleeping bag.

RS: And he said that confirms my suspicions, right?

JC: That confirmed his suspicions all right. For a while, Nate and I really didn't see too much of each other. When was that ski trip to Keller Peak?

NC: That was a year or so later. I was skiing with some more of my male friends out from the Keller Peak Ski Hut. It was a foggy day and there was snow falling and a light wind. It was a kind of a whiteout; it was a little bit hard to see where you were going. We were skiing on the snow-covered road from the ski hut up to Keller Peak, and here came a figure through the whiteout, approaching us all by itself. As it got closer I realized it was a skier plowing along, and then I realized it was all alone, and then it got closer and I realized it was a girl, and it got closer yet and it was Joan.

JC: What was I doing there?

NC: You were skiing down from--

JC: I was skiing down the road; that was the nicest little ski trip.

NC: It was real nice. I was living here alone at that time, and we had a good fall of snow. It was in February, 1942, because I had my 41 Ford. Anyway one Sunday I wanted to go skiing, and all the guys I knew were off in the military. I couldn't find any young male person to ski with, and so I thought, "Ah, I'll call up Base Camp and see if anybody down there wants to go," and of course I had in mind I was going to take a couple of guys. I said, "This is Nathan Clark. I live up on the hill above you, and I want to go skiing, and I wonder if anybody down there would like to go," and this girl said, "Joan and I would like to go." [All laugh.]

So I packed up my skis and went down and picked up Mary Fuller-- only she wasn't Fuller then, she was Mary Bennett. So Mary Bennett and Joan and I went skiing on Keller Peak. It was a beautiful day and we had a good ski trip.

#### Sentinel Dome Wedding, 1944

NC: Well, after that Base Camp was disbanded because of the war, and Joan moved to a small house on the other side of my hill. We saw each other quite a bit oftener, took many walks in the Montecito hills, and enjoyed listening to music together. Eventually near the end of the war we decided that we'd better live in the same house, and we got married.

JC: Just to emphasize that I didn't pursue Nate, I happened to be up in Spokane most of the summer of 1944, and he had been sent back to Schenectady by Lockheed. On his way home he came to Spokane to propose to me. After I came back to California we went to Yosemite and were married.

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NOTE: There is no page 49 in this interview.

NC: That was interesting. You see, the war was still on. It was a hot summer, and we decided that we would get married on Sunday, August 6th. Early Saturday we got in my car and drove up toward Yosemite. After we got part way up in the foothills we turned off onto an old dirt road that cut off from the main Yosemite Road in order to go up--

JC: We had to get our marriage license in Mariposa.

NC: I was dressed in suntans like all the military people, and I was only in my thirties you know, and I could get by as a soldier; didn't have any insignia or anything, but I had suntans. We were driving along on this old dirt road and all of a sudden there was a kind of muffled explosion and a lot of hissing. It turned out that in all this heat the radiator hose had burst. On my way to get married, a fine place, you know. So I took out some old pieces of cloth and some shoestrings and patched up the radiator hose. Some children came along, and they told us where there was some water, and we refilled the car, drove to Mariposa, and got our license from the county clerk, a man named Jean Grosjean. We then waited for the one and only minister to finish a funeral, and engaged him to marry us, with his wife and his sister as witnesses, in Yosemite the next day.

We went to the home of Ansel and Virginia Adams, over in the Old Village, where we were their guests for a couple of weeks. Sunday afternoon the minister and ladies met us, and we drove in a procession up to the high point below Sentinel Dome on the Glacier Point Road: Joan in her high heels and her white dress and me in my blue suit, and the minister, who I guess had never done any hiking before, and his two ladies in all their elegant clothes. The five of us walked up over the rocks and stood by the Jeffrey pine on top of Sentinel Dome, and he performed the service.

JC: It was very nice.

RS: A beautiful place to have the service.

JC: The minister said he'd always remember that his first wedding ceremony was at such a beautiful place, rather than chiding us for not being married in church.

RS: It was his first wedding ceremony?

JC: Yes, and it was ours too! [Laughter.]

NC: We drove down to Yosemite Valley, and I've forgotten where the Reverend Colman and the two women went, but they disappeared. Joan and I went to the Ahwahnee Hotel for our wedding dinner. But



NC: they didn't know we were just recently married, so they didn't do anything special. Along near the end of the meal the waitress found out we had just been married, so the only thing she could think of was to bring us cups and cups and cups of coffee. [All laugh.] And then we stayed at Ansel and Virginia's. I've forgotten where Ansel and Virginia were, they were away.

JC: They had gone to San Francisco.

NC: And so we had a very nice time. It was a beautiful place, and we were completely relaxed in a private home and had the run of the place. We played their hi-fi music, and we pretty near wore out some of their records. Then we packed up our hiking gear and sleeping bags and food on our backs and hiked across the valley and up the Four Mile Trail to Glacier Point and over to Illilouette Falls and crossed it and went up on the west slope of Mt. Clark and made a camp out there. The next day we climbed Mt. Clark, 11,506. It was named for Galen Clark who was the first caretaker of the valley, not for anybody of ours.

JC: After our Yosemite honeymoon we came home and have lived in our Los Angeles hilltop house ever since. We've worked together on a lot of conservation fights, some national and others very close to home. I suppose that now you'd like to get back to talking about Sierra Club matters.

## SIERRA CLUB INTERNAL AFFAIRS: CONTRIBUTIONS AND COMMENTS

## Schism Within The Southern California Chapter, 1945

Richard Searle: You referred to various activities in the club here, and one thing I'd like to cover is the conservation and internal activities. Did you have some of those things in your notes that you were going to cover, Like Olympic Peninsula, San Geronio, San Jacinto, dams in Grand Canyon, and of course your experiences during the period of your presidency and the organization of the club? Go ahead with what you have outlined, but I will look forward in particular to hearing about those things.

Nathan Clark: Yes, I would like to talk about those. The activities come in two major categories--my interests that are related to the organization and structure of the club and interests that are related to the conservation efforts. I would like to say that I didn't quit going in the mountains because I didn't like them--because I never quit going in the mountains, but after the war I found I had other interests that I had always neglected up to that point. One of these interests turned out to be running the big rivers, and I realized that since I was a working man and only had so many weeks of vacation, that if I kept on going to the same High Sierra I'd never run any of the big rivers. And so for quite a while I was not active with the club very much on anything but the river trips.

Then I realized that I'd seen the mountains, and I'd seen the rivers, but I hadn't seen any foreign countries. So then I started going mainly to Mexico and Central America, and once to Europe. Now this is not because I had lost interest in the old things, but I just didn't want to miss the new things while I still had time to take them in. Well, getting to organizations, I'd like to get that over with, because to me it's rather a dull subject, even though it is necessary.

- RS: Perhaps you could start by outlining the dates of the major offices you held in the Sierra Club.
- NC: All right. I'll just reel these off: 1945-'48, I was chairman of the Ski Mountaineers. From 1947 to '48 I was on the executive committee of the Southern California Chapter; 1955 to '68 I was a director; 1956 I was elected fifth officer of the executive committee; '57 the vice-president; '59 to '61 president. And then my interest shifted over to the Sierra Club Foundation. I've been active in that ever since it was formed in 1960, and the last two years I've been the vice-president. I've served on ever so many committees, and I don't think there's any point in trying to remember all of them; it's too much. I don't remember; I have no record, anyway.
- RS: That's a pretty complete list anyway, certainly on the national level. My impression is that you got into the presidency in a period when the club was beginning to grow rapidly, or at least had outgrown the organization they had as far as the main office and the professional staff is concerned.
- NC: Well, there's something I want to say before that time, because I think I am probably the only person that can say it. I don't see any of the other people that you will interview that are as familiar with this story as I am. This is not ego; I happen to be the only one. Phil Bernays in his interview\* mentioned that he was so surprised and disappointed when somebody proposed that the Sierra Club's Southern California Chapter be dissolved--remember that? Phil didn't seem to know why. He thought it was a terrible thing. And I thought it would probably be good to review that.

That whole thing started when a new person by the name of James Vickrey joined the Sierra Club and quickly worked himself up to become chairman of the Southern California Chapter. It turned out that Jim Vickrey was a gavel collector. He later on boasted that he had become chairman of this, that, and the other thing, and he had ten or twenty gavels to his credit. Vickrey made friends with the downtown old-timers group of the local chapter.

A few years before Vickrey appeared, a group of students from UCLA, partly organized by Glen Dawson with some others, had developed a great interest in skiing and had formed a ski club. Then, Glen got most of them to join the Sierra Club. This was done with club agreement so that they would be part of a large reputable organization

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\*Philip S. Bernays, Founding The Southern California Chapter, Richard Searle, interviewer, Sierra Club Oral History Project (Sierra Club, San Francisco, 1975).

NC: that the U.S. Forest Service would be willing to authorize to build ski huts, which the young people sought. They took up a collection among their group--they were members of the club now--went up to the mountains and built two huts. One was the Keller Peak hut, which is now a lodge, and the other is the San Antonio hut, which is up high on Mt. San Antonio, probably, I would guess, at about 9,000 feet elevation. Then they developed two sections, the Rock Climbing Section for summer activity, and the Ski Mountaineers Section for the winter activity.

RS: What year was this--roughly when?

NC: Probably 1937 or 1938. So once they had an organization they put their muscles and their brains and their money together and did interesting things. They built these two buildings, and they bought an addressing machine so they could send out their little mimeographed paper, The Mugelnoos, to their members. They collected a little money from hut fees and subscriptions and used it to repair and maintain the huts.

Jōan Clark: Could I interject something about the San Antonio hut? They built it twice.

NC: Well, I was going to get to that. They went to all the labor of hauling all that cement and wood and hardware and glass and everything else way up on the side of the mountain and built the hut. Then it burned down, burned clear to the ground. They immediately took up a collection, cleared away the wreckage, hauled up some more stuff and built the ski hut a second time.

RS: That's perseverance. Is it still there? Is it the same one now?

NC: I think so, yes.

Anyway, by the beginning of World War II, in 1941, most of the young active people of the ski mountaineers and rock climbers had joined the military or gone off to war plants or something of that kind and were away from the area. But during the prewar period these enthusiastic, energetic young people kind of irritated the old-timers, who began to resent the independent ways of the young ones.

RS: Were the Ski Mountaineers and the Rock Climbing Sections a part of the Sierra Club?

NC: They were sections of the Angeles Chapter, I mean of the Southern California Chapter. But there was a slight animosity, because although they were all Sierra Club members, one group wanted to do one kind of thing and the others wanted to do the other. For

NC: instance, the old-timers' group wanted to have their Friday night dinner programs, which they did, and they were good. They also wanted to have lots of parties at Harwood Lodge. But the young people didn't care much about Harwood Lodge. It wasn't high enough for good skiing most of the year, and they didn't care so much about parties, and they wanted their own group so they wanted to go somewhere else.

There was a little conflict, but they got along very nicely until Jim Vickrey came onto the scene. One of the first things he did when he was chairman was to dictate to the Ski Mountaineering and the Rock Climbing Section that they would have to hand over their addressing machine to the chapter officially--physically take it to the downtown club office. He also ordered them to turn in all the income from hut fees and sale of their little paper, then come begging for operating funds. He also dictated that the ski mountaineers would have to turn over management of their ski huts to the chapter, and also their local walks or ski schedule would have to be under control of the chapter outing committees.

Well, you can imagine how this hit those fiery young people. A fellow by the name of Bob Baker was the chairman of the ski mountaineers at that time, and up to that time I had been very inactive. I went with them occasionally but not too much; I would frequently meet them on ski trips, and we would in a friendly way greet each other, but I didn't go with them. Well, when this bomb dropped in the lap of the ski mountaineers--to lose control of their huts, lose their machine, lose control of their schedule, and lose control of their funds--a very strong animosity developed.

Then, because I knew Hildebrand and Lewis Clark, Will Colby and Walter Huber and Francis Farquhar and a whole lot of other directors, they elected me as chairman of the ski mountaineers. So after being inactive in the club, I found myself right in the very heart of this controversy.

Now the thing that Phil Bernays was talking about was an aftermath of that controversy--only the controversy became so heated that Duncan McDuffie, who was president of the club at that time, an elderly man and a very kind and peaceful man, had to call a special meeting of the board of directors to settle this matter: would the chapter take away all the autonomy from the ski mountaineers or not? My brother, who was just finishing up his term as a lieutenant commander in the Navy appeared at the board meeting in San Francisco in his uniform. I, of course, represented the ski mountaineers, and Jim Vickrey represented the chapter.

NC: The other directors from southern California were Stanley Jones,\* who was the vice president of the club, and he was on the side of the chapter; Weldon Heald, a wealthy man who has left the earth now--he was trying to be neutral; Phil Bernays, a very kind man who was attempting to be neutral, who didn't really understand what the argument was about, I think. He was one of the founders of the Angeles Chapter, and he did that in good faith, and I think he was so horrified at what was going on that he really didn't understand why the ski mountaineers resisted having their autonomy taken away. And the last was Leland Curtis, the artist and great expedition climber and skier, the only one of the directors down here who was a skier and was on the side of the ski mountaineers. So Jones was for the chapter, Heald and Bernays were neutral and trying to achieve peace, and Curtis was on our side.

The board of directors then dictated that the control of the ski huts would be turned over to the Sierra Club Lodge Committee, that is the main club, not the chapter. The lodge committee thereupon immediately appointed a committee of southern California ski mountaineers as a sub-committee to take care of the huts, so the huts went back to the Ski Mountaineers Section. The board also told the chapter they'd have to let the ski mountaineers use their own addressing machine and that the ski mountaineers and rock climbers had a right to make out their own schedule. They also specified that the young people should manage their own funds. So this really meant that the chapter lost the trial completely. My brother went up to Stanley Jones after the meeting and clapped him on the shoulder and said these exact words, "Well, don't cry, Stanley."

About this time I was elected to become a member of the executive committee of the chapter. But I was still the chairman of the Ski Mountaineering Section. This put me in an awkward position; I really should be faithful to every body that I join, but the chapter old-timers, all except me, were determined to take it out on the ski mountaineers and rock climbers. So every time there'd be a meeting of the executive committee for a while, and they'd take any action or threaten any action in the committee about the ski mountaineers, I would write to my friends on the board up in San Francisco, particularly Joel Hildebrand, with whom I had skied a great deal, and with whom I had a good friendship. So the people up there knew what was going on down here within about one day after it happened. Of course it was very obvious who was leaking the information, and in order to stop the leaks about chapter executive committee actions against the ski mountaineers, they called meetings of the committee but didn't notify me. I was being excluded.

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\*E. Stanley Jones, Sierra Club Officer and Angeles Chapter Leader, 1931-1975, Sierra Club Oral History Project (Sierra Club, San Francisco, 1976).

NC: The directors learned of this and at a subsequent board meeting, when the whole thing was being discussed, one member of the board who couldn't stand having so much argument about internal affairs of the club--and that was Ansel Adams--simply moved "that the Southern California Chapter be dissolved." That's what was so abhorrent to Phil Bernays, because he was probably the man of all men who had done the most to found the chapter. Now Ansel did not intend that members would lose their membership here, or that there would be no chapter organization. He simply didn't want the same group running it.

Ansel's motion did not carry, and that's probably good, because the whole thing blew over anyway. A new group of people got in charge of the chapter, and the big conservation battles of the late 1940s loomed up ahead of us. We forgot our internal differences and went on. Within a couple of years Jim Vickrey, who had started the whole thing, left the club, and I've never heard about him since. Since Phil Bernays seemed so disturbed, in the report of his interview, about this, I thought it was necessary to explain that the whole thing was brought about mainly by the egotism and arbitrariness of one person, Jim Vickrey.

Phil Bernays also refers to Leland Curtis in his interview. He said on page eighteen, "We had our problems, yes. At one time we had, as we called him, a traitor to our cause. He was an artist, Leland Curtis." Well, I'm kind of sorry that Phil put it that way, but he did. I said Phil didn't understand the ski mountaineers controversy. Leland Curtis was not a traitor to the Sierra Club. He was a director, and he had been a member for many years and supported the club. He was a traitor to the proposal of the chapter to take over the autonomy of the ski mountaineers, that's all. But he was not a traitor to the cause of conservation. Just as Stanley Jones was a traitor to the ski mountaineers, if you want to put it that way. They simply took sides.

More Acrimony: Farquhar and Colby

NC: This brings out an important lesson for the Sierra Club and all other organizations. This isn't the only time that there's been acrimony at the upper levels of the club, and it's going to continue. A very good example of a conflict between people who are highly respected is between Francis Farquhar and Will Colby, both old-time members of the club, and good friends, both sincere conservationists, both great outdoor people. Both of them have made first ascents of mountains. They were noble and wonderful people. They've both left us now.

NC: Will Colby was leading the Sierra Club High Trips for many years, after John Muir quit and I guess even before John Muir quit. He was so eager to make a success of those that he saw to it that the club never lost any money on the Sierra Club High Trip outings. But he didn't keep books. He didn't keep accurate records. I understand that on one outing there was a loss of several thousand dollars--that is, the cost of the outing, due to packing and difficulties they had, food and so forth, was several thousand dollars more than the money deposited by the members, and Will Colby made that up out of his own pocket. He was that honest.

But Francis Farquhar was professionally a certified public accountant, so of course he wanted everything down in columnar form and properly categorized and so forth, and he and Colby had it back and forth for years. There was a case of acrimony over a completely unnecessary--

RS: Different backgrounds, and so on.

NC: Different backgrounds. And there have been others where people differed because of simply, as you say, the background. We've seen it in recent years, the difference between different members of the board in just the last few years.

#### Conflicts Between Club and Foundation

NC: There is another very good example, and this is a very sad one, involving the Sierra Club Foundation. It just came to a head in the last two months.

The Sierra Club Foundation started out with only fifteen trustees and no employees. As we gathered money and influence, we had to keep track of many gifts to us and gifts and grants that we made to other people and other organizations. It finally became necessary to hire somebody, a paid person, to keep track of this and also to aid us in the solicitation of gifts and bequests. So we hired, after interviewing several people, a young fellow by the name of Cole Wilbur. We hired him probably about 1969 or 1970, and he had the equivalent position to the executive director of the Sierra Club, only his title was executive secretary.

Cole Wilbur did the best he could, but he got too busy so we hired a young fellow by the name of Steve Stevick as the administrator to take care of the administration of this organization, and then within the last year we've hired Stef Barragatto as a southern California representative, a full time man reporting to



NC: Wilbur. He has an office right next to the Sierra Club office here in Los Angeles on Beverly Boulevard. Also we hired Alice Pinsley and set her up in New York to represent the Sierra Club Foundation there. That's necessary because many of the big gifts and bequests come from New York. It's necessary to have somebody make the contacts, build up interest, and maintain the relationship with these people. And then we hired several secretaries and clerks, and we must now have a staff of about ten, reporting to Cole Wilbur, who then reports to the Board of Trustees.

Then the Sierra Club president, Larry I. Moss, became unhappy with the fact that we weren't giving the club more money. And they decided that they wanted to start their own solicitation business. But the Sierra Club of course does not have tax exemption, so they proposed to divide the Sierra Club into two branches--that branch which does the legislative activity, and another branch which carries on the non-legislative activity: the publications, the wilderness conferences, the outings, the research, and all the things that are non-legislative. They wanted to have their own solicitation organization, which of course would be competing directly with the Sierra Club Foundation to collect non-legislative funds.

This was under Larry Moss when it started. Larry started it because of the ambition and persistence of Denny Wilcher, who was the fund collector for the Sierra Club. Denny Wilcher apparently wants to be the fund collecting agency for the whole Sierra Club family of organizations. Denny made life so miserable for Cole Wilbur that in December, 1975, Wilbur resigned. So here's a case where the personal ambition and jealousy of one man, Denny Wilcher, possibly backed up by a few others, is forcing an inconvenient and unnecessary change in personnel on the foundation under the claim that we aren't cooperating. Yet ninety-five percent of our free money we give to the Sierra Club.

This is another example of the kind of conflict that appears between people who are all working for the same cause. That's why I say that conflict is inevitable, and we have to regulate ourselves and regulate our policies so that we don't let these conflicts become major things.

RS: I hope everything will work out in the future and the situation will resolve itself into a more workable one.

NC: Yes, I hope so too. This all came to a climax when I was in the wilds of Sonora, down in Mexico exploring some canyons, so I did not go to the joint meeting of the executive committee of the Sierra Club and the executive committee of the Sierra Club Foundation, on December 12, 1975, to try to solve this problem of the minor

NC: antagonisms. As a whole, the board of directors of the club and the board of trustees of the foundation are very eager to cooperate. It's just a few individuals who cause the trouble.

Now, since then, since Cole Wilbur left, one of our trustees, Nick Clinch, has been appointed as the executive secretary of the foundation. He will have to resign as a trustee, because a person can't be in the position of employing himself. Well, I think that's enough on those subjects.

RS: One question, Is that a full-time job, that of executive secretary?

NC: Yes.

#### The Dave Brower Episode: A Conflict Over Methods

NC: Now one more of these acrimonious things is the Dave Brower\* episode. Of course, you've been around all through that and I'm sure that--well, I suspect that other people you've interviewed have told you their perspective on it.

RS: True, but at the same time I think that this, by nature, needs many viewpoints, because I don't think any one person could at the time have an overall perspective, and I believe that you came onto the scene in an earlier stage, so perhaps you can approach it from that viewpoint.

NC: I probably have a different viewpoint from other people here in the south, because all my early activity in the Sierra Club centered on the Bay Area, and I knew most of the directors who came from the Bay region up until, say, the last few years. Since the club has expanded so, and directors have been elected from all over the United States, of course I don't know those people, but I knew all the old-timers.

I knew Dave Brower before he was even in the employ of the club, and then back in the early 1940s I think--maybe you can check up in the handbook and find the date--but anyway back in some time like that, the directors, which included among others Dick Leonard and my brother, and Francis Farquhar and Will Colby and Walter Huber, and a lot of these people we respect so much, decided that

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\*David R. Brower, oral history in process.

NC: the club needed a paid person to represent the club and go to meetings and present the club's side at hearings.

A certain man was available, Dave Brower, of course, who had worked for the University Press, which was connected with the University of California and with publications. And so he was put on, I think on a one-third time basis. Then as the club got a little bit more money because it got a few more members, maybe it was up to eight or nine thousand members by that time, they put him on half-time. Then they put him on three-fourth or two-thirds or something, and finally they put him on full time.\*

But most of us knew Dave before he was anything in the club other than a very energetic and enthusiastic member. He was a good rock climber, a good skier, and very enthusiastic about the things that we are, in terms of preserving the beauty and the cleanliness of the mountains. So he seemed to be the natural one to put on this job. He knew all the club stood for, he was an educated person, he was enthusiastic and available. As time went on he developed a strong desire to get certain things done that the directors wouldn't accept. For instance, in the late 1940s, I guess--

RS: He was in the armed services mainly around 1944?

NC: In 1945, '46, or thereabouts.

RS: So this would be a year or two after that maybe.

NC: He would use methods that the rest of us didn't like. For instance, he would impugn the motives of some public officials, and not only that, in his position he could get this published in the Bulletin. Now I may be wrong in directly saying that he went that far, but he went pretty far. He went pretty far in committing the club, and we continually had to be challenging him at the board meetings. At that time he and Virginia Ferguson were the only employees the only employees the club had in San Francisco.

Well, then, in the mid 1950s he had been able to arrange a loan of money to the club to publish a book of Ansel Adams' photographs, which came out as This Is the American Earth. The board discussed this at great length, whether we should undertake such a big expense in terms of the clubs' total annual budget. Well, we did. We undertook it, and as I understood it as a director at that time, the proposal was that we publish this book, and we would make

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\*David Brower hired as full-time executive director, 1952.—Ed.

NC: some money. The income would pay for the book, and there would be a little profit which could pay for starting another book or give some money to the conservation cause of the club.

It turned out that it didn't produce that profit, but more books were published anyway. There was a great deal of resistance on the part of some directors to approving more and more publications at a time when we were going further and further into the red, because we couldn't seem to take the money in at the right time, to phase it in right so that we had the money when we had to pay the bills.

RS: Did the books just appear, or were they--did you have to approve their publication? It sounds as if basically he was running the shop, and you sort of heard about what happened after the fact.

NC: He would propose a book, particularly American Earth and then Words of the Earth, which had Cedric Wright's pictures. Then we would ask him questions in the board meeting, but of course the board meeting was usually only one day, and we had to talk about many things in that one day, including the whole annual budget sometimes. And so we couldn't stay on that one subject very long. We never learned the details. We didn't know what company would do the printing or what company would do the binding. We didn't have a chance to read the text or see the photographs.

RS: I see. Was the publication committee in existence then?

NC: Not yet. We felt that we had an enthusiastic and sincere executive director. (I guess that's what we called him; I forget what we called him at first, but he became executive director eventually anyway.) We all knew that Dave was sincere and his heart was in the right place, but we didn't like his methods. And then we began to get stories, rumors that some of the people who were writing the text and supplying the pictures to be published were very unhappy about something. And then it finally came out that Dave was making verbal contracts with authors and with photographers, and never putting anything in writing.

I remember at one of the board meetings back about maybe 1958 or so, we practically ordered him to at least get a letter of intent before he got anybody to do anything, but he didn't do that. And finally, about those years, two different people threatened to sue us if they didn't get a contract--after they had delivered. It got to the point where we were actually afraid of a big lawsuit over the use of script material or photographs that had never been agreed on. There was no agreement as to what to do with them, no agreement for instance whether these things would be used in the calendars or on postcards, or whether they would be sold to other organizations. There was no letter at all on some of them.

NC: By this time I had been a director probably four or five years. I was vice-president by then, and perhaps because they couldn't find anybody else on the board that hadn't already been president, in 1959 they elected me. There's a humorous quirk in this. Will Colby hadn't seen me very much since the 1929 High Trip and the early 1930s, when I was about 24. When I was elected president I was 54. Mr. Colby was then in his high eighties and honorary president of the club. When asked what he thought of the new officers, he replied that they were all right, but he thought Nate Clark was pretty young for president.

Now, I should say that I'm not the kind of a person who seeks authority. I don't have any hunger for credit and importance. I've got lots of personal interests of my own, and I certainly did not want to be president. I thought it would be a terrible job for me, and it was. It was a terrible job because it takes so much time, and yet my employer, Lockheed, was very reluctant to let me take any time off at all, or even use my Lockheed secretary to type the letters. Well, my Lockheed secretary has typed lots of letters for the Sierra Club, but it was not with the permission of the company.

I had to do everything on weekends and evenings, as well as try to bring up a family and finish the house and have a life of my own. I was also doing a lot of tumbling and things in the gym, and I was swimming quite a lot, and I didn't like to give those up, so I didn't want to be president. But I got elected and did the best I could. One of the first things we had to do was to clip the wings of Dave, because he was getting us into such a financial situation that we were actually afraid the Sierra Club might go under.

RS: That was about 1960, or '58?

NC: Yes, about 1958. The only thing I could do alone as president was to create a publications committee, and as people told me later, that was quite a letter that created that committee. I wrote a letter to the board of directors requesting that they approve the publications committee, and this letter went on stating what the franchise or the duty of the committee would be and what its limits of authority would be, and what Brower was supposed to do; it was defining the whole situation. Now I don't know whether the publications committee's franchise has changed since then, but that was the beginning of it, and it was forced on us by Dave's refusal to have any contracts, to keep costs.

Of course he did a lot of other things--for example, whenever Dave traveled anywhere by air, and he did much more than anybody else had, he would always travel first class. Everybody else went coach.

NC: I traveled a lot for Lockheed, and I was in the aircraft business, and I traveled coach; I always do. Dave was also the one who started the policy of taking important people in government, like the secretary of the interior and the head of the Forest Service and the Park Service, or the regional directors, or whoever he dealt with, to private meetings and being pretty free with the liquor. And we didn't feel that Sierra Club funds should be used to buy liquor.

RS: He was applying the approach which more affluent organizations might be able to afford, as if it were deductible.

NC: Well, Dave came back to San Francisco after one of these trips, and I called a meeting of the executive committee of the board of directors, the top management of the organization.

Dave began telling us where he went and some of the things that went on. Then he got to a certain point and told us point-blank that he couldn't tell us the agreement he reached. I said, "Dave, what do you mean you can't even tell the president of the Sierra Club the arrangement you made in the name of the club?" Ed Wayburn, Charlotte Mauk, Dick Leonard, and my brother and I sat there and waited. Dave just sat there at his desk with his mouth open and said nothing. That was one of the conflicts that we had, that he would go out and make commitments, and he wouldn't even tell those of us who were, by law, the responsible people.

RS: And at that point in time I presume, naturally if this were a corporation the next consideration would be whether this person is going to retain his job.

NC: Well, it took several years to drop him, but we did, finally.

I have to say in honesty that Dave was doing the darndest he could possibly think of to advance the cause of conservation. He was not trying to hurt it; he was as faithful as a person could be. So again, it was kind of like the relationship between Francis Farquhar and Will Colby--it was a conflict on the methods.

RS: Was the publications committee effective? And do you happen to remember who the first chairman of it was?

NC: The first chairman, I think was August Frugè, wasn't it?

JC: Yes.

RS: Then he was probably chairman all the way up through 1968 or so, for eight or ten years.

NC: He was chairman for quite a while, and I think he was a very capable person. Another one appointed to the committee was George Marshall, later to be president of the club and also secretary and a trustee of the Sierra Club Foundation.

RS: Did the contracts--of course there were many verbal agreements--did the contract situation ever get cleared up as far as you know after the committee was appointed? I have the impression that it still wasn't closely handled as late as 1967, 1968. It was my impression that there were still questions about getting people under contract. At least at that time do you know if things were going pretty well?

NC: Yes. That's right. You had kids, and you had pretty good luck with them but you must realize that after a certain age, you can't completely control your kids. You can't be with them. They have to go walking out of the house and go their own way. And they can do things that you may not approve of later, but they can still do them. Well, the same applied to Dave Brower. He was our child. We could tell him what to do, but it was another thing to make him do it. And so he would go out and make his oral agreements. He thought he was doing the right thing, and I guess that either he was defying us, or else he just forgot. I don't know why, but he kept on getting us into trouble financially, and I think probably that was the basis of the difficulties we had.

Now the publications committee, you brought up that, I think the publications committee went into action right away. One of the things we did was to mandate that the publications we published would have to be reviewed by the publications committee before they would be published, and I don't know exactly how that worked because I had other responsibilities as president too, but the publications committee did function, and I think they did a great deal of good. And I think they still do.

#### Sierra Club President, 1959-1961: Contributions to Club Management

RS: When you became president what other changes did you initiate in addition to the publications committee, as far as the club organization was concerned? Maybe I'm going off of Dave now a little bit. Were there other organizational changes that you made besides the publications committee? I believe that this was a period of transition where we were going from a shoebox operation to something beyond that.

NC: My attitude was that the president was supposed to preside. That's his job. As far as I was concerned that's all I wanted

NC: to do, to preside, and have the executive committee or the board make all the decisions. I didn't want it to be a one-man dictatorship. So one of the first things I did was to assign certain categorical duties to every member of the executive committee.

For example, in most organizations that I've ever been connected with, the vice-president has no function really. He's supposed to operate in case of the president's absence, but aside from that (and the president usually sees to it that he's not absent) he doesn't have anything to do. And the other thing is the fifth member of the executive committee, who has nothing to do except to offer an opinion. So, since I didn't want to have to do everything, I just categorically assigned certain duties to the vice-president and certain duties to the fifth member of the executive committee, and that took the burden off the secretary and the president, which was a good thing to do because we were both overloaded.

Another thing that I felt I had to do was to hire a full time professional manager to manage the office. I convinced the board of that, and we finally set aside so many thousand dollars from the budget for, I guess, 1960 to hire what we called an office manager, and his duties would be to see that the records were kept up to date, and see that the money was kept track of, the dues from members and donations, and bills were paid and so on.

We hired a fellow by the name of Elmer Marriatt. He was about forty-five years old, and he was a professional in the field of office management. When Elmer Marriatt took over he found that poor Virginia Ferguson, who was trying to do everything in the Sierra Club all by herself, had over \$8000 in a shoebox in her desk that she hadn't been able to take care of and properly bank and properly account for. She was just overloaded to the point where she couldn't possibly do it all. Well, we didn't know that till Marriatt made his first report to us.

RS: Going through the office, I can see the letter. [Laughter.]

NC: No, he was nice about it. Marriatt was a good person and was eager to get along and make a success of his career with the club. Incidentally, just to make this a little more confusing, he was a member of that Unitarian Church choir back years before, where Lewis was a bass and I was a tenor, and Omo Grimwood was the soprano and Verginie de Fremery was the organist.

RS: Did Marriatt come to the Sierra Club as a result of your finding him?



NC: No, it was pure coincidence. He was doing his best to get along, but it finally leaked out that he was having some trouble with Dave. Dave wouldn't tell him what was going on. Dave would make commitments and forget all about them. And it got worse and the antagonism got worse, and finally at a board meeting in the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco, Marriatt stood up in the meeting and resigned and said, "If you want this club to survive you've got to watch your executive director."

RS: Was this before or after your presidency?

NC: Must have been after, I think it was about 1961. We hired him during my presidency, in fact that was one of the first things I did. Of course I had been vice-president for a couple of years, and I'd been the fifth member of the executive committee. That's why I felt so sorry about those two offices. I'd held both of them at different times.

A person shouldn't be secretary unless he lives in the Bay region, where the office is, in my opinion, and it's much preferable for the treasurer to be there too, where all the banks and investment agencies are.

RS: I can see the problem there. I guess Mr. Marriatt rather spectacularly resigned. What happened after he left?

NC: Immediately they had to get another man, and I've forgotten what his name was.

RS: It wasn't Donald Tweedy, was it, or did that come later?

NC: I couldn't tell you. I got interested in the foundation and in other things that Joan and I have been doing that I haven't told you anything about yet, which were very time-consuming and energy-consuming. So I didn't pay any attention, but I know they hired another man, and they did what I thought was a very foolish thing. They gave him a little bit better title--like you say you hire the first guy as a lieutenant, and he doesn't satisfy you; so you hire a new man as a captain, and he's not quite good enough; so you let him go and hire the next one as a general, but it's all the same job.

RS: So they gave that person the title but not the authority.

NC: They gave him the same authority, and a better title, and better pay, but it was the same job. And the board did that repeatedly, and they're still doing it. They keep changing the title--each time making it sound a little bit better--but the man basically still has the same thing to do, and that's to keep the business

NC: affairs of the office running right. Now of course in modern times, and by that I mean perhaps increasingly over the last ten years, the Sierra Club national headquarters office has taken on quite a large staff. At my last count it was ninety-three. With the growth of the club, the matter of accounting for things is a much bigger job. For instance, look at the Bulletin and see how many trips there are that have to be accounted for.

Another thing that Dave Brower did was to keep separate accounting for the trips and for the rest of the club. An accountant won't ever accept that. For an accountant you have to have all of your operations on one master sheet, and then you can subdivide them. Now that everything has to go through the Sierra Club office, of course, a more complicated accounting system is needed, and even the annual voting for directors has to be counted on a computer. My brother is the chairman of the judges of elections, has been for a number of years, and every year he tells me at great length of the problems he's had in trying to get all the ballots counted and all the irregularities that come in straightened out.

RS: I've talked to him just a little bit. I can appreciate it, and I guess it also gives you a little sympathy for the voter registrars in the local counties here. Do you have anything like job descriptions or office procedures? Of course that was something that an office manager would actually implement.

NC: As president, I wrote the job description for the original office manager and took it up with the board and we discussed it. Bestor Robinson had his little bit to put in on it, and Dick Leonard wanted to say some. I can't remember whether Will Siri was a director at that time. I think he was. Cliff Youngquist was a director, but he wasn't too much interested in that. Dick and Bestor were the main ones that added good material to that, and then it was up to him, this office manager, to write the job descriptions for anybody who worked under him.

For some reason, Dave Brower always wrote his own job description, which I think is a nice privilege, but who else could write it, actually?

RS: Well, it's not unusual to have a person write what he thinks his job is and then to have management go over it with him, but I don't know whether that was done in this case. It might have been something desirable in view of reaching a mutual understanding.

NC: I'd like to get back to Dave Brower just a minute. Some of the things that created antagonism between Dave and the directors were these matters of finance I talked about like the contracts,

NC: impugning the motives of public officials to a variable extent, publishing articles on subjects which at that time we thought were not proper for Sierra Club discussion. Such as population. He put in the Bulletin articles on population. We didn't know they were coming, and when we got our Bulletin there it was. It took us very much by surprise.

RS: And had he implemented policy which should have been approved by the board?

NC: Should have been approved. I'm trying to think of some of the other things he did. He was an advocate of using every possible means of accomplishing our objective, and I think that it was his way of influencing congressmen, which becomes a legislative act, which probably caused us to lose our tax exemption. I don't think anybody else on the board would have done it. Dick Leonard was very much against it, and the rest of us had to go along, and we were afraid we would lose our tax exemption if we kept on telling people to write to Congress, and particularly if the Sierra Club headquarters sent letters to Congress urging that certain laws be passed or not passed.

In fact, we recognized that probably back about as far as 1957, and in several sessions of the executive committee we had some pretty fierce arguments with Dave about that, but he wouldn't come around to our way. And it was because of that that in probably the fall of 1959, Dick Leonard, and Bestor Robinson, and Harold Bradley, and Alexander Hildebrand, and a few of us got together in a private meeting--not an official Sierra Club meeting--and talked the whole thing over, and decided we simply would have to start another organization to take care of getting funds that would be tax-exempt, and then we would have to keep it non-legislative. And that was the beginning of the creation of the Sierra Club Foundation.

RS: Then did they form the Sierra Club Foundation partly out of concern that the club might lose its tax deductible status?

NC: It was entirely that, one hundred percent that. In fact the articles of incorporation specify that the purpose of the Sierra Club Foundation is to collect and disperse funds. And for activity it said "for charitable, educational, etc., projects that are not in conflict with Article 501C3 of the Internal Revenue Service."

RS: So it can do anything that is tax deductible.

NC: Just by our article of incorporation we have to be tax deductible.

RS: That's very straightforward. [Laughter.]

NC: You've got to understand one thing about Dick, he's very straight-forward, he always comes to the point, explains it very clearly, and he is clear, he's got a clear mind. He's a great asset to the club.

Well, anyway, getting back to Dave, he did all these things like radio announcements and articles that were not approved by the board, continuing to impugn people's motives and continuing to urge legislation and so forth. But none of this was against the cause of conservation--it was only a different way of doing things--so I have to say, it was real important to be honest about it. Dave is not an enemy of conservation; he simply is a very hard person for anybody else to manage.

Now when he founded the John Muir Institute and the Friends of the Earth, which he did, you know, he was in such a responsible position he had to make a go of it. A lot of us that are not closely connected with him wonder how he did it, because he wasn't doing it with the club. Now maybe getting away from the club was the thing that kind of jacked him up to the point where he used better methods.

RS: Well, there was basically nobody to fall back upon or anybody else to pick up the traces, and I presume that if you don't have money then you can't spend it. It may have been to that point.

Charlotte Mauk

NC: I wanted to say a few things about Charlotte Mauk, because we have hardly mentioned her. Charlotte was my secretary, one of the few lady secretaries, perhaps the only lady secretary, the club has ever had. She was a gentle person, she loved the wilderness very much, and she and my brother and I were all very good friends. We had known each other for over thirty years at that time, because we had met in the 1920s, and by now it was the late 1950s. She also was the one who conceived the idea and brought to reality the wilderness conferences, which of course have held the attention of the public, government services, other organizations such as the Wilderness Society, and many chapters of the Sierra Club, and have been held in big cities all over the country for a long time. That was all Charlotte's doing.

RS: I'm trying to think of when the first wilderness conference was. Is that a question you can answer?

NC: No. Probably early 1950s, wouldn't it have been? [ed: First Wilderness Conference, 1949.]

She continued as club director until the term limit made it impossible for her to be reelected. As it did all the old directors, that got her out. Before she left the board of the Sierra Club we elected her as a trustee of the Sierra Club Foundation. So she served in that capacity until she died of compound, complicated things last year.

#### Some Thoughts on Club Procedures and Problems

RS: You expressed a thought in our conversation prior to one of these sessions about the three-term limit for Sierra Club directors. Do you care to comment on that at this time?

NC: Yes. I'm against it. I feel that a limit on the terms of the club officers is a good thing and very appropriate for a social organization. I think probably the majority of people that join a social organization such as a bridge club or golf club or maybe the Masons (I'm not a member) or other social clubs get in it because they have particularly high interest in dealing with people. And in order to have the club go, they invent various activities--they have dinners and dances and trips and various things that are to keep the members interested--but the prime objective of the organization is to serve as a gathering place for people. And for that kind of an organization I think it's logical for people to rise to the top; everybody should have a chance.

But I think in a manufacturing organization, General Electric, Lockheed, General Motors, many others, what you want is the best-qualified person, and if the best-qualified person stays the best he should be kept on, because the objective of such an organization is not to produce a social opportunity, for the employees or for the members; it's to get a very specific impersonal thing accomplished. And so I feel that if you can get really qualified people you should keep them, and you should retain the benefit of that knowledge of what's happened.

This has come to my attention many times in the board of directors, where Will Colby or Will Siri or Dick Leonard or Lewis Clark or Bestor Robinson could give an answer in a few seconds to the feasibility of some campaign or some method of approach on a campaign--I mean a conservation campaign--that a relative newcomer would know nothing about. I feel therefore that, in an organization where an impersonal objective is the prime objective,

NC: we shouldn't force a change in officers just to have a change.

I don't think that change for the sake of change is any good in such a case. I'm very much against it. It isn't for me--I was very glad to get out. In fact, I was just about to refuse to run again, even though on one of the elections I got the highest number of votes. It's that I think it was a great mistake to get Dick Leonard out, for example, and I regret that this kind of a thing goes on. But you see, there's so much of a social aspect of the Sierra Club, and many of the members see only that.

RS: You have an opinion, though, let's say the best should be on the board, and that's certainly true, but do you have any opinions of how the members should know if there are any other people who would be equally good or maybe even better? How should the members judge the situation? We have the selection by members at large. Have you ever thought about that aspect of the situation?

NC: Your question opens up a very fertile field for thought and discussion. I think it's a problem for anybody voting in an election, whether it's for public office such as city councilman or state senator or in a private organization such as the Sierra Club, to be able to obtain reliable information and the necessary perspective to know how to vote. For example, suppose when it comes to the election of a state assemblyman--I take this example because I'm trying to make a general statement rather than show any prejudice about the Sierra Club--maybe there would be four candidates for that office, and you would have to decide which one to vote for. You can vote for only one. So in the ideal case perhaps you would spend an evening privately in the living room at the home of each candidate, one after another, and you would talk for maybe three hours, and you'd ask questions and he would say what he had to say. When you got through, would you really know very much about that man? I don't think you would. You'd know something, but you wouldn't know really everything.

RS: That's true--he's on his best behavior.

NC: And he's up for show. Now, in public office you don't get anywhere near such a chance. You read stuff in the newspaper and see placards on the telephone poles, and you hear things on the radio and see them on the TV, and that's about all you have to go by. All of that is put up simply for public consumption. It may not represent the person at all. Well, the same kind of a situation, I think, applies to the Sierra Club. It even did when we had 5,000 members, and now with 150,000 it has simply intensified some, compared to what it used to be.

NC: So I don't know exactly what to do, but I do feel that the way we elect directors is not very good. In the last three elections I've taken the trouble, for instance, in my own case, to read through all of the statements, and then I'd make a big chart with all of the issues brought up by all of the candidates, maybe one candidate would mention six things, another would mention eleven, another one four, but these wouldn't all be the same things, so I would end up with a chart of maybe fifteen or eighteen different criteria. This man doesn't want pollution. Somebody else wants trips for the young people. Somebody else wants financial responsibility. They're all different problems.

Then I would go back over all these statements and make up a chart, putting the names of the candidates below each other in the left-hand column and issues in the other columns, checking off the things that various people brought up. In that way I could tell which candidates brought up the greatest number of questions that they were for or against, and I could also tell which ones were for the things that I thought were the best. But this is a terrible job; it took all one day to do that.

RS: This wouldn't really protect you against the demagogue.

NC: No. Certainly not.

RS: That sort of brings up another question, I won't digress too long, but I have heard comments at board meetings that as the club grew larger the presence of so many people at meetings resulted in board members reacting by acting as if they were in public and performing.

NC: Speech-giving.

RS: As opposed to perhaps being willing to let their hair down and say what they really think and take a flyer once in a while. Having been on the board, what was your feeling from that side of the table?

NC: I think that's exactly right, having been on that board and several other boards and having been on management of a big corporation, I know that sometimes you have to have executive sessions when people can say what they really think--you might say they have a knock-down-drag-out verbal fight. They're still friends, but they differ with each other and don't pull any punches. But when you have representatives of the press, and you have members at large who haven't the least idea of what the problems are--they're here for the first time at a meeting, and they can't possibly get the proper perspective--you simply can't speak for yourself freely. You can't do it.

RS: People could misunderstand because the context doesn't allow ample reply? One thing has been done, although not all of the time. When a new board is elected, they have an initiation retreat, so to speak, where certain members of the staff and the board get together and essentially hammer things out and bring the new members up to speed, hopefully. In your period of participation did the board ever do things of that nature? Maybe the executive sessions took care of that. What do you think about the idea as such?

NC: We didn't have any such training sessions when I was on the board. It probably would be a good thing. Actually there is so much to be brought up that it would be quite a meeting, but more than that, any issue that has any controversy--that is, that has more than one side--would have to be explained by somebody, and how are we going to get the person that can present this thoroughly and yet neutrally? I don't know how to do that.

I would like to make a suggestion. It's one I feel is very important, which I wish every candidate for public office would be required to follow: that is, he would either be given a list of the dominant issues of the day, or he would have to volunteer his own list, and then--and this is the important thing--he would have to state his order of priorities. I think that order of priorities is much more important than saying what you're for or against. As they say in the aircraft industry, everybody's for motherhood. Everybody wants less pollution and less timber cutting and less mining, better air and more forests and more parks and so forth; everybody wants all of these, and more member participation, and more funding to the chapters.

Everybody wants all of these fine things, and each by itself is a very worthwhile objective. But life isn't that simple in reality. Therefore I think that we should know where a person's feeling of priorities goes. For instance, if we don't have enough money to hire lawyers to fight dams on the Snake River and also publish a new exhibit format book, which does he think we ought to spend our money on? I don't think that he should give priorities on specific projects, but I think each candidate should state what his priorities in general categories of club responsibilities should be.

RS: I think you brought up a good point about the candidates, and it seems to me it could be carried forward to the operation of the board itself. During your tenure on the board, did the board formally or informally establish priorities, or was it sort of inherent in the proceedings? Was there actually a list of priorities?



NC: There wasn't a list, but we established certain categories of priorities. For example, in 1957 and '58, we felt that the two highest priorities were to develop the Sierra Club policy on national parks and the Sierra Club policy on national forests. The first year that I was president, at Dave Brower's strong urging, I held the board to concentrate on that for several ... meetings. We had long discussions and went over them page by page, item by item, to try to develop those two things, but at the same time we had many other problems. Then one year the problem was the financial status of the club, as you know, and that had to take priority. We didn't have a nicely listed set of projects to give our attention to or put our money on, and then arrange them in decreasing order of priority. I don't think that's possible.

RS: Well also, it could become sort of a bible which then resists change, and the priorities themselves should not be the goal, in the sense the list should not be the goal. It's just an indicator of what's most important, and it has to be rearranged for you to succeed in the top priority. I can certainly see that.

NC: I think it's a cardinal principle of the operation of any top management body such as a board of trustees or board of directors, that it must never allow itself to make rules that will inhibit its own actions. It mustn't because you don't know as much at any time as you're going to know in the future; therefore you must never say that I will not do so and so in the future or that I will. This is fundamental, and yet it's kind of cruel, because everybody who is subject to the decisions of the governing body usually has to go by them and doesn't dare make change.

A perfect example of that, which has occurred many times in any organization, I guess--it did in the Sierra Club and it has in the foundation to a certain extent--is that the governing body, such as the board of directors of the club, will be confronted with a problem which requires a decision, and after discussing it for as long a time as they feel they can afford to spend on it at that particular meeting, it will be delegated to a committee. So a committee will be appointed, usually with one director as the chairman and other well-known or otherwise qualified members.

The committee meets, and the committee doesn't know what the board wants. It doesn't know what limitations the board puts, so after three months or six months--that's the period in between meetings--it comes back and says, "We need more information from the board. What does the board want us to do?" But as a director, I say, "We don't know what we want. That's the reason we gave it to the committee." This is the way that any

- NC: limitation put on a committee or even on the top governing body acts as a handicap rather than a help.
- RS: Well actually, the scope of the problem is often the first assignment of a committee. You start at the highest level, you know: I have a symptom. Is there a problem? And carry it on down. Hopefully the board is perceptive enough that maybe they can scope the problem so that the committee can go into more depth from the beginning, rather than scoping it and then going into depth. Well, it sounds so familiar that all I can do is commiserate with you or agree with you.
- NC: I just have to make one more comment on what you just said. In 1936 when I left my job as an instructor in electrical engineering at USC, I started as a senior engineer in the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power during their frequency change, when the city changed from fifty cycles to sixty cycles. I was very young, I wasn't even thirty, but because I had been a professor, somehow I seemed to have a terrific status, and they made me production engineer of this whole blooming thing, employing thousands of people. Remember, I'd been a professor; I didn't know all this practical stuff that you get out in a big power system. So I went to my boss and said, "I don't understand the problem." He said, "Nate, when you understand the problem you've got half the answer. Find out what the problem is and come and tell me." That applies to all these things.

Getting back to the elections, I just want to wind it up. In my personal preference I would say that requiring a statement of priorities, at least as of the time of the election, would be a real contribution.

There is another thought that I wanted to get on the tape. To me it's important. The Sierra Club has the problem of the relationship of the staff, who stay on indefinitely, being controlled by directors or trustees, who only serve a limited term. It puts the directors at a disadvantage, because in case of any kind of a difference of opinion as to how things ought to be done or what has been done in the past, the staff by the very fact that it has been there a long time can compromise or even mislead the directors, who haven't been on the national scene very long.

There's another matter, too. We pay everybody to do everything nowadays. We pay the transportation, and we pay the hotel bills, and the meals, and the drinks, and we pay the lawyers a very adequate fee, and we pay everybody. When I was first in conservation if we wanted to go somewhere we supplied the gas, and we took our lunches, and if we had to sleep overnight we arranged to sleep in somebody's house or in a sleeping bag in their

- NC: back yard. Nobody seems to do that any more, and so the large portion of the budget for conservation now goes to paying for things that we used to get free. When Joan and I typed our various reports, we bought all the supplies and went out and had the prints made at our own expense. Of course I realize that now we must have full-time help in some matters, and those people must get paid.
- RS: I wonder if it's just that personal identity now has shifted from the national level down to the groups within the chapters; that is, a member who belongs today has less identification at the national level than maybe he did then. I wonder if it's just big business.
- NC: I think it is.
- JC: Harold Crowe said nowadays people are used to staying in deluxe hotels and having their breakfast served in bed, whereas in the olden days these same people would be backpacking.
- NC: Well, there are problems of getting big. Take the Sierra Club Foundation, and I think I can mention that a little bit because it's closely related, and it's the only Sierra Club activity that I engage in nowadays. The foundation is consumed by the business of fund-raising, perpetually reconsidering the budget, worrying about our overhead, legal complications, our tax exemption, managing our funds and our lands, and the responsibilities and obligations of the trustees.

For instance, we own some property down south of San Francisco, the Thorne estate. When Mrs. Thorne died she left the estate to the foundation, but she left two acres of it as a life estate to her former gardener. Now the former gardener is suing the foundation for a quarter of a million dollars for horrid things he said we did to him, like interfering with his water supply and parking our car on his road and so forth.

This is all very unpleasant. If you give your time toward the cause of clean air and saving the forests and the parks and the rivers and things, you hate to have to spend your time on this. But I think that it's inevitable. As these organizations get bigger, they have more members and more offices, and bigger staffs and more egos to deal with. I think it's going to be more and more like a big corporation.

I wanted to mention one other interesting thing that occurred in 1956. There had been a lot of discussion in the Sierra Club that the chapters were not being represented well enough on the board of directors. This was before we had the council. This

NC: had been building up for several years: the chapters felt that they didn't have a strong enough voice in what was going on. And so the board of directors decided to put it up to a vote of the membership as to whether we would have another breakdown in our basic organization, which would be primarily representative of the chapters rather than a representative of the cause of conservation. That did not mean that this other body would be anti-conservation, it would simply mean that its prime objective would be to look out for the interests and needs of the local organizations as compared to conservation, which is a club-wide concern.

The membership passed the issue, and therefore it was decided and decreed that there shall be a Sierra Club Council. That was finally announced at a board meeting at the Claremont Hotel in Berkeley. The president was Alex Hildebrand. I was a director, and he appointed me as chairman of the Sierra Club Council. This is just a humorous little thing.

RS: Was that pro tem?

NC: Pro tem. I was the first one. I called all the representatives together in a side room, and we had a meeting for one hour and elected Kathy Jackson as the first elected chairman. That finished up the story about my one hour as the first chairman of the Sierra Club Council.

#### Mid-Sixties Rift on the Board of Directors

NC: During the time that I was on the board, we had a group made up of Martin Litton, who is a publisher, you know, and an author--

RS: Does he work for--I guess most recently Sunset Magazine?

NC: He did. I understand he's not with them any longer, but I don't know.

RS: Ah yes, they parted ways finally. Lane Publications, I think it was.

NC: Then there was Dr. Eliot Porter, who was a dentist, and he quit dentistry and took up photography, and he was a source of several wonderful sets of color pictures that were in the Sierra Club's exhibit format books: the Galapagos was one of them, and I don't remember the others; I think one of the Wilderness books--

RS: In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World, that's the first one.

JC: He now lives in Santa Fe, I think.

RS: Did you say he was a dentist before he became a photographer?

NC: Yes. That's why he's "Doctor".

Then there was Fred Eissler, a schoolteacher in Santa Barbara. I could, if I were the kind, say these people were extremists. That is, they were more extreme than the rest of us. And they were extreme in the same way that Dave Brower was an extremist.

RS: Would the term be "holier than thou"?

NC: No, no, that's not it. They're all right that way. The problem was that they were extremists in conservation, that is, you might say, fanatics. They were pure conservationists. They thought that there should be no yielding or no compromising to any extent, no matter what the problem was. They felt that the conservationists should stick up for a purely ideal standard and should never, from our side, yield to any practical consideration. Now there's some sense to this, because we know we don't win all battles. So if we don't hold a maximum of pure idealistic theory, who will?

RS: There's a problem with interacting with other people though, too, and it may be--

NC: Yes. But then there are the others who feel that sometimes in a compromise you gain more than if you stick up only for what you really wanted in the first place. And so there was an antagonism. There was quite a serious rift that developed in the board of directors in the middle 1960s, and I guess it wasn't until maybe 1968 or 1969 when it began to calm down.

It was brought about by the fact that Dave Brower had all these problems of poor management and lack of communication with the directors, but he was a purist, and he wanted the ultimate in conservation; and these other purists--Litton, Porter and Eissler--wanted things to go his way because they felt that purism was the only thing that would save the conservation values. Whereas the others--and I wavered back and forth, as information came to me--were willing to compromise at times and not at others.

### Reversal on Mineral King, 1965

NC: This comes to a very important series of events that occurred when I was a director of the club. That was the Mineral King issue. I am going to discuss shortly my involvement in the San Gorgonio fight. We worked real hard on that, Joan and I; Joe Momyer; Charlotte Mauk, who came from Berkeley to work with us; and Judge Payne, who came up from San Diego. There were about twenty of us working very hard to keep those developments out of San Gorgonio.

At that time there had been a proposal that if we would yield and let the commercial people get into the High Sierra somewhere, the ski people would be willing to relax their pressure on San Gorgonio. And so that came to pass. The Forest Service denied the entry of Tommy Tyndall and others into the San Gorgonio wild area and the place was saved, and it's still a wilderness. But we didn't know where this other place might be--instead of San Gorgonio. The High Sierra is 700 miles long and San Gorgonio is only fifteen miles across--

RS: That's right, 30,000 acres.

NC: So it seemed fair that in the whole 700 miles they could find a satisfactory place. We didn't know until 1965, which was twenty years after the San Gorgonio fight, that Mineral King was to be it. So when the first proposal came up to develop at Mineral King, I felt morally obligated as a director of the club to say, "Okay, let them go into Mineral King, because they kept out of San Gorgonio." I was one of the leaders in the fight against the San Gorgonio intrusion.

RS: Was Joe Fontaine involved in the later period in 1965 or so, in the Mineral King evaluation?

NC: I don't know.

When it came up to the board of directors, when I was a director, I was one of those who voted to acquiesce and not fight the entry of the ski developments in Mineral King. Now there is a question as to whether I should have. But I did because I felt that I had agreed almost twenty years before. I thought that in the 700 miles they should be able to find a place, and Mineral King was halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco, and I felt I had to acquiesce.

Well, then, between that meeting and the next meeting of the board of directors, these were both the same year I believe, more

NC: information came to me and I read about it, and I found out what Disney was proposing to put in there, and then I began to study more about Mineral King as a specific place, and so at the next meeting I cast my vote the other way [May, 1965]. Now of course, others voted the way I did too, but the Sierra Club took up a position of opposition the second time, so I kind of feel that I cast the key vote in getting this fight started.

RS: That's rather interesting; this was one of my first periods of being at board of directors' meetings, and I remember a meeting at which Dave Brower initially spoke in essence saying or agreeing that we had to or should allow some development there, and Martin Litton disagreeing, and he spoke very strongly against it. It seemed apparent that Dave, at least, switched his position during that meeting.

I remember, I believe Charles Connaughton, from the Forest Service, was there at the meeting, and after the meeting was over, going down in the elevator with him, we had a few words of conversation, and he was very upset and felt--my impression was-- that he had been betrayed or that his ability to work with the Sierra Club, at least temporarily, had been impaired because the club had now turned against the development of Mineral King.

At the meeting, I was very impressed with the way things turned around. I think that Joe Fontaine may have been involved at the time as chairman of the Kern-Kaweah Chapter. I know that that chapter had been working with the Forest Service in working out some compromise in regards to the extent of development in Mineral King; at least they thought they had an agreement. That's what I do remember.

NC: Well, as you can see, there was a diversity of opinion as to just what the Sierra Club should do--as to whether we had previously committed ourselves, in accomplishing victory in the San Gorgonio fight, to yield in the Mineral King. Then we decided that we shouldn't, and that the ski developers should go somewhere else.

I would just like to add as a final comment, I hope, on this subject, that for several years after that, Harold Bradley had gone through Forest Service files and the Sierra Club files and tried to find any letter or any statement or agreement whereby we were committed to accept a development at Mineral King. He couldn't find any commitment at all.\* So on the basis of that,

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\*September, 1949, Sierra Club Board of Directors resolve that "the Sierra Club finds no objection from the standpoint of its policies to winter sports development in Mineral King as proposed by the U.S. Forest Service." [Ed.]

NC: I guess that the Sierra Club Board continued to oppose Mineral King, and of course, we're still opposing it. It's in the courts right now, I believe.

#### Club Membership Policies: Decisions on Growth and Discrimination

NC: I wanted to give you my perspective on the club's decision to increase in size, realizing of course that I could be wrong. Before 1960 Dave Brower had been bringing up the subject of needing more income. The club had 10,000 members in 1956, and 10,000 members paid so much in dues. Dave felt that he had to have more money, both for book publication and particularly for funding the conservation battles, and they cost money even before the days of the big lawsuits. There were lots of expenditures--travel, publications, conferences, meetings, research--so I remember his saying to the board of directors that he wanted us to permit a much more rapid growth of the club.

I remember his saying that we shouldn't have to have two sponsors; in fact he said why have any sponsors? Why not put ads in the magazines that anybody waiting in the doctor's waiting room or on the street corner or in a hotel lobby could pick up and see and send in his application and join. And of course I guess that's what it's finally come to. In my opinion there was a definite intent to change the policies of the club so as to cause and foster and purposely produce a rapid increase in membership. By 1960, Dave Brower was saying how wonderful it would be, when someday in the foreseeable future, we might have 25,000 members --and the whole board gasped at the thought because we then had about 14,000. Actually we passed the 25,000 quite soon.

When the club was going through some of its very rapid growth we had our Diamond Jubilee. Did you go to the Diamond Jubilee?

RS: I remember that I went. That's the seventy-fifth anniversary in 1967 when Phil Bernays spoke.

NC: And Will Siri.\* Remember how Will Siri said that the Sierra Club was growing at twenty percent a year and the United States at one percent a year, so it's just a matter of time until everybody is a member of the Sierra Club, and then what will we do with the Department of the Interior? [Laughter.]

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\*William E. Siri oral history interview, in process.



RS: I don't remember that remark exactly but that does sound like Will.

NC: Well, getting now to the oral history interview you conducted of Glen Dawson,\* I noticed that he said he'd known me most of his life, and he's a little younger than I, but I've known him for a good large portion of my life, so we have known each other for a long time. On page fourteen he made some comment about the membership policy of the Angeles Chapter as being possibly against the inclusion of minority groups.

I remember as a director I brought up the question of excluding Negroes. (Excuse me for using that term; as far as I'm concerned it's a perfectly good term, there's nothing wrong with it.) I proposed that the directors pass a resolution that Negroes and other minorities would not be excluded from membership. My wise and very good friend Bestor Robinson broke right in to what I was saying and said, "Now wait a minute--this is not an integration club; this is a conservation club," and he recommended that we take no stand on either exclusion or inclusion. We voted to take no stand, and so far as I know, there is no stand. In other words, the Sierra Club does not, and in my opinion should not, make an issue of integration; that's not what it is for.

There was another case during my first year as the president. One of the chapters wrote in that they had taken in a member several years before, and he had been going on their local walks. Then they had discovered that he had spent some time at the state prison at Atascadero--some people call it a hospital--because of an asserted homosexual morals charge brought by the Los Angeles police. The chapter officers asked us to take away his membership.

Well, I feel very strongly on that subject. I feel that the Sierra Club in the first place is not a morals organization. In the second place, if the fellow can live an honorable life after he has paid his debt to society, we should do what we can to rehabilitate him. We should not exclude him from an outdoor club. And so I told the executive committee, that I would not permit them to take any action to exclude this fellow from the club, and they voted not to, and that ended that. But I think that whether it's integrating people of other races, or people of other races, or people who have run afoul of the law and paid the price, if they can live an honorable life and support our cause that's all we want. As I said, I feel very strongly about that.

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\*Glen Dawson, Pioneer Rock Climber and Ski Mountaineer, Richard Searle, interviewer, Sierra Club Oral History Project (Sierra Club, San Francisco, 1975).

RS: I appreciate that. This brings to mind one comment I heard once, I believe it was during the controversy within the Angeles Chapter about admitting certain people. A letter came from San Francisco, perhaps from Dave Brower, saying, "There are no second class Sierra Club members." This certainly did put forth a point of view that they're all members, and if they're paid-up members they have full rights. I guess there were problems with discrimination; maybe George Shinno is one individual in this club that had some problems in the Angeles Chapter early days. Fortunately it looks like that problem, to what extent it ever existed, is long gone.

JC: The club would have been much worse off without George.

NC: We've got too much worthwhile to do to waste time on things like that.

## CONSERVATION ACTIVIST

## Fight To Save San Gorgonio Wilderness, 1944

Richard Searle: Could you tell us if you recall any particulars of your participation in the San Gorgonio fight?

Nathan Clark: The fight to conserve the wilderness of Mt. San Gorgonio was in 1944. I remember that because, having skied on Mt. San Gorgonio and enjoyed the wilderness both summer and winter, both on hiking trips and ski trips, having slept on the mountain, and having it in view from my home, I felt it very important that that wilderness be preserved as such. And so from the first word of a proposal to put ski lifts right up to Dollar Lake, I got interested and became a conservation activist.

RS: Are you sure it wasn't Dry Lake, now?

NC: No, I can't tell you where they were going to put the ski lifts. That was thirty years ago, remember, now. I know they were going to start at Poopout Hill, and they were going to open up a corridor, that is, define a boundary, within which developments would be permitted. And the developments, of course, were all for the benefit of the commercial people that wanted to make a killing off of what the skiers would spend--that's what it really amounted to. It was not to help the skiers, it was to get an income, which is what all these commercial things are, in the final analysis.

I got very much involved, and wrote quite an article for The Mugelnoos. This article was one of the longest ones I'd ever sent in, and it was not about skiing. It was during the latter part of the ski season. That was quite unusual, that they would print such a long article on conservation, because The Mugelnoos at that time was not very much interested in conservation. They felt that the Bulletin would take care of all that. Anyway, the article was accepted and printed.

NC: In a few weeks I got a letter back from a subscriber stationed in the South Pacific--I don't know whether he was Army, Air Force, or Navy, somebody I had never heard of before--saying how good the article was and that my view, that is, a conservation view, should be preserved. This turned out to be Joe Momyer, whom of course I got to know and like very much and to work with a great deal on conservation later. After the war Joe Momyer became the postmaster in San Bernardino, wasn't he Joan?

Joan Clark: Well, he worked in the post office. I don't know in just what capacity.

RS: I'd heard he was postmaster, also.

NC: He was an official of some kind, and he was also a ski mountaineer and rock climber and did a great deal on the construction of the ski huts.

RS: Was San Gorgonio any sort of a primitive area?

NC: It was the San Gorgonio Primitive Area. It's wilderness area now. A primitive area is an area of less than "X" acres, and what the number of acres is I don't remember now, but it's immaterial. When this story of the proposed development got to us, and the ski mountaineers and the chapter down here, all of us outdoor-type people, opposed it.

Now there were a few that were put in a difficult position--Glen Dawson was one. He had been responsible very largely for the development of the Ski Mountaineering Section, and he liked to ski, and of course it would have been nice to have some ski tows up there for the ski mountaineers and nobody else, and we would treat the country very carefully, and that would be nice; but of course you can't open up a development to the ski mountaineers and nobody else.

The ski mountaineers had to make up their minds, and they decided that they would go along with the main club stand. Joan and I were both ski mountaineers, and both club members, and of course I was opposed to the developments anyway, because I think there's so little wilderness left that we ought to preserve what little we've got. That's a wonderful area; of course I don't need to tell you.

So, as I mentioned, we wrote this article. The way we wrote it is that Joan and I together wrote it, and then we called on the phone and talked it over with people, and then Joan typed it and then retyped it, and I guess we worked quite a bit on that, didn't we, before the article came out in The Mugelnoos. Joan, do you want to add something to that?

NC: No, it's in the San Jacinto region. Anyway, we did a marvelous thing, and I think it was a milestone in conservation hearings. It's been done many times since. We decided that rather than having everybody state all of the reasons why the development should not occur, we would have no reason repeated, but we would have as many different reasons presented as possible by different people. So that when the hearing would eventually take place, everybody would come up and would get undivided attention because he would be saying something new.

Now, that may not sound like anything in these days, things are so well organized, but I think that's the first time that it was done. At least we originated it; we didn't copy it from anybody else. So we went over it, and for instance, Harry James presented the perspective of the boys' school, and somebody else presented something else. I presented the technical analysis. I said how many kilowatts of power it would take to run all this, and what size transmission line would be needed, and the width of the line, the sewer facilities, and the water supply--of course I probably pushed it up a little bit, but naturally I took the maximum.

RS: This is how bad it could be.

NC: But the interesting thing is that before the hearing started, Pat Thompson, who was the forest supervisor conducting the meeting, had prescribed certain things we should say--for instance, we should start off by saying our name and address, and whether or not we had ever been on the mountain, and whether or not we were skiers, and two or three other things. I gave my name and address and said I lived within sight of the mountain, I could look up on a clear day and see it every day, and I had skied on the mountain many times, I had slept on the mountain and all these things. Nobody except my friends knew which side I was on, because I didn't commit myself until I got through.

I was purposely being just as neutral as possible. I wasn't saying, "These guys that want to do this would have to put in a big transmission line, and these poor people that own a cabin will suffer." I didn't say that at all--very neutral and presumably factual. Until, right at the last minute, I came out with a good strong punch suddenly integrating all of this and requesting denial of entry rights for the developers. I got a terrific handclap--remember?

RS: Made you feel good.

NC: Really it did. And then we had to go to lunch, and Mr. Thompson came over and said he was very glad I talked.

JC: I really have nothing to add.

RS: Was there one central figure who wanted to develop it, like Mr. Deutch at one time was involved in this more recently?

NC: There was a Tommy Tyndall, wasn't he the one?

JC: Yes, he eventually met his doom by having his tractor turn over on him on Sugar Loaf. He took the name Tyndall, he told me one time, from Mt. Tyndall. Apparently he liked that name better than he liked his own name, whatever that was, and so Tommy Tyndall was really a pseudonym.

RS: He was one of the leaders, at least--

JC: He was the developer, yes.

NC: He was one of the pushers on San Gorgonio. Others were the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, and the Los Angeles Junior Chamber of Commerce. They were both advocating the development; of course, naturally they'd go for anything commercial that would bring more tourists out here. And then on the other side, aside from the Sierra Club, there were almost one hundred percent of the youth groups, the Boy Scouts and the church groups, and the private clubs, and the UCLA group--all the people that had used the mountain or would use the mountain for its previous wilderness use were, of course, against the development.

Joe Momyer was one of the leading people, perhaps the leader. Anyway, Joe Momyer, who lived in San Bernardino, and some others, decided that we should make a statement for the Forest Service hearing in San Bernardino. The Forest Service had announced a public hearing on the subject of whether they should or should not open up this wild area for ski development. So we held a meeting at Joe's house over in San Bernardino, and we had present probably Clark Jones from the Riverside Chapter and, of course, Joe Momyer. Charlotte Mauk came down from Berkeley, Joan and I went from here, and I don't know who the other people were. Oh, there was somebody from San Jacinto area, probably Harry James.

RS: Yes.

NC: He was there. Harry James was the operator of a private boy's school, a great outdoors person.

RS: By the way, is that school located in the San Gorgonio area by any chance?

RS: [Laughter] I gather that he wasn't too eager to have that area developed.

NC: He didn't want it, no. I only go into all this because you asked a lot of questions about my conservation activities, and I think really that was the beginning of my serious efforts to do something about conservation. Harold Crowe, remember, got in for social and outdoor reasons, and Phil Bernays did and Glen Dawson did, Dick Jones did, and so did many others. With all these real conservationists, who fought hard on the cause of conservation, it's almost unanimous that they originally joined the club for the social side--the trips and the outings and the ski trips--and didn't really think much about conservation at first. So therefore we can get good conservationists if we give them a proper exposure to the things that we're trying to conserve. Now of course, that was John Muir's idea originally, in starting the first outings, and after all these many years--what is it, eighty years now?--it's still a good way to expand our influence. It shows the idea was right.

Joan, is there anything you want to say about San Gorgonio?

JC: I don't think so, except that we were certainly plunged right into conservation battles as soon as the honeymoon was over!

NC: Yes, these led one right into another. I told you about the letter writing we did for the Kings Canyon National Park creation, 1939. During the war there wasn't much need for conservation because nobody was developing anything, and all the young people were away anyway. So on my horizon, the first thing that showed up after the war was San Gorgonio. I think it was right after that that there was a flurry of excitement about the proposal by somebody to withdraw quite a large area of forest from the Olympic National Park on the Olympic Peninsula in western Washington and open it up for lumbering.

RS: That was about 1947, I have noted here.

NC: That's about right. Well, that's pretty far away, and there wasn't very much we could do except write letters. I wasn't an official of the club but I studied the materials distributed by Dave Brower; I think Dave was in the club employ by that time on a part-time basis. Anyway, I saw the aerial photos with overlaid lines and lettering that were published in the Sierra Club Bulletin, and I wrote some letters, but I couldn't really do very much, because I didn't have any information and I didn't have any time. Also at that time I was going through difficulties with expansion of my department at Lockheed, and I had to spend all the time I could on that. So you asked about Olympic Park, but I can't say much.

NC: In the interest of San Gorgonio, actually we did more than just write an article for The MugeInoos and then go to the Forest Service hearing. We had quite a good many meetings getting ready, and we wrote other articles and gave speeches, and so forth. I only told you the two main things.

#### Economics and Engineering: Opposing the San Jacinto Tramway

NC: About two years after this was over, we were confronted by a proposal by the Palm Springs people, to put a tramway up their side of Mt. San Jacinto. Well, we had just saved our highest mountain, and San Jacinto is our next highest and of course this raised the wrath of everybody who was related to conservation.

In the case of San Gorgonio, my contribution had been the technical one to do with the utilities, the power line, the water, the sewage, the buildings, the road and all that. So I pondered with myself the question, "What on earth can I do about San Jacinto?" We had a meeting out in Riverside presided over by Joe Momyer, I think, but it could have been Clark Jones or Roscoe Poland, who were very active in conservation then. We heard a lawyer, Mr. E. W. Cunningham. Remember Mr. Cunningham?

JC: I can see him in my mind's eye.

NC: He was an older man. He was probably maybe sixty or something like that; I was in my early forties. He was a lawyer for the Edison Company and a Sierra Club member and a conservationist. He read over the proposed act to be passed by the state legislature which would create the San Jacinto Winter Park Authority.

RS: Was this fellow representing the Edison Company?

NC: No, he was present as a Sierra Club member. He was one of our friends. He read this thing over and interpreted it for us. He was a kind man, a mild fellow. This interpretation, which of course was true, telling us what would be permitted and what would not be permitted, made us mad, even madder and angrier than we were to begin with.

The proposal turned out to be that the tramway would be built up Chino Canyon, near Palm Springs. It would run up across Forest Service land through Chino Canyon, but when it got near the top of the mountain it would cross the boundary of the San Jacinto State Park. This had been created as a wilderness park years before, and kept in its wilderness condition for many, many



NC: years, and it was in its pristine state; it had forests and streams and snow in the winter. It was a beautiful place, and you don't have very many of those in southern California.

But if the state legislature would pass the bill creating the Winter Park Authority, they would only do it on state land which meant the state park. This was an act, therefore, to transfer some of the state park land from the state park department to a new authority of the state to be called the San Jacinto Winter Park Authority. These were all Palm Springs people: Mr. Coffman, the owner of the Desert Inn in Palm Springs and a Mr. Lockwood, their engineer, and other commercial people.

One way we could fight the development was to fight it through the Forest Service; to try to get the Forest Service not to permit the tramway to go up that canyon, and the part of the fight that was allocated to me was again the technical side. Well, I didn't know what I could say. How could you tell the Forest Service not to permit the state to build a tramway up a canyon, on a technical basis?

RS: Unless there were some unsafe aspects of it or something--

NC: Some people were saying rather ridiculous things, like one fellow was proposing to make a story that the winds were so strong they would ship the cars up over the cable, you know, make it swing around--I couldn't go for that--and others would say it was near an earthquake zone, the San Jacinto fault, and that the whole thing would fall down if an earthquake shook. Well, you know, steel towers and long steel cables aren't about to fall down--plain common sense tells you that. So I got more and more desperate as the time came closer and closer, and finally I went out to the Lockheed Air Terminal and took an airplane and went off by myself for a weekend, away from all distraction, and I came back with the ideas that delayed the tramway for ten years.

I went to San Francisco and went up on a hill in a park. It was a windy, sunny day, but terribly cold, and I sat under a pine tree and thought about everything that I could possibly bring to mind. It just occurred to me, why not attack their economic analysis? Coverdale and Colpitts, the eastern firm that had been their consulting engineers and had predicted great financial success the first year.

The reason I got this idea is that Joe Momyer on his own initiative had been able to get traffic counts on all the roads in that neighborhood, and he had also looked up for me and given to me all the data on rainfall at different elevations throughout the entire area--the whole mountain region and the desert region

- NC: and all around, and it was given in inches per month at different elevation ranges and localities.
- RS: That's amazing that he had that much detail, but apparently he had everything.
- NC: He really worked; I've got to give credit to Joe. He really did a lot. I've forgotten what other information there was, but anyway I decided that I would prove that the thing would not succeed financially. Of course I couldn't see into the distant future; I could only look into the first year or two.
- RS: Incidentally, at that point you were at least convinced on the basis of the surface evidence, that it would not be financially successful, so it wasn't a case of setting out to prove this: you already had some sense that it would not be successful?
- NC: Well, no, I wouldn't say that. I wanted to find out on the basis of my own figures whether it would be successful. The only things I could think of were the financial feasibility and the problem of water supply. So I came back here with these two ideas in mind; I'd done some rough calculations sitting on the lawn up there in San Francisco and getting pretty cold, but I came back and--although my job fully occupied my time during the week, somehow I kept refining the calculations, and as I progressed it looked better and better.
- RS: Or worse and worse, whatever viewpoint you take.
- NC: I phoned in and said I was sick. I was sick of the whole thing, but I couldn't say that [laughter], and after I made the preliminary calculations it looked like I was going to be able to prove that they could not make a success of it. Then I had to go back over it and refine it, and bring it down to a point where I could hold my ground if any technical person challenged me.

This was quite a job, but I finally ended up with a report about fifty pages long, that took all the most favorable information that I could dig up, favorable towards success of the tramway, but based on traffic counts and reasonable assumptions. Somewhere in the report I have a list of all the favorable assumptions that would tend to show that they could make a success, and even at that, I predicted that they would only have 301,000 passengers the first year. Well, years later when they built it, the first year they had 299,000. I wasn't off even one percent!

I worked hard on that, I really dug the bottom of my brain on that. Coverdale and Colpitts, this great engineering firm, had predicted 570,000. Coverdale and Colpitts were also the

NC: economic engineers for the San Rafael-Richmond Bridge. They predicted success there, and that bridge was a failure for the first five years.

I felt very good about that, because--and I make quite an issue just now in telling about it--wherever there was any doubt I used a figure which was in favor of their being successful. I was not allowing myself to be prejudiced against them, and then trying to make a technical point of that. I'll show you that report later, if you're interested.

RS: I would like to see it.

NC: So far as I know, that was the first economic analysis of an engineering project ever put out by the conservationists.

RS: There was no such thing, of course, as an environmental impact statement or any of the other aspects in those days. Incidentally, your testimony or statement had apparently a profound effect on the hearing.

NC: It didn't affect the hearing very much; in fact I don't even remember how the Forest Service hearing came out--it lasted two days, and I remember Judge Payne, a very, very fierce superior court judge from San Diego, came up and gave his talk, and it's been a family saying ever since: he said that the Mt. Lowe railway and the Mt. Tamalpais railway had their day and ceased to be! [All laugh.]

RS: Fire and brimstone!

NC: But what the report did was to stir up the Securities Exchange Commission and some other financial people. Dick Leonard took care of all that, and kept them from permitting the sale of the bonds.

RS: Oh, this was a state issue in bonds--wasn't it a state sale, because the Winter Park Authority was authorized by the state?

NC: The authority was, but the act did not permit the state to guarantee the bonds. The thing we went to was a Forest Service hearing, to try to convince the Forest Service not to give permission to put the tramway up Chino Canyon. But when we were not successful, or maybe we were, I don't know, the next thing was to keep the bonds from being sold. Of course we had also tried to get the state legislature not to pass the act--but we had lost that effort.

RS: I believe they established the authority to allow them to act as an institution to issue bonds, and the SEC then prevented them

- RS: or didn't allow them to issue these bonds because of the economic uncertainty of the development. In fact I remember a little bit about that. I was reading it in the newspapers and as you say, they established it, and it took them a long time to get the whole thing started--as you mentioned, ten years.
- NC: It was about ten years. Every month Dick Leonard wrote to the proper person in the state government to inquire whether they had changed their plans and what their present status was--letter after letter.
- RS: Do you know whether, when they finally built the development, did it get scaled down or did it go as close to San Jacinto as they had planned.
- NC: Oh, I think--have you been up the tramway?
- RS: Would you believe--no, I hiked to it from the other side!
- JC: We finally went, and enjoyed every minute of it, I hate to admit.
- NC: The reason I asked the question is that I think that we, the conservationists, did have a major impact in making them change their plans for the upper station. We pushed them by everything we did, and it wasn't just what I did--I don't want to take the whole credit. I probably did most all of the technical work on it, but there were many other that put their views in, and there were some awfully good points besides what I did. I think the net effect of the whole thing was to make them change their plans and exclude a number of things that we would not accept. But I think that as a result, the mountain terminal is not a bad place. It's really very nice.
- RS: There are no overnight accommodations, as I understand, no liquor.
- NC: Overnight accommodations are banned right in the act. They can't do it.
- RS: So they can't administratively change it.
- JC: They do have a cocktail lounge.
- NC: Yes, they have liquor up there; you can get a cocktail, but that to me is not as important as some of the other things.
- RS: Was Nick Clinch involved in this?
- NC: Nick didn't come on the original fight. The years went by and we kept haranguing away--I haven't told you about the water issue; we'll get to that. But as the years went by and all these people

NC: came and went, and we had to keep hammering away at this thing, Nick Clinch came into the story. He was turned onto it by Dick Leonard, because Dick and Nick were close friends, had been over a long period, and so we had some meetings at Nick Clinch's house. I don't know exactly what he did.

RS: I was interested because I read his campaign statement for election to the board of directors which referred to San Jacinto.

NC: Another event which occurred was a little bit interesting. The state assembly was going to have a vote on something to do with this--I guess it was the passage of the act. So of course the proposition had first to be reviewed by a state assembly committee, maybe the committee on finance or committee on state parks. The Sierra Club decided that I should go up and present my paper to the meetings of this committee, which of course by that time I could do extemporaneously, because I'd gone over it so many times. I'd rewritten it about three or four times as the years went by, and I kept updating it.

So I went up to Sacramento and sat in this big room in the capital. The honorable committee members were up on different levels of platforms, passing papers back and forth and not paying much attention, but they gave me fairly good attention. When the whole thing was over, everybody started to walk out. I went over to Earl Coffman, the head of the Winter Park Authority-to-be, and the owner of the Desert Inn--a big, important businessman and my prime enemy in this fight. I went over behind him and put my hand down and said, "Well, Mr. Coffman . . ." and he put his hand up to shake, but as soon as he saw who I was he pulled back and looked fiercely mad at me! He didn't speak to me, and I never saw him again.

RS: Some people are poor losers.

NC: I think that, although we didn't win--we didn't keep the tramway out--we made a major impact, and I think the tramway that did go in is therefore, from my personal standpoint, perfectly acceptable.

RS: When I was up at the top they hadn't completed it, but you could go a couple of hundred yards away and you wouldn't know it was there, at that time. Maybe they've cut timber away or something, but it's down at the bottom there and out of the way.

NC: That's right, right at the edge of the cliffs. There's a loop trail that takes about an hour to go around, just a walking trail in the dirt, with a few little signs pointing out interesting things. We all took it.

JC: It was immaculately clean.

NC: Very, very nice, and then there is a ranger station back out of the mountain station dedicated area, and there are some residences for the state park people, and then of course these days they keep track of the people going in, and you have to get a permit to pack into the area. If you want to walk in without a pack, anybody can go in at any time, but if you have a pack with the intent of sleeping in the area, you have to be within the daily quota.

RS: I see. It's just like a wilderness permit for a national park or forest. Tell me--you mentioned the first year they had some--think like 299,000 people--did the Winter Park Authority go bankrupt?

NC: No. You see, during the ten years it took them to get going on this thing, all the economic conditions changed, and who could have foretold thirty years ago what would happen by say, eighteen years ago? You can't tell. What could we say now about what's going to happen in 1990?

RS: The reason I was asking is that I had the impression at least at the time they finally built it, at least the first year or two, there was noise about the state taking over the authority. But apparently they recovered from the initial phase, if there was a problem, and it appears that they're a sustaining operation.

NC: Leonard tells me that for several years they were trying to sell the bonds, and they had great difficulty selling them, and finally some of the bonds were bought by wealthy men who knew the score, and who quickly disposed of them on the bond market. The big problem is to get the bonds sold in the first place. And apparently, if successful men will buy municipal bonds--this comes under that heading, municipal bonds, part of the state--if wealthy people will buy these bonds, widows and orphans and other people will think they're pretty safe, and therefore they will buy them. And this is incidentally quite a lesson--you shouldn't necessarily think that investments are good because some great person bought them.

The other thing that I tried to build a case on in the San Jacinto matter was the water supply. It was to prove that it would be unfeasible to take as much water up there as they would need to, without depriving somebody else who already has water. I analyzed every creek flowing off Mt. San Jacinto--the whole region, Snow Creek and Chino Creek and the ones on the west side--and the predicted flow of the metropolitan aqueduct (we'll call that a river) which goes right by near there; and I studied the rainfall at all the different elevations taken in thousand-foot increments, and so forth.

- NC: I concluded that the only way that they could get enough water to run this was to either take it out of Snow Creek, which is the water supply for Palm Springs, or take it in big drums, which they'd attach to the bottom of the tramway cars and haul it up, so many gallons each time a car went up. Well, I don't know just how they get the water up there now. Snow Creek, it turns out, in the long range doesn't have enough water.
- RS: That's also a long way around the mountain.
- NC: Well, yes, but I went a long way beyond that. I went down to Palm Canyon and even the south branch of Palm Canyon. I spent days studying the topographic map.
- RS: That would have been quite a problem just to transport the water, assuming a pipeline. Do you recall what quantity of water approximately they'd need?
- JC: He analyzed every last toilet [laughter].
- NC: You'd be surprised; the toilets are the biggest item. They are anywhere. You take these people that run these little restaurants out in the desert, their biggest problem is that they have to bring in water in a truck; it's the doggone toilets.
- JC: I read about a fourteen-year-old boy in the Times today, how he figured out you could make a toilet use two gallons less every time by bending the float down, and he did that to all the toilets in their house and nobody noticed the difference.
- NC: One of my projects, one of the many technical things that I want to do and never get to work on, is designing and building an electric toilet. What it really is [all laugh] is an ordinary toilet that has electrical valves instead of using floats and flipflops. One of the things that this would make possible is the system that they use throughout quite a bit of Europe, and that is that the toilet empties to different levels according to the requirements of the use.
- RS: I'll have to remember that, and also the design--well, we perhaps don't want to go into this much detail here [all laugh].
- NC: But I mean that's a practical thing when you're short of water.
- RS: I can see that. It actually turned out in the case of the tramway, as I gather, that the quantity of water that they would need wasn't available.

- NC: It wasn't available on the mountain. Other places you could get water--the upper mountain station is at 8,450 or say 8,400 feet, and so in order to get water, you'd either have to take it from a lower elevation and pump it up, or you'd have to take it from a higher elevation and use a gravity flow. There is no water supply at 8,400 feet. Tahquitz Creek might do, but it is quite a bit lower.
- RS: . . . Two or three thousand feet at best, and that's about bottom.
- NC: There's no flow of water of magnitude above 8,400 feet on any of these mountains. You'd have to pump it, and if you had to pump it from Tahquitz Creek it would take a pump of so many horsepower, so many volts of transmission line, and you'd have to have a road to get in and build it. That's in the report. If you pump it from Snow Creek, you would deprive the people of Palm Springs, which means then they'd have to negotiate with the metropolitan water district to get water from the aqueduct, the Colorado River.
- JC: That report was rather sickening, now that I think back.
- RS: Sickening in what sense?
- JC: That it just--how he could just sit there hour after hour and go into all those details!
- NC: The thing that amazes me now these many years thereafter is that those two reports, constituting over a hundred pages, were written in four days and three nights without stopping. I was grinding out with my slide rule, and Joan was sitting there next to me typing, and I would hand her a page and she would take it and type it.
- JC: I couldn't do that now!
- RS: It's interesting. I know that happens when you get somewhat of a labor of love. I know that when I wrote a handbook for the San Fernando Valley group, the same thing, my wife typed fifty pages for that handbook--I couldn't get her to type anything like that today.
- Those two reports then, the financial and the water, did delay the project for ten years.
- NC: I don't know which part did what good, because the people in San Francisco, particularly Dick Leonard, were much closer to the state headquarters.



NC: Incidentally, in my research I found out that on an average a human being in our way of living, not counting the gardens or things of that kind or the house he lives in, but just his own use, runs about 150 gallons per day. It's hard to believe. But a large portion of that is the toilets, some for washing, some for dish-washing, some for drinking--very little for drinking, of course, half a gallon or something. I'd be glad to show you the original manuscripts; I have them upstairs.

I think the only other thing I should say, and this is very important, is that I didn't do this by myself. This has to get into the record. Joe Momyer helped a great deal in looking up the basic data. I got a lot of help from other people whose names I don't even remember, but particularly Joe Momyer. Another person who helped a great deal was Joan, in doing all that typing. It's important to know that I don't claim the full credit for it. I did do the technical part.

RS: It's sort of interesting too, that sometimes you can actually enter into this very intense activity if there's a cause, and perhaps it's fortunate also that this period of activity doesn't last too long. You can do something that intense for maybe up to a month, and then after that you've got to have a rest, but it sure is a memorable experience.

NC: Well, I think that ought to wind it up. Joan, do you want to say more about San Jacinto?

JC: No--except that it seemed like an endless thing to type. At the time I was just awed by the way you sat and wrote and wrote and wrote as if it was just flowing out of your brain!

NC: Nowadays I have several calculators and a dozen slide rules; and I've also got an adding machine. I was just using it the other day in adding up the message units on my telephone bill, instead of using a computer, a calculator, or a slide rule.

JC: I'd rather not know!

NC: After I did my heavy work on San Jacinto, Dave Brower asked me repeatedly if I wouldn't write a similar thing for opposition to the Glen Canyon Dam, and for protection of Rainbow Bridge. By that time I was getting very active on the board of directors, and particularly, I couldn't find a good solid technical basis for writing a paper. The reasons were not the type of technology in which I'm particularly qualified. They had to do with hydrology and soil mechanics and related things. I didn't write the stuff for Dave, and that got him started on his arguments which were based on the softening of the limestone below the end of the Rainbow Bridge, the caving in of cliffs, et cetera.

RS: It might be interesting to note perhaps, in the case of the Grand Canyon controversy, and I don't know if you were going to comment on that, but I think Alan Carlin did a considerable study on the economics, and perhaps in a certain sense that would be similar to what you did in San Jacinto and San Gorgonio, and it was very effective at the time, I believe.

NC: Alan Carlin did some very good work.

#### Leading a Local Battle: Montecito Hills vs. The Housing Authority.

NC: You'll be amazed at this next topic. It has nothing to do with the Sierra Club, but it was truly conservation, and it has to come into the story because it was responsible for my dropping off further activity in Sierra Club conservation for the next few years except for updating my San Jacinto report. I did that whenever Dick Leonard wanted me to. I wrote the San Jacinto report in 1947 and updated it in '49, '51, and '53--I guess that was the last one--but there were very few changes.

This next activity was a big thing in our lives, and it affected our Sierra Club activities. This property on which I built this house I selected back in the mid-1930s because of the fine view of the mountains: San Gorgonio, San Jacinto, San Antonio, Sugar Loaf, Mt. Wilson, and many others. As you know, it's still a good view. Having settled here and having built a house here, when an emergency came in 1950 I had to stay and fight it, and this fight kept me from being very active in the Sierra Club for about three years. I should say it kept Joan and me, both of us, away.

In July, 1950, I was down the hill and happened to pick up a piece of dittoed paper which was telling people in Spanish that their houses were about to be condemned, down on Boundary Street about half a mile east of here, in order that the city housing authority could build a monstrous "slum-clearance" housing project. So I investigated this right away and found that that was true and that they were going to build thirteen-story buildings right along next to my house with 168 families facing me, whereas in a residential neighborhood you have eight neighbors at the maximum. Their plan had many other unpleasant aspects.

So I organized the citizens and property owners in this part of town, and we formed what we called the Montecito Hills Improvement Association, of which I was the first president. We also

NC: had other property owner's associations working with us, and we fought very hard. We had everybody against us: everybody in the Los Angeles City Council was against us to begin with, and of course the housing authority was against us.

We won over the City Council eventually; then we managed to get an election within the city of Los Angeles which favored us. We had four elections over the next three or four years in the state of California that clipped the wings of the housing authorities, which were tyrants. We were about to win our case and have this whole project called off, but it turned out that the housing authority had spent \$250,000 on surveys and plans on eight projects, and they refused to back out unless somebody paid them back for all that, which of course they were sure nobody could.

RS: Was this the federal housing authority?

NC: It involved federal money, but it was the city housing authority. It was independent of the city government, but it was called the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles. Actually, it's a political subdivision of the state.

So we took our case to Washington. The Federal Congress appropriated the money to pay off the costs and President Eisenhower signed the bill. This ended an awful ordeal for us.

JC: Our representative in Congress at that time was Norris Poulson. We happened to know his secretary, Mary Hornbeck, a Sierra Club member, and through her we worked through him. Later he became the mayor of Los Angeles.

NC: We got Fletcher Byron out, because he was the one that had initiated and supported this thing, and got Poulson in. We were the spark of it, right here in this room.

RS: Did you have essentially one hundred percent support of the people in this area? I presume you did.

NC: They were all ignorant at first, but we finally got one hundred percent of them. We managed finally to get one hundred percent support from the Los Angeles Times, and the Chamber of Commerce, which was quite a help, and we won over the councilmen one after another. I tell you about this because of two reasons. First, this fight went on for four years, and it was all we could do to stand it. It just about drove us nuts trying to keep up with this thing, and therefore during those four years I wasn't at all active in conservation work for the Sierra Club--1950 to 1954. So if you look at my Sierra Club record you'll find it's kind of blank in that time.

NC: The other thing--and this is very important--when we started, it looked hopeless. The city was against us, the housing authority was against us, the population didn't care, the state couldn't be concerned. It just looked hopeless. But we hammered away, and we called meetings. We collected funds from door to door, met with important people who were against us; and by presenting good, solid arguments, honest and straightforward with high integrity and figures, we won. It took us a long time.

In my closing remarks, if we ever get to them, that's one of my points: that people in the conservation field should not refuse to take on an important fight just because it looks hopeless, because you can win. This association, Montecito Hills Improvement Association, which I call MHIA, has kept alive all this time, that's twenty-some-odd years. We've won a lot of other battles: we've fought city hall to keep dumps out of our canyons; we've fought the city planning commission to prevent unfavorable rezoning. We've fought hard to keep streetlights out where nobody wanted them, and we were one of the few areas of the city that was able to prevail and win our way on the lighting issue.

JC: We really fought our own city councilman on that.

RS: You have streetlights, but this was a new expansion of the lighting district.

NC: It was a replacement of very good streetlights with more expensive ones with no more light.

RS: And higher taxes too, no doubt, or special assessments . . .

JC: Leaving up all the old poles too.

NC: I don't want to get into the streetlight business. But then after we kept the housing authority out of this valley, they had in the meantime torn down and carried away all the houses down there on Boundary Street and all around, so it was vacant land. Without going into details because this is not Sierra Club, but we were working on the kind of thing that the Sierra Club does--we were trying to preserve open space and get a park--by dint of a great deal of work and the showing of lantern slides at meetings of the people and of the civic authorities, we finally got a regional county part instead of the 10,000-unit housing project.

As a director of the club before a park here had been thought of, I had concurred with the Sierra Club board in voting to support the concept of regional parks in California. I remember Bestor

- NC: Robinson gave quite a talk. The reason that this was an issue is that it meant an increase in taxes, because regional parks have to be paid for, and of course the only place to get the money is taxes, and so there was some opposition to it to begin with. But the concept of regional parks--that is, a park that's intermediate in size between a city park and a state or national park and that serves a local region of maybe fifty miles across was new probably in the late 1950s. I don't remember exactly what year, but it passed the legislature, and it passed a popular vote of the people, and the concept went through, and we got one of the first regional parks in the city of Los Angeles.
- RS: Would this mean forming a regional park district?
- NC: No, not a district. It's a unique situation in which a county will propose a regional park, and then if the proposal that they have meets the requirements of the state act on regional parks, the state will approve it and supply the money. Then the park is built with state money; but it's a regional park, and it's managed by the local county government.
- JC: The local county has to provide matching funds?
- NC: No, I don't think so. I think it's entirely from the state.
- RS: I think I understand the basic idea though; it's actually a county-initiated thing. It's not like forming a regional park district.
- JC: This particular county park is on land owned by the City of Los Angeles, so if you ever want anything done there, you can have it thrown around like a football between the city park department, the city council, the board of supervisors and the county park department.
- NC: Following up on the basic ideas or concept of the Sierra Club, to try to conserve open space, we the people, largely through the influence of six or eight other husbands and wives and us, managed to get a county park here. Well this is a wonderful thing, it's a fine thing. People come here from all over the county, all over the state, all over the nation and even from foreign countries. It's one of the few places in the whole southern California area where you can't hear traffic anywhere. Down in the picnic area it's wonderful. It's absolutely quiet even on a busy day. The park is on rolling hills and has more than 300 acres, of which about a third is naturally wooded.
- JC: We feel very fortunate; one boundary is right against our property.

- NC: No sooner did we get the regional park in and the first phase of it built, than the city director of planning--a Mr. Calvin Hamilton, from the East, a great believer in development--proposed to put a secondary highway right across the middle of the park. Fortunately, as Joan mentioned, the city only owns the land, but they don't own the park. They don't own the lawns and the rest rooms and the pumping systems and the trees, and they don't have any control over them. So we prevailed on the board of supervisors to oppose the highway, and then finally got the county parks department to oppose it, and the city parks department, our councilman, and all the citizens to oppose it. After many meetings, we got the secondary highway taken off of the city's master plan for this park. But this will continue. They'll propose it again and we'll have to fight it down again, ad infinitum.
- RS: Hopefully it will be better than the experience we had, like in Elysian Park, where the Police Academy finally got into Elysian Park.
- NC: I'm a member of the Elysian Parks Association too and give them money and am very much on their side. Anyway, again, we were following up the basic principles of the Sierra Club. We asked for help from the Angeles Chapter, but they were too busy with Cariso Gorge and a whole lot of other places; they didn't respond at all. But we won our battle in the Sierra Club style, and that kept us from being very active in the Sierra Club.
- RS: I'd just like to mention a thought here, that it's been my impression that in many cases these local, or at least local-regional issues, are resolved by ad hoc assemblies of people who are in the local area and quite concerned, and a number of the leaders or people involved are Sierra Club members.
- NC: That's right, although most of the people we brought in are not Sierra Club members; they're our friends or our neighbors or people that live in this part of town, and we don't know them personally. They have joined with us on the basis of the good arguments that we put up.
- RS: In this case they're personally interested; they're not interested in the rest of many of the Sierra Club concerns. Here's an issue; they don't join the club, but at least they'll work on the problem.
- NC: There's another item that should be brought up now, and this has only been completed within less than twelve months. Stuck into this park was a beautiful estate which was never condemned for the public housing. And as long as it was a beautiful place with gardens and exotic trees, nobody objected to having it projecting into the park a good deal like the proposed development of San

NC: Gorgonio would have projected itself into the San Gorgonio wild area. But then the people who had lived there for many years sold it to new and younger people who soon sold it to some developers, and we were confronted with a threat of having a sizable condominium development right above the parking lot and the picnic ground in this otherwise wilderness park. So, mainly through the efforts of one person and the support of others she inspired to help, this crisis was met and beaten. As you may have guessed, that person is Joan, sitting here tonight.

She met with officials, took some of them on picnics in the park, hosted others here at home, wrote letters and articles, planned possible land exchanges and funding, spoke to the board of supervisors, dealt with the city council, circulated petitions, tried to prevail on the mayor, worked on the city and county parks departments, and arranged special tours for officials. She met with discouragement everywhere, but through just pushing ahead and trying and trying, she finally got the board of supervisors to make available the money to buy this estate.

So here again, we didn't get any help from the Sierra Club, but we were doing the same kind of things that we learned to do all those years we worked on conservation for the club. You know, you learn things by doing them. I think that Joan deserves a great deal more credit than she'll ever get.

JC: Although I've seen the motion and seen the signatures and everything else after the board of supervisors voted to acquire the land, I won't believe it until the land is finally really purchased and the park fence is relocated.

RS: I see--they won't suddenly borrow the money for something else?

JC: Well, on January fifteenth the parks department was supposed to file its final negative environmental impact report. One rather interesting thing is that our former supervisor, who claimed there was no money to buy this property, without mentioning it to his constituents, had earmarked \$327,000 to be spent in the same park for a swimming pool development, which nobody had asked for because there are many public pools fairly close in other parks. After he retired, I kept hammering away on his successor and on the parks director, making it seem as if I was the entire north-east Los Angeles. After all, every official and private citizen I had talked with had agreed that the land should be in the park. But they all merely passed the buck, while time went by and the developer could still have started to build sixteen houses in accordance with R-1 zoning, even though the zone variance to build condominiums had been denied.

- JC: Finally the county parks director wrote to the new board of supervisors and requested that the fund be transferred--\$100,000 for the purchase of this property, and \$200,000 for land acquisition for another county park. That leaves a little bit left over, but that's modern math. We felt we'd made a strategic gain this way, because they'd be less likely to cancel it or reallocate it if it's divided between two parks. Now we're waiting for final notice of purchase. As might be expected, the owners suddenly decided they had a gold mine there, and the whole thing has to go through the condemnation process.
- NC: Anyway, this MHIA has been a many-year effort. I was president only for the first four or five years and then I couldn't stand it any more, so they elected somebody else, and then I got active in the Sierra Club again. I wanted to tell about that, and particularly about keeping out the highway and buying the extra land, because these were efforts of just private individuals, just a small group, but it was made possible because of the methods I learned in the conservation work in the Sierra Club.



## REMINISCENCES OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SIERRANS

## Conflicts Between North and South

Nathan Clark: I would kind of like to make comments on some people and issues that I noticed in the other Sierra Club oral histories. In Glen Dawson's interview near the end, when you talked with him, Dick, you had asked something about what he thought of the controversy between the North and the South--not between the ski mountaineers and the chapter, but between northern and southern California. His answer was that most of his early friends in the club were in the north, and so he had sympathies there, but more than that, he felt the whole thing was unnecessary and silly.

Well, I wanted to agree with Glen, because as you know I joined in the San Francisco area, 1929, and most of the Sierra Club people I knew for many years were that group up there--Dick Leonard and my brother and Bestor Robinson and all that crowd, and of course I still know them. And then when I came south here, for the first time, I became aware of a slight conflict in feeling, not an animosity, but a kind of competition that maybe people down here are better than the ones up there, or this is a better chapter, or the people up there don't understand our problems.

Richard Searle: You're talking about Sierra Club activities when you say that.

NC: Yes. There's always been a certain amount of competition between Angelenos and San Franciscans. That's old stuff; I don't pay any attention to that.

RS: This is in the context of club organization.

NC: So I just wanted to say that I, as a long-time member, have felt the same as Glen, that is, that the feeling between the San Francisco area and the Los Angeles area in the club was silly, unnecessary,

NC: and I was glad that the club got so busy that it finally was washed out by more important concerns.

Also, Glen touched on this subject, I wanted to come out without any explanation necessarily, and say that I am personally opposed to area representation within the club. I think we should not elect directors because they come from New Orleans or Kalamazoo or Los Angeles or Berkeley. We should elect qualified people, and that's a problem--but the aim should be to get qualified people, not area representatives, because I think the basic types of problems that the club faces are problems that concern all people.

The board should not pass motions or do things for the benefit of a certain area of the country. We should do it for the benefit of conservation as a movement; whether the clearcutting or strip mining or air pollution is in Tennessee or in California doesn't make any difference in my opinion. So as a basic thing I am opposed to area representation. Furthermore, there's no limit to how far you can go. Should Watts be represented separately from Lynwood?

RS: I see--you mean on a chapter level as well.

NC: I mean, where do you draw the line? At state level, at the county level, at the area level? So the idea, I think, of area representation is very unsound. Well, that's enough on that.

### The Mugelnoos

NC: I noticed that Glen Dawson gave a very good account about the starting of The Mugelnoos, so therefore I don't have to, except I just would like to emphasize that The Mugelnoos was the first little paper printed by any agency of the Sierra Club. Up to that time, the only Sierra Club regular publication was the Bulletin.

RS: What year was that, about 1937?

NC: 1938, wasn't it, Joan?

Joan Clark: I think it started in 1937 or earlier, before I came to California. Then for a while, Ruth Mendenhall--I mean Ruth Dyar--and Joan Dyar were accused of trying to keep The Mugelnoos in the family, and we still chuckle about that once in awhile, even though I haven't edited it for many years. But she's still chairman of the editorial committee.

RS: The Mugelnoos is a very straightforward name, but is there any special way in which that name came about?

JC: I can tell you. The first chairman of the Ski Mountaineering Section was George Bauwens. He proposed the name. He spoke with a very strong German accent, which he never eradicated to the day of his death, maybe not even then. The word "mugel" means "a little hill" in German. It's not "mogul" as it's been prostituted--

NC: It's not "mewgle" either.

JC: It's not "mewgle" but it's "moogle" as the cow says, and "noos" is news with a German accent. So really it's "moogle noos", but people generally say "moogle news".

RS: I see. We used to be the mailers, and we never learned it properly.

JC: I believe it. I bet you said "muggle news". However, if you were the mailers, everything is forgiven.

NC: Well, I think Glen Dawson started this news sheet and printed it in the bookshop at first. Later on at meetings in the San Francisco region, before I was a director, it was decided, mainly by Charlotte Mauk, to start the San Francisco Bay paper, which became the Yodeler. And then it was quite a bit later that since the San Francisco Bay Chapter had a paper, the Angeles Chapter decided they would have one, and the name Southern Sierran was picked.

JC: I think Charlotte got the prize for suggesting that name.

NC: Yes, I think so . . .

#### Cliff Youngquist and Roads in the Parks

NC: I notice in what I've read so far, there's been very little reference to Cliff Youngquist. I regret that, because Cliff deserves some mention in all these stories. You can't interview him, of course; as you know, he passed away several years ago. Cliff Youngquist was a civil engineer who worked for the City of Los Angeles. He was a member of the Sierra Club for many many years. He took an interest in the outings and became a perennial manager of one of the base camp trips, and so hundreds of people got their first experience in the out-of-doors, at least on base camps, through his leadership. He was very well liked.

NC: He also was a director of the club for quite a long time, and he contributed his bit primarily in the engineering problems that came up. He was also a member of the committee appointed by President Harold Bradley\* to develop the Sierra Club's policy on roads in the national parks. I was the chairman and Alex Hildebrand, another engineer, was the third member. We really worked on that and passed the papers back and forth. I think we developed some very good policy. This was in 1957. I was a director at that time, but it was before I was the president.

RS: Was this about the time that the road development in Yosemite National Park was an issue?

NC: Tuolumne, yes.

RS: The one going along Tenaya Lake and that area there, because I remember some of that. I remember the promise, I thought it was a promise, that they were going to leave this thirty-mile section as a sort of memorial section, and years later it was built into a modern--

NC: Built up. Well, the kind of thing we were trying to do was to adopt a policy which, if followed, would have prevented the construction of freeway-type roads in the national parks. For instance, we believed in dividing the roads going in opposite directions, putting them half or a quarter of a mile apart. We did not believe in having deep cuts and high fills, and making a level road like a railroad. We felt that in the parks the roads should generally be laid on the landscape.

We developed, for instance, criteria for sharper turns than the park service was then advocating, and for smaller embankments and less clearance of the landscape off the side of the pavement. You probably know that throughout most of the United States and Mexico too, there is a policy of clearing all trees off the right-of-way of all federally-financed highways.

RS: Isn't this because of safety aspects?

NC: So they say. I don't agree with this at all, and I claim I know what I'm talking about. My father was a highway engineer, and I'm probably a highway robber, but anyway [laughter] we did not believe in that policy, at least within the national parks. We felt that the trees should be kept, if necessary, right up to

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\*Harold C. Bradley, Furthering the Sierra Club Tradition, Judy Snyder, interviewer, Sierra Club Oral History Project (Sierra Club, San Francisco, 1975).

- NC: the shoulders of the road, or at least pretty close. And I still think so--within the parks, certainly.
- RS: Incidentally, at least the highway that was built from the Crane Flat area on over--did the Park Service follow to some extent your recommendations, or did your recommendations come about in time to have any impact on that development?
- NC: I think we weren't soon enough for Yosemite roads, but we hoped that our policy might do some good in other parts of the country.

Well, maybe that's all I need to say. Cliff eventually declined to run again for the board of directors, and then he devoted himself to affairs down here. His wife died and after several years he married Carolyn Schmidt, a very capable, extroverted woman.

#### Anecdotes and Character Sketches

- NC: Phil Bernays mentioned on page eleven about a man by the name of D.R. Brothers. D. R. Brothers was the fellow who helped found the Riverside chapter. Well, now, before I tell any more about him I have to say that this was shortly after I had come to southern California, about 1931. I'd only been here a year, and when the proper occasion arose I decided that I wanted to communicate with the chapter by letter, but I wasn't very interested or at all informed as to who the important people were in the chapter. So on university letterhead, which is what I had, I wrote a letter addressed to my outdoor friends. And it started off: Sierra Club, Southern California Chapter, Dear Brothers:

Well, it just happened that D.R. Brothers was the chapter chairman!

- RS: All right! [All laugh.]
- NC: So I don't need to say any more. That was--the punishment fit the crime, I guess.

In Glen Dawson's interview, a slight reference is made to Dick Jones, and I wanted to say a little bit about him, because I've known him for many many years too. In fact, he's one of the old-timers who is going to go hiking up over Mt. Baldy with me this coming June. Another old-timer and ski mountaineer, Howard Koster, may go along too. We haven't finished finalizing that. But Dick Jones and my friend Jonnie and I went up and made

NC: a long trip the summer before last, from Lewis Saddle up Throop Peak and past Mt. Burnham to the top of Baden-Powell, back over Burnham and Throop Peak and out to Mt. Hawkins and back to Lewis Saddle.

RS: That's the loop there--the Throop Loop?

NC: The Throop Loop--quite a time. Oh, really it was just a wonderful trip. Well, Dick Jones was on the Baja California climb of El Picacho del Diablo in June, 1932, and he is an active member of the club now. He lives down in Laguna Niguel, and he's been our guest here within the last month. He lived in Highland Park in northeast Los Angeles as a boy.

JC: He has told of going fishing and hiking down in the Arroyo Seco long before it became a paved channel next to a freeway.

NC: He told us on that trip that at some time when he was a little boy he used to walk up in the Montecito hills and into the arroyo and up over Mt. Washington, when there was practically nothing here--just imagine, almost sixty years ago!

RS: That is something unique, a native Angeleno, I mean even a native Californian, for one thing!

NC: So I just wanted to bring in these pleasant things about Dick Jones. On page nineteen of Glen's interview you made reference to Stanley Jones, and you asked the question whether Dick Jones and Stanley Jones were related, and of course, the answer was no. Glen Dawson said that he thought that Stanley had some little bit of antagonism toward the rock climbers and ski mountaineers. I commented on that, that I think that kind of antagonism is perfectly normal and perfectly healthy. It is a little bit bothersome, of course. Stanley didn't want to go out and climb rocks, and so far as I know, though I don't know it all, he probably never went skiing. His sister, Marion Jones\*, was very active in the club at the time that Stanley was the vice-president of the club, and she and he are both still active in the Pasadena group at the present time.

I kind of agree with Glen on the relative position of the ski mountaineers and the rock climbers, on one hand, and the chapter on the other. Of course, I would; I was the chairman of it [laughter].

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\*Marion Jones, Reminiscences of the Southern California Sierra Club, 1927-1975, Sierra Club Oral History Project (Sierra Club, San Francisco, 1976).

- NC: Then on page twenty there was a little bit about Weldon Heald. Weldon Heald, as I mentioned in discussing the problem with the chapter and the ski mountaineers, was a very kind person. He was intelligent, he was a writer, well versed in the subjects of the outdoors, and I guess he was probably fairly wealthy. He lived in a beautiful mansion in Altadena which Joan and I visited. At one time he took us on a walk all around his extensive garden, which must have been several acres--wasn't it, Joan?
- JC: A redwood grove.
- NC: Yes, he had a redwood grove and all kinds of exotic trees, and he showed us all around. Well then, Joan was talking with his wife, Phyllis, who told how one day just before that she suddenly realized that her maid was up in the living room arranging flowers and Phyllis was down shaking the ashes out of the furnace. Nice way to treat your maid . . . On page twenty-one, there's a reference to Mt. Ansel Adams. It was named in the summer of 1934. Mt. Ansel Adams is in the group that's in the southeastern part of Yosemite Park, but I can't tell you exactly where it is.
- RS: Isberg Pass, or at least towards the Minarets?
- NC: No, Isberg Pass and the Minarets, I think, are outside the park.
- RS: Well, the Minarets are.
- NC: Well, anyway, it was in that general neighborhood.
- RS: Towards Mt. Clark.
- NC: Yes. Ansel\*--he was a young fellow then, maybe in his early thirties--and Rimo Bacigalupi, Helen LeConte,\*\* Virginia Ferguson, Virginia Adams, and my brother and others, whose names I can't remember right now, used to go around together quite a bit. I think that was the year that Ansel had a human mule to carry his stuff. You see, Ansel was a photographer, and he was kind of a lightweight, slender person, and he didn't want to carry a great big pack with camera, and lenses, and films, and everything. Also, it would be too hard to get it off his own back every time he wanted to change anything. So for several years he had a real mule, and he would stop the mule and go up to the side of it and undo a bag and take out a lens or change film or whatever.

Well, this particular year, I think this was the one, he decided that an animal mule was too hard to manage and couldn't

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\*Ansel Adams, oral history in process.

\*\*Helen LeConte, Reminiscences of LeConte Family Outings, The Sierra Club, and Ansel Adams, Ruth Teiser, interviewer. Sierra Club Oral History Project (Sierra Club, San Francisco, 1977).

NC: go to the places he wanted to go, so he hired a young fellow of college age. I don't suppose he paid him anything; he probably let him go on the trip free; I imagine it was an arrangement like that. And so he had this young fellow with a great big pack that carried all of Ansel's precious things, and anyway, that was the year--1934, I believe.

We were climbing around over there and finally Ansel, as the leader, took the whole bunch of us up a kind of rocky peak somewhere in that neighborhood, and we named it Mt. Ansel Adams. When I say "we", a whole bunch of us talked it over. I don't know who made the final proposal, if it ever got anywhere, but that's where it came from.

RS: Are you telling me then that you don't know whether it's been officially named?

NC: I don't know whether it's officially named yet. That's all of forty years ago, you know the name might have been decided on by now.

Then on page twenty-three Glen Dawson made reference to the High Trips being given up because of the impact of so many people in the mountains. Well, this was brought about by exterior complaint. I don't know who made the complaint, but the complaint was that the great big Sierra Club takes two hundred people over the mountains, and of course they wear down all the trails and all the meadows. And, within limits, it was possibly true.

But on the other hand, the Sierra Club has always been a very careful group, you know. They bury things deep enough, or they take things out. They're careful with the wood, and they're careful with the trash around. Anyway, the board of directors, back in the fifties I think it was--no, it was when I was president, but it was not my initiative--appointed an impact committee.

RS: Oh yes, wilderness impact.

NC: Wilderness impact. And this went on for several years, and many different people worked on it, and I think it was a result of that study in the late fifties and early sixties that caused the Sierra Club to change its policy about the High Trips. I only mention that because Glen didn't say when it occurred, and I thought it might be worthwhile mentioning that.



- RS: I do have a question in reference to Dr. Crowe.\* You were a contemporary with him on the board for a period of time?
- NC: Harold Crowe was a little bit ahead of me. He's about ten years older than I am, and he was on the board before I was, and he got off the board before I did. He's a wonderful person. The Sierra Club is very lucky to have kind and intelligent and well-meaning people like him.
- RS: I wondered if you were acquainted with some of his accomplishments on the board.
- NC: No, I couldn't say any more than he said in his interview.
- RS: He's a very modest individual, was my impression, and I was going to draw you out if you had participated with him in any events of significance to the club, and to maybe illustrate your knowledge of his character and contributions.
- NC: The only thing that he and I were involved in together was that ski mountaineers controversy in 1945, and just to review, in my opinion, he was trying as the highest class of a gentleman to bring peace into the family. I wanted the Sierra Club family to be together too, because I was in it long before I ever heard of the ski mountaineers--but I was in the embarrassing position of being chairman of the section, and so I had this problem, "How can I be faithful to everybody when they're fighting each other?"
- RS: I can appreciate that--you can carry that one quite a little way.
- NC: Yes, that goes on and on.

There was only one other thing from Glen's interview, and then we can go on with new material, and that was mention of Tyler Van Degrift. Tyler was very active in the Southern California Chapter, and so I got to know him; he was the one who welcomed me into the chapter in 1930. You know about his shoe store and then the ski store. I also knew Ethel Severson, sister of Parker Severson and went on trips with her. Tyler, Ethel, my friend Jonnie and I went up and climbed Mt. San Gorgonio about 1950, on skis. Tyler and Ethel married and raised two sons.

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\*Harold E. Crowe, Sierra Club Physician, Baron, and President, Richard Searle, interviewer, Sierra Club Oral History Project (Sierra Club, San Francisco, 1975).

### Developing a Conservation Committee, 1940s

NC: I wanted to get down to World War II, 1941-1945. The Sierra Club had a conservation committee, and the board of directors would pass its conservation problems along to this committee, which would make recommendations to the board and then the board would accept them or not. Now of course, since then, there have been other conservation committees, and now there are many of them. Anyway, during the war, all the young people were away, and so the conservation committee finally got down to one man, Art Blake.

Art Blake was a man in his upper fifties; he was a sales engineer for the Westinghouse Company. And he alone carried not only his war-time engineering but also the whole Sierra Club burden of conservation, which the assembled board of directors couldn't carry, and I think he just wore himself down very seriously. I think he impaired his health by working so hard in conservation. Right after World War II there was some kind of a question, as I've mentioned before, about Joshua Tree National Monument. I think it was mineral entry and proposed changes in the boundaries. So Art Blake came down here and sat in this room with Joan and me, and we also brought in some other people.

JC: I think we had a roomful.

NC: Anyway, that's when I first got to know Art Blake personally, and I developed quite a respect for him--a fine fellow. Well, he and Don McLain, who was one of the early climbers of El Picacho del Diablo down in Baja California and quite a character, and I, went out to Joshua Tree National Monument, and Art carried back to San Francisco the information that led to the Sierra Club's position opposing the proposed changes.

That was Art Blake. Gradually, as a result of his visit and our going concern, a group of us down here formed a southern section conservation committee. This was a section of the main club committee, but a group that got together here because we couldn't go up north to meet. We were all working people, of course. So for a while, there was the main Sierra Club Conservation Committee under Art Blake that reported to the board of directors, and this southern section that theoretically reported to the northern main group, and we worked in very good harmony.

RS: What year was this, roughly?

NC: Well, I think it was probably 1944. It was either '44 or '45. The San Francisco region had a conservation committee--actually it wasn't the San Francisco Bay Chapter committee, it was a club

- NC: committee in the San Francisco Bay Area. But there were many things down here also that needed attention, so the Southern California (now Angeles) Chapter formed its own conservation committee. Then for awhile we had two conservation committees down here, the chapter's committee and our southern section of the main committee.
- RS: That was the Southern California Chapter at that time, so it covered all of southern California. It would have almost the same area of interest, then.
- JC: The Riverside Chapter was established by then.
- NC: Oh yes, the Riverside Chapter came along back in the 1930s, before the World War. I helped Doris Price Rowland and D.R. Brothers in establishing that chapter, went out there many evenings to try to get the enthusiasm of the people. However, I think it was mainly Doris Price Rowland that put that chapter into existence.

But getting back to the two committees on conservation: eventually we managed to subdue our personal ambitions, all of us, and we combined into one committee. So then for awhile the Sierra Club had a southern section of the conservation committee as well as the main conservation committee. Then of course, after that, maybe in the 1950s, the number of problems that the club wanted to give its attention to became so great that many chapter conservation committees were formed, and now of course we have regional groups and regional group conservation committees, so that activity specifically for conservation is quite a big organization now. I don't even know exactly what it is, but I know the foundation has been granting money to the various regional conservation committees, right along. We have a regular standing budget item for that, as well as the money we give directly to the club. I think that's enough on that subject.

Another little item of interest: about 1946, '47, in the spring, we were getting ready to have the main Sierra Club annual dinner in Los Angeles. Previously, the decoration in the foyer of the dining room where we had the dinner was outdoor equipment-- climbing ropes and tents, sleeping bags, and parkas, and things of that type. I thought it might be a good idea, since the conservation problems were growing very fast, to substitute some big, nicely made conservation posters. So that year we got some help from Don McLain again and from a retired commercial artist who was very active in the chapter, an elderly man, Ralph Mocine. Ralph and I planned these conservation posters and Ralph did all the art work. They were big things, done in color, and they had maps and statements and photographs, and I think they were very

- NC: impressive. They filled the whole lobby of--I don't know, was it the Breakfast Club, Joan?
- JC: I think it was the Breakfast Club. We went to Roger Young Auditorium later.
- NC: That was quite a bit later. So anyway, the conservation posters came about in that year, and I think they were used for quite a number of years. I haven't been to a modern annual banquet. I don't think they would use those posters of course, because the problems are different now. That was an interesting development that I put some effort in on.
- RS: I know they have traveling poster exhibits from the club, which indirectly could have been an outgrowth of that.
- NC: Of course, in the 1950s, the amount of money increased, and we had Ansel's photographs, and Cedric Wright's, and the "This Is the American Earth" exhibit. As more members joined and the total income from dues increased, and the dues themselves increased, of course we could do more things.

#### Filming Wilderness Outings

- NC: In a way, this next item is kind of personal, and yet it's all tied up with the Sierra Club. In the late 1920s, probably about 1926 or 1927, amateur motion picture equipment was made available to the public, that is, sixteen millimeter film and cameras. The film was all black and white, and the cameras, of course, were not anything like they are now. I got quite interested; I'd already been following still photography, black and white, and as I've mentioned, I built a darkroom in the family home, and I'd gone on Sierra Club outings; so I started taking motion pictures of the High Trips mainly. By 1929 I was really going full bore on that.
- JC: When was the Muir Gorge trip?
- NC: Oh--Muir Gorge, on the Tuolumne River. That was a good picture; it was in 1934.
- JC: We showed that at Glen Dawson's book shop at the author's party for a new book.
- NC: Oh, yes. We showed my fifteen-minute reel of one of the trips through the Muir Gorge--have you been through there?

RS: I've never been to the gorge; I've been to the Waterwheel Falls, and I have gone below that. I'll have to get your recommendation; I'm going to do that some day.

NC: The gorge is a wonderful place. The main gorge is about a mile and a half through, but you have to hike a good many miles to get to it, and once you get through then you have to hike a number of miles back around the trail, the Tuolumne Canyon Trail. But that one mile and a half is just terrific. The river fills the gorge from wall to wall; the walls are smooth granite straight up within five degrees of vertical, and there's one big waterfall that has three divisions, and it's quite a trick to get over that. The last man has to make a high dive into a deep pool. Anyway, it's a wonderful trip, and I have movies of that.

RS: Are the movies in pretty good shape today--

NC: Oh yes. I'll show you. Have you ever seen my cabinet of films? I've finally got them all in one place except the cans that are down in the darkroom. It begins in about 1925 and goes up to December 1975.

RS: I'll have to look at your list of titles there.

NC: I kept on with this, and on the 1932 outing I made about 1600 feet of movies, and May Dornin, a long time member of the Sierra Club, made the titles for me. During the middle thirties I was poor because of the depression, and I didn't make any movies. Then in 1937, my brother Lewis, my Mexican friend Jonnie, my Norwegian friend Viles Fremstad, and I went on an interesting hike along French Creek Canyon and up past the head of Lake Italy, more or less the same trip I'd made with the Sierra Club in 1929, but only four of us, backpacking. I took black and white movies that year. Then from the 1950s on, up through just last month, January 1976, I've been making motion pictures, in color now, of Mexico, Central America, Canada, some of the big rivers, and a little bit in Europe.

However, in the midst of this I also made a lot of movies on Sierra Club trips. For instance, I was on the 1947 High Trip, the first one that Joan and I went on together.

Then we went on the second river trip the Sierra Club ever had, on the Yampa River in 1953, and the Canyon of Lodore trip in 1955. Lodore was my first experience of going through rapids, although the rapids are not big, not like the Grand Canyon.

RS: What river is that on?

NC: The Canyon of Lodore is on the Green River.

RS: That's when the Dinosaur National Monument issue was raging. I remember seeing one of the first Sierra Club films on that issue.

NC: I made part of that. Dave Brower put it together, and he used some of my film and other people's too, and some of his own. Anyway, he used some of my footage from the Lodore trip in 1955. Later he used some of my film from the 1956 Glacier Peak trip in Washington on another conservation campaign.

Then we went with the Sierra Club--the whole family, Joan, our boys Roger and Chris, and our daughter Sylvia--on a wilderness threshold trip in the Wind River Mountains in Wyoming in 1964, and I took a lot of film. That was partly scenic and partly family type film. Then we went to the Marble Mountains in northern California, on another wilderness threshold trip with the family, in 1965. Joan went through Glen Canyon with Georgie White in 1960, and she and I went through it again in May of 1961. On the French Alps Sierra Club trip of 1968, I took a lot of movies. I'd like to have you see them. Lewis was the leader and as I signed up to go, he made me the assistant leader [laughter]. There were many private trips, too. A lot of good films I made on non-Sierra Club trips. One of my best was the upper Grand Canyon with Georgie White during the spring flood of 1958.

As a result of all these partly Sierra Club outings and partly private outings, but over a period--this year, now, it's fifty years--I have quite a lot of good footage of films. I've shown many of these to chapter annual dinners and on one occasion to the Sierra Club annual dinner.

## ON CONSERVATION AND THE FUTURE OF THE SIERRA CLUB

## Conservation and the Government Agencies: An Appraisal

Nathan Clark: You asked about my attitude toward agencies of the government. I think that most of the directors of the national park system have been qualified and most of them have had the right attitude toward the parks. There have been a few that I can think of, not by name, that were too strongly interested in development. The basic act of creating the national park system required the park service to protect and conserve the parks and do whatever was necessary for the enjoyment of them by the people. That sounds like a very good ideal, but it's a conflicting idea, because sometimes what the people want is not at all in harmony with preservation.

For instance, commercial installations in the national parks and off-road vehicles in the national parks, ski tows, tramways, and excess of roads in the backcountry, wide roads instead of simple roads--these are all things which you might say are required by the second half of the enabling act, but are contrary to the first half. I think some of our park directors have been too interested in the second part and not enough in the first part.

I think the place where we've suffered the most is in the secretary of the interior position. That, of course, is a political payoff, and we've had people in the secretary's office who were utterly and completely unqualified by either experience or interest. Rogers C.B. Morton is one, and I don't remember who came before him.

Richard Searle: Walter Hickel, wasn't it?

NC: Hickel, he was another one. He had no business being in the position at all. He was a Nixon payoff. He supported Nixon so Nixon gave him the top job.

RS: The gentleman before that was Udall?

NC: Udall was a very good man. He's even written his own private books on the subjects of conservation, pollution, and preservation of the natural values, and now is in private enterprise in the field.

Jóan Clark: A cousin of his lives in our neighborhood.

RS: I don't remember all of those before Udall, but of course there was Harold Ickes, I guess, back there in the Roosevelt period.

NC: I didn't know much about him. I remember my brother, who was at that time a club director, couldn't say anything bad enough about Ickes. But then in more recent years he said that Ickes was so good compared to some of the others that he didn't criticize him any more [laughter].

I think the worst secretaries of the interior that I'm aware of are the ones appointed by Eisenhower and Nixon. Eisenhower was a military man. He had no reason to be very much interested in the things that the parks stand for. He spent his whole life either in the Philippines or in Europe or in Washington; although he was a fine man and I voted for him, he didn't have the interests that go with preservation of the natural values.

At one time we were having some kind of a battle during the Eisenhower regime. We wrote letters to the secretary of the interior, whose name I don't remember right now--immaterial--and we got nowhere. We wouldn't even get acknowledgments. And these were written in the name of the club president on letterhead. They should certainly have gotten acknowledgments. Private citizens didn't get any acknowledgments. So we started writing letters to Eisenhower himself. Well, of course, all the letters were automatically shunted by his secretary over to the secretary of the interior and evidently simply landed in the wastebasket.

RS: So everything was channeled to one man; there was no check and balance.

Do you have any opinions about our present Department of Interior and how it is going today?

NC: Well, I don't admire [Thomas]Kleppe very much. But the secretary of the interior does have a difficult job, because he has the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Reclamation and what should be called the Bureau of Parks, but we call it the National Park Service, under his domain, and these things are basically in conflict. For instance, reclamation is pretty much basically in conflict with parks.



NC: In my opinion, the Bureau of Reclamation has outlived its usefulness. I think it should be cut back to a quarter or a tenth of its present size. I don't think it's doing the country a good service. But it's a huge organization, and it's got a lot of political pull, and so it rides roughshod over the Park Service.

During one of these campaigns, the secretary of the interior had directed the National Park Service to completely refrain from making any comments whatsoever contrary to the Bureau of Reclamation plans. That was the Grand Canyon--and the Park Service had to prohibit their rangers from saying anything at the tourist campfire shows that criticized reclamation intrusion into the park. I think that's real wrong.

As far as the Forest Service is concerned, I find that I don't feel very friendly toward the Forest Service; I never have. The Forest Service, at least in modern years, is very heavily committed to clearcutting, and I don't believe in clearcutting. They say that of course the forests have to have some light in order for the new trees to grow, and as long as you take out only some of the trees there isn't enough sunlight for the little new ones. How do they suppose the forests have been here for a million years?

RS: It depends on whether you have a climax forest or whether you have a progression from a fire, or the like.

NC: There is an interesting sidelight on this, at least as recently as the mid-sixties. Dave Brower made a study of the required curriculum of practically every school of forestry in the United States, and he found that it was so heavily weighted toward logging and consumptive use of the forest that there was practically no emphasis at all put on the other values, such as recreation and watershed and wilderness.

Here is a little clipping from page two, part one of today's Los Angeles Times: that's January 9, 1976. I'll read it; it's just a short paragraph:

The California Board of Forestry, which is an official agency of the State of California, rejecting a recommendation by the National Park Service and the State Resources Agency, ruled against declaring a moratorium on private logging surrounding Redwood National Park, and voted not to adopt a rehabilitation plan or special rules covering the timber operations for the area around the park in Humboldt County.

- NC: This is a board which was appointed by the governor, a hangover from the Reagan regime, I guess, maybe longer than that. It's a board which is supposed to regulate forestry on private lands in California, and it is, I believe, one hundred percent comprised of management people in the logging industry. So of course they don't enforce any of the State Forest Practices Act; they won't do anything. They voted not to adopt any plan at all for rehabilitation.
- RS: That's rather amazing. I wonder if Governor Brown has attempted to make any new appointments. I suppose they are for certain terms.
- NC: Oh, I think so.
- RS: So the problem is there until the terms are up. I believe Claire Dedrick is the resource agency director. I know she has been attempting to require environmental impact statements such as that--do you know anything about what the outcome of that has been so far? I can't say it's amazing; it's frustrating, I guess I should say.
- NC: It's frustrating, and of course there are other agencies that have control of that land, and some federal court has recently ruled that the National Park Service must undertake a program of protecting that land, and that's independent of the state.
- RS: Do they have to put up proper dams along the edge, or take over the land, condemn it?
- NC: They may have to condemn it, and I certainly hope they do, because the loggers have very obviously been cutting right along the boundary first and left the hillsides way back up uncut, evidently to be sure they get the logs before protective measures can be effective.
- RS: This is along Redwood Creek as one example, and the situation is that they didn't acquire land up to the watershed divide. Originally they acquired land within about a half mile or quarter mile of the creek. So what I understand is that they're clear-cutting up above, and this causes flood water to come through the park and brings silt into the creek, and this is a problem.
- NC: They had it in Bull Creek back in 1950. The upper Bull Creek watershed had been clearcut, up around the canyon about ten miles back. But in the winter of 1955, they had cloudburst-proportion heavy rains in the winter, and something like 500 redwood trees, that you could classify as Big Trees, were undermined and fell over because of the flood. Now the same thing could happen on

- NC: Redwood Creek. But it's not only the threat of undermining the trees and having some of them fall. Equally important as you just mentioned is the siltation that will spoil the beautiful riverbed of Redwood Creek. And thirdly is the fact that as you hike along the trail now in the Redwood Creek Canyon, and you look up above the tops of the nearby trees, especially if you look across the canyon, you see all those bare slopes. Have you been up there by any chance?
- RS: Yes, I have. I was up there actually last winter. It was a little bit foggy and cloudy as it usually is in winter, so I didn't see all of that, but I did see some of the damage along the highway. I was very impressed, frankly, in some of the towns near there, I don't know if it was Dyerville, or how high the flood water got, and I presume part of that was due to the amount of runoff and possibly also the log jams or something downstream resulting from all of the clearcutting.
- NC: Of course, that was a very heavy winter--1964 was it?
- RS: I think that's probably right. They still talk about it. But I'm convinced that part of it, a good deal of it, might have been due to the poor logging practices.
- NC: Well, I think I've said enough about government. I have such strong feelings about government, and most of them are not very flattering, that we have a little policy, Joan and I, that when we go on a vacation trip we don't allow each other to even mention the word government. [All laugh.]
- JC: We get fined a nickel.
- RS: It's like myself and taxes. If somebody asks me a question about taxes I have to go on to something else.
- NC: I sympathize on that, because I have very strong ideas on taxes too.

#### A Proliferation of Conservation Organizations

- NC: You asked me about my activity in the private sector, or something equivalent to that, and so I'll just mention that for many years I've been a member of the National Parks Association, which is now the National Parks and Conservation Association. I think they do very good work.

- RS: You might be interested, incidentally, in comparing the character of some of these different organizations you belong to, and the way they operate, with the Sierra Club, or maybe where you think they fit within the national conservation movement. I have input that the Sierra Club is thought of as a very aggressive national organization, a strong lobby. Maybe you can draw a comparison with some of these other organizations.
- NC: I think they're all quite different. They serve different purposes, and I think in general they're all good. I'm in favor of having them all. I believe the NPCA does not have much membership participation, for example, while the Sierra Club does. The Sierra Club has members and chapters and sections and groups, and ski trips and hiking trips and dances and moonlight walks and shows and everything you can think of, and that has built up about three times as large a membership as the National Parks Association, although once they were about the same.
- RS: Who governs the organization--is it a closed corporation? Is it governed by a board of directors?
- NC: There's a board of directors, and Anthony Wayne Smith has the executive director kind of a job that Dave Brower had.
- RS: Do you know if it's a closed arrangement? Do the directors elect new directors?
- NC: Well, I guess they do because I've never received a ballot. As long as they do a good job I don't care whether they stay directors. You know how I feel; I don't think that change is any good unless it is for the better; just to have the change alone is not a worthwhile policy.
- RS: And they have a national staff, I presume, of some nature, but they don't have local groups or local chapters?
- NC: No, not that I know of. Another is American Forestry Association, which backs up the U.S. Forest Service. I subscribed to them for awhile, but I got so utterly disgusted with what they printed in their magazine backing up the excessive logging activities and either belittling or omitting the other things which belonged in their multiple-use policy that I vociferously resigned and wrote them a good strong letter, which of course probably landed in somebody's wastebasket, but at least I did it. And I don't honor the American Forestry Association. Did that about twenty years ago.

Now there are quite a number of wildlife organizations; I couldn't tell you how many. I'm going through an exercise right now here at home of tabulating all of these charities and things

NC: that are asking for money, and I find it far more than I can afford to give to, so I have to decide which ones I will and which ones I won't, but I think I found there are eight different outfits for animals that are asking for money.

RS: There ought to be a community chest for conservation.

NC: Oh, my. There's the Wildlife Institute and the World Wildlife Fund and the Fund for Animals that I can think of right now, and quite a number more.

JC: The March of Lions.

NC: And then I got a letter from the other day asking for money for animals, and they were simply an organization that was devoted to looking out for the welfare of domestic pets. Well, that's all right, of course, if that's what your interest is, but that's not mine--I'm interested in the wilderness, the wildlife.

RS: I wonder if there is getting to be such a proliferation of organizations, many of which you don't know anything about, that this is going to be confusing to the public and dilute coordinated efforts in certain areas?

NC: It is confusing, and I think worse than that, there is occasionally an organization which is a plain outright swindle. There was an article about that in the Los Angeles Times within the last month, of some organization that had finally been caught. They were collecting money and not using any of it for what the name sounded like.

I'm also a member of a few other things which might be a little surprising, but because I basically think the worst problem we have is population, I've been opposed to the population explosion as many others have, and so I'm a member of the World Population Planned Parenthood, Zero Population Growth, which run mainly be Sierra Club people (ZPG), Negative Population Growth (NPG), and National Organization for Non-Parents. That last one is an interesting one. Its main theme is that, if a married couple doesn't want to be parents, they should not be under a social obligation to be.

RS: I see. If not explicit, there's an implicit coercive effect due to the public attitude.

NC: Very strongly so. For instance, some churches. I've also been giving something to the cause of the American Indians because they got a very raw treatment by us white people--

RS: I'll ask you about the Wounded Knee situation some time.

NC: I don't know all about it, but I have known enough Indians personally to feel that white Americans are certainly no more noble than anybody else, especially our ancestors of a century ago.

Finally, before I get to my closing remarks, I wanted to mention that, as I guess you can see, I personally don't feel very important. I don't want to be important; I have no desire to have authority over other people except to make my home run smoothly and to avoid taxes [laughter].

JC: Well, that's quite an ambition.

NC: I feel it's time to let the young people take over, and I'm confident that they have the brains and energy to do it right. I'd like to live in peace and simplicity and have all the time in the world to go into the wilderness and do my reading and work on my inventions in my shop out here.

JC: Not to mention your movies.

NC: Well, that's one of my big programs. I have eighteen major programs I'm trying to work on now. So when I get elected out of the Sierra Club Foundation I'll be very glad to let somebody else run all of it.

RS: Very good. Let's see--you probably mentioned you're a member of the Save-the-Redwoods League also, did you?

NC: Oh, didn't I mention that? Yes, I'm a member of that, and I'm a member of the Wilderness Society too. You know, George Marshall\* was the president of it for a number of years. I admire George very much; I think he's a fine man, a man of the highest possible integrity. He is now a trustee or a director of it. He was the editor of The Living Wilderness for a number of years, a few years back. I might say that I think that The Living Wilderness and the publications of the Save-the-Redwoods League are much more interesting to read than the Sierra Club Bulletin, because in my opinion the Sierra Club Bulletin has too much on how bad everything is.

JC: It used to be made up primarily of interesting articles of what people had done, and I think this kind of a thing is much more inspirational to do good things than just reading the negative,

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\*George Marshall, oral history in process.

JC: because if you read too many things of a negative order, you wonder if you should just give up.

#### Growth and Expansion of The Sierra Club

RS: One of the other questions I had was about your general impressions and feelings about how the character of the club has changed over the years? We've sort of progressed from, I'll use the term, a provincial hiking club to a national conservation force. That was an opinion expressed, maybe you have some observations there. The future of the club--where is it going, where it should head?

NC: [After a pause.] Well, some of what you said is covered by my remarks, and something else you said is not. Of course, it has changed just as everything in civilization has changed in the last fifty years. Everything has become more numerous and more extensive. The population of the earth has doubled in fifty years, I think, from two billion when I was a kid, and now it's almost four billion. The United States was at 100 million population when I was in school; now it's 214 million and so forth. Of course we know what's happened. We know that if we don't limit our numbers we'll probably die off, not because of lack of food but because the living conditions will be unbearable.

But anyway, starting from that, the Sierra Club has grown, and I'm very glad it has. I think that one of the ways that the Sierra Club is making a lot of progress now that we could not make when we had ten thousand members, is that we have so many people on the outside who are on our side, who would not have been with a small membership.

So I think it's a good thing that the Sierra Club grows and I think it's going to continue to grow. I don't believe that it will grow indefinitely into the future at the same rate it has in the past. I think most of these things grow with kind of an O.G. curve, shaped like a saturation curve of magnetic material that starts off slow and grows steep and then flattens out again.

RS: Like an S-shaped curve maybe. Like our natural resources. That's only because the population is leveling off.

NC: I hope so. Then, besides expanding its field of subject matter, it is expanding in surface area of the earth. I think that's fine provided that we can do it right.

RS: Do you think that the Sierra Club should become a factor in international conservation politics? That's not a burning question today necessarily, and in fact in some ways I think the club is organized in such a way that--well, for instance, they've separated the Canadian chapters so they're in a position to become independent. I just wondered whether that, at one time, was an issue.

NC: That opens up a number of questions. The first thing that strikes me is about taxation. If the Sierra Club is international, how about our exemption or liabilities--the laws are very different in different countries. I wouldn't want to come right out and say, "yes we should be international," because of this uncertainty.

JC: I have felt strongly for a long time that we should not become international. For instance, what would the people of the United States think if there was a French conservation organization that came over to this country and established some chapters and decided what they were going to save in our country? I still remember, and it wasn't too many years ago, when we were fighting the Olympic National Park fight. I believe there was a chapter in Washington at that time; in fact some people I knew in Port Angeles, which was my brother's home, belonged to the Sierra Club.

But I talked to other people up there who lived right at the foot of Hurricane Ridge, and they thought that their wilderness was endless. Aside from that, they thought the Sierra Club was very presumptive to come in and tell them what they should do about their Olympic National Park. This happened only in the United States. I think that we would be treading on really touchy ground if we went into other countries. I think some of them may be doing a better job of conservation than we are.

RS: Certainly it would depend an awful lot on how you went about what you were doing.

JC: I think we have a lot to improve in our country without doing missionary work.

NC: How true. If the Sierra Club had chapters in other countries, and those chapters were made up entirely of people of those countries, and they did their own research and made their own recommendations, and we merely helped them with whatever research we could do, whatever knowledge we could give them, and maybe gave some money, that would be fine. I would be very doubtful as to the value of our dictating to our chapters abroad how they ought to do things.

RS: Maybe an affiliation but not literally a structured organization, where the decisions are made in the center of the world.



JC: That might turn out to be a very good thing.

#### Looking Ahead: Final Thoughts

NC: I had these seven final thoughts. Maybe this is slightly repeating. I have been very impressed by the high integrity of the Sierra Club leaders over a long period. I think we have gained status and strength because of people like Will Colby, Joel Hildebrand, Will Siri, Dick Sill, Ed Wayburn, Dick Leonard, Joe LeConte, Weldon Heald, Charlotte Mauk, Bestor Robinson, Einar Nilsson, Lewis Clark. . . I couldn't mention them all, but I mean I think in every case we have had people who are sincere, honest, and capable.

RS: All right.

NC: These next items are possibly going to sound like scolding, but they're not; they're just simply my convictions distilled out of all my forty-six or so years with the club.

First, I think the greatest need that the club has now, and always will have, is for integrity. I think there's nothing that is as important in winning our battles as to know what we're talking about, not to overstate anything, not to understate anything, and of course never to state untruths. Now I don't mean to say we are lacking it, because as I stated a moment ago, we do have it. I think we have very capable and honest people with high integrity, but I think of all the things a club could need, the Sierra Club needs it more than, say, a golf club or a bridge club or a breakfast club.

Second, I think the next thing the Sierra Club needs, and does have now, is vigor and aggressiveness. Within the limits of integrity, which is first, we need to be as forceful as we can. We have to combat extremely selfish interests--corporations, government bureaus and so on, that are self-serving and very well financed and are willing to use unethical tactics because of the enormous profit that might come to them. We should hit just as hard as we can.

The third thought is a little bit different. I think that if it gets to a point where we have to make a choice, it would better to be effective in a few programs than to take on so many that we're not a success in any of them. The Sierra Club must not take on so many programs that it loses effectiveness. We don't have to do everything, but we should be very effective on the ones that we do take.

NC: Fourth, I feel that the election procedure needs improvement. Many people feel the same. I think that is a subject that needs a great deal of thought. I've already explained that I think every candidate for being a director should have to state his priorities. I wish our public elections would require the same thing.

Fifth, we need to hear the opposition's arguments, particularly their best ones. I had a lot of trouble with Dave Brower on this. He would present us a new problem and then give us all the good conservation reasons why a certain thing should be done. If a director asked, "Dave, what are the opposition's arguments?", he would look surprised but say nothing. Maybe he didn't know, but we needed to understand both sides of the issue, to make an intelligent stand.

When I was at Lockheed I took various courses that the management people were supposed to take on company time. One was in public speaking. One day each member of the class was asked to pick an issue and present his argument in four minutes at the next meeting. Well, that's quite a difficult thing to do. I presented my four minutes' argument against the Mt. San Jacinto tramway, and then somebody in the class who'd only heard the opposition presented the good arguments against the conservation view. It took me by surprise and I couldn't answer him. A member of the Sierra Club who is working on any of these campaigns should have a comeback; he should have an immediate answer for the best arguments of the opposition. All the officials and the minor officials and everybody on our side should dig out and be informed of what the opposition has to say.

Now my number six is one I've already touched on--the handicap that the volunteers have to undergo because of the superior position in detailed experience held by the members of the staff. The executive director stays on year after year. Many little things come across his desk that he can't pass out to the directors or other volunteers--little items, little telephone calls, meetings with people, maybe some letters. The directors are in a position of having to direct the affairs of the organization when they don't have anywhere near the detailed background that the executive director has. He lasts, he goes on and on and on, and the directors come and go.

I think a good example of this has been the secretaries of the interior of United States, who have a hard time controlling the bureau heads of their departments, and their department heads, because every time there's a new president, there's a new secretary. But the head of the department has a career, and he can hide information, or defy whatever he has to, to keep on doing the same old thing.

- NC: Finally, the last thing, which was brought about by the successes that we've had here in our Montecito Hills Improvement Association, and in quite a good many campaigns that the Sierra Club has had, is that we should compromise as little as possible to gain our ends. We should not keep out of an important issue just because it seems very difficult, or just because it seems at the beginning that we probably can't win. If the item is really important we should go ahead with it even if we can't win--because we may win. Our fight against the public housing here was a perfect example, when we had everybody against us at the start, but we won the war. I bring this up because some past directors have been advocates of not taking on any battle unless we thought we could win, and I don't agree with that at all. We've won too many that looked impossible to begin with.
- JC: There was the one that we didn't win--the San Jacinto battle--and yet if we hadn't fought it, the outcome would have been a lot worse.
- NC: Oh yes.
- RS: That might be one aspect at the beginning. You don't understand the problem, and if you don't understand the problem you don't know what the odds are. I think, to use your comment, that when you understand the problem then you've got the problem half-solved.
- NC: Half of it. Well, that ends all I can think of to say. I just might mention there are photo albums, motion picture reels, my old written records, letters and tapes, and the Colby tape, that we have to decide to either do something about or else just drop off.
- RS: I want to thank you very much for the History Committee and for myself, Nate, for the time that you have spent in giving this interview. It was a pleasure sharing your experiences in these past several sessions. This concludes the oral part of the interview, and I want to thank you very much.
- NC: You are most welcome, Dick. I have enjoyed these sessions too, and also the renewing of contact with you. I have never before reviewed my life's works and probably never will again. So these conversations, and the research I've had to do to prepare for them, have not only been interesting and pleasurable, but brought to light many events I had completely forgotten.

I suppose all this material will be transcribed and typed in good form. I wonder whether anyone will read it--and if someone does, what use will be made of it.

NC: This has been a true story of growth, activity and maturity.  
It brings to mind the inevitable cycle of life. I wonder what's  
coming next!

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