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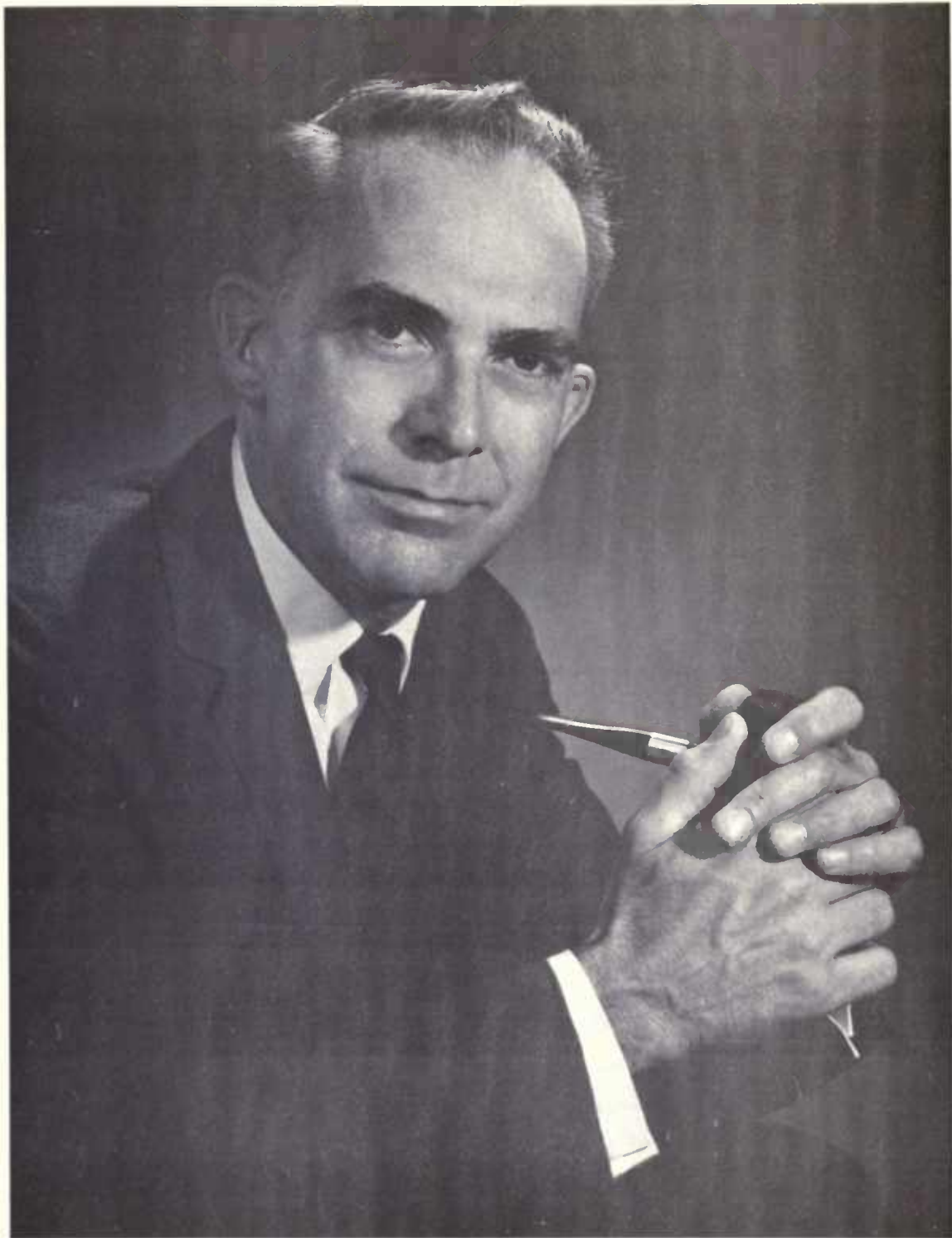
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William E. Siri

REFLECTIONS ON THE SIERRA CLUB, THE ENVIRONMENT,
AND MOUNTAINEERING, 1950s-1970s

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William E. Siri, 1964

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University of California
Berkeley, California

Sierra Club History Series

William E. Siri

REFLECTIONS ON THE SIERRA CLUB, THE ENVIRONMENT,
AND MOUNTAINEERING, 1950s-1970s

With an Introduction by
Phillip S. Berry

An Interview Conducted by
Ann Lage

Sponsored by the Sierra Club

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TABLE OF CONTENTS -- William E. Siri

INTRODUCTION by Phillip S. Berry	i
INTERVIEW HISTORY	ii
I YOUTH AND SCIENTIFIC CAREER	1
Youthful Passions: Science and the Mountains	1
Higher Education, Chicago and California	5
The Manhattan Project and the War's Aftermath	7
Biophysics at the Donner Laboratory, 1945-74	9
Energy Analysis Program, Lawrence Berkeley Lab, 1974-	11
II SIERRA CLUB INITIATE AND OFFICER	13
The Sierra Club of the Forties and Fifties: A Climber's View	13
Conflicts Over Membership Policies, 1949-60	16
The Board of Directors: Outdoorsman All, 1950s	19
Goals as Sierra Club President, 1964-66	20
An Understanding With Dave Brower, 1964	24
Duties, Accomplishments, and Frustrations as Club President	26
III THE SIERRA CLUB'S BROADENING VISIONS, 1960s	31
Overpopulation, a Growing Concern	31
Conflict Over Pesticides Policy	34
Resolution of Conflicts on the Board	38
IV REDWOOD NATIONAL PARK CAMPAIGN, 1964-68	40
Development of Sierra Club Proposal	40
Differences with Save-the-Redwoods League: Battling vs. Negotiating	43
The Full-Page Ads	47
The Final Outcome, October 1968	48
V A POLITICAL BATTLE FOR THE GRAND CANYON, 1964-68	52
The Club's Uncompromising Commitment	52
IRS Response to a Vigorous Campaign	55
Loss of Tax Deductibility "Not Dave's Fault"	58
Appealing the IRS Ruling	60
The Sierra Club and Its Patron, the Foundation	62
Past Presidents on the Foundation Board	64
Differences With Stewart Udall	66
Deciding Factor in Saving the Grand Canyon	68

VI	ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN THE FEDERAL LAND AGENCIES	70
	Changing Attitudes Toward Conservation, 1960s	70
	Managing Wilderness: Forest Service and Park Service Policies	72
	Controversy Over the Tioga Pass Road, 1958	74
	Park Service Procrastination in Designating Wilderness	76
	Passage of the Wilderness Act, 1964	77
VII	DEFENSE OF MINERAL KING	80
	Reversal of Board Policy: The Decision-Making Process, May, 1965	80
	Southern California Support for Ski Development	84
	Mineral King Park Status: A Legal and Legislative Battle	85
	A Turning Away From Practicality and Compromise	89
	Mismanagement of Forest Service Timber Lands	90
VIII	POLARIZATION OF THE SIERRA CLUB: THE NIPOMO DUNES-DIABLO CANYON CONTROVERSY	92
	Negotiations to Save Nipomo Dunes	92
	The Choice and Sierra Club Confirmation of Diablo Canyon Site	95
	Contending Philosophies in the Club: Approval of Alternate Sites	99
	Board Acceptance of Diablo, May, 1966--A Fraudulently Obtained Vote?	103
	Political Dynamics on the Board of Directors	105
	The 1967 Club Referendum and the <u>Half-Bulletin</u>	109
	Assessments and Afterthoughts	113
IX	DAVID BROWER AND THE SIERRA CLUB: AN INEVITABLE SCHISM	118
	Pyramiding Problems: Finances, Administration, Authority	118
	Pure Ideals and a Fatal Flaw	121
	Staff vs. Volunteer Member	125
	Attempts at Financial Control, 1966-68	127
	The Extent of the Financial Crisis	132
	The Adams-Leonard-Sill Charges, October, 1968	136
	Culmination of the Crisis, January-April, 1969	138
	Aftermath and Assessments of the Battle	144
	The Post-Brower Era: Contributions to Club Organization	146
	Corporate Pollution and Club Investment Policy	152
X	ENERGY POLICY: ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES	156
	Growth of Club Opposition to Nuclear Energy	156
	Nuclear Power: Environmentally Clean, with Acceptable Risks	160
	California's Nuclear Safeguards Initiative, 1976	163
	Sierra Club Support for Nuclear Moratorium, 1974	166
	Club Energy Policy, 1972: Resource Conservation and Environmental Constraints	171
	Environmentalists, Social Policy, and the Labor Movement	173
	Technology and Social Progress	180
	Growth Within the Sierra Club: Assets and Liabilities	184

XI	CALIFORNIA--PROTECTION FOR THE COAST, RIVERS AND DELTA	187
	Campaign for Coastal Protection Initiative, 1972	187
	The Peripheral Canal, Key Element in California's Water Plan	194
	Opposition to the Canal: Demand for Reevaluation and Firm Guarantees on Water Transports	196
XII	SAVE SAN FRANCISCO BAY ASSOCIATION	203
	Origin and Outlook of Save the Bay	203
	The Founders: Kerr, Gulick, and McLaughlin	207
	Organizational Structure and Influence	209
	1969 Legislative Campaign for a Permanent BCDC	213
	Monitoring the Regulatory Agencies: BCDC and U.S. Corps of Engineers	216
	Opposing Bay Fill: Westbay, Albany, Leslie Salt, and Suisun Marsh	219
	Update on the Peripheral Canal, 1977	223
XIII	SCIENCE AND MOUNTAINEERING: GLOBAL ADVENTURES	228
	Sierra Club Rock Climbing, Yosemite and the West	228
	Expedition Climbing, Cordillera Blanca	235
	Makalu, 1954: The Sierra Club in the Himalayas	239
	Climbing with the Sherpas	244
	Lessons of Makalu: Team Selection and Cultural Shock	248
	Biophysics in the Antarctic, 1957-58	250
XIV	THE FIRST AMERICAN EXPEDITION TO MOUNT EVEREST, 1963	260
	Expedition Organizing and Team Selection	260
	Tolls of the Approach and the Icefall	265
	Summit Ambitions of Leaders Dyhrenfurth and Siri	268
	Dissension and the Double Assault on the Summit	270
	Dyhrenfurth's Leadership Failings	275
	The West Ridge Team	276
	Science and Climbing, Conflicting Goals?	279
	EPILOGUE	282
	INDEX	283

INTRODUCTION

The Sierra Club has steady need for brilliance and tough-mindedness and is fortunate when it finds these qualities together in one person. A prime example was, and is, Will Siri--my friend, mentor, and occasional adversary for almost twenty years of national club affairs.

A "Who's Who" of Sierra Club greats has to include Will high on the list: expedition leader, club president, skilled strategist, and chief architect of the club's efforts to save coast and estuarine systems. Will provided the Sierra Club Board of Directors with political insight at its most crucial moments I can recall in the last ten years.

Strong-mindedness on both sides brought Will and Dave Brower into collision, and when Dave left (going on to continued greatness with our sister organization) Will determinedly set about insuring that Dave's best ideas and ideals would not be lost, but would be built upon. In the next years, Will helped expand greatly the club agenda to cover energy, population and a host of urban issues.

As anyone, he could be wrong. I thought he was on Diablo Canyon and nuclear power. But I never saw a better defense of our nuclear position--one Will voted against and still dissented from--than what he wrote an inquiring club member several years later.

Long meetings are drudgery both to the board and its audience. How many times Will brought it closer to its purposes with well-placed humor. How many times he skillfully expanded its vision or, with equal skill, deflated a bloated idea.

With his always persuasive and articulate voice, he guided the club to its early opposition to interbasin water transfers, choosing an audacious first shot--a frontal attack on the entire California water plan. That spirit of daring to go just within the limits of the politically possible has been an inspiration to me personally. I trust it will always inspire the Sierra Club itself.

Phillip S. Berry
Sierra Club Director

29 March 1979
Berkeley, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY

This interview with William E. Siri records the observations and experiences of a man with a record of major achievement in the fields of mountaineering, science, and conservation.

As mountaineer, Siri has an impressive record of first ascents in Yosemite rock climbing in the early 1950s. From Yosemite he went on to participate in and lead major mountaineering expeditions to the highest ranges of the world--in the Peruvian expedition to the Cordillera Blanca in 1952 (leader); the California Himalayan Expedition of 1954 to Makalu (leader); and the First American Expedition to Mount Everest, 1963 (deputy leader). In this interview he recounts these peak experiences, giving his insights into the problems of expedition organization and leadership, the stresses and interpersonal relationships among team members, and the overwhelming impact of the unique physical and cultural experience of expedition mountaineering.

Will Siri's second passion and consuming interest from boyhood has been science. As a biophysicist for the Donner Laboratory, University of California, Berkeley, he was on several occasions fortunate to pursue this scientific interest in conjunction with his mountaineering. He conducted high altitude physiological research in Peru, in Bolivia, and on the Everest climb, and studied adaptation to physiological stress on his expedition to Antarctica in 1957-58. Currently the director of the Energy Analysis Program at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, he brings his scientific background to bear on a key environmental problem, in analyzing the social, cultural, and environmental impacts of energy development.

The focus of this Sierra Club sponsored interview, however, is Will Siri's third career--that of environmentalist and Sierra Club leader. His active involvement in the Sierra Club spanned the years from 1956-74, during which he served continuously as a club director and as club president (1964-66), treasurer (1966-69), and vice-president (1970-72). This was a period of dramatic expansion in the Sierra Club, both in scope of interests and in membership nationwide. The interview traces the growth of Siri's own awareness of environmental problems and reveals his contribution in bringing the club's attention to questions of coastal and estuarine land planning, interbasin water transfers, and the conservation and environmentally safe development of energy.

The Sierra Club of the 1960s also experienced the development and resolution of a major internal crisis. Will Siri played a key role in this crisis. Here he candidly discusses and analyzes the issues and explains his participation in the divisive controversy over the proposed nuclear power plant at Diablo Canyon and in the events leading to the resignation of David Brower as the club's executive director.

In addition to his positions of leadership in the Sierra Club, Mr. Siri has served since 1967 as president of Save San Francisco Bay Association, a volunteer citizens-action organization devoted to preserving the San Francisco Bay-Delta environment. One chapter of the interview is devoted to his comments on the association and its major campaigns.

The eleven tape-recorded sessions which comprise this interview were conducted over a two-year period, from November 24, 1975, to November 28, 1977. They were interspersed between Siri's many commitments, including frequent trips to Washington, D.C., in his capacity as director of the Energy Analysis Program. Also present at the interviews, which took place in Mr. Siri's home in Richmond, California, was Ray Lage, assisting with the technical aspects.

Will Siri's interest in history and his scientific background were both evident during the interview sessions, in which he approached each issue analytically, with a keen eye for material of historical importance. His editing of the manuscript, itself a major task requiring over a year of time appropriated from his busy professional schedule, showed the same concern for clarity and for fair and complete presentation of the events, issues, and participants.

The end result, a valuable research document from a perceptive participant in the environmental movement of the 1950s-1970s, is the twenty-sixth completed interview in the Sierra Club History Committee's Oral History Project. Recipient of the club's esteemed William E. Colby award in 1975, Mr. Siri is an articulate and thoughtful person whose ironic sense of humor is manifest in these pages. He adds a new and valuable perspective to the project's documentation of the history of the Sierra Club and the environmental movement.

Will Siri's papers, covering his years of most active involvement in the Sierra Club, are deposited in the Sierra Club Collection, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. As a supplement to this oral history interview, Mr. Siri also took part in a Sierra Club History Committee sponsored videotaped interview of four major Sierra Club leaders, including David Brower, Richard Leonard, and Edgar Wayburn, on March 5, 1979. The videotape can be viewed by arrangement with the Bancroft Library.

Ann Lage
Interviewer-Editor
Co-chairman, Sierra Club
History Committee

31 March 1979
Berkeley, California

SIERRA CLUB ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
April 1979

Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library

Richard M. Leonard, Mountaineer, Lawyer, Environmentalist, 1976
William E. Siri, Reflections on The Sierra Club, the Environment,
and Mountaineering, 1950s-1970s, 1979
Ansel Adams, in process
David Brower, in process
Edgar Wayburn, in process

Sierra Club History Committee

Elizabeth Marston Bade, Recollections of William F. Bade and the Early
Sierra Club, 1976
Philip S. Bernays, Founding the Southern California Chapter, 1975
Harold C. Bradley, Furthering the Sierra Club Tradition, 1975
Nathan C. Clark, Sierra Club Leader, Outdoorsman, and Engineer, 1977
Harold E. Crowe, Sierra Club Physician, Baron, and President, 1975
Glen Dawson, Pioneer Rock Climber and Ski Mountaineer, 1975
Nora Evans, Sixty Years with the Sierra Club, 1976
Francis Farquhar, Sierra Club Mountaineer and Editor, 1974
Marjory Bridge Farquhar, Pioneer Woman Rock Climber and Sierra Club
Director, 1977
C. Nelson Hackett, Lasting Impressions of the Early Sierra Club, 1975
Joel Hildebrand, Sierra Club Leader and Ski Mountaineer, 1974
Helen LeConte, Reminiscences of LeConte Family Outings, the Sierra
Club, and Ansel Adams, 1977
John and Ruth Mendenhall, Forty Years of Sierra Club Mountaineering
Leadership, 1938-1978, 1979
Ruth E. Prager, Remembering the High Trips, 1976
Bestor Robinson, Thoughts on Conservation and the Sierra Club, 1974
Gordon Robinson, Forestry Consultant to the Sierra Club, 1979
James E. Rother, The Sierra Club, in the Early 1900s, 1974
In process, Ruth Bradley, Cicely Christy, Lewis Clark, Alfred Forsyth,
Wanda Goody, Ethel Horsfall, George Marshall, Stewart Ogilvy,
Sigurd Olson, Harriet Parsons, Walt Wheelock

California State University, Fullerton---Southern Sierrans Project

Thomas Amneus, New Directions for the Angeles Chapter, 1977
Irene Charnock, Portrait of a Sierra Club Volunteer, 1977
J. Gordon Chelew, Reflections of an Angeles Chapter Member, 1921-1975, 1976
Olivia R. Johnson, High Trip Reminiscences, 1904-1945, 1977
E. Stanley Jones, Sierra Club Officer and Angeles Chapter Leader,
1931-1975, 1976
Marion Jones, Reminiscences of the Southern California Sierra Club,
1927-1975, 1976
Robert R. Marshall, Angeles Chapter Leader and Wilderness Spokesman,
1960s, 1977
Dorothy Leavitt Pepper, High Trip High Jinks, 1976
Richard Searle, Grassroots Sierra Club Leader, 1976
In process, Robert Bear, Arthur Johnson, Roscoe Poland

I YOUTH AND SCIENTIFIC CAREER

[Interview 1: November 24, 1975]

Youthful Passions: Science and the Mountains

AL: Let's begin tonight, Mr. Siri, with something of your personal background. Can you tell us where you were born?

Siri: Yes. I was born in Philadelphia on January 2, 1919. After the first year my family moved to the suburbs in New Jersey. At that time it was beautiful open country. That's where I grew up for the next seventeen years.

AL: Near what city?

Siri: Philadelphia, but on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River. I went through the usual routine of growing up with all its pleasures and anguishes.

AL: How about your parents? What was your father's occupation?

Siri: My father [Emil M. Siri] was an engineer, with a specialty in steam engineering.

AL: Was he self-employed?

Siri: No, he was superintendent for a large firm. It was originally known as the Baldwin Locomotive Works and later became known as Baldwin-Lima-Hamilton Corporation. Among other things, they built very large testing machines. In fact, they built the largest testing machines in the world. There's one here at the University of California now, the first one that was built. They built all kinds of huge machinery-- the turbines for Grand Coulee and Hoover Dam, and all kinds of exotic large machinery.

Siri: That was Father. He was a superb mechanic. Anything mechanical he took to naturally, with an instinct for understanding that seemed infallible. Some of this rubbed off on me but not the infallibility.

My mother [Caroline] never worked. She kept house and reared a family, which I guess is more than enough work for anyone. She had three children--I had a sister who was younger and one who was older.

AL: Were they close in age?

Siri: I was separated from both by about a year and a half. A year and a half, as I recall, made a substantial difference, because I looked on my older sister, Ruth, as an older person; that is, we didn't have common friends and interests. Her friends, for example, in high school were a hundred years ahead of me. And on the other hand my younger sister, Elizabeth, who was only a year and a half younger, was the younger generation. At that age distance in months had the feeling of being vast. The set of friends were different, the interests were different, particularly during the 'teens I guess, when one's progress and perceptions change rapidly.

AL: And then, boy-girl? Wouldn't that make a difference?

Siri: There were those differences too, so our interests were totally different.

AL: Did your sisters get involved in science or anything? Did they go on to college?

Siri: My older sister went to college; my younger sister did not. She married not too long after she left high school, and that put an end to her academic career.

AL: Was there any interest in the outdoors in the family?

Siri: Yes, my mother, mostly. She comes from old German stock and always had a passion for the outdoors. She was an indefatigable hiker, and now, at eighty-two, she is an incorrigible walker. So she has a passion for the mountains which I acquired from her, quite clearly; my father was never really that much interested, although he was a great fisherman and loved the out-of-doors, of course, but not with that kind of dedicated passion that some of us have, I guess, as the result of an aberrant gene or whatever is responsible.

AL: [Laughing] That's how you explain the "why."

Siri: Yes, and this relates directly to my interest in conservation, mountaineering, and wilderness. I assume this derives from my mother's side, knowing the character of my mother and her interests.

Siri: I still remember vividly the feeling of exaltation when, as a small child, we made our annual pilgrimage into the Pocono mountains where our relatives had a summer place. That was the big event of the year for me because of the mountains. I remember the intense joy as we left the flat lands of New Jersey and Philadelphia and headed north out the narrow roads towards the first rise of ground. The sight of the first mountain brought a feeling of ecstasy that was then heightened by the view of mountains that seemed to stretch endlessly beyond. I awaited impatiently 356 days of the year. This was the great moment in my life each year.

AL: Did your sisters have the same excitement?

Siri: Not that I could tell. I don't think it made so deep an impression on them although they remember their summer outings in a pleasant wild place.

AL: Did you do a lot of exploring around the Poconos?

Siri: Not far beyond the region where we stayed. I was too young. I'd hike on nearby ridges above the Susquehanna River with my mother, and explore the river banks. It was a great place for small adventures. Those days made a deep, lasting impression. There was a strong sense of attunement with the mountains, the rock cliffs, forests that swept endlessly over those great ridges. Gosh, those mountains seemed high! I think they were all of fifteen hundred feet.

The Delaware Water Gap was my personal symbol. It marked the entry to the mountains and stood bold and clear as we approached the world of mountains I dreamed about. This would mean little to others; it was simply a place where the Delaware River had cut a deep gap through the mountains--the mountains in that part of the country are just great long ridges that run for hundreds of miles. In a few places rivers had cut gaps where they crossed the chains of mountains. The Delaware Water Gap was the largest of these.

So the Delaware Water Gap was my private symbol, and one I sketched endlessly in classes in school. It was built indelibly into my mind as the symbol of what I really wanted--that was to get to the mountains. It was an irrational, emotional attunement. There was no special event or person who set it off; it was, as I say, the expression of an aberrant gene.

RL: Were some of your friends equally interested in the mountains? Youngsters today in California, of course, have friends that they go backpacking with or climbing and so on.

Siri: No. Later, in looking back, I was extremely conscious of this. None of my friends seemed to share the same intensity of feeling. To them, it was an adventure going to the local creek or the local woods, as we did whenever we had the chance, but aside from the adventure in doing it, I didn't sense in them the same passion for wilderness and mountains.

AL: Was there any early concern with conservation or any issue that you recall?

Siri: No, not as a young boy, and I've often wondered about that. I do remember disappointment and frustration when wild places that I knew--mostly fields of weeds, small groves of trees, and creeks--were destroyed to make way for buildings and roads; I resented it, I was angry about it, but with a feeling of resignation that it was inevitable. What could I do? The big people did this, and this is what the big people do. So it was just a matter of searching for another place, another creek, another wood--and I could always find them. At that time there were no massive housing developments, and there were no freeways. One could always find another field or swamp to explore and enjoy. I wasn't yet conscious of the devastating impact the big people would have on the small wild places.

And so that was the start. It was a middle class upbringing, the usual high school--although our high school was very good. As I look back now, the education we got in, say, literature, English, and the sciences was generally better, or at least more thorough than what I have seen the schools produce in the past fifteen years.

AL: It was a public high school?

Siri: Yes. It was a much easier environment than now, of course. Everything fitted into its place back in those years. One accepted the world as it was; you didn't constantly challenge it. It's probably part of the price we're paying today. My friends and I were clearly headed for traditional careers. Most of the friends I had in high school were people with a scientific bent, and there was no question where we were going to end up--there was certainly never any question in my mind.

AL: Even before high school?

Siri: Yes, much before that.

AL: And how did that happen?

Siri: Well, it started in the sixth or seventh grade. A new world suddenly blossomed forth with the revelations of science and literature. Before long I was building my own telescope, reading the classics, and

Siri: blowing up the chemistry classroom with equal enthusiasm. [Laughter] The last caused no end of anguish for instructors and principal but they displayed admirable forbearance for youthful inquisitiveness and enthusiasm.

AL: Did this go on at school, or did your father foster it at home?

Siri: He always encouraged it, obviously, but by high school the level of science I was learning began to exceed that of his training many years earlier in engineering. Anyway, he was obviously pleased and excited by it all. There was no question in either of our minds but that I was going to end up as a scientist--no other possibility was entertained.

Higher Education: Chicago and California

AL: Where did you go to college?

Siri: University of Chicago. At that time it was the mecca of physics, and I was determined to be a physicist.

AL: What time was this?

Siri: I left home in 1937 and went off to Chicago.

RL: Just before Robert Maynard Hutchins?

Siri: No, Hutchins was there, along with [Mortimer] Adler, and he was there the whole time that I was at Chicago. It was an intellectually stimulating campus, particularly with Hutchins and Adler constantly challenging the established ideas. It drew a vibrant, highly intellectual, inquisitive group of students, much like Berkeley two decades later. And like Berkeley it tended to be a graduate school, and so I found myself a freshman in the midst of an intellectual maelstrom that was not the easiest thing in the world for a freshman to cope with straight away. But after a few milliseconds of adjustment [laughter] I entered into the spirit of yet another new and exciting world.

Later when I came to California during World War II, Berkeley seemed dull and lifeless by comparison, more like a trade school.

AL: When did you come to California--as a graduate student?

Siri: No, not immediately. You see, the war had gotten underway by the time I graduated, and I also considered it necessary to earn my own way in graduate school. I had worked every summer for the

Siri: Baldwin-Lima-Hamilton corporation during college years. I started as little more than a laborer, but when I showed some aptitude for machinery, I was put on a machinist apprentice program each summer. After five years at the University of Chicago, they asked me to come back, now as a research engineer. With a background in physics, I found the job quite easy to handle. After the first few projects, they seemed to develop confidence in what I was doing, and gradually I took on independent research projects. I found them interesting but hardly in the forefront of research. Anyway, this job continued for a year or more until I was invited to join a vast secret project that was in the forefront of research.

However, before I left Chicago to go to Baldwin in Philadelphia, I had a work experience that I don't regret a bit now. When I started graduate work at Chicago the urge for financial independence came at the same time. And so I took a job at U.S. Steel Corporation in South Chicago as a machinist. I went to school during the day and worked from four until midnight in the steel mills. And this proved to be a fascinating experience.

AL: What did you do in the steel mill?

Siri: I worked in the machine shop but the fascination of the job was the opportunity to observe intimately the Herculean operations of a large steel mill and get to know the steel makers. I found myself again in a totally different world, where I acquired a new vocabulary, which later served me well on occasion.

AL: Later at Berkeley. [Laughter]

Siri: Yes, but quite a few years ahead of the evolution of the Berkeley dialect. In the Berkeley scene [in the sixties] I wondered why the kids were getting so excited about the uninhibited use of obscene language. That's the way we used to talk normally in the shops. Anyway I learned something about large corporations and the way people live in a society that is far removed from academe.

AL: And you were going to graduate school at the same time.

Siri: Yes. I didn't find them incompatible at all. It was hard work having to work that many hours a day, but I enjoyed it. You know, at that time of your life you're inquisitive about everything; everything's new and exciting, and you're learning rapidly and acquiring all kinds of bad habits.

AL: Let's go on and outline the rest of your education and your scientific career.

Siri: Well, I did the rest of the graduate work here at Berkeley. A year after starting work in Philadelphia as a research engineer, I was informed of an opening here at Berkeley in a mysterious project where they wanted physicists. I was asked to come out for an interview and after a few seconds deliberation I went! After all, California contained some of the most beautiful mountains in the world, and that was irresistible. Furthermore, there was an exciting, and evidently important research project to join.

I was offered a job and found myself involved in the Manhattan Project, one of the most secret of all World War II operations. It was then explained that I was helping to make an atomic bomb. Up to that point the very thought of it never occurred to me. I'd had had courses in nuclear physics and knew the immense energy that was associated with nuclear reactions, but I had never associated this with the possibility of a bomb, so it came as a staggering revelation.

AL: And this was after the job had already begun?

Siri: Oh, they didn't tell me what it was all about beforehand, but they assured me it was important to the war effort and it looked so exciting I could hardly refuse the job. Why next to the mountains it was... [Laughter]

AL: You mentioned how Berkeley looked like a trade school when you first arrived, compared to the University of Chicago.

Siri: Yes, particularly after the veterans came back at the end of the war. They were older, more serious and mature than the usual college student. They had just gone through a war. They wanted one thing, and that was to get an education in a marketable skill and no nonsense about it. There was none of the intellectual excitement that prevailed in Chicago--not for some years until President Sproul forged Berkeley into one of the country's leading intellectual institutions.

The Manhattan Project and the War's Aftermath

AL: It seems to me we could have a whole interview on the Manhattan project, but maybe we should just go over the steps your career has taken before we discuss the conservation aspects of your life.

Siri: All right. Very briefly, we worked in greatest secrecy through the war years to separate uranium-235 for the first bombs, as everybody now knows. I spent a year at Berkeley and then moved with some of the team to Oak Ridge, Tennessee, to work on the final stages of it there, and then returned to Berkeley.

RL: Were you married at the time?

Siri: Yes, to my first wife.

One aspect of the Manhattan Project experience bears repeating. This has to do with the moral implications of developing the Bomb. It was a moment in history of intense excitement and anxiety. We were driven by a force that is difficult to appreciate in the context of today unless you lived through the war years. People think of the bomb, and correctly so, in terms of its use on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the potential horror of its future use. The force that drove us before Hiroshima was the certainty that the Germans were going to beat us, and if they did beat us, the world was theirs; there could be no question about it. England would be lost straightaway. Not only lost as an ally but literally destroyed. And there would be no question but that we would have to succumb as well, and Hitler would have his one thousand-year Reich secured.

We were absolutely certain that the Germans were way ahead of us; we had ample reason to believe so; and so we worked as though possessed. Always in the back of our minds was the thought, "My God, we can't fail--we can't fail." Under those circumstances the morality of what you're doing appears totally different. You may look back today and say, "My God, you scientists, look at the awful thing you've created." At that time we thought, "My God, if we don't succeed, the world must succumb to Hitler's monstrous rule."

After the war we learned that the Germans were ahead of us in some respects but had made a very serious error in judgment. Their leading physicist, Heisenberg, had concluded that a bomb could not be built. They then diverted their attention to the development of nuclear energy rather than a bomb. But we didn't know this until months after the war ended, when a scientific team went to Germany to question the German scientists and look at their facilities, and then realized what had happened.

AL: Were the German scientists confirmed Nazis themselves?

Siri: Some of them were, and some of them weren't. I wouldn't want to pass judgment on what motivated them or what they felt their moral obligations were. It's very difficult to do this when you reflect on it in a different setting.

AL: What about the atmosphere after the war? Some of the scientists appeared to at least regret the uses their work had been put to.

Siri: I think most scientists did. Realizing belatedly that there wasn't in fact a threat, they recognized the enormity of the thing they had spawned. Some scientists were deeply disturbed and flatly refused

Siri: to have anything more to do with weapons or even nuclear energy. A few were driven by feelings of guilt for what they had done. This wasn't true of all the scientists by any means. Some of them stayed on to develop bigger and better bombs, and some just didn't really care so long as they could do physics. One could find a broad spectrum of attitudes.

AL: At Berkeley, what was the outcome?

Siri: Well, at Berkeley, there was a swift return to basic physics research with little or no interest in nuclear energy per se or bombs. Under the guidance of Ernest Lawrence, Berkeley quickly became the world center for accelerators and nobel laureates. The old machines that were once used to produce enriched uranium were quickly rewired as cyclotrons to do pure physics research. It's been that way ever since. The attitude on the war work appeared to be, "We did it, and it's over, and now let's get back to meaningful things."

Biophysics at the Donner Lab, 1945-74

AL: When did you get into biophysics?

Siri: That was after the war. I always had a passion for biology--the result of my youthful experiences in small wild areas--as well as physics, and after the "Bomb" I found an opportunity to work with John Lawrence, still in the Radiation Laboratory, in the rapidly developing new field of biophysics. This was an exciting new area of research because the powerful research tools and methods of physics were just being applied to difficult problems in biology and medicine by a few physicists.

Those were pretty exciting days, to open up a new field, to establish new discipline and discover how naive biologists were in understanding the physical aspects of biology.

One of the first things physicists did was introduce physiologists and medicine to radioisotope tracers. With minute quantities of radioactive carbon, phosphorous, iodine, and other elements, we could follow in great detail the biochemical processes in living organisms. How, for example, does the thyroid gland work? Well, the chemists and physiologist had struggled with the problem for years. With radioactive iodine, it was soon learned how rapidly iodine was taken from the blood into the thyroid; how much and in what form iodine was stored there; how rapidly it was secreted as thyroid hormone--and in short order, with these marvelous new tools, it was possible to

Siri: unravel a lot of the mysteries of thyroid diseases. You could do that with other radioisotopes--we'd use traces of carbon-14 as a substitute for ordinary carbon in substances such as sugar or aspirin tablets and follow their metabolism.

Gradually this evolved into methods for diagnosing diseases. Several of the earliest diseases that were both diagnosed and treated with isotopes were thyroid diseases of the blood. If we didn't find cures, at least we found ways of measuring disease, and usually were able to provide insights into the disease processes. And in some cases this led to means for at least making the diseases more tolerable and putting off the inevitable for some years.

AL: Was this at the Donner Lab?

Siri: Yes.

AL: When was the Donner Lab formed?

Siri: Construction was completed just at the outset of the war, and it then immediately became part of the Manhattan Project facilities. Ernest Lawrence had his offices there, along with some of the nuclear chemistry laboratories. John Lawrence, the brother of Ernest Lawrence, occupied the basement rooms where he and a small staff of scientists were doing work for the Air Force on the effects of high altitudes on aviators. He had installed a high altitude chamber in which he would take human subjects up to about 25,000-30,000 feet to study the effects of decompression.

Anyway, after the war I eyed the high altitude chamber, which was about the size of this room, with great anticipation, because in it you can get to the top of Everest in ten minutes' time.

AL: And you used it for the Everest expedition.

Siri: Yes, I did. I ran some studies--I had used it a great deal before that--but I did some special studies on acclimatization just before the Everest expedition.

AL: Did you ever have the pleasure yourself?

Siri: Yes, as a matter of fact, just before the Mt. Everest trip I wanted to measure some of the acute effects of exposure to altitude, and so I had myself pumped down to about 18,000 feet and stayed there for four days, with a whole crew of people monitoring all the physiological effects. I was attached to a great umbilical cord of wires measuring everything.

Siri: It was in Donner Laboratory after the war, when it became a leading center for biophysics, that I spent the next twenty-five years or so.

Energy Analysis Program, Lawrence Berkeley Lab, 1974-

AL: Does that bring us up to the current period?

Siri: No, it doesn't, as a matter of fact. A little over a year ago I switched fields again, this time to another emerging field that seemed to combine all my interest, particularly conservation. I found myself a year ago managing a group of scientists in Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory whose mission was to analyze the impacts of energy development--these were the economic, social, cultural, environmental impacts of new and developing energy technologies. What we are doing now, at least in my case, is combining environmental interests developed in the Sierra Club, with what I did in physics, with what I did in biophysics and medical research. Now it's all rolled up into an integrated assessment of the consequences of energy development.

AL: What's the group called?

Siri: We call ourselves the Energy Analysis Program. Although we are concerned primarily with California, Hawaii, and Nevada, some of the analyses we do are national in scope, depending on the nature of the problem.

AL: Do you analyze actual projects or potential projects?

Siri: What we're trying to do is to look ahead, to ask the question "what if?" If energy consumption continues to increase at a prescribed rate, what are the impacts--the impacts on employment, on the local and statewide economies, on effluents, air and water pollution? What are the cultural impacts where we can measure them? We then look at alternative energy scenarios, that call for different combinations of fuels and different rates of energy consumption, and again ask the question what are the impacts, how do they differ?

For example, we're trying, along with the other laboratories across the country, to understand a little better what happens if the country switches from oil to coal, taking into account environmental and health costs and not just fuel costs.

We're not making judgments on whether these energy futures are good, bad or indifferent; we're just saying, "Here is what they do. Here are what the impacts are, in terms of the best numbers we

Siri: can arrive at. The legislator must then make the decision. We provide impact assessment so that the decision maker can better understand the consequences of his decisions.

RL: Who funds your work at present?

Siri: Primarily, at this point, ERDA, the Energy Research and Development Commission, formerly the Atomic Energy Commission. But now it's less attuned to nuclear energy; it's responsible for energy research generally, all forms--fossil, solar, geothermal, nuclear, and anything else.

AL: Is there more to add on your scientific career?

Siri: No, except, in passing, maybe one aspect of it. Because of my interest in biological and medical physics, we've always combined research with our mountaineering expeditions. We've always had a strong scientific program in all of our expeditions to the Andes, the Antarctic, and Himalayas. I guess we have produced a few meaningful bits of information on man at altitude.

II SIERRA CLUB INITIATE AND OFFICER

The Sierra Club of the Forties and Fifties: A Climber's View

AL: Should we turn now to your introduction into the Sierra Club?

Siri: All right. That goes back to 1944. I had come to Berkeley a year earlier and of course what I wanted most to do was to ski and climb mountains. There was no opportunity to climb then; the war was on, gas was rationed, and it was difficult to get away. And besides we didn't want to be away very long because we had to beat the Germans to the atomic bomb.

However, there was the rare occasion to go skiing. One of the people I got to know very well at the Laboratory was Fred Schmidt, one of the physicists. Fred was an ardent skier. He asked me if I wanted to go skiing, and of course I never wanted anything more. He also suggested that I become a member of the Sierra Club and told me that the Sierra Club had a lodge and a rope tow at Donner Summit.

He provided me with an application form, which at that time required two signatures. He signed it for me, but I needed a second signature. From inquiries about the Laboratory I quickly learned that the Laboratory photographer, Cedric Wright, was a member of the Sierra Club. Years later I was more than a little embarrassed when I discovered that Cedric Wright was more than just a member of the Sierra Club [laughter]. At that time, however, he was the official Lab photographer; he came around constantly to photograph our experiments. He was a very pleasant fellow. Not knowing Cedric at all, I thought he was a slightly kooky photographer.

AL: How old was he at that time?

Siri: I'm not sure. He must have been in his fifties or thereabouts. He was a gentle soul, struck one as a pleasant, friendly eccentric. I got to know Cedric and asked him if he would sign my application form, which of course he did. So I went off skiing.

Siri: This was the reason I joined the Sierra Club--they had ski facilities [laughter]. I knew nothing about the conservation movement at that point. I was new to the scene; I never heard of Hetch Hetchy or John Muir, but the club offered an opportunity to get to the mountains and ski. Of course, as soon as the war was finished, I very quickly learned that Cedric Wright was not just a pleasant, eccentric photographer, but he was something substantially more than that, and so was the Sierra Club. But I didn't develop a strong active role in conservation until some time later.

The mountains still enthralled me, and whatever spare time I had was concentrated on skiing and climbing. But then I did learn climbing from the old hands in the Sierra Club, and I got to know people like Bestor Robinson, Dick Leonard and Francis Farquhar--but mainly through mountaineering.

AL: Did you take the Cragmont Rock route?

Siri: Oh yes, I went through the whole course--Cragmont Rock, Indian Rock, and Grizzly Peak Rocks, and then on to Yosemite. I ran through the whole course. I seemed to catch on fairly quickly, and so I found myself invited on climbs. We did many climbs in Yosemite, and gradually we broadened out to other areas.

AL: Did you have any first ascents, or were those all captured?

Siri: Well, in those early days, until about 1950, the easier routes had all been climbed. We made a few abortive attempts at first ascents of some of the bigger walls, but it was too early yet for advanced technical climbing. It was after about 1950 that we began to do some real first ascents calling for more advanced technical climbing.

The heroes in the Sierra Club, of course, were men like Dick Leonard, Dave Brower, Bestor Robinson, and Francis Farquhar--all the experienced climbers who introduced climbing into this country and made all those magnificent first ascents in the Sierra Nevada. Those were the early heroes. As a matter of fact, the club was made up of almost nothing else. They were climbers, skiers, and hikers. There were only a few thousand members then. I think when I joined in the winter of 1944 there were fewer than four thousand members.

AL: How did you get from rock climbing and skiing into more conservation-oriented things?

Siri: Well, I have to confess that did come slowly, mainly because I really didn't know California that well; I didn't know the problems. The mountains I understood; they were beautiful mountains. Those were to be climbed on, or skied on. The thought hadn't really crept in yet that they also had to be defended. That came more slowly, as I became involved in club affairs, the outings and, most importantly, the climbing trips we made.

AL: Did the men you associated with through climbing seem involved in conservation?

Siri: Not so much the younger climbers, my contemporaries. Climbers such as Dick Leonard, Dave Brower, and Francis Farquhar had been deeply involved for many years, but when I saw them at Cragmont Rock we were climbing. It was mainly climbing that we discussed. So I didn't find myself drawn into the conservation battles as an activist for a few years. Then gradually as I looked about and heard the others talk, I became more conscious of what was going on, and learned a little bit about the history of the club and the battles that had taken place, and that it was indeed possible to do something about defending wilderness.

For someone from New Jersey, you know, this took a little doing. Back at that time it would never occur to us that anything could be done about the ravaging of the world; this was just the way it was. You've seen northern New Jersey, I presume. In any event, I must confess that my awareness of environmental action and the Sierra Club's role and my participation in it developed slowly. Not, probably, until I was elected to the Bay Chapter Executive Committee did I begin to take a more active role.

AL: Do you recall the date of that?

Siri: Let's see. It must have been in 1955 that I got elected to the board of directors, and so I must have been elected to the chapter executive committee about a year before that. I served on the executive committee of the chapter for a relatively short time, something like a year. I was made treasurer of the chapter and that committed me to the club straightaway, because I discovered the account books of the chapter were in abominable shape. There were some other things about the management of the chapter that seemed rather troublesome, so I very quickly found myself in the midst of the organizational problems in particular and then of course more and more deeply involved in conservation activities.

AL: Was the chapter very deeply involved in conservation at that time, or was it more social group with local outings?

Siri: There was a strong element of that aspect of it; that is, social outings, dinners, ski trips, activities generally. Still, there were the people like Dick Leonard and Dave Brower, of course; I guess half the directors were from this general area, and so there was a strong conservation leadership that was exercised less through the chapter and more through the club itself. It was hardly national at that time; it was primarily California-oriented.

AL: Did you consider men like Brower and Leonard sort of the older generation?

Siri: Yes, oh yes. I found myself in a peculiar position in that I was younger than the leaders in the club, but older than the cadre of younger people who were assuming leadership roles through climbing and outings activities. I felt spaced between two age groups in the club. This may have had its advantages, but it also had its disadvantages. The older men like Leonard, Farquhar, and Alex Hildebrand were the senior men--like my older sister, they always seemed the older generation at the time. This perception of age hierarchies was to vanish in time.

AL: I think just the fact that you put Dick Leonard and Francis Farquhar as a group, both older, whereas I'm sure Dick Leonard would never put himself in the same generation with Francis Farquhar...

Siri: That's right. There was a psychological tendency to lump anyone into a senior group if they were older than I. I suspect it had little to do with age but rather that they were well-established in the Sierra Club and I was a newcomer.

Conflicts Over Membership Policies, 1949-60

AL: We're trying to get some idea of the nature of the club in those earlier years; apparently it was quite a different club. I know that last time you mentioned something about the racial discrimination problems in the south.

Siri: That was really later, in the late fifties.

AL: Maybe it occurred more than once, because I've run across it referred to earlier; Leonard refers to it in the forties.

Siri: It may have come up in the forties; it could very well have. The incident that I remember most, that related to social conflict in the club that had nothing whatever to do with conservation, occurred..., when was it, in the late fifties? That was the loyalty oath affair in the Los Angeles chapter. Some of the leaders in the Angeles Chapter had gotten terribly excited about loyalty oaths and were determined that club leaders would all have to sign loyalty oaths and that any new member would have to sign a loyalty oath. It was consistent with the intensity of the feeling about Communism and loyalty oaths at that time. If you didn't sign a loyalty oath, clearly you were communist, you were at least suspect. This presented us with a challenge and some very painful meetings.

Siri: The loyalty oath leaders in Los Angeles were like the people concerned about communist conspiracy and unAmericanism that prevailed at that time. They were intense; they were worried; they were almost hysterical in their anxieties, and hence in their demands. I remember a meeting with the board of directors in Los Angeles at that time. It was quite a bitter contest with the leaders in the Angeles Chapter. The members of the board, with one exception, were vigorously opposed to the oath.

AL: Were the leaders in Los Angeles not members of the board, or did you have a couple of representatives?

Siri: There were at that time several directors from Los Angeles, but, with the one exception, they did not share the views of the Los Angeles Chapter leadership.

AL: Do you remember the names of some of them?

Siri: No, I don't offhand. Maybe I've subconsciously forgotten them. There were four or five members of the chapter who formed the hard core of the determined effort to have Sierra Club members, and particularly officers, sign loyalty oaths. I've forgotten the names of the leaders. Anyway, they had a small following. Maybe it wasn't so small.

This must have occurred in '57 or at the latest '58--*

AL: What was the course of the conflict?

Siri: Well, it just died away. The board refused to institute a loyalty oath and said it was inappropriate. We argued that we were in no danger of being taken over by Communists, that such an oath is intolerable in a free country and could not in any event achieve its purpose. They argued that we would be infiltrated and subverted; they were genuinely terrified. I was astonished; I hadn't run into this before.

*The Directors minutes and other interviews show a loyalty oath controversy in 1949; an issue of racial discrimination 1958-59; and a petition placed on the 1960 club ballot to require a loyalty oath for all members.

See Thomas Amneus, New Directions for the Angeles Chapter, Eric Redd, interviewer, Sierra Club Oral History Project (Sierra Club, San Francisco, 1977).

Siri: Well, I had on the Berkeley campus, but not in that real a fashion. Here were angry, demanding club members confronting us, seemingly from a different world. It wasn't quite real--they seemed like puppets acting out some kind of weird and awful scene. And there was no way of communicating effectively.

That was one episode. The other, of course, was the episode with the application from a Black family. That came to a head in April of 1959. Again it was the Angeles Chapter that objected, with dozens of bitter letters demanding that the Black family be denied membership; letters threatening resignation from the club if this Black family were admitted. The leaders in the Angeles Chapter took a very admirable position, as did the leadership of the club as a whole.

Harold Bradley was president at that time; he wrote to the group in Los Angeles that was protesting the admission of the Black family, what was for Harold Bradley, an extraordinarily strong, but just letter. Again unusual for Harold, he stated in no uncertain terms what they were to do and what they were not to do with the application. He laid it out flat, but in a fashion that no one could take offense. He made it clear, with full support of the board, that the only qualification for membership was interest in the purposes of the club. Gradually the issue subsided. I seem to recall the Black family withdrew their application and did not become members. [Apparently they did become members, but not active ones. Ed.] Those of us on the board, without exception, were horrified by this episode and took a very strong position on the issue of discrimination for membership.

AL: At that time, were applicants sort of funneled through the chapter membership committee?

Siri: No. I don't think so. The applications were, I think, sent to Virginia Ferguson in the club office, and then she alerted the chapter executive committee or membership committee--if they had one--of new applicants. Anyway, the word had gotten around that a Black family had applied for membership. Again this was a highly emotional affair--that was the only thing it could be--but the board of directors and the club in general, without question, dealt with it with dispatch and with no uncertainty as to where the club stood on the question of race or creed; they had nothing whatever to do with whether a person was qualified for membership. The only qualifications were those stated in the bylaws, that it was a person who shared an interest in the purposes of the Sierra Club.

The Board of Directors: Outdoorsmen All, 1950s

AL: How did you happen to be chosen as a director? Were you appointed to fill an open position or elected?

Siri: No, I was nominated for election.

AL: At that time did they just nominate a slate with no extra names on it?

Siri: No, as a matter of fact at that time we elected all fifteen directors every year, or was it every three years? Anyway, the whole lot of us were elected at the same time. The time I was first elected, in '56, I believe there were about twenty, twenty-two candidates, and I was just one of those elected; one of the first fifteen with the most votes.

AL: And you hadn't been particularly active in conservation up to this point?

Siri: No, but you see, I guess I got to be fairly well known, at least around California, from some climbing exploits and other activities, and then in the chapter the preceding year I established a fairly reasonable level of activity in chapter affairs and managed to meet more members up and down the state.

But more importantly, I think I had a high level of visibility as a result of the expedition I had led to the Himalayas in 1954. This was the first major American climbing expedition to the Himalayas and had the sponsorship of the Sierra Club, and we were all Sierra Club members. I had been lecturing up and down the state and in all of the chapters, and I was a name and a face that looked familiar, not as a great conservationist, you know, but simply a name many members recognized.

Besides, at that time you see, almost all of the members of the board of directors were well-known climbers, mountaineers, or hikers. They were people who had served on the board of directors for many years; they had come up through the outings and even more so climbing--Francis Farquhar, and Dick Leonard, Dave Brower and Bestor Robinson, and Alex Hildebrand, Einar Nilsson, and even Charlotte Mauk.

AL: Was she a director at that time?

Siri: Yes, since 1943.

AL: Elmer Aldrich was a director when you came on the board.

Siri: Right. Elmer and I were elected the same year for the first time. Elmer was--he was an intruder [laughter], in the sense that he wasn't a member of the closed group of climbers and outings people, though he was a great outdoorsman. He was on the staff of the State Parks and Recreation Department. He was a very valuable man to have on the board. He understood the politics of parks, and this was an important asset.

AL: It's true, as I look over the list of people on the board in 1956, they're all either old-time Sierra Clubbers, climbers--Stewart Kimball?

Siri: Stewart Kimball had been involved in the outings, of course, for years, and was an old skier, had done a little climbing--

AL: I'm trying to get sort of a base line for the changes that come later. As you say, this is sort of the closed club and--

Siri: Yes, it was, in a way. That was understandable for the time. When I joined the club there were--I've forgotten exactly how many members there were--but fewer than 4,000. Many of them knew each other. In the Bay Area, we knew almost everybody by name, at least by face, and we knew many of the people in the other chapters. So there was a sense of intimacy, a familiarity, and a closeness among the members because the club was small, and many of the people in the club then took an active role in its affairs. It was a small club, and it behaved like a small club in the sense of the camaraderie, common interests, the interaction, It hadn't gotten too large yet to become a highly structured, less personal institution. But that gradually changed as the club grew larger. It was impossible to know the growing thousands of new members, more and more of whom were not taking an active part but wanted to support the club's role in conservation.

Goals as Sierra Club President, 1964-66

AL: Now, I'm skipping ahead to your presidency, because we're going to be going back to a lot of these things, but I wanted to get some idea of how you were elected in 1964. You hadn't held any offices prior to the presidency.

Siri: No, I hadn't unless you consider election to a chapter executive committee holding office. Up to that time, the presidency was rotated around the directors, because the directors were on for years at a time, and so each person's turn would come up sooner or later. Mine came up. I think it was partly because everybody was busy that year, and they probably felt that I couldn't do too much damage [laughter].

AL: Who did you follow as president?

Siri: Ed Wayburn.

AL: And how did you see your role as president? How active a job was it considered, how much a leadership role?

Siri: It was the custom then to have an informal meeting of the directors a week or so in advance of the annual meeting in May and decide who was going to be what, and to my astonishment they asked me to serve as president. I didn't give them an answer then. I told them I would have to think about it, because my decision would also involve adjustments I would have to make in my work at the University. I indicated that if I were to take the job I would not be just holding the office until someone else came to fill it in an active role. I would not take it unless my role was that of an active leader in the club. If I were going to serve as president I would have to perform like one, and this would mean taking considerable time from my own work to do it. It was, in my mind, not a role I wanted to fill unless it were that of an effective president, spending the necessary time and effort and utilizing the authority of the office.

AL: Was that the traditional role of the Sierra Club president?

Siri: It varied from person to person. But I saw it as a position that, if you accepted, you damn well had better make work. If they want me to be president it was not to be a holding operation, and they would have to bear with me.

I also wanted as officers a couple of key people, among them, Dick Leonard and Ed Wayburn. I insisted that they be on the executive committee because they were experienced old hands I respected. I hadn't taken a really active role up to this point, and I felt I needed their guidance and support. If we were to form a team, they at least would have to be on the executive committee.

AL: Wayburn was vice-president, and what position did Leonard have-- secretary?

Siri: Yes, Ed was vice-president, Dick Leonard was secretary, Lewis Clark was treasurer, and George Marshall, fifth officer.

AL: Did you have a particular goal in mind? You appear to have, in the commitment you placed in it.

Siri: There were several internal matters that I thought needed attention. Among them, Dave [Brower], an aggressive as well as a highly gifted person, was emerging as the dominating figure in conservation, which generated internal problems along with spectacular results. He had

Siri: also just launched the Exhibit Format books program, which severely taxed the club's resources. Another concern related to the club's approach to environmental issues. Having sat on the board for some years participating in the discussions, I was occasionally troubled by the stance the board took on some issues. I had fairly strong feelings about the level of aggressiveness the club must exercise to maintain its growing effectiveness. There were some who had a tendency to compromise too early, to find "reasonable" or "realistic" solutions to problems rather than engage in head-on collisions and tests of strength when this seemed necessary on major issues. I held the conviction that easy compromise was not the club's mission--we had to wage a determined battle even at the cost of our losing at times; we had to battle as hard as we possibly could to achieve the ends that we thought were necessary. My outlook tended to side with those who took aggressive, almost uncompromising positions, realizing that the longer a battle could be waged, the more likely we were to win it. The virtue of perseverance had been demonstrated on many occasions.

There had been in some issues a tendency to compromise too early, to be "good guy," to be persuasive but friendly with the Forest Service, the Park Service, with the Bureau of Land Management, etc. I felt that we had to take a stronger and more persistent, more purist position, which didn't put me apart from others on the board, but I guess it put me more toward one end of the spectrum than the other.

AL: There were those who didn't agree with you.

Siri: With this basic philosophy, yes. This was best exemplified by Alex Hildebrand, who was a person I greatly admired for his very high moral principles. But he felt that you always had to be a gentleman; that you always had to be reasonable, rational, and you had to see the other values in the controversy as well. If an engineer presented an analysis, you had to accept that as a factual assessment and therefore adjust your plans accordingly.

Having worked as an engineer and scientist, I couldn't buy that [laughter]. I made a distinction between engineering and science and what one does as a human being in making value judgments about social and political goals. They had little in common. What you achieved in wilderness preservation at that time often had damn little to do with the scientific and engineering arguments. Later, when research led to a better understanding of the environmental impacts of man's activities, scientific evidence became progressively more important, sometimes decisive, in influencing decisions affecting the environment.

RL: Alex's background was chemical engineering?

Siri: He was, I believe, head of research for Standard Oil. There were a few others on the board, I guess, who held the view that you should try persuasion to resolve an issue, and settle, hopefully to some advantage. I couldn't quite see it that way, and others on the board couldn't either, and of course none of us could match Dave Brower.

AL: How about Dick Leonard? What was his point of view?

Siri: Dick generally was out in my end of the spectrum. Dick was not a man who compromised; he wanted to fight through battles. He was a great scrapper, and I admired Dick.

AL: And Bestor Robinson was one of the compromisers?

Siri: Yes. He had served on numerous government advisory committees and that may have moderated his position on some issues, I think. I don't mean this in criticism; it was more a question of how one viewed issues and appropriate action on them. For Bestor and Alex Hildebrand, and perhaps others, long experience in their professions may have convinced them that the most effective practice was the kind of relations they would have with other lawyers and businessmen; i.e., negotiate the best deal you could. Both men, however, were responsive to soundly reasoned arguments and skillful in formulating the club's position in clear, concise language.

I wanted to see us maintain an active, aggressive stance on all significant conservation issues that came to us. It appeared that we were growing rapidly in members and influence now. The club had been growing at about twelve percent per year for many years, and at the end of my term we were suddenly growing thirty percent per year--not because of me, but because of the rapidly evolving major conservation campaigns and our leading role in them. The club was growing so rapidly it was stretching its breeches, and a number of internal changes had to be made if the club was to fit its emerging national role.

An Understanding With Dave Brower, 1964

Siri: One of the first things I did was to have Dave Brower over for a heart-to-heart discussion--this was shortly after I was elected president. Dave and I sat in this room for several hours talking candidly about our respective roles and how we viewed the club's future. I told him what I expected of him and that I would support him as far as I could. Friction had already developed between Dave and some members of the board--there was no way of telling how this would evolve--and I recognized that there was a very real risk in what I was telling Dave. It might turn out to be extraordinarily beneficial to the club but could also turn out to be a disaster.

In any event, I told Dave quite frankly that I regarded him as the most creative and effective leader in the club--probably in the conservation movement--and that I would give him every possible support; that I also recognized the risk in doing this; and that we'd see how far it could go before it generated a critical internal crisis. I would support him in the books program particularly, but also in taking as aggressive a role as possible on conservation issues. It was with this understanding that I began my term as president: "Dave, you have wide latitude, please don't abuse it. This may prove inevitable at some time in the future, but let's see how it goes." I would support his actions as far as I could go, so long as it didn't jeopardize the club either structurally or financially.

AL: Were there any clear understandings or any definite limits that you placed on him?

Siri: I can't remember specific details of the conversation. I'm sure there were. I seem to recall that some rough bounds were set, but they were fairly broad in the sense that we had to preserve the integrity of the club at all costs, and by that I meant the club as a member-oriented institution; and its financial integrity. We were nowhere near that kind of danger then, and I sensed that differences between Dave and others were primarily philosophical ones. There was a growing alienation of Dave from his old friends Bestor and Alex Hildebrand and even Dick Leonard that had now become apparent.

AL: There had been earlier [in 1959] as I recall a resolution passed by the board which tried to place limits on Dave's style--that no officials would be attacked, or--

Siri: That's right. The board had passed several resolutions in attempts to curb Dave's zealous attacks on our opponents. I couldn't wholly disagree with this but also couldn't support severe strictures as long as his attacks were in reasonably good taste, legal, persuasive, and not needlessly abusive. This was one of the items I discussed with Dave at that time. The club had to take an aggressive stance. We couldn't play the role of country gentlemen; we were activists and had a lot of battles to win; and we couldn't always pull our punches to spare acquaintances in government bureaus. This question had come up several times before I became president and gradually intensified. I felt that I had to have an understanding with Dave at the very outset so we knew where we each stood on conservation action and a broad range of issues.

AL: Did your executive committee have this understanding with you, or was this an action on your own?

Siri: This was an understanding I had primarily with Dave but I also told the other members of the executive committee what I had in mind.

AL: Did they agree with your approach?

Siri: I don't recall if they agreed or disagreed. I don't recall that we had a lengthy discussion about it. We certainly didn't quarrel about it, I know. But each of them had certain reservations, I'm sure, about Dave and where he was going, and about some of his indiscretions and his usurpation of authority. These matters didn't disturb me too much at the time because my feeling was and still is, that while organizations are essential, their rules should not needlessly get in the way of people doing their jobs effectively, provided they do them effectively without tearing the organization apart. If necessary, let's bend the rules, and adapt the structure. If you're dealing with a gifted person of this kind, you fashion the rules to the needs, provided the benefits outweigh the risks.

So this was the way we set out--I cautioned him about going to excess in his actions, partly because they might not be effective, but mainly because they might cause debilitating internal disruption. The unanswered question was, where is the balance?

AL: He must have liked hearing that from you.

Siri: As I recall his reaction, he did. I felt kind of good about it too. Still, tucked away in the back of our minds was the question of where it would lead to. Will there come a time when Dave's actions lead

- Siri: to a serious crisis? Signs of conflict were evident, but hadn't evolved far enough to judge the future outcome, and it was worth the risk, as far as I could judge at the time, to give Dave a relatively free hand and see what he could do. Another two years, and we saw. [Laughter]
- AL: Did your relationship with him remain good throughout your presidency? Did this cause a lot of strains?
- Siri: No, I don't think so. I never felt a serious strain with Dave--not until much later, when it was clear that there was no way whatever, either by persuasion or by any formal means, of curbing his over-zealous drives that were then clearly jeopardizing the club's unity and its welfare. But even then I thought that we were still on terms of mutual respect, at least I felt that way toward Dave.
- AL: I guess I'm still trying to get what the balance was between the executive director and the president--what role did the president have if the executive director was given such wide authority?
- Siri: During the two years that I was president, I think my relationship with Dave was very good. I could talk with Dave, and I think he was usually candid with me at first. There were a number of things he did that he was candid with me about afterwards but not before [laughter], and these began to occur more often as time went by. I discovered financial and policy commitments he had made, large commitments, but after the fact. I'd call him on it, and he had a thousand explanations, none of them really convincing. About half the time in my second year as president he would consult me or at least alert me to what he was up too. But not always.

Duties, Accomplishments, and Frustrations as Club President

- AL: We will be getting into some more detail, maybe some specific instances later on. Did you find that the presidency was tremendously time-consuming?
- Siri: Yes. In fact, before I agreed to serve I went to John Lawrence, who was the director of our laboratory, and explained the situation. I said that if I accept, it is going to mean a substantial amount of time, and it would only be with his agreement that I could serve as president of the club. I made it quite clear; while I was president of the club my work for the Laboratory was going to suffer. He understood it and generously agreed to it, and so this removed one of the obstacles. The presidency was demanding, and essentially a full-time job. In fact it really demanded more time than most people could devote to it on a voluntary basis.

AL: So not everyone was in a position to be president.

Siri: That's right. It had to be someone who could offer the time.

AL: I notice that Mike McCloskey was appointed assistant to the president during your term in 1964. Was that a new position?

Siri: Yes. This was originally Ed Wayburn's idea. He'd served as president before me, and of course, as a doctor, time was hard to come by. How he managed a medical practice and also served as president I'll never understand. He felt it was necessary to have an assistant to the president, a staff person who was directly accountable to the president, and who could handle the many routine tasks that the president simply could not attend to in detail. Ed was quite insistent that there be an assistant to the president. It's a good idea. The club staff was not large and was fully committed to the jobs of keeping the organization going, like membership, accounting, outings, etc. Dave handled a multitude of conservation campaigns with one hand while producing books with the other and was not inclined to provide direct assistance to the president.

When I became president I asked Mike McCloskey to come down from Seattle and started him out as assistant to the president. Mike had by that time established himself as a very able regional conservation representative for the club. Well, Mike was too well qualified for the job; that was clear. The other aspect of it that I didn't like at the time was that with our limited budget for staff, I felt we had a more urgent need for a conservation department in the club, and Mike was the logical person to head it. Martin Litton at the time chuckled over establishing a department of conservation in the club because it seemed to him like bringing coals to Newcastle--conservation was what the whole club did. But the point was that there was no staff person really responsible for handling the conservation business; for preparing position papers, giving talks, attending hearings, organizing the conservation agenda and programs, and all the rest--we literally had no one doing the essential staff work.

I proposed to the board that a conservation department be established with Mike as head directly under Dave Brower. I sent a long memo to the board which provided a detailed job description for the position of conservation director of the club. This was adopted by the board. So I lost an assistant but we gained a conservation department with Mike as head.

It has worked very well to have a staff of people whose sole task is conservation; a staff to assist the president, the chapters, the board of directors, and perform the staff work for campaigns.

Siri: They were not to be involved in the service and administrative functions; that is, the administrative functions such as members' services, outings, accounting and publications, but they were to interface with these activities where necessary.

AL: And you didn't get another assistant?

Siri: No. We couldn't really afford another assistant; that would have to come later. There were several things that I wanted to do first--that was one, to establish a strong conservation department and over the years gradually expand it as funds permitted. The other addition I felt we needed was a technical staff--maybe not a department yet, but at least a scientist and forester--well-qualified people to do technical analysis and assessments, and provide backup material for our campaigns. They would also know other people in the field who could be called upon as expert witnesses, and people who could prepare position papers. That came some years later.

The first was Gordon Robinson who came on as staff forester. He was an invaluable asset. Gene Coan joined the staff later and then [Bob] Curry came in ultimately as the director of the research department, but that came some years afterward when we could afford it.

AL: All that takes money. Can you think of any other comments you might want to make on your role as president, not necessarily details of what you did.

Siri: Oh, I suppose there were a number of minor things in organization and operation of the board meetings. I always thought board meetings tended to be tedious and a little chaotic at times. This wasn't always the case. As presiding officer, some presidents had been better than others, but in order to get through an agenda and do it effectively, I felt that the meetings had to be tightened up; we had to stick to the point under discussion; that while we must allow flexibility and free discussion, on almost every issue that came up there had been a tendency to run around the same circle endlessly. It always seemed difficult for the chairman to break out of the circle and lead the debate quickly to some definite conclusion. Sitting on the board and watching the course of the discussion, you could often see it rambling over the same ground endlessly. So one of the things I decided was to see if meetings could be tightened up and discussions conducted in a somewhat more effective manner. This was kind of fun because it was a challenge.

AL: Was it successful?

Siri: I think so, yes. We managed to get through the agendas of the meetings on time, sometimes early. I'm sure I didn't improve my popularity with some members of the board. No one likes to be called

Siri: out of order for rambling, missing the point at issue or needlessly repeating arguments that had surfaced for the third time. I haven't any idea whether this irritated people or not. I'm sure it did some.

AL: And yet it is also irritating to be involved in a meeting that's going round and round.

Siri: If you have to sit in an audience, and watch this process, it must be pretty painful. One of the feelings that I had at the very outset was "My God, the meetings have got to be a little more orderly and systematic." When an important issue comes up that requires an extended discussion, as several did, then, yes, let it play out until a consensus is reached; or if it is clear that a consensus is not possible, then force it to a vote. But after an argument reached a plateau where it's not going any further, a vote on the issue cannot usefully be delayed.

Traditionally, club directors were long time friends and acquaintances. They had shared many club activities together, and there were almost never serious disagreements in board meetings. There were sometimes vigorous discussions but always on very friendly terms. Issues were discussed calmly, points conceded, and differences resolved amicably. One would often hear, "Yes, I see your point," or "That's a good argument," or "Let's consider this." So it was in the early years a pleasure to participate in such discussions, because one learned, perhaps added something worthwhile, and in the end everybody agreed. But as time passed, this was no longer the case; some issues provoked bitter quarrels, and uncompromising positions would be taken.

The friendly atmosphere and easy give and take of board meetings changed after the mid-fifties. New people came on the board who were not old acquaintances and who held views which they advanced aggressively. A few were demanding and intolerant in their approach and refractory in their positions. This didn't mean their aims weren't right, you know, but it did mean a growing conflict now between the old guard and the new people coming on. That was a fascinating interplay to see, but it was one which meant often exercising a fairly firm hand, which you do at your own peril.

AL: It's somewhat easy to understand things when you see it as you're presenting it; when you joined the board, the board was essentially a group of climbers. Even though there were age differences you were still from the same tradition, and I can see how this group would find the new members of the sixties to be intruders, if they were of a different philosophy.

Siri: That's right, they had a different background, a somewhat different philosophy and a strong loyalty to Dave Brower. They were not going to change the philosophy and habits of the--I hate to call them "old guard," but that may be the way newcomers may have perceived directors who had been on the board many years. And those on the board who had grown up with the club and successfully fought many of the great conservation battles were not about to give in easily.

AL: And in their minds the club was theirs?

Siri: I suppose so. There's a proprietary feeling that develops, I guess, when one belongs to an organization a long time. Not only is it your club, but you know your way is the right way. I found myself in the position of not being part of the older guard and yet not a part of the new people who were coming on the board. I like to think this lent a measure of detachment, which it probably didn't, but it meant, at least initially, that I didn't have strong ties to any faction--that came later--nor a rigid position on issues.

Loosely related to this was one thing that I constantly stressed, I guess, in those years, and that was, "For God's sake, let's do something; anything's better than nothing even if it's faulty." For most issues the club's effectiveness did not rest on passing a policy resolution in precisely the right form or to everyone's satisfaction but rather on what the follow-up was. "Let's set a position; we'll modify it later, but action is of paramount importance." You can't stop and study everything to death. It's absolutely necessary to move, to have some kind of action. You can always change the details of resolutions later once the course of action has been agreed upon.

I'm afraid I was impatient at times with the tedium of fifteen people editing a resolution in a meeting. We could in many cases have said simply, "We're opposed to the proposed action, and we're going to fight it." That's essentially what a resolution calling for a position on an issue would say anyway, and what really mattered was what we did about it.

III THE SIERRA CLUB'S BROADENING VISIONS, 1960s

[Interview 2: December 16, 1975]

Overpopulation, a Growing Concern

AL: Tonight I thought we'd discuss some of the major conservation issues of the sixties. But first, we talked earlier about your feeling that a major turning point occurred in the club's direction during the 1960s, and I thought you could start by giving an overview of these changes.

Siri: Until the early sixties, if you look back through the records of the club, you find almost our whole attention concentrated on wilderness: wilderness parks; wilderness areas; Wilderness Act; small parcels of primitive areas; roads through wilderness; what the forest service was doing to its forests; areas that we thought ought to be reserved until there was more extensive planning for wilderness. This theme dominated everything the club did, with exceptions, of course. This was the dominant theme; it had been since 1892.

But in the early sixties, I recall bits and pieces of other concerns emerging; pesticides and population in small fragments of action here and there; resolutions passed that were not comprehensive in any sense but rather primitive stabs at some kind of club policy. Population was perhaps the first, and I remember clearly the occasion when it first surfaced. It was at a caucus of the board at Dick Leonard's house. I don't remember the year, but it was either the tail end of the fifties or the very beginning of the sixties. We were all chatting about the usual subjects when Dave Brower casually raised the question of population. He thought that population was going to be a major problem. The response to it was, "That's an interesting idea; what do we discuss next?"

I could never let an opportunity pass to debate an idea, so I took a negative position on the significance of population growth, having in mind the way animal populations behave. Natural processes

Siri: generally control the populations of animal species. On the other hand it was true that micro-organisms grown in a Petrie dish, for example, continue to multiply exponentially until they suffer a catastrophic end either by exhausting their nutrient medium or by dying in their own excrement. However, man is not quite so simple-minded as a one-celled organism, and has the capacity to see a little farther ahead and perhaps avert disaster.

I argued this point briefly with Dave, but he steadfastly held to his position that population was going to be an environmental issue. He was right. That's because Dave's intuition on environmental matters often approached omniscience. But the population question didn't go very far beyond that conversation until some time later. Gradually, in other parts of the country, in other minds as well as Dave's, it began to grow to a substantial widespread concern.

It wasn't until some time later that population growth came to the attention of the board as an agenda item and was discussed. I have a note here that reminds me that in 1964 the board considered the population question and took the position that it supports a greatly increased program of education on population control. I think that was the first formal recognition we gave to population growth as an environmental problem.

AL: Do you remember why it was brought up at this point? Was it Dave's prodding?

Siri: I do not recall the circumstances other than there was now a growing awareness of the ominous implications of the population explosion. By 1964 there was a widespread conviction among environmentalists that population growth was the major environmental problem. The club simply could not ignore it. Many of the people in the club were now deeply concerned, but it had been interesting to observe the growth in awareness, including my own during the five or six years from the first brief discussion with Dave, to its general recognition as a major problem.

AL: It doesn't sound like the club took a leadership role.

Siri: That's right. I think the club was dragged into it.

AL: Were there any people who absolutely objected to discussing this type of issue?

Siri: I don't recall that there were. By that time everyone on the board conceded that population growth was a major problem facing the human race. One of the difficulties the board faced was how to come to grips with it. It was just not an easy thing to find the handle to--the club couldn't go out and dispense contraceptives! We could

Siri: urge Congress to enact some kind of legislation, but what kind of legislation? Education was really the only practical thing to do, but what type of education? How was it to be implemented. Was it to be done in the schools, and if you did that you know the kind of problems you would have straightaway. If we seemed remiss in dealing with the population question as a conservation issue, it was I think in part because we just didn't know what to do about it. If someone were cutting down trees or running a freeway through a park, we would know exactly what to do. But action on population growth is not as easy--you know, you can't go into everybody's bedroom and lie down on the floor as you would in front of a tractor [laughter].

From there on, of course, it gathered momentum. A committee was formed; more resolutions were passed, but I don't believe that even today we know really what to do about population growth other than wring our hands.

AL: And the club published The Population Bomb.*

Siri: That was perhaps the most effective thing the club could have done. The publication of Paul Ehrlich's The Population Bomb evoked intense interest in the subject. It proved also to be one of the more astute publishing efforts by the Sierra Club. Sales of that book have run into the millions.

AL: In Brower's introduction to that, I noticed he commented on the fact that his own organization was slow to get into it; he mentioned that in '68.

Siri: Yes, even in 1968, other than publishing the book, we weren't doing a great deal--except pressing here and there for legislation that might or might not be effective, and trying to develop educational material and other approaches to the problem. We don't know how effective it was. But other organizations were taking a more aggressive role in advocating population control. I guess we left it to them to deal more actively with the problem.

AL: What were some of the other issues that fall under this category?

Siri: Bit by bit, the club's vision broadened to include such things as pesticides, pollution, land-use planning, urban amenities, energy, and even labor. This at first was not accepted with enthusiasm by all members of the club. A few argued that the Sierra Club was a

*Paul R. Ehrlich, The Population Bomb (Ballantine, N.Y., 1968).

Siri: wilderness conservation organization, and let's stay in the woods. They had a point, too, because we were one of the strongest, most effective advocates of wilderness preservation.

Wildlife also entered the picture more strongly than it had in the past, although the Sierra Club had always been concerned with wildlife. You'll find actions by the club going back quite a few years--the whooping crane, the otters, and the condors particularly; the club took the lead in the battle for the preservation of the condors, more particularly for the preservation of their feeding-nesting grounds in the Sespe Forest in San Luis Obispo County. For several years in the late fifties that was a substantial battle with the Forest Service and the county.

AL: That seems a little more related to the traditional concern.

Siri: Yes, it was. It involved a dam, some roads, fire control measures and other intrusions into the condors' territory.

Conflict Over Pesticides Policy

Siri: Opposition to the use of pesticides came slowly for the club. There was some reluctance at first, on the part of some members of the board, people like Alex Hildebrand and the Clarks, who adhered to the club's traditional wilderness role, and as engineers had more pragmatic views on non-wilderness issues, although they were dedicated conservationists and I wouldn't suggest otherwise. One of our first actions occurred when the Park Service proposed spraying the needle miner in Yosemite Park, Tuolumne Meadows particularly. They explained that the needle miner was going to wipe out vast areas of trees and seriously disfigure the park. We did not become involved until the Park Service asked our permission to spray Sierra Club properties at Tuolumne Meadows. The board was quick to say no. But what about spraying the rest of Tuolumne Meadows and other park areas? At first there was strong reluctance on the part of some of the board members to protest broadcast spraying in the park feeling that we should restrict ourselves to the club's property because we didn't want it manipulated, but that the Park Service might have cause to engage in this kind of control elsewhere.

AL: Did they feel that the Park Service was justified elsewhere, or just that the Sierra Club shouldn't take a stand?

Siri: I think they felt there might be some justification for it. Alex Hildebrand, I think, argued that they knew what they were doing, and that we should leave it to the experts. But most of the members

Siri: of the board held strong feelings about the use of pesticides, particularly in national parks, and some were concerned about its use anywhere. Of course Dave Brower argued that pesticides simply should not be used at all.

In any event there gradually evolved a pesticide policy that grew stronger as time passed. Finally, because of our ignorance of the efficacy and impacts of pesticides, we asked Milton Hildebrand, professor of zoology at Davis, who was then chairman of the club's natural science committee, to provide the board with a report. His report was the final and I guess the definitive word on pesticides for the club. Milton Hildebrand took a very strong position after spending I guess three months examining the scientific literature and consulting other authorities. He proposed a very strong, comprehensive policy to the board, which was adopted unanimously. It called for essentially the discontinuance of the use of pesticides anywhere in wilderness areas except under extraordinary circumstances, where use of such agents could be fully justified.

RL: Was Milton's position, then, somewhat in opposition to his brother's and his father's?

Siri: I don't know about his father's views, but by this time Alex Hildebrand had pretty well come around. We had passed some resolutions in previous board meetings, which strengthened somewhat the Sierra Club's policy on pesticides, but Milton Hildebrand's proposal provided us with a well-formulated, comprehensive policy, which we enthusiastically embraced. It dispelled any lingering doubts some may have had about the club's position on pesticides.

AL: He didn't call for a ban on DDT altogether?

Siri: Not a total ban on DDT, no. That came several years later. Hildebrand's report and recommendation included not only chemical pesticides, but essentially all manipulations of wild areas--the needless management of animal life, the poisoning of coyotes, the use of other manipulative measures in national parks, wilderness areas, and primitive areas. So he addressed the general question of pest control on quite a broad front, and that pretty well established the club's position on these issues.

AL: I seem to recall some disagreement between the Hildebrands, I thought as a group, and Brower over this issue of pesticides; or perhaps they were not disagreeing about the issue but on some of Brower's publications about it.

Siri: Yes, I think you're right, but I don't recall the details. Dave, of course, was again head of the board as usual, and everyone was struggling to keep up with him in adjusting his convictions about

Siri: pesticides. I think you're right, but I don't recall the specifics, that Dave had made some very strong statements about pesticides and their users, and I vaguely recall that some members of the board took exception to them, mainly because of the character of the statements. Some directors were particularly sensitive about how we dealt with public officials, feeling that we shouldn't impugn their motives. We should deal with the facts; however vigorously we fought the battle it should be factual, honorable, and gentlemanly. This was a reasonable approach to take; it was one which had worked in the past, but unhappily no longer was always effective in the latter part of this century.

AL: I have some recollections that Rachel Carson's book, The Silent Spring, played some part in this disagreement between the elder Hildebrand and Dave Brower.

Siri: It could very well have. The prevailing attitude about Rachel Carson, not so much in conservation circles, but in scientific circles, was strong disagreement over the validity of her findings, her conclusions, and her analysis. Many biologists felt that her book gave an unwarranted, brash and insupportable picture of pesticides--somewhat hysterical and not well-founded. Others, of course, said she was right; you could draw these conclusions and they were valid.

The rest of us said the academic debate didn't matter one whit. Rachel Carson had made an important issue visible and however she did it was fine; the book can't be faulted for lack of effectiveness. It had a powerful effect in generating public awareness of the impact that pesticides were having, and the enormity of the impact they would have in the future if their use continued to expand.

AL: Then there was a general agreement that her basic thesis was correct?

Siri: Yes, I think we all accepted this. Even if the professionals in biology could quarrel about details, the quarrels often came down to a point where they didn't have sufficient information either, and it was then a matter of judgment. From what we could see of the ominous impacts of the indiscriminate use of pesticides, it was quite clear that a halt had to be called somewhere and the sooner the better.

AL: Who was Tom Jukes? I've seen several letters; he seems to be violently opposed to an anti-pesticide stand, but I don't know anything about him.

Siri: Tom Jukes is a long-time Sierra Club member. He was extremely active some years earlier when he lived in California, particularly in the activities of the club, skiing, hiking, and mountaineering.

AL: Didn't he come from Berkeley?

Siri: Yes. But he took a job with one of the major chemical companies, one which happened to produce pesticides. He's a chemist, and he felt very strongly that it was absolutely essential to use pesticides for control of diseases and devastating destruction of food crops, and always argued that the use of DDT probably had saved millions of lives. It certainly had saved tens of millions of people from malaria and other tropical diseases; he was right on this question. He said you had to balance those costs; it might have an environmental impact, yes, but you're saving a large population of the world from untold grief and costs.

It's an argument you can't ignore, but the position of the rest of us was, that's fine, but use selected pesticides under carefully controlled and limited conditions, not the extensive broadcast and indiscriminate use then practiced. In the long run we were going to pay an enormous cost in terms of loss of wildlife, loss of important insect species, and probably producing some worldwide or at least very widespread dislocations in ecosystems. By that time, of course, DDT was being detected even in penguins in the Antarctic. The oceans were full of it, and this made a pretty convincing story for those who were opposed to the use of DDT.

Anyway, as the sixties wore on, there was no question about the club's position on all pesticides--the use of poison baits, the manipulation of wilderness and wild areas and of national parks--wilderness should just be left alone. If there were needle miners, okay, there have been needle miners for the last million years, and somehow Yosemite had survived.

We began to develop a growing concern about fire control too at about this time, although we didn't really take a very specific or hardened position on fire control. We did feel that it was wrong in the national parks and wilderness areas. Since then the Park Service has been conducting studies on controlled burning, and foresters are coming around to recognizing that the longer you prevent fires, the worse they are when they do occur, because of the buildup of ground litter and brush. A fire then causes immense damage to trees, soil, and wildlife, whereas periodic fires are less damaging and part of the natural ecological processes of an area; in fact some ecosystems depend on it--depend critically on periodic fires.

AL: That would be a hard one to come around to, to watch a fire burning.

Siri: That's right, and of course it's even more difficult now, because when fires do start they are now far more damaging and more difficult to control. Witness the recent fire in Los Angeles. Fire prevention

Siri: in brush and forested areas had been practiced for years, and when fire did finally happen it was devastating, whereas formerly those slopes probably burned off every few years, and the fires were then less intense, less damaging. Anyway, the role of fire in natural areas was an emerging idea too.

Resolution of Conflicts on the Board

AL: I'm curious about Brower's role in prodding the board to take a stand on some of these issues--pesticides, pollution. Did he take an active role, or did he just sort of let the members come around to it?

Siri: No. Dave almost never took a passive role on anything he felt strongly about, and of course he felt strongly about almost everything that had to do with wilderness and the environment. He would vigorously and eloquently advance his point of view.

AL: Did he get vigorous arguments opposed to it in the initial years when policy was more cautious?

Siri: Sometimes, but remember in those early years, the nature of the debates was more like that of friendly discussions. Directors didn't get defensive and hostile in such discussions; they would concede points in good grace. Someone like Dick Leonard or Bestor Robinson, who might initially hold one position, would readily accept another view on an issue if he found the arguments and new information persuasive. Later, as the board changed and factions developed, there was a tendency to maintain rigid positions; the more you argued, the more fixed they became.

Earlier however our discussions, with rare exceptions, led to a consensus. They were occasionally vigorous discussions, and it was then a joy, because the points were well made, the interchanges informative, and a unified point of view gradually would emerge. It was a pleasant and rewarding experience.

AL: Would Dave himself be satisfied with the conclusion, normally?

Siri: Generally, yes. On occasion he may have felt that more could have been done, but under the circumstances that was as far as the board could act with the information at hand. This might be true of others, too. It wasn't always Dave who initiated and led the discussion on an issue. Generally, more often than not, it was one of the board members who had taken an active interest in the problem, or a committee chairman, or maybe someone from a chapter in whose

Siri: area the problem occurred. There was always a person or a small group of members who raised the issue, asked to have it put on the agenda, generated material, reports, and supporting arguments, and came to the board to present it--or enlisted the interest of one or more of the directors of the club, who then proposed a resolution and led the discussion.

Board meetings became more acrimonious as the sixties wore on--mainly because of dissension generated by Dave's activities but also because a new breed of somewhat younger person was coming to the board, who held extreme and adamant positions on nearly every issue. Their view had to prevail, and they would stay at an argument for a full day. The discussions would tend to get bitter and acrimonious, with no quarter given. We had a number of discussions of that sort.

I remember when I was president, the meeting in which we hammered out the off-road vehicle policy for the club. Fred Eissler, who was on the board at that time, had great difficulty ever conceding a point. He had to prevail, and he would simply drive the whole board to a bitter and ragged edge. On this occasion I just kept everybody there, and no meals, no nothing, until they resolved the club's policy on off-road vehicles. When they were getting to the point of physical and psychological exhaustion, as evening approached, Fred and other directors found they could concede points. The differences had to be resolved; and they were. Sometimes you have to push to the point where everyone's so exhausted they agree [laughter].

AL: Was Eissler able to give on that, then?

Siri: He had to, ultimately, but he also won many on his points, and they were incorporated in the club's policy. Some of the things he was proposing were so extreme that it would have been very difficult to implement such a policy if it were adopted, whereas the policy the rest were agreed to was more credible, certainly effective, and could be implemented.

AL: Are there any other comments on the sort of non-traditional issues before we turn to somewhat more traditional ones like the redwoods? We haven't talked much about air and water pollution.

Siri: No, air and water pollution seeped in [laughter], as it were, and nobody really felt they were inappropriate issues. The problems were there; everybody understood that air and water pollution were undesirable, and measures were needed to control pollution.

AL: Did the club lobby as strongly in Washington on this issue as they would on a national park issue? Or did they just pass resolutions?

Siri: There was a strong effort in Washington in support of the Clean Air Act [1970], and amendments to the Water Quality Act and other legislation. Yes, the club had a significant role in all these pieces of legislation and has ever since. The Washington office for some years now has been active on all these issues.

IV REDWOOD NATIONAL PARK CAMPAIGN, 1964-68

Development of Sierra Club Proposal

AL: Shall we turn now to talk about Redwood National Park? It seems a long way from air and water pollution, but it was one of the key issues of the mid-sixties.

Siri: Yes it was. The redwoods have been an ongoing issue for decades, I guess, but not in the form of a major campaign and never to establish a national park. In fact, even in 1960, we made a cautious start--the club advocated studies to identify redwood areas that warranted federal support for inclusion in the state park system. This was a long way from the later vision of a national park. At that time, in 1960, we were talking of just expanding the state park system with federal aid, if there weren't state funds sufficient to acquire additional redwood areas. We were particularly concerned with Jedediah Smith and Prairie Creek Parks, especially Gold Coast and Fern Canyon, outstanding areas that were not then in Prairie Creek State Park. It was a cautious start toward expansion of redwoods.

The sights gradually were raised, and we saw the possibility of not just adding bits and pieces to the state park system, but rather of taking the logical big leap and advocating a national park. That idea also was generated in the Interior Department, I think, independently. More likely it occurred in the minds of a lot of people about the same time. The Interior Department, back about then [June, 1964], undertook a study sponsored by the National Geographic Society to look at the possibilities of a national park, so even the National Geographic, which had published a number of articles on redwoods, was thinking about the possibility. So far as I recall this was the first meaningful study to lay out the possibilities of a redwoods national park. From that point on the whole concept began to spread and intensify.

AL: And grow. Wasn't the original figure mentioned 30,000 acres?

Siri: I believe so. As enthusiasm developed, and we made our own studies of the north coast redwoods, it became evident that the only way to ensure the protection of the trees was to include whole watersheds, and to try to embrace as many of the old redwoods as possible. Those were being rapidly cut, and one isn't going to replace them in less than a thousand years or so. Our position was that we had to preserve as much as possible of the original redwood stands, and equally important, ensure protection of their watersheds up to the crests of surrounding ridges. Cutting above the groves would do what we'd seen happen in Bull Creek, where there'd been extensive cutting in the upper watersheds, and then with the devastating floods that followed, massive quantities of silt were washed down into the basins, where it destroyed enormous numbers of old redwoods. We didn't want to see that happen in the national park.

Gradually there developed a schism between the Sierra Club and Save-the-Redwoods League over what areas should be preserved and what underlying premise there should be for preserving them. We were taking the position that whole watershed had to be preserved even though some portions of those watersheds had already been cut. We could see no other way of ensuring the preservation of the old redwoods that were still growing in the lower portions of the basins.

Save-the-Redwoods League took a somewhat different view. They felt that because of the political difficulty in passing a redwoods national park bill and the cost that would be involved, it was essential to include only those areas we would be absolutely confident of acquiring. These included certain prime groves, like Jedediah Smith in the Mill Creek area, and of course Prairie Creek--two northern areas where the state parks already existed. The Save-the-Redwoods League felt that this was politically possible to preserve those areas and that to go much further than this would jeopardize the whole campaign, jeopardize the possibility of getting a national park. They felt that the opposition we would encounter from the industry and the residents in the north coast counties would be so overwhelming that they would defeat an effort to establish a park and that the costs would be too high anyway, and Congress wouldn't go along with it.

We felt, on the other hand, that these were not only risks that we had to run for a much bigger park and a more meaningful park, but that the risks were acceptable in the sense that we thought we could prevail.

There were some ongoing studies by the Park Service with three alternatives proposed: one was quite a large park, which more or less matched what we had in mind; and then there were two--or several--lesser alternatives that were proposed, and it was from that point on that the battle was engaged.

AL: Was Wayburn the key figure in molding the Sierra Club's proposal?

Siri: Yes. Wayburn was appointed task leader for the Redwood National Park campaign.

AL: Before the club's proposal was developed?

Siri: Oh, yes. This was done when I was president. I made a formal appointment, so it would be generally recognized that Wayburn was the club's spokesman and campaign manager. He was the one person in the club with whom everyone would work in this campaign. Wayburn of course worked diligently and effectively at it for a number of years, until the park was in fact established. Many people in the north coastal counties, particularly from the college--Humboldt State College--were extremely helpful. They also took a lot of abuse. They were personally threatened and had to endure a lot of mischief from the loggers and the local residents--threats of discharge or punitive actions, abuse in the papers and by friends of labor and the lumber companies. It wasn't a very pleasant situation to be in if you were living up there and fighting for a national park. It was sometimes a bitterly fought battle with the companies, with labor, with the county supervisors and local governments and some of the residents.

AL: Wasn't the Sierra Club proposal more favorable to the local economy than Save-the-Redwoods League?

Siri: We felt that it was.

AL: But the local counties didn't agree?

Siri: No, they didn't want a national park at all. They didn't want any of these lands taken out of production. It was most important to their economy, they felt, to continue cutting. There was constant reiteration of the argument that you can cut today and tomorrow, but what are you going to do next year when you don't have anything left to cut. We argued that wherever a national park had been established we'd encountered similar resistance, but in the end they proved to be of enormous economic benefit to the local counties and the local people. They brought in all kinds of business they hadn't anticipated before. Cases in point were Yellowstone, and Yosemite, and Sequoia, and others.

RL: What sort of propaganda did industry put out to their workers to persuade them that this was not in their interest? Do you recall?

Siri: Yes--I don't recall the specifics--I recall only that it was a bitter and not wholly honest presentation of the facts. They played heavily on the theme of jobs and the loss of tax revenues. This was a significant issue of course with the counties and local governments.

AL: The club did support in lieu taxes, didn't it.

Siri: Oh yes, in fact very early we recognized that during the transition period, until the counties and the local people adjusted to a new economy, there would be some dislocations--no question about that. We fully supported provision of in lieu taxes, to be phased out over a reasonable period of time. We did recognize the transitional economic impacts the park would have and were quite willing to support whatever measures were needed to insure that the impacts would be minimized.

One of the antipark signs I remember particularly, that caused a great deal of hilarity, was one posted by one of the lumber companies--a huge sign along Highway 101 saying that one million seeds had been planted, implying that a great redwood forest would quickly rise out of the clear-cut lands. Some of the members went up to the area to see what kind of seeds they were. There were, in fact, a few redwood seeds among them, but they were mostly fir. This was what the companies wanted to grow instead of redwoods, because they could get a faster yield. We made as much publicity out of this as we could--pictures in the Bulletin of the beautiful sign: "1,000,000 seeds planted in the redwoods." Yes, but--they were mainly firs, and not many at that--one million don't go very far in planting a forest.

Differences with Save-the-Redwoods League: Battling vs. Negotiating

AL: Let me get back to the questions about the differences with the Save-the-Redwoods League. It seems that in the original proposal Wayburn writes about in the Bulletin, he does include Mill Creek.

Siri: Oh, yes.

AL: And then--that was in January '65, and by December Mill Creek is dropped from the club's proposals.

Siri: Yes, at the outset we were trying to establish an accord with Newton Drury and the Redwoods League, and purely on the basis of Newton Drury's vast information and understanding of the Redwoods areas--in many ways he was regarded the ultimate authority. But the more we looked at the problem the more we saw that the redwoods park had to be centered farther south and to include the watersheds. We discussed Mill Creek at great length in deciding whether it should be included or not, and whether it was more important to focus on those areas south of Mill Creek, between Jedediah Smith, Mill Creek and Redwood Creek, and areas even farther south. We finally came to the conclusion that this is where the park had to be centered.

AL: It seems originally that the club was trying to get both; you tried to focus on Redwood Creek, but also included Mill Creek and some of the watersheds of Mill Creek, and then that seemed to be dropped.

Siri: I don't recall the details; I simply recall that there were lengthy discussions on the areas to include. This was supported by on-the-ground studies that were commissioned by the club and that were also undertaken by club members, particularly those living in the area, and people from Humboldt State College. There gradually evolved, from the mass of information in these studies and numerous trips by Wayburn, a clear idea of the boundaries of the park area that we would propose.

During all of this time, of course, there were constant discussions with George Hartzog, who was then director of the National Park Service, and with congressmen and others, in an effort to advance our proposal for the park.

AL: Was there something of a bitter feeling toward Save-the-Redwoods League? This seems to come out in some of the ads, the pamphlets that Brower put out for instance, a pamphlet headlined: "Some of the Organizations Helping Really to Save the Redwoods."

Siri: No, I don't think that the feeling in the club was one of bitterness. It was another feeling--we were just terribly sad that Save-the-Redwoods League, our old friends, and we were at odds on this issue, and that there seemed no way to compromise the differences. We had meetings with Newton Drury and with Dick [Leonard]--of course, Dick was on both boards--and we were never able to come to an agreement. Newton held rigidly to his position as we did to ours.

AL: And this was based, you feel, primarily on what he thought was realistic?

Siri: On what he thought was right and realistic and important. It turned out that he was probably using a somewhat different set of premises. He wanted just the best of the redwood groves--Mill Creek, Jedediah Smith, and Prairie Creek--and thought this was really the most that could be gotten. These were the important redwood stands. I don't think the feeling in the club was generally one of bitterness, just regret that we could not agree with what we considered to be his severely limited view of what the park ought to be.

AL: There were efforts made to come to terms?

Siri: Oh, yes. Numerous efforts. We had many luncheons, dinners, evening conferences with Newton and Dick over a span of several years.

AL: Who participated in them? Wayburn?

Siri: Yes. Wayburn was always present. I was generally in attendance; sometimes Dave, and occasionally others.

Dave's ad was perhaps expressed in language a little stronger than most of us were feeling. Because of our long friendship and high regard for Newton Drury and Dick Leonard, our feeling was a sense of sadness that we had to tell them repeatedly that we wouldn't compromise on boundaries.

AL: I've heard a lot of remarks about Martin Litton's verbal attack on Drury. Was that at a board of directors' meeting?

Siri: Yes.

AL: He made the remark that Newton Drury had destroyed more redwoods than the lumber companies ever had--something to that effect.

Siri: Well, yes, but one had to know Martin Litton. Martin was sometimes given to exaggerated statements in the course of his colorful and uninhibited discourses. It didn't matter whether it was redwoods or something else; there was always something that Martin was thoroughly exercised about, and he could be brutal in his remarks. Martin was never the environmental statesman, but he was fascinating as a speaker. He used colorful phrases, analogies and metaphors, and they were often cutting, sometimes irresponsible. He never pulled his punches. He was never inhibited; if he felt something, he just said it.

AL: No matter who was in attendance?

Siri: Or against whom it was directed.

AL: This must have created a great deal of ill feeling.

Siri: It did on more than one occasion, on more than one issue because he was so abrasive in his uninhibited attacks on people, but he was still fascinating to listen to. But I don't think that Martin's views--at least as he expressed them--were always shared by the majority of us. In the case of the redwoods, however, there was a no difference of opinion. We all felt very strongly about our position, and felt it was justified, and we had to stick to it.

AL: Was there--I don't mean you personally--but was there any general feeling Drury was somewhat beholden to the lumber companies?

Siri: I don't think this crossed my mind; I don't think that anyone else would have seriously entertained the idea. I'd have to say this was a foreign thought to me. I don't recall its ever being discussed.

AL: So in discussing the differences with him the feeling would tend to be one of respect for him, for his views.

Siri: Yes, but one with which we couldn't agree. We just felt that he was wrong in spite of the fact that he was Mr. Redwoods. Our own studies hadn't led to the same conclusions. Newton had been National Park Service director for years, and often saw political and budget realities in a very different light from what we did. As executive director of the Redwoods League, he had been very successful in negotiating the purchase of small redwood groves. That's a very different thing from engaging in a hard campaign for a large redwood park. It's not the same thing at all. There was that difference, I suppose, in the way the two organizations were tuned. We weren't buying; we were persuading the country to acquire extensive areas of redwoods because we felt it was the only way of saving them; we had to include their watersheds or they wouldn't survive. Newton felt differently about it, and I suppose he approached it from a quite different point of views. We went in battling, swinging a broadax, and Newton was more attuned to quietly negotiating arrangements of this kind.

AL: Do you have any idea why the administration sort of neglected their own Department of Interior study and supported the Mill Creek proposal?

Siri: No, I don't know the details, but I would presume that Newton had some influence on that decision; Mill Creek was after all the Redwoods League's choice.

There was also, I believe, some agreement among the logging companies in the north counties that this was something they could tolerate; they could put up with it. But they could not tolerate the proposal we were making. And so that would have made it easier for the Park Service to acquire the land; it would have required a smaller battle, less expense. There was also something about the purchase of Mill Creek that made it fairly attractive for the company, or if not attractive at least not painful. What we were proposing would have taken most of the Arcata Company's redwood lands, and this of course would be painful for Arcata. That was I believe where our strongest opposition came from.

AL: Did Arcata have national ties?

Siri: I don't recall; it wasn't a company as large as the others in the area, and their main holdings were in the Redwood Creek area that we particularly wanted. In that sense, Mill Creek was an easier objective to achieve. There were significant concessions by the companies that owned most of the land at Mill Creek. They saw their way out of that area relatively easily, as compared with Redwood Creek and some of the lesser streams and watersheds that we were asking for.

Siri: In any event, Ed Wayburn was the leader in that battle, a very dogged person--one of Wayburn's chief assets is perseverance. It probably wasn't always a brilliant campaign, but that dogged determination, and thoroughness with which Ed goes about seeing through a campaign is the kind of thing that really pays off. The brilliant moments were generated by Dave, and one was the full-page ad.

The Full-Page Ads

AL: Was that the club's first use of full-page ads [December, 1965]?

Siri: I think it was. I can't recall an earlier one, although there may have been. I think it was the first attempt.

AL: That was Brower's idea?

Siri: I think it was Brower's idea, yes, but Wayburn did participate in the preparation of it.

AL: Did you participate in the preparation?

Siri: Not really. It seems to me I did see the ad before it was published. Wayburn, myself and I think a couple of staff people went over it in advance.

RL: You started to say something about the unfortunate wording of the ad earlier?

Siri: No, I'd have to refresh my memory by seeing the ad, but I think it related to the Save-the-Redwoods League, didn't it? It was perhaps worded a little more strongly than some members of the board would have liked, but I wasn't particularly troubled by it, because I thought we had to make our case clear. There was a significant difference between us.

AL: Here is one sentence that I think offended the Save-the-Redwoods League, "Others do not like it--particularly those who can be intimidated by a powerful industry with its extensive public relations program." I think they felt that that was a slap at Save-the-Redwoods League.

Siri: Looking at it now, it wasn't a particularly useful, or gracious, thing to put in the ad. I mean if I had to run the--

AL: You don't recall whether it was debated or anything?

Siri: No, I don't.

AL: There does seem to be, in looking at this ad and this pamphlet, "Some Of The Organizations Helping Really To Save The Redwoods," that it's a little bit of infighting; the public couldn't possibly know the position of Save-the-Redwoods League and all that.

Siri: That's right. With twenty-twenty hindsight, there were some tactical errors perhaps.

AL: But it did start a new way of fighting for the club, the idea of a full-page ad.

Siri: Oh yes, that technique was given birth at about that time.

AL: Was it done by an advertising agency?

Siri: We had assistance in putting the ads together, yes. It seems to me that the idea of ads came from Howard Gossage [of Freeman, Mander, and Gossage]. Dave had gotten to know Gossage quite well and respected--and used--his considerable talents. I'm quite sure the idea came from Gossage, and he helped us on many of the ads. He was a brilliant ad man and saw immediately that here was a medium to use in environmental campaigns. Dave saw instantly that it opened a whole new approach for mobilizing public support. But it was Gossage's genius that formed the idea and also the approaches reflected in the ads--the Grand Canyon ad, the redwood ads and some of the others. He was always intimately involved in the design and publication.

The Final Outcome, October 1968

AL: Now the final outcome of the park [on 10-2-68] was a 58,000 acre park, rather than the 90,000 the club had campaigned for.

Siri: Yes, I believe that was the case.

AL: And you read today about all the difficulties the park faces, and that there isn't complete watershed protection.

Siri: That's right, and we warned the Park Service time and again of the necessity for having complete watersheds. This was evident to us right at the outset. There were times when there were temptation to compromise on the watersheds, but Ed Wayburn held fast, supported by the majority of us. We just couldn't see taking a position on boundaries anywhere below the ridge crests of a redwood area we wanted to save. To do otherwise was foolish; it was asking for ultimate disaster.

AL: The club did accept a compromise?

Siri: We had to. Congress had the last word. At least we were getting the park. It was our clear intention, however, to continue to try to get the rest of the land to ensure the safety of the redwoods. The companies had already cut right along the park boundaries. There was absolute devastation from clearcutting right up to the park boundary. A wall of redwoods now stood exposed. The clear-cut land looked as though it had been struck by an atomic bomb. The ground was absolutely shredded--right up to the park boundary. You could foresee that happening everywhere once the park was established. With park boundaries set at the crests of the watersheds, the visual and physical impacts would be less damaging.

RL: Were the lumber companies intentionally taking away the beauty?

Siri: Well, they were boxing in the park.

AL: Making it impossible to expand.

Siri: That's right. Later park additions would be nothing but ruined earth--sterile, ready to slide away into the ocean. This was anticipated at the time, but there was just no possibility of getting the additional funding out of Congress for the bigger park.

AL: Does anyone from Save-the-Redwoods ever hold this up to the club, that the park is in danger now?

Siri: No, I can't imagine any of them doing that; they are mature persons. Besides, they would not have very good grounds for doing it anyway, because more was achieved than the league originally thought was possible. I believe the league also accepted the idea that it was essential to have the watersheds intact under Park Service control.

AL: Except that one might be able to say that their proposal was based on the realities of what Congress would finance. It was a small park with a complete watershed within the amount of money Congress was willing to pay, whereas the Sierra Club had a much grander proposal, but eventually they had to compromise on something that turned out to be unprotectable.

Siri: I don't think that argument can be advanced very effectively because it wasn't the whole of the Redwood National Park we proposed that's threatened, and there's still an opportunity to acquire or control those peripheral areas that endanger some portions of the park. I don't think that would be a sound argument. You are correct however. The league wanted a small gem of a redwood park, perfectly protected, whereas we advocated a much larger area that was more significant but subject to hazards.

AL: In retrospect, you support the club's stand.

Siri: Oh, yes, there is no question whatever in my mind, and I don't think there's a question in the minds of any of the other Sierra Club people. I don't recall that any club leader questioned the club's advocacy of a larger park than the one Congress created. If anyone said anything about it I'm just not aware of it. It gave us another thing to do--namely, to round out the Redwood National Park.* [Laughter]

AL: Is there anything you want to add on the redwoods?

Siri: Nothing significant I can think of at the moment. The feeling at the time was one of partial satisfaction in leading a successful effort to create a Redwood National Park with the opportunity of expanding it as the years passed and funds became available for acquisition of additional lands. We still hold out that hope. At least some crucial areas of redwoods were, in fact, saved. Mill Creek is part of a state park anyway. We weren't losing anything there.

AL: Did you visit these areas yourself?

Siri: Yes. I remember the first time I saw Prairie Creek. On the south side of Prairie Creek it's been clearcut. There is a photograph of that area featured in a number of the books, and there may be a photograph in the ad.

This, I think, may be it [refers to ad]: a wall of redwoods starting at Prairie Creek and this swath of clear cut going right down to the shore. An appalling sight. The access road at that time ran right down through here, through this clear cut or next to it down to the shore, and then you went along the Gold Coast. You'd turn off Highway 101 and go through a few trees that had been left to conceal this awful devastation, and then suddenly this whole thing opens up into this mass of destroyed land; it's an appalling sight.

So that's where the redwoods are at the moment, and that will be a continuing battle, I guess. The only final comment on the redwoods, in response to your question, "What is your assessment of the campaign and its outcome in retrospect?" I don't think we could have carried out that campaign otherwise; I don't really see anything now that would persuade me that it should significantly have altered

*March 27, 1978, President Carter signed Redwood National Park expansion act, adding 48,000 acres of land to the existing park.

Siri: what we did. One could always argue that maybe we should have held out and fought the battle even harder for the whole ninety-odd thousand acres, but--

AL: Was there anyone who argued that at the time?

Siri: We all did. We advocated it up to the time the president signed the bill.

AL: But you didn't try to persuade--or did you--persuade your friends in Congress to vote against that bill?

Siri: Not the final bill, no.

RL: Who were your friends in Congress then?

Siri: [Jeffrey] Cohelan was one, of course. [Don H.] Clausen was one of our bitter opponents, or strongest opponents, because it was partly his district. And then [John P.] Saylor, of Pennsylvania, and I don't recall who else it was. We did have obviously several very good friends in Congress, and I've just forgot the names.

AL: Did Wayburn accept the compromise?

Siri: Yes, ultimately. We all did. Time was running out.

RL: Can you recall the specific comment that former Governor Reagan made?

Siri: [Laughing] "You've seen one redwood, you've seen 'em all!" We had lunch with Governor Reagan sometime later on another question. We didn't raise the issue at all, but he complained about the abuse he took on that statement. He said, "That was not what I said at all! What I said was, 'How many redwoods do you need?'" And that he was misquoted. Well, that may be. Either way...[laughter].

V A POLITICAL BATTLE FOR THE GRAND CANYON, 1964-68

[Interview 3: February 11, 1976]

The Club's Uncompromising Commitment

- AL: We were going to start tonight discussing the Grand Canyon. You were president at the time, but I think you mentioned that Dave Brower took the lead in the battle.
- Siri: Yes, this was assigned to Dave. He had been running with it anyway, and he was the person with the deepest, most sustained interest in the Grand Canyon and was a natural selection. He was then recognized formally as the Grand Canyon task leader. It was essentially his show, in coordinating it, organizing it, preparing the materials, rounding up the expertise we needed, getting the publications started and published, and it was a job he did superbly well because he had a full range of tools at his hands.
- AL: You mean it was pretty much hands off? Were there any purse strings controls?
- Siri: Well, of course, because resources were limited, and it was necessary to define some bounds, but Grand Canyon was regarded as a high priority issue. As it had to be supported generously with the club's resources, the board would strain as far as it could to provide the funds that were needed and the manpower.
- AL: Were there those at the time--were there any who felt that too much of the club's resources were being expended on the campaign?
- Siri: No, I don't think at the time this was an issue of any great significance. We were always concerned that we didn't have enough funds for it, and I believe there were several fund-raising efforts. The advertisements were clearly a fund-raising effort, among other things. Grand Canyon was regarded by everyone as a major club campaign, and it was so designated.
- RL: What is the approximate date we're talking about?

AL: The two dams were proposed in February '64, and they were finally defeated in September '68. Was there no opposition, or anyone within the club that preferred some sort of compromise on the Grand Canyon?

Siri: There was such talk at times when things got terribly desperate. We were faced initially with a proposal to construct two high-rise dams, one at Marble Canyon and one at Bridge Canyon. The latter would have flooded the gorge immediately downstream of Grand Canyon Park--at the Grand Canyon National Monument, which is a natural extension of the park. It would have meant the reservoir would extend into and through the monument itself.

We were convinced the dams would alter the flow in the canyon itself; I don't think there was any question about that. Flows in the canyon would be at the mercy of the upper dam in Marble Canyon. It would also be the end of opportunities to boat down the Grand Canyon, but that was not the primary thrust of our opposition to the dams. It was that the Colorado River along its entire reach through the gorges was just no place to put dams, if they would in any way affect the Grand Canyon. There was talk at times, when things got terribly tough, of compromise with a low level dam whose reservoir would not extend so far into the monument.

AL: Were these board discussions, you mean?

Siri: Well, these proposals were brought to our attention, but most of us were not ready to hold still for any kind of dam in the Grand Canyon, and this was the prevailing view on the board. In fact, it was a position so strongly held that I think even when Dave told us of these as possibilities they were in effect dismissed out of hand. We felt very strongly that this was a battle we had to fight all the way through; we either won it or lost it, and to compromise was, to most of us, a loss. Even when it looked as though it were inevitable--as it did at times--that the dams would be built, the position of most of us was, "No, it's not an issue on which compromise is possible. No dams in the Grand Canyon." It was as simple as that. Anything less than that would have been to us a total loss of the effort. We just didn't think the Grand Canyon could live with dams, and that was about it.

Now, to counter the Bureau of Reclamation's arguments for the dams, Dave enlisted the help of some economists and analysts to take a look at the economics of the dams, and this began to generate some very fruitful results. The body of people that had to be convinced was Congress; if there were justification for not building the dams, it almost had to be based on persuasive economic reasons. The study ultimately had an extremely strong impact on swing votes in Congress.

Before the study was completed, however, Dave pursued another idea in proposing that instead of the dams, a nuclear power plant be built. This was environmentally relatively innocuous--at least everyone thought so at the time. There would be genuine benefits in

Siri: that it would spare the Grand Canyon, for one; the cost would probably be lower, producing electricity at a lower cost; and the environmental impacts would be minimal. It could be demonstrated that this alternative would be a more economical way to generate electricity, if that were the purpose of the dams. And so Dave pushed that one very hard, and with the aid of economists was able to demonstrate that there were no net benefits in building the dams if a nuclear power plant were built in the area.

This made headway with some members of Congress and others, but it was not yet decisive. The economic analysis was then continued by Alan Carlin, Dick Ball and another person who were at Rand Corporation at that time and this time their study did have a decisive impact.

The three men, at Dave's urging, performed an economic feasibility analysis of the dams and were able to show that the benefit-cost ratio was significantly less than one; that is, dams were being proposed to be built that simply wouldn't pay for themselves. They were heavily subsidized, and one of the chief forms of the subsidy was an exceedingly low discount rate of three to three-and-a-half percent, whereas the prevailing discount rate in industry and other government projects was five to seven percent even at that time. So, if one applied the normal discount rate for the time, it was clear that these dams were too costly to pay for themselves. It was busy work. And this, as much as anything else, I think, persuaded Congress, or at least the critical swing votes.

AL: You think that was the telling argument, the economic one, rather than more of an emotional appeal like flooding the Sistine Chapel--

Siri: Oh no, I don't dismiss those arguments as being unimportant, but if you almost have the votes, but don't quite, the economic arguments help bolster friends in Congress and persuade those who were genuinely concerned with the benefits and costs. If the latter are told the dams provide significant net benefits, they're sincere in believing the dams should be built for the benefit of the country.

But if, on the other hand, you can show them that this is pure skulduggery, that the economic feasibility of these dams was based on false premises, probably deliberately devised to make the dams look good--i.e., to give them a benefit-cost ratio of one or more--they're going to ask the same questions, "Why build them?" If this is the case, they're going to vote with us; and this is what happened.

AL: Do you know of any congressmen in particular who were swing votes?

Siri: No, at this late date I don't recall. We had a few good friends in Congress who were battling our side of the aisle, and a few who were fighting like mad against us; as I recall Wayne Aspinall was our most dedicated opponent. He was the constant champion of the Bureau of Reclamation.

IRS Response to a Vigorous Campaign

AL: What would you have to say about Brower's relationship with congressmen and government officials? It seems to me that this is one of the times when the club itself began to oppose some of Brower's so-called "attacks" on congressmen.

Siri: There was a division of opinion on the approaches that Dave used. He was getting to be pretty vigorous, and there were those--for the most part older members of the board--who felt that he was impugning the motives of honest but misguided legislators and bureaucrats, and this was not, in their view, the way to get things done. They believed you had to make your case as strong as you possibly could, but not to the extent of abusive personal attacks on people.

AL: I guess it was Udall in particular who was "attacked."

Siri: Yes, and many of us felt he had earned it. Most of us believed that in an all-out battle we had to use whatever weapons we had, so long as they were honest and effective. It's no different from any other political campaign. We all agreed, however, that the club should not arbitrarily abuse people in print nor recklessly impugn their motives. Such tactics weren't necessary if you had persuasive arguments and could mobilize your forces and develop a constituency with political muscle to swing the votes in a campaign or affect an administrative decision. I think that some of us, however, were inclined to feel that a time comes when you've got to use every political tool at your command if you think the issue is important enough and the opposition is unprincipled.

This is said in full recognition that it is not consonant with the concept of orderly advocacy, where everything is done in a gentlemanly fashion according to rules, written or implied. This disturbed some board members who had dealt with agency people for many years. They felt the limit had been transgressed, while the rest of us felt--in spite of the fact that it sounds pretty arbitrary--that in this case, and the redwoods campaign, we had to not only make a strong case on the facts and principles, but regard it as a political battle. I think ultimately those of us who felt it was a political battle and had to be waged as one prevailed.

- Siri: There was only one problem, and that is there was a third party involved that also took a position on political activities. That was the Internal Revenue Service, of course. Then one had to play by the rules for tax-exempt organizations, or else. [Laughter]
- AL: Some would say that maybe the IRS didn't play by the rules in this case.
- Siri: Since we were the victims, we were of course convinced that they did not, but I must confess that I don't have positive information on this. Perhaps the most you can say is that the IRS acted with astonishing swiftness for a federal agency in response to our ad.* Within twenty-four hours the Internal Revenue Service informed us our tax status was now in doubt. That kind of a speedy response could only have been the result of strong urging from somewhere.
- AL: I think in the Bulletin, Brower wrote that a leading congressional advocate of dams contacted a treasury department official, after seeing the ad, and the letter from IRS followed. Now did he have any information to support this accusation?
- Siri: Yes, there was either a phone call or a letter from Morris Udall to the Internal Revenue Service.
- AL: How did Brower know about it?
- Siri: I don't recall the details on this, other than that some action was taken by Morris Udall in bringing the advertisement to the attention of the Internal Revenue Service and demanding their attention. Later, Udall insisted that it was not his intention to have the club's tax status challenged, but that he felt the club had gone too far and some warning ought to be issued. Well, be that as it may, one has the impression, whether it's fair to Udall or not, that he was instrumental in precipitating the action. There may have been others involved too. I can imagine certain bureaus or other persons in Congress, maybe Wayne Aspinall or someone else, being outraged by the ad and using this as a pretext for action of this kind.
- AL: What about other people in the administration? One would think they'd have more of a direct line to the Internal Revenue Service.
- Siri: That's possible too. It's all conjecture; it was then and still is, except that we knew that Udall did contact the IRS and never denied it. He did, however, deny that he demanded the IRS rescind our 501(C)3 tax status.

*Sierra Club full-page ad, "Now Only You Can Save the Grand Canyon From Being Flooded...For Profit," New York Times, Washington Post, San Francisco Chronicle, Los Angeles Times, June 9, 1966.

AL: You were treasurer at that time, were you not?

Siri: Yes. June '66--I had completed my term as president and was then club treasurer.

AL: Did you have any role in dealing with the IRS?

Siri: Not really, no, except as an officer of the club. I had little direct contact with them. There was an audit involving the staff, and an exchange of correspondence and a decision by the board to challenge the action of the Internal Revenue Service.

AL: You must have been in a position to see the consequences of this decision for the club's income in contributions.

Siri: Yes. It was an interesting reaction. The immediate response, of course, was a flood of contributions to the club, many of them accompanied by notes saying, "This is to fight the Internal Revenue Service." We had contributions and letters of sympathy from an enormous number of people, many of whom were apparently willing to make contributions to the Sierra Club, knowing we were going to fight the Internal Revenue Service. I guess to many of them our contest with the Internal Revenue Service might have been even more important than our involvement with the Grand Canyon [laughter].

What it did, of course, was cut off large gifts and bequests. It was clearly not possible now for people to make gifts of \$50,000 or \$100,000; their money could more effectively be used somewhere else for charitable and educational purposes.

AL: Did that change the relationship between the club and the foundation?

Siri: Yes, because it meant that starting at that time, the foundation had to play a significant role in generating funds for the Sierra Club's non-political, non-legislative activities. In this sense, it was now "soft" money.

AL: It's still a little bit of a mystery to me how the relationship between the two works--the foundation has to maintain its independence in order to be tax-exempt.

Siri: Yes, that's right. Many things can be done by an organization to whom contributions are tax-exempt, and these are the kinds of activities that the foundation could support, and do so with the approval of the Internal Revenue Service. There are two areas in which such funds cannot be used, and those are legislative activity and political activity. Political activity is denied even to the club, under IRS rules as a 501(C)4 organization; that is, contributions to the Sierra Club are not tax-deductible to the donor, but the club does not have to pay taxes on whatever money it receives. If it

Siri: engaged in substantial political activity, the club would almost certainly lose even its 501(C)4 tax status, and then it would be subject to income taxes. Of course that would be damaging to the club.

The foundation had been set up about five years earlier by Dick Leonard. I should add that Dave Brower maintains it was his idea. It lay dormant for four or five years, with a little in the way of funds coming in, but not very much. There was no need for contributions to go through the foundation, and so it lay dormant as a safety measure--as a guardian for the club, because the club had been skirting the line on "substantial" legislative activity. We were never able to get a definition from the Internal Revenue Service as to what constituted substantial activity or what fraction of our resources could be expended in legislative effort. The IRS rules state that no substantial part of the resources will be used for legislative activities, without ever defining substantial. It apparently has to be proved in court or through hearings as to what constitutes "substantial" in each case. There is no number like one percent or five percent; in each case the Internal Revenue Service makes a judgment as to whether the activity is substantial.

Regarding their judgment as to the club's legislative activity in the case of the Grand Canyon or more particularly the advertisement, one could say that the Internal Revenue Service was already partly convinced that we had exceeded the bounds of "substantial," and with the advertisement it was now clear to them that we had. We think that's a pretty charitable view to take, and we never really adopted it [laughter].

AL: But had they been auditing you, looking at this issue for some time?

Siri: Not this specific issue; they had been auditing the club, yes, and while they had given us a clean bill of health, it was, we suspect, always with some hesitation.

Loss of Tax Deductibility "Not Dave's Fault"

AL: It seems to me that during the club election of 1969 Brower was accused of being responsible for losing the club's tax deductible status.

Siri: He may have been by some people who didn't understand what had gone on, who didn't know the thinking of the people who had made the decisions, and that was the board of directors with support of club leaders. That was never an argument that most of us would have

Siri: advanced against Dave. I certainly never would have. I couldn't; nor could most of the other members of the board, because we were pressing Congress constantly and realized the hazard. We didn't expect it to be so precipitous or to take quite this form, but we realized that we were running risks and accepted them. We had discussed this question on many occasions in the past; i.e., that the day might come when we would be challenged by IRS.

It came as a surprise at this time because of the suddenness and form in which it occurred, and because our level of legislative activity hadn't really changed since the last audit. It stirred a particularly bitter reaction, partly because of Udall's intervention.

In any event, I don't think any of us ever thought of the loss of tax deductibility as Dave's fault. Sure, one can say he precipitated the IRS action with the ad, but we were quite happy with the ad. There is no question in our minds that it was not Dave's fault. This was an outcome we all shared in producing, shared equally, as a result of decisions we'd made. We transgressed some imaginary line that the IRS had established, or that had been established for the IRS by somebody else, and that was a possibility we had long recognized.

AL: This is another accusation I've heard--that, in the dealings after the initial call from IRS, the way Dave handled it made it impossible for any agreement to be reached; that if he had handled it differently the IRS might have changed their decision.

Siri: That's always a possibility, and it's always a charge that can be made. I wouldn't want to make a judgment about that. Dave unquestionably did not improve our friendly relations with Internal Revenue Service, and he did make some charges that were made loud enough so they could be heard in many quarters about Udall and others. It's not impossible that in the heat of the moment he didn't improve personal relations with the Internal Revenue Service; and, who knows, it might have made it difficult for them to take a different position without some means of saving face. But this is all speculation.

AL: You don't know of any crucial turn in your dealings with the IRS?

Siri: No, I don't. There were many things Dave and others in the club said in public and in print about the dams but I would be hard pressed to say that any one of these, or all of it taken collectively were decisive in the IRS's adamant position on our tax status. I think it's just terribly difficult ever to get Internal Revenue Service decisions reversed. They have a very high batting average. Their decisions, I am told, are reversed in about five percent of the appeals.

Appealing the IRS Ruling

RL: Was the IRS ruling appealed in the courts?

Siri: Oh yes. We had a number of meetings--by "we" I mean the board, the officers of the club--to plan strategy, and of course we reviewed all the options that we and our attorneys could think of. One option was that we would do nothing, that the club was now free to take a more vigorous hand in legislative activities; we had always felt this constraint, and now that it was lifted, we could run free.

This appealed to many of us. We thought we could survive; we had the foundation that could pick up the innocent things like research and clean-up parties and preparation of testimony before administrative bodies or before Congress, and support of books. The books program, you see, was getting underway; this was educational, literary activity and it was pure, pure, pure, as long as the foundation didn't support a book that would be a sheer rabble-rouser, directed at some specific piece of legislation. There were uses for these tax deductible funds that the club could still pursue, particularly in publications, which put increasing demands on club resources. The club would survive, we felt, maybe with strains here and there. So that was one option.

On the other hand, we just couldn't see ourselves lying down without a fight. Maybe this was an irrational fight instinct emerging in most of us, but it prevailed and sallied forth to appeal the IRS decision. We justified our decision on the grounds that the action that had been taken by the Internal Revenue Service constituted a threat that would intimidate other conservation organizations. We knew for a fact that when this happened to the club there was a shiver of apprehension all across the country in all kinds of organizations, but particularly the conservation organizations that had been under heavy pressure.

At that time Congress and the prevailing mood across the country was not all that sympathetic to environmentalists; they were regarded as pansy-pluckers, little old ladies in tennis shoes, and long-haired nature lovers. Our image generally was not a very favorable one. Consequently, the other conservation organizations had a strong tendency to withdraw, to do only those things that they felt would in no way call the attention of the IRS to them. Granted, many of them were more highly independent on tax-deductible contributions than were we, and so the National Parks Association and Audubon Society and Wilderness Society and a host of others were watching us closely to see what was going to happen, and more importantly they were looking at themselves to see what was going to happen to them.

Siri: There were, therefore, two effects of the IRS action: One, it instilled a high level of anxiety in other organizations, and as a consequence probably reduced their effectiveness or their willingness to take a strong stand on some important issues, particularly if there were legislation pending. Second, it provoked the club into challenging the IRS decision, partly for our own sakes, of course, but more for the benefit of the whole conservation movement. This was a theme we kept coming back to. We felt a strong responsibility now to challenge the IRS and attempt to establish once and for all what the devil they meant by "substantial legislative activity," so that the other conservation organizations could then know where the bounds were and would have some guideline on what they could do and couldn't do without living in fear of jeopardizing their tax status. And so we went ahead full steam.

AL: Did that boundary line ever get established or did it remain as vague as ever?

Siri: No. At that time we were determined to take it all the way to the Supreme Court, but this didn't happen. As time passed, the other conservation organizations became somewhat less concerned, and there was less and less support for such litigation, and it was becoming costly to us.

RL: Who handled the appeal for the club?

Siri: It was Gary Torre, of an old line San Francisco firm--I keep thinking of "Rust, Smut, Mildew and Mold." [Laughter] I can never remember the names of law firms--it was Lillick, McHose, Wheat, Adams, and Charles. Gary Torre turned out to be a very good friend of the Sierra Club; he began to take an intense personal interest as he looked into the history of the club and how it functioned. The more he learned about the club the more fascinated he became. As he developed his brief, it became a thorough history of the club and its activities--how it behaved, what it did, and the kinds of effort it put into its campaigns. Probably this document is one of the most informative pieces of material we have on the club up to that time. He did a thorough job of researching the club: what its people did; who were they; how much of the club's resources were spent for what; and what kinds of activities the club was engaged in.

AL: Is this something he prepared for the court?

Siri: Yes, it was part of his brief to present in the appeal to demonstrate that an insubstantial portion of club resources was devoted to legislative activity. To do this, he examined all aspects of the club activities. The outings program, for example, is a major activity of the club, both in terms of member and staff participation and annual budget. The publications program was another example, along

Siri: with numerous other activities within the club that had nothing whatever to do with legislative activity but were educational, literary, and scientific. The amount of effort devoted to legislative activity was, in the context of the whole club, relatively small. Anyway, to establish that point he did a thorough examination of the club's activities and recent history; by that I mean ten or twenty years back.*

The Sierra Club and Its Patron, the Foundation

AL: I want to digress just for a minute. You were talking about the foundation and brought this question to mind. It may not be a valid one, but it seems the increasing influence of the foundation sort of has a political impact on the club, or does it, in that the foundation funds so much of the club's program and the leaders of the foundation are not the same as the leaders of the club, or does the board of directors of the club continue to allocate the money?

Siri: No, I'd have to say that none of those statements is wholly correct. [Laughter] First of all, the trustees of the foundation--they were originally called directors--were, with few exceptions, Sierra Club past and present directors and, for the most part, past presidents.

AL: They are present directors as well as past directors?

Siri: Yes. I'm not talking about now, I'm talking about the mid-sixties when it became necessary to activate the foundation to help support the club. There was no question about the sympathies of the board of the foundation. Everyone felt that it was the foundation's primary duty to support the club.

AL: But there was a division, it seems to me, between the older members of the club, the older leaders of the club, and the younger leaders, say, at the time of the Brower affair.

Siri: Now we are getting into another era, and that's the Dave Brower episode and events that occurred later. That episode raised other issues, internal, not Grand Canyon. As Dave expanded the publications program at something like thirty percent per year, and engaged in other activities that were immense drains on the club's resources, we began to fear the club was approaching bankruptcy. As that time approached, Dave looked to the foundation for additional funds. He

*See Sierra Club Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Siri: was searching everywhere for whatever money he could lay his hands on and attempting to defer payment of expenses. He was doing both of these with great ingenuity, but all it did was defer the day of reckoning.

Dave was now demanding foundation funds for purposes which the trustees felt would jeopardize the foundation's standing with the Internal Revenue Service, and which they felt were improper. Dave, of course, then mustered political support within the club for his position. It was at that point that some of the older members of the foundation, who were all past presidents, felt the foundation had to assert its independence. It was an organization separate from the Sierra Club, and it had to make its own decisions about where funds would go and for what purposes, or it would jeopardize its existence and fail in its fiduciary responsibility to donors.

On the other hand, the foundation board did not try, by its actions, to influence the club in its policies. However, some of us were members of both boards and all the trustees were past presidents of the club and still active in club affairs. This doubtless influenced our personal views and actions in both organizations, but I don't recall any attempt to exercise an influence over the club's affairs directly through the foundation, either in awarding grants or special conditions attached to them. We still turned over ninety-five percent of the gifts and bequests that we received in the foundation to the Sierra Club for non-legislative purposes.

AL: Was it turned over to the Sierra Club for any legal use that the Sierra Club wants to put it to?

Siri: No, no, it was not, and this has always been a firm condition on all grants made by the foundation. All grants were made for specific purposes. No, until a few years ago, the foundation steadfastly refused even to make block grants to the Sierra Club. What the foundation did was to invite the Sierra Club to submit a list of projects with a brief description and the amount of money requested for each project. These projects would be authorized for funding to the extent funds were available, but there was no actual transfer of funds to the Sierra Club. The expenses incurred by these projects, for example, in the publication of a book, were paid directly by the foundation on invoices received by the club and forwarded to the foundation.

AL: But the foundation doesn't take a list from the Sierra Club and decide which of those projects they will fund?

Siri: No, but if the request exceeded the available funds, we asked the club to set priorities or adjust the project budgets. This was done at the quarterly meetings of the trustees with club officers and senior staff present.

Project funding in this fashion did not work well. Both organizations had to keep separate but duplicate detailed accounts, which made the procedure expensive and subject to errors, and it left the Sierra Club no flexibility to adjust emphasis among projects to meet changing needs during the year. The club had asked that we consider block grants and largely on my prodding the trustees finally acquiesced. The club now presents the trustees with a funding program at the start of each fiscal year, listing projects with detailed descriptions and budgets for the year. The details are worked out in advance by the staffs of the two organizations. On approval by the trustees the funds granted are transferred, usually in quarterly increments, directly to the club, which can, at its discretion, shift funds from one of the listed projects to another. In turn, the foundation requires a quarterly report and annual audit on how the funds were spent.

It's possible there may have been items from time to time that the foundation felt that it could not support. I don't recall a specific case at the moment. The Sierra Club fully understands that foundation monies are to be used for purposes that don't involve legislative activity. This would exclude a book intended to influence a bill in Congress, for example.

RL: And have there been any books that the foundation wasn't able to support or fund?

Siri: I believe there was, but at the moment I don't recall the book.

As an afterthought to this discussion, I think it has to be concluded that since I sat on both boards, and both of them simultaneously for some years, this lent either impartiality or indecision or perhaps schizophrenia to my decision making efforts. [Laughter] At one time I had something to do with the preparation of club grant requests that would go to the foundation, and then I'd sit with the foundation board to vote on its approval. [Laughter]

Past Presidents on the Foundation Board

AL: Is the board of trustees still made up of past presidents?

Siri: No. In fact, there are relatively few left now. Let's see, about a third of the trustees I guess. The turnover of trustees has been fairly substantial. Many of the older members resigned in the

Siri: mid-sixties feeling that they had served enough time in the club and also the foundation and realizing times were changing, and they weren't in tune with the changing attitudes. They may have felt the time had come to leave the foundation to the devices of irresponsible people like me and some of the others [laughter].

AL: Was this with bitterness?

Siri: Oh, no. We often had some vigorous discussions, but I don't recall that they ever became quarrels. We expected people to argue their points of view. If it were otherwise, it would have been merely a social club. This is not what it was. It was all business. You want a number of points of view advanced and discussed so that you are aware of the options and the risks.

And then there were people like Harold Bradley, who was a man everybody loved without reservation, of whom everyone had the highest possible regard. Harold felt that he was getting too old, and simply decided that he should resign. I think we were all reluctant to see him go because Harold was a man with an eternally youthful outlook on environmental and social questions. Had he lived to 500, I think he would still have a youthful outlook.

RL: Have there been some trustees who've remained and seemed to change with the times also? I'm thinking of Lewis Clark, for example.

Siri: Lewis has tried very hard to keep his outlook contemporary, and so, I think, has his brother Nate. You can see them at times leaning over backwards, to accommodate a contemporary point of view, but it was not always a comfortable posture for them. Sometimes they failed, and Lewis particularly would suddenly take a hard position in reverse.

AL: And is Dick Leonard still on the foundation board?

Siri: Yes, and of course Leonard has always been a vigorous champion of conservation. He will be until he dies; it's built into him. He is an extremely able person and probably had as much as anybody to do with the development and evolution of the club and the foundation. His contributions have been immense. You don't realize this until you have known Dick a long time and become aware of the many things he has done for the club that are now taken for granted.

Of course, for someone like Dave and the faction in the club that supported Dave there was at least at one time an extremely bitter feeling regarding Dick as the very image of reactionary forces within the club. This just wasn't the case. But it was an easy idea to exploit, because anyone who so strongly opposed

Siri: Dave clearly had to be reactionary. By definition [laughter] you must be, otherwise you would support Dave; you would support the leader, the greatest innovator, the greatest driving force in conservation. Why else would you oppose him, unless you were old and lost in the past? So the argument went.

This view was held by many people who really had very little to do with the Brower episode. They viewed it as a division between old-timers and moderns, between conservatives and liberals. It was not in fact the basic issue at all.

AL: We're getting ahead of ourselves now, but I heard an interesting remark, when someone referred to the 1969 election when Brower was defeated as part of the great reactionary sweep in the country that brought Nixon to the presidency and Reagan to the governorship. I had never looked at it in quite that way.

Siri: No. It may have been construed in this fashion--well, it was-- but it was not the case; it was simply not so. Because there were no real differences in outlook on conservation issues or the vigor with which we should pursue campaigns. That was really not at issue except on one question, and that was Diablo Canyon, and that's where the split took place. But on every other conservation issue, on the whole philosophy of the conservation movement, there was unanimity of feeling among all of us. I don't recall any genuine differences among the whole lot of us. Hildebrand perhaps came as close, I guess, to a conservative position--something that one might call a conservative position--one could find, but that was about it.

Differences With Stewart Udall

AL: Let's go back and finish up with questions on the Grand Canyon. We thought we might talk something about Stewart Udall in discussing the Grand Canyon. Would you have any evaluation of him as a secretary of the interior, or as a conservationist?

Siri: Only a superficial one. I knew Stewart Udall somewhat. I'd visit him in his office, and he was here one time for dinner, and we had a number of conversations at other times. He played a mixed role, and it's difficult to know to what extent that role was one that was determined not by Stewart Udall but by the forces he had to contend with, the administration, political figures, the bureaus within his own department, the Bureau of Reclamation in particular. The Bureau of Reclamation had extremely strong allies in Congress and, of course, in industry. To the states, the bureau was a mammoth pork barrel and you don't deal easily with barrels of pork.

AL: But didn't he seem pretty well committed to the idea of the Grand Canyon dams and the whole Colorado River project and the transfer of the water from one basin to another?

Siri: That's right. It wasn't until the Grand Canyon battle was all but won that he changed his views. I guess he saw that the bureau's economic analysis wasn't all that sound, or perhaps he sensed the change in political climate in which the bureau and its chief congressional supporters found themselves because of the strong public reaction to the dams.

Interbasin transfer of water was a broader issue just beginning to take form, as a consequence of the Central Arizona Project, which Udall supported. We were discovering that these projects could be environmentally damaging as well as economically dubious. The California State Water Project was another example. It meant the loss of the north coast wild rivers, possible severe damage to the San Francisco Bay-Delta estuarine system, its wet lands, fisheries, and rich agricultural lands. The more we looked at this question, the more convinced we became that, no matter what history said about water transfer systems, there were clear signs that they were not always good projects on balance. They were, of course, to a few people, particularly to those who bought desert land for five bucks an acre and with water it was worth five hundred or five thousand.

Well, to answer your question, yes, Udall was highly supportive of the Central Arizona Water Project, and the Grand Canyon dams, and he did a hard selling job for several years, in support of them.

AL: Now on other issues he was more of an ally of the club, wasn't he?

Siri: Yes, he was.

AL: Did the Grand Canyon issue cause a division with him?

Siri: Not really, no. Udall remained a conservationist, fundamentally, and I think a friend of most of us. I haven't seen him for a couple of years now, but the last time we met it was on the friendliest of terms, so I don't think that campaign had any significant effects on our personal relationships with him. We felt, however, that even after his conversion he did not take a position as strong as we would like to have seen on environmental matters involving the Department of Interior.

AL: The redwood national park plan.

Siri: Yes, that's right. We realized that a secretary of interior isn't wholly his own master, that there are a god-awful lot of contending forces that he has to deal with. Maybe a stronger secretary of interior would have been more effective.

RL: You mean like Hickel? [Laughter]

Siri: That is a story in itself, but then you saw how long Hickel lasted.

The Deciding Factor in Saving the Grand Canyon

AL: That's the end of the questions I have on the Grand Canyon. Is there anything else?

Siri: I think it should be noted that ultimately we were successful. There are no dams in the Grand Canyon.

AL: Has the park been extended?

Siri: Yes, extended and enlarged, and it looks as though it's safe for a while. At least until this recession is over, and there are more federal funds available for building good things like dams around the country again [laughter].

RL: Excuse me, I had something else. I had a sense of something lacking, if we can go on with the Grand Canyon for just one moment. In summing it up, do you feel that there was some particular trick, device, or strategy, or was it simply a wearing down of the opposition that enabled you to win that battle? What was it that seemed to be the deciding factor?

Siri: I think perseverance was the essential factor in the success of the Grand Canyon battle as it is in nearly every major environmental campaign. The campaign had been waged to the point where the final blow could be delivered with the economic analysis, which demonstrated that the dams were heavily subsidized, and their benefit/cost ratio had been contrived. I think this pretty well settled the question.

Of course, the vigorous public reaction to the proposed dams was by far the most important factor. There is no question about that in my mind. The economic analysis standing alone would not have done it, but the stage had been set where that was the last act that was needed to save the canyon and kill the dams.

RL: There seemed to be a ground swell of public support for it, not just among, let's say, the conservation-minded.

Siri: That's right. There was broad public support of the organized efforts to stop the dams. You know, we and many congressmen got a flood of letters of the kind written by a dear old lady in New York who wrote, "I have never seen the Grand Canyon, and I never expect to

Siri: before I die, but I want to know that the Grand Canyon is there. Don't flood it." Letters of this kind were helpful because they indicated a nationwide interest in the Grand Canyon, and one that reached far beyond those who had visited the Canyon. It was a national symbol that people wanted to preserve even if they could never see it.

AL: Do you think this was a symbol that was in the American milieu, or is this a symbol that was created by some of Dave's ads and the books?

Siri: No, I don't think it was created. I think the potential for the public reaction was always there. The problem was to alert people to it, to focus their attention on it for a moment, to make them realize that if they didn't do something, if they didn't express themselves, it would be gone. I don't think you create something as strong as the reaction in support of the Grand Canyon. I think the most you do is mobilize a strong sentiment that already exists but is dormant.

We've had this kind of response on a number of issues. In California the coastal initiative, you may recall, had that same kind of response. We worked very hard on that campaign against well-financed opposition but it was the voters inherent desire to save the California coast from further ruin by indiscriminate development that passed the initiative. You know, we couldn't generate that kind of sentiment for the Sacramento Valley, I don't think [laughter].

VI ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN THE FEDERAL LAND AGENCIES

Changing Attitudes Toward Conservation, 1960s

AL: Shall we look briefly at the North Cascades area?

Siri: We can, but I really don't feel that competent to discuss it in detail.

AL: I didn't think we'd discuss it in detail either, unless there was something from your point of view.

Siri: No. I was of course on the scene at the time, but that campaign again was carried on mainly by Dave for the club. There were however several powerful and effective groups and club members in the Northwest who had been working for a North Cascades park for a long time. They were an experienced, competent lot of people, so it was in good hands. Dave nevertheless took a strong lead in the campaign.

The Forest Service proposed that selected areas of their lands in the Cascades be placed in the wilderness system, but we and others argued for a national park and a larger, more integrated area. What was originally proposed by the Park Service was ludicrous, in our view, as a national park. There were endless compromises along the way; boundaries pulled back, others extended, areas put in and others taken out. It became a battle for bits and pieces, and for features that had to be in the park. Our opposition was of course the Forest Service and the lumber companies who saw this area as a great timber resource to be utilized. At that time the outlook of the Forest Service, even more than now, was that forests were a resource that should be used for its commodity value, and therefore you managed forests for production; multiple use was the sacred phrase. Well, times and attitudes have changed. Probably that battle along with others had much to do with the changing attitudes in the Park Service and the Forest Service. They were subjected to the constant pressure and, we hope, education from the conservationists.

AL: Did you actually change minds within these bureaus, do you think?

Siri: Gradually with time new people came in, and the old crocodiles drew back into the water somewhere. Gradually there was a change, yes. The change is not achieved on the basis solely of arguments you advance. The arguments have to be convincing, obviously, but you also have to persuade a large number of other people who are not in the Forest Service. A strong constituency is needed to support a new idea or a change in point of view. This is sensed by the bureaus, by administrations, by congressmen, and others. It's part of the intricate process of change. Oh, sometimes you can achieve limited ends by going to court if there's a clear-cut legal issue. To change attitudes takes something much broader, like time, perseverance, and luck.

AL: That would be an accomplishment probably better than creating a park, if you can make a permanent change in administrative bodies.

Siri: Yes, of course. During the sixties there were a great many things that contributed to rapid change in attitudes. All of a sudden, in the space of a very few years, an almost universal concern for the environment emerged. Those of us who had been active in the conservation movement for many years, and formerly regarded as eccentrics, all of a sudden found ourselves respectable, and no longer called conservationists, but "environmentalists." The change came about with remarkable suddenness.

It was not a change that we had anticipated that soon nor that quickly. We had foreseen a gradual evolution in prevailing attitudes on conservation--and environment--in this country. The public's concern with environmental questions that now prevails, we had projected to evolve gradually during the next few decades. But then, I guess the cultural revolution was an event we could not imagine, much less anticipate. It shook up everything and everybody and left, among other things, a strong environmental awareness that had a profound impact on Congress, government bureaus, and corrective legislation. Even industry reluctantly made concessions to the new environmental ethic.

RL: It seems to be quite true, what you are saying about the cultural revolution, although there are inconsistencies in that too. Where there was concern for the environment and the younger people had also put a heavy emphasis on humanism, they felt that it was also quite all right to rip off, to use their own vernacular, someone who had more than they had [laughter], or even to drive their cars down the middle of a mountain meadow.

Siri: You're right, there were a great many inconsistencies, and maybe the historians and sociologists will someday explain what it was all about. These inconsistencies were sometimes beyond our

Siri: comprehension, and at times our patience, but perhaps should not have surprised us. History repeatedly tells us that in the peregrinations of human society anything is possible, nothing is absolute, and much is irrational.

The one aspect of the cultural revolution that we were grateful for, as conservationists, was the new, pervasive perception of the importance of wild resources and the environment. The club had struggled for seventy-five years to advance such an ethic, with only modest success, but now, all of a sudden, everybody was acting like John Muir. [Laughter]

Managing Wilderness: Forest Service and Park Service Policies

AL: You talked about changes you've seen in the Park Service and the Forest Service and other bureaus. Can you mention any more specifically? We were going to talk about that in relation to the Wilderness Act, and maybe we should get into that now.

Siri: Over the years there were changes in the Park Service and the Forest Service. It varied, depending upon who was chief forester and who was director of the National Park Service. It depended on the man in the office at the time. But we did see in the case of Chief Forester Ed Cliff, for example, some changes from the traditional Forest Service outlook. As for Hartzog, director of the Park Service, my impression of him was that of an enlightened bureaucrat but highly sensitive to political pressures. He seemed more receptive to the views of conservation organizations than his predecessor, Connie Wirth.

However, neither Cliff nor Hartzog advanced fast enough for us. No doubt the reason was that, while we represented a point of view, there were other views backed by substantial political forces to which the chief forester and the director of the Park Service were exposed on a daily basis. So the speed with which they could adjust to new ideas and attitudes was a lot slower than we would wish.

People in the Sierra Club were at the forefront of the environmental movement. You would hardly expect the chief forester also to be in the vanguard of the conservation movement. He had to provide trees, he had to heel to the prevailing economic interests. In principle, this is as it should be. The national forests are a vast resource and must supply a number of needs of the nation. This was generally recognized by conservationists. The question was how much wilderness would we keep? And under what conditions? The Forest

Siri: Service took a position far short of our expectations, and it was bridging that difference that brought us into conflict with the Forest Service on wilderness areas.

AL: Would you give Ed Cliff a positive score, say, in terms of setting aside wilderness areas under the Wilderness Act?

Siri: Yes. Cliff recognized that wilderness was here to stay and that wilderness had a strong constituency, as well as an act of Congress. While Cliff recognized the need for wilderness, the differences we had with him were on how much wilderness and the boundaries. We had fewer arguments with the Forest Service on management of wilderness than we did with the Park Service. In fact, the Park Service score on wilderness management and particularly on implementing the Wilderness Act was pretty poor, I think, compared to the Forest Service. The Forest Service understood what we and the act meant when we said don't manage wilderness areas; they are not to be manipulated. The Forest Service was pretty good about that.

AL: And how did the Park Service do with wilderness areas?

Siri: Well, you see, there were no areas designated as wilderness in the national parks before the passage of the Wilderness Act. National parks were to be administered in such a fashion as to preserve whatever qualities they were initially dedicated for. But as pressures built up in the national parks--particularly Yellowstone, Yosemite, and others--the Park Service found itself catering to the presumed needs of people visiting these areas: more campgrounds, more facilities, more administrative structures and activities, more roads, and so forth.

They did it with some care--what they regarded as great care--but which we regarded as a tendency to overdevelop national parks for the convenience of visitors--conveniences they often didn't need or that were irrelevant to the park. You don't need ice skating rinks in the middle of Yosemite Valley, or convention halls. You don't even need a big hotel and lots of roads built on the pretext that you have to provide access to every corner of a wilderness by car. It also seemed to us a violation of park values to build bigger and straighter roads to insure safety. We argued that it hasn't been demonstrated that you need to drive fifty miles an hour through Yosemite Valley, and that highways of high standards are just inappropriate.

Controversy Over the Tioga Pass Road, 1958

- Siri: One of the bitterest arguments we had with the Park Service--this was when Connie Wirth was director--was when they built the Tioga Pass highway. They blasted their way on the straightest line possible through these beautiful polished, glaciated granite slopes near Tenaya Lake and through areas where roads should never have been placed. They had laid it out and had largely completed it before anybody really knew what was happening.
- AL: The club did have a chance to fight that and lose before they built the road, didn't it?
- Siri: No. They went in and did the work, and we really didn't learn the extent of the damage till the road was almost finished.
- RL: You're talking about Tioga Pass?
- Siri: Yes, Tioga Pass road, in the late fifties.* We were absolutely furious, because there had been no public information on plans for the road. It had been built essentially in secrecy, whether deliberately or otherwise I can't say.
- AL: The Tenaya Lake part of it, though, was fought?
- Wiri: Yes, I think you're right. I don't recall the details. There might have been an opportunity, which failed, to divert the road across the granite slopes above Tenaya Lake. In fact, the club had done a study on alternative routes for the Tioga Pass road years before. The subject had come up before, but the Park Service obviously did not like our recommendations. Did you ever drive the old Tioga road?
- RL: No.
- Siri: It was fabulous. It was also impossible [laughter]. Twenty-one miles that took two hours. If somebody came from the other direction with a trailer, then you were there for the weekend. It was a little track that toured casually among the trees and around boulders, and made right-angle turns better suited to horses. It was an adventure getting a car through--and as near a wilderness experience as one can get in a car.

*1958. See Ansel Adams, "Tenaya Tragedy," Sierra Club Bulletin, November 1958.

Siri: Clearly, there would come a time when a somewhat better road would be needed. Years before the new road was built, the club had explored the area and laid out a route that would have stayed to the north of where the road was actually built. It would not have gone through or blast, cut, and filled any of those magnificent areas mutilated by the Park Service's road. So this was really what shook us up. We had no opportunity to provide input into the road design and route. And yet we had a route that looked good, that would serve the purpose adequately.

In addition to the routing of the road, we questioned the excessively high standards to which the road was built. It was a high-speed road, and there was no need whatever for that kind of road. By high standard, I mean with minimum curve radii that were far too large and far too much cut and fill. You could have curves and grades that would better conform to the terrain. The standards used were those for a high-speed highway, all done in the name of safety, of course.

RL: On the road nowadays you don't have to stop and look at glacial moraine; you ride by and there's a sign that says, "This is glacial moraine."

Siri: That's right; you don't have to suffer all these inconveniences like stopping your car.

AL: What do you think Wirth's feelings were--his attitude toward wilderness?

Siri: Wilderness was a fine thing up to the point where you had something more important to do, like run a road through it.

AL: He wasn't a wilderness lover?

Siri: I don't know whether he was or not. I think he was, in his own way, but he was also a "practical man," in providing for the safety and welfare of park visitors, along with needless amenities for them. The natural features were the amenities, but I sometimes felt that Wirth thought he had to improve on them.

AL: Did you have an opportunity to work with Wirth in any way?

Siri: Frequently on other matters. The road was an exception. That was an important road because of what was done. Immediately after we learned what was happening--that they were blasting through these glacial polished rocks, and the route they were taking--we made a fearful row about it. Wires and letters were fired off in all directions; we were just furious when we saw what had happened. So Connie came steaming out to San Francisco, and some of the club directors met with him in a special meeting. That was one of the bitterest meetings I can recall with anyone from an agency.

AL: Do you remember the date of this meeting?

Siri: No, I don't. But I remember that meeting particularly because the intensity of our feelings about the road. It was such an arrogant and senseless intrusion on a truly magnificent wilderness area in a national park. There was no real excuse he could offer that merited serious consideration for the route and the standards for the road.

As a consequence of that episode, the Sierra Club set about drafting a set of highway standards for wilderness areas and parks. Nate Clark, then a club director and a professional engineer, did a thorough job, a masterful job, in devising standards for park roads. We demanded that the Park Service adopt these. I think to a large extent they have. In any event, there were few episodes of that kind that followed. The Park Service was sensitized, and I think they realized what they had done after it was explained to them.

AL: How did Wirth respond to this meeting?

Siri: Well, he was angry at first. We were angry to the end. But I think he learned a lesson. He learned two lessons: one, he'd damn well better tell people about what he's going to do before he does it; and second, you don't need high-speed highways in national parks. In any event, he left the meeting feeling contrite.

AL: He just wasn't sensitive to the issue?

Siri: He certainly was after our meeting. In a way, I sometimes suspect that the road really was laid out and built without his full awareness of what was happening. It might very well be that if he had been fully aware of what was proposed he might not have approved it.

Hartzog was quite a different kind of man. I think he was more sensitive to where the pressures lay, to where the political strengths lay. He did understand the environmental movement; he knew what it was about, and I think he was largely sympathetic. We had a lot of differences, but as I recall he had a tendency to lean toward our position as far as he could and still maintain himself in office.

Park Service Procrastination in Designating Wilderness

AL: You mentioned that the Park Service dragged its feet over designating wilderness areas after the Wilderness Act. He was director at that time.

Siri: That's right. I don't know what was behind the tendency of the Park Service to procrastinate in designating wilderness areas within the parks. The first efforts that the Park Service made were to us appalling examples of what should not be done. The first maps that came out showed great swaths of excluded areas along highways and around campsites and facilities. Yellowstone, for example, looked like a cracked vase with patches of wilderness completely separated by wide bands along the roads and around centers where there were facilities--more of the park seemed out of the wilderness system than in. The argument was that they needed these as buffer zones. In response we said, "You need these for future hamburger stands, motels, and interpretive centers. We insisted they should not be in the parks. "They're not meant to be in the parks. The act that created the park system says so, at least by implication. The whole philosophy of the parks is being violated." We insisted that the wilderness boundaries be brought right down to the roads.

AL: Did that argument make headway?

Siri: Yes, it did. They finally adopted a more enlightened view, we like to think, on boundaries for the wilderness areas. There were a few places where they simply couldn't be turned around, but by and large we and others--the National Parks Association, Audubon Society, and others--finally persuaded them to include in the wilderness areas all the park land that had not, in fact, been "disturbed by the hand of man."

Passage of the Wilderness Act, 1964

AL: Should we talk for a minute about the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964?

Siri: Yes. The Wilderness Act was first advanced by Howard Zahniser at an early Wilderness Conference, I forget which one it was. It must have been at the very start of the sixties or late fifties. You'll find the information, undoubtedly, in one of the Wilderness Conference publications.* The proposal caught on slowly at first but then rapidly became the major national conservation effort. Some early legislation was drafted and introduced, and died. Each year we and other organizations, more particularly Zahniser, who was the driving force in those early days, would come back with new bills and new allies.

*Second Biennial Wilderness Conference, March 13, 1951. Summary of Proceedings included in Wildlands in Our Civilization, David Brower, ed. (Sierra Club, 1964).

- Siri: Of course we like to think the Sierra Club also played a significant role. Maybe it was more than just significant. Anyway, we immediately made passage of the Wilderness Act our primary mission-- it took top priority. Year after year we devoted a major effort to it, using whatever resources could be mustered.
- AL: Who in the club was most involved in this?
- Siri: Again, Dave, of course, but Wayburn also took a lead role in these efforts. George Marshall and Dick Leonard were particularly effective advocates.
- AL: Were you saying that the club may have had the major role in seeing this passed, over and above the Wilderness Society?
- Siri: It's hard to say. The Wilderness Society would doubtless claim they were largely responsible, and the Sierra Club will claim that distinction. I'm sure that our good friend in the National Parks Association, Tony Smith, will also claim the distinction. All I can say is that we were busy as hell pushing the wilderness concept and Wilderness Act over many years and expended a lot of effort on it. Who ultimately had the greatest influence on its passage we will probably never know, although Zahniser is certainly the most likely candidate.
- AL: Was there cooperation between the club and the Wilderness Society and the National Parks Association? Was there any conflict?
- Siri: I don't recall that there was a serious conflict. There may have been differences at times, particularly with Tony Smith of the National Parks Association. Tony had a tendency to hold independent views that were in curious ways at odds with positions we, the Wilderness Society, and other conservation organizations took. It was a matter of judgment, I guess. Tony would sometimes make judgments based on what he thought was political expediency--in this case, settle for what you knew you could get. The reaction from the rest of us was always the same, "No, damn it, we've successfully fought enough other battles against impossible odds to know we can win this one," and, to quote a tired cliché, "We've only begun to fight." Anyway, I don't recall any sustained differences that seriously strained our relationship.
- AL: Were you aware of any feeling on the part of the Wilderness Society that the club wasn't putting enough effort into it?
- Siri: No. If such a feeling existed, I was not aware of it. The problems we faced, we dealt with according to our strengths--the efforts of the logging industry to introduce weakening amendments; the efforts of the ranchers to permit continued use of wilderness areas for grazing

Siri: and the interest of the mining industry in having free access to explore and if they found deposits, to mine. Some of these uses still remained in the act when it was passed. It wasn't as clean an act as we wished--particularly in mining, and the long phase-out of grazing. The mining provisions were particularly painful. We regarded this as a major intrusion, with its roads, its tailing, and all the rest of the mess. So the act that ultimately passed was much better than we many times hoped ever to get, but it was not all that we had wanted.

AL: Anything else to add on the Wilderness Act?

Siri: Perhaps a postscript. It was a long sustained campaign; it ran about eight years from the time Zahniser first proposed a wilderness system to the time the president signed the Wilderness Act. The action took place in bits and pieces, with moments of intense struggle to have an amendment removed that had been planted by one interest or another--they all merge into a kind of tangle at this late date, without going back to review the history. The one tragic aspect of it was that Zahniser died only four months, I think, before the act was signed by the president. I don't think he lived to see it passed by Congress. He was to everyone's sorrow, not at the White House signing (9-3-64).

RL: Were you fortunate enough to get a pen from Lyndon Johnson?

Siri: No, I wasn't, and I probably couldn't have gotten one if I tried, because everyone was in there grabbing for them, but I can't say I was that infatuated with a pen. I must confess that it was the last thing that interested me. I stood there watching all this, and I couldn't understand why people would even want a used pen [laughter].

RL: That reminds me; they're minting all sorts of things now--coin collections that they're selling for the bicentennial--the flimsiest excuses for selling these momentos.

Siri: It's going to be an awful year to have to live through, I think. It's so contrived, so commercial, so artificial.

VII DEFENSE OF MINERAL KING

[Interview 4: March 10, 1976]

Reversal of Board Policy: The Decision-Making Process, May, 1965

AL: We thought we'd start tonight with a discussion of the club's policy on the development of Mineral King as a ski resort. Do you want to start by giving some background on this?

Siri: The initial position of the club on Mineral King was taken some years before I became a member of the board of directors. In checking the minutes of the meetings of the board going back to the forties, I find that on August 31, 1947, the board came to the conclusion that it found no objection to winter sports development at Mineral King, in the Sequoia National Forest. This policy was reaffirmed at the September board meeting in 1949, when the board again said it had no objection to the development at Mineral King. There had been an earlier proposal by the Forest Service to develop Mineral King, but no one offered a bid, and so the matter lay dormant for many years.

It was an area few people had visited, and only a few Sierra Club members knew the area well. Not many people went in because the twenty-five miles of road into Mineral King defied most automobiles and only the hardiest, most courageous drivers would make the trip.

Then in 1965 or toward the end of 1964, we learned that the Forest Service was again actively thinking of developing the area for winter sports. In February of 1965 they issued a new prospectus inviting bids for the development of Mineral King. This time, however, a few club leaders reacted adversely to the proposal, and some, unaware of its history, were incensed by what they thought was precipitous action by the Forest Service. Actually the Forest Service, [Regional Forester Charles A.] Connaughton assured us, had been thinking about it for some time. They had on record the policy of the Sierra Club not opposing it; consequently, the Forest Service felt that there would be no serious objection to the development of

Siri: Mineral King for winter sports, and so they issued the prospectus with the expectation of proceeding with the long-delayed development.

AL: Did they say if they'd ever considered asking the club again, since so many years had intervened, or isn't that their procedure, to inquire in advance?

Siri: No, I can only assume that they took the club's earlier policy statement as a valid expression of the position of the club, and one doesn't kick a sleeping dog. I presume they went on the assumption that the club would adhere to this policy and had no reason to believe that the club might have changed in the intervening years. That's about eighteen years, isn't it, that intervened between the club's first statement of policy on Mineral King and the time the prospectus was issued. But things had changed substantially in the intervening years, and from the moment the prospectus was issued, the fight was joined.

In the meantime, even before the prospectus came out, the Kern-Kaweah Chapter under John Harper--who was chairman of the chapter's executive committee at that time and very much concerned with wilderness areas in the southern Sierra, the Kern Plateau, particularly--had completed a fine study of the area. Their study had delineated areas which they felt ought to remain as wilderness areas, or that should be included in Sequoia National Park. Mineral King was one of these, and partly on the basis of that study, the board reviewed its earlier action, and ultimately took a position in opposition to any development in Mineral King.

But during this process, there was a lot of soul-searching by some members of the board of directors and by other members of the club. Because of differences in views on the issues involved, Mineral King became the subject of considerable controversy within the club before it was settled. About half the board members, including Dave Brower, straightaway felt that Mineral King should not be developed, arguing that while it was a somewhat impaired wilderness, it formed a small enclave of quite beautiful country, between Sequoia National Park, the game refuge, and Kings Canyon. Equally important, the only access to Mineral King was through Sequoia National Park. Eleven miles of road would have to be carved out of the park, and this was clearly at odds with Sierra Club policy for national parks.

The first debates on the issue raised immediately the question of the ethics of the club's now reversing its earlier position on Mineral King, which in effect was a pledge to the Forest Service. There were still members of the board who had participated in the earlier decision. Dick Leonard and Alex Hildebrand, and Lewis Clark felt very strongly that the club was honor-bound to live up to the 1947 agreement. Others argued that no board, any more than any legislature, was binding on a later board.

Siri: My personal position in all of this at the outset was a mixed one, trying to balance a feeling of moral obligation to the earlier commitment of the club against what--it became clear--was an obvious need to preserve the area. The board was also split, and so the argument was quite intense and lengthy.

AL: Was it over a period of meetings, or are you talking about the initial argument in May of 1965?

Siri: The initial discussion in 1965 took the better part of a day and a half, and was quite an intense debate. A number of resolutions pro and con were offered and defeated. I served as president at the time, and normally I did not vote, except in special circumstances. The first motion, calling for club opposition to any development in Mineral King, had a split vote of seven to six--seven for and six opposed, without my vote.

I was a little unsure of myself even then, although clearly leaning in favor of Mineral King as a wilderness area, but it seemed to me that the vote was so close it would not provide the kind of strength that would be needed to make the policy stick and be effective. And so I voted against the first resolution proposing that Mineral King not be developed. In weighing the pros and cons and the problems we were going to face with Mineral King, my feeling was that to take this new position would call for a major effort, and it was just as well that we have a clear majority. So I killed the first round by voting against it, which made it seven to seven, and then continued the discussion.

A number of resolutions were then offered, and finally, I guess some time the following day, after a series of resolutions had been offered and died for lack of support one way or another, essentially the same motion as the initial one was brought up again by Eissler. The motion stated that the Sierra Club would oppose any recreational development in the Mineral King area, as proposed by the Forest Service, and the club would ask for public hearings on the proposal. That passed handsomely with nine votes now in support of the resolution and I followed my usual practice of abstaining. The day-long debate had resulted in enough switched votes to give the resolution ample strength--it was nine to four.

AL: Was this second motion as strong as the earlier one that had been defeated?

Siri: The first motion that was offered, and defeated as a result of my vote, said, "The Sierra Club opposes any recreational development in the Mineral King area as contemplated in the Forest Service prospectus dated February 1965." The final resolution that did pass read, "The Sierra Club opposes any recreational development in Mineral King as contemplated in the Forest Service prospectus."

Siri: So it reads essentially the same, but to that was added,

"The Sierra Club requests the Forest Service conduct a public hearing on its management plan for the Mineral King area and access roads contemplated, and the Sierra Club informs the Forest Service of its support of the primitive aspects of Mineral King Valley and the fragile ecological values of the timerline zone surrounding it, and further the Sierra Club requests that no action be taken on any bids submitted pursuant to the Forest Service prospectus until after public hearings."

That resolution then carried nine to four, and after the usual custom that most presidents of the Sierra Club observe, I abstained. It carried more than two to one, which provided the strength the resolution needed to make it convincing.

AL: At this point Dick Leonard voted "no" on that, as well as Wayburn?

Siri: The "no" votes were Lewis Clark, Hildebrand, Leonard and Wayburn.

AL: Did Leonard change his views?

Siri: In time, I believe he did. So did Wayburn, of course. All the members of the board did, after enough time had elapsed for the sense of moral commitment to fade in importance. Wayburn was not in on the earlier action of the club back in 1947-49, but I can only guess that he presumed that there was a moral obligation to stick to the word of the club, and perhaps felt that maybe the matter had gone so far that it would be extremely difficult to reverse. I don't know; I can only guess.

Hildebrand and Lewis Clark and Dick Leonard felt very strongly about the importance of the club's commitment, and that even if in light of future events it appeared to have been not the best decision, a commitment had been made and one should honor it. Hildebrand particularly was adamant on this question.

AL: He also had participated in a survey that determined Mineral King would be a good area for skiers.

Siri: Yes, I'm sure you're right.

Southern California Support for Ski Development

AL: Are you going to tell us about the September, 1965, meeting, where Mineral King was again brought up?

Siri: Yes, if you'd like to hear about it.

AL: At whose urging was it brought up again?

Siri: I suppose some of us thought the May 1965 board meeting settled the club's position on Mineral King, and that now the battle would be joined with the Forest Service and the people who had responded to the prospectus. Disney, of course, was the frontrunner among the bidders; they had the most grandiose scheme of all. The others went down the scale to some minor developments, but it was clear that Disney was the chief contender.

AL: Even at that time you realized that Disney was involved?

Siri: I don't recall the timing, but it was probably shortly after the club's decision that we learned that Disney and two other developers submitted proposals. Disneyland next to Sequoia National Park was an absolute anathema--this dissolved residual doubts any club director still had.

But it was not the end of internal decision for the club because to our considerable surprise, we began to hear from club members, wholly from southern California. In due time four chapters submitted resolutions urging the board to withdraw its opposition to development in Mineral King. Ironically, one of the chapters was Kern-Kaweah, whose study was originally the basis for taking a fresh view of Mineral King. John Harper, who wrote the report and was strongly opposed to development in Mineral King, was now obliged, as chairman of the Kern-Kaweah chapter executive committee, to forward the resolution of his chapter urging the board to reverse its position and to not oppose winter sports development. We received a flood of letters, mainly from the Angeles, Riverside, and Kern-Kaweah chapters.

The southern chapters were concerned about two things: first, there were a great many skiers in southern California and few good ski slopes near Los Angeles. They were eager to have one, and it had been understood all along that Mineral King would be available. It was an excellent ski area and accessible from Los Angeles.

The other part of their concern related to the impact it might have on the San Gorgonio battle that had been going on for many years, a ski development proposed for the San Gorgonio Wilderness Area. The Angeles and Riverside chapters felt that our opposition

Siri: to Mineral King development might now impair that campaign, and they didn't want to see that happen. Kern-Kaweah shared somewhat this anxiety, but probably was more concerned with keeping the club's word as well as having access to a winter sports area. All the developed ski areas were in the northern part of the Sierra Nevada at that time. The Donner Summit area, Mount Rose, and so forth were the only good ski areas.

The chapter resolutions were brought to the attention of the board of course, and had to be acted on. I was still president of the club, and put the matter on the agenda to allow each of the chapters to present its views to the board.

I recall that in numerous discussions with directors, and with Dave and other members of the staff, and with other club leaders concerned with the issue, it was clear that there was not going to be any significant change in the vote; in fact, one or two directors who earlier cast negative votes might now support the club's position. After lengthy presentations and some discussion, I asked for a straw vote to see if there was any point in pursuing the discussion and bringing the matter to a formal vote. I had enough background information on the views of each of the directors to know that the vote would not change. I asked each of the directors to indicate in public, then, what his position was and whether he cared to change his vote. From the straw vote, it was so evident that there would be no change that there was no need to bring the matter to a formal vote. Obviously, if the decision not to call for a vote on it again had been challenged, we would have voted, but the outcome would have been the same.

AL: I understand Nathan Clark said he would switch.

Siri: Yes, right. But there was already an overwhelming majority of the board in favor of the earlier resolution opposing development of Mineral King. I suppose there were still some unhappy people in some of our southern chapters, but the matter had been settled presumably once and for all. No one chose to challenge it by putting it to a vote of the membership.

Mineral King Park Status: A Legal and Legislative Battle

Siri: The rest of it then became a long, long running battle with the Forest Service and with those who were intent on developing the area. That battle, of course, is still not finished. Those of us who had not yet been to Mineral King at the time of the 1965 board meeting didn't fully appreciate the significance of our resolution until later. Then it became clear to most of us that whatever the board's

Siri: earlier position had been in the forties, clearly the situation had changed, and that there were no grounds that we could see for agreeing to development of Mineral King. It simply had to be made ultimately a part of Sequoia National Park, and this of course has been the intent of the club ever since then. I don't think there's any question about that now in anybody's mind in the club.

There were several aspects of the proposed development that we found completely intolerable. One, of course, was the access road. Instead of a primitive two-lane road, to bring in the tens of thousands of skiers and operating personnel a major highway, probably three lanes or more, was proposed. This meant blasting a route eleven miles through the park along the river to reach the basin itself, and this was intolerable. There were all kinds of proposals for other means of transportation--railroads, tram cars (skateboards hadn't been invented yet but I suppose those might have been suggested)--but they all would irreparably damage the park. And of course there was the development in the basin itself, along with the high-rise ski lift towers on the passes that lead into the park and the game refuge. These towers would almost certainly have to be put on the top of the passes and would be visible from the park.

AL: Bestor Robinson saw a positive value in the ski lifts, in that if there were ski lifts, people would have better access to the wilderness in the summers--coming from the city, starting on a hike without having that strong an incline.

Siri: Bestor generally took a position that I guess he liked to feel was balanced: for some things you fought as vigorously as possible; others you might need to compromise. He would ask himself what are the benefits and the risks and, more important, what are the trade-offs--Is use of this area for winter sports a legitimate one? In his mind it was. This was not the kind of purist posture the club has tended, since the fifties, to take on wilderness issues. There are no trade-offs; there are no compromises, except those into which you're backed, by sheer force.

AL: You mentioned, I think at our first get-together, that there had been some suggestion of a meeting with the Disney people and the board was opposed.

Siri: This wasn't formal action by the board. It was an informal discussion among the board members. It's my recollection that Disney representatives did approach us for a meeting, and we decided that little could be gained from it.

AL: Was this early on in the battle?

Siri: Yes. We did meet with one developer who had submitted a response to the prospectus. Ed Wayburn, and I, and I believe Dave Brower met him over lunch in Ed's medical building and listened politely and asked a few questions, but as I recall, the conversation was mainly just listening to his story of what he proposed to do. It was clear to me by then that we simply could not support any development. His pitch primarily was first to moderate the Sierra Club's opposition to all development, and it appeared, as I recall, also an attempt to advance his own position over Disney's by offering to make more concessions than Disney would.

AL: This was a Disney competitor.

Siri: Yes, it was not Disney. Mike McCloskey made up a list of the bidders, and the one person we did meet, I believe, was Robert Brandt, from Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles. He was a relatively young man and apparently well-connected with movie personalities ready to finance the project. He said he was an ardent skier, and saw this as an opportunity to combine business and pleasure. Naturally, he assured us he was more sensitive to wilderness values than was Disney.

AL: And he felt if the club would support him, he might persuade the Forest Service to accept his proposal?

Siri: Yes.

AL: What about the question of legal action? The club voted in December, 1968, to authorize legal action to protect Mineral King, and then they brought suit in June '69.

Siri: This was, as I recall, going to be a test case. We always had a problem in bringing suits because of the question of standing to sue. We had no immediate economic interest such as property that would be harmed by a proposed development or action, and therefore the courts often held that we did not have standing to sue. I believe this was one of the issues in this case, because the question of standing had not yet been resolved and the Mineral King suit provided an opportunity to test this legal doctrine in the courts.

AL: I know they did use it as a test. That's the way it worked out--a testing of the standing to sue issue. I was wondering whether this was a board decision, or a decision of the legal committee.

Siri: Oh no, it would have to be a board decision. Only the board could authorize litigation by or on behalf of the club.

AL: But was it the board that decided whether or not to test the standing to sue, because they could have written in the interest of the club, that the club did have a direct interest, but apparently it was deliberately left out: the club took trips there, and--

Siri: Yes, but it did not own property in Mineral King, and it would not be harmed by development. The area was Forest Service land, and development was an administrative decision by the Forest Service. The question was, did we have legal standing to sue on grounds other than an economic interest that might be impaired. A more enlightened doctrine on standing had yet to be established. In many instances we were denied access to the courts because of the narrow view on standing.

AL: From what I understood, though, from Dick Leonard's interview, in this case, because of the club's activity in Mineral King, they could have had a case for standing, and in fact after it went to the Supreme Court and the standing was denied, they just had to make minor changes to mention that they took trips into the area, and that gave them standing automatically. But at some point there was a decision made that they wouldn't mention these obvious things, and they would just test whether the club, as sort of a voice of the environmental movement, could make the government bodies follow the law.

Siri: True. In retrospect it is obvious that the historical wilderness use of Mineral King by Sierra Club members should have been the basis of our plea for standing. This was, in fact, the argument we originally intended to use. Before the complaint was filed however our lawyers had a change of heart and persuaded us that it would be imprudent to use this argument for standing and that we must instead assert that we represented a public interest. This was a serious error in judgment. I recall that some of us were puzzled and dubious but we felt we had to defer to the judgment of our lawyers. The result was, of course, denial of standing by the courts.

When ultimately the case reached the Supreme Court, the court's action was cause for surprise, delight, and chagrin. In remanding the case to a lower federal court, the Supreme Court, in its written opinion, indicated it was not hostile to our case but we had gone about it badly, and then proceeded to explain how we should have pleaded our cause. In effect, we had gone all the way to the Supreme Court for a lesson in how to plea for standing in this case. The court must have been in a pedagogic mood as well as good humor at that moment.

RL: This was in '68, did you say?

AL: No, it didn't get to the Supreme Court until 1972. Now it's in the Federal District Court again [March, 1976].

Siri: Yes; I didn't follow the suit after leaving the board and don't know its present status.

Siri: Of course, in the intervening time the club has also been attempting to have Mineral King inserted in Sequoia National Park but hasn't yet succeeded.*

A Turning Away From Practicality and Compromise

AL: So you've been going on two fronts, a legal action and a legislative one. Anything else about Mineral King that needs to be mentioned?

Siri: Details will undoubtedly occur to me later, after we've gone on to other subjects. One passing thought, however. Mineral King was part of the transition in the club's character in this sense: up to that time there were directors who strongly felt that once their word had been given they were honor bound by it. To them it was a principle not to be violated without clear provocation. This was exemplified most strongly in Alex Hildebrand, but also in Bestor Robinson, and Lewis Clark. The principle was not abandoned by others; it was differently interpreted so far as club policy was concerned. The club's position on an issue could be changed at will as new information or attitudes required.

Another aspect of the change in attitude about this time is of interest. There was a growing demand for ski areas and some club members felt that all was not lost by conceding Mineral King to ski development. They were skiers and felt it would not mean the ultimate ruin of Sequoia National Park or the game refuge next to Mineral King. But it was a time when this view was gradually passing from the club to one that was much more polarized. It was a strong antidevelopment one that considered only the conservation values and no other aspects of an issue. The question became simply, "Is this worth saving? If it is, let's save it, and the hell with any other considerations." The new dirty word, or rather phrase, was "Let's be realistic." Anyone who used that phrase was immediately suspect; it represented a philosophy that was going out of style, but it was a phrase still used occasionally by the old-timers. I will confess I was also offended by the "let's be realistic" attitude. To me, the club existed primarily to perform an adversary role. Then, too, no one could judge "realism" until after the fact.

AL: Something occurs to me as you were mentioning that. Was there any sense in this Mineral King business of a friction between northern and southern California; did the southern California chapters tend to see the board as dominated by the north, and not listening to the wishes of the membership down there?

*October 1978 Congress passed the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (omnibus parks bill), which incorporated Mineral King into Sequoia National Park.

- Siri: I don't recall that it became a significant controversy. The other chapters all supported the club's position, but I don't think it became a north-south axis quarrel of any real consequence.
- AL: Did the southern chapters change their views?
- Siri: I don't know what their present view is; I think there was an acceptance of the board's decision once it had been reaffirmed. It was accepted, if reluctantly, by everyone as the club's position.
- AL: Is that unusual, for the board to go against the wishes of the chapters in whose territory the battle is waged.
- Siri: It is unusual, yes. But it wasn't unknown; in fact it might even not have been wholly uncommon, but it was infrequent. On issues of this kind generally the board would rely on the recommendations and studies made by chapters, but this took on such significance that the board acted quite independently. And as I said, the basis for it was a study made by John Harper, which supported a dormant view that just hadn't emerged before. The Forest Service prospectus merely triggered the controversy.

Mismanagement of Forest Service Timber Lands

- AL: I received an updated proposal [1976] on Mineral King from the Forest Service, and the point of view that it shows is amazing. They're still talking in Disneyland terms--how many people they can serve, and...
- Siri: That's right. The Forest Service regards it, I guess, as one of its missions to provide recreation these days; some of the old multiple-use concepts still prevail. And as one bureaucracy, why should they want to turn a part of their holdings over to another bureaucracy, namely the Park Service, when they can realize a substantial gain in leasing this land to developers?
- AL: The Forest Service itself shows some profit then?
- Siri: Yes. I presume it would realize substantial revenues for the Forest Service.
- AL: That's interesting. I never thought of it in monetary terms.
- Siri: Oh, but of course, that's what the Forest Service's function is--to manage forest lands, in principle to everyone's benefit--and it can be argued that developing Mineral King would be to a lot of people's benefit--and also realize revenues from the use of these public lands.

AL: And what happens to those revenues--do they just administrate the other public lands? They don't show a net profit, do they?

Siri: I don't know the answer to that, but the Forest Service leases land and sells timber in most of its forests except in those areas classified as wilderness or primitive. So the service realizes substantial revenues from the extraction of forest products from their lands.

Our quarrel with the Forest Service on forest management has not been over timber cutting and revenues, which we think is appropriate, but over its extensive clearcutting and other practices that we contend are excessively damaging to forests, its soil and streams. In the past we have rarely seen eye to eye with the Forest Service in the way it manages its lands, particularly its clearcutting practices, but there are signs of improvement.

AL: That's having some legislative action now, isn't it?

Siri: Oh yes, every year, we and others managed to have bills introduced which bit by bit chipped away at the problem. However the Forest Service, more so than the Park Service or many other newer federal agencies, is politically skillful and experienced in defending itself against threats to its traditional ways of doing things. It has many allies in labor and industry and in states where national forests are located. The Forest Service has always seemed more astute than, say, the Park Service in managing its political support and maintaining its strength in Congress and in the administration.

VIII POLARIZATION OF THE SIERRA CLUB: THE NIPOMO DUNES-DIABLO
CANYON CONTROVERSY

[Interviews 4 & 5: March 19, 1976, May 3, 1976]

Negotiations to Save Nipomo Dunes

AL: Shall we turn to the Nipomo Dunes? Why don't you first let us know what brought Nipomo Dunes to the attention of the club?

Siri: I don't know the details of the beginnings; they preceded my tour as president. It all started with Kathy Jackson and a few others who lived in the area, in San Luis Obispo. They knew the dunes intimately and were determined in one way or another to save them. Kathy especially spent an enormous amount of time taking groups into the dunes on Sunday outings and bringing the press in to generate publicity.

She struggled for a number of years and just never got terribly far because Nipomo Dunes--they were then called the Oceano Dunes--had been zoned industrial. San Luis Obispo County was an economically depressed area, and the county supervisors saw benefits in bringing industry into the county. Agriculture was not footing the bill for the county and its residents. There was already a coking plant [Collier Coke and Carbon Company] on the edge of the dunes; several oil companies had installations of various sorts, including wells, on the southern end of the dunes; and there was a military reservation adjacent to it. The dunes themselves still remained largely untouched, at least the more interesting parts of them.

Kathy finally was able to bring the dunes to the attention of the board. By that time, however, PG&E had purchased 1100 acres of the best part of the dunes, extending from the waterline to the Oso Flaco Lakes at the far inland edge of the dunes. PG&E was planning to construct a nuclear power plant with one, and probably several, very large units. The company had chosen this site feeling that there would be no strong opposition there because it was zoned industrial and the county offered every encouragement. PG&E decided this site was the most favorable of any along the coast in terms of its engineering and economic advantages. It was, by their analysis,

Siri: the best site for a nuclear power plant. It would cost least to build there; it would run most efficiently; and it was easily accessible for the heavy equipment that needed to be brought in.

PG&E proceeded cautiously. They had just been badly burned at Bodega Head, and so they were very much concerned about what the Sierra Club's position was going to be on this site. They were confident of the county, because the supervisors and many of the residents there thought this was just great. It meant substantial new revenue for the county, new jobs and businesses. I suppose in a sense one can't blame them; they were struggling with a dwindling agricultural economy, not knowing where the future lay, and here was this great big electric utility that was going to bail them out.

Kathy Jackson finally brought the matter before the board; on May 1, 1965, there was a consensus of the board: "For scenic recreation purposes under the management of the California State Division of Beaches and Parks, the Sierra Club recommends preservation of the shoreline and upland areas south of Oceano bounded by...etc." A resolution calling for preservation of the dunes had been passed earlier by the executive committee of the board [June 9, 1963], and the board consensus merely defined the boundaries somewhat more exactly.

Kathy Jackson by this time was the club's coordinator for the Nipomo Dunes campaign; a position I had appointed her to some time [February, 1965] earlier. She took on the task with enormous energy and was now making great strides.

Sometime before this point I had gone down to the dunes and spent a day or two with Kathy Jackson and some people from the county and from the Division of Beaches and Parks, and one or two supervisors. We toured the dunes, and it was clear that they had to be preserved. The dunes were unique in formation because of the peculiar wind and current patterns and the orientation of the California coast at that point. Some of the flora and fauna was rare, it could not be found in many other places. At that time we took a position that we would oppose any development in the dunes, and that if PG&E wanted to develop its land it would have to move back about a mile from the beach, which would put it outside of the dunes.

We weren't really happy about this. I didn't like it at all because I knew that if the plant were put there, even if it weren't in the middle of the dunes, it would still have a major impact on the dunes. For one thing they would have to bury immense conduits through the dunes then out to sea to bring in seawater for cooling. This meant just tearing up the dunes to put in the plants, and it meant all sorts of other ancillary structures including switchyards, roads, and huge transmission lines. Clearly if you wanted the dunes you couldn't have industry and particularly power plants anywhere in it or around it--it just wouldn't work.

AL: Was that mentioned as a possibility?

Siri: Yes. State Division of Beaches and Parks took the position that they would favor putting the plants 4000 feet back from the water's edge, or about a mile too, and indicated they wanted the dunes preserved. Well, the outcome of that was some meetings with PG&E and with Kathy and with Fred Eissler and Robert Hoover, a biologist from Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo. I guess more than maybe anyone I could not see power plants or any other industry located on the edge of the dunes if we wanted to preserve them; there was no way of making that work. Also, PG&E was reluctant to put the power plants back as much as 4000 or 5000 feet. To them it was economically unfeasible; the cost would have been too high. Gradually, as we talked, the discussions took a different turn, the result, I guess of having said, "We want the dunes preserved; go find another place." They agreed that they would look for other sites, and said they would discuss them with us before making a decision on the selection. We also insisted we wanted to see the dunes sold to the state and to no one else. PG&E agreed to these conditions.

Most of our discussions were held with Kenneth Diercks, who represented PG&E's president, and promised his best personal effort to persuade the company to live up to the agreement. We also met with [Sherman] Sibley and on another occasion with [Robert] Gerdes; I've forgotten which was president and which was chairman of the board at that time. PG&E promised to put in writing the agreement that, if another site were found which we did not oppose, they would hold the dunes undeveloped until the state could lease or purchase the land, essentially at the price they paid. The most important concessions we wanted were that they would not develop their property in the dunes, and they would not sell it to anyone but the state. This was put in writing by either Sibley or Gerdes, I don't recall which, although it contained reservations we would have preferred were left out.

AL: Did they retain the right or possibility of at some point developing it if they needed it for a power plant?

Siri: Yes. That was left open. They did this to protect their position. If the state did not acquire the land, PG&E was reluctant to agree that it still would not at some later date be considered for development; however, if it were sold to the state, then clearly it would not be available for PG&E development.

AL: I noted a letter from your papers at The Bancroft Library. This is June 21st, 1966, from President Gerdes to you, and he talks about after all the negotiations are completed for Diablo Canyon and all the permits were obtained, they were willing to "consider leasing our property to the state provided we reserve the right to develop

- AL: a power plant on the property in the future." And then he goes on to say if Diablo Canyon is developed it would be years before Nipomo Dunes would be needed.
- Siri: Yes. This was slightly at variance with his and Diercks' personal discussions with us, but he was unwilling to commit himself on paper for the record.
- AL: That must have made it difficult for you.
- Siri: Well, it wasn't exactly what we wanted to see in the record, but we had assurances from him that yes, if the state were to make an offer, that they would actually sell the property, or at least make a long-term lease and not lease or sell the property to others. It was my understanding, in checking with the Department of Parks and Recreation, that Diercks, for example, had approached them and discussed this, and I believe that [Director of the State Parks and Recreation Department William] Mott at that time had a number of discussions with PG&E about acquisition.
- AL: And eventually of course it was acquired. Did that cause a lot of trouble for you personally, with the other directors--the fact that they wouldn't put it in writing?
- Siri: No, I don't think that surfaced as a major element in the discussions. I don't recall that it did. You see the reason it didn't was that the probability of their developing the dunes once they had picked another site--the Diablo Canyon site--was extremely remote. There was space there for five units, and that would carry them out to the end of the century at least. In the meantime, the chances of their being able to put anything more on the coast would, we thought, grow progressively dimmer. Once we had any kind of concessions, once PG&E agreed not to develop in the Nipomo Dunes, there was almost no chance whatever that they could go back again. They'd have to fight it out all over again, and the fight next time around would be even more intense. They would not need to put in units, so the question wouldn't even come up for a very long time. So the realities of it were that it almost didn't matter what he said in his letter; the chances of ever going back in Nipomo Dunes were extremely dim, just on practical grounds.

The Choice and Sierra Club Confirmation of Diablo Canyon Site

- Siri: The consequence of all this was that PG&E undertook a new survey of the whole coast of San Luis Obispo with the object of identifying places where they could put a power plant that would meet at least some reasonable engineering criteria and would be at a cost that was

Siri: manageable. They singled out something like ten sites--I've forgotten the exact number now--along the coast. Only two or three of them offered any real possibility for a nuclear power plant.

AL: How was it that Diablo Canyon was the one chosen?

Siri: The other sites were unfavorable on rather obvious technical grounds. They went over the list of sites with us. There were ten possible sites where a plant would have access to sea water for cooling. Inland sites were ruled out because there was no assurance of the large quantities of water, even waste water, which they did consider, that are necessary for operating a power plant. They would not consider dry cooling towers at that time because of the substantially higher cost, lower efficiency, and uncertainty as to how well they would work. It must also be remembered that there was no coastal commission or coastal plan to prevent PG&E from constructing a plant anywhere they pleased on the coast.

Then they proceeded through the series of constraints on the alternative sites. Seismic problems ruled some out straightaway, because there were old faults in the area, and the AEC simply wouldn't issue a construction permit for a nuclear plant in such areas. Other sites were ruled out again because of AEC regulations. They were too near population centers. Others were ruled out for physical reasons; they were too small or extremely difficult to reach, or the terrain was unsuitable.

AL: Wasn't Nipomo Dunes fairly near a population center--there were those other industries?

Siri: Well, the industries in the area employed very few people. I don't recall specifically how the AEC regulations read, but they draw zones around the proposed site and look at the population density in those. The population has to be below certain levels for successive zones. Some of the sites that were looked at along the coast were close to a large town, or there were towns scattered around the site that made the population density too high.

In addition to the population and seismic problems, there were mechanical problems such as pumping water up too great a height to reach a plant placed on a high bench above the sea. So much of the electrical output from the plant would have to be used pumping water that it would reduce the efficiency to so low a level that it was impractical. Anyway it narrowed down to Diablo Canyon, which seemed satisfactory to PG&E, on seismic, isolation and physical grounds. One other site was at best marginal, partly because it was on a steep downsloping grade right to the edge of the water, which meant they had to carve out enormous amounts of earth to get to it. It would have made a hideous scar--I don't know that they were concerned about the scar, but they'd be concerned about the cost of moving all that earth.

AL: Did you find that they weren't too environmentally aware? Was their motivation just the pressure of the conservation groups? They didn't have any particular concern for Nipomo Dunes?

Siri: I don't know. I do know they would have built the plant in the Nipomo Dunes if they had not been opposed by conservation groups.

AL: Even when they were made aware of the fact that it was a unique area.

Siri: Yes, of course. I mean they're not all that altruistic--they're required both by law and by their stockholders to run a businesslike operation, first, and then if there are other considerations that don't interfere with efficient, reliable production of electricity, and involve no substantial cost, then fine.

AL: What about South Moss Landing that was mentioned later on by the opposition as an alternative? Was that brought up as one of these possible choices?

Siri: Yes, it was; it was considered as one of the sites, but the problem with that site was that there already existed a power plant there, a fossil fuel power plant and the most they could put in that site, for physical reasons, was one additional unit, and that would not meet the capacity requirements that PG&E was supposed to provide as determined by the PUC. They needed at least two units. They were thinking in terms of ultimately five nuclear units forming a power plant that would meet the projected electricity demand to the year 2000. At that time they thought they would need two units operating by the middle seventies. So that site was ruled out because it would provide space for only one unit. They would then have to go through the whole routine again of finding sites for additional units. This made no sense. If you were going to wreck a piece of coast, one unit will do it as well as two. The object was to find a site where they could put multiple units.

We were convinced in part that if we could get the damn things all centered in one place we would not have to face the problem of power plants sited all along the coast. We didn't want to go through this battle every year for a new selection of sites--the question was where could they put the whole collection of them and be finished with the matter until the next century, with least damage to the coast. By that time maybe something else could be done with them. The point is that it all boiled down to the site opposite Diablo Canyon, where they could put as many as four or five units.

Diablo Canyon, or the shoreline adjacent to Diablo Canyon, was an isolated, undeveloped area of the coast, near Point Buchon and a few miles south of the Montana de Oro state park. About seven

Siri: miles of the hilly land along the coast was privately owned. The bench along the shore was heavily grazed and treeless, but other than that it was a primitive part of the coast with no roads or structures of any kind.

There followed a series of conferences with Kathy Jackson, Robert Hoover and Fred Eissler and others to determine whether or not we should object to the site. Kathy had taken a number of hikes out along the coast south of Point Buchon and knew the area well. Collectively we concluded we should not object to the PG&E site. On the strength of this I made a recommendation to the board which led to a resolution that the Sierra Club would not oppose construction of the power plant at Diablo Canyon, provided the Nipomo Dunes were made available for acquisition by the state and that PG&E would not develop the dunes.

AL: We're talking now about the May, 1966, board meeting.

Siri: Yes, that resolution was passed at the May seventh meeting in 1966. It was a lengthy debate, again running a full day or a day and a half. The resolution that started all of this was, "The Sierra Club reaffirms its policy that Nipomo Dunes should be preserved unimpaired for scenic and recreational use under state management and considers Diablo Canyon, San Luis Obispo County, as satisfactory alternative site to the Nipomo Dunes for construction of a Pacific Gas and Electric Company generating facility, provided that..." Then there were a number of conditions placed on use of the Diablo Canyon site. That passed by a vote of nine to one; those who favored it were Adams, Clark--both Clarks--Jules Eichorn, Leonard, Marshall, Mauk, Siri, and Wayburn. Fred Eissler was the only person who opposed it, and Brooks and Dyer abstained. I've no doubt whatever that Litton would have joined Eissler had he been present at that meeting.

Well, that was the resolution that started two years of intense controversy and ultimately led to the resignation of Dave Brower, not on that issue alone, but this was the start of it all.

AL: The start of a split in the club, would you say?

Siri: Yes.

Contending Philosophies in the Club: Approval of Alternate Sites

AL: As you look at the material on this whole issue, it appears as if it was your main and overriding interest--was that just in retrospect, because of all the controversy, or did you spend much of your time as president working this out?

Siri: No, there were a great many other things happening at that time and Diablo Canyon simply became the most visible of a growing number of controversies. It brought into open conflict a number of contending forces within the club. Diablo Canyon became linked with the nuclear energy issue and I'm sure this had an effect on the attitude of some people in the club who had strong feelings about nuclear energy. Dave Pesonen was the most outspoken opponent of nuclear energy--or maybe it was PG&E, I never know for certain which--but I guess it's even more gratifying if you can combine them.

Fred Eissler was deeply disturbed by the board's decision. Fred was purist, in the strictest sense; he didn't like electric utility companies; he didn't like nuclear energy; he didn't like anything on the coast, or development anywhere for that matter. I don't say this in criticism, but simply to suggest that compared to other environmentalists, perhaps even Dave Brower, Eissler took extreme and uncompromising positions on issues in which he had an interest. He and Martin Litton emerged as leaders of the opposition to the Diablo Canyon decision by the board of directors. Dave Brower was not deeply immersed in the issue at that time, but said the board was taking precipitous action and should delay a decision.

AL: How did your own beliefs about the benefits of nuclear power affect your strong support for Diablo Canyon?

Siri: Nuclear energy had nothing to do with my position on Diablo Canyon. I was not--and still am not--opposed to nuclear energy with adequate safeguards, but I held no brief one way or the other on nuclear power plants as opposed to other kinds of power plants at that site. The alternative at that time probably would have been a natural gas-fired plant, which in retrospect would have meant an uglier installation and tall stacks emitting plumes of pollutants.

AL: Can we backtrack a minute here now? I'll ask you a few questions about what we've talked about. Who was it that made the first contact with PG&E? Was it Kathy Jackson? And how were you drawn into it? You seem to have taken it on with quite a bit of interest?

Siri: As I said earlier, I had named Kathy task leader for the Nipomo Dunes project. She was obviously the person most interested, best informed, and almost singlehandedly leading the battle for the dunes.

Siri: It was she who had contact initially with PG&E. She had contacted everybody who owned property in the dunes; the Collier Coke Company, the oil companies, PG&E, and the private owners of the Oso Flaco Lakes at the inland edge of the dunes.

AL: Did Doris Leonard have a role?

Siri: I don't recall just where Doris fitted into the picture at that time. She and George Collins, who together formed a conservation organization of their own, called Conservation Associates, became interested in the controversy. They independently contacted PG&E, and they also agreed that this was an acceptable solution to the site problem, in spite of the fact that George Collins had once prepared a report showing that this area was one that the Interior Department ought to consider for acquisition, as a dedicated area of one sort or another. George backed away from that position, and agreed that Nipomo Dunes was a place that had to be saved. He and Doris then lent their support to this proposal independently. They had much stronger contacts with PG&E than I did, or the Sierra Club did, or the Sierra Club wanted. We dealt with PG&E only on the basis of negotiating for the best possible solution to the site problem.

RL: Had Conservation Associates any other constituency?

Siri: Not really.

RL: Just as individuals.

Siri: That's right. So far as I know there were no members other than Doris and George; they operated out of Dick Leonard's law offices in the Mills Tower. They appeared to have influential contacts in agencies and industry. Just how influential they were is hard for me to judge, but some members of the club felt, I think, that because of these contacts, Conservation Associates may have been used as a conduit by others to arrive at compromises on environmental issues. In any event, George and Doris, I'm afraid, were not terribly persuasive with Sierra Club leaders. I think they were largely discounted. This may also be partly because they had not taken active roles in club affairs in recent years. Doris had been extremely active at one time, but many of the club leaders were new and they knew little of Doris Leonard. In any event, I don't know that she and George played a significant role in the club's controversy over Diablo Canyon.

AL: In these deliberations you and Jackson were having with PG&E were members of the board also brought into the thinking? Was this discussed at board meetings, or was it done informally?

Siri: Yes, both at board meetings and informally. Wayburn and I met regularly; often with Lewis Clark and Dick Leonard and whoever else happened to be available. I had also discussed it privately with Fred Eissler on several occasions. At first he had only the mildest of reservations about the site at Diablo Canyon but as time passed he took an intractable position in opposition, and by that time the die had been cast.

As the pro and con factions formed, I found myself being drawn more and more into the controversy, and it proved to be a messy one, no question about it.

AL: Was it usual that the club would sort of be drawn into PG&E's problems and their technical decisions--was that a departure from the usual way of doing things?

Siri: The club had traditionally worked this way--the club had almost always on major issues conducted studies on proposed alternatives. It was consistent with the longstanding tradition, starting with Muir in the Hetch Hetchy battle and on many of the other issues that had come up. On highways, this was the usual practice, to find alternative routes.

AL: Alternative routes that would meet the needs of the agency?

Siri: Yes. Tioga Road, for example. Or, for other examples, Brower's proposal to substitute a nuclear power plant for Grand Canyon dams, or in the case of the battles with the Forest Service, our proposing alternative cuts to preserve some area that we felt ought to remain as wilderness or alternative developments to those proposed. In the case of San Jacinto and San Geronio I think this was done--

AL: Mineral King was the alternative there, wasn't it?

Siri: Well, it was. That's right. It's a practice obviously that can backfire.

AL: Were there people at that time--Eissler, maybe Litton--who were actively opposed in principle to the club's seeking alternative sites?

Siri: Both Eissler and Litton, and Porter too, took the position that the club should consider only its concerns about an area that came under dispute and should not concern itself with working out the other man's problems--that was not the club's business. If it opposed a development or a use of a forest or shore, then the club should address itself solely to that issue and oppose it without compromise. It's a position that Eissler and Litton took almost without exception; it was a rigid doctrine with them. It's an extreme position, and one that has not worked to their benefit; in fact, this battle was lost not so much because I was clever but because they lost it.

Siri: Eissler could have won that battle, but Eissler was his own worst enemy. He came across as an intractable, rigid, irritating person, who lost friends left and right, who recognized no principle other than that of attaining his goal. The means by which he attained it didn't seem particularly to matter, because the goal was the important thing, and so justified the means. This came through so strongly that it offended a great many Sierra Club members who heard him and also offended most of the board members. It took outrageous forms, and Eissler, like any devout person--I guess Jesus Christ was one, so was Joan of Arc, and a number of others have been nailed to a cross or burned or otherwise disposed of by society--all have this inflexible, total dedication to a cause, and any means to achieve their end were justified. Most people don't see it that way, happily. I think that society would fall apart if they did, but it probably takes a few such people also to achieve some useful ends in the long run.

AL: How about Brower on that issue of alternate sites? He must have participated in some of those searches for alternate sites in the past.

Siri: Yes, for example, his proposed trade of nuclear for Grand Canyon dams and the original Mineral King decision. Brower responded very slowly to the Diablo Canyon issue; it may have been because of his deep involvement in other club problems. This one may not have seemed to him at first a sufficiently important issue. The publications especially were beginning to have problems about that time, so he spent a great deal of time in New York and overseas, out of San Francisco. Dave was running into serious internal problems from the way he was managing the club, exceeding his authority and overspending. The club's financial position was beginning to weaken, publications were running deeper and deeper into debt, books were coming out late. Dave was more and more troubled, and so was the board.

Dave's response to the Nipomo Dunes issue was slow to start, but then his alignment was inevitable because in Eissler, Litton and Porter, Dave had strong allies, in the sense that whatever Dave's view or position was would be supported by at least these three men. It didn't matter what the issue was or how it came out, there was strong mutual support among them. Dave probably was troubled, I think, by the club's agreeing to a site. This ran somewhat counter to his feelings about the coast, although not in the doctrinaire sense that it was with Eissler and Litton. I think he also saw that this was the only position he could take and still have Eissler and Litton's unquestioning support, at a time when all the other problems facing Dave were beginning to emerge as well. So it wasn't just the Diablo Canyon but other problems that were surfacing now, where Dave needed all the allies that he could possibly find.

Board Acceptance of Diablo, May, 1966--A Fraudulently Obtained Vote?

- AL: Brower's initial position, though, in the May, 1966, meeting, was simply to delay it so that some of the board members could visit Diablo Canyon. Was that very seriously considered, or why did you in particular reject that?
- Siri: There were some timing questions in all this, because PG&E was ready to move and had nearly all of its permits and licenses and all the rest of the things that they needed to start construction either at Nipomo Dunes or Diablo Canyon. The county was pressing very, very hard to get PG&E to start immediate construction of the plant. And so there was a strong sense of urgency in all of this--to delay another three months until the next board meeting might have been crucial in what happened, in the possibility of saving the dunes. We had come to the very bitter edge of that prospect because everything was set now for PG&E to go ahead except for this last minute back-off look at another site. If they found one that we would not oppose, Nipomo Dunes were saved.
- AL: Everything was set for the construction at Nipomo Dunes to go ahead, then?
- Siri: Yes, it was clear that if we took the position that we would oppose any other site, PG&E was prepared to say, "The hell with it; we'll fight it out, in the dunes." It was at that critical stage, where everybody had his cards on the table, and it was who held the highest hand. There was a critical question of timing; this was the reason for the move. Normally one could delay, and this is the usual practice. Delay is generally to the benefit of the Sierra Club. We had already, you see, for about a year--at least a year--delayed the construction.
- AL: It came up later that this initial discussion at the May 7th, 1966, board meeting was based in part on some erroneous information about PG&E's site in the canyon, or on the shelf above the canyon.
- Siri: Do you remember the specifics of it?
- AL: During the discussion at the board meeting, did Kathy Jackson present the description of Diablo Canyon?
- Siri: Kathy did, I did, several other people did.
- AL: Apparently the impression was given or directly stated that the plant would be hidden from view in the canyon, and then a few days later, after the board had passed the resolution, Kathy Jackson was told by Ken Diercks of PG&E that it wouldn't be hidden in the canyon, that it would be on the south coastal shelf, more visible.

- Siri: That's quite possible. Kathy may have misunderstood precisely how the plant was to be sited, but I felt this had been clear to others; I didn't think there had been misrepresentation on this. I gave a detailed description of site and location of facilities.
- AL: You understood it yourself.
- Siri: Oh, yes. They indicated exactly where the plant would be, where the switchyards would be placed and what areas it would involve. I don't think there was ever a misunderstanding about that on the part of others, including Fred Eissler and Martin Litton. I think they were aware of all the details from the very outset. And they made a point of informing themselves.
- AL: So when the board made its decision they never thought the plant would be hidden in the canyon.
- Siri: No, I don't think so. In fact, it was described I think in fairly specific terms as to where the plant would be. I never quite understood Kathy's misunderstanding about that.
- AL: Kathy Jackson did develop some misgivings aside from this incident, later, after a couple of months.
- Siri: Yes, I think it was Eissler who had gotten to her. But then she came about again, and she was a strong, vigorous supporter of the club's position.
- AL: What was Martin Litton referring to when later he said that this was a fraudulently obtained vote, or something to that effect? Do you recall that? I think he wrote to PG&E.
- Siri: Oh, yes. That famous letter! That was a letter he wrote on Sunset stationery which led to his separation, or threat of separation, from Sunset, because they were terribly exercised about it. That letter was so gross an exaggeration and distortion that it pretty well spoke for itself. He made every conceivable charge. I guess I left that letter in the collection of things I sent to Bancroft, or a copy of it. That was a priceless letter, because it was obviously written in a state of utter fury, and it was not correct. It was not a fraudulently obtained vote. It was a resolution passed overwhelmingly after a day and a half debate. It was a very, very lengthy debate, with a full opportunity for everyone to be heard--repeatedly.
- AL: What about statements about the quality of the environment at Diablo Canyon--statements made in May? Would you say those were challenged later effectively?

Siri: They were challenged, but not effectively.

AL: So there was nothing new to you brought out by the opposition later.

Siri: Yes, there were some new elements that I was not aware of. I'd seen the oak grove, and it was indeed an old and attractive oak grove but I hadn't realized the full extent of it, where it reached far back into Diablo Canyon. There were one or two other things that I wasn't aware of before. By that time so much momentum had been developed that it was now impossible to turn back. I don't know how the whole issue would have come out if the Sierra Club had taken a strong stand against PG&E's locating a plant in Nipomo Dunes and at Diablo Canyon. There'll always be an "if" in my mind, and a troublesome one, I admit.

AL: You mean you think there's a possibility the club might have won on both counts, at both sites?

Siri: Well, it's always possible but at that time I think improbable. If it were done today, it might be different, mainly because some years after Diablo Canyon, campaigns for the preservation of the coast were so successful. We couldn't generate such enthusiasm for the coast at that time in the mid-sixties, but later in the sixties and the early seventies, yes, in response to the coastal initiative. At the time of Diablo Canyon it was a different matter. It was too small an issue to attract wide public support--and it might have gone to PG&E--but I don't deny the possibility we may have saved both sites if there had been a way to delay construction.

AL: This is all in retrospect, of course, but when you say that it sounds as if the possibility of building the one unit at Moss Landing might have worked out, and times would have changed by the time they needed a second unit--feelings would have been stronger. Of course, it would have taken a good deal of foresight.

Siri: That's possible.

Political Dynamics on the Board of Directors

AL: Let's continue our discussion of the political dynamics on the board. Ansel Adams was certainly strong in his support for the Diablo Canyon alternative.

Siri: Yes, he was.

- AL: Was there a particular reason for that? I have always heard him described as a purist.
- Siri: On some things he is a purist, but Ansel was also of the old school of "let's propose alternatives; let's be reasonable men and work out a compromise, or negotiate a solution to a problem." On Diablo Canyon he was of course absolutely adamant in feeling that this was a reasonable solution to a difficult problem.
- AL: Was it a personal sort of distaste for Litton and Eissler?
- Siri: I'm sure it was. I'm sure this colored a good many people's feelings. That's why I say that these two men were their own worst enemies. You know, they had enormous talent and perseverance, which are two qualities we need most in environmental battles, but those qualities were too often used in a way that alienated people. They tended to be abrasive and divisive without realizing it. They did not understand that when they treated opponents ruthlessly they were going to alienate a lot of people who were in the middle. The way they conducted their affairs simply polarized people who otherwise might have been willing to go with them or stay in the middle and not join one side or the other. Ultimately, it would lead to a situation that could not be reversed--that is, they tended to polarize an issue in a way that was almost impossible to reverse or to resolve except by direct confrontation and test of strength.

It was a fascinating phenomenon to observe, and one I'm sure would interest sociologists. I was acutely conscious of this at the time and found it easy to take advantage of their indiscretions. One of the more blatant errors was Dave Brower's publication of the infamous half-Bulletin, which made an incredibly serious mistake in tactics. It is a pity that Dave, Martin, and Fred were so overwhelmed with their total dedication to the virtue of their point of view that they didn't realize they were making serious tactical errors.

- AL: Apparently a few people, when they visited Diablo Canyon, did come to feel it was a mistake; I think Jules Eichorn was one.
- Siri: Yes, Jules was one.
- AL: You wouldn't expect him to go along with Litton. Did he often vote with them?
- Siri: No, he didn't, that's right, and Jules made a very dramatic switch after he visited Diablo Canyon.
- AL: Do you think there are others who may have made the switch if it hadn't been for this deep division?

Siri: Yes, I think so.

AL: So board politics entered into it.

Siri: Yes, in the sense that board politics were generated by the two men trying too desperately to achieve their purpose, and in the effort, failing largely by their own overzealous actions. One can ask whether the position the club ultimately held on Diablo Canyon was a consequence of the way in which Eissler and Litton conducted their campaign. I'm sure this was a major element in what ultimately happened. As to who was right, only the future will tell.

AL: The issue of the club's integrity was brought up quite a bit.

Siri: Yes, that's right.

AL: Do you think that was a determining factor for some board members?

Siri: Oh, unquestionably, yes. It was for a lot of members of the club.

AL: What about George Marshall?

Siri: George might have supported a position against use of the Diablo Canyon site by PG&E, if Eissler and Litton had not gone about it the way they did. George is a man of extraordinarily high principle, just instinctively a very honorable man, and he was offended by many of the things he heard and saw.

AL: He was president during that following year, after the May, 1966, resolution.

Siri: Yes, that's right.

AL: Were the political dynamics more important, do you think, than the issue of reversing the policy of the club?

Siri: It wasn't all that clear to anyone, you see, that the club policy should be reversed. With 20/20 hindsight, maybe it's more arguable.

AL: But at that time, you feel that even after this year--I'm talking about the year from May 1966 to May '67--that still aside from the extraneous issues--

Siri: Well, there's no way of separating those out. I don't think that's possible, because attitudes have been set, in part by the pros and cons of the issue, but also by the tactics that had been used, and the intensity of the controversy. It was almost impossible psychologically for people to shift their position. It presented a set of

Siri: circumstances that are not too different from two nations going to war, each of them recognizing it's a stupid war that will gain them nothing but losses, and still not being able to stop it. How many wars have we gone into and done that--the Sierra Club did exactly the same thing; we had a civil war. The phenomenon was probably quite similar. I even have transcripts of some of those angry moments.

AL: Were those pretty hot meetings?

Siri: They were indeed!

AL: You mention Litton and Eissler. What about the other supporters? Did they also get hot, or were they just silent?

Siri: Everybody was pretty excited, but it was mainly Eissler and Litton on one side, and myself I guess, and Marshall and Leonard on the other [looks over transcripts]. Nate Clark I see had a lot to say too, but naturally an enormous space was taken up by Litton--well, Litton was always fascinating to listen to. I don't know if you have heard him or not, but he uses the most colorful language, totally uninhibited, in a highly inventive way, and so people simply sit back and listen in fascination to his articulate outrage, sometimes for hours. He's very difficult to turn off.

People are fascinated with it--and won't agree. He comes on too strong to make his case credible. He overkills and no longer sounds convincing, except in a vague sort of philosophical fashion. You find yourself agreeing with some of that sense of outrage, that purist position, but when it comes down to the specific issue, he loses it, if it's a hotly contested one.

He doesn't quite have a sense of where he has exceeded propriety, or has begun to rasp at people's sense of the propriety. He never recognizes when he's overstepped that invisible boundary. It doesn't matter on many issues, because we're all in accord, and then it's just diverting to hear his impassioned tirades. Then you're not offended because you're all in agreement, and this is generally the case. But on a contested issue it's dangerous, because once he transgressed that mysterious boundary which most people sense without being aware of, he begins to lose votes. You can almost see it--the attitudes change, and so sometimes in a battle you want him to continue. Let him go; he'll lose his case.

The same with Eissler--only not with the flamboyant language of Litton; he didn't have that talent at all--but Eissler began to irritate people from the moment he started. That boundary for him was very close in. He transgressed it immediately.

AL: He didn't have the saving grace of being entertaining, it seems.

Siri: Yes, that's right. And no humor--absolutely devoid of humor.

AL: How did he come up to be a board nominee?

Siri: He was aggressive and diligent and hard working. He had been extremely active and quite effective in many campaigns before he came on the board--a very active member--and this did impress everyone. What always impresses you if you're on the board of directors is to find someone out in the chapters who is suddenly emerging, suddenly becoming visible and turning out work, doing things, generating excitement; that's the kind of person you're always looking for. Sometimes you get some surprises.

The 1967 Club Referendum and the Half-Bulletin

Siri: The upshot of the Diablo Canyon controversy was, of course, a running battle that took up a great deal of time at every board meeting for a year--ultimately leading to the petition to the vote of the membership in April 1967. Even the approval by the board of the form of the petition became a day-long battle. The petition was submitted in one form that clearly biased the vote--you could only vote one way. To my everlasting discredit, I managed to get it biased the other way. [Laughter]

AL: Do you feel it was biased in the final presentation.

Siri: Of course it was. [Laughter]

AL: It definitely was the first time.

Siri: Well, yes. There was no way but one that you could have voted on the way that Eissler had framed it the first time. But he overlooked a couple of things, again making a terrible tactical error, because if he hadn't made that tactical error I couldn't have done a thing about it. The way they worded the petition was, "Check one of these: A. I desire the Sierra Club to urge that Diablo Canyon remain unaltered pending the outcome of comprehensive shoreline master-planning conducted during the club's proposed moratorium on siting of power plants at coastal locations of scenic recreational worth." The other part, B, is, "I favor the construction of power generating plants in the Diablo Canyon region, pursuant to the board resolution." If you were a club member sitting out there, how would you have voted on that?

AL: And no mention of Nipomo Dunes. Now tell us how it got change .

Siri: I pointed out that I thought this was so clearly biased, that one could vote only one way on the petition as it was presented; that that wasn't what was at issue; and furthermore, the board had the power to frame the question on the ballot, as stated in the bylaws, which I happened to have with me at the time: "In all questions as to the construction or meaning of the bylaws and the rules of the club, the decision of the board of directors shall be final unless rescinded by vote of the club as provided in these preceding articles." Which meant that the board could frame the question, and in fact did.

AL: Had that ever been used before? Was that something you discovered yourself?

Siri: I don't really recall, although I must confess I did look at the bylaws pretty carefully, because the form of the petition was so deviously slanted, and so I proposed another phrasing for the petition. I used the argument that first of all the board had the power to do this--frame the question to be put to the vote of the membership, and this is spelled out in the bylaws; and second, that my proposed wording followed the normal course in Robert's Rules of Order--for example, if there is an appeal to the chairman, or an appeal from the decision of the chair, the chair phrases the question to be put to the vote on appeal, "Shall the position of the chair be sustained?" not the other way around.

This is clearly what was at issue here--the board had a position, and the question was shall that position be sustained. And incidentally, throughout all of this, we had to tighten up on use of Robert's Rules of Order, because meetings were getting out of hand constantly; it would have been utter chaos. And so the question to be put on the ballot was now to read as "The Sierra Club reaffirms its policy that Nipomo Dunes shall be preserved unimpaired for scenic and recreational use under state management and considers Diablo Canyon, San Luis Obispo County, a satisfactory alternative site to the Nipomo Dunes for the construction of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company generating facility, provided that" etc., etc. Then hours and hours were spent in debating that, with Litton and Eissler trying desperately to amend it, to disarm it, and failing. The resolution passed, and this is the way it went on the ballot in April, 1967.

AL: Now you say that this one was biased also.

Siri: Well, in the sense that it frames the question in a way that weights it toward the existing policy of the board, as Robert's Rules of Order does too when the chair is challenged. So it was completely consistent with these conventional practices. I'll admit that it slants it towards the existing policy. I'm still not convinced that it should be otherwise. When a position is taken and somebody

Siri: challenges it, the proper question is "shall the board or the authority be sustained?" If you don't want to sustain it, then vote against it. The proper question is not, "I favor the construction of power generating plants." Well, nobody favors the construction of power generating plants--nobody whatever, and there's no way you can vote to sustain the club policy with that wording. In any event, it did come to a vote of the membership [April 8, 1967], and the vote in support of the board was overwhelming. It was 11,000 to 5,000--11,000 supporting the club's position, and 5,000 opposed.

AL: You mentioned the half-Bulletin. Can you tell us more about that?

Siri: The board had decided that prior to the 1967 referendum arguments pro and con would be published in the Bulletin because by that time there was a major controversy raging through the club. They received material from Litton and Eissler, and hadn't gotten material by the deadline from Ansel Adams and me, and then proceeded immediately to publish the Bulletin [February, 1967] with what they had, which was one side of the issue, and with a cover that was a clear distortion of the whole issue--a cover that showed something like this [refers to final Sierra Club Bulletin, February, 1967] but clearly distorted so that it would present at a glance a clear impression that you must oppose Diablo Canyon, and that Nipomo Dunes could be sacrificed.

AL: Was this a map similar to this one [on the cover of the February, 1967 Bulletin]?

Siri: Somewhat like that, but the cover was a map in which there were gross distortions--I've forgotten just how that was. The first people who saw it, who were involved or knew something about the issue, were outraged when they saw it, even if they were not fully committed. It was a deliberate, conscious effort to sway the membership by a wholly one-sided view of the issue.

RL: You feel that they should have delayed publication until the opposing arguments had been submitted?

Siri: Oh, yes. They should have made other changes also--starting with the cover, which outraged a great many people, members of the board, particularly, and also some of the leaders in the chapters, who knew the controversy and had kept current with it. The reaction was immediate and widespread. Dave succeeded in that one act in alienating a great many people straightaway. The act was intentional, clearly, and everyone perceived it as a devious, unfair tactic. I suspect Dave's confidence in the power of the words and pictures convinced him that if he got this thing out without opposing arguments in it that it would carry the day; it could be only the fault of the people preparing the counter-arguments that they weren't included. In fact he said that, as I recall, in the half-Bulletin--they hadn't

Siri: been received and therefore the Bulletin was being published. This was hardly convincing to members because the Bulletin was traditionally late, sometimes by a month or more, and our material was received only a day or two late.

AL: I've heard the charge that the failure to submit a timely argument was an intentional political tactic as well. Would you comment on this?

Siri: It decidedly was not. There would have been no tactical advantage in doing so. The simple truth is that I am a wretchedly slow writer and had great difficulty writing the piece for the Bulletin. I then had to send it to Ansel Adams for his suggestions and approval and have it reviewed by others. Time simply ran out, and I was late by a day or two.

AL: Did Dave write the introduction to the half-Bulletin?

Siri: I can't recall. I don't seem to have a copy of the half-Bulletin here to check. My copy is probably in the files I turned over to Bancroft Library.

AL: What about his argument that, because of the delay in the submission of other arguments, the Bulletin wouldn't reach the members before the election? Was that valid?

Siri: No. It was characteristic of the many specious arguments that were advanced, I admit, on both sides. As is always the case in a controversy of this sort, you use any pretext or any slim argument you can to gain any little bit of ground in your position. Many of the arguments were simply not sound, and often were totally unfounded or perverse, yet they had to be countered in one way or another. The whole question became clouded in misinformation and omissions of information that made it very difficult for people to make a judgment solely on the merits of the case.

AL: Did you find that their argument as presented in the half-Bulletin--the opposing side's argument--was unfounded? It's not presented with the flair that you would connect with Dave Brower; I don't think he wrote it.

Siri: I'm sure he didn't write it, because I thought it was badly done.

AL: In 1969 when they brought it up again, it was presented much better; he may have written that.

Siri: That could be. Oh, this is the thing I wrote.* It probably isn't any better. But whether this had any influence or not, this is what

*"In Defense of a Victory: The Nipomo Dunes," William E. Siri and Ansel Adams, Sierra Club Bulletin, February, 1967.

- Siri: was published after the half-Bulletin, when the board insisted in no uncertain terms that the arguments would be published in a new issue.
- AL: Was that sort of a dramatic moment? I understand it was at a board meeting that it was discovered.
- Siri: Its appearance was like setting off a bomb. I've rarely seen people so outraged as they were then; even those who supported Eissler and Litton were distressed by it.

Assessments and Afterthoughts

- AL: Do you want to assess somewhat Kathy Jackson's role? Did she tend to provide accurate information over all?
- Siri: Yes. Kathy really spearheaded the whole effort, starting with the Nipomo Dunes. She was totally dedicated to the dunes. Almost every weekend she took groups out into the dunes. She had all the newspapers lined up; she took the reporters and publishers out in the dunes. She arranged special affairs of one sort or another. She was a vigorous, almost overwhelming champion of the Nipomo Dunes, and this was the way the rest of us became interested in the dunes.
- AL: It seems from reading the material in your papers that there was some opposition to her personally, locally. Is that the case?
- Siri: Yes, I think this was a personality problem, because Kathy was an extremely assertive person. I had great admiration for Kathy, but I can see there was a difference in my position relative to hers, as compared to that of others. She was a prolific writer. She wrote for the papers, correspondence in great volumes, and she was a tireless investigator. She was like an investigative reporter, only with a level of diligence that I guess just drove people wild. But you know, it's that sort of energy that makes things go and gets results.

She was just incredibly good, except that she tended to come on so strong that it often exhausted other, lesser mortals, and they found it sometimes difficult to take. I mean she was insistent; she was driving; she was organized, productive and all of those good things; but to such an extreme that I guess she tended to turn off some people.

- AL: She seemed to have a really friendly relationship to this Ken Diercks--a lot of meetings at her home and a great deal of correspondence.

Siri: Part of Ken Diercks' job, of course, was to establish some kind of relationship with the Sierra Club and local citizen groups in the area, and he went about this with great skill, and generally with surprising candor. He was kind of a rough stone, but he conveyed the impression, which I think was sincere, that he was trying to be honest in his dealings with us. He would lay out PG&E's reactions to our moves and ask what do we do next? I don't think he tried to conceal anything, but on the other hand he was very effective in dealing with the opposition and in rounding up political support. He was skillful at his job. What I suppose made Diercks credible, was his willingness to look for solutions; for example, when we said initially, "We don't want the plant in the Nipomo Dunes. Go away, find another place," he said, "All right, we'll go up and down the coast and look for other sites, and we'll come back and consult you about them." The company proceeded to do this even though I suspect it could have prevailed at Nipomo Dunes if it made a determined stand. This, I think, lent a measure of credibility to Diercks for us. He was in contact with Kathy because Kathy was the task leader for the Nipomo Dunes. He had often to see her about details of the endless problems.

AL: Was there any question, as you look back, that she, or the club in general, was too drawn in to PG&E's problems, by becoming so close with Diercks and getting involved with PG&E's thinking? Did you take on some things that maybe were their responsibility?

Siri: That's possible but I don't think so. I was acutely aware of this hazard at the time. I think in one of the earlier discussions we talked about the question of tactics and basic philosophy. Should the Sierra Club engage in negotiating with the enemy? There's always been a strong feeling in the club, exemplified by Martin Litton and Dave Brower, and on many occasions by myself, that: no, we should determine the facts as fairly as we could, then take a position and not negotiate a position, or never be put in a position where we would agree to the siting of a facility or a road or whatnot.

On the other hand, there was also an equally long tradition starting with John Muir, that said in effect, whenever possible when presented with a conservation/environmental problem let's also find and propose alternatives that would serve the purpose of the threatening development but solves the environmental or conservation problem. Both of these practices had run parallel throughout the whole club's history, and the choice in each case varied from situation to situation, depending on who was involved and what the nature of the issue was. There has not been a rigid adherence to a doctrine, but rather the practice of two doctrines. Dave Brower, for example, used both with equal facility.

AL: Is that still the case?

Siri: I think it is, yes. I think that again and again the club will find that it's tactically the wise thing to investigate and propose alternatives, and there'll be other situations that call for flat-out opposition, with no consideration of alternatives. By and large in recent years, and this goes back to the time when I was president, we tended more toward the latter course. We simply adopted positions and let the chips fall where they may. Diablo Canyon was a case where that did not happen, and it may be that we became too concerned over the threat to Nipomo Dunes. I don't know; the answer to that will have to be determined by history, and even then it'll have to be a value judgment.

AL: You don't know what would have happened otherwise.

Siri: We don't know what would have happened otherwise. One can speculate, but I think we would have lost the dunes, if we had. We could save Nipomo Dunes by an exchange of sites, but I don't think at that time we could have kept the power plants out of the county and away from the coast. This was our best assessment of circumstances at the time. What we wanted most was to preserve the Nipomo Dunes, and the chances of doing that seemed pretty slim at the time, until PG&E finally agreed that if they could find another site they would not build on the property in Nipomo Dunes, and they would not sell it to anybody but the state for park purposes. So the question at that time on the siting of power plants hadn't reached the point of development that it did only a few years later when the club generally took the position that you shouldn't site any power plants--shouldn't site any facilities--on the coast.

AL: Just one more question, about Kathy Jackson. Is she still active?

Siri: No, after the Nipomo Dunes battle, or more particularly after the Diablo Canyon battle, Kathy continued to work on the dunes for, I guess, a couple of years, trying diligently to get the Department of Parks and Recreation to acquire the land. That was a very slow process, and then gradually Kathy took a less and less active role. In recent years we've seen very little of her. She hasn't shown up at meetings, and I haven't seen her. I think she remarried and apparently settled down again.

AL: She must have some outlet for her energies.

Siri: Oh, I'm sure she has; she'd almost have to.

AL: Is there anything that should be said about the process by which Nipomo Dunes eventually became a state park? Was it just the standard, slow negotiations? Did the club take a role in that?

Siri: Yes, we constantly pushed the parks department and Bill Mott to accelerate the acquisition. There was for some time a shortage of funds for acquisition because of competing demands for park acquisitions around the state. At that time the Santa Monica Mountains particularly was a pressing issue because of the intrusion of developments there, and the need for immediate purchase of land for state parks. Since southern California has more votes than San Luis Obispo County, Mott was hard pressed in setting up a list of acquisition priorities. San Luis Obispo County swung little political weight; hence, the purchase of the PG&E Nipomo Dunes property did not move as rapidly as it might have. The only real pressure he had on him was the Sierra Club.

AL: So eventually Nipomo Dunes was purchased and made a state park. Was there a relationship between the Diablo Canyon controversy and the development of the club's policy on siting power plants and on nuclear power?

Siri: I have no doubt whatever that it had a very strong influence on the club's subsequent attitude on siting, and possibly on nuclear power, although I'm not so sure about the latter. I think there were other elements involved in the question of nuclear development, because the club did not take a position against nuclear energy, and it still hasn't so far as I know, that is on nuclear energy per se, although most of the active people in the club are clearly opposed to nuclear energy. The issue of nuclear energy did not come up seriously until the early seventies. On the other hand, the question of siting was taken up immediately by the club after the Diablo Canyon affair, and several resolutions were passed opposing any further sitings on the coast.

AL: In fact, also on nuclear power right at the same time, in May, 1966, there was a motion that the Sierra Club should conduct studies to determine a basic policy on nuclear and other power, so they were thinking about it at least, thinking about gathering information.

Siri: Yes, that's right, but nothing really was done for the next five years or more. I think a number of resolutions were passed, but they were primarily siting questions. And of course, an energy policy was gradually developed. I guess I wrote the first basic overall energy policy, and this was adopted by the club.

AL: Yes. We plan to discuss that more fully later. Let's go back to the Nipomo Dunes for a minute. We've more or less discussed it through the referendum in 1967--the Diablo Canyon controversy and the defeat of the referendum, but it continued on for two more years. There was another referendum in 1969. Is there anything else to add, or is it so intertwined with the Brower controversy that you want to talk about it in terms of the developing split in the club?

Siri: It became part of the general internal turmoil the club was going through at that time, and it became for a time a central issue on which the two forces in the club tended to focus their differences. But it wasn't the only issue; it probably wasn't the decisive one either--it became just one of a number of issues that emerged as the alignments on Brower's activities hardened. It became something like a heated election campaign--a lot of noise about issues that after the election you forget about.

AL: So it took on more significance, you think.

Siri: Oh yes, no question about it.

AL: Let me ask one other question, then maybe we'll talk more about some of these other issues. What was the staff position during this period?

Siri: Oh, the staff vigorously supported Eissler and Litton because Dave Brower did. The staff uniformly supported Dave. He would hardly have tolerated someone who didn't.

AL: Would they go against the actual board policy in public?

Siri: Sometimes this was done.

AL: How about Mike McCloskey? How did he fit in during this time?

Siri: Well, Mike is a very astute politician. He saw to it that he was not deeply involved one way or the other, but stayed somewhat aloof from the whole proceeding.

AL: That must have been hard to do.

Siri: Well, I would presume that it takes considerable innate skill to do this, and he possessed it. He came through it all without a blemish, and you have to hand it to a man who can do that in the midst of that much turmoil.

AL: Was he on good terms with Brower as well?

Siri: I think so, yes. Mike never offended Brower, and he didn't offend the board. He was just a very able guy who had decided that he would simply not take part in the controversies.

IX DAVID BROWER AND THE SIERRA CLUB: AN INEVITABLE SCHISM

[Interviews 5 & 6: May 3, 1976, July 6, 1976]

Pyramiding Problems: Finances, Administration, Authority

- AL: We were going to move from the Diablo Canyon issue into the whole Brower controversy. What's a good way of approaching that? It's such a mass of different threads that seem to come together.
- Siri: In his youth Dave had been a very active Sierra Club member, particularly in climbing and outings. In 1941 he became a member of the board. By 1950, it became apparent the club needed staffing, and in 1952 Dick Leonard and some of the old timers asked Brower to come on as an executive director, a position he took, leaving his job as an editor with the University of California Press.
- AL: Was this a position he sort of created for himself, or was it another person's idea?
- Siri: I don't really know. I vaguely recall that he had something to do with helping to create the position. He was a very imaginative person and saw a need for it. I don't know that he necessarily saw himself in that position, although that's altogether possible because he left U.C. Press by mutual agreement at about that time.

The club's internal problems began in the early sixties when Dave began to assert himself in a progressively more independent fashion, first in the publications program and then in conservation activities, and the club's financial affairs. Dave grew impatient with the board, which he felt was too often an impediment to his efforts. He felt that he needed more support, and when the kinds of support that he felt he needed were not forthcoming, he proceeded more and more to act independently. He would make costly commitments and then report to the board. As time passed, he often failed to report significant, and especially expensive, actions, which the president and executive committee would learn about to their dismay.

AL: You're talking about policy or financial--?

Siri: I'm talking about financial problems he generated and major actions he would sometimes take without authorization. For example, when the advertisements got off to a start, I think he did not always inform Wayburn, who was president at the time, of how much they would cost or what was going to go into the ad. It is true, of course, that Wayburn later approved every picture, caption, and word that went into the redwoods ad, because this was something that he was very close to. On the Grand Canyon ads, no. In any event, Dave felt that any and all assets of the club should be available to expend on important causes, even if it strained the club. The causes were so important that we shouldn't worry about things like money; we should simply go out and get some more.

AL: He felt that you could have more imaginative fund raising?

Siri: He felt that, yes, among other things. When questioned about expenditures he constantly answered, "Don't worry, it'll come from somewhere. It's always come from somewhere before, let's not worry about it today because we'll lose the Grand Canyon or we'll lose the redwoods or the North Cascades, and we can't wait." And so he would move, sometimes very rapidly, and apparently with little serious doubt about the ultimate consequences for the club or the reactions he created. In any event, Dave's growing extravagance and the mounting cost of the publications program--the Exhibit Format books--and the way in which Dave conducted the business of the club gradually began to alarm many of the members of the board and the council and the club leadership generally. There was a growing concern about the financial health of the club, and whether Dave was exceeding the authority that an executive director should ever have.

AL: We have so many strands here: the exceeding of authority, the dealings with public agencies, financial and publications. I guess the financial problems and publications were connected.

Siri: The publications program was not the only financial problem that was involved. Dave would bring more and more people on the staff, which the club could not afford at that time. The publications program was a brilliant effort and a critical success, except that the books were not paying for themselves because of the way the publications program was managed, which was largely Dave Brower overseeing every little detail. Even though he had a fairly sizable staff by that time, he had to approve everything--the color, the printing, binding, and all the rest--and so he spent more and more time away from San Francisco. By the time I was president, or about mid-term, he was spending half of his time on the east coast and

Siri: abroad, and this generated some problems too. There was inadequate management of the club and staff, and the San Francisco office was gradually becoming a little chaotic.

AL: Who was the second in command?

Siri: [Pause] There really was nobody in second command to Dave Brower. But he had a couple of very loyal people--the editor of the Bulletin at that time, Hugh Nash, and the man he had in publications, John Schanhaar who was really the advertising manager, and maybe one or two other people on the staff.

Let's see if we can bring all these threads together then. There were the growing financial strains. There was a management problem, both in publications and the club generally. There was the exercise of authority exceeding that which members, chapters, and the board felt the executive director should exercise, and a tendency to disregard the board and to alienate the council. He did tell me in confidence a number of times when I talked with him, "We can't wait for the board. We'll do it now because it has to be done now, and we'll worry about the board later."

But you can do that only so long before it begins to generate all kinds of animosities and difficulties. Dave never quite sensed where that stopping point was, and he just proceeded at a faster and faster pace, both in jeopardizing the club's financial position and in producing more staff than we could afford, and not being able to manage it really well or adequately, and in taking unilateral actions that the board and club leaders felt were more and more out of keeping both with the club and with its aims.

AL: Do you want to be specific on some of those unilateral actions? I know there were things like placement of the ad in the New York Times. That came right towards the end.

Siri: Let me see if I can. The ads were but one--it was a more visible kind of thing. The additions of staff that were not authorized, the expenditures on books that were not always authorized, or proceeding with new titles before the publications committee made a decision--proceeding so far down the road with commitments that there was no choice left.

AL: You were on the publications committee at that time?

Siri: Yes.

AL: Were the Galapagos books an example of this?

Siri: Yes, the Galapagos books were a case in point. There were several others, too. Sensing that he might have difficulty getting them approved, he proceeded with them, and having spent \$25,000 and committed the club heavily beyond that, there was no way of turning back. All we could do was approve it. There were a number of books of this kind. Most of them sales failures and later remaindered and written off. In this way he effectively circumvented the publications committee and the board.

Pure Ideals and a Fatal Flaw

AL: What would you say that his motives were? Often you could say his devotion to conservation was such that he felt he had to move on, but in the case of the books, would you say that was his motivation also?

Siri: I don't question Dave's motives for a moment. He felt that he was doing the right thing. I'm sure he felt that the board was a drag on him and that he was the one person in the club who was doing something that was effective, and that if it weren't for him the whole club would collapse as a driving conservation force. Dave, I know, was convinced of this. He saw no one on the board or in the club generally who he felt was a person of such stature that they could substitute for him. He felt that he provided the drive, the initiative, the creative effort that he was convinced was essential.

His motives were absolutely pure, so pure that they couldn't exist in the real world, quite literally. He was a man who I don't think understood people very well, in fact I don't think he understood them at all. He understood issues, he understood conservation, perhaps like no one else, except Thoreau and Muir. This led him into all kinds of problems in trying to deal with organizations and particularly an organization like the Sierra Club where there weren't many followers. They were all leaders. It is by nature an elitist organization, and everyone wanted to play a role, wanted a part in the action. They weren't eager to see one man dominating the whole scene and doing things often that they didn't agree to or approve of, or that appeared to usurp the volunteer's role in the club.

The Sierra Club doesn't really like leaders of that kind. Everyone regards himself as a leader, I suppose, and in large measure this is fairly true. It's an activist organization and consists of activists, all in their own right. But because Dave didn't understand management of an organization, because he had the kind of personality that doesn't fit into a structure of that kind, because of his very loose regard for the financial problems that were

Siri: developing, it had to lead eventually to a schism; this was inevitable. It was only a matter of time whether it was one year or the next year.

AL: When did you begin to see this happening?

Siri: Not until after my term as president. I sat on the publications committee; I sat on most of the committees, and was aware of what was going on. While I was president and for a time afterwards, I argued with the other members of the board, "Look, Dave is a highly gifted person, and we have got to take some risks, but let's let it run as far as it can before decisive action has to be taken. Maybe Dave will adjust." I didn't really believe this, but I thought it was worth running the risk as far as we could carry it, knowing perfectly well that a time would come when the situation would resolve itself, perhaps in the kind of catastrophic way that it did.

AL: You told us about your meeting with him after you took over the presidency. Even at that time did you foresee that--?

Siri: Oh, yes. In fact I told him this at the time. It was shortly after I became president I had him up here, and we discussed it. I told him frankly what I felt the problems were going to be. I said I would support him as long as it was possible, recognizing that there were risks, that up to the point where it threatened the integrity of the club, I would give him my full support, and I did during the time I was president. In fact it took a lot of persuasion at times with the rest of the board and sometimes a pretty heavy hand to settle some of the problems that came up. I thought it was worth the risk still at that time. Okay, so there were transgressions of various kinds, if they don't do serious damage and if on balance they have advanced the conservation cause we have gained. To a point, it seemed to me less important what the organization was than what the organization does.

AL: So you were willing to let him exceed his authority.

Siri: That's right. But then there had to be a fine judgment sometimes as to whether this, if it continued to grow, would endanger the club; whether it would endanger its integrity or financial health. That didn't come until some time later and it became quite clear that a schism was progressing in an irreversible fashion to some kind of decisive conclusion, where it would be impossible for Dave to stay in the club.

AL: Was it the financial strain that you felt was coming to a head, or was it just the growing opposition?

- Siri: It was both. You can't separate these things; they're all part and parcel of the whole. There was a political alignment within the club that was growing; there were the financial problems that were growing rapidly and threatening--quite seriously threatening--the club's welfare. There were the problems of management of the club and the possibility of growing ineffectualness, both on Dave's part and the club, because of all of this. It was a complex mixture of things; it wasn't a single episode; it wasn't a single transgression or a misuse of funds; it was something that grew like a rolling snowball.
- AL: So you can't point to one most important issue.
- Siri: No. It's like believing that the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand or whoever it was, started World War I--I mean, it's not quite that simple.
- RL: Again, without meaning to impugn his motives here, but did Brower incur inordinately large personal expenses in these publications ventures--travel, entertainment, that kind of thing, to publicize the books?
- Siri: That question came up from time to time. Dave just did not like to submit travel expense accounts. As financial problems grew more severe, we were compelled to ask him to turn in an expense account for a whole year, and he actually finally did it. It was pretty generous. Dave always liked to travel first class, and in fact this came up at a board meeting or publications committee meeting. He explained that he was traveling with the books or layouts or whatnot, and he needed space--I couldn't personally quarrel with this.
- AL: I think this grated on the grassroots level.
- Siri: It very well could have, yes, because he stayed at good hotels, and he practically lived in hotels, so his expenses were running high, and I'm sure this was something that many of the board members and club members resented. I couldn't personally get terribly exercised over it, unless there were the possibility that he was somehow benefiting personally from the club, and I could never see any evidence of this; I don't think Dave was capable of it.
- AL: What about the conflict over his granting himself royalties?
- Siri: Well, yes, there were a few small things of that sort [laughter]. He also granted himself some other small benefits from time to time. His management of the travel money was I think a case in point, but it was nothing expansive or mean. He wasn't preparing to run off to Rio de Janeiro with the club's assets or something of that sort.

- AL: On that case of the ten percent royalties, there seemed to be quite an amusing interchange when Brower defended his attempt to obtain royalties on books he had edited for the club [Executive Committee meeting, June 8, 1968].
- Siri: That's right, that was one of the more amusing episodes, although I don't know that everybody regarded it as amusing. It was the first news of it--Dave never talked to any of us about that; he just wrote himself into the contracts without ever consulting anyone. Here again he made a mistake. It's conceivable that it might even have been granted to him, though I think probably not.
- AL: When you say he made a mistake, is this again sort of a lack of knowledge of people?
- Siri: Yes. He should have known perfectly well that he couldn't get away with it, and that the last thing to do is to try something like that that looks so sinister, so completely divisive, and so self-serving. Well, it may have been all of these things, but I think in Dave's mind, he saw himself as creating these books. You know, they wouldn't exist if it weren't for Dave. It wasn't just a photographer coming in and producing a big book--he did a lot of the writing, he did all the editing, he selected the photos. I know he felt entitled to some kind of recognition in the sense of receiving some of the benefits of the book.

He just took this for granted, and he realized that if he'd come first to the board or the publications committee they would have said, "No, you're paid to do that job; that's what you're paid to do, as you would be if you worked for the U.C. Press or any other organization." And so he didn't ask, he just did it, and it came to our attention quite by accident while someone was reviewing the contract. But it was one of the many things of this sort that he did that would come to the attention of the club officers sooner or later, and under those circumstances the information was received with outrage. Generally it was an inappropriate act, and in the case of the royalty, wrong, according to convention and general practice.

- AL: Did those things amuse you at the time or were you as upset about them as other people seem to have been?
- Siri: I was upset to the extent of thinking, "My god, damn fool, you should have discussed it with somebody in advance," and I faulted him on doing something just stupid. Dave isn't a stupid person except about other people, and this was a very stupid thing to do. So were some of his other acts. I was disappointed and annoyed that he did it, but I also gave him points for trying [laughter]. I really had to laugh over that one. And then what was funnier was Dave's straight-faced attempt at justifying his position.

Staff vs. Volunteer Member

- AL: Did the Sierra Club Council take an active role in Dave's eventual demise?
- Siri: Yes.
- AL: What was their main concern, would you say?
- Siri: There appeared to be two concerns in the council. One was the question of the club's financial health, which the council became extremely exercised about, almost as much as the board and other members of the club. And the other was the question of the dominating leadership that Dave was exercising at the time. Dave had little patience with the council, and they knew this, of course. It was just another obstacle in his way. Perhaps they were. On the other hand, it was a club in which members participate, and they wanted a council that governed internal affairs of the club. It is an integral part of the institution. Dave didn't quite appreciate this. In any event, those were two issues on which the council was disturbed--the uncontrollability of Dave, and his little regard for the council and their wishes.
- AL: Were there specific issues there as well?
- Siri: Yes. Many of them tended to revolve around financial questions. The council became fairly sensitive to Dave's defiance of the board, and if they were going to align themselves, it would naturally be with the board, I would think. Then it became a question of staff vs. volunteer member, and this became a dominating issue throughout the whole controversy. That is, the council particularly, but club members generally, were not going to have an uncontrolled leader, even if a genius, as the head of staff. The question of staff vs. volunteer member was really a major issue, and it was largely on this ground, I think, that Dave was finally voted out. They just didn't want that kind of leader in the club, that is, one who could dominate and ignore them.
- AL: You would think he would appreciate this feeling, since he came up also through the volunteer ranks.
- Siri: That has nothing to do with it. Dave, who is a totally dedicated conservationist, was doing what he thought needed to be done. The question of leadership was a secondary matter. No one else was doing it, he had to do it; or he felt that no one else was, and he had to. He wasn't thinking of it in terms of "Was this a club of volunteer activists, and therefore I should adjust myself to it?" No, his eyes were straight ahead and not looking on either side.

AL: Do you think he was surprised that the club continued to be so vital after he left?

Siri: I haven't any idea; I don't know.

AL: From what you described, you would think his view would be that he would think it would completely fall apart without him.

Siri: I would guess that he might have felt that the club would suffer severely with his departure--the man had an ego, obviously. What other thought could a large ego entertain than that the club would not function as well without him? He never understood that no one is indispensable in an organization like that. Some will drive it a little better or worse than others, but it will survive, because it's like an ant colony--everybody in it is busy working very hard.

Dave didn't always appreciate this I think--that a lot of the activity of the club didn't come out of the San Francisco office. That was the stuff that made the press mainly, but the mass of the club effort was conducted by its members at the chapter and regional levels. Here were totally dedicated volunteers in chapters working like mad, working diligently day in and day out, but not making headlines, not making great innovative splashes that had high visibility but being highly effective. This is where the club has always been extremely effective.

I don't think Dave ever appreciated this; in fact, he often regarded chapters and the council--and of course the board--as just impediments. They were always in the way; they were always demanding something. They were even demanding some of the funds at times to cover their efforts [laughter]. And this was ridiculous--how could these little chapters effectively use the monies that he needed to see his big campaigns through and get the publications program on the road? He felt that what he was doing would solve all these problems.

AL: One of the explanations or threads I've heard tied into the Brower affair is the element of generation gap, and even the issue of the Vietnam war and the connection between the Brower affair and the turmoil of the times.

Siri: Oh, that's possible, I suppose, but I don't think that was a legitimate cause. I think it was dragged in--what else could you say in the mid-sixties? It's got to affect everything, but I don't really think it was all that significant. That's a personal assessment, but I don't really quite know where it was involved, because the main elements of the controversy were quite clear and really had nothing to do with a generation gap or with a change in attitudes. There was a younger element that tended to follow Dave,

Siri: yes; Dave took positions on other issues, like Vietnam, but this had little or nothing to do with the club's internal dissensions.

AL: He did take positions on Vietnam?

Siri: Not in the name of the club, no. But he always was extremely liberal, supported extremely liberal causes, but then that wasn't unusual--I can't say Dave is any more radical than I was. I always held extremely liberal positions; I was opposed to the Vietnam war before the French moved out. I think some of the rest were too.

AL: Was there a petition circulated at the board of directors' meeting regarding Vietnam at one time?

Siri: I'm not sure; I have only the haziest recollection that this might have been the case, but I don't remember the occasion.

Dave was a person who I later felt should not have to be responsible to an organization. He was not an organization man in that sense. He should have been sponsored; that is, given a budget of a million dollars a year and told, "Dave, this is it. There isn't a cent more than that, but you have that much, go ahead and run. Do whatever you think is best." This would have been his role, mainly as an individual with a few followers, a few totally devout followers. This is what he's tended to have--a few very devout followers in the club and out of it. But that was about it. But he should never have been put in a position where he had to run something or be responsible to others or to an organization--particularly an organization where there are a lot of bright people who are also very active leaders who wanted to participate.

With Dave that wasn't easy unless you were a follower, unless you tended to show quite clearly that you were a devotee of Brower and the issues and saw things the way he did. That doesn't mean that he wouldn't get into strong arguments and debate over an issue with his followers. He expected that, and he would often change his mind on points at issue in such a discussion with, say, Martin Litton or Eissler, or Hugh Nash or one of the others. But when it came right down to it, it was still Dave Brower who was the leader.

Attempts at Financial Control, 1966-68

AL: Shall we discuss some of the specific conflicts that led to Brower's resignation?

Siri: All right, if we do then we need to go back a few years preceding his resignation. Do you want to do that, or how do you want to proceed?

AL: Well, I was focusing on the most recent ones, but if there's something you feel should be discussed earlier, I think you should.

Siri: There aren't many specific things before about 1966 that I can recall. The publications program had gotten well underway, but it was beginning to generate financial strains; it was just growing too rapidly. The whole publications program was evolved by and about Dave. He was always a step ahead of the publications committee and the board, and of course our finances as well. It cost about \$80,000 to produce an Exhibit Format book and Dave was determined to publish four a year. He started off with a black and white book, Ansel Adams's book, This is the American Earth, which was a success, both critically and financially. Then the program began to gather momentum. He went into color, and this became substantially more expensive, not only because of the color but because costs generally were beginning to rise.

He then broadened his scope. He left the traditional issues--that is, wilderness in the United States and more particularly in the West--and went to wilderness areas in other parts of the country and then overseas for interesting subjects. He saw conservation on a global scale, and this is what he had in mind for the books.

He attempted to build up the publications program to four titles a year--that is, four Exhibit Format books a year, plus numerous smaller books--although he was never able to keep that schedule. One of the chief problems was failure to publish books on time. It was critically important that they be published in the early fall, preferably no later than October, but he was too often late with the books. They didn't come out until December or January and completely missed the Christmas sales period.

Unless the books make the Christmas sales, they're going to run substantial losses, because the next year round they're old titles. You then have to have a new title to drag it along. And so we got into a vicious circle where Dave was never able to bring books in on time and then needed a new title to help spur sales of the first title. If you had a book scheduled for the spring it would come out in the summer or fall. The whole program was just poorly managed. He wasn't a good business manager. He was not a good administrator; it was not one of his strengths.

Most of the assets of the club were being used up very quickly by Brower in expanding the books program. He was devoting about half his time to it and was gradually spending more and more of his time away from San Francisco in developing the books, searching for ideas, getting books printed, wet-nursing the preparation of the books and moving very fast not only around the country but more and more overseas as time passed.

Siri: In the mid-sixties Brower began to make some shortcuts in his arrangements for books, and also some other activities--the advertisements, for example, but most particularly in the book program. He would often commit the club to considerable expenditures without consulting anyone--the president, or the executive committee, or even the rest of the staff for that matter. So by September of 1966 I proposed a set of administrative procedures to try to bring the whole problem of finances under some kind of control. This was a set of procedures that I drafted that called for the use of purchase orders and contracts for books or any other arrangements the club would have; and specified authorizations that would be required for expenditures--who should be consulted and who could authorize expenditures above certain amounts.

These were adopted by the board, and this was, I suppose, the first action by the board to institute administrative procedures that would bring order out of what was then just the beginnings of the insipient chaos that was to develop as the next year or two passed. These procedures were adopted with the specific idea of compelling Dave to adhere to some kind of orderly procedure so we and the staff would know where we stood from time to time, and that the commitments he had in the name of the club were consistent with club policy, the budget, and club resources.

AL: Would you say these were sort of standard operating procedures for a large organization?

Siri: Yes. I don't think there was anything novel in them. They were tailored to the Sierra Club and our particular circumstances; however, they were not as detailed or demanding as most business organizations would require.

AL: They weren't terribly restrictive?

Siri: No, they were not that restrictive, but they did demand adherence to some kind of minimum procedures, including use of purchase orders.

AL: Didn't you also make some attempt to remove Brower from the business management?

Siri: Yes. In May, 1967, I cooked up a scheme to separate the publications program. By that time the club was in desperate straits. We had a negative net worth, I think, of about \$200,000, and we had to find a way out of the situation. One of the schemes that I proposed was to separate publications from the Sierra Club, appoint a board of directors for a subsidiary publishing organization and move Dave to New York, which we all regarded--and Dave did too--as the center of the publishing world. Since he was spending at least half of his time there already, we'd set up the office there, and the publications program would then have to survive or fail essentially as a business.

Siri: I proposed that everything the club had put into the program be turned over to a publications organization, which would still be an arm of the Sierra Club. By that time there was something close to \$800,000 invested in the books program. These were the club's assets, and most of that was now in the form of publications inventory. I thought perhaps the cleanest thing to do would be set up a separate organization, and have Dave run it with a board of directors or a steering committee or whatever it might call for, and try to make a go of it. It was my hope that he would succeed when confronted with the realities of trying to run publications as a business. To survive it would need to be run as a business.

What he was doing now was engaging in some fiendishly clever schemes to support the publications program--like advance billing of membership dues; the wilderness books program, where members would pay \$200 in advance and then receive books of their choice in later years. These schemes improved current cash flow but at the expense of borrowing against future income. He also transferred funds from one thing to another, disguising publications bills as something else, often as conservation. There were all kinds of schemes to keep it going, and what it meant, of course, was that everything in the club was subsidizing the publications program.

The only thing he wasn't able to touch was outings. The outings committee was a closely knit, separate group, and they weren't having any of it. But he was draining the assets of the club and putting its future in hock. He wanted to put up the club's lands for sale and hock the furniture, do whatever was necessary to keep the program expanding. At that time the publications program was growing at thirty percent per year. That meant a lot of new capital each year that had to go into it, and there wasn't that kind of capital around. And so it was only a matter of time before the club just sank under the weight of debt.

AL: Did he see this proposal that you made as an attempt to sort of harness him on conservation, or did his followers interpret it ideologically rather than just financially?

Siri: Dave felt that this would hamper him.

AL: It would take him out of conservation except insofar as the books promote conservation, but your motive, as I understand it, from the way you've talked, was not to harness him?

Siri: No. It was an attempt to avert incipient failure of the publications program and bankruptcy of the club. The club had to survive. It would also put Dave in a position so that he could still work with the club, but the whole thing would be under better control. It would not be just an individual running the whole show pretty much

Siri: as he felt at the moment, but I saw still the possibility of having Dave actively involved in the club conservation battles, but removed just enough so that he wasn't draining everything from the club-- staff, resources, everything else--into the publications program. He simply couldn't manage the other affairs of the club.

By that time feelings were running quite strong throughout the club; grassroots elements of the club particularly were beginning to sense here was a man out of control. It was their club; they didn't like that.

AL: I came across some clippings from the San Francisco Chronicle regarding the May, 1967, board meeting, where they said that you were part of a cabal out to get Brower, and there were rumors that the May, 1967, meeting was going to fire Brower. It had something to do with your publication reorganization program, I assume. Do you remember that? And a tremendous membership response as a result of these rumors, a tremendous expression of sympathy for Brower.

Siri: I remember the occasion, but not the details. I vaguely recall that I was singled out as the arch enemy of Dave, but what I proposed was designed to keep the publishing program alive, because it had reached a point where it would very quickly bankrupt the club.

AL: I just wondered how the publicity was generated?

Siri: I think that was done by Dave or Hugh Nash. At that time both were very friendly with George Duchek, a well-known reporter for the Chronicle, who wrote the story.

AL: What happened to your proposal?

Siri: It got ground up in all the things that came after, along with Dave's resignation. As I recall, it was not adopted. The resolution of the problem took another turn, which ultimately meant Dave's separation from the club. I don't think that scheme was really enthusiastically received anyway.

AL: It would have been a major change, and not the kind they were looking for, maybe.

Siri: And Dave didn't like it; he simply felt it was a means of getting him out of the way. In part it was; let's face it. But I didn't like to see the publications program disappear.

AL: Wasn't that the beginning of the publications reorganization committee that then finally brought a plan for total reorganization of the club? That's the way I read it. Right after this May, 1967, meeting they did form the publications reorganization committee; then it was expanded to consider the whole club.

Siri: Yes, I think you're right. There was a sequence of moves, starting as I indicated earlier with the administrative controls that were adopted, and then a number of other actions, and finally a proposal for a reorganization of the publications program. This led to the appointment of a reorganization committee that was headed by Charles Huestis. I served on the committee. The committee's report was submitted at the September, 1968, meeting of the board of directors.

One of the recommendations in the report was to establish several new senior officers in the club: one was executive vice-president, which would be Dave Brower; the other would be an administrative vice-president, a person to be found, an experienced administrator who would handle the administrative affairs of the club and relieve Dave of these activities. It was argued that because of the demands of the conservation activities and more particularly the publications program, he hadn't been able to deal with the administrative problems. That was absolutely true; it was also clear to many people that administration was really not something that Dave was very much atune to; he regarded it as an institutional menace, I guess, an organizational thing that you left to underlings.

The Extent of the Financial Crisis

Siri: This was one more step in attempting to bring some kind of order out of the way in which the club was run and more particularly to stave off bankruptcy which we all desperately felt was coming very quickly. At this point our net worth, adding up all our assets and subtracting all the obligations came out less than the permanent fund. The permanent fund had been established many many years earlier; it was a permanent fund into which life memberships went. According to the bylaws it was not to be extended, only the earnings from the fund could be used. The permanent fund had to stand covered by assets of one sort or another, and about this point the club's net assets were even less than the permanent fund, the amount required to cover the permanent fund.

AL: So in other words, the fund was being offered as security, for loans.

Siri: Well, that had already been done. It was even worse than that. If you took our net worth, that was less than the permanent fund. If a member really wanted to do it he could legally have taken the board of directors to court, I guess, and might very well have won his case; that is, we would have been charged with irresponsibility and made liable for the club's deficits.

AL: Was that a real concern? I notice that's mentioned a lot.

Siri: It didn't seriously concern most of us. Dick Sill and Dick Leonard both brought up this legal point. It could have been a real one if a member were serious about it. I don't think that the rest of us were seriously concerned about that except on moral grounds. We were in fact being irresponsible and despite all our efforts over a period of years, we had not found a way of dealing with the problem effectively. Anything that we came up with, that would work in almost any conceivable organization, Dave could always circumvent or ignore, and he did both with such profound skill that we were never able to bring him under control.

AL: The financial crisis, then, you would attribute primarily to Dave Brower's methods or his needs--the point I'm making is that the financial crisis seemed to continue after he was gone, and maybe even get worse.

Siri: Yes, but the reason was that by the time the whole thing came to a final resolution with Dave's resignation, the club was on the verge of bankruptcy. Bankruptcy may be only a slight exaggeration but the club was in fact destitute and desperate. It had to deal with a huge book inventory which the market value was a small fraction of the cost; there were substantial debts to be paid; and a great many commitments to authors, photographers, publishers, printers, and binders. Also the growth in club membership virtually ceased about that time, which further compounded the club's financial problems. Many of the members that had been drawn in by the full page newspaper ads, stayed only a year or two and dropped out. They were not like Sierra Club members that joined in the normal course of their association through conservation or the outings or other activities. These people remained members most of their lives.

AL: And that wasn't counted on, I assume.

Siri: No, because you see, the chief source of capital proved to be the members' dues. Dave was drawing on that as well, and committing it in advance on the assumption a high rate growth would continue. When Dave resigned, the club was in rather bad straits, and we recognized that it was going to take some years before the club's financial health could be restored. The inventory, the debts, and the commitments that had already been made could not be dealt with overnight. Even with drastic cutbacks it would still take time to accumulate resources to pay the debts. The inventory we knew would give us problems for four or five years, and much of it would have to be written off.

AL: So the problems of the early seventies then were just continuations?

Siri: That's right. We had estimated then, when Dave resigned, that it was going to take us something like five years to recover.

Among the other things that had been done between 1966 and 1968 was the creation of an executive director's contingency fund, and this was also an attempt to bring Brower's extravagances within some kind of control, so we could at least identify what the club was committed to and try to put a ceiling on it. This was a fund set at some value--I think it was about \$20,000 or \$25,000--that would be left to the discretion of the executive director.

During the year or so in which this fund was in operation, Brower had used it for a variety of things--some of them perfectly legitimate in developing new book projects, which is what it was intended for. But he was also using it for all kinds of other activities unrelated to publications, except by the longest stretch of the imagination.

At the board meeting in February, 1968, Dick Sill, one of the directors, questioned the contingency fund and asked that it be eliminated or in some fashion further restricted. Both Wayburn and I defended the fund, arguing that the fund was not only necessary to insure that the publications program would proceed without too many impediments, but it also gave us some kind of upper bound on the funds that were being used. It was an identifiable account, whereas before Brower would use whatever assets were available from other funds--in fact he would use resources of the club whether they were available or not [laughter]. And so consequently we insisted that the fund be continued.

It was renamed the Executive Director's Discretionary Fund and was set at \$25,000. It was to be used in a manner consistent with board policy and was to require the concurrence of the president for substantial expenditures from it; this was not required before. So the president could not only be aware of what was happening, but what the funds were being used for. We established the fund in a fashion such that it could be reimbursed; that is, if Dave started a project which later paid out, then the fund could be reimbursed by that amount. In any event, the fund would be reinstated each year at \$25,000 and treated as a budget item. This was one more effort to bring some kind of control over the club's finances and some control over Dave's use of club funds, more particularly to make sure they were at least consistent with club policy and club aims.

That all happened in February, 1968. None of this really worked. Dave found all of these procedures inconvenient, and since he was an exceedingly intelligent man he found far more ways around them or to ignore them than we could possibly conceive means of

Siri: curbing the abuses. The simplest thing, of course, was to ignore them altogether, and there were many quarrels about his not adhering to the administrative procedures or the way in which he was committing the club. None of these procedures really worked effectively. They worked very well for the rest of the staff, and things like contracts and purchase orders everyone diligently adhered to. But the rest of the staff wasn't our problem.

Finally, in September of 1968, things had gotten to a point where the concern was felt far beyond the board itself. Many of the other club leaders, particularly in the chapters in California who knew what was going on, were becoming restive. It was clear that there were deep and growing concerns throughout the club, not only on the board of directors.

In looking through my files I ran across a letter to George Marshall--it was about a year earlier, in 1967. Even by 1967, the financial strains in the club were quite severe, and repeatedly in the board meetings, I had to record as treasurer that the strains were there, that we were not bankrupt but we were headed in that direction--unless some substantial changes were made. In any event, George Marshall, who was a member of the board and president at one time, had a very keen sense of humor that came out at unexpected times. In July, 1967, he wrote me a letter lamenting the problems in the club and proposed humorously a platform on which we might run in the next election for the board. I could not find George's letter, but I responded with a counterplatform. We have kept this confidential, and I reserve the right to remove it from the transcript on second thought, but my letter and also George's give a picture of the feelings that prevailed at the time quite broadly across the club.

In part my letter to George reads: "Nothing would please me more than to share your inspiring platform, if I should be renominated, and if I should agree to serve again. However, I would like to suggest that we appeal to all elements within the club and call for spiritual strength by adding the following prayer: Our Brower, which art infallible, promoted be thy name. Thy club despair, thy will be done to directors as it is in publications. Give us this day our daily fright, and forgive us our doubts as we forget our debtors. And lead us not into solvency, but deliver us from reason, for thine is the club, and the compulsion, and the ambition forever, ah David." [Laughter]

Continuing the letter: "But my doubts runneth over (Psalm 23). My term is ending, I shall not want another. It maketh me to lie down on my university job. It leadeth me into useless contention. It galleth my sensibilities. It leadeth me into paths of righteous frustration for the club's sake. Yea, though I wallow through mounds of figures, I find no solution, for David art with us. His

Siri: deceits and staff they confound us. He prepared schemes behind us in the presence of his lackeys, anointest my brow with sweat. My bile runneth over. Surely frustration and anxiety shall follow me all the days of my term, and I would dwell in the house of confusion forever." [Laughter]

That was not meant to be true, but rather it was an impromptu expression of a feeling many of us had about the club situation at the moment.

The Adams-Leonard-Sill Charges, October, 1968

Siri: In the board meeting of September of 1968, Sill, who along with Ansel Adams and Dick Leonard was most deeply concerned about this on the board, brought the subject up at the board meeting and moved that Brower be discharged on grounds of irresponsibility. The motion did not pass, but a special board meeting was called in October, 1968, by Sill, Leonard and Adams, asking the board to sit as a hearing committee for their charges supporting a demand for Brower's dismissal. They based their case on three charges: one, the diversion of royalties; second, failure to follow policy directives, particularly with respect to the Galapagos Expedition project and book program; and third, financial irresponsibility. All three of these were correct; the question is whether singly or collectively they would necessarily call for Dave's discharge.

The case was really not made sufficiently strong. The diversion of royalties we have discussed earlier. It can be argued that this was not a violation of any written rule, but it was generally considered improper for the paid editor of the publications program.

Clearly he failed to follow club directives on the Galapagos book; he had been directed not to expend moneys that had been made available in England, and the publications committee, after having reviewed the book proposal, had ordered that it be abandoned, but Dave proceeded with the book anyway.

AL: There were clear orders that it be abandoned? It seemed to me at times that he was given the go-ahead in a limited sort of way.

Siri: At most, he was told to expend no more than \$2,000 in developing the project. We wanted to wait and see how the Galapagos book, and how the whole project, developed. He had in mind two volumes, and the costs were going to be enormous. We were already in very bad straits financially, and it wasn't evident where the capital was going to come from or whether the book was going to sell, and so he was ordered not to spend more than \$2,000 before coming back to the publications committee.

- Siri: The financial irresponsibility charge related to a great many specific things that Dave had done without consulting the president or the executive committee or in ignoring some of the rules that had been laid down by the board. While the Sill, Leonard and Adams demand for his dismissal did not prevail, it was clear that this set the stage for things that followed. While the board was still reluctant to fire him, it was clearer than ever that something had to be done, or else the club was in very serious danger of actual bankruptcy.
- AL: Now at this point you also were reluctant, I assume; you never joined with Sill, Leonard and Adams.
- Siri: Yes, I was reluctant. I still thought that there was a way around the problems with Dave and was willing to explore other, and less drastic, solutions.
- AL: Was the alternative that you were thinking of the solution that the publications reorganization committee proposed?
- Siri: That was one of them, yes.
- AL: That was discussed at the same board meeting, on October 19, 1968.
- Siri: Yes, that's right. The reorganization committee had proposed that we hire an administrative vice president who would assume control of the administration of the club. We hoped that this might bring some kind of order into the club's operations and restraints on what Dave was doing. It would have to be a person with sufficient authority and strength of character to handle the problems on a day-to-day basis. One of the difficulties with the volunteer officers of the club was that they obviously couldn't be on hand day in and day out, and unless they were, there was no chance that they could maintain the kinds of control that were obviously needed by this time.
- AL: Did this same proposal call for a paid president?
- Siri: Yes.
- AL: What did they envision there--what type of person?
- Siri: As proposed by the reorganization committee, this was to be a senior person in the sense of somebody comparable to a university president or a man who had had a great deal of experience in other organizations, perhaps federal organizations or other institutions; a man of established character and prestige.
- AL: Would the president be the active and dominating figure?

Siri: Yes--the senior person. It was clear almost from the start that that part of the proposal was never going to be implemented. Well, it wasn't that clear immediately, but it became fairly evident quickly in the succeeding months from the negative reaction of the chapters and members. It was clear that they just did not want a paid president. It was an activist organization, and everyone saw himself as aspiring to the board of directors and presidency of the club. Besides they didn't want more power held in the hands of staff--this became a battle cry among the members of the club, particularly the chapter leaders and council. In essence the reaction was, "It's still a member-oriented club, and by God the staff is there to serve the members and that's the way it's going to be--a full-time paid president is not what we want." At board meetings this theme was repeatedly emphasized by club leaders from throughout the club.

AL: It comes up again--we're skipping ahead, but--in May and June of 1971, a new reorganization committee brought up the same proposal again, and apparently there was a tremendous outcry.

Siri: Outcry in opposition to it, yes. We're getting away from the subject of Dave Brower for a moment--we haven't quite got him resigned--but the proposal for a full-time paid president became more complicated in a sense because Phil Berry was a possible contender for that office and did in fact become quite interested in having the office. For some reason or other, which I've never fully understood, both the staff and many of the members of the club did not want Phil, particularly, as a paid president. As a volunteer president he was fine. It may have been only a question of their focusing their attention on one person, having identified a person who was interested in having the job, since there were no other candidates at the moment.

In any event, that never happened, and it's possible that it never will, in an organization in which there are so many active people who regard the club as their club and not a club dominated by the staff. This was a substantial part of Dave Brower's problem, too, in that while he had extraordinary insights into environmental and conservation issues, and could see them long before others, Dave poorly understood people and institutions, particularly an organization such as the Sierra Club.

Culmination of the Crisis, January-April, 1969

Siri: The effort by Sill and Leonard and Adams to discharge Brower at the special board meeting of October, 1968, was unsuccessful. In December, 1968, the next step had to be taken because Dave had proceeded with his international expansion--in his efforts to produce a line of

Siri: international books--and he was called to account on this. There were additional demands for his resignation, I think, from Sill and Leonard, but Dave Sive, who was a close ally of Dave Brower, resolved the situation by drafting a resolution which was passed by the board which limited Brower's activities in his international efforts.

The reason for this was--even Dave Sive could see it--that there were a great many legal questions that had been raised; that is, could the Sierra Club under its existing bylaws, engage in international activities? There was some division of opinion, but the legal committee of the club said, "No, the club's articles of incorporation would have to be revised to do so before the club could go international." There were also financial problems connected with it that added to everything else that was happening and just made it impossible.

For the moment that problem appeared to be resolved, but with no certainty whatever, because we didn't know that the moment Dave left the boardroom that he wouldn't simply pursue it as he had all along, as was his customary practice. We'd come to learn that almost within minutes after a board meeting he was already on the phone making additional commitments that the board had said he shouldn't make.

Then in February of 1969, a special meeting was called by President Ed Wayburn. Wayburn reviewed several incidents which had occurred during the past year and had culminated in Wayburn's suspending Brower's financial authority in January, 1969. The final incident was Dave's unauthorized New York Times ad, Earth National Park [on January 14, 1969], which amounted to an expenditure of at least \$10,000 and probably would have involved two or three times that much had he not been halted in mid-process. Anyway, this ad called for contributions to the international book series, which in the preceding month Dave had been told by the board he could not do [laughter]--not until the articles of incorporation had been changed, the board had had a chance to look at the legal and financial problems, and the publications committee could make a recommendation on the international book series. As I said, Dave no sooner left that December board meeting than he went out and arranged a full page ad.

That was one item. The Explorer was a second item. Without consulting anyone, Dave had put together the Explorer [in November, 1968] and had represented it to the Post Office Department as a periodical paid out of dues and therefore qualified for the special low postal rate reserved for such publications. It was no such thing. Nobody had been consulted about the Explorer before. It was not clear that it was to be a periodical; it was not clear how it was ever going to be paid for, or that it could be financed by dues--there was no dues money to cover the Explorer.

- AL: He spent eight thousand dollars, I think; from what you're saying, the club just didn't have it.
- Siri: That's right; the club didn't have it. When Wayburn learned about this he had to, among other things, inform the post office immediately that an error had been made and the club was withdrawing its request for a rate for the Explorer.

Then, third, there was an incredible telegram to the secretary of the treasury that Dave had sent on his own initiative [in May, 1968] at the very moment when the Sierra Club was engaged in the hearings before the Internal Revenue Service in Washington. It was a very sensitive moment in our efforts to reverse the IRA action on the club's tax status. Dave dropped his telegram like a bomb in the middle of the proceedings. The wire expressed a position adverse to that which the board of directors had already adopted and had the effect of undermining Gary Torre, who was representing the club before the IRS. It was an incredible action, and we were all stunned by it.

- AL: What exactly was it?
- Siri: I don't have a copy of the telegram. All I can remember is an impression of a naive, ill-tempered, wholly inappropriate statement of protest to the secretary of the treasury. Everyone was outraged by this intervention, which could very well have destroyed everything we had worked for up to that moment.
- AL: Did he disavow Gary Torre as the club's legal representative or was it the point of view that the board was taking at the time that he disavowed?
- Siri: We had all agreed, including Dave, on our role and procedure in appealing the IRS decision; that was never an issue. Over a period of a year or two we had discussed at great length our position and the procedures we would follow. There was complete agreement on all this, until Dave's telegram, which disavowed Gary Torre and charged the IRS with deceit in attacking conservation organizations.

In any event, between January and February, 1969, President Wayburn was compelled to relieve Dave of authority to expend funds, and of course Dave contested this, stating first in the memo to Wayburn that he had no authority to relieve him of the power to manage the club's financial affairs or to make commitments on the part of the club. Wayburn put this question to the legal committee, which sustained the president. It was clear that the senior elected officer, the president, does have that authority, and it was even foolish for Dave to contest it, but contest it he did. In any event, Brower was relieved of authority to expend monies until the

Siri: special board meeting was convened, and that action was sustained by the full board [February 8, 1969]. At that point Dave asked for a leave of absence until the April, 1969, election, and it was approved by the board.

In effect, this was really the end of the line for Dave's association with the club. At the May meeting that year, 1969, after his defeat in the club election, Dave offered his resignation, and I did make the motion to accept the resignation. It was an awkward, terribly sad moment, and that was the end of the Dave Brower association with the club, in a formal sense, but it was to be another probably four years before the club could recover from the financial strains that had developed during the preceding five.

AL: We should discuss the April election, the membership involvement, and the election campaign.

Siri: Dave ran for the board of directors that spring. Dave was quite confident that he would of course be overwhelmingly elected. In fact he was overwhelmingly defeated. The members just didn't want him as a director of the club. He was sixth on the ballot, way below the first five. This must have been a bitter disappointment to Dave, but undoubtedly it was also persuasive to him that his strength within the club was not what he had imagined it to be. I'm sure he had anticipated an overwhelming show of strength.

AL: Do you recall anything about the conduct of the campaign? Were you campaigning yourself?

Siri: No.

AL: Were you involved at all in the breakdown into slates, or active campaigning?

Siri: I have only a vague recollection of this--the first club election in which there was an overt political campaign waged--no, that had occurred earlier in the Diablo Canyon elections, but this might have been the first time in an election of a board.

AL: I think it was prohibited in '68, but it occurred. And this was the first time that it was allowed.

Siri: Yes. There were some changes that liberalized the campaigning rules; in effect we removed all bars. I think we all came to the conclusion, in liberalizing the election rules, that probably, if one were so eager to serve on the board that he would wage a vigorous campaign that he would succeed only in defeating himself. I think this was probably borne out in Dave's campaign. Members were just not ready for that kind of political activity within the club.

AL: It was waged on both sides.

Siri: Yes, it was. The fact remains, I think, that the club members had become so alarmed over the financial problems of the club and the constant charges that were leveled against Dave that to some of us it was not surprising at all that Dave did not prevail in the election.

AL: Things moved very fast from October of '68, which was when Sill and Leonard and Adams were really the only three willing to discharge him, and seven months later he was out.

Siri: That's right. During this time I was struck by an aspect of Dave's behavior that I had not been aware of before, and I found disturbing. If Dave conducted conservation campaigns as badly as he mismanaged his own affairs within the club, was he also losing, or at least not effectively advancing, conservation battles? One did not have to be a very astute person to perceive that he was doing all the wrong things. Almost without exception, he succeeded in doing absolutely the wrong thing, and his timing was perfect too, in doing the wrong thing.

I recall a feeling of disappointment that I had expected much more of Dave, that he could easily have won over the club membership, won his own election, and had his own way if he had had any feeling, any sensitivity for what was happening. It occurred to me that maybe the campaigns he ran were conducted in somewhat the same fashion, that we were just lucky that we had a lot of very active able people in every campaign--the redwoods, Grand Canyon, the North Cascades, and the Wilderness Act.

AL: He did have a way of alienating government officials.

Siri: No question about that. That question was brought up time and again, but we felt that if that was the way it had to be, we weren't going to back away, just to make friends we didn't need.

AL: Is this a serious point that you're making?

Siri: Yes, it is. During that last year, I had grave doubts that Dave could successfully run any campaign, because he did not seem to have a feeling for what was right and wrong in achieving an end in a campaign of this sort. Dealing with people and organizations was something quite different from writing tracts or producing books. The latter were creative efforts at which he was very good.

AL: But he did manage the Grand Canyon campaign.

Siri: Well, yes and no. We had some extraordinarily good people on the Grand Canyon campaign. But you are right, it was a successful campaign, and Dave deserves full credit for its success.

AL: When you catalogue these series of events Brower's departure seems inevitable. The question becomes, not why did he leave, but why didn't matters come to a head sooner?

Siri: That's right. In any other organization he had given cause for dismissal by, say, 1967. I suppose all of us were reluctant to face up to it for several reasons. We had regarded him as such a valuable asset to the club that I guess we were hesitant to think that we could do without him, particularly in the books. What happens if Dave leaves, could we survive in publishing? Well, gradually it became evident that we couldn't survive if he stayed, but it took awhile to see it.

AL: You had been a strong supporter of his publications program, it appears to me. You had argued for four Exhibit Format books when others wanted to cut back to three.

Siri: I still thought that it could be done, that we could manage the finances, but each year he would come in late with the books, and we would have a growing deficit.

AL: And that surprised you each time? You didn't count on it?

Siri: No, he assured us the books are coming in on time this year. Then he would scrap a whole printing, or there would be delays, or he would suddenly change printers or binders, or something was wrong, and this would happen again and again.

AL: In your budget estimate each year it appeared that you counted on a certain amount of income from the books, which later you had to revise.

Siri: Because the books weren't ready on time. If we missed November, the program would end up with an enormous deficit.

AL: Some of his genius must have been in giving you hope that things were going to be better. So many disappointments!

Siri: Well, yes, because it came from assurances we would learn later were just not founded, or they were assurances that were valid at the time, but then a week or a month later, something would happen, or he would decide that he would change the whole damn thing. With the Exhibit Format books it was too costly ever to miss a publication date, October or November, and furthermore if you start discarding printings, the costs begin to skyrocket. I guess I was always confident that this year we would manage. We never did. I still supported the publications program, believing that despite its problems, Dave had created the most compelling voice in the conservation movement. The club had to continue the program, preferably with Dave, but without him if necessary.

Aftermath and Assessments of the Battle

- Siri: Torn relationships within the club healed quickly after Dave left. Before that May meeting the club was torn. Tempers flared; board meetings and chapter meetings were quarrelsome and inconclusive; and conditions in the club had degenerated to a terrible state, psychologically, financially and perhaps in the club's effectiveness as well. Almost the moment Dave left there was an almost audible sigh of relief throughout the club, and people began to work together again and have a strong feeling of unity once more.
- AL: Even among Dave's supporters?
- Siri: Yes, there was not the same animosity and bitterness that had prevailed before. People got along pretty well together. Even Litton. Until that time, board meetings were completely polarized on Dave Brower, on the Diablo Canyon issue, and on a number of other issues too. Litton and Eissler, particularly, but Goldsworthy and Eliot Porter as well would always side with Dave whatever the issue. I mean it was automatic, like switching on light.
- AL: What about Paul Brooks? Was he sympathetic with Brower?
- Siri: No, Paul was also outraged by things Dave would do, but he would rarely show it. He would always look for a compromise, a gentleman's way of dealing with the situation. Paul is a sensitive, humane person in every sense. He did not like controversy and personal bitterness; he found it extremely distasteful.
- AL: What about Wayburn, how would you assess his role in the controversy?
- Siri: It was tolerant, perhaps indecisive, until that February meeting in 1969, when Wayburn had finally been pushed to his limit.
- AL: When you say indecisive, now what do you mean?
- Siri: Wayburn could rarely be brought to the point of making a firm decision, except on the environmental questions, and there he was very good. On Alaska, redwoods, there was no question whatever about Wayburn's perception of conservation and his determination to prevail. And everyone in the club was in agreement with him on conservation. But on some of these internal matters, he was extremely reluctant to come to grips decisively with a problem. I suppose we should applaud him for trying to find compromises. But then, I guess we all compromised, until it was almost too late.
- AL: Was that how he saw his role, as a healing figure? Was he working from strength or from weakness?

Siri: I think Wayburn saw his role as that of trying to bring some kind of amity among contending parties--not necessarily as a compromiser, but as someone who tried to, if not adjudicate, at least intervene in a sense of maintaining good relations with both sides and mediating the differences. He was also extremely wary of alliances, even the appearance of alliance with any faction.

AL: I noticed that at the May meeting in 1969 that many of Dave's former supporters wanted to keep him on as president.

Siri: Yes, Wayburn had been very successful as a conservationist. He was unquestionably the most effective conservation leader in the club. He did know how to run a campaign. Wayburn has made more contributions to the preservation of wilderness probably than any other person in the club in recent years, that is, through the sixties and early seventies. I have a great deal of respect for him. I don't know how he manages to practice medicine along with his conservation activities.

AL: I notice that Phil Berry, in accepting the nomination for president, said that his choice had been you.

Siri: Yes, he had talked to me a number of times about it and I refused. It called for too much time. The next year was going to be a demanding one in terms of time, wear and tear, and I couldn't afford the time it would demand.

AL: How have you found it conducting your business at the University with all your involvement in the Sierra Club and other conservation activities?

Siri: Well, for the two years I was president it was almost impossible to be effective in my own work, and that was between 1964 and 1966. By the end of the sixties there was no way in which one could serve as president and be doing anything but concentrate on club problems; financial and administrative problems had become so severe, so tangled, and the dissension within the club so difficult that it meant spending full time at it--not just full time but all day, every evening, and weekends.

AL: It might as well have been a paid position.

Siri: As a matter of fact that's what we did with Phil Berry; we paid his salary, or a substantial part of it. He was, in fact, a paid president.

AL: Did that require any bylaw adjustment?

Siri: No. We reimbursed him for time, at something less than what he would earn if he were in his law office, but nevertheless it was substantially more than the next highest person on the staff would be paid, very substantially.

The Post-Brower Era: Contributions to Club Organization

Siri: The reorganization continued, and among other things that I guess I did was to introduce the proposal for regional conservation committees. Reorganization had been debated, sometimes heatedly, at several board meetings without resolution. Finally, I've forgotten just when, I gave a lengthy discourse on the subject, and proposed that the board create or permit to be created regional conservation committees covering the whole of the United States and each consisting of more than one state or chapter [June 26-27, 1971].

This proposal was adopted and very quickly regional conservation committees were formed in addition to the three that already existed. The entire United States was then covered by regional conservation committees, which were given considerable authority to handle conservation issues in their regions. That system seems to have worked well enough. The other thing that I guess I contributed to was some clarification of the relationship of club committees to staff, which had not been at all clear. It turned out to be quite a simple relationship, that is, one-to-one relationship between committees and staff functions or staff departments.

AL: Each committee was tied in with a certain staff position?

Siri: Yes, or more properly with a staff function. In effect that was the way it had been working, but the relationship had never been clearly articulated or formalized. Finally there was a recommendation for a senior staff position.

AL: When you say a senior staff member, are you referring to someone above the executive director level?

Siri: No, this was the chief administrative officer, who was supposed to handle the administrative duties of the club in the sense that the reorganization committee had proposed. That's something that didn't work, maybe because we found the wrong man.

AL: This was following through with the idea of an administrative officer and an executive director existing side by side.

Siri: Yes.

AL: That proposal almost seemed designed around Dave Brower and his weaknesses.

Siri: Yes, it was. It was very consciously designed. But it would have worked even if Dave hadn't proved to be a problem. It was a rational approach to the needs of a growing organization. The membership was increasing rapidly; so were its problems. Staff was expanding, and the executive director had such a broad scope of responsibilities to deal with. He can't personally be a conservation leader, an administrator, a book publisher, and a dozen other things all simultaneously. The administrative jobs have to be left to someone who is trained and experienced in administering an organization as complex as the club. We had an increasing number of representatives across the country, in Washington, the Northeast, southern California, the Midwest; offices were being opened in a variety of places--ultimately in London for a while--and in New York, and this required some kind of management by an able manager.

AL: How is it worked out now? Has Mike McCloskey virtually the same areas of responsibility that Brower did without the book publishing?

Siri: Yes, Mike has had no substantial role in publications. Now that Dave is gone, Mike still has little direct involvement in publications because we now have an excellent editor in Jon Beckman. Jon is not only a very able editor, with a very fine sense of what's good in conservation and what's good in terms of books, but he is also a damned able business manager. He operates with a crew of six people and turns out more books than Dave did at one time with fifteen.

AL: Does he turn them out on time?

Siri: Yes. They come out on time, every time. If there's slippage it's just because the book's gone sour, because the photographer's goofed or the author has failed to produce, but he handles that kind of situation very well, and the books come out on time.

RL: It's an excellent program for bringing the club before the public's eye.

Siri: Oh, absolutely. To me the publications program is absolutely vital to the club and to conservation.

AL: Does the club still subsidize publications?

Siri: No. The foundation does. [Laughter] But the club does not. We still hope that within a year or two--three at the most--the publications program will be wholly self-supporting, that is, independent of subsidies. I think there's a good chance of this with Beckman. It's headed in that direction; the program's doing very well.

Siri: Anyway, the battles haven't ceased, but they're of a different kind now, and the publications battle comes up every couple of years and will until the publications program is self-sufficient. In fact, I've been fighting that battle year in and year out; just last fall I guess it was, there was a major battle again to keep it alive. Current members of the board were looking around for ways to cut expenses. The club's gone in the opposite direction now--supermanagers and bright people who are institutionally or establishment-oriented. Now there are mammoth conferences on budgets and all the little details of finance and organization management. To me this has gone too far toward a highly structured business and seems stifling. And so they saw the publications program as a drain on club resources, which it is not now, and I had to put up a fierce defense of the publications program, but they bought it.

AL: Now how is the balance between the publications committee and the staff worked out?

Siri: I don't think there is a problem there at all, so far as I know. It's a very smooth, well-coordinated activity.

AL: You're still on the publications committee. Who is the initiator? What functions does the publications committee have?

Siri: The committee now serves more effectively as an advisor and editorial body for the editor. Jon draws up the budget, but now its review by the publications committee has meaning. Proposed new titles are reviewed and approved before Jon proceeds with commitments. We get regularly a rundown on all books in production and those scheduled two or three years in advance. We know what's happening to them, what the cost breakdown is, what their schedules are.

It's just a very good working relationship. All the committee members get material to review. And that's been useful, because when Jon proposes a title that the committee has doubts about, there is a fair, free, and in-depth discussion of the proposed books. If Jon is persuaded by the committee's arguments, he will simply say, "Okay, I agree with you." On the other hand, he has also argued his case and won it. In either case, the matter is settled.

AL: Would you have to be convinced for it to go on?

Siri: Oh, I think so. Now, unlike the Brower years, these matters are easily resolved by Jon and the committee. It's just a very good working relationship because of the high level of mutual respect and rational behavior by everyone.

AL: I'm just trying to compare it with the relationship--not just what it was under Brower, but what it was supposed to be under Brower. Was the publications committee supposed to be the final authority or wasn't it worked out, or--?

Siri: The publications committee was supposed to do all of these things. It was supposed to approve titles and manuscripts and authorize expenditures on every title. As things got progressively worse under Brower, the publications committee attempted to tighten up its control--that is, to assert what it thought its role was--but it was never wholly successful. Proposed titles and draft manuscripts were to be approved, and a limit was set on funds available to develop a new title. Too often Dave simply ignored the committee and the ordinary practices in any publishing operation. By the time the committee could learn where a book project stood, it was too late to turn back because of the expenditures and commitments. This is not to suggest that all books were published without the knowledge and approval of the committee. Most were, but they also presented endless problems because of their delays and needless expense. This often made publications committee meetings pretty disagreeable; they really weren't pleasant affairs.

But now, in contrast, there's a lot of enthusiasm. Everybody works together, and they're eager to get things done. There's a good exchange of criticism and ideas, and amiable agreement on what is to be done. Nobody cares what the rules are--you don't need them. This is the ideal. But you need somebody like Jon Beckman, I guess, who is both a good editor, an imaginative one, and also has a very good sense of how to run a publishing operation. Also understands people.

AL: And he's also not trying to run the club, and run the publications at the same time.

Siri: That's right.

AL: Would you want to comment on Mike McCloskey's leadership of the club?

Siri: Mike is a good executive director; that is, he keeps all the machinery running pretty well. He's not a charismatic person like Dave, but he's extremely businesslike and a very good workman. When he prepares testimony before congressional hearings, he doesn't come in like a bolt of lightning. He's more persuasive; he comes in like a lawyer with sound facts and a good case. But he doesn't make headlines, and there's something to be said for headlines sometimes. It often takes a charismatic person to generate a public reaction, but Mike doesn't have that capacity.

RL: We no longer have an individual in any conservation organization the likes of Dave Brower--not even Dave Brower, any longer. No one with that personality who generates the headlines.

AL: Well, maybe the times aren't right for them. There's something to be said for proper interaction with the times.

Siri: I think that's partly true. In fact, it may be true in a very large measure. This is not the time for a great leader. In the fifties and sixties conservation was still "conservation"; it wasn't "environment" yet, and most legislators and the public at large hadn't yet come attune to what it all meant, even what the word "environment" meant. It wasn't until the late sixties that this became a national pastime, and of course we owe it as much to the Arabs as anybody for advancing the cause of energy conservation.

AL: But now perhaps people are satiated.

Siri: Well, also, the country was hit after 1968 by a recession. There isn't money for conservation the easy way that it came in the sixties. The foundation is finding it very hard to raise funds for the club.

AL: How about Brower and FOE?

Siri: I understand they're having their problems too.

AL: Anything more along these lines that we should have? At one time you were going to mention the Sierra Club Council. Did you say you had had some role in founding the council?

Siri: No, I was on the board about the time the council was created, I guess, but it drifted along for a good many years, playing a not very significant role in club affairs. It dealt with some internal matters and produced a few reports that were accepted by the board, but not much was ever done about them. It was a period in which there were a couple of able persons who chaired the council, among them Dick Sill and Ned Robinson, and Kathy Jackson, I think, at one time. These were all very able people, but the setting was not quite right. The club wasn't yet attuned to a council; it's role hadn't been fully identified.

I remember when I became president Dick Sill was chairman of the council, and he asked me what I thought the council ought to do, where was its authority, and what was expected of it? The only advice I could give him was that no one yet knows what role the council will play, but it's got to be a significant one, on internal matters. I suggested to Dick that he lead the council into exploring its bounds; that is, to take whatever actions it felt necessary, presume authority, and when it reached a certain point the board would let it know that it had reached a bound. So keep exploring the boundaries of the council's range of action and authority, and the board will let it know if in the board's opinion, the council is exceeding what authority it thought it should have.

Siri: This was an interesting empirical process, I thought, and it was more or less what then happened in the following years. Sill, of course, was a very energetic person, and proceeded in earnest to explore the bounds. Gradually the council gained strength and confidence. Confidence was what it really needed, because initially it felt extremely insecure. The board did everything; the board made all the decisions. Gradually the board recognized that it could not handle all the internal matters, that they properly should be handled by the council.

So more and more the board recognized that the council could and should play a more dominant role in dealing with internal matters of the club. It started by setting boundaries of chapters, resolving disputes among chapters or among chapter committees, and gradually picking up more and more of the internal matters of the club until gradually the council gained considerable recognition and strength throughout the club, and with it the necessary self-confidence.

This, incidentally, presented an imagined threat to Dave, and more than once he tried to find means of disbanding the council. He always held it in very low regard, and of course the council was aware of this--they couldn't help but sense it, particularly after Dave made overt moves, along with the people like Litton and Eissler who supported him, to reduce the authority of the council or eliminate it altogether.

There were a number of moves over the years to eliminate or weaken the council, one of them a proposed bylaw change in the 1968 election. Dave always regarded it as a thorn in his side, just another thing to contend with in his higher purpose of leading the country to salvation in conservation.

The council has produced over the years a number of very able leaders. Many of them later went onto the board, or took leading roles in club affairs. And there were several of us, I guess, who always supported the council vigorously; in fact, in this proposed bylaw, in April, 1968, it seems to me I made it a personal campaign to defeat it. We succeeded.

I felt the council was important for a variety of reasons, if nothing else to give a good many club leaders, who were determined to lead, an opportunity to do just that and to participate in the activities of the club in a more meaningful way than they could in the confines of their chapters. I saw it also as a source of experienced people for election to the board.

AL: It seems that that would happen quite regularly.

Siri: Yes; it's worked out very well. Over the years, defending the publications program and the council were two small contributions I hope future hindsight may judge to have been useful. Defending the publications program has not always been easy. [Laughter]

Corporate Pollution and Club Investment Policy

AL: You were on the investment committee. How long were you on this committee?

Siri: I guess since it was created, and I guess maybe because I created it. [Laughter] There was some kind of predecessor committee, but it was inactive. Wasn't that part of the reorganization that I proposed? I chaired the investment committee for a number of years, and then it was chaired by a number of other people.

AL: Was there ever any concern in the sixties about the anti-environmental nature of the club's investments?

Siri: Not really. I have a vague recollection the subject may have come up from time to time, but it was never seriously considered. It's a matter mainly of emotional reaction, because it's unrealistic to assume that you can invest in anything that is wholly benign. If funds are placed in a bank savings account, how do you think the bank uses that money? It's used for loans--building loans, construction loans, industrial loans--you don't know where it goes but you know some of it is going for things you might oppose.

If you invest it in the United States government bonds or treasury notes or treasury bills, that money goes to build tanks and bigger and better nuclear bombs and big dams that the Bureau of Reclamation may be building in northern California rivers, as well as a lot of good things. All you have to do is look at the federal budget and say: well, our investment of \$100,000 in treasury notes means that 1/2 is used in building a bigger and better military machine, and so much is being used for dams and other projects we don't approve of. Part is used for worthy causes, for the most part unrelated to conservation and then a wee bit is for the Park Service and wilderness, but even that comes out of a special fund. If you invest in a presumably benign company there is no assurance the company does not sell to or buy from other companies whose activities we disapprove.

AL: This was brought up just last year, wasn't it? [1975]

Siri: Yes, there is now a strong feeling, not only in the club but in other conservation organizations, that we should have an investment policy consistent with our environmental policies and that would

Siri: presumably encourage the development of clean industrial operations. The latter is nonsense. It can't have the intended effect. Clearly we would want to steer away from certain companies that are outrageous polluters--certain utility and oil and chemical companies that battle environmental protection.

AL: In '63, I noticed the portfolio included PG&E, several oil companies, GMAC, US Steel, a mining company...

Siri: Yes, and they were all bad investments [laughter]. The poor performance of our investment advisor and the chaotic state of the club's finances made it evident we needed expert advice. We needed a financial committee consisting primarily of experts in finance, accounting, and economics. Once the committee was formed and met regularly it was extremely helpful in dealing with some of the club's problems.

AL: Were the experts from the club or hired consultants?

Siri: No, they were not hired consultants, except for the accounting firm--it always had one or two people whom we wanted to sit in with us and they were extremely helpful--they were also members and took a personal interest in the affairs of the club. The others--they were not all Sierra Club members--were bank officers, economists, financial experts, and managers at fairly high levels. They were people with a great deal of professional experience.

The other aspect relating to investments was this--when I began to look at the track record of the club's investments I was shocked at the performance. Our investment advisor Bill Wentworth was an old-time club member. At first he had done this as a service for the club, but when the club's investments began to grow, his investment firm had to charge an investment fee. Anyway, I looked back over some fifteen years of his performance and was able to show that if we would have put our funds in a bank savings account at four percent per year, we would have been three and one half percent ahead of Bill Wentworth's performance over a span of fifteen years! [Laughter]. One of the things we did soon after was to dispense with Bill Wentworth's services, in spite of his long loyalty to the club. We just couldn't afford him!

Then I looked at the performance of mutual funds and they weren't much better. If you had just put money in the bank at the prevailing interest rates, you would have done better.

AL: Was there a big improvement after you got this committee functioning?

Siri: Not really. The market the past five years has been so unpredictable, so difficult on investments, that I don't think much has come out of an investment policy. I don't know where you'd find an investment advisor who knew what the hell was happening.

AL: Are you doing better than four percent?

Siri: Yes. The one thing we did in the Sierra Club Foundation was to find an investment advisor who stayed out of the equities market, that is, stocks, and as a result of an analysis I presented to the foundation trustees, they agreed that we should stay with an investment advisor who would put all of our funds in income investments-- U.S. treasury instruments, bonds, and commercial paper that were less subject to market fluctuations. We have done very well comparatively.

AL: What is your background in investments?

Siri: Having lost a little money in the market, I took a vigorous personal interest [laughter] and applied some of my scientific training.

AL: Do you have any particular expertise?

Siri: No, I don't think so, other than that a scientist would bring to it. In any event, I think the foundation is quite secure in its investments. I don't know what's happening in the Sierra Club today.

AL: You are on the investment committee?

Siri: The foundation's, yes, but not the club's. I haven't been involved in the club's investments for several years. The thrust in the club now seems to be investment policy as it relates to environmental issues. I must confess I can't get very excited about it because I think it's a form of self-deception, probably even less profitable than we were with our investment advisors earlier.

AL: All I would think they could do is invest in some up and coming companies selling solar power units or windmills, or something of that sort.

Siri: That's possible, yes, but those are pretty high-risk operations, and companies that are going to be building such power plants will be the electric utilities--Southern California Edison, San Diego Gas & Electric, PG&E, and equipment vendors like General Electric. They also build nuclear reactors and coal-fired plants.

AL: You mentioned in our first discussion about an incident where you and Phil Berry ran for the Standard Oil Board of Directors. Would you want to tell us about that?

Siri: That was an amusing episode and a rather interesting afternoon. Phil suggested the idea, probably in 1968, that just for the hell of it, he put me up for election to the board of directors of Standard Oil of California. He asked a few friends if they owned

Siri: stock in Standard Oil and would they give him their proxy? He ended up with about 2,200 proxy votes. It's one vote per share. So we marched into the annual stockholders meeting in the Standard Oil building and were greeted by guards who demanded identification and our briefcases. We then went up to the huge hall in the Standard Oil building where they were holding the meeting.

At that time the president was Arnold Miller, an arch opponent of conservation. He gave his annual talk demonstrating that all was well in the world and would be even better if conservationists would stay out of their hair, that the company was conscientiously meeting the energy needs, etc. The meeting was then opened to nominations to the board, a pointless formality in a predetermined proceeding. Phil stood up and nominated me, which caused no end of surprise and a few boos.

I have forgotten how the election proceeded, but somebody read off the results. We lost. I vaguely recall the election came out something like 4,500 to 11,000,000 [laughter]. So we lost by a modest margin. But what amused us was that we picked up twice as many votes as we had proxies for. Still, it wasn't very much. The hundreds of people who were there were clearly investing in Standard Oil and were interested only in their investment.

AL: Did you or Phil get to make a speech about your point of view?

Siri: Phil, very briefly, in nominating me. The meeting was run very tightly.

AL: You were never motivated to try again and pick up a few more votes?

Siri: No, we didn't think we could get 6,000,000 votes!

X ENERGY POLICY: ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

[Interview 7: July 27, 1976]

Growth of Club Opposition to Nuclear Energy

Siri: For most of its history the club had no interest in energy issues other than proposed sitings of dams, power plants, and transmission lines in wild and wilderness areas. The three most notable examples of these battles were Hetch Hetchy, some sixty-five years ago, and more recently, Dinosaur and Grand Canyon. It wasn't until recent years, that is, the mid-nineteen sixties, that the club, along with many others, broadened its outlook on the intensifying environmental impacts of emergy growth and began to take an active part in controversies over strip mining, air and water pollution, and ultimately the potential hazards of nuclear energy.

The club's first contact with nuclear energy, I guess, was in 1963, in the Bodega Head controversy. That campaign was not started by the Sierra Club; it was begun by a few residents in the area of Bodega Head and by David Pesonen. David Pesonen appeared to discover at Bodega Head a major goal in life--to head off nuclear energy and maybe the Pacific Gas & Electric Company.

AL: This came about in the course of his involvement with Bodega Head?

Siri: I don't really know whether it preceded Bodega Head, or was coincidental with it. In any event, Dave Pesonen led that battle almost singlehandedly, with a remarkable display of perseverance, and he finally prevailed. But he did have the assistance of some determined people in the area--one woman particularly, whose name I've forgotten, who provided much of the local driving force.

Bodega Head was finally turned around, not directly by the efforts of the conservationists, but by the Advisory Committee on Nuclear Safety for the Atomic Energy Commission, which reversed its earlier position on the hazards of the site, ostensibly in view of new seismic findings. But that would never have happened if the

Siri: campaign hadn't forced the AEC to reexamine its position and also made the advisory committee more sensitive to its responsibilities. That decision to permit construction of the plant would never have been reversed had it not been for the public--and legal--attention that Pesonen and his group focused on the hazards of building a nuclear plant at Bodega Head.

The Sierra Club did not take a position on nuclear energy then, and it did not for quite a few years afterward--almost a decade later.

AL: I read somewhere that David Pesonen felt that some members of the Sierra Club were actually impeding his progress at Bodega Head, and he got very little cooperation. Is that something you can recall?

Siri: I can't recall that anyone actually impeded his efforts; I don't know how they could have done that, though anything's possible; I'm just not aware of it. There was something less than wholehearted enthusiasm on the part of the board and Sierra Club members generally for an all-out campaign on Bodega Head. It was not an issue that excited a great many people in the club. Those principally involved were those in the area, and a few totally dedicated conservationists who did not want to see anything on the coast.

AL: Did the board take a position on it?

Siri: Yes, the board did take a position in support of the association that Pesonen and the people in the area put together. At the board meeting in July of 1958 the Sierra Club Board said that it "supports the acquisition of Bodega Head by the state as part of its Sonoma coast state park system." Clearly, as I recall, the board felt that it should not be used as a power plant site of any kind, but should be part of the park system.

AL: So they were focusing not so much on the dangers of nuclear power.

Siri: That's right. The board didn't think it appropriate for us to be involved in those technical issues. The Sierra Club had not yet emerged from its preoccupation with wilderness preservation. Most of the members felt that was where the club's emphasis should continue to be placed. There are still many Sierra Clubbers who feel the club should confine itself to defending wilderness.

Then in 1962 the board reaffirmed its opposition to a power plant at Bodega Head and requested public hearings by the Public Utilities Commission, again supporting Pesonen and his group. That was the Northern California Association to Preserve Bodega Head and Harbor. In 1962 the PUC granted Pacific Gas & Electric Company a permit for plant construction at Bodega Head, and the

Siri: following year legal action was taken by the Northern California Association, and the club was invited to intervene in its support. I believe we did ultimately enter as amicus curiae. There was some confusion in the board at that time; the executive committee, I see, in reviewing the minutes of the executive committee and the board, recommended that the Sierra Club not participate in the legal action to force the Sonoma Board of Supervisors to hold a second public hearing, but this was reversed shortly after by the board, and the action of the executive committee was not approved; that is, the board agreed that the club would intervene in support of the legal action.

AL: Do you remember your own views on that?

Siri: My position, as I recall, like most of the others at the time, was not related to the power plant or to energy per se but rather to use of the site. I agreed with the others; it was just not a place to build a power plant. It was an area of the coast that should definitely be preserved, in its natural state or if not natural state, at least preserved undeveloped. I think we were all in agreement on that point.

The next power plant problem that confronted the club was the plan of Pacific Gas & Electric Company to build a power plant in the Nipomo Dunes. In 1965 the board reaffirmed its position on the dunes; namely, that there should not be a power plant in the dunes, that the area should be made a part of the state park system. And then, following that, there was a steady succession of actions relating to proposed developments--an oil refinery at Moss Landing, Storm King on the Hudson River, and dams in canyons across the country, not the least, the Grand Canyon. We have already discussed the Grand Canyon dams battle but one aspect of it bears repeating in the context of this discussion on nuclear energy. It was argued by the club at that time that the economics of a nuclear power plant were significantly better than the dams. Not only would the nuclear plant generate electricity substantially less expensively than the dams, it would not result in the environmental impacts that the dams would produce. The proponent of that proposal was Dave Brower. A few years later Dave, of course, became a vigorous opponent of nuclear energy when their potential hazards were disclosed.

AL: So that was pretty well accepted as an argument by most members of the board?

Siri: It was accepted as a valid argument by all the members of the board. When you come right down to it, if the tradeoff is a nuclear power plant or the Grand Canyon, I think most of us would argue that it would have to be the nuclear power plant, not the Grand Canyon that would provide the power.

Siri: Through the mid-sixties, energy itself slowly came to be recognized as one of the chief disrupters of the environment. Almost everywhere that environmental problems arose there were energy aspects to them. Obviously in the case of dams this was true, and coal-mining, strip mining particularly, and oil refineries and offshore drilling, but energy had not yet reached, even by the mid-sixties, the point where it was an overwhelming concern of environmentalists. That began to grow in the minds of just a few of us who had some technical background and were becoming more and more aware of what the problems were and how they interrelated to energy growth and to population growth.

I guess it really wasn't until the early seventies that a widespread concern about nuclear energy emerged, right down to the grassroots level. This came about, at first, as a result of the many disclosures of weaknesses of the AEC safety program. This was followed by revelations of the problems with management of high level nuclear wastes, and the potential for plutonium diversion, and its awesome consequences. A number of recognized experts in the field challenged AEC decisions and policies on nuclear energy, and from there on, of course, the whole controversy took off like a skyrocket among environmentalists.

AL: Who in the club was a leader in bringing the concern about nuclear energy to the board?

Siri: Dave Pesonen probably was the original club opponent of nuclear energy. It was a little difficult at times to distinguish his opposition to nuclear energy as distinct from his opposition to PG&E and other utilities. Sometimes we wondered who he was really battling, but there was no question but what Dave has been for many years thoroughly convinced that nuclear energy must be abandoned, and there's no question but what his concern about it is genuine as well as vocal. So he was one of the leading early opponents of nuclear energy. Bit by bit more people in the club and on the board became concerned about it.

Fred Eissler was another person who early developed a strong aversion to nuclear power plants, stemming probably from his fight over Diablo Canyon. His original opposition was not on grounds that it was a nuclear power plant but rather that it was sited on the coast and shouldn't be there--anywhere on the coast.

AL: Were his feelings and his commitment based on technical knowledge at all?

Siri: No, not really. Eissler had, so far as I know, no training in the sciences. He was an English teacher, I believe. He was quite intelligent, so he could read the lay literature as well as anybody else and form his own opinions. He would also consult a great

Siri: variety of people; he was quite enterprising in doing this, and in selecting what was consistent with his own feelings about the subject.

Aside from Eissler, there probably was not a single person on the board in the early seventies who had strong opinions one way or the other about nuclear energy. This did not develop until some time later, and then people with some influence on the board like Phil Berry could support a moratorium on nuclear energy. In about 1973, I guess, or thereabouts, Phil settled in his own mind the view that nuclear power had to be abandoned, that it was not simply not safe.

RL: Were there proponents of nuclear energy on the board, or those that seemed to have a strong leaning toward it?

Siri: I think Dick Leonard, probably. I can't speak with absolute certainty, but from the things he said, his general position, I think he would support nuclear energy, as the least of a number of evils insofar as producing energy is concerned. In his mind I'm sure that it was better than strip-mining vast areas of the country and fouling up the air and water with coal and oil burners.

RL: Again without the technical know-how, which Eissler lacked also?

Siri: Dick would have a better command of technical matters. Although he was trained as a lawyer, he had a fair command of technical matters by virtue of a lifelong interest and a great deal of reading and also contact with people in the field. He was a director of Varian Associates, which was a company full of brilliant scientific minds. He had more opportunities than most lay persons to hear technical discussions of nuclear energy. I'm quite sure he balanced the pros and cons of nuclear versus coal and oil and dams. In any event he obviously came to the conclusion that nuclear was not as bad as some people made it seem, and that on balance, it was an energy resource we would probably have to use.

Nuclear Power: Environmentally Clean, with Acceptable Risks

Siri: I guess one of the more vocal people in all of these debates was Siri, who took sometimes peculiar positions. The position really varied with the issue. In some instances it was based on whether the proposed facility, whatever the nature of the facility, was to be sited in an area that I felt should be preserved, irrespective of what it was for. Even a new tower of Babel reaching to heaven should not be put in Yosemite Valley, even if God ordained it. Those

Siri: issues were quite clear. It was clearly the case in the Nipomo Dunes, and at Bodega Head, Yosemite or the Grand Canyon, or any of the national parks and wilderness areas.

Then on the question of kinds of energy, that is, nuclear versus coal or oil, I had strong feelings about strip mining and also the dirtiness of burning coal--I'd seen strip-mined areas, and they were pretty awesome--and oil is clearly coming to an end before many more decades have passed. Natural gas is rapidly disappearing; it's no longer available to electric utility companies now. So that left for the future the non-fossil fuels options, one of which is nuclear.

Even though I was familiar with the errors that had been committed and actions the AEC had taken that were clearly wrong or inadequate, particularly on safety, I didn't feel that nuclear energy was all that bad.

It was certainly something that we could live with. That's a position that I still hold. I'm not an all-out proponent of nuclear; I'm not an advocate of any particular form of energy. I think we have to keep the options open until we know where we're going in energy technologies. Solar and the advanced technologies are still off on the horizon.

Energy analysis is what I do professionally, that is, examine as objectively as possible our future energy options, and assess the environmental and economic consequences of alternatives. In looking at it professionally I can't afford the luxury of selecting data and performing analyses simply to support an intuitive, preconceived notion, no matter how attractive and plausible it may seem. If you look at the history of every technology, the course of their evolution is pretty much the same. If we could convert to solar energy overnight that would be fine, but there is no possibility of doing that on a scale that would supply most of our energy demand by the 1990s. Economically, it is not feasible. You can't convert an entire industry, or even develop the economic and institutional adjustments necessary to implant a large scale new technology in a decade's time. It takes that long just to introduce a new model of a conventional airplane; from the drawing board to the test flight is about ten years. A whole new technology requires twenty-five to thirty years before it's fully deployed. Neither I nor any of the other people in the field could see these new methods for producing energy, such as solar and fusion, coming within the next twenty or thirty years on a scale that would make it unnecessary to have light water cooled reactors and coal-fired plants.

Energy facility questions, I thought, had to be dealt with on a case by case basis. Strip mining had to be planned, managed and regulated far better than was then being contemplated. The same

Siri: with oil, and the supertankers, ports, deepwater channels, and all the mess that oil burning is going to continue to generate. Our continued growth in the use of oil and coal generate such enormous, awesome environmental impacts that one can't just dismiss nuclear out of hand and say that it presents a potential problem for the next three-quarters of a million years.

AL: I've run across a letter you've written, I think maybe to Fred Eissler, and this was in connection with Diablo Canyon in the mid-sixties, where you really were enthused about nuclear energy. This was going to save our future. Do you still feel this strongly, positively, about it as you did at that time?

Siri: I don't recall precisely what I said to Fred. I do remember that the letter to Fred was written with deliberate overemphasis, hoping that some of it might brush off on Fred.

I guess my present position is that I'm not alarmed by the presumed terrors of nuclear energy. Moreover there is no way we can put that genie back in the bottle. We can do what we will in this country; it's not going to stop the rest of the world or parts of it from expanding the use of nuclear energy. Many of the underdeveloped nations of the world aspire to share the affluence of the developed nations but cannot afford the fossil fuels to upgrade their economies. On the other hand, they can afford nuclear plants. The capital cost is a little higher than for a coal-fired plant, but then the fuel costs are less and affordable. These countries cannot improve their economic welfare without energy; or they can't do it with oxen and human muscle power. Rightly or wrongly, many of these countries see nuclear energy as the only recourse. This, of course, presents one of the great hazards. The more countries that have nuclear power plants, particularly the less advanced countries, the more likelihood there will be of meltdowns, accidental release of radioactivity, and diversion of plutonium, simply because many such countries don't have the technical base on which to maintain such an industry.

We will need alternative sources of energy between now and the time when new and more benign technologies are brought in, particularly solar and possibly fusion--which many of us hope will be the ultimate clean, or relatively clean, and inexhaustible forms of energy. We're running out of oil; oil prices are skyrocketing; and we are at the mercy of the OPEC nations, which now supply more than a third of the oil we use. Coal is going to be an important interim fuel, but its use can't be accelerated fast enough to displace oil, and it also presents some severe environmental problems. Coal is a very dirty fuel, and it's going to have a huge impact on a large part of the country when it is used at say twice the level it is now. That leaves nuclear as one clean energy source, environmentally, until solar and other energy sources are fully developed.

AL: You don't feel that energy conservation can...?

Siri: This is with energy conservation, of course.

AL: How do the people in the club who support the moratorium on nuclear energy answer your arguments? Do you feel they aren't looking at the whole issue?

Siri: I think so. I think they've been frightened out of their wits by what has been said about the potential dangers of nuclear energy. It is possible for a nuclear reactor to melt down and to release a large quantity of radioactivity; it is possible for plutonium to be diverted and misused; and it is possible that there will be escape of some high level radioactive waste. I am convinced all these things are going to happen sometime, someplace, in the next twenty-five years as more and more countries have reactors. I think we'll survive it very well, just as we survive forty-five thousand deaths and hundreds of thousands of injuries and billions of dollars worth of property damage every year from automobile accidents. I don't mean that the nuclear reactors are going to produce the same number of deaths; I think the risks are quite small.

There are a lot of toxic things that mankind has always dealt with. If they were disseminated carefully, you could poison or injure half the world's population; it doesn't need to be radioactive. Industry handles immense quantities of hazardous materials that are only sometimes troublesome. If one had a bottle of snake venom or a vial of botulism, you could dispose of tens of thousands of people. But it doesn't happen. Only in exceedingly rare events is there an accident such that a few people are injured. I'm quite convinced that it's going to be the same with nuclear energy.

California's Nuclear Safeguards Initiative, 1976

RL: But then, in view of these possibilities, and of course, what you said earlier concerning the concern of many people about the Atomic Energy Commission safeguards, would you say that our own Proposition 15 [Nuclear Safeguards Initiative, June, 1976] here in California was a step in the right direction, or on the whole it was not a good thing and should have been defeated as it was?

Siri: Well, let me answer the last part first. It should have been defeated, because it was an exceedingly poor piece of legislation, but I can't say that Proposition 15 was bad in principle. As written, it was too simplistic and drastic a solution for a complex problem. It would not have achieved its purpose except in California briefly. If it

Siri: had passed, it would almost certainly, the following day, have gone to the courts and quickly up to the Supreme Court. I think there is little doubt that it would have been invalidated on constitutional grounds. There is no possible way that the conditions of Proposition 15 could have been met. It was in effect a moratorium on nuclear energy.

But Proposition 15 was an exceedingly important piece of legislation. It did the one thing that needed to be done. It shook up the industry and federal and state agencies and brought the whole issue before the public. It was an event of great significance in what it achieved indirectly. So in my mind there is no question but what Proposition 15 served an important function.

AL: Does this mean in raising the issue of safety problems? Or raising the concern with energy?

Siri: The whole issue of energy and, more particularly, nuclear energy. Because the regulatory agencies, while in their own minds thought they were doing a conscientious job, in the broader sense they were not. Proposition 15 helped to focus attention on the need for improving safety in nuclear energy. It dramatized the problems of nuclear safety and its regulation. I think in the long run it advanced the efforts to understand and improve nuclear safety.

The arguments that were advanced were specious, on both sides. I listened in dismay to the nonsense that was said both for and against Proposition 15.

RL: Would you say the public was educated then, by the campaign?

Siri: I don't think it even mattered.

RL: What was the deciding factor for its defeat, then?

Siri: The public was not convinced. But it was made aware of the problems, and at least a third of the voters were convinced, and this constitutes a lot of pressure on government agencies and on the industry. So on balance, yes, Proposition 15 was an important action, in spite of the fact that it was on other terms an inappropriate and faulty piece of legislation. The fact that it qualified and that it posed a threat to the industry and the regulatory agencies was the important function of Proposition 15.

AL: And the club certainly backed it wholeheartedly. Did the club have the kind of views that you have?

Siri: Some people in the club did, yes, but not the majority.

AL: In backing the proposition, did they see that it was a chance to educate people, or were they wholeheartedly in favor of a moratorium?

Siri: There was a wide spectrum of feelings in the club about it. There were members who were dead set against it and a flood of letters demanding that the club take a position against Proposition 15, that the arguments that were being publicized were exaggerations or in error. A few threatened to quit the club; maybe a few did.

At the other extreme there were perhaps more members who were extremely supportive of the club's position. They contributed funds, felt very strongly that Proposition 15 had to pass, and that nuclear energy constituted the greatest of all threats to mankind. And there was every opinion in between. There were those who felt that Proposition 15 was not a very good piece of legislation, but that it was generating needed public concern and having an influence on both industry and regulatory agencies.

AL: You weren't on the board at the time, but did you take any role in trying to persuade the club?

Siri: No, I did not; in fact, I took a completely neutral position, and deliberately so. I had taken on a study of the consequences of a nuclear moratorium and insisted on strict impartiality. This may have distressed the Atomic Energy Commission or ERDA, which probably would like to have seen a study more supportive of its position. I still don't think nuclear energy is wrong or can be rejected, but it does need more attention to safety, particularly the security of plutonium against diversion and production by every nation with a reactor.

AL: It needs more safeguards than are presently applied to it--do you see that as a serious matter, getting additional safeguards?

Siri: Of course, just as I see indiscriminate strip mining as a serious problem also, and proposals for supertanker ports in the San Francisco Bay, or of half-million ton liquid natural gas tankers that present hazards of enormous potential--a thousand Hindenburgs all going up at one time.

AL: Has this created much friction within the club--people being for or against nuclear energy? Has it lined people up on one side or the other or created difficulty?

Siri: It did initially, I think, but I don't believe that it is true now. I think there's a fairly general agreement that the club should oppose nuclear energy, or at least support a moratorium until the perceived problems are solved; that is, reactor safety, high level waste disposal, and the plutonium problems. There are uncertainties

- Siri: associated with all of these, no question about that. No one, including the industry, says that none of these things can happen. The question is, what is the probability of their happening, and what risk are people willing to accept? When we climb mountains we accept a very high level of risk, but we do that on our own volition. Or if we fly in an aircraft or drive on the freeways we accept a very high level of risk.
- AL: But you're just accepting it for yourself, not for others.
- Siri: Well, we accept it for ourselves and our families. We don't hesitate to expose our families. On the other hand, there are four million people living in the Bay Area, and they know there is a considerable risk, and it's not one they have any control over unless they move away. It doesn't stop them from living here. They know that, if there's a severe earthquake here, their chances of injury or death are pretty high, and yet they continue to work in the city, live in the area. I live next to the Hayward Fault, which is less than a quarter of a mile away from here.
- RL: Of course, that sort of thing seems so much more remote than--
- Siri: Well, we're accustomed to it. We do accept risks over which we have no control with almost no thought at all of the consequences until something stirs up an emotional reaction. You see this, for example, in people buying houses in flood plains, or downstream from a big dam, or in active seismic areas--under conditions that are almost unbelievable, when you know the risks are high, and yet it doesn't stop them.

Sierra Club Support for Nuclear Moratorium, 1974

- AL: Is there a lot of friction between the pro-nuclear and anti-nuclear faction in the club?
- Siri: I don't think there is now, no.
- AL: But at the time the policy was being decided on in 1974?* For instance, Diablo Canyon generated much ill feeling.

*January 12-13, 1974, Board of Directors voted to oppose new nuclear fission reactors pending resolution of safety factors and adequate policies to curb energy over-use. See Sierra Club Bulletin, February, 1974, p. 15, for full text of nuclear power policy.

Siri: Oh, nothing like the bitter arguments that developed over Diablo Canyon, no.

AL: Was there respect for your point of view, which lost out?

Siri: Oh, I think so. These were straight debates on the question.

AL: Was it something you personally felt quite strongly about?

Siri: I didn't think the club should take a strong position in support of an outright nuclear moratorium; I did support most positions that would require the regulatory agencies and industry to face up to the job of improving safety and plutonium control. I still feel that way, but not to the point of supporting a moratorium. Unless you want to get rid of nuclear energy in total, just don't want to bother with it, which is a position that Dave Pesonen and many club members and others take, a moratorium will not help solve the problems--it'll make it almost impossible to solve the problems. I don't mean that the problems are such that if they're not solved the whole world is going to blow up--it is more a question of reducing the risk to the lowest level practicable. I think the risk is exceedingly small, at least in the United States.

AL: What about other members of the club who have technical backgrounds such as you have?

Siri: There are many such members who do not approve of the club's policy on nuclear energy. On the other hand the club's national energy committee consists of members with professional competence in many fields, including nuclear engineering, and I believe that most of them are opposed to nuclear energy, in varying degrees. Some of them, I believe, feel that the AEC and ERDA have not done an adequate job in reducing the risks; they have serious doubts about the adequacy of nuclear safety, but are not willing to say there must be a complete abandonment of nuclear energy.

So there's still a wide spectrum of attitudes. But I think more generally, it's fairly moderate in the sense that, yes, the regulatory agencies have got to be a lot tougher than they have been, there's got to be more research and analysis on safety, diversion, and waste management. I think all of us are agreed that this is necessary. There isn't a vigorous debate; those who hold moderate positions on nuclear energy just don't make a big issue of opposing those who do feel strongly about nuclear energy.

AL: You mentioned earlier that it was a grassroots effort that caused the club to take its first stand calling for a moratorium on nuclear energy. And also you said that a lot of people in the club opposed that stand.

Siri: This emerged at one of the last board meetings I attended [January 12-13, 1974], in which the club's position on nuclear energy was being discussed. I had offered a resolution calling for additional research and analysis of nuclear energy, and a separation of regulation from development. Phil Berry offered a substitute resolution calling for a moratorium, and to my surprise, there was an instant response to it--a favorable response. Many of the chapters then gave it vigorous support. I was quite surprised to see the support that his resolution generated in the members attending the meeting; these were club leaders from the council and chapters--chapter chairman or representatives. There were also those who argued strongly against Phil's resolution, but ultimately the board supported it.

AL: Dave Brower attended that and spoke in favor of the moratorium?

Siri: Yes, he was there. I don't think Dave carried much weight that day. He is a very respected person, but I don't think that it was his arguments that carried the day at all. It was the spontaneous reaction of members attending the meeting that persuaded a majority of directors.

AL: Do you know anything about the change in his views?

Siri: Well, Dave is strongly opposed to nuclear energy now, and laughingly reminisces about the time when he proposed that a nuclear power plant be built instead of the Grand Canyon dams. He recognizes that he was able to change his opinion, and I respect him for it. I also respect Phil for beating me at that debate because I hadn't lost many debates up until then.

AL: Was it a long debate?

Siri: I think it lasted most of the morning.

AL: Do you feel there were people on the board who actually made up their mind as the result of the debate?

Siri: I think so, yes, because the atmosphere was so heavily loaded. This was what surprised all of us, I think--Phil just happened to hit a sympathetic chord, and there was just an overwhelming expression of support; some of it got to be quite emotional. It's impossible to counter a set of circumstances like that by rational discussion; the arguments just don't carry any weight in a highly emotional setting.

AL: It sounds like the Berkeley City Council meetings.

Siri: It could very well be. Anything you have to say is perceived to be biased.

AL: Was there any hostility towards you as a representative of pro-nuclear energy.

Siri: No, I don't think so. I didn't sense any at all.

AL: Do you know who on the board was a sort of swing vote on that, who may have been swayed at the time, in that particular set of circumstances?

Siri: I think the circumstances swayed Ed Wayburn. He has a very fine sense of political expediency and can see the way attitudes are running, although before that time he had either been on the fence, or said that no, we shouldn't go that far.

Dick Leonard, of course, was vigorously opposed to a moratorium as was Larry Moss and Claire Dedrick, who is now the California state resources secretary. It seems to me six of us were the only holdouts. I believe the others were Bill Futrell and Paul Swatek.

After that it was clear from other indications as well as the board's vote that the club had decided what it wanted, and I felt that it was not my role to try to reverse the whole situation. In the first place I probably could not do it, and in the second place, having debated the issue and lost, I could accept the fact that the Sierra Club's position would serve a useful political purpose and one that I could share: namely, that it would help focus attention on the regulatory agencies and the nuclear industry to be sure that every measure would be taken to insure nuclear safety.

Under the Atomic Energy Commission, safety, waste management, and safeguards were tucked in a corner somewhere with second-rate minds attending to the safety research and development. These aspects of nuclear energy were not given adequate support in the past nor did they attract first-rate talent. The AEC and the industry did not respond until every wrong move became a headline and past sins of omission caught up with them. This was good, it would make them all shape up. The AEC had reached the ripe age of twenty-five years or thereabouts, and by the time an agency attains that venerable age, it becomes cemented in place. Attitudes are set, the whole structure is fixed, the relationships with the industry it is to regulate are smooth and solicitous. It's about that time that something has got to happen. Mainly, I think the thing that ought to happen is that every twenty-five years an agency is liquidated and a new one created with a new set of players.

AL: Is that what's happened to the AEC?

- Siri: Not completely, no. Some of the old hands are still there and running some of the show--not all of them, there have been enough changes to have an impact, and I think the impact's generally going to be good.
- AL: Has the development part been separated from the regulation?
- Siri: Yes, that was done a year and a half ago when the AEC was broken up into ERDA, which included the research and development activities of the former AEC, and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, a new agency which assumed the regulatory functions.
- AL: Is it well run, do you think?
- Siri: I think it's much better the way it is now, because regulation is now completely separated from research and development. There will always be problems, depending on who the commissioners are. I just don't think that under Nixon and Ford we could have had the best collection of commissioners, but they're doing a much better job than was done under the AEC, no doubt largely as a result of intense pressure from the public and from professionally competent people in the field who have been disturbed by the inadequacy of nuclear safety research and regulations.
- RL: Before we leave this particular issue, if you'll ignore my naivetè, it appeared that the board's decision was a reflection of the club's membership, at least under the circumstances of that meeting. Has that always been true of the board's decisions? Have they reflected the membership's wishes, at least on the major issues?
- Siri: I think they have, but perhaps not in the sense that you mean it, that the board has been timidly responsive to pressures. It has not. By and large the board does really reflect the prevailing attitudes of members but not always. Generally it does because of a common set of values among most members. In the case of Grand Canyon, or Redwood National Park, the wilderness areas, there is no question.

In many instances, the board is leading and has adopted policies that were at first not too enthusiastically embraced by chapters or members. In some of the first actions taken by the board on population, on air and water pollution, and energy, the board was really leading the membership in these areas. The club sort of dragged along with the board's decisions. There have been some very good people on the board. They had sound, intuitive feelings about environmental issues long before they became generally known and understood. I think the board has been responsive when it needed to be, but it has taken an aggressive lead when it felt there was a need.

Siri: The nuclear energy issue will always be a troublesome one, I think, or it will be for some years, until people become accustomed to the idea. And then someday when the nuclear power plant melts down, it will be treated pretty much like the failure of the Teton River Dam--"My, isn't that terrible!"--and then switch the TV to the baseball game.

AL: That's human nature, isn't it?

Siri: Of course.

AL: Unless you're living next door to the nuclear power plant.

Siri: That's right, and if you're living downstream from a ruptured dam, or in an earthquake zone when it's active.

Club Energy Policy, 1972: Resource Conservation and Environmental Constraints

AL: Should we go on to discuss the development of the overall energy policy, which you had quite a role in?

Siri: Yes, if you wish. In the early seventies, it became apparent to me and a few others that the club needed to be involved in energy policy. I could urge this on the club simply because I had a professional familiarity with energy technology developments and more important, was aware of the growing environmental impacts of the rapid growth in energy consumption. Looking into the future the consequences appeared awesome unless we and other nations changed our way of supplying and using energy. It was clear that there needed to be a good many institutional, economic, regulatory, and technical changes brought about in a relatively short time to insure that the growth of energy was more restrained and efficient and the environmental impacts were mitigated.

These were not being attended to; there was no national policy, except bigger is better. That's considered economically sound and it's traditional Americanism. Looking to the future, however, there must be a limit to our extravagant waste of resources and environmental abuses. We are incredibly wasteful, in spite of exhortations from the White House to conserve.

So several of us who were deeply concerned about the implication of continued rapid growth in energy consumption initiated efforts to involve the club in energy policy. We formed a small energy committee with Larry Moss and Paul Swatek and I as its principal members. We

Siri: initially tried drafting some resolutions, but we didn't seem to be getting very far; we tended to get down to small specific issues and not policy. In an act of inspiration, or more correctly desperation, at the board meeting in October 1972 I finally put together a broad policy statement. I think it covered a couple of pages and encompassed just about everything under the sun so far as energy was concerned, but it provided the Sierra Club with a general policy on energy, and the board quickly passed it. I guess that was the formal entry of the Sierra Club into the broad arena of energy policy. In brief, this initial general policy statement called for the institution of mandatory measures and incentives to conserve energy, and for effective environmental controls--technical and regulatory--on all energy supply and consuming facilities.

At the same board meeting we also drafted a set of more specific recommendations on the Price-Anderson act; on breeders; and on separation of the AEC into an independent regulatory agency and a research and development agency. So we then had a broad policy statement that I'd prepared, and a series of specific issue-oriented resolutions as a start. We agreed that we would continue to expand on the general policy statement by proposing resolutions on specific aspects of energy, and this we then proceeded to do.

This gradually evolved into something substantially more ambitious in the form of a national energy committee. The first chairman was Sid Moglewer, who did an outstanding job in organizing a large, multidisciplinary committee of experts from across the country. Under Moglewer's leadership, it proved to be a highly productive committee. He was professionally qualified for the job--he was a systems analyst--and he was an extremely articulate person as well as energetic and persistent. He had all those qualities that make a very good chairman. The committee produced a considerable volume of policy in the following years.

AL: Did that deal with the nuclear question as well?

Siri: Yes, it did. In spite of my position on the earlier nuclear energy resolution I was made chairman of the nuclear subcommittee. I agreed to take it temporarily until the subcommittee got underway and a permanent chairman could be found. I was too busy with other things to function effectively as the chairman, and I felt strongly that a chairman should be someone who could spend the required time and effort at it. I also felt the chairman of that committee ought to be someone who was in spirit wholly attuned to the club's position on nuclear energy.

AL: This was after the club called for a nuclear moratorium in '74?

Siri: Yes. I have stayed on the committee because of genuine interest in the problems nuclear energy presents and not to oppose the club's position.

AL: Who chairs that subcommittee now?

Siri: Bob Watt from Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory. There hasn't been a meeting for some time; I think probably because Bob Watt is, like everyone else, so busy that he finds it difficult to find the time for it. It's a committee that should be active because energy and its impacts are our most pressing problems. My role in it is to try to keep everybody honest in the information the committee develops, and this means on both sides of nuclear and other technologies.

AL: I noticed that the club's battle book on energy by John Holdren apparently was issued before or while the club was in the process of developing energy policy through its complicated committee method. Was there any connection between the writing of that book and the views that he stated and the club's evolving policy?

Siri: There was some, inevitably, but the only demand we made of authors is that their views not run counter in some overt fashion to those of the Sierra Club. There need not be a laundry list of the club's positions on issues. They are the author's opinions, but we're not going to publish a book that clearly is contradictory to club policy, although that may have happened too from time to time. Anyway there has been no attempt to dictate to an author what the content of his book should be, although we often make suggestions in reviews of manuscripts.

AL: But in a book like that, in particular, doesn't the public perceive the author's point of view to be Sierra Club policy?

Siri: It's possible. This question has often been raised. I think it is true that a Sierra Club book is construed to reflect club policy. John Holdren, though, I don't think called for a moratorium. He was criticizing nuclear energy and the regulatory agencies; what he did was describe nuclear energy, and in a descriptive fashion he showed what some of the problems were and did this very ably. He's a brilliant young fellow. So he wasn't presenting a policy; he was discussing the problems that are and could be associated with nuclear energy.

Environmentalists, Social Policy, and the Labor Movement

AL: Would you say that the energy policy showed a sort of anti-growth bias?

Siri: In a limited sense, perhaps. It was not intended as a no-growth policy, although some club members hold this view. I think it corresponds more to a controlled growth, and ultimately a limit to

Siri: growth. We will at some time have to achieve zero population growth--we can't grow in numbers forever, obviously--and maybe the same thing could apply to energy. I don't think the Sierra Club is proposing that this year or in the next ten years we arrive at zero growth, recognizing that it's physically not possible to do so, but in the long run we must endeavor to achieve that end on the grounds that nothing can grow forever. I guess the differences lie in just how far we can grow in population and energy consumption.

AL: Do you think Sierra Club policies would necessitate a decreased standard of living, as some people say?

Siri: I don't think that is proposed. I think it is argued that it is not necessary to diminish the quality of life by limiting growth, and I think it's an argument that has not been invalidated. There's not an easy way yet of establishing whether the quality of life can be maintained at a constant population, constant GNP, constant energy input. Maybe it can; it seems rational, but we don't know yet that it is. How do you prove it, how do you demonstrate it?

Every society and most natural ecosystems are in a state of flux, either growing or dying. Some will remain stable for an extended period of time, but ultimately something happens in any ecosystem. We manipulate our ecosystem, and maybe that's the difference. Whether human society can maintain a stable productivity, constant per capita energy consumption, and population is not at all clear. It may not be possible in the real world as desirable as it appears to be now. I'm not suggesting that it isn't; I'm just suggesting that no one knows the answer. It may be that once society comes to that point it may become so sick of the milieu and so bored that it will seek its usual ways out.

AL: I guess one thing I'm getting at is if it were determined that to save the environment the American people would have to lower their economic standard of living, do you think that the club, as it's presently constituted, could take that kind of stand; would its members allow it, and would the board be willing to? Are people too comfortable to do it?

Siri: That's a long hard guess to make. I don't know. It would depend on so many things. If you were asking me if people were beginning to starve, if they were going unclothed and unhoused, would the club be responsive to this, I think it would; if it meant merely that American society would put up with some inconveniences for the sake of a better environment, I think the club would strongly support such a policy. I think this is the crux of the argument. There may be inconveniences; it may not be possible to drive a three or four thousand-pound automobile in the future; we may have to do with less of something, but this doesn't mean lessening of this mysterious thing called the quality of life. The quality of life seems to be whatever it is you happen to be accustomed to.

AL: The quality of life to me encompasses a broader range than standard of living. Clean air is part of the quality of life.

Siri: That may be but I am mindful of a meeting on the proposed Dow Chemical plant held by the Air Pollution Control Board about a week ago [July, 1976]. It was attended by a number of environmentalists, including club members, who argued that no permit be granted to Dow Chemical for a site near Collinsville in Solano County because of the pollution it would produce. On the other hand, there were several hundred labor union people there who were making things very unpleasant, demanding that the Dow Chemical plant be built, and the hell with all this clean air nonsense. So you can speak for yourself, you can't speak for a construction trade union that couldn't care less; they wanted assurance of a job tomorrow.

AL: You've had a role in trying to bring together the often opposing viewpoints of conservationists and labor. I noticed that in one of the statements that you helped draft on energy and economic policy, in January 1973, that you suggested the club should support measures to protect the poor if the energy crisis intensified.

Siri: That came about as a result of several things. I had talked at several conferences held by labor leaders. One of them was sponsored by Don Vial, then chairman of the University of California's Industrial Relations Department, who was extremely active as an academician in labor affairs, not a labor leader but a very knowledgeable person who had the trust of labor leaders. He arranged a conference, called "Labor and the Environment" at which I gave a talk. I tried to press the point that we were not costing labor jobs; in the long run, in fact, we were probably generating jobs for them.

I guess perhaps more than some others I realized that we had better try to reach some kind of accord with labor, and so I had a series of meetings with labor leaders in California, attempting to establish communications with them.

The meetings, I thought, were quite fruitful at first. There was good communication and understanding, but it never reached down and pervaded the rank and file. The union leaders themselves, as they explained it, said, "We understand what you're talking about, but we can't go back to our unions tomorrow and express it the way you have, or the way that I'm talking to you now. We understand the problems, but unless we come out fighting for jobs on Monday, we don't have jobs ourselves; we are no longer union leaders." So either because they did not wish to undertake that kind of test of their strength or did not think it was worth doing, we were never able to go much farther with it.

Siri: I did offer a couple of resolutions that were adopted by the board in an attempt to establish better working relationships with labor. One of our concerns was the question that you raise--whether some of the energy policies the board might adopt would adversely affect people with low incomes. For example, we were proposing that the cost of energy be increased; this is one of the most effective ways of discouraging waste and reducing the consumption of energy. I think every economist would support this view.

The question immediately arose, if you increase the cost of energy is some segment of society more affected than others? It seemed clear that low income groups would be adversely affected if a larger proportion of their income had now to be expended on energy in commuting to work with their cars and heating their houses. To those with middle class incomes, and particularly the wealthy, this would be an inconsequential part of their discretionary funds.

We wanted to be reasonably careful about how an energy pricing policy might be perceived, and guard against developing a policy that would lead to even greater inequities. The board did adopt, as part of its energy statement in January 1973, a policy that special efforts should be made to ensure that higher energy prices did not penalize the poor. It was recognized that it is a legitimate issue in dealing with energy to consider what inequities are produced in altering the scheme of things, but I must confess that efforts in this direction did not go very far. The concern about this issue has not attained the depths of feeling or analysis that the strictly environmental aspects of energy have been given by environmentalists generally and club members in particular.

I don't think club members are wholly insensitive to this, but they constitute generally a fairly narrow segment of society. They are keenly attuned to the environmental issues, but to some of the sociological issues I think less well. I think this is just in the nature of the organization and the people who populate it. I don't think that they're unsympathetic in the least; they are concerned, but they're more concerned with the environmental questions, and this is why they belong to the club. Of course, some members are concerned solely about wilderness preservation, and not about other things like energy and population, least of all about labor. In fact, there were fairly strong feelings of disagreement expressed when we proposed finding some kind of accord with labor.

AL: Tell us more about the attempt to develop a club policy on labor.

Siri: As I said, I had begun meeting with union leaders, at least around California, trying to establish some kind of dialogue with them, and gradually got to know some of them. There was kind of an understanding; when we sat down together, we could talk sense. I thought

Siri: there was an opportunity to broaden this understanding so that labor and the Sierra Club, which really had common interests when you sorted out all the nonsense, could get together and be political allies in areas of common concern. And so I went to the board with several proposals, which were adopted [May, 1973].

The occasion which precipitated the board's actions was the Shell Oil strike by the Atomic and Chemical Workers Union. The leader of the union was very sympathetic to the environmental movement generally, and the issues related to air and water pollution in particular. For those who worked in chemical plants exposure to toxic pollutants was a serious health hazard and this was, of course, the union's primary complaint.

After a great deal of thought in advance, to be sure that even I believed that it was a legitimate thing for the club to do, I proposed a resolution supporting the position of the Atomic and Oil Workers, which the board adopted. I then proposed additional measures for engaging labor in some kind of action of mutual interest and support, among them the formation of a labor committee of club members and representatives of labor unions.

It was all adopted by the board, but it was clear that there wasn't a great deal of enthusiasm for this. In fact, there was some mild opposition, even reflected in some of the statements made by directors of the board. They reluctantly went along with it. Most of them, I think, saw the possible merits in it and thought that our relationship with labor ought to be and must be improved and some kind of alliance established. A few were lukewarm on it. But the feeling was more evident in the lack of enthusiasm in the general club leadership. It was clear that the time really hadn't come yet for the Sierra Club to shake hands with labor and regard them as friends and allies.

AL: Was part of your motivation on the Shell Oil strike to show labor how you could be an ally or were you doing it on general principles?

Siri: It was on both. Let's face it. It was primarily to demonstrate that the Sierra Club could support labor on significant issues where we had a common interest. It was important to make that demonstration; this is, I think, what the board ultimately bought. At least it was what I argued.

AL: Did you get much negative feedback on it?

Siri: Yes, there was some. In fact, there were some fairly strongly worded letters saying that we should not get into labor affairs; this is none of our business. It was a new departure, and we always had a response of this kind whenever the club looked in a new direction; however small the deviation from the traditional concerns of the club, there were always a few members who would protest.

- AL: One of the arguments that I heard against it was that the club had to maintain its allies in industry, that they needed to work with industry to accomplish their ends and shouldn't alienate them by siding with labor--an inability to see that labor could also become an ally.
- Siri: Yes, I have a vague recollection of such arguments, but it was not a view I could support and it wasn't one that members of the board seriously considered.
- AL: Were you a member of the labor committee?
- Siri: No, as a matter of fact. I was serving on so many other committees that there was just no possibility. The committee never really went anywhere; it was essentially inactive. The people who were appointed didn't have a background in labor or a familiarity with the problems, and they were all people from parts of the country where they would not have an opportunity to be in touch with labor leaders. The committee received no moral or other support from the club, and it just slowly died.
- AL: That might have been an expression of grassroots attitudes. Was there some strong opposition?
- Siri: There was, in fact, some opposition, but the way it was received generally by the club can best be described as indifference. Nobody was really enthusiastic about becoming involved with labor. It's a different society from the Sierra Club, and you couldn't bring them together that fast. They're two totally different cultures, in spite of the fact that nearly everything the Sierra Club tries to do has its first benefits for labor and for low-income people. Parks, access to the coast, reduction of air pollution, etc., etc.-- the persons who most immediately benefit from these are low-income people, laborers.
- AL: Actually, from a couple of remarks reported in the minutes [Board of Directors, May, 1973], it looked to me as though a couple of the labor leaders weren't too enthusiastic either.
- Siri: Among labor leaders there were people like Jack Henning, in the construction trades, to whom environmentalists were an anathema. But Jack is a very astute person, and while he makes loud noises in public about the evils of environmentalism, I think he was willing to see how far we might go in reaching some kind of an accord that might benefit the construction trades. He said this to me in private and then in a public meeting following a talk I gave. I think he would have cooperated if the club had conscientiously followed up. He would have been the most difficult of the labor leaders to bring around. I think he may have been convinced but

- Siri: remained guarded. The construction trade unions were not going to change their attitudes toward environmentalists overnight. We would have to go to them and lay our proposals on the table and they'd chew it over and see what was in it for them. I can't fault them for that.
- RL: Your own attitude seems twofold, though; you have some understanding of labor's problems and also recognize that if you could develop their support it would be very great.
- Siri: Yes, because if we had developed their support--and I think this is why the board passed the resolution--it was clear that they would constitute a powerful political ally. My own feeling about it was that this was the obvious politics of establishing a working relationship with labor. The other part of it was a more intellectual thing. I thought that labor was being badly misled by industry and too often getting to bed with industry. Labor was allying itself with industry in what they thought was a common cause, and I didn't think their causes were common.

The argument I used with labor leaders was that in every environmental controversy involving construction in which we seem opposed to you, there are alternative solutions that would benefit both labor and the environment, and quite possibly create even more jobs. The only alternative you're picking is the one handed to you by the developer, whereas another site might be to your advantage if not his. We tried to explain that when we oppose construction of a power plant at a specific site it could be put somewhere else--there must be another dozen sites where it would be acceptable, where you wouldn't have the opposition of the environmentalists. Furthermore, some of the policies that we were proposing would lead not to a loss of jobs but to additional jobs--restoration of strip-mined land, for example, or the recovery of sulfur oxides and particulates from stack gases from power plants--all of these things cost money, provide more jobs.

I think that to a small extent the labor leaders I talked to conceded this is possible but they are hard-headed pragmatists and had to be shown there are more jobs and not fewer as a result of environmental policies. We never did get quite to that point except in a few examples where we showed that conservation of energy could very well lead to additional jobs. I still think there is an opportunity, if someone wanted to spend the time and effort and had some feeling for it, to establish better rapport with the labor unions. But then maybe the chief obstacle is the Sierra Club itself.

What ultimately happened, of course, is that the industry itself captured the support of labor, particularly the construction trades but others as well, and they formed a joint organization called the California Council for Environmental and Economic Balance, headquartered in Sacramento.

AL: To fight environmental concerns?

Siri: Essentially so, yes, to counter the organized environmental efforts. Mike Peevey, an old acquaintance and former labor leader, took the job as the executive director of the organization.

RL: You sound very modest in your answers, because I gather from our previous talks that this was more than an intellectual point of view that you're taking, that you had an affinity for, let's not even say labor, but for the working man.

Siri: That may be part of it, having been a working man myself at one time. I guess I have always been concerned about the inequities that prevail in human societies, ours included, and this no doubt may influence some of my attitudes and actions.

Technology and Social Progress

AL: In your keynote address for the 1965 Wilderness Conference you expressed the view that technology--energy and machinery--was ultimately going to be the salvation of the environment. Do you still hold this view?

Siri: Yes. I still think technology will, when we learn to use it more wisely. It's not the machinery's fault. It is our careless use of it. Man directs what it does, and for too long he's been doing so with little regard for the environmental damage. This is a problem. We can get exercised over machinery, but the bulldozer is just a mindless lump of steel until somebody sits up there at the steering wheel with orders to level a mountain or fill a marsh.

You can't have 250 million people in this country with little energy and no tools and not wreck the country. This is a message I tried to get over--maybe not very well. I've seen countries like India, Nepal, and several in South America where the inhabitants have little more than a machete or an ax and maybe an ox, but they just wreck their countries. Nepal is becoming an awful mess. Even though the population density is still not that great, the villagers have burned and slashed through the country indiscriminately with no thought of tomorrow when they clearcut ground or build villages. The result is of course disappearance of forests and massive erosion and polluted streams. In India it's pretty much the same story.

You don't need a bulldozer or a power plant to destroy a wilderness area or even a whole country. You just need a pair of hands, even one hand, and an ax! Even a stone ax! If you had nothing but an ax and a domestic animal to work with, the land

Siri: requirements for each person increase enormously. If you tried to support 200 or 300 million people in this country on that kind of economy, it would mean, among other things, the rapid disappearance of forests everywhere in the struggle to survive, the country denuded, and its water supplies thoroughly polluted. We wouldn't have wilderness areas or national parks, or anything of that kind. But with energy and advanced technology, the needs of a large population such as ours can be provided without destroying the land and its natural resources.

You can of course destroy the land and our environment even faster with energy and technology and this is what we've been doing until recently. The question is, are we intelligent enough to use energy and technology intelligently? I think we are.

AL: Has there been an anti-technology group on the board in the past, or now?

Siri: In a limited sense, yes, but I don't think anyone on the board ever thought that all technology was totally evil, that we had to go back to the cave or even wholly to the single family farm. I don't recall this was ever a view the Sierra Club entertained. On the other hand, there were members of the board who had a strong distaste for advanced technology. They neither understood nor trusted it, but, then, perhaps the latter follows naturally from the former. However, I think all club directors, past and present, have felt that technologies have been developed and used with too little regard for their environmental impacts.

AL: But you wouldn't say that some of the anti-nuclear power stands are based on a distrust of technology?

Siri: That may be an element in some people's attitude, but I don't think that's uniformly the case. Many of the people who actively oppose nuclear energy are concerned specifically about the potential hazards, not technologies generally. People should be concerned about this. There are legitimate differences of opinion about the risks of nuclear energy. I suspect that for those who are most vehemently opposed to nuclear energy it would make little difference in their attitudes even if it were demonstrated that nuclear energy were no more hazardous than other energy technologies. They seem to argue that you cannot in fact demonstrate that it is safe. In a strict sense this is true; you can never prove anything is absolutely safe.

In any event I still am optimistic and don't hold the view that technology is solely at fault; I think man is at fault for misusing his technology, which you must remember includes the ax as well as nuclear energy.

AL: So you might still give your 1965 keynote address?

Siri: Yes, I don't think I would disagree with that original thesis.

AL: The address struck me as being quite optimistic that planning would solve a lot of our problems.

Siri: I'm even more optimistic now than I was at that time, ten years ago. A lot has happened in the meantime that we didn't even anticipate then. There have been improvements, decided improvements, in environmental legislation, regulations, attitudes of industry and government--and improvement in control of technology.

AL: What about on a world-wide basis? Population, for instance, or resource distribution world-wide?

Siri: Those are social and economic problems whose solution must involve technological advancement. It is in the technologically advanced countries where some control of population growth and environmental impacts is achieved.

AL: I guess when I say optimistic I mean thinking in a broader sense--optimistic in general about the future of mankind or the future of a decent livable planet.

Siri: Yes, I am. But before we achieve a steady state with reasonable equity for all nations, the world will face several centuries of intense turmoil. Three-quarters of the world isn't going to be brought up from the stone age to an economic level and a style of living that the other quarter enjoys without an immense amount of conflict. The underdeveloped, underprivileged three-quarters of the world is proliferating at a far greater rate than the advanced countries. This presents a future that is ominous, but I think the survivability of mankind is sufficiently high to bridge the transition to a more equitable world economy and environment.

AL: Are you involved at all in any international environmental organizations?

Siri: No, not now.

AL: Can you say in a nutshell, or not in a nutshell, what in general has motivated you to contribute so much of your time and energy and skills to the environmental movement?

Siri: There is no way of answering that any more than I can answer why we climb mountains.

AL: We'll be asking that soon. [Laughter] You better be thinking about that one.

Siri: I don't know; one can think up plausible reasons but I'm not sure I believe any of them. It may have been triggered by early associations and then reinforced by intuitive insights. Later it became an intellectual as well as an attitudinal commitment. In my case, as it did for many pre-1960 environmentalists, it was almost certainly associated with exposure to places I enjoyed with a deep passion, the wild areas and mountains, and a recognition that they were being threatened. And from that primitive awareness I became conscious of the multitudinous assaults on the environment and the broader problems to which they are linked. In any event, my involvement in the environmental movement did not spring spontaneously in a vacuum. It was nurtured by a diversity of forces, some emotional, others intellectual, and no doubt social.

AL: Any particular individual or group of individuals that would be influential in pushing you in that direction, or did it just grow out of your general experiences?

Siri: After I joined the club, yes: Ansel Adams, Dave Brower, Dick Leonard, and John Muir. Before that, no. I will have to attribute an earlier interest to childhood experiences, or, as in the case of mountain climbing, to an aberrant gene. My earliest recollections go back to the discovery of a fascinating world of nature around me, the excitement of visiting a neighboring stream or observing for hours on end the interplay of life in a field with weeds, bugs and small animals, or playing in our local forests. When I was a little kid, these were great adventures. When I grew up, they were still wonderful adventures. I suppose these early exposures to micro-wilderness influenced my later outlook.

AL: You can't attribute it to some early mentor?

Siri: My mother always had passion for mountains and outdoors, but had little time or opportunity to enjoy either.

AL: Did she exert any strong influence on you?

Siri: No, not in a fashion that I was conscious of. I didn't take an active role in conservation activities until I was relatively old, compared to what kids are doing today. I must have been in my mid-twenties before I began to become active. But all of this time I was skiing and climbing and hiking and getting out into remote areas--the joy of exploring was always there. I never thought that some damn fool would come through with a chain saw or bulldozer and wreck it all.

AL: Any religious beliefs or philosophies that have shaped your point of view at all?

Siri: No religious beliefs whatever. I must confess, I suppose for the record, that I have absolutely no religious beliefs. I do have opinions about religions but they are best left unsaid. I do recognize religion as a necessary social institution, maybe a psychological need. I don't need it; it has never played any role in my life.

AL: It doesn't influence your view or appreciation of nature?

Siri: No, absolutely not. It has nothing whatever to do with my view on anything. I suppose there is merit to the ethical precepts embodied in most religions but they seem less conscientiously practiced than the rituals. What other purposes it serves I'm not sure--I'm not a sociologist. Anyway, religion has had no part whatever in my attitudes or feelings. Philosophical beliefs? No, I suppose if you're a physical scientist you relate most things, including life, to physical laws and chemistry. This does not diminish the joy of living, but you can also accept the fact that as a human being you are a product of a high level of built-in programming plus the programming you acquire by virtue of your relationships and experiences.

Growth Within the Sierra Club: Assets and Liabilities

AL: Did you happen to read Galen Rowell's article? I think it was called "Sierra Club Come Home."

Siri: No.

AL: Apparently, he felt the club had lost its roots in losing its ties with mountaineering. Do you see this as not just changing the nature of the club, but weakening the club in some ways?

Siri: It's hard to say. This argument has been made before. There was a time when almost all of the directors of the club were mountaineers and backpackers. Former club leaders like Bestor Robinson, Dave Brower, Dick Leonard were all climbers. There are not many climbers left on the board, but all the directors are still wilderness advocates. The Sierra Club has broadened its scope and mountaineering is now a much smaller part of the club activity than formerly. Its energies were diverted into additional, and I think more profitable, directions for a conservation organization. Whether it has weakened the club or not I don't know.

It could not possibly have stayed as a mountaineering club, or a club with a dominant interest in mountaineering, and still have become a large organization and a very influential one. Back when

Siri: the club consisted of a few thousand members, most of them knew each other, they were all strong hikers, and they all shared a common, dominant interest in western wilderness. That might not be the organization that would have an influence on environmental politics today, and I don't think so. Today's club, with 160,000 members all over the country with diverse environmental interests, I think is much more important and effective. The climbers can focus their interest and energies in other organizations.

AL: What's your opinion of the direction the club is taking?

Siri: That's very difficult to say. When one no longer takes an intensely active role in an organization after having been with it and had such a role for many years, there is a tendency to think that maybe it is not as effective as it was in the good old days. This is an attitude I absolutely want to avoid. I'm not going to make that judgment because I don't know. Times change, and so do people's attitudes and methods. The club is still a very strong organization.

There is one thing that does concern me, and it's not unique to the Sierra Club; it's common to all institutions. Sooner or later they tend to become so organized and so structured that they lose a lot of their flexibility and with it their effectiveness. I saw signs of this in the club, even when I was president, and I guess I contributed to it with the efforts to reorganize. With rapid growth, reorganization was called for and there was probably no way of avoiding it. The larger the club becomes, the more diverse and the more geographically spread, how do you coordinate all of this? It calls for progressively more complex organization and management, and this means that you tread a very narrow line between becoming a perfect organization that's totally ineffectual, and becoming a well-coordinated organization which is still effective. I think the club tends to weave about that line from time to time.

AL: You mean over-organized--too concerned with organizational matters?

Siri: Yes. The Bay Chapter became this way a long time ago. It's the biggest chapter of the club. It became unwieldy and relatively ineffective compared to the young chapters, where there might be a thousand members or so. In fact the most effective chapters per capita were those with 100 or 200 members. They formed a corps of people who were totally dedicated, all of whom were essentially leaders in their own right. As the chapter grows it becomes diluted and becomes more unwieldy. I think the Sierra Club is having somewhat this problem, how seriously I just don't know but it is going to change from decade to decade, I think. There are going to be times when it is going to have good leadership--a dynamic group of people with a high level of motivation and dedication--and it will then run into trouble, because of a dynamic leader probably [laughter].

Siri: And there are going to be more passive periods--I think it is going through a relatively passive period now. But I don't think this is the end of the line. Like any institution, if it survives, it goes through phases from time to time, depending on who's on the scene, and also the circumstances prevailing at the time. It's a large institution now and so are its problems.

AL: And its goal now is to double its membership?

Siri: Yes, I suppose this is inevitable. It's always a hazard of growth--the need for more growth. We recognize the dangers of growth in population, energy, and economy, but we don't recognize it in our own household. Some of us have tried to make this point before, but it doesn't get through. One can ask the question whether the Sierra Club would be a more effective organization if it consisted of 50,000 members, relatively selected in some suitable fashion, than with 200,000 members. I'm almost inclined to think that it might be more effective if it were somehow more selective and smaller so it would be more manageable, but I wouldn't propose this; I don't know the answer, but I do know it would be rejected. The larger the club gets, the greater are the demands for its funds for all kinds of things, not all of which are important. As demand grows, the process becomes a massive political game within the organization. Consequently the more things you try to fund, the more dilute your effort becomes, the more urgent is the need for additional income, which means increasing the membership, but this generates more demands. It's a vicious circle. Of course, if the club grew twenty percent per year, or even better, thirty percent per year as it did for a few years back in the sixties, ultimately everybody in the country would be a member. Maybe that should be the goal to achieve; the club could then levy taxes.

I don't know where it's going, and nobody can--except that there are great hazards in becoming very large and unwieldy and inflexible. I'm not suggesting the club is totally that, but it has some of the symptoms of growth syndrome. We will see what happens in the future.

XI CALIFORNIA--PROTECTION FOR THE COAST, RIVERS AND DELTA

[Interview 8: October 12, 1976]

Campaign for Coastal Protection Initiative, 1972

AL: I thought we'd start by some discussion about the campaign for the California Coastal Protection Initiative in 1972. It seemed in a review of the minutes that you had first proposed the idea of a moratorium on development of the coast and a California Coastal Commission in 1967. Do you recall where that idea originated?

Siri: I'm not certain where it originated. It was an idea that had been around for some time and whose time had come for the coast. I rather doubt that it was original with me. I think it simply grew. It was probably triggered by the successful creation of the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC). We saw BCDC as a model for a coastal commission. Most of the people, at least in California in conservation, had been concerned for many years about the coast. We had often discussed means of coping with that problem as we saw the encroachment of developments in southern California and now on the northern California coast, particularly the siting of power plants, refineries, ports, and subdivisions.

AL: Did this have any relation to the Nipomo Dunes-Diablo Canyon controversy? You proposed it right in the midst of that controversy.

Siri: Yes it did, the Nipomo Dunes controversy quite clearly was the immediate stimulus for advancing the idea of the coastal planning commission and control of some kind. After that battle, it was obvious that similar battles were going to be engaged in every year until there was some systematic planning for the whole California coast--or for all coasts and not just California. So the Nipomo Dunes controversy didn't create the idea, but it helped precipitate action.

AL: Were there other groups working on this before you proposed it to the Sierra Club, or was the Sierra Club the initiator?

Siri: There were small groups up and down the state that were concerned about individual developments--some people in southern California who were concerned about Newport Bay and proposed developments there, and others along the coast concerned about what was happening to their local piece of the coast. It hadn't really coalesced into an organized, coast-wide effort, but it all came together very quickly. Legislation was introduced; Senator Alan Sieroty was of course the force behind the legislation.

AL: Were the ideas his?

Siri: They were provided I guess by any number of us who became involved in the campaign to see a bill passed. We had had no success in earlier attempts. All attempts died in the legislature, in one committee or another. There were enough vested interests who could influence the significant committees--local government committee, finance committee, and others--so it just got shot down every time a bill was introduced.

AL: Any specific vested interests that you recall?

Siri: You know the alignment after the initiative was in the works--those who owned property along the coast and those construction firms that hoped to realize substantial profits from building miles of residences along the coast were clearly opposed to any kind of constraints. Construction trade unions, of course, were vigorously opposed to any kind of coastal legislation. They felt they had a lot to lose if there were constraints on construction, and their primary interest as we were told repeatedly was, "Don't bother us with these conservation ideas, tell us where we are going to have a job Monday." That's hard to quarrel with, so I can't fault them for holding a position that was different from ours, except that we thought that it was short-sighted: homes were going to be built, and we argued that they just didn't have to all be built on the coast.

So the alignment of interest groups led on the one hand to a very strong faction that had economic interest in the coast, and on the other hand to an alliance of those who wanted to see the preservation of the coast, or at least better planning and control of coastal development. This included essentially all of the conservation or environmental organizations, plus a number of unions that didn't have a special interest in construction, service trades in particular. And the alliance became quite strong. This was a case where citizen's organizations, conservation organizations, could all get together because there was a clear objective. They were all pushing for the same purpose. Naturally, once successful, the alliance would fall apart, as it did, but for that purpose everyone hung tightly together in a concerted effort to pass the initiative.

AL: I notice that the UAW supported it. Do labor unions usually take such stands that are unrelated to their purposes?

Siri: That isn't uncommon for the UAW. They have had a fairly strong conservation element in their general policy; they've supported conservationists on any number of occasions, not just the coastal issue. And so have other unions as well. In this controversy, it was primarily the construction trades that felt that they had to oppose any kind of restrictions on coastal development. They felt it meant loss of jobs to them.

The leadership of the campaign for the conservationists centered primarily, I like to think, on the Sierra Club, but we might have a disagreement about that from Janet Adams, who ran something she called the Coastal Alliance. Initially an alliance was put together which Janet directed full time--she was the driving force behind it--and a number of us sat in as a steering committee, putting the alliance together and working directly with Alan Sieroty.

AL: Was this before the initiative decision.

Siri: Yes. I have forgotten what the dates were.

AL: March, 1972, was the decision to have the initiative campaign.

Siri: Well, it was probably a year before that that the alliance was first put together. In any event, Janet was a very willful and an effective campaigner. She was constantly up in Sacramento, badgering people for funds and support and advancing the cause. She played quite an important role, but I think that many people who were leaders in this battle found it difficult to work with Janet. She was too independent, demanding, and short-tempered. She could not tolerate ideas of others or people she felt threatened her self-appointed leadership role. So she proceeded pretty much on her own.

As time passed, we found that we had to proceed independently if we were to be effective. We didn't disassociate ourselves from the Coastal Alliance, but we did make a major effort on our own, and we found that our pleas for contributions in the campaign were generously rewarded. We discovered an intense interest by people all up and down the state, not only those living along the coast but inland as well.

AL: Did this surprise you, the amount of backing?

Siri: No, not really. Because here was something that everyone knew and had regard for. Everybody knew the coast and wanted to see it preserved. People throughout the state were concerned about

- Siri: inaccessibility to the beaches and shoreline, and didn't want to see the shoreline as a junkyard from Oregon to Mexico. So the response was very good--in such places as Fresno and Bakersfield as well as San Luis Obispo. Californians love their coastline, and it was evident in the response that we saw. We had well organized groups up and down the state working precincts and working in the streets.
- AL: Through the Sierra Club?
- Siri: Yes.
- AL: You were the coastal campaign coordinator for the Sierra Club. Did you have staff people assisting you?
- Siri: Yes, we had one full-time staff person, and several others helping out. In southern California, there was an especially effective group working very hard at it. George Wagner, particularly, a young attorney, took a leading role there. Then there were one or two others in the area who spent most of their time engaged in this campaign and did a highly professional job.
- AL: Whose idea was it to go for an initiative? Wasn't that a new approach for the Sierra Club?
- Siri: No, it wasn't exactly a new approach, but it was something we regarded as a last resort because the earlier attempts to get bills through the legislature, as I said, all died in committee. Apparently there was no way of getting such a piece of legislation through the legislature while the contending forces were so strong at the committee level. So we regarded this as a last resort. And I think this is what initiative campaigns should be considered. You try every normal means that you can. At that time we didn't feel that one should fly in with an initiative every time you felt an urge to do something. One had to make an honest effort to get legislation through the elected bodies.
- AL: Had the club been involved in initiative campaigns before?
- Siri: I don't recall, not at the same level that this one ultimately entailed. This was a major campaign for the club. Every possible effort was put into it--staff, major fund-raising efforts and all the rest, and in the development of an organization up and down the state.
- AL: What organization did Janet Adams come out of?
- Siri: She really didn't. She worked with Claire Dedrick for a while. The two of them had a small business which didn't go too well. They separated and Janet became engaged in public relations activities for various clients, and this was a campaign in which she had a very strong interest.

AL: Was she a staff person or was this volunteer?

Siri: I don't know what the final arrangement was, I suppose she was on some kind of retainer or salary from the funds she raised, in cooperation with others, but I think it was primarily expenses; I don't recall the details. But she was operating essentially alone at that time; that is, she was not directly representing an established club or organization. She served as a director or coordinator for the Coastal Alliance.

The Sierra Club fitted into this whole scheme of things in a peculiar sort of way. We found that we had to run our own show to be effective, so we maintained as close a liaison as possible with Janet Adams. You know, we're all fighting on the same side, but you swing your sword and we'll swing our ax.

AL: Anything else you want to mention about the campaign or about the outcome? In particular, there was a tremendous amount of financial support from out of state, I understand, against the initiative.

Siri: Yes, I don't remember the details, but the utility companies, the builders, the construction trade unions, Standard Oil and a host of others who had a vested interest in what happened to the coast, all put in substantial amounts of funds in an effort to beat the measure.

AL: Any distortions in the campaign?

Siri: Yes, the whole campaign was badly distorted. This was the campaign directed by the PR firm, Whitaker and Baxter. Whitaker and Baxter early in the campaign asked us to meet with them. I guess the object was to persuade us to come to some kind of compromise agreement at the outset. They assured us this would be a straight, honest campaign. Well, the way they conducted it ultimately proved to be so divisive, so dishonest and distorted that we had the feeling that Whitaker and Baxter won our battle for us. And after the election, it was clear that their clients also felt that Whitaker and Baxter had lost it for them [laughter]. It was so divisive, so mean, and in a sense, unprofessional that we were almost pleased with the way they were running their campaign. It would have to turn off people. If anything, it made our job easier, but we were still a little edgy; obviously we weren't certain until it all happened.

AL: Was the club or the Coastal Alliance able to afford much television time? Or was it mainly the precinct work?

Siri: No, we could afford television time, posters, billboards, and ads on buses, just as Whitaker and Baxter did, but not on the same elaborate level, obviously.

AL: Did you have a public relations firm?

Siri: No, but we did have any number of talented people, radio and television personalities, particularly movie actors, who were willing to give their time for spot commercials, so we were able to afford one-minute or thirty second spots up and down the state on TV and radio.

AL: Did you coordinate this sort of thing?

Siri: Yes, it was coordinated under our campaign. I was task leader for the Sierra Club portion of it.

AL: You are so modest. We have trouble with all the "we's" and "us's." Then after the interview is over I realize that I never did find out what Will did. It was all "we" and "us" who did it.

Siri: Well, my job was that of general manager, and it took a lot of very talented people to prepare the material, to seek out free talent and arrange the radio and TV spots, to get things on buses and what not. Sure, I was a part of all that and tried to coordinate it.

AL: Did your work at the university take as much of your time then as now?

Siri: No, it didn't. It would have been impossible if today's conditions prevailed then. Then I could take a substantial amount of time off, or at least put off until tomorrow what I couldn't do today. That would be difficult now.

It was an exciting campaign, and we won it. I guess there were some classic elements in that campaign in that there was nothing foolish in the way it was handled. We had tried all the normal routes to generate the interest in the coast. The interest was potentially there; it was dormant. We tried every means available to us to introduce legislation, tried to get it enacted, without success. After trying these routes--administrative, legislative, and legal--we had exhausted all remedies, and, still feeling that it was absolutely essential to bring land zoning or land planning to the coast before many more years had passed, we then proceeded with the only route left, the initiative. It would have to be the final decision. If people wanted coastal planning and assurance of access to the coast, they would say so, and they did.

AL: How satisfied are you with the way the system has worked?

Siri: I think it has worked as well as we could have hoped. In some of the local coastal commissions we were more than a little distressed at the appointments that were made to them, but we had expected this.

Siri: But the state commission, with Mel Lane and Joe Bodevich coming over from BCDC, we thought was not only an able state coastal commission, but it had its heart and head in the right place with very able people.

AL: Who chose them?

Siri: The governor appointed one, the assembly another, one or two by the senate; I've forgotten the formula for appointing the commissioners.

AL: But the governor didn't appoint them all.

Siri: No, that could have been utter disaster. By and large the commissions, particularly the state commission, were as much as we could hope for. They did their work. They came up with a coastal plan. I think there would be varied views on how successful it was. In my view it was as much as or maybe even a little more than we might have hoped for.

AL: You mean the actual plan?

Siri: Yes, the coastal zone plan and regulations.

RL: Some people might not remember the number of the proposition--you haven't mentioned it.

Siri: Yes, Proposition 20.

AL: Anything else you want to add on that issue?

Siri: Perhaps a few random thoughts. Only a temporary set of commissions were created by the legislation. Ultimately we would face the battle all over again in establishing the coastal commission as a permanent body and also in the adoption of a coastal zone management plan by the legislature. I was not involved in that campaign, which took place this past year. I think the coast is reasonably safe. I don't think it's possible now to totally dismantle the regulatory machinery and the efforts that have been made to date. People like coasts! As long as they like shores and beautiful scenery along the California coast, I think they are going to fight for it.

AL: It's a good model for other areas. Do you think this kind of land-use planning can be transferred to a less popular area? Do you think it would be accepted?

Siri: Yes, I think this has been done in parts of the Gulf Coast, at least to some extent. Other areas are looking at their coastal zones as well. Ultimately I think all coastal zones will be managed in some effective fashion. I don't think Oregon has a coastal commission, but both the state and coastal communities have been more prudent than others in the way they've dealt with the Oregon Coast.

AL: Well, they can see the experience of their neighbors to the south!

Siri: Yes. Right. They can see all the awful things that can happen.

The Peripheral Canal, Key Element in California's Water Plan

AL: Should we turn to the Peripheral Canal and the California water plan, another fairly recent battle that you were active in?

Siri: Yes. The proposed Peripheral Canal is the key element in the vast state-federal water systems to convey northern water south across the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Its impact on the delta is only one aspect of California's water problems that we have long been concerned about. The general problem is that of massive transfers of water from one hydro-basin to another--the development of huge conveyances, dams and reservoirs and the severe impacts they may have on the north coast wild rivers, the delta, and San Francisco Bay. We've always felt that whenever a system as large as that is proposed, it should be examined for more than just engineering and economic feasibility. Those were the only two questions ever considered in the past, before environmental impact reports and environmental impact statements were required.

We had already fought against the Arizona water plan and NAWAPA--you know, the North American Water System that was proposed to start in Alaska, with huge transfer systems with dams, aqueducts, canals and reservoirs spreading all across Alaska, Canada, and the northern United States to bring water to southern California and the Mid-West. And it meant tunneling, damming, cutting through some of the national parks, up and down wild rivers all over the place, the whole of North America was to be covered with all kinds of concrete structures. I don't recall where the idea originated, but it is a scheme that surfaces every once in a while. It's obviously in somebody's file cabinet in some agency which pulls it out from time to time, tries it out to see what the climate is like [laughter], and then thrusts it back into the filing cabinet.

The Central Arizona water plan caused us more concern because it was closer to realization. It would have inundated some of the beautiful wild lands in Arizona and raised havoc with some of the best scenic areas.

The largest water system in construction was in California. This was the combination of the Bureau of Reclamation's Central Valley water project and the state water project. These had been devised and authorized in 1950. At the time we knew very little about big water transfer systems and what their ultimate environmental

Siri: consequences would be, or whether they were justified and on what grounds. So we really paid very little attention to it unless it involved a dam in a valley that we wanted to see preserved, or if it meant loss of a wild river. It was not until the mid-sixties that we really began to think about these systems and develop anxieties about their consequences.

The more we learned about the state water project and saw its potential consequences, the more concerned we became about its impact, its artificial stimulation of growth in areas where maybe growth shouldn't be stimulated, and its environmental impacts, particularly in northern California and the delta. By then a substantial part of the state water project and the Bureau of Reclamation's Central Valley water project had already been constructed, so there was no way of reversing the billion dollars or so of work that had already been installed. In jest, I suggested the Mendota canal or the California aqueduct could be used for a kayak and canoe channel for "river" touring between northern and southern California. But it seemed to us that the way to approach the problem was to bring it to a halt long enough to have a reevaluation of where it all should go, and maybe in the light of new developments and new thinking, it could be modified so that it could provide the benefits intended but not the potential environmental and sociological damage that we thought would result from its completion.

There were several things that were clear. First of all, the way the federal project and the state project were going, it was clearly the planned intention to tap all the wild rivers in northern California--the Trinity, the Eel, etc.--for export to southern California. The argument had been made repeatedly by Bill Gianelli, director of the Department of Water Resources, that water planning was very simple. Water was plentiful in northern California where there weren't many people, so the obvious thing to do is ship it to southern California where the people were--or will be in 2020. He stated it in just those simplistic terms. The only thing that need be considered, he repeatedly said over the years, was, "Is it economically and technically feasible?" Presumably this question had been answered in 1950 when the project was authorized by the legislature, and the first bond issue was passed.

Two problems were immediately apparent. The first was the immediate threat to the northern California wild rivers. The second was the serious impact the state water project and the federal Central Valley water project would have on the delta and San Francisco Bay. Substantial damage was already being done to the delta by the export of water. If you looked at the historical flows in the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers, the outflows from the delta, and the proposed export of water from the delta, it was evident that by the year 2020, when the project was completed and the full water

Siri: deliveries would be made, the drastically reduced natural outflow would have a devastating effect on the delta and possibly the bay and Suisun Marsh. In dry years there might not be any water under the Carquinez Bridge, other than sea water, because the proposed exports of water by the year 2020 could commit, in dry years, the whole of fresh water flowing into the delta.

The key to this whole problem was the Peripheral Canal. Without the canal it was possible to pump only so much water out of the delta for export to southern California and the southern San Joaquin Valley before they began to suck in brackish water backing up from the bay and the ocean. And southern California wanted the purest water it could get. They could do that only if they put in a peripheral canal connecting the Sacramento River with the pumps. So the campaign, at least in my mind, became quite a simple one: block the Peripheral Canal. The canal hung like the sword of Damocles over the delta and the northern California wild rivers. We successfully blocked construction of the Peripheral Canal for the moment.

Opposition to the Canal: Demand for Reevaluation and Firm Guarantees on Water Transports

AL: So the Peripheral Canal opposition was just a device to block the water plan?

Siri: Yes. Now let me back up for a moment. There was a water committee in the Sierra Club, and unfortunately the members of this committee hadn't had enough experience in this kind of political action. They were taken out on field trips by the Department of Water Resources, and attended by members of the Metropolitan Water Districts in Los Angeles, which was to receive half the water exported, and by people from the Kern County Water District and other water districts. They managed to persuade our committee that the canal was environmentally beneficial; that if the canal weren't built, there would be irreparable damage to the delta; that the canal would provide the means of reestablishing the flows in the channels in the delta, because they would put in spigots here and there to let water out. The water committee came back with a recommendation to the board to not oppose and perhaps even approve the Peripheral Canal [1969]. I guess that was one of the occasions when I--I don't know if I exploded, but I guess I took a pretty strong position [laughter]. The committee backed away from it, and I got the board to pass a resolution in opposition to the Peripheral Canal. This became a strong campaign issue for the club. The policy was extended to the state water project and the Bureau of Reclamation's Central Valley

Siri: water project and then broadened in scope to question all inter-basin water transfers systems until there have been a thorough study of their impacts, need, and alternatives.

In any event, I always regarded the Peripheral Canal as the key to the water problem in California and the delta particularly. Now, I don't know that the Peripheral Canal isn't the right way to go to save the delta, but I wouldn't be convinced that it should be built until there are absolute guarantees that it would not be used to export fresh water from the delta to the extent that it would damage the delta and the bay itself. There is no assurance of this. The capacity of the proposed Peripheral Canal could handle the whole flow of the Sacramento River three quarters of the year; that is, one could run the Sacramento River completely through the Peripheral Canal and off to southern California to irrigate semi-arid lands that are not now irrigated or used or needed for agriculture, and for swimming pools in the Los Angeles area. That's something over 4,000,000 acre-feet a year. And the feds would be pumping out even more than that. And since southern California has a majority of votes with its larger population, it's clear that if it ever came to a question of who would get water, the Sacramento River would go down the Peripheral Canal.

So there could be no assurances written this year that would guarantee that the bay and the delta would not be utterly destroyed next year, or ten years from now or fifty years from now. And so there were two considerations: Was there another solution to this problem that would provide a mechanical or economical guarantee, and not just a resolution by one legislature which would be overturned by the next? Second, why not pause long enough to reevaluate the whole water project to see if there are alternative ways of dealing with water requirements, other than this simpleminded wall-to-wall plumbing system?

AL: Is it now an actual moratorium, or is it just tied up in legal battles?

Siri: When Jerry Brown became governor, he installed some new people in the Department of Water Resources--Bill Gianelli left--and the new people there brought a halt to things and said, "Okay, let's take a look at it and see what the problems are."

AL: I saw the other day that they recommended construction.

Siri: Yes. It shows you what happens to good conservationists when they join the establishment. [Laughter]

AL: Were these good conservationists who recommended it?

Siri: Well, one of them, the deputy director of the Department of Water Resources, was a very active conservationist, Jerry Meral, who formerly opposed the canal.

AL: Had he been active in the Sierra Club?

Siri: Oh yes, extremely active. I haven't seen the report yet so I don't know what their recommendation is. I saw an indication in the paper that they might recommend it, but until I receive the report, I won't know what's involved. If it's a recommendation that they proceed with construction of the Peripheral Canal, I think we'll be back in battle.

AL: Have there been environmental impact statements filed?

Siri: Yes. Totally inadequate. It was a foolish exercise.

AL: Has Save the Bay been involved in this, or was your work in Save the Bay related to this?

Siri: Most of this activity was conducted through the Sierra Club when I was still on the board. I have been active as president of Save the Bay Association too, but there I have to relate it to the San Francisco Bay. It's clear from the studies that have been done that the reduction of fresh water flows into the bay will have a profound effect on the bay itself. On this subject Gianelli and I disagreed the most violently in our debates on TV and radio and in print.

AL: When was this?

Siri: Over a span of several years, starting in 1969. We appeared in TV programs in San Francisco, in Oakland and in Sacramento, sometimes just the two of us, sometimes four of us. Congressman Jerome Waldie and I sometimes ganged up on Gianelli and one of his staff or somebody from one of the water districts. They were always fun because Waldie was of course extremely well-informed and a dedicated opponent to the Peripheral Canal. The two of us had a ball because Gianelli was an old-line engineer. He saw things in very simplistic terms, and he was an easy target.

AL: I'm surprised he allowed himself to be a target!

Siri: I don't think he realized it.

RL: What was Gianelli's background?

Siri: He came up from southern California. He was with one of the water districts, and I have a vague recollection that he was with the Los Angeles Metropolitan Water District. I think he was appointed by Pat Brown.

- AL: Brown was a strong backer of the California water plan?
- Siri: Yes and he still is. Brown Senior is still a strong champion of the water project.
- AL: What about southern Californians in the Sierra Club. Was there any opposition?
- Siri: No, almost none, which surprised me a little. I thought they wouldn't play an active role on this issue because it might be sensitive in that area and because they might see it in a different light. But it wasn't the case. We had strong support in southern California and also from Central Valley chapters--people in Fresno and Bakersfield. They saw it as a conservation issue, and adhered to their basic philosophy.
- AL: You were talking about the contracts for water through 2020. Who were they buying the water from? Who owns that water or is going to own it?
- Siri: The state issued bonds for construction of the water project. The Department of Water Resources then expended those funds to build the project. The department would then arrange contracts for the sale of water to the water districts. Now there is another body involved in all this and that is the Water Resources Board. It also has a role in the allocation of water, and I don't recall whose authority ends where. The Water Resources Board can and did set minimum water quality standards for the delta. This was partly on our urging and also on the urging of people from the delta. This limited the amount of water that could be exported in spite of the contracts. But the contracts were between the State Department of Water Resources and the water districts throughout the state.
- AL: They didn't consider that where the water fell determined who owned it?
- Siri: No. The question of riparian rights was one that has always been in litigation, and it was handled in part I guess by, "All right, we'll give you a pail of water but we will take the tubful." This is about the way it went. Gradually there were more withdrawals up the Sacramento River, that is upstream from Sacramento itself, and in the delta, so there was a contest as to who would get the water, but by that time, the Department of Water Resources had contracted for the sale of 4.2 million acre-feet a year which was an enormous amount of water. This meant that by the year 2000 or certainly by 2020, the amount of water being released into the delta would diminish to a point where in dry years there would be a negligible flow of fresh water into the delta and the bay.

AL: What do you see as an ultimate solution to the problem?

Siri: The one we proposed and the one I still think is the rational one, but probably cannot be achieved. First of all, there needs to be a thorough reexamination of the two water systems, both the feds and the state, to see what the legitimate needs are and look at the alternatives. Is it possible by the year 2000 or 2020 that desalinization will have reached a point where it is also economically feasible or competitive with the cost of shipping water over the Tehachipis, for example?

Second, the feds and the state have got to get together; they operate two independent water systems. You go down the Central Valley and here are two canals, running parallel, right down the valley. One is federal water, the other is state water. You know, it's a preposterous situation. Each has its own reservoirs, dams and whatnot, all mixed into a complex system. At one point, I guess in the Clifton Forebay where the pumps are located, the two waters come together and they keep some kind of an accounting system, but we argued that if the feds and state would just get their heads together, the systems that they already have would almost certainly meet the water needs up through 2020. This is perhaps asking too much, but we can still push in that direction.

And third, there had to be an absolute guarantee in the form of physical and economic limitations as to what could be transported across the delta so that it wouldn't lead to future temptations to dam up all the wild rivers and ship all the water across the delta.

AL: It seems that this issue is an example of what you first mentioned when we started our interviews, the change in the club's concerns in the sixties to a much broader outlook.

Siri: Yes that's right. This came along at a time when we had already developed a strong preoccupation with population growth, energy growth and pollution. It was clear that whenever anyone did something on a large scale there should be a more comprehensive examination of its consequences to see whether it's really the thing that should be done or if there are alternatives that are more benign.

AL: I noticed that in the president's report in 1970--I guess this was right after you had put forth the recommendations on interbasin water transfers--Phil Berry noted that the board had progressed towards engaging the issue on a more theoretical level. Was this one of his concerns or goals?

Siri: Well, I guess there were a couple of us who were always pressing for expansion of the club's range of concern and their vision, and Phil is one of the younger members who saw this quite clearly.

Siri: Phil's personal interest centered primarily on wilderness areas and more importantly on forest practices. This was the area where he made his most substantial contribution. He had a significant impact on what happened to forest practices, the Forest Practices Act, and the implementation of it in California. But he clearly saw the need for a much broader view by conservation organizations and the Sierra Club in particular. So I always had Phil's support in this kind of endeavor.

AL: Anything else to add on the water plan? Are there any of your confrontations with Gianelli worthy of reporting on?

Siri: He was an interesting fellow, an engineer of the old school, with very narrow vision, no capacity to see things in a contemporary light. If you had a problem, solve it. He didn't worry about all this peripheral stuff, and particularly you didn't worry about the posy pluckers, the little old women in tennis shoes.

AL: Is that what he called them? Are those his words?

Siri: Yes. He even used those words in some of our debates. This is what we were to him. He was a man from another generation, another world. But he was an awfully nice guy. We would say the most awful things in countering his proposals, and he'd just come bouncing back asking for more! He was always friendly before and after pretty vigorous debates.

AL: Did he ever address himself to the questions you raised that were sort of outside his frame of reference?

Siri: No, because he couldn't put them in the same context. He was quite incapable of that. He saw us as doing nothing but obstructing a sound engineering plan. In his mind there was a clear, unarguable need for water in southern California. He claimed that withdrawals of water had no bearing on the bay. The bay is polluted because you pour your garbage and sewage into it.

In one respect he was right, sewage has to be cleaned up, but it was only part of the problem. Even if we had tertiary treatment of all the sewage going into the bay, the bay would still become eutrophic if there were no fresh water inflows. It would be one great green mass of decaying algae, if it didn't have those big flushing flows in winter in particular. He just said flatly that circulation in the bay had nothing to do with water inflows. These were a matter of tidal action. This hasn't been borne out in the studies by the Corps of Engineers, USGS, and others. He was advancing an argument that he firmly believed, but just wasn't correct.

Siri: The water problem isn't finished. It's going to be a growing problem over the years because water is one of our scarcest resources and it's wanted by everybody.

AL: It seems that desalinization is going to be the only answer.

Siri: It might be; it depends on the price of energy.

XII SAVE SAN FRANCISCO BAY ASSOCIATION

[Interview 11: November 28, 1977]

Origin and Outlook of Save the Bay

AL: Tonight we are discussing Save San Francisco Bay Association. Shall we begin by your telling us how you became involved in the association.

Siri: I believe it started as a result of my activities in the Sierra Club, and the concern with the San Francisco Bay and related problems that were of course of interest to the Save the Bay Association. I found myself joining and attending meetings back in the mid sixties, and from there on I found myself more deeply involved very quickly because of a personal keen interest in the purposes of the Save the Bay Association. I guess no one objected to my presence and activity, and some even may have thought it useful on occasion.

AL: Was your wife also involved?

Siri: Not directly. Jean is really not an organization person in that sense. She operates one-person conservation campaigns on a great many issues, including the bay. But she finds that she can be more effective operating as an individual and more often than not a very persuasive one. She does have her own organization; it's called the West Contra Costa Conservation League.

AL: And it's a one-woman show?

Siri: No, actually there are three women. They alternate as president, treasurer, and something else, only because from time to time there is a need to explain what their organization is. However, they have been able to demonstrate several hundred members on occasion, when a legal suit or inquiry demands it. But it's quite a loose organization.

AL: I noticed in the minutes that she had come to some of the Save the Bay board meetings.

- Siri: Oh yes, Jean still comes to some of the meetings if there is an issue in which she is involved being taken up by Save the Bay Association.
- AL: And how did you get to be president of this organization?
- Siri: I was elected president at the board meeting in May of 1967. Bill Mott, who was at that time director of the East Bay Regional Park District, had been serving as president. He resigned when he moved to Sacramento to take on the job of director of Parks and Recreation.
- AL: At the time, when you first became involved in Save the Bay, was it a small group of people who invited others to come to meetings or was it sort of open attendance?
- Siri: It was usually a meeting of board members with a guest or two. I don't recall my initial contacts; however, once I had contacted Mrs. [Catherine] Kerr and [Sylvia] McLaughlin and [Esther] Gulick I believe I was invited to attend the board meetings, which were held once a month, and then was made a member of the board. At that time we were in the thick of a battle over BCDC.
- AL: How does the presidency of Save the Bay compare with the Sierra Club presidency? Is it an active office?
- Siri: It can be as passive or active as the president chooses to make it, although if he takes something less than a minimal role the chances are that he would not stay very long. We've had this problem from time to time on the board of directors of the association, where people who, primarily because of personal affairs, have not been able to get to many meetings, and in due time we've asked them if they would resign and make a space for someone who could take a more active role. This happens on a fairly regular basis, not because of lack of interest, but people become involved in their own professions, or move away, or they are unable to get to meetings regularly enough or to perform an effective role. So there is some turnover in the board, in fact a healthy turnover but not excessive. Many people can be active for a period of years, and then their personal affairs catch up with them, and they find that they have to pull back from their volunteer services to the community.
- AL: Has the nature of the board changed over the years, have you noticed, in types of members?
- Siri: Not substantially, no. The outlook of the Save the Bay Association remains quite constant through its whole history. Its primary purpose is to preserve the bay waters and the shoreline; to insure public access to the shore; and, where the shoreline is to be used or developed, to insure that it is developed in a fashion that's

Siri: acceptable for environmental and aesthetic reasons, and is also water-oriented. So Save the Bay has always felt that its primary role was the bay, and we have had from time to time to interpret this in a fairly strict sense when we have been approached by other organizations to take part in campaigns that lay outside of the bay or even outside of the Bay Area. We've felt we had to concentrate all of our resources on this immediate area, that is, the San Francisco Bay and, in part, the delta.

AL: Do you think that's worked out well?

Siri: Oh, yes. I think it's been an effective policy in that we have concentrated our resources and maintained the lead role in bay problems.

AL: I had asked you if the board members had changed. Is there a conscious effort to get a balance of technical skills or a diversity in background and experience?

Siri: Yes, we try to maintain a diversity of disciplines and bay-related experience. More often than not we try to have people on the board who can represent regions of the Bay Area in addition to, or sometimes even more than, expertise; that is, we have people from all of the Bay Area counties. And these are usually people who have taken leading roles in bay issues in these areas.

AL: Do you know something of the background of the original members?

Siri: Yes. The original members were three women, Kay Kerr, Sylvia McLaughlin and Esther Gulick. Their husbands are all associated with UC Berkeley. These three women back in the early sixties looked out of their windows here in the hills and could see what was going on in the bay and decided that they didn't really like what they saw. The three of them got together and formed an organization, Save San Francisco Bay Association. That was the start of it; I believe that was in 1961.

One of the first things they did was to persuade state Senator [Eugene] McAteer to introduce a bill creating the Bay Conservation and Development Commission. This was an act on their part of incredible skill and persuasiveness because Senator McAteer, one would have thought, was an unlikely candidate to put in a bill to restrict the development of San Francisco Bay. In any event he and Senator [Nicholas] Petris together brought the bill through to a signature by the governor.

Well, it wasn't quite that simple. The initial effort to pass the bill was a vigorous and often a very bitter battle. It finally passed in 1965. That of course was the start and the major modern

Siri: action that gave some kind of public control over what was happening in the bay. Up until that time, until the passage of BCDC, the bay was being filled indiscriminately, used as a junk yard and sewage ditch, and the prospects that the bay would continue to be a large body of water in the future looked rather dim.

One of the most persuasive charts that we have circulated is one showing the bay as a small river with all the rest of it filled. Something like two-thirds of the bay is less than eighteen feet deep, which is about the depth that can be filled economically. Until the end of the 1950s and early '60s it appeared that every community and private owner of land in the bay was bent on filling it as quickly as it could be done. It represented new real estate, and the capital appreciation and tax revenues were of course seductive.

AL: Including the city of Berkeley, I guess.

Siri: Including the city of Berkeley. Some of the actions by cities were appallingly shortsighted. Albany, Berkeley and Emeryville were particularly notable examples of this--completely mindless fills, no plan; just dumped bed springs, garbage and anything else that could be hauled on a truck. When it became dry land, however unstable, then it would be used for commercial developments and high density housing. This of course adds to the tax base, it was argued as though it were sacred dogma.

AL: It's a great indication of how thinking has changed in such a short time.

Siri: Yes.

AL: It's inconceivable that this would go on without being challenged today. I guess it goes on illegally.

Siri: Well, not so much. We regard this as one of our functions--monitoring the bay for illegal fills.

AL: Didn't Emeryville recently fill illegally?

Siri: Yes, the city claims it was a misunderstanding. The issue was so confused that it was never possible for the courts to arrive at an unequivocal opinion as to who was at fault. But it was clear that Emeryville was sufficiently at fault so some mitigation had to be exercised. We're convinced, of course, that Emeryville knew exactly what it was doing all the time. And it was only by chance that the excessive fill was discovered by BCDC staff.

In any event, the controls over fill exercised by BCDC and the Corps of Engineers are quite good, and they have been good, we feel, because of the very strong constituency these organizations have.

Siri: The residents of the Bay Area are very conscious of what happens to the bay and the shoreline, so much so that anything new that appears is immediately reported. People do attend the BCDC hearings regularly. We always have several people on hand, and we're in constant communication with the Corps of Engineers and BCDC.

AL: Is the cooperation pretty good, between Save the Bay and these two agencies?

Siri: It has been excellent.

AL: Do you get a sort of adversary relationship at all?

Siri: It has been at times, yes, because we adhere to certain principles in regard to public access, filling, and use of the shoreline, and when there are deviations from this we make our opinions known very clearly to BCDC. They are quite aware of this. They are also aware that we can arouse substantial public opposition to proposed action if there's a need to do so. So the constituency is one that is active, watchful and I think respected.

AL: The members respond when you send out your alerts?

Siri: Yes, they do. I'll say more about that in a moment. So there has been a good working relationship between Save the Bay Association and the regulatory agencies--the Army Corps of Engineers, BCDC, the Attorney General's office, State Lands Commission, the Water Quality Control Board, and to a lesser extent, the Regional Air Pollution Control Board. We've also had good relations of course with the Department of the Interior in some of the projects developed in the bay.

The Founders: Kerr, Gulick, and McLaughlin

Siri: But let me get back to the origin, that is, the three women who started it all and have been continuously the most active members of the association and the most effective. They work at it full time, and in recent years more particularly Kay Kerr and Esther Gulick, I rather suspect, work on bay problems perhaps twelve hours a day.

AL: Do they take a role as officers of the club as well?

Siri: Yes, they're officers. But they each have refused to be the president, and so they pick a figurehead like me or some one else. I think both of them, or all three of these women, are a bit

- Siri: reluctant to present public testimony personally. They always manage to get someone expert in the field to testify or they coerce the president into doing this, whenever he can be shaken loose from other things. But their particular value lies in their total dedication to the bay and to the association, and their very considerable skills and inherent intelligence. They're extremely able women. And the three of them are quite different types of personality, in a way that compliments each other. So Kerr, Gulick, and McLaughlin are really in the truest sense Save San Francisco Bay Association.
- AL: At times when there may have been a key decision to be made, would they have had an outstanding role in determining the direction that the association has taken? Do they take a strong stand?
- Siri: Yes, particularly Kay Kerr. She's an extraordinarily astute, intelligent, and critical person. She generates ideas in an astonishing fashion. She has an unbelievable command of information and details about everybody and everything concerned with the bay. She has a fairly good command of the legal aspects, the institutional problems, the people, the characteristics and all of this. She never passes herself off as an expert, but she has a striking command of all of these areas and is able to synthesize them in a very effective way. She also has the capacity to know and to ask key questions in very critical situations.
- These are talents that everyone that she has had to deal with has come to respect and pay attention to. She's not easily put off; she is impossible to deceive with a neat bureaucratic answer. She has, of course, very considerable political muscle by virtue of her own strength and contacts and partly through her husband, who was formerly the president of the university. She has first name familiarity with most of the leading figures in the country, which also is helpful.
- The same is true of Sylvia McLaughlin although Sylvia is a much different kind of person, but no less dedicated, and no less able to generate support and get matters attended to. And the third, Esther Gulick, whose husband was a professor of economics, is also an extremely intelligent woman, seemingly quiet but attends to all the details of the organization. She keeps things running smoothly and manages to keep the rest of us out of stupid situations that we might otherwise inadvertently get ourselves into. So Esther is the person who, in a way, really sees that the organization is running properly, that people do the things that they are supposed to, that the organization's functions, whether financial or administrative, get done and are done well.
- AL: Is there any political persuasion that predominates?

- Siri: No, I have never heard any clues in our discussion as to the particular political persuasion of the members of the board of the organization, but I would have to judge that there probably is an equal mixture of conventional Democrats and Republicans, since they're all drawn from the middle class and upper middle class strata of local society, with a few enterprising younger people and always a student. So they're representative of the hill folk I guess, in that they're generally fairly conventional, the way you would expect doctors, lawyers, and professors to be.
- AL: Does this kind of conventional background ever come in conflict with some of the issues that the bay might raise, like property rights or..?
- Siri: No, we never let that interfere with our views on the bay, including the question of property rights [laughter]. In fact we've battled that one--there is unanimity of feeling among those who serve on the board on these matters. Coming back for a moment to members of Save the Bay board, some have been there for a very long time; I guess I'm one of the earliest, aside from the three women who created it and still run it. There are people like Dwight Steele, who has been on for quite a long time, a number of other women--Barbara Eastman I guess has been on for a very long time--and several others, but there is a reasonable turnover so there is a fresh influx of people and ideas and talents.

Organizational Structure and Influence

- AL: Is the board self-perpetuating?
- Siri: Yes, well it is in fact. Although the election of directors takes place at the annual public meeting, a nominations committee usually presents a slate of people and by and large it includes the existing directors on the board, plus a few new persons to fill vacancies that have occurred during the year.
- AL: But they present the complete slate?
- Siri: Yes, generally it is a complete slate, and then the members do vote on it, but no one has questioned it so far or nominated other candidates.
- AL: Was there a decision made at some point to keep it that type of an organization?
- Siri: Yes, it started out that way, and we all agreed to keep it that way; it seems to be working well and the people who take an active role in Save the Bay, as well as those who are just members at least

Siri: haven't complained, so I suppose that is some indication that they are not unhappy with what the association has been doing. And I suppose this will continue as long as the association takes a vigorous and rather purist role on San Francisco Bay.

We were talking about the people who have been active in the association, over the years. They represented a great many interests and disciplines, I think I said earlier that there are always lawyers on the board. Lawyers are absolutely essential because much of what Save the Bay does ultimately ends up in litigation of one kind or another. Then there are all sorts of people--women who are nominally housewives but have taken an active role in public affairs and conservation and the bay particularly. I think Barbara Eastman would fall into this class, and so would the three women who created the association. We always try to have some breadth of competence and disciplines but also regional representation. And representation by people who have been unusually active and effective in their region of the bay.

AL: What about staff, is that an important position? You have a couple of staff people, don't you?

Siri: Yes, there are two women who help part-time. The husband of one of them is deceased, but he was at the university, and the husband of the other is at the university. Then there is usually a young staff member or two who handle the office, prepare reports, draft testimony, appear at hearings to give testimony, and attend commission meetings. They are kept busy, quite busy all the time.

AL: But there is not an executive director?

Siri: No. We have no formal staff structure. From time to time we also have interns, usually young lawyers, who will spend from a few weeks to six months with us, working on legal research.

AL: You don't have a problem with the staff running away with the organization.

Siri: [Laughter] No, we don't have that problem and I think it's unlikely here. It's a very informal structure in many senses, and we haven't wanted to expand it; that is, to have a steadily growing organization that ultimately becomes too unwieldy to act effectively. As a result the people who have joined the Save the Bay Association stay quite a long time. Most of our members I guess are people who joined at the outset, in the early sixties, who were permanent residents and love the area and don't want to see it destroyed.

But they are not all local; we have a surprising number of members outside of the immediate Bay Area. I don't recall the numbers, but a significant number in southern California and out of

- Siri: state. They are people who once lived here or who visited the Bay Area, and who decided that for a dollar a year it was worth it to them to support an effort to keep the bay in its present form.
- AL: When a call for action goes out, what kind of response are you likely to get? How many of your members are active in that sense?
- Siri: I'm not sure. We can only gauge from reaction of agencies when they know we're bringing an issue to the attention of members. They tend to pay attention; they are aware that Save the Bay has taken a stand and has asked its members to express their views.
- AL: So the influence you would say is considerable?
- Siri: I can only guess that there's a good response when we put out a newsletter and bring something to the members' attention.
- AL: Does the association ever negotiate with an agency or with a corporate body that has an interest in the bay or do they tend to take a stand and support that stand?
- Siri: It depends on the issue. There have been many issues we have negotiated, but they've never involved compromise on filling for a purpose which we do not regard as either water-oriented or essential to the welfare of the community, or on the question of public access and preservation of marshes.
- AL: On your basic principles.
- Siri: Yes, and in fact the most significant advances have been won by standing firm and refusing to compromise. And the result was far more than I think we could have achieved by compromising on the issue.
- AL: Let me ask you one more question along this line, and then we'll get to some of those issues. Have there been any divisions or conflicts within the Save San Francisco Bay Association? Anytime that it might have floundered?
- Siri: Not really, no. There has been remarkable unanimity of feeling. On the details of some issues, that is, whether we should or should not take an action, there have been at times differences of opinions. These are discussed in a completely open, and I think a very effective, fashion by the board in its monthly meetings. Sometimes we may start a discussion with a diversity of views, but almost always we wind up with a consensus, both in the vote and in spirit. There is almost never a vote taken that isn't unanimous by the time it is taken. We've had nothing like the bitter controversy we've seen in the Sierra Club and some other organizations.

AL: What do you attribute that unanimity to?

Siri: Well, they are quite different organizations. Save the Bay is a small organization; it's more like what the Sierra Club used to be back in the forties and fifties. Every one has the same common cause; no one has a vested interest; and it's not a means for exercising personal ambitions. The board members are people with very busy and productive lives and don't need to seek in the Save the Bay Association ego satisfaction and recognition. They have a total dedication to the bay environment, and simply lend their talents and time to the resolution of problems.

AL: They're not on an ego trip.

Siri: That's right. I have never really seen this aspect of human behavior exercised in our meetings.

AL: Sounds very refreshing.

Siri: It is. Probably there is an inherent uniformity of view too, and that helps, not in every organization but it does in one as narrowly focused as the Save the Bay Association. It means quick mutual understanding and everyone pulling together to act on a decision.

AL: Anything else about Save the Bay as an organization before we go to some of the specific campaigns?

Siri: No, other than that the association had, I think it is fair to say, much to do with the creation and subsequent performance of BCDC and has had a significant role in most of the environmental and conservation campaigns around the bay. There is however something it did not do. It did not play a major role in the creation of the South Bay National Wildlife Refuge. We were quite conscious of this, but that activity was in good hands with an ad hoc committee of citizens of the South Bay.

AL: A separate committee?

Siri: A separate committee not connected with Save the Bay, although most of the members involved in that campaign were members of Save the Bay. We did have a role in it, but the lead role was played by a few key people in the South Bay who were determined to see a wildlife refuge established. Save the Bay was, of course, strongly supportive and probably had its major effect in ensuring that BCDC retained jurisdiction over the salt ponds, many of which became part of the refuge.

AL: You are talking about 1969 now?

Siri: Both, as well as earlier, in 1965, when legislation creating BCDC was first passed. This problem had to be faced again in 1969 when BCDC was made a permanent agency and later when Leslie Salt Company contested the salt pond jurisdiction and the refuge proposal.

1969 Legislative Campaign for a Permanent BCDC

AL: Let's talk some about that 1969 legislative campaign that made BCDC permanent and put the bay plan into effect. You played a fairly active role in that?

Siri: Yes, we did.

AL: You as an individual also?

Siri: Yes, I like to think so. [Laughter] If I didn't, I spent a god-awful lot of time in meetings, hearings, and conferences.

AL: Can you recall some of the key events?

Siri: One event comes to mind but I would not qualify it as a "key." It probably sticks in my memory because it was such a gross display of self-serving interests and seemed a caricature of the opposition to an effective regional agency to control bay development.

Several of us, including Kay Kerr, Esther Gulick, and Dwight Steele, met with Angelo Siracusa at his request, to discuss the Bay Area Council's proposal for BCDC legislation. Siracusa was executive director of the council, an organization representing primarily large commercial and industrial organizations in the Bay Area. After assuring us of the council's sincere interest in having BCDC made a permanent regional agency, he proceeded to unveil the council's proposed legislation. It was such an offensive, ill-disguised scheme to render BCDC a totally ineffectual agency that momentarily we were left with a difficult decision: to laugh and walk out; or be outraged for wasting our time, and walk out. Instead, we could not resist the temptation to tell him what we thought of his proposed BCDC legislation. His response, as I recall, was a verbal flexing of the council's political muscle, and assurance that Assemblyman Jack Knox was ready to carry the bill unless we were willing to make substantial concessions. We were never able to share his views, but I must confess they caused us anxious moments in Sacramento.

AL: Was the main force behind the opposition business interest in general or specific businesses with interests in bay lands?

- Siri: The latter. But they enlisted the support of businesses and influential people who did not have a specific interest in bay lands. One always looks for allies among one's friends, and they did the same.
- AL: What was the position there of Save the Bay on compromising? I read the Rice Odell book,* and he mentioned a split among conservationists, that some conservation organizations were more willing to compromise.
- Siri: Some were, apparently because they had adopted a timid view of the political realities, which we could not accept. We were determined to see a bill passed without impairment of BCDC's powers and effectiveness. There was no point in compromising if BCDC were significantly weakened in its authority or so stacked with appointees representing special interests that it could never act on anything. This was the thrust of proposed compromises and amendments to the bill.
- AL: What organizations wanted to compromise, what other conservation organizations?
- Siri: My memory really isn't clear enough to confidently identify the organizations. I have only a hazy recollection of numerous conferences with other organization that were sometimes frustrating.
- AL: Do you remember anything that would give us some insight into how the entrepreneurial interests might have inflicted themselves on the legislature? What kind of pressures would a man like Knox be under? In terms of his own campaign contributions or..?
- Siri: That would be one source of pressure, yes--people and businesses with interests in bay lands who had political and economic influence. They have a perfect right to go to legislators and get what they can out of them. They would solicit support from legislators who, if they were sympathetic, as a number of them were, would put pressure on Knox. There are innumerable ways in which this is done. It's not as simple as someone with a vested interest in the bay reminding Knox that they would not contribute to his next campaign. That I'm sure was done, but it is only one of many ways in which pressures were brought, just as we bring pressure on not only legislators within the Bay Area, but try to persuade legislators up

*Rice Odell, The Saving of San Francisco Bay: A Report on Citizen Action and Regional Planning (The Conservation Foundation, Washington, D.C., 1972).

Siri: and down the state to support our position. So the others do the same thing. They're in somewhat better position at times, in that they have economic interests at stake and these can always be expressed in jobs and dollars. In contrast our only recourse is to mobilize public support. We can't make election campaign contributions, or even spend association funds on legislative campaigns.

AL: Would you say Knox was a sincere conservationist or did he see that the public support was strong?

Siri: I think there was a bit of both. Knox was and is a very able legislator, and the extent to which he has supported environmental legislation has depended upon what his keen political sense tells him he can achieve. Knox has also supported legislation and activities, not necessarily related to the bay, but in his district, which I question. If you have him on your side it may not be a guarantee, but it is reasonable assurance that a bill you want will get through the legislature intact. He was very good. How many blue chips he had to trade for the BCDC bill I don't know, but I think it may have been considerable.

AL: Labor came out fairly much in support of BCDC, didn't they?

Siri: Some labor did, but my recollection is that the construction trades did not. We have never really had the construction trades on our side in any conservation issue, as far as I can recall. They build things; these are their jobs, and any regulation of development of the bay lands they see as a threat to jobs.

AL: Was it a strong opposition do you recall?

Siri: I just don't recall.

We had strong opposition from a number of cities of course that had bay filling ambitions. Emeryville and Albany were, as I recall, notable examples. The Port of Oakland strongly opposed BCDC. They wanted a completely free hand to expand the airport and the port areas and to fill and develop a substantial part of the area around the bridge and beyond.

AL: Does the federal government also have to abide by the BCDC? Do they control federal government fill too?

Siri: I believe so, I believe this is the case.

AL: Now the final makeup of the BCDC must have been something of a compromise. Didn't they put more power into the hands of home rule and local communities?

Siri: No, not when the bill finally passed. In an effort to emasculate BCDC all kinds of weakening amendments were tried. The most serious threat was an attempt to make BCDC an appointed body, consisting of people appointed by city councils and county supervisors. We insisted that BCDC had to consist of people holding elective office and therefore accountable to their constituents. We were adamant from the outset that they had to be elected, not appointed, except for the ex officio members of several federal and state agencies who sit on the commission without vote. Having prevailed on this point, compromises were then proposed in which the commission would consist of appointed members initially to serve until commissioners could be elected eighteen months later. We considered this a subterfuge. The initial appointed commission would do all the planning and establish BCDC policies before an elected commission could be seated. We made it clear that we would try to kill the bill if this amendment were adopted. And finally we got the bill that we and our allies wanted, with minor faults. The commission would retain its planning and permit authority and consist of persons who were accountable by virtue of election to public office and could fairly represent the public interest rather than special interest.

AL: They were actually elected officials who came on the commission.

Siri: Yes.

AL: But wouldn't they tend to represent these local interests?

Siri: That's right, but their interests often compete and conflict.

Monitoring the Regulatory Agencies: BCDC and U.S. Corps of Engineers

AL: Has there been a problem with that, Albany trading off with Emeryville and so on?

Siri: I'm sure that happens, but there are problems with any system that you can devise. I remember our discussions with political scientists who had spent their lives studying government organizations. It was quite clear both from those discussions and from our own experiences that the most one can hope for in a government agency is a structure that is reasonably responsive to the public interest. There is no unique form of organization that will guarantee that it is going to perform as you wish it to perform. But there is a variety of organizations and structures that can perform a job provided there is constant attention to them by the citizenry. It was clear that no matter what kind of organization could be devised for regulation of bay development, there was no assurance that it would work effectively without eternal vigilance. The key to bay conservation was eternal vigilance, not the precise form of the organization.

AL: So Save the Bay never thought their job was over when the BCDC bill passed.

Siri: That's right. It was the understanding among ourselves that once BCDC had been created as a permanent regional agency, that was only the start. Our job would continue indefinitely, as long as there was a concern about the bay. And so we have rarely missed a meeting of the commission I think in all of these years. Kay Kerr and Esther Gulick are always there along with whomever we have as staff. From time to time when I can get there, they'll drag me along for whatever value I may seem to have.

AL: Was this particular plan the model for the Coastal Conservation Initiative?

Siri: Yes. We saw that it worked for the bay and thought that it could work for the coast.

AL: Is it as effective do you think?

Siri: It was not quite as effective on the coast simply because there were 1500 miles of coastline to watch, and the interests were more diverse and dispersed. Particularly in northern California there were no very strong local constituencies and rather narrowly drawn economic interests. So it was quite different from the bay, which is set in a large urban area. Most of the other parts of the coast are rural.

AL: And that continuing watchdog role is unable to function as well.

Siri: That's right, but despite this the coastal commission has worked I think quite well. Perhaps because the two key people in BCDC were transferred to the coastal commission; that is, Melvin B. Lane and Joseph E. Bodovitz, as chairman of the statewide commission and executive director. They had had the experience of organizing and managing BCDC, and so it was not a new role for them. They could step into the coastal commission as experts with substantial experience.

And we've also been fortunate in that the new chairman and executive director of BCDC are able people who are sympathetic to the environmentalists' views on the bay. Col. Charles Roberts, the executive director, and Joseph Houghteling, now chairman of BCDC, we count as environmentalists. We've been fortunate so far but I have no doubt that in due time there may be development-oriented people occupying these positions.

AL: How were they appointed?

Siri: The governor appoints the chairman and the commission hires the executive director.

Establishing BCDC and bringing some reforms in the outlook of the Corps of Engineers I think were the two most significant institutional issues in which we've been involved.

AL: Now how did that change in the Corps of Engineers come about?

Siri: The Corps traditionally had approved whatever local interests and developers wanted. Permits for fills or dredging or anything else were granted pro forma or not even necessary, and enforcement was nearly nonexistent. Dredging, diking, and filling were considered worthy engineering endeavors so long as they did not interfere with navigation.

AL: And they had the jurisdiction over the bay?

Siri: They're the permit authority for work in all navigable waters of the U.S., and before BCDC, the only agency with authority to control bay fills. When Col. Charles Roberts became district engineer, the San Francisco district of the Corps changed completely and for the better. He restored an effective permit procedure, encouraged public participation, developed a strong enforcement section, and he was sympathetic to the need to preserve the bay, marshes, and tidelands. When Col. Roberts retired he was followed by Col. James Lammie who was found to be an even stronger ally. I think it was during his tour of duty in the San Francisco district office, and possibly through his efforts, that the jurisdiction of the Corps was extended from mean high water to mean higher high water. This meant their jurisdiction now extended landward over the whole extent of the mud flats and other lands subject to tidal action; and accordingly, permits are now required for any work proposed in these important but formerly unprotected areas.

AL: Mean higher high water?

Siri: Yes. There is a series of recognized tidal levels, you see. There is mean low water, which is the average of low tides for the year; mean water, which is the average of all tides for the year; mean high water, which is the mean of high tides for the year; and then there's mean higher high water, which is the mean of the higher of the two daily high tides.

AL: So that would be about the best you could get?

Siri: Yes, beyond that line, it is dry land.

AL: And this he could do, he had the jurisdiction?

Siri: Yes, but this soon became a national issue. Conservationists in other parts of the country demanded that the Corps extend its jurisdiction in their districts as well. Unfortunately the rule could not apply to the east coast and Gulf coast where the high tides do not differ. Other west coast districts were unwilling to adopt the mean higher high water line. As it now stands, this district of the Corps is the only one in the country I believe where its jurisdiction is maintained at the mean higher high tide line.

AL: So the institutional reforms that we are talking about are local ones?

Siri: That's right. So far as I know, the San Francisco district of the Corps became a unique model of sensitivity to environmental and local citizen concerns over estuarine areas. All this did not happen wholly by chance. Save the Bay Association and others put constant pressure on the Corps, and we did not hesitate to appeal to the commanding general, the White House, and our congressional delegation when we thought it was necessary. This seemed to produce results.

AL: And this was in the early sixties also?

Siri: No, this was much later. This was in the early seventies. So the regulatory bodies have been effectively dealt with in the Bay Area, but to keep them effective is an ongoing burden. Anyway we'll keep at it.

Opposing Bay Fill: Westbay, Albany, Leslie Salt, and Suisun Marsh

Siri: The other problems were related to efforts by industry, private owners, and local communities to fill. The biggest and longest-fought battle was the Westbay Community Associates proposed development in the south bay. It was a consortium of three organizations-- Crocker Bank, Ideal Cement and David Rockefeller. They proposed ten years ago to fill and develop some 10,000 acres of the south bay, the land owned by Ideal Cement, with financing by Crocker Bank and David Rockefeller. Filling 10,000 acres of the bay was an appalling idea and their plans for developing the fill were as extravagant as one could imagine.

Naturally, opposition to the proposed development was immediate and vigorous and led to litigation by the Attorney General's office for the State Lands Commission in which we and the Sierra Club happily joined. The issue became narrowed very quickly to the question of whether or not the submerged and tidelands slated for

Siri: fill were subject to the public trust doctrine. The Attorney General's office--and we--asserted that it did. If the courts agreed with us, the Westbay Community Associates could not fill those lands, nor could they use them for purposes inconsistent with the public trust. We intervened and took an active role in the suit--we could not possibly have carried that suit ourselves because of the enormous cost, which of course was borne by the state.

AL: The state was the main party to the suit?

Siri: Yes. It took more than five years and was settled only about two months ago. The final outcome was gratifying. Rather than pursue the case further, a settlement was reached in which Westbay Community Associates agreed that the public trust did apply to all submerged lands and tidelands up to mean higher high water, and that the only places that the Westbay Community Associates would develop were three small areas of dry land. So one could not have asked for a better solution to that long bitter battle. As far as we were concerned it was a total victory.

AL: I guess I'm missing something, because I can't see how it could be questioned whether the public trust would apply to tidal and submerged lands. I thought that was what we were talking about, that you can't fill the bay.

Siri: That's right, but Westbay Community Associates maintained that because of the complex history of the titles to those lands, the public trust no longer applied.

AL: The lands themselves were not different from the other lands we're talking about, in terms of where they stood in the bay, what kinds of lands they were?

Siri: The public trust issue is not at all that clear. We're just now beginning to test that question all over again on the Santa Fe land. The legal issues there are somewhat different and more clouded and so the outcome is not as certain, although we hope it will end up in the same way.

The other problem that took so much time and effort was the determination of the original line of mean higher high water when the deeds to the tidelands were issued.

We have had to resort to the courts in other instances as well. The city of Albany was a case in point. The State Lands Commission was persuaded to bring to a halt the fill, thereby rescinding the grant of submerged land to the city of Albany because the city had not observed the public trust provisions required in the original grant. But part of the land had already been filled and that fill

Siri: continues to rise although they cannot extend it further into the bay. It's the most mindless of operations, and no one seems to know what to do with it or how to stop it. The city had no plan; they simply contracted with a dump operation to fill the land granted to it, and then when they had to discontinue filling, the dump operator threatened to take them to court, and the city weakened. Anyway, it's not going out further but it's going higher and higher.

AL: And there's no way to stop it?

Siri: We haven't found a way as yet.

The Emeryville fill was grandfathered by Senator Nick Petris. There was no way of getting that one out of the act creating BCDC. We tried, and Nick was helpful in every other respect in fighting for the bill, but that provision had to stand. There was obviously some compelling reason, which we never learned. We assume somehow Nick was committed, and he just couldn't budge on that one--there was nothing we could do to change it--so Emeryville was grandfathered.

AL: That's the Watergate development.

Siri: The whole awful damn thing. Berkeley too was grandfathered, and there was no way we could get around that one either. We tried...

AL: That's going to be more public-oriented, I think.

Siri: Yes, part of it. Part of it is in dispute by the owner who originally wanted to build a shopping center on it and still does. So that will be going to court soon too.

AL: What about Leslie Salt? That's another complicated one, isn't it?

Siri: Yes, it is. That was a long but interesting contest with Leslie Salt Company. To start with, Leslie's salt ponds were a major issue in the BCDC legislation. All the environmental organizations wanted the salt ponds included in BCDC's jurisdiction, and obviously Leslie did not. So that was a battle that had to be fought right down to the last day. At another point Leslie Salt, in collaboration with Mobile Homes, proposed to fill and develop some of the salt ponds. We had a timely ally in that battle, and that was a recession, which helped kill a lot of ill-conceived projects of that kind. We were confronted with a different kind of problem a few years ago when Huey Johnson decided he would try his hand at negotiating an agreement between Leslie Salt and the federal government for the creation of the south bay national wildlife refuge. Huey, I'm sure with the best of intentions, came up with a grand scheme that he worked out with Leslie Salt and then asked us to comment on it. Well, we did a little more, I'm afraid, then comment on it. We said

Siri: that if he tried to promote the scheme he would have to fight the whole lot of us--Save the Bay, Sierra Club, Audubon and a couple of other organizations. There was nothing in the proposal that we could accept, except possibly the good intention and even that left doubts because Huey's organization [Trust for Public Lands] would realize a fee of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Leslie Salt was offering to sell the salt pond in question to the Department of Interior for an extravagant price, lease back the land for salt production, and be given complete freedom to act in certain areas where they wanted to develop, that is, exemption from BCDC and the Army Corps of Engineers jurisdiction and any zoning laws applying to the land. It was so preposterous, we were astonished anyone would have the gall to propose it, but it did take up valuable time. We told Huey to go back to Leslie and tell them what we thought of it and made a counter proposal. In effect our proposal said, 'Why don't you give the 22,000 acres to the federal government for a wildlife refuge and you can keep it in salt production rent-free; when you finally decide that salt production isn't economical, then it would revert to a wildlife refuge. As for development of other Leslie bay lands, we and the regulatory agencies would deal with those when they were proposed. I'm sure we will always be confronted with proposals to fill and develop salt ponds as long as any remain in private ownership.

AL: Do you have any direct contact with Leslie Salt?

Siri: Yes, initially with an elderly president and the company lawyer on another development scheme sometime before Huey developed his proposal. Then they hired a young president [John Lillie], a very bright young guy, very personable. He attended a number of our meetings with Huey, and we invited him to meet with our executive committee. He assured us he was open-minded about Huey's (!) proposal provided certain conditions were met, and we told them what we thought of them. Huey Johnson finally had to abandon the whole idea.

AL: How about the Suisun Marsh?

Siri: Yes, that's been a long ongoing struggle, running perhaps ten years now, maybe longer. Bit by bit we've gained protection for the marsh. There still remain the questions of the buffer zone and what will be permitted in the buffer zone. That battle is still going on.

AL: Who were the forces in opposition to that?

Siri: Well, [John] Nejedly and Dan Boatwright were the chief villains in that piece. They sponsored a senate bill that would permit development along a road adjacent to the marsh, according to rumor, for a former associate who owned the property. It's not even in Nejedly's district.

Siri: But we've had differences with Senator Nejedly over other issues in the past, and it's never clear just where he comes down on environmental issues. We do know that in some instances it has depended on who last saw him before he voted [laughter]. In the case of the Peripheral Canal, it's quite different. There Nejedly has always taken a firm position in opposition to the Peripheral Canal. On that issue we have joined with him in some fine debates with proponents of the canal.

AL: Why is he on the so-called right side of that issue?

Siri: It's in the interest of all the people in his district. The whole county is bitterly opposed to the Peripheral Canal and the export of water from the delta and Nejedly of course must be sympathetic to these interests. On things of this kind his actions would suggest that it's more than just a philosophical position on how to deal with private property. I'm sure that's a facet in it, but it would seem to go beyond that in some instances.

Update on the Peripheral Canal, 1977

AL: Do you want to bring us up-to-date on the Peripheral Canal? [This interview took place on November 28, 1977.] When we last talked [October 12, 1976] Brown had just brought out his compromise but you hadn't had a chance to look at it.

Siri: Yes, our position--and I'm now speaking for Save the Bay--is vigorously opposed to the Ayala bill [S.B. 346] and to the Peripheral Canal. That's still our view in spite of compromising amendments that were added. That bill in our view is a needless threat to the delta, the north coast wild rivers, and water quality of the bay.

AL: Now the Sierra Club apparently is supporting it?

Siri: Yes, that's right.

AL: How do you account for that?

Siri: I don't know. We debated this in the Sierra Club, but I didn't have the time to put in the effort that was really needed to turn the Sierra Club around. I thought I'd had the club halfway turned around in attending a couple of meetings where the issue came up, but I wasn't able to get to the Sierra Club board meeting where the issue was on the agenda but wasn't discussed. The board of directors of the Sierra Club refused to consider the matter, saying that it was properly handled by the local committee [which supported the Ayala Bill]. I think the board would have considered it if we had just had the time to do something about it.

Siri: I can't speak for the club, except to say that, in our opinion, the club has been somehow deceived and has violated its own basic philosophy on development of this kind. It's almost inconceivable that it could have taken this position. It's a compromise of a kind that neither the club or any other dedicated environmental organization ought to take. The giving up the battle before it's ever gotten anywhere. I had to reverse the club once before on this issue when a committee decided this was a great idea to save some of the sloughs in the delta, never considering the broader consequences of it--that it was one more step toward the demise of the northern California wild rivers and impairment of the delta and the bay.

There's no way the proposed canal can fail to be misused in the future. Its great excess in capacity would always present an irresistible opportunity to divert ever greater quantities of fresh water from the delta and bay, regardless of the damage this might do. And that damage can be very substantial for one of the country's great estuarine systems. The proposed interagency agreements to maintain delta water quality and other promissory nonsense are something like international treaties: they are observed as long as it's convenient. And the moment it is not convenient you disregard them. And even if made law, the acts of this year's legislature are not binding on future legislatures. There is nothing absolute, immutable, sacred about a law, or an agreement. So why do Governor Brown and the Department of Water Resources even bother trying to reassure northern Californians with these agreements that are going to be exercised? They can be unexercised the following year, and they will be. The basic problem is the enormous physical capacity of the canal. For two-thirds of any normal water year the canal could convey the whole of the Sacramento River around the delta for export to the San Joaquin Valley and southern California.

AL: What is the argument that they give for building such a huge canal?

Siri: They argue that it can then be used to take advantage of the high water flows in the Sacramento River during the winter and early spring. If they built a canal of large capacity, then they can divert some of this water for ground water recharge. The argument is reasonable. The only trouble is that the dam canal is there during the rest of the year, and the water demands will increase to whatever water supply is physically obtainable, and that could be the whole of the Sacramento River for two-thirds to three-quarters of the year. Without adequate fresh water flows the delta and much of the bay would become stagnant sewers. If a big canal is there, it is going to be used, even if only to pay off the investment.

Save the Bay has taken a strong position in opposition to the Ayala bill, along with Friends of the Earth and Friends of the River, but not the Sierra Club.

AL: Isn't Friends of the River connected with the Sierra Club in some way?

Siri: It's now independent of the Sierra Club, but I think they are all members of the club. Some Sierra Club leaders seemed reluctant to oppose Jerry Meral and Larry Moss, two formerly active environmentalists given important appointments by Governor Brown.

AL: Is Larry Moss involved in it?

Siri: Yes, both Meral and Moss are now supporting the Peripheral Canal. Unbelievable what happens to perfectly good environmentalists when they go to Sacramento; both men were active opponents of the canal before they went to Sacramento.

AL: You don't have any further insights into why the club has taken this position? Is there a group of people who have been for it all along? You said a few years ago you had to fight the same battle with this same regional conservation committee.

Siri: No, I think part of the problem is that some of the environmental activists who accepted political appointments apparently have been drawn into the hysteria of Sacramento, and when Sierra Club members talk with them, they're told about the marvelous compromise agreement that will assure protection of the delta. I believe the Sierra Club's deviation from its principles in this instance was the consequence of a few key members of a committee being conned into believing the Peripheral Canal was inevitable and the Ayala Bill was the best and only compromise possible.

Once this happened, a kind of mass acquiescence to the idea infected the Sierra Club. It was painful to watch this phenomenon as it swept through the club. Loyalties to the key figures formed and members' reactions had almost nothing to do with the issue. It was a behavioral phenomenon rather than a careful evaluation of issues and probable outcomes. Added to that was a feeling I sensed that the club felt that Jerry Brown, Jerry Meral, and other environmentalists now in Sacramento could not be wrong, and even if they were, they should be supported.

AL: Is the same thing going to happen on the national level? I noticed in the last Bulletin the conversation with Bill Futrell, where he seemed extremely optimistic about Carter and spoke in these same terms of not always being in opposition but even if Carter wasn't everything that you wanted you have someone in there who was really an environmentalist, and you should get behind him.

Siri: I can't help feeling there has been a change in the outlook of the club, but I have not taken an active role in the internal affairs for some time and cannot assess the change, if in fact there is one.

- Siri: Nevertheless the club does seem less vigorous and idealistic than it has been in the past. It's become, "Let us be reasonable men and compromise."
- AL: You say FOE is also opposing the Peripheral Canal?
- Siri: Yes, FOE has still some of that old spirit. It's pretty wild at times, but maybe that's what it takes. If you're going to be an adversary, you've got to be a real one, not a make-believe one. It's surprising how many things you can achieve sometimes by sheer bluff [laughter].
- AL: Do you think it will be more difficult to oppose the Peripheral Canal with the Sierra Club supporting it?
- Siri: Of course, but it will make it more interesting.
- AL: Do you feel optimistic? It sounds pretty glum right now.
- Siri: It makes it more interesting, let's put it that way. After all dull battles are hardly worth getting involved in [laughter].
- AL: Will this be a battle primarily political, or will there be any kind of legal opportunities?
- Siri: No, I don't see any legal opportunities. Some of those have been tested. We tested two possible avenues when I was still active in the club, and they both never made it through the courts, and we were almost sure that they wouldn't. It has no evident legal weakness that one can make a significant attack on. We can chip away at bits of things knowing perfectly well at the outset that they were not likely to be decisive, only diversionary. It's not the same kind of issue as the public trust doctrine in bay litigation.
- AL: So it will be primarily political?
- Siri: Yes. Purely political.*

*The Ayala bill--S.B. 346--was defeated by the California State Senate on February 2, 1978. In April, 1978, the national Sierra Club membership voted on two questions concerning the Peripheral Canal. The membership confirmed the Sierra Club Board's opinion that the issue was a regional one and should be decided by the California Regional Conservation Committees, rather than by a vote of the full club. At the same time, the membership vote was decisively in favor of Sierra Club opposition to the Peripheral Canal. See Sierra, April 1978 and San Francisco Bay Chapter Yodeler, March 1978 for pro and con arguments on S.B. 346 and the Sierra Club referendum.

- AL: It should be interesting as you say. Any other things that we should cover that we haven't? Comments on the association or the campaigns that you have been involved in?
- Siri: One minor aspect and that is the biennial conference that Save San Francisco Bay Association holds. These have uniformly been well attended by environmental leaders, legislators, and representatives of government agencies. The next one, on December 10th [1977], will focus on the public trust controversies still affecting some submerged and tidal lands in the bay. I believe these conferences have had a modest impact in making regional environmental leaders aware of problems and means of coping with them.
- AL: So it's a conference designed not just for your members but for public leaders?
- Siri: That's right. We usually have good attendance by legislators who have immediate concern for the bay, by federal and state agencies that are involved in any way with regulation and bay activities, and by leaders from environmental and citizen public interest groups. It gives everyone an opportunity to air his views and also identify critical issues on the bay.
- AL: Have relations with other conservation groups been satisfactory?
- Siri: Yes, they've been very good. We enter into many of these battles on a cooperative basis mainly because there are other people interested, and you want all the allies you can muster. And as long as the three ladies are active I guess the Save the Bay Association will be a vigorous, continuing force in the area.

XIII SCIENCE AND MOUNTAINEERING: GLOBAL ADVENTURES

[Interview 9: May 1, 1977]

Sierra Club Rock Climbing, Yosemite and the West

- AL: Shall we start off with your telling us about how you were initiated into rock climbing?
- Siri: I think I stated in an earlier interview that a passion for climbing was a genetic defect that grew with the years but with little opportunity to indulge it until my mid-twenties. During World War II I came to the West Coast from Philadelphia in response to an offer of a position in the Radiation Laboratory at the University of California but equally as much because California was where the mountains were. It was not a difficult decision to make, probably taking all of several seconds. Nothing in the way of climbing could be done during the war, but immediately after the war the old climbers reassembled again from all parts of the world, and I joined them in the local climbs. The Sierra Club had an active rock climbing section with some of the best of American climbers--people like Dave Brower, Dick Leonard, Francis Farquhar, the Bedayn brothers and many others. They conducted training sessions on local rocks, and I was one of their more enthusiastic students.
- AL: This was your first experience with rock climbing. You hadn't done it in the East?
- Siri: That's right I had had no training in climbing before, and it was now time to learn the techniques of rock climbing before I thought seriously about more ambitious adventures I had long dreamed about. I had read the accounts of the first ascents in the Sierra Nevada, and of course I had read the accounts of ascents of Mount Everest and Kangchenjunga and other great climbs. It was an exciting moment to be on the rock for the first time with a rope around my waist.

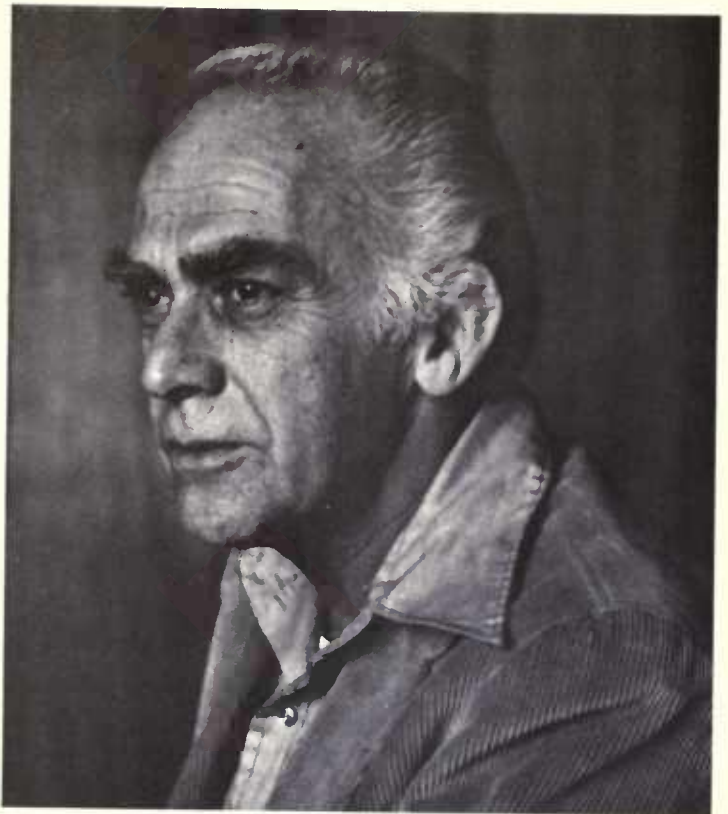
William E. Siri, 1977

Photograph by Ray Lage

below:

Siri on Summit Ridge of
Huandoy, and peaks to north.
California Peruvian
Expedition, July 1953.

Photograph by Allen Steck
Sierra Club Bulletin
October 1953



Siri: I found that I took naturally to rock climbing, mainly I suppose because I was oriented psychologically to it, but I also discovered that I had a little bit of skill in terms of balance and coordination. So for many sessions I trailed at the end of the rope, following one of the old leaders up a local traditional climb, but quickly I found that it wasn't all that awesome, and it was great fun, and even found I could do climbs that some of the old hands had difficulty with. In due time I found myself leading others up the pitches at Cragmont and Indian Rock [in Berkeley], Hunters Hill near Vallejo, and the Pinnacles. I then moved on to Yosemite for the qualifying climbs on the Brothers, Washington's Column, the Royal Arches, and many other climbs pioneered by the pre-war climbers.

AL: Was all this done through the Rock Climbing Section?

Siri: Yes, the Rock Climbing Section at that time had a well-organized course of training. To qualify for the section, one had to make a certain number of specified ascents to demonstrate technical competence and sound judgment. As I recall we received some kind of certificate that said we were now a certified climber and qualified to lead climbs. It was an extremely active section at that time. Every Sunday at least fifty climbers would collect at a rock cliff in the Bay Area for practice, training, and mountaineering gossip. The old timers were always there along with the eager novices like myself. Among the newcomers were people like Allen Steck, Bill Long, and others who went on to do some notable first ascents in Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada.

AL: So they came in about the same time that you did?

Siri: Yes. Most of them were a little ahead of me. I got a rather late start so I found myself chronologically somewhere between the more experienced hands who had climbed before the war and the post-war climbers who were a little younger than I was at the time. But I identified more with the younger group because the age difference was smaller, and we were all starting together.

AL: You mentioned reading about mountain climbing both in the Sierra Nevada and in Europe. Where did you get introduced to mountaineering literature?

Siri: The first books I ever saw were James Ramsey Ullman's two early books on mountains. One was Kingdom of Adventure: Everest and the other was his book on the first ascents of the great mountains of the world, High Conquest. That was my introduction to serious climbing on the big mountains. After that there was a whole host of books that I sought out, and among them of course were the Sierra Club Bulletins, which detailed many of the early ascents of Bestor Robinson, Farquhar and Dave Brower, and Dick Leonard. They were in my mind the great climbers; I had read about them and their ascents and they were the people I looked up to.

- AL: And yet the generation that you came in with did a lot more spectacular climbing in Yosemite, didn't they? How would you compare those two generations?
- Siri: No, that was a still later generation of climbers that came on the scene ten to fifteen years after the time I'm talking about. Just as we had advanced substantially beyond the techniques and severity of climbing that the older climbers had achieved, so the generation that followed us advanced well beyond what we had been able to do in the 1940s and 1950s. Climbing today is certainly more sophisticated than the best of the climbing we were able to do in the post World War II years.
- AL: Is that a result of the equipment or what?
- Siri: It is a result of the equipment, of accumulated experience, development of new techniques--the natural evolution of an activity like climbing. We now have equipment and techniques that were simply not available to us at that time.
- AL: Maybe more full-time attention also?
- Siri: That was also part of the growth in mountaineering. The climbers before the war, and for ten to fifteen years after the war, were casual climbers, in that we all had vocations to contend with. So it was weekends and maybe a few weeks vacation time when we were able to climb. But when the next generation of climbers came along--say fifteen years later--they devoted a much larger fraction of their time to climbing and made it, in effect, a vocation instead of an avocation. This had a profound effect on what they could achieve in climbing. Now that they are aging, of course, they too are going into businesses and professions.
- AL: Tell us some more about your climbing. What do you remember as memorable experiences in Yosemite?
- Siri: Well, the first experiences are always memorable, no matter what it is--whether it is climbing, the first trip abroad, or the first love affair. Those first exposures produce deep impressions and can become firmly imbedded in one's memory. I can look back to weekends in Yosemite Valley struggling up the traditional climbs, and then doing the first ascent on the east buttress of El Capitan [June, 1953], and being the first to get up to the tree in the face of El Capitan [March, 1952]. However, even those pale compared to the first exposure overseas to the great peaks of the Andes and Himalayas. Those memories are still vivid.
- AL: Let me ask you one other question about that ascent of El Capitan. Was that an unusually long ascent for the time, three days?

Siri: Yes, it was for its time. Climbers had spent that long on faces before, but it was not a common practice. Ascents were usually made in one day, and it was considered an act of heroism if one had to bivouac on a climb.

AL: What was it like bivouacking on El Capitan?

Siri: It was a mixture of things: elation, anxiety, pleasure, high motivation, hunger, and extreme discomfort. It rained at night, and during the days we were often immersed in thick, cold fog. At one bivouac we hung in ropes anchored to a crack in the rock for the night, with water running down the wall and strong winds driving rain up the face of the cliffs. We were thoroughly soaked and unable to exercise to keep warm. It was a wet, cold, miserable night, but at that time it was an acceptable part of the adventure. We not only endured it, but in a peculiar, perhaps masochistic way, might even have enjoyed it, knowing that it would come to an end soon, and then we could tell all of our friends about it.

AL: There has to be some element of that to make you do it.

Siri: That's right; it was sort of an act of earning brownie points, I guess, among your peers.

AL: Now who was on that climb?

Siri: I'm not sure that I remember all of them. Willi Unsoeld was, of course, a very strong climber in the group. Allen Steck was there, and Bill Long.

AL: And another climb that was mentioned in the Sierra Club Handbook I guess--Castle Rock Spire in 1950? Was that a particular landmark climb?

Siri: Yes, it was. For that time it was technically a very difficult climb. Numerous attempts had been made on Castle Rock Spire, but no one had succeeded in finding a climbable route. It was just a great, smooth finger-like spire of granite. We made three attempts on it, one of them with probably one of the most colorful characters in California mountain climbing. That was John Salathé, whose trade was blacksmithing and who had powerful hands and the arms that enabled him to spend the whole day drilling holes in granite for expansion bolts straight up the face where there were no cracks. He was also a vegetarian and had a variety of unusual views on life and how it was to be spent. He was a very able climber, however, and did the first ascent of the Lost Arrow. In any event, our first two tries at climbing Castle Rock Spire failed, but at least we had discovered what we thought was a route that would go. On the third try, we made it to the summit. This proved to be one of the more spectacular climbs of the time because of the technical difficulty. It required direct aid almost the whole of the route, from bottom to top.

- AL: At that time was the use of direct aid a controversial subject?
- Siri: Not in this country it wasn't. There were still some remnants of the old philosophy of climbing in Europe, more particularly in England, where the use of hardware was frowned upon, but that persisted for only a few more years until the new, young British climbers saw mountaineering in a more contemporary light.
- AL: How about the older generation of Sierra Club climbers like Farquhar or even Brower and Leonard? Did they have a different attitude toward the use of pitons?
- Siri: Not from ours; we learned the use of climbing aids from them. No, the old hands at climbing in California--men like Francis Farquhar and Dick Leonard and Dave Brower--had introduced pitons and the technique of dynamic belaying.
- AL: What about the difference between the use for direct aid and using them for safety only?
- Siri: No, there was never a difference of opinion that I was aware of. The grades of climbing had already been established by Brower and Leonard and Robinson, and we pretty much adhered to those. Grade four called for use of a rope for safety, without direct aid; grade five was a climb in which direct aid was called for. The use of hardware in climbing was well established in this country. No, there was never a serious question about its use, particularly where safety was concerned.
- AL: Did it come up later?
- Siri: No. I don't recall that direct aid was ever in dispute.
- AL: I don't know where I picked up this idea that it was an issue in rock climbing.
- Siri: Well, there may have been people who thought direct aid was inappropriate, but not among the active climbers that I knew, and that was most of them.
- AL: Any other Sierra climbs that are particularly memorable?
- Siri: No. Most of our hard technical climbs were in Yosemite in those years, except for the notable exception of Castle Rock Spire. The other mountains we climbed in the Sierra Nevada were not that demanding. Yosemite of course was the great technical climbing arena with its vertical walls of granite. There were a great many other places where we did climb in the Sierra Nevada, and of course we went for weekends to Pinnacles and many other places that were not as large or spectacular.

AL: On some of these lengthy climbs or especially difficult ones, did any one person take the role of leader? How was the interpersonal relationship worked out?

Siri: There was never a well-defined leader, although some climbers were clearly more skillful and daring than others. It was always a small group of people enjoying themselves. Usually a trip of this kind was conceived in the course of conversation among climbers. On occasion one climber would become excited about a particular climb that had come to his attention and he would then persuade some of his friends to join him in the venture.

AL: How about the route-finding decisions during the actual climb?

Siri: This was almost always a group effort. On the climb itself there would of course be discussions of where we go and how it was going to be done, but this was more in the nature of a technical discussion. The way the climb was conducted was a matter of group effort. No one person was designated as leader; no one person made the decisions. It was by consensus that we would try a route, and decide who should lead each pitch.

In preparing for a climb someone would agree to provide the food, and someone else would secure ropes, and we all pooled whatever equipment we had available for the climb. It was an extremely informal kind of arrangement, a group of friends going out to play games.

What I have just described is how most serious climbers, acting on their own initiatives, conduct their private climbing activities. I should make a distinction here between this kind of climbing and the organized mountain climbing trips sponsored by the Sierra Club and other organizations. The latter are highly organized and conducted by a leader and assistants accountable to the Sierra Club. The trips are carefully scheduled, announced in various publications, and are generally open to members at large. Many chapters regularly conduct mountaineering trips of short durations in nearby ranges, but the club, and other organizations, run fairly ambitious outings to the big overseas ranges.

AL: I wanted to get an idea of the organization of these Sierra climbs as background for some of the questions later about expedition problems.

Siri: For the serious climber there is a profound distinction. Most of us grew up climbing on our own initiative. We learned mountaineering by doing it with more experienced friends. The question of a designated leader was never broached and a leader was considered alien to the perceived personal freedom in climbing. By their nature,

- Siri: serious climbers appear to be independent, self-sufficient personalities and not amenable to formalized structures, especially the concept of a "leader." It is sometimes difficult for climbers to adjust to an expedition, where it is necessary then to have a designated leader.
- AL: Now were there other climbs within the United States outside the Sierra that are of interest?
- Siri: Oh yes, but let's include Canada. Their mountains are extensions of ours--or vice versa. My climbs included the Rockies, both in the United States and Canada, the coast range of British Columbia, and the Cascades. The British Columbia coast range was particularly attractive because it was wild, almost inaccessible country. There were not many, if any, trails and few roads; simply getting into the mountains was an adventure itself. Mountains like Waddington and the many fine snow peaks in British Columbia were not high mountains by Peruvian and even Sierra Nevada standards, but they rose from very low bases almost at sea level, and they were heavily encrusted with glaciers, and snow, and bad weather. Peaks like Robson and Waddington and many others in British Columbia were always great attractions.
- AL: What mountains in Alaska did you climb?
- Siri: I haven't climbed in Alaska. They were always attractive to us, but at that time relatively few climbers were able to get to Alaska. The costs were high, and it took a great deal of time, and it meant launching a major effort.
- AL: You must have had more time than you have now.
- Siri: We either had more time, or we made more time. During those youthful years we had fewer responsibilities. We didn't have calendars that were great scribbles of things we had to attend to day by day. And so we had a great deal more freedom in picking our time. At that age the world can struggle on for a few days without you, but as you advance in age you find that you're absolutely indispensable, and it's much more difficult then to abandon all these important things to go off to do the things you really love most.
- AL: At least you think you're more indispensable.
- Siri: That's right. And it's with some uneasiness now when we go off for a weekend or even for a few weeks and return to find that the world has, in fact, continued quite well without you. Sometimes perhaps even for the better, but indispensibility is an illusion we like to adhere to.

AL: That's right. You climbed in the Alps also, didn't you?

Siri: Yes, a little bit.

AL: When was that?

Siri: On several trips to Europe on business in the fifties I would take off for a week or so and climb. I did some climbs around the region of Mont Blanc and in several other areas of the Alps. These were not new routes. We climbed established routes, but they were technically demanding, and it was gratifying to discover my training was adequate for the climbs.

Expedition Climbing, Cordillera Blanca

AL: Now, how did you get into expedition climbing? That started pretty early in your career.

Siri: I suppose the beginning of it was, again, James Ramsey Ullman's book. Having read Ullman's book and then gone through the library for all the books on great climbing expeditions I could find, I developed the urge, of course, but that lay dormant until the opportunities either came or could be made. We had climbed in British Columbia and the Canadian Rockies, which were mini-expeditions that further stimulated the determination to make a full-scale first overseas venture came not as a result of my efforts, but rather those of our laboratory, Donner laboratory.

The laboratory had been engaged for many years in a study of blood diseases, more particularly polycythemia vera, which was a form of cancer of the bone marrow which produces red blood cells. Polycythemia means an abnormal increase in the number of red blood cells. Now one of the things that happens at high altitude is the development of a polycythemia but it's not malignant, it's a reversible polycythemia. The studies we were doing on polycythemia suggested that we might best investigate what happens in the normal person when abnormal production of red blood cells is induced by hypoxia or high altitude.

The best way to do that would be to go where the high altitude residents were. The best place to do that was in Peru because there existed in Peru at that time a very able group of research physiologists and MDs led by Professor Alberto Hurtado. Professor Hurtado had recently constructed a laboratory at about 15,000 feet in the Andes, which we could use for our purpose, and there was a substantial population of people living nearby at high altitude. Consequently

Siri: Dr. John Lawrence, who was the director of Donner Laboratory, arranged for a group of us to go to Peru to spend a month or two to carry out studies on production of red blood cells in people living at high altitudes. We had developed several new techniques using radioactive tracers to measure the physiological processes involved in red blood cell production, and we used these in Peru. That was our first overseas expedition, and I participated in that as one of the half-dozen scientists.

AL: It sounds so coincidental to think that you would fall into something that is so in line with your interests. You're sure you didn't design this experiment?

Siri: No, I didn't design that one, but I think there were two reasons why I was invited to go on this expedition. One was, of course, that I was also working in this field along with colleagues at Donner, and I had certain skills that were needed for the work; the other was that of course they all knew that I was a mountain climber. I had had exposures to high altitudes and managed quite well, and I knew my way around the mountains. They thought this might conceivably be useful, if they were going to have any problems at 15,000 feet.

AL: Was anyone else a mountain climber?

Siri: No. The others had no experience whatever with mountains. Climbing skill wasn't necessary at all for this expedition, but the others felt I could cope with the altitude in the event they could not. In fact the other members of the team did feel the effects of altitude quite strongly. For whatever reason I had no problems with it and found time to climb peaks near the high altitude research station.

AL: That was 1950?

Siri: Yes. Well, that expedition clearly pointed the way to additional ones. It familiarized me with the problems that would be encountered in overseas expeditions and gave me some familiarity with how they might be organized and managed.

AL: You did some mountain climbing at that time, or did you?

Siri: Yes, a little bit, as time permitted. I climbed some nearby mountains to about eighteen or nineteen thousand feet with a local Indian resident. It's never wise to climb a peak like that alone.

In any event within two years I proposed and organized a second expedition to Peru [July, 1953]. I designed another research project to obtain more definitive information on polycythemia and the physiology of blood cell production, which meant we had to go to substantially higher altitudes. The subjects for the study would

- Siri: have to be climbers, and so vocation and avocation fitted together very nicely. We'd do the blood studies and other physiological studies on the climbers at an altitude of about 20,000 to 22,000 feet.
- AL: How were these two intertwined? Was the science your main interest or was that your excuse to get the expedition to Peru, or is it not that simple?
- Siri: No, they were dual interests, and happened to be complementary. I would have gone there for the research alone; I would have gone there for the climbing alone, but the opportunity to combine both interests was highly satisfactory. It would be unfair to say that the science was used simply as a device to get to Peru, because we had quite serious studies to perform and were fully prepared to carry them out.
- AL: Now how did the group of non-scientific climbers take to the science part of the expedition?
- Siri: They would have to see it in quite a different light because they were not doing the research and realizing the rewards that would come from doing the research; they were experimental subjects. But for the opportunity to go to Peru and to climb some of the magnificent peaks of the Cordillera Blanca, they agreed to put up with the venipunctures and other uncomfortable procedures I would have to perform on them.
- AL: Was that financed by the University?
- Siri: Yes, it was. Again Dr. Lawrence was able to raise funds but they were not very substantial. They did not have to be because the Air Force was also interested in what we were doing, since high altitude physiology was of considerable interest to them. The Air Force provided transportation, which eliminated the largest cost item. So the expedition was very inexpensive in terms of our direct costs. That was the origin of my own interests in starting overseas expeditions. Later expeditions didn't become easier, but the problems were now at least familiar, and one could go about coping with them.

The Peruvian trip did not work out as we had planned because of the death of Oscar Cook. Cook was a very strong climber and a very fine athlete, but when we had reached an altitude of about sixteen thousand feet he suddenly became ill and within a few hours went into a coma. As we struggled to bring him down the mountain he died, at a still quite high altitude. With the loss of Cook of course, all of our plans went awry. We brought his body down, and by the time we were able to return to the mountains little time remained, but we did make a first ascent or two.

Siri: This was a tragic affair in more than one way, because no one could diagnose Oscar's disease or knew how to treat it. Because of some of the symptoms, his death was ascribed to pulmonary pneumonia, not knowing what else to attribute it to. It wasn't until some years later that Dr. Houston and Dr. Hultgren described for the first time a high altitude syndrome that they called primary pulmonary edema. They showed that certain people are predisposed to pulmonary edema when exposed to high altitudes. Their lungs simply fill up with fluids, and they die if not quickly removed to low altitude or given oxygen. We then realized that Cook was a classic case of pulmonary edema.

AL: It came on very suddenly?

Siri: Yes.

AL: He hadn't had any signs of weakness?

Siri: That's right. Pulmonary edema can develop rapidly in a strong and otherwise healthy person. Since then, of course, many cases of pulmonary edema have been reported. It is now a well-known disease of altitude; it has nothing to do with infections or pre-existing pathology. Some people are simply susceptible to pulmonary edema at high altitude.

But we didn't know that at the time, and it probably would not have mattered even if we had known it because there was nothing more we could have done other than what we tried to do--bring him down to lower altitude as quickly as possible--and we were not successful. We were high up the mountain, and we had a treacherous glacier to descend. In twenty-four hours of hard struggle we had lowered him only two thousand feet. That wasn't enough. His disease went to termination.

RL: So I suspect that antibiotics are not effective in pulmonary edema.

Siri: No, they are of no value whatever.

RL: How is it treated today? Inhalation therapy--that kind of thing?

Siri: Oxygen provides almost immediate relief and is a complete cure. We had no oxygen, of course, but in the absence of oxygen sometimes complete bed rest will enable a person to survive. Whether this would have worked at the altitude we were at is doubtful because he had already gone into coma, and it's very unlikely that he would have recovered even with complete rest.

AL: What is the effect on the group of climbers? I assume he was rather a close friend.

Siri: He was a close friend of all the members of the group. Of course the impact is devastating. How do you explain it? You have intense feelings of loss, guilt and of responsibility. Sadder but not wiser we returned to the peaks two weeks later to make several ascents including a first ascent on Nevado Huandoy.

Makalu, 1954: the Sierra Club in the Himalayas

AL: And then--the Himalayas?

Siri: Yes, even before we set off for Peru, we were thinking about the Himalayas. Obviously this is the goal of every climber. And a group of us--some of the better climbers that had associated during the late forties and fifties--got together, and we thought about where we would like to go and how we would get there. We would gather from time to time and think about the great peaks that we would challenge, and we finally settled on the peak, Dhau Lagiri. This was the peak that the French had attempted to climb in 1950 before turning to their dramatic ascent of Annapurna. Our request for permission to climb was turned down by the Nepalese government because someone else had gotten to it first.

The next peak we asked for was called Makalu. It ranked as the fifth highest peak. From the few photographs that were available, it was a formidable peak. No one had attempted to climb it and it was not even clear how Makalu could be reached by an expedition. To my surprise, the Nepalese government granted us permission to climb it in the spring of 1954. It took about two and a half years to put the expedition together and finance it. We then took off for Makalu--we, meaning the climbers who had climbed together in California. It was strictly a California team.

AL: All Sierra Club members.

Siri: And all Sierra Club members, yes.

AL: Who organized it? Or was this still a group effort?

Siri: It was largely a group effort, but I guess I was the principal organizer--chairman of the committee that we set up and then ultimately leader of the expedition.

AL: And who did you go to for financing?

Siri: We went to everyone. We went to any number of foundations and to the Sierra Club, of course. We sought individual contributions, which became a substantial part of our funds. I also secured

Siri: research funds. The largest expense was transportation, and here again the Air Force came to our rescue. The Air Force at that time had a flight that ran once a week between California and New Delhi-- it was called the embassy run because it deposited embassy staff at capitals along the way. In support of our research program, the Air Force agreed to fly us to Calcutta. The funding for that expedition was rather meager, and so was the equipment, which was less than adequate. It consisted mainly of equipment each of us already had, plus a few things we were able to purchase or beg.

AL: You didn't find the companies eager to donate?

Siri: Some companies did, yes. They either donated it or provided it at cost or at something less than cost. A few companies were reasonably generous. But Himalayan mountaineering at that time was a novelty, and very few people understood it in this country, although in Europe of course such an expedition would have commanded widespread attention and support. But support was very difficult to find in the United States in the fifties.

I think there may be a few things said about Makalu because it was really a Sierra Club venture in the sense that all the members of the team were members of the Sierra Club, and of course it had the enthusiastic support of the club in terms of contributions from members, although very little from the club itself. It was also the first major American climbing effort in the Himalayas.

Nepal had opened its borders only a few years earlier. After several hundred years of being a very tightly closed country, there was a bloodless revolution in 1949, and by 1950 they were allowing foreigners into the country for the first time.

This was an overwhelming experience for all of us, except perhaps Willi Unsoeld. Willi had been in the Indian part of the Himalayas before on his own and had attempted to climb Nanda Devi.

AL: As a solo climber?

Siri: No, there were two other persons who he had met along the way. It was not a major effort; he had just knocked around the Himalayas for one summer I think. For the rest of us it was an overwhelming experience because we had never seen a mountain so big or encountered a cultural impact so extreme. I think this made a deep impression on everybody.

I suppose one of the most notable features of the expedition was the effort to find the mountain. One could see it from India, but the only maps that existed at that time were the Survey of India maps, and these were exercises in fantasy by surveyers stationed

Siri: in India a hundred miles from the mountains. Ed Hillary had gotten to Makalu the year before with a very small team. He made no effort to climb it, but he was the first person to get anywhere near it. He got to Makalu by an extremely difficult route over several very high passes with a small team of climbers who had been with him on Everest. It was not a route that one could take hundreds of porters over. Our first problem was to find a way to the peak itself, and this called for quite a bit of exploration along the way.

AL: Were there any resources that you had to draw on there, any local knowledgeable people?

Siri: We did this constantly, but it wasn't always very useful. In the first parts of the journey, hiking northward from the Indian border, yes. There the Sherpas who were with us knew the way, and they would also ask directions from local villagers. It wasn't until we got into the high country, among the great peaks of the Himalayas, that the villagers were very little aid to us. We would simply have to explore deep gorges and high ridges.

AL: How long was the expedition in time? How long did you spend approaching?

Siri: Just about a month. We ultimately did find a way to the base of the mountain by a route that I doubt anyone would want to repeat.

The route we tried to climb proved to be an extremely difficult one, and because of that, combined with the early arrival of the monsoon that year, we didn't succeed. I suppose the best that can be said is that among the dozen climbing expeditions in the Himalayas that year--none of which were successful--we were the only group that got away without a serious accident or death. But it's always difficult to walk away from a mountain after several months of effort and realize you hadn't succeeded in reaching the summit.

AL: It was climbed the following year. Did they draw on your experience?

Siri: Yes, I had correspondence with Jean Franco, who led the French expedition the following year. The French came in with an extremely powerful team of climbers that included people like Lionel Terray, Guido Magnone, and Jean Couzy. They also arrived on the scene with an immense amount of oxygen and used oxygen all the way up the mountain. They also chose a better route. They had more time available than we did and took a route that required moving farther around the mountain that we were able to do. But in any event they succeeded in climbing Makalu and did it very handily.

AL: Had your team used oxygen?

- Siri: No, we had no oxygen with us. It would have been far too expensive.
- AL: Isn't that quite a high peak to attempt without oxygen?
- Siri: It is, it's a little under 28,000 feet. We would have preferred to have oxygen obviously, but we simply couldn't afford it.
- AL: When you set out did you think you had a good chance of obtaining the peak?
- Siri: One always thinks he has good chances of reaching the summit. [Laughter] That drive is always there right up to the last minute, and one only reluctantly turns away realizing the odds are hopeless or that there is simply no time left. That was the case here. Well, it wasn't as simply as that--we were running out of food, we had already run out of money, and we were wondering how we were going to pay off the Sherpas and the porters. But we were also running out of time and weather. The monsoon was drifting up the valley very rapidly. Of course that ended any further effort on the mountain; we had to be off the mountain when the monsoon arrived.
- AL: That makes the final decision.
- Siri: Yes.
- AL: How did the California climbers adapt to the setting there--to the high altitude, the type of climbing, and the length of the expedition. Was it difficult for some of them?
- Siri: I think they did very well. None of us had climbed on a mountain that high before. The highest had been in Peru. That was about 21,000 feet, which was respectable enough, I guess, at least it gave us a start on what we would find in the Himalayas. We were still novices, there's no question about it. The French were far more experienced, and they had very substantially better support and better equipment.

Hillary was in the area at the same time. He had also asked for permission to climb Makalu, but was turned down because the Nepalese government had already given permission to us, and only one permit is granted in any season. Nevertheless, Hillary showed up with a very strong team and went around to another side of the mountain. In spite of the fact that they did not have explicit permission to climb Makalu, they proceeded to explore it, do a reconnaissance. We presumed the reconnaissance would have been called to a halt once they reached the summit [laughter]. But they had several pieces of bad luck, and the final blow came when Hillary fell into a crevasse. In the process of getting him out several of his ribs were broken, and he developed pneumonia and had to leave the area. That terminated their efforts.

AL: Anything memorable from the standpoint of your leadership role on that expedition? Were there occasions where you had to take over the role of leader as opposed to one among equals?

Siri: Yes, it was a role that was never played in our other climbing efforts, except perhaps to some extent in Peru. Here, there had to be a designated leader. I had organized the expedition and arranged financing and probably for this reason I was chosen the leader by group consensus, and more formally by our advisory committee. For an expedition under those circumstances it is necessary to have a designated leader. Some one person has to represent the expedition with the Sherpas and endless authorities that need to be dealt with, and at times make tough decisions.

There were any number of tough decisions that had to be made on the Makalu trip. They were decisions that perhaps not everybody in the team would have agreed to or could be entirely enthusiastic about, and maybe some of them were wrong. No one is that infallible. But, unlike the climbing we had done before, on Makalu it was necessary for some one person to make hard decisions. Sometimes unpopular ones.

AL: Decisions on route, or when to turn around, or what type of decision are you speaking of?

Siri: There were many such decisions, but I remember particularly one decision, when it was apparent that we had relatively few days left before the monsoon was to arrive, and we were not having a great deal of success in our efforts to get above a critical point on the mountain. It was suggested by several members, who made their case well and vigorously, that we pull off the mountain and try a completely new route on another side. In weighing the possibilities, I had to conclude that, no, we could not do that, that there simply did not remain sufficient time, nor did we have adequate resources. I'm not prepared to say that was absolutely the right decision or the only decision that could be made, but it had to be made, and the others had to adhere to it.

AL: Are the thought processes as clear at those altitudes?

Siri: No, not at all. I think that above 20,000 feet there is unquestionably impairment of judgment and perception.

AL: Even if you're there for a substantial amount of time?

Siri: Yes, I think so.

AL: So how do you sort that out? I mean does one part of your mind tell you that you're not thinking so clearly?

- Siri: Well, one part of your mind can tell the other part that, yes, you're not thinking very clearly, but what does the other part of the mind do when it says, "I know but I'm hypoxic and what more do you expect?" [Laughter] The awareness of it doesn't correct it. A bottle of oxygen might.
- AL: When you look back on some of your expeditions do you question your judgments? Can you see that you weren't thinking clearly?
- Siri: Yes, I don't think there is any question about that. But that does not make it different from any important event in one's life. You dwell on it frequently for a long time afterwards. Did you make the right decision? If I had only done this or that we might have succeeded, but we never know the answer.
- AL: But, particularly, I mean do you question how could I have made that judgment, can you see that you weren't thinking clearly? Or is it just replaying it, as you would at any altitude, replaying the decision you made at some crucial moment?
- Siri: No. I think it takes more of the form of oversights and insufficient-- and unobtainable--information needed to make a faultless decision. Cerebration may be impaired, perhaps only slower, at 22,000 feet but the capacity to make rational judgments is not destroyed.

Climbing with the Sherpas

- AL: Anything that you learned from this expedition that had an effect on decisions or attitudes you had during Everest? Was it useful for you later?
- Siri: Unquestionably, yes. It was a lesson in how men performed under stressful conditions of this kind. Perhaps I learned something about selecting members of a team for an undertaking of this kind. Exposure to the local cultures was important and rewarding, with the Sherpas particularly. It was invaluable experience in the kinds of problems that would be encountered later. And it was an education in how organized expeditions tend to behave and what it needed to make them perform. One can design logically perfect organizations and plans, but one can't design the people who participate in them, and in an operation of this kind there needs to be a great deal of flexibility, innovation, and especially sensitivity in management because climbers are notoriously independent and seem to resent authority.

AL: Those are all so intriguing, the things that you mentioned, would you want to go into more detail on them, such as selecting team members or relationships with the local people?

Siri: We learned in the course of the Makalu expedition, and we learned quite quickly, that climbing in the Himalayas with Sherpas is quite different from climbing in this country or even in Europe. Learning to work with the Sherpas is just a matter of getting to know them, knowing something about the way they behave and think, what their attitudes are, and appreciating just how able they are on the mountains. One quickly develops a good feeling for the Sherpas in the course of a major effort on a big Himalayan peak. That close rapport was essential later on Everest.

In all the climbing we had done previously we were accustomed to carrying our own packs fully loaded, seventy-five or eighty pounds, and being completely self sufficient--everybody an independent entity in that he carried on his back everything that he needed. We started off the first days on the Makalu expedition with pretty much this ingrained attitude that we were independent climbers, by god; we didn't need servants and porters, except to help bring in eight tons of equipment which we couldn't carry on our backs, but everything else we would carry on our backs. We resisted the Sherpas' exercise of their normal duties, such as setting up camp, and washing socks, and preparing meals, and exploring ahead, and all the rest of the things. It took us less than a week to shed fifty pounds of the seventy-five we were carrying [laughter], and to let the Sherpas blow up our air mattresses and erect our tents. But by the end of the first week we found this an extremely agreeable arrangement. We adopted the old British traditions after that with no great difficulty at all. So we relaxed and worked with, instead of resisting the efforts of the Sherpas to perform their normal duties.

AL: Did the Sherpas think you were a bit strange when you were carrying on this way?

Siri: Probably so, there is always a period of familiarization in which everybody gets to know everybody else, but it must have struck them as odd that we were so insistent on carrying our heavy packs. They didn't quite know how to take our efforts to put up our tents and blow up our own air mattresses I guess. But they were patient and extremely tolerant, and with the wisdom of the East they realized that we would settle down in time and learn. I guess we did.

AL: Did you have a head man for the Sherpas or someone who had more experience with it to handle this?

Siri: There is always a sirdar, who's the head Sherpa. We were extremely fortunate in having a Sherpa by the name of Ang-Tharkey. He was older and far more experienced than the other Sherpas. He was the

Siri: sirdar for the French Annapurna exposition and had been on many British expeditions before World War II to other parts of the Himalayas. He was regarded as one of the greatest of the sirdars. He was an extraordinarily fine man, and we quickly developed a profound respect and affection for him. I realized in very short order that Ang-Tharkey could handle all the porter and Sherpa problems; that was not my responsibility as leader of the expedition. Ang-Tharkey would come to my tent in the morning, and we would have a brief discussion about the day's plans. His command of English was adequate, but it was not so fluent that he would carry on an extended conversation. He would brief me on where things stood, ask me what the plans were for the day, and that was it. If a problem came up that called for a decision on my part, he would come to me, but other than that we would get things sorted out first thing in the morning in a few minutes time and then Ang-Tharkey would handle the logistics for the whole rest of the day.

AL: What kind of salary did Ang-Tharkey get for that type of job?

Siri: I've forgotten exactly what he was paid but I think it was about three or four dollars a day. The porters were paid four rupies, which at that time was roughly a dollar. The Sherpas were paid somewhat more.

AL: The Sherpas were the high altitude porters?

Siri: Yes, the lowland porters were discharged on reaching the snow line or base camp. Most of the porters for the approach march were drawn from the lowland villages, but about fifty Sherpa porters had come down from their high Himalayan villages in the Sola Khumbu region to portage for us. The Sherpas are descendants from the Tibetans, and they are quite different from the Nepalese.

About ten of the Sherpas were climbing Sherpas. These were associated with the Mountain Institute in Darjeeling. Most of them had had previous expedition experience with the French, German, British and others.

On the Makalu expedition we had two young Sherpas who had not had previous expedition experience. One of them was a young Sherpa by the name of [Nawang] Gombu, who proved to be by all odds the most resourceful and brightest of the Sherpas, a very able young man by any standard. He possessed extraordinary initiative that quickly put him in a position of leadership and problem solver. He would instinctively move in and do the right things. The other was a still younger Sherpa by the name of Chotari, who was an unending source of enthusiasm, drive, and good humor. He would bellow Sherpa folk songs at full voice along the trails as he carried a huge load on his back. He was not a porter; he was a novice going with us on his

Siri: first expedition to qualify as a climbing Sherpa. Chotari also had initiative, unfailing good humor, and an immense amount of energy.

When we went to Everest I insisted that Gombu and Chotari join us. As it turned out Gombu was one of the members of our team who got to the summit of Everest. Later he made a second ascent, with an Indian expedition; the only man to climb Everest twice. Chotari went on to become a sirdar not many years later.

AL: Was he on the Everest expedition also?

Siri: Yes, he was, but he was not the sirdar. But all of the Sherpas were excellent. They are admirable people for whom we had great respect. We became very fond of them and good friends. They were nothing like the lowland people. They were resourceful, were always able to take the worst of conditions in the best of humor, and of course could cope with almost any situation that arose. They were at home in the mountains, and, like the Peruvian Altiplano Indians, genetically adapted to harsh conditions and high altitude.

AL: What would be their homeland altitude?

Siri: Their villages were at altitudes of eight to thirteen thousand feet.

AL: And how does it affect them when they go up to twenty-five thousand. Do they hold up a lot better than those that live at sea level?

Siri: Yes, oh yes.

AL: But they still need oxygen.

Siri: Well, they don't need it as much as we do. They can tolerate altitudes far better than other people. In the course of many generations, adaptive processes have made them better equipped physiologically for hypoxia than people from low altitudes. They have larger lungs relative to their body size. They appear to have larger right hearts, which is the side of the heart that pumps blood through the lungs. There are other aspects of Sherpas that enable them to perform better than we at high altitudes. We could never match them in performance under hypoxic conditions.

AL: Do they have the drive to get to the top or do they look upon it as ridiculous?

Siri: A few do, not all of them. Gombu was one who did. There was no question Gombu was going to get to the summit even if he had to go there alone. He was extremely highly motivated. For most of the others, as much as they loved the mountains, climbing was only a job for them, and they didn't have that peculiar, and possibly pathological drive that the rest of us possessed.

Lessons of Makalu: Team Selection and Cultural Shock

AL: You mentioned what you had learned about selection of team members. Are there any specifics that you want to talk about?

Siri: It's still difficult to pinpoint. I recall, when we were selecting the Everest team, trying to identify just what those features were that we wanted in a team member, and I'm not sure that even to this day that I can identify fully what those qualities are. We somehow had to sense in a person a quality of independence and, more importantly, stability. How would he behave under extremely adverse conditions, particularly sustained stress? Could we expect him to stay together psychologically, to pull his full "weight," and to maintain a high level of motivation under the worst of conditions?

AL: How do you judge that if you haven't seen them in action?

Siri: This is the common problem of selecting persons for demanding jobs. Part of it is based on personal experience with the man, part of it is based on how you interpret the opinions of others that you question about him, and in large part it is based on his known past performance, technical skill and judgment. In the end, a decision is based on a mixture of facts and intuitive judgment.

AL: Do you interview people?

Siri: Oh yes.

AL: Not just based on the fraternity?

Siri: On Everest it was not, that's right. Makalu, yes. But we also eliminated people in the Makalu expedition. As organizer and leader of the expedition I had to face several such ugly moments. Those were the times when I had to tell someone who considered himself a sure candidate that he was no longer to be considered a member of the expedition. This is a dreadful moment. In the Makalu expedition there were two cases in which there was a consensus among the other members of the team, and either separately or in small groups, they had suggested to me that so-and-so really did not fit in, or was not qualified, in one case physically, for the expedition. I had to agree with them and then had to tell a man something almost as devastating as a judge's pronouncement of the death penalty. That happened several times; it also happened on the Everest expedition.

The moment you mention the expedition to someone and tell them they are being considered as a candidate, there is no doubt in that man's mind but that he is already a member of the expedition. He wants so desperately to go that he can't even entertain the possibility

Siri: that he will not be on the expedition. And this is the frame of mind of a person who must be told he has not been selected. It's a terribly difficult moment because you know what a crushing blow it is to the man. In every case where I have had to tell somebody he was rejected, I've created a bitter, life-long enemy. It didn't matter how valid the reasons, there was no way to soften the blow of rejection; it's an extremely emotional reaction.

AL: The reasons you are giving are often very personal from what you described; it's nothing physical or ability?

Siri: I perhaps misled you on that. In one case it was clearly a matter involving a physical impairment. But generally it's a mixture of things including personality or attitude. This undoubtedly is a significant element, but the decision is also based on an assessment of a man's probable performance under sustained stress. What kind of drive does he have? For an objective like Everest it's essential to pick people who have the capacity for sustained drive in the face of adversity and who, quite frankly, are willing to take risks. That begins to narrow down the candidates very quickly if you can sense it.

The man's skill and experience are also important, although lack of experience wouldn't necessarily rule out a person who seems otherwise to be able, who you believe can learn fast and has good judgment. But all of these elements are involved--confidence in the man's drive, his skills, his experience, his performance under stress, his ability to work with others--all of these things we in some mysterious way try to assess. And you're not always right. People are often great surprises.

AL: Were you surprised by the performance of some?

Siri: On Makalu, yes. I had both underestimated and overestimated probable performance of several team members before the expedition. But there is nothing like a war or a Himalayan expedition to bring out qualities in men that are not evident under ordinary conditions. I think we were more confident in picking the Everest team, but by that time we'd had more experience, and also, Norman Dyhrenfurth and I were pooling our judgment in making selections.

AL: Well, you had the experience of having seen at least some of them on a similar expedition.

Siri: Yes.

AL: Anything else about the Makalu expedition?

Siri: No, except to reemphasize that a person's first expedition to a major Himalayan peak can be an overwhelming experience, especially for younger persons. The intense feelings of anticipation and

Siri: uncertainty of success, the long, arduous effort on the mountain, the hazards and discomforts endured, the intense goal orientation, and the cultural shock all combine to produce a profound impact. It often changes men's lives. For a year or more after returning from Makalu, seemingly trivial cues, like a bird sound similar to one I had heard in the Himalayas, would trigger a flood of intense memories, and it was only with some effort that I could bring myself back to the present. The urge to return was so overwhelming that it often dominated other things that I should have been doing at that moment.

The aftermath of Everest was even more intense and the impact greater for nearly all the members of the team but especially so for those who had not been to the Himalayas before. Most of the members of the expedition were married, and about half of those households broke up after we returned. Four or five switched careers, and one never went back to his intended academic career. There were other psychological and social ramifications that I was aware of but am not qualified to describe. For me the impact of Everest was less dramatic than it had been for Makalu because it was a familiar experience, and I could anticipate much of it. I didn't have that almost pathologic post-expedition reaction. I could enjoy the trip without the burden of the intense first-exposure emotional hang-ups.

AL: But Makalu did have that tremendous effect on you?

Siri: Not as striking as Everest had on members of that expedition. I will admit, though, that after Makalu the desire to catch the next plane back and rerun that magnificent experience was all but irresistible. It was like being in love I guess for the first time. It had that intensity and that long sustained aftermath. I suppose an unrequited love--after all we hadn't gotten to the summit of the mountain. [Laughter]

Biophysics in the Antarctic, 1957-58

[Interview 10: May 16, 1977]

AL: Should we move on to the Antarctic expedition in 1957-58? Was that primarily scientific?

Siri: Yes, that trip was designed from the start as a scientific expedition. It was initiated by Professor Nello Pace after some conversations he and I had after the Makalu trip. Over a period of about a year it gradually took shape. It was finally named the International Physiological Expedition to Antarctica--INPHEXAN for short. It involved four of us from the United States and two from England. One

Siri: of the men from England was a well known high altitude physiologist, Griffith Pugh, who had been with Sir Edmund Hillary on Everest and a couple of other expeditions. The other was an M.D., James Adam, who was interested in environmental research and medicine.

The main thrust of that expedition was an attempt to assess physiological stress in people working in the Antarctic. There were substantial numbers of military and scientific personnel in the Antarctic in 1957 and 1958 during the geophysical year, and some of them were spending months at a time in remote parts of the Antarctic. These were the glaciologists and the geophysicists who would go out in teams of six across the Ross Shelf Ice or over the Polar Plateau, doing their studies.

We arranged to fly out to them on resupply flights and remain with them for a week or two to do our studies on the team members. We would then return to our base at the U.S. station at McMurdo Sound and fly out to another field team or remote station. This worked out very well, and we were able to spend much of our time in the field far from the stations, and generally in remote parts of the Antarctic.

AL: Were these high altitudes?

Siri: No, the highest altitude was about 10,000 feet, and that was on the polar plateau, and that's hardly high altitude. We were more interested in the stress due to more general environmental conditions-- extreme cold, high winds, deprivation of the normal amenities, isolation for months at a time, and the usual kinds of stresses that develop in small, isolated groups of that kind. Did this result in measurable physiological stress? Were there adaptations to cold that we could measure?

We had quite a bit of success in reaching out to the field teams, and we'd spend a week with them, collecting urine and blood and conducting a variety of tests. Once we were acclimatized to the cold, we simply set up our laboratory on the snow. We had our own equipment--tents, food and arctic gear--which we had to pack up every day to travel in the snow cats with the geophysical team.

We worked out a deal with the geophysicists in which we would help them with their work, in return for blood and urine. Probably one of the oddest messages broadcast across the Antarctic, at least while we were there, was one I sent out before we were scheduled to meet one of the field teams about 500 miles away. I've forgotten the precise wording, but this was broadcast to the whole of the Antarctic: "Do not urinate four hours before our arrival." [Laughter] And for the rest of our stay in the Antarctic we were met at stations

Siri: all over the Antarctic and by field teams with a good deal of earthy humor. People weren't sure just who the message was directed to [laughter]. There were some tense moments apparently in some quarters.

As a result of these excursions we probably saw more of the Antarctic than most people who have been there. We found no evidence of physiological stress in the stations, such as that at McMurdo Sound or Byrd Station, because there the people weren't even acclimatized to cold. They lived in overheated huts and enjoyed most of the amenities of normal living that had been provided by the navy. It was only in the field teams where we found men acclimatized to cold, but we also found very little evidence of physiological stress.

We did have a few stressful moments. One was returning from the South Pole, where we had flown to meet Sir Edmund Hillary, who had just arrived on his trans-Antarctic trip with tractors and his New Zealand team. We flew to the pole to intercept them to collect blood and urine. [Laughter]

AL: He must have been happy to see you.

Siri: Well, yes, Ed was at least amused to see me, I guess, but he wasn't at all happy to see the 10cc syringe that I brought out.

AL: Was this planned in advance I hope or did you just arrive?

Siri: We knew for about a week in advance approximately when he was going to arrive. There had been radio communication between us, and so he knew that we were coming. He's a very courageous man who has no hesitancy to risk his life in all kinds of adventures, except for one, and that's having his veins punctured. I guess a 10cc syringe looks like an enormous torture device but the amount of blood is small. He had to lie down and turn his face away and I hid the syringe until the last moment. Even at that he turned white. Anyway we did get Sir Edmund Hillary's blood.

On the way to the South Pole we had an uneventful and very beautiful flight, flying up the Beardmore Glacier by the route Captain Robert Scott had traveled on his way to the South Pole back in 1912 and passing over the spot where he died on his return from the pole. Our return flight was more eventful. Shortly before we arrived at McMurdo Sound where the air strip is on the sea ice, low fog had crept in, and you cannot from the air or anywhere else distinguish fog from ice. There were some tense moments trying to land the plane. There are no alternative airports obviously; the nearest one is twenty-four hours away in New Zealand. After several heart-stopping passes, Commander Coley did make a successful landing. There had been a number of others that weren't, and the evidence were still strewn around the ice runway.

Siri: That was one of our more exciting moments, but the greatest adventure of all came when one of my companions, Peter Hildebrand, and I joined two geophysicists on a trip to a wholly unexplored region of the Polar Plateau, in the so-called Victoria Land. This was an area that had not been explored as yet, and the geophysicists wanted particularly to get into this area, since there was no data on it. We were eager to join them because it might give us an opportunity to find some evidence of physiological stress.

The object here was to deposit the four of us with tents and equipment on the Polar Plateau in Victoria Land and leave us there for two weeks. It took us a full month to persuade the base commander and the naval commander to take us on this venture. They felt it was far too risky, and they were not sure that they could land a plane successfully. The polar ice is not smooth in many places; it's rough and carved into sastrugi. These are irregular windshaped forms sculptured across the landscape, and make landing a plane precarious. They were also not certain they could ever find us again. They weren't all that confident of the portable electronic devices that we would carry.

They were finally prevailed upon to take us; I guess mainly to get us out of camp and off their backs. They thought maybe if they lost us for good it would be just as well. They did take us, and it was a rough landing as they predicted, damaging one side of the landing gear in the process. In any event, we were deposited on the Polar Plateau about 500 miles from base, at an altitude of 10,000 feet, and left to our own devices. For a few moments after the plane took off it seemed the loneliest place in the world. It's absolutely indescribable--flat and white all the way around the horizon, with a moderate wind blowing as it continued to do for the next ten days.

This area was supposed to be particularly interesting because it was believed to be the birthplace of all the rotten weather in the southern hemisphere. It was supposed to be the place where the great storms were created that blew out over the Ross Sea. So, in anticipation of extremely bad weather I attempted to build an igloo in the event our tents were blown away, as I was quite sure they would be. However, it was an igloo that I'm glad was in the middle of the Antarctic Continent where no one could see it.

AL: Have you ever built an igloo before?

Siri: I had never built a complete igloo, and I can't say that this was a complete igloo either. It was a structure that managed to stand for the time we were there, and since our tents did not blow away, we used it for other purposes. For ten days the weather was reasonably good. It did nothing but blow very steadily and be very cold. But the great storms did not form over our heads and blow off

Siri: to the north. It was just bright sunny day after sunny day. Of course the sun just rolled around the horizon, without ever rising or lowering.

As the time for our pick-up flight approached we had occasional moments of anxiety about being found, about a successful second landing, and the weather. The plane's success in locating us was a result, not of the elaborate electronic gear we had brought with us, but of a roll of window screening and some bamboo poles I had picked up at the last moment from the McMurdo Station trash pile before boarding the plane for our flight to the Victoria Plateau. The day before our scheduled pickup, I built, with no small difficulty, a big corner radar reflector with this junk. It was fascinating trying to build this thing laid out on the ice with a strong wind blowing and dry powdery snow blowing all over everything. It got into every conceivable crack and cranny. I spent the better part of a day wrestling with a roll of copper wire that was bent on rolling back up on itself, or blowing away.

But I finally managed to put it up, and it was a thing of beauty. It was quite a spectacular sight to see this shiny coppery screen fluttering excitedly in the wind between the bamboo poles. What was even more gratifying about the corner reflector was that it sang like a chorus from the wind blowing through it, all day long and all night, varying in pitch, but always softly and with complex harmonies.

AL: You mean it really was nice?

Siri: Oh it was, it was just a beautiful sound. All we could hear ordinarily was the whisssssh of the dry, sand-like snow blowing like a lot of wriggling white monsters across the plateau. You'd see them coming toward you by the hundreds as they would work their way around through the sastrugi, then blow past you and run downwind and disappear across the plateau. The whole surface was in constant movement.

The junk corner reflector also worked. The next day the plane came straight into us because they picked up the radar reflections from this big screen seventy-five miles away, and they homed right in on it.

AL: Now you hadn't thought about this in advance?

Siri: No, we had tried everything, including radio beacons. I had even dug out of the snow at McMurdo Station some abandoned aircraft tires and took those out on the sea ice and set fire to them with gasoline, thinking they would produce a beautiful, big plume of black smoke that you could see for a hundred miles across the plateau. That didn't work because in the wind it all burned too well, leaving a thin, white smoke that could not be seen beyond a hundred feet.

AL: You were glad to see the plane arrive.

Siri: We were very happy to see the plane. We had food for about thirty days, but this was not enough food to enable us to get back to the station if we had to walk.

It was more than just an idle discussion that we had before we left, in which we agreed that if we had to we would resort to cannibalism. Quite simply, whoever survives has the right to use whatever resources he has. There was no disagreement about that; we would, I think, have resorted to cannibalism if that were necessary for survival.

AL: Why did you not take enough food to walk back?

Siri: One of the problems was the limited weight we could carry on the plane. There was a limit because we had a lot of scientific gear that we had to carry, including some five hundred pounds of explosives for the seismic studies. But even if we had sufficient food for a 500 mile trek, we had no way to transport it. We certainly could not carry it on our backs.

There is one serious difficulty with an agreement to resort to cannibalism and that was if you got awfully hungry how could you be sure you would not dispatch your buddy, or he you, for a quick meal. Happily we didn't have to resolve that problem.

AL: Did you have any misgivings about setting off on a trip that people were so pessimistic about? Or did you think they were overestimating the difficulties of picking you up?

Siri: No, I suppose that if you're a mountaineer, you accept a high risk as part of the adventure. On the other hand, most of us in mountaineering would not accept a high level risk in other activities. Some of us are very nervous about driving freeways. So it's a fairly specific risk that we'll accept, and this was one of them. We knew that it was a high-risk operation. Almost every part of it was, the landing on the plateau, the problem of being located again, and then the take-off.

AL: Was it an essential part of your research, or was it more for the adventure?

Siri: We convinced ourselves that it was an essential part of the research. As it turned out, it was a significant part of the geophysical research, but the geophysicists could not go unless we were to join them. Under no conditions would the station commander take just two men, and there were no other geophysicists who were that eager to join the two that were willing to do. We were willing, recognizing that it was a somewhat nervous operation.

AL: You didn't find signs of physiological stress?

Siri: No, we did not. Well, there are evidences of physiological stress in some of the stations. I didn't see any evidence of this in the field teams. The two men that we went out with on the polar plateau were very stable people and took it all in their stride. They were well aware of the risks they were taking, but they took them quite happily, just like mountaineers.

AL: How does the body acclimatize to cold?

Siri: We're not sure about many things, but the acclimatization is not all that profound. There are some changes that take place. There is an increase in the basal metabolic rate; the capacity to sleep in the cold improves. Initially the extremities are very cold and extremely uncomfortable, but after about three or four days the circulation readjusts apparently, and so you maintain a higher temperature in the extremities, that is the feet and the hands and legs. There is a thickening of the skin so that you're able to handle cold objects and have less feeling of coldness.

AL: How long would the thickening of the skin take?

Siri: A week or two weeks. At first we felt terribly cold, but as the days passed we felt less discomfort and wore less clothing. I can't say that it was ever really warm though. At minus forty you're cold, but the feeling of coldness was different than when we first arrived. We tolerated it better even though we were cold. There are doubtless other changes but none among the hormonal and biochemical tests we made. The regulatory hormones were all normal. There was no change in blood, no change in the excretory constituents in urine, which are sometimes indications of physiological changes; everything was normal, except metabolic rate and some feature of blood circulation. We had to conclude that as far as we could see, at least in the people that we tested, there were no profound physiological changes.

AL: Who financed this?

Siri: This trip was financed mainly by the Office of Naval Research, which quite naturally had an interest in cold physiology. Part of it was financed by the British National Research Council. The navy provided the transportation for us.

We did not have a chance to climb a real mountain on that trip, although we were next to one, that was Mount Erebus, the only volcano in the Antarctic. It's about 13,000 feet high. When we were at the base at McMurdo Sound we could look up, about twenty miles away I guess, at Mount Erebus, rising way above us. We were determined, at least I was determined, to climb it but ran out of time before winter set in.

AL: Would that have been a first ascent?

Siri: No, the first ascent was made quite a long time ago, by one of the early expeditions to the Antarctic. For one reason or another the opportunities fell through, mainly because opportunities came up at unexpected moments to go out to the field teams. It also meant putting together a fairly substantial operation and finding a team of men who would want to do it. Although I started several times to do this, it was always stopped because of some other opportunity that we had to accept or take advantage of because our main business was to do the research.

One can become very attached to the Antarctic. It's a beautiful place even though it doesn't have a single tree or a blade of grass. It has a romance and beauty all of its own, and of course the excitement. There are always exciting moments, flying in white-outs, trying to land in them, and the storms, and of course the killer whales and penguins, and even the shua gulls, who would eat out your eyes if you gave them a chance.

AL: Have you ever been back?

Siri: No, I haven't, and I've always wanted to go back. I became infatuated with the Antarctic.

The stories of the Antarctic I guess are endless. But I do remember particularly the first flight we took out to one of the field teams. At that time they were flying old DC3s in the Antarctic. They're reliable machines, generally, although the bits and pieces of a few of them were spread around the ice, which didn't generate all that much confidence. These were old machines that had been around for a long time, and they looked like battered old Fords.

On the first flight that I took out to one of the field teams, we had to make an emergency landing, because one of the engines went out. We were out over the Ross Shelf Ice, which in many areas is heavily crevassed with immense fissures, fifty feet wide and two hundred feet deep. When the engine went out, it wasn't at all clear where the ground was, or what its conditions were. The pilot was an old Antarctic hand, or he had been there several seasons. He simply put the plane in a slow descent and quietly sat there in the cockpit smoking a cigar until we hit something. When we hit something we knew we were down on the ice and had landed. [Laughter] It made landings a little rough at times. With an old DC3 I guess you could do this; well, he did do it.

AL: It sounds as if he had done it before.

Siri: I suspect that he had. I won't say that he was totally unconcerned, but, you're right, he looked as though he had done it before and counted on his luck not to be in a crevassed area.

There was a pilot, a co-pilot, and an old navy crew chief, who was the mechanic. When the plane finally came to a halt, still in the whiteout, he calmly opened the door, stepped out, and began taking the engine apart. Now, it was evident he had also done this before because when he took a part off the engine and put it down on the snow he also put a flag by it. That was so he could find it again. On this occasion it turned out to be a faulty magneto in one of the engines. The mechanic had some old baling wire, a supply of chewing gum and paper clips, some scotch tape and other useful things, with which he made repairs, and off we went, a day later.

AL: My confidence would have been very low at that point.

Siri: We were sure that, between the old navy chief and the pilot, if they had to, they could get the plane off the snow without motors.

AL: Is there any further comment on the Antarctic?

Siri: I don't think there's much point in dwelling on more of my personal adventures. The Antarctic at least at that time was a particularly interesting place to be because of the people who came through--the genuine old Antarctic hands, Paul Siple and Admiral [George] Dufek and some of the older explorers like [George H.] Wilkins, among others. There were exciting moments exchanging tales and hearing their accounts of both Arctic and Antarctic exploration.

AL: How long were you there?

Siri: About four months. We didn't stay the whole year.

There was one other experience worth noting. Admiral Byrd's old stations, Little America 1, 2, and 3, were placed on the edge of the Ross Shelf Ice. The Ross Shelf Ice is perhaps 500 miles wide and a couple of hundreds of miles deep before it abuts the great range of mountains that ring the Ross Sea. The ice itself is about 1,500 feet thick and floats on the Ross Sea. Little America 3 was in full use, a major U.S. station, when we were there in 1957. While we were at Little America 3, we arranged a trip to the long-abandoned Little America 1, about forty miles away. The only evidences of the base were some poles for radio antenna still projecting above the surface of the ice, but the rest was all under twenty feet of ice now, having been completely covered in the intervening years since 1933.

Siri: But someone had already dug a hole through the snow and ice down to one of the huts, and so we entered the system through the hole and were able to tour the old huts and passageways between them. It was a fascinating sight. They were slowly being crushed by the ice but you could still work your way through them. The tunnels were used as storage places for food and equipment, and now, as they slowly collapsed, they looked like supermarkets that had been struck by a tornado. Food was being extruded from their boxes and cans. There were cookies and rice and canned meats all over the place.

Everything was frozen brick-hard and covered with a beautiful lacework of frost. We found a twenty-five pound turkey that had been frozen for twenty-five years and hauled it to the surface. We took it back to our base and discovered that a twenty-five pound turkey does not cook well or very fast over a primus stove. [Laughter] So we finally turned it over to the cook.

AL: Did you taste it?

Siri: Yes, it was like frozen turkey.

AL: That must have been quite an eerie experience?

Siri: It was. Everything was suffused with a purple glow through the twenty feet of snow and ice. Light still penetrates but it's a deep purple and casts everything with purple light. We crawled through passageways and into old huts, still in the condition in which they had been abandoned after Admiral Byrd's first Antarctic expedition.

Sadly, about three years later that whole portion of the Ross Shelf Ice broke free and drifted off to sea as a big table iceberg and of course slowly melted and deposited the remnants of Little America 1 on the bottom of the ocean.

AL: Did you notice any environmental problems at that time? You hear a lot about pollution of the Antarctic now.

Siri: No, the reports of DDT in penguins and fish came later. The most memorable evidence of environmental affairs I saw was when I climbed off the plane when we landed at McMurdo Sound after our flight from New Zealand. I guess we all felt like Admiral Byrd, come to explore new worlds, but it was short lived because some wag had planted a sign in the ice right beside the runway that said, "Extinguish cigarettes. Keep Antarctica green." So we knew that we were among conservationists [laughter] even if they took the romance out of our arrival.

XIV THE FIRST AMERICAN EXPEDITION TO MOUNT EVEREST, 1963

Expedition Organizing and Team Selection

AL: How early in the planning stages did you get involved in the expedition on Mount Everest?

Siri: Oh, just about at the start. Norman Dyhrenfurth was the man who instigated it, of course. He had been to Everest three times already, once with the Swiss, twice on his own. And of course he was determined to go back. It was the ultimate challenge, and Norman was recognized as one of the leading authorities on the Himalayas.

In any event, I have forgotten what our initial contact on Everest was, but I was involved almost from the start and saw it through all the difficult two years or so that it took to organize and finance the expedition and select the team members. We would meet fairly frequently at his home in Santa Monica and do the planning.

Early on we had formed an advisory committee. Well, it became more than that because we incorporated the activities into a non-profit 501(C)3 corporation. To do this Norman had rounded up a group of distinguished people to serve on the board of directors, and I had brought in some more. We had lawyers, bankers and sundry other well-established people. I believe there were nine of them, in total. One was senior vice-president of Hughes Aircraft, another was the district attorney for Los Angeles, and another was an internationally well-known geophysicist. There were a couple of bankers and several lawyers of some note.

AL: Were they interested in mountaineering particularly?

Siri: A few of them, yes. One of them was Bestor Robinson. The others were not really climbers. Several more were interested in climbing, and of course they were all keenly interested in Mount Everest. They

Siri: thought it was a great adventure just sitting on a board of directors of the Mount Everest corporation, but they were also extremely helpful. So we had a formalized business going--that is, a non-profit corporation--that was duly recognized by the state and the federal government. We needed this to receive tax-deductible funds, but equally important we needed it to receive grants from granting agencies, particular federal funding agencies. Since there had to be accountability, they could make grants only to qualified institutions.

The board met at fairly regular intervals, and Norman and I met frequently. The principal problem, as always, in these ventures is, of course, funding it, and that was a constant struggle. But it was an activity in which Norman seemed to excel; he was a very good promoter. We also had some assistance from Stewart Udall, who was secretary of the interior at that time. I knew Udall through my conservation activities. He was quite pleased to have some association with the expedition and was quite helpful.

AL: In getting government grants, you mean?

Siri: No, not so much that, except perhaps in one instance. He was helpful by indicating to the agency that the expedition had his personal endorsement, but he couldn't pull political strings. What we got from the government were all research grants, and these had to be funded on their merit. In the end we had support for the scientific program, which was quite ambitious, and support from National Geographic Society, partly in support of the research and partly in support of the film and magazine articles they hoped to see out of it. The rest came from private contributors and industry, and surprisingly enough, the State Department.

The arrangement with the State Department was one that they found useful for their purposes. Because of the money exchange problem, the State Department had some tens of thousands of rupees in India, which the Indians would not permit them to use except in India, and would not permit the State Department to exchange for dollars. It was my impression that the State Department didn't know what to do with the funds. It occurred either to someone in the State Department or to Norman, and I don't know to this day which, that they might use this money for its intended purpose, which was I think to support activities in India. The State Department offered--or agreed to--provide us with some of those funds for expenses in India and Nepal if we would agree to bring back four or five of the Sherpas to the United States on a cultural exchange. This was a splendid idea; it fitted in with our plans exactly; we were eager to bring back four or five of the Sherpas for a tour of the United States after the expedition. This all worked out very well. We could use the rupees in India and Nepal to pay porters' wages, and after the expedition we would bring back the Sherpas, which we did.

Siri: So funds came from a great many sources, and equipment was provided by manufacturers either at cost or less than cost, and sometimes for nothing. They were quite generous. Again, Norman was very effective in soliciting that kind of help. It was after all the first American attempt on Everest, and back in 1962 when we were in the midst of all this it commanded perhaps more attention than it does today. American expeditions had always had a very difficult time raising funds as we had learned in the Makalu experience.

After about a year's time, funding began to look pretty good. The scientific program carried a fairly substantial part of the financial burden. We had research programs in sociology, psychology, physiology, glaciology, and geophysics. All of these studies were funded by a variety of granting agencies--the National Science Foundation and the Office of Naval Research, NASA, AEC, and others.

AL: And did this finance some of the main thrust of the expedition also, not just the research?

Siri: Yes.

AL: Was it always conceived of as such a large endeavor?

Siri: Yes, from the very outset we pictured it as a major expedition, possibly the biggest joint mountaineering-scientific expedition to go into the Himalayas. We had a strong scientific compliment as well as a very powerful climbing team. Many of the members doubled as both, as scientists and climbers. The density of advanced degrees was pretty high on this expedition. I don't think there was anyone with less than a masters degree.

Planning went on for about two years--slowly putting the thing together, searching out the funding for it, preparing research grant proposals, selecting equipment and making endless trips back east, around the state, and around the country trying to promote equipment or funds. We encountered a great deal of interest at that time, but fund raising was still not easy.

The final act was selection of the team. Norman and I had already culled the people we thought we would want from the many applications we had received.

AL: Do you recall how many applications?

Siri: No, I don't off-hand, but there were many more than we could possibly take. As you can well imagine, I guess every climber in the country, and a lot of those who couldn't climb, wanted to go. In spite of the fact that it was in the days before women's lib there were a number of women that wanted to go too. We were surprised.

AL: You didn't reject those out-of-hand, did you?

Siri: Well, not out-of-hand, but there were none who really qualified, who had, at that time, the kind of climbing experience needed. And I guess we were somewhat chauvinistic about it too. We felt that it would present us with problems that we couldn't deal with.

AL: I think Marjory Farquhar could have handled it.

Siri: Yes. If she had been a little younger, she might very well have gone. For the final selection process we had everybody on Mt. Rainier for a week.

AL: That was part of the selection process, I thought it was training.

Siri: Well, it was both. By that time we had the candidates we wanted, but a final choice had to be made. We thought we had a very good group of people selected, and there needed to be some final shaking out to be sure that we wouldn't be taking someone who would prove a real problem.

RL: The criteria that you exercised also included, say, matching personalities in some fashion or other?

Siri: That was a consideration but only one of many. We had some fairly well-formed ideas about what we wanted. But there were more subtle things that are difficult to describe. There are matters of judgment and some of these aspects of personality make-up, which we couldn't really judge till we saw somebody in action with a group of team members in relative isolation, climbing together.

We had a good session on Mount Rainier, and it proved to be even better than we had anticipated because there was a raging storm most of the time, which gave us an opportunity to see how the guys behaved, what their reactions were. With the storm, it was impossible even for this crowd to climb Mount Rainier. We were up at Muir Hut.

During this session it became quite clear that one man could not be taken, and that was a painful episode. He was so distraught and so bitterly disappointed, we were fearful that he might resort to almost any drastic measure. You could almost understand it; you thought to yourself, "My god, suppose I were cut out of this expedition at this point."

AL: Did people understand that the final selection had not taken place?

Siri: Yes. Oh yes, this was made clear. For most of them there wasn't much doubt, either in our minds or theirs. Well, I suppose this was true of all of them; they were extremely confident. It was also

Siri: perhaps one of this fellow's failings; he had quite convinced himself that he was on. It had been made clear in advance that there was no guarantee, that the final selection would be made after the training session. But you know if you approach someone and say, "Would you consider going on an Everest trip?" particularly back then, you could qualify it any way you want--you could say, "We're looking at a number of candidates; we'd like to consider you, but there is no guarantee that you're on." From that moment on this fellow is convinced absolutely that there is no question but that he is going. The psychology is a difficult one to deal with.

In any event the final selection was made and the next step was a meeting of the entire team here at Berkeley. The team spent five days here. Two of the days, I had them in my laboratory to do some baseline physiological studies. The rest of the time they were under the care of a battery of psychologists and psychiatrists, at the Institute for Human Behavior at U.C. There were about sixteen of us, and I think there were about twenty-five psychologists and psychiatrists. For three days they applied every test that the profession had ever devised; they had us going constantly throughout the whole day on these tests.

AL: That must have been an experience.

Siri: The results were rather interesting. I can't quote them now, but one memorable finding amused us. It characterized the members of the team as more like architects or scientists than morticians or bankers, which we thought, in our narrow view, was a laudable finding. [Laughter]

AL: You were happy to spend the three days finding that out.

Siri: Right. That's right. It also indicated that the team members were characterized by a high level of independence, reluctance to depend or lean on someone else, or to have other people be heavily dependent on them. Every man regarded everyone else as an independent person who would carry his own weight in whatever circumstances. They didn't form very close personal ties.

AL: Not just with their climbing but in general I suppose?

Siri: That's right, in their personality makeup. But they would, in emergencies, respond at the risk of their own lives. It was a highly moral group in that peculiar sense, not necessarily in the conventional sense.

AL: Did they have any studies about resorting to cannibalism? [Laughter]

Siri: I don't think so. But it could have been regarded as a measure of high moral obligation to group survival; you know, "Joe, if I go before you do, help yourself." [Laughter] I still subscribe to the

Siri: idea. The moralistic attitude toward cannibalism I find juvenile. Now, on the other hand, dispatching people for a meal is something else again.

AL: That might be the reason for the taboos against it.

Siri: I'm sure that has something to do with it, yes. In any event, they managed to characterize the team fairly thoroughly. Whether accurately or not I don't know, but thoroughly, yes.

AL: Did they do before and after studies?

Siri: They really didn't do the after studies, but James Lester did "during" studies.

AL: I know in the write-up in the Everest book, the psychologist, I guess, said they would be studying this group for a number of years to come.

Siri: That didn't really happen. He studied the group during the expedition of course and immediately afterwards, but not in the intensive fashion that the studies were carried out beforehand. And he was not able to follow up. After the expedition it just dispersed all over the country. Also he became infatuated with a charming and very lovely airline stewardess who lived in England. He spent the months after he came back to the United States tracking her down and finally talked her into marrying him, so he was quite busy when he got back.

Tolls of the Approach and the Icefall

Siri: After all of this, in due time we set off for the Himalayas. It turned out to be the biggest expedition, short of an army, that had ever gone into the area. We started out from Kathmandu with eighteen expedition climbers, and about thirty-five climbing Sherpas. Along with us were Jimmy Roberts, the former British Army Colonel, who had been with the Everest expeditions as their transport officer, and of course a Nepalese representative who joined the expedition, a very delightful fellow and very good companion, but he made no pretenses of being an expert climber and had no designs on the summit.

AL: How far did he go with you?

Siri: He went to base camp, and I think on one occasion he went up to one of the other camps. He was a thoroughly delightful fellow to have along, a very fine sense of humor and took it all in stride. Then a sirdar, the head of the Sherpas, and some 909 porters.

Siri: This great snaking band crept over the Himalayas for the next three weeks with more than one traumatic event to mark the way. The worst was a smallpox outbreak, which in a way we were responsible for because we didn't discover the infected porter until some days after he was infected and contagious. He wasn't reported to us by the other porters, even though they knew that he had smallpox. They kept away from him, but we didn't observe this for some days. In the meantime we had passed through numerous villages, which meant they had all been infected. There was a heartbreaking moment when we learned that he had in fact infected the villagers and other porters for days back. We still have no idea of the total toll of lives that that one porter inflicted, but the number of deaths probably exceeded fifty along the way. We re-innolated all of our porters and Sherpas, but that didn't help very much.

AL: You hadn't innolated them to begin with?

Siri: The Sherpas, yes, the climbing Sherpas, but 900 porters, no, we hadn't innolated them.

Let's see, there was the day the bridge fell down. This was a bridge over a fast running, icy-cold river and suspended from a pair of wrought iron chains. The Nepalese in that part of the Himalayas make a lot of excellent things, but one of them is not iron. The bridge just collapsed under the porters and deposited eleven or twelve of them into the river. None of them could swim but we were able to retrieve the whole lot of them. Although they were banged up a bit there were no serious injuries to our immense surprise and no drownings, and we lost only one box. We--and they--were lucky, but we were impressed with the durability of the porters. It was incredible. They fell maybe fifteen feet onto the rocks and into the river with sixty-pound loads and none of them was seriously injured.

AL: Did they keep right on going?

Siri: Oh yes. Some didn't carry loads immediately, but by the next day or two they all were hauling their loads. There were a few banged heads, bruises, and scraped arms, but no broken bones, no concussions.

In due time we got to Namche Bazar, the principal village of the Sherpas, and spent several days there sorting out equipment and getting ready for the final march to base camp. Namche Bazar is for climbers, at least it was then, an extremely hospitable--almost unendurably hospitable--place. We know many of the Sherpas personally. Some had been on expeditions with us and we knew others from expedition accounts. They insisted that we come to their homes, where they endlessly poured rakshe, chang, and tea with rancid yak butter. After a day of that you were not really sure that climbing Everest was

Siri: the tough part of the journey. At that time it was just getting through Namche Bazar intact. [Laughter]

And then on to Thangboche, the famous monastery, another day's march toward Everest. There we spent about five days acclimatizing and re-sorting our gear for the last part of the trek. It was about this time that I started my physiological studies. It was also about this time that everybody was coming down with the infections--upper respiratory infections of all sorts. We were really a sick lot for about a week.

AL: What is that from? The altitude?

Siri: No, it's not from the altitude. I think it was from the combination of physical stress, exposure to new viruses that we hadn't been exposed to before from the local population, and the exposure now to cold and wet conditions--just a combination of things I guess. We were really a sick lot, wholly unfit for Everest.

AL: About what altitude was this?

Siri: This was about 13,000. Gradually as the days passed we recovered and began to resemble a team of climbers again.

For a while the expedition went reasonably well. Base camp was established and we started sending teams into the icefall to find a route through it and place camps in the Western Cwm. Disaster struck again in the form of a collapsing ice wall that killed Jake Breitenbach and badly injured a couple of others. The whole expedition team was badly shaken. The following day we realized the impact of the tragedy. Several of the team members were close friends of Jake and were so dispirited by his death they were talking about abandoning the expedition. Well, this was out of the question, but we had to allow time for them to adjust.

It was really the Sherpas who assisted us out of the dilemma because Norman and I couldn't go to our companions and say, "Damn it, look, fellows, Jake would have wanted you to go on; he would be disappointed if..." These fellows were too sophisticated to try to serve them up that kind of stuff so we thought that, all right, it will take a few days for the shock to moderate, and we could then ease them back to the climb. It took only two days and it was the Sherpas surprisingly enough who brought about the change quickly. They could look on the situation more objectively than we. They had seen a lot of men killed in the mountains, so this was nothing new to them. They made it evident to the team members. "What is all this nonsense? Let's get back to work." Of course Breitenbach was killed, but that's what you expected in the icefall. The chances are at least one in a hundred that somebody is going to be killed on

Siri: an expedition of this kind. It was evident that the Sherpas were becoming a little impatient. This became clear to all the team members, and then very quickly they got control of their emotions... and back into the icefall they went.

AL: Is there much talk of potential death before an expedition or in the early stages of it?

Siri: No, not really. No one skirts it, no one dwells on it. You joke about it; it's something that you accept as a matter of fact. We have all seen buddies die on the mountains from a variety of causes, and if you weren't fairly adjustable to this kind of situation, that is, the possibility of death or serious injury, you just wouldn't be doing this kind of thing. It was something you didn't talk about a great deal but, on the other hand, you sometimes did discuss it. We exchanged stories about incidents that had occurred, but the conversation was always on a matter-of-fact level, like discussing the weather. But when somebody dies the impact is there; we are not so detached as, "There goes Joe, god damn it." [Laughter] It's hardly that. You feel it very strongly when a companion is injured or killed.

Summit Ambitions of Leaders Dyhrenfurth and Siri

AL: What were your own goals at this point in the expedition? Your own personal goals?

Siri: I suppose we all entertained a secret ambition to get to the summit. Norman and I had made an agreement while we were organizing the expedition that neither of us would try for the summit or intrude ourself into a summit party. We made this clear to the group during the briefing session we had on Mount Rainier. We felt too that the summit party would become pretty evident in time so we didn't anticipate a great problem in its selection. All of our experiences had indicated that when the final moment comes there are usually just a few guys who are in fit condition to make the final try. But we had agreed that we would not put ourselves in the summit party as leader and deputy leader. There was a clear understanding that this would be the case, and so, I don't know about Norman, but I had adjusted myself to the idea.

AL: This was done for what purpose?

Siri: It was done for several reasons, the most important of which was to avoid a problem that other expeditions had encountered where the leader had simply asserted his authority and prerogative and said, "I shall be the summit party," with the rest of the team in support

Siri: to put the leader on the summit. We didn't want to approach it in this fashion. It had to be on the basis that it would be the fittest men at the time who would make the try for the summit. They would not be preempted by the expedition leader or deputy leader. This was necessary to settle a lot of anxieties that climbers have about this, especially the members of our team, all of whom had strong feelings on this subject. The other part of it too was that Norman and I were forty-five at the time, and that's past the prime age for climbing to 29,000 feet, as Norman later discovered.

As it turned out however, neither our resolution nor age stopped Norman, and he did make an attempt--unsuccessfully--to put himself on the summit at the last moment, which was almost a disaster--both for Norman and for the team that was picked for the summit climb. Maybe that's a later story.

AL: I noticed that Ullman talks about some profound change in your goals during the course of the climb. He indicates that in the early part of the trip, you did have summit desires and then at some point you made peace with yourself and devoted yourself to science.

Siri: I think this impression may have been created unintentionally, because during the approach march I guess I was a little too vigorous and perhaps aggressive, or something, than other members thought I should be. For example, one of the things I enjoyed was racing down hills, and I would sometimes stir up a contest with somebody, and we'd go leaping down rocky trails at high speed. I guess I also put in some forced marches or something of this sort. This apparently conveyed the impression that I was secretly bent on reaching the summit because I was much too active and much too aggressive along the trail.

No, this was not the case. I had already adjusted myself to the idea that I would not try...oh way in the back of my mind I guess there was a "what if," but that was fantasy, not determination, and I was aware of it. Some of the members of the team thought my activity, which is perfectly normal behavior for me, demonstrated a determination to be in the summit party. This was casually mentioned to me several times. In fact, it got to the point where one of the doctors went to Norman and said he thought Siri was on drugs; he thought he was taking Benzedrine. Norman confronted me with this and wanted to know if I was taking Benzedrine.

AL: This was on the approach march?

Siri: We had gotten to base camp about then. I was absolutely shocked; I couldn't believe it. What the hell had I been doing that would make them think that I was on drugs?

AL: You must have shown extraordinary vigor.

Siri: Maybe they just pictured me as a scientist, and maybe scientists weren't supposed to be doing these things. But they knew I was a climber and had climbed a few things. I was absolutely shocked by this, and I don't know that I ever gave Norman a convincing answer. The most I'd ever taken anywhere, anytime, was aspirin for headaches. I was appalled by the pill-popping, summit-seeking image that somehow I had cast unwittingly. I just thought it was a great joy to be there, to be able to run around the country.

AL: That gave you the high.

Siri: Right, that was high enough.

Dissension and the Double Assault on the Summit

Siri: We decided that the first effort was to be made by the South Col route; that's the route that had been pioneered by Hillary and also used by the Swiss. In the meantime [Tom] Hornbein and Willi Unsoeld, [Dick] Emerson and Jim Corbet became infatuated with the West Ridge of Everest. While the main effort was concentrated on the Col route, they set about exploring the route up the West Ridge and were making good progress. But it was always a troublesome matter dealing with their demands for additional support and supplies and more particularly for Sherpas.

They were insistent that, even if they did not succeed in climbing the West Ridge to the summit, it would be a greater achievement to explore a side of the mountain that had never been explored before; therefore, it had greater merit than climbing Everest by a known route even if we got to the summit that way. But Norman and I couldn't see it that way. We would divert to the West Ridge only as much of our resources as we could spare but not to the point that it would jeopardize the main effort of getting a team on the summit.

The reason for this was that we had moral obligations and commitments to the National Geographic Society to produce a film all the way up to the summit of the mountain, to the sponsors of the expedition, to the many people who had given gifts, and to all the support we had. They were expecting us to climb Mount Everest, and they didn't give a damn how we climbed it as long as it was a successful climb. So we had, Norman and I felt, an absolute obligation to climb Everest, and we would have to do it first by the one route we knew would give us a reasonable chance of success. That was the South Col route. Moreover, Big Jim Whittaker and [Barry] Bishop and [Luther] Jerstad were all committed to that route, no less

Siri: than Tom and Willi to theirs. They wanted to climb the mountain; they weren't interested in the West Ridge. So this was a decision that had to be made, and it was a painful one for the West Ridgers.

AL: Did it cause a lot of dissension?

Siri: It caused dissension, yes. There was a clear split between the West Ridgers and the South Col team. It was a contentious problem to deal with. The personalities in the two groups were quite different.

AL: Must have given the psychologist a lot of interesting material.

Siri: Yes. Right, and it was a problem that constantly had to be dealt with, and at times dealt with firmly. Hornbein particularly, the spiritual leader of the West Ridgers, is a very persistent person and doesn't give in easily. We readily agreed however that once the summit had been reached by way of the South Col, we would concentrate all our resources on the West Ridge. After Whittaker and Gombu got to the summit, that was done.

AL: Was there ever a thought of not diverting the effort to the West Ridge and getting more team members up to the top?

Siri: No, because it was clear that if we got a team to the summit of Everest by way of the South Col we would have met our obligations. Once a team reached the summit, the expedition could at that point be counted a success. If there were an opportunity to get another two men up, we would certainly try. Twenty days after Whittaker and Gombu's ascent, Jerstad and Bishop got to the summit as well. But since the camps had been established on the South Col route more effort could be diverted to the West Ridge, and that was done. We all agreed an ascent of the West Ridge would be an extraordinary achievement.

AL: What was your feeling about the West Ridge attempt aside from this practical matter? Did you find it exciting?

Siri: But of course, yes.

AL: Did it seem a reasonable route?

Siri: No. Well, it did up to a point, but what lay beyond about 25,000 feet was totally unknown. It lay on the shingle-like north side of Everest, and it wasn't at all clear that it was a route that would go. From what we could see, it was certainly going to be more difficult than the South Col route, which proved to be the case. It was through the sheer doggedness of Hornbein and Willi Unsoeld that it went at all. They reached the summit quite late, about six o'clock in the afternoon, which meant that the descent had to be made in darkness.

Siri: The whole operation at the end of May was an incredible scheme that we could never have planned in advance or perhaps even in a more rational state of mind unaffected by altitude. Bishop and Jerstad would ascend the South Col route to the summit and meet Willi Unsoeld and Hornbein coming up from the West Ridge. Considering the uncertainties and difficulties it was a scheme you could only have thought up in a fantasy. The chance of achieving this feat was little better than zero, but this did not seem to trouble anyone. Despite the odds against it, the scheme worked, and even more surprising, no lives were lost.

This incredible plan succeeded by sheer force of will and extraordinary luck. The West Ridgers were literally blown off the ridge at 25,000 feet during a fierce storm that nearly cost them their lives and had to retreat to the lower camps. They lost most of their equipment at camp 3W and that looked like the end of the West Ridge attempt. In that big blow for a day or so they were badly mauled and demoralized. Even Willi and Tom Hornbein thought that was the end of the effort on the West Ridge, but the wind no sooner abated than their spirits recovered and they were back at it with whatever equipment they could find in the lower camps. They headed straight up the mountain again, the weather held, and a final camp was placed at the top of a long, steep tongue of ice of something over 27,000 feet. There they were left, the two of them, Willi and Tom, while the others descended. There would be no way of getting back to them, of course.

They were in place at the same time that Bishop and Jerstad reached the highest camp on the other side of the mountain. The next day they all started towards the summit.

AL: They didn't know each other's position?

Siri: Once the two camps were set, yes, I think they did know each other's position. The following day, however, Bishop and Jerstad did not know whether Willi and Tom were able to make it to the summit or not. They knew they were in a high camp but also knew the climbing from there on was extremely difficult. When Bishop and Jerstad got to the summit they looked down the West Ridge and saw no evidence of the other team, so they assumed that they could not make it, and after a half hour or so on the summit they headed down. Climbing down was not easy. They both ran out of oxygen soon after leaving the summit and their progress became slow and erratic. By about ten o'clock that night, they had come to a dead halt.

In the meantime Willi Unsoeld and Tom Hornbein reached the summit late--about three or three and a half hours later than the first team--and now they headed down the South Col route. Of course, that was new terrain to them, and sometime that evening long

Siri: after sunset they encountered the other pair of men--Bishop and Jerstad. They went on together a little way to total darkness, but then were compelled to stop for the night at 28,000 feet without shelter.

AL: Wasn't the bivouac at that altitude a first in Everest climbing?

Siri: Yes. During the night all except Tom Hornbein suffered severe frostbite, which cost two of them their toes. But they were extraordinarily lucky. There was no wind that night, otherwise the four would not have survived.

Hornbein was the only one of the four who had either the presence of mind or the capacity to unlace his boots. He took off his boots and planted them on Willi's chest to warm them. Just the act of loosening his boots probably saved his feet by improving the blood circulation. That's not an easy thing to do at that altitude--just unlacing a boot--you're not sure you could ever lace it up again. But somehow Tom managed to do it.

The trip down must have been harrowing, particularly during the dark when they had first tried to descend. In a debriefing after they came down they reported doing illogical things that you would never do if you were in full command of your senses. One of them remembered that for some inexplicable reason they decided to tie their climbing ropes together in the middle. This was almost their undoing, of course. They realized after a couple of narrow escapes this wasn't the thing to do so they untied.

All of them had lapses of memory. They had no recollection of what happened for extended periods of time during the descent, one of the effects of severe hypoxia.

AL: Were there any further effects? You mentioned in your write-up in the Ullman book that there were after effects of oxygen deprivation among some of the climbers.

Siri: I think some of these were effects of severe hypoxia--lapses of memory and periods of depression.

AL: You mean lapses of just what went on at that time?

Siri: Well that, but also a more generalized impairment; for example, several complained that they had poor recall of certain names, words, and events.

AL: Just among the four of them?

- Siri: I don't know about others, except Norman who had similar complaints. He had been to 27,500 feet and although he had oxygen he had suffered more than the others from hypoxia. Those who were with him at the time say that he was essentially delirious; they had their hands full trying to get him down from the higher camps.
- AL: Did he suffer any frostbite?
- Siri: No, just the oxygen lack. At his age clearly it told on his performance. He had a very bad time of it descending after a night at the highest camp. He should not have been there.
- AL: Did he make that decision to go up there, to continue, when he was already under the effects?
- Siri: Well, maybe he had always entertained the hope of going to the summit, and I can understand that. This was his fourth expedition to Everest, and he had almost devoted his life to Everest. It would be almost irresistible to be in that position and not want to go through with it, even though he had made a commitment not to be in the summit party. Whether he had made this decision earlier I don't know, but I suspect that when everything was ready and Whittaker was about to take off that he found it irresistible to follow, because he put himself and his Sherpa in second position as support, clearly with the intention of following Whittaker to the summit. This came as a surprise to all of us.
- RL: In addition to the disturbances in language function were there any disturbances of other higher brain function, intellectual or personal?
- Siri: Many of the members had varying degrees of depression; in some it was intermittent, in others probably nearly chronic for a year or more.
- AL: Now were these the ones that made the summit?
- Siri: Yes, but it occurred in others as well. Depression was one of the evidences of perhaps some damage, probably not permanent. There were other effects in some, mainly changes in life style but these effects would have nothing to do with hypoxia. There were, for example, numerous divorces within a year or two after they came back. It's hard to know whether this resulted from the impact of the expedition experience or was a preexisting situation. Cultural shock and the impacts of a great adventure of that kind are probably pretty profound in many men. This may have been a precipitating factor for many of the things that happened after they came back.

Dyhrenfurth's Leadership Failings

Siri: The primary character in this play of course was Norman Dyhrenfurth, since he was the instigator and the promoter. At these things he was superb. The tragedy is that Norman was not a leader. He was a superb project manager up to the time we took to the field. He could deal with officialdom, and with the problems that we would encounter in India and Nepal, and he was good at raising funds and expediting the struggle through red tape. But there was almost a magical change when it came to the operational part of an expedition--that is, leading the expedition in the field--and unhappily, it became quickly evident to the entire team that Norman was not a leader, that he was unable to make decisions or provide dynamic leadership. In primary decisions, he would resort to calling in everybody and asking for a vote where clearly a vote wasn't called for. It's not a democratic activity; the leader is accountable to others as well as to the team. In an operation of this kind somebody's got to be leader, he's got to make the decisions, although he seeks the counsel of others.

AL: Was this his philosophy, though, that it should be a group decision?

Siri: No, he was just indecisive and often unaware of or unresponsive to significant management problems.

AL: Was this on issues like the West Ridge vs. the South Col?

Siri: On some of these things I sort of helped him make decisions.

AL: He hadn't seemed like one who would sit back when there is a decision that had to be made?

Siri: That's right. He would never convey that impression because in any other circumstance he was decisive, and exercised initiative and great skill. It came as an enormous surprise to me because having worked with him for two years or more I rarely if ever found him at a loss for effective action in dealing with people and the frustrating problems in getting the expedition organized.

AL: Did he make decisions about team selection?

Siri: Yes, we never had a problem there. We would discuss it, and he had pretty clear ideas and was quite perceptive. We both made a couple of mistakes in spite of everything and also in spite of advice which we choose to ignore. But for some curious reason he did not live up to expectations as a leader, as a man who makes decisions in the field and can follow them through.

Siri: Regrettably, Norman's failings in the field resulted in total disaster for his next expedition, the international expedition that he took to Everest. In fairness to him, I should add that he had more difficult problems to deal with: climbers from half a dozen different countries, each with his own ambitions and language, and relatively little coherent team spirit. In a case like that, a strong, decisive leader is essential. And Norman wasn't.

AL: Did you find that a lot of the leading work fell on your shoulders then?

Siri: Not really, because I was in an awkward position where I had no real authority in the field. So it had to be by suasion wherever possible to get Norman to make a decision and also deal with the contending factions. I acted as a buffer, I guess, usually between team members and Norman, wherever it was possible. This was perhaps one of my major roles in the field.

The West Ridge was a wholly independent operation. Willi and Tom particularly made their own decisions. They planned their whole operation, and there wasn't much that you could do or would want to do. They were managing very well, too well in fact.

RL: Was there some point when what they intended doing was a genuine risk to the goal of the expedition?

Siri: It could have been if we had given way to their demands, particularly Hornbein's, to divert the whole effort to the West Ridge. One never knows how that would have turned out. It might have turned out well, but we couldn't run the risk of not getting a team to the summit by a fairly sure route. There was no assurance that we would ever get anywhere near the summit on the West Ridge, until it was actually done. So my job was mainly that of serving as a buffer between team members and Norman, in whom they had largely lost confidence.

The West Ridge Team

AL: How did the interaction go? Would you have fairly rational discussions or very emotional ones?

Siri: There was nothing like an angry confrontation. There were moments of anger, yes, but I think, as I recall, everyone remained fairly well in control so far as overt actions were concerned. Underlying it all were some very strong feelings. The West Ridgers, for example, made it not only absolutely clear, but set up circumstances where no one was on the West Ridge other than those they wanted to be on

Siri: the West Ridge. That excluded Jerstad, Bishop, and Whittaker, whom they did not want on the West Ridge and made it clear were to stay the hell off.

AL: Now Bishop at one time started out as a West Ridger, didn't he?

Siri: That's right.

AL: And did they make the decision for him to switch routes?

Siri: In a sense, yes. It was soon made clear to him and us that he was not welcome on the West Ridge. I couldn't help but wonder at the inhumanity of man to his fellow men at times when they think they have a lot at stake and they sense the threat of competition. There are few expeditions, particularly among the larger expeditions, that have returned with everyone enduring friends as a result of their adventure together. Expeditions tend, if anything, to generate enduring enmities, but perhaps this isn't too surprising. For several months a team like this is under intense stress, not only environmental factors--hypoxia and cold and abnormal diets and cultural shock and everything else--but the intensity of their expectations, and perhaps failure to achieve them, the competition, and the anxieties. There is a lot at stake in terms of peer recognition and self-fulfillment and the worst in men may come out even in high-principled mountaineers.

AL: Would you have any characterization of Unsoeld?

Siri: Well, yes. Unsoeld is probably the most endearing and outgoing of men to everyone who has ever met him. There is something about him that appeals to people instinctively. They gravitate to him; they trust him; and they find him spiritually and intellectually stimulating. His overflowing enthusiasm and his eternal optimism and generosity are infectious. I must confess that I have a slightly different picture of Willi. It's not really at odds with the picture I've just given of Willi as an extraordinary human being. But there were other elements in his makeup that I seemed to see that others don't, and that suggests that possibly the problem is in my perception of him.

Willi has been on two expeditions with me, and in the crunch when you want somebody to go all out, to risk everything, to have the drive to achieve a difficult goal, yes, Willi is there and that's what he's great at. But when it comes to the drudgery of organizing an expedition, to doing the work in the field, to supporting its operations, Willi was not there to help.

AL: He wants to be on the summit?

- Siri: Yes. Oh, I don't think his ambitions for the summit were any more intense than Hornbein's, Whittaker's or Dyhrenfurth's, and that is essential in a climber, but in the more mundane things about an expedition that everybody has to participate in, Willi was really not for that. He was the man who stood to the side, looked only to his own needs and conveyed the feeling, "My work starts up there." At times he could be cruel, as he was about Bishop on the West Ridge. So I have mixed feelings about Willi, which I don't think are very widely shared by others.
- AL: Hornbein mentions him as being very competitive.
- Siri: Yes, he was that. But then of course Tom would feel that about anybody who was after the same thing that he was after [laughter]. And again I don't fault men for being competitive; after all, in an activity of this sort, if they don't have that built-in drive they're really not any good except to carry loads.
- AL: Was the writing of the Sierra Club book, The West Ridge,* a difficult matter with all these underlying stresses and ill feelings?
- Siri: Tom Hornbein wrote the book, of course, and it's Tom's view of the way things were. It is a highly personalized view of the expedition. If you hear another member's account it would not sound the same. Most of what Tom wrote is factually correct. Some of his assessments of people and events are biased because they're heavily weighted by Tom's personal outlook, but I think he says this at the outset of the book. It is one man's view of what transpired and one man's perception of people. It's not a view that's shared by everybody on the expedition. I saw it somewhat differently. Tom certainly could not see himself as others saw him, as an ambitious, willful person who demanded that things be done his way. He's extremely assertive, but then sometimes you need people like that to get unusual things done, even if it does not endear them to others.
- RL: An adventure of this magnitude certainly brings out some of the very best among some individuals who might participate. By the same token, does it bring out some of the very base characteristics in a man?
- Siri: Yes. It most certainly does. It must inevitably because the psychological stresses are intense. They're bound to reveal a man's basic makeup in many subtle and overt ways. Perhaps one of the tragedies is that [James Barry] Corbet, who was, in a technical sense, the best climber of the lot, did not have an opportunity to reach the

*Thomas F. Hornbein, Everest: The West Ridge, (Sierra Club, 1966).

Siri: summit. But he was no match for Willi and Tom Hornbein in terms of initiative, drive, or domination. Corbet was a Sherpa, a carrier. In effect this is what they needed him for, and yet he was probably the strongest and best climber, the one with the best chance to reach the summit, had he been given that chance.

AL: At one time did they think four men might be able to go up?

Siri: One always looks at it optimistically like that, but when the chips are down there were just two men who were going to have that opportunity. That was Willi and Tom on the West Ridge.

AL: Did he have bitter feelings about it, do you know, or did he accept that role?

Siri: I don't know. Corbet was an amiable fellow. He was not an aggressive person. He wouldn't consciously assert himself in such a fashion as to clear the field of competition.

Science and Climbing, Conflicting Goals?

AL: In Hornbein's book, he mentions an instance where the climbing goal and science were in conflict, and I think the example he gave was your insistence they did not use oxygen below 23,000. Is there anything to add about that?

Siri: We did have a heated discussion on oxygen. Some of them wanted to start lower than the 24,000 or 25,000 feet I wanted, and this led to a lengthy discussion on where they could start with oxygen. I wanted them to go without oxygen as high as possible without impairing progress or threatening the success of the expedition. I compromised on 23,000 feet, and that was it. They do not use oxygen before 23,000 feet, and they didn't need to.

AL: Was he not in agreement with you?

Siri: I think they were all agreed after a while. We got up to 23,000 feet with no difficulty at all so far as hypoxia was concerned.

AL: Wouldn't it have put an undue demand on the supply of oxygen to begin lower?

Siri: As it turned out it would have, yes, because of the losses and because of Norman's attempt on the summit. That made a big inroad into the oxygen supply.

AL: He quotes an interchange where he says that you would probably prefer that they climb without oxygen altogether. And you agreed, yes. It sounded a little bit facetious to me, I wasn't sure.

Siri: Oh sure, it was facetious. It was a silly statement to make, on both our parts.

AL: Caught on someone's tape recorder?

Siri: Yes. In any event it was essential to avoid using oxygen below 23,000 feet because we had a lot at stake in the physiological studies, and this would not jeopardize the expedition in any way. Part of this came about, I think, because the climbers who were not involved in research except as subjects were not sympathetic to research.

AL: But there are so many climbers who are scientists.

Siri: That's true. They were tolerant but others resented the intrusion of research and thought it was unnecessary baggage. The non-scientists made this clear, and I accepted this as part of my role--I mean climbers are just generally unsympathetic to any research on serious mountaineering expeditions. They take a dim view of it; they took more than just a dim view of it this time, since the experiments I was running meant taking blood and collecting twenty-four hour urine specimens.

One of the experiments meant they had to be confined in a tent for a whole day with an indwelling needle in a vein, a large indwelling needle, and have blood sampled at frequent intervals. It was uncomfortable. It meant a lot of needle punctures, and they were not at all happy about that. Three members of the team simply refused to participate. I can understand their feelings. It would hardly come as a surprise, whatever they might have said about this research.

There are times too when I don't want to have anything to do with research on a climb, but on something like Everest it's not only a means of funding an expedition but it's a rare opportunity that you really can't miss, or shouldn't miss. There aren't many opportunities to do research on men under those conditions. As it turned out the results were significant.

AL: Any further comments?

Siri: Yes, one final observation. The psychological dissolution of the team was a striking behavioral phenomenon. That happened the moment the last four men came down from the summit. Psychologically, the whole expedition collapsed and was no longer a team. It was just a

Siri: group of men, with no common cause for interaction except to get home, and each nursing possibly troubling thoughts about the preceding months.

AL: Didn't this leave a sour feeling for you?

Siri: Somewhat, perhaps, because at that point the expedition lost all the coherence and meaning it once had. It was just a group of men getting back as fast as they could, with no goal other than "get the hell out...let's get back." Very little interpersonal relationships were left, even between Tom and Willi, although Willi wasn't on the return march. Even Tom's close feelings for Willi were not fully shared by Willi. Once we got back to the states it was the same story; we all went our separate ways. Norman had lost whatever respect he once had in the minds of the members of the expedition; they didn't regard him as a leader, and they didn't respect him, and he sensed this. We all met again in the Rose Garden at the White House, to be received by President Kennedy, but that was something else again.

AL: Is there any neat tie-in now between your return and your becoming Sierra Club president the following year?

Siri: Possibly, but I suspect it was only coincidence. On the other hand, perhaps the observation of men under stress on Everest was good training for the years that followed in the Sierra Club.

EPILOGUE

Siri: In reading the transcripts of these interviews, I have the disturbing feeling that candor can be--and was--overdone. It is a tribute to the interviewer's skill in eliciting such deeply personal impressions, but as a scientist I am troubled that it is not a carefully reasoned, unbiased assessment of people and events for the future reader. But then an even more disturbing thought crosses my mind. Perhaps the future reader will scan these pages less for my insights on people and events than for what they reveal of this person who helped shape the events. If so, perhaps history is better served.

INDEX -- Will Siri

- Adam, James, M.D., 251
 Adams, Ansel, 98, 105-106, 111, 112, 128, 136, 137, 138-139, 183
 Adams, Janet, 189, 190-191
 Adler, Mortimer, 5
 Air Force, United States, 237, 239
 air pollution, 39, 175
 Albany, California, bay fill, 206, 215, 216, 220-221
 Aldrich, Elmer, 19-20
 Alps, climbing in, 235
 Andes mountains. See Cordillera Blanca, Peru, expeditions
 Angeles Chapter. See Sierra Club, chapters, Angeles
 Ang-Tharkey, 245-246
 Antarctica, International Physiological Expedition to (INPHEXAN), 250-260
 Army Corps of Engineers. See Engineers, U.S. Army Corps of
 Aspinall, Wayne, 55, 56
 Atomic and Chemical Workers Union, 177
 Atomic Energy Commission, 96, 156-157, 159, 161, 163, 165, 169-170, 172, 262
See also Energy Research and Development Agency; Nuclear Regulatory Commission
 Ayala bill (S.B. 346), 223-226
- Ball, Dick, 54
 Bay Area Council, San Francisco, 213
 Bay Conservation and Development Commission, 187, 193, 204, 205-207, 212-218, 221
 Beaches and Parks, Division of, 93-94. See also Parks and Recreation, California State Department of
 Beckman, Jon, 147-149
 Berkeley, California, bay fill, 206, 221
 Berry, Phillip S., 138, 145-146, 154-155, 160, 168, 200-201
 Bishop, Barry, 270, 271, 272, 277, 278
 Bodega Head power plant, 93, 156-158
 Boatwright, Dan, 222
 Bodevich, Joseph E., 193, 217
 Bradley, Harold, 18, 65
 Brandt, Robert, 87
 Breitenbach, Jake, 267-268
 Bridge Canyon dam, 53. See also Grand Canyon, proposed dams
 Brooks, Paul, 98, 144

Brower, David, 58, 70, 78, 87, 101, 149, 183
 climber, 14, 15, 16, 19, 118, 228, 229, 232
 conservation tactics, 23, 55-56, 114
 Diablo Canyon, 99, 102, 106, 111-112
 events leading to resignation as executive director of Sierra Club,
 98, 102, 118-143
 full page advertisements, 47-48, 56, 119, 139
 Grand Canyon campaign, 52-56
 Mineral King, 81
 nuclear energy, 158, 168
 publications, 62-63, 119-121, 123-124, 128-132, 143, 148-149
 Redwood National Park campaign, 45
 Sierra Club's broadened scope, 31-32, 35, 38, 81
 Sierra Club Council, 151
 Sierra Club Executive Director, 21-22, 24-26, 118
 Sierra Club tax status, 58-59
 See also Sierra Club, internal problems, 1960s; specific conservation
 issues and campaigns
 Brown, Edmund G. (Pat), 198-199
 Brown, Jerry, 197, 224, 225
 Byrd, Admiral Richard E., 258, 259

California. For all state commissions and agencies see subjects with which they deal, e.g., Water Resources, California State Department of
 California Coastal Protection Initiative, 69, 105, 187, 189, 190-194, 217
 California Council for Environmental and Economic Balance, 179-180
 California State Legislature. See legislation, California State Legislature
 California state water project, 67, 194-202
 cannibalism, 255, 264-265
 Carlin, Alan, 54
 Carson, Rachel, 36
 Castle Rock Spire ascent, 231, 232
 Central Arizona water project, 67, 194
 Central Valley water project, 194, 195, 196-197, 200
 Chotari, 246-247
 Clark, Lewis, 21, 34, 65, 81, 83, 89, 98, 100
 Clark, Nathan, 34, 65, 76, 85, 98, 108
 Clausen, Don H., 51
 Clean Air Act, 39
 Cliff, Edward, 72, 73
 Clifton Forebay, 200
 Coan, Gene, 28
 Coastal Alliance, 189, 191
 Coastal Commission, California, 187, 192-193, 217
 coastal land planning, 96, 116, 158, 187-188, 192-194
 coastal protection campaign, California, 187-194
 Cohelan, Jeffrey, 51

cold, acclimatization to, 251, 256
 Collier Coke & Carbon Company, 92, 100
 Collins, George, 100
 Congress, United States, 49, 51, 53-55
 Connaughton, Charles A., 80

conservation:

advertising, 47-48, 56, 58, 69, 193
 economic aspects, 173-180
 international, 128, 138-139, 180-182
 philosophy and tactics, 22-25, 46-48, 55-56, 68-69, 86, 89, 101-102, 106, 114, 115, 190, 224-226
 public opinion, 60, 69, 71-72, 189-190, 193
 relation to outdoor experience, 14-15, 183-184
 technology, 180

See also specific conservation campaigns and issues; corporations and conservation; labor and conservation; the poor and conservation

Conservation Associates, 100
 Cook, Oscar, 237-239
 Corbet, James Barry, 270, 278-279
 Cordillera Blanca, Peru, expeditions, 235-239
 corporations and conservation, 94-105, 114, 178
 cultural revolution, 71-72
 Curry, Robert, 28

DDT. See pesticides

Dedrick, Claire, 169, 190
 Delaware Water Gap, 3
 delta. See Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta
 desalinization of water, 200, 202
 Diablo Canyon, proposed power plant in, 95-106, 109-111, 113-116, 141, 144, 159. See also Nipomo Dunes
 Diercks, Kenneth, 94-95, 103, 113-114
 Disney, Walt. See Walt Disney, Inc.
 Donner Laboratory, University of California, Berkeley, 9-11, 235-236
 Dow Chemical Company, 175
 Drury, Newton, 43, 44, 45-46
 Ducheck, George, 131
 Dyer, Polly, 98
 Dyhrenfurth, Norman, 249
 expedition leadership, 275-276, 281
 organizes Everest expedition, 260-264
 summit attempt, 268-269, 274, 279

- Earth National Park advertisement, 139
 Eastman, Barbara, 209, 210
 economic growth, 173-174
 Eichorn, Jules, 98, 106
 Eissler, Fred, 39, 82, 94, 98, 99, 100, 101-102, 104, 106-107, 108-109, 110, 111, 117, 127, 144, 159-160, 161
 El Capitan ascent, 230-231
 Emerson, Richard, 270
 Emeryville, California, bay fill, 206, 215, 216, 221
 Energy Analysis Program, 11-12
 energy policy, 156-171
 coal strip mining, 161, 162
 conservation, 163, 171-172
 nuclear power, 53-54, 99, 116, 159-171, 181
 oil, 162
 solar, 161
 Energy Research and Development Agency (ERDA), 12, 170. See also Atomic Energy Commission
 Engineers, U.S. Army Corps of, 201, 206, 207, 218-219
 environmentalism. See conservation
 Erebus, Mount, 256-257
Everest: The West Ridge, 278
 Everest, Mount, 228, 229, 241, 260. See also West Ridge; South Col, Everest; Everest, Mount, First American Expedition to
 Everest, Mount, First American Expedition to:
 aftermath, 250, 274, 280-281
 characteristics of team members, 264-265, 271
 death of Breitenbach, 267-268
 organization and funding, 260-262
 oxygen, use of, 279-280
 scientific program, 10, 261, 262, 264, 279-280
 Sherpas, 244-245, 247, 265-268
 South Col effort, 270-273
 stress, 267, 277
 summit ambitions of leaders, 268-270, 274
 team selection, 244, 248, 262-264, 275
 West Ridge effort, 270-273, 276-279
 women applicants, 262-263
 Exhibit Format Book Series, 128, 143
 expeditions. See Antarctica, International Physiological Expedition to; Cordillera Blanca, Peru, expeditions to; Everest, Mount, First American Expedition to; Makalu, expedition to
Explorer, 139-140

- Farquhar, Francis, 14, 15, 16, 19, 228, 229, 232
 Farquhar, Marjory, 263
 Ferguson, Virginia, 18
 forests:
 disease and insect control, 34-35
 fire control, 37-38
 logging practices, 91, 201
 watersheds and logging, 41, 49
 See also lumber industry; Forest Service; Redwood National Park campaign
 Forest Service, United States:
 and conservationists, 70-72
 forest management, 90-91
 Mineral King, 80-84, 88
 multiple use, 70
 and wilderness, 72-73
 Franco, Jean, 241
 Friends of the Earth, 150, 224-225
 Friends of the River, 224-225
 Futrell, William, 169, 225
- Galapagos Islands Exhibit Format book, 120-121, 136
 Gerdes, Robert, 94-95
 Gianelli, William, 195, 197, 198, 201
 Goldsworthy, Pat, 144
 Gombu, Nawang, 246-247, 271
 Gossage, Howard, 48
 Grand Canyon, proposed dams, 52-62, 66-69, 142, 158
 Grand Canyon National Monument, 53
 Gulick, Esther, 204, 205, 207, 213, 217
- half-Bulletin, 106, 111-113
 Harper, John, 81, 84, 90
 Hartzog, George, 44, 72, 76
 Henning, Jack, 178-179
High Conquest, 229
 Hildebrand, Alex, 16, 19, 22, 34-35, 66, 83, 89
 Hildebrand, Joel, 35
 Hildebrand, Milton, 35
 Hildebrand, Peter, 253
 Hillary, Edmund, 241, 242, 251, 252, 270
 Himalayan Expedition, California. See Makalu, California Expedition to
 Holdren, John, 173
 Hoover, Robert, 94, 98
 Hornbein, Tom, 270-273, 276, 278, 279, 281
 Houghteling, Joseph, 217
 Huestis, Charles, 132
 Hurtado, Alberto, 235
 Hutchins, Robert Maynard, 5
 hypoxia, 235, 243-244, 247, 273-274, 277, 279

- India, Survey of, maps, 240-241
- INPHEXAN. See Antarctica, International Physiological Expedition to inter-basin water transfers, 67, 194, 197, 200. See also Grand Canyon; Peripheral Canal
- Interior, Department of, 40, 46, 66, 67, 207, 222
- Internal Revenue Service, 56-62, 140
- Jackson, Kathleen, 92, 93, 94, 98, 99-100, 103-104, 113-115, 150
- Jedediah Smith State Park, 40
- Jerstad, Luther, 270, 271, 272, 277
- Johnson, Huey, 221-222
- Jukes, Thomas, 36-37
-
- Kern County Water District, 196
- Kerr, Catherine, 204, 205, 207, 213, 217
- Kimball, Stewart, 20
- Kingdom of Adventure: Everest, 229
- Knox, John, 213, 214-215
-
- labor unions and conservation, 175-180, 188-189, 215
- Lammie, Colonel James, 218
- Lands Commission, California State, 219, 220
- Lane, Melvin B., 193, 217
- Lawrence, John, 9, 10, 26, 236, 237
- Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, 11-12
- legal actions. See Sierra Club, legal actions; Save San Francisco Bay, legal actions
- legislation, California State Legislature:
 coastal protection, 188
 Peripheral Canal, 223-226
 San Francisco Bay protection, 205, 213-216
- Leonard, Doris, 100
- Leonard, Richard:
 Brower controversy, 65-66, 118, 133, 136-137, 138-139
 climber, 14, 15, 16, 19, 228, 229, 232
 Diablo Canyon controversy, 98, 100, 108
 Mineral King, 83, 88
 nuclear power, 160, 169
 Redwood National Park, 44, 45
 Sierra Club Foundation, 58, 65
 Wilderness Act, 78
- Leslie Salt Company, 213, 221-222
- Lester, James, 265
- litigation. See Sierra Club, legal actions; Save San Francisco Bay, legal actions
- Little America 1, 2, 3, 258-259
- Litton, Martin, 45, 98, 99, 101-102, 104, 106-107, 108, 110, 111, 117, 127, 144

- Long, William, 229, 231
 Los Angeles Metropolitan Water District, 196, 198
 loyalty oath. See Sierra Club, membership policies
 lumber industry, 42-43, 45, 46, 49, 70
- McAteer, Eugene, 205
 McCloskey, Michael, 27, 87, 117, 147, 149
 McLaughlin, Sylvia, 204, 205
 McMurdo Sound, Antarctica, 251, 252, 254, 256, 259
 Makalu, 1954 California Himalayan Expedition to:
 approach to, 240-241
 arrangements for, 239-240
 cultural impact of, 240, 244, 249-250
 leadership, 243
 route, 241, 243
 Sherpas, 245-247
 team selection, 248-249
 Makalu, French expedition to, 241
 Manhattan Project, 7-9, 10
 Marble Canyon dam, 53. See also Grand Canyon, proposed dams
 Marshall, George, 21, 78, 98, 107, 108, 135
 Mauk, Charlotte, 19, 98
 Mendota Canal, 195
 Meral, Gerald, 198, 226
 Miller, Arnold, 155
 Mineral King, proposed development, 80-90, 101
 Moglewer, Sidney, 172
 Moss, Larry E., 225
 Moss, Lawrence I., 169, 171
 Moss Landing, proposed power plant, 97, 105, 158
 Mott, William Penn, Jr., 95, 116, 204
 mountaineering expeditions:
 deaths on, 237-238, 267-268
 impact on team members, 249-250, 274, 277, 280-281
 leadership, 233-234, 239, 243, 268-269, 275-276
 organization, 236, 239-240, 244, 260-262
 oxygen on, 241-242, 279-80
 science on, 10, 12, 236-237, 261, 262, 279-280
 stress, 244, 248, 277, 278
 team selection, 244, 248-249, 262-264
 transportation, 237, 240
See also specific expeditions, e.g., Makalu

- Namche Bazar, 266-267
 Nash, Hugh, 120, 127, 131
 National Audubon Society, 60, 77, 222
 national forest. See Forest Service, U.S.; forests
National Geographic, redwood park study, 40
 National Geographic Society, participation in Everest expedition, 261, 270
 national parks. See National Park Service; names of specific national parks
 National Park Service, 90, 91
 North Cascades area, 70
 pesticide use in parks, 34-35
 recreation, 73
 Redwood National Park establishment, 41, 44, 48
 roads in parks, 74-76, 81, 86, 101
 wilderness in parks, 72-73, 76-77
 National Parks Association, 60, 77, 78
 nature appreciation, 2-4, 183-184
 Nejedly, John, 222-223
 Nepal, government, 239, 240, 265
 Nevado Huandoy, 239
 Nilsson, Einar, 19
 Nipomo Dunes, California, proposed power plant, 92-95, 96, 98, 100, 103, 105, 109, 113-116, 158, 187. See also Diablo Canyon, proposed power plant
 North American Water System (NAWAPA), 194
 North Cascades, Washington, proposed national park, 70
 Northern California Association to Preserve Bodega Head and Harbor, 157-158
 nuclear power. See energy policy, nuclear power
 nuclear power plants. See specific sites, e.g., Diablo Canyon; Bodega Head
 Nuclear Regulatory Commission, 170
 Nuclear Safeguards Initiative (California's Proposition 15, 1976), 163-165
 Nuclear Safety, Advisory Committee on, Atomic Energy Commission, 156
- Oakland, Port of, opposition to Bay Conservation and Development Commission, 215
 Oceano Dunes. See Nipomo Dunes
- Pace, Nello, 250
 Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E), 92-105 passim, 113-114, 115, 156, 157
 Parks and Recreation, California State Department of, 95, 115-116. See also Beaches and Parks, Division of
 Peevey, Michael, 180
 Peripheral Canal, California water project, 194-200, 223-226
 Peru, 234, 235-237, 239, 242, 243. See also Cordillera Blanca expeditions
 Pesonen, David, 99, 156-157, 159, 167
 pesticides, 34-37
 Petris, Nicholas, 205, 221

- physiological stress, 251, 252, 253, 256. See also mountaineering expeditions, stress
 Pinnacles National Monument, 229, 232
 Pocono mountains, 3
 Polar Plateau, Antarctica, 251, 253-254
 pollution. See air pollution; water pollution
 polycythemia, 235, 236
 the poor and conservation, 176, 178
 population growth, 31-33, 173-174
 Porter, Eliot, 101, 102, 144
 Prairie Creek State Park, 40, 50
 Price-Anderson Act, 172
 Proposition 15. See Nuclear Safeguards Initiative
 publications reorganization committee. See Sierra Club, reorganization
 public trust doctrine, 220, 226, 227
 Public Utilities Commission, California, 157
 Pugh, Griffith, 251
 pulmonary edema, 237-238
- racial discrimination. See Sierra Club, membership policies
 Reclamation, Bureau of, 53, 55, 66, 67, 194, 195, 196-197
 reclamation projects. See water projects
 Redwood National Park campaign, 40-52
 differences with Save-the-Redwoods League, 41, 43-44
 full-page ads, 47-48
 local opposition, 42-43
 lumber companies, 42-43, 45, 46, 49
 park expansion, 50 (note)
 park location, 41, 43-44, 46
 Regional Air Pollution Control Board (Bay Area), 175
 riparian rights, 199
 Roberts, Colonel Charles, 217, 218
 Roberts, Jimmy, 265
 Robinson, Bestor, 14, 19, 23, 86, 89, 229, 232, 260
 Robinson, Gordon, 28
 rock climbing, 14, 15, 228-235
 Rock Climbing Section, Sierra Club San Francisco Bay Chapter, 228-229
 Ross Shelf Ice, Antarctica, 251, 257, 258, 259
- Sacramento River, 195, 196, 197, 199, 224
 Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, 194, 195, 196, 197, 199, 200, 205, 223-224
 Salathé, John, 231
 San Francisco Bay, 195, 197, 198, 199, 201, 203-226 *passim*
 San Francisco Bay Area agencies. See Bay Area Council; Bay Conservation and Development Commission
 San Francisco Chronicle, 131
 San Geronio Wilderness Area, 84-85, 101

- San Luis Obispo county, 92, 95, 103, 116
- Save-the-Redwoods League, 41, 43-46, 47, 48, 49
- Save San Francisco Bay Association, 198, 203-223
- biennial conferences, 227
 - board of directors, 204-205, 208-210, 212
 - conservation campaigns:
 - Bay Conservation and Development Commission, establishment of, 205-206, 213-216
 - bay fill, opposition to (Westbay, Albany, Leslie Salt, Suisun Marsh), 206, 219-223
 - Peripheral Canal, 223-224
 - founders, 205, 207-208
 - internal structure, 204, 209-211
 - legal actions, 219-221, 226
 - purposes, 204-205, 206
 - regulatory agencies, relations with, 206-207, 216-219
 - tactics and influence, 211, 214
- Saylor, John P., 51
- Schanhaar, John, 120
- Schmidt, Fred, 13
- scientific research. See mountaineering expeditions, science on; Antarctica expedition
- Sequoia National Forest. See Mineral King, proposed development
- Sequoia National Park, 81, 84, 86, 89
- Shell Oil Company strike, 177
- Sherpas. See Everest expedition, Sherpas; Makalu expedition, Sherpas
- Sibley, Sherman, 94
- Sieroty, Alan, 188, 189
- Sierra Club:
 - advertising program, 47-48, 56, 58, 69, 139
 - Board of Directors meetings, 28-30, 38-39, 82-85, 98, 103-104, 108-110, 131, 136-141, 144, 166-169
 - Brower controversy. See Sierra Club, internal problems, 1960s Bulletin. See Sierra Club Bulletin
 - changes in, 23-24, 31-39, 81, 89, 177, 184-186, 200-201, 225-226
 - chapters:
 - Angeles, 16-18, 84-85
 - Kern-Kaweah, 81, 84-85
 - San Francisco Bay, 15, 185, 228-229
 - conservation campaigns. See specific campaigns, e.g., Redwood National Park
 - conservation committees, regional, 146
 - corporations, relations with, 94-105, 113, 114, 178
 - Council, 125, 126, 150-152
 - differing viewpoints in, 39, 65-66, 89-90, 98, 101, 105-113, 117, 125, 144-145
 - elections, 19, 109-113, 141-142, 226
 - federal agencies, relations with, 72-73, 75-76
 - finances, 62-64, 102, 132-135
 - investments, 152-154

Sierra Club: (Continued)

- Foundation, relations with, 57-58, 62-64. See also Sierra Club Foundation
- internal problems, 1960s, 118-146
 - Adams-Sill-Leonard charges, 136-138
 - Earth National Park ad, 139
 - executive director's discretionary fund, 134
 - Explorer, 139-140
 - Galapagos books, 120-121, 136
 - permanent fund, 132
 - royalties, ten percent, 123-124
 - See also Sierra Club, finances; Sierra Club, publications; Diablo Canyon, proposed power plant
- international programs, 128, 138-139
- labor unions, relations with, 175-180
- legal actions, 87-89, 158, 219, 226
- membership policies, 16-18, 133
- mountaineering, 13, 130, 184-185, 239-140
- outings program, 130, 233
- policies. See specific issues, e.g., energy
- president's role, 20-21, 26-28, 140, 145-146
- publications program, 33, 62, 102, 123-124, 128-132, 133, 136, 139, 143, 147-149, 173
- reorganization, 129-132, 137-138, 146-147
- tax deduction status, 55-62, 140
- staff and volunteers, relations between, 125-126, 137-138
- Sierra Club Bulletin, 56, 229
- half-Bulletin, 106, 111-113
- Sierra Club Foundation, 57-58, 60, 62-65, 147, 150, 154
- Silent Spring 36
- Sill, Richard, 133, 136, 137, 138-139, 150
- Siple, Paul, 258
- Siracusa, Angelo, 213
- Siri, Jean, 203-204
- Siri, William E.:
 - Brower controversy, analysis of, 118-146
 - conservation issues and campaigns, involvement in, 31-32, 36, 39, 42
 - California coastal campaign coordinator, 187-194
 - energy policies, 116, 160-162, 171-174, 176
 - labor and the environment, 175-180
 - Mineral King, 82-83, 85-87
 - Nipomo Dunes-Diablo Canyon, 93-118
 - nuclear power, 99, 160-171, 181
 - Redwood National Park, 42, 44-45, 47, 50
 - San Francisco Bay-Delta, 194-226
 - conservation philosophy and tactics, 14-15, 21-25, 46, 89, 114-115, 180-184
 - education, 4-6
 - expeditions to:
 - Antarctica, 250-260
 - Cordillera Blanca, Peru, 235-239
 - Everest, 260-281
 - Makalu, 239-250

Siri, William E.: (Continued)

- family and early life, 1-5, 183
 - Manhattan Project, 7-9
 - rock climbing and mountaineering, 12, 14, 19, 228-281. See also Siri, expeditions
 - Save San Francisco Bay Association president, 198, 204. See also Save San Francisco Bay Association
 - scientific career, 4, 7-12. See also Siri, expeditions
 - Sierra Club:
 - Board of Directors, elected to, 19
 - Foundation trustee, 64
 - Investment Committee, 152-154
 - president, 20-30
 - Publications Committee, 120-121, 148-149
 - reasons for joining, 13-16
 - reorganization, 129-132, 137-139, 143, 146-147, 150-152
 - San Francisco Bay Chapter Executive Committee, 15
 - See also Sierra Club
 - Standard Oil Board of Directors, nominated for, 154-155
 - Sive, David, 139
 - Smith, Anthony, 78
 - social policy and the environment, 173-180
 - Sola Khumbu region, 246
 - South Bay National Wildlife Refuge, 212
 - South Col, Mount Everest, 270-272
 - South Moss Landing. See Moss Landing
 - Standard Oil of California, 154, 191
 - State, U.S. Department of, 261
 - Steck, Allen, 229, 231
 - Steele, Dwight, 209, 213
 - Storm King power plant, 158
 - Suisun Marsh, 196, 222-223
 - Sunset magazine, 104
 - Supreme Court, United States, 88
 - Swatek, Paul, 169, 171
-
- technology and the environment, 180-182
 - Thangboche, 267
 - This is the American Earth, 128
 - Tioga Road, 74-76, 101
 - Torre, Gary, 61-62, 140
 - Trust for Public Lands, 222

- Udall, Morris, 56, 59
 Udall, Stewart, 55, 66-67, 261
 Ullman, James Ramsey, 229, 235, 269, 273
 United Auto Workers (UAW), 189
 United States. For all federal government entities, see subjects with which they deal, e.g., Congress, U.S.; Reclamation, Bureau of
 United States, living conditions and prospects, 174-175, 180-181
 University of California, Berkeley, 5, 6, 7, 9-12, 228
 University of Chicago, 5, 6
 Unsoeld, Willi, 231, 240, 270-273, 276, 277-278, 279, 281
- Vial, Donald, 175
 Victoria Land, Antarctica, 253, 254
 Vietnam War, 126-127
- Wagner, George, 190
 Waldie, Jerome, 198
 Walt Disney, Inc., 84, 86-87
 water pollution, 201
 water projects. See California state water project; Central Arizona water project; Grand Canyon, proposed dams; Peripheral Canal
 Water Resources, California State Department of, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 224
 Water Resources Board, 199
 Water Quality Act, 39
 Watt, Bob, 173
 Wayburn, Edgar, 78
 Brower controversy, role in, 139, 140, 144-145
 Mineral King campaign, 83, 87
 Nipomo Dunes-Diablo Canyon controversy, 98, 101
 nuclear energy, position on, 169
 Redwood National Park campaign, 42, 43, 44-45, 47, 48, 51
 Sierra Club officer, 21, 119
 Wentworth, Bill, 153
 Westbay Community Associates, 219-220
 West Contra Costa Conservation League, 203
 West Ridge, Mount Everest, 270-272, 276-279
 Whitaker and Baxter, Inc., 191
 Whittaker, James, 270, 271, 274, 277, 278
 wild and scenic rivers, California, 194-195, 223-224
 wilderness, 31, 33-34, 72-73, 76-79
 Wilderness Act, 73, 76, 77-79
 Wilderness Society, 60, 78
 wildlife conservation, 34
 winter sports, 13, 84-86, 89
 Wirth, Conrad, 72, 74-76
 Worth War II, 5, 7-9
 Wright, Cedri, 13, 14

Yellowstone National Park, 73, 77
Yosemite National Park, 34, 73
 rock climbing in, 229, 230-231, 232
Tioga Road, 74-76, 101

Zahniser, Howard, 77-79

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