



WAYNE HOWELL

Interviewer: Regina Kong

Others Present: N/A

Interview Date: June 19, 2019

Interview Location: Hobbit Hole, Inian Islands

Transcriber: Regina Kong

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“This place gets ahold of you and you just can’t not be here”

-born November 29, 1952 in Cortez, Colorado

-spent most of life in Colorado and Utah; became archaeologist in Guatemala then got interested in Alaska

-secured job with Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1983; fell in love with the place and started coming back

-settled Southeast 1989

-[2:25] assigned to work in Arctic Village in Brooks Range; “that sense of vastness and historic depth was really what I saw and experienced and was attracted to”

-friend AJ Lynch got a job with national parks service

-came back to Alaska 1986 working in Denali National Park doing mining compliance service; very remote field camp helicopter access only

-[3:28] every two 2 weeks, 10 days working and 4 days off ; would go to howling dog bar in Fairbanks. [4:39] “you could play volleyball and horseshoe through the midnight sun”

-met wife Kim Ney at Howling Dog. She’d recently left Hobbit Hole. Kim stayed in Gustavus

-1999 moved to Gustavus.

-[6:01] Kim inherited “beat-up old skiff” nicknamed Knucklehead from uncle Roy

-wanted to show Wayne white sulfur hot springs, stopped by Hobbit Hole on the way and that was first time Wayne saw HH 1989

-came 1979-84/85

-[7:10] “I sensed right away how special it was” [8:29] “It had a buzz to it”

-1995 hired by NPS to be archaeologist until 2014 at Glacier Bay Nat. Park

-job was to be liaison with Huna and improve relationships between park service and hoonah Tlingit

-fox farm to homestead to Howe brothers, sons of Bob Howe who was superintendent of Glaciers Bay

-Kim had special relationship with Bob and Doris Howe

-Howe brothers decided to be power trollers, commercial fishermen

-heard about HH being for sale and acquired it

-[11:00] HH became hub of activity for alternative, hippie, young rowdy commercial fishing

-[11:13] a lot of people would call in, enjoy hot shower on the dock, come up to the house and get a meal

-Kim started planning gardens

-[11:35] grew greens (spinach, kale) in summer, carrots, peas, potatoes

-“it was a place to come and socialize” [12:00] “it was open to anyone that showed up and wanted to fit in that niche. It took on an aura of being a place with a really positive vibe to it. Once that positive vibe developed, it kind of took and set in. Throughout the region, word spread and you could plan on coming here and experiencing that good feeling and good times. It was a working operation. These people were really dedicated fishermen. If you wanted to make it out here, you had to have that work ethic.”

-learned how better to apply work ethic when he got here, “it’s that thing that rubs off. People just give it their all”

-would visit regularly with Bob and Doris since they were neighbors; took in Kim as daughter

-[15:00] Doris Howe would knit woolen hats, designed for working people out on the water; big earflaps, called them “hobbit helmets” but only people on the “inner circle” got the hats; “to get one was a badge of honor”; went to folk festival with Kim who said “there’s a hobbit”

-sense of community and belonging [16:29] the hobbit hole is “one of those special places”

-HH known throughout the region

-Bob was park service biologist by training

-Greg and Fred went to hs in Juneau because Bob’s job as superintendent was in Juneau

-[20:00] Howes lived in Glacier bay until 1976

-[20:32] in Gustavus Bob had marine band radio by his chair so he was connected with HH

-Wayne and Kim came to HH every few years, every Labor Day remembrance Party

-[21:19] dog tradition established by Howes “every time you’d come and go there was a dog to greet you” names=eenuk, olie was Kim’s favorite black lab; cats too

-pets are tradition that lives on

-got busy and only came up with young people from Huna, summer session to bring the out on archaeological surveys

-over years quit coming regularly until Zach and Inian Islands

-2019 was second work party

-Huna young children, brought them through the laundry, where the boat names are painted on the rock

-[25:10] remains of old Tlingit summer camp, monument to commemorate woman and her one-year old child who died

-every one of those kids Wayne is still in contact with remembers those trips

-made 3 or 4 of those trips, very meaningful for them

- [26:28] talks about Ken Grant, Tlingit elder who fished here as a young man on his dad’s seine boat

-very difficult place to fish in

-at one point 50 seine boats operating out of Huna

-[28:25] sometimes was deck hand on crab and halibut boats, worked as deckhand and cook on two charter boats 1989-95

-[29:42] On the communities here: “You have to really want to be here”; what it means to be an Alaskan. “It requires people of independent attitude and demeanor and outlook. You have to deal with the weather and the remoteness and isolation. What you end up with is a cadre of people who want to be here. You have that shared commitment to place that draws you all together in a common bond.” “You just got to be tough. You can’t be afraid of hard work. Toughness and an internal fortitude.”

-very few people here were born in Alaska

-[32:14] “Once you get up here and it clicks.” Loves Colorado and Utah but “It pains me not to be here because this is home now” “This place gets ahold of you and you just can’t not be here”

-[32:46] was committed to Kim and not the place for a few years. Took a while for it to click for him. Didn't know at the time Gustavus October 1987 was the wettest October on record. Thought Kim was crazy for wanting to live here.

-34:03 in the beginning was only here seasonally. go to Guatemala in winters. then got the job 1995 and saw need to work better with Native community

[36:04] describes work as archaeologist with NPS more in-depth. What NPS really needed was someone to interact with community and develop relationships, get over old grievances with Tlingit and Yakutat

-worked on project looking at archaeological evidence to anchor Tlingit names to locations.

-[39:33] HH has several names, worked with Greg Streveler (Zach's uncle)

ex. names= spirit name of man, name of people where they used to gaffe seals

-learning Native stories of place, of times of peril

-program to allow Tlingit to continue traditional food-harvesting practices in park such as collecting seagull eggs

-[42:29] Powerful moment when Wayne reflects on seeing the student groups at Inian. Shares meaningful experience. Got interested in archaeology from young age just growing up in Cortez, CO. Went to BYU. Did summer field school in Montezuma Canyon, Utah. Lived in remote camp in desert for 6 weeks. ON weekends explore other archaeological sites. "That field school experience utterly transformed me in terms of how I saw the landscape. How I interpreted things happened around me. It was an eye-opening experience... This was something else. Ray opened our eyes to a different way of seeing, taught us how to see more complex things and make sense of them. But also how to live a rugged, self-reliant life. It was really transformative..." [44:50] goes into Ray's life story. "How to live with each other peaceably as a community. How to be tough, resilient, creative. He taught that lesson to me. When I started coming back to the Hobbit Hole and seeing those students, the same things happened. So it's part of a legacy" [45:48].