



GREG STREVELER

Interviewer: Regina Kong

Others Present: N/A

Interview Date: July 11, 2019

Interview Location: Gustavus, AK

Transcriber: Regina Kong

Date of Transcription: July 19, 2019

“And that remains one of the cornerstones in my life...to try to bear the ecological cost but only ask of the world the amount of cost that’s necessary to lead a joyful life and no more than that. It’s my belief that we’re asking way too much of the world right now and I don’t want to have to pay that cost if I don’t have to.”

-born 1941 in southern Wisconsin, lived in farm country and moved to Alaska summertime 1962, permanently 1966

-dad was plumber, electrician, heating. Greg worked for dad and for farmers

-two sisters and a brother

-[2:19] What brought him to Alaska. “To begin with, the ability to work hard. I was a gofer on an expedition. They needed somebody to dig holes.” First trip was joint anthropology and zoology trip to Aleutian Islands. “When I saw Alaska I figured out that one way or another I had to live here...The first thing I noticed was that all the trees were on the stump and all the ecosystems were still working. I thought boy, wouldn’t I love to live in a place like that. And it’s still my thought...Holy Judas this place is wild. So you go thousands upon thousands of miles and there’s a few people here, just a bunch of critters. And then I got on a plane to the Aleutian Islands and it was like the end of the world in those days. Nobody was out there. We got out in this little remote Aleut village.” Thought it was cool to find people that still lived that way.

-[4:57] Two years later, doing project on master’s degree and went to Kodiak Islands. After graduated with master’s, found work with Fish and Game in Petersburg. Norwegian fishing community. Ran into superintendent of Glacier Bay and got hired. Went to training academy in Grand Canyon to get ranger credentials and moved back to Glacier Bay. Worked for federal government until 1980 but got “too independent.” Started own business as ecological and geological consultant, did field studies on various topics and teaching until retired.

-[7:27] Training to become a ranger. “In those days the concept of ranger was pretty broad. It was partially law enforcement. It was also partially visitor contact and resource management. Everywhere from learning how to shoot a sidearm to learning how to put handcuffs on people. To how to survey wildlife and how to make an evening program for people at the lodge. The park service was much more ad hoc in those days than it is now. Much less compartmentalized...Middle of winter in Glacier Bay I think there were 9 of us. Very small staff and you did what had to be done. The superintendent said ‘Did you read your job description?’ I said ‘yeah.’ He said, ‘Well, ignore that. You’re here to do what needs to be done.’”

-[8:50] A day could vary from shoveling snow off dock, fixing patrol boat, making evening program, making nature trail. Greg found work very fulfilling. But at same time was building subsistence lifestyle.

-[10:37] Subsistence lifestyle. “I was born in an era of family farms where just about everybody in our neighborhood, either they or their father had built their farm on 160 acres they got from the government as a homestead. They built their barns and they built their houses and they raised their kids. In those days you didn’t just grow soybeans and corn and go to the store. In those days you grew a little bit of everything so when times were tough—which they were when I was a kid because farming was going into a big recession—nobody went hungry. There was always good stuff to eat. We ate like kings even when there was no money.” Greg put in charge of garden at 12. “There was a lot of pride in this, that I was helping the family feed their face, you know...It was hard times in the countryside so my dad wasn’t getting paid very well but we always had all the produce we wanted.” Families would invite Greg’s family to help butcher and take back the meat. “I knew how to work hard, how to take care of animals, how to process them.”

-[12:55] early Gustavus: “It was pretty much built around farming. It was one of the few pieces of flat country in Southeast Alaska...Here it was people trying to grow stuff...The first thing I started looking around for a piece of land to buy. Before the house was even founded I was growing a garden.”

-[13:34] Plants that do well in Gustavus: Root crops (potatoes, parsnips, carrots, beets) in winter. Summer =cucumbers, tomatoes. Semi-perennial greens like kale. “Our goal has always been to feed ourselves as much as we can from what we grow, fish or game...It’s a very satisfying life to me...The more I got ecologically into it I realized that the more you live off the stuff you pay the ecological cost for, that you have some chance of living a life that the earth might be able to put up with. Instead of purchasing a chunk of chicken breast under cellophane, you want a chicken you raise a chicken and you know where that came from and that the environment paid something to raise that chicken. So you learn pretty quick to tally the ecological cost of what you ate that day. And that remains one of the cornerstones in my life...to try to bear the ecological cost but only ask of the world the amount of cost that’s necessary to lead a joyful life and no more than that. It’s my belief that we’re asking way too much of the world right now and I don’t want to have to pay that cost if I don’t have to.”

-[16:25] how to get that same satisfaction if living in a place that’s not as close to the land: Move in that direction as far as you can. “One of the considerable worries I have for the world is the degree to which we’ve become urbanized. I think it makes it harder and harder. There really isn’t any complete substitute to getting up in the morning and being surrounded by an ecosystem that’s working. Because it sort of becomes part of your gestalt. But I admire people who do their best in what I consider difficult circumstances by trying to pay attention as much as you can to what you eat and where it comes from, what you buy and where it comes from...I think that if our world is going to succeed in your generation, we all have to start really internalizing one word: limits. We can’t keep asking the world for everything we want. We have to ask the world for what we need and then slow down after that.”

-[19:12] Top carnivores in Gustavus show Greg that the system is working. “I’m extremely aware of the beauty of that carrot that I ate that every time I take a bite of it I’m aware of my cost to the world to eat that. And you can’t do that when you buy it from the supermarket. There’s just not that visceral connection, you know. There can be an intellectual connection but not a visceral one. To me it’s the visceral connection that matters the most although I read voraciously about all aspects of the modern world and the fast world. Being a geologist you’re always thinking about the past.”

-[22:50] Natural history of Gustavus. Tough place in early days. No native people lived there permanently. First non-native people came 1915, three married couples homesteading. First homesteaders that stayed came 1921.

-[29:12] Geology of the Hobbit Hole and why it looks the way it does. Metamorphic rock. “The Hobbit Hole is part of a major suture zone—a place where two crustal plates come together and all

mash together. So the rocks are highly highly altered. Some are almost melted. And they're very tough. Inian Islands is sitting right in the middle of Cross Sound and Icy Strait is upstream from them...During the height of the last great ice age, about 18-20,000 years ago, those islands were covered by something like 2,000 feet of ice. And that ice extended way out to the ocean. 10 or 12 miles at least off of Cape Spencer there, way out. If you think about all the ice that came all the way from Skagway and all the way from Juneau and all the way down to Petersburg, all that ice was funneled through there. If you imagine Southeast Alaska being the tube of toothpaste and that's the nozzle and all that stuff squirted out right there. There's a lot of deep holes in Icy Strait and a lot of deep holes just past Inian Islands but they stand right in the middle of it. And they were so tough they stood against the ice and became an above-water feature. So the rock is extremely resistant to erosion. So just imagine it's just like a fist standing against the stream. For thousands of years that ice is just going against it and nailing it from the front end and piling over the top of it and it stood its ground over that time. It's a very tough piece of rock. On either sides of it there were fault lines so the ice was able to excavate the rock out there and dig North Pass and South Pass and then dig the hole that is now Cross Sound. In a few words, the rock started out a long time ago by being a mismatch of rocks between two crustal plates that got really, really beat up and really, really cooked and made into something very resistant. And then the ice age ended up rounded it into a big knob that has holes on either side of it, straits on either side of it that could be cut down to below sea level. So you've got a big fist just sitting in the middle of Cross Sound. Not only does that give terrestrial critters a place to live in the middle of all that, but it's also very important for marine critters...everything gets concentrated there. That's why you see all the critters you see out there. Se lions just love it...There's so much concentrated life there. And for that same reason it's always been so important to people."

-[33:48] History of Hobbit Hole with seine fishery. Very hard but extremely rewarding place to fish. Hoonah people became masters. It was a source of great prestige and great wealth. Biological reasons to stop fishery but it made a great difference to Hoonah people. Less involved in Inian Islands after fishery stopped.

-[41:31] Importance of the place for Hoonah people: "Their way of looking at the world was animist. When places mattered to them, mostly it mattered because they kept them alive. They would invest those places with particular spirits and particular stories. The people of Southeast Alaska place immense stock in stories." Tlingit people illustrated ownership by stories. The deed to property was story. Hobbit Hole by proxy part of giant octopus story. Tlingit people had system of land rights when white people showed up, one that was almost homologous with ours.

-[51:38] Greg's involvement with Hobbit Hole. Superintendent of Glacier Bay/Greg's boss was Bob Howe, father of Greg and Fred.

-[52:49] first impression of Hobbit Hole. "As an ecologist and geologist an extremely exciting place. I always loved to go there and look things over and try to puzzle out the rocks you see. As a geologist you can see how complicated it is. Every place you look a rock's different and it's so cool to try to figure that out. All the life siphoning by there. The woods are so complicated. In those days I was a young scientist just absorbing everything I could and it was just one of the hot spots around. Every time I got a chance I'd try to go out there and figure some of the stuff out."

- [53:47] Some of Greg's favorite things to look at. "There was something inherently powerful about islands that could stand up. When I figured out the power that the ice had exerted on that spot and the rock that had stood up to it, it was just like. It was just an inherently powerful place to me. I could just feel that rock standing up to the ice for thousands of years. It was sort of a subliminal feeling there of power. And then all the stream of life passing was just another vivid and powerful thing. When I first came I was very taken with an author named Carlos Casteneda. He was an anthropologist, Mexican heritage. He was studying Yaqui Indians down in northern Sonora. Nobody

knows for sure if this was real or contrived. But the story goes like this: He meets this Yaqui sorcerer named Don Juan. One of the things that stuck in my mind is that Don Juan said two things. Everything that really matters you only see out of the corner of your eye and if you look at it, it goes away. In other words, everything that really matters is kind of ineffable. And the second thing he said was that a landscape has a geographic topography but it also has a psychic topography. And just like some landscapes that have mountains on them and deep valleys, a landscape has psychic highs and lows. Some places that have a particularly high psychic geography he called power spots. And I thought the Inian Islands and Cross Sounds were power spots. I really liked that metaphor.”

-[57:40] Reaction to Zach’s idea to turn Hobbit Hole into Inian Islands Institute. “Aghast” at first but amazed but what he succeeded in doing. Discusses Zach and Laura’s “power of vision” and the challenges he sees for them.

-[1:11:28] Talking about Zach and Laura. “I just hope the enormity of the world’s problems don’t weigh on them too hard, that they allow themselves some simple joys outside that. My personal feeling is that the way to survive the world at the present time is compartmentalization, that you can have a part of your psyche which you take on full force life’s problems and the world’s solutions but you put sideboards on that so that your joy in life don’t depend on that, which can be difficult and dark for a while. There have to be parts of yourself that bring you joy that aren’t open to erosion.”

-[1:12:29] What brings Greg joy. “What seems to be at the base of everything is information and relationship. Much to my amazement, those are two pretty good words to describe my joy. I find that I am what I relate to.” Joy from loving people and from trying to understand and see the world through someone else’s eyes.