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TRANSCRIPT

RECORDING NO.: Tape 5 Side AandB
INTERVIEWER: Kelly Lally
INTERVIEWEE: Donald Hazellett
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 8/20/1987
PLACE OF INTERVIEW: Russellville, Indiana
OTHER PEOPLE PRESENT:
EQUIPMENT USED:
AMOUNT OF RECORDING (TAPE/MINIDISK) USED: 45:15
DESCRIPTION OF CONTENTS:

TRANSCRIBED BY: Christie Burns **DATE**: July, 2007
Transcribed with the support of a Transcription Grant from the Oral History Commission of the Kentucky Historical Society.

KEY: K=Kelly Lally
D=Donald Hazellett
MRS=Mrs. Hazellett

Italics= emphasis
// = overlapping or interrupted speech
[ ] [not part of recording]
Lapsed time represented in left column by minutes and seconds (i.e. 5:50)
? or * = transcript needs to be checked

0:00 K: This is Kelly Lally and I'm here outside Russellville, Indiana, with Mr. Donald Hazellett. Today is August the 20th, 1987. When were you born, Mr. Hazellett?

D: Where, or when?

K: When and where?

D: I was born August the 20th, nineteen-five.

K: Nineteen-and-five.

D: This is my birthday.

K: [chuckles] Well happy birthday!

D: Thank you.

K: Where //

D: So that makes me eighty-two.

K: Happy birthday again. That's great. Uh, where were you born?

D: Uh, in the house right south of us here.

K: Here in Russellville. And you basically, besides your work, have you lived here all your life?

D: Oh yes. This has always been my voting precinct.

K: Oh! Well, how many people were in your family?

D: I had one sister.

K: And was your father a farmer?

D: Yeah, my farmer—my father was basically a farmer, uh, although he, in his day he was trained as a steam engineer. Thrashing machine, anything to do with steam locomotive. And I don't know just where he—They gave the course someplace out of Purdue or someplace that he took that.

1:35 K: How did you get interested in geology?

D: Uh, I went to the University of Illinois, and uh, of course when I first matriculated over at the University of Illinois, I was in the engineering school, electrical engineering. Because when I was still in high school, I uh, went to the Westinghouse Electric, and worked in the research lab. At that time, there was only one radio station in the United States, and that was KDKA. And uh, I heard that and there was no voice communication then. It was all dots and dashes. And uh, so I went out seeking, see what I could get on. So I got on as a research assistant, and worked with C.R. Hannah. He was a Purdue graduate. The Hannah Crossing down here where 36 and 231 crosses, that land was all owned by the Hannahs. And uh, C.R., of course, was instrumental in trying to get me to be an engineer. But then when you get into your college classes and take various classes, why then you drift into other interests. And it was through that angle that I got interested, and I got to know very well, and maybe my professor got to know me fairly well. Francis Parker—uh, can't think of his last name now.

K: Shepherd.

D: Shepherd. He was from the east coast, and he was doing his doctorate, and summer—He was taking, doing his work in the, on the Rocky Mountain Trench in Canada. And by the time summer came around he, I guess, knew me well enough to ask me to go along as his field assistant. So I went into that. And then went on and got my degree there. Then, another one of my professors, Doctor Arthur Bevin, later became—I stutter around here too much—state geologist of Virginia. And uh, all out of the clear sky, this brings me into the park service. Now one night I got a call and wanted to know what I was doing. And I said I was working on my masters degree. And he said, "Would you like to start working for the park service?" And I said, "Well how could I work for the park service? I don't have a civil service exam. Never taken one or anything." They were just out of it. In fact, he called me from Washington. They had a governors' conference there, and he attended that, and at that time they didn't have a

geologist on the staff at Washington in the National Park Service. He said, "Well, we don't have anybody in mind, and I know you can do it, and there's nobody on the civil service roll, so we can waive it." They wanted to know when we could start. So we just got in the car. So there we were. And so there I was in the Washington office. You want to ask more?

K: No, go ahead, just tell me how you started working in the field.

6:03 D: Then, future national parks have always been a troublesome thing to get. Now here's two parallels. The Great Smokies. Few people were involved. Just timber companies, and a few people living in those little coves. That's all, see, very few people. So they don't give you much trouble. But Mammoth Cave coming along, that was an entirely different ball of worms. Uh, the people that were guides there, they were second and third generation people. They knew very little out of the cave as a whole. They knew one avenue. If you wanted to see a certain part of the cave, it was [unintelligible] or somebody would take you there. That was just it. And the general—Now those are all wonderful people down there. I don't want anything to ever come out of this tape to say it's not, see.

K: I know what you're saying.

D: And uh, then it was a question up in the office we knew they were nearing the land acquisition, and we knew that—I'm speaking now from headquarters, and we debated this many times. How're we gonna do it? What—How can we soothe this thing over? And we knew that even though the guides were hardworking and had always worked there, they—it wasn't that they weren't telling the truth //

K: They were just limited.

D: // it was what knowledge they had. And if they looked down the avenue and that's a duck, well, that's what it looks like, see, and whatnot. Uh, we needed to brace that up just a little. Not to change it, not to change the flavor of the trip, but to get the information on a little more solid base. So there was no way a National Park Service employee could go down there and say, "We're gonna work you over." So we decided that my wife and I would go down looking for work. So we got in our little Ford, went down to Cave City. We didn't go out too far. We went to Cave City, and I asked around, "Is there any work?" No, it's too late to pick tobacco worms, and nobody was doing anything, and that was about the only work there was. You know, they were just finishing up with that. So we rented us a little apartment above the drug store there, main street of Cave City. And in the afternoons, I'd be talking to people, sit on the bench down there. The boys from Mammoth Cave would come in. I met them all. "Boy what you guys are doing, we don't have anywhere. We're looking for work." And uh, they'd tell me somebody might have something, I'd go see him. And quite a little time went on, and they apparently liked me. We didn't come in, gonna run the place. We were honest people, come in looking for work. So the boys went out and talked to Marty Charlay, he was cave manager at that time. And a very personable person, with a French acc—extension—extraction. And uh, so they said if I thought I'd go out and talk to him, he could get me the job. So I was, got to work around the parking lot, doing things like that, you know. So as you knew, as you knew these guys as they finished their day's work. In effect, they were jealous of each other. Jealous of what they knew in their area of the cave, as opposed to somebody else in their area of the cave. So I found this out working twenty-four hours a day. Uh, "Now would you go with me tonight, and I'll show you some *real* cave." So that night we'd go with him, see. Well then the other guide, "You go with me." So,

and, in later years, Marty Charlay said, outside of himself, that I had been in more avenues of Mammoth Cave than any other living person. And I think that's true today, because they guides that are there now haven't been anyplace, see, and all these old guides had never been in these others. So as far as I know, I still have that distinction of having been in more avenues in Mammoth Cave than any other living person.

K: Good we're getting you on tape, then!

D: So uh, it worked out real well.

12:57 D: And then in the meantime I would go with these guides as they went on the trip, and I took with me Marty Charlay's secretary, and she took down in shorthand everything they said, everything they said. Then it was up to me to keep the flavor of that. And brush out what they could. Now these guides were no resentful to changing the mineral they were talking about. They were glad to know really what it was, see. So it wasn't—they were just, that's what they'd been told. So that, what evolved out of that whole thing was that I developed a guidebook for each trip that they were showing at that time. Now those are all out of date now, because they don't even show those trips as such now. But it was through that that each one of them had later, some years later, I went down there—We were talking with one of the guides there then. "Oh yes," he said, "we still use your guidebook." They had it down in their lockers. But to go back just a little bit, I left, of course, the management out of Washington was down. They had other assignments for me, you know, so it worked out that they got me on in Washington again. So then the next time we went back, why, we had our government car //

K: Excuse me for just a second. The first time you went was about what time, what year? Do you remember?

D: Uh, first time we went was in nineteen and thirty—was is seven or eight?

MRS: I think '37.

D: Yeah.

MRS: Uh-huh. And then we went back to Washington after about six months. And then we were there '38, a part of '38 and '39.

K: Okay.

D: And it was during that uh, summer of '38 that we were hashing up the possibility of a new discovery. And uh, going down the river, and the guides built boats. We had to have three boats. Have you heard that story?

K: No.

16:09 D: Uh, we had—That river was very treacherous. And during rainy seasons, the cavern was full of water and you couldn't get out. So you had to protect yourself. And you couldn't get all the way down the river in one boat. It was the rockfalls. So they had to build three boats, progressively, to get to where we were going. And uh, as I remember, I was notified when they were exploring, and I was notified that they had found their way in, and that I was assigned to go

in and make the preliminary report on the new discovery. And if I'm not mistaken, it was in October 1939 that I made my first trip in there. And that was exactly one year from the time they made the first discovery, which was in '38. And at that time, I was doing work down on Cape Hatteras, the national park down there, on the water supply. And they notified me. The time element comes in there, and you gotta work these things out. But before we went in to really explore, the cave engineer down there had made preliminary surveys. And they had drilled a hole, a well, down into the cave, so that if we were trapped in there, they could feed us. So Florley would send our sandwiches down and our lightbulbs and everything. But we were never really trapped. But just in case.

D: Now from the historic entrance back into this, what we called the New Discovery now, I logged in there, it took us eighteen hours, and that's a *long* trip //

K: Yeah.

D: // in there. Anymore questions then?

K: Go ahead.

18:45 D: They uh, so out of that, out of that whole episode, I suppose, we've always felt that we injected in there a lot of good will between the park service and the management in there, and that we were very well accepted.

K: Well that's good. I know that there had been a lot of problems, even with the local residents.

D: Oh yes, yes. And so many of those guides had a lot of families, and they spoke good words for us, so we weren't foreigners anymore. And we were part of it.

K: Did they say anything when you came back with your government car? You were talking about that earlier, after //

D: Oh they—Yes, you see, they knew that when I, when we left, I was to be assigned to Washington, see.

K: Oh, okay. They didn't think that you were there earlier.

D: It worked out fine.

K: Oh good.

D: And uh, so, can you kick that off?

K: Sure.

[cut in recording]

20:03 K: So you were, you went to Mammoth Cave about three times, you say?

D: Oh I, we were in and out many times.

K: In and out many times.

D: Yeah, because basically, that was—Now, my assignment with the Washington office was a very unique assignment. I was a troubleshooter, and my travel order read "continental United States and island possessions." And I was given an open-ended budget to do what—I might be in one state and two or three states had to take care of. That is water wells, and road bank, road materials, and whatnot that I would be called on. And I just go ahead and do it, see. So I was the only one that had such an assignment. Well, in fact, the matter is, working out of the Washington office, basically no one had a private car. I mean, assigned to them. It was this pool car business. And it didn't take me long to tell them, "Now if I'm gonna do this, I've got to have a car that I can depend on, that I service, that I see that it's going." So, they said, "Well, if we order you a new car for yourself, you'll have to drive it a hundred-thousand miles before you can get another one." And I said, "Well that's no trouble, the way I do it." So then back then, filling stations closed up at night. And with the schedule I had, a lot of times I'd drive all night to get to a certain area in order for most of it, and sleep a couple hours. So we had to get permission from the FBI to have a second gas tank put in the car. So I had better cruising range in there. So uh, I was in and out of Mammoth Cave just on any kind of a schedule that—

22:35 K: So you worked, you went through the New Discovery, you kind of plotted it out. Is that what you did, part of it?

D: Yes.

K: And worked with the guidebooks, developed the guidebooks while you were there. What exactly do you test the different—I'm not sure—I mean, I know that you went through. What else did you do while you were there? Or that's the sum of it?

D: That was basically //

K: I don't know what a geologist does.

MRS: Well, didn't you help lay out some trails?

D: Oh yes.

MRS: A natural trails. And roads, some roads. Road material. Because they had an engineer to lay out the roads.

D: And in fact, I was instrumental in starting the naturalist program. Surface. And uh, they, they built an amphitheatre down by the hotel, and at times I was there when I'd give lectures down there on geology and all in the evening. People would sit out on those. And uh, I was rather pleased. The last time I was down there—when was that? Two years ago or three years ago.

MRS: No, it was just a year ago. It won't be a year 'til last Ma—September.

D: And that's when the superintendent—I hadn't met this superintendent, but he heard that I was—well, I had made arrangements with the hotel there to be there, and they had told the

superintendent I was coming. And uh, so when I went in to see him, he had my report on this New Discovery on his desk. And uh, //

MRS: It was written how many years ago? Forty years ago.

D: And he had it on the desk. And I says, "Well now, what has been done about showing that? What has developed?" I was worried about that. He says, "Just exactly like you recommended. It is never to be open to the public."

K: That's what Ray Scott told me.

D: Yeah. And uh, and only scientific-minded people can go in there, and they go in under strict supervision of guides, or two or three, and they have to walk exactly where we walked.

K: Oh, that's great.

D: In a sixteen-inch path.

K: Well you were really instrumental down there.

D: Because it's one place—It's the one cave in the world that man had never been in.

MRS: One that we know.

D: Well, nobody's been able to dispute it. Uh, that—You see those boots in that picture over there? That was my friend's piece in my report on that New Discovery. And the word is under that, "Man walks on untrodded Earth and carries light to a realm which has been forever dark." Now that's hard to find.

26:25 K: Well, let's see. Um, did you come into contact with the Civilian Conservation Corps very much while you were working? They were working at the same time you were there.

D: They were working at the same time I was there. I basically had, well, knowledge that they were there, and they were working on trails in there. And I'd see them work.

MRS: They were under the jurisdiction of the Army. And he was with the National Park Service. So they had very little //

D: There was no overlapping of //

MRS: He worked with the architect, and that architect was Tommy Nelson. And he designed all the structures above ground. Tommy Nelson, and he worked with the chief manager, that was Fred Benowese. I don't know if you've heard of him or not. And um, the superintendent at that time was Mr. Hoskins.

D: Taylor Hoskins.

MRS: Taylor Hoskins, yes. And uh, I can't think of the other people.

D: No.

MRS: We knew Tommy.

D: Yeah, do you want to click that again?

K: Okay.

[cut in recording]

27:40 K: So after your work with Mammoth Cave, uh, when were you completed with your work at Mammoth Cave? When did you finish that?

D: Uh, really, never.

K: Never?

D: Uh, until—Well, I haven't done anything very recent over there. I suppose that the last real project I did was write the report on the New Discovery and whatnot. And uh, the—'Course I don't, when I go down there now, I don't do much caving, because I do have an artificial hip now. And uh, that doesn't do well with a lot of walking and whatnot. But 'course then, my work went to just the other areas. I was the only geologist that had a broad assignment. And uh, as I say, my travel order read "continental United States, and island possessions." They were just writing too many travel orders. And of course having a car that really wasn't assigned to a fool, there was a question when I was at headquarters what to do with it. Where do you put it? So they conceived the idea that, well, there's plenty of room over in the White House garage. Why don't you take it in there? But I think today how, how impossible that would be with the security.

K: Oh yeah, you couldn't get anywhere near.

D: I'd just drive in there and wave to the guards and take it down there. And I'd have my car sitting down there beside the limousines. And we'd kid each other about them washing up my car for me and whatnot.

[cut in recording]

30:00 K: This is the second side of my tape with Mr. Donald Hazellett. Yeah, as you were saying, times have changed.

D: 'Course, rather an interesting offshoot there, when Oak Ridge was being conceived as a research site for developing the atomic bomb, I was assigned—there were no buildings out there then. And they gave me an office in TVA personnel office, and I was assigned to hire—recruit and hire—engineers to do that work. And I had signature authorization. Not on the top engineers, but an engineer that would drawing two or three thousand dollars a year. That was a pretty good salary for a young engineer coming out of college at that time. And I hired hundreds of those before we got Oak Ridge going and they had a personnel office of their own. And then with the war coming on there, although we as the United States were not in it, we were involved in sending aircraft to England. They were all created and sent on commercial ships and whatnot.

At that time the Corps of Engineers were having the problem of getting water for their Caribbean bases, which was even thinking far enough ahead, that we might have to carry out this African invasion. That's the reason we were going that way. I remember. Of course, even loaned to the Corps of Engineers, they were supposed to furnish me transportation from wherever I was between Puerto Rico and Trinidad. And there was a plane that came out of Puerto Rico in the morning and went to Trinidad, came back. Historically the largest airplane we had at that time was the B-24. That looks like a little one at the present time. But, they were training pilots on those B-24s on the island of St. Croix. And we used to take our—we had the right to go out to the mess hall to eat, living there on the, the island. So the captain knew my—He says, "Well why don't you just arrange your schedule and not make it known just where you're going that day, and after the plane's gone, why, you read your schedule to go the other way. And we have to fly these planes, so we'll go wherever you want to go." So that was my schedule. I had to maybe tell him the day before. We'd go the opposite direction. And there I was, just a civilian, riding a B-24. Now really, that created quite a stir when we'd go into the international airport at Puerto Rico, and just little ol' me get out and walk out. And that plane would wait on me. But if I stayed all night, and I remember one night I stayed all night there in the hotel at Puerto Rico. But the personnel on the B-24 couldn't stay there. They went to the—there was an air base on the west end of Puerto Rico. So in the early morning airs, I heard some commotion down in the harbor there, and I looked out and our fleet was going on silence, ah no, on radar. And they were signaling with lights. And they all went out duck fashion. So then when the plane came in to pick me up at the airport, why, the captain said, "Where'd the fleet go? We heard it went out." I said, "Well I was gonna ask you where it went." I said, "They took off about three o'clock in the morning and went, they went to the northeast." 'Course, you'd always have to be just a little bare as to how you say things. I said, "What's your schedule?" And, "Well, it's your schedule. We're flying you." I said, "Well,"—I couldn't just say, "Let's go hunt the fleet." I said, "I believe there's some islands off to the northeast I'd like to look at." So we took off and I was laying down on the mat in the front gunner's bow on the B-24, and the captain called down to me on his speaker. He says, "You can see them ahead?" And I said, "No, I can't." He said, "We'll soon be where you can." And there was our fleet. So then we had to identify ourselves, so we, the captain radioed the commander of the fleet, who we were, and he says, "Well come on over." And uh, so we flew over there. Here was a German submarine trying to get in position to sink that merchant ship that was loaded with airplanes.

K: Wow.

D: And our fleet was duck fashioning around the commercial to keep the submarine away. To keep—so it couldn't. Now whatever happened, I can never confirm. But it was published in the paper that there was an oil slick.

K: Wow, you've had some adventures!

D: So that was fun. We got to fly right down over the ships. The B-24. That was right nice.

37:57 K: What did you do during World War II?

D: Uh, kept on working with the—

K: Still?

D: On those special assignments, you know.

K: Have you traveled all over United States then?

D: Oh yes.

[cut in recording]

38:32 D: But we had a rather unique arrangement. With an arrangement like I had, I had permission that my wife could go with me on any trip. She could ride in a government vehicle anytime, and we could stay wherever we wanted to. That was rather unique, and a lot of them were envious of that, that sort of thing. I have a fireplace in there that has rocks from all over the United States.

K: I see that. That's the second one of those I've seen in the last weeks, and those are the only two I've ever seen in my life. What's your favorite place that you've been?

D: Home.

ALL: [laughs]

K: Well what's your favorite job that you've done?

D: Well, that would really be hard to say. I suppose I'm a little unique in that respect. I have enjoyed all the jobs I've done. 'Course they would get monotonous after a fashion, but I suppose the challenge is just to—Well, you just take that little instance there in Puerto Rico. That was a rather satisfying experience in just being about to pull out of a hat something concrete. Make a solution //

[cut in recording]

40:49 D: // use that as a temporary headquarters and work out of that.

K: So how long did you work for the government doing these different projects all over the country and so forth?

D: Ooh, that'd be hard to figure out.

[cut in recording]

41:08 K: What did you do after you—

D: Uh, came back to the farm here, and basically, because our son needed to get in school. And then I taught school over at our local school district. I hadn't been here too long until they came to ask me if I would, and I said, "Well, I've set up to farm here. I was gonna do some farming." Well they thought I'd be more valuable teaching school, so I taught school until retirement age.

K: What level did you teach?

D: Industrial arts.

K: Industrial arts. A high school?

D: Yes. Oh yeah.

K: Huh. That's interesting after all the geology. Were you able to bring in some of your experiences?

D: Well, I suppose, I suppose some of them would say I brought them in too much, in that I was able to build in the shop equipment where I could saw rocks, and my students could saw rocks and make bookends and paperweights, and things like that, and take them home. But I was always picking up, trying to get by on the equipment I had. I would raise some broom corn here, and the kids in the junior high could make brooms and sew them for their families. So I enjoyed it very much. I suppose now over there on the t.v., those bookends are made from petrified wood from the petrified forest. And uh—

43:33 K: You've had quite a few opportunities. You say you've been back to Mammoth Cave several times since //

D: Oh yes.

K: // you stopped work there. What do you think of the park and the cave now?

D: Well it, uh, of course, it's grand. I'm glad it went the way it did.

[cut in recording]

44:11 D: And uh, I had on my VCR, the pictures of the old guides winding the torches. Have you ever seen any of that?

K: Uh-huh.

D: You've seen that. It was a great experience. And uh, I don't, I would say that I can think of no other way that we could've got the cooperation of all the guides and local people in doing it any other way than we did. Just going in and being adopted, so to speak. And taking it. Picking tobacco worms.

K: That's a really interesting story. Well I'll go ahead and turn this off now.

D: Okay.

[CONCLUSION OF INTERVIEW]