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Interview with David Spence (FA 1098)

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**Kentucky Folklife Program
Interview Transcription**

Project name: Ranger Lore (LOCRP)
Field ID and name: #0005; David Spence interview
Interviewee: David Spence
Interviewer/Recordist: Brent Björkman
Date: 12/3/2013
Location: Mammoth Cave National Park, KY
Others Present: N/A
Equipment used: EOS 70D DSLR Camera
Microphone: Rode, VideoMic Pro Compact Shotgun Microphone
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Context:

Technical Considerations: Audio file was created from the compiled video files for the purpose of transcription

Transcription prepared by: Jennie Boyd

Transcribing Conventions:

Use of square brackets [] indicates a note from the transcriber.
Use of parentheses () indicates a conversational aside.
Use of em dash — indicates an interruption of thought or conversation.
Use of ellipses ... indicates a discontinued thought.
Use of quotations “ ” indicates dialogue within conversation.
Use of italics indicates emphasis.
Use of underline indicates movie, magazine, newspaper, or book titles.
Names of interviewee and interviewer are abbreviated by first and last initial letters.
Time is recorded in time elapsed by the convention [hours:minutes:seconds].

Note: This transcription is as accurate and complete as possible. In any question of interpretation, the researcher is referred to the recording itself as the primary document representing this event.

[time elapsed in hours:minutes:seconds]

[00:00:00]

BRENT BJÖRKMAN: Okay, to-, today is December 3, 2013. This is Brent Björkman, the, the director of the Kentucky Folklife Program. And I'm in the process of doing some interviews for the Library of Congress for the occupational folklife project, part of the Archie Green Fellowship. And we're here at, working at Mammoth Cave, talking to some of the park rangers. We're, we're really about the working lives of park rangers, talking to many different folks in different places in their careers. I'll be going off-site, away from Mammoth Cave in the weeks to come talking to retired folks, be traveling to some other parks, federally related parks in Kentucky as well. But Mammoth Cave is a place that is near my home and have a lot of great folks here. And I'm here today with David Spence. David is going to tell us a little bit about his connection to his job and, maybe David, we could just start off by talking about, you know, where, where you, where you're from and maybe how you got interested. Is it, has it been a childhood memory thing that first started traveling to parks or how did you get connected to this job?

DAVID SPENCE: No, I grew up in the area and my earliest recollection of Mammoth Cave was my mom brought me here when I was about seven. And of course, when you live in this area, going to school you go on school trips, so I never thought I'd ever be a park ranger, but I thought it would be a cool job. And how I got associated, years later, after I got out of the Navy, I started at the university at Western in the anthropology program. And I would volunteer up here. I would come up and volunteer and assist the archaeologist who was not here at Mammoth Cave but at Big South Fork. His name was Tom Lejeune. So I'd help him do some surface surveys here in the park, over on the north side and on the south side and I also assisted Dr. G-, George Carruthers. At that time he was finishing up his doctorate at the, Wash U. in St. Louis. And my first project that I ever did inside a cave was with Dr. Carruthers, and that was doing surveys along Audubon Avenue in the Rotunda for the paving stones. And then later on that led into me getting hired on as assistant archaeology in the Earthwatch program. The Earthwatch program involved a cultural inventory of a three mile stretch of cave, main cave from basically Chief City to the entrance, and this entailed volunteer work from, for people who want to do this type of work. This was kind of a public archaeological program. And Earthwatch is an organization that supplies the

volunteers and George, myself, and some other folks were the mentors. And so for six years that, I was on the last six years—it was a project that lasted over ten years. I started, I think in '99 and that's how I got my foot in the door at Mammoth Cave. Of course that's not a full time job, so I thought it'd be neat to be a guide here part-time. And some of the, my student comrades had also worked, and they kept telling me, you need to work here as a guide. So I applied online one year, didn't get it. And then I, the next year, I, I submitted an application, brought it in in person, and I got hired on as a seasonal in 2003.

BB: Okay.

DS: And then worked that season. It was early, I think I was here in February of 2003 and worked that season which was, it was, that was, it was an awesome season. And then that, that winter they came out with four permanent positions and I applied, and they actually hired six, and I was one of the six that was hired, so that's how I got here as a guide at Mammoth Cave. And I—

BB: So— So at first it was, it was temporary, people had been telling you, seasonal—

DS: It, seasonal. Right, now I'm kind of a, a rare bird. I was only a seasonal less than a season, six months. There's been people here for years that have tried to get a permanent position. And I think my experience with the Earthwatch and archaeological resources at Mammoth Cave really helped me get one of those positions.

BB: Yeah, yeah. What was your, do you recall your first day when you, when you, you know, when you started that season, that first seasonal work?

Is that—[0:05:05]

DS: Yeah, I remember showing up, I met Kathy Proffitt, she's the daily operations supervisor. And I was in civilian clothes, I didn't have a uniform yet. I trailed. I trailed some tours. And I think I, I actually trailed a tour by myself. I mean, there was another ranger, but

it was in the wintertime. It was slow. And I did that before I was actually officially trained. And then we had our training with, where I the, the new, the other new seasonals. There was, I think six in the class, or in that group. And there was a couple that were volunteers, and there was one fellow, Ronnie Doyle who had, was a guide in the early '70s but had come back years later after he retired from his school teaching. So my first day, I remember it was, they threw me in the mix and threw me in the cave and that's, that's how things work here, you know. It's got more of a, on-the-job training.

BB: Yeah.

DS: But it was, it was exciting. Still is.

BB: Yeah. You had some first mentors? Or, I mean, I, I, what I mean—

DS: First mentors...of course all the, the like Joe Duvall, Bobby Steenbergen, Chuck DuCroix. I was paired with Chuck a lot. Chuck actually would let me, you know, I was still in that process of learning to guide, I was with Chuck a lot. And he would actually let me do a presentation in the cave. And I would do something archaeological, talk about the Earthwatch program or the archaeological resources or prehistoric. And that really helped me, you know, as we say, jump up on the rock and start doing a program.

BB: So can you tell me more about the Earthwatch program? You said it's, it was something in place for about ten years. Was it, was Carruthers, was he—

DS: Carruthers wasn't the first. I can't think. It was a lady. And I guess once she got her graduate program, doctorate, whatever, finished, George took over.

BB: Was it a federal—

DS: It's federal, yeah, it—now, Earthwatch program's actually a nonprofit organization and they partnered, the National Parks Service partnered with Earthwatch to do this, to get this, basically, we're mandated by laws, there's some laws that passed about having inventories of resource-, cultural invent-, inventories of resources. And a lot of what we have at Mammoth Cave is actually still in the cave. When we find artifacts, we leave them in the cave. They have been there for thousands of years. So they wanted to see, they wanted to do this, the three mile stretch, main cave, historic route, Broadway, to actually see what was still there. See what, because there's been a lot of impact in the last couple hundred years, the saltpeter works and tours and anything else. So they partnered with Earthwatch and they provided the volunteers. Basically these are people that would, were going on vacation and they wanted to do something different. They would say, "Okay, I want to go on an expedition somewhere." And they would go to Earthwatch webpage, "Oh, Mammoth Cave. Let's go to Mammoth Cave." And so they would come. And we provided them with a place to stay at the research station, and I think one year we stayed at Hamilton Valley. And basically it was for ten days. We'd go in the cave. We went late in the evening so we wouldn't impact on tours. And we'd stay down there for about six or seven hours, come out about nine or ten o'clock. Usually there was about ten volunteers. We'd break them up. We'd have the discovery team. And then we had a mapping team. And we had a photographic team. The mapping team, or the discovery team, their job was to crawl around in the breakdown, look for artifacts, flag them, we had flags and if, if you've ever been to Mammoth Cave during Earthwatch, there would be flags all over the place where artifacts had been found. And then we had these cards and they would describe, measure, detail everything, document as much as they could. And we had codes. We had prehistoric codes and we had historic codes. And anything that was after 1700 would be historical. Anything that was, that was prehistoric. And then we had subcodes for different things. You know, so they would, they did all that and they would just move along, finding stuff. And sometimes a flag might have five or six cards. We did signatures. And we had flags stuck to the wall all over the place. And we did a section. We didn't do, like, we'd do a section, to keep it systematic. And then the mapping team would come in. And we would map everything. We had a theodolite to laser transit [0:10:00] and I did a lot of that. I assisted

with the volunteers with that quite a bit. And we had one person out on the stick, the stadium, and this was all mapped electronically. We could download it to a computer and see where things were. And then we had the photographic team. And the pho-, the photographer was Chuck Sutherland. He was the project photographer and he would get some volunteers and go through all his indoctrination on what they were going to do. They didn't photograph everything, only photograph unique and best representative type artifacts. So that's what we did. And then the park was really good, you know, they'd have a day off, providing cave trips. I mean, the food was good, the stay was good and I mean, they got to see stuff that the normal tours wouldn't get to see. And I've talked to some of those people that had been on numerous other Earthwatch projects all over the world, Africa, and they said, by far the Mammoth Cave one was the cheapest but was probably the best experience, that, th-, they experienced from other places.

BB: What an interesting way for you to get a, I mean, I know you came here as a child []—

DS: Right.

BB: But what an interesting way for you to, you know, I don't know, maybe subconsciously kind of feeling this place out. Is, is this a place I like, you know?

DS: Well, I'll tell you what, my first day in the cave on Earthwatch, I, you know, I wasn't familiar with the cave too much. We had left some flags, we left our flags outside. So I had to walk out of the cave to get the flags. I, we're a mile in the cave. So I had, you know, being the low guy on the totem pole, I had to go get the flags. So I'm walking through the cave all by myself, got the cave to myself, no lights on, just got my helmet and my headlamp. And I'm walking through the cave and I'm just walking around. I said, "Wow. I got to stay here." This, this was a, it was neat.

BB: Wow.

DS: It was like the cave was talking to me as I was walking out of the cave.

BB: I was thinking about those Earthwatch volunteers and just your own sensibilities as a person and, you know, whether you have these aspirations to be a teacher, I mean, you certainly, you did it for six years, so, does that transfer into your current job as somebody who sees these people for certainly not a week or two at a time, but for a couple of hours at a time and, you know, did you see, did you see the volunteers as visitors in a, in a sense and, and did that help you maybe grow into what you've become?

DS: Well, I, maybe, in some way, but they were, they were the grunts. You know, they were, you know—

BB: And they knew it, I mean.

DS: They knew it. But also, it, they were also visitors. It was a learning experience for them too. And, you know, being in the cave, being local and growing up in the area, you know, you're always telling them other things related to the cave. So it, it was, I guess you could say it was volunteer/visitor. I mean they're, they're, we did take them on other tours. We took them on crawling tours, everyday a ranger would come over and do a, like a presentation, a slide show presentation with them. So, yeah, they were visitors too.

BB: Um-hm. Um-hm.

DS: And I, I would like to say that I was still on Earthwatch when I, when I got hired on, so I would do a full eight hour day, guiding, and as soon as I was done, I'd jump in my coveralls and back in the cave for another eight hours in the cave. And I did that for, until the last year when we did our last artifacts in the Rotunda in 2004 or '05. I think we had over 13,000 data points and no telling how many man hours. Tens of thousands of man hours.

BB: Yeah.

DS: So it was, it was a good pro-program.

BB: So it was nice. I mean, that program was phasing out and it was the perfect time for you to—

DS: Right.

BB: To be here.

DS: It was great to see it done, but I was kind of sad to see it go when it was time to move on. But there have been other little projects that have splintered off. I mean, that data's still there, and it's there for researchers and it's there for the park to go back and see how artifacts are, are being impacted or if things have moved around and we can go back and check on things. So—

BB: It's good to feel a part of that, I mean.

DS: Yes. Yeah. That's, that was major.

BB: You know, as I'm starting this project and one of the, one of the reasons I do it is because I want to learn about all the connective and what does it mean to be a park ranger. You know, I'm learning about there's the interpretive—

DS: Right.

BB: And then there's the law enforcement and that sort of thing. And, and everybody brings a specialty of some sort to it. [0:15:01] And can you tell me about how you work with these, this great group of people, that, that you bring your own sensibilities to it and maybe how you've added to a particular—

DS: Well, I try to, with the, my background with the archaeological resources, and one of the things I've really pushed here is resource protection. How do we protect the cave? It's not just the guides' or the interpreter or the rangers' job, it's, and his partners, but it's everybody's job, the, the visitor. Why is it important to protect this? You know, there's laws involved. You know, there's a, there's enabling legislation, you know, 1916 Organic Act, protect, preserve, conserve, leave the, the scenery unimpaired and for future generations to enjoy. So that's one thing that I guess that I've tried here, my little niche is more the prehistoric, especially on the lantern, the Violet City Lantern Tour, is a, there is a, you know, tell that prehistoric story, but why is it important to protect this? Why don't we, you know, there are bodies in the cave, you know, there's, there's got to be this respect and also Civil War, I've kind of, that's another little niche. And that comes right from Earthwatch. One of the artifacts that I found was a, was a board and on the backside of the board, there was a flag drawn on it and 'William Garvin.' Will Garvin was a guy, he was a slave. He was also a soldier. And at that point I didn't know who the guy was. So I started doing some research and find out he was a slave and then he's also a soldier during the Civil War.

BB: Wow.

DS: And I've always had an interest in the Civil War, but, the, the Civil War story at Mammoth Cave wasn't being told. I mean it was there. And so, I guess that's my other thing that I've given is tell that story, the Civil War story here at Mammoth Cave. The soldiers have come. You know, it's, they have a story to tell. It's not just battles and such. It's also, you know, there's other, there's other things than marching. There's we can go and see Mammoth Cave. Business as usual here. Let's have some fun, you know. So, I, I, that's, that's something I've really put, have done here. I've done, I've helped put together binders, I've collected letters and first hand accounts. I've done first person living history dress up type interpretation here. So it's been fun, doing that and telling that story.

BB: So your life as a guide is also, they let you, let you stretch your wings and you go after the things that, that interest you. Where do you do this, where would you do this research?

DS: Well before I was at [], I, I work at the Kentucky Library, the special collections at Mam-, at, in Bowling Green at Western Kentucky University. And this, you know, I guess, I guess I cut my own, my research with, you know, this was before the Internet. You know, you had to actually look at documents or if there was microfilm or you had to maybe do interlibrary loan and get something. And so I spent a lot of time in the library up there. They have an incredible collection. Or I'd have to go to other facilities like up in Louisville, or to the Filson, the state archives, which is another great facility, the Kentucky Historical Society, or even going out of state to public, like courthouses and things like that. The Internet has really made access to, especially firsthand accounts and letters more accessible, where archives and manuscripts are putting that stuff online. And also where people that have this in their own family collection, it's getting on the Internet. So this is what I pulled from to tell that story of the soldiers.

BB: Did you do that on your off time or is it—

DS: I, I do it on, I do a lot on my off time, but I also do a lot here at Mammoth Cave when I got time. If I run across a new signature in the cave or, a, a really neat story, we got a letter, this was a couple years ago, it was actually last winter. We got a letter from a fellow and he had a letter that, it was his wife's granddad. And he was a soldier from, from Illinois. He had written a letter to his wife. And one of the towns, the town that he was at was Munfordville. Well he misspelled it. He didn't know what Munfordville was, he didn't know what Mammoth Cave was. [0:20:00] He said, "What is Mammoth Cave?" Well, well we wrote a letter back and told him. And this guy had been up to Munfordville, this was, he was a Union soldier, and he was describing slaves being sold at that time. This was, that was still legal. He's describing the cave. You know, he's excited about describing the cave. So we write a letter back to this guy saying, "Well this is, yeah, he was here." And at the Kentucky Library, they have the hotel registry for that time frame. I was able to photograph this

man's name in the hotel registry and send it back to him and his wife. So it's, it's neat things like that.

BB: Wow. Yeah, your specialty, I mean, it just adds to everything.

DS: Yeah. You, you, you take it a step further, try to make that connection. One of the first ones I ever tried to research was, I had a lady whose grandfather or great-grandfather was from a Louisiana regiment. And in her family history, he said he came to Mammoth Cave and wrote his name somewhere in the cave. I've never found it, but I don't, I don't doubt that he was ever here.

BB: Wow.

DS: There's a lot of stories out there.

BB: Yeah.

DS: As I tell people, even today, you know, every name on that wall in the cave tells a, there's a story involved.

BB: Tell me about the different, I haven't really talked to too many people and I, if you can encapsulate, we've been talking about different cave tours, the historic cave tour—

DS: Right.

BB: Can you tell me about, and you mentioned one that maybe lent itself to more a Civil War or maybe it was more to an archaeological one where you were able to have more touchstones?

DS: Right. The, the historic tour is to me the classic Mammoth Cave tour. That's Fat Man's Misery, that's the big cave, that's the John Houchin's bear story, Rotunda, the saltpeter works, the different levels, Mammoth Dome. There's a basic story involved with that trip, but every guide can adjust it to his liking or what the visitor—they may ask a question and, bam, you'll just take off from there. So the historic tour, I, I just talk historic. I might throw a little geology in here and there, but it's historic, you know, and, and I might do a basic, you know, I'll talk, I can talk about saltpeter and it's importance at Mammoth Cave, and, but I might talk more something related to the Civil War, you know. I'll talk, okay, guided tour-, tours begin in 1816, tourism. Well let's talk about the Civil War era, you know, the soldiers' experience through the cave. Violet City Lantern tour, that's a three hour trip. I really delve into the prehistoric once we get out of the main cave and beyond Giant's Coffin and that part of the cave, the archaeological record in that part of the cave is incredible. I mean, there's, you walk through and if you look there's stuff laying everywhere, and that's part of the cave that I spent a lot of time in. I, It's like going home. And so I, I really talk up the prehistoric peoples, trying to paint their life thousands of years ago, why did they come to the cave. We don't know why they came here, but we can maybe guess why. Maybe it's the same reason why we're in there. Who knows? So going in different parts of the cave, at, the cave seems to have its own personality. Different tours have that, that, that different personality. You know, I wouldn't talk a lot of history on a new interest tour, that's more of a geology tour. That history, you know, in the last eighty years it's there, but it's more of a geology tour, I guess you could say. So every tour has, you, we're supposed to have outlines but we customize, you know, we, every tour, it's custom. That's what's great about working here. We don't, they don't give you a script, say, "Here. Regurgitate this back to the visitor." You know, we have our, we have a basic outline of what we could talk about, but then we can just, just, it's like a tree, you know, there's branches. Just, just, you can talk about whatever, whatever is, you know, interesting to you or, or like I said, a visitor might ask a question. There's a book out on Stephen Bishop, it's a children's book, and sometimes, we'll be, I'll get school groups, and I'll ask, "What are you guys studying?" And it's all, "Well, we're reading this book about Stephen Bishop." And they're on a historic tour, so I'll custom that, that whole tour on that book. I'll stop in places where that book is, places in the book, there

that are mentioned in the book and say, "Stephen was here." You know so they can connect the bo-, with the book. And this was a real guy in a real place.

BB: Yeah. [0:24:56] How about some stories, funny or interesting stories about maybe there's something that, sharing some visitor's "A-ha!" moment or something that you remember or, or just something comical or maybe even scary that happened that turned out.

DS: Well, we got a lot of potty stories.

BB: Oh.

DS: There's always that going to happen.

BB: The people can't wait.

DS: They can't wait. They got to go. There's an accident. There's a lot of those. But I, I don't want to make fun of any visitor because that happens. It happens. And I tell them, I say, "It happens." Probably the one that I remember most, where you really, you really leave something meaningful with the visitor, I had a lady get off the bus and she came up and hugged me. I can just see her eyes, twinkles, tears, she was moved. I was, I was like, "Wow. I did my job." That's what I wanted. You know, I'm not, I'm not out there to be [], but everything clicked and she, she came away with something. She was, she got her experience, Mammoth Cave, experience.

BB: That's, that's—

DS: That's my job. That's what I'm trying to do.

BB: Yeah.

DS: And I love that. I, I love when you walk away and people are just smiling and it's like wow, I've just, just walked through Mammoth Cave and I'm the guide. I've got to take you down there and show you this place and try to say something that's meaningful for everybody. You know, there's only so much time and, that you can do in this, but you're, you got to connect with everybody. Even, it don't matter if they're four or eighty years old.

BB: It's a challenge.

DS: It is. So that, that one time that lady, she jumped, she came off the bus and she came up and gave me a hug and it, that was, that was good. And there was another time, I had this, sometimes you get kids that are, you, they're just, they're in with it. They're all about science and the history and they're really paying attention. And I had this kid, he was up front with me. He was always asking questions and he, I mean he, you know, this guy's a future park ranger, you can just tell. And we get out of the cave and he's on the bus, and I can see him watching me. And there's a guy smoking. Sometimes people just before we get on the bus, they'll light one up. And this guy's smoke, was smoking. And I said, "Okay, we got to, we got to go." So he throws the cigarette down. I, I, you know, it's just natural to do that I guess, but you know, we're at a national park. You can cause a forest fire. And this kid is watching this. "What's Ranger Dave going to do?" And I said, "Sir, only you can prevent a forest fire." And the guy looked at me and said, "Yeah, I think you're right." So he picks it up and puts it in his pocket. And I looked back at the kid and he gives me high, you know, the thumbs up. You know, so that made me feel good. The kid, he saw that we do, we do care about the place.

BB: Yeah. You see, have you seen many changes? You know I spoke with someone else about anything from different equipment over the, the time to the—

DS: The lights have definitely changed. You know, when I first came as a child, the place was lit up like a football stadium. You could see everything. It had different types of lights.

And I was the monitoring archaeologist for the, for the lighting project. I was on furlough. At that time I was, I had a furlough. So on my furlough in the winter time, I was with the electricians in the cave, rewiring the cave and putting in the new lights, and that transition from our old lighting system to the new, I, it was, it was a major difference. It wasn't as bright. And people that come, had come in the past, they'll say, "There's something different about this place." I says, "Is it darker?" They say, "Yes." So I think that's probably one of the big things that has changed since I've been here: the lighting. The trails, they're, yeah, this, this is always a work in progress. I was on, one of the first things I did in the cave was a survey for trail improvement, and that's the paving stones.

BB: Yeah, tell me more about that, I, you mentioned that before.

DS: The paving stones, they have a, a toll board and basically that's to cut down on the dust and catch the clothes, the lint off the clothes. Keep that stuff contained to the trail because if you walk through the cave, you can see, I mean, there's a dust problem in parts of the cave, especially where the trail's really dirty, where we're still walking on dirt trails. So that's, that's effects, we're always trying to minimize our impact, so sometimes we have to build something to minimize our impact. So, right below the, the, the historical CCC trail, we did a trip through that trail, [0:30:00] underneath that, the, that archaeological record is still intact. It's still there. So that trail is almost like a cap, protecting that. So, the, they didn't have to chip up or break up the old trail, they just put the paving stones right on top of that. And basically our job was to see what type of archaeological stuff was below there. There's not going to be any impact because the, the, that trail, actually the paving stone's protecting the old trail. So that's, that was the purpose behind the, the paving stones. One of the things I like to, you know, like I said, it's a work in progress. And eventually they're going to have most of the cave trails like that. When we come out of Little Back there on the historic, we're gathering up, I'm waiting for everybody to come out of Mammoth Dome. And I'm, I'm just, just asking questions or people got questions and just conversing with the crowd. And I'll ask them, I'll say, well, I'll tell them about the paving stones and what their purpose is. And I say, I'll ask them, well how do you, I'll say, "Hey, we're going to have the whole story

around the paving stones. How many paving stones do you think it's going to take to finish that?" And I'll get all these crazy answers, millions, two millions, nah, a billion, nah. And they finally I'll say, "It only is going to take one to finish it. The last one." (laughs) So—

BB: So the humor that—

DS: Yeah, you got to throw a little humor in. I try not to do humor too much. You know, it's a serious place, but you know, I'll do, sometimes you need the humor to break the, the ice. Sometimes people are so scared going in the cave, they're frightened. And you want to put them at ease, so you throw a little humor in.

BB: Are you able to see that?

DS: Oh yeah. Yeah I can see, you know, one of the first things you do is you scare the hell out of them. You tell them, you tell them what they got themselves into. You do they old, we got this white card, safety card, and there's this one part where we want you to consider your own limitations. We, I do an abstract, a short thing of what you're going to do on the tour and I want you to consider negotiating stairs, tight spots, going up in elevation, down in elevation, being in the cave, heights, and then health issues, heart, respiratory, circulatory, joint replacements, pacemakers, because if you have any problems in the cave, it's going to take a long time to get you out. And so, and that's, that's watered down. That's watered down. So you know, some people, the first time I ever heard Joe Duvall do his talk, I thought—and I'm his trailer—I was like, "Do I need to be going on this tour?" Because he'll scare, you know. Joe's actually, he has lawsuits involving on a cave tour, so—

BB: But it is a serious thing.

DS: It is a serious thing. And we've, and I'll tell you, I have seen everything in the cave. There's nothing I have not seen related to health. I've seen hurt ankles—

BB: Respiratory.

DS: Respiratory, heart problems, people going into labor. That's happened once. Luckily no baby came out of the cave extra. For the most part, people listen to your advice. Yeah, there's, there's people that are going to have health issues they don't know about. That's going to happen. And you got the, the ones, the few that don't listen to good wisdom. We can't tell them not to go in a cave or not to go on the cave tour. I can advise you and hopefully they, they take that advice.

BB: Where's the future in the, I mean, what's the evolution? It seems like people are being more mindful of both tangible and intangible kinds of things. Are you trying to get those things across?

DS: Yeah. Protecting the cave, protecting yourself, that was something I had to struggle with when I first started working here was, you know, this idea of interpretation and, and working in universal concepts, that you had tangibles and intangibles. And working those in, you know. There's all kinds of tangibles, but throw in some intangibles, concepts, you know, fear in the cave, excitement, these can be universal concepts. Death, the unknown. So I think we do a pretty good job of working those in. I try to be passionate. If you're not passion-, to me that's, I've found that you've got to be passionate, you know, you don't want to be dry. "Well, this is a cave. A hundred and forty feet underground." "Welcome to the Rotunda," you know. "This ain't even the bigger room!" You know, you got to get them excited. [0:35:00] And they are excited. But you just pull them in more.

BB: How about bigger groups or smaller groups? Can you tell me a little bit about interactions?

DS: Larger groups, they're, you don't interact unless you're stopped and you're waiting for everybody to catch up. But you can't interact as much. You interact before and after the tour, maybe a little bit while, you know, you ask some questions. Not as much as if you had

a smaller group. And I'll tell people, "You better ask questions because I will talk you, I will talk for three hours." And I can do it too. I just, earlier I had a tour of Historic, I had six people. And I, so I was able to show them some things that I don't normally show people because you, you just can't with a hundred and twenty people. You know, you got to be in and out of the cave in a certain time, but with a smaller group, you're able to share more of the cave, tell them more of the story of the cave, spend a little bit more time. It's quiet. You know, one of the things I commented, it was so nice walking through main cave, it was so quiet. It was like that first time I walked through it by myself. They got to experience that also. So it's, it's nice to have a small group, but it's good, it's good to have the larger groups too. It, I, you know, it flip-flops, I guess. I like small groups because I like to gab.

BB: When you have a large group, or a small group, do you always have somebody trail? Or if it's small enough, can you do it yourself?

DS: No. Our policy here, if it's twenty-five and less, it doesn't trail, unless there's someone on the tour you feel might be a problem with a health issue or maybe a parent's got too many little ones. Then we'll have another ranger. But that's the policy. If it's above twenty-six, then there's another ranger.

BB: What would you give, what kind of advice would you give to somebody who's starting off and you, they think, like, they look like they're, they could be really good and, you know, how would you help to mentor them, whether they implicitly ask you for, for advice or—

DS: Well, the first thing I always tell them is don't worry about your story. That will come. Work on your timing. Know, you know, learn the cave, the timing. That's, I, I, that's, that's very important because if you're not, if you're late getting out of the cave that means your partner is going to be late getting out of the cave. He might not like that. And then, if it's, like the summer, you've got other tours coming behind you. So I always, it's important to have your, your program, but it's also important about that timing. And I, probably the biggest thing is, is don't try to tell everything that you've learned because—one of the

things, and I, and I did it too, is you're so excited about doing your job, you're, you're finally up on the rock and you're wanting to do, do the Mammoth Cave guide thing is you'll try to tell them everything that you possibly know, and you can't do that. I mean, break it up. You can use, break everything up, just, you don't have to tell them everything. You can tell, you can have one concept of the cave and break it up into little stops. Or instead of, you can, I've seen new people, and I've done it too, do an entire tour on one stop. And then you ain't, now what are you going to do? So that, that's probably my big, you know, it's important, your timing and try, you know, do your own thing, you know. We pair up new, new, new guides with seasoned guides. Like I said earlier, it was, it's on-the-job training and you're picking up things. But you can't do their tour, you got to do your own.

BB: Is there anything else that you can think of that you'd like to get across to me, to get across for the, for the record? It's, it's been a great interview so far.

DS: Some people ask me if I like my job, and I say, "No," I say, "I love my job." It's a great job. It's not, nothing, it's not boring. When we walk in the cave, we walk in the Rotunda, and I'll, I'll tell people, especially small groups, be a little bit more informal, I'll say, "You know, my earliest recollections of Mammoth Cave is this room. And it's just as fresh as the first time I walked in."

BB: Wow. That's great.

[0:39:54]

[END OF INTERVIEW]