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**Kentucky Folklife Program
Interview Transcription**

Project name: Ranger Lore (LOCRP)

Field ID and name: #0018; Peter Zahrt interview

Interviewee: Peter Zahrt

Interviewer/Recordist: Brent Björkman

Date: 4/17/14

Location: Mammoth Cave National Park, KY

Others Present: N/A

Equipment used: EOS 70D DSLR Camera

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Context:

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

Transcription prepared by: Karen Hogg

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]

BB: Okay. It's, uh, April 17th, 2014. This is Brent Bjorkman with the Kentucky Folklife Program and I'm working on the Ranger Lore, the occupational working lives of park rangers. We're here at Mammoth Cave and we're talking to a, we've been talking to a number of people over the last few months, and today we're, we're talking to law enforcement personnel. And, I'm here with a guest. Would you introduce yourself and, and tell me your position.

PZ: Peter Zahrt, United States park ranger.

BB: Okay, Peter. Um, tell me a little bit about how you even got started in, in doing this kind of work. Is it something from a, way back?

PZ: I got started, um, when I was in high school working for the Indiana State Parks. The guy gave me a job as a security officer and, uh, they kind of groomed me because I lost all my nights and weekends, you know, with my senior year and, uh, I really liked the idea. I never really thought about law enforcement and, but I really liked it. I enjoyed it. I did it for 4 or 5 years during college and decided I wanted to get into law enforcement in a park setting and just one step after another.

BB: So how did that training go after you started there, you know, is it a, is it progression of different kind of training or?

PZ: Mm hmm.

BB: Mm hmm.

PZ: Uh, the cool thing about the Park Service and that's, uh, ironically speaking, uh, you, uh, go to a seasonal academy, seasonal law enforcement academy accredited by the National Park Service. Uh, you pay for it yourself, uh, room, lodging, course, everything. And then, once you get through that, uh, you're not promised a job. You just have a certification that allows you to apply to jobs. And so, uh, you work seasonally for a little bit and then, you get enough experience, you can apply for a permanent job, which I am now. And then, uh, after being permanent for a couple years, they send you to more training and then you're kicked out into the wild.

BB: Is it specialized training or is it just, just advancing in this?

PZ: Which, which training are you talking about?

BB: Yeah. Is it a general training and then you, you go to, you said, you—

PZ: Oh, um, yeah, the, it's basic law enforcement, investigations, firearms, driving, defensive tactics.

BB: Mm hmm.

PZ: Yeah.

BB: Yeah.

PZ: Uh, specialized training comes later, like, uh, use of force instructor, firearms instructor, stuff like that. That comes later.

BB: Mm hmm. So you, after that training, did you stay in Indiana?

PZ: Uh, well, that was with the state parks. Um, I actually went to the seasonal law enforcement academy, the one I was talking about, once I graduated college. And then, um, I couldn't get a job for the winter season, so I was a tractor—. No, wait. What was it? Oh, I cut trees at the state park where I worked. Then, I was a beer salesman. And then, I got a job at Isle Royale National Park as a seasonal law enforcement ranger. So I went up to Michigan.

BB: And that was your first?

PZ: Yeah. That was my first hitch.

BB: Tell me about that. Tell me about Isle Royale. I know that all parks have different flavors. They have different feelings and different concentrations.

PZ: Mm hmm.

BB: Tell me a little bit about that first federal, uh, ranger experience.

PZ: Uh, well I thought I was prepared for anything and I was looking for adventure and it's a six and a half hour boat ride from the Northern Peninsula, or the Upper Peninsula of Michigan to Isle Royale, which is an island in Lake Superior. And, uh, I was on the boat. I was feeling good and then I saw the island come up out of the horizon. I was like, "What the heck did I get into?" So, uh, very remote, um, you would order your groceries a week in advance. They would come by boat. You would have to drive your boat 2 hours to get to the headquarters island, pick up your groceries, go back. You'd turn in your grocery slip for the next week and that's how groceries were, and if you forgot something or left something off the list or they forgot to give it to you, you did without. So, they forgot my beer one week and that was bad. Yeah, but very remote. It was beautiful though. I could go out, um, I worked in the most remote duty station called Mullen Bay. It was kind of in the middle of the island and, um, I think I saw my boss 6 times over the season and, uh, it was very remote. But I could go out, I would get my patrol boat early, about 7:00, and, uh, there was another island next to the island. You know, it's a large island with little islands, you know, all around. It's a huge island. I think it's 40 miles long. And, uh, it was called Wright Island. It was kind of shaped like a 'W.' And, uh, I could come around the, the bend of the island on plane, you know, at full speed, cut the motor and coast in and there was a family of moose that lived there. And, early in the morning, there'd be, uh, 3 mama moose and a couple babies playing in the water early in the morning. It was pretty special.

[00:05:28]

BB: Yeah. Absolutely.

PZ: Pretty neat.

BB: So, you said you were at the remote station. Were there, thinking about your, your comrades, your ranger comrades, how many were out there total and, and did you get to see them much? I know you didn't see your boss.

PZ: Well, there were, uh, I believe it was 2 to a district. And so, I had a district ranger and he had a ranger with him at Windigo, which was the far west side of the island. We were kind of the sub-district of that district, Mullen Bay, so it was me and another guy. Then, there was a chief ranger who was at the headquarters island. It was called Mott Island. And then there were 2 more at, I forget.

BB: Mm hmm.

PZ: And then, uh, 2 more after that. So, what is that? 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 of us?

BB: So you were isolated most of the, you were by yourself most of the time.

PZ: Yeah. I went, I think, 2 weeks without seeing another person. It was kind of weird.

BB: So, what were the duties? You had your patrol boat, but you were just—

PZ: Yeah, we'd get in the boat. Isle Royale is the least visited National Park in the lower 48. So, uh, they had us doing other things like clearing a trail if you came up upon something, clearing out an old fire tower. Um, we cleaned bathrooms, um, and then in between all that, if you contacted somebody, ran across somebody, you know, do a marine safety inspection. Check their permits, stuff like that.

BB: Mmm. That was for long season?

PZ: Mm hmm. That was about all I could take of that. I'm a people person.

BB: Yeah. And then you came here?

PZ: I, uh, let's see, left there. Um, I was still seasonal. Um, once the season ends, there's a few parks that have winter seasonals like The Everglades or some of the southern parks that will hire, uh, temporary, er, seasonal rangers but those are few and far between. So, I was a tractor mechanic for awhile and then I got the job at Mammoth Cave, came down here in 2008, and was down here for about a year and then I got permanent and moved to Cape Hatteras National Sea, Seashore in, uh, North Carolina, another island. I should've learned the first time don't ever live on an island.

BB: Right. But a different type of situation or —

PZ: Yeah. Mm hmm. It was civilized. I mean they had a gas station and, you know, but it was still, it was 23 miles of the coast of North Carolina. The only way to get there was by vehicle ferry. Um, you could go to the next island up, which was Hatteras Island. That was a 40-minute ferry ride. So, it was still isolated.

You know, if the, if the weather was bad and the ferry couldn't run, you're not going anywhere. Or, if the ferry broke down, you're not going anywhere. Major medical emergency, it's a helicopter ride, um, yeah. It's still isolated but a town, you know, I mean.

BB: Right. Were you seeking [indecipherable] or it's just these were the jobs that you just [indecipherable]?

PZ: Yeah, uh, let's see. Barack Obama was coming into office and he was planning to end the war in Iraq and everything like that and was promising, you know, to return everybody home. Well, I'm a non-veteran, so I had to jump on any opportunity that I could. And, uh, I was fortunate enough to get that opportunity.

BB: Mm hmm.

PZ: But, interesting place, Cape Hatteras.

BB: So, you need to build up your CV or your, your, your resume and, and—

PZ: Yeah.

BB: —your working, your working life.

PZ: Yeah. You need to have, uh, before you get hired permanent, you know, they want somebody that's seasoned, that's done the job, everything like that, so, additional training and what, whatever.

BB: Do you have any interesting stories from either Isle Royale or Hatteras that were, or was it all pretty much drudgery?

PZ: Um, let's see. The Isle Royale, I got sent on a fire to the, what was it called, the boundary waters at, um, Superior National Forest. That's up by your neck of the woods. Um, I did 12 days up there, came back to the island. They flew you in, flew you out on seaplane. Um, came back, got a half a day off. We had a fire on the island from a lightning strike. And so, I worked, I think it roughly around 30 straight days, doing all fire stuff, so. It was a long hitch.

[00:10:16]

BB: And that fire training is part of the collective training?

PZ: Mm hmm. Yeah. All park service rangers, yeah, all law enforcement rangers should be red-carded, which is our, uh, certification to fight wild [indecipherable] fire. Uh, I think the scariest thing that happened to me up at Isle Royale was a, a gale was moving in. And, uh, you know, which is, was it 40 plus mile an hour winds, or something like that. Well, Lake Superior is like the worst stretch of water I've

ever seen. It made, you know, the Atlantic Ocean when I was down at Cape Hatteras, I was like, “Pfft. That’s nothing.” And, uh, I had to go tell these hikers, you know, that it was a gale and the ferry wouldn’t be coming so they needed to figure it out. Stay an extra night. You know, I mean, when you’re backpacking, you have each day plotted out. Well, I mean, they’re adding an extra day unexpectedly so I needed to go tell them that. And, uh, I went out in my little boat and, uh, the waves were so high that, um, when I was in the trough, in between the waves, I couldn’t see the top of the next one coming. And I was going around a point which is, you know, a bad idea in the, those conditions and, uh, I was like, “You know what? It’s too unsafe. Turn around.” So I started to turn around. A wave hit the side of the boat and almost swamped the boat. That was pretty hairy. You know, the water is 40-some degrees so if you’re thrown overboard, you’d have 10, 15 minutes before hypothermia would set in. So, I was probably three quarters of a mile off the coast of the island, so.

BB: And you returned to that particular—

PZ: Oh yeah. I turned around, uh, pushed throttle all the way forward and was bailing out as much as I could with the [indecipherable] was running. Just had my fingers crossed I was gonna make it back to the channel in one piece.

BB: Wow.

PZ: It was pretty hairy.

BB: So, you had Marine boat safe training.

PZ: Yeah. The, uh, Park Service does. It’s called Motorboat Operator’s Certification Course – MOCC. And, uh, I think the program at Isle Royale is the best in the Park Service just because of the, the water you would run in up there. Um, I think it was, it was over, it was probably about a week and a half long. They did navigation, survival. You name it. Anything not, anything related to boating, they would do. So, you know, you would go out in fog, I was driving a 24, 23-foot V-haul boat, so not a huge boat, and, uh, it would be so foggy, I couldn’t even see the bough of my own boat. So, you would go all by radar and GPS. Or at night, you know, something came up, we had to go, so. I got job offers just because of my boating experience up at Isle Royale so best, best boating in the Park Service.

BB: For guide, I mean, like guiding, what kind of boating offers would you get from like—

PZ: Oh, like other Park Service jobs that like, you know, lake parks or parks with water. Yeah, pretty, pretty wild.

BB: Mm hmm. So, this is a few years in, you go to Hatteras, and then you come here.

PZ: Uh, Isle Royale, Mammoth Cave, I was here for about a year seasonally.

BB: Okay.

PZ: And then, I went to Cape Hatteras.

BB: And then had the opportunity to return to here for a permanent position?

PZ: Yeah. Uh, from Cape Hatteras, I went out to Texas. I was at Lake Meredith National Recreation Area. And, job came open here and I was fortunate enough to get it. So I moved back here.

BB: So what is the job, what does it consist of? What are your duties consists of here?

PZ: Um, It's a grab bag. I mean, when you leave the, the house in the morning, you never know. It could be a cave rescue, somebody having a medical emergency or somebody fell, broke their leg, twisted their ankle. You name it, in the cave, which brings its own set of, uh, problems and challenges. Um, could be out, just writing speeding tickets, seat belt tickets, traffic enforcement. Um, it could be a fire. It could be a lost hiker. It could be somebody having problems on the river. We have, what is it, 30 miles of river, we have to, we're responsible of, or responsible for. Um, it could be a meth lab at the hotel. It could be, you know, you name it. We do the full spectrum of law enforcement here.

[00:14:56]

BB: Sounds like an exciting time and a challenging time.

PZ: It is. That's why I like it. Plus, I mean, you know, great office to work in. It's beautiful out here.

BB: And you live here?

PZ: I do. I'm required by my job description to live in the park. So, I live in a house here. I still have to pay rent but.

BB: Mm hmm.

PZ: It's called a, uh, Mission 66 house. There was a big push in the '60s to revitalize the parks. They redid roads and buildings and everything and they built these houses. Well, the floor plan is the same. So, I could go to Nebraska and get in a Mission 66 house and that's the living room. That's the kitchen. That's the laundry room. They're all the same, all over the country.

BB: Have you lived in a Mission 66 house before here?

PZ: No. Um, let's see. At Isle Royale, I was in a cabin that was powered by solar power and at Mammoth Cave, I was in a seasonal apartment, which is just, you know, an apartment, nothing special. And then at, uh, Cape Hatteras, I lived in the old lighthouse keeper quarters. It was a house built in the 1890s, I think,

beautiful house. And then, uh, Lake Meredith, I had to buy my own house and then back here, I have a house.

BB: Mm hmm.

PZ: Interesting.

BB: Mm hmm. What are some interesting things that have been happening? You know, I know, I know from talking to Brian there's no typical day.

PZ: Yeah.

BB: You just illustrated that.

PZ: Mm hmm.

BB: Was there some things that have made you, you know, proud, or, or afraid, or, um, things like that? I mean, maybe you don't wanna name names or anything or maybe, maybe I've caught you off guard.

PZ: I'm trying to think, well, that's a question people always ask you as a law enforcement officer. When were you scared the most or?

BB: Mm hmm.

PZ: Um, here at Mammoth Cave, I don't know. We've had a couple hairy situations, you know, uh, drunk people wanting to fight, uh, drunk drivers. Um, uh, a ranger and I got called to an island on the Green River and it was late at night. Um, we got the call right at midnight of a man screaming from a woman who was camping in the woods. She heard this man screaming. And, uh, we're like, "Okay." So we, you know, we're trying to figure it out, figure it out. Get a call from some people that are camping with the man and they call us up and they go, "Look. We're, we're really scared. This guy, he's going crazy. Um, you know, we left the campsite 'cause we're, we're afraid he's going to do something bad." And, we're thinking, "Man, they're drunk, like, you know, this isn't, whatever." So we decide, uh, we need to go check it out. This guy's causing a problem. He needs to leave. Um, so, uh, we put in around three o'clock in the morning, go up river. Contact these guys. They're all about, I don't know, in their thirties, kind of big, you know, muscular guys. And, they're running away and we're like, "What?" You know, what are you running from? And the whole time, I'm still thinking like, "These guys are just, you know, they're out of their mind. They're just drunk. Whatever." And, they're like, "Look. You don't understand. We're legitimately scared of this guy. Like, you know, he's saying he's gonna hurt us, everything." We're like, "Okay. Well, stay here and we'll go see what's going on." We motor up the river another half mile and there's this guy who's about 6'3", 220, with one percent body fat. I mean, his arms were about that big around. I mean, huge. And I was like, "Holy cow. What is this?" We get up there and I'm like, "Hey man, you know, are you so-and-so?" And he goes, "Yeah." And I'm like, "Well, we got a complaint, uh, about you. Go ahead. Put your hands up. Spin around for me." So, he starts to turn around and, uh, I said, "Go, put your hands behind your back." And he turns around, looks at me, puts his hand, he was wearing a hooded sweatshirt, puts his hands in his pockets. And so, we think, you know, this isn't good. And, uh, there's no one else. It's just him. And, he just goes blank. And so, you know, your hairs start to stand up like, "Oh, this isn't good." And, uh, we're like, "Come on, man. Take your hands out of your pockets. Do it now. Put your hands behind your back." And he starts saying, uh, "No weapon

formed against me shall prosper.” Starts yelling it at us. So we end up tasing the guy. He goes down. Get him handcuffed. It took us awhile to get him handcuffed. I mean, his, he was huge. Get him handcuffed and in the inside of his hooded sweatshirt pocket was a rock about that long, shaped like that. And we think, I mean, if we gave him any more time, he was gonna, gonna bash our heads in. So, we get the others guys out of the tent and they’re all just about the same size. They were grown men scared of this guy, hiding from him. So, we get them handcuffed, put them in the boat. Everything’s fine, take him to the hospital. Something happens again. He starts screaming, “No weapon formed against me shall prosper.” I mean, it was just a fight in the hospital. Get him cleared medically, take him to the jail, screaming. I mean, it was crazy but extremely dangerous when you think about officer safety – 3:30 in the morning. You’re going to a site that you know they’ve been drinking. You know drugs are involved. Um, it’s just you and another guy, no radio coverage, can’t get out with your radios. It’s just you two and this guy. It was pretty hairy, but it turned out okay.

[00:21:07]

BB: Well, yeah, and then, just, you know, I guess one of the things we talk about working culture, so your comrade, your, your, the guy that you were with, your colleague, how do you work together on something like that? I mean, are you, you know, how do you, how do you divide up the—

PZ: I think it comes from training, knowing, you know, if, okay, I see him doing this. I need to do this, just training and experience.

BB: Mm hmm. And just, the practice of working in a team and—

PZ: Mm hmm. We’re a, we’re a pretty close-knit group here. There’s five of us. So, we’re, we all work well together, pretty close.

BB: Yeah. It’s long hours? It’s a—

PZ: Uh, we work a ten-hour day. So, it can be long. You know, like, that night, I didn’t get home ‘til 10:30 the next morning. I started my shift at 2:00 in the afternoon, the prior day. So, it was a long day. Can be long days. I fought a fire out in Texas. I went to work at 8:00 in the morning, um, got called to the fire at 3:00 in the afternoon. Got home about 9:30 the next morning. Went to sleep. Woke up at 4:00. Got called back out to the fire. It flared back up. So, it can be long days.

BB: Yeah. No typical day.

PZ: No. You never know. You never know and it could be the most boring day in the world and you’re just beating your against the wall. And then, two minutes before the end of your shift, you know, something happens.

BB: What’s the most meaningful part of your job to you? I mean, is there any certain part that, that you’re attracted to most?

PZ: I think the idea of the national parks, you know. I mean, these are such great, what a great idea, you know? Here, the government has established, you know, these special places for people and it's free! Come on in. Check it out, you know. Do, you know. Enjoy it. It's for you, you know. I love it. And, uh, so I think being able to protect those special places is appealing.

BB: You use the word, uh, you know, I was just watching Ken Burns.

PZ: Mm hmm.

BB: "America's Greatest Idea" that Wallace Stegner, I think, coined that term and it's a, it's a pretty compelling story that we reserve these places.

PZ: Mm hmm.

BB: And it [indecipherable] to the idea, going back to like John Muir and, um, what do you think about stewardship? You're part of the stewardship thing that you've devoted your life to and, you know, do you have anything to, what you, what, how do you conceive stewardship in the context of the national parks?

PZ: I think just being a, uh, a responsible, good user of the resource, you know. A lot of people have worked a lot of long hours, uh, whether it be in Washington or the trail crew. People have worked very hard to give this, I mean, to make it available to the general, you know, to the nation. And, I mean, you know, it should be taken care of. You should use it responsibly, you know. Don't throw your litter, litter out. Don't carve on trees. You know, just simple things. Be a good user of it. Let it, let it be how you had found it for generations to come.

BB: Mm hmm. So, the interaction with the, with the general park user, not the, the criminal element, are you a gentle hand kind of person or how do you, how do you deal with most of the visitors or?

[00:25:01]

PZ: I, just, talk to them just how I'm talking to you. You know, if they need kicked in the butt, we'll kick 'em in the butt, but most of the time, it's just, just talk to them.

BB: Do you think they see you different because of that, the way you're, with the, with the sidearm, and, um, with, now with the vest?

PZ: I think people are confused. You know, whoa, you know, what's a park ranger doing with that, you know? But, in the 1920s, uh, I just saw a thing from, uh, oh, this is bad. I'm a bad park ranger. I can't, I can't think of the guy's name. Who was it? Um, not Muir. Whose the other guys? Um, the original founders, what, hit some of the, you just said a, a couple of the names, what, um.

BB: Like, the first environmentalists, you mean?

PZ: The, the founders of the, the guys that really pushed the park service forward.

BB: I'm, I'm a bad [indecipherable].

PZ: Oh, man! I mean, they got like a, a thing at every park for the guy. I can't, anyway, I read a, uh, an old announcement from the 1920s for a ranger in Yellowstone and one of the things on it was, "Your primary duty is a police officer." And that's from, I mean, that's from way back when. I mean, the first park ranger, Harry Yount, carried a gun. But, people see, you know, the, the hat and the, the outfit and they think you're just, you know, jolly bear. But, uh, that's the reason why park rangers are the number one assaulted, uh, federal law enforcement agents in the country because, I mean, well, think about it. You get some guy from downtown St. Louis, no idea about the national parks, not. They know it's a park. They've seen Yogi Bear. They know Ranger Rick. Well, they come. They decide to do whatever that's wrong and here comes a park ranger to tell them, "You need to stop this or this or I'm gonna give you a ticket for this." And, you're a park ranger. What can you do? You know, so that's, I, that's why we're assaulted so many times. They just, they think you're just a – "I'm gonna give you a talk and point out what kind of flower that is." So—

BB: That completely makes sense.

PZ: Mm hmm.

BB: I was thinking about that. You have to be this, you're primarily this law enforcement person but yet you're perceived as a simple interpreter that they've interpreted as—

PZ: Yeah. You're just—

BB: You don't have jurisdiction.

PZ: Yeah. You're just a, just a park ranger. You know, you'll be on a traffic stop, trying to write this person a ticket and these people will stop, "Hey, where's the visitors center?" or "Where can we get fire wood?" And it's like, "Do you see that car, you know, with the lights and, I'm busy, you know." I was doing a field sobriety test to a guy. He was drunk, driving drunk. I was doing my field sobriety test and some guy just came up, walked up to me and was like, "Hey, man. Where's the hotel at?" You know, it's crazy so—

BB: Yeah, that is and that actually really helps me, um, understand better because I know it's gotta be a real chore, um, to look different than a blue, uh—

PZ: Yeah.

BB: —uh, uniform blue, I guess.

PZ: Mm hmm. Yeah, what people normally conceive as a, what a police officer would wear. We wear these mainly out of comfort. These are great.

BB: Why are they so comfortable?

PZ: Uh, well normally, you know, the bulletproof vest goes under a shirt and, I mean, the heat gets, you know, all your body heat gets trapped and if it's hot outside and, uh, I mean, they're just not comfortable. You sit down. They come up. They just, I mean, you're always fighting it. This thing, you know, you wear it on the outside. Air can get in. It's just, oh, it's great.

BB: Warm in the winter?

PZ: Yeah.

BB: [Indecipherable.]

PZ: Yeah. Yeah and, I mean, say you, uh, you know, you're doing something outside in the summer, searching a car or hiking somewhere to go find somebody. I mean, you can just take it off, cool down for a couple minutes and then put it right back on. You don't have to take your shirt off. Take the vest off.

BB: What's it made out of? What's the—

PZ: Uh, the vest?

BB: Is it Kevlar?

PZ: Yeah. The inside is Kevlar, outside is just, I don't know, some material.

BB: Mm hmm.

PZ: But, very comfortable.

BB: What I'm wondering, I think, somebody's told me up until not so long ago that maybe you had them underneath, maybe that was it, but it's a real visual cue—

PZ: Yeah.

BB: That maybe helps you with this issue. You do look different than Chuck or somebody in, in interpretation.

PZ: Well—

BB: And of course, you have the, side, the, the gun, the firearm, handgun.

PZ: Uh, up until, what was it, 2003, I don't know if Brian told you but, uh, the buffalo badge, the badge that, like, Chuck would wear, or any of the other, eh, everybody wore them. The park rang-, the law enforcement guy—

[00:30:05]

BB: The one on your side, on your—

PZ: No. This, uh, well the badge that Chuck wears, it's called the buffalo badge and up until, I believe it was 2003, everybody wore the same badge.

BB: Yeah. Okay.

PZ: Even, even us. So, if I came up to you and said, “Hey. Stop doing this.” Well, I just saw you. A cave, you know, a cave guide had the same badge. So, I think in 2003, they switched to this badge or this shield, I think is what they call it and, uh, uh, that really helps to differentiate us from, um, an interpreter or a science guide or whatever.

BB: It seems important.

PZ: Yeah. Yeah.

BB: Makes your life easier.

PZ: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I mean in, up until the, what, the ‘80s, late ‘80s, some parks wouldn’t even allow, were, uh, let the law enforcement guys wear their gun belts while doing their job.

BB: Would they not have access to guns or would they be kept in the, in the cab of truck or—

PZ: Yeah. Um, there were quite a few rangers shot that their gun was in a briefcase under the front seat of their patrol car because the superintendent or park management didn’t want visitors to see, you know, a park ranger with a gun, so.

BB: That’s wild.

PZ: Mm hmm. Come a long way.

BB: No. Absolutely. That’s for sure. So do you like it at Mammoth Cave? Do you have aspirations? I mean, is this a place or are you at a place in your life now, having been going through law enforcement work here, is it something you are, is Mammoth Cave, like, home now or is it a—

PZ: It will be home for a while.

BB: Yeah.

PZ: Moving around, you know, every two years, you just get to meet people and get kind of oriented to the community and in to the community and then, you know, you gotta move on. So, um, I’ve always wanted to get back here. I’m happy to be back here. So, I intend on staying for a while.

BB: ‘Cause you grew up not so far away.

PZ: Yeah, about five hours to the north, in Indiana. Yeah. So, it’s nice, great area.

BB: Mm hmm. Is there anything you want to share with me about this? Do you have any stories of, any other stories you wanted to share about your working life or just thoughts about this job or this place or your comrades, your colleagues? I mean, you mentioned that you’re, you’re quite close ‘cause it’s a real small group of you.

PZ: Mm hmm.

BB: I’m getting to know them well but, uh, just wondering if you had any final thoughts about things.

PZ: I think it's a job that people take very personally and I think you'll see that through all your interviews. People take a real ownership in it. I don't know if that comes from working by yourself a lot, if it comes from being out in the wilderness. I, I don't know where it comes from but everybody takes it very personally. They take real ownership in it, you know. Um, I don't know a better way to describe it. It's just, it's a job that, it's a job but it's also almost like a lifestyle and I think it's good. I love it. Couldn't imagine doing anything else.

BB: Thanks.

PZ: Mm hmm.

[00:33:36]

[End of recording]

[End of transcription]