PETER GIBBS

Salt Lake City, Utah

An Interview by

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THIS IS ELIZABETH SHUPUT CONDUCTING AN INTERVIEW WITH PETER GIBBBS ON THE 11TH OF OCTOBER, 2006, UNIVERSITY OF UTAH, MARRIOTT LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, MULTIMEDIA ARCHIVES DEPARTMENT.

ES: Alright. What is your full name?

PG: Peter Edward Gibbs.

ES: And where were you born?

PG: Right here in Salt Lake.

ES: Okay. In a hospital?

PG: Yes.

ES: Which hospital?

PG: I have no idea!

ES: Okay. And what year was that? What's your birthday?

PG: That was October 16, 1943.

ES: Okay. Wonderful. And where were you raised?

PG: In Salt Lake. I grew up in a bungalow about half a block east of East High School.

ES: Okay.

PG: And eventually went to high school there. Most of my junior high years were spent at Stewart School, which was an experimental school here on campus. It's gone now.

ES: Experimental how?
Peter Gibbs

PG: They were just experimenting with different teaching methods. It was a non--they avoided things like emphasis on English grammar, pushed science a lot.

ES: Okay.

PG: Kind of fun. You had to go to school with a whole lot of professors' kids.

ES: Yeah. Okay. And then, when you were attending East High School, were you involved in any of the clubs? Extracurricular activities?

PG: The only really extracurricular activity that I was seriously involved with was the Spanish Club. And I did become an exchange student, went to Mexico City at the end of my junior year.

ES: Okay.

PG: Which was great fun.

ES: Wonderful. And how about your family? Do you have siblings?

PG: I have an older brother, Charles. He's three years older than I.

ES: Okay. And how did you become involved in the outdoors? I know. It's a tough question.

PG: Yeah. One of the, I guess, significant events--I was a member of the Boy Scouts, Troop 186, which was sponsored by the Unitarian Church. It was a very, very active outdoor-oriented scout troop. A fortunate thing to be involved with.

ES: Right.

PG: We were hiking in the Uintas, those trails that lead from Mirror Lake, long before there were paved roads up there.
ES: Wow.

PG: And into the backcountry of even like Zion Park and Arches long before there were paved roads in there.

ES: Right.

PG: That was great fun.

ES: Absolutely.

PG: And then I had the great fortune, back when I was in junior high school, when I was in 8th grade, at the end of 8th grade. One of the students, Michael Brady, his father, Lyle, and Uncle Lionel Brady took the "whole class", all of the boys in the class, of course, on a river trip through Glen Canyon.

ES: Okay.

PG: So we got to see the canyon. They were building the dam then. I mean, it was one of the last years that you could do that.

ES: Right.

PG: That was a wonderful experience.

ES: Wow.

PG: I'll never forget it.

ES: Do you have photographs from that?

PG: I don't. I wish I did! Just up there [referencing memory].

ES: Yeah. Okay. And did your family encourage outdoor activity? Did you go out with your father and your brother much?
PG: Well, through the Scouts. At that level, my father was very much involved with the
Scouts and they did, both my mother and father, did really encourage that sort of thing.
Later it was kind of the opposite. They were trying to get me back into serious study and
find a real job and all of that!
ES: Right.
PG: Through my high school years I did an awful lot of hiking (mostly) and no serious
climbing. By the time I got into college, then I got hooked up with the Ute Alpine Club
and with the Salt Lake Grotto.
ES: Okay.
PG: And started doing a lot of caving, particularly vertical caving, you know, and Jon
Haman (who I am afraid is dead now), and Karl Dunn and a lot of other people. Great
time, having fun crawling around in the mud.
ES: Yeah. Now, how long were you a member of the Ute Alpine Club, then? How long
did you participate in that?
PG: Off and on, but certainly my first four years here. Mostly I was doing caving and
some climbing and some ski touring.
ES: Okay.
PG: Quite a bit of ski touring, actually. Hiking and, I think mountain climbing, hiking
up the Wasatch Climbing which, you know, no technical climbing at that point.
ES: Right.
PG: We did do (Karl Dunn and I and Robert and Rob Sears), did a climb on the Twin
Brothers in Zion. That was probably the closest thing to a technical climb I would have done at that point.

ES: Right. And so how, then, did you become involved with climbing?

PG: It's kind of a funny story. Let's see, now. It would have been about 1957 that I started the business, the ascender business, Gibbs Ascenders. We're still very much involved with caving. That was the purpose of the thing. It was really about caving. And about, I don't know, a year after that, going into graduate school, all along here, George Lowe and I were close buddies. We were both students in the Physics Department. Not necessarily its best students, you understand. Both were not entirely serious quite all the time about school.

ES: Right. Busy outside playing!

PG: We were having too much fun. Anyway, at the end of it in the first year in graduate school, after a particularly disastrous examination in quantum mechanics, we both came out thoroughly frustrated and George said, "Let's go climbing." And that's how I started.

ES: Wow.

PG: He had an extra pair of Kletter shoes (Ger. kletterschuhe) in the car, and he took me up to do School Room. And George being George said, "Let's see what you can do." He started off doing the mantle and then, when I managed to do that (after a lot of tries), took more or less the standard route up and then nailed the roof. And he was quite impressed that a mere caver would be able to actually do that.

ES: Right.
PG: And that's how it started.

ES: Wow.

PG: I did a whole bunch of stuff with George and others. Eric Eliason.

ES: Great. Well, what a teacher to have.

PG: He's the best. Absolutely.

ES: Yeah.

PG: I was always a little frightened when I went out with him because I knew we were going to do something terrifically difficult. Always. And the hardest things I ever did were probably done with him. But I always felt the safest, too.

ES: Right.

PG: He knew how to protect better than anybody.

ES: Yeah.

PG: He was really good at it.

ES: Yeah. So, I'm just blown away. I love this stuff. Okay. Now, let's back up just one second.

PG: Sure.

ES: Let's talk about your caving experiences, then. You came up with the invention of the Gibbs Ascender.

PG: Yeah.

ES: Now, explain to me. How did that come about?

PG: Well, it really wasn't my idea originally. What happened was I went back to visit
with my brother, my older brother, who was heavily involved in caving, even more than I was.

ES: Okay.

PG: You know, he was at Case Western Reserve working on his doctorate in mechanical engineering; and he was going down into the big caves in Kentucky and West Virginia and got into a situation where he was trying to climb out of a vertical section in a waterfall, so he became hypothermic. In those days cavers were way behind the climbers; they'd never heard of Jumars, and they were all using prussic knots which are slow, especially when you get onto a wet, muddy rope. Difficult to use. By the time he got out (he was afraid that he was going to die in the process), but he got out; and then somewhere or another, I don't know where the idea really originally came from, if he made it up, or I think he probably saw it somewhere else in a magazine or something. I'm not sure.

ES: Okay.

PG: Anyway, he got some of their experimental people that run the shops for graduate students' and professors' projects. He got friendly with some of those people, and got them to build him one of these things that he'd seen (or I don't know where the idea really came from).

ES: Right.

PG: Anyway, he kind of passed that on to me, and I took it back to Salt Lake. I'd been in and out of Neff's Cave a couple of times and decided to try to make something that really
worked a lot better. Again, I got in a little trouble with the Physics Department because I was out trying my best to get this business started.

ES: Right.

PG: Chasing around town and changing the design and making it so that it was actually commercially feasible.

ES: Right.

PG: And then, I guess it was that fall, the National Speleological Society yearly has a convention and that year they held it in Lovell, Wyoming, which was close enough to drive to.

ES: Right.

PG: I had managed to make sixty-five of these ascenders. And my brother had been practicing with these ascenders that I had sent him, now, and he had set up--this was the really bright part. He came up with a way to rig them so that you didn't use them with your hands. You mounted one on your foot and one with your opposite knee, so you used your leg power instead of your arms. Very smart.

ES: Great. Yeah.

PG: Very smart. And we went to this conference, this convention, camped out on the lawn of the park and they had this--I think they still do it--a contest every year where they time people climbing a hundred feet of rope using anything they want.

ES: Right.

PG: And my brother, using this system that he'd just developed, cut the old record in half.
We sold out that afternoon.

ES: Right. I can imagine.

PG: Of course, these were, you know, the best people for marketing. These were the people who are the most influential cavers in the country. They were all there; they'd all go back and spread the word. That's how the business got started.

ES: So was it just exponential growth from there then, after that?

PG: Well, you know, it was a very small market.

ES: Right.

PG: But all of a sudden we had about ninety-five percent of that very small market, for a long time.

ES: Now, working with and coming up with the perfect design for this piece of machinery, how were you funded? What was it, personal funds?

PG: Yeah, just out of pocket. It was small stuff.

ES: Right.

PG: Started out with--I found a guy here in Salt Lake that built me a one-sided mold for casting six or eight cams built onto it that he had carefully carved into this thing. He only charged me a hundred dollars for it.

ES: Wow.

PG: I mean it was astounding.

ES: Yeah.

PG: I mean, that's the sort of thing that got us by.
ES: Right. Right. And did your physics, your knowledge of physics come into play when you were--

PG: Sure, yeah. Sure it did.

ES: Okay.

PG: Strength of materials and, you know, the forces that were going to be on the cam and the pin that set it up, work as an axle, and all of that. And later, in design changes for other specific uses.

ES: And did your brother have knowledge of physics as well?

PG: Oh, yeah! But he wasn't really very involved after that first--

ES: The original?

PG: The first bit. You know, he went back to school and didn't really want to be part of the business. He was a little bit afraid of the liability question.

ES: Okay.

PG: That liability question.

ES: Big one.

PG: Yes, it is.

ES: Right.

PG: The other thing that happened in there is that I got to know George Lowe, you know, and he was doing these bizarre things, winter ascents in Alaska and really difficult stuff. And he started writing about Gibbs Ascenders in his articles to climbing magazines. That's how we broke into the climbing market.
ES: Okay. Okay.

PG: Thank you, George!

ES: Again, again.

PG: Right.

ES: So when you climbed with him, the Gibbs Ascender had already come out on the market?

PG: Oh yeah, yeah. It was already in the caving market by the time I started climbing.

ES: And did you guys utilize that through your climbing adventures together?

PG: Off and on. You know, it isn't really designed for rock climbers. Where it's good is on big mountains.

ES: Right. And big mountains?

PG: Big mountains, kind of stuff where you're dealing with frozen ropes and things like that.

ES: Okay, okay.

PG: And avalanche protection.

ES: Okay. Now, let's get back to you climbing with George. What other areas do you recall visiting with him?

PG: Well, I didn't do that much with George other than in the Salt Lake granite here in Little Cottonwood.

ES: Okay.
Peter Gibbs

PG: We did some very (for me), very hard things. First ascents there. The S-Matrix, that's one we did. I think it's rated 5.10 now. I'm not sure. George always claimed that he wasn't really capable of doing anything harder than 5.9, so he never rated anything harder than 5.9.

ES: Right. I've climbed a lot of his routes and I'm thinking, "There's no way. There's no way this is a 9!"

PG: Right, yeah.

ES: Okay.

PG: And what else did I do with him? With George up there? Mexican Crack. That's sort of a short ... it's really a boulder. Big boulder. A little difficult. And, gosh-- Eric Eliason and I did a couple. Eric was kind of the other of his protégés, and Eric and I got climbing together. And we did a couple of climbs up on the Black Buttress. Frozen stool, that was no big deal, but the Tin Man (that's what it's called), the Tin Man.

ES: Okay.

PG: That's an A4; very dangerous climb. It's one of those if you pop something, you're going to get hurt.

ES: Right. And did you have any close calls or any experiences where there were injuries involved?

PG: Not anything serious. You know, I took some sliding falls here and there and ripped up my knuckles from time to time. After all, with George, I was often in over my head.
ES: Right, right.

PG: The other thing I did with George every winter is George would get a group of us together and head for the Tetons.

ES: Right.

PG: Always over Christmas vacation. The weather was always terrible, and we almost always got avalanched off, basically. Just got into some awful scenes with avalanches sailing down the valleys at us. I was often just in the support party in those things. You know, Jock Glidden was with him, and I don't know, other people, pretty well-known people with a lot of winter experience that I didn't have yet.

ES: Right.

PG: Ralph Tingey and Bob Irvine and some of those people were there. Lots of fun getting to know those guys.

ES: I can imagine. Yeah.

PG: Oh, boy. Gosh. What else? I don't know if I did much else with George. A little kayaking. We did a little kayaking. Later, I did a--I think Roy knows this. I'm sure Roy knows it. I've written about it in Cleo, but I did a climb on the Grapevine Buttress in Grand Canyon. First ascent there. A really serious piece.

ES: Okay. And who was with you on that?

PG: It ended up being Eric Eliason and I that did that. The first time we went to do it was with George Gerhart and Ed Hikida. Old friends. And, you know, you have to boat down there; borrowed a boat from Ron Smith and Grand Canyon Expeditions (whom I
was working for at the time).

**ES:** Okay.

**PG:** He just let us take the boat. We rowed on down there and pulled in at the bottom of the thing. It's a terrifying place to be because there's all of this loose stuff that is coming off, you know. It's clattering down the gullies. So there's a massive pegmatitic intrusion right in the middle of it that we're going to climb. It's very good solid rock, but the two couloirs that are leading down to this beachless mass are raining chunks of rock down. Big mass. Anyway, there's no beach. There's just these rocks that are sticking up. Massive rocks all over the place, and little pools of sand kind of here and there in the middle of it.

During the night, that night, I got up meaning to pee; and stepping into one of these little pools of sand discovered that I was not stepping into sand. I was stepping into the fire! It was just a layer of white ash over the hot coals. My bare foot stepped into it, and being about half asleep, I stomped my other foot in to get the first one out. Fortunately, there was a bucket of water sitting there. It would have been very hard to get down to the river through all of that mass of rock. So my feet got cooled quickly in the water. Very fortunate.

**ES:** Now, is that before you did the first ascent, or--

**PG:** Yeah. This is the first try. And the morning after (probably the most painful night I've ever spent) we packed our gear up. I bled the blisters and got my tennis shoes on, and rowed us down to Phantom Ranch. George hadn't started rowing yet. I had the pleasure
of an eight-hour ride out on the back of a mule of which the last couple of thousand feet were in a snow storm. And it was just a horrible end to the trip. Oh, gosh! Anyway, about six months later or so, we, Eric and I, went back and actually did the climb.

ES: Oh, my goodness! I was going to say I can't even imagine putting shoes on over blistered feet like that.

PG: Had to do it.

ES: Yeah, absolutely.

PG: You do what you have to.

ES: Yeah. Wow. What other areas have you been on the rock in?

PG: Well, Ed Hikida and I (think I started out with George Gerhart, too), we did a climb on Steamboat Rock, which is right at the confluence of the Yampa and Green Rivers. There's a very nice ... there's one crack there that Layton Kor did there early in the 50's, and there's another one slightly upstream that we did. It started out with George and I, Bego (George) Gerhart. But somewhere, in the middle of doing it, I kicked a rock loose that got him on the knee. It sort of ended us for that weekend. The next week Ed followed me up to finish it.

ES: I know how it is. Those climbs, they get stuck in your mind. You have to go back and finish them.

PG: You have to go back and do them, you know.

ES: Yeah, absolutely.

PG: This was fairly hard; probably 5.8, A3 or something like that, and about a grade four.
Pretty serious stuff for a guy just starting out, you know.

ES: Right. Absolutely.

PG: I don't know. Climbing. Later I did a climb on the Middle Fork of the Salmon at Golden Creek with Ray Erkkila. Did a lot of caving then.

END SIDE A

CONTINUED ON SIDE B

ES: Alright, let's go ahead and continue with that story. What just popped into your mind?

PG: Oh. Eric Eliason and I decided when fall came we wanted to go climb in the Santa Marta Range in Colombia, thinking, "Well, let's go do some international stuff and look at this as an area for climbing to see if we want to bring tourists down here." You realize how naive that was? To Colombia? And also, we were going to look at some rivers to see if we could find, again, something to take tourists down. And then we were going to go down to Ecuador and climb Chimborazo. It's probably the easiest place in the world to get over twenty thousand feet.

ES: Okay.

PG: And that was why. That was the plan.

ES: Great!
Peter Gibbs

PG: Well, this is the part we did. We did eventually go to Chimborazo and climb it. The
time in Colombia was very interesting, sometimes a little scary. We didn't end up
actually climbing anything. We did have our lives threatened. They thought we were
government agents. We did end up on the north coast in the transit area for cocaine and
the growing area for marijuana and for—

One of the first days on the beach we were assaulted (I would say) by this young
gentleman who was very forcefully trying to get us to bring a boat down. "Would you
bring a boat down? We'll load it for you." He said, "We have maps. We can give you
maps of the southern United States, show you right where to take it in."

ES: Oh, goodness!

PG: We decided that it was probably a good idea to get out of town quickly, so we did.
We went off into the jungle, and as we were going up through the jungle with this pair of
brothers who we had hired, a gentleman joined us out of the jungle. Just sort of appeared
out of the jungle. Looked like a city guy, you know. Everybody is carrying a machete of
course. And he walks along with us, and as he's walking along with us he starts asking us
questions, and eventually makes it very clear that we should be careful, "because people
disappear into the jungle all of the time," he said.

Well, we went on, and the two brothers are there with their little donkeys that are
loaded with our packs. And they explained that we had to stay at their bamboo shack that
night and the next day; that there were people going to come and talk to us. They said
because we had come up to the north coast in a taxi they were sure we were government
agents. We were just a couple of dumb kids, you know, out looking for a good time!

And the next day—we stayed there with these guys—this guy shows up (again, the same guy who had talked to us the day before) and a couple of other guys. And out of the forest, from up in the forest, comes this donkey with a guy on it. He looked like somebody out of a spaghetti western. I mean, it was somebody from central casting. He had this sort of long, dirty, greasy coat on and a greasy, floppy wide-brimmed hat on, and heavy beard. He sat on the donkey with his left foot almost on the ground (I mean, these donkeys are small).

ES: Okay.

PG: And his right foot was, you know, hooked across onto his left knee. And then there was a carbine right there across his lap, pointed at us, of course! And that guy sat there, stone faced, didn't say anything, didn't smile, didn't blink (I don't think) for most of the day. Didn't ever get off the donkey. Just sat there.

ES: Right.

PG: While we were getting questioned.

ES: Right.

PG: We didn't have to fight our way out. I thought we might. Eventually we seemed to convince them that we were just a couple of dumb kids.

ES: Right.

PG: Naive kids up having a good time, you know, or trying to.

ES: Right.
PG: And then finally, the guy on the donkey, without saying a word, no signals that we saw, just turned around and clop, clop, clop, clop, and he was gone. And we fortunately had brought with us a bottle of rum that we were going to use to celebrate climbs. We got that out and passed it around.

ES: Celebrate your lives!

PG: Yes. Let's make sure everybody's happy now.

ES: Right.

PG: Eventually, these guys said, "Okay, we're going to let you go on. You stay with these brothers and you go right where you said you were going to go." They were out looking at what we were trying to do. We were just looking at a river we wanted to consider running.

ES: Okay.

PG: "And you can go up to the headwaters of this river and stay with these two guys and then they'll send you down the river and you will be okay."

"Okay, we'll do whatever you ask."

The next morning we're going up the trail and we come across a whole troop of workers, everybody, of course, with machetes. And one guy who was obviously running the show, probably part of FARC (the revolutionary forces of Columbia).

ES: Right.

PG: Almost certainly part of FARC, with a group of men that were probably basically slaves working the marijuana fields. And he obviously knew who we were. He'd heard
through the grapevine (the marijuana vine, whatever it is) that we were there, and came over and questioned us again.

"What are you doing here?"

And I tried to explain: "Well, we're looking at this river. We're thinking of bringing tourists here."

And he looked at me, you know, right in the eyes. And he said, "That sounds like a really good idea, but I don't think this is the right place."

No kidding! I had to agree with him on that one.

ES: Right! So did you eventually find a place that would have been reasonable to bring tourists back to?

PG: Not there, not where we were.

ES: Right.

PG: The next morning, we went up there and the two brothers dropped us off with the packs, and we had a wonderful time going down this steep, you know, tree lined, jungle lined, gully with a beautiful stream, with crawdads in it and ... nobody. You know, we had the place. We were all by ourselves. It was wonderful!

ES: Yeah.

PG: We realized quickly that the stream was completely impractical to take anybody on, but we had a great time. And when we got down to where we were getting close to the ocean, it was flattening out, and the canyon we're in, it dissipates. You know? And as we're walking along with our packs, for the first time we see there's a hut off on the left,
on the other side of this little stream. And as we're walking along, this lady comes
running out of this bamboo hut and is just yelling and waving her arms at us to "Stop!"
This is all going on in Spanish, of course, but we get the idea.

ES: Right.

PG: We're kind of looking, Eric and I, at each other, wondering, "Do we run? What do
we do now?" And the lady came over and showed us. We were about five feet from
walking into a trip wire. The lady, you know, she showed us (and I've got pictures of it
somewhere) this ancient sort of half homemade shotgun loaded up with bolts and nuts
and all kinds of junk. It was a trap that she'd set out trying to kill a jaguar that was killing
her chickens. Oh, it would have been a terrible way to die!

ES: Oh, yeah! Especially after, you know, getting away from all of these--

PG: Yeah.

ES: --you know, drug cartelling man. Oh, goodness!

PG: Oh, my. Well, that was sort of the end of the incidents and we got out of Colombia
fairly quickly after that. Very relieved to arrive in Ecuador, and just go climbing.

ES: Right. And what was the rock like in Ecuador, then?

PG: Well, we were doing Chimborazo, which is, you know, really quite easy. It's just
sort of a massive hump of ice and snow, and a lot of crevasse problems and stuff, but it's
basically a rock.

ES: Okay.

PG: There's enough snow, you know, at twenty thousand feet that I couldn't see the rock,
frankly.

ES: This is true. Means climbing back in the day, then.

PG: Yes. So anyway, one of the projects I have been trying to do since I've retired is to try to write up some of this stuff. At this point, I've written a novel now that's about that trip we did to Colombia.

ES: Oh, wow!

PG: Fictional.

ES: Very cool.

PG: That's been fun doing.

ES: And what's the name of the novel?

PG: It's called *Off Track in Colombia*. It hasn't been published yet; I'm trying to get it published right now.

ES: Right. Wow. Years down the road.

PG: Somewhere, maybe.

ES: Cool. Now, you've done quite a bit of ski touring as well. Did you do that with a lot of your climbing buddies?

PG: Yeah. Well, this is kind of an interesting story, I think. You know, Bob Irvine and Ralph Tingey and Bill Conrod all worked for the Park Service at various times.

ES: Right.

PG: In the Tetons?

ES: Right.
PG: Well, they became wonderful sources. They were able to get us permission and get us keys to these cabins so that we could go do serious winter touring. During the Depression days, 1930s, the Forest Service on the outside, the Park Service on the inside, built a series of cabins. It wasn't ski touring in those days, it was snow shoeing—one snowshoe day apart all around the park, the periphery of Yellowstone Park, the purpose being to stop poaching.

ES: Okay.

PG: Well, a lot of those cabins are still there, and they're used in the summer, you know, for patrolling purposes. In the winter they're abandoned; they're left in beautiful condition with all the wood cut and everything. And we got permission and keys to the cabins so we did... Two different years we did the same ski tour from the Enos Lake area over to the front of Flag Ranch. About one hundred miles.

ES: Okay.

PG: Seven or eight days. Wonderful trips!

ES: Yeah.

PG: Really beautiful.

ES: Do you recall who went along with you on those trips?

PG: Bill Conrod went on one, and Ralph Tingey went on part of one. He had to go back to the office. Milt Hokanson was on one, Dave Smith was on one, Dick Wallin was on one. Who else? Oh, Mark Freed was on one. Charlie Parmley was on one. Have I forgotten anybody? I think that's it. I got about everybody.
ES: I understand it was quite a small community back then of these outdoorsman, so I figure you must have done a lot of stuff together.

PG: Yes.

ES: Seems like. It's wonderful. Now, you mentioned, and this is backing way up and I apologize for this one, but you mentioned Salt Lake Grotto. Can you explain to me what that is? I've never heard of this before.

PG: Well, the National Speleological Society is sort of the national organization for cavers, and their small units are called grottos.

ES: Okay.

PG: It's a club that's part of the National Speleological Society.

ES: Okay, wonderful.

PG: That's all it is.

ES: Off the record from my knowledge.

PG: I think I've probably covered an awful lot of it at this point.

ES: Well, good. Good, good.

PG: What else did we do?

ES: Do you have any particular favorite areas that you tended to visit more frequently than others?

PG: Well, it's changed over the years. You know, I did all that early college time rock climbing. Gordon's Hangover. I did that with Don Black. And I did the Open Book of
Lone Peak in January one year with Dean Hannibal and Dennis Turville. Nothing much else here.

You know, I kind of got away both from caving and later from climbing, and I'm still running the business, of course, but I was really more involved with river running. And eventually, particularly after I went to Idaho to work, I got heavily involved with sea kayaking.

ES: Okay.

PG: That was great fun. Bob Sevy, whom I worked for, and John Cole and I each bought these hardshell kayaks that came apart into three pieces bolted together so we could fly them around places. And we did some really nice trips. We did one down to Baja to Magdalena Bay. Spent one of the best Christmases I've ever had down there eating clams and scallops and lobster and everything we could catch, you know.

ES: Yeah.

PG: And then we did one to Palau one year. That was spectacular! We were there for a couple of weeks by ourselves, basically alone the whole time going from island to island in this archipelago, diving. The most spectacular diving I've ever done! Living off the land or the sea, rather, mostly.

ES: And this is sea kayaking?

PG: Sea kayaking, yes.

ES: Okay.

PG: And then we did one to the Exuma Islands, and we did about fifty miles of the
Exuma Islands from island to island to island. One of the islands we came across there was the island that Pablo Escobar had owned and used. He was dead at that point, but there were crashed planes in the harbor and all kinds of bullet holes and things!

**ES:** Telling its own history.

**PG:** Yes, yes.

**ES:** Wow.

**PG:** We were having fun and doing sea kayaking and fishing, particularly my boss, particularly the fishing. Bob Sevy, that is. We did a lot of bone fishing while we were there. That was great fun! We did one to Belize kind of going from island to island out there, twenty miles, thirty miles off of the coast. That was a lot of fun, too! Then I did one with a girlfriend of mine, Nancy Orr, and my brother's kid, Chris Gibbs. We did what was called "The Wilderness Trail." It's a one hundred mile kayak trip through the Florida Everglades.

**ES:** Oh, wow.

**PG:** That was neat, too.

**ES:** Yeah.

**PG:** That was fun.

**ES:** Yeah.

**PG:** That's all the major stuff I did there. What else did I do? Probably running out here.

**ES:** That's fine.

**PG:** Did some pretty strange things. George Gerhart and I, one of my crazy ideas,
borrowed a couple Sportyaks from A.C. Ekker. I was working for Outlaw Trails at the
time. And we took Sportyaks through the Black Box of the San Rafael which,
fortunately, didn’t have enough water, or we probably would have been killed. Oh, yeah,
in 1973, my boss at that time was Ron Smith at Grand Canyon Expeditions, and he had
been promoting this deal with National Geographic to go and run the Omo River in
Ethiopia.

ES: Okay.

PG: Well, in the end he wasn't able to go, so he sent me to run the trip for him. We spent
three or four weeks on the river getting down onto Lake Rudolph and dealing with
crocodiles and hippos and ... Wow! What an experience that was.

ES: Yeah, yeah. And how many people were on that trip?

PG: Well, there were a ton of...about fifteen of us, I think. There were six of us
boatmen, and then there were four or five old guests of Ron's that would kind of help pay
the bill, basically.

ES: Right.

PG: Ron put up a bunch of money. Geographic put up a bunch of money. And John
Flannery was there who is a very good writer/photographer, adventure
writer/photographer.

ES: Okay.

PG: Ian Douglas Hamilton, who is a native; well, he's not actually native, he's actually
British, but he has lived in Kenya most of his life, and is an expert on elephants. And
Alan Root was there who is a very well-known (at least at the time) natural life photographer. Done a bunch of stuff for *Geographic* and is native Kenyan. Had some wonderful stories about the Mau Maus because he was actually in war against the Mau Maus.

ES: Wow.

PG: And when we got down onto Lake Rudolph we drove them (quite illegally) the boats, and motored them across the border of Ethiopia into Kenya. That's the only way we could get them out.

ES: Right.

PG: In order that we could hand them over to Louis Leakey.

ES: Okay.

PG: And that's part of the deal. We were going to give all of that stuff to Leakey.

ES: Right.

PG: Excuse me, Richard Leakey, the son. Not Louis. Louis was already dead.

ES: Okay. Okay. Now, was this written up then and published and, you know ...  

PG: No, it wasn't. *Geographic* wasn't real happy about the fact that Richard Bangs had gone and run it just the year before. They wanted it to be a first.

ES: Okay.

PG: So it didn't ever get written up.

ES: Right.
PG: But the other guy who was there was the photographer and worked with Diane Fosse. I can't think of his name at the moment. It will come to me—Bob Campbell with Anglia Television.

ES: Yeah.

PG: Anyway, that was kind of a... It was great from my point of view because I got to go and run the trip.

ES: Oh, yeah!

PG: So what if I didn't end up with my face in the magazine, it's okay.

ES: Right, right. The experience was enough, absolutely.

PG: Absolutely. It was a wonderful experience. Any other crazy stuff I haven't mentioned? Oh, and in 1972 I started a company, a business, called Baja Expeditions with some friends of mine.

ES: Okay.

PG: We were doing trips from La Paz back up to the top of the Gulf in an eighty-foot converted shrimper called *The Poseidon Run* right after *The Poseidon Adventure* came out. And then, you know, we picked new people up, and then headed back down. That sort of went on for a couple of years. My idea there was that I wanted to do it part-time in the winter so I could keep running the river in the summer and climbing in the fall and spring.

ES: Right.
PG: It got down to where Tim Means and I were the only ones left, and he wanted to chase it more seriously, so I backed out and left it to him. He's still running it.

ES: Really?

PG: Yes.

ES: I was going to say, I'm sure I've heard of Baja Expeditions.

PG: Yeah, it's still in existence.

ES: Okay, alright.

PG: I'm the one who actually started it.

ES: Right.

PG: The other one, then, I think you said you've interviewed Cal Giddings.

ES: We do have his papers. I actually did not have the pleasure to interview him, but I would have loved to.

PG: Yeah.

ES: But we do have his papers and some of his photographs and stuff.

PG: Good. Well, I was on a trip with him and Jim Burns and Les Jones.

ES: Okay.

PG: And I have it written down here as 1971, but I'm not sure that that was the right year.

ES: Okay.

END OF TAPE ONE
TAPE TWO

ES: All righty.

PG: Okay. We kayaked the Zion narrows during the spring of, I think it was, 1971, but I'm not sure. It was Cal Giddings and Jim Burns and Les Jones and I, and a young fellow that Les worked with, whose name I have lost now. I was an almost complete beginner in a kayak. I had lots of experience river running, but I'd only been in a kayak a little bit. I'd run Desolation, and I'd run Grand Canyon. I was way over my head, of course, as usual, and eventually managed to get stuck in this boulder pile rapid and got washed out of my boat. Eventually, the force of the water cracked the boat in half. Fortunately, we were almost all the way through it at that point, and a lot of duct tape got me out. I thought it was very funny. I don't know if you know anything about Les Jones?

ES: I don't. I don't know a lot about him.

PG: He's a wonderful character. Early on he made those scroll maps of the rivers. He'd done a lot of river running.

ES: Okay.

PG: And he did a lot of it by himself. He was a welder, an excellent welder, a heliarc welder; and he built these aluminum kayaks. Welded them up himself made out of aluminum. And they had these gigantic, just gigantic cockpits, because he didn't know how to roll. And he always believed the thing to do if you tipped over was get out of the boat, you know?
ES: Right.

PG: So he had two of these that he brought along on this trip, one for this fellow that he worked with, and one for him. And you could hear them for miles. Calang! Calang! Calang! We started calling them, "The Monitor of the Merrimack." It was really hilarious. They didn't actually run any of the rapids; I mean Cal and Jim Burns did, and I did when I was in my boat, you know.

ES: Right.

PG: They mostly let them go and then tried to catch them--

ES: Right.

PG: --sort of thing. When the Parks Service started taking control of river running in Grand Canyon, Les Jones talked to them about kayaking, and he convinced them that part of their regulations should be that any kayaks had to have these giant cockpits so you could get out of them in a hurry.

ES: Oh, wow! Now for the kayaking back then, did they have spray skirts?

PG: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

ES: Okay.

PG: Kayaking was actually fairly advanced; it's just that Les Jones didn't know about it!

ES: Okay. Wow.

PG: He's an amazing character. I mean, he really ran an awful lot of rivers. Did a lot of it by himself.

ES: Right.
PG: He made all the scroll maps. They were really the only river running maps available. You know, he'd describe the river very well.

ES: Right, right. And now you’ve guided for about forty years, you mentioned, in this e-mail you sent to me. Was that all through the same company?

PG: No, no, no. I started out working for Western River Expeditions.

ES: Okay.

PG: An old friend of mine now, Art Gallenson, got me involved. He and--who else had started out there? I think Ron Smith, actually, had started with Western out there. Ron Smith eventually went out on his own; started Grand Canyon Expeditions. Working at Western was really fun for a young kid like I was then, because you moved around all over the place. You followed the water. You'd start out, maybe, in spring you'd be in the Grand Canyon for a trip, and then as things--or two, maybe--and go up and run a cataract. And then you might go to Dinosaur and run the Yampa when it's roaring. And then you might go up and run the Selway in Idaho and the Middle Fork of the Salmon, and then go back to the main Salmon. It was really fun!

ES: Wow. And Western sent you to all of those different locations?

PG: Yeah.

ES: And up into Idaho?

PG: You just get moved around. One year we went to run the Columbia up in Canada; that was a lot of fun! Then, eventually I got tired of that and moved onto, went to work
for Grand Canyon Expeditions. Became good friends with Ron. Had a lot of fun with Ron. Then really got to like Grand Canyon a great deal.

ES: Right.

PG: I loved it in there. Rowed a lot of trips, motored a lot of trips.

ES: Yeah.

PG: Loved it down there. Art Gallenson and I had done a lot of hiking through the canyon, all the old trails in the canyon. We'd kind of gone and hiked there. And next, I went to Idaho. Kind of got to the point where I couldn't deal with the heat in the summer at the Grand Canyon anymore.

ES: Yeah.

PG: Got too old for it. Went to Idaho and went to work for Wilderness Encounters, Jim Campbell's outfit. Had a lot of fun there, too. Good times. That's where I met Jerry Hughes and Don Banducci. Don Banducci eventually started Yakima Racks.

ES: Okay.

PG: Jerry Hughes runs Hughes River Expeditions still. Cort Conley was there. He was managing it, as much as river runners are ever managed. Of course, Earl Perry. A lot of other people. Eventually, that sort of got itself into trouble due to some bad management. Not Cort's fault. Jim Campbell's fault. And I went to work for Bob Sevy, Sevy Guide Service, and I probably worked for him longer than anyone else. Almost twenty years. And we did those sea kayak trips together, we did some, you know. Fished our way through Chile together. Ran the Bio-Bio. Eventually we did. I did three years trips with
him in Alaska on the Noatak, the Alatna, the Alagnoc, and the Kongacut, clear up north of the Arctic Circle.

ES: Yeah.

PG: I have a lot of grizzly bear stories. And off and on during all this period I worked for Jerry Hughes as well, and for Outlaw Trails before A.C. Ekker was killed in a plane crash. That's kind of it, really. I finally retired about five years ago.

ES: Okay.


ES: Private trips.

PG: Yeah.

ES: And so, as far as all of your old peers and outdoor buddies, do you keep in touch with many of them?

PG: Not a lot of them. A few. I'm heading up to Island Park on the Henry's Fork of the Snake to fish tomorrow with my good old buddy, Ed Hikida and his wife, who I did a bunch of climbing and river running and stuff with. Probably about a month ago I had dinner with Eric Eliason for the first time seeing him in ten years.

ES: Wow.

PG: That was good, that was fun.

ES: Yeah.

PG: Talking things over, laughing about our junket to Colombia. Oh, my. I see Jerry
Peter Gibbs

Hughes fairly often, and Bob Sevy. I go up to Stanley to steelhead fish; that's where Bob lives, in Stanley. I've lost track of most of them.

ES: It can be difficult to stay in touch.

PG: Yeah. Everybody's active, everybody's doing things.

ES: Yeah. Now just a couple of quick questions, and this is, again, going back into earlier on. Did you patent the Gibbs Ascender and everything like that?

PG: Oh yes, yes. It was patented. It's long off patent now, though.

ES: Right.

PG: We had such a lock on the market for a long time that it wasn't really a problem; it didn't matter whether it was patented or not. At least the caving market we really had locked up.

ES: Right. And for caving did you use the same ropes that you used for climbing?

PG: Oh, no!

ES: Very different?

PG: Yeah, they're very low-stretch ropes.

ES: Okay.

PG: You don't want to them to catch falls. If you get on a--my brother and I went to Las Golondrinas Cave, it's down in central Mexico--or in Chihuahua, actually, northern Mexico. It's an eleven hundred foot vertical pitch with no--You're hundreds of feet away from the wall.

ES: Right.
PG: If you're on a stretchy climbing rope that long, and you're trying to walk up the rope, it starts bouncing.

ES: Right.

PG: You know? You want a rope that is as stiff as you can get.

ES: Okay. Well, that makes very much sense. And then, you referred to Bego Gerhart and George Gerhart. Is this the same individual?

PG: Yeah. George I knew him from college here, and we did some river running and climbing and all sorts of things. I had a lot of fun with George. And somewhere along the way he got involved with a young lady, Susan (I don't remember her last name now). They were quite seriously involved for a long time, and they took these Indian names, Bego and Ote. That's where it came from.

ES: Okay.

PG: I'm afraid that Ote married somebody else, but ...

ES: Right, but Bego is still around!

PG: And he still uses the name Bego.

ES: Right.

PG: He's on Clio.

ES: Alright.

PG: He's a member of Clio.

ES: Clio?

PG: Oh, you don't know? Well, that's how I know Roy Webb, I suppose.
ES: Okay.

PG: You know, it's this history, Grand Canyon history website.

ES: Ah.

PG: We're all members of.

ES: Okay.

PG: A bunch of us.

ES: Okay. And I understand Bego is now living down south somewhere, and he rigs climbing ropes for rappels.

PG: Yeah, and he's out in Moab.

ES: Yeah.

PG: He's been doing it for quite a while.

ES: Well, I need to get down there and talk to him next.

PG: Yeah. He'd take you climbing!

ES: Well, I hope so! That would be wonderful. Well, is there anything else that you would like to add or that you can think of?

PG: I think I've just about run out of ... my whole life is gone before my eyes! Oh, my. I graduated with a PhD in Mechanical Engineering in the spring of '71.

ES: From the University of Utah?


ES: Okay.
PG: Anything else in here? I don't know. I don't think there's anything else here. That's about it.

ES: Okay. Wonderful. All done with the interview.

END OF INTERVIEW