



Pat and Darit Reed at Rocky Mountain National Park.

‘If you want to be a superintendent’

Ranger Pat Reed: An Interview with Lilli Tichinin

During his 43-year career with the National Park Service, Pat Reed worked at 11 diverse parks, including Death Valley, Cape Hatteras and Jefferson National Expansion. He spent the first 20 years of his career in various ranger positions. During the next 20 years, he served as superintendent of Chickamauga & Chattanooga National Military Park and Mammoth Cave National Park. In this excerpt from an oral history interview at the 2014 Ranger Rendezvous, Reed describes the value of the formal training and informal mentoring he received at the start of his National Park Service career. Especially important was the advice of Frank Kowski, an advocate for ranger training and the first superintendent of Albright Training Center who served in that capacity from 1957 to 1966.

PAT REED: At the end of my sophomore year of college I was 20 years old, and I wasn't quite old enough to apply for a ranger job. But I got a job as a maintenance worker at Mount Rushmore in South Dakota, and spent the summer there. That really changed my whole life in terms of a perspective of wanting to have a career with the National Park Service.

I went back to school and back around 1970, George Hartzog was the director [of the Park Service] and NPS had a Washington-based intake ranger program. The Midwest Regional office in Omaha came to Iowa State University, and they only had one slot to fill. They interviewed me and I was very, very fortunate and lucky, I'm sure, to get that spot. And so at the end of my junior year of college, I went to the Grand Teton National Park as an intake — or student trainee they called it at the time — and spent the summer there and did mostly law enforcement. (This was back when the Tetons was in the Midwest Region.) I worked road patrol and mountain search and rescue mostly.

I admired the district ranger I worked for, Tom Milligan. Tom was a real ranger's ranger, kind of a skills ranger. I remember going into the backcountry with him on patrols and he'd say, "We'll arrest some people this summer and we'll have some medical emergencies, and oh, yeah, we'll have to recover some dead bodies." It was a whole new world as a ranger.

Being a student trainee, I also had some opportunity for diversity of experience. They put me on the entrance station for a week; I spent a week doing rafting patrols on the Snake River; I spent a week out on lake patrol on Jackson Lake. It was all really tough duty.

I went back to Iowa State and finished my senior year of college in the spring of '71 and unlike many of the students, I was again fortunate and blessed that I actually had a job when I graduated. I went back to the Tetons. They wanted me to go to the first available Introduction to Park Operations class at Albright Training Center, and that didn't open until the fall. So I went back to the Tetons until late fall and then went to Albright Training Center.

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Lon Garrison was the superintendent there at the time and was a longtime, legendary person in the Park Service — the superintendent at Yellowstone at one time. I remember being around a campfire with Lon Garrison and Frank Kowski. Frank had come back to talk to the intake class. We were sitting around drinking a beer and Frank was chewing on a cigar, and I remember him saying, "If you want to be a superintendent in the National Park Service you have to have a diversity of experience."

He said, "You've got to work in big parks, in recreation areas, in little parks, historic and cultural and natural." I remember that sticking with me over the years. Maybe that's why I ended up working in 11 different parks over my ca-



Pat Reed's retirement photo in 2012.

reer. And I often said: There are 350 units now, it'd be great if you could work a year in all of them, if you could live that long. Obviously, that's not going to happen, but it was great for me to think about.

That time around the campfire with Lon Garrison and Frank Kowski really did stick with me. I guess I didn't have a vision that I would ever go that far in the Park Service, to be a manager of a national park and have the privilege and the honor to do that. Initially I was thinking, "Well, if I could just get to be a chief ranger that would be wonderful." Then I found even with the ranger activities and the great times I've had here, and as much as I love ranger activities, after so many years you kind of find yourself repeating yourself a little bit.

I could have stayed being a field ranger all of my career but it seemed to be a sense that I really wanted to be able to contribute a little more at a different level. I wanted to be able to be part of making decisions that had long-ranging impacts on resources. That you could be a part of something like building a bypass around Chickamauga Battlefield — that really, for the life of that NPS unit, is going to make a huge impact — or helping to create a new unit of the park system like Moccasin Bend National Archeological District at Chick-Chatt, or helping employees develop and grow in the Park Service.

LILLI TICHININ: You've had such a wide range of experiences during your career, what was it that initially drew you to the Park Service?

PAT REED: I remember in 1971 going to the Tetons when I actually got a flat hat and a uniform, standing in front of the mirror in the living room of our house in Iowa, admiring myself and wearing this uniform and thinking, "Gosh, I'm really going to get paid to go out and work in Grand Teton National Park and be a ranger." From then on it was a no-brainer for me.

Pat Reed retired from the Park Service as the Superintendent of Mammoth Cave National Park in 2012 and now lives in Colorado.

Lilli Tichinin, an intern with the Park History Program in Washington, D.C., received a Supernaugh Scholarship to attend the Rendezvous in 2014.