

Mill Valley Oral History Program

*A collaboration between the Mill Valley
Historical Society and the Mill Valley
Public Library*

MATT CERKEL

**An Oral History Interview
Conducted by Debra Schwartz in 2017**

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In this oral history, Marin Municipal Water District park ranger Matt Cerkel shares his passion for Mt. Tam as well as some of the extensive historical, geographical, and environmental knowledge he acquired in his 22 years working on the mountain. Born in San Francisco, Matt grew up in Kentfield and Greenbrae. Matt relates how his father's side of the family came to San Francisco in the 1850s, and how his grandfather told him stories about taking the ferry from the city in the 1920s to go hiking on Mt. Tam. A graduate of Redwood High School, Matt then attended the University of Idaho and began working for the Marin Municipal Water District when he came home for summer vacations. Matt recounts the history of the water district, and gives a detailed description of what a park ranger does. He tells stories of mountain rescues, wildlife sightings, and various other tales from the trails. In addition to being a park ranger, Matt is also a photographer and a lecturer, and he discusses his book of photographs *A Year on the Mountain*. Matt shares his views on how those who enjoy the mountain can show their appreciation through specific ways of caring for it. He concludes this oral history by conjuring up a few of the magical days he has spent on the mountain, when he was surprised anew by its breathtaking beauty or the discovery of some unmapped natural treasure.

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Oral History of Matt Cerkel
May 5th, 2017

Editor's note: This transcript has been reviewed by Matt Cerkel, who made minor corrections and clarifications to the original.

0:00:01 Debra Schwartz: Today is May 5th, 2017. My name is Debra Schwartz, and I am sitting here on behalf of the Mill Valley Public Library and the Mill Valley Historical Society to conduct an interview with —

0:00:18 Matt Cerkel: Matt Cerkel.

0:00:19 Debra Schwartz: Matt Cerkel — a name I hear a lot. And I see you a lot too, Matt, on the mountain.

0:00:28 Matt Cerkel: This is true.

0:00:29 Debra Schwartz: You are?

0:00:30 Matt Cerkel: A park ranger for the Marin Municipal Water District on its Mt. Tamalpais Watershed.

0:00:36 Debra Schwartz: But I've seen you far more times in other capacities as well because you're a lecturer.

0:00:42 Matt Cerkel: That's right. I'm a lecturer, a photographer, a bit of a naturalist, an outdoors person, a lover of the mountain, and a historian for the mountain.

0:00:56 Debra Schwartz: Yes. Personally, I kind of think of you as the voice of the mountain. Any question I have about anything to do with Mt. Tam, it seems to be that you're the one I reach out to.

0:01:07 Matt Cerkel: Well, I try to stay knowledgeable on what's going on on the mountain currently, what has gone on on the mountain in the past, and just try to have a general knowledge of the mountain that I can then share with others.

0:01:22 Debra Schwartz: First of all, I'd like to say thank you very much for taking the time to include your story in our oral history program. I feel like I've been hunting my prey here — it's taken us how long? We started to talk about having an interview and I believe — it's how many months later?

0:01:41 Matt Cerkel: Going on 14 or 15.

0:01:45 Debra Schwartz: [laughs] You're like a wildlife sighting. I finally got you, right here and now. So, thank you for taking this time 'cause I know you're really, really busy.

0:01:54 Matt Cerkel: You're welcome. I'm glad we could finally make a time work.

0:01:56 Debra Schwartz: Yes. So, first of all, I'd just love to get a little information, a little background information, about you and your family. So if you could tell me just a little bit about your parents — if they're from the area, or what brought them to the area, and where you were raised, and just a little something about you.

0:02:15 Matt Cerkel: Okay. Well, my family, at least on my father's side, has been in California since 1852. So, a long history here, pretty much based out of San Francisco. My mom's from New Jersey. But as the family stories go, one of my great-great-grandfathers, Alfred Perkins, was an early San Francisco photographer who took landscape photography and other early photography, and according to family stories was also somebody who knew John Muir. So, sometimes I've wondered, "Did my interest in photography — was it from my great-great-grandfather?" And there's been a long family history, especially on my dad's side, of being on Mt. Tam. My own grandfather used to tell me stories of during the 1920s, which was the heyday of hiking on Mt. Tam, of taking the ferry to Sausalito, catching the train to Mill Valley, and then hiking over the mountain. One of the most memorable hikes he told me about was he started in Mill Valley, hiked over the mountain, just guessing now, down Cataract Trail to Alpine Dam and then followed Lagunitas Creek all the way to the town of Lagunitas where he caught the narrow-gauge train back to Sausalito. [chuckles]

So, my family has a long history on Mt. Tam. And I would love to be able to duplicate that hike but can't complete that route anymore because Lagunitas Creek below Alpine Dam is now partly flooded with Kent Lake. I guess I could do Bolinas Ridge instead of Cataract Creek and Lagunitas Creek and still end up in the same place. And, granted, there's no more narrow-gauge train going from Lagunitas.

0:04:19 Debra Schwartz: Yes, I guess you'd just have to use your thumb.

0:04:23 Matt Cerkel: Or have a car waiting for me.

0:04:24 Debra Schwartz: Yes. Well, that's interesting. From the mid-1800s. If you could include their names as well — do you know where they came from, where that side of family came from?

0:04:37 Matt Cerkel: On my father's side it's English, French, Portuguese, Polish, German, Italian — a whole mixture. Then you're onto my mom's family. My mom's family was English, Irish, Slovakian and Czech.

0:05:00 Debra Schwartz: You're practically the world all in one man.

0:05:01 Matt Cerkel: Or at least Europe.

0:05:02 Debra Schwartz: Yes. [chuckles] Well, most people came in the 1850s for one reason.

0:05:11 Matt Cerkel: We know they came to California for the gold rush because there's a building — I want to say it's in Murphys or Angel Camp — with one of my relative's name on it. So they came for the gold rush, but I don't think they were miners because there was more money to be made from selling things to the miners than actually doing the mining.

0:05:36 Debra Schwartz: As they say, "Mine the miners."

0:05:38 Matt Cerkel: And I think that's what happened.

0:05:41 Debra Schwartz: And they came from where again, did you say?

0:05:45 Matt Cerkel: Well, England, probably Scotland.

0:05:48 Debra Schwartz: But directly from before San Francisco.

0:05:50 Matt Cerkel: Oh, before San Francisco, some of my relatives actually came over on the Mayflower. We've traced it that far back. So, my family in one form or another has been in this country before it was a country. So long family history there. And now I'm married to my wife Heather Hill who grew up in the East Bay and has been a park ranger like myself. We currently live on the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed at Alpine Dam.

0:06:23 Debra Schwartz: That's a nice place to live.

0:06:26 Matt Cerkel: This winter was a bit challenging. The Fairfax-Bolinas Road was closed for a long period. One morning I woke up to go to work, and going down the driveway there was a landslide blocking our driveway bigger than our house. It was like, "Yeah, I'm not going to be driving my truck to work today."

0:06:45 Debra Schwartz: It was a lot of rain this year.

0:06:47 Matt Cerkel: And Alpine is one of the wettest spots in all of Marin, that's why the dam was built there in 1917 through 1919.

0:06:58 Debra Schwartz: Where were you raised? In Marin?

0:07:02 Matt Cerkel: I was born in San Francisco and was raised in Kentfield and later Greenbrae. And graduated Redwood High School in 1989.

0:07:11 Debra Schwartz: So just so we don't forget who you're descended from. Could you give your father and your mother's names?

0:07:17 Matt Cerkel: Tony Cerkel and my mom was Patricia Farley.

0:07:24 Debra Schwartz: So you went to Redwood High.

0:07:28 Matt Cerkel: Yes.

0:07:28 Debra Schwartz: Were you an outdoorsy fellow? All right from the get-go?

0:07:32 Matt Cerkel: Well, I can remember Mt. Tam, going up there even in the 1970s. I was a small child. I remember in 1974 or '75 when they had the big snow on Mt. Tam, we lived in Kentfield at that time on McAllister Avenue. I remember that morning waking up, and you looked outside and it was snow all over the mountain. And I remember taking drives up to the top of the mountain and along Ridgecrest Boulevard and hiking at Phoenix Lake and hiking up around the East Peak. And later in high school I did a lot of mountain biking, and that's where I really first started to extensively explore Mt. Tam on my own, with my mountain bike. And then, also later, I started to hike around the mountain just to go to all the different places. I always had a fascination with history from the Mountain Railroad and later I learned about the plane crashes, which I could talk about extensively.

0:08:33 Debra Schwartz: I have paid to hear you talk about that extensively. You're quite the authority about local plane crashes.

0:08:43 Matt Cerkel: Yep, and that started with Mt. Tam, because I knew they were there but there wasn't much in the history books at that time or known about them, except that they had occurred and the type of airplane they might have been. But even some of the history books got that wrong. So one thing led to another. I started to research those but in the process I learned about a lot more. Just during the Second World War there were over 60 plane crashes in Marin County. Just a fraction of those occurred on Mt. Tam. I'm thinking there were five on Mt. Tam during World War II.

0:09:28 Debra Schwartz: Some of the remnants still remain on the mountain.

0:09:35 Matt Cerkel: And now they're part of the mountain history and protected historic sites. I remember also when there was a lot more. I started working for the water district in the early 1990s. I was a seasonal employee while I was in college, working for the rangers. I remember one of the old time rangers up there was kind of my mentor, Gordon Hasler, showing me where the airplane wing was. And later we discovered somebody was trying to steal it, and we recovered it and brought it to the ranger station only to have it stolen from the ranger station a few years later. People might think that's a little odd, but people who restore vintage airplanes can either use parts or use something like a wing as a pattern to make more parts. A Corsair, which is the type of plane that crashed on Mt. Tam, one was recovered from a swamp in the Carolinas, I believe, and just the wreckage of it sold for a half million dollars.

0:10:44 Debra Schwartz: Oh, my.

0:10:45 Matt Cerkel: So, when there's money involved people will sometimes do things that they shouldn't be doing, and when we're talking about historic resources, that ends up costing everyone that historic resource. I think John Muir said that nothing marketable is safe. Yet, at the same time, if he makes parks marketable where people want to visit, that can actually help make them safe. Lot of wisdom with John Muir, and as I mentioned earlier, there's possibly even family history of knowing him. I've had a number of conversations with his great, great grandson. I haven't met him personally yet, but when I first chatted with him I mentioned, quoting my family history, "My great-great-grandfather knew your great-great-grandfather." So, it's interesting how sometimes the world can be a small place like that.

0:11:46 Debra Schwartz: Comes full circle for a Cerkel.

0:11:47 Matt Cerkel: Exactly. [chuckles]

0:11:50 Debra Schwartz: Before we get off too much into other things, I just wanted to ask you at what point did you know that you wanted to dedicate your life to service on the mountain?

0:12:02 Matt Cerkel: What's ironic is probably for a very long time I remember, but I think it was probably 1976 for Halloween when I was probably in first grade at Greenbrae School. I dressed as a park ranger for Halloween. My dad knew the then-supervising ranger at Samuel P. Taylor, Lanny Wagner, and he loaned us a state park hat and gave me a state park uniform shirt, so I think the seeds were planted early, and that I wanted to work on as a ranger and preferably on Mt. Tam. So I'd say more than 40 years ago I knew roughly what I wanted to do and eventually accomplished it.

0:12:56 Debra Schwartz: How did you accomplish it? How did it go? After high school did you —

0:13:00 Matt Cerkel: After high school I went to the University of Idaho's College of Forestry where I majored in Wildland and Recreation Management. I'd come home every summer and work seasonally for the Marin Municipal Water District. I started with the district in 1990 as a seasonal employee and then in '91 got to start working on the mountain and within a few days of working as basically a park aide for the water district down at Mt. Tam I realized, "Okay, I now know for certain I want to be a ranger and I want to be a ranger here." And I made that my goal then. I continued to work for the district first as a seasonal employee, basically the summers of '91, '92 and '93 as a park aide on Mt. Tam for the water district.

After graduating college in '94, I got, I guess you could call it a promotion to a temporary employee. With the water district I was a park ranger aide and at the same time I was going to the Law Enforcement Ranger Academy at Santa Rosa to get my law enforcement training. I'd already previously gotten my firefighting training a couple of seasons earlier in 1992 by attending Marin County Fire Department's Wildland and Fire

Academy. And when I was in college, I was also a volunteer firefighter for the Moscow Volunteer Fire Department in the city where University of Idaho was located. During that process, I became, initially a first responder, now known as an EMR, emergency medical responder. And later, just after starting with the water district as a park ranger in March of 1995, I got my EMT certificate, so I became an emergency medical technician. For about a two-year period in the mid-'90s, I was also a member of the Marin County Sheriff's Department Search and Rescue team. But trying to work full-time as a ranger on Mt. Tam and then keeping up with the training for search and rescue was a difficult task, so I focused on my paid job. It was still a good experience and the search and rescue team still plays a vital role on Mt. Tam helping the different park agencies out when there's missing hikers or rescues to perform.

0:15:38 Debra Schwartz: Yes, indeed. I know this for a fact because you were first responder to one of my friend's terrible bike accidents about a month and a half ago.

0:15:53 Matt Cerkel: That's right. That was one of the more intense medical aid calls I was on and sadly did not have a good result at the end but we provided the best care we could, immediately I mean. We were actually all coming back from a previous accident, and an ambulance from Ross Valley Paramedic Authority — which is staffed by Marin County Fire Department and also firefighters from Ross Valley Fire Department — came upon him, and I was right behind them.

0:16:33 Debra Schwartz: He'd had a bike accident on —

0:16:35 Matt Cerkel: On Fairfax-Bolinas Road. We had a helicopter already in the area and he was airlifted, but due to the nature of the injuries he did not survive.

0:16:47 Debra Schwartz: Had he not been so severely injured, having such an amazingly quick response with transport to a trauma center could've made all the difference.

0:17:00 Matt Cerkel: Exactly, that's true.

0:17:01 Debra Schwartz: So on a personal note, I just want to profoundly thank you —

0:17:05 Matt Cerkel: You're welcome.

0:17:06 Debra Schwartz: For being there. I know you love the mountain. A lot of the people that get injured on the mountain are there because they also love it, and I think it makes a huge difference to know that people that may be injured and perhaps not even able to speak for themselves are being cared for by people that truly understand why they're there.

0:17:25 Matt Cerkel: And that's part of my job as a park ranger is to provide that service.

0:17:32 Debra Schwartz: So let me ask you now, what is the role of a water district? What is the role that the water district has in protecting the mountain? Tell me about your job.

0:17:48 Matt Cerkel: Okay. Well, first, I have to start with the history of the water district's involvement on Mt. Tam and the public's desire to protect it. The idea of protecting Mt. Tam as a public park predates the water district. William Kent was kind of the father of the idea of protecting Mt. Tam as a park, and he formed the Tamalpais National Park Association in 1903. And at that time, all of Mt. Tam, except for a little parcel at Cascade Falls in Mill Valley, was privately owned, primarily most of the slopes of Mt. Tam and the peaks were owned by private water companies. You had the North Coast Water Company that was on the south side of Mt. Tam where Railroad Grade is now, and then on the north side of the mountain you had what was originally called the Marin County Water Company and later became the Marin Water and Power Company that first built Lake Lagunitas in 1872, and later would build Phoenix Lake in around 1904.

So, going back to this idea of preserving Mt. Tam, the initial segment of Mt. Tam publicly preserved as public land was Muir Woods, which William Kent bought and then donated to the federal government to protect it from being dammed by one of the private water companies. And he donated it because the private water companies couldn't do condemnation proceedings on federal land. So he saved it and he suggested it to Teddy Roosevelt, who was the president of the time and his personal friend, that it be named in honor of John Muir. But that was only, at that time, less than 300 acres. So a very small parcel of land considering Mt. Tam region. You could estimate it covers about 40,000 to 50,000 acres of total land.

William Kent also, being a progressive during the height of the progressive era, realized that private water companies in Marin weren't providing the best service and so he helped with the idea of creating a municipal water district. And kind of through his guidance the state of California enacted the Municipal Water District Act of 1911, which authorized the creation of municipal water districts. And in 1912, in April 1912, the voters of the proposed Marin Municipal Water District, which at that time included the major towns and cities from San Rafael south, approved the creation of the Marin Municipal Water District. One of the major selling points was that it would bring the Mt. Tamalpais region into public ownership. And from the planning stages it took a few more years. In 1915, the voters approved a bond measure allowing the construction of the Alpine Project or Alpine Dam in Alpine Lake and the purchase of the private water companies. At that time, two of the three private water companies did not allow public access and would actually arrest people for trespassing if they —

0:21:20 Debra Schwartz: Do you remember which companies?

0:21:22 Matt Cerkel: That was the Marin Water and Power Company and the Lagunitas Water Company. North Coast Water Company was more progressive and

allowed public access, but one of the selling points of the bond measure was it would bring these lands into public ownership, and the water district envisioned the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed, or at the time they called it the Mt. Tamalpais Public Park, like a national park in miniature. The water district took over the land officially in 1916 but didn't officially open them to the public until February 23, 1917 when the first set of rules and regulations were approved, because the lands were being set aside not just as a park but primarily as a source of Marin County's drinking water, or the district's drinking water. They had to get approval of the rules and regulations from the State Board of Health to allow them to open it. At the same time, the district also planned for how it would take care of those lands and how they would be policed. That's the same day the water district approved the creation of what they then called the "patrolman job," which later was changed to "park ranger" when that job title became more common — 'cause at that point, in 1916, 1917, the only agency using the title "park ranger" was the National Park Service, which was also established in 1916 partly under the guidance of William Kent. So that ties it all in.

At that time, in the state parks, their job title was originally "guardians" and then "park wardens." So it took a considerable time for all the agencies to kind of agree on a job title and went with the park ranger title. At the time when the district established its park rangers, the job responsibility was to enforce all the rules and regulations, patrol the mountain, fight the fires, and do other things like take care of the sanitary needs of the watershed and help manage the wild game. One of the job requirements at that time is that early rangers had to supply their own horse. So the basic job duties of the ranger has not really changed, it still focuses on protecting the watershed, enforcing the rules, patrolling the mountains, fighting the fires.

One of my favorite sayings about what a ranger should do is: "Park rangers are protectors, explainers, hosts, caretakers, people who are expected to be knowledgeable, helpful, courteous, and professional. People who find you when you're lost, help you when you're hurt, rescue you when you're stuck, and enforce the law when you or others cannot abide by it." And to me, that pretty much sums up what a park ranger should be, and as a water district park ranger, we do meet that. We're peace officers. We actually have the same training requirements as a city police officer or a deputy sheriff. We are wildland firefighters. We're emergency medical technicians. We're trained as search and rescue technicians. We are also expected to be environmental educators. So we wear a lot of different hats. Each is a very important aspect of the job, and you have to have the knowledge in all those areas to truly be effective in the job, and understand when each of those tools should be used and how to use it.

0:25:22 Debra Schwartz: So, in essence, when anyone passes a ranger with the ranger outfit on that's just distinguishable from all other hikers, you're passing a highly specialized professional.

0:25:36 Matt Cerkel: Correct.

0:25:37 Debra Schwartz: Someone who is honed in all ways to handle any and many circumstances and topics.

0:25:47 Matt Cerkel: On any given day, you don't know what is going to be thrown in your direction that day. I mean, it could be a medical emergency, it could be a lost hiker. Just a couple weeks ago, we had two lost hikers who'd gotten off trail on Mt. Tam, ended up in the Swede Gorge drainage, which is one of the most remote sections of the mountain off trail. And it took a couple of hours to get to them even though we knew where they were at 'cause they gave us their GPS coordinates.

0:26:19 Debra Schwartz: They had cell service?

0:26:20 Matt Cerkel: And cell service.

0:26:21 Debra Schwartz: Well, that's not always the case.

0:26:24 Matt Cerkel: Exactly. It took us a couple of hours to get to them because there were no maintained trails to where they were at. And at one point, we had to rescue one of our rangers within 100 yards of them, but due to terrain and darkness he could not safely get from where he was at to where they were at. Eventually we actually also got the help from Marin County Search and Rescue, and they actually had to hike up the creek drainage from Alpine Lake to where these people were, and then it took about two hours to hike them out.

0:26:55 Debra Schwartz: My goodness! How did they get in there?

0:26:58 Matt Cerkel: Well, they ended up going off trail. They were on the High Marsh Trail and took a wrong turn onto one of the unofficial trails that are not a maintained route. And they eventually lost that. They knew where they needed to get to, so they kind of started to follow the creek, and eventually the creek got a little too rugged and they ended up on a ridge and realized that they were running out of daylight and called for help.

0:27:29 Debra Schwartz: Were they on a wooded, treed ridge or an open ridge?

0:27:34 Matt Cerkel: It was a combination ridge where they realized they needed to call for help, they had hit a manzanita field that they couldn't get through so they worked their way around it and they ended up under heavy timber.

0:27:45 Debra Schwartz: Okay. So the fact is that there is an awful lot of land, natural undisturbed territory, which in the conception of the municipal water district was designated and protected as open space to be used for recreation and not to be developed. Can you talk a little bit about that?

0:28:07 Matt Cerkel: Yeah. Well, first and foremost, the land the district set aside was to supply the drinking water and to this day the highest priority for the water district lands

is to protect the water quality and water production of the land. But when the water district took over mountain, the first large chunk of Mt. Tam as public land in 1917, at that time the district took ownership of 10,700 acres including the three peaks of Mt. Tam, and we were the first large piece of public land within the immediate Bay Area. At that time, you had Muir Woods, which was less than 300 acres, down by Santa Cruz we had Big Basin State Park, and the only other major parkland or protected area was MMWD's [Marin Municipal Water District's] watershed lands on Mt. Tam, which was also a major destination for recreational use.

I mean people have been using Mt. Tam recreationally for well over 100 years and, if you know where to look, you can find the tourist map from 1898 that shows some of the same trails that people use today, such as Cataract Trail. But the first large piece — and pretty much still the crown jewel of public land in Marin — is owned by the water district and while the cornerstone of the foundation of land preservation in Marin was started with Muir Woods in 1907, the foundation of the rest of Marin's land preservation started with the water district in 1917. And if you were to actually look at a map, you could see how the public lands and protected areas in Marin grew around that initial 10,000 acres of water district land.

On 1928, you had Mt. Tam State Park that at that time it was much smaller than the current state park primarily focusing in on the Pantoll and the Steep Ravine areas and once again William Kent played a major role in that. In the mid-'40s, the water district lands expanded significantly into the Kent Lake, or what's now the Kent Lake drainage, so the Lagunitas Creek canyon below Alpine Dam — which at the same time was established Samuel P. Taylor Park. Mt. Tam State Park gradually expanded around what the water district had opened up and preserved. And later, in '62, you had Point Reyes National Seashore. In 1972 you had GGNRA and the Marin County Open Space District. But if you took a time lapse of Marin County starting in 1900 where there was no public land to today, you could see how everything we've built around that 10,000 acres that the water district preserved — and now today the water district manages over 18,000 acres on Mt. Tam — makes it the single largest land management agency on Mt. Tam.

To put in perspective, I believe the state park is around 6,000 acres, and then you have some land managed by the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, which now includes Muir Woods and Marin County Open Space District. But it's kind of an untold story, because when people think of Mt. Tam, they don't normally think of the water district. Some of the locals do, but when people see me, "Well, what's the water district doing up here? Oh, you're a ranger on Mt. Tam or do you work for the state park?" Then I have to explain to them that I work for the water district and we play an integral role not only today on Mt. Tam but for over 100 years we've been actively involved in protecting Mt. Tam for future generations and providing Marin County, or at least the residents of the Marin Municipal Water District, with their drinking water.

0:32:31 Debra Schwartz: I don't think state park or any other agency really has trucks that give water to thirsty hikers. In the summer this has actually happened where water

district truck comes by and they hand you a glass of water if you're thirsty. This is a very courteous and unexpected gesture.

0:32:54 Matt Cerkel: And it's also a public safety thing or preventative search and rescue because summertime, when it gets hot, people often overestimate their abilities and underestimate what they need, and it's better to provide water to somebody before they need it than to wait for them to have possibly a medical emergency because of dehydration.

0:33:21 Debra Schwartz: It's just a bit of a surprise because nowhere in the world that I've hiked has it. You see a truck come along the ridge and out steps a fellow offering you water — or a woman.

0:33:34 Matt Cerkel: We've developed that over the past few years especially, but we've learned that during the summertime, especially if you're coming from San Francisco and you're thinking it's going to be cool, you get on Mt. Tam, especially above the inversion layer, and it can get really, really hot, and people are often not prepared for what they're going to go out and do. Because there's this perception, "Oh, it's so close to San Francisco, it's really not that wild of a place." And the fact that you can have people get lost off trail and it takes a couple hours to get to them, gives you an idea of how rugged Mt. Tam actually is, and how wild it still is.

0:34:24 Debra Schwartz: It's a very good point you're making because we're just really, as the crow flies, a few miles from San Francisco, and people that come from the city to hike over here are often surprised by the wildlife, for example, we have mountain lions and fox and an abundance of deer and many other animals, and people do die on these trails.

0:34:52 Matt Cerkel: Luckily not that often, but I've been to a number of cardiac arrests and sometimes we're successful and sometimes we're not. And sadly, because it is such a beautiful place, Mt. Tam is also a place where people sometimes go to end their lives, and I've been to a few of those cases. One of the cases also illustrates how rugged Mt. Tam is. A few years back, I went to a call where somebody had driven off Ridgecrest Boulevard and driven their car into the trees, so it was out of sight. They were only probably 100 yards or so off Ridgecrest Boulevard, but in an area where people pass all the time and the car had been down there with the victim in it for two years before it was found because it was an area where people normally don't go and there were no trails. This person didn't want to be found, so he purposely steered his car off through the trees to a place where, unless you actually went down there, you wouldn't find it. And it was actually people who we suspect were illegally collecting mushrooms who came across it. So, sadly, Mt. Tam can be a destination for people who want to end their lives, and they want to be in a beautiful place. It's really tragic but it happens.

0:36:22 Debra Schwartz: Yes. Tell me about some of your most interesting rescues.

0:36:31 Matt Cerkel: Probably the single most interesting rescue was in 2008. It was once again in the Swede Gorge drainage of Mt. Tam. We get a call late in the day of an injured hiker down on the trail. There were two hikers. It had taken the other hiker an hour to hike out from where he was at to get cell phone service so he could call for help. And it took another hour and a half for the rescuers, or at least the first rescuers, to get to this hiker's location. It was on an unmaintained trail, or what we call a non-system trail, down the Middle Fork of the Swede Gorge drainage on Mt. Tam, which is one of the major creeks feeding Alpine Lake. From there we ended up involving the entire ranger staff of, at that time, eight people plus two engine companies of three people each from the fire department, plus 20 members of the search and rescue team. And to carry this patient out in a wheeled litter down this drainage, because there were no maintained routes, took seven hours.

0:37:48 Debra Schwartz: What was the injury?

0:37:49 Matt Cerkel: Turns out she had a broken neck.

0:37:52 Debra Schwartz: Oh, my.

0:37:53 Matt Cerkel: She had fallen 50 feet off the trail. There's a number of these non-system routes on Mt. Tam, which we really don't encourage people to use because they get people lost like these hikers I previously have talked about. And then in this case, the hiker who had led her there was a very experienced hiker but she wasn't and she lost her footing. So these trails pose a safety threat because people get lost and people get injured, and if you get lost or injured in these areas, as you've kind of seen now, it can take a long time to get you out. That was the single most interesting rescue. I mean we get a lot of carry outs on Cataract Trail because people twist an ankle or even break a leg.

We get a lot of mountain bike accidents, especially of people going downhill. I went to one last weekend where the person was riding one of the berms on Railroad Grade, which we prefer people not to do. According to the witness he was riding, but they were doing about 30 miles an hour, and he lost control of his bike and landed on his head. Luckily, he was not critically injured, and we treated his injuries and the fire department transported him to the hospital.

Then some of the rescued people aren't injured. They just get lost sometimes. They take wrong turns. This particular area is on the mountain where we have a long history. We refer to one area, kind of in the Swede Gorge/High Marsh area, as the Bermuda Triangle because people tend to get lost there. And as a land management agency, we have tried to address that by putting in better signage and trying to hide the unofficial routes. But people continue to use the unofficial routes or uncover the work that we do to make them less obvious.

0:40:01 Debra Schwartz: For those that may not know where Swede Gorge area is why don't you explain.

0:40:08 Matt Cerkel: The Swede Gorge Creek is one of the major tributaries of Alpine Dam or Alpine Lake. The Swede Gorge Creek start on the upper slopes of Mt. Tam crossing Northside Trail, then crossing High Marsh Trail, and they all converge prior to the Helen Markt Trail where there's a fabulous bridge that was built by a longtime water district employee and later state park docent, Jim Vitek, the Swede Gorge Bridge, which he built in the early '50s. It's one of the neatest bridges on Mt. Tam, and he built the trail and named it in honor of Helen Markt, who was the wife of then water district lake keeper Frank Markt. They had earlier been the last lodge keepers at the old Summit House or Larson Lodge, which was located at Ridgecrest Boulevard on Bolinas Ridge, Fairfax-Bolinas Road. But going back to the Swede Gorge drainage, it's probably — at least on the main part of Mt. Tam — probably one of the wildest and ruggedest sections of the mountain. It has three major tributaries, the West Fork, Middle Fork and East Fork. And people are going to be most familiar with it if they hike down Kent Trail below Hidden Lake. And at one point you come within a few feet of it, and the whole way down that section of Kent Trail you can hear the creek running. And that's the East Fork.

0:41:50 Debra Schwartz: You talked about the history of plane wrecks. So there are some areas that most people can Google, or maps will show where there's evidence of plane wrecks.

0:42:03 Matt Cerkel: Yes. Regrettably, in these days of Internet and smartphone, it's hard to keep things hidden, which is in some ways good, some ways bad. Most of the plane crashes on Mt. Tam occurred during the Second World War or just after. And with that a lot of debris is still remaining at those sites. In one of the sites off Old Railroad Grade at the top of Double Bow Knot there's the Vic Haun Trail which also was known as the Old Plane Trail or the Airplane Trail, leading near to it. You actually cross the debris field on Vic Haun of the single deadliest accident on Mt. Tam, which occurred on November 30th, 1944 when a US Navy PBM-5 Mariner, which was a seaplane patrol bomber on a flight to Hawaii, crashed into Mt. Tam killing all eight crew members on board. And when visiting that site, you can still find boot heels and fragments of leather boots. In reality, it's a grave site because I've talked to the witnesses who were there soon afterwards, who were young kids at that time. Everyone went up to go see the plane crash. And vividly, I remember a conversation with one of these people, that he was up there with his father, and they found a boot and they looked in it and the foot was still in the boot.

So chances are the Navy didn't get all the human remains. And when visiting that particular site, treat it with the respect that you would treat a graveyard because eight men died there. And the other site — oh, there's the two Corsairs that crashed after a mid-air collision above Rock Springs just after the Second World War. A lot of that wreckage over the years has actually been stolen, I think I mentioned that earlier. But where I tell people to go is the engine from one of the planes is in Cataract Creek above Laurel Dell Fire Road. We don't encourage people to go off-trail looking for the wreckage. We know people do, but we ask people to protect all cultural history sites or historic sites on Mt. Tam as historic. And if you do visit them, take pictures but don't take anything else.

Leave only footprints, take only pictures. Leave something behind for future generations to see.

0:44:46 Debra Schwartz: Yesterday I was hiking in the Muir Headlands over by Rodeo Beach, and I was up at Tennessee Point and I noticed that there was some debris as you're looking out at the ocean to the left, right below the Point. And I could not tell what it is. Now I texted you and you said —

0:45:10 Matt Cerkel: Without actually seeing it myself — which now I'm really curious — there were a number of military installations along that section of coast from observation posts for the coastal artillery down at Fort Cronkhite and Fort Barry. There were also coastal searchlights, giant spotlights, probably multi-million candle power, that they'd use to search for enemy ships offshore at night. And I know there was one near Tennessee Point, because just prior to World War II, a pilot out of Hamilton Field was flying his P-40 just off Tennessee Point when one of those searchlights turned on him. It temporarily blinded him, they believe, and it caused him to crash into the surf killing him just off Tennessee Beach. Those would be literally right on the cliff faces, so without actually seeing it myself, I'm going to assume it quite possibly could be the framework and parts of what was a coastal searchlight.

0:46:24 Debra Schwartz: It's interesting that that kind of material isn't removed.

0:46:29 Matt Cerkel: Well, the military pretty much left all that behind. They took anything important that was easily to remove but the coastline basically from Point Reyes all the way down to the Half Moon Bay area is crisscrossed with remnants of coastal fortifications and their facilities, primarily on observation posts which look like pill boxes. 'Cause the coastal artillery, especially the last generation of it with the 16-inch naval guns, could shoot a 2000-pound shell beyond the Farallon Islands. So they wanted to have observation posts all along the coast and with those observation posts, it was almost like how a fire lookout works. They'd take a bearing, the other observation post would take a bearing, and then they'd triangulate the location of the enemy ship and then fire on that location. So the whole coast around San Francisco Bay is lined with these old military installations and the closer you got to the Golden Gate the more concentrated they became.

0:47:44 Debra Schwartz: Interesting. And now how about West Peak?

0:47:46 Matt Cerkel: West Peak was, and still is, the highest peak of Mt. Tam, but is currently not accessible because of the FAA radar installation, which originally was part of the Mill Valley Air Force Station. It was early warning radar that the Air Force built in the early stages of the Cold War on Mt. Tam. They bulldozed the peak down, and for many years I thought the West Peak was now lower than the East Peak, which is now considered the top of Mt. Tam. And West Peak, they've only recently figured it's two-thousand —

0:48:30 Debra Schwartz: 2,572 [feet]. So it's more than that?

0:48:32 Matt Cerkel: 2,584.

0:48:35 Debra Schwartz: Isn't that interesting? So where the big golf ball is —

0:48:39 Matt Cerkel: Is still the highest peak of Mt. Tam. And it's the highest because you have the Ridgecrest Boulevard there. On an interesting side note, just after this is the highest you can drive on Mt. Tam, but the water district is now looking at the restoration of the West Peak area to remove the remnants of the military base. Gary Yost, the filmmaker, is really one of the driving forces behind this with his films. He did the film *Invisible Peak* to explain the history there. And he is, as I said, one of the driving forces to encourage the restoration of West Peak in the water district along with its partners at ONE TAM, or Tamalpais Lands Collaborative, who are currently putting together a restoration feasibility study. We'll have a laundry list basically of the restoration options.

0:49:43 Debra Schwartz: So, when you're talking about the restoration, for those that don't know, although the barracks and many of the buildings that once occupied that part of West Peak are gone, the foundations, they shaved a good part of that mountain. How many feet was it, 30 feet or something?

0:50:00 Matt Cerkel: At least.

0:50:00 Debra Schwartz: Yes, 30 feet was shaved flat, and then you have the remnants and the foundations.

0:50:05 Matt Cerkel: And there are a few remaining buildings, a bowling alley, the boiler room, the sewage treatment plant. It was basically a small city of about almost 400 people who lived up there. And I know the water district or watershed manager, Mike Swezy, is also a big backer of this restoration effort because it is kind of a scar on Mt. Tam. So, hopefully within my lifetime, or even within my career, we'll see the restoration begin to restore that section of Mt. Tam. The West Peak area itself, where the radar dome is, or the golf ball as everyone calls it, is still leased to the federal government so that very top, top portion will probably not be restored for the foreseeable future but as new technologies develop, who knows? Hopefully that radar will eventually be considered obsolete and no longer needed.

0:51:08 Debra Schwartz: Will the publicity material that says East Peak is the tallest peak on Mt. Tam be altered, I wonder?

0:51:15 Matt Cerkel: Well, it should because that is not accurate anymore, because they've perhaps now determined West Peak is still higher. Going back to the one little side note, how Mt. Tam has been a destination for recreation tourism, is that the first road built up to the top of Mt. Tam, Eldridge Grade, which was built in 1884, was basically a tourist wagon road and it actually went to the West Peak because that was the highest peak. And later, after the railroad was built in 1896, it fell out of favor, and in 1920 the Ridgecrest Boulevard Company which was a private company that built Ridgecrest

Boulevard and later Pantoll Road, as a toll tourist road, basically built the West Ridgecrest Boulevard over the footprint of Eldridge Grade, from near the West Peak to the saddle between East Peak and Middle Peak.

0:52:18 Debra Schwartz: You are more than a rescuer, a firefighter, all these things — you're a photographer. Tell me about that, because I know you spoke at Mill Valley Historical Society first Wednesday about your book. What is it?

0:52:36 Matt Cerkel: *A Year on the Mountain.*

0:52:37 Debra Schwartz: *A Year on the Mountain*, with all these exquisite photographs.

0:52:41 Matt Cerkel: Well, being a ranger on Mt. Tam, I realize I get to see some extraordinary things on a daily basis. And probably six, seven years ago I started to dabble a little bit in photography, and I realized that I should share what I see on a daily basis with other people, and photography is obviously the way to do that. Because I get to see the different seasons on the mountain — I'm up there pretty much — or my work schedule, I'm on a 4/10 schedule, so I work four days a week, 10 hour shifts. But I'm up there, now living up there. I'm up there every day so I get to see extraordinary things that other people go to on their weekends, but I get to see it on a daily basis. Also, getting to know the mountain, I get into the remote areas that many people don't get to see. And I've learned to appreciate not only the big landscape views but sometimes even the small wild flowers, some of which are easily overlooked, but if you know when and where to look for them are actually quite spectacular. So, my whole goal with photography was to share what I get to see with others.

0:54:01 Debra Schwartz: This is probably a funny question, but do you have a favorite flower? Is there that one little beautiful creature that calls to you more than the others?

0:54:11 Matt Cerkel: I don't have one single favorite; I have a couple. Calypso orchid, the spotted and striped coral root orchids, the giant stream orchids, the Indian pink, which is actually a brilliant red flower, and the Tamalpais jewelflower and the Tamalpais bristly jewelflower.

0:54:35 Debra Schwartz: Okay. How about — I don't recall that many. I don't think many of those are too scented. Do you have a favorite scented flower?

0:54:42 Matt Cerkel: Calypso orchid.

0:54:44 Debra Schwartz: Calypso orchid.

0:54:44 Matt Cerkel: Yep. It's very distinctive and pleasant scent.

0:54:51 Debra Schwartz: So how about some of the other —

0:54:53 Matt Cerkel: And I'd actually throw into that the Ceanothus when it's in bloom.

0:54:57 Debra Schwartz: Oh, the purple — beautiful. So how about more odd and amazing things? I mean, there's so much natural phenomenon that takes place and even bizarre things with human beings. I'm on the mountain a lot myself, and there are things I have seen that I don't think anybody would even believe. How about you?

0:55:18 Matt Cerkel: Well, seeing a person walking their monitor lizard on a leash. That was entertaining. [laughs]

0:55:26 Debra Schwartz: Wait. Monitored? What do you mean?

0:55:28 Debra Schwartz: Monitor lizard.

0:55:29 Debra Schwartz: Oh, it's a very large —

0:55:30 Matt Cerkel: Four-foot long lizard.

0:55:32 Debra Schwartz: On a leash?

0:55:33 Matt Cerkel: On a leash.

0:55:33 Debra Schwartz: Okay, that is amazing.

0:55:36 Matt Cerkel: I've seen a few people packing in their cat in their pack [chuckles] and sometimes on a leash. And another guy, I haven't seen him in a while, he used to hike with his parrot on his shoulder. Sometimes you get funny questions like — so I'm in full uniform, right down to the Smokey Bear hat, and people, "Are you a ranger? Is this your park?"

0:56:10 Debra Schwartz: That's sweet.

0:56:13 Matt Cerkel: Questions like that. Or I think I mentioned: "What's the water district doing here? Are you here to fix the pipes?"

0:56:24 Debra Schwartz: Keep going, these are great.

0:56:27 Matt Cerkel: Just trying to think of some other good ones.

0:56:32 Debra Schwartz: How about drunk guys in the night? I have encountered a few. I don't know if they had to take a cooling off walk or what but —

0:56:41 Matt Cerkel: I haven't encountered too many drunks so far. I remember going to — it was initially dispatched as a medical aid call back in the, I think it was in the late

'90s, and it got a little more complicated than that. When I roll up to where the patient is described, the guy is shirtless. They always seem to be shirtless in a situation like this, drunk. He's raising his hands and as we start to talk to him, we decipher what actually happened. He and his buddy had been driving on Bolinas Road, both drunk. They got in a fist fight. One of them — not the guy that we initially encountered, but the other guy — pulled a gun on his friend, and shot at him. Luckily missing him. They crashed their car. And they both took off.

We never did find the gunman because he was probably hiding in the brush somewhere. But what started off as a simple, "Oh, it's a medical aid call" turned into, "Okay, we've got a guy who just shot at his friend. They crashed their car. They're drunk."

0:57:51 Debra Schwartz: Where to begin when you're writing your ticket?

0:57:55 Matt Cerkel: And in this case, the one guy was shirtless, which, if you ever watch the TV show *Cops*, the drunk guys always seem to be shirtless. [chuckles]

0:58:05 Debra Schwartz: I recall one amazing misty gray day when an 85-year-old woman ran past me on the trail barefoot in bikini. She'd been swimming in one of the creeks. I would say a mountain sprite or a mountain fairy would be an apt description of her. I've seen her several times.

0:58:32 Matt Cerkel: Yeah, well I'm familiar with who you're talking about, and sometimes she's been seen with less than a bikini on.

0:58:40 Debra Schwartz: [chuckles] Yeah.

0:58:41 Matt Cerkel: We get calls about her, especially during the summer months. A couple times in the summer, we'll get complaints. And we'll have to go look, but luckily we don't, in some ways, don't catch her in the act.

0:58:57 Debra Schwartz: Yes. I've also seen her dressed quite nicely, beautifully and fashionably with sandals. What is it: a pork pie hat? Beautiful clothing, hiking in the most remote places completely made up, dolled up. Anything is possible. She loves the mountain.

0:59:18 Matt Cerkel: People do love the mountain, and some of the people who love the mountain can be a little strange.

0:59:24 Debra Schwartz: Or we'll say —

0:59:27 Matt Cerkel: Eccentric?

0:59:27 Debra Schwartz: Eccentric. Yes. But okay. So how about animal sightings? How about animal encounters?

0:59:36 Matt Cerkel: I've seen two mountain lions not too close. Actually, one ran in front of my truck, and it was gone like that. One was more on a distant hillside. Bobcats — the entertaining thing with bobcats is sometimes they'll just sit there and watch you as you watch them. You sit there, they sit there, and we just kind of stare at each other. Coyotes, you see them pretty regularly. Going back to bobcats, I remember one time seeing, at dusk, a bobcat chasing a rabbit.

1:00:13 Debra Schwartz: I've seen mountain lions doing that.

1:00:17 Matt Cerkel: One of the more memorable encounters — and this is also a people encounter — here was a spotted owl, a northern spotted owl sitting on a tree right above the trail on a tree branch, right above the trail — a very popular trail — and eight feet off the ground, just sitting there as plain as day. I sat there and I was watching it and I wish I had a camera. I wasn't into photography at that time. But I'm sitting there watching it and literally a couple dozen people passed me, not one of them asked, "What are you doing?" Not one person even noticed the owl in the tree. They were so focused on what they were doing. Finally somebody said, "Oh, what are you looking at, ranger?" And I pointed it out and people were surprised. What amazes me was that a good-sized owl, plain as day, was just right above the trail, literally right above the trail, and a couple of dozen people didn't notice it. How can you not notice that?

1:01:23 Debra Schwartz: Right. And deer, lots of deer. Ever been charged by a deer?

1:01:27 Matt Cerkel: Nope.

1:01:28 Debra Schwartz: No?

1:01:29 Matt Cerkel: I've had a turkey go after my truck before though, a tom turkey. And I've seen a tom turkey fight off a coyote that was trying to get to some hens.

1:01:40 Debra Schwartz: Oh, my! That's a brave turkey.

1:01:43 Matt Cerkel: Well the tom turkeys, they can look pretty big, and the coyotes, they mainly look for easy meals, and it's like, "Oh, that's not so easy."

1:01:52 Debra Schwartz: Snakes. Now, I see lots and lots of snakes. Tell me about your snakes.

1:01:58 Matt Cerkel: I see them. Just last week at my residence, I caught a garter snake that had obviously, had recently eaten because it had this big bulge, that you could tell was moving through it to get to its stomach. It's like, "Okay, somebody just ate."

1:02:20 Debra Schwartz: How about rattlers?

1:02:21 Matt Cerkel: I see them from time to time, most of them pretty small. They're actually a very photogenic snake. Actually I saw one last — I'm trying to remember what

trail I saw it on — High Marsh Trail, just in from Cataract Trail, in that area by High Marsh Trail. I often see rattlesnakes in there, which surprised a lot of people, right next to the trail. But I moved it off, and it went on its way.

1:02:50 Debra Schwartz: I've seen them on the way to Carson Falls; one, just the last year.

1:02:55 Matt Cerkel: Yeah, you see them in the rocky areas a lot.

1:03:00 Debra Schwartz: I kind of think of you as the voice of Mt. Tamalpais, honestly. You spend so much time on the mountain. First I'd like to ask you, do you think you've been changed as a person because of the time you've spent — so much time alone — on the mountain?

1:03:23 Matt Cerkel: I think I have. I've learnt how to not only pay attention to the big landscape or the big picture, but also to take the time to look for the small details: the small wildflowers, unusual features on the ground, rocks, historic stuff, coming across a historic cabin site and find glass from the 1860s. You can't spend time on the mountain and not have it affect you. So, spending the last 22 years up there working, definitely has become part of who I am.

1:04:05 Debra Schwartz: Do you see the world off of the mountain differently because of your time on the mountain?

1:04:12 Matt Cerkel: It makes me appreciate the mountain and the fact that we have this wild place, right next door to civilization. Because a lot of places do not have a place as wild as Mt. Tam literally right next door to millions of people.

1:04:38 Debra Schwartz: What are the things that you wish you could do that you aren't able to do right now? In your perfect world, what would you like to see? And this doesn't have to do with the municipal water district, this is just you.

1:04:54 Matt Cerkel: That's kind of a hard question. Some of it would be for people to treat the mountain respectfully. Because I can try to reach people, but [for them] to understand the impacts you have on the mountain and try to minimize those impacts — from making sure you don't litter and leave your stuff behind, and try to minimize your footprint, shall we say, on the mountain. And to just learn to appreciate what it represents, and take the time to pay attention to the details. You wish you could see more people pay attention to not just all their activity, but what's going on around them.

1:05:48 Debra Schwartz: In other words, not just calibrate your heart rate as you're getting your workout but to immerse yourself into the natural environment and see the world around you, is that what you're saying?

1:06:00 Matt Cerkel: That sums it up, I think, pretty well, yes.

1:06:03 Debra Schwartz: If you were actually an advocate, truly, you could be an advocate for the mountain if you had the authority to speak for the mountain. And you know the mountain pretty well. You've been hanging out with this mountain for a long time. What do you think the mountain would say? To us, to me, to everybody?

1:06:26 Matt Cerkel: "Treat me with respect. Help to take care of this place. I provide you with recreation and the outdoors and drinking water. Help protect me so I can continue to provide you with these features."

1:06:53 Debra Schwartz: And what is "protect me"? What are the actions people can do? Besides don't litter. Are there any other actions?

1:07:02 Matt Cerkel: Oh, yeah. Don't take things off the mountain. Don't take plants. Don't take historic items. Don't vandalize it. Leave some areas wild; not every location needs a trail. Learn to appreciate the small things, because it's not just the big picture, the big landscape, as I've talked about several times; it's a lot of the small things, too. Respect the fact that there's things that are on Mt. Tam that occur nowhere else in the world, especially with plants. Understand how you're impacting the mountain and minimize those impacts. Try to leave no trace, and just treat the mountain with respect.

1:08:00 Debra Schwartz: I encountered a gentleman the other day when I was hiking. He was probably in his 80s. He told me he was going to be hiking up a trail that was closed some years ago. I asked him about doing that and he said, "I know we have to be very careful about the mountain, so I take off my shoes and I go up barefoot so I don't leave any impression on the trail." I had to laugh.

1:08:28 Matt Cerkel: That's some interesting —

1:08:30 Debra Schwartz: It was not a very smooth trail, let me say.

1:08:34 Matt Cerkel: And that's kind of justifying something you shouldn't be doing. Oh, I know I shouldn't be doing this, but I'm going to do it anyway.

1:08:44 Debra Schwartz: Yes, it's interesting. That people have a way of sort of negotiating what they think is okay and what is not, is my point.

1:08:51 Matt Cerkel: That's true.

1:08:52 Debra Schwartz: So that is something I imagine you face all the time.

1:08:56 Matt Cerkel: Quite regularly.

1:08:58 Debra Schwartz: Like people that throw orange rinds down and say, "It's natural." Or cigarette butts. Speaking of cigarette butts, is it legal to smoke on Mt. Tam?

1:09:09 Matt Cerkel: No, it is not.

1:09:09 Debra Schwartz: Where is it not legal to smoke on Mt. Tam?

1:09:13 Matt Cerkel: You cannot smoke anywhere on water district lands.

1:09:17 Debra Schwartz: Anything.

1:09:20 Matt Cerkel: Anything. That doesn't stop people, of course.

1:09:26 Debra Schwartz: Yes. I just thought we'd get that on tape.

1:09:29 Matt Cerkel: And these days, "Oh, marijuana's legal now, so we can smoke — " You can't smoke on Mt. Tam. I don't care what you're smoking. You're not allowed to smoke up here.

1:09:41 Debra Schwartz: For obvious reasons.

1:09:44 Matt Cerkel: Mm-hmm. Well, by numbers the most common litter I find on Mt. Tam would be cigarette butts, followed by energy bar wrappers or gels, and then dog poop bags.

1:10:04 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

1:10:05 Matt Cerkel: Those are the four most common things of litter I see.

1:10:08 Debra Schwartz: Okay, as we're getting closer to the end I'm going to ask two more questions. Okay? First of all, is there something we haven't spoken about that you would like to speak about? Something that we haven't covered.

1:10:25 Matt Cerkel: Well, Mt. Tam has a unique history, its history in shaping Marin County. It's the symbol of Marin County. It's the symbol of land preservation in Marin County. You have human history dating back to the first people, the Miwok, who evidently viewed the mountain as being sacred, and they primarily lived in the valleys in their villages and used Mt. Tam as a hunting ground. There were no permanent villages on Mt. Tam itself. And you have the human history from there. You have the early explorers. I'm sure the early Spanish explorers, they and Sir Francis Drake, both saw Mt. Tam. You have the rancho history of the Mexican land grants, followed by the American history once we became part of the United States. You had the exploitation years of Mt. Tam where it was heavily logged and there was mining and extensive cattle grazing. But early on it also became a source of water for the growing communities of Marin County — both the larger dams like Lake Lagunitas, which in fact is actually now one of our smaller lakes, to the small diversionaries in the streams ringing Mt. Tam.

You have the tourist history, first with Eldridge Grade as a tourist road, and later the Mt. Tam Railroad. You had the hunting history. One time Mt. Tam had grizzly bears, black bears and they were hunted to extinction by hunters. You have the logging, as I've

mentioned earlier. You had the railroads, you had the Mt. Tamalpais in Muir Woods, the tourist railroad. You also had going up where Kent Lake is now on spur line off an old narrow-gauge railroad that was built primarily to get cordwood so people would have firewood in San Francisco. And it's all intertwined. You got the road building history: Eldridge Grade, Fairfax-Bolinas Road, the Ridgecrest Boulevard, and some of it was built for transportation, some of it was built for tourism. You have the land preservation history starting with Muir Woods and then the water district and then the state park, and how that shaped the Marin County we all love and know today. And the history continues to evolve. We have the fires used to be very frequent on Mt. Tam and actually fire is needed for a healthy ecosystem on Mt. Tam, but for the past 100 years we've suppressed fire and allowed the fuels to build up which has changed the landscape of Mt. Tam. So it's just a rich, rich history of the plane crashes — you have settlers. And if you know where to look, you could actually find remnants of this history.

1:13:43 Debra Schwartz: In essence, what you're saying to me, and where I see you incorporate what you embody, is a perspective, a broader perspective with also an acute attention to the smaller things.

1:14:00 Matt Cerkel: Correct.

1:14:00 Debra Schwartz: That is what you live.

1:14:01 Matt Cerkel: Yes.

1:14:06 Debra Schwartz: Great. That's nice. Very, very interesting. And it is a good way, I think, for all of us to look at this: the bigger picture, the broader picture, but with the appreciation for the smallest things.

1:14:20 Matt Cerkel: There is something to be learned from that, yes.

1:14:23 Debra Schwartz: Okay, so here's my final request or question, really. You've had thousands and thousands of experiences on Mt. Tam. Thousands of thousands of days. Can you end this interview with just a description of one of those great days, a moment, a time, maybe an ordinary day, maybe something special, but something that stands apart for you or lives within you that represents what it is you do and what it is you love?

1:14:58 Matt Cerkel: That's a particularly hard question. One's popping into my mind. It was actually fairly recent, in December of 2015. So, even though we were still in drought, it had started raining early in December, and I remember hiking the entire length of Cataract Trail that day. It had not been a heavy rain, but it had been raining for like 24 hours or so. It was never very heavy, and I was just hiking down Cataract and seeing the sheer volume of the water coming down the creek. It took me by surprise because I expect that when we have a big storm but this was not by any means a big storm. But everything had already been saturated, and even though the rain was relatively light, just the sheer amount of water coming off the mountain and into Cataract Creek was

breathtaking and surprising. And just seeing the waterfall that near peak was like, “Wow, this is impressive.” Because, as I said, I didn’t expect what I saw. I expected good waterfalls, but it was absolutely breathtaking. Luckily, I had the right gear on so I stayed comfortable and dry, but it was like, “Wow, I was not expecting this today.”

1:16:28 Debra Schwartz: So after all these years, I guess Mt. Tam continues to surprise you.

1:16:33 Matt Cerkel: Yes, it does. And then another interesting one — I’ll close with this — it was back in 2011. I was hiking on an unofficial trail that I had recently spotted, but had never been on that particular route before. I’m hiking along and I come up over this gentle rise into a flat area and I find a lake. It’s like, “Am I by Hidden Lake? No, it can’t be.” And I checked my GPS and it wasn’t Hidden Lake I found. It was about an acre in size, a pond I guess you could call it, a seasonal wetland, a pond, ephemeral pool, vernal pool, whatever you want to call it. That was not on any of our maps, and it’s like, “Wow.” Here’s something that’s pretty obvious, and obviously other people had been there, but to come across something that’s not on any of our maps and doing the research through the water district files, I can only find one reference to this area where some — it was called Pig Pond by one person but it wasn’t mapped — it was just mentioned that it was in this particular location somewhat near Hidden Lake. It was still surprising to come across something so distinctive that it wasn’t really and firmly on any official maps. It’s like, “Wow!” [chuckles]

1:18:06 Debra Schwartz: All in a day’s work, I guess.

1:18:08 Matt Cerkel: The mountain continues to surprise.

1:18:10 Debra Schwartz: Yes. Well, thank you so much, Matt.

1:18:13 Matt Cerkel: You’re welcome.

1:18:14 Debra Schwartz: Thank you for finally giving me these precious few hours and for taking such good care of all of us and particularly Mt. Tamalpais. I look forward to seeing you on the trails.

1:18:26 Matt Cerkel: Thank you, and I’ll see you up there.

1:18:28 Debra Schwartz: That’s it. All right.