**Transcription sponsored by Cuyahoga Valley National Park**

**Andrew Glasier** [00:00:00] Let's start with just basic questions and then we'll go through your work in the Valley. For the record, could we have your name, when you were born, and where were you born?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:00:08] Timothy R. Atkinson, [...], 1950, Dayton, Ohio.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:00:18] And how long have you lived in this part of the world in northeast Ohio?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:00:23] Since 1979.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:00:27] And you moved here... Why did you move here?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:00:30] I came up for an interview with the Park Service. And that's why I moved up here. I started work two weeks later after the interview.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:00:41] And what were you doing for the Park Service?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:00:44] When I originally came here, I was an engineer, engineering equipment operator, work leader.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:00:50] Can you expand on that? What kind of role that was, what they were asking you to do?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:00:54] Well, at that time they brought in two work leaders at the same time, two engineering equipment operator work leaders, under the premises that they were going to be taking over all the roads and so forth around the area. And that didn't work out. But that's why they originally brought in two work leaders. And I was one of the two. Our job at that time was basically to operate the equipment and so forth that was here. The other operator that came in, he kind of took over the roads part of it, and I took over the trails part of the scenario. And that's the way we worked for about two or three years in that capacity. So we was kind of doing a little bit of everything in the park as far as that dealt with equipment operation. So...

**Andrew Glasier** [00:01:46] When the park started it was a recreation area. Was it kind of like small staffed because it was a recreation area?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:01:55] I think it was because it was more that it was just growing. It still hadn't acquired all of its property yet, and it still was basically getting its feet under itself. So the staff built from that point forward until what it is today.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:02:16] So you start off as an administrative equipment operator work leader...

**Tim Atkinson** [00:02:20] Correct.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:02:21] And they hired... Why did they hire you specifically? I mean, what were your qualifications prior to that?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:02:26] Well, I had spent well over four years in the Seabees in the Navy and construction as an equipment operato,r and I had a little over seven years with the Greene County Highway Department as an operator. And I had put in an application with the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base just under a general heading of equipment operator. And I had actually forgotten about that. And I went to work for American Freight working the docks and I kept getting laid off because they were... Just the way they were doing things, you know? And I got a call from the park to come in for an interview. I said, sure, be glad to. And I had no idea where the park was even at. [laughs]

**Andrew Glasier** [00:03:16] When you got here then, they divided your workload with... Or did you guys, the two people that were hired, yourself and the other person, decide to divide between roads and trails, so to speak?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:03:26] No, it's just the way it kind of worked out. The foreman came in and two of us as operators came in exactly the same day to work out of the Virginia Kendall maintenance department. And like I said, we basically did a little bit of everything. But John kind of went with the road side of it and I kind of went with the trail side, but yet we both dealt with both things. We both would work in both areas. It's just that when we wasn't operating, we kind of moved to those ways. I guess. I don't really how to explain it. It's just the way it kind of worked out.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:04:02] Like a natural flow, so to speak?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:04:03] Yeah, yeah, yeah. My first job was working up at the... where there used to be the old motorcycle track up on across from Happy Days Visitor Center. It was removing that and taking up part of that was the trails back in there where they are now but motorcycles and stuff had really made bogs and stuff back in there and took the dozer back in there and moved all that stuff around, leveled it out. Basically did away with the motorcycle track that was up there. And that's when Birdsell was the superintendent and the headquarters was right up there next to it. So I don't think he liked the noise that much, but that pretty well took care of the motorcycle track up there and the snowmobiles.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:04:47] So it was a snowmobile motorcycle track across from the Happy Days Visitor Center?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:04:50] Yeah.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:04:52] And that was purchased... And the land was purchased by the park?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:04:54] Well, all of that land was purchased by the park. It was all part of the Happy Days area, you know, so, yeah, it was all taken over at that time.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:05:09] And you would work... Had you worked in trail maintenance projects before?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:05:13] No, I'd really never dealt much at all with trails. It was a good opportunity for me and an experience just getting into that. But I like the outdoors, so it just kind of came naturally. Yes.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:05:26] And how is that different? What kind of what things did you have to learn about trail maintenance that you... [inaudible]

**Tim Atkinson** [00:05:32] Well, you have to learn about the lay of the land more, you know, and how the trail would naturally go and try to keep it so that, you know, you were still seeing good vistas and so forth from and making the trail work for what type of use it was gonna be for. You know, there's some cases where you can have a steeper terrain than you can in others, but you have to... Depends upon what the trail is. It just... Just a lot of things you have to look at. The way the ground goes, the diversified different foliage and stuff. You have the different type trees you have without impacting those things, but yet still being able to make it work so that the trail's a nice, pleasant place to go and some trails you have to have... So like the Towpath, you know, you've got a certain elevation you have to be so at that it's accessible for everybody. On some of the other trails that go back in the woods, you don't have that as bad. You know, you don't want to get a great slope, but yet you can get a little steeper incline on some places. So it just kind of, I guess, come natural. I don't know. I'm just an outdoors person.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:06:42] How did you... How were trails designed? I mean, the Towpath is a long trail. It's obviously designed next to the canal. But these other trails, were you part of the design process? Did you make help make decisions about where the trails would go?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:06:56] Well, you know, it's kind of funny about that, when I first got here, there was no trail plan for the park yet. I joined part of a committee with people from the outside, local residents, people interested in a lot of different type of trails. And that's when the trail plan first got started by that group that was put together. We went out and looked at a lot of different places, a lot of different sites and said, well, this would be a good place, this wouldn't be a good place for a trail. And that's how we kind of got going with it. And there was already some trails that were preexisting in the area. So, you know, those you kind of were already there. You know, what is now the Forest Point Trail now and then you've got what used to be the old West Forest, West Forest Trail. I can't remember the name of the place now. Anyway, it's over where Pine Grove Trail is now. That trail used to be back in there. It was totally different because it went back into the Boy Scout camp a different way. It was all part of... The A Trail joined into it in certain sections. But some of that stuff was there. So you kind of worked with what you had. So you already had kind of a reference point to go with, you know, but we laid out a lot of other trails that wasn't there before and expanded on those. So then the new ones, all that was part of the trail plan or the master trail plan that was put together that identified trailheads, identified trails, even some of those today still aren't built, but they're there. Then even the trail plan today is still due to be updated because it's getting too far gone now.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:08:45] And the trail... The master trail plan, that was decided by this committee, so to speak?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:08:49] Well, it was kind of put together that way. It was all of everybody's thoughts that were put together and says, you know, this would be good or this wouldn't be good or and so forth, to kind of put together what these trails were. And then the park staff did a lot of that, as far as, you know, putting it all down and say, okay, this is where we'll go. This is a proposed route to do this way and that way, looking at all the topo maps and everything. And that's how you kind of, you know, go with that stuff. Then going out in a field and walking it. It could be two or three different times and different times of the season, too. And that's important because you never know what's going to be happening during a particular season. So I know there's a lot of times that we would go out and we'd walk the same area, gee, three or four times just to see what it looked like and how it was going to react, because it makes a big difference in how you build a trail and where you build it. So...

**Andrew Glasier** [00:09:45] Would you walk with this committee?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:09:47] Well, not so much the committee. It'd basically be the staff from in the park. And also there was a lot of volunteers that would come in and were very, very beneficial in how this park was designed and built at the end. So all of that kind of would be put together and make a cohesive type of a trail system and make it work. So... 'Cause a lot of that today is taken care of and walked and helped maintain by the volunteers in the park. That's been a major asset to this park.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:10:25] The volunteers.

**Tim Atkinson** [00:10:26] Oh, yes. Yeah, the Cuyahoga Valley Trails ssociation, the Ohio Horseman's Council, Medina County chapter, and so forth. That's been a major, major thing with this park. Yeah. That was a big part of my job, was working with those folks and keeping, and keeping things kind of going and in line, and it just... It's a big thing.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:10:53] So part of your job was helping to coordinate the volunteers to work on these trails?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:10:57] Yeah, a lot of that is there. You know, I worked with them. A lot of it is done through other staff in the park. But I would basically be out there with them. I'd coordinate with them as far as stuff that they would need, materials they would need. If they needed any other type of equipment or assistance and so forth, we would deliver stuff out there for them so that it was ready for them on the day that they were going to do their work, and basically go out and we would kind of lay the trail out together. Yeah. And make it work. And if there was problems out there, because we finally ended up with a system so that they could... When they would go out and do their monthly walk or their weekend walks that they would do, they would send the papers back in to us at the park and I would get a copy of those papers and they would identify problems that were out there that they dealt with or problems that they couldn't deal with and we would have to deal with, it was a big asset to us because we couldn't cover the kind of ground and miles of trails that was out there with the small staff that we had. So, yeah, we worked together in doing that. Mm hmm.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:12:14] So those volunteers were astronomically important to some of the trails, and you started off talking about, a little bit, about your background before as a machine operator. A lot of the smaller trails, would you use machines on those?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:12:28] Oh, no.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:12:28] Those were all done by hand basically?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:12:29] Right. Well, we try to do, naturally, each trail is different because of whatever its use was. If it was just a hiking trail, you know, you're only talking maybe five to eight feet wide at the most. So we would try to do these trails and make 'em accessible because at the time we had a small trail type buggies that we could get out there and be able to take stuff out there and work on these trails. If we had to do it all by walking and so forth again there, we wouldn't be at the mileage that we were at when I left by anyway. There's just no way we could make that. So a lot of these trails were designed that way. But ski trails had their certain list, horse trails, naturally, we had a certain way for them, had a certain height set for them. A lot of this is all dictated by guidelines that were set down and so forth by the Park Service in other areas and so forth. So all of this comes together to how you would actually approach a trail, how you would make the width, how you'd make the height and so forth. Ski trails, naturally, when you come down a hill, curves, you had to have a little wider area to make that, you know, going across the bridges and so forth. So all that would come into play.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:13:46] How many mileage of trails do you think you were...

**Tim Atkinson** [00:13:48] We were we were approaching... Pardon?

**Andrew Glasier** [00:13:52] That you were part of.

**Tim Atkinson** [00:13:53] Oh, I don't know. I think when I got here, we had close to about 16 miles of trail in the park. When I left, we were close to a little over 100 miles of trail in the park. See, it expanded quite a bit. But between the park staff and the volunteers, that's the way it was able to get there. Naturally, the Towpath opened up a big chunk of mileage through the park. And that was an experience by itself.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:14:24] Let's talk about the Towpath for a while. You know, it's probably the most well-known trail in the area.

**Tim Atkinson** [00:14:29] Yeah.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:14:30] It's beloved by many people, used by thousands of people all the time.

**Tim Atkinson** [00:14:34] Yes.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:14:35] You know, let's talk about the construction of that and the ideas that got to that point.

**Tim Atkinson** [00:14:39] It was interesting. Before we actually... John Debo sat down and said, Okay, we're going to do the Towpath Trail. We used part of the Towpath Trail for the Environmental Education Center. They used it to be able to get down to the river and so forth. And that was in the southern part of the park. And we used to go in there with weed eaters and just—you're really only talking maybe a couple foot wide of the Towpath, that was always there—but we would do a section down through there in places so that they could use that for their work that they wanted to do. But then there was other sections like from here at Boston up to Highland Road that was already there, you know, it needed work, but it was already there because of the paper mill that was up there. But then there was other sections where there was absolutely nothing at all. But it was an experience. It had its bad times, had a lot of those, and it had good times too. Like I told you before, that the big issue with the Towpath was getting the sites to be able to work on the Towpath, certain areas to be able to work out of and to be able to cover directions going north or south. That was really a big thing because there just wasn't a place that you could go in and just take over that kind of fit. You know? So we couldn't use our site at the... Where the maintenance yard, because it was just too far to have to take things back and forth and everything. So we had everything to deal with. You know, we had... In a lot of areas, we had a lot of trees to deal with, the stumps to deal with, actually remaking the Towpath itself, getting it back to where it belonged. Bridges, calder pipes, people. That was one of the things with building the Towpath that... I can remember an instance where we were actually under construction in a section and the guys actually stopped to eat lunch, and a guy went by on his bicycle trying to get by and put his foot on the back of the one guy because he was trying to get through. You know? It was... It was interesting. [laughs] You always had to be aware because people were going through, no matter what. And, you know, and we were trying to get it done ahead of time and keep going and keep it working and get it completed. And they were using it just about as fast as we could put it down. So it was interesting. The southern end from Ira Road south was, basically, all had to be put in because Riverview Road took up a lot of where the Towpath was originally. And so we had to kind of meander down through there and work our way through the low part of that area. There's places down there where we've probably got 30, 40 inches of stone in the ground because it was that kind of material down in there in order to keep it solid enough to make it work, and then bring it through the two half locks and then continue on down to Bath Road. So it was interesting. It was. I... That was an experience that... I was glad to see it done. But yet you really felt like you was part of the history, you know, because we come across a lot of the old surveyor marks that were there for the Towpath. So it was pretty much on line with where it was going in a lot of the area. So... And it was pretty. You could be going through a field one minute, next to a cornfield, the next, next to a road the next time, and then you're right next to the river again. But like anything else, it's got its problems, you know? When you're next to water like that, it's hard to hard to maintain something that way.. But it is nice and people do use it. Weekends, that's one place you kind of avoid if you've been around it much at all. [laughs]

**Andrew Glasier** [00:18:42] Is the maintenance of the Towpath as big an issue as the construction was or because so many people use it?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:18:52] Well... I'd have to say, yes. It is a big issue. As you know, that a lot of the other connections, connectors to this are asphalt. John had always wanted to see it maintained as it was, you know, the historic part of it. So that's why it's always been a stone-type surface on it. But it's nice that way. But it does present its problems, too. Like anything else, you know, you get water on it, you get bicycles on it, you get people on it, you name it. It wears that stone down and it gets dusty. That was always one of the big complaints in the summertime is the dust. We tried a lot of different things that we could with equipment to keep the dust down, but it gets dusty. But, yeah, it's difficult to deal with it. You still have to maintain it, you still have to keep the ruts out of it. You still have to keep whether it gets washed out when the river gets up and you get the floods, you gotta go back in and work on it. It's always something to do. There's never a down time on the Towpath. You know, you still mow it, you still keep the leaves and the stuff off of... especially like we used to have the marathon and so forth. You know, you always kind of worried about that because you never knew what it was going to be like that day. And, you know, you'd try to get the walnuts, that type stuff off of it for the runners. But even for people that are on bicycles, you always had trees that come down, storms and stuff. There's always something going on. Up north, you'd have the river that played a big role with the Towpath. I remember the big flood we had and we had a lot of damage on the Towpath. But it was always part of the job. You know, you still went out and you maintain it to keep it going because you'd always have stretches that were not harmed at all, you know, and you still had people and people still wanted to go. They still wanted to ride. I know one time we had a flood. It's been maybe four or five years ago now up north. And I was out walking, looking at the damage and I was walking through muck on the Towpath, and here come a guy on a bicycle. He was going through no matter what, and he'd get off and pick his bike up and carry it over the downed trees that were laid across the Towpath, and go on. You know? You can't keep the people off.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:21:29] What do you think is the success of this trail? What is it about this trail that draws so many people?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:21:34] I think a lot of it has to do with just the area that it's in. I mean, you get on the Towpath and you look at what you can see. You know, you got eagles' nests now that are actually on the Towpath or close to the Towpath, within sight anyway. But everything. I don't care what it is, you know, just about any kind of animal you can find on the Towpath, from turtles to snakes to deer to coyotes now to any kind of critters, they're out there. We had a big thing we was building with turtles that would come up here and try to bury their eggs into the fresh part, you know, because it was soft and they would try to do that and make their nest in there. But people enjoy the area. It has a lot to offer. It's scenic. You know, it gives you the forest-type view in some places and it gives you the open area in another. So it just has a good feel to it. You have a lot of shade, you have a lot of sun, you name it. Wherever you want it, you've got it there. But yet you're still close to where you live or other things you may want to do. And it was a bright idea and a brainstorm to put that through the Valley because I think that really kept this area going. I really do. You look at Peninsula on weekends down there. That place was bustling because of the people that would come in there. And then when you have the train and so forth involved in it too now. It all ties together. But yeah, I can't envision this place right now without that Towpath going through it. I think it made that big of an impact on this park.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:23:17] How long did it take for the total construction of the park?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:23:21] Just about four year... Oh. Excuse me?

**Andrew Glasier** [00:23:22] Go ahead.

**Tim Atkinson** [00:23:24] I thought you was gonna say the Towpath

**Andrew Glasier** [00:23:25] Yeah, the Towpath.

**Tim Atkinson** [00:23:25] Yeah, it was about four years. Yeah. And there's still pieces that are being done, you know, to fix it. And as long as you continue to have the the floods and stuff, you're always gonna have those type of scenarios going on. But yeah, it took about that length of time to actually from start to completion because we had the what you'd call the grand opening or the start of it, you know, and we'd actually started Towpath before that. It's just that that's when they wanted to have their, you know, the shovel event. [laughs].

**Andrew Glasier** [00:24:02] And did you start in the south and head north, or was there, just whatever parts made sense?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:24:07] It kind of depended on... Well, we kind of worked with areas that were already starting to... That were there, you know? You figure it was easier to go in and start doing areas that were like from Boston north in places because it was primarily there. You didn't have as much to do. You could open up some sections to let people onto to get them done. You start thinking about places that were south. There was some contractor work there, naturally, getting through the Beaver Marsh and that type of thing, and just north of Peninsula, the boardwalk and so forth. Those had to be done and they were being done by contract. So you couldn't get in there and do some of that stuff. We had a lot of trees deal with and that's what we do a lot of times. The wintertime was we'd have a crew in that dealt with doing nothing but getting the trees down and taking care of all that and the stumps and everything, and then we started doing the actual construction of the Towpath, you know, when the good weather came around. So we would skip and jump into different places. And probably the last place that was done was from Ira south to get that section put in. And then we had the guardrail, the wooden guardrail and everything had to be put up. You know, the landscape architect had a major chore of getting all this stuff ready and making all the contacts with the right people and the counties and so forth in the townships and everything else just to keep it going. But, you know, we'd get out there and we'd get it staked out and figure out what we needed as far as materials and stuff, and then we'd go from there. Each year with the budget and so forth, we'd work in how we were going to deal with certain things. But it was a... It was an interesting and I'd say satisfying goal by the time we got done with it.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:26:06] Each section?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:26:08] Yeah, yeah, each section had its own little quirks to it that you had to deal with. And some places we would have two or three bridges we'd have to put in in a section, you know, and then those would have to be fabricated and made and then brought to the park. And then we would have to get everything done as far as all the concrete work and everything for the walls and everything and the foundations and get out and then get it set in place and build the Towpath after that. So yeah, it was... It was interesting.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:26:41] While you guys were working on the Towpath, were other trails, did other trails kind of get left behind a little bit?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:26:46] Well, no, not really, because the Towpath was kind of a set crew. You know, it really wasn't the park trail crew that worked on the Towpath, at least all the time. I mean, there was times that that would take place, but we had a crew that we brought in strictly for Towpath construction because there's no other way we could do it and still try to keep going and maintain the other sites. You just... There just wasn't. We only had three people as far as park staff that dealt with trails. And that's not not very many at all. So it was kind of you still dealt with the Towpath but yet you dealt with everything else, too. You had to keep it all going. But there was a set crew that came in for the Towpath, and we would have certain people that came in and that works during the summer. And some of them would be there. Some of 'em wouldn't be there for the wintertime as far as doing tree work because you didn't need as many at that time. But you start thinking about the trucks, we know we would rent trucks and still have our park trucks, but we'd have to rent trucks, too. So we kept both things still going. But you always had more drivers, you had operators, you had people that are just doing the basic labor-type work. So. It was different.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:28:06] It seems like it had a lot more equipment to it than the normal trail maintenance.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:28:12] Yeah. Yeah, it would. Oh yeah. As far as regular trail maintenance goes, yeah, because you're we're talking about an eight-foot-wide trail, the Towpath. So, yeah, you know, we still had to do those or we still had an excavator. We'd have a paver that we would bring in to actually lay the stone down. Yeah, he still had a lot of different type stuff by the time he's finished with it, you know, sheep's-foot rollers, smooth rollers. So, yeah, you'd have more there than what you would out on a regular trail because when you're out working on a regular trail, you're doing most of that work by hand. You know, there would be times you'd have where you'd have a piece of equipment there, but not that much. You know, the impact there was trying not to impact the ground so much itself. But the Towpath's a different scenario because of what it was going to have to carry and so forth. You know, it was a wheelchair accessible thing, so, you know, five percent or less is the grade on that. So everything had to be worked in to do that, you know. You had bridges to put in and culverts to put in. You can't do all of that by hand, not this premade stuff. So, yeah, there's a lot of equipment.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:29:28] You talk about the wheelchair accessible, that means it has a five percent rate is the maximum it could have?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:29:33] Yes.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:29:34] And was that a conscious choice to keep it kind of a flat trail?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:29:38] It was. Well, the Towpath itself is basically a flat-type trail. And but the idea was to make it accessible for everybody. So when you talk about the Towpath Trail, it's accessible for everybody, whether you're in a wheelchair or walking or in places, even horses, you know, it comes onto the Towpath. But, yeah, anybody could be out there on just about anything and do it. And it still gives us the accessibility with the equipment when we need to get out there and do work and so forth.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:30:12] You talked earlier about the seasonality of trails, like certain trails are better during certain seasons. Can you explain that a little bit more?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:30:22] Well, when you start thinking about a ski trail, for instance, and you want it to go through certain areas, if it's an area where summertime it's really dry, well, it's no, no, problem. You're not skiing naturally, but yet you know this area is good. If you come back in the same area in the wintertime, there may be a lot of standing water and so forth going through that area. So is that where you want the trail to be? And, you know, when you're making that trail, you're going over and looking at all these places and thinking about it in different seasons because of how it's going to lend itself to what you're wanting to use the trail for. If it's an area that's really wet, well you can't naturally have a ski trail in here so much because the snow isn't going to stay there because it's going to get wet all the time and it's not going to be snow anymore. But yet, if you reroute the trail in certain ways and take it through certain spots, you can get around some of that. You don't want to be under a lot of growth all the time either that's probably predominantly going to have trees on it that, you know, like the evergreens and stuff. They're not going to shed their leaves like the other trees do. So you've got to kind of work your way through some of these places in different seasons and determine exactly where you want that trail to go. And that's going to determine how good that trail is going to be for the use you want. Hiking trails aren't as big a problem, although you don't want it to be in wet areas and you don't want grades that are so bad that, you know, people can't make it up all the way or, you know, you want to make it so it works for everybody. Naturally, you've got different types of trails, whether it's a moderate-type trail or a hard trail or an easy trail. You take Forest Point Trail, that's kind of made so that when people go over to the Octagon, they can walk back there and take a nice, leisurely walk through the back—it's about a half mile—and come back out again without any major grades or anything else on it. So you have to look at what you're wanting to do. Horse trails, you can get away with a little bit more of an incline in places, but you don't want it to be a major incline all the time either, because that presents different problems with runoff and everything else and how you get that to work. You know, the slope of the trail makes a major difference in how you approach it because of how you want the water to run. So different seasons mean different things to trails and where you put it and how you make it work.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:32:56] How did your job evolve since you first took possession in 1979?

**Andrew Glasier** [00:33:00] Ooh. Well, I started out just doing a little bit of everything as an equipment operator work leader. A few years later, they decided that they didn't need that. When they came in and did an audit in the park, they didn't need equipment operator work leaders. They kind of give us a choice at the time. We could either be Engineering Equipment Operator 10's or we could take a walk, so to speak. [laughs] Naturally, we went to Engineering Equipment Operator 10's. About 1985 I had a chance to apply for the supervisor position. I applied for that. I got that and then I was a supervisor for the Roads, Trails, and Grounds Department for there until I retired in 2001. Or 2007, excuse me. So it changed a lot in how I dealt with things, how I looked at things, how I looked at people, how I looked at the surroundings, because it wasn't just thinking of, well, I just come in and do my job that day and go home. I had to start thinking about everything else involved with it, you know, and what people were doing and how things were going, not just the trails, but the whole thing. But you have a good staff underneath you and it makes a world of difference. But it changes a lot. Yeah, it really did.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:34:26] You took us through like towards the end of your career, like a normal day, what a normal day would be like, or was there a normal day?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:34:34] You know, I don't think there ever was a normal day. Like I always said before that nothing stayed the same. Every day was different. We have a system in the park now called... It's Facility Maintenance Management System. It's a lot of computer-generated type stuff. A lot of my time was taken up by that. I guess it's a good thing. You put down a lot of stuff that dealt with the history of the park, dealt with the trails itself, I mean, very specific stuff, you know, as far as what kind of signs you had out there, what they're made of, what kind of trail you got, how wide is it, how long is it? Everything. Culverts. I mean, it's a whole history type of scenarios, but it's all geared towards the maintenance and in replacing stuff at a later date, how you can hopefully get money for it at some point or other to go out, rework it. You know that in five years this is going to have to be redone. Hopefully that's built into the system. So when that time comes around, you're going to have a work order that pops up and said, you know, this needs to be replaced and hopefully we can get the money for, you know, special money to come in and do that. But it took a lot of time. It did. And not just myself, but a lot of the staff, the work leaders, the other supervisors that I had there, it took an awful lot of time to do that. Sometimes I felt like it was taking more time away from actually getting out and doing the work than it was what I was seeing from it that come from it. And I hope at some point maybe that [will] change and my understanding is, it's getting worse. [laughs] With the stuff that they're asking you to do. But my normal day would be to come in, kind of open the place up, get things going. I would be on the computer. I would answer all my emails that come in and questions back and forth and deal with the Facility Maintenance Management System of what had to be done at that time. Meetings, naturally. Just communications back and forth with the guys as to what's going on. I'd still try to get out in the field as much as I could to be able to look at stuff and see what was going on out there. And then the day would come to an end, but it didn't seem like it ever ended. [laughs] And then, naturally, when we would have the bad weather and stuff, things would change a lot as to what took place. But there was never a... I don't think there was ever a dull day. You know, some days were more hectic than others, but I don't think there was ever a dull day. I enjoyed my time in the park. Really did. And yet there's still so much out there to be done. Yeah. But I think that was about it.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:37:41] Oh, you are foreman towards the end. How many people were under your direction at that point?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:37:48] I think towards the end there during the wintertime, we had a staff of about 16 permanent employees. Summertime that would jump up naturally quite a bit because we would have our subject to furloughs coming back in, then our seasonal staff. Seasonal staff wasn't as big as what it used to be, but with the special projects and stuff and special allocations of money that we would get under the FMSS system, we would be able to bring in more folks to to do those particular tasks that had to be done. I think we'd probably get up probably close to about 30, 40 people during the summertime.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:38:39] A significant amount of people.

**Tim Atkinson** [00:38:41] Yes. Yes, it was. Yeah, and there for a long time. Until I got the two other supervisors, it was too many. [laughs] Yeah, it really was. You couldn't... You couldn't diversify your time enough with everybody to be fair with everybody in their evaluations and so forth, because you just couldn't spend the kind of time with them to be able to really sit down and say, we got to work on this or this or this, or say, you know, great job, you know? But it helped. It made a big difference. When [we] had a couple of the supervisors come in, we had the work leader in roads, we had a work later in trails, we had a work leader in grounds. But even the work leaders, they're out in the field. You know? They're out in the field doing the job. And you had to rely on them and you had to rely on the other two supervisors to be able to get the supplies and stuff to what they needed to do, or at least to let you know so that you're trying to stay ahead of the ball game as far as what's going on to get the stuff going for 'em.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:39:51] Sounds like you had more and more like office work and towards the end there than actual...

**Andrew Glasier** [00:39:56] Yes. Yeah, you did. You did. And FMMS had a big role in that. Yeah. Yeah, you were. You were tied to that thing a lot. Yeah. You really were. If it was going to make it work, that's what it was going to take to do it. Like I say, I could see the good parts of that program. But it just took so much time. It really did.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:40:23] Was it time inputting information and stuff?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:40:25] Yeah, yes, inputting it. Putting stuff back into it, you know, like when you change something out in the field or change a sign or change a post or whatever, you know, you'd try to get back in and update your records and so forth. If you would end up where you had one place that was a stone at one time and then you asphalted it over, well you'd go back in and try to change the record so it would show that, you know, as an accurate thing. Well, this is how many miles or this is how many feet now, this trail is asphalt, this is how many is gravel this is how much is earthen, and that type of scenario. So, yeah, it was a continual change on that and try to keep it going, and then they were always adding stuff into it that they wanted to see done. So you were constantly under the the eight ball to try to meet the quotas basically is what was set up. And if you didn't, that had an impact on what kind of money that you could get for these special programs. So you had to had to keep your head going with it or otherwise you'd get lost.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:41:36] Do all parks have to use this program?

**Andrew Glasier** [00:41:38] Yes. All parks are getting into that now. Yeah, it's a big thing. It's a real big thing. And we when we first started using this program, we had so many problems because we were an outlying area. Virginia Kendall maintenance unit over there was kind of the outlying area. So and the same thing with the central maintenance, the buildings, utilities, they were in outlying area, you know, away from the headquarters. So it presented different problems as far as the communications, the wiring that had to be dealt with to make it work. But a lot of times we'd be working in the program and it'd just go off and we would lose it. If you were in working with something and hadn't saved it yet, it's gone. You know, you'd have to go back in and recreate that again. And it was just a... It would happen all the time. You'd be working in it and it'd just freeze up on you. And, you know, when you're really getting involved with that and putting in a lot of stuff, you finally learned that once you put in a little bit, you'd save it and then go on again, you know, because otherwise it just... You'd just tear your hair out. [laughs]

**Andrew Glasier** [00:42:48] You said you retired in 2007?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:42:49] Yes.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:42:52] Is that a difficult transition? Do you still visit the park?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:42:55] I still come into the park. You know, it's... I've been to the park one time, to visit one of the employees who had a retirement. But I've really kind of tried to stay away a little bit, you know, just to kind of make a clean type of break, I guess you might say. I still think about the park all the time and stuff to do, but I still come back into the park, I still use the trails. Yeah. So I'm still around. But we take care of my grandson five days a week, and I just am enjoying that immensely. You know, it's just been so great to be able to spend the time with him as he's growing up now. So. And that's one of the reasons why I retired, because he was, you know, he's just only three years old, and I've enjoyed every minute of it. So it's been great.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:43:53] Fantastic. You said you had in your background—before you got here, you got this job—that you had some... that you enjoyed the outdoors, that you had a kind of a backyard and outdoors... Can you talk a little bit about that in your childhood? Were you a hunter, a fisher[man]?

**Andrew Glasier** [00:44:07] Yes, I did that. I still do that. I don't hunt anymore but I still fish. I just like the outside. I love being out in the woods. I mushroom hunt a lot. Didn't hear me say that. So I've always done that, you know, and I've always enjoyed the outside. I was raised up originally on a farm. I just like being out, and it doesn't matter what time of year it is, so... It's a natural thing to me to be out there, and when I came into work for the park, it was like a perfect fit, you know, to me. So I couldn't go any other way. I'm originally from the southern part of Ohio and I came up here and had no idea what this place was even like. I was totally amazed when I got here and saw what the area looked like, you know. I was expecting nothing but a flat-type scenario up here, but it totally changed my mind when I got up here. And then all the animals and stuff that's around just... I don't know if I can tell you all the things I've seen since I've been up here, which is really kind of strange. Even where I live at now, we've had all kinds of animals right in the yard. I've had wild turkeys in my yard. We have deer there all the time. They clean my bird feeders out like crazy. But we've had fox and geese and ducks and raccoons. Naturally, it just... Everything. So I'm just an outdoors type of person. Like I said, I give up hunting a long time ago because I haven't really found a place that I want to go. And I'm too much into the animals now, I guess to kill 'em [laughs], but it's just, I guess it's in my blood. My family's always been outdoorsy type people, so... It's just a natural setting.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:46:22] So let's talk about the animals. What is the most impressive animal that you've seen here in the park, or the most shocking or amazing?

**Andrew Glasier** [00:46:33] Ooh. I think probably the... Oh, boy. I remember when I first got here, it might have been maybe a year later, I was working on a trail and I heard this noise coming through the woods and if anybody... I swore that it was somebody walking through the woods. You know, it was making that much noise, and I stopped what I was doing and I just look. I was watching and looked at the direction it was coming from and it walks out. Two grouse walking through, and they were making so much racket, I couldn't believe what they were. When I first got out there, they were two grouse. But those, I haven't even seen anymore. I think I was the first and probably the last time I saw any grouse here in the park. But I couldn't believe the racket that they were making coming through there. But there's just been so many things. Even on the Towpath, I had a black snake one time stretched clear across the Towpath, one side to the other, and there was bicycles coming so I got up there where it was at and I moved it on a little bit faster. But, you know, it was just amazing how big that snake was, you know? But between the deer and everything else, a lot of beaver. And I know back in '79, there wasn't a whole lot of beaver in the park, but, boy, they sure moved in. And they kind of took over every place. But you'd see 'em all over. And there's a couple of places now... There's a place up off 303 that there's a big beaver place back in there. You have to walk back in probably about three-quarters of a mile or so to get to it. But it's a great big area that they've developed back in there. And it's really neat to go back there and just sit and watch 'em. But there's a lot. All the deer. I've seen some big bucks in this park just everywhere. And that was one thing neat about being out on the trails. You'd always see that. We had the Civilian Conservation Corps. It's the kind of thing that where they brought kids in from the cities and we would do a program with them. And we built a lot of Pine Grove Trail with that. And it was amazing to see those kids out there, and some of them had never seen a deer before. And we had a doe come through with a couple of fawns, and they could not believe what they were seeing, you know, and it's kind of cool to be here when they're doing that. But it's just an experience. But there's just all kinds of animals. I don't care where you're at. Now, they got the eagles in the park. And I understand or read that there's also a falcon now that's over, I guess it'd be the Turnpike bridge that's got a nest in there or did have a nest in that. So that's... It's neat to see that stuff coming back. Yeah.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:49:20] So you've generally seen an increase in the wildlife?

**Andrew Glasier** [00:49:22] Oh yeah. Yes, yes. Big time. Yeah. Because a lot of that stuff, you know, some stuff kind of disappeared like the grouse. I haven't seen grouse now for a long time. I've still seen a few pheasant. At one point there the rabbits were really down. And then, gosh, I don't know, it was 2006, 2005, I started seeing a bigger number of rabbits coming back, which kind of surprised me. Even in the turkeys, you know, a lot of turkeys that were let go in this park were done by the state, you know, as an accident. They were putting 'em a lot on their property. But, you know, turkeys, they don't stay in one spot. But there's a lot of turkeys in this park. And it kind of surprised me that their numbers were increasing because of the number of coyotes that are in the park. You know, you would think naturally that their numbers would go down with the more coyotes there are. But a lot of wild turkey in this area now. I don't know how many times you'd see crossing the road a mother going to cross, and I know one time there was 14 little chicks right behind her going across the road. And it's just amazing to see. You wouldn't think it to be in this urban an area. And it's kind of funny, I know I used to go a lot like over to the hardware stores or Lowe's or something and be getting something from outside. And here people come up. And if I did it after work, I'd still had my uniform on. And they come up and ask me, what do you do about the deer to keep them from eating your plants? And they'd be complaining about it. And you ask them where they lived and they moved right up against the boundary of the park. Well, you know, they gotta eat, too. [laughs]So you just try to plant things that they don't normally eat. But it's funny to listen to some of it. And yet other people are really glad that they're there. But it's funny listening to some people when they start talking about their shrubbery and stuff and how they're being trimmed up from the bottom. [laughs] And it's all because of the deer.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:51:27] From your perspective, why do you think this valley is so important to the region and the world, or the United States? What is it about this spot that makes it that special?

**Andrew Glasier** [00:51:36] Well, when you look at where it's at, all of the development that's around, and if you sit back and think to yourself, what would this be like right now if the park wasn't here? And all you have to do is go out and look at how the construction is taking place up against the boundaries of the park. You know, and you knew or know that if the park wasn't here, that this would be condominiums everywhere. You could look where they could build 'em to live and you wouldn't see a division between Akron and Cleveland anymore because they're just... There just wouldn't be. You know, I understand a part of, you know, people wanting to get the income, you know, the cities and the townships and stuff wanting people to move in. But if the park wasn't here, the deer that, because the population of this park has grown so much with the deer, they're being driven from those places into a smaller and tighter area. Now, I think it's a lot to do with why this park has a problem with deer and Metro Parks have a problem with deer because they don't have a place to go anymore, at least not where they can run pretty open and free. You know, you're always hearing about the accidents on the roads with the deer and the collisions and stuff, but they're being driven out of lots of places because the population is getting so big and a lot of the interstates are moving out. Well, where are they moving to? You know, closer and closer, where they can go and the park, you know... A lot of these places even advertise it, you know, back right up to the park, you know, National Park Service right at your backyard. Well, that has its problems when you do that. But I couldn't even think about what this place would really look like if the park wasn't here. I'd be... I think everybody would really be kind of disturbed by it eventually, because you wouldn't have the open areas. And you look at the old Coliseum site. Now you've got birds and you're never used to be in this area for a long time. They're nesting there now because you have a prairie-type scenario out there with the grasses and stuff. But yet if you didn't know the Coliseum was there, would you know it? No. But it's progress that takes place. Unfortunately, it hurts some people, you know, Boston Township and so forth. Their income isn't as big as they used to be. But I think when you start looking at it on a whole, you know, you look at how many people could actually visit this park and have the kind of settings that you've got. If it wasn't here, you wouldn't have it. It just wouldn't be available to anybody to do it. And, you know, you can... Akron, Cleveland, the metropark systems there, they provide a lot. And, you know, you just you have to have a place to go, and you start looking at the numbers of people that go to these places, why are they going there? There just isn't any other place to go to unless you want to go a long distance, and now the way gas is getting, people aren't going to go a long distance, you know, not not very much anyway. So the impact of the park, I think, is a positive thing, no matter which way you try to spin it, just on people's lives, because you can get out here, you can at least relax, you know, you can walk a trail and hear things you don't normally hear all the time and see things you don't normally see all the time and yet still feel comfortable. It's just amazing to start looking at the different falls in the park. You go over to Buttermilk Falls and look at that and Blue Hen Falls and look at that. And it's so relaxing. Brandywine Falls. And depending on what time you go there to look at it, but it's just nice, you know, it's just nice to do and nice to see.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:55:53] What do you think are some of the watershed moment in the history of this hour, in your opinion,.

**Tim Atkinson** [00:55:58] Some of the what?

**Andrew Glasier** [00:55:59] Watershed, like important moments or times you can say, wow, this really made an impact or it's making this a better place?

**Tim Atkinson** [00:56:09] Hmm. Well, naturally, Towpath is one. That's probably the biggie. I think the development a lot, not just the Towpath is there, but the development of a lot of the other trails that opened it up for a lot of different people. You know, most of the trails at the time were down in the southern part of the park, but trails have been diversified a lot more up in the northern part of the park. And you start looking at how the connections from the different municipalities and so forth have joined now to the park system and made a connection. It opened things up so much. The horse trails that are in the park, you can go from the south clear to the north now and continue on over into Metro Park and go on. I think the canal with the visitor center, the Canal Visitor Center that's up there, even though it's had its problems with floods and so forth, it still plays a big role in this park for people to be able to come to different things, to different programs. The three-C [Civilian Conservation Corps, or CCC] era that, you know, built the Ledges and the Octagon and the Happy Days Visitors Center, that place down there is it's a beautiful place to see. I can't... I'm really having a hard time pinpointing one thing that I think is probably a major player here in changes, but, you know, the thing with bringing the farmsteads back into the park, I think, is a super idea. It makes it difficult keeping up with the maintenance part of it to get these places ready again for that, but keeping the open areas, bringing that back in the parks gives a place for people to see different things that actually happened here in the Valley at the time, you know? I just can't put a finger on anything else that makes a real big change in... I think the Towpath probably ranks up there that is the most because of what it did and how it connected things and things were... You can read the story about the park, you know, in the area through what was out there.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:59:01] So that is a nice mixture of history as well as nature together.

**Tim Atkinson** [00:59:05] Yes.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:59:05] That's interesting with this park.

**Andrew Glasier** [00:59:07] Yes. Yes, it does, because, you know, even if you go down and start reading the way signs, even after putting 'em in and doing that, I still go back and read those and it still kind of amazes me of what actually took place. So you look at Peninsula, what used to be in that area, and, you know, the pictures kind of show that. It's hard to fathom. You know, even down here across from the river right here at Boston, you know, the old brick factory and stuff that was there, it's... You can't picture that in your mind, you know, until you start looking at that and say, wow, you know, this is history. It's just, it's amazing what was here. I would have never known that they built canal boats and that type stuff in that era, in that area and do it it just... But a lot of these trails show that, you know, the old carriage trail system, beautiful system up here now it's... You know, it's surrounded a lot by all the houses and so forth that are out there. But yet it's part of the history. You know, there's been a lot on the trails here. But, you know, everything else is kind of come to be with what is going on. We put in a lot of different places, all getting back to trails, you know, we built a lot of parking lots and so forth in this park. I started sitting back and thinking about some of the old Morebeo place, which is now the trailhead up there at Station Road. And that used to be the first YECC building there. And it's just amazing when you start thinking about some of the stuff that's happened in this park and where it started and where it's at now. It's just hard to comprehend all of it. Just a lot a lot of history. A lot of history.

**Andrew Glasier** [01:01:06] When you first came here, could you imagine the park the way it is now, or has it been kind of like a shock, looking back at how much it's grown and everything over the time that you worked here?

**Tim Atkinson** [01:01:16] I think shock might be the word. Yeah. Yeah. I know when I first got here... When I first got here, I wasn't in uniform yet, Park Service uniform. And that was very scary times back then. You know, a lot of the people really wanted nothing to do with the Park Service and the people with the park. So you had to mind your P's and Q's and watch what you said to who you said it to. So it wasn't that big of an area. The Virginia Kendall unit was kind of the site, you know, even though the park boundaries were much larger, that was kind of the area. And, you know, all the trails were kind of in that area. Most of your buildings were in that area that... where people actually stayed, you know, the old communications center and the maintenance building was all in the same building there on Route 303. The headquarters was just across the street, you know, and everything was kind of right there. So and you start thinking about how it's expanded and fingered out and progressed and now you have a lot of people that are really happy. There's been a lot of communication and joint activities between groups and so forth that... You know, people can see, I think, now what this park really had to offer in the long run. But it was just, I think, just getting on its feet at that time and, yeah, it's amazing to see how things have changed, what's in place now and what wasn't in place. Some of the things that have changed, you kind of feel a little bit sorry that it's changed, but yet, you know, progress has to go on and in you know, times are in such a way now that you have to start thinking about how you're going to get the income to keep things going and so forth. So you can't do things the way you did things a long time ago. But, yeah, it's definitely a shocker [laughs] when you start thinking about it and looking back at things.

**Andrew Glasier** [01:03:30] Where you see the part going in ten years, twenty-five years, fifty years? Do you think that it's at its limit or...

**Tim Atkinson** [01:03:37] Ooh. I think it will continue. I think the growth of the park is probably close to being about as big as it's going to be. I still think there'll probably be more trails developed. I think as far as parking lots and that type, there is still some trailheads that are on still on the master trail plan, but over the years some of those have kind of fallen by the wayside because other things have happened. There's been other connections to other places. So naturally, that changes where you would have the trailhead to be, as far as parking [and] everything goes. And I think this park has still got a lot of growing to do as far as its connections with the outside public. When I say that, I mean the different cities and townships and stuff that are still part of this, even with the Metro Parks. There's got to be an awful lot of cooperation there between all of them to make things to work and still to grow, but yet without hopefully hurting anybody in the process. There was an interesting article in the paper here not too long ago about that in Peninsula. It was saying they're feeling the crunch down there. Always amazed me that the little places stayed in business after the Coliseum left. You know, I thought, boy, that little town is going to just dry up, you know? But they were hiring people like crazy on weekends and stuff, and in summertime when the Towpath was running, they couldn't keep enough people there to work. I think that this park will be here 50 years from now. I think there'll probably be a lot of changes. I think there's still a major thing to be dealt with with the volunteers and the cooperation that takes place. To me, that is a vital role in this park, one that they can't afford to lose. And they've got to keep nurturing that to keep it going no matter what it takes, because this park isn't going to take care of itself. And they're not going to have the staff to be able to do it that way and maintain what they've got and still be a first-class place, and in my mind it is that. I've been to a lot of different places and this park is still there. You know, it still draws a lot of people. And I think it's always going to do that as long as it can be maintained and stay up with what's going on. Naturally, Mother Nature has a big role in that, too. And, you know, the Towpath is in a difficult area. Just like the railroad workers and just like the canal was. Well, the canal, it was eventually taken out because of Mother Nature. But yet, you know, when you see the number of people that use that and try to use it, even when you've got a section closed down because of a problem, it's just amazing. I just I think that this park will be here for a long, long, long time. I think I'll be dead and gone by this place is ever even... It just won't go away. I just don't think... As long as they get the cooperation of the people and the government still stands behind it and they still get enough money to be able to keep running and support, I think it'll be here for a long time.

**Andrew Glasier** [01:07:43] Well, is there anything you'd like to add that we didn't cover or expand on anything that we didn't have a chance to?

**Tim Atkinson** [01:07:53] I can't think of anything. You know, as long as the leadership and so forth is behind this park and keep things going. You know, John Debo, since he's been here, he's made a significant impact on this park and how it goes, and he fits that role very well. I think as long as that continues and his supporting staff is there, you know, kudos to all of them for the way it's going, but it's been tough leaving. [laughs] I won't say that it hasn't, but... It was time. It was time. But I'm very glad to have been a part of this place. It's just a... It's just been neat. [laughs]

**Andrew Glasier** [01:08:49] Thank you very much.

**Tim Atkinson** [01:08:51] Oh. Thank you.

**Amy Sumen** [01:08:51] I have one question.

**Tim Atkinson** [01:08:53] Sure.

**Amy Sumen** [01:08:53] You mentioned a couple times the initials, I think they're FCSS or FCC?

**Andrew Glasier** [01:08:59] It's a computer program.

**Amy Sumen** [01:09:00] Oh, that was a computer program that you were using?

**Tim Atkinson** [01:09:02] Yes.

**Amy Sumen** [01:09:03] Oh, okay.

**Tim Atkinson** [01:09:04] FMSS.

**Amy Sumen** [01:09:05] Oh, FMSS, okay. Thank you. A computer program.

**Tim Atkinson** [01:09:08] Yes. Yes, yeah.

**Amy Sumen** [01:09:11] So we're all done?

**Tim Atkinson** [01:09:12] I think so.

**Amy Sumen** [01:09:13] Okay.