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Fred W. Binnewies
October 3, 1962

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FRED W. BINNEWIES

REEL XLIII

Corrections sent with letter of March 4
made on March 13, 1964.

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Herb Evison: This is Herbert Evison at Glacier National Park on the morning of October 3, 1962. At the moment I am in the superintendent's office, seated with Fred W. Binnewies, who is assistant superintendent of Glacier National Park. The superintendent's desk is vacant at the moment awaiting the arrival of Spud Bill from Grand Teton, who has been appointed to succeed Ed Hummel, who recently transferred to the Western Office of the – Western Regional Office of the National Park Service.

Herb Evison: With all that off my chest, Fred, how about our starting off with a brief run-down on your career in the National Park Service. When did you come in?

Fred Binnewies: Well, Herb, I started in 1931 as a seasonal ranger at Rocky Mountain. I was a schoolteacher there at the time in the high school, teaching science and mathematics—

Herb Evison: You mean at Estes Park?

Fred Binnewies: At Estes Park. And of course through that I learned about the National Park Service, and it came as sort of a natural thing that I was quite interested in it and was able to get a seasonal appointment there starting in 1931, and I continued on for five seasons then as a seasonal ranger at Rocky. Started out under Jack Moomaw, by the way, who, you may recall, was one of the old-time rangers at Rocky Mountain.

Herb Evison: Didn't he go down to the Southeast somewhere, later?

Fred Binnewies: No, he retired there. John McLaughlin was chief ranger, and Edmund Rogers was the superintendent, John Preston was assistant superintendent.

Fred Binnewies: In 1935 and '36 I quit school teaching and went to Chicago and tried to be a chemist for a year. That didn't pan out quite as well as I thought it might, and so I came back to Colorado; and in the fall of '36 I received a permanent appointment at Mammoth Cave, Kentucky.

Herb Evison: Well, now, had you taken a Civil Service examination?

Fred Binnewies: Yes. This was sort of by accident, too. The junior park naturalist examination came up in '33, I think it was, and I learned that I had enough seasonal experience to qualify for it, so I went down and took it, as much a matter of practice as anything else, but really never expected to get a permanent appointment from it. So, it was really quite a surprise and certainly a lot of pleasure that I did get a permanent appointment from that examination in 1936.

- Herb Evison: And you went to Mammoth Cave. That was in the very early days of Mammoth Cave, and you went as a ranger?
- Fred Binnewies: Yes, I was the first permanent ranger at Mammoth Cave, unless you count Bob Holland, who was the acting superintendent at the time, and I think he had a chief ranger rating. But I was really the first permanent ranger that was appointed there. And this was before it was established as a park; it was a park project at the time.
- Herb Evison: And as I remember it, that was a rather interesting period, because the prospective park had a lot of neighbors who were not particularly friendly toward the idea of there being a park, isn't that correct?
- Fred Binnewies: It certainly is. Almost all of our activity there for the first, oh, I would say three or four years that I was there, was just a matter of public relations with the local people, and assisting, too, in the land purchase program, because they were still buying a lot of the private land within the boundary of the park there. Of course, that always creates a lot of difficulties. Many of those people had been born and raised right on those farms and had lived there all their life and naturally they resented having to move; but we did a lot of work trying to sell the national park idea to them and get them to accept the fact that the park was going to be established there.
- Fred Binnewies: It was rather interesting, too, that many of those people that even though they balked like everything at leaving their old home, when they finally did get moved they came back later and said it was probably the best thing that ever happened to them.
- Herb Evison: Many of them did that?
- Fred Binnewies: Yes. They were able to get better farms; they moved into other communities where they made good friends; and really it wasn't quite as bad as they anticipated at first. It was really a wonderful experience working with those people, too, because many of them knew little except just their immediate surroundings there.
- Fred Binnewies: Well, for example, I knew one fellow who was born and raised, got married, and lived in the same house all of his life and had never spent a night away from that house. The farthest he had ever been away was just where he could walk and return in a day.
- Herb Evison: And how old a man was he?
- Fred Binnewies: He was 81 when I knew him, and a remarkably intelligent fellow. I don't know where he got all of his information but I suspect that he read almanacs pretty thoroughly and the local paper; but it was really amazing the variety of subjects that he could talk on; he was a great talker and he

could carry on a conversation all day and half the night on almost anything you wanted to discuss.

Herb Evison: Well, now, some of those people in there, when they were first approached about the sale of their land, I would take it that the approach had to be a pretty darned careful one in lots of cases.

Fred Binnewies: Oh, yes, it did. They had two land buyers in there at the time and they were quite good at that. Ralph Bragg was one of them; I don't know if you ever knew him or not; but he was the kind of fellow who could go out and sit down with them and talk about their pigs and chickens and tobacco, really just in a good friendly way; and he was able to buy the land without too much difficulty. In fact, I think it was really a remarkable program in there. As I recall, there were about 650 separate tracts that were purchased, and there were only a couple of them that we had to go to condemnation on. One of them was a sort of friendly condemnation suit, but there was really only one that we had to condemn because there just was no other way to get it. And out of that many tracts and the number of people they had to deal with, I think it was a rather remarkable program.

Herb Evison: Aside from the people whose land was being bought, though, there were also land owners on the boundaries of the park and within easy reach of the park who I assume had made some use or other of the land, hunted over some of it or something like that kind, with whom the park had some difficulties in those early days, didn't it?

Fred Binnewies: Yes, we had a lot of trouble with the adjacent landowners, because they just couldn't understand at first what the park was all about and what the park regulations were. They were used to going out and killing a squirrel anyplace they wanted to; and I think the thing that probably broke that up was the fact that we arrested the sheriff of the county for shooting a squirrel in the park one time, and when that word got around, why, the rest of them decided maybe they had better quit.

Herb Evison: Maybe the Park Service meant business.

Fred Binnewies: Yes. And they also tried to burn the place up. I went there in November of '36 and that year they had more fires at Mammoth Cave than all of the rest of the Park Service put together – 258, I think it was. The next year, cut that down to about 40-some; and by this continued effort in telling the people about the purpose of the park and everything, we were able to reduce the fire problem down to, oh, a minimum.

Fred Binnewies: It was my ambition to go one year without a fire there, and almost made it; the only fire that we had was started by a coon that ran into a high-voltage electric wire that had been blown down in a windstorm, and he shorted the

wire and it arced down through his body and started a fire. But that was the only one we had one year there.

Herb Evison: You could hardly feel very guilty about that.

Fred Binnewies: No. The biggest problem with fires there of course was the people living adjacent to the park burning tobacco beds. They would start a tobacco bed burning, and it might be perfectly calm in the morning but by noon a little breeze would come up, and they would go to lunch or leave it unattended for a while. The wind would blow it out and start a fire in the grass, and quite often it burned into the park.

Herb Evison: What do you mean by tobacco bed burning?

Fred Binnewies: In preparing for planting tobacco they clear off a little piece of ground and they burn brush on top of this ground in order to get all weed seed and fungus or anything else out of it before they plant the tobacco seed; then they plant the seeds in this bed, and after the plants sprout and get up about four or five inches high, then they transplant them out into the fields. And this burning seems to be a necessity, although I know that there was some experimentation with chemicals to take the place of the burning. But it was the general practice all over the country there. Of course, tobacco was their money crop; everybody had a little patch; and so, we had tobacco beds burning all over the place. Many times, we would have thirty or forty smokes that we could count around the edge of the park there. It really kept the lookouts jumping.

Herb Evison: You say that was in the spring, and that would be before the leaves were on the trees and while there was still considerable fire danger?

Fred Binnewies: Yes. That was one of the things we had a little trouble getting the regional and Washington office used to, the fact that our fire season was in the winter there at Mammoth Cave. It started in the latter part of October and ran on through until things greened up in the spring.

Herb Evison: And actually lasted all through the winter?

Fred Binnewies: Yes, with a little break, possibly, in January when we got rains and things got dampened down pretty well, but potentially there was fire danger all winter.

Herb Evison: I hadn't realized that. I knew generally fall and spring in country with deciduous forest was fire danger time but didn't realize it extended into the winter anywhere.

Fred Binnewies: Well, it didn't get enough snow there at Mammoth Cave to really make very much difference. The snows that we did get would just stay on a short time, and of course the broomsedge grass there dries out very

rapidly; it doesn't absorb very much moisture, and within a day or two after a snow or rain, things could burn again.

Herb Evison: And there was lots of that in there, if I am not mistaken, because isn't that a sign of worn-out land, where you have a lot of that?

Fred Binnewies: Oh, yes. The old farms, as soon as they were abandoned, would grow back up into broomsedge and sassafras and persimmon bushes, and there were many, many acres of that broomsedge that would grow up almost shoulder high sometimes and burn very, very fiercely and rapidly. It was quite a problem, not too difficult to suppress, really, but it burned fast and covered a lot of acres in a very short time. I know the largest fire we had there was something over 600 acres that burned in about two hours. It really went to town. You didn't dare get in front of that; you had to wait until it hit the woods and slowed down in the leaves, and then you were able to control it in the leaves and duff on the edge of the woods.

Herb Evison: Well, now, when you went there, Bob Holland was acting superintendent. When did Taylor Hoskins come in there? Were you still there when he came?

Fred Binnewies: Yes. Taylor Hoskins came there in '38.

Herb Evison: I have always understood that he had a good deal to do with the education of the neighbors particularly, and with impressing on them that the Park Service meant business. Would you credit Taylor with doing a good public relations job in there?

Fred Binnewies: Well, I certainly would, because Taylor was the sort of fellow who could go right out and sit down with them and talk about the things that they were interested in, and Taylor had a wonderful memory for people and relationships, and that is quite important to those people. They pay a lot of attention to families and they carry relationships through second and third and fourth cousins and that sort of thing. Well, Taylor was really amazing in the way he could find out who was related to whom and just what the relationship was, and when he was talking to people he would bring that into the conversation, and it meant a lot to them. And of course, being a Virginian, too, they accepted him probably a little better than they did me, because I was from the West and sort of an unknown quantity. But Taylor would go out and chew tobacco with them, and really made a fine impression on the local people.

Herb Evison: You have given me a side of that that I hadn't heard before.

Herb Evison: Well, you stayed there until when?

Fred Binnewies: 1947.

- Herb Evison: In other words, you were in there for eleven years?
- Fred Binnewies: Yes, just about eleven years.
- Herb Evison: Well, now, when you left there what were you?
- Fred Binnewies: I was chief ranger. In fact, I was acting chief ranger almost from the time that I went there, but I was in fact chief ranger when I left; I went to Bandelier National Monument, New Mexico, then as superintendent.
- Herb Evison: Now, looking back over that eleven years in a brand-new national park, are there any other things that stand out in your memory as interesting or unusual or important?
- Fred Binnewies: Well, the last year I was there of course was a busy one, because we had the National Park Service superintendent's conference, and we had the dedication of the park, and we had a regional fire school there all that year, which kept us sort of busy.
- Fred Binnewies: The dedication was a very interesting thing to experience, too. We had a fairly good crowd, and it was well organized. Taylor did a good job on that. It was one of those things that all of us got pretty involved in, but at least we think it went off fairly well.
- Herb Evison: Now that was in 1946, wasn't it?
- Fred Binnewies: Yes. I might say, too, Herb, this reminds me that I went to Tolson Tech in Richmond about that time, too, the first one that was held after the war, and you were there and I think that's probably where I got acquainted with you the first time. I think I had met you briefly before that, but I really felt that I got to know you a little better at Richmond, and it certainly was one of the high points in my career. I have never forgotten that session. In fact, I still carry my notebook around and take a look at it once in a while to see what changes have been made and how much of it is still applicable.
- Herb Evison: Well, that would – notes on one of those sessions would really be a good thing to consult to check up on changes.
- Fred Binnewies: Yes, it's real interesting.
- Herb Evison: Fred, you went from Mammoth Cave down to Bandelier, which certainly was a pretty sharp change of scene, change of surroundings. I wonder what things stand out in your memory particularly from your years – seven, wasn't it? – at Bandelier?
- Fred Binnewies: Well, I think that Bandelier is one of the finest training areas that I have any knowledge about, because it is in effect a miniature park. It has on a small scale practically all of the problems that you will find in any of the larger parks. It has a concession operation; it has a fire problem; it has

forest pest control problem; it has roads, trails; a fine interpretive program; entrance station operation; everything that you would find in the larger parks. And I consider it really an excellent means of training the new superintendent, as I was then, because there were so many of these things I had not had any direct experience with before; and to be exposed to them on, you might say, a small scale like that was really a wonderful experience. I am thoroughly convinced that some of our best training can be done in the smaller areas.

Herb Evison: So long as they offer a variety of problems.

Fred Binnewies: Yes, that's right. And Bandelier certainly did that. You had the ruins tour; you had the maintenance of the ruins and the archaeological excavations that were carried on there at the time; also an important public relations problem there with the Atomic Energy Commission right next door at Los Alamos – that was a real dilly, and one that gave us a few bad moments, but we managed to work it out all right.

Fred Binnewies: Art Thomas, who was superintendent there before I was, was the one that caught most of the brunt of that, because he was there when Los Alamos was started and of course at that time they couldn't tell him anything about it and they just kind of rode rough-shod over him at times; but later on, when we knew what their purpose was, why, then we were able to work out things much better. It was an unusual situation, of course, one that you don't find in very many areas.

Herb Evison: Well, now, when you were there what sort of problem did you have with the people of Los Alamos?

Fred Binnewies: Oh, Herb, we didn't have too many problems directly. I think one of the most interesting things I felt there at Bandelier was that I knew that those scientists, people up there at Los Alamos, were working under a considerable amount of pressure, many of them working six days a week and probably untold number of hours of overtime in addition to that. They would come down to Bandelier on a Saturday or Sunday, go into the campground, and many times I have seen them just go over there and spread out a blanket and stay there practically all day, just thoroughly relaxing. You could almost feel the renewed vigor and renewed energy coming back to them by being able to forget about their pressures that they were under at Los Alamos, for a day down in that beautiful setting.

Fred Binnewies: The campground, as you probably know, is right along a little stream, and the canyon is really a beautiful place. And you just think, they could go back on a Monday morning refreshed and renewed and do a much better job. I really felt that the National Park Service there was contributing to

the defense effort by being able to furnish such a place as that for the relaxation and enjoyment of those people.

Fred Binnewies: We had splendid cooperation from the officials of the Atomic Energy Commission. They gave us a great deal of help whenever they could. The only thing is, whenever they wanted something like a road or a power line or a water line, there wasn't very much that we could do to buck it; but we always presented our side of the story to them, and they were quite considerate. There were some things that they just felt they had to have, and at that time they were certainly in the driver's seat and generally got them. But they considered our point of view just as much as they possibly could. It was a real toughie there for a while, and I think it has all worked out very well now. I understand that the Atomic Energy Commission has donated a considerable tract of land to the Monument. It has been enlarged now. They were quite cooperative in fire suppression, and almost anything else where they could help us out.

Herb Evison: Fred, you probably remember that back in Mather's day – and I think even as late as Albright's day as Director – there were proposals for a Pajarito National Park, and there was a companion proposal of a Cliff Cities National Park, to include Bandelier but quite a lot more country around it. Now, a national park of course is considered primarily a scenic place. What would you think about establishing a national park around the Bandelier nucleus?

Fred Binnewies: Oh, I think it's a real fine idea, and I was real sorry that they weren't able to get that legislation through when it was originally proposed, because the whole area is quite scenic, in addition to the very important archaeological remains that are there. It is one of the richest archaeological areas in the Southwest, when you consider the whole Pajarito Plateau, and certainly it is important enough that it should have been included in a larger area than they were able to establish as Bandelier National Monument. I understand there is a proposal now to create the Jemez Crater National Park, and I certainly hope that will go through, because the crater which starts near the western edge of Bandelier is, I understand, one of the largest of that type in the world.

Fred Binnewies: I think there is a wonderful geologic and archaeologic story to be told there, because the crater created a tremendous amount of ash that built up the cliffs and the plateau area that was later used by the Indians, so that the combination of geology and archaeology would make a really fascinating story. I think it is certainly deserving of serious consideration for a park.

Herb Evison: Do you know, is most of the Jemez land privately owned?

- Fred Binnewies: Yes, almost the entire interior of the crater – or the caldera, I guess is a more proper name for it – is owned by a big cattle company, but I think they probably would be willing to sell out, of course for a price.
- Herb Evison: But it would be one of those that would have to be bought?
- Fred Binnewies: Yes. Some of the land surrounding it is Forest Service land.
- Herb Evison: Now, how about the land which would have to be taken in if there were an extension of Bandelier to take in more of that Pajarito Plateau? That would be mostly national forest, wouldn't it?
- Fred Binnewies: Oh, national forests and Indian lands. The Indians own land up there on the Plateau, too, particularly around the Puye ruins. I think the San Ildefonso, or Santa Clara Pueblo owns lands up in there. But except for the portion, which is now controlled by Los Alamos County, a great deal of the land is either Forest Service or Indian lands.
- Herb Evison: Anything else from Bandelier that you—?
- Fred Binnewies: Well, it was a wonderful experience there, Herb, and I certainly have a soft spot in my heart for it. I think it is one of the jewels of the National Park Service. It's too bad it isn't a little better known. We had the problem there that I think many places have, that locally it was known as Frijoles Canyon, and so many visitors would come out and say they had inquired about Bandelier National Monument and no one seemed to know what it was; but if they mentioned Frijoles Canyon, why, everybody knew what Frijoles Canyon was. So, it's just one of those things that we have to keep working on and get the proper nomenclature in use by the local people there so that they can tell the visitors more about it.
- Herb Evison: You feel that it has the capacity for handling many more visitors, do you?
- Fred Binnewies: Well, it's pretty limited. That's one of the big problems there, the fact that the Canyon is pretty small and doesn't have capacity for a great number of visitors, except that this new addition will provide space for additional campgrounds and additional facilities, probably up on the rim of the Canyon instead of down on the bottom.

[END OF SIDE 1]

[START OF SIDE 2]

- Herb Evison: Fred, in what year did you go to the Death Valley as superintendent?
- Fred Binnewies: Well, in 1954, in May.
- Herb Evison: And you were there until—?
- Fred Binnewies: Until 1960.

- Herb Evison: Well, that of course again was a complete change in character of area from either of the two previous ones that you had been in. What sort of problems does the superintendent of Death Valley particularly face?
- Fred Binnewies: Well, Death Valley is a most interesting area and I think probably one that is misunderstood more than any other area in the Service. It's a place that there is little middle ground: people that come there either hate it or love it. And I must admit that when I first went there it was with some slight misgivings, because the desert – and particularly Death Valley – is a place that is so foreign to the experience of most people; they are used to at least trees and grass and flowers, and they get out into the desert which is quite barren and it just really almost throws them for a loop. It is an entirely new experience and one that they sort of have to get used to. I think that many people who may not see anything of particular interest or beauty in Death Valley when they first arrive, if they'll just stay there for a day or two they completely change their mind and they become very fascinated with it, because the vastness, the solitude, and the change of light and color and shadows on the mountains and on the eroded areas around there, just provides really unforgettable experience.
- Fred Binnewies: There is a lot of color in Death Valley in the rocks and in the formations there that are very fascinating. I know that some people think it is very drab and uninteresting, but they just don't see it, and they just don't take the time to see it. It's of course so large that you can't see the place in just a few minutes or a few hours; at least a day or two is required to even begin to see some of the main points of interest there.
- Fred Binnewies: I know that when I first went there, I had a very strange feeling about it for nearly three months. It was somewhat frightening, and I actually considered ways and means that I might get out of the place. But one day I was driving down from up in the mountains from Wildrose Canyon, and in coming down through Emigrant Canyon I got to a place near the mouth of the Canyon where the whole valley kind of opens up in front of you. Very suddenly there was a feeling came over me that now I understood the desert and I understood the valley; and from then on, that feeling grew and grew, until I really came to love the place and it was a marvelous experience.
- Fred Binnewies: It had its problems, of course, because of the isolation and the heat. We found we could live with both of them; and it certainly created in me a feeling that I will never get over; I always will want to go to the desert, any opportunity that I have, because – oh, I don't know; it just really gets under your skin after a certain length of time.

- Herb Evison: Well, did Amy have the same feeling about it, or acquire the same feeling about it?
- Fred Binnewies: Yes, she certainly did. She felt very much the same way; and the color and the vastness of it, everything, she would go back tomorrow if she had the opportunity. In fact, we talk sometimes about what we want to do when we retire, and we considered retiring out somewhere in the semi-desert area, anyway, someplace where we can get out into the desert once in a while, because she really liked it very much. And the children do, too. That was rather interesting. I know my daughter particularly talks about it quite a lot, and she thinks there's no place quite like Death Valley.
- Herb Evison: Now, I was just about to ask you a question about those children, because they must all have been of school age while you were in there, weren't they?
- Fred Binnewies: Yes. One boy, my older boy, Bill, had just graduated from high school at Los Alamos when we went to Death Valley. He started in college out there; he started in – a junior college down at San Bernardino. Bob, the younger boy, had one more year of high school, and we sent him up to my parents in South Dakota to finish up that last year, because the school situation there in Death Valley is pretty tough. The kids have to ride the bus sixty miles to the high school, and it's a rather small school that doesn't have too much to offer. Of course, there is the advantage that the kids get a lot of personal attention and they learn pretty well in that school, but they can't take part in too many activities that you normally think of in a high school.
- Herb Evison: And where is the school?
- Fred Binnewies: It's at Shoshone, which is sixty miles from park headquarters. My daughter was just starting school out there, in the grades, and they had a grade school right down at Furnace Creek in Death Valley, so that wasn't too much of a problem. Again, not very many children in the school, and about half of them were Shoshone Indians, which added quite a bit of interest to it, really.
- Herb Evison: I can believe that. How many rooms in the school? Was it a one-room school?
- Fred Binnewies: It was essentially a one-room school. They had two rooms, but they used one of them as a sort of work room, and they had six – well, when we first went there, they had all eight grades in that school and had two teachers. Then the number of students went down where they only had one teacher; then they finally cut it to six grades, they took the seventh and eighth graders down to Shoshone to the high school.

Herb Evison: That made an awful large part of the day spent just getting back and forth to school, it seems to me. That's even worse than the situation at Yosemite.

Fred Binnewies: Well, it took a little over an hour. The kids left home a little after seven in the morning and they got back about four in the afternoon, which wasn't too bad. Of course, the bus only, I think, made one stop between Death Valley and Shoshone, and the roads are good, so they could make good time down there. Of course, one of the problems was that many of the after-school activities that they might have there, the children from Death Valley weren't able to participate in them very much; they could only take part in those that were going in school hours.

Herb Evison: Not much of a social life in connection with the school for them, either, I would judge.

Fred Binnewies: No. That was one of the interesting things about being in Death Valley, though, that, of course, the employees there sort of had to make their own entertainment. We had a wonderful bunch of people, any time anyone would suggest having a potluck or a party of some kind, everyone just pitched right in and took a good active part in it, and we had a lot of fun. It really worked out very well, because of the cooperation that we had from all the rest of the staff.

Herb Evison: I think I remember having read at the time that you left there, that some very nice things were said about both you and Amy in connection with your leadership in community activities there. Isn't my memory correct?

Fred Binnewies: I don't know. It's certainly awfully nice of you to say that. We of course enjoy almost anything that comes along; like to play bridge, like to go swimming and dancing, so we certainly tried to get into all the activities that were available down there, and tried—

Fred Binnewies: One of the things we tried to do didn't work out too well, was to get a little more participation with the employees of the – well, I can't say concessioner, exactly; they are private operations there at Furnace Creek Ranch and Furnace Creek Inn.

Fred Binnewies: And we started a committee, called the "Death Valley Boosters," an organization in which we tried to bring in the employees of the Ranch and the Inn, and we got some of them interested, but largely it was Park Service people who took the lead in all of the activities that we were able to carry on there in the Valley.

Herb Evison: Now that's a rather unusual relationship in there, that inside of the Monument you have these two operations, the Ranch and the Inn; in general, how was that relationship?

- Fred Binnewies: Oh, it was very fine, really. Of course the properties were owned by the U.S. Borax and Chemical Company – it was formerly the Pacific Coast Borax Company – and they had been of course interested in the National Park Service, well, prior to the establishment of the Service, because Steve Mather was an employee of the Pacific Coast Borax Company at one time. In fact, it was Steve Mather that coined the phrase “20-Mule Team Borax” that became practically a household word throughout the nation, and he thought of that because of the 20-mule teams that hauled borax out of Death Valley. So, the Borax Company has certainly been closely associated with the Park Service for many years. Horace Albright at the present time is on their board of directors of the company, and what is now the U.S. Borax and Chemical Company was formed with the merger of the company that Horace was president of.
- Herb Evison: I believe, Fred, while you were in Death Valley, that the Fred Harvey Company took over the operation of the Furnace Creek Ranch and Furnace Creek Inn.
- Fred Binnewies: Yes, they did.
- Herb Evison: Is that correct?
- Fred Binnewies: They leased it from the Borax Company and are operating at the present time. They are doing a real fine job, too, by the way.
- Herb Evison: They have added some additional motel units down at Furnace Creek Ranch and are really doing a bang-up job that we know the Fred Harvey Company is noted for.
- Herb Evison: And they are nice people to deal with.
- Fred Binnewies: Oh, excellent. Our relations with them have been very, very fine, just as the ones with the Borax Company.
- Herb Evison: Fred, Death Valley is unusual, fairly unusual, among areas of the National Park System in that prospecting and mining are still permitted on Monument lands; and I wonder if that isn't somewhat of a headache to the superintendent of the Monument.
- Fred Binnewies: It certainly is. It is probably the biggest problem that we have in Death Valley, because a miner can file a claim anyplace in the Monument, and of course when he files a claim he can demand access to it; we can't deny him the right to construct a road to the claim; about the only thing we can do is to tell him within certain limits where to put the road. We can insist that he not use necessarily the shortest route to the claim but maybe follow up a wash or go in some way that doesn't scar up the landscape too much. But of course, the mine dumps that are created from any mining activity,

and even the prospect holes, all create a distraction in the landscape there; and it is really a big problem.

Fred Binnewies: Shortly before I left there, there were two companies that filed over – well, nearly 200 placer claims. Now a placer claim is 160 acres. And they filed these down toward the south end of the Monument, but they covered the whole floor of the Valley and up onto the sides of the hills there for a ways. Then they came in with bulldozers and dug deep trenches on the claims, as their discovery work. They piled up big mounds of earth, and they were visible of course in that flat country down on the floor of the Valley, visible for many miles. It created a scar that was really pretty terrible, at least from the Park Service point of view. And this is just an illustration of what can happen in the right of the miners to establish claims. Most of the claims that were established there are the lode claims – that are 20 acres; but of course, one person can claim several of those if he wants to, and consequently they can tie up quite a bit of ground. Probably – or I should say, a very serious consequence of the mining activity is the use of the springs. Almost any mining operation has to have water, or at least the miner has to have a place where he can get drinking water; so, they establish camps or sometimes residences close to springs, which denies their use by wildlife.

Fred Binnewies: While I was in Death Valley, we made quite a study of the bighorn sheep that are found there. This was done by Ralph Wells and his wife, Buddy, who was a seasonal ranger, and he made a very excellent study of the bighorn. It had been thought for many years that competition between the burros – wild burros – that are found there and the bighorn was pretty serious; but Ralph found out that this is not necessarily the case – that the competition between man and the bighorn and the burros was really the serious thing, because any time that there is development at a spring, the sheep will quit using it. In the very limited water supply of course that there is in the desert, this can become an extremely important factor so far as survival of the sheep is concerned.

Fred Binnewies: So I certainly hope that it will be possible within not too many years to get legislation which will restrict mining in Death Valley and put it under better control, because the way it is now it's wide open and there is little that can be done to curtail it; and the scars, the activity that's going on there is really pretty serious so far as park standards are concerned. I understand that there is an effort now to withdraw certain areas, as the ones of principal visitor interest, from mining entry. If this is successful it will at least protect the major points of interest in the Valley, but there are so many others that should also be protected, and mining activity should be eliminated completely, because really there is not very much in Death

Valley of commercial value. I think this is borne out by reports of the Geological Survey. And while there are some rich pockets of minerals, yet there has never been – or only in a very, very few instances has there been anything that really amounted to very much. I think this is generally conceded by the mining interest, but still they of course are reluctant to give up any territory in which there might be the remote possibility that somebody might find a little pocket of ore that they could mine out. So, it's really going to be a battle, but we have considerable support in favor of elimination of mining in Death Valley, and I really hope that it can be accomplished before very long.

Herb Evison: How about the Death Valley '49ers organization? Have they ever taken any stand on it?

Fred Binnewies: Yes, they were opposed at first to this withdrawal of any of the land from mining entry, because there are a number of the '49ers that had mining interests and are closely associated with miners. But I understand now they have reversed their position and are in favor of it. I think their concern originally was for some water rights, which I tried to explain to them as clearly as possible were not involved in this proposed withdrawal at all. And I think they have been convinced of that now, so that they are in support of withdrawing these critical areas from mining entry. I doubt that they would give a great deal of support in any effort to eliminate mining completely, although there are a number of the '49ers who are definitely in favor of it. They, especially after we showed them some of the things that were going on out there from the mining activity, particularly this bulldozing out of big holes and everything, why, they are becoming more and more convinced that it should be eliminated. It will take a little time, I think, to get them to really give active support to that sort of proposal. I know that individuals will help, but as an organization I think it is questionable at the present time.

Herb Evison: Well, now, can the miner go in there and not only delimit claims, but can he end up by getting title to land in there?

Fred Binnewies: Yes, and that's the serious thing, because he can patent a claim and then of course he has title to it in fee simple and can do anything he wants to. It's a thing that if the government then wants it, they would have to buy him out. It seems sort of ridiculous that anyone could go in and patent government land and then just turn around and sell it back to the government. So, I think the first step certainly is to get legislation which would prohibit patenting of claims, and possibly putting any mining activity on a lease basis, as is now done with certain minerals. But this will all take legislation, and I think the sooner it can be done the better.

Herb Evison: I am very glad indeed to have your description of just what that involves. I hadn't realized before that they could go in there and actually patent claims. I knew that mining was permitted.

Fred Binnewies: Well, it's true that there are not very many people that do patent claims, for some reason or other; they just don't go to that additional expense, because once they file a claim, all they have to do is claim \$100 worth of work a year, their assessment work, and that keeps the claim valid. In fact they don't even have to do that – they can still hold the claim but it is open to somebody else to jump it or file on top of them if they don't do their assessment work; but they can hold a claim indefinitely as long as no one else develops an interest in it, even without doing the assessment work.

Fred Binnewies: Now there's a big company there, I understand, that – let's see, I don't recall the name of it just offhand – but they filed a great many claims up in the upper part of Furnace Creek Wash and are carrying those to patent, which is going to be a rather serious thing, because they plan on open-pit mining, and you know what that means. This will be right along on both sides of the road that leads up to Dantes View, which is of course one of the principal points of interest there in Death Valley; I think it's going to create a pretty bad situation if they do go ahead and develop their plans the way they have them at the present time. Oh, that's the Kern County Cattle Companies, I think it is. It's a fairly large organization and they have diversified interests. Certainly, they started out with cattle, but they have gotten into a lot of other things; and they are planning on mining borax there.

Herb Evison: Well, that sounds pretty bad.

Herb Evison: Fred, when we started this – or before we started this – I remarked on the fact that you have two sons who are also working for the National Park Service. What, if any, can you tell me about how they happened to go with the Park Service, aside from the fact that their old man worked for it, has worked for it for a long time?

Fred Binnewies: Well, Herb, that's a kind of a toughie. Of course, I am very proud of the fact that both of the boys have decided to go with the Park Service. The older boy, Bill, is now at Shadow Mountain Recreation Area in Colorado, and he pretty well made up his mind from the time that he started into college that he wanted to get into the Park Service. He pointed more or less toward the naturalist division, but is a ranger now, and I am not sure whether he has changed his mind, whether he wants to stay as a ranger or would like to transfer to the naturalist division; but that's somewhat immaterial, something he can make up his mind. He majored in

conservation and wildlife management in college, and there didn't seem to be much of a question in his mind of what he wanted to do.

Fred Binnewies: The other boy, the younger one, is a ranger now at Yellowstone, stationed at Old Faithful, and he had a little tougher time. He has been extremely interested in history, and he wasn't too sure that he wanted to get into the Park Service, but he told me one time that he thought and thought of other things that he wanted to do, and he realized that in anything else he would have to live in the city and he didn't want any part of that, so he decided that he would make the Park Service a career. And certainly, he hasn't regretted it so far. I think he made a good choice, of course. And I think both boys are going to be a credit to the Service. I certainly hope that they will. They do have a lot of interest, and I think probably it was because of the fact that we lived in the variety of areas that we did when they were growing up, that made them develop this interest.

Herb Evison: Tell me this: Have you seen or heard of any indication of prejudice among Park Service people against Park Service sons?

Fred Binnewies: No, I certainly haven't seen any evidence of that. I know I want the boys to be entirely on their own. I am certainly not – the last thing I would want to do would be to use my position to try to help them in any way. I think they're – I think probably they do have a little bit tougher time, if you want to call it that, because – well, it's just like being the son of a college professor, which I was: I know that if I would take a class under my dad I would have had to work a lot harder than the other kids in the class, just because I was the prof's son and they would think that there might be some favoritism shown. I certainly hope that this isn't the case so far as my boys in the Park Service are concerned, because I want them to be strictly on their own and make their own way from here on out.

Herb Evison: Fred, you have a very high opinion of Death Valley.

Fred Binnewies: I certainly do, Herb, I think it is one of the most unique and spectacular areas in the Service, and it ought to be a national park. It has all of the qualifications that were ever established for park status, and certainly it should be given that designation just as soon as possible. Of course this mining problem is the thing that is holding it up right now, but I think that it should be given park status anyway, because it is a wonderful, spectacular, beautiful area; scenically it is outstanding, and it certainly ought to be a park.

Herb Evison: I am glad to have that statement from you. And I thank you for this whole recording experience.

[END OF INTERVIEW]