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Herman B. Barnett
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Interview conducted by S. Herbert Evison
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HERMAN B. BARNETT
REEL XXXVII,
SIDE II

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Herbert Evison: This is Herbert Evison, and this is the 10th of October, 1962. Today I am in Puyallup, Washington, and sitting right alongside of me is Herman B. Barnett, who worked at Mount Rainier National Park for the National Park Service, and even before there was a National Park Service, for a period of thirty years, having retired in 1945.

Herbert Evison: Now, Mr. Barnett, tell me something about the first kind of work that you did in Mount Rainier National Park and when it was.

Herman Barnett: The first kind of work I did in Mount Rainier National Park was working for the Billy Nation – putting up a barn at Paradise for the horses when they came in there with the stages, and they would have some place to feed them and take care of them.

Herbert Evison: Now those were the proprietors of the stage line running from Ashford?

Herman Barnett: They run from Ashford, yes. The train came in as far as Ashford and then they took them from there on up by stage. And then they drove into Paradise and had dinner there, then they would drive back down, and the train would pick them up again.

Herbert Evison: Now, by dinner you mean what, a noon meal?

Herman Barnett: Noon meal.

Herbert Evison: They made one roundtrip a day?

Herman Barnett: That's right, to the train. Those that wanted to stay overnight of course could stay, but a great many of them went back.

Herbert Evison: Came up there hoping it would be clear and they would get a good view of the mountain from Paradise.

Herman Barnett: That's right.

Herbert Evison: Well, now—

Herman Barnett: That was in 1912.

Herbert Evison: In 1912! And you did other jobs in there, I believe, before you even became a seasonal or a temporary ranger in 1914.

Herman Barnett: Yes, I worked for the government on trails and telephone lines, putting up telephone lines and working on trails, and also working on cabins, finishing up cabins on the inside; different types of work.

Herbert Evison: You mean the patrol type of cabin?

Herman Barnett: That's right, patrol cabins they had in Paradise and places in the park.

- Herbert Evison: Now, was there a walkable trail around the mountain at that time?
- Herman Barnett: Well, no, there wasn't. There was a type of trail, but the first trails we had that went clear around the mountain were built about 1915 and 1916.
- Herbert Evison: What you had, the way you were able to get around the mountain then, I judge, was by very rough trail up to that time.
- Herman Barnett: That's right; old Indian trails. They were more ways than they were trails.
- Herbert Evison: More what?
- Herman Barnett: More ways.
- Herbert Evison: Incidentally, were you always a slim man such as you are now?
- Herman Barnett: I always weighed about 135 pounds.
- Herbert Evison: Well, that's a good basis for longevity.
- Herman Barnett: Oh, indeed, yes, I guess it is, because I am 82 years old.
- Herbert Evison: And an extraordinarily lively one. Now you started as a temporary ranger in 1915. Who was the superintendent then?
- Herman Barnett: D. L. Rayburn.
- Herbert Evison: D. L. Rayburn. And what were your responsibilities as a temporary ranger?
- Herman Barnett: Well, I had charge of the Ohanapecosh ranger station. That was a three months' job at that time, 1915.
- Herbert Evison: And how did you get into Ohanapecosh at that time? Was there a road?
- Herman Barnett: Well, no, there was not a road. We had what we called a way, but in 1916 they built a road that you could get over, although there were turns on it that you had to back up to get around, in order to get up there. In 1916 they did have a type of road in there. You see, that was Ohanapecosh Hot Springs.
- Herbert Evison: And what was in there at the time besides just the hot springs? Was there a development?
- Herman Barnett: No, no development. They had what they called the mud baths and they had a hot bath that you could get into, and a great many people came in there for rheumatism, and they camped. Of course, there was no other accommodation; they brought their own supplies and did their own eating and cooking.
- Herbert Evison: Usually come in by horse?

Herman Barnett: Oh yes, they had to; pack horse.

Herbert Evison: Pretty crude at that time, I would judge. Were these hot baths and mud baths open?

Herman Barnett: Oh, they were out, just out, yes. But they really were quite good for medicinal purposes, very good for them. I know men that went in there that had rheumatism so bad they had to be carried in, and they walked out in a month.

Herbert Evison: Yes? And they would come in to stay that long?

Herman Barnett: Oh yes, they did, quite a number of them. Then after they changed that, they did away with mud baths – they were not sanitary – and they put in the bath house. That was a little later; that was about in 1917 they put in a bath house and piped the water in.

Herbert Evison: But the people who came up there for rheumatism treatment, was it the mud baths or the hot water?

Herman Barnett: Oh, the mud baths were the best; they baked it right out of them.

Herbert Evison: But they just ceased using the mud?

Herman Barnett: Yes. They thought it wasn't sanitary and they did away with that; the government inspectors. That was in the Forest Service at that time.

Herbert Evison: Oh yes, that's right. I remember. And yet you were working for the Park Service?

Herman Barnett: I was working for the Park Service. The line was between my cabin and the hot springs, about a quarter of a mile there, and the line went right between the two; so, I spent a great deal of my time down at the hot springs. Later they extended that line and took in the hot springs.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, were there forest rangers – was there a forest ranger stationed in there too?

Herman Barnett: No. Packwood was the closest. That was thirteen miles below.

Herbert Evison: Oh yes. Did you carry some responsibilities for the Forest Service as well as the Park Service?

Herman Barnett: No, I did not, except that I would notify them, of course, of fires or anything, any condition that wasn't right. We did that back and forth.

Herbert Evison: Now, was there a telephone in there at that time?

Herman Barnett: Yes, we had a telephone; one wire grounded.

- Herbert Evison: The typical old forest telephone. Well, now, you went in there in 1915 as a temporary ranger. Were you in there just that one summer or succeeding summers?
- Herman Barnett: Succeeding summers until I had my permanent appointment in 1917.
- Herbert Evison: Then when you got your permanent appointment what happened then?
- Herman Barnett: Well, when I got my permanent appointment I was moved over to Longmire. In 1917, the winter of 1917, that's when I did predatory game hunting.
- Herbert Evison: Well, now, tell me something about that. What were your procedures for getting the game and what did you go after?
- Herman Barnett: Any predatory animal – wildcat, coyotes, wolves, fox, marten, fisher, cougars, bobcats – any predatory animal.
- Herbert Evison: Were you pretty successful at it?
- Herman Barnett: Well, I made fairly good money, yes. I only got \$12.50 a month but I kept all my furs.
- Herbert Evison: Oh yes and were able to sell those. You started in as a permanent ranger at \$12.50 a month?
- Herman Barnett: No. That was the winter of '17. I didn't get my appointment until the spring of '17.
- Herbert Evison: I see. You were in there as a predatory animal hunter just before you got your permanent appointment. Then in '17 you were stationed in Longmire – that is, the summer after you got your permanent appointment – and did you engage after that in any predatory control?
- Herman Barnett: No. You know they changed the rule then: everything was protected, which was a very good thing for the Park Service.
- Herbert Evison: I knew that ultimately that happened, but I didn't realize it happened that early. Well, now, tell me something about those years as a ranger. In 1917 I don't even remember who the superintendent was then—
- Herman Barnett: D. L. Rayburn.
- Herbert Evison: D. L. Rayburn was still superintendent. Then you served in there under Rayburn and you served in there under Toll and Peters and Tomlinson and Preston—
- Herman Barnett: That's right: Tomlinson and Nelson and Preston.
- Herbert Evison: Was there a Nelson in there too?

- Herman Barnett: Yes, for about three years.
- Herbert Evison: I had forgotten that. Do you know what became of him?
- Herman Barnett: Well, he went back to Washington, D. C. He didn't like the job and didn't want it in the first place, and he was an Army engineer, and he was a very fine man, too – as they all were; I have no objection to any of them. But he was quite a character himself. He was one man that didn't give one – (I shouldn't be talking like that here) – he was a man that didn't care about the park company; he said what he wanted to and did as he wanted to; he didn't take any orders.
- Herbert Evison: Now, he would have been a man selected by Stephen Mather.
- Herman Barnett: Yes, Stephen Mather.
- Herbert Evison: Like all of the others that I named there. I guess Macy was the last man you served under, and I guess he also was a Mather selection but not as superintendent of Rainier. Isn't that right?
- Herman Barnett: You know, I doubt that he was Mather's. He worked for me as assistant chief ranger for quite a long time.
- Herbert Evison: Macy did? Is that so?
- Herman Barnett: Yes.
- Herbert Evison: Well, now, one thing I would be interested in knowing: did you ever have any contacts while you were chief ranger with Mather or Albright? I would be interested in hearing something about your contacts with Mather.
- Herman Barnett: Well, I don't think I ever met a man that I really liked as well as I did him. He had a way with him that a man certainly couldn't help but like him. And he would be away from that park for a year, and he would come back, and my family was living there, a boy and a girl, young, going to school, and he could come in a year after he had been gone and possibly had just met us, and call every one of us by name. He had a memory that I don't know how a man can do it. Oh, I made trips with Mather clear across the mountain, horseback, and camped out. And he was a very interesting man to be with.
- Herbert Evison: He was indeed. I wonder if any of these trips you made with Mr. Mather stick out in your memory particularly, or anything that happened on them. I know from my own experience he was a wonderful man on a saddle trip.

- Herman Barnett: I don't really recall anything out of the ordinary. I do know that traveling with him he was always interested in you and that you were comfortable and that everything was going all right. He would go around the camp, you know, and check on you at night to see if everything was all right. I don't recall anything out of the ordinary.
- Herman Barnett: Well, Albright at that time was of course – he wasn't there – I had met Albright, yes, but not to be out with him. I couldn't say much about him.
- Herbert Evison: Well, now, you became a permanent ranger in 1917. Were you thenceforth ever stationed anywhere else than at Longmire?
- Herman Barnett: All over the park. Even in '17 I went to Paradise and had charge of that valley during the summer, then back to Longmire; I had my family there. Of course, I was at Ohanapecosh, then I was transferred to White River in '21 and had charge of that side of the park for four years. And then Tomlinson came in and he brought me back to Longmire and I stayed there.
- Herbert Evison: Well, what were you when you came back to Longmire? Were you a district ranger?
- Herman Barnett: No, chief ranger.
- Herbert Evison: Mr. Tomlinson – Major Tomlinson made you chief ranger when he—?
- Herman Barnett: I was made chief ranger under Toll.
- Herbert Evison: Oh, were you? Then you were chief ranger from what year?
- Herman Barnett: Well, it was 1921 to 1931.
- Herbert Evison: But then from 1931 to 1945?
- Herman Barnett: Then I was district ranger.
- Herbert Evison: And it was during your assignments as district ranger presumably that you were at these many different places. Well, that was a long time of service in one park, and aren't there some things that you remember in those years that still seem particularly interesting or unusual or important to you?
- Herman Barnett: Well, yes, there are of course. I was chief ranger when the party was lost in the glaciers up there. Charley Brown was my district ranger at Paradise, and they lost those five of them in the glacier after coming down from Paradise. And Charley went down; in fact, he got a citation from Washington. I told him and so did Tomlinson (he was superintendent) that he didn't have to go down and try to bring the bodies out, it was too dangerous; but he said he was afraid to listen; he says, "If it's my time they'll get me," so down he went and he got this Greathouse; he was a

running mate of Red Grange, he was one of them, and he had been going out there to learn to guide, he was going to guide that following summer. And they lost the five of them in the crevasse.

Herbert Evison: Where was that?

Herman Barnett: That was above Gibraltar, going up the summit.

Herbert Evison: And do you remember about when that was?

Herman Barnett: Well, of course those records are over there, but I think it was in '29; I'm pretty sure it was. Charley went down, and of course Greathouse had pulled a lot of snow and stuff in on him when he went back, the whole party when they went in; and he got a rope on him, and he had to cut him loose. You know that's the way it happened; they freeze in there. They got the rope on him and pulled him out, and he came out and he was all right. But there was another man in the party that had crawled out; this crevasse broke out over Cowlitz Glacier; and he crawled out and he fell, and they found him way down on the glacier, way down below there. He was dead. There was two of them dead.

Herbert Evison: But three of the five were rescued?

Herman Barnett: Yes. They were broken up pretty bad, but they came out of it all right.

Herbert Evison: And they had fallen into a crevasse and snow had fallen down with them?

Herman Barnett: Oh, it always does that. But they had guided to the top and coming back there was a blizzard came up. They crossed the snow bridge. Coming back, the blizzard was quite dense and they could hardly see, and the fellow that was guiding (I can't recall his name, although I know it as well as my own, it just slipped my mind at the present time) told me, he says, "I looked up and saw us coming to this bridge and it was so dense I had to look down again, and I missed the bridge and I pulled the whole party in, because they were roped together." And he pulled the whole party in. And that was one mistake in one way, to ever do that, but that was what happened. I am pretty sure that was '29.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, you said that Charley Brown undertook this; by that I mean he undertook actually to go down into the crevasse—

Herman Barnett: That's right.

Herbert Evison: But there must have been – were you in the party that was there with him?

Herman Barnett: Oh yes, I was up there, but I was getting along a little older and he was younger, and he went and brought the bodies out. But we were all up there.

Herbert Evison: Well, how many men would go along on a rescue like that.

Herman Barnett: I think we had seven, if I remember.

Herbert Evison: And all pretty good mountaineers, I would judge.

Herman Barnett: Oh, yes.

Herbert Evison: Were you particularly organized for mountain rescues?

Herman Barnett: Well, not like they are today, no; no, not like they are today. Of course, that has gotten to be a science.

Herbert Evison: Well, some of it must have developed in your day though.

Herman Barnett: Oh yes, it was developing all the time, there's no doubt of that.

Herbert Evison: In what way would you say that mountain rescue developed or improved?

Herman Barnett: Well, it was the fact that they are organized now and have all the equipment that you can think of to take care of those things, and they have the type of men that are trained for it and keep in condition. It used to be at one time you just had to go out and grab what you could and use them, but now it's a different thing entirely. And they go anyplace.

Herbert Evison: Now, did you ever have to pass a Civil Service examination to get your ranger appointment?

Herman Barnett: No, I didn't.

Herbert Evison: That was at a time when a superintendent could give a permanent appointment.

Herman Barnett: That's right.

Herbert Evison: And when Civil Service was blanketed over those positions you just automatically were blanketed in.

Herman Barnett: I was blanketed in, although it cost me \$444 – I remember it because it was such a funny amount of money to get the benefit of my service, past service.

Herbert Evison: Oh, you had to pay that into the Civil Service retirement fund?

Herman Barnett: That's right. \$444. And that gave me up to date.

Herbert Evison: For your full thirty years of service.

Herman Barnett: That's right.

Herbert Evison: That's a pretty nice amount to have – five years more than I had.

- Herbert Evison: Well, now, of course I would suppose rescue work would be one of the things that would particularly stand out. Do you think of any others besides that particular rescue?
- Herman Barnett: Well, I don't know. There was a funny thing that happened up there. There was a party going to the summit (you may not be interested in this, I don't know, it might be something you could work in), but I think there was seven in the party and they were going to the summit. And of course, after you got above Gibraltar, they didn't let them sit down and rest; there was too much exertion getting up and down. And this fellow was told just to stand on his alpenstock, and he leaned back against the wall and his feet slipped out from under him and he went down about 1200 feet. Of course, they had to go back then; they turned the party back, went out to get him; and do you know they found a man in a crevasse they didn't know was there, and he was all right and they got him out. Down about twelve feet.
- Herbert Evison: They didn't even know that he—?
- Herman Barnett: No, he didn't register; he had just gone out wandering around. They saved his life, but the fellow that was down, of course he was dead. That was a peculiar thing.
- Herbert Evison: If it weren't the truth you would say it couldn't happen.
- Herman Barnett: That's a fact; absolutely so.
- Herbert Evison: Mr. Barnett, you served under a long succession of superintendents.
- Herman Barnett: Well, Rayburn wanted to take me down to Grand Canyon when he was transferred down there, but I had my family and kids and they were going to school; and he told me at the time they were hauling water in there, but he says, "That's all right, we have plenty." But I didn't know; I figured I was better off where I was.
- Herbert Evison: But you figure that of the group that you served under the one who stands out above the others perhaps is Mr. Rayburn?
- Herman Barnett: Rayburn, yes. He was a great friend of Stephen T. Mather.
- Herbert Evison: Well, now, how about Roger Toll?
- Herman Barnett: Well, now, you couldn't find a finer man than Roger W. Toll, but he didn't know nothing about Park Service or work. He was born with a spoon in his mouth, silver and gold both; and they were wonderful people, he and his wife, they were wonderful people. But just as an example of how damned dumb he was on some things: he had a roof that leaked on his house that he lived in right across from where we did there at the Entrance, and I had a ranger working for me, Charley Brown, and he was

a kind of jack of all trades. And he wanted his roof fixed because he said it leaked. And Charley had been doing some other work and Roger Toll came over one morning and he says, "Charley, this would be a wonderful day to fix that roof. It's raining and the rain is dripping up there and there's nothing else you can do." And Charley says, "Why, Mr. Toll, you couldn't pick a worse day to get up on a roof and try to fix it." Well, now, you know that to be a fact; that's no time to fix a roof. But that just shows how—

Herbert Evison: Somewhat on the impractical side—

Herman Barnett: Absolutely impractical, you're right.

Herbert Evison: And how about John Preston?

Herman Barnett: I liked John Preston. A great many people didn't, but I did, I really did.

Herbert Evison: How was he toward the people working for him?

Herman Barnett: Couldn't be better, I don't think. He did some things that I would never do if I were superintendent, but that's his business strictly. He would run poker games for the boys and all that. While I don't object to playing poker, because I played lots of it, but I would never have it with a superintendent. I don't believe in it. I don't think it works out.

Herbert Evison: Now you have been out since 1945. Had you lived in Puyallup before you went with the Park Service?

Herman Barnett: No.

Herbert Evison: How did you happen to pick this place, just liked the town?

Herman Barnett: No. I worked for Hollis for quite a long time, my son up there, you know him. Well, I went in there after I retired, and he was trying to build that place up and having quite a time of it, and Ethel and I – my wife – we went in and helped him out for about five years. No, we didn't charge him a cent for the work we did, and we did plenty of it. But then I had a place in Everett, and we would go out there quite often; and it was going back and forth and back and forth, and I thought well, why not sell that place and get somewhere closer? So, we did; we sold it, and then we bought this. And the only reason was Hollis, to be closer to him.

Herbert Evison: That's H-o-l-l-i-s, isn't it?

Herman Barnett: Yes.

Herbert Evison: Well, do you still get up there occasionally?

Herman Barnett: Well, I haven't since I have been sick. Ethel gets up quite often.

- Herbert Evison: You were saying, Mr. Barnett, that you had one awfully bad night.
- Herman Barnett: Yes. That was when I was doing this park hunting, and I was going in; I had a ranch down at Packwood, and I was going into the park and the snow was about ten feet, it was wet snow and bad traveling. And Ethel's brother – my wife's brother – was going in with me to see that I got there, and we had some little packs on our backs, and we started out; about thirteen miles. And we got, oh, within about three miles of the station and it was raining quite hard on this snow, and sticky, very sticky; and we had home-made skis; and every move and you got about a hundred pounds of snow on each ski and you were setting them ahead and trying to get some place.
- Herman Barnett: When we got up to Laurel Hill – that was just about three miles from the station – and Harold says, "I can't go another step. I'll drop." So, I say, "Alright, we'll just have to stop then." We did; we stopped and got over by a tree and we stayed there all night. And we couldn't get a fire going because there was no wood or anything close, but we did get a little smudge. And in the morning, by the time it got morning this had melted down 'til our little smoke was away below us. But we started out from there then. The three miles from there on in it took us four hours to make it on skis, and we got within less than a quarter of a mile from the station and Harold says, "I can't go another step," and I says, "I can't hardly make any more distance myself, so I'll go on in and try and get warmed up and get some coffee and I'll come on back and help you." And I went in, and got into this old cabin there at the springs, and I pulled some cedar boards off and got a fire going and got all my clothes off and started to dry them and get warm, and he came in. And I think that was the nicest thing I ever saw, was for him to come in there at that time, because oh I dreaded thinking I had to go back and help him in.
- Herbert Evison: I can believe that that was a joyous sight.
- Herman Barnett: Yes, it really was.
- Herbert Evison: Well, you say you traveled on home-made skis. You mean skis that you had made yourself?
- Herman Barnett: Oh, yes.
- Herbert Evison: What did you make them out of?
- Herman Barnett: Alaska cedar is about the best.
- Herbert Evison: Where do you find that? Up fairly high?
- Herman Barnett: Oh, yes, it usually grows above 3500. But Alaska cedar, if you get the right kind of a tree, it splits well, that's wonderful wood.

- Herbert Evison: And how did you get a curve in on it?
- Herman Barnett: Steamed it. Steam them and bend them and then put them in something that will hold it.
- Herbert Evison: Well, now, that's a harder wood and a closer-grained wood than the western red cedar, isn't it?
- Herman Barnett: Oh yes, it's a very slow-growth wood, growing at that elevation. Those tables and things in the administrative building up there, have you seen them, at Longmire? They are Alaska cedar. It's a beautiful wood and takes a high polish. And it grows around 3500. I fought a lot of forest fires, some big ones, and I think that's the worst type of tree that you can find to have a fire in. It's usually hollow, and the fire will get on the inside of it and go up it, and it will start steaming and then it will start twisting, and you try to saw it down and you stick your saw every time. And I have seen them up to five and six feet through. And a fire gets in an Alaska cedar that has got any size is an awful nuisance.
- Herbert Evison: I didn't even realize they got to be that size.
- Herman Barnett: Well, they do. Some of them get exceptionally large.
- Herbert Evison: And they tend to decay at the heart, like the red cedar does?
- Herman Barnett: That's right.
- Herbert Evison: Well, Mr. Barnett, I suppose that if I sat here long enough, I would be able to get more stuff from you; as a matter of fact, I feel sure I could. But I notice I am getting close to the end of this tape. After I get away from here, you'll probably think of a half a dozen interesting things you should have told me, but I am glad to have on here these reminiscences of a very long time ago in Mount Rainier. It is a pleasure to come down—
- Herman Barnett: I killed four cougars in the park; not in the park, but just outside the park.
- Herbert Evison: What kind of money would you get for a cougar hide in those days?
- Herman Barnett: There was a \$20 bounty besides the hide. The hide really isn't worth much money, but the bounty is what counts.
- Herbert Evison: Well, were your other earnings chiefly bounty on animals like coyote, or—?
- Herman Barnett: No. Bobcats got \$5; and the coyotes are – they aren't really a coyote; they call them Big Basin coyotes; they are a species of wolf, a cross between a coyote and a wolf – we usually got \$1 on those. Marten would bring a fairly good price, and mink; marten sometimes up as high as \$20 or \$30.
- Herbert Evison: How about wolverine? Did you ever get any?

Herman Barnett: No. I have seen their tracks, though, but I never did.

Herbert Evison: A pretty elusive animal.

Herman Barnett: They are, very much so. There are some wandering around, because I have seen their tracks. They never bothered a trapline of mine, though. They have the reputation of doing it. I trapped one or two when I was up on Mount Adams. I wasn't a predatory animal hunter then; I was just trapping.

[END OF INTERVIEW]