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Edwin Rothfuss
October 29, 2012

Interview conducted by Hannah Nyala West
Transcribed by West Transcript Services
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Audio File: ROTHFUSS Edwin 29 Oct 2012

[START OF TRACK 1]

Hannah Nyala West: This interview is being conducted with Edwin Rothfuss at the Miramonte Spa and Resort at the Annual Association for National Park Rangers meeting [Ranger Rendezvous] in Indian Wells, California on Monday, October 29th, 2012. The interviewer is Hannah Nyala West. Okay, Ed, so why don't we start with you telling us where and when you were born, anything you want to tell us about your parents, your early life?

Edwin Rothfuss: Okay, I was born in Ohio. Our family had been there for many generations, and my earliest memories were when we moved from suburbia, after World War II, to a farm, so all my teenage and pre-teenage years were on a farm in Ohio. We did not travel far. I graduated from high school in southwestern Ohio, took a bachelor's degree at Ohio State University, and [following] my sophomore year was the first time I'd ever consciously visited a national park. And it was my first trip west of the Mississippi.

Edwin Rothfuss: Four of us college students went to Idaho to work in blister rust, and I remember as we left going back to Ohio State in the fall, we stopped by Yellowstone National Park, the first national park I'm consciously visiting as a college junior, and I remember we got in there late, so we crossed over the boardwalk and put our sleeping bags next to a geyser because it was warm. The next morning, we got up we realized we had trespassed and were illegally camping and wet, but that was my first experience in a national park.¹

Hannah Nyala West: In Yellowstone.

Edwin Rothfuss: In Yellowstone, and later in the year I graduated from Ohio State in a bad year. My major was geology, they weren't hiring any geologists that year – “What in the devil do I do now?” – and I threw my hat in the ring, and the first job offer I got was a call from the Blue Ridge Parkway, offering me a job as a park ranger. I did not know what a park ranger was, except I remember seeing people in funny gray and green uniforms and funny hat in Yellowstone. I didn't know what a ranger did, but it was a paying job, and I was a graduate with not a job, so I took it. So that's basically my early years.

Hannah Nyala West: Hm. Mhm. What was your birthdate?

Edwin Rothfuss: April 19, 1936.

¹ ER inserted the following information during the review of this transcript: “During my senior year at Ohio State I spent the summer in Ephraim, Utah doing my field studies in geology and was able to visit Grand Canyon, Zion, Bryce Canyon, and got to appreciate national parks.

Hannah Nyala West: And in what place.

Edwin Rothfuss: It'd be Middletown, Ohio. Southwestern Ohio.

Hannah Nyala West: Middletown, Ohio. Okay. And the farm that you grew up on – what town or county was it in?

Edwin Rothfuss: It was in Butler County.

Hannah Nyala West: Butler County. Okay. Then we can come forward to your Park Service years then. Do you have memories of that first job – what was most exciting to you about it, what was challenging?

Edwin Rothfuss: The first offer, I should someday tell you about how I was interviewed for the job which is a cool story.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Edwin Rothfuss: Okay. At Ohio State I'd first actually got a call from Piedmont Airlines, and they said, "Mr. Rothfuss, you're being considered for a job as a park ranger, and we'd like to interview you." So, I went down to the Piedmont Airlines office in Columbus, Ohio for an interview. And I, of course, didn't know what it was going to be about. And so, the gentleman, we talked about all kinds of things, we talked about Ohio State's football and things like this, and he said, and I said, "Well, I'm being interviewed for jobs as a park ranger. What's a park ranger do? What is a park ranger?" And I can quote him almost exactly. He said, "Ed, I don't know a damn thing about the National Park Service, but the superintendent of Blue Ridge Parkway is a good friend of the president of Piedmont Airlines, and the superintendent wanted to know what you were like and he especially wanted to know what your race was, because he was not going to have a minority on that park."

Hannah Nyala West: Interesting. What year was that?

Edwin Rothfuss: That was [December 1958, I graduated that month].²

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh.

Edwin Rothfuss: And, I mean, today that would be really offensive – in fact, not long after that was very offensive – but it was a job! And the next day Mr. Weems called, Sam P. Weems superintendent of Blue Ridge Parkway, "Ed, I want to offer you this job." And I said, "Mr. Weems, I'd be honored to have the job, however in 30 days – since I didn't have a job I'd enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves – and in 30 days I report for active duty." He said, "I don't care. You come down, work for me 30 days, I'll put you on military furlough, and in six months you can come back and you'll be seven months

² FH corrected the "1959" date, which was on the recording, during review of the transcript.

toward getting your first promotion from GS-5 to GS-7.”³ So I went down and walked up to his office in Roanoke, Virginia at the time, and I remember I went into his office and he was behind this big desk like this and there was a Confederate flag, there was a U.S. flag – and he let me know real quick his politics. And he introduced me to the chief ranger, and the chief ranger said, “Oh by the way, here’s a gun. Here’s the regulations. Here’s a citation book, and here’s the keys. Want you tomorrow to drive up to Peaks of Otter and meet with Park Ranger Phil Ward – he’ll show you the ropes.” That was an hour after I got into the Park Service! Crazy. I mean those were insane days. And then they took me down the hall and introduced me to the chief naturalist, and then I realized there were two branches. And I thought as a geologist I’d be a naturalist, but somehow, they gave me a gun and said I was what today would be a law enforcement ranger. That was my first job. So, I did that for 30 days, not knowing what in the heck I was doing but learning a little bit about the Park Service. Went to the Army, came back, and then spent another year and a half on the Blue Ridge Parkway, which is a wonderful place to work, a wonderful park, but I think got transferred you know just shortly after that to Everglades National Park. Again, as a law enforcement ranger.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay, so you worked early law enforcement. Did they call it law enforcement then or protection?

Edwin Rothfuss: Well, they called it law enforcement, and it’s amazing more of us didn’t get hurt or killed in those days, ‘cause it, well, you hear the kind of training or lack of training they gave us to get started. When I went to Everglades, though, it changed my whole career in the National Park Service. And I owe it to the District Ranger, Ernie Borgman, who was the supervisor—

Hannah Nyala West: What was his name again?

Edwin Rothfuss: Ernie Borgman, B-O-R-G-M-A-N. And he was the District Ranger for Flamingo, at the very end of the road in Everglades National Park. And he had two rangers, a GS-7 and then I was a 7, too, but I was subordinate to the other. And we had one naturalist there, and a couple maintenance men. And he said, “Ed, we’re in a small operation here, and everybody has to carry a load for everybody. And even though you’re a law enforce – well, you’re a ranger and handle law enforcement, wrestle the drunks and do all those kind of things and do the rescues, I want you to learn about interpretation, ‘cause if the naturalist is sick, we fill in. In fact, one day a month you have to give a naturalist talk at the [Flamingo Visitor Center].” And a typical day once happened. There was an

³ See p. 5 of narrator review hard copy of transcript for additional note on this position.

automobile accident on the park road, and I was up there investigating the accident, and just as I was wrapping up I got a call from the District Ranger, he said, "Ed, we have a boating incident way out in Florida Bay, so I sent the naturalist out to take care of that incident, so you get back here to help cover." Well, it turned out by the time I got back the naturalist was still tied up on the boating incident, and I had to fill in and give his talk that night.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh.

Edwin Rothfuss: So all of us worked together and that gave me the empathy and the feeling for that cross training, to be a law enforcement ranger, to be a naturalist, to be a maintenance person and to fill in, and three of my later jobs were in the concept of I&RM, Interpretation and Resource Management was the big thing in the '70s primarily and early '80s. It phased out, but that was a wonderful opportunity to experience, and I had three parks [Canyonlands, Virgin Islands, Mammoth Cave] where that was my key role.

Hannah Nyala West: What kind of training did you have in those early years?

Edwin Rothfuss: Very, very little training, very early in the early – well, 1959 and 1960s – but in the spring, 1960, I did get sent to what is now the Albright Training Center. But at that time, it was a 12-week session in Yosemite National Park called Kowski College. And I was in I think the sixth classes that were held there. And that gave us, you know, what, ten - twelve weeks in all subjects. We all gave talks, we learned law enforcement, we learned ropework outside on the rocks, and that was my foundation for training, but beyond that, it was maybe what the supervisor would do in the park. It was not all the law enforcement training there is now, I mean, it was very limited, but that beginning session gave also a very strong foundation for, you know, as we went through our careers then.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. And so, you developed a cohort of people that you sort of went through the Service with, as colleagues?

Edwin Rothfuss: To some extent, but we scattered to the four winds, and some of them, you know, I've been in touch with. Have of them are deceased now, but some of them are just, I think, Dave McLean, he was in my class—

Hannah Nyala West: Spelled—

Edwin Rothfuss: M-C-L-E-A-N. David McLean was at that time what would now the law enforcement ranger at Lake Mead. He later transferred to Yosemite and came back to Lake Mead. And my wife got an email from he and his significant other last night. We're having dinner with them probably when we get back to Las Vegas, which is our winter residence. So, we keep in touch with them. The other one I

was fairly close with was Harvey Wickware, who was the superintendent of Mount Rushmore.

Hannah Nyala West: How do you spell his last name?

Edwin Rothfuss: W-I-C-K-W-A-R-E. He's now retired, living in Alabama, and we became friends back in 1960. But in 1979 I overlapped with him 30 days at Mount Rushmore when he was leaving as superintendent and I was coming in as superintendent. And, you know, we've been in touch a little bit. But I haven't really worked with other members of my peer group, say, since then, other than those two. Like I say, Dave is the only one I really see now regularly on a basis in Nevada.

Hannah Nyala West: Did you have any notable mentors in those years, in say, the first decade or so?⁴

Edwin Rothfuss: Oh, well, certainly Ernie Borgman. I have to give him an awful lot of credit for getting me started in the right direction. Al Rector was a District Ranger in the Blue Ridge Parkway – my first limited experience in the Blue Ridge Parkway. He was a good mentor to get started.

Hannah Nyala West: R-E-C-T-O-R?

Edwin Rothfuss: R-E-C-T-O-R. And those are two. The one that probably made the second biggest influence on me. Ernie was a very strong influence, and even though I was only with him about nine months. Dave Beal, B-E-A-L, who retired as, well, let's see, he was superintendent of Great Smokies and a regional director. But he was the chief naturalist in Grand Canyon, and I went there as a naturalist, and a lot of things that I learned from him that I really put into practice when I became a superintendent.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay, so where did you go from Everglades?

Edwin Rothfuss: Ah, well, I went, I got called back to the U.S. Army for a year of active duty.

Hannah Nyala West: In what year was that?

Edwin Rothfuss: And I got called back in for the Berlin crisis in September of 1961, and then the Berlin crisis for me was winding down, and I was released to go to graduate school in June of '62, and I started graduated school and I just finished one semester there, and then went back on active duty with the Park Service, but my job had been filled behind me in Everglades, so they offered me a naturalist job at Grand Canyon.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

⁴ See cover letter ER returned with edited transcript for additional mentors.

Edwin Rothfuss: And I got there in September of 1962, and that's when Dave Beal was my supervisor. And one thing that he taught me there that I have practiced ever since, even to this very day, is I recall getting there, and Christmas was coming up and so was Thanksgiving. I said, "I guess, Dave, you know, we'll close the visitor center Christmas Day." He said, "Absolutely not. Cause you look at the number of people that are always here and you look where they're from. They're from China, they're from Japan, they're from around the world, and not all these people celebrate Christmas like we do, and we have an obligation to provide service to them." And when I got to, you know, like Death Valley, there was the thought, "Well, we close on holidays." No way. Look at our clientele. We say open. Now in retirement I volunteer with the BLM at Red Rock National Conservation Area in Las Vegas, and I started volunteering there about 12 years ago – they closed on Thanksgiving and Christmas and New Year's. And I just talked with the manager, who is a GS-11 manager. I was a retired GS-15 superintendent and I, you know, tried to tactfully say, "Don't you think we ought to try to stay open on these holidays?" "Absolutely not! I don't want my employees to have to work on a holiday." And I said, "You know, I found in my Park Service experience it was easy to get volunteers to do that because, hey, that's an extra days' pay, and some of my staff did not have families or children there, and they were happy to work for the double time and wouldn't it be good – I said, I'm a volunteer, I'll volunteer to be there for those three days." "No way." Well I, they finally got [him] kicked out, so but finally they came about to that, as of even today, I called soon as I got back to Las Vegas for the winter and I called, said "You're gonna be open Thanksgiving Day and New Year's Day and Christmas." "Oh, yes." I said, "Put me down. I'll be there." But Dave Beal got me started on that and, when I got to be a division chief, when I got to be a superintendent at Mount Rushmore and Death Valley, I mean, that was my mantra. You serve the public. And I never had trouble getting volunteers to work for pay, double time on holidays, you know.

Hannah Nyala West: And you clearly had a sense then, and the Service had a sense then, of the public being much wider than just U.S. citizens – this is a public that includes the world.

Edwin Rothfuss: That's where I picked it up, with Dave Beal there. You know, I wasn't really conscious of that particularly in Blue Ridge. A little bit in Everglades. But it really hit me hard with Dave, you know, there as a mentor, and I owe a lot to him in developing my thinking and I think I ended up with a fairly successful career. But those were several early people that helped me get started, and there were later people that were really beneficial, too.

Hannah Nyala West: Well, we'll – let's pick them up as we go along. So, you were at Grand Canyon as a naturalist starting in September of 1962.

Edwin Rothfuss: Yeah.

Hannah Nyala West: And then how long were you there?

Edwin Rothfuss: I was there basically two years.

Hannah Nyala West: Two years, okay.

Edwin Rothfuss: And what had happened is Canyonlands National Park was in the process of becoming a national park, but it had not happened yet. And Frank Kowski was the [deputy] regional director out of Santa Fe, New Mexico.⁵

Hannah Nyala West: How do you spell that?

Edwin Rothfuss: K-O-W-S-K-I.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay, and that's Frank Kowski.

Edwin Rothfuss: Right. He's one of the legends in the National Park Service. And Frank had an idea which had its good points and negative points. But he said, "This is a special park being created in Utah, and I want it to be right," and he was a strong believer in this I&RM concept, Interpretation and Resources Management. So Bates Wilson was the superintendent at Arches and he was kinda the father of Canyonlands – and Bates Wilson had his chief ranger and his staff at Arches, and he thought "Boy when this becomes a park, I want my chief ranger at Arches to become the chief ranger of Canyonlands", and he picked the staff he wanted, but Frank Kowski the [deputy] regional director had different ideas, and I was offered the job to be the first District Ranger at Island in the Sky in Canyonlands National Park, the North District. And I understand why I was picked, and Frank Kowski picked all the staff. He picked Rothfuss because I had been a ranger, i.e. law enforcement, I had worked in Everglades as law enforcement and learned maintenance and the concept of working teamwork with naturalists and rangers and all. And then I was a naturalist, and he said, "Here's a guy that's got the very experience to be in charge of that." And he also picked his chief of I&RM and his assistant of I&RM and there were seven of us that transferred in in one week to be the new staff at Canyonlands. And we were assigned to do all functions. The downside was that he did not want amateurs – his term – amateurs to learn on the job up there, so we lateralled in. I lateralled in as a 9. My assistant, Eldon Reyer—

Hannah Nyala West: Spelled?

⁵ ER included the following note in the edited transcript: "Dan Beard was the regional director."

Edwin Rothfuss: R-E-Y-E-R. He is retired as the Associate Regional Director at Santa Fe about 20, 18 years ago. But all of us lateralled in. But what happened, I lateralled in as a 9 and had a good background, you know, and eight months, nine months after I was there, I got an offer for a two-grade promotion to go to the Virgin Islands. The day of our farewell party, Eldon Reyer – had lateralled in as a 7 – got an offer to go to Alaska as a 9. And within a couple years, most of us all transferred. There was only, I think, one of the original seven left after those [two years]. And that was the downside. In his wisdom of get the people hit the ground running, we did not have to go a learning experience, we moved too rapidly, I mean, we got out of there. So, we, I can't say I left any impact there. I just found the housing area, we got out there we hired a day-labor crew, we built the housing area, we put in the sewage system, we did all that, and you know we helped in the original planning, but then bang – we were gone.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. You arrived there at Canyonlands when?

Edwin Rothfuss: It would've been about the first week of [November], 1964.⁶

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. And then headed to the Virgin Islands in —

Edwin Rothfuss: By, actually it was the next year [fall 1965, October 10]. Let's see, am I getting my dates mixed up here? It's probably on my resume.

Hannah Nyala West: Let me look here.

Edwin Rothfuss: Because I got there in the fall, and I left the next year. I was only there about nine months on the job.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Edwin Rothfuss: But I was offered a two-grade promotion to move to the Virgin Islands and that was – I just couldn't pass that up.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh.

Edwin Rothfuss: In fact, I'd been considered a month before that to go to Hawaii as a lateral, and I said, "Hey, are you serious? You know, I just got to Canyonlands six months before." "Oh well, we must've made a mistake. We probably shouldn't have offered you the job. We'll retract that now that you've explained you've only been in your job six month", but those were the years that rapid movement, it was under Hartzog's plan of he'd rather have a person who's worked one year or two years in ten parks over a twenty-year period rather than twenty years in one park. And he moved us.

Hannah Nyala West: So, you went to the Virgin Islands as—

Edwin Rothfuss: I got a GS-11 Chief Naturalist job.

⁶ ER replaced "October" from recording with November in edited transcript.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Edwin Rothfuss: And two years later we had some problems down there. The Secretary's Advisory Board came to the Virgin Islands. George Hartzog came down with the Advisory Board. The superintendent, who was a grand gentleman, you know, the kind of person you'd say would be great to be the grandfather of your children, you know, but he was not the most effective superintendent, and he got in such a tizzy with the Secretary's Advisory Board coming and the Director coming, he put himself in the hospital. Or he didn't put himself, but he had to go to the hospital, and he did not designate an Acting Superintendent, and he had his wife bring his uniform to him the day that they were all flying in, but he just, he couldn't get out of bed. So, you know I kind of ended up, without any designation, just kind of de facto superintendent with no designation. When they came in, I was the one who got to meet George Hartzog and the Secretary's Advisory Board, and you know we did the plans that the superintendent had had, we had the cocktail party and all this, and George Hartzog was driving around the park, chewing on his cigar, you know, "Rrrr Rrrr Rrr Rrr," he was kinda hell on wheels, you know, but he asked a lot of questions. Well, when he got back to Washington, he immediately established a new Assistant Superintendent in the Virgin Islands and sent Joe Brown, who had a distinguished career in the Park Service. He sent Joe down immediately as Assistant Superintendent. "As soon as we get Frank to retire, [Joe Brown, you're the superintendent".

Hannah Nyala West: What was Frank's last name?

Edwin Rothfuss: Givens. Actually, just a great gentleman, but he was one of my weaker, I'd say, supervisors. You know I'd write a memo, or he'd say, "Ed, would you write something" and I'd write it up and give it to him and he'd say "Great, great!" And he never once changed a word of anything I did, and that wasn't helpful to me! I enjoyed getting something back with red lines through it and all, you know. But, anyway, George Hartzog went back to Washington and Joe Brown came down and somehow George Hartzog really didn't like the Chief Ranger, and they moved the Chief Ranger to a clerk's job in Washington. And they combined his job and my job and gave me an upgrade to a 12, that's to be the Chief of I&RM. So George Hartzog in all his roughness down there, you know, got the chief ranger canned, got a new superintendent in, and I became the benefactor of getting my job combined, so I then supervised the rangers and I supervised the naturalists and the lifeguards and all.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm.

Edwin Rothfuss: Now I remember the Chief Ranger was a neat guy. He had some problems – I don't want to get into that – but I could overhear him talking to his new rangers across the thin walls, and he would say, "Remember, Joe, damnit, you're a park ranger, and I do not want you, when you do the boat patrol around there, to pick up any garbage at the campgrounds. That's the [maintenance worker's] job, and you stay away from the naturalists." I mean, see, that was his, of course, what got him on the wrong side of the new superintendent and George Hartzog. But that was a wonderful experience in the Virgin Islands. I could've stayed there forever. But it was a tough place to live, you know, you're isolated in the area, the schools are not the best. We sent our kids across, they started Montessori School there, we put 'em on the boat in the mornings, ship 'em off to the other island, have a cab pick 'em up, take 'em to the Montessori School and back, and it was tough on – spouses did not work it was back in the days when there was the employee and most of 'em were men. All of 'em on my staff except my secretary were all men, so the wives were stay-at-home moms, only one I could think ever worked while she was down there. It was a rough place for families back in the '60s there, but just a wonderful experience. I loved the Virgin Islands. You know, I could've stayed there forever, I think.

Hannah Nyala West: Mhm. Let's pick up where you got married and your children, when they came along.

Edwin Rothfuss: Okay. My wife Marge and I met in Yosemite when we were there at training with Kowski College back in 1960 in the spring. She was working for the Yosemite Park and Curry Company, and we met there and dated there and got engaged there in those twelve weeks, and then she came east in December of 1960, and we got married New Year's Eve, and we had a very small wedding. The rangers that lived in that area and their families were there at the wedding, my parents came, her parents did not come but her aunt and uncle – he worked for the Bureau of Public Roads in Washington, they came down – very small wedding. And from there we went to Everglades for our honeymoon, and that's when they happened to realize who I was, and it turned out that the Assistant Superintendent had a bunch of names on his desk and he made a point [to meet us]. Back [on the] Blue Ridge and two weeks later I got an offer to go to Everglades – that's how it happened. Anyway, when it got back into Park Service, our first daughter Sally was born in Grand Canyon in the hospital there, our second child was Peter who was born in a hospital at Moab Utah when we were at Canyonlands National Park. And it's kind of funny, his doctor was both a medical doctor and a veterinarian, and he apologized when I'd rushed my wife Marge to the hospital that morning about six o'clock, he – this cowboy with mud all over his

boots – comes stomping into the waiting room, said, “Oh you must be Marge’s husband. Why don’t you come on it? I’m Doctor Rutt, I’m just – we had a colt, trouble down there, but now I gotta get in here and deliver your child!”

Hannah Nyala West: How do you spell his name – Rutt? R-U—

Edwin Rothfuss: T-T, I believe it was. It’s the only time I ever saw him. And he went in and delivered my son, and then, let’s see, that was at Canyonlands, then we moved to the Virgin Islands and my wife became pregnant there, but she was not going to deliver Mark in the Virgin Islands! So, she flew back to San Francisco where her father was. He was the chief fire officer for the Forest Service there at the time. She flew back to San Francisco and delivered our third and final child, Mark, in San Francisco. So, he’s a fifth generation Californian, which my wife is from there, and two of these adult children now live in Las Vegas, and they are both single, even they’re getting up in years. My other son Mark is living in Kalispell, Montana, he’s married and this last winter we had our first grandchildren – twin sons! Twin grandsons. So that’s the family and when and where.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. And so how long were you in the Virgin Islands then?

Edwin Rothfuss: [Almost] four years.

Hannah Nyala West: Four years. That was your longest post so far?

Edwin Rothfuss: That point, yes. And I got a call from the next mentor, was Charles Marshall, who was the Deputy Regional Director for the Southeast Region. And he was I think a descendant or distant relative of John Marshall, the Chief Justice, and an attorney, and he was really a sharp person. And I have a lot of respect for him and all. And he called me and said, “Ed, I want you at Mammoth Cave.” I didn’t want to go to Mammoth Cave. I loved the Virgin Islands; I was game to stay. And he said, “You come up here to Richmond, Virginia,” which were the headquarters at the time, and Charlie Marshall sat me down and he talked to me. He said, “You have done an outstanding job as the Chief of I&RM, Interpretation and Resource Management, in the Virgin Islands, and we are having a hell of a job in Mammoth Cave in Kentucky.” The superintendent verbally supports it, but he really doesn’t, and the chief interpreter who was the Chief of I&RM was a tremendous interpreter, but he wasn’t motivated to be the chief, and it’s not happening. We want it to work there. And you might have to buck the superintendent sometimes, but I want you to go there and get I&RM working.” Well, I don’t really want to go. But Charlie Marshall was one of these people that, after two hours, I said, “Sir, when do you want me there?”

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.]

Edwin Rothfuss: So, I left. It was just short of four years when I went to Mammoth Cave, and that was a lateral.

Hannah Nyala West: You were a GS-12 then. Okay.

Edwin Rothfuss: And he gave me a list of what he wanted done, and I think I probably on my resume maybe mentioned a couple things there that, one of was cement relations between the National Park Service and Cave Research Foundation. They were like this [makes hand gesture for 'at odds']. And he said, "Ed, you're an old farm boy. You're a geologist. You're just across the river, born and raised just across the river from Kentucky, you know, we think you can do all this." Well, that was wishful thinking [chuckles]. But I did do the Cave Research Foundation and that was good eventually. I worked it two ways: I had respect for the researchers and the college professors that did all the spelunking research there, and I had 25 cave guides and they were like this [slaps one hand in other palm] and it permeated all the way up to the superintendent. And I asked, "What's wrong?" and the researchers said, "We've tried to get the cave guys to work with us but they don't want to have anything to do with us." And I went to the cave guides and I remember almost their very words. They said, "We don't like those longhaired hippies down there" – or whatever they called them at the time – "They just go in there and fornicate in the caves," you know. They just had these horrible thoughts about these researchers. So, I asked Cave Research Foundation, "If I could get a guide to come with you on one of these trips, would you welcome that?" "Yeah!" I went to Cave Guides, I said, "You guys are suspicious about what these guys are doing down in the cave. Could I get one of you to volunteer to go with them?" Henry Tunks said, "I'll go."

Hannah Nyala West: How do you spell his name?

Edwin Rothfuss: T-U-N-K-S. But he was one of the just local boys, I don't know if he ever graduated from high school or what, but you know he was one of them. He was that Kentucky clique, you know, the old-time cave guides, and so he went with them. And this started melting down. He realized, "Hey these are pretty neat people! And I'm learning things." And he'd go back and share it with the other guides, and I was so proud. The old-time cave guides said that Mammoth Cave, there's Joppa Ridge and Mammoth Cave Ridge, and there's 150 miles of cave here and maybe 150 miles of cave there, but there must be a connection somewhere.⁷ But after I left

⁷ Original opening of this sentence— "After I left it turned out that" was deleted by ER during review of transcript.

one of the park staff was crawling into a cave with a scientist, and they found the connection. And all of a sudden what the old-time cave guides thought would've happened did happen, and now it's one of the longest caves in the world, over 300 miles. I feel kind of proud of somehow breaking that down, and I understand it's now – I've been back, about ten years ago – and it's a wonderful park and I think those old biases that were there, you know, when I was there another thing that was tough is the guides really wanted to try, they got a union going. I'm not sure if the union's still going, but we had some union negotiations and I remember Tiny [last name unclear] was one of these great big gorilla guys, well, one of the big labor unions in Louisville, Kentucky, he came in for a meeting and he said [to the] Superintendent Bendt, "We're here because we're gonna get the rights for your maintenance people and your rangers and your guides, and if we don't we're gonna close this park, we're gonna barricade the roads [laughs], and here's what we want. You know, we're afraid that in the winter when you have somebody go out on a snowplow, the snow's five, six inches of snow through, we want two men on every plow". Why? "Well, what if one of 'em gets sick or has a heart attack? We need his backup on the plow – two guys on one piece of equipment – ferry operators, we want two at every ferry, because what if one man gets hurt? And we're not happy that Rothfuss", me, "you're making those guides work an eight-hour shift". When I got there in the winter, maybe there'd be twenty of 'em down there in the guide lounge and they'd, 'Oh, there's a couple visitors up there. I want a cave guide. Well, who's gonna do it this time?' And the rest of them would just play cards and just lay down there while one person went up to do the tour. Well, in I&RM, I assigned 'em to work with Resources Management, to get on the surface and work with the rangers on deer projects and all that. And they kinda resented me 'cause I was getting eight hours of work out of 'em. [Laughs.] Anyway, those were the kind of situations at Mammoth Cave, but a wonderful park and today our superintendent at Death Valley is leaving Monday to be the new superintendent at Mammoth Cave.

Hannah Nyala West: Oh really? Cool.

Edwin Rothfuss: Yes. We are going to her farewell party on Friday night.

Hannah Nyala West: What is Tiny's last name?

Edwin Rothfuss: I don't have the slightest idea. RO kee [phonetic spelling] was—

Hannah Nyala West: Rokie?

Edwin Rothfuss: Is how I remember the name, but I only met him during those couple weeks when he was pounding his fists there.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. What was his position? Union leader?

Edwin Rothfuss: Well, he was somehow with the big labor, I want to say it was the AFOL, it was one of those big unions, and he was their organizer, and the maintenance guys and the guides that wanted that brought him in.

Hannah Nyala West: So those are some of the organizational changes that you implemented while you were at Mammoth?

Edwin Rothfuss: Well, I was involved in helping to implement 'em. It didn't work though, in total. It's a, you know, I tried to get those things going and the guides, and even down there, it happened in maintenance and it happened to the superintendent. A couple of my guys and one of the old-time rangers – wasn't one of the professionals that moved around the system but was a homegrown ranger and heck of a nice guy – but he and two of the other guys went over to Cumberland, oh what is it, Cumberland Mountains National Park or so, and there was a guy there that they thought was his kind of guy, and they went over and said, "We want you to come to Mammoth Cave, we want to get rid of the superintendent, and we want you to be superintendent". And he said, "I, you know I'm not gonna get involved in that". But they were going out and doing that, and a couple of my guys – I had 25 guys on my staff – and they resented me because they always had a policy that when the chief guy died or so quit, the oldest person got the job. Seniority. The oldest man there – and it was all men – the oldest man automatically became chief. I got there, the chief was kinda senile, 72 years old, frail, and he just stood behind the desk doing nothing, but he was chief. He'd earned his rights, he'd earned his stripes, he'd been there, you know, from a child. And when he stepped down, I saw that one of the younger men, Lewis Cutliff—

Hannah Nyala West: Cutliff?

Edwin Rothfuss: Cutliff, yes, C-U-T-L-I-F-F.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. L-E-W-I-S?

Edwin Rothfuss: Yes. Lewis Cutliff was a third-generation cave guide. His grandpappy guided in Mammoth Cave. His pappy guided in Mammoth Cave. He did. But he also went on to University of Kentucky and got his degree. He was a bright individual, and he had this wonderful family history of the caves, so, you know, he was one of them. And it just, I can't think of a person that I admire more at Mammoth Cave than him. Well, I got him promoted to the [assistant] chief, and it made it a little rough for him, because even though he was one of them, he'd bucked the system. He went over 15 other people that were more senior. And I was the culprit. And one of the old-timers, two of the old-timers got around, went

around the neighborhood a petition to remove me from my job.⁸
[Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: Oh no. [Laughs.]

Edwin Rothfuss: And at the end of almost two years, I got an offer for a promotion to go to Glacier National Park.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. Got there in April of 1971?

Edwin Rothfuss: Yeah. And the superintendent of Glacier, he offered me the job as a promotion to GS-13 Chief Naturalist. And I said, "Well, Mr. Briggie, I'm really in line, and Charlie Marshall, my mentor there, they got me to Mammoth Cave in the first place, knew we were having trouble down there, we were making some progress, but it was painful and slow, and he had told me that he was looking for an assistant superintendent job for me." He said, "You don't have to lateral but that'd be your first role as assistant superintendent." And I told Bill Briggie, I said, "I'm really being in line for a management job, you know, as an assistant superintendent, and I'd really rather do that." He said, "But that's why I want you as a chief naturalist up here, because I'm tired of these darn fern-feelers. I want somebody who can make tough decisions, you know, you've been doing that with the union down there, you've demonstrated, you're working in ranger activities, you're the one I want!" And I said, "Let me take a week and think about it." Well, I remember talking to some people I respect, and they said, "Remember, Ed, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, and you'd better take that Glacier job." Which I did.

Hannah Nyala West: Bill Briggie?

Edwin Rothfuss: Bill Briggie. He's—

Hannah Nyala West: Spelled—

Edwin Rothfuss: B-R-I-G-G-I-E.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Edwin Rothfuss: Now he's kind of the notorious, infamous in the National Park Service, you may have heard his name.

Hannah Nyala West: It sounds familiar, but I can't place it in my mind.

Edwin Rothfuss: Yeah. He was superintendent of a number of parks, Glacier, Lake Mead, Mount Rainier, Lake Mead twice.

Hannah Nyala West: Maybe it's from Mount Rainier that I heard his name.

⁸ In note added to edited transcript, ER wrote, "Later Lewis became Chief Guide and retired from Mammoth Cave a few years ago."

Edwin Rothfuss: And he also retired from Mount Rainier, went over and lives in Oregon now.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Edwin Rothfuss: And he was also deputy director of the National Park Service under Gary Everhardt.

Hannah Nyala West: Oh, okay.

Edwin Rothfuss: But he was kind of hell on wheels. I consider him a mentor, but almost in a negative way, 'cause sometimes you learn from people's mistakes or not mistakes, they do the things that were tough. He was hell on wheels for people. I respected him for making tough decisions and getting jobs done, but he was cruel to the people he did not respect or were not producing, I mean, he could've been real helpful for people that were not living up to standards, but he just, if you weren't producing, you had it. [Chuckles.]

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm.

Edwin Rothfuss: Even though I learned that from George Hartzog, too. There were a lot of common thoughts between the two of them. But anyway, that's a long story.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. So, you were at Glacier as chief naturalist until—

Edwin Rothfuss: Eight years there. In 1979, and that's when I went to Mount Rushmore as superintendent.

Hannah Nyala West: So, you just had to skip right over that Assistant Superintendent job? [Laughs.]

Edwin Rothfuss: Yes. [Laughs.] Yeah, I had so many friends that had been assistant superintendents, and that seems to be a thankless job. It's like being the vice president.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. So, what were some of your accomplishments at Mount Rushmore and how was it different, how was the agency changing?

Edwin Rothfuss: A couple of things. One, I think I was the first one to really recognize that the workmen who worked on Mount Rushmore in building it, we started recognizing them, it's coming up for some of the events and introducing them to the public. Mount Rushmore, it was a wonderful park, but it was kinda limited. You've been to Mount Rushmore, it's kinda small, the resource. So, and I didn't want to crowd my staff 'cause in a small area like that it's too easy for the superintendent to be too involved. In fact, my chief of maintenance said, "Ed, you're spending too much time, you know, let me do my job." You know, 'Gosh, thanks for reminding me!' I got involved, I think one of the accomplishments there is when we

were trying to get or change the law enforcement aspect in many of the parks. We had proprietary law enforcement that we could only enforce like resource management issues there. So I was the state coordinator and I worked with the governor's office and represented the National Park Service up there, and we got concurrent jurisdiction, and that was, that then covered Badlands and Wind Cave and Jewell Cave, and I spent a lot of time doing that. I really worked on the public relations of, you know – we had some bad relationships with the Native Americans up there. My predecessor, though I feel very highly of him – I mentioned him earlier, Harvey Wickware – when they had like some Native American issues up there, the superintendent wore a firearm to walk down in the parking lot and all. And we had the Hell's Angels coming up for the Sturgis [rally]. He would kind of play a hard role. Well, I made a point – I went into Yellow Thunder camp, I went to some meetings where Native American issues were up. Russell Means came up to me after one of the meetings, you've heard of Russell Means?

Hannah Nyala West: Yeah. He just passed away.

Edwin Rothfuss: Yeah. And he came up to me after a meeting, he said, "Superintendent Rothfuss, I kind of like your comments here and thinking. Would you like to come down to our armed camp?" I don't know if he used 'armed' and our 'camp' but Yellow Thunder Camp, which was an armed camp in the forest areas. And I said, "Well, yeah. I kind of respect your thoughts there and I'd like to learn more about it." And he said, "Well, fine." We set a date and in a show of faith on my part, I said, "Would you mind, Mr. Means, if I brought my daughter? My daughter is a high-school senior in Rapid City. She's very interested in Native Americans. She's interested in photography." "Wonderful, bring her." And I talked to the Forest Supervisor [Mathers], because this was an armed camp within the Forest Service and Mathers – I can't think of his first name right now – I went to him and I said, "Russell Means invited me to go to the camp. What do you think?" And he said, "We have never been in there, and you know that's a scary place, but god, if he invited you, keep your eyes open and tell me what you see when you get back."

Edwin Rothfuss: So, Sally and I went down, and as we drove down this winding road we came to a gate across there, and about four mean-looking guys with firearms, guns in their hands were the Native Americans guarding that camp. And I said, "Oh, Ed Rothfuss, superintendent of Mount Rushmore, and Russell Means—" "Yes, we know you're coming. Go ahead." We got to the bottom and Russell Means welcomed us, and he said, "Sally"—you know, he was very gracious—"you're welcome to take photographs while you're

down here of anything, but there's a sweat lodge there, that's a special place," and he pointed it out, "but just don't include those in your photographs." We walked around that camp for a couple hours, maybe a little less than two. And he talked about his people and their love of the Black Hills and that's their ancestral land and they really would like to get that land back type of things. So, we left and I met with the Forest Supervisor. I didn't see anything there other than you know the kind of things I'm telling you, there were guys down there with guns, but there were women and children, and I said, only a couple cars there, I don't remember if there was anything said, but anyway that's the kind of, you know I felt that I helped make some relations between and I know that our concessioner was a little upset when the Native Americans asked if they could use our meeting room at park headquarters up there. Well, fine. The park concessioner was "Well, you don't know, that's dangerous, they'll close the concession down." Oh, come on. Be serious. Well they came up, then held a meeting there, good heavens. [Laughs.] So.

Hannah Nyala West: So, you were part then of the agency beginning to shift some in its—

Edwin Rothfuss: Well, I felt so. You know, I hadn't thought about it in those terms, but I think, you know I guess I've always had an empathy for minorities, and especially when I was a part of the minority in the Virgin Islands. I was part of the ten percent of the 'continentals', the whites living in the Virgin Islands. And several of my college roommates were minorities also. Yeah, I've always had empathy for minorities, and the Native Americans, [sometimes] they're difficult to work with, but I feel basically wonderful people. And I think that was my first real relationships with Native Americans there in South Dakota.

Hannah Nyala West: And you were there in the '70s, so you were in a really—

Edwin Rothfuss: Well, '79 to '82.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. Had the agency started to change by that time on the ground, where other historically disadvantaged groups might've been [concerned]? Had you begun to see any changes?

Edwin Rothfuss: Well, I guess I can only kind of relate to the parks I was in. But it seems like along in the '70s things were changing, and it seems like you know there, I've been reading the biography on George Hartzog, and you know there was a big emphasis there to look at women in positions of superintendents and other minorities. So, I'd say with Hartzog, and that was you know in the mid-sixties, I think things started changing that way, you know, I think. He certainly helped on that.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. And then you headed to Death Valley?

Edwin Rothfuss: To Glacier, those eight years.

Hannah Nyala West: Oh, to Glacier, oh that's right – no, you had Glacier and then Mount Rushmore—

Edwin Rothfuss: No, I'm sorry. I went to Glacier, then to Rushmore, then to Death Valley.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Edwin Rothfuss: And I was offered the job down there in Death Valley, and I had had a couple people I respected that – Death Valley sounded like Devil's Hole, I don't want to go there! [laughs] – but there were two people, Jim Thompson, who was the Deputy Regional Director at the Rocky Mountain Region at the time. He and I were on a taskforce to do some project up in Yellowstone, and he and I were the only two on the taskforce, so we had meals together and he and I spent a lot of time together. And one of his favorite jobs was several years before he had superintended at Death Valley, and he just filled me full of the neat things of Death Valley, and I had a whole different image. And also the Administrative Officer I worked with in Glacier National Park, that was one of his choice jobs, and he talked more about the fun of living there, the Olympic-sized swimming pool, and the social life and all in an isolated area. So, when I was at Rushmore, this is when Jim was still Deputy Regional Director, I got the offer to go to Death Valley. And it was, yeah [laughs].

Hannah Nyala West: So, what were some of your more memorable activities at Death Valley?

Edwin Rothfuss: Well, you only have thirty minutes – I mean, I could spend a day and a half! [Chuckles.]

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.] This is probably one of those areas that qualifies as needing a follow-up interview, but if you want to hit the high points for this—

Edwin Rothfuss: The high points. When I was sent there, ah, the regional directors always give the superintendents the list, 'Here's the mandates. Here's what we want done.' Number one was they'd been fighting the overpopulation of burros since 1939. We've got to get those critters out of the park. We've just spent a lot of money in a detailed plan, and the plan was approved earlier in 1982. Your job is to implement it. Get the job done. Keep us out of court. Keep us out of bad press. But get the damn job done. [Chuckles.] Number one!

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.]

Edwin Rothfuss: And I've written a [report] – it's 30 pages – I've given talks on it, I've written, I've got a thirty-page article published in a magazine. It's going to be a chapter in a book that's coming out on Death Valley, hopefully in the next decade, we've been working on it for several years. I wrote the chapter on feral burros. And last night I was [talking with] Dick Martin, former superintendent. [He] said, "Ed, you'll never believe it, on your watch we got rid of almost 7,000 of those animals." It was theoretical zero. But after I left the program drifted. Dick Martin said, "I was camping a few days ago, this week, in Death Valley Butte Valley. We couldn't sleep at night for the braying of the burros." Ohhh. I was up at four o'clock this morning, and I have back there a four-page writeup that I wrote last night, that I'm hoping – I can't think of her name now, but the Deputy Regional Director who's here – I want her to read that, because I feel I've still got a little fire left in the belly and darn it. That really bugs me. We've gotta get that park back to keeping those burros out. But anyway, that's number one.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm.

Edwin Rothfuss: The second thing he said, "You've got mining issues in Death Valley. There's active mining and you've got the most capable and brilliant mining engineer in the Park Service working in your park down there but he's a workaholic, he's 65 years old. You learn from him what's going on and you keep him alive." [Laughs.] And Bob Mitchum was one, you know he's one that I was able to get a meritorious service award for because he was just great. So, mining issues was big, and we eliminated a lot of mining activity while I was down there. We'd sit down and negotiate with Pfizer Chemical, for example, and Bob Mitchum was my anchor there. He could talk turkey with the geologist there, and [as] superintendent, with my background I could half understand what they were talking about. Bill Tilden was the attorney for Pfizer, so Bill and I kind of related, but these guys were talking the technical [geology] stuff. So that was the second issue. The third issue—

Hannah Nyala West: Pfizer? Can you give me the spelling of that?

Edwin Rothfuss: Oh, Pfizer. Pfizer Chemical.

Hannah Nyala West: Oh, okay. P-H-I-F-Z-E-R or something like that. [Correct spelling is Pfizer.]

Edwin Rothfuss: Yeah. The third thing on the list is there's some real serious personnel problems in Death Valley, and I was given a list, not totally by the Regional Director but by one of [his] deputies, of about seven people that needed to be moved. This one, if you can fire the S.O.B., you've got our blessings. These couple you've gotta get out of the park 'cause they're just not doing good. Here's a guy that's a really good guy, but he needs to get out of there for

his own good. He's a great guy, but he's working under the wrong supervisor, and you've gotta help him get out. So, I get a list of about seven personnel actions that I had to get into. That was a tough one. And let's see, those – and then of course part of the personnel issues were inadequate housing. I had to offer a job to a GS-12 with three children, and I said, "Here's a forty-year-old singlewide hotbox trailer is the best housing I can offer." That's bad. We've had employees there, before I arrived and after I arrived, who would send their kids to Wasatch Academy in Utah because of the inadequate schools [serving Death Valley]. They had to drive sixty miles on a bus to a school that was like a bullpen, there were like thirty kids there and they would just throw 'em in a room. My boys suffered so I sent my son to Wasatch Academy, and then my wife moved to Bishop, California, so they could you know go into schools there. But I worked on that, so we got the okay to send the kids to a different school, shorter route, different state. We sent them across the state line [to Beatty, Nevada]. We worked it out between California and Nevada. And we got housing. I was pleased I was able to get several million dollars to build new housing. Dick Martin got more money and build more housing. J. T. Reynolds got more. So finally, we got decent housing for employees, decent schooling, so that was an issue all related to personnel. Move people, get the right team in, and that was, when I went there it was kinda hell for the first couple years. When I left, I was very, very pleased. I think the thing that, and I'm gonna talk about this, I don't know if you're going to Death Valley Saturday, are you?

Hannah Nyala West: I can't, no.

Edwin Rothfuss: Okay. Sarah Craighead, the [departing] superintendent's got this four of us talking. She wants each of us to give the highlights and I was trying to think, "How can I say this just in a few words?"

Hannah Nyala West: Oh, wow.

Edwin Rothfuss: But that was an issue and the Regional Director said I should stay there about four years, so work on the burros and these other things so you can get out, but then the Desert Protection Act came up. You're familiar with that?

Hannah Nyala West: Mhm.

Edwin Rothfuss: And I got right in the middle of that. And I ended up being the National Park Service representative for the Senate and the House hearings in Washington. And that was a challenge, because when I would go in there to testify – actually it was the Secretary of the Interior that would testify – but on his left hand he had Ed Hasty, who was the state director for BLM to answer the technical questions there. Ed Rothfuss, who was the Park Service

representative sitting on his right side, to answer technical questions on Park Service. And under one administration – I guess I can just say it, Republican administration – the answer was absolutely, “We’re gonna kill this bill. This bill should not pass. We don’t want the BLM lands to become Park Service and its restrictions”. And I remember going in the Secretary’s office, and I remember him saying, “Rothfuss, now remember. We are here to kill this bill.” And they knew my personal feelings. Professionally I knew that it should happen. And they’d say, “Remember, we’re to kill this bill, and we don’t want anything to come out there that would jeopardize us killing the bill.” And then, of course, when the administration changed, “We want this bill to pass.”

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.]

Edwin Rothfuss: And that was frustrating! You know, how to answer the questions without prostituting yourself or, you know, just – it was tough.

Hannah Nyala West: How did you do it?

Edwin Rothfuss: Well, I was lucky that, because, you know, superintendents go to Washington, they meet their – they know their Congressman and their Senators and all that. Like Alan Cranston. I spent an awful lot of time with his aide, [Kathy] Lacey [formerly Kathy Files], and she knew exactly how I felt, and she knew how to feed Cranston’s [to ask the] question, the same with Bruce Vento, who was in the House. I’d spent some time with him. So, they would phrase questions to me that would allow me to answer and that helped. I mean, if I didn’t know anybody up there, particularly if on the other side, you know, Bruce Vento was real active to get this bill passed. He was in the House there, he’s since passed away, but I was lucky in that regard. ‘Cause they would direct me to the Secretary, and if the Secretary said, “Well, that superintendent mentioned a little bit about the park aspect,” well, I would answer that just professionally.

Edwin Rothfuss: But if they had a counter question, like one question, in fact, it’s written up. There’s a book written on this whole thing, and there’s a little bit of – I’m in it for a few sentences in there – but one question that gives an example of how it went.⁹ It was, I think, maybe it was Bruce Vento raised the question. He said, “We have Superintendent Rothfuss sitting beside you there, and we’ve heard the argument pro and con of why East Mojave should become part of the National Park System, so I want to ask Superintendent Rothfuss, in your expert opinion, in your knowledge of that area, do you feel that it merits the credentials or so of being a unit in the National Park Service?” And I said something that was something

⁹ Frank Wheat, *California Desert Miracle* (Sunbolt Pub, 1999).

that we were not supposed to really talk about. There was a plan that was done in the 70s between BLM and the Park Service that said this was a special area, it could be National Park quality. But then the Republican party, 'We don't want that mentioned.' But when Bruce Vento said, "In your professional opinion, do you feel it merits Park Service status," I said, "Well, I do not have expertise to say that on my own personal knowledge. However, the plan was developed in the 1970s." "Oh, what plan was that?" [Chuckles.] And then you got on the record and then they called former Regional Director Howard Chapman, who was in on that plan in the early '70s. They said, "Mr. Chapman, Rothfuss brought up the comment about this report. Did you tell us about that report and what it said?" And he was then retired, so he got in there and really laid it out why that Mojave should be under the National Park Service. So, it wasn't like, you know, that was something I did there. I did get in trouble for it, but it was walking that line, and if Bruce Vento hadn't've phrased that question just right, I wouldn't have been able to slip that in without causing a big furor.

Hannah Nyala West: Right.

Edwin Rothfuss: But it opened the door, you know, that little crack open there, to say something nice about the Mojave.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. That's been a major change in the California and Nevada desert.

Edwin Rothfuss: Oh absolutely.

Hannah Nyala West: And just in time—

Edwin Rothfuss: Yeah, yeah.

Hannah Nyala West: —based on what's going on now with desert development.

Edwin Rothfuss: Yeah. So anyway, that was it. And let's see. Those were the issues, and then when Alan Cranston came down and I had the privilege of hiking up the trails with Alan Cranston and he brought along Shelley Duvall, you know, Popeye and Olive Oil, and Morgan Fairchild. And somebody said, "Boy, you're lucky you get to hike up there with Morgan Fairchild," but I wasn't very impressed with Morgan Fairchild. I mean, she was attractive, but too stern and serious – which is good because that's what we were there for – but Shelley Duvall was a character. I really liked her. I mean, she was just a fun person. But she was fun, she wasn't really a cerebral in the way of park management and all that, but she was dating Alan Cranston's son and that's how she happened to be along. She was fun to be with. She livened our party a little bit. But [Morgan

Fairchild] was, I respect her because she was serious about, ‘Boy this is special land. This should become a national park’.¹⁰

Edwin Rothfuss: And I almost got the axe on one case. The Republicans organized a tour of the California desert and they were coming through Death Valley, and they had senators’ and representatives’ aides, and they had people from mining industry, mining heads and all that. And they didn’t really tell me they were coming to Death Valley, but I got a call from U.S. Borax, had that big mining operation, they said, “Ed, all these people are coming to see our mining operations here in Death Valley. You’d better come along with us.” So, I and Mel Essington, who was my chief mining engineer at the time.

Hannah Nyala West: Mel Essington.

Edwin Rothfuss: E-S-S-I-N-G-T-O-N.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Edwin Rothfuss: So we, the two of us went with this group, and – you’ve been to Death Valley, you’ve been up Zabriskie Point – and we got up to Zabriskie Point and we waved the arms and there was a big mound of borax over there, I can’t remember the name of the mountain base. We talked about that, we talked about – somebody asked, ‘Well, how does Park Service work with mining companies and all that?’ And I [and Mel Essington] told them how we worked together. As we walked down the hill, I could hear there’s a couple mining engineers like thirty feet behind us. I could hear one of them, “You know, the National Park Service doesn’t sound like they’d be that bad to work with. It sounds like, you know, from what Mining Engineer Essington explained, it sounds like they’re willing to sit down with us and help me negotiate. We think we could probably work with the Park Service.” And about that time, somebody grabbed me by the shoulder, and it was one of the aides from the Secretary’s Office, and he said, “Damnit, Rothfuss! You’ve gotta muzzle your people. We’re supposed to kill this bill. And these guys are thinking maybe the Park Service could work with ‘em.” Then we got up to the mining office and we had a woman from the Secretary’s office, and she was fairly high up, I can’t remember her name or anything. But the Borax people made a presentation and, you know, I was asked for comments, and I said something which was probably out of line, but I’m willing to do that because I felt strong about it. ‘Cause that was being a little rough. U.S. Borax and Park Service were a little bit at odds, but yet we were still friends and could work together, and the one man there who invited me to go on the tour and I had talked about there’s a loggerhead now, because we can’t really negotiate where

¹⁰ ER mis-spoke and said “Shelley Duvall” instead of Morgan Fairchild on the recording.

the boundary should be on this Borax lands. And I said, "Well, we're at loggerheads on this issue of the Borax and Park Service lands, and there is a possibility that we could do some tradeoffs and maybe move some boundary here," and this one woman, she practically screamed at me. She said, "Mr. Rothfuss, or Superintendent Rothfuss, by what authority can you say that?" [Laughs.] I said, "Well, only, you know, [as] I was asked the question. I am only answering from my professional opinion and those of my engineering staff, Mel Essington and others, that we feel this would work, and I have talked about it with U.S. Borax." She said, "You have no authority to say that. You have no authority to speak." Fine. The next day I got a call from the Secretary's office, and I don't remember who it was, but it was somebody I had met. He was somewhere down in the chain's [secretary's] office. "They are trying to decide what to do with you. But you know, we, I know you're doing a good job as the superintendent of Death Valley, so god, could you just cool it for a little bit until this blows over" But because of that I was then bucked off being the representative of the Park Service, of being at the table up there [in Washington]. [Laughs.] And my regional director was really ticked at me, because then he had to do it, and oh, he hated that with a passion. And I don't think he ever forgave me of that. [Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.]

Edwin Rothfuss: But anyway, long story on that. And the other thing that I was very pleased to be a part of is I was very involved in getting Manzanar going on as a National Historic Site. And I never received an official designation on it, but being the close superintendent, I was kind of the liaison, you get up there and do things, and I sent some staff up to help 'em do things, and I worked very closely with it. In fact I and Dennis Otsuji was one of the Japanese Americans who was interned there as a child, and John Reynolds, who was [NPS] Deputy Director at the time, got a group of landscape architects to do an initial plan for there, and I was the liaison working with them. And Dennis and I then put the dog and pony show together. We went to Washington and gave a slide program and presentation to there in the Interior Building on Manzanar. We went to Los Angeles and did it. We went to the Regional Office, 'cause there were some people in the Park Service [who] didn't want it, you know, some of 'em were still fighting World War II. But others were very intensely interested in it, and so I got involved in that level. And when this made the National Historic Site, I went to Stan Albright and I said, "We need to get a superintendent up there real quick, because the Japanese Americans need somebody on site to really work with, the Valley up there, Owens Valley needs a superintendent," and he basically said, "We cannot do that until

Congress authorizes money and the positions to do it.” I said, “Damnit, we get parks all the time that there is money is taken from some other park. Death Valley, I gave money to Great Basin when it got enlarged. I gave money to Channel Islands, you know, a lot of parks get tapped to help bail out another area until Congress acts.” He said, “Absolutely not.” So, I went to the Director, Richardson – is that his name? Richardson. [Roger G. Kennedy, served as director from June 1993 to March 1997.] And I told him, I said, “Sir, I’m having trouble with my regional director.” He said, “That’s not news. I hear that from superintendents all the time.” And I told him that we needed a superintendent out there. The next day I got a call from my supervisor, the regional director. He chewed me out on the phone. I was at home. My wife said, “Ed, you’ve never talked that long to the regional director on the phone, ever.” He chewed me out royally about doing this. I said, “Well, you and I talked about it many times. You kept saying, ‘No, no.’” He said, “Well, which division chief are you giving up?” And I said, “Well, Ross Hopkins used to be a superintendent, but he ran into a little trouble when he got busted as a superintendent.” And I had him as a Cultural Resource Management Specialist. And he, you know, he was a GS-12, a brilliant historian, and he kind of would go with me to Manzanar, and the Japanese Americans really liked him. You know, he related with them. And he was actually working as my chief interpreter at the time. And I said [to the regional director], “Ross Hopkins used to be a superintendent. He’d love to be a superintendent again. Why not make him superintendent?” He said, “Fine. You’ve lost him. And you cannot refill that position until Congress gives money and staff.” I said, “Fine.” And he said, “Also I don’t want to supervise him. He is under your supervision. I don’t want to have anything to do with him. He is the next superintendent.” [Laughs.] So, I had that position vacant for the next year and a half before I retired. But I had a great Acting [Chief], so fine. But then it was kind of interesting.

Edwin Rothfuss: The Japanese American community invited him [Regional Director Albright], you know, protocol, the Regional Director. He came down to their annual pilgrimage in April, and they wanted him to speak, you know, the new National Monument or Historic Site is here, rah rah. And I said to my regional director, “Stan, this would be a great time for you to publicly announce that Ross Hopkins is going to be the new superintendent and will be coming up.” “Nope, not going to do it.” And I called the Deputy Regional Director, John Reynolds, who was really a champion of Native American rights and Japanese American rights and really got it going. John Reynolds is just a fantastic, you know, he’s one of the superstars in this whole story. I called John and I said, “John, Stan

won't use this opportunity, which is a golden opportunity, to anoint Ross Hopkins as the superintendent." He said, "Ed, I'll take care of it." I got a call later in the day from Stan Albright, said, "Damn it, Rothfuss. You write my speech. You write what I need to say." "Yes sir! Happy to do it!" And he did, he was a professional and he got up there, you know, he did everything just right. He gave a great talk and he anointed, you know, I'm happy to introduce Ross, but he said, "Rothfuss, I don't want to have anything to do with him personally. You work with him." And so, I did until I retired. [Laughs.] Anyway, end of story. [Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: It sounds to me as if you were involved at several key points in genuinely innovative approaches to the way things had been done before and looking at shifting the culture in a way in the parks that you were in. Do you have any suggestions for leaders of the Park Service today as to how you could have more innovation? Does the agency need that kind of innovation now? What's the future look like to you?

Edwin Rothfuss: You know, I'm not sure how I could answer that. It's ah, one thing that has bothered me a little bit in the Park Service is when people are put into positions, I think they need to look at many aspects of it. For example, I can think of several parks I worked in that they picked a superintendent who could care less about the resource. And I think that if you choose a person to be in charge of resources management in a park or a deputy regional director or a park superintendent, that in addition to all their background and training and talents, is are they really dedicated to the resource responsibility that they have? You don't want to send someone to Death Valley that 'I don't like the damn desert, but I'm getting a promotion out of it, I'll take it.' I mean, I think we've gotta be very careful on doing that, because I found the bad experiences I had was when we had a supervisor at any level who didn't love and respect the resource they were at and the responsibilities they had. They took it for a job or promotion or stair-step or whatever. I mean, that's something that bothers me at this point in time. And I'm hoping – I can't remember her name now, but the deputy regional director here – I hope I can get her ear before I leave because I learned some things last night talking with somebody and my god, I hope they get the right superintendent to replace Sarah in Death Valley. Some things need to happen, and they need to get someone who's gonna have the interest in that challenge and do it. If they put it on the table as a challenge, they will, but they gotta put it up front and say, like when I was getting the job, they said, "Get those burros out of there, watch on mining, and handle personnel issues." I mean, if the issue that I'm concerned about hits one of those top points, then they'll get the right person. Cause

the right person will hear what they're going into. It's, I don't know, but I think that's a thing we just need to think about.

Edwin Rothfuss:

One thing that in the whole Park Service that bothers some of us old-timers is how the concept of the National Park Service families are really, and that started I think, well, in areas close to towns it started probably in the '70s. In isolated areas or very remote, it's probably not changing. But I recall when I went to Glacier National Park in the '70s, 1972 got to Glacier, '71 – excuse me. The superintendent and all division chiefs lived in the park, and we became a family there. We became very close. We had parties together, we played poker on payday night together, and all of us lived there. But then in the '70s, I was the first division chief given the approval to live outside because I had a son that had dyslexia and we needed to move into Kalispell, 30 miles away. And with reluctance I got permission to do it. Within a couple years, all the division chiefs and superintendent lived in towns! Now the bad part was we lost that family; we lost that sense of community. In talking to the employees now, well, it's like a job. At five o'clock we go, we disappear. So, we're losing some of that Park Service family. The upside, though, the other side is helping at community relations. Like right now the chief ranger in Glacier – which all of 'em live outside the park – but he belongs to the Rotary Club in Columbia Falls, and he's a respected member of the community, and in that club he's, in fact one of the park superintendents was the president of that club, and Mark is, he's going to be the president of that club, he's going to be a superintendent someday someplace. So, the upside is, it gets the people out into the communities. And part of it is because of, you know, housing, schooling, dual careers – I mean a lot of these things play into making it different, difficult to keep this Park Service family together. And I don't know. It bothers some of us that we see this breaking down but we see the upside of in the community and the need for when you get dual careers and opportunity of buying a house, building equity toward the future versus living in a government place, and that's a challenge. I don't know the answer on that.

Edwin Rothfuss:

I think one big thing I've brushed over that so easily is, when I look at Death Valley, if I have to say there was one single accomplishment that I feel very pleased about getting going – I didn't even mention yet – and that's establishing the division of Resources Management. And when I got there, we had one part-time resource manager, and we had a couple mining engineers that focused only on mining. And I had to bust some heads internally, but we got a division. When I left, we had something like 15 or 18 positions in resources management, and our first two GS-9/11 museum curators. We got a hydrologist, we got a [landscape]

architect and an archaeologist. We built the division focusing on the resources. And I see this happening throughout the Park Service along in the '70s and '80s, '90s. You're seeing real professional divisions handling resources and, you know, basically the Organic Act talks 'provide for the use and enjoyment but protect the resources' and I think that a lot of us started thinking that, when it comes down to it, you've gotta protect the resources. That's gotta be a kind of be a little of priority even over visitors, but you've gotta work those two together, not in conflict. And I'm pleased to see this happen throughout the Park Service, more and more big divisions of resource management.

Hannah Nyala West: Where do you see the agency being in the next ten years or so?

Edwin Rothfuss: [Sigh.]

Hannah Nyala West: Got five minutes [laughs] if we can sign the form in 30 seconds.

Edwin Rothfuss: Yeah. I just really don't know. It's kinda scary, I mean, what could happen next month. Those things are gonna have an impact. The American public and the world loves our National Park system. I mean, we're a favorite agency, we've got, you know, it's just I can't think of a better job to ever work in. We're helping resources, we're helping people, we're helping people enjoy lives, I mean, it's such a great organization and our mission is so good. It's just I can't imagine the American public would let something bad happen to the Park Service. I guess we're always going to be here, and we're always going to be a good agency, but god, you know, I guess we just have to keep working on, trying to keep professional, trying to keep the support. Community relations, public relations—we need to work hard on that. I think we're getting some brilliant people in there. When I first came here yesterday, I asked Scot, the former [ANPR] president, I said, "How many people are coming?" He said "Ninety." I said, "Ninety? That's not very many. This is one of the least attended I can think of, that's sad." He said, "Well, I'm really concerned what's going to happen to ANPR cause the young people, you know, they aren't into joining things today. I mean, you've got your iPads, you've got all these things and what's going to happen?" I walked into the Board of Director's meeting – I don't know if you got into there yesterday, but we had to have a conversation in the hall, and when we walked in there were 10 people in there and wow, I was surprised, there were only two over [age 40-45] in there. These were young kids, I thought some of these probably weren't born much after – or before – I retired. So, there are more young people here than I expected, and that's a good sign. And I hope, I hope that we do attract younger people and a diversity of ethnic groups to come in the Park Service and be a part of it. And I think if we keep working at that, I mean, these are some pretty good kids. Like Alison [Steiner], I just met

her briefly, but she seems to have some real spunk, and so and then I don't know, I just, it's something that I think we're always going to have the Park Service, always going to be a great organization, but we do need to keep on trying to keep getting to the right people, doing the right things, and to support them. And it's public relations, I think that's the main thing, you know, I hate to see in some areas I think, you know, even at Death Valley. I think the two guys that followed me were great, but I think they didn't spend as much time on public relations as I did when I was there. But on the other hand, I found when I was superintendent, sometimes you've gotta know when to say no, cause I found about two years before I retired I was spending like 25 nights a year in a hotel some place, cause 'Ed, you gotta be at this meeting and this meeting'. And my last two years I started saying, "I just can't come to that. I'm either going to send somebody or I just can't make it." And spend more attention to the park and attention to the public relations and staff. Maybe we spend too much damn time, you know, on meetings and travel, and maybe conference calls and sessions, I think the technology has improved so much since I retired that a lot of these things could be done without having to fly across the country at great expense and time, expenditures and such. I don't know.

Hannah Nyala West: Mhm. Excellent. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us. This is kicking this project off, and hopefully we'll be able to help it become institutional so that it happens and builds. I'm a firm believer in oral history as not just documentation of the past, but as a way to do public outreach, to reach people, because it's the human stories that get people to care about the land ultimately.

Edwin Rothfuss: Yeah, yeah.

Hannah Nyala West: Many people don't want to come to Death Valley, but we need them to care about it.

Edwin Rothfuss: Yes, exactly.

Hannah Nyala West: We need them to care that it exists. And these kinds of stories and getting them out to people, through all the media that we have available to us today, are ways to do that. So, we really do appreciate this. I think there's several areas that they could do follow-up interviews with you, thematic kind of things, so you might get a call where they're asking to do that. And, given that you're in Las Vegas, you're close to some of us, so might even be able to do it in person. But we will stay in touch.

Edwin Rothfuss: Okay.

Hannah Nyala West: So, thank you again.

Edwin Rothfuss: Thank you, Hannah.

[END OF TRACK 1]

[END OF INTERVIEW]