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Herbert Evison's National Park Service Oral History Project, 1952-1999

John M. Davis
November 6, 1962

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JOHN M. DAVIS

REEL LXXI,

SIDE II

REEL LXXII

Including corrections and changes offered by Davis – March 1964

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Herbert Evison: This is Herbert Evison at Ash Mountain headquarters of Sequoia National Park on the morning of November 6, 1962, which happens to be election day. With me is John M. Davis, superintendent of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, in whose office at Ash Mountain this recording is taking place.

Herbert Evison: John, let's start this off with a kind of a thumb-nail sketch of your career with the National Park Service, telling how come you started to work with it and what jobs you have held.

John Davis: Well, that's rather an interesting story, Herb, as to how I got into the National Park Service. I was raised in the city of Tacoma and as a young fellow of course had gone up to the park many times.

Herbert Evison: You say, "the park." Mount Rainier?

John Davis: Mount Rainier National Park, which is just sixty miles from my home. I always enjoyed the park and thought of course it was a very beautiful area.

John Davis: When I got out of college my first job was with a real estate firm in Seattle, Washington, and while I was paid very well for the work I was doing at that time I still had a girl and was hoping to get married one of these days. So, after I had been in this real estate firm about three months, I asked them for a raise. Of course, they didn't give it to me, but I told them to find someone else for my job; I hadn't another job lined up but I knew that I wasn't going to get any place there at the salary that I was getting.

John Davis: So, I happened to hear about a ranger vacancy up at Mount Rainier and also that the superintendent, who was Major Owen A. Tomlinson, would be in Seattle that day to interview applicants for this ranger position. This was in the days when permanent rangers were simply hired by the superintendent; they were not under Civil Service at that time. So, I appeared at the lobby of the Frye Hotel the next day to have my interview with the Major. There were about thirty or forty other young fellows in the lobby of the hotel waiting their turn for an interview.

John Davis: Finally, my turn came and I spent quite an interesting half hour with the Major. I think the fact that I had taken some shorthand and typing more or less clinched the job for me, because he told me that I would be the one selected and to be prepared to leave with him for Mount Rainier the next morning, April 11, 1926.

John Davis: At that time the Major didn't have a full-time stenographer or secretary; he had one only during the four or five summer months and the rest of the

year he was pretty well dependent on the fiscal office to type up his letters. So, when he found a ranger that could take shorthand and typing, why, he was very happy, because as it worked out I was out in the park during the summer months when the weather was good and then I returned to the office in the fall when the Major lost his secretary. And for the first two years I was there I would work in the office doing his secretarial work. When I told the Major I had taken shorthand and typing I hadn't fibbed to him, but I didn't tell him that I wasn't much of a stenographer. However, the Major couldn't dictate, and I couldn't take it very well, so between the two of us we had quite a time, but as it finally worked out we both got to be pretty good before I got out of that assignment.

Herbert Evison: You mean he learned to dictate?

John Davis: He learned to dictate, and invariably if there was a word could be spelled two ways he would know one way and I would know the other. I can recall many of my letters coming back looking like a chicken that had stepped in some ink had been walking across the paper; they were pretty well scratched up. He used lots of commas, and of course in the business English I had taken in college I was told the use of commas was pretty much of a matter of personal taste. So, we had quite a time at first there but it worked out and I guess I was better than nothing, but perhaps not a heck of a lot better.

John Davis: Anyway, within about two years of when I went there the Major was able to get a full-time secretary, so I was relieved to do ranger work throughout the whole year. I worked as a park ranger until January 16, 1931, when I was made chief ranger of the park. I continued in that job until April 2 of 1938 when I was promoted to the assistant superintendent position at Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks. That organization also administered five national monuments at that time.

John Davis: I remained at Zion until in July, July 29 of 1941, when I was promoted to the position of assistant superintendent at Grand Canyon National Park, and I continued there until the 21st of January in 1946 when I was transferred to the regional office as an assistant regional director. Part of my job there, along with the duties of an assistant regional director, was the administration of twenty-seven national monuments which were known at that time as Southwestern National Monuments.

John Davis: I continued as an assistant regional director until March 3rd, 1950, when they reestablished the position of superintendent of Southwestern National Monuments, and I had my choice of either taking the superintendency or remaining in the regional office. I chose to be the superintendent of Southwestern National Monuments, and continued on in Santa Fe until in

1952 I believe it was, November of 1952, we moved our headquarters to Gila Pueblo at Globe, Arizona, and I remained in that area and in that job until January 27 of 1957 when I was offered the position of chief of conservation and protection in the Washington office and of course I accepted and moved there.

John Davis: In September – well, September 30 of 1957 – I was made chief of the newly established division of ranger activities in which position I continued until I had an opportunity to come to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks as superintendent on October 31st, 1959, and of course I have been in that position since then.

Herbert Evison: You have been around a good deal of the western and D. C. map in the course of that career, and I would like now to go back to the beginnings of it. You have already indicated one of the important differences with respect to ranger employment between 1926, was it, that you started? and today, in that you were hired by the superintendent on his own responsibility. But I know there must have been a lot of other differences at that time from what – well, what goes on in Sequoia National Park and Kings Canyon National Park now as far as ranger activities are concerned, and I think it would be interesting to get some of those contrasts on the record.

John Davis: Well, Herb, as I look back over thirty-six years – almost thirty-seven years – in the National Park Service of course there have been many changes.

John Davis: I started out as a park ranger, and as I compare the work that rangers did thirty-six years ago and what they do now, really the jobs are still pretty much basically the same. We have the problem of forest protection, of wildlife protection, of taking care of the visitors and the various accidents and emergencies that they would get into, law enforcement and operation of entrance stations, fish planting; except I think our jobs in the early days covered perhaps a little wider range of activity than the ranger job does today.

John Davis: When I was district ranger at Paradise Valley – incidentally, which I was about the second summer that I was at Mount Rainier National Park – the rangers had charge of all trail maintenance, all telephone line maintenance; they had charge of the campgrounds and the campground caretakers; they were expected to keep a very close observation on concession operations; and they were more or less the superintendent's representative in the district areas. They were expected to do a lot of things. Our jobs were not defined at that time by job sheets or job descriptions at all. I suppose it may have varied somewhat from park to park depending upon the individual superintendent's ideas of how it

should be managed. But I know, as a district ranger at Paradise Valley, he looked to me to keep all the activities in that district going. That included some of supervision or at least keeping track of the interpretive program of the temporary rangers there. We didn't have a permanent naturalist stationed at Paradise Valley so it was more or less up to me to see that they were getting to their programs on time, their uniforms were clean and they were properly uniformed, that they did a good job in their interpretive programs; and I would evaluate the various ranger-naturalists, and so on.

John Davis: I was expected to keep the superintendent well informed on all activities in the district. Nowdays we are pretty well compartmentalized and rather strict lines are drawn between the various branches or divisions within the park, and that phase of it has pretty well disappeared.

John Davis: I mentioned that I was selected by the park superintendent and that was before the park rangers were under Civil Service. Actually, that was the case; I was selected by the park superintendent, but my papers – appointment papers – arrived in Washington one day after the rangers had been all blanketed in under Civil Service. So, after I had been in the Service almost a year, I found out that I didn't have a permanent appointment as a park ranger and it was necessary for me to take the first park ranger Civil Service examination that was ever given. That was rather an interesting examination; the questions were based primarily to test a man's practical knowledge of field operations: woodsmen type of questions, questions concerning firefighting and handling horses and trail work, and along that line. That was before they got into the type of testing that is designed to measure a man's intelligence rather than his practical knowledge. Anyway, I passed the exam and continued in my job just as if I had been a ranger right from the very beginning.

John Davis: Life in those days as far as paperwork is concerned was quite simple. They had no regional offices then; the superintendent would correspond directly with the Washington office, right with Stephen T. Mather who was director of the Park Service at that time. I had taken many letters for the Major addressed to the director and we would receive back replies signed by Stephen T. Mather; our correspondence was direct.

John Davis: Our appointments, as an example: My appointment papers for my first job as park ranger was simply one sheet of paper that said that John M. Davis is hereby appointed as a park ranger at $1,620 per annum less QH&L, which meant quarters, heat, and light; and they charged us $15 a month for quarters, heat and light. In those days you were charged for quarters not on the basis of what quarters you had or what quarters they assigned you but on the basis of the salary bracket that you were in; and $1,620 called for a $15 a month deduction for quarters. My first quarters at Mount Rainier

were a tent; tent quarters simply with a little tin wood heater in the middle of the floor, no sink, no toilet facilities, cracks in the floor so that sweeping the floor was quite a simple job – you'd simply have to stir it around a little bit and it would fall between the cracks. We had a Chick Sales out in back of our tent. I shared that tent with two other people, so that actually we were paying $45 a month for that tent. That of course would be very inconsistent in the light of our quarters situation today, but we weren't particularly concerned about it; we accepted it as part of the job and gave very little thought to the matter.

John Davis: Other points of interest that applied to the earlier days was that we worked six days a week; that was the requirement. There was never anything that said how many hours a day that a person had to work, and it was simply accepted as part of our job that we work whatever number of hours that would be required to do our work. And during the summer months, say from the first of June or actually perhaps from the first of May, all through until after hunting season in the fall, all the rangers worked seven days a week and we worked oh, ten, twelve, fourteen, sometimes more hours a day. We never knew of such a thing as overtime and of course none was ever paid. But hours of work were not given much consideration. We had a job to do, and we worked whatever number of hours it took to do that job.

John Davis: Our Park Service uniform in those days was quite interesting. In fact, everyone wore a uniform: the warehouseman, the office people who worked in the office, the road foreman – all wore a National Park Service uniform. And we all had a sleeve insignia; each one was a little different than the other. The ranger's insignia was a sequoia cone inside of a sequoia wreath; and if you were a park ranger you had one cone, and the assistant chief ranger had two, and the chief ranger had three. (Herb, have you heard this before?)

Herbert Evison: No.

John Davis: And the temporary rangers and naturalists didn't have any cones, they just had the wreath on their shoulder patch. The park naturalist would have a bear encircled by a wreath. The office people would have an inkwell with a quill or pen in the inkwell. The maintenance foreman would have a crossed pick and shovel. And so on down the line; everyone was required to wear a uniform regardless of what his position was. There was just no uniform group – I mean there was no single group that wore the uniform exclusively; everyone had to have it, from the warehouseman on up. So, it was rather an interesting thing.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, what was the uniform like in those days?

John Davis: Well, of course we had what we called the choke-bore britches which were really riding britches, and the cloth material that was used was a whipcord in forestry green, the same color it is now. The coat was a pinched-back coat very similar to the one we wear now except it was a little shorter and a little snugger fitting.

John Davis: Uniforms were expensive in those days. Those of us at Mount Rainier paid $60 for our uniform, our coat, just our coat and our britches. We had them made by the best tailor in the nearby town or city of Tacoma, and they were really a good job. To get a pair of riding britches to fit properly it required a highly skilled cutter, and a person could pay up to $75 in those days just for a nice fitting pair of riding britches. For puttees – rather, we wore puttees or even some of the fellows wore the old cloth wrapped legging like they used in World War I. And then a little later we did go to the field boot, the field riding boot it was, which was much more attractive than the puttees or the wrap-around leggings which used to cut the circulation out of your legs. These field boots, however, were quite expensive; I remember I bought my first pair at Frederick and Nelson in Seattle and I paid $26 for them, which was a lot of money in the days when a ranger was being paid $150 a month.

John Davis: Major Tomlinson or Superintendent Tomlinson was the chairman of the National Park Service uniform committee, so we were more or less guinea pigs for the uniform committee, and many uniforms were developed right there at Mount Rainier. As an example, the first ski uniform was developed there.

Herbert Evison: The first what kind?

John Davis: The first ski uniform, winter ski uniform. Winter sports developed during the period that I was at Rainier. When I first went there people would come up to the park on weekends and merely romp around on a pair of snowshoes, and we had a toboggan slide there, but it was a rare thing to see a pair of skis that were anything more than – that had anything more than a toe strap. But within two or three or four years after I went there, skiing started to develop in this country and Rainier was one of the first places that catered to the skiers.

John Davis: We would hike up to Paradise Valley where snow depths ran around fifteen to twenty feet and give a hand to the skiers that were injured, and we would do that in our regular Park Service uniform which was of course very much out of place and very impractical for that type of work. Also, in those days the visitors who would come up used many bright colors. They would wear sweaters and stocking caps of wool, and high-top boots with the long wool stocking of bright color; bright colors were more or less the

order of the day. The Major wanted a ski uniform that would be distinctive and stand out among those bright colors.

John Davis: So, we went down and had uniforms made out of 19-ounce elastique that was a powder blue with a maroon stripe down the leg and maroon on the patch pocket of the jacket. It was a very bright and really a very pretty color combination and a very pretty uniform and it sure as the dickens did stand out; in fact it stood out to the extent that we felt like doormen in front of a ritzy hotel or something. We didn't wear a ski cap at first; we wore a tam-o-shanter made of the same material and of a powder blue color with a small maroon pom-pom on the top of it.

John Davis: Well, we felt so darned conspicuous – and hollered so much about it – I think there were only three of us that bought uniforms; Oscar Sedergren was one and Charlie Browne was the other; the other rangers more or less gave us a bad time about those uniforms and wouldn't go along with the idea.

John Davis: Anyway, we were trying to be cooperative and help the Major and his uniform committee. But we finally abandoned it. We dyed those uniforms a navy blue and we used them on winter patrol. Then we had to buy another uniform – and mind you, these uniforms were all tailor made, they weren't bought from Fechheimer's.

Herbert Evison: And there was no uniform allowance.

John Davis: No, there was no uniform allowance in those days, believe me. And of course, by that time I was married and had a couple of small children, so that money wasn't too plentiful. But nevertheless, there was quite a spirit in the Park Service at that time. We were new; we were young, and things that we gripe about today would have been unheard of then. The whole spirit of the thing carried us through so that we weren't looking for things to complain about much; we trying to find ways to get things done, and it was quite different than it is now. However, that to me is all very understandable.

John Davis: Anyway, our next ski uniform that we developed was an elastique uniform very similar, practically the same thing that they wear today. We wore a canvas spat to make a good connection between the knit ends of our ski trousers and our ski boots, so that was how the first National Park Service ski uniform developed.

John Davis: We also were the guinea pigs for the first raincoat. I can remember that we paid quite a bit for it too. It was a gabardine raincoat, of very heavy gabardine, and it was very long; it came down oh, within twelve inches of the ground practically. It was a trench coat style, but a very attractive coat

lined with wool. The uniform overcoat that we had to wear before that was an old World War I type of coat made out of heavy khaki-colored wool material, or the short mackinaw. But this longer coat gave us protection for our legs particularly on weekends during winter months when we used to have to stand out in some pretty tough storms to park cars. Parking space was pretty much at a premium and each one had to be parked and parked close so that we would have enough space; so, we had to stand out in quite a few snowstorms, and that long length was really quite a help to us.

John Davis: The rangers in those days when I first went to work were primarily the woodsmen type; they were darned good men; they knew the woods, they knew how to do log work; they knew how to lay out trails and how to work on trails and fight fire; they were practical men but definitely of the woodsmen type. A high school education as a whole was about the top educational level; many of them perhaps only had grade school education, but they were intelligent men and very devoted men.

John Davis: They were not too interested in skiing, and we used to have many arguments over the advantages of skis over snowshoes and on many other points. The rangers then were not very interested in getting very far up on the mountains. That was really out of their territory, out of their realm of knowledge, so that rescue work for the most part was done by others than the park rangers.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, by whom?

John Davis: Well, at Rainier at least the guides, the summer guides, that were in the employ of the Rainier National Park Company would do much of it; and of course even in those days we had some volunteer help from the mountaineering organizations such as The Mountaineers, of Seattle, Washington. However, things were beginning to change, because the guides used to give the rangers kind of a bad time. The guides would wear their bright green shirts around with a well-tanned face and their short climbing pants and boots and they kind of held themselves as being a little bit superior to the park rangers, which always irked me somewhat.

John Davis: So, one of the first things I tried to do when I was district ranger at Paradise was to hire some temporary rangers that were good mountain climbers, and one of the first men that I selected for that job was Charlie Brown, who was an excellent mountaineer and a good man on the ice and a good climber. And from that time on leadership on rescues was supplied by park personnel. I used to go along with them and be scared to death most of the time because I didn't know much about climbing and didn't

have too much of an opportunity to learn about it. I would go anyway; I felt it my responsibility.

John Davis: But we did have quite a few rescues in those days. I can recall the first one that occurred while I was at Paradise, when a guide party of five slipped and fell and the whole bunch went into a crevasse. Two of the men lost their lives – two of the people who were being guided – and the others were pretty well shook up and suffering severe shock. We left Paradise at about 1:30 in the afternoon and arrived at about the 12,000-foot elevation on the mountain at 8 o'clock at night, and I can recall very vividly how green we were. We arrived at a point where a man was down in a crevasse. We sank our ice axe in the snow to serve as an anchor, or to serve as an anchor for the rope on which one of our men was to descend to see if he could find the man, and we found out that the whole bunch of us were standing on a snow bridge. We were also pretty exhausted, going from Paradise Valley and carrying as we did a wire stretcher on our head and other supplies, so by the time we got there we were all in but our shoestrings.

John Davis: Incidentally, Charlie Brown was given a Presidential appointment as a park ranger because of his work on that rescue. He was at Camp Muir when the accident occurred; I had sent him up there to open up the cabin for the summer at Camp Muir at 10,000 feet elevation, and he was at that location when word came down of the accident, and of course Charlie, without proper equipment, immediately went ahead, started up the mountain and helped the survivors down. He also went down – I believe it was – the Ingraham Glacier, but I'm not sure of that – the glacier to the point where another young man who had lost his life, where his body was, – he had slid down the glacier for a half a mile or perhaps a mile – and when Charlie got to him why, the abrasive effect of the snow and ice on the glacier had taken most of the clothes off of his body and quite a bit of the flesh too.

John Davis: Anyway, Charlie was given the first appointment that I ever knew of – I am sure there may have been others before that, but at least he was given an appointment by the President of the United States as a permanent park ranger. The President, as I understand it, is the only one who can give an appointment to a person with full Civil Service rights. That authority apparently is not used very often but it is used in cases of heroic effort such as Charlie Brown had performed on that particular rescue.

John Davis: There were other rescues there; in fact, we would have one almost every year. Another rescue that occurred while I was at Rainier when I was chief ranger: A young man by the name of Delmar Fadden – McFadden – no, Fadden, it is – had tried to climb the mountain alone in the winter from the

White River side and when he failed to return his brother finally told us what he tried to do, and we spent quite a while (before we found out that he had tried to climb the mountain) searching the lower elevations.

John Davis: Anyway, that was a winter trip – the end of January and the first of February – and a party of five of us went up to less than 1,000 feet from the summit of Mount Rainier and recovered the body of this 19-year-old boy, which of course was frozen solid when we got there. But it was quite a trip. We left – we started skiing at the White River Entrance station at about the 3,000-foot elevation at five o'clock in the afternoon and travelled that night on skis; stopped for a short while at Starbo's cabin for food and an hour or two rest, and then continued on on skis above there in the dark up to a point where it was necessary for us to put on crampons, and we arrived at where the boy was at about oh, I imagine about 3:30 in the afternoon or 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

John Davis: We lashed him in canvas, and we started down, arriving back at Starbo's cabin which was in alpine country about 5,500 feet at ten o'clock at night. And that was quite a grueling trip. I think I was 34 at that time, and Bill Butler was with us on that trip – he was the only other Park Service man; and then there were three young mountaineers from Seattle; and all of them were under 25 and most of them were around 21 or 22. I made up my mind that I was getting too old for that kind of strenuous activity.

John Davis: Anyway, as a result of this trip Bill Butler was also given a presidential appointment to the position as park ranger for his heroic work on that particular rescue. Bill had been working for us oh, for 2 or 3 years prior to that time but didn't meet the qualification standards for the park ranger position. In those days it was necessary to have a college degree in order to qualify for a park ranger job. He couldn't qualify through experience. It was just a short period when that was the requirement. We would have been very happy to have had him sooner as a park ranger but there was no way we could get him on in a permanent position, but he was given a Presidential appointment for his rescue.

John Davis: That was really quite a rescue. As we were coming down with the body we had to traverse a slick ice, glare ice, very steep slope, quite a long one. Our ropes were not long enough to reach to the bottom of the slope, so we had to break up in two parties; the three fellows from Seattle were in one group; Bill and I were tied together in the other. They let their man down about the middle of the ice slope on the rope and they let Bill down their rope, and the body, and I was to go down and anchor myself and let Bill and the body down to the bottom of the slope.

John Davis: Well, we got that far all right, but when it came to anchoring where I had to anchor and let Bill and body down, my legs did not have any strength left in them and my knees started to bend. We were standing on a terrifically steep slope so that in order to get a good footing you had to bend your ankles and knees. Anyway, when my knees started to bend, I knew that as soon as they touched, I would make a toboggan out of myself, but nevertheless I couldn't stop it. So, when my knee did touch, my feet went out from under me, and I started down the mountainside at miles an hour. I got to the end of the rope that Bill was tied to and of course yanked Bill off his feet, and Bill and I and the cadaver went free-wheeling down the mountainside with very little chance to stop. I recall the incident of course very vividly, and I will say that there was no fear. We were too busy to be concerned about what would happen to have any fear. I was more interested in seeing where the devil I was going and trying to get my pack off my head. But apparently through the grace of God – and I can't think of any other reason – the three of us did stop in a patch of corn snow where the slope was a little flatter. The snow was very dense and heavy – corn snow – and the three of us came to a stop there.

John Davis: We were completely out of sight of the other three fellows – that is the three of us I am speaking of Butler, the cadaver and myself – the other three fellows were the ones who really suffered because they watched the whole thing and didn't think there was a Chinaman's chance that we would ever stop and that we wouldn't be killed. But we finally got together. They were the ones that were almost hysterical when they caught up with us. Fortunately, none of us suffered a broken leg or a sprained leg or a dislocated shoulder or hip or anything. We were battered pretty badly; our bodies were pretty black and blue.

John Davis: Anyway, we continued on down the mountainside in the dark and we left the body at Steamboat Prow. We were just too exhausted to bring it any further. We continued from there on down to where we left our skis, took our crampons off and put our skis on. While we were up on the mountain it had snowed oh, perhaps a foot, about twelve inches of fresh snow, so that when we put our skis on we had this fresh snow to contend with and had very little strength left in our legs. We would only go about ten feet or so and fall, and it's quite hard work to pick yourself up out of the snow and start again, especially when you're already exhausted. So, we finally tried to walk without our skis, and we sank in very deep each step, so we couldn't do that.

John Davis: We finally put our sealskins on our skis and thought that might retard so that we could walk down on our skis without sinking in. But that really didn't work very well.

John Davis: All this time we could see the light in the cabin down at Starbo's old mine and it was oh, maybe 3- or 4,000 feet below us; but we were really quite concerned as to whether or not we were going to make it down there. Well, we of course finally did. We got in long after dark – 10:00 p.m. – and the boys, the support party, went up the next day and got the body from Steamboat Prow, which was around oh, I think 9,500 feet in elevation, and they brought it on down and that concluded the rescue. That was just one of the interesting and perhaps the most spectacular rescues that rangers performed in those days. I had no business up there; I was not a skilled mountaineer, but nevertheless I felt that as chief ranger I should perhaps be up there.

John Davis: There is quite an interesting story about Bill Butler. I am sure that Bill wouldn't tell you much about this rescue because he is rather a reticent person, but he has really done, as everyone knows, very wonderful work at Rainier.

John Davis: The first I got acquainted with Bill it was in March when the rangers were putting up the single wire grounded telephone lines around the park that we had to maintain. They were at Mowich Lake at an elevation of about 5,500 feet. There must have been oh, ten to fifteen feet of snow on the ground. They were staying at the cabin there when this young fellow walked in just out of the clear sky, practically. There were no roads in there, of course; it was miles from a point where any road reached. And of course they were quite surprised to see one lone man up in that country.

John Davis: Bill had seen the mountain from Seattle or Tacoma, around in there. He was on his way to Alaska but was attracted by the mountain and decided just to go see it, so he merely started out walking and ended up at Mowich Lake.

John Davis: The fellows of course took him in the cabin and fed him and gave him shelter, and he helped them for two or three days with their telephone line work and then they suggested that he might get a job if he would come back to park headquarters with them. Well, they brought him in and introduced him to me. And, mind you, this was in the days of the depression when jobs were pretty darned hard to come by. Anyway, this young fellow with a very winning pleasant smile, a big husky kid, it was almost impossible to refuse him a job so we gave him a job I think as a temporary ranger, either that or on a trail crew, I have forgotten just which; anyway he went to work in a temporary position of some kind.

John Davis: And of course as we got better acquainted with Bill the more we liked him, and we would hire him each season. In fact, we would try to provide employment for him during the fall and winter months, and one of the

ways we had to do it was to get him a job as winter caretaker for a CCC camp. In those days caretakers were paid $40 a month, but that wasn't too bad; it wouldn't cost them over $20 for groceries, so they still had some money left, and they were very much sought after jobs in spite of the low salary.

John Davis: So, Bill worked as a caretaker to keep the snow shoveled off some of the CCC camps. And we also would use him on winter trail maintenance to keep the markers up on the ski trail between Paradise and Narada Falls. And Bill was doing that kind of work when he was called to give us a hand on this rescue that I just told you about, and from then on of course was given his Presidential appointment as a park ranger.

John Davis: Well, I could talk for quite a long while about the early days. Maybe one other thing that I should tell about and that is the winter patrols that we used to make in Mount Rainier. As I told you, the rangers would work many hours a day seven days a week all through the spring, summer, and fall, but the rest of the year we didn't have too much work that could be done because of the snow and climatic conditions, so we had quite a bit of time on our hands.

John Davis: And one of the problems that we had with our ranger force was the problem of cabin fever. After a month or two of inactivity the rangers would begin going sour on the world and hating themselves and everyone else. So, we thought that it might be well to provide some activity for them to get their blood circulating and to help their mental attitude. So, we started making winter patrols around the park.

John Davis: The first patrol was made with Frank Brockman, the park naturalist at the time, and Major Tomlinson authorized me to go down and buy what equipment I needed. I can remember going to Seattle and buying two down sleeping bags and skis and ski sealskins and – well, we had everything but the kitchen range on those trips. We had the old Trapper Nelson packboards. We would take a flashlight, a revolver, a hatchet, emergency food, skis and snowshoes, so you can very well imagine that we were well loaded down. And it was the first patrol that was ever made in the winter, and we really had a rough time.

John Davis: We finally abandoned our skis when the snow got pretty thin and icy at the lower end—. First, I should tell you that we went from Paradise Valley to Ohanapecosh, a distance of about twenty-two miles I believe it was, by trail, which was quite an undertaking, down Stevens Canyon. Anyway, we abandoned our skis just before we got to Ohanapecosh after dark and had to go back up and get them the next day, we were so completely exhausted.

John Davis: Well, after that first trip we knew a little more about what we could do, so the next season or so we built patrol cabins spaced around the park about oh, fifteen miles generally, some were a little more perhaps, some a little less; so that even under normal travel conditions we would get in around two or three o'clock in the afternoon, and if we hit tougher conditions we might get in later, sometimes after dark. But we stocked those cabins with food, fuel – wood, that is – and blankets, so we didn't have to carry much, and we would take trips across one side of the park. We would leave from the west side highway and go across to Mowich Lake and over to the Carbon River; or we would go up to Yakima Park and then across the north side to Carbon River; or from Yakima Park across the east side down to Ohanapecosh; or from Paradise Valley over to Ohanapecosh as I have mentioned.

John Davis: The rangers themselves were, as I said, old-timers and many of them preferred to use snowshoes, which we let them do, and they sure had a hard job in slogging through that snow. But these winter patrols were not very well accepted; they weren't very popular with the men. They were very well satisfied to spend the winter rather leisurely, so that I was about the only one and, well, Frank Brockman and a few of the others, that were pushing the thing, so that at times they kind of used to give us a bad time about these winter patrols and all the work we had to do to accomplish them in comparison to the benefits to be gained; and I'll have to admit there weren't many benefits except that it did give us an opportunity to learn how to travel in our park under any conditions at any time. And frankly, some of the most interesting and exciting experiences that I had during my years as a ranger occurred on those winter patrols.

John Davis: I have never seen the country more beautiful; I have never enjoyed anything quite as much, when I look back, as the winter patrols that we used to make around the park. I don't believe that they make them nowadays; I think perhaps they have discontinued them. But at that time certainly they served a good purpose and I'll always remember them.

Herbert Evison: John, were they patrols by individuals or did they go in pairs?

John Davis: Oh, we would never go less than three in a party, so that – it was rather dangerous skiing out a long ways from any road, out in the timber in deep snow. Of course we'd get up in alpine country too. But there was always a certain amount of danger involved. In fact, we used to carry morphine with us. We had two or three morphine tablets that I had acquired from a doctor and certainly I won't mention his name, but we had those simply in case one of us did receive a severe sprain or a dislocated hip or shoulder or a broken leg, which could have happened, that at least we could take off the edge of the shock that would result from such an accident until help

could be brought in and the man could be gotten out of there. And the idea of three would be that one man would stay with the injured person while the other one went for help. So, we never travelled less than three in a group.

John Davis: Rather, this is a little sideline and perhaps I shouldn't say this but when we would arrive at a cabin it would be completely covered with snow. Most of them were covered with eight or ten feet of snow and we would have to dig down to get in and also dig down to get the covering off the chimney. And the inside of those log cabins was pretty much like the inside of a refrigerator except it was much damper; it would be very cold and damp. And we would be quite warm and perhaps perspiring when we arrived and before we could build a fire and get the cabin warmed up why, we would have cooled off, so there was a good chance to catch a bad cold or at least we would be quite uncomfortable until we would get the cabin, the dead chill, out of the cabin.

John Davis: So, one way we found to correct that situation was that we would carry grain alcohol with us, good old grain alcohol, and the first thing that we did when we got into the cabin was to melt snow and boil the water, get hot water and make us a hot toddy. We would always have a lemon and we had canned butter in the cabin, a little nutmeg and sugar, and we really had a wonderful hot toddy and that would keep us warm and keep us in good spirits until the cabin warmed up and until we could get our dinner. And of course, we enjoyed, as you can imagine, we enjoyed that a great deal and it served a real purpose, I think.

Herbert Evison: When you say "kept you in good spirits" of course there was no pun intended.

John Davis: No, of course not. That was – it was – I look back on those hot toddies as the best drinks I ever had.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, on those patrols you certainly did more than just plod along from one station to another. What did you look for when you were on a patrol?

John Davis: Well, actually we would look for animal tracks, but in that deep snow the larger animals: the bear had hibernated, the deer had gone to lower elevations, so that about the only tracks we would see were the snowshoe rabbits and marten tracks or something like that. And we would also look, check on the possibility of someone running a trapline in the park. We had quite a few marten and the pelt of a marten was worth quite a lot at that time, so the traplines had been run in the park and – however, not many – and we would just make general observations of conditions. But I think the main value of those trips was that it taught us how to ski, it taught us

how to survive, and taught us how to travel in real tough situations, storm conditions; it taught us something about snowslides and avalanches and it gave us confidence that should anything ever develop we would have the knowledge and the ability to get to any part of our park at any time of the year, besides the advantage of getting the men off their tails in the wintertime and giving them something to do. Actually, while they griped a lot about those trips, I do know that they enjoyed them just as much as I did and they learned to like them, and it was really a fine thing, I think; although actually we didn't accomplish a heck of a lot in the way of wildlife protection, there was some value there perhaps.

Herbert Evison: Looking back on it have you ever had a feeling that perhaps there might have been more year-round rangers at Rainier than were really needed? That you might have had not so many the year round and perhaps more help in the summer?

John Davis: No, I don't think so. You are pretty well dependent on men in the park – at least we were in those days – who had a knowledge of the park, and you couldn't give a man a part-time job and expect him to be back every year; so that having those men there with the knowledge of the park was certainly an advantage. The little that the government may have lost in the way of paying them salaries for a few months during the winter really didn't amount to a great deal. We did need someone at the end of the roads that approached the park, and that's where they were stationed, because there would be visitors come up that far quite frequently during the winter. And in order to keep track of the park they were stationed there; these men weren't all at one place; they were stationed scattered around the park, so that simply their presence there justified their being on the job. No, I don't think there would be any question about that at all, Herb.

John Davis: Well, of course, Herb, I could go talking about the days of Mount Rainier; that was my first park, my first job, and I was there twelve years, and I was young and physically active so that my roots of course went pretty deep in that area.

John Davis: Incidentally, I was – as I said I was there twelve years, and I was the first one to ever be transferred and promoted out of Mount Rainier National Park. In those days we didn't know about lateral transfers. Promotions were made for the most part within the park organization, and I can remember very vividly that I thought some day if I could be chief ranger – that's when I first went to work there – that I would feel that I had accomplished a great deal and be very satisfied. So it is interesting to note that particularly in view of the rapid and – too rapid – movement of personnel in our organization today where they hardly remain in a park long enough to get acquainted with it at all, it is interesting to note that in

those days I was there for twelve years and was the first man to ever be transferred out of the park, when I went to Zion as assistant superintendent.

Herbert Evison: I'd like to ask a man of your varied experience for your opinion about periods of service in a place. You were saying nowadays they are too rapidly moved. Would you make any general observation about how long a man should be in field jobs of various kinds before he is well enough acquainted with that job to really begin producing?

John Davis: Well, that's pretty hard to say, Herb. You can only speak in generalities, of course; but I do know that it takes a man at least two years in an area before he becomes – before he feels that he is fairly well acquainted with the area and before he becomes fully effective on his job. Now this applies to a ranger, to a park superintendent: It's two years before you begin to have confidence in your judgment in the decisions, because there is such a tremendous amount to learn – the country itself, the people you are working with, the peculiar problems of that park. And while you work and do a lot of good in those first two years, you accomplish a lot of work, you are not fully effective; and really I've never felt that I knew a park or began to have confidence in my own judgments in my decisions until I had been in that park for about two years; and after that you begin to become really fully effective.

Herbert Evison: And after that therefore there should be a fairly lengthy period during which you can put out one hundred percent production.

John Davis: I think so. Of course, when you have promotional positions to fill, why, you have no choice but to move men, and certainly it would be unfair to bring someone from outside the Service to fill them, so, it's too bad but I really don't know how to avoid much of it. There's some that no doubt can be avoided. I think these lateral transfers sometimes are made too quick, or when a man will be in a park only a year and they will pull him out and promote him somewhere else, why, that park has received really very little value and benefit from that man. And I wish there was some way, some solution to it; I don't have any except that I think we should avoid unnecessary transfers either laterally or promotion if we can possibly do it. And certainly, I feel that we should avoid moving key personnel such as the man in charge of fire control activities or a chief ranger just before a summer season starts. I think most of those moves are caused by the superintendents themselves. They leave vacancies that they have in their organization open during the winter months to make salary savings, and don't fill them until the spring, and then there's a great rush to fill a lot of positions, a lot of vacancies are created; when you move one man you have to move six others, it seems; but it does leave everyone with

inexperienced men just before the fire season, just before the very active summer season, that have practically no experience. And believe me it's pretty important. Each area is different; each area has its different problems, and to have men who are familiar with just the geographic locations and the terrain and the problems that are peculiar to that area is extremely valuable.

John Davis: There's one other thing or perhaps several other things, Herb, that perhaps I ought to tell you about during my days at Mount Rainier. And one was the Sunset Park fire. I'll never forget that. It's a good example of what can happen in these northern parks.

John Davis: We had had a road clearing job, road construction job, and they were clearing the trees off the right-of-way and had to burn them on the right-of-way – nowdays they would salvage these logs, I believe – anyway they burned them, decked them and burned them. And on one job we had had seven-and-a-half inches of rain in October and then on the 7th of November a wind came up, the humidity dropped, and sparks were blown out of the ashes of where they had burned and started a fire that covered 8,000 acres in one day. Now this, mind you, was on November 7; covered 8,000 acres in one day. The fire travelled almost exclusively in the crowns of the trees.

John Davis: We sent crews in there – this was before I was chief ranger; I was still a ranger then – they sent crews in there as soon as they could get them, and then the next day they had a hard time getting the crews out of there because of about twelve inches or more of fresh snow that had fallen; so I kind of wanted to point that out.

John Davis: There's one other thing that it's hard to talk about a park perhaps without talking about yourself, and I have no desire to aggrandize myself, but I do want to tell you about one situation that occurred while I was there.

John Davis: While I was chief ranger, I was the coordinator of six CCC camps and at the same time they had sent my assistant chief ranger, who was Preston Macy, over to Olympic National Park. We woke up one morning and received a telegram that we were responsible for Olympic National Monument at that time, and the Major, Tomlinson, had the problem of getting someone over there to see what the place was like and what needed to be done, so he sent Macy who was my assistant chief. So, I worked without an assistant chief. Of course, Macy had quite a job too, I'll have to admit that. But I worked without an assistant chief with a very sizeable organization and with six CCC camps to supervise, and believe me that was a full-time job. Many long hours it took to do it and it was quite a load to carry.

John Davis: But the reason I mention it is because those things happened in those days. We didn't cry about staffing; we didn't yell too much about it; it was simply that was the job and we had to do the best we could. And many times they may look back on the old days and think they were pretty leisurely but in reality we worked like the very devil and had pretty heavy responsibilities, much more so than you would normally find, I think, nowadays. We are so much better staffed and when an unusual situation develops the Service usually moves in and provides perhaps not all the staff we need but certainly more staff than we would ever have been provided in those early days.

John Davis: Well, I think I had better leave Mount Rainier. I could keep on talking there for a long long time, Herb.

John Davis: At Zion it was quite an interesting experience. Patraw was superintendent when I went there; he was superintendent about seven months when he was transferred to Hot Springs and Paul Franke came in as superintendent. He was there about seven months when they sent Marsh Finnan in there. Marsh was not well. He was there about a year and actually was not on the job too much. And then Marsh left, and they brought Paul Franke back; and all of this occurred in a period of about three-and-a-quarter years that I was the assistant superintendent at Zion; I just mention that in passing.

Herbert Evison: You had to be the stabilizer of the organization, I suspect.

John Davis: Well, it was quite a bit of work, but again we all got along fine, and it worked out very well. Zion and Bryce Canyon and we had about five national monuments – Lehman Caves, Capitol Reef, Cedar Brakes, oh gosh – Zion National Monument, and I guess there must have been one – Timpanogos Cave – were all in there and they all had ERA or WPA projects going in them at the time, so we were kept pretty busy. But I enjoyed my years there.

John Davis: Then I went to Grand Canyon as assistant superintendent. Doctor Bryant had just arrived there as superintendent, and I enjoyed my years there very much. Most of the time I was there was during the war years so that our construction activity and our travel was at a relatively low ebb. However, I used to go down into the desert and encourage the Army forces that were in training down in the desert to make a trip up to the park as a training trip. We had an old CCC camp at headquarters there at Grand Canyon and we kept that building busy all the time. They would send up oh, 3- or 4- or 500, maybe sometimes several thousand soldiers at one time that were in training during the war time on a field trip, a training trip, up to the park, and it gave some use to the park; it gave the men a delightful experience in the park there, certainly a break from their severe training program and

schedules, and so we kept the park pretty busy playing host to the Armed Forces there. Of course, we had many very distinguished visitors come into Grand Canyon. I remember that; remember Prince Faisal from Arabia who along with his brother, another prince, two slaves and several sheiks, that came in there. And the heir apparent to the throne of Iraq or Iran, one or the other was in there. And Lord and Lady Halifax, and many others. So, it was really quite an interesting assignment.

John Davis: Then I went to the regional office where I got involved with Southwestern Monuments and spent almost eleven years of my career fighting the battles of Southwestern Monuments. I was perhaps instrumental in the reestablishment of the superintendent's position for Southwestern Monuments and the movement of their headquarters from Santa Fe to Globe, Arizona, where through my efforts along with a lot of help of many others we had acquired Gila Pueblo, and that remained as the headquarters for Southwestern National Monuments, certainly one of the finest organizations that I have ever known in the National Park Service and one that perhaps did more good for the Service through the personal contacts that these monument superintendents and the men in the monuments would make with visitors.

John Davis: Now, admittedly I am prejudiced about Southwestern Monuments, and others could very well challenge my statements and I wouldn't blame them if they did; but we did have a fine organization, and I always regretted that the Service saw fit to discontinue it, because I think it was the finest unit in our entire Park Service organization.

John Davis: When I went to Washington, Connie Wirth had called me and asked me if I wanted to – or if I would take the job as chief of conservation and protection, and I think I surprised him somewhat by giving him an answer and told him I would go at the same time that he offered it to me. I was glad to go back there, and when I did go back there one of the first things that was very obvious to me was the need for a division of ranger activities, and actually before I was transferred back there I made the proposal to the Management Improvement Committee that such a division be established, which was rather a brash act for a man who had not even moved to the Washington office yet to make and to tell them what they needed there; but I felt so strongly that they did need such a division that I did make the proposal, and worked with many others, and again I had the help of Eivind Scoyen; Connie Wirth certainly backed wholeheartedly, and we finally got the division of ranger activities established and I was made the first chief of that division.

Herbert Evison: John, back about 1946 or '47 the then superintendent of Great Smoky Mountains National Park made the suggestion to me that there ought to be

in the Washington office of the Park Service some office which specifically represented the interests of the ranger. He called attention to the fact that every other field activity has specific representation in there. And later I made – I passed on that suggestion to a gentleman in Washington by the name of Tolson and the response that I got to my suggestion that there ought to be a ranger branch or something of that kind in there was, "Oh, no, you don't need anything like that. Everybody looks after the ranger's business." And of course, you know when anything is everybody's business it's nobody's business. I offer you that as a preliminary to asking you to discuss a little bit the reasons for the establishment of the division of ranger activities and what you concluded, as you considered it, the job of that division was.

John Davis: Well, Herb, we are getting out of the field of reminiscing. However, I don't mind commenting some on it. The need for a division of ranger activities has been discussed for oh, twenty-five or thirty years, ever since – perhaps not that long – but ever since the Service regionalized. Everyone else had a counterpart in a regional office and in the Washington office except the rangers. And you pointed out a very good idea, that they felt that the regional director and the director and the others were the ones responsible for the rangers, but actually those men perform a management function. Of course, it's not up to me for me to tell them what their job is, but their function is primarily management and it's not protection, it's not the basic job that a ranger does. So, while they did a very fine job, Tolson and everyone else, in looking after the rangers, there was no one who had a definite responsibility to promote and develop the policies and the techniques that were needed in protection work and in rangers' work.

John Davis: I think it still remains one of the least developed fields of activity that we have in the National Park Service. There's a tremendous need for more clearly stated policies, for more clearly defined policies that guide the preservation and protection of a park, the handling of visitors, the operation of entrance stations, and you can go through the whole gamut of ranger activities. And it is perhaps the most basic activity that we have.

John Davis: The rangers are the ones who are on the firing line. They deal with the visitors; they deal in the preservation of our national parks, and the rest of us more or less do the mechanical work that makes it possible for them to do their job, do the job that they do. So, my thinking perhaps is getting a little bit foggy to sit down and discuss this intelligently without giving it quite a bit of thought. It's a difficult thing to do.

John Davis: But I do think that the rangers should have somebody that is responsible not just for the rangers as individuals, not a political representative in the regional offices or the Washington office that is there to look after the

welfare of rangers. However, knowing the facts of life as we do that has some importance. But basically, the most important thing is someone who will develop and promote and refine the techniques, the methods, that the ranger uses in managing and protecting park values and in dealing with the millions of visitors we have coming to the parks, and there is a tremendously fertile field open still in that.

John Davis: I am sorry in a way. Larry Cook certainly, I know, is doing a splendid job and doing as much as he can. But at times I have regretted that I did leave that job to come to the field, but the temptation of having a large national park and completing my career as a field superintendent was really too great and I yielded to it and came out to the park. But it would have been a tremendously interesting job to stay there and, as Larry Cook is doing (and is doing a very fine job of it) to develop the policies, the procedures, and the standards and the methods that apply to the protection and preservation of our parks and everything that's in them along with assisting in dealing with the millions of visitors that come to the parks. There is a tremendously fertile field open for much improvement to be made.

Herbert Evison: I have discussed the work of the division of ranger activities with Larry and others in there a good many times, and one of the comments that Larry made to me on two or three occasions was that even with an inadequate organization – and you never began to have an adequate organization when you were in there, because you were brand new and this had to wait and acquire them gradually – but he made the point that in spite of the inadequacies of the ranger activities division as far as man-power was concerned, it had a tendency to become a sort of catch-all for chores that nobody else wanted to do, or that there was no specific assignment of duties for. I wondered if you found that were true during the period you served as head of the division.

John Davis: No, I don't remember being faced with that problem. Of course, there are assignments that come up that have to be given to someone that perhaps don't clearly fall in the realm of responsibility of any one individual, and certainly the director should have the prerogative of assigning that to whoever he feels can do a good job. So, I was never bothered nor have I been concerned about that phase of it.

John Davis: The ranger division has made wonderful strides. We did get representatives in each regional office, and they have their branches fairly well established. I think – I am sure that I am inclined to be impatient and want things done quicker than can be accomplished from a practical point of view, so that they are making good progress and I perhaps shouldn't be impatient and want them to do more, because that takes time and it will

come and they have made wonderful progress in setting up the division of ranger activities.

John Davis: I think the Service has recognized the value of having such a division with so many different differences of opinion developed over the boat use on Yellowstone Lake and the reduction of the elk herd, and there have been many other activities throughout the Service that required someone who was specialized and who had the responsibility for handling them. It's really a tremendous field of operation and has a tremendous future to it too, and much can be done. I keep emphasizing the fact that there's still a lot to be done, and I am sure it will be accomplished.

Herbert Evison: John, I would like your opinion on this, and I don't think it's a dangerous one to ask you: You have had experience with rangers now for thirty-five or thirty-six years. Do you feel that the Park Service today is getting as – is recruiting as good quality people for the ranger job as was the case ten years or twenty years ago?

John Davis: Well, I think so. The men we are recruiting today are far superior to the men we recruited when I was young in the Service, there's no question about that. They are more intelligent, more capable men. I think that we during periods when there is a lot of unemployment and there is higher competition for jobs, theoretically at least the Service should be able to recruit a better grade of employees than they would at other times. But during the last ten or fifteen years, employment has been at a high level, there has not been the competition for jobs that there used to be; so we are in a labor market, we are in a market for a certain skills and certain abilities and we have to compete with other fields of activity. And when there's a lot of competition, perhaps we have to be a little smarter than the others to keep up the caliber, and I think we've done a pretty good job of that.

John Davis: Now the young men that I see coming in the ranger force here in this park and other parks, and I assume it's the same throughout the Service, are pretty doggoned good men, darned good men.

Herbert Evison: How would you appraise the results of the kind of intensive training they've been getting at the Training Center the last five or six years? Do you see specific results from that?

John Davis: Oh, yes. I think these training centers – the National Park Service Training Center that we have at Yosemite that's to be moved to Grand Canyon – has done a splendid job; and I think all these other training sessions that we have are extremely valuable. Of course, there is always the danger of going overboard on training; it becomes popular and the thing to do and

everybody wants to do it, and sometimes there is that danger of perhaps training too much.

John Davis: My feeling on training for the young rangers and naturalists, historians, archeologists, engineers, and so on, fiscal people – I think they all should have a chance at that training initially when they first enter the Service, but I don't think that we should give them too many – train them in too many techniques and job skills. I think that our training is more of an indoctrination training to give them a good idea of what the National Park Service is, what its objectives are, what its basic policies are, something about the history of the Park Service, so that they get the broad picture and become indoctrinated in Park Service philosophy, to capture some of the spirit that the Park Service has had through the years and that we are always in danger of losing when we grow bigger. It's hard to maintain that spirit but I think we should. I think the emphasis should be on indoctrination and giving a broad background picture of the Service rather than attempting at an early date, when these men are new to the Service to teach some specific skills. And that's my feeling in a nutshell on it, Herb.

Herbert Evison: Now, is there anything still that you would like to add to this? I don't want to cut you off while you still have good stuff up your sleeve.

John Davis: No, I don't think so, Herb. I could talk about the Service, which has been my whole life, my whole career, for quite a few hours and express many opinions, many of them which perhaps would be a little bit fuzzy and prejudiced, I am sure. But the Park Service has certainly been a wonderful organization through the years. I have never had any, not the slightest regret that I made my career in the Service. It has been an extremely interesting, exciting, and worthwhile life and I wouldn't have traded with anyone.

Herbert Evison: Thank you very much for that, John.

[END OF INTERVIEW]