

National Park Service (NPS) History Collection

NPS Oral History Collection (HFCA 1817)
Herbert Evison's National Park Service Oral History Project, 1952-1999



Meredith Guillet
November 17, 1963

Interview conducted by S. Herbert Evison
Transcribed by Unknown
Digitized by Sara E. Forrest

This digital transcript contains updated pagination, formatting, and editing for accessibility and compliance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. Interview content has not been altered.
The original typed transcript is preserved in the NPS History Collection.

The National Park Service does not have a release form for this interview. Access is provided for research and accessibility via assistive technology purposes only. Individuals are responsible for ensuring that their use complies with copyright laws.

NPS History Collection
Harpers Ferry Center
P.O. Box 50
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425
HFC_Archivist@nps.gov

MEREDITH GUILLET

RELL L-III

SIDE II

Containing changes and corrections submitted with undated letter of early July 1964

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Herbert Evison: This is Herbert Evison. This is the evening of November 16 (1963) and right now I am in the home of the superintendent of Canyon de Chelly National Monument. That superintendent is Meredith Guillet, and Meredith is in here as superintendent for the second time in his National Park Service career, and for very good reasons, and I think we will get some of the reasons for that, Meredith, if you will give some of your background in connection with this country and your family's background.

Meredith Guillet: Well, Herb, my father came out in 1886. His two brothers, Peter, and Herman Guillet had been here previously, Peter in 1879 and had gone on to California, then he came back in 1883. And Mr. Ed Noland who had a trading post at Navajo Springs also had a trading post near the Four Corners at that time. My uncle Peter went to work there for Ed Noland; later he bought out the Four Corners store and he brought his brother Herman out. Then my other uncle, Sterl (Sterling) Thomas, for whom Thomas House at Mesa Verde is named, came out with my father, and they worked at the trading post near the Four Corners for a while. It burned down, and they moved down the river and established a trading post at Riverview, which is now Aneth, Utah, and my father worked with the other three brothers; he took care of the stock.

Meredith Guillet: At that time, they traded with both the Utes and the Navajo Indians. The Utes were on the north side of the San Juan River and the Navajos were on the south side. And my uncles Pete and Herm took care of the trading activities. My uncle Sterl took Navajo workers to the mining camps. At that time the mines at Telluride, Rico, and Silverton were going full blast, they used Navajo laborers. He recruited some labor and took it up there, but my father took care of all the stock: this included the buying of sheep and cattle. They furnished a lot of the meat for the mining towns - Rico, Silverton, Telluride, and that general area.

Meredith Guillet: My father later left the store and took up a homestead in the lower Montezuma Valley and began raising cattle. He bought Navajo cattle, not of the best type, but he imported pure Hereford from the east and started the TIL cattle brand there. At this time, he was buying cattle from the Navajos, and he met the late Chee Dodge first in 1895, who was running the trading post at Round Rock at that time, and they became fast friends. My father later, with his stock activities and all, made regular trips trading with the Navajos buying cattle, sheep, livestock; but their horses were rather poor stock at that time and that was one of my father's hobbies, raising fine horses. He also imported the first Missouri jacks mules back to raise good mules in the Montezuma Valley.

Meredith Guillet: But the Navajos needed good horses and they were always after him to bring them down, so he began bringing good stock down on the reservation. In the wintertime the Guillet brothers had a flour mill in Mancos, Colorado, and he ran the flour mill; as soon as the grass was high

enough in the spring, he would get his horses, come down and begin buying stock. He did this for quite a number of years.

Meredith Guillet: My uncles, later leaving Riverview, moved up to what was then called Mitchell Springs; it is now the thriving town of Cortez, Colorado. And they were among perhaps the first merchants in the town of Cortez today. My uncle Sterl Thomas was one of the first sheriffs of Montezuma County, and my father at one time served as the under-sheriff to some of the very old-timers in Mancos, Colorado.

Meredith Guillet: But I was born in 1910, September 10, in Mancos, Colorado, where I went to school. As soon as I became tough enough, I guess, and of the right age that my father figured I could stand a 4- or 500-mile horseback trip driving 4- or 500 head of cattle, I began coming with him on the reservation. My first trip to the Navajo Reservation was in 1921; I was 11 years old. We left Mancos and we had about 60 head of wild horses. Some of them hadn't been broke, some of them had; and we brought them down to Crystal, and these horses had already been spoken for, they were special orders; and we went over to Chee Dodge's. That was when I first met who is now Anna Wauneka, who was then Anna Dodge. She was going to school in Santa Fe and had just come back. I remember the first meeting very well, because she was a very good-looking girl, and after eating mostly mutton and bread (biscuits out of a Dutch oven) she had sliced oranges for me, and I'll never forget this in my life. (Is this the kind of stuff you want?)

Meredith Guillet: I was fairly young, and we went down to Tanner Springs, Chee Dodge's ranch down near Wide Ruins, and we had to wait for the Navajos to round up the cattle. It was near the Fourth of July at that time and some of them wanted to go to a Fourth of July celebration in Gallup. So, my father decided, "Well, we'll just take a trip over the Reservation while we are waiting," so we headed north. This was in 1921. The Bernheimer Expedition had just, I guess, gone into Rainbow Bridge, but we were traveling across country, and we stopped at Cow Springs, then went north to Kayenta. My father had known the Wetherills for years; the Wetherills were old Mancos residents; John, Al, and Dick, all of them, he knew quite well. And we decided we would just jaunt around the country.

Meredith Guillet: We went over to Navajo Mountain and that was my first visit to Rainbow Bridge National Monument. I guess it was a national monument at that time, but I don't remember it as being such; I think it was created in 1906, but there hadn't been too many people in, and national monuments were not too well known at that time, but we went in. Then we came out and went south across country, coming back to Tanner Springs. I remember at this particular time the mesa above Tanner Springs completely covered with arrow points and metates. My father was a believer in letting everything be. He never allowed me to dig up any graves or anything of that sort, but if we did find an arrowhead, why, that wasn't too bad. I

remember I picked up quite a number of them, some of which I later donated to Mesa Verde National Park. At that time, I didn't think I was going to do it, but I did. Maybe my later conscience got the best of me.

Meredith Guillet: I also remember this trip particularly, because while they were rounding up cattle a Navajo woman was weaving a rug, and she would teach me how to weave and let me weave a little bit on this rug, and she would also teach roe words. Well, we had Navajo helpers - my father could speak Navajo quite fluently and I knew a few words, but working with the Navajos they took quite an interest in me and they would teach me words as we would go along with the cattle during the day, and then at night they would ask me to say them back to them, and many times I would have to say them back many times.

Meredith Guillet: I remember one incident particularly. These cattle were very wild, and on this first trip my father was afraid that they would stampede, and we put them in a corral at Klăg Ē Tōh and my father said, "If I kick you during the night, you get up and run just as fast as you can run." We had two old Navajos with us who were there, and in the middle of the night something scared the cattle and they hit the side of the fence, Dad kicked me, and I took off. I didn't have many clothes on, but I didn't know which way I was going. Well, the Navajos got quite a bang out of that, and they first started calling me "The Boy That Runs Fast."

Meredith Guillet: We went along with the cattle. Finally, we got up to Chee Dodge's, and Chee gave me my first Navajo name, which was Denet Tsosi, which meant Slim Navajo. It was a very good name, but one hardly given to a boy. I think it was given more to make me feel good than anything else.

Meredith Guillet: We took the cattle on to Mancos, put them on the range.

Herbert Evison: Let me interrupt you. What was the translation of that name?

Meredith Guillet: Ashkēē Ū Ā Lee Gōt - boy that runs away.

Meredith Guillet: And then for several years, from the time I was in the fifth or sixth grade until I graduated from high school, I spent practically every summer on the Reservation with cattle. We almost always bought 4- or 500 head of Chee Dodge's cattle, taking them north to Mancos, putting them on the range. My uncle and father were in business together and he generally took care of the sale of the cattle after they got them to Mancos, then my father would come back, and we would buy ewes and lambs. This generally would go beyond the time school started, so many times I would be put on the old stage, maybe at Tohatchi or Gallup, sent north to Cortez and Mancos so I would get to school on time.

Meredith Guillet: But as soon as Dad got up with the sheep, then my after-school duties were feeding sheep and taking care of carrying all the supplies to the herders and things of that sort. And then Dad would start in with the flour

mill again. So, my time during school was generally pretty well taken up, and even then, we had Navajos helping us up there.

Meredith Guillet: When I was a senior in high school I came with my father; we were buying sheep from Chee Dodge - or cattle, rather, from Chee Dodge - and Chee told me he was going to give me a real good heifer. I told him, well, I didn't know, and he said, "Yes, I want to see how good you are; you pick one out." Well, I was rather hesitant to pick the best one I could see, as long as it was a gift, so I picked a rather poor one. Chee said, "Oh, you don't know how to pick cattle. Let me pick them for you." So, we had one of his cowboys cut one out over here, then he saw one he decided looked a little better and he cut one out over here; then pretty soon he saw another one; and he cut five head of his best heifers out and he said, "Now, which one are you going to take?" And I said, "You can pick them better than I; you pick one." And he said, "No, take all five of them."

Meredith Guillet: So, these five heifers gave me my start in college. My father had put aside some money to help me, but these five heifers, with the money that I got helping my father, in percentage and all, helped me get my first year of college.

Meredith Guillet: Well, about that time my father, who had always heard of karakul fur sheep, and the long-haired Navajo sheep he thought would cross with the karakul sheep, so he imported some of the first karakul bucks that were used in this country. He had held out about 200 head of old Navajo long-haired sheep because the wool made the best blankets; it wasn't greasy like Rambouillet and the other. And he had thought not only of perhaps getting a good grade of fur for Persian lamb or something of that sort, but also of improving a good Navajo weaving wool.

Meredith Guillet: This happened of course in 1928, and I guess most of you who are of the right age remember what happened in 1929, when everything went haywire. Well, my father had to sell his karakul sheep and all, and he lost most everything he had. I was in school at the time, and had it not been for Chee Dodge's five heifers I don't know but what I might have had to quit. But I did get a job in a restaurant and managed to work my way through at least almost two years of school; I went five quarters, actually; I had to quit the third quarter because I didn't have quite enough money to go right on through and I had a job, so I went to work in Grand Junction, Colorado.

Herbert Evison: Where did you go to college?

Meredith Guillet: At Mesa, what is now Mesa College in Grand Junction. At that time, it was Grand Junction Junior College.

Meredith Guillet: But I was working in a restaurant, and I got a piece of steel wool in my finger and I got blood poisoning quite badly and I had to quit, so I came back to Mancos and I had been there about two weeks when I was approached by a friend of mine, Frank Humiston, who was working at

Mesa Verde National Park. He needed a rodman for a survey crew. So, I would say that around the middle of September of 1931, I went to work with the survey crew under Jack Williams which was the engineer's name. There was an engineering department at that time in the Park Service out of San Francisco. And I worked with the first survey crew to survey the deep well, the trails town Spruce Canyon to Navajo over to the west side; and we also surveyed many of the ruin roads that are in use today.

Meredith Guillet: Well, I worked there until sometime the following spring, and of course that was depression time at that time also. Then I went back, and I worked with my father with his stock; he hadn't lost all of his sheep yet (which he did later), but we still had some stock, and stayed that winter. Then I went to Denver looking for work, which was very difficult to find. I found odd jobs here and there, but I had two sisters who had pretty good jobs and they decided that perhaps I shouldn't be wasting my time and they went together and paid my tuition for a course in free-hand drawing, which was one of my hidden talents, I suppose, at Chappell's School, which was the Denver University School of Art. And art has since been a hobby of mine, although I have had no further formal training than that.

Meredith Guillet: I came back to Mancos and went to work with the Forest Service on insect control work at Big Water Springs up in the Glade district up near Delores, Colorado. This was about the time the CCC's were being started. Paul R. Franke, who is now retired from the National Park Service, and I know that anyone listening to this record will probably have met him or know him real well - was my superintendent of schools all through high school. His wife Betty was also a teacher of both myself and my wife; and Paul R. Franke, knowing my interest in art, sent word that they were planning some work at Mesa Verde and that they didn't have the money at the time but if I were interested in joining the CCC's he thought it might work into something pretty good. So, I probably am one of the few people to quit a pretty good paying job to join the CCC, but I did, and I went to work at Mesa Verde.

Meredith Guillet: My father was on the Reservation at that time running the Crystal Trading Post with Charlie Newcomb. Well, this money coming onto the Reservation for the building of new day schools and things of that sort was creating quite a bit of work in the trading posts on the Reservation. My father thought I was rather foolish, as I had turned down a real good job working in a trading post also, to go to work in the CCC's at Mesa Verde.

Meredith Guillet: I worked there, and we built the second diorama, I think, that probably had been built in the Park Service. The first one was constructed by Lyle Bennett, a Basketmaker II diorama. And my main job was the constructing of a diorama (Basketmaker III).

Meredith Guillet: I stayed at Mesa Verde for a year, and Mr. Franke thought that he was going to get an appropriation for museum maintenance and ruins reconnaissance and that sort of thing. It didn't come through, and my

father was giving me quite a bit of pressure to help him on the Reservation, so I left the CCC and came down on the Reservation and went to work as an Indian trader at the Crystal store. Of course, during this time, I had been courting my wife, Emma, and we were engaged but at that time she didn't know whether she wanted to live out on an Indian trading post forty miles from the nearest hospital or any other facility - well, we were at least 100 miles from Gallup, New Mexico, the nearest town; and I couldn't talk her into marrying me and going down there with me.

Meredith Guillet: But I worked there for quite a while, and of course I saved most of my money, then later I went to work at the Greasewood Springs trading post after Mr. Newcomb sold out, and I worked for Mr. Ashcroft and Quentin Taylor there; later also at the Mancos Creek trading post below Cortez.

Meredith Guillet: Well, I still remembered my work in the National Park Service and had wanted to get in, but I had saved up enough money to more or less have a little bit for investment opportunity. John Bauer, a friend of mine who had worked for one of the old-time merchants in Mancos, Colorado, Ellis Taylor, bought out the store and wanted me to go in with him. So, I went in, and for the next four years I worked as a merchant, I guess you would say; I was assistant manager of the Bauer Cash Store in Mancos, during which time I was married to my present wife, Emma. I did all right in the store business, but I was getting a little bit irritated at all the ladies coming in, pinching the tomatoes and then complaining because they were soft. So finally, Don Watson, who was working at Mesa Verde, used to come down and kid me a little bit about counter jumping and this and that, and one day he said, "Meredith, wouldn't you really like to go back to work for the Park Service?" And I said, "Yes, Don, I really would." He said, "Well, we have got a job at Black Canyon of the Gunnison. It's seasonal, but maybe we can keep you working during the winter at something else." So, I said okay.

Meredith Guillet: I told John that I needed outside work, that the inside work just wasn't cut out for me, so he gave me his blessing and I went to work again for the National Park Service at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument.

Herbert Evison: That would have been about what year?

Meredith Guillet: That was about 1937.

Herbert Evison: Before you go ahead, I want to take you back a little bit. You mentioned repeatedly Chee Dodge. Now people listening to this are not going to know who Chee Dodge was. I take it he was a Navajo.

Meredith Guillet: Chee Dodge was you might say the traditional chief of the Navajo for at least 40 years, maybe 50, I don't know the exact number of years. He was an interpreter for Colonel Dodge at the Bosque Redondo, the area near

Fort Sumner, New Mexico, where the Navajos were exiled after Kit Carson had rounded them up in 1864, and they kept them there until 1868. Chee Dodge was a small boy at that time, and on the walk to the Bosque Redondo an old man picked Chee up - an old Navajo man, I should say. One of the soldiers told him to put him down, that if he couldn't come alone, let the coyotes get him. About this time one of the officers who happened to be by heard the soldier say this, and of course he took care of the soldier, but he also took Chee, the little boy, up on his saddle and he rode along with him, and he became quite fond of Chee. And later during the years Chee became sort of an officer's servant boy around Fort Sumner, later becoming an interpreter.

Meredith Guillet: When the Navajos came back from the Bosque Redondo, Chee was probably better acquainted with the white man's language than any other Navajo at that time, and he also was quite a brilliant man. He took advantage of all the opportunities he had. When he was able to get land down near the Santa Fe Railway, he also got stock, stocked it, and he built up quite a sizeable fortune. He was called Hosteen Dēētsī, which means The Man Who Talks for the Navajo; and he was recognized from about 1895 until the time he died in 1948 as the head man of the Navajo. He was their tribal chairman and their tribal leader for a great many years, and a great friend of my father's.

Herbert Evison: And I take it, a great friend of yours.

Meredith Guillet: Yes, he was one of my favorite people. Actually, I have quite a number of pictures that Chee gave me when I was a small boy; and I went to see him in the Ganado hospital just before he died. My father was also sick in the hospital, and they passed away within three months of each other. I think Chee passed away around the first of February and my father passed away the middle of March. And it distressed my father very greatly that he wasn't able to come down and see Chee when he was in the hospital.

Meredith Guillet: These are things as I remember them. They are rather disconnected, probably have no bearing on this—

Herbert Evison: Don't have any misgivings about that. I am glad to get all of this background of your acquaintance with the Navajos and the Navajo country. I take it that through all these years you constantly acquired greater proficiency in the Navajo language yourself.

Meredith Guillet: Yes. I could speak Navajo pretty well. The Navajos still tell me I speak like an old Navajo. What Navajo I learned I learned when the old Navajo was still being spoken. The Navajo language has changed greatly, it seems to me, in the last 20 or so years, with the adoption of new words, I think the traders perhaps have had an effect on this. A trader who doesn't pronounce the word quite right, the others come in, they begin to pronounce it like he does, and eventually the pronunciation changes somewhat. But after being away for thirteen years I thought that I had lost

most of my proficiency. I find that a great many of the words come back easily, particularly the things I talked about when I was a child in stock raising and that sort of thing. Of course, Civil Service rules and regulations and that type of use of the Navajo language that I learned when I was here fourteen years ago, why, I didn't remember when I was at Walnut Canyon, I had no occasion to use it, I didn't come into contact with many Navajos, and it slipped my mind. But I find it coming back, as I am amazed sometimes, I will say something, then wonder, "Well, is that right?" Apparently, it is because I get the right answer.

Meredith Guillet: But here at Canyon de Chelly I think, and I would like to say here that I owe a great deal to my father. The Navajos respected him a great deal; they knew me when I was a small boy; I was no stranger to them. Many of the Navajos here at Canyon de Chelly worked for my father, had known him for years. Around Crystal he was known as Nah Neōl Tsosi, which means Like a Pine Tree Waving in the Wind, because of the way he walked. So, the old Navajos from that northern section near the head of Canyon de Chelly and Canyon del Muerto call me Nah Neōl Tsosi Begay. Over here around Chinle when he was buying cattle - my father was a rather impatient person; he didn't like to weigh every sheep or every lamb, and he would say, "I'll bet you so and-so, I'll give you so much for these, but if you want to weigh them, we'll pay you by the pound. You want to bet me by the weight? If we have to weigh them, that's what it will be." They would agree, some of them on his guessing of weight would go along with him; so, they started calling him Dah Kah'ī Nez, or Tall Gambler. Well, my father never shot craps or played cards in his life.

Meredith Guillet: My name, my good Navajo name that was given me later, my own name, Tsegi Ni Tsosi, or Slim Canyon Man, was given to me by a great many of the other Indians here. That's a good name. Of course, the Navajos never use a good name, to a man's face, because it will wear out. If they have to address me, they will say "Guillet" or some name like that. In speaking of me they use my Navajo name, which is Tsegi Ni Tsosio

Meredith Guillet: The name Meredith I got from an old hunter and guide who perhaps many Park Service people know. He was later around Yellowstone - Steve Elkins or Meredith Elkins. He was a great gambler. My father didn't gamble, though he liked his schnapps, I guess I should say, now and then. And when the two of them were out together my father would preach to Steve the evils of drink and Steve would preach to my father the evils of gambling, so they did neither. And my mother was very fond of Steve, so she gave me the name Meredith, being the first boy in the family. But that's just to give you the origin of my name. My mother was also of Welsh descent, and Meredith is of course a Welsh name, which went along well with that.

Meredith Guillet: I don't know whether you might be interested in this or not, but as long as it is something of the family history - I am quite proud of my great-

grandfather, Peter Guillet, because I think he was perhaps the first advocate of a Forest Service in the United States. He was a captain in the Navy, in the French Navy, and also a great conservationist. Napoleon, under whom he served, had him make a survey of the timber resources of the Mississippi Valley. Of course, this timber survey was made primarily for the surveying of timber that might be used for the building of ships, the masts and various parts needed in seventy gunships of the line.

Meredith Guillet: After Napoleon was defeated, my great-grandfather was exiled. He didn't happen to be in France at the time and having heard of it he didn't sail back to France; he sailed the ships into Princess Anne, Maryland, and turned them over to the young Navy of the United States. His book, which is now in the Library of Congress, has a rather odd name for what it contains. It is called "Timber 'Merchants' Guide." But the first 30 or 40 pages of this are dedicated to the people of the young country of the United States, why they should set up a division of forestry and save all the timber back for ten miles on either side of any running stream, because if they did not the streams would silt up, they would be unnavigable; should they get in war and need the lumber or the timber, they couldn't get it out because the streams would be filled with silt. He was particularly concerned because all of the early immigrants into this country were of course taking up land along the bottomlands and cutting all of the timber.

Meredith Guillet: This book is by Peter Guillet, French by birth, American by choice, and it was printed by William Printers in 1824. I don't know whether there was an advocate for a United States Forest Service before that time or not, but I think he was perhaps among the first.

Herbert Evison: I would suspect he might very well have been the first. Let's get on with your own career, Meredith. A while ago you talked about your first - you got a seasonal appointment at Black Canyon of the Gunnison. Now go on from there.

Meredith Guillet: From this seasonal appointment I worked in 1937, I worked six, sometimes seven, months out of the year at Black Canyon, coming back at first and working during the winter months back in the store with John Bauer. Later I went to work at Mesa Verde, working with survey crews or as jack hammer man or other phases, whatever the allotment or appropriations at Mesa Verde Park might allow, maybe working for another three or four months. I always had a job in the store in case I wanted to go back. So, I was never out of work.

Meredith Guillet: Later I did take a job during the winter as instructor in adult and child education in arts and crafts. I taught arts and crafts in the Mancos schools, with adult classes at night, in woodworking and painting, oil painting, free-hand drawing, things of that sort. This was under the old Public Works Administration, this artists program that they had, WPA or PWA.

Herbert Evison: Works Progress Administration.

- Meredith Guillet: Yes, WPA. Then as soon as the Black Canyon opened up, if Mesa Verde didn't have any work, I went back to Black Canyon; generally, I went up to Mesa Verde for a while, then back to the Black Canyon of the Gunnison.
- Meredith Guillet: In 1942 I received my appointment as park ranger at Casa Grande National Monument, working there under Al Bicknell, whom I'll never forget and to whom I'll be forever grateful. It was one of the finest experiences in my Park Service career, and I think I'll love Al and Bina Bicknell as long as I live.
- Meredith Guillet: From there, because of my Navajo experience, I was transferred to Canyon de Chelly National Monument, and I served as custodian and later superintendent here for 8½ years. At that time, I was the only man here. There was very little money. As I remember, I had my salary and \$100 a month - \$100 a year, I should say - to run the place on; that's for administration. If we had a big rainstorm or something that washed out any of our roads and trails, occasionally we could get a little act-of-God money. Chuck Richey generally was able to dig some up somewhere. And I worked under Chuck Richey, who was the first superintendent of Southwestern Monuments during my tour of duty. He had just succeeded High Miller, who had gone back to I believe Washington as chief clerk - or maybe Chicago, at that time.
- Meredith Guillet: I was trying to remember, Herb, the first superintendent of Big Bend, who was his assistant superintendent.
- Herbert Evison: Ross Maxwell.
- Meredith Guillet: Yes, Ross Maxwell was the assistant superintendent at that time, and I worked under both of them. Later John Davis replaced Chuck Richey as superintendent of Southwestern National Monuments, and I worked here under John until 1950. Of course, I had a war service appointment; I had not taken the Civil Service examination; and I felt that my career in the Park Service was something I wanted, rather than take a chance. I went to Carlsbad and served as a guide until I could get my competitive status, then I was transferred back to Chaco Canyon National Monument as superintendent.
- Meredith Guillet: Of course, at that time Chaco Canyon was, and still is, pretty isolated. There was no school for my daughter, and I needed a school. So, I was offered Walnut Canyon National Monument, where I went and where I stayed until transferred back to Canyon de Chelly on January 21st, 1963.
- Herbert Evison: Last year.
- Meredith Guillet: Yes, last January.
- Herbert Evison: Well, now, I think that the most interest in your career centers right here at Canyon de Chelly, and I would certainly like to get on the record

something about the contacts, the relationships that a superintendent in here has to maintain, starting with the Navajos.

Meredith Guillet: This is an area different from any other area in the National Park System. It took an act of Congress, an Enabling Act first, to establish it. The land belonged to the Navajo tribe of Indians; it was held in trust by the government of the United States for them, and this Act which established Canyon de Chelly National Monument gave the President of the United States the authority to proclaim it a national monument. This was not possible under the original Antiquities Act of 1906 because of Tribal ownership of lands. This Act specifically retained for the Navajo tribe all rights that they had previously held to the surface and mineral rights and the use of the land. It delegated or charged the Park Service only with the protection of the archeological features and the care and accommodation of visitors.

Meredith Guillet: The Navajos at Canyon de Chelly were always against this Act or this approval by the Tribal Council. They had never approved it; it was approved by other members, rather than the Chinle chapter; so naturally there was a little bit of antagonism toward the National Park Service. This may have been generated by some of the early traders also. I know that during the original talks, the trader talked to the Navajos here, the Navajos have told me, telling them that if they let a national monument come here they couldn't pick flowers, they couldn't get the medicine that they had always gotten during their lives, they couldn't cut the trees and get wood, that the tourists would tramp through their cornfields, pick their peaches, desecrate the graves of their dead, and that sort of thing. And this was one of the things that we had to be very careful about.

Meredith Guillet: When we made our agreement with the tribe - it has been some years since I read the files, the files are not here so I can refresh my memory; where they are I don't know - but I do recall that we agreed that we would control the visitors, and regulations were established in the Federal code of regulations, Title 36, which fulfilled our obligations. These regulations stated that no one would be allowed to go into the canyon unless accompanied by a park ranger or authorized guide. Over-night camping in the Canyon was also prohibited because this was one of the questions that the Indians raised: would the people burn up all their wood supply? About the only wood that the Navajos in Canyon de Chelly had was the driftwood that came down; and with unlimited camping in there, the whites would use up their supply of wood, which was quite an important item to the Indians. So, the prohibition of over-night camping in Canyon de Chelly, besides helping us protect the archeological features, also served the purpose to keep the Indians more or less happy.

Meredith Guillet: The Navajos did not understand the value of a national park to their overall economic development, nor do they today yet, although it is beginning to come through. They are beginning to understand this, and their attitude

toward the National Park Service is becoming a little better. But for many years this was a touch-and-go situation, and the utmost tact and diplomacy had to be used in all your dealings with the tribe, if you were to maintain any sort of good operation at Canyon de Chelly.

Meredith Guillet: In order to do this, the man who dealt with the Navajo had to be completely honest, he had to know what he was doing, he had to gain the respect of the Navajo, and he had to keep that respect. The Navajo is naturally hesitant to trust a stranger, and they have every reason in the world to be so, because they have been fooled quite a number of times. And in any National Park business, we had first to gain their trust and confidence. A new man it will perhaps take two or three years before they begin to trust him. With the present policy of transfer and promotion, just about the time a man had reached any degree of efficiency in his job and had gained the support and trust of the Navajos, he was transferred, and then the new process would start all over. This, and the probability that the new man may be not experienced at all in Navajo relations, would start something completely different from the man before. And this sort of thing worked up to sort of a natural mistrust of our objectives. (Now is this the sort of thing you want?)

Herbert Evison: Absolutely.

Meredith Guillet: The fact (as I mentioned before, of coming in here) the Navajos had known me since I was a small child, many of them, made it easier. I wasn't a stranger, so I had the advantage over some of the previous custodians in that the Navajos trusted me, they knew my father, respected him highly, and I didn't have the same period of working with them and learning, to go through, having been with them more or less all my life.

Meredith Guillet: I might add here that the important thing in dealing with the Navajo is not so much knowing how to speak their language as in knowing how they think. The Navajo logic, their objectives in life, are different than ours; and having worked with them you begin to understand them. You don't know why you understand them; you just know how their mind works; it works different than ours. If you are working in the store and working around them you find yourself thinking in Navajo terms, rather than in terms you would use with your wife or family or anyone else. You just have a double personality, I guess you might say. But they are child-like in many ways, and very very wise in ethics. You will find a man among them who you might think has the wisdom of a Winston Churchill, yet you will find his thinking on another subject not beyond the level of perhaps a twelve-year-old child. So, in order to make yourself completely understood you have to be able to adjust from one level to the other level, according to what you are discussing and what you are talking about.

Meredith Guillet: Some of the trouble, I think, in our dealings with the Navajo, even some very finely educated Navajos, can be traced back to this. The Navajo will maybe have a fine college education; he might have graduated from

Columbia University; he may be able to speak to you on atomic science; he may be able to speak on political science, history, and a great many things: yet on something that you would expect anyone to know about, he may not understand at all. This has been brought out at several meetings I have attended, Herb, with Les Arnberger and Ed Plummer and some of the tribal lawyers. Although Les explained these things in very plain terms to anyone of us and we would have had no difficulty in understanding it at all; these Navajos did not understand it, particularly on the use of facilities at Glen Canyon. They figured they would never be able to dock at a Park Service dock, that they would be eliminated from this. And I think just the explaining of this one thing helped us along quite a bit.

Meredith Guillet: These fellows are very highly educated, they have high positions in the tribe, and to speak to them you would put them on an equal with most any of our Washington men that come out and talk with them. It is just one of those things. (I hope this is not going to be played to any Navajos!) But it is, whether they realize it or not, just a way of thinking that they have; and their objectives in life have never been, until the white man taught them, the accumulation of worldly goods; it has been more or less harmony among their own people and their own plan. And the reason some of the Navajos have never made good merchants, until comparatively recent years, is because if they had anything they shared it with all of their neighbors until it was gone. And this is not only a trait of the Navajos, it also is a trait of the Hopi and many of the other Indians of the Southwest - perhaps letting out the Lagunas or Santo Domingos; they are pretty sharp traders.

Meredith Guillet: I don't know; our particular problems here are making the Navajos like the Park Service. We try to help them in every way we can, personally, and wherever we can do it in the name of the Park Service also we do it. For instance, we may stick our necks out sometimes. An old woman - well, the water may come up in the Canyon, we may have a flash flood, it may fill some old woman's well or waterhole. These wells are dug in the quicksand, they have to be dug back quite a ways, it's the only water supply. If we are working in the Canyon and come by and see this, we stop. We may quit fifteen, twenty minutes early and get five or six of our men out and dig a well there for them. We do a few things like this. This may not be strictly according to regulations in other parks, but if we are going to succeed here, we are going to have to forget a lot of the strict red tape and work on a human basis, rather than strictly a bureaucratic basis.

Herbert Evison: I think that's a very good point to have made, and I can't imagine any decent person raising any objection to that kind of relationship with your Navajos.

Herbert Evison: You mentioned several other agencies that you have to work with here too and presumably keep on the good side of.

- Meredith Guillet: The Bureau of Indian Affairs, with whom we have very fine relations now, and during my administration here they have always been very cooperative with me. They have quite a large settlement at Chinle; it's the Chinle area headquarters for three districts. And of course, the BIA employees have their regular duties in the Canyon. They have supervision over the lands, the stock, everything just the same as if it were any other part of the Reservation. We have this overlapping jurisdiction with them.
- Meredith Guillet: During the last several years the Public Health Service has taken over the health problems of the Navajo tribe, and we also cooperate with them in any way possible. We bring many people out of the Canyon; we have four-wheel-drive vehicles, and when and people get sick and the canyons aren't navigable by any other vehicle, we will go up and bring out sick people for the Public Health Service, take them to the clinic. And they assist us in any way possible that they can also.
- Meredith Guillet: And we have a very fine working organization here, working together now; and even though we have an overlapping jurisdiction thus far we have found no trouble at all.
- Meredith Guillet: Now the Navajo Tribal Parks Commission, which was established several years ago, we also cooperate with. They also have jurisdiction - the tribal park rangers do - within the national monument. But they have areas adjoining Three Turkey Tribal Park, and they are proposing now to almost enclose us in a large recreational area which will extend from the Cove about fifty miles north to Nazlini about twenty miles south. This will be traversed by a large parkway which will leave Navajo Route 1 at Mexican Water, coming down the west side of the Lukachukais to Window Rock, across to Ganado, back up by Chinle Round Rock, and will be perhaps one of the most spectacular sections of the whole reservation, giving any visitor coming on the reservation a view of the best of Navajoland.
- Meredith Guillet: In the headwaters of Canyon del Muerto, they have constructed a large dam, Tsaile Lake, which they are now proposing to make a large recreational area. This large recreational area makes areas formerly inaccessible - that is, sections of Canyon del Muerto with very valuable unexcavated sites that were formerly inaccessible, accessible to the users of these recreational areas. This necessitates a complete new change in our former Mission 66 proposals and developments, or scheduled developments, because now we will have to put ranger districts in each of these areas. We will have to develop roads. There will be roads coming in to Chinle, from that section, roads from Wheatfield coming on the south rim. These areas that we formerly didn't have to worry about now are going to be heavy public-use areas. And if we maintain our charge by Congress in protecting the archeological features, we are going to have to have a man in there most of the time.

- Meredith Guillet: So, our whole development program has just expanded overnight, with this new development by the tribal parks and the over-all economic development of the reservation.
- Herbert Evison: Well, now, part of the Mission 66 program I take it is, I think you said earlier, to take a decent road down along the west called rim of the canyon, which is now what I think we called Navajo paving when I was out here fifteen years ago.
- Meredith Guillet: Yes. That will go on the northwest side of Canyon del Muerto. It will make areas such as Mummy Cave - that is, overlooks above Mummy cave - and Antelope House and various sections of Canyon del Muerto which were formerly seen only by those who were able to take the canyon trip - it will make them accessible. We'll have a trail that will lead in at Twin Trails; it will be a long trail and we may perhaps develop that to where Canyon del Muerto may be accessible by trail. However, the ruins there are so fragile and have not been completely excavated and stabilized, that it will be some years before we will allow travel into the canyon by trail unless accompanied by a guide or park ranger.
- Herbert Evison: I shouldn't think you could ever permit that, considering the widely scattered prehistoric material that there is.
- Meredith Guillet: I don't think we'll be able to. The only thing is pressure that might be brought to bear, because after I left here, they put a self-guiding trail down to White House, which is strictly against our federal code of regulations; but this thing has been in use for I would guess almost ten years, and it's pretty hard to stop a thing like that right away. The tribe itself if we have cooperation with them and tribal park rangers, might change its attitude. It may be that we can have conducted trips down the trail and send someone with them, but that would be the only way. We would never let them go by themselves; we don't propose this ever.
- Herbert Evison: Actually, in the fairly immediate future you are going to have to see quite a considerable enlargement of your staff in order to take proper care of this place, aren't you.
- Meredith Guillet: That's right.
- Herbert Evison: Have you figured out how many more rangers you ought to have in here?
- Meredith Guillet: We have. We have submitted the request - we have got to have three right away. We can get by with seasonals eight months of the year, you see, because this won't be a winter-use area. We can get by with seasonals probably for a year or two at Tsaille and at Wheatfield. After that we are going to have to have year-around men there and an extra ranger here.
- Meredith Guillet: Now, during the summer months we have had very good luck in recruiting Navajo rangers who can speak both Navajo and English fluently. This last year we had a Navajo anthropologist, a graduate of New Mexico

University, a girl, incidentally, who was very fine. We also had an architect major, who was excellent - Leon Shirley - who spoke Navajo and English fluently and who qualified under our own Civil Service standards for seasonal park ranger. However, there are many of the tribal park rangers who are of good park ranger quality and who would work well not only here but in any of these areas that have dealings with the Navajos, and we are trying now to get as many of these boys interested in taking our Civil Service examination for park ranger as possible so that we can perhaps use them here and in other areas where Navajo relations are important.

Meredith Guillet: This present job of mine is not only superintendent of Canyon de Chelly; it's general relations officer. I am to be consulted by any of the National Park areas in this region who have any dealings with the Navajo tribe. I don't know whether I explained that to you or not.

Herbert Evison: No, and I am glad you remembered to.

Meredith Guillet: It's the second position of this type, I understand, that has been established in the Park Service. Jess Nusbaum had the other one, as Department Archeologist or something. And it's subject to my incumbency. If I die, the position is abolished. So that accounts for the need here also of an assistant superintendent to do the general leg work of the area while I run out working on the Indian relations. And a great deal of my time is taken up in just talking to Navajos, because when one of them comes to see you, you can't very well say, "I'm busy; come back tomorrow."

Herbert Evison: Of course, that also is an important part of the justification for the higher grade, I take it.

Meredith Guillet: That's right. However, the complications and the headaches - this area, Herb, is 84,500 acres, and it isn't 84,500 acres over which you have any complete jurisdiction; it's 84,500 acres with ruins scattered over it that you have got to protect without any mechanics for enforcing your regulations. We don't have any U. S. commissioner. The State has no authority on the reservation; the Navajos have no authority off the reservation; the Navajo policeman can't arrest a white man unless through his deputy sheriff's commission in Navajo County; and a county sheriff can't come up here and arrest a Navajo. So, if we were to find any sort of a violation, we would have to have that thing documented down practically to moving pictures of a man doing it, then take it to Prescott to a U. S. Federal judge, and if we didn't have everything just cut and dried on evidence and all, the thing would be thrown out of court because nine chances out of ten every man on your jury, if he demanded a jury trial, would have been pothunters themselves and they wouldn't convict anybody for doing something they had done.

Meredith Guillet: So, we have to work this thing by bluff and cuff and persuasion.

Herbert Evison: Well, I think you're in a very extraordinary spot, certainly one that demands an awful lot that the Park Service couldn't find anywhere else. I am glad you're back here, frankly.

Meredith Guillet: Well, it's a challenging job, but sometimes I get a little bit wondering whether I am going to accomplish anything or not, then all of a sudden everything seems to fall in place and my spirits rise. They will rise for a while, then pretty soon something will come about, and I'll get a little blue again. You can't predict a Navajo because they are the most unpredictable people in the world. But you can establish some sort of pattern as to how they are going to react to certain things and generally you can guess pretty close, and so far, I have guessed pretty much right.

Herbert Evison: Well, Meredith, we are getting awfully close to this long tape's end. I have gotten a wonderful bunch of stuff here from you, and I am just delighted to have it.

Meredith Guillet: I don't know whether this is the type of stuff you have been wanting to get.

Herbert Evison: Well, it is, and if it hadn't been I would have interrupted you long ago to get you back on the track.

Meredith Guillet: Well, had I known you were coming in I could probably have made a note and gotten this a little more coordinated.

[END OF INTERVIEW]