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Harold Ratcliff
April 2, 1973

Interview conducted by S. Herbert Evison
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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Oral History Interview

H. Ratcliff

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Side One and Two

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PROCEEDINGS

[START OF TAPE 185 SIDE 1]

Herbert Evison: This is April 2, 1973. I am Herb Evison, and again this afternoon I'm in the Southwest Regional Office of the National Park Service. And with me is Harold Ratcliff, who's a lot better known as Slim.

Herbert Evison: And, Slim, let's start this off by you telling me when and where you were born, and also telling me something about the family you were born into.

Harold Ratcliff: Okay, Herb. I was born in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, in August 16, 1905. And my dad was a rancher, he'd been a rancher for years. He was born in South Park, Colorado, near Fairplay. My mother's folks came from Scotland to Denver and moved over to Steamboat. And after she met my father - and during my years up to the time I went to college, Dad was the foreman for a big ranch there in Steamboat Springs, the Wither Brothers. They also had a store in Steamboat Springs, and my dad freighted from Tie Siding (a railroad stop), in Wyoming to Steamboat Spring, six horses and two wagons and he hauled the first glass that went into that store, in the wagon from Tieside, Wyoming to Steamboat Springs.

Harold Ratcliff: And he was just an old-time old cowboy. That's all he ever did, was ranch. And I went to high school in Steamboat Springs, and then I worked through the summer with my uncle, and I guess he and I didn't get along together. I was too ornery, or he was, one of the two. And Dad told me he wanted me to do something besides shovel manure and feed cattle like he'd done all his life.

Harold Ratcliff: So, about that time the Forest Service was getting started, and I decided I wanted to be a forester. So, I went to college at what is now Colorado State University. In those days, we called it the cow college, Colorado Aggies. I graduated there in May in 1928 with a degree in forestry. And from there I went to California with the Forest Service on what they called a range reconnaissance in those days. Nowadays you'd call it typemapping, we ran survey work.

Herbert Evison: Oh, yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: That was summertime work, and when that ran out, I fooled around that winter. I went out to Fort Bragg and worked at the Union Lumber Company for a while. And then came back to Susanville where I was headquartered and that spring, April of 1929, I entered the National Park Service at Rocky Mountain National Park.

Harold Ratcliff: You want to know something about when I got married, I guess.

Herbert Evison: Yes, I did. Who?

Harold Ratcliff: I married Viva Mae Irwin from Denver, Colorado. She was an ex-Aggie, and at the time we were married she was teaching school in Wyman,

Colorado. We were married just before I graduated on May 27, 1928. We had three children, two girls and a boy. The oldest girl, Nadeen, is now living in California with her husband and family. The younger daughter is living in Pasadena, Texas, her husband works for NASA. They're aeronautical engineers and been involved in all these moon flights and so forth. And her son Howard, the youngest one of the three, is married and living in Cleveland, Ohio. He's a associate pastor for the Christian Church organization in Cleveland in Ohio.

Harold Ratcliff: So, they're scattered all over the country.

Herbert Evison: Yes. Well, you've got a degree, a B.A. in what since has become popularly known as the Ranger factory. And you went to work for the Park Service in what year?

Harold Ratcliff: 1929.

Herbert Evison: 1929. Must have been just before the Crash, huh?

Harold Ratcliff: It was, and I guess I was real lucky. People in the park always told me how lucky I was to be able to have a job when they didn't.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well, now, you started as - what? As a Ranger?

Harold Ratcliff: As a Ranger in Rocky Mountains, yeah.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Now, who would have been superintendent there, Toll?

Harold Ratcliff: No, Edmund Rogers. Edmund Rogers was made superintendent in February of that year, and I went to work there in April.

Herbert Evison: Oh, yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: We came in pretty close together there.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, how long were you there?

Harold Ratcliff: Twelve years. I left there in 1941.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. You left there in 1941. What had been your position when you left?

Harold Ratcliff: I was district ranger Rocky Mountain National Park. One of the three Rangers - at that time, they had three Rangers working in the park, and I had one of the three Ranger districts.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: And in addition to being Ranger, I was responsible for wildlife work and forestry, both.

Herbert Evison: Yes.

Harold Ratcliff: So, it kept me kind of busy. It didn't have time to get too bored on anything.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Here's a thing that I would like to ask you. I don't remember that Rocky Mountain has ever had such a forest fire record comparable to that of Glacier, where there have been terrible fires.

Herbert Evison: But there's a lot of nice forest in Rocky Mountain, and I wonder what you remember about how you were organized to get on top of forest fires.

Harold Ratcliff: Well, my Ranger district had wonderful park lookouts, and I was responsible for that. And - well, a lookout would report the fires and we'd go to them. Of course, during the C. C. C. days when we really had all the help, we - but Rocky Mountain never did have the bad fires while I was there that Glacier and some of the other parks had. It was a different type of forest.

Herbert Evison: Yes.

Harold Ratcliff: Now, we joined the Roosevelt National Forest, and they did have several pretty-good sized – what we call project fires nowadays that I got in on as a cooperator from the Park Service.

Herbert Evison: But I remember talking with a guy whom you may remember from that period. Did you ever know Bill Sarre?

Harold Ratcliff: No, I never knew Bill. Bill left Region Three here just before I came here.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well, he was telling me when I came to him a couple of years ago down in Florida, that in spite of the fact that the Park Service has had a chief forester for some time, when he started, he found generally that the parks gave specific instances of Grand Canyon, were really not adequately organized to get on top of fires quickly and get rid of them before they got out of hand.

Herbert Evison: Do you remember anything about that situation generally at that period?

Harold Ratcliff: Well, I think it was along about that time in 1929, we were just getting started, I think. In fact, John Coffman was just made chief forester that year.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: Either that year of 1930, I forget which.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: And we were just getting started on that program at that time.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: But I know we had no difficulties at Rocky Mountain. We got on them pretty fast there.

Herbert Evison: Of course, you had the advantage of a fair-sized population at both entrances.

Harold Ratcliff: Oh, yeah, we had men rig out a crew pretty fast. And a lot of the parks didn't have at that time.

Herbert Evison: Looking back on that period of your first Park Service rangership, do any things particularly stand out in your memory, any events, or developments of that period?

Harold Ratcliff: Well, Herb, I think about the difference in that period and what it is today. And in that period, there was no 40-hour week, you were on call duty 24 hours a day if you wanted to.

Harold Ratcliff: And I remember one time, I hadn't been on annual leave for a good while. And I went in to see the chief and was griping about not being away from the park. And he looked at me and said, well, you hired out to be tough, didn't you?

Harold Ratcliff: But I think as I look back on that period now, I think that the work I did, that was more or less extracurricular, your Ranger job was a fulltime job. If you had this other work that had to be done, and they assigned me the wildlife work and the forestry work. And I think some of the most interesting work I did was along about 1939 to '40, '38 to '40, in there, was working on the bighorn sheep problem with fellows from Wyoming and those places.

Harold Ratcliff: We were having difficulty with the bighorn sheep. They seemed to be disappearing and getting a disease they called hemorrhagic septicemia. I don't know how to spell it—

Herbert Evison: I do.

Harold Ratcliff: I don't even know what it was. But, anyway, that was some of my interesting work at the time. And then the forestry work. I was responsible for insect control. And when I went to school at Colorado Aggie, we had one semester, one hour a week on insects, and about all we did was learn the name of a few of them.

Harold Ratcliff: So, what I learned about insect control had to be done the hard way. But those were interesting years. It kept you from being bored. You had plenty to do.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. I'm interested in particular in your concern with wildlife and your observation of wildlife, which I gather you sort of had to tuck in when you could find time for it.

Harold Ratcliff: Well, as a supplement, when I went to school, the range management at that time was unknown as such and we had a few courses - elective courses we could take, and I was always interested in range management. And of course, there was an opportunity to study what the deer and elk were - what forage they were eating, and I got real interested in doing that.

Harold Ratcliff: And then you remember Ben Thompson.

Herbert Evison: Oh, yes.

Harold Ratcliff: Ben Thompson and—

Herbert Evison: And George Wright.

Harold Ratcliff: And George Wright came there. And there was another fellow, I can't think of his name.

Herbert Evison: Dixon.

Harold Ratcliff: Yeah, Dixon came there. And they asked the superintendent if I could have a little time to work on that in addition to what else I was doing. So that's how I got started.

Herbert Evison: Oh, yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: And during the years we set up work there during the CCC days, and just before I left, I wrote a big report on it and sent it in and I understand after I left there, that the work I did on the wildlife kind of helped them get into a program there to control them.

Harold Ratcliff: We had too many - one thing I was interested in, we had too many wildlife in our winter range.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: And we were trying to figure out something to do about that.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, as I remember it, the elk were a particular problem there.

Harold Ratcliff: Yes.

Herbert Evison: Was it elk and deer?

Harold Ratcliff: Well, the elk and deer both, actually.

Harold Ratcliff: The elk had been brought in - at one time there were no elk in Rocky Mountain. They were brought in from Yellowstone and they increased to the place where there just wasn't enough winter range to feed them.

Harold Ratcliff: And one reason was that at the time the park itself was built into their old passage where they used to migrate.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: And then as the land was developed, the fences were set up and the elk, instead of being able to get out and get down toward the valley country, they had to stay up there. And they were just eating themselves out of house and home.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: So, after I came to Region Three, I understand they put in a program here and I guess they've got them down now where they don't have too much difficulty with them.

Herbert Evison: Now, anything else about that Rocky Mountain period?

Harold Ratcliff: Well, I think about the - starting the ski patrol there. And I never was a real fancy skier, but we had quite a lot of fun on that, because we always had to go out and measure snow on our own Ranger districts.

Harold Ratcliff: And I had one fellow, he was a water commissioner in the city of Longmont, Colorado. And they had water rights on three of the lakes in my Ranger district. He used to come up with me and measure snow in the wintertime, and he didn't like to ski because he had a trick knee that was always going out on him. And we had to go on snowshoes when he came along.

Harold Ratcliff: But I think it was an interesting period in my life. I look back on it now as real interesting.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well, it sounds interesting, too. Where did you go from Rocky Mountain?

Harold Ratcliff: From Rocky Mountain I went to Dinosaur National Monument over to Jensen, Utah. I was the first permanent custodian over there. They had had custodians working there temporarily through the WPA days. And, well, Charlie Humberger, you probably know Charlie.

Herbert Evison: Yes.

Harold Ratcliff: He was over there as a temporary just before I was, and I think - one of the fellows from Yellowstone was down there about a year before I went over there.

Harold Ratcliff: So, one of the fellows from Yellowstone was down there about a year before I went over there. They were just temporary. I was the first one, I went over there in August of '41. And was there just a year when I was transferred down to Sante Fe here in Region Three.

Herbert Evison: You were succeeded there, I think, by a guy named Beard.

Harold Ratcliff: Yeah, Dan Beard was my successor there at Dinosaur.

Herbert Evison: I had a real good session with him this morning.

Harold Ratcliff: Oh, you did?

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: Well, yeah, Dan followed me there and just before he came, we made a boat trip down the Yampa River. I think there were eight of us in two flatbottom boats. A lot different from the way they run that river now.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: We were ten days on the river there. It was a real interesting trip.

Herbert Evison: Where did you start, Lily Park?

Harold Ratcliff: We started at Lily Park and ended up at Split Mountain Gorge just east of Dinosaur headquarters.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, yeah. Well, you saw some real nice whitewater in spots.

Harold Ratcliff: We had a lot of fun on that trip, I'd rather ride a bucking horse any day, though, than those boats in the rapids.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. And of course, Dinosaur being large was still awful new. And you were there, I think it was enlarged in '38, wasn't it?

Harold Ratcliff: In '39, I think it was.

Herbert Evison: '39.

Harold Ratcliff: Yes, it was – making trips by car was where I spent most of my time, trying to get acquainted with that country. And of course, we had the Dinosaur Quarry that was named after it. A lot of people couldn't understand why the back country was called Dinosaur National Monument, so I had to tell them that there was a great big tail that was tied to that little dog that first started out.

Harold Ratcliff: But that—

[END OF TAPE 185 SIDE 1]

[START OF TAPE 185 SIDE 2]

Herbert Evison: While we were changing this tape, you made some remark about the people of the neighborhood and their not understanding the Park Service. Of course, I think that must have been a very interesting period, and perhaps occasionally a kind of a trying one.

Herbert Evison: But what can you tell me about local attitudes and local treatment?

Harold Ratcliff: Well, the people, just didn't understand. They had been told by some people that they couldn't sell the ranches, or they couldn't do this or couldn't do that. So, I spent quite a bit of my time - I used to call it missionary work for the Park Service. They didn't understand what was happening up at the headquarters, at Dinosaur Monument, or why we didn't do this or didn't do that.

Harold Ratcliff: So, I spent quite a bit of time - let me give you one good example. This one lady had a beer joint down at the Jensen where we got our mail. And I stopped there one day to leave some information on the deer and elk hunting season in Colorado and Utah, both, since they joined boundaries.

- Harold Ratcliff: And she went into a big dissertation about why we weren't doing something at Dinosaur. And so, I explained to her that due to the war we had cut down our expenditures and plans that we had for developing after the war. And she says, well, just so you do something up there. And, of course, she mixed in quite a few swear words in it. The Mormon people seem to do that quite a bit. They just swear as a matter of course, I guess.
- Harold Ratcliff: But after I explained to her what we tried to do and I told her that if she wanted to get money to write to her Senators and Congressman, that I couldn't do it, but she could do it that way. And from then on, every time I stopped in there, she was real friendly.
- Harold Ratcliff: And several of the ranchers, the same way. They just didn't understand, and they'd say, well, so-and-so told them they couldn't sell the ranch, or they couldn't do anything. And I'd say, well, as long as you own the ranch you can do whatever you want to on it, within reason, of course. And I did get into a little difficulty on the hunting season. I'd been used to working where we had jurisdiction over everything inside the park. And I told some people they couldn't hunt. And of course, they wrote to the regional director right away, and - the director in Washington, and I got a letter from my coordinating superintendent at Rocky Mountain National Park to go see this fellow.
- Harold Ratcliff: And I sat down and explained to him that I had made a mistake. That I was used to working in an area where they couldn't, and that as long as he stayed on his own property, he could hunt, and I couldn't do anything about it. And anyway, after I got through explaining things to him, we were friends after that. He had an upstairs office in town, he was a lawyer there, and he used to stick his head out the window, "hey, Slim, come up, I got some questions," and we'd go up and have a nice visit after that.
- Harold Ratcliff: As I say, a lot of it was public relations work, just missionary work.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah.
- Harold Ratcliff: Teaching them what the Park Service was. Just drawing an imaginary line across the country there and telling them they couldn't carry a gun when they crossed that line. Those old ranchers there are used to having a gun on their saddle all the time.
- Herbert Evison: You know, I was in there in the summer of 1955. And we went by a back road around Island Park and spent the night at the ranch of a guy named Bobb Ruple. Were you ever acquainted with that family?
- Harold Ratcliff: No, Mr. Ruple had died by the time I got over there, and his daughter was still there. And her husband ran the ranch at that time. Yes, I got acquainted there and spent quite a bit of time over there with him around Island Park.

- Harold Ratcliff: But the thing that bothered us, it was only a short distance across the country, but it was about 60 miles around to get in there from Dinosaur Headquarters.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah. I remember that well. Anything else that we ought to have on the record of your observations while you were at Dinosaur?
- Harold Ratcliff: Well, I might give you an observation since I left there. I never did figure out how they were going to build that museum right up against that mountain and still get it constructed like they're doing now.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah.
- Harold Ratcliff: Well, shortly afterward, 1959, when they had their dedication, the wife and I drove over there to be there at the time, and, by golly, they did it.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah. That's really an extraordinary thing, isn't it?
- Harold Ratcliffe: It really is, and I couldn't explain to the people - one fellow came out there one time, there were about four of them on a Sunday morning. And I took them up to the old Dinosaur quarry, and then across from the quarry there was a cliff there that had dinosaur bones weathered out right in the rock. I took them over there and showed them some of those things, and on the way back down to the headquarters, I was walking along behind these fellows. And he turned to his wife and said, honey, I've been in Vernal for 20 years and I never knew there was anything like that out here.
- Herbert Evison: Oh.
- Harold Ratcliff: And - well, we're all that way, I think. And a lot of the local people couldn't understand why we wanted that park, as we called it, in that back country. One rancher told me, when they were trying to set up grazing allotments, he didn't see any reason why they should make that a park, as he had almost lost his life in that river.
- Harold Ratcliff: It was interesting. In fact, I was just getting interested and getting so I knew the country and some of the people when I got transferred down here.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well, now, you came down here in what capacity?
- Harold Ratcliff: Well, today, Herb, I'd really be in the top brass if I'd come down here with the title of ecologist.
- Herbert Evison: Oh, you were really—
- Harold Ratcliff: But I came down here to head up the study of grazing in the national parks, way up to the Mississippi, which is what I came down here to do, was make the study of grazing and try to work out a grazing program in the Park Service where they still had large plot grazing at that time.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Yeah. Well, now, did your - did what you had learned at Colorado A&M stand you in any particular good stead in making studies and working up programs like that, or had it been experience on the ground?

Harold Ratcliff: It was a combination, Herb, I think. Having been raised on a cattle ranch, and then the - my work at Colorado A&M. And then, of course, the work I did with the wildlife in Rocky Mountain kept me in touch with that sort of thing.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: And I guess for some reason or another, I'd always been able to sit on the corral fence and chew tobacco and spit and talk to the ranchers in their own language. And that helped quite a bit.

Herbert Evison: Well, you came down here as an ecologist and were you here all the rest of your Park Service career?

Harold Ratcliff: Practically. I came here in '42 and then in '54 I transferred to Globe, Arizona to Southwestern National Monuments.

Herbert Evison: I didn't know you - I didn't remember that.

Harold Ratcliff: Then transferred back here in '57 again.

Harold Ratcliff: And when I left, I had the title of soil conservationist - when I retired, I was doing soil conservation, grazing and safety, were my three main projects.

Herbert Evison: Oh, yes. Well, that was a long, long period, with a three-year break, but a long period on one assignment.

Harold Ratcliff: Well, Herb, I think I was very lucky in that respect, in that a lot of fellows I know moved about every year or two.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: But during my 32 years, I think I actually only moved four times.

Herbert Evison: Think of that.

Harold Ratcliff: It was something that I think I always felt lucky in.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well, I'd love to have any account of those years, of events of those years or thoughts of those years that you want to put on the record, Slim.

Harold Ratcliff: Well, it was quite an interesting assignment. And sometimes I used to wonder what they thought a fellow was, because I'd get sent from here to South Dakota. I wound up to Wind Cave and Badlands and tried to work out grazing problems for them up there, get a grazing program set up.

Harold Ratcliff: And then you'd go from here to the desert, for instance, out at Joshua Tree National Monument in California, entirely different environment, entirely different setup as far as forestry is concerned. And they always seemed to

want an answer in the shortest length of time, and I just wasn't that kind of a guy. I'd take my time getting it for them, because you can't just go into an area and spend a day or two there.

Herbert Evison: No, no.

Harold Ratcliff: And I used to work it this way. I'd make up my own mind about what I thought about carrying capacity and what the range would do, and then I'd contact the ranchers or the Soil Conservation Service or whoever was working there, too, the agency, and get their ideas and compare them with mine.

Harold Ratcliff: And usually, we were pretty close together. I remember - one of the first assignments I had after I came here was down at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, down at Ajoariz. And I'd never been in the desert, and it was about 110 in the shade, and no shade. And Bates Wilson was Acting Superintendent down there at the time, and we drove around for a couple of days, and I couldn't find any grass that amounted to anything. And finally, one day, I said what does a cow find to eat down here, anyhow? He told me, it was all - mostly browse and plants I wasn't acquainted with, cat's claw, palo verde and jojoba and that sort of stuff.

Harold Ratcliff: So, I said, well, how do you figure grazing capacity on that? He said, well, you're the grazing man, that's your problem. So, I spent about a week or so down there, and I came up with the figure of four head of cattle per section on a year-round basis. Now, that's not very many cattle.

Harold Ratcliff: So, as I say, I went off into Ajo one day, checking around. And I found some of the ranchers who used to ranch out there, and one of them, the first thing he said before I even told him what I wanted, he says, well, how many head of cattle do you think that country can run up there? Well, I said, the desert is new to me entirely, and I said, I just made a long horseback guess of about four head per section.

Harold Ratcliff: Well, he said, that's about what I run when I was out there. So, I figured I wasn't too far off base. But I might tell you, I was great at telling stories and I told this one to a fellow on the train one time going back from Chicago - to a safety meeting. We were talking about jackrabbits. You've seen these antelope jackrabbits in the desert, haven't you, Herb?

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: And you know how long, long eared and how tall they are? I told him one day; I was helping this rancher down there move a bunch of cattle and they broke out of the corral. And we had to let part of them go up the creek while we penned up the rest of them. And rode out up there, and I was riding back, and I told him, on the way back one of these jackrabbits jumped out of the brush and my horse ran him 100 yards before he decided he wasn't a calf.

- Harold Ratcliff: And he just looked at me like I'd been out in the Quaker Patch too long and walked off to the end of the car and sat down. But that was interesting kind of work, out grazing that desert country. I never did think it was really year-long grazing, and it was quite a problem, trying to work something out with those fellows there.
- Herbert Evison: Of course, the heck of it is, they're still grazing in there after all this long time.
- Harold Ratcliff: Yeah, we never did manage to get rid of them. And I keep hoping every year that they will, but the grazing in that desert country, Herb, just doesn't - well, it just doesn't do the vegetation any good.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah.
- Harold Ratcliff: But rounding up down there was something else. When they talked about having a roundup, why, I thought I'd get out on a horse like we did in Colorado. But they fence all their water, and the cattle are pretty wild. So, you hide out in a blind and get a few head of cattle to come in to drink, and then you try to sneak over and shut the gate before they can run over you and get out.
- Harold Ratcliff: And we were 19 days, counting - well, we counted around 900 head of cattle in that time. And so, it was quite a different way of rounding up than I ever did before.
- Herbert Evison: I would call that pretty expensive counting.
- Harold Ratcliff: It was, yeah. There were four of us in the Park Service crew and four on their crew. We'd stay about three days at the well. By that time the cattle would get so they wouldn't come in. They'd stand off out there about a quarter of a mile from the corral and bawl, but they wouldn't come into drink.
- Harold Ratcliff: So, we'd move to the next well, because what they would do, they'd go back to the well we just been at or go to a different one. So, we were 19 days down there, counting that many cattle. That was 1947. And I had a nice assignment in 1946 up at Jackson Hole National Monument, when that was established as a national monument, trying to work out grazing horses up there. And I think we came to a pretty good agreement on what needed to be done there at that time.
- Harold Ratcliff: And then - oh, I had lots of assignments that were quite interesting. I think one of the other interesting ones I had was in 1956 when I went up in the high country in Sierra, at King's Canyon, to check grazing use. The Sierra Club and the Park Service were always bumping their heads about how many mules they ought to have on those Sierra Club trips.
- Harold Ratcliff: So, we went up there and set out plots ahead of the people before they came in, and then we went back afterwards and followed them up, just try to get an idea of what damage was going on. And Torn Allen was

superintendent there at the time and George Walker was Assistant Superintendent. And so, I recommended some things. What they ever did, I never got back to check up on it, but that Sierra country was entirely different high country than I'd ever been in before.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well, one thing I'd like to ask you, how destructive did you find that these Sierra Club trips were to the high country?

Harold Ratcliff: Not too bad, Herb. But the main thing I discovered is that they would camp in the same place year after year, see. And I recommend that they change and not camp in the same place. Then there were some high lakes where they grazed their mules that I recommended they not graze them, because at that time of the year the ground was still soft, and they tramped out more grass than they ate.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: So, I think by regulating their camping and moving their camping spots to different sites each year, I don't think they'll do too much damage there.

Harold Ratcliff: One place I always wanted to get into was Kings Canyon, but I never did. They have a different situation there, I understand.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: Than they have at some of the other places.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: But, anyway, that was an interesting assignment.

Herbert Evison: You've gotten out into lots of good scenery, haven't you?

Harold Ratcliff: Yeah, and pretty good fishing, too, there. Lowell Sumner came in to spend the last week with me there, so the day I was waiting for him I decided to go fishing, after I'd gotten my notes all caught up.

Harold Ratcliff: So, I caught a nice bunch of golden trout, and the packer and Lowell came in that evening and looked it over, and said, well, Slim, I've had so much fish up in Alaska, I just don't eat fish anymore. So, the packer and I had to eat all those fish.

Harold Ratcliff: Well, I think - when I say there's a lot of interesting things, I liked that assignment in Globe pretty much, the three years I was there, because I had an opportunity not only to plan the work of the fellows, but I had to see that they got their money and how much they needed and all that, and work out the appropriations for them.

Herbert Evison: This was for what?

Harold Ratcliff: Forestry and soil conservation work in the national monument.

Herbert Evison: Oh, yes.

Harold Ratcliff: I was called a forester, but like all foresters in those days, we were responsible for fire protection and forest insects, soil conservation, water, anything that had to do with protection, that was my baby down there.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: And you not only planned the money, but you had an opportunity to get out in the field and actually plan some of the work and help get some of it done.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: Which was interesting.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, what would you say was the scope of that work, soil conservation, as far as your job was concerned?

Harold Ratcliff: Well, it depended on the area. We were mostly trying to control the erosion and also get some vegetation back where it had been eroded or burnt off. One of the last jobs I did was, I was at Mesa Verde National Park in '59 and we had a bad fire up there. And afterwards, we sowed grass in there with an airplane to get some grass cover on the ground so it wouldn't all wash off, because it burned about everything there was to burn. And incidentally, just last year, I went into that old burn just to see what it was like, because I hadn't been back there since 1959. And they've got a wonderful grass cover on there now. And some of the browse is coming back in real good shape. The trees aren't because there were no seed trees left. It just burned them up.

Harold Ratcliff: And right on the edge a little ways in from the edge of the existing forest now, there is some revegetation.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: But they've got a good grass cover, so it didn't erode after that was done. And Chaco Canyon was a place where erosion was always one of our main projects, trying to keep that arroyo from cutting into the ruins. We finally got that stopped, I think, in pretty good shape.

Herbert Evison: Did that take quite an engineering job to do?

Harold Ratcliff: Well, it was mostly planting trees and willows on the arroyo banks and trying to hold the channel into the center of the arroyo so it wouldn't get over and cut the banks. That was our main project there.

Herbert Evison: Were these plants and trees that were put in there, were they native?

Harold Ratcliff: Yes, we - we went out and got them from joining lands. We got some from the Navaho people up at Shi Rock. And we always went out and got native willows and stuff to put in.

- Herbert Evison: Well, I wonder, you mentioned willow, and it's even hard to picture willow in that country which is so dry.
- Harold Ratcliff: Well, we went to different places around in Arizona where we could get it, you know. And, of course, there was quite a bit of salt brush that had gotten in there. They started using that in this country for soil erosion control and it spreads downstream, the seed and everything. And there was quite a bit of that in there, and we tried to get rid of that as much as we could. But it was quite a job to do that.
- Harold Ratcliff: And Big Bend was quite interesting. We tried to do some soil and moisture work down there in some of the great big arroyos that flooded. But we had difficulty down there on account of the dry seasons; usually, we tried to plant our grass seed when we had rain. A lot of times, we'd get just enough rain to start the grass and then it dried up. So, we had quite a problem down there, and we finally got switched around to where we tried to do our planting in the wet years instead of trying to do it when it was dry.
- Harold Ratcliff: And I hadn't been back to Big Bend since 1968, I guess, so I don't know what's gone on down there since that time.
- [Recording interrupted]
- Herbert Evison: You just started to say, talking about Big Bend.
- Harold Ratcliff: Well, I did quite a bit of work down there in forestry and soil conservation. And I was down with one of the landscape architects, Carl Allman, and we were down at - I guess they call it Rio Grande Village now, but in those days, there was nothing there but just an old barn.
- Harold Ratcliff: And we were sitting there in the shade of a tamarisk tree, and Carl said, Slim, when do you think - they were getting ready to build a new headquarters right out in the open up there. And he said, Slim, what do you think would be good for shade around the new headquarters up there? And, oh, I said, Carl, I don't know, I think an Anheuser Busch on a good hot day is about as good as anything. And he started to write down Anheuser Busch, and he looked at me and he says, darn you, Slim, somebody is going to kill you.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah, nothing more wonderful for a hot day.
- Harold Ratcliff: But Big Bend was quite a place. I was one of the first ones down there after it was established as a national park. And we had a chief Ranger who had been transferred in from Hot Springs National Park, and that was quite a change. And he was really scared of those Mexicans down on the river. And whenever we'd go down there, he just couldn't get out of there soon enough.
- Harold Ratcliff: And one day we were down there, one of the ranchers, the Johnson Ranch, I think it was - and we pulled up by the old cabin there, and I started to get

out of the pickup. And there were two Mexicans in there, asleep. And they had one horse tied out by the river. And both of them came out of that house just like somebody had shot them, and they headed for the river. And the guy beat the one on the horse to the river. And then they turned around and looked to see if we were going to chase them. They thought we were border patrol.

Harold Ratcliff: But, anyway, we were going over to check on the fire that burned up the top of Dead Horse Mountain. And John Coffman, our chief forester, wanted me to check it and see what the damage had been done and make a report. On the way over there, O.P. stopped the pickup and he looked, and I said, what's the matter? Slim, he said, there was a house there just the other day. And sure enough, somebody had come in and hauled out one of these old ranch houses over there, just a frame house. It was been there a couple of days before when he drove by there. And sure enough, the house was gone.

Harold Ratcliff: But we went down to Castalon, which was a trading post on the west side of the park, just outside of Boquillas Canyon a ways. And I had to ride with a Mexican cowhand, their foreman. And we rode all day. And my Spanish is very limited, and I asked him if we could understand English and he said no, could I speak Spanish and I told him I could, a little bit.

Harold Ratcliff: Well, I found out what I wanted, but I had an awful time understanding him because he talked so fast, I tried to translate as he went. But I finally got the information I needed. And we rode all day that day, O.P. Senter and this ranch foreman and I. And we got back that evening and he wanted to stay all night and I wanted him to go to headquarters. But we slept out in the garage at this trading post, and the owner had a diesel motor that was hooked up to the refrigerator, and every time the refrigerator kicked on, that motor would start. We didn't get so much sleep. So, I said, I'm not going to sleep here. So, we went over to one of the other ranches on a little hill overlooking the end of Boquillas Canyon across into Mexico.

Harold Ratcliff: And there were Mexicans across the river, singing and hollering and just having a good time. And O.P. wouldn't go to bed. He was afraid they were going to come across and massacre us. But I finally went to bed, and I don't know how long he stayed up that night. But he had quite a time down there. Of course, that was a way for us to "pull people's legs." We kidded him so much he thought Pancho Villa was going to come back and massacre him all the time.

Harold Ratcliff: But the early days in Big Bend were quite pioneering. When you went to Alpine, it took all day to get in and get groceries and get back. And if the rains came up and flooded, why, you may not get back then.

Harold Ratcliff: And a few years later, I went down there with Carl Allman and some of these fellows, and I was fussing because here it was, one or two o'clock and they still hadn't left Alpine yet. And I was fussing about getting on

down to Big Bend shooting on down on a paved road, and we got there, and they were fussing at me, what are you raising so much fuss about? And I said, well, the roads have changed. In the early days, you couldn't get there that fast.

Herbert Evison: That was the road going down from Alpine and coming in on the west side?

Harold Ratcliff: Yeah, uh-huh. I guess that's all paved down that way now.

Herbert Evison: Oh, yes. Wonderful road.

Harold Ratcliff: But Big Bend is quite an area. I always enjoy it. I went down there one spring, I went on regular business, and I got over in Dagger Flats when those giant daggers were in bloom and got some real good pictures of them.

Harold Ratcliff: And lots of people of course get down there in the desert and they don't know what they're looking for, anyway, and they don't like it very well. But there was Chico Mountains are only 7,000 feet, it's the highest peak. But to those Texans, that's really getting out of the hot weather when you get up there. I'd like to go back one of these days just to see the changes that were made. We used to have to do our own cooking when we first went down there.

Herbert Evison: Well, I forget how we did our cooking when I first went down there in 1935. But I think we ate in a CCC camp.

Harold Ratcliff: You probably did, yeah. The CCC camp had moved out when we went down there, and they had some cabins up on the hill.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: And Ross Maxwell was superintendent, and we just did everything. I think we had one or two dinners with Ross while we were there. But otherwise, we did our own cooking up there.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: In 1945, we had a superintendents' conference, a fire control training conference down in Big Bend. And Newton Drury was director at the time.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: And Tilletson was regional director here in Sante Fe. And of course, that was during World War II, and I was acting regional forester here and Art Thomas who was superintendent out at Bandolier at the time, he and I went down ahead of time and got everything arranged, and we used the CCC camp. And Tony Valancia, who's still maintenance man out at Bandolier National Monument - came down there. I told Rod I wanted him down there. And sure enough, our Mexican cook that Ross had hired

to do the cooking didn't show up. So, when Tony came in about midnight the first night, I broke the sad news to him that he was going to be chief cook.

Harold Ratcliff: And of course, we had plenty of help to help him. But we even had the director and Mr. Tilletson and everybody else "pearl diving" for us and washing dishes during the camp down there. But they all seemed to enjoy it.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: It was quite an experience.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, you served here under quite a succession of regional directors.

Harold Ratcliff: Yes, there was Tilletson, and then Hugh Miller.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: And Hugh was - well, let's see, no Patraw was the assistant regional director. Evind Scoyen was in the office at that time, as assistant regional director. I think the only two regional directors I served under was Tilly and Hugh Miller.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: And I retired just ahead of Hugh. He retired about a year after I did, I think, or something like that.

Herbert Evison: Well, I thought he retired when Tom Allen came in here.

Harold Ratcliff: Oh, yeah, Tom - that's right, Tom Allen was in here in that time too, yeah.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Harold Ratcliff: But I've been retired so long, Herb, I have to stop and think back to see what was going on.

Herbert Evison: How about me, retiring in '68?

Harold Ratcliff: Everybody says, Slim, when did you retire? And I have to stop and count back. It's been 13 years. No, 12 years.

Herbert Evison: Oh, has it?

Harold Ratcliff: Twelve years, '61.

Herbert Evison: You're like me. You're kind of cheating the Civil Service retirement fund by living so long.

Harold Ratcliff: I expect so, maybe.

Herbert Evison: Well, Slim, I don't know what else to ask you. I certainly am not cutting you off, if there are any other recollections and anecdotes or anything else that we can put on here, I hope you'll do it.

- Harold Ratcliff: Oh, I could probably spend a whole afternoon telling yarns.
- Herbert Evison: Well, —
- Harold Ratcliff: About things. Just one, when we were working down there at Oregon Pipe Cactus, Henry Gray was one of the family Grays that still owned the grazing rights down there. I guess Henry is still alive, I haven't seen him for a good number of years.
- Harold Ratcliff: But we were out riding one day and ran into a bunch of cattle. And I asked him why he didn't get rid of some of his old cows. And he said, well, Slim, they might have another calf. And then over in the spring of '43, we went to Grand Canyon National Monument and there was a little argument going on over there between some of the ranchers over the water. Perry Brown was chief Ranger there at the time. And we went over and spent about three or four days, maybe a week, over there, trying to ride around and get this water problem settled. And that's really rough country to raise cattle in. And this rancher, Smoots, lived right outside of the monument boundary over there and ran cattle in the wintertime. And he furnished our packhorses for us.
- Harold Ratcliff: And the afternoon we got in, we went up to his house and there were a couple of young bulls laying out in the pasture, dead. And I asked him if he knew what killed them and he said no. And I said, well, how long have they been dead? I had the idea I might go out and examine their stomachs and see what they'd been eating, just to find out. But they'd been dead too long.
- Harold Ratcliff: And I said, do you have any poison around? He says, oh, we have a little bit of larkspur but that don't kill bulls or buck sheep. And I kind of batted my eyes and said, come again on that, Mr. Smoots. He says, well, they don't kill bulls or buck sheep.
- Harold Ratcliff: So, I let it go at that, there wasn't any use arguing with him. But then he told me that - see, he was 90 miles from Kanab and 90 miles from St. George. And he said, in the early days when he was just a kid, the cattle started dying from larkspur poisoning, so he said, I got my knife out and whittled on their tails and I saved some of them. I said, oh, you did? And he said, yeah, larkspur stagnates the blood and if you can get the blood to flowing you can save some of them.
- Harold Ratcliff: So, I didn't argue with him, I just figured the ones that didn't get too much larkspur lived, anyway. But you learned all kinds of things like that. Next to the last day we were coming up I was in the canyon, and we got to the top of this hill and our horses were all of them in a lather just climbing up that hill. And I said, well, Mr. Smoots, how do you get cattle up here, anyway?
- Harold Ratcliff: Oh, he said, they'll come up with trail, but if one of them breaks back, no use of running her down because the time you get her back in the herd,

she's too weak to get up the hill. So that's what I called making it the hard way over there. But that was quite that was an interesting trip, too, this fellow, about the second or third day out, when - by the time he got his own mule packed, why, Perry and I had our horses all packed and ready to go. He just looked at me kind of funny and said, oh, you guys know about packing. Guess he thought he had a bunch of greenhorns with him.

Harold Ratcliff: You know, Herb, I think the Park Service - as I look back, I think we had more esprit de corps in the early days than they have now. We were all just one great big family and everywhere you went, everybody had the idea that we were doing a job that needed to be done. I think the esprit de corps is different now than it was then. It seemed to me, the last few years that I was in the service, the young fellows would come in, the first thing they wanted to know is, when can I be chief ranger, when can I be something else? Didn't realize that it takes a few years to get something beneath you to warrant that.

Harold Ratcliff: But a lot of them, they wanted to be chief Ranger right off the bat, and I think it's a lot different than it used to be. And I know when I was at Rocky Mountain National Park, we never heard of anybody talking about retiring. And now you talk to fellows that have only got ten or 15 years in and they want to retire right away. It just seems to be a different organization today than it used to be.

Harold Ratcliff: Maybe it's just gotten too big, you know?

Herbert Evison: Well, that probably is one of its faults. Of course, maybe some of us have gotten too old, too.

Harold Ratcliff: Well, yeah. That reminds me, two or three years ago, Sam Lamb who I knew at Rocky Mountain National Park way back in 1930, he was a seasonal ranger then, he was working for the State Fish and Game in New Mexico, and he just retired about a year ago.

Harold Ratcliff: Sam and I were on a field trip for the Society for Ranger Management down in the Southern part of the state. And I said, Sam, it sure looks good to me to see all these young fellows attending these meetings. I can remember when I first was a member of the Society of American Foresters here in the Southwest. You go to meetings, there wouldn't be anybody around, but old gray-headed guys like you and me.

Harold Ratcliff: Sam looked at me and grinned and said, well, Slim, maybe we're just getting older. I said, that could be, too.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. One of the great misfortunes of life, that you do get older, huh?

Harold Ratcliff: Well, I had fun. You might be interested in what I've been doing since I retired.

Herbert Evison: I wanted to ask you about that, yes.

- Harold Ratcliff: Well, I set up an office in consulting work in range management, and that didn't work out like I expected it would. I got a few jobs, but mostly the jobs that I got, some rancher had an argument with the BLM or the Forest Service and wanted you to come help him out. And most of those fellows they've got enough expenses anyway that they're just not going to dig up money to pay a fellow to come around and advise them how to run their ranch. And one rancher over near wagon mound over here, I wrote to him, he'd been on a ranch tour with a bunch of the ranchers. And I wrote to him and sent some pictures of his cabin and asked him if I could come over and talk to him about his ranch. Well, he said, we've been on this ranch by guess and by God for about 20 years and seem to be doing pretty good.
- Harold Ratcliff: So, then I got into ranch real estate, and I worked at that until 1970. And another interesting thing was riding in Colorado in these wilderness trail rides with the American Forestry Association. I did that from '63 to '69. Part of the time I worked with the outfitters and part of the time I worked for AFA, as a representative for them.
- Harold Ratcliff: And that was interesting work. The only reason I quit was, in 1970 I happened to have the misfortune of breaking a hip and I just never found time to get back at it again, so I quit that. I'm still newsletter editor for the Society for Range Management. That's a job in itself. The last week in the month is the worst. Well, it isn't really bad, about three days of pounding the typewriter and I can get it done. The hardest part has been getting information to put in it, and you know what that is, yourself.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah.
- Harold Ratcliff: And the last two years have been real good. The presidents last year and the year before have been real good in getting me information. And this year so far, it's working all right.
- Harold Ratcliff: We put out a bimonthly letter. We put out six last year and hope to get six out this year. And our - one thing that bugged me the first two years, was the fact I had to keep that mailing list up to date, for our printer. And a year ago, our executive secretary in Denver wanted to try his hand at turning out newsletters, how many he could handle and still get his own work out. So, he has the mailing list right there all the time, so I don't have to worry about that.
- Harold Ratcliff: That was the biggest problem in the whole thing. Drive you up the wall trying to keep up with these—
- Herbert Evison: Yeah. How much of a mailing list?
- Harold Ratcliff: Oh, we have around 300 members. And, of course, we'd send them to other sections, too. But I think well, we don't have that many here in New Mexico, we've got 290 this year. There's a few of them don't pay up every year, we have to keep after them.

- Harold Ratcliff: But that's interesting, it keeps my finger in the pie on range management. That's been my main interest since I retired, anyway, and it keeps my finger in that. That's what I was doing this morning for a while, trying to read a magazine and then think about what I was going to talk to you about this afternoon.
- Herbert Evison: You thought to good purpose, anyway, because we've been getting some very interesting lively stuff on this tape. You seem to be kind of a lively guy.
- Harold Ratcliff: I've been looking forward to this for a long time. And when Hillman called me Friday afternoon and said you were going to be here, I said, oh, my gosh, I'm supposed to go to Denver. And the weather didn't cooperate, or I'd have been in Denver. But I'm glad it did.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well, an occasional bad day has its blessing side, too.
- Harold Ratcliff: Well, a couple of years ago I came out of the post office down here and met a fellow and I said, well, fine day today. He said, we always have fine weather in Sante Fe. Some days are just better than others.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah.
- Harold Ratcliff: So, it's been real fine. I've enjoyed it. I'd like to hear what some of the others had to say, if I had time to listen to it.
- Herbert Evison: Well, it's interesting. Back there in Harper's Ferry are all the tapes that I made, including those back in '62. You can go back there and listen to Karl Russell or Harold Brandt or Herb Mayor or Clark Stratton or Al Bicknell.
- Harold Ratcliff: You got Al, huh?
- Herbert Evison: Yes.
- Harold Ratcliff: I can tell you a story about Al. The first time I went to Casa Grande National Monument in September and Stu Carlton and I left Flagstaff in the morning. We needed a jacket. We got down there in Casa Grande about mid-afternoon, it was about 114, and I was kidding Al and I said, hey, how does an old Yellowstone Ranger like you stand the heat down there? I just was new down there and the heat was something different to me.
- Harold Ratcliff: Well, Slim, he says, I got a pair of snowshoes out there in the garage. He says, whenever I get accustomed to the heat I just go down and look at those snowshoes for about 20 minutes and I'm willing to stay right here.
- Harold Ratcliff: Yeah, Al was quite a character. And one time, during World War II, you probably remember when the Japanese were sending over these bombs by the balloon. And we were supposed to have a training session down there in Phoenix. There were about a half a dozen Park Service fellows going down there to get that training, so we'd know how to handle the things.

And I just come up - that was the year we had the training session in Big Bend National Park.

Harold Ratcliff: And I came back through Southern Arizona just to take in that meeting, and I stayed with Al at Casa Grande. And Binah wondered what we were doing to supervise the office for her, and Al wouldn't tell her. He said, I don't know, we're just going in there for a meeting, we don't know what it's all about. And she kept trying to pry it out of him and he wouldn't tell her, and I wouldn't, either. And finally, she looked at me and said, Slim, if it wasn't for you, I'd think you were both damn liars.

Harold Ratcliff: And shortly after that, I was here at home and John Coffman came out and we were leaving on a trip together and having lunch at my house. And I turned the radio on to get the news, and here came a big blast over the news broadcast about these bombs that were sent over by the balloons and everything, and John looked me, so surprised, and he said, Slim, that's not supposed to be out, that's supposed to be secret. Well, I said, there it is, you just heard what the man said.

Harold Ratcliff: Yeah, I knew a lot of them. I knew Carl Russell; I knew Dr. Bryant. I could tell you something about him, too. While I was at Rocky Mountain National Park, he came through there on his way to Washington on his first assignment in Washington. And we had closed the campground for the season, and I was tooting up the road in the pickup and I saw this smoke coming out of the cabin in the campground. And I wondered who's in there?

Harold Ratcliff: So, I wheeled over there and started to give the lady a little static about what was she doing in the cabin? And it was Mrs. Bryant and the family. I didn't know they were even in the country, didn't know him at all. But she never did forget that. I saw her at Grand Canyon when I first came to Region Three. Harold was superintendent at Grand Canyon and was over there for assignment. And we had dinner with one another, and she still remembered me coming over to the campground in Rocky Mountain was back there in '29 or '30, whichever it was, and wanting to bawl her out for being in the cabin there.

Harold Ratcliff: Well, there were some great days in those days. And I guess they still are, but maybe we're just too old to know what they're doing, Herb.

Herbert Evison: Well, do you want to quit?

Harold Ratcliff: Oh, might as well, I think.

Herbert Evison: Well, we will, if that's what you want to do. Well, I'd just be glad to get any more stuff on here that occurs to you.

Harold Ratcliff: Well, I could probably go on. I've kept a diary over the years and my wife wanted to look it at this morning and I said, well, most of the stuff Herb is

going to want is before I even kept a daily diary. So, I just think of it as it comes along.

Harold Ratcliff: But it was an interesting career. I'm not sorry that I did it. I'd do it all over again, if I had to, I expect.

Herbert Evison: Well, that seems to be the common conclusion of all Park Service people, that it was a pretty darn good existence.

Harold Ratcliff: Yeah, it was. We had - well, a fellow has to gripe about something. If he didn't gripe, he wouldn't be natural. But I can think of a lot of things at Rocky Mountain, old Jack Moomaw and going skiing with him and having a heart attack at one of the stations way out on the skis eleventeen miles from nowhere. And things like that just made life more interesting, I guess.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well, thanks an awful lot, Slim, for being willing to come around this afternoon and chinning with me on this tape. It's been a thoroughly enjoyable experience.

Harold Ratcliff: Well, it's been enjoyable for me to meet you again, Herb, and good luck to you for the rest of your stay, how long are you going to be here, by the way?

[END OF TAPE 185 SIDE 2]

[END OF INTERVIEW]