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Kenneth Ashley
July 21, 1971

Interview conducted by S. Herbert Evison
Transcribed by Norma Phelps
Digitized by Casey L. Oehler

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

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EVISON INTERVIEW WITH KENNETH ASHLEY

KENNETH ASHLEY - 1920

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Herbert Evison: Today is July 21, 1971. I'm Herb Evison and for the third time today, I am sitting in front of the microphone at Blue Ridge Parkway Maintenance Headquarters at Vinton, just outside Roanoke. With me is a man whose name has been familiar to me for a long while, but whom I have only just met. And that's Kenneth Ashley. I think I first heard of him as a ranger – probably as Chief Ranger – in one of my old stamping grounds, which is Mount Rainier National Park. But, Ken, let's start this off by getting on the record your birthdate and where you were born, something about the family you were born into, what your father did, and so on – your education.

Kenneth Ashley: Well, Herb, I was born December 10, 1920, in Oak Park, Illinois, which is a suburb of Chicago.

Herbert Evison: The largest village in the U.S.

Kenneth Ashley: Absolutely, and the birthplace of Frank Lloyd Wright among others.

Herbert Evison: Hmm.

Kenneth Ashley: You were probably stationed there during W.W. II.

Herbert Evison: Yes, that's right, yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: Well, my father had a farming background, but he graduated from Purdue in electrical engineering and he was an electrical contractor for a good many years around Chicago. And my mother was also born – she was born in Chicago, my father was from Indiana. I had one sister who was younger than I, and she's still living. I think that of some significance in the early years is the fact that we used to go down on my grandfather's farm in Indiana and my uncle's farm in Indiana, and I kind of got, you know, distinctive enjoyment out of the outdoors – I know you must hear that over and over again. Along about 1934, we took a trip west. This was the first opportunity I had ever been west. And, among other places, we visited Yellowstone. And, after that trip – I'm not gonna be corny and say that I wanted to be a Park Ranger from that time on, but I decided, at that point, that whatever I did decide to do, I was going to do it out west.

Herbert Evison: Uh huh!

Kenneth Ashley: So, I followed by going to school, one you may have heard of before – Colorado State University.

Herbert Evison: (laugh) Oh, yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: It was Colorado A&M in those days.

Herbert Evison: It was generally known among Park Service people as the "Ranger Factory."

Kenneth Ashley: Right. And – I graduated there in 1943, in Forestry. And several of my classmates, of course, are in the NPS now. After graduation – this, of course, was right there in the middle of W.W. II, and I had enlisted in a Marine Corps program offered which allowed me to finish school. And then, I went with the Marine Corps and took Officer candidate training and wound up in the Pacific and was discharged in late 1945.

Herbert Evison: As a what?

Kenneth Ashley: First Lieutenant, I was in artillery, field artillery.

Herbert Evison: Had you by that time committed matrimony?

Kenneth Ashley: No, I was engaged all during the war, and to Ethel Rainer, was her name, and, in fact, she was my landlady's daughter. And Ethel graduated from Stephens College in Missouri. And immediately following my discharge – and I mean immediately – we were married in Fort Collins, Colorado, which is her home, of course. And we spent – I must tell you about the – I was looking for a job, and at that time I was thinking in terms of the Forest Service – but the Forest Service, for one reason or another, didn't have a real good recruiting picture at that time. But I was visiting my parents in Chicago, and I wound up in the Merchandise Mart, and I saw the NPS on one of the doors there, and I went in and talked to Hugh Miller. He was the Personnel Officer for the Park Service at that time. And Hugh was extremely encouraging to me, and took a lot of notes, and so forth, and told me how to apply and what not, and he almost assured me that my chances were good. And then, I went to work for a logging and milling company in Walden, Colorado, up in the northern Rockies, and we spent about a year there. Both of us were working, and I worked as Woods Clerk and I then became Chief Clerk for that company there in Walden. And, along in December, and this was 1946 – I received a couple of inquiries as to availability, as they used to call them, and, I remember there was one to Death Valley, which didn't work out, and there was one to Lake Texoma but finally I got one to Yosemite. And so, we accepted that one. I was happy doing what I was doing, but by that time I had decided definitely I wanted to get with the Park Service because during the intervening year, between the time I first talked to Mr. Miller, and when I started getting

offers, of course, I did a lot of research on the Park Service, and I decided that this was the place I wanted to be. So, we were really thrilled to get that first offer to Yosemite. And, I went on duty January 15, 1947.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, well, now, how long were you in Yosemite?

Kenneth Ashley: I was there a long time – a little over 11 years.

Herbert Evison: Well, you were there during the 1950 NPS Conference; you were there under Carl Russel as Superintendent.

Kenneth Ashley: Right.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, you were in Yosemite for 11 years?

Kenneth Ashley: Right.

Herbert Evison: From early ‘47 to 1958, huh?

Kenneth Ashley: ‘58, July of ‘58. And well, you remember, Herb, in those days there just wasn’t the moving around that there is now, and, as I recall, during that time I had just one offer to go someplace else and that was Muir Woods, but I had just made District Ranger in the Valley which was, in order of position, kind of highly sought after. And so, I did turn down that one. But, then in 1958, why I was offered Assistant Chief Ranger at Mount Rainier, I wasn’t Chief Ranger there, I was Assistant.

Herbert Evison: Well, then you were at Rainier for how long?

Kenneth Ashley: Until November of ‘62, about four and a half years.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, and you went?

Kenneth Ashley: To Yellowstone.

Herbert Evison: As what?

Kenneth Ashley: Again, as Assistant Chief Ranger, but then—

Herbert Evison: Yeah, in a bigger park—

Kenneth Ashley: And with the grade advanced, but the job was similar. And I remained at Yellowstone until April of 1967.

Herbert Evison: When you came here?

Kenneth Ashley: When I came here, so, I’ve just been in the four areas.

Herbert Evison: Four pretty varied areas, though.

Kenneth Ashley: Oh, yeah, right.

Herbert Evison: And, now, I have tape recorded the recollections and the observations of three previous Chief Rangers of the Blue Ridge Parkway and the present Superintendent, and Carl Gilbert, and Len Volz.

Kenneth Ashley: Un huh.

Herbert Evison: And, it is particularly of interest to me, to get on the record something of what you have found in the way of contrast between the ranger job in those western areas where you served, and I'm thinking of service in the capacity of Assistant Chief Ranger which would have meant you were the Chief Ranger's right hand man; contrast between the kind of duties you found yourself involved in, and the kind here. I'll suggest some of the kind of things I am sure would have impinged on your consciousness.

Kenneth Ashley: Un huh.

Herbert Evison: In Yosemite and in Yellowstone, and in Rainier, your neighbors were the national forest,

Kenneth Ashley: Un huh.

Herbert Evison: It's true that in Yosemite you had some people in places up like Foresta and some private property owners over in Wawona. But, on the whole, you had just about one neighbor, and the same was true in Yellowstone.

Kenneth Ashley: Uh huh.

Herbert Evison: Here you come to a long, slim park and if there is one special characteristic of it, it is the fact that it has to live with a whole flock of very close neighbors.

Kenneth Ashley: Yes.

Herbert Evison: It has to live with them, has to get along with them, and there is on the whole, a somewhat different breed then the normal, the usual inhabitant of these old' United States. Now, I have mentioned the one thing, which I'm sure you can develop on the basis of some of the experiences that you had. But, I'm sure also that you find other points of contrast; and the floor is yours, I would like you to just discuss that as long as you feel like doing it.

Kenneth Ashley: Well, you mentioned probably the most important thing, and that is the difference between the external influences that you run into on the Blue Ridge Parkway as opposed to the natural areas in the West. You know, in the west your problems are more inclined toward the visitor. The actual park visitor that comes in from the outside, I always thought in terms of – you had to protect the area from the visitors, and you had to protect the visitors from other visitors, and you had to protect the visitor from the area.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: And back here at the Blue Ridge Parkway are what I call a bona fide Parkway visitor, one who comes to the Parkway for the pure purpose of enjoying the Parkway; he gives us practically no problem. They may litter a little bit, and they may steal a little bit, they may drink a little bit too much occasionally, but usually the 12 million people that visit the Blue Ridge Parkway don't give the Ranger much problem.

Herbert Evison: As a matter of fact, I imagine you find those that you have contact with on the whole, very pleasant to make contact with.

Kenneth Ashley: Right, they're anxious to enjoy the area, the people who come from a great distance – it's quite different from what they've been exposed to, and they're just in a mood to enjoy it; and the people from Virginia, North Carolina, and the surrounding states – particularly those two states – I think they have a tremendous pride in the Parkway having in a way, participated in forming it by donating the land and so forth. But here again, to me the most important job of the Ranger on Blue Ridge Parkway is preserving the integrity of this 1,400-mile boundary we have along which reside some 4,000 neighbors, as you pointed out. And this job is not getting any easier, because the neighbors are perhaps a little more sophisticated now and a little more conscious of their rights. Some of them aren't as impressed with the federal enforcement arm here as you might wish they were; and with the land values increasing as they are, you have this tremendous pressure along our boundaries, all the time, for some type of encroachment.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, you're actually dealing with an influx of new population along your boarders.

Kenneth Ashley: Right, it's changing all the time, and in some places we find the little farm, you know, as the farmer gets old, his children don't always take over, and the farm either becomes abandoned or else he sells out to someone else who is consolidating and they're consolidating for the purpose of subdividing again. It's just a continual change of ownership pattern and the traditional picture that we have been trying to preserve and probably that we've taken for granted since the Parkway was first constructed, 35 years ago, it's getting to be increasingly difficult to maintain. And we find ourselves with a choice sometimes as to whether to leave what is along the Parkway to be exposed to the visitor's eyes or to screen it out. And screening out isn't a good answer because eventually we would have permanent trees and nothing else.

Herbert Evison: Yes.

Kenneth Ashley: I know that Granville must have talked at great lengths about that type of thing. And I'd even go a step further and say that whereas right now, we have people paying the government for the privilege of cultivating the land, or pasturing it – grass farming as many call it – if we sincerely want to preserve this sort of a picture, we may find ourselves reversed and we will be paying people to do this.

Herbert Evison: Uh huh.

Kenneth Ashley: I don't think the concept should be too radical for our doctrine because we have living farm demonstrations other places in the Park Service where we're actually paying employees to do their own chores.

Herbert Evison: But here it would be that as an alternative to a wholly undesirable type of development that would be visible to the person traveling the Parkway or using the Parkway.

Kenneth Ashley: Right. We're talking, perhaps, about two different problems, but related problems, in that we have our own corridor, which encompasses a lot of agricultural land which is under lease. And, we find ourselves in more difficulty all the time to replace a leasee who expires, or moves, or something, with another one. And, as opposed to what is just outside of our boundaries, which we at this point, unfortunately, don't have a whole lot of control over—

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: But even if you were to go down the Parkway now, as opposed to, say, when you did maybe 20 years ago, you would see a lot of what you would say, "Well, that used to be a field there, as I recall, now, it's a locust grove." And those areas that we have just had to abandon because there's no one available to lease them, there's no one interested in them, and we don't have the maintenance funds to keep them in open pasture condition.

Herbert Evison: Yes, and of course, on the other hand, as you come now, increasingly you see things off the Parkway land that you resent.

Kenneth Ashley: Right.

Herbert Evison: We're just sorry that they form a part of the Parkway picture.

Kenneth Ashley: Un huh.

Herbert Evison: You bet, I noticed that especially coming down the Parkway last fall, the last part of September.

Kenneth Ashley: Un huh.

Herbert Evison: So many places where I saw new houses going up with a very nice natural scene, but with no architectural distinction at all.

Kenneth Ashley: Absolutely (chuckle). A lot of this – you know, you were asking me about the contrasts; now, one thing I know that we all expected when we got here was the difficulties involved in contending with an organization that is stretched out over 470 miles.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: And this makes it – I think this makes it more difficult for a Chief Ranger, for example. You know, now, I'm Assistant Superintendent, so, I'm involved in a little different ball game now; but that few years as Chief Ranger I felt that it made it more difficult for those of us in administrative positions – well, it makes it more difficult for everybody – but as far as experience for the individual ranger, or district ranger, I think that in many ways, he's got the superior experiences, because he is out on his own. And he, oftentimes – the district ranger in particular – is involved in problem-solving and public relations challenges – dealing with neighbors, which, in any other situation, the Superintendent would take hold of.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: But, here, because

Herbert Evison: Of the very nature of this long park,

Kenneth Ashley: Right, so, it is a good experience – District Ranger – but a difficult one in some ways, and I say this particularly in regard to the career type of employee, who comes from a long way off; I'm not including myself in this because we live in a more or less urban setting here, but some of our stations, where the ranger's wives are located in pretty isolated situations, are pretty tough on a gal, because these mountain people are friendly but they are very reserved; consequently, it's seldom that a Ranger and his wife are ever totally accepted. They are usually looked upon as outsiders. It can be a lonely existence for those who are not, you might say, locally oriented. And one of the things, you know, when I came here, I said, "O.K. now, I'm a Chief Ranger, if I were Chief Ranger at Yellowstone I think I could step right in, I'd know what to do." But I was sort of desperate here to know what to do. And I guess the out and out becoming acquainted with the Parkway is a tremendous undertaking; and you want to start administering and supervising and everything. But I found, in my own case, really the best thing was to kinda stand back for a while and think "they were getting along fine before I got there." And I spent my time getting acquainted and contacting the people along the Parkway – parkway employees and their families – because they appreciate it, they

appreciate talking to someone from headquarters, and just the fact that they can talk to somebody, you know, and talk about their problems and so forth, I think contributes to their morale.

Kenneth Ashley: One kind of funny thing I recognized when I went up to Mt. Mitchell, for the first time. I had a young fellow who was 18 or 19 years younger than I am, and we walked from the parking area up to the tower, you know, on top of Mt. Mitchell; and it's not over – I don't think it's even a quarter of a mile walk from the parking area up there, but it's up a series of steps. And this fellow, obviously overweight by about 40 or 45 pounds, had to stop and huff and puff about three times between the time we left the car and got up there.

Kenneth Ashley: And, I began to notice we had a lot of excess weight along the Parkway, and it's a sedentary type of existence, in a way, and yet, every now and then, you're thrust into a fire situation, where you have to put out a tremendous amount of physical labor and energy, and over a short span of time. And it just builds up the heart attacks to my way of thinking.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: And so I, one of the first things I did that excited a lot of interest and comment was to put this FBI weight chart – and you know – tell the boys to get with it. And most of them responded by saying they were gonna have to grow 2 inches instead of taking off the weight, you know; but, anyway, they came around and then they began to take pride in it, you know, so at least we got them physically fit there for a little while.

Herbert Evison: That's a very interesting phase of it that I hadn't ever had mentioned to me before; and I'm glad you mentioned the uh, the matter of the Park Service wife and her situation in an isolated location. I hadn't realized, as a matter of fact, that that situation did exist. I thought that as a rule Ranger stations were located reasonably close to other Park Service employees, but looking back now, going along the Parkway, I remember seeing signs for a number of Ranger stations that were out way off from anywhere.

Kenneth Ashley: We have, in most of our situations I think, maybe eight or nine of them we have a Ranger dwelling and a maintenance dwelling that is vacant because the maintenance fellow is local, so he lives off down the mountain someplace, and, of course, the Ranger – he's out and around all day long but usually, this age group they're in, the wife has two or three youngsters, a couple of preschoolers, and so she's really nailed down, so it's a consideration for management to remember – that these gals are there, too.

Herbert Evison: Yes, I should hope that it would be a consideration for management.

Kenneth Ashley: Like right now, on the Parkway I would say that probably a third of our Rangers are of the western breed, and so they not only don't have any close acquaintances nearby but even their family and friends are a long way off too.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: So, this is something you have to think about.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, well, certainly it is of value, from the Ranger's standpoint, the Park Service's standpoint, from the public standpoint, to have somebody that's had solely western experience, come in to a place like this, and get a good strong taste of what this kind of experience is, and yet I suspect that just in spite of general agreement on the desirability of that, there must be a lot of personal problems that get pretty tough in attempting to follow a program like that – of a kind that you suggested.

Kenneth Ashley: Yes.

Herbert Evison: Have you ever given any thought to what, if any, changes you would make in the present system of transferring people from western parks in here, that might help to remedy some of the current defects?

Kenneth Ashley: Well, I've given it a lot of thought, in fact, in order to resolve those, some work that I did, involving a paper I wrote, which got to the Director, and was triggered by the law-enforcement situation, resulted in correspondence between Lon Garrison and myself, and became quite public as far as the Service is concerned.

Herbert Evison: Garrison in his current capacity?

Kenneth Ashley: Yes, in his current capacity, and the reason he wrote me back was, this is a matter of interest to me, I think but this was a little bit of a dissenting paper about a number of things that were going on in the Service, and it culminated in that the Director contacted me and asked me to select a committee of 14 people, two from each region, to meet with him in Grand Canyon, just this last June 24, to talk about some of these concerns that field people – particularly Rangers – had been expressing. And, it was kind of an extraordinary step on his part.

Herbert Evison: Yes, this was, there could have been some awful lively sessions.

Kenneth Ashley: It was a real good one, and he followed up by writing a memorandum which laid to rest some of the concerns but focused in on the fact that we do have problems in communicating.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: And this was in connection with a matter about which I talked to your son, because you probably are aware that he keyed in on this particular problem last December or January.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: And one of the ideas he had was kind of a field management committee made up of field people selected by field people, for the Director to test some of his ideas and programs on, and it is one which I think we're going to follow up on. Boyd, unfortunately, became ill and I think went into the hospital and his whole idea just sort of lost its momentum.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: So, we're in the process of trying to pick that up again, but this is kind of a long way of getting around to answering your question, which you gave me a while ago, about curing this problem of transferring, and I think it goes right back to recruiting. And we have right now in the Service, we have kind of an imbalance between the number of positions available, say in the West, and the number of people who want to be in the West as opposed to the number of positions in the East, and the number of people who want to be in the East. Generally speaking, we have more permanent positions, uniform positions, you know, the career type positions, in the East; but we have more western oriented people in the Service.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: And it goes back to the opposite implication in the seasonal. Most of our seasonals are in the West, whereas, back here, we don't have nearly the seasonal forces, because it's more of a year-round thing.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: But, consequently, you have a tremendous reservoir of people who get their interest in the Park Service from the western exposure – either the seasonal Ranger – primarily the seasonal Ranger.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, even if he's an easterner.

Kenneth Ashley: Yeah, even if he's from the East, why, he's apt to become a westerner, you know, like a lot of us. And so, I think that one thing we took up with the Director is that we've got to recruit more on regional basis, because there's a lot of people, you know, who want to be in the East and I just don't think that we should continually have to contend with this problem of people trying to scratch and claw their way back West.

Herbert Evison: Uh huh.

Kenneth Ashley: Because we do have quite a bit of it here on the Parkway. But it isn't something that you can cure overnight. I think you have to start way back in the beginning of a person's career, and avoid getting yourself over-committed to people, you know, and then not being able to satisfy them, because, I think, everybody understands that when they go with the NPS, they are going to have to spend time, you know, moving around to different places in the country, and as you pointed out, it's extremely desirable to get this varied experience. But, they do, like myself personally, I hope to be back west again sometime.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: You know, I've got friends, relatives, and so forth out that way, and I think it's something that you just can't shrug off.

Herbert Evison: No, no, I certainly agree with you heartily there. There's no reason why you should try to shrug it off. I'm saying that the trouble is, in most cases, the men who are brought east spend too damn much time thinking about getting west again and not enough about the opportunities that are offered on, specifically on, the Blue Ridge Parkway for a variety of experience, of proving experiences.

Kenneth Ashley: Uh huh.

Herbert Evison: And it's been my experience, that every Chief Ranger that I've talked to feels the same way, this is a great proving and training ground.

Kenneth Ashley: Un huh.

Herbert Evison: The feeling is that if a man has been a good Ranger on the Blue Ridge Parkway, by God he's a good ranger anywhere.

Kenneth Ashley: Yeah.

Herbert Evison: He can handle most any situation – I think one of the very great values of the Blue Ridge Parkway is as a training place, as a giver of the kind of experience that really proves whether a guy has it, to a much greater extent, I think, and in more varied ways, than your typical western area does.

Kenneth Ashley: Well, I think, the big thing is being away from close supervision.

Herbert Evison: Yes.

Kenneth Ashley: Being in places where no one is there to tell them what to do – maybe give them a little guidance over the radio – but, by and large, you have to stand or fall on your own two feet.

Herbert Evison: You can't, you're not going to be held by the hand.

Kenneth Ashley: No, that's right (chuckle)

Herbert Evison: Well, do you think of any experiences you had as a Ranger here, on your assignment of Chief Ranger, that we might get on the record.

Kenneth Ashley: This is where I always had difficulty uh, (Pause)

Herbert Evison: I'm going to restate the question that I asked before we took this little interval, and ask you to turn your memory back to those days when you were a Ranger in Yosemite – your first permanent employment with the Park Service. I'd like your reminiscences of people, and of events, even events that you didn't necessarily participate in, but that you were at least an observer of or had some contact with. So, let's do start back in Yosemite – and what year was it?

Kenneth Ashley: Well, it was the middle of January 1947. It was the wintertime when I went to work at Yosemite, and we didn't have any youngsters then, incidentally, both my youngsters were born there – Janet in 1949, and David in 1951.

Herbert Evison: You didn't tell me about them.

Kenneth Ashley: No, I didn't did I?

Herbert Evison: Let's get the dope on the tape about them.

Kenneth Ashley: Well, Janet graduated from Gardiner High School in Montana, while we were at Yellowstone, and David graduated here at Vinton, and then they both are at CSU, although Janet just graduated last May, and David will be a junior, and then they spend their summers working for the Yosemite Park and Currey Company in Tuolumne Meadows.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: Janet's a cashier at the store there and David is a porter at the lodge.

Herbert Evison: (chuckle)

Kenneth Ashley: So, they were born there, actually they were pretty young when we left there, but I think Yosemite is probably, well, it's hard to tell, they like both Yosemite and Yellowstone, of course. But, my first reaction there at Yosemite, I think, was a little unfavorable, because I went in on what they call "grave yard," – GCP – Government Center Patrol, where you work midnight to eight, go around and shake doors and check the grates at the dam to make sure they weren't clogged up with leaves during the spring runoff, and then make a patrol down the road to precede the school bus going down the first thing in the morning, and I never did do very well trying to work midnight to eight, and then pick up sleeping the rest of the

day. For a few months there, I began to wonder if this was really what I had prepared myself for.

Kenneth Ashley: But at the beginning of the summer we were moved out to Hetchnevchy, and, of course, in those days you moved lock, stock, and barrel, just pick up everything and put it in a stake side truck and moved into one of those little houses that had been placed there when they built the dam, and then for the next six months, I spent as much time on horseback, in that Jack Main Canyon country near Wilbur Lake and up in that area, as I did off of a horse.

Herbert Evison: This was on patrols?

Kenneth Ashley: Right, on back country patrol. We'd go out for a week, or sometimes we'd go out for 10 days, and come back in for a few days, and get organized, rest up our stock, and head out again.

Herbert Evison: Now, that sounds like an almost ideal existence.

Kenneth Ashley: Well, I guess that didn't really require any college preparedness, either, but that didn't make any difference to me, because this was something I really enjoyed, and, of course, Ethel was able to make two or three of those trips with me. And there was no question after that first summer, you know, that I was dedicated and devoted and everything else. And we spent, well, we were stationed at Wawona for three years, and I did a little time at Arch Rock, and we spent a couple of summers at Crane Flat, and one of the guys that I remember in particular working for was Sam King.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: And Sam, I remember he was up at Crane Flat, he was a District Ranger, he used to look up at the sugar pines in the morning, and say, "Imagine, Ashley, that they pay us to do this!"

Herbert Evison: (chuckle)

Kenneth Ashley: That was Sam's attitude, and I've often thought, in fact, I told Sam this once, that if there was any way that every beginning ranger could work a little time with Sam, just so some of his beautiful attitude could rub off on them, it would really be something, because I was a great admirer of Sam's. He had this great Park Service attitude, I think that the, you know, just talking about fun now, the best recollection that I have of enjoyable and tough assignments were those snow-gauging trips we used to take to measure the various snow courses for the state of California, so they could determine what the runoff was gonna be and how much irrigation water they were going to have. When I went there, why the guys were still using skis, about eight feet long, and they'd prepare them with belt-dressing and

then they'd use paraffine – was the only kind of wax they'd use. And if they had to climb any grade at all, why they'd put on rope climbers.

Herbert Evison: Uh huh.

Kenneth Ashley: But, about the time I came in, why, some of the younger fellows that had experience in cross-country skiing down at the University of California began to introduce cross-country waxes, you know, European cross-country waxes, and people were kind of amazed to see that you could actually ski uphill with this wax and then glide down.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: But, in taking those courses, there, that was the only way to go in those days, you had to ski them, and there was just something, a kind of thrill, about knowing that all of these people in the San Joaquin Valley, were just hanging on our report, to find out what the conditions were up in the High Sierra. And I remember the reports had to be taken between the 27th of one month and the fourth of the next month. And no matter what the weather or snow conditions were, we started out and took those courses. The one that gave me the most pleasure, and everyone that took it, I suppose, was the one where we'd go to Tuolumne Meadows, by way of the Tenaya Zig Zag Trail, to Snow Flats and Tenaya Lake, about a nine-day trip. And there was oh, a lot of pride connected with it, because we were doing something that just not every Tom, Dick, and Harry were able to do.

Herbert Evison: Uh huh.

Kenneth Ashley: We always had some reporter coming up from Fresno, saying "I want to get the real story on snow gauging and the best way to do it is to go with you." We never did have a reporter that really had himself in shape to take that whole trip, you know, just getting up the Tenaya Zig Zag, leaving the Valley, was enough to finish them off. One time John Townsley and I, and I forget who the other fellow was, started in from Tuolumne Meadows, we'd finished all the courses, and Tuolumne Meadows by trail into the Valley, was around 40-42 miles. And, we were feeling good, and we just skied right into the Valley, 42 miles in one day. And I don't think that anyone else ever did that in one day. John and I always get a kick out of talking about that.

Herbert Evison: Now, nobody that I've ever taped before has told any of the stories of this snow gauging. Let's get a little more of the story on this tape. What pre-arrangements the summer or fall before, before the snow starts to fall, are made for these snow gauging expeditions?

Kenneth Ashley: Well, let's go back a little further than that. The State of California had set up a network of courses throughout the High Sierra in the snow belt. Each course consisted of two legs with anywhere from ten to 15 samples each. The courses were marked by orange markers set way up in trees above the deep snow level, and at either end of the course. The state provided us with a blueprint map which had the prescribed distances between the samples. For example, we would start at one end of the course under one of the signs and measure the map distance to our first sample and then like as not the rest of the samples would be 100 feet apart, but it was important to stay on line between the two trees so that the samples in successive months would be taken in approximately, or as close as possible, in the same place. These courses were laid out by the State of California and these are what we followed.

Kenneth Ashley: As far as advance preparations are concerned, we had to maintain all the snow equipment, which consisted of the tubes, which had to be very carefully lacquered and polished, checked to see that they were all straight, a little device that we called "cookie cutter" which is what we cleaned out the tube with when we had trouble with sticky snow conditions, a tape measure, a scale, and the canvas case that was used to pack the equipment away. This meant a horseback trip to these courses, for very few of them lay along the road.

Kenneth Ashley: Then there were the ranger stations and snow patrol cabins to outfit with groceries and check over the supplies for the winter.

Herbert Evison: You didn't have to carry these around.

Kenneth Ashley: Usually, no, but we did have to carry the complete outfit from one of the lower courses at Rafferty Creek up to Fletcher Lake. Fletcher Lake was four or five miles above Rafferty Creek, so it meant that we carried the gear that far. One of the nostalgic recollections I have is the moaning of the wind through the slots in those snow tubes as we glided down from the Fletcher Lake down to Rafferty Creek.

Kenneth Ashley: The gear actually was no great burden. But we were fairly heavily loaded because we always felt that we should, each one of us, have a sleeping bag, some emergency food, first-aid supplies, ski wax, a few miscellaneous tools for ski repairs, extra clothing, fire starting material and that sort of thing, so we probably carried 25 or 30 pounds. We seldom camped out at night. The only condition under which we would camp out was if we had bad conditions and tough travellings and simply didn't make the cabins but I can remember that happening only once or twice the whole time that I did that, which spanned about ten years. But, a sleeping

bag, we felt, was very important. If you got weathered in or lost or someone was injured, why you certainly would want that.

Kenneth Ashley: As far as actually taking the courses is concerned, I need to describe the snow tube a little further. They came in two sizes, three-foot sections and five-foot sections. In the Sierra Nevada we used the five-foot sections almost exclusively because of the depth of the snow. If your snow was eight feet deep, you screwed two of them together. One winter I remember that we used four on all the courses. That is 20 feet of tube and we had somewhere between 16 and 17 feet of snow at all the courses. Since then I understand that even that year has been exceeded.

Kenneth Ashley: We would take this tube and raise it right straight up above our head and then bring it down with a sharp downward motion so that it slipped down into the snow. If your conditions were good, that is, if air temperature and snow temperature were both below freezing, usually the tube would go right to the ground without much problem. If the snow conditions weren't good, for example, if you had a very warm day, then, of course, since the snow is below 32° why you immediately introduce yourself to a set of problems of the snow freezing to the tube. About the only remedy in a case like that was to wait until the sun went down and the weather turned cold and then there would be no problem.

Kenneth Ashley: And it was important, when you sent the tube to the ground, to pick up just the right amount of dirt. In other words, the perfect sample would be one in which the dirt thickness was just a fraction of an inch just to confirm the fact that you were down through the snow but yet not be a factor when you weighed it. The ranger keeping notes would then record the depth and we would pull the tube out and as we pulled it out we looked through the slits to see what the length of the core was. Now the core would always be less than the depth because it was compressed and the compression of this core could be interpreted by those reading the measurements and it had a relation to the rapidity with which the snow would run off. Come spring, if it was compressed very tightly, why, it was a good pack and runoff would be slow – that was good. If it was a lot of snow that came rapidly and hadn't settled why, that was more apt to run off quicker and that was not as good.

Kenneth Ashley: Next, we would weigh the tube, and this gave us the water content of the snow which, of course, was another very important statistic for the people doing the interpreting. Then, of course, we would measure the distance to the next sample, repeat the process and most of the courses had anywhere from 18 to 24 samples. Usually, it took two or and two and one-half hours to make the course. This was not always a most pleasant part of the trip. As you know, Herb, when you are skiing cross-country, you seldom have

any trouble keeping warm. Once in a while, you will even have a problem keeping cool but when you stop to take the snow course and you are just more or less standing around and not all that active and the wind may be blowing and the temperature around 10° to 12° and you are not active for two or three hours, why, that part of the trip, as I say, is not that pleasant.

Kenneth Ashley: A days trip usually consisted of between 12 and 15 miles and each day we would take one or two snow courses. In Yosemite, we had 17 to 20 courses total, all of which had to be taken during that time period I mentioned before. The one that most of us enjoyed the most, and the one that I took every year for ten years, was the January and March trip to Tuolumne Meadows, Tioga Pass and Fletcher Lake. We went on over Tioga Pass to Saddle Bag Lake and Sawmill Flats. Usually with good conditions it would take about nine days.

Kenneth Ashley: We always had to be wary of the snow conditions. For example, if we had had some fresh snow and we expected fair weather, that was the kind of condition in which you could have the sunshine warm your skis and then, when they would go into the cold snow, you would get the snow freezing to your skis the same as I described with the snow tubes, and this was a condition that was very tough to ski in. So, if that seemed likely, we would get up at 4:00 a.m. and try to get where we were going by noon before it got warm. On the other hand, if we had hard pack conditions – no new snow – then it really didn't make much difference what time of the day we traveled. Sometimes during a full moon, the guys would take one or two of the closer-in courses by moonlight. But now, of course, all of this is done with a snow machine and I feel a little sorry for the guys who are involved in it because I think it is really a little bit too easy.

Herbert Evison: You mean the snow go.

Kenneth Ashley: Yes, I think the machine they use now is the Tucker Snowcat and they just start out from Yosemite Valley and follow the road. In fact, the one course that they can't get through to with a snow machine is Rafferty Creek and, of course, they have the one up above Fletcher so they've eliminated those.

Herbert Evison: Are you saying they are a bunch of softies?

Kenneth Ashley: No, I'm really not saying that. I think that most of the Rangers would dearly love to do that sort of thing. I just think that we have as active a group now as there ever was, but it just isn't the same to go out and ski something like that when you can take a machine. When we were doing it, we had absolutely no other way of doing it unless you snowshoed. But would that about do it on the snow gauging?

Herbert Evison: Yes, that's fine.

Kenneth Ashley: I don't want to take the whole tape on it.

Herbert Evison: That's fine. That's just wonderful stuff, I'm very happy to have that. Now, you had a lot of years there in Yosemite. How about people, your contacts, you were there under John Preston, you were there under Carl Russell.

Kenneth Ashley: Yes, and Frank Kittredge was Superintendent there when I first went there.

Herbert Evison: Oh yeah, well, I think it would be nice to get on the record some of your impressions of those Superintendents you served under.

Kenneth Ashley: Mr. Kittredge, at that point, you know, I was so far removed from the Superintendent, I don't know, I do want to say one thing though. I remember when I first went into Yosemite, I mean I was green about, you know, I told you I had been doing some research on the Park system and so forth, I found there were still quite a few things I didn't know. And Oscar Sedergren was the Chief Ranger then, and when I went in and introduced myself, he talked to me a while and he said, "Well, I want you to come back and meet Mr. Kittredge." We went back and talked to Mr. Kittredge and Mr. Kittredge said to Oscar, he said, "Well, now, do you have Ashley and his wife in the Stephen Mather room, over at the Ranger Club, until they get organized, their furniture gets here?" And Oscar says "Yeah, we've got them in Room 9." And Mr. Kittredge said, "You know, Mr. Mather was largely responsible for the club being here, and this one room, Room 9, we call the Stephen Mather room because whenever he comes, why he always likes to have that room." And I'm sure he said it in the past tense, but I didn't differentiate too clearly and remember saying to Mr. Kittredge, "Well, I sure hope he doesn't show up tonight, because we've been driving a long way, and we're tired." (chuckle)

Herbert Evison: (chuckle) Well, you wonder how a person could make a statement like that about a person who had been dead 20 years, and just never got any place in the Park Service. (chuckle)

Kenneth Ashley: (chuckle) But, I remember one thing about Mr. Kittredge that impressed me very much; every Sunday afternoon he and Mrs. Kittredge would go over to the hospital and they'd visit everybody in the hospital. Most of them were visitors and he'd always wear his uniform, and he'd just talk to them, and it was a very pleasant thing he did there.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: And Oscar Sedergren, to me, was a great Chief Ranger.

Herbert Evison: Yeah?

Kenneth Ashley: He was kind of a hardnosed guy, and pretty much wanted it done his way. And he was a Swede, you know, but I don't – I'd never want to sell him short, because he was, to my way of thinking, he was a great Ranger. And I was associated with him for a long time, you know.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: I guess we understood each other, and, I liked Oscar very much. In fact, he was the only Chief Ranger I – you know, he was only the second Chief Ranger in the country, when you think about it.

Herbert Evison: Count him and Forrest Townsley, right?

Kenneth Ashley: And then Elmer Fladmark was there for quite a while. I never worked with Elmer, but there were three Chief Rangers that spanned one thing like 50 years and that's pretty unusual. You take a look at Yellowstone, and they're used to changing like the seasons there. (chuckle)

Herbert Evison: (chuckle) Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: And, Carl Russell, he was a real gentleman. And he was doing a lot of work on his – you know – the book he wrote.

Herbert Evison: Fur Trade?

Kenneth Ashley: Fur Trade.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: And every weekend, I was at Crane Flat, for several seasons we were there – we'd see Mr. Russell come up the road and he's always stop by the Ranger Station and say Hello to whoever was there. Then he'd head down to the Merced Grove. Have you ever been down there?

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: Well, do you remember that station down there that was actually never used.

Herbert Evison: Uh huh.

Kenneth Ashley: Because it was kind of out of the way. But – Carl and Betty would go down there, and Carl would work on his books down there in the big tree grove for a couple of days, and then late Sunday evening, he'd come back out. And then John Preston was there. All I can say about the three Superintendents that I was aware of during Yosemite is that they were all real great Park Service people.

Herbert Evison: Uh huh.

Kenneth Ashley: Yep, real great Park Service people, I liked every one of them. In fact, all the personnel in Yosemite, in those days, were superior people, I really believe. The job which I liked for sheer enjoyment and I think challenge, was the district ranger job, that I had down in Yosemite Valley.

Herbert Evison: That – I would think that would be a great experience in any man's life, to be a District Ranger in Yosemite Valley. Can we get something on the tape about that experience?

Kenneth Ashley: Yeah.

Herbert Evison: What is it, what is it that makes it special?

Kenneth Ashley: Well, I think it must be the variety of the – you know – there really are challenges that are imposed on the guy, and these relate to the number of people that are there.

Herbert Evison: Uh huh.

Kenneth Ashley: Because, of course, now, actually – and this is a proper move – they have restricted somewhat the number of people that can get into the Valley or at least, stay overnight there, which is kind of a key to it. But in those days, we figured there was a pillow count of about 5,500 that could stay in the accommodations, and between the government and the Currey Company and their families, there was a permanent population of around 1,200.

Kenneth Ashley: And, then the campgrounds – on a normal summer night, would have somewhere around 10,000 people in them.

Herbert Evison: Uh huh.

Kenneth Ashley: So, in that very small area there, we had 10, 12, 17 – well, around 17,000 or 18,000 people.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, which is a good size town.

Kenneth Ashley: Yes sir, in fact, people, it didn't seem to bother most of them. But they were actually much more crowded there than they were in the crowded cities that they tried to escape.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. (chuckle)

Kenneth Ashley: We had – I guess I'm getting to ramble here – but I do want to mention – this situation here. Last summer we flew out to California, and when we came, we flew nonstop from Dallas to San Francisco. On our approach to San Francisco, we were low enough that, you know, we could actually see the cars on the road, and we could point out Ten Lakes, and Gaylor Lakes, and we got a real kick out of looking out the window and seeing all these places, you know, that we recognized and knew so well. And then, just

three days later, we were hiking in that country, because we went right up to the meadows where the kids were, and we spent four days going up to these back-country lakes. And, I suddenly realized that these jet planes, really, are making quite an impact on the back-country there, because there are so many of them, and they're on their approach route in to San Francisco; and there were times when we'd have to stop talking to let one of these jets get out of the way – they were making so much racket. Another thing, you know, there were jet contrails and one day the atmosphere was such that they weren't dissipating – they were just kind of spread out, and it was a very clear day, but we were under a cloud cover there for about two hours shortly after noon, because so many contrails had spread out and just hadn't dispersed for some atmospheric reason – hadn't been absorbed in the atmosphere. And I was concerned enough about it, for the heck of it, I wrote a letter to the head of the Federal Aviation Agency, bringing this out. And, I got a nice letter back from them, in which he stated that they were aware of this problem, and so forth and so on. I guess they just can't make their way around to every national park but, it's particularly noticeable down at Yosemite, because of so many planes coming in there to San Francisco.

Herbert Evison: I didn't realize that you would get the feeling.

Kenneth Ashley: Yeah, it was because it had been probably 15 years since we had been, you know, up in the High Sierras – 12 anyway. But that was one thing, that was an environmental thing there, you know. Everyone was talking about it, and this was a real good demonstration of progress in one way destroying something else.

Herbert Evison: Let's get a little stuff on your experience at Rainier on here Ken. Who did you serve under there?

Kenneth Ashley: Well, Preston Macy was the uh, Superintendent when I first went there, he was later succeeded by John Rutter. And we still keep in touch with Preston, he's probably got more friends in the Park Service than anyone else, I think.

Herbert Evison: Really?

Kenneth Ashley: He's another grand fellow to work for. And, the Chief Ranger was Rueben Hart, who's now over at Glacier. I was Assistant Chief Ranger, and of course I think that the biggest factor in anybody's experience at Mount Rainier was Bill Butler.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: And, I'm sure that his name had come up in a few tapes. In fact, have you ever taped him?

Herbert Evison: I taped him eight years ago.

Kenneth Ashley: Well, great! I know you think about articulate people, Bill can be articulate, but he's so doggone modest and I'm assuming he probably revealed more things about himself that should be told and—

Herbert Evison: Yes, I got a good tape of him.

Kenneth Ashley: Well, that's wonderful! But Bill, to me, he was a real person.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: I thought about Bill that Bill Butler's problems came after everyone else's were taken care of.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: That's the way he operated. But to me the all-consuming feature that affected everything we did there at Mt. Rainier, was the mountain itself. And uh, I knew that the first thing I wanted to do when I got there just as soon as I could was to get to the summit of Mount Rainier, because I had noted when you were visitors or were being interviewed by anybody, or if a reporter had something, or if we had a rescue going on or something, would ask you questions about the mountain, you could give them all the information you wanted, but they eventually got around to the point of saying "Well, have you been up?"

Herbert Evison: Uh huh.

Kenneth Ashley: And if you said "No, I haven't," it pretty well discounted everything you had to say prior to that and so I did. I got up to the, in fact, I climbed the mountain several times while I was there, and I always thought that the best part of that mountain climbing, was when you got back down again. (chuckle)

Herbert Evison: (chuckle) Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: Because it was a pretty high elevation. And I also know I think that the one, if I made any contribution at all it was to instill this same attitude with every Ranger there, and every new Ranger that came, why, before he did anything else, he had to get up that mountain.

Herbert Evison: Uh huh.

Kenneth Ashley: And then after that, why, we made it an annual thing, we made arrangements so that people could do it. We'd send them up with a guide, Bill, one of the best times I had was climbing the mountain with Bill, you know—

Herbert Evison: Bill Butler?

Kenneth Ashley: Yeah. Of course, he was getting along where he wasn't climbing very often, because, of course, he was getting old. But I think that the time I climbed with Bill, it was his 62nd ascent. So, you can see that he'd been up and down a good many times. And I've been out with Bill, you know, we have a lot of emergency-type situations at Rainier in the wintertime – people getting lost – they would ski out from Paradise on a cross-country ski trip to go up the slope of the mountain, and then they'd get fogged in and there's no more hopeless feeling in the world than being fogged in on Mount Rainier. It's just like being inside of – inside of a box that instead of being black, it's white. And, this, are you about to the end of the tape?

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

[END OF TAPE 83 SIDE 2]

[START OF TAPE 84 SIDE 1]

Kenneth Ashley: We were talking about Mount Rainier, and, I guess I was speaking about Bill Butler, but, anyway, the situation of being lost up on Mount Rainier – in going after people who were lost and in getting, actually, into about the same kind of a situation that the people who were lost were in, I guess, because when you get up into an area where there is no detail, no rock, no trees, nothing to identify with except expansive snow that blends into this heavy fog. You cannot tell literally, whether you're going up or down sometimes. And I found from experience myself, to kind of lean forward – to lean gingerly forward – and fall backwards, because I didn't know which way was up. But in those situations, where I had been in a, say, in a leadership capacity, my idea was to just sit down and wait till the fog lifted. But, Bill had some kind of built-in radar, or antenna or something that allowed him to – possibly it was part of just his long time association with the mountain – he knew it so well; but he had to have something beyond that, he could feel for where he was, which exceeded that of any person that I ever did run into. And where the rest of us would become immobilized, Bill could still carry on and guide and lead and make good use of the rescue effort. Rainier was the – I would have to say the kind of echo, John Preston was telling you about – Mount Rainier is kind of the jewel of the National Park System. It, as far as the scenery is concerned, I don't think that there's anything else that compares with it. The, you know, the mountain itself furnished a backdrop for the magnificent display of wildflowers. And, Indian Henry, I don't know what time of the year you were there—

Herbert Evison: It was all covered with snow.

Kenneth Ashley: Well, it was all covered with snow. Had you been there, you know – well, I'm sure you did make later trips up there – get up to where there was

more color than green and then all the time, did you look up and see the mountain in the—

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: Background – when you could see it. I remember one time being in Ricksecker Point, and there were two I think they must have been two schoolteacher types from Ohio there. And I was looking toward the mountain, the sun was shining – but it was one of those times when there was a cloud lying in along the glaciers, and it swept up and completely obscured the mountain. And these ladies were saying, "Well, Ranger, we have been to Mount Rainier four times, right in the middle of the summer, and we have yet to see Mount Rainier." And as they were talking to me, and they were facing South, you know, the Tatoosh Range—

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: Which, of course, was out. And I, of course, was looking at the mountain, and could see the cloud dissipating. And, I said, "Well, ladies, turn around and look." Because about that time the mountain became visible. (chuckle) And, I thought that they were going to cry, they were so happy, you know, to see that mountain finally, they thought I had something to do with it, I guess, but that is the one thing about Rainier – you do have a lot of bad weather there, but, here again, like Mr. Macy would say, "When you have the good days, why, you forget the bad ones, right away. It's that kind of place."

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: I don't think of anything else in particular, about Rainier.

Herbert Evison: Now, you weren't there at all when Townsley was Superintendent?

Kenneth Ashley: No, no, John – John and I rangered together in Yosemite and we were very good friends. But no, I was in Yellowstone then, when John went—

Herbert Evison: Well, yeah, now – let's get a little of this Yellowstone experience on the tape too, cause that's a very different breed of cat from either Yosemite or Mount Rainier and any impressions that you carry out of the events that you think of. I'd like to get them.

Kenneth Ashley: Well, Yellowstone is a, it seems to me in Yellowstone, that we were, the season would come on so fast, and we would have to gear up so much, that we were always in the process of getting ready for the summer season, until all of a sudden we realized that the summer season was practically over and we never had gotten ready really.

Herbert Evison: (chuckle)

Kenneth Ashley: And I think that's kind of typical of a place where you get, we must have gotten 90 percent of our travel, probably, in about an eight-week period there, and well, with a permanent ranger force of 25, we expanded by adding 110 seasonals and so you can see what I mean about a lot of your – a lot of the permanent people's time was devoted to getting ready, training people and getting people located properly, getting them squared away. And all of a sudden, this process, you realize, is no longer necessary because the season is practically gone. Yellowstone, I think, is the place which is more, speaking of it from kind of a selfish employee's standpoint, Yellowstone is a place where you have to spend time in order to fully appreciate it. It always concerned me when people would come there and really not enjoy it, and I think, that the reason was that they were trying to do too much, in too short a time, and perhaps, hadn't been adequately prepared. Scenery, it doesn't compare to Yosemite or Rainier, or a lot of other places – a little bit monotonous, perhaps, to a person who's looking for something spectacular because he goes through this lodge pole pine forest. But to a person who spends time there, there's always something new. You know, like in the spring you go around the corner and there's a grizzly who is maybe just taking down an elk or something like that. Usually, things like that, you don't see often – the incident where I saw a grizzly, you know, you might say, a grizzly in the wild attacking another animal – probably two or three times. People wouldn't see that. You know, the ordinary visitor just wouldn't see that. They were very fortunate to see a grizzly bear. And those encounters with grizzlies oftentimes weren't the most pleasant kind, you know. It would be at nighttime, in the campgrounds, or something.

Herbert Evison: Yes.

Kenneth Ashley: I remember Mr. Albright talking about this and wondering how we could improve this situation; he wanted people to have a grizzly experience. And I told him, "Mr. Albright, I'll tell you, I don't have to see a grizzly to have a grizzly experience. When I go out on a trail in Yellowstone Park, I'm having a grizzly experience, because just the fact that they're out there, makes me more alert and more conscious of what's going on around me." And, I think this is very true. It adds a certain spice to Yellowstone, and in Glacier, too, of course which you don't have in any other park. And I know that we've got a lot of concern with this, because of this Mr. Heck, and the accident we had in Yellowstone has placed a new focus on our whole safety program and yet, to me the danger that's involved with grizzly bears in a place like Yellowstone, that's part of the Yellowstone experience,

Herbert Evison: Uh huh.

Kenneth Ashley: I would hate to have us take visitors around in armored cars or something just so they'd be safe, because I think it would destroy something for them. The same way, you know, with your other animals – your moose, some elk, during the summertime, you know, you see the usual cluster of elk out in Hayden Valley, but in the late fall, you drive up through, or maybe ride horseback, and all of a sudden – come around a bend in the trail, or a curve in the road and you'll see 450 elk have suddenly moved in there. You know, it's an experience that you can't program. You don't know what's going to happen. You can't set it up, you can't plan it. It just happens, and you have to be around there to appreciate these things.

Herbert Evison: I have had two different friends who have been very viciously attacked during the deer-rutting season by deer.

Kenneth Ashley: Hmmm.

Herbert Evison: One of them was old Robert Moran, the old ship builder of Seattle, from way back in the start of the century. Once was a fellow who went into an enclosure – Indiana State Park, and was attacked, as was the custodian who was killed. The reason I mention it is because I wonder if you know whether the elk are particularly dangerous – the bull elk are particularly dangerous during the rutting season?

Kenneth Ashley: I think there's an element of hazard in getting too close to a bull elk when he's in a rut. I don't remember anyone having been injured by a bull elk. But I would say that when they're pawing the ground or bugling, or their neck has swollen up, they present kind of a different appearance and I don't think people – I don't remember people ever crowding them. I remember a couple of instances of people being injured by moose. But this was a simply a situation where, you know, a moose is a tremendous attraction for people who are taking photographs. And out in Hidden Valley, on several occasions, I've seen people, you know, completely encircling a moose and it didn't seem to bother that moose. And yet, there came a time when the moose was going to go someplace else, he just lifted up his head and he went someplace else, and he had to go through that circle. And those were the occasions when I remember people being injured, that they just couldn't get out of the way fast enough. And one of them was injured in the side by his antlers, and the other one tripped and fell down and actually was stomped on by one hoof. There was nothing malicious about it, it was just that the moose got ready to quit eating and headed out and somebody was in his road, you know.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: And I guess the bear, the moose and bear – they were the only two animals I remember actually injuring people, you know, in Yellowstone.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, there's been some complaint recently about the inadequacy of Park Service safeguards in the Hot Spring Geyser areas that I suppose you have heard something about. Looking back on your experience there, do you feel that safeguards against – well – against a kid coming into a boiling pool or somebody breaking through a crust or something of that kind – were adequate?

Kenneth Ashley: Probably not, and I hope that Mr. Heck doesn't get a hold of this (chuckle)

Herbert Evison: (chuckle)

Kenneth Ashley: In other words, this is off the record, but, now, I don't think that we can do anything like protect people against every hazard in a national park, you know, and you have probably been involved in conversations about this many times. I think probably our main pitch should be first at the entrance to the park, where they come in and, of course, we've done this so many years in connection with bears. At Yellowstone, we actually had a special leaflet that we gave to people and the instructions for the Ranger when he delivered it was to call attention to it, and say, "Please, read this leaflet about the bears. They are wild animals and they're dangerous." And, I would think that in a place like Yellowstone, we had the same obligation, we had to inform the people at the entrance that the hot pools, you know, that they present a hazard, and, to keep their children under control. And, then again, perhaps, it should be taught a little more vigorously at the campfire programs, and as people entered the geyser basin, you know, when they get out of their car and walk, actually get on the boardwalk, why, at that point, there probably should be, and there was – I mean we did have various warnings about them. And how much is enough I guess is the real question there. And when you're having your own flesh and blood disappear in front of your eyes in a scalding pool, of course, this is going to have a tremendous bearing on your thoughts about the subject from then on. And, I think that we have to avoid over-reacting because, you know, we can't spoil the springs for people, because – you know, of a few people who do get in trouble.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: I often felt the same way in Yosemite, that we, by our anxiety to protect those few foolish people, that we could restrict people, that they would lose this element of hazard and danger which I think is, perhaps, part of the natural experience. It's different from someone driving on the Parkway. I mean, you, know, they expect to be protected as much as possible; but when somebody undertakes to deal with nature on her own terms, I think that they accept an element of danger and risk. And, well, I'm not going to say that we will pay with a few lives for this philosophy,

but I do think that we would destroy something by being so restrictive and so careful with people that they're revolting.

Herbert Evison: Uh huh. Well, I think that's instinctive. In your experience there in Yellowstone, I'm sure that you had many encounters with the DO NOT FEED THE BEARS AND DO NOT MOLEST THE BEARS, and so on. Can you think of anything specific in connection with that particular human protection problem?

Kenneth Ashley: I had wondered, in fact, I was wondering at the time, and this wasn't only me, a lot of us wondered, during the experimentation that was being done with the grizzly bear and there was a number of studies going around. And the use of the succostrin, as the means of immobilizing the bear, we were beginning to wonder whether the use of this drug might possibly lead to the bear losing their fear of people. Because the way succostrin works, it immobilized the bears' nervous system to the extent that he knew what was going on – at least this was what the scientist told us – but the bear recognized people and could see, still smell, and was conscious of things going on around him. But he was powerless to use his muscles – the drug just immobilized his nervous system, and his muscles couldn't respond. Our reaction when a bear got loose on the campgrounds causing trouble, if we couldn't trap it, we'd go out, you know, with a dart gun, and hit it with the darts which would immobilize it. And then we would take the bear either in the pick-up or else we'd put him in the trap, because he would come out of the effects of the drug in about 20 minutes. And, a number of the bears probably had this treatment, maybe half of dozen times during its career. And we were beginning to wonder whether this constant use of the drug might actually have a little backlash effect, in that the bear became familiar with being handled and realized that nothing drastic had happened, that he might lose his fear of people.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: And I think that the researchers themselves, who were conducting some of these experiments, were beginning to wonder about the psychological effects, you know, that this just might have on the bears.

Herbert Evison: It's a little difficult to ask a bear.

Kenneth Ashley: Yeah, it is! (chuckle)

Herbert Evison: What his psychological reactions are.

Kenneth Ashley: But they really are having, I talked to one of the Rangers, just a short while ago, and, of course, one of the things that they had done in Yellowstone was to close one of the dumps. And the grizzly bears seemed to have gone to the campgrounds – those who used to stay in that dump.

Now, they're standing out in some of the campgrounds, and it really is kind of an undertaking to go up in one of those campgrounds and capture one of those.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: I think that they're obviously discouraging people. But that's something probably I shouldn't even be talking about, because the situation is changed since I left there. My family used to camp for two weeks every June out in the Fishing Bridge Campgrounds I remember. I don't think I'd want my family to camp out there anymore, because there's just too many visitors stirring around there. But they never had any trouble. You know, they were competent about keeping the camp clean and not leaving any food in the tent, because the food seemed to be the thing that drew the bears. But that bear situation in Yellowstone was interesting because people would keep score on it. And, people who had been on a trip, one or two, or three, or ten years ago, they would count the bears that they would see going around the route. And then they'd come back two or three years later, perhaps, and maybe count again. And if they didn't see at least as many bears as they'd seen that first trip, they'd say, "What's happened to all the bears?" And, of course, this thing fluctuates with the seasons too. One in particular, you talk about incidents involving bears, I remember the one we called the "antenna bear" was operating over in the vicinity of Sylvan Pass between East Entrance and Lake.

Kenneth Ashley: I was over there, I went over there to make the, just the regular entrance check in June, and there were still snow banks along the road on the top of Sylvan Pass, and when I got over there, after making an audit the Ranger gave me the memorandum to give to the District Park Ranger over at Lake and said "Here, we've got a problem with this bear." So, I read it and it was a report of this bear that was operating on Sylvan Pass, and to date he had broken off 31 antennas off of cars, and all this Ranger had were reports of those cars that were coming out. You see, he didn't know how many antennas had been broken off by this bear from cars going into the Park.

Herbert Evison: Uh huh.

Kenneth Ashley: And I said, "My gosh, you do have a problem, try move the bear." So, I drove back then, and when I got to Sylvan Pass, why, sure enough this bear was there, and he was sitting up on the snow, sitting up like a teddy bear, you know and I stopped and he jumped down and came over and stood right in front of me, and then he put his paws on the hood of the car, and waltzed around to where the antenna would be ordinarily, you know, on the right hand side of the hood there; but, of course, I had short-wave

and my antenna was one of those long-lift antennas and coming from the rear bumper. And so, he just took his paws and kind of engulfed the area where that antenna would be, but it wasn't there. And then he tried clawing at my windshield wipers, and at that time I drove off and left him, you know.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Kenneth Ashley: And about that time, another car came along, I saw him doing the same thing with that car and apparently he was moving into position to get that antenna. And I didn't stay there to look, you know. I did notice a number of antennas along the pavement there, and what in the world possessed this bear to do this, I don't know. But he just specialized in antennas and every car he got a chance, he'd just break that antenna off. Well, when I talked to the Ranger about it a little later, that same day, he said "Yeah, they've had several reports of antennas being broken off by a bear near Sylvan Pass," so I suppose he'd had 40 or 45 antennas by that time. So, I said, "Well you do want to trap him and remove him and put him somewhere else." So, they did, but they couldn't get him to go in the truck, so they finally had to use the succostrin, and being really with winter coat, they overestimated his weight, and gave him too much and it killed him.

Herbert Evison: Hmm.

Kenneth Ashley: And you know, I was kind of sorry about that, because he seemed like kind of a character. (chuckle) We should at least have tried to let him operate somewhere else for a while. That wasn't a grizzly, that was a black bear.

(It sounds as though the microphone fails, or some type of mechanical difficulty, and interview ends – no complimentary closing.)

[END OF TAPE 84 SIDE 1]

[END OF INTERVIEW]