

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #357 - Sides A/B

Subject: Ellis Mason - With Video

Place: Mason Home - Hines, Oregon

Date: March 25, 1994

Interviewers: Barbara Lofgren & Dorothea Purdy

Release Form: Yes

DOROTHEA PURDY: This is Dorothea Purdy, along with Barbara Lofgren, and we are talking with Ellis Mason at his home in Hines, Oregon. The date is March 25th, 1994, and this transcript is #357. Ellis, we'll start by asking you your full name.

ELLIS MASON: Well, my full name is Gerald Ellis Mason; I've always gone by Ellis Mason.

DOROTHEA: Where were you born?

ELLIS: I was born in, near Turner in the Willamette Valley. Turner is ten, fifteen miles south, and maybe a little east of Salem.

DOROTHEA: Well, what were your parent's names?

ELLIS: My parents' name is George Ellis Mason; he was born and raised in Missouri. And my mother was Nettie Belle Wood, and she was born and raised in the hills above Turner, same place I was born and raised.

DOROTHEA: Do you know something about your grandparents that would be interesting to tell us?

ELLIS: Oh, my grand --- my, excuse me, grandparents did you say?

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

ELLIS: Well, my grandparents were, came, let's see now, my grandparents settled in Turner, above Turner, in the hills above Turner. If you was to go from Turner kind of west and south why you'd get on a high ridge of hills, and that's where their dad, my great-granddad homesteaded years ago.

But my grandparent's mother was born and raised up there in those hills, and lived there all of her life. And that's where my mother was born, and raised, and lived all of her life too, up until the last number of years.

DOROTHEA: You talked earlier about your grandmother living in Boise for a while, due to the fact that she was ill as a child. Can you tell us something about that?

ELLIS: Well to, would you like for me to go back to the reason she was there?

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

ELLIS: Well, my great-granddad was born and raised as a young fellow back in Iowa, I believe it was. And then he was, like many of the other settlers, now this is my great-granddad; there was a great movement to come West. And in 1854, why he came out by wagon train. And most of the old timers in those days were looking for a gold mine, or something like that, all along the trail or in the country, or the rich Willamette Valley.

Well, my great-granddad came through this country here in 1854 by wagon train, of course. And then he kept a going, and he ended up over in the Willamette Valley, and that's when he homesteaded in the hills above Turner. And he homesteaded there in 1855. And he didn't bring his family with him on that original trip out, and after a few years, he went back and was coming back with his family. And when he got out into the Western states here, why they were losing lots of children in those days; they were estimating losing about one child out of every ten. And when they got sick and died is all they could do was just bury them and keep going, which is kind of a sad story.

But when they was coming back with the family, they had five children, why my grandmother got sick and they thought she was going to die, and so they dropped out of the wagon train and built a log cabin to stay in. And it turned out that was the first house ever built in Boise, Idaho. Now, there was another family on this wagon train, that they didn't want to see this, my great-granddad drop out by himself with these children and stay, so they dropped out with them. And they built this log cabin to stay in because of the sick girl. Well, they built my great-granddad's first because of the girl that was sick, and then as soon as they got it built, they built another one just like it. And

now they're both, both been moved into the Julie Davis Park in Boise. It's a real nice park, and it has been preserved and the park is building up better all the time.

Now, this Julie Davis was a grandmother of Tom Davis who owns the Alvord Ranch at the present time, has for twenty some years, down on the east side of the Steens. But anyway, they, that was the first permanent structure or house in Boise. And while they were there, the Calvary was coming through protecting the immigrants from the Indians. And this young Calvary boy met this young girl, I'm sorry I referred to her as my grandmother, but she wasn't my grandmother yet. But this Calvary boy met her and then they got married in a little less than a year. And then that was my grandparents then, the Calvary man whose name was Wood, Matt Wood, married this young girl which is, turned out then to be my grandmother.

Well, when they got married they soon moved over on her dad's homestead on the hills above Turner. And then that's where, this was in 1863. Now that's when my mother, my mother was born and raised there on that same homestead that her granddad had homesteaded on years ago.

BARBARA LOFGREN: What was your grandmother's name?

ELLIS: My grandmother's name was Wood, on my mother's side.

BARBARA: Her first name?

ELLIS: Her first name was, can't say it right now. Sorry about that.

BARBARA: Well, if you think of it ---

ELLIS: Yeah. I know it, but I just can't say it. But they lived there all the rest of their life until they passed away. And then when my mother got married, why they, we stayed on the ranch. She was born and raised there; we stayed on the farm there, too.

BARBARA: What were your parent's names?

ELLIS: My parents was George Ellis Mason, and Nettie Belle Wood.

BARBARA: Belle Wood, okay.

ELLIS: Wood was her maiden name.

BARBARA: Did you go to school in Turner or in Salem or ---

ELLIS: Yeah, well, she went to school in the hills above Turner. There was just an old one-room

schoolhouse. And she had a sister that was a little older than she was and used to teach school in this old house, schoolhouse, which it was just a one room school-house, which there is nothing there at the present time, its all been disbanded and things. But my mother went to school in that schoolhouse there. And it's the same one that I went through grade school in.

BARBARA: And so you went to school in Turner, also?

ELLIS: Yes, and it's, Turner was our address. It was up in the hills above Turner a ways.

BARBARA: And do you have brothers or sisters?

ELLIS: Yeah, I have a sister that's a couple, three years older than I am, and another sister that's two, or two and a half years younger than I am. And that was the size of the family, two girls and a boy.

BARBARA: And did we ask you when you were born?

ELLIS: Yeah, I was born in, May the 23rd, 1915 in the Turner area there.

BARBARA: And did you go on to college then?

ELLIS: Well, when we got to, I have a sister a little older, and when we got ready to go to high school it was, and of course, in those days why we were still, at that time, we had just got our first car, we was going to town. ... went in a horse and buggy. And so they thought, well, they would get a farm down closer to high school, someplace. So they bought a place and sold their farm there down by the Chemawa Indian School, about in the 1930s when we was ready to go to high school. So actually, we went to high school in Salem.

BARBARA: In Salem. And what was your sister's name?

ELLIS: Hildred was my oldest sister, and Iris; I R I S was my youngest sister.

BARBARA: Hilda did you say?

ELLIS: H I L D R E D.

DOROTHEA: Hildred.

BARBARA: Oh. So no brothers then?

ELLIS: No brothers, no.

BARBARA: Two sisters, okay.

DOROTHEA: You then went on to college after?

ELLIS: Well, when I got out of high school in 1933, I --- my dad was a farmer all of his life. And well he did --- when he first left Missouri, I might throw it in, he went up to Alaska and worked on a railroad up in Nome, Alaska for a couple of years. And he came back and then is when he met my mother and they got married. And that's, they lived the rest of their life there then in Turner area.

DOROTHEA: And then did you go into college right out of high school, or did you work for a while?

ELLIS: No, I was, my dad had a farm there and I was a farming with him, helping on the farm. And then I did a lot of share farming for neighbors for two or three years. And I was working one night in a prune drier, I was a night drier man, which is a pretty important job for a young kid, you know, drying prunes. Because you were responsible for keeping the temperatures right and everything like that.

My gosh, I had a neighbor that lived three or four miles down the road came over, and he said, this was in 1935, yeah, 1935, that he wanted to go to college and take a course in this wildlife management. It was the first year that that was ever started in the United States. And I think there was something like nine or eleven colleges was going to teach that. And Oregon State was the only one on the West Coast. So he said, "I want to go and take that." His dad had worked for the Game Department as a game warden, which they used to do their own law enforcement for many, many years.

And so I told my mother about it when I got home that night, and she would go into town several days a week sometimes, and did housework for people to make a little money. And she told one of the women she was working for, whom I had helped some doing some garden work for and lawn work in the summertime. And told her about it, so when the General came home, he was a Major General in the Army, he just picked up their phone and told her that he called Dean Showenfield, who was the Dean of Agriculture at Oregon State. He said, "Had a boy there that wanted to go to school, and didn't have any money, and wanted to know if there could be any way

you could get him a job so he could go to college?" And he said, "Send him over, we'll take care of him."

So I got a day off and went over and talked to him. And they was just starting this course, and there was a fellow by the name of (Roland) Dimmick was starting the, heading up the department of Fish and Wildlife School, and he was originally an entomologist professor there; he was a great fisherman, so they thought he would be a good one to be in charge of that. So, he took that over and he started. And so my job was, I was assigned to him, I was to get so much money, and I worked for the head of the department there.

But I had numerous jobs like: oh they wanted some beaver to be mascots for the Oregon State Beavers. And I took care of them, go out every day and make sure they had feed, and they weren't getting out, and things like that. And I worked in the veterinary building there, and just did miscellaneous work for the fish and wildlife, the department. And I did a lot of lab work for, had to set up lab works for some of the classes, why I did that. I just did miscellaneous jobs for the department all four years through college.

And I got what was pretty good money in those days. I was probably getting fifteen, twenty cents an hour, something like that, you know, at the time. That's the reason that I was able to go to college, was the fact that I had this job. Because most of the people couldn't afford it. Of course, we were baching, this other boy. And his parents were farmers too, and we'd make a trip back home once every three weeks, or a month at least, and then we'd take home a lot, back a lot of groceries with us. So it didn't cost us very much to bach there. And we got us a little apartment up in a building there, the only people lived there was the dentist, the doctor and his wife lived in --- they rented us two rooms across the hall from where they lived, and his office was in the other end. And it's just amazing; I think we gave them \$15 a month for that, for our rooms up there.

BARBARA: Do you remember what his name was, the dentist?

ELLIS: Oh boy, yes, I do. First time I haven't been able to think of that in years.

BARBARA: Where was this, where was his office located? Was it downtown?

ELLIS: Yeah, it was on 15th and Monroe; Monroe is one of the main streets up and down.

BARBARA: Yeah, I grew up in Corvallis, so I know.

ELLIS: Oh, is that so? And it was right on the, yeah 15th and Monroe. Yeah, I've stopped in there once in a great while when I'm over there. So, we lived there with them all four years. And he was, they were a real nice couple. And he fixed our teeth and wouldn't charge us anything for it either, and things like that, you know. Just a real nice fellow.

DOROTHEA: What did it cost you to go through your, how many years, four years of college?

ELLIS: Yeah. Boy, I'd like to have, I have a, I kept track; I've kept a diary ever since I was out of high school. And I've got a three-page typewritten of what it cost me each semester, term, going to college. And actually, it's too bad I couldn't, hadn't dug this out; I could give you the exact figures. But I actually it didn't cost me anything to go to college, figuring the intake. Now, in the summertime, I was working on a farm and saving my money. And while I was going to school, I was working part time. But my income that I made working while I was in, summertime help or work, or during the wintertime, it cost me practically nothing. But my total expenses, I know was around, oh maybe \$150, \$300 a year. It's amazing, you know, nowadays you talk to people about that, that doesn't seem realistic.

DOROTHEA: It doesn't even pay the rent.

ELLIS: No, I should say not, not for a month, little own a year.

DOROTHEA: No. So, well then, what made you decide to come to Harney County?

ELLIS: Well, when I got through school, I came over here in 1937 while I was still in school, I hadn't graduated yet. And it was on a big game field trip. And the, John Scharff was down here on the refuge then, and this big game field trip came through here for years. After I came here for, oh for twenty years that trip, that group would come through every year. And I'd take them on tours, too. I remember we went up on the Steens Mountains and John Scharff was our guide up there then. He'd only been here a couple years or so, he came in 1935. I remember John, he likes to tell this story yet, he asked me, "Well, how I liked this country?" I told him, "Well, I just, it's just great. Nice to see it, but I sure wouldn't want to live here." And now I've been here, came in 1939 to stay, and now they can't get rid of me, no way. (Laughter)

BARBARA: I guess we should back up just a minute and ask you why was it that you decided that you wanted to go into wildlife?

ELLIS: Well, I was a farmer boy, and I loved it, and I liked the hills. And I used to trap as a young kid, now the hills where I trapped, my mother's brothers used to trap. And she knew where some of the old, he used to trap a lot of skunks. And there were certain dens around in some of the canyons up in the hills there, and she got me into some of the areas and I found them, and so I trapped skunks and occasionally would get a mink, but not very often. But I just loved the out of doors, and I was, didn't like the big cities at all, you know. So, I, this wildlife sounded good to me.

BARBARA: But you didn't want to stay on and be a farmer, rancher like your dad?

ELLIS: Well, I enjoyed it, I really enjoyed farming. I used to go to the neighbors from where my folk's place was, and I'd farm, oh I had six, or five, or six acres of potatoes one time, and put them in just on the share basis for the neighbors, you know. And I made pretty good money doing that. It wasn't much money, but it was good in those days, you know. And I enjoyed that, but I've seen so many people, and farmers in those days they just couldn't make a go of it. And a lot of the farmers are the same way now, but they're shuffling a lot more money than we were then.

BARBARA: So you could see a better way of life by going into the wildlife?

ELLIS: Yeah, yeah, that's right. And the wildlife appealed to me, because I, as a young kid liked that. I liked to go out and trap and shoot ground squirrels. I used to make a lot of money trapping gray diggers, and moles, and gophers. Now Harney --- or Marion County at that time paid ten cents a piece for the scalp of a mole and a gopher. Now, the county paid this. And so I, and the gray diggers, you got five cents for them. And boy, I trapped a lot of them, and I made quite a lot of money. I just liked the wildlife, so, I, that's the reason I decided to go to this wildlife school.

BARBARA: So when you graduated from college in 1939, was it?

ELLIS: Yes, uh huh.

BARBARA: What kind of job opportunities did you have then?

ELLIS: Well they, there wasn't a great lot of jobs then, but I lucked out in that they had a job in Burns. So, I decided well I was, just felt tickled to death that I'd --- I wasn't scared of the country

because of the trip I made over here. But that was a comment that I made that I didn't think I'd like to live here. But they had a job in Burns, so I come over and I took a liking to it right quick. And now, I've been here ever since, and they can't get me out, rid of it now.

DOROTHEA: Well, you mentioned you had two boys. When and where did you meet your wife, and when did you get married?

ELLIS: Oh, I met my wife probably in 1939 or '40, and in the Salem area. Now, I worked here all of the time, but the winter, that's right, the winter of '40, the winter of '39, they was having a, they had a big burn in Tillamook County, a big burn there, it burned thousands and thousands of acres. And so, they sent me over there for a couple of months to determine what we was going to do for the benefit of the wildlife in that big burn area. So, I went over and I surveyed the country, and picked out areas and different seedings we could put in for it to benefit wildlife. And that's when I met my wife when I was over there, at that occasion, like that. But I just stayed over there a couple months or so, and then I come back here.

And at that time, when I was working for the Game Commission, starting in 1939, why when ---- I covered all of Southeastern Oregon. And if there was an uprising of some kind in Lake County, or Malheur County, or Ukiah, I went up there for a little, just a matter of a month or two. Well, I was a going everyplace. I might just inject there how good things were then, you know, and how great the deer populations were. And now they, I like to tell the, and in this office right here in Hines now, and of course, I was alone and I worked out of my house all the time. And there is fifteen people working here now for the game department. And I also was covering the rest of Southeastern Oregon, and there is probably another ten in the offices in those areas. And I tell them how great things were when I was alone, and how much better the population is. And now I says, "Here you've got fifteen right here and things have gone to pot." And they tell me, "You know why it has taken fifteen of us?" They tell me that I worked for so long, and did absolutely nothing, and its taken fifteen to try to catch up from what I should have done. (Laughter) But I get along good with them.

DOROTHEA: Yeah. Well, how did your, we'll ask you a little bit about your courting, if you lived

over here, and she lived over there, how did you commute back and forth, or ---

ELLIS: Well then, in '41, and I went back over there then, that's when we got married I believe.

We, I was in the national, I had been in the National Guard, in fact I think I might have stretched the truth about my age a little bit to get in, because I got to drill there every Monday night and get a dollar, and got a dollar a night for drilling. And that was pretty big money, you know. And so that's, I was in the National Guard, but when I come over here of course there wasn't any unit here to drill with, so I was inactive.

But I, when war broke out, or they mobilized the National Guard a year before; they just mobilized them for a year before the war broke out. And so, when they mobilized them, well I went over there then, and I was stationed down on the mouth of the Columbia River for that year. And then when the year was up, they wouldn't let us out because war was imminent then, it was approaching, you see. So that's when I met my wife when I was over in that area. Because I went home weekends, every once in a while, from the National Guard camp. And then it wasn't just a month or two after that, why, they sent me to California to a camouflage school, San Francisco, which was a big deal for some kid that has never been any place in his life, you know. But while I was down there going to this school, why war broke out, so they shipped everybody back to their home stations.

And then everybody at that time that had been to college, they shipped you all off to a ninety-day wonder school, whether you knew anything or not. A ninety-day wonder school is a school for officer candidate school. They, you went to school for ninety days, and it's a wonder you ever got through it, or something. But anyway, that's what happened there, you see. I went to this officer's candidate school, and soon after that.

And then I was in the Service then up until about 1945, 1945; yeah that's when the war was over. I was in the South Pacific for quite awhile; I was in the Philippines when the war was over. And then they shipped everybody back home. And as soon as I got back, I went to the game department and they asked me, "Where do you want to go, where do you want to work?" And I said, "Well, I want to go to Burns." They said, "I knew you'd say that." So, I come back over here, and I've been

here ever since.

But they did tell me at that time, they says, "We've got a lot of elk up in the Ukiah area, and there is lots of damage, we'd like for you to go up there before you report to Burns, and see what we can do with the big elk herds up there." And so, I went up there for a couple of months. And that's, and then I came down here, and I've been here ever since. But I've gone other places. In those days, you know, if they had trouble some place, why they didn't have a lot of people, or any locals, so they'd send somebody like myself to work in a place just for a matter of a few weeks, or a month, you know.

BARBARA: So basically, what was your job as a wildlife person for the Game Commission?

ELLIS: Well, I was what they call a biologist. I, primarily the job of a biologist is to study the, watch the life history and the habits, and the food conditions, and the livelihood of the animals. Just look out for them like you would a herd of cattle, you know. You watch their feeding habits, and conditions. Or if they had anything to eat in the wintertime, and things like that. And we have a lot of deer in those times, and in the late '30's. And it's just amazing; it's unbelievable how many deer we had.

And in 1937, there wasn't anybody working here, I was still in school then. But there was a fellow that, I think he worked in a fish hatchery or something, and Wayne Stewart was a rancher, and he owned the Murderer's Creeks Ranch, which is on the South Fork of the John Day River, a little ways below John Day. And they went up in there in that winter of '37, and they estimated ten thousand deer died. Now, that's just an estimate. And then in 1939, they were just denuding the country. The game department had their first antlerless season, where you could kill anything. And I run a checking station there at Dayville for ten days or so, and I checked out over nine hundred deer. There was another boy with me at that checking station at that time, but we had a known kill that year of 19,000 deer in that John Day, South Fork area. Now, that's a lot of deer. And they just estimated two years before that 10,000 died.

DOROTHEA: Now, what was the reason, lack of food?

ELLIS: Lack of food. They were just starving to death. They had bad winters, and like the deer

just --- they had eaten all the browse. Their main, the deer are a browsing animal, they eat browse. Cattle and elk they're a grazing animal, primarily grass. Of course, the deer will eat a little grass, too. And just like an elk, they'll browse too if they have to, but they are really a grazing animal like a white face cow. But that's just a good example of having too many deer. Now, they browse the shrubs so extensively that it just killed most of them, and it just denuded their winter ranges in there. But it's just an example of the deer population. And actually from that time it was so high, and it so happens it stayed high like that for, up until 1960.

After I come back from the Service, then I got settled down here, and I established census routes. Pretty near all of them was done a horseback. I rode about two months in the spring, a horseback, counting the deer on their winter range. And in so doing, I could compare the numbers from year to year and determine whether the population was increasing or decreasing. In the fall of the year, which I did it mostly with my vehicle and afoot, I'd go out and I would classify the deer so I could say that we had, as it happened the fifteen years right after the war up until 1960, I averaged 82 fawn per 100 does, which is a good increase for a cow, let alone a wild deer that was wintering out like that.

And as it so happened in 1961, the fawn survival went down to the point where there was only 40 fawn per 100 does. And I averaged the fifteen years before that, 82. There is a lot we don't know about it, even today. But as it so happens, the fawn survival since that 1960 is averaging 40 fawn or less. In that fifteen-year period, after that high period through there, it's just amazing that they stayed so high. Well, people say, "Why?" Well, you can tell them the coyotes did it. Well, that settled it, they'd believe that. But that isn't the case; I've seen too many examples where that doesn't hold true.

Now, like during that fifteen-year period from '45 to '60, when I averaged 82 fawn per 100 doe, we had a way, way more coyotes in those days than we have now. So there has to be something else to it. But like I say, the public you tell them the winter loss due to the coyotes and stuff was a common --- there is something else, and I don't really think we really know. I know, and you do too, that the coyotes take their fair share of them all right. But rodents is normally the main food of their

choice, is rodents. And when you have rabbit cycles go up and down, and along with other rodents, or squirrels and things, why if you have a good food supply for them, the coyotes get along and the numbers build up and you don't recognize it, until all of a sudden why they ---

DOROTHEA: Do you think it might be disease partly?

ELLIS: No, I don't think its disease. There is no records of any disease that they've had. Now, there again you can blame it on things like that. For example, only antelope and deer, and various things years ago, when the sheep men --- this used to be a sheep country, you know, just thousands and thousands of sheep, before they went primarily into the cattle business. Well, they blame the lack, the disappearance of a lot of the deer and things onto the fact that the, oh, disease, that the sheep men, yeah they blame that even today they'll say well when the sheep men came in here with those large bands of sheep that their diseases was transmitted to the wildlife. Well, I question that. I'm sure that there is some truth to that, but that wasn't the only reason. There is just a combination of things.

Now, I can, I verify a lot of this kind of information by some of the old timers that I got to know after I was here, you know. For example, I've heard that in the old days, when the homesteaders started coming here, there wasn't any sagebrush in the country, and it was just bunchgrass stirrup high to your saddle horse, you know. And, but now I don't, I've talked to so many old timers and got good information. When they have a story to go with it, I believe that. It isn't just your memory, you know. I can get around my sisters and tell them how things happened when we were kids. They say, "Well, you old goat, it didn't happen that way at all; it happened this way." Well, they just remember things differently.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

ELLIS: But now, right straight across the street here in 1910, old Ernie Quier, a homesteader, homesteaded in Virginia Valley, now that's just up out of Princeton a ways. And he came there then, and I asked him --- and he burned out during the war, and he moved in here right across the road from me. And so, I asked him about this, not being any sagebrush, that it was all bunchgrass. Well, he said, "Let me tell you a story," he said, "we go out every fall," and this was before the First

World War, "we'd go out every fall and we'd drag sagebrush for a week, usually with four horses abreast."

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

ELLIS: And now, you know, you don't drag young sagebrush and break it off. You know lots of it will just bend over and flip right back up. They drag an old juniper tree, or anything they could get to break it off. And then they'd come back after they got a lot of it drug and broken off, they'd come back with a wagon and haul that in. And that tells you that was their winter's fuel supply. That's what they did their cooking on, and everything like that. That's what they kept warm by. Well, when you tell me there wasn't any sagebrush in the country when the homesteaders came here, like in 1910 there, there was lots of old sagebrush at that time, because that was their livelihood. That just isn't his memory.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

ELLIS: And another old fellow, Merlin McMullen in the Drewsey country, I've asked him about things like that. And he buckarood in the days when they, before the railroad come into Burns. It didn't come in here until 1924, and they had these big cattle drives. Of course, the railroad got up to Crane about, oh, let's see, it was in 1919, I believe. And then they finally moved on into Burns. And in those, up until that time, why they had these big cattle drives, and they trailed their cattle to Ontario, put them on, and he was on those drives. And he told me a lot of interesting observations about things like that. And I asked him, "Well, what was the deer population like in those days?" Well, he said, "I had some friends from over in the Portland area wanted to come over deer hunting. I tried to talk them out of it, but they came anyway." And he said, now this has been thirty years ago, because Ernie has been, or Merlin McMullen has been dead about that long at least. And he said, "That they went up north of, up the Dollar Basin country in the Malheur River there above Drewsey, and they hunted hard for a week," and they said, "they run out of eating food up there, and they hadn't even found a fresh track to hunt." He said, "That's what the deer population was like." So they just, of course, in those days, they were leaving the cows out as long as they possibly could. And so, they butchered a calf there belonged to Mike Acton. Now he was an old, old time

cowman here. And he said, "I took the money." and he said, "We went down and I went and paid Mike for his calf." He says, "Well, thanks a lot boys, I'm glad you was able to have some meat, you know."

DOROTHEA: Something to eat.

ELLIS: Now they don't do business that way nowadays, you know.

DOROTHEA: No, no.

ELLIS: That's the way, that's what the deer population was like in those days. And he has given me lots of real interesting stories. You know, like Stinkingwater Mountain out there, they naturally stayed overnight on these cattle drives with their cattle. And it stunk so, up and down this creek, so they named, the buckaroos named that Stinkingwater Creek. And so they, that's where its got its name, I'm sure of that. Now, I have here a book called "Oregon Geographical Names," which has been out for years. And it's just like a dictionary, you may have seen it. And you look up Burns, and it will tell you the life history of where it's got its name. Or if you look up Fields, and you look up Stinkingwater Creek it tells you, it says in the book, it says it probably got its name from the hot springs above the O'Toole Ranch. Well, you know the O'Tooles probably in the Drewsey country. And there are some hot springs up there, and it smells mostly a sulphur smell around most all your hot springs. It didn't say that's where it got its name, but it probably got its name from that hot springs.

But I like the story that Ernie said, that the buckaroos named that Stinkingwater Creek, Stinkingwater Mountain from the dying salmon. Now that tells you something else, that the salmon did come up the Columbia River, and then up the Snake River, and up the Malheur River, and up into the Drewsey country and spawning up there in those days.

DOROTHEA: And of course, they don't do that anymore either.

ELLIS: Oh no, there is too many, way, way too many dams on the river.

DOROTHEA: Besides the lack of the water.

ELLIS: I'm kind of changing the subject there. But getting back to the deer a little bit, the deer population has just, like I say --- and a short statement I'd say that when the homesteaders first come

here, there was practically no deer. Now, or I asked Ernie Quier when he was telling me about the sagebrush, what the deer population was like, he says, "Well, we all trapped coyotes to get some cash to buy our beans and flour to get us through the winter months." And he said, "If any of us saw a deer track, boy, the word would really pass around. So and so saw a deer track in a certain canyon." They weren't necessarily seeing the deer, they was just seeing the deer track. And that's how plentiful the deer were on the Steens Mountains.

And it's those kind of stories, and in addition to that, he told me about --- now see he was fifty miles out of town from here. And there was four or five years that some of the old homestead neighbors, and they'd got together and they'd come with their horses and wagons and go up above old Fort Harney, up on top of the rim there. And they camped up there, and they hunted deer up there. And they didn't always get a deer, but there was more deer there than there was on the Steens Mountain. Because, and you know they wouldn't be going a hundred miles round trip with their wagons and horses if there was any deer to hunt down there.

DOROTHEA: Well, the deer population got a little better then though in the '50's, didn't it?

ELLIS: Well, the deer population years ago, when the homestead, before the First World War say, there was very few deer in this country. And it just gradually built up until the late '30s, when we have records of killing over 19,000 in that one area. Then it leveled off right there, and it stayed. We had too many deer for years there. Like that fifteen-year period there, until the fawn survival dropped down, they just ceased to increase much. So years ago, there wasn't any deer here to speak of, then we had too many deer, and it leveled off, and it went down, and it's still going down.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, there is not many deer again.

ELLIS: There isn't near the deer there used to be. But this isn't an up and down cycle like, oh, for example, jackrabbits or something like that, you know. They're cyclic, and in fact, I made a graph once of the jackrabbits. Harney County paid a bounty on them, five cents a piece. And it shows them peaking every five years. Now they blame the downfall onto tularemia, and I assume that probably is factual. However, I don't know that factual. But they'll gradually build up, and the cow men didn't pay much--- or the sheep men in those days, it was mostly, because the coyotes were

feeding on these rabbits when they were building up, it didn't bother the sheep near so much. And then when the rabbit population would fall off, you had a bunch of hungry coyotes, and they eat anything they could get a hold of, so they were real hard on their sheep, and what calves the cowmen had in those countries. So they did cycle like that.

And to talk of the cycles of animals, that is a clear-cut cycle, and it's black and white figures that the county has. Now, in 1926, now this goes back quite a ways, they bountied two hundred --- they bountied three hundred and fifty thousand jackrabbits in round numbers. Now that's a lot of jackrabbits, and at five cents a piece in those days was a lot of money. The homesteaders, a lot of them would get together and they'd make drives, and wings. They would just go in there and club them to death.

And then just five years later --- now I mentioned they cycle every five years, that's an average. Now, sometimes it might have been six, seven, or eight years, or less sometimes. But it averaged five years. And they, when they would drop down, why, there was nothing for the coyotes then to eat. And they just gradually build back up, and it just went on like that all through the years. Now it was just five years, and after 19 --- when did I say they started that?

BARBARA: '26.

ELLIS: 1926, yeah. Well, in '31, they only bountied ten thousand rabbits. Now just before that, five years before they bountied two hundred and fifty --- three hundred and fifty thousand. Then, excuse me, 1936, they bountied two hundred and forty-five thousand jackrabbits. You see, that is a terrific change there. And then it just went on like that, not near the big numbers. Until now, you know, here in the last fifteen years we, we have very few jackrabbits.

DOROTHEA: We see very few jackrabbits.

ELLIS: I see somebody once in awhile, and they say, "Boy, the rabbits are sure coming back." "Yeah, how many did you see?" "Well, we saw eight or ten, or five or six between here and Fields." I says, "You think they're coming back?" I said, "Do you want to hear my jackrabbit story?" So I tell them my jackrabbit story where they bountied that many. Well, you know Harney County took the bounty off of jackrabbits in, I think, I'm not sure of this, now in 1954 or '55, along

in there. And they only bountied, the last year they had the bounty, they only bountied eight hundred and some. And I think my boys bountied ninety percent of those. (Laughter) But, so there is so many cycles, and really I don't think we know the reason for it. I shouldn't say that, but --- and like I say if you wanted to act like a smart guy you could tell them the coyotes did it and they were, fine, great, that's great, but I don't believe that.

BARBARA: As a biologist, you're supposed to know, right?

ELLIS: Yeah, you should know. But that isn't factual; there has to be something else.

DOROTHEA: Well, also, do you think the coyotes are as thick as they used to be?

ELLIS: Oh, there isn't one coyote now where we used to have twenty, I don't think. No, their numbers are way, way down.

DOROTHEA: Do you think this is because of the air shooting and different things like this?

ELLIS: Well, there is a combination of things. Now, I can't factually say, but I went to Boise one time to a meeting with the wildlife people from all over the country, and there was a fellow there who had been working on the wolves up in Alaska, just as an example, in relation to the caribou. Well, he found up there when the caribou population built up, and there was lots of food, the wolves was a living on them, they had maybe say average seven pups per litter. And that's not a factual number; I don't remember what it was. And then when the caribou population dropped way down, they maybe only averaged three pups per litter. Well, that's, and he said, he had information that showed that some of the wolves wouldn't even breed when their food supply was way down.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

ELLIS: And I know that locally here, now you probably remember Kenneth Meservey, a boy that trapped here for years and years. And he dug a lot of coyote dens in the spring of the year. And he told me at those times, he says, "When the rabbit population is down, and the coyotes' food supply was practically nothing, why they'd only, their litters was much, much less. And when the coyote population was high, the --- I mean the rabbit population was high, the coyotes would maybe average twice as many pups per litter." And that's tied to their food supply.

DOROTHEA: We have to pause for a moment so I can turn this tape.

ELLIS: Sure.

SIDE B

DOROTHEA: Okay, now we're back on.

BARBARA: So as a biologist, what are all the different animals, or creatures, that you were involved with, or kept track of during the time that you were working for the Game Commission? What all did it involve?

ELLIS: Well, to begin with, when I, before the war, and then right after the war, I worked fish and game both. And then, soon after the war, they put a fisheries biologist, and he took over my fish work that I was doing. And then, so I worked strictly game, now like that includes all your big game animals, all of them, and all your upland game animals, and predators, and things like that. That was my responsibilities. And I spent all of my time trying to determine the populations of the predators as well as the big game animals, and upland game birds, and things like that. Like on the deer, I had these census routes that I rode a horseback year after year. And I'd say, like from the east side of the Steens, I rode four days along there and always stayed there at the Alvord Ranch. Now, this Tom Davis that owns the Alvord Ranch, and his grandmother is the one that named the park there, gave the park to them. And he and I went to school together at Corvallis. He graduated --- I always thought, I'm only thirty days older than he is, I think. But I saw something the other, I thought we were in the same class, but I guess he was a year behind me anyway. But we were there at the same time. But there is --- huh, forgot what I was talking about.

DOROTHEA: Tom Davis ---

ELLIS: Well, I brought that --- oh yes, I was taking these census a horseback for deer. And I always stayed there, and I rode four days up along the mountain. I rode about the same routes every year, depending, some years if there was less snow well I might have been up on the foothills a little higher than I would in others. But I was in the concentration of deer, and I kept track of the number of deer I saw from year to year, and all other animals that I saw on that same route. And then that told me well, if there was an increase or a decrease in the population of the animals.

And also on that same ride, I'd keep track of all the carcass I'd found. Now, I started these about the first of March, that's when the weather in this country breaks about. So I saw, for every mile, so like if I rode sixty miles on the east side of the Steens, I saw maybe 25 carcasses, or so many carcasses per mile of travel. And I did that all over the Harney district then. And that's about the time after the war, the fellows started coming back, they started hiring more. And so, in Malheur County, they put a biologist on there, and another one in Lake County, so that relieved me of those areas. So, I was primarily in Harney County from the Nevada line north up to Baker County, or the top of the Strawberry Mountains. That drainage going the other way was in the boy's (Cliff Lemons) and John Day country's district. So, I had the biggest district in, still had the biggest district in Oregon.

But I worked; my work was concentrated on wildlife, except for the fish in the general area. Like in the spring of the year, I was getting population trends on all the animals.

Now the antelope was the same way. Now antelope population has never been good here. The habitat, it's a habitat problem I think, because I have contacted Wyoming on it, who have lots of antelope. Well, Peter Skene Ogden, when he come through here in 1826, why it indicates by the diaries that they went without meat for a long period of time because they didn't, couldn't find any. All of a sudden, they found a herd of antelopes, so they got a meat supply. Well, you know there wasn't a lot of antelope in those days, or they wouldn't have been going without meat. And the antelope population stayed up, going up and down.

Well, I started a food habit study in 1951 on antelope. I collected two or three animals every month out of the year. And California, the University of Davis there, had a couple, they had three fellows working on their Master's Degree there, they were botanist-type people. And so I collected and I sent the stomachs to them to analyze. And I sent them a list of all the shrubs and vegetation that we had here. And each of those three boys would take a third of that stomach, of the individual animals, and they'd come up with a certain percentage of sagebrush, certain percentage of bitterbrush, certain percent of grass, certain percent of forbs and things like that. When they finished, then the three of them would get together and they averaged their findings. So it wasn't

just the decision of one boy, it was three of them. So it was a fairly accurate, I'd say, food habits analysis of them.

And that was important, I think, that it, the summary of it was 61% of the sagebrush, 61% of the food of a year round diet of an antelope is sagebrush. Now a lot of people, you see antelope out here feeding on the grass and stuff, they think they're eating grass, but actually they're only, 2%, a little under 2% of the year round diet of an antelope is sagebrush (corrected to grass). Now I didn't collect these animals in somebody's alfalfa field or someplace like that. I got them in typical antelope habitat, which is out in short sagebrush country. And like when you think they're out here eating grass, what they're eating is different species of forbs, 14% of their year round diet is forb. Includes, well, we could call them weeds, you know, a lot of different species of things like that. So actually, sagebrush is their main diet by far. And their population was going up and down. And when we was having these bad years, I contacted the Wyoming game department because they kill a lot of antelope.

Now, as it happened, in this year that I contacted them, they said they didn't know, couldn't answer my question about my problems here, because they never had any problems. Their population is just going wild all the time. At that time, they were killing four times as many antelope every year as Oregon had for a total population. I estimated in the flying --- and I did all of my population trend figures were on the deer I rode them a horseback, and the antelope I did it with an airplane. And they were killing, at that time, 40,000 antelope every year during their hunting season, that's a known kill for them. And we had what I had as an estimate from my populations; we had 10,000 deer in Oregon for a total population.

DOROTHEA: Antelope, you mean.

ELLIS: That's antelope, yes, this is antelope. Now antelope, Wyoming was killing four times as many antelope every year as we had for total population. And it's been that way; I know that it's a habitat condition, I think. Because they have just been killing them year after year. And they hunt antelope, and kill antelope like we do our deer.

We have too many hunters for what deer we have, and it boils down is about all there is to

kill is yearlings, forked horns. And in their case, most of the animals they kill, antelope animals are yearlings. Because they are hunting them heavy, like we're hunting our population heavy here.

DOROTHEA: Now, the elk population is getting quite overrun now. Do you think that is going to be a problem, or do you think they're going to---

ELLIS: Well, it could, yes, because elk are a grazing animal like a white-faced cow, and deer are browsing animals. And if you get a large herd of elk around a rancher's property, why, that is in direct competition then with their cows.

And it's, to go back on the history of our elk a little, we brought in some elk and put them in Northeastern Oregon in the late '20s, and they built up in Northeastern Oregon and in good shape. Now that is typical elk country. And we had our first elk season in Oregon, legal elk season was in 1933, and that was just in Northeastern Oregon, the very corner up there where the elk had built up. Well, after the war, we decided then that that is typical elk habitat up there, it's --- you've got lots of these canyons, open south slopes, bare south slopes, and canyons have got lots of vegetation, trees, lots of trees, a forest in it, you know. And that's ideal, the elk would go up in the open hillsides and graze like a cow would, and then they had all that cover in the forest and the timber to stay in. So they decided well, they would manage it, Northeastern Oregon, for elk primarily, and Southeastern Oregon, which was primarily deer, was what we had; they'd manage this area here for the deer. Now they weren't, didn't want to get rid of, kill off all the elk that we had that was gradually moving into this country, but so, but they let anybody could hunt, come down here and hunt elk, either sex, for years. They did it that way because they didn't want the elk population to build up and be a direct competition with cattle in this country here. Well, it went along like that for a long time, many years. And then finally they over hunted the Northeastern Oregon for elk so heavy, that there just wasn't, they killed pretty near all the mature bulls, and there wasn't anything left to breed the cows but the yearlings. And now, sometimes some of the yearling bulls weren't mature enough to cover a cow at that time, and so she would go out of heat, and she wouldn't get bred again for another month. And so, actually, the overhunting, if you want to call it that, delayed their calving season up there clear up into November, October and November, you see, where they used to breed

in August.

And so then, of course, our hunting population increased so much that they had to start just allowing so many hunters in this area, and so many in another area to prevent the over harvesting of the animals like that. But the elk have been increasing, and they've just, moving into this country. We've got them all over the desert country here now. Not large numbers, but the most, we've got more elk in this area than we've ever had in, I think, in White man's time here.

But, oh, I've seen some right along the Nevada line, not big numbers, but they're all over that. You probably know the McLean boys down there; the middle boy lives here in Burns now. But he was on the Oregon End Ranch just three miles inside the line. I came up through there about two, or probably three years ago, and a big bull crossed the road just in front of me before I got to the ranch. And I always stop at ranches when I went by, and stopped in there. And they were working some cattle there in the corral, and Ronald, that's the middle boy, rode over and I told him about seeing that bull. He says, "I've known you all my life, and I never known you to drink, but you been drinking now haven't you?" I says, "Well, you get in and I'll take you down, and I think I've got a fifty, fifty chance of showing you that bull, because he just went up on the Pueblos there." So, oh he said, "I'll take your word." So I went on and had a nice visit with them.

Went on over Domingo Pass and went into Fields, and Dolly Holloway, she's born and raised in that country, and she was working in the store. And she come out and I was telling her about that, and seeing those elk, and here come Julie Thompson, her and her husband owned the store. And she said, "Ellis Mason, did I hear you say you saw some elk over there?" And I said, "I sure did." "Oh my goodness," she says, "I'll apologize, I'll apologize, if you saw some I'll take your word for it."

Well this Marjorie Miler, a Drewsey girl, she is married to a Defenbaugh boy, been married for thirty years or so. And she had taken some school children someplace, and got home just a couple weeks before that, about dark. And she told them there, she said, "I almost hit a herd of elk, there were five or six there." And this Julie Thompson said, "We gave her a pretty bad time." Said, "Now you was born and raised with them all your life on a cow ranch, and you don't even know an

elk from a white faced cow." (Laughter) But she said, "If you saw some, I'll apologize to her." But the elk have moved into this country, and they're scattered on the desert country, not in big numbers, but there are a few every place. They are a great animal to travel. And if you get too big a build up, it's going to be in direct competition with the cowman.

DOROTHEA: It is getting to be that way.

ELLIS: In places, it definitely is now, you bet.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, in places, yeah.

ELLIS: Well, when I come back from the service, they sent me up to Ukiah. Now, Dick Hotchkiss' wife, she was raised up there. In fact, I was talking to her here just the other day, and I knew this before, that her parents --- when I went out, I spent about a month or six weeks up there trying to determine what we're going to do with this big population of elk in there. And I stayed at their place, and used one of their saddle horses, and they was glad to have me. And surveyed the situation, and I decided it was all we can do with a bunch of elk like this is to have a special season and get rid of some of them. And then when they had that special season, why, they sent me back up there because I was the only one in the game department that had a four-wheel drive. It belonged to the game commission, but they couldn't buy four-wheel drives then, right after the war, but they bought this old army truck. And that's what I had, so they sent me up there for the season so I could get around better. But that's the way the elk population, they started in 1930 hunting them, and they've just gradually built up, and they moved into this country and just kind of taking over.

BARBARA: What about bear, how many bear do we have in our country around here?

ELLIS: Well, bear population has never been high here. Bear are mostly in Western Oregon; they've got quite a lot of bear. But we have scattered bear, now I wouldn't average seeing over one bear a year in all my travels in the country. We have very, very few bear. And they're an animal of the timber too, you know.

BARBARA: Well, I remember a couple years ago up at Idlewild someone had an encounter with a bear up there.

ELLIS: Oh yeah. Well, all through this country, they're just, about once a year you'd hear of somebody getting into a bear. And every time some people would see a bear, they'd think they was going to get charged. And they weren't mean at all, really. But they're, I only know of one case on the Steens Mountain where there is a bear there. Now there is Kenneth Meservey who, when he tells you something, it's factual. I'd heard that he'd seen a bear track down in the canyon below Fish Lake. And when I saw him I'd heard about it, and I told him about that. I said, "Kenneth had you been drinking?" He said, "I knew you'd say that." But he said, "I'm going to take you down there and show you that track." I said, "I'll take your word for it Kenneth." But he saw a bear track, and I know he did. But they're an animal of the timber; they don't get out in the country. That was just an animal that decided to take off out on his own, or something.

DOROTHEA: Are there many on the Steens?

ELLIS: Bear, none, I'd say none.

DOROTHEA: None.

ELLIS: Huh uh, none.

DOROTHEA: We have some up in, where we run our cattle. We see probably two a year.

ELLIS: Yeah. Well, their population has never built up high here at all.

DOROTHEA: We saw, well, Clint culled a blonde bear one year.

ELLIS: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: And whether he just hadn't turned color, or what, we don't know, but he was a real light colored bear.

ELLIS: Well, somebody from John Day killed a bear one time, and this has been thirty, thirty-five years ago, and it was a real light one. I went and looked at it. But I think it's just like maybe a horse or a, you'll get a throw-back on a color, maybe back in a few generations he had this light color in his blood line, or something. And maybe, so I don't know why this would show up in the bear, but it has once in a great while.

DOROTHEA: They're not as big, but although we did see one big one, we were coming out from riding camp one evening, and this one run across the road in front of us. And he must have been a

good six foot or better tall, because he climbed the tree.

ELLIS: Uh huh, yeah. Yeah, this black bear, this species we have here is a small bear. And they are the smallest of the bears, you know, your grizzlies and others are much bigger animal than the little black bear that we have here.

DOROTHEA: Well, you mentioned your boys; did they go on to college? We first, maybe we better get their names, you have two boys?

ELLIS: Yeah, my oldest boy was, we called him Ellis, Ellis Daryl was his name. And he was born and raised all of his life here. He was actually born right after I went to this ninety-day wonder school back on the East Coast. He was born back there, and from there they, pretty near all of the officers that were graduating, they shipped them to, directly to the South Pacific. But they had a whole list of places they could go, and I was high enough in the academic list there that I got my choice pretty much. So I took the, that was my first experience ever being in that hot country, like, this was in South Carolina. So I took the most northern place that I could get, and that was Portland, Maine. So I reported up there, and they sent me off on the islands up there in the North Atlantic. My wife was able to go out there with me, and that's where my oldest boy was born, there. But our home was really here yet, then. But he was born back there, but he lived all his life here.

DOROTHEA: And then your second boy?

ELLIS: Well, he was born here, too, but he was born about four years later. He is, and he spent all of his life until he went away to work here in this ---

BARBARA: And his name is what?

ELLIS: Duane. Duane is my youngest boy, yeah.

BARBARA: And how do you spell that Duane?

ELLIS: He's about --- D U A N E.

BARBARA: Okay.

ELLIS: Yeah, he is forty-six, and the oldest boy is fifty, yeah.

BARBARA: And do you have grandchildren?

ELLIS: Yeah, I've got two grandchildren. And, well I got three grandsons. Now I have --- we adopted a girl, and with counting, which I can claim her, I got a great-granddaughter that graduated from Oregon State last year, two years ago. She is considerably, about ten years older than my boys.

DOROTHEA: Now, what was your daughter's name?

ELLIS: Ruby, Ruby Maulding is her married name now.

DOROTHEA: And where do they live?

ELLIS: Well, Ruby lives up at Silver Creek Falls. She is on a farm, has been ever since she has been married there. And she is an animal nut like I am. She likes horses, and she's raised llamas for years, and all kinds of foreign animals, she has in there. And she, like a good llama, she'll get ten thousand dollars for it, you know, there is quite a demand for them if you have a good one.

BARBARA: I've heard they're pretty expensive animals.

ELLIS: But my oldest boy, he is, he graduated from Oregon State, and went to Oregon State there too. And along with his wife, was a local girl here, Julie Hinshaw. They both graduated from Oregon State. And he graduated in education, and he went to Scio, and he taught school there for about twenty years. I think it was maybe nineteen years he was there. And then Julie was a pharmacy major, and she decided she wanted to get an internship in pharmacy in a Portland Hospital. So he thought a super --- he had been a superintendent for probably ten years or more, so he thought well, they ought to move once in a while, so they moved down north, or west of Portland out near, they live near Banks, that's their address. But Vernonia, he is superintendent of the school district up there, and has been now for probably five years or so.

And my other boy works up at Mount Hood. Now he works at the Timberline Lodge, he does their computer work there. He went to Oregon State, also. And other things, he likes to wait tables. He's, contrary to my situation, he's got a nice personality, and he makes more money getting tips and waiting tables than he does doing the computer work up there.

BARBARA: He is a free spirit then, huh?

ELLIS: Yeah. But they're both here in Oregon anyway.

BARBARA: Well that's nice to have them close, all three of them close then.

ELLIS: Uh huh. But he's, my youngest boy, he'd go to get in a job and just do great, and the first thing he decided he wanted to go to Australia. So he'd go down and spend a year or two there, then he'd come back and spend three or four years, then he'd want to go back again. So he'd go to New Zealand for a few years. And every place he went, he'd say I'm going to get a job, you know. And that's kind of in his lifestyle.

BARBARA: When we first came today, you mentioned something about your ham radios. How did you get involved in that? And I understand you became acquainted with Jim Weston down on the desert.

ELLIS: Yeah, well ham radio, when I was just a young fellow I got started in it then. But I never did get to the point where I got a license. And then I got away from it, and I started to college and things, I give up hobbies like that quite a bit, you know. And so I, ham radio is just a, is kind of hard to explain it. It's the FCC, Federal Communications Commission, they assign certain frequencies of the spectrum to the Forest Service, and then the BLM, and citizen groups, and business people. And then they set six or seven different bands; the hams have certain band of frequencies in there. And that's where the hams use all the time. And it's a real good emergency communications. Like in this country here, I've, well I've had my license for well over thirty years. But to me, in this country when I get down around Beatty Butte someplace, toward the Nevada line or, heck I'm sometimes fifty miles from the nearest ranch. If I ever broke down, well, I might be out there --- now years ago I wouldn't have minded having to walk fifty miles maybe. But I don't want to walk that far anymore.

BARBARA: Right.

ELLIS: But I like to carry that with me because with that I can always get out. I might not find anybody in Oregon that I can talk to, I could get on the higher frequency and talk to somebody in California, or Washington, or Idaho, or someplace. And they can make a phone call for you. And nowadays, I think they can call somebody for you just as cheap as Portland can call over here, you know. So, I always carry my rig with me like that. And I always carry two batteries in case the

battery, lose a battery. And always carry two spares. Now, I've in my time with the game department, I always had two batteries. And there was two or three times that I loaned my extra battery to somebody up on the Steens, or somebody out of the way. Something had happened; theirs would go dead on them. I know one time, I remember a battery housing broke loose and it fell down and pulled the top off of the battery where the cable connects on it. So, I just gave him my extra battery, and he left it for me at the service station when he come through Burns.

It's a good communications, and you meet a lot of people, and you get a lot of good information from people like that. Now, this Jim Weston, that lived for 36 years in a cave down here on the east side --- I was trapping deer down there and I was camped on Pike Creek just a couple miles from him. And I got acquainted with him, because I got acquainted in my work with all the people away like that. I always stayed at their ranches, and in fact, you take before the war, and after the war there, these ranchers, they liked to have people stop in, they like to visit with you, you know. And if I had, I took horses a lot when I was riding, and they put your horse up for you, and that's just the way they do. But nowadays, vehicles are so good, and roads are so good, and gosh, somebody in the South End can come home in two hours and a half from the South End, you know. And they just don't, the people working for the game department now, they don't know hardly any of the ranchers, and I knew them all, I got acquainted with them, you know.

And it's --- Okay, well, I got into the ham radio business primarily because of emergency communications in this country here. And the people don't realize it, but we didn't even have telephones in Harney County here until 1960. Now this is in the South End of the county. We had it prior to that, of course, up here. But I got interested, and then of course my boys were interested, and both of my boys were ham radio operators. And when they went away to college, well I was able to talk to them pretty regular, I still do. And whenever they want to talk to me, to borrow money or something, you know like that, why they call me on the phone like now. And I never answer my phone until it rings at least twice. Because if it just rings once and there is nobody there, that's the cue that I better go turn the radio on, one of the boys or somebody wants to talk to me. And it's been going on like that for years. And if I want to talk to them, why I just call them on the

phone and hang up as soon as it rings, and that's the way we have our communications.

But it has been, I've, through the years and traveling like particularly in deer season, you get out in the desert country someplace, I've made emergency calls for quite a number of people, you know, illnesses, or heart attacks, or somebody died. Twice that I have come on to a deer camp and somebody had had a heart attack, and I was able to get out and --- on one case, I come on up on this place, a fellow on the South End of Catlow Valley, I'm sure he was dead when I was there. But his partner had showed up and he'd had a heart attack and died. I'm sure he was dead when I picked him up. But they wanted me to bring him to Burns, so I did. I could have called in at that time too on the radio, but --- It's good communications to have, and I still think a lot of it, for my own sake if not to help other people. But I enjoy helping other people anyway.

Now, this Jim Weston, the miners, and his brother that came on the Steens, they were down there for 36 years. And I was trapping deer down there, camped on Pike Creek, and the boys a helping me was, his name was Case, working for me here. I spent my evenings by going up to the cave where this Jim and Mike Weston lived, and I was teaching them the Morse code and the radio setup so he could get a license, you know, if he wanted to. And my partner was a rockhound, so he was spending his evenings in camp working on rocks. But finally, this Jim went to, well, he is, see, he is 88 years old now, he is a little older than I am, about ten years, or nine years anyway. But he went to California to visit his brother once, and he come back he had his ham license, and he has been in the ham business ever since.

DOROTHEA: Does he still do it? We talked to him, but I don't ---

ELLIS: He just went out of the business when he moved up.

BARBARA: When he moved up last June.

ELLIS: See, he moved into town down here last fall.

BARBARA: Yeah, June, I think he said.

ELLIS: June?

BARBARA: Uh huh.

ELLIS: And no, he decided to sell his radio, and he is clear out of it now. But he was, every night

and morning see, we have an Oregon, what they call an Oregon emergency net. There was a little town of Vanport on the Columbia River, down below the river, below Portland. And it had a big flood there about, that's been about forty or fifty years ago, and it just wiped that whole town out. There isn't such a place now. Well, the ham radio people got all involved in emergency communications, but they, we weren't very efficient. So, they decided, well, let's get together every night at 6 o'clock and we'll call the roll, and all interested people, and get organized, so in case of another emergency why we could be far more efficient and do a better job. So as it happens, they've, they're still doing it, they're still calling a roll of all hams in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and California that want to check in. They call all the Oregon towns first, in case, now, like right now if I want to get a hold of anybody in Oregon or neighboring states, I can catch them usually at 6 o'clock there, they call that roll. And there is pretty near always somebody listening that can make a phone call. Some, like in Portland, anybody can call in Portland for you. And most all of the towns --- you'd be surprised, there is a lot of little towns have a ham or two in them, you know.

BARBARA: So I suppose you have really become acquainted with a lot of people then over the years through your ham radio.

ELLIS: Oh yeah, you meet people and you get to know them, and you think you know what they look like just from visiting, and you see them and they sure look different than you ---

BARBARA: Uh-huh, we always conjure up a mental picture of people. Well, how many years did you work with the Oregon Fish and Game here, and when did you retire?

ELLIS: Well, I worked for them for, I worked 41 years for the Oregon --- I call it the Game Commission. But during my time of working for them, they had four or five different names. Like now it's called the Department of Fish and Wildlife. And for a long time it was just the Wildlife Commission. And then it was the Oregon State Game Commission and they had various names like that. I habitually call it the Game Commission, but it's now the Department of Fish and Wildlife. They changed the name of it just, oh like when they went to the Department of Fish and Wildlife a lot of people --- well first they changed it to the Wildlife Commission which would include fish, but some of the fish people didn't think they were getting a fair share of it so they had

to put the name of fish and game both on it like that.

But I worked 41 years, and I retired in 1980, the first of 1980, the end of '79. Now I can't, don't have time now to explain this word retirement to you, because it is difficult.

BARBARA: You're too busy?

ELLIS: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Now, you also, during the time that you were working with the Game Commission, you were also a member of the Grange and a Boy Scout leader. Can you tell us some of the things that you did?

ELLIS: My life has been centered pretty much around children. I've always loved children and animals. Horses or any kind of animal, I've always enjoyed working with them. And it's interesting, and of course, having the two boys here, I went to two National Boy Scout Jamborees. And it's hard for them to find somebody that is interested in children that will be a Scout Master. And in 1957, my oldest boy was the right age, and they have these National Jamborees every four years, and so I took a troop of, and we belong here in the Burns area, to the Oregon-Idaho Council of the Boy Scouts. And so we, I took a troop of Boy Scouts; more of them were from Idaho than they were from here, but they included this area, too. We went to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania for ten days. And then three years later, they had a, they changed it from four to three because that was the fiftieth anniversary of the Boy Scouts. So at that time, we went to Colorado Springs, Colorado, for that Jamboree. They alternated from the East Coast one time, the next time it would be on the West Coast, vice versa, you know.

But that's an enjoyable life, and it fit in with my work good. I could be going some place and have to take care of something, well, I could take the boys out and sometimes stay two, three, four nights sometime, depend on what was going on. And they liked to do that of course. It was a good way to watch young people, watch their lives develop. And I think when they get out on their own like that, and doing their own cooking and things, they find out living a life isn't just like it is at home all the time, you know. When they go away to college, why, they find out that people don't do things just like mother and dad does at home, you know. And I think it's good experience for them to get

out and mingle with other children. I've watched it, and it's so interesting, you know.

You'll be going out with a troop of Boy Scouts and they get so they can do their own cooking and get along great. If you take a new boy along, it's just interesting to me to stand back and kind of watch him. And he'll, boy, he is just around watching the boys doing their cooking. And, you know, he doesn't say much, but boy, it isn't a little bit then, boy, he is a learning by watching.

BARBARA: Taking it all in.

ELLIS: First thing, you know, he is right in there going with them. And that is quite an education for him, I think.

DOROTHEA: Well, now you, since you've retired, do you do much traveling?

ELLIS: No, not a great lot. In addition, like you mention the Grange, I was master of the Grange out here for some time. And it was interesting, that's a good group. I, you're dealing there with ranchers, and farming groups, and things like that, and that was, I think, a real interesting life.

No, I do lots of going. My life is, when I was working I spent, much to my disappointment, I had to spend one day a month in the office to make out a month end report. Now the boys are working; they spend one day in the field, and the rest of the time in the office. It's pretty near that bad, that's an exaggeration of course. But no, I like the, I enjoyed it in the hills, and I was fortunate in those times, I could take my boys with me. My wife was sick for a long time, and a lot smarter than I is, but she had a mental problem and I took the boys with me in the summertime. We'd be gone for a week at a time, lots of times. And it was good experience for them, and I was fortunate I was able to take my children. They don't allow things like that anymore.

DOROTHEA: No.

ELLIS: But they'd go, like when I was working with the antelope there for quite a few years in the fawning season during May and June, why they'd go out and spend a week with me a lot of times. And in fact, they helped me a lot, you know, quite a bit. And it has been my lifestyle. I enjoy it in the hills, I just go along and I can look up under these rims and think, well I can remember how my kids were little, they'd hike along up there, and I'd be down there doing something, worrying, afraid they was going to get into a rattlesnake den or something, you know, and things like that. But I

enjoy the hills, I go to new areas and see something new, I want to know how in the world do the people make their living here. What type of, what are their problems in making a living in the community like this, you know.

But my biggest joys is just right around Southeastern Oregon here, to go out and see the country. I had a boy, well, my oldest boy took ROTC in school, and when he graduated why he owed the Army two years, and then he went to Germany. And so, while he was over there, I went over and visited him. And I made a hurried trip down through South America and across Africa one time. And I have no interest in going, it's nice to see those places, but --- And there, when I was in Germany, my boy had his car over there and we'd travel around and you'd see people working here and there, and I was interested in just how they were doing things the old-fashioned way, you know. See some woman out there with a scythe cutting, trying to cut hay and stuff, and helping like that. It embarrassed my daughter-in-law a lot. I liked to go out and talk to those people, you know, but she, that embarrassed her. But it's interesting to see those places.

But I really think that you don't have to be an anti-socialist to like the lack of people, which we have here in Harney County. It's like they say, the 9th largest county in the United States, and our total population is right around 7,000 people all the time in the whole area, which is 10,132 square miles. So it's a sparsely settled area, and I think our children that are raised and lived in this country, they've got a good, or maybe a lots of times a much better background than the children raised in the big cities. Because they, they're in the big cities, they don't learn the things I think they should be learning sometimes. That I think our children in sparsely settled areas --- they get their foot in the right track, and I think they learn better habits of life than they do where they're just mingling with a bunch, a whole bunch of children get together, and I don't think they learn the right things sometimes.

DOROTHEA: Do you spend a lot of time, you showed us when we first came in, doing woodwork? Where do you get your materials?

ELLIS: Well, I think anybody that's, when you get older, see I'm going to be eighty years old here in another year. And I've seen a lot of ranchers in this country that have been here all their life, and

led a happy life ranching and feeding cattle and things. And the way things have been going here in the last 20 or 30 years, why, people come along with a lot of money and they pay, buy the ranch and pay ten times what it's worth. And then, they'll move into town to be happy ever after. But there is only about one out of a very small percentage of them that can't handle that. They come in, if they don't have any hobbies, why, they just sit around and watch TV and things. The first thing, you know, they've got an ailment and they don't last long. I think you got to be healthy; you've got to keep your mind active all the time, you've got to keep your body physically fit, and I enjoy doing that. That's kind of my, has always been my lifestyle.

But these people, unless they have hobbies, like ham radio, is a hobby --- gosh, when I go out now I always take my radio with me. And it takes me ten minutes to set it up when I stop for camp, and I can talk to my boys every night. And it's always, I check in on this emergency net where they call roll, somebody, I check in with them every night when I'm out. And so somebody knows where I'm at every night when I'm camping out and things.

But no, I think being out in the out of doors is an enjoyable life, and it's just been my lifestyle. Oh, there are certain places I like to go, like my great-granddad, some of my relation after they left Boise and moved up into Silver City mine, that was up between Jordan Valley and Boise, I like to go through there once a year. They claim, according to the signs up there, between 8,000 and 9,000 people at that mine site, beautiful old place up there. A lot of old two, three story buildings, you know, and their old mine shafts there, and some old churches on the hill. And now there isn't anybody live there, but it's all being restored as the old original buildings have been restored. To me, to go and see something like that it's just amazing, you know.

BARBARA: Do you pick your sagebrush and your wood up when you go out camping to make all your things that you do your woodworking with?

ELLIS: Yeah, I was going to say, that's another hobby I have here at home. I just enjoy making things on the lathe. I got a Shopsmith, they call it, gave \$210 for it back about 40, 50 years ago. They cost \$2,000-\$3,000 dollars now from the attachments that I have. But no, I like to play with it; it's in an old chicken house out here. It's small, and it's easy to keep warm in the wintertime, so I

spend my time out there just making things. I pick up sagebrush; I got to making things out of sagebrush years ago. It's something a little different. And juniper turns real good, and it's, I like the smell of it, and it's got good color to it, and various kinds of woods like that. But if you want something hard to make a mallet out of or something, why, mountain mahogany is your best. Mahogany is hard to find or get it cured. I've got an old doghouse out here; I've got it full of something most of the time. Sometimes it has been in there two or three years to get it cured so it won't crack. But that's just another hobby. Like I say, it keeps your mind occupied, and I enjoy doing that.

DOROTHEA: Well, we're running to the end of our tape again. Would you want to talk any more about different things, or shall we call it quits for a while and come back another time?

ELLIS: Well I, it's immaterial to me, but I think I can truthfully say that working 41 years for the Game Department like I did, I probably had --- I can't imagine myself ever having a more enjoyable life than I had. Because it was just, fit into my lifestyle, things I loved to do, and lots of it. I'm helping people, and ---

Oh, when I was going up on someplace on some mountain, why, I knew there was a cow camp up there, I'd call the rancher and see if he wanted to send anything up to the buckaroo that might be staying up there, and things like that. I enjoyed helping people if I could, like that. And I just enjoy it. And like I say, I think I've had as enjoyable life as I could ever experience here. My mother came over and stayed with me the last few years of her life. She was 94 when she passed away. And it's been an enjoyable life.

DOROTHEA: Well, we're about to run out of tape, and before we do, I want to thank you for the afternoon. Let's pause and do a video, and then if we think we can talk about something we can come back another time and visit with you again. So we'd like to thank you for the afternoon and your showing us all of your wares that you have built, it was very interesting. But now, we'll say thank you.

ELLIS: Okay, thank you.

(END OF TAPE)

b1