The following index lists the major topics in the audio recording and the approximate point when they occur in the recording according to an analog cassette recorder’s tape counter. This tape counter index (TCI) has not been edited for accuracy by Archives and Special Collections.
Introduction to the program.

Bevis says that on this program a taped interview with Bud Guthrie will be presented and then Bevis will continue his remarks on the Big Sky as a naturalist novel. First they start with the interview with Guthrie at his home in Chouteau, Montana. Bevis asks Guthrie when he first saw the country and come to know it. Guthrie says that he grew up in Chouteau and lived there until he was 21 years old. His father had came out from Indiana and became the principal of the Teton County high school.

Bevis asks Guthrie when he began writing. Guthrie says that he began writing in the early 1940s. Bevis asks him which book of his he likes the most. Guthrie says that it would be the book that he still has to write. Guthrie talks about the written word and the debt which people owe to the past.

Bevis asks Guthrie whether any books influenced him or thought of as models when he wrote The Big Sky. Guthrie says, no. Guthrie says that he was motivated by the fact that no one had really written honestly about the days of the fur trappers. Guthrie says that other books had been written about the fur trappers but they were romantic. Bevis asks him whether he did any reading in history or documents getting ready to write the book. Guthrie says that he read about 100 original accounts on detail about fur trappers.

Guthrie digresses and talks about a little blue pamphlet that he picked up one time and had to sell for $25,000 because he needed the money. The guy who wrote the pamphlet was Father Joe Williams and he was later a figure in one of Guthrie's books.

Bevis talks about some of the conclusions of the panel about Guthrie's book. To the panel the character of Boone seemed to be very reduced and he seemed to be a very aggressive character. Bevis asks Guthrie how he can be sure that a true picture of the mountain man would be like the Boone.

Guthrie says that he has personally encountered violent people in the Appalachian mountains for example and this is one of the things that influenced him. Bevis says that the Appalachians are very old and complex with regard to its people and the people do tend to be
more violent in a sort of civilized manner. This is how Bevis sees Boone and he feels that Boone would make a better character if he were set in a place like the Appalachians than on the frontier. Bevis asks why Dick Summers isn't the main character in the book and thus coming to represent the stereotyped mountain man.

301-350 Guthrie says that Summer almost did become the main character. Bevis asks him why he chose Boone to be the main character then. Guthrie says that Summers just sort of came onto the page and he never really considered him for the part of the main character especially since he had already started with Boone.

351-400 Bevis asks him what some of his other favorite Western books are since he has written the Big Sky. Guthrie says that he likes Jim Welch's Winter in the Blood. He then talks about some of the books he would recommend if he were to have to choose some books for a history course on Montana authors.

401-450 Bevis asks him if he considers Garcia's book to be romantic. Guthrie says that he isn't sure he believes it altogether. He says that Garcia seems to have mixed a few things in the book that happened at later times than the time the book was supposed to be written about. Bevis notes that the same question was raised with the panel when discussing Garcia's book. Bevis tells Guthrie of a few things that the panel discussed about Garcia's book in relation to its time setting.

451-500 They continue to talk about Garcia's book and the problems with reminiscing like Garcia did when he wrote the book. Guthrie says that another book he would have in a history course would be Dan Cushman's Stay Away Joe. Bevis wants Guthrie to explain why he would choose the book because it is one of the books that he passed up for Welch's Winter in the Blood.

501-600 Guthrie says that they are companion pieces. Cushman brings an element of humor into his book. Bevis asks Guthrie about where Boone shot Jim in the book. Guthrie says that there is a question that he gets asked more than that and it is "What happened to Boone at the end of the book?". Guthrie says that the answer to the question is to let the reader write his own ending to the book. Bevis compares the ending of Guthrie's book to Henry James' Portrait of a Lady, which has a very similar ending.

601-650 Guthrie says that that is about the only good thing he has heard about James' writings. He doesn't like to read that kind of writing much. Bevis talks about the Western dialect in the book.
651-700 They talks about the act of narration in the book. Guthrie explains that the book really isn't being narrated as an author would intrude into the page to explain what it happening to a character. Instead the narration encompasses the mind of the character without actually entering it.

701-750 Bevis asks Guthrie if using the issue of Western language in a Western book is important. Guthrie says that it is more of development than an issue. Guthrie says that the early writers, who were brought up with the books of the noted Eastern writers, had to break the mold and start using Western language in their writings.

751-800 Guthrie notes that know the Western writers use their own language, which is still good English, although it is not the conventional kind. Bevis reads a few lines from the book in which he thinks Guthrie was very effective in his writings.

801-850 Bevis finishes reading the passage in the book and they discuss why it is so effective. Guthrie put the passage in the mind of another trapper who was along with Boone but who had a more sensitive view of events and the things going on around him. Boone would not be right for that passage because he didn't have the feeling that Jim, the other trapper, had.

851-944 This again brings up the question of why Boone was made the main character when the more effective passages in the book are lived through the minds of people other than Boone. Guthrie talks about the character of Jim and that he sort of came out of nowhere. Guthrie says that the characters just started to appear when one was needed to fill in for something that Boone wasn't able to do.

END OF SIDE A]

[SID B]

000-050 Bevis talks about the reader instinct in the book and the fact that readers need to have a feeling for what Boone will do at the end of the book. Bevis reads a passage from the book that has Boone reflecting over his killing Jim a short time back. Bevis asks Guthrie how much Boone, at this point in the book, has taken responsibility for his actions. Guthrie says that the experience would have an effect on Boone but he didn't determine what the effect was and didn't really want to. He left that up to the reader to decide.

051-081 Guthrie says that one of the things that he tells young and upcoming writers is that the reader is smarter than
the writer thinks and so everything doesn't have to be spelled out for them. Bevis thanks Guthrie for the interview and they have another beer.

082-150 Bevis continues his program back in the Missoula studio. Bevis says that Guthrie's novel is very dark and he wants to continue his consideration of it as a naturalist novel. Bevis restates part of last week's program when he talked about naturalism and that it is a part of Darwinian law. Bevis continues to talk about naturalism and its big movement in the early part of the century. This type of naturalism meant life without thinking or feeling. This was then reflected in the writing of the period when the characters did not think or feel.

151-200 Bevis comments that naturalism the way it worked out was not the scientific theory or the realistic view the way authors had presented it. So a naturalist character like Boone did not arise because of the wanting for historical accuracy but because the author just happened to be interested in that type of person. Bevis talks about the naturalism in Jack London's books. Some are set in the deep north where it is extremely cold and a man has to go up against some peril from nature. This is certainly not realistic or scientifically accurate yet it is naturalistic.

201-250 Bevis comments that he doesn't know what the reason for the use of naturalism is but it nevertheless is used and we have to deal with it. Bevis reiterates from last week's program that primitive means someone that does not think or feel on the same level as the typical "civilized" human. This also takes into account how physically violent and rough a life people lead. However, Bevis notes that Europeans are just as physically violent as the next group of people.

251-300 Bevis comments that non-European society is not simple or innocent. Many of the societies outside Europe are more complex and conscious of what is going on. And so when the Europeans took a look at the cultures unlike their own they felt they were looking at more primitive peoples. Bevis notes that Boone may be the most meanest person in town but does this mean that he is not a person with a great deal of feeling. Bevis says that the mean people are usually the most complicated yet European society tends to portray these types of people as simple.

301-367 So Bevis' conclusion about Boone is that he is not a simple man. Bevis now turns to the Big Sky as a naturalist novel. Bevis says that the way Guthrie wrote the book it is certainly not a simple naturalist story because of the complex plot at the end of the
book. Bevis again states that the book is a dark work of art. It is dark because of Boone's character. So Bevis feels that the book represents the darkest view of ourselves and the darkest side of human myth. Bevis mentions that next week the program will take a look at the stories of Dorothy Johnson. Bevis then signs off.

[END OF TAPE]