Oral History 365-10

Passport in Time Interviews on the Lewis and Clark National Forest

Interviewee: Ruth Hardenbrook

Interviewers: Kelly Keim and Cathy Luiken

September 16, 1997

Note: A portion of this interview has been edited out at the request of the interviewee.

Kelly: This is an oral history interview with Ruth Hardenbrook at her home in Stanford. Kelly Keim and Cathy Luiken are doing the interview. Ruth when did you first come to the area?

Ruth: I was born here in 1922.

Kelly: Exactly where?

Ruth: Out where the Hutterites live now, on Surprise Creek.

Kelly: How did your folks come to the area?

Ruth: My father worked on the railroad. He came from Missouri and he was a railroad man. There was an accident in Billings and his friend got killed and it upset him so badly that he left the railroad. And Tom Chamberlain who was from his area in Missouri, was on a ranch here which was the JB Long Company, so my father looked him up and continued to work for him, and was there for 35 years. And my mother had come to Montana as a young woman, cooking from ranch to ranch and ended up in Great Falls and cooked in boarding houses and then they needed a cook out on this ranch and so she came out here and that’s how she met my father.

Cathy: What are your earliest memories of growing up in this area?

Ruth: I don’t know what you want, what you mean?

Cathy: Oh some things you remember from childhood, relative to the forest or the mountains, maybe.

Ruth: Or weather, you were talking about weather. During the school year my mother would move into town so that the children, the older … there were six of us children, I was the middle child … could go to school. And then at Christmas time my father came into town with the horses and sled and loaded us all up for Christmas vacation and took us out to the ranch. I practically remember the one trip because there was a cow down in a coulee and it couldn’t get up, and of course my father stopped and tailed her up and got her on her feet. I don’t know how long she lasted after that. But it was eight miles back out to the ranch and we were bundled up and went with the team and sled. That was about one of the earliest Christmas’s I can remember,
going out there to the ranch. And we children, there was four of us at that time, we slept crosswise in the big double brass bed. (Laughter)

Kelly: I suppose maybe you cut a Christmas tree on the ride up there?

Ruth: No, because between here and where the Hutterite’s are there are no trees. And I actually don’t even remember having a Christmas tree. We may have had one but I really don’t remember. I remember hanging our stockings on the mantle and making ornaments, but as far as remembering a Christmas tree I really don’t remember one. Just getting the oranges and things like that in our stockings was just part of our Christmas.

Kelly: Did your mom and dad start their own ranch?

Ruth: No. They started once but primarily my dad stayed with JB Long Company. In these pictures up Dry Wolf, where the Hodges place was, I didn’t show you, that is where they bought a piece of land and attempted to build a ranch. But my father stayed with JB Long, and so it left my mother with a young hired man up there trying to take care of things. Then she had to come to town in the fall to put the older children in school, so that ranching didn’t work out for us. So my father stayed with JB Long Company. He was the manager, there was 54,000 acres in the ranch at that time. And a lot of this was sheep, we well be talking about the sheep trailing, and going in.

Kelly: The Long Ranch had cattle and sheep?

Ruth: Primarily they started with sheep. They brought one of the first bunches of the Blackface Bucks sheep into this area. They got them, I think, from the Carmichael Ranch at Augusta, and unloaded them at Merino.

Kelly: That’s on Marks folks’ place, there may be remnants of an old corral there.

Ruth: I don’t think there’s anything left at Merino. I have the wire-wooden chairs that came from Merino, there’s five of them. They look like ice cream chairs that were used in the store that was there. The old boss at the ranch, he brought them from Merino in the wagon one day, of course they always traveled in wagons. I said “Tom, I like those chairs.” I was a small child, and he always called me Roxy. And he said “Well Roxy, when you get married then you can have them.” And so it went on a good many years from then and when I got married, these chairs were still in the granary on the ranch. Tom of course had been dead quite a few years, so I said to my father “Dad, Tom said I could have those wire chairs,” and he said “You can have them,” and I still have them.

Kelly: Oh neat. So your folks had a house here in town?

Ruth: Well at first my mother rented, whatever was available in the fall when she came in with children for school. But she didn’t like to pay rent, she felt that was a waste of money and daddy didn’t really approve of her going in debt and buying a house. But mom managed to make the payments by keeping other children that had to come in to school, and boarded them. So we
always had a house full of kids, because mom had them wall-to-wall. She was a good cook and they apparently liked it because some of them stayed for several years.

Kelly: Did they go home on weekends?

Ruth: If the weather permitted but the weather had a lot to do with it. Or depending on what activities they had to do in high school. Even the DeGroat’s, he was one of the first rangers, they had a son, he boarded with us for school.

Cathy: So how many people were in the school?

Ruth: Oh, I couldn’t tell you how many we had, quite a few though, because we had both a grade school building and a high school building. It was a big grade school building. There were larger families in those days.

Kelly: What did your dad do for the Long outfit?

Ruth: He was the manager of it, overseer. So he did everything because my father was the type of person, he would not ask one of the men to do what he wouldn’t do himself. And actually he worked harder than any of the men did because, that’s just the way he was. And of course that’s how I started going into the mountains. I think they had four bands of sheep in there, but I’m not real sure. On Prospect Ridge, there was one, and that’s where we had to be careful because the Two Dot sheep came up from the Harlowton side, and they didn’t want to mix the bands of course. Then there was a band of sheep on Baldy and out Spring Coulee Ridge. And then down in Stinger they had a band, so I’m not sure how many bands they took in.

Kelly: How big was a band?

Ruth: Kelly I’m not real sure, but I know it had to be at least a thousand, because we had so many sheep out there, and so I know it was at least a thousand.

Kelly: Seems like a number that is considered a band, varied from place to place.

Ruth: Depending on your terrain I think too, and also maybe the forage. To start with of course, everything was (horse) packed in. Now I don’t remember the fire of 1910 because I wasn’t born yet, but it was such a big fire, and they talked a lot about it and everybody had to go and fight it, or try. And so they took several pack-strings from up at the ranch.

Kelly: Horses or mules?

Ruth: Horses, with supplies of food, primarily and water jugs, you know, to carry water to the men. I don’t know if all their efforts helped, maybe they got a fireguard built and stopped it, I don’t know.

Kelly: Which fire was this?
Ruth: The one in 1910 and that's the one that burned in Lyons Gulch and across there. I can't tell you where it started, kind of in Silver Creek and burned out across there. Anyhow that was the first I recall, but that was from them talking about it. And then when they finally built the road, that was in the early '30's they started it up over the mountain. Prior to that time, everything had to go in for the sheep in pack-strings. And do you have pictures where the counting gate was for the sheep to go in?

Kelly: I don't think so, you showed me on a map.

Ruth: Oh, we never got up there? You've never been there?

Kelly: I have only been as close as the collapsed cubby set, the bear trap.

Ruth: We should go up there then, that way you would know where we counted the sheep in. Then of course everything was packed in with horses, pack-strings. Two of the men that herded for JB Long, one of them was Gus Gydal, he was a German man, and the other one was Sam and I can't remember Sam’s last name, and he was a Dane. They took great pride in bringing out the heaviest lambs in the fall. In fact there was a real competition between those two, even though there were other bands in there, who would have the heaviest lambs. And they brought out wonderful lambs, and that showed the care they gave the bands of sheep, moving them at the proper time and keeping them on water.

Lightning is terrible on Bandbox, terrible strikes up there and this always scared Gus. And he said “Well, if it gets me, just throw me in one of these mine holes, there’s no use trying to pack the old body out.” Sure enough, just about that time he got hit. Well, he was unconscious so they loaded him on a packhorse and took him down to Lyons Gulch, that was the closest place where people lived, and they went to, I imagine, Neilson's, maybe Wagner's. And I think they had a car by that time maybe, I'm not sure. And Gus was still unconscious and they brought him to the ranch. I guess they called the old doctor, but what could he do? But he finally came to and he was perfectly normal after that, and went back into the mountains many a time. But I always remember Gus on Bandbox.

And when he would go into town .... when they came out of the mountains, believe me they were ready to go to town on a “bender”. And he would go in for a week to ten days to Great Falls, by train. He would always get on the train here, because by that time we had the train, 1910 was when they got the train. And he would take the train and he would go in for these benders, and he came back out on this train. Of course we would be here for school, and so he would come to the house. And he would always bring a very large package of wieners, and a big thing of sauerkraut, and then he would ask momma to cook that for supper. And then that would kind of start healing him up, and back to the ranch he would go, and he would be good for another year.

Kelly: Another year, amazing. Where was the ranch headquarters?

Ruth: Where the Hutterite’s are now.
Kelly: Oh, the JB Long headquarters were there?

Ruth: To start with, the headquarters were up the creek from there.

Kelly: Up Surprise Creek?

Ruth: Where Bower’s brothers had been. And so that was the beginning of the headquarters. And why they left there and moved down to the other place, I don’t know. And then they even rented those buildings out for a little while up there, because some people used it.

Kelly: At the Bower’s headquarters?

Ruth: Some people by the name of Miller lived there for several years. But anyhow that’s where the headquarters were.

Kelly: Are those still standing, any buildings there?

Ruth: Yes, primarily the big root cellar. What a grand building that is, and it was built prior to 1910. But you see they built a roof over the root cellar so that it never deteriorated, and it’s all rocked up on the inside and that’s where the Hutterite’s store all their potatoes, still. It’s a wonderful building.

Kelly: Still! It’s on the Colony now? The Bower place must be near the head of Surprise Creek?

Ruth: Yes, up near the big dam. You know where the big dam is? Oh, you must go up there and see the big dam, because that was built the first time in around 1910. The Hutterite’s had to look that up to determine their water rights. Of course it was made bigger at various times, but it’s quite a large dam.

Kelly: What is it’s use?

Ruth: Irrigation. And it has some wonderful fishing.

Kelly: What families lived out at the ranch headquarters?

Ruth: There never were any families except us. The two old Chamberlains that were connected with the JB Long Company were both bachelors. Tom was an alcoholic and he bought his whiskey by the small keg, and one room in the house, the house where I was born in, that was where he kept his keg of whiskey. It was a small room, and occasionally he would not get the bung shut off and it would drip, drip, and drip. It smelled like a still, and the plaster came off the ceiling of the living room down below, from the whiskey sopping through. He would sit up there and drink too much, and come stumbling down the stairs. It was awful!

Kelly: How old were you then?
Ruth: Well, probably 4 or 5. But he always liked me and when he went into town on his benders I don’t know where he got the lady’s handkerchiefs but it seemed to be a passion with him. When he would come home from Great Falls, he would always have several of these lovely lady’s handkerchiefs, but he would always have them laundered, he always gave them to me. Unfortunately, I don’t have a single one of them left. But he always had several, so he brought me the hankies.

His brother Lee was there also, he too was a bachelor, but he was not very aggressive and he didn’t drink, he played the violin beautifully. So he was more or less our chore boy, he milked cows and he took care of the hogs, and took care of the chickens, and took care of the garden, and just did everything. Just a little old fellow that worked along and never asked for much of anything.

Kelly: Was it common for a ranch to have hogs?

Ruth: Oh yes, we had a lot of hogs. They used to butcher a 150 hogs between Thanksgiving and Christmas. You see, we had around 30 men, and it took a lot of bacon and ham, etc. So they would start butchering the day after Thanksgiving and that’s 30 days. They wouldn’t butcher every day, but something was done with the butchering every day to take care of 150 hogs in 30 days. They cured all the meat and made all the sausage, and that was something that was interesting. They packed the sausage …. I have one of the little jars, well they’re similar to the one over there with the flowers in them (pointing). I helped with that, I was small, but anybody could make packs of sausage, and put them down in the crocks, various sizes of crocks, little ones for single herders and bigger ones and so forth, cook it and pack it down in the crocks, and pour hot lard over it. Those would keep indefinitely because the hot lard sealed them, you didn’t need refrigeration.

Kelly: Interesting.

Ruth: And that was one thing that we took to the herders in the mountains, because it was such a treat for them. But it was difficult, because we did it all on packhorses and see the herder was on a packhorse, to manage to take care of that little crock. The crock had to be returned, we had to have the crocks back for the next year. We made lots of sausage in the crocks and some of them were in gallon crocks. Like I say, there was various size crocks, and then if there was two men in a camp, then you took a bigger crock.

And then, you don’t think about feeding dogs, this was before dog food, you didn’t have bags of dog food. So you see there was cracklings, it’s the skin of the hog, that you end up with after you cook it and press the grease out to make the lard. We had big black bread pans, they were large, probably 15 inches by 24 inches, just fit in an oven, they were large shallow pans. My mother would cook up cornmeal mush and then stir in a lot of these cracklings into it, and then put that into the oven and bake it. If you had extra buttermilk or sour milk or anything like that, that was used instead of water, because it made it more nourishing. Now when this dried, it kept indefinitely too. That’s what we fed the dogs because with the milk in it, you know, and the cracklings and then the cornmeal, it was quite nourishing and the dogs did well on it. So that’s
what we used for dog food, and of course pans and pans of that. Of course we took it out of the
pans and put it in sacks.

And my dear mother sewed sacks, your salt and flour and sugar came in cloth sacks. And of
course we used tons of salt, because we had so many sheep. We did have cattle, but not as many
as sheep. Anyhow, momma saved all the salt sacks and she would bleach them to get the print
out of them. Can you imaging doing that by hand on a washboard, in a tub and a boiler on the
stove! Then she would sew up little individual sacks … this was before paper sacks and plastic
bags.

Kelly: Now we take that for granted.

Ruth: And so she sewed sacks, and sewed sacks. Fortunately she had an old sewing machine,
but before she got the sewing machine she sewed them by hand. All this stuff had to be put in
some kind of a container, so of course it was the sacks. Because we got raisins, prunes, pears,
peaches, apricots, and apples this way, all dried fruit, and it came in twenty-five pound wooden
boxes. I have some of the wooden crates left yet. You see it had to be divided up in small
quantities to go out to all the herders and camps. And that’s what these sacks were used for, but
again if they didn’t return the sacks, they didn’t get any more. We had one herder that absolutely
refused to wash dishes, and he would just hide ‘em, throw ‘em away, and so he just got tin cans,
because he would just keep on taking all the dishes and throwing them away. (Laughter)

Cathy: I heard other people used those sacks to make clothes for there children.

Ruth: Oh those sacks made everything! Sheets for the bed, your underclothes, some of them
came in various weights. Some of them were much softer and a nicer weight of cloth, some of
them were quite heavy, a case like for hand towels, things like that. Yes, if we hadn’t had sacks
we probably wouldn’t of had any bloomers, we made many bloomers out of the sacks.

Kelly: So you hand made underwear?

Ruth: Oh, they sewed it all. And you know, a lot of the lady’s underclothes were black satinet,
and bloomers were really bloomers you know. They were like a short pair of pants with elastic
around the legs and elastic around the waist. Why they chose the black satinet, I have no idea,
but it was used for years for bloomers, and it was black.

Kelly: That wasn’t recycled from a sack?

Ruth: No. That’s when they were more affluent and bought the black satinet. Oh, the sacks
were put to good use, they were used for everything, and it was in later years that we got … you
see, like in Missouri and Minnesota, a long time before we got them out here, they made printed
sacks of calico, but they were far more common back east then they were back here. I still have
a couple of those too, a pretty print, primarily chicken feed started coming in the printed sacks.
My aunt Mary, she was in Missouri, she would try and buy the same prints so that would be
enough to make a dress or something.
Kelly: What kind of dogs did the herders like best?

Ruth: Oh, we had good dogs. If a dog was extremely intelligent, that’s the ones they kept. There was no mercy shown you know. If a dog wasn’t suitable, the dog was destroyed, they were not kept as pets, they were working animals. If there would be a female that had unusually smart pups, they were very careful to which male dog the female was bred to. And the dogs were kept shut up, they weren’t allowed to just run around. When the herders were in .... in the winter time they would come in as close as they could to the main camp .... so we’d have a lot of dogs. Well, the dogs were shut up in the kennels because they couldn’t be allowed to run around, that’s all there was to it.

But yes, the dogs were a cross. We had never heard of Border Collies at that time, I don’t recall the name, and we never had a purebred Collie, they were too mild a dog. They had to be more aggressive, they were simply called sheep dogs. They looked like a Border Collie or Australian Shepard, their colors were primarily from a brindle to a light color with a white collar around the neck. The black and white dogs are more those Border Collies that were imported from Scotland in later years. Those were wonderful dogs. But no, we raised our own dogs, but like I say if a pup wasn’t proving out, he was quickly dispatched.

Kelly: Where were some of the sheepherders from?

Ruth: Well, like I said, Sam was a Dane and Gus was a German. We didn’t have any of the Spanish sheepherders in this area, they primarily went to California and Nevada. These here were run-of-the-mill men. They would arrive at the ranch looking for a job, if they could handle it, they could herd sheep. But it was a very responsible job, so we didn’t just let anybody out with a band of sheep.

Kelly: Did the sheepherders go out with the sheep wagon?

Ruth: Well, yes, the sheep wagon of course was their mode of living, just like a trailer house now. They had the lovely little stove in it and then their bunk, and their table. Barely room to turn around in, but it was adequate. And on the back there was usually a box like a trunk, tacked to the back, that in the summer time you could keep part of your supplies in there. Canned milk, of course they always had that in the little tiny cans so that it wouldn’t spoil, and that was my favorite trick, to sneak into the herders back trunk and get one of those cans of milk, knock a hole in it and drink it. I drank an awful lot of canned milk, I just loved it. The herders of course, when they were in the mountains, lived in tents.

Kelly: Oh, not the wagons?

Ruth: Well, you couldn’t pull the wagons in there, there was no road. Can you imagine going over Bandbox in a wagon? No, you couldn’t get a wagon there.

Kelly: I see, so the wagons were used closer to the ranch or in the foothills?
Ruth: Yes, or out here on the prairie, but in the mountains everything was tents, except the camp tender, the main camp up there, was a log cabin.

Kelly: Where was that?

Ruth: Do you know where Lake Elva is? Well north and east of that, I could take you up there and I could show you the exact spot.

Kelly: Towards Elk Saddle, and there was a cabin there, near to the Blue Dick?

Ruth: Yes, well it was away from the Blue Dick, above the Blue Dick. Some time we’ll have to go up there and I’ll have to show you where it was.

Cathy: The Blue Dick was a mine?

Ruth: Yes, and of course the cabins and everything are still there, it’s a patented mine. But the main camp, that was a log cabin, because the camp tender stayed there with his pack-string, then went up from there to take care of the herders. And so after they built the road …. my dad worked awful long hours and he was inclined to fall asleep at the wheel, of course by this time we had a vehicle …. somebody had to go with him and talk, so he wouldn’t fall asleep. And I guess I was of the age that I got to go, whether I wanted to or not. And so I went to the mountains many times with my dad, and then we always had to stay overnight. But see I couldn’t sleep in the cabin because that wouldn’t be proper, so I had to sleep in the back of the pickup. You could hear the mountain lions, and they sound like a woman screaming, is what they sound like, and I was always afraid one was going to get me in the back of that old pickup.

Kelly: You were just in the bed of the pickup?

Ruth: Up in the bed of the pickup, it was a good bed with a good tarp. This was before sleeping bags, I still have one of the bed tarps. They were waterproof, one of the big double bed tarps. I didn’t use this blanket when I used to go in with my dad, but then after Johnny and I was married, I inherited this blanket. I still have it, it’s an original Hudson Bay, and instead of being white, it’s gray. But the four stripes are woven in at the center seam and it’s a double blanket and believe me its warm. That’s the only blanket you needed out here because you could roll up in that and you were warm.

Anyhow I would go with my dad to keep him awake, then I would stay there at the cabin while he went out with the camp tender to check the range and check the sheep, and be sure everything was alright. He would do this once a week so I spent a lot of time going up and down that mountain road. There was a certain little park where he would pull off and take a nap. At noon we’d eat a sandwich then pull off and sleep for half an hour, then he’d get up and be ready to go again. Dad would go out with the camp tender, they had six horses in the pack-string, because they had salt, and clean clothes for the herders, and groceries. The clean clothes, my dear mother washed their clothes too.
Some of the herders really tried to stay clean, they would bathe in the creeks but then at least they tried. Then I would wait there at the cabin and I would try and cook something, I had some kind of a meal ready when they got back in. I would hear the bells of the horses because they had bells on the sheep and bells on the horses, that’s the only way you could find them in the forest. I would go and meet my dad when I would hear the bells, in the mountains you can hear those for a long ways. Then I would take the pack-string and bring it in slowly, and he would be tired, I would have the coffee pot on, he could go ahead and get into camp, make himself comfortable, then I would bring in the pack-string for him.

Kelly: About how old were you?

Ruth: Well, lets see the road was put in there in the early ‘30’s, ’33 I think ...

Kelly: This is the road up Dry Wolf, all the way to Elk Saddle?

Ruth: All the way to Elk Saddle, yes. And I was born in ’22, so I must of started going in there when I was 9 or 10 years old, and I continued to go as long as I was able. See, dad left out there in the 1940’s, I continued to go out until then.

Kelly: What was his name?

Ruth: Harry Crabtree. An interesting thing, the herders were limited as you can imagine, on how you could supply groceries to somebody on a packhorse. Of course they had beans, potatoes were not a common staple because potatoes are bulky, but occasionally they would give them a sack of potatoes, small sack, because they were very bulky, but you had beans. Beans were their staple food and of course the dried fruit, they had a variety and choice of that. We did have canned tomatos, but that again was bulky, but as a treat we’d take that in to them. And if you wanted eggs, because now you understand eggs don’t pack very good on a packhorse, we had the sacks of oats for the horses, and now eggs packed nice in those. Oats also act kind of like refrigeration.

Now, we never had butter, because butter just melts in spite of you. It didn’t matter if the lard melted in the little crocks, also its’ melting point is a little higher than butter anyhow, but we never had butter because it just melted. And the eggs we packed in the oats, and also if we had something else we wanted to keep cool, we’d put it in the oat sacks because it acts as insulation. The eggs ….. we had little wooden cartons you could put a dozen in, but that too was bulky, so if you were real careful you could put them in the oats sack individually and then you remembered how many you put in the sack! (Laughter) And that was a real treat to the herder, when you went into tent camp and brought a few eggs with the oats, they didn’t have eggs very often.

Cathy: Do you remember stories from any of the sheepherders, any particular characters?

Ruth: Well, one of the herder camp tenders, in fact he ended up being my brother-in-law, he married my older sister, was going to take a short cut up out of Stinger Creek, up to the main camp. It was getting late, so he thought he would go up across Slide Rock, because there were deer trails in the spring you could see, and he thought he could get on one of these trails and
make a shortcut up to the cabin instead of going way up around by Lake Elva, or out across Prospect Ridge. Well see he got up too far, and he couldn’t turn around, he had this pack-string and here he is caught in this Slide Rock.

Kelly: I’ve seen that, at the head of Stinger. Oh, he had a pack-string!

Ruth: Pack-string, and he couldn’t turn them around. And that man practically built a road across that scree, because if he’d broken a leg on a horse, he’d had to shoot it right there. It was two or three o’clock in the morning before he ever got into town. Can you imagine trying to get a pack string across that scree?

Kelly: No, scrambling or hiking alone would be challenging enough.

Ruth: So he never tried that again. But they were all good men because, they had to be or we couldn’t trust them in the mountains. Like I say, the crazy one out here that threw all the dishes in the creek, someone like that you didn’t keep too long, got rid of them. You picked a man for his character, they were good men, some of them stayed with the firm as long as my father did, for years.

Kelly: Where there enough sheep wagons to combine the bands in the winter?

Ruth: Oh there were lots of sheep wagons.

Cathy: Did you ever get to play in a sheep wagon?

Ruth: Oh yes, and then you see they would have what they called the “cook car” which was just a big sheep wagon, because when they put up the hay in the fields .... you could see the fields in one of those etchings that I did there .... they would have to bring the haying crew and so then they’d have this big, big wagon on iron wheels, they weren’t rubber wheels, they were iron wheels, and the cook would cook for 20 men in there, and it would be just primarily the stove and this table to work on, and a long table with benches on it to feed the men.

Cathy: Inside the wagon?

Ruth: Inside. It had steps that went up to get in there. Again the supplies were in the box on the back of the wagon. Of course they had better potatoes and things because you could get it to them.

The herders always said “If you see the sheep eating it, it’s safe to eat.” And so they ate various mushrooms, because if the sheep ate them they knew it was safe to eat them. The same with the forbs, and all sorts of tubers, some of which I wouldn’t even recognize anymore. I would have to get back up there and look. The bull thistle, you know that big purple one, oh it’s just like celery if you pull it from down in the ground you know, and they used that. And then in the spring there was the water cress and of course the wild onions and the clover. And various flowers are very edible and the herders gathered these. You see, they had all day, they were
moving along slowly with these sheep and they learned to gather these various plants and it was part of their supper.

Kelly: I suppose they learned to use some of the plants medicinally?

Ruth: I don’t know, no doubt they did.

Kelly: What kind of medicine did the camp tender take out?

Ruth: I’m afraid there was very little, because if you hurt yourself, you soaked it in soapy hot water. This was before antibiotics, they probably had mentholatum, there was always mentholatum. And liniment of course, always horse liniment, always used liniment. So the medicine was pretty sparse.

Cathy: Just a bottle of whiskey! (Laughter)

Ruth: But they weren’t allowed whiskey.

Cathy: Oh yes, not on the job. Other people have mentioned how much the shepherders drank, when they got off and came out.

Ruth: They didn’t drink a bit of whiskey when with the sheep, but after they went to town on benders...

Kelly: Do you have “rum-runner” stories?

Ruth: Oh, they were terrible. All the bootleggers, daddy would get so cross when the bootleggers would come, because it just meant trouble. Oh what was his name, thinking back … I can’t think of his name now. Of course, Stores, he had the liquor still right above the ranch there. He was a homesteader, and he had a still. And in order to disguise the still, the barrels where the mash was fermenting was in his hog hut, so it looked liked it was just hogs. And he had an old steam engine that he would saw wood with, so if you saw smoke coming out of his steam engine you thought nothing of it, because you thought he was just firing it up to saw. But you see, that was his still, the steam engine.

So it was quite well hid from the “revenuers.” But this one bootlegger, he would come to the ranch and … in order to keep the men satisfied, you couldn’t deny them everything … so my dad would try and control it, rather than try to stop it. If you forbid it, it’s not unlike dealing with children. So he would try and control how much booze he allowed this man to sell the men in the bunkhouse. That way he could kind of tell when it would be gone, because he just let them drink it up and be rid of it. But no liquor ever went into the mountains, you just couldn’t have it and you could never get drunk there anyway. And they understood it, they knew that it was just absolutely taboo to do it in the mountains.

Kelly: More fun among company anyway. (Laughter)
Ruth: Well you see, in this day and age, we’re social drinkers, but a lot of those men had a past that they were forgetting, or wanting to forget, so maybe that’s why they drank. Maybe it just gave them a glorious feeling.

Kelly: You called that moonshine?

Ruth: Yes it was moonshine, because that was in the prohibition days, but we just called it booze. The one herder Sam, he would get drunk on the ranch, but due to the fact that he was such a good man, my dad did not fire him. We put up with him. But Sam was a big man, and very strong. He would get up there to the Stores place, sure enough, and get a bottle, and Sam would be drunk. He’d walk of course, at that time we were living up in the upper house where Bowers were, and here he came one day and he was drunk. We were scared to death of him, so us kids all ran into the back of the house, it was quite a big house. In the back of the house there were little cubbyhole closets behind the fireplace and we all went in there and hid. Momma had ran and jumped in the car and was headed for the other ranch to get my dad.

Sam was mad! He was cross at us because when he came there, momma fed him, and when he sat down his bottle had slipped out of his pocket and fallen on the floor. Well, momma didn’t know that his bottle was lying on the floor behind the table. So she had fed him and started him down the road to the other ranch. Well he got a little ways down the road and discovered his bottle was gone. That made him real mad so he came back, and he thought momma had taken his bottle. She didn’t know it was lying on the floor behind the table. And so he was getting quite abusive, so of course the only thing momma could do was tell us kids to go hide, and we did. And she got in the car and went down to get my dad. He came and we heard Sam in the house, he was just ransacking things looking for that bottle.

You know what a single tree is? It’s an oak piece of wood that is hooked onto a wagon with a harness. Well it’s about 30 inches long, it’s oak, and it’s about 3 inches in diameter, a very solid stick I assure you. Here came my dad and he had that club in his hand. By this time Sam had just gone out in the shade, sat down and gone to sleep. Well my dad got him on his feet, Sam would listen to my dad, but if he hadn’t my dad would have hit him with that and knocked him out. But my dad got him in the back of the pickup, such as pickups were in those days, and took him down to the other ranch. But that was one case of a drunken herder, and we were afraid of him because he was so big and so strong. But he sure listened to my dad when my dad came with that club!

Cathy: So did he find his bottle?

Ruth: Then momma found it, and there it was on the floor behind the table, and of course that’s what all the ruckus was about, he thought that momma had stolen his bottle.

Kelly: You mentioned the Hodge’s place, where is that?

Ruth: You know where Butcherknife is, it’s just a little bit above Butcherknife.

Kelly: Above the mouth?
Ruth: Up the main road. Do you know where Don Billadeau’s trailer house is down in the trees?

Kelly: The one in the trees on the east side of the road?

Ruth: Yes. The Hodges place was right there.

Kelly: I bet the Long Ranch grazed on the Forest before the National Forest was established.

Ruth: Well I can’t tell you that because I don’t know when the Jefferson National Forest was instituted. See, that’s 1922 in this booklet.

Kelly: I should know, about the turn of the century, so they had permits.

Ruth: Would that 1900 map indicate it’s on Forest?

Kelly: It would, yes. Did the ranger come around often? Did he visit the camp tender regularly?

Ruth: Oh yes. That’s why there’s pictures of the Ranger up on top of Baldy, you bet they did. That’s why I went over to Landusky. Does that map say anything about the National Forest? You see, it was the Ranger’s job to go over there in the Little Rockies, and check that gold mine. There was a big gold mine there, and still is. But at that time, instead of having the open …. what did they call that, the open pit where they put the slurry in for the gold?

Kelly: The cyanide ponds.

Ruth: They had that in big wooden tanks, huge tanks. I don’t know how far they were across, they were in this enclosed building, and there were catwalks all around. And you had to be very careful, because if you would have fallen in, that’s the end of you and your body because that cyanide could just burn you up. And that was the gold mill there. And I can’t tell you how many bars of gold they minted there, but it was quite an operation. I don’t know why the Ranger had to go there and check that, but he did, that was one of his jobs.

Kelly: The Ranger from here, would go up?

Ruth: Yes because that was Jefferson National Forest. And that was when I got to see the wild horses, on one of the trips over there.

Kelly: You went with a Ranger over there?

Ruth: That’s why, because I was with a Ranger.

Cathy: Do you remember the Ranger’s name?
Ruth: Stacy Eckert. It was a long day because we had to start so early in the morning. I can’t tell you what kind of a vehicle we had, it was a pickup, and we took the ferry across the river.

Kelly: At Cow Island crossing?

Ruth: I couldn’t tell you which one we went across, but we took the ferry across the river and then went on. He had to check that mine over there, maybe he was checking other things too. There was a magpie that talked which I got to see!

Kelly: A magpie?

Ruth: Yes, they had him in a saloon, he talked, and the Ranger stopped at the saloon? I can’t tell you why we stopped, maybe just to see the magpie. Being a young women, I guess it was alright if you went in and saw the magpie. But we’d start real early in the morning, that was a long trip, and it would be way after dark before we would get back. We never stayed over, I don’t know where we would have stayed. That was quite a gold operation at that time.

Kelly: What do you remember about the Blue Dick Mine?

Ruth: Not very much, because the old people who started it when it first opened up, that was before my time. But that’s why there’s the road from Utica. There was always a road up that far, because it came up from Utica to those mines. But you see from this side, going up Dry Wolf, there was no road. And Crookenburg was our county surveyor, he tried to build a road up the side, it’s kind of up the side of Bandbox, it’s those zigzags. He had great ideas, but wasn’t a very good engineer, because he ran out of space to zag. (Laughter) He hadn’t figured it right, and if he had maybe figured it a little better he could of gone on in there and maybe got to Elk Saddle, I don’t know. But he wasn’t a very good engineer, and so we always called that Crookenburg’s folly. Then it was several years after that when they started the other road, and boy they did.

Kelly: I’ve seen it spelled Lion, L-I-O-N Gulch, and also L-Y-O-N.

Ruth: Boy, I don’t know which is correct, but I would say L-Y, because it was named for people and not for animals I’m sure. I have no recollection of a family called Lyon up in that area, but then with all those mining claims, perhaps the name would show up and someone patented it. Most of those claims have been patented. Fiddlers did own quite a bunch of them. It was primarily silver. They thought they were going to find a mother load up there and spent an awful lot of money digging that hole up there trying to find gold. They thought that was it, there’s traces of gold all up and down that creek. They called it the War Horse.

Kelly: Yes, I’ve been there, and Jon Wagner told me the background about it.

Ruth: They never found it, then they finally gave up. And in later years, now this guy from Geyser, a young man, was in there trying. Maybe he got it all. Do you know his name?

Kelly: It’s Jack Gamble, and his partners.
Ruth: Yes. They thought they could perfect that gold separating machine.

Kelly: Jack just got interested in that this last ten years.

Ruth: Well, that’s probably about the time, but they got some kind of a machine they think will separate the gold from the ore.

Kelly: Probably so they don’t have to bring all the ore down. The mine was pretty remote, but some people are still up there.

Ruth: Is it a patented claim? I thought it was patented.

Kelly: I think it’s not patented. Yes, I had trouble getting the background on it, but it’s unpatented and was abandoned.

Ruth: I guess when Whitmer’s gave up, they gave up on it. But I thought they had kept that mining claim, because how else could they keep the cabin?

Kelly: That’s probably controversial.

Cathy: Where did they send the gold?

Kelly: I don’t remember. John Wagner told me how the guy brought it down in a in a sled, a rock sled.

Ruth: They called them stone boats, but it’s close to a rock sled! (Laughter)

Kelly: That’s it, that’s the phrase he used.

Cathy: Is this maybe similar to the sapphires, someone said were sent to Tiffany’s (in New York)?

Kelly: The sapphires were sent to Tiffany’s to be initially identified. I think the gold from the War Horse maybe went to East Helena.

Ruth: Or it might have gone over the mountain to the smelter’s over in Barker in Monarch, they had smelters over there you see.

Cathy: So what’s the issue of gold? There are some people, environmentalists, in the Black Hills that are protesting gold, I’m not sure of the reason

Kelly: Sometimes the ore, the gold is pretty finely dispersed through out a whole lot of rock and you get a whole lot of rock out and process it, to get just a little gold, so it’s a big disturbance.
Ruth: A whole mountain! Because that’s what they want to do up there, is move the whole mountain.

Kelly: In the Little Rockies?

Ruth: Yes, well that’s back where that old gold mine was, you see, but when I was over there in the early ’30’s, they were in the main vein at that time.

Kelly: Oh, a vein, now they’re just processing ore.

Ruth: Yes, because they didn’t have that much really disturbed to get the gold, but again they were moving a lot of dirt none-the-less.

Cathy: And you can do that in a National Forest, move a ... whole mountain?

Ruth: The mining laws precede a lot of the other laws.

Kelly: Like historic preservation laws. Back in the late 1800’s, the government and the population wanted to see most of the west developed. And the mines meant jobs, and roads would be built, railroads would be extended to reach the mines and that was a way to open up the west. So the mining laws promoted mining, made it real easy to go in if you thought you had discovered something, made it easy to develop. And they haven’t been changed since, its controversial.

Ruth: When I left the JB Long Company then I went to the Hardenbrook Ranch. And that was cattle and we had to trail into Oti Park which is right at the foot of Big Baldy. In 1940 when I went up there, of course I went in ’38 -’39 but I wasn’t married to Johnny then, it was very primitive. Didn’t have four-wheel drives, we had a Whippet, a Model-A, and a ’31 Chevrolet, and an old stripped Model T. Real well equipped! (Laughter) There was kind of a road up, primarily we drove up Belt Creek to get to Oti Park, that logging hadn’t been done you see so that logging road wasn’t in there, you just went up the bottom of the creek.

Kelly: They’d drive up the creek, the Dry Fork of Elk Creek?

Ruth: Yes. This again was before sleeping bags so of course we had to take our bedrolls. And a big spruce tree sheds the water, its almost like a tent, because we very rarely took a tent. I’m not even sure we even owned a tent to start with, we just stayed under a spruce tree if it rained. And if you take off the branches, they kind of bowed you know, and laid with the bow up like this, it makes a really very comfortable bed. You can roll out your bedroll on that and your are quite comfortable. I can’t remember for sure which year the bad flood hit up there, it was in the early ’60’s though.

Kelly: ’64?

Ruth: It was the big one was, it washed all the roads out, it destroyed them all. So we had to go by packhorse, take in everything from the ranch with packhorse, the salt, take the cattle in,
everything by packhorse. Jim Fiddler was going to help us, at that time he still wanted to be a cowboy, he wasn’t really into it very much, and oh he wanted to be a cowboy in the worst way, he ended up being a good cow man. He wanted to go in with us and of course his help was welcome. So he was bringing a packhorse and a saddle horse. We saw him coming, see what we did, we had some older horses that we hadn’t broke to ride, we never had gotten to it, and they were mean, tough old things, big, you know. He was going to break one of these and one of his, and we had one we wanted to break.

So here we saw Jim coming across our meadow up there and he had managed to tie some sugans, quilts, he didn’t have much of a bedroll, on his packhorse. Well, his riding horse had got to bucking and of course he couldn’t stop the horse, and the only way he could keep him from bucking was pull him out, you know, go real fast with his own horse, with the halter tied around his saddle horn, and he could pull and yank on the packhorse. So he was coming across the meadow as fast as he could go to keep that horse from bucking, the blankets had come loose and the packhorse was just tromping them to shreds. He got there and we got the horse stopped and the blankets untangled and rolled them up, what we could, into the bedroll. He stayed over night, then we got our packhorses ready and started in with the cattle. We got to the foot of the Blankenship, as far as we could get that night. It was always bad because there was no drift fence between our place and the range, in fact there was no drift fences on the range then either.

Kelly: What is the range?

Ruth: Oti Park. So we made camp at the foot of the Blankenship that night and then went on with the cattle and the horses. We packed salt on these two horses we were trying to break, and believe me, by the time we packed all the way in there, you could ride them back out, they were so tired, and knew they were headed for home. We had to make I don’t know how many trips during the summer, we had to go every couple of weeks to take salt and check the cows, see where they were. Because with no gates and no drift fences, can you imagine how they can scatter on you, those 45 head of cows on 100,000 acres.

Kelly: How did you find them?

Ruth: You know, it was really amazing that we didn’t lose more than we did. One winter we couldn’t find two cows so they stayed in, they had calves with them and they managed to winter in there. Of course they lost their new born calves, but their yearling calves were still with them, and they had managed to survive, ate branches or whatever. They weren’t in very good shape but they were alive and their yearling calves were alive.

Another time we lost two bulls. So Johnny rented an airplane and kept flying and he knew that sooner or later he would probably be able to spot them. And they had managed to work their way up to Spring Coulee Ridge, the ridge that goes to Big Baldy. Then he got a neighbor and the first day when they went in they couldn’t get around the snow drifts, so they had to come back and start in again the next day. Had those bulls been lousy, they would have died because they were just living in this little park and had gotten afraid of the snow. They would not cross the snow bank until the horses made it, even a little snow bank, even eight inches of snow. They wouldn’t step into it until the horses made a track, because apparently they had floundered so in
the snow they had gotten afraid of it. So they did find the two bulls. Of course we had to find them if we could, because bulls were expensive. That was an experience for those bulls and it was after the first of the year when we finally found them up there, and they had worked their way up to that ridge.

But there were no drift fences, so there was no place to, when we’d round up these cattle, to hold them until we got them all together. So we’d have to make several trips right from the ranch over there, that’s 17 miles, and then round up as many cattle as we could find and then start them back out. We got caught in there one night. We always carried hard candy and some sandwiches and things in our saddlebags. But we just couldn’t make it back out that night, fortunately a rancher had a put up some bales of hay, and so we built an igloo of these bales of hay and crawled in there and spent the night. We had no other shelter, and we were comfortable in our little igloo.

Kelly: What route did you take?

Ruth: Over the Blankenship. When the family was living at the Taylor Ranch, this was the original homesteads that connected, were with the Taylor Ranch ....

Kelly: Whose original homestead?

Ruth: The Butterfield and the Hardenbrooks. They were related to the Taylor’s at the Taylor Ranch, R.D. Taylor, I can’t tell you what the R stood for, Reed though I think, but anyhow he was the first one that came out and homesteaded. He had his wife and son Charlie, then Wayne Butterfield came next, and home-steaded next to him, then the rest of the family came. They all lived at the Taylor Ranch, it’s still in existence, the old buildings. They all lived there for a number of winters. The railroad wasn’t here yet but there was a railroad into Monarch, that was the railroad. Where and how they got their mail, I don’t know, maybe it came to Monarch. They did get mail because I’ve got letters of 1896.

Anyhow the one woman’s husband, he hadn’t come out here with them, he was a city boy, he died, committed suicide. So they, the women, had to go back to straighten up the estate. In this letter, I tried to find it, they had written that they were preparing to leave the men for the winter. They had done a lot of canning and a lot of baking and they hoped they could get over the Blankenship before the snows came, to get back East, because if it snowed before they got over the Blankenship to catch the train, then they would have to wait another year.

Kelly: They wouldn’t ride out?

Ruth: There was no railroad here. If they’d come out this way, they’d probably had to go to Utica to catch a stagecoach.

Kelly: And that wasn’t an option?

Ruth: No, they wanted to take the train. There was the matter of getting over the mountain and taking the train at Monarch, and going back East. I don’t know what year that railroad was built.
up that canyon. Dry Wolf was not productive in anything, it was settled later. Prospectors hadn’t found any gold around Monarch and Neihart, that was the silver mine, and Utica, that was the sapphire mine but there was nothing up Dry Wolf. So there was no reason to build a road, not many people, just a few farmers or ranchers.

Kelly: There’s an old cabin up Spring Creek, do you know the story of that?

Ruth: You mean where the Doc Williams place was?

Kelly: No not that far up. You turn and head up the main Spring Creek Coulee road and then you head toward the true head of Spring Creek.

Ruth: Where the spring is, and the cabin is off up there, northwest of the spring?

Kelly: The one I’m thinking of is in a smaller coulee. It wouldn’t get you to Lone Tree or Anderson Peak, and there’s a little cabin in there

Ruth: Well there was two cabins, the Brownie’s and the Nick Owens’s place.

Kelly: Nick Owens and Brownie’s?

Ruth: Brownie is the one closer down where Pete Hansen used to have his cabin, on Bill Jones’ property. The one farther up, the old one, that was Nick Owens.

Kathy: What did he do?

Ruth: I imagine he was a prospector, I can’t tell you. We always called up to Nick Owens cabin so it must have been Nick’s. It was a dry camp, had no water.

Kelly: Oh, I thought it was near a spring.

Ruth: The other one is. The Brownie cabin down below has a little spring but there’s no spring by Nick Owens.

Kelly: I’ll have to get a map and sort them out.

Ruth: That’s the only cabin there I can think of, besides the Doc Williams place.

Kelly: Tell us about the Doc Williams place.

Ruth: Well, that was actually quite an establishment at one time. It was at the foot, this side, of Blankenship for people going over the mountain. It was a hospital, had a doctor, and people came out to him. In fact my father-in-law had typhoid fever and spent a long time there. Typhoid was not uncommon in those days and you usually associated that with contamination of water, I don’t know. And yet they continued to use the same spring.
Doc Williams lived there, he had a hospital, a big barn and accommodations for travelers, you had to stay somewhere between places. They put up hay, it was a nice hayfield and meadow out there, in fact an old mowing machine is still there. And there is still an old mowing machine up Oti Park right under the rim of Baldy, and I don’t know who in the world stayed in there long enough to have a mowing machine, but there had to be a dwelling at one time to have a mowing machine get in there. Quite a place for a mowing machine. It was one of the places, the meadow, where we put salt for the cows, and we still do. It’s marked salt ground, that’s the “mowing machine salt ground.”

Kelly: Was there a bordello near the Doc Williams place? I heard about one.

Ruth: If there was, it was never mentioned, it’s very possible though.

Kelly: Maybe this was closer to Hughesville?

Ruth: Oh, no doubt, there was one over there.

Kelly: Do you have stories from Hughesville?

Ruth: Not too many but my brother-in-law’s family, he worked with JB Long, they’re the ones that opened that mine. He worked there two different times when the mine was open. They had a nice dwelling, a nice house there. They lived in two different houses while there when it was in full operation. Heavens, I don’t know how many people lived there, a thousand or more, a lot of people. There was a large school and they had a hospital of course.

Kelly: How long was the Doc Williams hospital used?

Ruth: Oh I wouldn’t know when it was started and I can’t tell you what year they moved away, probably in the early ‘30’s or late ‘20’s, late ‘20’s probably. They must have moved part of the buildings or torn them down, but I don’t know who got the logs because they were all made of log, and the log piles are not there. The only thing there is the remains of part of one of the barns and one of the old houses, I don’t know who took the logs or what they used them for.

Kelly: There’s a homestead to the northwest, down lower in Lone Tree Park.

Ruth: That’s the Knoepke place.

Kelly: How do you spell that?

Ruth: K-N-O-E-P-K-E. The Knoepke place is the second one, where the ice cave is, not the first one.

Kelly: There’s a big two story place not far below the ice cave.

Ruth: I believe that was called the Anderson place, because that’s built on deeded land. That was the Anderson place.
Kelly: How long did they stay there?

Ruth: Well, I wouldn’t have any idea, because by the time I went up there in the ‘40’s, it was abandoned.

Kelly: What do you remember about the ice cave?

Ruth: Well, just that it was an oddity that you went to see.

Kelly: I heard that a wagon came up from Geyser to cut ice and take it back.

Ruth: Oh, there wasn’t really that much ice to bring back. Maybe they came up to get some ice to say it was from the caves. Well, I shouldn’t say there isn’t that much ice, maybe there’s a lot of ice you could cut, I really don’t know how much ice is in there. Apparently it’s kind of like a little glacier in that the water seeps down in and it freezes, and then it stays frozen.

Cathy: Do you have memories of other Forest Rangers, besides Stacy Eckhart?

Ruth: Well, the DeGroats because their son boarded with us, but you see the Layburn’s, those people were before my time. My husbands family was acquainted with them, which is why I have the pictures of them, but I don’t remember them personally.

Kelly: Do you remember or did you hear stories of Indians in the mountains?

Ruth: The only Indians that I heard directly about was an old couple of Indians that lived at Coal Mine Coulee, that’s behind Fiddler, towards Wolf Butte. I’m trying to get you to visualize a straight line between where Fiddlers live now, and there’s a coulee over there called Coal Mine Coulee, with coal mines in it. Why these two old Indians, a man and a woman, ever settled or ended up there I have no idea, but when Johnny’s grandmother and grandfather came and they were there on Duane’s place, there was one set of buildings.

The old man Indian would come up there and say “Me no eat today” and then just sit there and wait, and he would sit until he was fed. And then Johnny’s grandmother would always encourage him to take some food to the squaw, but he would just eat and eat until he was just stuffed, and then she would try to give him some more so he did take it home. What they survived on down there, maybe woodchucks in the summer, I have no idea, but they lived down there. No doubt, deer occasionally.

Kelly: Do you remember stories about this rock art? (Looking at picture.)

Ruth: No. Johnny’s mother sent pictures of it into National Geographic, and they said it was older than what they had records for.

Kelly: This is the Dry Wolf Rock.
Cathy: I was going to ask you about this picture, whether it was common back then for women to do taxidermy? (Looking at picture.)

Ruth: I don’t know, she just ordered the books and learned how to do it. People just did everything because there were no stores close by, if you wanted anything you did it yourself. She did quite a few mountings. For a long time, that head was in the Stockman’s Bar in Lewistown, I don’t know where it went from there.

Kelly: Do you remember stories about particular bears, or mountain lions?

Ruth: Well, the bear, no. Of course the white wolf you know is such a historical thing through here, and he was on the ranch. He was gone by the time I went there because he was killed in the ‘30’s, but he did destroy cattle on the ranch. Occasionally the bears on the mountains, apparently just for fun, would go down through a band of sheep just loping, you know a bear lopes, and swatting one after the other and some of them he would kill. Of course the herder would shoot him and that was before bears were protected. It was too bad because it would just scatter the sheep when a bear got into them like that, apparently just for fun. He didn’t seem to be really interested in eating them after he killed them, just romped on through them. But no, we never really were bothered by the bears. There’s still bears that come down to the ranch and summer, but they never bothered anything.

Kelly: There are two features near Dry Pole, up Dry Gulch, they are like pole teepees. One is still standing and the other was just below Dry Gulch counting gate. Trappers have described cubby sets similar to these, for bear traps, but some archeologist’s think these pole features are historical wicki-ups.

Ruth: No, they wouldn’t have lasted that long because that kind of timber is not a long lasting timber. One fellow that I knew, [name of man edited out at the request of the interviewee] set many bear traps.

Kelly: I think I called him, and he said he knew of these, but these weren’t his.

Ruth: No one would admit if they were theirs, because you really weren’t supposed to be setting bear traps. (Laughter) This fellow set many bear traps, I would certainly assume these were his. But no, they can’t be that old because that type of timber don’t last.

Kelly: You told me about an old building called the Grey Barn?

Ruth: Yes, but didn’t it burn not too long ago?

Kelly: I think it did. Were they homesteaders?

Ruth: Yes. Mrs. Grey, and I can’t remember her husband’s name, but yes they were homesteaders up there. It’s amazing how many people were up there, there was the Grey’s, the Pancakes, and the “Wap’s”, I don’t know the Italians family name, they were called the “Wap’s”
Part of their little fireplace is still up there in the coulees where the “Wap’s” house was, nice little fireplace.

Who else was there, the Grey’s place, the Pancakes place and the “Wap’s” and of course the Taylor ranch, which is right across from there, and the school house was there. Oh, they thought they could make a living. It didn’t take much too live, you didn’t have taxes and you didn’t have gasoline for a car. It was primarily “Can I provide enough food for my family and livestock for the year.” And of course the livestock was a food supply. There was always the dream of expanding and getting larger, but they started out with the hope “Can I provide food and shelter for my family,” and they lived very, very plain.

Kelly: You’ve already told me about the sheep driveway, and the camps up Bandbox, but I don’t have it on tape. Did the driveway have a name?

Ruth: I don’t know. We just called it the sheep trail, because the sheep always had to go that way. Even the later years, when Wilson was still going in, they always had to use the sheep trail to go in and come out. The last couple years that Donald Wilson was in the mountain with his sheep, they did give him permission to come right down the road, but it was really not to his advantage. I don’t even know why he decided to do it because they gave him such a short allotted time that he could be on the road, and they came through our place, he asked if they could cross there which of course we told him he could. But he was moving the sheep so fast it would run several pounds off those lambs. Whereas when you came out the sheep trail you grazed as you came slowly. So it was to no advantage to come right straight down that road, because he came off it too fast to abide by the timeline they allotted him.

Kelly: The Forest Service?

Ruth: Yes, and then he quit going in. Are there any bands in the mountains still? From the Martindale side?

Kelly: Yes.

Ruth: But none from this side?

Kelly: I don’t know.

Ruth: Well Hughes’s were the last ones that kept a permit, and then they turned their’s into a cattle range up there.

Kelly: Don’t sheep usually graze much higher in the mountains than the cattle?

Ruth: Oh yes.

Kelly: They had a range that could go either way?
Ruth: Hughes’s happened to have one somewhere on the head of the Judith, that they could put some cattle on that would be satisfactory. Well you see, Reed’s had Lost Fork, that was a cattle range and maybe that’s what Hughes’s got. Maybe they gave up sheep grazing in exchange for cattle range. The Reed Ranch doesn’t go in there anymore so maybe that’s where his is. The highway went where it is now, but it wasn’t fenced and that was quite a big field. I got caught in this blizzard, you can kind of get confused, of course, I was only a small child, but I managed to get there. I was with them for a long time.

Of course that was in the ’30’s during the drought. Their cow pasture was way down towards the end of the Buttes, it was probably a couple of miles down there. In the daytime that’s where we left the cows. We took them down early in the morning and then left them all day, and then brought them back at night to be milked. The poor man milked all those cows by hand. And then they cranked the separator and made the cream. When I get this sketch done, I’ll show you how far it was from the barn to the house. And they lugged those huge buckets of milk up to the house and then separated them (the milk) and then took the skim milk back to the barn to feed the calves and the hogs. And Mrs. Ray was a little tiny short person. I know she wasn’t five feet tall. The milk buckets just drag almost on the ground when that little woman carried those two big buckets!

Oh, I was going to mention, taking these cows way down there to the daytime pasture, then we’d have to go down at night to bring them back. Due to the shortage of grass… see now that was the main highway through that pasture, that was the Custer highway, it went past there, it didn’t go where it is now.

Kelly: Oh, it went around the north end of the Butte?

Ruth: No it didn’t go around the north, the stage road went around the north end of the Butte, but when they started going with cars, they went around where Mable and Dave Hill live now. They didn’t go over the Butte, but wound around it. But that was the Custer highway, and then they fenced it. But at night we herded the cows out there on the highway to get extra grass. We had to stay with them of course, you couldn’t just let them be out there. It was against the law to even have them on the highway, but we were herding them. We herded them all the way up and down there, we kept them out as late at night as we could and then we’d have to turn them in so we could go to bed. We just did that in the summer time.

Kelly: For extra pasture?

Ruth: Yes. Pastures were such a premium. They planted beans, navy beans and they did get them pulled out and harvested. And this stone barn that Mary Anne mentioned, is still standing. They dumped the beans in this stone barn and of course there’s a lot of trash in the bean plants and stuff, but the beans had shelled out pretty good. And so my mother had a party, she did this to help Ray’s out, she gave a party and fixed prizes and food and everything, and invited the ladies from in town to come out and hand pick these beans, to take the trash out of them, and the one that picked the most got a prize, the one that picked second-most got a prize. And we cleaned beans all day long and quite a few ladies came, and they were given their prizes, and they brought their kids with them, and some of the kids would help. I can’t tell you how many
pounds of beans we got cleaned that day, but a lot. And then again, put them in the cloth sacks and sew them up.

Kelly: These are beans they had grown up there?

Ruth: Yes, can you imagine gathering these beans this country?

Kelly: No! I’m unfamiliar with bean harvesting...

Ruth: I don’t think they were ever raised in this country again, and they didn’t have a very good crop. They gathered them up with a binder somehow, I’m not real sure how. I can remember trying to beat the beans out of the pods in the stone building on the stone floor. We swept them up and put them in the middle of this table and the ladies just sat there and picked the good beans away from the trash. What a chore!

Mr. and Mrs. Ray belonged to a club where he went, when somebody died they sent you a postcard and told you they had died and you mailed them fifty cents. Well, then when you died, if you had kept up your dues of sending fifty cents, them they would pay for your funeral.

Kelly: A chain letter?

Ruth: Uh huh, but you sent the fifty cents in. So they would get a letter when somebody died, you know, they didn’t always have fifty cents, so Mrs. Ray and I would go to the hen house, she would pick out a nice big fat Buff Washington chicken, beautiful chickens, pick out an old hen. And she could tell if one was laying or not, because she sure didn’t want to get one of the layers. She would pick out one of these chickens and of course she would chop its head off and we would dress it. And you just had to have the chicken spotlessly clean and we just worked and worked until there was not a pinfeather or blemish on that nice big fat bird. Then we would bring it to town and try and sell it for fifty cents.

Sometimes I would have to go to several houses before I found a lady that would take one for fifty cents. Mrs. Mathew quite often bought one, Mrs. Fritkoff would quite often buy one. These were the richer people, Mathew’s was the bank, Fritkoff was the Basin Store. The people in this house, they had in the coal business at that time, so I hit the more well-to-do houses until I could sell these hens for fifty cents. Then Mrs. Ray would send fifty cents to this outfit and you know I don’t know if they still belonged to it. Mr. Ray died first, he died in about ’41 or ’42 something like that, then she went to Spokane to be near a nephew, and I don’t know if she had kept up with this club and if that paid for Mr. Ray’s funeral or not. They’re both buried in Lewistown, in the Lewistown cemetery.

Kelly: How interesting, kind of a life insurance policy.

Ruth: Yes, to pay for the funeral. And those poor cows, and milking all of those cows, and separating all that milk. And the cream can sat in the kitchen until it was full, it must have got pretty sour!
Kelly: Changing the subject, did the WPA build the road up Dry Wolf, across Yogo Peak?

Ruth: The one over the mountain up to Elk Saddle, I don’t think it was the WPA, I don’t remember.

Kelly: Do you know of any WPA or CCC projects in this area or on the Forest?

Ruth: You know I really don’t, however, I am sure there was WPA work here because of the people that were involved in it.

Kelly: Any camps?

Ruth: At Neihart, because some of our boys went over and stayed in that camp.

Kelly: So they came over and stayed in that camp. I’ve seen pictures of it.

Ruth: Some of the high schooler’s missed a couple years of high school to the CCC camp, because they were paid money and that was cash income for the family. People were awfully short of cash.

Kelly: Tell us about the Gears.

Ruth: I don’t know anything about them, because of course they were way before my time. They have come back and buried people in the cemetery, they have to bring them cremated now, they can’t bring a body. But they can still put cre-mains, I believe they call it, there in the cemetery. Well, I guess it has been 20 years since the last time I remember them bringing somebody. But they have been back, relatives inquiring about it and going up there and seeing the place. And I don’t know who has taken responsibility of keeping that fence around it, maybe they do.

Kelly: Eagle Scouts most recently, and did research and put up the sign.

Cathy: Do you know about lookouts in this part of the mountains, fire lookout towers?

Ruth: There was the tower, of course, on Yogo, but before that was built there was the lookout on Big Baldy, that’s where my husbands uncle was in the lookout.

Kelly: About when?

Ruth: In the late ‘30’s, because the tower was there in the ‘40’s. Of course the road went in about ’33, and the lookout tower on Baldy was before that. There wasn’t a tower on Baldy, he just lived there in a cabin and had this route where he had to walk out and see as good as he could see.

Kelly: Do you know much about that tower at Anderson Peak?
Ruth: Well, I was to it a number of times.

Kelly: Do you know when it was built?

Ruth: That too was in the ‘40’s when that was built, it was new, at the head of Lone Tree and that was in the ‘40’s.

Kelly: Well, that covers about all of our points.

Ruth: Well I hope I have been of some good. I didn’t want to just ramble.

Kelly: This has been just great. Thank you very much.

End of Interview