This is Cathy Luiken and Kelly Keim, and we are at the home of Lew Miller in Harlowton, doing a Pass Port in Time Interview on the history of the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Today is September 11, 1997.

Kelly: Mr. Miller, when did you first come to the area?

Lew: I came to the area in the early spring of 1930, to this particular area. Of course, I've spent 80 years in this state, but to the Snowy Mountain area, early in the spring of 1930.

Cathy: I read in your book that you came from Kansas?

Lew: Well, I was born in Kansas, but I was only 3 years old when I came up from Kansas. I don't know much about Kansas. I'm almost a native.

Cathy: And what brought you here to Montana?

Lew: Well, my mother came to Montana. My father passed away when I was just a baby, and then my mother came to Montana.

Kelly: Other children were with you?

Lew: Myself and two sisters.

Kelly: Did she come alone?

Lew: Yes, yes and at that time we settled in the Shepard area, and then we lived for 3 or 4 years in that Pine Hill country north of Shepard, up in that area. And then moved down in the area near Bridger, Montana, the Clark Fork Valley. And then when I was 15, I guess, we moved to the Snowy Mountains.

Cathy: What are some of your memories growing up in Montana?

Lew: Oh, there's so many that I couldn't begin to recall.

Kelly: What are your earliest memories of the Big Snowy's?
Lew: Well, I remember getting off the immigrant car; you know in those days folks would get an immigrant car on the railroad, and move their belongings that way. Another young fellow and I, John Bernhart, we came up on this immigrant car and we landed in Hedgesville, Montana. That's a ghost town over here now. We didn't know anyone, we didn't know where we were going except that we were going to Careless Creek area in the Snowy Mountains. So we went up to the grocery store, and the fellow said, well there's someone going out in that direction now, and you can ride with him. Well, it turned out that this fellow had been celebrating his birthday, and he was quite inebriated, and he had a 1929 Model A Ford that he was trying to show off, and out of town we went at a great speed. We were scared to death, both of us. He got up the road about 8 or 9 miles, and he said "There's a fellow I need to see". So, he stopped to talk to Harry Giltman, who was an old, old timer from this country. As soon as he stopped, we got out. We'd had all the riding we wanted, but he pointed out to us, we told him we were going to Careless Creek, and he pointed out the canyon to us, the Careless Creek canyon. So, we knew where to head for, so we walked the rest of the 11 miles, or what it was up the Careless Creek canyon. I remember seeing those mountains, that's my first sight of them.

Kelly: You were on your way to a job?

Lew: No, my folks, or my stepfather and my folks were moving to a ranch on the very head of Careless Creek. The ranch actually bordered the forest reserve on the head of Careless Creek.

Kelly: Was it an established ranch that they were buying, or was it a homestead?

Lew: They bought this ranch, and it was kind of a sad story. They had a ranch down on the Clark's Fork, which they traded for this place, and assumed a mortgage of only $4,000. Pretty good size ranch. $4,000 and that broke them, they lost the ranch. Because, you know in 1930, when the 1929 depression hit and they were selling lambs for 3 and 4 cents a pound, and wool for a nickel a pound, they just couldn't make it. They went broke on that ranch. That ranch controlled or owned the 4 miles of Careless Creek, the head of Careless Creek.

Cathy: What was your first job?

Lew: First job, why I don't know. I think probably my first job of any consequence was herding a band of sheep in the Snowy's in the summer of 1931. That's probably my first job. It was an unsalaried position, you know. That was my job. So, I took a band of sheep into the Snowy's in 1931 and put in the summer up there with them.

Kelly: They brought you provisions?

Lew: Oh, yes.

Kelly: About how often?

Lew: Oh, once a week. At least once a week, sometimes more often.
Kelly: And you moved your camp and your band of sheep around. Could they drive to your camp?

Lew: Yes, they could. The range that I was herding on was not Forest Service ground, it was private land but it bordered the forest reserve all the way across there.

Kelly: It was foothills?

Lew: Yes, it was right in the mountains you might say. It was right in the mountains.

Kelly: Did you camp at established camps; had a herder before you and the ranch set up camps?

Lew: No, no. As far as I know there had never been any sheep in that particular area. It had been cattle range.

Kelly: We heard a little bit about a pipeline from the ice cave to some troughs for sheep?

Lew: That's right.

Kelly: Was that one of yours?

Lew: No, that wasn't mine, that was Winnecook, but yes, I've seen that. I've been there. They used to have a band of sheep, I believe as I remember, 3 bands of sheep. One of them was right on the very tops of the mountains, but that wasn't part of my operation.

(Tape recorded poorly for a few moments; sounds like discussion in background by Lew about a sheepherder who lost his job up on the mountain)

Lew: . . . . send him along the way for a little while; he wanted a ride, and I told him "I wasn't able to give him a ride this time, so you'll have to walk." (Laugh)

Kelly: Were most of the operations up against the mountain sheep or cattle?

Lew: They were mostly cattle at that particular time. See, even the Winnecook Ranch, their home ranch was off away from the mountains, even though they went into the mountains. As I said, I think they had a permit for 3 bands. They were not up against the mountains, so this operation was one of the few sheep outfits that was right up against the mountains there in that area.

Kelly: Do remember seeing or hearing of any Indians using the mountains?

Lew: No, I don't. They did that at one time, I'm sure, but not in my time. I don't remember that. On the ranch there were, down in the low areas, kind of a swampy wet area, at that time there was still a lot of buffalo bones and so forth in there that indicated that at one time there had been a lot of buffalo in the area, and they were pretty well preserved in that wet area. Now, I don't think you could find a single bone. There's evidence that at an earlier time there were a lot of elk
in those mountains, and then they were all gone at that time. There wasn't any elk in the mountains, now they're back again.

Kelly: When you were herding sheep, did you have trouble with bear or wolves?

Lew: Never had any trouble with bear or wolves. Never did. No, we didn't have any bear trouble. There were a few bear in there, not very many, although to the east of us, that was another sheep outfit that used to go into the mountains. Perry brothers, the Rothemy Ranch Company, there ranch was down on the lower end of Swimming Woman Creek, but they ran in the mountains, and the summer that I was in the mountains I remember they losing sheep over east from there at that time, the Perry brothers.

Cathy: How about any deer? Some people had said that there were more mule deer at that time?

Lew: They were all mule deer. That is, I didn't see any whitetail until, oh, along in the 40's. They were all mule deer. It seemed as though there weren't near the deer population, wasn't near what it is now. You would have to go out and hunt some time two or three days to see any deer.

Kelly: Were you involved in forest fires? Fighting forest fires?

Lew: Yes, I was up on that fire, and I can't remember the exact year, but in the early 50's. I was living at that time east of Ryegate, and I saw the smoke up there. I hated to see my mountains burn up, so I went into Ryegate and stopped at the sheriff's office where they were recruiting people to fight fire, and picked up a couple of hobo's that rode up with me, and we went up on that fire. In fact, they sort of put me in charge of about twenty-eight, I believe it was, high school boys. We went out to fight that fire.

I've always had some regrets about that fire, and I could be wrong, but I think that fire could have been contained in the Swimming Woman Canyon. I think it was a fact that someone in charge didn't know the area that well, because there was just a very narrow strip of timber that went from Swimming Woman Canyon over the Half Moon Pass and down into Flat Willow Creek, and I always thought that we could have gone back there and built a back fire, or ditches dug, and trail cutting, and probably contained it in the canyon. It was during the night, it went over the top and down into Flat Willow, and just burnt quite an area over there.

Kelly: Do you remember any lookouts? Fire lookouts?

Lew: No, I don't. I remember the old ranger from years back. I'd see quite a bit of him, Dave Lake. I've seen a lot of Dave. He was quite a man. You'd never know where you'd run into him, he was all over the mountains.

Kelly: On horseback usually?

Lew: Yes, on horseback some, and he drove a, I believe it was a Model T Ford some. But he was on horseback, and as I recall, he kept these horses on Blake Creek. I might of been wrong about that, but I think he kept his horses on Blake Creek. I heard tell about a record that he
made. I don't know this, but this was just hearsay: coming out from Judith Gap, and getting his horse and being up on top of the mountain to a fire in just record time. He done it in a hurry.

Kelly: Wow, it's really steep!

Lew: Now, that's just the story, the report, I heard, I don't know you know. I was amused, thinking back, he came along one day when I was camped in Tepee Canyon, which is the next canyon west of Careless Creek, east of Careless Creek, sorry. And he came along and he said, "You know anything about a sack of cornmeal lying on the ranger trail"? I said "No", and he said "Have you seen anybody"? I said "I haven't seen anybody". So, he says "Well I'm going back to investigate". So he went back, and he followed the tracks from where this bag of cornmeal was laying, up through a bunch of quaking aspens. There's a spring up there, and here some moonshiners had set up a still there, on the forest reserve, and they were making corn whiskey, and they were carrying these bags of cornmeal up there, and they'd got tired and left one laying there on the trail just about the time that Dave came along.

Kelly: Very incriminating!

Lew: So, he told them, he said "I'll give you 24 hours" he says "to get all this off the forest reserve". And that was no small job because they had a big steam boiler, and 10 or 12 big mash boxes, and about all the equipment that goes with it. But they had it off there. I don't think he turned them in, or anything, but he told them "I'll give you 24 hours to get it off of here". And it was gone. It's strange how they got that in there without me even being aware of it you know. However, you know I was out all day, and maybe they did a lot of this at night, I don't know.

Kelly: They had to go through your sheep area?

Lew: No, they didn't. They didn't have to go through me at all, but they were rather close you know. So, Dave, he didn't put up with any foolishness.

Kelly: Do you know of other stills? Or rum running stories?

Lew: Well, just the same bunch. This was before this time, before I had moved clear up to the forest reserve area. I was still about 2 miles south of there, and this was earlier in the year, it was probably May or June, and I was camped there, and I heard a commotion down in these trees, and I went down there, and here was this still, and when I spoke to these fellows, they were just, boy everybody just dashed around, and one fellow went for a rifle that he had there, you know. But I happen to know one of the fellows real well, I just happen to know him, and so they were operating there before they moved up north, and he said "next time you come down here" he says, "kid, you be singing or whistling or something, don't just walk in here". And then they moved up there, I don't know why, and then Dave moved them out of there, and they had to move back south again.

Kelly: How did Swimming Woman get it's name?

Lew: I don't know that. I've wondered that myself. I don't know.
Kelly: How about Cushman?

Lew: I don't know that either. We lived about 6 miles west of Cushman at one time, and I never did know how Cushman got it's name.

Kelly: Are there places on the forest that used to have a different name?

Lew: I can't think of any right now.

Kelly: Did your mother and stepfather's ranch, up against the mountains, have a grazing permit?

Lew: They had what they called an Off and On permit. This is where they use part of there own lands in conjunction with forest reserve land, you know. Their livestock move back and forth, yes.

Kelly: I guess that's the pattern still. Do you know how they went about getting it?

Lew: No. I don't, but they didn't have a permit in the canyon. At that time some had a permit in the canyon, and some down below the canyon in lower areas.

Kelly: In Swimming Woman Canyon?

Lew: Well, Careless Creek.

Kelly: Are there old cabins up there?

Lew: I'm sorry to say they're gone. There was one just below the forest reserve, which was an old homestead. It was the old Harry White homestead, and I cut mine props up there in the Careless Creek country in 1932, I believe. We cut props for the Roundup mines, my partner and I, and this homestead was just across the creek from us. It was a nice cabin there, and 2 nice large rooms, a nice cabin, so I took my wife Hester up there 4 years ago. I said "I want to show you this nice cabin up there". We went up there, and the roof had caved in, and there was a tree growing up in one of the rooms about 20 feet tall. Just gone, and that's the way it is with so many of these old homesteads. It kind of hurts me to go out and see these things.

Kelly: This was on Careless Creek?

Lew: Yes, it was on Careless Creek.

Kelly: What do you think it was, a farm?

Lew: Well, at one time it was a homestead, you see, and you might say a little ranch. Then the homesteader left, and after that it was used by folks who were working in the timber, and so forth. Like I say, we were cutting props for the Roundup mines at that time, and the folks that were living in that cabin were doing the same. We were cutting these, well it was dry fir timber
that had been burnt in that fire in the early 1900's. This was nice dry fir wood, and Roundup mines, they just preferred that to the green timber. So, we were cutting those mine props for the mine. By the way, when we started we received a nickel a piece for these props, and then they cut us down to three and a half cents. That's what we received. Now the fellow that hauled them to the mine I don't know what he got. And I was up to the folk's ranch just two weeks ago. Nothing left there but the old spring house. That's all that's left.

Kelly: Can you remember any special projects the Forest Service or the WPA or CCC might have done in the Big Snowy's?

Lew: No, I don't remember any projects. I know they didn't have the CC's in there, and they didn't have the WPA up in the mountains, as far as I know. Of course in them days, we didn't get too far from home. They might of had some in the area, but we didn't get very far from home.

Kelly: Were there any patterns of conflicts between the ranchers and picnic'ers or loggers, or anyone?

Lew: Not that I can recall. I don't think we had any problems at that time. We had a group of folks that used to come up from Ryegate every summer and they weren't on our ranch, but they were right next to it. They'd come up there, and they converted an abandoned homestead into kind of a lodge, and they come up, young folk, and everybody, and they'd come up in the summer time and spend a big part of the summer there. We never had any problems at that time. We had a little different class of people then that we have nowadays.

Kelly: Would they come and go?

Lew: Yeah, they'd come and go.

Kelly: So they wouldn't stay there for a month? I was just wondering what they did.

Lew: No, but there was usually someone there all the time, but maybe different ones. They'd come and go. Most of them came from Ryegate and south of Ryegate.

Kelly: Did people come with tents to the mountains?

Lew: Yes, there were a few tents. Not too many, though.

Kelly: I don't mean just the Ryegate group, but people to the mountains. Hunters, I suppose?

Lew: Hunters. We used to take a tent up during hunting. Yes, there were folks in tents.

Kelly: Before they changed the highway south of Roundup, you could still see some of the dugouts of Kline?

Lew: Yes.
Kelly: Were you ever in those?

Lew: No, I never was.

Kelly: It was a whole community? Interesting, houses dug into the sandstone.

Lew: I don't know, I was never in them. I would like to see them sometime.

Kelly: There aren't as many anymore. Were you ever aware of any rescues made in the mountains? Lost hunters or hikers?

Lew: No, I don't think so. I can't recall any.

Kelly: Well, this has been real interesting.

Lew: Well, I don't think I had much information for you.

Cathy: Certainly, you did.

Lew: I'm interested in history myself.

Kelly: Do you have old photos?

Lew: Oh, yes, yes.

Kelly: If you'd like to bring them out, we could talk about them in a way that would leave a record on tape.

Lew: Well, yes, if I knew where they were.

Kelly: We don't want you to have to go into too much trouble.

Cathy: The Forest Service in this project is also looking for old photos. You could certainly, if you were willing, could drop those off to Dave Wanderaas.

Lew: Yes, you know, we've got so many albums and things. But I could go through that.

Kelly: He would make copies.

Lew: What type of photos would you be interested in?

Cathy: Pertaining to the Lewis & Clark National Forest.

Kelly: I guess there weren't lookouts in the Snowy's?
Lew: I don't know of any. Well, I guess there was at one time. They said there was one up there, but I have never seen it, but the old timers said there was a lookout up on top there somewhere.

Kelly: Somewhere on top?

Lew: Yeah, and I shouldn't say where it was, because I don't know. But I remember the old timers telling about that, but I didn't ever see it.

Cathy: If you have photos of the Snowy Mountains, you can certainly, if or when you find them, pass them on to Dave if you could.

Lew: I sure will.

Cathy: And we can also give you a copy of the tape too.

Lew: Ok.

Kelly: Some people have requested a copy of the transcript of the tape when it's done. You can have that too if you want.

Cathy: I know you have a lot of history.

Lew: Yes, there's been lots of changes. We are retired from ranching, I guess, you know. Our sons are on the ranch out here.

Cathy: On the ranch that you owned?

Lew: Yeah, the ranch we owned.

Kelly: Tell us about those Swimming Woman mining operations?

Lew: Well, I think the first, that I recall, and this is before my time, a fellow by the name of Steigan had a gold mine up there, and he operated that for some years. I don't know what kind of success he had, but anyway, he was I think the first. And then in my time and before my time, some fellows by the name of Zier brothers, they mined up there for years. They were up there every summer. They would tunnel back into the hills here and there, and I don't know whether they found enough to pay their expenses. Probably not, because they had another brother who operated a ranch on the east end of the Snowys, and I think he made enough money on the ranch to grubstake these other two. But I don't think they ever found a whole lot, but they did do a lot of mining.

And then a fellow came in there in the early 30's, and I'm trying to think of his name, and I might be wrong, but I think it was Scarbrough, came in there and he put in a sluice box there in the creek and he ran that sluice. So he got everyone excited about the gold and so forth. Myself and a whole bunch of us teenagers, young folks, we went over there and we filed on claims there.
in the canyon. They wouldn't of been legal, because we never had them recorded, we would've had to go and had them recorded. Somewhere on the east side of the canyon there's a tin can on a tree with my name on it, a claim I filed.

Kelly: A placer claim?

Lew: No, this wasn't a placer.

Kelly: Was there an exposure of minerals?

Lew: Oh, no. We wouldn't of known if we'd seen it. He was trying to get people, well he was a shyster, he was kind of a promoter and he had some friends of mine who were ranchers, well they just abandoned their ranch and went to work for him in some kind of a partnership agreement. He wanted somebody to do his work, and what he was looking for, as I recall, was what they call the "Spotted Horse lead". It was the old "Spotted Horse" mine over in the Judith mountains, and that was a rich productive mine for many years, and then it had played out. The theory was that it might have cropped up in the Snowy's, and this is what he was looking for. He had these fellows all excited about it and doing his work, and one day he sent in some pretty good assays that showed pretty good. And they found him salting these samples. What they meant by that, he'd dump a little extra in there, see. So that blew the whole thing. I don't think anyone ever found any amount of gold or metals in Swimming Woman, not to amount to anything.

Kelly: I've seen a prospect or a caved-in mine up on the road; you can drive to it, and it's on the west creek. Do you know who's prospect that was?

Lew: The Zier brothers. Yeap, it was one (belonging to) of the Zier brothers.

Kelly: Do you know of mining in other areas of the Big Snowy's?

Lew: I really don't know of any. Well, yes, there's a canyon or a coulee or whatever you call it, that comes down from the east and empties into Swimming Woman; it's down below the canyon.

Kelly: Just below the narrows?

Lew: Yes, and there was a mine in there at one time and I don't know a whole lot about it.

Kelly: I see, yeah, the Big Snowy's aren't known for mining.

Lew: No, no, that's right. The Belts, I don't know how that mining was. There was quite a bit of mining in the Belts at one time. I don't know how much they found, but I have been over the Belts quite a bit in recent years and found a number of old mines. I was interested in something I just got acquainted with here at Labor Day; some of my family went up on Muddy Creek, that's the next canyon west of Daisy Dean, and I had never been in that Muddy, and we went down over this almost impossible road and got down in there, and down in the bottom of that canyon.
there was an old steam engine. I can't figure out how in the world they ever got that steam engine in there.

Kelly: Ah, George Cameron and Ruth Cameron have mentioned it.

Lew: And I've been doing a little inquiring, and somebody said it belonged to John Whelan, see. They thought it did, and I couldn't figure out what they wanted with it in there, because just walking around and looking around there I didn't see any evidence of logging when they had logged, and I didn't see any mine. They used to use these in their mines, I didn't see any, but here's this old steam engine.

Kelly: Did it build a road, or start a road?

Lew: I don't think so.

Kelly: I haven't been there to see it, and I've heard of it.

Lew: I just was amazed to see that thing. They would of had to come in from the south, because they never could've gotten up on that mountain where we went down in there. Never, and there must at one time been some kind of a trail in from the south. So, I'm still inquiring about that.

Kelly: Well, if we hear we'll call you.

Lew: Sure. I'd appreciated it. I'm just interested, see, and how they got it in there, and why they wanted it there.

Kelly: Well, thanks a lot for your time.

Lew: Oh, I'm sure I never did give you much.

Kelly: Oh, no, these stories are important. Thank you very much for your time.

END OF TAPE