Richard Kenck: .. Joe Williams', in that area back in (unintelligible) their cattle at night, wolves would get a yearling or two over night.

Ed Nentwig: Over on Wolf Creek?

RK: Yeah on this side of Wolf Creek. This is what they call Rock Creek Basin in there. Well, the government trappers worked in there with poison and one fella was a crack shot and he got a lot of 'em. When they put the 1080 [poison] in it, they annihilated the wolves.

EN: Is that right?

RK: They just took those baits and scattered 'em everywhere. It cleaned out the wolves. The last few years when I was working back in the foothills and further back, biggest bunch of wolves I saw was seven head. There was a hundred killed one fall and there was another killed the next fall. After that, was a year or two, I saw three. 'Bout two years ago there was one followed my track. I'd made a circle and when I came back he'd gone up my track (unintelligible). I never saw him. Then about two years ago, out here there was one wolf that used to cross and there was a lot of people saw it at different times way out here on the flats. He made a circle, and he'd go back along the foothills and he went north and he'd come back to Haystack Butte and then come back. Somebody shot one way up in the North Fork, and I think maybe that was him. I don't know really. He hasn't showed up the last couple of years.. .and a migratory.. .he might have died too.

EN: Did you ever trap very many wolves?

RK: I never trapped too many, no. I just wasn't big enough to handle 'em when there was a lot of 'em. But when I was a kid going to school, they used to follow our ski tracks to school and darn near scared the life out of me. As a kid, third, fourth, fifth grade you know, goldarn there'd be two or three wolves sitting up on the hill and there's always the one that's set up and the others'd be laying down but that one would be setting up. We'd go by and they'd come down and they'd
get in that ski track. They'd trot along. If we stopped, they'd stop, a hundred and fifty yards behind us just curious, didn't bother us. Boy, it didn't take us long to get to school either with those big devils.

EN: Kind of gave you an incentive.

RK: (laughs)...to get to school.

EN: Has there been any reports recently? I know they killed a wolf here this winter up by Havre I think it was. Have you heard of any right around here recently?

RK: Not on the flats, no.

EN: How about up in the hills?

RK: In the mountains, up in the North Fork Center, you see a track once in a while, they're there. I haven't been back in that country on snowshoes for several years. I used to make a trip through maybe a week on the snowshoes, counting elk and stuff. Once in a while we'd see where a couple of wolves had gone through.

EN: When you were trapping in the Bob Marshall, that was in the thirties wasn't it?

RK: Yeah, twenties, late twenties, early thirties.

EN: Once you got your camp established and stuff and your gear all in there, what would a typical day start out like when you were running a line?

RK: We figured from twelve to fifteen miles between camps, and that was a good day and we figured about ten traps a mile. I was running about six hundred traps and about sixty miles trapping. You'd just move from one cabin to the next. Our main cabin, we'd do our laundry and rest up and go baking and stuff like that. The average day we'd take out just at daylight and it'd usually be anywhere from 4:30, 'round 4:30, before we'd get in at night. Made a long day of it.

EN: Did you stop on the trail for lunch and stuff?
RK: I never did carry lunch.

EN: Never did?

RK: I always had rations in my pack. Like today, I'll eat breakfast, no dinner, with a little supper. Just got in that habit. Some fellas gotta stop and eat, some fellas gotta stop and take a drink at every creek crossing. I could go for a week straight and never take a drink. I drink coffee, tea, stuff like that, but drinking cold water'd weaken you same as eating salt. You'd get weak as a rag if you...

EN: Why do you figure that is?

RK: I don't know, I think it changes the temperature in your body. You're out in the cold, and you drink that cold water, and it takes the heat out of your body, and it just takes that much more in you to build it back up.

EN: When you say you'd put out ten to twelve traps per mile, were they all martin traps?

RK: Mostly. Martin and cat traps.

EN: Martin and cat traps.

What kind of a method did you use to decide where you were gonna put a martin or a cat set?

RK: Usually you knew the martin runs. You'd see...martin travelled through in bunches, and if you can get ahead of them, you've really got it made if you can keep ahead of them because you can pick 'em up right along. They had a regular run that they make every so often, and you'd set those traps in those places. We used the same sets year after year.

EN: What do you think makes 'em have a run? Why do they move from (unintelligible)?

RK: It's the territory, and they'll more or less follow the creek bottoms and stuff like that. You never catch outside of way up on the divide where they're crossing back and forth. But they'll still be in the coolies where there're big trees and heavy timber.
EN: How about the cats? How would you do that?

RK: The cats, they’d follow the ridges and under the cliffs. The trails would go around the end of a cliff and maybe run for miles, and the trail’d go around the end of it here and you’d set a cat trap there and then they’d travel that back and forth under those cliffs. I suppose rabbits and grouse and stuff like that’s what they’re living on, and they were thicker in there and just protected out of the wind.

EN: These are mostly lynx or bobcats?

RK: Both.

EN: Both?

RK: There's more lynx back in that country than there was bobcat. The bobcat were further out.

EN: When you trapped the coyotes, what kind of method did you use to decide where you were gonna put a trap for a coyote?

RK: You gotta watch for their signs. They have a regular route. If a coyote goes through a trail, through the brush or something, you can figure he's gonna go back through there. Cowtrails and then of course around carcasses and stuff, bone piles and stuff like that. If there's a dam, a stop-water dam, they usually fool around on those and of course the cowtrails and stuff through the hills. You find a place where the wind'll blow the snow off next to a cowtrail and put dirt-hole sets and set posts like that in most places.

EN: How long do you usually figure between trips that a coyote will make?

RK: Depends. Sometimes they'll make that trip every seven or eight days, sometimes it'll be two weeks.

EN: What do you think, what determines the length of time from seven days to two weeks?

RK: I don't know. Never figured it out.
EN: Never figured it out, huh? What size traps do you like to use when you're trapping coyotes.

RK: I've always used number fours, but I've caught some of 'em in number threes but I've lost some of 'em in number threes too.

EN: Number four Victor or Newhouse?

RK: Number four Victor. A number three Newhouse would hold 'em but Victor, they'd get loose from number three. I've got a bunch of number three jumps out there, it'll hold a lot of 'em but every once in a while you'll lose one of 'em too.

EN: How about for beaver? What size trap do you like to use for that?

RK: Number fourteen's my choice, and I've used those big ones with four... what do they call... not one-fourteen. What are those big ones we've got out there?

EN: The big wolf traps?

RK: Yeah.

EN: Those are one-fourteen Newhouse.

RK: One-fourteen. Then there's these little jump traps, number four jumps. That's my choice. The jaw trap and then of course (unintelligible) three-thirty.

EN: When you're trapping beaver, what method do you use to go in and... let's say you were gonna go into an area and you were gonna trap the beaver out of this area that were, oh you figure there was too many beaver. How do you know if there's too many beaver, and how do you know how many beaver you can take out of an area?

RK: It depends on the number of dams. One beaver will build maybe six or seven dams that'll go up and down the creek for a half a mile. The lodges and the dens that you find along, you can figure from that. When you've got a lodge, you're gonna figure there's four or five beaver in that
lodge. If there's three or four lodges within a mile or two, you know you've got quite a bunch of beaver. Then from the cuttings, and one thing or another two or three (?) you know there's quite a bunch of beaver in there and those fresh cuttings. The only place I've ever tried to annihilate beaver is where they're really raising (unintelligible). In the summertime here I trap a lot of them and transfer them and take them back where there's no roads, no ditches or anything and plant 'em. Then in a year or two I can go and take a crop off them. Their colony's started. Once in awhile somebody comes and poaches 'em all out on me. I get so mad after I've packed so many in on my pack for three or four miles, (laughs)

EN: What do you look for when you're gonna move 'em? What's gotta be there to make it so they'll stay?

RK: Food and water.

EN: Food and water? What kind of trees do they like the best?

RK: Willows and quakers [quaking aspen].

EN: Quake aspen.

RK: That's their (unintelligible).

EN: Is it important as to how much water's flowing or...?

RK: Not too much. Just that it grows. I've planted them where there was nothing but a spring, and the creek wouldn't be two feet wide coming down the coolie, and had 'em building it up where they'd have ponds in there and a dam four or five feet high and one dam right behind the other. As long as they've got the food they'll stay there.

EN: There's a lot of people that say when you have a good beaver population, the fishing is also good.

RK: It is. Now there's one area up here that the creek went down through a canyon and I planted some beaver up at the head of it and it went around up through another valley. I packed beaver up in there, and I put in four beaver—they were small ones. In about three years, those beaver dams were clear down for two miles down through this canyon, lot of willows and quakers and
stuff. The Fish and Game come along and planted a bunch of eastern brook [Eastern brook trout] and boy talk about good fishing.

EN: Is that right?

RK: That Eastern was right at home there. But '64 flood scoured that out to where there's no food or anything in there anymore. I'd take two or three beaver out of there a year usually, but it's where this road crosses the creek that they'd dam up the culvert and I had to take 'em out. So I planted a bunch in behind there and had a good colony started, too close to the road somebody traps 'em out. (unintelligible) chop the dams (unintelligible).

EN: So you kind of did your work for nothing there.

RK: But those were several years that down through that canyon, I took a lot of beaver out of there. The fella that owned the place just below it, the creek used to sink and it was a regular jungle of willows and stuff. The cattle'd get in there and they had an awful time crossing it to take 'em through and cross there. Well, the beaver built dams all down through there and they just a nice crossing. The cattle had to go, they couldn't get into that jungle anymore. But they finally built a big dam right below the crossing and I had to take out five or six beaver out of there, (laughs) They had four feet of water in this crossing.

EN: When you say sink, you mean the water disappears?

RK: Yeah, it just sunk and they'd come out way down below. That's the only water he had in that field at certain times of the year. Certain times it'd run over but late in the fall it'd just disappear into the ground.

EN: The 'ol beaver, he's provided a lot of pros and cons for the landowners around here, hasn't he?

RK: Beaver, he's a conservationist, no fooling. He's a big help if he's in the right place. He's good flood control, and wherever you find beaver dams you find fur, mink muskrat, otter, swan (unintelligible) the fish, all kinds of birds and duck ponds and these (unintelligible) ducks they like to nest in these places.

EN: He's kind of a nucleus to everything.
RK: That's right. You get a good series of beaver dams, and you find everything in there. Coyotes and bobcats and everything else, of course they're looking for a beaver. There's always rabbits and stuff around the brush.

EN: Wherever you had that water, you have good place for everything. You think that the beaver population around in Augusta here, is it as good as it was in the twenties and thirties and forties or is it worse?

RK: In the twenties everything was under permit system. The land owner had (unintelligible) ten beaver, something, fifteen beaver whatever his judgment was. But now it's wide open. The population has gone down in places where their goats are, but the most places that I trap are back off the roads. I've trapped 'em for sixty-five years or better, and I get about the same amount of beaver every year.

EN: What do you keep in mind when you go into an area? What are you thinking about when you're gonna go trap beaver? What would be your objective, if you had any objective in mind?

RK: Outside of, what you get off of the fur. (laughs)

EN: Dollars and cents?

RK: That's right.

EN: But don't you have kind of a deeper objective, what we were just kind of talking about, out there? One terminology that's used a lot is farming. Aren't you kind of farming the fur?

RK: That's right because I'll take quite a few beaver out of this area this year. It might be two or three years before I come back there to take any amount out. Now over here, I keep shifting back and forth. This fall I took nineteen beaver out of (unintelligible) home, and I hadn't trapped that for a good many years. Other people have trapped it, but still I got nineteen beaver out of there.

EN: Over on the Dearborn?

RK: I didn't clean it then, but I cleaned 'em out where they were going damage.
EN: Do you think that's a good methodology for trappers?

RK: It is. It is because you let that population grow, and you can't stockpile it. If you leave it too long, you're either gonna starve out (unintelligible) so you've got to keep working back and forth. My main hope now—I'm getting older and I don't travel like fused to—most of it now is where they're having trouble around irrigating ditches and round the county roads under bridges and stuff like that where I get most of the beaver.

EN: You see this conflict between people and the wildlife.

RK: They flood a lot of meadows and stuff like that. I had one place this fall. I took nine beaver out of, and they built dams in the creek. Well they weren't flooding it much, but it was sub-irrigating back underneath and they were getting alkaline leach back in the meadow. We cleaned the beaver out and we took back and tore out the dams. That settled it. The creek is back down to normal.

EN: How'd the landowner feel about that?

RK: He's the one that asked me to go get 'em. (laughs)

EN: Do you find landowners that have a real negative attitude about any wildlife in your work too, where they want you to just take all the beavers, they don't want any left there?

RK: That's right.

EN: How do you feel about that? Do you try and talk 'em into leaving a few there for doing some good or are you just go in and do your job?

RK: I just go in and take 'em out. Up here we have a situation where we got the creek runs through a man's ranch. Alright up here this fella won't allow any traps of any kind. Alright, maybe down here the same. Those people travel back and forth, and I can take about the same amount of beaver off that place every year.

EN: ...because they'll be feeding.
RK: Yeah.

EN: ...coming back and forth. I see.

Do you think all wildlife's kind of like the beaver where you've gotta do this farming technique, you've gotta take care of it?

RK: That's right. If you don't take care of it, you've got nothing. That's what makes it hard where the price of fur is up and you get an influx of would-be trappers. They'll clean out everything that they can, and take the cream, then they're gone. It's hard to farm it when they do that because they may be taking your breeding stock.

EN: There's a lot of talk now about this competition—I know we were talking earlier—between bobcats and coyotes. Has that always been that way where you've got too many coyotes?

RK: Yeah.

EN: How do you think that...How does the coyote population grow to that?

RK: It'll just explode every so often. You got a lot of gophers and rabbits and stuff. Then if they're trapped down real hard, like when they was using 1080 and stuff like that, the coyote (?) seven or eight pups [in a litter]. If they're over here and the food isn't too much, they only have three or four pups. They seem to govern themselves more or less. I think it's the same with deer. If the food goes down, then goldarn it, they'll only have one fawn where otherwise they'll have two. It works that way. There'll be a lot of dry does in the tough years when the population gets too thick. They kind of govern themselves that way and then of course disease.

Now we had a proposition here two or three years ago. We had a lot of fox in here. I never tried to trap fox at all. I like to watch 'em. I never saw one yet that wasn't hunting mice or grasshoppers or something. I can sit for an hour and watch a fox play around, but I would catch a few in the coyote traps and like that. Here about three years ago, I think that parvo [canine parvovirus] got into 'em and all of a sudden they just disappeared. They weren't trapped and they weren't shot off because they'd been here for several years and the population stayed about the same. Then all of a sudden they were gone. This last year there's a few showing up again down in (unintelligible).

EN: Where do you think those few came from?
RK: Just some that survived. That's the way I've got it sized up. Now up here in my brother's field, he had a den in there and he had a black fox, silver fox. She'd follow him around when he was irrigating, getting the moles. She'd fill up and she'd look like a barrel, then she'd go to the den and she'd come back and look skinny again. She'd follow him all day, and she was in there about three years when finally she disappeared. That den is dead; you don't hardly see a fox track anymore.

EN: When she went back to the den, you think she'd regurgitate the moles for the pups?

RK: Yeah, she had about seven little pups, and boy they'd get out there and played, buck around, (laughs)

EN: Have you trapped quite a few coon too?

RK: Oh yeah.

EN: How do you go about trapping coons?

RK: I snare a lot 'em.

EN: Do ya?

RK: Yeah.

EN: How do you know where to make a snare set?

RK: A coon will leave a trail, he travels and will leave a trail. You set a little loop about that big.

EN: About four inches across?

RK: About four or five inches and he'll go into that and you've got him. He'll hang himself in a short time. When you put him in a trap, if you've got a trap that's a little bit big, the jaws a little high, he'll chew his foot off underneath 'cause it's numb. He'll eat that; he'll just eat it up. Then

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he just pulls the stump out and he's gone. An hour or two, but he's gone in a trap. If you don't
drown him, why it's hard to hold him in a trap. The right trap or snare, I don't lose him.

EN: When you go to make a beaver set, what kinds of beaver sets do you like to make the best?

RK: On the slides and the banks and lots of times you'll find a place that there's no slide or
anything, well then I make a little mud pile and put my scent on that and a good place to drown
'em in.

EN: They use mud piles as territory markers don't they? And a slide, when you say slide that...

RK: Coming out to feed or work or so on.

EN: ...moving the brush down into the water. Is it true do you think that—I know it's a method
that I use, I was wondering if you used it—that you can pretty well tell how many beaver in a
lodge by the cache size too in the fall? How big a cache they'll hold?

RK: Yeah.

EN: When you make a slide set, do you use a steel-leg hold trap?

RK: Yeah.

EN: Will you put that down by the water?

RK: Put it in the water.

EN: Oh you do?

RK: Under about three or four inches of water. Depends, I usually take 'em, and if there's a shelf
so I can set my trap on it or take my boot and make a shelf, but if it drops off too straight and it's
pretty deep then I'll set my trap down in there maybe under eighteen inches of water but I'll take
some little sticks, let 'em stick out from the bank like that. He'll swim into it and when he hits
those sticks, he'll let his hind end down, get him behind.
RK: I've caught 'em before being eighteen inches. Not only that, but you'll get the big ones. The little ones, you don't pick 'em up so often although you'll get a little one once in awhile that way too. When they hit those sticks, it hits 'em in the chest and they swim with their front feet behind 'em. They come up to those sticks—put 'em two or three inches apart—and they hit those and they settle down.

EN: How did you learn things like a beaver swims with his front feet behind him?

RK: Watch him. (laughs)

EN: Do you think that's a good thing for trappers to do is watch the wildlife?

RK: If they don't they're not good trappers. If you don't understand the habits of an animal, you'll never make a trapper. I had a fella out, he was the district manager of the International Harvester Company. He come up here one time and wanted to go hill climbing. We went up to the cabin and there was about two inches of new snow came that evening. The next morning we took off, and he didn't go very far because he couldn't hike very far. Going down, I was telling him what had happened, "Here a weasel caught a mouse, and there the mouse had gone. Here's bobcat track, and here's a coyote track," and so on. I was telling him all the time what had happened. We set down after awhile and started looking at the (unintelligible). He says, "Goldarn it," he says, "You know if I'd come up here, all I'd a seen was trees and mountains. You go down the trail and it's a regular newspaper. You knew everything that was going on." He came back here, I hadn't seen him for ten, twelve years. He came in and Sadie here all afternoon had coffee with... and visited with him. He still remembered that trip. He says, "I never realized how to observe and know what's going on."

EN: How did you learn how to do that?

RK: I grew up with it.

EN: Just being outdoors all the time?

RK: All the time.
EN: Keeping your eyes open. Do you think everybody is able to observe like that or just special people you think?

RK: No, they got to be trained for it, but the average person don't see it. They can't tell what's going on.

EN: When you're out trapping, you make most of your own scents?

RK: Yeah.

EN: How did you learn to do that?

RK: Trial and error.

EN: Trial and error? You use a scent mostly on all animals you trap?

RK: For near all of 'em yeah. One reason for using scent is get away from birds, camp robbers and magpies and crows and ravens like that. With the scent you don't have that much problem, (pan lid crashes)

EN: Do you think that learning how to make a scent's kind of the same as learning the habits of the animal, you just have to observe what your scents do and don't do?

RK: A lot of it. You find hatchings of 'em from the tracks when they come around to sniff but it don't do nothing. Now there's so many scents on the market, there's a lot of them are good. In the last few years, I make some of my scent because I vary it. I never use on coyotes, use the same on every set or they won't pay any attention to it. So you make this set with one scent and that set with another one and on up the creek. Kind of keeps them confused.

EN: Do you do the same with beavers and everything?

RK: Beaver, a lot of times I set just blind sets. I make my own beaver scent. But I learned that to start with from an old fella that was a (?), came to Montana years and years ago. He was an old
man and I was just a little kid and the beaver were in the fish ponds, plugging up the outlet, of course, losing fish. We had to clean 'em every day so he said, "I'll show you how to catch those beavers." He was an old Swiss fella. He took me out and he set a trap for me and showed me in the summertime. He said, "You catch a beaver there." That fall I went to trapping beaver and I got one.

EN: Did he ever say how he learned to do that?

RK: I don't know.

EN: Do you think he knew that from Switzerland or Sweden?

RK: No, probably way back in the (unintelligible) he probably learned it from some old mountain man or somebody.

EN: Did he teach you how to make scent?

RK: Yeah, but I mix it different now than I did then.

EN: Did you improve you think?

RK: Yeah.

EN: Works a little better now. What clued you in to try and improve it, just you wanted to see if something else would work?

RK: I'm always experimenting with something. I've experimented with a thousand things and thro wed 'em away, (laughs)

EN: Have you ever trapped mountain lions or bears?

RK: Yeah.
EN: How did you go about trapping mountain lions?

RK: You find their trails and then make cubbies.

EN: A cubby? That's a little house?

RK: It's more or less just a V, made out of stuff so that they just will go in the easiest place see. You don't try to close it too tight or they won't go in it. I've got pictures of a mountain lion in a trap, and we turned him loose.

EN: How would you turn a mountain lion loose out of a trap?

RK: Oh, that's easy.

EN: Is it?

RK: Yeah.

EN: How did you do it?

RK: You just put a snare on his... put a rope around his neck and stretch him out and one on his hind foot and stretch him out. Then pull the leg out—he’s got the trap on—and pull it out tight and get him pulled tight, half choked down, loosen the trap and then you pull the ropes off of him.

EN: I'm gonna turn the tape over here.

[End of side A]

EN: When you trap bears how do you go about trapping bears?

RK: Use a cubby.
EN: A cubby? Same thing?

RK: Other than these Aldrich traps, they're useful in trails. With the laws now, you've got to look at that trap every twelve hours and you've got to fence it in with wood and put signs. I don't use the big steel traps anymore. I've got that one out there which we've caught quite a few bear with where they were bothering. But use that Aldrich trap which..safer. There's too many people walking around now.

EN: Aldrich trap is the snare trap?

RK: Yeah. Of course, you get caught in that all you gotta do is reach down and pull it off. With the big bear trap, you stepped in that, he's there, you just don't get loose. If you break a leg (unintelligible), but it is much safer. As I say there's so many people walking around now it's darn dangerous to set one of them traps.

EN: The snare trap that you use, how do you handle a bear once you come to the set?

RK: Ordinarily we tranquilize him, put a collar on him and turn him loose, haul him out of the country. Otherwise, two-seventy [270 rifle] or an aught sixty [.30-06 rifle].

EN: I see, sometimes you use that method too?

RK: Yeah.

EN: How did you learn to work with bears?

RK: People were having trouble, and just kind of fell into, I guess. I used to practice the same thing that you'd use on a bobcat or a mountain lion. Usually use an old sheep carcass or something in there for bait. If nothing else, we'd mix up a bunch of fish and stuff and let it get about half-rotten and mix it with honey and stuff like that. I caught one bear up at the cabin one time on a muskmelon rind.

EN: Is that right?

RK: Yeah.
EN: He came in for that?

RK: Smeared that around on a tree and threwed the rind down there. The next morning I had the bear.

EN: Was it a big bear?

RK: No, it wasn't too big, but he sure raised hell in the cabin. He took out three windows out of the cabin and tore the inside upside-down. But he got a little too friendly and we had a bunch of 4-H kids in the cabin and he came up to the door and pretty near scared 'em too death. I was afraid he'd hurt somebody so I got rid of him.

EN: We were talking earlier about your trapping cabins back in the Bob Marshall. You were telling me how you put a double roof on them. That was standard procedure?

RK: Roofs, yeah.

EN: How was that again? You said they'd never leak because... How did that work?

RK: The air space between them would be six to eight inches between the regular roof and the boughs where enough heat went through the roof, the less melted. It didn't really make it drip, it would crust that snow and then of course it was cold enough it never thawed it well. You take just a dirt-roof cabin, the dirt from underneath would melt it and it'd go down through the roof. But this other way, it goes up, there's insulation there and that cold air in between.

EN: Did you ever put windows in your cabins?

RK: Oh no.

EN: Would you come in at night and work your fur?

RK: Yeah. Martin, of course, you could pack them, but you take a lynx or something like that and used to have some awful times trying to skin 'em. Lynx was about two-thirds froze, be froze
solid and have to thaw him out. Might have to leave him in the cabin and keep a fire going for the next day to get him thawed out.

EN: I bet that was a job packing a full lynx out.

RK: Oh boy yeah, or a coyote. Take a forty-five pound coyote. I come out of Ford Creek up here one time, I had four of ’em. I was bowlegged coming out on snowshoes. Boy I had two over each shoulder. I had to throw a stick across my shoulders, that way, two of ’em hanging on each side and them going down there, (laughs)

EN: I bet you were a little shorter when you got down, huh?

RK: I sure was. I’d hate to do it now.

EN: When you would get in at night, how long would you usually stay up and take care of fur every night.

RK: Until you were done. Sometimes until midnight.

EN: Then back up at dawn?

RK: Mm-hm.

EN: Those were some hard times.

RK: You bet, but usually when we’d come in if we’d have martin and they were froze of course, we’d come into the main camp, one fella’d go out on the line and the other fella's stay in camp. He'd do the washing and take a bath and all that stuff. Work the woodpile and what not. He'd be there over a day then he’d take off on the line. Meantime this other fella'd come in. Took us about four days to go around. We took turns going that way. Of course we had spur lines that fell in the main camp. Take off on a spur line for just a day’s run round trip.

EN: Did you use the old, what they called, the wagon wheel method where your main camp was the hub and then your lines went out in different directions.
RK: Yeah and then we figured to make a circle. We'd go up one creek like that and cross and come down another creek and back to our main camp.

EN: Make a loop in there.

RK: Yeah. Like up at the head of Hoadley Creek on to Sadler, we'd take the top of the Continental Divide and we'd go up and down the Continental Divide to the crown of the mountain. We had to camp there and then we'd work the head of the South Fork over into the Rabbit Creek, Basin Creek, in that country, Fish Creek. Then we'd cross over into Straight Creek and come back down Straight Creek see.

EN: Did you always have the same partner when you were in the Bob?

RK: No I had a couple of different ones.

EN: Let's see, how can I put this? This might be... It's interesting to me and it might be interesting to anybody listening to this tape. A lot of the old time trappers, I know Bud Moore and I talked about this and he said out of all the guys that he knew he only knew two guys in his whole life that were partners and stayed partners. Did you find that was hard to handle a partner, always get along on the good days and bad days?

RK: It was one fella, Old Ed Druckmiller(?), he was a lot older than I was. Some of these cabins he built and we run—I would say—ten or fifteen years, maybe longer that we worked together. Packed together in the summertime and trapped in the wintertime and so on. He and I got along fine. But the other partner that I had was here only just for a year, and he went down to California. He came from Colorado, and he went back to California. Other than that, when I was a kid once in awhile we'd have a partner for a winter or a month or something like that. It really was a loner, a loner deal. You get back in the Bob Marshall, you'd better have a partner.

EN: For safety.

RK: For safety reasons. You get hurt or anything, you don't come in in time, he can go look for you. Now this old Ed Druckmiller, he was kind of a loner although he'd take me as a partner once in awhile. But he broke a leg back in there, way up at the head of South Fork up under Observation Pass, broke one bone in his leg below the knee. He strapped his snowshoe to his knee and he bound it up the best he could. He got to a cabin and he tied his foot to the post of the bed. He put his belt on it and he set that leg and he bound it up. Six weeks he laid there in that
cabin. He walked out. He said he had about seven miles to go to get to another cabin. He said that was the longest goldarn hike he ever made in his life. It was nothing for him to go out and do ten, fifteen miles a day just trotting along like a bobcat.

EN: How did he break his leg?

RK: Fell snowshoeing.

EN: Tripped or something?

RK: Tripped or something and snapped that one bone.

EN: When he lay in the cabin for six weeks, how did he get fire wood and water and food?

RK: He was a fella that always had about two or three cords of wood all split up. That's one thing he always did. Then this cabin had a spring, I showed you a picture of it, a spring right along and he took a rope and he took a piece of blanket and he'd throw that blanket into the spring and bring it back and wring it out. That's the way he got his water. His wood was just outside of the door. He made himself a business that he could walk around on his knee after he healed up some. He'd walk on his knee with this wood leg with his leg in a cast behind. That's the way he managed. He had a dog, an old shepherd dog, and that dog watched him try to snare wood out of this woodpile with a rope. He pulled in several sticks, and that dog would go out and get a stick of wood and bring it in.

EN: Is that right?

RK: Go out and get another one and bring it in. He finally got so that he'd go down to the creek with the bucket and bring a bucketful of water back.

EN: Good friend then.

RK: You bet.

EN: Did you ever have when you—you said you were partners for ten or fifteen years with this fella—did you have some pretty good times?
RK: Oh yeah.

EN: Would you sit around in the evening and exchange what happened through the day?

RK: Oh yeah. Played cribbage. (laughs) But usually we had skinning and stretching to do like that. Maybe bake up a bunch of stuff we were gonna take off somewhere and take the dog sled and away we'd go for two or three days. Make a whole bunch of biscuits and one thing another. I've got a picture of an old Airedale dog we used to hitch to this dogsled, and one of us ahead and one behind and away we'd go. That time there was a lot of little trappers cabins and Forest Service cabins around there. Now they're all burnt up. It's a crime because a lot of those cabins were back out... You didn't see 'em everyday, people knew where they were well they happened to run into 'em hurt or in a blizzard or anything it was... Pretty near all of them had a stove in of some kind, an old barrel or something.

There's one case up here on the Dearborn a few years ago. The cabin had an old stove in it and the fella got lost up there in a hell of a blizzard. About twenty inches of snow fell and he didn't know where he was. He found this cabin and he went in there and stayed. He didn't get much to eat. He shot one squirrel, and he didn't have much to eat but he stayed right there. We found him there. It was about five days before we found him. Even I (unintelligible) been through that.

Forest Service burned up the cabin.

EN: The Forest Service burnt the cabin? Why do you think they done that?

RK: These environmentalists. They don't want anything... Burned up some cabins that were wonderful cabins. Just real good cabins, (unintelligible) logs and cement foundation and everything. These outfitters had them.

EN: Do you think they were afraid of overusage?

RK: No, no. It spoiled the environment to see something in there.

EN: It was aesthetic. That's kind of a sad deal then.
RK: It is and with the backpackers and the cross-country skiers and stuff, we're gonna find people are gonna be lost and die. The same way with our grizzly bear, we're gonna have trouble with the grizzly bear.

When I was a kid, I never knew of a grizzly on the Dearborn only way ahead of him to go up there, but we had a lot of sheep in the mountains and they trapped and shot 'em all the time. Down on our old ranch we never heard of 'em; once in a while a black bear, but never a grizzly. In the last few years been about seven grizzlies killed in that, right in (unintelligible).

EN: Why do you think the bears are coming down like that?

RK: They're getting a little thicker, the sheep men went out of the mountains, they quit shooting and trapping them. They get a little thicker and a little thicker, now they're coming out here on the flats. We've got one grizzly within a mile of a town up here. He knocked a bunch of beehives over and eat up the bees and the honey both. Smashed everything. Got him, and he had over three gallons of bees in his stomach when we cut him open.

EN: Holy cow!

RK: (laughs) Cleaned out the whole colony.

EN: Was he a big bear?

RK: Didn't weigh so much. He'd been a big bear, but goldarn it he was skin and pole. Didn't have any teeth and his ears was gone, scabby.

EN: Kind of an old fella then.

RK: He was an old fella.

EN: Do you think that the burning down of the cabins, that kind of brought a close to the era of trapping and stuff that went on?

RK: Yeah.
EN: That was kind of what did it?

RK: We did have some tent camps but god they're the most uncomfortable things. You'd go in and they were just plumb cold. You warm 'em up, and then goldarn it as soon as you go to bed and the fire goes out, you'd freeze to death again. It'd get around forty, fifty below zero when you get back in there, high up. It's pretty miserable.

EN: So you'd just as soon have the log cabin?

RK: That's right. We used to set our tent and then we'd put ridgepoles over the tent and then put poles down over that off of the tent. Out on the edge we'd put our wood along the walls of the tent. Then snow would bank up on that, which made it fairly warm. You'd keep from freezing to death. It was an uncomfortable camp.

EN: Did you try to stay away from those quite a bit?

RK: You bet.

EN: Build you a little cabin. Would you build your cabins in the summertime?

RK: Yeah.

EN: How big were they usually?

RK: About eight foot square.

EN: Eight foot square?

RK: Some of 'em were eight by ten.

EN: Dirt floor?

RK: Dirt floor.
EN: Would you just set your logs on the dirt or rocks?

RK: Yeah, set 'em right on the (unintelligible).

EN: Then build her up. Did you have bunks in there to sleep on?

RK: Yeah, the bunks would be along one end of the cabin and then the stove... You could set on the bunk and reach the stove. Then you had a little table over here and set on the end of the bunk.

EN: Everything in the world was within arm's reach.

RK: That's right.

EN: That's one guy's terminology of comfortable when you can reach everything from the bed.

Would you hang your furs from the ceiling?

RK: Ordinarily we just rolled 'em up and took 'em into the main camp. We put them on the ridge logs at the main camp.

EN: The main camp pretty good sized?

RK: Sixteen by twenty-four inside.

EN: It was a bigger building? I see.

RK: I have a picture of it here somewhere. We'll look it up after a little. We built that in 1924, and it's still as solid today as it was. That's on a foundation, rock foundation, and it's got a good roof on it, roofing material on it.

EN: They haven't burned that one down?
RK: They haven't burnt that down. It costs... When we built it, we got a permit and it cost us twenty-seven fifty a year in rent for this land. Now it costs us two hundred and fifty.

EN: Holy cow!

RK: Every year they come up now. They said this year it'd be two-hundred and seventy or forty, but this year it's two-fifty.

EN: This cabin's in the Bob too?

RK: Yeah. Not in the Bob; it's right across the river from it within about three miles.

EN: You still go up to this cabin?

RK: Oh yeah.

EN: Is that the one you showed me in the pictures where you take your family and stuff and go up there?

RK: Yeah.

EN: So she's still standing solid?

RK: Just as solid. Hit those logs; they just ring like a bell.

EN: Do you ever think about going up there and running a few spur lines out of there?

RK: The last few years I haven't because there's been a bunch that've been running snowmobiles back and forth. I haven't monkeyed with it too much on that account.

EN: They kind of raise heck with it?
RK: Yeah.

EN: Do they just disturb everything?

RK: Mm-hm.

EN: I see.

RK: Fifty, sixty snowmobiles go in there at one time, and they might go in there at midnight and travel around all night. Get up on the airstrip up there and go down and have races and everything else, (unintelligible)

EN: When you were back in there, did you ever get very lonely?

RK: Never had time.

EN: Never had time?

RK: Never thought about that.

EN: Kept yourself busy?

RK: Yeah.

EN: With your partner there, the old fella, did you ever have days when you kind of had a little misunderstanding or anything like that?

RK: I don't think we ever had an argument in all those years. I knew him for... I knew him up until the time he died. I don't think we ever had an argument.
EN: You think that might be a lot of people now, they're nervous. Well, I think they're nervous. I think probably you think they're nervous too. Do you think it's because they don't talk things out? They hid their feelings and stuff?

RK: That's right, and I think a lot of it is greed.

EN: You think so?

RK: I think a lot of it is greed. Think the other fella's getting the best of him. Now this old fella and I, we'd take off and just enjoy being out. I learned a lot from him because he used to average about eighty martin a year. When he got eighty martin, he'd quit. It took him a month and he'd quit. Done that for years. He trapped in here, came in here in 1915. Helped build our cabin. He could handle an ax, boy I tell you, his work was just perfect.

EN: This was the Swede guy or what was this fella's name?

RK: Ed Druckmiller.

EN: Ed Druckmiller. He wasn't the guy from Sweden?

RK: No. That old fella was an old prospector that used to work around the (unintelligible) outfits and stuff and get our grub stake.

EN: What was his name?

RK: Jakey Shadder(?).

EN: This Mr. Druckmiller, what nationality was he do you remember?

RK: I don't know what. He used to have a place down in the Crazy Mountains, a ranch down there. He came up here and was working with the ACM when he came into the country. He came in through the Flathead side, prospecting for the ACM, and that's how he landed in this country.

EN: I think we'll take a break here, and if we pick up later, we can start the tape machine again.
[Interview pauses]

EN: I'd like to kind of cap the tape off, Dick, and...

You started trapping... The old Cree Indian fella that got you kind of started there, he took you under his wing and taught you a few things.

RK: Muskrats and mink was where I started.

EN: Do you remember his name?

RK: Dan Gerveis.

EN: Dan Gerveis?

RK: G - E - R - V - E - I - S .

EN: Was a French name?

RK: It was a French name.

EN: What got you... What inspired you to get started trapping with Dan?

RK: Muskrats used to bother our fish ponds, dig big holes in the dams, and we could trap them alright. Then there was mink on the river and the fish ponds so he was trapping mink. Of course I wanted to try it too. He showed me how to snare a fish and make some bait, (unintelligible). You had to go right down the river to school. I'd run a line morning and evening and if I got home before dark I'd set traps to my cabin.

EN: Now that you've trapped for most of your life...

RK: I started in when I was seven, caught my first beaver when I was ten.
EN: How do you feel about your life as a trapper?

RK: I love it.

EN: You love it.

RK: I love the outdoors, and if I was able as I said, I've got the age now I can't get out and hike like I used to. I still keep up my (unintelligible) I wish I was thirty years younger.

EN: And go some more.

RK: I'd go some more. You don't get rich at it, but there's something about this money don't mean anything either. How about these fellas that are out here working big wages and like that dying off at thirty-five, forty years old of a heart attack. They haven't enjoyed life. All they've done is been a slave to their... You got to enjoy your life along with it.

EN: Do you think trapping, if you're maybe to sum it up, would be true peace of mind?

RK: It is. It is, there's something that just keeps you going. You always wonder what's in the next trap and so on. What you're gonna do here and how you're gonna come out there. Been a lot of disappointment. At the same time, during the Depression I just about made my living in the wintertime as a trapper. People were working for fifteen dollars a month on a ranch here and working twelve, fourteen hours a day. I was getting a hundred and fifty, two hundred dollars a month from fur, and I didn't have to listen to any boss or anything else.

EN: (laughs) Your own boss?

So if you were to sum it up, do you think trapping's been pretty good to you?

RK: It's been good to me. I made good money at it. It's a hobby that's paid.

EN: And offered some enjoyment too. We'll stop the tape with that.