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This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

Oral History Number: 149-004e
Interviewee: Clarence “Cy” Young
Interviewer: Ernest Kraft
Date of Interview: November 12, 1965
Project: National Bison Range Oral History Project

Note: The recording quality changes throughout the interview, causing the audio to increase in speed and pitch.

Ernest Kraft: This is November 12—

Clarence “Cy” Young: ‘65.

EK: —1965, and we’re going to finish up this tape with a story about the bighorn sheep that were poached over on the Ravalli hillside. This is Cy talking now.

CY: Yeah, one day I was riding fence around the south side. In fact, I was riding around the entire fence, and I got over along the Jocko River and I run onto two big sheep heads with full curls that had been killed. The heads were left there, and they had drug the sheep out. They wasn't very far from the fence, and they drug the sheep down the fence and pulled the wire loose on the bottom of the posts and raised it enough to drag the sheep under. They drug them down through and waded the Jocko River which was full of slush-ice at the time. Drug them on across the railroad tracks and over to the foothills across the highway—across the south side of the highway—and hit the ditch.

There's an irrigation ditch there, about waist deep, and some sweet clover along the bank. They'd went down the ditch then, with these sheep to a cabin, to a fellow by the name of Lomy Matt (?). So I followed the track—there was a little skiff of snow on the ground, it was very easy to follow the tracks—so I tracked them right to the house. I didn't have any authority to search the house, so I come back and went over to the [Flathead] Agency and talked to the Superintendent Cole about it, so he suggested I get the Indian agent—Indian policeman—who was Jack Curtis (?), special agent on the for the whole reservation. The next morning then—I also told Dr. Norton [Robert C. Norton] about it, who was superintendent at the Bison Range at that time—and Mr. Curtis come down, and the two of us went over there, and went in the house. We asked Mrs. Matt where Lomy was.

She said, “Lomy’s awful sick, awful sick in bed.”

Of course, had his head covered up and everything, I mean, had the appearance of having his head covered up. Jack Curtis went over and pulled back the covers, and here lay one these big mountain sheep in the bed. [laughs]

He kidded with Mrs. Matt, he says, “Is that Lomy? Is that your husband?” [laughs]

There was a little trap-door right in the middle of the room, and there was a little blood on the floor. Jack raised up the trap-door, and there sat Lomy down in the little dug-out hole there under the floor, along with another mountain sheep. So we asked him, "Where'd you get the mountain sheep, Lomy?"

He said, "We find them hanging up in the tree out on the Jocko."

Jack said, "Oh, you'll have to do better than that. We can't accept that story."

Lomy says, "My son-and-law, he find them up Revais Creek."

He says, "You'll have to still do better than that."

So, Lomy couldn't come up with anything better. We took them and we took the sheep and Lomy and his son-in-law over to the agency, and put them in jail for a little while. They demanded a jury trial. They got a jury down to Dixon, and we tried them with a jury trial and, of course, they were convicted. Spent six months in the jail down at Thompson Falls, which was just what they wanted as long it was wintertime—pretty cold. [laughs] When they got out of jail, the son-in-law was going shoot me as I was a principal witness and appeared against him at the trial and more or less responsible for him getting convicted.

EK: Who was he?

CY: A guy by the name of Gendreaux (?) and Lomy Matt. Gendreaux was the son-in-law, he was the guy that was going to kill me. So he gets a few bottles of beer over at St. Ignatius, and he gets his friend that owned a motorcycle to bring him over here and borrowed a gun. They got out, and was heading for the Bison Range, and they got down to Ravalli and they stopped for a few more beers—a little firewater. They left Ravalli on this motorcycle doing 80 or 90, or however fast a motorcycle would go. They got just across the Ravalli bridge, and they hit a car head-on. This Gendreaux went through the windshield and cut his head off. The woman that was driving the car said it went rolling across the road just like a football—bouncing like a football.

EK: Did he fly off the motorcycle and fly through the car window?

CY: Yes. Yes, he flew off of the motorcycle and went through this car windshield. That, I guess, supposedly saved my bacon. May be responsible for my being here today on account of him—he never got to the Bison Range, because—

EK: Well this was what year, Cy, about?

CY: About '33 or '34 along in there. '32, 1932.

EK: Was there quite a bit of it, usually, generally, or was it a hit and miss thing, the poaching?

CY: It was pretty general along the Jocko there, especially in the deer.

EK: Mule deer?

CY: Mule deer. There was not very few white-tails over there, and mostly every little while, we'd find where a deer had been drug out and occasionally a sheep, too, because we knew the sheep weren't increasing there as fast they should, and—

EK: I found a sheep over there shot in the belly about three years ago—

CY: —and we suspected that there was more poaching going on over there than we knew about.

EK: They cut her throat, but that's all. They [unintelligible] her, they shot right back behind her lungs. They'd cut her throat about a foot long and bled her, but apparently they got spooked off or something—

CY: Probably got spooked off.

EK: She was just above the road there about 400 or 500 yards.

CY: One time, the day before Christmas, I was over there riding, and I started up the Trisky trail—there was no road up to Trisky at that time—and there was five deer butchered and they were gutted right in the trail. In fact, I think they wanted us to find them, because they had drug them down off the side of Sheep Mountain there and gutted them right in the trail.

EK: Wasn't there another story about a gun over there on Ravalli Hill? 22, or something that the [unintelligible] had got her—

CY: I think we got that up Mission Creek there someplace.

EK: I don't remember the story.

CY: I remember something about that. I don't remember the details, but I believe it was up Mission Creek there someplace, pretty close to Mission Creek.

EK: Some poachers left a gun?

CY: Yes, they got spooked and left a gun, or either left it there so that they could come and use it without having to be packing it back and forth. That could be, you know. But that's the only

time we ever actually caught anybody right with the...killing sheep, but they had been evidence before that; that's where they had been drug out that we suspected—

EK: And they never ever did catch them with deer?

CY: No, never ever caught any right with a deer.

EK: How often, would you say, at that time, were you around on that side?

CY: Well, we were around on that side once in a while, maybe once a week, but you have to ride right along the fence to detect that stuff—where you see where they'd been going in or out. **You cant ride back** half-mile away from the fence and find anything as a rule.

EK: What year was it you put that trail in there? That was after the CCs [Civilian Conservation Corps] came.

CY: Well, they was an old trail along part of the Jocko there, when they built the fence, to get material in there.

EK: Was that outside?

CY: Part of it was outside and part inside.

EK: There's part of that right now that's almost impossible to ride within 100 yards of it.

CY: Oh yeah, yeah. It is, but the old trail, it was right along the fence. You could go right close to—

EK: The trail was on the other side there most the time.

CY: From Elk Creek to the substation, part of it—half of it—was inside and half outside.

EK: On the river, I mean.

CY: It was all on the north side of the river.

EK: Oh, it was?

CY: Yeah, it was all on the north side of the river, but part was inside the fence and part was outside the fence. From Elk Creek up to about halfway to Trisky, it was outside the fence. Then you come inside there, and from there on to Trisky it was inside the fence. From Trisky on up to the substation, it was outside the fence. Then we finally built another trail inside the fence.

EK: Did you ride outside the fence on those rides?

CY: Part of the time. You rode where the trail was though. At times, but other times, I'd stay on the inside where there was not trail and then ride along the fence too. If I didn't want to go as far as the substation—if I wanted to pull up Trisky or up Twin Canyons or some of those places, why, then I'd stay inside.

EK: Is there just one saddle gate over there?

CY: There was two saddle gates. There was one at Elk Creek. There was a saddle gate at Elk Creek, and there was a saddle gate midway between Trisky and Elk Creek. There was another saddle gate at Trisky.

EK: There's two of them, then, that's been taken out because there's only one at Elk Creek.

CY: Yeah. Right where that water gap is, there at Trisky, that's right close to where the old saddle gate used to be.

EK: Yeah. That's a rough piece of country. I rode that thing last summer, and it's hard on a horse.

[End of Interview]