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**Oral History Number: 006-006**

**Interviewee: Glen A. Smith**

**Interviewer: N/A**

**Date of Interview: circa 1950s**

**Project: Glen A. Smith Reminiscences Oral History Project**

Glen Smith: The old man just laid down on the ground, and laughed and when I went up to the house, he was very much pleased. [He] told his wife how I'd taught the old ram a good lesson.

An interesting thing about the Pryor Mountains is the ice well and ice cave. Up on the main, what they call the Big Pryor, is an ice cave. At least there's a hole in the ground, and you can toss a rock in there, and it takes it about 20 seconds 'til you can hear it hit the bottom. There's a very cold breeze that comes out of the well. I don't know how deep it is, but it is generally known as the ice well.

Down on the Little Pryor is an ice cave. This cave is big enough at the mouth that you can drive four horses abreast in it. After you get back about 75 to 100 feet you run into ice hanging down from the ceiling and little icicles sticking up from the bottom called stalactites and stalagmites. They are almost as cold as ice. Water dripping from the upper ones form the lower ones. Then you come into an area that's about 20 feet wide and 50 feet long that's regular ice. I don't know how thick it is, but along one side of the ice there's a passageway that you can go on down and get underneath. It appears that the ice must be at least 20 to 30 feet thick. Down in the lower chambers is a home of bats. Thousands of bats have their homes there. This cave is quite an oddity and there are quite a few people that visit it.

Another unusual thing happens on the Pryor Mountains: that's the only place I know of, there is, on the high portion of the range, no water for the livestock. It was expansive country and I succeeded in getting a sheepman to try out the use of it. Every morning I had noticed when I was up that there was a very heavy dew and there was considerable lupine and in the top of each lupine leaf was a big goblet of water so that if they got out early in the morning, the sheep would get all the moisture they needed. He wasn't satisfied, however, that the sheep were getting all the water they needed, so he very painfully pushed a bunch down into the stream about 1,500 feet down in the valley—steep going. When the sheep got down there, they jumped across the stream. I don't know what happened, but I guess it convinced him that they didn't need any water. Thereafter this range was used for a number of years that I know of by just the dew on the leaves.

I often wanted to try out what in England they called "dew ponds." I read an article one time in which they stated that they scooped out some soil and made a basin and in the basin they hauled in clay, put in a layer of clay, then a layer of straw and then a layer of clay. They hauled a small amount of water in there and as the fogs and dew accumulated at night it seemed to draw the water to these ponds and they were kept brink full all summer long. I never was able

to get an appropriation for that purpose, but it would be interesting to know whether or not the heavy dews up there could be harnessed in that way for stock water.

It might be of interest to those who may have occasion to read or listen to these statements to give some information about my family. I was married to Cressie C. Rowe of Fort Benton on November 16, 1904. Our first daughter, Ivey, was born in December 1908. In March of that year [1909], Mrs. Smith and Ivey were taken to Ashland, Montana, which was the supervisor's headquarters of the Custer National Forest. She was the only white baby in that little town, and, since the Cheyenne Indian Reservation was just across the Tongue River and there were a bunch of Cheyennes in town every day, she became quite a friend to a number of Cheyenne women. It wasn't long before she was talking Cheyenne more freely than she did English.

I recall taking Mother to Ashland where I had been for five or six months batching. With this baby she mentioned that she had quite a lot of washing to take care of. I said, "Oh, don't worry about washing and cleaning the house" —which I had batched in—"we'll get one of those Cheyenne women to do it." She came back with she wouldn't have one of those dirty old squaws in her house. But it wasn't long after that that I had been out for two or three days on a ride, and when I came back I noticed the clothes line was plumb full of baby white clothes. I thought to myself, "Mrs. Smith now has about worn herself out cleaning up the house, washing and ironing and so forth." When I got to the house, however, I found Betsy Two Bull, a pretty, well-educated Carlyle Indian had been there most of the day and done the washing, cleaned the house, combed Mother's hair, took care of the baby and everything. Mother was sitting there like a queen in a palace. After that there was no question about who did the washing. We found that there were a number of very well-educated Cheyenne women that did domestic housework and did it very splendidly, so that part of the question was pretty well settled.

Later on, after we moved to Billings, we were expecting another child but not for a week or ten days, and I was called on some business to Red Lodge. I'd only been down there one day, when I got a call from Billings telling me that the child was expected very soon so I hired an automobile for \$20 to take me to Billings. The train that ran up to Red Lodge at that time came up in the morning and back in the evening, so it was about 6:00 when it returned to Billings. I was anxious to get there before that time and therefore hired this automobile. In those days the roads were terrible and automobile tires were worse. We started out and in the first six miles we had about six flats. I got out and we had to take the tires off and patch and blow them up again. I soon got tired of that, so I sat in the car and read a magazine and let the fellow do the rest of it. As we came into Laurel, Montana, which is on the main line of the Northern Pacific Railroad, we were on three flats for the last half mile. The train was sitting there headed for Billings and I jumped out of the car and gave the fellow \$10 and beat it over and got on the train and I got home about the same time as the passenger train from Red Lodge would. It was a very disgusting day, and I shall never forget the anxiety which Mrs. Smith had regarding my return because I had phoned her that I was leaving early that morning. Glenny [Glenna], our second daughter, was born on March 20, 1912.

I shall never forget when we moved from Red Lodge to Billings. The school was just beyond us and Ivey was about two and a half to three years old and school children used to go by the house and she stood by a large window crying and saying, "Oh, please come in and play with Ivey." It was very heart rending because the weather was so bad, she couldn't get out and play in the yard and she had no one to play with.

Our third daughter, Charlotte, was born in July 1913 and this made up our family. Our oldest daughter, Ivey, was killed in an automobile wreck near Missoula, Montana, in 1922.

Our family has always been pretty close together and we spent a great many days of our vacation and evenings together in camping and fishing. It was not uncommon to come off from a pack trip maybe of two- or three-weeks duration and Mrs. Smith would meet me with the children at the depot with the car all loaded to go on a camping trip. I never refused to go, but sometimes it seemed a little out of place to be going on a camping trip when I'd just come off of a three-weeks pack trip where we camped every night at some new spot. But we enjoyed those things and I look upon them with a great deal of pleasure.

National Forests were very interesting years beginning in 1908 and ending in 1914. One of the things that made it especially interesting was the fact that the administration of national forests was all new to the general public and there were lots of new things to solve. There were very few telephones and few lookouts and very few trails. The building of trails and telephone lines, establishing a fire organization and the handling of a number of timber sales besides getting an inventory of the resources, especially timber, was a thought-provoking problem.

On the Beartooth, I started a program of getting a rough estimate of the timber on each main watershed and in addition making a photograph record of the various resources—timber stands, grazing, waterpower, etcetera—of as many of the main streams that we were able to reach in the three or four years that we were working on it. I understand that later on a fire destroyed these records, but it seemed to me that a photograph record of the conditions on each watershed, if there was any resource that was available for public use, was an important part of our resource management program. I learned with regret that these records were destroyed by fire. I left the Beartooth with some regret on being transferred on July 15, 1914, to the Kootenai Forest at Libby, Montana. I had found the problems, while they were small, in a way very interesting. I enjoyed whipping the administration into shape.

When I arrived on the Kootenai in July 1914, it was practically in the middle of the fire season and I had no time to think about regretting that I had been taken off of the Beartooth Forest. My time was fully occupied by fires for the next month and a half to two months. Fortunately, I had some exceptionally good help. The late L. F. Vinal was my assistant and I found Mr. Vinal to be a most reliable and efficient forest officer. I have never known anybody that could do as many jobs and do them well as Les Vinal. I felt that I was fortunate in having him to lean upon for some period of time. There were a number of men that were exceptionally good: Harry Lee Baker was a ranger at Troy, Montana, and J. K. Dwinelle was forest assistant along with several

other men who were well trained and efficient forest officers. One of the main problems outside of the fire suppression was the establishment of a lookout system and the construction of improvements at these lookouts. A selection of them was the most important thing and to this end a great deal of work was put into the job. During the four years that I was supervisor there, 14 lookouts were established on the basis of their ability to give a clear sight to the largest territory in case of fires. A few roads were to be built, too, with the small amount of appropriations that were available. It was a matter of getting some kind of a road over which vehicles could be used.

During my assignment there, we completed a road between Libby and Troy. Prior to this time there was no way of taking a vehicle between Libby and Troy. A very crude trail followed the north bank of the Kootenai River and there was a ferry at each of the towns, Troy and Libby. Later a bridge was built at both places and when the road was completed between Libby and Troy, and the road extended on down to Bonners Ferry, people began to think that they were living in a civilized country.

Up to that time—about 1915—when the first automobile traveled between Kalispell and Spokane via Libby, Troy, Bonners Ferry and made the trip in 12 hours it was considered quite a feat. Now I believe that the roads are in such condition that you can drive between Kalispell and Spokane via the same route in about five hours.

In selecting these lookouts several methods were used. One method was to make use of a certain point a year or two to find out just exactly how efficient it would be if it was improved. I remember one such place was a lookout in the upper valley of Libby Creek. It was not a very high peak, but it sat out away from most of the rest of the country and gave a good view of a good many of the side drainages. I instructed John Brooks, the ranger, to establish a crows nest in an old tamarack tree that grew out on a very advantageous point on this mountain and we would try it out for a few years. After he drove railroad spikes in the tree for hand holds and footholds, I went up there and he had placed a little deck around the top of the tree about 60 feet from the ground, this tree being about 14 or 15 inches at breast high, and about seven or eight inches at the top. He had provided no space to get on this platform except out over the edge. It was not so very difficult to make it up, but to find a place to put your feet while you started down was a different proposition. I recall that he and I were sitting up there looking the country over with field glasses and sketching on a forest map the area that could be seen, and a little mountain squall came up and blew like fury for about 10 or 15 minutes. This tree swayed back and forth about 20 feet and we didn't know at any time when the thing would snap off at the bottom. We were just sitting on the platform without anything to hold onto except the main trunk of the tree and we pretty near squeezed that off by hanging on to it. It was really a thriller and when I started to go down and had to swing out over the side of this platform and dangle my feet in the air for a while to find one of the railroad spikes to climb down on, it seemed that there was nothing but space below me.

The Kootenai proved to be a much larger job and had more problems than the Beartooth and Custer combined, so the next four years were very busy and interesting years. The settlement of a land policy which grew out of the act of June 11, 1906, was one that caused considerable anxiety on my part. Prior to my arriving on the Kootenai, a policy had been established, with the consent of the Secretary of Agriculture Wilson, to examine any land that was level enough to be farmed and, if it was timbered, to advise the applicants that any who desired to homestead it under the act of June 11, 1906, that the land had been examined and found to be agricultural: but because of the stand of timber it was chiefly valuable for timber at that time, but the timber would be removed at an early date and the land would be listed to him for homesteading. There were about 105 of these classifications in that category and some of them were five or six years old. We had been able to move the timber from only a very few. After looking the situation over generally, I did not believe that the land should be classified as agricultural in the first place regardless of the timber. So I held up any approval of the reports which had been made by forest officers under the policy set by the Secretary of Agriculture until I could analyze and study the situation more thoroughly. I came to the conclusion that many of these claims had been hanging fire so long and that in a sense, by our policy of withholding listing until the timber was moved, and since there didn't seem to be any prospects of moving it at an early date, that we would be forced to list these claims because we had practically mortgaged them to the applicants by our policy. I therefore proposed to the regional forester that we reclassify these lands and advise the applicant that the land had been reclassified and it had been determined that they were chiefly valuable for the production of timber and that their application was therefore rejected. This, of course, brought on quite a different line of thinking and Mr. Silcox and Mr. Dave Mason—Mr. Silcox being the regional forester, and Dave Mason being the assistant regional forester in charge of timber management—both came over to Libby to discuss the matter with me. They were rather reluctant to take any action until they had more evidence to convince them of the soundness of such a policy. Well, in view of the fact that we had a timber sale going on one of the tracts that had been applied for, and the applicant had been told that as soon as the timber was removed it would be listed to him, I said, "Well, let's go down and take a look at the timber sale just below Quartz Creek on the north side of the Kootenai River about ten miles below Libby." They were about two-thirds through logging this tract of land and they were cutting it clean of a very fine stand of Yellow Pine on the second and third benches above the river.

When we started out over it, Mr. Silcox wanted to know what on earth I was cutting the timber so clean for. I told him that this was one of the tracts that had been listed under the act of June 11, but listing was suspended until the timber was removed. We had to walk up on the third bench which was about 200 or 300 feet above the second bench, and he stopped on the side hill and he said, "Has this been listed as part of the land?"

I said, "Yes."

"Well," he said, "what on earth can they grow here?"

I said, "I don't know. I didn't list the land and I haven't any idea what anybody'd use this for unless possibly they could raise pumpkins on it and when the pumpkins are ripe, just go along and cut them loose and let them roll down to the bottom of the hill and harvest them down there." He immediately jumped onto me by saying that this was no laughing matter. I told him I knew damn well it was no laughing matter and that's the reason I had them down there to look the thing over. I said, "I don't know where we're going to go if we're going to list this kind of land—whether we'll have anything left but a few mountain tops. A great many of our streams which contain a lot of timber the mouth of the stream has been blocked by the listing, or proposing to list, land under the act of June 11."

He then told me how the policy came about. A petition had been gotten out and signed by a great many people asking that a strip six miles wide on either side of the Kootenai River be eliminated from the Kootenai National Forest because it was agricultural in character. Well, by the greatest stretch of imagination you could not figure that over five percent of the total area within such a strip would ever be permanently farmed and I told him so. He said, "Well, they had to make some concessions in order to keep this petition from becoming effective, either through an act of Congress or approval of the Secretary of Agriculture." He made a statement that he thought that Mr. Skeels, who was my predecessor, had done a wonderful job there to mold public sentiment more in favor of national forests. Well, to this I took exceptions! In the first place, the public was not very much concerned about the policies and boundaries of the national forest. The whole thing was being stirred up and kept alive by a local paper and a local man, by the name of Kennedy who was a former state senator and who, at one time, had tried to become supervisor of the forest: but failing because of age and because of it not being considered a political job, he did not seem to be eligible. But to Mr. Kennedy and [Mr. Southwick], editor of the *Western News* [The *Western News*. Part owner and editor was Ernest A. Southwick. See Bauder's *History of Montana*, Volume III, page 1,536.] That a man by the name of Leo Faust was listed two different claims, one each near the mouth of Big Creek on the north side of the Kootenai River. These were some of the best stands of Yellow Pine timber along the river and neither one of them ever did anything except file on the lands and sell their filing relinquishments for around \$1,500 to \$1,800 apiece. I made the statement that I thought anybody that had the resources of the national forest available could do a lot in buying public sentiment. He jumped on me about this, so I recited to him the deal that had been made by Mr. Skeels to list these two claims and how they were sold and thereby had eliminated some of the criticism that had been made through the local paper. I did not find generally any real demand for the elimination of a large area. In fact, I thought the general public was coming to believe that the national forest was an important thing in that particular part of the country.

1914 was considered one of the bad fire years, although the Kootenai got by in pretty good shape. One of the main difficulties in handling the fire problem on the forest was the lack of good fire fighters. A good many of the lumber mills were shut down because of trouble with the IWW organization and this was the case with the mills at Libby and Eureka. The woods and mill workers that belonged to the IWW organization at Libby set up a camp down next to the Kootenai River and elected their walking boss, cooks, and other officers to control conditions

there. One day we were very much pressed for 25 or 50 fire fighters and I had been told that I would be unable to get any out of Spokane, so I went down to the IWW camp, looked up the walking boss, and asked him what the chances were to get 25 firefighters. He said, "Well, I don't know. I'll call the men together and you can talk to them and see what you can do with them." He called the bunch together, probably about 150 men, and I got up on a cracker box and gave them a talk about the necessity of protecting our national forest so that labor would be assured of future employment. As for 25 volunteers, there was immediate response. These men were good woodsmen and went out on a fire and did a good job. The local people were up in the air considerably about the IWW shutting down the sawmill and the woods operation, and they pretty near boycotted me for even thinking of hiring IWWs to fight fires. But at any rate, after this one trial of 25 firefighters, I was able to get all the men we needed in this particular neighborhood from this IWW camp. All I had to do was to call on them and they cooperated to the furthest extent.

As soon as the fire season slacked up, I began to look into the timber sale business and found that the Bonners Ferry Lumber Company had been buying timber along the Kootenai River from the Canadian boundary down. They apparently were a pretty hard outfit to deal with because they always waited until the about middle of winter to make any deals with logging contractors for logging. In other words, they held the logging contractors at bay so long idle with their outfits until they were eager and willing to contract for very low prices. Not only that, but I found them to be very close on their scaling so that very few of their operators were able to make much more than bare wages. At that time, most of the logging was done by the use of teams, sleighs, etcetera, and if a man had 15 or 25 teams standing around eating high priced hay and oats, they soon got in a position of being willing to take a contract at almost any price. By such tactics they placed the Forest Service in a very embarrassing position also because these contractors generally came to the Forest Service and [unintelligible] letting them meet at sales. Since our federal laws and regulations required that the timber must be advertised and sold to the highest bidder, it placed us in a very embarrassing position because there was no way of knowing what the Bonners Ferry Lumber Company was going to want and when they would want to have it cut and delivered. It must be recalled that practically all the timber that was cut on the Kootenai Forest at that time was floated down the Kootenai River to the Bonners Ferry Mill.

After sizing this situation up, I went down to Bonners Ferry to have a talk with Mr. McCoy who was superintendent of the mill and explained to him the necessity of having to know in advance—at least six months or a year—about what their needs were going to be in order that we could prepare some sale areas for immediate sale. When I asked him what their needs were going to be, he leaned back and closed his eyes and said, "Well, if you've got anything that's cheap and handy, we'll be glad to contract for it,"

I said, "Mr. McCoy, we haven't got anything that's particularly cheap or handy, but if I could have some kind of idea of what your cut would require, I could have timber surveys made and some sale areas prepared and advertised so that the sales could be made early enough so that



contractors could get on a job and be ready to log as soon as logging conditions were favorable.” In that country, they generally depended on snow and sleighs and therefore most of the sale work would be done in the wintertime. After considerable parley, Mr. McCoy was very indifferent to the Forest Service problem and didn't seem to care whether or not we did anything about the situation. Nevertheless, I went ahead and, as soon as the fire season was over and we had cleaned up pretty well, I put several men at cruising various possible timber sale areas along the Kootenai River and getting them in shape to be advertised, When the Bonners Ferry Company finally woke up that early winter to the fact that they would have to have additional timber, we were in shape to take care of the demand,

It was at that time we found quite a little discrepancy between the Bonners Ferry Lumber Company's log scale and the Forest Service log scale. The scalers for the Bonners Ferry Lumber Company were invariably much lower—about as much as 20 percent—than Forest Service scales. We therefore called for an expert scaler and had our scale verified. The Bonners Ferry Lumber Company was not very happy about this, but they finally had to come to accepting our Forest Service scale which was quite a relief to the logging contractors.

The annual log drive down the Kootenai River was quite an item at that time and the company generally had about 25 men on such a drive. They generally employed about three bateaus, which were recognized as the type of boat that is best adapted to river driving. They are a large, deep boat about 30 feet long pointed on both ends. They hold about 20 men, and they are very good in swift water. Generally, two of these boats are used on either side of the river to keep logs from jamming up in sloughs and pools while the third boat is used to carry the mess outfit, cook and camp equipment.

It's very interesting to note that there were times when the Kootenai River was at flood stage that it was just about all a crew of twenty men could do to put a boat across the river without drifting downstream a considerable distance. I recall at one time, when we were camped overnight at Libby, I had to go across the river in the Forest Service boat and I pulled the boat up the river about a quarter of a mile and took the oars in and the swiftness of the current carried me down.

[End of Interview]