

Maureen and Mike

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**Oral History Number: 228-001**  
**Interviewee: Arnold Bolle**  
**Interviewer: Matt Blessing**  
**Date of Interview: February 1988**

Arnold Bolle: I think, from the beginning, an educational intent or goal, was inherent in everything we've done about wilderness. It wasn't just considered just a recreation area. The idea was to maintain certain parts of the country, undisturbed, so that people could learn to understand and appreciate them, and that they could serve as part of sort of mile posts—a place that could be identified as original, as the rest of the world changed more and more. There's always been this intent to get more people to understand that, and, of course, many, many people react instinctively to that—they like to see something [unintelligible]. At one time there was plenty of opportunity for us, but the scarcity of opportunity is what increases its value. So, I'd say that the people who favored wilderness and wanted support for it had two things in mind. One of them was to give the people the chance to get in and see it, and encourage them to do it. The other one, of course, by doing so was to gain their support in protecting the area. This was national, this was by of the Montana Voters Association.

So they've always served this purpose. I don't think anywhere near enough, but I think that their value, from a scientific standpoint, is to have undisturbed areas to study and compare to see what happens. To gain information that could be useful, not only in the management of wilderness, but outside the area where you don't have that kind of longstanding background to draw on. That this value is going to continuing to be important. In many areas—let's say natural areas, not necessarily official wilderness, but includes official wilderness—around many cities, you'll find areas of this kind where school children are taken, where grown-ups are taken, where other groups—senior citizens or whatever—are taken out and instructed in the natural world.

Matt Blessing: In the East, there's school forests, but no one seems to have heard of them west of the Mississippi.

AB: [laughs] That's right. Yes, it's a very common thing.

Now, one of the arguments, in protecting the Rattlesnake was the fact that it has served for years as a source of information to citizens of the city. Schoolchildren have been taken out there—not anymore, perhaps, in some other places, but regularly—but then there have been a series of graduate students and faculty doing research up there for years. On the phases of wildlife, on the vegetation, on the geology in soils, on the water. It's been very enriching, but also so handy, and it also has the distinction of being natural, uncontaminated by man. There might be natural contamination like Giardia, [laughs] but that's important to know too and other things that may cause...organisms that live and die and exist in the area. So the education is a very important part.

Now, Pat Williams, of course, had a special interest in that because he was a teacher, and his strength comes from that direction. He has a fondness for that. He added the word *education* to the title of this area, and specified that education was the main purpose of this area. That does make it unusual. There has been developed, as a result of that, a committee to look at the possibility of using it—the various ways it might be used. There is, first of all, a study committee that set up sort of a program, and now a continuing committee that works in that way.

MB: So the Pat Williams bill emphasizing education, was it that emphasis that was able to get it through Congress? Was it the main argument?

AB: No. I think it would have gone without that. In fact, in John Melcher's bill in Senate didn't include education in the title. There was no handicap, so I'd say there was no special favor or disfavor with the word, but as far as I know, it's the only case where the word *education* is included in the title. In the purpose, of course, it's there throughout.

MB: Are there other wilderness areas that have emphasized education? Perhaps the Eastern wilderness areas?

AB: Yes, I've heard of some. White Mountains (?), for example. Yes. There are others, I can't give you good examples—specific—but I know that it has come up a number of times in discussions.

MB: Why don't we back up, and talk about Friends of The Rattlesnake. You talked about it a bit before [unintelligible] and how it originated and it's course in the 1970's.

AB: Well, it grew out a controversy. It's explained in there [refers to unnamed source materials], to some extent, but the area was the only one that was not developed in the valleys around Missoula. So attracted quite a little use. Then the Montana Power Company undertook an enterprise of cutting some trees up there and doing some logging, and the road was built on up past...A road was "improved"—I have to use quotation marks, because it's still pretty rough—up to the Franklin Ranger Station, and then continued where it had never been before, up the valley another five, six miles into some timber was harvested up there. It was not a profitable operation, and it was a mess and the people in the city objected. In fact, the Montana Power Company expressed regret over it, and they were very apologetic about it and wanted to forget it. But the road was built, and the access was there. Four-wheel-drive vehicles kept driving up into it and then taking off from there and going off in different directions, and motor bikes. Montana Power Company was very upset about that part of it then, and they put a gate down at the lower end and blocked it. No more four-wheel-drives. But motorbikes continued, and they kept going up and they went up all the trails then and on up into the lakes. They rutted up the meadows. They were a nuisance everywhere. Of course, there were more and more people using it on foot than horseback.

Finally, one instance, a motor-biker pulled right in front of a horse, and the horse bolted and threw Dr. Booth (?) and he lay unconscious for some time, the story goes. Then he came to, and he said, "This has got to end."

This, of course, there was controversy developing, and Friends of the Rattlesnake was organized. This was in the '70s—mid to later '70s, mid '70s about. That organization then set out to try to get some better management in the area. They worked with the Montana Power Company and the Forest Service to try to work out some kind of management, and they jointly hired a man who was—I guess you'd call him—a ranger, because his idea was to sort of keep people in line and avoid the problems and so forth. So that was sort of the start of the program.

Then the Friends of the Rattlesnake then set out to really familiarize people around the city with what was up here, and produced some films, shows—slide shows—and they were presented by various members of the group to go to school, to service clubs, to various organizations around the city. They were very well received, and they're really very beautifully done. I guess they're still available, and I think they're excellent. They did a great deal to familiarize people with the area. Then the organization started to meet more and more with the Forest Service and with the Montana Power people about developing some kind of use-plan for the area that really would make [unintelligible] sense.

This was under way when Rare II was established, and Rare II went through several processes, but it came up to where a decision had to be made by the Forest service on the areas in the state. Without consultation at all, they made the decision it could not be wilderness area. In our discussions with them before, it had never even mentioned whether or not it would be wilderness, it was just some kind of area. How should we manage it? How should we protect it, and see that it is taken care of? When they came up with this one, this was separate, apart, and presented. Sentiment grew very quickly, "Well, why not? Why shouldn't it be a wilderness area?"

In fact, that sort of, then, led to, "Well, dammit, it will be." [laughs]

MB: What were some of the ideas that the Friends of the Rattlesnake had for management? National recreation area or—

AB: There was no designation. It was a matter of just setting it up with some sort of a special area for it, where it would be protected, that would be managed in keeping with natural [unintelligible] and so forth. Without coming to a designation. We hadn't reached that really, although it was about somewhere along there that somebody in the Forest Service suggested that possibly be a national recreation area be part of it.

Anyhow, it took a while with some debate in the Friends of the Rattlesnake organization. Why should it be? Well why not, or so forth. Finally, I think the thing that finally tipped it was when the Montana Power Company sold the water system. We had been working with them, and Joe

McElwain (?) who was president of Montana Power, had been very sympathetic and helpful. In fact, we had worked with him with the idea of donating the land to the Forest Service or some other public agency. We were thinking either the city or the county, but that...very sympathetic to that. Then, when he sold the water system, well we thought, my gosh the whole thing may be sold, although we saw that they had not sold the land. So we met with him, and we asked him how come he sold the water system but not the land. He said, "I want you fellows now to get the Forest Service to buy it from us and make it into a wilderness area." Just like that.

So, we realized that, really, it was critical because they could have very easily, then, have sold that land to someone else if that didn't work, and there would be a sub-division—a development—and that would be the end of it. So, we had a little session and decided right then, well, this is the time we now go to Pat Williams and make a suggestion. We very quickly got together and drew up a proposed bill. Chas Kinskey (?) and I went in to see Pat, and said, "Pat..." We explained the situation, that we'd been meeting with these people all over town, that the sympathy was very strong, that the upper area be declared...that the whole area be protected, and that it should be done in such a way so that all the Montana Power lands can be bought or traded or whatever, so that the purchase could be made of all of it. Of course, the upper area would qualify as wilderness, but the lower area certainly would not. So that was the area that we recommended should be national recreation area, and that action be taken to enact a plan including the transfer of the lands.

Pat listened to us, and that's when he made his famous remark and says, "You can tell the people of Missoula that Pat Williams will introduce and pass a law creating this area."

MB: Looking at the make-up of the early membership of the Friends of the Rattlesnake, were there past wilderness advocates—people who fought for previous wilderness areas in the state of Montana—or was it simply a community of people who had past ties with the land.

AB: It was largely Missoula-community people, but it included...Like I say, any group of Missoula people it includes wilderness advocates. [laughs] [unintelligible] experience because there are a lot of them here. It did, of course, but that wasn't really the motivating group. It was a citizen's group, and they were just people from all walks of life actually—laborers, faculty, professional, doctors, whatever. Just about as much of a cross section as you could get.

MB: Is this idea of using the national recreation area corridor—sort of the crescent shape on the map here—is that unique in drawing up a wilderness area to use it as a tool and to declare it as a recreation area instead of a wilderness area to get it through Congress?

AB: That was unfortunate. The proposal was that wilderness would start right here [refers to unnamed source]. Here's the Franklin Ranger Station that was [unintelligible].

MB: It would start at the Franklin Ranger Station.

AB: Yes. Pat, originally, I think, got carried away—what some of us thought. He wanted to establish, not only a recreational intent, but establish a recreational center somewhere. He was even talking of it up here, and he wanted to have a couple miles up here where people could be taken by car or something, as part of the educational program.

It was not a very good idea, and if there was going to be one at all, it would have to be, really should be one here. So we talked him out of that, and we thought we had [unintelligible]. But then when it went into the Senate, Melcher, for unexplained reasons, wanted to run it all the way up here. This is where the timber road ends, right here. In fact, the motorbike question had not been settled, and he was going to leave it up there...I think it was partly the motorbike issue, but still going all the way up to there was ridiculous.

I told you about the famous phone call that I got from Pat that after this thing had been going on—we'd been trying to get the thing settled—it was in the afternoon. Pat said, "We've only got about 20 minutes left, and you've got either the six-mile corridor up the middle, or 5,000 acres off to the east side—one or the other.

I said, "My god, is that the only choice? What if we don't take either?"

He said, "Well, then it's going to [unintelligible]."

This was right at the time with the Regan administration coming in, and it looked like there would not be one.

MB: So it was December of '80, or Regan was already in?

AB: He'd been elected, but he wasn't in office. It was the last few days.

There was no time to consult with anyone else. I don't know if he [Pat Williams] tried to call anyone else or not, but he called me. He said, "You've got to make a decision. There's no more time."

Thinking about it, I figured that if the corridor...I go with the corridor, because then use of it or not would be a matter of administrative decision. I thought that we could bring in a force to bring that under control, or later bring it into wilderness. While the other one would have permitted, perhaps, a construction of a road further on in, or trails, which would have just wiped it out and never could have gotten in. The interesting thing is—the claim is that the Forest Service was pushing Melcher to do this, but Orville Daniels earlier had said that he didn't want a corridor up there, because this made management of the wilderness impossible. It's a nuisance, a bad nuisance, [unintelligible]. I think, bit by bit, it'll maybe be controlled, properly managed. [door closes] In fact, the Friends of the Rattlesnake proposed that in the present wilderness bill that's up for consideration right now, that the corridor be removed [unintelligible] wilderness. We wrote to Max Baucus to include it in his bill. He said, well, he

thought perhaps we should probably get a hold of John on that, which we did. Of course, John said he saw no reason for it. So at the present time—

MB: Saw no reason for it not to be wiped out?

AB: No reason for it being included in wilderness, because...I don't know why. I've forgotten, but he didn't go along with our idea. However, it's a matter of time before [unintelligible]. The road is now getting to be almost impassable.

MB: In 1980, was it because...Well, of course it was because of the road. Are there other areas, where there were past homesteaders' or squatters' foundations and a few apple trees? Does that make a difference in the wilderness area? If there are 80-year-old relics?

AB: No it doesn't. That has been argued, and in fact, it was an argument against including any of that area that has been harvested here, because man's activity was evident. But the law clearly states, and the precedent, that an area that has been developed can be included and then just restored. Can be restored, if it is possible to restore it. [unintelligible] That question, that issue was raised.

MB: That must have been in the '60s?

AB: Yes.

MB: I've been told that I should investigate the Eastern wilderness acts of the early '70s, perhaps, to get a grasp of how a wilderness area could have been created four miles from Missoula. Do you think that had a definite impact or a change in—

AB: Yes. That's really where the issue came up—whether an area that had been previously disturbed could become wilderness, because, they said in the East, why, there's virtually no area that hasn't been. That's really where the issue came up. There're places that were all harvested and all cut, and maybe even been homesteaded, maybe had rock-walls and so forth. Throughout the East, at one time, about 80 percent of it was cleared and farmed, and now about 80 percent of it has gone back to forest. There's one difference there, and that is, because of more moisture, it recovers faster than a lot of our dry land here but it's about the same idea as the West.

MB: Do you have anything else?

AB: There's some more recent history. The Forest Service, about, oh, it must be about five, six years ago, after our protest on this [unintelligible] here, really seriously undertook a plan for the Rattlesnake. We worked with them very closely, and they with all the groups. They sought then to, sort of, isolate the Friends of the Rattlesnake. Thought they were too much pressure, and maybe it was, but they tried to identify us as an extreme group, as a radical left-wing or...I

think. Then sought to increase their other clientele groups such as the motor-bikers and horse-backers and others, and sort of separate us. Motor-bikers, then, it was interesting that they then did come forward and they wanted more attention.

The Forest Service then came out with a plan for the Rattlesnake—for the lower country—which we thought was way over-developed. It was a planned to set up whole new trail system. In fact, they're going to have one trail system for motor bikes and one trail system for people, and we just protested it. In fact, the whole community did [unintelligible] about that one. We came out with a counter-plan, and going back, particularly, to Pat Williams' plan here, or bill, which designates the management...This is the report on Pat's bill, in which he clearly says that, "Promotion, support, and increase public awareness and understanding of the significance of our wildlands as a natural resource is number one." Second is a protection management of water quality and supply, preservation, enhancement, and management of the wildlife, and then, public recreation and enjoyment. On the basis of that, we said this plan that was proposed just didn't fit this. We had some further discussion with them, and got them to accept the idea of [unintelligible].

At that time, they then completely reversed themselves and came out with a plan which kept motorbikes entirely out of the area and dogs too. In fact, they went from one extreme to the other almost, but we were delighted with that one. That plan has been drawn, and now is enforced, and the idea is to keep it [unintelligible]. Over the past years, then we've been working rather closely with a change of rangers from time to time. There were various incidents, in the later days, with the motorbikes—nails in the trail and other things of this kind. There was kind of some sabotage going on. Anyhow, finally came out. Then we'd been working with them rather closely, and Friends of the Rattlesnake had been the main group working with the Forest Service but it's almost been like a ping-pong match. Every time they propose something, [unintelligible]. We've now moved to this L-A-C approach, which I have been pushing very hard, because I think it's one where the whole community can get together and work on a plan and get agreement in advance of what is being done. We can keep it currently, through monitoring and review, keep a planning process that involves the public with the Forest Service—the decision makers—in doing—

MB: LAC stands for what?

AB: Limits of acceptable change. It's a new idea in wilderness management. It started up on the Bob Marshall. I worked on that development of the idea, and now it's popping up everywhere. Everybody thinks it's a great idea, which it is. And it's now started in the Rattlesnake. I see great hopes now that we'll have a fine, progressive, friendly, relationship. [laughs]

MB: This is a loaded question, but why the sudden switch in the Forest Service?

AB: I'm not sure I want to put this on tape. I'll tell you without the tape.

MB: Okay. Later.

AB: Yes. [laughs]

MB: That's not a good oral history topic. [laughs]

AB: [laughs] You can decide on that, but I just as soon that their names are off, and I don't want to be on public record. [laughs]

MB: Sure. That took it to about...Well, the LAC is an idea within the last three or four years?

AB: Yes, and it's finally taking place. We've had our second meeting, and we're just getting it under way.

You better come to one of those and get involved in it. You can really see some good stuff. Here, we're trying to bring in all the groups—user groups—and representatives in here, and we'll talk, first of all, of what kind of problems exist and then we'll [unintelligible]. This plan, the primary plan, was developed on the Bob Marshall Wilderness, and it took quite a while to develop but it came out and finally emerged last year. It's the first plan produced by the Forest Service that has not been appealed, because the appeals are taken care of in advance, because people have had a chance to talk it over. We don't agree on everything in there, but we recognize that there might be ones that we'll have to [unintelligible].

MB: Let's see. I don't have anything else to finish up.

Are you pleased with the 1980 legislation? Of course, we've mentioned the compromises that had to be made, but—

AB: Yes, I am. Except the corridor. That is an abomination. I think, generally, it's working out well. Actually, there are areas...the boundaries aren't all that important, especially around here because are vast areas in there that are just primitive and as wild as the wilderness area. There's no trails. It's steep, rugged, very wild, and virtually no one ever gets in there. It doesn't really matter, so the boundaries, I don't think it's all that important. I think it's a real treasure for the people of Missoula, Montana, well, and the United States. But I think everybody in Missoula is that much richer for having it right here.

MB: I've talked to some critics, who live in the sub-divisions in the Lower Rattlesnake, who feel that simply by giving the title—a national wilderness area—it brought in so many more people, that it worked to the detriment of the wilderness experience.

AB: You hear that a great deal, and you hear that not only about this one, but lots of others. That's been investigated and in town to be, virtually, without foundation. In fact, it was investigated in this case, and they found very little difference. There might have been a little

kick, but overall...If this were the only we had in the state or Western Montana, why, we'd be flooded, but my gosh, there are so many alternatives here. Anytime, it gets a little bit crowded up there, why...and you can get out in the high country and the lakes, just beautiful areas and be alone—

[End of Interview]