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**Interviewee: Richard C. Kenck**

**Interviewer: Edd Nentwig**

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Edd Nentwig: Today we're going to interview Mr. Dick Kenck of Augusta, Montana. Let's start back in your early life, Dick. Where were you born at?

Richard Kenck: I was born in Choteau.

EN: Choteau, Montana. What year?

RK: 1906

EN: What was your family doing in Choteau?

RK: My dad was the first dentist between Helena and the Canadian line. He was practicing in Choteau.

EN: When did you first become involved in trapping?

RK: About the first year I started school. Used to have to walk to school and lived in the mountains and there was a trap line between there and the school.

EN: How did you get interested in trapping? Did your Dad trap?

RK: No, he didn't. There were a few Indians that trapped and we just...That's the way I made my spending money for a while

EN: What tribe were they? Do you remember?

RK: Most of them were Crees. That is, French-Canadian Crees and half breeds.

EN: How did you get to know them?

RK: They were our next door neighbors.

EN: Oh, Is that right?

RK: The school I went to had sixty-five enrolled, but there was over about thirty in the school at the time and there never was the same ones in succession. A lot of those kids that were 18, 19

years old were in the third grade. And the First World War and my Dad was on the (?) business and one of them couldn't even sign their name. Signed with an X.

EN: Did you make, get friends there at school and they taught you how to trap?

RK: Yes, and then they used to work for some ranch too.

EN: Your father have a pretty good sized ranch?

RK: Yes. 2,700 acres of deeded land. And then we had several sections that we leased.

EN: Was it all farming?

RK: No, we raised cattle and raised fish. We brought the first fish, came in from Ovando. There was a hatchery in Ovando in 1908. Came across the Spring Lake and then, and a bunch of eyed eggs. And we started our hatchery.

EN: What kind of fish were they?

RK: Eastern Brook Trout

EN: Is that right?

RK: Probably the first fish in, above the falls. Above the Diversion Dam on Sun River. There's 300 miles of water and not a fish in it. There's the falls about 75 feet high and they couldn't get over. He packed fish in from Craig. They brought in on the train from Craig. Hauled them in barrels from Craig to the Spring Wagon and then took them back and packed them in pack horses down the road. Planted [the fish] in the Benchmark area and in the North Fork Sun River. Those fish, they're still Eastern Brook Trout. And the beaver dams and stuff.

EN: When you first started trapping what did you trap for mainly?

RK: Mainly muskrat, weasels. And once in a while get a skunk.

EN: Did your dad buy you traps or did you buy them yourself?

RK: Bought them myself. We trapped gophers and Dad would give us a penny a piece for the gopher's tails. And get enough to buy a trap and get it, get a number one trap for about two bits.

EN: How did you go about handling your fur? Who helped you do that?

RK: Well there was this Indian that showed me. He used to work for us. Real nice old fellow.

EN: Do you remember his name?

RK: Dan Jarbee (?).

EN: Dan Jarbee. And he was right there in Choteau?

RK: No, he was on the Dearborn, right there, right at the ranch.

EN: How long did you live there?

RK: We moved up there in 1908 and lived there until 1926.

EN: So you spent quite a bit of your early childhood there. Were you born right there on the ranch?

RK: No, I was born in Choteau. Moved up there when I was just a little kid.

EN: Your ranch then was right out here...

RK: The ranch was right in the mouth of the Dearborn Canyon.

EN: Oh I see. Must have been an interesting place for a young guy trapping I suppose.

RK: Well, I'm trapping in there now.

EN: Are you?

RK: Above the Jones' place, [they] called me up one evening. Wanted me to go up and trap beaver in there. It's kind of old stomping grounds for me.

EN: Did you run into any other old timers that were young down there that were also trappers down there

RK: Oh, yes.

EN: Do you remember any of their names?

RK: Well old Jakey Shander (?) was an old roofer. Came to the country years and years ago. He was an old man and he showed me how to trap beaver.

EN: How did you get to know him?

RK: He was just an old timer. He was herding sheep for an outfit back in the mountains and we used to stop at the ridge in the fall and stay for a few days. He lived up here in the mountains.

EN: Were you very old when you met him?

RK: No, probably eight, nine years old when I first met him.

EN: Did you start trapping beaver then or did you...

RK: I was ten years old when I got my first beaver.

EN: Down on the Dearborn?

RK: Yes.

EN: How are the beaver down there? Are they pretty good beaver?

RK: Yes.

EN: Nice and dark?

RK: Yes, dark.

EN: How did you, when you sold your furs...what was your...did you take the money and invest it in more equipment or did you use it for spending money or...

RK: Well, invested some of it and some of it I bought more equipment with. They kept building up new equipment until I went out and worked for wages. Then after we sold the ranch I went to trapping. Had about 600 marten traps at one time. During the Second World War when I came back, had about a dozen left. Too many people borrowed them and sold them again.

EN: Oh is that right? When your folks sold the ranch then, you were, how old were you about then?

RK: I was out of high school.

EN: Out of high school. What did you kind of go out and start working for yourself then?

RK: Yes.

EN: Who'd you go to work for?

RK: Well I worked for the Allen Ranch which is the (?) Dude Ranch now. Helped build the main lodge there. Did the packing and so on. When they built the foundation and the basement I packed two hundred and forty sacks of cement for the basement for that lodge.

EN: On horseback?

RK: It was all pack horses, yes.

EN: When you were talking that you had some marten traps, when did you become interested in trapping marten?

RK: About 1926 or 7.

EN: How did you get to learn how to trap marten?

RK: Well there was an old fellow by the name of Ed Brookmeiner(?). He trapped marten years and years back. He and I trapped together for a couple years.

EN: He taught you the ropes?

RK: Yes. He was a mountain man. He was one fellow that could take care of himself in the mountains anytime.

EN: Was he an old fellow when you got to know him?

RK: Well, he was about fifty years old when I first knew him. He lived to be way up in the 80s. He quit trapping when he was about 65, I think, something like that.

EN: Where did you start trapping marten at?

RK: Back in the Sun River area. Over on the edge of Stadler. Back and forth across the, between the South Fork of the Sun River and the South Fork of the Flathead.

EN: You're quite a coyote trapper now. When did you begin trapping predators?

RK: Well, I trapped coyotes for a good many years on the Dearborn but I was never too successful until the last few years. Now they call me here and there.

EN: Did somebody teach you how to catch coyotes?

RK: Well, pretty much. There was different ones that showed me. One government trapper – I don't even remember his name. Kinda got me interested in it. It's mostly around old Hardaway.

EN: When you, after you left the ranch and you went to work how long did you work that place?

RK: Well I worked two seasons at the Allen ranch and then I went to work for the county on catskinners for six years. Then I got married.

EN: Yes, marriage. Did you get your own place then?

RK: Yes. I leased the service station for a while and then when it came to the World War, was gone for three years and then came back and bought the business that I still own. I leased it out here three years ago.

EN: That's here in Augusta?

RK: Yes.

EN: I see. How did your trapping, when you came back from the service, that was the Second World War? Did you pick your trapping up when you came back?

RK: Oh yes.

EN: You say you only had a few marten traps left? So did you have to begin getting new equipment?

RK: Well I never went back after marten. Price went down so you can't afford to trap in this country. You have to have all the camps, all the pack horses, stuff to get back into marten country and it just cost too much for what you get out of it.

EN: How did you like your marten trapping?

RK: Oh I loved it. We had about 60 miles of trap line, we had four camps, cabins. And of course the Forest Service burned most of those down that they could find. But we'd make a circle. We'd make that circle every three, four days. Takes four different cabins and there's two of us. One would go and then we'd come back to the main camp and the other one would go.

EN: Where you allowed to have cabins back then?

RK: Yes

EN: Or did the Forest Service just burn them down since then?

RK: Yes.

EN: Oh I see. That was the new law they passed back then I guess. When you're out trapping marten, how did you go about that?

RK: We packed the supplies into these cabins in the fall. And then we took snowshoes and from then on it was snowshoe work all the time.

EN: Did you pack in with horses in the fall?

RK: Yes.

EN: Packed your gear in and your supplies?

RK: Well, we didn't pack the gear so much. There was one cabin that was way up next to the Continental Divide and we had a spring right along side the cabin, not a lot of water of course. We woke up one morning and heard something in the spring, opened the door a little crack and there was a calf elk at the spring eating the watercress. I reached back and got my six shooter and I had my winter's meat right there. I sure got soaked getting him out of the spring.

EN: Did you ever try any of that watercress yourself?

RK: Oh yes.

EN: Some people eat that on salads, I guess.

RK: It's kind of peppery.

EN: Yes. How long, you say you were just up there, a few seasons with that fellow trapping marten?

RK: Yes.

EN: The price was pretty good then?

RK: Well when we first started we'd make an average of about from fifty to seventy-five dollars a marten.

EN: How many did you catch on an average?

RK: Well, when we first started we only got eighty marten and quit. If it took us a month, we quit. If it took us all winter, when we got eighty marten we quit. The last year I trapped twenty marten was about the limit.

EN: Why did you decide on eighty? What brought that up?

RK: Well, I don't know. We didn't want to over trap and 'cause we went back year after year over the same area.

EN: What was kind of the general, what do they call a general area where you trap marten?

RK: It's a, I don't know. It was the South Fork of the Sun River along the Continental Divide. From there to Scapegoat.

EN: You made your loop back through there?

RK: Yes

EN: When you trapped marten, what other animals did you trap back in there?

RK: Mink. Weasels. Lots of weasels.

EN: Were they both pretty plentiful?

RK: Oh yes.

EN: Was there much wolverine activity then?

RK: Very little, very little. We got one fisher one winter and he tore up my line for about five, six miles. Finally nailed him, and we ran into trouble. At that time they were legal. So that was the only one I ever saw a sign of.

EN: How did you get involved with scents and stuff? Did you buy your scents or make your own?

RK: Well make my own. We kept experimenting and experimenting and then after we got to predator trapping I got some Thomas (?) scent and that worked real good. Used it with the (?) guns around the sheep and livestock and I make a lot of money on scent too.

EN: After you got back from the Second World War and stuff is that when you primarily got involved with predators or after that?

RK: Yes.

EN: The marten prices were kind of down.

RK: Yes. And the rest of the furs (?) were scarce on account of the 1080 poison. And even coyotes were quite scarce, except in the mountains.

EN: Let's talk about little bit about that 1080 we were talking earlier when we were having lunch. I'd like to kind of get that conversation we had back if you could. You were telling me about you'd seen three animals killed in succession with the same bait. How did that start?

RK: Well, my brother and I had a place out here and it had cattle. He was feeding the cattle and came down the haystack one day and there was coyote laying on the stack, was dead. The government had a bait station about a mile or so up on the butte, above there. He didn't even know it was there. Wasn't on his land and he just took a pitchfork and threw this coyote out over the fence. He didn't want it along side of the stack. He didn't know what had happened to it. He kind of forgot about it and it drifted over. Well in the spring when this cabin is up checking the cattle and this coyote had rotted to where there was just bones left. There was a cow chewing the bone. He didn't pay too much attention and that afternoon he went back and the cow was lying there dead. So he got to looking and she had been chewing the jaw bone of this coyote. So he had to take her off the meadow at least. A tractor came pulled her up along the brush, along the creek. Three or four days later he went up and skunks had been eating the lips and stuff along this cow and there were five skunks lying there dead. So we figured that 1080 went through three different animals.

EN: And was potent enough to kill all three in succession.

RK: That's right. Evidently the saliva around those lips and stuff, see, spread that poison was enough in that jawbone to get that cow.

EN: So when you got involved in predators that was about 19... the late 1940s. When you came back from the Second World War.

RK: Yes, it was '46.

EN: Did you become an employee of the government back then?

RK: No

EN: Or just a private?

RK: Yes.

EN: Was the 1080 program in pretty good swing then?

RK: Yes

EN: What was some other instances you had to do with 1080 that you can recall?

RK: Well there was one sheep outfit that the government had three bait stations and the coyotes got so they didn't pay any attention to them, they'd go around them. And once in a while you'd find a pup that they killed but the birds would pick up the bait and I think they scattered. These magpies and ravens would pick up a chunk as big as a walnut and carry it for ten miles and drop it. And up there where they had those three bait stations I caught thirteen coyotes going through where they went through one wire fence. Right below one of those bait stations.

EN: Why do you figure they weren't going near the baits?

RK: They got wise to them.

EN: They got smart to them.

RK: And to this day, you, a dead carcass. They wouldn't touch it until it's buried or deteriorated. They'll sniff around an old bone pile a lot better than they will a fresh, dead carcass.

EN: How do you think that's been transferred down through the...

RK: They're scared of it.

EN: They've just naturally been taught from one generation to the next.

RK: Yes.

EN: When you became involved in predators did you primarily work just coyotes?

RK: Yes.

EN: Were there any wolves in the country?

RK: No. No, the 1080 about killed the wolves. When I was a kid there was lots of wolves. In fact they were over here close to Wolf Creek. They used to (unintelligible) with cattle at night. They'd lose a yearling every blooming night. They got a government trapper in there who was an expert with a rifle and he made an awful killing between that and poisoning the traps. He about wiped them out and then when they put the 1080 out, that got them.

EN: Do you remember the government trapper's name?

RK: Rawl Manarck (?)?

EN: Rawl Manarck. What sort of a fellow was he?

RK: Oh he was a real nice fellow. He lived around Wolf Creek here for a good many years.

EN: Oh, he did?

RK: Yes

EN: Was he fairly old then?

RK: Oh I'd say he was forty-five to fifty years old.

EN: And he worked for the state or federal government?

RK: The federal government.

EN: When you became involved in coyotes were you still running your service station?

RK: Yes.

EN: Just trapping part time?

RK: Yes.

EN: Did you trap close to home?

RK: Well I had about a sixty mile trap line that I'd run three times a week.

EN: Were you pretty successful?

RK: Pretty successful, yes.

EN: I don't know if you, I've been told you were a government trapper. Is that true?

RK: No, I worked with the state.

EN: Oh, with the state.

RK: But I'm not a hired employee. I moved a lot of beaver in the summertime and live trapping for the state for, traps and steering me here and there to get them out of these irrigating ditches and not transplant them.

EN: How'd you get involved doing that?

RK: Well, it's what the government ordered, in the first place.

EN: A local fellow here?

RK: Yes. Bruce Neil (?) used to be the game warden. He was pretty well known over the state. He was a great friend of mine and we worked together quite a lot on different things. Then I worked for the Department one winter herding elk. That's the way I got mixed up in it.

EN: What size traps would you use when you were trapping coyotes?

RK: Threes and fours.

EN: What brand?

RK: Victors and Ice House (?).

EN: Used light pole traps then?

RK: Yes. And we also used snares from, oh, back in '32 or 3 I started using snares. Then they finally came out with commercial lock and they were much more successful. Only '33, [193]4 Thompson came out in the lock. I've used them ever since.

EN: With the old style, what, you made yourself?

RK: Some we made ourselves. The first ones I made out of steel fish leader. Braided. I took three or four strands and braided. It was deadly because it was hard to see. When you're out skinning a coyote if you got him around the neck his head fell off. The hide would be cut to your throat. Cut you in to, to deep.

EN: How did you learn how to use snares? Did somebody teach you?

RK: Oh, probably snaring rabbits. And gophers.

EN: When you were young?

RK: Yes

EN: Did you have a pretty good relationship with those Cree Indians when you went to high school?

RK: Oh yes.

EN: Pretty fine people?

RK: Good people

EN: What was their attitude about trapping?

RK: Well, a few of them trapped. Some of the older ones. The younger ones never did so much. They weren't too ambitious.

EN: Did they trap for money or for garments?

RK: No, just for what they'd get out of the fur. They usually sold that locally to somebody.

EN: Right around here?

RK: Yes.

EN: Were there fur buyers right local here then?

RK: There was, uh, oh in the 30s there was a preacher here. Pretty well known around this area and he would go over to Stevensville. And Paradise. Somewhere over there. And he bought fur. The game warden kept track of him. One winter he bought \$65,000 worth of fur in town here.

EN: Do you remember his name?

RK: Yes, it was Fridley(?).

EN: Fridley. That was his last name?

RK: But he was a preacher that poached for a living and god darn it, his poaching paid better than the preaching and he quit preaching.

EN: Is that right? I'll be damned. Did you ever sell fur to him?

RK: Oh yes.

EN: Was he a pretty good buyer?

RK: Oh yes. He bought for Beckwith's [Mercantile] on a commission basis.

EN: How did he, did he pay you cash?

RK: Yes.

EN: Did he poach himself quite a bit?

RK: Oh you bet. He never got anything but big blankets. He had a .22 rifle with a seven cell flashlight strapped to the barrel. And he worked at night and then, he had beavers.

EN: Was the beaver [trapping] closed [illegal] around here then?

RK: Yes, all the way down. He trapped here and put them to Great Falls down the Sun River. And anyplace else that he could slip in.

EN: Warden ever caught him?

RK: No. I was talking to the warden one time and he was over on Cascade. He said he knew he was trapping beaver. He said he could smell it on him. Got out there and said he couldn't prove it. They found out afterwards that he had a big beaver hide under his shirt while they was talking to him.

EN: (laughter) Is that right? No wonder he could smell him. I'll be damned. Was there any other trappers when you were trapping in the late '40s that were right local here that you remember?

RK: Yes. There was one of the ranchers that trapped. But not so much in the '40s. More in the '30s. After the war there wasn't so many of the ranchers that trapped. A few kids trapped and there was a few that were more or less, I don't know that they were professional trappers. They were these fellows that come in and trapped for a week or two and take off and leave their traps and stuff. And pick up their fur and their traps. They come in, beaver trappers primarily come in during hunting season and pretend to be hunting and clean out all them beaver. Chop the dams and so on.

EN: Did you get involved with the enforcement of the game department back early?

RK: Well, I was just helping them. That was, not all.

EN: You weren't a look-out for these fellows that were poaching or anything?

RK: Well, no. Not entirely. I did turn in a couple of them.

EN: When you were young how did you begin your...it was kind of interesting, to a lot of people that when you're a youngster and you start trapping and set up square that you gotta take care of your traps regularly and take care of that fur and not trap too many animals, like we were talking about the marten. Who kind of, would you say, was the most institutional [instrumental] in getting you started on the right track?

RK: Probably my dad.

EN: Your dad

RK: Yes. He was the one that helped get the summer game preserve put in here. And he also put in what they called the Twin Buttes Game Preserve which they've abandoned in the last few years. That was to conserve deer. They were...along the Dearborn they were commercializing hunting for market. They used to camp and there'd be four horse teams go out with them and they got this Twin Buttes game preserve in there, well, they stopped that. At that time, well, I can first remember the limit was three deer per person. Well, then they cut it down to one and then finally it went to a straight buck low (?). The deer were very scarce. We had maybe thirty, forty heads of deer on the ranch at that time. And now, well, two years ago I counted eight hundred head in one bunch. Up here on Elk Creek which is just north of our north line I counted 1,100 head out on the flats here two years ago.

EN: Were most of them mule deer?

RK: Yes. Now the whitetail, we never heard of a whitetail hardly when I was a kid. And now the whitetail are everywhere. There are herds of them. And they're getting too thick a lot of these places and die off of disease because they're just like rabbits.

EN: Do you think maybe a little more hunting pressure would be...

RK: Well, yes. But it's kind of hard because...take along the river here. We've got a work preserve or game preserve here because of so many people living on both sides and [they] get to hunting in there. Somebody's going to get shot. It's too dangerous. There's too many houses. Too many people living. They had to keep it down.

EN: When you started working predators, I know in previous conversations we've talked about mountain lions and stuff. Did you begin getting involved in mountain lions about the same time?

RK: Well, no. I think '40s, early '50s. That's when the lions really began to get thick. The deer were awfully thick at that time and a lion would come out of the mountains and follow the deer. They were way out here on the flats. We had one lion right here in the dump one time and this lady got this one up here a couple years ago. But they were following the whitetails along the river.

EN: Did you get involved through your connection with the game warden there?

RK: Yes. More or less.

EN: Did he call you?

RK: Well we just hunted on our own. Got our fifty dollar bounty on them and a hundred on our own and then we'd take the hides and get forty, fifty dollars out of a hide.

EN: So it was pretty powerful...

RK: Yes, it was because I got, one day I went out and got four lions.

EN: Holy cow

RK: Another time, I think the last hunt I was on I got three. I had a fellow from the game commission. Called me up, he'd been through the country up here and he saw a lion kill and asked me if I'd take him in on it. I had two dogs and I said "sure." It was about ten or eleven of them showed up. Next morning we went lion hunting and got three lions.

EN: Holy cow. Were they all lions right in the general vicinity of the kill?

RK: Yes. There was an old one and two young ones. Two smaller ones. They'd made the kill and had it buried and we jumped them and they went three different directions. One dove one way and one dove the other and I had one pup and I didn't know whether he was staying or not. I knew the other dog would. When I got down to where the pup was he was half way up the tree just, he was going to eat that lion if he could catch him.

EN: I'll be danged. How did you get started using dogs?

RK: Well it's about the only way you can get them [lions]. You can trap one once in a while. You can snare one once in a while. But with a dog, you get on a fresh track and if you work it right there's lots of times I've gotten them within a hundred yards after I first started when you turn the dog loose.

EN: Did you hunt just walking along side your dogs?

RK: Absolutely

EN: Did you use a horse?

RK: No

EN: Oh, never used a horse?

RK: No. If you use a horse then you always end up further away from the horse than you are from camp.

EN: They don't like mountain lions?

RK: Well, going into such rough country you can't use a horse.

EN: I see

RK: Sometimes it's almost impossible to even use snowshoes to get through. Crawl on your belly through the brush. It's rough. Almost a thousand miles between every cat.

EN: How did you learn how to train your dogs to chase mountain lions, or did you?

RK: With a tom cat.

EN: Oh, is that right? How did you go about that?

RK: Take a tom cat and put him up a tree and then turn a dog on him to sic'em out him, see. Then I used scent. I'd drag a sack over to the scent round him up to a tree and tie the sack up in the tree. I've got a dog out here, it's been years, there was a cat that got into a spin one day and he jumped him up in the tree and he kept him there for half a day. You go out there now and holler cat and that dog will start looking up in the tree and will go on barking. He remembers that. Year or so or go.

EN: Kind of an inborn trait.

RK: Yes, an inborn trait. They're a coon hound, you know. Cat hunting.

EN: Did you work bears at the same time much?

RK: No. I've never lost a bear so I don't ever have to hunt for them. I have killed several but they're the trouble makers. (unintelligible)

EN: How did you go about that?

RK: Well usually set a snare.

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

[Tape 1, Side B]

RK: Used what they called the overage (?) trap. It's what the government uses. I've made several of them. Similar to it. But it's the safest bet because a man steps in it and all he's got to do is just take the snare off. It don't hurt at all.

EN: It's a foot snare then?

RK: It's a foot snare. Leg snare. It's spring loaded and when they step on the trigger it throws the loop up around your leg. Fasten it to a big log and he just takes off. The trap itself is made out of a quarter inch welding rock. Spring on it and trigger and they step on the trigger and it flips the spring back and throws the snare up.

EN: How did you learn how to use those?

RK: Well, (unintelligible) trapper got the first one. I never liked to use a bear trap because god darn there's too much deer or catching elk or something else and we had to, the rules now, you got to look at them every twelve hours and you gotta build fence around them and put signs up and everything. But these overage traps you don't have to do that. But the bears, the only thing the overage trap is ever good for. I've tried them on coyotes and stuff like that but they, you could catch one once in a while but there's nothing like the leghold trap. Or a foot trap. They're not very successful.

EN: When you catch bears did you catch mainly black bears?

RK: Black bears and grizzlies.

EN: Are the grizzlies pretty hard to handle?

RK: Well, you hit them with a dart gun and they're pretty easy to handle then.

EN: What did you do with them then?

RK: Put them in a net and took one up here. He had a radio collar on at Ronan. And he showed up over here. They hauled him outta here. Don't know where they took him to and the next spring he came back so we caught him again and that radio collar was still working. They thought something had happened to him because they lost track of it. But the last time they took him up in British Columbia. They figured that bear traveled over 1,400 miles and he came back. When he came from Ronan he crossed three mountain ranges. Across the Mission Range, the Swan Range, and the **main** range. Came right down here.

EN: Where did they take him the last time out?

RK: I don't know where they took him. He hasn't been back since.

EN: How long ago was that, that you were trapping bears?

RK: Well, a couple years ago. Most of the time we use a live trap. But now you can't move them, you know. For a while they'd take them out and dump them real regularly right down on a ranch or someplace if you have trouble. So they quit that. Even in the park. They take them back in the back country and if he shows up again they just do away with him. They have to. Because one they lose the fear of man and once they've groomed livestock it's easier (?).

EN: Then they're a problem.

RK: They're a problem.

EN: How do you, what do you think about the old coyote that you're trapping? How do you feel about it?

RK: Well I think the last animal (unintelligible) to threaten man is going to be the coyote.

EN: You think so. Why do you think that?

RK: He's adaptable to anything. He can eat anything, live on anything. And he's just adaptable to anything. Like in Los Angeles, in Verona. They killed a little girl down there. I was reading here a little while ago where in a 30 miles radius there've been five or six attacks right in that area. Kids getting'...and I was reading not long ago where in Maine a fellow, I think it was in Maine, a fellow was cutting wood and a bunch of coyotes there attacked him. He threw his chainsaw at them and make a run for his car. He shot one coyote but he lost the seat of his pants when he was getting in the car.

EN: Do you think that stronger trapping pressure could keep them in check?

RK: That's right.

EN: More people trapping?

RK: Yes. It's about the only way they can be controlled. It really is.

EN: Were you in the (unintelligible) business here in Augusta

RK: Yes.

EN: And you bought, that was your service station there?

RK: Well I had the shop, welding/machine shop there.

EN: How long were you in that business?

RK: I was in the imprint (?) business for 20 years. I was another 23 years in the welding-machine shop.

EN: So quite a while.

RK: Welding was my trade.

EN: How did you get started welding?

RK: I went to school in Bozeman and was the first class that went through the shop in Bozeman. It was welding.

EN: Is that right?

RK: Yes. They didn't have an instructor then. They had to go out to a private and get a welder from the snake (?) plant, came in and taught us how to weld. I just went from there and went halfway around the world.

EN: Oh, did you? Did you have an occasion in your machine shop to improve on equipment and things like that for trap line use?

RK: Oh yes. I've got several things that I've done. I was experimenting all the time.

EN: What were some of them you'd worked on?

RK: Well, one of them was this overage trap I designed once. Similar to what...I don't know. Different handy tools and stuff. I experimented with all kinds of things to see if it would work on coyote. I've been at it for over sixty-some, sixty-five years and yet they still make a monkey out of me.

EN: Is that right? They're still pretty smart?

RK: Still pretty smart. I had one coyote up here, it was three legged. And I trapped for it for three years. I was digging the traps out and walked around. I had a bobcat trap set and it snowed, froze and one thing another and I got up with a shovel and I dug all of the snow out and threw it out in big chunks and kind of fell far to the ground. Dug my trap out and reset it and next time I had that three-legged coyote in that trap. I had place ten feet around it that was tore up from chunks of snow and leaves, grass, sticks, and everything else scattered all around. Had that three-legged coyote in that trap.

EN: Do you think he just got a little bit unwarily?

RK: No, I think that he decided that that much ruckus around wasn't any danger.

EN: Oh I see. Must have been a pretty proud day for you.

RK: Yes, it was.

EN: To get that three-legged coyote.

RK: Since then I've gotten a lot of three-legged coyotes.

EN: Oh? What do you think is causing them to have three-legs?

RK: Oh, getting shot. I got one that had been shot through both elbows. And he run around on the elbows. His legs are turned up this way. And he had calluses on the elbows where he'd bounce. And it was in a small area. Right around creek there's a lot of ryegrass and a lot of (?) and stuff in there. I'd seen the tracks in the snow. It would jump, hop like a kangaroo. I couldn't figure out what the heck it was. Finally I nailed him with a snare. And that coyote had never left probably forty acres. It was fat as a seal. And both front legs turned up by his ears. He had been shot right through both legs.

EN: Do you think that's cause for a lot of the recent pressure on coyotes? The high prices and stuff? Everybody's out for them?

RK: Yes. That's right. They'd shoot at a coyote if he's half a mile away, they'll shoot at him anyway. With these high-powered rifles they think they can do it. There's no gaining on it with those big rifles now then there ever was with a .30-30. And there was more game killed with the .30-30 than there is with the 300 or 357 Magnums.

EN: Do you work on skunks very much to keep them in check?

RK: Well, in some places, yes. I got to a big skunk yesterday, throwed him in the bush. You can't get anything for them now. But there's a problem we're fishing and that is rabies. I'm licensed to use the cyanide gun and start in on this rabies business. In case we do have to go after it. Teton County was quarantined last summer. Had four or five cases up there. Down on Malta they've had fifty-some cases. They found a rabid bat up here in Sun River canyon last summer. So it's something that we got to watch and the (?) are thick with them fleas.

EN: What do you think is causing the rabies? Just too many skunks?

RK: Skunk is a carrier and bat is a carrier and they tend to be that the skunk can be a carrier and never get it. But he can infect every skunk in the den and I've caught as high as eighteen skunks out of a den.

EN: In the winter time?

RK: In the winter time. And just breathing in the air, they say that those can infect it. So it's really a risky set-up.

EN: Weren't you telling me one time at the (unintelligible), I think it was you. We were talking and you were telling me a story about you had a trunk load of skunks or something. Was that you that was telling me that?

RK: Yes. Out here one time, it was during the Depression. I had 'bout a sixty, seventy mile trap line. Coyotes, badgers, and so on. Of course I was looking for any kind of fur. There was a culvert and there was some tracks in this culvert so I went to investigate. I got fourteen skunks outta there with a piece of barbwire. Took about thirty feet of barbwire and twisted it in there and start turning it round. I get'em by the tail and you could feel them tighten up and pull out and I have skunk. And I came in and didn't smell so good and the Mrs. threw me out with the rest of the skunks. But good dollars. Darn it, but it was (unintelligible) for two months off of that pile of skunks.

EN: Oh? What were they worth then?

RK: Oh, about two and a half.

EN: Is that right?

RK: Two and a half would buy a sack of flour.

EN: You trapping during the Depression out there quite a bit?

RK: Yes. It was the only way I made a living for winter time. I worked on the cat[caterpillar tractor] in the summer and they shut us off after about six months work, six months in the winter we was out. Had to trap. Had to do something because there was no work anywhere. That time of year, even in the summer, the ranchers were paying fifteen dollars a month and board. You worked about twelve, fifteen hours a day. Well I could beat that with trapping all to pieces.

EN: Were coyotes and so forth pretty plentiful then?

RK: Yes. And coyote and badgers, I averaged about just about twenty dollars straight through for them. Three or four years. The average, it just held at about twenty dollar average.

EN: So if you caught one coyote a month you made more than that fellow working on a ranch.

RK: Oh yes.

EN: I'll be damned.

RK: It was nothing to go out and get one or two coyotes and maybe a couple of badgers a couple times a week.

EN: Did you trap anywhere other than right around here, around Augusta in your lifetime?

RK: No.

EN: Pretty much right here.

RK: Right in this area. Still trapping the same area. You might see outside a few sections were somebody's moved in on me. Been trapping the same area that I did when I was a kid.

EN: Did you ever have any students that you taught how to trap?

RK: Oh, several kids that I've taught.

EN: Did you enjoy doing that?

RK: Oh yes.

EN: Were they good students?

RK: They were good students. Yes, they were really interested. They made their little spending money. Bought (?) and rifles and stuff with the fur that they've got. Mostly weasels and muskrats and mink. There's one of them, he's getting to be a pretty fair beaver trapper.

EN: I see. Did you trap beaver quite a bit when you was trapping them pretty heavy?

RK: Oh yes.

EN: Did you?

RK: Yes. It's been one of my main coats. It isn't everybody that can catch beaver successfully. With the new conibear traps. It's really a different tool now. Just chop the dams and set the conibears in there and one thing or another. With the old snare traps it took, that was a different tool.

EN: Why was it so, a lot of people couldn't be very successful at it?

RK: Well, when there's one little fellow that was a government trapper when we were here. And he got a heart attack. He was trapping in an area and he got a heart attack and he fell in the creek and he didn't make it. And that fellow that owned the property called me and asked me if I'd trap for him. I found a lot his traps that were set and didn't use weight enough on his traps and he was using small traps. Out of twenty-three beaver I caught on that place nineteen of them had three feet or less. He was getting their feet and they'd get up in the brush and get them pushed off. But he's still living in this area.

EN: When you first learned how to trap beaver were you shown the proper way to set a trap and so forth?

RK: That's right.

EN: How would go about that?

RK: Well, fasten a rock, probably weigh twenty-five pounds to the trap. And then a wire running from that back up to a lake or somewheres. Have slack enough on that wire, you'd get into deep water. Your beaver landed nine times when they jump for deep water when the trap hits him. Once in a while you'd find one that would go up on the bank and when you do you usually lose him because he'd twist off in short time. Especially on the front legs. There were on the bank real quick and then they'd just twist around until their foot comes off.

EN: They seem to do pretty good even though they lose a foot?

RK: Oh yes. I got one big beaver out here one time through the ice and he had both front feet gone, part of a one hind foot. And under the skin there was a .22 bullet in his neck. He had lived. The bullet was kind of grizzled over.

EN: Was he pretty healthy?

RK: He was a big healthy beaver. But he didn't get on the bank. He used the water all time. He just the roots and stuff. You could see where he worked along the water line.

EN: Did you make your own scent for beaver?

RK: Yes.

EN: How'd you learn how to do that?

RK: Old Jakey Shander (?).

EN: He taught you.

RK: Yes.

EN: He was a pretty good friend to you then.

RK: Oh yes. A fine old man. An old Swiss. He told about trapping wolves in the eastern part of the state when they first came here. He said that they worked around sheep a lot (unintelligible), you know? He said he caught a wolf one time out there and he didn't have his gun with him. So he says he kind of choked her with a club 'bout 6 feet long. And he says, "Got out there and I swung and I hit that wolf just as hard as I could hit him." He says, "He almost took the seat out of my pants." (laughs) "So I went back and got the gun."

EN: Did he trap quite a while?

RK: Oh yes. He trapped for years.

EN: Over east there in the mountains?

RK: Yes. And then he had a little homestead up here in the mountains. There's a creek named after him, Jakey Creek. He had a mine up there and he prospected and he had a mine up there for years.

EN: Did he come to, you said he came to America from Sweden?

RK: Switzerland.

EN: Oh, Switzerland. I wonder how he learned how to trap. Did he ever tell you?

RK: No, I don't know.

EN: Was a single man all his life?

RK: Yes.

EN: Was he a pretty good fur handler?

RK: Well, that I don't know. I never saw him with fur. He never made a real business of trapping. He liked to prospect.

EN: Oh did he?

RK: What he did do a little trapping here and there.

EN: Think that was for pin money if he didn't do too good?

RK: Yes.

EN: I see. Did you father, after he sold the ranch out, what did he do for, did he retire?

RK: He went back and opened a dental office again. After his health broke down he had to go with the ranch and it was years that he couldn't hardly do anything. His heart went bad. And, but after he was on the ranch he, before he left the ranch he was stacking for four wagons in Beaver Flag stack. Didn't seem to bother him. But he was the oldest practicing dentist in the United States when he retired.

EN: How old was he?

RK: About eighty-five.

EN: Is that right?

RK: And he died when he was well past ninety.

EN: Was he pretty hard on you kids at home for keeping care of your teeth?

RK: No. No. He used to get after us once in a while.

EN: What do you think generated his strong interest in the wildlife?

RK: He always was. He was born in Helena and my Granddad was killed by the Nez Perce Indians in Yellowstone Park.

EN: Oh.

RK: And he was just a little kid and his brother was only two, three years old when his Dad was killed.

EN: What was that a battle down there?

RK: Well, the Nez Perce Indians were coming through and Dad talked to Chief Joseph years afterwards and the Chief said that there was a bunch of the young bucks went back against his orders and they raided these parties that were in Yellowstone down there. They were working the country over. There was quite a party of them. And they shot them up and killed my

grandfather and another fellow and shot one fellow through the hip. I don't know, there was several of them in the party that got shot up.

EN: Was that when Chief Joseph was on the run?

RK: Yes. Yes, he went on through and they caught him up in Big Sandy. My Dad went up when they put the marker up there. There was a monument there and Dad dedicated that monument to Chief Joseph.

EN: Was he pretty good friends with Chief Joseph?

RK: Well he wasn't really a friend. But he knew him, see? Visited with him because of his Dad's involvement.

EN: Did your Dad tell you quite a bit about that?

RK: Oh yes.

EN: That must have been something to have a man like that for a father that was so interested in wildlife and involved in Montana history and things like that.

RK: Yes. He loved to hunt. Loved to fish.

EN: Did he?

RK: Yes

EN: Did he hunt for elk and deer?

RK: Oh yes.

EN: Did he take you with him when you were young?

RK: Never hunted with him 'til after I was broke.

EN: Is that right? Why was that do you think?

RK: Never had time. Anytime that he wanted to go hunting it meant that they packed in and I was going to school. And then, I don't know, fishing was always somebody would come get a (?), something else that upset the apple cart and just never, never did. But the stories he told, one thing or another, of the trips that he made, one thing or another, I think it was what got me interested. As much as anything. And of course living in the mountains. I was everywhere.

EN: That's pretty over there in the Dearborn.

RK: Oh it is.

EN: Was that river, is it pretty much today like it was then?

RK: Oh, no. It is some but the upper bottom is washed out considerable. In '16 it took a lot of the land and then '64 flood that raised havoc and '75 again. It's widening the river bed out. (unintelligible) where we used to have farmland. It's washing more and more of it.

EN: Is your folks' homestead still standing out there?

RK: Oh yes. It's erect now. I've got a picture of it here somewhere. But this big cow outfit's got it now. A big corporation bought up five, six, seven ranches and they've got it and it's all run through for housing heads of cattle.

EN: Do you still have trapping rights up on that ground?

RK: They called me this fall to walk through "For God's sake not the beaver."

EN: Oh is that right?

RK: I got nineteen over there so far.

EN: Down on the Dearborn?

RK: Well, it's on the Dearborn in a tributary. Which run, the creek runs up through our old place. I trapped for years and years when it was livable.

EN: I heard the fishing was pretty good on the Dearborn.

RK: It used to be wonderful. We had fish ponds there which kept that stocked pretty well until they put the bridge in, '06...after, well it was about '15 that they put the bridge in. And the automobiles couldn't get across. The crossing looked like it was six inches deep and they get in the middle and they're bogged down and it'd take a four team round to pull them out. But after they put the bridge in it, got so that they'd be as much as 150 cars go up the road on a weekend. When we was kids we'd take a saddle horse and gunny sack and go up the river a mile or so and we'd fill that gunny sack with fish. They'd fill their basket and then dump it. Then go on fishing. In two years time the fishing went kaput. It's never been any good since, and now the canal takes all the water out for about two miles and the creek was dry. But our old place was about five hundred inches of water came off right at the house. That's where we furnished the fish ponds with little springs. From there on the river runs a stream all the time. There's no more ditches come out of it then til it goes way down the road, the highway down here.

EN: Did you trap mink on the river when you were young?

RK: Yes.

EN: How were the mink there, pretty good?

RK: Oh there weren't too many. This country up here never has been too big a mink country. Well, they don't have the crawfish and that kind of stuff that they do in the...we used to get quite a few mink up around Benchmark and like that but it seemed like it only in Fall. Mink will disappear. You don't hardly see them. Only a few and just tracks once in a while. But they go down the road here and up at these irrigation projects where there's a lot of frogs and lizard and snakes and so on. I think they hit that warm water in the springs and stuff around those irrigation canals and one think another too.

EN: Did you ever have any bother your fish ponds up there?

RK: Oh yes.

EN: Did you have to get out the traps and go after them?

RK: Yes.

EN: How about raccoons and stuff?

RK: Never hunted a raccoon in here until just a few years ago.

EN: Oh is that right?

RK: There was one coon caught oh, probably thirty, forty years ago up here in Sun River Canyon and they figured that he was a pet that got away from somebody. They had never heard of a coon. They were in down in the eastern part of the state but we never heard of them up here. But they kept working up the river. Came up around Ulm and then they started up Sun River. So I've caught coon back here in the mountains up around 8,000 feet in altitude. Had caught them in bobcat traps. There was a coon up there that weighed over forty pounds. He was fat as a seal. Don't know where he's doing now, but nothing but a few pine nuts up there and the squirrels, pack rats, and that's about all. But he was doing alright. Now coons are everywhere.

EN: Did you trap much fox in your life?

RK: I never tried trapping fox too much. I caught quite a few fox but I like to see them around. They're great mousers and they never worked anything to speak of. A lot of people say "Oh, they get the pheasants, get the pheasants." It isn't the fox that get the pheasants. We've got

skunks, we've got coons, we've got weasels, and we've got the worst predators, a bunch of seagull. I've been rolling hay, I worked on ranches and rolling hay. Go out there and there would be little pheasants that'd be wouldn't able to fly yet. And a group of seagulls would come down and pick up a whole covey. And (unintelligible) they'd lose their cover and seagulls come down and take the whole covey.

EN: Were there always seagulls up here?

RK: There are more now than there ever was. They used to be a few around the lakes but now there's thousands of them.

EN: Why do you think that is?

RK: I don't know. Whether it's the farming that brought it in or what, I don't know.

EN: I've heard that attitude by a lot of fellows up in this country about the seagulls killing all the game birds and stuff. They're pretty bitter about that.

RK: Yes. And they've got to poisoning, spraying all the ditch banks and the fence flows and everything and they didn't have cover. Now there's a few of them that are leaving the cover and we're getting some pheasants. They're getting some protection not only from the predators but also from the weather.

EN: So you think that's a better attitude?

RK: Very much so. Take down in Nebraska, was one of the pheasant capitals of the world. They lost their pheasants and they said "Oh, the fox are getting' them." It wasn't the fox, it was the idea that they was farming so intensively that they had no cover. And the 4-H kids got the idea and one near you, to get the farmers to agree to a patch. With coarse stuff, sweet clover and one thing or another. And they did. Their pheasants are coming back. Well, now it's going pretty well over the state and the state is getting back their reputation. Now in the East they made a study of the fox and in one area they annihilated the fox as far as they could. In the other area there was no trapping in the mountain. They left the fox just as he was. And they burned some rural area and the other was very, very small percentage of difference. Whether there was no fox or whether there was lots of fox. So it isn't the fox that does it. The fox will hunt grasshoppers, he'll hunt waste and stuff like that far more than he will...true, I'm not saying they ain't going to get a pheasant if they can, but he doesn't hurt the pheasant.

EN: He does a lot more good than he does harm.

RK: That's right. Gophers and all that kind of stuff—

EN: How do you feel about these house cats and so forth that are...

RK: House cat is the worst predators we've got. The feral cat is not for a born hunter. And cottontail rabbits and all that, and birds, he'll get them.

EN: When you're working with coyotes and trapping, have you quite a few sheep and cattle kills with coyotes?

RK: Yes.

EN: Just locally around here?

RK: There's one fellow lost one hundred fifty head of sheep out here with coyotes.

EN: In one year?

RK: Gosh, I think I sent you a picture of a bunch of lamb that we killed. And he lost, I think around fifty or sixty that year. But there's one hundred fifty head that the coyotes run into a barbwire fence, piled them up and what they didn't kill they smothered.

EN: Huh. That's a substantial loss, isn't it?

RK: You bet. It put him out of the sheep business for a while.

EN: How would you go about when you get a call for a sheep problem? What do you first do?

RK: Well I get out there and try to find where these coyotes are coming from. They're going to move someplace where they got protection. In other words, a place to hide. And I find the trails where they're coming in and I set those cradles to burn early with cyanide guns. Because you can't work with traps around sheep or cattle. And then commercial license to handle a cyanide gun.

EN: Is that what they call the M44?

RK: That's right.

EN: Are they pretty effective?

RK: Very effective. I've used them for years before the EPA got so dog garn environmental and start raising hell. I used them for years and years but that one time they used .38 caliber shell. And just a cap in it. And a little of the cyanide. They weren't really good but they made an awful noise. They would bang like a firecracker. Well the coyote, when that went off he took off. He might go 500 yards before he dropped. But when he took a breath he was gone. He'd just fall over. I've seen them in the snow when they fell. Never a struggle mark of any kind. But these

M-4s don't make any noise. I've got three coyotes within thirty, forty feet. I've got three or four sets around a carcass see? And they wouldn't get over twenty feet. Sometimes they wouldn't get ten feet from the, where they hit her.

EN: How does that, when the cap...

RK: The wolves were close. And there's a heating capsule, plastic capsule. And the explosion goes up through it. There's a forty pound spring behind it. And it goes up through and fires that, see? Hits them right in the mouth. Two million ways of getting a coyote. Simple reason is that when he takes a breath he's gone.

EN: The cyanide kills him?

RK: Kill him right now. And it's, there's little sign of struggle. Never found any place that he ever moved a foot after he rolled over.

EN: Is it hard to get him to put his mouth on that?

RK: No.

EN: Just put bait on there and then they pick them up?

RK: Yes.

EN: You have to have a license to use those don't you?

RK: That's right. You can't buy the shells and the equipment unless you have a license.

EN: Oh I see. Is it given to you by the state?

RK: Yes. After (unintelligible). After the school you got to take a test and you've got to, there's all kinds of red tape and stuff. You've got make reports and all kinds of stuff like that.

EN: (unintelligible) and agriculture, right?

RK: Yes.

[End of Tape 1, Side B]

[Tape 2, Side A]

EN: We'll probably get another half hour here before we have to stop. I'd like to maybe reflect on some of the things you've seen, changes of attitude and management and changes of attitude towards trappers and stuff. We were talking here during our break that you'd said you've seen some changes in trappers' attitudes towards one another. What are some of those changes?

RK: Well, the older trappers, they're kind of had a territory of their own. Each one kind of respected the other fellow's territory. The last few years it seems like they got no respect at all. They'll move in and, I've had one fellow come in here, had traps set and staked to the same stake my trap was hooked to. They had no respect at all. If you wasn't there to get your fur out of the trap then you lost the trap alone. Lost over the years a lot of traps on that account. The old fellows, if they came along and found your trap and it had something in it they'd kill it and hang it up. You'd leave a note and go on.

EN: Do you think that gentleman's agreement that you used to have is kind of fading with the young generation?

RK: That's right. No respect for the other fellow's property.

EN: Do you think there's any way we can kind of get a handle on that maybe?

RK: The best way that I know of is what they use in Canada. They've set up there, they can have a district or a territory for a trapper and that is his. Nobody else is allowed to use it. If he wants to get rid of it, or if he wants to lease it out for a year or like that fine and dandy. If he wants to sell it he can sell it. The trapping rights and his equipment. But there's nobody else can go into that territory to trap and I think that would be the answer to it.

EN: Do you think that, how do you, what kind of changes have you seen in Fish and Game's attitude towards trapping?

RK: Well, I think they're coming back to the point where they realize that trapping is very necessary. And they're getting educated to that. For a while it was, well, more up to the game warden and if you got a game warden that wanted to make a record for himself and had a hard time of it. If you had a good game warden that was reasonable, he helped you. Now I've been lucky. We've had Bruce Neal, an old friend of mine and an old trapper himself. Came to the country trapping. He worked at the Fish and Game for years and years. I think you'd find his history mixed up with this probably. But the game warden we got now is just about ready to retire and he's been very good. I've got along with him fine.

EN: What's his name?

RK: Paul Mahavrage (?).

EN: Yes, I've met Paul over in Helena.

RK: He's really kind of rough but at the same time he's been fair. He'd help a fellow out. Now he turns a lot of work towards me. Somebody's got beaver trouble he comes to me and I go clear down, well I've gone clear down to Sumner (?) for trapping beaver in the summertime. You know, he's helped me out a lot. There's somebody having trouble he come to, either that or he'll come to call on me.

EN: When you go to work a beaver problem in the summertime, what's the procedure you use to do that?

RK: Well, it's usually around the head gate of a ditch. People that own the ditch got the right to get those beaver. They have me go and pull them out.

EN: How do you do that?

RK: Use these live traps.

EN: Are they the clam shell type traps?

RK: Yes. They're like a suitcase for them to get in.

EN: How do you get the beaver to go in there?

RK: Well, you bait them. They're, they've got flat and they're on the water, see? Beaver comes in and trips it and it pulls up on him. Well then, I put them in the back end of my Jeep and I use a regular cage trap. I set it up there in the cab with this cage trap with a camera flash and open the trap up and he'll run for that dark corner. Then slam the door down and I can pack him anywhere. The smaller beaver, I've put them in a gunny sack and threw them on my back and carried them three or four miles to put him in there. But the big ones I don't try to haul. Carry them on my back out and haul them in the Jeep and dump them off. But I try to get into places where there's no irrigating ditches and no loads or anything to bother. You know, I've started several colonies and had real nice colonies started. Here a couple years ago, a fellow came in to the country and he cleaned them out before the season opened. He just, I caught him afterwards and I told him he never would have got outta there if I'd known he was in there. He came to be hunting and instead of that he was trappin. He told me he got forty-seven beaver out. But this Benchmark country has had beaver in it all my life and every few years somebody goes out and cleans them out. I've trapped that country for years and years and I never took only just a few while close to road or in culverts and close to cabins where they were bothering like that. I left the rest of them because they're a good flood control. They do a lot of good. They're good fish ponds and everything else.

EN: You'd think the Fish and Game would be really interested in the beaver's welfare because they build good fisheries and good habitats.

RK: That's right. They're beginning to find it out. Years ago, it was under a permit system and the landowner had to get the permit and then he could hire somebody and usually hired on a 50-50 basis. He'd buy the license and then we'd have to have them tagged. Then we'd go in and sell them and split, see? But now, after the price of beaver went down to four or five dollars a blanked beaver, well, they says to heck with it. They turn around and turn it over to the trapper. Well since then, they don't like to monkey with it. You know most of them don't want to monkey with a beaver. They don't get all gnawed up in it anyway because they don't handle them right and they take them and get a third what they're worth. Well, they haven't got time.

EN: When we were out in your fur shed here during our break and we looked at your furs it was kind of nice to see that you do, I would say, one of the nicest jobs of handling the fur. Have you always taken pride in the way you take care of your fur?

RK: That's right.

EN: Why do you think that is?

RK: When we were trappin marten ol' Ed Brookmeiner (?) was the one that put me on to it. He knew, take his marten hides, and they were just perfect when he got through with them. Right down to even the claws and everything wrong on the hide. I've got a little marten foot to poke off the hide. But he shipped to Sears-Roebuck one year and he got a seventy-five dollar prize for the best handling a bunch of fur that came in that week.

EN: So that kind of instilled in you to take care of your fur?

RK: That's right. And afterwards when I started to sell them to like, Joe down there. He put me on to how to take care of some of this on beaver and stuff. And I get a little better price.

EN: Joe down at Pacific Game?

RK: Yes.

EN: Have you sold to Pacific for quite a while?

RK: Oh good many years, yes.

EN: Where else did you sell?

RK: Oh I sold to Beckman and then I used to ship for Shoburton (?) and F.C. Taylor and Mals and Stephen (?). You know, got stuck most of the time.

EN: Those are a lot of old companies.

RK: The last marten I shipped for Mals and Stephen, and had them held separate and they sent back what they offered for them and I had them sent back. Turned right around, same package, mailed them to Sears Roebuck and make a hundred and fifty dollars on them.

EN: I'll be damned. So that was a pretty good chunk of change for you?

RK: At that time, 30, 40 dollars a month for wages. Yes.

EN: Made some grocery money?

RK: You bet.

EN: In working with game wardens, have you, you say you've enjoyed pretty healthy relationship with those people. Do you feel pretty good about your actions and the way you've been able to help the game wardens out for all these problems and stuff?

RK: Yes.

EN: Do you teach young fellows the same kind of ethics?

RK: That's right. If they don't have that, they not going to have anything. You've got to firm that stuff and you can't stockpile wildlife. I don't care what it is, you can't stockpile it. Because they get to thick, they'll either starve themselves out and disease or something will get them. So you've got to take a crop off of them to keep them to where their environment and they will get along.

Now take the deer here. A few years ago there was thousands of them. They live right here and down. It's nothing to see seventeen, eighteen head of deer go right down the street here. Well, dog garn all of the sudden they disappeared. You could hunt all over the country and hardly see a deer. What happened to them I don't know. Whether they moved out or whether they died off. Never found carcasses or anything but they ate their environment down to where, the chokecherry bushes, the serviceberry bushes and rose bushes and like that were eaten down to stumps. And naturally had to get out. Well it took several years for that to come back. And that's no good.

And we'd take our coyotes. They get too dog garn thick. Now last winter we run into a mange about this time of year, begin to get mangy coyotes. We just throw them in the fire and burn them. Disease gets them one way or another.

Now fox, we had a lot of fox around here and all of the sudden, just like that, they never were trapped, they never were shot, but they disappeared. We didn't know what happened. It was this parvo, this distemper disease that they get. Just wiped them out. Now all this last year a few of them are coming back again. But it was nothing that my brother had to, a den up in his field of silverfox. Black fox, beautiful. She used to follow him around when he was irrigating and picking up the moles that was grounded out. He'd go to her den and she'd be that big around. Dog garn she'd come back and she'd be skinny. Dog garn she go picking moles. Follow him around all day. We never tried to trap her. Just dog garn it, they just do too much good.

EN: What would she take? Eat the moles and take them up and throw them up for the pups?

RK: That's right. For the pups. She was there for two or three years. Finally somebody got her, shot her.

EN: We were talking out in your fur shed about eagles. Have you had a lot of dealings with eagles?

RK: You bet. There's one time we got a five dollar bounty on them. Tthey used to get a good bang outta hitting one of them with a .270. They'd just exploded when you hit them with a soft point bullet.

EN: When did they pay a bounty on them?

RK: Oh, it was back, just after the war. Along in the early '50s.

EN: Did they pay for golden and bald eagles?

RK: Well, we didn't have bald eagles at that time. (unintelligible). An eagle was an eagle. We didn't have the bald eagles to bother. It was all the golden eagles. They're boogers on lands. We've had quite a lot of trouble with them killing young calves. They'll get a calf that's just born. It isn't dry yet and they'll come down and they'll get him. Dog garn if the old cow gets off a little ways feeding, they'll get him.

EN: You was telling me that you saw an eagle kill a coyote once.

RK: Oh yes.

EN: How did they do that?

RK: They get them running down hill and they'll hit them and send them rolling. Come on them like that and just send them rolling. The coyote never gets up. Paralyzes them.

EN: Hits them in the back?

RK: Yes.

EN: I'll be damned.

RK: I've seen them kill deer. Yearling deer. They're the death on them. I heard a (?) up here from the Fish and Game one year and in a three miles stretch, it was on a side hill and that time there was twelve, fifteen hundred head of deer in there. They averaged a deer a day. Right on the road where I went through with a saddlehorse. You can always tell an eagle kill because there's the entire carcass and the bones will be picked clean but ribs and everything are all right there. They don't go into the guts first. They open them up in the flank and pull them out. With a coyote kill, you'll find a little blood, and little hair, and maybe one or two bones scattered about. But there's nothing left. But with an eagle, the entire carcass is there. What the eagle don't get your ravens and magpies clean up. You can always tell, you could tell those eagle kills because there wouldn't be a track of anything around but the bird tracks.

EN: In your old time experiences, I shouldn't say old time, but your past experiences in the Bob Marshall, up in there trapping marten and stuff. Was that pretty nice country?

RK: Beautiful country.

EN: Did you see any evidence of trappers that had been there before?

RK: Oh yes.

EN: What was some of that evidence?

RK: Oh, old cabins, old traps. Some of that is set through them in the trees. One thing another. Old cabins were caved in. Little six by eight cabins or six by six cabins and so on.

EN: You were showing me some pictures of your trapper cabin with the double roof there. Did you build that yourself?

RK: Yes.

EN: How big was that?

RK: It was about six by eight.

EN: Six by eight. Did you live there by yourself?

RK: Well, we used it as a line camp, see? We'd spend the night there and then go on, see? It was, we had a head and stove, and well, being there you don't want blood all the time so you come in late and wet and what not. You could build a fire. I was in there when it was fifty-five below zero. At the main cabin. I don't know up there on the Continental Divide, I don't know how cold it was. These spruce trees would split wide open. So a tree two feet in diameter, you could look right through the center of it. It would open up that wide. It would sound like a rifle shot and you could hear those, sounds like a bunch of hunters all over the mountain. I often wondered what made those streaks on those trees. But in the spring they come back together and they heal.

EN: I'll be damned.

RK: You'll see those trees with a line coming right straight down and you look on the other side, if it was lightening it'd go down one side but they'll be a streak on both sides. That's where they opened up and came together again.

EN: Did you do most of your fur handling in your cabin?

RK: Yes, all of it.

EN: At night?

RK: Yes. Candlelight.

EN: Candlelight? I bet that was pretty long days?

RK: You bet. Especially if the snow was soft. Some places you'd have to break trail every time you went through. There's a drift you know. There was one place on the Continental Divide, with the, head of Hoadley Creek. Between Hoadley Creek and Stadler. We had a cabin just on the side of the divide, on the head of Stadler. Going up, what we call the switchbacks, I had a trap set on a leaning tree and kept moving it as the snow got deeper. Well, afterwards the Forest Service built a trail and they built a trail right under this leaning tree. Those damn nealies (?) at the Clearwater Game Range over there came through with a pack cot, he happened to look up and there was a trap hanging off of this tree. He stood up in his saddle. He had a tall horse. Stood up in the saddle and he could just reach the trap. He gave it a jerk. My name was on the trap.

EN: Is that right?

RK: When I left there I had a load and I just swung the trap and just left it. It was hanging off the tree. It was close to fifteen feet. To that trap.

EN: That's a pretty healthy snowfall.

RK: But it drifted every day. That was the bear cabin. Was steep and they've got switchbacks on the government trail going up there now. The old cabin that they had at Stadler is still standing but the hunters are using it for wood. The roof was caved in and one thing or another but the walls were still solid.

EN: Did you spend some pretty long days out there by yourself?

RK: Oh yes.

EN: How did you feel on those days? Pretty happy?

RK: Just happy. I never was healthier or happier in my life I don't think. When I was on the line.

EN: Did you ever have a partner full time?

RK: Oh yes. Usually did when I went in in the fall. There'd be two of us go in, see?

EN: Same guy all the time?

RK: No.

EN: Different fellows?

RK: Yes. This old Ed Brookmeiner and I, we run, I would say ten years that we trapped the mountains. If we wasn't trapping we was snowshoeing and we go from here to there and lot of those trapper cabins, we knew where they were and they all had a little stove in them. We might be gone for a week before we got back to the main cabin. Take a sack of biscuits and one thing another and the snowshoe rabbits and squirrels if we caught them. If there was a squirrel bark, boy we had it. The same with snowshoe rabbit. We'd run him for a hour and we'd finally get him. And fish, there was lots of fish at that time. Now it's fished out and build a road in there and it ruined it. We lived right off the country. I learned more about survival from him.

In fact his... he broke a leg. Way back in, way up at the end of the South Fork. He needed a pad and he put his snowshoe on his knee. He broke one bone below his knee. Put a pad on it and he made it over a mile to this cabin. Six weeks he laid in that cabin. Set his own leg. Tied his belt around his foot and set his leg. He had an old shepherd dog. There was a spring right close to his cabin and he could throw a rope with a blanket, piece of blanket on it into the spring and he would squeeze that out. That's the way he got water. After that dog watched him do that a few times that dog would take the bucket and go down and bring back a bucket of water.

EN: Is that right?

RK: He always had a big pile of wood right at the door and that dog would bring in one stick of wood at a time. (unintelligible).

EN: What did he use for groceries?

RK: He had it stocked. He said that coming out it was about fifteen miles to the main cabins. Says that was the longest fifteen miles he ever made in his life. He had one little line shack in between with a bed in it and a stove but not much grub. He stayed in that and he said he didn't know whether he was ever going to make it or not. That leg was weak, you know? He's a little short fellow. He wasn't any taller than I am. He took this kind of little dog trot and he'd keep that up day after day and day after day. I never saw him get tired.

EN: He'd trapped in the Bob before you knew him?

RK: Oh yes. I knew him for years before I trapped with him. He came in, came up Stadler. He was prospecting for the ACM when he came in there. He followed the game trail up on this side and that's the country I trapped through. There was no forced trail in here at that time. Now you've got the trail, it's the main trail over the mountains.

EN: I bet you spend some fine evenings together around the fire?

RK: Oh yes. We used to have a lot of fun.

EN: Would you tell stories and stuff like that?

RK: Oh yes. He'd tell a lot of his experiences and stuff. He was a crack shot. And dog garn it they, he wasn't afraid of anything. We was going in one time, it was along in February. We went in on snowshoes, pack on our back and our dog. Right where our cabin is there's a deep coulee. Tthere'd been a real warm spell and water had come up in these coulees and big thaw. Evidently there was a grizzly, had a den up at the head of this coulee and he got drowned out. Was the only thing we could figure and he was down in right at our water hole at the cabin. He started up the bank on the other side. It was only about a hundred feet across this coulee but it was pretty deep. He had a .6 shooter and he just reached around and grabbed that .6 shooter, come down and BOW! And the old grizzly just rolled up like that, better than bald. Scared me to death. I was on snowshoes and there's no tree big enough for six or eight feet high around there. I says, I watched him a little bit and he says, "He ain't going no place." He says and he walked down about ten feet and he shot him in the head. It was a small grizzly, I'd say maybe weigted three hundred pounds or something like that. It was the most beautiful hide I'd ever saw in my life. Wasn't a bare spot on him anywhere and the fur was a good six inches long. Well we skinned him out and took him up to the cabin and scraped him down and stretched him and when he got in in the spring we took him out and had him mounted. We got five hundred dollars for that hide. But he was past eighty years old and he was hunting elk up there back of Clicks (?) and there was a waterfall and he was following a bull elk and there about six inches of

fresh snow and he stepped over a log and a grizzly and stepped up about thirty feet from him. Stood right up and fronted him. He shot the grizzly and the grizzly kept a coming. He put four shots into him and you could put a dollar on those four shots when we skinned him out. That bear squared under eight feet.

EN: How do you mean squared?

RK: When we stretched him out. He was eight feet, well just about eight feet.

EN: Eight feet up and down and eight feet across?

RK: Yes.

EN: Holy smokes.

RK: One of the biggest grizzlies that was killed in there.

EN: And this guy was eighty years old?

RK: Yes. He says, "I couldn't run." He says, "All of that wind fall." He said, "I knew I beared him so I just, I just start pumping lead into him." When he dropped him, he touched him with the end of the gun.

EN: How big a rifle was he using?

RK: An old aught 6.

EN: An old aught 6?

RK: An Enfield

EN: Did he trap for most of his life?

RK: Well, after he, yes. He came here in about 1915. He trapped from then on. But before that he worked for the ACM some. And he had a ranch at one time down in the Crazy Mountains. But uh, he stayed in the mountains for most of the time. Worked for the Forest Service in the summertime, trapped in the winter, like that. And then he worked for Clicks up there, for Allens, for years. Until he got too old. He finally went purt' near blind.

EN: Well, did he stay here until he passed away?

RK: Oh yes.

EN: How old was he when he passed away?

RK: About eighty-five.

EN: I see. You and him were pretty good friends all through your life then?

RK: Oh yes. He was a grand old man.

EN: When he passed away, did he leave you with any firm impressions?

RK: No. Not that I know of. Just that he was a friend and that was it. He and Bruce Neal knew each other ever since he came to the country and of course, Bruce came in here in 1905. He came up from Missouri trapping. Came up in here and he trapped bear in the First World War.

EN: Do you know Bruce pretty well?

RK: Oh, I knew him ever since I was a little kid.

EN: I've heard some good stories about him but I never knew anybody...

RK: (unintelligible) history behind him yards long. Worked for the Fish and Game for years and years and years, the game warden. Then he was the manager of the game range up here and he, really he was the one that preserved our elk. He just, he was a wonderful game warden. Nobody knew where he was at. He had couple mules he called Pinky and Damnit. He'd, we'd walk the North Fork of the Sun River and leave Pinky and Damnit and he might find them over on the Dearborn. When somebody he was after, he'd just take through the hills afoot. Or he might leave his car on the Dearborn and he'd go around Willow Creek. One time some fellows, up on the game preserve shot a sheep. He knew they were coming out. Well, they knew he was in Sun River so they come down through Willow Creek. But when they got to the gorge up in Willow Creek there's only one way through there. He was sitting on the trail, "Well boys," he says, "you better meet me in town."

EN: Is that right?

RK: (laughter – unintelligible) There was no arguing with him. He never, anybody that he ever pinched, I don't think he ever had an enemy. You know he was that kind of fellow.

EN: Pretty good fellow.

RK: At the same time he had a big family. He had about eighteen kids. Two women. But of all those years, if there was somebody that was needy, like that, you might find a box of groceries on your porch. Nobody knew where it come from. It was Bruce.

EN: I'll be danged.

RK: One time there was a family up here. It's on the game range now, a fellow had a little homestead. He three or four kids. And he had thirteen, fourteen head of cattle and skinned poor, you know? But the elk was all over his place all winter. Well dog garn, Bruce was coming through with one high mucky muck from up in Helena, showing him the game situation and he stopped at this fellow's place and the fellow "Sure," he says, "gotta stock meat." When they come in he went off to bushes and he come back with great big steaks. Dog garn it. They ate. After he left, well, this fellow says, "Hey, that was elk meat." He says, "dog garn it." Bruce looks at him and says, "That's the finest beef steak I ever ate in my life." He says, "That fellow knew he was hooked." That fellow wouldn't have killed but one elk a year but he fed his family. But he'd wait, and before the season was on or not. When the elk got by his door he bust one of them and hang him up. But that was the way it was Bruce.

EN: Was he a pretty good trapper?

RK: He was a good trapper. Trapped wolves. He had a trap line running for miles and miles.

EN: Did you get to know him pretty well?

RK: Knew him from the time I was a little kid.

EN: Did he trap just wolves and predators?

RK: Oh no. He trapped everything.

EN: Everything.

RK: Yes.

EN: Beaver, and mink, and muskrats, and stuff?

RK: Oh yes.

EN: Well he lived up in the wilderness 'til he passed away, didn't he?

RK: (unintelligible) right on the edge. He lived at the mouth of Sun River Canyon.

EN: There's quite a story, that guy. The way he passed away there, I heard, one night around a campfire they were telling me. Did you ever hear that?

RK: I know what happened.

EN: Oh. That, sometime, would be a good story for people to hear about.

RK: You know when he was passed eighty he had a plastic socket put in his hip. He walked around with a crutch for a while and then a cane. He got on a pair of snowshoes and walked out about a mile and back just to show them that he could do it.

EN: I'll be damned.

RK: After he had that socket put in.

EN: He lived to be pretty old?

RK: Oh yes, he was close to ninety. He was eighty-eight, eighty-nine.

EN: His health failed him at last, didn't it?

RK: Yes, well he kind of went blind too. And deaf. But he didn't want anybody to ever take care of him. He was very independent. You couldn't do anything to help him. If he knew it, well, he refused. But as I say, if there was somebody that was hungry, it was Bruce that put in a twenty-five dollar order of groceries for them or something. He'd help people out. I've known him to donate stuff and they never knew where it come from. It was Bruce that did it.

EN: I'll be damned. Did he take pretty good care of his fur?

RK: Well, he was pretty rough at it.

EN: Was he?

RK: Yes, he kind of took the bones out of the beaver.

EN: (laughter) I'll be danged. He's got a boy now that's in the Fish and Game, doesn't he?

RK: Yes, he works at Clearwater.

EN: Dan?

EK: Yes. That's one of the original family. Then he raised that family and then remarried and raised another family. And one of his boys worked in John Deere in Choteau. He still lives on the home place up there.

EN: Oh he does?

RK: Takes care of his mother and his wife.

EN: It seems like things are, do you think things are changing in the fish and game a little bit?

RK: Yes. I think that as time goes on they're going to get a better set-up on their fur. I'm hoping so. We haven't had, well, Newby was on the fur for a while but there never was a study made of it or anything like that. And I think now that they're beginning to realize that the fur means something they're going to have to study it more. And I think this bobcat situation is one thing that's brought that on. Plus the Trappers Association working on it. Which I give them a lot of credit.

EN: We're about out of tape there, on that side. So we'll stop for today.

[End of Interview]