An Interview with
BEN
COLVIN

An Oral History produced by
Robert D. McCracken

Esmeralda County History Project
Esmeralda County, Nevada
Goldfield
2013

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PREFACE

The Esmeralda County History Project (ECHP) engages in interviewing people who can provide firsthand descriptions of the individuals, events, and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the recordings of the interviews and their transcriptions.

The Esmeralda County Board of Commissioners initiated the ECHP in 1993 in order to collect information on the origin, history, traditions, and quality of life of Esmeralda County communities that may be impacted by the construction of a high-level nuclear waste repository located at Yucca Mountain, adjoining the Nevada Test Site in Nye County. Though the repository has yet to be built, the ten oral histories in this group of interviews were paid for by county monies received in connection with the Yucca Mountain effort, which is now in hiatus.

In themselves, oral history interviews are *not* history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiography as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the ECHPôs operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the ECHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim as possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts,

and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherence. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often largely unreadable and therefore a waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the ECHP will, in preparing a text:

a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the *uhs*, *ahs* and other noises with which speech is often sprinkled;

b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;

c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context;

d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered but have been added to render the text intelligible; and

e. make every effort to correctly spell the names of all individuals and places, recognizing that an occasional word may be misspelled because no authoritative source on its correct spelling was found.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As project director, I would like to express my deep appreciation to those who participated in the Esmeralda County History Project (ECHP). It was an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to obtain oral histories from participating individuals. I was welcomed into many homes and was allowed to share in the recollection of local history. I thank the residents throughout Esmeralda County and Nevadað too numerous to mention by nameð who provided assistance and information. They helped make the successful completion of this project possible.

Appreciation goes to the Esmeralda County Commissioners who initiated the project in 1993: Chairman Wade Barton, Virginia Ridgway, and Joyce Hartman. Appreciation also goes to current Chairman Nancy J. Boland, William C. Kirby, and Dominick Pappalardo, who initiated the current project in 2012, and to Ralph M. Keyes, who became a commissioner in 2013. Ed Mueller, Director, Esmeralda County Repository Oversight Program, gave enthusiastic support and advocacy for this effort. The United States Department of Energy, through Mr. Muellerôs office, provided funds for this round of interviews. Thanks are extended to Commissioners Boland, Kirby, Pappalardo, Keyes, and Mr. Mueller for their input regarding the conduct of this research and for serving as a sounding board as we worked out methodological problems. These interviews would never have become a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Esmeralda County commissioners and Mr. Mueller.

Jean Charney served as editor and administrative assistant throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Jean Charney and Robert B. Clark transcribed a number of interviews, as did the staff of Pioneer Transcription Services in Penn Valley,

California. Julie Lancaster and Suzy McCoy provided project coordination. Editing was done by Jean Charney and Darlene Morse. Proofreading and indexing were provided at various times by Darlene Morse and Marilyn Anderson. Joni Eastley proofed all the manuscripts and often double-checked, as accurately as possible, the spelling of peopleôs names and the names of their children and other relatives. Jeanne Sharp Howerton provided digital services and consultation. Eva La Rue and Angela Haag of the Central Nevada Museum and Suzy McCoy served as consultants throughout the project; their participation was essential. Much-deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

All material for the ECHP was prepared with the support of the Esmeralda County Nuclear Waste Repository Oversight Program, funded by the U.S. Department of Energy. However, any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author and the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect the views of Esmeralda County or the U.S. DOE.

ð Robert D. McCracken
2013

INTRODUCTION

Historians generally consider the year 1890 as the close of the American frontier. By then, most of the western United States had been settled, ranches and farms developed, communities established, and roads and railroads constructed. The mining boomtowns, based on the lure of overnight riches from newly developed lodes, were but a memory.

Yet, even in the 2010s, the spirit of the American frontier can still be found in Esmeralda County, Nevada, in the attitudes, values, lifestyles, and memories of area residents.

Esmeralda County was established by an act of the Territorial Legislature of Nevada on November 23, 1861. The first boom camp in the county, Aurora, named after the goddess of dawn of Roman mythology, mushroomed into existence in the early 1860s with a population of at least 5000. The name Esmeralda, Spanish for "emerald," was provided by a member of the party that made the initial discovery of gold at Aurora; the individual probably had some beauty in mindð the term was then a common name for girls with green eyes. Another version is that the name referred to the Gypsy dancer Esmeralda in Victor Hugoôs novel, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame.* Discoveries at Aurora were followed by others at Columbus (1864), Red Mountain/Silver Peak (1864), Gold Mountain (1866), Palmetto (1866), Montezuma (1867), Oneota (1870), Sylvania (1870), and Lida Valley (1871). Goldfield, which sprang to life in 1902, was the last great mining camp of the American West, and one of the greatest gold camps in the history of the world. Along with Tonopah (1900) and Rhyolite (1904), its two sister boomtowns, and several score of

smaller, shorter-lived daughter camps located on the central Nevada desert, Goldfield was the last magnificent flowering of the American frontier.

Between 1903 and 1942, Goldfield produced approximately 7.7 million tons of ore containing more than 4.1 million ounces of gold and over 1.4 million ounces of silver, worth $90 million, mostly when gold was priced at $20 per ounce. Goldfieldôs glory days were from about 1904 until World War I. After approximately 1918, mine production declined to a fraction of what it had been, yet the town lived on. It survived a terrible flash flood in 1913 and a catastrophic fire in 1923 that wiped out a substantial proportion of the townð at least 33 square blocks, by some old-timersô estimates. Another fire in 1924 nearly applied the coup de grâce to the grand lady, but still she persevered.

Much has been written concerning Goldfieldôs prosperous years, but relatively less material is available on the town and its people from the decades following the end of World War I. Much of the history of Esmeralda County is stored in the memories of individuals who are still living.

Aware of Esmeralda Countyôs close ties to the land and our nationôs frontier past, and the scarcity of written sources on local history after 1920, the Esmeralda County commissioners initiated the Esmeralda County History Project (ECHP) in 1993. The ECHP is an effort to systematically collect and preserve the history of Esmeralda County. The centerpiece of the ECHP is a set of interviews conducted with individuals who had knowledge of local history. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then edited lightly to preserve the language and speech patterns of those interviewed. All oral history interviews have been printed on acid-free paper and bound and archived in Esmeralda

County libraries, Special Collections in the James R. Dickinson Library at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, and at other archival sites located throughout Nevada.

The interviews conducted between 1993 and 1994 vary in length and detail, but together they form an unprecedented composite of life in Esmeralda County after 1920. These interviews can be compared to a bouquet: Each flower in the bouquet is uniqueð some are large, others are smallð yet each adds to the total image. In sum, the interviews provide a view of county history that reveals the flow of life and events for a part of Nevadaôs past that has heretofore been largely neglected by historians.

A second set of interviews was initiated in 2011. The goal here was the same as for the interviews collected 20 years earlierð provide a view of Esmeralda County history unavailable elsewhere through interviews with county residents. However, in this series interviews were also conducted with a second goal in mind. Over 97 percent of the land in Esmeralda County is controlled and managed by the federal governmentð more than any other county in Nevada; indeed, in any state outside Alaskað and of the private land approximately 50 percent consists of patented mining claims, leaving little opportunity for community expansion on private land. A large percentage of Esmeralda County residents consequently believe the county is in large measure governed by the federal government as opposed to elected state of Nevada, county, and local officials. Many feel the strong presence of the federal government has the effect of constricting economic opportunity and personal freedom for local residents in many areas of life and would like to see changes made in that arrangement with the transfer of more control to local and state government. Those issues formed part of the focus of these oral histories.

ð RDM
2013

This is Robert McCracken talking to Ben Colvin at his home in Goldfield, Nevada, November 6, 2011.

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Ben, could you state your name as it reads on your birth certificate?

BC: Benjamin James Colvin.

RM: And where were you born?

BC: In Pendleton, Oregon.

RM: Where they make the Pendleton shirts?

BC: Correct. In a hospital just across the street from the Pendleton woolen mills.

RM: And when were you born?

BC: May 30, 1938, at 6:45 a.m.

RM: And tell me your motherôs full name.

BC: Thelma Scroggins Colvin.

RM: Where was she born?

BC: About a mile north of the town of Long Creek, Oregon, right on Long Creek itself. Thatôs about 99 miles south of Pendleton, Oregon, on Highway 395.

RM: Is it cattle country?

BC: Long Creek is; Pendleton is wheat country. All of that Long Creek country is cattle, and there used to be some sheep.

RM: Do you remember when your mother was born?

BC: It was July 12, 1901.

RM: And she grew up in that area? What did her parents do for a living?

BC: I really donôt know. Her grandmother came across the Plains from Independence,

Missouri, in 1876. They first settled near John Day, then the next year they settled just out of Long Creek itself. The Paiute warriors came through that country in 1878, and all those people around Long Creek forted up in what they called the Fort of Long Creek. The Indians started to move north of Burns, Oregon, and in that country. I think they killed one man in Fox Valley, which is just south of Long Creek a ways.

The story goes that when they came through Long Creek, all the people were in that fort. One of the Indians went up to the fort and he asked for some water. They said the only reason he wanted to get into the fort to get some water was to see what they had in there. I think they had very few guns; they didn't have a dang thing to protect themselves with. They didn't let him in and so he went on north. My dad's mother told me that on the river where I grew up, the Middle Fork of the John Day, there were several people– how many, I don't know. But she said they were all forted up in an old hewn two-story log house. The Indians came through and took all the cattle and horses.

If you see that country, you can see there's a lot of rimrock. The Indians told them not to follow them and they went up through the rimrock to the north, and she said the white men said they saw one of the Indians come back and look over the rim to see if anybody was following them. But anyway, they went on out, past Ukiah, Alby, and Battle Mountain, and that's where they had the skirmish out at what they call Battle Mountain, which is about 40 miles south of Pendleton. I've heard that there was just a little ridge separating the Indians from the white men; it wasn't much of a skirmish. But the Indians went on north of Battle Mountain, and I can show you where it's at. There were two men at the south end, Whitaker Flats; it was their homestead. They had, of course, hand-dug a well and they got down in the well. The Indians went in the house and

took all the furniture out and threw it in that well; they didnôt know the white men were in there.

Then the Indians went on out to Pendleton, and they were going to meet up with some other Indians. I might have their names wrong, but I believe it was the Yakima Indians because the Yakimas were on the north side of the Columbia, and they were meeting with the Umatilla Indians. Chief Egan was the ringleader of this bunch that was moving out of Burns and going toward Pendleton, as I understand it. Anyway, the other Indians cut his head off, put it in a gunnysack and threw it down on the courthouse steps in Pendleton and the Indian groups never did get together. But the attempt was 1878.

RM: And your motherôs grandmother was there?

BC: Yes, my motherôs grandmother and her children were there. There were two girls and four boys in the family and about three of them, I guess, had been born when those Indians came through there. My mother wasnôt born until 23 years later.

RM: Her people must have had a strong connection with that land, either farming or ranching.

BC: Yes. My great-grandfather on my motherôs side came out at the same time; they were in the same wagon train. My mother said that her dad said about his dad, the only thing he could do was sing, ñOh, the big red apples in the John Day Valley.ò

RM: Is it famous apple country?

BC: It isnôt, but they can raise fruit there right enough, and thatôs why they picked it. That was what they call the Oregon Trail, the one that the 49ers took from Independence, Missouri. It forks in Idaho, somewhere around where the Malheur River runs into the Snake River by Ontario, Oregon. They took the fork that went up on the Malheur River.

The Oregon Trail went on towards Baker City and La Grande and then over the Blue Mountains to Pendleton, and then down to what is Hermiston and Arlington and the Columbia River. I don't know what they called it, but that's where it forked off, and that's where this wagon train that my grandparents were in went, and that's why they ended up in John Day. Like I said, they were in John Day for a little while, and then they went to Long Creek. And I know they were there in '78, when that Indian thing happened.

This is something that gets me. Everybody says, "I want the country to go back like it was before the white man came. We had all kinds of deer and elk and whatnot running around." Well, my great-grandmother said she thought they were going to starve to death.

RM: You mean her people?

BC: Yes; not the Indians, the white people. Because there just wasn't a damn thing to eat that first winter. Here's another thing that was deceiving to them: They came from Missouri and she told my mother that they had a lot of fruit in Missouri to pick in the fall of the year. They got out to Oregon and there wasn't a darn thing. At that time, there were no orchards and nobody had any gardens, and there was no cattle, there was no game. Don't give me that story that it was full of game, because there wasn't any game; I don't know what they lived on. She said she thought they were going to starve to death. My great-grandmother was probably only about 23 years old when she came in.

But after the winter, they got some seed and planted a garden. And they must've had a few cows with them when they came. Anyway, after that first year, they made it all right. That country is a grass country, bunchgrass. It's real good cattle feed, there's no

question about it.

Now, they have wintersô youôve got to put up hay to feed the cattle through the winter. I donôt know what they did in the winter for sure, unless they went farther to the west down on the John Day River where itôs lower elevation and less snow. Long Creek itself is not real high, only about 3,500 feet elevation. I know just north of where we lived on the river, there was a ridge up there that you had to go over, and then you went down on the Meadowbrook side to North Fork. Thereôs a summit there, the Meadowbrook Summit, that is 4,127 feet, a foot higher than the elevation in Schurz. The difference is in Schurz, you can raise all kinds of alfalfa and gardens. The people in Long Creek had a hell of a time trying to raise a garden.

RM: Because the winters were too rough or the soil was no good, or what?

BC: The temperature is so different. They get late spring frosts that would kill gardens, and thereôs not much irrigation water. There are run-through springs, but not irrigation water, so nobody up there raised any alfalfa at that elevation. They do in Eureka, and I know theyôre pretty high. Iôm always amazed at how much difference there is in what you can grow at this elevation and what you can grow up in Oregon because itôs so far north. And the days up there are a lot shorter in the wintertime.

RM: So you can be more productive down here than up there?

BC: In that one area. Now farther north in Pendleton, itôs great wheat country. Out at Hermiston, itôs row crop production. The alfalfa and cornô hey, you never tasted any better melons than Hermiston melons. [Laughs] But anyway, that area around Long Creek was where they settled.

RM: Okay, now letôs talk about your dad. What was his name?

BC: L. C. Colvin, and he went by ñBud,ò L. C. ñBudò Colvin. His name was Loaren Carl, and he never liked that name.

RM: And when and where was he born?

BC: I think on Skookumchuck Creek, up by Tenino, Washington, on November 19, 1898.

RM: And where did he grow up?

BC: He was six years old when his dad and mother moved into the ranch on the Middle Fork of the John Day, where I grew up. My dadôs father bought the ranch from a guy by the name of Aden Sloan.

RM: How big was the ranch?

BC: Approximately 8,000 acres.

RM: Was that his land, or was it like here, where you donôt own it all?

BC: Iôm talking about deeded land. Then he ran on what they called the reserve. He went over there in 1904, and the Forest Service had just started, or maybe started later. But anyway, he ran cattle in the summertime up on what they called the reserve.

RM: And what was the reserve?

BC: That was government land.

RM: And they would lease the land?

BC: I donôt know, now that I think about it. They must have charged them so much per head.

RM: Like the BLM does here?

BC: I think so. They mustôve had something like that. All I know is that he ran them up there, of course, in the summertime. And how many, I donôt have a clue.

RM: And he would feed them in the winter?

BC: Yes, heôd put up hay to feed them in the winter.

RM: So they were growing hay for themð probably alfalfa?

BC: Maybe a little alfalfa, but most of it was dryland farming, wheat or rye.

RM: You can feed a cow wheat or rye in the winter?

BC: Theyôll eat that or nothing at all.

RM: What happened if they didnôt get a crop? Or did they always get one?

BC: That was the one thing my granddad, my dadôs dad said, that spring always came in that country. It might it not be too good sometimes, but theyôve always had spring. When he was about 15 or 16, he went down on the Cimarron in New Mexico for four or five years and worked on the old original 101 Ranch.

RM: Is that a famous ranch?

BC: From what I understand. My grandfatherôs aunt married a man that was a foreman down there; I think his name was Jones. (They had a son, and he got drug to death when he was about 13 years old; he was hung up in the stirrup.) I think thatôs how he got my grandfather and his brother to go down there.

RM: Oh, how awful.

BC: Yes; I just saw the obituary. So he went down there to work and was there about four or five years, and in about 1890, he came back.

RM: This is your grandfather?

BC: Yes. He was born in 1867. Anyway, he came back, and he would buy cattle, yearlings or two-year olds, and feed them a while, and then his brother would butcher them for the hides and take the meat around and sell it to people.

RM: Was this in the John Day area?

BC: No, this was around the Centralia-Chehalis area in Washington. My dad said that his dad did that for ten years and he made $1,000 a year. That's when he bought the place in Oregon. I don't know how he got from Washington to The Dalles, but he got down there and he bought a colt from somebody there and rode up the John Day River and met Aden Sloan; he'd heard the place was for sale. There was another place out by Pendleton. It was a better ranch, but he didn't figure he had enough money to buy it. That's when he bought that place where we lived.

RM: And so you grew up on that ranch. Did it have a name?

BC: Not to my knowledge.

RM: Clearly, you've got deep roots in ranching.

BC: All the Colvins have always been involved in cattle.

RM: So you grew up with it and you know cows?

BC: I'll keep learning till the day they pat me in the face with a shovel.

RM: What kind of cattle were they running in those days?

BC: They were mostly shorthorn. I don't have a clue what year it was, but my dad told me my granddad went back to Missouri, where his dad, my great-granddad, came from. He saw some Hereford bulls, and he didn't have enough money with him because they cost more than he thought they were going to. I forget who it was that he was buying them from, but that man asked somebody else what kind of a fellow that Colvin was, wondering if his word was good, and the person said yes, it was all right. Anyway, they were Herefords, and he brought them out to the place.

RM: How did he get them out there?

BC: They came in on the railroad and they probably came into Pendleton because thatôs where we had to take our cattleð and they did it from over at Burns, too, because they used to go through that country. Theyôd take them to Pendleton and put them on the railroad. My dad said if a buyer had bought some cattle, people would take them into Pendleton. There was a place just south of there on McKay Creek that had a lot of milkweed. They said if the buyers knew theyôd been on that milkweed the day before, they wouldnôt pay quite as much because for some reason or other it kind of bound them up and so theyôd stay real full for a day or two.

RM: Oh, so they would feed them milkweed to up their weight?

BC: Yes, but the buyers wouldnôt pay as much for them if they knew about it. Itôs a funny thing with that milkweed. We had it there on the river and we had a few milk cows, and we always let them run out there. If they got on that milkweed, you couldnôt drink the milk that day because it was so damn bitter. You had to throw it out or let the calves have it.

RM: The calves would take it?

BC: Yes. We always had a calf on every cow. Another thing was my dad said one time he and his dad or an uncle took some cattle into Pendleton, and of course people were living there half a mile from the stockyards. Those cattle were probably not the gentlest in the world and this one year, several of them jumped over the fence and into a guyôs yard and tore down something. My dad said, ñI looked back and here that guy came a-pedaling his bicycle up there.ò My granddad paid him a few dollars or something for damages.

I donôt see why that didnôt happen more often; it probably did because the cattle

were range cattle, and instead of getting out of the way, people probably were standing out there and listening, and every time theyôd move theyôd spook the cattle, you know.

But then they built a line off the railroad at Pendleton to Pilot Rock, which is about 16 miles south of Pendleton, and the railroad built corrals to hold cattle. I canôt tell you when they did that, but my dad said along in the last of the ô20s, the corrals were falling down. He said it mustôve been about 1930, they fixed them all up new again. Well, about that time the trucks started coming in so they started trucking and never used them. They never used the corral or the railroad spur. It was in the early ô30s when they started trucking.

RM: So the trucks replaced the railroads then?

BC: Because they were more convenient. And in 1933, they finished the highway out to John Day. At first, they would truck them from where we were with a little old truck with an 8 x 15 bed on it, and they would haul six or seven cows. Theyôd go to Pilot Rock, drop them off, and come back. The trucks just kept getting bigger all the time, until they are what they are now.

RM: Thatôs interesting. How did your dad meet your mother?

BC: They went to school together.

RM: In what town would they have gone to school?

BC: You couldnôt call it a townð there was a post office and a grocery store. I canôt remember, but it was three or five miles that she walked to school.

RM: Oh, my lord.

BC: It was three miles anyway, and I canôt tell you how, but the kids had to cross the river down there. The little kids crossed the river by themselves, and I donôt know what

kind of a bridge they had. The school must have been about six miles from the ranch where my dad was. It was called the Ritter School, because thatôs what the post office was called. My dad and his older brother and two older sisters went to another school up there that was about four miles, but they rode horses all the time. I donôt know why, but they started going to school at Ritter. Anyway, my mom and dad went to the Ritter School at the same time, and of course, everybody knew everybody. My mother and my dad lived only about three miles apart.

RM: And then, you grew up on the ranch that had been your grandfatherôs ranch, so you grew up with cows and ranching and the whole thing?

BC: Yes. I guess I was six or seven years old and I was with an uncle who had lived over in Washington. He asked me what my brand was, because about that time my dad and his brother split up their partnership of the ranch. I said the brand is 111 on the left rib and a crop on the left ear and a dock.

RM: Whatôs a dock?

BC: That is what my uncle asked. You cut the bush off the end of a cowôs tail. When they divided up the cattle they had them there in the corral, so they just took a gate cut on them and as they came out, my dadôs brother counted them. Then the ones that were left, my dad didnôt want them getting mixed up, so he cut the bush out of the tail just below the bone; they called it docking their tails. That was because my uncle hadnôt branded his yet so they didnôt know how to tell them apart if they got back together.

I was trying to think the other day, but I mustôve been about three or four. My dad took me up on top of the rimrocks; they had some cows up there. Coming home, I was on this old mare that all us kids learned to ride on. All of a sudden I fell off; my foot hung in

the stirrup. This is what a good kidôs horse isð she just stopped.

RM: Oh, my gosh; you were just hanging there?

BC: Hanging and squalling. My dad didnôt know what happened because I was behind him. The next day he took me somewhere but I was riding in front of him in the saddle. We were going along, and all a sudden I fell asleep. So he knew what had happened the day before, you see. I fell asleep and fell off.

CHAPTER TWO

RM: So you have been working with cows and horses all your life. Now, what motivated your family to move down here? And when did that happen?

BC: I came down here to stay on the 22nd of November, 1968. It started with my uncle and his wife and my cousin. They came down and bought the Hip-O at Five Mile in 1966.

RM: Which part of the Hip-O did they buy? Where was its headquarters?

BC: At Five Mile.

RM: Oh, I see. How did they know about it?

BC: My cousin was reading a paper someplace and saw where the PTP mustôve had it listed for sale.

RM: Who was the PTP?

BC: That was the group that owned it, and they bought it from John Casey. John Casey, if Iôm not mistaken, bought it from the Butler estate after Florence Butler died. Then he sold it to PTP. I canôt rememberð Terry, Phillip, and another oneð there were three men involved and their brand was PTP. Anyway, my cousin Tom Colvin and his dad and mom were in it together. Tom was my uncle, and then Tom, Jr., and we always called him Tommy. Like I said, I think he must have read about them having it for sale. I know Linkletter looked at it.

RM: Art Linkletter? And he eventually bought a different ranch, right?

BC: Yes, Lida.

RM: What did your cousin pay for it, do you know?

BC: It seems like it was around $400,000.

RM: I wonder how much he put down.

BC: I wouldn't have a clue.

RM: What did the Hip-O consist of then, land-wise, and camps and everything?

BC: I can't give you the names of all of them, but he went up to what they call Box Canyon, which is ten or 15 miles north of Highway 6, out where Five Mile is. I'm not sure if his range rights started right there. Anyway, he went through there and then went up to what they call Little Fish Lake– it was in quite a circle up in there in the valley. Then he had some rights for some cattle up on the Forest Service on Table Mountain– not on top, but on the side. And then he came back down, and had everything below Highway 6 down through to the bombing range. They called it Stone Cabin Valley, I think.

RM: And how far down was the bombing range border? It was south of Silver Bow, right?

BC: Yes. There's a spring called Stinking Springs. The boundary is the Mount Diablo Line, but that Mount Diablo Line must not be over 100 or 200 feet south of Stinking Springs.

RM: He didn't go south of the Diablo Line?

BC: His cattle run down there if there was no fence. He had one well that he pumped all the time in there called Dead Horse Well. This is something that if I'd known then what I know now, I would have never came down here.

RM: Oh, really? What was that?

BC: I didn't know it at the time, but the government bought all the water rights on the

bombing range in ô62ô every water right south of the Mount Diablo Line and west of the Kawich Mountains.

RM: Did they buy the rights to keep the people off?

BC: Well, they made a test range out of it. But this is what burns me up, because the real estate guys we were dealing with said they had checked everything about the basin water resources, and they said, ñHereôs all the waters you have.ò It is really important to have those waters. So the water rights were transferred over to us but the government had bought them.

RM: They had bought them and they didnôt put the information on the record?

BC: Not in Carson City. And thereôs no better cattle country than that bombing rangeô I donôt give a damn where you go. Why didnôt they go down where the big dunes are by Amargosa or something if they wanted to put a bombing range in? I agree we have got to have a strong defense and army, but why did they take the best part of the damn country?

RM: Can you name any of the springs and wells where they bought the water?

BC: Thereôs Desert Well, Gold Crater, and what the government calls Well No. One. Well No. Two is whatôs called Jimôs Well. I think they bought all of them, and probably Dead Horse, just to name a few.

RM: So in ô62, they went down and bought up a lot of the stock water rights to keep the ranchers out because if you donôt have water, you canôt graze.

BC: Thatôs right. It all started with World War IIô they had this base out here, the Tonopah Test Range. Then the politicians and bureaucrats came in. It was convenient for themô I think they extended the Tonopah Test Range to the Nevada Test Site. They

extended everything north of Mercury on the Test Site.

RM: I see. Itôs interesting that the Test Site was established in about 1950, but in 1962, they were still buying up wells?

BC: Well, it was a bad lease, but they didnôt have rights in there. There was a class-action lawsuit and it involved Jim Daniels, Joe Fallini, Sr., and it had to have involved the Hip-O. There were two wells that I know ofð one was the Dead Horse Well and the other was the Florence Well, named after Florence Butler. John Casey, I think, might have drilled Dead Horse because somebody told me the driller saw him somewhere near Point Able and he said, ñWhere do you want me to drill this well?ò

And he said, ñOh, out there where that dead horse is, by the road.ò

Andy Anderson was pumping the Florence Well because he bought the 40 Bar from Jim Daniels.

RM: Where was the 40 Bar?

BC: It took in all this area around Goldfield.

RM: Which you eventually got?

BC: That we got.

RM: But he didnôt buy the Hip-O?

BC: No, but when they bought those waters out there, the Hip-O didnôt remove any of their well-pumping equipment. Jim went in and pumped the Florence Well; heôd go in there at midnight and pump it. And later, Andy Anderson was pumping it at midnight.

RM: Because their cows were going down there?

BC: The cows were there. And my cousin Tom was using the Dead Horse Well, I know. He pumped it all for ten years after I came here. One time, Andy Anderson was in

a plane talking with some of the generals from that airbase in Las Vegas, Nellis. He said, ñI rode around all over out there with them in a plane.ò

RM: Why was he in a plane with them?

BC: I donôt know. He said, ñI was talking to them like a Dutch uncle.ò And evidently, they convinced him that he didnôt have any right to pump that well so he hauled all his cows that were around that well down to Freezeout.

RM: Where is Freezeout?

BC: You know where the road takes off and goes to Tolicha Peak about 20 miles north of Beatty? There used to be a windmill sitting there on the open road, and it was half a mile off Highway 95. He hauled all those cows down there and put them where that water is. Thatôs where they were when we came here. I didnôt know there was a problem with the water. We flew all of this country when we were counting cows and we flew all the test range, clear down to what they call Gold Flats and Florence Well. I know there were some cows down there. Like I said, if Iôd known then what I know now, I wouldnôt have bought the ranch. But that was the best country. Gosh darn, thatôs good country out there.

RM: Whatôs good about it?

BC: Thereôs lots of feed. Thereôs Indian rice grass and Guyetta grass, and lots of good browse out thereð white sage, for one. Those cattle did well out there.

RM: So as a rancher with deep roots in ranching, you would say thatôs the best ground you know of for cows?

BC: Yes, Iôd pick that for 300 or 400, 500 head of cattle. Itôs short of water, I agree. Now, O. K. Reed never went below the Mount Diablo Line. I canôt answer how come or why for, but between him and the Kawich Cattle Company, it seemed like they had an

agreement that he just didn't go down south and drill any wells. O. K. Reed's cattle did drift south of the Mount Diablo Line on snow and on ponds that collected rainwater.

RM: Was the Kawich the 40 Bar and O. K. Reed had the land east of there?

BC: Reed had the land east of the Kawich Mountains and he had the land north of the Mount Diablo line. I'd have to show you on a map, but basically, that's where it was. There's what they call Cedar Pipeline, Cedar Spring— Reed had all of that right down through to Quartzsite Mountain, and the Kawich Cattle Company had about nine miles, everything that's on the Test Site out here east of Goldfield. You can go over in the Cactus Range, and there's Cactus Spring, Alkali Spring, an unnamed spring, Sulfide Well, Antelope Spring. Those are all in the Cactus Range, plus they had Desert Well and Gold Crater.

RM: And those are the springs that are in the primo area that the government bought the water rights for?

BC: Right. Then when Jim Daniels bought from Floyd Lamb, he went six miles over from Florence Well and drilled a well of his own. You see, it was legal at that time because it was beyond the three-mile radius.

I understand that A. M. Johnson was the man who bought that Kawich Cattle Company in 1929, and he or his heirs had control over it until about 1947 or '48.

RM: Was that the Johnson who supported Death Valley Scotty?

BC: Yes.

RM: So Johnson had the Kawich Cattle Company.

BC: Yes, after Salisbury. Salisbury was the secretary of the Kawich Cattle Company and he's the one that had those wells and springs that I mentioned in the Cactus Range.

Salisbury was in there from about 1915 or ô16 until about 1929, and then Johnson came along and bought it. I think it was Johnsonôs wife who wanted to be the rancher (I read somewhere that she was talking to Jim Daniels at one time or another about ranching). Anyway, Johnson was a businessman out of Chicago. I did some title researchð he sold it to another guy for about one day and then he got it back again. And so it went from about 1930, Iðll say, until about 1947. He must have died in ô45 or ô46 and Floyd Lamb bought the Kawich Cattle Company from Johnsonôs estate. Then Jim Daniels came along and bought everything on the west side of the Kawich Mountains and everything south of the Mount Diablo line from Floyd Lamb.

Jim went down and took in Pillar Spring and up on Black Mountainð or Timber Mountain, they call it. It also took in the well in Monte Cristo Wash. When Jim bought all of this, he went over to the east of Florence Wellð I call it Well No. One, but the government called it No. Two. He went over about six-and-a-half or seven miles and drilled another well, and they called it Jimôs Well, or Deep Well. That was not too far south of Nixon Lake. I donôt know if anybody had a water right on that or not, but I know that his cows watered there. But, you see, it took in all of that country.

RM: And a lot of that is on the bombing range now?

BC: Itôs all on the bombing range.

RM: So the bombing range boundary is close to the Mount Diablo Line?

BC: Yes, hereôs where the boundary of the bombing range was. [Showing a map] The Mount Diablo Line is the northern boundary of the bombing range.

RM: So it takes in Mud Lake?

BC: It takes in a lot of Mud Lake.

RM: Were the wells all dug by O. K. and Ed Reed?

BC: No.

RM: And the bombing range crosses the Kawich Range and then it came south.

BC: South to here. A whole bunch of this area is bombing range, and hereôs Quartzsite Mountain. They call this a dry lake on the map and all the natives call it Nixon Lake.

RM: And itôs near Salisbury Well. And thatôs named after the guy who was part of the Kawich Cattle Company?

BC: As far as I know, it is Salisbury Tank; there is no well. There are three different spellings. Hereôs John Salsberry, President of the Kawich Cattle Company, S-A-L-S-B-E-R-R-Y. And hereôs Saulsbury Wash, and thatôs S-A-U-L-S-B-U-R-Y. And then weôve got Salisbury Tank, S-A-L-I-S-B-U-R-Y. Take your pick.

RM: I figure they canôt spell, but maybe Iôm wrong.

BC: Theyôve got a Salisbury steak up at the Mizpah now.

RM: [Laughs] Well, the bottom line here is, the bombing range has taken up a huge chunk of good land.

BC: This is Point Able, the main gate going into the Test Site. This is called Reed Ranch Well No. One, and thatôs altogether different; itôs just outside the boundary. Itôs confusing. But anyway, here is what Jim Daniels bought.

RM: On the map, it looks like it ran down the west side of the Kawich Range.

BC: Yes. Hereôs the Esmeraldaï Nye County Line, and this says Willow Spring right there. This is what they called the Kawich Road, coming out of Goldfield.

RM: And it goes over to the Kawich Range, which is off limits now, right?

BC: Yes. This was the Kawich Ranch range, and all of this right down through here.

This was George McKennaôs.

RM: Around Goldfield and to the south of Goldfield?

BC: Correct. He had a dairy about four miles east of Goldfield, and then he started running range cattle.

RM: When Tom Colvin bought the Five Mile, his land didnôt come down this way, or did it? Where was his range?

BC: Here, between him and Pine Creek Ranch. If you can draw an imaginary line right here to about two miles west of the Reed Ranch there.

RM: Oh, he ran clear down south of there.

BC: When we had that hard winter in ô69, all of these cattleð Cliffordôs, ours, anything that I have hereð all went down on Gold Flat. This is the Cactus Range. And Arcularias at Pine Creek, if they had anything up here, they went down there, too. There was no fence there then.

RM: Going back to the map, thereôs the 40 Barð how would you describe it vis-à-vis Tom Colvinôs place?

BC: He had rights in here. This is where, I think, hard feelings came about. O. K. Reed stayed above the Mount Diablo Line.

RM: I donôt think Reed did stay above the line. He was all over here.

BC: Did he have any water rights in there? He had water over here on Cedar Spring and Wild Horse and if he didnôt, why did he go to Pine Creek Well and South Well Nos. One, Two, Three?

RM: Eventually, he went clear over here into Lincoln County, into whatôs now Area 51. But remember, O.K. Reed was out of there by 1940.

BC: Thatôs when Jim Butler bought it. Now, Butlerôs cattle ran down in here because this was the headquarters of his ranch, Hawes Canyon.

RM: With the No. One well?

BC: Yes. But when John Casey came in there, he burned that down, they told me.

RM: Is that right? He burned down the buildings at the ranch headquarters at Hawes Canyon? Why did he do that?

BC: So he wouldnôt have to pay taxes on it, maybe. I donôt know. Jack Hollowayôs brother-in-law was a cow boss here for Florence Butler. I know this was kind of their headquarters when they were out there. They ran down in here, and this is where the defugalty, the feud, came in because Florence went down here and drilled that well. I mean, it created hard feelings.

BC: Johnson owned all of this.

RM: Youôre circling this whole area south of, basically, Mud Lake, going clear down toward Pahute Mesa and over toward the west side of the Kawich.

BC: And Pillar Spring is down in here someplace.

RM: Down in Pahute Mesa?

BC: Well, south of there. But at that time, it was legal to drill that well because there wasnôt any other water within six miles. So yes, when Florence Butler was here, she was using this range that exists down in here.

I donôt know if Johnson had any cattle there at the time or not. As I said, I think his wife was the one that wanted to be the rancher. And then after he passed away, Floyd Lamb bought this, which went through the Kawich Cattle Company, and he immediately sold it to Jim Daniels. Jim then drilled Well No. Two on Gold Flat. As I told you, we

always called it Deep Well or Jimôs Well. And then, there was the big defugalty between Jim Daniels and John Caseyð John drilled Dead Horse Well within the boundary of the Kawich Cattle Company. It made for hard feelings.

RM: Iôm sure it did. Now, getting back to the government coming in and buying up these well water rights and not even filing their purchases with the state, you did a title search, right? You would have done a title search?

BC: The realtors went to Carson City and got all of the water rightsð the ones here, and Desert Well and so forth.

RM: Right about where?

BC: Youôve got Cactus Spring and Alkali Spring in the Cactus Range and Sulfide Well, Antelope Springð and all these rights have always been with the Kawich Cattle Company.

RM: I see. To get back to Tom Colvin, what do you think motivated him to leave Oregon and come to Nevada?

BC: I canôt answer that.

RM: Did he keep his place up there?

BC: Yes. Heôs still up there and heôs out here, too. Heôs got the Five Mile, also.

RM: And did your involvement come from you talking to him and heôs saying hey, this is pretty cool, or what?

BC: That goes back to my dad. My dad and I came down here just looking around in ô67, I guess it was. Youôve got to understand, my dad could ride a horse as long and as far as anybody and do it as easy as you and I could ride in a pickup. The only way anybody would ride farther is if they had a tougher horse, and that was very unlikely. He

liked the idea of having to do everything on horseback with no fences. He just loved that sort of thing, and he didn't like it in Oregon.

RM: Even though he'd grown up there?

BC: My dad heard about this place down here after Tom bought Five Mile. We stopped and looked at a place up by Austin on the way down, and then we came on down and visited with Tom.

RM: Was Tom giving you good reports?

BC: On his place, yes. As far as this place, Jim Daniels died in September of 1966 and the bank ran his ranch, the 40 Bar, for a year. Andy Anderson bought it from the bank in 1967 in, I'll say November. It was the next September, in '68, that they said Andy was going to put this place up for sale. We came down and looked at a lot of it in September of '68, and I don't know why or how come or why for, Andy all of a sudden said he don't want to sell. Then a month and a half or two months later, he said he wanted to sell. So we came down and, like I said, I came down to stay on November 22, 1968. We made the deal December 31, 1968.

RM: What all did you acquire?

BC: Everything that Jim Daniels and/or Andy Anderson had, meaning all the water rights and the cattle and brands and all the personal and real property.

RM: Plus the BLM leases? How many deeded acres did it include?

BC: About 550,000 acres. There were 520 acres of deeded property.

RM: All in one place or scattered around?

BC: Basically all in one place.

RM: Where was that?

BC: On Montezuma Mountain, just west of Goldfield. I forget how itôs split up, but there was a timber claim. Jim bought that back in the ô50s. The BLM land was a Section 15 lease.

RM: What is that?

BC: The government had x amount of acres, and they would lease it to you for x amount of dollars. It amounted to several mils per acre, I think, because on this place, the lease was about $4,100 or something like that a year.

RM: Thatôs a lot, isnôt it?

BC: Well, itôs pretty good. Lida was the same way.

RM: Where they would lease to you?

BC: They leased acres and you could run one cow or a thousand.

RM: Oh, they didnôt have restrictions?

BC: You had the right to graze because you had the water rights. Thatôs why I say this is a water-based lease instead of a land base. I think they talked to Jim and told him that he had to have some land in order to keep this lease. Well, he had that timber claim up there, and there isnôt a damn thing you can run on it if thereôs no water. Like I say, a Section 15 is a water base. The water is your base property, not what you can run. Itôs not like a Section 3. Up north, those are all Section 3.

RM: And what is a Section 3?

BC: You have to have patented land in order to run your cattle on the government land because they figure that youôll be off of the government land for x amount of days and on private ground instead. Now, thatôs my understanding of the way it works.

RM: So the bottom line here is that there are different kinds of leases on the federal

property. Is that right?

BC: I guess you would say that. There's something else– the reason they call it a Section 15. In '68, all the Section 15s went to an animal unit month, AUM, basis. An AUM is the feed a cow and calf will eat in a month. Before, Section 3 was an AUM basis but Section 15 wasn't.

They charged $4,200 to lease that because at that time, the AUM was cheaper than the Section 15. It was about $700 or $800 cheaper if you went with the AUMs at the time because I think they charged 30 cents or 33 cents per AUM. Then in '69, as I said, they went to an AUM basis on the Section 15.

RM: And yours had been a lot of Section 15?

BC: They still called it a Section 15 lease, but they were charged per AUM as a Section 15 lease. It was so many mils per acre– I forgot exactly what that was.

RM: When you bought the 40 Bar, how many acres of leased land did you have?

BC: It was about 550,000. We ran over all of this area out in here, including a bunch of Death Valley Monument on the Nevada side– we ran up in the Grapevine Hills.

RM: You were there?

BC: There was no way of keeping them out of there. There was no fence.

RM: So you went down beyond Sarcobatus Flat?

BC: Oh, yes. My range goes down to where the Beatty airport is; the south end of my range is where the Bikini Ranch is now.

RM: That was on the border of the Test Site, between Highway 95 and the Test Site?

BC: Yes. To the west it went up into the Grapevine Mountains.

RM: Is that good feed up there?

BC: It's a lot better than the bottom is down there. That's where Strozzi had a place, Strozzi Ranch. Then the Park Service just went in and told him to get the hell out of there.

RM: He didn't have a legal right to be there?

BC: Yes, he had water rights there. That doesn't matter. They took it over. And I don't think they compensated him for any of that.

RM: You had the Bullfrog Hills, didn't you?

BC: Oh, yes. I have a water right in there.

RM: Does your lease take in Sarcobatus Flat?

BC: Yes, some of it.

RM: So you probably go up to Angel's Ladies and to Shady Lady?

BC: Just across the highway from that.

RM: And you go over against the Grapevines?

BC: Over against the Death Valley National Monument. I go, let's say, on the east side of Death Valley National Monument in Nevada, and around and on the north side of the monument close to the Esmeralda and Nye County line.

RM: When does it spring back east?

BC: You know that telephone brick station house down on 95 on Sarcobatus Flat?

RM: Yes, I do.

BC: It's just south of Monte Cristo Wash. Right there the line goes east and west on the west side of the highway, between me and Lida.

RM: Okay, but you don't go north of that line on the west side of 95?

BC: No.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: How does a guy patrol his cattle? I mean, itôs such a vast country.

BC: [Laughs] You just go every day. In this country, thereôs no limits to where those cows can go. Basically, it depends on the time of year. You go by where your waters are. It depends on the terrain, but in the summer if you go out two to three miles and make a big circle, youõll get 98, 99 percent of them. In the winter theyõll go ten, 12 miles, or whatever.

RM: When theyôre getting snow?

BC: Snow or cool or cold weather. Theyõll go two miles in the summertime when itôs hot, and then theyôve got to came back to drink. If itôs cool, theyõll stay out two days or longer. You might see the neighborôs cows over here and theyôre supposed to be out on the flat about 12 to 14 miles from that water. So theyôve came that far, but I know they were turned loose out on the flat. Iôve seen the neighbors up here just north of Tonopahð those cows were going ten miles to water and back in one day.

RM: They were walking 20 miles?

BC: Round trip, yes. That was in the spring of the year, like April. But donôt set a limit. This is the thing Iôm trying to get through to the judgeð or Iõd like to, in Wayne Hageôs case. He keeps reading that Wayne has 50 feet on each of ditch right of way. Well, thatôs not for grazing, thatôs for maintenance. Because when you get a water right from the state engineerôs office, that doesnôt set a limit to how far those cattle will go. You just get it for x amount of cubic feet per second to water x amount of cows. And that means you can take in two, three, four, five milesð whatever it is. You have all of that

area that surrounds the water. The judge keeps mentioning a limit all the time, and there is no limit. And now, a lot of the ranges are fenced. The ranches' exterior boundaries are fenced.

RM: That's expensive.

BC: Well, the highway is pretty well fenced and you've got natural boundaries. It's like over here— the Kawich Range was kind of a boundary for the whole basin to the west. You get up north here and you've got the Toiyabes— the Pine Creek Ranch on the west side, and then Table Mountain and the others on the other side. There is no definite boundary for how far a cow can go; you just keep them within your range as much as you can.

RM: And basically you knew all the waters in this huge area where you could range your cows, didn't you? You knew where every water hole was.

BC: Yes. I didn't go where there wasn't any water or where my cows weren't supposed to be because they just didn't go there.

RM: So you're not looking for cows in every nook and cranny on your place. You're looking where there's access to water.

BC: Yes. And there's another little thing: When you look at this country, it looks flat. If it's real windy and cold, you might just as well stay in the house because the cows are either lying down or in a hole so you can't see them.

RM: No kidding— they lie down to get out of the wind? I didn't know that.

BC: Yes, or they get behind a dirt bank or something. There are these cut banks, like that one over there, facing the south. If there's a bunch of snow, the cows can be there for what looks like four or five days, from the manure that's piled up. There's not many trees

in this country, but theyôll stand in the shade of a power pole and face the sun; then when itôs cold, theyôll get broadside and absorb all the heat that they can.

After I came here, on February the 18th, 1969, it started snowing. It snowed for three days and two nights or two nights and three days. They closed the highway up here at the summit in Goldfield and it snowed in Beatty and then it ended up as rain in Beatty. It washed the road out from Hot Springs down south clear down past Beatty. Those cattle over in Stone Cabin Valleyð thatôs everything between these mountains and this side of Kawichð went down to Gold Flat.

RM: So youôre saying that when the weather was real bad, the cows would head down Stone Cabin Valley and all through that country down toward Gold Flat. Theyôd go down as far as Stonewall on the east side of Stonewall? Is it milder there?

BC: Oh, yes. Not on top, but down in the valley. Theyôd just drift. They wouldnôt do it every year but when they get a storm like the one Iôm talking about, there were several thousand head of cattle down there on Gold Flat.

RM: How do those cows know to do that?

BC: Itôs instinct. This is the problem with fencesð the cows canôt drift if you have a lot of fences. Theyôre not going to go where itôs colder if they can help it. And generally speaking, at a lower elevation, the snowôs not going to be as deep. Thatôs as long as thereôs a way out. They can get caught behind a mountain or something.

Thereôs another thing about this country, as compared to up in Oregonð thereôs a lot more sun. Thatôs the reason a cow can live and survive in this country, where they canôt up in that Oregon country.

RM: Up there they need more to keep warm?

BC: They need heat, yes. Down here, theyôll be bone thin but theyôll live and make it. Like I say, that sun [gives them something].

RM: Itôs fascinatingð you know so much about running cows on the desert.

BC: Youôve got to look at it from a cowôs point of view. Donôt look at it from a humanôs point of view because theyôre all wet; most of them donôt understand. Hereôs somethingð these cows are pretty trotty.

RM: What does that mean? They would run?

BC: When I first came here, they would run when they saw you. I donôt know how come or why for, and they got me doing the same. For instance, they fenced the highway out here, and I found that those cows, that first year, would jump that fence. Theyôll stand flat-footed and jump a four-wire barbed wire fence.

RM: A cow can do that?

BC: These did. They were real athletic.

RM: I had no idea.

BC: Also, I found out that if I drove them down past a gate and then opened the gate and drove them back, they wouldnôt see the gate. I donôt know what it was, but they couldnôt see it. If I got ahead of them first and opened the gate and then drove them up there, generally they would go through the gate. A cow has to see that gate and see it open before sheôll go through it. Hereôs another thing: You read their earsð their ears are where theyôre looking.

RM: Their ears are pointing to where theyôre looking?

BC: A cow canôt roll their eyes in their head, but they can see this way and this way.

RM: Side vision.

BC: They can see, but wherever that ear is pointed is where theyôre concentrating. If itôs pointing over here, theyôre concentrating over here.

RM: So the ear is the key to what theyôre focusing on.

BC: I think it is. And another thingð in this country, people usually try to drive them too far too fast. I drove them six, eight miles just to brand them. Up in Oregon, from Mount Vernon to John Day is eight miles. You wouldnôt drive a cow from Mount Vernon to John Day just to brand them. They are fuller cowsð I mean, theyôve got a bigger paunch on them and probably are in better shape, generally speaking. But these damn things down here, Iôve seen them so thin theyôd have to stand sideways twice to make a shadow, but they could trot for 20 miles.

And itôs funny. Now, I like cattle with a little ear on them down here because I think they travel better. Itôs the way theyôre built; maybe theyôre a little leggier, and they arenôt quite so heavy muscled. And another thing, it seems that they really hang onto their calves better.

RM: Theyôre better mothers?

BC: I think they are, yes. Up in Oregon weôve had all Herefords. My dad was a staunch Hereford man. Theyôre good cattle, and I know we trailed the cows and calves up the river every spring. We were on a county road right by the river and weôd have to stop every couple hours and let them mother up because the dang calves would want to get in the back end, and the cows that were in the front wouldnôt try to get back to their calves. I donôt know if the calves couldnôt or wouldnôt or didnôt want to keep up with the cows. So youôd have to stop and mother them up again.

RM: They get too far apart?

BC: Well, you can't drive a young calf by itself – it's like trying to drive a wet noodle up a wildcat's ass. They'll run right back under you, around you, or over you to double around. You've got to keep them with the cow; they just have to follow the cow. Down here, it seems like the calves stay pretty close with the cows. I don't know if it's the difference in the area or what, but ours in Oregon were Hereford cows and these here have a little bit of every breed in them.

Some of them had a little more Hereford or a little something. Some of them were black but they weren't Angus. They had horns, and I don't know what they were. I think – and I've thought about it a lot – that they all started from George McKenna out here. He ran a dairy. He started in Tonopah and Goldfield and he brought milk into town. Then he got some range cattle. I wouldn't be surprised if most of these cows didn't originally come from his dairy cows.

RM: Where was his operation?

BC: That would be at what they call Laughlin Well. It's about three or four miles east of Goldfield right beside the Kawich Road.

RM: How far back does that dairy go?

BC: To 1906, I think.

RM: It goes back to the beginning, pretty much.

BC: Yes, it had to have been. I don't think he would have had much of a dairy until they got the railroad in here in order for him to have hay. He had water out there; there's a well. But I just can't imagine that he got very much milk out of the cows unless he had some hay.

RM: And he was selling milk in Goldfield and Tonopah?

BC: He started in Tonopah and then he came over here. I can't think of the other guy– it was McKenna and somebody else. They were together in Tonopah. George McKenna sold out to Chris Dahlstrom in about 1946 or '47. That's the way Chris Dahlstrom got a lot of his cows– he bought the range cattle and the water rights from McKenna.

RM: But McKenna was running the dairy cattle plus some range cattle?

BC: To start with. I bet the dairy didn't last until the '20s, and then I think he went into the range cattle. I heard Dahlstrom's son, Hank, say that he used to go out to Desert Well and the Florence Well and get his cows and drive them back in here by himself. I just don't think Johnson had any cattle the last few years because Chris didn't have any water rights out there. That's a gray area for me because nobody around now can tell me for sure, and I haven't got anything on paper.

RM: I know I keep asking you this, but coming down here was such a big switch for you. How did you feel about it?

BC: It's a funny thing– when I was getting ready to came down here, my dad never said very much and I didn't have a clue what it was like. I mean, I'd been over it in a plane and an automobile and stuff. He said, "How do you think you'll like it down there?" [Laughs] I didn't have a clue. I'd never been away from the area in Oregon except to go Pendleton to go to school.

I've got to admit, for a while it was spooky. It was such a damn big country, you know. Up in Oregon– and I've said this a million times– if you can see a hill over there, you can drive a cow to it in an hour or two. Down here, if you see a hill over there someplace, it's liable to take you a couple days to drive a cow to it. I'll say it was kind of

a funny feeling; I wasn't used to such a big open space.

Another thing that I noticed— I was out about ten miles away one evening and I wasn't getting any cows. I was on horseback, but I had the truck, too. Up in Oregon, even if the moon isn't shining, you get on those ridges, and you can see pretty well for a little bit. Down here, it's blacker than the ace of spades— you can't see your hand in front of your face if the moon isn't shining. I learned right then that you want to get back to where you're going, or figure on camping where you're at, because you can't see to travel horseback at night.

RM: That must have been really strange. Did your dad still own the ranch in Oregon?

BC: Oh, yes.

RM: And he didn't come down with you? Did he have any sons or daughters that stayed with him up there?

BC: I've got a brother and he stayed up there.

RM: Is he still there?

BC: Yes.

RM: And the ranch is still in the family?

BC: Yes. Half of it's in mine and half in my brother's.

RM: So you still have interests there. Were there ever times after you came down here that you thought, "I screwed up?"

BC: It's a funny thing. I don't know how to explain it, but it must've kind of grown on me or something. For one thing, we're in the same place year-round and it's hard to get around to all of it. It kept me going all the time. I didn't have much time to think about anything else, but I wanted to keep those cattle branded up. I worked with Tom Colvin

and Wayne Hage and those guys. Wayne has got 700-some thousand acres, but in the wintertime theyôre down on one section, which is 300,000 acres, and in the summertime theyôre bunched up more, Iôll say.

RM: And yours are scattered.

BC: Yes, on 500,000, 600,000 acresô they were running over a million acres.

RM: Wow.

BC: I had to go all the time. And I made some big mistakes. I really liked to wean the calves in the fall, but a big mistake I made was Iôd feed them for a month or two, then Iôd turn them out. And generally I put them in a different area than what they came from. But instead of driving them, or opening them up when they came out of the trailer, Iôd just turn them out where the water was, or I liked to turn them out where there were some more cattle.

It never dawned on me for a long time, but the sonofabitches, you couldnôt drive them. I donôt know why, but if you would hold them up when they were out there, and then run into them a month or a year later, you could hold them up. I figured if I could get them in a corral, that would qualify them as milking calves, but that wasnôt really the truth.

Then I started unloading them out of the trailer and holding them up. By hold them up, Iôm talking about riding around them so they wouldnôt run. Then I started driving them towards the water where I wanted to put them, and theyôd start to trot, of course. But I got them so they would either stop or turn when I was in front of them. Pretty soon, I got them to where I could ride along beside them or trot, or whatever it was, and they would just walk. I didnôt want them to run because they get hot; and if they

get hot, you might as well throw them away because they act like they're plum goofy. I mean, if you've got ten head, they'll go 11 different directions.

So you watch them, and when they start slobbering a little bit, you hold them up. A cow doesn't really like to run the way a horse does. They will run and they can run, but they're walkers. But anyway, I did that and then when I got them where I wanted to put them on the water, they would drink.

That's the No. 1 thing— you can run them through water up to their bellies, but if they don't drink, they won't come back to the water. I know with my dad, if we put cows in another pasture or something, we always put them on the water. I didn't realize that until I got to fooling around with the cows down here. Like I say, I'd drive those yearlings, after they were weaned, about four miles and put them on water, and they'd always go back to it.

RM: Is this true for a calf or a cow, too?

BC: Calf, cow, horse, whatever.

RM: They've got to drink to get a sense of that's where the water is?

BC: I can't explain it, but I dumped some out here at Alkali once on the water. They ran down through; it was muddy, but it was water. About two and a half, three months later, they ended up at Gabbs. You know how far that is?

RM: They went clear up to Gabbs?

BC: I should've known better than to let them run through that water. Up in Oregon I had a mare and a colt, and I took her up and put her up on that rimrock, and I remember I led her up to the water, and there was a watering trough. I mean, there was a little mud down below the trough. I took the halter off of her, let her go, and went back to the ranch

house. There was a gate that was about half a mile underneath the hill and I went back up there about two days later, and there she was. The damn fool had been down in that corner all that time, and didn't have sense enough to go to the water.

RM: So it's the same with horses.

BC: Same with horses. I've thought about it, and I've noticed up there we have a lot of these little canyons with a little water in them; when you drive the cattle across them, I've thought, "Those damn things, anyway! It's only been a quarter of a mile and they just got a drink back there, but they get another drink here," maybe just a little sip. And I'm wondering if that isn't what it was. They get it in their head that they know there's water there, and then they can come back to it. Like I say, I'll keep learning about cattle and horses until they pat me in the face with a shovel.

One time at Willow Spring, I drove some weaned yearlings about seven miles up to the water and put them on that water. A day or so later, I went down there and saw their tracks where they'd came back down the road. They went around this way and hit the fence and came back this way. It was about 20 miles around there, but they came back to where they had watered a day or two before.

But after I started doing that, I was driving some more of them going up this road, and there were some on the other side. I drove the cows I was with right through them and they just stood there and looked at me. And before, they would have taken off and run like heck. The next year, I was doing the same thing again, and they were down here by the sewer ponds— there were half a dozen or a dozen. They were feeding down there. And this one steer, he was probably a year and a half, coming two years old, he put an old fish hook in his tail and his head went up, it was as if to say, "Hey, you son of a guns,

come on! We got to get to running!ò Well, they didnôt do a darn thing. They stood there and looked at me and I was driving some cows, and he waited and looked, and pretty soon, as if to say, ñAw, the hell with you,ò his tail went down and his head went down. It was just like youôd stuck a needle in a balloon and let all the air out. He just stood there and I never had another bit of trouble with him. But if one of them would have run, he would have run with it. But before that, theyôd always run like hell and you had to run around them to head them off.

When you have cows out here, they have to get acclimated, and it takes a while. I like to wean my calves and bring them in and feed them hay when they're calves. Then when they are eight or ten years old or real weak, I can bring them in and feed them hay and they will eat hay as soon as I feed it to them. If they have never eaten any hay, they won't eat hay. After Iôve fed them here, I turn the bull calves out and they donôt have to work or anything, they just follow the cows around and they get to know the countryð where the feed is, where the water is. So by the time they get old enough to breed, they're kind of acclimated, and they do pretty well.

RM: They wonôt eat hay if theyôre not used to it?

BC: You can feed them the best hay in the country and theyôll dang near starve to death before theyôll eat hay. That really got me the second year I was here when it was so dry. Iôd bring them in and put them in the corral and they wouldnôt eat. Thatôs why I always wean them off of the cows and then feed them hay.

The first or second year I was here, I shipped about a four-year-old steer up to Oregon. My brother said he got off the truck and down the chute and he went out and took a mouthful of grass and spit it out. He didnôt know what it was.

CHAPTER FOUR

RM: Can you think of some instances where government policy, wanting to build a wilderness or a national forest or make a change, affected your business and your ability to function?

BC: The way the bureaucrats in the government are working, I think theyôre putting all the ranchers out of business.

RM: You mean the ranchers on public land? Or all of them?

BC: Youôve got big government making rules and regulations even for people who are on private ground; they are making the rules and regulations to fit themselves. And 50 or 60 years ago, I think the bureaucrats who worked for the Forest Service and the BLM were more on, Iôd say, the livestock peopleôs side. But here in the last 20 to 30 years, theyôve turned. One reason is there are so many environmentalists out there that are running the show; they outnumber the ranchers ten to one, 20 to one, or whatever it is. So the bureaucrats listen to them because this is where their money is coming from, where the votes are coming from. I call it fee land, but, most everybody calls it public land or government land.

I get so disgusted with the bureaucrats saying, ñOh, weôre going to save this for future generations. We want to have it for our childrenôs children to look at.ò Itôs the biggest lie that ever came down the pike, I think. For instance, right now theyôre having a heck of a time up there in Elkoð the Forest Service wants to close a bunch of roads up there. And of course there are some people that donôt want them to close it because the ranchers have got cattle running out there, and youôve got the hunters that want to hunt.

The Forest Service said, ñWe arenôt going to close all of them. There are just some of them theyôre going to close.ò Well, that is true, but if I canôt get out there as a rancher, I canôt take care of the cows, the hunters arenôt going to go out there, either.

And theyôve got so many rules and regulations. If you get a foot or two feet off the right of way road, theyôll give you a ticket and youôve got to make two trips to Reno and go before a judge. Pretty soon, youôre going to say, ñI donôt care about going out there.ò I mean, it isnôt really worth it. Iôm talking about the people that want to go out there and maybe camp or hunt or something like that. And if they donôt go, the kids arenôt going to go. The kids say, ñWell, Iôm not interested in that. Iôm just not going to go.ò Pretty soon everybodyôs going to be off of there and then theyôre going to close more roads. Or they close them off because theyôve got an endangered plant or something and they donôt want it torn up. They say theyôre saving it for future generations. I think itôs BS. I think they want everybody out of this rural country, and to put them in the big cities where they can control them better.

I tried to get along with them. Iôve paid my dues, paid my grazing fees, and as far as I knew I was doing everything right, trying to be a good guy. And they came up with this thingð the first thing they did was this range management plan. Where the range was overgrazed, on the map it was painted in red. My place looked like somebody stubbed his toe on a five-gallon bucket of red paint because the whole damn thing was red. I wrote a letter and I talked to, at the time, the state director, and I said, ñThose wild horses are eating me out of house and home down there.ò The director of the BLM said the BLM doesnôt have the money to gather the horses. Elko, Humboldt, and Eureka have all the money.

The next time they said, ñWell, we can't do anything. We don't know who's eating that feed out there, whether it's the horses or whether it's the cows.ò

In 1996, I took a 150-head non-use. After I moved my cattle out in 1990, I thought, ñThose damn horses, they can do whatever they want to with them.ò In 1988, they counted over 1,300 head of horses and burros on my allotment and it was only permitted for 908 head of cows. And the BLM said they didn't know how many horses and burros there were on my allotment in 1971, when the Wild Horse and Burro Act went into effect.

RM: So there were a lot more horses and burros than cows on your allotment in 1988?

BC: Yes, and there weren't supposed to be any. They said you're supposed to have x number head of cows; there was no mention of horses and burros. I'll bet there were 2,000 head of those things. That was in '88. In '86, I took off 150 head of cows. In 1990, the BLM removed some horses off my allotment. This was the first time the BLM took any horses off my allotment. From the time that damn Wild Horse and Burro Act went into effect until 1990, they never removed one horse or burro off of my ranch. I'd ask them, and they say, ñWell, we don't have the money. Elko County's got all the money.ò Or Lander County. Or Eureka. Everybody else has the money, but we don't have the money. And then they said, ñWell, we can't tell who's eating the feed out there, if it's the horses or the burros.ò

When I shipped my cattle out in 1990, I thought, ñI'll just fix you so-and-sos, and we'll see what happens.ò Ten days after I shipped the last load out, they started gathering horses. They didn't remove very many, but they did remove some of them.

Then I think the next year, or two years later, they removed a few more. In '95 we

had a real good year, then ð97 was a bad year again. I think in ð97 they were out here. And I forgot how many they took off right out here, east of Goldfield; it was like 600 head. There wasnôt enough water for but 150 head.

The people in town, some of them, were complaining about the horses dying out there. The government people wouldnôt listen to me, but they listened to them. I was up talking to the area manager, and I said, ñHow long is it going to be before you start gathering those horses?ò

He said, ñWe canôt possibly get started until Novemberò (this was about the 17th of July).

And the guy from town that was with me said, ñItôs going to look pretty damn bad on 20/20 and some of those other TV shows where the horses are falling over dead.ò I donôt know if that had anything to do with it, but ten days after I was there, they were gathering horses and burros off of my range. At that time I think they gathered 600 or 700 head of horses east of Goldfield. When they had gathered them before, they put everything back on the range that was eight or nine years old and olderð this was their way of managing it. But this time, they shipped everything that they gathered in the corrals. It made a heck of a difference.

They took the weaker ones to Palomino Valley. They took some of the ones that they thought were stronger, stouter, in better shape to Ravenswood, up north of Austin, and took some over by Rachel, somewhere in that area, and they turned them out. A bunch of the ones they took to Ravenswood died up thereð they were trying to get back down here. They said they died up along that fence on Highway 50. I know that fall, I saw one down on the Reese River, and that was just about the poorest dang horse I ever

saw still walking.

Itôs not that Iôm so smart, but those guys are supposed to be experts. They dumped them on the range up there and the horses didnôt know where in the hell anything was. Like I told you, if the horse or cow doesnôt drink out of a spring or something, they donôt know where itôs at. So they didnôt know where they were, but they were coming back to Goldfield.

And the ones they dumped over by Rachel, I think came back on the Test Site. They were losing horses out there, colts and maybe the older ones. They went out there and gathered all the colts off of the mares. That sounds like a good deal on paper, but what are the damn mares going to do? Just as soon as they pull the colts off, theyôre going to breed again, so youôve got the same problem over again the next year.

RM: What do you make of the mania for saving the wild horses?

BC: Theyôre feral horses. They all came from the horses that ranchers and miners brought into this country. Farther north, and maybe here too, back in the early 1900s or before, the government gave the ranchers what they called remount studs to breed to their mares so they could sell the colts to the army. And that was a good deal for the governmentð the ranchers raised them and then they sold them back.

Again, people have got the wrong conceptionð they think the horses will live forever. You might not have seen it, but I wrote a piece in the paper here a month ago. There were three things that I stressed: No. 1 was, the government has to repeal the Wild Horse and Burro Act. I think it was a vote-getter, and maybe brought in money, when they passed that. The reason there wasnôt one opposing vote to it is because people in Nevada, especially in the western states, thought it was such a ridiculous bill that it would

never passð nobody would vote for it.

The second thing I stressed was that they made it a law that they couldnôt slaughter any horses in the United States for human consumption. For domestic horses that maybe are crippled, maybe they just arenôt any good, and people canôt afford them, itôs a lot more humane to run them through a slaughterhouse where they get a bolt in the head. I mean, they donôt suffer. If you turn them out, the horses donôt know where in the heck anything is and they starve to death. When they get down and canôt get up, theyôll dig a hole like that with their head.

RM: Youôre gesturing that they strike their head.

BC: They hit their head on the ground, and you can see where theyôve thrashed with their feet. I donôt know how long they will live like that, but compare them with a cow. When a cow gets on its side like that, it will bloat and die within an hour or two. Of course, theyôll lie down, but they can always get up. But where they get down and canôt roll over or get up, theyôll bloat and die. A horse wonôt, and I donôt know if itôs because of the cowôs stomachs or because the horse doesnôt have anything in his stomach, but Iôm saying the horses will live for three or four days. Youôve got the damn coyotes eating the hind ends out of them, and theyôre still alive.

RM: Oh, how awful.

BC: I donôt know if the mountain lions eat on them, but coyotes do, and then the damn ravens came along and peck their eyes out. Now you tell me if thatôs humane.

RM: Do you see quite a bit of that on the range?

BC: Whenever I see a dead one like that, yes. There are two that I have seen for sure, and a guy named Ron Cerri, the president of the Nevada Cattlemenôs Association, said

the exact same thing. He had a horse that he thought a lot of and he didn't want to run him off to slaughter– he'd didn't want him hit in head. And like all people, he got busy and wasn't paying attention, and so one day he was kind of looking for his horse or something, and he looked out to where the horses were, and that was what he saw– the coyotes were eating on him and he was still alive.

RM: Oh, my God.

BC: How long they live, I don't know. But in '97 when they gathered the horses I was telling you about, I don't know if they missed one if he was too weak to keep up, but after they got through gathering them I was out at a water, and he was one of the poorest I ever saw that was still walking. It was like Charlie Russell– do you remember any of his paintings?

RM: Sure.

BC: The one called "The Last of the Five Thousand," where there's two or three poor old steers and around them are five or six wolves or coyotes. That's what that horse reminded me of because behind him about 100 feet was this coyote. It's like the coyote said, "If I just keep up, I'm going to get me a hot meal sure." That was in about November, and in January or February, just a mile or a mile and a half over, out in a draw, was a dead horse and it looked like the same one. He'd laid there and dug a hole with his head. If the coyotes did eat on him before he died, I couldn't tell because he had been dead so long.

And there was another one, a mare. One tooth on each side, maybe the bottom, was real hard, and the matching tooth on the top was real soft; the bottom one went up and into the gums. You can imagine how you'd try to eat like that. She died, of course;

starved to death. She had that same hole dug; I found her a while after she died.

RM: The wild horses werenôt a problem when you came down here, were they? When did it start being a problem and what happened?

BC: It started in 1971 when they enacted that Wild Horse and Burro Act. In ô92 they were having a problem with the wild horses and saying they had to try to fix it because nothing was being done. That was in ô92, damn near 20 years ago. That was the third emphasis in this thing I wrote: Weôve got to turn the management of these horses back over to the ranchers and the Indians on their reservations because we never had a problem before. The government got into it and that was the problem. Itôs not that the government people are bad people; itôs just that they donôt know.

RM: Partly theyôre responding to the contingent that feels the horses are a symbol of the West, and all of that.

BC: Again, I donôt think theyôre such bad people. Youôve heard of Madeline Pickens, the wife of T. Boone Pickens; heôs a multi-billionaire oil man. She has money from her previous husband and she had horses so sheôs supposed to know all about them. But they were racehorses, which is nothing bad, but they kept them in closed pastures. She just bought two ranches east of Ely, and is going to put a bunch of these so-called mustangs on them. And of course, she wants the taxpayers to foot the billô itôs around $500 a year per head. Sheôs going to put several thousand out there. I donôt know whoôs going to run it, and with many horses, theyôre going to be nothing but skin and bones again. But, ñOh, weôve got a beautiful bunch of mustangs for the public to come and see.ò Itôs a farce. Itôs a lie.

RM: Now, how have the horses damaged you as a rancher?

BC: They actually put me out of business.

RM: How did that happen?

BC: They were running horses on my range, and they wouldn't reduce the number. I was supposed to have 908 cows and at the time that they counted them I had 750 because I'd already taken 150 head for non-use. I didn't realize it, but the horses were taking all of the feed out there. And like I said, when I shipped the last load out they started gathering a few horses for the first time ever off my allotment. It really helped the range when they shipped all of them, after they gathered them in '97. But yes, they just put me out of business. I shipped my cows up to Oregon and I was going to bring them back, and nothing ever happened.

They turned this RMP Ranch into four pastures. I would run the cows in each pasture for three months, and for the fourth one, I'd have to take them somewhere else and rest that one for a year. But I couldn't gather the cows in the two or three days… in 1990 it took me two months at least to gather them and ship them out of here. I shipped all but 12 head or something like that.

The thing that really made me mad was that they left the horses here. Down at Beatty, I think the first year, 1995, they shipped 500 head of burros out of there. Two years later, they shipped 439 head, and they were only supposed to have something like 250. So look at the numbers they got there. I wouldn't mind it so much if they would be truthful about it, but they just lie through their teeth. Even if they knew how to manage the horses out here, they couldn't do it because there are too many people in Washington, D.C., telling the boss, and the boss and the boss and the boss, what they're supposed to do. And the bosses don't have a clue.

RM: Now, let me get this straight. They wanted to divide this vast area into four ranges?

BC: I call them pastures. I would put all of my cattle in one pasture for three months, then after three months I put them in this next pasture for three months, and then I put them in this third pasture for three months. Now for the last three months, Iôve got to move them somewhere clear off my range.

RM: Where are you supposed to take them?

BC: Thatôs it. There isnôt a place to take them. Did you ever try finding pasture for 900 cows? And overnight? And Iôm supposed to leave this one so-called pasture vacant.

RM: They will rest that one for the year, is that the deal?

BC: Thatôs the deal. But they leave the horses on there year round.

RM: On all four of them?

BC: All four of them, yes. I couldnôt haul water fast enough for those damn horses. I just threw up my handsð thereôs no way in the world I could do that.

RM: To me, it seems goofy.

BC: Well it is, but thatôs the way they had of getting rid of me.

RM: You mean, you think that was the strategy behind it?

BC: I do.

RM: So you havenôt run cows since?

BC: I tried it for a little while here, but then I got in a big pissing match with them and I kind of lost, so I donôt have any cattle now.

RM: But do you still have the allotment?

BC: I still have it.

RM: Do you still have to pay on that?

BC: No, because Iôm not running anything. And Iôm not going to sign a permit.

RM: What would a permit be for?

BC: A permit to use this range. If I sign it, theyôre telling me how to run my ranch, and I canôt do that; it wonôt work. Thatôs where it is right now, but it started out with the horses.

RM: Okay, it started off with the wild horses. What else did it go to?

BC: I canôt remember what they call the rotation for sure; they claim that I have to have a permit to run out there, and I donôt think I do.

RM: If you wanted to run cows now youôd have to get a permit? But donôt you already have an allotment?

BC: I have an allotment and I own the waters, but letôs go back to what they always quote. Itôs 43 CFR, Code of Federal Regulations. If you look at that, at the very top it says, ñPublic Lands.ò If itôs public land, there are all these things you have to do and get a permit is one of them. Where is this public land? There are about 132 court cases on that, but the one we always look to first is Barden v. the Northern Pacific Railway in 1892. The Supreme Court said any land to which no one has a right or a claim attached is public land. If Iôve got a water right out here, Iôve got a right to be there, according to state law.

This was before there was a BLM, before there was a Forest Service. There have been about 132 court cases that all say the same thing. Any land to which no one has a right or claim attached is public land or territory. This is not public land, itôs fee land, meaning that I have the inheritable right to use it. I can buy it or sell that right.

Hereôs the other thing: If you have a water right out there, you have to have the right to the forage thatôs appurtenant to that because without the forage, I canôt use the water. If you put a fence around there and put all them cattle in just where that water is, they wonôt drink the water because they have to have that forage to make them drink water. In order to prove beneficial use to that water, I had to have forage for the cows. This was something that wasnôt written in stone, but itôs as sure as when you first woke up in the morning or first learned anything. Itôs like you can go down to the library and get all the books on astronomy that you want. How many of them say the sun comes up in the East and goes down in the West? Itôs something that you learn as soon as you learn to talk.

In the West, water rights laws were based on prior appropriation doctrine. First of all, there wasnôt very much water on this land west of the 100th meridian. Itôs called first in time, first in right. If you had the water right, that gave you the right to the forage that was appurtenant to that. Where, in the East, they didnôt have very much land but they had lots of water. That is called riparian water doctrine. And this was in prior appropriations because in the East, where you get the land, the waterôs already there. Out here, you get the water and then the feed is there. Thatôs where the difference is.

Thatôs what happened with the ranch out at Lida. The BLM wonôt let them go up on the mountain anywhere around thereô theyôve got to haul all their water to wherever theyôre running any cattle.

RM: They wonôt let them go up on the mountain and get their water?

BC: No. Theyôve got water rights, but the BLM wonôt let them maintain them.

RM: Where is the water right?

BC: Itôs all over, just like it is here. They want to keep them off the mountainð the ranch has a lot of pipelines out there and they wonôt let them maintain them.

RM: Why?

BC: Itôs a way of keeping them off; itôs another bureaucratic way of knocking the livestock people out. They let them haul water, but they donôt want them maintaining any of those water rights.

RM: So theyôve got to go up and haul water out of their spring, letôs say, rather than let it run in a pipe? What is their justification for that? It seems pretty silly to me.

BC: It is. Theyôre just choking them out of there.

RM: Do you think thatôs a long-term strategy, to choke people out of the rural West?

BC: Yes. Itôs working. You donôt notice one, or two, or three going, but after a while, itôs 100 or 200, and pretty soon youôll have everybody leaving the land. Everything points that way; can you point to something that tells me different?

RM: I was talking with Jeanne Sharp Howerton, who grew up on the Sharp Ranch in Railroad Valley. (As you know, she and I wrote a book about Railroad Valley.) We were talking about how if you go back 60 years or so, a lot of people were living out in the hills with little cabins, little mines, and maybe even little ranches. Now thereôs nobody out there in those hills. Like you said, it seems that the policies, or whatever, are driving people off of the land in the West to crowd them all into cities.

BC: They want them in the cities where they can control them. The worldôs getting really populated; they could put a bug or any damn thing in the water to kill people.

RM: You mean, just wipe them out?

BC: Wipe out 90, 95, or 99 percent of a city. I donôt want to believe it, but everything

points in that direction. I think in the last 60 years, the population of the world has doubled.

RM: I think so. I remember when I was a teenager, the world population was two and a half billion; now itôs at seven, and itôs going to nine in like the next 40, 50 years.

BC: I donôt remember what it was; I mean, I just wasnôt paying any attention to it. But look at the ranches, especially around Belmont. Dangô there were half a dozen or so individual little ranches and now thereôs one, Pine Creek Ranch, and the bureaucrats are trying to put them out of business.

RM: Does Pine Creek encompass the little ranches, or are the little ranches just gone?

BC: It encompasses some of them. Thereôs some on the side that have been taken up by another ranch.

RM: This whole region of central Nevada had a lot of little ranches and they also had some big onesô United Cattle and the Kawich and so on.

BC: Iôm amazed at the number of cattle that theyôre supposed to have run. I canôt tell for sure because all I know is whatôs on the tax roll, and naturally they are not going to record all of them. If Iôm not mistaken, the sheriff or somebody was supposed to go out and count everybodyôs cattle at that time. I just keep looking at those figures and I see how many cattle this guy had, and how many this one was supposed to have had, on the tax roll. I donôt think it was accurate.

RM: Iôve been told by old-timers who are now deceased that those records are not accurateô people were not paying taxes on all their cows because the county wanted to keep them in business. If youôre going to make a guy pay full taxes on every cow, youôre going to put him out of business, and they wanted people out there. Now they donôt want

them out there. Iôm not saying Nye County or Esmeralda Countyôs like that. Thereôs another thingð look at Las Vegas, with their water grab. Who knows how far thatôs going to go?

BC: It could be like Owens Valley.

RM: Thatôs right. Thatôll really dry it up out here and prevent people from earning a living and living here.

BC: It doesnôt take a very big water hole for a few cows. You can put out a storage tank and collect it when they arenôt drinking. But down in Las Vegas, they take a lot of water, as much as irrigation people do, and it will dry it all up.

RM: They want to strip the water out of the rural areas, basically just dry them up, and use it to build these monster cities.

BC: Yes. It would raise all kinds of hell with Nevada because Nevada doesnôt have any water to spare.

RM: Thatôs right. Water is critical. Are there any other examples you can think of of how the federal or state policies toward the land have made it more difficult for you to live and work here?

BC: Off the top of my head right now, Iôve hit on the main ones. As I said, itôs not that the bureaucrats are bad people, but they are endorsing policies that go against the ranching business. Itôs like closing the roads to the wilderness. Today only one or two roads are closed, but 20 years down the road, maybe 30 or 40 of these roads will be taken away. They donôt do it all at once; itôs over a period of time.

I get so disgusted when they try and tell me how Iôm supposed to run cows. It doesnôt matter to them if Iôve got one or a million cows out hereð their lifestyle goes on

just the same. I have to be accountable for every dang cow and try to get as much out of her as I can to pay my bills, when you think about it. The horses were eating me out of house and home and yet, they weren't doing a damn thing about it. They can do whatever they want to and I'm not real good at fighting them.

RM: Western ranching is a part of our heritage, and to have policies that are in effect putting ranchers out of business is a little bit disgusting. And at the same time, getting all sentimental about wild horses. You want a few wild horses on the range? Fine, but 1,300? Come on.

BC: It's not good for the range or good for the horses. There's a guy up here who's been in Nevada all his life and he's kind of a wild horse man; he likes them, to a certain extent. He was looking at a picture that a woman took of a bunch up here by Virginia City that were down on the Truckee River. She was talking about what beautiful horses they were, look at these beautiful horses.

George looked up and he said, "You know, you've got two things here. One, they're the most inbred damn things that ever came down the pike, and No. 2, they're starving to death. What's beautiful about them?" When they gathered those horses that one time, there was a horse with a condition called parrot mouth, where the top teeth hang way over the bottom. Why in the world didn't they cut that horse out and send him down the road? Don't leave the poor bastard there to starve to death. Again, they need to look at these horses. I know they can't see them all, but during the spring that so many were dying out here– a month or two months, before a specialist out of Tonopah came out and they said everything looked great.

RM: What year was that, can you recall?

BC: I think it was ô97, but donôt quote me for sure. Anyway, I canôt use any of the natural springs that I have up on Montezuma. If I use any, Iôve got to haul water. I might be able to pump it out of wells, but I canôt use any of the springs.

RM: Whatôs their rationalization?

BC: Itôs a way of getting me off the range; thatôs what their real strategy is. You canôt do very well if youôve got to haul water all the time, and Iôve tried it. Look at the difference between hauling water over a road and a pipeline in terms of just what youôre doing to the environment. I mean, itôs stupid.

I have a lot of pictures, but I know there are some better ones of cows. This is my little load of logs that I brought down from Oregon. It weighed 39,000 pounds and something. I got a ticket in Oregon because I was overweight, and I didnôt think I could get overweight.

RM: What did you do with the wood?

BC: It was for firewood.

RM: What did the ticket cost you?

BC: It seems like it was $19 and the patrolman said, ñIf youôll call the judge, you might get it reduced.ò I did, and I think she reduced it to $12 or $13. It was on our ranch up in Oregon; I got the logs off our deeded property THERE.

RM: Those are big trees.

BC: Oh, yes. I donôt like those damn trees, but we made lots of money on them.

RM: Selling them for lumber? A big tree is worth a lot of money, isnôt it?

BC: Well, it was. Now thereôs a state tax on it. When we were selling timber, about the time I came down here, if they said $300 a thousand, thatôs what you got. Now they

might give you $400, but youôve got to pay for having it logged, and then youôve got the state tax on top of it. And the damned environmentalists have got this screwed up so bad about dragging logs across those little old streams and one thing or another.

RM: There are problems everywhere, arenôt there? Well, thanks a lot for talking with me; this has been really interesting.

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