

Smithsonian Folklife Interview

Ian Barlow
Wilderness Ranger/Forest Service Packer
Nez Perce National Forest, Idaho

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Interviewer: Bob Beckley

Bob Beckley (BB): Okay, we're rolling. This is Bob Beckley conducting an interview for the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Today we're going to interview Ian Barlow. Ian, can you tell us your name and spell your name for us please.

Ian Barlow (IB): Okay. Ian Barlow. It's I-A-N B-A-R-L-O-W.

Bb: What do you do with the Forest Service? How long have you been with the Forest Service?

IB: Oh God. Yeah. I came down from Alberta. I used to work in the parks as a packer in Banff and Jasper National Park for private outfitters. And I came down in 1978 and applied for a job on the Salmon-Challis Forest and actually ended up getting a job on the Nez Perce Forest as a packer. And I was pretty lucky, because it was the last all wilderness ranger district in the U.S. So the ranger station itself had no road access and was twenty-six miles in from the road.

BB: Can you explain to us what a packer is?

IB: Yeah. What I do is work as an animal packer on mules; usually riding a horse and packing mules. And what we did in there... It's a wilderness district so by law it was non-motorized except in emergency situations. And I had twenty-two head of mules and horses which I'd end up packing on trail supplies, fire lookouts, and also a lot in fire suppression. And that was before we had the long line capabilities that we have with helicopters today. So it was basically living out, usually away from the road for six or seven months, and packing someplace different every day, and basically living on the trail with your mules, which oftentimes are like a bunch of criminals, I guess would be the best way to put it.

BB: How so?

IB: It's hard to describe at first. Because it's a herd mentality, a lot of times you can wake up in the morning and look at your animals, and you just get a feeling. Every single animal's going to be good. Other days, every single animal's in a bad mood. And on days like that there's almost... You still do your job, and you do it, but it's just a fight from morning 'til evening.

BB: So what does a packer do? What do you pack in, what do you pack out?

IB: [Laughs] That's like asking, what have you done every day of your life for the last six years. What you do is, you buy train, take care of all your stock, deal with gear, with your saddles,

mantis, ropes, things like that; and you put them together into a cohesive working unit. So what we'd end up doing is, usually on the day that you have a job... Usually if you get time you pack all your gear the night before. So if you had nine head of mules and one horse, you'd pack eighteen loads, trying to get them balanced and shaped the same way. Loads were real different. A lot of times it would be groceries and supplies for lookout, which would include personal gear for a person for three months. That is pretty repetitive type of packing. It's fairly similar stuff. When packing gets really interesting is when you're doing things that are oddball loads, such as tandem packing telephone poles between two mules; packing long loads of lumber; packing stuff like that. And that's when it gets challenging and interesting. And anytime you do that there's a lot of potential for accident, but it's also a lot more fun because it's beyond what you're normally doing. In fire a lot of times we'd end up packing junk gear off of fires, moving pumps and hoses between fire and stuff like that, if there were separate parts of a fire. And surprisingly enough mules, especially mules, get really used to it. A lot of times you'd be moving your animals, oh, within six feet of active flame, and other than smoke where they start coughing, they get used to it and they just handle it like a normal fire fighter would.

BB: [Inaudible question regarding smokejumpers]

IB: Yeah. Smokejumpers, and usually would be about ninety pounds a load. Each jumper, when they jump, they'd end up putting all their junk gear into their packs, and a lot of times you'd just manti it right up and they'd be close enough in weight so that you could, it'd be fairly fast. But sometimes, especially in the early '80s when we were doing that a lot, you'd end up with just huge, huge loads. And occasionally, if the jumpers weren't cognizant of pack stock, they'd leave their gear in a place where you couldn't get to it. And I think one fire that I was on in Twin Buttes several years ago there were thirty-five animal loads of gear, and it was all half a mile downhill from the nearest place that I could get stock to. Well, probably closer to a quarter mile; anyway, it took me six days just to carry the gear by myself up to where I could get the stock to it.

BB: So what time of day does a packer's job start?

IB: Depends on the time of year. Usually early in the summer I'd start at four to four-thirty. You catch your animals, brush them, and by the time you've got the dust off of them basically you're black from head to toe if it's real dusty or muddy. And then I'd usually get them saddled and then have breakfast, and then right after breakfast start packing to the destination to where I was going. And a lot of times I think at Moose Creek, which is where I first worked, it wasn't a normal part of the Forest Service. So a lot of times I'd work from four-thirty in the morning 'til ten-thirty at night almost every single day. But you'd still get paid for an eight hour day back then.

BB: And Moose Creek's on the Nez Perce National Forest?

IB: Yeah. It's on the Nez Perce and it's along the Selway River in central Idaho.

BB: So Why is that not typical or different from most [word unclear].

IB: To get into that, I guess that was probably the start of my whole Forest Service career anyway. When I first got down there one of the first people I met was a guy named [Emil Keck?]. And he was an old Russian logger who was originally from North Dakota and then moved to the coast and became a rigger, which in essence was rigging spar trees before they had portable towers. And in the early '60s he came to Moose Creek. And then in 1967 the Nez Perce Forest—and this is important I think to the reason that all of us do our work—but the Nez Perce Forest hired the first woman, a woman named Penny who was working in the field. And one of the things about working in the back country or the bush like you do there, is that after a while all your opinions become facts. And the reason they become facts is that there's nobody to bounce them off of. So Emil knew one fact. Well actually three facts. Women weren't strong enough to do the work, they couldn't handle the pressure of the work; and they'd just flip out and leave. Quit. So they weren't worth having out there. Well when the forest itself hired Penny they hired her as a dispatcher and a lookout on the Nez Perce Forest, and he said, if it's the last thing I do I'm going to get rid of you. And she said, well, I can do anything you can do. And they started these friendly competitions, like both of them would pack five cubitainers, and each cubitainer was five gallons of water, up to [Shisler?] Lookout where she was working, and she cleaned his clock. So she was packing basically eighty pounds of water plus her backpack, and she'd beat him up the hill every time. So he started realizing something different. Well another thing about this guy was he could totally reverse his opinions. And when he opinions it was like, oh shoot. Women are the greatest thing on earth. So he married her. And after marrying her they started working as a couple. And a lot of us who came in there as kids or young adults, they would take and they would teach a bunch of stuff. One is, no matter what you do, you can [emphasis] do it. You may not know how, but if you use your mind you can figure it out. And then you can do it safely and you can do it effectively. And one of the things that they did was during the winter they'd live in a wall tent down in the bottom of a canyon covered with snow, and they'd rig these suspension bridges with nobody else, very little or no motorized machinery, and they'd build or re-build a two hundred and sixty-seven foot suspension bridge that could take fifteen head of stock on it at one time. And by stock that means mules and horses. And they taught a lot of us that. And so it was different than a lot of the Forest Service because it was one of the last places that had people who actually actively worked and lived in the field or the bush basically year round. And they'd take eighteen year old kids and they'd put them through ten days of training and then they'd say you're out of here and you'd better do a good job. If you don't it's your fault. But one of the things about Emil and Penny, and I don't know how to describe this without somebody knowing them, but they were really hard on people, but at the same time they gave them the confidence to go and do anything. And realizing that it was never good enough, and the next job that you did, if you're thinking about it, should be better than the one you just completed.

BB: What else does a packer do? If you're going in there packing in supplies, packing out junk gear? What's a typical day like for a packer, in terms of...?

IB: Everything?

BB: Yeah. In terms of everything.

IB: Okay. Mine I think was different from a lot of people. A lot of districts that have packers, trail crew goes in first or they go in with the trail crew and they clear the trail. At Moose Creek basically you're expected to do a lot of your work alone. So a lot of times mid-spring or early summer, if I were packing a lookout up, I'd get all the gear like I talked about earlier, and head out on the trail. And then half the time the trail was logged in. The other thing about Emil and Penny, because Emil was an old logger who had grown up with hand tools and he was extremely proficient, they taught us how to use tools well. And also realizing that next year you were going to be better than this year and you'd better keep on getting better until you retired. And so I'd end up sometimes with big rockslides, sometimes with huge blow downs of trees, [jackplots?] of trees where trees had blown all over each other. And at first I didn't know all of the complexities, with tension and compression in the wood when they're piled up; and you'd sit down there and you'd figure all right, you're going to do this. My pack strings were usually real well broke, a lot of times I didn't have to tie them. A lot of times with my horse, he would lead the mules, the mules would be tied in a string, so you'd have one horse and nine mules, and I'd just throw the reins over the horse's neck, and a lot of times he'd be walking, oh, two or three hundred yards behind me while I'd be clearing trail. And they'd just come and they'd stand and you'd be cutting, and eventually you'd figure out how to do it better, and figure out how to do it safely. And then you'd get to the fire lookout, a lot of times the lookout wasn't really experienced with the stuff, because they were new and they hadn't spent a lot of time in the bush. So you'd help them set up the lookout, open it up, raise the shutters, calibrate the [alliday?], which is the fire finder and how you locate fires. And then get water, find a place for your stock at night. A lot of times you're on a ridge top and there isn't much water nearby, so you'd go off the ridge, find the water; if it was a little spring sometimes it would take an hour to an hour and a half just to water your animals, bring them back up, feed them, and make sure they were there in the morning. One of the things about mules is, they're smarter and they're tougher than horses. But for some reason... they're hybrid, they're a cross between a horse and a donkey. A male jack and a mare. But they're usually, not always, but they're usually subservient to a horse. So if your horse is a horse that they like, which sometimes is a mare or sometimes a strong-minded gelding, the mules will usually stay with your horse. So if I hobbled the horse and turned him out, if there was grass, didn't have to worry about the mules. Just turn them loose and they'd stay with the mules. And in twenty-three years of packing I have only lost my stock once. And the reason I think was when you're living with them, even if you're not fully paying attention, you start seeing... you feel their mood. And they'll be out grazing, sometime I'd go to bed and all of a sudden I'd just get this feeling in the middle of the night, and I'd get up, and sure enough, my animals were headed down the trail. Well one of the things that I did, every single time I caught them I'd call them. And you'd go, "Comon". And they'd come in, and then immediately you'd feed them by hand. And so sometimes when these animals were caught I'd roll over in my sleeping bag and I'd just yell "Comon", and they'd turn around and they'd come back and I'd feed them, I'd catch the horse and put him up, and then they were fine 'til morning. Occasionally you'd end up with a horse getting sick or cholicing where there's something wrong in their stomach. And when something like that happened you don't have access to first aid, you don't have access to veterinarians, but you do have a radio. So I'd call in to the dispatcher, they'd call out to Grangeville, which is where the forest supervisor's office is and the nearest telephone, and we'd get on line with a vet and he would give me advice on what to do. So you'd have to be able to describe accurately, over the radio, the symptoms of the disease or the ailment that the animal

has, and take care of that. Luckily, with animals that are working in a situation like that, you don't have very many medical problems.

BB: Have you ever lost an animal?

IB: gosh, I'm trying to think. I've had them go lame quite a bit. I've had some bad accidents. No. Actually the only animal that I lost on the trail-- other than getting sick, I've had a couple get sick and die—but the one that I lost was questionable when I bought it, and some other people had a bad wreck and this mule turned extremely mean. And he got to the point where, you'd just get near him and he'd lay his ears back and he'd turn around and he'd try to kick you. Again, because mules are smarter and tougher... Like a lot of times a horse'll kick, and they'll miss you. A mule, if he's a kicker, and if he's half mean, they'll usually connect when they kick you. And this mule was getting to the point where I'd have a pack and I'd be going up to load him and he'd kick the pack right out of my hands. And so that mule I finally... Emil Keck and I talked about it, and he gave me a rifle and I went out and shot it. And I think it was probably the best decision we could have made there.

BB: So when an animal dies in the wilderness, one of the horses or mules, what happens to the animal? What do you do with it?

IB: Well usually you have something happening before. You know it's going to die. So if it goes off the trail. If it's hurt to the point where you have to put it down, you put it down, usually off the trail. And then, especially the Moose Creek area, it's full of bear. There's probably the highest concentration of black bear that I had ever seen. And when that happened you just put it down away from the trail and away from where people are camping, and usually the bears have it cleaned up in a couple weeks. Or if they smell it right off, it could be a couple days. That's I think one of the other things; you know you're talking about packing and stuff. Well, because of... especially in the '70s and early '80s, were still real high up populations. And a lot of black bear, especially the older bear, because they live quite a while and they learn. Mothers will teach cubs certain patterns of behavior. And so the bear would focus a lot on elk during calving season. And we'd have a lot of contact with bear while we were working. A lot of time... Most of the mules are pretty well broke to it; you could have bear walking within fifteen feet of the mules and they don't really care. But occasionally you'd have them pop right out of the brush and run right through the middle of your pack string. And then stuff starts getting bucked off everywhere. We were talking a little while ago about the moods that animals get in. Well Warren Miller, who I do a lot of work with, and I had a lookout to take down in 1984, and it was called Bear Wall lookout and it was on the Selway face. And we decided that instead of just breaking all the windows... The windows and doors were all hand made, and a lot of the old [captain?] chairs in the [alliday?]. So we went up to pack everything out. And these windows were pretty big. They were six foot windows. And I double-wrapped them in fire sleeping pads. They're foam pads. And then we double mantied them because it took two canvas mantis to wrap them. And they're wrapped almost like a Christmas package and then bound with rope. And we got up that morning, and every mule was just in a really bad mood. We packed all the mules, and these windows were big enough that they went from behind their rear almost up to behind their eyes. And the door of course was six-eight. And so that went right up on one side. We put one window and one door on each animal. And we had twelve animals loaded with tools and chairs and bolts

from the lookout and everything else. And we started at three o'clock in the morning. At about five-thirty we had everything packed and we headed down this hill. And immediately they started jumping off the trail. We had one time when a fighter plane came down really low, broke the sonic barrier, and there was this boom. And the animals were jumping anyway, and three animals rolled over the edge. None of the animals got hurt, but all we heard was the tinkling of glass and stuff, and it was still wrapped up. We finally got out at one-thirty the next morning, out to the road at Selway Falls, and just collapsed in bed with headaches from all the stress of all this happening, because we'd basically been going for twenty-two hours. And next day we got up, drove into Grangeville to the jumper base and unloaded everything at the jumper base at the dumpster, and out of all the windows and doors we'd broken one pane of glass. And that was it, and everything was still good, which really surprised us. But those were days when that herd mentality is just going to be fairly stressful on you. And luckily they're not very often.

BB: What else can you tell us about life as a packer? What do you eat when you're out on the trail? How do you cook?

IB: When we started there was I think a culture at Moose Creek of eating a lot of freeze dried. And I started doing that, but I didn't really care for freeze dried that much. One of the things, because I was packing so much gear, I had very little room left over for my own gear. So usually, if it looked like good weather, what I would bring is just a lot of times a couple fresh vegetables that would last because I didn't have coolers. We were a fairly broke district at the time so we didn't have a lot of extra equipment. I'd usually bring a sleeping bag and a sleeping pad, and unless I was looking forward to a lot of rain that would be it. I'd lay out a manti on the ground, throw it over my sleeping pad, and then put my sleeping bag down at night and then just throw another canvas manti over it. And that's all I'd use to sleep, because there's so much work, with taking care of the animals, and we were usually moving camp every single day, that the less camp I had, the better. And then in rainy years I'd take a little tent, but I'd never set it up unless it was already raining. And that was good into the fall, into well below freezing, because those canvas mantis actually warm your sleeping bag up about ten degrees, and they breath. So you stay pretty dry and you don't sweat in it. A lot of times for food I'd just bring a little tiny camp stove, and one, usually for myself, one spoon and one small cook pot. And that was it, and I'd make stews at night with, you know, noodles, and a little bit of meat sometimes, and vegetables, and that would be about it. Usually crackers or bread, something for sandwiches for lunch, and then hot cereal for breakfast. But it wasn't like I wasn't packing heavy trail camps. And a lot of times when you see someone packing a heavy trail camp, they bring it out one place ten miles or twenty miles, and they're there for eight or ten days. And then they'll have wall tents and everything else. We were moving almost every single day.

BB: What do you drink when you're out on the trail?

IB: Usually water or juice; dehydrated juices. But pretty well most of the time was water. Tea or coffee for breakfast, something like that. Same at night, and then just water all day. If it was real dry, some of the south hillsides on the Salmon and the Snake River, [corrects himself] Salmon and the Selway River, sorry, you'll end up getting a hundred, a hundred and fifteen, hundred and twenty degrees on the south facing hillsides during the day, and usually anywhere from seven to fifteen percent humidity, so you'd end up drinking a lot of water during the course of the day.

And until about two years ago I just drank out of every stream that I ever came to, and never seemed to get sick. And a lot of people now, there's more awareness of [geority?], and I'd get real mild rumblings but that would be about it.

BB: Do you have any favorite packer stories that you can share with us, or adventures?

IB: [Laughs] Yeah, probably one that was before I came down to the Forest Service, when I was working for an outfitter in the parks in Alberta. And one of the things there, and it's still tied to down here, but packing there they use sawbucks and diamond hitches. And it was a different style of packing than the style that we do with the Forest Service, and not as effective. The second thing was, all the animals up there, we never tied them together, so we loose-herded them. And we had a ride called the Parker Pennington the Third ride, which came out, it was a youth camp that came every year, and they had eighty-eight kids. And we happened to have about eighty head of stock. The kids would share off, and my boss and I would send the guides off with them. And we'd have forty kids ride, and then the two of us would pack forty head of stock. Well when we packed there we had nose nets, which were a wire net that went over their face and attached to their halter so they couldn't eat but they could drink. And so we got started early afternoon; we got all the kids off and we still had to go twenty miles into the bush. And we got these forty head of stock packed. And they were huge packs, with big side packs and top packs, and some of them we had twenty-two sleeping bags plus food and stuff on. And right about dark, which was about midnight, these animals would start; they'd take off all over the place, and then you'd herd them and then they'd line out. And we got to this mountain on the back side of this place called Deception Pass, and all of a sudden a sow grizzly and two cubs came out, and she just bluff charged this bunch of horses. And the next thing we knew we had forty-four horses headed up the mountain, through heavy blow down and old spruce, and jumping these things, and all we saw was just eighty kids, two miles away, in a night that was going to get below thirty-three degrees, with no sleeping bags, no food, and forty-four horses scattered all over the hillside just running through. Well, we looked and we couldn't even get up there after them; and they were, you know, we heard branches breaking and trees coming down, and all of a sudden, five minutes later, we see all these horses firing back down the hill. And out of the whole bunch we'd only lost one sleeping bag. Well we got in about two in the morning, and gave everybody their stuff, and it worked out fine. But I think stuff like that happens pretty well fairly often. It's just now it starts getting, it's been so long, you start forgetting about stuff like that. I had one other. Warren and I were actually coming down the trail, and it was pretty interesting because I used to have a little white-colored red [heeler?], and he used to run in front of the horses. And we were coming down with a full pack string, and all of a sudden I heard this squalling in the brush, and I looked up and there was this long tail, and I thought, oh shoot, Shaun's got in a fight with a young mountain lion. And Warren jumped off his horse and he was looking for a rock, and this dog and this cat rolled down into the trail. And the cat had the dog by the face and the dog had the cat by the face, and what I was nervous about was cats have such strong hind legs, was it getting underneath the dog and actually disemboweling it. And so Warren's doing that and I'm going up to look. And I've got a new horse, and this horse is putting his head in my back and pushing me forward like this every time I started. And I figured, oh shoot, this is a young cougar, probably two year old, it's just gotten away from its mother. I'll bet that I could grab this cat by the tail and throw it off the bank. So I reached down, and the second I grabbed it by the tail, it and the dog let go of each other, and it was like, doggone, he's yours

now. And this cat curled up right between my legs, and I was standing about this far apart, and its head was right here, and it laid its ears back the way they do on TV and it just started hissing and I reached back to kick it—and this all happened in about twenty seconds—and of course my feet were this far from it so when I kicked it there was almost no pressure. And I kicked it once, and I reached back the second time, it took off and that was the end of it. But I think the more time you spend out there, stuff like that happens, you know, occasionally. And it's pretty neat actually. There was no time in this to get scared, and even afterwards, you know, we ran and chased it to see if we could run it up a tree and get some pictures of it, but it took off and didn't tree.

BB: So you probably have a whole slew of wilderness and packing stories that you can share.

IB: Oh, yeah I think over the years there's been... That was... There's been several with cougars and several with bear, and most, well actually every time it's worked out all right.

BB: you talked a while ago about disassembling a lookout tower. Do you also do... you talked before about restoration of old cabins. What's involved in that? What do you do?

IB: Yeah and that's... Actually before I started with cabins I'd worked doing timber frame restoration in some big restoration projects such as the Strawberry Bank project in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. And I'd done some work in that during the winter with timber framing, which were basically the same type of construction was brought over in the 15 and 1600s by shipwrights from England and from Spain. And it was basically a gradual transformation from that to historic cabin restoration. Because I'd had somewhat of a background in history and the importance, it wasn't very long, even when I was a kid, that I realized there's something just incredibly special about these back country cabins. Not just... Part of it was from the architecture, but part of it was from realizing how hard it was just to get those logs, and bring them there when the person, all they had was an axe or an axe and a crosscut. And then that appreciation got to the point where, when there started to be projects I started working with it, and it turned out I had an affinity for problem solving. One of the things about... it's not that difficult to build a cabin. But when you have to re-build it you have to do it in reverse. So a lot of it's problem solving as much as the work itself. In other words, we did an old lookout two years ago, and some people from the Forest Service came to me and said, do you think this can be restored, because all of the logs were rotted, and I'm looking at the... Sure. Of course it can. I don't have any idea how I'm going to do it, but I know it can. And so I started looking at it. Well, there were four courses of logs, and then the lookout, the windows were all the way around the lookout, and then it had gable ends, which were like this, above it. And there was a loft in the lookout. And because all the logs were rotted, we had to pick it up. And Warren and I got to talking, and Warren goes, well what if we take two logs and we run them through the window headers at the top of the windows, cut the floor out, and then we'll just build up cribbing inside. So we cut the floor out, ran the logs through, and we pulled them by ropes up into the rafters. And then we built cribbing underneath and then we jacked these logs up, and we picked the entire lookout up. And we took a chain saw-- this one was outside a wilderness—and we just cut all the logs out. We took careful measurements first. We went down in the parking lot and re-built it. And during the time... so we had this whole roof that was hanging up in the air. I was worried because it was at seventy-five hundred feet. I was worried about a storm coming through. It was like, some of

the thunderstorms that come through during the summer will be accompanied by really high winds. When that happens... We guyed it off so that we figured we could stand sixty or eighty mile an hour gusts. Took it out, re-built it, came back in, put a new rock foundation underneath and set it down. And it was pretty neat because one of the things that happens when you do that is, in Idaho country and parts of Montana a lot of the public isn't really in love with the Forest Service anymore, because a lot of times they don't see them working on the ground anymore. And when this happens, every single person that came up there, old loggers, old farmers and ranchers would come up and they'd go, God, this is great. This is so great that you're doing that. So we'd just get so much public support when we're doing this, because history means a lot to them. And every cabin that we do is totally different, so what worked in this one would be really different than working on another one, because you have to have different way of jacking it up, and re-scribing the logs if it's a [scribed?] building. And then setting the windows and door and floor back in place so that it fits. A lot of the old buildings weren't square, and one of the things with the National Historic Preservation Act is you have to rebuild the same way that it was done originally. So a lot of times the reason that we have to re-build is because there was a construction fault or a design flaw in the original building, and we pretty well have to copy those flaws back into it. But it is trying to remain true to the way those buildings were built originally.

BB: How many cabins, lookouts, have you done in the course of your career?

IB: Oh gosh, if you include barns and stuff like that, worked on probably thirty, thirty-five, somewhere in there. And one of the things, you know, a big part of what I also do is I work with traditional... Originally in the Wilderness Act they were called primitive tools. We tend to call them traditional tools because they weren't primitive in any way. And a lot of that started with edge tools such as [abses?], axes, slicks, which are a big type of framing chisel, or cutting tools like crosscut saws. And because of the training that Emil and Penny had given us, we saw a long time ago that if they were used well and if they were kept really sharp, and when I'm talking about really sharp is my belief that ninety-nine per cent plus of all tools that you see—hand tools—aren't truly sharp. But if they were and they were used well you could work really effectively and really quickly with them. One of the things about working with traditional tools is, probably the most important tool you have is your mind. Because you don't have the option of a motor to provide horsepower. And so you have to intelligently and thoughtfully do your work. And a lot again is problem-solving; it's using your mind. Well one of the things, we do a lot of training in this, and one of the biggest benefits that comes out of it is, if you take those techniques that you use with traditional or non-motorized tools and you adapt them to more modern, motorized areas you find that you're way better off. Because then you're thinking every time you do something. Like an example is, several years ago I was working with a pretty competent chain-saw sawyer. And I was headed down to Whitewater Ranch, which is in the Salmon. It's a really steep road, that goes down into the Salmon River canyon. It was in the spring. Well, there'd been a lot of blowdown that winter. And what had blown down was some monstrous, old growth Ponderosa pine; some of it was fifty-five inches in diameter, sixty inches in diameter, which is big for central Idaho. And this guy was ahead of me with the fire crew, and he was an experienced sawyer, and he was cutting these trees out of the road. And he was cutting blocks that were about twelve to eighteen inches but they were about three hundred pounds in weight. And I looked at him and was just joking, and I said, I could get these out of here quicker with a crosscut. Well he immediately bristled and said what do you mean? And I said, because

I'm lazy. And I would only do one cut in this tree. And this tree was laying lengthwise in the road, and he goes, why don't you show me?. And I showed him with the chainsaw because that's all we had there. And I said, if you took one cut here you could roll both forty or fifty foot sections out of the road. And we did that; we took one cut, and we got down on our backs and we used our legs, and this tree just rolled out. And he said, what made you think of that? And I said, the reason is because I've been using a crosscut. And I can't afford the energy to make two cuts when I can get by with one. You can afford the energy, because you've got the horsepower of a chainsaw. So we have to think about it. But if you take that thought back, and you start that thought process, and you start working with your chainsaw thinking about it and problem solving, you can double your output in the course of a day. And after that we started working a lot with fire crews and started trying teach them to problem solve. What it really is is problem solving. But also to some extent developing the skills of caring for tools and equipment and keeping them really sharp.

BB: So you do packing, you do log cabin restoration, and traditional tools user and trainer.

IB: Yeah. And I think actually that's a big part of my passion in working with the Forest Service. One of the things is I was way luckier than most people I think, in that I had really good teachers. And teachers can develop and foster passion in people in what they're doing.

BB: And I can tell that you do that with the folks that you train.

IB: Oh yeah. Yeah. And you know, we love doing that.

BB: Well we have about two minutes on this tape. I could put another tape in, or do you have...?

IB: I'm fine.

BB: How much more do you have to say?

IB: Oh shoot. [Laughs] I could go on until it starts snowing. What do you want to do on that?

BB: Your choice.

IB: I guess... Three minutes. One of the things that's become increasingly important is how as a federal agency we communicate and work with people who don't belong to the agency. In other words, the public that has real interest in working on federal land. And that doesn't necessarily mean Forest Service; it could be BLM or Park Service. And this past summer we had a real interesting thing which just drove back home some of the observations that I'd made before. We were working in Dinali National Park doing traditioal tool training. And we were doing a lot of clearing or fuels reduction around some of these historic cabins. Adjacent to where we were working they were doing dog sled demonstrations. And a lot of people would come and they'd sit in the amphitheater and they'd watch these dog sleds. Well we were told that we were supposed to shut down every time these demonstrations started so we wouldn't interfere. Well, after doing about five or six shutdowns during the course of three days we forgot once, and so we were still working when these people showed up. But what happened was, these people

almost to a person left this amphitheater and they came over and they started watching us working with traditional tools. And all we were doing was cutting up brush and cutting down trees. And it reminded me again of how people respond to this. And how important history and keeping that history alive... Keeping it alive in a viable fashion is really important to our relationship with people.

BB: Well you know, the goal of this project is to put on a folklife festival on the Mall in Washington D.C. in 2005. And one of the things we're probably going to be looking at is packing, cabin restoration, traditional tool use. If the opportunity presented itself, is that something you'd be interested in participating in?

IB: Oh I'd love to. I think, you know, there's so much, and obviously interviews like this, it's an artificial situation. That's a real situation. And I think that the people you work with, I know we've done dozens of training all around the country, the Forest Service and National Parks, and the response that we get, every time we do it we end up getting more programs to do. And so I, yeah, I would jump at the chance to do something like that.

BB: Only about ten or fifteen seconds. Anything you want to say.

IB: No. I think that's about it for now. Thanks much.

BB: Thank you. This was good.

END OF INTERVIEW