

Smithsonian Folklife Festival Interview

Robert Beckley

Project leader & Photographer,

Technology and Development Center, Missoula, Montana

(Former smokejumper)

July 2004

Interviewer: Bonnie Dearing

[Interviewee is seated in his office.]

Robert Beckley (RB): I suppose we should turn off the radio.

[RB rises, walks off screen, then returns to his seat.]

RB: I used to have a screensaver on the computer that had very faint bird noises on it. It would amaze people in the winter time when they would be walking by and they'd hear birds. And wouldn't think anything of it until, wait a minute. It's February in Montana. There's no birds. [Laughs]

Bonnie Dearing (BD): Okay. Please state your name and spell it.

RB: My name's Bob Beckley. B-E-C-K-L-E-Y.

BD: And what's your relationship with the Forest Service?

RB: I've had a very long relationship with the Forest Service. I've been with the Forest Service since 1975. I got my start on the Nez Perce National Forest, and I'm now with the Forest Service Technology and Development Program in Missoula, Montana.

BD: Okay. What is your background or education that focused you to the Forest Service?

RB: Background... The reason I came to the Forest Service was, when I was a little boy I used to watch Lassie on TV. And Timmy's dad was a forest ranger, and I knew that someday I wanted to be a forest ranger too. And one day there was smokejumpers on Lassie, and oh, I want to be a smokejumper. So really what brought me to the Forest Service was a love for the outdoors and watching Lassie when I was a little kid.

BD: Okay. Tell me about your first position and just sort of walk through career, involving anecdotes or stories that you think would be of interest.

RB: Sure, we can do that. I grew up in San Francisco, California. I worked for the Park Service in 1973 and 1974. And in 1975 I got my first Forest Service job on the Nez Perce in Idaho. I was a timber stand examiner; we did timber stand exams. The next year I worked for the Clearwater National Forest in

Kooskia, Idaho. I did fire prevention. That was probably one of my favorite jobs in the Forest Service. My job was to patrol the river. I drove up and down the south fork, [corrects himself] the middle fork of the Clearwater River and part of the Lochsa River. Every day. I would get to work at noon. I worked from noon to eight-thirty in the evening. So when I got there at noon everybody was out to lunch, nobody wanted to talk to me. I got back at eight-thirty at night and everybody was gone. It was a great job for a twenty-one year old kid. I don't think I bought a lunch all season. Every place I wanted to go, everybody wanted to feed the ranger. It was great. The following year I did fire prevention on the Pierce District of the Clearwater. Completely different. That was away from the general public, and I was doing logging inspections. At the time I had hair down to about here [indicates halfway between his elbow and shoulder] and a big beard, and Pierce, Idaho was a fairly redneck community, and doing logging inspections with long hair didn't really work out that well. It was... There were some tense moments, but it was still good. It was a good experience. After that I went to the Colville National Forest in Washington. I worked there for a few years doing some fire stuff, doing a little bit of timber stuff. And then I went to work for BLM in Alaska one year, flying aerial detection out of Wildwood, Alaska. It was an air force base that the air force turned over to BLM. I was there the last year of it before BLM turned that land over to the state. The following year... I think I took a summer off to play. And then I went to Region Three, where I did, I flew helitack on the Kaibab National Forest. And after that I became a smokejumper. I went to Redmond, Oregon, went through rookie training to be a smokejumper. The following year I transferred back to the Nez Perce, back to Grangeville, Idaho where I started, and stayed there several years until I broke my back on a jump. After that I came to smokejumper base in Missoula where I did public affairs for a bit. And then moved over to the Technology and Development Center, where I am today. And I think I've been blessed with one of those jobs that you just can't describe. I came here as a photographer; after I broke my back they took my hobby and made it a profession. So I was a photographer for a while. Then when we went through a series of cutbacks I wound up doing projects as well as doing photography on projects. The Technology and Development Center, the way we operate, we... People in the Forest Service identify problems, and we look for solutions to those problems. That solution could be a modification of some tactic that they're doing to whatever the job is; it may require a piece of equipment being developed; it could be a training plan that we need to develop and put into force. Really it's kind of a no holds barred program. It's whatever the problem is, we will find a solution for it, wherever it goes, wherever it takes us. So I became one of the project leaders at the Technology and Development Center. From that I wound up becoming one of the blasters. I also do the public affairs, government relations. My job can change hour to hour. So I really don't... There is no easy way to describe what I do.

BD: Then why don't you describe some of the products of some of the projects that you've done? I know you've worked on that water system?

RB: One of the projects we've recently completed is an accessible hand pump. The old-style hand pumps—the hand-cranked pumps that are in camp grounds—don't meet the Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines, which is certain height requirements and certain pounds of force to operate. We looked for a commercially-made, accessible hand pump for our camp grounds, and couldn't find one. And we actually had people laugh at us when we wanted to know if they would be interested in building one. Nobody wanted to put their research and development dollars into that, so I took on the project. We now have developed a small rotary pump which meets ADA guidelines. It operates under five pounds of force, and we have a patent on it. The T and D center, [corrects himself] the T and D program has any number of patents on different products we've done. The hand pump was a project I worked on. We've also

worked on... Well, we work in nine different program areas. Fire, recreation, safety, health, air shed, water shed, engineering facilities... I'm probably missing a few. The main focus of my work here is in recreation, aviation and fire, and safety and health. We developed a fire shelter that has saved well over three hundred lives from wildland firefighters. It's their last source of defense if they're about to be consumed by fire. It's a little aluminum foil pup tent to get inside and let the fire burn over them. Being a smokejumper, I've also been involved in the smokejumper parachute development. We develop a... Smokejumpers are kind of a different group. We parachute out of airplanes to suppress wildland fires. It's not like sky diving. We don't jump out at ten, fifteen thousand feet and float down to a nice grassy meadow. Typically you'll jump out the door between twelve, fifteen hundred feet, sometimes up to two thousand feet, sometimes as low as a thousand. When you jump out the door it takes four seconds for your parachute to open. In that four seconds you can fall four hundred feet before your parachute fully deploys. If the trees in that area are a hundred feet tall, I suppose realistically you could already be halfway to the ground before your parachute even deploys. And you're seldom landing in nice, grassy fields. It could be rocks, trees. You don't land in the fire, but you get as close as you can. It's different; it's exciting, it's challenging.

BD: And the MTDC has developed...

RB: And we have developed a smokejumper parachute. And the parachute... The chute we're using now is the FS-14. It was developed here at MTDC with the help of private industry, and of course with the input of the smokejumpers. That parachute has been so successful, the military has adopted it. I believe when some branch of the army, I don't know what air force branch it was, jumped in Iraq in 2003 or two thousand... I guess it was 2003, they actually jumped on a smokejumper parachute. They have a little different color scheme than we do, but it was a parachute designed here at the center. It's hard to say, it's hard to pick out specific projects; we do so much. And even though we're technology and development, and we're looking at the next generation—where we as an agency go next—we haven't forgotten the old ways. There's a new revival in traditional tools, such as crosscut saws. In the wilderness... Established in the Wilderness Act of 1964, you can't use motorized equipment in wilderness areas. So our wilderness crews still use crosscut saws. Those good quality crosscut saws are few and far between anymore. They were built probably up through the '50s, and they're gone now. They're being snapped up by collectors, and so we've started a project to design and build prototypes for a new quality, or a high-quality new version crosscut saw, but based on the old principles. We've also done crosscut saw tools, we've done work with axes. These are the skills that not just Forest Service heritage is based on, but American heritage. I mean, these are the tools that built

America. And the people that operated those tools, the people that knew those tools, they're long gone now. There's still a few people left that really know how to use those tools correctly and efficiently, and we're trying to capture that knowledge before it's gone so that we can keep those skill bases alive. It's good for the wilderness; it maintains the integrity and character of wilderness, but it's good for us as an agency as well. It's good for our history, our heritage.

BD: Okay. Would you like to expand on some of your other positions? You mentioned you're a helitack person.

RB: Helitack is... I was helitack before I became a smokejumper. Helitack is getting to fires by helicopter. I enjoyed the time in Region Three, in Arizona, flying helitack, but helicopters kind of fly by

what's called the crowbar theory. Which is, you put a big enough engine on it, anything will fly. They always made me nervous. There's something, there's just something not right about them.

BD: Kind of like a bumblebee. {Like} you're flying...

RB: Yeah, you're hovering, and... [Shakes his head] you shouldn't be there. [Laughs] So it was a good, quick, efficient way to get to fires, but it was really smokejumping that was my love. Smokejumping is... Smokejumping is the cream of the crop for firefighting. The people you work with are... It's a brotherhood, it's a sisterhood that is just... The camaraderie is so incredible. Of all the things that I have done, I think those are friendships that I will keep forever, and memories that I will keep forever.

BD: They have kind of a culture of their own, don't they?

RB: Oh, very much. Once you're accepted in, you're there for life. I don't think there's any such thing as an ex-smokejumper. But it's not easy to get in. When I went through rookie training, I believe they had fifteen positions. They made offers to fifty people, and forty-seven people showed up for training. But I don't think they even really started training us until they washed out half the class. It's different now. Now they make offers and they try to keep each smokejumper, or each potential smokejumper that shows up. Back in the old days they really broke you down. They wanted you to... They wanted to see what you were made of before they invested the time and the energy in training.

BD: Nowadays most new smoke jumpers have been on hotshot crew previously though, haven't they?

RB: Oh yes.

BD: It wasn't like that before, was it?

RB: Pretty much. You had to have quite a bit of fire experience. I think for the fifty people that they offered jobs to, they had well over three hundred apply. That is, three hundred people applying for fifteen positions. At the end of rookie training, thirteen of us made it through. And it's a... What you're looking for in a smokejumper is not necessarily big, strong muscle. You're looking for mental attitude; you're looking for discipline. When you're in the door of an airplane at a thousand, fifteen hundred feet, and you look out and you see rocks and trees and fire, that's not the time to question your self-worth. So it's finding the people with the right attitude.

BD: And would you still be smokejumping today if you hadn't had your accident?

RB: [Pauses; then laughs heartily] I would like to think not. But I don't know. That was... It was a long time ago, and there's still people that I jumped with that are still jumping.

BD: How long did you jump?

RB: Three years. I broke my back on my thirty-ninth jump, which will be nineteen years ago next Tuesday. I was jumping out of Grangeville, and it was July 13th, 1985. We had a... We got a fire call in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area. So we put eight smokejumpers in a twin otter, we took off from Grangeville. Spotted one fire on the way there that we thought had some potential to get bigger, but dispatch ordered us to proceed to the fire that we were originally sent to. When we got there the spotter threw one set of streamers. Streamers are crepe paper, fifteen foot pieces of crepe paper, with wire, a

piece of wire in the bottom of it. As you throw those out of the door of the airplane, they unravel, and they drift to the ground at roughly the same speed as a smokejumper would fall to the ground. From that you're able to judge wind speed and wind direction, and that's how you determine where to let the smokejumper exit the aircraft to try to make it into the spot. Well, the spotter threw one set of streamers, went right into the spot, so the next pass we... two jumpers hopped out the door. When they made it to the spot... I was first man, second stick. As I exited the airplane, and my partner immediately followed me, the winds were completely different. We... we were completely different. And they were coming from a different place, and as I fought to get into the spot, and I was lined up to where I think I was going to make it, I suddenly hit a pocket of up air, or dead air, that just stopped my parachute. I just... It was like hitting a wall. I stopped moving forward, and just came straight down, and I landed in the top of a tree that really didn't want me. And I didn't want to be there either. Tree landings can be common for smokejumpers, but you try to plan the trees you want to land in. This was a very large Grand Fir. It had three tops to it, rot around the boll, a lean, and I was on the downhill top. I had enough time to look up and see rot around the boll, and I knew I was in trouble. We carry let-down rope to lower ourselves out of trees. I was able to tie off to my parachute and start my let-down procedures, when [snaps his fingers] the treetop snapped. So I fell eighty feet. I hit one branch on the way down that clipped my helmet, went over and broke my nose. I hit the ground, and of course now the treetop is wrapped up inside my parachute that I'm still hooked to, or that rather my let-down line's hooked to. So that came down and clobbered me again.

BD: Did you have a radio?

RB: Well, when I got hurt there were already two jumpers on the ground, plus my partner, so now there's four of us. The spotter actually saw me slide out of the tree; he saw the tree break and me fall out of it. We knew right away, they knew right away that there was an injury, and the whole planeload jumped. I was fortunate that I had two EMTs on the plane. Smokejumpers carry a trauma kit; we're trained in advanced first aid, and I was fortunate in that I had two EMTs, and one of the smokejumpers was in his second year of med school. But nevertheless I fell eighty feet and it was rough. It took almost four hours for the helicopter to get, to come from Missoula to get me out. In that four hours... Well, the jumpers put mast pants on me to stabilize my blood pressure. I had IVs in me. And we carried Demerol, but I knew with my injuries, the only way I was going to make it out of there was to stay focused, stay with the jumpers, to work with them as they were trying to work with me. But after so much time it's... the pain was incredible. The pain went from... You were no longer in pain. You were pain. The pain was pure. That's the only way to describe it, just pure pain. From the tips of my toes to the end of my hair, it was just pure pain. And... It was just pure. And at one point it was... Well I closed my eyes and [snaps his fingers] boom, I was gone. I was in a white light that was just incredible. The pain was gone, and I was surrounded by pure love, pure joy, pure peace. It was wonderful. But I could hear my jump partner, Bill Martin, who was my best friend. I could kind of hear the jumpers in the background getting worried and... they were on the radio, and it was... But it was like, aahh [waves his hand as if dismissing it] I don't care now. But I could hear Bill telling me to come back. So I came back to talk to Bill. But as soon as I came back it was back in that pure pain. It was back in pure hell. Stayed there, jumpers were cutting a helispot, helicopter from Missoula showed up; the hospital helicopter showed up. They couldn't land because there were still some trees that were too close for them to get into. So they flew away, and when they flew away without me it was, [waves his hand again] don't want to be here no more, and I closed my eyes and [snaps fingers] went away again. Back in that white light, pain's gone, and I thought, I'm going

to stay this time. And I remember walking through that light, and it was incredible. I could see myself, but I could see myself from the bottoms of my feet to the top of my head, in every way, shape angle, but all in one view. But I was still myself. And in that white light I knew everything, I saw everything. It was heaven. It was just great. And as I was walking through the light, this voice came out of, out of the light, and said, okay, you need to turn around and go back now. But no, I'm not going to go back. No, you have to go back now. No, I don't want to go back. But at the same time it's, yeah, you don't argue with this. And I'm turning around and heading back out. And I came out and I was being loaded into the hospital helicopter. And they flew me away to Missoula. And after cat-scans and X-rays and all that stuff... I had broken my back in five places. Spent almost two weeks in intensive care, and then home in a hospital bed for six months, and then up starting to do things. Recovery was hard. It was rough. I think probably the roughest thing about it was, some two years after the injury I went to the Forest Service and said, you know, I'm ready to come back to work now. And they didn't want me. The agency looked at me and said, no, we don't have a place for you here.

BD: Did you have a permanent appointment before?

RB: I had an appointment. But it was, why don't you stay on comp? We don't need you here. Basically you're damaged goods. If you're a federal employee and you get hurt on the job, you're kind of a disposable commodity. And I knew smokejumping was a dangerous occupation, but I never figured I was a mercenary. We got into long, drawn-out battles over my coming back to work. I had to research the law. And I remember finding the Code of Federal Regulations and walking into Personnel one day and saying, look, you guys are wrong. You can [emphasis] put me back to work, and you can [emphasis] give me another position. Boy, that was the day my life went to hell. I learned you don't tell Personnel what their job is. And we fought for years. It involved EEO complaints, lawsuits. All I wanted to do is come back to work. The agency wasn't very nice.

BD: Of course nowadays we put people on light duty all the time.

RB: Well, back in those days we didn't do it. And now what we're doing is not necessarily right. I'm also a member of the National Federation of Federal Employees. I'm the union rep. And my specialty is people getting hurt on the job. And seeing...

[Phone rings. Recorder turned off for phone call, then turned back on.]

RB: I'm one of the union reps for the National Federation of Federal Employees. We've done some studies within the Forest Service on how employees are treated once they've been hurt on the job. And it's really... It's almost criminal in itself. We'll take people that really require some measure of accommodation and are not getting it. We're looking at people... We're not looking at people for their potential; we're just looking to get them off worker's compensation rolls. And if they don't have the proper supervision, or that ground-level support from supervisors, from their employer, they can easily get pigeon-holed in jobs that are dead-end jobs, and they're stuck there. When the union did their initial study we opened up a comment period, a very short time in the middle of winter when most seasonal employees, which are the majority of the injured employees, are off work. In the middle of winter we got two hundred responses. It was too much for the union to accept. We didn't know how to deal with it. Drug and alcohol problems are common. Divorce is common. We had a couple suicides. We had people thinking about workplace violence. I mean it was just... Their lives were ruined because they got hurt on

the job. The union followed it up a couple years later. We did the same thing; we got another couple hundred responses. But they were different people. It seems a common tactic, or commonly what happens is, someone who is seriously injured and requires alternative placement-- meaning they can't go back to their previous positions—they're put in these positions which they're not interested in, they don't get the training, they're just, they're not receiving good accommodation. And then they're directed to an OPM disability retirement, which is only forty per cent of your high three taxable, and then they're gone. And these people leave very disgruntled. And it's only a matter of time before some of them come back and are not nice to us. So I know that angle well. In my case I fought tooth and nail to come back to work, and I've been very successful. They didn't want me, but I like what I do, and I'm good at what I do. So it's... But there again, maybe that's part of attitude.

BD: You want to work and you're willing to learn and to change direction.

RB: Well, you just don't give up. I think one more note on my injury that I really need to throw in there. I mentioned Bill Martin, who was my jump partner, my best friend. When Bill got off that fire—the Three Links Fire in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Areas—he came to the hospital to see me, and we kind of laughed and joked about how I was almost the third smokejumper to die as a result of a jump. A lot of smokejumpers have died over the years from the fire, but only two of them had died as a result of the actual jump itself at that time. Bill and I... I remember lying there in my hospital bed and Bill and I talking about it. There were lots of tears shed, and he was probably as shaken up as I was. And we kind of laughed and joked about it, how I was almost the third jumper to die as a result of the jump. And then a few years later Bill was the third jumper to die as a result of the jump. He was practicing on an experimental chute, and the chute failed to deploy.

[Silence. Deep breath]

Phew! Okay. Now. [Laughs]

And now I'm at the Technology and Development Center. Which is... Which is a kind of unknown part of the agency that is just incredible.

BD: Which section of the Forest Service are you in?

RB: Well even though I'm in Missoula, Montana, I'm part of the Washington office. There's actually two technology and development centers. There's one here in Missoula. There's another in San Dimas, California. But we're detached units of the Washington office.

BD: Are you in the NFS system, or Research, or...?

RB: We are part of engineering.

BD: Oh. So it's NFS.

RB: Uh huh. And it's just... [shakes his head] Everything is new. Everything is on the cutting edge. It's all different. Every year we get new projects. It's such a wonderful, challenging place to work. And the things we do aren't just for the Forest Service. I mentioned the parachute earlier that the military's adopted. The accessible hand pump. We've had some inquiries from the U.S. Agency for International Development that this might be something good for developing countries, or perhaps some of those war-

torn countries in Africa where people are missing limbs, and... nothing happens without water. You don't have water, you don't make it. And this pump will give more people access to potable water.

BD: Would some of the things developed by the center be available for display? For hands-on display?

RB: Oh gosh yes. We can bring hand pumps. We can bring parachutes. We can bring crosscut saws. We have a number of projects that were failures, but a number that are successes. Some are too successful. The current chief of the Forest Service has identified off-highway vehicles as one of his four threats to the Forest Service, to national forest land. The original off-highway vehicle was developed right here at the Technology and Development Center. Back in those days we were the Equipment and Development Center. And we developed the... like a little mini-motorcycle. It was called the Tote Goat. And that was to get foresters and forest technicians up into the forest to do their jobs. And since then it has become dirt bikes and ATVs and so...

BD: All different kinds of things that go into the woods – be careful what you ask for.

RB: Oh absolutely.

BD: Do you have any humorous stories or anecdotes you'd like to share? Enjoyable experiences? They always talk about the Forest Service as a family. Cultural kinds of thing that exhibit that, like your reunions that you had?

RB: Okay. The Forest Service has [emphasis] always been considered family. Considers itself family. However, after my injury and the way I was treated, and then seeing how other people were treated, and seeing how Billy Martin's wife was treated after he died-- originally they tried to say he committed suicide, and there was sexual harassment directed towards his wife, to make her drop her grievance, or her inquiries into Bill's death, and go away. She eventually did quit, because she...

BD: She was an employee as well?

RB: She was an employee as well. Yeah, we might be considered family, but like all families there are those dysfunctional elements. In terms of...

BD: You talk about "we" when you talk about smoke jumping, so I don't think you've left it behind.

RB: Oh no. I think probably one of my fondest memories of jumping was a fire that I jumped... Now I can't remember the year. 1984 maybe; '83. We jumped in the wilderness area, and every three days you get a fresh food drop. Well the third day was Sunday morning. We had the fire contained. The DC-3 flew overhead and kicked out these cargo boxes with our fresh food. In the boxes are milk, juice, steak, vegetables; great stuff. And back in those days we could also get beer. There were... occasionally someone would box up some beer and kick that out the door as well. I'm sure they don't do that anymore with the new rules and regulations that we're under, but back in those days, yeah, you could get beer on a fire occasionally. And I have this vivid memory of the plane dropping our fresh food. And it's Sunday morning. And you can always tell an experienced smokejumper because... Our two main firefighting tools are the Pulaski, which is half-axe, half-hoe, and the shovel. Experienced smokejumper, experienced firefighter, you don't use the shovel. That shovel is clean. Because that's what you fry your steak on when you get the fresh food drop. And I have this vision, this memory, of being on this fire, sitting on the

mountaintop, and this gorgeous view in front of me. The sun is up, just barely coming up. And I'm frying a steak on the shovel, drinking a beer, and reading the Sunday newspaper. And God, it just doesn't get any better than this.

BD: I'm sure they don't do that nowadays. [Laughter]

RB: Well, that was back when smokejumpers were essentially a breed apart, and they left us alone. Now we're much more mainstream, much more incorporated with the rest of the agency, and you don't see, you don't see the things that you used to see. It used to be pretty rough and tumble.

DB: Well, we talked about your early experiences, your smoke jumping experiences, and your MTDC job. Is there anything else you'd like to include?

RB: Let's see. I have one more quick story that just took place last week. The Technology and Development Center has oversight for the Forest Service blasting program. So we provide the technical expertise, and the review and safety for Forest Service blasting. Just outside of Missoula is the Nine Mile Ranger District, which was a historic ranger station. It was built by the CCC. They had an old pole barn. It was a barn they used for storing hay in. Log sides, and a roof truss system. It wasn't built by CCC. I think it was built in the '50s. And it had a little bit of a lean to it. A couple of the log supports, even though they were up off the ground on cement and steel rails, had a little bit of rot to it. So the ranger looked at it and said, that's a hazard and we need to get rid of it. Why don't you blow it? Blow that thing up. Well, we went out there with the regional blaster and strapped all these bombs to these log supports. There were six supports, so we put... On one side we put two bombs on each log; on the other side, just one; figuring [Illustrates with his hands] we'd blow out this one side, the other side blows—we have delays built into it—the whole thing would collapse away from the road. Well, we blew that one side and it went so quick that I think it disconnected the other side. That barn went plunk, [Illustrating with his hands] and just tipped over on its side. And I thought, oh God, if the ranger thought it was a hazard before [Laughs] wait'll he sees it now. So we went and looked at it, and whoever built that barn, they must have been a bridge builder or a ship builder. That truss system was impressive. So we went and wired the center log of each of the trusses. Blew that out. And all that barn did was shake. And it stayed in the same shape. I'm sure whoever did that was just rolling around in heaven just laughing at us.

BD: And so you still have a tipped-over barn?

RB: We have a tipped-over barn, and they're going to bring in excavator and just knock it down. [Laughter]

BD: That's funny. So you said you were a blaster. And you blasted; it just wasn't real effective.

RB: Well, no.

BD: Okay. Anything else?

RB: Yeah, I'm sure there's a ton of other things that I could talk about and go over, but nothing comes to mind right now.

BD: Any hands-on activities that you think would be good for children or other people on the Mall?

RB: I could see bringing back packing tables and packing smokejumper parachutes. Letting people get hands-on experience with what a parachute feels like. Folding, packing parachutes. We can bring back crosscut saws and logs, and people can take a turn trying to cut a log with a crosscut saw. We'll bring back the hand pump; people can crank water. We have... Well, with the wilderness program, there's so many hands-on programs for minimal impact and leave-no-trace. We have so many things we can do. And the Technology and Development program has so many of the Forest Service firsts that we'd have to go through the archives and figure out, what are some of those things that we did before anybody else did? And how that's changed the agency, or the world. And see if we have any of those things still left around that we can bring back as displays. It's kind of who we are and what we do. I can see it as a problem, or a project. Yeah. So all in all, despite the problems, despite the anguish that I have felt with the agency over how I was treated after I'd been hurt...

BD: Would you work anyplace else?

RB: Not a chance. I love the agency. I love who we are and what we do. We might have people who aren't the best, but we have people that are.

END OF INTERVIEW