James Hammer
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Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests
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Interviewer: Barbara Kenedy-Fish

Barbara Fish (BF): Hi, I'm Barbara Fish and this is the Smithsonian Folklife Festival project, and I'm here with Jim Hammer today. Today is March 18th, 2000. Okay. Go ahead Jim.

Jim Hammer (JH): Good morning.

BF: Go ahead and introduce yourself.

JH: Good morning. My name is Jim Hammer. I work on the Okanogan Wenatchee National Forest up here in north central Washington, on the Methnow Valley Ranger District. It's about halfway between Spokane and Seattle on the eastern side of the Cascade Mountains.

BF: Great. Can you tell us a little bit about what your job is?

JH: I'm the trails and wilderness coordinator here on the district. Over the years I have done all the way from trail construction and maintenance, to marking them out-- that's' marking out where a trail would go on the ground—to in later years more office work as far as all the computer type stuff involved with trails nowadays, and putting together contracts for the construction and maintenance of them. Working on the budget and other exciting things.

BF: now when did you start out with the Forest Service, Jim?

JH: I actually started with the Forest Service in 1966. I'd just graduated from high school and needed a job, and I went over and asked for a job with the Forest Service and they said fill out these papers; and the ladies all went out for lunch, and when they came back they figured out I hadn't gotten very far, and one of them told me how to fill out the papers, and the next day I went to work.

BF: And what did you start out doing?

JH: The first year I actually worked about six weeks, and I worked on a brush crew in fire control, where we piled brush from logging slash along the road so that a fire wouldn't start next to the road, hopefully, and it'd kind of clean up the countryside.

BF: Okay, so now let's skip to doing trail work. How did you manage to go from being on a fire crew and doing that kind of stuff to getting into trail work?

JH: At that time the person in charge of fire control—at that time it was called fire control—trails were a portion of that. So the same fellow that would be basically in my position now over trails at that time was over fire control and trails on the district. And the second year they just had myself and another young fellow that had come out of college for the year, put us on the trail crew. And we did what they call a condition survey. We would push a wheel along, measure the trails and write down the different conditions, where the different features were in the trials, whether it was a water bar or a bridge, a rocky area that needed fixing, a washed-out that needed repair or anything else. And we took down the information and they used that for budgeting and figuring out what to do next on the trails.

BF: All right. So how did you really get started? Tell me some of the first experiences you had being out on the trails and working with trail crews?

JH: Well, the first real experience with a crew would probably come in 1968. And through the work in 1967 in the summer the bosses figured we had three bridges that needed repair. At that time there wasn't any wilderness where we were at, so we could drop all the material that we needed to build bridges in by airplane. There was a smokejumper base local. They loaded, we took all the bridge tacking, all of our camping equipment to the jump base, and they flew over the area where we'd marked the spot, so to speak, and dropped our camp and all of our equipment out. All the way from chain saws to tents to bridge decking to our groceries. Our boss had given us good instructions before we left, walking into the job, not to fall any big trees because the oldest kid on the crew was twenty-one; but as the parachutes come down, nothing was guiding them but the wind, and several of them blew into trees. And couple of them fortunately blew into good trees that were right close to the bridge, and they were maybe forty feet up, maybe sixty to a hundred, but they were right up there. And they were trees that we could fall in the right direction so we just put an undercut in, which is a face cut on your tree, went around to the back and laid the trees down right across the river, right where the bridge site was. So we wound up getting the chutes out of the trees and getting our stringers in one fell swoop so to speak. As we walked across the trees laying across the river, we see a few beans that had been canned, laying on the rocks. So the first thing we figured out was we were having beans for supper, and we salvaged what we could, and that was our first supper. Beans, and whatever else we had to go with it at the time.

BF: So Jim, tell me a little bit about… You were talking about when you had to learn how to run a pack string, and what that took, and the experience that you had the first time out.

JH: Well, I come up to the [Wicker?] District in 1976, and they … we had a wilderness area by then up here, it was a little over half a million acres of the [Pasayten?] Wilderness. And of course we were using mules and such to pack our gear in. And we had at that time a person called the district packer, but everybody that was a foreman or a trail crew leader or whatever had to know a little something about packing. So I went out a time or two on day trips, where we'd saddle up our horses or mule and throw some

tools on, and go to do whatever little job we needed to do. And then about the first of June we moved into the Chewuck River. And we built a couple of small bridges, and dug a bunch of trail that was fairly rocky and repaired that. Then, the packer had taken all the stock out and he come back in at the end of two weeks. And they said, this is a good time for you to learn something about being with a pack string by yourself. So we gathered up three or four mules—they gave me old gentle ones of course, hopefully—and showed me how to mantie up the gear, that's tie it up in a tarp. We tied up the gear in a tarp, threw it on the mules, and they handed me the lead rope and I headed for the trail head, about twelve miles away. And everything went smooth. The packs rode well. I seemed to ride fairly well. We got to the trail head and I hauled my load of stock back to Eight Mile Ranch, where we keep our animals, and unloaded them and went back and got another load. By that time the rest of the outfit was out, and had their stuff unloaded, and we were ready to haul the rest of the animals back to the ranch.

BF: Okay. We're going to skip around a little bit. Where are we right now? What is this place, this building that we're in?

JH: Right now we're in the saddle room, as we call it, it's actually the repair shop for the tock; all this stuff that you put on a horse, whether it's a saddle or a bridle, or whatever is called tack. And this is the repair room for that. Over here on the wall we've got various kinds of hardware that you might need; that breaks and one thing or another. Over here,,, we buy our leather by the side as we call it. That's basically they'll take and they'll split the cow down the back and when they're making the leather, and they'll can all one side of the animal. And they make different types: this particular piece here is latigo leather, which you'd use for the latigos, or the little straps of leather that hold the straps on your horse, up here on the saddle. And then you've got all the way from strapping leather to chap leather to make your chaps out of, your strings out of, your straps that hold your pack saddle together. The pack saddle is basically a tree. This is called a tree. And it's basically a piece of wood—most saddle trees are made of wood—and when you have a pack saddle tree you have what you call your rings coming over it. And when you buy your tree you got your metal rings and you got your pieces of wood here. This is known as a decker. It was invented y the Decker boys back in Idaho about the turn of the twentieth century. It was a little better than the old saddles; they had wooden pieces here; made an x they called a sawbuck. They looked similar to what you'd lay a stick of wood in to cut your wood up in the old days. Anyway, then when you get your tree, you add the straps on to it. This goes up to what they call the breast collar that goes around the front of the animal. This goes back to the britchin, that goes around the back side of the animal. And then you've got the riggin' here that holds your cinch on. And all that stuff because it gets used is going to break, so we have to repair it sooner or later.

BF: Okay. So that's why you have the sewing machines and all that kind of good stuff, right?

JH: Right. And we might make a few axe sheaths or axe scabbards and a few other things too.

BF: All right.

Brief interruption in video.

JH: Okay. For let's say doing a job of trail maintenance. When we would do a maintenance job in the back country or wilderness, either one, you need tools to dig in the dirt. We've got what we call a pick-matic. Actually we call it a hoe dag, but it's in actuality a pick-matic. We use shovels. And then we use a tool called a mccloud. It's a fire tool. It's got a hoe on one side and a rack on the other. And we've got our camp. We've usually packed a wall camp. What we call a sheepherder stove. It's a wood burning stove. Then we packed a gas stove. We pack boxes to keep our groceries in. And we use little tarps to keep all of our duffle and everything else in. Anyway a string was usually comprised of about six head of animals that would pack all the camp gear and one animal that would pack the tools. And if we were in the front country, we would have a chain saw tied across all the rest of the tools, and in the back country or wilderness we'd have a cross cut or a handsaw.

And we've got our camp. We've usually packed a wall tent, what we call a sheepherder's stove. It's a wood burning stove. Then we packed a gas stove. We packed boxes to keep our groceries in. And we use little tarps to pack everything else in. Anyway the string was usually comprised of about six head of animals that would pack all the camp gear and one animal that would pack the tools. And if we were in the front country you would have a chain saw tied across all the rest of the tools, and in the back country or wilderness you would have a crosscut or a hand saw. Anyway usually we had three to four people. There'd be a person that was dedicated pretty much to packing as long as we were moving every day. They would get up in the morning, make the breakfast. One of the crew or two would go look for the saddle horses and mules. By the time they got back with that, breakfast would be ready. Everybody would break down their own beds and get them and their duffle ready to pack up, basically throw it in the heap. The packer then would break camp. About that time the crew was leaving to start maintaining trail and they would be would be cutting out the logs, clean out the drains, kicking the rocks out if the way, and then the packer would pack up the camp and they would have a pre-determined place where they would meet on down the trail, because most camps were pretty well known where they would be. You'll need water there for the animals, you'll need water for the camp, and you'd need some feed for the animals. So the camp might be five miles down the trail, it might be six or eight miles down the trail or ten; and if you couldn't maintain that much trail then you'd have to come back the next day to wherever you quit the day before and go on down the trail. And sometimes if the weather was good you might stop and eat your lunch or whatever. Other times I've been out when the weather was pretty bad, and we'd just take turns, while we were maintaining trail, of getting on a saddle horse and riding along long enough to eat your sandwich, and getting off your saddle horse and walking, just to stay warm if nothing else. Plus if you're on a horse you can't do much trail maintenance. You've got to get to where you can get to the rocks; you've got to get to the drains; you've got to be able to get to the logs. But it's nice to have the saddle horse there when you need to go back to camp or whatever else you

might need. And the tool mule, of course, he's always a lot better off. He's got a horse there to keep him company.

BF: Okay. So what makes a good mule? And what makes a good pack horse?

JH: Well mainly, we like them to be gentle. It's always nice to not be kicked or struck or anything else; or bit. And we tend to use animals here on the district, that pack mules usually have like a draft animal, or we used to call them a work horse mother, like a Belgian or a Percheron or something like that. And then a mammoth jack as a dad. And a mule of course is a cross between the horse mother and the jack or the burro or the donkey dad, whatever you want to call him.

BF: Why do you call him a mammoth?

JH: Because the mammoth tends to be a larger strain or breed or whatever. They're about fourteen hands tall, and a hand is four inches, so they're fairly tall for a burro type animal. And you want some size to your pack mules usually. But the big work horse animals, as a rule, are a little more gentle than your hot blood type critters. So we would tend to buy a work horse type mule. And they're bigger, and if we go to working heavy duty stuff, packing bridge decking and that kind of stuff, they'll keep it up above the rocks and stuff. Plus they'll be able to pack two, three hundred pounds, where another animal may not, we feel.

BF: Okay, now you're talking about your saddle horse too, and how important that animal was for transportation. What kind of personality did it need?

JH: Well, there again, I'm not much of a cowboy that way, so I like 'em gentle. And you don't want any more rodeos out there; you get enough anyway, running into bees and one thing and another. So you want a fairly gentle horse. I always liked an animal that had a fairly good set of withers to hold the saddle on, whether it was a pack horse or a saddle horse. But you want an animal that can step out and move three miles an hour or faster. If you're riding alone you want to be able to go faster than that; if you're pulling a pack string, you're not going to be going any faster than about three miles an hour anyway. So basically being gentle. I used to when I was younger like a real tall horse. Anymore it's harder for me to get on, so I'd just as soon have a shorter horse. As long as he's strong enough to hold me in the saddle, I don't care what he looks like.

BF: Okay, now we've talked about the personalities of the mule. We've talked about the personalities of the horse. What about the personality of the packer? What's the typical packer's personality, and trail foreman's personality? What do you need to do that?

JH: Well, you need to be able to make do with what you got when you don't have what you really need, and still get the job done. You need to be able to go out in the brush for ten days to two weeks and longer at times, and put up with that with two or three other people. And it's nice if you've got the personalities with the three people or whatever it is that you can get along, because it's kind of like you're living together like you're married

for darned near for that of a time, and the better disposition you all are the better off you are. Now in the old days when I first come up here, we tended to have an old packer and an old trail foreman that probably weren't the easiest folks to get along with, but on the other hand being the younger fellow you tended to get along with them anyway. So as I got older and was more dealing with the crews and such, I tried to get along with everybody; and you just about have to as much as you can. You don't want to be getting into fights out there 'cause it's a long ways out, and if you've got bad feelings towards one another it can make an awful long two weeks. So compatibility is the best thing, and that's hard to judge when you're looking at a piece of paper trying to hire somebody.

BF: And you've got to be able to put up with different kinds of weather and be able to be around the animals and work hard. Right? Give me a typical work day.

JH: Well, a typical work day now… we try to keep it to eight hours. It used to be, a person would get up around five in the morning and start breakfast; the one person, like I talked about before. Another person would head out looking for the animals, wrangling as they call it. Now the night before, we'd usually take, put a hobble and a bell on one or two of the horses, maybe hobble all the horses. And if we had any young mules that hadn't been running loose yet much, we'd put hobbles on them. We'd turn them loose in a grassy area. We would hopefully have the camp between the grassy area and the main trail out, so that if you heard him coming down the trail in the night you'd hear that bell and would be able to go out and stop him. Anyway the wranglers would go out and catch the animals and bring them in; and the cook or the foreman or whoever by that time would have breakfast made. You would eat your breakfast; you would saddle up the animals; you might leave the packers out and just saddle up the animals you were hitting the trail with; the packer would do the dishes while everybody else hit the trail. And that was usually by eight o'clock, easily you were on the trail.

BF: Well when would you wrap it up then?

JH: Usually we're done, the work part of it, as far as the trail maintenance, by four-thirty or five. You see you got your eight hour day in. Hopefully by that time the packer had passed you and set up camp, although we had one old packer for a while that another young fellow and I… He had a tendency to get to camp and he was pretty slow, and by the time you got into camp by four-thirty or five then you'd have to spend another hour helping him set up camp. So we got to where we might stay out 'til about six o'clock working trail just so we wouldn't have to help set up camp. And then, once you got in, the camp was set up, you'd unload what you had; you'd take all the horses and mules together to wherever the feed was and turn them loose. So usually by six, seven o'clock at night you were done with most of your work and hopefully done with your eating. And then by nine o'clock you were ready to go to bed. We used to say nine o'clock was legal time. If you went to bed before nine o'clock somebody could harass you and that was okay. But after nine o'clock you were supposed to be able to go to bed and everybody leave you alone.

BF: Okay. So what kind of grub would you eat? I mean did you bring in fresh vegetables or did you eat beans every day?

JH: Well, usually what we did, we would have a pressure cooker, we would have a gas stove, we would have a sheepherder's stove, we would have our cooler boxes. The first night we would usually eat steak, because it was easy. And then after that you would have a roast; you would take and put a roast in a pressure cooker along with some bacon; not bacon, but potatoes and carrots and onions. And you'd have yourself a pot roast pretty easily. Usually other than your steak, and sometimes even with that you'd buy a boneless, so you weren't packing the extra weight you weren't going to get any good out of. Plus you didn't have to worry about what you were going to do with the leftovers. The we'd have a meal or two of hamburger; we might just fry up hamburger patties or make like a Salisbury steak or whatever you want to call it. We might roast it; you can roast a piece of hamburger similar to what you can a roast. We might have a meal of spaghetti out of it. Then we could maybe bring in pork chops if they were frozen and eat them early on. In he old days we usually had about five or six meals of fresh meat, and then we'd pack a ham with us. And then the ham would keep pretty well and we might just fry it up and eat it with some potatoes or whatever else we was eating. We usually had fresh potatoes every day unless we had spaghetti or something. We'd maybe bring in a package of stew meat and make stew. We would always have a bunch of beans with us, and we might… You can take beans and put them in a pressure cooker and as long as you don't fill them up too high you can cook beans in a pressure cooker in about forty-five minutes. So that works out pretty good. You'd cook up a bunch of beans, throw in your ham and an onion or two, and that was supper.

BF: And so what was a typical breakfast?

JH: A typical breakfast. Well, depends on who you were with. If you were with one old packer, old Bill Imes, you'd have spotted dog, along with whatever else you had. And spotted dog was basically rolled oats—or oatmeal as some folks know it—you'd start boiling your water, you'd throw in a handful of raisins and a little salt, and then you'd throw in the oatmeal, and after a while you'd have your spotted dog. And that was along with usually bacon, and eggs and hotcakes. And with a couple of the old packers the only variety you had was from bacon, eggs and hotcakes, was eggs, bacon, and hotcakes. So after a while some of us started packing a few other things. One of the old calls in fact if you had a bigger crew and once the animals were in, and breakfast was done, if everybody wasn't up, we had one old boy that'd holler out "The dog's got a spot", and that meant that the breakfast was done and you'd better be getting up. And once in a while there was folks that lay long enough they had to be told to get up, but most folks after the second or third trip knew when it was time to get up and had that figured out.

BF: And then your lunches, I suppose, were just sandwiches on the go then?

JH: Usually we'd buy sandwiches and cookies, and we'd usually have some kind of either apples or oranges and that kind of stuff. You don't want to pack bananas, they don't work out too well inside of saddlebags. But apples and oranges work out good. And

we used to buy a lot of these little canned puddings, and they'd last pretty good; the ones you don't have to refrigerate. And we'd have them in the mountains. And that made a pretty good deal for something to eat for supper.

BF: No freeze dried foods though?

JH: We, as a trail crew with animals, we didn't have much freeze dried food. The only thing we had dry, you might say, was hot cake flour and oatmeal. But we ate pretty good, and we worked hard, and it didn't show on me then like it does now.

BF: Oh pshaw. What was your best trip and worst trip that you can remember?

JH: My best trip. It's hard to say which one's my best trip. I've had an awful lot of good ones back there. One of my real good trips I guess was by myself, chasing contractors, and that was basically, a lot of our work is done by trail contractors. And we would have to inspect their work, and then we would just have to take an animal or two with us to carry our camp and a saddle horse to carry us. And we'd ride back there, and it was basically a ride through the woods. Looking at their work and seeing what kind of work they were doing. And that was a pretty nice trip. And other times I've been out with a person or two that I've enjoyed the company of, and we would be doing our work, whether it was trail maintenance or trail construction. If the weather was nice, and sometimes if it got a little bad even, it was still pretty pleasant. We had a wall tent with a sheepherder stove in it. A wall tent's about twelve by fourteen or sixteen. You put a heater up in that for the cold weather, and a lot of times at the higher elevations in the evenings or early mornings it's still pretty cold in the middle of the summer. Or you could even have snow. And the worst trip I ever had was probably when I packed a body out, just because of the fact that I was packing a body.

BF: Tell us about that a little bit.

JH: It was around the twelfth of June if I remember right. A fellow came into the district office, along about noon or so, and said that his dad had had a heart attack, they had revived him, but they didn't know if he would stay revived, and of course they needed help to get him out. It was real cloudy that day, both here in Winthrop and up Andrews Creek where the camp was at. They couldn't get a helicopter in. We had a lady working here as a wilderness ranger at the time that was also a registered nurse. We got ahold of the local ambulance folks and the county sheriff who's actually the people responsible for Search and rescue. They asked us for help, and we had some expertise because we knew the country, and we had some equipment for the trail as far as cutting the trail out. So I gathered up an axe and a saw, and Marge the wilderness ranger, she and the head of the local ambulance service, Cindy Button, went in first as quick as they could. Myself and two ambulance workers and a couple of sheriff's posse members, Charlie and Al Flag, came in behind with some animals and I brought a big Forest Service meal to pack anything we might have to. Their camp was about ten miles in. And of course we got a late start. And the trail hadn't been maintained like I said, and it was pretty heavy timber going up Andrews Creek, and there was lot of stuff we had to go around. And when you

have to go around some downfall in the trail, that means you got to weave your way around through brush, and trails usually have about an eight to ten foot right-of-way cut out, and when you weave through brush of course you might be brushing right up against the trees. The camp was about ten miles in and we got in probably it was along just about dark. And of course dark comes fairly late in June. The cloud cover was about the top of the trees and they were probably sixty, seventy feet tall, the taller ones. We were up fairly high. Cindy and the other folks did whatever they needed to do to do the coroner-type stuff to make everything okay so to speak, because it was obvious that the fellow was dead. We basically brought him out of his tent in a sleeping bag and put everything in a body bag. Then we laid out two manties kind of kiddy-corner to each other, and wrapped them around him and mantied him up and tied him with two mantie ropes. The fellow was in the neighborhood of six foot three or four and weighed two sixty-five, two hundred and seventy pounds. So he was a fair-sized fellow. Made a pretty fair load for Paul the mule. So we turned him over and got him tied on the mule the best we could. And then we asked Marge the wilderness ranger if she'd lead him. And she said she'd lead as long as somebody else went in front. So I rode in front, and the first thing we figured out was, by going around everything we went around going up Andrews Creek we couldn't get back the way we came. Another six miles in was the Spanish Camp cabin. From that to the trail's about nineteen miles going the other way, going out the Chewack River. We'd already maintained about eight or ten miles to the Chewack River and most of the upper end is fairly small timber so it would be easy to cut out we know. So we figured the best thing to do was to go to Spanish Camp and come back out the other way, which is the way from where we're at around give or take twenty-six miles. The folks there were of course going to break camp the next day and they give us a little coffee and a little bacon. By now it's nine-thirty at night and it's pitch dark. I mean, it's darker than the inside of a cow; you literally can't see your hand in front of your face, and you sure can't see the person behind you on the next animal. So we headed into Spanish Camp, and every once in a while old Paul the mule would stop. And when he did of course the rope would come tight and Marge would holler at us, and we had a couple or three flashlights and we'd go back, and if that load slipped at all, old Paul was a good mule and he'd stop, and we'd just re-tie it, re-position it on the mule, and off we'd go again. Another time my horse just stopped dead, and we got to looking; there was this tree in front of him across the trail. And a couple of them, we were able to look at, take the flashlights, and figure out how to get around them. Finally we come to one and couldn't figure out a way to get around it, so Charley Flag set there with a flashlight and held it while I chopped the tree out about eleven thirty at night. We chopped a tree out of the way. It wasn't a big tree, and that was nice, but we got it out of the way and we got on into Spanish Camp. By the time we got to Spanish Camp it was midnight or a little later and it was starting to snow. And like I've probably said before, it could snow any month of the year in the high country there, and Spanish Camp for this country's high, it's about sixty-two hundred feet. Anyway we decided our best bet was to spend the night there; it would start to get light in the morning, and so we tied the horses and mules up outside. And I went down to the creek and got a bucket of water and some of the other folks started a fire, and we made some coffee. Marge and Cindy fried up the bacon. So we sat there for a little while and ate straight bacon and drank coffee. And Charley had been what they called an old remount packer back in the days when they had lots of packing

going on in the Forest Service, so he entertained us with stories and it was a thoroughly pleasant night. Except that that cabin isn't that warm and everybody wasn't dressed for that kind of weather, but we kept everything going as good as we could and kept the fire going, and everybody stayed relatively okay. Along about four in the morning it started to lighten up a little bit in the east. We decided it was about time we might as well head out. We had about four inches of snow on us by then. So we took off and started riding. We still weren't… in some ways didn't have the right coats on and everything, so we'd get off and walk occasionally. So we probably walked about half as much as we rode on the way up, just trying to stay warm. We did have a radio with us, and they'd put a person onto a lookout to relay for us, so we called out when we left the cabin and told them which way we were heading, and it took us, oh probably six hours or seven to get out to the trailhead, and they'd moved their trucks up from Andrews Creek trailhead to thirty mile, so we had an ambulance waiting for us there along with the stock trucks, and everybody got unloaded and headed for home.

BF: Boy. That was quite an experience. And in twenty-four hours that happened?

JH: We were probably out in the neighborhood of twenty-four hours, yeah. And that's probably like I say the worst trip I ever had just because of what I had to do along the line. I'm sure it worse for the guy's family than it ever was for me, of course. It was a good thing having Cindy there because she had dealt with a lot of that kind of stuff and was pretty sensitive, and the rest of us were basically doing the work and she was doing all the PR work and everything else she had to do.

BF: You talked about some of the worst weather and getting caught in snow storms and that sort of thing. Did that ever really affect you at any time? Have to change your plans or…?

JH: Usually the main thing it would do is that you wouldn't… We got into… I talked a little earlier about Ellis and I taking turns on the saddle horse eating our lunch. We did that going over Sheep Mountain and we headed up to a spot called Bunker Hill and camped and set up for the night. Actually a pretty pleasant spot. We run the horses kind of out around the south side of Bunker Hill and let them go to feed. Bill Imes was our packer with us at that time with us. In the morning we heard a kind of a real flat 'Pssst, Passst" against the tent, and after you heard it a few times you realize that's snow. And plus things are kind of sagging. So we get up there and there's four to six inches of snow all over the ground. And of course the first thing you have to do is, there again, make breakfast, and look for the animals. So I take off to look for the animals and I got an idea of course where I left them the night before so I head that way. And I probably walked half a mile before I even seen a track. And then I seen some indents in the snow. And luckily the animals were smart enough to kind of hole up, so they found a spot under some trees once they got their bellies full and were standing there. They were probably a mile, mile and a half from our camp. But I got them and brought them on back to camp, and we basically did our regular job except we couldn't clean the drains very well over the top of Bunker Hill because we couldn't see them, and we couldn't kick the rocks because we couldn't see them. So once we got down towards thePasaytenRiver some…

And that day we didn't move camp, we just left it where it was at because we were blazing a trail down to thePasaytenRiver, which we'd already cleaned the trail along thePasaytenRiver. But we got all the downfall cut out of it. And we made the trip down and back ,and by the time we got down and back, of course, it was time to go to bed again and there was still snow on the ground. So we went ahead and acted like there wasn't. There wasn't much else we could do; knocked the snow off the tent. And then the next day we broke camp and headed out Larch Creek, and came down Larch Creek, and once we got down out of Bunker Hill a ways everything warmed up and there wasn't near as much snow and we could go ahead and do regular trail maintenance.

Bf: Do you want to take a little break or do you want to keep going?

JH: Oh I could take a little rest a minute.

BF: Okay.

[TAPE INTERRUPTED]

JH: Back in the late '70s we went over to cut out the Boulder Creek Trail. It's kind of on the west side of our district. The trail hadn't been cut out for twenty, thirty years, which meant there was a lot of stuff growing in the trail, a lot of stuff across the trail, and several pieces of the trail that was gone. And we had one spot there, we'd cut the trail one day and the next day we were going to ride across that piece of trail and go on down further to start cutting again. As we started across old Tim Able the packer said something along the lines of, "You boys might want to ride kinda light in the saddle going across here." Well I was riding an old sorrel horse name of Streak, and as we come along a piece of ground about twenty, thirty feet across, there really wasn't any tread there and it was a pretty good piece of side slope. I was about the third guy in line, and the other two horses did fine. Mine acted like he was kind of stumbling, so I just took a leap, right out from in front of the saddle and jumped right over the head of the horse, and right as I was doing that of course the horse was going down. And he rolled over a time or two and rolled to the bottom of the creek. Landed on his back. I was okay, I landed in a bunch of alder brush. But then we went down and got the horse straightened around. The only thing he really did was scar up my saddle a little bit. So everything worked out pretty good really. And I guess that's one time I was glad I was able to move in a hurry.

BF: So you talk about rodeos. And is that a typical experience for a packer, to get into a rodeo once in a while?

JH: Every packer does once in a while, and for different reasons. We had one old mule by the name of Brownie, and we used to say she was [cat-hammed?], and that is on the back of her leg instead of coming around like most animals would she was more straight; which meant the britchin' instead of holding up here where it belongs, and we'd actually go and try to lift it up with the adjustment straps to make sure it stayed up, at times if she was going downhill just right that britchin' slipped down. Well when it slipped down a little bit there was a side to that rubbing on her flanks or getting too close to her hot joints

or something, she'd go to bucking. Now I'd done some blasting. My boss, the resource assistant at the time and another person, we went in on the Buckskin Ridge Trail. And there was a spot in there, there was a bunch of rock about as high as this table that you had to jump up onto with your horse. So we went in there and laid our explosives along that and blasted it out so that the trail was on the contour with the mountain side. We kept on going; and the Buckskin Ridge Trail was a lot of old sheep driveway trail, so in places it just doesn't hardly exist. We went along in one spot and we lost the trail, basically we were following the game trail. And Brownie was one of our mules. The packs were riding pretty good except in places going down a steeper hill. That britchin' would slide down her leg and I'd keep walking her. She wasn't doing a thing. We come across one area there, there was a pretty steep slide slope, there was a creek running down it. We stepped all the horses across it; she steeped across it. Worked out fine. We went a little further and here we hit the main trail again. Once we went back on the other trail she went to bucking. It was just like she knew she couldn't buck out there 'cause she could of killed herself in the back country. Soon as we got on the good trail she tried to buck her pack off again. I went back and got everything re-adjusted and off we went. Everything worked fine.

BF: How many times did you have to go collect stuff?

JH: Usually not too often. Most of the time we had stuff tied on pretty well, and tied up pretty good, so I didn't really lose too much stuff over the years. We've had packs slip, where I went along several times and everything was looking good and something would happen back there and I'd take another look and I might have a pack on top of the animal instead of each side of it. I'd have one underneath and one on top. And that's a little frustrating. Then all you can do is go back and tie up your animals and take that one off by itself and re-pack it.

BF: So there's a real art to packing. Tell me about it.

JH: You can pack just an awful lot of different things. We packed lumber up to ten two twelve feet long. Now to do that we have what we call a lumber rat that we bolt onto the decker rings. Then it would come down, and mostly when you're going to pack lumber you'll weigh it to get it as close to weight as you can. And then if you've got real long lumber you'll tie it at the back because just the way the animal's shaped it has a tendency to poke in towards their head, and some animals don't necessarily appreciate that. So if you can put a rope around the backside of the animal to kind of pull the load in, then it will usually ride a little better. Now there's some of the old boys that used to pack with a swivel, where they put actually a long piece of board or whatever onto two animals. I've never done that myself but I've seen the swivels that do it and I've seen pictures.

BF: What's the most unwieldy load that you've ever packed in?

JH: Unwieldy load. One of the hardest things I've ever had to pack, or that was hardest for me to pack-- and it could have been the mule I was packing it on—was two hundred pounds load of [feen?]. She should have been even, they should have rode perfect. They

each weighed two hundred pounds. They were each two fifty pound sacks. We shook them down so that they were pretty tight. We mantied them up and we put them on a little mule by the name of Midge, and we had to re-pack that about half a dozen times in the twelve, fourteen miles into Hidden Lakes. It was a simple load, it should have packed easy. But whether it was the way she was—and it could have been that she was pretty fat yet, and she lost a little weight just going in there, and maybe that made it slip. But something wasn't right. But I packed in twelve foot pieces of lumber that hasn't worked. I've packed a wheelbarrow, and I've packed one several times, and the worst time I ever had packing a wheelbarrow was down the main street of Winthrop here. I went through the parade one time with a wheelbarrow, and of course with several thousand people watching, my wheelbarrow had to slip a little bit. Where if I'd been in the back country I'd have had it tied on and it probably wouldn't have happened at all.

BF: What are some of the most interesting encounters you've had with people? We've got about eleven more minutes to go on this video and I just wanted to catch a couple more anecdotes.

JH: Well, one time I was in at the Pasayten Airport, myself and two other fellows, and we went in on a weekend to move a trail crew camp. They'd been camped in on Frosty Creek, and all we were doing was just bundling up their gear and moving it a few miles up the trail because they were re-constructing the trail and we wanted to put them closer so they didn't have to walk an hour or two a day just to do their job. So we stayed at the old Pasayten Airport cabin, and that's an old government facility that has a barn and an outhouse and a pretty nice cabin and a long airstrip that isn't used anymore. We went in one day, and we went up the next day to move the camp. We come back that evening, and there was a bunch of dudes in there or guests from a commercial packer. And their animals ran off. So they had about four or five women, and then the cook and then the cook and the packer that worked for the outfit, and the women were all hiking, and then the packer and the cook were writing and packing the groceries and doing the cooking and everything like that. Anyway all their animals, for whatever reason, left. So they were going to spend the night. That was fine and dandy. Well once I realized their animals left, there was a kind of a fence out through the brush. So I thought, well I better check that fence to make sure ours don't leave. Well as I was checking the fence I walked past the barn. Well here's two of the ladies in the barn, taking a bath. And that surprised me I guess. But it didn't seem to bother them a lot. But I talked with them for a second and then went on about my business. And that's probably one of the more interesting things that's happened out there.

BF: (laughing) Did you actually talk to them?

JH: I did. And it didn't seem to bother them a bit.

BF: Did they ever find their horses?

JH: They did. Actually what happened is, we were in there just packing stuff in there, so we had quite a few empty animals, so we brought their gear out. And they walked out,

and the packer walked out. And on the way out, he walked a different way than we did, because he knew the way that we were going, and he walked a different direction and found his animals; they'd headed for home. So he found his animals and we all basically met again at the trail head and just left their stuff. Their boss was there to pick it up and take it back. But anyone who's been out in the mountains much with a pack string has lost their animals sooner or later, so we understood that and it didn't bother us too much.

BF: Okay, you got about eight more minutes. Is there one more little story you want to tell or something you want to say about yourself and your experiences with the Forest Service and as a packer, or what?

JH: Well, there's probably lots of stories I could tell.

BF: I'm sure there are.

JH: And about myself, that's not all that interesting. I've just been around for thirty odd years, and went from being, like I said before, on the crew, to kind of hopefully helping direct the crew now, or staying out of their way so they can get their work done. And years ago I was helping out the range conservationist, or the range con as we call him, and he was trying to build a… He had a piece of real rocky trail that he was trying to get cows down through. And so what he wanted done was to drill and blast a section of rock so that the cows could walk down this way into Huckleberry Creek. Well being with frank, he always had a bunch of cow permitees come in and talk and need things done, so he didn't leave the Wolf Creek trailhead 'til about noon or so. And we didn't have that far to go. So we got in a couple miles to the North Fork and headed up the North Fork, and the first thing that happened is we come to some downfall across the trail. Well that's no big deal except that there was a bee nest underneath of it. So here's the bees. We head up there and the animals pull back, and they're tied together from one mules head to the other mule's saddle with quarter inch rope, so it will break and you won't have too bad of a wreck,. And this rope broke, and we wound getting our way around the downfall. 'Cause this is basically an unmaintained trail. Then we had to tie up our lead animals, go back and gather everything that had broke loose, and take them on up and tie them back together and go. Well we went in there, and once we got to the head of North Fork we had to kind of more or less cross country on a cow trail for a mile or two to where we camped. We set up our camp—this must have been about a Monday—and turned our animals out every day so they could go eat and what not and get something to drink. And then we'd tie them up at night. And anyway, we worked in there every day, drilling and blasting. The last day we were trying to get it done, so we drilled and blasted pretty late. We got back to camp; we decided, well, we'd better turn the animals loose to let them eat a little bit. So we turned everything loose to let them eat. It was starting to get dark on us, and all of a sudden we heard the bells heading off down the trail. And we thought, oh shucks, we better get to finding them. So we each gathered up our flashlights and headed down through the brush, and our doggone flashlights ran out of batteries. So here we are in the middle of the black darkness not being able to see where we were at, on the north slope in the timber. So we decided, well, our best bet was to look for them in the morning; maybe they didn't go too far. Well, the morning come around and we couldn't

hear bells or anything, so we got up and had breakfast, and Frank decided he'd go looking for animals if I'd break camp. Frank found the animals; they were about two miles from the truck. And he had to turn around and head back for the camp. And we're probably about eight or ten miles in. Well, when he got to those bees, he lost two animals. They wouldn't follow. He didn't have halters for them. He got into camp and we packed up. Luckily we had two mule loads of powder, so we had enough animals to bring out, except we had two extra saddles. Old Brownie was one of the mules that came, and she was built like a camel with that extra saddle on top of her. But every so often that britching would slip down like I talked about before and she'd go to bucking, and sometimes we'd only get to go a quarter mile before we had to re-pack her. Finally we got down to where the bees were at, and here were those two other animals waiting about a hundred yards away. So we just saddled them up and re-packed and didn't have a bit of trouble 'til we'd gone the rest of the way to the trailhead. We didn't get back to the trailhead until ten o'clock that night. And we were mighty happy to see the trailhead. That gave us one fairly late night.

BF: All right. Well, thank you. And then we're going to get together and talk about how to pack a mule and that sort of thing when the mules get up here. Now where do you keep them stashed this time of year?

JH: Right now we have a fellow who has a ranch down there at Kittikas right next to Ellensburg. And I believe all the Okanogan and Wenatchee animals are down there. He pastures them until he runs out of pasture or gets too much snow, and then he feeds them hay for the winter.

BF: So when do you bring them up?

JH: We should bring them up around the first of may.

BF: Okay. And then there's a barn here/ or a ranch?

JH: We've got a ranch, as we call it, eight miles north of town, called Eight Mile Ranch, and it's got about fifty acres of irrigated pasture. It's got a hay barn and a tack shed, and all this tack in here will be put out there come spring. And then we'll either base our stuff out of there. We also have another pasture up Alder Creek out of Twist that we'll run a few of our horses and our mule on and there we keep all of our stuff in Twist to do that.

BF: All right. So we're going to get back together in May then.

JH: Okay.

BF: All right. Well thanks, Jim.

JH;: Well thank you, Barb.

END OF INTERVIEW