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An interview with
John Breckenridge
By Miriam Breckenridge

1979

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Introduction: This is an interview with John Breckenridge, his memories of the sheep industry, by Miriam Breckenridge, March 4, 1978.

EARLY REMEMBRANCES OF KETCHUM

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: I am trying to collect the history of the sheep business as it functioned in central and south central Idaho, I guess that's what you call it, basically starting with people who were first in the Ketchum Livestock Association. And to begin with, John, I'd like it if you could talk a little bit about what you remember as a child. Now, I know Father Breck first wasn't in the sheep business, but you did-- you do have some recollections of what was happening up in Ketchum in early 1920s, don't you?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: My recollection of Ketchum in the early 1920s-- I was only five years old in 1921-- are very sketchy. I only remember-- don't remember anything about the sheep business in Ketchum in the early 1920s. I remember-- probably my earliest recollection is somewhere about nineteen . twenty-one (1921) or twenty-two (1922). I can remember driving with my dad and mother from Twin Falls over to Stanley Basin when we, my mother and dad, built the first cabin at Pettit Lake. About all I remember of the trip from Twin Falls to Pettit Lake is leaving home early in the morning in the old Marman touring car and going down the Blue -- across the Snake River on the bridge that Blue Lakes grade was then just down in the bottom of the canyon across the river, and driving up the other side. But it was a toll road, of course then, owned by Mr. Perrine. I don't remember what the toll was-- maybe ten cents. And then I wouldn't remember anything, excepting on the trips we would stop at what we call "the Cottonwoods," which is about this side of where U.S. 93 crosses the Wood River at a spot called "the Narrows.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Yes.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: We stopped in there for lunch, picnic lunch. And then driving on over Timmerman Hill, I can remember the pleasant sight and the smell of the green, irrigated fields on the north side of Timmerman Hill as opposed to the sagebrush desert on the south side. And . . . going through Bellevue, I can remember the hand-drawn fire wagon that was in the then City Hall, the one . MB- The one that is still there?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: The one-- the building that still is there.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: The one with the steeple a little off angle.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: The one that is still there, with the steeple on top, right. Then Ketchum was just a dirt street.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Now, Jack Lane's store then was in the same location that it was until he ceased to operate it?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: No. My recollection-- what was Sanger's Garage on the corner diagonally across from what is now Bald Mountain Hot Springs was-- Jack Lane's store was right next door to that.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: That's what other people have told me. The old store, as it was called later on. It was later torn down and Jack Lane built a warehouse on that area. I don't remember going in to the old store; I just remember driving through Ketchum. The Golden Rule Store was there. The-- what is now the souvenir shop next to the Drug Store was there. I believe it was originally a bank, I'm not positive. The building, which houses now the First Security Bank and was Jack Lane's store that I remember most, was, of course, there. What was in it?

SHEEP IN THE SAWTOOTH VALLEY

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: I don't remember. Then from Ketchum on north to Galena was just a wagon road, just two parallel tracks, of course, we used for automobiles. But it was not graded even, no barrow pits or anything like that. I don't remember the first road over Galena Summit. The one I remember is the second road, which, of course, you remember. [It was] the same one that was there when you and I were married in the late thirties (1930's). That road, of course, was a graded road; they had to grade it to build it, but it was maintained with a horse-drawn road grader. And the road on the other side of Galena Summit to Pettit Lake, again, was just two parallel tracks going through the sagebrush. There were no irrigated meadows in the southern end of Sawtooth Valley.

I can remember seeing bands of sheep, but I have no recollection where they were going or why they were there or anything else about the sheep business at that time. It was at that time that my dad had a small flock of purebred Hampshire sheep, but he kept them here on the farm in Twin Falls the year round. And in fact, my job used to be to herd that small flock of sheep in the barrow pit on what is now Blue Lakes Boulevard, before it was oiled, even.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Just like you saw those little Egyptian kids herding sheep on the ditch banks of the Nile.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Same way.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: And you did that.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: I did that.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: I never knew that. You said, John, that you can remember when in the spring you looked out at the desert, as we look at it from the front of our house, and it would be from there on-- if you went over that way at all-- it was just dotted with sheep wagons. Now is that in this period of the twenties (1920's)?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: I don't remember that; just looking out and seeing the sheep wagons in the early twenties (1920's).

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: You don't?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: No, it was-- in the early thirties (1930's) I remember. I became more cognizant of the range sheep business then, because by that time, Dad had started to put together Busterback Ranch in Sawtooth Valley and was taking his purebred-- enlarged purebred Hampshire sheep flock out on to the desert and up across the desert on over Galena Summit and onto the ranch during the summertime. That would have been in about 1930 because he started to put the ranch together in 1929. And I used to take the little Dodge Coupe with the two-wheel trailer and take supplies out to the sheep camp when they were out in the desert. And it was at that time that I remember seeing sheep camps all over the place, so to speak.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: In all probability they would have been there before, and you were not aware of them.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Oh, I am sure they were there before; I just didn't pay any attention to them.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Yes. What was there with-- was there a herder and a camp tender there with the band of purebred?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Yes. Herder, [a] Scotchman, by the name of Sam Thompson. And as I recall, the camp tender's name was Otto McCormick. The two wagons were drawn by a team of white mules. That's my first recollection of the desert. And they would get ...oh, not over fifteen miles off of [Highway] 93 and I thought they were clear out on the end of the world. But that was just starting out into the desert as we-- as I later came to know it. At that time-- and this would have been in the early thirties (1930's)-- I remember when we would go to Stanley Basin that we always stopped at Jack Lane's store. Maybe we always did that, when I was-- in the early twenties (1920's), I don't remember though. But that was just part of going to the mountains, was to stop at Lane's store. And it was then, of course, that we started planning, or irrigating the ranch in Sawtooth Valley and keeping sheep there. Sometime about in the early thirties (1930's), Dad acquired Forest Reserve on that creek. I could look it up and find out what date it is-- was-- but I don't remember other than the early thirties (1930's).

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: And that was right adjacent to [what] was private property because that was the hundred and sixty he bought first.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Right. And it was in about 1931 or thirty-two (1932) that I started irrigating ... on the ranch and taking care of the sheep, watching to see if there were any sick ones and that sort of thing.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: But you were living at Pettit Lake with your mother?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: And I lived at Pettit Lake. It was, I believe, in thirty-three (1933) or thirty-four (1934) that I started sleeping down at Busterback in the ranch house there and then would go to Pettit Lake for meals.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: The ranch house would have been the double ranch house that Seagraves had built?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: It was a single ranch that Seagraves -- was on the Seagraves' place and we bought it. We moved the south half of what is now the double ranch house, what we call now the big cattle field which was then called the Auchenbach Place. We moved that cabin up to the ranch house by the corrals and made the double house.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: I see.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: I remember in the Smiley Creek-Pole Creek area that there was a herd of bucks, a community herd, that many of the sheep operators would put their bucks in together and have a buck herd. I can't remember-- the man's name was Bell, I think- who ran the buck herd. But they were herded on the land that is now owned by Salmon Fall Sheep Company, Frank Hensley now, and probably down on what was part of our place.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: In reading Bill Horton's diaries, he refers to the buck herd and that practice must have started early.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Oh, I am sure it did, because they had to go some place with the bucks, and that would have been-- I don't know when it started-- but I am sure it started years before I knew anything about it.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Now, who else was on the ranch when you started going down and staying there nights? Were you there to watch the sheep?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Um, hum. Well, the first year I was there it was Tom Peavey (?) and then the next time, it was Frank Peavey (?). Tom and I were the irrigators one year and then Frank and I irrigated-- I think it was two years.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: So you were irrigating, and the herder and the camp tender who would come from Twin Falls were mainly responsible for the sheep.

SHEEP TRANSPORTATION

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Right. Then I start to remember more about the sheep trailing back and forth across the summit. And I remember the first year that any sheep were trucked into Ketchum. And I can't remember what year it was, but it was in the early thirties (1930's) that Bill Newman started hauling sheep from . his range . . . up Valley Creek, by Cape Horn, into Ketchum. And it would take three or four days to haul a band of sheep in there. And everybody knew he was crazy.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Now, and this was for shipping out?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: This was just the fat lambs that he would haul in, the lambs that he was going to ship to market. And I have just vague recollections of what seemed like a huge truck, probably hauled fifty or sixty head as opposed to the six hundred that they haul today. And as I say, it would take two or three days to haul all of one band of sheep all the way in there, making several trips, at least two a day. And then they would feed them in the river pens on the Ketchum Livestock Association land 'til they were all congregated and then load them on the railroad. The common practice when I got into the business, of course, was to truck all of the

lambs into Ketchum on, let's say, on one day, and then feed them hay Monday afternoon or Monday night and load them on the train like Tuesday morning. When I got into the business, of course, we were still shipping our lambs to Denver for sale, and you would leave Ketchum on the train early one morning and next morning you would be in Green River, Wyoming, to unload the sheep. They could not be on the train longer than thirty-six hours 'til they had to be unloaded for feed, water, and rest.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: This was a federal regulation?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Yes. And they'd stay and feed hay all day long in Green River, then we'd load up again at night and the third morning you'd be in Denver. Somewhat later, perhaps early forties (1940's), we started shipping to Ogden rather than to Denver -- still on the railroad. And then we started trucking some lambs to Ogden. But, increasingly, the sales were made in the country. The packer would take delivery at some country point where they would be weighed, where there was a scale.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Before we get into that for a minute, I'd like to go back to exactly what the procedure was when you got into the central stockyard. You arrived, we'll say at Denver, and I remember going once, what was the procedure there? You'd unload and then what?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: The lambs were unloaded and put in pens at the stockyard in the sheep barns and fed hay and water. And for the most part, the lambs were consigned to a selling agent, a commission agent. And each commission agency had a certain set of pens. The agencies were: John Clay and Company, W. R ... oh, I don't remember all the -- Smith and Company ... different ones, but there were a number of different commission houses. They had a certain set of pens in the sheep barn and if you were shipping to John Clay, your sheep were put into pens that were assigned to John Clay.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: This was all determined before you ever left?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Oh, yes.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: And when you got there, some man there would help you? You didn't have to [unload] by yourself?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: We did not unload the sheep. The stockyard's people and the railroad people and the commission people unloaded the sheep. We usually helped.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Yes, but it was their responsibility.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: And they were responsible for feeding the sheep and we were responsible for-- I say we were responsible-- the shipper usually went along and made sure that the sheep were well- fed and that they were well-watered. In those days we didn't think very much about a weighing condition. We tried to just get them as full of hay and water as we could

get them. Then the sheep were sold usually in the morning. They would arrive off the trains, say, along six or seven o'clock in the morning and they were sold by noon.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: My recollection of, at least one time, when I met you -and I couldn't tell you now whether it was Ogden or Denver-but of those quite wide alleys, wider alleys than for instance in the shipping yards, it seemed to me, inside the barn, and men walking up and down, looking at these pens, and then feeling their backs in the accepted manner for testing their fatness. Now, is that kind of the way it worked?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: That's the way it worked. The commission-- the salesman, would bring the packer-buyer into the pens and they would look at the lambs, as you say, feel them, see how fat they were, and trade on them. Sometimes they'd sell them to the first packer that came along. Usually, there was a turn system. Swift, Armour, Cudahy and Wilson were the big major packers. Swift might be first in John Clay's alley in the morning, and Armour would be first in W. R. Smith's alley. I don't recall how those turns were worked out, but there was some specific way in which each packer would go to each commission firm's sales alley. And sometimes the salesman would sell to the first packer that was in; sometimes he would price them and go all through however [many] major packers came along to buy them. And usually the lambs that were purchased in Denver were pretty much slaughtered in Denver, those that were fat. I have no idea where the feeder lambs went at that time. The commission agent usually had an order for feeders from somebody and they went someplace, but I don't know where.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Well, course, at that stage you weren't even considering feeding lambs. It was ewe lamb production and sold everything...

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Sold all the-- both the lambs and the wether-lambs and we bought our replacement.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Now, you mean both the -

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: We sold the ewes, the lambs and the wether-lambs, all of them .

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: I'm with you.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: All of them. Bought our replacement ewe lambs from somebody else.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: And then you would be paid by John Clay?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Right. And John Clay would deduct from our account sales the freight and what the railroad charged. There was a charge for putting sand in the railroad cars. There was a charge for hay consumed both at the feed station in Green River and at the stockyards in Denver, if that's where you sold, and a commission. I think the commission was five cents a head or five cents a hundred weight -- I'm not sure -- the selling commission.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Right.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: And we would then be paid what was left. Sometimes, in the real early thirties (1930's), there wasn't very much left, by the time you paid the freight and the commission. The first lambs that we sold, which was in 1939, I think we got $6.50 a hundred weight for them. Alfalfa hay at that time was selling for $6.00 a ton; herder's wages were $40.00 a month, board and room. And as you well remember, we had, my dad and I had two thousand ewes and I owned one thousand of them. And we made a thousand dollars on a dollar a head on the ewes, and I made a trip to Vermont.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Yes, only that was in nineteen .

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Thirty-nine (1939).

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Thirty-eight (1938), but we won't get sidetracked. We got married in thirty-nine (1939). Now, well now, when and why did you start doing country buying, John? Yes, go ahead and then we can go back .

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: When and why did I start selling in the country?

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Yes.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: As I say, we first would ship to Denver; then Ogden, Utah, seemed to be a better market for our Idaho lambs. The practice in Ogden was that the commission agent was collecting a commission from me for selling lambs and he was collecting a commission from the buyer for buying lambs. And I felt very strongly that our-- the packers' interest and my interest-- were diametrically opposed. I wanted all I could get and the packer wanted to buy as cheaply as he could. And that the commission agent, therefore, was in an untenable position to represent us both fairly, on the same sheep in the same transaction. There were many arguments for shipping to the central market. The market was established there and it was a good place to congregate a lot of lambs so that the packers, the buyers didn't have to travel the countryside to purchase. There were a lot of arguments in favor of the central market. But none of them, to me, overcame the fact that the buyer-- that the commission agent was representing me, the seller, and the packing house organization, the buyer. And so I decided that the best thing, the only thing left for me to do, was to try to sell directly to the packer-buyer or to an order buyer who was representing the packer and being paid by the packer and buying in the country. So my first sale in the country was in about 1945 or forty-six (1946), to Swift and Company, I imagine...

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Was it that early? It was before Father Breck died, because you first built the scales.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Um, hum. It was in forty-five (1945) or forty-six (1946).

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: I guess it was. And I remember, and of course, I wasn't around very much-- I was at home-- but I still remember the repercussions when you started that business of having the buyer come up there and look at your lambs. And I'm just sure "the Fanny Club" worked you over.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: They worked me over, but good. I can still remember the older sheep men sitting in Jack Lane's store telling me what a fool I was to be selling lambs in the country. And, of course, they were aided greatly by the commission house representatives who were still trying to solicit business for the central markets. And I don't know whether I was smart or whether I wasn't smart, but now, of course, it's a common practice. The central market is a thing of the past, not because I started to sell in the country. It's because the agents-- one of the main reasons, I still feel, was that the commission agent was still trying to represent both parties and being paid by both parties.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Well, Father Breck was in agreement with you on that.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Yes.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: So you had his support; you didn't buck him on that.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: No, no.

BEGINNING OF EWE-LAMB OPERATION

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: If you would please start in on how you then, yourself, actually got into the ewe-lamb ranch sheep operation.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: All right. As I said, my dad had a purebred operation and when I was in college-- when we were in college at Swarthmore in 1935, my dad sold his purebred sheep to Mr. Blastock, Bob Blastock.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Well, I never realized that.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Yes, and got out of the sheep business. There are other stories connected with that, somewhat beside the point.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Could I just ask, was one of the reasons for this, because of the economics of a purebred outfit?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: No.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: It wasn't. Okay.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: No, I think it probably-- Dad didn't have anybody to carry-- that was interested in carrying it on. As you recall, I was going to be "the great chemist", so he sold them.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: I see.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Then, when you and I got out of college, I came home and told Dad I wanted to go into the sheep business. He and I purchased the Jack Skillern outfit in September of 1938.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: And, of course, the Skillern family went back a long time.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: They had been in the sheep business in Idaho for ... this was the third generation, I think.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Third generation that you purchased it from.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Yes.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: And you bought-- it amounted to, really, did you say about two thousand ewes?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: About two thousand ewes and a grazing preference on the Sawtooth Forest, what is still known as the Skillern Creek allotment.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Yes.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: We purchased some Bureau of Land Management grazing preferences from Mitchell Lecertua. Dad had in the meantime added more land to the Busterback Ranch and there were certain Bureau of Land Management grazing preferences pertinent to the land which he purchased. So that together with the BLM rights, as we call them-- as you know they are not rights, they're preferences-- together with the ones that he had established by operating his purebred sheep on the Bureau of Land Management on the lands before the Taylor Grazing Act was passed in 1934, we had sufficient BLM animal unit months. We had the Vat Creek allotment, forest allotment, and purchased the grazing preference on the Big Smoky from Skillerns. And that was tenth of September, I think, 1938. The-- we built the lambing sheds here on the farm, that fall, and brought the sheep from the desert down here to lamb in the winter, 1938-39. As you remember, along with the sheep came Andrew Marcus, and in the next ten years, I got almost to where I could understand what he said when he talked. (laughter)

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Well, did some of the other herders come with Andrew, or do you remember?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Yes. There were two that--

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Came with the outfit.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Came with us. And . . . that was the start of the range sheep business, as far as I was concerned. And I remember Mr. Blastock asking how many sheep I had, and I said a thousand, and he said, "Good, mistakes you make on those will cost you just half as much as if you had two thousand." (laughter) And I thought he was a kind of a dumb old guy, but he wasn't.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Oh, dear.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: He happened to be right.

GRAZING REGULATIONS

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Well, then just for a minute going to the BLM, Father Breck, when he first had his purebred out there, under what arrangements did he go across the desert? It was not-?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: There was no Bureau of Land Management. The Taylor Grazing Act was passed in 1934, I think, and in order to establish grazing preference for the qualified-- under the Taylor Grazing Act, you had to have operated sheep on the area for which you were applying for grazing preference, any three or two consecutive years, between 1929 and 1934. And then, that was your priority; those who had operated during that time were given priority over people who had not operated then. Then you had also to fill a commensurability standard, which meant that you had to either own or lease land on which you could produce feed for your required number of livestock three months in the year. And this land was supposed to be contiguous, or relatively near the area in which you wished to graze. That's the way you established your grazing preference when the Taylor Act was formed.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Prior to the Taylor Act, an individual would take his sheep-

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Anybody could take his livestock, regardless of numbers, and go anyplace he wanted to go. But, and that was one reason for the establishment of the Taylor Grazing Act; the land was, I believe, very much overgrazed and there was no management at all. It was just a first-come, first-serve basis. This was true, of course, on the land that is now administered by the National Forest. Prior to 1906, the passage of the Forest Act, anybody could go any place at any time and stay as long as they wanted to with as many livestock as they wanted to. And the land was suffering because of it.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: There must have been a few problems; you would not recall any of this from your father, probably because you wouldn't have been interested. But for instance, when he would start out from this farm-- he did operate out there as you said before the Taylor Grazing Act-- and supposing he was heading for the same place as somebody else was-- it's just who got there first; was that --?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Yes, if the other person got there first, you detoured and went someplace else, but you didn't detour very far. You just didn't get your favorite camping spot. And one of the favorite tricks of some of the sheep men was to put a band of yearlings with no lambs in a certain area, and if anybody with a band [of] ewes and lambs would come close, the yearling herder would start the yearling ewes toward that band of ewes and lambs. And if you didn't get out of the way, you mixed. Well, there were no lambs involved with the yearlings, so the person who owned the yearlings didn't really care if you had to build a corral and separate the sheep. But it wasn't good for lambs, for fattening lambs. It was a cagey way to control some -- quite a lot of country. And perfectly legitimate, and in those days, considered quite moral. It was a very effective tool and it was carried out by some operators up until ... oh, mid-sixties (1960's).

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Do you have any recollections at all of seeing very many cattle, John, in the area where traditionally through your lifetime, there have been sheep?

CATTLE

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: There were almost no cattle. The land north of the Snake River from . . . oh, Glenns Ferry to American Falls, was almost entirely sheep grazing. One reason was that there was a scarcity of water. And the cattle, of course, were not herded and it was impossible to haul any water for them or impractical to haul water for them. So that when the first cattle started to come, they would congregate around the water holes, and they would graze back just as far as they could until they got thirsty and then they would come back to the water. And when the cattle first started coming in any numbers on the federal lands where we operated, there was --no, let me back up and say-[tape off, tape on]

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: You were right in the middle of a sentence when we ran out of tape.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: All right. We were talking about when I first remember cattle being grazed on the public domain in the area in which we were operating sheep. The cattle would graze close to the water and would graze out as far as they could 'til they got thirsty and then come back. Obviously a very poor land management. And I also was saying that the sheep grazed in the spring and in the fall. When cattle first started to come, they grazed there all summer. And they literally beat the land to death around five or six miles back from any water. This isn't because they were cattle; it was just poor management. The distribution was bad. Sheep, had they stayed there in the summertime and grazed in the same way, would have done the same thing. And this went on for some time until the areas close to the water holes were almost completely denuded either close to water holes or close to the rivers or canal, at which time there was a change in management practices, where there were wells drilled and more water holes made available for cattle. And the numbers of cattle that could stay there in the summertime were reduced. And there was quite a lot of reseeding done close to where the land had been denuded. And the recovery of the land was very good. So again, I am not trying to have a sheep and cattle war.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Oh, I understand that.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: But it was a poor management practice, done by we humans that caused it all. So as time went on, the economics of the cattle business got better than economics of the sheep business. And a lot of sheep outfits sold, and the grazing preferences that the sheep owners had had were transferred to cattle. So that now, there are lots of cattle out there and different, new management techniques have been devised, such as rest/rotation. A lot of fencing has been done, so that the area will support a lot of cattle and a lot of sheep with the management techniques that are now being used.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: In the beginning, it was just coincidence then, probably, that there were sheep in this country rather than cattle?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Uh.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: I think not only...

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: It wasn't coincidence, I don't think. I think the Sawtooth Forest, the north portion of the Sawtooth Forest, a steep and rugged country is not adaptable to cattle. Cattle just don't like that kind of country and won't do well. So it was sheep country, the forest was, and therefore used by sheep. And the desert country south of the mountains, was a natural

place for the sheep to come in the spring, and fall, and in the winter. But there was no place to go in the summer for cattle, so I think [it's] one of the main reasons it was sheep country.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: There were always cattle over-- on the-- more cattle up in the areas of Cape Horn, where it was a little more open and hadn't there been, traditionally, quite a lot more cattle over Trail Creek Summit, on that side?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Copper Basin.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Copper Basin.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: In that area, yes. Where the--

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Meadows are big.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Where there are more meadows and less steep mountains.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Yes.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: That's true. But those cattle traditionally went down the Salmon River towards Challis and that area in the winter and the spring and fall.

SHEEP GRAZING SCHEDULE

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Yes. Whereas, as you've just stated, and if I understand correctly, the sheep by and large, the sheep that grazed in the summertime in the Sawtooths, wintered in the Shoshone area, the Hagerman Valley area, the Twin Falls area. Is that correct?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Twin Falls, Jerome, Shoshone, Hagerman, as far as Hammett, as far east as American Falls.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: And only in the very, very early days of the sheep business in this country did anybody really try to stay on the desert with their sheep in the winter.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: For the most part that is true. There were then, and ... oh, from American Falls on still are, sheep outfits . east, who winter out on the desert and lamb in April and May. But most of this area did not lend itself to winter grazing; the snow was too deep. So the operator was going to be on supplemental feed, so that's when the shed-lambing started, as I understand it. If you were going to have to feed your sheep supplementally, you [might] just as well start lambing in January and February. And the goal then, of course, was to have your lambs ready for marketing in June, July, and early August, before lambs were marketed from other areas where they lambed in April and May. And there were not so many lambs in June, July, and August going to market. So generally speaking, there the price was higher, and that is my understanding of why everybody started to lamb in the sheds in this area in the wintertime. Because we didn't have any winter range and we were feeding supplementally anyway. So we decided to lamb then too, and try and take advantage of the generally better markets in June, July, and August.

WOOL

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Would you talk a little bit, please, about the kind of wool that has been produced in Idaho? The grading-there've never been fine wools come out of Idaho, have there?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Yes ... Originally there was. Originally most sheep were fine-wool sheep. But with our practice of shed lambing, we were looking for a lamb that would develop rapidly and would get fat at an earlier age. So there were two ways to do this breeding; one, was to use a mutton-type or black face sheep, the Down sheep, Hampshiredown, the Suffolkdown -- all came from England. And those lambs develop more rapidly, get fatter at an earlier age than do the white-faced sheep, the Rambouillet, the Lincoln, Cotswold and so forth. Originally, the fine wool sheep, the Rambouillet sheep was a smaller sheep and its offspring took a long time to get fat. So this was not a particularly desirable ewe for this early lamb operation. So the early operators started crossing the Rambouillet, a fine-wool sheep, with a Lincoln, a coarse-wool sheep, and getting a medium wool sheep. By medium-- when I talk about fine and coarse and medium, of course, we're talking about the diameter of the wool fiber itself. And the medium-wool sheep offspring tend to get fat at a little earlier age than the fine-wool sheep. So that was one of the reasons for the crossing of the Rambouillet and the Lincoln. Also, you obtain some hybrid vigor from the crossbred sheep and, again, get a fat lamb at an earlier age due to the genetics of crossbreeding. And the third cross then, of course, was made with the black face, giving some more hybrid vigor. That's the reason that it all started this way. There is, of course-- depending on style-- there are times when the coarse wool is in demand and times when the fine wool is in demand. The tweeds and the heavier type clothing take a coarse wool. The gabardines, that type of fabric takes fine wool. So styles have an awful lot to do with what kind of wool that is in demand. Of course, socks and blankets and those things all take coarse wool. So sometimes you had a good market for the coarse wool and sometimes you had a poor market for the coarse wool as compared to fine wool and vice versa.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: While in the whole vogue of carpeting that came in until it got-

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Carpeting had a lot-- carpet wool is even a coarser wool than was here. It is a wool that came primarily from areas of the world where there had been very low upgrading in the breeds of sheep: China, the Middle East, some in New Zealand, and quite a little in South America. But the carpet wool didn't have an awful lot of effect on our domestic wool market because we grew very little wool that was suitable for carpet. As a matter of fact, in spite of the historic stand of the wool growers in the United States in favor of a high protective tariff, carpet wools almost without exception have been exempted from tariffs because there was so little of it produced in this country.

LAMB FEEDING PROCEDURES

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Well, when the process got to the point where you had the breed you wanted for a fat lamb-- I mean a lamb that got fat more quickly-- did most of the producers ship fat lambs or were there lots of feeders?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Oh, originally, there were almost no fat lambs. The-an eighty pound lamb in the-- still in the twenties (1920's), was a heavy lamb. And one reason was that the lambs were shipped to the-- at a younger age. There were so many sheep there wasn't enough feed to feed the lambs as long as we feed them now on grass. I couldn't tell you what percentage of the lambs were fat and what percentage were feeders. I wouldn't have any idea. And I wouldn't have any idea what the eating habits of the people were at that time-- if they wanted a lamb that had less fat on it for eating. But as time went along, we were producing a lamb that weighed a lot more. I can remember the first hundred pound lambs.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: So can I.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: They were enormous by comparison. And since that time, we have become more cognizant of what percentage of the lambs are-- when they have to leave the range-- what percentage are fat lambs and what percentage are feeder lambs. What is a fat lamb? I'm sure some people have always been cognizant of weighing conditions. But I think we think more about that than we used to. Those who still try to fill their lambs with hay and water the night before they sell are recognized. And you try to buy with a bigger percentage shrink, because you're buying on a yield basis more.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: And by yield, you mean what actually you get when the lamb is butchered?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Yes.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Would you talk a little bit, please, about the transition that you went through of getting into a lamb feeding operation, as well as the ewe-lamb production and why you did it? The economics that forced you to this.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Well, originally, it was not economics that forced us to it. As we developed more pastures on the ranch in Sawtooth Valley by planting clover and irrigating, we developed a lot more feed than we had originally had there. And it was the type of feed that you could fatten lambs on very well. So we found ourselves with more lamb-fattening feed than we knew what to do with, with our own two thousand ewes and their lambs. We started first fattening our own lambs, the lambs that came off the forest range that were not fat when we had to leave the forest with the ewes and lambs. We started saving those and fattening them on the pastures by virtue of the fact that usually the fat lamb was worth more than the feeder lamb. This worked out very satisfactorily. So, rather than increasing our ewe and lamb operation, because we had this clover pasture we started buying feeder lambs from our neighbors. When they would ship their fat lambs we would buy their feeder lambs and put them on the clover pasture. And it worked just as well with their feeder lambs as it did with ours. So really, we weren't forced into it; we just kind of fell into it. Uh, as time went on we started buying more and more feeder lambs for the ranch in Stanley Basin and couldn't get all of those-- the lambs that we were buying-- we couldn't get all of them fat. So at that time, we started to bring the lambs that didn't fatten in the Stanley Basin, Sawtooth Valley to Twin Falls area and putting them on beet tops to finish the lambs that didn't fatten in Stanley Basin. This proved to be profitable, so we started buying more lambs that were born in April and May from areas such as Wyoming,

Utah, and bringing them -- in there and putting them on beet tops and fattening them here. We always had some that didn't quite make it to get fat, and we would sell those as feeders.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: If you didn't send them to California-- to Arizona.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: That's what I was going to say. That's when we started taking the end of those that didn't get fat to Arizona to get fat. That's how we got in the feeder lamb business. And the other reason was that we didn't have the -- we were limited in the amount of forest land that we had and in the amount of BLM land that we had available to us. It was becoming increasingly difficult to get competent herders to herd the ewes and the lambs. We had herders with our ewes and lambs that were not busy in the fall when we would combine our -- after we shipped our lambs we would combine the bands into one. We had a couple of extra men and operating the beet top pasture in Twin Falls was a way of keeping them gainfully employed so that we could keep them the year round. Then in later times, in the sixties-- late sixties (1960's) and early seventies (1970's) -- the predators started to work on the ewe and lamb bands on the desert, which loss was pretty hard, well, became uneconomic. Those were the other reasons for expanding the feeder lamb business rather than the ewe and lamb business. It just fit our circumstances better.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: You were ... like along in the sixties (1960's), John, you were concerned with being able to have a year-round operation for most of the people you employed, were you not, by then? Because, well, when you think back when we were first married, there were lots of people who worked just part of the year, and then they took off like the irrigators we had up north. And remember when after a certain time, why, there were so many sheepherders that would be just let go and they were apparently content with that, and the economy was such that they were glad to have that much time off. But that did change.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Absolutely, and that's what I've tried to bring out, and that was one reason for our changing in going into the feeder lamb business in the fall and the winter, was to keep our people gainfully employed year-round. (pause)

REASONS FOR SELLING BUSINESS

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: I've heard you say that you felt that the major reason for your finally deciding to sell the ewe-lamb operation was because you could not get adequate, dependable people to take care of the sheep.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: That's right. With that and adding to that the increase in predation by the coyote. But the thing that really made me make up my mind to sell the sheep was that I couldn't see any way to mechanize our type of a sheep operation. And that it would be always dependent, a labor-intensive business as we were doing it. It was increasingly difficult to get conscientious, qualified people who were willing to live the lonely life of the sheepherder. And I don't think that's changed. I think there were always going to be sheep, but they will be raised under conditions different than we were trying to do it on the open range and shed-lambing in southern Idaho. Plus the fact that the shed-lambing became-as feed stuffs became more expensive-- the shed-lambing operation became much more expensive and as, it being a labor intensive type of operation, the labor costs were going up dramatically. And the prices we were

able to get on the quote "early" unquote lambs, the July and August market, wasn't all that much better as it used to be. So it just became harder to make it work. But the main thing was finding people who wanted to be sheepherders, good sheepherders.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Of course, it isn't just Idaho where this has been true .

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: That is right.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: I mean the sheep numbers are way, way down .

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: All over.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: All over.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: And the other thing, of course, that has had a bearing on that has been the reduction of the grazing preferences that didn't really affect-- have a big impact on our particular operation. We had more BLM animal unit months than we ever used. Then as the reductions came along, so far as we were concerned, they were mostly paper reductions; we weren't stocking to our full capacity. With the forest, we stopped using the forest as much by increasing the amount of forage that we could produce at both our ranch in Picabo and in Sawtooth Valley so that our dependence on the forest was relatively small.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: But that was something that both you and Father Breck calculated. You felt that you were going to be limited.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Yes.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Not just you, but everybody was going to be limited. .

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: We felt there were going to be sizable reductions on the carrying capacity of the forest lands and we tried to develop lands, we tried to develop more feed someplace else on the land that we owned, so that we'd have more control of it. And that has proved to be very true. Not all of the reductions, I think, are bad. I think there are some that have been made-- I think the pendulum has tended to swing too far in the opposite directions. There is no question in my mind that the many areas of the Sawtooth National Forest-- and I'll confine my remarks to that-- were overgrazed. And at least some of the reductions were certainly justified and necessary. I think, as I say, we perhaps swung too far the other way and are not utilizing all of the feed that can be utilized on a sustained basis with new management techniques. The same I think is true on the BLM lands, that they were at one time horribly overgrazed. Now I think that, in some areas at least, they are undergrazed, partly due to reductions, but due more to the new management techniques, rest/rotation-grazing, that sort of thing. And the response that there has been to the new techniques has been unbelievable for me.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: You mean the response of the ground, the soil...

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: The way the land has responded in its production.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Yes, well, because besides the rest/rotation, there's also been seeding.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Right, other types of grasses. Elimination of competition such as sagebrush, competition for the grasses, I mean. And as I say, I think we're going too far the other way now.

ROLE OF FAMILY

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: I have asked all the other sheep men to whom I've talked, to comment on what part, if any, the family of the sheep men played in the whole operation of the business. By and large, they all feel that the operation of the sheep was the man's world.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: I think that certainly has been true.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Our family has been pretty typical of a sheep family, in that the children liked to go with you to sheep camp. And this was done on occasions. I know it would be sometimes when we would all be there, but not very many.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: No, there were very limited times.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Well, when you used to shear out on the desert, remember I used to take the children out.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Right Of course, they were always around the lambing sheds when we were here on the farm, which is home. They were always there then, but when the sheep -- the family was not migratory as were the sheep. And when the sheep left the home farm, then it was not until summertime that the family was around very much, either individually or collectively. Then mostly at times when we would ship lambs or work the sheep in a confined area for one reason of another. Their life on the -- they were practically never in the sheep camp for other than periodic visits.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: And a meal, yes.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: And a meal, that type of thing. They did not live with the sheep at all. And it was -- in I think most instances, still is -- pretty much a man's world. There are many families where -- I an going to say it the other way. There are very few families where the families go with the sheep all the time. And it's not conducive to a twelve-month, twenty-four hours a day family life, quite the contrary. And that brings with it its problems.

FUTURE OF SHEEP BUSINESS

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Do you want to make any comments on what you think the future of the sheep business will be in this country? And now, well, you can start with the Ketchum area, if you want to, but there are so few sheep really in that area anymore, that ...

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Well, I think, as I stated a while ago, I think there will always be sheep. It's still the second oldest business in the world. [laughter]

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Herding sheep, right after women.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: And the sheep is an economic animal in that it utilizes forage, which otherwise would be wasted. Other classes of livestock won't do well on it. I see no-- other than recreation-- humans would not be able to utilize it, other than with the sheep for food and fiber. In other words, I don't see any other kind of human food being raised on a lot of the area that sheep now are fattened on. So, I think there is always a place for the sheep. I think that two things are probably going to happen and are happening. One is the research that's being done on multiple births with ewes. I don't suppose that a ewe will be-- on the average, they will be able to raise more than two lambs. But here again, I think we'd be able to raise these lambs on a major scale as we've always done on a minor scale, using supplemental feed for the baby lambs and raising them in that way. I think, too, that the research that's being done on - with the use of hormones, and causing estrus in sheep more rapidly, that it won't be long until it would be common practice to have at least three lamb crops every two years and maybe two lamb crops every one year. But the two crops in one year is still a ways off, if in fact, it does come to pass. That will increase the production per head; it will increase the cost of raising the lamb, but not in the same proportion as the production cost is reduced.

Then, I think that the semi-confinement of raising sheep will come into play. By semi-confinement, I mean fenced pastures. There are new developments coming on in electric fences that are more easily moved and where you can control the sheep without having to have so many people involved. In other words, it would be a less intensive -- labor-intensive business. There are new types of forage being developed, that will -- you can raise more feed per acre, hence more sheep per acre. And you can do it with -- you can operate the livestock in a smaller area, rather than having your -- being so migratory that you're going a hundred to a hundred and fifty or two hundred miles from winter quarters to summer quarters. It'll be confined, well, to much less than that. How much, I don't know.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: But you are going to have to have some better control of the coyote.

PREDATORS

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: The predator control is probably the key to the whole thing. If you can't keep the sheep alive, there's no point in trying to raise them. The percentage that are being lost to predation is, at least in today's world, untenable, in my opinion. I think there will be some way devised to control the predators. I don't know what that will be. There will have to be. A lot of people who feel that the livestock man is trying to eradicate the predator, we are going to have to convince them that is not true. I think we are also going to have to live with some predation, to live with some predators and find a way to restrain their predation. Even though they stay -- the predator himself stays alive.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Well, it's -- the problem is the predator being allowed to stay alive where there are humans. I mean, even in the instances of bears in some of these park areas. The bear doesn't seem to be as prevalent with the sheep as the coyote is, is that correct?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Close to the park areas, one is about as bad as the other.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: It is? I've wondered.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: I think we'll stop bears from killing humans before we'll stop coyotes from killing sheep.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Oh, I'm sure. I'm sure.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: But there's got to be a way to do it. I don't know what it is, at the moment.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Did the coyote. .

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: I mean, we know how to control the coyotes. Right now we can do it with the 10-80 poison. We can control the coyote; that's no problem, but how to use the 10-80 poison or its equivalent-

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Strychnine, or is that what 10-80-

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Some type of poison control, how to use that in 1978 [and what] is acceptable to the general public is one of the big questions.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: John, I never heard of the coyote -- Oh, I probably knew such an animal existed, but I didn't really become aware of it until I came out west. Now, is it simply because the west still has more area that is unpopulated, that the coyote is still here? Now, for instance, you think of the farm flocks that exist ...

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: No, the coyote not only has been in the past pretty much a western animal. They're coyotes in all fifty -- well, I don't know about Hawaii -- but it's in all other forty-nine states. .

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Today.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Today. And it may have been there before, but I'm not aware of it if it was.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Well, I can remember the excitement of seeing a red fox in New England, and of seeing -- you didn't see many bear, but I thought it was simply because the place had been populated so long.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: I don't think the coyotes have been in all states very long. . . but they are now.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Until just. .

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: They're a wily animal and a shrewd [that] you don't need to worry about eradicating; he's too smart. So we’ve got to be smarter than the coyote.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: So the reason I really brought this up is because I was thinking that possibly until some of the developments have come -- you've mentioned that the sheep business as a business will be kept alive with small flocks on farms like in Kentucky and Ohio

and Pennsylvania. But if those people are also getting coyotes, why, then they face the same problem as we do here.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Not as intensively.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Because the flock is small and close to the house.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Well, there aren't that many coyotes yet. Then, of course, they still have a dog problem.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Yes.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Domestic-dog problem.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Yes, and of course, it is probably greater today, there are so many pet dogs in our affluent society.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: I don't know what the percentage per family -- percentage of dogs per family is. Haven't any idea. A bunch.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: A bunch. Right, a bunch. Well, I thank you very much and if you think of something else you'd like to have in this record of the sheep business, why, then we'll have another interview. Or if I think of some more questions I want to ask you, okay?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Good. It's a great business.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

Introduction: This is an interview of John Breckenridge talking about the National Forest Service, interviewed by Miriam Breckenridge in 1979.

FIRST CONTACT WITH FOREST SERVICE

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: I am glad John, that we are going to talk -- rather, you are going to talk, and I'm going to put questions and listen about the National Forest Service. Because in any complete history of the sheep business in the western states, including Idaho, the institution of the Forest Service has had a great deal of bearing on how the sheep business is operated. Is that true?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Yes, it's been a very integral part of the sheep business where the operator or owner was using the public lands as a part of his grazing setup.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: What were your first contacts? What is your earliest recollection of the Forest Service?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: My earliest recollection is a rather vague one. Had nothing to do with the livestock business. But it came about at the time my dad and mother built our cabin on Pettit

Lake. And the logs were cut from trees on the National Forest ground. And Bill Horton, the Forest Ranger, had to mark individually and personally each of the trees that was allowed to be cut for the construction of the cabin. That was just a part of his many duties as a forest ranger. My own father believed, and I believe too, that there was a great necessity for a management agency for the forest lands publicly owned in the United States. He was one of the signers of a petition which was responsible for the establishing of the National Forest, Routt National Forest, I think it was, in Colorado. And so, I am-perhaps, have a little bit different feeling about the Forest Service than many of the range-livestock operators in the western United States in that I feel that there has to be a managing agency and that the Forest Service, by and large, has done a good job in managing the National Forest.

THE PRINCIPLE OF MULTIPLE USE

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: One of the reasons I feel strongly that the Forest Service is a good managing agent is that their basic philosophy, all through the years, has been one which supports the multiple use concept, in which I -- I believe in this concept very, very strongly, that you should be able to use the forest for recreation, for grazing, for timber harvest and for mining. This use -- these uses, cannot all be made on the same acre. In other words, you can't have a bed ground for a band of sheep in the middle of a campground, but there is room for everybody using all of the acres for the various uses. (tape off, tape on) These uses, in order to be sustained uses, have to be made in a proper way. You can't overgraze the area, you can't over-recreate the areas, you can't harvest all the timber with no thought of reforestation, and you can't have a dredge mine where you go away and leave all the tailings that will be there for thousands of years. Those are not proper uses. But the Forest Service over time, in my opinion, has tried to manage the land so that the uses were made properly. I've had violent disagreements with some of the individual foresters, not on the multiple use principles, but rather in the way the uses were permitted. For a long time there was a marked lack of research, speaking strictly of grazing, as to what was, in fact, proper grazing. And a number of concepts were developed for measuring the amount of grass and weed and forbs that could be harvested on a sustained basis. Some of these concepts, in my opinion, were very impractical to put to use and some of them, while they were good concepts and practical to use, were not understood thoroughly either by the permitee or by the forest ranger. And this led to a lot of conflict between the rangers and the livestock operators.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Can you give an example of what you mean by a concept that was misunderstood or abused?

LAND MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Well, I can give one example of a -- I can't remember the name of the person who developed this technique. But you used a hoop about a foot in diameter, a wire hoop, and you walked across a designated area of range and put the hoop down at predetermined intervals and counted, identified and counted the weight of each of the species of forage inside the hoop. And then you made another test on the same area two or three years later to get range trends, whether the trend for the forage was going up or going down.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: And you say the hoop was a foot?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: About a foot in diameter. One of the rangers who was utilizing this hoop, in order that he be completely impartial as to where he placed the hoop, was throwing it in the air and letting it drop. It was on a rather steep hillside that he was making this so-called transect, and when he dropped the hoop, the hoop would bounce until it came to an area where there was enough forage, whether it was sagebrush, grass, weed or whatever, to stop the hoop from rolling. And the -- every time he would count the amount of forage that was inside of the hoop, it was obvious that he was not getting a true picture, because he never got any bare ground, and there was obviously a lot of bare ground on the hillside. And he wasn't smart enough to know that the hoop was stopping when it came to, as I say, a large bunch of grass, or sagebrush, or whatever, rolling across the bare ground. This is only an example of, in that use of a good range analysis tool. And these things, as I say, led to quite a little disagreement between the permitee and the forest ranger. Not all rangers did that, however. I am not going to say where this fellow is in the Forest Service now, but he didn't stop as District Ranger.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: I believe I know to whom you are referring, but it probably isn't pertinent to the matter at hand to pursue that any further.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Let it be said that he and I didn't agree.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Right. Well, one of the reasons always given for the decrease in sheep numbers in central Idaho is the curtailment of the usage of the forest for grazing. Now, would you want to comment on that?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: That, in my opinion, is absolutely true. One of the reasons that there are not as many numbers grazing is because the Forest Service has reduced the permitted numbers on the National Forest. There is no question in my mind that in most areas of the National Forest, and we'll -- most areas were terribly overgrazed. And with the resulting erosion and deterioration of the soil that followed that overgrazing. When the Forest Service was first established -- I think it was 1906 -- there were not very many attempts to reduce the permitted numbers of livestock on the ranges. As the Service became more experienced, they then tried to manage the ranges where [sic], so there would be less deterioration in the soil and an increase in the cover that the soil needed to hold it in place. The only way that was known at that time to increase production of forage on the ranges was to reduce the numbers of livestock that utilized the area. There were no techniques for reseeding. There were no techniques for rest-rotation management, that sort of thing. It was strictly a reduction in numbers concept. As time went along, we developed new management techniques as well as new agricultural techniques for increasing the forage available so that we could sustain numbers. The development of drought-resistant grasses, such as crested wheat grass, Siberian wheat grass, and the development of mechanical means of eradicating undesirable plants and planting good grasses. These techniques were developed and developed to the extent where [sic] it was economically feasible to use them. So you could improve the carrying capacity of a range by improving the type of forage that grows there. Then the use of herbicides came into play; where by spraying an area, you could kill some of the undesirable plants, and more desirable and palatable plants would take their place. Probably we -- in some instances, we used the herbicides somewhat indiscriminately and killed some desirable plants. In any event, the use of herbicides, particulars 2-4-D, those chemicals have been curtailed because of the damage done to-or the alleged damage done to other plants and to animals and insects.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: May I just ask... when you say, "we" here, are you referring to the private operator, or are you talking about the Forest Service having used these materials?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Both. The -- one of the latest management techniques that has been developed is rest-rotation management, where you graze an area heavily for a year and then rest it for a year. That's an over-simplification, but basically that's what it is. And it's a management tool that has produced astounding results in the increase in forage that is available to grow -- is available for use, excuse me. These -- this means a reduction in numbers that utilize an area --numbers of livestock that utilize an area, but it allows some places to be used that otherwise might have to be closed to grazing entirely. As I say, originally, the only technique that was available was reduction of numbers or closing an area to grazing entirely. And this created a lot of ill feeling between the forest rangers and the livestock operators. I think, probably both were interested in the same goal, namely to sustain production, but there was a big difference in opinion of what constituted a sustained production. That difference of opinion still exists to some extent, but not nearly as strongly as it did, say twenty-five or thirty years ago.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Then you would say -- you would disagree with the people who say, "The Forest Service just tried to run the sheep men out of the forest."

INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTALISTS AND RECREATION

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: I would mostly disagree with that. I think that the Forest Service has been very dedicated to the multiple use principle. However, in the past several years, the environmentalist groups who believe only in recreational use of the land or no use at all, certainly not -- They do not believe in mining, grazing or logging -- The pressures, political pressures of these groups, has had a strong influence, in my opinion, on the activities of the Forest Service.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: But that really is in the last ten to fifteen years, and the accusation about running the livestock man off the forest goes back to the curtailment of usage in say, for example, the twenties (1920's), among the people in the Ketchum area, isn't that true?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Very true. That accusation has been going on for years and years.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: But they do refer with it, don't they, John, to the time when the first major cuts in numbers were made in the twenties (1920's) and thirties (1930's)?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Um, hum. That was when the accusation was made that all the Forest Service is trying to do is to run the sheep off the -- the sheep and cattle, the livestock in other words -- off the National Forest. And some people believe that very strongly. My father started putting together some private land for summer grazing in the late twenties, late 1920s and he said, "This is my hedge against the day when there'll be no more livestock grazing permitted on the National Forest." Whether he thought the Forest Service -- He did not think that the Forest Service, per se, was going to try and eliminate the livestock grazing on the National Forest, but he felt that other pressures would be such that, politically, the Forest Service might have to do that one day.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Well also, in the Ketchum area, which is what we're talking about to some major extent here; the fact that recreation has become almost the number one business and you have so many people there who feel they don't want to have the landscape disturbed -- has in your opinion, that area felt the impact of the pressures of the environmentalist groups stronger than in some other places?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: I don't know that I'm qualified to talk about other places. Certainly the recreationist has had a tremendous effect on the uses of the Forest lands in the Ketchum area. Witness the Sawtooth National Recreation Area that is now in existence. Of course, there has been a pressure since 1914, to have the area declared a National Park, the area in the Stanley Basins' Salmon River Country. So that isn't new, but the pressure for the development of the Sawtooth National that's the way they're coming out now.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: What about the increase in personnel in the Forest Service, as you have witnessed it in Idaho?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: The personnel originally were those trained in-- as forest rangers, and then some who were trained in fire, forest fire suppression, and some fence builders and some

timber markers. Very, very few people in the each of the ranger's office. Whether they were understaffed ... I guess, I am not prepared to say. I do not think they were. There has been a tremendous increase in the number of personnel that are employed by the Forest Service, many of whom are so-called experts in a particular field: the wildlife manager, the fish biologist, the soils people, the landscape architects, are all now under the -- in almost all of the District Ranger Offices, certainly in the Supervisor's Office. Whether it is necessary to have all these people is a grave question in my mind. I personally do not feel that they are all necessary. I think where the Forest Service needs some advice on, for instance the fisheries, that there are within the private sector or other agencies, such as the Fish and Game Department in Idaho, fish biologists that could advise the Forest Service just as ably as their own paid personnel. The same is true with the landscape architects and many of the other divisions that I mentioned. It's grown into quite a bureaucracy, which perhaps is still doing as able a job of managing the resources as they once did. I am not prepared to say, I guess, they are not doing a good job. I think they are way overstaffed to do it. And the other change that I think I see is in the young men who are entering the Forest Service now. Many of them -- if not most of them, many of them at least -- appear to be losing sight of the multiple use principle and being more the advocates of either wilderness or recreation use. There are still some who believe strongly in and work strongly for the multiple uses. But I think that I see a drift away from the multiple use concept. If that is true, then in my opinion, there is no point in having a National Park Service and a National Forest Service, because the objectives of both will be the same: single use ... namely recreation, and only some types of recreational use.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: And the elimination of any productive use of the forest lands

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Yes.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: . . . such as mining, grazing, lumbering.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Right. And this is the real cause for concern to me. Because, as I say, I've spent -- My business lifetime has been one of supporting the multiple use concept. I still believe strongly in it. Proper use, yes, but multiple use. And I hate to see it changing because I think, it's, it's - The loss of the use of the resource for other than recreation will eventually mean a shortage of food and fiber, minerals, trees. All of which have a profound effect on the well being of the people in our country. And I hate to see that resource lost when it can be utilized on a sustained, year-in year-out productive use; when it is done right. And it can be done right.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: So, speaking again just of the livestock business, if you -- the various techniques you've outlined, such as rotation in usage of the grazing area and control of the types of forage, et cetera -- If these techniques were used, you feel that we could still have a sizable livestock population on the forests of central Idaho?

THE FUTURE OF GRAZING ON THE PUBLIC LAND

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: A very viable livestock population.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Now, do you think that the numbers are too low now, John? Have they been curtailed too much?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: In some areas I think they have, and in other areas, perhaps they haven't been controlled enough but -- By and large, I think that the reductions in use, the cuts in the grazing preferences have been at least sufficient and in some instances too much. And that by using today's techniques, we can continue to utilize the land. Plus the fact that there will be new techniques developed for land management. I can't tell you what they are, because they aren't developed yet. But there will be new ones that will make grazing on the National Forest even more practical and probably will be able to raise the carrying capacities to where [sic] we can graze more animals, provided that we don't lose sight of the multiple use principle. And that, I am afraid, is where we are going.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Maybe influenced a great deal by the fact that we are primarily now an urban nation?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Very much influenced by that fact and that there have both for the livestock and for the land.

TRAILING VERSUS TRUCKING

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Well, wasn't one of the processes or patterns of use that made a terrible impact on the land the trailing of the ewes with the lambs at their side up the trails, over Galena Summit and then they disperse. Then the ewes and lambs would trail back for shipping, and then the ewes trailed back again for further feeding. And those ...

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: And then out

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: And then out. And also interspersed with that there were bands of yearlings and there were bands of bucks. And as a result the sheep trail that went over Galena Summit just couldn't help but become bare. And that bare trail was one of the sights that really

excited people who saw it into -- what'd they call them ... thinking that sheep were just ... ? "Nasty, little maggots ..."

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: "Woolly maggots."

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: "Woolly maggots."

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Unfortunately, that trail paralleled U.S. 93. There were other trails that were probably just as bad, but not just as visible. And I'm not holding a brief for having a trail that looked like that. But here again, a change in management: instead of trailing the ewes in, ewes and lambs in, turning the ewes out -- excuse me, trailing the ewes and lambs in to graze for awhile and trailing them back to the rail head -- all this was changed by the advent of better roads and trucks. And also by the use of trucks instead of railroads to transport the livestock.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: To the market?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: To the market.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: When they were fat, yes.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: And so just the management tool of trucking left less use of the trail. And the last time I rode that Ketchum-Stanley driveway, stock driveway, I could not believe what was growing there -- how much was growing there, and this was four or five years ago. We thought -- we, the users of the trail, thought that when Jay Sevy, the Forest Supervisor, said he was going to close the trail -- we thought the end of the world had come. If it did, it came and went. We're still there. We're doing it a different way and a better way in my opinion. Another use of the management tool to continue the use of livestock on the public land. And it costs more probably to truck sheep than it does to trail them, but not a great lot.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Because in the trailing process you did lose weight, you lost pounds.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: You lost sheep and you lost pounds. And plus the fact that trucking equipment is much more sophisticated now. The first sheep trucks I remember, you hauled maybe forty or fifty head on one truckload and it took ten or twelve hours to get from, lets say Cape Horn, north of Stanley to Ketchum. Now you put five hundred animals on a truck and in that same ten or twelve hours you're almost to Ogden, Utah, or to wherever you are going, toward a packing plant rather than a rail head. This gets off the subject a little of the Forest Service, but I only use it as an example of a management tool that has improved the grazing on the National Forest. And it was not done by reducing numbers.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Um, hum.

CURRENT PROBLEMS IN SHEEP RANCHING

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: To be sure numbers have been reduced. But economics have had a lot to do with the reduction as well as reducing the permitted numbers. Predator problem has

had its effect. The difficulty in obtaining competent help has had its effect, even greater, I think than the impact of the reductions of the permitted numbers on the forest.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: If you could find the men to take -- or women, we say now, men or women -- to herd the sheep on the forests, certainly it's a feasible way still to fatten animals, isn't it?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: Absolutely.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: And it's a -- As you have pointed out, if it is a usage that does not abuse the land, it's what we call a renewable resource, isn't that true?

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: It's a renewable resource, sustained use.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: Um, hum.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: By sustained use meaning year after year after year. "Renewable resource" is probably a better way to put it.

MIRIAM BRECKENRIDGE: And if it is not used by livestock, at least at the present time, we have no other -- no thought of any other way to use those native grasses, because they are basically native grasses except where there has been the technique of eradicating a, well, what's called a "noxious weed", isn't it? [Laughs] It means a less nutritious plant that takes over a given hillside.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: An invader plant.

MB.: Yes.

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE: The -- Yes, the only way it can be utilized is by animals, either wild animals or domestic animals. There might be some increase in the number of wild animals, if there were no domestic animals grazed on the National Forest. am not prepared to say there won't be. But one of the reasons that the increase, if any, would be limited, is because in many areas, we are either farming the winter range of this -- these wild animals, or we have built towns or ski resorts or some other impediment which precludes their grazing some place in the wintertime. And by and large, the National Forest are summer grazing areas for animals, be they wild or domestic. And the wild -- both types -- Both the wild animals and the domestic animals, have to have some place to go in the wintertime. And many of their winter ranges are destroyed in the ways I just mentioned.

END OF INTERVIEW

Deanne Thompson: This ends the interview with John Breckenridge on the National Forest Service conducted by Miriam Breckenridge.