

An Interview with

**Leo Drey**

at his office in  
St. Louis, Missouri

**27 January 1998**

interviewed by Will Sarvis



Oral History Program  
The State Historical Society of Missouri

© 1998

Collection C3966

Missouri Environment a.c. 6, 7



## NOTICE

1) This material is protected by copyright law (Title 17, U.S. Code). It may not be cited without acknowledgment to the Western Historical Manuscript Collection, a Joint Collection of the University of Missouri and the State Historical Society of Missouri.

Citations should include: Missouri Environment Oral History Project (C3966), [name of interviewee], [name of the interviewer], [date and place of interview], [audio recording or transcript], Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, Missouri.

2) Reproductions of this transcript are available for reference use only and cannot be reproduced or published in any form (including digital formats) without written permission from the Western Historical Manuscript Collection.

3) Use of information or quotations from any Missouri Environment Oral History Project transcript indicates agreement to indemnify and hold harmless the University of Missouri, the State Historical Society of Missouri, their officers, employees, and agents, and the interviewee from and against all claims and actions arising out of the use of this material.

*For further information, contact:*

Western Historical Manuscript Collection  
23 Ellis Library  
University of Missouri  
Columbia, MO 65201-5149



## PREFACE

Leo A. Drey was born in 1917 in St. Louis. He attended Antioch College, and later worked as assistant treasurer for Wohl Shoe Company in St. Louis. In 1951 he began buying timber land in the eastern Missouri Ozarks. This early acquisition soon grew, and by the early 1960s, the land had the name of Pioneer Forest and entailed about 135,000 acres. Today that figure is around 160,000 acres, all told. Mr. Drey's extensive collection of letters and other papers is deposited in the Western Historical Manuscript Collection at the University of St. Louis. Researchers should consult this collection (and the Kay Drey collection) for voluminous additional information pertaining to environmental matters and their history in Missouri and the nation.

I first caught sight of Mr. Drey on September 27th, 1997, at the Watkins Mill State Historic Site, where we were all gathered for a state parks meeting. I soon came to appreciate his tremendous significance in Missouri land protection matters and hoped someone would interview him for our Missouri Environment Oral History Project. With my own interest in Missouri environmental history settling on the establishment of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways, that interviewer turned out to be me.

I met Mr. Drey in his downtown St. Louis office, a room with walls covered by awards and plaques from the MU Forestry Club, Department of the Interior, Missouri Parks Association, and many other organizations. Pictures of wild land, mementos (statuettes of raptor hatchlings; an elk or a caribou), and a cabinet full of land maps all reflected a long conservation career. Mr. Drey sat at his desk and I across from it, beside what surely must have been an antique safe (N&J Friedman, Herring, Hall, Marvin Co., St. Louis). We talked amiably of many things on and off tape, and before I left Mr. Drey joked about his limited wall space and lack of desire for any more honorariums.

The interview was recorded on two Sony type I (normal bias) audio cassettes, using a Marantz PMD-222 manual recorder (set on automatic recording level) and a Shure VP64 omnidirectional microphone attached to a floor stand. The third tape (TDK SA-X 90; a copy of the original), narrated by Mr. Drey, was recorded on equipment unknown to this editor. But all three tapes exhibit high audio quality and are easily understandable throughout.

The following transcript represents a faithful rendering of the entire oral history interview. Minor stylistic alterations -- none of factual consequence -- have been made as part of a general transcription policy. Mr. Drey, the interviewee or narrator, carefully examined a draft transcript and indicated additional modifications, some of substantive value. Additional historical material expressed in his letter accompanying the returned draft are included in the following transcript. Any use of brackets [ ] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Parentheses ( ) are used to indicate laughter or a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation. Quotation marks [" "] indicate speech depicting dialogue, or words highlighted for the usual special purposes (such as indicating irony). Double dashes [--] and ellipses [ . . . ] are also used as a stylistic method in an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editors, Will Sarvis and N. Renae Farris.



WS: I am in St. Louis, Missouri, where I am with Mr. Leo A. Drey. We're going to talk about land use, the Ozark National Scenic Riverways, and all kinds of things. But, I thought before we got focused on that, maybe you could just give us an autobiographical sketch about where you were born, grew up, and how you came to be interested in land.

LD: I was born here in St. Louis in 1917. I've lived here all my life. Of course, there was a period when I was in the service and college and so on. But this has been my home. I went to Antioch College, which features its work-study program. In the course of that I had a number of different work experiences and ended up with a degree in business and government. You would have thought with that background that I might have ended up where I am now, but I didn't.

In fact, looking back on it, I went back there and talked to the head of the cooperative department that arranges the work prospects. I said, "How did you let me go into business? It's certainly not congenial." And he got out my record and indicated that they had tried to push me in various other directions, but stubborn as I am -- I knew I didn't want law. I knew I didn't want medicine -- I didn't think I did; I'd had one co-op in a hospital, because my stepfather was a surgeon. So that kind of left me with business. But, looking at my record, the only two C-minuses I got -- one was in introductory accounting, and the other was money credit banking. Whereas all my science courses I was getting As and (chuckling) so on. So it was sort of ridiculous. But, as I say, I was bullheaded.

It took me some years of working for a shoe company here (Wohl Shoe Company,

where I was assistant treasurer) to decide this wasn't congenial and I should do something else. I guess I was influenced by the early experiences I had in camps and all. I loved the out of doors. I decided to strike a blow for conservation and try to do something. (I don't know how much history like this you want). But I did spend a good number of months looking around and talking to people. I investigated prospects of a forestry project of some kind in a number of places, Maine to Florida. I visited and looked around in Tennessee. I decided the opportunities and needs were at least as great here in the Ozarks. Some of the people I talked to, I said, "How many acres do you need to cover the overhead, salary of a professional, taxes, and other expenses?" The advice I got was that 25,000 acres would be sufficient for that.

So that was my initial objective, to assemble 25,000 acres of land, manage it along conservation lines; a demonstration project indicating that you could manage land in the droughty, rather infertile Ozark soils through individual tree selection without going broke in the process. That was my initial objective.

I had assembled a little more than that -- maybe 35,000 acres -- when I was out on a fire one night, when I'd been called by the district forester in Ellington with the Department of Conservation. They had a big fire, actually on Department of Conservation land. They needed to send in more crews. I had a Jeep and, "Would I take a crew into their fire?" Which I was glad to do. It *was* a big fire. About 3 o'clock in the morning we took a breather. Someone flopped in the leaves next to me where I was resting.

**[tape meter, 50]**

His name was Charlie Kirk, and he was employed by National Distillers Products, which owned almost 90,000 acres of land in Missouri. He asked me if I knew that they'd changed their cutting policies.

**[telephone interruption; tape recorder momentarily off]**

And I was not aware of that. When we got the fire out I had a conversation with National Distillers. After an extended period of negotiation I ended up with their 89,900 [acres], adding that to the 35,000 I already had, and I've been over my head ever since. So that's the history of it. I don't know -- is that what you're looking for?

WS: Sure. Yes. Do you happen to recall around what year it was you first bought land?

LD: 1951, I bought the first land. And this was 1954, I guess, that I got the National Distillers property.

WS: And your land was primarily in the Shannon County, Dent County . . .

LD: Not much in Dent. It was and is mostly in Shannon, and a lot in Reynolds; quite a bit in Carter, and then it trails off with a lesser amount in Ripley, Texas, and just a very little in Dent, though that's where our headquarters is.

WS: Now a lot of this land had been some of the Pioneer Cooperage Company? Is that correct?

LD: That's where National Distillers got the bulk of their land. They added some to it. But, the story on that is, having bought this land for its potential in turning out stave bolts for cooperage; white oak stave bolts for whiskey barrels -- when the [Second World] War

came along they weren't assured of the fact that they would be able to get the white oak they needed. They bought this land for this purpose. Then they found out, as things went along, that that was *not* a problem. That's why they were willing to let it go.

WS: Do you have an idea of how much acreage you own now?

LD: It's just over 154,000.

WS: Just over 154,000. And you've given away quite a bit, haven't you?

LD: Well; about 4,400 acres have been turned over to this foundation I established in 1956 (I believe it was), which bears the name L-A-D Foundation. I guess the derivation of the source of that (chuckling) is not too hidden. But I had been turning over land to them to protect as natural areas, largely. I happen to have one property, Dillard Mill, that is leased to the state for the mythical dollar a year rent as a state park or state historic site. One other tract that is leased as a state park is Grand Gulf. A lot more land than that has been leased to the Department of Conservation also on the same kind of term, a dollar a year, to be protected and watched over as natural areas. Now, there is some land that is located more conveniently to our headquarters in Salem, that my people look out for themselves, to protect.

WS: Now these natural areas, do they have special botanical significance?

LD: Yes. Two of them are "research natural areas."

**[tape meter, 100]**

The Society of American Foresters has a program to find different forest types and have them just left alone. Let nature takes its course. So we have two of those. One is a white

oak area we call the Current River Natural Area. Another is an old growth eastern red cedar area we call Pioneer Natural Area. Those are two of those that meet the Society of American Foresters qualifications. Those are research natural areas. The others are areas that have either botanic significance or geologic significance. One of them has some rock carvings, petroglyphs. Other than that they're of botanic interest or geologic interest.

WS: Eastern red cedar forest is pretty rare, I would think.

LD: To have old growth trees, it *is* very rare. These trees are [indicates about fourteen inches in diameter with his hands]. I don't know what the girth is, but twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six inches DBH [diameter at breast height], I guess. The white oak area is, of course, larger trees. That's somewhere in the thirty or forty inches diameter, I guess.

WS: Was that cooperage actively cultivating white oak, or were they just harvesting what was there?

LD: No, they were harvesting it. They had very superior management. The two people in charge, Ed Woods and Charlie Kirk, were really recognized as being preeminent in the field of foresters. They'd been at it a long time. They're the ones who established the model that we're still following, this individual tree selection. The government agencies had hypothesized that you would end up with a maple forest if you didn't clear cut, because maple thrives in shade, whereas oak regenerates in full sunlight. Of course, we've been at that for almost fifty years (counting the time that Ed and Charlie were running that 89,900 acres that National Distillers had) and demonstrated that you *can* regenerate an oak forest. And we *have* generated an oak forest through individual tree

selection.

WS: Yes, I got the impression from your Congressional testimony that you were never much a fan of clear cutting as a silvicultural technique.

LD: No. The government research in the early days of Missouri was more devoted toward pine -- which, after all, is a minor component of the stand, and less to hardwoods. And so there wasn't really any very authoritative guidance on this sort of thing. In fact, my current manager, Clint Trammel, did his master's thesis on university land north of Salem.

**[tape meter, 150]**

(I can't think of the name of that farm; it will come to me in a minute). But his conclusion was that it would have to work out over a long period of time to be authoritative, but there was no particular economic penalty if land was managed through individual tree selection rather than through clear cutting.

**[telephone interruption; tape recorder momentarily off]**

LD: That place was called Wurdack Farm, where he did his research, I believe. The point of it is, of course, that while you could anticipate perhaps getting a little more revenue -- the person who's doing the logging could afford to pay a little bit more because he was getting a higher volume through clear cutting than individual tree selection -- on the other hand, offsetting or probably more than offsetting is the fact that nature is doing our planting for us. If you clear cut you're really going to need to spend quite a bit of money to (chuckling) replant your forest, you might say. While it's not absolutely certain, and

you'd have to wait for a complete rotation to know, there is reason to believe that [that is the case].

WS: When you first got involved with forest management, were you influenced by the writings of historic figures like Gifford Pinchot or something like that?

LD: No, really not particularly. I've gotten acquainted with some of the authoritative figures; Olaus Murie, I got to know, and Sigurd Olson, and so on and so forth. But no, I didn't do a great deal of reading background. When I went into this my conversations were with the head of the school of forestry at the University of Missouri, one of the vice presidents at T.J. Moss Tie Company (who owned the biggest acreage of privately owned land in Missouri at that time), and the same Ed Woods and Charlie Kirk that I mentioned to you. People like that. So my reading was not extensive. It became (laughing) extensive all of a sudden, but not before I got into this, no.

WS: I see. Did you ever use prescribed fire in your forest management?

LD: We have experimented a little bit with it on a very limited basis, yes.

WS: Well, what was your first knowledge of what came to be this Ozark National Scenic Riverways? What was your first intimation that something was going to happen up there along those lines?

**[tape meter, 200]**

LD: I had probably, no doubt, the leading role in setting up what was known as the first Missouri Forest Resource Conference (I think, was how we titled it), in which Stuart Symington was the principle speaker introduced by then-Governor [James] Blair. The

lunch speaker was Attorney General John Dalton, introduced by then-Speaker of the Missouri House of Representatives, Dick Ichord. To me, the most important outcome and purpose of that conference -- though it was never made known to the public, as such; or certainly *one* of the most important things -- was that the REA, Rural Electrification Administration, was running around getting signatures on petitions at that time in support of several dams on the Current River in the Ozarks. And we managed to influence Symington in advance of that meeting to come out flat footedly in opposition in Governor Blair's presence. The reason for that was that the poop that we were getting was that Governor Blair was leaning toward coming out in favor of those dams. And when he heard what Symington said, that was the last of it. Some of those petitions, I think, have been put to good use, probably, in the outhouses down there.

**[telephone interruption; tape recorder momentarily off]**

LD: I've lost track. I don't know where we are.

WS: You were talking about the disposal of those petitions. (Laughs)

LD: (laughing) Oh, yes.

So I've had an interest in protecting those streams for some time. In fact, we had never cut [timber] within sight of the rivers. I had, at one time, over thirty-four, thirty-five miles of river frontage on the Current and Jacks Fork. So, I think about that time there were the beginnings of interest on the part of the Park Service, perhaps, trying to do their thing there, in contrast with what the REA had in mind.

WS: Now was the REA trying to get the Army Corps to build those dams?

LD: I'm not sure about that. I don't recall. But they were very actively trying to put in the Water Valley dam. I don't know; there were several dams.

**[tape meter, 250]**

I can't think anymore what the name of the big one was; maybe Blair Creek dam. I don't remember. But that was a program they were trying to advance.

WS: Did Senator Symington stay involved with this project -- ?

LD: No. Well, he made this welcome statement. Then, subsequently, he did come out with his proposals for an Ozark Rivers National Monument. That was the first thing that evolved, eventually, into the Ozark Scenic Riverways.

WS: Oh, that was his idea, the National Monument.

LD: That was the initial legislation, that he introduced, as I recall.

WS: Now, I take it most of that land was in the district of the Congressman down there, Paul Jones? Is that correct?

LD: No, not really. Paul Jones had the southern end in Ripley County. All of the northern part was in Dick Ichord's district. He had just been elected Congressman. And he campaigned, in fact, for Congress with a position that was in opposition to the idea of the Park Service doing anything, that, "He wasn't going to turn his district over to being a habitat of a lot of bobcats and hoot owls," was the way he phrased it, as I recall.

WS: In your own opinion, would you say Congressman Ichord pretty much reflected the majority of his constituency in that feeling at that time?

LD: Yes and no. He reflected the feeling of -- well, I would have to say yes, at that time he

did. As things went along -- and as George Hartzog, the director of the National Park Service at that time, made his pitch -- I would say that the residents of the towns down there, at least the large number of residents in the towns, particularly in Van Buren, saw this as an opportunity to prosper and have motels and restaurants and all, similar to what they have in the Great Smokies. The farmers and landowners along the rivers were in opposition. But there was this cleavage between the towns people and the rural people.

WS: You also had quite a bit of involvement in this from other Missouri Congressman; I think particularly Richard Bolling, and maybe Tom Curtis?

**[tape meter, 300]**

LD: Yes. I don't recall Bolling being a factor. Ichord, of course, after he was elected, changed his position. Symington put pressure on him and he reversed course. But Bolling I don't recall as being very much of an actor. I think it was more Paul Jones-- and Paul Jones did get the Eleven Point dropped. The original proposal was for it to be included, and he got it dropped.

**[end of side 1, tape I; tape meter, 317]**

WS: One thing I was trying to do was just identify, at the national level, who the key individuals were (perhaps Senator Symington) who were involved in this.

LD: Yes. Now you mentioned Tom Curtis, and I wanted to get back to that. Some of us who felt as I did, as I described earlier, that there was reason perhaps that the Forest Service might have done a better job and would have been more acceptable, and might have been a more appropriate administrator than to bring in the Park Service. After all, the Forest

Service appealed. They not only had this property in the watershed and were dominant in the watersheds, but their clientele was more outdoorsmen, fishermen, so on and so forth. In contrast to the Park Service -- the appeal is often to families with young children and that kind of thing. The river -- after all, there's a safety factor there. Almost every year someone drowns in the Current. There were reasons that seemed to us that a more appropriate administrator might be the Forest Service rather than the Park Service.

So, one of the people that I was working with, Davis Biggs, was a partner of Congressman Curtis. (By the way, I offered him an invitation; and got word to him through his son, actually, we were meeting here. I thought he might offer something that would be useful to you if he sat in on it. But he's even older than I am at age eighty-one; I don't know, late in his eighties, I guess, and he just wasn't up to it). But anyway, he got Tom Curtis interested. And Tom Curtis introduced what came to be known as the Forest Service bill. So there were actually two bills before Congress. There was the Park Service bill and there was the Forest Service bill, which was a collaborative effort. Actually, Dave Biggs did most of the work on it, and he and I worked together. I gave him my ideas and he put it in legal form. Tom Curtis introduced that legislation.

Curtis' Forest Service bill had at least as much conservationist support as the Park Service bill. On the Forest Service side we had people like Olaus Murie (I mentioned before) of the Wilderness Society. We had Joe Penfold, the executive director of the Izaak Walton League in those days. They had the National Park Association on their side, and they had the Sierra Club on their side. The Sierra Club had a chapter up in

Chicago, and they just knew automatically that the Park Service was white-hatted and the Forest Service was black-hatted. And while they had *no* familiarity with the local scene. I don't know that any of their members ever floated the Current, Jacks Fork, or Eleven Point. But anyway, they came out on the other side.

So, it was a split in the conservation movement. The result, nothing happened in the first Congress that considered this. There was the Park Service bill and the Forest Service bill, and neither of them moved. An interesting supporter of the Forest Service bill was . . . boy, I'm going back here now; was the author of a well known book at that time, *The Organization Man*.

**[tape meter, 50]**

The fellow worked for the Rockefeller Foundation or was affiliated somehow with the Rockefeller Foundation.

**[tape recorder momentarily off]**

William H. Whyte, Jr., Holly [Hollingsworth] Whyte. And he testified that this Curtis bill was the first time that Congress had brought to its attention in legislation and hearings a bill which has its central feature the conservation easements or development restrictions as a central feature. He was interested in it and testified on behalf of the Rockefeller Foundation in favor of that bill.

WS: I'm guessing then that Congressman Curtis would have been the primary congressional player for the Forest Service bill.

LD: That's right. And what happened was that neither bill moved, because there was a split in

the conservation community. Each approach had its own advocates. So nothing happened to that Congress (whatever the number of it was). Then the question became, “Should we have Curtis reintroduce his bill the next Congress?” Which might result in the same impasse -- or not, because the attention the rivers were getting, the national attention which they had not had before. Visitation was coming up, and it was obvious something needed to be done.

So we decided that we would not have Curtis reintroduce his bill. Symington revised his bill, and no longer called for an Ozark Rivers National Monument (or whatever it was called). He *did* put in a provision in his bill mentioning scenic easements. They were not a central feature of it. It was still based in part on land acquisition, fee title acquisition. But at least that was in there as another option. Having made that decision, instead of that, we still had real reservations (some of us) about the wisdom of making the Park Service the administrator for one of the reasons I mentioned: their clientele is families. The rivers have some danger to them.

**[tape meter, 100]**

They were a new agency [in the region]. The local people were, you know, “show me” in Missouri, the guiding light, and notably suspicious in the Ozarks. I remember when the REA came in, many a person saying, “Nope. I’m agin it! It’s something new. I’m agin it.” That was the attitude here too, in many circles.

So we decided not to have Curtis do that. Symington *did* revise his bill. We still had reservations. We then began talking to the landowners along the river about the

possibility of a state administration rather than a Park Service administration. We got a rather fairer reception in many quarters. We had landowners sign what were headed, or called, "letters of intent." In these letters of intent the landowners indicated that if the state acquired scenic easements on their land, they would execute such scenic easements (or development restriction agreements) in the state's favor. I indicated I would turn over the first 300 feet or whatever (I don't remember what the letters of intent specified exactly) at no cost to the state, or execute these development restriction agreements in their favor. And others did that too, turning over. Many did not. They would turn it over, but with some remuneration to them for what they were turning over.

I don't remember anymore. I just don't know, Will; I think we had maybe something like 300 of those letters of intent. It was a substantial amount of land. (That's part of the stuff I think has been turned over to your organization, Western Historical Manuscript Collection. I think they have them. I'm pretty damn sure *I* don't have them anymore). But that was not accepted in the end, obviously. Congress enacted the legislation, the redraft, and the state didn't pick up that ball. There have been other states -- I think maybe Maine -- have protected their rivers. But this was something that I don't think you'll find particularly in the Park Service's records. They, probably, list me as an opponent. In their eyes I was an opponent. And all the time, before they ever *heard* of the Current River, I was (chuckling) trying to protect it. But I thought by other, possibly better, means.

After all, it's a completely different sort of recreational experience now than

before the Park Service came in. It was enjoyed by overnight campers and fishermen and that sort of thing.

[tape meter, 150]

There was a whole minor industry there of people taking people out on johnboats, fishing and all; outfitters that did that sort of thing. You had the illusion, in the old days, that you were in a wilderness. After you put in your canoe and rounded the first bend from the putting in place, why, it was man against the river. But nowadays you have mostly day floaters shrieking in delight as they turn over in every riffle. And, you know, you're *never* out of sight of half a dozen other canoes, and it's quite a different sort of experience. These people are enjoying the experience in their own way, but it's a *different* experience than we used to have on the Eleven Point, Jacks Fork, and Current rivers.

WS: You use this phrase, "illusion of wilderness," and I found that in your Congressional testimony too. That really caught my attention in terms of maybe some indication of your philosophy. I've got some indication, that maybe from the Park Service or some other parties, the idea that there was really a myth of a primitive state there. Whereas I would take it from *your* interpretation -- obviously the land had been altered by humans, quite substantially.

LD: That's right. We, as I said, never cut within sight of the rivers. But that differed from what others did. There *was* some cutting. It *was* an altered state. But, as an indication of the change, I might mention an anecdote. Stewart Udall, when this controversy was

going on, sent Sigurd Olson -- famous canoeist from the boundary waters canoe area -- out to see why some of us had reservations about this particular approach that the Interior Department had initiated with Symington. I was a designated hitter to take Olson out. He came with another person from Washington, a fellow named Craig, who was the editor of *American Forests*, the magazine of the American Forestry Association. Ed Woods, my manager at that time, had Craig in his canoe and I had Olson in my canoe.

We spent one day on the Jacks Fork and the second day on the Current River. Sig had failed to bring along his swimming trunks. So, the Secretary of Interior's representative, Sig Olson, went skinny dipping -- which you could *do* in those days! Nowadays the sheriff would have him, there'd be headlines about the Interior Department's man going bare-assed in the Jack Forks River. It's a completely different sort of recreational experience today.

WS: When did Mr. Hall, Leonard Hall, start getting involved with that area up there?

[tape meter, 200]

LD: Len was an old line conservationist as well as a writer and lecturer for the Audubon Society. He had a love of the rivers. He was a fisherman, and his wife fished. They'd go out. He would run the canoe and she would cast from the bow. He had a long time love of those Ozark streams, and wrote about it in his book, *Stars Upstream*.

Len and I, I'm afraid, parted company on this particular issue. It's kind of a sad thing. He was in his *strenuous* efforts to get the Park Service legislation enacted. He attributed motives to me that he *had* to know better [about]. He *had* to know that I was

not motivated by self-interest, but he indicated that I was, which kind of cooled our friendship for many years.

But he was *used* by the Park Service. They deferred to him. [spoken sarcastically:] “Oh, Mr. Hall, what should we do? Oh, is that right! Is *that* so! I’m glad you told us that, Mr. Hall. We’ll certainly take that into consideration.” They buttered him up good. And really, he lost his perspective to a certain extent, *I* felt. But he was very active and supported their efforts. And of course, they got this Riverways thing enacted.

We continued to see each other after that, but there was a certain strain in our relationship -- *not* caused by the fact that he took a lot of poetic license in his *Stars Upstream* book about an incident in which I appeared, and he described in that book. We were floating on the lower Current River, below Big Spring. It was the only time I ever floated below Big Spring, because it’s a pretty slow moving stream down there, much bigger than it is up above. We were floating, and [Virginia Watson] “Ginnie” [Hall]<sup>1</sup> was fishing. Charlie Guggenheim -- does that name mean anything to you? Well, he was a documentary film maker. He was along. So I think, as I recall, there were maybe three canoes. (I think there were just the three canoes).

**[tape meter, 250]**

I was floating, watching Ginnie fish. (And I think I’m right, that that was a stretch of the river where -- I’d been on so many float trips that I forget. It might have been

---

<sup>1</sup> Leonard Hall’s wife.

above Big Spring. I'm just not sure). Anyway, it was a placid stretch and I had my feet up letting the canoe go. There was a stob sticking up that caught the keel, just enough. We were carrying Len Hall's old fashioned tent -- a great big canvas thing, not one of these little things you have now; a big old fashioned tent -- on top of our canoe. We didn't have it fastened down. We just took it along as an accommodation to him. And when this branch caught the keel, the canoe went over the side and we got a little shift of water in the boat. My wife [Kay Drey] jumped out and caught this heavy canvas thing, which is water logged by this time, and is holding it up, standing on this drift, this part of a tree that caused the problem. Charlie Guggenheim, meanwhile upstream, is tying down his camera and all (laughing) that sort of thing. There was no trouble. It was nothing. It was a placid part of the river. My wife is more or less about to drown holding this heavy canvas thing up there.

It's very dramatic in Len's book, how we'd gone through a shoot and turned this way and that way, and I'd gotten in trouble. The canoe capsized and lost the ax and so on and so forth. I said to Len afterwards, "I'm going to hit you over the head sometime with that ax!" (Laughs) It never was lost! It wasn't as he described it at all. But he made a really dramatic incident out of it. But anyway. So there's at least one inaccuracy in *Stars Upstream* that I know of.

**[tape meter, 300]**

WS: Yes, I remember that passage from that book. It *was* very dramatic. (Laughs)

LD: Very dramatic! (Laughing) And it was none of it true! I was just watching Ginnie fish,

and this thing caught me. There was enough of a jolt that it threw the tent over the side, and that put that side down, and a little water came in. But it was (laughing) no capsizing. Nothing like it.

WS: I'm glad to get that from an eyewitness (laughing) of that account, to tell you the truth.

LD: Well, alright; it was more dramatic, and if it helped him sell his book, more power to him.

**[end of side 2, tape II; tape meter, 312]**

WS: When you were going around getting these letters of intent, and also I guess, just managing your timber and buying land in that area -- you must have established quite a rapport with the native people in the Ozark region.

LD: Well, I'm kind of proud of the fact. I never was or ever will be accepted. I do feel that I'm a foreigner. But at least I got my "first papers." I'm not a complete outsider. And those who know me -- I've got friends down there who understand what I'm doing, and respect what I'm doing, and so on and so forth. But there are more people that I don't know than I do know. You know; and green goddess, and all that. I've got a lot of land and they have a lesser amount of land. It came to the surface, of course, when we had this proposal for a state system of rivers. People have been suspicious of me ever since. I think a lot of that has been alleviated. There's something called a Scenic Rivers Watershed Partnership (I think that's the name of it) that has representation from the political leadership; county supervisor, that kind of thing, from a number of those same counties down there -- Carter County, Shannon County, Reynolds County, Ripley County, Dent County, several other counties. They all have members of the board, and

they have a quarterly meeting. I've been going down there. I think I've reestablished a decent relationship with these county officials.

Because as an outsider, I thought that one of the more important things for me to do was trying to accomplish certain conservation objectives, and to demonstrate that land should be managed by the principle I espoused rather than clear cutting. And that timber is an asset and should be protected, and you shouldn't set fire to the woods as had been the custom.

Of course, that setting fire to the woods *has* been a long standing custom, but when the range was closed -- there was grazing on the open range, and had been historically, ever since the old growth timber was first taken out of there. But open range grazing was banned by the Missouri General Assembly some few years ago, and since then the forest fires have been greatly limited.

**[telephone interruption; tape recorder momentarily off]**

WS: You were talking about the closing of the free range.

LD: Oh, yes. That made a tremendous difference down there. When I came into the area in 1951, there were two major concerns. One was the setting of fires, largely to make the grass grow greener earlier in the spring for the cattle. There were cattle and hogs on the open range. There were grudge fires set. There were fires set to get rid of the varmints; the ticks, and chiggers, and the snakes. And there were fires set because, "Well, it's the custom down here. Pa did it, and Grandpap did it. We set fire to the range in the spring." Usually right around Easter. That was a way to celebrate Easter. And, you know, "It's

kind of dull down here.” And there’s some excitement if there are fires.

**[tape meter, 50]**

Some people even did it, supposedly, they set fire and then get paid by the state to help put the fires out. And there were grudge fires. If some of your neighbors that did something you didn’t like, you’d get even by setting fire to the woods. You’d go along on horseback and drop a match here and there as you went down the trail and “string fire.” That was the expression, “string fire.” And that had been a custom.

When the range was closed, that had a vast impact. All of us trying to get them to think of timber as a crop had an impact. And intentionally set fires, now, are few and far between. There are fires that, people out and about burning brush, and the fire gets away from them. People throw cigarettes around carelessly and so on and so forth. But the intentional fires are largely a thing of the past. The biggest difference was the closing of the range. I can’t give you the year of that; that was in the late ‘50s, I think.

WS: I understand timber poaching was also pretty prevalent down there.

LD: That was the second thing. The word locally isn’t “poaching,” it’s “grandmawing.” “That’s a fine load of logs you got there, son. Where’d you get them?” “Down to Grandmaw’s place.” You know. That did happen, and I’ve got some anecdotes about that on the tape I gave you. (I’m not going to repeat them).

WS: I’ve heard an awful lot about the Scots-Irish and this kind of clannishness and fear of outsiders or dislike of outsiders, so I take it you’re not going to contradict that common wisdom. Is that (laughing) pretty much the truth?

LD: That's true. Right. You have to respect these people. I mean, I certainly do. They went out in a wilderness. The pioneers came in there. They cleared up a few acres near a spring that they found and built a cabin there, and were self sufficient. It's just a marvel to me how the settlers opened up that country through subsistence farming, wrung a living out of this rather infertile land. It was fertile enough alongside the creeks, but that's not where (laughing) most of the land was. They *were* independent. They would come in on horseback, I guess, occasionally to town to get some essentials. But the old idea was you helped your neighbor, and if your neighbor was in trouble -- his barn burned down or something -- you went out and helped him rebuild.

WS: In addition to all the native people, I also notice in this story there are prominent St. Louis people, such as yourself and I guess Mr. Hall, who also had a great interest in the area. There was bound to be more than just the two of you, though, I guess.

LD: Oh, yes. There were an awful lot of people -- not in the numbers that you have there today -- who discovered the streams and loved to float. The big difference, of course, in addition to the Park Service and this publicity, "Come one, come all, see the rivers that we're protecting for enjoyment." There were the outdoorsmen who came there and fished and so on in the old days. Then there were the native people with their johnboats. Now the city people didn't know how to run a johnboat. The city people were afraid to take their canvas canoes out on the river.

**[tape meter, 100]**

Old type of canvas canoes. They were afraid they'd break them up. But the big

difference was the Grumman Canoe after the war. Grumman started making canoes after they quit making war planes. That has made a vast difference, because city people could take a canoe out and dent it up a little bit, perhaps, but it was something they could get enjoyment on the river from. They couldn't do it with johnboats. Oh sure, some of them would go out with outfitters, a few. But there's been a tremendous change in visitation with the coming of the Park Service *and* the aluminum canoe.

WS: Was there much in the way of recreational cabins or summer cabins up there, for St. Louis people?

LD: Yes. Not much, but there were some. Davis Biggs, I mentioned before, had a cabin on the Jacks Fork; had had for many, many years, before the roads were black topped. It was a venture to get down there. There were some cabins. There was this difference that I referred to before in the Park Service bill and the Forest Service bill. The Park Service, unfortunately, either through drafting their legislation or their interpretation of the legislation, had *not* been very aggressive -- or as aggressive as I think they could and should have been -- in removing those cabins. Though they, as I mentioned before, put in a development restriction or scenic easement agreement in their bill. They largely offered that not to the farmer, but to the person who had the developed property -- which would perpetuate the cabin usage that he had. Sure, if you already had a cabin, why not sign a scenic easement agreement, so on and so forth. So I think they misinterpreted it or abused or non-utilized the scenic easement provision. Certainly they haven't done extensively. They would give a cabin owner a life tenancy; get rid of a cabin, eventually,

that way. But they didn't really utilize the scenic easement provision, because they didn't offer it to those people. They didn't offer it to the farmers, they offered it to the person with the development.

WS: When you mentioned this proposal, the old state system, and how that ball had not been picked up, was that the Conservation Commission just not interested?

LD: Wait. The "old state system?"

WS: You said, at one time, before the Park Service got the authorization, that there was an idea for the state to control the...

LD: Yes. There were landowners along the river who actually executed letters of intent. (And I'm sorry; they're in the collection at Western Manuscripts. I'm sure they have them, and I don't have them). But it expressed this intention that if the state did choose to administer to protect the rivers through state action, administer them and all, that landowners would -- either for free or for a consideration -- turn over a scenic easement along the rivers to the state, and protect them through these development restriction agreements rather than through a fee title acquisition.

**[tape meter, 150]**

That was the so-called letter of intent that expressed this intention. "I, the owner of such-and-such would do thus-and-so."

WS: And they sent these letters to the Missouri Department of Conservation?

LD: They were collected by the group who had reservations about the proposed Park Service legislation -- which was still proposed, not enacted. The intention was to turn them over

to the governor, I guess; I don't remember how they were addressed; whether they were addressed to the Conservation Department or the governor of Missouri. I think the original or those letters may be in this collection, or maybe they're just copies. I don't know, sitting here right now, where they went. I don't know whether they were turned over to the governor. I don't know. I don't remember.

WS: But there was just a lack of interest on the part of the state government?

LD: The state never picked up and grabbed hold of the idea, no.

WS: As far as I've been able to tell, the General Assembly did pass some resolutions saying they saw a need to protect the area, but as far as that goes, I suppose it's sort of like a voice of support, but no force or law or anything.

**[Mr. Drey begins searching his office files in search of documentary evidence of the letters of intent or the group that organized to gather them; incidental conversation omitted, tape meter, 171-195]**

WS: Did Ed Stegner and the Conservation Federation get involved with this at all?

LD: I suppose they must have. I don't have any clear recollection of them being particularly active. Ed, on the Conservation Federation, was very active in subsequent state efforts to enact a statewide system through state action. Governor [Warren E.] Hearnes, when he was governor, formed a governor's wild rivers advisory committee, and Ed Stegner was chairman and I was vice chairman of it. We met. This went on for several years, trying to enact a statewide program. But I'm afraid largely through the antagonisms which the Ozark Scenic Rivers legislation caused, there was such strong anti-government feeling down there, none of these efforts for a statewide system were successful. We went after

that for years, one way or another.

WS: Speaking of the resistance, I understand -- in fact, it was Jim Keefe who told me -- somebody in St. Charles, a citizen advocate of the Riverways, got his car bombed? Do you remember that?

LD: Oh, yes. Very well.

WS: Do you remember who that was?

LD: Yes, I remember who it was. He's still an active conservationist.

**[Incidental conversation omitted while Mr. Drey searches for the name, tape meter, 227-266]**

Roger Taylor.

WS: That would have been in the early '60s, I guess, before the law...

LD: I think it was more like 1970.<sup>2</sup>

WS: Oh, that late?

LD: Yes.

WS: After it had been enacted.

LD: Oh, yes.

WS: He lived in the city of St. Charles?

LD: He lived in St. Charles somewhere. You know Roger Pryor? You should. He has a memory. He'll remember everything. He's the research person for the [Missouri] Coalition for the Environment. And, while my memory is faulty at age eighty-one, why, he has a remarkable memory.

---

<sup>2</sup> This took place in April of 1970.

WS: Well, this is a question that I particularly wanted to ask you, because after the Riverways issue, you were also involved in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. And, I don't know if this was evident at the time, but I have heard some people comment that in retrospect, the Riverways was obviously something of a test case for that later act.

LD: Yes. [In fact, some of the principles we had espoused in Tom Curtis' proposed legislation were that when a federal agency already had been actively involved in a region where an area was proposed for protection, that agency (rather than another not previously involved there) should be designated the administrator, also that scenic easements should be a central feature of that legislation, and so on].

WS: And in retrospect some people look back and are disappointed with the Park Service in that they felt they did not appoint the strongest team of people to go down and implement this test case -- and that, in fact, they sent maybe not the strongest leaders to an area that obviously had great importance in terms of precedent.

LD: Well, I don't know. The proposal was floundering, or at least it was subject to debate as to its wisdom, until George Hartzog came along. George Hartzog, I think, was a lawyer as well as the head of the team that worked with this thing. He *really* energetically threw himself into this. He was the one that got the legislation enacted. There were other people; Ted Swem, and all. But the people, then, that they put in charge afterwards *were* people of mixed abilities.

**[tape meter, 300]**

Some of them were pretty good, and some of them were pretty weak. Some of them

stayed in the office and never got out on the land or on the rivers at all.

**[telephone interruption; tape recorder momentarily off]**

WS: In the end, did they condemn any of your land? Did they take any of your land through eminent domain?

LD: Yes. They only condemned one small piece, which I didn't discourage or oppose. Sho-Me Power (I think that was name of this [Electric] co-op) wanted to build a high line as directly as possible, or at least over the Current River. They didn't want to have to go around it or anything like that. I was in opposition to that, and the Park Service certainly didn't want it. But they were under political pressure and couldn't really do anything about it. So I tried to fight the Sho-Me power line, unsuccessfully, eventually. They did cross the river.

But why did you ask me this question? I've already forgotten what I'm answering.

WS: Starting out with the eminent domain, I asked if they had --

LD: Oh, yes. Yes. And in their efforts to stop the power line, they did take this one area where Sho-Me proposed to build the line across the river. It was an exercise in futility. They didn't prevail, anyway. But I was cooperating with them in that. And other than that, nothing else was condemned. They did that because they had to move in a hurry.

**[tape meter, 350]**

Everywhere else we reached an accommodation where they would acquire a scenic easement in exchange for their excess land behind the river. The Park Service legislation

provided that they could divest land outside of their proposed boundaries, and that's what they did. I got the land back from the rivers that they got.

If they bought property from someone and there was 500 acres, and a hundred acres were close to the river, and 400 acres were beyond their proposed boundaries, they weren't required to keep the whole tract, and they were glad to work out some accommodation with me where I got that back land in exchange for my thirty-four, thirty-five miles of river frontage. And so the only land they acquired through prospective condemnation was that one tract.

And they *still* have never acquired one piece that they wanted, the Cave Spring property. I turned Cave Spring over to my [L-A-D] foundation, because the offer that they made was so ludicrously low that it was unacceptable. So the Foundation has had that ever since.

**[end of side 1, tape II; tape meter, 385]**

WS: Do you have any idea how much you spent in legal fees in terms of the land transactions?

LD: No, I have no idea.

WS: I would imagine it would be extremely high, over the years.

LD: No idea.

WS: I haven't gotten into this yet, but I'm going to try to put a profile together of all the people who did have land condemned. And I would guess your position would have been atypical, in that you did have the wherewithal to at least have some influence, or some clout. Whereas the average person, perhaps, if they had a small tract, they pretty much

had to lose the land, whether they liked it or not.

LD: Well, it was partly, maybe that. But I think it was partly recognition that we were environmentalists who were managing the land right, and they didn't have to be all that concerned.

WS: Oh, so they did have some respect for what you were doing, then.

LD: I think so; I would like to think so.

WS: Was there ever an organization of property owners, in terms of trying to speak with a unified voice over the land acquisition, or easements, and eminent domain?

LD: Yes. There was. Going back to ancient history. [Mr. Drey begins searching through documents looking for old letterhead containing the organization's name] At one time we had something called the Ozark Rivers Association. [Reads from an old Ozark Rivers Association membership card:] "To preserve the natural beauty of the Missouri Ozark streams, I am enclosing membership dues for \_\_\_\_." And we had a number of people sign those things. (That's one thing I guess I didn't turn over to UMSL. I thought I'd more or less gotten rid of most of that stuff). But yes, there was an organization [of river frontage landowners]. I thought I might have the letterhead of it.

**[Mr. Drey searching, tape meter, 24-45; tape recorder momentarily off; on again, more searching, tape meter, 46-56]**

WS: One thing I wanted to ask you about. I understand the old Rose Cliff Hotel was quite an area of congregation for people like yourself.

LD: That's right. When you mentioned Len Hall I almost talked about Rose Cliff Hotel; Ben Davis and that outfit.

WS: Did you meet Thad Snow?

LD: No.

WS: Was that past his time? Was he already gone by then?

LD: I think so. Now what was his name?

WS: Thad Snow.

LD: Thad Snow. No, I never met Thad Snow.

WS: He was a farmer in Mississippi County, and went up there to write his memoirs. He wrote that *From Missouri*, the book. But he had been a cotton farmer down in Mississippi County.

LD: Yes, he and Ben Davis. They were all just stories to me. I knew Ben Davis, but I never knew Thad Snow.

WS: Ben Davis was the owner?

LD: He ran the Rose Cliff. I don't know whether he owned it or just ran it.

WS: I understand he became something of an authoritative conservationist himself, just by listening (laughing) to all you guys.

LD: Well, he did. And Rip Burrows, I think, was the postmaster in Van Buren. He was another one. Those are the names that come to mind.

WS: Did you have Forest Service people interacting with the group there, or not?

LD: I have no recollection of it.

WS: That was the Clark back then. It wasn't the Mark Twain, right?

LD: Right.

WS: Were you ever acquainted with any of the Forest Service chiefs or anything? You mentioned Joe Penfold, and that made me think of national figures.

LD: Well, the [Forest Service administrator] that I knew best and respected [was Art Greeley. Though his dad had been a Chief of the Forest Service, Art never received that rank. Actually, I've really never known too many of the higher level officials at the USFS, but I was greatly impressed by this man's vision and abilities].

WS: In terms of state politicians -- either senators, representatives, or governors -- are there any that stand out in your memory as being what you might call "champions" of conservation, that took a particular interest and helped your cause, that kind of thing?

LD: [shakes his head "no."]

WS: Have we had a "conservation governor?" You mentioned Governor Hearnes earlier.

LD: No name jumps out at me, as saying, "Boy, he was great." I don't think there's been much leadership there; much interest. That may be unfair, but I don't think of anybody.

WS: So the leadership in Missouri would come from various non-governmental organizations?

LD: Yes, that's right. Obviously the largest is the Conservation Federation of Missouri. They're not nearly as aggressive as the Coalition for the Environment. The Sierra Club, on certain issues, is a factor. But I don't think, in the political arena, there's anyone that's worth noting. At least I don't think of it, anyhow.

WS: You mentioned a while ago about how the visitation down at the Riverways has gone up and all. And we talked quite a bit about the implementation of the 1964 Act. This is kind of a broad question, but I wonder how your perspective on the Riverways may have

evolved since then, since 1964 -- if you've got any philosophical reflections on what they've done, or maybe how some of your older opinions may have been modified.

**[tape meter, 100]**

LD: We've just kind of adjusted to them. We go our way and they go theirs. I have no particular controversies with them. I think it's regrettable and really hard to understand that in all these years -- it *is* a lot of years, now -- they've never established their boundaries. They never surveyed their boundaries. The first thing we do when we buy a tract of land, we survey it to know where the land is. You can't manage it if you don't know where it is. Down on the Buffalo [River] when the Buffalo was taken over by the government, they immediately established their boundaries. And all these years the Park Service has never given this enough of a priority. I'm sure there are demands on their funds for all kinds of things. But to me it's ludicrous that you would not know where your property is.

The result of that is, here we've turned over this thirty-four (maybe it's thirty-five and a quarter) miles of boundary to them, and we think it's their obligation to establish the dividing line between us and them. The property they bought and took away from us, in effect. So we are very careful to stay at least 300 feet back, because they have a scenic easement on the first 300 feet. Incidentally, the fee title underlying the scenic easement has been turned over to this L-A-D Foundation. But we're very careful to leave at least 300 feet back. We don't get on it. But shoot, they don't know where their land is. We could cut within 200 feet or a hundred feet, they wouldn't know. They don't know. It's

crazy. But other than that, why, we go our way and they go theirs. We haven't had any controversies with them.

WS: I haven't yet tabulated how many directors or supervisors (I'm not sure what the title would be, of the head person) -- I don't know how many have come and gone since 1964, but I wonder if maybe any of them stand out in your memory for any particular reason?

LD: Yes. (I think they call them superintendent). I think the best one may have been a fellow named Ben Thompson. I think he's gone onward and upward and become a regional supervisor or something like that. He was, I think, the best one they've had. The fellow who just retired [Art Sullivan] was alright, but Ben was a good one. [Art Sullivan also tried hard, and Art was the one who tried to carry out the Riverways Act's mandate, hitherto neglected, to encourage some forward planning in the watershed].

WS: Do they tend to rotate their personnel the way the Forest Service does?

LD: Yes.

WS: Yes. I understand why they do that, but it seems to me the disadvantage is you never get that kind of rapport with your community, that the state people get sometimes.

LD: That's right.

If you ever do bother to listen to that tape, and there's anything that occurs to you afterwards, why let me know.

WS: Great. Yes, I'd like to come back, and I'd like to check with you on some other things as we go along. I think, for now, that's probably all my questions for you, unless you can think of something I've failed to ask you.

LD: No, (laughing) no.

WS: All right. Thank you, Mr. Drey, very much.

**[end of interview; tape meter, 145]**