

An Interview with  
**James “Jim” D. Smith**

at the Cross Country Trail Ride Arena in  
Eminence, Missouri

**03 April 1998**

interviewed by Will Sarvis



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## PREFACE

James “Jim” D. Smith was born in Eminence, Missouri, on September 3, 1944. He was raised in Shannon County on land that had been in his family for generations. He still lives there today. Smith discusses the controversy between the U.S. National Park Service and the people of Eminence. The debate between the two began in 1990 when the Park Service claimed there were feral horses running free on federal land. As the owner of the Cross Country Trail Ride Arena and a citizen of the area Smith had a stake in the debate. Art Sullivan, the Park Service Superintendent, pushed to get rid of the wild horses in Eminence. What resulted was a court case that ended in the favor of the Park Services, after being taken all the way to Washington D.C. to a U.S. Supreme Court.

After the ruling, U.S. Representative Bill Emerson drafted a bill to save the horses by making them a permanent part of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways. The bill was posthumously passed in 1996 by his wife, JoAnn, Senators Kit Bond and John Ashcroft. The Missouri Wild Horse League was organized in response to the situation as well and is still in operation today. Smith is a longtime member of the league and supporter of their work for wild horses.

The interview was recorded on a 3M type I (normal bias) audio cassette, using a Sony TC-D5 Pro II stereo cassette recorder (set on automatic recording level) and an Audio-Technica AT825 stereo microphone attached to a tripod floor stand. No interference compromises the recording, and the audio quality is good 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. 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 editor.



**[Tape meter, 000. Begin side one, tape one of two. Begin interview.]**

WS: I'm sitting here in Eminence, Missouri, at the Cross Country Trail Ride Arena with Mr. James Smith, who is the owner of this outfit. I thought just to get started -- well, first of all, maybe you could tell me your birth date.

JS: My birth date is September the 3rd, and I was born in '44.

WS: Here in Shannon County, I guess.

JS: Well, actually, right here on this farm. We're still on home ground.

WS: I imagine your family goes back quite a ways in Shannon County.

JS: Yes. For a *lot* of years. In fact, nearly all of my family was born right here in Shannon County. My granny just died a couple of years ago. She was a little over a hundred. She spent her whole entire life right here in Shannon County.

WS: I imagine your ancestors were among the first people that came here.

JS: Yes, some of them. The Chiltons and the Mahans were some of the first people to come in this area. This farm was part of the Chilton farm. In fact, the Chilton graveyard is right in my back door. Jane is my wife. We both came out of the Chilton family.

WS: I guess when you were a boy you started hearing about various government agencies wanting to come in here, among them the Army Corps, where they were going to dam the Current River?

JS: I barely can remember that. But I do remember my granddad and my dad and them talking about wanting to dam up the rivers, and they were going to flood us out. But that never happened.

WS: And then, as far as I can tell, you got people that were either trying to get the Forest Service to expand along the rivers or bring the Park Service in to stop the Army Corps, more or less.

JS: Well, yes. Then, when they came along with this Park Service thing, that was quite a controversial thing. A few people were for it, and most people weren't. Most people weren't for that. And the way they went about it wasn't good at all, in a lot of ways. They had people coming in here buying ground; buying the property. And a lot of those farms, the people that lived there, that had been handed down through generations. Some of them were older folks, and they [the Park Service] took advantage of them and scared them a little and just gave them whatever [price] they wanted to, really. And then others kind of fought back a little bit and got more than the ground was worth.

WS: Now, they had the land office right here in Eminence, didn't they?

JS: Yes, they did. Some of that didn't turn out good. Then, after the Park Service *got* in here; oh, it's been a squabble since. I mean it. Hardly any of the people in the office, in the supervision part of it, are local people. They bring them in from no telling where. And they don't get along good with the local people. It's kind of like the Park Service against the locals. And that's the way a lot of them look at it. Of course, in the end, that doesn't work out good.

WS: You do have one exception in Mr. Bailey, don't you? You know Mr. Bailey?

JS: Yes.

WS: Now he's from Shannon County, isn't he?

JS: Yes.

WS: They tell me he was able to get some jobs for the local people.

JS: Well, a few. But it doesn't amount to that many jobs, really. But Bill Bailey did help some people. He was in that office for a while. He was over the concessionaire part of it. And he did help those canoe rentals and stuff, some. He cut out a lot of the red tape for them, and made things work a lot easier.

WS: It seems like he could be kind of a liaison between the Park Service and the local people.

JS: He knew how to talk to these local people and how to get along with them, and how to work with them and get things done without a big squabble. But still, he had a job to do, and he did his job. But a lot of those guys come in there, they don't get along; they don't fit in well, and they don't get along with the people. They'll let them know real quick that they really don't care whether they like it or whether they don't. "Here's what we're going to do." And these people, they don't push well. You can talk to them and get them to do a lot of things, but if you go to pushing them, they don't push good.

**[tape meter, 50]**

WS: Do you remember Reverend Vincent Bucher?

JS: Yes. I knew him well.

WS: Now, he was involved with that (I believe it was called) the Current and Eleven Point River Association.

JS: Yes.

WS: They were trying to come up with an alternative plan from the Park Service coming in.

JS: I went to school with some of his kids. And he played a pretty important part in the whole -- see, his church was out on the north end of the county, right on 19 Highway. They had a real good setup up there. They did a lot of good things. It was a lot like a summer camp and a work program type thing for a lot of kids.

WS: Would you happen to know a man by the name of Jim Bockman?

JS: Yes.

WS: I think he's out of Birch Tree.

JS: Yes, I knew him.

WS: Now, he was also a ranger that was from the area.

JS: Yes, he was one of the few. Jim did a good job. He worked with the people good, and got a lot of things done that they never could have done otherwise, and saved a lot of hard feeling and stuff. I worked with Jim a lot.

WS: Oh, I see. Well, you've seen five or six superintendents come and go, and I wonder if there was one of them that maybe worked better with the local people compared with the others?

JS: The one we've got now, Mr. Ben Clary, is probably the best one we've had, by far. Most of those superintendents -- I don't know, they just seemed like they didn't really care that much about the local people. They didn't care *what* they thought. They were going to do it the Park Service way, and if the people liked it, fine -- if they didn't, to hell with them. That's just their attitude. And that don't go good. Now Ben's not geared up that way. He's a guy that you can go to and talk with. Of course, he's got limits. There are some

things he can do and some things he can't do. But there's usually more than one way of doing things, too, you know. And he's a guy that I believe we're going to be able to work with. The people are sure impressed. Because he's so damn much further ahead of what we've been used to. Art Sullivan was the last one before Ben, and I don't know of anybody that would give him kind words.

WS: Was he the most disagreeable, would you say?

JS: Well, probably. Of course, we got into a big squabble with him on this wild horse thing that we didn't encounter with those others. And it seemed like because the local people wanted to keep those wild horses, that was main reason he wanted to get rid of them. And somebody shot thirteen of them.

WS: Is that right?

JS: Yes. Art Sullivan wanted to say the local coyote hunters did that. And boy, that didn't sit well with the coyote hunters at all. It didn't sit well with the local people. And the local people didn't shoot those horses. If they had wanted them killed, they'd have killed them years ago.

The Park Service started trying to get rid of them. They came to me. And the Humane Society came to me, and he'd met with the Park Service, and he said, "One way or the other, they're getting rid of them even if they have to shoot them." Me being with this trail ride and horse operation, he came to me and talked to me about that. Well, the first thing you know, we got to talking it around and we put together some boys up at; oh, one of them lived at Mountain View, one lived at Birch Tree. Ronald Smotherman and

Richard Wilkins. They're two boys that liked to ride and camp along the river. They liked to see those wild horses. So they kind of got to pushing this thing and got the Missouri Wild Horse League kind of started, and got people talking about it. We had a meeting or two and got the thing formed.

We were lucky enough to get a lawyer. There was a girl talking about this in a restaurant, and this lawyer (his name is Doug Kennedy, from Poplar Bluff) was at the next table. He was overhearing this conversation. He got interested in it, and he wanted to know more about it. Well, in the end, he got in on this thing and volunteered his service as a lawyer.

**[tape meter, 100]**

He strictly donated his time and efforts. We paid him a little bit for filing fees and stuff like that, you know. But his time and stuff, he donated all that, and carried this thing all the way to Washington, D.C., and got a bill passed to save those wild horses.

Of course, we never could have done that if it hadn't been for Bill Emerson. Bill Emerson was our U.S. Representative in Congress. We went to him to talk to him. He brought this bill together. Before we got the bill actually passed, he passed away. But we got his wife to fill out his unexpired term. So she picked up on that and carried that thing right on through, and pushed that, and got that bill passed.

WS: Well, that's just been recently, then.

JS: Yes! Yes. About two years ago.

Now, then, the Park Service has got to help us protect them instead of shooting

them. And in the bill they drew up, we can have up to fifty wild horses. When we pass the number fifty, of at any time before or in between there -- see, it's up to the Wild Horse League to maintain, look after, and take care of the horses. And this Wild Horse League, we've got thousands of members. We do fundraisers. We just had a horse show two weekends ago, right here. It got together -- oh, I don't know exactly what amount of money -- but it's real close to \$4,000. Then we do fundraisers. We sell our memberships at \$5 a year. And we've got T-shirts, sweat shirts, jackets, caps, and mugs. We've also got a machine here now, in my western store, that any picture -- like, if somebody wanted to take a picture of the wild horses, they could bring that in -- and we run it through that machine and make a print and put that on their shirt or something. So that makes a real nice thing. And all the stuff we do like that -- the money for the T-shirt (the cost of the shirt we keep) -- but all the profit on it goes to the Wild Horse League. So that's a pretty good little deal.

Of course, we spend a lot of money. I talking about, it cost a ton of money by the time we got all that all taken care of. But the Wild Horse League, right now, has got something over \$40,000 in the kitty. We've put together a few little things through the years, as time goes on, that will kick in and make them a little money. We're doing the second October Ride this year, the Trail Ride is. And the Wild Horse League is going to get a \$25,000 donation off of that thing.

WS: Are your members mostly in this area?

JS: They're nationwide. See, on this trail ride we've had people here from every state and ten

foreign countries. So we've got people that joined this Wild Horse League in some other country. So it's pretty widespread. And the Wild Horse League is getting ready to join the Missouri Equine Association. Then, in turn, a lot of those other horse groups will join our thing. There are a lot of horses in the state of Missouri.

WS: When did you first learn about these wild horses?

JS: Oh Lord, all my life.

WS: They've been around that long.

JS: Oh, yes. Yes. They've been here. There were wild horses here when my granny grew up over by Two Rivers, in Prairie Hollow, right at the foot of Coot Mountain where they've got the Coot Mountain lookout tower for the fire tower. She grew up right there at the foot of Coot Mountain.

**[tape meter, 150]**

She told me stories about when she was a little girl, their horses or mules (whatever they had) would occasionally get out. Of course then it was open range, see, and people would run their stock outside. And they'd get with those wild horses. Sometimes it'd be a month before they could get them back. Because, hell, they were just out there in the wild. *Wild* wild.

A lot of people *ran* their stock out. And that's kind of how those horses got started. There were always a few horses here and there. There were people that lived all up and down the Jacks Fork River. I mean, just every hollow there was a family or two or three. Most of them worked in the woods cutting logs or hacking ties or some damn

thing. But when the Depression came along -- man, they starved out. Well, hell, that stock -- they couldn't sell those horses. There wasn't anybody to buy them. Nobody had any money. And they weren't worth anything if they'd had them caught. So they just moved off to the city or somewhere, wherever they could find a job. Most of them intended to come back and get them [the horses], but, hell, they never did. So they were just out there, for years and years.

Then, one long time, there wasn't a stud with them. Then, some people had an old stud that they'd retired, and put him on a pasture. Those wild horses got in there with him. That horse didn't last long. He got stuck between two trees. They didn't find him, and he died right there. But that next spring there were four gray colts born. From there the herd went to building.

Then some boys had a little old stud that got away from them. He was a little old mean ass thing, and they didn't bother to get him back, so he was with them for a while. He was an Appaloosa. So you can see that Appaloosa in some of them now. But God, that was way back there, too. That was a long time ago. So that kind of got the herd going.

Now, then, we've got about a little over thirty. I'm not sure how many colts we've got on the ground right now. There are seven studs out there. So we're probably going to pick up. We're going to do an adoption program. We'll do that on the federal adoption horse program, like they do the burros, wild horses, mustangs. But I think we'll probably do a little different deal. We'll probably sell chances on them, and then the

money will go back into the Wild Horse League to do other projects. We're going to clean up ten of those big fields that has just grown up into thorn brush, and multiflora roses, and what have you. So we'll make better pasture and better habitat for those horses. Then the people that come here that want to see them will have a better chance, because they'll be in one of those fields or other, where there's good food for them. So that money will all go back into the Wild Horse League to support the wild horses.

WS: You mentioned open range, and just kind of by the way, I wonder if you might remember when the range got closed in Shannon County?

JS: I think that was in '58.

WS: Was that like a county referendum or something that people voted on?

JS: Yes.

WS: Oh, is that right. That kind of surprises me, because I thought open range was awfully popular.

JS: Well, it got to be, here, there was so much stock on 19 Highway and 106 Highway. See, for years there wasn't a lot of traffic. But then, when the floating started, and different things; more tourism and different things -- shoot, we were having stuff run over on the road.

**[tape meter, 200]**

We had a bull hit right up here on 19, by the end of the bridge here, at one time; black bull, in the middle of the night. It could have been a bad deal. It wasn't. It tore up the rig and killed the bull. Nobody got hurt out of it, but it could have been a bad deal. So,

the first thing you know, it was just too much. And the danger thing was the deal. So they voted to close that open range.

WS: I guess that meant if you *had* stock you had to fence them in.

JS: Yes.

WS: Well, when this wild horse thing started up, I imagine you had a fair amount of media coverage.

JS: We did.

WS: How did that work out? I mean, did people take sides in the media, or not?

JS: Oh; that was news news, so we got a good little bit of coverage.

WS: Was that Missouri papers mostly? Or national?

JS: It went everywhere. It was on national television. In fact, I had a note from Dan Rather, that he would plan to come. We did a demonstration at the [Park Service] headquarters building at Van Buren. Dan Rather and Connie Chung were doing the news then. They had planned to come here; we never could get our times together. It got too late. Either he'd call me, and I wasn't here; I called him, and I didn't get a hold of him. It just didn't work. But we gathered a good bit of news coverage. I've had these truck drivers that would be in Pennsylvania or California and lay over a day, and be in a motel room and flip the TV on and see us on television talking about the wild horses.

WS: Tell me about this demonstration you had in Van Buren. I've heard estimates from 200 to 1,000 people and horses going to Van Buren. I don't know how many you thought there was.

JS: I could look back on my records and tell you pretty close what there was, but the exact number now I don't remember. We started right here at the Trail Ride. That was during the October ride. The sheriff led us out of here in a convoy going to Van Buren. And when we pulled into Winona, which is ten miles south of us -- as we were pulling into the city of Winona, I heard the [police] radio. This deputy was at the end of the bridge right here at Eminence, and he called the sheriff and told him that the last one had just pulled onto the Jacks Fork River bridge. So that was bumper to bumper from here to Winona, going to Van Buren. And a lot of them were already at Van Buren, that came from other places. We had a lot of people from a lot of different places, and from other states, that were there in that demonstration.

It would have probably been twice as big. But on a Wednesday before we did that (on a Friday) the Park Service put out on the radio and the newspapers and stuff that we had come to an agreement. Well, we hadn't. So a lot of people said, "Oh, they've got it worked out." So they just didn't show. But we didn't. They called and wanted to make an agreement, but it didn't fit. So we didn't.

**[tape meter, 250]**

And we were geared up to go to Omaha [to the regional Park Service headquarters] with a nationwide demonstration, from here to Omaha. We had a lot of folks. It would have gotten to be a big thing when we got to Omaha. They would have dang sure knew we were there. But I was glad we didn't have to do that. We had it all geared up and a lot of the planning; where we were going to meet at what night, and whose field we were going

to camp in. We were definitely headed.

WS: Whose idea was the demonstration at Van Buren?

JS: That was kind of a deal with the Wild Horse League. We had to give them a wake up call that we were serious about what we were talking about. And in the end they found that out, because we didn't quit until we went right on to Washington, D.C. and got this bill passed.

But now, then, we're coming along. We're getting along pretty good, and doing probably better than we've ever done since the Park Service has been here. The relationship between the local people and the Park Service is a whole lot better. Of course, when you get people like -- well, Ben Clary -- in a position that's not giving people a lot of trouble and a lot of unnecessary stuff, things will *get* better. But they were trying to close off all the river access, and giving the hunters a lot of problems, the boat and motor people a lot of problems. It just went on and on and on. But things have leveled out and doing a whole lot better.

WS: You mentioned the Humane Society. Now were they on the side of the Wild Horse League?

JS: You bet.

WS: Did you have any other groups that were on your side?

JS: Oh, yes. We had different ones. When we cranked this wild horse thing up and went to pushing it, it went to growing by leaps and bounds. Of course, being in this trail ride business and us having people from all over the country, those folks were hearing that.

They were reading it in the papers at their town, and seeing it on the news and different things. And they were interested. A lot of them could see, and they were afraid that if we all don't get together and get this thing under control, then the horse people all over the country are going to lose their places to ride, they're going to lose their places to camp. They're [federal land management agencies] just going to keep cutting off [access]. And they were doing that. They were shutting off trails all over the country; closing trails. So they banded together throughout the whole United States, actually.

If we hadn't of had as much interest, and as many different people -- and we had people involved in this thing from all walks of life. Everything from an astronaut to a brain surgeon. And that's no understatement. In fact, our astronaut, Tom Akers, was born and raised right here, just a couple of miles west of us.

WS: So was this the headquarters of the Wild Horse League, in Eminence?

JS: Yes. We're sitting right in the middle of it, right here. Of course, this is convenient for us, too.

**[tape meter, 300]**

It's a good outlet. We do a lot of our selling right here in town. And other western stores, and other people around the country -- we'd send them T-shirts and sweat shirts and stuff -- and they'd sell them and send the money back to us, and sell memberships. In St. Louis, Illinois, Poplar Bluff -- you name it. A lot of those people would get donations. It's been a big, widespread thing.

During the trail ride we've got people coming from a lot of different places, and

we have a meeting during each trail ride. That way the people that are from away from here can be in on the meeting and have some input and catch up on where we're at, what we're doing, what we're trying to do, and that kind of thing. We get a lot of good ideas and a lot of good support from a lot of folks that are from no telling where. They maybe just come here once every five years, and some of them come every year.

So it's been a big, widespread thing that a lot of people are involved in. I heard a guy the other day say the other day that he saw a report where there are a good bit over seven million horses in the state of Missouri.

WS: That's a lot of horses.

JS: That's a *whole bunch* of horses. And those people all need and want somewhere to go ride and play with a horse. There have been tons of dollars spent. It's unreal. You come here during a trail ride and look at this thing. It's unreal the amount of dollars that is spent on camp gear. Now they've got a lot of these trailers, see, are self-contained trailers with living quarters, and they pull the horses in the back. And, of course, they've got to have a pretty good pickup to pull that. A lot of big, fine motor homes. And during that trail ride you'll see everything here from a little bitty pup tent to the best motor coach made. Literally. That covers a lot of ground, and a lot of different aspects, from camp gear on.

**[end of side 1, tape I; tape meter, 348]**

WS: We were talking about the Humane Society being a group on your side. Were there other major organizations on the other side, opposing you? Like the Sierra Club?

JS: The Sierra Club. All those kind of people. Some of them call themselves naturalists, and some of them call themselves conservationists, and this, that, and the other. And their main concern, it seemed like, was they wanted to hike but they didn't want horses on the trail. But they're hiking on our horse trails, is the bottom line. Because I know who made those horse trails. And there are a lot of people who *do* use those trails.

It was like I was talking to Ben Clary the other day. The Park Service doesn't want any new trails on Park Ground. Well, hell, they ain't got hardly none to start with. Most of the trails are off on private ground or on state property. Then, of course, we use the county roads some, too. But here the Park Service is with 86,000 acres, but they don't want any trails. Well what in the hell would 86,000 acres be worth if nobody can see it or use it? And they bought this park ground as a recreation park. But they don't want people to recreate; is what it looks to me like. To me we should have a trail on both sides of the Jacks Fork and both sides of the Current River, from one end of the park to the other. And we should have primitive horse camps along the way. They've got primitive camps for the floater. They've got primitive camps for the weekend camper. We've got one horse camp, that they've designated as a horse camp, and it's up where the old trail ride grounds were, where we moved from to here. And you can't get to it. And it's not kept, any. The multiflora rose bushes, the thorn brush, and the weeds and stuff in the summertime is higher than your head. So who the hell is going to go up there and camp in a wilderness? In a snake bin? They've built a john there, but it's almost half a mile from the river. So if you're going to camp down close to the river, then to use the john

you've got to climb that hill half a mile. Who the hell do you think is going to do that? Nobody. And the floater comes by, they don't have access to that john, because they don't know where it's at, for one thing. And if they did, they ain't going to walk a half mile up that hill. But that's kind of the way they do things.

We've been in a big squabble -- the Sierra Club, the Park Service, and different ones -- they've taken river samples, and they think that we're polluting the river. Well, I've got qualified people that have taken river samples too. I can tell you what the bacteria is, and where it's coming from. But they don't want to talk about -- like on a Fourth of July weekend, when all the canoe rentals are full, all the campgrounds are full, and we didn't have nothing going on -- that's the time when the bacteria was the highest in the river! When the fecal count was the highest. But they want to go back and pick up a '92 report that the Park Service did, which was during a flood -- and of course, when you have a flood you have runoff from the whole damn country. But they don't talk about it. All they want to talk about is that fecal count on that time. And since '92, we've changed our *whole* program -- I'm talking about several different ways. So we're not polluting the river. That'd be the last thing in the world we'd do.

In fact, like now, we've got a trail that crosses the back side of the camp. But during the ride, when we've got a big ride going, on our organized rides, we don't take them across that river there. I've got a trail that goes on this side of it. We ride *along* that river, all the way down, then hit the county road, then go on. Of course, people that ride on their own, some of them will cross. But by us gearing our ride up different, and

leading the guided rides different, we've cut down on the river crossing; the amount of horses crossing the river. We've probably cut that in half or more. And I've got patrols that ride that river during the trail rides, and the people that are caught playing in the river with a horse -- [whistles:] *swt!* Out the gate and gone. We'll send them home. And they don't come back any more. Once they mess up here, they're on the black list, and they don't come back. And there are several of them on it.

**[tape meter, 50]**

WS: You mentioned brush hogging these pastures and all to kind of provide a habitat for them. Do you go so far as to try to do some veterinary work with them, to take care of them?

JS: Well, when we can. When it comes to the point where we've got to catch horses and adopt them out, then the first thing we do is call the veterinarian in. He'll worm them. And he'll pull blood on them, check them, and Coggins test them, and do all that kind of thing; castrate the studs. Whoever ends up with that horse in that contract -- I'm not sure how that all reads. They have to have a certain size pen and a certain height pen. And they've got to keep them a year. After a year, then; after they've messed with them a year, by that time they've either figured out they can break them and handle them or they can't break them and handle them. If they've fed them a year, it's up to them. They can do whatever they want to, then. They can sell them. But they've got to keep them a year. And I think the thought behind that was, if anybody -- by the time they've kept them a year, they're either attached to them and going to work with them, or they've figured out that they can't. And if they can't work with them, you don't want to stick them for life

with them.

WS: Well, I imagine those wild horses are prone to some kind of medical problems that you wouldn't have with a domestic horse. You mentioned worming.

JS: You know, the dudes take pretty good care of themselves.

WS: Do they?

JS: Oh, yes. In fact, right now, I saw a herd yesterday evening. Golly, they're fat and slick. They're already shedded off. Well *my* horses ain't shedded off. They're just getting ready to. And I've kept a big square bale of alfalfa hay in front of them all winter. And those wild horses don't know what alfalfa is. You can put hay out there and they'll just look at it and bugger and going around it. They don't know what it is!

(Laughter)

You can't feed them.

WS: What do they like to eat?

JS: They've got everything they need out there. If they want fescue, they'll go down there on that fescue patch and pick. If they want clover they'll pick clover. They just browse around wherever. They get in the woods and eat acorns. They may go off up in the woods and stay two or three days; just way off in the woods, browse around acorns and nip off buds and little limbs, and just eat brush. Then one day they'll mosey back to the field. They may stay in the field a month. But they're off in the river bottoms and stuff. Of course, there's water everywhere. Water is not a problem for them here. We've springs and creeks in every hollow. So they just browse around.

Now there's a cornfield over on Current River, and one herd stays up there. In fact, we call them the Cornfield Bunch. And they get in that cornfield once in a while. But they don't eat much. And they don't mess up much. They'll take a little bite here, and a little bite there. But you know, domestic horses, if they'd get in a cornfield, they just stay right there and eat that corn and founder -- kill them. Every damn one of them, it would. Why, you let a horse, if he gets into a feed barrel, he'll stand right there and eat that fifty gallon barrel of feed and kill him dead. But those wild horses, they don't do that.

WS: They somehow know better, I guess.

JS: I don't know what the deal is. Of course, one thing, they've got access to anything that they want, or get to craving, I guess. And when they come into that field, they're not hungry, because they've been browsing around and picking around here and there and all around before they got there. Now if there wasn't plenty of food out there and they were *hungry* hungry, I'd say they'd probably -- but they're not used to eating grain, so they don't really know a lot about it. You'll see where they'll take a bite off an ear. They might just take one bite. And usually they'll just make one round around the outer edge, and probably won't get four or five rows deep in the cornfield. I've tracked them. I've watched them. But if my horses were to get in that cornfield, they'd all stay right there until they eat themselves to death. Right there. They'd kill themselves. But those [wild] horses, I've gone over there looking for them, the Cornfield Bunch, and find where they've been in that field.

[tape meter, 100]

And they make one little pass; maybe not go plum around the field. Then they were gone, and might not come back to that field for a month. My horses, if they found that field, they'd go over there every day. But they're different.

WS: Do bobcats or coyotes ever harass them?

JS: No, they don't fool with them. They'll kick them or strike them or bite them. Heck, I've seen them chase hounds. We'd be deer hunting or coyote hunting and the hounds come along, and especially those mares with colts -- and those dogs; of course, they weren't bothering the horses, actually. They were just passing by. But they didn't want them around those horses, and man, those old mares would take a charge at them. I've seen one catch a dog once. She was striking at it with her front feet and kind of knocked him. And she just grabbed that thing on the middle of the back with her teeth and threw it twenty feet high. Needless to say, the hound didn't stay. He left there.

The worst problem the wild horses have got is the Current and the Jacks Fork rivers. We lose a lot of colts, drowning. In fact, we've picked up three. I've got three of them, now, that we've picked up.

WS: Oh, you saved them.

JS: Saved them, yes. One of them, the mare ran off and left it as a little bitty baby, and never did come back to it. It was her first colt. Her herd left and the colt was laying there sleeping. She just ran off and left it. It was just a day old. Three days later she never had come back. So we picked it up and bought it in and raised it on another mare.

And then, another one was in the river. It was a little bitty fellow. He was just a few days old. The river was up a little. And there were some boys over there boat riding. In fact, they were part of the Wild Horse League. They were over there riding their motorboat and saw something in a big old whole tree, roots and all, that had washed out and was there in the river. And they saw something make a little splash there. One of them said, "What is that?" He said, "I don't know. I think it was a duck." The other one said, "No, that wasn't a duck." He said, "I think that looked like something's head. It looked like a deer." "Well," he said, "turn around. Go back." So they ran up there and flipped around with the boat and ran back by, and that little old colt, he'd been in the river so long he'd almost frozen. He'd just about had it. He'd given out. He was just holding on with his front feet on a limb, with just his head sticking out. So they motored on up in that tree top and got that little fellow and got him in the boat. Boy, he liked to turn the boat over.

WS: I guess so!

JS: He liked to wreck them right there. And that little old thing, he was young enough, he didn't have any teeth in front. But he bit them and struck them and kicked them and liked to turn the boat over. That one boy had great big bruises on his arm where that little fellow had bit him. But they brought it in. And I knew what herd it was out of. I'd seen them a few days before. So we took it, and I put it on my mare. She'd just had a colt about three or four weeks before, and she adopted him. She took him.

But then that herd that he belonged to showed up at Shawnee Creek. So we took

that colt down there and were going to give it back to his momma. And here she came running to it, and that stud wouldn't let her have it. He would not let her have that colt. In fact, he grabbed that little old colt in his teeth and threw him twenty yards across the field, and was going to paw him, see. He was down mauling that colt, and that other stud out of another herd ran over there and knocked him down, and they had a sure enough fight, right there. They had a stud fight in the middle of that field. That other herd didn't want to hurt the colt, but none of them could take it. So we picked him back up and brought him in, and I let my mare raise him.

**[tape meter, 150]**

WS: I guess you must have quite a mixed bloodline in this wild horse herd, or maybe there's a dominant bloodline that's in there.

JS: That old stud I was telling you about was an Arabian; an old gray Arabian stud. Well, that's where a lot of that gray came from. But then later, when that Appy [Appaloosa] stud got in there, why, he was white and had little spots around on him. So some of those colts show Appy. In fact, this first colt that I was telling you that we got and raised, that the mare ran off and left, she just had a colt the other day. And she's *white* white. And this little colt she's had, it's kind of a sorrel with an Appy blanket right on top of its hips. She had bred to a young colt of mine that's out of gated stuff. So this little old colt here, it looks like an Appy but gates like a saddle horse.

(Laughter)

WS: I know these horses are mostly in the upper reaches of the Current and Jacks Fork. I kind

of get the idea that in this Ozark National Scenic Riverways, that you've got kind of a differentiation between the upper reaches of the river, and then downriver in Carter County. Maybe you've got that impression, maybe not. I don't know. I'm talking about the local response to this linear park, is maybe different upriver to downriver.

DS: I don't know of that, hardly. Of course, the park headquarters is at Van Buren. Some of those people get along with them pretty good, and a lot of them don't. I know when Art Sullivan down there, a lot of those business places right there on Main Street in Van Buren had signs in their window, "Park Employees Not Welcome."

WS: Is that right?

DS: Yes, they did. They're not like that now. But he gave them a lot of trouble. Unnecessary trouble. Current River runs through Van Buren, and it's a lot bigger down there than it is here. So not nearly as much canoeing down there, but there's a lot of tubing and motorboat riding. Some of them had big boats. Well, Art cut that horsepower back to forty horse. And a lot of them had to get rid of the boat, get rid of the motors. But the Park Service ran seventy-five and hundred horse motors. And those people don't like that. Here they've got to run a forty horse, and here comes a park ranger with a seventy-five horse. You know? But I don't use the river that much. I don't float. I don't boat. It keeps me busy trying to keep my little tract together.

WS: I realize the superintendent can have a big influence, obviously, in terms of his attitude. But I imagine the rangers that are assigned to the certain parts of the river can also have a big influence.

JS: Yes. I'm talking about it. Big time. Because they're the ones out here doing the enforcing. But that park superintendent, he can direct those rangers. And if they're not doing right, he can straighten them up real quick and easy. Of course, it depends on that superintendent as to how he wants that run. He's got a head man over that ranger division, but still, the park superintendent -- that's where the buck stops.

**[tape meter, 200]**

WS: Well, Mr. Smith, I've asked you everything I can think of. I don't know if we've left something out that I should have asked you.

JS: You'll think about it as soon as you leave here. Don't you imagine?

(Laughter)

WS: What would you have them do different, the Park Service, if you could have them do different?

JS: Oh, I'll tell you probably what would help the situation more than anything, if they had some good, qualified, local people involved in the top end of the staff, in the planning end of it, and work with and for the community as well as the people abroad. You wouldn't have so much "We of the Park Service" against the damn locals. And that's exactly the way they put it a lot of the time. If you'll talk to different people, you'll find that out real quick.

But the local people, of course, they're here and going to stay here. They grew up here, they live here, they make their living here, and they want to be here or they'd be somewhere else. And the park people have all *come* from somewhere else to here. Some

of them bring a lot of ideas that don't work.

WS: Do you think you get any benefit from the Park Service being here? Or would you be better off if they were just gone?

JS: We'd be better off if they'd never come. The whole county would probably have been a damn sight better off. Because we've got every kind of a law and every kind of regulation that we might need already on the books without the Park Service coming in here and telling us if, as, when, what, and how much we can do. And they strictly want to control every damn thing, on or off park ground. But they don't have the authority. And I think they're going to figure that out directly.

WS: How about the Forest Service? Do you guys have trails on Forest Service land?

JS: No, *I* don't. We don't have any Forest Service land in our school district here in Eminence. We're adjacent *to* some of it. But we have a gob of Park Service ground. And they have damn near broke our school, because they don't pay any taxes. Once in a while they do, most of the time they don't. Now, when they first started this thing, they'd pay anybody -- see, I *worked* for the Park Service for a while.

WS: Oh, you did?

JS: Yes, I did. I ran the grist mill and made whiskey for them.

WS: (laughing) Is that right?

JS: Yes. That's where I learned to make whiskey. But I ran the grist mill at Alley Spring. We had the whiskey still set up there. That was a cultural demonstration, see. We had a good program. We had a local guy that was a school teacher. He was math, biology,

science, and that kind of a background. He grew up right here. He was a native here. He grew up here and retired, teaching school, here. He was a hunter and a trapper.

**[tape meter, 250]**

He gave a nature walk once or twice a day, through the park and around the spring, and identified wildflowers and trees and plants, and answered thousands of questions. Then he did a campfire program of a night, for the campers that were camped there overnight. He had a super program. It was very educational. It was well put together and well done. It was a nice program. Then we ran the grist mill on demonstrations. They still used the old, original water turbine for power.

WS: I'll be darned. They must have restored it, I guess.

JS: Yes. We did some while I was there. I took the thing out of there and cleaned it up and got it back to working. Then later, they've done some more work to it. But my great granddad was one of the head carpenters in building that old mill building in 1893. Then, my granddad worked there when they were putting that park together; the pavilions, cabins, and that kind of thing.

WS: Oh, the state park.

JS: Yes. And see, that was a project. He walked from the Broadfoot Field, down there right above Two Rivers, to Alley Spring to work, of a morning, and walked back that night. Then they worked. They didn't do like the Park Service does now; one guy leaning on a shovel and the rest of them watching him. But at any rate, then here later on I came along and had the opportunity to run that mill and restore a good bit of it. It was a good

program. But they don't do any of that anymore. They just slowly cut back. Shortly after I left the grist mill, they'd bring in some lady from South Carolina or somewhere that had no idea about anything here. So they spent all summer trying to educate that person to run that grist mill. By the time they got that done, the season was gone. But that's Park Service. That's the way they operate. Instead of hiring some local person that already knew about this, and had some background on it -- no, they'll bring some New Yorker in that doesn't know or give a damn, neither, about it. But that's the way they operate.

If the Park Service hadn't have come here, we would have gotten along fine. They actually don't provide that many jobs. And the aggravation outweighs the job end of it, tremendously. But I think they're like country music: I think they're here to stay. I'm *afraid* they are.

**[tape meter, 300]**

And I'll bet you, by the time you get home, you'll think back. You'll have to come back. We'll have to talk again.

WS: I'd like to. As I learn more about this I'll think of more questions to ask you. I very much appreciate the information. I don't think I could have come to a better place to learn, especially, about the Wild Horse League.

JS: If you get back and catch me at a time when we've got a minute, I'll show you those wild horses.

WS: I'd love to see them. I really would.

JS: Because I'll know, pretty close, where they're at.

WS: I wonder if anybody's kept a scrapbook on the publications and the notice -- you know, like if it was in the newspaper. Would you happen to be that person?

JS: I know where there's one.

WS: I'd like to just be able to write down -- because I can go back to the library and find the articles and all, but I'd like to read about it so I can learn more about it.

JS: If you come back at a better time -- see, my daughter is the secretary of the Wild Horse League. We've got stuff.

WS: Great.

JS: She's a pretty good historian. She loves this kind of thing.

WS: Oh, great! She'd be just the person to help me out.

JS: We've got articles from when we started until we went to Washington and got back. One trip up there we had to break out of the damned airport.

WS: (laughing) Is that right?

JS: Boy, that was a good trip, kind of. And I never had rode an airplane before, and I never had planned on it. I would have given anything in the world if somebody else had gone in my place.

WS: Yes, I know what you mean.

JS: But I'd gone too far to turn back. And I couldn't get those other boys to do that. So, there wasn't nothing for me to do but go. We got on that damn plane, and it left St. Louis in a storm. I'm talking about a real storm. We were sitting right behind the wing. I

thought that goddamn thing was going to leave us a time or two. They do some extra flopping around that I didn't know they do. But at any rate, when we got to Washington and sat down there, we came right down that goddamn bay. I remembered seeing that plane crash a few years ago when they went off in that bay in the ice. And we just kept dropping down lower, and lower. And finally I told Doug Kennedy, "We better by God find the ground or we're going to be in the water. We're pulling an eight foot wake behind us now, we're so goddamned low." And then, when we hit the ground, I actually thought that plane was going to come apart. I never saw such vibration in my life.

**[tape meter, 350]**

And we ran a long ways before I could tell we were slowing down *any*. I could see that big bay ahead of us. I just knew what was fixing to happen. But, it worked out all right.

We got off that. Of course, we weren't in any hurry. Everybody else seemed to be in a *hell* of a hurry, just grabbing stuff, snatching, and pushing and crowding. I thought, "Hell, let's let them have a head start." So we were the last ones off the plane. Well, all that flight crew, they'd got out of there and got to stand out and stretch a little and stuff, you know. Well, I guess they could tell by looking at us, "Now there's some old boys who are out of place. They don't belong in Washington, D.C." Because we all had western clothes and hats on, and boots, and what have you. The pilot said, "You boys in town playing? Or are you on business?" I said, "There ain't no playing about us. We're strictly business."

**[end of side 2, tape I; tape meter, 367]**

**[omitted during tape changing interval: brief account of their Congressional testimony and time in Washington, D.C.]**

JS: We started to get on the plane, and they said, “No.” We waited in line; it seemed to me like it was a half mile long. We got up there and she said, “Oh, you’re in the wrong line. You need to go back and go down in the basement, downstairs, and check out at that point.” Well, we got down there and there was another big line. So we wobbled along in that line. We got up there and this guy says, “Uh oh, this will not work here.” A little, twisty-butted kind of guy. I said, “Well, the lady up there sent us down here.” [imitating a swishy, effeminate voice:] “Oh. I don’t care what she says. You have to check out up there.” I said, “Now, hell fire!” So we got back up there. Well, hell, they’d done closed that one and gone! Shut the door.

We go back down there, and here he is twisting his ass out of there. I said, “Hold the damn deal. We’ve got to check out here.” He said, “I’m sorry. But we’ve closed.” I said, “I’m sorry, by God, you’re fixing to open.” He said, “You’ll just have to catch the next flight.” I said, “No, you’re fixing to catch the toe of my boot right in the cheek of your ass! Is what is fixing to happen.” He said, “Gee! You sound serious!” I said, “By God, I *am* serious.” He just didn’t know how serious.

Well, I look out there, and that plane is sitting right outside the window. They’d already rolled the damn boot in. I looked out there, and that pilot got up there in the window and motioned for us to come on. Well, hell, I recognized him. Of course, he recognized us. He just sat there and waited on us. And they wouldn’t let us on. I said, “Well, hell.” They’d done locked the doors. I said, “Reckon where do they *want* a door?”

We're fixing to come out of here." "No, no," Doug said. I said, "I'll kick the goddamned door down." He said, "No, don't do that, now." I just went over and grabbed that goddamned bar across that door, and I'm talking about, I gave it a rattling. Son! And I set off alarms. We got their attention. And by God, they came running down there and shook us down; all that kind of crap.

That plane wouldn't leave. That pilot, "Bring them on." So he called back in there and said, "Hey. You've got some of our passengers, and we're not leaving until they get on here." It took about thirty-some minutes. They had to open her back up and put us on. That tickled [the pilot and crew]. Of course, the first thing, before they let us go sit down, they had to have a report of what all (laughing) happened. When we got to St. Louis, why, we had another big visit with them.

WS: They were waiting for you.

JS: Yes, they waited for us. He wouldn't leave. Ah, you know they've had a lot of fun out of that. I know they did, because I've got a group of pilots that come here on a trail ride. It seems to me like they work so many days on and so many days off. And sometimes their days off don't hit at the time I'm having a ride. So I let them come in between times. But every time we're having a ride, if they're off, they come. Some of them are from Mississippi, and some of them are from Tennessee and Kentucky and around. Of course, they've all acquainted through their work and stuff. They get together and come up here. They've talked to those pilots that flew us, so I know that they've had a lot of fun out of that. But then, in the end, they didn't realize how serious we were. We got that bill

passed too.

WS: Did you sit in and watch them debate that in committee or whatever?

JS: We testified before the committees, both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

WS: And so you only had to do that one round of testifying?

JS: No, two. We had to do that before the representatives, and then before the Senate.

WS: And then they passed it.

JS: Yes.

WS: You said you had to go to Washington twice.

JS: Yes, that was two different trips.

WS: So you had to go for each time you testified. I see.

JS: Right. That was an experience. I don't care to go back. They were going to take us and take us on a tour. We got on a tour bus, and they wanted to look Washington over. Well, hell, it didn't take me long to see what I was going to see, and I took me a nice nap while they whopped around through all that traffic and crap. Karen's going back. She's taking her kids and going back up there, she said. So hell. I'll just tell them my part of it. I'm not going back up there. I didn't leave anything up there. Unless we get into another big squabble, I ain't going back. I'd like to get this squabbling over with. I don't really care about those kind of deals.

WS: It takes up a lot of time and energy.

**[tape meter, 50]**

JS: Yes. And it's senseless, a lot of the time. It should have never happened. We shouldn't

ever have had to do all that crap.

WS: Did Mr. Sullivan take that on as soon as he came on?

JS: No. Hell, no. I don't know exactly how long, but it was way over twenty-five years after the park had been here, before they ever even recognized those horses as being there.

And they're not on park ground not nearly half the time. They're probably on my ground as much as they're on park ground. They're on us right now, some of them are.

WS: Is there any national forest land around there that they get on?

JS: No. They're on private ground *way* more than they are park ground. Like when they're in those fields. As soon as they leave those fields they're off on private ground. So they go down there and pick around, go back up on the hill. In any given day they'll spend more time off park ground than they do on it. And they're not hurting a damn thing.

WS: If you had to estimate, how big of a territory would you say they roam over, in terms of acres?

JS: Oh; I don't know. You can't tell about them dudes. They'll come here and stay right across the river there on that farm. They'll just come over there and stay a few days. I don't know if they get bored or what. All of a sudden, for no reason [snaps his fingers], they'll just pick up and go traveling. And they may go back down to Two Rivers. They'll stay down there a day or two. The next thing, they're over there at Broadfoot Field. Next thing, they're over at Shirttail Mountain. They may go to the mountain and stay on the big lake for three or four days. They're just here, there, and around.

WS: They ever go much further downriver than Two Rivers?

JS: Not far. They'll go down to Coot Hollow or Wildcat Mountain. They have been over on Blair. Blair Creek is over the mountain from Current River, over Wildcat Mountain. They just come in on Blair Creek. It's fifteen miles long with just one old field after the other. But they don't go over there. I don't know why they don't. They just never have taken up over there, I guess. They don't need that area. By the time they go down below Two Rivers a little ways, well then they feed back up on the north side, then they cross back over into the Broadfoot Field or over into the Two Rivers Field. Maybe in time, as they get different herds, they might eventually want to move over there. They're in little old groups. I believe eleven is the biggest group.

WS: So I guess you've got about four or five groups.

JS: Yes. One old stud, they've whupped him out. He's just off by himself. He's changed colors. He was a real pretty blue; blue-gray looking. Now, then, he's almost white. I saw him one day last week by himself. Then there are two young studs together by themselves. And they swap every once in a while. One time I saw those studs -- each herd were the same mares, but the studs had swapped.

WS: I guess they battled it out.

JS: Yes, they did. There was probably a mare in heat in that other one that wasn't in his, and he swapped girls for a while.

WS: When you get ready to adopt one out, how do you catch them?

JS: We'll have to trap them.

WS: Is that like a big cage of some sort?

JS: We'll build a big pen. We salt them. See, the Park Service won't let us put salt out on park ground. We had a big squabble over that. They stole our salt. But I bet they don't do that anymore. That came damn near to being a bad deal. So we put out salt on private ground. And we'll build a pen on private ground. And when they come in for salt, then we can shut the gate on them. The Park Service hired some people to come and catch them, and *did* catch them. Got thirty-three of them.

WS: What'd they do with them?

JS: They said they didn't catch any.

WS: Well, what do you *think* they did with them?

JS: Sent them to the killers, a bunch of them. Cut their heads off.

WS: How do you know they caught them, if they denied it? Just by watching the herd?

**[tape meter, 100]**

JS: Yes. And I can show you a picture of their catch pen. And I can show you one of the horses that they bought right out of that bunch. I hear old Patterson's got that horse. And I know where a bunch of them went. And the boys that caught the horses didn't come back, either.

WS: Park Service guys?

JS: No, they contracted some boys.

WS: Did that ever make the newspapers or anything?

JS: Well, yes. Yes it did. One of those boys was from Van Buren, and he worked for the Park Service, part-time. But at any rate, we finally got that deal settled.

WS: When they got those horses, I imagine that came before you all went down to Van Buren with the demonstration.

JS: Yes.

WS: I would guess something like that would help inspire you to *make* such a demonstration.  
(Laughs)

JS: Yes! And then them lying about it. The Park Service, they, “have no knowledge.” No knowledge, hell. They paid them to do it. They worked out a deal, actually. What did they pay them? \$100 a horse, I think, up to five horses, or some damn thing. And whatever they caught over they just took and sold. Well hell, those horses were bringing more than \$500 a piece on the killer market. Those were big, fat horses. So they were bringing \$800 or \$900 a piece. So they just told them to get rid of them, and that way they didn’t show up on the park records.

WS: So basically the Park Service gave them permission to trap them on Park Service land.

JS: Yes. They used four-wheelers, horses, and an airplane to run them. They built a pen, and then ran some wire on both sides. A big wide funnel-like thing, and funneled them right in there and shut the gate on them. That’s where they backed the trailer up there, and there was a line right there where the ground was all torn up. There’s where they loaded them. They’d cut down trees and stuff to clear out an area there. That’s where those horses were used to going across the river. They built the trap right in that road. They’d run up there. They were in it before they realized what was going on. And some of them, they caught them and took them over there and put them in a guy’s barn in a big lot. One

of those mares had a colt. She aborted. She lost her colt. That neighbor told me that they took that colt and when they crossed the bridge they threw that colt in the river. We had a private investigator hired on that thing for a good little while. But they just don't know what all we *did* learn.

WS: I guess you could have pressed a lawsuit against them.

JS: Yes. If we had ever found the horses. But they hid them in the barn. And the boys screwed up on their deal and went to the wrong place. They had the horses in another place. And that guy stood right there and lied to those boys and made them believe. And then that night they went and moved the horses. We didn't find out about that for a little while. But, at any rate, I'm kind of glad that's all over with.

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