

An Interview with
David D. Thompson

by telephone to
Chociti Lake, New Mexico

20 July 1998

interviewed by Will Sarvis



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PREFACE

David D. Thompson was born on March 27, 1924 in Mount Morris, Michigan. He began his Park Service career at the Effigy Mounds National Monument in Iowa during the mid-1950s. Subsequently he worked as a historian at Fort McHenry National Monument in Maryland and Manassas National Battlefield Park in Virginia, then as chief historian for Mount Rushmore, followed by an appointment as chief research historian of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis. Next, Mr. Thompson transferred into the Midwest regional office, which fortunately gave him an opportunity to study the Ozarks area of Missouri. He arrived as the third superintendent of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways (ONSR) in 1967 and stayed until 1970, when he became a regional director in his continuing ascent up the Park Service hierarchy.

The ONSR got off to an unfortunate start with an apparent poor choice in its first superintendent. The second superintendent, Vernon Hennesay (see a.c. 11, of the Missouri Environment Oral History Collection) attempted to repair this early damage, but only stayed at the ONSR a short time before transferring to Yellowstone National Park. Mr. Thompson, therefore, arrived at the ONSR during a time of particular upheaval, and subsequently became the first superintendent to really persevere with the establishment of the ONSR. Local people around the Current and Jacks Fork region still remember him today as one of the best and most liked of superintendents, and Mr. Thompson offers in the following pages some indications of why this came to be.

Mr. Thompson's tenure at ONSR was *the* critical time of land acquisition for the new area. Land acquisition had begun prior to his arrival and continued afterward, but the huge majority of this often controversial and sometimes delicate endeavor took place during his superintendency. The following interview is valuable on these grounds alone.

While the Land Office based in Eminence carried out the actual land acquisition effort, Mr. Thompson and his headquarters in Van Buren began the early patrolling and rangering of the ONSR, with focus on various aspects of law enforcement, such as litter control and hunting regulation. One momentous event during this period was the successful transfer of the three state parks (Big Spring, Alley Spring, and Round Spring) into Park Service jurisdiction. Mr. Thompson credits Mr. William W. Bailey (see a.c. 24, 25 of the Missouri Environment Collection) with this major achievement. Finally, a most noteworthy topic included in this interview involved then-Shannon County Prosecuting Attorney Winston Buford's opposition to the Park Service, which had consequences. Mr. Thompson offers a candid account of this issue.

The interview was recorded on Sony type I (normal bias) audio cassettes, using a Marantz PMD-222 manual recorder (set on automatic recording level) through a direct telephone link. The audio quality is good for these recording circumstances.

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, Will Sarvis.

WS: I'm here in Columbia, Missouri, and with me on the telephone is Mr. David D. Thompson, who is near Chociti Lake, New Mexico. First of all, could I ask you for your birth date, Mr. Thompson?

DT: March 27, '24.

WS: And where were you born, sir?

DT: Mount Morris, Michigan.

WS: Maybe, just to get started, you could give me some autobiographical information about how you grew up, and maybe how you got interested in the outdoors.

DT: After we spent my early childhood in Flint, Michigan -- Mount Morris is a suburb, now, of Flint. Then it was just a little town of its own. My dad worked for Buick Motor Company. I spend my early childhood there, in Flint. I became interested in aviation. There was young man right down the street from me. We used to play together, and his father was manager of Bishop Airport in Flint, Michigan. So after building many model airplanes and making all sort of pronouncements about how I was going to learn to fly, his dad took me up on it one day and took me out flying, and about scared the heck out of me. But I survived it and found that that was really fun. That was put on hold, though, when we moved to a little town of Mount Pleasant, Michigan, northwest of Flint. Dad bought a small fruit farm out there. He was a farmer from way back, he and Mom, so he wanted to get back to that even though he was an executive in Buick Motor Company.

So I finished my high school years there. About the time that I was finishing and graduating -- in fact, just a little before -- I enlisted in the Army air corps. I spent some time in the Army air corps, until 1946 (I believe it was); and that's when I got out. I was

a fighter pilot in World War Two. After I finished my degree in college at Upper Iowa University I decided -- at the time I was also working at Buick Motor Company -- that I really didn't like walking in and punching a time clock. So I ran a flying service for about six or seven years. That started slowing down, so I went back to teaching. A fellow by the name of Floyd Gunderson was supposed to be a seasonal park ranger at Effigy Mounds National Monument. And he decided he wanted to go back to Mount Rainer, but he didn't want to renege on getting into the Park Service, so he asked me if I was interested. And teaching generally leaves you a three months period in the summer, so I signed up. That was my beginning in the National Park Service.

WS: Do you remember what year that was?

AS: I believe it was in '56.

WS: And what did you study in college, Mr. Thompson?

AS: I had enough credits for four different majors, but I declared in history. My wife accused me of chasing skirts, was the reason I had so many different [credits]. I had started out in pre-law. After the war, everybody getting out of service, it seemed like they were going to be lawyers. I guess they were all going to sue the government. So I decided maybe that was a ham and egg racket, and I got out of it. Little did I know how wonderful an occupation that would be; sue everybody in the world.

Howard Baker, who at that time was regional director, he came out to visit Effigy Mounds, and we got to discussing career goals and things like that. He had found out that I had taken the FSEE [federal service entrance] examination and scored quite high on it, and wanted to know if I was interested in permanent employment with the Park

Service. So my wife and I discussed it for a while. I actually took a pay cut to go into the National Park Service as a full time park historian at Fort McHenry. From there I went to Manassas National Battlefield Park, as historian.

[tape meter, 50]

I believe it was 1960 that I went to Manassas. I was involved in the reenactment of the battle of first Manassas, which in my estimation was a disaster. But, everybody seemed to (laughing) enjoy it.

I was transferred to Mount Rushmore as the chief park historian there. There I wrote a sound and light program. There had been one there before, but I wrote a different one for it; and spent some time there. Then I was transferred to Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in 1963 as chief research historian. So I was there during the building of the arch. I left just before they put the final cap on it, because I'd worked myself out of a job. I had actually finished all of the research that we thought was necessary for the museum of westward expansion. Of course, as you know, when you think that research is done, that means that you're about half done. But, we had just about all that we needed for that.

I was then transferred to the Midwest regional office as an interpretative specialist. After a year there, I was then promoted to regional chief of interpretation. And I stayed there through '66. I believe it was the latter part of '66 when I was actually appointed as superintendent of Ozark Scenic Riverways. We went there in '67, so I guess that my entrance on duty was 1967. So that brings us about to the point I guess you want to talk about.

WS: One thing that caught my attention, when you mentioned the Jefferson National Expansion [Memorial; JNEM] -- I guess that's where you met Mr. Hartzog.

DT: Yes. Well, he was not the superintendent there at the time. He was director by then.

WS: Oh, he'd already moved up.

DT: Yes.

WS: You say you got to the Riverways in '67. Do you remember how long you stayed there?

DT: I was promoted to regional director in 1970.

WS: So for about three or four years?

DT: Roughly three years.

WS: When you went to the Riverways or first heard about the possibility of being appointed superintendent, you must have been aware of what a pioneering endeavor it was; being the first scenic river in the country and everything.

DT: Yes, it certainly was. But I did have a little bit of background with it, because I was regional chief of interpretation; also at JNEM. I got in on some of the planning, like voyagers; also the early planning for the Scenic Riverways. It was a peripheral planning effort, because they were talking with me primarily about interpretation rather than land purchasing, and so forth.

WS: So maybe you learned something about the culture and the history of the area.

DT: Oh, yes. Right. And I think that was one of the benefits that I had over the previous two [superintendents]. Hennesay was just before me, and . . .

WS: Ted Davenport?

DT: Ted Davenport, yes. Ted, as you probably know, kind of irritated the people down there. I think that his feelings weren't quite the way that he put them in words. He had a short fuse, and I think some of the Riverways people irritated him at times. He managed to irritate back. And Hennesay, because he had been there with him at the same time, couldn't shake the image. That was unfortunate, because I think Vern Hennesay was a real fine man, from what I know. Well, as far as that, I suppose Ted was too. But you know, sometimes people, their personalities clash and there's just not much to do.

So anyway, when I got there, things were in an uproar. One of the first floats down the river that I had with Bill Bailey, we suddenly had a leak in the canoe, and he said it looked like somebody had shot a hole in the canoe. (laughs) It was from the bank, probably. I said, "Boy, he sure just was lucky to miss us." And he said, "No, he wasn't lucky. If he'd wanted to, he'd have got you." (laughs) It was just kind of a warning.

[tape meter, 100]

That gave me an inkling of what the initial tenor was down there. So my first feeling was, I had to change that image of the Park Service.

One of the things that I found was that the people had not been told the exact truth about what was going to happen. They'd walk around the edges of it. And I'm not saying that they directly lied, but a lot of things they were being told about the land and what it was going to be used for, and how it would be handled, just wasn't the way it was going to be.

WS: Can you remember any of the details? Like, was the condemnation issue not addressed, or something like that?

DT: Well; you know, it's hard when you're getting it second and third hand to really put a finger on exactly what they were telling them. Because you don't know how much shading the people were giving. After all, they were vitally interested in their own thing. But I think they felt they would be offered a price that was probably nowhere near what the land was worth. And if they didn't accept it, it would be condemned.

Well, that was not the case at all. That was what I tried to tell them. The basis upon which I tried to establish my administration was that we told them the absolute truth, even if it really raised some hackles. But we told them exactly what was going to happen. The only places that would be condemned would be those places that were absolutely needed for development. All of the others we would buy in fee simple if they wanted to sell. If they did not, we would offer them life tenure. Some people took that, and some people decided to sell.

But the land was always, in my estimation, fairly appraised. We had a full staff of appraisers and land acquisition officers. John Wright was leading it at the time. I don't recall some of the names of the other people. Dorsey [Adams] was one I remember. As I say, thirty-some years, the mind fogs.

That was one of the major questions every time we would have a meeting. To help our image a little I joined the [Rotary Club] in town.

WS: Was that Van Buren or Eminence?

DT: Van Buren. Van Buren was the headquarters area. Eventually I became president of the club, so that helped. People thought I was interested in the town, which I was. We built a home there. H.C. McClintock built it for us; a real nice home. I wish I'd kept it.

(laughs) The total monthly fee on that was \$126 a month, and that included taxes, interest, (laughing) and insurance. Beautiful place on three acres. In fact, the present airport is right next to land that I owned. I offered them a cutback so that they could put the airport in and take the one that was in Big Spring out, because that was a dangerous airport.

Well anyway, back to the other thing. One of the big helps in my getting and gaining some degree of acceptance by the people was the fact that my wife was a music teacher, and so she started teaching in school. You know, the kids would come home, and they liked their "singing teacher." So I have to give my wife an awful lot of credit for helping me win the people -- not all of them, but a large percentage of them -- over to at least being willing to listen to our pitch about what was going to happen, and how it would be developed, and how it would benefit them in the long run.

[tape meter, 150]

And then, of course, Bill Bailey was *really* instrumental in getting an awful lot done for me, because he knew the people. They respected his views. And also, he had the ear of Dick Ichord, who was the U.S. representative in the House at that time. So he helped us a lot. Let's see; Dick came down a few times, a couple of times with George [Hartzog], as I remember. Everything was going along very well. Oh; I can't say that *everything* went well. There were a few glitches, and there were a few hard feelings that ended up. But we tried to smooth them over as best we could. And we accommodated the people as best as possible, and still achieved our mission.

Another sore spot was the people that had boating concessions. They weren't concessions at the time, but they'd put johnboats in, and they'd rented them out for many years. Of course, the minute some people -- as far away as St. Louis -- heard that the Scenic Riverways was going to become a national park area, they were all trying to horn in and get things in. So we had to set up criteria (which was later changed, I understand) to accommodate those people that were already on the Riverways, to give them at least initial opportunity to start an operation under a concession type of contract. Some of them we just let go as they were because we didn't own the land. So they just continued to put the johnboats in. I really don't know how they finally handled that. That was one question I was going to ask Randy Pope when he was superintendent, and we had a meeting (laughing) and I just never got around to it.

WS: Did you have any problem with these scenic easements?

DT: Well, some people were a little bit suspicious of them. They thought they'd lose total control of their land, and they really didn't. There were just certain parameters on what they could do. If they built anything it had to be back so far away from the river; it had to be a certain type of structure that fit into the environment. Those things, you know; people don't like to be told what they can do on what they consider their own land.

But just like an easement. I don't know whether you have a utility easement around your house where you live. You can plant, or mow the lawn, or anything else you've got there. But if the city of whoever owns the easement decides to come through, you've got to let them go through and tear all that back up again, and that is rather irritating.

So anyway, as I remember, when I first arrived on the scene there, they had about fifteen acres that had actually been closed on. There were a number of other acres they were still negotiating with and had about ready to close. But if my memory serves me, there was only actually fifteen acres that were closed and belonged to the National Park Service.

WS: Do you remember how many you had closed on by the time you left the Riverways?

DT: I think it was 70,000-some acres.

WS: Now that's what I thought. I was beginning to think that the bulk of the land acquisition took place during your time there.

DT: Yes, it did. Then they finished it off. We had a section up through quite a ways above Round Springs, but below Montauk.

[tape meter, 200]

It wasn't a priority because we didn't get Montauk State Park springs there.

That was another thing that, really, I felt quite proud of after we got it done. And here again Bill Bailey, I think, was just extremely beneficial to me and the Park Service in getting it done, and that was getting the three state parks -- Big Spring, Round Spring, and Alley Spring -- turned over to the National Park Service.

WS: Was there some kind of a renegeing on that? Because I understand from the congressional testimony that there was an agreement that those lands would be handed over. But then it looks like it got political or something and they tried to back out of it. Do you remember how that happened?

DT: No. Joe Jaeger and Matt Matheney and I went to Washington because there were some sticking points at one time that was primarily about the handling of personnel that were already at the state parks. That had to be worked out. Just appointing them straight off hand like that into the register was a little bit illegal. So we had to get clearance through the personnel office on ways that it could be handled, and some of those got a little bit sticky. I would just as soon not put it on the record, but a couple of them had some little legal troubles, I guess.

WS: I remembered hearing somebody say that all those personnel were offered federal status. So I realized that that was an obvious way to accommodate state employees and have them not lose their jobs and all.

DT: Yes. I think when it finally all washed out, all those that wanted to come with the Park Service, we were able to accommodate them.

WS: You had the special land staff based in Eminence. Were they there the entire time you were superintendent?

DT: Yes. In fact, they continued on. John Wright was transferred later, after I moved, and I don't know who became the chief of the land office at the time. But John moved to, I believe, right around Omaha. He subsequently passed away. He and his wife Prisilla lived there.

WS: One impression I got -- you mentioned earlier that you thought the appraisal was done correctly and fair. And I don't know if this can ever be determined without the actual documents, but I kind of got the impression at one point that Congress had allocated a certain amount of money for land acquisition which sort of shackled the lands staff

people in terms of what they *could* offer, because they knew that they couldn't exceed their budget. I don't know if that's an accurate impression or not.

DT: Here again, most of that stuff was handled by the land acquisition office, and I had no direct supervisory responsibility over the land office. If they had a parcel of land that was required for development I could say yay or nay on their approach to it, but the rest of it, they pretty well handled it on their own.

[tape meter, 250]

We'd get together from time to time. They'd explain the problems they were having. We would try to iron out [the problems]. Often I would go to the people involved and try to put it from a Park Service perspective. Because often these lands people did not quite understand what all we needed and why we needed it. I think John Wright was a little closer to most of them. And a fellow by the name of Dorsey [Adams], who had been a park ranger, understood it somewhat. Then, of course, George from time to time would change his mind on exactly what we could. That sometimes created a little bit of difficulty in ironing those out. But in the long run, I think his feelings and changes were correct.

WS: He had a lot of direct, even personal interest in the Riverways, didn't he?

DT: He sure did. He and I got along very well down there, much better than we did after I became regional (laughing) director.

WS: I would think that would be kind of sticky or potentially sticky, because the superintendent (from what I've gathered) generally has a pretty good degree of autonomy.

DT: Yes.

WS: If you have a director who's so interested in your particular area (laughs), that seems like that could potentially infringe upon that autonomy.

DT: Yes, it did, but George had pretty definite ideas. As I say, very often he was right. Many people wouldn't challenge him if they thought he was wrong. I was not one of them. If I thought he was wrong, I'd directly challenge him on it. But the only thing that you could say with George, he would accept the challenge, but you damn sure better be right (laughs) when it all worked out.

WS: So I guess these lands staff people are sort of like an independent agency within the Interior Department.

DT: Yes.

WS: So I imagine, just the way you described it, there had to be some coordination, but really there was not really a direct link between the Park Service and what they were doing.

DT: Well, we had our own senior land man in the Park Service office. I can't even think of his name now; big, heavy-set fellow. (It's probably immaterial anyway). So he was working with the Department of Interior very closely on anything that we did. As far as I know -- and of course I don't know what happened at the Washington level -- but generally the Washington office did not directly get into our operation. About the only time that we ever heard of them would be when George would jump on them about the land office not moving fast enough. And then, of course, the trickle down was more of a downpour. George was not a bit backward about telling people what they should be doing, and how fast they should be doing it.

[tape meter, 300]

Just as an aside, as I recall, I'd been regional director for about three months, and things had just gone swimmingly fine. The telephone rang one day. My secretary said it was Mr. Hartzog on the telephone. My associate director Marshall was standing there. He said, "I'd better leave." I said, "No." I told Glennis [Mann], "Put it on the speaker phone," which was a poor (laughing) situation. The first words George said was, "What the pluperfect hell are you doing down there?" And I didn't have the foggiest idea of what he was talking about. In the next couple of months, I found out what a "pluperfect hell" was. But we got along very well, really. That's kind of off the point.

WS: That's interesting, though; because of course, I had read his book, or at least that chapter on the Riverways. And the very fact that it would merit a chapter indicated how much he liked it, and of course many other people had mentioned that, too. I don't know what it was about that area that attracted him so much, but it must have been something.

DT: I think it was the concept of it, in the first place. Then, of course, I was lucky enough to get the three state parks transferred -- that kind of put me on his A List. But here again, Joe Jaeger and Matt Matheney were *very* instrumental in that, because they felt that -- while they were losing some of their own bailiwick -- it was really making the Riverways. And they really thought the Riverways concept was very good for the state of Missouri.

WS: I understand, without those three parks you didn't *have* much of a Riverways.

DT: No.

WS: So I appreciate what you're saying about how important they were.

DT: Yes.

WS: Well, did you have any problem with visitation while you were there? I mean, the kind of crowds they get there now, and they've gotten in the last couple of decades, have been pretty substantial.

DT: Of course, you've got to remember at the time there was already a pretty good visitation base, just because of the float trips. But until we built the little visitors center on the ferry crossing just about across from Eminence. We didn't really have much of a place to contact the visitors. Of course, I didn't have much of a staff, either. Andy Anderson was the chief ranger; and Dave Essex, who was my chief law enforcement ranger. Bob Peters (I believe his first name was Bob) was our district ranger upriver.

[tape meter, 350]

Then, of course, we had some maintenance personnel, and they kind of doubled [in other capacities]. Fortunately I still had an airplane, so I did an awful lot of patrolling of the area by air. I could do in a couple of hours what they couldn't do in a whole week.

The actual visitation at the time just wasn't that heavy. Most of the problems that the rangers had on the river was littering, and stuff like that. They had some firearms problems, but nothing of any significance, that I remember.

[end of side 1, tape I; tape meter, 365]

WS: I was talking with Mr. Sullivan last week. He was the superintendent there until just a few years ago, actually. In fact, I think he was there for about nineteen years.

DT: Yes, he probably was there during the bigger portion of the actual development.

WS: Right. And of course, by then -- and all this is detailed pretty heavily in the staff minutes through those years -- they started getting the typical kind of visitation problems with

fighters and drunkenness and controlled substance possession; that kind of thing. Maybe you can verify this -- it sounds like maybe some of your problems may have come more with the local people in terms of some of the retaliation I've heard about with poaching, or vandalism, or that kind of thing.

DT: Yes. I don't know whether you've ever heard the expression "grandmawing."

WS: Right, yes. Was that still going on?

DT: Oh, yes. That was very heavy then when they thought we were going to take the property. I don't think the landowners were doing it. But they would get to fooling around, picking up a few good trees here and there. So, our rangers were kept pretty busy trying to check on that. With the Riverways spread out so far, and with the checkerboard land pattern that we had during the time, it was very difficult to know when (laughing) you were on our property or not. They needed GPS [Global-Positioning Satellite] then is what they needed.

WS: Well, I understand that was one of the problems. I don't know what time period you would isolate this to, but it looks like there was never the adequate funding for surveying your property as it was being acquired.

DT: That's right. And we had a problem -- here again, I can't remember the fellow's name; you would think the problem it caused I would have it. Bill Bailey had taken a crew out to remove some of the buildings on some of the property. (I almost had the name). Anyway, the guy had sold us a parcel of land. But the buildings he was living in was not on the same property. So Bill assumed those buildings were part of the property. So they tore those down. I mean, they were nothing but junk; an old trailer. We tore them down

and burned up most of the wood and everything like that. Well, Winston Buford, who was the local . . .

WS: He was the prosecutor in Shannon.

DT: Yes, prosecuting attorney. (I kept thinking of DA, but I don't think that was it; he may have been a DA, but it was prosecuting attorney). Well, he had me arrested for authorizing the burning down of a "residential complex." (laughs) God, even the mice wouldn't live in the place, (laughing) it was so raunchy.

WS: Yes, Mr. Bailey told me about that. He said he had arranged to have bail for you almost as soon as you arrived.

DT: Yes, he did.

WS: He seemed to think Mr. Buford's aim was to try to get you there late so that you would have to stay overnight. (laughs)

DT: That was entirely his idea. But it didn't work out. That's what I say; Bill Bailey was probably the best right arm I had there at Ozark Scenic Riverways, because he knew everybody and everybody liked him. I would have, no doubt, spent the night in the clink there. The funny part of it is, at that time I couldn't bail myself out. It had to be a different party. Bill got the local grocer to put up the money. I don't think it was that much.

I think Winston was trying to get himself set up to take over Ichord's seat, but it backfired on him. Because fortunately, we'd all by then developed a pretty good rapport with the people in town; well, not only in town, but on the Riverways. So he didn't even carry his own district. So I think that shut him off on that.

WS: Well, he wasn't even from there, was he?

DT: No.

WS: He was from Kansas City, I think.

DT: Right.

WS: Well, did you have much interaction with the Forest Service in regard to that Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. And they, of course, had the management of the Eleven Point right next door to you.

DT: We met from time to time. We'd exchange ideas and thoughts. But we didn't have any difficulties with them.

WS: Yes, I didn't anticipate that. I guess in the broader perspective, most people see the Riverways as kind of a precedent.

[tape meter, 50]

DT: They were interested in the type of land acquisition, and also what we were doing with trying to control the amount of boaters on the rivers. And all of the attendant ranger problems; littering, drinking -- not that you couldn't drink, but drunkenness. So we got together from time to time. But, as I say, their [interest] was primarily asking us questions. Often some of the meetings that I'd set up would be with our lands acquisition people, because they were interested in scenic easements and less than fee simple acquisition of properties; life tenures.

WS: In the Riverways itself, would you make any kind of distinction between the upriver and the downriver portions, in terms of how people reacted to the Riverways coming in? Or any number of other factors, I can't think of, right off hand. In particular, some people

will distinguish between Shannon County and Carter County. I guess the bulk of the Riverways has ended up in Shannon County.

DT: No, I don't recall. Of course, here again, you'll remember, Bill Bailey is from Shannon County. And most of the people knew him. I just can't recall any specific instances where there was any more animosity upriver as downriver. Our communications weren't as good upriver as they were right near Van Buren and the lower portion, and Big Spring and Round and Alley Spring. They were easier for us to get to. It was quite a bit harder to get up to Montauk unless you drove way out of the way. I'd frequently over-fly the area, but to get up to that upper area, you'd have to go clear up to 68 (I'm looking at a map here, now) to state road K, and then down to Montauk, and then over to the Riverways. Through Rector was probably the easiest way to get to the upper part of it. And the upper part was primarily taken not so much to provide access to the river as to protect the upper part of the river from pollution and adverse development. Because there was not any real good access there, except through Rector and Darien and some of those places through there.

WS: You mentioned Mr. Jaeger, and obviously you had those dealings with the State Parks people. But I realize in later years, the Riverways people down there have done some programs with the Conservation Department of Missouri. I guess the otter reintroduction and their wildlife plot program, and that kind of thing. So I was just wondering if you had any kind of cooperative programs with them?

DT: No, not at the time. See, I really wasn't there all that long a time. Most of the emphasis was on land acquisition. My contact, at that time, was with Joe Jaeger and Matt Matheney and some of the state [legislators] that were up there.

WS: Like Mr. [Cordell] Skaggs? Do you remember him?

DT: Yes. So, any of the other work with the state government probably came after I left. I'm sure we had meetings with them from time to time, but as I say, without the benefit of minutes from the meetings and so forth -- it wasn't a strong effort that it sticks in my mind in any way.

WS: Do you remember anything about the Ozark National Scenic Riverways Commission? They had the members from the counties, two governor appointees, and there was an Interior Department appointee. They were supposed to act as, I guess, sort of an advisory council. It was part of the enabling legislation, was how they got there. Leonard Hall was one of the members.

DT: Yes. But most often those meetings, George Hartzog would be present, and he would be the one that would really be running the meeting.

[tape meter, 100]

We had two or three meetings, but it wasn't like later when in the southeast region we had a Southeast Region Advisory Commission, which I chaired most of the time. And John King was also the civilian head of it. But the advisory commission for Ozark Scenic Riverways was primarily that we'd get together with George and the people. We'd discuss what was going on, what ways *they* could help.

WS: Did you have much interaction with many of the more high profile environmental groups, like Sierra Club or Audubon Society?

DT: No. As I say, we weren't really doing an awful lot on the Riverways. We were just buying it up. So, as far as any development that would have had adverse affect on the environment or anything like that, there just wasn't all that much going on. Most of the activity was, as I say, we built that one little visitors center. I can't even remember the name of the visitors' center. Isn't that terrible? I even did a little video for it.

WS: Well, I'm not familiar with all the developments there yet. It wouldn't be Powder Mill?

DT: Powder Mill, that was it.

WS: Oh, it *was* Powder Mill?

DT: Yes.

WS: I see. Well, a while ago, you mentioned your predecessors, Mr. Hennesay and Mr. Davenport. Just as you said, many people had mentioned to me how Mr. Davenport kind of rubbed the people the wrong way. The thing that surprised me about that was, with this being the first scenic river in the United States, and with Mr. Hartzog so directly interested in it, I'm just surprised he would make him the superintendent -- or maybe it wasn't completely his decision. I was surprised he didn't very carefully pick his first superintendent for this obviously pretty amazing endeavor.

DT: I hope George never reads any of this I'm saying. (laughs) But George had a tendency, sometimes, to shoot from the hip. If a guy did something really good, and that caught his eye at that moment, that might have been the trigger point. But the other thing about George to remember is, that once he *realized* he had made a mistake, it didn't take him

long to rectify it. I could say the same thing for Milt Thompson. You know, Milt was a good man, but he just wasn't right for the Riverways. And George rectified that real quick, too.

WS: Now did he follow directly after you?

DT: Yes.

WS: I see. And then there was Mr. Pope, who was in there before Mr. Sullivan came in.

DT: Yes. Now Randy, I think, did a good job.

WS: Yes, people remember him in that regard too, down there, from what I've heard. I'm still trying to find him. I guess he might be in North Carolina

[omitted incidental conversation pertaining to Mr. Pope's location; tape meter, 140-154]

He's the last one. I talked to Mr. Hennesay up in Montana. He verified what you had said. When I asked him what was his most important accomplishment, he said it was trying to smooth the ruffled feathers that had been created. But then he wasn't there that long before he went out to Yellowstone.

DT: As I say, he was in an untenable position. Being under a superintendent like that, you have to go along with what they're telling you to say. So he became part of the problem, inadvertently. Because Vern just was not that kind of a person. He respected those people.

You know, those people, in many cases, may not have been well educated, but they weren't stupid. They were very warm people. If you got to know them, they would be about as good a friend as you could find. Like Luin Smith, he owned the telephone company. And Marlin McClintock, he had the local motel. Just a lot of those people

were extremely warm, friendly people. You treat them right and they treat you right. Of course, Cokie McSpadden, the local undertaker. (laughs)

WS: Yes, he's still there. So, would you attribute success with the local people -- I'm not trying to flatter you, but everybody I've talked to down there remembered you as quite successful in working with the local people, and in great contrast with Mr. Davenport, in particular, your predecessor -- would you attribute that to respect for the local people, and then also your wife's teaching of music and I guess, generally, fitting in with the community more than maybe some of the others?

DT: I would say that was 99.9% of it. We tried to treat them as equals, which they were. They weren't always well educated, but they certainly were not dumb by any case. Many of them had done very well in high school, although not too many in that part of the country had gone to college at that time. They still were extremely fine people. Also, they had certain cultural traits and mores that we just fell right in with. If they wanted to go on a sucker gig, we'd go with them. (laughs) Sucker fries are quite fun. I don't know whether you've been on one.

WS: I've heard a lot about them.

DT: Hush puppies. Everybody thinks, "Suckers? Oh, my God." But you know, the Current and Jacks Fork River were so clear, having been fed by these big springs, that even though a sucker is a bottom feeder, there was no pollution in them at all.

But, as I say, they treated us very well, and we tried to reciprocate.

WS: Looking at your career prior to the Riverways, it doesn't look like you had been in any place that could have possibly prepared you for going into an area where there was a

massive land acquisition endeavor going on. I guess you just thought fast on your feet to deal with those kind of problems.

[tape meter, 200]

DT: (laughing) Well, I tried. Of course, I have also studied law. That helped in some respects. I never completed and took the bar. I decided to change; I guess I mentioned that early on, that every son and brother that came out of the service looked like he was going to be a lawyer. When I left Central Michigan College of Education, where I took my pre-law, I studied law on my own after that. I read law. Because I thought at that time, when I first started, with the background I had -- and if I'd finished the correspondence course in law I was taking I could have read law. But by the time I finished, because I had so many other duties, I just didn't get done in time, and they'd passed new legislation where you had to get a doctorate, really, in law, from a recognized college. This was LaSalle Correspondence Institute. So I learned quite a bit about land acquisition and the legal aspects of it. Later, John Coulter in Atlanta, we became very good friends. He was the regional solicitor. So anyway, I guess most of the stuff was just common sense that you'd try to go along with.

WS: Now this was back when Mr. Hartzog had created the three classifications of Park Service lands; the cultural or historic sites, the natural resource sites (what we might call ecological sites today), and then the recreation areas.

DT: Right.

WS: And of course you were in a recreation area. Mr. Sullivan was telling me how you had different manuals and that kind of thing. He saw the demise of that during his tenure

down there, but I don't know if you remember -- did Mr. Hartzog create that prior to your arrival there, or was that implemented during your time there?

DT: No; I just don't remember on that. I think that it was actually after that. I'm sorry that my memory is so poor, but after going to the regional office I had fifty-four other parks there, and I got information overload, I think. (laughs)

WS: Did you stay at the regional office for the rest of your Park Service career?

DT: Oh, no. I stayed there seven years, and moved the regional office three times, and it was supposed to be moved once more. Whalen was the director at the time. I met him in the Washington office and told him, "I've had enough. I don't want to move another inch with that regional office." Because every time you move you lose people, and records get lost and all screwed up.

WS: You mean they'd move the office to different parts of the region?

DT: First we were in Richmond, when I first went there. We had bought a house and renovated it. My wife had just put the last coat of paint on one of the doors upstairs when I came home with the news that we were moving in two months to Atlanta. That didn't make her terribly happy.

[tape meter, 250]

WS: That was in the same region.

DT: Yes. At that time I had Williamsburg and a lot of those places. But then it was reorganized, and that was put in the northeast region, or central; I forget, now, which one. But then we had a number of new areas in the southeast region that we had to get. I'm getting off the horn here, but I've just had so many things happen since then, that my

memory -- and I looked around the house here, and somewhere I know I've got some of the background material; but, Lord only knows after thirty-some years where it would be.

WS: It's interesting to know what you did later, because that could possibly affect the way you look back and see the Riverways, in light of all your other experience.

DT: Yes. Well, it was a great experience. We just loved the people down there. I wish now that I'd have kept the house down there. A couple of years after I became regional director I could have easily afforded that kind of money, and I could have rented it out. Randy Pope, in fact, rented it a number of years.

WS: It could be your summer home right now.

DT: Right. It was a beautiful little home up in the woods, and an airstrip right behind it, because I dedicated about a half acre, I think it was, as an easement (not fee simple) where they could cut back to have the proper slope for the runway environment. In the transfer I had permanent access from my land onto the taxiway. So I could have had my own hanger there (laughing) and everything. But it didn't work out that way.

WS: I'll bet remember Leo Drey from down at the Ozark Riverways.

DT: Yes, I sure do.

WS: Did you ever have much interaction with him and his land?

DT: We had a few conversations. He, of course, wanted a little more than we wanted to give him for his property, and he wanted to remove certain portions of it and sell other portions, and we just couldn't quite go along with all that. But I think most of his interactions were with the land office. Ours was more of a social type of get together.

[omitted incidental conversation concerning the location of possible land office retirees; tape meter, 293-300]

WS: When they work on a lands team like that, are they technically Park Service employees, or Interior Department employees? How does that work?

DT: Most of the ones that were actually on duty every day would have been Park Service employees. Now they hired appraisers from time to time that would not be part of the National Park Service, but would be under contract. But most of the primary people in the lands office would be Park Service employees.

WS: I see.

[more omitted incidental conversation concerning location of former lands staff; tape meter, 310-347]

DT: There was another fellow with the land office; Troy. I can't remember whether that was his first name or last name. The funny part of it is, too, when he'd get on the radio, he'd raise his voice about four octaves. He had this real southern accent, and you couldn't understand a full word he was saying. We used to kid him about it, tell him to quit chewing his words, to slow down and speak clearly.

[end of side 2, tape I; tape meter, 361]

WS: When you think back, what do you think was the most important thing you got accomplished down there?

DT: Well, my feeling is that the most important thing is that the most important thing was getting the people to accept the Riverways a little more than they had before. I won't say they *totally* accepted it, but I think we got it off being totally antagonistic toward it and accepting it. Then, of course, the transfer of the three state parks.

WS: Is there anything you would do differently if you could go back?

DT: I suppose there should have been, but there's nothing that I can recall right off the bat. I think most things, if they blew up in our face, we tried to correct them at the time. As I say, my major effort at the time actually *running* the Riverways was getting acceptance as much as possible by the people, and smoothing the feathers of the people that ran the johnboats, canoes, and so forth; to try to work that out to where they could live together, and we didn't get a bunch of outsiders horning in. That was the hardest thing to do, because sometimes we didn't have any legal means to stop them if they were not going across land that we actually owned at the time.

WS: You're talking about the canoe concessionaires?

DT: Yes.

WS: Yes, Mr. Sullivan told me about that. That ended up being a very lengthy legal battle. It took about ten years to resolve, he said. So, I guess the genesis of that occurred during your time there.

DT: More than likely. As I say, we tried to put a handle on it. Unless we owned the property itself, there was no way we could stop them. Then, often, they would find another access over land we didn't own, if we tried to shut them off.

WS: Now, the Concession Act had been revised just a couple of years prior to your arriving at the Riverways. Is that right?

DT: Yes.

WS: I think it was in 1965. But that didn't help you any with your problems there.

DT: No, not a bit. We tried to use it, but they'd get a good lawyer and he'd say, "It isn't applicable here." See, the Riverways was just authorized. It wasn't really established until the '70s.

WS: Oh, dedicated.

DT: Yes.

WS: Right. It was authorized in '64. But you're right, it wasn't dedicated -- you're talking about when President Nixon's daughter came down and all that?

DT: Yes.

WS: Okay. I can't remember what date that was.

DT: So the authorization bill, all that really does is provide you money and with parameters of what you're supposed to do. It doesn't really give you an awful lot of legal basis to take some actions against any of the landowners or anything.

WS: Was your funding adequate the entire time you were down there?

DT: Oh, hell; funding is never adequate. We had to scrounge just to keep a few rangers on duty and people in the office. The land acquisition office, of course they needed more money if they were going to move more rapidly. And sometimes that dragging of feet created a "we told you so" attitude. Because they would close on a piece of property and then not have the money to pay them off for a few months.

WS: Was your office and the lands office allocated money together or separately?

DT: No, our money was totally separate from the land office.

WS: Now, I imagine you were able to build your staff a little bit during that time. Were you?

DT: We built it a little bit. We had a few maintenance people. I was trying to remember how many. I think we had about seven or eight maintenance people. Now, once we got the state parks, of course, we increased quite rapidly. But up till that time I had two or three people in the office; a management assistant, a secretary, a clerk, and myself -- and then Andy Anderson, when he came on board as chief ranger. And then we had Dave Essex as chief law enforcement officer. Bob Peters was a district ranger, upriver. Golly, I can't think of my chief of maintenance's name to save my soul; real tall, skinny guy; a real hard worker.

[tape meter, 50]

And we had David Pough. The reason I remember him was because he was a little short dynamo. And two or three others. I think we picked up eight or nine people with the state parks. Now that's a guess. I hope you can check some of these numbers, because I'm trying to do a lot of this *a priori*. I have no documentation in front of me or anything.

WS: Did you ever hear about those so-called wild horses that later became such an issue? They were left over from the open range, which I guess you really saw the tail end of when you got down there.

DT: No pun intended, right?

WS: (laughing) Right!

DT: No. We didn't have that much problem with the wild horses, as I remember. I think that was further up north. I just don't remember it being a problem while I was there.

WS: Was the open range an issue at all in your management?

DT: No. Grandmawing was a bigger problem than that was. Bob Peters, he may have had more problem upriver with that, but it wasn't anything he couldn't handle, so I never heard too much about it. At that time we didn't have much in the way of good radio systems. Not like today, where most of these parks have very fine radio systems. Ours was very primitive. Often I couldn't reach him from up there unless I took off in my airplane and called him from the air. Because we didn't have repeaters or anything like that. It was line of sight stuff.

WS: Did you have any problems with fire in the forest?

DT: No, we had a couple of them, but nothing that I recall that was of any significance -- except the one that Bill Bailey (laughing) and those guys started.

WS: Yes, I heard that you got teased quite a bit about that.

DT: Yes. George Hartzog says he remembers seeing me looking out through the bars. Well, that ain't the case at all. (laughs) He likes that as a good story, because I never was actually behind bars. I went up there and they fingerprinted me and everything else. By then Bill had arranged for this grocer to pay my bail. They had arranged to get the judge out of bed at night to come down. Old Buford was trying his best to get me locked up, at least over night, if nothing more. The local newspaper man, of course, put quite a spread in his paper.

WS: After he lost his race for Congress, did he back off on his problems?

DT: Yes. I never heard anything from him after that. I'm not even sure that he won the job [of county prosecutor] again there.

WS: I came across a few indications in the Riverways records. It looked like -- I guess while he was prosecutor -- for a while they were batting around the idea of making him something of a federal magistrate, or something, so that he could handle some of the problems that the Riverways was having in terms of visitors, littering, or vandalism or whatever, instead of having to send them all to St. Louis. Did that happen while you were there?

DT: No. But I understand he did become a magistrate, but whether it was federal magistrate or just local I don't know. Bill Bailey sent me a clipping one time. He said, "Look, your old friend is a judge now." (laughs) I thought, "Oh, God, pity the poor people under his jurisdiction."

WS: I thought that it seemed kind of ironic that he would start out being such an obvious enemy, and then later it looked like he was doing *some* cooperation. Because I think the case load got to be overwhelming for a while. They tell me now, in Van Buren, the court on every Monday and Wednesday is packed with outside visitors that have violated some law on the Riverways.

[tape meter, 100]

DT: I had nothing against Winston Buford. It was heart rending at the time. You'd never know exactly how something like that is going to turn out. But they finally just dropped the case. There was just absolutely no way that I would have authorized anything like that, and even if I had, I was operating within what I thought was my realm of authority on property that we owned. So there was never any real case.

Of course, it happened the night of my wife's Christmas party at school. They called her and told her I was in jail. (laughs) Of course I wasn't, but I was awful close. And then, we were flying up to Iowa for Christmas, and I had to get the court to agree that I wasn't a flight risk and everything. No pun intended again! (laughs)

WS: So you would attribute Mr. Buford's actions as being mostly motivated by this plan to get elected in the Congress, then.

DT: That's the way I saw it. It was strictly a political ploy. Because he figured there were enough people that were against the Riverways. If they thought, "Here, it just proves it. They caught one of them trying to burn us down out here." But, as I say, it backfired on him. So, I guess if they were talking about making him federal magistrate, maybe it was the old saying, "Love your enemies. If nothing else, it will drive them nuts."

WS: Right. Or that old thing, "Honey catches more flies than vinegar," or something like that.

DT: Yes. (laughs) Keep him where you can see him.

WS: Well, Mr. Thompson, I've gotten through all my questions for you. I sure do appreciate your willingness to talk with me today and offer all this information.

DT: I hope I was some help. As I said, thirty-some years and all the water and debris that's gone over the bridge since then has cleared some of the stuff out. I'll probably remember a lot of stuff later on. (laughs)

WS: We can add it one way or another, if you like.

[omitted incidental conversation pertaining to possible additions to the transcript, a future additional interview, and locating additional documentary information; tape meter, 128-152; end of interview; tape meter, 152]