

Bill Howell edited

BH: I am Bill Howell and I was born in 1927. Our home was on the banks of the Grande Ronde River, about a mile southeast of Imbler. I lived there until 1961 or '2 at which time we moved to our present location in Imbler. We continue to farm the ground down there.

My father was born in 1896, grew up on that piece of farmland that his Dad had bought. I don't know when my Grandfather acquired the land, probably sometime in the 1870's or '80's. Dad also added acreage to the original ranch.

Grande Ronde River Flooding Problems and Diking Program

I: You've been farming that piece of land ever since?

BH: Yes.

I: I'd like you to tell us a little about the Grande Ronde River and its changes in water flows, vegetation, and other riparian communities.

BH: I guess the thing I remember most was the river bottomland and the annual flooding.

I: Would that be during the spring snowmelt?

BH: During the spring run-off you could count on annual flooding. There are marks through some of that bottomland where the river just went through it. My first good recollection of changes was after the 1948 flood.

There was a more or less cooperative arrangement to start a diking program here in the north end of the valley. Along in the mid-50s there was an extensive diking program to protect the flood plain. This was a cost share program with the Corps of Engineers; they were supposed to leave a specific type of dike that would maintain a flow of sixty-five hundred second feet to qualify for the cost share. In my opinion, this has been very successful and we have been able to raise good crops from good productive land. It's not a hundred percent protection from flooding, but it never was intended to be. The problem we have today is that that diking system is eroded and it needs some repair.

I: Do you remember how extensive the diking system was through the valley?

BH: The diking system south was up as far as the confluence of Catherine Creek, near what we used to call Fay Bridge; to the north, it is nearly all diked.

I: It seems like right around the Davis ground and Hot Lake area, there was Tule Lake area that was drained. That program was begun before the turn of the century.

BH: They had a different kind of a program up there. There were still a lot of diking and dredging going on up there during the '50s, but I'm not really familiar with how that was put together. Basically, it included the Grande Ronde, Willow Creek and their tributaries, since they weren't affected by any diking.

I: What about flooding in that area back of Willow Creek?

BH: It wasn't major. There's some flooding on the McKenzie Century Farm where it's very, very wet. He does some manual farming; he manages grass and cattle there. It's not a flood plain like we have down here.

The last flood we had was in 1996.

I: I was with the Corps of Engineers and flew around during that flood in February.

BH: Back in '91 we were looking at 15,000-plus acres in this area that were flooded. But off the top of my head, I remember 1948 was the major flood. Then, we've had sort of major floods periodically through the '50s and other big one in '64-'65.

Of course we had the dike for a lot of protection until '91, however '91 was not supposed to be a flood year. We didn't have the snow pack in the mountains. We were feeling pretty comfortable, and then the rain came down in torrents. It was around the first of May that year, but it can happen anytime as we saw in February of 1995.

I: Well, even in December because it was before Christmas when the John Day bridge went out. That whole valley was full of water.

BH: I had cattle over here on a flood plain that I'd wintered on year in and year out. We went to a wheat convention in Reno that year and I got a phone call that we were flooding up here. The cattle were bunched up on a little high ground. I got home and I had to bring 200 head of cows over to this twenty acres out here. That was first of February in 1995 and the mud was really thick.

I: It looked like two-thirds of the valley was under water and the rain started before Christmas.

BH: As far as other kinds of changes, like the quality of water, and I made this statement in meetings a lot of times. I'm suspicious that our quality of water in Grande Ronde River in the Imbler area, is most likely better than it was when I

was a kid ten, twelve years old. I'll sort of qualify that: in those days we did not have major irrigation; that came in the early 1960's.

I: It was pretty much dry land farming?

BH: It was all dry land farming, there weren't any withdrawals from the river, but the river went dry. There's still some neighbors who are alive who remember playing in the sandbars. If you jumped real good, you could keep your feet dry while crossing the river. To put it in a nutshell, today there are several of us who've been irrigating for quite a while in this area, and it seems like the water lasts longer in the season than it used to and it recovers earlier in the fall. I have no data or scientific basis to say that we're getting return flows, but I think we are. Something has happened.

Basically, if you want to talk about reservoir, the only reservoir we have is in the soil. Through the irrigation I think it's creeping back in, but that's a supposition. The quality of water in comparison when I was a kid, it not only dried up, you had stagnate pools green with scum. I see very, very little of that anymore. It's a cleaner stream from that respect.

Most likely there's not as much brush along the sides of the river, the diking took out some of that. I can show you a place now that the banks just slum off any vegetation; it has never been touched by grazing or herbicides. It's the fluctuation of the moisture, and when you get a high water condition in the spring and then it goes down, the bank goes with it.

We've lost a lot of brush, some of it's been cleared, but a lot of it's just been a natural process.

I: Do you recall how extensive the cottonwoods were through this area?

BH: I don't recall ever seeing a lot of cottonwood in this area, but did have a lot of thorn brush. Lately, we have lost a lot of the thorn brush from along the river bank by winter kill, too much water, or a natural aging process; maybe it was the use of herbicides. There were never a lot of willows along the river banks, just thorn brush.

Flood control has been a major item with most of us down in this reach. It's still a major consideration.

I: How close did the floods get in Imbler?

BH: Imbler is in no danger, there's enough grade down there. The grade drops off fairly quickly and there is little problem with population. There's a little bit of Willow Creek that will go over the highway. But as far as between here and La Grande, water's been up a little bit right there by Wright's Slough where the

fertilizer plant is now. Conley, I've seen water back up in there; streams come down off of Mt Emily.

I: It's just another area I think probably used to be wetland.

BH: It might've been before there was a ditch dug through there, it looks darn near natural.

I: Looking at an aerial photograph, there are been some areas that are straightened out. Where they've ditched down through there, they took out a lot of the old wiggles.

BH: The old channel that the state ditch replaced made a quite a dent out in there. A big share of that's been shoved in and cleared, and unless you know what to look for you don't see it anymore. There are pivots running over a lot of those areas.

I: That McDowell's ditch that was down through there, that's all been shoved in and you don't see it anymore except the swale of it.

BH: I didn't see the changes, but I've seen the progression of the state ditch. Bud Jones is a real good reference on that. I don't like the looks of the state ditch. It's a personal thing, because it's not controlled; it's still eroding; it's still vertical banks. That started out with a horse and fresno with a six-by-six ditch. Another reference you might want to talk to is Wilfred Hamann.

In fact, I just was visiting with Willie on New Year's; we played cards together and he got to talking about that ditch. They had formed a district to finance it and I think they assessed themselves about two bits an acre on some forty thousand acres. That was quite a project to put that ditch in.

That's been a major change, and of course it did open up a lot of productive farm land out there. Another one that you might talk to is Burr Courtright. You talked about the Tulee Lake and some of the soil composition out there. I've heard Burr talk a little bit about that.

I guess the other major change that I've seen is through irrigation and how productive the valley is, not only from dollars and cents, but the environmental status of the valley. I think the valley is better today than it's ever been. This place right here when I was a kid, I remember that fence out there and the road being covered up with dust and sand from the wind blowing. Now, we still get some blowing in the valley, but water's made it possible to keep perennial crops in, like grass seed, alfalfa, and mint. Those things don't blow.

The other thing the water has helped with, even if you re-crop wheat or something that you're pretty well on a annual cropping schedule, you've got very little bare ground setting out there. If you use any judgment at all, there shouldn't be any

bare ground. I think the irrigation has really been a plus for the economy of the whole area.

I was active when we tried to build the Grande Ronde Project, the two dams. I sat on the committee from its inception until it disbanded when I was chairman. It was in Dave Baum's era when the Economic Development Corporation of La Grande -- Johnny Lemmon, Dave Baum and other merchants in La Grande -- put together some money and initiated a study that was called the Tri-County Economic Study, or something to that effect. That study said that the future economic viability of the three counties -- Wallowa, Union and Baker County -- hinged on the development of the two dams of the Grande Ronde and Catherine Creek.

Beaver

I: Tell me a little about the beaver population along the Grande Ronde.

BH: There used to be a lot of beaver along the river. When I say that, that's when I was growing up in the 1940's. I used to go down and fish on the riverbank; I would be down there in the evening and I'd hear the old beaver tails slap the water and I would watch them.

I: Were they pretty well widespread through there?

BH: Well, I can't really say; it was in that area along our property that was a mile or two. I don't see any beaver sign at all today. There used to a lot of them, but now all I see are muskrats along the river.

I: That area there where the beaver were, were they working on the thorn brush or were there enough willows in there?

BH: No, I never did see them use the thorn brush. There's enough soft wood, willows and red brush in there for them to eat. We didn't have any cottonwoods in that reach down there at all. It was all willow or some other soft kind of brush.

There is a little patch of cottonwoods in that area I'm speaking about; they were on an island that never used to be grazed, and it had some big cottonwoods. It still has a few. A former owner went in and cleared up, he thought he was going to get a lot of pasture out of it. Well, there wasn't any pasture to be had. If he had just thought about it, there weren't any acres involved. He did clear out a real good habitat full of deer and birds -- nobody went there since you couldn't get around to it.

I: That was right in the bottomland?

BH: Yes, in that flood plain just about a mile out of Imbler, at the big ranch where the white fence is. Just back past the house, you can see the cottonwood. There's a little stretch, it might be three acres, and that's all there is of that pasture.

I: Do you remember what they did with the cottonwoods?

BH: Oh, they were just piled up and burned.

I: I talked to one guy who said a lot of times back up towards La Grande, they shoved them over into the old channel, and just covered them up with dirt.

Fish Runs

I: What about as far as fish runs, do you remember any down through here when you were growing up?

BH: Well, this is all dirt bottom down here, and the fish biologists tell me there is no spawning in a dirt bottom. Quite frankly, I've never seen a salmon. All the salmon that used to go up, has to go right through this area and I've never seen one. The nearest to any kind of **andramonus** [CHECK THIS WORD] fish I saw happened one spring when we used to fish this area a lot. (I haven't fished it for forty years.) The water was going down and we were catching what we called trout. I think what they were though, were the smolt going out. I didn't know that until years later because I didn't know what they were. That's the closest fish I have ever observed to resembling andramonus fish.

I: Do you remember seeing any eels in there?

BH: Yes, by virtue of sucking them into a screen on an irrigation pump. Not too many. I see a lot more eels over in Willow Creek in the shallower waters; it's full of them.

I: With regard to the eels, are you talking presently or in the past?

BH: I haven't seen them for quite a while because I haven't been pumping out of there. I did have an irrigation pump down there several years ago, and one of the problems was sucking those dang eels up. I haven't irrigated out of the Grande Ronde in several years. Now we've changed our irrigation system. But on occasion, I did pick a few up that got stuck somehow in the screens and then you got a mess. That was in the late '70's or early '80's.

I: Did you ever get up into the upper Grande Ronde area for fishing?

BH: Years ago I did some fishing up there. I'm not an avid fisherman. I like to fish, I just never had time to do it. I've never caught a steelhead, I've never fished for

salmon. I've fished for trout up above Tony Vey Meadows. We used to hunt elk up in Liver Camp, and I fished the meadows up there. All we got were little Eastern Brookies out of the pond up there. I'm not any authority on the vegetation up there at all. They tell me it's entirely different, but to me it looks just like it did forty years ago. Do you see a difference in the riparian areas?

I: Not so much there as much as it is up on the uplands, particularly with the lodge pole pine. There has been a massive change with that species. I am particularly interested in the beaver dams, though. I remember falling in one time when we were out there working. To this day I can't remember exactly where it was.

BH: At Tony's meadow, I think they use it differently than they did when Tony was alive and that goes back a long time. When we first started elk hunting up there he'd bring his steers, most likely three-year-olds, up there in the fall of the year and it was belly-deep grass. I don't think he pastured that much in the summertime. It was sort of a prior-to- wintering grounds, they would be in there -
- big and fat cattle.

I: Well, it's pretty lush up back up there. I was thinking, down farther towards where Meadow Creek runs into the Grande Ronde River.

BH: That's always looked pretty used to me. I never did see a lot of tall grass anywhere down there. As far as visibly seeing a change up there, no I haven't seen much. I want to go back up and see how this log placement is. Have you seen that? **[need a description here of the log placement and when it happened]**

I: Yeah, I was in there photographing late last summer.

Ice Jams

BH: That's pretty controversial and it's a high risk. Being a board member of the watershed group, you take a responsibility for the fish. How best can you serve that cause? Quite frankly on the first go-around, I was opposed to doing it because of the ice flows. My wife grew up at Camp Elkanah. We have pictures of the old ice jams. They used to jam up against the bridge trellises and her dad and all the Greek crew up there, spent their winters digging the ice off of the railroad trellises.

I've got a few old black and white snapshots of that. So we know there's a tremendous ice flow up there and the first year they were in, they had some movement. I don't know really what harm it caused; there might have been a little damage downstream, but the fact that it moved made a lot of people upset.

Then it came back to us on the board that we didn't do it right. I was asked to go up and really look at it, which I did with Paul Baney. The stretch that they

wanted to do this year, I guess I was convinced it was worth the risk because the way it is now, it certainly isn't a fish stream. There's no habitat there. The logs will create some pooling or some slack water or maybe a little water depth in the summer months. It is most likely one of the better fish projects that we have spent money on, if it doesn't wash out.

I: Way up the Grande Ronde going towards Camp Carson, where they put those logs in, that was looking real good.

BH: Yes, you don't get near the heavy flow or ice and it seems more stabilized. I may have to eat crow on that thing. It's one that I felt it's good for the fish, it may not work at the other end, but I guess it's worth a try.

A lot of the things that concern me in these projects, are we getting our money's worth? We won't know that for many years through the monitoring process and evaluation. I'm sure that we have spent money where we should've saved it. But you know, you're never a hundred percent right.

I: Hopefully you learn to monitor and of course, you could get to having conditions where everything looks real good for a good number of years and then all of a sudden you get a real nasty year and everything gets wiped out.

BH: Look at the Imnaha. Of course what's happened down there this year, is most likely a hundred-year frequency. It might've been a twohundred year frequency, I don't know, but that's natural. There's no predictability, none at all.

Just like this flood we had in 1991 – it was the highest water I've ever seen down here. Now, you can talk about '64 and '65 or the rest of those flood years, but it was higher in 1991.

Rinehart Gap

Another concern we have, and I don't know the answer because nothing's ever been done about it, but ever since 1948, is the plug in the Rinehart gap; we can't get rid of the water. There have been a lot of studies by the Corps of Engineers after 1948: a drainage study where they made certain recommendations which had to do with the gap, partial diking, some storage to go along with it which could alleviate our flooding. That didn't happen, of course, and they chose to pursue the two dams of the Grande Ronde Project. They chose to go that way and conserve our water rather than flush it and I think that was most likely good thinking.

Now the hydrology folks get into it and they say, no, we mustn't lower the water level because you'll create a long-term head cut and maybe take the moisture out of soil here. There is a recent study of the lower reaches down here that's in our CS office. In fact, I've got a copy of it here but I can't lay my hands on it right

now. It was done with funding from the Bureau of Reclamation and NRCS and sort of brought everything into focus -- what we need to do if we rebuild dikes. It also addressed the Rinehart gap, and the thinking there, is that you move it back and make it wider. You can go down there in high water and there's hardly any current compared to what we normally have up here, and it still starts backing up.

Well, the Corps did a preliminary cost study for us but I personally am not agreement with the concept they had of hauling out all the removal. They got plenty of bank on the outside to gain twenty, thirty percent of the channel capacity. If they'd just take a big heavy track hoe equipment, pull it back, you could kick the heck out of the cost factor. That's a theory that I personally have and I think some other people share it. There are some other problems. Elgin got a little wet here a couple years ago.

I: Clark Creek this last year?

BH: Clark Creek went on a rampage and now you've got two or three houses down at the lower end of it. All in all, it'd be very difficult to get any program going there, more than repairing our diking. That's what's necessary for flood control and we're really concerned about it; some of our prime lands are prone to being flooded.

I: On the Grande Ronde Project, whereabouts were the locations for the dams up the Grande Ronde River?

BH: Well, I think it ended up right below Spring Creek. The original site was just above it somewhere in the old rifle range area, but they were losing too much water capability. As I recall they had a site right below Spring Creek where they would put in the reservoir. Then Catherine Creek Dam was up there near the Hall Ranch was, near the lower end of the meadow in that gap there.

I: Right where it narrows down.

BH: Yes. I still remember most of the numbers involved, I didn't have the site located.

I: I have the report the Corps of Engineers did on the final impact study on Catherine Creek, but the one on the Grande Ronde I never saw anything.

BH: I think I've got all of the authorization reports and everything boxed up. I'm not going to throw those away like some of the other stuff. I still go back to them.

Interestingly, I mentioned earlier about the way they write memos and the literature today. I have one that's almost handwritten and it is from 1941. I don't recall the name of the professor, but I think he was a professor out of OSU. He made an evaluation: "In the Grande Ronde," he says, "I talked to an older Indian

today that saw a salmon last week.” This I think was in August of 1941. He saw a salmon. Isn’t that spawning time in August?

I: Spawning goes into August, and maybe early September.

BH: I wonder what’s the matter with the numbers, but he didn’t elaborate -- he saw one salmon. Then he got over into Catherine Creek and he made about the same kind of a comment that they’d seen two or three. I believe it was on the north fork where he made quite a few comments about the stream being plugged with brush and that it was restricting the passage of the fish. I wonder if that was the forerunner of the logging practices that cleaned all the streams out.

I: Well, in ’41 they had already been logging up in there on south fork, they pushed that road up the north fork and they just side cast all that stuff right into the creek.

BH: Is that what happened there?

I: Yes, the road was right along the stream edge and they just pushed all that brush and rock into the stream.

BH: They just plugged the stream? I didn’t know that. I thought maybe it was just a natural thing.

I: No that was all manmade.

BH: When did the logging practices end? They didn’t have a logging practices act, but the policy was to clean all the streams. You couldn’t cross them, you couldn’t leave anything in them.

I: That’s right when they got serious about it is in the ‘60s. However, I can remember, in the ‘50s and early ‘60s, it was still common practice just to skid down the drawbottoms, with a cast because that was the easiest way to go. You pulled everything down off the hills. They horse-logged all that south Catherine Creek, pulled it down off the hills into the bottom and then just floated down bottoms with the Cats. It was the same way up the Grande Ronde River. I talked to some of the people who worked for Mt. Emily Lumber and it was still going on into the ‘50s.

BH: We talk about the current woody debris in the creeks and so on. I’m getting tired of hearing somebody in the crowd say, “Just a few years ago we had to clean the streams. Why don’t they make up their minds”! It’s getting to be real old, and they will never live that down. One year we clean the streams, the next we clean them of all debris.

I don’t even know who incorporated that idea, whether it was AD, ODF&W or the Forest Service.

I: I really don't know where it came from, but it was common practice that you take everything out.

BH: The loggers, I can still remember them being upset, "Oh gosh, you just tied our hands."

I: Going through the cycles without really thinking of what you're doing. It goes from one extreme to the other like the tide, without sitting down and seeing the practicality of it or why we are doing this.

Do you remember any Indians coming and fishing over this way? There was a period when everyone was on horseback and wagon travel. It was real tough to get around; one person I talked to, their folks used to go from Cricket Flats with a wagon over in a full day's trip to Catherine Creek. They would camp there and catch salmon -- pitchfork them and then go back.

BH: Was that where the name Fish Trap Hill, out of Elgin, comes from?

I: Might be. I understand, Bill, right in there around the mouth of Indian Creek, they used to put traps in there and I guess probably gig them.

BH: Indian Creek is listed as a salmon bearing stream as well as bull trout stream.

I'm sure there are still some people around, like Vernal Hug who would know. Laurose Hibberd, possibly could tell you something, she and Dick have had a river ranch down here all of their married life.

I: I refer to Hug's book a lot. I have talked with his son and he tried to find some old pictures but he didn't know about the area outside of Elgin proper.

I: Do you recall the splash dam on the Minam when that logging was done down through there? There was a mill down off the Minam a little bit.

BH: No. I heard a few brief stories. I've never known anybody that was really involved in that. There again, Laurose and Dick Hibberd might have some inside information on that. Dick had an interest in Red's Horse Ranch years ago. I heard stories they had a logging camp down at the land ranch or thereabouts and Louie Hale ran a pack train up, serviced that out of Minam. Those things are tough to come by. No, I'm not much help on that, but that might be a lead.

I was going to ask you a question. There's a law on the books, apparently a legislative law, that's been pretty dormant for years, but twice it's come into focus and that's the Navigability Determination. Have you run into any information on it?

I: No, I haven't. I've seen a little bit in the paper that talked about it, but I've never read anything in depth on it.

BH: First time it showed up, I did a little investigation on some people who were still alive and were involved in Mt. Emily Lumber Company. How they brought the logs floats down and the splash dams up into the tail end of Tony's Meadow.

I: Of course that quit about 1906 when they put the railroad in. They ran the logs up to that time.

BH: Yes, and that's reason the railroad went in because the rest of it was a mess.

Early Lumber mills

I: The river runs there and that was the Grande Ronde Lumber Company doing that. 1906 was when the railroad started. Then Mt. Emily Lumber Company began in 1924 when they actually started cutting their first logs. They bought out the land of the Grande Ronde Lumber Company and kind of extended the railroad a lot farther up the creeks.

BH: What about the Perry mill?

I: That was the Grande Ronde Lumber Company.

BH: I just ran across a note on that when they moved that mill to Pondosa in 1926.

I: The people who had owned it took it over to Pondosa. Mt. Emily bought out their land holdings, the railroad and the land up above, supplying them with logs.

BH: What was the name of the other big mill up there?

I: Palmer.

BH: Bowman-Hicks?

I: It was Palmer before Bowman-Hicks.

BH: Oh, it was?

I: Palmer started in 1907 when they went over to Palmer Junction, logged all that off for about seven years, and hauled the logs to La Grande. Then they went to Smith Mountain where they logged that out, which was about 1921. Bowman Hicks bought that out and had the mill at where the fairgrounds are now.

BH: I barely remember that.

I: Bowman Hicks evidently bought the Palmer holdings and then they logged out of Wallowa, keeping a mill here and a lot of land.

BH: Well, they've been cutting trees for a long time.

I: George Fox right there at Orodell on the west side of La Grande had one of the first mills in 1863. There was a mill in Union and then six miles up Catherine Creek there was another one in '63. It went from there to Summerville and over to Indian Valley, so they were taking a lot of trees out. I got some pictures the other day on Mt. Harris, where they had a heck of a deck, with steam cars hauling. One picture shows horses pulling this wagon that was on logs skid, also called a spool cart. It was sort of like a little railroad car with eight thousand feet on it with a horse draw.

BH: And that was on top of Mt Harris?

I: Yes, on Mt. Harris in 1900.

BH: When I was a kid, we fished up there.. There were two sites, one down in the old Indian Creek campground right on Indian Creek, and one down the road north, an area that was called Patty Meadows and I'll bet that's the one you're talking about.

I: It might be. From the pictures you really can't tell the exact location, it just says Mt. Harris.

BH: But as far up in the timber proper, I don't recall ever seeing or hearing anything about a mill site. But Patty Meadows did have an old mill at one time. There was also a mill down on the old traversal ground right down on Indian Creek.

I: You start to look at the old records and there were so many mills around here.

BH: Oh yes, everybody had one.

I: They would cut out and then they'd move, or go broke and somebody else would pick up their equipment.

BH: There was a mill on the north end right around the river. You take the old road and go around. I was of high school age when that was operating. I don't even know who operated it. There is a guy still around who owns the property there, L. C. Smith.

They owned a lot of timber property. They were a family that apparently had a few dollars in the Depression and they bought a lot of land. There was a lot of timber land for a buck an acre then and many were selling their land.

I: It was profitable if you could hang on to it long enough.

BH: Of course they couldn't help it selling off their timber holdings. Our family missed our fortune when we didn't buy timber when we could have.

I: There's an old wagon road off Mt. Harris, I am not sure if they cut that and then hauled lumber down there or just what it was, but it would have had a been around the turn of the century.

BH: Does it go back east off the top of Mt. Harris?

I: Well, I thought it came off this end here to the west.

BH: The only road I've ever known is called Rattlesnake Gap. If you look out the window here, you can see where it is at. It goes up through a gap on the north and there's a rock cut up there. But boy, I don't know if they ever hauled lumber off of there. It's an awfully steep grade up there and a lot of big boulders.

Every fall when we lived down here east of Imbler, my dad would take the hayrack off the old steel wheel hayrack, he had brake chocks in it, and he'd cut out the brake blocks out of apple wood. The way they worked, they were a cast block and then you just shaped your wood in a V and slipped them in there. He built those out of apple wood.

They'd make one or two trips up there. They had a pole that had a quite a lot of leverage that was a good green stout pole, about three-inches, and tapered at the end. They would tie a double block pulley with a half-inch rope or so; they had a double block on it and that was your brake. Well, this friend who was a neighbor of Dad's, every fall we'd go up there to the old Magoudie ground, and we would cut wood and cross-haul it with a team onto the bunks of the wagon, or we'd haul down bridge timber because we had a private wood bridge across the Grande Ronde down at the place. I tell you, my dad, I don't know how he lived through it. We had an old team and we'd come down through those rock slides. He would be standing up on top of the load. He would be hanging onto the team this way and hanging on the brake that way and if something broke, I mean, he would've been gone.

That wagon just literally just sort of wallowed its way down through the rocks and the bracing on the team was tight all the time. They kept their feet, I don't know how. I remember that road and as far as I know that's the only road down through that.

Now a little later on right at the top end of the meadow, they cut down through land that used to belong to Harvey Ruckman, and it still belongs to his daughter, Mary Bennett. That road comes down at the Noyce property down here over the hill. When they got trucks to log with, they logged some stuff out of there and,

gosh, the ruts were belly-deep; it didn't hold up very well. There were a lot of logs later on that came out that way. Where that mill would've been in those days I don't have a clue.

I: Those mills were scattered all over, so there's nothing in the photo that you could see, except that it was heavily timbered for a while. I'm just assuming they cut the trees up in the forest and then brought the lumber out; that was the way a lot of them did, but it's hard to tell. It was back there in 1900 so.

BH: There were some things that went on up there. When I was eighteen oh, twenty years old, I was hunting with my dad, and we went up there deer hunting. I circled up back sort of on the northeast side of Mt Harris, and it was really full of timber; there was no logging at that time up there at all, it was all brushy. I came up on a rocky ridge, just sort of opened up on a little rocky point and low and behold, there was an old shack up there under a fruit tree. Somebody had lived there and for several years, I asked around if anyone maybe knew about that, but I never did find out.

I: When I went through that survey of 1863, they actually show a road access around Mt. Harris! Can you believe that?

BH: Holy cats!

I: It's hard to imagine why they would've been up in there at that period of time.

BH: They were still pioneering.

I: But there is all this other area that was easier going.

BH: They were looking for someplace to live. Maybe just over the hill, there was a valley.

I: That's a tough way to go.

BH: Did the 1863 survey show access that came on down Indian Creek?

I: Yes, it showed an access road or wagon road.

BH: They most likely hit Indian Creek and went on down into Indian Valley.

I: That's a tough one. With all the routes and places you could go, that's a rugged one to get to because of the higher elevation up there.

BH: Jerry, I have a question for you. Have you drawn any conclusions hpw we in the uplands or north part of the county, have affected the fish migration?

I: This whole life cycle of the fish -- the salmon and steelhead -- goes from the ocean clear up to the headwaters. There are no questions about that. There is the Columbia River as a corridor and the dams.

When you start looking at numbers of fish that were caught before the turn of the century, there were a tremendous number of them. They had the cannery down there, and they had the fishnets, so there were large numbers of fish that were taken out before they ever got to the headwaters. Talking to some of the people up here who can remember seeing the fish, it didn't seem like there was a crash in numbers, but just a gradual reduction like in the Catherine Creek area particularly. I haven't found as much in the Grande Ronde as I have in Catherine Creek. There they had the large numbers of fish in the '20s and '30s when it starts decreasing. I can remember clear up into the early '60s, there were still a lot of fish coming through.

Carson Mine

In that 1941 survey report it talked about where was happening to the habitat, where the spawning beds had barriers and they couldn't get up stream. You had all this logging going on for decades and decades and decades; you had the heavy overgrazing back up through the Starkey country where they were bringing herds of sheep and cattle through there, and horses. Plus, up the Grande Ronde, they're hydraulic mining up at Carson Mine, where a million and a half yards of soil went down into the river. A lot of silt build up and then that was the dredging in 1939 and again in the '50s and again and in the '80s.

BH: I didn't know that was happening at Carson.

I: They went back in, to rehabilitate that area in 1996, but it didn't really work. What they're doing was side-casting that onto the edge and then dumping it into the creek.

BH: I know we approved some funding but I had forgotten who the people were that was going to rehabilitate that area. They did the work in 1995 and '96. I didn't know they had done work up there in the '80s. It was around '82 when they had the shovels in there.

I: When gold reached four hundred dollars?

BH: The Rainbow Mine was up there along with some others. Did the Rainbow ever open up again?

I: Not that I know of, or there was nothing significant coming out of it. There was also the Indiana Mine and the Arella Mine.

- BH: The Indiana Mine's down on the river and the Rainbow was up on the hill to the east. They were pretty active along that period, but I didn't know Carson Mine ever did anything.
- I: The Tanner Gulch was the one that was dumping everything into the creek. The Indiana mine was all hard rock, so except for major leeching into the creek, it wasn't near enough to foul the river.
- BH: Thy washed away the mountain side up there. That's quite a project. When I visited that area in the early '70s, elk hunting up there, the buildings were still up, and in pretty good shape. The doors on the old saloon still worked.
- I: I'll be darned!
- BH: You could still walk up the steps onto the porch on the old saloon. As I recall, the wood was weathered, but it wasn't rotten. Then we walked out to where the pipe came in from the upper Grande Ronde, where they were getting the water.
- I: You're talking about Camp Carson?
- BH: Yes, Camp Carson up on top of the hill. There was an eighteen or twenty-inch plyke- pipe steel wrapped. They had to bring in that water from whatever the water level was of the Grande Ronde. It was quite a project. I didn't know they'd ever opened that up again.
- I: They dredged the creek bottom in 1939. It was the Oro Plata outfit that came in and brought a shovel type dredge, not like the old-time dredge there at Sumpter. They dredged about two-mile stretch down through there. That was the bottomland and then they went out of business. But in 1957 they did a little bit of work, and again in '82 I think it was.
- BH: Well, that's the watershed health money that went into that rehabilitation project in 1996.
- I: I went to the Geology Department in Baker and they said they'd had some problems with how effective that project was.
- BH: I've never heard whether it was effective or not. Certainly some of these things maybe aren't effective. We spent a lot of money on wire fencing, and some of it was put too close to the creeks and wadded up in a ball. But I guess you got to try to do something.
- I: What we need to do is to look, monitor, and to learn if it was not done right or was done senselessly, to recognize that and don't repeat it. Just don't go back and just keep doing it just for the sake of doing something.

BH: There's a tremendous amount of erratic concepts and erratic pressures for quick fixes. This didn't get this way overnight and it won't be healed overnight. In the meantime we have to take an overall view and maintain some economies. I can't fix things on my ranch if I don't make some money.

I've sort of taken a lot of look and listen time and what I have concluded is that yes, we need to do the very best job we can. We need to be aware of this TMDL study that's just starting. In fact, I go to my first meeting as an ag committee member. I have no idea where that's going to go. I sort of understand it, but just sort a. It is going tell us some things about what's going into the river. So we take a look at that.

In the meantime we got to devise some plans so that we can still stay on the land, and produce. How we get there is going to be the difficult part. I told some watershed health people one time that I see no justification that would dictate major changes to our area of timber, cattle, and ranching. We work on conservation in a good-managed practice. Those practices are on the books. We haven't been doing everything suggested in all the cases. But we are gaining.

I: When you look at the insect problems in the forest and the fire problems, hopefully intelligent men with technology can aide Mother Nature in doing a better job, but that hasn't been the case, unfortunately.

BH: No.

I: You got to be able to weigh all the factors to do it.

BH: I really think that the pendulum will turn around that we do have to have management. See, we've gone through this before and we've failed. We need to give it back and let nature takes its course.

Let me ask you something. Have you followed the eastside ecosystem plan very closely?

I: Not really closely. I think so many of these plans, now I maybe talking out of line here, there's this do everything in the worst way, going from one extreme to the other and it always goes right down the middle. We are not paying any common sense to actually examine what the are conditions out on the ground; the whole Grande Ronde watershed is so complex, and this is not reflected in the papers and studies. When the pioneers first came here all this was open ponderosa pine; you could drive your wagons through all grass. Well, that's the biggest fallacy of anything that you could imagine. You go back to the old journals when the first pioneers came here they had to shut down and stop because they had to cut their way through that forest to get the wagons through. That's right there in the documentation time after time after time, but for the political agenda they don't

want to see that or recognize it or pay any attention to it. That was not the way the forest was.