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Interview no. 861

Guy Lee

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
ORAL HISTORY INSTITUTE

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, 1994

INTERVIEWEE/ADDRESS: Guy Lee, P.O. Box 264, Marathon, Tx., 79842.
Phone: 915-386-4295.

INTERVIEW BY: John R. Moore

DATE: March 23, 1994

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW: 1 hour, 20 minutes/English

SUMMARY: Lee, age 79, came to the Pope Ranch in Big Bend as a child in 1916. His father worked on the ranch. Lee has worked as a candelia wax maker, highway employee, cowboy and for two years (1946-48) as a river rider for the State of Texas.

As a river rider, Lee was a commissioned law enforcement officer charged with daily riding horseback on a 26-mile circuit along the Rio Grande from Hot Springs west. He was responsible for ensuring no Mexican livestock entered the park or the United States during a severe epidemic of Mexican hoof and mouth disease. He had to shoot several head of cattle that strayed into the park. He relates particulars of his work as a river rider, his relations with cross-river residents and his association with National Park Service employees.

He discusses fishing in the Rio Grande, the environment and wildlife of the park along the river and his acquaintance with Maggie Smith, concessionaire operating the Hot Springs store, motel and mineral baths. He lived with his wife and children in the structure on the knoll above the Hot Springs store.

He provides some detail about Texas Rangers in the area from 1916 through the border conflict created by the Mexican Revolution. For 24 years following his employment as a river rider, Lee worked as a cowboy on the Gage Ranch at Marathon.

Big Bend National Park
Oral History Project

Guy Lee
By John R. Moore

March 23, 1994

M: Guy Lee for the Big Bend Oral History Project, March 23, 1994 at his home in Marathon, Texas, interviewed by John Moore.

Mr. Lee, would you tell us about when and where you were born and how long you have lived in the Marathon area?

L: In Marathon, I've lived here...well, I'm seventy-nine, around about eighty. I came here in 1916 when I was just a little tot. We moved down on the Pope Ranch with Applewhite and Long from Pearsall. They had a trainload of steers and my daddy had the farm down there, so he sold it and bought a little bunch of cows and moved out here and took care of those steers on the Pope Ranch.

M: This was at Pearsall, Texas?

L: Yes. We lived on the Pope Ranch until I was about twenty-four years old. My mother died in 1917 and I was just raised up and down the Maravillas Creek, you might say, down there on the Pope Ranch. Of course, my brothers and all went to school up here until I was old enough to go to school. Well, Daddy boarded us out. My daddy died in [19]33 and I was about seventeen when he died. And I have been just working ever since, here and there and yonder most of the time, but I really call Marathon my home.

M: Could you tell me, Mr. Lee, where the Pope Ranch is?

L: Oh, it's south of town about thirty miles...toward the Park.

M: It's not in the Park?

L: No. It's not in the Park. It joins the ranch that joins the Park, but it's not in it. I guess the closest place would be about ten miles, or something like that, where you enter the Park.

M: So you were here during the time that the federal government took over what is now Big Bend Park?

L: Well, I don't remember. They had a Three C [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp, a camp fire and thirty... I guess they put that there about [19]35 or somewhere along in there. I don't remember.

M: Are you talking about the Civilian Conservation Corps?

L: Yeah. Then after it moved out that's when they took over the Park. That's when I met Ross Maxwell. I worked on the ranch up this side where we were living for several years. I worked for him and then, after he finally died, I just scattered around and worked up there in Van Horn and, you know, just everywhere a ranch was...cowboying. I came back here then and went to work for myself. I had a little bunch of goats. That didn't work out. I bought an oil rig and drilled wells for a while. That didn't make me much money. I made candelia wax for a while, me and an old boy. It seemed like that didn't work, so I went to riding the river. I signed up in El Paso for it. I rode it for two years and I moved away from Marathon and I went to work for the Gage Ranch here. I stayed

with him twenty-four years before I left and went on my own again with a little bunch of cattle. I just got rid of my cattle yesterday, so I'm footloose again. (chuckles)

M: You're looking for employment again, right?

L: Looking for employment of some kind again.

M: There are a lot of things I want to ask you about. Tell me about making candelia wax. What got you into it?

L: Well, it's very interesting if you make it. I really was interested in it. Of course, we had wet laborers then, wet Mexicans out of Mexico...cheap. It wouldn't pay now because your labor would cost you too much. But we had big vats made out of steel and you build up, like, out of adobe, just like you were going to build an adobe house. You just make a pit out of adobe and you set this vat in it. You have a fire box under it and you put these green weeds- it's green when they pull it- pack it in on burros. Then you stack it up, fire it, and you got a Mexican cooking it all. Of course, as it dries, they use that dry candelia, that weed, to fire the boiler. It really works. It burns just like gasoline. You've got to have acids. You fill these eight-foot vats. I don't know how many burrow-loads of weeds you could put in that vat. Mexicans would load it and just keep loading it. Then you had a big door you closed down on it made out of iron bars. You latched it and it pressed it down. After it boiled a while they would pour this sulfuric acid in there. And that just doubles the heat. Then all the wax comes to the top and they

skim it off and pour it in tubs to cool. After it cools, of course, it's broken and they sack it. It's very interesting. You'd nearly have to watch somebody make it.

M: What was your market? Who did you sell the wax to?

L: Well, I sold it to Casner in Alpine, [Texas] but they sold it, shipped it, I guess, to New York or somewhere. When I first started, what got me interested in it, there was a fellow who borrowed a bunch of money from a fellow in New York. He came out here and he was buying wax and stuff. It was a big company. This fellow came out and set this old boy up. He went in and added in it in such an expensive way he never could make money.

I hauled a fellow down the river- he was making wax down there close to the river- and the old fellow talked to me. I should have really got in with him but, you know, I thought, "Well, he's from New York." And I didn't know him. And he was closing this old boy out. I thought, "Well, now, he may be just talking to me." But I wished now I had really got in with him because I would've been honest with him and everything. I think I would've really made some money because he really set me up in being this in a big way. He really knew how to make it. He stayed up here at the hotel and he got some of that weed when he was with me and had a coffee pot. He boiled it off in a coffee pot up there in the hotel.

M: He made a small amount in the hotel?

L: He just made a little dab of wax. He made that wax and then he came back to me again. I still wasn't interested enough in him. I was into wax alright, but I was a little afraid of him. New York, that's quite a distance from here in this western country and I couldn't figure him out. Then I got to thinking after everything was all blown over I had nothing to lose, but just my time. If he had furnished me ten dollars-well, it would've been just a gift, you know- I sure should've took him on. He bought that old boy a truck. Boy! He had him really set up in the business in a big way.

M: How much was candelia wax worth?

L: It was forty-five cents a pound after it was cooked off. Then Casner bought it. That was just the crude wax. Then he bought it and recooked it, which was refined, and I don't have any idea what he got, but he made a lot of money out of it. I expect he was bringing probably two dollars a pound.

M: Do you know who Mr. Casner sold the wax to?

L: No. He shipped it out of Alpine by the carloads.

M: What was it used for?

L: Well, there's lots of things: records, phonograph records...all that kind of stuff was made. There's different kinds of wax to polish woods and everything made with it. There's a time I knew a lot of things that they used the wax for.

M: Did the military use it for grease?

L: Well, I never did hear of it, but I expect they did. I

imagine that's what made it so high.

M: Why is no candelia wax made in this part of the country now?

L: No. That old boy was setting up in the Park. It was some country the Park hadn't bought. It was right up Tornillo Creek, [Texas] from Hot Springs, [Texas]. Have you been to Hot Springs?

M: Yes.

L: Well, you cross that creek with that big circle bridge on it. Well, it was right up that creek about five or six miles up there. The Park didn't own that. It belonged to some fellow that had a bunch of goats in there and everything. The Park later bought it, but at the time they didn't have it. There's a world of that weed up there...a world of it.

M: This would have been in the late 1940s when you're talking about?

L: Yeah. I imagine that would be about [19]41 or [19]42 because right after that I went to work for the Highway Department. I was living in the Park then. I went to work for the Highway Department in [19]40 and we moved down there. That was in 1940 when that old boy was making that wax. He didn't stay there very long.

M: I understand that you became a river rider in the 1950s.

L: Yeah, it was about [19]47...the last part of [19]46, [19]47, and part of [19]48. I moved up here and went to work for Gage.

M: So you lived in the Park?

L: I was in the Park in the last part of [19]46. I signed up for river riding and they moved me about twenty-five miles, I guess, up the river from Hot Springs. I stayed up there about a week to ten days when the boss came by and moved me back to Hot Springs.

M: Mr. Lee, why was the government hiring river riders? What was a river rider?

L: Well, I had to kill a few cows and everything. I decided there wasn't very much. We had to pack...wear our pistol. We had a badge. We were just like, more or less, a customs officer.

M: What was the need for river riders? Was there a problem with livestock?

L: Yeah. It was cattle crossing, coming out of Mexico with hoof-and-mouth disease. They didn't want to get it in Texas, you see. The State had river riders even down in Mexico checking the cattle. Hoof-and-mouth disease, which along the river there wasn't none of it, because nothing but a cloven-hoofed animal would have it. A horse wouldn't have it, nothing like that. A cloven-hoofed would have it, but it was in a country where it's damp, you know, lots of moisture. That was the reason it was way down in Mexico. Along the border they never did find any of it.

M: But, nonetheless, they hired river riders to ensure...

L: The State fixed it because they were shipping cattle out of Mexico into the States. Then a lot of the Mexicans would move

up to the border, which they could have gotten it that way. We had to pack a Winchester and a pistol all the time. I had thirteen miles that I had to ride every day by horseback...up that river and back down it seven days a week. When I moved to Hot Springs...in nine months I never did come to town or nothing. I stayed right there. I made my ride every day for nine months. My wife would go to town, but I never did. I really liked it. It was a good-paying job. It paid real good.

M: You said you signed up in El Paso. Was that where the State was hiring river riders?

L: Yeah, that's where I signed up. In El Paso.

M: What agency hired you? Who did you work for?

L: Well, all I know was the fellow that I signed up with, his name was Redmond. He was a State man and that's all. I signed up with him and they took my fingerprints and everything. I never did seem him after that. In two years I never did see him.

M: So they made you, in effect, a law enforcement officer to enforce livestock...

L: They had to check me whether I was a *bandito* or what, you know. It was a good job. I really enjoyed it because I could fish up and down that river. In the Park, of course, you weren't allowed but two throw lines to the person. And two hooks on each line was all that you were allowed. Of course, where I rode the river you never did see anybody. Of course,

I had different lines hidden all up and down the river.

M: Did you catch a lot of catfish?

L: A lot of hooks. Then I had an old park ranger who lived at Boquillas, [Texas]. That's right below Hot Springs. Of course, I knew him. He used to be a Texas Ranger.

M: What was his name, Mr. Lee?

L: Glascock. Henry Glascock. I called him Hank. Everybody called him Hank. I knew him for years. Of course, old Hank, I'd get at him. You weren't allowed to say, "No bait," nothing like that. He'd come up to Hot Springs and I'd say, "Hank, you got any bait?" "No. I thought maybe you had some." I'd say, "Oh, I've got a good saying, but I ain't got nobody to help me." "Well, by golly, I'll help you." And he'd go down there to the river and we'd see some minnows and he'd get in his car and go back to Boquillas.

He had a throw line down there right above Boquillas under a bluff. You'd climb down onto that bluff and go out on a ledge and just throw a line out. There's a deep hole of water there. So I went down there one evening and I didn't know he had his line there, but I found that throw line. It was more like a trout line. It had eleven or twelve hooks on it. You just drop it off that bluff, you know. I baited it all up and hung it off of that bluff, came back up to Hot Springs, and there he was. He just sat there- he had a little store, he and his wife- and I got to talking to him. I said, "Boy, I found a little hole of water down the river. I found

a throw line. It must have been somebody's trout line that had it hidden." He looked right funny and directly he said, "You leave that line alone. That belongs to me." (chuckles) We got along real good.

Ross Maxwell, he was the superintendent. Well, I got along with him fine. I had to watch them little Rangers that would move in, you know, working. I had to watch them. Of course, old Ross and them could cover up for me so far, but I couldn't afford do something I wasn't supposed to do right out in the open.

M: Ross Maxwell was the first superintendent?

L: Yeah. He was the superintendent down in the Three C camp. He sure was a nice fellow. I was working on the highway in the Park when he made it a park. The Three C camp was already there. Ross was working there for the Three C. The Park bought all the land.

M: That would have been in 1944 or before?

L: I guess along about then when the Park first went to work. That Three C camp was there several years before they made it a Park because the fellow I was working for on the ranch, when they moved in, he furnished him a truck. Everybody in this neck of the woods, you know, had a truck, but they couldn't move them in.

M: As a river rider, you mentioned you had to shoot some cattle. Can you tell me of that experience?

L: That belonged right across the river. I knew the old Mexican

that owned them. I went across the river and told him, "Do not let them come across." You know, he had a bunch of kids. He didn't have to let them come over. But the old Mexican had just been there all of his life and he couldn't believe there was such a thing as somebody making him keep his stuff on the other side of the river when he wanted them over here. Of course, there was a big Johnson grass field on this side and he dragged them old cows over and let them graze. I told him, "Don't bring them over here. Come over here and cut all that grass you want and pack it over there and let them eat it over there. Don't let them come over here." Oh, he wouldn't do it. He just wouldn't do it, but them Mexicans knew. You see, we had certain hours we had to ride. In other words, I'd leave in the morning at six o'clock and I wasn't supposed to be back until 1:00 p.m. Then I had a partner that left camp at 1:00 p.m. and went up the river and he didn't get back until 7:00 p.m.. Well, that day when I killed the cows, it was in the evening. Like, I'd ride that evening; one day I'd ride in the morning, next day I'd ride in the evening. Well, there was another river riders' camp thirteen miles to the end of my ride and then there's about two miles all around the mountain there where this other fellow was. Sometimes I'd go up and see how he was making it and I'd be late coming back. And them Mexicans, of course, I guess they'd seen that I'd already come back and they'd missed me. But when I came back I met them cows right in my trail and there were some

soldiers, Mexican soldiers. I noticed them sitting on top of a hill right across the river watching me. Of course, they knew that old Mexican hadn't got his cows and, of course, they saw that and they knew I was going to kill them. Sure enough, I did. That old Mexican, he never did show up on my side of the river after that.

In later years he moved into Marathon and worked on the Gages'. I was working for Gage running their sheep outfit down south. And that old boy that was running the cow outfit had hired him to cook for them. He knew him all of his life and he hired him to cook for them. I'd go up out there and he wanted me... . Couldn't drive, that old Mexican couldn't, so they wanted him to take them lunch behind them mountains in there. He'd call me on the radio and ask me if I'd come and haul lunch from the old Mexican around there. I drove out up there and there the old Mexican was. I asked him if he had any more cattle. He wouldn't talk to me.

M: He wasn't too friendly to you?

L: He hadn't forgot and he didn't want to talk about it.

M: What did the State provide you as far as equipment? Did they provide you horses and firearms?

L: You had to furnish your own horse and they allowed you so much money a month to feed them. For fact, I had to have two, sometimes three, because a horse gets jaded when you ride them everyday. They burn out on one kind of feed and then you've got to get another one. It was really bad on horses.

I had an old gray horse that could nearly talk. I had three kids and one of them was old enough for school. My wife taught him his first year and the next year the other one come up for school, so she'd come to town. The little girl, she wasn't old enough when she came to town to go to school. Late one evening I turned that old gray horse out. He couldn't run at all. Well, I heard that little girl hollering and screaming. I looked out and that old horse had her by the hair of the head just walking along. She was trying to run and holler and that old horse was just walking on. He was doing it for meanness, you know. I hollered at him and he turned her loose. She came running into the house.

We had a dog. We weren't supposed to have dogs in the Park. When the Park rangers would drive up my wife would holler at that dog and that dog would go in the house and get under the stove. He'd hide. When he was a pup he'd go down and play with that horse. That horse would get him by the hide and hold him. That dog would just holler and scream and kick and that horse would just stand there like he was asleep holding that dog up in the air.

M: What was the horse's name? What did you call him?

L: Solis. I'd turned back right down the river from the Solis place. It's a Mexican name.

M: Would that would be C-E-L-E-S-E?

L: I don't know just how you spell it in Mexican.

M: Close.

L: But that old horse was just like a scared nigger boy. I'd go up the river and there'd be green grass growing. I'd get off of him, unsaddle him, and put him around out of my sight. I'd get in the shade and put him out and let him graze. You know, he wouldn't graze. You'd hear him coming back. He'd come back and stand right over me. He'd never move. He'd stand right over me until I'd have to get up and saddle him up and go on up the river.

M: You said there were thirteen miles to the end of your ride. So each day you went twenty-six miles?

L: Each day. Thirteen up and thirteen back.

M: So you had to make about two miles an hour?

L: Well, it all depended. I had seven hours to kill and it really didn't make any difference where I killed them. I'd jog along and if it took me eight hours, well, I'd spend eight. I never would come in early, but I always make my seven hours. A lot of times I'd spend eight because I'd go around to the other camp and maybe stay there a couple of hours drinking coffee with the fellow talking to him.

End of Tape One

Side A

Beginning of Tape One

Side B

L: On that job you weren't insured or nothing. Most oil jobs, you know, you're insured. But you weren't insured if the horse fell way or something like a Mexican shot you. That was just tough luck. You were just on your own.

M: Were you ever shot by anyone?

L: No, I never did. When I killed them cows my boss had to send another fellow up the river with me. He wouldn't let me ride by myself. It didn't bother me. You couldn't get him to go across that river. I'd go across the river. Well, most of the Mexicans I knew.

M: The cattle you shot, they did not have hoof-and-mouth disease, but you still had to shoot them because they kept...

L: No, they did not. Yeah, I still had to shoot them. You had to shoot them then burn them. If you didn't burn them the Mexicans would come across and butcher them right behind you.

M: You lived at Hot Springs. Did the State provide the house for you at Hot Springs?

L: No, I had to rent. I rented the house. I had a little rock house up on the hill. I think it fell down now.

M: There's still some walls up. There's no roof.

L: There's no roof? Well, that's the one we lived in. There was a fireplace and we had a big screened porch. It was really nice.

M: Did you rent that from Maggie Smith?

L: Yes, old Maggie. Well, more people stayed there back then. A lot of the mail was run every Monday. That's how we got groceries. The old man that ran the mail house- I knew him all my life- he lived here in Marathon. If we needed anything we just gave him a bill and he'd get it at the store and bring it out Monday morning.

M: What was his name?

L: Ed Hancock. He carried the mail for years down there.

M: How did he deliver the mail? Did he have a truck?

L: He used to. He had a big truck and he'd haul freight out of the Park- it wasn't a park then- but he'd haul for them ranchers. A lot of them had goats. They'd share and he'd haul a mohair and everything. When he'd take the mail down he'd haul a mohair back. In later years he got just a three-quarter ton pickup and he'd load it up. He had two small trailers. Of course, I'd buy horse feed, hay, and oats and then buy a big bill of groceries. We'd usually buy a month's supply of groceries from him. He'd have to unload that.

M: Did he charge you to deliver from Marathon?

L: Yeah. He'd charge so much. Well, the stores usually paid it. That's the way...he'd just haul it.

M: Then you'd pay the store?

L: And the store would pay it.

M: May I ask how much you made as a river rider? How much did the State pay?

L: Well, if you didn't ride Saturday and Sunday, if you rode forty hours, you wouldn't make very much, but if you put in Saturdays and Sundays then they'd pay overtime on those two days. I rode every Saturday and Sunday. That would usually make my check pretty big, but they didn't pay...just for five days a week. A lot of the old boys would just ride five days a week and they'd come to town. They didn't stay. They just didn't ride the river because they didn't make no money they said, but I owed a bunch of money and I had to make some money somehow, so I rode Saturdays and Sundays and all.

M: Do you remember how much you made a month, approximately?

L: I'd usually get a check that paid twice a month. For fifteen days it would run me usually two hundred and forty or something like that...for fifteen days.

M: So you made about four hundred and fifty dollars a month, five hundred dollars a month?

L: Something like that with my horse feed and everything.

M: That was a lot of money then.

L: Yeah, because you couldn't get a job on a ranch. Well, two dollars a day was what they paid on a ranch. (Mr. Lee's responds to an unidentified person's question) An old boy in there killed another one and another one's brother shot him and he shot one of the brothers. The man that shot him was a river rider and his brother...both of them were river riders. This other boy was working for a fellow.

M: How many people worked for the Border Quarantine Project as

river riders in this area that you know of?

L: Well, on my route from El Paso down to New Braunfels...at the Pecos high bridge they had a river rider camp there. He didn't have to ride nowhere. He just had to sit there. It was just pitiful, because it's right...the bridge is on the Pecos and right down the river is Mexico on the Rio Grande, so he had to watch that part of the river. He'd just sit there. He didn't ride or nothing. And, oh, they were fixed. They'd take down here at Black Gap- well, let's see. I was in the Park; two from Castolon, [Texas] down to where I was and two at Castolon; two right below, that's four; and two at the Woodson place- that's where I went from when I first went there- there were two fellows there, that's six; there were two at Solis, that was eight; and there were two at Hot Springs, that's ten; and one at Boquillas because you just went from Boquillas down to that shut-in. I rode that a while and there was no way you could put in seven hours unless you just hid and slept. And it was too hot to sleep. That old boy, he just rode that one. He didn't have a mile hardly to ride. He'd camp there at Boquillas on this side of the river and just went over that little pass down to that shut-in...Boquillas Canyon.

M: So there were ten or eleven on that distance? About seventy miles?

L: On that distance from Castolon I'd say that it would, maybe, be thirty miles.

M: Thirty miles that you would patrol?

L: Us ten were on it. And then they came over the mountain from Boquillas, they had two more, and then in each canyon down there, there'd be two. At the mouth of the Maravillas there'd be two that just went on down the river like that.

M: So there were a lot of you employed by that project?

L: There were a lot of us employed.

M: You worked for the project for two years. Did you find a better job or did the project end?

L: Well, all the kids had to go to school and I had to move away from the Park, so I left river riding because I would have had to have run two camps and pay house rent. I didn't own a house up here then, so I got a job from Gage.

M: Do you know when the Quarantine Project ended? How long did they have river riders in the Park?

L: Well, I think they still have them...some of the big bosses and some of the river riding bosses. I had a river rider boss that was just a river rider when I went to work. He got promoted to boss and then he had a brother who was a boss. They're both dead. There was another boy I knew that was promoted to boss and he lives in El Paso now. He still has something to do with it, but I think it's in an automobile. I think most of it now is in automobiles.

M: So there are still, to your knowledge, river riders in modern times?

L: Yeah. They tried to put them in- cut it down just to the

bosses- into customs, so they watch for horses that cross the river and stuff like that. They don't have to throw anything back across or kill nothing but, like, some of the ranchers along the border smuggle Mexican horses across the river. Well, they catch them, kind of like customs.

M: Was smuggling a problem at the time you rode the river? Did people smuggle?

L: Well, yeah. It went on then but, of course, at the time I could catch a fellow like that, but it didn't mean anything.

M: What would they be smuggling?

L: Well, the only thing they'd smuggle when I was there would be meat and stuff. They'd butcher it and sell it. They'd have customs, of course. There were a few custom officers there that were really in customs. They'd watch for smuggled horses or anything like that, but I'd throw fifteen or twenty head of horses across back into Mexico every day. I'd have to make a report on it, but it didn't amount to anything. But they made you make a report. Every week you turned in your report: how many rides you made, how many cows you killed, how many horses you threw across. A lot of that kind of stuff was foolish because there wasn't a law against it. A Mexican's horse that lived right on the border would come across. They'd done it all their lives. Some of the big shots would try to make a big to-do about it, but I never would. I told him, "It's none of your business and none of mine. I don't know why I would want to jump on some poor old Mexican because his horse come

across the river."

M: Did the Park Service help you in doing your job?

L: If the cows came across I'd have to do something about it.

M: What about the Park Service? Did they work with you?

L: No. They watched all the time- you couldn't even build a fire- the Park Service. (chuckles) A lot of cane thickets up and down that river. That cane...we had to ride the river as close to it as we could get. There were places on my ride that me and my partner... . I had a big folding knife. The thing closed up and it was about that long (indicates dimensions) when you opened it.

M: About a foot long?

L: We'd cut that cane with it and we'd have to make a trail through that cane. It would come up over your horse. You were on horseback. You'd ride in there and there would just be a lane through there...cut cane, cut cane, cut cane. And we'd find a patch of dry cane...it would burn when we set it on fire. The Park finally got so bad and raised so much trouble that I had to quit.

Maggie was running that store. Rattlesnakes by the jillion were living in that cane, you know. She had people that stayed in that cabin. Right around the point from that cabin under the bluff there was a cane thicket and people would go up through there fishing. If they could find a hole to see the water they'd fish. They were always killing a rattlesnake. One morning I started out and Maggie stopped me-

I was on horseback- and said, "Will you do me a favor?" I said, "Well, if I can." She said, "When you go around the point there I'm going to give you some matches." You see, I chewed tobacco. I never did pack a match because those Rangers were always jumping on me. Somebody would start a fire and they'd think that it was lit by me, so I wouldn't pack a match. I'd say, "Well, I chew tobacco. I don't pack no dang match." She told me, "Throw a match off of that bluff into that cane ever so far." So I did. I went around, struck those matches, and threw them off of that bluff. I went up on the river and, boy! I got way up there and I looked back and it looked like the world was burning down there. You couldn't go nowhere, rather than get into that bluff.

All the Park Rangers and everybody was there. Maggie said that one of them- of course, one of them fellows lived in Alpine. I knew him. He said, "That's old Guy setting those fires." Maggie said, "I'll bet you five dollars it ain't. He left early this morning by horseback and he ain't come in yet. He don't even pack a match." I came in and they sure had figured it being me. (chuckles) Maggie was holding up for me. I wish you could have met her. She was a real cutter, that old woman was.

M: What brought her to this country? How did she get the store from the Langford family?

L: How did she get it? Well, she came from Uvalde, [Texas]. She first started in Uvalde. Her first husband died in El Paso

and she married a fellow by the name of Smith and moved back to Uvalde. Then she moved out here and they had a little store down there on the side of the road in the Park. Ms. Daniel carried the mail and everything in Boquillas and they had the Daniel Farm. They hadn't sold it to the Park. She sold the farm and left and Maggie got the mail-carrying job and also got the concessionaire at Hot Springs.

M: So she didn't own the property? She just rented it from the Park?

L: No, she didn't own. Well, as long as Ross Maxwell was there, it was alright. She sold wax, too. They'd bring it to her across the river. Then the river rider, my boss, he boarded room there with her and stayed there. I don't know how long he lived there...boarded and had a room there in Hot Springs. Then he got that boss job and he went to turn her in for buying wax out of Mexico. He'd get up there and hide and try to catch her smuggling something. That old woman wasn't smuggling nothing. And you couldn't, of course. She'd been right there in the store.

She had her way with them Mexicans. Now those Mexicans would do anything for her and she'd do nearly anything for them. She'd go across there and doctor them, go to their dances and marry them, and everything else over there.

M: What was she? A justice of the peace?

L: She acted alright in Mexico. Like an old boy I was raised with; he was drunk there in Boquillas and there were two who

were going to get married. He said he could marry them. He got somebody who got a Sears and Roebuck catalog. He married them Mexicans. (chuckles)

M: I guess that's because there were no priests in Boquillas.

L: They never knew the difference. They went off as happy they could be. That old boy married them.

M: What was the feeling of people that had sold their ranches to the Park Service? Were they happy or satisfied?

L: Most of them, yeah. There were a few that weren't, but I think they finally, all of them, agreed. There was one or two that had a pretty good bunch of land, but most of the ranchers in the Park didn't own but a section or two. And they just used all of it. It really didn't make that much of a difference.

M: So most of the land they ran their livestock on was what, school land or state land?

L: Yeah, state land. You take the Burnam Ranch. I think the Burnams' owned about three sections. They had a big fine home. They never did have too many cattle. Mrs. Burnam taught school. She taught school until she died up here. They'd take in hunters and they'd hunt there in the Park and charge the hunter. Really, if the hunter would object to it he wouldn't have to have paid them at all because they'd have to survey their three sections off to find where it was cornered.

One fellow had a little place called the Grapevine Ranch.

He never had cattle. He had a bunch of old mares, wild mares. They'd run all over the Park. Where we were living, on the Pope Ranch this side of the Persimmon Gap, a lot of those mares would come straight up here and get on us. He didn't have land, never did. It was all inbred, but that was the way they all ranched. A lot of them wouldn't have a section. A lot of them would just have, maybe, so much land. They'd have a house built on it and they'd live there. Of course, nobody said anything because their neighbors lived over two or three miles away. That's all we had and that's the way it worked.

M: The Park Service says that when it took over the area the ranchers had overgrazed the land and, in some cases, it still hasn't recovered.

L: Really, nobody ever complained down there unless it would be a watering... . Now, some of those places that didn't have wells, they'd have some mules and build a dirt tank. Well, if you lived there a mile or so, you'd turn a bunch of cattle loose on your little place and they all would come over here and went to drinking that water. Well, that's what would usually stir up stink.

M: Did ranchers overgraze Big Bend...as an experienced livestock man?

L: No. Big Bend now...if there's anything to overgraze in that Big Bend would be river cane up and down that river. You can't even see the river now. When I rode the river there were a few places where you couldn't see the river. I blame

the Park for that. I sure do. I think the Park ought to do something about that river cane because there's a world of people that go and visit that Park that want to see the river. There's places where you can't even walk to it on account of that river cane. Hot Springs is nearly that bad. You can't hardly... . Like where the spring used to be and where the cabins are you can get there pretty good. Then on below there where there used to be another spring down there below Hot Springs it would just boil up out of the ground. Just a big sand hole. When I was a kid we used to go down there and camp. An old fellow and his boy...they lived up here and I used to go to school with his boy. When school was out the old man took his baths and he'd take us down there and stay twenty-one days. We'd roam up and down the river. We were just kids. We'd roam up and down the river. That big old hole was about this deep. (indicates dimensions)

M: Waist deep?

L: Yeah. We'd jump in it...the water boiling. That's wonderful water. That's the best drinking water in the world. If you get a water bag and hang it up at night, let it get cool, it's sure good water.

M: So because of your experience as a young man down there you knew the area real well when you went to work as a river rider?

L: Yeah. They had a well at Hot Springs and I'd pack water from the springs to drink. In the Tornillo Creek run we'd wash.

I'd pack it out of that creek, but we'd drink out of that. I'd pack it from Hot Springs, but kids would go down there and they'd spit in that well and everything. I just couldn't drink it. It wasn't very sanitary with them kids all up there; playing, looging, spitting in it. But that hot water down there where it would come out...that spring is something else. I've been going there ever since I was a little kid. After school would turn out we'd go down there.

While we were living there there was a couple that brought their wife's mother down there and camped. They had to pack her to the springs in a sore-bottom chair. Those two men would get that old woman in that chair and then pick up that chair and pack her. They'd camp right in front of the store down there. In about a week those two women would walk that old woman down there. That's how sweating out that stuff would have.

When I went to El Paso to sign up I caught the train here. The passenger train came through here at about two o'clock in the morning. I got on it and I bought a round-trip ticket. I was going to come back the next morning. It didn't have heat. The heat had messed up on it and there'd come a snow. And I, like everybody on there, froze to death. I got the awfulest cold. Of course, after I signed up I came back here and move right on down the river. And boy! I was nearly dead for about a week until I moved to Hot Springs. I told Maggie, "I'm gonna crawl into that hot water tonight after

everybody goes to bed." Because there was people, you know, taking baths, you couldn't hardly get time to bathe in the daytime. You had to have an hour. You know, I got rid of that cold in no time. I stayed there two years and never did have a cold. That's the best water in the world. The Park tore their house down. It's just a place, I guess, you might wash your feet in it now.

End of Tape One

Side B

Beginning of Tape Two

Side A

M: Particularly during the summer when it was so hot, did you have to carry a lot of water on horseback?

L: I had a quart canteen that I put on my saddle. I'd leave the house with it. I'd fill it full of cool water out of a water bag. Then in hot summertime, two or three miles up the river, there was another hot spring that blew out of the ground and run into the river. I'd have to stop there. I'd drink all that quart canteen of water and I'd refill it. It was one of them little army canteens. I'd fill it and wet it good and tie it onto my saddle. By the time it dried up it would be pretty cool. I'd usually make the ride and come back to that

spring. Then I'd make it from there back to the house.

I had the Winchester on my saddle and you'd gall the horse...your saddle would with all that load on him. I hated to pack a big load on my horse because it would sweat with that weight on him and it would gall him.

M: You said you also carried a handgun all the time?

L: All the time.

M: What type of handgun did you carry?

L: I had a .38-.44 pistol and a .30-.30 Winchester.

M: A Smith and Wesson pistol?

L: Yeah. Smith and Wesson.

M: If you were riding everyday for nine months or so for those two years how did your family celebrate Christmas and Thanksgiving? Did you stay in Hot Springs during the holidays?

L: There was no holiday. I'd ride every day. I'd ride the river and I had to pack that pistol because one day I didn't take my Winchester and I came back in that evening and there was a bigshot from El Paso there. He saw that I didn't have my Winchester and, boy, he wrang me out! He said that whatever I'd done to not go without that Winchester... . Of course, I could kill a cow with that .38 pistol. That was all I was worried about. I could shoot that pistol better than he thought I could I imagined.

M: What did Mrs. Smith sell in her store? If you sent to town for groceries once a month did she have any groceries?

L: If you ran out of beans you could buy beans, but she just kept flour...like that. She'd just keep the smallest little bags she could buy because them Mexicans would just usually buy all of her flour. Like, they would buy nothing but a twenty-four pound sack. And if they ran out of that they'd usually just buy a ten-pound bag or a five-pound bag, something like that. Mostly they bought whole corn and ground it up to make their tortillas. They didn't use much flour, but I'd order my flour from town and then when I'd get the load I'd order some more, but if I ran out I'd buy a little bag, something like that. You could buy canned tomatoes, canned lunch meat, and stuff like that.

M: Did you pack a lunch with you when you rode the river?

L: No. I never did. See, I'd come in and leave at 6:00 a.m. and ride until 1:00 p.m. Well, if I was back by 1:00 p.m. I'd just... . If I got in at 2:00 p.m. I'd eat at 2:00 p.m.

M: Did you ever have an experience of getting caught in bad weather? Did you ever have to stay out overnight?

L: No, I never did have to stay out at night, but I had some bad weather...rains. A lot of places on that river where the river comes up you've got to go way around where it backs into them draws or where it runs into... . We'd cross right close to the river, but when it backs up it's just old loose mud. You'd bog a horse down in there. I'd have to go around that. Then it snowed a time or two. That was quite a surprise down on that river...waking up and it would be snowing. I had to

make my ride and it was really cold. I've had some big rains catch me out like that.

M: What about wildlife along the river? Was there a lot of...

L: Very few, very few deer. I bet you on that thirteen miles that I rode the river, I imagine in the two years there, I'd say three deer is all I've jumped coming to that river for water from the Chisos Mountains there. The fellows up above me on that ride, they'd seen a panther or two, but I never did see that. Cows and stuff like that I would. A lot of them Mexicans eat them deer. That was one thing because there wasn't a law. Then them Mexicans were coming across and killing a deer. Them Mexicans would eat the deer. They'd done it all their lives, you know. Then there was quite a few deer way back up towards the Chisos Mountains, but they'd never would come down towards the river because there was water up there in the Chisos, springs, and stuff like that.

M: You said early that you came to this area in 1916?

L: [19]16, yeah.

M: Do you recall much as a child about the Mexican Revolution?

L: Very little. All I remember much about it is that down at the ranch we had then the Texas Rangers riding horseback all the time. When they came from the river into town they had a pack mule. They'd pack a load of groceries to go back on pack mules. They'd stay all night with us. I remember that.

M: At the Pope Ranch?

L: At the Pope Ranch, yeah. They'd stay all night with us

because I remember as a kid looking at them pretty pistols they had. They had some of the prettiest guns I'd ever seen. Them old single-action Colts. That always made me think that a Ranger was the most famous law then. And they were. Most of them Rangers couldn't shoot through that door. That was the funny thing. As I kid, I thought, "Oh boy! I'd hate that thing...to have to be that gun." Well, in later years, we had an old Ranger here. He was a deputy sheriff. And I actually doubt if he could shoot through that door with that danged pistol.

M: What was his name, Mr. Lee?

L: Young. Earl Young. I knew him. He'd stay all night with us at the ranch. His family lived here in town. One of them I knew was John Hollis. He lived here. He was a Ranger and he had another fancy reel, another fancy pistol. Bob Sumrall, he was a Ranger. He had a real fancy pistol. They had the smartest horses I'd ever seen. He'd turn them loose out at the ranch at a trap and he'd walk out in the morning. If they could hear him holler that mule and horse would come to him. They'd come in right to that Ranger. That's something else I thought was real something. Well, I was just an old kid and I really loved horses and things.

M: What was the Ranger's name that could call his horse?

L: Bob Sumrall...that had the horse. Then later years there was a bunch of them that I never did know, but a lot of them old first-go Rangers, back when I was a kid- they were all on

horseback. In later years, of course, they've got Model-T Fords.

M: These Texas Rangers, you talk about their horses and their guns. How did they dress? What did they look like that you remember as a kid?

L: Dress? Well, they usually had on their boots, pant legs down their boot tops, a big wide gun-belt, a pistol hanging on, and they always, of course, had their old .30 army lever-action. That's the kind of rifles they packed. That's a real heavy gun. And if you had to pack one on horseback everyday, well... I'm satisfied that those Rangers didn't cover their ground that they said they'd cover by horseback up and down that river. I think that they, of course, had them pack mules they kept in camp right with them. Of course, they'd have places they'd watch and they'd back away from the river and hide and do most of that. Them old .30 army rifles are real heavy. They're short. They're made to pack horseback in a scabbard, but golly, that old gun is heavy. An old .30-30 is heavy enough if you had to pack it everyday on horseback, but that .30 army, I guess, weighs twice as much as a .30 does, but they're twice as powerful as a .30-.30 is.

M: Were you old enough in 1916 to recall the Glen Springs raid?

L: No. You see, I was born in [19]14.

M: Do you remember the raid at Glen Springs?

L: No, I don't. We were living there at the Pope at the time of the raid at Glen Springs...right after that. I remember my

dad talking about it. And then at night they watched it all around the ranch house because old Pancho Villa- they never did know- raided Glen Springs. That's in the Park now. And that's where the Ranger station wound up being...at Glen Springs. That's something else the Park tore down all of that. And it should've been left there because of the history there. Old Pancho Villa raided Hot Springs. I assume his men did.

M: Glen Springs, right.

L: Glen Springs, I mean. They raided it, some of his men, but old Pancho Villa was mostly at Presidio. Of course, he was all up and down the river.

M: Mr. Lee, we talked for quite a while. Is there anything else you'd like to mention, any other recollection, before we conclude here?

L: No, I've told you about all I can remember, just growing up on that old Pope Ranch in Maravillas. Of course, Estelle's down there. She's always making talk somewhere. Have you met her?

M: Yes, I have.

L: Well, she's always making talk. I was invited to one. She wanted me to come down and tell about my life on the Pope Ranch. Well, I didn't care about that because there wasn't nothing to that as far as I was concerned. I was just raised up there working the cattle and everything on the ranch and them goats. We had a couple of flocks of goats, goat herds, and stuff like that.

- M: Were you ever approached by Ross Maxwell to join the Park Service? Did he ever offer you a job with the Park Service?
- L: Yeah, he offered me one when I was getting ready to leave river riding. He offered me a job and I turned it down. I wish now I had taken it because I could have gotten...I already got the best job he could've given me down there in the Park when I left there.
- M: What kind of job would that have been?
- L: Well, at that time, I could run two or three different kinds of machinery, which that would have been fine by me down there. I've been retired and forgot about the Park now. I wouldn't do it. I didn't...I wanted to come back to ranch life.
- M: Did you think that the Park Service was not your type of work?
- L: No, I didn't. I really didn't. I thought it wasn't my type of work because they restricted. They wouldn't even let somebody burn down a little bush. They wouldn't let you do this. They wouldn't let you do that. Of course, Ross, at the time he offered me a job that Park wasn't worrying me much. Right after he left those Rangers really got slick on there and things like that. Me being an old country boy...I've been down there all of my life doing things I'm big enough to do on that river, you know. We went to the river to fish, my wife and another couple. We camped there at Hot Springs at them cabins. Well, we'd cleaned out one, put out camp in it, but we were sleeping on the porch. They tore it all down now.

That old boy and me been down the river fishing that night and we came in way late and the women-folks have done gone to bed. And we were sitting out there drinking a beer by moonlight and we heard a car coming down. You know, we had that one-way drive coming in there. We were sitting there drinking this beer and this car came down there without any lights. He pulled down there and whipped in front of that cabin and turned his lights on. He got out. He was a really smart little Ranger, you know. He said, "You people know you're not supposed to camp here?" I said, "No sir. We didn't know it. There aren't signs here saying that you're not supposed to." There wasn't nothing there then. The road wasn't even blocked off. Well, it's blocked off now. Then you could drive right down in front of the cabin. He kept on being right smart and he said, "Well, it's against the law to camp here." I said, "Well, that's too bad. I'm not going to move tonight. I'll tell you something else; where I come from there's a law against people driving around over the country with no lights on. I don't believe you're supposed to drive down through this canyon with your lights off." That old boy got in his car and left. I never did see him after that. That's the kind of Rangers they had then. No telling where the little old fellow came from.

M: In your opinion, Mr. Lee, has the Park been good for the Big Bend area, for Marathon and Alpine?

L: Well, I think it has now. Now it has. Back when it first

started I would say no. All the ranchers came here and bought their groceries up here and they were all paying taxes on what little they had. They spent their money up here. When the Park bought all that they moved out. They just stopped that. I mean, it just quit all of a sudden. There were no tourists, either. It's just been in recent years that the tourist trade has really built up that park in Marathon. Now, the tourist trade has really built up Marathon since these fellows bought this hotel here. He predicted that. The fellows that bought that hotel went in there and I swore that he would never make it because he bought the hotel cheap enough...the old building. But lord, he spent a fortune fixing it up. I just couldn't see where he'd ever get his money back. He predicted that the people here wouldn't know Marathon in ten years. I'm about decided that...the way he keeps building and everything. He's really helped Marathon.

M: I'm told that Marathon at one time was quite a booming little town back in the [19]50s or earlier.

L: At one time there were lots of more people here. We used to have horse races right up and down in front of the old brick building on this side of the tracks.

M: On the south side?

L: There used to be horse races there. Old cowboys would come to town on horseback and they'd match a race right up and down that street and things like that. Of course, now you never see a man on horseback anymore. You won't even find a man out

here on a ranch on horseback anymore.

M: Mr. Lee, I've taken enough of your time and I'm going to conclude our interview.

L: Well, I hope you can use what I've told you. (chuckles)

M: We appreciate it very much. Thank you.

End of Interview