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Interview with BLRI Chief of Interpretation Patty Lockamy

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This interview was conducted in Patty Lockamy's office at the Blue Ridge Parkway Headquarters in Asheville, NC. Ms. Lockamy had recently been interviewed for a series on the Blue Ridge Parkway by the Asheville Citizen-Times, so she had been thinking about the kinds of questions that I brought up. The interview was meant to orient the research that I would undertake for the oral history/applied ethnography contract that I was carrying out. I used a Marantz PMD-430, so the sound quality—with the exception of some microphone noise—is excellent throughout.

Philip Coyle: My name is Philip Coyle I teach anthropology at Western Carolina University I have a contract with the Blue Ridge Parkway to do oral history and ethnographic research. Today is Wednesday, January 8th. It is 1:30 in the afternoon and I am sitting here with Patty Lockamy in her office in the Blue Ridge Parkway headquarters in Asheville, North Carolina. Could you please spell your name?

Patty Lockamy: Sure, it's Patty Lockamy. P-A-T-T-Y L-O-C-K-A-M-Y

Philip Coyle: Now you understand more than anybody that this tape will be archived in Blue Ridge Parkway archives. Do I have your permission to put this tape and its transcription in the Blue Ridge Parkway archives?

Patty Lockamy: Yes.

Philip Coyle: And I also give my permission that my words can be used later by the Blue Ridge Parkway. Could you tell me a little about your background?

(013) **Patty Lockamy:** Sure, depending on how far back we want to go. I am a North Carolinian; I grew up in North Carolina. I grew up in Charlotte. I went to a high school called Myers Park High school. When I was pretty early on I had a good idea of what I wanted to do. That I wanted to work for the National Park Service or some organization like the National Park Service. In general that is pretty much what I knew from about the age of 15 on. So when I was in college...or when I was in high school I pretty much directly decided to apply to Western Carolina University, realizing that would put me close to both the Great Smoky Mountains and the Blue Ridge Parkway. So it was kind of a strategic decision on where to go to school. I went there and majored in Earth Science and I minored in Art; while I was there. I was able to pick up some good work during the school year with some professors in the Earth Science Department. Pretty early on in college, I guess it was my second summer I got on with the National Park Service. I was originally offered a job at Cape Hatteras and I accepted it and then they had a hurricane that year and the place that I was suppose to work—this would have been 1979--the place I was suppose to work at was flooded and they called me back and told me I didn't have a

job because the campground is gone. I thought, "there goes my chance to work with the Park Service," and then the next week the Blue Ridge Parkway called and I readily accepted a summertime job and ended up on the Virginia section of park up at Humpback Rocks and James River. I spent the next two summers working that north end; occasionally would up in Shenandoah National Park. Sometime we would switch back and forth so I did a little bit of work up there. The second year I actually stayed out of school for a semester and worked on through about Christmas time. The third year, still in college, I worked on the Rocky Knob section of the park.

I then graduated and then pretty much immediately was picked up permanently by the Park as a General Park Ranger and stationed at the Peaks of Otter. I did just all the things you do as a general Park Ranger--I worked in the campgrounds, I did road patrol, I worked with hunters, I went and got a law enforcement commission so that I had law enforcement authority in the Park. It wasn't a really heavy law enforcement area where I worked, we worked a lot with poachers, with a lot of resource-type violations, but we also did investigate traffic accidents and worked with folks who were injured or hurt in the park. So I did that for probably 3-4 years then became what is called the Assistant District Ranger in that area, where I started supervising the interpretative operations at the Peaks of Otter. I supervised all the summertime people who came up; at that time it was a very busy operation, this would have been about 1985 or 1986. We had lots of staff, college students and teachers who worked in the Park and Peaks of Otter is very busy. I really enjoyed that work. I did that for a couple of years and then I ended up as the Virginia Interpretive Specialist. That was a position that did not supervise but really directed and guided all the interpretive operations in the Virginia section of the park. I was stationed for that at Vinton. That was essentially an acting assignment. The person who was in it was off on some leave and the leave turned into about two years worth of time so I was able to act in that position and function in that position for about two years.

I then left the Park Service to have a child and ended up having two children at the time and it was difficult to work in the 80s and find day-care in a rural area for small children [Laughter] so my husband and I decided that we would move to Charlotte where he took a job as a Geologist. So we moved to Charlotte and I didn't do anything for a couple of years. Gradually I wanted to keep my foot in the door so I went to work for a Science Museum in Charlotte called Discovery Place, and I taught there in the Physical Science Department and did kind of part-time for a year. Then I was hired on contract through Discover Place by the city of Charlotte to open up an environmental education center that had started in Charlotte. The county--Mecklenburg County--had developed this place called Reedy Creek Park and they put an environmental center in the park but they didn't have anybody on their staff to open it. I did that--opened the environmental ed. Center--and then the job I had always wanted came open on the Parkway. My husband had a chance to come to Asheville so I got the position of North Carolina Interpretive Specialist back with the Blue Ridge Parkway.

So we moved back to Asheville. I went back to work full time, well I had already been working full time, but we moved back I went back to work for the Park and worked for seven years in that position. Then I accepted a position called the Chief of Interpretation for the Outer Banks Parks in late 1999 and worked for Wright Brothers, for Fort Raleigh

National Historic Site and for Cape Hatteras National Seashore and did that not for a long time, maybe a little less than two years we were out there. And at that time the parkway started reorganizing and offered me another position to come back here. That brought me to the position I am now, which is Chief of Interpretation for the Blue Ridge Parkway. I have been here for one year and about four or five months, in that position.

P.C: Can I follow up on a couple of things out of that?

P.L: Sure.

P.C: One of the things I would like to follow up on is you said you became interested in this type of work by the time you were 15. Could you speak about that--was there a big event that got you interested or what was it about your childhood or young adolescence that got you interested in this field?

(094) **P.L:** Yeah, you know I have thought about that, and just looking back on where I grew up; I grew up in an old part of Charlotte and lived near a place called the Charlotte Nature Museum. Growing up there all the kids in the neighborhood went over there all the time and just absolutely loved it. I think that that little museum had such an incredible influence, not just on me but all the kids in the neighborhood. When I look at all of us now, because it was a tight neighborhood and we all keep in touch, it is amazing how many people on our street who are the same age as me went into a science field or were attracted to forestry or medicine or earth sciences or some kind of a science field and I am sure the museum had an influence on us. I definitely had an interest in that direction and I think the museum and the activities we participated in over there pulled me a little bit more that way. I was able to volunteer there. I was able to participate in some summer programs. One when I was about 14, it was an expedition thing where we camped all over North Carolina and visited State and National Parks--the Outer Banks, Blue Ridge Parkway, different places throughout the state--camping the whole way and being spoken to by people who worked in those places. I remember just thinking that is what I wanted to do when I am in college. Not only me but a couple of people in that summer venture went into some kind of an outdoor field. And I guess we were probable inclined in that way anyway because we wanted to go on the summer venture. But I think that was important.

I remember when my parents took us to the Blue Ridge Parkway--we went several times when I was growing up--and I remember each time vividly. I remember one time being up around the Mt. Mitchell area on a beautiful day and just being absolutely just almost overwhelmed with what I was seeing when I was about 11 or 12 years old at that time. I remember not being able to stop looking out the window and I remember that to this day that it was some type of calling or inkling or maybe it is just a great memory, but those are the things I remember.

P.C: It's a great connection that now you are involved in these teaching-in-schools things because now you can see a whole new generation come back to that.

(124) **P.L:** Yeah, I think that our Parks-as-Classroom program that we have in the Park is critical to the protection of the Park, to the communities and to what the children in these communities value about the place that they are growing up in. I think it is a really powerful program.

P.C: Then to think one of the things that really got you inspired was that you felt like you could actually go on and have a career. It wasn't just being taught to you, you actually felt that you could become part of it somehow.

(130) **P.L:** Yes, I just knew I could. I don't know how to explain it, but I knew there were summer jobs out there, I knew someone had to get them, and I was going to apply. I remember when I was at Western and the day the person from the National Park Service came to interview us at the employment center--there were a whole bunch of us that went, a line of 20 of us who went to these interviews [Laughter]--and my friends I remember laughed at me because I dressed up. I found a suit, I put it on, I said, "I am getting this job I don't care what it takes." They came in their blue jeans and kind of raggedy... this was back in the late seventies so nobody dressed up and I got the job. So I was glad.

P.C: Another thing I wanted to follow up with is that you talked about how you were a general employee, doing a variety of things. Then you made a transition into interpretation. Can you talk about that transition?

(140) **P.L:** Yeah, sure. Interpretation was always my first love. I did that as a seasonal, gave programs, gave demonstrations. Even as a Generalist Ranger with a protection commission, when I first started out as a permanent I still did interpretation. So it was always a part of what I did. I knew after a while, after doing some exploring, that that was the direction I wanted to go. So as you do when you are in a position, if there is an area you like you tend to do more work in that area and maybe get noticed a little bit more in that area. It was just the right time, I had enough experience and the person who was doing that before left and the door opened and I was able to step in there.

P.C: Did you ever think that you might be more of a research-oriented hard scientist type or did you always feel that you had a direction toward interpretation?

(157) **P.L:** I never really thought about being a full-time scientist. I think I may have had an illusion early on that resource management was more people oriented than it is. I did have a strong interest in resources and how they were managed and participating in some of those studies. I don't think I ever envisioned myself as working in a strict science environment. I was always more bent towards working with the public. Working toward sharing that knowledge of what we were doing with the public because I just believe that is what is going to protect the Parks.

P.C: People are going to...talk about that, protecting the parks.

P.L: Yeah, um... I think that people are very interested in what is going on in the Parks and that the public is very educated and very interested in what we do and their the Parks. They love their Parks and want them protected. I think that the more they think about them, the more they hear about them, and the more they get engaged with what is going on, that that enlivens the natural interest that they have and make them connect with the place. Then, of course, they will want to protect it if they care about it and are connected to it.

P.C: Another thing I wanted to have you elaborate on, if you feel like it is...that you quit to have a child and you have been an employee of the Park Service for 20 some years.

P.L: Yeah, if you counted... but I was gone for four and a half years.

P.C: Would you like to comment on what it is like, or what it has been like, as a woman and as a mother working for the Blue Ridge Parkway?

(179) **P.L:** Yes, I think the people who did the hard work came before me. They were the people in the 60's and early 70's. They kind of paved the way for a lot of this. I remember starting out, even as a Seasonal up in Virginia, people calling us Rangerettes [Laughter] instead of Rangers and we said --oh no, we all do the same work and we all have the same name. We were in the newspaper one time--my Supervisor was the first female permanent Park Ranger on the Blue Ridge Parkway, her name was Nancy Green at the time--and she and I would be out doing our work and people would say "Oh look there's two woman Park Rangers" [Laughter] We were actually in the newspaper one time up in Buena Vista. They thought that this was a very unusual thing. I *never* thought about it as unusual. I just I don't know, maybe I was just naive enough, or if it was just the times...I just never ever considered it usual, it was just what I did and what I was about. I remember when I was expecting my first child--that was the first time in this park that a field ranger had a baby--so people didn't know what to do with me. I thought "well, come on. What's the big deal. This is just a part of life; it happens everyday. This is not 1945; This is 1985," at the time. I had the first maternity uniform in the Park and I remember going to a training up at the Peaks of Otter Lodge on concessions--how you monitor and evaluate a concession facility. There were people there from all over the country and the Superintendent from Big Bend National Park was there. About the third day he came up to me and said "you know, I gotta tell you, this really bugs me, but I have never been to a park before where they let the Rangers go around with their shirttails out." [Laughter] And I remember looking at him and thinking, "is he kidding? No, he's not kidding! Oh, he's got to be kidding..." And then I thought, "he *is* serious." [Laughter] So I said, "well I guess you have never seen the new National Park Service maternity uniform." This was 1985 and he about fell through the floor he was so embarrassed. It was obvious that I was pregnant, I was probably seven months at the time, and it just didn't cross his mind. It never entered his mind. So I guess it was more unusual for some people than it was for me. But the people I worked with--who were mostly men at the time--were great. It just wasn't a big deal.

P.C: Well thanks for talking about your background. I hope I wasn't prying too much. [Laughter]

P.L: I was probably rambling here. [Laughter]

P.C: You were kind of invited into this job, asked to apply, "recruited" as you mentioned to me before and one of the reasons was because of the reorganization of Interpretation here at the Blue Ridge Parkway so maybe you could talk about that.

(225) **P.L:** I was at the Outer Banks and had a very challenging position out there and enjoyed the position. After I had been in it for a little over a year the Parkway started to call and said, "hey, were thinking about this reorganization. We are going to strengthen the interpretation. We're going to pull it out, put it up on its own feet and we need somebody to direct it...would you be interested if we did that?" And of course I would be interested. When they first called I thought they were talking in terms of a couple of years from now, so it ended up happening much faster than that. I was recruited for the position, legally recruited. It was all above board and legal, it could possibly have caused some resentment because I know there are other people across the country who would very much love to be in this position--I have had people tell me that--"Boy how did you get that aren't you lucky to be in that position." It is very flattering and humbling for me that they did recruit me. I doubt that will ever happen to me again in my life. I am trying to savor it and enjoy it and I do feel like I was almost born to do this job so I think I can do it as well as anybody out there. I know the park; that is probably the biggest advantage. This place is a monster. Coming in cold from another place it could take you years to learn all the idiosyncrasies, the history, just even the logistics: where things are at, the visitation trends, all those kinds of things. I think that that was an absolute huge advantage to walk in here and have all that under my belt and be able to pick the operation up and start moving with it.

P.C: I have noticed that the Park Service tends to move people around, sort of like the Catholic Church of old, you know. [Laughter] How long do you expect to be in this job, do you think?

(264) **P.L:** Well, right now, I feel I was born to be doing what I am doing. I plan to be here a good 6 years, which is kind of a minimum time. My children are about the age that in about 6 years they will all be graduated from high school and if we wanted to make a move we could look at it then. The Park Service is a lot better now; typically you apply if you want to move. The whole culture or the Park Service is changing now from what it was maybe 10-15 years ago, when people did move pretty frequently. Now almost 95% of folks are dual career couples. It's not like it was even in the early 70s where Dad could say OK were going to move and everybody moves and Mom takes care of things. The Park Service has finally realized it and the movement is finally slowing down. People are more in a permanent work force. This is important for people in their 30s and 40s. You see a lot of movement in the early years in their 20s and then again when the kids are off in college. My career goals right now...I am leaving that open right now. Sometimes I think I would love to go to D.C. and work on setting national policy at

some point, but really I want to stay here long enough to make a difference, long enough to build this operation into something and then maybe someone else can take and even take it a step further. I don't want to do here what I did at the Outer Banks, which was to just stay a couple of years, start to do something, and then take off and go somewhere else. I really want to make a difference here. I think the 6 years is good for now.

P.C: It is interesting talking to Laura Rotegard, who is a community development person previously to what she is doing now, and she was always saying I needed to talk to people like Bruce Bytner, you know, who came up again and again. These people who have been in one place for many, many years and I think that there is an osmosis and you have to be in a place for a long time before you truly understand it.

P.L: I think there is a lot to be said for stability, and the Park Service is finally realizing that it's not always healthy to just constantly move everyone around. The real stability, if you get out here and talk to some of these maintenance folks who have been here forever, it is amazing what they know.

P.C: Could you actually describe the organizational structure as it was and as it is now?

(305) **P.L:** Yeah. As it was for at least a couple of decades--at least two and a half decades--the Interpretive Operation, which is the programming, the exhibits, the education, pretty much anything to do with day-to-day public contact was supervised by protection people. Initially it was called a generalist management style, where you had a District Ranger who really did come from a background where they had done interpretation, they had done law enforcement, they had done resource management...they were General Park Rangers, which is the way I started out. That was the typical Park Ranger of the 60s a General Park Ranger, so those guy's, mostly guys, were in supervisory positions at the time. They were somewhat effective at being able to supervise all those three functions, but not completely successful. As each of those specialties--resource-management, law-enforcement, and interpretation--began to specialize there was no way, I think, that any one person could keep up with that. Most of the other Parks throughout the system separated off into divisions, where you had a separate division for interpretation, a separate division for resource management and a separate division for law enforcement, and each one had professional managers in each of those disciplines supervising those operations. The Parkway resisted that for years, I think mainly due to budget constraints. Some of it was logistical...the thought of how to manage this huge Park, and to do it with any kind of economic sense. I think that had a lot to do with why they kept things the way they were. More and more and more through the 1990s it was really apparent that it wasn't working. We were one of the last Parks really left that was operating under this old system. When our Superintendent, Gary Everhart, who had been here for years and years, when he retired and Dan Brown came in, I think the time was right for us to take a harder look at ourselves. Gordon Wisinger was here at the time and he felt pretty strongly that we were not getting our "bang for the buck"; the Park wasn't operating as professionally as it could. He really worked hard to make a case for separating the disciplines out and so Dan was agreeable and they did it. That is where we are today. We are pretty young in the interpretive operation. Initially I

was worried that many of these District Rangers who were still in place, that had supervised all of these functions--and we were taking something away from the--and we were worried that there would be some resistance, there could be some hard feelings, but we haven't run into any of that. It has worked very, very well. The way the organization works now is that interpretation functions as a separate component of the Resource Management/Visitor Services Division and I supervise it. We have hired 4 District Interpreters who supervise the day-to-day operations within their district; each of them supervise between ten and twelve seasonal people in the summer, and anywhere from 1 to 3 seasonal people in the winter who do Parks-as-Classroom work. We have a total work force of seasonal folks that will vary from 40 to 50 people each year, depending on the budget. We have 4 District Interpreters who supervise them. We have a staff Interpretive Specialist named Peter Givins who is in Virginia, stationed up in Roanoke. He helps with a lot of the specialty work, the writing, some of the exhibits, planning and design, a lot of the specialty work that needs to be done. He doesn't supervise anymore, because often when you are covered up with supervision you don't have time to do some of the more specialized work; so he really concentrates on that. We now have now a secretarial person who helps with the administration and then I am now the Chief of the Interpretative Operation. We manage a cooperating association, Eastern National, which has another 28 employees who help us operate the visitor's centers. They are a partner organization.

P.C: Can I interrupt you there, this is the end of side one, tape one and then we will get back to this...

[End of side one]

This is the Beginning of side two, tape one of Philip Coyle's—Ted Coyle's—interview with Patty Lockamy at the Blue Ridge Parkway Headquarters on Jan 8th, 2003. And you were just talking about the organization structure in place right now, and you had gone through talking about the different District Interpretive Specialists that you supervise, ending with Peter Givins in Roanoke, and then you were just talking about Eastern National, and your relation to Eastern National.

(438) **P.L:** Eastern National is a partner organization that we work very closely with. They are a cooperating association. They have a total of 28 employees who help us staff the visitor centers...we could not run the park without them. We really consider them part of our staff also. If you put all those people together we have about 80 people providing interpretive services on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Not counting our volunteers, we have another 30-40 out there helping us also. One thing I forgot to mention about the old organization that I think is important to note is that we only had three permanent interpreters in the park for years and years and years, and we were Interpretative Specialists, I was one of them. We had a Park Interpretive Specialist, his name was Phil Nobblit, and then we had 2 State Interpretive Specialists, Virginia and North Carolina...the division that I served in for about 7 years. There was another position added to help supervise operations at the Folk Art Center, Michelle Martaens, so then that added a 4th permanent interpretive position to the park. Out of a staff of 200 permanent

people we had 4, at our max, we had 4 permanent interpretive folks in the park, which is pretty dismal, I think, and our statistics reflected this. When we did our visitor surveys-evaluations in the summer-time 5 years ago, the score that we got when we asked visitors to rate the interpretive services that they saw on the Parkway, we had a 79% approval rate. Last year we had a 97% approval rate. We can't help but think that this reorganization may have had something to do with that. That we are professionalizing what the public gets, what they see, what they experience when they are in the park.

P.C: This is not something that we said we were going to talk about but it is something that came up to me. I was staying at the Peaks of Otter Lodge and do you think that there is any danger of over interpreting the Blue Ridge Parkway?

(463) **P.L:** Hmmm. It's hard for me to imagine right now because we are still trying to build the program, but yeah...That is something that we talk to our interpreters about. When you are standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon and your looking out and seeing that view for the first time and you can't even speak because it is so incredible, it's probable not the best time to go up and start interpreting the Geology of the Grand Canyon to some one. [Laughter] You have those experiences on the Blue Ridge Parkway too. I have been at overlooks where you pull in and a family is just standing there and it is incredible. Maybe there is a raven flying through the air, the wind is just right and the breeze is just right and everything is just perfect. There are moments like that when you don't...the park does its own interpreting, the resource interprets itself. I would see that as a potential danger.

P.C: What I was thinking about at Peaks of Otter was that I could see that when you go stay there and you are in the hotel rooms they have a little book that tells you about the local scene and it's not very historical and it's much more a vacation spot, you know, for a family and it's kind of a mid-priced lodge to stay at and um... then in the gift shop there is a CD that you are suppose to buy, that is an atmospheric CD that you can put in your car as you drive on the Parkway and it's more of a evocative experience that they are going for there rather than any kind of social-historical understanding of the past.

(483) **P.L:** Yeah I think...I guess that it is subjective, too. I guess it depends on what people's interests are. What we try to do at our visitor centers is offer a variety of interpretative items that people can choose from. For instance, at the Peaks of Otter, the Peaks is a very broad kind of a thematic place, there is just about every theme in the park up there. There's natural, cultural, historical, just everything. There's endangered species and so you really can get flooded with information there. It is interesting too, the concessions, it use-to-be that they didn't really offer some of the kinds of things that we offer in our visitor centers for sale. They would not have offered those kinds of audio tours or kind of atmospheric CD's; they would have offered trinkets for people to buy. It has only been in the last few years that I think that they have realized that the public, the clientele that stays at the concessions, many times don't want trinkets, that they really enjoy other things--books about history, books about culture. So they have started offering some of the same items for sale in their gift shops that we are offering in the visitor centers and I think you don't see that anywhere closely than at Peaks of Otter,

where the visitor's center is just a half-mile down the road, some of the same items are being sold.

P.C: What I noticed at Peaks of Otter was that people have a connection to that place and so if there is stuff in the gift shop that can deepen their connection to the place and sort of lock in that identity that they have, it is obviously going to help in preserving the Park, you know.

P.L: That is why we have never minded that sometimes the concession are carrying the same kinds of things that we carry in the visitor centers, even though they compete financially with us to a small extent the overwhelming idea is that we are going to connect people to the Park. If they do that at the lodge or at the visitor center, on the trail to Sharptop, well who cares where that happens, as long as they are connected. We look at them as real partners in interpretation.

P.C: One of the things that you said to me the first time we talked in here was that you saw yourself as a storyteller, do you still stand by that?

P.L: I would think so; I think that all interpreters are storytellers of their Parks...that's what we do.

P.C: So what are the stories that you feel need to be told over the next 6 years or longer...we hope that you stay here?

(513) **P.L:** Well, obviously there are the traditional themes of the park resources which are always important: the endangered species that we have, the high altitude ecosystems that are so fragile, the aquatic systems that we have. The history of the park. How the Parkway was built those kinds of things are always going to be important. Some of the things that I see that are especially compelling now and that we really need to talk about in the next few years are those issues that are very directly affecting the park. Air quality is definitely one of those issues. You read about it in the paper all the time but if you live here you know that the views are disappearing. We are looking at why...there are a lot of studies going on as to why, but it is just really important that we understand why and that we try to have other people understand that also. Maybe then we can do something about it. If we lose the views along the Blue Ridge Parkway we essentially lose the Park. We don't want to scare people off from coming here even though the views really are not as good as they were 15-20 years ago. Even 10 years ago. They are not nearly as good as they were. At the same time we want people to understand what is happening--what the threat is. Adjacent land development is another issue. View sheds and what is happening to the development right along the Parkway. That umm... is another way that we could lose the Park, I think if you talk with some people who might say we have already lost the Park in a couple of areas because of the adjacent land development that has changed these traditional agricultural scenes, scenes that 50 years ago nobody could ever imagine that there would be a subdivision where this beautiful farm field was but it's now absolutely very realistic and we are losing the Park in sections and so we need to talk about that as much as we can. We need to concentrate on that and not just with visitors

to the park but members of the community and with zoning boards and with leaders in the community and just everywhere we can have people understand the value that we are losing and how quickly that this resource is being lost with development. So there is that and I think that is very important.

We need to broaden our stories. We've concentrated, for the last 60 years, we focused on one group of people who lived in the southern Appalachian Mountains, the old Scotch-Irish mountaineer who was very rugged and independent and was able to conquer anything in his path and very humble and lived in these very scenic quaint kind of places. There is such a larger story out there that we have neglected to tell and frankly that we don't know a lot about. We need to work with researchers. We need to work with universities. We need to try to get all this knowledge that we can of other people who lived in the communities, who contributed to the history of the area, from the Native Americans on through various cultures that have lived in the mountains. The African Americans, the different European groups, not just the Scotch-Irish people, but French, and the Germans, and the Melungeons...just everybody who has contributed to this area and to get off of this idea that it was just this one group who settled the region. That all history began about 1850, which is how we tended to interpret it in the park and that people did nothing but make baskets and dip candles and things like that ...but that is the way for years that our interpretative programs were. We thought there was nothing greater you could do than learn how to weave a basket or dip a candle [Laughter] and we did it at the Cone Estate, we did at Humpback Rocks, we did it anywhere where we had any kind of cultural site, it didn't matter what it was, we were weaving baskets and dipping candles and we have got to get away from that and really look at a more complete story, a whole story. And educate ourselves and better educate the public about the region. I think it's more than what we need to do, it is a real responsibility that the Park has.

P.C: We could talk about some specific areas like the music center for example. You know, I have an interest in this because I am supposed to be going to Sparta and Galax over the next few months and do you have thoughts about that?

(571) **P.L:** Well, the music center is just fantastic. I think that we are in a very historic time right now. That we will see that place grow to be one of the attractions in the country. What is happening up there is incredibly significant and we are really grateful to people like Joe Wilson, to Gary Everhart, the former superintendent, and too many other people who worked to try to make that happen. I am lucky enough to be here now while it is happening and developing. What we have got up there right now is that phase one is finished and we have an amphitheater that just opened this summer. We have restrooms and what we call a luthier shop where people are going to make instruments someday, but right now we have turned that into a small visitor's center just to serve people out of. The support that we are getting for that place, the connections that are being made to that place, are already starting to happen. Our partner is National Council for Traditional Art, they are a great bunch of people, very knowledgeable group of people. I don't think we could ask for a better group of people to work with on trying to get the right performers in there. What we want to showcase are performers who play music that originated from

this area. Whether that is someone like Ricky Skaggs who is very famous, or Doc Watson, or other people like the Barr family or the Appalachian Mountain Girls who are from the Galax community. I think we are going to bring all that together at that site and it is going to be very, very significant. We will begin construction on phase two this spring--May or June, which will include an interpretive center, so I am able to work with that. We're working with the National Council for the Traditional Arts, I will be working with them to make what I hope will be a very credible interpretative center up there that will highlight the history associated with how music began in this area, where some of the influences came from, how instruments are made and even how we might expect things might progress in the future, as well as the influence that it has had on the rest of the country...so it's going to be a lot of fun. I just feel so lucky to be here right now while that's happening.

P.C: It is almost overwhelming the amount of great music that has come out of that region. Anybody who likes music is going to be completely taken with that and then driving along the Blue Ridge Parkway to get to it is going to be a great thing. Um... you were mentioning that Houck Medford is coming at 3:00 and so that would be a segue to talk about the museum--the Mineral Museum.

(608) **P.L:** The Minerals Museum, the Museum of North Carolina Minerals, is a project that we are right in the middle of, as I speak. In fact my phone rings about every ten minutes about the Minerals Museum. Another great project that was a museum that was one of the first major visitor centers and museum centers on the Parkway, built in 1956. It was state of the art at the time, wonderful exhibits, schools came from everywhere, people came from everywhere to see this. That kind of lasted all through the 60's and even into the early 70's, but some time in the 70's that began to...the exhibits began to get old, people stopped coming and until the mid 90's there were no school groups coming to the museum to see those exhibits, they were so out of date that they were absolutely incorrect. We were able to obtain some funding with some partners, the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation is one of those partners--Houck Medford is the director of the foundation--with the state of North Carolina, and Mitchell County, we obtained some transportation enhancement money for the T21 grant system and ultimately we had close to a million dollars to re-do that facility: to put an addition on to it, to make the restrooms more modern and larger, pretty much re-do the whole place. The exhibits are under fabrication right now. Again we will tell a more complete story about the technicalities of geology and mountain building and mineralization and how all that is special to this region, and occurs in this region, but also the history of mining and the economic importance of mining and minerals to this region and to North Carolina. We are pretty excited; we have a company called Howard Revis Designs, from Washington D.C., who has helped us design the exhibits. They are a great firm, they are right now working on the Museum of the Native American, up in D.C. so...pretty good firm, we feel like we are going to have some first class stuff there...and we have engaged the help of universities, Western Carolina has helped with those exhibits, Appalachian State, UNCA here in Asheville has helped. The state geologist, Carl Merchad and Mark Carter, who work with the North Carolina Geologic Survey have also helped, so we have had some very credible geologic advice to try to make that happen there... Our goal is that once again that that

museum will be an attraction for school groups throughout the region, and it will be a point of pride, a place of pride for the people of Mitchell County and really this whole area.

P.C: We have another good segue into the Parks-as-Classroom Program. Could to talk about that?

(648) **P.L:** Yeah, Parks As Classroom. We have, I would say...I'm going to be bold when I say this, but I think I am correct: we have the largest Parks-as-Classroom program in the country right now on the Blue Ridge Parkway. We reach over 26,000 children last year directly; this is direct contact with a ranger and a child in the classroom. Last year over 26,000...we are serving every single county now, for the first time, that are contiguous to the Blue Ridge Parkway; all 29 counties through Virginia and North Carolina, thorough both states. We have even gone a little bit into Tennessee, although we don't concentrate there. The goal of that program is to connect the students with the Park. To help them realize that even though they may not have a place like Discovery Place or some big science museum, that they have one of the greatest resources in the country in their own back yard. We started this program about 6 or 7 years ago when I was in my old position. We started just in Asheville and in North Carolina and it has now grown to go through the whole Park. We hire five wintertime people who do nothing but go out and give Parks-as-Classroom programming to these schools in these counties. Then, on top of those five we have the district interpreter who also participate in that, so we have 9 people basically out there in the wintertime working in the schools and the success has just been absolutely tremendous. We are thrilled with it. We have been able to develop curriculum, we have been able to work with the Appalachian Consortium, with Appalachian State, and with the State of North Carolina to develop a couple of curriculum guides about the park that we now have out there in the schools, about the program in the schools. And we are seeing more school groups come in on there own now as teachers get more comfortable with what is here and they start realizing, "hey we have got Price Park right here in the backyard, we've got Boone Fork Creek right there with all kinds of things going on." It is a great program and one that we are really proud of.

P.C: I want to ask you about the vision of the Parkway with these interpretative centers that are really destinations of their own. I want to ask you if you see on the horizon any future centers and I will give you a second to think about that, but before you think about that I want to ask you about Explore Park. What is your take on that? There is a Park Service visitor center is going in there, is there not?

P.L: Well, there is a visitor's center there and it has a National Park Service arrowhead on it, so one would think that it is a National Park Service Visitors Center.

P.C: It looked like it to me. [Laughter]

(690) **P.L:** It is actually owned by Explore Park. It is definitely our goal that there be a visitor center there. We would like to contribute to that visitor center and make it very

successful. We support it as much as we can. We don't have a Ranger right now that works out of that Visitors Center; we do provide them with our brochures. There is really a seamless entryway into Explore Park. You go off the Blue Ridge Parkway on this access road that looks just like the Blue Ridge Park—and it is in fact owned by the Blue Ridge Parkway—but then as soon as you get to the visitors center the boundary changes and you are in Explorer Park and they own that visitors center, and their folks work in there. Since we do not have a visitor's center in Roanoke, and obviously there is a very large community there, there is a real desire to serve that community. We are partnering as much as we can with Explorer to make that visitor center successful. We did have a person in there last year and there just weren't enough visitations there yet to justify putting someone in there again this year. We had...they had an Explorer Park person, we had a Ranger there and you might get 50 visitors a day and they weren't overwhelmed by the people working there, so there wasn't a need for it. But we do provide programming in the auditoriums there and we are working with them on museum exhibits to go in that visitor center and that is happening right now. The first phase of the exhibits will be the Blue Ridge Parkway phase. That funding is in place and we are fabricating those and hope to have that up and running by this summer. We have several museum projects going on right now. Explore Park, Mineral Museum, the umm...Music Center, which is under design right now, and then we just finished Peaks of Otter, completely renovating that, and that reopened this summer. It has been busy exhibit wise. [Laughter]

P.C: So can you imagine, or in the long distance planning stages or maybe part of the...or maybe that is a separate question of the general management plans, but do you foresee in some foggy way other analogous interpretative centers?

(730)**P.L:** I think what we see is maybe not more visitors centers--we might even see less visitors centers--the Parkway was really good for years and years about saying, "well lets open another visitors center," so we now have 15 visitor centers or visitor contact stations through the Park. Some of them are in very strategic locations and are very successful, others are not and we really don't get much visitation in them. For instance I definitely see the Blue Ridge Music Center as being a major visitor's center, and a real attraction in the Park. When that opens in what I am going to predict will be about 2006, I wouldn't be surprised if we see Cumberland Knob Visitors Center, which is 5 miles down the road, close up. Or maybe become an outdoor kind of center that people can stop at and still picnic at, but we won't man it anymore. I think we have to really look, and be smart about where we are putting our resources, so that we really are reaching people where they are going. Another place that I think we are going to look at is up at Rocky Knob. We have a visitor's center at Rocky Knob; not many visitors go to it. It is the second least visited center in the Park, but 9 miles down the road is Mabry Mill where we have hundreds of thousands of people right there, but we don't have a center there, we don't have a Ranger there, we don't have maps there. That is where we ought to be is 9 miles down the road, where the public is and not where we are hoping the public will come. We need to just face it that they are not coming there and just go where the people are. I think we need to look real strategically at some of those things to be more effective with what we are doing. We may look at James River in the future and I don't think that we will see that one close down, but that may be one that we see enhanced, actually, with

stronger interpretative operations and maybe getting that canal lock up and running, having real demonstrations there and making that an attraction again. The other thing that I really hope we see is our visitor centers on either end of the park, especially at Humpback Rock really trying to make that more of a place where people can stop in and get first rate quality orientation information about the park. That is the first place that they come to, it's the first visitor center you get to if you are going north to south on the Parkway and we might want to increase our presence there a little bit more.

P.C: Well one thing that I hear again and again talking to people is they say that they are business owners and they are next to the Park and they want to have access to the tourists somehow. Yet on the other hand there is the Park Service mandate to conserve resources and historical tradition of the Blue Ridge Parkway which is to minimize any kind of distraction and create as natural of an experience as you can have while driving...Do you have any thoughts on that?

(784) **P.L:** That is a real balance and it is one of the unique things about this Park is that we are so linear and go nearly 500 miles through all these communities and that we do have an economic impact on the communities, and that was one of our intentions and I think that that is important that we realize that. On the other hand I feel pretty strongly that we do not in any way want to start advertising businesses in the Park in any kind of a way that is going to detract from the landscape architecture of the park, the visual experience of the park. As soon as you open that door you have completely changed the Park. I feel pretty strongly about not letting that happen visually in the Park. However I do recognize that it is important for the neighbors and I think that we can continue to work with organizations like the Blue Ridge Parkway Association, we have right behind you a directory...that is something that we pretty much give out to every visitor that comes in. We are working on making that a little more visually appealing so that people will want to pick it up. It is a great document that talks about the various businesses that are up and down the Parkway and we are trying to stress with our frontline interpreters behind the desk to get to know those places that are in the communities around them, to get to know where the restaurants are, the gas stations...get to know those people on a face-to-face basis, keep information under the desk so that if visitors inquire about it that we can certainly be educated and provide that kind of information for them.

P.C: You don't see anything more like a travel center at the visitors center or some sort of more formal way to orientate people to business...I don't know, I don't have...

P.L: Well I think that we will see that. I think because of the way the Park Service is working now with partners that that is almost unavoidable and it actually has worked in some other Parks. We will see that at the Music Center to a certain degree because we have a partner there and the city of Galax is very interested in having a presence there also. The challenge is going to be how we do that, how we provide that information to visitors in a real quality kind of way so that it doesn't look real commercial. We may see the Folk Art Center expand here in Asheville in the near future, I am sure that there will be an emphasis by the community and by the congressmen to showcase the resources, the commercial resources in the region, and the attractions--places like Grandfather

Mountain, white-water rafting and all these great things you can do when you are in the mountains and so again that is going to be the challenge is how do we do that in a quality kind of way. We certainly don't want to look commercial and we will work really hard to make sure that we don't.

P.C: And the reason for not looking commercial is what?

(843)**P.L:** I think that it is the whole visual experience. I think that people come to places like the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Great Smoky Mountains, any of National Parks to get away from the commercialism. National Parks are probably one of the last great places on earth that you can come and get away from commercialism and just experience the resources and so if we go that other direction we are going to lose that and people are not going to like it.

P.C: Well it is 3:00 and this is the end of side 2 tape one and my name is Philip Coyle and I have been here with Patty Lockamy in her office at the Blue Ridge Parkway Headquarters and it is January 8th, 2003. This concludes our interview. Thank you very much.