

Dan Pittillo Interview Log

Location: Hunter Library—Western Carolina University

Date: 02/24/04

Interview by Philip E. Coyle

Log by Tonya Teague

Checked by Philip E. Coyle

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Interview with Dan Pittillo

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Transcribed by Tonya Teague

Checked by: Philip E. Coyle

(001) Philip Coyle: It's February 24th, 2004, and my name is Ted Coyle, Philip Coyle. And I'm here at Western Carolina University in Hunter Library with J. Daniel Pittillo [he goes by "Dan Pittillo"]. Would you spell your name for me?

Dan Pittillo: P-I-T-T-I-L-L-O.

PC: And when were you born, and where were you born?

DP: I was born in Hendersonville, North Carolina, October 25th, 1938.

(007) PC: We've been corresponding here a little bit about some different topics to talk about, and one of them is your background. Maybe you could talk about growing up in Hendersonville.

DP: Okay...when I was a child, Dad essentially had bought a home site. He had bought this just after the Depression, so the amount of cash he had available was very small. So we lived in a small twenty-by-twenty garage apartment when I was a child. Actually, he had not done that for a couple of years because we spent, I think a year or so, with his parents living at home. But anyway, Dad was a farmer. He did crop farming initially. He began to move into dairy farming, and started out with, I don't know, half a dozen cows. Eventually, that developed into a bigger effort, and he built a barn. I remember building that barn, that old barn that's still on the home site. And I remember climbing up a little bit while they were working on the roof...I don't think they let me get above the scaffolding...I don't recall doing that, so at least that's in my memory. But we milked cows. I think by the time I was about eight years old, I was milking up to five cows at a time, and I was going to school. So we would have to get up fairly early in the morning to milk the cows. I would get ready and leave and catch the bus—I think it was about eight-thirty everyday I went to school. And we continued to do that for, I don't know, for maybe four or five years and then moved into a new barn. And...while I was doing all this, we'd have a little time, and I got interested in bugs and got interested in plants and things of that sort, so I began to do collections. And I first started as an insect collection, and I don't remember how long I worked on that, but probably in the seventh and eighth grades I did most of the collecting. A little later, I began to work with trees, and I collected tree leaves and things of that sort, developed a collection that I wound up putting in the high school laboratory. Just nailed them to the wall. I guess, along, about my sophomore, maybe my junior year, I was contacted by the high school teacher saying, "Dan, would you be willing to help with the Carolina flora project," and I said, "Sure." So I began the project, and we had a procedure we followed. We collected plants... I'm pretty sure that was pretty much through my senior year...junior year and senior year.

And I put them in a big box, got the labels and stuff that I was supposed to do, and sent all this off. I guess I was surprised by one of the professors...C. Richard Bell...came driving up one day, one summer. I happened to be at home...and both Mom and I were at home and we were both flabbergasted that this UNC professor would come driving all the way to our house. Of course, he had good directions, because all my labels said how to get there. And eventually, I received a book from Dr. H.R. Topman, who sent this book to "Dan Pittillo, future botanist." At this point, I had not really considered that I was going to be a botanist, because I was interested in chemistry as well. And the result was that I got encouraged to go to college. So my high school teacher was a graduate of Berea...he says, "Dan, you should go to Berea. But if you can't get into Berea, go to Western." And I said, "Okay. Well, I'll see if I can get in Berea." So I decided to go to Berea.

PC: Starting a long tradition of Western as a fallback school.

DP: Yes. [laughs] So, initially, the application got waylaid somehow, at least the request did not get there. And it was getting close to the deadline of times, and they sent me a letter saying, "If you intend to get in, you've got to get this in within a week." So I managed to get the whole application finished and got in, and so I started Berea, I guess, in the fall of 1957... '58... '57...and continued there and got my degree in '61. Went from Berea, encouraged to go to the University of Kentucky, went to Kentucky, got a master's degree in '63, was encouraged to go on to get my doctorate, and went to Georgia, and finished my doctorate at the University of Georgia in 1966. And all along, was moving from the whole idea that chemistry was going to be my profession. I kept running into difficult, "I can't do this chemistry. This is not going to be it." But, I think in part, I was encouraged to go into botany because I had a professor who really sort of took me under his wing and said, "Dan, could you help me build my wall?" And I helped Professor Hull build his concrete wall for a bank he had at his house. And they wound up...I don't know who did it. He may have helped, but got a grant from the U.S. Forest Service for about \$3,000, and at the rate I was being paid, which was somewhere above eighteen cents an hour, I wound up collecting plants at Berea College, got all that collection together. I think there were somewhere in the neighborhood of five hundred or six hundred species we collected. And while I was at the University of Kentucky, I moved into more of a narrow area, as you always do as you advance. I got into an ecological project—worked with John Morgan at the University of Kentucky. Got a project involving Yellowwood trees... Yellowwood's my favorite tree. It's a relic that's not a very common tree—it's on campus, by the way—and so when I got finished with that degree, I went to the University of Georgia, and found a teaching assistantship. I had a teaching assistantship at the University of Kentucky as well. But the teaching assistantship at the University of Georgia allowed me to get through my degree without having to be in debt, so when I got to Western in 1966, we came here essentially debt free, and I had just a little bit of cash. And we worked two years...got enough background to—enough cash, I should say—to invest in a homesite, and we bought a home. And that's where I've been ever since...on Cane Creek.

(089) PC: You say "we." Maybe you could talk a little bit about your wife.

DP: My wife, I met at the University of Georgia. She was working in the botany lab down there. I thought she was dating somebody else, and I didn't want to break them up because I thought they were close. Turned out, it wasn't the case. And so when I asked her for a date, she was thrilled and I was thrilled, and so we wound up dating, I guess, for most of two years at the University of Georgia. She went on one more year working at North Georgia College, working as an assistant to the Dean of Women, which she did not like, and I'm sure she didn't, while I finished my doctorate. So she and I got married immediately upon my graduation with my doctorate, and we moved here, as I said, in 1966. And we started living with Dr. Morris Morrow in his apartment, and that gave us an insight into the institution and a good chance to get settled and see what was what and give my wife a chance to see where she wanted to go. She wound up taking art classes initially. She did that for about four or five years. And she didn't quite finish an art degree, but she almost did. But art was her alternate interest, so she did that, and we started our family, and Heather was born in '69, and then Shane was born in '74.

(110) PC: I'm struck by, that in the mid-sixties, ecology was a pretty hot topic.

DP: Yeah. Actually, ecology, for me, began when I started reading Gene Odum's textbook. That was the second edition of his ecology textbook, and I said, "Yeah, this is something that's going to be important." And I realized this in part when we were working on the farm at home. We were moving fairly fast, because we were going essentially from pioneer homesteading to industrialized farm during my few years as a youngster and, then, while I was in college, in the summers. And what bothered me was that as we were using some chemicals on our cornfields, Dad was using atrazine, which was a pre-emergence spray, and you put that on the field before you plant. You plant the corn, which goes in the ground, so that pre-emergence spray essentially keeps the weeds out. Maybe, I don't know, maybe you do that afterwards. But anyway, you have to put the atrazine on before the plants begin to come up, and the corn comes up because it's deep in the ground, whereas shallow weeds are killed. The thing that bugged me about it was, I at the end of the field when the boom of the sprayer leaked there was more of the material that got there than was to be applied, but that place remained sterile for the next several years. And I said, "There's something not being quite right about this. They haven't told us the whole deal. This stuff is not breaking down fast enough or something." So that's one reason I got into the notion that ecology might be one of the things we need to look at, the whole system, and see how that works and not just individual components of the system. So when I got to Georgia, by the way, I worked down there with Gaither Plummer. Gaither was working on a project that involved all out accumulations on rock outcrops. So he had hired... well, actually, I guess he must have encouraged me to take the project with him, and I did. And we got involved with just seeing where the radioisotopes that were coming from both Russian tests and American tests were landing in the natural systems and where they were going. And the fact that Gene Odum was there at Georgia meant that I wound up going to seminars and taking classes with Gene and also with Gene's colleagues, like Frank Golley and several others. And that pretty well confirmed my notion that I was going to be an ecologist and interested in ecosystems and not just plants themselves.

PC: I remember the ecology flag back in those days. Do you remember the ecology flag?

DP: Yeah...I kind of...I wasn't in that, what you might call, mainline ecological business, but, you know, I wasn't one of these, what you might call, street demonstrators. I never really was on the street, and I never really helped do that, although I have to admit that going to some of the meetings here when the national forest was...planning to build the road into Joyce Kilmer. And I learned of that...and I suddenly became active. I was active on sort of a quiet mode. I would, like, contact Roy Taylor, and Roy Taylor says, "Dan, why were you not saying that that road should have been put there before?" And I says, "Well, it was because I was in college at the time," and he says, "Well, I guess I understand that." So we wound up moving the road that was to cut back through Kilmer, the upper end of Joyce Kilmer, because, I said to Taylor, "You know, if this happens, since ten thousand acres is required for wilderness, this excludes the possibility, that Joyce Kilmer cannot become a wilderness since it's only thirty-eight hundred acres and we need a little bit more of the territory on the other side, and if you cut through it with a road, that's going to preclude it being a wilderness. And so that's the position that we essentially stayed with, and we wound up with the meeting, and Keith Hargrove and some of them, Cliff Edmonson from U.T., a bunch of us, got together and said, "Well what does it take to make this road go through? Because we want to put it through." At the time, I said to Keith, I said, "Keith, do you know if the Park Service really wants to use this scenic road also as an access to timber," and he said, "Yes." But that wasn't something that was broadcast. So I knew that that was one of the main thoughts. But the trouble was, the alternate routes were going to be a little more impacting and, indeed, it's taken, what, thirty years, really, to build the road to the south, which is now called the Cherohala Skyway.

PC: So I didn't even realize that originally, that plan, that skyway was meant to go through Joyce Kilmer.

DP: Yeah. What it does now, it ends at a place called Maple Springs, and they've got essentially a...sort of a handicapped boardwalk or whatever up there. You can go up there and be on that boardwalk and...if you're in a wheelchair or whatever, and it gives you some views of the vicinity, but it just dead-ends. But the plan was for that to go on up Hale Ridge, to cut in by Hale, which is the fire tower ridge point, and to cut back a little bit into the watershed at Kilmer and to go on out the other side, I guess, near Stratton Bald, eventually go over Stratton Gap where it now is connected.

(196) PC: Well, I guess that's a good segue to talk about Panthertown. And...but before we talk about Panthertown, I have to ask, it also seems like the biology department here at Western at that period was really on a roll.

DP: Yes, as a matter of fact, I feel like many of us have been moving...of course, we weren't all going together. At one point, I wanted to get some projects started as a group on, say, Joyce Kilmer, and Alan Moore and I actually did some early investigation there, and Alan was interested in mammal trapping, so we did a little bit of that. But we could

not get [Fred] Coyle and [Richard] Bruce to work with salamanders and spiders and insects and stuff, so we wound up going our own individual roots. And Coyle, I think, pretty much has done exactly what he's planned to do. Bruce wound up being a director of the Highlands Biological Station and he didn't really have time to address this kind of thing. And Jerry West, he was interested in his own little projects, so we wound up not going together on a given spot, but when Bruce was at Highlands, he began to realize how valuable Panthertown was. And, also, I got interested in Panthertown because of my efforts toward there in about 1970. And I was working with Jim Horton at the time on the floristics of the southern Highlands outcrops. And that effort put me in places like that that I would have otherwise not seen. At the time, Panthertown was owned by Liberty Properties, a subsidiary of Liberty Corporation, which is Liberty Life and I don't know how many other entities there is, but anyway, Liberty was the main ownership. And they were using that as a hunting facility for a hunting club. So they had managers that essentially were doing the same thing that they'd been doing, I guess, before that. I don't know how long the hunting club was there. But at any rate, Panthertown was known by regional hunters. And I think that probably the basis of the name for Panthertown was because it was known to have panthers in it, and that was one of the things that...I don't know if that was what they hunted, but at any rate, they hunted bear, they hunted probably deer, but I think bear was probably the main thing they would have hunted. And maybe fished. And I do know a story where one of the wildlife officers was up there. Came across a man who had a sack full, he said, of about eighty brook trout. So he got charged with illegal poaching. And, so, I do know that it was sort of a private club deal. Henry Ford hunted there, Tom Edison hunted there...so it was a known place, and there was a railroad when the lumber company got into it. There was a railroad that came up from Toxaway and went all the way down into the bottom of the valley, and I guess this would have been the way that some of these resort folks managed to get up to the lodge. The lodge is still there, it's still intact. It's sometimes called Kingdom Land. But at any rate, that building is still there, and it's owned privately. So the whole valley was beginning to get interest from the fact that, geologically, it's weird. It's sort of a tilted back valley. In other words, the Tuckasegee River that forms in it doesn't drain quickly to the north and then the west, as it would normally. It drains more slowly, and it's probably because either there's more dense rock...to the north and west, or because there's some other reason. But the valley is flat. It's flat enough that there's boggy areas and it's wetlands, and so you get a lot of brown water, and with the brown water, enough nutrient in the water to get higher levels of insects, and with higher levels of insects, I've been told, that the trout in there that's brook trout, number something in the neighborhood of three hundred pounds per mile, compared to the Smoky's, which usually run about thirty pounds per mile of brook trout. That's what the claim was. I don't know whether there's really that many, but that's a pretty high number. At least that's what they calculate. And, so, several of our students have been working on the site with insects, with bogs, with spiders, and just distribution of salamanders and other vertebrates. Do you want me to talk about...

(279) PC: I wanted you to talk about the Georgia Extension.

DP: The Georgia Extension. Apparently that extension was in process when I got there, and I didn't know it. I looked this up recently, and in 1970, it was already in process. I didn't realize this, so apparently, I got into a situation where at least part of the managers were wondering if I was feeding the Park Service information, and I wasn't at the time. Actually, they thought I was feeding them information, so at one point, they got very disturbed with some of the comments I was making about how I wanted to protect the valley, because I thought Schoolhouse Falls and all that area was an important natural feature. And so the manager, the forest manager, Mr. Millican, wrote me a rather terse letter one time, said he assumed this was the last time I'd be going into that place, and I said, "Well, okay." Luckily, I bumped into the vice president of Liberty Properties, and the man said, "Okay, so we have an interesting place here." And I think that may have had a little bit of influence on actually how it wound up, that they didn't...or, perhaps, just plain finance. They couldn't get enough money to do all the things they wanted to do. Namely, they were thinking of condominiums, a lake, lodges, home sites, and the only thing that they actually wound up doing was selling off some home sites on the western ridge. Mr. Everhart and I visited the site at one point. I don't remember exactly what year it was, and I couldn't find a reference to it. But I remember us looking at that valley from Salt Rock and saying, "You know, this could remind you of the Yosemite of the east." Namely, if you give Yosemite Valley several thousands of years or hundreds of thousands of years of erosion, it might look like this. In other words, it's going down. And, so you've got big Green Mountain, which looks kind of like it could have been El Capitan, and then you have little Green Mountain, which is not a Half Dome, but it may be Half Dome smoothed off and swamp. So, Gary said, "You know, Dan, this needs to be in public ownership." And I said, "Yeah, I agree with you." But I didn't say that "I agree with you" the way it turned out. Because what happened was, when the planners for the Parkway got to working on it, they decided to put a dam in there, make a big lake, put in or install a campground all around the lake, and just let out the entire bog system and let out Schoolhouse Falls. They did that projection when they got to Cashiers with the public meeting and we called them on it before they got to Highlands for the next meeting. I went to both meetings. They had removed the dam or moved the dam upstream so that it didn't flood Schoolhouse Falls. So they really didn't know what was going on then. And I guess maybe Liberty Properties, their folks began to realize that. And not only was I arguing against some of the things the Parkway was doing, but all of the people that were involved in the process—that is, all the owners along there, and apparently pretty wealthy and, should I say, influential owners—put enough pressure against the legislators and so on that the project was dropped. So it never became to fruition. Liberty must have decided that they weren't going to develop it, for whatever reason. I do not know exactly. I'd like to see their record sometime. But they backed off, and decided they were going to sell the whole valley. And in the eighties, late eighties, it was settled, and initially, it was sold to the Nature Conservancy, for about five minutes, and then it was sold to the Forest Service, in part. I should have...let me back up on that. It was sold initially to Duke. Duke bought it. I don't know, they may have owned it for a few months. They then sold it to the Nature Conservancy, and the Nature Conservancy sold it to the Forest Service. Duke retained a six hundred foot wide corridor for their power line. So that means that the power line was cut through the middle. One of the arguments...one of the reasons I got into an argument with Duke Power was because they invited me to come up and

suggest to them where the power line should be, they wanted to put one there, and I said, "Well, don't put it through the middle of the valley." And I come to find out that they had already agreed with the landowners that they would not put it anywhere else. They'd put it through the valley, and that really hurt because, in part, they'd been trustees in common with Liberty Properties, and trustees in common with Duke Power. They were trustees also in common with the Nature Conservancy. So it was, you know...and I don't know how Alcoa got into all this, but Alcoa was involved, because Duke Power was intending to sell, quote "power to the rest at peak demand periods," and the rest turned out to be... Alcoa. Aluminum Company of America in Marryville, Tennessee. And I found that out through one of the folks who was in the union that worked with Nantahala Power.

PC: So that's where that power line is going, right?

DP: So the power line connects so that Duke would not have to wheel it through Georgia Power to get it over to Tennessee, where they intended to make a connection and sell power cheaper than TVA was doing to Alcoa or...because Alcoa had essentially reached their limit on their hydro production. They couldn't expand their company. So they needed additional power, and they wanted cheaper power. They didn't want to pay the TVA price.

PC: Well, you pretty much said it, when you talked about that land transfer, it had to be important...important people meeting in small rooms to decide that.

DP: Yes, it probably did. I just felt like they were using me. They were trying to get me on, to bring me on, but they didn't tell me initially what they'd planned. They were telling me, "If we were to do this, what would you think we should do?" And I was saying, "Don't put it through the valley, because it's such an important natural area." I had suggested they'd either go north or south. Well, it turned out, they wouldn't go south because there were developers on the south side that were essentially funding the effort to keep it out of the south side. The north side...Duke contacted the folks on the north side and said, "Do you want this power line to come across here?" Of course, no, they don't want that power line across their turf. So it wound up going through the middle of the valley. In general, Duke was...I'm not totally aggravated with Duke. I mean, they were pretty careful about how they installed it, the ground work they did to search out the power line right of way to locate it so that it didn't have as much impact on the vegetation as it might have otherwise. In other words, they used hilltops and then strung lines over a great distance, so the corridor, the river, the power line is way up high and it doesn't reach down close. The only thing I worry about is if we were to ever extend this whole business to the next level of power transmission lines, it would dwarf these lines, and that would really be quite a...but, you know they'd own the right of way, so they could do it. (435—End of Side One, Tape One).

Side Two, Tape One

(B001) PC: This is the beginning of Side Two, Tape One of the interview with Dan Pittillo at Western Carolina University on February 24th, 2004. We were just getting to talking about Pisgah Campground.

DP: Yeah...Pisgah is a place that I knew from, I guess, maybe around 1955. I didn't know it as a child very well, but I recall Dad and I driving up there with the family. I said "Dad and I," it was me and mom and the whole family. I guess there was all those seven of us, kids and so on in the car...driving through that Pisgah Lodge area. And there may have been some[BLRI] construction going on at the time, but I don't remember that. I just remember the road was kind of gravelly and bumpy and rough. And we had an old 1949 Buick that Dad had acquired through my uncle, and the old Buick had been changed or altered to be used for a blind lady. And they had the black...the windows were essentially black, they were almost black, and you could barely see through them in the backside. But we rode in the back of the car, and, of course, we had the windows down most of the time if we wanted to see out very well. But on that trip, if I'm not confused on when it was, on our way back, we wrecked the car. Someone ran into us. They came into the side of the car with their car and just essentially ripped the wheel cover off the front of the wheel, and dented the back fender, and scraped the side. Wound up sort of demolishing the front end of the Pontiac, and...the family that did it, or the people that did it, never did get charged or anything, which is kind of interesting. Dad was upset with it. But at any rate, I didn't know what was there. I really didn't know what was there until we started researching the area, and most of that came about in the eighties.

(B027) PC: Didn't you tell me before that you used to hike up there as a boy?

DP: No. No...No I did not. I hiked very little. We didn't have much time to be out and do much hiking. I mean, I might have hiked...I hiked around my home a lot, but I didn't have time to get out and do much hiking like, you know, up in the mountains area. Probably because you get up in the morning, you milk the cattle, you don't get finished until nine o'clock, then you've got to be home around five or six at the latest to milk again, and if you're going to do much hiking, you have to do that just kind of... So I'd go up to Bear Wallow, which is north of where I was, and we walked up the mountain there and back down to the car, or whatever. And I did some hiking later in my life to the Shining Rock area. We did that, but we drove in quite a ways to pick blueberries. And then we'd hike up on the Shining Rock area, and then back. But I never was a big hiker.

(B041) PC: So you didn't know about Pisgah area until you actually got into this...

DP: I really didn't know it very well until I got in there and looked at it from a scientific point of view. And, as I said, most of this took place...I might have been up there in the seventies sometime. I don't recall exactly when I first got there. But 1983 was when we really dug into it, and that's when I really began to think that it was important. So I worked with Paul and Hazel Delcourt of the University of Tennessee, and they were paleoecologists, I guess, is the best way I can describe them. They were interested in the

period from about fifty thousand years ago to present. So they had been working in the region, and they met me sometime, I guess, back in the seventies. But at any rate, they had this project that they were doing, and they wanted to look at high elevation sites to see if we could find evidence of tundra. And one of the places that turned out to be most useful was Flat Laurel Gap. One of the three sites that they had picked. We looked at some other sites, and we turned them down for various reasons. One thing is, the deposit needs to be deep enough, so they looked for deeper deposits. Flat Laurel Gap site had about a ninety centimeter depth of deposition, and so that's one reason they chose it. The Pink Beds, which are just to the south of that, the deposition there was less than a foot. So it just wasn't deep enough. David Schaefer was their student, and he was the one they put on the project. And so David and the Delcourts and I did this project up there one summer... I guess it must have been about two or three days... in one summer of '83. And that's when we began to piece together some information that supported the notion that the high elevations had tundra, which was their essential hypothesis. But they didn't have much data on it. And Schaefer's work, as he expressed it, said that about twelve thousand years ago, the permafrost melted, but the permafrost sediment washed into this basin, filled up a while. The permafrost that he dated at twelve thousand years was done with thermo-luminescence, which is a weak dating technique. It's not good. In other words, it's got a lot of variance, and so it was twelve thousand years plus or minus about seventeen hundred years. So maybe it was ten thousand years. Then he looked at some other things, like, deluges, because there was quite clearly and evident from the sort of northeast side of the bog a debris avalanche. In other words, boulders, and rocks, and so on, and he suggested that the area was essentially blocked, and it was flooded for a period of time until that washed out. He thinks that took place sometime between nine and seven thousand years ago. Then, there's a hiatus. That means that there's a loss of any information from about then until three thousand years. Three thousand years ago to present is the deposition of peat, of the heath in the peat. And so heaths, rhododendron, mountain laurel, blueberries, all those things are present. One of the heaths is missing, it's not there anymore, and that is called leather leaf. And that species is not evident in the site. But we see some other species there that are present that's usually found in northern situations, like cotton grass and bog asphodel. So those are in there, and those would be what one would expect to find in these northern situations. So that's a hint that that would have been tundra during the glacial period. I worked in there a little bit subsequently. I guess it was in 1989, that three students and I went up there and looked under the boulder that Schaefer had looked under and collected some soil. Did it in a sterile fashion, so we could see whether or not there were either fungi or bacteria. And I was hoping to find the presence of maybe a spore for a fern, or something of that sort. Did not. Did not find a spore or those, but plenty of bacteria, plenty of fungi... found beetle carapaces. Found ant heads, found charcoal... so that tells me that there's some information that's yet to be gained from that site if we go ahead and proceed on the funding and see what we can find in terms of dating—we can date that charcoal. We might want to look a little deeper under that boulder to see what else is under it, because it slides down and sits on material that's present and it fixes it in time. Well, Rob Young, from Western Carolina, has gone back and looked at the place again. Rob says the geology needs to be reinterpreted, and I'm beginning to agree with Rob. He says that what Schaefer was claiming to be sediment from the permafrost is actually material that's just in place: decomposed rock.

In other words, it's rock that's just undergone decomposition in place. And he drilled this, while we were using the hand probe. In other words, we were using a hand-coring device, he used a machine-coring device, which allowed him to get down into that material much deeper and to get a better indication of what was going on present. And he had some questions about the dating of the material as well. So that's something we need to redo, and Rob also has been looking at the water levels in there, and he did that within the last couple of years. And we think that there is the possibility that the site may be affected by the kinds of activities around the bog. One of the things that bugged me a lot, back in the late seventies or early eighties, we were asked to be scientific advisors for the Blue Ridge Parkway. We did that for a few years, and then they sort of quit asking us. But, at the same time, we were on call. And I think it was toward the end of the decade, in the eighties, that Gary Everhart and the rest of the folks decided they were going to expand the quarters that the workers there at the lodge were to use. And so he said, apparently, "Go ahead," and whether they had approval for that or not, I don't know. We weren't told. One day I was on the Parkway, and I saw all these flags up. I says, "What in the world's going on here?" I looked around a little bit, it looked like they were fixing to put some buildings in. So I contacted Everhart fairly straightforwardly and said, "What in the heck is happening to this site?" And he said, essentially, "We have plans, and we're going ahead with building." So I guess because I called his hand on it and I would send out letters to several other folks, he realized that he had to go back through the procedure, so they reevaluated the site. The result was--I didn't know whether it was going to do this--but the result was that they moved the quarters from the site adjacent to the bog to the site sort of northeast of the existing lodge, which is where they're located now. So that got the facility a little bit away from the boggy site where it'd have a greater effect on the bog itself. I guess that's my personal position, and my personal position stands that I think the bog area, the whole basin, is not a proper place for a campground. It's really not a proper place for drainage from the roadway and so on, but I have recommended that the park service consider moving the campground facility from the bog site out and to another place, perhaps on a ridge near what the old Buck Lodge used to be. But I'd like to see it moved. And I think that would make it in a better protected status for the future.

(B158) PC: What do you think about the oak forest in there? I've read some reports that say that the oak forest is also unique.

DP: Those trees are sometimes referred to as oak orchards, and that's because the trees are dwarfed. They're dwarfed in part from weather; they may be dwarfed in part from genetic variance...I don't know the answer to the genetic question. But they are short. And they tend to be far enough apart that you kind of get light coming through. And I guess that's one thought that people has with regards to oak orchard and why they've come up with the notion that it's an "oak orchard," quote. Well, the area just to the north of the bog has younger trees on it, which tells me that that was probably open earlier. I don't know whether...I think the place was actually grazed with cattle. I don't know whether that was an open spot when Europeans got here or not. It may have not been. At any rate, there was a meadow to the north of the site, and that meadow has grown up with oak trees, and they're fairly young, compared to those down in the basin, the area itself. I don't know whether anybody has dated those trees. I would imagine that they probably

are a hundred plus, but I'm not sure they're, you know, not three or four hundred years old. If they're three or four hundred years old, that would tell us that they were predating the time at which we initially went into the site. Further to the south, on...I think that's called Big Ridge...but anyway, the...or maybe Big Bald. That site has got the same pattern of sort of dwarfed oak trees. Again, it's probably been that if not in historic times, in prehistoric times, it's been in meadow. That suggests that it was either grazed or being maintained by wild animals during and postglacial times. Glacial times would probably have been severe up there—in other words, eighteen thousand years ago, the weather would have been severe enough that I would imagine that the trees and whatever was there would have been only scrub. In other words, they would have been krumholtz. They would have been laid down against the ground, or there might not have been oaks there at all. There might have been willows or something, but not...in other words, tundra species. There would not have been oaks. The oaks probably migrated into the area subsequently, and it would have had to be maintained from, say, about seven thousand to present, because if it wasn't maintained by grazers, it would not have lasted. The other possibility is that it could have been maintained by Indian activity, and if it was fire, the only way fire would have worked would be that if you had enough debris dry enough, and it might have been during the hipsothermal, which would have been somewhere around five to six thousand years ago, it might have been dry enough to have burnt and, therefore, establish the meadows. But my point is that much as that area was probably in meadows at that time.

(B211) PC: So the oak isn't particularly endangered as compared to the bog?

DP: I don't guess it is. I wouldn't think it's endangered by that. It may be endangered by other activities, such as...we have these insect outbreaks every once in a while, and there was a real major outbreak about four years ago, and they're Fall web worms, and the Fall web worms can come in the Spring apparently, and they have a population explosion, and they last for a year or two and then they drop off. I don't know what's involved in that process, but if that's the case...if that were to be a continual thing, then the oaks would be doomed, because they can't live many years without foliage. What they'll do in Spring if there's Fall web worms is they'll put out their new growth, and these insects just absolutely eat the leaves as fast as they grow, and the trees are almost skeletonized...leaf material, hardly any leaves left. The grass is dropping all over the place, and then after those insects finish that part of their life cycle, and they've gone on and done whatever, they'll put out a new growth again. But that's too costly for the tree's resources. In other words, too much of the energy that's stored in the roots is being pulled out to put on leaves, and then pulled out again to put on leaves again.

(B232) PC: Well, let me ask you about what your opinion of...you know, currently, the Parkway is pulling back from the bog, and...your opinion about some of those, sort of, halfway actions.

DP: I think...okay...One of the things that the Parkway was supposed to have done, and they started this in the seventies and didn't do it, or didn't complete it, they were supposed to essentially have a long range development plan and management plan, and

they didn't do it. In other words, that essentially becomes the EIS. I'm sort of aggravated because they didn't, and that may be in part because the superintendent didn't want this done. I don't know. At least it never was done. It may be in part because the funding, or whatever they say that has to be done, you know, required to do this. So the Blue Ridge Parkway has been told time and again that you need to do an impact statement here, and an impact statement there, by several of us. And, of course, they don't do impact statements if they can get by with an EA. EA, of course, is one step lower than an impact statement. Impact statement means it has to become public and pretty widely evaluated, and so on. Well, they are in process now, finally, of doing a development plan. In other words, it essentially will become their impact statement. And so they're following NEPA. But this really didn't start until Dan Brown, the current superintendent, got there. Or it wasn't in place until he got there. And, so I'm thinking they may actually back off, or maybe even project that they'll back off with the campground at the site. I feel like that may be the case. I knew they weren't going to do this when the sewer line was to be upgraded recently, because you can't have the sewer just dumping sewage, raw sewage, into the stream.

PC: Which it was, in the past.

DP: And it has been. And so, every one in a while all the sewage apparently backs up because it gets blocked downstream and doesn't make it all the way down to the treatment plant, which is down a ways. Initially, they had a different way of treating the sewage, and it was essentially a ground... I'm not sure what you call it. But it's where it goes into the ground and, essentially, the septic system beneath the ground. And now they've been working it with a regular above ground sewage plant. In part, I guess because they're getting a lot more people using the lodge, using the rest area there at the campground store, and using... well, you've got new resident quarters using those, and then, the campground. And the campground has been dumping trailers there, which I don't think should be done. I don't think trailer sewage systems should be emptied there on that campground. That is not a good place to do it, because you're loading that system and you're right at the top end of the headwaters, and the headwaters should not be the place where you dump your sewage. I guess the good thing about the sewage is that if you have raw sewage in the creek, it does have a distance to go, and so maybe the bacteria and stuff will be decomposed or whatever by the time it gets down to the bottom of the hill. But I'm not sure about the compounds that's put in the tanks that are dumped from the trailers, the house trailers or the recreational vehicles. [tape paused] There are...

PC: Let me ask you the question here...

DP: Okay...alright.

PC: ...because I paused the tape for just one moment. (B293) The Blue Ridge Parkway is kind of interesting because it's a road and has a very narrow right of way, unlike some larger parks, yet it is part of the park system. Maybe you could speak about that.

DP: Okay...there isn't...the laws that put together the Parkway operations and management, and so on, are different than they are for the national parks, such as the Great Smoky's. In other words, the Blue Ridge Parkway is not a Great Smoky's Park equivalent. But the park's system is under jurisdiction of, I think it's...what is it...that 1918—whatever the date is—regulation that they are to be—and it's kind of a dual, almost impossible thing to fill. They're to be for the protection of the park for an indefinite period of time, for everyone to enjoy, but to enjoy them, to make them accessible. The Parkway, of course, is much more accessible. And I think the interpretation of Mr. Everhart was that what we need to do is to have the Parkway meet the desires and needs of more of the public, which says that the public is interested in things that are, you know...It's not to get back into the backcountry, but rather to drive and to have a pleasant experience on the drive...or to go to a place and have a pleasant meal on the park...or to go to a campground and have a pleasant experience camping. But not to have to go backpacking three miles to a distant point for a campsite. So the Parkway itself, I think, has been looked at differently, but what I'm saying here is, what's the value of the Parkway if the quality of the environment and the scenes and so on are damaged, or essentially mediated by the kinds of activities that the park service allows so that it's no longer that quality that we go there for in the first place? We're trying to escape some of the city, urban life that we're living to a place where it's pleasant and not just covered up with human activity. And I think we can't go too far with getting too many...can you imagine what the park would be like if we had traffic jams all the time? It would not be a pleasant experience, so we don't want to get on the Parkway for that. We want to be able to get on the Parkway, enjoy a drive, stop...a lot of people like to get off the Parkway, get off the drive, park somewhere, and just get out and lie in the grass and enjoy the sun and whatever else. That's fine, as long as we're not doing it to the point that it becomes a problem for us. So I don't know whether we'll ever get to the point of saying, "Well, we're going to limit the number of people we give access at a given time to the Parkway." We may have to say that we cannot have ski resorts, that we cannot have swimming pools, that we cannot have some of the things that private recreation folks can provide. So I think that one of the things the Parkway needs to do is say, "What is valuable? How do we protect it? How do we manage it?" And I don't think they've done that in all cases as they should, and this is...the Pisgah site, I think, is particularly one that demonstrates that.

(B369) PC: Well, you were saying that you feel like a lot of people on the Parkway, and I was agreeing with you, don't even really realize what they're seeing.

DP: I think that's true, and one of the problems in part is, how do you inform a person before they go to a place? There are two things that can be done. One, you can have visitor's centers, in which a visitor can go. But that's not the same thing as actually being directed. One of the things that does not happen on the Blue Ridge Parkway is that we don't have groups of people driving along with a ranger, the ranger explaining what it is that is there that they're looking at. That does not happen on the Blue Ridge Parkway. That is a complete negation as far as I can see. While I was in, I guess it was Glacier National Park, I was on a boat with a ranger, and we were talking about things that we were seeing as we went through. I don't remember how many there were, perhaps fifty or

more of us. That's one way of handling groups of people that are interested in what they're seeing. Then I was in McKinley National Park on a bus with a ranger. There was a group of us, and again, they were explaining what we were seeing. "Did you see the bears...?" But the Blue Ridge Parkway is not doing that, so I think the education system on the Blue Ridge Parkway is pretty dismal. The only thing that's been happening is at the campground sites, they do have campground programs. However, that has declined, I believe, over the last several years instead of increased. In other words, I don't think there's as much progression. People begin to learn about where to go to see which ranger, who knows what's going on. You can't go and talk about Little Rabbit Foo Foo too many times before you're tired of it. But it may be important that you go, if you've got a historian, or you've got a natural history person, or somebody who's familiar with a lot of stuff, who's giving programs at these campgrounds or who's a ranger. That is, a naturalist ranger. Not one who's out with guns and trying to protect the public who might be otherwise sought after or something. So that's the big point that I think needs to be made about the Blue Ridge Parkway, is that the education system is not what it should be. They don't know Pisgah, they don't know where Pisgah bog is, they don't know what was there. They don't know Flat Laurel Gap Bog. There is no knowledge of it.

(B426) PC: But what would you do, because here, concretely, say the campground is moved, which seems possible, actually, or at least moved back. Would you interpret that bog, or would you just try to keep it hidden so that people didn't destroy it?

DP: We'd have to do some interpretation. I think interpretation has to be done. Now, you'd have to do it somewhat visually. In other words, you probably would have to use video or slides or something to allow it, because...(B438)

End of Tape One

Side One, Tape Two

(AA001) PC: This is the beginning of Side One, Tape Two of the February 24th interview with J. Daniel Pittillo [goes by "Dan Pittillo"] here at Western Carolina University. You were saying that to interpret the bog, it would have to be visual somehow.

DP: Yeah...they do have people in the Park Service. They have one or two persons that are hired to do much of...you might say, evaluations of natural areas. They've actually increased by one. They used to have one person on the road, I guess, that was in charge of looking after the natural areas from one end of the park to the other. Now, they've got at least two that I know of—they may have more than that. But how does interpretation get done? It all depends on how it's managed. If you don't have much in the way of interpreters, then you're not going to get interpretation. What I had thought would be appropriate if...because you're always having...the interpreters are going to have to learn as we learn. In other words, as the scientist, or whoever's digging information out, is learning, it has to be transferred to the interpreter. Or, the scientist has to be asked to go do it. How is it being done? Much of what actually is occurring as interpretation, you

don't call your local park service and say, "We would like an interpreter today, or tomorrow, or next week to meet with our group." We'd rather just have some of us who know the Parkway and going with the group and doing interpretation. In other words, the interpretation is being done by local people, or whatever. The way I thought it might work, is that we have interpreters...they'd have interpreters in training, and that's going to have to be a continual process. They'd also need to hire...I think they need to hire people who are in the region. Because a lot of times, regional people have much greater depth and understanding of what's going on in the area, than do the folks that have been transferred from park to park. So interpreters that are moving from here, to yonder, and all about are going to be more general because they don't know what's going on in the different park when they've not lived there or not been there long enough. Some people are able to grasp the information quicker than others, but still, it gets to be a point when I think interpreters have to be completely trained, they have to learn. So in our case, like, when we have the Native Plant Conference, the Cullowhee Native Plant Conference, we have, with every group that goes up there, an interpreter, an interpreter that's from here somewhere, or someone that knows the material or knows the subject things when they interpret.

PC: And they just do that out of the goodness of their heart, or...?

DP: Well, in some cases, there may be some pay, but in the case of what I was just telling you, that's arranged through the standing committees and all. But, yeah, you either have people that are free, which is sometimes very difficult to do. Or, you have to have some kind of...so, what happens is they provide quarters for these people who would come and do the interpretation, and so they don't charge them for conference fees and stuff of that sort.

PC: Maybe a little stipend or something to make them...

DP: And maybe a little stipend, or honorarium of some sort.

PC: Well, um...

DP: Either that, or you have to have somebody that's hired and had a salary job who has enough flexibility in their job that they can do this.

PC: You just don't see...I mean, you go to the Parkway and all the interpreters are running a thousand ways at once, you know, and then most of them are seasonals...they hire them on seasonally, and they are engaging young college graduates, maybe not from the region, just as you said, who will... You know, they're here for a while...you notice all the interpretive theaters, which they essentially run, the Blue Ridge Parkway, have deteriorated now so that they don't even have the capacity for slide projection anymore. So people just hold up little pictures of Foo Foo Rabbit, as you said, and... [laughs] There's only so many of those that you can...

DP: If the Parkway doesn't do this, they're missing the boat that they should be doing. It's true that when you have a crowd with children and older adults, and some people that are physically not as able, that you have variance among the people. And, so, you do a little different things in these interpretation situations than you would otherwise. I've done some interpretation. I've done it with the Forest Service, I've done a little bit with the Park Service, and I'm starting with the Blue Ridge Parkway, so...

(AA061) PC: Let me interject, which is, one of the things that I find annoying about the interpretive programs that they have is that they're canned programs.

DP: Sure.

PC: It's like, it's about trout or something. So you're at Linville, and it's not talking about Linville. You know, it's about rhododendrons or something, which is fine, it's like learning about rhododendrons. But you're not hearing what the story is about that particular site, and once you hear the story of the particular site, it's much more compelling, you know?

DP: I think that it is, and I do know that there are people out there who don't want to go to these interpretations. I think in the park, they're getting a culture that's oriented in a different direction, and part of the reason it's oriented in a different direction is because, for one thing, as they've grown up, they haven't learned the kind of things that I learned. And a lot of what I've learned, of course, in my case, has been my own self-taught stuff. But I think I was encouraged along the way. I remember in the second grade, Mrs. May said to me, "Dan, draw your cattails bigger." And, then when I was in the eighth grade, Myron Wilson said, you know...he was encouraging us to do all sorts of things, intellectual and so on. So I think it has a lot to do with who the teachers are and the kind of encouragement that you get along the way. It still is. I think that's pretty well understood throughout the school system, and, of course, the best teachers are not necessarily the ones who can deliver the best...should I say, lecture? But the ones who deliver a reasonably good lecture, but also do a lot of encouraging of the individuals.

PC: A lesson for the Blue Ridge Parkway. Well, that will conclude our interview for today, and I really appreciate your time. Thank you very much.

DP: Okay, you're welcome. (AA086)

End of Interview

From: Dan Pittillo
Sent: Tuesday, February 24, 2004 10:58 AM
To: Philip Coyle
Subject: RE: From Ted Coyle about BLRI

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY
(828) 227-7268
FAX: (828) 227-7061

Ted,
Those are some good ones! It will be good if I do a little background checking to get my facts in order before I do this.

J. Dan Pittillo
H. F. "Cotton" and Catherine Robinson
Professor in Biology
Department of Biology
Western Carolina University
Cullowhee, NC 28723
Phone 828-227-3653
Fax 828-227-7647

From: Philip Coyle
Sent: Friday, February 20, 2004 1:39 PM
To: Dan Pittillo
Subject: From Ted Coyle about BLRI

Dear Dan,

Thanks for agreeing to be interviewed on Tuesday at 11:30. Perhaps we can meet in your office and then go to the library, where we might both hide to do the recording. Looking at my notes from our last meeting I realize that it was almost a year ago! Time flies; sorry for the delay. I don't have "questions" per se, but rather some topics that I'd like to get you to talk about. Here are some examples:

- Your background as a local going up to the mountains before the parkway
- visited Asheville to Mt. Mitchell area with uncle Ostell ca. 1950-51 during construction, i.e. before paving began
- sometime around 1955 our family drove up NC 151, which was before construction of the BLRI parkway, and I recall passing in front of the old Pisgah Lodge. I think we got onto that route at Wagon Road Gap and travelled out via Candler, returning home via NC 191. A black family driving a new Pontiac car pulled into the side of our car at the intersection of the Parkway entrance ramp, took off the tire cover of the right front fender, and dented the back fender. They were upset that their new car front end was damaged. Dad didn't call highway patrol and had a gentleman's agreement that they would pay for damages. That never happened.
 - The origin of you interest in science and botany
- interest began observing nature between chores on dairy farm; collected insects in 7/8th grade and made display for Edneyville High School lab later
- encouraged by French Rogers, highschool biology/chemistry/geometry teacher to attend college at Berea
 - The Georgia extension and Panthertown
- proposed by National Park Service in 1970 or earlier; my first work there was in October, 1970 when Dr. Jim Horton and I were working on a project, Vegetation of Southern Appalachian Rock Outcrops. Liberty Properties (affiliate of The Liberty Cooperation) owned the property and had Milliken Forestry Company of South Carolina managing the white pines planated in the valley. There was some friction between Blue Ridge Parkway officials and Liberty owners at the time and there was a suggestion by Mr. Milliken that I was encouraging Parkway officials; he asked me to remain neutral with regard to NPS aquisition of a large acreage in the valley to develop a travel trailer park.
- sometime subsequently I visited the valley with Superintendent Everhardt and we discussed the quality of the scenery. I suggested it reminded me of Yosemite Valley if it had eroded several thousands of years.
 - Pisgah campground and botany issues
- parkway in the area was constructed in the 1960's and according to Dr. Garrett Smathers there were no scientists available during the planning of the facility at Flat Laurel Gap (or Pisgah Recreational Area). Dr. Smathers was employed as a naturalist/ranger during that time but and his input was not considered in the construction phases
- use of the facility has increased generally over the years, especially on the busy July 4 or other holidays.
- the paleoecological site was investigated in 1983 by a team from the University of Tennessee- Paul and Hazel Delcourt,

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
student David Shafer and I
•we found that there was considerable historic information available in the sediment that was backed up by the resistant geological formation below the bog
•Shafer's report suggested that the site had about 12,000 years of deposition with the lowest material eroding from permafrost melt debris avalanches that occurred during deluges between 9,000 and 7,000 years ago; and vegetation consisting of heath (rhododendrons, azalea, blueberries, etc.) mainly between 3,000 years back and present. Several species extirpated, such as leatherleaf, a thick-leaved heath shrub now found to the north; loss of fraser fir around the turn of the 1900's and subsequent loss of chestnut in the 1930's. We noted there still were the more northern cotton grass and bog asphodels present.

•in 1989 three of WCU students, Barbara Doman, Robert Gouge, and Pam Peele and I conducted a review of one of the avalanche boulders to discover that charcoal, ant heads, beetle carapaces, and many bacteria and fungi were deposited about a meter below the large boulder
•recently Dr. Rob Young has been investigating the geology of the area and has concluded that there is a significantly different interpretation on the geologic history for the site
•the point is that the site is a significant location for us to be able to interpret the natural history of the area which should help us understand some of the trends for the area for the future. For example, will the global warming significantly alter the area? Will human impact on the site significantly alter the rate at which it is altered?
•my personal position is that the site needs to be reserved as a gauge for our future, a "canary in the coal mine," and the human impact on the site should be reduced- the campground should be moved to a more upland location in the vicinity, such as near where the old Buck Lodge once stood.

•

• Everhardt

•Mr. Everhardt was director of the National Park Service with the Ford Administration. As I understand, the Federal Government gives the director a position of his choice upon termination of his duties and he returned to become superintendent of the Blue Ridge Parkway, a capacity in which he served from 1975-1977. Mr. Everhardt was educated as a civil engineer and tended to favor engineering projects. In the late 1970's to 1980's I served as scientific advisor to the Blue Ridge Parkway but in 1986 a proposal to extend seven resident worker units into the area above the bog site was approved and construction had begun. One day I discovered the flagging, etc., and was angry because this intrusion extended the impact on the site. I called the officials, especially Mr. Everhardt, to task for proceeding without reasonable protection to the resource. After a meeting of various professionals and the officials from Southeast Regional Office in Atlanta, the decision to move quarters to the area east and above the present Pisgah lodge.

Here are some more that you might consider:

- Philosophical musings on the Parkway and its place in the world
- The National Park movement
- Environmentalism
- Fall leaf forecasting
- Park service science
- Any other things that you think should be represented in the BLRI archives.

Have a nice weekend,
Ted