

* This interview contains good information. However, the 1st tape is damaged, it's very hard to hear. A reporter sat in on the interview. She asks some questions on the second side of tape I.

Tape Index Sheet

General Topic of Interview: Experiences of a Maintenance Foreman on the Blue Ridge Parkway

Date: June 29, 1996
 Place: Sparta, NC
 Length: 70 minutes

Personal Data:

Narrator Name Robert Sparks
 Address Sparta, N.C. 53035
342-4717
 Birthplace Allegheny, NC
 Birthdate 1916
 Occupations(s) Maintenance Foreman

- scanned
- returned from interviewee (is in nursing home, cannot read interview)
- corrected
- final copy sent

Interviewer Name Alicia Gallant
 Address 610 F. Clement St.
Radford, VA 24141
 Title: Research Assistant
 What was the occasion of the interview?
Oral history interview for Blue Ridge Parkway project

Interview Data:

Side 1

Side 2

Estimated time on tape:

Subjects covered, in approximate order (please spell out names of persons & places mentioned)

<u>00</u>	
<u>03</u>	<u>Sections of the parkway worked/work done on the Parkway</u>
	<u>work w/ Native Americans on the Parkway</u>
<u>09</u>	<u>Reporter for Allegheny News arrives</u>
<u>10</u>	<u>Job History w/ the Parkway</u>
<u>12</u>	<u>Teaching classes for the Civilian Conservation Corps/ the CCC</u>
<u>20</u>	<u>Work on the Parkway following working with the CCC</u>
<u>27</u>	<u>Likes/dislikes of the job (Maintenance foreman)</u>
Side 2 <u>00</u>	<u>The Civilian Conservation Corps/ Experience before the CCC</u>
<u>01</u>	<u>Experiences as a Maintenance foreman</u>

Use back of sheet if necessary

Time

Subjects covered

- 10 Spare time activities
- 12 Park service employees - changes overtime / Park concessions
- 15 Experiences as a maintenance foreman / Feelings for the Parkway
- ~~20~~ 21 Family
- 25 Reporter for Allegheny News asks some questions - the CCC
- 27 World War II
- 28 Building a reservoir near Asheville

Tape 2

- 00 Working conditions (at Asheville)
- 03 General feelings of community members in NC towards the Parkway
- 04 Worst aspects of the job as maintenance foreman

Names / Places

- Doughton Park
- Rt. 89 to Rt. 16 (NC)
- Smokies
- VA line
- Bluff Maintenance Area
- Asheville, NC
- Rt. 18 (NC)
- Soko Gap
- VA line to Rt. 16
- Gillespie Gap

Dates

- 1916 - born in Allegheny Co, NC
- 1938 (? he was unsure) began working for the Parkway
- 1970s retired
- Dec. 31, 1930 married

Sparks brings back Parkway memories for history project

By VENITA JENKINS
Staff

Several college interns and Blue Ridge Parkway employees are interviewing people who helped build the 60-year-old scenic highway, as part of an oral history project.

Alisa Gallant, a student at Radford University in Radford, Va., recently conducted an interview with Robert Sparks, a resident of Sparta and former employee of the Parkway.

According to Gallant, these interviews have been quite a learning experience. "You can learn a lot more talking to people than in the classroom," she said. "It is also a lot more interesting."

Sparks is the ninth person she has interviewed so far. He was among the people who helped build the 470-mile-long national scenic highway.

"There are hundreds of men who worked on the Parkway, not only for the Civilian

Conservation Corps, but also men who were hired by local contracting firms," said Jackie Holt, curator of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

"We never really got their stories. We want to know what it was like to work on the Parkway when it was being built, during the Depression." She said the recordings will be used by park staff for interpretive programs and by researchers.

"Anyone can listen to them. They will be catalogued into the park archives and transcribed," she said.

Sparks, who is 86, told Gallant about one day 66 years ago when a man came knocking on his door, and asked him to work for the Parkway as a maintenance supervisor.

At first he was hesitant, but later decided to join the men with the Civilian Conservation Corps. Sparks did not know that he was in for an adventure and taking part in history.

Sparks said that he began working on the Blue Ridge Parkway at age 25. Before being hired as a temporary supervisor, he was a self-employed carpenter.

"I had been in the building business since I was 17 years old," he said. "A few of the guys knew I knew how to build things. They sent a man over to my place to ask me to help with the construction of the maintenance area. At first I didn't want to go, but I went ahead."

"They had a camp that the boys all stayed in," Sparks said. "At night they would hold classes every other week and discuss working conditions and how to do this and that."

Sparks said he did not live in the camps. He would return home after a hard day's work to his wife, Bessie.

As supervisor, Sparks had to pick the best men he felt were capable to (See PARKWAY, Page 14)



REMINSICING THE EARLY YEARS — Robert Sparks talks about the early years of the Blue Ridge Parkway during an interview for an oral history project.

Parkway

(Continued from Page 1) assist with construction. He said he had 15 to 20 men working under his supervision.

"They were all eager to learn," he said. "Most of them were 16 years old. I never really had any trouble out of the boys. They wanted to learn the trade."

"I saw one of my boys a few weeks back. He said he wouldn't have been a carpenter if it wasn't for me."

In less than eight months, Sparks and his group, which he affectionately calls "The Boys," built an office, storage area, and a workshop in Soco Gap near Maggie Valley on the southern end of the Parkway.

After the construction of the maintenance area was complete, Sparks left to join the Navy as a chief petty officer. His career did not last long due to an ear problem. Three months after joining the service, Sparks was sent home because of a perforated eardrum.

"I had been out on drills and my ear went to draining. That's when they caught me and sent me home," he said. "When I went in, I wanted to stay. On my discharge they wrote, 'not qualified for re-enlistment.'"

Sparks returned to the Parkway as a full-time maintenance supervisor for the Bluffs District,

part of which is the section through Alleghany.

With the new position came new responsibilities for Sparks. He had to travel throughout the Parkway for various jobs, he said. The biggest one lasted almost two years near Asheville.

"We had to put in a great big water reservoir on Mount Pisgah and near Craggy Gardens," he said. "I got an apartment and took my wife with me."

He said that the work was hard and rugged. The six-man crew had to take the material up and down the treacherous mountain.

"The boys had to take the pipes on their shoulders," he said. "The mountain was straight up and down. It was real rough on them."

"I have not been back there since we built it," said Sparks. "I would like to go back and see the changes that have been made."

Sparks worked for the Parkway for almost 30 years.

"I came back home after my retirement and got into more hard work," he said. "I worked at home and built my house."

He said that the worst thing about working for the Parkway was the constant traveling.

"It was hard to keep up with the boys," he said. "I was so scattered out at times, but it gave me some extra money."

"The best memories I have are of the boys," he recalled. "They liked to play tricks every once in awhile. They were mischievous boys."

Sparks has seen the Parkway change since its beginning. Although it appears to be better since the good ole days, he said the Parkway has suffered in some ways.

"It's a nice parkway," Sparks said. "They don't have the help that I had. The quality of services have suffered because they don't have the money to spend."

Sparks has not returned to the Parkway for several years due to illness, but he hopes to return one day.

"I use to go back to the places where I have been, but I have not been there in awhile," he said. "I hope to go back someday."

The construction of the Parkway officially began with a groundbreaking ceremony on Sept. 11, 1935 at Cumberland Knob, which is in Alleghany County near the Virginia state line.

It was an effort by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration to help pull the mountains out of The Great Depression.

It is a national park and connects the Shenandoah National Park in northern Virginia and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in southwestern North Carolina.

Interview with Mr. Robert Sparks 6/29/96 Sparta, N.C.

(Interviewed by Alicia Gallant)

TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE

RS: (Indistinguishable for a minute or so). Then I worked with the CC boys, and built the maintenance area there in Doughton Park. With the CC boys, under my supervision. They didn't know anything. And I've had some of 'em come to me, and say, "Well, I wouldn't have been a carpenter if it hadn't been for you."

AG: Really?

RS: But they're all scattered now. There's one that lives in Galax, but I don't know where the rest of 'em are.

AG: Is that Glenn Williams, that lives in Galax? Did you know him?

RS: No, he's uh, I can't think of his name, (indistinguishable). He was a nice boy. And he told me, he said, "I'd never be a carpenter, if it hadn't been for you." I had a Greer boy, up there. He lives up in the other side of West Jefferson, up in that area somewhere. And uh, (clears throat) I had him in there (indistinguishable.) And he, he went into business himself after he got out of school. I believe I trained him. And I've taught classes there, in, at that maintenance area there, with some of the boys. For, oh, I believe it was in the space of time (indistinguishable) gettin' 'em to understand what to do, cuttin' the wood. It didn't last very long. But some of the boys went on, as I understand, and made carpenters. One, in particular, that I know of, went into bricks, he become a brick man. And so, that's about the story of the CC boys. (Indistinguishable) They had me instruct them, (indistinguishable) the Park Service. I had a section, of the Parkway, a huge section of the Parkway, 59 to 16, (indistinguishable) that I believe went in there, and (coughs) I worked in there. Whenever they had a building, or a construction of buildings, they would leave me in there, in the building, and I would work all the way into the Smokies.

AG: Into the Smokies?

RS: Yeah.

AG: Wow.

RS: There were Indians up there, for about four years.

AG: Oh, really? Did you have any contact with them?

RS: The Indians?

AG: Uh-huh.

RS: Oh, yeah. They were friendly to us.

AG: They were, or weren't?

RS: Good workers.

AG: Oh really?

RS: Yeah. I had an Indian foreman, (indistinguishable) Some of 'em were a little lazy, but they did good work. There was somethin' like that all the time, from now on, you know.

AG: How did they feel about the Parkway?

RS: The boys?

AG: The Indians?

RS: Oh, they loved it. Yeah, they loved it. They loved that money. They were nice boys, that's all I remember. Of course, I had, the Indian I had, was (indistinguishable). So we didn't have any problem and the Indians did their work.

AG: How many were there, about?

RS: Beg your pardon?

AG: About how many of them were there?

RS: Oh, I guess I had uh, oh, maybe half a dozen. Some of 'em, (indistinguishable.)

RS: (Continued) And 'course I, from the Virginia line, through the Smokies, I was workin' (indistinguishable). I (indistinguishable) there at the Bluff. And I didn't go. I had men (indistinguishable) that worked in another place. (Indistinguishable) I stayed in Asheville one year, I guess along the same line, we had a lot of construction over on the north side of the mountain, at the dome up there, just before you come down— oh, shoot, I can't think of the name. But anyway, I worked there, and we had a lot of 'em working there. Up on the north side of the mountain, (indistinguishable) and we had, we had a— I built a reservoir on top of the mountain, underground, you know, and we pumped the water from there, up to the top. And then you went down the Parkway, about uh, I guess a quarter of a mile, or somethin' like that. To the Bluff Maintenance Area. And we had a tunnel, underground, and (indistinguishable). But somebody was Chief of this, I don't know. But they done an awful lot of work.

AG: So you were in charge of the Virginia line, all the way to the Smokies?

RS: Yeah. I was at uh, I was stationed at the Bluff Maintenance Area. But they removed me, (indistinguishable) And then when we get through, we'd come back, and probably wouldn't be that long till I'd be somewhere else.

AG: So, what was your job title?

RS: I was Maintenance Foreman.

AG: Maintenance Foreman? So what was— what was kind of a— what were your typical duties?

RS: Well, supervisin' the buildings, and whatever we had. Was my job. I still got my name plate over there on my desk. (Laughs)

AG: Oh yeah. What kinds of things did you do in a day? Like a typical day?

RS: I guess I done a lot of runnin'. Keepin' the equipment goin', and keep everybody going. Get the materials. I had to keep everything ready because I was Foreman. (Clock strikes eleven o'clock.) 'Cause I'm a-gettin' 85 years old, and soon to be 86, and my memory isn't as good as it used to be.

AG: Where were you born?

RS: I was born right here in this town. 'Bout three miles down 18. (Indistinguishable)

AG: Where did you live?

RS: I lived down 18 there, over about two miles.

AG: Did you live in company housing? Did they provide housing for you?

RS: No, I had to pay my own rent. No, they didn't provide it at all. (Indistinguishable.)

AG: I think the reporters here, I'm gonna ask probably a couple of the same questions that you've already answered, just so she can hear you answer. (Doorbell rings)

RS: Come in! (Indistinguishable) Hi.

Guest: I'm (?) I'm supposed to sit in the interview.

RS: Well, sit down. I don't know whether you know anything more now than you did to begin with. (Laughs) (Pause) But I did a lot, worked with a lot of men.

AG: Um, what year did you start working for the Parkway?

RS: Oh, let's see... I guess I was, I don't think I was 30. I guess I was about 28 years old.

AG: Was that in the 1930s?

RS: No, I can't remember. You get to be 86 years old, you forget.

AG: Um, how did you end up getting the job?

RS: Well, they, they had a, used to call them, at the Bluff, (indistinguishable) Bluff, Maintenance Area. (Indistinguishable) at that Maintenance Area. They sent a man down from (indistinguishable) and then he come and work both

- RS: (Continued) (indistinguishable). Well, I didn't want to, to begin with, but I finally changed my mind. And I went up there and worked with the boys. And we built that maintenance area, with them CC boys. I made carpenters out of them. They had a bunch of those boys on the road with another foreman, that was workin' those. But I had that construction there, I worked with the boys in there. And they were eager to work. They were eager to learn.
- AG: And were you working with the Park Service then?
- RS: I was with the Parks. Well, they had another, called it then, they had a, I don't know what that was. (Indistinguishable).
- AG: Like a private firm?
- RS: Yeah. And they stayed there, they had a camp over there. And I worked there.
- AG: So you were hired to supervise the system.
- RS: Supervise. M-hm.
- AG: Um, and, so, you said before that you held classes?
- RS: Well, we would at night. Part of the time I'd hold a class, and we'd discuss working conditions, and how to do this, and how to do that. (Indistinguishable). We had 'em, I believe we had 'em about every couple of weeks.
- AG: Every week?
- RS: No, about every other week.
- AG: Oh, every other week. Um, were you out there supervising them all day long?
- RS: Oh yeah. And they were eager to learn, them boys. And I had a choice. See, they had a, those boys, CC boys, out on the roadway, trimming along the roadway, (indistinguishable), that was under another foreman, I just had those, I picked my boys, those I thought would do a good job. And they did it.
- AG: About how many people were under your—
- RS: I wanta say, eight of 'em, or ten. I guess it was around 15. Some of 'em would drop out, and we had to get another.
- AG: And did anything big happen when you were with the CC camps? Did anybody famous visit?
- RS: No, not that I know of.
- AG: No? Were there any accidents?
- RS: Oh, no. I was careful with my boys. They was pleased. They done a lot of good work. There wasn't nothing in that area, and they built all the maintenance buildings up there, except that garage up there. They built that later, another bunch did. But I didn't have anything (indistinguishable). Now, all the rest of 'em, they built those buildings, under my supervision.
- AG: How long did that take?
- RS: Well, I guess about six or eight months. Had an office in there, and storage, where our storage (indistinguishable) and then an office there. And they had a bookshop. But the garage, wasn't built until after I left.
- AG: Did you um, live with them in the camps then? Or were you still living—
- RS: No, I did stay up here. I was stationed. And they had an instructor in one of the camps that (indistinguishable). He was onto somethin' all the time, and he kept 'em straight. (Laughs) 'Cause I'd get 'em in the daytime, see.
- AG: Were you hired, um as a temporary worker, then? Or were you permanent?
- RS: I wasn't permanent. No. At that time, no.
- AG: So what happened when the camps were over?
- RS: Uh, they done away with the boys, you see. It was just for the War, in the Service, there. Oh yeah, I done completed that job and I took some of the boys with me to (indistinguishable).
- AG: To where? I'm sorry.

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RS: Up at Soco Gap.

AG: Soco Gap?

RS: M-hm. We worked there a while and built a (indistinguishable). I believe I

was off— oh, yeah, I was off, I'm sorry. I was registered for (indistinguishable) for the war. A lot of things shut down. And after the War was over, they sent a man down there and then I came back to the Park Service. I went back, and I worked for the people for the Parkway.

AG: Were you building sections of the Parkway? Or were you—

RS: Well, at that time, I was out cleaning up around the roadways, and everything.

AG: And was this, um, were you a permanent worker at this time? Or was that a temporary position?

RS: Yeah, I was a permanent.

AG: So was that, you were hired as a maintenance foreman?

RS: M-hm. And when that was over in a month, I went over (indistinguishable)

AG: So how did you manage that? Did you move around?

RS: Oh, yeah. I had a, I had to get a (indistinguishable). I remember one of (indistinguishable) had a, built an underground reservoir, an enormous up on the top of the mountain, the tip of the mountain before it goes down to Asheville there. And I had those boys, and I hired one guy up there who (indistinguishable) and we built a, put in an underground storage water tank. An enormous size. And uh, I showed the boys how to set the floor inside. And I had to build a (indistinguishable) for a magazine, to get some dynamite. And he couldn't, he couldn't get a light. (Laughs) And I had to go about two miles. I was comin' back, and I had showed them boys how to set the framing up and around, and how to set the forms. And when I come back, they'd turned the studs there in the sides, and (laughs) they had them flipped around. And I said, "What're you gonna do? You (indistinguishable) up in there?" Never thought about that. (Laughs) So I had them turn it. Oh boy, it was just a whole little scene. (Indistinguishable).

AG: How many people were under you, at that point?

RS: Oh, I had about a half a dozen under me. (Clock strikes) One man was, claimed to be a carpenter. And I left him in charge, and when I come back, he had the studs turned in, and (indistinguishable) (Laughs) The studs up through there and they had the form still standing' (laughs)... I say, you get ahold of a bunch like that, you've got something. You've got to stay there every minute. They didn't know anything about building. I stayed with 'em till they got that there reservoir done.

AG: How long did it—

RS: And then we went around down the side of the mountain (indistinguishable) you know. I stayed up in there, I guess, about two years. Yeah. I guess I've been supervising (indistinguishable).

AG: What other projects like that do you remember supervising?

RS: Well, I don't know, that's pretty much it. Besides the work that I did. Bluff District up there. (Indistinguishable). The Bluff was up over in my section. I had a section from the Virginia line, up 'till 16. I was there when I was supervising. Fact, I built a (indistinguishable). I had good foremans up there. And I'd turn it over to them when I had to go somewhere. And that's about the story of it.

AG: M-hm. When you were actually in a place, were the foremen out there, were you out there working with them?

RS: Yeah. I stayed with them. And of course, I always had a foreman under me. I'd tell him what to do, and of course, I'd have to get out and see that we had the material to work with and...

AG: What did you like about the job?

RS: Money. (Laughs) I liked to work with the boys. I had older men there at that time, but we mostly had boys who were beginning, the CC boys. They were just

eager to learn, and I was up at that maintenance area, and I told you about them, they were mischevious.

AG: Do you have any stories about that, about anything that happened up there?

RS: Nothin' in particular. Sometimes they'd try to— you know, some of the livelier boys would try to trick someone. (Laughs)

AG: What did they do? Do you remember any of that?

RS: Well, any kind of mischief.

AG: Did that ever happen to you?

RS: No. No, they knew better. (Laughs) But they were good workers. Good boys. And they wanted to learn a trade, too. They wanted to learn carpentry. They learned how to do that. (Indistinguishable) CC boys.

AG: Did they always ask you a lot of questions?

RS: Oh yeah. They were good about that. And they had a crew that would go out on the roadside, you know, cleaning up and such (indistinguishable) But I could pick my boys, and do what I wanted to with 'em.

AG: Did you pick from the ones that were working—

RS: Yeah. Ones that worked on the road. They had an office there, they had supervisors, and a State office there. And the foremens runnin' those boys, that went out in the Bluff and left 'em on the roads, the banks. And back at that time, there was a lot of seeding and everything to do on the Parkway. And I don't remember those boys' names. That time has passed and left me.
(END OF SIDE ONE)

SIDE TWO

AG: But you were twenty three or four?

RS: Yeah, (indistinguishable). I went into the building business when I was 17. (Indistinguishable).

AG: So when did you start that?

RS: (Indistinguishable) Gillespie Gap.

AG: Were you in the CC over there?

RS: Oh, no, I stayed with the CC boys in the camp. They had a guy over at the camp, they was mischevious, they had to have, uh (laughs)

AG: What kinds of things happened there?

RS: Oh, they'd play tricks on one another, I heard about it the next morning. (Laughs)

AG: I heard about some things like, they'd put a bucket of water on top of the door.

RS: Yeah, Things like that would go on, you know. (Laughs)

AG: Um, did you, so did you already have your business, building houses and things, before your work with the CC? Or was that—

RS: Oh, yeah. I'd been building. I knew building. See, I built— took those boys and built all of that maintenance area there. That was 1934.

AG: When did you start that?

RS: (Indistinguishable). And then I worked them later at (indistinguishable).

AG: Oh, you did?

RS: And that's about the story I know.

AG: Um, what didn't you like about the job?

RS: Money. (Laughs) (Indistinguishable.) Well, I liked the work, but once in a while you'd find (indistinguishable). I didn't have enough (indistinguishable). I had a job where you'd learn, and if you'd learn something, I had one boy he

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said, "I'd never been a carpenter if it hadn't been for you." And I had one boy that, on up the other side of West Jefferson, (Indistinguishable) he made a brick mason. And he done a good job. (Indistinguishable)

AG: And you were out there watching 'em the whole time.

RS: That's right. And they were mischevious. (Laughs)

AG: Um, did you work 40 hours a week?

RS: I don't remember that. Yeah, I guess we did. Yeah. Supposed to work 40 hours. The CC boys, they had to learn, you know, (indistinguishable). Built that maintenance area. Didn't build that garage, that little storage garage. It was not a small building on the lake there, as you could see.

AG: How did you decide which of the boys would make good workers under you?

RS: Well, I tried (indistinguishable). The boys that were working on the road, you know, the ones that were working on the road?

AG: M-hm.

RS: I never did have to (indistinguishable). And I'd understand that the kind of work that they done (indistinguishable) mischevious, they guy that was workin' with 'em (indistinguishable). They were mischevious.

AG: Did they get along with each other?

RS: Oh yeah. As far as I know. Because I didn't know what they were like back in the camp. They did when they were with me. They'd talk about (indistinguishable). (Laughs) The captain over there, well I don't know, I guess he was a little loose on 'em.

AG: (Indistinguishable).

RS: And that's about the story of it, I suppose.

AG: What's your best memory of that time?

RS: Well, (indistinguishable) Mischevious. I know one time, we sent a boy, what was, I can't remember his name. He went up and when he came back he couldn't find us. (Laughs) (Indistinguishable). And I didn't know if I'd given him directions. (Indistinguishable).

AG: Did you have any contact with the Park Rangers?

RS: No, not the Rangers, no. (Indistinguishable). Bluff to 16. (Clock strikes.) (Indistinguishable.)

AG: (Indistinguishable)

RS: The supervisor (indistinguishable).

AG: And when you went on the project, where did you live?

RS: Well, I'd get a room. And one time, when I was at Asheville, I got an apartment. (Indistinguishable.)

AG: Over at the maintenance area?

RS: The maintenance area. (Indistinguishable.)

AG: And that's where you built the reservoir?

RS: Yeah. That's where I built that. Built one on top of the mountain. Then we built another one near a picnic area.

AG: Did you build the picnic area too?

RS: No, I didn't. I didn't do that. I did get the boys started before I left. (Indistinguishable).

AG: Where was the main office?

RS: Our office was right at Bluff. I didn't work the Virginia side of the line.

AG: Um, and how long did you work for, up there.

RS: Let me see. A couple of years. I stayed up there a couple of years.

AG: Did you, um, then you retired?

RS: Yeah, I come home. To do more hard work.

AG: What year did you retire?

RS: In uh, I don't know. (Indistinguishable) I worked with the Park Service for 40 years.

AG: Wow. During that time, what did you do in your time off?

RS: Well I had to work at home, I was building. I actually built my house, where I live. This house.

AG: Oh, you built this house?

RS: Yeah. Except for the plumbing, and the wiring of the house, I didn't do that. Except for that, I built the whole thing.

AG: So did you any farming?

RS: Oh no, I didn't do that. I was away too much. (Indistinguishable) And they sent a man down there, wanted me to come to the Parkway, and that's where I went. For the next 30 years. I was off a few years, during the War. I was in the Service. They put me here at Gillespie Gap, to build the Parkway. And I (indistinguishable). But they caught me later. (Indistinguishable). And I went in, I worked on the right-of-way. And they found out that I was (indistinguishable) but they wouldn't have me sent back home. (Laughs) The Superintendent sent a man to have me come back.

AG: Um, can you tell if the Park Service employees have changed, over time?

RS: Well, they haven't changed too much. It's true they don't have (indistinguishable) Another thing, I don't think they've got (indistinguishable). At that time, they had (indistinguishable).

AG: What do you think of Park Concessions?

RS: Concessions?

AG: M-hm.

RS: Well, all right, I guess. All right. I supervised the building, that building, over in the maintenance area there.

AG: Was that at Bluff?

RS: At Bluff. And (indistinguishable), they did good work, the men. (Indistinguishable).

AG: So were they, the caretakers, were you their boss?

RS: (Indistinguishable).

AG: So did you tell them (indistinguishable).

RS: But, I had foremans under me. And they wanted me to take a particular job, you know, far away, and so I went. And then I'd come back and do the same thing over again. And I was back again. And I stayed through my two years, I guess. Up at Asheville. I had my apartment there. I left home so much.

AG: Was that the longest that you were in one place?

RS: Yeah, let me see. (Indistinguishable).

AG: What other kinds of things did you do besides building maintenance areas and taking care of things like, building the reservoirs?

RS: I supervised (Indistinguishable).

AG: So, over-all, did you like the job?

RS: Oh, yeah. I liked it.

AG: Do you remember, um, the first time you saw the Blue Ridge Parkway?

RS: I don't know, (indistinguishable). They started at the Virginia line, and go all the way up, you see, and back then when I was a boy, they had contractors doing all that work. (Indistinguishable) And I guess I went back during that time.

AG: What do you think of the Parkway today?

RS: It's a nice place. But they don't have the help up there that I did, in my day. We kept all the same things up, the shrubbery and all that. And I had plenty of help. They just don't have it.

AG: So do you think the quality of service is suffering today because of that?

RS: Somewhat. I think. I haven't been up there in a while, I don't know. I think maybe it has. They don't have the help that they need.

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AG: How often are you on the Parkway now?

RS: Haven't been up there for a few years. (Indistinguishable). Ten or fifteen years. I used to go up there more. (Indistinguishable). I'm 86, and (indistinguishable) I can't remember like I used to-

AG: Are you still connected with the Parkway in any way?

RS: No, not any more.

AG: Are you involved with the Alumni Association?

RS: They have one, but (indistinguishable) for the last two or three years. But I am going back. We don't have nobody to help us out. No children. And, you know, we're by ourselves. We have two godsons, just two. I worked up there on the Parkway, and come back and work around the house. Come back and work. (Indistinguishable).

AG: Can you think of anything else that's important?

RS: No, I think I'm— (Laughs) I think I'm run out.

AG: (to reporter) Do you have any questions that you wanted to ask?

Reporter: What's your last name?

RS: Sparks. (Clock strikes.)

Reporter: You're both originally from Sparta?

RS: Uh-huh. (Pause) Are you gonna send me a copy?

Reporter: Of course.

RS: (Indistinguishable) (Laughs)

Reporter: I just started with (indistinguishable).

AG: Oh yeah.

RS: You're gonna put it in the paper?

Reporter: Yes sir.

RS: Well that'll be a nice little study.

Reporter: What were the average ages of the guys that were in the CC camps?

RS: Well, they were young boys.

Reporter: About teenagers?

RS: Yeah, teenagers.

AG: You had to be seventeen, right?

RS: M-hm. Had to be sixteen, I believe they let 'em in there at sixteen. I'm not sure. I didn't have anything to do with that. The only thing I had to deal with was was the workers, I wasn't at the camp. I wasn't there at night.

(Indistinguishable) (Laughs) They were a mischevious bunch of boys. But they were good workers. And they wanted to learn a trade, too.

Reporter: Did they look up to you like a father figure?

RS: Oh, I saw one of the boys (indistinguishable) down to Galax. And that boy, down at Jefferson, he made a brick mason.

AG: So you kept in touch with some of 'em over the years.

RS: Well, they'd send me (indistinguishable) I never seen 'em. But they'd send me (indistinguishable)

AG: That must be nice to be able to think that you had some influence over them.

RS: They were a good group of boys.

Reporter: What were the reasons that they sent you home from the army?

RS: (Indistinguishable). I was in (indistinguishable).

Reporter: were you there for long?

RS: No, I wasn't there long. No, I was there three months. (Indistinguishable).

AG: Were you glad to go home?

RS: Well, after a little I was. When I went in, I wanted to stay there. On account of, they put me (indistinguishable). (Pause) I stayed with 'em a while, before I came home. (Indistinguishable).

Reporter: What year were you and your wife married?

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RS: Married in 1930. Last day of December. (Indistinguishable). You want to write a book on me, right? (Laughs)

Reporter: If I do write a book, I'll give you some of the profits. (Laughs)

AG: So were you already working for the CCC camps when you were married?

RS: Yeah. (Indistinguishable).

Reporter: What was the name of the place you were workin' at in Asheville?

RS: Well, I worked, I'll tell you the truth, I worked all the way from the Parkway to Asheville. Odds and ends you know, that were bein' done.

AG: What was the park called in Asheville that you were working on? With the reservoir?

RS: Beg your pardon?

AG: What was the park called? That you built the reservoir at?

RS: It was up at the mountain, this side of Asheville, top of the mountain.

AG: Do you remember what the name of the mountain is?

RS: Let' s see... (Indistinguishable) We had some rough country over there. Had to go down through there, (indistinguishable) across the side of the mountain. And the picnic area (indistinguishable). END OF INTERVIEW