

Interview with Clint Bishop

April 19, 1994

Interviewer:
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AW: Clint, would you like to start with where you were born and where you grew up?

CB: I'm a native Montanan, born at Havre. We were, however, living in Shelby when I was born. The reason I was born in Havre was that two of my mother's older sisters were living in Havre at that time. My mother's family were real old timers as far as Montana was concerned. Her father was a blacksmith at Fort Benton in the early days; and when I say early days, I'm talking about 150 or more years ago. They were up there at that time when that was the head of distribution for supplies that were shipped up the river and were taken out by wagon from there. All of my mother's sisters and brothers were born at Fort Benton. My dad came to Montana from Iowa. He and his brother were both newspaper people and bought the Choteau Acantha in Choteau and came out there. And then my aunt after they'd been here a couple of years wanted to be back with her folks in Iowa so my uncle went back out there and my Dad had the newspaper. From there he met my Mother, I'm not sure where, but they were married and he bought the Shelby Promoter and operated the newspaper up there for a period of time.

AW: He must have given up on the Choteau Acantha and bought the other paper?

CB: Yeah, he sold that. Then one year dad operated Whetstone's paper in Cut Bank and it might have been while Whetstone was in the legislature or something like that, but anyway, he bought the Hill County Democrat and we lived in Havre until my folks died in 1929. After that my Dad left enough money for the four of us children to get through school – and when I say through school, I meant college. The three oldest ones were sent to the Ursulan Academy in Great Falls where I was until I finished eighth grade. I was 12 when the folks died. They only took boys through the eighth grade at the Academy and then I was sent to Mount St. Charles here in Helena. That is now Carroll College. I was in high school there at the time they changed the name.

AW: What was it called earlier?

CB: Mount St. Charles; now is Carroll College.

AW: Your folks died at the same time, in an accident?

CB: They died nine months apart. My youngest brother was born seven months after my dad died. He was only two months old when my mother died. Then we were, my sister and I and my oldest brother decided, after I became a sophomore, or when I finished as a sophomore, that we'd stay back with my grandmother in Iowa. I lived back there and finished college in Iowa State. I had just finished there when I was drafted in the service.

AW: Was your undergraduate degree in fish and wildlife?

CB: Forestry, but I took as much wildlife as I could in the program.

AW: You had your Bachelor's Degree before you went in the army?

CB: Before I went; I had gotten it just before I was drafted into the service.

AW: You learned about the fish and wildlife field when you were in college?

CB: Right. Then I was in the service when I was first drafted, I was first assigned to Custer's old outfit down in El Paso, Texas. Seventh calvary division. After war was declared we got so far under-strength down there being an old regular army outfit they were pulling personnel out like made to form cadres for new outfits. When that happened it wound up that each man was taking care of two or three horses. You'd saddle up one horse and you'd leave the other one or two, whichever the case may be, with you; then we had about a seven or eight mile ride every day. You'd ride the horse out and then you'd change saddles half way and ride one of the others back. When you got back you got to groom all three of them. When you groomed a horse in the calvary, you know how you brush the hair on the horse the wrong way the dust comes to the surface? Well it didn't when you were through. Brushing them in the calvary. Consequently I got pretty fed up with taking care of horses. Anyway, they were calling for volunteers one day. This outfit was to be trained; it was to be a special outfit; the plan was to have them put ashore or drop from airplane in Norway to destroy the heavy water plants that the Germans had in Norway. And so the place, it turned out, after I volunteered I found out the place that had been selected for training was Fort Harrison in Montana. So, as far as I was concerned, I was coming home.

AW: You went into the army in Iowa and wound up back in Montana?

CB: Yeah. Well I was drafted in Fort Lewis. And then I went overseas with the First Special Service Force after training. I don't know if you want anything about the training here, Art.

AW: Well, just about where you served, when you got out and how you learned about the job in Montana.

CB: Well, I served here and our first assignment was Kiska in the Aleutians, which turned out to be a dry run. When I came back then we were sent to Italy and that's where I was until I got banged up and wound up in the army hospital in Cleveland, Ohio. That's where I met my first wife. She was working with a shirt-tail relative of mine, the folks from Havre, contacted her to come out and visit me. She had a step mother at home that she wasn't real comfortable with and was looking for excuses to get away. So she came out with this cousin and then when she started to care, she didn't know if she should keep coming or not. Anyway, after two and a half years in the hospital I got out and applied for this job with the department.

AW: How did you learn about the job?

CB: Well, Art Lamey was a good friend of my Dad's and I contacted him to see about the possibility of getting back to Montana. I wanted to get back to Montana, being a native. Having my degree in forestry, I applied and they indicated there were some job openings in the fish and game department. I made applications and I was the second fisheries biologist hired by the department. Chuck Phenicie was hired first, and if I remember right, in June of '47. Then in September '47 I was hired.

AW: Was your office in Helena?

CB: The office was in Helena. It was in the Capitol building. At the time Chuck and I started there were no essentially no files other than the hatchery planting schedules on fisheries in the department. One of the first assignments Chuck gave me when we started was to prepare a file of the streams and lakes of the waters in Montana.

AW: How did you start? What was the first thing you did?

CB: Well, the first thing I did was got the best maps I could. And then I started up at the headwaters and listed them and worked my way, township, range and section. Did that by drainage. After we had completed that, then we wanted to get the information – there was no accumulation even of the planting records. One of the big jobs I had at the early stages was to go down to the basement of the Capitol building where the fish and game had storage and locate the plantings that had been made by the hatcheries. Introduce those into the files that had been set up on the various waters. Then they decided they, we wanted to get some creel census

information on the waters and so we set up creel census records for the wardens to keep and also for fisherman logs, individuals would keep logs on the various waters. We also, at the same time to make this easier to handle, we made arrangements to put it on computers. I entered the file numbers in the file we had for these waters in our master file. Then we prepared and mailed these fisherman logs and the wardens creel census and then those were sent into me and I coded them for the computers. They were sent in and became part of our master file.

AW: That was something that I had the advantage of when I started in Missoula in '51, when I started in Miles City, of course in that part of the country you hadn't got to yet, fisheries wasn't all that important. But in Missoula in '54, that was the only records I had were the result of both the warden creel census and the log creel census. You could print it out by computer and filed in orderly manner. Didn't you take some time off to go back for your Master's?

CB: Yes, back in '49. I went back and got my master's degree in fish and wildlife management. I was allowed to go with the understanding that I still would handle the creel census information and the planting information and getting it into the proper order for the computers.

AW: Could you put that into your thesis program?

CB: No. So, I went back and got my master's degree in fish and wildlife management, about March of '51 that I finished that.

AW: It seems to me when I started in July of '51 you had just come back to work. You were in Helena at the time. I didn't get into Helena much from Miles City, though. But I think that was the first time we met. Then your office was over at the Mitchell Building.

CB: Right, they reassigned us over to the Mitchell Building and the department started growing. They needed more space.

AW: You must have gotten in on some field work. I think everyone back then got in on some shocking crews I think.

CB: Well, I can remember the first old shocker we had. It weighed, it was an old shocker that we got that was heavy.

AW: Was this the thing that Opheim had on wheels? He had one on bicycle wheels.

CB: I think this was even prior to that. Chuck and I, with some of the wardens, were

some who worked on that first. One of the things we found in stream sampling and in creel census we found a number of cases where the hatchery was planting one species of fish and there were none of that species being caught or present. That enabled us to improve the chances for stocking with putting in the species that apparently were adapted to the waters we were putting them in.

AW: That was what the old five year plan was supposed to accomplish but didn't. It was drawn up entirely in various offices. Prior to the five year plan, as I understand it, fish were stocked by wherever the game warden, hatchery guy and local fisherman thought. The five year plan you at least put them in waters that were capable of sustaining trout, not necessarily the same species. How bout vehicles in those days? We didn't have four wheel drives.

CB: The first one I had, I remember, was just a grey panel. Then I got a green suburban.

AW: That gray panel you had was a Ford, I think. It had a four speed. I had the mate to it when I went to Miles City but I got the red one with the three speed. Spent more time getting that thing dug out of mud holes than I did driving it.

CB: Then, when we got that four wheel drive suburban, that was quite an improvement. Chuck and I got around quite a bit to various parts of the state trying to get information. We did some preliminary work with that old shocker where we could get information on some of the waters. And then we had a lot of meeting all over the state with sportsmen that we were trying to satisfy.

AW: That was the basis I think in formulating a fish stocking management policy. I have a copy of the old '54 biennial which is probably still one of the best examples of what the fisheries division was trying to do.

CB: A lot of my earlier work was just paper work getting those files set up. Chuck had an experience previously to coming to Montana with that, he was knowledgeable about some of it. I was pretty much just following his, because he had some experience.

AW: He worked in Washington. I think he went to work directly from his Ph.D. But he didn't finish either his master's or his Ph.D. But when you started, Stubblefield was in charge of fisheries, in '47?

CB: Right.

AW: But you worked out of the Helena office until when?

CB: '62. When I moved to Billings. I became fisheries manager down there. Laney Hanzel worked for me for a time down there. Pat Marcuson worked for me for 16 years. I remember when Pat first started working in the high country there were a number of supervisors in other districts, well Poz was one of them, that would give me a bad time about using somebody up in that, cause how would anyone get up there in the mountain lakes. I kept Pat at that, to start with, Pat loved that kind of work. I had help up there previously that didn't enjoy getting up in that type of country. When Pat had completed the work and came out with a management plan for the high country, there were a number of supervisors that expressed wishes that they had that information on their high waters.

AW: He covered it pretty thoroughly, didn't he?

CB: He sure did. He would go up in the winter time to check and see what the fish were doing. He come out before he left to Canada after I retired, with a book on the high lakes that's for sale now. We had Bill Wiedenheft down there. I think the first fish manager had two districts.

AW: Yes, I think the first person stationed in Billings was Perry Nelson. Earlier Opheim shared Billings and Bozeman.

CB: Then the one went down to Miles City.

AW: Yes, when Perry came over he took Miles City. Before that the Miles City district had been shared between the fisheries managers in Glasgow and Billings.

CB: And, right. There was a little adjustment between Bozeman and I think they extended the Billings one a little further west.

AW: But you think your high lakes survey was one of your major accomplishments?

CB: Yes, I think so.

AW: Well you also got things like Cooney and ...

CB: Yeah, they're going well as fisheries today.

AW: Another thing that happened when you were in Billings was the Bureau of Reclamation constructing the Yellowtail Dam on the Bighorn. Do you want to talk about some of your problems with that?

CB: Well, one of the early things that we did on the Bighorn was to get into, we took a boat trip down through the Bighorn Canyon, down to where we passed through the dam site prior to the completion of the dam. What we were doing was trying to estimate what might, what type of fish might be suitable for the reservoir when it was completed.

AW: Were you looking at what kind of bottom it would have before it was filled?

CB: Yeah, and what fish were in there.

AW: It must have looked like a vertical bottom at that time.

CB: One of the things we decided at that time was that it appeared to us it probably would be best suited to a walleye and lake trout. Those were the species then that we introduced at the time they closed the reservoir. There also were brown trout present in the waters and we stocked some rainbow, I think. They seemed to do real well. They grew big. That has become a very popular fishery; that's probably fished as heavy as any waters in that region.

AW: Also one of the most spectacular.

End of Interview.

Transcribed by Margie Peterson.
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