

Interview with Ross Mersereau by Max G. Geier (with Ted Dyrness), September 3, 1997, 1:00 p.m. at Mersereau's house in Corvallis, Oregon. Transcribed by Brooke Warren.

Ross Mersereau was a Marine and lost a lung during the battle of Iwo Jima, but still managed a career as a watershed technician on Andrews Forest working with Al Levno, Dick Fredriksen, Jack Rothacher, and others. An exceptionally reliable worker, he credits Levno with high standards for producing high-quality data. For many years, he and his large family resided in a house on the Blue River Ranger District headquarters compound, so he had ready access to the field sites.

Max Geier: This is the interview with Ross Mersereau, taking place on Wednesday, the 3rd of September, at 1:00 in the afternoon. Ted Dyrness also is attending the interview. The place of the interview is Ross Mersereau's house in Corvallis, Oregon. If you could start out by talking a little about your personal background and how you came to be working with the Forest Service. I understand that you worked as a watershed technician at the Andrews Experimental Forest from 1966 to 1988, roughly. Is that right?

Ross Mersereau: I worked during that time, up until '88. But I was already living up there, and spent all my time there until '70.

Geier: Okay.

Mersereau: And then I moved to Corvallis.

Ted Dyrness: So, when did you move into the house up there?

Mersereau: I moved into the house up there in '66.

Dyrness: Okay.

Mersereau: October '66.

Dyrness: Okay. Did you come after Dick? [Fredriksen]

Mersereau: Yes.

Dyrness: Right after Dick?

Mersereau: No. Al [Levno] was there.

Dyrness: Okay. I was trying to remember if Al lived there. And he did for a year or something.

Mersereau: He and his family lived in the trailer up on the hill.

Dyrness: When he first got there. I remember that.

Mersereau: When he first got there, and I think just before when Dick [Fredriksen] moved down [to Corvallis] to do his doctorate, then, Al moved into the house.

Dyrness: So, when would that be, early '60s?

Mersereau: No. I would say --

Dyrness: -- Four or something; '64?

Mersereau: Probably '60. Could have been '64 or '65, somewhere in there.

Dyrness: Yeah, something like that.

Geier: If you could, please talk a little about what you were doing before then. What led you to that point?

Mersereau: Oh, I had had some problems with my back in the kind of work that I was doing.

Geier: What had you been doing?

Mersereau: I worked in a cannery for a while, and then I worked driving a lumber truck.

Geier: Okay.

Mersereau: I was doing a lot of lifting and things, and then, I had two back operations, and convinced the state to put me on vocational rehabilitation.

Geier: Okay.

Mersereau: I had a degree in education, taught for a year, and then I decided I didn't like that.

Geier: Where had you gone to school?

Mersereau: I went to Oregon State.

Geier: Oregon State.

Mersereau: Yeah.

Geier: You taught here in Oregon, then?

Mersereau: Yeah, I taught in Springfield.

Geier: Springfield, okay.

Mersereau: When I went to vocational rehabilitation to get some help, I thought maybe a little different education along with what I already had, would put me in a better position for a job that didn't require so much back work.

Geier: Uh-huh.

Mersereau: So, I decided I'd rather not go back and keep trying at teaching. I just didn't feel like I was a teacher. (Laughter) At least not the kind of teacher that I had hoped to be.

Geier: What level had you been teaching at?

Mersereau: High school.

Geier: High school. A particular subject?

Mersereau: Biology was my major.

Geier: Okay.

Mersereau: I had a major in biology and minors in social science and music. And I thought that those things would be good.

Dyrness: Sure.

Mersereau: Would keep me occupied.

Dyrness: As far as teaching goes?

Mersereau: When I went to teaching, they put me in "General Science." The hard part of it was that, at that particular school at that time, they were teaching "general science" in a three-year period, and they had general science all divided up. General science was all physics.

Dyrness: Not in your bag? (Laughter)

Mersereau: And I had not had any physics. In high school and the ninth grade, I couldn't even remember having physics, although I know I must have had it.

Dyrness: Some [physics]?

Mersereau: You know, I had general science, and there must have been some physics. But, I really had to work hard. I spent a lot of time studying, trying to keep ahead of the class. I was new, and didn't have a lot of experience at the discipline, and that really forced things for me, because I figured, if I can't get a hang of it, I needed to change. I got better, but I didn't get where I thought I was good, and it was a real worry. So, I decided to do something else. I decided, if I was teaching biology where I was prepared, maybe it would be different, but I didn't get a job. I tried several other schools, and all they wanted was a general science teacher. So, when I went to the vocational rehabilitation, I told them I didn't want to teach. Would I have to just go back, and get more stuff in teaching, and they said no, you do what you want. So, at the time I thought I was kind of interested in biology and the ocean.

Dyrness: Oceanography type stuff?

Mersereau: Oceanography type stuff. So, I went out to the University of Oregon in Eugene, tried to find somebody over there that I could talk to, and didn't get much help. I had gone to school with Chuck Warren, who was a Professor of Fish and Wildlife at Oregon State, so I came back up here and I talked to him, and he said that he would take me on.

Dyrness: As a graduate student?

Mersereau: As a graduate student.

Dyrness: I didn't remember that. Interesting.

Mersereau: And so, he took me on for about a year, and then, when I finally decided what I wanted to do for my --

Geier: -- Thesis?

Mersereau: Thesis. I switched over to one of the other professors, and started working on that. But I was spending so much time studying and trying to get my grades and everything, that I didn't have enough time to really spend on the --

Dyrness: -- Researching?

Mersereau: Research.

Dyrness: That sounds familiar. (Laughter)

Mersereau: I got to the point where I had to make a decision. I could either find somebody coming in from someplace so that I could go do it, or I would just have to lay off and go do it, and then come back. Jay Gashwiler was one of the professors for Fish and Wildlife [OSU Dept.], he had a study on the Andrews, and he knew Dick Fredriksen. Then Jack [Rothacher], and all

those guys, and he, said they need somebody over there on the Andrews. They're looking for a technician to work, and it might be something that I'd like to do.

Geier: He is the person that you did thesis with then?

Mersereau: No, he was the guy that got me pointed in the right direction, and sent me to Dick.

Geier: Okay.

Dyrness: Did you ever finish your thesis?

Mersereau: No. I never finished my thesis.

Dyrness: You never finished your graduate degree?

Mersereau: No. I had all but about six hours of class work.

Dyrness: Have you had any regrets about that?

Mersereau: For a long time I really worried about it. And one time Jack said to me --

Dyrness: -- Don't worry about it.

Mersereau: Well, he had gotten to the point in his life where what he said was, "I'm really doing what I want to do and I just don't want to put the effort into more schooling." And so he said, "I just quit trying or worrying about getting my doctor's degree."

Dyrness: Unlike Dick. And it was always kind of a question of whether Dick should have done it, you know? [Ph.D.]

Mersereau: Yeah, yeah.

Dyrness: Dick [Fredriksen] went back and got his doctorate degree, and it was really tough, because you're on in life and you're professionally established, anyway. But this is the old idea that you need to have a Ph.D. for obtaining your "union card" to be a bonafide research scientist. Dick did it. Bob Ruth did it. And in a lot of cases it just was kind of --

Geier: -- Not necessary. [Unless planning career move into academia.]

Dyrness: Yeah, a lot of pain and misery for little return.

Geier: Yeah.

Mersereau: I was forty when I started the program.

Dyrness: You were forty?

Mersereau: I was not only forty, but I had all nine of my kids to support. So, I luckily got a job in the department over there under work study, and I was able to make enough money plus whatever the state gave me, plus what my disability gave from the service.

Dyrness: Your disability was service-connected, that's what I was thinking. Is it Army?

Mersereau: The Marine Corps.

Dyrness: Marine Corps.

Geier: Marine Corps, okay. That was during World War II?

Mersereau: Yeah.

Geier: Okay.

Dyrness: That's what I was thinking.

Geier: So, what years were you at OSU as an undergraduate after the war?

Mersereau: As an undergraduate, I came after the war, in 1946 to '51.

Geier: Okay.

Mersereau: I went an extra year and went to several summer sessions. At that time, you had to have four years of undergraduate work in order to get a certificate. Then, for the next four or five years you had to keep going back to school, picking up credits till you got 15 more credits. Well, I just went ahead and got 'em. I had that much time on the G.I. Bill, and I just went ahead, and so I took five years, came up with 200 and, oh, 50-some [credit] hours.

Geier: Then you worked for about a year, and then, you went back for the graduate work?

Mersereau: Right.

Geier: Had you gone into the service right after high school?

Mersereau: Oh, yeah. I was 18.

Geier: What year was that? '42?

Mersereau: In '43.

Geier: '43, okay.

Dyrness: Tail end of the war, then.

Mersereau: Well, '43 was a year after Pearl Harbor, and I was there until '46.

Dyrness: Where did you serve?

Mersereau: In the South Pacific.

Dyrness: Yeah. I remember you telling war stories every once in a while. I'd forgotten that. I remember sitting in the truck when it's raining outside, eating our lunch...Ros telling stories.

Mersereau: I went overseas as a replacement, and the Third Division had just come back from Bougainville [Solomon Islands]. There was about six months of training in there that I got in on, and then we went to Guam. So, I was in the Guam campaign and the Iwo Jima campaign.

Geier: Wow.

Mersereau: And that's where I got shot. (Laughter)

Geier: And that was a disability then?

Mersereau: Yeah. [On Iwo Jima—suffered severe injuries, lungs, back, etc.]

Dyrness: You still get disability pay now?

Mersereau: Oh, yeah.

Geier: As I understand it, when you started working at the Andrews, Jay Gashwiler was the person that put you on in this position. Who did you work most closely with when you were actually up there at the time?

Mersereau: Al Levno.

Geier: Al, okay.

Mersereau: When I worked, Dick was always there, Jack was there, and Ted. That was the one thing about our unit that really attracted me, was that everybody worked together if you needed help. If you got on the phone and you called, it didn't make any difference whether it was a project leader or another technician, or wherever, somebody came to down to give you a hand.

Dyrness: Rebuilding sediment basins, stuff like that. Might not be your study, but everybody pitched in, especially after the '64 flood. We were wiped out, and on March 3 we had to rebuild it. It wasn't my study, but it was expected everybody would come out and help rebuild things.

Geier: Had you been down to the Andrews at all before you started working there?

Mersereau: Dick took me down the week before I moved down. In fact, as we were driving home, coming up the road alongside Blue River reservoir, he said, "Well, I think we'd like to have you work for us." (Laughter) I was pretty impressed by that time, and so I said, "Yeah."

Dyrness: And I imagine an attractive part of that job was getting housing for you and the kids?

Mersereau: Well, yeah. At least I didn't have to worry about that.

Dyrness: Yeah, where were you going to live and stuff.

Mersereau: And the fact that at that time, I had this nice, big house, and I think it was only about forty some dollars a month.

Dyrness: Yeah, it's not given to you, but it's cheap.

Mersereau: At that time, I might have had to pay eighty or ninety. I don't think up until the last year I was there, that I ever had to pay more than a hundred, because, they kept re-assessing it.

Dyrness: And you left in '78.

Mersereau: Yeah.

Geier: Was that a Forest Service house?

Mersereau: It was a Forest Service house.

Geier: There in Blue River?

Dyrness: Right next to the ranger station.

Geier: Oh, wow.

Mersereau: Yep, that presented problems. (Laughter)

Geier: Why is that?

Mersereau: Well, I was thinking the other day, and went through the rangers in my head, and I only had trouble with two rangers, the guy that was there when I left, and the guy that was

there when I started. I thought about them and how they did after they left Blue River. And I thought about the other two rangers that I got along well with, and what happened to them. It seems to me that the two guys I got along well with went the farthest.

Dyrness: In the Forest Service?

Mersereau: Yeah. Mike Kerrick was --

Dyrness: -- Supervisor.

Mersereau: Supervisor of the forest [Willamette NF], by the time he retired. And Bill [Aunsbaugh] was the Director of Youth, or, what do you call it?

Dyrness: Job Corps?

Mersereau: Job Corps, in this region. The other two guys, I don't know what happened to them.

Geier: Bob Burns?

Mersereau: Burns was there when I left.

Dyrness: Who was there when you came?

Mersereau: Oh --

Dyrness: -- Mealey? [Bob]

Mersereau: Not Mealey. The guy after Mealey. I'm trying to think of his name.

Geier: Britt Ash?

Mersereau: No.

Dyrness: Well, she's there now, Bur-something.

Geier: Lynn Burditt.

Dyrness: Burditt, yeah.

Geier: Came in after you left?

Mersereau: I don't know.

Geier: I can't remember who that was. I think I've got it at home.

Mersereau: I think those two guys had some problems with the fact that they were rangers, and I was a technician.

Dyrness: Tried to pull rank on you and stuff like that?

Mersereau: Yeah. I didn't let them tell me what to do because I didn't figure it was my job to do that.

Dyrness: No, because they weren't your boss.

Mersereau: They weren't the boss and if they had something that I did that they didn't like, and the first guy did complain to Jack. Actually, the first guy complained to the director of the station [PNW Station]. And he went through Jack to talk to me.

Geier: So Jack Rothacher was your --

Mersereau: -- Jack was my project leader.

Geier: Okay.

Mersereau: Anyway, I felt if they had anything to say to me, that's the way they should cope.

Geier: Do you remember when you first arrived at the Andrews, what your first impressions were of the place? Was it on that tour that you got a week before?

Mersereau: I remember we stopped at the Watershed 3 gauging station. I think Al was there.

Dyrness: Doing some servicing or something?

Mersereau: Doing a check. Then we went up to the Hi-15 [Watersheds 6-8], and I found out the next week that I still didn't know where the hell that was. (Laughter) But, I got a chance to look at those stations and see what I was going to do. I didn't see anything there that would give me any problems. It was just a question of learning the system. Al taught me the system. He spent an ungodly amount of time down there that he wouldn't have had to do if I'd been more knowledgeable about everything. He taught me how to do things I didn't know, and pointed out big problems you had to watch out for. Every time I needed a hand, he was down there to help me. If I was doing something wrong, or, if there was a problem, he'd kind of drop me a hint.

Dyrness: Al's a very patient guy. He really is.

Mersereau: Yeah.

Geier: He was living down at the McKenzie at that time, wasn't he?

Mersereau: No, he was living in Corvallis at that time.

Geier: Okay.

Dyrness: You see, because that's how Ros got the house. He moved to Corvallis.

Geier: Okay. So, he, brought you up to speed long distance.

Dyrness: That's right. I was just sitting here thinking, I wonder how many round trips Al made to Andrews. (Laughter) Must be astronomical; maybe tens of thousands of round-trips.

Mersereau: It's no wonder that he had trouble with his marriage to his first wife. Because she wanted to do something besides sit at home while he was off working somewhere. I'm sure that had a lot to do with it.

Geier: Now, you had nine kids yourself, right?

Mersereau: I had nine.

Geier: And did you all fit in down there alright?

Mersereau: Oh, yeah.

Dyrness: Kids liked it, didn't they?

Mersereau: Yeah. The kids really, really, did. It took about a year for them to get settled in. I say it was two or three years before I began to feel like I fit into the "up-river community" there, and the "up-river style." You got so that you realized that finally you had arrived as part of people of the river. ["up-river" area; McKenzie River upstream from town/area of Blue River.]

Geier: Now you were there for about 12 years before you moved?

Mersereau: Before we moved, yeah.

Geier: So, was there some kind of event that occurred where you realized that you were kind of comfortable there. Do you remember when you first started feeling that?

Mersereau: Well, it was that they began to talk to me like they would to anybody else on the river. If I walked into the Blue River Tavern, I didn't have to worry. You'd walk in the door, and they'd say hello. I got up to play shuffleboard one time, and I wasn't very good at it, I was just

starting to learn. One of the guys came up, one of the guys on the river and said, "Here let me show you." Those kind of things. And the people at the store start calling you by name.

Geier: You spent a lot of time in Blue River, on your time off, it sounds like.

Mersereau: Well, of course, I lived right there.

Dyrness: But, did you go in to town to buy groceries once a week like Jean [Rothacher – wife of Jack] said they did?

Mersereau: Not very often.

Dyrness: Is that right? Jean was saying that once a week, they would go in and buy groceries.

Mersereau: We did go in and buy them because it was cheaper to do that. I just really didn't have enough money to make all those trips.

Dyrness: So, when you went, you bought in bulk?

Mersereau: Oh, yeah.

Geier: So, your kids mostly graduated from the local school there, it sounds like.

Mersereau: My oldest boy was part way through high school when we moved down there, and he was not happy about leaving. He left a girlfriend up here, and he had it all figured out that he was going to move into her house and live with her and her folks, all this kind of stuff. I said, "No, you're going to go with the rest of us." So, he wasn't happy. But for the rest of them, it was no problem.

Geier: After they were down there a while they got to be part of the community, too. Maybe you could describe an average day or average week. What kinds of things might you have been involved in?

Mersereau: I think I gotta start with Friday. Friday was the weekly check day. That meant that would go to each one of the watersheds, check the chart and check the heights of the water with a hook gauge, mark the chart and replace it if it was time to replace the chart and take the temperature. And also do all those things I needed to do, and make sure that the instrument was recording, and that it was accurate. So, I would do that at Watersheds 1, 2, and 3. I did that at our climate station, which had rainfall and air temperature and moisture and what do you call it?

Dyrness: Humidity.

Mersereau: Humidity, right.

Dyrness: Was that that at the administrative site? [HJA-HQ; labs, dorms, meeting rooms, etc.]

Mersereau: That wasn't at the administrative site.

Dyrness: Where was it? Near Watershed 2?

Mersereau: Yeah, it was right down the hill from Watershed 2.

Dyrness: That was before the administrative site's climatic station [was constructed].

Mersereau: Right, right.

Geier: What were your impressions of the facilities and the physical infrastructure on the Andrews when you started working there?

Mersereau: I thought it was set up pretty well. The houses were made in such a way they would go through the winter and keep things dry. The only thing at the beginning that we really needed that we didn't have, was some way to heat the [met] stations so the instruments wouldn't freeze up. I thought we did pretty well. As time went on, I could see that we were doing pretty well in keeping the record. Once in a while you go up, a battery would have run out and would be stopped, and then you had to figure out what you could do to minimize the amount of time the instrument was down. You got to the point where you realized you were really there to maintain as much of the record as you could maintain. Al stressed that all the time to me. You go out there, if the thing is down, you do something. You do something to get it going, but you do something. If that means running back to town and getting more instruments or more batteries or whatever it takes, you get that thing going again. A couple of times, I thought I had it going, and two or three days later, I came back and found it was down again, and it didn't take me long to figure out I couldn't trust it. If it went down once and I didn't do anything to really fix it, then I couldn't trust it to stay up. So, I started carrying extra instruments. If we had an extra instrument, it went in the truck. I always had extra batteries in the truck, and extra clocks. Whatever I thought would take. And there's where Al helped because he helped me decide what was important, and then, I just kept adding stuff to whatever I carried in the truck so that, if anything happened at all, I'd be able to get it started again.

Geier: Did your routine of work change with the seasons? Beginning with winter?

Mersereau: The times didn't change really. The only thing that I had to remember was when Day Light Savings Time came. We ran everything on [Pacific] Standard Time, and so whatever my watch said, I had to remember to change it by an hour.

Dyrness: On the chart.

Mersereau: We just kept doing that. The other thing was, of course, in the winter you go out with rain clothes and rubber boots, and whatever you can do to stay dry, because, if you can stay dry, you can stay warm, and if you can stay warm, you can do the work. If you're out there freezing, you can't do the work the way you should.

Geier: Well, was there a problem staying dry?

Mersereau: Well, sometimes it would just pour. There was a study that had to do with sediment in the stream. What happens to sediment going out; does it increase or decrease, under certain circumstances. We had to take samples and to do it often enough that we could set up a curve. So, it would start raining, and you set a standard, and you had to initiate this process. You'd be sitting down at work, working away, finishing up, getting ready to go home. It would start to rain and you wouldn't think too much about it. An hour later, you'd realize that it's still raining, and not only is it raining, it's raining harder than it was. So, then you had to say, is this going to be one of those times? And you didn't want to go out. (Laughter) It's not very fun to be out there when it was pouring, but eventually you had to decide, I've either got to go or I'm gonna miss it. You didn't get too many really hard rains, but you could afford to let one go by. Finally, it was up to me to go look and see. I could look at the rain around me in Blue River; the Andrews is seven or ten miles away. I'd look at the rain gauge outside my house, a rain gauge right outside the house. I'd go out, I'd empty the cup and set the cup back. The cup held a half an inch. I would watch it and if it filled up that half inch in the next hour or so, then I knew that --

Dyrness: Pretty major percentage.

Mersereau: Yeah. If it didn't, that didn't mean I wasn't going out there. If you were having problems getting enough water in the cup, you might decide that you had to go out there and look. And so, you would go. And, you would know when you got out there, how much rain was coming down, what the flow was, and what it was recording. By looking at the curve of the chart, you could tell what was coming into the stream. If you had a curve beginning to get steep and go up, then you knew that, I need to be out taking samples. If you got out there, and it's still going along like nothing was happening at all, then you probably wouldn't worry about it. Go home, have dinner and everything. Maybe in the middle of the night, when you're sound asleep, you'd get this feeling, then, (laughter) you'd open up your eyes, and it just sounded like the house was beginning to break down. Then you had to go out, and it didn't make a difference if it was 12:00 or 3:00, or whenever it was, you were expected to go out and check on it.

Geier: Sounds like you spent a lot of time in the field alone. You were going out by yourself it sounds like.

Mersereau: Oh, yeah.

Geier: Okay. Was that ever a problem?

Mersereau: It was never too much of a problem. I personally liked people with me. That's why I always liked to have Al with me. In terms of getting along out there, I could do that. I didn't have any trouble doing that.

Dyrness: What would happen if something went wrong? Did you have a radio with you?

Mersereau: Well, there was a lot of change in that kind of thing, particularly having to do with safety. And I know I talked with Al about it a lot of times.

Dyrness: On safety.

Mersereau: On safety, and what we need to do. Many times, it had to do with people who were out and had gotten hurt. One of the things was that you had to stay in the budget. About the only time that you could get any extra money was at the end of the fiscal year. Then you could make out a list and go to the powers that be, and try to get some extra money that somebody else might have left over. That's what happened to us. We were able to get a big snow machine. I would just like to take the pick-up out there. That allowed you not only to get out there, but allowed you to carry everything you were supposed to carry. By the time I left Blue River, we were getting six gallon jugs of water that were collected all during the time, every three weeks. And we were hauling batteries back-and-forth, instead of little batteries just for the instruments. These were big car batteries that we put up for the machines that took the samples. One of the things that we got them to start to buy us was rain gear. What else? Oh, the radios. And all this time, we were talking about things like a radio, so that we could call in. Well, one of the things that happened with Al and I a couple of times, is that we had things happen that weren't really life threatening, except that here we were, 12, 15 miles out on the Andrews, and stuck.

Dyrness: With the snow machine broken down or something.

Mersereau: With something broken down, yeah, and with no way to call and tell people where we were. And I know that at least twice we met the district's [Blue River R.D.] trucks.

Dyrness: Coming out from the district office.

Mersereau: Coming out through town. We came into town and say we're going by, we stopped and talked, and my wife had gotten worried about us, so she'd called the ranger.

Geier: The district kind of acted as the backup for you out there.

Mersereau: Right. So then, they would get a couple of guys and a truck, and they'd take off. Luckily, they didn't have to go very far because we'd manage to make it in. Al and I both liked being out, but the one rule that Al had, and that I finally incorporated into everything that I did, was that the work comes first. You go out, do everything you need to do to finish the job. Then if you want to go sit out on a porch somewhere and enjoy the scenery, you can do that. But, if

there's any work to be done, you do that first. If you don't have time at the end of that time to look at the scenery, you don't look at the scenery. One of those days we decided to go look at the scenery. We had gone up to the upper Blue River, the back side of the Andrews, really part of the district rather than the Andrews. We used Lookout Creek as one watershed, the upper part of Blue River as the other watershed, to compare. We had gone up to upper Blue River and had made the check and everything, and it was getting along toward the end of the day. Al said, "Well, let's go around Carpenter, and come down the ridge, down Lookout Creek, that way." Sure, that's great. Then we'd see what everything looks like, and what changes are being made. So, we started down, and we got down to....(long pause)....I'm trying to remember -

Geier: Here, I've got a map.

Mersereau: Okay, we came around to here.

Dyrness: Right here.

Mersereau: Right here. And if you remember, there's an old spur road that ran down into a unit and crossed the creek, and came up on this road over here. This had been an old stream crossing at one time. We drove down and thought, we'll go down there and come up on the Mack Creek road, and then we'll come back in that way. Up until the '64-'65 period, you could drive right through there. Anyway, we stopped, he and I got out and we looked at it, and we decided that there wouldn't be any problem with us if we crossed it. So we started, and it's not very far, it was about eight or ten feet, I think, across the creek and we got clear out in the middle of it, and the wheel slipped off a rock, and we put the rear end right down on a boulder.

Dyrness: You were hung up then.

Mersereau: We were hung up. We couldn't move. Every time you turned the motor, the wheels would spin, and you'd sit there. We got out and tried to figure out how to get off that boulder with all the weight we had in the truck, and there were angles that did not have enough push or pull or anything. We looked at all the stuff that we had. Of course, I had tire chains. We even tried hooking up a tire chain, but it wasn't strong enough to pull it off. Al says, "Well, they're logging up there." I said, "They're logging up the road. We can back up where we passed them and get somebody to come down and give us a pull." But Al said we'd never hear the end of it.

Dyrness: Is that right? You wouldn't hear of it, huh? (Laughter)

Mersereau: Al wouldn't go ask them. He didn't want the district or anybody to know that we got stuck out there. So, we started walking. Of course, we'd just come through this unit, and I think there was one big tree across the creek right there. It might have been a western red cedar, or something like that. So, we got out, we started looking, we covered that whole unit, and we found four or five big scraps of cable. We wrapped it around the tree, we tied these big

knots (laughter) in the cable, and we strung them off and tied the other ends to the front of the truck. And then we took the old –

Dyrness: -- the jack.

Mersereau: Yeah, we had those big jacks that's got a "come-a-long" on it. So we tied one end on a tree there, put the other end in the jaws, and we started to crank. Well, it took us about half an hour to just pull the knots up tight. (Laughter) Finally, we got it up to where everything was tight, we did that about three times, the thing slid right off that boulder, and we drove it right off.

Dyrness: That's a handy-man jack, right?

Mersereau: Handy-man, right. So, we came back into town, and that was when the time when the Forest Service was starting out there to find us. It was about 7:00 and we had started around there about four, when we made that trip. And we should have, we might have might have gotten home 5:30 [p.m.] at the latest.

Dyrness: And that's a time when you could have used the radio and you didn't have one.

Mersereau: Yeah, yeah.

Geier: You would ordinarily check-in with someone before you left, so they knew when you were expected back, it sounds like?

Mersereau: Well yeah, because we had certain things we did at certain times, and we made schedules, so that this day we would do this, and this day we would do that. People would have an idea of about where we were going to be at any time. And the only time that would change would be like if we did something like that, rather than just go out and come back.

Geier: Sounds like you were lobbying for the radio for a while. Who was the decision-maker on that? Who did you have to convince?

Mersereau: I think we had to convince the project leaders for one thing. And we had to convince other people, the director and his staff, that they should supply the money that it would take to get them. That was hard. We never got a radio until, you remember when the technicians had their big meeting in Portland?

Geier: All the technicians in the station [PNW] got together?

Mersereau: Yeah.

Dyrness: Oh gosh, I vaguely remember that, but I can't remember when it was.

Mersereau: Well, one of the things we stated was that we needed some kind of communication for the field crew. And even then, it was another four or five years before they followed through.

Dyrness: In Alaska, we never sent a crew out without a radio. For example, I remember one time we had a crew on a river boat, and they got cross-wise to a log jetting out into the stream, and, to make a long story short, the boat sank, leaving them stranded on a river bank. Without a radio, it would have been a bad deal. Somebody'd have to go out and look for them, maybe that night, so we could send help in another boat, and we never did find that boat. (Laughter)

Geier: When was it that you did get a radio?

Mersereau: We got them, I think it was after I moved to Corvallis.

Dyrness: No kidding?

Mersereau: I think the last couple years I was in Corvallis. We started to borrow the pack sets and things from the district, if we were going to be –

Dyrness: -- Be out alone.

Mersereau: Be out alone. Particularly in the winter. It was really, really bad in the winter, if you went out. You could go a long way with a ski-doo or a sno-cat. And, if something happened, you were a long way --

Dyrness: -- Long way from help, yeah.

Mersereau: We tried to, at least, in those cases, have the radio. But on the Andrews, there were times when things happened. I got stuck at Watershed 7 one time, and I had to walk back.

Dyrness: In the winter?

Mersereau: In the winter. Well, the particular time that I did it, it was kinda in the late spring, but there was still enough snow that I had to use a ski-doo.

Dyrness: And the ski-doo broken down?

Mersereau: The clutch in the ski-doo is a couple of disks that are side by side and they turn. As you go faster, the two disks come together and put more pressure on the belt and they cause it to go faster. So, there are these two plates. One of them broke. Luckily I didn't have my feet in there. Usually, I ran the ski-doo on my knees. I put my knees on the seat, then I run it that way, so I didn't have my feet down alongside that clutch. It broke, and I tried whatever I could. I knew there was no way I was gonna move that thing. So, I put the things that I was concerned

about keeping somebody from coming in and taking them, in one of the gauge houses. I think it was one of the rain-gauge houses.

End of Side A of Tape 1 (of 2)

Begin Side B, Tape 1 (of 2)

Mersereau: And some other stuff, I just left it with the ski-doo. I wasn't too worried about that. And then, all the data and everything like that, I put in a pack and I walked out.

Dyrness: How long did it take you?

Mersereau: Oh, it took several hours because it's seven miles. I checked it one time. I had a little chart in one of my notebooks that told me how far I was from the entrance. It was seven miles from there to the road to Watershed 2.

Dyrness: That's where you'd parked your truck?

Mersereau: I think at the time, I'd parked the truck, probably where McRae Creek takes over. So that would be a couple of miles less than that.

Dyrness: But slogging through snow and all, probably wet snow, if it's late winter or early spring.

Mersereau: Al and I drove up on Blue Ridge just past the road that goes south to Watershed 10. That's when the snow started to give us problems with the truck, so we got out our snowshoes and snowshoed down to one of the units onto the road that takes at the concrete bridge, and out and up through the Hi-15 [watersheds], on the backside of the ridge, took a trail, and came down the road and got to the ski-doo. We were getting ready to see if we could get it out of there. I had come back and looked in the book, and I'd tried to figure out what was the part that broke.

Dyrness: Hmm, so he could maybe order it [the part], and do repairs?

Mersereau: So we could order it, and when that part came, it wasn't the same part. So, I told Al; "There's no point in us going out there, it's not the right part." And he said, "Are you sure?" And I said, "I'm sure that it's not the same part." He said, "Well, maybe they've had this trouble before, and this is a new part that you are supposed to use."

Dyrness: Looks different, but it's a replacement?

Mersereau: Yeah, it's still supposed to replace that. And I said, "I don't think it's it," and he said, "Well, I think we ought to go check." And so I tried to convince him, but he wouldn't be convinced. He was just sure.

Dyrness: You ought to go and try it at least.

Mersereau: We ought to at least try it. So, like I say, rather than walk up from Watershed 2, like would have had to do, we went up and drove up on top of the ridge and then went over there. We got there about noon, we looked at it, he looked at it, and he took the part to me. We tried all kinds of things, and he finally decided that it wasn't the right part. (Laughter)

Dyrness: So that you wouldn't argue with him.

Mersereau: So, that didn't help because we still wanted to walk out of there. Al is one of these guys, the only way I can describe it is, if a farmer is plowing his field and something happens to the plow, some way or another, he fixes it with whatever materials he has at hand, so he can finish the plowing. I think this kind of experience in Al's life has fixed him good for this kind of thing, because he would do anything to get an instrument going and keeping it going. And he would do anything to keep the job on an even keel. If I hadn't known part of this job, he taught it. The first week I was on the job, he and I were driving around on the Andrews, and it was during a lunch period. We had gone out, and we were doing something out there, I don't know whether it was a check or whatever it was. And he said, "Well, you haven't been up on Blue Ridge, the road that goes up to the administrative site, so we'll go up there. And you can see what that's like up there." I was driving, going up the road, and there were rocks all over the road, some of them pretty good size. I was trying to go around the rocks, and tried to go across one of the rocks, hit a tie-rod with the rock, and broke the tie-rod. And here's these wheels destroyed on the front of the truck. I thought, of all the things to do the first week of the job, it's not to do something like that. It didn't bother him, didn't seem to bother him at all. He got out, looked at it, got underneath, checked it all out, and he said, "Well," he said, "there seems to be some threads on this side and some threads on that side." And he then said, "I think we can tighten that up enough so that we can get the truck back to town."

Geier: In reverse drive?

Mersereau: We straightened everything up, I looked at the front, he started turning, moving the wheels a little 'till we got everything as straight as we could. Wheels aren't supposed to be that straight, but it was a pretty sloppy job. We did the best we could. He took the clamp off, put those two together, he turned the tie-rod and had to loosen the one on the other side. He turned the tie-rod so it came in more, put the clamp back on to include both halves, and tightened up the other side. We turned the truck around in the middle of the road and drove home. (Laughter)

Dyrness: Is that right? But you had the tie-rod replaced in town?

Mersereau: Yeah, we took it in to Arco, and had it fixed.

Dyrness: So how did you ever repair that snow machine?

Mersereau: Oh. (Laughter)

Dyrness: Yeah, I'm still out there with that old part that doesn't work.

Mersereau: The snow machine. What I was gonna say about that was, Al and I looked at it a long time, and he said something about trying to make something that would fit in the place of the part that was broken.

Dyrness: Clutch.

Mersereau: Yeah, and I said, "Well, let's see now. I remember before it started to snow this year, that we left a piece of plywood up on the gauging station." So, I went up, got the plywood, Al and I looked at the parts. We laid them down on that sheet of plywood, drew around them, then took the chainsaw and cut out a round piece with a hole in the middle of it, took the bolts out, put it together, put the nuts back on the bolt and everything, then put the belt in there and started the motor. It started to turn, and it pulled the machine about eight inches maybe. At which time, the belt crawled right over the top of that piece of plywood because of the friction, and came down on the back side. (Laughter) And we tried three or four things, you know, along the same lines, trying to get that to work. If we wanted to keep fixing a belt, move it six inches at a time, (laughter) we probably could have got the machine down the road. But, finally, it got to be about 3:00 in the afternoon, and we could see that, if we didn't start walking, we'd be out there after dark. So, we had to walk all the way back to the top of the ridge and then down the ridge, and finally got to the pickup. That was another time we met the Forest Service coming in.

Dyrness: So, you must have been really tired that night, huh?

Mersereau: Oh, boy.

Geier: You were out there working on quite a few stations people had set up earlier. How much interaction did you have with the scientists who were using the data you were bringing in?

Mersereau: Well, at the time I started, there was Ted and Jack and Dick. I think those were the three. I don't remember anybody else.

Dyrness: It was almost all our project team were working there. Except for guys like Franklin that'd come around every once in a while, and just kind of do bootleg studies out there. But at that time, it was just us guys like Jay Gashwiler, that came in and used the area as a study site, but it was pretty lonely out there. It really was.

Mersereau: Yeah. There were a lot of times when I might go out off the road for maybe a quarter of a mile, half a mile, something like that, and it would be just like you were on the moon or somewhere. You couldn't hear any sound of trucks. Even when there were people

out there, you couldn't hear them. One of the first guys that worked on the Andrews was Roy Silen. Part of Roy's study was to partition the Andrews into logging units, and locate where various roads would be. So, he did a lot of surveying out there and there weren't any roads then. He was out there by himself. We had a few trails that he got the district to build for him. When you were out there and you'd been walking for maybe a quarter of an hour, a half an hour, or something like that, you weren't really sure where you were, except that you'd have an idea of the direction, at least I felt like I had an idea of direction. I'd say, "Boy, I don't believe anybody's ever been out here, because I don't see any sign of anything that tell me that anybody'd been out here." And, I'd be thinking about our own studies and about the studies of those people that had been doing before us. I didn't see any possibility [that anyone had been here before]. And I'd walk down and turn around a tree to go up this way, and here's one of Roy Silen's survey signs.

Geier: So, he would've been there.

Mersereau: That's about the only way that you realized that you weren't out there by yourself.

Geier: When you experienced difficulties, you were talking earlier about equipment breaking down and things like, was there some kind of a process of feedback to the people who designed the studies, to let them know there were problems out there? How did that work?

Mersereau: When I saw there was something that needed to be changed in the study, or that might affect the study, I would tell Al or Jack or the scientist who was responsible for the study. Then we'd decide whether we could make those kinds of changes. But, if it just came to that we lost three days of data because a battery went down, then probably not, except when it came time to work the chart, then you would see it was there, and that would be noted.

Geier: How much of your time up there was spent in doing that kind of data processing work, once you've done the field work?

Mersereau: Well, that's what I was saying about Friday. On Friday, I would go out and do all these watersheds. I would change the charts when needed, and fix anything that needed to be fixed. By the time I'd been there a couple of years, I could get that all done by noon or 1:00 at the latest. Then I would go in, I'd sit at my desk, and I'd do all correcting on the charts, and get them ready to go. The times we would need the charts to work them all out completely, like on the A-35 charts, there might be three months before we'd take the chart off, whereas on the weather charts, they would be off every week or couple of weeks. At those times, we would take everything together, and by then, I would have worked everything over we corrected for time, so that you knew when the midnight points were, and we knew that this line is not two inches of rain, but 1.75 inches of rain, or something like that. I did most of that stuff on Friday afternoon.

Geier: Did your perception of your job out there and responsibilities change over time? And did you get a sense your responsibilities were becoming more difficult? When you were out there

living on the Andrews for about 12 years, in that span of time, were there different kinds of studies that were being introduced there?

Mersereau: From the time that I went out until probably about 1970, I think there was mainly just our studies. And Jay Gashwiler's.

Dyrness: Yeah, and Jerry once in a while.

Mersereau: Yeah, that was when the IBP started. We were one of the main areas for the coniferous biome, so there were more and more people that came out. One thing I noticed about that, was that where our scientists were working together, the scientists in the biome, generally were not. You make sure one guy didn't step on the territory of the other person. That was a little harder to do when some people think theirs is the only thing worth doing. And they're not a bit bashful about pushing what they do, and not paying much attention to what others do.

Geier: I see the number of technicians increased in that period, too. Is that right?

Mersereau: I don't think we had too much change in the technicians we had. In the beginning, or at least in that period of time, the scientists were mainly the people that came out there.

Geier: Oh, okay. So, they came out and did their own studies.

Mersereau: Yeah.

Dyrness: Plus, there were graduate students. I was thinking of Len Houck, for example. And post-docs like Jim Sedell started coming. He was a post-doc on the biome. The IBP project in itself didn't result in our hiring a lot more technicians.

Mersereau: We hired Mike Winters, mainly for Dick [Fredriksen]. Mike was supposed to help on Dick's studies so Al and I could spend more time with some other things. We decided that we didn't need the studies expanded, but needed some extra help, particularly because we were rebuilding some of our stations [climate/hydrology]. Al got permission to hire a couple of new technicians, and the only ones he could get were minorities. And that was a real experience, because up until then, almost everybody we had was pretty well-educated. I had a degree, and Al, by this time, had a degree. Under different circumstances both of us would have been scientists, rather than just technicians. Then we get two guys that I don't even know if they finished high school. But the thing I noticed was, when I was a technician, most of the people in the technician-organization were college-trained people. And there's a different mind-set, the only thing I can think of. Because, in all the time I was in college, I don't think there was a year, or a science course I ever took, that didn't mention the scientific aptitude....what do they call it?

Geier: Method?

Mersereau: Method. When I started working out there, it was something that I had wanted to do. If I'd have been smarter or thought more about it when I was going to school, I would have done something besides education. But, it was something I really wanted to do all the time, and this gave me the opportunity to do it. The other thing was, there were lots of times when you could look at some data that you'd gotten, that you'd picked up and you screwed up somehow, or maybe went off and left a bad battery on the thing, and you could have said, "Well, let's see, we'll just run this line over here, and we'll just forget that this ever happened."

Dyrness: Do a little extrapolation.

Mersereau: Yeah. I found that very hard to do. I felt the rest of the guys they used were the same way. And so, when you get people who don't have that kind of education, they don't have the opportunity to understand this, and they don't do things the same way. And things aren't as important to them. It's not important that we do this every Friday. I'll do it Friday and maybe, if I feel like it, I'll do it Saturday, or maybe I'll come back Monday and do it, and that's okay. And when you're trying to compare Watershed 1 with Watershed 2 and Watershed 3, you've gotta do them all at the same time. Because mainly, it's easier to understand the differences when you don't have to worry about whether during this rain storm, these things happened.

Geier: So, it sounds like construction on the new stations developed over time, and different technicians were brought in, not the ones you were used to working with up to that point, and those new people less commonly had the college education you're talking about.

Mersereau: Right. Now, it wasn't that they weren't good workers or anything like that. It was just that it was an entirely different kind of way of looking at it. To them, it was just a job like painting a house. "We'll go paint the house and maybe we'll finish today, maybe we'll finish next week. As long as we get paid."

Geier: This technician organization you were talking about, when did this start up?

Mersereau: That was after '78, must have been in the early '80s. Some of the technicians were unhappy, because in their particular project, they weren't treated like they knew anything.

Dyrness: Not treated as equals.

Mersereau: See, I never had that feeling. I remember the first annual meeting that we had. A couple weeks ahead of time, Jack [Rothacher] called me up and he said, "We're going to have a meeting, we're gonna plan this next period of work, and we want to know what's going on. If you can, prepare a short report on Watersheds 1, 2, and 3 when you come up." And I came up and everybody talked about his study, and nobody looked at me, like well, what the hell are you doing here, or anything like that. That was just part of the thing. When Jack laid the work out

for the coming year, he also gave you certain responsibilities to do. When this work that Ted and I did, came up, that was one of the things that he gave me to do along with Ted.

Dyrness: No small task.

Mersereau: No.

Dyrness: Trying to get over to Watershed 1 after the slash burning.

Geier: About 1972?

Dyrness: They didn't get around to burning that slash until '67, '68.

Mersereau: No, '66.

Dyrness: '66? That was fall of '66?

Mersereau: Yeah, I was only there a week or so when that happened.

Dyrness: When they burned the slash, okay. Because I could never remember. Were you along with us standing on a ridge and watching it burn after night fall?

Mersereau: Yeah. You told me about it. I remember you guys were up on the top of the ridge, and Al and I were at the bottom.

Dyrness: Oh, you were at the bottom. Shortly after that, that's when we noticed that a lot of soil was piling up.

Mersereau: Yeah, well we didn't do the soil conditions survey until the following spring.

Dyrness: How much was heavily burned, lightly-burned, unburned, and so on.

Geier: So, it was logged from what, '62 to '63? Wasn't it?

Dyrness: Yeah, they started logging it in fall of '62, but see, the "fly in the ointment" was Watershed 1, because it was the skyline method, and because the whole, huge watershed was being logged, clear-cut, and the process continued over three, maybe four years.

Mersereau: Yeah, four years.

Dyrness: It threw a monkey wrench into our study, because we would envision it like the settings on Watershed 3, that in a year certainly would be done, and we'd set the clock back to zero as far as secondary succession following logging. Ross helped me, not only on this study on soil movement, which amounted to mostly dry ravel, he also helped on the plant survey, the revegetation survey.

Mersereau: And the soil pits that lead down and run all over there.

Dyrness: Yeah, you guys got yoked into that too, didn't you? A lot of guys did.

Geier: These are the ones that never got filled back in?

Dyrness: Still there I suppose (Laughter). We dug about, must have been, oh, in the neighborhood of 300 pits on Watershed 1, 2, and 3. Because it was pretty intensive.

Geier: Now, just pick and shovel work?

Dyrness: Yeah.

Mersereau: The thing that I remember about that more than anything, was that Ted and I would stand side-by-side and we would have a pit that was about that wide. We could stand side-by-side with our shovels and never touch each other. Dick Fredriksen and I could stand in the same position, and if I didn't watch out, I got a shovel alongside the head. (Laughter) Dick was one of those guys, that when he went to work, he went full-blast.

Dyrness: Yeah, there was no intermediate speed with Dick. So, you helped him on Watershed 9 and 10?

Mersereau: Right.

Dyrness: Dick did most of the work on 9 and 10. Of course, they came on line after Watershed 1, 2, and 3. The other was the Hi-15 Watersheds [Watersheds 6-8], then 9 and 10. Poor Al was involved up to his ears, not only with the H.J. Andrews, but we had South Umpqua, we had Fox Creek, whatever it's called, the City of Portland watershed, the Bull Run watershed. You mention those project meetings, especially in the spring. Everybody would say, "Well, we're getting spread pretty thin on having to maintain all these watersheds, all these records." And Jack would say, "Yeah, we're collecting all these charts and we don't even have time to digitize them and summarize the data." Remember him saying that?

Mersereau: Yeah.

Dyrness: Every year he'd say that. But now that work's all been done and everybody points to the Andrews as the longest consecutive running record of climatic and stream, just about anywhere in the world, and that's worth its weight in gold. And at that time we were saying, it's a human response, "Why collect all this data and put it in a drawer, and never do anything with it. We don't have any time." But, in retrospect, it was the greatest thing. In retrospect, it's good to hear guys like Ross saying, "I haven't messed up the record, and I corrected all the discrepancies on time." Because without that, the record wouldn't be as reliable as it has been. So you know, a lot of people deserve credit and we should say we're proud of it, that this

information is going to be used and it's going to be valuable, and it's got to be as accurate as possible. Al deserves a heck of a lot of credit, as do you, and Jack does also because he could have very easily said, "As project leader, I'm going to say no more. We're going to cut out of this work."

Mersereau: We even talked about that one time.

Dyrness: Oh, I think we talked about it every year. Yeah, I remember that.

Geier: He was getting ready to cancel the project, or what?

Dyrness: No, not cancel the project, but just back out of all this record-keeping.

Geier: Oh, okay.

Mersereau: It got to the point on 1, 2, and 3, where they thought, "Whoa, we've got enough."

Dyrness: But fortunately, about that time, Dick got interested in the chemical characteristics of water, where previously most work zeroed in on suspended sediment and turbidity kind in relation to conservation. But then Dick got keyed into the chemical characteristics of the water, and how that changed over time after logging, following up on what Hubbard Brook was doing in the east. And so, it became increasingly important that we continue the record, because other people were looking at different aspects. But he needed volume changes over time, etc.

Mersereau: It is interesting to know how this study, which I thought was done when we wrote this article, George and Fred started up again, and George ran it for one more year in the '80s.

Dyrness: George who?

Mersereau: George Lienkaemper.

Dyrness: No kidding?

Mersereau: Yeah.

Dyrness: Is that right? I didn't know that.

Mersereau: Yeah.

Dyrness: I was up in Alaska then, you know.

Mersereau: They put erosion boxes back in.

Dyrness: No kidding.

Mersereau: Where they had been, and as close as they could figure out where they were. There were a couple of times I had to walk up and say, "Well, I think it was about here, or there."

Dyrness: Were they the same design boxes?

Mersereau: Yeah.

Dyrness: This design grew topsy-turvy in Jack's garage on Woods Creek Road. He said, "Well, let's use sheets of plywood, 8 feet by 4 feet, so we have the box, 8-foot long, and we'll have it supported by metal fence posts with U-bolts going into it." Remember that?

Mersereau: Yeah.

Dyrness: Then we said, well man, a lot of the flow gets hung up short of traveling clear down into the box. So, that's when we designed a sheet of plastic stretching on the slope above the lip of the box to facilitate soil movement once it's raveling down the slope, to make sure it can get entirely into the box. Ross' job was to go around to the various boxes and measure the amount of soil at weekly intervals, or something like that.

Mersereau: Make any notes that I needed to on the amount of vegetation and all that.

Dyrness: Some of these boxes were on steep slopes, very steep slopes. I swear some of them were 80% plus.

Mersereau: Yeah, 80%.

Geier: As the focus of the studies changed and what scientists were going to do with the data, did you just continue what was being done before plus new information requirements, or was there a decision made at some point to discontinue some elements and continue other elements?

Mersereau: Of this study?

Geier: Just in general. This could be a good example of that.

Mersereau: Well, George and Fred set it up just like they did then. I didn't think they'd have much in the boxes.

Dyrness: Were they catching much?

Mersereau: They weren't catching much. When I went out on that watershed with George one time, and the box that was over on the left hand side of the watershed, the one that had the

slump that went into the box. The *ceanothus* was like “walking in” under these trees. It was up there eight or ten feet tall, and there was nothing but bare soil.

Dyrness: And you got to walk under the *ceanothus*?

Mersereau: And you could walk under the *ceanothus*.

Dyrness: That’s healthy.

Mersereau: And then, there was berry vines and what have you across the ground. But, there just was so much vegetation I’m surprised that he could even get around. I had trouble walking around and we didn’t have any vegetation.

Dyrness: One of the principle findings that we thought we found in this study, was that it occurs principally when there’s virtually no vegetation. You don’t have to have much vegetation cover to stop the cycle, because it relies on cascading particles, one particle hitting another. Ten, fifteen percent cover of things like fireweed would be enough to really effectively hold it.

Mersereau: And, the first year or two after it was burned, that’s the plant that came out the most.

Dyrness: Several species of herbs, yeah.

Geier: On the water samples you were talking about earlier, the shift from turbidity to chemical content?

Mersereau: That was just added.

Geier: It was just added in?

Mersereau: Yeah.

Geier: One measurement may have more than the other?

Mersereau: Yes. The one thing that did require, was that we make sure that there was enough heat in the gauge house so the water didn’t freeze. We would go up there and maybe our heaters were down. Maybe they weren’t running anymore, maybe they’d run out of fuel or something.

Dyrness: Was it butane usually?

Mersereau: We usually had butane. In the Hi-15, we had big 250-gallon tanks. Down at 9 and 10 and at 2 [Watersheds]. They finally put them at 2. We just had those five, ten-gallon tanks.

Dyrness: Portable ones.

Mersereau: Portable ones that we hauled. That mainly was a question of keeping enough heat in there so the water didn't freeze, and didn't lock everything up in ice. In fact, on the Hi-15, we even put a heater under the flume, so that the water coming through the flume wouldn't freeze to the flume. Those kind of things, we had to make some changes for. All this stuff that Al and I and Dick and whoever else who was with us came up with, was by reading what somebody else did or by trying something out. Talking to the gas man, we finally decided that, if we got regular pilot lights and set them up so that they just made enough heat, if we boxed in the flume, so there was just enough heat to keep it from freezing. But, there were times before then that there'd be that much ice. And, of course, that froze the hydrograph, too.

Geier: Was there ever a point you reached where the things they were adding into the study meant that you just didn't have time to do it all, and you needed more people to help?

Mersereau: Yeah. I think that most of the time, once we got a station set up and we knew just exactly what we were doing with it, then what happened was that we would do different sets at different times. Instead of going out on Friday, for instance, and doing 1, 2, 3, and 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10, we'd do 1, 2, 3. And then, some other time of the week, we'd do 6, 7, and 8, and some other time in the week, we'd do 9 and 10. [Numbers refer to experimental watersheds at HJA-EF].

Geier: It sounds like maybe your times that you mentioned earlier about being able to sit back there and enjoy the scenery might have become a lot less common.

Mersereau: That's true. (Laughter) That's true. I never ceased to enjoy being out there though. There was always something, always something.

Dyrness: And when you stopped to think about it, you'd say, well, it's just a privilege to work here. It really is, you know.

Mersereau: Right. Al and I many times said, "We should be paying them." (Laughter) That's what he would say, and I would say, "Oh no, oh, no." (Laughter) But we were going to the Andrews and doing that work, we were going to Bull Run and doing that work, we were going to Coyote Creek down on the South Umpqua, and doing the same kind of work. There was always something that made the trip worthwhile.

Geier: When the time crunch starts to build up, was there a process where you decided whether it's necessary to hire someone else to do the work?

Mersereau: Yeah, they hired George, and he started making the trip. He lived in Corvallis, but he would make the trips with Al. Sometimes, we'd have to divide the work up so that we could go different places. Sometimes we'd all have to go wherever it was. Particularly in the summer. We always used the summer to make sure everything was ready for the winter,

because that's when we had all our big problems as far as keeping things going. We would spend a lot of time preparing. George and I went to Stevens Instruments up in Beaverton, and got them to give us a training session [about using and maintaining their instruments]. They spent one whole day teaching us how to take the instrument apart and put it back together again.

Dyrness: This is George [Lienkaemper], also?

Mersereau: Yeah.

Geier: Which instrument, and which company?

Mersereau: It was an A-35 Streamflow Recorder. It's a big thing like that, with all kinds of chains and pens and what have you, and clocks. They showed us how the machine worked, and then they sat us down at a table and they screw it up, and then they sent us down there to fix it.

Geier: So, this was a manufacturer's machine?

Mersereau: Yeah. Blue Colt Stevens.

Geier: Okay.

Mersereau: They did all the instruments. We had the A-35, and a rain-snow gauge that worked with the same kind of clocks and same kind of tracking equipment. Al, George and I decided if we were going to have to make sure those instruments were in all the time, we had to know more about the instruments. So, we got them [Stevens] to show us. We spent a whole day up there.

Dyrness: Are they manufactured up there?

Mersereau: Yeah. I don't know if they manufacture that machine anymore or not.

Dyrness: Yeah, I was wondering about that.

Mersereau: Because everything is electronic anymore. But, we went through their plant, and we worked with all them. We were looking around, and Al one day decided that instead of buying some electronic equipment for streamflow gauges and everything, that there were a lot of advantages to having the A-35 on every watershed.

Dyrness: Even as a back-up or something?

Mersereau: No, just having that on there. For one thing, you could walk into the gauge house and look at the chart, and you knew what was going on. You knew what had been transpiring

before you got there, and you knew if it was on time, and you knew if it was stopped, you had some kind of an idea of why. Anyway, he felt this was better for us than going to some piece of equipment that if something went wrong, we would have to ship it off to the manufacturer to do something about it, and then wait for it to get back. So, he collected every A-35 that he could find in the Western United States, and he went clear to San Dimas [Experimental Forest in Southern California], and got A-35s from there.

Dyrness: Because other people were phasing them out?

Mersereau: Yeah. And we took them and had three or four extra by the time he got done. Then we started buying parts so we could fix them. That's when George and I decided we were going to have to go somewhere, like the manufacturer, so they can show us how to really set the instrument up right. That's when we went, not too long before I retired. I called USGS because they still have the A-35, also. I has heard they've got a whole warehouse full of these things somewhere. That's not true. They had no intentions of getting rid of their A-35s. One of them said, "I think you might be able to find some in Georgia."

Dyrness: That speaks well for the instrument.

Mersereau: Yeah.

Dyrness: You know, in an electronic age.

Mersereau: But, anyway, I couldn't get them from them either. We did a lot of work to get those instruments and in good condition.

Dyrness: So, you always, always had a couple back-ups. If one falls down, you could just put a new one there.

Mersereau: Oh, yeah. Lots of times we carried an instrument in and put it in place of something that was already there.

Geier: So, the idea was just continuity of data. This was one that carried all the way through.

Mersereau: Well, what's the word, ratings, what's a rating system?

Dyrness: Rating curve?

Mersereau: Yeah, for each of us.

Dyrness: Yeah, what do you call peer review?

Mersereau: Anyway, one of the things that [we were scored on] was "you have only lost so much data over the last year."

Dyrness: So those standards you couldn't do anything about.

Mersereau: And we set the standards. George and I set it at 95%. Al said that's not enough.

Dyrness: He wanted it about 98%, was it?

Mersereau: Well, he wanted it down to 90 or 85. So, he thought he was being more realistic. But George and I felt that --

Dyrness: -- You could get 95%.

Mersereau: That we could get 95%, and if we expected ourselves to get 95%, that's what we would do.

Geier: So, did you?

Mersereau: Pretty close.

Geier: I was curious, you mentioned earlier, when the IBP came in, there started to be some issues with conflicting research interests out there. Were people kind of stepping on each other's toes with the research? How was that resolved?

Mersereau: Okay, the IBP was over in '74, wasn't it?

Dyrness: No, it was still going when I left in '74.

Mersereau: But not much, just a couple of years.

Dyrness: Yeah, until about '76, '77.

Mersereau: Okay.

Dyrness: And then, soon after, LTER started. [1980]

Mersereau: Yeah, and by the time they were done, Art McKee was taking charge of things down there for Jerry.

Dyrness: As site director. [HJA EF]

Mersereau: I think from then on, people began to work better. Sedell was down there, and he was always a good, easy guy to work with. Art McKee came in and worked with me from the time he got there.

End of Side B, Tape 1 (of 2)

Begin Side A, Tape 2 (of 2)

Mersereau: When they were out there, they were walking on somebody else's toes.

Dyrness: That was an important thing.

Mersereau: Territory.

Dyrness: To avoid people impinging on other people's research sites. You'd think that with a 15,000-acre experimental forest, it wouldn't be that much of a problem. But, beginning with IBP, it became a problem. Personal differences arose, people would get mad, so Art's role was very, very important. He seemed to be the kind of guy that could do that; make everybody report where their plots are, and keep track of what everybody was doing. Because, like Ross said, people are really absorbed in their own little study and they don't have time to keep track of what the other people are doing. That's why you need a site director.

Mersereau: And one of the things that I noticed Jerry tried, was to keep everybody talking to each other, so that everybody would know what other people were doing. But, you take a watershed; Watershed 1 was 257 acres or something like that.

Dyrness: Something like that, yeah.

Mersereau: With a watershed that big, you could have two or three studies going on in it that could affect the streamflow. You could, if you let that happen. So, you had to watch out. The studies that we had going on in [Watersheds] 1, 2, and 3, for instance, were a number of studies that had to do with slope movement and plant succession, streamflow and sediment movement, and that kind of stuff. But, they all acted together and were part of the main watershed study. So, people couldn't move in and do things that would screw that up.

Geier: So, the difference with Art, was that there was somebody on the site who was coordinating that. Who served that role when Al was there?

Mersereau: I did.

Geier: You did, okay. How did that work out?

Mersereau: I was really Jack's hand down there.

Dyrness: Representative there, yeah.

Mersereau: That's the only way I could get by as a technician and do that, if the district [Blue River R.D.] wanted to do some logging or salvage logging, something like that. When I first went down there, they picked up a few logs here and there for their forestry from the Andrews.

They would do it by having salvage studies and what have you, and they would come to me and say, "Well, we're gonna do such and such tomorrow. We're sending a guy out to mark some trees for salvage on the Hi-15 on the McRae Creek road." They would go out and would start marking. I remember this particular thing happening. One Friday, a technician and I went up to Hi-15 (Watersheds 6, 7, & 8), made a check, and it seemed to me every other tree was marked, particularly the western red cedar. I looked at it a long time, and a lot of the cedars were marked.

Dyrness: Doing okay?

Mersereau: Yeah, it looked to me like it was doing alright. So, as soon as I got back, I called Jack and told him. One of the things that always made me feel good with Jack, was he was interested in what I had to say, and how I would resolve it. I suggested he come down and we go look at it. So, he did, and he looked at it and said, "Boy, I've seen cedar like that out there that's fifty years old that's still standing." So, then he went and talked to the district. When he went back to Corvallis, he wrote some rules for salvage logging. And wrote them in a letter with these rules in it. When I went back out there, a lot of those marks were marked out.

Dyrness: Painted over.

Mersereau: Yeah. So, that was the kind of thing I did. When people had a complaint because of something that happened on their study, they'd say something to me, then I'd go look at it and talk to whoever I thought I needed to talk to. I never had any problems. I was saying about the rangers; whoever the ranger was there made a big difference. I wish I could remember his name, the first guy there. He was not for doing anything that would help us. He didn't loan us stuff, he didn't send his guys out to help us or anything. The next guy that came in was Mike Kerrick, and I never ever had any problem with Mike, and immediately, people started cooperating. They would set up a sale, then I'd get a call on the phone from one of the pre-sale men, and he'd say, "What about slope movement? We've got such and such on this particular sale, and we'd like to know a little more about whether we should be logging that, or should restrict it," or something like that. And if I had a good answer, I would say so. Most of the time, I would tell them to call you or Dick or Jack or somebody, and try to talk to them about those things. So, there started to be cooperation between the guys on the district and me, and incidentally, the station [PNW].

Geier: So, sort of the top down is what you're saying, when Kerrick came in he changed the attitudes of the people in the district there.

Mersereau: That occurred clear through Bill Aunsbaugh, when he was there. There was no problem there at all. He just let us keep working together. It was a lot different, so it depends on the person who is there too. The last couple rangers have been pretty good up there, too.

Dyrness: Oh, yeah. The ranger now, she's usually at the LTER meetings. She comes into town for the meetings, and that would have been unheard of years ago.

Geier: Steve Eubanks and Lynn Burditt.

Dyrness: Were you there when Steve Eubanks was there?

Mersereau: Yeah. I didn't know him, but I knew of him. I knew who he was and recognized him when he came to the meetings.

Dyrness: He was a guy that really wanted to apply what was being learned on the Andrews right away, and to try it out.

Geier: It was a generational shift there of people working on the Andrews. As I understand it, right about the time the program really transitioned into the LTER, there were more registered people that were working up there, and they tended to be more at the beginning of their careers, than earlier. As somebody who lived in Blue River for a long period of time up until then, did you see a change in the way people on the Andrews related with the community of Blue River?

Mersereau: When they started to accept me, then they started to accept the Andrews pretty well. The Andrews is kind of unique in a way. It's close and has a lot of things people like. There's good fishing in there, there's lots of deer, and there's bear, that kind of thing. Those people were so used to using it that way, when we started to restrict things, there were people that weren't too happy about that. But, I didn't see people get really angry like you might expect otherwise. I think that was because they had a little better idea of what the Andrews was doing. They might not have agreed with everything we did, but we didn't go following people around on the Andrews to see what they were doing. We had some vandalism, and there was not a hell of a lot you could do when you told them, "No." So, we didn't run around the river telling everybody that they were destroying the place. But, now the people that are on the Andrews live in the area, and most of them are people who have been there a long time.

Geier: That was one thing that I wanted to know. When Art comes in there in mid-70s, one of the things he started to focus on, was building up the facilities of the headquarters site there, and people started camping out on site instead of staying in motels at Blue River and things like that. I was curious how much that affected the way people from Blue River viewed the Andrews.

Mersereau: I don't think at the beginning it affected too many people, because there weren't too many motels and places for people to stay on the river. There were a few, but not many. The people on the river that had motels and cabins and what have you, had always relied on tourists, so they really weren't impacted very much. They always had tourists in there, and there wasn't any more than one or two facilities available. One was right there by the golf course. And, of course, we used all the restaurants.

Dyrness: Yeah, over the years there's a lot of restaurant meals and trading at the grocery store.

Geier: Well, as I understand it, you moved from Blue River to Corvallis, in what, '76 or '78?

Mersereau: '78.

Geier: '78?

Mersereau: It was May of '78 when I came out here.

Geier: Why'd you do that at that point?

Mersereau: Al had been trying for about two years to get me to move to Corvallis. Mainly because we had so many areas like Bull Run and the South Umpqua, they were beginning to go down into northern California around Arcata, and doing some drilling and putting in slope movement tubes and things like that. And it was easier if we were all in Corvallis for our particular studies. So, finally in '68, I had decided that maybe we ought to move into Corvallis.

Geier: In other words, the work was moving off the Andrews into a broader range of sites?

Mersereau: Yeah.

Dyrness: '78.

Mersereau: Yeah. Al talked to Dennis [Harr] and Dick and everybody into the idea that Art was leaning too much on me. That there were things that Art had problems with that had to do with being, uh, what's the word I want? If he didn't like something the [Blue River] district did, he'd practically start a fight sometimes. He didn't get along with the guys in district too well. And because Art's "one of those guys," if he sees something wrong, he --

Dyrness: -- Calls a spade a spade.

Mersereau: He doesn't try any diplomacy, he just says so. So, when he'd run into a situation like that, sometimes he'd leave it up to me to do something about it, and Al would say, "That's not your job anymore, that's Art's job."

Geier: So, in other words, you've been there in the community for a long time, so your long-term presence there gave you some leverage. You had interaction with the district at a different level it sounds like?

Mersereau: Yeah, we had social relations and parties, and from the first year that I was there, we were included in those. It took about a year, but from then on, if there was a party, then they would talk to us and make sure that we were part of it.

Geier: You had mentioned earlier a little bit of friction with the district ranger, the first one and the last one when you were there, but aside from that, it sounds like your relations with the district people were pretty good then.

Mersereau: Oh, yeah.

Geier: When you left and came to Corvallis, how often did you plan on going back to the Andrews?

Mersereau: We still had our own studies on the Andrews, and at the time, we didn't think Art's bunch would carry on the studies in the way we wanted them to. There were indications that John Moreau was the guy that did most of the stuff for them, and that he thought it was important enough to do it that way. We had a system set up that we felt gave us the best record, and there were times when he didn't think it was necessary to follow those rules. So, we just kept doing our thing, and every once in a while Al would say, "I think we can let John take over this." So, eventually he was doing it, and he's doing a real good job now. It's the main reason I think why it isn't necessary to have so many technicians running around down there for our studies.

Geier: If you think about the Andrews at the time you moved up to Corvallis, and what it was like when you first started working there in '66, what kinds of things would you identify as main differences in terms of landscapes or facilities or people there, and how it had changed?

Mersereau: Seems to me, when I first moved up there, I didn't have a very good view of the big picture, of everything I was doing. It was a question of just learning this and learning that and learning something else, until I got to do the job and understood what I was doing. When I got ready to leave, that was second nature. I felt if I went out and something was wrong, I knew how to fix it, that whatever I would do, even if it wasn't according to the study plan, I would do it if it wouldn't affect the study at all. And also, I was able to look at various studies that were suggested and know that I could go in and help build them, or I could help set them up, or I could help do them. That is what I had learned was important in preventing somebody from doing something that would spoil their study. At least I felt that way.

Geier: You found that changing later?

Mersereau: Oh, you mean at that time?

Geier: Well, I guess I misunderstood you. I thought you were saying that this was the way you felt when you first started working, as you started working there, and becoming used to it.

Mersereau: No, I meant when I left.

Geier: Oh, okay.

Mersereau: I mean, if they were going to set up a new study, then I had people coming and asking me about the study, and whether they should do this or do that or do something else. I felt I had learned enough so that I could put some input into it, not that they needed to do everything I said, but this was a problem that we had gone through, and we found to be a problem. And if you've got a way of doing things that will resolve that problem, then there is no problem. But, people are not out there all the time, and don't really realize what is going on out there, any more than I did when I started. When I went out with Dick after I first came up, and I looked at Watershed 3 and it's going across the flume, and it's going across an area about so wide, and it's only about that deep. It's really kind of a nice, peaceful thing to happen. When it starts to rain, and you go out there, you don't have anything like that. You have something that's like this deep, and you reach down in there with a bottle to get a water sample, and you can feel boulders.

Dyrness: Passing through the flume.

Mersereau: Yeah, passing through the flume.

Dyrness: That's why it was designed that way, to pass them through. Yeah.

Mersereau: And you just don't have any idea. When most people are out there, they go out there during good weather. They don't go out during bad weather. And yet, those things happen, and you've got to be prepared when you set up a study. The same thing happens because of the snow. I felt a lot more comfortable out there then, than I would ever have when I first started out.

Geier: I'm sure. How did that kind of knowledge of on-site characteristics make its way back so people designing the studies would have knowledge of it? Were you involved at that level at all?

Mersereau: I don't know, other than just talking, like to Al and me.

Dyrness: Other people that design the studies, like Dick and Jack and maybe Dennis Harr would have spent some time sampling in the middle of the night. They know what's going on. They're not just sitting in a lab, and having no field experience and sampling during storms and so on.

Mersereau: One of the comments in the technician meeting that the technicians that we had at the time were smart enough that they could understand what a study was all about and what it was supposed to do. If they went out and something was wrong, they could fix it.

Dyrness: Or come back saying this study has got to be changed.

Mersereau: Yeah. I felt that by the time that I moved up here, that people would trust me enough to do whatever needed to be done. The biggest complaint at the technician meeting

was that half of those technicians never saw the study plan, because the study plan was stuck away in somebody's file and was never offered to them when they went out.

Dyrness: That is bad.

Geier: They didn't know what they were supposed to be doing.

Mersereau: So, they didn't really know what the study was supposed to be all about. And they were treated like they didn't know anything.

Geier: You said that didn't really happen at the Andrews, in that way.

Mersereau: It did not happen in this project.

Geier: Going back a little bit, you were talking earlier about your interaction with the Blue River District [Willamette National Forest], and a couple of examples of chance interactions, like when they're coming out to look for you, or when these trees were marked for logging. Was that a typical kind of interaction, or was there a more common way that you would be dealing with them on a day-to-day basis? How'd they get to know you so well, is what I'm asking?

Mersereau: Well, I had my office right in the station. If I was in the station, I took my coffee break with everybody else. So, I knew all the guys and I lived in the station house, which was right in the middle of everybody else.

Geier: And that was all the way through the time that you left in '78?

Mersereau: Yeah.

Geier: Okay. I was just thinking now with the headquarters up there on the forest, it sounds like that opportunity is less common. Is that true?

Mersereau: I think maybe not as much as it would have been, if we'd been out there to start with. There's better communication now than there was before. Cooperation is there if they want to ask for it. I think that when the cooperation wasn't there at the beginning, it was kind of a block to getting some things done. But, it didn't take any time at all to run out there and pick up a boulder and call somebody out there.

Geier: It sounds like things are a little bit more institutionalized now that the cooperation level is higher?

Mersereau: Right, right.

Geier: How are you doing for energy levels here? We've been out here for a while here. I've got a few more questions. I wanted you to explain how you would describe the level of staff

involvement in decision-making processes at the Andrews. In other words, how directly were you asked to participate in decisions about facilities on the Andrews, studies on the Andrews, problem-solving, those kinds of things?

Mersereau: I felt like, well, how would I put it? If Jack wanted something done, he would call. If he wanted some information about something, he would call and we would talk. One time we decided to have a sale along Lookout Creek, and we were planning on leaving a leave strip along the stream. About that same time, we were planning on having a shelterwood sale [logging method retaining 40-50% of tree cover], and we'd been talking about shelterwood, but we didn't have anything on the Andrews that you could call a shelterwood. So, Jack came down, and he and I went out and we laid the sale out. And it wasn't Jack saying, well, we're going to do this, this, this, this and this. I wrote it down and we handed it in. It was Jack asking me what I thought. It was kind of a thing where I felt that what I had to say was important. And that's the way Jack worked. I never felt like Jack was one of those guys that would sit back and just tell everybody what to do. He just wasn't that kind of a person.

Dyrness: Yeah.

Mersereau: He made it real easy to get the technicians and the scientists to work together.

Geier: And he worked for some major changes in the way the place was run from the early involvement with Jack and implementation of IBP, the transition to the long-term ecological reserve, and the changes in the structure of the administration out there, like Art McKee coming in as site director, the transition from Jerry Franklin to Fred Swanson, things like that. How did you see it from a staff perspective? How did those kinds of changes influence the kinds of things that you did, or the types of problems that you encountered and had to resolve? Because we talked about it, apparently, there's a pretty strong personal relationship you had with Jack that helped solve a lot of problems.

Mersereau: Well, not only Jack, but Ted and Dick and Al and the other people that we got together with. There were some changes in the kinds of studies that we took on, but they were things that were small. In the studies Dick [Fredriksen] was doing, Dick was doing most of the Watershed stuff. Dennis Harr, who was also a hydrologist, had some ideas about things he wanted to do that were different than what Dick was doing. And so, there had to be some shifting of monies and effort into some of those things. Al and I talked about this kind of a thing that was happening. I don't know that there were any really hard feelings, except that I think both Fred and Dennis must have felt they were just kind of sitting there twiddling their thumbs, because there wasn't enough money to do the things Dick was wanting to do, and the thing that they were wanting to do. So, there were some changes there, but there was a period of time in there when Dick was mentally not able to handle his part of it, and so things got changed. He was kind of left doing his thing, or trying to finish up on his thing, and not being able to finish it. That was kind of hard, because when he started having problems, he would come down to my office and say, "When you're out there doing such and such, what is it that you do?" Or, "What did you do at this particular time?" I would explain to him, he would leave

and in about an hour, he'd come back and say, "Ross, tell me, when you were out such and such at such a time ..."

Dyrness: Exact same question?

Mersereau: Exact same question. And, it was hard. I had a lot of respect for Dick and what he was doing, what he had found out and everything. It was hard to put up with that.

Dyrness: When did that start occurring? What year?

Mersereau: Oh, that was in the early '80s.

Dyrness: Early '80s.

Mersereau: When we found out he [Fredriksen] had Alzheimer's, we began to understand. That kind of left it open then for Fred and Dennis to get in their stuff, and we started making changes in things that we did. And I began to learn things that I hadn't known before, and that was fun.

Geier: It sounds like part of your job out there was continuously learning.

Mersereau: Oh, yeah. Anytime anybody started a new study then it was. Particularly, if I was supposed to do part of it, I had to learn what it was we were doing.

Dyrness: And why.

Mersereau: And why. If I was going to have to go out there and fix something, I had to know. And, we spent five years helping a fish project that Bill [Meehan] had when he first started in our project. He set up a five-year study and myself and Friday and Carlos and Al did all the work. Bill would go out when he could, and when he couldn't, we'd handle it. So, we had this whole new fish study, and it involved all kinds of collecting insects and counting fish and measuring fish and checking the streamflow and everything else, so you'd just keep learning things.

Geier: One of the things here with the administrative changes I was talking about earlier, you were talking about difficulties with getting a radio and things like that earlier on. How did you deal with expenditures or equipment needs, things like that?

Mersereau: Yeah, they did. Al did a lot of checking around and trying to work with companies like Bell Telephone. We were finally able to put a radio in a truck, so that at least we had the radio along with the truck. Then we were able to get access to a radio from the district that they were either going to get rid of, or that we could buy separately. We started getting those and when we did that, it helped us a lot in some of the things we did, because we started doing a lot of surveying. So, when we were studying slope movement that was some of the work of

Fred and George. George was a geologist. Those two had studies set up for slope movement, and we did surveys the full length of some of those slopes that were a mile-and-a-half long, and with cross-lines and everything. So, having the radios made it easier to communicate along those lines. Then there were times when we needed a radio when it was really necessary to get help.

Geier: So, it made a difference not having to go to the PNW Station to get approval? I'm trying to get a grip on where the money was coming from at this point. Is it coming in through IBP?

Mersereau: The money was still coming from the PNW.

Geier: Oh, okay.

Mersereau: It's just that we're able now to kind of channel it into a little bit different direction. I remember Al and I and Carlos and Friday, all going to the store buying new rain clothes and rain boots and stuff like that, and the station [PNW] paying for it. And then there came a time when they decided they didn't want to do that. But, we were able to talk the station into being more safety conscious. We tried to get them to buy into sending at least two people instead of having just one guy go out. It got to the point where we were going out with at least in two people each time we went. And the only time that we would go out by ourselves, would be if it was in the middle of summer and things were easy and there wasn't a great deal of danger.

Geier: It sounds like, from what you said earlier, you always preferred to have Al with you anyway when you were out there, so this is just more of a formalization of a preference you had.

Mersereau: Right.

Geier: What did you do if Al wasn't there? Were there other people that you tried to take out in the field with you, if Al wasn't around?

Mersereau: We had Al and myself and George when he was here. Carlos was Spanish-American, and Friday was a Spanish-American.

Geier: Friday?

Mersereau: Friday, his name was Louis.

Geier: Okay.

Mersereau: He came with that name. (Laughter) We asked him when he first got there what his name was, and he said, "Friday." So, that's what we called him.

Geier: Carlos' last name was what?

Mersereau: Carlos' name was Hernacia or something like that.

Geier: They were the ones that came in about the time you were building the shelters?

Mersereau: Yes, when we were doing rebuilding at 9 and 10 [watersheds]. When I first started up there, one of my first jobs on 9 and 10 was to build a gauging station. Then they put in the stilling well with a board across the top, then set the instrument on top of that and put the float in, and they just had a cover that they just set over it. Al said, "We need some stations." He told me about what size, so I spent part of the winter getting the material and making some stations. In order to make them easy to haul up there and put together, I made each side a unit in itself, and then I just drilled holes through and put bolts in them. Did the same thing with the roof. So, the first summer when we were up there, he and I took those stations up and put them in place.

Along about the second year I was there, Dick decided he needed more water samples. What he needed was a system where he could get a series of samples that represented the amount of water coming down and going through the flume. The flume was a box constricted at the front end; it's called an H-flume. At the beginning, we had those, and later, when he wanted to change it again, he had us put in a different kind of a flume. We had to build a small building alongside the regular station, and put our jugs and sampling equipment in there. He made a timer box that was activated by the height of the water, in which a float passed through some magnets and operated some switches, so the instrument would know what the height of the water was, and how often it should take a sample. So, we started out with this little gauging station with all this equipment in it, and then, of course, one of the first things that happened, everything froze up. All the tubes froze and we spent a lot of time working on that, trying to get it so that it would always be available to take a sample. That's when we started trying to figure out a way to heat the stations.

Then, a little later, Dick decided he needed more than what was there; he needed something that really would work. So, we redesigned all the stations. By this time, I got a bright idea, and I told Al. I said, "We do all this work and there was nothing to show for it." Our designs and labor, the materials, and all that kind of stuff. There was nothing that would deter anybody from going ahead and trying to do anything. The thing that happens most of the time when you're not a professional builder, is it takes you forever. Because you do something and you make a mistake, so you have to redo it. Then you do some more and you make another mistake, and then you have to redo it. So, it'd take all summer long to rebuild each station. And, when we stopped to think about everything that we had to do, that was about when things were beginning to change with the IBP and everything, and we were getting more and more and more work. To have to stop and rebuild that station was getting to be a real problem. So, I suggested to Al we hire a carpenter and that he'd be the foreman. He'd sit down and work out the details and materials that we would need, and we could go out and order the material from wherever we could get it the cheapest. In the meantime, he would tell us when to start, where to start, and what to do and what not to do, and, as it turned out, we

got a really fine carpenter. We got a contractor who had the time to spend. He spent a whole month out there and we did two stations.

Geier: Who was that?

Mersereau: I can't remember his name.

Geier: Okay.

Dyrness: He was from Blue River.

Mersereau: Well, he was from the other end of the south end Springfield.

Dyrness: Springfield.

Mersereau: Out toward that end, over Cedar Flats [Just east of Springfield near McKenzie River]. Anyway, he would run up there and he'd line up the work, and, boy, we did everything. We hauled rock and we hauled concrete and we put in the flumes and did all the work. Then, when it came time to do the house, he says, "Okay Ross, I want you to take this down." He said, "You lay that board out there and I'll give you the figures." And he'd measure and he'd give me a number and I would measure on the board and make a mark, and he told me everything and when we got done, he grabbed the saw and he went, "zim, zim, zim." And we had the side. (Laughter) It took the two of us probably about two hours, to put up all the side and framing of the roof, and then he put two of the guys to put the shingles on. And, we finished up with the windows and all that kind of stuff, and built steps and anything that needed to be done.

Dyrness: So, it really was wise to have a carpenter.

Mersereau: Oh, yeah. And it didn't cost us all that much to get him to do that.

Dyrness: Leave it to a professional, huh?

Mersereau: We did 10 first, and then we went over and did 9 [experimental watersheds]. If that did nothing else, it taught us how to do those things. That's why I felt like I could help.

Dyrness: Next to your experience on the Andrews?

Mersereau: Yeah.

Geier: So, were the two of you enough with all this help, is that right?

Mersereau: Yeah.

Geier: Okay.

Mersereau: We did everything but put the instruments in. Then he was done at the end of that month, and we started putting instruments in, setting them up and surveying the levels of the water and everything in order to get them in right. We were able to put some heaters in there so that it wouldn't freeze up on us and everything.

Geier: Do you recall how that person was contracted?

Mersereau: I'm not sure. I think Al probably went through the phone book. Or maybe he heard about him from somebody, I'm not sure. But anyway, it was that kind of thing that allowed us not only to do the work, but to know what to do and to be able to transfer that knowledge into all the rest of the stations that we put up. We put up stations for earthflow equipment and we put up stations on the Bull Run. Dennis [Harr] had some studies up there. It was just one of those things that Dennis says, "I want this," and we did it.

Geier: I was just thinking, we're going over three hours here, we should probably stop this. The tape's gonna run out in a second anyway. But I just wanted to give you a chance, because I asked a lot of questions, and if you had something that you wanted to add here that I hadn't asked you.

Mersereau: Well, I was trying to figure out what it was you were going to want to know, because a lot of the things that I know a lot of people know. But the things that I thought of more than anything as far as the Andrews, were the people that were involved, at least when I was there. I think it made the studies and the data and everything that we did, more valuable. It made it more true, just because of the kind of people that were involved, not only as far as the data was concerned, but the things that we kept shifting to and doing. We had different people who had different ideas about what to do. They're doing things up there now that wouldn't have dawned on me in a thousand years. And they're working off of satellites. I can remember one time when I wondered why the heck we're not doing that. And then I forgot about it. (Laughter)

Geier: They're working off satellites totally?

Dyrness: GPS's?

Mersereau: They're doing weather reports and everything off of those.

Geier: Well, you had a lot of experience working in different capacities, going into the Marine Corps and things. Was there something different about this group of people that you hadn't encountered before?

Mersereau: I think that they were willing to put some faith in whether I could do the job or not. I think in times before that, I wasn't so sure that anybody thought that what I had to say was worth listening to – (continuing thoughts on next tape).

End of Side A of Tape 2 (or 2)

Begin Side B, Tape 2 (of 2)

Mersereau: -- what was going on and how important it was. I think if you're going to help somebody, you've got to have some feeling that they think you're worth doing it. That's the thing that I felt, and I don't believe there was any time at the beginning that I didn't feel that way. Particularly when Jack started including me in everything, and then listening to what I had to say. I think it kind of pumps your ego and makes you want to do things right.

Geier: So that stayed pretty consistent in the various periods of your work up there?

Mersereau: Yeah.

Geier: Well, probably we shouldn't take up all of your afternoon here. I may be getting back in touch with you, especially about some of the periods we haven't talked a lot about since your time back here in Corvallis, things like that. But, three hours is a pretty long time to be sitting there talking.

Dyrness: He handled it pretty good though.

Geier: Yeah, I like your stories. So, I'm gonna be working on this for the next several months here, and if anything occurs to you, I've asked people to provide written comments, if you have something you want to add, or recollections, people you think I should talk to, things like that.

Dyrness: Hey, have you talked to George?

Geier: George. Which one?

Dyrness: Lienkaemper?

Geier: No, I haven't.

Dyrness: Well, it strikes me that might be a good idea to talk to George. His office is right down the hall from mine, you know. He's kind of next to Carol Woods' office.

Geier: I've got it in my notes.

Dyrness: He's a GIS guy now. Computer guru. Yeah.

Geier: What was his time frame of being up there? He was up there a while.

Mersereau: I think he started before I moved up, because he was working with Fred. He was really kind of working as Fred's helper.

Dyrness: When did you move up again?

Mersereau: '78.

Dyrness: '78.

Mersereau: Then I moved up, then he and I and Al, worked more together. By then Carlos and Friday had left. So, there were just the three of us. He was pretty sharp. In fact he, he'd get tired of going up. I think Al was surprised, I guess, when George told him he didn't want to go out in the field anymore. He wanted to do something else. And then this other job came up.

Dyrness: Yeah, he's happy as a clam. He just sits there at his computer. (Laughter)

Mersereau: He and I shared the office for a while, next door to each other. Way back before we started getting a lot of computers around there, he was programming everything into his H.P. calculator, setting things up and trying to show me how to run the thing. And that's the one thing that I had a hard time with.

Dyrness: You're of the generation who has that the common complaint.

Mersereau: My kids, my grandkids, know more about computers than I do.

Dyrness: Oh yeah, but they're growing up with it, you know. There's not that phobia that the rest of us have to battle.

Geier: I'm not sure if I was telling you or Fred, but I've been putting material into a computer database. It's about the point where it would be useful to actually bring into the interviews. I could punch up on there, if you were having trouble remembering the names of stuff, I could bring them up, if you have enough of a word database.

Mersereau: Well, Fred and George, but mainly Fred, did a lot of walking around the Andrews. He walked all over that place. He must have at least hit everyplace that you and Jerry hit.

Dyrness: Yeah, yeah.

Mersereau: Only he was digging, he was digging soil pits.

Dyrness: He knows that place really well.

Geier: Now which Fred are you talking about?

Dyrness: Fred Swanson.

Mersereau: I don't know whether this stuff is in the file still. One of the old files was still in the office there, and in it are some old studies. The one I remember that was really interesting was the study they made on the road that they first built up to the Andrews.

Dyrness: That would be Roy Silen?

Geier: Was it the access road?

Mersereau: It was the access road that went up to the Andrews. The district built the road, or at least the logging company did. The records had to show how big it was, how long it was, how much per mile it cost to build it, and everything that they did.

Dyrness: Must be late '40s or something, huh?

Mersereau: Yeah, yeah.

Geier: Yeah, it was another four years before Roy was up there, so I'd like to see that.

Mersereau: When Roy first started there wasn't any road in there at all. And, the road went up to the scout camp. That was about it.

Dyrness: Where was the scout camp? Was it located by a swimming hole?

Mersereau: Let's see, where was it? The camp was right at the junction, wasn't it?

Dyrness: Right where the road connects.

Mersereau: Saddle Dam, right in there. Wasn't it there?

Dyrness: Oh, the Saddle Dam, there. Wow, that's not very far in. Saddle Dam is that first little dam on Blue River Reservoir.

Geier: Oh, okay.

Dyrness: Yeah, just as you hit Blue River Reservoir.

Geier: Yeah, that's right.

Mersereau: Well, in the first years that I went up there, they were still using that old road. We would come up the hill past the Saddle Dam, and then go down that old road. At the time they were working on the road that's there now. At night when I would run in there to get water samples, I would come onto spots where there were parts of a slope sliding out across the road,

and it was just like gravy moving. And I'd go around the toe of it and then I'd just step in it, so that I could get out there and get my samples and get back before it closed the road off.

Dyrness: Yeah, that's what happened during the storms.

Mersereau: And I think that was the old road that was in the study.

Geier: That's definitely something I'd like to get my hands on, one of the old logging plans.

Mersereau: I think the first people in there. Like Don Gray. Did you ever meet him? He put in a lot of tubes to measure slope movement. He did them on Watershed 1, he did them on that interface between 2 and 3 [watersheds], and he did them down 9 and 10 [watersheds].

Dyrness: That doesn't ring a bell, he must have been after '74.

Mersereau: He started in '68, and that was the first year that he got out there.

Dyrness: Is that right? Don Gray [Professor-University of Michigan]. You know, the name sounds familiar, but I can't picture him or anything. Where's he at now?

Mersereau: Doug Swanston didn't exactly like some of the work that he did, but I've got his report; must be still out in the garage. I've got his study, anyway.

Dyrness: Is he still around?

Mersereau: Well, he was from Michigan and he came out in the summer and set those up, in fact; he set them up in Seattle, some here, and some down in California.

Dyrness: Don Gray.

Mersereau: He was an engineer.

Dyrness: So, he published a report on this?

Mersereau: Yeah.

Dyrness: Where did it appear?

Mersereau: I don't know whether it was in a journal. I know it was in a publication like this [USFS report].

Geier: That's one of those things that you could get back to me about. If it occurs to you, let me know.

Dyrness: Yeah, if you could, write a note or something.

Mersereau: I was trying to think of, I forgot about Fred, I mean about Doug Swanston, too.

Dyrness: Did he do any work down there though?

Mersereau: He put in some [inclinometer] tubes.

Dyrness: On the Andrews?

Mersereau: On the Andrews. He put them on the slide that comes down across Lookout Creek, above the road junction that goes to Carpenter, there's a big slide that goes clear across the creek.

Dyrness: Kind of a land flow [earthflow] type of thing, yeah.

Mersereau: And he put in some tubes there.

Dyrness: What are they, strain gauge tubes, or what?

Mersereau: No, they were inclinometer tubes. He put them in there and down at Powers [Oregon].

Dyrness: Did you help him on this?

Mersereau: Well, Carlos and Friday did a lot of the work to put them in. And then, I helped read them all. Spent a lot of time running around doing that.

Dyrness: What years would be?

Mersereau: Oh, that seems to me like it was in '70. Boy, they started up before I moved from Blue River, so it had to be before '78. Maybe '75, somewhere around there.

Dyrness: '75, yeah. That's the year after I left. And then, not long after that, Doug went back to Alaska.

Mersereau: Went back to Alaska, you're right.

Geier: He was only there for a year or two.

Mersereau: Yeah, but he had tubes there, he had tubes down at Powers, he had tubes down in California, near Arcata. That was something. They got a drill rig and took it out on those slopes, and there were times when they had to winch the rig around so that they could sit on the slope, and then jack it up so they could get a straight shot with the drill.

Geier: You were saying that was Swanston [Doug], didn't you?

Mersereau: One of the things that makes that system work, or not, is that you have to make sure the bottom end is in bedrock. And there's some ways of making sure. And he never was sure.

Dyrness: Don Gray wasn't sure.

Mersereau: Well, Doug wasn't sure either.

Dyrness: No, not Don Gray?

Mersereau: Don Gray got them in the bedrock. But, there were some questions in there. But these are all people that got started on the Andrews and helped.

Geier: Well, we should probably call an end to it here. Let me give you my card here, if you do find some more material. Keep this to make a copy, and I'll give it back to you.

Mersereau: Sure, I may have another copy, but it'd be quicker to, if you copy it.

Geier: And like I said, if anything does occur to you, or if you find some, what are you trying to track down here?

Mersereau: Oh, this was in the Springfield paper one time.

Dyrness: What's the date on that anyway?

Geier: '75.

Dyrness: '75, look at that.

End of Side B, Tape 2 (of 2)

End of Interview