

Boyd Henderson
Zion National Park Oral History Project
CCC Reunion
September 28, 1989

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Nancy Harms: This is Nancy Harms. I am interviewing Boyd Henderson. Today is September 28th 1989, behind the nature center. We will be discussing his involvement in the CCC's, his time here in Zion as a CCCer.

Boyd Henderson: Just about Zions here or do you want it all?

Nancy Harms: If we can start with Zion mainly, yes.

Boyd Henderson: I went into the CCC camp in July of 1935 at Duck Creek. We got to work for Leonel Chidester; he was a foreman out on the Aspen Mirror Lake dam. We put it together with team and frizzlers.

Nancy Harms: Team and ?

Boyd Henderson: Team and frizzlers.

Nancy Harms: What's that?

Boyd Henderson: That's a scraper, a scraper pulled by two horses. We rip-rapped the dam and I was overseeing placing the rip-rap, and while we was there we finished the dam up. We left there and went down into Parowan Canyon on a gravel job for about three weeks. Then they called us in and said the camp was breaking up and they shipped us in October to Escalante. I went to Escalante, Utah, in the camp over there. I spent a year working on the road from Escalante up over Hell's Backbone, Skyline Bridge which is a long way down on both sides.

And then in October of '36 I was transferred from Escalante to Bryce where I was for a week and then we come down to Zions in October '36. I went to work up on the Nevada switchback where I worked most of the winter off and on, when we could, when the snow wasn't too deep, and we wasn't shoveling snow. We shoveled a lot of it that winter too. It was a real experience and snow right here in the bottom of the canyon was at least three and a half feet deep at one time. It got 15 below zero. The barracks in them days didn't have too much insulation in them. We had two big old pot belly stoves that we had them

red hot and you could freeze water within ten feet of it during the night. We spent an awful winter there that was something to look back on, I'll tell you that.

Harms: You were camped up there on the Nevada switchbacks?

Henderson: No, we were camped right here across the creek. I worked up on the Nevada switchbacks most of the time. I worked as a powder monkey and rock builder.

Harms: What's a powder monkey?

Henderson: Well, [he] handles dynamite and they drill holes in rocks and put dynamite in them and blew them up.

Harms: Had you worked with dynamite prior to CCCer?

Henderson: No, I started dynamite in Escalante Camp when I was over there.

Harms: Did they have a separate class for people to learn how to do dynamite or was it just on the job training?

Henderson: Just on the job training, in them days it was. I had a good teacher Hayden Church of Panguitch. Then when I come over here, I went right to work as the same thing, building and blowing those big rocks up on the switchbacks that we didn't dare roll down. I would break them up in little pieces.

In the spring, March of '37, they called a bunch of us out to go up on the east end checking station buildings to shovel the snow off from them. It was five feet of ice and snow on top of those buildings; that was the 20th of March. We just had to cut it with axes and shovels and slide it off from the buildings and you could walk off any place.

We had a good time. I enjoyed it all winter, and we shoveled an awful lot of snow all up the canyon and dug people out of snow banks.

Harms: You are originally from where?

Henderson: I am from over to Cannonville, that's over by Bryce Canyon, underneath Bryce Canyon.

Harms: Cannonville?

Henderson: Yes.

Harms: And you live where now?

Henderson: I live down in Washington.

Harms: Washington, okay great.

Henderson: When I retired in 1980, we moved down there to get out of the snow.

Harms: Even though you lived in Utah, had you visited Zion prior to that time?

Henderson: Oh yes, we used to visit down there once in a while.

Harms: Did you enjoy working in it or was that a special treat?

Henderson: Well, I enjoyed the work here that winter, had a good camp, a bunch of good men. I spent six months down here.

Harms: You talk about the cold though, my goodness.

Henderson: Oh, it got cold.

Harms: How did you stay warm?

Henderson: That wasn't easy. [Laughter] That snow slid off that Checkerboard mountain seemed like every night, seemed like it would just be in the middle of the night when it would do it and we'd have to go up and shovel it, dig the vehicles out and bring them on down. I spent several nights up there digging out of snow banks there at Checkerboard Mountain. It was quite an adventure. Anything else that I could tell that would be of interest to anybody?

Harms: What did you think of the people, the visitors? Did you think there were a lot? You'd come here as a youngster and as you've come along and got older, did you realize that there were more and more people coming into the area?

Henderson: Oh yes, it was always busy. It's been 53 years since I left here, and probably in those days maybe three or four hundred people come in here in the summer time; now [its] a million. Makes a lot of difference; I've seen it grow a lot

Harms: Were you here during the times of the Easter pageants? Do you remember those?

Henderson: Yes.

Harms: Did you help with the building of those areas?

Henderson: No, I didn't help build those areas. I come down here several times for two of the Easter pageants in the years following that. It's quite the place.

Harms: When you would run into visitors occasionally, not only were you finding them on Checkerboard Mesa to help them get out, but occasionally when you were working on trails etc. were you running into visitors as well?

Henderson: Well there wasn't too many going up and down the road in them days. We had several of them we had to dig out of snow banks up on the mountain that winter.

Harms: You found their reactions then very good because they were quite happy to see you, right?

Henderson: I'll tell you there was a lot of them. The only piece of machinery we had to remove snow was shovels and an FWD that it didn't have too much power. It had a big hoist on the back of it and we pulled lot of cars out of snow banks with them up along between here and out on top.

Harms: Did you go into the town of Springdale very much?

Henderson: Oh yes. We used go down there to dances once in a while, 'bout every week we'd go down for an hour or two, go down and check things out.

Harms: How did you find the local residents reacting to CCCers?

Henderson: They always got along good. We didn't ever have no trouble. Went down to Hurricane to dances several times. We always had a good time

Harms: The facilities... you remember the visitor center being in a different location than where it is now?

Henderson: I don't remember anything about the visitor center in them days.

Harms: Or the lodge or anything like that?

Henderson: They had the lodge. I don't know; it was here some place. And they had some buildings back up the in canyon there where the park rangers and that lived up in the canyon there and on up the canyon where some of the homes are up in there. I met several of the rangers. The deer was all down in here that winter and there was a lot of them in here, 50-75 head in a bunch.

Harms: Did you ever have to do any of the relocation of the deer? Were you in on that at all?

Henderson: No we didn't do anything that winter. They did the next summer, they done a lot of relocating I know that. There was just too many deer in here for what feed there was.

Harms: Have you run into any of the people from that time? Have you run into the same people or have you kept some of the same friendships?

Henderson: Well some.

Harms: Built some strong friendships there, they just only got better?

Henderson: Some of them was really good. I run into an old buddy of mine that was in CC camp here together, in Salt Lake. We spent about 20 years in Salt Lake and we used to get together quite often and reminisce and things. A lot of them.

Harms: Do you remember any of the songs from the CCC's? Anyone in your camp use to write songs?

Henderson: No, not that I know of.

Harms: Poems or anything?

Henderson: I know some that done it, but I can't remember which ones they were or what they were about.

Harms: What do you think about the park now?

Henderson: Well, it's a lot different than it was, I know that. A lot better trails and better facilities. I know my family's come up into the camp grounds and around the lodge and had lunch a time or two in the last 10-12 years since we have been back down here. We go back and forth through here quite lot because we have property up on the mountain,

go up there in the summer time quite a lot. We quite enjoy it. Every once in a while come up through here and see what's going on.

Harms: Sure.

Henderson: The roads have improved. (laughter)

Harms: You said you used to go into town occasionally for dancing, etc., whereabouts would they hold the dancing?

Henderson: They didn't hold too many dances in Springdale.

Harms: On the Rockville floor?

Henderson: On the Rockville floor and we used to go down to Hurricane quite a lot for high school dances. I used to go with quite a lot of girls down there.

Harms: Did you have to thumb? Did you use your thumb to get down there?

Henderson: No, some of us had a car sometimes most the time when I was here. The winter of '36 and 7, I had a car down here all winter.

Harms: You must have been quite popular then because you could give people rides (laughter)

Henderson: Yes we used to, me and my brother were both here and we had a car between us. We'd go down and take a bunch down to Hurricane, or St. George. We only went to St. George once.

Harms: What do you think of your CCC years? Do you think that they gave you a better education?

Henderson: Oh, yes.

Harms: More awareness of life?

Henderson: Oh, yes, more awareness of life, a lot of things. I know the CCC's took a lot of boys and made men out of them.

Harms: Were you one?

Henderson: Well, I think so. I was about 19 before I went into CCC. I'd been out sheep herding quite a lot before then and spent several years with sheep, a lot of time alone.

Harms: So you've done quite a bit of work from sheep to dynamite

Henderson: I quite enjoyed that. I got into it and learned how to do it, a lot of dangers to it.

There was a fellow in Escalante that just been blown up just about three or four months before I was married. It was just a mischarge and he walked back to see what was going on and it blew up in his face. Hayden Church, he always told us to never trust it. If you don't see up and go off, don't go back there for 24 hours at least. We blew up a lot of trees and a lot of ledges, that one right over there.

Harms: After you left the CCC did you use any of the same skills?

Henderson: Yes, I did. I went to work for a construction outfit building the road for part of a summer. I got right back into it on that and its come in handy a time or two since then, but I didn't get into it too much.

Harms: So you have been able to use the experiences then to your good.

Henderson: Oh I've used a lot of them.

Harms: Wonderful. What do you think about the CCC for Zion National Park, did it benefit by having the CCCs in it?

Henderson: Oh I think so. I know it did. They built a lot of trails and put in a lot of walls, a lot of dams, built a lot of roads.

Harms: You were here in '37. Does that mean you were having anything to do with the retaining walls around the lodge area?

Henderson: No, I worked up the canyon all the time, right up on the switch backs most of the time.

Harms: And what about for the nation, do you think that CCC was quite important for the nation?

Henderson: Oh yes. It was a lifesaver right at that time. Like I say, it took a lot of boys and made men out of them.

Harms: Do you think it's another thing that could be done today?

Henderson: I think this Job Corps they've got is a whole lot the same thing. It helps a lot of people

Harms: It does.

Henderson: I don't remember where everything was here. They have changed so much in the last 50 years, a lot of water gone under the bridge since then.

Harms: Were their cabins around this area when you were working across the way?

Henderson: Well, let's see there was the two CCC camps; there was one on this side of the river and one on that side of the river that winter I was here. It seems to me like there was some cabins down in here, between the CC camp and town.

Harms: When you were working on the Nevada switchbacks, was that just to help with the slump that was constantly falling off, drifting, trying to secure it

Henderson: Yes. That's what we was doing was fixing it so that it wouldn't fall no more. We moved an awful lot of earth up there in that winter.

Harms: What types of things did you do to secure it?

Henderson: Well just taking everything that was loose, that was hanging over anything and moving it on down the hill, and us pushing it over the bank into the canyon there. We come down there one February one year in the spring and we got just above the slide there and some rocks fell down and had the road blocked. So I took two or three of the boys and we went down and I knew where the key was to the tool box, went down and got some bars, and we went up and barred out about three or four rocks and got about seven or eight cars on through. Just as we got out of there, when the last car got out of there, well there comes some more down off the mountain. It was kind of scary, spooky but knowing where things was, it helped a lot 'cause I had work there all winter. They'd had slides like that before.

Harms: I work at the visitor center here a lot. The visitors that come through are surprised at the tunnel and that was such an experience to go through and such a frightening thing. Was it the same thing for visitors back then, as far as their vehicles maybe were a little bit smaller?

Henderson: The vehicles were quite a lot smaller and there wasn't near as much traffic as there is today. I know when we come down here just after the tunnel was finished the first time I come down through here in '30 or '31 whenever it was. I don't remember when it was, but we come on down and went on down to Hurricane and got a load of peaches and took back over home, I, and my dad and mother. That was quite the experience coming down through that tunnel. How they ever got a road down through there I don't know? I know they called the engineer crazy and a lot of other things before he got a road through there. I had a great uncle that worked on it. He worked on this bridge up in the canyon, on the main highway, first big bridge up there. He worked on that and built several of the bridges up and down the canyon. He did really good on the rock quarry up there.

Harms: Do you remember any of the people specifically you were talking to at the time, the people you were working with? Do you remember, was anyone a particular clown or a character you always remember cause they always brang a smile to your face, that type of thing, always trying to catch a joke somewhere?

Henderson: I know we had two fellows on our gang up there that was always breaking [unintelligible], that always brought us something to do. [Unintelligible] We had a good time, done a lot of work

Harms: Yes you did, did a lot of work. Were there other areas in the park that you would have liked to work at or you got a chance to explore because you were here a long time as a CCC, so you got a chance to explore a little bit more?

Henderson: Not too much. One fall we took a hike up on Angel's Landing and couple of guys, quite a hike up there then. Probably a different trail now than it was then.

Harms: I don't know

Henderson: Wasn't much a trail then, I know that. [It's] quite a lot different than it was 50 years ago.

Harms: The park is?

Henderson: Yes

Harms: Taking on a little different perspective, different personality?

Henderson: Well, [that] might be a lot of it too.

Harms: Any rituals? Any traditions going on in your camp, any things you could always count on people doing?

Henderson: It's been so long since I did all those things.

Harms: Is there anything else you would like to say about the CCC's?

Henderson: It was a good thing in those days. They had it take a lot of boys off from the road and off of the trails and give them something to do, something to look forward to.

Harms: Did you get a chance to speak to any of the gentlemen from other areas of the United States, from the south and from New York area?

Henderson: Oh yes, we had people out here across the river here, some of them was from back east and then a CC camp over to Henrieville, above Henrieville, a lot of them were from Kentucky, a lot of boys from Kentucky. I met a lot of those boys. Well, in fact one of them married my sister.

Harms: Were they quite amazed by the sights of the west?

Henderson: There was several of them that married girls from here and they have stayed here and lived here for the rest of their lives. My brother-in-law he just died two years ago. He come out here in '34 [to the] CCC camp, stayed till they broke it up, and then he went on and went to work for the state and retired from the state road construction. Same thing he was doing in the C's was road construction, heavy equipment.

Harms: So he learned his craft and kept it going?

Henderson: Yes.

Harms: Similar to what you had done.

Henderson: There was a lot of them that done that too.

Harms: Well thank you very much.

Henderson: You bet. Thanks a lot.

Harms: Thank you.