

Karl Lowder
Zion National Park Oral History Project
CCC Reunion
September 28, 1989

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Al Warnakie: My name is Al Warnakie. I'll be conducting this interview. The interview is being conducted at Zion Nature Center, Zion National Park, Utah. The date is September 28, 1989, The time is 4 p.m. The interviewee is Karl Lowder, L-O-W-D-E-R.

Karl, you got your discharge form with you and it says you joined up on July 7, 1938. Could you tell me a little about what you were doing before you joined the CCC's?

Karl Lowder: Well, I just mostly worked around farms in the Parowan community, garden work, stuff like that. I usually grew the produce like carrots and peas and I worked a lot in that when the seasons come on to be harvested and stuff like that. So that's what I was doing most of the time other than going to school.

Al Warnakie: And you were enrolled in the Bryce Canyon Camp, is that correct?

Karl Lowder: Yes.

Al Warnakie: Did you then come down to Zion later on or did you stay up at Bryce?

Karl Lowder: We come down to Zion when it got cool in the fall of the year and stayed there through the winter then went back there when it became summer again.

Al Warnakie: So the next winter, that was the winter of 38' you all moved down here for your winter camp.

Karl Lowder: Yeah.

Al Warnakie: What did you do? What was your job in the CCC's?

Karl Lowder: In Zion or in Bryce?

Al Warnakie: First in Bryce.

Karl Lowder: In Bryce, I started out with pulling these white top weeds out of the park to keep them from spreading, and trail work, done some trail work.

Al Warnakie: Do you remember which trail you worked on?

Karl Lowder: No I don't. I know I shoveled a lot of dirt out on the Bryce Point.

Al Warnakie: Okay.

Karl Lowder: Into trucks with these old number two hand shovels.

Al Warnakie: (Laughs) You know you did a lot of shoveling.

Lowder: Yes I did a lot of shoveling.

Warnakie: Okay and what was your job down in Zion?

Lowder: I got appendicitis in Bryce and they sent me to the Cedar City Hospital. I was in the hospital there for about three weeks and the camp had moved down here to Zion by that time. So they just gave me an easy job flagging cars up there on the switch backs where they were keeping the dirt from slipping down on the road and getting in the way. So I started flagging cars there. I did that and I got kind of nervous and tired of it, so I asked them to give me something else to do besides flagging so I started shoveling. Then I got on KP once and decided I wanted to get on to steady KP. I just kind of liked that job. So we got several guys to sign up for steady KP and I started out that. I was only on that for a short period of time until they sent me to Fort Douglas to a cook school.

Warnakie: Yes.

Lowder: So when I came back from the cook school and I was a cook here in the CC camp here in Zion.

Warnakie: Okay, you were flagging traffic up on the switchbacks, is that what you were doing?

Lowder: At the tunnel, the mouth of the tunnel, the lower end of the tunnel.

Warnakie: Okay now, how long were you enrolled in the CCC's?

Lowder: I was there thirty three months.

Warnakie: And you went to Fort Douglas and learned how to be a cook and then came back and you were a regular cook here at Zion?

Lowder: Yes, that's right.

Warnakie: What was the food like in the camps?

Lowder: I thought it was good food.

Warnakie: What would be let's say a typical meal for breakfast?

Lowder: Well, breakfast time a lot of times we would have hot cakes or maybe omelets. Another morning maybe cottage fried potatoes with fried eggs and sometimes French toast. We

had something different about every morning, every week, I mean every day of the week for breakfast.

Warnakie: Sound pretty good to me. I wish we could get you over to the men's dorm and have you cook for us. [Laugh.]

Warnakie: What about lunch? What would be a typical meal for lunch?

Lowder: Well, for lunch times we made sandwiches and sent them out to some of the boys. And we'd give them an orange or a banana or something like that to go along with it and a drink of some kind. The ones in camp a lot of times would be maybe potatoes and some kind of meat, beef or stewed beef, or something like that, or boiled beef, and pork and beans quite a bit of the time. We had beans quite regular, maybe two or three times a week. And sometimes we would have a good meal for supper time, meat, potatoes and gravy on the side. We would make a desert out of rice, rice pudding and such.

Warnakie: Well, what was your experience like as cook? Did you enjoy that?

Lowder: Yeah, I liked cooking.

Warnakie: How many cooks were there in the camp?

Lowder: Depending on the shift, you would usually have a first cook and a second cook and then maybe a student cook.

Warnakie: When you came back from Camp Douglas what position were you in?

Lowder: I started out as student cook and then maybe within a couple weeks I was second cook. Then I got to be first cook before I got out.

Warnakie: The woman that was talking to us a few minutes ago before we set up the interview, she said something about having to come in early and go down to Springdale or something like that? What was that about?

Lowder: Well, I got married here before I got out of the CC Camp. It was about three months before I got out. I got married, so I had a little apartment down in Springdale, then I would have to cook breakfast, so I would have to get up about 4:00 in the morning and walk up there and get ready and get the breakfast in time for the boys to go out to work.

Warnakie: So the last three months you lived down in Springdale and every morning you had to get up before the crack of dawn and walk up from Springdale up to the camp here then.

Lowder: Yes, every other day you would go on at noon and then you would cook supper and then you would cook breakfast and then you would cook dinner and then you would be off shift again. So the next time you would start again would be at noon.

Warnakie: So you would rotate every other day.

Lowder: Yeah, we had two different shifts.

Warnakie: So you were here in '38 and then in '39. What was the camp like? Do you remember how big it was and was it still the main camp over here in the Watchmen area?

Lowder: Yes, it was still the main camp. We still had I imagine about six or eight barracks there, I'm not sure.

Warnakie: What was it like living in those barracks before you got married and moved down to Springdale?

Lowder: Living in the barracks? Well, you got used to being around other boys or other men, other young men, and how to react with other people which you know is different from being in your home. You kind of learn to deal with things away from your mother and you dad and learned a little more responsibility, how to take care of your clothes and things like that. Well you got to respect more about what you parents had done for you and how much time they had put in keeping your clothes clean and stuff like that. You had to learn how to keep your beds and your barracks cleaned up and have a little responsibility for yourself.

Warnakie: What did you all do in the evenings after, well now you were cooking so your shifts were kind of messed up compared to some of the guys I guess, but what did you do on your off time for entertainment?

Lowder: Oh sometimes there would be what we used to call 'pie wagon', they would take us maybe on a weekend, maybe to Hurricane or St. George or someplace like that Friday night to a dance or something like that. Then we would load up and come back that night again. Once in a while you would get a little home sick and go home on a weekend when you had a weekend off.

Warnakie: And your home was Parowan?

Lowder: Parowan, yeah.

Warnakie: That's where you were born?

Lowder: Yes.

Warnakie: Your birthday is July 7th? What year?

Lowder: 1918.

Warnakie: 1918. So you were nineteen years old or you joined on your nineteenth birthday exactly, right?

Lowder: Yeah. I got a little home sick when I was out in Bryce one year. I got a guy to take me to Panguitch, and then there was a road junction in north Panguitch about ten miles. I had him dump me off there and I started to hitch hike from there to Parowan and I walked clear to Parowan, thirty five miles that night.

Warnakie: (Laughs.) You didn't get a ride? Well, sounds to me like from your description you felt real proud that you got the opportunity to go to cook school in Camp Douglas, Fort Douglas.

Lowder: Yes, I did.

Warnakie: What did you do when you left the CCC's?

Lowder: I had a job at a service station in Milford. I went there and there was service station attendant in Milford.

Warnakie: Did you have a chance to get back into cooking? Did you ever do any cooking after that?

Lowder: I went in the army. I got in the army and after I was in the army, they put me on KP there one day. The cook was making hot cakes one day and stuff like that. So I said, "Well, why don't you just let me help you make some of those hot cakes?" So I cooked hot cakes for them and one thing and another. Then it wasn't too long that one of the cooks was discharged or something and they put me on as a cook, so I worked my way from a student cook to a second cook and then a first cook and then I got me a mess sergeant until I got released out of the army.

Warnakie: How long were you in the army?

Lowder: I was in there about nineteen months.

Warnakie: So you got to be the mess sergeant and you got to run around the mess hall and give everybody a hard time, right?

Lowder: Yeah, that's right.

Both: (Laugh.)

Warnakie: Yeah, I spent a little time in the Air Force, so I know a bit about mess sergeants.

How would you characterize your experience in the CCCs? What I'm asking here is that you were born and raised here in Utah, this is your home, and I know that during the depression that there were rough times in Utah as there were everywhere else. How did you feel about the opportunity to come to the CCCs?

Lowder: I was glad to get a job, getting a little money, a little spending money or something like that. There really wasn't that much around where I was raised. Jobs were pretty scarce. It was a grateful opportunity for me to find something to pick up a little income.

Warnakie: How did you like living down in Zion Park?

Lowder: I liked it because it was more like a winter time job. But I liked it in Bryce in the summer time too.

Warnakie: It's kind of a nice place to work if you're going to work someplace isn't it?

Lowder: Yes, uh huh.

Warnakie: Did you get a chance to do any hiking around Zion or get out on the trails of anything?

Lowder: I went up this trail up towards this natural bridge on Bridge Mountain a couple times and I think that's about the only trail I walked up.

Warnakie: Did you walk all the way up to the bridge?

Lowder: I didn't get clear up to the bridge.

Warnakie: I understand it involves a little bit of climbing to get up there. Were they working on the Parunawep Trail, which now is the Watchmen Trail while you were here?

Lowder: I don't remember any of that.

Warnakie: So the only work like that was up on the switchbacks for you, right?

Lowder: Yes.

Warnakie: What was the tunnel in the switch backs like back then? I mean now the cars just zoom through and they had to block off the windows because there were too many people coming through. What was it like then, when you were working up there with traffic coming through and tourists?

Lowder: Well, there was quite a bit of traffic then, but I don't know, the tunnel looked about like it does now; just one or two of the windows is a little different. The light is a little better. Other than that I don't see too much change in the tunnels.

Warnakie: Did you have anything to do with the Park Service employees while you were here?

Lowder: No.

Warnakie: Do you remember them at all, the National Park Service?

Lowder: I just remember one or two of the guys. Mac Bean was a mechanic or something like that in a shop. Some of the foremen, they were over the work crew, but other than that I don't.

Warnakie: Is there anything else you want to get on tape? Any experiences that you can think of or anything going on here at the Zion Camp that you want to get on the record?

Lowder: I can't think of anything special.

Warnakie: Mr. Lowder brought his discharge paper from the CCCs with him and we are going to make a copy of that and have it added to the record. I have it here. It's pretty complete a pretty interesting document here, it says:

“Honorable discharge from the Civilian Conservation Corps. To all whom it may concern. This can certify that Karl Lowder, [and they misspelled his name] #CC9-277285, a member of the Civilian Conservation Corps, who was enrolled July 7, 1938, at Camp NP-3, Bryce Canyon, Utah, is hereby discharged therefrom for reason of: To accept employment. Said Karl Lowder was born in Parowan in the state of Utah. When enrolled he was nineteen years of age. Occupation of laborer. He went on to be a cook. He had brown eyes, dark brown hair, dark complexion, and was 5 feet 9 inches in height. His color was white. Given under my hand at Springdale, Utah, this 21st day of April, 1941. Signed by Lee W. Freeman, Sub-altern, Commanding

On the back: “A record of service in Civilian Conservation Corps. Served from 7/7/38 to 10/6/38 under the NPS, [National Park Service] at Camp NP-3 Utah. Type of work: Pick and shovel. Manner of performance: Satisfactory. From 10/7/38 to 5/4/39 under NPS at Camp NP-4 Utah. Type of work: Pick and shovel. Manner of performance: Satisfactory. 5/5/39 to 8/6/39 under NPS at NP-3 Utah. Type of work: Second cook. Manner of performance: Excellent. 8/7/39 to 9/8/39 under War Department at Headquarters in Casual Detachment. Type of work: Cook school. [That was at Fort Douglas, right?] Manner of performance: Satisfactory. 9/9/39 to 4/21/41 under NPS at Camp NP-4 Utah. First Cook. Manner of performance: Excellent.”

Under the remarks section: “Educational qualifications: Graduated from high school. Occupational qualifications: Cook and laborer.” Then there is an immunization record. That's about it. Again, signed by Lee W. Freeman, Sub-altern. Commanding.

[End of interview.]