

Interview with Bill Ehorn

INT: --early 1900s?

BE: Sure, I can tell you what I know about ranching on Santa Rosa Island and as far as I know, it started back in the 1830s. They brought sheep onto the island and then, in 1856, I believe that was the date, you know, pigs were introduced onto the island. And then, from there on, it seemed like it was going to continue to be more sheep than anything and in the 1860s and '70s, the Moore family brought a lot more sheep out here and I've heard counts of up to, like, 125,000, which I can't believe was on this island. But I heard also stories from people in Santa Barbara, on a clear day, when all these sheep were out here, you could look across the channel and see dust plumes going up on Santa Rosa Island, especially in a dry year. It was not until 1902 that that sheep ranch started to change and a family by the name of Vail and Vickers moved out here and their idea was, they're going to do a cattle ranch on Santa Rosa Island. As you can see, you know, the grass out here is just, you know, there's lots of it and it was great grassland, especially suited, I think, to bringing not only sheep but then, cattle. And so, the cattle were introduced out here in, as far as I know, 1902 and during the next 20 years or so, the Vail and Vickers did all they could to remove the remaining sheep on the island. And to go back just a little bit, when the sheep were here in the late 1800s, there

were, I guess, some stories about how, in a drought year and the price was down on sheep and they had so many of them that it wasn't feasible to ship them into the mainland to sell. They would boil these sheep up in these large vats there at the main ranch here on Santa Rosa Island and remove the lanolin, and then, sell the lanolin. But anyway, the big change was in 1902, with cattle and they prospered fairly well out here for nearly 100 years, here on Santa Rosa Island.

INT: Can you tell us how you came to meet the Vail family? What was your first encounter with the Vail family and what was the level of the operation at that point, in terms of structures and number of cowboys? Who did you meet and what did you see when you first came onto Santa Rosa and when was that? In what, in --

BE: Well, I think it was, to answer your question, that I met the Vails just at a party, actually, on Santa Cruz Island. The National Park Service, including myself and the director of the National Park Service, who was out visiting, was invited on Santa Cruz Island by Dr. Carey Stanton, who at that time owned about 90% of Santa Cruz. This was in 1976 and so, we all went out on Santa Cruz Island and I didn't know this ahead of time but when I got there, I was introduced to Russ and Al Vail, who then were the managers and part owners of Santa Rosa Island. I was really thrilled about that. I'd never met them, just heard all these stories about this

magnificent island and the ranching. I come from northern California and I've been around ranches all my life. I have horses and I just wanted to meet these guys, you know, and get an opportunity. Maybe they would invite me out to this magnificent place. So anyway, we sat around the pool there at Santa Cruz and we talked and talked. They said, well, we'd like to have you come out sometime and as I remember, I thought, why what a great opportunity it would be to go out there to Santa Rosa Island and maybe they'll let me bring Dr. Stanton, because I was trying to build a relationship with all of the landowners, a positive relationship. And Dr. Stanton hadn't been out here for years and years and he was also a good friend of the Vails. And then, I also wanted to bring Pierre Gherini out, who was one of the owners on the east end of Santa Cruz. He hadn't been out here for a long time. I thought, boy, what a great thing this would be I can put this together to bring all of the landowners, the private landowners out here to Santa Rosa. Al and Russ Vail invited me to come up and said I could do that, so I came out here and I don't know. We had a lot in common and we really hit it off great and you know, it went from there. I came out more and more as time went on and eventually, got into really understanding the ranch operations and how magnificent it was out here, to come back. And it's like going back 100 years in time in early California ranching history.

INT: Can you describe Al and Tim briefly as individuals?
What was Al Vail like? What was Tim like?

BE: Russ Vail.

INT: I'm sorry.

BE: Yeah, Tim, yeah.

INT: Please describe each of the --

BE: Well, they were not identical twins and at the time, I think they were in their early, no, late 50s, I believe, when I first met them. And they were the kind of guy that was about the most honest person you ever met. And a handshake to them meant everything. They didn't like to do paperwork. They didn't like, you know, any contracts or anything. And they'd look you straight in the eye and shake your hand, and that was the deal. And they lived by that. And just a little side track, even the hunting operation that went on out here with the elk and the deer, there was never any contract with the pack or the hunter operation out here at all. It was just a handshake and that went on for a lot of years out here on the island. But they were really great people and just really got to know them well. And they were two of my best friends.

INT: Can you share an experience or two that you had with the Vails on the island, in terms of participating in roundup or in other parts of their operation? What were --

BE: Well.

INT: Some of the things that you remember most fondly in

terms of just being out here with them?

BE: That's a great question because you had to build their trust. And it took a lot of time being with them and proving to them that I was an honest person, too, and, you know, build a friendship. They knew right off that I would love to come out here and spent time with them, you know, on this ranch and especially getting on a horse. And this place is a magnificent place to ride a horse. And so I kept asking, you know, and saying hey, you know, think I can come out and go on one of these roundups some time and, well, let's wait a little while, you know. And you know, a couple of years went by before they finally said, sure, Ehorn, come on out here and we'll get you on a horse. And I remember telling them, don't give me any of these young horses. I needed a good old horse that's not going to buck me off. And they said, ah, don't worry about it. One of the cowboys of --they'll fix you up with a good, gentle horse. So I thought that was good, so I came out here on one of the roundups. This was before the national park was established and it was like 1978, as I recall. So I came out here, all excited and stuff. And I didn't have a saddle at that time until I got this one right here. And so, they lent me a saddle and everything and I came out and started on the first ride. We started gathering cattle and you know, they were convinced I was okay on a horse. They didn't have to worry about me getting in trouble

and everything. And so, I got the chance and come out from that time on and come out more and more all the time and help with the roundups.

INT: How did the roundup go? What was the process? Did it last a week or two, or a day or two? And how many people were involved? And what did you do? Will you get up every morning? You get up before sunrise?

BE: Oh, sure.

INT: Well, what was your day?

BE: Yeah, the roundups out here, you know, they were long days and sometimes, together, all this whole island here took several weeks. Actually, they portioned off the island or zoned it off into different areas, you know, where they would go in and spend time gathering the cattle in the west end of the island, the east, south, and north ends of the island. They had special pastures where they put heifers and they put steers in other places on the island. And so, they planned this in advance and where they needed to go that day and gather those cattle, and get them moving. They did the gatherings, actually, twice a year, once in the spring and once in the fall. Anyway, we would head out of the ranch, sometimes at 4:00 in the morning, in the dark. And as you can see, this island's kind of windy. You can see this grass blowing like this and it would be real windy in the morning, and dark, and cold. And you'd get on that horse at the barn

there and you'd start trotting. I mean, you would trot halfway across this island and you know from the main ranch Bechers Bay out here to the west end and here at China Camp, it's over 18 miles. And you know, sometimes you might trot for nine miles on this island before you'd ever start and find one of these canyons, like these right here, Acapulco and Whetstone and these canyons here, and you'd start up at the top of them, off the main road and then, you'd ride down these canyons and gather what cattle they are. And you'd funnel them into China Camp here and this is only one of several pens that were developed here on the island. The line cabins, there were three of them here, so you could have lunch when you got here and everything. And you'd bring all the cattle and we'd all come together, you know, with cowboys in every one of these canyons, vaqueros, and put them into the corrals. Once we got them here, then we're worn out. We've been going since 4:00 in the morning and by now, it's almost noon. And then, we'd go into these line shacks here and we'd have a barbeque or we'd just have, as some of my former rangers say, we'd have a peanut butter and Pico Pico sauce and maybe, sometimes, a can of tuna that was left in here. But when I got out here, I thought, you know, we got to do something better. We need to get a barbeque out here and we need to do tri-tip, and beans, and tortillas, and do it the cowboy way. And so, the cowboys, they really liked it when I was out here

because we made that happen. Anyway, we'd, after lunch, you know, take a little siesta and then, go back to the corrals here and sort the cattle, and take the heavier animals and we'd drive them over to a holding pen on the other side of the island from China Camp here in this particular case. And then, we would have a truck there and we'd take the pickup, go back to the main ranch. Next morning, leave the same time, about 4:00 in the truck and come out here and gather up our horses that we left out here, pick up the cattle, and drive them all the way to the ranch, and you know, weigh them and ship them out of there.

INT: How many head were on the island in any ranching cycle and could you describe what they were? Were they mothers with calves? Were some trucked in shipped over here to be fattened? How did the cattle part of the cattle operation work?

BE: Well, the cattle, when they first came out here in the early days, in the early 1900s, it was mainly a cow and calf operation, where they were raising calves out here, raising cattle. And as time went on, they changed that from a cow calf operation to what they called a stalker operation, where they would buy calves that were, you know, 2 to 300 pounds in size. And they'd buy them, actually, as time went on. In the later years, they were buying these cattle as far away as Florida and bringing some mixed breeds in rather than

just straight Herefords. At first, they had just Hereford cattle because Al Vail, he loved Hereford cattle because they're a beautiful animal and he took a lot of pride in the cattle that were out here on this island. So then, they had this stocker operation and they'd bring them on. They kept them for two wet seasons or two winters. It was usually around 18 months and you can't believe that these cattle came in here, you know, these calves that, you know, 2 to 300 pounds and in these 2 winters, they would gain a lot of weight, up to 900, 1,000 pounds, sometimes 1,000 pounds. As you can see, of the grass, how it would put the fat on them and everything. So you talk about grass-fed beef, I'm not sure you could find any better in the United States than came off this island right here.

INT: What was the Vails' market for the beef? Do you know where, once they shipped off of the island, where the beef went? Did they have a single buyer? Did they have, where did the cattle go? What was the market?

BE: Okay, that's another good question because, yeah, this is a real early California cattle ranch. It's on an island, which makes it unique, as far as I know, especially the cattle boat that they had out here. They had a boat called the Vaquero and they had two of them, actually. They were built specifically to haul cattle and prior to that, they had some barge operations and they had a schooner that brought

cattle out. And they would take them down to the southeast side of this island, what they called the old ranch, and they would just kick the cattle off the schooner and the barges and make them swim ashore. And then, later on, they got their own cattle boat and it had corrals on it and everything. The one I'm familiar with was the Vaquero II and they had, I forget how many pens on it, but they could put, you know, 12 to 18 head of cattle in each pen and take 100 adult beef cattle off of here at one time and calves, they could bring 2 to 300 of them, sometimes, out here in the fall of the year. And so, they would take them to Port Hueneme and then, they'd be picked up by whoever they sold the cattle to. It varied and I don't know exactly, you know, who they were selling to but a lot of these cattle, in the later years, they would go be picked up and go to Simplot or some feedlots on the mainland, and then, they'd be fattened up and then sold to markets, so that's what I know about that.

INT: I've got just a few more questions. How're we doing, all right here?

INT: I got to get --

INT: --

BE: Right, well, it started, you know, in 1902 with these two guys, these ranchers that were running a ranch operation in southern California and Arizona. They'd heard about this island, I guess, and they thought, well, that might be a

really neat thing to do, you know? And so, they took a chance and thought, well, let's do it. So, they came up and I don't know what the purchase price was in those days but they bought this island and they started this ranch in operation. They were out here for a number of years and then, they had family and stuff. And there was Al Vail and Russ Vail, and there was Margaret Vail on the Vail side and I never got acquainted at all with the Vickers. I met one of the cousins one time and that was about it. But they weren't out here during my time, anyway, and I just got to know Russ and Al really well. And Al had two daughters and one of them is Nita Vail. She was active out here and the other daughter, I didn't know her as well, Mary. But she would come out and ride horses and go on these cattle drives from time to time. And then, Russ Vail had a son, had two sons and a daughter. I got to know Tim Vail really well and he came out here and actually worked out here as a cowboy. He spent a lot of time doing things, helping, gathering cattle and doing all the ranch stuff, working on fence lines, and all that stuff. Then there was John Vail who came out here a lot, I mean, John Woolley and then, Will Woolley, Margie's son, and he loved the island, too. They all loved it, you know, and they'd come out here and they'd stay in the big house. And then, as time went on and I got more acquainted with them, you know, the families would come out and the foreman would bring their, that had

been there before, E. K. Smith and his family would come out here and spend time in the summer. And they'd spend a couple of months sometimes. They had a jeep out here and they'd drive around, see the island and just kind of relive the past out here. It was great. They're just all wonderful people, every one of them.

INT: (Inaudible phrase) people who ran into the (inaudible phrase) the most unforgettable character I ever met. --Who were some of the unforgettable characters you've met during your active time here at the island, cowboys, ranch foremen, -- people, even the (inaudible phrase)--

BE: --

INT: Made this island tick.

BE: That's a long list and I guess Russ and Al Vail stand right up there at the top but there was a lot of other characters that were out here. The cowboys themselves were, you know, each one of them was really different kinds of folks and they loved being out here. Most of them are just Mexican vaqueros that were here and, you know, they all had good stories. The latest ranch foreman that was out here that I got to know really well, his name was Bill Wallace. He'd been here on this island for over 40 years by the time that he left. He started out here in the early days and he was out here for a number of years. And then, he decided he would get off the island and he would become a commercial fisherman,

which he did. And that didn't last very long at all and within a couple of years or so, he was back here as a ranch foreman. And he lived over there in his own house that he built from material he got from -- from the old Air Force station. He lived there and then, he supervised all these vaqueros out here. He was quite a cowboy in his own right. He'd done a little rodeo during his time and he knew cattle really, really well. He did a really good job in managing this ranch for Al. Of course, he was out here and then, Al and Russ were on the mainland in their office there, and they'd talk every single day, you know, on the phone. Sometimes, the phone connections weren't all that great but you know, those were the characters, the colorful ones were the cowboys out here and Russ and Al Vail and their families. It was just unbelievable.

INT: What (inaudible phrase) but why is there no ranch that operates -- and that's more from the point of view of (inaudible phrases) ran a separate (inaudible phrases) which of the ranches operate begin to wind down and (inaudible phrases) turn into a hunting (inaudible phrases). What happens when (inaudible phrase)?

BE: Well, that all relates to the legislation that established the national park on March 5, 1980 and at that time, in the legislation, it allowed for the Vails, the Vail and Vickers to continue their way of life on this island,

which included the ranching operation and the elk and deer hunting operation, which had become commercial in 1978. What happened was, in 1997, well no, I got to go back to 1980. Right after that, we put together an agreement with the Vails, actually, that said that --, which was provided by the law that they could stay here for up to 25 years with what we called the reservation use and occupancy, or some other administrative tool, which they could continue their way of life on this island. So that was all going well and good, and we did a special use permit. They continued their way of life out here and the park service from 1980 to 1986, we didn't have the funding to purchase the island, so they still owned it, even though it was in the national park. So there was no problem there. Then, in 1986, the last day of 1986, the island was purchased by the federal government and then, we did a special use permit at that time. That went on until about 1997. There was a lawsuit that began the demise of the ranch. But they were going to be able to stay here until 2011 and continue their way of life, which included the hunting and the ranching until the lawsuit in 1997. Through that lawsuit, there was a settlement agreement that came up and the agreement was that the Vail and Vickers would remove all the cattle and the horses from the island, that they could continue the elk and deer hunting until such time as 2011, but the last four years, those animals had to be reduced by 25%.

So by the end of 2011, there wouldn't be any introduced animals on this island. So that kind of was the story about how caused the demise of the ranching. But now, it's a national park and, God, it's a great national park. You know, it's so many resources out here, the plants and the animals, and especially around the beaches, the pinniped populations have exploded around here. I just yesterday saw a banding of a bald eagle. In all my years out here, I'd never seen a bald eagle out here. In fact, I can recall maybe a couple of times when I'm riding the ranch out here on horseback where I saw a golden eagle but I wasn't sure. But yesterday, wow, what a treat that was, to see this bald eagle, you know, soaring above these beautiful marine -- on the island, and saw the chick banded. They turned loose. They were free and I'm thinking, wow, you know, I don't know why they're back here but I'm sure glad they are. It was really quite a thrill.

INT: (inaudible phrases)

BE: It's changed already dramatically and, you know, I left here in 1989 and I've come back every year. I came back and helped out on the hunting operation. I would use any excuse I could get to come out here. If anybody said, you know, can you come out, I was always right here. And I've been able to be away from the island long enough to come back and really see the dramatic changes that have taken place out here. It's incredible what's happened. You know, even today,

when we're driving out on the road, how the plants are growing right over the road in some places. We have to trim them. We never used to have to do that and this grass has gotten so tall and, you know, it's luxurious and, you know, it's just, it's amazing, the changes that take place on these islands. And I saw this on San Miguel, too, when the burros were removed back in 1976, 77, I guess it was, when we removed the burros. You know, we tried to document these changes but it's amazing how the plant, you know, come back. And also, some of the plants that were thought to be extinct on these islands and especially right here in Santa Rosa because of the grazing activity and the impact of grazing by all of the animals, you know, some people thought that these plants were extinct and the no longer existed. And you've got to remember that on these islands, you might have the same kind of a genus of a plant out here but it'll be, maybe, a different species or a subspecies of what you might see on the mainland. And everything takes on a different aspect out here, you know, on these islands. Some of these plants that were thought to be extinct, you know, I guess they were hibernating or whatever they were doing but they're starting to come back and I can't wait to get down to the southeast end of the island, the old ranch, because there's a magnificent wildflower place and I want to see what's going on down there. But it's amazing, what happens when you don't have grazing animals --. So even

though that was an exciting part of time as a ranch, you know, it's transferring right now, transforming into a great national park.

INT: How about the number of different people and initiatives that are involved in restoration? (Inaudible phrase) moving the cattle off. That only goes part of -- yesterday, we saw -- a berry expert and a bald eagle -- another island where (inaudible phrase) talk about the concept behind restoration of an island and the number of different initiatives and people that volunteer to high-level experts like -- how important that is. (Inaudible phrase) restoration take a lot of people -- and is it going well?

BE: Restoration is, it takes a lot of people. It takes a lot of money and, you know, you have to go back, I guess, to what national parks are all about. And in national parks, we try to preserve and protect all the natural and cultural things that we have there. It's guided by strong policies and we'll come out in national parks that have been utilized by humans and changed, and try to bring them back to a natural functioning ecosystem, you know, like prior to European man's involvement. And that's kind of what our organic tact is all about. And oftentimes, in newer national parks, like Channel Island and the last park that I worked in was Redwood National Park, we've had major restoration efforts. Right here on this island and some of the other islands, which we got started

early on was, you know, one of the first orders of business was to get rid of the introduced species that weren't there naturally and then, let the ecosystem come back and begin to function different under a natural functioning system. Oftentimes, we will put up greenhouses and try to grow those native plants in greenhouses and then go and transplant in certain areas within the park or, in this case, on the island. I guess, you know, you say how intensive is it and then the management, what does it cost and all that stuff? I turned to Redwood National Park as probably the prime example of restoration in the entire national park system. Up there, you know the lands were logged for the redwood, especially in Redwood Creek and there was over 300 miles of logging road there. And it was left there, skid roads and stuff like that and, you know, we had clear cut and all that. We came in and made a national park out of it and most of the work that's been done out there, done there since 1968, has been in restoration and taking the logging roads out, removing them with the same equipment that put them in, and then bringing native redwood trees and Douglas fir back and transplanting them in these areas, and restoring the watershed, the tributary creek, you know, to protect the salmon and all that stuff. We have a staff up there of, you know, 50, 60 different disciplines of science. We have the same thing here in the Channel Islands. We've got a huge resource management

staff but you got to realize that we not only manage the terrestrial resources of the islands themselves and these plants but out to one nautical mile around each one of these islands is still Channel Islands National Park and we've also got a job to do in taking care of the marine resources. We've done some great things. We've got 17 underwater transects around here. We're looking at the tide pools. We're looking at the plant life, the kelp, and all the other plant life, and the fishery as well. We've been able to discover things like a disease with the black abalone, or all of the abalones and why were they disappearing and all that stuff. And we got on top of it and now, I've heard from people that they've all come back and they're doing really well, you know, recovering. And all that takes a lot of time, and money, and people that have those expertises, just like we saw with Peter with the reintroduction of the bald eagle, so it's a big job and it's a lot of fun, too.

INT: We have a couple of other (inaudible phrases) a whole lot of detail (inaudible phrases) what was that --

BE: Sure, the --

INT: In 19 --

BE: Sure, that's a fair question. In 1986, right after the park was acquired, federal government gave us the money to do it and so we began to allow visitor use out here. We had places that were restricted for them to go and, you know, they

had to be under the guidance of a ranger out here. Little by little, it increased a little bit. We put a campground in and all of that but I guess there were some people that came out here, visitors, and they happened to look at the riparian habitat. You got to realize, too, that this island right here, Santa Rosa, has 11 creeks on it, you know, some of them bigger than others and some are just springs, but no other island in the Channel Islands has that. So the cattle, of course, when the grass dries up and everything, they're going to get down in these riparian habitats and they cause an impact. In addition to the plants there, it also was contaminating some of the creeks out here. So then, the state water quality board got involved and these visitors, whoever it was, came out here and they got back to the mainland and they said, you know, this is a national park and this shouldn't happen. But I don't think they understood, at that time, really, that we had a 25-year agreement that was spelled out in Congress. You know, I was there testifying before the United States Senate Committee on natural resources and national parks and there's not too many of them still alive that can say they were there. I listened to what these people said on the committee, these senators, and it was, like, wow, you know, we hope that you're going to be able to continue to work with the Vails out there and continue with their way of life as it has been, which included the ranch and the hunting

for 25 years, you know, and work with them. So that's what I was trying to do and allowing visitors to come to the island, you know, on a limited basis but making sure they could get here. And then, all of a sudden, I was gone at the time that the lawsuit came about but it was a lawsuit that sued the National Park Service and Vail and Vickers for allowing these cattle and grazing activities to continue on the island. So I think it was around 1997 that the case went before the United States District Court and out of that case hearing was a settlement agreement, which, it was agreed upon by Vail and Vickers, we'll remove the cattle and the horses but we'd like to keep the hunting operation. So they said, okay, we'll do that. And so that was what I know about it, kind of, and it's behind us now. You know, we've got to look forward to the positive things and the great things like we've seen in the last couple of days out here and the changes that are taking place.

INT: -- in two years, -- you have 100th anniversary of a national park, so (inaudible phrase) for a settlement. They end up in their park and say why it ought to be the -- for 100 years. What would you say about Channel Island, that by nominating it --

BE: I got to tell you that I've coined this phrase and I say it today. This is the greatest national park in America. And that became kind of a logo here at Channel Islands and

even when they answered the phone here before we got all this high technology, it was, hi, this is Channel Islands National Park. This is the greatest national park in America. And that's what it is. And if I had to vote, this is it.

INT: (Inaudible phrase)

BE: Okay. Long before I came here in the 1930s, Channel Islands was being talked about as being established as a national park. Once I got here and I looked back on the records and stuff, I found that the director of the National Park Service, Horace Albright at the time, had heard all of these needs to make a national park of Channel Islands, so he sent an assistant out here by the name of Henry Tolson to come out to these islands and take a look at them and see if they really warranted national park status. And so, Mr. Tolson came out and got involved with the Navy at Port Hueneme, got in a boat, and came out here. The Navy brought him out and he took a look at Santa Cruz Island. He could see some of the other islands and he said, wow, this is a beautiful place. And he got all excited and he went back to the mainland, flew back to Washington, and wrote a report back to the director. And he said, yes, Mr. Director, I've looked at these Channel Islands and they do warrant national park status. But right now, they are so protected by the rough seas and the channel between the mainland and those islands that we shouldn't be in a big hurry to move on establishment of a Channel Islands

National Park. Besides that, we're involved with so many national parks on the mainland, we're looking at a lot of them here and they need our attention more than the Channel Islands. And then, nothing was said about it from that point. They thought, well, we'll just put it to the side and we'll kind of think about. Interesting enough, in 1936, there was a letter from the owner of Santa Cruz Island at the time. His name was Edwin Stanton and he actually asked the director of the National Park Service if he would like to purchase Santa Cruz Island to make a national park out of it. And of course, again, we thought the Park Service thought it was well protected and we didn't have the wherewithal at that time to move on it. So it was set aside. So a period of time went through there, about another 20 years or so. and then, there was a couple of other pieces of legislation where congressmen would introduce a bill to try to establish the Channel Islands National Park and it fell on deaf ears and didn't go anywhere. And so, I come on the scene here in 1974 as the new superintendent of Channel Islands National Monument, which had been set aside in 1938 as a national monument to protect the scientific remains of animals or whatever it was. They weren't sure what --.

INT: Why don't we start that again?

BE: Okay.

INT: Because we are so good up until then --. I came here

in 1974 -- Channel Islands National Monument was established -
-.

BE: Okay. I came here in 1974 as the superintendent of
Channel Islands National Monument and I'm losing it again --.

INT: Okay, I'll tell you what.

BE: Let me think just a minute. Okay.

INT: Well, we can actually start in 1938. In 1938 --

BE: Okay.

INT: The Channel Islands National Monument was
established. You don't have to go through the legislation of
the '50s.

BE: Okay.

INT: We already covered that, so in 1938, the Channel
Islands National Monument was established.

BE: Right, and it included Anacapa and Santa Barbara,
okay.

INT: Yeah, I came here in 1974 to oversee that operation
and then you can go from there.

BE: Okay.

INT: So, and --

BE: In 1974, I --

INT: 1938, Channel Islands National Monument --.

BE: Okay. In 1938, Channel Islands National Monument was
established and it included the two smallest of the 8 Channel
Islands, Anacapa Island and Santa Barbara Island. In 19, I've

lost it again. I got to think --

INT: In 1974, let us go from there.

BE: Okay. I came here in 1974 as the superintendent of Channel Islands National Monument, which included Anacapa and Santa Barbara Islands. Once I got here, I got an opportunity. I came right out. In fact, the first weekend I arrived and I came out to Anacapa Island. And I went up on the island and there was a staircase that goes up. It was locked. I had to crawl around there and go up on the island. And I got up there and I walked around. And it looked like it was in really bad condition. And I'd heard these stories before I came here that the National Park Service had not been doing a great job out here in cleaning the islands up and this and that, so we didn't have a really good relationship with the community and the public at that time. Soon after that, I got a chance to go to Santa Barbara Island. We had a Quonset hut down there. We had mice running all through it. It was hard to get ashore and, you know, I got really upset about that. And I could see why we were getting these comments about the National Park Service and I'd been in the National Park Service several years at that time and have a lot of pride in what we do. So I decided I needed to start cleaning up our act, which I did. I went out there by myself. I helped clean the toilet at Frenchy's Cove and went up and put in a campground, and did everything I could. And then, I would go

out in the community and I'd take a slide program. I'd show people what this place was really like and come out and see us, you know. And I started working with Island Packers, helping the concession to the park and got them more involved. They were all excited and they also educated me on the wonderful things that we have here on the Channel Islands. And then, I heard about this place called San Miguel Island and that there was some kind of an agreement that dated back to 1963, with the United States Navy, to have the National Park Service go to San Miguel Island, which is the westernmost of all the Channel Islands. In fact, it's back here. We saw it today from Santa Rosa Island. And I thought, I've got to go out there and take a look at it because the Navy has this agreement with us to go out and look at the natural and cultural resources on San Miguel Island and report back to the Navy within three years as to what the National Park recommendations were, including management. Now this island's owned by the United States Navy and so, I got on an airplane out of Santa Barbara and I flew out there, landed in the middle of the island all by myself, put my backpack on, walked out to Point Bennett on San Miguel and you've probably never been out at Point Bennett but it is one of the most magnificent wildlife spectacles I have ever seen in my entire career in the National Park Service. It's about a two-mile hike and it's a wind-swept island. And I'm walking along

there and it's about this time. It's getting around 6:00, 7:00 and the closer I get to the west end of that island, you could hear these animals barking in the distance. And they got louder and louder as you went. And when I got within about a half a mile of Point Bennett, you could smell these animals and it was just unreal. And I kept thinking, what's this all about, you know? And so, I got out to the point and there's a big cliff that drops off to a huge --. It was literally covered with pinniped, seals, and sea lions like I have never seen in my life. And I thought, wow, this is absolutely spectacular. There happened to be a research station out there with a fellow by the name of Bob DeLong who worked for National Marine Fisheries Service and he was doing research there, working on his doctorate degree and I met him for the first time. He began to tell me this story about how significant San Miguel was and this pinniped rookery. It has, at that time, about six species of seals and sea lions that would breed there of different species and he was there looking at the return of the Alaskan fur seal that comes all the way from the Aleutian Islands at Alaska, goes down to San Miguel Island right there at Point Bennett, and they're beginning to breed again because they were wiped out on the island, exterminated in the 1860s. So here it is, you know, over 100 years later, and they're just starting to come back. And he's out there recording all this. And the more he

talked, the more excited I got and I thought, I've got to do something about this. We needed to get it under the protection of the National Park Service. So the next day, I got up and we walked around the island. I saw Caliche Forest, which is the sand castings of the ancient trees that existed or plants on the island and I couldn't believe it. There were some statues that were up 12 feet high and they had, you know, a diameter of maybe 15, 16 inches. And they're all kind of fragile and all this stuff and I thought, wow. And then, the island foxes were jumping all around and, you know, the red tailed hawks and I just got really turned on to it. So I got back and the next day, got on the airplane, went back, and I was all charged up. And I thought, got to get hold of the Navy but first, I need to get this report done that they'd asked for, which this is 1974 and it was due back in 1966. And I was embarrassed about that, so anyway, we put together a report. In the meanwhile, I started making contact with the Navy and got together with a civilian down there by the name of Les -- and he started talking to me and he said yeah. He says, you know, we're kind of interested in getting somebody to take care of that. So, some time went on and then, I got a call from the National Marine Mammal Commission and the president and so, we took him out on a trip and we brought a fellow who's famous in wildlife management by the name of Starker Leopold, who was a professor at UC Berkley and he was

on this commission. I took him out there and the purpose of this trip was to go out and watch this individual come in by boat, who was a fisherman, but he had a permit to capture California sea lions off of Point Bennett area so they could ship them to zoos. And so, we're standing up on the bluff and, you know, I have a radio in my hand and we had a ranger down below me there and watching this operation. And so this guy comes in and as soon as they hit the beach, they just stampede these animals and they're just, you know, trying to get further up on the beach. Starker Leopold looked at me and he said, stop it. Stop it, I've seen enough. This is absolutely ridiculous, you know. We cannot have this happen on this rookery. This is, you know, so important. And so we stopped it. And so that was the end of the live captures out there on San Miguel Island. And then, he turned to me and he said, you know, we've got to find some way to protect this. He said, this is not right, to have people come out there and do this. In the meanwhile, there's a lot of fishermen goes out there and they fish around the island. They come ashore and same thing happened. And so he said, you know, we need somebody like the fish and wildlife bureau that could protect this and manage it and I said, hey, this is the National Park Service. We could do the same thing. Besides that, you know, we can open it up, maybe certain parts of it, so the public can come out and see this wildlife spectacle. He said, well,

yeah, that might not be a bad idea. So anyway, I got all excited about that because I had the commission kind of behind me. So I went back and then, I started really working on the Navy. We got the report in to them and finally, they said, okay, we'll do an agreement with you. So in 1976, in November of '76, we had an agreement signed by the Assistant Secretary of the Interior Nathaniel Reed and also the Secretary of Navy. It was a 10-year agreement, as I remember at the time, but to be renewed. And so what that did, it placed it under the administration of the Channel Islands National Monument, so wow, my park's growing, you know? And so we have Anacapa, Santa Barbara, and San Miguel. So what's left? There's Santa Rosa but it was a well-run cattle ranch out here. I hadn't been out here and I'd heard about, magnificent island. And then, Santa Cruz Island, you know, Dr. Carey Stanton owned 90% of it and the Gherini family owned the other. So anyway, we marched forward and as time went on, I started to get to know Dr. Stanton out on Santa Cruz Island. I was invited out to a party, took the director out there, and lo and behold, I met Russ and Al Vail out there from Santa Rosa Island. And they asked me to come out here and so I brought the other landowners out with me and we had a nice lunch and we talked and all this stuff and got better acquainted. In 1978, I happened to be in the Santa Barbara airport flying to San Francisco to the regional office and I get a call on the white

phone and it's Dr. Stanton on Santa Cruz Island. And he said, Bill, he says, I wanted you to be the first to know that I have sold my island to the Nature Conservancy. And I just kind of dropped down a little bit and thought wow, well, this is really good because we know now Santa Cruz is going to be preserved and protected. And at about the same time, maybe a little bit before this happened, you know, another event happened and that was the establishment of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area but the first bill that went in was done by Congressman Tony Beilenson and he included the Channel Islands in the bill and it was the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and the Channel Islands National Seashore. Right away, I thought well, this isn't going to work. There are two different kinds of resources and they're miles and miles apart, you know. We can't tie them together and we needed to have two pieces of legislation. So the bill went into congress and they dropped the Channel Islands portion out but went ahead and established the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. But the stage was set that okay, we're going to go for the Channel Islands National Park and why not, you know? Santa Cruz is protected, except for the east end, by the Nature Conservancy, Anacapa, Santa Barbara, San Miguel were national parks, and then, there's Santa Rosa. And so anyway, it was kind of an environmental movement going on at that time and so I went and

I talked to our local congressman Bob Lagormarsino and I got him charged up about it and I said you know, if you don't introduce a bill for the Channel Islands National Park, somebody else is going to do it and it's in your district and you know the players. And I talked him into it and it didn't take much to talk him into it. So then, I got involved with the preparation of the legislation with the staffers and the senate committees in Washington DC and we put together some legislation and he introduced that legislation and I had the opportunity and the privilege to go back there and testify before the senate committee on national parks. And I was scared to death when I did it. I'd never been in the United States Capitol and to go there, it was a wonderful experience. I told the story about how beautiful these islands were and what there was out here to preserve and protect that was worthy to be protected forever and that we'd have the public come out and enjoy it and learn from them. So the bill went through quite rapidly and the park got established on March 5, 1980. In the meanwhile, I was working with the Vail and Vickers and so was the congressman here on Santa Rosa Island. They kind of had the feeling that they knew that this was going to probably happen but they had concerns about how they would be treated and their way of life and all this. And as I've said before, if it hadn't been for the great stewardship of Dr. Stanton and the Gherinis on Santa Cruz and here, that

it wouldn't be worthy of national park status. And so, they went back and testified as well as I did and they said we're not really against the establishment of the national park. However, we have some major concerns and he listened to all these concerns and so when the bill came out, it allowed for what we call it, 25-year use and occupancy or some other administrative means like a special use permit where they would be allowed to stay here for 25 years on Santa Rosa Island. And Santa Rosa Island was also placed in high priority for acquisition ahead of the east end of Santa Cruz and so it took from 1980 to 1986, the last day in '86 to come up with the federal appropriations to purchase Santa Rosa Island. In the meanwhile, we were doing a conceptual general management plan of the islands of San Miguel and here and on Santa Cruz, even though we didn't own them. And we got an appraisal done and once we got that all done, we had to wait until 1986 to get the funding. And we went ahead with the purchase of Santa Rosa. We still had the east end of Santa Cruz to do, which got finalized, actually, in the 19 I want to say 88 or some like that. We got $\frac{3}{4}$ of the interest purchased over there with leftover money from Santa Rosa Island and the rest was done later on after I left the Channel Islands, so the park is here and this is the favorite, my best place I've ever worked. I love these islands and the big picture is that they're protected here forever and they're becoming more and

more public accessible as things change and facilities improve
and everything. And it's been a wonderful career being here.
And I'm proud of the Channel Islands National Park.

INT: (Inaudible phrase).

END OF INTERVIEW

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