

Interview with William Rom**Interviewed by Margaret Robertson
Minnesota Historical Society****Interviewed on April 2, 1987
at the Ely home of Mr. Rom**

MR: You say your parents were immigrants from Yugoslavia?

WR: That's right. Yes, my dad came over to the United States in the 1890's. I'm not sure of the exact date. My mother came over in 1886 and went to school in Scranton, Pennsylvania, for six years and then returned to Yugoslavia. When she was sixteen, she came back to the United States with instructions to meet my father and get married. It was a prearranged marriage. They were married in 1896. My mother was sixteen years old, and my father was twenty-nine years old. And they had ten children--nine surviving. One of them died at childbirth. I was born December 5, 1917. My father was in a mine accident on January 2, 1918 and died on January 4, so I didn't know him. I was only a month old. And here my mother was left with nine children. There were no such things as insurance. I think the mining company granted a thousand dollars to tide widows over, and that's all she had.

MR: Was your family living in this area?

WR: They lived in Ely, yes. They were married in Ely. Father Buh was the Catholic priest at that time for the area. My mother came from Vrcice, which is a little village outside of Semich, Yugoslavia--Slovenia--and my father came from Potoki. Barbara and I both had the privilege of going back there four times now and visiting the old homeland. We met my mother's sister, who was still alive at the time, in 1958, along with her family. She was living in the original farmland but in a newly built house. The old homestead was destroyed by the Germans. The whole village, in fact, was burned down, and the only building left was the church. My mother's sister looked very much like my mother.

She had no idea we were coming. Our travel agent couldn't book us for Yugoslavia, because it was behind the Iron Curtain, and you couldn't get in the country. Well, we toured Europe that year. We went to the fair in Brussels. Then we visited Germany, Switzerland, France, and Italy. In Venice, we had four extra days, so the travel agent there called Zagreb and made a reservation for us at a hotel. He said there was no problem going in. So we were able to get into Yugoslavia.

I got quite a kick out of the travel agent--he told us that it would

cost us five dollars a night to stay at the best hotel in Zagreb. We said, "Well, that's fine." He said, "Of course, that's per person."

I said, "Well, that's all right." He said, "Well, that includes dinner and breakfast," which was true. It was a very fine hotel. So we took an interpreter the next day and rented a car. We went over about 75 miles away and drove up into Slovenia and visited my mother's sister. As we walked in the door, she was at the kitchen stove and turned around. Never having seen me, she recognized me and said, "Wilhelm." They speak German there, also. It was quite a thrill to talk to her. Of course, my mother spoke pretty good German, too--as well as English and some Slovenian--having spent a good deal of her youth in America.

On this last trip we were able to look my father's side of the family up. He came from the little town of Potoki. It was a little village--probably four or five homes--just a farming community. My first cousin--my father's brother's daughter was living in the old homestead. This home had been used for probably two or three hundred years. Her son was living with her, along with his wife and their little daughter. So the new generation was taking over. It was quite interesting. They had quite a big farm. Her husband had fought with the partisans in World War II--he was sixteen years old at the time. Incidentally, he was nine years younger than my cousin. She was sixty-five, and he was fifty-six. He very proudly took me over to his tractor--he had a brand new tractor--and showed me the odometer on it. It had only about 20 hours of time on it. They were very proud of it--it was something new. They're getting modernized, and the economy seems to be quite good in Yugoslavia.

MR: Is there quite a Yugoslavian community in Ely?

WR: Yes. About half the town was Yugoslav--both Slovenian and Croatian. The other half was primarily Finnish people, and there were a few Swedish, German, and Italian families. But predominantly it was Yugoslav and Finnish. They had come to work in the mines, and there was ample work at that time. My parents had left the Austro-Hungarian empire, and they were much like serfs when they were over there. They didn't have anything. So when they came over here and got a job, they were quite content and happy.

As I said, most of the town worked in the mines--there being four active mines in Ely when I was a youngster. Quite a few mines started up and didn't go anywhere, but there were four of them that did make a success of it, and that's where most of the people worked.

MR: So how did your mother survive with nine kids?

WR: Well, she cooked at weddings and took in boarders. My oldest brother was twenty, and he worked to support the family. They seemed to survive all right. She did cook at all the weddings, and in those days a wedding was a three day affair. It was quite a job, and I can still remember helping her--good old fashioned weddings. But we managed somehow, and the children were all kicked into the work, you know. My oldest brother is still alive. He's eighty-nine. I have a

sister eighty-seven and another brother eighty-four and one eighty-one and another sister seventy-nine, so it's a long lived family--all of the nine.

Let me tell you a little about my own youth. I kind of grew up free. My mother had so many children that she couldn't keep track of them, it seemed. I roamed the woods in this particular area around Ely and got to know the country pretty well--did a lot of fishing, hunting, hiking, and canoeing. We started going to different cabins. There was a cabin that belonged to Slippery Joe Preblich, another immigrant that just recently died, by the way. He died at the age of ninety-six. We'd go out there and fish bass and stay in the shack, and he didn't mind. Then my brother had a cabin up by Whiskey Hill, which is on the number one highway. They call that Whiskey Hill because in the old logging days, the loggers would come into town, and on the way back to camp they'd get to Whiskey Hill where they'd take the bottles and throw them in the woods. That's as far as they got. Number one was a logging road at one time used by the loggers getting down to Stony River and so forth.

Two of my brothers had cabins on White Iron Lake, which I went to frequently. Incidentally, I was at my older brother's cabin by Silver Rapids Lodge back in 1928 and was swept down Silver Rapids. I was about eleven or twelve years old then and came about as close as I got to drowning. Fortunately, the current took me right to the boat, and my brother grabbed me and pulled me into the boat. But I had already gone about a quarter of a mile down the rapids.

Then we had a cabin up by Omaday Lake. That was back in the thirties. We did a lot of deer hunting in there--that was our deer hunting camp. It was about five miles in from Highway 1. We'd get our deer, and naturally when you hunt, you don't hunt closer to the road. You hunt further in. So we ended up dragging our deer out about six miles, and we did quite a bit of hunting in the thirties--in the depression years. At the same time, we'd hike up to Gabbro Lake and fish up there and at the Kawishiwi River. We would walk five or six miles to go fishing and then walk back again.

Back in 1934, I went to the Chicago World's Fair. I had \$3.50 in my pocket and caught the local passenger train--that is, the water tank. I didn't pay my fare and hitchhiked and rode the rails to Chicago. I got to see the World's Fair, and that was an exciting time for me.

MR: Oh yes. What an adventure.

WR: I stayed in school and went to junior college. The first year in junior college I had an opportunity to work for Sig Olson under the NYA program--the National Youth Administration--during the depression.

MR: This was Vermilion Community College?

WR: No. At that time it was known as Ely Junior College. It's now called the Vermilion Community College. Sig got me my first job with

the U.S. Forest Service on a portage crew. I was intending to go into wildlife management. The students who were majoring in forestry and wildlife were given preference for jobs on portage crews. Sig was influential in getting me and several other young students to get a job on the portage crews. That was 1937 when we got our first job and worked on the crews on the Kekekabic Trail and quite a few of the portages in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. In 1938 I did the same. We worked on the Kekekabic Trail again and completed it from Kekekabic Lake to Gabimichigami and from Kek down to Pan Lake. Then another crew came up from Kelso and met us at Pan Lake. So the trail went from Kekekabic to Kelso Tower and from Fernberg Tower to Kekekabic Tower and from the Kekekabic Tower to Gunflint Tower. All the towers were joined by a fire trail. So we worked on that.

In 1939 I ran the fire tower on Kekekabic Lake and reported for the Forest Service. It was a 110 foot tower and the most remote tower in any national forest in the country. It didn't have a telephone or anything--just radio communication. And while I was there, I did a little research for the University. I was a student at the University by that time in wildlife management and did a study on the small mammals of northeastern Minnesota. I wrote a little paper on it. That was quite interesting. I caught nine different small mammals, and one of them was quite rare. It was only the third incident where it was caught in the state of Minnesota. That was a northern woodland jumping mouse.

Well, in 1940 I worked on the portage crews again. Three of us had a job of maintaining the trails. We didn't do any new construction. We just brushed out and cut the windfalls and repaired docks and so forth. That was a very exciting summer. We spent two weeks at a time in the woods. We would come in on the weekend, load up with groceries, and go back out for two weeks again. We got to know the Boundary Waters Canoe Area quite well. I applied for a job after graduating in June of 1940, but there was nothing available in my field.

MR: Your field was wildlife management?

WR: Wildlife management, yes. It was one of the original classes--one of the first to graduate from the University of Minnesota in wildlife. Well, things were kind of heating up in the world, and it looked like war was coming. People were joining the Army and the Navy and so forth. And I had a desire to fly. In 1939 I started to take flying lessons at what was then Wold Chamberlain Field. It was just a sod field, and I was flying a little J2 Cub--40 horsepower. I tried to get into the naval flying school in Pensacola, but I couldn't pass the eye exam. That was in June of 1940. And they said, "Well, go out in the woods and spend a summer there and eat a lot of carrots and come back in September and take the eye exam again." Well, I did, and I couldn't pass it in September, either. But they did mention that there was a new V7 program for deck officers in the Navy. So I went down to take the test on that, and again I couldn't pass the eye exam.

But I did have a scholarship at the University of Oklahoma, and I figured, well, I'll go ahead and take advantage of that. So I loaded up a trailer with a friend of mine who had a fellowship down there. He was a graduate in wildlife management too, and his folks were going to drive us down. So we put our footlocker on a trailer and covered it up and headed out of Minneapolis for Norman, Oklahoma. Well, on the way out of town, we passed the armory, and I said, "Stop. I'll take the test once more." And I ran up the steps and took the eye test, and I passed it.

So I joined the Navy right there and then. They promised to give us a commission which paid \$200 a month--that sounded like a lot of money in the early thirties and forties. Game managers and game wardens were only paid about \$100 a month. Anyway, I was scheduled to take a cruise in November of 1940. I had September and October and a good part of November to kill, so I went out west to visit two of my mother's sisters and a bunch of cousins I had out there and to look for a job at the same time. It was impossible to get a job in Butte, but they did recommend going to northern Idaho and looking into some possibilities there. So I did, and I got a job working on the Union Pacific Railroad. I worked there about a week or so and got a job then in an underground mine--the Consolidated Custer Mine in Burke, Idaho. I worked there for awhile and then went back to Butte and worked in two mines there. While there, I took a test for driving a sightseeing bus in Yellowstone Park. I passed that and was all ready to take the job in June when the Navy called me. And that was the end of my freedom. I was in the Navy from then on.

I went to midshipman school at Northwestern University and then ended up in naval intelligence in September of 1941 in Seattle. I was there about three months, and then Pearl Harbor came and I ended up in February of 1942 on the USS Maryland, where I spent the next thirteen months. A very good friend of mine on the Maryland was Ray Glumack, who is on the Metropolitan Airport Commission and who recently retired as director. So Ray and I were together quite a bit, and we did a little flying together. He put me in the back seat as an observer now and then. I met Barbara, my wife, a week before Pearl Harbor in Seattle too, by the way. That was in November of 1941.

MR: Where was the Maryland stationed?

WR: The Maryland was damaged at Pearl Harbor. Then she came up to Bremerton, Washington, while I was in Seattle on duty. She was repaired, and we left there in February of 1942. We went down into the lower Pacific, and we spent four months down in the Fijis and some period of time around the Hebrides out to sea. And then that's when the Guadalcanal campaign was on. From the Maryland I went up to transfer to Guadalcanal and ended up on Tulagi for seven months. Backing up a little, at midshipman school I overheard a fellow talking about Sig Olson. This was in the summer of 1941. So I introduced myself, and it was Tom Larson from Aitkin, Minnesota. Well, I didn't see Tom again until March of 1943, when I was assigned to a tent in Tulagi to stay in. I walked into the tent, and there

was Tom again. [Chuckles] And so Tom and I spent the next seven months together. Then a third fellow was a good friend of ours. The three of us chummed together quite a bit there and finally ended up on Tahiti. The third guy now owns two of the big hotels there--the Tahara on Tahiti and the Hotel Bora Bora on Bora Bora. Incidentally, in January of 1985, the three of us got together again in Tahiti for a reunion.

Anyway, there I met Tom and spent seven months in Tulagi. From there I went back to the States and went to several schools, including a damage control school in Philadelphia. We were assigned to a little jeep carrier in Astoria, Oregon, and then I was sent back to Bremerton again to go to a fire school. It was there where I was rooming with a fellow, and we decided we wanted a date. So I called the sorority house where Barbara had been a student. I was thinking she had probably graduated, but at least I'd have a lead for a date and I could find out where she is. Of the forty girls in the house, her sister answered the phone and lined me up with a date with Barbara again. Of course, her sister quizzed me--asked me how many stripes I had, what religion I was, what nationality I was, what education I had, and so forth. Anyway, she called Barbara and told her that she had lined up a date. We were supposed to go to the Orchid Room in the Olympic Hotel and have a dinner dance. Barbara thought it was a big joke because it was April 1st--you know, April Fool's Day, which is our real anniversary--April of 1944. In August of that year we were married--one of those wartime marriages.

Before August I was assigned to the USS Bismarck Sea, a little jeep carrier, as the first lieutenant. We went out as far as the Marshall Islands and back to the States. By August we were back in San Diego and went into the repair yard. We had set the date of August 15th to get married in San Francisco--Barbara's folks were living there at the time. They had given me four days off to get married and have a honeymoon and get back to the ship in San Diego. The night before I was supposed to leave--I was all packed and everything--I got orders from Washington, D.C. transferring me to San Francisco, which couldn't have been more timely and beautiful. I had three months there instead of four days, and they gave me ten days for a honeymoon, which we spent down in the Santa Cruz Mountains and Carmel and that area.

Well, at any rate, I was on that carrier only about three months. She was sunk off Iwo Jima three months later and lost half of the officers and crew. There again, I was a little fortunate in getting off of it. I had been assigned to an attack transport detail by then. The ship was being built in Richmond, California--the Richmond Naval Yard. I served as first lieutenant and debarkation officer and also as the cargo officer in charge of all the loading. We hauled troops into the forward areas. When the ship was built, we put it in commission and went down to Guadalcanal and up to Ulithi Atoll. I was on there for quite a few months, and we finally ended up at Okinawa on the initial landing. The landing was on April 1st of 1945--again April Fool's Day--and this turned out to be Easter Sunday also. We were there for the first six days of the assault and

landing, until we finally got transferred out of there. We got all our cargo unloaded--there had been fourteen hundred troops and a canine corps on board with us.

We finally got back to the States again, and I got duty on shore in San Diego, where I spent the last year on active duty in operations.

While I was there, I organized a canoe trip program for boys in northern Minnesota, which I had in the back of my mind all this while. In May of 1946, I left the service, and we drove up to Ely in a 1939 Buick. By that time, we had one boy--Bill Jr., who wasn't quite a year old.

Here in Ely, we started Canoe Country Outfitters. The first year we did canoe trips for boys, taking them out on ten day and two week canoe trips, which I guided myself. We operated out of a little one-car garage--my sister's garage. That winter we went down to Chicago and promoted canoe trips. I made a movie the first year, which we showed there. We also did some advertising and talked to people down at the sports shows and so forth.

In 1947, we started building our warehouse, which is still in existence there on the main street of Ely--629 East Sheridan Street.

When we put up our building, my brother had a sawmill, so he gathered all the logs, cut all the lumber, and charged me only for the one employee whom he had working part time. All the lumber for that building cost me only \$32. That was pretty generous of my brother. He did help us get started, and we bought the property from my mother. She had it in the family.

We started with four canoes, and by the end of the season, we had twelve. We expanded a little bit. In the following year we took on the general public as well as boys. The boys program was very demanding. We had about seven or eight boys from Hollywood come up once, and one of the boys got homesick, and he wouldn't go on a canoe trip. So he stayed with Barbara while I had to take the other boys out in the woods. It's just like being a babysitter. The general public--give them a camping outfit, a canoe, and their food and shove them out the door, so to speak. Of course, you give them all the instructions, but you don't see them again for a week or ten days. Then they come back, pay their bill, and leave for home. It was much simpler than taking care of boys.

So in the third year we went strictly into general outfitting. We kept expanding and adding canoes and pouring everything back into the business. We finally got the Grumman Agency when Grumman got going strong on the new canoes that they put out. I was selling canoes to all the other outfitters and leasing them and so forth. I ended up with about 500 canoes, and we had begun with four. We had a mailing list of 22,000, and over 100,000 people we had outfitted. We had thirty-five employees, and it turned out to be quite a big business.

All of our children worked in the business--guiding and working in the store in the sporting goods and outfitting departments. Bill Jr.

and Roger guided for about ten years, while Larry worked in the office. Becky guided and worked in the store. They all got a lot of publicity out of it. They all went away to school and are all ardent conservationists and pretty interested in the preservation of the wilderness. So they all got some benefit out of the outfitting business.

Bill Jr. is very active in conservation, and he's done a lot of traveling and exploring. He climbed Mount McKinley and part of one of the mountains next to Mount Everest--he got up to 22,000 feet anyway. He's climbed just about every good-sized mountain in the country--in the world, in fact. He's been up the Matterhorn, Mount Rosa, Mount Kilimanjaro, and Mount McKinley, as I mentioned. When he went up McKinley, one of the fellows in his group died from pulmonary edema, a twenty-three year old man. Bill graduated from the University of Minnesota in medicine. He is now with the National Institutes of Health in Washington, D.C.

Becky, who is a lawyer, is past chairman of Project Environment for the state of Minnesota. She's also on the Friends of the Boundary Waters Foundation Board and very active in conservation. Roger is up in Alaska, and he's on the Northern Alaska Environmental Board. He conducts trips into the wilderness of Alaska. In fact, Barbara and I took one of his trips last summer. We went up to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for ten days and walked around there. It's about 180 miles north of the Arctic Circle--a very exciting trip.

Larry is a bush pilot. He flew up in Alaska the last three years, and he's also gone to a gunsmith school. He's not only a commercial pilot and instrument rated--multi-engine and single-engine--but he's an aircraft mechanic, also. Now he's going to run our outpost camp up in Canada. He ran it for about five years, and he's going to go back again. He had enough of Alaska. Flying is quite dangerous up there--bad weather, lots of wind, lots of storms.

I sold the business in 1975. I had reached retirement age, and I had a little heart problem which was bothering me. Eventually, I had a valve replaced in 1979 at the Mayo Clinic. I'm back in good shape again. But in 1975, it was bothering me, and we were working a little too hard, I guess, for our age and condition. So we sold it to one of our employees, Bob Olson, who worked for me for 25 years. His whole family, in fact, worked for me, and they're still working in the business and doing very well. We had no problem turning it over to him, and he has no problem taking it over.

Back in 1962, I purchased a small camp up in Canada. It's a fly-in camp on Harris Lake. It's one hundred miles from Ely, forty miles north of Fort Frances. We ran that in conjunction with Canoe Country Outfitters, and we still retain that. Larry, as I say, is going to take over there again. We've got a couple of outlying cabins from there. So that's been keeping us active.

I'm still maintaining my flying. I got my license in 1948 under a GI bill and first started taking lessons in 1939. But the war

intervened, and I didn't get back to flying until 1948. I've owned seven different airplanes. Now I still have the one Cessna 185 on floats. I'm still active. I did lose my license for four years when I had the heart operation. They weren't permitting any pilot to fly with a heart operation. But one man took it to court--I guess it was a Frontier Airlines pilot--and he got reinstated, and he's flying commercially again. I noticed an article on it one time in one of the pilot magazines. So I did a little writing myself--I wrote for four years to the FAA, and they finally submitted and allowed me to fly again. But I have to take a very strenuous physical at Duluth Clinic every six months now. They require it.

I can remember taking my first flight--in about 1932--from the old Ely Airport. It cost fifty cents to fly in a Curtis Robin with Miller Wittig, who was later killed not far from the Duluth Airport--flying at night in bad weather. The first fellow to crash at the Ely Airport, by the way, was Malcolm Dunlap. He was a stunt pilot, and they were having an air show. It just opened up at two o'clock, and about 2:20 he made a barrel roll too close to the ground and hit the ground right in front of the crowd. He was killed, of course--burned to death. I saw the accident and ran over to the airplane. But of course, there was no hope of pulling the man out.

There were a couple of other instances. We were at Sand Point one time, when a woman walked right into the propeller on another airplane. Barb and I flew her out. Barb was in the back with her, and I highballed it over there to the ambulance. But she gave her last gasp and died as I landed. Another time, one of my guides was a student pilot. He went up with a cousin of his, and he didn't return. So the next morning we went out and made a search for him. We spotted him from the air--his plane had crashed. We went in there and carried him out. They were both killed in that accident. He was one of my guides--a real nice fellow--I missed him quite a bit.

One of our outposts was a moose camp up 150 miles from Ely. It used to be really in the middle of the wilderness. Now they're logging up there. But we had about fifteen years, I'd say, of moose hunting up there, and we used the plane to fly up there quite a bit. Then we used to fly up to Hudson Bay and do a lot of goose hunting--up to Fort Severin and the Seal and Churchill rivers. One year we flew north of the Arctic Circle and fished lake trout up in Franklin Lake.

Well, maybe you are wondering why I became interested in wilderness preservation and so forth. I guess it came naturally, being in contact with Sig Olson during college years, and Bill Magie was a good friend of ours from way back in the twenties. Bill Magie, of course, was executive secretary of the Friends of the Wilderness and an admirer of Bob Marshall, who was with the Forest Service. Bob Marshall Wilderness in Montana is named after him. He did a lot of exploring up in Alaska. I became involved in the outfitting business because I loved the wilderness and the canoe country. It was just natural to become involved in the fight to preserve the BWCA. It's been a long, long battle, and it seems like it will never be over

with.

There are always problems coming up. The current problem now is management policy allowing mechanized vehicles on the portages and so forth. That's going to court now. Several environmental groups are fighting it. What else do you want me to touch upon now?

MR: Well, at what point did you get involved in the fight for the wilderness?

WR: It was in the early forties. Barb and I went over that the other day, and I dug out some old correspondence. There are quite a few letters I had written back in the forties--when I was still in the service in fact--and particularly when I got back to San Diego on shore duty. Immediately after the war, there was a big surge of seaplane traffic in the BWCA. There were thirty-six seaplanes stationed right in Ely and primarily operating in the BWCA. People were flying in from Chicago with Republic Sea Bees [amphibians], which were particularly popular at that time. They'd take off on wheels and land in lakes up here. There was no control over them, you know. Nobody controlled the amount of fish they took out. It destroyed the atmosphere of the wilderness.

Resorts were springing up as well. One was being built on Lake Kekekabic, and there were three of them on Knife Lake. There was property on Thomas Lake, and there was property on Fraser Lake that was rumored to be developed. There were two resorts on Crooked Lake, and probably fourteen or fifteen on Basswood Lake. They were all serviced by seaplane. In other words, any private land in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area--and there was quite a bit at that time--was being developed into resorts serviced by seaplanes. It was quite a threat to the wilderness. Finally in 1949, Truman signed the airban.

MR: Do you find yourself criticized a lot, being a pilot and an outfitter yourself?

WR: Yes, I feel that way, yes. But I do have just a natural desire to fly. I still think it's not right to fly into a wilderness area. There's plenty of other country to fly into. All of Canada outside of the Quetico was available, and that's where I did most of my flying. It was open to anybody.

MR: But didn't people feel that your position was somewhat hypocritical in that you supported the airban as an outfitter and a pilot?

WR: Yes. There was some criticism on that--that I was an outfitter who wanted to preserve the area and was looking out for myself, so to speak. Well, I guess I just went in to outfitting naturally. It was a natural thing for me to do. And I loved to fly. I wasn't about to give up flying in the great big country that this is. The Boundary Waters Canoe Area is only one million acres of the entire state of Minnesota. And with all of Canada north of us open, why, there are

plenty of places to fly without violating any wilderness concept. So it didn't bother me too much. I continued to fly, and I am still flying. I think I'm probably the oldest active bush pilot around here right now--I'm 69 years old.

We were picketed during 1974 and 1975. They picketed our store, and they put logging trucks up and down Main Street in front of my store so people couldn't get in there. Fellows were carrying signs around, "Run the bum Rom out of town," "Don't buy here," and so forth. That went on for two weekends in May of that particular year. We lost a little business but not much.

MR: Had you sold the store yet?

WR: No. It was just prior to our selling the store. They didn't seem to get anywhere. It seemed like every time there's a battle to do something to preserve the wilderness, we win the battle. The airban was signed, the resorts were all bought out, and motors were banned from most of the area. Snowmobiles were banned. The area was finally declared a wilderness in 1978. This was all vigorously fought by local people and others, not knowing what they were fighting against. The great majority of people in this country, I think, would like to see this last little wilderness saved and preserved for future generations to enjoy. It hasn't been an easy battle, but thank God for some leaders like Bud Heinselman, Kevin Proescholdt, Sig Olson, Bill Magie, Ernest Oberholtzer, Frank Hubachek, Chuck Dayton, and so forth. They're all very prominent people who have done a lot for this area--who have devoted their lives to it. The Sierra Club and the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness have also done a lot.

There's been a lot of criticism, of course, of me. I've been threatened. A bomb went off under my porch in 1949 just before the airban. It was really a firecracker--a police firecracker--but it sounded like a big stick of dynamite. That didn't deter us though. We still fought to preserve the area.

MR: Do you think the attitude of the town has changed since the Smrekars were more influential here?

WR: Unfortunately, I think the new generation is pretty much following in their footsteps. They grew up during the use of snowmobiles and three wheelers and motors, and very few of them ever paddled anyplace. Then they were denied all this, and they fought back, and they're still fighting back. Now they're saying that Ely's economy is going to pieces--that we have to open the area up and utilize it rather than preserve it. Well, they forget that it is being utilized. Ely's salvation is preserving this wilderness, because it'll be here forever.

We do have an outfitting industry and tourist industry here. There are about eleven or twelve outfitters operating out of Ely, and it'll be an industry that'll always be here if we save it. If we open it wide open, it'll be good for maybe eight or ten years, and then it'll

be just like the rest of Minnesota and Wisconsin. Lakes will be fished out, and there won't be any wilderness left. I've got a map that shows where the road was proposed from Fernberg to Gunflint right through the center of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. A few years back we had a Chamber secretary who was promoting this road. It would have opened a lot of virgin lakes to fishing, and it would have been good for a little while--but it wouldn't have been good for too long. Our industry would have gone downhill.

The population of Ely hasn't changed much. It's gone down a little, but mainly it's been hurt by the mining industry folding up. Basically, I think this town will survive. Back in 1949, there was talk about rolling up the sidewalks in Ely, because they were going to stop all the seaplanes from flying into the wilderness. Well, Ely didn't fold up, and it won't fold up. There may be a loss of some businesses, but I think others will take their place.

There are no outfitters going broke. I don't know of any outfitters that folded up in the thirty years that I was in the business and the twelve years that I've been retired. There were three outfitters when I started up--two others besides myself--and now there are close to a dozen around here. So it's an expanding industry. There could be some more resort development to take the place of the resorts that have been bought out, and that may come about in time.

MR: I have talked to people from the Conservation Alliance who say that the resort buy-out really reduced the tourism industry around here. You don't think that's so?

WR: Well, there's no question about it, yes it did. They like to refer to the bed count. It's down, but I don't see any reason why it shouldn't come back up again. There's White Iron Lake, for instance, and Farm Lake, Garden Lake, Fall Lake, Big Lake, Burntside and Saganaga--a lot of good lakes. There is also High Lake, Fenske Lake, and Birch Lake--a lot of lakes around here that could be developed. These lakes have very little resort activity on them, and they are not nearly fully developed.

I think in time the resorts will come back again, because this is a great area. The nice thing about it is you can go in for a day by canoe and come back out again and stay at a resort. We do have the BWCA right at our doorstep, and I think we're very, very fortunate to have that. I like to compare Ely with Eveleth or some of the other towns down the range that have been affected by mining. They don't have the BWCA next to them, and we do, and I think we should be very thankful for it and very grateful and very happy to be so lucky.

MR: The Conservation Alliance and the Ely Echo say that there isn't enough public access to lakes outside the BWCA.

WR: Well, if you take a real good study of it, I think it will show that there is ample access. If you're going up and down the Echo Trail, for instance, there've been new access roads put into Mudro. Big Lake has got a brand new access going into it. They have access

to Fenske Lake and a whole chain of lakes there. There is access to Bass Lake, Low Lake, Upper Bass Lake, and, of course, Burntside--you can drive right to it. They all have access. And then when you get to Fernberg, you have access to Twin Lakes. You have a portage, but you can get into Wood Lake, Moose Lake, Snowbank, and Lake One. They all have access--Twin Lakes and Ojibway Lake. By the Kawishiwi River, you've got the road going near Little Gabbro Lake. Then further south, you've got a road to Snake River that goes into Bald Eagle. You've got a road right up to Isabella. You've got a road up to Kawishiwi Lake. And I'm sure if you'd go up the Gunflint, you'd find equal access to many lakes. I can't think of very many lakes that you can't get to. I guess they want to drive right up to it and put their boats in and not do any work involved, which would destroy a lake in a heck of a hurry. Some of these you have to portage into, but a good deal of them you can drive right up to already. So I think it's a plea that isn't very well studied.

I think there are too many access points in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. Going back to the forties now, for instance, we had one canoe route that started at Lake One and went all the way to Alice Lake and down to Malberg and Koma and Polly, Kawishiwi, Perent Lake, Isabella, Isabella River, Bald Eagle and Gabbro and ended up either at Halfway Bridge or Farm Lake. This was one of the wildest canoe routes in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. It was comparable to the Hunters Island canoe route in the Quetico. This route was completely ravaged by road to Kawishiwi, Perent, Isabella, the Snake River, and Little Gabbro.

They've destroyed this wilderness route. It's no longer a wilderness. You keep hitting roads as you go. I remember taking the Isabella River one time between Perent and Isabella Lake, and I crossed eleven logging bridges in that short period of time. Then, of course, there are big culverts right over the Isabella River downstream from Isabella Lake, and they're going to be removed now finally. But this route was just destroyed by access roads. So there were really too many access roads into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. It isn't that big an area that it needs a road to every lake practically. There are too many access points.

I like to compare the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, which is only one million acres, to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which is nine million acres of wilderness with about ten million acres of refuge adjoining--that's nineteen million acres compared to one million acres that's wilderness--all wilderness. So one million acres isn't very much to save. This wilderness is probably the most accessible wilderness in the country. In saying that, I mean it's most accessible to the most people. There are about forty million people living within a day's drive of it, and just about anybody can go in there. Older people enjoy the trips, and youth enjoy them. I took our children out when they were two years old, and from then on they've been in and out of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area all their lives. As for older people, I had a fellow who was 95 years old go in one time, and I know of blind people and people in wheelchairs going through the Wilderness Inquiry II program. There's plenty of

access, so I don't think they have any grounds for demanding more.

MR: It seems as if Canada is taking a more serious approach toward wilderness recently. It used to be that they thought they had so much wilderness that they could be less careful with it. Now in the Quetico, for example, they are becoming more strict.

WR: Yes, in the Quetico, they take no nonsense about their management policy. They just shut off motors and aircraft altogether. You can't motor now into North Bay or on the Canadian side of Basswood Lake, for instance. They did have a lot of wilderness, but if you fly over the area, you find out that it is dwindling very rapidly. They are doing a lot of clear-cut logging. It is their main industry up there. You can't fault them for it. It's a matter of jobs for them. But on the other hand, they're doing a tremendous job of preserving the Quetico Park. I think they're doing a lot more than actually we are in trying to save that area.

MR: What are some of your memories of Ober and Sig during those early conservation meetings?

WR: Well, Sig was a wilderness ecologist for the Izaak Walton League, and his meetings were primarily down in Chicago. I remember one big important meeting was at Park Ridge, Illinois, during which they discussed the airban with the FAA. Some of the Ely fellows went down to that. But Sig was instrumental in organizing that meeting. Of course, Sig had done a lot of writing and lecturing prior to that, but I think most of his fighting was done while he was the IWL's wilderness ecologist. And, of course, he later became head of the National Parks Association and the Wilderness Society and was very active in those.

Bill Magie and Frank Robertson were others who did a lot of the groundwork up here. Frank was the president of the Friends of the Wilderness, which was very active in the late forties and the fifties. Bill was executive secretary and wrote thousands of letters. He knew all the congressmen like John Blatnik and Hubert Humphrey, and they all knew Bill. They had meetings at Bill's house.

I can remember going to one meeting, and John Blatnik and Al Quie were there. Al was quite instrumental in getting the wilderness bill enacted in 1964 when he was in Congress. Ernie Griffith and Cal Rutstrum were also involved. But Sig, Bill Magie, and Frank Robertson probably were the most active up in this particular area. Adolph Anderson was also active, and in more recent years, Bud Heinselman, Kevin Proescholdt, Chuck Dayton, and Herb Johnson are very active. The fellows in the Wilderness Inquiry II program are also doing a lot of good.

MR: Bill Magie used to guide for you, didn't he?

WR: Yes. Bill guided for about ten years after he retired from U.S. Steel and the railroads. He guided for me until he was in his seventies. Prior to Bill, Pat Magie--Bill [Magie] Jr.--guided for us. He started when he was seventeen years old, you know. In the

early sixties, Pat went into the flying business. But when Bill guided for us, he took all the Wilderness Society trips. We had a trip every year--two or three of them, in fact. He was always in demand there. And everytime he took a Wilderness Society trip, some of the individuals would come back and ask for Bill again to go on private trips. He was on the go all the time. He was full of stories, and he was a good guide and a good cook. My youngest son, Roger, packed for him and learned guiding through Bill. He started going out with Bill when he was twelve or thirteen years old. Bill was a great influence.

MR: Your family must know the BWCA like the back of your hand.

WR: Yes. I pulled out a map before that shows you some of the trips I have taken. In my time I've taken a little over a hundred canoe trips, I guess. Barbara upstairs has taken forty-five trips with me. This will give you an idea of the different trips I've taken in my time. [Pulling out a map] A good deal of them I've taken several times. This is the Quetico and Boundary Waters Area. This is a wonderful country.

As I said, our son, Bill Jr., guided for about ten years, and then Roger guided for about ten years too, and they covered a lot of country too. Last fall we made a trip to north of Shell Lake and that area. I always try to get to a spot where I've never been before. I like to bushwack and go into lakes that don't have portages if I can find them. They're getting scarcer and scarcer, though. We've taken canoe trips out of our camp up north and from our moose camp up there, also--that's virgin country. It's all being logged over though now, so we've moved out of that. Our moose camp, in fact, now has a road going right to the lake, so it's rather destroyed.

MR: Do you think that the Canadians ought to cut back on the amount of logging they do?

WR: I don't think so. It's a main industry with them. They do have twenty year plans, and they've plotted out these areas for twenty years ahead. They're not doing any regeneration. Logging is going on too fast and over too vast an area, and there's very little replanting and so forth. Eventually, I think in thirty, forty, or fifty years from now, they might be in a pinch. They're going to have to go quite a ways--either move the plants or haul for longer distances, which is quite a problem. But I don't think there is a trend towards setting any other wilderness areas aside--other than a little area north of Fowl Lake on the Voyageur Route between Pigeon River and Big Saganaga. They're talking about setting a little area aside there. I'd like to see them enlarge the Quetico and take in more area to the east, which is being logged right now. But even after it's logged, if they take it in, it will be protected.

There is also an area to the northwest all the way to the Pipestone River that is a nice part to be preserved. But they're logging up there again, too. In fact, there's a road going very close to

Beaverhouse Lake now in recent years. I can remember when that was the middle of nowhere. In fact, when I first started outfitting, there was no road to Atikokan and Eva Lake and the railroad. They put this road in the fifties from Thunder Bay to Atikokan and then over to Fort Frances.

Because of that road, we started a race which I hope they renew someday. We got Grumman to kick in a thousand dollars in prize money for the fastest paddlers between Ely and Atikokan and back to Ely again. At that time it was from Ely to French Lake and back to Ely. We held that race for several years, and then it faded out. That was quite an interesting race. My oldest son took it one year when it started at French Lake. They came to Ely, and they spent the night here, and then they paddled back. He got into Ely, I remember, and his hands were raw with blisters. He went to the doctor, and the doctor told him he was insane to go back. The doctor bandaged him up, he put on gloves, and off he went. He didn't win the race.

MR: How much of a distance is that?

WR: Oh, I would say a little over a hundred miles, but it was non-stop paddling and portaging. There were quite a few canoes. They had probably twenty or twenty-five canoes in the race. When they first started, I took the Chamber secretary of Atikokan, our Ely Chamber secretary, and a publicity man from Thunder Bay over the route by plane. A funny incident happened. When I took off at Sandy Point, the ranger asked if I'd fly his pack sack of food along with me, so I threw that in the luggage compartment and landed at Ottawa Island. I dropped his pack sack off at his dock and then taxied over to the customs station.

Immediately, the customs officer who was standing on the dock said, "Your plane is impounded." I said, "What for?" He said, "You touched the other dock before you came and cleared with customs." "Well, I just brought the ranger's food. He asked me if I'd do it, and I did it as a favor to him." He said, "Well, it makes no difference. You're supposed to come to the customs dock first, then go over there, then come back." Well, the wind had been such that I had come to the ranger's dock first. Anyway, I had two Canadians with me, and they got into a big argument with the customs man. But he wouldn't release the plane. It was impounded at the dock, and we didn't know what to do. Finally, the customs man said, "Well, I'll let you use my boat and get over to the Americana Resort over at Wind Bay, and there's a radio telephone. You can call Fort Frances and talk to the collector of customs there and see what he says."

So I did use his boat, and I went over and called the collector of customs. He was a good friend of mine--I'd met when he was at another customs post and I knew him pretty well. So he said, "Consider yourself bawled out, and go over there and tell him to give your darn airplane back to you." That's all it took, and we got our plane back.

So we covered the route by air, and then that summer we ran the first

race from French Lake to Ely and back again. As I said, my oldest boy was one of the racers in that. He didn't win the prize, though. He did complete the trip, however, so he succeeded.

Getting back to hiking, in 1983, I decided to hike the Kekekabic Trail. I started about noon one day, and at three o'clock the third day I made it to Gunflint Lake. I hiked it with my son's dog as a companion. It's forty-two miles--I went by the old Kekekabic Tower, which has been removed since then and hiked down to the cabin and then continued on to the trail. The unfortunate thing about this trail is that the Forest Service has abandoned the middle twenty miles of it. They're maintaining the first ten miles from Fernberg Road to Old Pines Trail, which is a branch off of the Kekekabic. Then they're maintaining the other ten miles out of Gunflint coming from Gunflint into the west.

But the middle twenty miles are abandoned. They've taken the trail off the maps, and they are not maintaining it. As a result, it's being grown over, and it's difficult to find the trail in places. You have to put up a red handkerchief or something and let your pack down and go and look for the trail to find your way back. I counted over 600 windfalls, which I had to climb around or over or under--and that's kind of a nuisance. I wish they'd get back in there with a volunteer crew and maintain this trail. As I mentioned earlier, I worked on that trail in 1937 and 1938--putting in parts of the original trail at that time. The government expended a lot of money to put this trail in, and it's just too bad that they've abandoned it.

Last year, Barb and I hiked to Snowbank and camped out for two nights. It was quite an interesting hike. We were getting ready for our trip up to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Shortly after that, we hiked around Angle Worm Lake on an overnight hike. Then we flew up to Alaska, of course, and took that ten day hike into the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. We had the retired refuge manager with us on that trip. There were eleven of us altogether, including an Associated Press reporter who flew in solo and climbed up the mountains into the tundra country. He found us and spent the last four days with us.

He did quite a story on the proposed oilfield north of Schrader Lake in the tundra area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge just south of Barter Island. They're talking about going in there and drilling for oil just like at Prudhoe Bay. It's very questionable whether there's a merchantable amount of oil there. They may end up destroying the country and getting very little oil out of it. They claim that if they did find oil, they'd probably get no more than enough to run the country for about fifty days. This happens to be the birthing grounds for the herd of caribou that migrates from the Porcupine Mountains in the Yukon. This area is a calving ground, and then they migrate back.

While we were in there in July, we saw one herd of over 2,000 caribou, and we saw a couple of wolverines. My son and this reporter

made a side trip and ran into a big grizzly bear--followed him for about a mile about a hundred yards away from him. The reporter was kind of excited, but my son told him, "Well, he just happens to be going the same way we are." [Chuckles] The bear didn't bother them, actually. So we've done a little hiking now and have taken that up. It's quite interesting.

I think that there is potential for a good industry in hiking in this particular area--to start a little trekking concern. I don't know if you were reading the Minneapolis paper and Jim Klobucher's column lately, but he's been trekking in Nepal. Well, we were in Nepal about a year and a half ago, and we didn't do any hiking to speak of, but we did do a lot of sightseeing. Jimmy Carter had just been there--he had taken a trip just prior to us. Here people pay thousands of dollars to fly halfway around the world to hike, while we have these beautiful trails up here in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area and the Superior National Forest, and nobody's capitalizing on it.

MR: Yes. There hasn't been an emphasis on that at all, really.

WR: There could be organized hiking trips, you know--take groups of ten or so. A person could make a business of it, I would think. But there's nothing being done on that, and it should be promoted to help Ely's economy. In Nepal, they do it in the fall, and it's the main industry there for the whole country. It's just organized groups going out and hiking. When you get up to eighteen, twenty thousand feet, you've got altitude to contend with and everything else, which you don't have here. There is great potential to organize hiking tours in this area, and maybe eventually someone will do it. If I were younger, I think I would start up something like that myself.

MR: Were you in favor of Voyageurs National Park?

WR: Oh, definitely. I think the more area we set aside to preserve and keep natural, the better off we are. Opponents would argue that by creating wilderness areas and parks, you're shutting out the people. The big argument up here is that local people have been shut out of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. In fact, when the issue of shutting down the mechanical portages came about, one of the leaders here said, "Well, now they're closing all the portages off to us."

Well, we're not. If you look back at the history of Minnesota, at one time it was all wilderness. Now two percent of it is wilderness. If anybody's being shut out, it's the people that want wilderness. We only have two percent left. Although we do have the Chippewa National Forest. We really have only one national park in the state. There's Isle Royale, but that belongs to Michigan.

So I think that it was a good project, a good idea. It's too bad it was so highly developed by the time they got around to it. But I think it's being handled right. There's been opposition, of course, to make things tougher for the Park Service--namely, Vic Davis and some of his antics. I know Vic very well. I'm a good friend of

his. But no, I think the Voyageur Park was a great idea. Thank our ex-governor and some of the others who have fought for it. My son-in-law, incidentally, is on the board of Voyageur Park--Reid Carron. He's an attorney with the law firm of Faegre and Benson.

MR: Yes, Brian O'Neill is with that firm, also.

WR: Yes. Both my daughter and her husband are partners in the firm, along with Brian.

MR: It's amazing how the conservationists in Minnesota are really a close-knit group. Everybody seems to know everybody else.

WR: They have a common interest. I guess that's the binding thing. It's a great bunch of fellows, I think. The opposition says that the Izaak Walton League and the Sierra Club and all these people are just rolling in money--that these groups are made up of the elite. But you know, these are ordinary people like you and me. Most of them are college graduates, and there are quite a few professional people. They are people who do a lot of thinking, and who appreciate the value of the wilderness--getting away from their jobs and the city and coming up here. Where else can you go and get away from it all?

MR: I think that the people who have traveled outside the state tend to appreciate it the most.

WR: That's very true. You go into foreign countries, and you don't see wilderness areas like this anymore in Europe--it's all fairly high developed areas.

MR: And acid rain has knocked down a lot of Europe's forests too, I understand.

WR: That's right, yes. That's quite a threat here, too, as well as in Canada. Acid rain is another rising problem for the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

As I said before, there's no end to the problems. This business of fighting mechanical portages now--the 1978 law required that mechanical portages be eliminated in 1984 if there's a suitable alternative. When I was in the outfitting business, we had portage wheels, and every outfitter had portage wheels, and there were a lot of private wheels around town. People had portage wheels, and they'd haul their boats across portages into Basswood Lake. It was a common thing. Well, I understand a local ranger and recreational officer of the Duluth office and another Forest Service man--three of them--attempted to take Prairie Portage with a boat, a motor, and a manual portage wheel. Supposedly, they couldn't make the first hill. Well, this is untrue. This is a deliberate lie, because there is an alternative--a manual wheel. They said they couldn't do it with a manual wheel. Well, it's been done for years, so they're just out and out lying. Now there's a court battle over it.

It doesn't seem proper to see trucks and cars parked right in the

middle of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. It's a wilderness area. There should be no mechanization in a wilderness area--none whatsoever. There shouldn't be cabins. I think the Forest Service should eliminate all their cabins in the Boundary Waters now that it is declared a wilderness. When a person comes to a wilderness area, he doesn't expect to see manmade cabins and motorboats and snowmobiles and trucks. Prairie Portage has a truck on it, as well as jeeps, trailers, and buildings. Over at Trout Lake, there's a great big flatbed truck. You can run two boats up on it and run the truck into the water, and then they run the boats right up on their truck and haul them across. It's a nice flat portage. It's easy to run a portage wheel there. The four mile portage isn't really needed, because you have access from both Newton Lake and Prairie Portage to Basswood. So it's no loss. You can still go by canoe through Mud and Good Lakes and some of those lakes. You can go from Fall Lake to Basswood to Hoist Bay.

MR: Mechanized portages don't seem that important. Do you think that it is a symbol for people who were against the original 1978 bill? It's hard to believe that people get so upset about it, but indeed they do.

WR: They certainly do, yes. To put it bluntly, it's the laziness of modern man. They'd rather have a truck haul them across than do it manually. And actually, doing it manually isn't really that much work. You run the portage wheel down into the water, lift the bow up, and you can drop the boat onto the wheel. Two or three guys just balance the boat and go across with it and drop it in the water on the other end. There's very little heavy physical labor involved. I like to think of the time when I carried a fourteen foot boat across Prairie Portage on my shoulders without a yoke. It was 135 pounds, and I carried it across Prairie Portage and carried it back. So with a portage wheel, it's certainly much easier. No, there's no excuse for mechanization in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

I think the Forest Service is making a great mistake and doing a real disservice to the wilderness by saying there is no alternative, because they know better. Certainly I know better--having used portage wheels and rented them out--and knowing that a lot of people in Ely have them. So it seems like one of our biggest problems is convincing the Forest Service that this is a wilderness, and it should be managed like a wilderness--not allowing 700 snowmobiles to go in one day like they did this last winter. In fact, they opened the area up twice for snowmobiles.

MR: For Dorothy Molter's memorial service?

WR: Up to Knife Lake, yes. It was a nice gesture, but I think it was also destroying the spirit of the wilderness by allowing hundreds of snowmobiles to go in there.

MR: It seems as if that started out as part of a funeral service and snowballed into something else. I can't believe that 700 snowmobilers were just out there for that.

WR: You see, it's banned for snowmobiles, but they opened it up temporarily for that. This is an indication that if you give them an inch, they'll take a mile. If you let them go on these mechanized portages, the next thing they will do is open it up to snowmobiles again. If they can do it one day, they can allow snowmobiling for a week or a month or three months or whatever. This is one thing you have to be guarding against constantly.

MR: I know there is concern also over the Forest Service's road building program.

WR: Yes, well it's just like when in 1949, there was talk about a railroad going up to Isabella Lake. Isabella Lake was in the middle of the wilderness at that time. As I mentioned, it was part of one of the best canoe routes in the BWCA. I objected, along with many others, and I got a letter back from the executive secretary of the Izaak Walton League. He was misinformed, because he wrote that a railroad was an alternative to putting in a highway in there, which would have opened up the wilderness to even more people. Well, now the railroad is right alongside the highway going into Isabella Lake.

The Forest Service did it. There was a great big wind blowdown at Polly Lake. The Forest Service said it was a fire hazard and that the timber was going to waste. They were going in there to take it out; therefore, they had to put this road in. So they pushed the road up to Polly Lake, but they didn't stop there. They went all the way up to Alice Lake and back almost to Wilder Lake and Hudson Lake. It took out a tremendous area--maybe a thousand times greater than the Polly Lake blowdown. So this was simply a lie to get their way and to calm people down.

MR: Why does the Forest Service have this interest in road building?

WR: I can't understand it. They're road happy, so to speak.

MR: It does seem that way, doesn't it?

WR: Yes. They keep putting in roads right and left, and their budget calls for more. There's quite a few more roads that are going to be put in in the next ten years. I suppose to get to their timber you have to have roads, but there is such a thing as putting a little more primitive road in there. Instead, they're putting in these high grade roads, which they should destroy when they're through and plant over. But they're not doing enough replanting work, and if a road comes anywhere near a lake, they seem to have to push it through all the way--particularly a Boundary Waters Canoe Area lake like the Snake River and Little Gabbro. Right after that Little Gabbro road was put in--the Spruce Road--Bill Magie and I counted over 90 boats in Little Gabbro. This is a wilderness lake, you know. You used to have to walk twelve miles to get there or go in by canoe. Now you drive right up to it, practically. They seem to have a lot of money for roads, but they won't put a penny into that Kekekabic Trail to help the recreational aspect of the Boundary Waters. It wouldn't

take that much to put that trail back into service.

MR: So changing the philosophy of the Forest Service is a monumental task.

WR: It is, but then they've got two-thirds of the Superior National Forest to practice their multiple-use forest policy. Leave the one-third which is declared a wilderness as a wilderness. They can't seem to leave it alone. They've got to meddle with it. They want mechanized portages. They want to keep snowmobiles going in. They'd be itching to get in there and log if they weren't shut out. They'd allow mining in there if nobody would say anything. They just aren't wilderness-minded it seems. There are very few people in the Forest Service who really are dedicated to wilderness preservation.

When I was at the University, I took forest policy from Professor Allison and some of the other professors. Particularly in forest policy class, I didn't hear one word said about wilderness preservation. There was nothing said about management of a national forest as a wilderness. They completely ignored wilderness. I think this has rubbed off on too many foresters. They see wilderness as a wasteland, not an area to be preserved as is, and it's very unfortunate. And in that light, it's just too bad that Robert Marshall, who was an employee of the Forest Service, died at such a young age--the age of thirty-eight--because he would have had a lot of influence on Forest Service policy.

MR: He accomplished so much in such a short time.

WR: Yes, in that short a lifetime. He claimed he would walk forty miles a day, and after he had dinner, he'd go out for a little hike again. [Chuckles] It sounds impossible, but he was quite a man. I guess maybe that's why he died so young. Forty miles is a long way. On that Kekekabic Trail, I walked twenty miles in one day, and I was pretty exhausted by the time I got through. I barely made the last hill by Gabby. I had ten miles left to go. I had made the middle twenty miles, and that was the toughest part of the trail--not only that, I walked a mile down to the cabin at Kekekabic Tower, and a mile back--so I added a couple miles. Twenty miles is quite a bit. Forty, that's asking an awful lot. But I can't think of anybody in the Forest Service who has really taken Bob Marshall's place since that time. It's too bad.

MR: A lot of bureaucrats, but not many conservationists.

WR: Yes, that's right. You see, if you say anything about the wilderness or criticize them for what they're doing, then you're an enemy of theirs. One time Barbara and I were on a canoe trip and went past Hope Lake up to Manawaki, and we wanted to take a quick trip from Manawaki into Polly. Anyway, we got down past Manawaki, and we crossed under a bridge on the Manawaki Creek--a Forest Service logging bridge--and a little further down we found a regular garbage dump. A logging camp had dumped all their garbage right over the cliff onto the edge of the creek. Then we saw tree stumps where they

were logging within twenty feet of the creek. Well, the Shipstead-Newton-Nolan Act doesn't allow this. You're not supposed to log within 400 feet of a waterway.

So Bill Magie and I got our heads together, and we complained to the Forest Service. Well, they didn't believe us, but they finally sent a man up--Don Ferguson, who used to be the ranger up in the Lac La Croix District. He was the recreational officer at the Duluth office at the time. He came up to Isabella and met us. He wasn't very happy about being taken away from his desk. But we got in his car, and we drove across those culverts by Isabella Lake. We took the old logging road way up to Polly Lake and went into Manawaki. We walked down to the river and saw the stumps that were cut twenty feet from the river. Then we saw the bridge, and we looked at the map. Both were in a no-cut area. At that time, there was a no-cut section of the Boundary Waters that was not supposed to be logged at all. Both the bridge and the road were. So Don was kind of shocked himself. He hadn't thought it was true, but it was. He was pretty nice to us after that, and he saw to it that they removed the bridge and replanted the road. I went back in there later, and I saw that they had covered up some of the damage.

So they do make mistakes, and sometimes they're a little careless. By and large though, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area is not being managed as a wilderness, and the Forest Service has got to realize that it is a wilderness legally. There should be no exceptions.

MR: So people are always going to have to remain vigilant.

WR: That's right. There's a local faction who would like to see it opened up to snowmobiles, motors, and mechanized portages--even seaplanes and logging. They say it would help Ely's economy--give it a shot in the arm for a while. But as soon as the canoe country is destroyed as a wilderness, our economy would go downhill again. But if it is preserved, it will last forever.

MR: Thank you, Mr. Rom.