Joe Blanford

"I don't think I'd ever want to live any other place.

This is good enough for me!"

by James L. Kemry

"THIS COUNTRY WAS BROKE IN BY GUYS THAT HAD IT."

"Start on how long I been here. We came to Routt County in 1900, where I've spent most all of my life, with the exception of the few years I went to school over by Denver and Golden, small towns east of the mountains. Then I came back in 1915 after what schooling I had and I spent the rest of the time here. I worked out of the family a few years, and then I got enough money to buy a place down near the Lake Place that Mary Mann owns now. I bought it in 1926. We moved down there in the summer of 1930. I got married to Thelma Jackson and we lived down there until 1937. That spring the house burnt down so we had to move to where we are right now. We've been here ever since. I don't think I'd ever want to live any other place. This is good enough for me! We enjoy the summers and the winters aren't quite as good as we'd like to have them, but we got used to them so I guess we're still with the winters.

My parents brought me over here with a team and wagon. I was born in November in 1899, so I was about six, seven, or eight months old, somewheres in there, when we came here. My father had homesteaded over on the northern part of the land that Bill May now owns. We've stayed pretty close in the area. I've been here ever since. I have only left the state a few times in all them years. I've been to Utah and Wyoming just to visit, but never to work or anything.

My father homesteaded 160 acres. It's over on the Bill May place six miles up Elk River. He sold the ranch later and went back to eastern slope. We traveled around a good deal, and that's the education I got, was out east of the mountains. All I ever had. We came back in 1908 and again in 1915 permanently. I had all the schooling at that time that I received and then it wasn't very long before I was on my own. I was from a large family and there were ten children. I was the oldest one, so in that day and age you had your hands full with a family that size. I don't know what you would do today, maybe it would be better or worse, I wouldn't want to say. But that was the first reason we came out here. To my way of thinking, there was lots better land, but here we are close to relatives.

In 1916 I went out on my own. I was seventeen years old that fall and I fed cattle all winter. We were paid $15 a month plus board. Two of us had a thousand head of steers. We would start in the morning before daylight and each of us had a lantern that would tie on the Jacob Staff. (That's the piece that comes up off the front of the sled rack that you wrap your lines around.) The fellow with me would go to one side of the field and I would go to the other, and we would feed all day. Just one load after another. Those cows could eat and eat and never quit and we weren't feeding them as much as they should have had. When dark would come, we'd load up an extra load so we'd be ready in the morning. We never had a second that we weren't doing something. And it was cold! The fellow there with me was a young guy. Same age as I was and he froze his toes and couldn't put his boots on. So we went to town and got old felt shoes to put on under his overshoes. Later the end of his toes sluffed off. It seemed like there never was a warm day. We were batching— imagine having to do all that work and then having to take care of a house too. One day he got up earlier than I did and looked out the door and said we lost a haystack.

He said, 'Look at them cows'. And there were about 500 on top of the pile and a big fog coming up from it.

I said, 'Oh Boy!'.

He stood there a minute and then he said, 'Well, that's one we won't have to feed!'

Well, they were building in Steamboat Springs, and we were hauling lumber from Diamond

Park.We would leave Steamboat at dark,around 5 a.m. and go up to Clark. Sometimes we would make it by noon and sometimes we wouldn't. That's quite a drive. Then we would make it up to Diamond Park after dark, way after dark. It never warmed up. It never got above 30 deg below in Diamond Park. If it did, I never saw it. When we were hauling lumber we would walk behind the sled, because if you sat on that green timber that was froze, just see how hot you would get. I didn't think I could ever take it, but you got to eat, that's a man's first problem, even today, because without it you ain't going to be here. It's a simple process.

I hauled lumber all winter long. There were fellows on there from middle age up to as old as I am now that would sit on the green timber all day long without ever getting off. We took better care of the horses than we did of ourselves. We depended entirely on the horses. If we were going to haul anything, the horse had to be in shape. Sharp shod for the ice on the road.

There was one fellow that never slept in the house, even at 30 degrees below. He was out behind his four horses. We all had our bed rolls, that's your blankets all wrapped up in a tarp. And he would go out and throw down his bedrool behind his four horses and sleep all night, when it was even 30 degrees below, and he was 72 years old.

This country was broke in by guys that had it. At first I didn't think I could ever take it. The first trip I made, I got up to Diamond Park at 9:30 p.m. There were about seven or eight of us in there, and I got there last because I left town last. We had to load up that night. When my turn came, it must have been 10:30. The guy at the mill had a list of what I was supposed to haul and we loaded it. I went down to the bunk house and it was full. Another fellow and I drawed the grainery. They had about 1,000 bushels of oats hauled up there to feed the horses. Well, we took our bed roll and laid it down on the oats and every time we moved, we had another bunch of oats to warm up. You can't warm up 1,000 bushels of oats. We did have a good place for the horses though.

About 3 o'clock that morning, I couldn't stand it anymore, my feet were cold and I was shivering, so I got up and went into the cook shack and built the fire. Then wanting something to do, I went down and started cutting the water holes.

One of the fellows hollered out the door, 'What's the matter with you, kid? Can't you sleep?'

I answered that I was cold.

He said, 'Knock off that chopping that ice, we got to get some sleep.'

Well, at 5 o'clock the flunkey hollered breakfast and I had to be there to eat. They didn't mess with you. We had a long day coming.

In the early '60's, I finally killed my first bear. I couldn't draw no luck. First no shells, then the gun jammed, something always come up so I couldn't shoot. But I did make it once, so I had good luck that time.

It was over on the Encampment River drainage. We went in there from the Columbine side on the Ellis Trail in the park. To start with, we had killed an elk over on the west fork of the Encampment River. I have always been a little guy who couldn't pack a whole lot, and we were going to have to pack that elk up a hill. We didn't happen to have horses that time so I went and told the fellow with me, 'I can't pack an elk up that hill. I can hardly pack myself up that hill.' I suggested pulling camp and coming up through Whiskey Park and Hog Park, so we did that. We had an old jeep pickup and we got within a quarter of a mile of that elk. We had a good camp and there were a lot of deer in there, so we decided to stay.

The next day, just as the sun hit, I saw a big buck and I killed him so close to camp that we hauled him down easily. Then the next day I said, 'You know, I think this morning we will go up on Buck Mountain. I have never been up on there yet and I am getting old. The time is going to run out, and I want to see what's on top of that mountain.'

The fellow with me said o.k. so I went out after a bucket of water, and when I came back he was laying on his cot. He had a bad leg that would come out of joint at his knee. He said, 'I went outside and stumbled on that ice and fell down, and when I got up my leg felt like it was going to go out of joint. I can't go up on Buck Mountain today with you.'

I said, 'I have to go. I have been putting this off for three years in a row. Today is the day.'

He said, 'I'll stay in camp. I know very well I don't want to get up there and not be able to walk back. You have to have two good legs under you to go up there on that mountain.'

I still had a cow license and on the way up there I stopped under a tree to eat an apple. The wind was blowing. I was sitting under a tree looking over the country with my rifle leaning up against a tree. New country always intrigues me.

A cow elk ran out and I saw a small clearing and thought that should do it. I thought for a minute, 'Do I want a cow way up here by myself? I would have a problem getting her back to camp.'

I'm like all guys. When you have that fever, you don't always use the best judgement. So I took a shot. I couldn't see if I hit her or not. Then I saw a closer one so I shot at her. I missed and saw dirt fly and thought 'No Good!' I thought to myself that with all those cows there should be a bull with them, and I sat around a while and got to wondering what happened to my slug. So I went to see what my slug did, something that I always do, because you can hit something and it will go off and die and that is no way to do it. If you shoot with a high-powered rifle, you should know what happened to that slug.

I went over there and figured out I was high and probably not leading either one of them enough. I still would rather have a bull than a cow and there should be a bull with that bunch of cows. I glanced over at the side of the hill and saw a black spot move. I know the mane of an old bull is black, and I was sure that was a bull. I looked a time or two and decided that was a bull as sure as fate. I might as well have a bull, so I kneeled down and shot. The black spot disappeared, but I didn't hear any noise. I was wondering what in the world was going on.

I went over to see what happened. On my way over there I saw a cub. It was a yearling and a cinnamon color. I had been wanting a bear for a long time, so I shot him. I went up there, drug him off the hill and split him so he would bleed. Then I went to see what my other bullet had done. I went up there and after hunting around for a while I found what I had hit. It was the mother bear and she weighed about 450 pounds.

Well, I looked at her and said, This is nuts! How am I going to get her out? My friend is going to have to help me get her down. I can hardly roll her!

I tried rolling her first one way then the other and going down through the trees and dead falls and stuff. No way! So I decided that I would blaze a trail down to camp so I could find the bear again.

On the way back I saw the other two cubs. They were up in the top of a tree. But I didn't want them. I already had more bears than I knew what to do with.

This mother had three cubs and that's a rarity in nature. Bears rarely ever have more than two and a cub follows its mother for a year. She was plumb black and I had hit her in the neck and that's probably the reason why there was no noise. She settled right down.

I had the small one mounted. I sold the big one to pay for the small one to be mounted. I have had several chances since but I didn't want to stock up on bears. I had always wanted one and now I have it.

I went on Mad Creek to help with a bear, a fellow had killed on up there. He told me that he went into the cave and killed him. I wouldn't tell that because there was nothing on the indications to show that happened. There was a lot of blood scattered around the cave. I don't know if he went into the cave and killed him with a six-shooter or not, I won't say that.

He wanted me to help him get her out. She never had no cubs and the fat on her back measured three and a half inches, pure white fat. That was real good meat. You couldn't tell that from pork.

The fellow said that he seen her tracks and figured she was in the cave. I won't say he did, I don't know. Looking at the tracks I would say he blasted her in the flat several times. There was too much blood in the snow outside. The bear was in the entrance of the cave. I know because I went in.

You know all the stories about being attacked by a bear, and they are all malarky.

He said that he went into the cave and she woke up. No way! He said that he just emptied his six-shooter into her. A 38 Smith and Wesson would kill a bear if it was put into the right places. I often wondered how his knees were working when he did it. I always figured that it happened the way I figured it happened. A bear is a lot faster than you think he is. A bear is double geared lightning.

Over on the Encampment River, they were cutting railroad ties and sending them over to Laramie in 1889. They would cut the ties and haul them as far as they could on sleds, then load them on wagons and take the ties to the railroad. The last time I was in there, there were six or eight of the little cabins in there. They had quarried the road and the road had rotted, and the trees and brush had grown back on the roads, and it was still lousy traveling.

We were up in there after an elk, I thought we were the only people crazy enough to be in there that time of the year in those mud holes. We were having lots of grief. We were bogged down and a fellow walked out in front of us. We came to this last big mud hole. We were debating whether or not to quarry it and I said, 'That little jeep of yours is plumb good, just back up as far as you can and hit it running.'

I was giving him a big sales talk because I don't like cutting logs for quarrying a mud hole and then just leaving them. We were just in the process of trying to run through it when this man came up to me. I didn't know who he was and he said, 'That guy sure respects the forest, doesn't he?'

I said, 'I don't know. Why?'

'Look at what he is destroying.'

'What do you mean, destroying?'

'Look at the way that jeep is throwing rocks and mud all over the place. That is good elk food.'

Well, as it turned out, this guy was the Routt Forest Supervisor and the fellow with me was scared that we were going to get a fine.

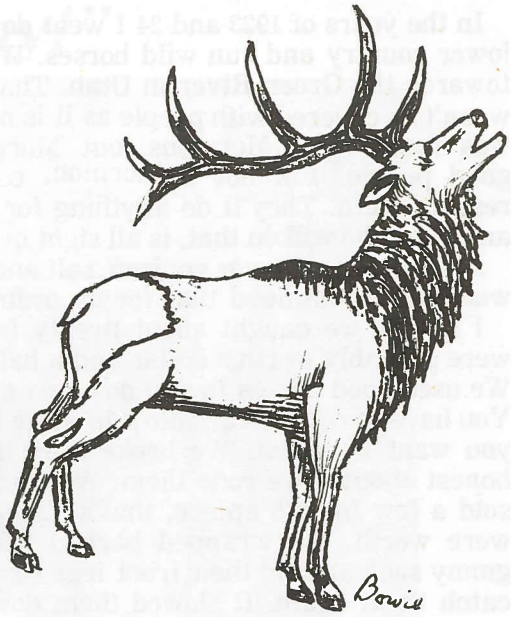
I said, 'That fellow don't know what he is talking about even if he is a Routt Supervisor. If we get a fine, we get a fine.'

The next day about daylight, we heard a shot. The fellow with me said, 'Well, there he is and he probably has the sheriff.'

'If he wants it, he can have it.' I got up and sure enough he was there. He asked me how long I had been around this country and if I knew where he could get an easy elk.

'Man, if I knowed where you could get an easy elk, I would have had it gone a long time ago. I can tell you where you can get an elk, but there is nothing easy about it.'

He didn't want no work. Easy one — there is no easy one. In the winter there is too much snow and in the summer, they are too fast. Don't try to tell me about that business. I have eaten them every month of the year and quite a few months, they ain't worth eating either.



"I HAVE EATEN THEM EVERY MONTH OF THE YEAR AND QUITE A FEW MONTHS, THEY AIN'T WORTH EATING EITHER."

In the years of 1923 and 24 I went down to the lower country and run wild horses. Went down towards the Green River in Utah. That countrv wasn't as covered with people as it is now. What was there were Mormons, but Mormons are good people. I'm not a Mormon, but I sure respect them. They'll do anything for you, and anybody who will do that, is all right in my book.

All we had to eat was venison, salt and coffee. I wouldn't recommend that for an ordinary guy.

I reckon we caught about twenty head, they were probably worth a dollar and a half a piece. We used good horses to run down no good ones. You have to roll that all into a lifetime to know if you want it or not. We broke them all, to be honest about it we rode them. We traded them, sold a few for $15 apiece, that's about all they were worth. We wrapped barbed wire and a gunny sack around their front legs so you could catch them again. It slowed them down.

Started to sell one to a fellow in Steamboat Springs, (I won't say his name as he might still be working in the ring). So I took a horse up there who had really been roughed up and the fellow looked the horse over and asked what those marks were on the front leg, and I told him they were brush marks. I didn't tell him what the problem was.

The fellow walked around him a few times and said he didn't like his eye.

'What's the matter with his eye?' I asked.

He said, 'He doesn't have a friendly look.'

The horse wasn't very big but he was sure dynamite. If he would have been fat, I don't think I could even rode him.

We were eating deer, and you'd have to be careful which one you would kill. You had to try to get one with some meat on him. That venison, when it's poor like that, is the nearest to nothing you ever tried to eat. We would draw straws to see who did the hunting, and we would tell the fellow not to kill the first one he saw. Look them all over, we would say, and try to get one that's got some meat on him. There were so many of them and no feed, dead ones everywhere.

There were four or five Mormons running horses on the other side of the river. I went over there one day to see if I could borrow some baking powder, to help raise the biscuits. Sour-dough was the way to do it, but we got careless and didn't save any. They had a pile of deer legs as high as my barn is. I wouldn't know how many there was in there. Just showed me they were in the same predicament we were.

We had a little rodeo among ourselves there and the Mormons had a lot of them wild horses. The little ranchers around there all came. A fellow bought a bottle, he said he went to dig a fort, he wouldn't tell me where he went, but he was gone all day long and when he came back, he brought a quart of white lightning. Everybody there drank on it the next day and he had some left over. that stuff was out of this world.

The first year we had elk season was in 1918 or 19, from the middle of November to the first part of December. It was so that you spent all your nights by a campfire.

The first one I ever killed I couldn't eat. He was past eating. I don't think that you could eat the gravy hardly. Old, he didn't have no teeth. It was a wonder that he didn't starve to death. If we would have let him go awhile longer, he would have. We got him on the North Fork of Fish Creek. We were just dragging our toes in snow all day, and I was riding a tall horse.

One of the fellows with me had a brand new pair of Hyer boots. You know, if you could buy a pair of Hyer boots, you were rated not top, but you were getting close. Anyway, his feet got cold, so he stopped and pulled off his saddle and set on it while I built a fire. He pulled off his boots and was wearing silk socks, that's how tight his boots were. When he got his feet warm, they swelled up and he couldn't get those boots back on. It was 20 degrees below zero. We got him on a horse, no problem, but he had to ride back to camp without his boots on.

We had 4 horses on a wagon with a load of hay. We took care of them horses first, kind of like the Army. Save the horses, them fellows can be replaced. I spent two of the coldest weeks of my life up there hunting elk.

Years later, I could have solved that, because I knew a little something. Funny thing about life is, that when you go down the road, you learn things. When you are about 18, you think you accumulated all you need to know. If you knowed as much when you are 50 years old, as you think you did when you were 18, you would be a walking encyclopedia.

Elk hunting is something else. Fishing is the same way. I went to Mad Creek in middle November to break the ice a lot of times to catch those greylings. Talk about a wet cold job, just try that.

I bought a piece of state land in 1926. I never did homestead. I had worked for a woman for ten and one half years off and on, and she owned this place, and she kept telling me she wanted to sell it to me. One day she was in town she told me that she wanted me to go up to the courthouse because she wanted to give me the deed to the place. So that's how I came by this 200 acres. She said when I worked for her the early years for nothing she thought she owed me more than what she paid me. So she fixed it up for me to get the deed on it. Then I sold the place down on the lake, because the lake place was too far off the road, keep the road open in the winter time. So I decided to take the home place. When I was

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Joe and James talking about Joe's land.

married in 1930, my wife's folks had homesteaded this place so when the time come I took and bought that too.

I just practically put all the money back on my wife's folk's homeplace. There was a federal loan on it, and I just assumed the loan. So I wasn't out any money. It cost me $10 an acre. I hadn't developed the place I sold too much. I just run livestock or cattle on it till I was married. I didn't try to do anything. But after I got a family, why, I had to go at it from a different angle. There's a lot of difference when you're eating and you've got three or four depending on you that are eating too. But that's the way it should be. That's what makes the world. That's the way the world was intended or it wouldn't have been that way. I'm not sorry the way it happened. I have no regrets. I don't know as I'd want to reverse the trend. I can't say that. I always kinda liked to see what's over the hill. I had no reason to want to stay forever and I have enjoyed what I had. I think the Lord has really blessed me in more ways than one. I got lots of blessings so I am willing to accept anything that comes.

Now I have about 380 acres of deeded land plus about 125 acres of BLM. I have a munity lease on it, the place that ajoins me. At one time we had a thousand acres, back here. About six of us practically had all of that land which is now some of Camilletti's and all of the Greeks. The Greeks that sold out to this one company. We had that all leased. But when the family got big and started to leave home, going to the Army and Navy. I could see that we had one in all the services, just one right after another.

So when it came up for sale, I could have had any part of it. The family thought I should take it all, but I said, 'How many guys are going to be here to help me?' A fellow gets old—everybody does. Some people don't realize it, but the day comes when you get old. And I didn't want the place strung out all over. I would rather have a little easy than have a lot and have to work twenty-four hours a day just trying to hang on to it.

So I didn't want it. I can make a living and that's all I intend to take with me anyhow. It's like that young fellow who started out and acquired a lot. Everyone would tell how much he made and what he accomplished. Then one day he died and there were several old fellows around the stove in the store talking about him and one fellow asked how much did he leave, he must have left a lot. One old fellow said, 'You know, he left it all' , and that's the answer. So if one can look at life in that line, he won't have no headaches. I can promise you that because I can talk for myself. And that's about all you're going to do here anyway.

I missed the military. I was rough and ready to go. I would have had to go in 1918, that was when we had that flu. A fellow that you talked to in the morning, the next day, they would call you and say he was dead. There was a fellow, came to be registered to go into the Army. The woman I was working for, when I come to work, she was real shook up and said, 'Joe, So and so is dead' . I replied that he was here when we registered yesterday. She said he must have been sick.

There was a lot of people that died at that time, three or four funerals a day. That flu was something, they called it by all types of names. I don't know what it really was.

They are talking about this swine flu that we have right now that they are talking about inoculating for, some say that it is something the same, I wouldn't know, but I know the other was a real situation.

When they held a funeral, we would stay outside in the open rather than go into a building so someone wouldn't catch it. They thought that it would help. I don't know if it particularly did or not.

I dug a lot of graves over there in that little graveyard that is up on the hill (Elk Mountain Cemetery), mostly for friends and neighbors. Whenever a grave had to be dug, we got together and dug it. At this day and age, people don't do that. I think people have changed too. I don't know, but I believe I have helped dig nine-tenths of them anyway. Because I started in 1915. There are a lot of people that I know in there.

I went down there one time and there was a baby that had to be buried, so I went down with another fellow and we were all day. We were purt' near half a day just shoveling the snow back away from the plot. Then we dug not quite four feet but that was a long ways up. We just got the hole dug and here they came with the baby to bury it. I got a lot of kinfolks in there. My mother and father, uncles and aunts. I got a lot of people in there.

A few years ago, the mortician called me and said he had a burial and asked if I knew the man and I said I knowed him, and he said he wanted to be buried in the Elk Mountain Cemetery. He asked if there were any other besides the one on the road and I said no. He asked if I would go down and show them where to dig, and I said I would. He had contacted the county commissioners to plow the road in there so I could go down and show them where to dig. We had a backhoe come out and that was the first time for that. I kind of enjoyed that, all I had to do was to stand there and tell them where to put it and how much hole to dig. After the funeral some of his folks came up here to thank me for what I had done. Well, we were just always a part of it. You always done that because that was just about all you could do for them, for the last thing, and you always tried to do it.

In 1965, we lost our little girl. She was nine years old and we took her to Children's Hospital. She had a malfunction when she was born and it was one thing right after another. The doctor told me he would have to operate and take some of her intestines out. After he operated, he said she wouldn't live over twenty-four hours, but he said that he felt he had done the very best he could. He had to take too much out. Gangrene had set in, and she passed on.

In the meantime, I had alerted some of the kinfolks and a friend and a doctor came in and were telling me how sorry they were but things like that happen. The doctor mentioned that some people get mad about things like that. I told him he was painting me wrong because I didn't operate that way. 'You said that you did your level best. If you did or you didn't, I don't know. I will give you the chance of the doubt. You have to live with it...I don't, so why should I get mad?'

While we were talking, a long distance call came. A fellow from home to find out where we wanted the grave. After I had finished, the doctor asked me if I had been talking to the undertaker.

I replied, 'No, neighbors.'

'Why'', he said, 'I have never heard of anything like that. Man, what kind of country do you live in?''

When anybody passed away, there was always enough to do it by hand and that was all there was to it. If anything else happened, the neighbors would come up and plant your crops or anything else that needed done. Fact is, this very time I'm talking about, they came up here and plowed a field and planted it to potatoes. There were three or four acres of barley that were never done when she died and they planted that, but I done the same thing. Everybody else did.

You know you can't live without having a little of everything. Did you ever stop to think about that? You know, if you didn't have a few problems, you wouldn't look at yourself and see what's the matter with you. That's life one hundred percent. You never get up in the morning and look at the day but it is a different

"JUST LIKE THE MAN WITH THE FENCE - GOOD FENCES MAKE GOOD NEIGHBORS."

day than was the day before. Just as sure as the sun is going to come up.

When my house burned down, the neighbors came and helped me move that house to get closer to the spot where I was figuring to get water, but the spring is over yonder. Then the neighbors gave us clothing and enough stuff to start again, everybody did. I found out if you are a good neighbor, you got a good neighbor. Just like the man with the fence — good fences make good neighbors. That's the way it works.

You can go into any backwards country, back away from civilization and you'll find that type of conditions between neighbors.

I can remember, I rode the range for a good many years, that was one thing I could always get a job at — punching cows. I know when I would go into the back country, that it would never cost me nothing to stay, you would lead 2 horses and ride one, and when you would come up to the door, they always wanted you to put the horses in the pasture and come in and eat. Sometimes you would wonder how the people ate as good as they did, they took it all off the land.

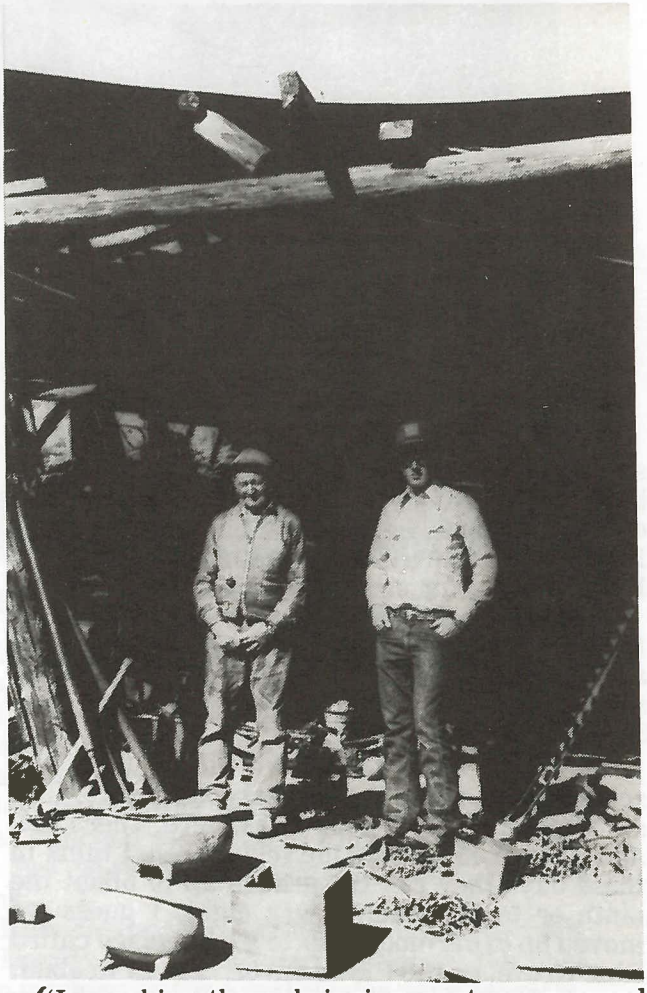
Every fall, I always liked to go to the upper country and push cows down to the lower country, and every night I had a place I could stay. Fact is, that if you didn't stay, it would make them mad at you. They felt that you were slighting them. They wanted you to come in and break bread with them.

This country back through here was all homesteaded at one time and there were all different nationalities, some of them couldn't even talk to you in English, but they all had kids that could.

There was one place I stayed that had a little yellar haired gal. I used to always like to make it there. She would set there and tell me what the rest of the people were talking about.

You were as welcome as the flowers in May when you rode up to the house. I'll tell you that. Dirt floor, swept as clean as this is here — probably cleaner. I haven't swept it in a while. They would have the straw ticks on the bed about as thick as this table. And they had feather blankets, all for a fellow to lay on. You always had the best bed in the house. Them people were the backbone of the world. That's what made this country as great as it is, you have to have something good to start with and that's what did it. The old people really wanted you to come and stop and if you had any news you could tell them, anything that happened around the neighborhood or community, they were really anxious to hear that. If you go where you don't see anybody for months and months you get really lonesome. And the guys like us riding the country, talking to all of the people, were full of news.

That's what our country lacks today, the togetherness. We got more or less just individualistic. A feller gets up and looks out and thinks that he has his own problems that he can't get on top of. But there are some of them people left, there will always be a few of them left. The elements are mixed, and there are some good elements in them. That's all there is to that.



"I see him there bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top. In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed. He moves in darkness as it seems to me, Not of woods only and the shade of trees. He will not go behind his father's saying, and he likes having thought of it so well he says again 'Good fences make good neighbors'."

by Robert Frost