

Arthur Bjerke tells of his hunting days and of different game animals - their habits, their abundance, and his attitudes towards them. He also explains more about surveying with Bill Helmer.

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I. Index

ARTHUR BJERKE

Deary; b. 1886

farmer; herder; carpenter; logger

1.3 hours

minute page

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Side B

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Side C

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Arthur Bjerke

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with Sam Schrager
October 10, 1973

II. Transcript

SAM SCHRAGER: I'd say your old head is pretty good.

ARTHUR DJERKE: No, it ain't much good anymore. I can't remember much.

SAM: You know it seems to me you remember pretty good. You remember a lot more than most of the people that I speak to.

A B: Well, I was down on the ridge Monday and seen Ed Halseth. And I've known him since he was that high. He's over 70, he's pretty good yet. Anyway he can get around pretty good.

SAM: You remember how we were talking about Bill Helmer and you surveying?

A B: Yeah?

SAM: Well, I was thinking about that, and I was wondering about how you did it. I was wondering what kind of instruments you used to do the surveying.

A B: Well we generally used one of them tip-up, mostly a compass though. That is a compass with levels on it, so you raised them up, and then of course it was so you had to set 'em level. Otherwise if you didn't set 'em level you'd be a-runnin' off. Well of course we might run off a little, but then of course we'd have to measure between the government stakes, and he'd keep track of so many chains that we measured, and if it didn't come back, then he'd know how many inches he'd have to set back every stake to get 'em in line.

SAM: How did you decide where the corners were supposed to be?

A B: Well you know the government stakes was put down in the '80's up here. So that was quite awhile before our times, and of course the marks was all in the trees, that is on the corners. So we could find them pretty good. By gosh I'll bet I could go over in the Park country and find the marks that was put down in the '85's. And there is one just a half a mile down here, and the old mark that was put down in '85, and the old witness tree that's fell over, but it's still a-layin' there.

SAM: What kind of mark did they put in the tree?

A B: Well they'd blaze it off, and then they had a kind of digger that they'd dig into the tree, so you could read 'em all right. And there is one stump right up here with the government mark in it yet.

SAM: How did you decide if the government mark was right or your mark was right?

A B: Well we'd have to go by the government mark. We couldn't change that. There is no way of changing the government mark. Now over here at Camp 4 at Potlatch, that is where there's two government corners in there. They're a couple hundred feet apart.

SAM: How do you think that happened?

A B: Well, see one set of surveyors come from one side and another come from another side and that's where they come together. Well they established the two corners, so it's a corner of no man's land in there.

SAM: Well what was the purpose of you and Helmer checking the old survey for?

A B: Well that was the Potlatch buying the timber, see, and they'd have to estimate the timber. Well they'd have to know where their lines was. Now that field over there is in four sections, two townships, range one and two. That's a government corner right over across the creek there. And I've kept that tils here three, four years ago, tils I wasn't able to farm myself, and by god they plowed it up. So the fella that was supposed to farm it wasn't here. He had a hired man and by god he plowed up the government corner.

SAM: Was it a tree?

A B: No, it was a concrete block. And I don't know I never could find the block again.

SAM: Did you and Helmer put new marks on the corners or did you just find the old corners?

A B: We just found the old corners and then, say the marks on the trees grewed

over. Well we'd have to chop off the wood so we could find the old mark in underneath...Old Bill Helmer was pretty good in the woods. It was no danger of that feller getting lost. And it wasn't much danger of me getting lost neither. I knew everything between Avon and Elk River pretty good, because I herded cattle along in 1903-4, for three years in through that country. Yes I knew the man that homesteaded where Elk River is.

SAM: Who is that?

A B: Oh hell I can't think of his name. He was quite a fella to drink. He was a big man. Oh, I can't think of his name. (Old Man Trumball.)

SAM: Was he the guy that had a lodge for hunters?

A B: Yah. Yeah that Bronson Meadow y'know, where the Shattucks and Hughes Meadow used to be, they call it the Bronson now I think--that's where I had the camp. So it was just over the hill over to Elk River from there. And no fish in them creeks those days. There was no fish above Elk Creek Falls. And there was none in the Shattucks and Hughes Creeks, neither. It was some big falls on that creek.

SAM: Did you see many people out there?

A B: Not very many. Nothing else than in the fall some fellas would come up and pheasant hunting more than anything else. And there wasn't hardly any deer in there then. And very seldom an elk'd be seen in that country. (Pause.)

SAM: Why wasn't there game then?

A B: Well sir, you know there was too much snow up in there. The game didn't stay in there too much. They stayed down this way further, that is the deer. And the elk, they all was over on the Clearwater.

SAM: Did this guy live out there on the Elk River himself? Did he have neighbors?

A B: Well he was mostly there by himself. Of course he had an old woman and a

stepson there with him. And the stepson would always steal his whiskey.

SAM: How did they get by out there?

A B: Oh, they'd get by all right. Of course they could ^{go} down below the falls, that wasn't over three miles, and they could catch all the damn fish they wanted to down there. And that's mostly where a lot of them fellas come up, y'know, and stayed up there, and there was more of a gambling den than anything else up there. And then of course there was quite a few Indians come in there, and in the summer it was lots of huckleberries back in there. The huckleberry pickers'd come in. And y'know, it didn't take much too much to live. Flour was pretty cheap, and one thing another.

SAM: What did you do out there when you were herding the cattle? Did you have to stay with them on the range all the time?

A B: Well I'd go around them every day and keep 'em so that they didn't get too far spread out. I had about 400 head I was a-takin' care of. So it was just me and the dog and the horse. And the dog, I kept him at camp most of the time, because them damn bear y'know would come and want to get into camp. But the dog'd keep them out of camp all right.

SAM: There was a lot of bear?

A B: Oh there was quite a few bear all right. But that's one thing I never shot, I never shot a bear, because I didn't want to eat them...

(End of Side A)

SAM: You say you didn't want to eat 'em?

A B: No, I didn't want to eat no bear.

SAM: So you didn't want to kill 'em?

A B: No, what's the use of killing something you don't want to eat? The only thing I'd want to kill is coyotes, but boy I had it in for them. Because they

were always a-killin' deer.

SAM: Can you ever remember a time when there were wolves in this country?

A B: Wolves? Well there was one time there was three wolves come in to this country. I killed one of them, and I think old man Dillman and Gus (?) Anderson killed the other two. That's all the wolves I remember. And I never killed a cougar, I've seen 'em though. But I never killed a cougar. But coyotes I killed lot of them. And I killed quite a few dogs that was a-chasin' deer too. You know, a deer is a funny animal. If they are chased bad by coyotes or a dog, they might run right up to a person. I've had deer come so close to me that I could lay my hand on 'em, that'd been chased. You wouldn't think that, would ya? But by gosh now, I had one deer that was bothered by a dog over there, by god he come right up to me and he followed me right up to the barn, after I beat hell out of the dog. No by gosh a deer y'know gets pretty tame if they are chased by dogs or coyote.

SAM: Do you think he was coming to you for help, or was he just confused?

A B: I think he was a-comin' to me for help. Because when I knocked hell out of the dog and chased the dog out, by god the deer crawled through the fence and followed me right up to the barn. No, and a time or two there's been other deer y'know that have run up to fellers that way, that'd been chased by dogs or coyotes. Now up there at Helmer, Ross, there was a deer that come in there, and she got tamer than the dickens. And she got so she'd come in the house and jump into the bed and sleep in bed. Oh a deer tames right down fast. They had a tame deer in Deary one year, that damn thing you know was just as tame as it could be. God, that'd follow you all over.

SAM: Was the deer just loose in Deary?

A B: Yeah. Yeah, somebody had killed the mother of this fawn, and the game warden took into Deary and raised it there. And boy it got so damn tame,

you know, it just wanted to come in the houses and everyplace else. No, you take a deer, you know, they go to a person for protection if they are bothered too much.

SAM: Do you think a deer has to be a fawn to get really tame?

A B: No, I think they can get pretty tame if they're pretty grown. Well had one doe here, I think she'd been around some barns during the winter and been fed with cattle--she was so tame I could go as close to her as from here to the radio and stand and talk to her. But she wouldn't let me touch her. She was around here for two, three years, but I think finally somebody killed her. But she was really tame. I wouldn't have shot her on a bet. She was my best friend. No, they can get pretty friendly when they are around people.

SAM: Do you think deer are pretty smart?

A B: Well I know they ain't dumb by any means. They are pretty smart all right. I know they can make a fool out of a person damned easy in the woods. A deer has made a fool of lots of hunters. (Pause.) I got a book from Ed Halseth yesterday, but you couldn't read that, it's Norwegian.

SAM: You're right, I can't make out a word. I bet you can read it pretty good though.

A B: Oh I can read it all right.

SAM: Could you read me a little bit of it, so I could hear how it sounds?

A B: Oh, I don't know. (Pause. He reads a few words.) Oh heck, if I could see it I could read it all right, but it's all blurred so bad.

SAM: Could you speak a little to me then, not reading? Say something to me in Norwegian?

A B: (He recites.) That was Swede I spoke now. There's just one thing I wish I'd done, that I'd went back to Denmark and then went around by Stockholm, Sweden, and back up through Norway. Because I could talk to all of them. I could get along pretty good with Denmark, and I could get along with the

skonigs in Sweden. And the real Swedish language, I could get along pretty good with them because I could read that. And Norwegian, I could read that if I could see it.

SAM: Is there much difference between Norwegians and Swedes?

A B: Oh there's quite a lot of difference in the pronunciation. But Denmark and Norway uses the same book, the same language. Denmark y'know and Norway used to be one country at one time.

SAM: What about the people Arthur, the Swedes and the Norwegians? Were they very much alike? Did they have a lot in common when they came over here?

A B: Oh yeah, they get along pretty good. You take the Lutheran church down here that they started down below Deary, you know about half of the people that joined it was Swedes. There is lots of Swedes buried in that Lutheran cemetery down there. I think there is more Swedes than Norwegians buried down there.

SAM: Well there were more Swedes than Norwegians that come out here, weren't there?

A B: Yeah, well from Deary down towards Troy it was more Swedes than Norwegians.

SAM: Why did your family leave Norway and come out here?

A B: Oh, I don't know. Times pretty hard back there. And dad, y'know the place that dad had there, his father and his grandfather was all born on the same place. And dad was born on the same place and I was born in the same house. So that's a pretty old house.

SAM: Was there any difference, Arthur, in the customs between the Swedes and the Norwegians over here?

A B: Oh, not a great deal. They got along pretty good. And there wasn't too much difference. Yah, you know, that down in around in Troy they had all kinds of weather at one time down there. There was one fella by the name Winter, and one by the name Summer, and one by the name Storm. So they had

winter, summer, and storm all at one time down there (laughs).

SAM: Can you remember any of the customs that your family kept, that were Norwegian, when they came over here? Like holidays?

A B: Well now like Christmas, they'd do up all the work the day before Christmas. Well then they kept 13 holidays that they didn't do nothing else than visit neighbors and around like that. That was the old country customs and Easter, there was Easter Sunday and second day of Easter. The day after Easter was a holiday. And Good Friday was always a holiday. And like Christmas, there'd always be a Christmas tree and one thing another.

SAM: When did you start to hunt, Arthur?

A B: Well, I started hunting when I was about 15 years old. I got a .22, that was my first gun. That'd be about 1903-4, I have an idea I started hunting somewheres in there.

SAM: How did you learn?

A B: Well generally the first hunting I done was with a bow and arrow, and then I got a .22 and I done quite a little hunting with that. Then 1906, well before that, it must have been about 1900, I got the first big gun, that was a 44-40, but hell, you could run as fast as that bullet'd go. But then about 1906 I got a 30-30 and I've still got it. And the first shot I ever fired with that 30-30 I killed a deer. And the last shot I ever fired I killed a coyote with it.

SAM: Was it deer that you hunted mostly?

A B: Yahl. Well there is one stump over across Corral Creek, that is on McKinney's place. There is one stump there that I used to stand on, and I'm the only man that ever killed a deer from that stump. And I've shot 26 deer off from that same stump. I killed one big buck there that hogdressed 226 pounds. That was a big deer. We used to have some awful big deer in the early days, but none of them left. And you know the elk we had here, they were shipped

in from the Yellowstone Park. They were shipped in in 1928. They were shipped to Bovill and kept up there at the company horse barn that winter. They had to beg for money to ship them elk in, so I put in eight, ten dollars to have them shipped in. George Lawrence put in ten dollars and Fritz Peterson put in ten dollars. It cost us about seven dollars a head to have 'em shipped in. We got thirty head.

SAM: Did they take to the country good?

A B: Oh yeah, they took to the country right along. Hell they got so they fed clean down to Kendrick. Hell there was one time before they opened the season, I seen as high as 26 elk in that field over there, at one time. I seen 26 elk and 50 some odd deer one night. That's a lot of game. And now there is hardly anything left.

SAM: What do you think caused that? All the game to disappear?

A B: Well, too damn much hunting going on, and too much damn much poisoning done. You take like the birds, y'know, all this farm business they had 'em poison squirrels one year, a couple years. And they run around and poisoned around all the fields. Well they had poison grain, and they scattered that all around on top of the ground around the edges of the field. Well they poisoned the biggest part of the birds.

SAM: Do you know which kinds of birds they poisoned?

A B: Well it was mostly grouse and pheasants, because they were a-workin' in the fields. When the grain'd start in getting ripe, they'd come in the fields and work on those grain heads that'd be lost and one thing another. Well they'd find that poison grain, well they'd eat that too, and of course that'd kill 'em.

SAM: Did there used to be a lot of grouse and pheasant in the old days?

A B: Well y'know, you could go out here, I can remember I could go out for ten minutes and have a dozen pheasant. And the same way with grouse. God, there

was grouse galore. There were three different breed of grouse. There was the hooters and the gray grouse and then the mountain grouse.

SAM: What was the first kind you said, hoo doos?

A B: No, they'd sit and hoot in the trees in the morning. Well there was a lot of 'em'd just get up and go out in the morning and they'd hear 'em hoot up in the trees and go out and kill 'em. And then we had the foolhens, and they were so damn foolish you could walk right up to 'em and kill 'em with a stick.

(End of Side B)

SAM: How come you could shoot so many deer from the same stump on McKinney's place? Did the deer just used to gather there?

A B: They used to travel and I don't know, I was always lucky. It got so that when we would be a-huntin' in there, they wouldn't let nobody else go up to that stand but me, because they said that I was the only one that could kill a deer there. I never had one get away from me neither that I shot at up there. I got every one I shot at. Oh I was a little better shot than the biggest part of them.

SAM: What size gun did you like to use on the deer?

A B: A 30-30, the same old gun I've got now. That old gun must have killed close to a hundred deer and about 20 elks since I had it. Melvin Halseth was down the other night. He asked me if I remember when I stood out here and shot elk down there at the edge of the woods. Shooting over a quarter of a mile with a 30-30 and kill them three elk.

SAM: You shot 'em one after another?

A B: Yup.

SAM: What did you do with all the meat?

A B: Well, I had neighbors. Hell I never...I'd hunt with the neighbors, I was generally the lucky one that killed the game. One time I worked in Deary,

and I worked tils quitting time, and I come home, and I haven't had time to hunt, it was the last of the hunting season. And I come home, and I stopped out here and I got out and I looked up on top of that hill there, and I thought I seen a cow in the field up there. I had fall wheat up there. I said, "Now whose damn cow is in the field up there." I stood and looked at her a little bit, it was getting pretty late in the evening, getting kind of dusk. But I could see her good agin' the sky light over there. And I looked and I said, "By god, that ain't a cow, that's an elk." So I got the gun out of the pickup, and I started in shooting. I shot nine times and I got two elk up there. And it was late in the evening, Melvin Peterson lived over here where Winn lives now, and he come out of the barn with a lantern. And I hollered at him, "Come on down here, I got some job to do." And Edwin Magnuson was over there, he come down, we went up and I had two elk up there. I took the tractor and the stone boat and went up and went up there, loaded them on, hauled 'em down and hung 'em up, skinned 'em. Well I give Melvin and Edwin--they both had family--the big elk, and then I kept the little one and I kept a half of that, and give the other half to another neighbor.

SAM: Did your friends believe a small gun like yours could do as well as a 30-06?

A B: No they used to laugh at me, but I'd generally kill 'em just as far off as they did. I went up to the Selway one time, and there was three of us, and they made fun of my small gun. They had big guns, and we'd been in there quite awhile hunting, and we haven't got anything. And the last day we was in there, we's going down the trail and look around. And I says, "I wouldn't go down the trail with you fellas, I'll take the ridge fork, and you fellas can go down the trail." So I took the ridge and pretty soon I heard them starting in shooting to beat the devil down on the trail. Well I go down there and see what's a-goin' on. I got down there and by gosh they have shot all their cartridges, and there was a bull elk over across the canyon, a big

canyon, it must have been about five or six hundred yards. And they said, "Oh shit, what are you going to do with that gun?"

I says, "I can shoot just as well as you fellers can." Well they put out a new shell for the 30-30, 110 grain bullet. Well that put her up in the 2800. And I had some of them shells in the gun. I shot twice at the elk. And the first time I shot he kind of staggered, and I shot again and he walked ahead a couple steps and he went down. Well they said, "You sure as hell didn't hit him with that gun." And when we skinned him by god we found two bullets out of my gun in him and that was all he ever was hit. And I was shooting further than they did with the big gun. They didn't laugh so much at that little gun then. I killed that elk and a big buck over there, and a small deer, and that was all the game we got on that trip. I had the head on that big mule deer mounted but that burnt up when the house burnt up. I had three deer heads mounted that burnt up.

SAM: The house here burnt up?

A B: Yeah. Yeah that burnt up. That part of this house is an old railroad car. I built on this part.

SAM: How did it catch fire?

A B: Well I don't know. It started upstairs about four o'clock in the morning. And I haven't had fire in the stove since early the morning before, so it couldn't have been from the stove. But there was a lot of stuff cached up there. There was a woman that cooked here when they cut the timber in the Milwaukee down here. She had a lot of stuff cached up there, and I kind of think maybe it's been some matches or something in some of the clothes up there that some mice or something had gnawed on. So all her stuff burnt up. Oh I done quite a lot of carpenter work in the early days. Several houses in Helmer and some in Bovill that I've built, and some in Deary. And there is one south of Troy on the road between Troy and Kendrick that I've built.

SAM: Do you remember the old fires in Deary?

A B: Oh yeah I remember some of them. Yeah, I remember when it burnt pretty well in Deary and also in Bovill. (Pause.) Well there isn't too many of them oldtimers left in Bovill neither.

SAM: Do you remember what happened in either of those fires? How they started?

A B: Well, it's hard telling how they started. I think some of them in Deary was set. I always had that in my mind but nobody could prove it.

SAM: Why would they be set?

A B: Oh, just meanness. (Pause.)

SAM: Did people get lost very much in the country? Oh when they were going hunting or going around, trying to get from one place to another?

A B: Oh not too much. 'Course there is one fella from Genesee that never have found that was lost back in back of Beal's Butte there. They never have found him. And then that banker from Palouse was lost in there. They think they found him but they ain't too sure about it.

SAM: Did you like to go very far like in that country up in there, Beal's Butte, to get game, or did you like to stay around here?

A B: Oh I stayed mostly around here. I never hunted far away from home. About as far as I hunted from home was up here on Cherry Butte and back in on Vasser Meadows and Corral Creek.

SAM: Did you like to go around and explore the country just for the heck of it?

A B: Oh, when I was with the cattle of course I looked over the country pretty good, so I was pretty well acquainted. Oh, I was up on Marble Creek and in that country some.

SAM: Do you think that the coyotes are pretty smart animals?

A B: You're goddamned right they are smart. You better not touch a trap that you are going to catch one of them in with your bare hands. If you do the coyote will never touch it. They're too smart for that. They got a pretty

good scent. But once in awhile a coyote will crossbreed with a dog. And when you get one of them dogs you generally get a mean one. Well y'know that's how they used to raise the wolf hounds. They'd cross 'em with wolves to get sleigh dog, and I guess they were pretty vicious, big lot of 'em.

SAM: How come you didn't want the coyotes to kill any deer?

A B: Well you know the snow would get deep and the deer'd break through the crust. There'd be a little crust on the snow, and the coyotes'd run on top, and then they'd hamstring the deer and kill 'em and eat 'em. Hell, y'know, coyotes'd kill lots of deer. There used to be one place down here in the spring of the year where the deer'd winter. It was right on the breaks of the river, on the breaks of Potlatch. I used to go down there every spring and I'd always kill a bobcat or two down in there, and coyotes that was a-killin' deer. And there was a few lynx cats in there. They'd weigh about 35-40 pounds, they were pretty good size. The lynx cats, they had tassels on their ears, the bobcats didn't.

SAM: Was there difference in their habits?

A B: Well you take them bobcats and the lynx cats, they'd jump on a deer's back. They'd jump out of a tree and onto their back, and then they'd cut their spinal cord. But the coyotes'd generally hamstring 'em. There is one place over across Corral Creek there, I shot only three deer on that place, but I killed three deer with two shot. Two was a-runnin' right abreast, right side to me, and I shot through one and killed the other one behind of it. And the third one I shot through two little pines and killed that behind of the two pine.

SAM: Why do you think you're such a darn good shot?

A B: Well when I herded cattle I didn't have nothing else to do than to practice. And the boss, he had a gun. He'd always come up every two weeks and bring some provision up to me, and we'd generally have a shooting match every night.

And you know .22 cartridges, you could buy them by the box, ten cents a box for .22 shorts, or three boxes for 25 cents, so it didn't cost much to shoot. Well that's all I did shooting, there was thousands of chipmunks. I was shooting at chipmunks all the time. And then when I wanted a bird, I'd just take the gun out and kill the bird and have something to eat, have a bird for me and the dog.

SAM: When you think back, do some times seem like they were good times, and some times like they were bad times?

A B: Oh, at time there were bad times all right. I remember in '91 or 2, in the Cleveland's times, by god the times was tough. About the only thing we had was a little bread and milk and eggs to eat. And I got so tired of eggs that I never wanted to eat eggs since.

SAM: What about the good times, which times were good times?

A B: Well, during the McKinley time we started in getting pretty good times again. And then during World's War I it was pretty good times, and also in World's War II. The Potlatch camp was right over here during World's War II. There is one fella up at Bovill that was flunky in camp over here when the camp was over here. I seen him last summer. We had quite a visit.

SAM: What about the depression in 1929 and around in there? Was that a really hard time here?

A B: Oh yeah, it was pretty close. Yes, it was pretty hard time. A lot of the banks went hay...went flooey then. Yes, the bank in Deary went haywire, and the bank in Bovill.

SAM: What about Troy?

A B: Well Troy was damned near gone, if it ain't been for old Green...

Transcribed and typed by Sherrie Fields