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**Kentucky Folklife Program
Interview Transcription**

Project name: Ranger Lore (LOCRP)

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Interviewee: Charles (Eddie) Wells

Interviewer/Recordist: Brent Björkman

Date: 4/23/2014

Location: Mammoth Cave National Park, KY

Others Present: N/A

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Transcription prepared by: Jennie Boyd

Transcribing Conventions:

Use of square brackets [] indicates a note from the transcriber.

Use of parentheses () indicates a conversational aside.

Use of em dash — indicates an interruption of thought or conversation.

Use of ellipses ... indicates a discontinued thought.

Use of quotations “ ” indicates dialogue within conversation.

Use of italics indicates emphasis.

Use of underline indicates movie, magazine, newspaper, or book titles.

Names of interviewee and interviewer are abbreviated by first and last initial letters.

Time is recorded in time elapsed by the convention [hours:minutes:seconds].

Note: This transcription is as accurate and complete as possible. In any question of interpretation, the researcher is referred to the recording itself as the primary document representing this event.

[time elapsed in hours:minutes:seconds]

[00:00:00]

BRENT BJÖRKMAN: Today is April 23, 2014. This is Brent Björkman, with the Kentucky Folklife Program. And I'm here at Mammoth Cave, continuing to interview, interview series that I'm doing with park rangers. And we're talking about working lives in the park service. And today I'm with another guest, and we're about to start. Can you tell me your name and your current position?

EDDIE WELLS: My name's Eddie Wells, and I'm currently the Volunteer and Partnerships Program Coordinator for Mammoth Cave National Park.

BB: Can you tell me a little bit about how you got connected to this area, to the park service? That's kind of how we've been starting.

EW: Okay. Well, I grew up here. I grew up only about fourteen miles outside of the park. Family friend was a ranger and eventually the general foreman of maintenance and he helped me to get my first job here in 1980 with the old Young Adult Conservation Corps. And I did anything from picking up litter along the, the roadsides to doing maintenance for the most part down inside the cave. They just reopened the Echo River Cave Tour in 1980, so they put me down there because they knew I was interested in the cave and it basically blossomed into me becoming a seasonal cave guide. I was going to Western Kentucky University at the time and so I thought, what a great summer job. Well, it was only about a month I decided I wanted to be a national park ranger and it was a huge career choice.

BB: Um-hm. So what were the steps after—did you get your degree and then go on with, with the hoops you had to jump?

EW: Well, when I was, when I was in college, there would be positions come open. I'd apply for them. And I was going to try to go to school, finish my degree and work permanently. And so finally when I did graduate in the fall of 1984, it was the next year I was offered my first permanent position. And it was here at Mammoth Cave as a permanent part-time law

enforcement ranger, which I was interested in law enforcement. And so I was here for a year and then I transferred away to another national park, Chickamauga in Chattanooga National Military Park, and they sent me to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center where I obtained my full law enforcement commission and that basically really started my law enforcement career. And I worked a total of six other parks before transferring back here in 2000.

BB: What parks were those?

EW: I was at Chickamauga in Chattanooga National Military Park, Everglades National Park, Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Arkansas Post National Memorial, Vicksburg National Military Park and then finally, Homestead National Monument in Beatrice, Nebraska. And a buddy of mine said, "Hey, we've got a job open here at Mammoth Cave." It was the first time a permanent law enforcement job had been open in years. And I thought, I got to go for this. And so I put in for it and like the third day of January of 2000, they said, "Come on back home." And so here I am ever since. And I, I did law enforcement until June 2008.

BB: Okay. So tell a little bit about, law enforcement seems like it was a real mainstay of a lot of your career. I know it's been evolving and continues to do so. We can talk about that in a moment. But tell me a little bit about the process of, of those first, first couple weeks when you started as a green law enforcement person and then maybe talk about how, how that, how your duties have changed and, and, and how that's progressed over time.

EW: I remember when I started out, when I first got my commission, at that time Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park was one of the highest level law enforcement parks in the southeast region. And I had a wonderful supervisor and mentor. His name's Jim Stobb. And he took me under my wing and for the first two weeks after I had my commission, I rode with him for like the first three days and watched him real close on how he did stuff and compared it to what I was taught in, in my training. And then finally one day we went out to the patrol car and he says, "You're driving." And so we went out

there and we drove around and, and you know, I'd make traffic stops and everything and, and he was saying, "Now don't write a ticket just yet." And then finally one day, he says, "Okay, let's go. I want to see you in full action." And so we went out. Within about thirty minutes I had my first traffic, real traffic stop with a ticket. And he said, "Okay. That's good enough. Take me back to the ranger station. You carry on." [0:05:01] And so after only about two weeks of what you might even consider a rudimentary field training, I was put right in, thrown right to the wolves. But I learned. And I really learned a lot in my training and I was pretty safe but back then it wasn't as, I'm going to s-, I, it was always dangerous, but I think it's really evolved over the last twenty years, because I've got twenty years in in law enforcement. And back then, my gun belt only weighed about maybe seven or eight pounds. By the time that I left law enforcement, between my gun belt and my armor, it probably weighed around twenty-five pounds with all the equipment that we had to carry. So, but that's, it was needed because people have, seem to have gotten in some ways a little more violent, a little more, there's more potential I think. People's attitudes have changed towards law enforcement in the national park service. It's, it's a pretty dangerous profession. A lot of people think that we're the soft, fuzzy, they're not going to do anything sort of individuals, but our training has evolved to where we're more proactive. We have to be more cognizant of officer safety, much more these days. And so you have a wide variety of, of gear that you have to deal with and, and unfortunately, some people get, get shown why we're trained the way we're trained.

BB: Well that, that's interesting. And that's come up with some of your law enforcement colleagues that I've interviewed is—I think Pete Sark was talking about, people do think you're a certain way or they don't understand you're a real law enforcement officer.

EW: Um-hm.

BB: The public perceptions are created and I'm not sure why they're that way. Do you have any ideas about why people think that?

EW: I think it's from the, I think it's one, from the old Lassie movies where, you know, I think it was Corey the forest ranger and Lassie would go out and take care of all kinds of things. I think it's also from the Smokey the Bear commercials. Seeing this big t-, cuddly teddy bear. And they think we're all like that. And there was a time when rangers could be more like that. But unfortunately the law enforcement rangers, we've had to toughen up and, and rise to face the occasion because we deal with drug traffickers, dangerous motorcycle gangs. I've dealt with arson investigations, child pornography, sexual assaults, robberies, burglaries. National park rangers, we, we have the authority to investigate every federal violation that occurs within a national park, and we have to be prepared for that.

BB: So does that, you were talking about the evolution of both societal change and training.

EW: Um-hm.

BB: Kind of running, I don't want to put words in your—I mean, is it, kind of handed, the same kind of time period maybe, and how has the training changed? I was talking to one law enforcement officer in Tennessee who did a lot of interp for a good bit of his career. And in his forties, he went to the academy.

EW: Um-hm.

BB: And he said, "I had to learn how to see things completely different than you see things."

EW: I did too.

BB: Can you, can you talk about that at all or—

EW: Well, sure. When I started out, the basic police course for land management agencies was nine weeks long. There was no field training except what you got when you got your commission when you got back to your park. Now the training is somewhere around

eighteen to twenty weeks, followed by an eleven-week field-training period which is definitely a pass/fail. You are put in with a field-training ranger in real life situations. And unfortunately, some people don't make the grade. It, it, it shows whether they have the wherewithal, the metal, the intelligence, the aggressiveness, the physical prowess to, to be able to do this job. And here at Mammoth Cave, I was the first field training lead here. I was one of the first nineteen field training leads in the National Park Service. We, nineteen were all trained at the same time down at FLETC and, and so it was a pretty proud moment when I came back here to start setting up the, the program and I supervised four of my former colleagues as field-training rangers. And we had to, it was tough. We would have to counsel trainees. It wasn't just a rubber stamp thing. They had to come out here and prove that they knew what they were doing. So it's, as society has changed, the training has become much more demanding than what I went through. Much more demanding.

BB: Um-hm. I'm even seeing a— [0:10:00] can you tell me for the record, I've heard it a couple times and I did not enquire. FLETC?

EW: Federal Law Enforcement Training Center. That's an acronym. Park service people tend to use a lot of acronyms.

BB: Sure. Sure. Sounds like you've seen a lot of things in all these, all these different, do you have any stories that are maybe informative to thinking about how you've been informed by the job and, and what you've learned or something you've taken pride in assisting with. Maybe it's just an individual's education, a park visitor's education or something you helped to, to provide greater safety in, in a traumatic situation or—

EW: Well, as a, as a park ranger, not only are you law enforcement, you also do emergency medical services, search and rescue, hazardous materials and several other things. And, and I, two of the most profound things that stood out in my mind was when I was the E-, I was also the EMS coor-, Emergency Medical Services coordinator here before my colleague

Brian Sacia took that over. And I was able to get an epinephrine administration program started. This was for people that have severe allergic reactions—

BB: Um-hm.

EW: And, and we got signed off by a medical doctor, and within about one week of us getting our epi-pens, I was in fact instructing an EMS class here. I was a new, I was an EMT and I got a call from the ferry operator that there was a car coming across the ferry that had an eleven year old girl who was in anaphylactic shock and I had one of my colleagues to stop her, I ran out of class, ran over there, there they were, the, the girl was obviously in anaphylactic shock. I told the mother who I was, what I had and what I was wanting to do. And she said, "Do it." And I gave her the shot and it was almost like you could see this young lady start to deflate. The swelling was going down. She started breathing easier. Had an ambulance coming. And when it was all over with, I was like, Wow, I made a difference. And then the same thing happened about a year later. The funny part about that is is the, the girl, her parents, one was a, a doctor, one was an RN, and they didn't recognize anaphylactic shock. I had to tell them, "Your daughter's in anaphylactic shock. If I don't give her this shot, she could die." And it, "Is it that serious?" I said, "Yes, it is that serious." The father came up after we had loaded her onto the ambulance, and he said, "What's going on?" I said, "Your daughter's in anaphylactic shock. They're taking her to the medical center in Bowling Green." "I didn't think it was that bad." So sometimes, park rangers, I'm not putting down doctors at all, but sometimes they don't have the field experience that we do to recognize some of these emergency situations. And I could tell the girl was in, in shock from about twenty-five yards away as I drove up, because her head looked like a basketball. So again, making a difference.

BB: Wow. And thinking about that, that particular epi-pen. I mean, we're here in the nature with, with these toxins.

EW: Um-hm.

BB: More so. So.

EW: Oh yeah.

BB: How great to take the lead on something like that.

EW: Yeah, that was, that was a real point of pride for me. That we was, that we were able to get this program started and had a lot of cooperation from park management. They supported it. And after we saved that first one, it was like, “How much more money do you, can we give to you to buy more pens? You need a replacement don’t you?” “Oh yeah, I need a replacement.” (laughs) But there’s been a lot of things in law enforcement—

BB: So you mentioned nefarious individuals, and I’m not trying to sensationalize it, but I think something for the record might be, this very fact that you’re sharing with me that there are things, situations that you have to deal with. And I think those kinds of stories are engaging if, if those are something you wanted to share.

EW: Sure. I want to say, probably—

BB: They could be at this park or it can be at all those other parks. You have such a wide, wide range.

EW: Well, this one actually occurred in Everglades National Park, which is in the south, south Florida. When you think of south Florida, you think of drug trafficking and drug runners and the whole nine yards. You think of the Drug Enforcement Administration U.S. Customs. One day, there was a training course going on in the park and just about every ranger in the park was sent to this training and the district I was in, the Flamingo District, was a half million acres in size. [0:15:00] It’s ninety-five percent water. We patrolled by regular patrol boats. We didn’t have the airboats down there. That was in other parts of the

park. And they only left two of us rangers, one to run the roads and me to run the backcountry in my patrol boat. And so—

BB: For how many days?

EW: It was for five days. We were b-, me and Mike Maginnis were by ourselves. And, and so what we decided to do, so that we could mutually back each other up was to stay on land unless we got called out to the water because otherwise there would have been no back up. I was at the marina store. I heard radio traffic and it was a DEA fixed wing airplane that was flying over the Shark River area. They saw two sailboats anchored nearby with a small dinghy running back and forth between them. And they profiled this as probable cocaine off-load operation. And that was a very common practice. A lot of drugs came through Everglades National Park. So me and Mike, we get our automatic weapons. We had automatic rifles, shotguns, you name it, body armor, the whole nine yards. And so we get in my patrol boat and we're heading up towards Shark Valley, which was like, or Shark River, which was like twenty miles out into the backcountry. And the only other ranger that was in, in mutual support was up at Everglade City, about forty miles away. And so we told dispatch, "Have him start rolling down this way." And as we're getting closer, dispatch came on the radio and said, "Do you want us to summon the U.S. Customs interdiction team helicopter?" And I said, "Bring 'em on. I want guns." And so by the time we got on scene, we went into what we called a high risk boat takedown configuration. Two boats approaching from the fantail, staggered. And we got on loudspeakers, said, "Get everybody on the fantail. Hands up. Hands on your head. Nobody moves." About that time the, the customs Blackhawk helicopter comes in. They're circling overhead about a hundred and fifty feet. The doors were open. And you saw eight guys with their .308 caliber Steyr machine guns all pointed right down at that boat. And the people on board said, "What's going on?" I said, "You tell me." I said, "You twitch, they'll rake this boat." I said, "Do you understand me?" "Yes." "Good. We're boarding you." And we did not find any sign of drugs. But there were guns, there was a couple of guns and some other stuff. And we ran them. Everything came back. But when it was over with, we all met up far away, outside the area of operation, and

we all just about collapsed, because our adrenaline was just so, we were just so fired up and, and wired and focused on what we were doing. And it was incredible. Some good times I had down at Everglades. I got to go aboard Marine One, the president's helicopter when the for-, the first President Bush came to visit. The pilot, the commander of VF-1, the marine detachment, took us on board and said, "Don't take any pictures, but," said, "This is where the president sits," and all th-, that was cool. So there's, there's been some fun times to go along with the scary times too.

BB: Right. And putting your training to use. I mean, that situation, that possible drug situation was—

EW: Um-hm.

BB: Wow.

EW: Oh yeah. There's been times I had to wrestle people to get them handcuffed. You know at, that's, that's really tough to try to fight somebody and keep them away from your gun at the same time. I've dealt with child pornographers, just all kinds of stuff. There's, there's a lot more, there's more, what goes on in culture outside the park in society, happens inside the parks too. People don't realize that. It does.

BB: They think everyone's on vacation and they're, they've left whatever they are outside, but—

EW: That's it. And that's the attitude a lot of them have too. You'll, you'll find car doors unlocked with purses inside. That led to me, I'm one of the only, I was one of the only national park rangers to ever testify on a federal death penalty sentencing because, and it started with two individuals breaking into cars and it led to a multistate crime spree that these two people, these, this one guy and another guy went on. And they murdered people while they were out and about on their spree. [0:20:00] And so I was called in to testify

when it was all said and done. And right now, they're on federal death row. And that was, that was something to be able to tie the crimes at Mammoth Cave National Park into this crime spree.

BB: Um-hm. So partners are, partners are really important, your team within the park is pretty important too, isn't it?

EW: Yes it is, inside and outside.

BB: Um-hm. You probably have a special—but I think the bond is different between the law enforcement—I'm not sure if this is a stupid question, but—the law enforcement team, I've heard camaraderie stories in all aspects of park ranger work—

EW: Yes.

BB: But I was just wondering, from your estimation, is it, is it different? How is it different, you know? How, how do you work as a team? It sounds like it's a special bond.

EW: It is a special bond. But I, I don't want to just say it's law enforcement rangers. It's, I think, throughout the entire park there's a bond there, that we've got a common mission to protect, preserve, to interpret, to manage, and, and it, it is common, but I think that, that when you're a law enforcement ranger and you've faced dangerous situations, traumatic situations where you've maybe saved lives or maybe you've made a major arrest or something. And everybody comes together as a team. It does, it really, it tends to bond the, the unit together much more so. Me and my former partner in law enforcement, we're, we're very close friends to this day.

BB: You mentioned before you've been, worked at a lot of different places and you're from this area.

EW: Um-hm.

BB: And are returning here. So you have experienced the cultures, park cultures, in a wide variety of instances. How, how is Mammoth Cave, or how do they, how are they different? Maybe how is Mammoth Cave different? Again, I don't want to make this entire thing about Mammoth Cave, but being here with Mammoth Cave people, it is a very specialized kind of place.

EW: It is. As far as the, in the different parks, the, the culture in each one, it varies. I'm going to say probably the camaraderie at Chickamauga was very close to this. It was I think even tighter down at Everglades because down there the park itself is a half, a million and a half acres. And our, our rangers are so spread far and wide and they're so good at what they do that even, I was in the Flamingo district, there might be rangers in the Tamiami district and I might be called on to go up and help them and it was just like hand-in-glove, you know. You knew what to do because we were all on the same team and it was very close. In other places it's not been like that. Other places have been very tight. It just, it really depends upon the tempo of the management, what, what they expect, what they want to do, want to accomplish. We go out and accomplish what they need us to.

BB: Um-hm. So some management you agree with more and some, some is sli-, it's not as, helping people be more cohesive or—

EW: Right.

BB: Um-hm. One thing I haven't asked law enforcement folks is, what's a typical day like? I tried it one time and it really didn't work very well.

EW: Oh, gosh, I'll tell you why it didn't: because there is no typical day. The thing is, is when you come into work, here at Mammoth Cave, we have take home vehicles. So you, when you got out to your vehicle at your house, you were on duty. You could come into work and

maybe not one thing happen. You might have maybe one verbal warning, or you might be drawing your gun and taking somebody down at gunpoint. You never knew. So when you came in you had to have the mindset, is this the day? And you also had to have the mindset, I'm going home at the end of this day, too. If a bad guy doesn't, that's his problem. I'm living. They may not.

BB: Um-hm.

EW: And so you had to have that mindset. You had to be ready to fight all the time. And so that's a little hard on you mentally and physically because you're at a higher level of preparedness than you would be if you had an office job. So I'd have days that were extremely slow that would just about put you to sleep, followed by a day of absolute terror and you run yourself ragged. So it's hard to say. [0:25:00]

BB: Did that get tiring after a while? I know that you've, maybe we can talk a little bit about your current position and, and that's, your, your time with the park service has changed over time—

EW: Um-hm.

BB: So law enforcement into, you know, how, why was that decision made to, to go forward into a different capacity?

EW: Well, it wasn't necessarily a very voluntary thing. What happened was I was having in my twentieth year, I was having neck problems. And so a long story short, I wound up going to a neurosurgeon and said, "We have to operate." And so after my neck was operated on, I went back to him for a fitness evaluation, fitness for duty evaluation, and again, he said, "Now do park rangers do police work?" And I said, "Well, yes sir, we do." "Do you wrestle people?" "Yes, we do." "Well, you don't need to be doing law enforcement anymore. You could be put in a wheelchair. You could be crippled for the rest of your life." And so he

wrote up a report. He sent it to the park. And fortunately, my position I'm in now was open. And instead of having to take a disability retirement, I was able to actually come into this. And the advantage is, is I've had a Mon-, finally had after twenty years, a Monday through Friday, eight to four-thirty schedule whereas, as a ranger, about two-thirds of my year was working at nights, holidays and weekends, and the other third was dayshift. There was a lot of time away from the family.

BB: Yeah. Yeah. So do your current job today entails what kinds of, what kinds of elements?

EW: Well, probably, I'm, I'm the coordinator of the park's volunteer program. I work with recruiting and helping to select volunteers to work in the different divisions of the park and, and volunteers can do anything except law enforcement. That's a, that's a federal mandate. They can do pretty much anything you want them to. I work with those, work with a lot of volunteer groups. I work with scouts. That sort of thing. I'm also the park's agreements officer. And in that role, I'm responsible for all the cooperative agreements like between Mammoth Cave and Western Kentucky University, the University of Kentucky, and other sorts of entities, the Cave Research Foundation, the National Speleological Society. So I have to formulate all these agreement packages. I'm also involved with cultural resource management. I work with the, as a liaison with the museum management program here. I deal some with archaeological management, historic structures, cultural landscapes, history, the cemetery program. I'm the co-liaison with the seven affiliated tribes associated with Mammoth Cave National Park. And on top of that I'm one of three requisitioners for the park. These, what our role is, is when somebody needs to buy something that's over, say, three thousand dollars, we're the one that has to cut the orders for it. And so I stay pretty busy a lot.

BB: Wow. That's amazing. So it's satisfying in a different way, or—

EW: It is. It is. It's great when you've got some really cool volunteers in and, and they come out, and our volunteers do make a difference. And, and they come out and they've done

something and they're like, "Wow, this was fun. Thanks. Thanks for letting me be a ranger for a day." Or something along those lines. And, and although it's not paid, they're certainly appreciated.

BB: Um-hm. Tell me about Harry Yount.

EW: Harry Yount.

BB: And the Harry Yount Award.

EW: Oh, wow. So, I guess my colleagues must have told you about that one.

BB: I, you know, I'm trying, I try to get a little handle on the different rangers that I'm going to interview. And I know that you received the Harry Yount Award, and I was searching it out a little bit. But you know, that's, that's a pretty distinguished award in the park service. And can you tell me when you got it and, and how that nomination came and what it means to you?

EW: Well, at first the nomination was a mystery. Every year, there's a call that comes out from the Washington office for nominations for the Harry Yount Award. Harry Yount was the first National Park Ranger. He was— [0:30:00] [INTERRUPTION—RECORDING STOPS] Harry Yount was the first National Park Ranger, hired in Yellowstone National Park, which was the first national park. And so they obviously named the award in honor of Harry. And one day in, in February of 2006, we were, just reported for duty at eight o'clock. The chief ranger comes into the squad bay and very sternly says, "Everybody in my office now." And we're like, "Uh-oh, what have we done?" So we went in there. And all of a sudden, he starts smiling and laughing, says, "I want you to listen to this phone message." So he pulls up his voicemail on speakerphone. And it's the regional chief ranger, saying, "I want to inform you that you have a regional Harry Yount Award winner on your staff." And I was the only one nominated. I almost passed out. And what it was, was, a, several weeks before, our law

enforcement specialist told me to come in in full dress uniform, and I didn't know what it was for. So he, I get dressed, he sticks me up against the wall, takes a picture, and says, "Thanks." And I'm like, "What's this about?" And he said, "Well, we're nominating you for the Harry Yount Award." And I'm like, "Well, man, that's cool. I, I appre-, I'm flattered. That's, that's something." I never thought no more about it. And then that morning—and so that, that following morning, or however many weeks it was, I was notified. I wasn't worth anything the rest of the day. I mean, I was floating on cloud nine. I got to go with our chief ranger to the regional chief ranger's conference where I was presented that award by the regional director. It's probably one of the top three most memorable occasions in my career.

BB: Wow.

EW: And there's two Harry Yount Award winners in this park. Myself and Larry Johnson who I work with in Science and Resource Management. He was a ranger also, and he got it two years before I did. So there's two of us.

BB: What are some of the characteristics of these winners? Just a, a varied career or just above and beyond the call of duty or—

EW: It's kind of, it's basically a peer nominated thing. And when you, when you're nominated, they do cite your, your career. They cite what your contributions have been. Differences that you've made, your appearance, your professionalism, all that sort of thing. And so when it's all said and done, when those, there are seven regional winners picked across the, the United States. And then there's one national Harry Yount Award winner that's picked. And I didn't get that, but that was okay, because I was satisfied with what I had and I still don't see how I deserve it, but I'm very thankful and grateful that I was nominated.

BB: So you're a, as a ranger, are caretakers and, and what I was, I'd like to just ask you is, tell me about the concept of stewardship in your eyes. You know, as a, I'm using that word because everyone goes back to it, or that's, that's the word that I find in my head—

EW: Um-hm.

BB: That's culminated in talking to people about their jobs and their lives.

EW: Stewardship to me means that these lands, these national parks, they're, they're placed in our care because there's nothing else like them in the United States. And some places, like Mammoth Cave, it's the longest cave in the world. I've been fortunate that I've been entrusted to help care for and manage it so that it doesn't suffer loss. You know, a park ranger can give out a hundred speeding tickets in a month, but the most satisfying is when you apprehend somebody who's doing something to the resource—writing their name on a cave wall, poaching deer, poaching ginseng, stuff like that. That gets under our skin. We don't like it. That's what we're here for. We preserve it because we want you, we want other people to come back in their old age and see it just like it was, as much, as close as possible. Bring your grandkids back. They can see what you saw. Sure there's going to be a few little changes through time. But we want to preserve it. That's what we're trusted to do. And I think we do a good job.

BB: You've shared something about the enthusiasm you have, enthusiasm you have more recently, because you're working with volunteers [0:35:00] and giving them that satisfaction. If you have a, maybe a younger person or somebody who's interested, what do you, what do you look for in somebody who's interested? And then have you been able to mentor people along or—and then what do you say to them if, if they pick your brain, Harry Yount Award winner, about you know, how can I do this? You know, you've, you know, what kind of interactions do you have with, with people who might want to pursue that?

EW: Now that I'm kind of a desk jockey, now I don't, I'm not able to interact as much with the public as I did. But when I was a ranger, I got that all the time. And that's changed over time because back in the early days when I got on permanent, and by the way, it took me six years, so it sometimes takes a long time to get, get in because the applicants are many and the jobs are few. You had to apply on park ranger and park technician registers with the office of personnel management. Now I understand it's somewhat the same, except the applications are different. You basically use resumes and so forth. But I would tell anybody, first get a degree. The minimum is a bachelor's degree. You got to have that. Don't expect to come out of a high school and get a, a permanent park service job. It usually doesn't happen. I have seen it, but it's been extremely rare. Get that degree in a natural science, cultural resource such as history or archaeology, or recreation, something like that. That's what I would tell them. Get that basic. Then also either volunteer and/or apply for seasonal positions, because once you get your foot in the door, then that tends to help build up your resume. And keep working at it. Put your nose to the grindstone and you'll be noticed. It doesn't necessarily say that everybody that does that will be hired, but it increases your chances. I would also tell somebody if they were interested in law enforcement, go to one of the seasonal law enforcement academies that's throughout the US. You've got to pay for it, but you come out with a seasonal commission, and you can do almost the same things as a fully commissioned, permanent law enforcement ranger. So there's, there's different things you can do to gain experience, but experience and a great attitude and the education are three key things I would tell anybody if they're interested, seriously interested in the, in the park service. Also, the military. I strongly recommend if somebody, if they serve in the military, we've got s-, lot of veterans on our staff in all divisions, and they're awesome. And so that's a great way to gain experience too.

BB: I was thinking back on something you said about taking care of the large Florida preserve, park and the increasing training that law enforcement has had over the years. How do you work currently with, how are you seen, or how do you work collaboratively with local law enforcement, federal agents, fed-, other federals, FBI, that sort of thing? Has that changed over the years as well and, you know, maybe you have something recently

that, not naming names, but maybe there's a situation that you could share that kind of illustrates that?

EW: Oh, certainly. I mean, I think there's always been a partnership in the national parks with other agencies, state, local and federal. For example, a couple of child pornography cases I worked, I had to work with the FBI with analyzing the forensic computer information.

BB: So they, so what does that mean, the child por-, the pornographers are here and they're distributing or they just have the materials or—

EW: Usually it was possession but could be distributing. We have a job corps center here on the park, and in these cases, it was students and, and we weren't able to make a successful case because evidence was mishandled before I was able to get to it. But, but it happens. And, and again, I went to the US Attorney's office to get search warrants. I got to work with the FBI specialists in computer science. You do that, you work a lot with local sheriffs offices, you work a lot with local police departments, the state police. And now national park rangers in Kentucky have been afforded State Peace Officer status, so if a, a park ranger and law enforcement was traveling on official duty outside the park, they observe a felony, they can take action. [0:40:00] And they can make the arrest. And then they turn it over to the, to the locals, whenever that occurs. So the teamwork is, is really, I think it's just gotten a whole lot better. We've, we've responded to back up locals many times. I have several times.

BB: Well, I've really, I've enjoyed these stories and things. And I was wondering, usually when I, I start coming to the end, or close to the end, is there anything you want to get across, or is there any—the stories are very vivid and, and poignant. Is there anything that you wanted to share? Either a closing thought or a couple more stories or, about your work?

EW: Well, basically I, I just feel very blessed and thankful that, that I was able to do this. I mean, my degree is in biology. I could have had other types of jobs had I wanted them, but I went for my heart. I, I was in a fraternity at Western. And one day, one of my fraternity brothers and I were driving through Bowling Green and, and he says, "Ed, I understand that you've put in for some permanent jobs up at Mammoth Cave." He said, "Do they pay much?" And I s-, and this was back around 1981, '82, and I said, "Not a whole lot." He said, "But do you love it?" And I said, "Yes, I do." And he said, "That's good." He says, "You know my family is rich." And he says, "Money is great, but," he says, "It's also brought us a lot of misery." He said, "I'm telling you, follow your heart." And I did. And I've not regretted it one second. I love it.

BB: That's a good friend. Eddie I had another thought, you know, I, I just love this park as well, being, now living so close to it. And, you know, I love the fall. It, it's a time, you know, when the tourists are away and I can just drive up here and park the car and got for a run or go for a walk and I think that's one of my favorite times of the year. So, I don't know, what are your favorite times of the year?

EW: I agree. It's my favorite too. I remember back when we had more flexibility to get out into the resource a whole lot more. I'd be assigned to backcountry patrol. And I'd check out a four wheel drive vehicle and I would have to go out and drive some of the, the fire roads and part of the trail system are along roads. And I always loved it, especially if it was, if it was a Saturday, the leaves were changing. I would be driving around and I'd stop in at one of the local small groceries. And I'd, they'd fix me a sandwich, get some chips and a, and a drink and there's this one place I'd always go. I would drive out the Turn-, Turnhole Spring Trail on the north side. And when you get out there, it's basically a peninsula that you can sit and look out the left and right of the vehicle and look straight down almost to the, to the river below you because it makes a big horseshoe. And I would go out there on those fall days. That's where I had my lunch. It was awesome. And then another thing we did was river patrol. We have patrol boats here. And I got to do that quite a bit because of my experience at Everglades running boats. And so in the fall, aw man, getting out on the river,

you make a few contacts, but you are out there, the air is crisp, it was beautiful, blue skies, those are the best memories.

BB: Were other people fishing at that time of year?

EW: A few. A few. Main-, mainly a few canoers and kayakers, but a lot of times I almost had the river to myself. It was awesome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]