



FINDING AID

MARJANE AMBLER INTERIOR PARK EMPLOYEES ORAL HISTORIES

1987-1995

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Collection Number: MSC 206

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HISTORY

Born in Colorado on May 19, 1948, Marjane Ambler began a career in journalism in 1968. Ambler worked in various positions including as editor of the *High Country News*, an environmental publication, from 1974 to 1980.

In 1984, Ambler's husband Terry Wehrman accepted a position as a "snow groomer" in Lake Village, Yellowstone National Park. The couple spent the next nine years living year-round in the interior of Yellowstone. Ambler worked as a volunteer during the early years and as an interpretive ranger during the summers of 1990-1993.

During her time at Lake Village, Ambler began to collect the recollections of the other park employees and family members within her small social circle, as well as former park employees who experienced living and working in the park interior in past decades or whose careers were otherwise notable. These activities culminated in Ambler's 2013 book *Yellowstone Has Teeth*, which narrated the recollections of Ambler's interviewees interwoven with her own experiences in a wide-ranging memoir of "living year-round in the world's first national park."

Ambler and Wehrman left Lake Village in 1993, after which Ambler served as editor of the *Tribal College Journal* from 1995 to 2006. Ambler is also the author of *Breaking the Iron Bonds: Indian Control of Energy Development* published by University Press of Kansas in 1990. Ambler and Wehrman split time between homes in Atlantic City, Wyoming, and Lake Havasu, Arizona.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

MARJANE AMBLER INTERIOR PARK EMPLOYEES ORAL HISTORIES 1987-1995

CATALOG NUMBER YELL 188046

VOLUME 0.5 LF (9 interviews)

DESCRIPTION This collection consists of nine oral histories of Yellowstone National Park employees and spouses interviewed by Marjane Ambler. Materials include copied cassette tapes, interview summaries, transcripts, release forms, and occasional correspondence/background material. Content from all interviews in this collection appear in *Yellowstone Has Teeth* except for the William Armstrong interview.

Ambler's purpose in writing *Yellowstone Has Teeth* was to document the experiences of interior park employees with an emphasis on life during the winter season. Ambler also wanted to expand the diversity of Yellowstone employees whose careers are documented in writing. In addition to male rangers, Ambler sought out the experiences of other park employees including maintenance workers and the "hidden community of women, who are either rangers or support troops for the rangers." Both goals are reflected in the interviews assembled in this collection. The six men and three women represented are former park rangers, concessions and maintenance workers, volunteers, and homemakers. Interviewers begin by stating basic biographical details and usually develop into an open-ended discussion of their park careers. Life in the park interior is the dominant topic, especially dealing with winter weather and daily life in isolated outposts. Other common topics include wildlife management (elk, bison, and bears), work hazards, transportation, and family life. Some interviews are more focused, such as Henry Rahn's work as a bear feeder and Kathleen O'Leary's experience during the fires of 1988.

ORGANIZATION Arranged by format and then chronologically.

PROVENANCE Gift of Marjane Ambler, 1987-1989

RESTRICTIONS YES, use restrictions are noted for individual interviews.

ASSOCIATED MATERIALS Audio recordings and transcripts are available online at [Montana History Portal \(www.mtmemory.org\)](http://www.mtmemory.org).

Ambler, Marjane. *Yellowstone Has Teeth*. Helena: Riverbend, 2013.
Yellowstone Research Library

CONTAINER LIST

Box 1

File Number	Title
01.01	Correspondence, 1990-1995
01.02	Information and Project Sheets, circa 1990
01.03	Transcripts (original), circa 1990

Box Number	Title
02	Recordings, 1987-1989

Item	Title
YELL188046-OH1	Gerald “Jerry” Bateson Sr. interviewed by Marjane Ambler with comments by Terry Wehrman in Gardiner, Montana, March 21, 1987 Jerry Bateson was the winterkeeper at Lake Hotel from 1950 to 1975. This Interview covers Bateson’s twenty-five winter seasons at Lake, with an emphasis on his general living conditions. Topics include work duties removing snow from roofs; transportation by skis and snow plane; lack of communication and amenities; entertainment and hobbies; the electrification of Lake; housing conditions and provisioning of winterkeepers by the Yellowstone Park Company; bear encounters; significant events including the rescue of a stranded pilot and the 1965 collapse of Lake Lodge’s boiler room; and weather conditions, both extreme and typical. The experiences of his wife and son are also discussed, as are other winterkeepers at Lake. Listen online: https://www.mtmemory.org/nodes/view/78264?keywords=
YELL188046-OH2	Helen Wolfe interviewed by Marjane Ambler in Lake Village, Wyoming, April 5, 1987 Helen Wolfe worked as a cook and maintenance worker for the National Park Service from 1965 to 1987. This interview covers Wolfe’s career with the NPS from the 1960s until the date of the interview. A major focus is Wolfe’s experience as the second woman ever hired by Yellowstone’s Maintenance Division. Wolfe discusses the difficulties she and her colleague Verna Nelson faced, including harassment by coworkers and park visitors. Wolfe also discusses her affection for working in the Norris Geyser Basin, including her experience as the first person to witness Steamboat Geyser’s 1978 eruption after nine years of dormancy. Other topics include relations with visitors, cooking for Presidents

Box Number	Title
02	Recordings, 1987-1989 (continued)
Item YELL188046-OH2	Title Helen Wolfe interviewed by Marjane Ambler in Lake Village, Wyoming, April 5, 1987 (continued) Ford and Carter, and bear encounters. Listen online: https://www.mtmemory.org/nodes/view/78261?keywords=
YELL188046- OH3	Kathleen O’Leary interviewed by Marjane Ambler in Lake Village, Wyoming, August 28, 1988 Kathleen O’Leary was the wife of ranger David Phillips and a direct observer of the 1988 fires. This interview was recorded a few days after O’Leary and Phillips’ harrowing escape through the burning landscape of the Thorofare district to Lake Village. Unlike the other interviews in this collection, it is tightly focused on O’Leary’s recent experiences of the previous few months. She discusses the beginning and progression of the 1988 fire season, firefighting strategies employed by both the National Park Service and National Forest Service, her and her husband’s activities in defending the Thorofare district, the psychological effects of living near active wildfires, and a detailed and dramatic account of the couple’s escape with four horses and one mule. Listen online: https://www.mtmemory.org/nodes/view/78262?keywords=
YELL188046-OH4	Francis "Red" Payne interviewed by Marjane Ambler with comments by Terry Wehrman in Livingston, Montana, December 3, 1988 Red Payne was a maintenance foreman in Yellowstone from 1966 to 1974. Payne shares experiences from his decade in Yellowstone’s Maintenance Division, primarily relating to clearing snow from roads and breaking the ice pack on Yellowstone Lake. Payne discusses equipment, working with women and black employees, worker recreation, and bear stories. Other topics include firefighting, wildlife management, poaching, harvesting hay for the Lamar Buffalo Ranch as a teenager, and stories from Payne’s contemporaries including ranger Jerry Mernin and maintenance worker “Blue” Evans. Finally, Payne shares some of his father’s stories of driving park stagecoaches in the early 20th century and reflects on changes to the park in recent decades. Listen online: https://www.mtmemory.org/nodes/view/78277?keywords=

Box Number	Title
02	Recordings, 1987-1989 (continued)

Item	Title
YELL188046-OH5	William "Scott" Chapman interviewed by Marjane Ambler with comments by Louise Chapman and Terry Wehrman in Gardiner, Montana, December 15, 1988, and January 21, 1989

Scott Chapman was a ranger at Yellowstone from 1930 to 1962, a record breaking thirty-two years without transfer. This interview is wide ranging, covering stories and experiences from Chapman's extensive career at Yellowstone. Major topics include the nature of ranger work in the 1930s; winter living conditions; Chapman's work on the Lamar Buffalo Ranch; transportation (skiing and horses); challenges raising his son Bill in backcountry isolation; family and social life in Mammoth, West Yellowstone, and in backcountry posts; the Park's history of wildlife management (especially the elk culling program, which Chapman helped administer); run-ins with poachers; firefighting; and Chapman's recollections of other influential rangers including George Baggley, Joe Douglas, and Harry Trischman. Listen online: <https://www.mtmemory.org/nodes/view/78263?keywords=>

YELL188046-OH6	William "Bill" Armstrong interviewed by Marjane Ambler with comments by Mary Armstrong and Terry Wehrman in Livingston, Montana, January 7, 1989 [RESTRICTED]
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Bill Armstrong worked in Yellowstone's Maintenance Division from 1948 to 1980. He also worked on a PWA-funded road construction crew during the 1930s. This interview contains stories and reflections from Armstrong's road crew experience (1933-1934) and his early career with the National Park Service (1948-1960s). Topics include 1930s road construction equipment and techniques; interactions with CCC workers; challenges of the post-WWII boom in visitation with limited facilities; improvements and problems brought by Mission 66; bear stories, including efforts to discourage bears from campgrounds by improving sanitation; and elk and bear interactions and management policies. Contact the Archives for research access.

Box Number	Title
02	Recordings, 1987-1989 (continued)

Item	Title
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YELL188046-OH7	Robert "Bob" Murphy interviewed by Marjane Ambler with comments by Alice Murphy in Livingston, Montana, February 7, 1989
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Bob Murphy was a career National Park Service ranger and administrator, serving as superintendent and chief ranger of multiple National Parks from the 1930s to 1974. This interview consists of stories and impressions from Murphy's career at Yellowstone, 1938-1956. Major topics include cross country ski patrols, with detailed descriptions of ski equipment, routes taken, and memorable trips; backcountry cabins; smoke jumping and fire suppression; poaching and law enforcement; elk and bison reductions; and Brucellosis studies at the Lamar Buffalo Ranch. Murphy also discusses the cultural attitudes of early park rangers, noting the influence of military culture and the wide latitude rangers were afforded in their work duties. Murphy recalls stories from the careers of other rangers, including Harold "Bob" Jones, Hugh Ebert, Bert McLaran, and Harry Trischman. Listen online: <https://www.mtmemory.org/nodes/view/78266?keywords=&lsk=0eba1e18badb821267b78af01a35a516>

YELL188046-OH8	Alice Bigelow Murphy interviewed by Marjane Ambler with comments by Bob Murphy in Livingston, Montana, May 17, 1989
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Alice Murphy was a National Park Service employee and wife of ranger and administrator Bob Murphy. This interview mainly focuses on Murphy's experience at the Snake River Ranger Station in the winter of 1952-1953. Murphy discusses the details of her home life: appliances, radio communication, food storage, transportation, hobbies, and social life. Murphy's living conditions were primitive but growing up on a ranch prepared her for the hardship. Murphy also discusses her time in Mammoth, with a general discussion of job opportunities for women in Yellowstone; and relations between rangers, maintenance workers, and concessions employees. Listen online: <https://www.mtmemory.org/nodes/view/78267?keywords=&lsk=48aec654f4a67e1756ccbf06e05bec2a>

Box Number	Title
02	Recordings, 1987-1989 (continued)

Item	Title
YELL188046-OH9	Henry "Hank" Rahn interviewed by Marjane Ambler with comments by Terry Wehrman, Joe Figg, and Cora Figg in Lake Village, Wyoming, August 17, 1989 Hank Rahn worked as a garbage truck driver and bear feeder at Yellowstone from 1936 to 1942. This short interview covers Rahn's experiences as a bear feeder at the Otter Creek dump site between 1938 and 1942. Rahn discusses details of the bear feeding program, bear behavior, defending himself and his truck, close calls while feeding bears, and encounters with bears outside of his regular job. Listen online: https://www.mtmemory.org/nodes/view/78261?keywords=